

## Iain Scott

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**PARTICIPANT:** My name Iain Scott, I was born in 1959, so happily I'm approaching my sixtieth year next year. I was born and bred in Bury which is just north of the city and spent the first 21 years of my life there as part of a very close Scottish-based family. When I was 21 I moved to Prestwich having met my partner, and give-and-a-bit years later we moved slightly closer in to Manchester where we've been for the last thirty years.

My involvement with the LGBT community has been long and varied, which is fantastic really because it gives me a pretty unique perspective on certainly the LGBT community in the Greater Manchester area. So initially it was because of my own personal sexuality and having met my soul mate and the love of my life. The early years that I socialised, utilised the Village, was basically just for enjoyment. That was the case for many years. I then became involved in a business called Metz which was actually before you were even born. We opened Metz the 1st of December 1994, so that's before you were born I would suggest, yeah. And it's now called Ruby's. Actually, it's the only one still now with the bridge that's on the other side. And we ran that for many successful years, there were about five of us involved in it. We took it to Liverpool as a brand, we then went on to Leeds, and when eventually Leeds took the whole group down, basically it was renamed and it became a venue called Eden.

And I had left before that time to pursue travel and a variety of other interests. I then briefly returned to what had been my original profession, which was advertising, sales, marketing, PR, where I ran a very successful business on Deansgate in Manchester and worked for some of the top publishers not just in this country but in the world. And I did that on a freelance basis for about five years, did lots of travel with my partner, and we had an absolutely fantastic time. And the Village at that point became less relevant because a lot of the time I wasn't even in the country, but as and when was required we used to use it socially. But always maintained a lot of the contacts that I'd always built from those early years.

And then in 2001 myself and my partner and a long-time friend opened a bar restaurant called Taurus, which was number 1 Canal Street. It is now ironically called Number 1 Canal Street. And we operated that for 13-and-a-half very successful years. And at that point that's basically where the community aspect of what I've always done really came in to its own, because Taurus was laughingly and sometimes mockingly known as 'the community centre' because from the day we opened we became the natural home to pretty much every social group that was going. Social, sporting, the choir started with us. The list is endless, dozen and dozens. The footballers, male and female, rugby teams. As I say the choir started as three people in our basement. We set up theatre in the basement which became the home of the Greater Manchester Fringe Festival, which is something else I'm still involved in seven years on. And the list is endless.

We were the hub of everything that went on really on Canal Street and particularly in terms of Pride, one of the great highlights was always Polly outside our venue over

the whole weekend. And it was so busy that they actually had to re-route people from that main entrance there right round to other entrances because people just couldn't flow. And we did that for 13-and-a-half years. And sadly because of landlord difficulties and the intransigence of the local council we closed the business three years ago next week, as it happens, or later this week. And that pretty much saw the end to the hospitality part of what I've always done.

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Running parallel to all of that I had always operated Canal Street Online, which is now in about its 11th years. And it started off in all honesty as something of a hobby and something that, because it didn't exist there was no umbrella media for the street, for the Village, for LGBT in the area. So effectively I created it and provided content. Much of the content actually came from the many social and sporting groups who were our customers anyway. And it built and built and built and built. And as I sit here today it's actually cumulatively the largest LGBT media outside of London. The only four organisations that have bigger cumulative numbers right across twelve platforms are all London-based publishers. So there's actually nobody else in the provinces who have anywhere near the numbers that I do. And I say that not for any grandeur, but actually it's something that started as a hobby that became commercial over the years, has actually developed in to this major piece of LGBT media. And therefore links back in to the community.

So every single day, every single week, whether it's social media, whether it's the site, whether it's the emails that I sent, it is the hub of information about what's going on in the Village, but actually more importantly what's going on within the LGBT community beyond. And as I've always said from day one, the LGBT community is not a geographical location. It is not about Canal Street, it's not about Richmond or Sackville or the Gay Village. Although they are significant, LGBT as a term cannot be define by geography. And with that in mind, that's why I built and continue to content the site with lots of stuff that isn't Village related. And the great thing about it is that our community has expanded with confidence and I'm very proud to say that in some small way I have contributed to that. So that many services, hospitality, entertainment, professional services, whatever, work is now available to our community right across Greater Manchester and thankfully well beyond.

