

CAGS Press Release: Croydon honours gay war heroes

21 January 2009

Croydon will be paying tribute to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) war heroes in February this year as part of LGBT History Month.

On Saturday 6th February at 1pm, the Deputy Mayor of Croydon, Cllr Russell Jackson, will lay a pink triangle wreath at the War Memorial in Katharine Street Croydon, in honour of Alan Turing and other LGBT war heroes. Local LGBT Representatives will then add pink triangle memory sticks in recognition of LGBT communities worldwide who continue to fight against unjust persecution. The pink triangle, along with the rainbow flag, is an international symbol for LGBT people, in memory of homosexuals who were forced to wear a pink triangle badge in Nazi concentration camps.

Croydon will be honouring Alan Turing as a war hero for the important role he played during the Second World War. He didn't fire a shot, he didn't kill anyone, yet through his work he saved thousands upon thousands of lives.

Alan Turing is most famous for his work at Bletchley Park on breaking the German Enigma codes. Today it is recognised that without his outstanding contribution to Britain's fight against the Nazis, the history of the Second World War could have been very different. The breaking of the Enigma codes saved thousands of lives on the battle field, in our cities and on the sea. It enabled convoys carrying food and essential military supplies from North America to cross the Atlantic with the threat of a U-Boat attack much diminished.

In 1952 Alan Turing, an unsung war hero, was arrested for being attracted to and falling in love with men. For this victimless crime, he was arrested, charged and found guilty. He was sentenced and offered the choice of prison or chemical castration. He chose the latter and committed suicide within two years.

We will also on this occasion remember all the other unsung LGBT heroes who played their part in the Second World War, and who like Alan Turing were badly treated by the society they had loyally served, when they returned home.

During February, Croydon's LGBT community is also honouring Roberta Cowell, the Second World War fighter pilot, born in Sydenham Road, Croydon, who became Britain's first post-operative male to female transsexual.

Both Alan Turing and Roberta Cowell will be featured in the LGBT History Month exhibition in the Croydon Clocktower from the 5th to the 12th of February, and there will be a special event to commemorate Roberta Cowell on the 13th.

Croydon's LGBT History Month events are co-ordinated by Crocus (Croydon's LGBT Network – www.croydoncrocus.org.uk). The wreath-laying is organised by CAGS (Croydon Area Gay Society – www.cags.org.uk). The Roberta Cowell celebration is organised by Croydon Trans Group – www.lgbtcroydon.org.uk/trans. For a full list of Croydon LGBT History Month events see www.lgbtcroydon.org.uk/historymonth.

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This press release is also available on the web at <http://www.cags.org.uk/pdfs/pressrel-2010-01.pdf>