

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Robert Brown
Interviewer: Keith Stewart
Place of Interview: Paddington
Date: 7th April 2009
Files:

Key

KS: = Interviewer, Keith Stewart
RB:= Interviewee, Robert Brown
[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time
[5:22 IA] = inaudible section at this time
Word 5:22 = best guess at word

RB: No, you were lucky, the hotel's being renovated. So usually there's lots of work noise going on, over the last few days there's been drills and hammers, you name it there's been everything going on. So I think you must have chosen a good moment, they were at lunch, that's what it is. <Laughs>

KS: And how long before your stuff arrives, all your things?

RB: It's supposed to have been here already but I'm lucky I've got the time off, I can just... They said it will take another week but never mind.

KS: I'm just checking the recording level to make sure I've got it right, while we're chatting. It should pick up my voice as well as your voice.

RB: Do you want to put this in the middle somewhere?

KS: No, that's fine.

RB: OK.

KS: I think we're close enough. Let me ask you about... tell me about things that you do in your spare time?

RB: Well as you can see, I practise Buddhism, have done for twenty years. And a lot of the things I'm doing at the moment is taking Buddhism into the lesbian and gay community, supporting a lot of the Buddhist members across the UK, having stalls at Pride events, interviews. I moved back up to Scotland, because my mum's from Ipswich, my dad's from Aberdeen, I moved back up to Scotland, to Perth in Scotland at the age of seven and I moved down to London at the age of seventeen.

KS: OK, we'll start the interview now and I'll ask you the same questions again, I just wanted to check that to make sure I got it right.

RB: No problem.

- KS:** OK, so the date is 7th April and I'm the interviewer Keith Stewart. And tell me your name again and where you were born.
- RB:** My name is Robert Brown and I was born in Devizes in Wiltshire but I grew up in Perth in Scotland. My dad's from Aberdeen, mum's from Ipswich, travelled around the first few years and moved back up when I was seven years old.
- KS:** And we're at your flat in Gloucester Terrace in Paddington and this is the Galop helpline project.
- RB:** It is indeed.
- KS:** So thank you for offering to be interviewed.
- RB:** My pleasure.
- KS:** So let's start off, so just tell me a bit about your background: childhood, those sorts of things.
- RB:** Childhood, goodness. Let's just say that moving back up to Scotland when I was seven years old, I suppose I'm one of the lucky ones, I've always known I was gay. I started a gay youth group in Scotland when I was fifteen years old, it was the only youth group, even to this day, that actually existed in Perth, let alone in Tayside. There used to be each month probably about a dozen of us from the age of thirteen to eighteen, we used to get together from Kirkcaldy, Glenrothes, Dundee, Perth, Letham, all the surrounding areas, we used to get together. I was very lucky to get a Post Office box from Gay Scotland where I used to type up sticky labels, put them on the back of bus seats and lamp posts and people used to write in and I used to get letters forwarded to me. So from the age of fifteen I've always realised that I wanted to do things and support where I could so I started a gay youth group. And then moved to London when I was seventeen.
- KS:** What was the experience like of setting up that group and running it? How did that feel to you?
- RB:** Oh exciting. I had gay pen-pals round the world when I was thirteen, always knew what I was, but actually being in the situation where I could be in contact with people the same age as me and actually we could get together and support each other, that sort of thing. I'm still in contact with some of those people today, let alone from all those years ago. No, when there was nothing around and you didn't know what to do it was exciting. I went to my first Gay Pride march at the age of sixteen, coach down from Scotland to London for the day and back up again. Fantastic!
- KS:** And what inspired you to keep it going and get it started?
- RB:** The fact that there was nothing there, there was nothing out there for me. I thought 'Well there's nothing out there for me, what can I do to create it?' So I did. It literally was as simple as that. One of my gay pen-pals who lived in Belfast, or just outside Belfast in Omagh, had sent me a copy of *Gay Times* and it was through that I got in contact with Gay Scotland who gave me a Post Office box. I just explained who I was, what I was doing and they were more than willing to give me a Post Office box and forwarded things to me in brown envelopes which obviously was the thing in those days, where nobody

knew what was going on. Yeah, it was exciting to actually feel... to be able to support people, where you knew you weren't alone, especially at that age, when you know you're not alone.

KS: And did you have other friends and people around you at the time that were helping you?

RB: No, no. It grew, obviously, through the thing, but no, at the time it was only myself. I got a little bit of support when I first started going to the gay bars and clubs, the first one I went to was in Dundee, a place called Bees Knees and the gay outdoor club in Dundee, we used to go hill walking when I was fifteen, sixteen. And a month after my sixteenth birthday two of the guys who were running the place said 'Look, come on, we'll take you out.' So they took me out to the club, the gay club in Dundee and they were really, really nice blokes, they just looked after me, made sure I was safe and fine and gave me a safe place to actually crash. So it was fantastic, absolutely fantastic.

KS: It was quite a positive experience for you then?

RB: It was for me, yes. Absolutely, completely. No, I thoroughly enjoyed myself from when I started taking control of my life at the age of fifteen and started doing things that I wanted to do. No, absolutely.

KS: Those experiences that they had then, do they reflect and show in your life now in any way?

