

National Ambulance  
LGBT Network

# Back to LGBT Basics - Change



Supporting Lesbian, Gay,  
Bisexual, Trans staff,  
patients and communities

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Looking at the changes and  
events that have defined  
'LGBT' in the last 40 years

The National Committee, February 2021

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National Ambulance  
LGBT Network



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# All about change

**Read This  
First!**



In the last forty years there have been many changes linked to the lives of LGBT people. In many ways LGBT lives today are almost unrecognisable from forty years ago.

Some of the changes are linked to updates in legislation which have given new rights and protections that we enjoy today. Others had to be fought for, such as the right to legally represent a same-sex partnership.

There is no doubt that the programme *It's a Sin* has got people talking about the past and has shocked quite a few. The programme about friendship and coming out is set against a background of the origins of AIDS in the UK and at a time when the Government really didn't want gay people to have a voice, never mind support them.

The programme seems to have given permission for people who lived through some of these times to open up about their experiences. And that is what

this pack is all about. It is a look at the many changes from the past forty years by people who were there.

Four members of the National Ambulance LGBT Network committee have written their own stories. We have also included timelines and a short quiz for you to have a go at. If you enjoyed watching *It's a Sin*, we hope you also enjoy reading these reflections.

*Alistair, Josh, Kirsten and Tony*



# Inspired by *It's a Sin*

Read This  
First!



As we were putting this resource together the outstanding new Channel 4 series ***It's a Sin*** hit our screens. It's got all of us talking and the National Ambulance LGBT Network committee found ourselves having some honest and reflective conversations that wouldn't have happened before. We really suggest you watch this fantastic programme and then have a read of this resource. We hope you enjoy.

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‘Overall, it's hard to find fault. This is a powerful, emotional, entertaining and educational ride, boasting committed performances, impeccable casting, flawless writing and cross-generational appeal, all underscored by glossy, cinematic direction from Peter Hoar. It's quite simply one of the best gay television shows ever made.’

Attitude magazine's review of *It's a Sin*  
20 January 2020

# Test your knowledge



In what year was legislation passed that stopped people being removed from their jobs because they are gay?

In what year did the first person die from AIDS in the United Kingdom?

In what year was the ban lifted on gay people serving in the military?

In what year was Section 28 introduced which effectively prevented discussion about homosexuality in schools?

In what year did same sex marriages become recognised in England, Scotland and Wales?

These are the dates but they are in the wrong order

**2013**

**1988**

**2003**

**2000**

**1982**

# Power to the next generation [1]



By Tony Faraway

“When did you first know you were gay?” is a question I’ve been frequently asked by straight people, to which I usually reply, “When did you first know you were straight?”. The point is that developing a sense of your own sexuality is seldom like a switch being thrown! When I started secondary school one of the questions we were asked in a piece of biology homework was “What do you find attractive about the secondary sexual characteristics of the opposite sex?”. Not being able to answer this was very perplexing. I realised several years later that the teacher who told me that I should completely ignore the question and not worry about it, had probably realised that I was gay before I had realised it myself.

Later, perhaps when I was perhaps 14 years old, the sex education we received related entirely to reproduction – or it’s prevention. The

fear of ‘being found out’ made me wish the ground could swallow me up. I will never forget the anxiety provoked by having a sheepskin condom (for those allergic to latex) waved in my face by the health promotion lady who had been invited to provide a teaching session for a group of us. A quirk of fate had led me to being the only male in that group, so it was to me she asked “What do you think?”. It was the first time I’d ever seen a condom, and I’d certainly never contemplated a situation in which I would need to use one. I still recall that moment in slow motion, as people often do when they recall witnessing a road accident. I was more lost for words than I’d ever been before.

Growing up at the time that I did, and living in a rural village in the Cotswolds, meant that I’d not knowingly met anyone else who was gay. My idea of what that meant was formed by the hysteria in the media around AIDS, the preaching of the

sinfulness of sex between anyone other than a married couple, and the fact that ‘homosexuality’ was still used as a medical term for a psychiatric illness. I felt I had to keep my ‘abnormality’ a secret at all costs. Some of those costs were never gaining a sense of belonging, having no idea what my future might look like and getting very good at pretending to be someone who was not fully ‘me’. Even if I had had the courage to speak to a teacher at school about the huge fears and shame that I had, they would not have been supportive – by law – as Section 28 banned this (more on this later).

It’s worth expanding on what I meant when I wrote ‘having no idea what my future might look like’. That I would meet a woman, marry and have children was deemed pretty much a foregone conclusion. This is what all young men eventually did, wasn’t it? But how could I resolve that picture of the future with the fact that I was in no

# Power to the next generation [2]



way attracted to the opposite sex? There was no visible alternative path to follow. Same-sex relationships were entirely absent from the world-view that I had grown up to see. It's true that there were flamboyant, effeminate and often outrageously camp characters shown on our TV screens (most of whom I loved), albeit that they were usually comically portrayed. But I somehow remained naively unaware of the connection of these stereotypes and sexuality.

The first time I was aware of the existence of gay sex being hinted at was when the 'falling tombstones' public service announcement burst into our living rooms imploring us not to 'die of ignorance'. I would sink back in my seat and remain very still, trying to appear entirely uninterested. The last thing I wanted was for 'that' subject to be brought up. Any mention of anything associated with relationships or sex was utterly taboo. So, anything associated with

same-sex relationships or sex was somewhere much further down the line on a continuum of things that can never be mentioned. I also lived in fear of the threatened leaflet dropping onto my parent's doormat any day soon that was repeatedly hailed in the public service announcements. I imagined the panic I'd have trying to hide any sign of emotion should they make any mention of it. I intercepted the post every day to avoid this happening, and was very relieved when it did arrive and I was able to stuff it in a pocket without my parents seeing me, and tore it to shreds and put it in a bin on my way to school.

