

# LGBT+ History Month

February in the United Kingdom marks LGBT+ History Month which has the purpose of observing and learning about the history of gay rights and related civil rights movements.

This year LGBT+ History Month is extra special as it sees the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the very first Pride March in the UK in 1972.

Over the following slides you can learn about 28 fascinating, ingenious and often heroic LGBT+ individuals from history.



## *Additional Resources:*

*LGBT History Month UK Website - <https://lgbtplushistorymonth.co.uk/>*

*Good As You: From Prejudice to Pride by Paul Flynn*

*Pride: The Story of the LGBTQ Equality Movement by Matthew Todd*

1912 - 1954

# Alan Turing

Alan Turing was a mathematician, computer scientist, logician and philosopher.

Turing was a genius who quite literally saved the world. From inventing modern computing and artificial intelligence to being instrumental in the winning of World War II, Turing's legacy is overwhelming (and now immortalized on the £50 note).

His life was littered with success, and he shone from the age of 13 studying Einstein's theory of relativity. He was a patriot and was given an OBE for his life-changing inventions and work. However, by the end of his life, this eccentric, creative man was hardly seen as a hero. Turing became one of the most well-known victims of anti-gay legislation and was convicted of gross-indecency in 1952. Two years later he would be found dead at home from suicide.

He was a queer hero of science, human progress, and the pursuit of truth.



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1926 - 1998

# Jackie Forster

Jackie Forster was a news reporter, actress, archivist and lesbian rights activist.

In the early years of her life, Jackie travelled the globe and even married author Peter Forster in 1958. However, she divorced him in 1962 after coming to terms with her own sexuality. She would return to the UK to work for Border Television (now ITV Border) as a news reporter with her girlfriend and children. From that point on, she became a well-known figure in the promotion of women's and lesbian rights in the United Kingdom.

Forster joined the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) and served on its executive committee before participating in the first ever Gay Pride march in 1971. She was one of the founders of Sappho (a long running lesbian publication) and was also part of the Greater London Council's Women's Committee. From 1992 until her death, she was an active member of the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre management committee



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1958 - 1990

# Keith Haring

Keith Haring was an American artist best known for his graffiti subculture work.

Haring was many of the queer creatives who populated New York City in the 1980s mixing with the likes of Madonna, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. After enrolling at the School of Visual Arts in 1978, the gawky art hero became synonymous with the cartoonish drawings that littered the NYC subway showing birth, death, love, sex and freedom.

Through hundreds, if not thousands, of works created in white chalk across the metropolis, Haring's raw and vibrant style marked him out as a queer, sex-positive artist who dealt with social justice. He travelled the world creating works for hospitals, children centres and charities and taking part in over 100 exhibitions. In 1990, Haring died aged 31 after being diagnosed with AIDS the following year.

His imagery and works cannot be understated in their role in the activism and awareness of AIDS today.



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Keith Haring

Ignorance = Fear /  
Silence = Death  
(1989)





1945 - 1992

# Marsha P. Johnson

Marsha P. Johnson was an American gay liberation activist.

Born in 1945, Marsha was a founding member of the Gay Liberation Front and an AIDS activist with ACT UP. A self-identified drag queen, Marsha came to prominence in the New York gay and art scene modelling for the likes of Andy Warhol and performing in a drag troupe called Hot Peaches.

Marsha is synonymous with the Stonewall Uprising in 1969 when a group of drag queens and queer people stood up to the NYPD outside the now famous Stonewall Inn. Despite denying to have started the riot, many eyewitnesses claim that Marsha (along with Sylvia Rivera) were the first people to engage with the police on that day.

Since Johnson's death in 1992, their life has been celebrated in numerous ways including in documentaries, murals, art and museum exhibitions.





1960 - 1987

## Mark Ashton

Mark Ashton was a British gay rights activist who co-founded the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) group which was later immortalized in the film "Pride".

Ashton involved himself in numerous activist and charity groups including the London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In 1984, along with his friend Mike Jackson, he founded the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM) in Claydon House on the Heygate Estate in Elephant and Castle. The principal aim of the group was to collect donations to help with the miner's strike. Ashton demonstrating the importance of marginalized and oppressed groups working together in what modern observers would coin "intersectionality".



