

HUMBER
STREET
GALLERY

The Rainbow Brick Road

Absolutely
Cultured

Hull Queer Space Stories



Queer Hull hasn't always been an integrated space where we wore pride on our sleeve and where allies and none Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual (LGBTQIA+) people mix, love and stand side by side.

Here we will explore the shadows of the past and watch as these stories burst into visible rays of a vibrant rainbow trail that weaves around the city.

With tales of how it used to be, how it got better and what still needs to be done. But most importantly, asking the question. How do we preserve the queer heritage of Hull?

Let's take a walk along the rainbow brick road of Hull, visiting voices of the community along the way. Parts of this road are shiny and beautiful, some of it is a little broken, crumbled or disappearing all together.

Though what's amazing about this road is that along your travels, you'll meet many people that are fixing it. Mending it, with their bare hands, hearts and souls.

But, that's Hull people for you anyway, isn't it? Despite their sexuality!

Many of the well known venues used to dwell around the outer parts of the city, somewhat in the shadows, not in the hustle and bustle or the over populated boozing areas.

Apart from one of Hull's earliest queer venues, Pollys was right smack bang in the city centre.

Pollys operated as a gay bar long before the 1967 act of allowing same sex relationships. Pollys was hidden in plain sight. It wasn't common knowledge that this was a queer space. Only for those in the know, it was a safe place to reside if who you loved, could be classed unlawful.



"It was ultra discreet. Underground culture almost. If you knew about it, you were probably gay. It was a word of mouth venue"

There are scars left from spaces like Pollys, many are still not willing to speak about it, many didn't want to share their stories. There is an older LGBTQIA+ community where not talking about it, is still so ingrained in them, it's still not an easy task for them to do now, despite time being more accepting.

Though rest assured, the Pollys are still out there, they meet, they reminisce and they have each other. Some don't need to talk, they lived it.

So, get to the bar and...

"...buy me a babycham please duckie..."

From the city centre we spiral outwards, the rainbow brick road leading us back into the dark shadowy edges of the pubs and clubs for the 'not quite right folks', the folks who are ok, if they keep it 'behind closed doors'. The ones that should 'stick to their own and leave us straights alone'.

Though even in some queer accepting bars, ran by same sex couples, a no kissing policy was to be adhered to,

"There was a record scratch halt and we all got told off, especially the lesbians for some reason? To stop taking the piss and stop kissing"

The Alexandra Hotel was the after venue once Frankies Vauxhall Tavern kicked out as it had dancing and a late bar. Perhaps the landlords didn't want to drive away their non-queer clientele but enjoyed the foot fall after the last orders at Frankies.

A monetary gain, but not a liberated one for the LGBTQIA+ people of Hull.



Frankies Vauxhall Tavern felt like a right of passage for many in the city. From the outside you would think of it as just another 'old man pub'.

Some young people didn't have the courage to enter, they just headed straight for the clubs... some though, did dare.

"From the moment you arrived clicking the latch on the door and experiencing those already within turning as you entered... Fresh meat!"

You always felt welcome. It was bizarre, queer and unique with an eclectic eccentric collection held within. Many remember the gay porn plastered around the male toilets, that antique tractor seats where repurposed as bar stools and that the handle to the ladies toilets was that of...

"... a big brass penis!"

What other venue in Hull had a swing hanging from the rafters, which on one memorable occasion saw twaddles, a well known, unpolished yet unapologetic drag performer, get her high heel stuck fast in the ceiling during a particularly high swing. Just a 'normal' night out in queer Hull.

The rainbow brick road of Hull could be visualised as that of a ring road. An outer circle that halos the city centre, a colourful yet multicoloured hazy city limit glow.

To the west of the city, more drag to be had at the St George's pub, home of the infamous Bobby Mandrell or head back over to the industrial estate of Wincolmllee for drag cabaret on the actual bar of The Old Bull and Bush.

Though inside you were at ease amongst the queers and the queens, you were warned to keep your wits about you as you left. Advised to never walk alone back into town and be sure to 'act straight' in the taxi ride home!

"Safe spaces, doesn't always mean safe places"



A glimmer of hope and lesbian lust awaits you, the rainbow glow from the city limits shines over the Polar Bear on Spring Bank. Home to the sapphic sorts and girls who liked girls would pile there in droves. The lesbian bar that promised a welcoming reception, all you had to do was be brave and cross the threshold. It took younger lesbians a number of tries, some ending up with the giggles and becoming too shy, so would just walk on by.

It was only a pre-bar for Silhouettes anyway...