RB: Yes, I've always been someone who's actually decided to create things if they weren't there; to be able to try and give back to the community that I've always had something from. Now for me it's always been the lesbian and gay community. I grew up, literally, within the lesbian and gay community and so, for me, it's always been about what can I contribute back? Wherever I've been, wherever I am, I've lived in New Zealand for a wee while, lived in Australia for a wee while and I've always tried to do things and contribute back to my community. That's the way I look at it, so that's the way I've always been. And that, for me, was a wee bit of... starting that group was actually giving something back because I'd already got things from that. Not support, as such, but contacts, people and pen-pals, so yeah.

KS: And what was the name of the group?

RB: I don't think we called each other anything, it was just literally an LGBT youth group for Tayside and Dundee, Perth. So I actually can't remember if we called ourselves anything, I think it was just literally a youth group, an LGBT youth group. As I say there was a few people from Dundee, a few of us from Perth, there was a lassie from Letham, another lassie from Kirkcaldy, a guy from Glenrothes, another transgender member who actually committed suicide who was from Perth as well. I still remember most of the people in my head.

KS: And your first Pride, when was it? And tell us a little bit about it.

RB: It was, let's see, 1987. I was sixteen years old and my first ever visit to a gay club was a month after my sixteenth birthday, so that was March that year, and I bumped into my cousin Gordon's ex-girlfriend, Tracy, and her new girlfriend, Jackie, and I was standing there with a drink in my hand and she

comes up and goes 'What are you doing here?' And I was like 'Aargh! Don't tell anyone, please! Don't tell anyone!' And the following weekend my cousin comes up to me and says 'I know where you were last weekend.' And I was like 'No!' He was cool, he was fine. The first ever Gay Pride march, there was coaches that left from Edinburgh and Glasgow and so Tracy and Jackie got me on one of the coaches, they came as well and we got the coach on the Friday night down to London, Jubilee Gardens, and then the coach back up on the Saturday night and then back home. And it was the following weekend that I came out officially because my mum had been asking where I was that weekend and I basically told her a wee bit of a white lie, saying I was visiting a pen-pal in Camberley in Surrey. She was like 'No, you were with Tracy and Jackie.' 'I was not, I was not with Tracy in Dundee.' And I said 'I was in London for the London Lesbian and Gay Pride March,' just as she throws an iron at me and just misses me. She was busy ironing at the time, you see, and she wasn't very happy at the fact that I was gay.

KS: Tell me anything else about that experience and coming out.

RB: Oh for me it was tremendous. I had already started having lots of gay friends, obviously hidden away. I'd had a couple of, I'd say, partners but my first boyfriend was April that year for three months. He turned out to be a DJ in Steps, one of the gay clubs in Glasgow, at the time. He was 21, I was sixteen and he wouldn't kiss me in a gay club because his straight friends might know he was gay. He and his straight friends used to go to the gay club and he was DJing there. And he lived in Auchterarder, and Auchterarder is next to Gleneagles Hotel, it's the wee village there. And I just thought 'You know, you're five years older than me and you're not comfortable being with me in a gay club,' so I finished it. I finished with him. We actually met in a straight club in Perth, he was introduced to me by Tracy. I still remember him, once again, because you never forget the first boyfriend but I remember in... not all the wrong reasons because he then ended up marrying someone who also turned out to be a lesbian, so he obviously wasn't comfortable with himself. There was me at sixteen years old fully comfortable with who I was. But the first ever Gay Pride march, I still remember it very well. About 10,000 of us at Jubilee Gardens, the most amazing experience ever.

KS: Tell us a bit about that. Tell us about your day then.

RB: It was just being there. Obviously the coach journey from Scotland to London is quite long and it's like 'Wow.' Even now it takes nine or ten hours. But when you're on a coach full of lesbian and gays from Scotland, and it's your first time, obviously drinking on the coach. But it was just an amazing feeling to think. Even now when you go to Pride it's quite an enjoyable experience and that, but when it's your first one at that age, that long ago. Now you've got all the regional ones it's not such a big deal but when you go to your first one at sixteen years old and the anticipation and then seeing all of these other lesbian and gays. Because obviously before you'd only ever seen a few more in a bar or in a club but seeing thousands of people just being there, for me, was the most amazing experience. I just didn't want to leave, I did not want to leave that day, it was phenomenal. Even just looking back, I just think I was sixteen years old and I did not want to leave. And the following year I actually came to London anyway.

KS: So that was 1987.

RB: That was 1987.

KS: So 1987 was your first Pride and then you came to London?

RB: Yes.

KS: What was the particular reasoning for that?

RB: I was actually supposed to be working in a château in France and I got kicked out of France so I ended up in London. I didn't consciously move to London at that time, I wanted to go to Napier College in Edinburgh and study accountancy because I wanted to get out of Perth, I knew I was gay, I could go to Edinburgh for a wee while to the bars and clubs. I'd been going to Dundee, going to Glasgow and I just knew I had to get out of Perth because even now Perth is probably one of the most right-wing conservative homophobic places in the UK. It's basically where Sir Nicholas Fairburn was the MP and during the age of consent debates Nicholas Fairburn turned around and said 'Homosexuality is only about putting the penis up an arse.' That was basically his rationale for not voting with age consent. It was also where Brian Souter was from. Brian Souter, as you know, is the head of Stagecoach, he spent hundreds of thousands of pounds of his own money trying to keep Section 28 in Scotland. But not only that, it was also a time when I used to go to a church called Church of the Nazarene, a very right-wing Christian church, and the minister of the church was Brian Souter's brother. So that's the sort of environment I grew up in, the sort of environment I was actually involved in. But despite all that I still started my own gay group and I just get out. I just remember telling the minister that I was gay and he told me I was going to go to hell. And I still remember telling him 'No, I'm going to heaven,' not realising there was a gay club in London called Heaven at the time. Which now I look back I think it was quite funny.

