



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER

The Unfinished Portrait

Researching & presenting the life of Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer, Felbrigg Hall



Research Centre for Museums and Galleries
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1. Introduction

In July 2017, a short film – *The Unfinished Portrait* – was launched at Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk, as part of the National Trust’s national public programme, *Prejudice and Pride*. The programme, running throughout 2017, has examined the lives of individuals who challenged conventions of sexuality and gender across a number of Trust properties and marked fifty years since the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales.

Researched and created by the University of Leicester’s Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) in collaboration with the Trust, *The Unfinished Portrait* focused on the life of Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer, the last squire of Felbrigg Hall. This report summarises the background to the project; the research process; the interpretation of sources; and the development of the script. It concludes with a brief account of the events following the launch of the film and the public and media response it generated.

2. The Research Centre for Museums and Galleries

The Research Centre for Museums and Galleries was established in 1999 to carry out research that can inform and enhance thinking and practice in the museums, galleries and heritage sector; that can contribute to policy and professional debates internationally on wide ranging cultural, educational, political and social issues; and can make significant new contributions to knowledge in the field of museum studies and cognate disciplines. It is located within the University of Leicester's School of Museum Studies which is recognised nationally and internationally for the quality and impact of its research.

RCMG specialises in socially-engaged research, carried out in collaboration with museums, galleries and heritage organisations. Projects are carefully designed to bring diverse, interdisciplinary forms of expertise to bear on challenges facing museums and heritage organisations and to develop new insights that can enrich and often transform sector thinking and practice.

Our Vision

Our research stimulates new thinking and creative practice that enables cultural organisations to become more ambitious and impactful in nurturing more equitable and inclusive societies.

Our research focus

Our research engages with and responds to real world contexts. We understand museums, galleries and heritage as part of – and active in shaping - the contemporary world.

We do research with cultural organisations that:

- stimulates values-led change and supports experimental practice;
- fosters cultural organisations' active engagement in changing social, political and environmental arenas;
- explores how museums can inform and enrich audience attitudes and public debate, stimulating, framing and hosting conversations around contemporary societal concerns;
- explores how museums can meaningfully and ethically engage diverse and ever-changing communities and audiences;
- examines and interrogates the impact and value of culture and cultural participation.

3. Prejudice and Pride: A National Trust/RCMG collaboration

In March 2016, the National Trust approached the University of Leicester's Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) to explore the possibilities of a research-led collaboration to support the Trust's plans for its new *Challenging Histories* programme.¹ Discussions focused around the value of working together on the 2017 programme, *Prejudice and Pride*, which would see the Trust join cultural organisations across the country in marking fifty years since the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales². RCMG has particular expertise in this field from prior research collaborations and Professor Sandell has recently completed a ten year study of international museum, gallery and heritage engagement with LGBTQ and other human rights themes.³

Working closely with a cohort of properties and key staff from across the Trust, this collaborative project, led by Professor Richard Sandell, has explored the following research questions:

- How can we offer diverse audiences (new and existing) authentic, engaging and meaningful experiences and purposefully engage the public in debates surrounding LGBTQ history, culture and equality by researching, acknowledging and presenting the LGBTQ histories and associations in the places, stories and collections of the National Trust?
- How can we contribute to new thinking and practice related to the presentation of LGBTQ histories within the international heritage and museum field?
- How can the Trust develop and sustain its capacity to engage audiences around challenging histories?

The project's three key objectives are:

- to support the development of a high-quality public offer in 2017 working collaboratively with a cohort of properties
- to contribute to international thinking and practice in the field
- to explore and pursue means of embedding learning from the project (in properties, in future national public programmes, in the Trust's organisational culture).

¹ For further details, see <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/how-we-are-challenging-our-history>.

² Further information on *Prejudice and Pride* can be found here <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/exploring-lgbtq-history-at-national-trust-places> and here <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/projects/prejudice-and-pride>

³ Sandell, R. (2017) *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, London and New York: Routledge.

The primary focus has been a series of activities to support participating Trust properties in exploring and resolving the challenges that surround the public presentation of LGBTQ lives, drawing on international research and practice. These challenges include:

