



Background

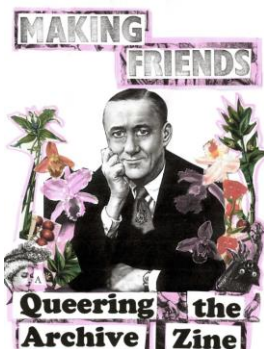
Library and Learning Resources (LLR) are committed to developing dynamic library collections that reflect the different perspectives, cultures and backgrounds of the communities they serve (LLR Strategy, 2024). As part of this, the Archives and Special Collections Working Group ensure that the university's archives remain current and relevant to its communities, through collection policies, embedded teaching, volunteering and engagement.



Recent archive projects have focussed on listing and digitizing items, for example, the Dover Wesleyan Methodist Scrapbook. These projects have provided work experience for Applied Humanities students; concentrating on skills development and developing graduate attributes, rather than creating agentic participant-led experiences.

The university's *Vision 2030*, which places collaboration, courage, and creativity at the heart of university life, has encouraged a reframing of archival projects to encompass the university's broader vision. Embracing the university's commitment to eliminating discrimination; promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion; and embedding a strong sense of belonging (CCCU, 2024), staff have sought ways to broaden engagement with the collections. A national survey of sexual orientation by generation conducted in 2022 revealed that 71% of Gen Z identify as straight but only half of those surveyed are exclusively attracted to the opposite sex (Clarke, 2024). In addition, data from the 2021 census revealed that 4.49% of respondents aged 16 and over in the local authority district of Canterbury are LGB+, higher than in any other district in Kent (Office for National Statistics, 2024). The archival collections reflect dominant historic narratives of the past; so, a decision was made to reimagine the archive collections through a queer lens to encourage a sense of connection and belonging for LGBTQIA+ communities.

The Project



In the Spring of 2024, the Queering the Archive (QTA) project was established to encourage a deep dive into the collections through a queer lens, exploring archival gaps and silences, and challenging the dominant power dynamics that have informed archival practice. The aim of the project was to harness the transformative nature of archives to challenge representations of queerness, but also to facilitate change. Over a series of workshops, participants would not only interrogate representations of the past but become empowered as makers of modern memory by creating a zine reflecting the voice of LGBTQIA+ students today.

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Theory into Practice



Using queer theories and prompts from critical texts by Bristow (1995), Furneaux (2009), Love (2009) and Muñoz (2009) participants explored sexuality and gender in the archive collections to create their own creative responses. Initial research used open ended exploration, using many 'queer' techniques such as instinct, intuition, gossip, free association, queer futurity and personal resonance to interrogate the material. The workshops provided an opportunity to share ideas whilst looking at material that is largely absent of queer content, in a space where students and staff could form their own connections to the material.

Participants discussed how to find 'queer' material and what this would mean for the zine using Jeanne Schepers' essay *Zine Pedagogies: Students as Critical Makers* (2023) as inspiration, investigating examples of queer zines, and thinking about different making techniques including erasure poetry inspired by Tom Phillips and collage by Max Ernst.

Outcome

The workshops attracted 18 participants of whom five came from a local sixth form and one from a neighbouring university. Over a series of four research sessions and five zine-making workshops, two zines were created:



Making Friends, and *The Many Faces of Courtney Rage*. Participants were invited to complete post workshop questionnaires. Most participants were studying humanities subjects and had an interest in LGBTQIA+ literature and history but one student who was studying a social sciences degree was attracted to "the archive aspect but also just being part of something for our community". Feedback was largely positive with one participant reporting that "It made me feel seen as a queer person and further intrigued me about how queerness can be hinted at and presented within literature." Whilst another wrote that "it was so much fun looking at queer material without being apologetic" expressing their feeling that the event offered a "safe space where you can discuss ideas that you might not be able to talk about elsewhere". Others described it as a relaxing experience where they could share ideas or thoughts freely. Only one participant felt "anxious when the spotlight is on me" and "sensorily bothered" by the environment.

What next?

The project has evidenced the value of archives for collaboration, courageousness and creativity, encouraging the Archives and Special Collections Working Group to develop further opportunities for themed workshops. In the summer of 2024, two students, supported by Bob Henderson and Kathy Robertson, investigated representations of gender in the university archives, creating their own zine *Canterbury Coll*A*ge* about life at Christ Church College in the 1960s. Using collage and photography, the students blended old and new images of the campus to create a past and present mashup (Majnic-Lane and Loos-Page, 2024). Future projects will be themed on some of the topics recommended by students which include researching the archives through the lens of neurodivergence, mental health and wellbeing, and environmental concerns.

As a result of the project, members of the Learning Skills Team, Dr Gaynor Williams and Dr Lynsey Blandford have begun looking at zine-making as a pedagogical tool for critical thinking and reflection and hope to put their ideas into practice in the new academic framework.



Acknowledgements

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