But no, through the copy of *Gay Times* I was given and through the contacts I had through the youth group I became really good friends, and I'm still really good friends with now, this guy and every Tuesday I used to go to his house and we used to go into his bedroom and flick through *Gay Times* and go 'Oh my goodness! Look! Look!' And then there was a château in France and basically it was in the Loire and it was Château de **Vrie**. It was English owned, or the guy was English and he was gay as well and we basically managed to get jobs there for the summer for three months, working in the château. My mate got there before I did, I got there, the guy hated me as soon as I arrived. I got there and jumped on the worktop in the kitchen and said 'I'm here!' And he was like 'Worktops are for working on, not for sitting on.' And that was it, three weeks later I was kicked out, I was given enough money from what I'd earned. I basically got back to London, my mate was like 'We can go to Paris if you want!' I was like 'No, fine. You stay here,' because he was going to go to university anyway. And I ended up in London with just enough money to get back up to Scotland but I decided I was going to stay. I knew one person in London and so I phoned him up from Paris and said 'I'm on my way to London, do you mind if I stay with you?' He said 'OK, you can stay with me for two weeks.' Within the first week I had a job, within the second week I had a place to stay and that was it. My mum was phoning me and telling me that if I didn't come home she'd get the police to drag me back up to Scotland because I was seventeen. And the laws are different in Scotland and England, in Scotland if you're sixteen you can do what you want, in England it was eighteen. Or the other way round, I think it's the other

way round. So basically they couldn't do anything and I decided to stay in London and that was it.

KS: Tell me about the job.

RB: Yeah, it was in this fantastic little restaurant in the Kings Road. It's not there any more, unfortunately, but I got a job as a waiter. And from the age of thirteen I'd always been working as well and I'd earn like £50 a week as a silver service waiter in a hotel in Perth. So I came to London, I already knew how to work behind a bar, I grew up behind a bar as well, so I did know how to pull pints, work behind a bar, silver service waiter, I'd been a porter in a hotel, so I'd already had lots of skills. I could type quite fast as well, I did that at school. So I even got temp work typing during the day, I was working in the restaurant in the evening, in the Kings Road and I was working there for quite a few months until I got my first full-time job at the age of eighteen years old as a secretary, secretary to a sales team for a video training film company called Playback, which was Mel Smith, Griff Rhys Jones training film company. So I was working there for a couple of years from the age of eighteen to twenty. But the first job I ever got was as a waiter in the evenings, I was literally working six nights a week, didn't really go out in London because I couldn't because I was working each night until about one, two in the morning. So the only time I could literally do anything was a Sunday and I used to go to the gay teenage group in Holloway Road on a Sunday, Sunday afternoon. Once again I'm still friends with people from then and I still know people from then and from the gay teenage group.

KS: Tell me about the teenage group and what that was like.

RB: Oh that was phenomenal. It was a lifeline for me, coming to London not knowing anybody. We used to go to the Black Cap on a Sunday and a Wednesday if I wasn't working, but when I stopped working in the evenings, of course, I used to go on a Wednesday but I used to go along on a Sunday and it was just a small group of us, once again, mostly gay men, all different types of gay men, a few lesbians. But we used to just hang out and really have a good afternoon on the Sunday afternoon. It was a safe haven, basically and once again it was for me, starting the gay youth group in Scotland and actually being part of a youth group in London, was phenomenal, once again, for me because it actually gave me the support and the friendship as well of people of my own age. I got to meet different people, so we went out to the bars and clubs, I didn't feel like I was on my own because we all went out together, even though we were gay, we were underage. <Laughs> We used to go and I remember having my eighteenth birthday in the Black Cap and my sister was there, she lived in London for a wee while. But I remember having my eighteenth birthday and one of the DJs turned around and said 'And happy birthday to Robert, even though he's been coming here for years!' And I was like 'Well I haven't actually,' but I'd been there that often it felt like I'd been going there for years. I think they realised some of us were underage but of course they couldn't tell who we were but we used to go there anyway. It was a lifeline for us, I tell you, an absolute lifeline.

KS: How did your work life compare to that, the social life?

RB: Well once again the restaurant I worked in was quite gay. It wasn't a gay restaurant but it was gay owned, all the waiting staff were gay, most of the

people who went there were gay. So I felt like I was in that gay environment anyway, and had such a laugh. It really was such a laugh working there. For the life of me I cannot remember what the restaurant was called, I remember we used to have to wear these funny Hawaiian shirts and green wraparound cloths and just jeans and we had such a laugh. But it was there I got my first place to stay as well, got my first job within a week, as I say, in the restaurant, got my first place to stay because one of the customers had a spare room. So I lived in Old Street for a year. But once again it was just such a good atmosphere, the owner was an Italian guy called Gus – big, fat, camp Italian guy and it was just like being part of a family, it was just really friendly. So I feel I've always had quite a welcoming welcome to London and quite a supportive one. And that, for me, has always been the background of things that I've always tried to do be it when I was in Scotland or whenever I started, tried to do things in London, it's always been to see how I could support other people with the same sort of start that I've had, if that makes sense.

