

# QUEER FOOTPRINTS

‘An incredibly powerful exploration of a London that has been deliberately hidden, by one of the most courageous and insightful activists we have.’

—Owen Jones, author of *Chavs*

‘An electrifying adventure through London’s untold queer past. Every page is packed with inspiring, moving and downright hilarious secrets just itching to be uncovered, and with the riotously entertaining Dan Glass as your mincing tour guide, you’ll have an absolute blast as you do. A word of warning: after reading this, London will never seem the same again.’

—Sam Arbor, Director’s Assistant of Netflix’s *Heartstopper*

‘Dan Glass is a charming raconteur, grass-roots historian, people lover and pleasure seeker who delights in guiding us from pick-ups to pinkwashing through the queer London that he loves. He lets both the neophyte and the experienced City dweller discover the magic anew.’

—Sarah Schulman, writer

‘The strength and the beauty of this book is its resolute and joyful nod to queer history, the multiplicity of our stories and the ongoing, transformative process of our queer footprints which continue to add layers onto the city I was lucky enough to grow up in. London, through the eyes of Glass, is ever-changing but always radical.’

—Juno Roche, author of *Queer Sex*

‘Dan Glass, London’s unofficial queer mayor, takes you bar and history hopping through former gay ghettos and new queer spaces. The oral histories Glass obtained from those who were there, much like hidden gems on less travelled side streets, bring his guide to vibrant life.’

—Peter Staley, HIV activist and author of *Never Silent:  
ACT UP and My Life in Activism*

‘Offers a fascinating, lively and revealing look into the capital’s queer past. Like the winding streets themselves, there is something surprising at every turn. This is a queer look at London with a Capital Q and is by turns intimate, gossipy, personal and political.’

—Joseph Galliano, Director of Queer Britain,  
the national LGBTQ+ museum

‘Your back-pocket guide to our queer/LGBTQIA+ histories, full of joy and ammunition to claim without any shame our beautiful queer futures.’

—Tash Walker, host of The Log Books podcast  
and co-chair of Switchboard LGBT+ Helpline

‘Glass has used his vast experience as a campaigner to create something dizzyingly energetic. His writing isn’t just informative; it compels you to act.’

—Darren McGarvey, Orwell Prizewinning author of *Poverty Safari*

‘Dan’s enthusiasm and passion for LGBTQIA+ culture is relentless. It is impossible to read this book without being swept up into the legend of London’s queer history of resistance, solidarity and downright fabulosity. By the end of this book you will be marching on the streets in a thong.’

—Stacey Clare, author of *The Ethical Stripper*

‘Walking queerly in the footsteps of Dan Glass is a reparative experience. We have been here and forever will be. While strolling alongside these pages you will be invited to engage with the mosaic of a city as seen through experiences of lesser and more known queer trailblazers of all times. This book is a monument in the making – find your pace and don’t you walk straight!’

—Szymon Adamczak, performance maker and HIV activist

‘An exuberant pilgrimage through space and time into the radiant heart of queer history.’

—Uli Lenart, Gay’s The Word bookshop

‘From coming out on Old Compton Street to soul-fire fights in Brixton, finding Heaven under the Arches to ACT UP protests in the streets, Dan Glass has curated a manifesto and maps for “queerdos” across London. You will find freedom in these minces!’

—Amin Ghaziani, Professor of Sociology,  
University of British Columbia, Canada

‘A fascinating walk through the early years of gay liberation to the (partial) decriminalisation of homosexuality in June 1967.’

—Jonathan Blake, British gay rights activist

‘Radical and revolutionary ... *Queer Footprints* will be used in the decades to come to guide queer youth and transform the conversation about trans issues. Dan Glass will lead you gasping for more, and by the end, you’ll be fighting for justice on the streets.’

—Ntombi Nyathi, Training for Transformation

‘There are remarkable books and then there is *Queer Footprints*. Highly informative, witty, candid and steeped in historical detail, Dan Glass serves as the bobbin in the weaving process of herstories, bringing you an immersive reading experience which makes necessary the act of radical love. Whether you’re a Londoner, a visitor or someone who’s never stepped foot in the city, *Queer Footprints* will enrich your knowledge of queer history.’

