



The Wales LGBTQ+ Timeline Collection

Merthyr Tudful / Merthyr Tydfil Edition

Introduction



In 2021 the Welsh Government commissioned training in LGBTQ+ Language and History for local museums, libraries and archives to encourage the celebration of local stories of sexual orientation and gender identity.

This is part of the work being done on raising awareness and understanding of the diverse population of Wales and compliments the Welsh Government Action Plan which aims to:

- tackle inequalities experienced by LGBTQ+ communities;
- challenge discrimination;
- create a society where LGBTQ+ people are safe to live and love authentically, openly and freely as themselves.

The training provided effective learning points and practical tools to enable staff and volunteers to move forward with a fully inclusive programme resulting in an expansion beyond the organisation to the general public, such as family historians, local historians and community groups. Allowing the promotion of historic material in ways not realised before and enhancing work with partner organisations in not only in making LGBTQ+ material accessible to the public, but also in collecting and preserving this heritage.

An outcome of the LGBTQ+ Language and History training is the construction of timelines

for each of the 22 counties of Wales. This provides a means by which local people, allies and events can be celebrated instead of replicating mainstream narratives and celebrities.

A baseline of highlighted moments from history was constructed by Norena Shopland from her Welsh historic material collection on sexual orientations and gender identities, and from that contributed to the Hanes LHDT+ Cymru / LGBTQ+ Research Group Wales established to encourage and promote research into Welsh LGBTQ+ history. Their website, LGBTQ Cymru is funded by Swansea University to record as much information as possible on this history.

<https://lgbtqcymru.swansea.ac.uk/>

People are encouraged to add to and keep expanding the timelines to make them as comprehensive as possible.

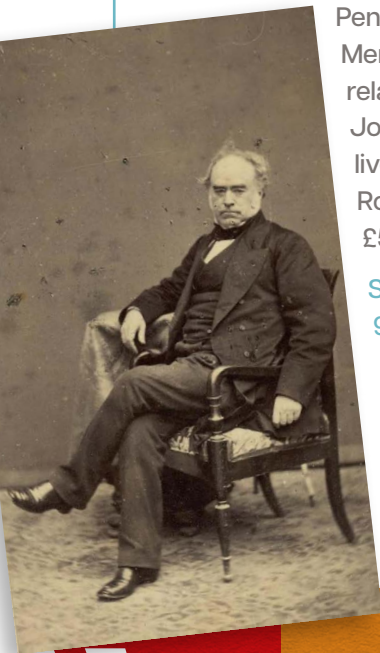
19th CENTURY >

1802

Penry Williams (1802–1885) from Merthyr Tydfil was in a long-term relationship with Welsh sculptor, John Gibson (1790–1866) and they lived together for many years in Rome. In his will, John left Penry £500 (about £73,000 today).

Source: *Brecon County Times*, 9 June 1866

Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons; Antonio Mariannecci; Public Domain.



1861

The death penalty for buggery was abolished when the Offences Against the Person Act 1828 was replaced with the Offences Against the Person Act 1861.

A total of 8921 men had been prosecuted since 1806 for sodomy with 404 sentenced to death and 56 executed. Homosexuality remained illegal until partially decriminalised in 1967 in England and Wales, and 1980 in Scotland.

1879

1867

The Women of Our Mineral Districts.

A writer ... invokes the aid of men of the stamp of Lord Shaftesbury in ameliorating the condition of the women employed more or less in Merthyr, Dowlais, Aberdare, and in scores of other coal and iron districts in South Wales ... "In the works the women, chiefly young females, are engaged in manual labour from morning to night, hearing all the common language and observing all the usual habits of the unrestrained and half-civilized men. The dress of these wretched females can scarcely be distinguished from that of the men. In voice, manner, appearance, and actions they have become unsexed.

Source: *Cardiff & Merthyr Guardian*, May 10, 1867

1879

Merthyr Police Court.

Alleged Attempt to Commit an Unnatural Offence - David Lewis and William Davies were brought up on remand charged as above. The evidence was gone through in a cleared court on the previous Saturday. To-day the Stipendiary, after addressing the prisoners some words of warning, dismissed them.

