

BRADFORD MADE
Heritage Brought to Life
Stories from Bradford's Communities

KS 4/5 (AGE 14-18)
Activity Pack

PRIDE ON THE LINE

The Story of Bradford Gay Switchboard



LOCAL STORIES

FOR LEARNERS



BRADFORD 2025
UK City of Culture

PACK AT A GLANCE

Developed in collaboration with Alice Parsons of Castles in the Sky Projects, this pack explores the rich history of LGBTQ+ activism in Bradford and the development of Bradford Gay Switchboard as a resource for the community in the 1980s. Learners will investigate how people in Bradford organised and connected before the internet and will design their own inclusive spaces.

This pack includes original images of the posters, magazine covers, and leaflets created by gay activists to promote events and fundraise for the switchboard.

Recommended for: Ages 14-18 (Key stages 4 and 5)

Includes: Story / Original Artwork / Design task
/ Discussion questions / Research task
/ Ideas for further reading

Links to: History / Local learning / PSHE / SMSC
Media / Art and design

INTRODUCING

ALICE PARSONS



Alice Parsons

Alice Parsons is a Creative Producer and Curator who lives and works in Bradford. Originally from Liverpool, Alice runs Castles in the Sky Projects - a platform celebrating LGBTQIA+ heritage and creativity through events, drag, and community projects across the North of England.

During Bradford's City of Culture year in 2025, Alice curated a range of exciting LGBTQ+ events and projects, working closely with members of the Bradford Gay Switchboard and others to celebrate and archive their experiences as part of the city's LGBTQ+ history. She also helped to create this resource pack, helping share the journey of the Bradford Gay Switchboard with new audiences.

Alice tells us the story of Bradford's LGBTQ+ history...

Connected Voices: Bradford's LGBTQ+ Story

Bradford has always been home to an LGBTQ+ community. Being a lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, asexual or intersex is not new, and our history is rich and everywhere; you just have to know where to look.

What we know about what it was like to be someone who identifies as LGBTQ+ in Bradford's past comes from individuals. Many people now in their 70s and 80s have handed on items such as badges, posters, and magazines and these, as well as sharing their memories, can help us to understand what life would have been like.

Although we know the community's history goes much further back, our story begins in the 1970s with the creation of the Bradford Gay Liberation Front.

The Gay Liberation Front was a political organisation that wanted to improve the rights of LGBTQ+ people. Gay Liberation Front groups were active around the world, including in Denmark, New Zealand, the USA, and across the UK, in cities such as Huddersfield, London, and Bradford.

The Gay Liberation Front, or 'Gay Lib' as it was known, was set up in response to the 1969 Stonewall uprising.

Image credit: Bradford Gay Liberation Front
Poster by Alan Richardson circa 1973/4



What was the Stonewall uprising?

The Stonewall Inn is a bar in Greenwich Village, New York City. It was very popular with gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people who would come together to socialise and feel safe. In New York, at the time, as in many places around the world, some laws made being LGBTQ+ very difficult and even illegal. In New York, there was a particular law that said people should be wearing 'at least three articles of gender appropriate clothing'. This law meant trans people could not express their gender identity safely and were not respected by the state. Police officers were allowed to arrest anybody they felt was not performing their gender adequately.

On the evening of June 28 1969, police began to arrest people based on this law, largely targeting trans people and butch presenting lesbians wearing what the state saw as 'men's clothing'.

At the Stonewall Inn as arrests took place, other customers looked on, frustrated and angry at the treatment of their community. It was not the first time the bar had been raided or its LGBTQ+ customers treated this way, but on this particular night, instead of walking away, onlookers gathered closer and began to fight back, shouting and throwing things, dancing and chanting 'gay power', refusing to go away quietly. The events that night led to large protests and gatherings at the venue for the next 5 days.

Although many people credit Stonewall as the birth of the gay rights movement, it was far from the first time people had fought back against unfairness or homophobia in society. Stonewall is important to our story and the history of the movement, as it directly led to the creation of the first branch of the Gay Liberation Front, right there and then in 1969.

Back to Bradford

Word soon travelled globally, and the Bradford Gay Liberation Front was established in 1974. The group, which was advertised to 'homosexual men and women', began weekly meetings at a space in the city centre.

Some members decided that a good way to spread the word and make a space for them to learn more about each other and express their views was to create a magazine. They started GRAFT in 1975. GRAFT stood for 'Gays Retaliate Against Fascist Tyranny', and the magazine contained stories, listings for other events, information about gatherings, recipes, horoscopes and more.

