

THE GLASS BAR AND EUSTON ROAD.

The Glass Bar was women-only bar that was established by Elaine McKenzie and operated between 1995-2008 from a building called the West Lodge, which is now inhabited by the Euston Tap. This is one of two Portland stone lodges, built in a monumental neoclassical style, designed by the engineer J. B. Stansby in 1870. They are now Grade-II listed and are the only buildings to survive the controversial demolition of old Euston Station in the 1960s. The Glass Bar's tenure in the West Lodge made it both 'the most architecturally recognized queer venue in London and one of the most discrete, hidden in plain sight within the urban fabric'.

McKenzie had found London's queer venues to be dominated by white lesbian and gay people, and as a result - in her words - 'cold and cliquey'; she's recounted that as 'a black gay person you had parties in odd places'. She wanted to provide a welcoming space for *all* women. Reflecting the West Lodge's proximity to the universities of Bloomsbury, McKenzie's 1995 planning application to Camden Council proposed a change of use from an office 'to a meeting place and networking venue' for 'academic and professional women'. The membership model and £1 joining fee enabled McKenzie to prioritise women's access. Her policy was, she says, 'if you identified as a woman, that's it you could come [...] so we had cis and trans women in'. Despite striving to uphold an inclusive atmosphere, McKenzie herself experienced racist behaviour, such as being challenged about how she funded the bar, or being talked over, when white customers chose to address her white staff members. The Glass Bar was Tardis-like, bigger than it appeared from the outside, with an upstairs room and ground floor bar, linked by a spiral staircase. The bar offered a meeting place for women's social networks, including 'Kiss', a group for queer Asian women. It was also popular with women from out of town, due to its proximity to Euston, King's Cross and St Pancras stations. Former patrons will remember having to knock on the door for admission, but they would have to find bar first. As one patron recalls:

'I could never find the Glass Bar entrance! I used to have to call Elaine and she would come and find me wandering around Euston station. My lesbian sister used to be inside waiting for me, rolling her eyes. It was the time before mobile phones'.

Following the privatisation of British Rail in the 1990's, The West Lodge was owned by Railtrack, and from 2002 Network Rail. McKenzie learned through conversations with a customer who worked for Railtrack that the organisation wanted rid of The Glass Bar. She herself experienced Railtrack as an 'old boys network', who preferred franchises over independent businesses. Despite initial support, Railtrack and National Rail managers increasingly exhibited obstructive attitudes by prohibiting applications for outdoor seating and more visible external signage. This ensured that The Glass Bar's queerness remained out of public sight and space. Looking at Euston Tap today, we can see that Bloomsbury Leisure Group who own multiple hospitality venues in the area, have received more leniency.

In 2006, Network Rail suddenly tripled and backdated the rent. With the costs of maintenance works also looming, The Glass Bar closed for 3 months, before re-opening due a community fundraising campaign. After a further dramatic rent hike in 2008, McKenzie decided that the battle with Network Rail was too unequal and too insurmountable, so the venue closed permanently. However, she has continued The Glass Bar as a network that frequents other venues. The Glass Bar's closure aligns with wider patterns of LGBTQ+ night-time venue closures in London since the 2006, many of which have been linked to rent hikes and gentrification, as well as private developer-led regeneration and largescale redevelopment projects.

Euston Road, For Your Convenience

At one time Euston Road was furnished with several public urinals that were reputedly venues for gay sex in 1930s. In 1937, a unique guidebook was published, entitled *For Your Convenience: A Learned Dialogue Instructive to all Londoners and London Visitors*. Although *For Your Convenience* is full of coded references to homosexuality and cottaging, the narrative could plausibly be read as a guide to London's public toilets, and it included a handy pull-out map showing where all public conveniences described in the text are located. This may explain why it was published by a reputable publishing house - Routledge.

Authored by 'Paul Pry', a pseudonym for Thomas Burke, the book takes the form of a dialogue between two members of a fictitious gentleman's club. An older man, called 'Mr Mumble', seeks enlightenment from a younger, unnamed informant on, quote, 'some of the things a man often wants to know ... [like] what to do if one were walking through Wigmore Street after three cups of tea'.

The young man responds by offering Mr Mumble a detailed account of places where 'relief' may be found in central London after excessive consumption of tea or lager. He declares the urinals on Euston Road to be too visible to 'natives and foreigners'. Instead, he directs Mr Mumble to cottages located away from the prying eyes of law, such as Buckingham Gate, noting, quote:

Places of that kind, which have no attendants, afford excellent rendezvous to people who wish to meet out of doors and yet escape the eye of the Busy [i.e. cops] ... to exchange information out of earshot of their friends and the observation of the Dicks [i.e plainclothed policemen]

Eventually, the two companions make their way to nearest lavatory...

Written by Bob Mills and Lo Marshall, 2024.

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