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**INTERVIEWER 1:** Thanks. So the next thing I want to ask about will be relating to AIDS and safe sex because you're a person who's been involved in Manchester for a long time, both as an individual and as a business owner. So could you think about ways the community changed and adapted and how your life was changed by the onset of the AIDS crisis?

**PARTICIPANT:** Okay, that's interesting because the AIDS crisis was something that for me wasn't a crisis, it didn't affect me in other than concern. I was not somebody that lost people that were close to me at the time through AIDS. Obviously was concerned about it, obviously was intrigued to know more about it, and I've always actually supported the many organisations including this one who their raison d'être is simply to provide support and hopefully to ultimately eradicate the condition. Sadly

that's not the case yet but a lot of great work has been done over the years, but it wasn't something that ever affected me personally.

Within my own sex life it was something again that I was aware of, but then again I've always been someone who has looked after my own self, possibly through selfishness if nothing else, first and foremost. And then from a secondary point obviously my partner, and even when I have had sex outside of that relationship he has always been at the forefront with myself. So the point is quite simply I have always personally looked after my body in terms of sexual activity and still continue to, and it's foremost in my mind. And I'm thankful in many respects for that because at a time when I was aware of my change of sexuality because I'd led a very heterosexual life in many respects before then, when I made the change as it were then sex became part of it.

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And I'm just really pleased that I was able to bring to my own enjoyment safety and sadly many others have not and continue not to. But there's no question that the late-80s, early-90s, big changes were going on. Thankfully at the same time more awareness was created and research which continues, but research at the time, a lot of funds and resources were diverted and as we sit here now people who were diagnosed even in the late-80s are leading very full and happy lives, and have lived with HIV and have never developed AIDS. And whilst I think that is a wonderful thing, part of the problem is that the younger generation coming through now subconsciously I believe actually think that it is cured. What unfortunately they don't even see are the side effects of medication and what it can do to people, and there are many other intricacies surrounding it. But I think by and large it would be true to say that when socialising, a lot of the millennials and younger that are coming out actually don't really consider HIV/AIDS as being an important issue any longer. And there is no question that a lot of behaviour reflects that, and I think that is one of the major challenges going forward.

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**INTERVIEWER 1:** So is it, are we seeing a return to the old days when everything was a lot more carefree and people were a lot more careful? Or is it new types of behaviour that are equally dangerous?

**PARTICIPANT:** At the end of the day the carefree attitude, I think, ties in with modern living. So there is, in my opinion, no question that we live in more hedonistic times. Not just in terms of sexual activity but the enjoyment of drugs, which I'm happy to say are something that has never appealed. I enjoy alcohol, always have done, but alcohol has never been more widely available. You put all of these... there are more venues available now, more late-night venues. The young people coming out now, and some of the older ones are not coming out until ten, eleven, twelve o'clock at night, socialising all the way through the night. There's more of that kind of venue than there ever was. So I don't see how you can divide the way that life is generally, which is in and out of the LGBT community, this is a general comment of millennials and younger.

I don't see how you can divide the way that they enjoy themselves now and the number of venues that provide that enjoyment from the sad fact that there is again an increase and rise in lots of conditions. STDs, HIV in to AIDS. It's not going away. And it's behavioural.

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**INTERVIEWER 1:** So back when you were first going out in the Village in Manchester, there were less night club, you were saying?

**PARTICIPANT:** There was less of everything. In fact there is too much of everything now. So effectively you had just a small amount of venues, you know. The ones that came to mind initially were the Thompson's Arms, you had the Rembrandt, you had the New York, New York, which was the original New York. You had the New Union. And that was pretty much it. Cruz came later. All of the major venues that are now well-established on the streets, none of them were around at the time apart from the ones I've just mentioned. There were one or two other venues that weren't in the Village, Slingsby's comes to mind. There was a place called Rocky's which was just off Deansgate, but they weren't actually in the Village because the Village didn't exist. So the people who were out already and people who were coming out at that time, in mid- to late-80s, even in to the early-90s, only actually had a choice of half a dozen venues to go to.

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**INTERVIEWER 1:** Was it all very open community back then, the way that it is now? Was it very easy to say that you were going to these clubs or to be seen in these clubs, or was it the sort of thing you had to be careful about, that you had to kind of hide?

