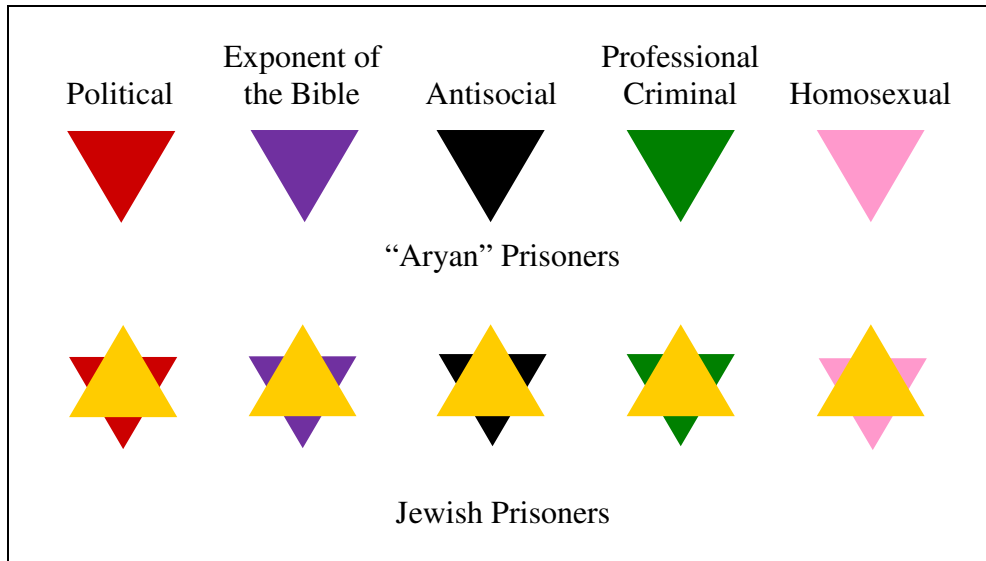


A HOPELESS BUT HEARTFELT GESTURE

This tale of his unjust arrest by GLF member Alan Wakeman was originally published in July 1971 in Come Together 7 - GLF's first regular newspaper

The day before Remembrance Sunday last year I happened to walk through the gardens of Westminster Abbey where a field of remembrance crosses had been set out. Many of them were for specific named groups and the field did its job – that is, it set me remembering. I thought in particular of the thousands of homosexuals who were interned and executed by the Nazis. No one knows exactly how many because no one has ever bothered to count. Like the Jews, they were made to wear special identifying marks. Here is a complete list of them. It makes grim reading:



The following passage, from a book called *The Theory and Practice of Hell* by Eugen Kogon gives an idea of what it was like for homosexual internees:

"Homosexual practices were actually very widespread in the camps. The prisoners, however, ostracized only those whom the SS marked with the pink triangle.

The fate of the homosexuals in the concentration camps can only be described as ghastly. They were often segregated in special barracks and work details. Such segregation offered ample opportunity to unscrupulous elements in positions of power to engage in extortion and maltreatment... In October 1938 they (the homosexuals in Buchenwald) were transferred to the penal colony in a body and had to slave in the quarry. This consigned them to the lowest caste in camp during the most difficult years. In shipments to extermination camps, such as Nordhausen, Natzweiler and Gross-Rosen, they furnished the highest proportionate share, for the camp had an understandable tendency to slough off all elements considered least valuable or worthless. If anything could save them at all, it was to enter into sordid relationships within the camp, but this was as likely to endanger their lives as to save them. Theirs was an insoluble predicament and virtually all of them perished."

Unlike the Jews, these victims of Nazi persecution have no memorials* and are not remembered or mourned by society. Indeed there has been such a conspiracy of silence that few people even know that these events ever occurred.

On this particular November Saturday, thinking about all these things, I was moved to buy a cross with a poppy on it, like the hundreds of others that had already been set down. If I had had a pink triangle, I would have put that on it, but this was a spontaneous act and all I had with me to identify the cross with the victims it specially commemorated, was a GLF badge. I fixed this to it and put it in the ground.