Media sensationalisation of the emergence of HIV and AIDS fuelled homophobia, with headlines such as 'Britain threatened by gay virus plague' and 'I'd shoot my son if he had AIDS, says vicar'. This was a time when a prime minister could say "Children who need to be taught to respect traditional moral values are being taught that

they have an inalienable right to be gay... All of those children are being cheated of a sound start in life. Yes, cheated."

It was in this atmosphere that the Local Government Act 1988 came into force. This contained the first new homophobic law in a century. Clause 2 of Section 28, entitled *Prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material*, states that a local authority shall not:

*(a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.*

In practice, that meant that teachers were prohibited from discussing even the possibility of same-sex relationships with students. Also councils were forbidden from stocking libraries with literature or films that contained gay or lesbian themes. And,



# Power to the next generation [3]



of course, this was long before the creation of the internet, so, apart from the scant and biased media coverage, schools and libraries were just about the only ways in which you could find out about anything. The election campaign that year saw the Conservatives using this public sentiment in rhetoric against Labour, claiming that they were intent on seeing pro-LGBT books taught in school.

So, just at the moment when so much could have been gained by appropriate education in the fight against the spread of what remained for many years a fatal and incurable disease, any such efforts to do so were thwarted. Worse still, the motivation for doing so was for attempts at political gain. On a personal level, the spectre of AIDS as related by politicians and in the media, added to my sense of 'having no idea what the future might look like'. That I would probably contract AIDS and die young seemed

an unshakeable certainty. It probably also was a strong factor in the political views that I was developing.

In 1993 I turned 21 and finally reached the age of consent - six years later than my heterosexual friends of the same age. So not only was I 'sinful', 'mad' and felt my life was likely to be very short, I could also legitimately be labelled as having been a criminal. But at least now I no longer felt that I was the only one. Ironically, a year later, in 1994 the gay age of consent reduced to 18.



*First visit from my parents after coming out*

By chance, a year later when I started university two of my friends let slip that they were members of the Lesbian and Gay Society (yes, the B and the T had not yet been added), and I found I was able to finally come out to someone for the first time – and began 'making up for lost time' (I'll spare you the details!). By now information regarding the prevention of transmission of the disease had become common knowledge. The same friend to whom I came out abandoned university to work for a charity called 'Rubber Stuffers', which promoted safer sex, and was one organisation that furnished many gay establishments with packs of condoms and lube. I often got roped in to helping put the packs together, or give them out to people, such as at the Fresher's Fair – something that felt both very daring and somewhat liberating.

After finishing at university, I did not take my PGCE as I had intended in

# Power to the next generation [4]



order to enter teaching as I'd long wished to do, as I refused to live a secret life (you could legitimately be sacked if anyone found out). It just didn't seem worth it.

Still not knowing what direction to take as far as a career was concerned, I soon returned to working in retail, as I had done before I took my degree, before much later joining the ambulance service. I did eventually buy a flat with another man – even if getting a mortgage required us to have life assurance in place, for which we both had to submit to a medical examination, including an HIV test. We did settle in a small rural town – even if we found few friends, not having the connections with the church, school and pubs where the social fabric of our community tended to be formed.

It is only in the last three years that I've realised the extent of the impact of my experience so far throughout my life as a gay man on my self-esteem

and mental health. During this time, through the friends I have made through Pride in SECamb and the National Ambulance LGBT Network, I have 'found my tribe', gained a sense of belonging, learnt so much more about sexuality and gender, gained a new sense of purpose in working towards equality, diversity and inclusion and moved a fair way away from the 'shame' that was engrained in me from my upbringing towards a sense of pride in simply being who and how I am.



*At Brighton Pride in 2019*

I am not going to lie, it's been a rough old journey at times, but I owe the depth of character that I now feel I have to the fact of being a gay man. I am very grateful for this, and no longer wish that things were different. Along with all the trials and tribulations, I have gained a real sense of purpose in doing what I can to stop those younger than myself from suffering some of the inequalities and lack of inclusion which have so profoundly shaped my life. In those efforts I have learnt of their difficulties that I did not have to contend with, as well as them enabling me to learn so much more about myself. I feel very strongly that there is so much good that can come from the conversations that all the activities of LGBT History Month are provoking, and want everyone to take up every opportunity they have of sharing their personal histories. It's not just a load of nostalgia – it's a form of therapy of which the world is in desperate need.

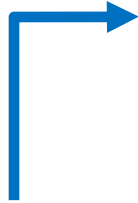
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# Timeline - Origin of AIDS



Terrence Higgins becomes the first person in the UK to die from AIDS. His partner and friends went on to set up the Terrence Higgins Trust which offered support to people living with HIV.



**1982**

**1984**

**1986**

**1981**

**1983**

**1985**

**1987**

First cases of a new illness were identified in America. Five people had symptoms linked to their immune systems.

Data for this period is not reliable but it is thought at least 500 people had died of AIDS in the UK. The Government decide to act and release a public information campaign, 'AIDS; Don't Die of Ignorance'.



# Why *It's a Sin* is one to watch [1]



By Alistair Gunn

Being in lockdown on a miserable January weekend seems the perfect time for a spot of binge watching. I saved the new Channel 4 programme for this and was totally glued after the first episode of *It's a Sin*. I watched all five episodes back to back, finishing at 03:00, and then watched it all again two days later. In a word; brilliant!

If Russell T Davies didn't already hold my top spot for writing and screenplays he certainly does now. Anyone who can tug your emotions that many ways in an hour is brilliant and the fact it is all based on reality makes the whole thing more poignant.