**PARTICIPANT:** It dependent on the individual. Personally I never felt that I had the need to hide from anybody. The only important people that ever needed to know were my family and I sat them down and told them myself collectively to their faces. Beyond that it wasn't anybody else's business. Professionally it wasn't a particular issue for me. And if somebody wanted to know then I would happily tell them, but I didn't wear it as a badge of honour. I dare say lots of other people at the time, because it was a different world, faced prejudice both in the family home, amongst friends, in the workplace. In other walks of life I can only talk personally that it wasn't an issue but I'm sensible enough to know that it was for other people.

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**INTERVIEWER 1:** So were the clubs themselves very open about what they were? And the pubs, were they flamboyant, and di they have the rainbow flags and the lights hanging down like they do now?

**PARTICIPANT:** Not at all. No, those are part of the new freedoms and the badge of honour now that I think businesses wear as well as their customers. At the time it was much more discreet until you got inside the venue. So you kind of knew where you were going and once you got inside everything was much more low-key, almost

without exception, because it was all about the people. Not necessarily flashing lights. You had limited entertainment. Basically it was about established drag queens, about half a dozen that had been about for a long time. And very little else. There was no variant of the kind of entertainment that you got. I think that came much later and to be fair I think Metz and then Taurus were a big part of broadening the entertainment and bringing live entertainment and theatre and poetry and the like in to the Village, as opposed to just a lip synching drag performer. So that was kind of what it was like at that time

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** So I was just wondering if you could tell me a little bit about... you mentioned that HIV didn't really affect you personally, but do you remember any of the kind of media coverage at that time?

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh yes.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** What was that like?

**PARTICIPANT:** Well the media coverage, it was meant to be shocking, wasn't it, at the time? I mean we all remember the television commercials with John Hurt and the then Conservative government, as a knee-jerk reaction, spent money and resource taking those commercials out. Very dark, very dramatic. But actually in my opinion did two jobs very well at the same time. Made it aware to a broader community. I think the gay male community and some of the lesbian community were aware of what was going on from America pretty early on. But there was a lot of misinformation, a lack of real understanding, and that existed for many years, probably in to a decade.

So the first thing that happened was it made through our television boxes the expressions 'HIV' and 'AIDS' much more aware to more people. But the other thing it did was it bred ignorance at the same time. Because people didn't fully understand then actually they reacted extremely badly and aggressively and homophobia and aggression and many of those unattractive scenarios actually occurred at the same time, so it was a bittersweet experience. And then since then obviously it was through the Princess Diana exposure which was all very positive, and I think a series of these different things over time made the whole area of HIV and AIDS much more understood. But at the end of the day none of it can change people's hearts and minds. If people have it within themselves to be anti-anything then actually a television commercial isn't going to make any difference, or Princess Diana visiting a hospital isn't going to make any difference to those kinds of people.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** You mentioned Diana. What effect did that have? For someone who doesn't know about it-?

**PARTICIPANT:** Well I knew about it at the time she visited because she came afterwards.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** Yeah of course, what I mean is, for someone who is maybe younger than us who wasn't maybe around at that time, why was that visit by Diana so important?

**PARTICIPANT:** Well I think we all know the answer to the question, which is that a member of the royal family, actually by shaking hands and visiting, was actually saying visually 'this is not something that you need to be frightened of, you are quite easily and safely able to shake hands and hug, do whatever you like. It is not something that can be transferred just by human context'. Simple human contact. It has to be either something that it injected through clumsy use of drugs or through sexual activity. And I think even now those are 95% of the ways that sadly people contract the condition. She demonstrated that actually it was not possible to contract HIV just by shaking somebody's hand.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** So you've mentioned your work in the community and at various bars, one of the major initiatives of Healthy Gay Manchester and then the LGF was distributing condoms and lube. And obviously that needed a support from the community to be able to put them in to bars and things like that. What was your approach to that? Did they approach you?

**PARTICIPANT:** Well I was approached with everybody else to be honest, it was part of being a responsible licensee to provide that service. It was an extremely expensive one, it wasn't particularly targeted because we used to have a very diverse customer base. And we used to have prostitutes who would come in for supplies of condoms, which we never challenged because it was about safe sex ultimately and I didn't feel that it was down to us to judge who was using them and how. It wasn't in my gift to do so, I hadn't provided them, I was simply providing the space for distribution. And I think many other operators of businesses felt the same way, but they would have to speak for themselves.

