***Outing the Past* Launch**

**Friday 16 February 2018**

**Belfast City Hall**

**LIVING HISTORY**

**Jeffrey Dudgeon**

I must first welcome all of you here this weekend to Outing the Past, especially those that have travelled from Britain - some I met, or met again, last summer, in London, in the round of celebrations for the 50th anniversary of decriminalisation - in England and Wales.

And also those from points south, notably Brian Lacey, author of ‘Terrible Queer Creatures – Homosexuality in Irish History’.

History for me was what happened before I was a teenager, that is before the 1960s.

For most now that era is actually ancient history but it is what fascinates me, the fifty or so years that prefigured our emergence - and mine - from the shadows.

For an 18-year-old today, history is what happened before the year 2000, that is anything in the 20th century.

For anyone - even those only in middle age that is hard to grasp.

But it is amazing that those my age were the first visible LGBT generation.

For a young teenager, even the Civil Partnership Bill is history - in other words something that they do not remember at first hand.

For that reason, *The Long View* is important and needs better understanding. It explains why equal marriage is something all-consuming for younger people but not to the same degree for older ones who lived through the many stages of gaining freedom and legal equality.

When I was asked to speak at this launch event, I suggested the subject of Harford Montgomery Hyde; someone whose name means next to nothing today in Belfast.

When I came to working on that address, and having in front of me a lecture I gave on Hyde at Wolfenden 50 in London, I began to see it was harder to edit 10,000 words down for a 10-minute talk than to write and research the original.

Better I thought to publish my work on Hyde than abbreviate it. So I did just that, and in a couple of weeks put together a booklet on him, relating, in particular, to what he did and wrote on homosexuality while giving the context of his times and relating his parliamentary struggles for law reform - and the abrupt end to his elected career.

This is now published and available in Kindle, and in Amazon-Print-on-Demand. It is ‘*H. Montgomery Hyde - Ulster Unionist MP, Gay Law Reform Campaigner and Prodigious Author’*. The title says it all so I don’t need to say more than ‘Do read it’. Luckily I brought fifty copies with me which are available here tonight. It should be launched next month.

And I do recommend Library Ireland Media who did the publishing work at breakneck speed with little complaint.

So I won’t be giving a talk on Hyde.

I knew preceding, let alone following, David Norris is a hard act which I won’t even attempt. So I thought I’d speak about archives and gay history - and the pitfalls and pleasures of research. Something close to all your hearts.

Before I do, I will reference two events in relation to criminalisation – both mass trials. One, before I was gay sentient, was in Lurgan, Co Armagh in 1958. 19 were charged, 18 convicted and 7 jailed. That I detail in the Hyde booklet. The second was in Bangor, Co Down in 1967 when 11 were convicted, the youngest only 19; five were jailed and others ordered to be “restricted to hospital for treatment”, one 20-year-old for 18 months. I knew several of them, Ernie Thompson and Jim Kempson in particular, who were to open the first gay-run pub and disco, the popular Chariot Rooms in Belfast’s North Street in the 1970s.

Ernie and Jim were both brave, and cautious – with good reason. I remember discussions we had over gay liberation when they advised discretion and restraint. I was the radical then.

Those trials were not history. That was the present for many of us, as was the 1976 gay purge when 22 people, all the committee members of NIGRA and Cara-Friend, were arrested. Luckily none were charged or jailed.

The world was changing a little, as we were campaigned for our freedom.

The social historian, UCD Professor Diarmaid Ferriter, in his book on the history of twentieth-century Irish sexuality, asked the question: How do we tell the history of Irish sex, when the only record available is that of criminalisation and social stigma?

Similarly, Kieran Rose of GLEN in Dublin argued that historical evidence for gay and lesbian lives and subcultures, before the 1970s, is from “those seeking to control homosexuality,” not from lesbians and gay men themselves.”

Kieran also warned that the archival record comes through many conduits – “the people who created them, the functionaries who managed them, the archivists who selected them for preservation and make them available for use, and the researchers who use them in constructing accounts of the past.”

Until my time, the past was negative.

Indeed there is also a danger, as David Norris discovered in his 2011 Presidential campaign, that enemies and journalists can now go through the details of one’s past to find damaging statements hardly remarked upon at the time. This happened in relation to the Irish Queer Archive (IQA) after it was catalogued by the NLI. And now of course social media mean the minutest details of your past can live for ever. It was not ever thus.