Source: *Merthyr Telegraph*, 10 October 1879

1885

The British Parliament enacted Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, section 11 of which, known as the Labouchere Amendment, prohibited gross indecency between males.

It thus became possible to prosecute homosexuals for engaging in sexual acts where buggery or attempted buggery could not be proven.

The Labouchere Amendment became known as the Blackmailers Charter because it was so easy to accuse men, regardless if it was true or not, of being homosexual.

1894

Crown Court, Merthyr Cases. Thomas Henderson, 16, was charged with feloniously and wickedly committing an unnatural offence with Philip Wheelan, 23, at Merthyr on 31 May, both young Dowlais labourers. They were found guilty, with Wheelan received six months imprisonment, and Henderson four months.

Source: *South Wales Daily Post*, 7 July 1894; *Evening Express*, 9 July 1894



1896

1895

Oscar Wilde, tried for gross indecency over a relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, was sentenced to two years in prison with hard labour.



1896

William Evans was charged with on 9 February 1896 'at Merthyr Dovan, unlawfully attempting to procure the commission by a male person named Thomas Powell of an act of gross indecency with himself. The prosecution was dropped. William had previously been arrested two years earlier, for attempted sodomy by assaulting George Edwards, and had spent two years in Swansea jail as a result.

Source: Swansea Gaol Records 1877-1902; Glamorgan, Wales, Calendar of Prisoners, 1850-1920 1889-1894, both via Ancestry

1896

Indecent Exposure. Alfred Evan Williams and William Joseph Thomas were charged with indecent exposure at Penyardren. Prisoners were sent to gaol for a month with hard labour.

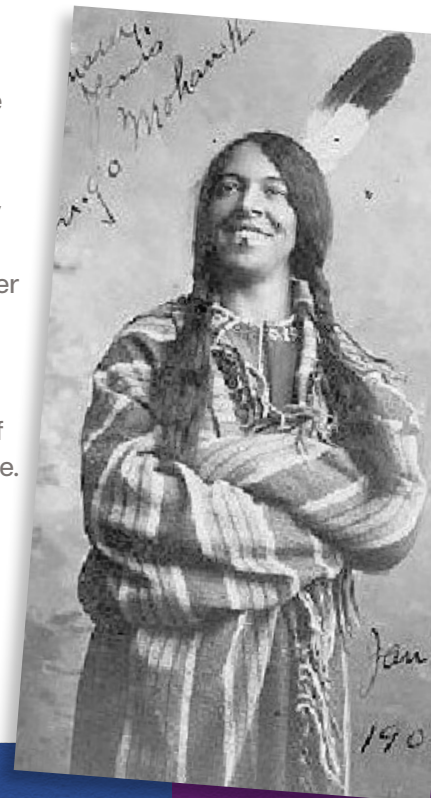
Source: *Merthyr Times and Dowlais Times*, 14 May, 1896

1896

A theatre in Merthyr, hosted Gowongo Mohawk (1860-1924), a playwright and actor born in Gowanda, New York of the Seneca Nation. Her husband was Charles W. Charles, an army captain who served with General Custer, and she travelled the world with her plays. She brought her most famous work, Wep-ton-no-mah, The Indian Mail Carrier to Merthyr in March in which she played the role of a Native American man. The play was first launched in Liverpool in 1893 with the only surviving copy of the script in the British Library. In her performance, Gowongo troubled stereotypes of indigeneity, race, gender, and sexuality with the Merthyr Times noting Gowongo, 'exhibits such wealth of muscular arms and legs that at

once attracts the attention of the house. With amazing rapidity she hurls a man, from sheer force of muscular power, over her head, and in the knife fight relies wholly on her superior skill. She feels as comfortable in male attire as in her broadcloth dresses and beads, as can easily be seen when she is on the stage.' Gowongo also appeared in Swansea and Cardiff where this sketch of her was done. She is now recognised as a male impersonator or early drag act.

