

# QUEER NORFOLK STORIES



PHOTOS: SÁRA LAPINOVÁ

## QUEER NORFOLK STORIES IS A YOUNG NORFOLK ARTS PROJECT THAT CELEBRATES THE WONDERFUL, EXTRAORDINARY LIVES OF LOCAL LGBTQ+ PEOPLE.

This zine accompanies the Queer Norfolk Stories audio trail, which launches on July 8th as part of the 2021 Young Norfolk Arts Festival. The audio trail features local LGBTQ+ stories, with a wedding at Norwich Castle, musings about coming out and community, and more; you can listen to the trail via the free ECHOES app - search "Queer Norfolk Stories" to reveal the locations around Norwich city centre where you can interact with each story.

Inside this zine, you will find the transcripts of 6 queer, Norfolk stories, as well as short introductions from us.

We loved creating this unique love letter to Norfolk's LGBTQ+ communities and we hope you enjoy perusing this zine.

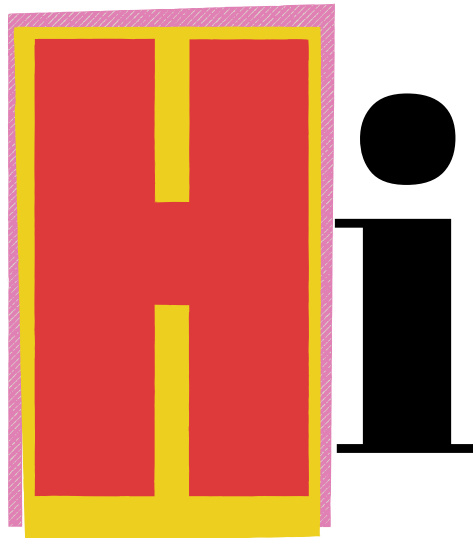
This project is also a part of Norwich Pride Inspired, and is funded by Festival Bridge as part of the #MovingItOn programme.



Ellie

I'm Ellie and I'm a bisexual events worker, bookstagrammer, and creative.

I moved to Norwich in 2017, and the city was incredibly important for me in exploring and learning about my own sexuality and queer culture.



Sára

I'm Sára and I'm a queer film programmer, podcaster and bookstagrammer.

I knew I was queer for a long time before moving to Norwich but living here has given me a whole new perspective of safe queer spaces and has allowed me to express my sexuality in a new way.





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PHOTO: SÁRA LAPINOVÁ



Hi I'm Deb and I'm the Secretary at Norwich Pride.

Rainbows are everywhere during Pride Month. Helping create the colourful, joyous atmosphere that is so uplifting. Our vision here at Norwich Pride has always been to 'turn Norwich into a rainbow'. In doing this we hope the city becomes a place where everyone can feel safe and proud to be themselves. But what are the origins of the rainbow flag as an LGBT+ symbol?

Well, it has its roots in the 'Gay Rights' movement of the 1960s and 70s where the LGBT+ community were in the midst of a battle for equal rights. Gilbert Baker, an artist, was asked to come up with a new symbol for the community. Something positive, that celebrated love. Baker thought that a gay nation should have a flag, to proclaim its own idea of power. "We needed a flag to fly everywhere" he said.

He was dancing in San Francisco under the glitter ball and remembers, "We were all in a swirl of colour and light. It was like a rainbow. That's the moment when I knew exactly what kind of flag I would make." Baker's design featured 8 coloured stripes and included a dark indigo and a hot pink, both lost over the years. That first rainbow flag design was flown on the 25th June 1978 at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade.

However, it wasn't until 1994 that the rainbow flag was truly established as the symbol for LGBT+ pride. In June that year Baker achieved a world record when he created a one mile-long flag to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. In 2003 Baker was commissioned to produce another giant flag, this time marking the 25th anniversary of the flag itself. For old time's sake Baker included the two lost colours from the original. This flag measured one and a quarter miles stretching across Key West, Florida, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. It was called "Rainbow 25 Sea to Sea" and was carried by 5,000 people! The flag was divided afterwards and sections were sent to hundreds of cities worldwide.

For our 2019 march Norwich Pride were delighted to be able to bring a huge section of that very same historic flag to Norwich. We borrowed it from the European Pride Organisers Association and they brought it to us in a huge yellow suitcase.



I was the Volunteer Co-Ordinator for the day and spent a lot of my time rushing between venues, connecting with people and helping make sure the day was running smoothly. We had our base in the wonderful 'WellBeing Centre' close to Chapelfield Gardens and in the middle of the day, close to the start of the march, I was running back there and crossed in front of City Hall.