So in relation to the homosexual archive how did we get here?

Homosexuality by that name is, as most know, a mid-Victorian coinage, and essentially an urban phenomenon. Obviously same-sex love and sex has been around from the beginning of time. It was certainly well-noted in the Greek and Roman eras and occasionally esteemed, or treated as respectable, as with the Ladies of Llangollen (a Ponsonby and a Butler from Kilkenny, in the late 18th century.)

However, history is written by the victor, or whoever leaves records. Until recently, written records on gays came in two types: those concerning the top echelons of society – the rich and powerful – and those from the bottom drawer, about those being taken through the criminal courts after police involvement. Our history is inevitably coloured by that.

Sometimes the two types co-incided, as with so many Irish examples: the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven, Mervyn Touchet, from Cork, beheaded in 1631 for sodomy and rape, and the Church of Ireland Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, John Atherton, a leading anti-sodomy campaigner, hanged with his steward in Dublin in 1640 for that very crime.

And another bishop, Percy Jocelyn, of Clogher, who in 1822, was caught in a compromising position with a Guardsman in the back room of a London pub. He was sacked for “the crimes of immorality, incontinence, Sodomitical practices, habits, and propensities” – not to mention neglecting his episcopal duties. Jocelyn, a brother of the Earl of Roden from Tollymore in Newcastle Co Down, was the most senior British churchman to be involved in a public homosexual scandal in the 19th century and indeed was the proximate cause of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh’s suicide.

The Irish figure in these scandals and executions, as much, if not more, than England or Scotland. One has to ask why? Then there were the 19th century events like the Dublin Castle sodomy scandal and the Crown Jewels theft by the bad gay brother of Shackleton the explorer.

Montgomery Hyde, author of *The Other Love* and a host of books about sex and spying, and about Oscar Wilde and Roger Casement, mapped this Irish pattern.

Brian Lacey’s *Terrible Queer Creatures – Homosexuality in Irish History* travelled the same road, updating Hyde and adding many references to same-sex attraction in Gaelic literature.

A fascinating foreign archival example is the ‘Office of the Night’ that for seventy years in the 15th century sought out sodomy in Florence. 17,000 men in a city of only 40,000 inhabitants were investigated; 3,000 were convicted and thousands more confessed to gain pardon. Because of the detailed records left by the Office, it is reckoned that one in two Florentine men came to the attention of the authorities for sodomy.

As an aside, and revealing what yet can be unexpectedly found in archives, I instance the discovery in the 1930s of Christopher Marlowe’s inquest record, written in Latin. It helped to reveal the intelligence complications of the gay playwright’s violent death and that it was much more than a tavern brawl over an unpaid bill.

It is well described in *The Reckoning* by Charles Nicholl, a superb piece of historical detective work.

And then we have the two greatest gay men of the 20th century – Wilde and Casement. Both Irish, both taken through the courts, and both the subject of an enormous amount of literature, as well as documentary archival records.

Since the gay liberation movement in the 1970s, LGBT lives are well documented, but even starting from the 1920s, personal records were made, kept and preserved in the form of letters even film; some being transmuted into literature.

After that came the pre-digital deluge of archival material, both on campaigns, and on the lives of the ordinary. This is where I appear, both creating archives as a gay campaigner and searching them as a writer, about Roger Casement, in particular.

Here, PRONI has the NIGRA files, catalogued and uncatalogued and those early files from Cara-Friend, of gay men and women coming in from the provincial cold, while the Linen Hall Library also has some gay material. In London there are the Hall Carpenter archives and, as mentioned, the IQA in Dublin.

In conclusion, Ed Madden of the University of South Carolina and no stranger to Belfast has controversially asked “What are the risks of institutionalization? Is the institutionalization of gay history part of the ongoing normalization and commodification of gay and lesbian culture – and if so, what resources does the archive offer to resist those current cultural and political imperatives?”

I leave his questions hanging in the air, and will conclude with listing some problems and contemporary issues for LGBT historians – the impact and archival organisation of electronic records and digitisation; the downside of the Freedom of Information Act with illuminating comments in government papers no longer being made or recorded; the surfeit of archival material that leaves nothing for the social historian, except distillation, and little to the imagination for the novelist.

I look forward to our discussions in the Ulster Museum tomorrow.

**Old GLF slogan – “We are what you warned us against”**