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1942 -

# Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir

Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir was a former flight attendant turned Icelandic politician.

Sigurðardóttir was the world's first openly LGBTQ+ person to head a national government (as the Icelandic Prime minister). She had a long and eventful political career that saw significant advances in gay and lesbian rights in Iceland during her tenure.

Most Icelanders saw nothing unusual about having a lesbian prime minister, but she was an advocate for many social reforms including being instrumental in passing marriage equality in 2010 with her and her partner Jonina one of the first couples to take advantage of it.

Sigurðardóttir is not necessarily a name that comes up in LGBTQ+ history books but she set the example that LGBTQ+ people can hold significant positions of power in government.





1951 - 2012

# Sally Ride

Sally Ride was an American astronaut, physicist and science educator

Ride became the first American woman to fly into space. However, it wasn't until her obituary was published that the public discovered something that had remained unknown to her adoring fans - for 27 years she had shared her life with another woman, Dr Tam O'Shaughnessy.

In the 1970s, Ride joined NASA overcoming obstacles and barriers (namely from the press) that male colleagues did not have to endure. She went into space in 1983, and again in 1984. Ride felt the pressures of being the first American woman in space and set up the Sally Ride Science - a non-profit that helps make science fun and accessible to young (girls in particular).

Sally Ride showed us that LGBTQ+ people are everywhere, and they are even in space!



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1854-1900

# Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde was an Irish novelist, poet and playwright who has become one of the most well-known figures in LGBTQ+ history.

He published a plethora of writing throughout his life, with some of his most influential works such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) cementing themselves into the fibre of the English Canon. Several of Wilde's texts were criticised for their decadence and homosexual allusions, highlighting the contemporary narrow-mindedness he was forced to contend with.

Despite being married with two sons; Wilde loosened the reins on his sexuality and started engaging in romances with some of the period's most powerful figures. It was after his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas that he was sentenced to two years hard labour for gross indecency.



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**“Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault. Those who find beautiful meanings in beautiful things are the cultivated. For these there is hope. They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty.**

OSCAR WILDE

1932 – 2007

# Barbara Gittings

Barbara Gittings was a civil rights pioneer who campaigned for gay and lesbian equality for nearly fifty years and founded the America's first ever national lesbian organization.

A highly visible, passionate and militant lesbian activist, she also edited *The Ladder* (the first national lesbian rag in the USA). Her lobbying against workplace discrimination and homosexuality being treated as a mental illness in the 1970s cemented her reputation as a front-line activist that shaped modern LGBTQ+ lives.

When she moved into an assisted living facility with her life partner Kay, she continued to be an outspoken individual who was proud of who she was right until her death in 2007.



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1945-1991

# Freddie Mercury

Born Farrokh Bulsara, Freddie Mercury was a British singer, songwriter, record producer and lead vocalist of the rock band Queen.

As a musical artist, he penned and performed some of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's greatest rock songs including 'Killer Queen', 'Bohemian Rhapsody', and 'We are the Champions' to name but a few. He was known for his distinctive flamboyance and charismatic stage performances which often saw him interact with the audience. The most notable example can be seen throughout Queen's 1985 Live Aid concert; considered by many as a landmark rock moment.

Mercury was criticized for not publicly engaging with gay activist groups, or speaking out about his personal struggles with AIDS, with many suggesting that someone of his stature and influence could have helped in the fight against it. Regardless, he promoted a level of queerness into the mainstream that was uncommon at the time and will continue to be remembered as both a rock and queer icon for generations to come.



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1926-1989

# Christine Jorgensen

Christine Jorgensen was an American soldier, actress, night club singer and activist who became widely known in the United States as the first person to undergo sex reassignment surgery in the 1950s.

Born in New York, Jorgensen underwent surgery in Denmark and became an instant celebrity upon her return to the US, with her transition being the subject of a *New York Daily News* front-page story. Jorgensen used her platform to advocate for transgender people and pave the way for a more inclusive perspective on gender identity.

As a transgender spokesperson and public figure, she toured universities speaking about her experiences and became one of the founding members of the "sexual revolution" in the 1960s.