And it became just a part of what business operators provided. Personally I remain unconvinced that the link between providing that service actually made any difference to HIV contraction levels then or now. I've never actually seen a piece of written evidence to that end. And that may well be because I've just never seen it. It may exist but it's never been in the public domain. Or indeed the professional domain. Because had it been so then actually through my Canal Street platforms I'm sure that if it had represented a 50% decline over a five-year period in the amount of gay men contracting HIV I would be aware of it.

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**INTERVIEWER 1:** What about, was it something that you saw running these clubs that made you doubt that? Was there behaviour... is there a specific reason why you're sceptical?

**PARTICIPANT:** As a personal view, I think that there have always been people who even knowing the dangers of unsafe sex would still have it. And I don't believe that that group of people would ever have been affected by having free condoms or not, they made choices and continue to make choices, and even now actually there are sadly people who want to have sex and who advertise sex that is bareback because that's what they want, that's what they need, and they want other people who feel the same way.

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**PARTICIPANT:** And that then becomes a question of choice of the individual, whether to proceed accordingly. I also believe that if there were people like myself, and there are many of them I'm sure, that took their personal safety serious then they would provide condoms to that end. Because I never once used a condom that was provided by what was then the LGF, because I would, if I needed a condom then I would provide it for myself. And I know many other people that felt the same way.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** What was your... there was the case famously of James Anderton, the police chief constable making very derogatory comments toward people living with HIV. How, as someone who's quite prominent in the Village, how's the relationship with the police changed over time?

**PARTICIPANT:** Oh tremendously. I mean, everybody was pretty horrified of his comments at the time, but actually many were also not surprised because of his personal Christian beliefs. And some of those still exist but in other people. What did it do? It gave the impression that the police were anti-gay, which is ludicrous because then and now many policemen and women and people that don't identify as either, are members of the Greater Manchester Police Force. And anybody that's attended any of the last dozen prides will know that they're probably the largest services group that actually marches in the parade every year. And they are very evident in the Village in an on-going twelve-monthly basis.

And I think much of that has come from, he was a catalyst for actually making them more visible and I think the good thing that came out of it is that people who were in the police force at that time actually stood their ground and came out and marched in almost the very next parade that happened after his comments. And then it just built and built as the force became more understanding and because people that worked in the services generally became much more confident to be themselves in their place of work.

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**INTERVIEWER 1:** Going off of the comments that he made, at the time did you notice a change in the way that the wider Manchester community started treating the gay community in the wake of HIV and AIDS? Was there like an initial backlash?

**PARTICIPANT:** I can't say that it was that noticeable at the time, it was against a catalyst that brought good people, good-hearted people, who actually came to the Village with their friends, with their family, to support their children, to support their work colleagues. Just came out because they want to enjoy socialising with them. And it built and built and built to where it is today. I can't honestly say that there was an overnight reaction to the arrival and therefore the wider community came out in force. I think what they did then and what they've always done is they've chosen how to support their loved ones or their friends or their colleagues, and maybe the change is, at the time it was a bit more covert and people socialised in private houses or went to other venues in the city where maybe, you know, there was an office party of ten but one of them had to be gay, everybody knew that but it wasn't obvious to everybody else. And some of that still happens now.

We've made a lot of important strides in visibility and in choice and confidence, but actually there are still a great many people out there who need peer support in whatever form it comes. And that's more important than it's ever been. So I am asked every single day of my professional life, do I think that the Village is dead? Do I think that there is any need for the Village any longer? And automatically my answer is always 'yes, of course' because people tend to think of the Village as being a place full of very confident out LGBT people. And that is not the case. You walk ten minutes from here in any direction and you will find homophobia, transphobia, racism, all of those things together sometimes. So there's never been a greater need for a safe and secure place where people can socialise amongst themselves or with friends or with colleagues.

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And there is also a large group of very young people who are finding their sexuality, not necessarily coming out, who actually need the confidence of some of the venues, some of the larger venues, that they can experiment in or just be a part of. And I think that that must not be underestimated. And so whilst I have many strong feelings about the quality of a lot of venues that currently exist, I am delighted that they exist because I think that there are people out there that need those kind of places. And then what happens... and it's very generation. And also religious. One of the great growth areas in the last two years has been the rise of groups like the Asian LGBT Group who have links to this organisation. And it's been wonderful to watch people who are prohibited through their religion in a family environment or a work environment to actually be anything other than Muslim. And thankfully that is not the case and never has been and never will be. But they now have a safe location, i.e., the Village, to be able to be visible and to enjoy themselves and be themselves.

