

WILLIAMS, GRIFFITH VAUGHAN (GRIFF) (1940 - 2010), journalist and gay activist

Name: Griffith Vaughan Williams
Date of birth: 1940
Date of death: 2010
Partner: Paul Cannon
Parent: Griffith Williams
Parent: Katherine Williams (née Turner)
Gender: Male
Occupation: journalist and gay activist
Area of activity: Literature and Writing; Politics, Government and Political Movements
Author: Norena Shopland

Griff Vaughan Williams was born on 9 November 1940 in Bangor, Gwynedd, the only child of Griffith Williams (b. 1910), and his wife Katherine (née Turner, 1910-1968). He was educated at Friars grammar school in Bangor before studying journalism in Cardiff, and then worked for a number of magazines and provincial newspapers around the country until he joined the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in their press office. He later became a freelance journalist.

When the government failed to enact the recommendations of the Wolfenden Report (1957) recommending partial decriminalisation of homosexuality, a number of activist groups were set up and Williams volunteered at the Homosexual Law Reform Society from 1962 to 1970. He was an early member of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), formed in 1969, and worked continually with them for 35 years until his death.

One of his jobs at CHE was to organise the annual conference, and in 1976 his application to hold it in Scarborough was rejected by the local council. His attempts to then hold the conference in Llandudno the following year resulted in a very public fight about discrimination but nonetheless raised the profile and membership of CHE.

In 1974 he consulted on and participated in a pioneering documentary about homosexual equality for ITV, *Speak for Yourself*, which outlined CHE's work. When Peter Mitchell stood as the 'Campaign for Homosexual Civil Rights' candidate for the City of London and Westminster in a parliamentary election in 1977, Williams acted as his election agent.

From the 1980s Williams was increasingly concerned about the high level of violence against gay people, and contributed research to the CHE publication *Attacks on Gay People* by Julian Meldrum (1981). Throughout the late 1980s and 90s there was a series of high-profile murders, including the serial killer Peter Moore in north Wales, and so Williams, with other members of CHE, approached the Metropolitan Police suggesting they work together. This was something not welcomed by all members, who distrusted the police due to their hostility towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their lack of commitment in tackling crimes against them. Nevertheless, the meeting was a success and saw the setting up of the London Lesbian and Gay Police Initiative which met regularly throughout the 1990s.

The horrific bombing of a London gay pub, the Admiral Duncan, in 1999 which resulted in three people being killed and 79 injured pushed the Metropolitan Police to contact Williams and others to advise them on working with the LGBT community. This resulted in the formation of the LGBT Advisory Group, 'Policing Watchdog for LGBT People in London' (still in existence today). Griff remained closely involved with this group right up to his death and was an important adviser on murders of LGBT people.

Bob Hodgson, the co-chair of the Advisory Group, recalled that Griff Williams was: a character, and a gay activist who had an encyclopaedic knowledge of LGBT issues and details of past and current cases. He scoured local papers and visited coroner's courts to discover pieces of information on LGBT cases which had been overlooked or badly investigated.

Problems with the police persisted and in 2002 an idea was put forward by the Advisory Group to investigate the ways that murders were still being handled by the police, and five years later they published *The Murder Review* (2007) in which it was claimed many of the murders were being hampered by the institutional discrimination that existed within the police force. Much of the research was done by Griff Williams and Bob Hodgson. The report made 22 recommendations for improvements in the Met, all of which were implemented, and the Met awarded Commendations to Williams and his colleagues for their work. In the following years other police forces followed the Met's lead and implemented changes which all ultimately originated from the CHE report.

Griff Vaughan Williams died on 15 November 2010 and was survived by his partner of 30 years Paul Cannon. He was buried at Mortlake Crematorium, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

The obituary in *The Independent* quotes the historian Keith Howes who described him as: passionately, noisily committed to gay rights but never pompous or elitist; always politely eloquent, even at his most bombastic. His was a powerful gay voice, devoted to truth and equality.

His papers are housed at the Bishopsgate Institute, London, and at the London School of Economics Library.

Author

Norena Shopland

Sources

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LGBT Archives: Griffith Vaughan Williams

Bishopgate Institute: Williams, Griffith Vaughan

London University: London School of Economics Library, Archives and Special Collections, Williams, Griffith Vaughan, (1940-2010), gay activist

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