1928-1987

# Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol was an American artist, film director and producer, widely recognised as a leading figure in the visual art movement known as pop art.

Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Warhol initially pursued a successful career as a commercial illustrator. After exhibiting his work in several galleries throughout the 1950s, he received widespread appreciation as an influential and controversial artist. His New York studio, The Factory, became a well-known gathering place for playwrights, intellectuals, drag queens, Hollywood celebrities and other wealthy patrons.

He lived openly as a gay man prior to the gay liberation movement. In June 1968, he was almost killed by a radical feminist Valerie Solanas who shot him inside his studio. However, Warhol's work continued to unveil and celebrate the queer underworld in a way that previously had not been achieved.



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1930 - 1978

# Harvey Milk

Harvey Milk was an American politician and one of the first openly gay politicians to hold public office.

A passionate local business owner in San Francisco during the 1970s, Harvey Milk turned into a politician in the state of California. His frankness and good humour instantly earned him popularity among San Francisco's growing gay population. With his promise to "sort out San Francisco's chihuahua poop problem" he was elected and served an 11-month term.

In this time, he was the driving force behind revising gay rights law, programs to benefit minority groups and the elderly and was instrumental in the defeat of the state senate imposing a law on the banning of gay teaching in public schools.

In 1978 Milk was shot dead by a disgruntled former city employee. His legacy continues to live on to this day.





1907-1954

# Frida Kahlo

Frida Kahlo was a Mexican painter best known for her self-portraits during the early twentieth century.

Kahlo rose to posthumous fame in the late 1970s when her work was rediscovered by art historians and political activists. Up until this point, she had remained relatively unknown and was simply regarded as the wife of Diego Rivera (a celebrated Mexican artist). By the early 1990s, she was celebrated as an icon for the Chicanos (the feminism movement) and the LGBTQ+ movement.

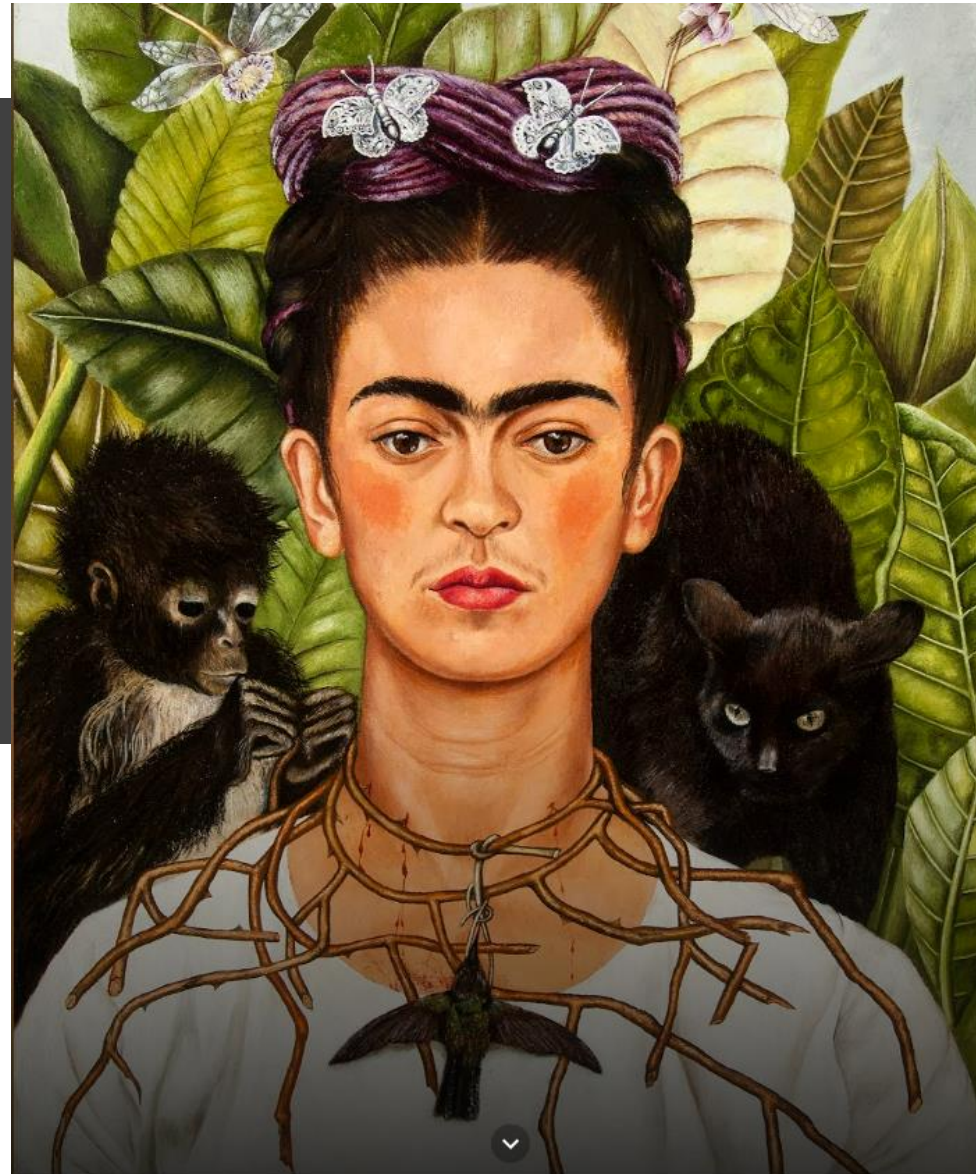
The background to her paintings was one of revolution, pain and love and she styled her self-portraits on traditional Mexican clothing with flowers in her hair (a somewhat political statement at the time). Her queer status was reflected in her incredible female sexual confidence, and her unmistakable rejection of contemporary normative behaviour was at odds with the 1930s, 40s and 50s macho society.