—Katlego Kai Kolanyane-Kesupile, writer, artist and queer activist

‘So engagingly written. A fabulous work of love and defiance. It documents and honours extraordinary and everyday struggles for personal and collective freedom, in a city of dreams and nightmares but so many delights!’

—David Rosenberg, author of *Rebel Footprints*

‘An illuminating and inspiring journey around the city of London; weaving together stories of resistance, care and the joy of collective trouble-making, and reminding us of the connectedness of our lives and struggles. In *Queer Footprints*, radical queer history is something that is constantly being made, not consigned to the past. This is a book that evokes many feelings – but above all, it provides us with the hope we need to act.’

—Alice Robson, organiser with Feminist Fightback

‘An essential and extensive guide through the spaces in London which have enabled change across the world ... All told with the enthusiasm and wonder of one of the most passionate and creative queer activists in the UK, Dan Glass.’

—Ruth Daniel, CEO of In Place of War

‘We forget that all achievements that LGBTQ communities enjoy in the West did not fall from the sky, but rather, are a consequence of political struggle. *Queer Footprints* honours the people and places who formed that history. A guide, a historical non-fiction and a series of journalistic reporting all in one – I hope all cities across the world can one day have their own *Queer Footprints*.’

—Sergey Khazov-Cassia, Russian journalist and writer

‘A truly rewarding read, full of insights and knowledge and intertwined with anecdotes from those who were there. This book is a goldmine for those interested in finding out about the queer history of the streets of London.’

—Gillian Murphy, Curator for Equality, Rights and Citizenship,  
London School of Economics Library

‘A fascinating and passionate ode to queer London in all its glory. Dan Glass has inspired hundreds if not thousands of people towards social justice and the transformative power of community activism. He has created London’s new essential anthology of heroic queer histories and the untold stories of queers who built the world’s greatest city.

—Jeremy Goldstein, founder of London Artists Projects

‘Dan Glass is a living gift from our queer ancestry with an ability to write our present with an alternative view of our past. His experience has shaped the way we appreciate the world we live in and how we choose to question the past.’

—Kieron Jina, artist

‘Whether you are reading in the comfort of your own home, or following one of the tours live on the street, *Queer Footprints* brings the LGBTQIA+ history of London to life in a beautiful and visceral manner. This is no self-important history lesson that starts somewhere in the past and leads you date by date to the present. It’s all rather punk and, well, queer. A love letter to queer London reminds us that although we’re not always in the mainstream telling of history, we have always been here. And whilst the spaces and places we’ve occupied throughout the recent past may no longer be ours, or no longer even exist, this powerful book reminds us that real history, and indeed our future, doesn’t lie in dates, buildings, pomp and ceremony, but within the hearts, minds, loves, lives, losses and desires of all the LGBTQIA+ people who occupied our cities before us.’

—Nathaniel Hall, playwright and HIV activist

‘In his usual glorious fashion, Dan brings us truly out from the sheets and into the streets. This is more than a history book. It’s a living walking guide. It’s a closeted cartographer’s wet dream come true. It’s a brick to throw through the windows of London’s most transphobic establishments ... I’ll be utterly shocked if there aren’t queer walking guides like this across all continents in five years.’

—Phil Wilmot, member of Beautiful Trouble

‘Dan Glass has uncovered the queer history of one of the world’s great cities in a way that is not only eye-opening, but just as entertaining as the writer himself. Whether you’ve visited London, lived in London, or never been that lucky, you will see it with fresh eyes ... his call to action, for activists to create similar histories of their communities today, is one I believe will be the legacy of this fabulous book.’

—Victoria Noe, author of *Fag Hags, Divas and Moms*

# Queer Footprints

A Guide to Uncovering  
London's Fierce History

Dan Glass

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# Introduction

Hello, dear readers! I'm Dan Glass. I'm so excited to take you on a tour through the fumes, the regrets, the constant Costa coffees, the hangovers, the walks of shame, the moments of fame and the 'was I here last night, I can't remember?' moments that make up the experience we are part of in this phenomenal, mysterious and naughty city – London Town.