In a 1976 article in GRAFT, the writers mention plans to start a Bradford Gay Switchboard and include a callout for anybody interested in helping to get in touch. The switchboard didn't start until a little later than this, but clearly there was interest early on. In 1981, the Bradford Lesbian Line began receiving calls, and by 1983, Bradford Gay Switchboard also became a live telephone line. With two phone lines in operation, Bradford's LGBTQ+ community were about to be connected like never before.



GRAFT (Gays Retaliate Against Fascist Tyranny)
Bradford GLF Publication 1976

What is a phonenumber?

Unlike today, almost nobody would have a mobile phone until the mid to late 1990s. Instead, people had what was called a 'landline' or used public phones like those you see in red phone boxes. To make a call you would need to make a note of the phone number for your friends or family to dial, or you would phone services, like the switchboard.

Bradford Lesbian Line and Bradford Gay Switchboard were both phone lines that anybody could call up and speak to a gay person or a lesbian about their lives. People would call to ask for advice, a friendly listening ear, or for tips on where to meet new gay friends, such as at events, clubs or meetings.

Many people would call from phone boxes even if they had a landline at home, as they often wanted a private space to speak where they couldn't be heard by the people they lived with.

Bradford Gay Switchboard

Bradford Gay Switchboard was run by a collective of friends who volunteered their time answering the phone to callers who needed a listening ear, information about the local gay scene or practical support with accessing information about healthcare, housing or making new friends.

Outside of answering phones, the 'Switchboard Collective' would also organise events such as discos, gigs, talks, and performances to help raise money to keep the service running. The costs of running a switchboard included renting desk space and a phone line, plus purchasing items such as an answering machine and printing information for the switchboard, advertisements in local papers or magazines, and posters for their events.

The people who made the switchboard service possible were a group of ordinary people who volunteered their time to try to improve their community's lives at a time when there was little help or support for other LGBTQ+ people.

In the 1980s, LGBTQ+ people in Bradford were also very involved in supporting and defending other people who were being mistreated or were fighting for their rights. The Switchboard Collective, along with other LGBTQ+ people, would often be seen at anti-racist and anti-fascist protests in Bradford. They would carry banners that said things like 'gays against fascism' to showcase both their own identities and their solidarity.

The Bradford Gay Switchboard Collective, like many activists in the 80s and 90s was based mainly in Manningham, with volunteers also collaborating with groups like the Asian Youth Movement to run Manningham Community Centre. These spaces were incredibly important, especially before the internet was invented. Many people would only find their community in person, by word of mouth, or through services like the switchboard.



INVESTIGATE



Phone lines

- What skills does a person need to be a volunteer on a phone line?
- Why was the phone line important to people in Bradford?

There is still a national LGBTQ+ switchboard that anyone in the UK can call to speak with someone about their feelings, questions and life.

- Do you think it would be useful to have local switchboards again, for specific groups, communities or helplines, like they had in the 80s and 90s?

When the internet became more widely available, many people started getting their information there, and it was also a place to make friends and speak with people through messaging apps. What do you think are the differences between speaking with someone on the phone line and getting information from the internet? What are the pros and cons?

Despite phone lines shutting down, the number of people using the national phone line is rising. Why might that be?



Activism

What is Activism?

Activism: the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change.

Bradford has a long history of activism. Think about the following questions and write down your initial ideas and thoughts:

- Have you ever been involved in any activism?
- Do you know of any activism happening in Bradford today?
- What kind of actions and activities are being organised?
- What would you like to change about your community or society more broadly?
- How might you start campaigning on these issues? What would be most effective?
- How are people using social media for activism?
- What are the benefits of this? Are there any negatives?
- What challenges do you think there were for organising and activism before the internet?

Bradford Resource Centre

How did activist and community groups organise before the internet?

Bradford Gay Switchboard used many spaces as their offices and base. One of the early places they used to receive calls was the original Bradford Resource Centre at 31 Manor Row. The Resource Centre offered meeting spaces, printing and badge-making facilities, and offices. After the Resource Centre moved to Chapel Street in 1995, many more LGBTQ+ groups used these services, including a Lesbian Mothers Group. Collectives who wrote newsletters and magazines would often use BRC as an address to receive post. The library at BRC also collected all the newsletters published by Bradford Gay Switchboard, such as **Bradford Gay**.



Bradford Resource Centre was officially founded in January 1979. Its original aims were: "to provide a range of essential education and other resources to people who are organising for change either where they work or where they live, and to work with groups of people attempting to win improvements in and to increase democratic control over, major aspects of their lives, and to oppose all forms of discrimination by race, sex and age."