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Frida Kahlo

Self-portrait with  
thorn necklace and  
hummingbird (1940)





1912-1987

# Bayard Rustin

Bayard Rustin was an African American leader in social movements for civil rights, socialism, nonviolence and gay rights.

Rustin spent his life fighting for the rights of others, while at the same time facing immense discrimination because of his race and sexuality. In 1941 he worked with A. Philip Randolph on the March on Washington Movement to protest racial discrimination in employment. He also organized Freedom Rides and worked relentlessly behind the scenes to strengthen Martin Luther King's leadership of the Civil Rights Movement.

In the 1980s he became a public advocate on behalf of gay rights, speaking at events as an activist and supporter of human rights. In 2013, President Barack Obama posthumously awarded Rustin the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



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1950-

## Michael Cashman

Michael Cashman is a British actor, politician and LGBTQ+ rights activist.

In 1986 he was cast as Colin Russel in the BBC soap opera *EastEnders*. This role paved the way for LGBT representation on primetime television, with his character having the first gay kiss in a British soap; a scene watched by an estimated 17 million people. Despite the controversy that followed, Cashman and his partner fought the status quo and found themselves in the fight against Margaret Thatcher's section 28 in 1988 which banned the 'promotion' of homosexuality in schools.

Cashman has continued to fight for LGBTQ+ rights throughout his career, transitioning into politics in 1999 when he became a Labour Party MEP for the West Midlands. He is also a founder of Stonewall (an LGBT rights charity), a patron of The Food Chain (a London-based HIV charity) and a patron of LGBT labour.





**“ Despite the sacrifices over the years, the pain, the decimation of people’s humanity, the denial of their integrity and their identity, the stigma that they had faced, the same things are happening again now...This time the target is not LGB people, but trans women, trans men, non-binary people and trans teenagers.**

**MICHAEL CASHMAN**

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1929-2017

# Edith Windsor

Edith Windsor was an American LGBT rights activist and technology manager at IBM.

She was the lead plaintiff in the 2013 Supreme Court of the United States case *United States v. Windsor*, which overturned Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act which was considered a landmark legal victory for the same-sex marriage movement in the USA. As a result of this victory, the Obama administration and federal agencies extended rights, privileges and benefits to married same-sex couples.

Following her departure from IBM in 1975, she increased her involvement with LGBTQ+ organisations such as Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, Services and Advocacy for LGBT Elders, LGBT community centre and founded the improv group "Old Queens Acting Up". She passed away in 2017 with Hillary Clinton speaking at her funeral about the incredible impact she had on the world.