But those that did enter found a relaxed vibe. Though those seeking a similar vibe to that of 'The Planet' from Hollywood lesbian show 'The L Word' may not have received that same level of, glamour.

"I didn't find my equivalent of Shane, but I did find.."

"...Tracy the Trucker, who had a dog, loved hiking and was on a night out in flat shoes"

It's a shame that some of these, older and original spaces along the rainbow brick road of Hull have disappeared, crumbled or are no longer there. There is a sense of loss, a lack of community, a place to belong. Some still grieve for places lost.

Missing the certainty of queer spaces. Some are still second guessing their safety.

"The old spaces meant that being brave isn't part of the evenings getting ready routine"

Silhouettes held the crown for top queer club for many years, it first found it's place on the rainbow brick road, in what many refer to as, just somebodies house on Spring Bank.



Just like home, it had a safe and welcoming feeling. Many called the Park Street venue the 'New' Silhouettes. It was a welcome expansion in space for Hull's growing or most likely, just more openly OUT queer community.

Many a conversation isn't had about Silhouettes without the mention of the guy in a tutu, who propped up the bar. Sometimes he would be in S&M gear or a suit jacket and tie upper, suspenders, and knee high boots lower.

"I rember walking in, the music pumping, smoke machines, lazars and queer people everywhere. I smiled, I was home!"

Of course, Silhouettes wasn't the only club in town, Fuel was a massive and exciting progression for the cities queer scene. Propaganda, Yorkshireman and The Star and Garter were popular pre-club haunts that would see a thriving community partying the night away before taking the pilgrimage along the last leg on the rainbow brick road, to finish the night in Fuel.





Over the years Fuel has had many different event types, bringing that big queer club feel to Hull. Steelpan drummers playing along live with the DJ set, while shooting out glitter from cannons and go-go dancers on platforms and poles, leaving you delirious and unsure if you were actually in Hull or Ibiza? There was a real feeling of being transported to another place. Just for the night.

"I grew up in a small village so catching that train on a Friday night into Hull was a real adventure!"

Sadly some have never felt at home, welcome or even safe in some of these queer spaces. There is a diverse representation of people included in LGBTQIA+ community and still, in present time. There is a divide within that culture. The vanilla queers of LGB forget that there is a community within a community that still fights for visibility.

There is privilege many now just scoff at as being accepted that others are still fighting for. Asked to leave a latrine because gender was just assumed. Being asked, 'you do know this is a gay club don't you princess?' because...

"You look too pretty to be a lesbian"

Because being they or them is just too much!

For who?

Who is it really affecting?

Why do you care?

Constant questions and lack of support from within our own queer communities, makes a tiring battle, even more tiresome.

Are you not too old to be out clubbing?

"You might just grow out of it, it's probably just a phase."

Where are the TQIA+ allies at? Moving forward, this is the work still needing to be done.



Lucky for us, the rainbow brick road has side streets, cul-de-sacs and avenues here in Hull that we can venture down and feel welcome. Other venues are just as important, other venues have safe queer space but are not called a gay venue.

Other spaces are a coffee shop or corner cafe. The drop in community centres or the local youth club, that most likely, the funding will soon stop and they will be taken away. But that's a cause to fight another day.

Other spaces that witness first kisses, Spiders, where nobody in there even battered an eyelid. The Adelphi that's like sitting in a friend's front room, just with live entertainment

"I have never felt any negative feelings inside there. Never, in twenty years!"

And for the young who champion integration due to their diverse friend groups, they will most likely never get that secret underground club feel because, everybody, all humans are in their club. There are many new spaces popping up, feeling comfortable in their own skin anywhere from the Avenues to Humber street.

It's a beautiful privilege to hold your partners hand across the table at a restaurant but it's also awesome to...

"...camp it up and have a Kiki at the New Star or Oak Vaults"

It's also been witnessed, on the late bus from town to Bransholme, a couple of

"Young Queers, singing show tunes and the full top deck joining in"



Some might say, "only in Hull" but it seems that slowly, especially in the UK, we're getting there. Many beautiful, colourful and passionate souls, brick by brick, continue to lay our Rainbow brick road for us. Paving the way!

They tell us, this is how we preserve our heritage, moving forward from the foundations that the brave laid before us.

Continuing to have pride and hold a pride event year upon year. For pride is remembrance and Pride in Hull, not just the event, but the pride in peoples hearts. Will keep preserving our queer heritage for those who from time to time, wish to glance back, learn their history as they smile and take giant steps forward.

Hull Queer Space Stories was commissioned by Absolutely Cultured and forms part of the public programme associated with the exhibition In My Room by Hannah Quinlan and Rosie Hastings at Humber Street Gallery in Summer 2021.

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