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**INTERVIEWER 1:** So do you ever picture the future of the Village and the future of the LGBT community in Manchester? You know, what's your kind of ideal future for us?

**PARTICIPANT:** I don't think there is such a thing as an ideal place. I think one of the problems is that, with greater freedoms you get the [Missed] [00:32:49]. So with every advance in the law, you get an increase in the number of people who are anti that legislation. I think same-sex marriage is a good example of that, where it's hailed across the globe as being a wonderful thing, but what it has done is it has brought right-wing extremists of opposing views pretty much across the globe as well, and I think that will continue. So to answer your question, I think the Village will continue to evolve, I think it is about to change again, it has evolved many times over the 25 or so years or more, in fact 30 years plus, that I've been aware of it and using it. It will change again because there's a lot of new residents coming, there's a lot of new build coming, there's going to be a conflict between some of the later venues and their licensing issues and those new arrivals, those new hotels, apartments, offices, and that will make a big change. And many of those venues will be serving the daytime trade, which is something that I know a great deal about and to be frank which the Village doesn't currently serve, with the exception of about three, maybe four venues. So the daytime feel of the Gay Village is going to be massively different forever and it remains to be seen what support the LGBT community choose to give that or not. Beyond that, the night-time economy I think will continue. I think there will be some bars that will change again, there will be some that will disappear and in some cases that is a good thing. There will be some that will change ownership and there has been a lot of that going on recently, as close as the week before last. And in fact last week there was a change of ownership as well. There are more conversations going on as we sit here, there are more leases that are coming up for renewal that will not be renewed and therefore some business that we take for granted now will actually either relocate or close.

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So there is nothing new in all of that. For anybody that's been around longer than two or three years, or five years or ten or twenty, will know that the Village ebbs and flows. But it always moves forward in some way.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** I was going to ask, what's the best thing about running a bar?

**PARTICIPANT:** Making money.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** Okay.

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**INTERVIEWER 1:** Nice and simple.

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**INTERVIEWER 2:** We're coming to the end of the interview now, is there anything else you'd like to add that maybe we haven't covered or anything else that you'd like to mention at all?

**PARTICIPANT:** Hard to know what we haven't covered really. I don't think this is about politics or religion or any of that... although those issues have affected some of the conversation. You know, to summarise, much of what goes on in modern LGBT life is a very positive thing and I would cite the transgender part of that, I think there's been tremendous strides forward over the last few years and again personally I've been supportive of the trans community well before Sparkle ever existed and have befriended to this day people who fit in to one of the categories within trans. Sparkle is the visible part of it, as Pride is for the wider community. But actually on a day-to-day basis there's a poster on that wall over there for Mermaids. Few years ago you couldn't possibly conceive that an organisation doing the great work that Mermaids do would ever be envisaged.

So I think all of this is very positive, I think there'll be more coming through. I wonder sometimes whether the community as a whole globally pounce on things that are not relevant. I think sometimes we run the risk of going too far with equality as we see it and I think marriage is possibly one of those. I've been with my partner for 37 years and the last thing we would ever do is get married. Because marriage is in our view about religion, about the procreation of children, but it's actually not the right word for what a same-sex couple should be allowed to do. Civil partnership is great, equality is the key. We have complete equality within our relationship and with other people outside of our relationship. Would marriage make any difference? No it wouldn't in our case. And I question the word 'marriage', not equality, not the right to have the same rights across a whole range of areas. In fact, I've been a forerunner in those areas. Very strongly believe in equality and have been flying that flag for thirty-odd years. But sometimes we seem to want everything that the broader community has got, and I worry that in some cases we go too far. Not necessarily in Manchester but I think globally there's a great danger. I think we should not lose sight of the fact that we are individuals, first and foremost, and we have a natural right to be equally treated by everybody in every walk of our life. If we choose then to take a partner and move forward with somebody with as many equal rights in employment, in mortgages, in insurance, in all of those areas, we should have the right to do it and we do, but sometimes I just worry slightly that we push these things maybe too far.

[00:39:47] End of transcript.