Sources: Wikipedia;
Merthyr Times, 12 March 1896;
Evening Express, 7 March 1896



1911

20th CENTURY >

1901

Woman in Man's Attire. Johanna Williams was summoned for being disorderly in Quarry-row, Merthyr. P.S. Toye said the woman, who was of rather large proportions, was dressed in a man's clothes, and parading the streets with about 100 people around her. She said she only did it 'for a lark. A couple of boys came from the front, and I said I would come from the front too, and put on the clothes.' (laughter in court) P.S. Toye said, 'The trousers were her husband's, and were too small for her. There were a lot of small children about.' The Stipendiary said it was a serious offence and a ridiculous proceeding. Defendant would be fined 5s and costs.

Source: *Cardiff Times*, 29 June 1901

1911

Edith Gertrude Phillips, lived with her father, a pitman, her mother and five siblings at the Glynderis Engine House in Abercanaid but claimed her mother ill-treated her so she left home. She took her brother's clothes, cut her hair, and walked to Dowlais Ironworks to look for a job. Unable find employment, she walked to the South Pit at Plymouth Colliery, and got a job as a miner's 'boy' where she was highly valued by collier, Matthew Thomas. She lodged at a house in Nightingale Street, Abercanaid where she was discovered when having a wash.

Source: Norena Shopland, *Forbidden Lives: LGBT stories from Wales*, Seren Books, 2017



1914

The First World War broke out in August 1914. Army historian A.D. Harvey writes that “at least 230 soldiers were court-martialled, convicted and sentenced to terms of imprisonment for homosexual offences” during World War I.

1914

George Henry Edington was charged with ‘feloniously, wickedly, and against the order of nature, carnally knowing Henry Stanley Davies, and then ... did commit and perpetrate the abominable crime of buggery on the 28th May 1914, at Merthyr Tydfil.’ A second charge included the same, but on the 8th June.

Source: Glamorgan Archives, Calendar of Prisoners, 1850-1920



1921

1920s-30s

Daryl Leeworthy, in the introduction to the research guide, *Queering Glamorgan*, wrote about the absence of male-to-male sexual activity in the early part of the 20th century, ‘In Merthyr Tydfil there was almost no police action on these crimes in the 1920s and 1930s, introducing into the record an absence

around which it is now difficult to manoeuvre.’

Source: *Queering Glamorgan*, Glamorgan Archives – a free downloadable LGBTQ+ research guide

1921

The Criminal Law Amendment Act was revised in the House of Commons to include a section making sexual “acts of gross indecency” between women illegal. While the Act was passed by the Commons, it was defeated by the House of Lords.

Queering Glamorgan



A Research Guide to Sources for the Study of LGBT History



1935

Cedric Morris (1889–1982) was born in Sketty, Swansea but spent most of his adult life in East Anglia with his partner Arthur Lett-Haines. He was proud of his Welsh heritage and returned often to paint local scenes including *Dowlais from the Cinder Tips* in 1935.

After the First World War there had been a lack of appreciation for Welsh art and works by Welsh artists was seldom seen in London, so Cedric organized an Exhibition of Contemporary Welsh Art in 1935 which led to the founding of the Contemporary Art Society for Wales. In a radio interview about the exhibition, he called for a community in art to be developed, a Welsh magazine and the organisation for exhibitions. That same year the South Wales Group was founded on very similar lines and Cedric became a member.

He became closely involved with the Merthyr Tydfil Educational Settlement at Gwaunfarren House which had been set up in 1937 providing education and welfare services to people suffering in the Depression.

Cedric also knew Heinz Koppel a German Jewish émigré who fled the holocaust, and in 1944 through Cedric's influence, Heinz was teaching art at the Merthyr Tydfil Education Settlement which Cedric was closely involved in. This later grew into the Merthyr Tydfil Arts Centre with Koppel as principal. Several of Cedric's paintings are in the Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery.

Source: Norena Shopland, *Forbidden Lives: LGBT stories from Wales* (Seren Books, 2017)



1954

1945

World War II ends. Following the war, moral attitudes to homosexuality changed.

1946

Michael Dillon has one of the first sex reassignment surgeries from female to male.

1951

Roberta Cowell, a former World War II Spitfire pilot, becomes the first transgender woman to undergo male-to-female confirmation surgery.

