

IMMIGRATION GROUP PRAISED

THE UK LESBIAN AND GAY IMMIGRATION GROUP WAS JUST ONE OF THE WINNERS AT THIS YEAR'S BLACK LGBT COMMUNITY AWARDS...



The UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group (www.uklgig.org.uk) was amongst those honoured at the second Black LGBT Community Awards in London in late September - organised by the Black Gay Men's Advisory Group (www.bgmag.org.uk). Other winners - judged to have made a difference to the lives of black LGBTs - included health promotion group Big Up; and lesbian rapper, Mz Fontaine. More details can be found at www.blgbt.com.

BALKANS: BOSNIAN GAY FEST SHUTS, SERBIAN QUEERS DEFIANT

Organisers of Bosnia's first ever queer festival, in capital Sarajevo, claim they were forced to prematurely shut the event after participants were assaulted by an angry mob of around 70 men, throwing stones and lobbing anti-gay jibes. Meanwhile, around 25 Serbians were attacked by neo-fascists after attending the 5th Queerbeograd festival, in Serb capital Belgrade. Both countries are supposedly keen to enter the EU.

IRAQ: GAY "SAVIOR" ASSASSINATED

A leading gay Iraqi activist and organiser of "safe houses" for gay men, a 27-year old simply known as Bashar, has been assassinated in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. It's believed that he was gunned down by militia whilst in a barbershop. Said veteran UK activist, Peter Tatchell: "Bashar was a kind, generous and extremely brave young man - a true hero who put his life on the line to save the lives of others."

OUTSPOKEN: ALLAN HORSFALL

FORTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER ITS FIRST MANIFESTATION - AS THE NORTH-WEST HOMOSEXUAL LAW REFORM COMMITTEE - THE CAMPAIGN FOR HOMOSEXUAL EQUALITY (CHE) IS STILL A CREDIBLE FIGHTING FORCE, SAYS ITS HONORARY LIFE-PRESIDENT.



The CHE is still very much relevant today, actively tackling a range of issues - despite us having thought, more than once, that it had reached the end of the road in that it had helped achieve every reform that seemed possible at the time.

We worked for three years from 1964 to help convince provincial MPs that gay law reform was not just the concern of the metropolitan, chattering classes and that the sky would not fall if they voted for it, which they eventually famously did - albeit only in a diluted form. The progress subsequently made since 1967 was quite unthinkable at the time, as the faint-hearts then warned: "An equal age of consent? Forget it. Reform in Scotland? Not likely. Northern Ireland? With Paisley running his Save Ulster from Sodomy campaign! Civil Partnerships? Mad!"

Indeed, gays could hardly believe that anything much had changed in 1967. There was no rash of gay clubs opening, no dancing in the streets, no Pride marches. It was five years before the Gay Liberation Front appeared, and 12 before we saw the Labour Campaign for Gay Rights.

However, it was nice to have allies at last, and, eventually, all the things we hardly dreamed of, and more, were achieved. We have equality before the law now, don't we? Well, not quite!

The law is equal in its enactment, but far from equal in its enforcement. For example, public prejudice leads to constant pressure on the police to deal with outdoor manifestations of gay sex, whereas more blatant straight sexual activity is accepted with equanimity. Moreover, this public prejudice is well represented on juries to the extent that I sometimes feel we'd be better off if gay cases were heard by judges sitting alone, like the old Diplock system in Northern Ireland!

These are just a couple of the very real issues impacting on gay lives that will be occupying some of us, as CHE soldiers on - despite a lack of resources or even a suitable office space in London.

For more on the Campaign for Homosexual Equality's work, and to see how you might help, www.ch-e.org.uk

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AND FINALLY...

PENN PUCKERS UP

Actor Sean Penn allegedly texted his ex-wife Madonna after his first on-screen gay kiss. Penn, 48, is taking the lead role in Gus Van Sant's new movie *Milk* (pictured right), a biopic about Harvey Milk, California's first openly gay elected official. He shared an on-screen kiss with co-star James Franco, and Franco later said in an interview: "After our kiss, Sean texted Madonna and said, 'I just popped my cherry kissing a guy. I thought of you. I don't know why.'" Harvey Milk was elected a city supervisor of San Francisco in 1977, but only served 11 months before being assassinated. There is already Academy Award speculation for Sean Penn's performance in the film, which is due to be released in the UK in January.



LUCAS IN WONDERLAND

Little Britain star Matt Lucas has told BBC News that he and comedy partner David Walliams are currently working on the script of their first feature film, which will find the duo playing multiple characters. "The two of us will play five or six characters that will go around together, so it'll be technically very challenging. . . . We looked at people like Mike Myers and Eddie Murphy and how they appear as lots of different characters." The movie is being developed with US studio Dreamworks, and will be produced by Ben Stiller's production company, Red Hour. Before that, Lucas will portray the roles of Tweedledee and Tweedledum in Tim Burton's forthcoming adaptation of *Alice In Wonderland* - due for release in 2010.

CURRY WEDDING

Former *Blue Peter* presenter Mark Curry, 47, has entered into a civil partnership with his long-term partner, Jeremy Sandle. The two, who have been together ten years, tied the knot at Marble Hill Mansion in Twickenham, in front of guests, which included Sandle's daughter and ex-wife. Curry presented *Blue Peter* from 1986 to 1989, but only talked publicly about his sexuality for the first time in the run up to the civil partnership. "Jeremy and I are both mature people who care deeply for each other and decided to formalise our union simply for legal purposes," Curry told *The Daily Mail*. "Our families are 100 per cent supportive. "I've known that I was gay since my late teens, but I was advised early in the 80s, by a seasoned ex-presenter, that it was best to keep quiet. . . . thankfully, times have changed and today no one is penalised for being who they are."