Wales is Proud: a look into a national LGBTQ+



Mark Etheridge, Curator of LGBTQ+ History in front of 'Wales is… Proud' display.

Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales is actively collecting objects, documents, photographs and oral histories to fully represent the LGBTQ+ community and lived experience in Wales

From books to posters and protest banners, the collection spans decades of pride events and activism, as well as items representing the everyday lives of LGBTQ+ people.

Mark Etheridge has been the curator since 2019, sourcing new objects and reinterpreting and uncovering hidden queer histories. The collection now contains over 1,100 items, which Mark hopes will bring much-needed visibility: “It raises awareness of LGBTQ+ history in Wales, from the Cardiff Gay Liberation Front and Campaign for Homosexual Equality in the 1970s, up to recent years with protests for trans rights.”

> Pride events in Wales are no longer just in large cities like Swansea and Cardiff, but are now being held across Wales...
>
> *Mark Etheridge, Curator of LGBTQ+ History at Amgueddfa Cymru*

The museum is always looking for more items to add to the collection. Could you help to record and preserve Wales' LGBTQ+ history for future generations?

St Fagans 'Wales is… Proud' display

St Fagans National Museum of History – one of Europe's biggest open-air museums which completed a redevelopment project in 2018 – is showcasing some objects in the collection as part of its 'Wales is… Proud' display. Visitors can see:

> A purple pin badge with a white fist outline that reads gay liberation front
>
> Cardiff Gay Liberation Front badge, 1970s.

- Badges worn by members of the Cardiff Gay Liberation Front and Cardiff Campaign for Homosexual Equality in the 1970s.
- Memorabilia from Cardiff Pride events.
- A large portrait of Pembrokeshire-born Terrence Higgins, who was one of the first people in the UK to die of AIDS in 1982. Artist Nathan Wyburn created the piece using white and green stamps to reflect his Welsh heritage and celebrate his life and legacy.
- Banner from Glitter Cymru – a social and support group for LGBTQ+ people of colour in Wales.
- Items of protest action against Section 28 of the Local Government Act, which banned the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities between 1988 and 2003. A CYLCH banner (Cymdeithas Lesbiaid a Hoywon Cymraeg eu Hiaith, a society for Welsh-speaking gay and lesbian people) was used at an Aberystwyth Section 28 protest in 1991.

A crucial collection

Pride started as a protest and a call for equal rights in the 1970s. Since the first Pride march in Cardiff in 1985, there has been a recent expansion of pride events throughout Wales. Mark says: "Pride events in Wales are no longer just in large cities like Swansea and Cardiff, but are now being held across Wales with many first Prides in places like Llantwit Major, Llandrindod Wells, Hay on Wye, Bangor, Aberdare and Newport, happening over the last few years."

Though there is still a long way to go, it signifies how far things have come and it's becoming increasingly more important – the 2021 census revealed that the highest proportion of young people in England and Wales who do not identify as heterosexual live in a rural Welsh county.

> A crowd with colourful balloons and flags holding a rainbow pride banner that reads Barry Pride,
>
> The first Barry Pride held on 21 September 2019.

Feedback on the display has been hugely positive, with Mark recently featuring in the 'Meet me at the museum' podcast with presenter Owain Wyn Evans and his husband. He says: "Objects from the collection have already been used in various displays across our sites.

"Plus we have plans for a further LGBTQ+ exhibition at the National Waterfront Museum in 2024, so watch this space."

> I feel the importance of the ‘Wales is… Proud’ display is that it has raised awareness of the LGBTQ+ collection, increased visibility for the community and shown that Amgueddfa Cymru is serious about making sure the community is part of the displays, events and learning programmes across our museum sites.
>
> *Mark Etheridge, Curator of LGBTQ+ History at Amgueddfa Cymru*

A call out for donations

Have you got items that tell a story about LGBTQ+ life and culture in Wales? If so, Mark wants to hear from you. He's asking for donations of objects, documents, photographs and more to add to the collection. “So far the call out has only led to a small number of objects being donated, but even a small number can greatly improve representation.

“I am still working hard collecting from protests, pride events and through community groups. I feel the importance of the ‘Wales is… Proud’ display is that it has raised awareness of the LGBTQ+ collection, increased visibility for the community and shown that Amgueddfa Cymru is serious about making sure the community is part of the displays, events and learning programmes across our museum sites.”

> A museum space with various LGBTQ+ objects on display, such as protest banners, signs and photos
> Part of 'Wales is… Proud' display at St Fagans National Museum of History.