1954

Alan Turing, an English mathematician, logician, cryptanalyst and computer scientist, influential in the development of computer science, committed suicide.

He had been given a course of female hormones (chemical castration) by doctors as an alternative to prison after being prosecuted by the police because of his homosexuality.



Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons
File:Alan-Turing-Rephotography.jpg

1957

The Wolfenden Committee is formed. When it concludes in 1957 it recommends a partial decriminalisation for male homosexuality. When these recommendations are not followed by the government the Homosexual Law Reform Society is formed to campaign for the recommendations to be enacted.

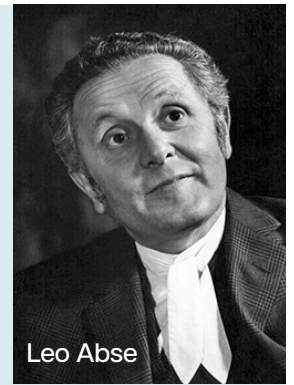
1960s

The Red Cow pub in Merthyr Tydfil was a place where gay people were accepted.

Source: Daryl Leeworthy, *Queering Glamorgan*, Glamorgan Archives

1967

Ten years after the Wolfenden Report, Cardiffian MP Leo Abse introduced the Sexual Offences Bill 1967 supported by Labour MP Roy Jenkins, then the Labour Home Secretary.



Leo Abse

Photo credit
© National Portrait Gallery, London



1982

1970

Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was established.



1974

Labour MP Maureen Colquhoun comes out as the first lesbian MP.

1982

Welshman Terry Higgins dies of AIDS in St Thomas' Hospital London. His partner Rupert Whitaker and friend Martyn Butler set up the Terry Higgins Trust (which became the Terrence Higgins Trust), the first UK AIDS charity.



1983

Two influential clergymen met a sharp rebuff after demanding a ban on homosexuality advice in the classroom. Steve Morgan, vicar of Cyfartha and Anthony Wintle, vicar of Treharris, were condemned for supporting “ignorant and ill-informed” views “likely to lead to further misery.” Wildly inaccurate fact and figures were published in leaflets and magazines. Lisa Power, press officer for London-based advice service, Gay Switchboard, said, ‘Ignoring homosexuality will not make it go away. Refusing young people the information they need on all kinds of sexuality can only breed ignorance, fear and violence. Homosexuality can’t be cured by medicine or prayer. It is not an illness. Young people need to know that it is possible to be gay and happy, but this will not be the case if homosexuals are persecuted by leaders of the church and community.’

Source: *Merthyr Express*, 6 October 1983

1984

MP Chris Smith is elected making him the first openly out homosexual politician in the UK parliament.

1984

Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, a campaign of LGBT+ support for striking workers in the miners' strike of 1984 and 1985, is launched. The film *Pride* covers their story.



1995

1988

Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 enacted as an amendment to the United Kingdom's Local Government Act 1986, on 24 May 1988 stated that a local authority “shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality” or “promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship”.

There was not a single prosecution under Section 28 because nobody knew what ‘promote’ meant or what a ‘pretended family relationship’ was supposed to be.

1994

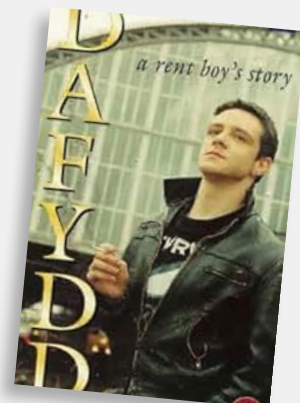
‘Thanks for nothing’ shouts gay rights campaigner after decision Vote lowers homosexual age to 18.

MPs decided in a historic vote to lower the age of consent for homosexual men from 21 to 18. Voting was 427 to 162, an overwhelmingly majority of 265. Labour MPs who voted for proposal of 18 (rather than 16 to bring it into line with heterosexual sex) included Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney).

Source: *Herald of Scotland*, 22 February 1994

1995

Richard Harrington, born in Gurnos and brought up in Heolgerrig, Merthyr Tydfil, wins a BAFTA Cymru Award for his portrayal of a young gay hustler in the BBC film *Dafydd*, part of the Wales Playhouse programme.