KS: Yes, it does. What sort of time was that? What was the year roughly?

RB: Oh, seventeen, eighteen years old so 1988/89. I moved to London or rather ended up in London 7th July 1988 so yeah, last year was twenty years in London, yeah 21 years this year, it's quite a while.

KS: And around that time, that time that you arrived, was there anything else happening nationally or locally around the gay scene you remember?

RB: Not really. I remember Comptons, obviously, it was the old spit and sawdust Comptons with the two doors and the bar in the middle. There were very few bars that we could go to, I remember there was obviously the old style Black Cap with the nice bar at the front; there was the old style Two Brewers; there was the Copacabana and the other places in the Earls Court, but there wasn't really that much of a place, there wasn't much of a scene really. Obviously there was Heaven and there was a couple of other places but no, there wasn't really that much. Literally, I think the youth groups in those days, or the social groups, were the places that you really went to meet people. Obviously there was no internet, there was no Gaydar, there was none of this sort of interaction that you could actually have with people. In those days, no, it wasn't desolate but of course it wasn't as good as what it is now. And in a way I sometimes think it's lost that now where in those days people were more social, people knew each other a lot more, people went up to the bars to talk and to meet people, which they still do nowadays but I think in those days it was a lot more because there were no other avenues like the internet or the saunas or whatever it might have been.

KS: Was that social aspect very different from home? How different were the expectations?

RB: Well don't forget, in Perth that there's nothing, literally nothing. Even today in Perth there's no gay group, let alone a gay bar, let alone a gay club. And so it is very much coming from a place where I used to sneak out at night when I finished school, I used to sneak out from my bedroom, I used to lock my bedroom door, take the handle off so they couldn't get it, climb out the bedroom window, get a coach to either Edinburgh or Glasgow to one of the gay bars, get the last coach back, sneak back into my bedroom just to be able to go somewhere, to actually in London where you can be anywhere, you can go anywhere. There used to be the Angel as well, there used to be Heads. A

lot of my friends are lesbians so I used to go to a lot of the lesbian bars and clubs as well, which for me was very important because I wasn't just going out there to meet people, I was going out to socialise and to meet people on a friendly basis. So I used to go to a lot of the lesbian bars and clubs and I used to know a lot of the people on the lesbian scene in those days as well. And completely different from home with regards to there was nothing at all where I grew up, literally nothing. I used to meet up with a few of the lesbian and gay people I knew in Perth or Dundee or wherever, but that was mainly because I actually created that social network, that youth group. And from that we actually used to go out and meet other people and that sort of thing. But no, if it wasn't for me making that social group and that social network there would probably be nothing around in those days. So for two years I created something because there was nothing, if that makes sense.

KS: Yes, it does. How did you get involved in Galop then? Tell me about that process.

RB: Once again I've always been looking at certain aspects or certain areas where I like to volunteer and I like to support and help out. I helped out for a little while in ILGA, International Lesbian and Gay Association, I used to go to their offices and help stuff envelopes and everything else. I did that for a little while and it wasn't the case of not continuing, it was more of a case I got so busy doing other things. I joined the Prison Service when I was 21 years old and I'd been practising Buddhism for a couple of years, I started practising Buddhism at the age of nineteen. I decided to chant for a job with five qualities in it – each day was different, the hours were different, the money was good, I can help people and I can contribute to society. And I sat there chanting and thinking 'I want to be a social worker. Oh God I hate studying, no I don't want to be a social worker.' Next thing I know I've been accepted into the Prison Service which was the last thing I probably would have even thought about. Did the training and I was joking to my colleagues at the training college, because I started off at Pentonville as well as Holloway because I lived in North London at the time, I was like 'Oh you're all going to get Brixton. I live in North London, I started at Pentonville, you're all going to get Brixton.' And I was the only one in the whole training college to get Brixton, the only one. So basically it was a case that I was at Brixton for a while and while I was there I was looking at what other avenues I could support, and Galop was there. Galop, I think, had only been going around for a short period, it was still in its infancy, certainly not as huge as I perceive it to be now. So literally it was a case, it was a small little office and I think maybe about three or four desks and I can't even remember what part of London it was now, but it was quite central London. And I just remember going there to help on the helpline and to answer the telephone. And the reason why I chose Galop was because I was a prison officer and I thought Galop in those days wasn't getting enough attention or enough support that I felt it should have got. In those days I don't think Galop maybe had enough PR, people didn't know what Galop was. I don't know the reasons for it but I just thought 'Is there anything I can do to support?' And so I went along. Yeah, I was stuffing envelopes once again and I was helping on the helpline once in a while.

KS: How did you initially hear about Galop?

RB: I can't remember. I think I must have read about it somewhere in *Capital Gay* or *Capital News*, whatever the gay paper at the time was called. I just telephoned and said 'Can I help?' Once again one of the reasons why I

wanted to help was because I'm gay, I was now working in an environment that I thought I could give a different insight to and OK, it's mainly gay police in the thing, however, prison officers and the prisons side of things are often missed whenever you look at anything to do with gay life. Unless it's to do with porn or to do with some sort of fantasy, prisons are often disregarded. So I thought 'OK, how can I support as a gay prison officer in this sort of environment?' Maybe they wouldn't even need my help. However they said no, I think in those days they were very grateful for all the support they could get, so I went along and helped man the helpline. I didn't know what to expect, I was very nervous the first time I went, I must admit.