There were thousands of people lining the streets. The atmosphere was electric and everywhere you looked there was colour. All the wonderful colours of the rainbow. Spirits were high and anticipation was building. Bands were playing, dancers were dancing, people were hugging friends and petting rainbow dressed dogs. The Pride Pop-Up stall was heaving with Pride-goers buying flags of every colour and excitedly, and proudly, draping themselves in the flag of their choice, ready for the march.



**THE ATMOSPHERE WAS ELECTRIC AND  
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I paused as I was crossing Bethel Street and turned my back to the market, just to take it all in. The march was being expertly lined up by our March Leader back down Bethel Street ready to make its familiar round-city tour that would end in Chapelfield Gardens for the festivities.



And just at that moment the Gilbert Baker flag was suddenly let loose from the yellow suitcase and held down its full length by hundreds of volunteers. It was gently lifted high into the air, and this amazing symbol of the history of our community spread itself the length of the street, unfurling in all its glory, gently undulating as it settled. The most enormous cheer erupted from the crowd at the sight of it.

And I felt so moved. And it made my day that we could feel safe and proud in this place on this day and I could see that we had fulfilled our mission at Norwich Pride. We had 'turned Norwich into a rainbow'.

And that's a wonderful memory that I will always cherish.







## *Genderqueer*



Hi, I'm Tiah-Paige Burrell, I'm a young actress based in Norfolk and I am panromantic, demisexual and genderqueer. I came out by accident actually. I was intending to come out, but not in the way that I had. Basically, I went to some online Norfolk queer community groups to say, look, I think I'm pan and demi, but I've got no idea how to broach the subject with my family and friends. And about 10, maybe not even 20 seconds after I'd posted that my mum sent me a screenshot of the post saying "you just did".

And I don't think I've ever panicked so much in about 5 seconds as I had in that moment, 'cause I had no idea how she was going to take it. Then I was very lucky because she turned around and said "What did you think I was going to say? Of course I support you!" and that was quite lucky cause I know a lot of people don't have their family support, but it was such a relief to know that I did.



As for my genderqueer, that took a lot longer for me to discover. I identified as a cis female for so long, but I realised that I wasn't happy in just that. I realised that I didn't really fit with the sort of female norms that a lot of females around me did. And I just, I felt like I was something more, something outside of that, but I couldn't figure out what it was, until I met a very lovely nonbinary pal of mine.

We're very good friends now and they helped me discover sort of all the different gender identities there are, and also just gave me the confidence and the motivation just to come out and just sort of be who I want to be rather than trying to fit in with societal pressures. And so this year, very recently actually, I came out as genderqueer as well, but that was a rollercoaster of a journey trying to figure that one out. And yeah, so that's just a little into my story.

I would like to mention how welcoming the community is in Norfolk. Like I've never been to a Pride event, but just based on my interactions with all the LGBT+ people within the community, it's just so supportive and so lovely to have people who've been through similar experiences, and people who haven't, but can share theirs. It's just been so lovely just to have friends who get it.



And so the more sort of LGBT+ people I meet in Norfolk, the more I feel like I fit in and that's just such a lovely thing, to have that support in the community. I wanted to thank everyone in the LGBT+ community really because it's just been such an onslaught of happiness. Sorry, that was really cheesy, but it has been, and I'm proud that I am a panromantic, demisexual and genderqueer. Thank you very much.

“THE MORE SORT OF LGBT+ PEOPLE I MEET IN NORFOLK, THE MORE I FEEL LIKE I FIT IN AND THAT'S JUST SUCH A LOVELY THING”

*By Tiah-Paige Burrell*

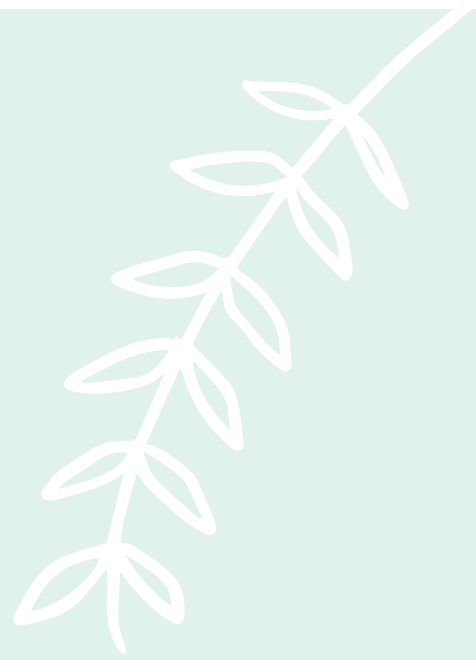
Entangled Cities



by Sara Lapinová

Stepping off the bus, with tangled hair and crescents beneath her tired eyes, I couldn't wait to show her my city. I stepped on my tip toes to reach for a hug, falling over my words like I always do when I'm flustered, my accent becoming thicker like it always does when I feel at home. It's not a romantic story. I do my best tour guide impression, showing her The Birdcage where I change between a pop art dream queen and a noir femme fatale, dancing with beautiful strangers covered in glitter. I think of when I visited her city. Her city was a hot summer, watermelon juice dripping down our crop tops, walking barefoot and getting giddy in the summer rain. Soft touches and shy cheek kisses, teaching me how to dance and my feet failing me just like my words. We get a coffee and sit by the river, the one by Playhouse. I take a polaroid photo of her because I'm sentimental, although they're probably terrible for the environment, and think that to me, she'll now always be a part of my city.