Reading posts on social media since watching it, I've seen the common experience seems to be reducing people to tears. It's interesting that my experience was a bit different. I think I've borne witness to enough tears when it comes to the subject of HIV

and instead felt a deep sense of satisfaction that this story is finally being told. It may sound hard but the harsh reality of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the UK needs to be understood in all the unpleasant graphic detail needed. Putting it bluntly, if we don't learn from this it could happen all over again.

I went to university in Manchester in 1992, a time when the initial shock of the whole situation was apparent and understood. By then everyone knew what HIV was and how it was transmitted. We'd moved on from tumbling tombstones and 'dying of ignorance' to more practical solutions. The organisation Healthy Gay Manchester was in its infancy and diligent members of the community were busy making safe-sex packs and out telling new students that condoms and lube was the only way to play. The guy who told me practically had me pinned to the wall of the pub as he begged me to be safe, pressing one of the packs firmly into my hand. There

was something about the way his eyes welled up as he spoke to me that has left an indelible impression on my memory.

The characters in *It's a Sin* are people I knew. Although not the leading role in the show, the character Jill has a particular resonance. Some of the most active people in the fight against the disease were not actually gay themselves and they seemed to see things very clearly from an onlooker's perspective. I remember one party, heavily populated by gay guys and straight girls, where a female friend of mine finally lost it at the sexualisation of every discussion in the hands of the guys. When she yelled out 'That's exactly what's going to kill you', again with tears in her eyes, some people took notice. Not all.

The main character in the series is Richie who is an AIDS denier until reality calls close to home. He is played by Olly Alexander more

# Why *It's a Sin* is one to watch [2]



commonly known to us as the singer from Years and Years. I was a bit sceptical about his transition from pop singer to actor, but I needn't have been. Not only is the character so well created by Russell T Davies, he is played amazingly by Olly. I was never the most flamboyant of characters and always admired those around me who lit up the room they were in simply by their presence. Ritchie is one of those people.

When I say I didn't cry I may have been sparing with the truth. For those who have watched the series there is one scene where a group of people are bundled into a police van. Ritchie is the last to be manhandled in and what follows is one of the powerful moments. It's a moment of realisation which took me straight back to the moment the first person confided in me that they were HIV positive. I was in a car at the time, thankfully in the back and not in the discloser's eyeline. Another friend sat next to me at that

moment evidently didn't know either and squeezed my hand tight as tears started to roll down my face. That person sat next to me is still a good friend today and we've occasionally reflected on that car journey and sharing a realisation that HIV was enjoying living all around us and causing misery and fear wherever it got chance.

The programme delves into so many other facets of LGB life. I deliberately omit the T there as that hadn't been added at this point and the integration of these two groups of people hadn't been established. You could be fired for being gay because there were no employment rights. And people were, as character Colin finds out. The Equality Act began to correct this in 2003, but it wasn't until 2007 that sexual orientation was added and then 2010 when the full impact we enjoy today was felt. In the year 2000 I was teaching and I remember sitting in front of the head teacher as he

explained this was, 'something we don't want the children to know about'. I know he was trying to be supportive and we got on very well. His concern being any complaints from parents could cause me problems with my future career. I remember the feeling driving home that evening and thinking that I was a second-rate citizen. It's that very feeling that is the reason I am so proud to head up an organisation that is celebrating difference today and ensuring people can bring their whole selves to work.

The harsh reality of early treatment for AIDS is explored in the programme. Although incidences of people being locked up were quite rare and isolated, this really did happen. The lack of understanding about transmission and the assumption this was a 'gay disease' invoked some hideous responses. At the same time it was largely swathes of the gay community, together with allies, that set up support mechanisms that many people came

# Why *It's a Sin* is one to watch [3]



to rely upon. Around a year ago I had dinner with a guy who really brought this to life for me. He was old enough to remember times when the persecution of gay people was rife, the problems associated with living with his partner who was in the military and the start of the whole AIDS epidemic. He shared a couple of anecdotes that are also firmly imprinted on my memory. The first was how he was not able to enter or leave his apartment with his partner for fear of being watched. Being found out to be gay in the military resulted in hundreds of people being summarily discharged from their jobs. He also recounted the horror of living in London during the start of the AIDS epidemic. He referred to two wards in Charing Cross Hospital where symptomatic men suddenly found themselves finding out they had AIDS and being nursed for their final days.

As people became more aware of the situation many feared the whole idea

of going into hospital and begged their friends to look after them at home. The guy I had dinner with became very reflective when we talked about this and paused while his eyes welled up with tears. What he said next is one of the most shocking statements I have ever heard; 'You know the hardest thing I've ever had to do is put my friend in a body bag because the undertakers wouldn't touch the body'.

In the programme there are some moments some of our younger colleagues may not have considered. There was a scene where Ritchie is being interrogated by a member of bank staff to get a mortgage. It's interesting that he lied to every question regarding his sexual orientation. I didn't, and left the bank being told in order to progress my application I would need to have a HIV test. This was back in 2000 and I'm delighted that this practice is no longer allowed.

The more serious test followed my own personal brush with HIV infection. After waiting the required period of time and torturing myself that a very incidental risk was actually a certain positive diagnosis, I made the decision to visit a clinic in London where I thought people would be more helpful. And they were. The nurse who dealt with me was amazing. We talked and he did the fast test and braced me for the result. I broke down when he told me but I was reassured my response was not unusual. Weeks of contemplating the result and my own mortality resulted in some extreme reactions. That was for a negative result; I can't imagine what state I would have been in if the other result was revealed.

*It's a Sin* clearly brings home just how far things have come in the last thirty years. Advances in science and medicine have completely changed the likely outcomes for people and there is reason to think we could eradicate the

# Why *It's a Sin* is one to watch [4]



disease in the UK by combining new treatments and proactive PrEP therapies. As this article shows, so many tears have been shed over HIV and every complication that it has created. I certainly think there is one tombstone we'd all like to see and it would not be greeted by tears and despair. That tombstone would simply read 'HIV: Rest in Peace'.