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1934 - 1992

# Audre Lorde

Poet, feminist, activist and queer hero, Audre Lorde was born in New York in the mid-1930s.

Lorde had her first poem published when she was just 15, in Seventeen magazine. Throughout her career she published 9 volumes of poetry and 5 works of prose and was named the New York state poet laureate.

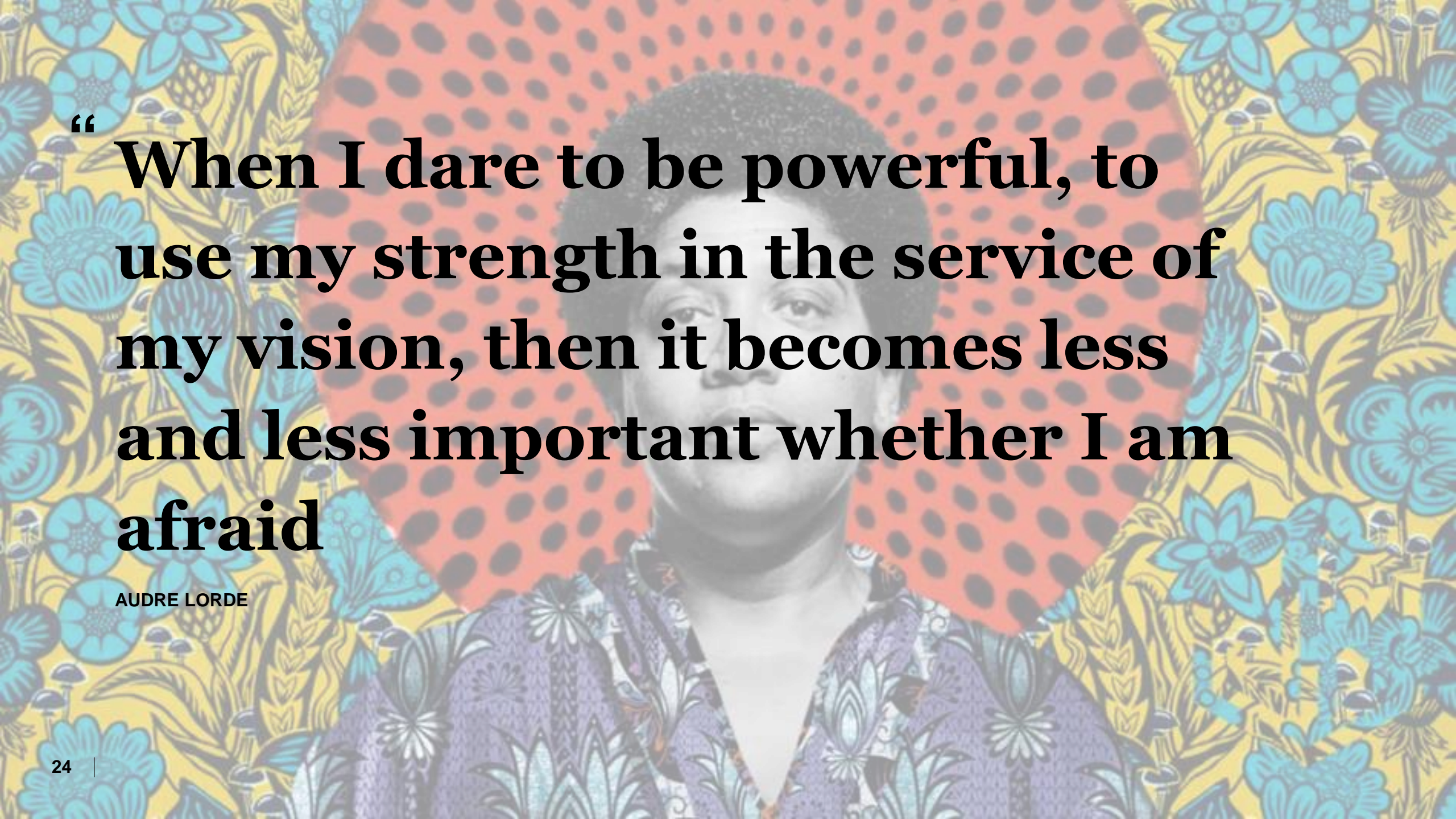
Audre's work gave voice to issues of race, gender and sexuality. As a writer and performer, Lorde was deadly serious one minute, and light and coquettish the next.