I met E when I got my first job in Norwich. I don't want to say too much about his life as it's not really my story to tell and I also think he'd have hated it! I was actually always a bit scared and shy of him to be honest, he was such a presence, but he had a really great sense of humour and lots of anecdotes to tell.

When he became ill a few of us would pop round to see how he was getting on, I'd come and cut his hair and give him a shave. He'd always been so well turned out at work, but his flat was a real state and he had stopped looking after himself. It was never mentioned outright but we knew that he was gay. We knew there had been a few boyfriends, mostly really young troubled lads who took advantage of him. Homosexuality would have been illegal right up until he was 40 years old. And he was also a Catholic, so I think the church and state had embedded this really deep sense of shame that I imagine so many of his generation shared.

When he died we cleared out his flat, purposely getting rid of anything personal before the nice guys from Oxfam came and took whatever was worth selling on.



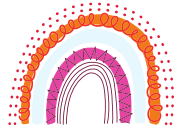
**“I WONDER WHAT KIND OF PERSON HE REALLY WAS OR WOULD HAVE BEEN, AND THE LIFE AND THE LOVES HE’D HAD OR HE WOULD HAVE HAD.”**

I have thought of E really often these last few years. As I’ve worked through my own identity as a queer person, how I feel within the community and particularly here in Norfolk. And I wonder what kind of person he really was or would have been, and the life and the loves he’d had or he would have had. I wonder if I’ve ever felt the same tiny glimmer of shame and secrets that he’s carried with him, and that feeling of always being on the periphery of something, and maybe even the periphery of yourself. I wonder what story he’d have told us, if he could.

*Anonymous*



# WEDDING AT THE CASTLE



WATERCOLOUR PORTRAIT: ELOISE O'HARE



**Stevie:** Hi, I'm Stevie.

**Shell:** And I'm Shell.

**Stevie:** On a sunny day in August 2016 we got married here, at Norwich Castle.

**Shell:** The castle is a particularly special place for us, as at the first Norwich Pride in 2009, I stood on the battlements as we raised the rainbow flag over the city. It was an amazing feeling.

**Stevie:** Our wedding was tiny and perfect, just us and our best friends Ruth and Wendy, with photographer Ruski capturing it for us. Our big wedding celebration for family and friends was later in the year.

**Shell:** It was an emotional day as Stevie's wonderful sister, Pippa, had died during the week. We nearly put it off, but Pippa loved us as a couple, loved coming to Norwich, especially for Pride celebrations.

**Stevie:** We warned the registrar that it might get emotional, but as soon as she played the first song on the CD player, we burst into tears. Eventually she turned the volume down gently, and we began.



**Shell:** Wendy and Ruth read poems: "New Face" by Alice Walker and "Hour" by Carol Ann Duffy.



**Stevie:** "Time hates love, wants love poor, but love spins gold, gold, gold from straw."

**Shell:** The most special moment for me was when she pronounced us wife and wife. When you're filling in the online wedding forms, they give you various options for scripts, wife and wife wasn't there, and I hadn't realised how much I wanted to hear it until she said it.

**Stevie:** When we got outside, our friend Jojo was there with our beloved cockapoo Frank, wearing a big flouncy, satin bow, and we posed for happy photos with our best boy.

**Shell:** The wedding photo appeared in the EDP wedding section at the weekend. The next day we were walking in Mundesley, when a woman stopped us and said, "I saw that dog in the EDP".

**Stevie:** It was like two women getting married, that's nothing, but a dog in a big bow? Now that's news.



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”

**Shell:** Later, our friend, the international artist Eloise O'Hare, painted a wedding portrait of us at the Castle. A huge, beautiful watercolour.

**Stevie:** Eloise imagined the rainbow flag flying on the Castle just for us, and that's how it felt, the day we got married at the Castle

*By Shell and Stevie*





# MY QUEER STORY

*By Nell Basley*

Hello, my name's Nell. I'm from Acle, I'm 19, and this is my queer Norfolk story. So, most LGBTQ+ people remember their firsts. It's part of the queer experience I think, letting that part of yourself out, or not, and learning how to navigate as other in a straight world. Those firsts are special though.