At the time, Bradford was going through profound economic and social changes. There was an increase in unemployment, many people living in poor-quality housing, and a decrease in funding for benefits and community work. There was a need for resources to help people organise to improve their lives.

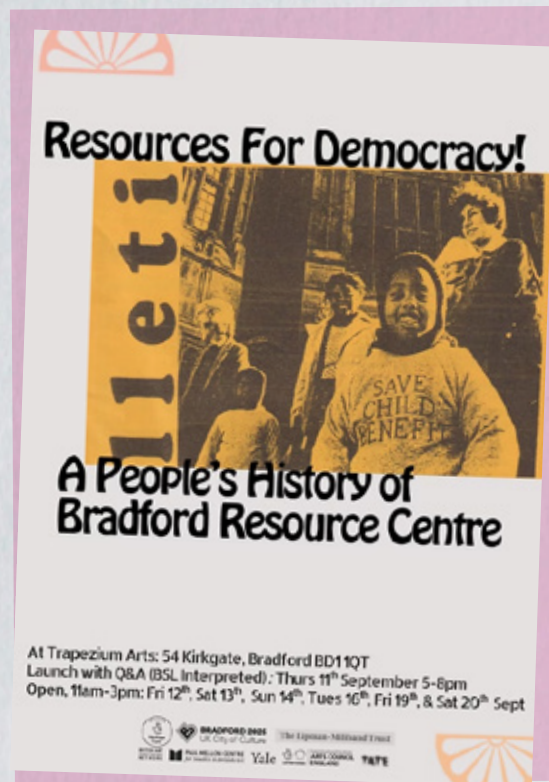
Ali Hussein, who was involved at the very start of the Resource Centre considered that in a challenging social and political climate, BRC was "very crucial in giving communities some sense of direction... a sense of community, solidarity, engagement." Mandy Cook (another early BRC worker) describes how there was also a focus on access to practical resources: "People would come to us to print leaflets, to make photocopies. We started a library with books on welfare rights and housing issues. We organised events." As Mandy makes clear, the BRC played a vital role in a time before computers, the internet and home printing: "It's difficult for people to understand nowadays how invaluable these practical resources we had were – we were the only place where they were all in one place."

- What would have been most useful about the resource centre for people campaigning on issues before the internet?
- How did people try to share and communicate their campaigns with others?
- What would groups have needed to help them do this?

A detailed history of The Bradford Resource Centre,
written by Joel White can be found here:

[A Short History of BRC by Joel White | Friends of Bradford Resource Centre](#)

Bradford in the Pink Poster by Colin Lloyd, 1984



Exhibition poster by The Bradford Resource Centre

Funding cuts impacted the resource centre and there have been ongoing struggles to maintain the building, as well as a flood in 2022. Efforts are currently underway to renovate and restore the building so it can once again be used by the community and provide a space for connection, creativity and activism. The 'resources' people will need now and in the coming years will differ from when the centre first opened, but some needs will remain the same.

- What 'resources' in a building do you think communities might need and make use of now?
- What about in the future?

Find out more about Bradford Resource Centre here:

[HOME | Friends of Bradford Resource Centre](#)



LEARN AND CREATE

Safe spaces have been important for marginalised groups throughout history, including members of the LGBTQ+ community. For members of Bradford Gay Switchboard, this will have included several pubs and nightlife locations, many of which no longer exist. The history of LGBTQ+ spaces spans centuries, but has always been about creating a place to meet where people can be themselves without fear of violence or negative judgment.

Task: Design your own inclusive safe space

You will need:

- Your choice of medium for creating a mood board (digital or pen/paper)
- Your chosen art materials, which could include pencils, paint, pens, graphite, collage supplies, etc.
- Optional: crafting materials, including boxes, cardboard, material/fabric, glue, tape, paint, etc.

Your inclusive space could be for the LGBTQ+ community, or for any other group of people that you think would benefit from their own safe space, or for organising or activism.

Begin by creating a mood board or mind map of all the things you would need for your space.

You might think about:

- Who is the space for?
- Where would it be located?
- What resources would you need?
- How would you ensure that anyone who needs to can access your space?
- What would you do in the space?
- Why is your space needed?

Sketch out your space. You could make a more technical drawing, such as a floor plan outlining the physical borders of space and where different features would be, or you could be more illustrative and paint or draw scenes of people in your space to show how it would be used. You could also use collage to create different textures and sensory features of your space.