There is a horrible warning though behind all this, and particularly relevant in the current fight against a pandemic. I am writing this the day after we've passed the milestone of 100,000 deaths due to Covid-19. Whilst we could get rid of HIV there could be something similar in future. Have we learned the lessons to ensure the level of suffering is never experienced

again? In current times are people really following the advice and protecting themselves? To be honest, I am cynical and would wholeheartedly suggest that everyone should watch *It's a Sin*. It's a part of history we need to understand and learn from. Repeating my earlier statement; if we don't learn from this it could happen all over again. \*

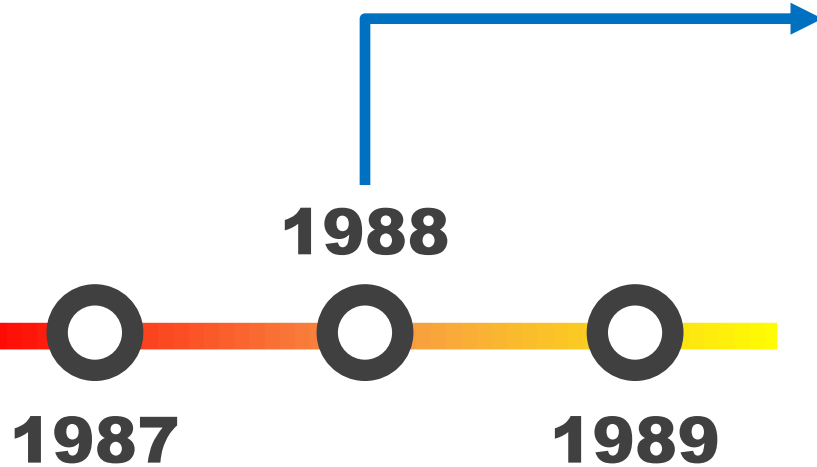


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Here I am attending London Pride in 1992 together with my group of close friends from university. There was a real sense of camaraderie at events like this. Although people wanted to take part, some feared being seen on television. Many people hadn't come out to their families yet. They didn't have to worry; as soon as a camera was spotted everyone else would circle around them and make sure they were well hidden. Apart from me that is. Six foot two and a mop of red hair. Try hiding that!

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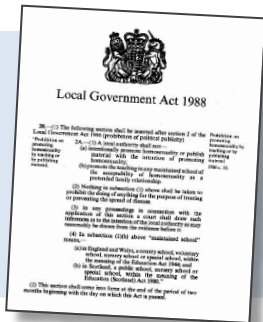
# Timeline - Section 28



By the end of the 1980s the number of known deaths from AIDS had topped 1,000 with the main impact being felt in London and other major cities. The majority of deaths were amongst gay and bisexual men.

Looking back it's horrifying to think that the introduction of Section 28 came in at the same time. Margaret Thatcher, who seemed disturbed that young people were being 'told they had the inalienable right to be gay', and brought in legislation that practically silenced any discussion about gay people in schools.

It's so horrendous now to think that at the point young gay people needed sex education the most the subject was closed. That has to be one of the most callous political acts ever made.



Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 was a controversial amendment to the UK's Local Government Act 1986, enacted on 24 May 1988



# Ask the committee [1]



We asked the National Ambulance LGBT Network committee which part of the programme *It's a Sin* resonated with them most...

The coming out journey was both heart-wrenching and warm. The same fears, the same worries, the same predictions as to how it might go. So really, things probably *haven't* changed in terms of the emotions young people go through here, generation after generation. But hopefully, the results are more positive now we are in a (mostly) more tolerant world.

Alex Ewings, London Ambulance Service

The thing that resonated with me the most was how scared everyone was about coming out to their family. I can't imagine how hard it must have been to come out in the 80's with the overwhelming amount of homophobia, prejudice and discrimination there was. I finally came out in 2008 and even then it was hard! It is so scary to do. The anxiety felt is horrendous because you just don't know if your family will except and embrace it or reject and disown you. I was very lucky that my family completely accepted me.

Emma Burrow, North East Coast Ambulance Service

# Ask the committee [2]



The fact that I did not pursue my career aspirations of teaching, refusing to have to live a 'double life' where if it were discovered that I was gay I would almost undoubtedly be sacked, and this would have been seen as 'legitimate'.

Tony Faraway, South East Coast Ambulance Service

I would say the fear mixed with excitement of discovering yourself in the early days of your 'gay life' and the impact that those early experiences and the people you meet have on your life.

Adam Williams, North West Ambulance Service

The effect of coming out and what it does to families. I found it traumatising coming out to my family and resulted in not speaking to my dad for three years. So, seeing the struggle that Ritchie had when he tried to tell his family, resonated with me on many levels, let alone then wanting to tell them about his HIV status.

Leigh Keyte-Jones, West Midlands Ambulance Service

# Ask the committee [3]



For obvious reasons I think, I found myself relating to Colin's character. The shy, slightly socially awkward Welsh boy who's moved to the city from the South Wales valleys! I found myself doing exactly that in the late 90's when I left home to start university. I hadn't applied to university because I really wanted to study a particular subject, but because I saw university as my way of getting out of a place where I didn't fit in, a place where it was a struggle to be yourself. By the late 90's HIV and AIDS awareness had moved on a little, we knew more about how the virus was spread and unprotected sex itself was now the sin. I remember being persuaded to go with a friend for a HIV test, back then the first I'd had. It took over a week to get the result, but that week felt like a month! Today, you can get a result in twenty minutes, so there's no reason and no shame to getting tested regularly.