KS: Is there anything else you remember about that first day or those first moments?

RB: Oh I still remember it to this day, very vividly I still remember to the day. Somebody was there, I can't remember his name, very helpful, trying to put me at ease and everything else and he was very much like 'The first phone call is always the worst. You don't know what to expect.' And I just remember 'Hello, can I help you?' sort of thing at Galop and it turned out that this lesbian's partner had just been put in prison in Holloway. And the first phone call that I picked up was from this lesbian who wanted to know what she could expect, how Galop could maybe help or what it was like in prison, what the conditions were like and everything. Because I'd been in Holloway, because I knew the prison system, because I knew the service, I was like 'You know what? I can help you in this one.' And I thought that was perfect. For me being there, the first call I ever got was from someone whose girlfriend had literally just been put in prison that day and she was phoning Galop for some help and support. And that's why I maybe thought it needed... I look back and I think it was right for me to volunteer and be there that day at that time because maybe someone else would have picked the phone up and couldn't have answered that question and wouldn't have been able to put that person at ease. Do I remember anything after that? No. I remember the first time, I remember the first phone call, I remember it so vividly because it was so pertinent to me and because of that. And I thought if Galop wasn't there would that person have maybe felt at ease? Probably not, she wouldn't have known where to turn, where to go. But because Galop was, once again, I still remember it so vividly.

KS: How did you feel after that first [30:25]?

RB: Elated, absolutely elated. I just really felt that I was meant to be there at that time. I think I only supported Galop again for maybe six months or so after that but once again that's the only thing I really remember about it because it was the first phone call and, once again, it was so pertinent to me. And for me, once again people are so used to Galop being the policing, the gay policing thing, yet someone phones up about a prison and I'm at the other end of the phone. Once again, I still think that's quite funny at the end of the day when I look back all those years. Because it was probably about fifteen years, yeah, fifteen or more years ago when I did it.

KS: And in the community, in the gay community or the community generally, did people know about Galop?

RB: I don't think they did, no. I used to say to people 'Oh I'm off to go and help at Galop,' and they didn't know, or rather the people I spoke to didn't know.

Once again there's a lot more recognition now because you see Galop's logo, they seem to be everywhere, they seem to be a big organisation. But at the time, no, not in the slightest. Once again I'm not sure why that was. Personally speaking, I think it had more to do with the fact that the more the Metropolitan Police has come on board, as a more open, transparent organisation, the more Galop has been able to actually thrive, grow and become bigger as well, and become more supportive. But once again I do feel that prisons are still a bit left out, but that's my own personal view and I'm very much prison orientated. My ex is a policeman and I've got lots of people who are police officers who are friends of mine, I've got lots of people who are prison officers, and I still feel that prisons are missed out quite a lot in every area of society, be it [32:27 1A], whatever.

KS: What period of time was that that you did the volunteering work with...?

RB: Well I joined the Prison Service in '92, so it probably would have been about '95, '94, '95, it would have been at that time. But yes, so probably about fifteen years ago.

KS: And can you remember anything that was happening, again, nationally or generally on the scene?

RB: No, not really. I just remember there was not a lot happening, full stop. Once again, as I say, I still remember Galop was in this small little office, dusty desks, dusty shelves, not much happening. There wasn't really much happening nationally either, with regards to policing for the lesbian and gay community or with regards to anything that's going on nowadays. I look at some things that are going on nowadays and I see Galop's logo everywhere and I think that would never happen in those days. In fact the logo didn't exist in those days and, as I say, a lot of people probably wouldn't even know what Galop was then. Now it's a lot more.

KS: Organisations like that had a lower profile at the time?

RB: I think so. I think the profile in those days were HIV and AIDS. Things like Galop didn't get a look in, far from it. And that's probably one of the reasons why I actually chose to go and support Galop rather than another organisation, because it was part of the side of things that I was interested in as a gay man, as a prison officer in those days. But also the fact that it was one of those things where the organisation needed the support, lots of other organisations, gay ones, had... all the glamorous organisations in those days had the support whereas things like Galop which wasn't glamorous in those days, I suppose it is a bit more nowadays, I'm not sure. But it is one of those things where, in those days, people didn't want to touch it, people didn't want to support it, I'm not sure why. But that's one of the reasons why I did.

KS: You talked about when you first came to London about Pride, were you still involved in going to any of those sorts of events?

RB: What nowadays?

KS: Around that time you were working with Galop [35:02 1A].

RB: Oh always, I've always been going to Pride, always been going to Pride. I never actually did anything at Pride for Galop although I do still... one of the

things that I have been doing, as I say, for the last twelve years is taking Buddhism into the lesbian and gay community through having stalls at Gay Pride events. Primarily Summer Rights, when I first started but now we had it all over the UK, last year we had it at quite a few Gay Pride events around the UK including Plymouth Pride, Cornwall Pride, UK Black Pride, Student Pride, Glasgow Pride, Manchester, Birmingham, London, Brighton, Bournemouth and then this year we've got stalls on Buddhism at all those places except for Plymouth because Plymouth and Cornwall are one week after the other and our members haven't got the time to do both. So we're not doing Plymouth because that's the smaller one but we're also going to be doing Cardiff, Belfast, Oxford, Reading, Edinburgh, so yeah.