It's an enormous honour and privilege to trot these routes with you and shake our booties together. We are going to have a lot of fun marching in the steps of so many iconic souls; celebrating legendary people, moments and movements, all continuing to build the road to freedom – a legacy you are now part of too.

The idea for *Queer Footprints* rooted itself back in 2014 when I was in my favourite club, the legendary Joiners Arms on Hackney Road. This is where the importance of cherishing, and the gravity of losing, queer spaces dawned on me. Catching up with friends while smoking a cigarette, I was told that alongside the recent mass closure of other queer spaces, the Joiners doors would soon be shutting too. Rising rents and a lack of protection were dooming yet another queer place to the scrapheap of cultural life. I dropped my cigarette and sparked up an idea. 'No ^%&\$%\* way. Not our Joiners. Let's stop the Joiners from being shut down. Let's speak to the landlord and organise a meeting.' This is how Friends of the Joiners Arms began: with an incredible, diverse, creative collective determined to win a new space back in its place.

Through this organising experience, I learnt that fire-fighting the closure of queer spaces is not enough. We have to dig deeper.



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Two years later in 2016, I co-founded Queer Tours of London – A Mince through Time, walks that tell the stories of London’s queer herstory, shedding light on the lives, spaces, identities, repression and resistance that form the backdrop of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual and other (LGBTQIA+) lives today. Ever since, the forces of queer-nature at Friends of the Joiners Arms have been working night and day to cultivate home through reclaiming queer space, and I’ve been writing this toolkit for you.

Fast forward to 2022, and thanks to so many of you out there – the queer community and our allies, all buying shares and supporting our performance club nights, we recently raised enough cash to create a new queer space opening in the Joiners Arms’ honour!

When the new space opens, I assure you, I am going to put this pen down, and whatever protest placard I’m holding, and dance and sweat like there’s no tomorrow. I hope you’ll join me there.

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

*Queer Footprints* is your invitation to take up space! Get your towel out, take to your garden, your favourite park or somewhere comfortable to read the book. Better still, take it into the streets, on your own or with friends, with strangers, whatever works for you. Taking up space feels good, eh? We can change the way we all experience our city, whether you’re LGBTQIA+, an ally or someone hungry for freedom. We are the queerdos we have been waiting for and we don’t have to hide anymore.

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There is more than one way to use this book. You might find it easier to read the book first and then do the walks – or you might decide to just go for it. The Soho, Brixton, Trafalgar Square and Whitechapel routes should each take approximately 1–2 hours; for the Piccadilly, King’s Cross and Ladbroke Grove routes, I would give it half a day. The ‘mini minces’ queer power short stops can be on the spot in various parts of town. When planning your trip make the most of London’s fabulous array of queer spaces, places and events which can be seen in the resources section at the end of *Queer Footprints*. London has a huge range of yummy places to eat too, so tuck in.

The gorgeous maps illustrated by Mark Glasgow will help you navigate the route. My previous book, *United Queerdom: From the Legends of the Gay Liberation Front to the Queens of Tomorrow*, focused primarily on the period in the run up to 50 years of radical Pride in 2022. *Queer Footprints* zooms out with and from the GLF and focuses primarily on ‘living herstory’. *Herstory* is history viewed from a feminist perspective. I have chosen to platform incredible queer places, spaces and people predominantly since the Sexual Offences Act, 1967, which led to the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality. The areas covered have been chosen based on curating walks that make most sense chronologically, politically and practically, as well as highlighting stories previously less known.

I didn’t want to write *Queer Footprints* in a detached way. I chose not to write, ‘in this building this happened ...’, or ‘In this street someone said ...’ because the reality is we create community together, continually, all the time. These stories are real and they happened to real people. So I chose to give space to those who were there to speak and narrate their own experiences, and who

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make my heart boooooom! It's been a delicious joy to sit with these icons, and their beloveds, hearing these stories from their mouths. All those who are alive, I am chuffed to call my friends. We have organised many protests and programmes for transformation together and continually fine-tune our movements so that we can scamper on effectively ahead.