Gareth Thomas, Welsh Ambulance Service



Lord Sugar ✓  
@Lord\_Sugar

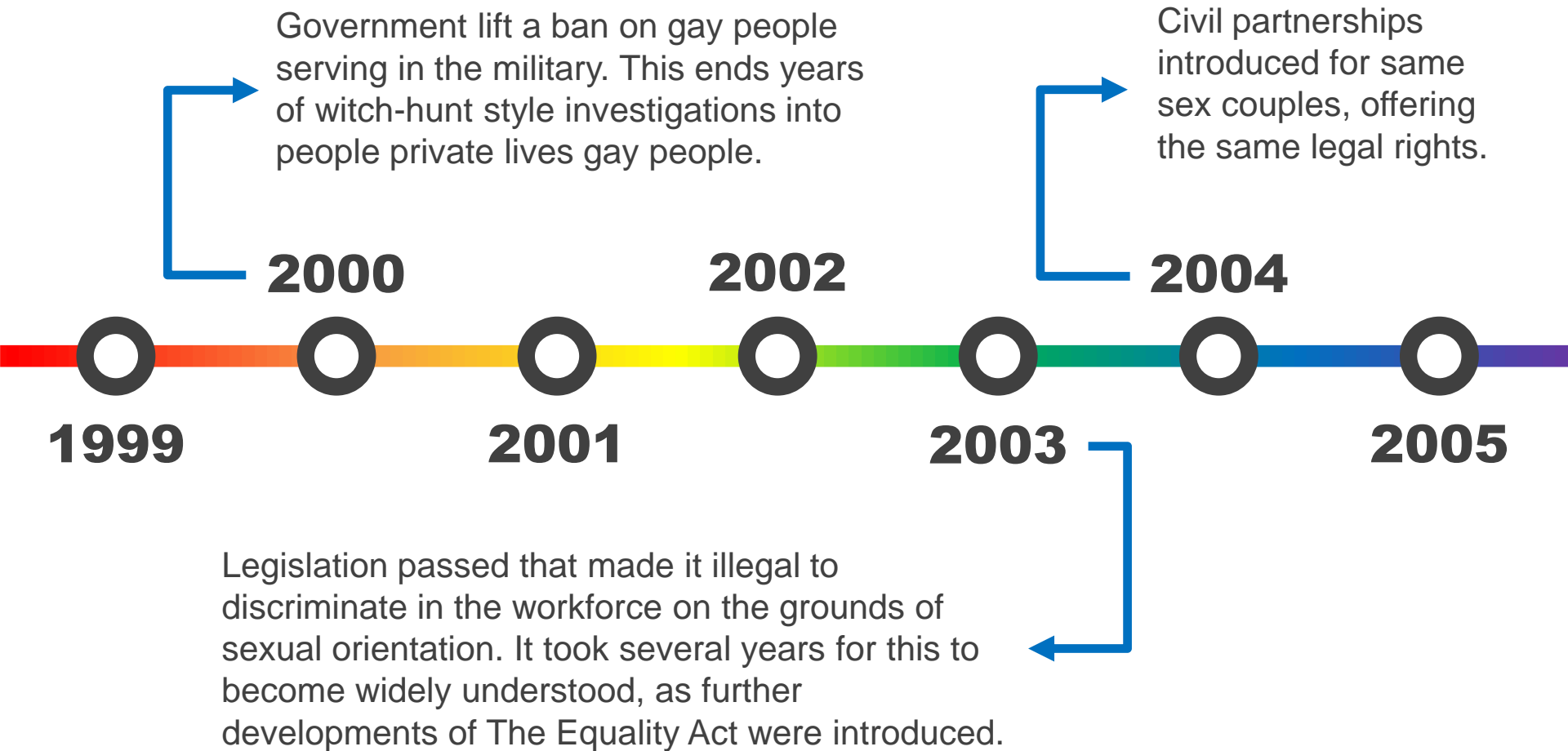
Brilliant series on Ch 4 "It's a sin".  
Going to win awards.

10:07 · 04/02/2021 · [Twitter for Android](#)

39 Retweets 13 Quote Tweets 2,016 Likes

Acclaim for the programme *It's a Sin* is coming from all angles. Even Lord Sugar has added his two-penn'orth on this one. Let's hope his prediction comes true!

# Timeline - Changes in legislation [1]



# The forgotten epidemic [1]



By Kirsten Willis BEM

I, like many LGBT people, have recently taken to social media platforms in celebration of Russell T Davies television series *It's a Sin*. Having binge watched the entire five episodes across one weekend, something I would never normally do, it got me thinking how the current Covid-19 climate we find ourselves in, might assimilate with an almost forgotten epidemic of the last Century, that of HIV and AIDS.

I admit to having an air of excitement about this new television series about a time gone by, the early 1980s and what it might stimulate my thoughts toward. When HIV and AIDS were first discussed, I was still at primary school, yet I still recall furtive discussions in the playground, about a disease that was spreading across young men, and for whom it seemed to take no prisoners.

By the time I had moved on to secondary school, HIV and AIDS were becoming staples of the English language, something to be fearful of, to illicit dread and something which killed indiscriminately, not dissimilarly to Covid-19 in many ways.

Suddenly lurking amongst us all was this silent killer, a disease which was so ill understood, that many denied such a thing could kill as it did, not unlike the Covid-19 pandemic of current times. Others cast blame towards minority groups, yells of 'it's a gay disease', which of course elicited hugely divisive behaviours and prejudice towards LGBT people.

As I began to learn and understand more, campaigns such as in 1986 'Don't die of ignorance' were launched by the Government. The doom and gloom of a tombstone, standing proudly at the centre of our television screens, with the ominous sound of bells, an indication back to olden times to 'bring out your dead'.

