



COUNTDOWN ON SPANNER ARCHIVE

(COS)

COS Countdown on Spanner Archive 1984-1998

Name of Creator: Countdown on Spanner

Extent: 6 Folders

Administrative/Biographical History: Operation Spanner was a police investigation into same-sex male Sadomasochism across the United Kingdom in the late 1980s. The investigation, led by the Obscene Publications Squad of the Metropolitan Police, began in 1987 and ran for three years, during which approximately 100 gay and bisexual men were questioned by police.

The investigation culminated in a report naming 43 individuals, of whom the Director of Public Prosecutions chose to prosecute 16 men for assault occasioning actual bodily harm, unlawful wounding and other offences related to consensual, private sadomasochistic sex sessions held in various locations between 1978 and 1987. A resulting House of Lords judgement, *R v Brown*, ruled that consent was not a valid legal defence for actual bodily harm in Britain.

The case sparked a national conversation about the limits of consent and the role of government in sexual encounters between consenting adults. It also spawned two activist organisations dedicated to promoting the rights of sadomasochists: Countdown on Spanner and The Sexual Freedom Coalition and an annual SM Pride March through Central London.

Countdown on Spanner was formed in August 1992 in an effort to reverse the Court of Appeal ruling, and "demand the recognition that sadomasochism is a valid, sensual and legitimate part of human sexuality". The following month, it began publishing the newsletter Spanner People, and staged a public demonstration calling on Detective Superintendent Michael Hames, Head of the Obscene Publications Squad, to resign. On 28 November, the inaugural SM Pride parade was held, with more than 700 people marching through Central London.

In 1995, the Spanner Trust was established to provide assistance to the Spanner defendants, lobby for a change in British law to legalise sadomasochism, and provide assistance to any person subjected to discrimination because of their consensual sexual behaviour.

Custodial History: Deposited with Bishopsgate Institute by Robert Grover, October 2020.

Scope and Content: Papers, photographs, press cuttings, correspondence, press releases and publications regarding Countdown on Spanner, fetish and kink, and SM Pride, [1984-1998]

System of Arrangement:

No further arrangement required.

Language/scripts of material:

English

Access conditions:

OPEN

Copying conditions:

Photocopying, scanning and digital photography (without flash) is permitted for research purposes on completion of the Library's Copyright Declaration form and with respect to current UK copyright law.

Finding Aids:

Copy of handlist available in researcher's area.

Rules and Conventions:

Compiled in compliance with General International Standard Archival Description, ISAD(G), second edition, 2000; National Council on Archives Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names, 1997.

Press cuttings, publications and correspondence regarding the activist group Countdown on Spanner, [1992-1995]

Includes:

- leaflet from Liberty AGM (July 1992)
- printed statement from Richard Buxton QX, Commissioner with principal responsibility for criminal law (April 1993)
- leaflet for the Leather Archives Museum, with attached note requesting information on Spanner
- press cutting, 'S&M: The limits of liberty', Guardian (28 November 1992)
- press cutting, 'Turning the Spanner on sexuality', The Pink Paper (21 March 1993)
- press cutting, 'Spanning the Divide', Rouge issue 13 (1993)
- photocopied press cutting, letter to the editor, 'Trial reveals police and social prejudices', Independent (29 December 1990)
- photocopied press cutting, '15 men convicted of degrading and vicious practices', The Times (20 December 1990)
- press cutting, 'Defiance of an average man: Chris Woods meets Spanner "ring-leader" Roland Jaggard', Capital Gay (12 March 1993)
- photocopied press cutting, 'Operation Spanner', Tar & Feathers vol 3, no 2
- photocopied press cutting "'Pain for pleasure" gays guilty, say lords', Guardian (12 March 1993)
- press cutting, 'SM, Civil Liberties and Spanner' by Kellan Farshea, Capital Gay (21 August 1992)
- Newslink: the newsletter of gay male s/m activists, number 24 (Winter 1992-1993)
- press cutting, 'Minority's Minority Steps from the Shadows: Gay Male S/M Activists', reprinted from the special "Leather" issue of The Advocate on May 29, 1984
- A4 notebook with handwritten notes regarding the Spanner case, legal resources, contacts and the gay press (1993)
- letter to Countdown on Spanner from Cambridge University Students Union (02 May 1993)
- letter to Kellan Farshea from Granada Television, thanking him for his contribution to

- the debate regarding 'the intervention by the law to prohibit people indulging in S&M sex' (08 December 1992)
- letter to Kellan Farshea from Andrew Puddephatt of Liberty, thanking him for his mailing concerning the Spanner campaign (12 October 1992)
 - letter to Countdown on Spanner from Sub-culture Alternatives Freedom Foundation (SAFF) (21 October 1992)
 - draft Declaration of Trust establishing a trust known as The Spanner Trust (10pp; 1994)
 - information sheet regarding 'Interim Aims and Objectives' of Countdown on Spanner
 - report, 'Sado-Masochism and the Law: Consent versus Paternalism', Anthony Furlong; Legal Notes No 12, Libertarian Alliance (1991)
 - letter from The Spanner Trust thanking ASMF (France) for their donation. The letterhead lists the Trustees as David Burrows, Kellan Farshea, Dr Tuppy Owens, Carole Scarodimos and Tim Woodward; Hon. Secretary Rob Grover (26 November 1997)
 - LCLGR [Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights] Newsletter No 10 (Spring 1993)
 - LCCGR Newsletter No 11 (Summer 1993), with letter to the editor from Kellan Farshea
 - press release/article for GMSMA, New York, 'Spanner Update' (April 1994)
 - photocopied press cutting, 'Consensual sado-masochistic acts unlawful', The Independent (12 March 1993)
 - photocopied press cutting, 'Leaders of vicious and perverted sex gang jailed', The Times (20 December 1990)
 - flyer from Countdown on Spanner, 'Law Lords Ruling Condemned as Unworkable and Unjust'
 - press cutting, 'Law reformers give the green light to SM sex', The Pink Paper (22 December 1995)
 - printed 'Spanner Time Line'