- **How do we research and understand LGBTQ lives in the past?** What methods and approaches can we use to research the lives of people whose experiences have sometimes been shaped (and erased) by discriminatory social and legal norms? LGBTQ history needs to be considered in the context of a society which promoted secrecy and covert behaviour amongst many of those people whose sexuality and gender fell outside of society's norms. Because of this, historical sources may be limited. As a result, the number of LGBTQ histories we have knowledge of is relatively small. Historic houses have an important part to play in bringing to life these histories as part of all our history, and specifically to give contemporary LGBTQ lives an anchor in the past.
- **How do we interpret and publicly present LGBTQ histories in ways that are ethical and meaningful to contemporary audiences?** In recent years, historians have been identifying sites of LGBTQ interest and a growing number of heritage and museum organisations internationally are seeking to actively incorporate these histories of marginalised people into their interpretation⁴. However, researchers have identified a suite of challenges that have sometimes inhibited or constrained work in this area:
 - Heterosexuality has often been viewed as 'the norm' and same-sex love and desire as deviant.⁵ So, we often assume that someone was heterosexual unless we are told otherwise. We have all grown up in a society which assumes heterosexuality as the normal way to be. Furthermore, family trees which identify relationships through marriage (and are widely used as part of the interpretation of historic houses) have tended to silence same-sex relationships.
 - Although recent years have been characterised by greater understanding and respect for LGBTQ lives – reflected in a suite of legal changes and greater diversity across the media landscape and public realm – prejudice and discrimination persist and same-sex relationships are still viewed negatively by some, as immoral, deviant, harmful or unacceptable.

⁴ See, for example, Ferentinos, S. (2015) *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites*, Lanham MA: Rowman and Littlefield, for a discussion of leading-edge practice in the United States National Parks Service.

⁵ For a fuller discussion of heteronormativity – defined as 'the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged', see Berlant and Warner (1998).

- Efforts to explore and reveal LGBTQ histories have very often prompted demands for disproportionate levels of evidence before accepting that someone might be viewed as part of a queer past or LGBTQ heritage which, as many researchers have noted, would never be expected to prove an individual's heterosexuality. Any assertion of same-sex love and desire can often generate demands for legal, photographic or documentary evidence, numerous first-person and secondary accounts (no number is ever deemed sufficient) or a written 'confession' by the individual in question. Frequently demands are focused on proof of actual sexual relations; here, 'sex' is commonly conflated with 'sexuality'. Someone can be lesbian, gay or bisexual (or understood as part of a history of same-sex love and desire) without evidence that they engaged in same-sex acts just as someone can be understood to be heterosexual without engaging in heterosexual sex.
- Sometimes people will go to extraordinary lengths to resist any effort to understand individuals from the past as part of queer or LGBTQ history. This can sometimes point to genuine concerns for historical accuracy but also, in many cases, to deeply embedded, conscious or unconscious, prejudice (Sandell 2017). Lisa Yun Lee, former director of the Jane Addams Hull House in Chicago, United States, a site that broke new ground in engaging audiences in debate around the most appropriate way to describe Jane Addams' relationship with her long-time companion, Mary Rozet-Smith. writes:

The hushed debates that erupt into public uproars now and again about whether Jane Addams 'was or wasn't' reflect legitimate intellectual interest in the cultural evolution of language and the history of sexuality, but more often than not are a manifestation of homophobia expressed as a pathological anxiety about our most important historical icons and what is appropriate and acceptable at any particular historic moment. This uneasiness manifests itself in the all too common symptom of selective historical amnesia' (2011: 179)⁶.

- There are numerous challenges around the use of language – should we use contemporary identity terms (gay, lesbian, bisexual) for historical figures who lived when such terms were not in existence or widely used? 'Queer' has become a term widely used in academic research to cover the broad spectrum of sexualities and genders and how these confuse the strict binaries of straight/gay, male/female and

⁶ Lee, L. Y. (2011) 'Peering into the bedroom: restorative justice at the Jane Addams Hull House Museum' in J. Marstine (ed) *Redefining ethics for the Twenty-First-Century Museum*, London and New York: Routledge: 174-87.

masculine/feminine. Although not uncontested, 'queer' can be a very useful overarching term (sometimes also used as a verb) to overcome some of the limitations of the familiar contemporary identity markers – L, G, B and T.

A team with a mix of expertise, experience and skills in the field – principally Professor Richard Sandell, artist, curator and researcher Professor Matt Smith, RCMG Director, Jocelyn Dodd and Research Associate, Sarah Plumb – was brought together to take forward the collaboration that would run from August 2016 to May 2018. The research team was expanded to include Tom Butler and Julie Howell, specifically for projects at Felbrigg Hall and, later, Kingston Lacy.

Additional elements included a large scale audience research component that investigates visitors' responses, and engagement with, *Prejudice and Pride* and an international conference (and accompanying publication) to examine the legacy of the programme and support future practice across and beyond the Trust. As the collaboration developed, a number of properties sought greater input from the RCMG team to assist them in taking forward their plans for participating in the national public programme.

4. Felbrigg Hall

As part of its national public programme activities, the National Trust invited properties with LGBTQ connections and/or an interest in LGBTQ-themed programming to join a group that, with support from RCMG, would jointly research these stories and how they might be publicly presented. Drawing on a rich and growing body of international research around LGBTQ public heritage, RCMG designed and delivered events to support properties in taking this work forward. Staff from Felbrigg Hall attended the first of these events at Sutton House, London, on Tuesday 15 November 2016.