21st CENTURY >

2000

The UK Labour government stops banning homosexuals from the armed forces after the European Court of Human Rights rules it unlawful.

The government also introduces legislation to repeal Section 28 in England and Wales – Conservative MPs oppose the move. The bill is defeated by bishops and Conservatives in the House of Lords.

Scotland abolished Clause 2a (Section 28) of the Local Government Act in October though it remains in place in England and Wales.

2001

Julien Macdonald (b.1971) was born in Merthyr Tydfil, and attended Cyfarthfa High School before studying art at The College, Merthyr Tydfil. He later became a fashion designer and in 2001, was named “British Fashion Designer of the Year”, and in the same year, appointed chief designer at Givenchy (Alexander McQueen's successor).

Source: [Wikipedia](#)



2004

2003

Section 28, which banned councils and schools from intentionally promoting homosexuality, is repealed in England and Wales and Northern Ireland. Employment Equality Regulations made it illegal to discriminate against lesbians, gays or bisexuals at work.

2004

The Civil Partnership Act 2004 is passed by the Labour Government, giving same-sex couples the same rights and responsibilities as married heterosexual couples in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

The Gender Recognition Act 2004 is passed by the Labour Government. The Act gives transsexual people legal recognition as members of the sex appropriate to their gender (male or female) allowing them to acquire a new birth certificate, affording them full recognition of their acquired sex in law for all purposes, including marriage.

2008

Born in Greenfield Terrace, Merthyr Tydfil, Illtyd Harrington was deputy leader of the Greater London Council (1981–84). He was openly gay and lived for fifty years with his partner, Christopher “Chris” Downes, who worked as a theatrical dresser for Laurence Olivier and Maggie Smith among others. In a 2008 interview with the Merthyr Express Illtyd said, “It’s one of my deepest regrets I was never MP for Merthyr.’ He co-produced a BBC Radio Wales project with his nephew, the well-known actor Richard Harrington, and touched on his own experiences of living in London as a homosexual before it was decriminalised. Illtyd had worked at the Merthyr Express when he was 16. In the TV interview, Richard asked him how it had been possible, especially with Illtyd holding public office, for two men to live together, and Illtyd replied, “We did it openly. There were lots of men and women like us. We didn’t advertise, putting a sign up – we just got on with our lives.”

Source: [WalesOnline](#), 28 December 2007;
[Merthyr Express](#), 10 January 2008



Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons
By BBC - Original publication: TelevisionImmediate

2008

Angela Eagle becomes the first female MP to enter into a civil partnership (with partner Maria Exall).



2014

2009

Welsh rugby star Gareth Thomas becomes the first known top-level professional male athlete in a team sport to come out while still active in professional sport.

2010

The Equality Act 2010 makes discrimination against lesbians and gay men in the provision of goods and services illegal.

2012

A Welsh gay couple from Merthyr won £1 million in the EuroMillions lottery. Civil servant Ian Pearce, 45, and his partner, physiotherapist Lyn Sexton, 41, had been together for 16 years. They were presented with their cheque at Cyfarthfa Castle, also the venue for their civil partnership six years previously.

Source: [Splag Wales](#),
[Newsletter Issue 44](#), May 2012

2014

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council fly the rainbow flag for the first time, in association with Visible LGBT.

2014

Same-sex marriage becomes legal in England and Wales on 29 March under the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.

2016

Hannah Blythyn, Jeremy Miles, and Adam Price became the first openly gay members of the Welsh Assembly.

2016

Rini Chatterjee, born and brought up in Porthcawl and a GP for Cwm Taf Health Board in Merthyr. When nominated as one of Wales' 40 most influential LGBTQ+ people in Wales for 2016 Rini said being Welsh is incredibly important to her. "I think I use every part of my life to do my job, being gay, my own struggles with anxiety and depression. If I'm open hopefully my patients can be open."