Some of the iconic locations you'll visit on our walks are now luxury flat complexes, a KFC or a NatWest bank. It baffles me that these places aren't covered in blue heritage plaques and don't have flags flying outside them proudly declaring their queerstory to every unsuspecting passer-by. But however hard the corporate privatised tarmac falls on us, we still come rising up like a defiant spring. Today, I'm so excited at how queer spaces, clubs, movements and support networks are bubbling to the surface, reclaiming spaces for the masses in our ever-evolving queer city. Long may it continue!

What you will see in the pages ahead reflects only about 0.00000001 per cent of the research undertaken for this book, because queers have changed the world since the dawn of time. I have 40 giant maps of London regions printed on my wall with over 2000 case studies of people power – maybe more books like this will follow.

When you've finished with *Queer Footprints* don't leave it on your shelf gathering dust. Pass it to a friend – or, even better, think of the biggest homophobe in your life and buy it for them for their birthday. You never know, you might see them dancing to Lil Nas X or Donna Summer the following year.

## INTRODUCTION

### INTO THE FUTURE

London is changing so fast. The world is changing so fast. It is incumbent on us as curious people to keep telling our stories, to keep creating change and to keep expanding our horizons. There are lonely people out there who needn't be, trust me. Glorious and glittering collective action can create beauty against all odds. These stories are a recognition of our interconnection – how the person opposite you on the tube is somehow intimately intertwined in the salvation of our city for all people, against profit and greed. Reach out to them.

I feel so lucky and grateful to have written this. Every day has been a massive dose of ancestral shaking. I have cried, laughed and fallen harder in love everyday with our incredible community, so much so that now it's done I'm going to be a little bit heartbroken.

There's one last thing as you tie up your boots: *Queer Footprints* is only an appetiser, a gateway book for you to continue our lineage, by documenting queerstory. You are that story. Whatever the choppy future seas have in store for us, knowing we can drop anchor, reconnect with those who've come before us and all the wisdom and inspiration they hold, will mean we can venture more boldly into the eye of the storm and help others find their way.

So get yourself a shiny new notebook and print out a map on which you can plot the treasure of your community's story. The moment we begin to shape our own identities, everything becomes bigger out there. Do it. The world will be so much better for it.



‘Queer not as being about who you’re having sex with (that can be a dimension of it); but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live’ – bell hooks



# I

## Homosexuals Come Out!

### Soho

Have you ever wondered how to break free from cultural stereotypes? Have you ever dreamt of creating a neighbourhood where everyone can be themselves in all their delicious and defiant identities? Have you ever wanted to know how to create the most exhilarating club nights, fabulous effective movements for change and how to connect with people across cultures? Great! Welcome to Soho, the pulsing Queen Bee of Queer London and meet the fierce force behind some of the legends who have paved the way.

#### START: TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD STATION

1. The Make-Up is Cracking – *Old Compton Street*
2. Like a Trifle! – *Madame Jojo's, 8–10 Brewer Street*
3. Life Was a Funny Thing – *Au Chat Noir, 72 Old Compton Street*
4. Queer Valentines Carnival – *Comptons of Soho Pub, 51–53 Old Compton Street*
5. Somewhere Over the Rainbow – *Admiral Duncan, 54 Old Compton Street*
6. I Don't Like the Look of You Cunty – *The Colony Club Room, 41 Dean Street*



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7. Sexual Freedom – *Dean Street Services*, 43 *Dean Street*
  8. I'm a Lesbian. What Do You Do? – *Gargoyle Club*, 69 *Dean Street*
  9. Breaking Out the Ghetto – *Karl Marx Plaque*, 30 *Dean Street*
  10. Black and Gay, Back in the Day – *Candy Bar*, 4 *Carlisle Street*
  11. Queer Black Joy – *Soho Square*
  12. Fuck the Pain Away – *Ghetto, Falconberg Court*
- Where's the Pub? *Admiral Duncan*, 54 *Old Compton Street*