Later in the year, RCMG was invited to work with Felbrigg staff and volunteers to carry out research into ‘the last squire of Felbrigg’, Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer. The project would help to stimulate further research into the squire over the next few years and would result in a public output – available online and on property – that would form part of *Prejudice and Pride*. The outcome was a short film - *The Unfinished Portrait* – through which visitors could learn more about the life and times of the squire. The film, which launched in July 2017, acknowledges Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer’s homosexuality and sheds new light on his creative and scholarly output, his wide and diverse literary and friendship circles, and his legacy.

5. Research brief and background

RCMG's proposal (March 2017), approved by the Trust, stated:

The Last Squire

This project seeks to tell the rich story of Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer – a notable historian, the last Squire of Felbrigg and the man responsible for ensuring the survival and preservation of the beautiful house and estate that was so close to his heart.

Research will be undertaken to create an engaging, site-appropriate online resource that introduces visitors to RWKC, his fascinating life, his love of Felbrigg and the part he played in ensuring the estate could be accessed and enjoyed by future generations.

At present there is a significant difference in the way that RWKC's personal life is articulated in a variety of online and scholarly accounts of his life and the Trust's own interpretation. For example, even though Wikipedia states 'Wyndham Ketton-Cremer was homosexual and never married' the Trust's website currently states that 'Robert did not marry and the central tragedy of his life was the loss of his younger brother in 1941'.

This discrepancy will be addressed through further research and will draw on the concepts and interpretive principles emerging from the RCMG/National Trust collaboration to ensure that what is known or presumed about RWKC's sexuality is plainly stated and seamlessly woven into the bigger story of his life.

The story will be presented through an online/digital story potentially comprising text, image and/or film. Visitors to the property will be made aware of the resource through high quality print and/or a video screen (to be explored and discussed with property staff). It is anticipated that the offer will go live in the late summer/early autumn. Although led by RCMG, the project will proceed with the full involvement of Felbrigg colleagues.

The RCMG team aimed to discover more about RWKC's life as a whole, fleshing him out as a person rather than focusing on his sexuality as a defining characteristic. Until *The Unfinished Portrait*, RWKC was often described as 'The Last Squire', an epithet that largely restricts his story to his family tree and his role within Norfolk's landed gentry. Drawing on a larger field of academic research that has revealed the processes through which lives which challenge gender and sexual norms are often excluded or less visible within the public realm, we explored the possibilities of

talking more openly about RWKC's sexuality as part of a broader story. Our aim here (and, indeed, across *Prejudice and Pride* more broadly) was to treat same-sex love and desire and gender diversity with the same respect (and lack of stigma) that is routinely afforded to heterosexual lives in across heritage sites and the wider public realm.

At the same time, the research team soon determined from their visits to the property that, whilst openness about RWKC's homosexuality would help to correct the discrepancy between what was widely assumed by many current staff and volunteers and the way in which RWKC's life was presented to the public, that his story should not be reduced to one wholly shaped by sexuality. As such, the research consciously sought to explore and reposition RWKC's story beyond the framework of 'the last squire' but avoid focusing exclusively on his sexuality.

RWKC's later, public life and accolades are already very well known. While the research team wanted to celebrate these achievements, there was also a desire to go beyond them in order to provide a fuller, more rounded portrait that could draw on lesser known aspects of his life.

The consideration of RWKC's sexuality was to be integral to the research given the impetus and focus of *Prejudice and Pride*. However, the team was well aware of challenges inherent in researching past LGBTQ lives (discussed above).

Research would need to be conducted with an understanding that RWKC lived most of his life at a time when homosexuality was criminalised. As researchers have widely noted, LGBTQ lives have commonly been erased from historical accounts; sometimes by the application of a moral lens that stigmatises non-normative lives or, in other cases, more literally by efforts to destroy records that might be viewed as incriminating. Where LGBTQ lives are visible, they have often been viewed through frameworks that criminalise or medicalise same-sex love and desire. In some settings, personal papers have been destroyed or hidden by the individual or their family.

Finally, across the *Prejudice and Pride* programme, the team had discussed the ethical issues surrounding the claiming of individuals from the past as part of a queer or LGBTQ history when, in their own time, they may have gone to considerable lengths to conceal aspects of their life or identity to some people. In the case of Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer, there already existed publicly available statements, referring unequivocally to his homosexuality, which came up readily through a quick search on the internet, although the basis for these claims was not evident or explicit. Whilst the planned film would not, therefore, be 'outing' RWKC with new information about his sexuality – since this was already easily accessible to

the public on Wikipedia – the research team were mindful of the greater public awareness that *Prejudice and Pride* would bring.