The LGBTQ+ collection can also be searched on Amgueddfa Cymru’s Collections Online catalogue. This has become an important resource, and gives permanent visibility to Wales’ LGBTQ+ community.

More inspiring stories

Explore our LGBTQ+ heritage projects and find out how we can support you.

There’s still time left to apply for a Dynamic Collections grant if you have an idea for your own collection reinterpretation project.

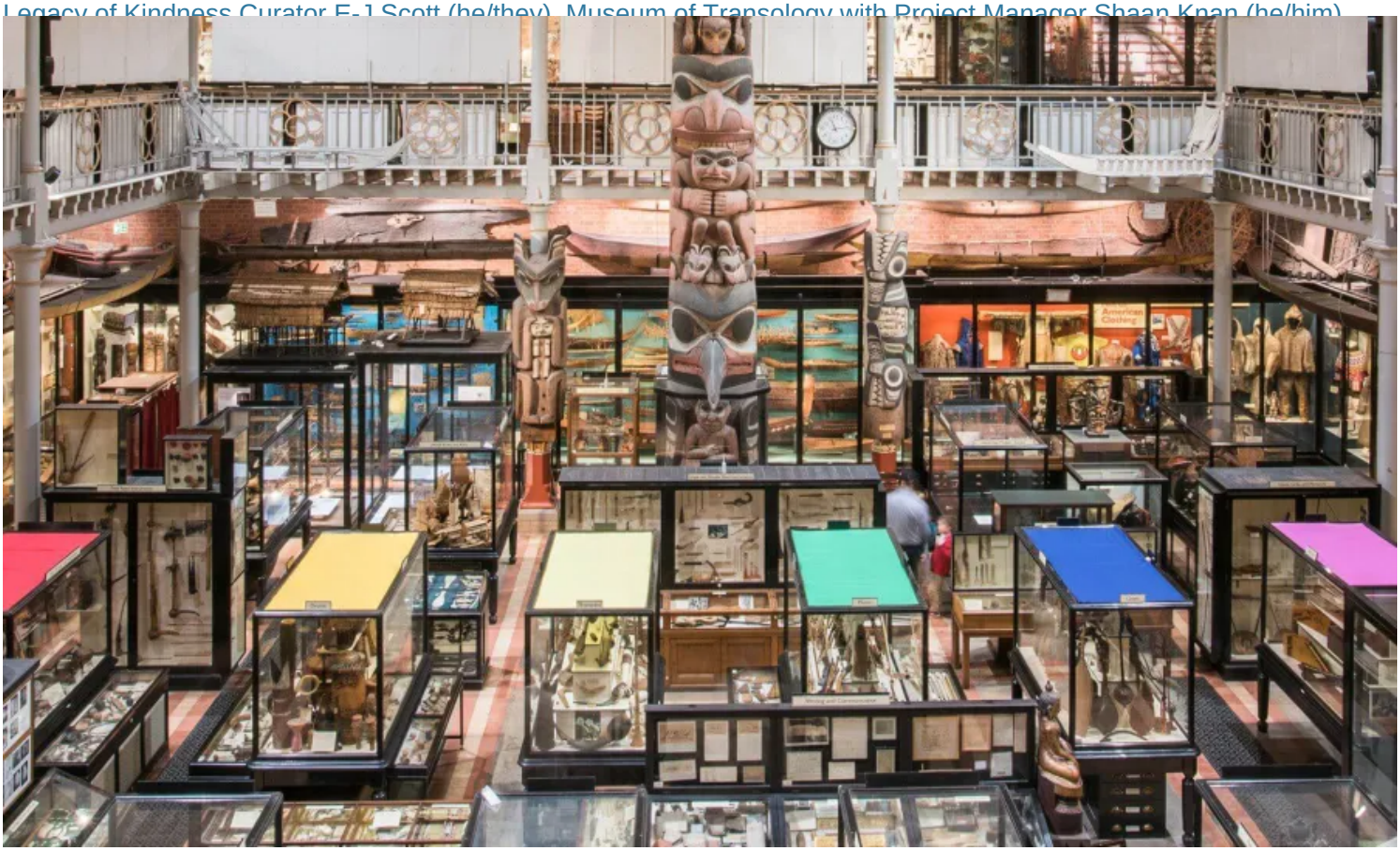


The slogan ‘It’s OK 2BU’ became an emblem to represent what it means to be out on the Quantock Hills. Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme



pride in the countryside

Legacy of Kindness Curator E-J Scott (he/they), Museum of Transology with Project Manager Shaan Knan (he/him)



Dynamic Collections: behind the scenes at Pitt Rivers