I remember being friends with a lad at school who was referred to as 'Gay Lord' and feeling completely aggrieved that people were so cruel, seeing how it affected him so much and before I knew it I was standing up to the bullies, defending his corner, unaware of how my own sexual orientation would present itself a few years later. As I went on to College, far more was known about the transmission of HIV, during my time at secondary school, it had entered the realms of sex education, having to watch the woefully bad video in biology lessons, then learning to apply a condom to various random items of fruit and veg!

When I think back now, it isn't with the humiliation, that I'm sure the whole class were experiencing at the time, being taught by a teacher old enough to be my nan, but with admiration, that the value placed on peoples lives was in fact changing.

Suddenly we were waking up to the

# The forgotten epidemic [2]



thought that this invisible killer, wasn't just affecting minority groups, but was in fact something that was an ever present threat to us all. Well, that was until we got wise and became educated.

Fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, *It's a Sin* brought home to me so many emotions which had in many ways been repressed for years. The fight I had experienced to be accepted, to be able to feel comfortable about being myself and my emerging sexuality, the feelings that somehow 'I was the only one', not knowing that this struggle was real for so many more hidden figures.

When I reflect, I remember a distinct time when I joined the Police force aged 21, I was living with my then girlfriend and completed the application forms to join, fearful of the vetting process. I knew that enhanced checks would be undertaken to check both my own and family's integrity

from finances, qualifications, credit checks, criminal convictions, etc. I also knew that a home visit would be conducted. I have never been so nervous to have two senior serving police officers come to my house and to explain who my girlfriend was to them, so much so we agreed that she was a housemate, we had two other lodgers, so it seemed easier to keep it under the radar.

Thankfully the reality was much easier, they twigged straight away. To be fair I probably did look like your stereotypical lesbian of the time, short spiky hair, too much denim and DM boots! I was accepted into the Police, but little was ever said, there were no invites for my girlfriend to social events, but there were plenty of awkward conversations about relationships, where I wanted the ground to open and swallow me up.

So it was with pain that I watched the characters Jill and Ritchie of *It's a Sin*

having to lie to the financial advisor to get a mortgage, repression of identity, denial of self, so many generalisations designed to ensure we existed fitted the expectations of society, to be a heterosexual person.

*It's a Sin* evoked so many strong emotions, that are parallel to the emotions I have felt over the past year and the invisible fight with the Coronavirus. Those who believe it is Government trying to control a generation by pushing through a political agenda and privatise the NHS, by proving it is no longer fit for purpose. I'd argue that those of us that work within the NHS have never responded better as an organisation, doing the most for the most, truly embracing Aneurin Bevan's vision for healthcare.

Some people are arguing that Coronavirus is manmade to line the pockets of the pharmaceutical industry. This is an argument we heard



# The forgotten epidemic [3]



when HIV first came to the fore, and for those who believe in conspiracy theories, today's scepticism has strong parallels with the HIV/AIDS crisis.

I held in the 1980s and 1990s for how our precious life was threatened and how the LGBT community was

targeted so brutally. In some ways things have improved, but in other ways not. I have read lots recently and from what I observe, it seems that minority groups remain the target for the masses.

So have we really learnt anything from

our experience of an epidemic in the 80s and 90s applicable to today's global pandemic? If I'm honest I'm not so sure we have and we still have a long way to go. So, let's just be nice to one another, celebrate each others' lives as our own, because we are all in this together. \*

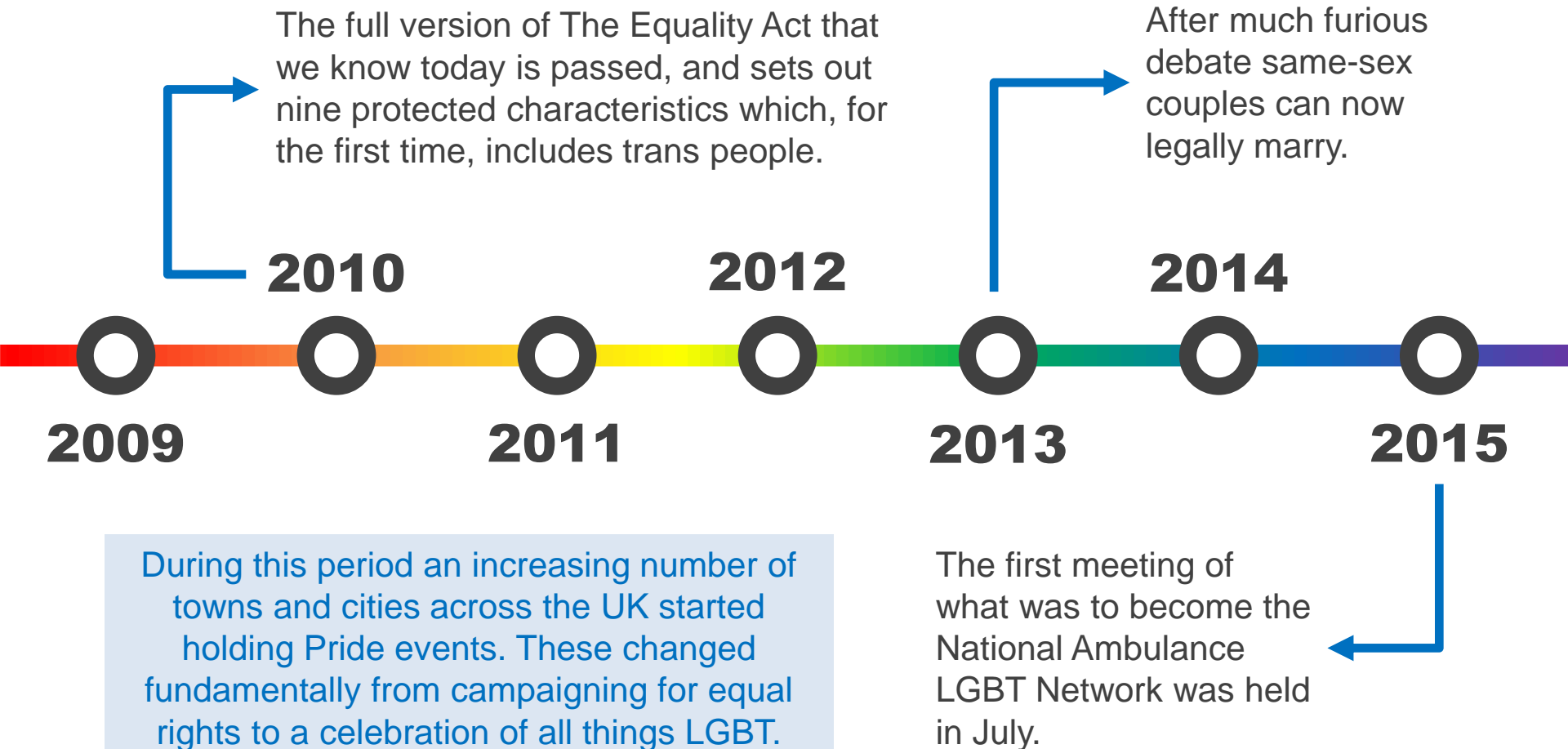
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Rocking the stereotype in the early 90s, reflecting on coming out in 1991, then of joining the Police force in 1993. I was so proud to be finally wearing the uniform after all the worry of the application and vetting process, with the fear I might not be accepted for who I am.

