

GAY HISTORY IN MY NEIGHBOURHOOD



- Mark Ashton & Gay's The Word
- Stella and Fanny
- Jack Saul and The Cleveland Street Scandal



Amazingly inspiring characters



GAY'S THE WORD & Mark Ashton

Just a couple blocks from my home, you can find the queer book store [GAY'S THE WORD](#).¹ I have spent so much time in gay bookstores and I am saddened that so many have closed. But this one, founded in 1979, is not only still open, it remains very popular. The group [Lesbians & Gays Support the Miners](#) (LGSM) met in this bookstore as shown in the movie [Pride](#).

A key player in LGSM was the legendary [Mark Ashton](#) whose achievements are honoured with a blue plaque above the bookstore. But perhaps more telling of the touching impact he had on the community is the song [For a Friend](#).



¹ It was named after the musical with the same name of Ivor Novello

Stella and Fanny



My flat overlooks St. George's Garden, a former cemetery turned into a park. On the other side of this small cemetery is Wakefield Street where Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park, aka Stella and Fanny, lodged.

They were two amazingly brave cross-dressers who would often go out in public, especially to The Strand, which is nearby. They were arrested in 1870, charged with conspiracy to commit sodomy, and subject to a lot of abuse.

'The clerks who recorded the proceedings got into a terrible muddle, littering their transcripts with crossings-out and corrections, turning 'he's' into 'she's' – and vice versa. The witnesses were equally confused, stumbling and tying themselves in linguistic knots.'
From: McKenna, 'Fanny and Stella: The young men who shocked Victorian England', p. 35.

But amazingly:

The Foreman: 'Not guilty' (loud cheers, drive of Bravo!)" — His Lordship: 'Upon all the counts of the indictment?' — The Foreman: 'Yes, my lord. Not guilty on all the counts' (renewed cheering, which was, however, soon suppressed). From: Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper, Sunday 21 May 1871, p. 8.



Jack (John) Saul and the Cleveland Street Scandal



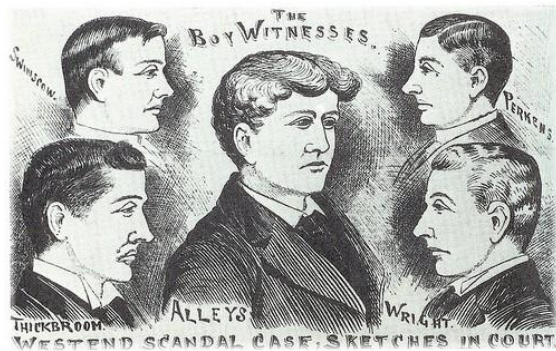
In July 1889, a telegraph boy, Charles, Thomas Swinscow, was found to have a bit too much money on him. This led to the discovery of a male brothel in Cleveland Street and the scandal named after this street. The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 had made *all* homosexual acts between men, as well as (attempted) procurement, illegal. Lots happened; most of it very sad, obviously.

What intrigued me was the character of Jack Saul, a self-proclaimed “professional sodomite” and in the language of the days a “Mary-ann.” There is actually some information about him and an excellent biography by Glenn Chandler called “*The Sins of Jack Saul*,” which borrows part of its title from the book “*Sins of the Cities of the Plain*,” a very erotic homosexual novel supposedly written by Jack Saul. That Jack was named as the author of this clandestine manuscript was probably due to his notoriety, not to any involvement in writing it.

During one of my short visits to London in the 90s, I was keen to find 19 Cleveland Street and was disappointed when I saw that the house itself no longer exists. Since that first visit, I have walked through Cleveland Street many times. It is located just a couple blocks from where I lived in Soho. And whenever I walk to Wigmore Hall from my current place, I pass through it. Every time I walk through Cleveland

Street, I think of Jack. Specifically, I search for buildings that must have been there in the 1880s and then wonder how Jack felt when he walked through that street and saw those same buildings.

Why am I so fascinated with Jack? We know Jack was born in 1857 in Dublin in a poor environment. He must have been attractive because he was introduced in some more upscale gay circles when young. But it didn’t last and we also know that his life must have been very difficult at times. During the trial he was 37, so not that young anymore for a “Mary-ann.” He was described as effeminate in newspapers. And he was treated inhumanely by the judge and many others. The reason I am fascinated and so very impressed is that – although he was treated with so much contempt by society – he wasn’t ashamed of who he was and gave evidence with a lot of courage. Although I know his life must have been quite miserable at times, I wonder whether at least some of these times he walked through that street and saw those buildings he may have been happy or at least content. I really hope that did happen.





Court records regarding Jack's testimony are quite interesting.

"And were you hunted out by the police?" –
 "No, they have never interfered. They have always been kind to me."

"Do you mean they have deliberately shut their eyes to your infamous practices?" –
 "They have had to shut their eyes to more than me."

[About his first encounter on the street with Lord Euston] "He laughed at me, and I winked at him."

George Bernard Shaw, one of the founders of the LSE, wrote at the time: "I appeal now to the champions of individual rights ... to join me in a protest against a law by which two adult men can be sentenced to twenty years penal servitude for a private act, freely consented to and desired by both which concerns themselves alone. There is absolutely no justification for the law except the old theological one of making the secular arm the instrument of God's vengeance."