Today, she might be read as an intersectional feminist - holding the belief that oppressive institutions are interconnected and cannot be examined individually. Lorde was involved in the fighting of all prejudice, not only in mainstream culture, but within feminism itself too. Her words are powerful, unapologetic and timeless.



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**“When I dare to be powerful, to  
use my strength in the service of  
my vision, then it becomes less  
and less important whether I am  
afraid**

AUDRE LORDE



1942-1994

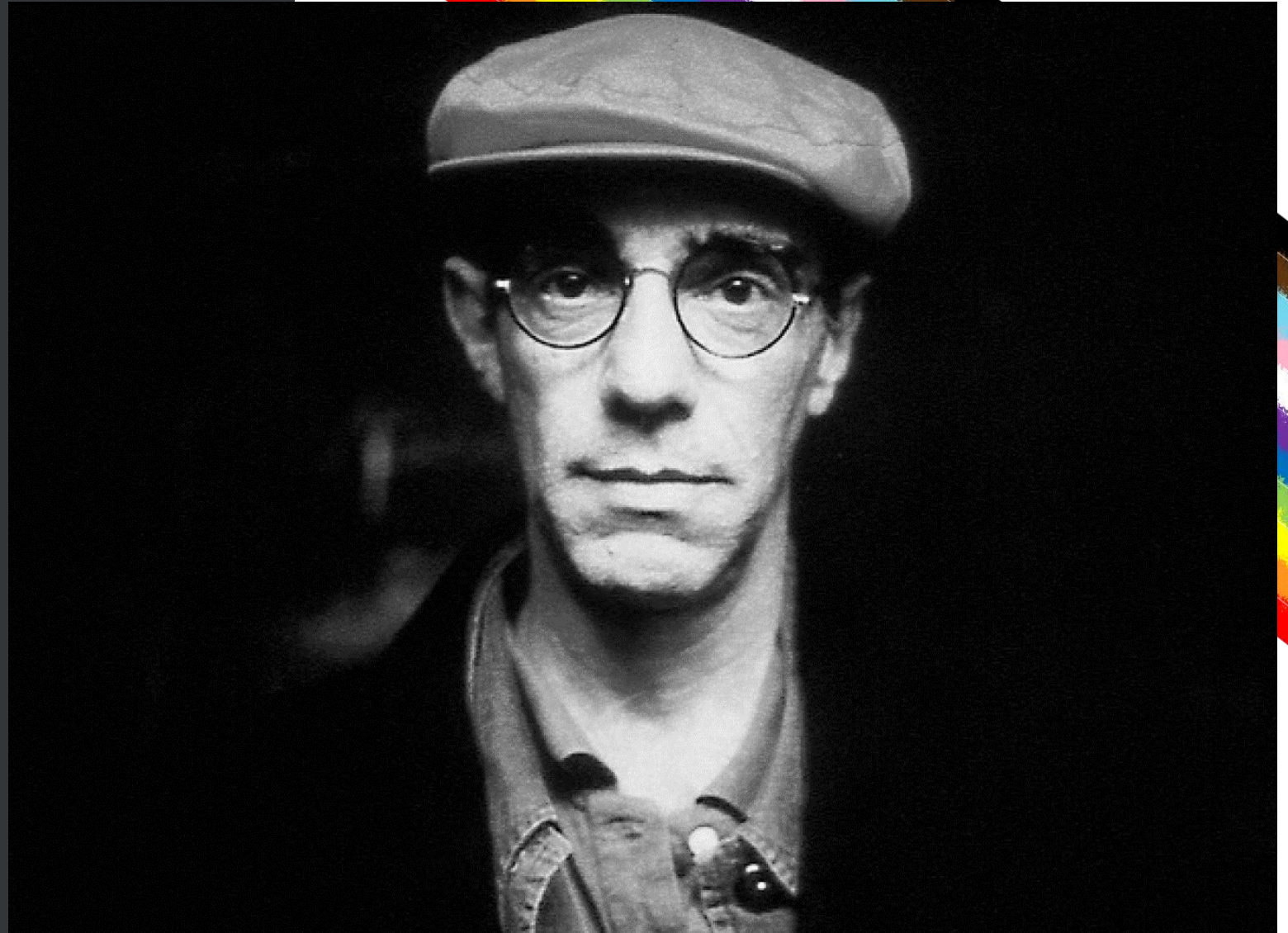
# Derek Jarman

Derek Jarman was an English film director, stage designer, author and gay rights activist.