Source: *WalesOnline*, 'The Pinc List 2016: The 40 most influential LGBTQ people in Wales,' 13 August 2016

2017

'This is what it's like growing up LGBT in The Valleys,' a group of activists teamed up to host Merthyr Tydfil's first LGBT club night. "It means there is a safe space for LGBT people to come together but it also tells the community around us that we are here," said Andrew Creak. The 20-year-old film student, who grew up in Caerphilly, said previously he wouldn't have felt comfortable going out in the area. "I don't go out in the Valleys – not really," he said. Run by campaigning organisations Visible Merthyr and Hope Not Hate, the night aims to be as open and welcoming as possible.

Source: Oliver Milne, 'This is what it's like growing up LGBT in The Valleys,' *WalesOnline*, 25 February 2017



2017

2017

Flamboyant weatherman Owain Wyn Evans married boyfriend Arran Rees in a day dominated by Welsh cakes. "There were cakes and bara brith everywhere. There were hundreds of Welsh cakes. We were entrenched in Welsh cakes." The 33-year-old and his 28-year-old beau, who works for the V&A, struggled to find room for them. Both of their families came for the big day – Owain's from Ammanford and Arran's from Merthyr.

Source: James McCarthy, 'Weatherman Owain Wyn Evans lifts the lid on his dream wedding day,' *WalesOnline*, 19 March 2017

2017

Queering the Map is a Canadian initiative to create a community-based online collaborative and counter-mapping platform on which users submit their personal queer experiences to specific locations on a single collective map. Since its inception, users have contributed more than 500,000 posts in 23 languages to the platform. Several people have left pins in Merthyr.



I saw Love, Simon here with my mam. On the way home we had our first real conversation about sexuality and I realised she would accept me. I never got to come out to her as she passed away last month. I'll always remember that conversation, I'll always know that she would have loved me and accepted me always. **||**



Came out to my mam as a lesbian in the car around here, she's been nothing but supportive since. **||**

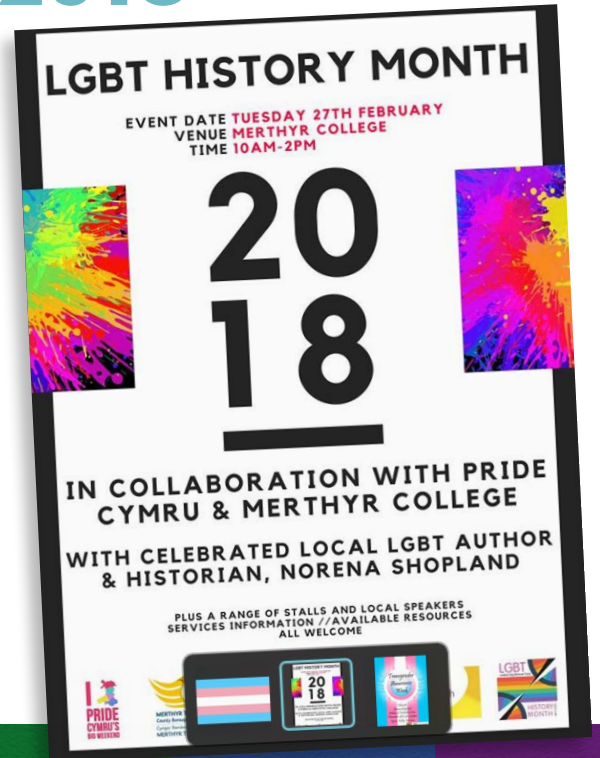
2018

Pink Iris is formed as a support group for locals and to promote awareness and inclusion. On the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia There was an LGBT Flag Raising Ceremony in Merthyr Tydfil on 17th May 2018 to mark IDAHOT (International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia). We also attended the LGBTQIA – Pink Iris Forum. This group is newly formed after the dissolution of the Visible SMT group. As the group are just starting out independently, support has also been given through the Local Authority and from Project Unity, the Rhondda Cynon Taff LGBT+ group.