Later that day I discovered the cross had been removed by a policeman. I found him and asked him why. He wouldn't answer and I began to explain my reasons for putting the cross there. He said that I should go to Cannon Row if I had any complaints and then began to walk away. I said I was trying to speak to him as one human being to another, not as a citizen to a policeman. I'm not sure why, but at this moment, I got out my notebook and began to write down what had just happened and while I was doing this, he came back and arrested me. When I asked on what charge, he said: "Indecent behaviour."

I was taken to Cannon Row in one of their lovely black vans and locked up in a cell. From time to time six or seven different policemen came to stare at me with obvious contempt. All done to intimidate, no doubt, but I happened to have my embroidery with me and this served the dual purpose of soothing me and disconcerting them. I recommend embroidery for police stations. Eventually I was marched into the station sergeant's office and waited while about half a dozen of them offered one another tea and idle banter and completely ignored me as one searched through all my things, including reading every single page of my private diary and notebook. I asked if they had the right to do this and received the reply: "Every right in the world." After I had been held like this for about three quarters of an hour, the station sergeant asked me to listen carefully while the man who had arrested me made a statement. I asked if I might make notes but was ignored as before. I made notes anyway. It was only as I listened to this statement that I began to realise the full force of what was happening to me for *every single thing he said was untrue both in substance and in detail* and I realised I had no witnesses. Even so, at this stage, they were not suggesting that I had insulted anyone in particular – they were relying on the fact that the placing of the cross with the badge was itself sufficient grounds for the charge which read: "Using insulting behaviour whereby a breach of the peace may have been occasioned... Contrary to section 54 (13) Metropolitan Police Act 1839."

I appeared at Bow Street the following Monday, pleaded not guilty and asked for an adjournment, which I got. Some of the events of this day may be of interest. After "surrendering to bail" I was locked up in a room like a dirty public lavatory with about 30 other men. (Women and men prisoners have to be kept apart or who knows what they might get up to?) At intervals policemen of varying ranks came in and bellowed out people's names as if they were being summoned to the last judgement. But when "my" policeman came in, he called me Alan and was friendly and polite. Later, while we were waiting to go into court, he took me on one side and as good as said he was sorry and he wished he hadn't done it.

By the time the case was heard in January this year (1972), the police had changed their story completely. They were now claiming I had insulted the policeman who arrested me and that I "shouted and waved my arms about so much that persons who were praying in the churchyard (!) had risen from their knees to threaten me

with clenched fists. I don't believe there was a single person in the court who believed this preposterous concocted story, least of all the police. Anyway, when I gave my evidence I was again feeling very calm and peaceable and I sincerely tried to tell the truth as well as I could remember it. The magistrates duly retired to consider their verdict (they use expressions like that – it means they went out to have a think) and when they reappeared they literally apologised to *me* for finding the case “proven”. They conditionally discharged me and refused an application from the police for costs. Legal friends tell me this means they knew very well the police were lying but were not prepared for such a minor charge to have it officially put on the record. So, my legal friends tell me, it's a moral victory, whatever that may mean.

A few friends have suggested this is not enough and that I should appeal; but I've had enough of playing at their idiot courtroom games. I have better things to do with my time and my energy.

Postscript Summer 1973

A year has passed since I wrote this article and during this year I've not only been “of good behaviour” but have also been able to view the whole episode more objectively. I now believe the policeman arrested me when he saw me taking notes because *he* felt threatened. I'm also sure he was uncomfortable going along with the story concocted in the police station. During the routine part of his evidence he spoke clearly and loudly with his head held high but when he came to the invented part he dropped his eyes, shuffled his feet and mumbled. Clearly lying wasn't something he'd expected to have to do when he joined the police force. I'm not trying to excuse him. The fact remains he did lie and I was found guilty of something I didn't do. But which of us can truthfully say we've never failed to live up to our own personal concept of morality? Besides, I felt pretty good as I was carried shoulder-high from the courtroom (where Oscar Wilde was tried!) by a crowd of gay activist friends who'd come to give me moral support. And, guess what? In the street outside the young policeman who'd originally arrested me, came over and presented me with the little wooden cross with its GLF badge still on it, saying: “Alan – I thought you'd like to keep this.” It helped that he was dishy.

*In 2010 the pink triangle is widely known and there are now several memorials to the thousands of homosexuals murdered by the Nazis, including a commemorative plaque in Berlin and a moving memorial in Amsterdam.