KS: So has the gay world, if that's the right phrase, changed between when you arrived and now?

RB: Has it changed? I think it's got larger, it's become more open. To some degrees, in a way I think it's got worse. It's changed, definitely. I do find that somehow gay men and lesbians have become a bit more separated. I felt much more of a community when we had more things to fight with and fight next to whereas I also think that a lot of gay men, especially, feel that all of our rights have been won. And so I feel there's a lack of political awareness of all the... not just the achievements that have been won but also the achievements that still need to be won. Not just for here, but for our support for lesbians and gays in other countries. Not even just far away places like South East Asia or Africa or the Pacific islands or wherever, but also nearer home like Eastern Europe and even some places in Europe, like Italy. I think a lot of gay men especially think because we have the bars, clubs, saunas, cafés we're fine because we can get civil partnered, which I'm against because it's still not marriage. People think it's fine. I don't think it is, I personally don't think we're fine, not until we have full equality and we can actually walk down the street holding our partner's hand without fear of being abused, beaten up, murdered, can we actually say we've achieved something. Yes, we have achieved something but I still believe we've got a long way to go.

KS: Thinking about that period of time, was it about six months or so you were with Galop? Any other people or any other instances you remember first of all?

RB: You know what? No. I just remember going there, answering the phone, answering various bland questions. I thought they were bland but once again it's like your first boyfriend, you never forget, the first phone call you never forget because it was so pertinent to you. And the fact that you managed to help that person to such a degree. As I say, having a distraught person on the other end of the line, phoning Galop because they thought they were the only person who could help them, and being that person at the end of the line who, probably at that time within Galop, was the only person that could help them because I was the only person working in the prison system actually volunteering for Galop, as far as I'm aware, and I was able to answer the question full off. No, the other things were very much like you'd go along meetings, but I didn't feel anything was happening, that's one of the reasons I actually stopped going. I didn't feel that Galop was going anywhere and that's a horrible thing to say. Now I look back and I think 'OK, my God, what has happened in the last fifteen years,' but obviously I got more involved in the Prison Service and I got involved in lots of other things like HIV and AIDS in

prisons and everything else. In there I actually felt like nothing was moving forward. As I say, it was a small volunteer group of people and I honestly felt like nothing was happening with Galop which was one of the reasons I actually stepped back and started doing other things.

KS: And looking back and reflecting across from then until now, any thoughts on the impact that time of Galop had on you?

RB: One thing that has always made a lasting impact, the fact that it actually made me realise what Galop was. Every time I see Galop I've always got it with fond recognition. I always tell people what Galop is about. A lot of people, I feel, still don't understand what Galop is, and it is one of those things where every time I see Galop's logo, for me personally if I see Galop's logo and I see Galop's involved in something, I always think that's quite a good thing. It always gives me fond memories and always gives me that horrible warm fuzzy feeling, the fact that I actually feel something good's going to come out of whatever they give their logo to. I know it sounds a bit strange and a bit, excuse the language, but a bit wankyish but because I understand what the objectives and the principles of Galop are, then for me actually... I actually do, every time I see Galop I try and explain to people what it's about and what Galop's about. But I still think there's a lot of people out there who don't understand and still don't really... as I say, they feel that everything's fine, hunky dory and they don't understand or just close their ears off to people like Galop, which I think is quite a shame.

KS: And what do you think the impact on the LGBT community has been of Galop?

RB: I think to a degree there's a bigger awareness, but I think people are only more aware of Galop when they need to be, when something happens or when they're involved in that sort of environment, be it policing or be it anything to do with legal or law. People actually then start understanding or start hearing about Galop. Impact on the lesbian and gay community? Yes, but to a degree. Once again I still come back to the fact that, for me, it's been about prisons. I don't think Galop has done enough for prisons and to support that whole aspect of the LGBT community. Because don't forget there's a hidden community of which people love to just hide away and ignore. Yes, it's fine supporting the Metropolitan Police and supporting all the other aspects that go round that, but there's still people who actually probably need the support from Galop rather than the ones where they actually are getting it at the moment. So whilst Galop has actually done a lot with regards to supporting recognising what has been achieved and what can be done with the legal aspects – supporting the Metropolitan Police and supporting the police across the UK, highlighting homophobic crimes and transphobic crimes and highlighting how you can actually report them and all that sort of stuff, I do feel that that's only one side of it and I do feel that a lot more could be done to... Personally, I feel a lot more could be done to highlight Galop. I still feel there's a lot of people out there who don't know what it is until it's too late, i.e. they've been through that sort of thing and then they understand they need to report it or then they actually look around to see what there is to support them. I'm not sure, as I say, I think Galop's got larger because our reporting systems have got larger. I think more people are reporting homophobic crime and I think Galop's got larger because of that fact as well, rather than just, no disrespect, because of its own merits, shall we say. I think because the way society has changed, that's not dismissing all the work that

Galop's doing, it's just more of a case of I still feel there's that little extra it can do to bring itself actually out to the fore a bit more.

KS: Have you noticed any changes in policing of the community over the years?