### 1. THE MAKE-UP IS CRACKING – OLD COMPTON STREET

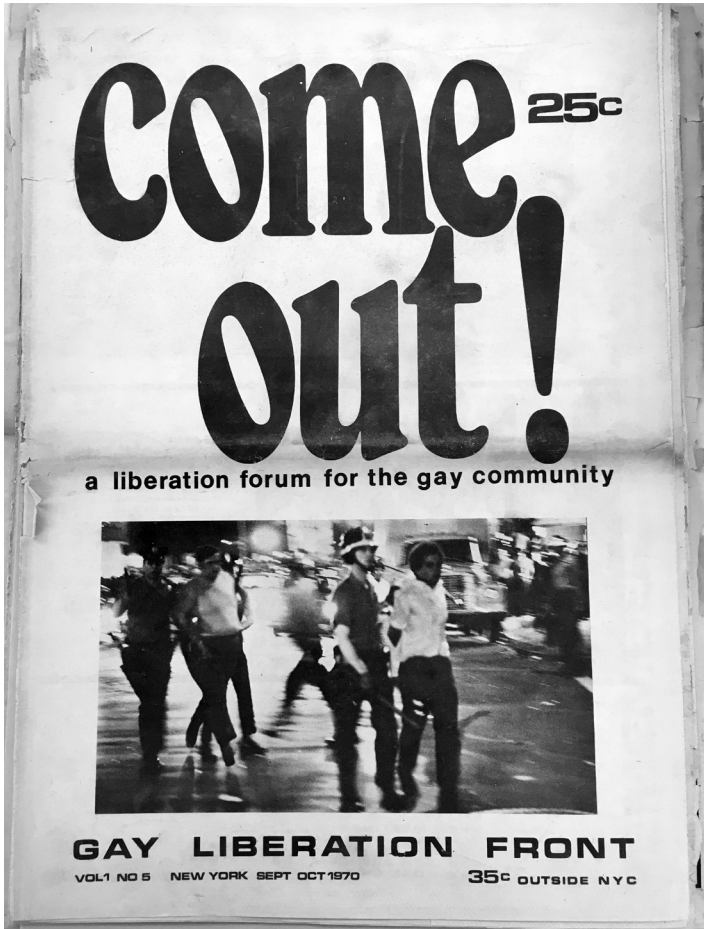
Stand slap bang in the centre of the street. It's a cool summer's night in 1972. All around Soho, black London cabs and red double-decker buses whizz by and a song, 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough' by Diana Ross, can be heard faintly from a cafe nearby, but here it's quiet. Knock, knock ... you can hear tapping on doors close by. Members of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) are trotting up and down the street in multicoloured linen shirts and corduroy flares, wrapping their knuckles on doors with handfuls of the GLF magazine *Come Out!* under their arms. Some shop-workers peered out and took the magazine, others screaming that they should leave immediately for fear of police reprisal and losing their jobs.

Ted Brown, a GLF activist, remembers that time:

At the time there were no public gay bars or clubs. In London a few known gay venues existed and there were a handful of venues where secrecy was still the norm. There was only one pub that I knew of – the Salisbury pub near the Globe Theatre

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and two cafes – the Lyons Corner House on the Strand and one on Regent Street – with straights on one side and gays on the other. Lesbians went to Gateways Club in Chelsea or private women's parties. That's why the GLF were marching. Straight people had no idea gay pubs were there, even the GLF activists



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had to ask each other where they were. Windows blacked out, hidden away, you wouldn't know it was a pub.

Ghettos, the physical boundaries humans create, can be used to segregate and oppress, but also to protect. Ghettos constantly require us to reflect on whom they truly serve, and Martha Shelley's got something to say about that: 'The roles are beginning to wear thin', as she wrote in the pages of *Come Out!*

The make-up is cracking ... The roles – breadwinner, little wife, screaming fag, bulldoze, James Bond – are the cardboard characters we are trying to fit into, as if being human and spontaneous were so horrible that we each have to pick on a character out of a third-rate novel and try to cut ourselves down to size.

