



St
Martin
in
the
Fields

Where Love and Sorrow Meet

*An Ecumenical Service of Lament and Hope
to Mark the Fiftieth Anniversary
of the Sexual Offences Act 1967*

Saturday 29 July 2017

10.30am

Preacher: *Canon Mark Oakley*

Music: *London Gay Men's Chorus*

ALL ARE WELCOME

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St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London, WC2N 4JJ
Phone: 020 7766 1100 Online: www.smitf.org

Where Love and Sorrow Meet

An Ecumenical Service of Lament and Hope to Mark the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act 1967

Saturday 29 July 2017 • 10:30am
In the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields

Nineteen-fifties Britain was a time of explicit government-sanctioned persecution of homosexual men by the Home Secretary David Maxwell-Fyffe. This included lengthy prison sentences, extravagant denunciations, humiliations by the media, witch hunts, summary dismissals, and blackmail. Even with the trial and disgrace of men such as Oscar Wilde fresh in people's minds, the state embarked on another wave of show trials. Edward Montague, Michael Pitt-Rivers and Peter Wildeblood were among those convicted and sent to prison. This attempt to criminalise a whole section of society, curtail freedom, and anathematise their lives and whole being eventually stirred some of the progressive conscience of the country. Leading figures such as J.B. Priestley, Jacquetta Hawkes and Lord Astor joined forces to demand a review of the law. Organisations were created to change public opinion, mobilise support in parliament and the media, and provide counselling and support.

In 1956 the Wolfenden Committee recommended partial decriminalisation. This finally became law on 27 July 1967 – but in England and Wales only. Basic injustices remained entrenched even after the Sexual Offences Act. Convictions for gay sex rose after the Act, before falling. Throughout this period leading reformers – such as Allan Horsfall and Anthony Grey, who respectively led the North West Law Reform Committee and the Albany Trust – risked their reputations and careers. The Campaign for Homosexual Equality continued their work, pressing for full equality throughout the UK and an equal age of consent. Jackie Foster and Sharley MacLean were notable lesbian campaigners. Icebreakers, the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, Gay's The Word Bookshop, and the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement trailblazed their way through the homophobia of their generation. The Gay Liberation Front attacked the foundations of a hostile and cruel society by direct action. This was still the era of entrapment by 'pretty police,' positive vetting – which barred gay men from certain jobs – and the near-invisibility of positive images in the media.

The struggle for justice is not complete, and many still experience discrimination and hostility, particularly within the church and faith communities. Campaigning for full equality continues to this day.

This event is free to attend and everyone is welcome