

Eastbourne Gay Group – early days

Plans to launch a gay group in Eastbourne were discussed at an informal gathering on 13 August 1976. As a result of this, Eastbourne Gay Group (EGG) was formed and met for the first time in the Friends Meeting House, Wish Road, on 3 September of that same year.

The event could have, it was reported at the time, been deemed illegal. Under common law, the publicising of such a meeting could be seen to be ‘conspiring to corrupt public morals’.

Its aims from the start were to provide varied social events (including walks and London theatre trips), meetings at members’ homes, to engage in serious discussions on law reform and to invite speakers from CHE (Campaign for Homosexual Equality). Above all, the Group would offer support for gay men and women in Eastbourne and try to help combat the feelings of loneliness that were felt by many. EGG received support from other gay groups in the area, notably Hastings and Littlehampton.

There were several venues available in the early days; first at the Friends Meeting House and the Theatre Club, and later at the Bourne Inn, the Rose & Crown and the Hartington (‘the Hart’). Within a year, the group had held its first gay disco at the Stone Cross Memorial Hall.

In early 1977, the group was successful in its application to be affiliated with CHE and continued to be proactive within the town. Later that year, a letter was sent to GP practices in Eastbourne and the surrounding area to promote the aims of CHE ‘in the direction of befriending and providing social support’ for the gay community.

By the following year, the Eastbourne Central Library had been persuaded to carry copies of Gay News. The group newsletter said it felt that the paper had been ‘scrutinised by many people’ in the short time that it had been on display.

1978 also saw the publication of an article in the Eastbourne Herald by journalist Mollie Leach. In it she dismisses the myths about homosexuality and talks about the pressures of being gay in today’s society. At least half the article promotes the work of the Eastbourne branch of CHE and includes the helpline number.

In 1979, a lesbian couple told the newsletter that their relationship had been ‘blessed’ by a Vicar in Eastbourne in a church.

The source of this information comes from a file of papers which traces the growth of the group from its start in 1976 until November 1981 when the documentation finishes.