

BOOK REVIEW

Ben Campkin, *Queer Premises: LGBTQ+ Venues in London since the 1980s*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. xv + 278pp. 30 plates. 9 figures. Bibliography. £75.00 hbk. £24.99 pbk.

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Where I grew up had no gay scene and no queer venues other than a layby on the A556 and an assortment of seedy, if robust, public toilets left over from a decaying 1970s shopping precinct. It was only when I first went to London, aged 18, and stood in the middle of Soho that I began to understand what queer venues could be. Ben Campkin's *Queer Premises: LGBTQ+ Venues in London since the 1980s* is a welcome addition to an already rich literature on the ecologies of queer spaces and the relationships between urban governance and LGBTQ+ venues catering to heterogeneous queer populations. Campkin guides us through four decades of change in the urban environment, explaining how LGBTQ+ people have sought to embed themselves and their concerns into the planning infrastructure of London, and how different local governments have responded to the needs of queer venues and campaigners in an environment of capital-driven redevelopment and 'supergentification' (p. 169).

Campkin's central proposition is that a neat narrative around the establishment, closure and function of LGBTQ+ venues in London since the 1980s – 'the oversimplification of commentary on the decline or death of queer space' (p. 6) – needs to be complicated by exploring how different forms and functions of venues have interacted with the urban environment. In a series of case-studies, Campkin draws focus to planning and governance changes in the 1980s and in the New Labour era, as well as to the two most prolific waves of venue closures in the mid-2000s and the mid-2010s. First, he explores the London Lesbian and Gay Centre in Islington and its position in the battles with the Thatcher government. Subsequent chapters cover the changes to urban governance structures with the establishment of the Greater London Assembly (GLA) and mayor of London, community and media responses to LGBTQ+ venue closures. He also traces the impacts of large-scale redevelopment on queer premises, and the emergence of more complex heritage and community focused planning regimes which began to pit local authorities against property developers with significant capital outlays.

Unfortunately, Campkin does not provide a history of the Islington's London Lesbian and Gay Centre's ecology. There is no engagement with, for example, London's original lesbian and gay space in Brixton, the South London Gay Centre and its relationship with the Gay Liberation Front squats around Railton Road. However, his account of the 1980s does provide a compelling analysis of the Islington venue as it moved from a worker's co-operative, to attracting funding from the left-

controlled Greater London Council (GLC), before it again morphed into a social enterprise in 1988 after falling into a debt crisis following the GLC's abolition two years prior. Campkin shows how, during this period, the Centre became a space for radical activist groups. These ranged from the AIDS activist group ACT UP, to community service groups that advised on housing and AIDS, to important communication and educational organizations like the Hall-Carpenter Archives and the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard.

The focus of Campkin's case-studies then moves on to venue closure and community campaigns in the face of wide-scale redevelopment. Over the course of three chapters, Campkin examines the fate of queer venues caught up in the redevelopment of King's Cross by private developers. He shows how queer communities mobilized planning and heritage procedure to protect venues which could be proved as community assets. Rail redevelopments, privately contracted and funded by public subsidy at King's Cross in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and at Tottenham Court Road with Crossrail in the 2010s, undermined policies meant to include protected minorities in decision-making, with 'businesses and property owners' (p. 109) consulted instead of queer people and venue-users themselves. In other cases, local authorities such as Tower Hamlets did intervene and 'make a case for the general value of all LGBTQ+ premises' (p. 170) when developers attempted to contrast London's last leather club for gay men, The Backstreet, with the 'purer (and implicitly more heteronormative) "neighbourhood environment"' (p. 158) which they believed surrounded the venue. In the face of supergentrification, Campkin documents how queer people have been able to utilize LGBTQ+ culture and heritage to leverage protection of queer venues as Assets of Community Value, backed in applications made to local government by organizations like English Heritage and Historic England.

Queer Premises fits well into contemporary queer historiography, mapping spaces, venues and, importantly, their relationships to urban planning and governance regimes. While *Queer Premises* is a much-needed addition to queer history literature, it is of even greater use to those in LGBTQ+ communities who are aware of the dangers to queer spaces in other cities facing major projects of urban redevelopment amid changing governance regimes, and who want to organize against the encroachment of rentier urban redevelopment of the spaces we live and move within.

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