Optional: Using your drawings, now create a 3D diorama (model) of your space. You will need a box or frame that is several inches deep with an open-faced front so viewers can see the scene you are creating. You can then fill your scene with any of the elements from your design that you want to feature.

You might think about textures, layers, and what features you want to highlight. What would you want to be in the foreground? Or the background?

You could present your ideas to others in your group.

Possible Adaptation:

- You could research LGBTQ+ and/or inclusive spaces throughout history and design a safe space for a particular era, based on what people might have needed then.

Inspiration: History in the Making is a Historic England initiative that enables underrepresented young people (aged 13-25) to discover, engage, and connect with their local stories and ensure the history that matters to them is not forgotten. Some of their projects have an LGBTQ+ focus, examine other marginalised histories, and explore the history of activism. You can read more about them here:

[New Projects for History in the Making | Historic England](#)



Summat Creative CIC project focusing on the overlooked history of people with Learning Disabilities who worked in Bradford's mills in the 1800s/1900s. Explore the corresponding resource pack at <https://bradford2025.co.uk/resource/hidden-hands-learning-disabled-workers-of-bradfords-mills/>

GET INSPIRED

Bradford Gay Switchboard activists put on many events to raise money and bring the community together. They usually designed and printed their own posters using hand-screen printing equipment—they believed that art was part of the activism!

Have a close look at the 'Bradford in the Pink' poster from 1984. What was the event? How did people find out more information? Think carefully about the images—how do they specifically link to Bradford? Do you think the poster would have been effective at raising awareness of the event? Why or why not?



Activity: Design a badge or poster

Have a go at designing a poster or badge for an issue that is important to you. Use the examples in this pack for inspiration and research some well-known campaign logos to gather ideas before you begin.

Think carefully about shapes, colours, font and slogans. How will you best get your message across?



DIG DEEPER

Further reading and resources

Video footage of LGBTQ+ activism in the 1980s

<https://www.yfanefa.com/record/8924> - can see tavern in the town, gays against facism & Bradford GLF banners & members of Bradford Gay Switchboard

Books for further reading on UK LGBTQ+ history (Reading age 14+):

Fiction:

- The Milkman's on His Way - David Rees
- Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit - Jeanette Winterson
- Heartstopper - Alice Oseman

Non-Fiction:

- Queer Georgians - Anthony Delaney
- Before We Were Trans - Kit Heyam
- Thank you for calling the Lesbian Line - Elizabeth Lovatt
- We Are Everywhere - Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown
- A Short History of Queer Women - Kirsty Loehr

For more information on LGBTQ+ safe spaces throughout history:

Historic England's Pride of Place Project uncovers and celebrates places of LGBTQ heritage across England, ranging from the frontiers of Roman Britain to the gay pubs and clubs that remain important in our lives today: [Pride of Place: England's LGBTQ Heritage | Historic England](#)

[Molly houses & queer subculture in Georgian London | London Museum](#) - safe spaces for gay men to meet despite anti-homosexuality laws in England

[The Ladies of Llangollen | Cadw](#) - the story of Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, a couple who created their ideal home in rural Wales

English Heritage - 7 sites linked to LGBTQ+ History: [7 sites linked to England's LGBTQ+ history | English Heritage](#)

For more on activism and working-class history:

[People's History Museum: The national museum of democracy](#)

Working Class History - [History isn't made by kings and politicians, it is made by us.](#)

Peace Museum Digital Archive: [Digital Collections - The Peace Museum](#)

For more information on the community interest company who are working to restore the Bradford Resource Centre:

[Home - People's Property Portfolio](#)



NOTES FOR EDUCATORS

Educators will be aware of the need for sensitivity and care when discussing LGBTQ+ stories with their learners. Please read and check if the materials are suitable for use with your learners before using them.

It will be important to understand learners' knowledge and context—some may have lived experience; others may have misconceptions. Create a safe, respectful learning space, modelling empathy, openness, and accurate understanding.