Right on Martha. It's about time to flip the script and discover who we really are. 'Time to Come Out!' the GLF members called in response to the shop owners as they peeped out from the slots in their doors.

Ted continues:

At the time, Old Compton Street was gay, but only a few people knew it and it was quite elitist. You had to be in the know, pretty or wealthy to get into any of the clubs. In order to reclaim the self-determination of our bodies, it was necessary to secure certain rights, but this was only the first step. We joined a fight against a whole system of domination, with its divide-and-rule logic that extended into the individual self. Examples were

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the adoption of male and female roles among gay people and challenging being asked whether you are ‘butch or bitch’ when entering a bar or ‘lipstick lesbians’ or ‘bulldykes’. There’s still not enough spaces for the whole LGBTQIA+ community. But London is so much better for gay people at large now – Old Compton Street is so out now! GLF made that happen.

The GLF were on a not-so-secret mission to not only break out of the gay ghetto and into the outside world, but also to break down the elitism and stereotypes within the ghetto itself. Ted was also involved with a small group called ‘Gays against Fascism’.

Coming out of the closet can result in rejection, with potentially catastrophic consequences. Coming out can also be a positive, enchanting and liberating experience and often a wild mixture of both. It is a profoundly brave and courageous act, one that happens not just once but continues throughout our lives, as Dustin Bradley Goltz explores as ‘a daily and moment-by-moment negotiation, contingent upon context, social assumptions, and shared social cues’. Choosing what to wear, imagining a dream job to apply for, owning the natural pitch of our voice or pondering how to walk out the door, jeez, sometimes we’ve come out five times before we’ve even had our cornflakes.

Coming out happens constantly here on Old Compton Street, in many daring ways. Here is a small street that provides a magnitude of homes, a patchwork of places and people that are defiantly creating pathways for freedom. One of those people is Josh Hepple. He can often be found sitting here having a coffee responding to many blushing faces and online invitations.

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Josh's outstanding and attention-grabbing writing explores his unique account of his experiences using Grindr, the gay dating and sex app. He has cerebral palsy, his impairment affecting his speech and mobility, relying on personal assistants 24/7. Growing up in Edinburgh, he sensed the need for wider support and so helped to establish the charity TalkTime Edinburgh providing free counselling for disabled teenagers, regardless of sexual orientation. His equality training sessions are based on the social model of disability and as a campaigner and activist Josh has worked in many different sectors such as the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. He is the spirit of the civil rights mantra 'Nothing about us, without us, is for us', written from the view of disabled people who are disabled by barriers in society and not by their impairment or difference. Enjoy the tour ahead – I have no doubt you will, with Josh by your side.

### 2. *LIKE A TRIFLE!* – MADAME JOJO'S, 8–10 BREWER STREET

With its go-go dancers in windows and the red lights over the alleyway doors, you know that Soho has always been naughty. Very, very naughty. Colin Vaines, a film producer and long-time Soho resident, recalls:

During the 1970s, red lights were everywhere and every other entrance seemed to be a strip club, massage parlour, sex cinema or sex shop selling magazines and 8mm home movies. Displays inside and outside the shops, sometimes plastered on entire walls of buildings, were as graphic as the law – or rather, the notoriously corrupt 'porn squad' of the time – would allow.

