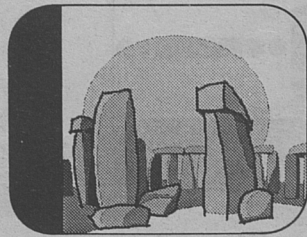


STONEHENGE TO STONEWALL

by charlie emond



Kings, Queens, and Men in Tights

If you were gay and lived in the Middle Ages, your sexual options varied with the territory and with your position in society. But since men married very late, if they could afford to marry at all, sexual activity with other men was apparently universal.

In fact, the attitude of the common people was "don't call it anything, just do it!" It was a part of a traditional male bonding thing between kinsmen, neighbors, and coworkers. It didn't become a problem unless you got too aggressive in your small village and took to leaping out of hedges and wrestling farm hands to the ground. This could get you into big trouble with the authorities.

Those powers that were used two terms for homosexuality: "sodomy," meaning all sexual acts between persons of the same sex, and "sexual acts against nature," which included masturbation and a bunch of other things. These terms were usually applied to men because they believed that a woman needed a man for erotic pleasure. (They might have been authorities in some sense of the word, but they obviously weren't when it came to sex!)

These authorities, who always seem to be irked by people enjoying themselves, tried in vain to legislate against it. In one extended crackdown in Florence in the 1430s, they picked up 17,000 men out of a population of 40,000, and even then they probably missed a few.

Door number one: the confessional

If you could manage to live without sex (supposedly) and just enjoy those "passionate friendships," there was always the Holy Roman Catholic Closet. In the early medieval period, things were actually

rather loose within the church.

For example, the court of Charlemagne was graced by the churchman Alcuin (735-804), the greatest scholar of his day and the most prominent figure in the Carolingian Renaissance. He and the rest of his scholars were widely known to have been gay.

Tights."

The Robin Hood stories are filled with homoerotic references to arrows, quivers, and swords. In a line from one translation, "When Robin Hood was about 20 years old; he happen'd to meet Little John; A jolly brisk blade right fit for the trade, for he was a

Didn't you always wonder just why this band was so "merrie?" There was nary a merry woman in sight, after all, and you know that these young outlaws would need something to keep themselves busy in between robbing rich travelers and paying off the poor.

To give you some idea of just how common it was to find family in the church, it seems that the Islamic writers of this period thought that all Christian clergy were gay!

The forest queen

A recent scholarly study outed Robin Hood and his Merry Men. I know, what a shock! Who could be next? Michelangelo? Francis Bacon? Erasmus?

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This intriguing new analysis of the old legends claims that Robin Hood and his men were in the forest because of an increasingly less tolerant church attitude toward men having sex with men. They were outlaws because they were gay. In the recent movie versions, Kevin Costner and Sean Connery should have portrayed Robin Hood closer to the way Mel Brooks did in his film, "Robin Hood: Men in

lusty young man." Another of the 14th century ballads describes Robin as having a domestic tiff over money with his intimate friend, Little John.

Ring my bells!

What about Maid Marian you ask? As Robin's love interest - or Friar Tuck's according to some ballads - a "maid" (an unmarried girl) would certainly not have been the love interest for the whole merry band.

Anyway, it turns out that Maid Marian wasn't even "born" yet. She didn't come near the forest until the 16th century, because she had her own thing going on in the village. Every May she could be found cavorting on the green with five men wearing bells and ribbons. This English rustic dance came to be called the Morris-dance, and the kicker here is that "Maid Marian" was in fact a boy in a dress!

As these May day festivities caught on, some perceptive onlooker finally noticed that, "Hey nonny, nonny, the lusty

dancers around our phallic May-pole are all men!" So Maid Marian morphed into a woman and the Robin Hood character was added as her love interest.

In the end, legend has it that Robin Hood was "rehabilitated" (?) by Richard the Lion heart. As we'll discuss shortly, this Richard was actually much closer to Richard Simmons than to Richard Nixon. He knew a kindred spirit when he saw one. He knighted Robin Hood and made him the first Earl of Huntingdon. Not surprisingly, the present-day Earl of Huntingdon, with the middle name of "Robin Hood," is not amused by this new research.

about her until he died and she had to appeal to the pope for his inheritance.

Once he and King Philip of France (1165-1223) had a romantic fling that was reported to have surprised the both of them. "at night their beds did not separate them... they were astonished at the passionate love between them and marveled at it."

When Richard went off to join the crusades, he left William Longchamp, Bishop of Ely in charge of England. Bishop William was a man that the English barons were quite willing to trust with their daughters...but not with their sons.

Finally, Edward the Second of England (1284-1327) was an openly gay monarch whose 13-year love affair with Piers Gaveston led to civil war and a really weird movie by Derek Jarmon.

Next time: Mona Lisa was a man, or the life of the other Leonardo

For more information: In writing this column, one of my main sources continues to be John Boswell's Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality. Another I use more as I go along is Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay & Lesbian Past, a collection of essays edited by Martin Duberman.

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Lifestyles of the rich and gay

Speaking of royalty, if you were rich and famous during the Middle Ages, it was way easier to be gay. Hey, some things never change.

By all accounts, William II of England (1056-1100), surnamed Rufus, was a terrible king but a terrific queen. His wild court was openly gay. He hated the church and was witty and blasphemous in his speech, if fat and ugly in appearance. In the language of my Encyclopedia Britannica, "His character was assailed by the darkest rumors which he never attempted to confute." He never married.

Richard the Lion heart (1157-1199), the famous crusading king of England, was profoundly Catholic and attended mass every day of his life. He was also profoundly gay by all measures ancient and modern. He did have a wife, but nobody knew much



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