”



# Timeline - Changes in legislation [2]



# Ask the committee [4]



Lydia West plays the part of Jill in *It's a Sin*. This wonderful performance seems to have captured the hearts of many people.

One character in *It's a Sin* seems to have captured the hearts of many people. In the programme Jill quickly realises there is something very sinister about the mystery illness sweeping amongst gay men and sets to find out more.

We asked the National Committee what their favourite part of the series and their answers probably won't surprise you. Many people saw the selfless acts of Jill as real inspiration, and others even recognised people who were very much like this fictional character.

We love the hashtag that is circulating...

**#BeMoreJill**

# Ask the committee [5]



We asked the National Ambulance LGBT Network committee what their favourite part of the programme *It's a Sin* was...

Jill! What an absolute gem throughout the series, she showed the true allegiance that allies have for the LGBT community, ignoring the persons sexuality or gender identity and just supporting and being a true friend. Her character was so consistent and heart-warming throughout the whole series. There was loads of other good bits too, but she was the stable rock of the series.

Leigh Keyte-Jones, West Midlands Ambulance Service

The solidarity of the characters, they all had each other's backs, all supported each other, a real sense of community.

Adam Williams, North West Ambulance Service

Jill's compassion.

Alex Ewings, London Ambulance Service

# Ask the committee [6]



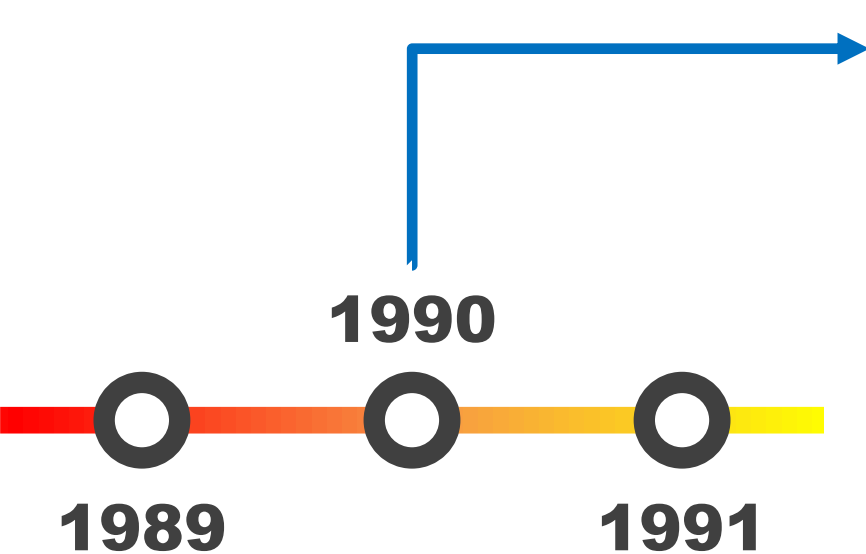
Jill! What an absolute legend she is! Jill is actually based on a real life friend of Russell T Davies. The real 'Jill' plays Jill's mum in *It's a Sin*. I love Jill because when the rumours start circulating about the mysterious 'gay cancer', instead of ignoring it, Jill tries to learn and educate herself about what HIV/AIDS actually is and how it is transmitted. She then becomes the most amazing support to her friends who are ill. She even visits strangers on the AIDS ward who are alone because their own families have disowned them for being gay. She represents exactly what the best kind of ally is and does.

Emma Burrow, North East Coast Ambulance Service

There are just too many to choose from! The relationship between the five friends throughout the series was so beautifully portrayed throughout but the scene when they are all sat around the table at the Pink Palace remembering, celebrating and grieving for (spoiler alert) Richie is something that felt special and so real to me. I've set this as everyone's LGBT History Month homework, this is a must watch series for everybody.

Asmina Chowdhury, South East Cost Ambulance Service

# Timeline - LGB or LGBT?



Up until the early 1990s you would only have heard people refer to LGB. The affiliation with the transgender community hadn't been established and many people debated whether they should be connected. Many people believed these were two very different facets of diversity.

Today we take this for granted and the LGBT acronym has now expanded to represent a greater variety of sexual and gender identities. This is often shortened to LGBT+.

Here at the National Ambulance LGBT Network we are proud that we have been able to address the health inequalities faced by trans people and will shortly be developing resources to make sure we can confidently support the full spectrum of people represented by LGBT+.