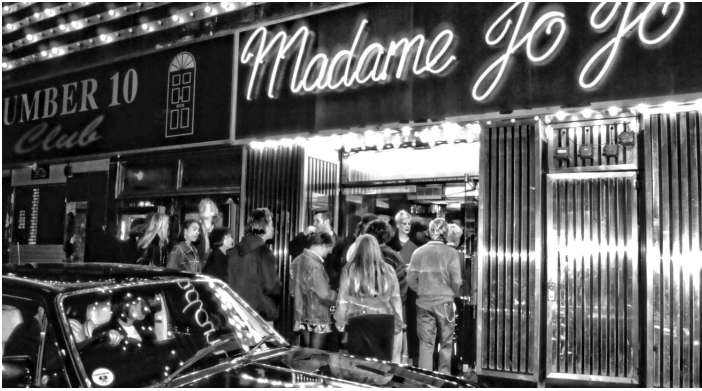
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‘A community of fringe culture’ from 1960 to 2004, Madame Jojo’s nightclub began with the original Madame Jojo as the host. It soon became a hotbed for everyone – gays, straights, drag, transgender, punks, hipsters and pop stars – hellbent on providing a space to be free. The crowds were a mixture of the out and fashionable with the underground and sleazy, celebrities such as Eartha Kitt, Danny La Rue, Liza Minnelli, Michael Ball and Chaka Khan mixing with prostitutes, punks and pimps. Soho showed musty old Blighty how life really could be lived, regardless of gender, sexuality or creed; and many of the shop signs are remnants of that era. ‘Everybody was thrown into the melee: it wasn’t corporate, it wasn’t mundane. Like a trifle, colourful and glittery’, recalls ‘The very Miss Dusty O’ who ran ‘Trannyshack’ here on Wednesday nights. A dazzling array of shows where young stars like actress and cabaret performer Mzz Kimberley cut their teeth here working with the original Jojo and as a show girl in a Ruby Venezuela show, six nights a week. Mzz Kim recalls with a twinkle in her eye:

Madame Jojo’s was of huge importance to me. Alongside Lily Savage, Ebony, the only Black drag queen on the scene at the time, also performed in the club. All sorts of things used to happen – Grace Jones dancing on tables, Jean Paul Gaultier and Donatella Versace doing the conga in the road outside – Soho will be more magnolia for its loss.

The club’s licence was revoked suddenly in 2014 after a ‘serious incident of disorder’, according to the police report. The *Guardian* newspaper exposed how the council’s motives were questioned when it was revealed soon after that the club had already been

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Credit: Mzz Kimberley / Bishopsgate Institute

ring fenced by the owners for demolition and development over the next few years. That raid marked the start of the current phase of gentrification in Soho, where now it seems like every other building is being gutted or demolished to make way for expensive flats.

Counter-culture cannot be faked, and once it's gone it's gone. Much of the gentrification is due to plain greed overriding any kind of social commitment or social policy. It remains to be seen whether replacement music venues such as the 'new' Madame JoJo's will be able to provide a similar experience at similar inexpensive prices. Triple rent increases have since forced other local shops to shut down as well. It was in this context that the 'Save Soho' campaign began, joined by GLF activists such as Alan Wakeman. The campaign's call to arms is 'Inclusive, not Exclusive'. In the short time it has existed, it has had a number of small but significant victories, such as saving Rupert Street's historic Yard Bar from poorly initiated and destructive 'develop-

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ment', but at the end of the day, if we need more determination, we can always learn from Quentin Crisp.

### 3. *LIFE WAS A FUNNY THING* – AU CHAT NOIR, 72 OLD COMPTON STREET

'If at first you don't succeed, then failure may be your style' once quipped Quentin Crisp, charmer, actor and author of *The Naked Civil Servant*.

Around the corner on Charing Cross Road in 1947, 20 years before the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality, Quentin turned on his heels in response to a voice saying 'Just a moment, you. We are taking you in for soliciting'. He was faced with two police officers.

Crisp had been 'window shopping for shoes', a euphemism for a traditional cruising technique outside selective shops known on the queer underground. Nigel Kelly explores Quentin's experiences in *Quentin Crisp: The Profession of Being*:

I had already systematically searched all the likely windows in Oxford Street and was just starting on Charing Cross Road when I was stopped by two policemen disguised as human beings. They demanded to see my exemption papers. As always, I showed them the one that said that I suffered from sexual perversion. When my inquisitors had retrieved their eyebrows from the roots of their hair, they gave me back this rather grubby document and I moved on.

Iconic.