RB: Honestly or not? On the one side it's good that there are organisations like Galop who can actually pull the police up on certain instances and certain situations and highlight aspects which the police need to be better on and challenge them on. And if groups like Galop didn't exist we probably wouldn't have got this far as well, because I know there's a lot of work behind the scenes which goes on. However, personally speaking, and having someone who has actually reported homophobic crime over the last few years, there are certain boroughs, there are certain police forces, who I think nothing has changed whatsoever. I won't mention which ones they are but some of them are quite central London boroughs, some of them are obviously quite localised and quite outlying areas of the police service. And going to the Unison lesbian and gay national conference last year, and hearing a Metropolitan police service, not this one but from a major city outside of London, turn around to a young gay man and say that he couldn't possibly have been raped because he's gay shows we still have a long way to go for the police. And that's just horrifying, absolutely horrifying. And once again, I think that Galop's remit, there is so much for Galop to do and obviously it can't do everything at this moment in time, it can't do everything. And I think it's grown because there is so much for Galop to do and because we're speaking out a lot more. People are actually now not afraid to speak out whereas before I think they were. And, once again, that's one of the positive things about Galop is the fact that it has actually been supporting people with regards to enabling people to speak out a lot more than they used to. Because I remember years ago Galop was a bit of politicising group but it didn't have the means to support people to speak out and support all the initiatives it's doing nowadays. Which, once again, is a good thing.

<End of Part 1>

KS: So if we talk about some of your experiences with Galop and your moving down to London and joining the prison service. You were mentioning about the police services, the different things in the police services that need to happen moving forward in some ways. Anything else? Any other thoughts about your experiences – your experiences with Galop, things that might have reflected into your life around that and then just generally around the LGBT community. There's a couple of things we were going to talk about.

RB: Well I think, personally, having done that brief stint with Galop all those years ago, when I have come across people in the lesbian community or I have come across friends of mine who have either been homophobically abused or needed support, I've known where to point them whereas before I wouldn't know what to do. For me that's the biggest awareness; I've actually been able to actually say 'Have you contacted them? Maybe they can help, maybe they can support.' That's been going on, literally, over the last fifteen years; I've always pointed people in the direction of Galop, first and foremost, whenever something like that has happened. Be it for reporting, be it a problem with the police, be it whatever it may have been, at least I've known where to direct people whereas I wouldn't ever have had that awareness if I'd never actually

volunteered. Whether or not they then took me up on the offers, that was up to them, but at least I knew where to send to send them; at least I knew that there was an organisation out there that could actually support. I think that also was one of the main things, one of the best things about Galop, was the fact that it existed because even today there's nothing out there that I would... there's nowhere else that I would actually direct people that needed any sort of support. In the first instance be it challenge the police's behaviour, be it... whatever it may be. First and foremost I send them to Galop. If it's not the right organisation I'm sure they'd send them on to elsewhere. What with all the gay organisations that were going out there at the time and everything else, there was nothing really, when you're looking at any sort of that sort of support to do with the law, to do with the police, to do with whatever it may be. Even now I can't think of any other organisation that I'd send someone to. So, yeah, in that sort of impact I think, yeah, Galop still is the only thing that comes to mind when it comes to any sort of policing or any sort of law, be it police, be it prison, be it whatever.

KS: And when you're looking around now, in terms of seeing Galop out there, how do you see it? I mean like notice it?

RB: How do I see it? I see it as a supporter of a lot of the initiatives that the police are doing; a lot of the homophobic awareness things; a lot of the things in our community. Obviously it's a lot more happening at Pride events, there's stalls going on and obviously there's lots of awareness materials and such like. I do feel that once again it could do more for prisons, but that's my own personal view. I do feel it could actually support more with regards to GALIPS – the Gay and Lesbian Prison Service Group and also gay and lesbians in the prison service itself i.e. prison offenders. However, once again, that's just my own personal view. A lot of people do align themselves to the Metropolitan Police and to that side of policing and that sort of areas because it's, once again, a bit more glamorous. What it does at the moment, as well, with regards to supporting our community to make sure that they actually record and register any sort of homophobic crime or any sort of awareness, I think that needs to be encouraged a lot more as well. I know it's out there, I know there's the articles, there's the magazines, the posters in the bars and the clubs and everything else, but once again I do feel that, as a community, sometimes we are actually a bit... and I think that's Galop's fault, I think we're still not doing as much as we should to either support Galop or record homophobic crime as much as we are. Once again I'm not sure what Galop can do to increase that more than what they're doing at the moment except for actually drag people by the neck and getting them to actually register things. Maybe do things slightly differently rather than just a poster in a bar, actually go out physically to the bars and actually speak to people. I know there's certain fundraisers that go on and everything else, but at the end of the day it's still down to us as a community to actually do something; Galop can't do everything for us.

KS: And is it a more visible organisation now than **5:27 IA**?

RB: Oh most definitely. Yeah, most definitely a much more visible organisation. As I say, you see the logo a lot more, supporting different initiatives and supporting different areas whereas before it was... I think it was trying to find where it needed to go all those years. As I say, we're talking fifteen years ago and it's grown a hell of a lot since then. And it really was a case of in those days, because of the support and the volunteer support and also the funds, in

those days I don't think Galop was getting any funds whatsoever, I think it literally was just a voluntary organisation, I really cannot remember. But in those days it was a case of 'This is all we can do, is see what we can support, do the helpline and get the word out there.' There wasn't that whole thing about support, about reporting homophobic crime because no-one was collecting any statistics in those days anyway, no-one cared. And in those days the Metropolitan Police couldn't give a damn, let alone any of the other police organisations around the UK. So in a way Galop was actually just building the foundations and actually doing the groundwork in those days to where we are now. So it's most definitely changed a hell of a lot since then, a lot more noticeable and a lot more... I believe it's a lot more visible and I do know that every time that something to do with the law is out there I usually see Galop's logo. And maybe it's because I'm always looking out for it, I don't know, maybe I'm more aware than others but I do see it out there a lot more than I used to.