I vividly remember my first Norwich Pride in 2018 when I was 16. Whenever I meet someone outside the Forum or wander past now, I can still visualise the colour of that Pride parade, even when the location itself is grey and barren, except a couple of seagulls. The hope of what Pride represents still remains. Not every queer person attends Pride. Not all of us are larger than life or wear flamboyant clothing, because there's no one type of queer person. We're as varied and multi-faced as every individual on this planet. But what I personally love about Pride is that, the variation. There are many variables, but we come together to celebrate something wonderful: our human right to express our identity, our loves and passions wholeheartedly. To be our authentic selves.



When I close my eyes, I can remember it all. I can remember the badges that are still on one of my bags, reading Pride Norwich 2018. I can remember getting my photos done with a bunch of my friends, us all squeezing in this outdoor photo booth with weird hats and wigs and feather boas on. I can remember seeing drag queens in real life for the first time and just being amazed by how strong they appeared, even if they didn't feel it.



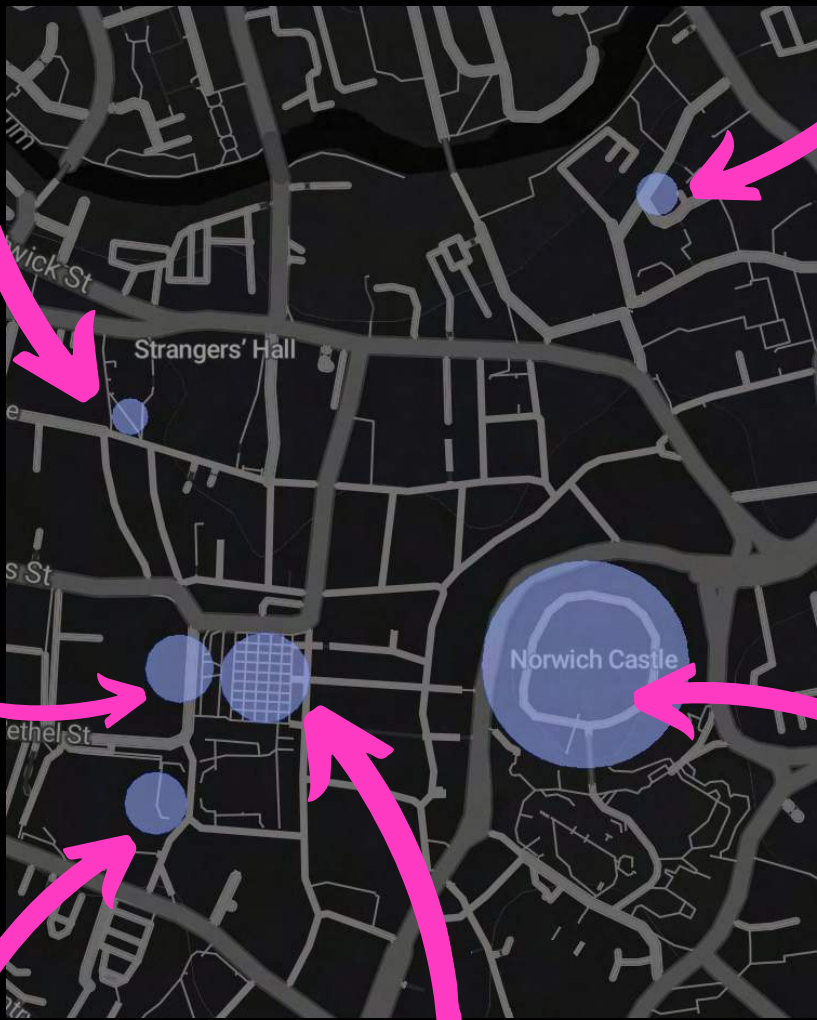
**"The joy of being  
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identities..."**

The joy of being surrounded by all ages and gender identities and remembering how the first Pride was a riot. It had to be. And it still has remnants of protest-esque attributes now. Music loudspeakers, banners, ribbons, speeches. Even though it's still a struggle, we've come so far. And comparing what Pride has been like and what it is now is important as part of queer history. And I can't wait to see how these events evolve in the future, even in a little area of England, in Norfolk. Thank you for listening to my story.

# Audio Trail Map

'Entangled Cities'

'E'



'Rainbow  
Flag'

'Wedding  
at the  
Castle'

'My Queer  
Story'

'Genderqueer'

THANK YOU FOR READING! CHECK OUT THE  
'QUEER NORFOLK STORIES' AUDIO TRAIL ON  
**ECHOES:**



**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR RESPONSES TO  
THE AUDIO TRAIL WE WOULD LOVE TO CHAT TO  
YOU!**

**CONTACT US AT  
[QUEERNORFOLKSTORIES@GMAIL.COM](mailto:QUEERNORFOLKSTORIES@GMAIL.COM)**