Jarman's first films were experimental Super 8mm shorts; a form he developed later in his career, most notably in his prominent work *The Angelic Conversation* (1985). A pub in Angel (The Angelic) – a mere 25-minute walk from the Yonder offices – is named after this film and Jarman himself was a frequent patron.

He was a tireless and vociferous campaigner for gay rights and spoke openly about his personal struggle with AIDS. He actively opposed the infamous Section 28, which sought to ban the promotion of homosexuality in schools.

In 1991, Jarman was canonised by an activist group of gay male 'nuns' known as the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence as an act of political protest.



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1951 - 2002

# Sylvia Rivera

A sex worker and transwoman, Sylvia risked everything to play a part in the LGBT+ story.

She was close friends with Marsha P. Johnson and together they opened a homeless shelter for transgender youth in New York. Like Marsha, she became best known for her role in the Stonewall Riots in 1969 but her activism extended beyond gay rights and to all civil equality causes including the early women's movement. Her volatile nature put her at odds with the people she campaigned with, and she found herself not fitting into either the gay liberation movement or the fight for women's equality. Sylvia never backed down and today she is credited for opening up the queer movement to be more inclusive and embrace people of colour, gender non-conformists, trans people and people from different economic backgrounds.

Sylvia's legacy lives on through the Sylvia Rivera law project, a legal aid organisation serving transgender, intersex and or non- gender conforming individuals.



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1951 -

## Chris Smith

No history of LGBTQ+ life in the United Kingdom would be complete without mentioning Chris Smith (now Baron Smith of Finsbury) who set many firsts in British politics.

Whilst gay politicians existed before 1984, Chris Smith was the first gay MP to voluntarily come out soon after he was elected by the people of South Islington and Finsbury (the constituency in which our office currently resides). In 1997 he became the first openly gay cabinet minister (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport) and was instrumental in making museums free for all. In 2005, he achieved another first, becoming the first British politician to go public as HIV-positive and speaking publicly about his diagnosis.

After over 20 years of public service, Chris was created a life peer and became Baron Smith of Finsbury in the London Borough of Islington.



1960 -

# Alison Bechdel

An impossibly geeky American cartoonist, Bechdel's work marks her out as a unique queer artist and important cultural voice.

For 25 years, her comic strip "Dykes to Watch Out For" (1983-2008) documented the highs and lows, ins and outs of lesbian culture. It was in this that the "Bechdel Test" was introduced for films and books which can only be passed if they feature two women having a conversation about something other than a man (now widely used to point out sexist media).

Her work continues to be met with huge acclaim including her memoirs "Fun Home" (2006) and "Are You My Mother" (2012), the former being made into a Broadway musical. Bechdel continues to demonstrate that in popular culture there is a place for geeky lesbian and queer people in all their glory. She currently lives happily with her partner Holly, an artist, in rural Vermont.





# The Bechdel Test

*DYKES TO WATCH OUT FOR*

ALISON BECHDEL

1985



1951 - 2017

# Gilbert Baker

A world-famous political activist, designer and vexillographer, Gilbert's work spanned nearly four decades and in recent years has received some of the highest accolades for his work. He created the Rainbow Flag in 1978 for the San Francisco gay and lesbian parade, and his creation has been embraced across the world as the universal symbol of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movement.

Born in the conservative state of Kansas, Baker thrived in the counterculture movement in the post-Stonewall era and honed his desire to create a replacement for the pink triangle (now more readily associated with Nazis in WWII). Over the subsequent decades, Baker created the Rainbow Flag and in 1994 created a world record mile long version to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. In 2015 the Museum of Modern Art ranked the rainbow flag as an internationally recognised symbol as important as the recycling symbol.