Source: Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Annual Equality Report 2018-2019



2018



2019

2019

The raising of the LGBT & Transgender flags took place on 18 February 2019 in the presence of the Mayor, Councillor Clive Tovey, The Leader, Councillor Kevin O'Neill, Deputy Chief Executive, Ellis Cooper, Chief Superintendent, Belinda Davies, Dawn Bowden AM along with Councillors, Staff of MTCBC, Police Officers, PCSO's, representatives of the Youth Forum and students from Merthyr College. The flags were raised by Ryan Crowley, Chair of the Youth Forum and Krystian Maciejczyk Deputy Youth Mayor. On the Merthyr Tydfil CBC Facebook site, there were numerous negative and hate-filled comments with many more writing in defence of the council.

Source: Merthyr Tydfil CBC Facebook, 18 February 2019

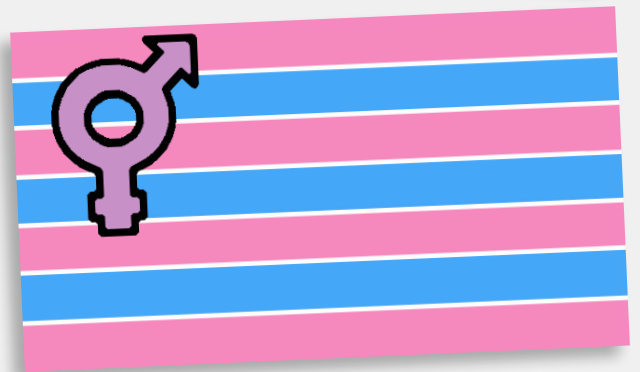
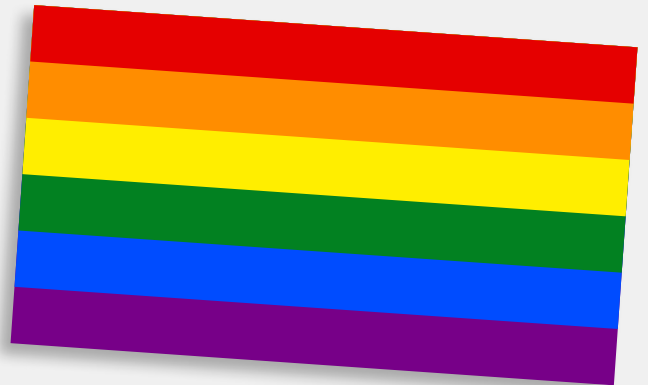
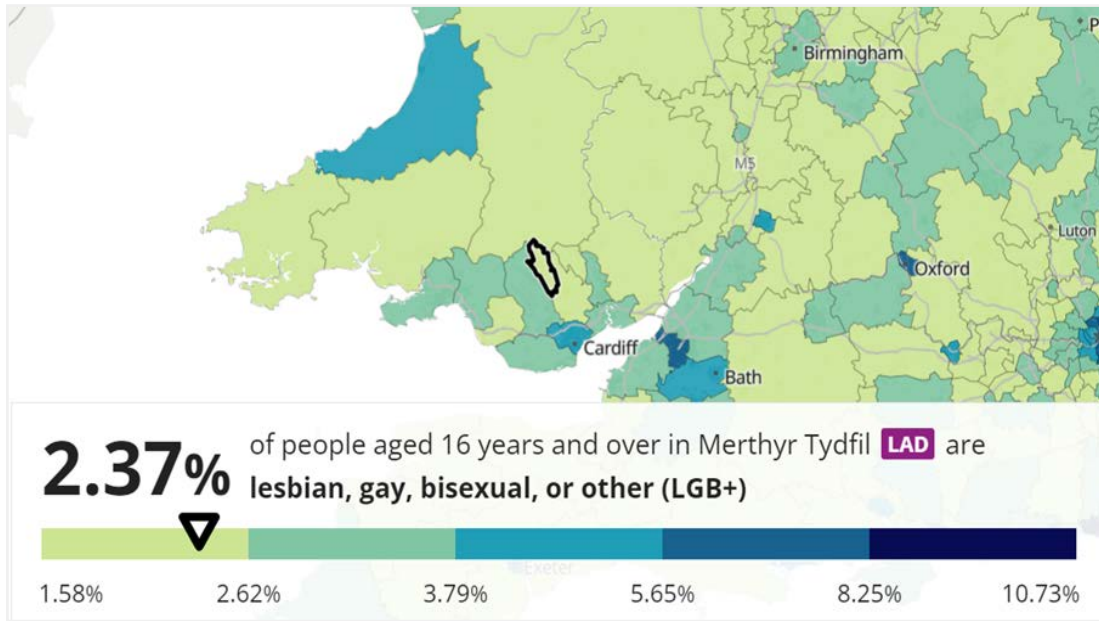


Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons
By Johnathan Andrew - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0

2021

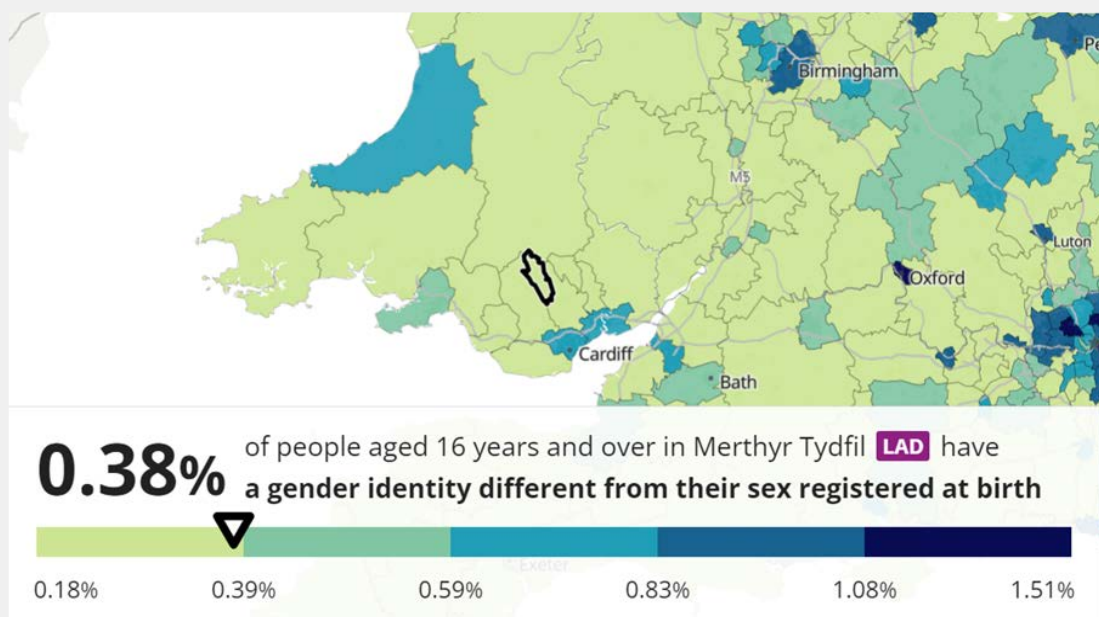
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2021

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council showed its support of the LGBT+ community by raising the Progress Flag outside the Civic Centre today on 1 February 2021. The Progress Flag, released in 2018, aims to represent inclusion and progression. It includes the six stripes of the LGBTQ flag, alongside the trans flag, and stripes representing marginalised communities. These form an arrow pointing towards the right to represent forward movement. Council Leader Cllr Lisa Mytton spoke of the strong ties between South Wales communities and LGBT groups, dating back to the Miners' Strike of 1984-85.

Source: Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Merthyr Tudful /Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, LGBT+ History Month, 1 February 2021



2021

Owen J Hurcum became the world's first non-binary mayor and Wales' youngest ever elected mayor of Bangor City Council in Gwynedd, Wales.



2023

2023



Merthyr Pride

Merthyr holds its first Pride organised by the Merthyr Pride Working Group made up of representatives from the LGBTQIA+ community and local partners and sponsors.



Thank you

These have been just a few highlights from Merthyr Tudful / Merthyr Tydfil's sexual orientation and gender identity history.

If you think we've missed anything that should be included, please do let us know by using the web link below.

We will update the timeline on a regular basis.

www.lgbtqcymru.swansea.ac.uk



Draig Enfys

 search **Draig Enfys**