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COS/2

SM Pride

1988-1998

Leaflets, flyers, press releases, press cuttings, photographs and publications regarding SM Pride, [1988-1998]

Includes:

- small card, 'Perverts on Euro Pride, 25 June Amsterdam'
- press release 'SM Pride Awards for Mendacity' (24 January 1998)
- handwritten notes regarding SM Pride and the future of the Spanner Campaign
- postcard with handwritten plans for upcoming demonstrations and rallies, 1992-1997
- copy of Axiom News (18 December 1997)
- postcard for SM Pride to be held 24 January 1998
- press cutting, 'We're only here for the gear', News of the World (31 October 1993)
- leaflet for SM Dayschool Programme at ULU, for SM Pride '93
- flyer for SM Pride March '95, 'Perverts on Parade' (09 September 1995)
- press cutting, 'Yes means yes: SM Pride has now become Europe's largest and most high profile SM event', Pink Paper (30 September 1994)
- printed announcement of the launch of 'the new SM Pride Organisation' (1998)
- photocopied press cutting, 'Burning with Pride': image of Kellan Farshea with caption reading in part '...Farshea, one of the speakers at Saturday's SM Pride rally in Trafalgar Square, showed hundreds of marchers just what he thought of the Operation Spanner ruling which sent gay SMers to prison – he burnt it, to wild cheers from the crowd', Capital Gay (05 November 1993)
- copy of Bad Attitude: a lesbian sex magazine, vol 4, number 1 (Spring 88)
- The SM Gays Resource Book, first edition (16pp)
- flyer, SM Gays week (15-19 July 1992)
- Ungagged newsletter no 2 (1994)
- leaflet for ASMF (in French), summer meeting (4-6 June 1993)
- leaflet, Safe S/M: advice on AIDS Prevention (3rd edn; March 1990)
- flyer, SM Gays Programme (July-December 1992)
- SM Pride News, Issue No 1 (Summer 1998)
- booklet, 'SM Pride, SM Proud?: a discussion document on the pansexual SM pride event by Master B'
- printed SM Pride Launch: Sat 24th Jan 1998 Draft Timetable

- A4 hardback notebook labelled 'SM Pride 1998'

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COS/3

SM, Fetish, Kink

1984-1998

Publications and press cuttings regarding S/M, leather, fetish and kink, [1984-1998]

Includes:

- photocopied issue of On Our Backs magazine (Winter 1986)
- Consenting Adults, issue 2 (Winter 1997/8)
- Time Out XXX Directory (December 1997)
- The Meat Rack New Gay Contact Mag, no. 1
- The Rod Closet: the catalogue of the Academy Club
- Erotica: a catalogue of books and periodicals (November 1993)
- Brat Attack: the zine for leatherdykes and other bad girls, no 3 (c.1992)
- S/Mart: a newsletter of Gay SM, issue no 3 (May 1984)
- Boxing News vol 49, no 14 (02 April 1993)
- Zeitgeist International, issue 4. Contains piece written by Countdown on Spanner trustee Kellan Farshea, (1992)
- programme for Dungeon in the Sky, 'Europe's largest SM event'
- press cutting, 'BBC gets cold feet about sado-masochism play', Observer (19 November 1995)
- typescript press reports, including 'Vanilla Sex? It Can't Be Licked' (Ruth Picardie, Guardian, 23 August 1993); 'Laws of Sex and Pain – Consensual Sado-Masochism Should Not Be Made a Crime' (The Times, 02 December 1992) and 'An Issue of Equality, Fairness and Health' (Independent, 19 February 1994)
- photocopied typescript document about the history of SM, by Gareth J Medway, entitled, 'Those were the days ...' (15pp, n.d.)
- flyer for education workshops run by GMSMA [Gay Male SM Activists] (Autumn 1992)
- Safe, Sane, Consensual: newsletter of the S/M-Leather-Fetish Contingent for the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian/Gay/Bi Equal Rights and Liberation (1993)
- flyer for SMil's 5th International S&M Summer Camp (1993)

- press cutting, 'Knobs and Knockers', Guardian (12 November 1997)
- Lady O Society newsletters no 5 (December 1994) and no 7 (June 1995)

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COS/4

Gordon Rainsford photographs

c.1995

Three black-and-white photographs taken by Gordon Rainsford, [c.1995]

Includes:

- image of a singer, keyboard player, audience and two men dancing
- two images of Countdown on Spanner/SM march, central London

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