KS: And you know at that sort of time when you moved to London and started doing your initial volunteering, what do you think people were doing to find support?

RB: I don't think they were, to be perfectly honest. I think people were just accepting that it was part of being gay, the abuse, the beatings, whatever. I don't think people were actually out there looking for anything to support them because nobody cared in those days. Personally I don't feel that people actually were looking for anything because they were just happy to hide away. I remember a lot of the gay bars actually were blackened out windows and people weren't actually out in the streets, people weren't out full stop. But a lot has changed in the last fifteen years and people have got more confident, self-confident in themselves as well as being more confident to be out in the workplace or in the street or whatever it may be. So I think with that that's actually given a new self-renewal with regards to I'm actually quite happy reporting homophobic crime, now where do I go? And with that people have actually now started looking and I think that's one of the main reasons why it's become a lot larger and a lot more vocal and where Galop can do a lot more as well to support people, whereas before I don't think people actually wanted to do anything, whereas now they do, if that makes any sense.

KS: Thank you. At the moment, just to bring everything together to finish, are there other things that you're involved in?

RB: Well at the moment, as I say, I'm still involved, I'm bringing that to a finish at the moment, involved in taking Buddhism into the lesbian and gay community. After twelve years we're finally becoming an official part of our organisation. We've never been an unofficial part, shall we say, we've not been like the Christian church where we've not been accepted, but it's taken twelve years for a group of us finally to come together and actually say what we really want: for us to become an official part of the organisation which we've got a launch coming up later on this year. Which then gives me a lot more free time, as I mentioned before I'm getting more involved in Unison, in the LGBT side of that. Because I believe there's still a lot more we need to do in the LGBT community, as I say, especially within some of the forces we have. I know that within a lot of the Unison/LGBT work that we're doing I probably will come across... probably liaise with Galop quite a lot within that. I also remember as well, Galop in those days was really primarily London focussed, there wasn't the resources to do anything else apart from the helpline people could phone

from anywhere. But it really was London focussed where now it's national. I think that's one of the hugest changes within Galop, where I go across the UK and I see Galop whereas before it literally was only London focussed.

KS: What would you say are the benefits in the community, that being a national organisation?

RB: Friends, support, people can actually come together whereas before they couldn't. People in the Highlands and Islands, for example, can get the same sort of support as people from London can get just from an organisation like Galop. People in Devon and Cornwall can get the same sort of support as we do in London, just by connecting with an organisation like Galop. I think once again that's because Galop has been able to grow, not diversify as such, because I think if it goes too far then it might spread itself too thin, but it's been able to actually have the resources to do that whereas before, once again as I say, it was just London based and they could do what they could do and that was it. I think coming from a place, for example, where I appreciate there not being a gay scene, I can certainly appreciate what it must be like for people in the same sort of circumstances to me to actually now come across an organisation like Galop and actually being able to contact them.

KS: And how does it feel now to go to Pride? Do a Pride event?

RB: Well usually when I'm at a Pride event, I'm actually organising a stall so I'm actually seeing it from a different point of view and I'm actually doing something in a different way. This year I'm actually there supporting the people who are doing the stalls. For me, I still enjoy Pride, I still think it's a fantastic event, be it a good party, be it a good political awareness thing. I do feel we need to put political awareness back into the heart of Pride, I think that's been lost, I think a lot of people still think of it as just a good party and that everything is OK. I do feel that we need to give more focus on aspects like Galop, to be perfectly honest. I do feel that at each Pride event we have, we need to raise awareness of what's been going on within the lesbian and gay community. I don't think enough people actually out there realise how many beatings, murders, how many homophobic abuses have actually been happening within the UK and how much they're actually on the increase in London, let alone the rest of the UK. I think that needs to be highlighted and, personally speaking, I feel that Galop needs to be given the full front of each Pride event, be it each Pride march, be it the main stall as you walk into an event. It would be good to actually have... I know it's quite horrific to have, but statistics, I'm not sure how hard that would be to actually gather together, of different homophobic attacks or reporting that's been going on across the UK, so that people can actually see that. They go to a Pride event, they can see the reality of what's going on outside of Pride and the reality of what's going on in day to day life for people who aren't as secure and as comfortable living in a big metropolitan city. And I know that sounds horrible to say it but I think the community needs to have a huge wake up call to the reality of what's going on out there, because I do know there's still a lot of homophobic abuse and I think Galop needs to be at the forefront of that. But I also feel that Pride needs to give Galop the opportunity to be at the forefront of that. I often think that Pride often pushes Galop to the back because it's easier for them to have a nice little party at the front and put things like that at the back. Once again, if that makes sense, but that's where I'm coming from.

KS: That's grand, thank you very much. Anything else you want to say to [14:12 IA]?

RB: No, not at all, just thank you for your time, it's interesting to think back of all those years ago. And whenever I see the Galop logo I always speak to my friends and mention about that first phone call. I don't even know who she was or where she is but I vividly remember it put me at ease, that phone call put me at ease and I think I put her at ease. It was good. Thank you.

KS: Thank you.

<End of recording>