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# Gilbert Baker, original eight- stripe Gay Pride flag, 1978

*“What I liked about the rainbow  
is that it fits all of us.*

*It’s all the colors.*

*It represents all the genders.*

*It represents all the races.*

*It’s the rainbow of humanity.”*

— Gilbert Baker



1952 -

# Peter Tatchell

Born in Australia, Tatchell has been campaigning for human rights, democracy, LGBTQ+ freedom and global justice since the 1960s and he is a notable figure in the British LGBTQ+ community.

His most prominent involvements were leading the Gay Liberation Front (1971-1974), the queer human rights group OutRage! (1990-2011) and ACT UP. Tatchell with others helped organise Britain's first Gay Pride march in 1972.

Some of his notable moments include ambushing public figures such as Tony Blair, Robert Mugabe and Mike Tyson in order to further his cause. He currently set up and works for the Peter Tatchell Foundation where he campaigns for human rights in Britain and internationally. Additionally, he supports LGBTQ+ activists in over 70 countries that outlaw gay and lesbian relationships.





1972 -

# Laverne Cox

Laverne Cox is an actor, writer, producer and civil rights activist from the USA.

A fascinating orator who in her career has sought to build bridges between often opposing groups of individuals, she has been one of the unifying voices on the road to equal rights for transgender individuals.

Cox became a household name playing Sophia Burset in Orange is the New Black which won her a Primetime Emmy Award (making her the first transgender person to win an award in any acting category). Cox visibility increased in 2014 when she appeared in the cover of Time Magazine and she continues to use her platform and status to promote the issues many transgender people face.

Cox's life resonates with so many LGBTQ+ individuals and reminds us all that not fitting in and struggling to be your authentic self is something we can all relate to.



**“Beyond truth and trans, one of the big Ts for me would probably be trying because at the end of the day we can think whatever, but it's like, what are we going to do? Because as long as we're trying, I think that goes a long way.**

**LAVERNE COX**



1974 -

## Lady Phyll

Phyll Opoku-Gyimah, also known as Lady Phyll, is a British political activist, co-founder of UK Black Pride and executive director for the Kaleidoscope Trust. She works to promote unity and cooperation among all black people of African, Asian, Caribbean, Middle Eastern and Latin American descent, as well as their friends and families, who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Lady Phyll publicly rejected an MBE in the 2016 honors.

She has served on numerous committees including for Stonewall and the Trades Union Congress. Considered one of the most prominent lesbian activists, she was named as one of the 100 Great Black Britain's in 2020 and continues to raise awareness of racism in the LGBTQ+ community and speak about the importance of intersectionality.



1962-

# Tammy Baldwin

Tammy Baldwin is an American lawyer and politician serving as the junior United States senator from Wisconsin since January 2013.

She became the first openly LGBT woman elected to the House of Representatives and to the Senate in 1999 and 2013 respectively. A large part of her work has revolved around spearheading legislation to prevent discrimination against LGBTQ Americans.

She identifies as progressive and has a consistently progressive voting record. She supports Medicare for All, LGBTQ rights, tighter gun control and opposed the Iraq War.





1939 -

# Ian McKellen

Regarded as a British Cultural Icon, Sir Ian McKellen CH CBE is an English actor and activist whose career started in 1961 at the Belgrade Theatre.

He is the recipient of 7 Laurence Olivier Awards, a Tony Award, a Golden Globe and a Screen Actors Guild Award and is perhaps best known for his roles as Magneto in the X-Men films and Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings and Hobbit trilogies. Beyond his acting career, McKellen is a prominent LGBTQ+ activist and consistently lobbied against Section 28. He was one of the co-founders of the Stonewall, an LGBTQ+ rights lobby group named after the Stonewall Riots. Additionally, he is also a patron of LGBT History Month, Pride London, Oxford Pride, LGBT Foundation, FFLAG and The Albert Kennedy Trust.

He is consistently ranked highly on the World Pride Power List and continues to be a vocal advocate for all LGBTQ+ people.



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**“Personally, coming out was one of the most important things I’ve ever done, lifting from my shoulders the millstones of lies that I hadn’t even realised I was carrying**

**IAN MCKELLEN**