You can find some useful resources for LGBTQ+ young people, or those questioning their identity, below, as well as some safeguarding guidance for educators:

Support for LGBTQ+ Young People

Equity Partnership (Bradford): [Home - Equity Partnership - Bradford LGBTQ+](#)

Be You Project: [The BeYou Project - Porchlight](#)

The Proud Trust: [For LGBTQ+ Young People - The Proud Trust](#)

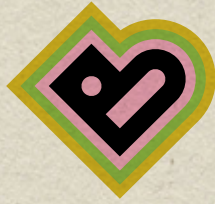
Young Futures – Stonewall: [Young Futures | Stonewall](#)

MESMAC: [LGBT+ youth - Yorkshire MESMAC](#)

NSPCC Guidance and Advice on Safeguarding LGBTQ+ Children & Young People:

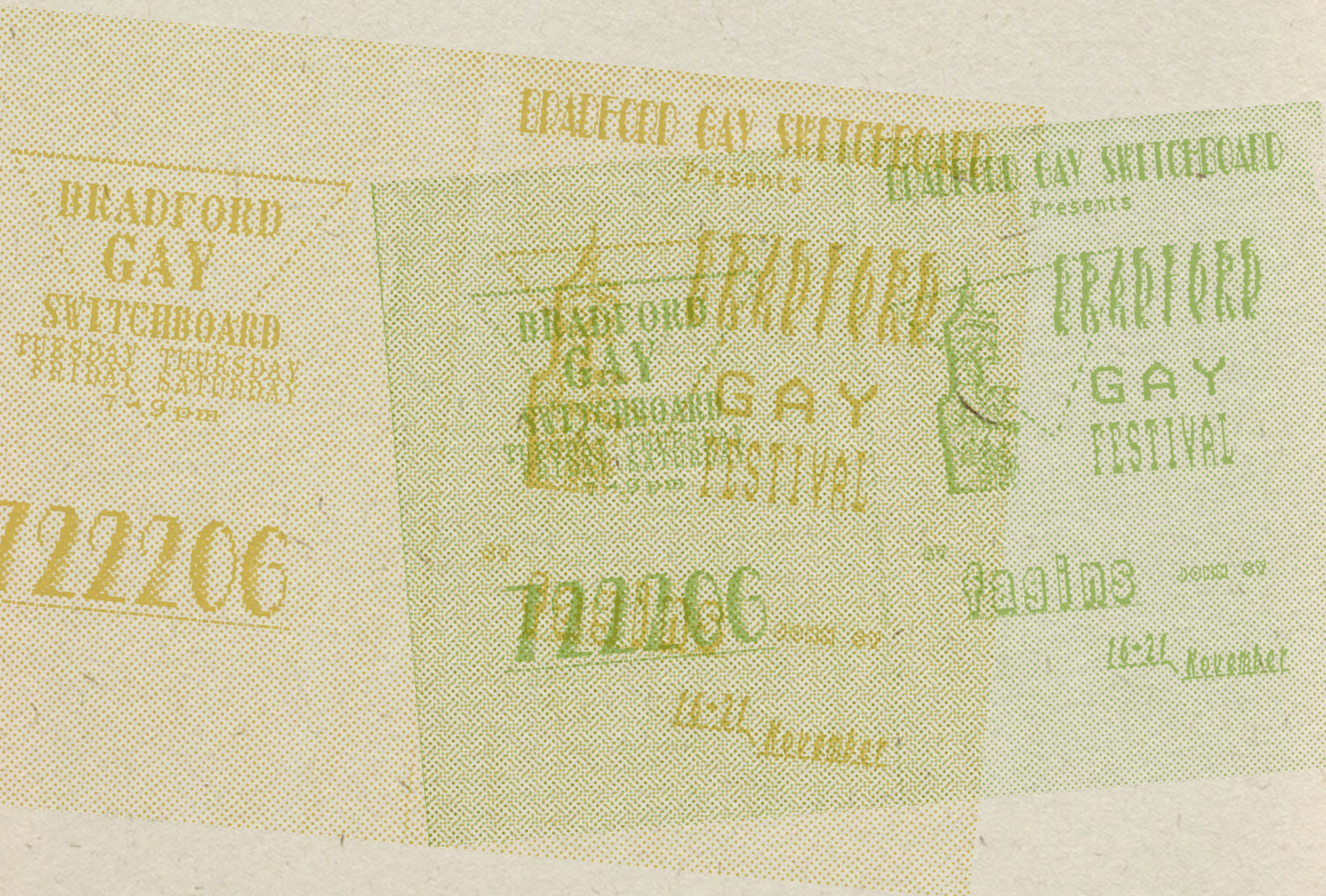
[Safeguarding LGBTQ+ children and young people | NSPCC Learning](#)

National Education Union guidance on supporting trans and gender questioning young people: [Supporting trans and gender questioning students | National Education Union](#)



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This resource was co-created by the Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture Cultural Learning team and developed in collaboration with Alice Parsons of Castles in the Sky Projects.

Graphic design by Lee Goater

This resource was commissioned by Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture. Images are courtesy of Bradford LGBTQ+ Archive and Bradford Resource Centre.



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Made possible with
Heritage Fund