# *It's a Sin* - A younger perspective [1]



By Josh Barraclough

As a trans man who was born in 1988, I expected *It's a Sin* to be good but I didn't expect it to resonate with me as much as it did. The first time I heard of HIV or AIDS was after Princess Diana sadly passed away in 1997. The news piece included the famous photograph of Princess Diana shaking the hand of terminally ill man with AIDS. I was only nine at the time and I just assumed that it was a terminal disease similar to cancer. I never heard anything further about HIV or AIDS until sex education began in Year 8 at secondary school. I had no idea how many people the disease had killed worldwide, but I do remember even in 2002 when I started sex education that it was still a subject which was surrounded by a lot of stigma. I remember one immature boy in my class saying that another pupil had AIDS because he was gay and I will be honest, being a naïve teenager who wanted to fit in, I probably laughed along with the rest of the

class. It seems that even as we went into the new millennium and despite what had been learnt about HIV by that point, the stigma had still seeped into my generation.

For me personally Ritchie's character mirrored my own personal story into adulthood and even though I started University in 2007 I saw so many characters in the show that I recognised from those days. I should mention that at this point in my life, although I knew I was transgender I was living as female and identifying to the world as a lesbian. I come from a working-class background, myself and my brother are the first generation of our family not to be sent down the pit. Despite my family now owning and running their own successful businesses, their working-class attitudes remain. My identity as a trans man is not something my family have yet been able to accept or even acknowledge. They live in a state of denial and I often find I am living as

two people. I love my family and they love me, but there is a constant 'elephant in the room' when I am with them, which I know could be damaging if I let it. Ritchie's family share many of the traits I see within my own family unit even to this day.

I left for University in 2007 to study Drama and Theatre as far away from home as I could possibly apply. I found my place at university and I was surrounded by gay men. My close group of friends consisted of people who all identified as LGB and HIV was not something we ever discussed or even worried about. I look back now and realise how naïve we were to the suffering of our own community 20 years prior. Many of my male friends were having unprotected sex, a few even contracted gonorrhoea or chlamydia. I realise now how uneducated and uninformed we were as to the dangers. We didn't seem to grasp the seriousness of what had gone before. I've learnt so much since

# *It's a Sin* - A younger perspective [2]



then about HIV after reading the National Ambulance LGBT Network's CPD resource Providing Good Care to People Living with HIV but I never connected to the subject on a personal level until I watched *It's a Sin*.

One of my closest friends from drama school was frighteningly similar to Ritchie, the life and soul of every party. He had a magnetism people were attracted to and being a drama student, he loved the limelight. He was renowned for having unprotected sex and I wonder if he had been born twenty years prior his fate would have been like Ritchie's. The entire show

felt like it took my group of friends from drama school and threw us back in time twenty years. It made the empathy and heartbreak as we learnt the fate of each character even more startling. I'll admit I cried, not once but a few times during the show.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but it seems for me at least that the next generation were not fully aware of the gravity of what had gone before. It seems that the shame and stigma kept the harsh reality of the AIDS epidemic under wraps for those who came after. I'm proud of how far our community has come since then, watching *It's a*

*Sin* made me realise the huge strides we have made towards equality, particularly for those who identify as LGB. But it also made me realise how much work we still have to do. Too many LGBT people still have to hide themselves and many of the negative attitudes that existed in the 1980s still exist today. The most important message I took going forward is that we must not let something like that happen again, that we must educate ourselves on what has gone before, know the history of our community and keep striving forward for equality and inclusion for all minority groups. \*



“

Aberystwyth University in 2007 and although I was still living as female at the time, I found my community there. It's the first place I ever felt a sense of belonging.

”



# Answers

**Don't Cheat!**



Here are the answers to the quiz on Slide 4.

The last forty years have seen the most far-reaching changes in legislation and rights for LGBT people.

In what year was legislation passed that stopped people being removed from their jobs because they are gay?

**2003**

In what year did the first person die from AIDS in the United Kingdom?

**1982**

In what year was the ban lifted on gay people serving in the military?

**2000**

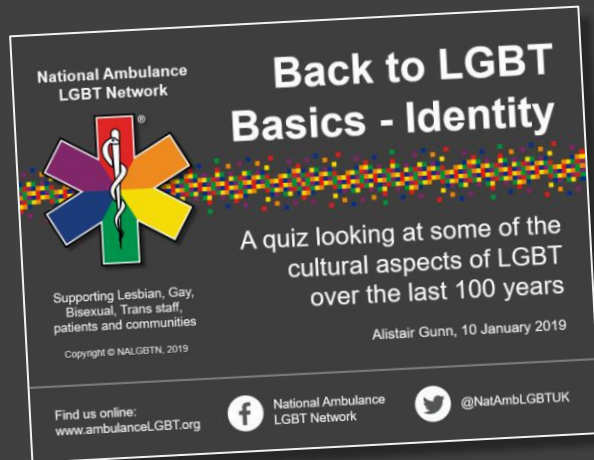
In what year was Section 28 introduced which effectively prevented discussion about homosexuality in schools?

**1988**

In what year did same sex marriages become recognised in England, Scotland and Wales?

**2013**

# Other 'Back to LGBT Basics' packs



## 2018 pack - Identity

The first pack we released looks at all aspects of identity including the extended LGBT acronym, flags, famous people and even a lesson on the secret gay language of Polari. There's an added dimension ideal for network meetings – each slide contains a false fact!



## 2019 pack - Trans

The second pack from 2019 looks at the history of transgender people. It is full of surprising information, this resource will generate lots of discussion. To make it more interactive, there is also a false fact on every slide. An ideal pack for network LGBT History Month events.

[www.ambulanceLGBT.org](http://www.ambulanceLGBT.org)