This broader issue has been widely discussed in the literature and there are numerous helpful parallels (linked to disability, race and ethnicity as well as sexuality) which the team had used to unpack the ethics surrounding public portrayals of difference with staff and volunteers at Felbrigg prior to the film's launch. One well documented example, the case of the FDR memorial in Washington DC, was used to explore the importance of contemporary portrayals that challenge the stigma associated with differences in the past. Franklin Delano Roosevelt went to great lengths to hide his disability during his lifetime but, in 2001, a new room was added to the memorial in Washington DC featuring a bronze statue of the President using his wheelchair. As Richard Sandell has written⁷;

Controversy surrounding the FDR memorial began even before the dedication ceremony held on 2 May 1997. Rosemarie Garland Thomson describes the views of disability rights activists and disability studies scholars at that time;

[we] had wanted to avoid recreating the persistent stereotypes of disability – the ones that tell us that disability is a shameful personal problem relegated to the private realm of charity and medicine but inappropriate in the public sphere. We had wanted the memorial to tell the story of a man who was both disabled by polio and president of the United States for 12 years... But the only statue that even remotely referred to FDR's disability showed him seated, covered by a cape, on a chair with small wheels barely peeking out' (2001:B11)

Those who were critical of the original memorial argued that decisions regarding the manner in which the President would be represented should be informed, not by the social mores and perceptions of disability in FDR's time, but rather by the post-civil rights values of twenty-first century America. Those who opposed a new addition to the memorial accused disability activists of political correctness...

...a new statue – clearly showing FDR in his wheelchair – was subsequently unveiled in 2001. This addition was viewed by many as an important achievement, a contribution to the development of a more progressive understanding of disability, one which drew on the realities of FDR's lived experience but which was framed in ways that challenged rather than reinforced prevalent contemporary negative stereotypes (Sandell 2010: 8).

⁷ Sandell, R. and Dodd, J. (2010), 'Activist practice', in R. Sandell, J. Dodd and R. Garland Thomson (eds), *Re-Presenting Disability: Activism and Agency in the Museum*, London: Routledge: 3-22.

6. Research process

Research ethics

The University of Leicester requires that all those conducting research, whether they are students or members of staff, adhere to the highest levels of research conduct. The University Research Code of Conduct⁸ lays out the standards expected from all those carrying out research under its auspices.

In accordance with the code, approval was sought and granted from the University of Leicester's research ethics committee to work with staff and volunteers to take the project forward.

Narrative framework

The RCMG team initially identified three potential narratives that might guide research. These were informed by conversations with Felbrigg Hall staff and wider Trust colleagues and stakeholders:

i) 'The Last Squire'

Building on the conventional narrative of RWKC as the Last Squire of Felbrigg Hall, this research strand proposed to set his life in the context of other men that had donated their homes and collections to the National Trust, a number of whom were known to be gay. This was informed by RWKC's relationship with James Lees Milne (Bloch 2010), and wider research on links between gay men and cultural heritage⁹.

ii) 'Bunny'

This research strand proposed setting RWKC's life within the context of his friendships and private life, rather than his known public achievements or position within the landed gentry. This was inspired by his nickname – 'Bunny' – and his little known friendships with unconventional people of his day, garnered from book inscriptions and letters.

iii) 'An Unconventional Life'

⁸ See, <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/researchsupport/documents/research-code-of-conduct>

⁹ See, for example, Adair, J. H. (2010) 'House Museum or Walk-In Closet? The (Non)Representation of Gay Men in the House Museums They Called Home' in A. Levin (ed) *Gender and Sexuality in Museums: A Reader*, London and New York: Routledge: 264-78.

This narrative proposed focusing on some of the less conventional features of RWKC's life including his sympathetic and open treatment of same-sex desire in his biographies, what drove him creatively, and to set this in the context of lives that defied the conventions of their day.

These research strands/narratives helped to structure the team's thinking ahead of the on-site research, and acted as a guide to assessing and prioritising sources.

Stages of research

The research comprised three overlapping stages: desk research; on-site research; and conversations and interviews.

From the outset, it was understood that the timescales and scope of the research were limited, but that any outputs would inform future research on RWKC, and potentially contribute to future public programming (for example, in 2019 which marks fifty years since Felbrigg Hall was bequeathed to the National Trust).

In addition, the research team were mindful of the interpretive dilemmas, discussed above, which are inherent when researching LGBTQ histories.

The project took place over a period of months involving visits, discussions with staff and volunteers, desk research and on-site archival research at Felbrigg Hall that was mainly carried out during the period 21-24th May 2017. During this time, the team met again with various staff and volunteers. As well as a discussion of useful leads, suggested research locations within the house, and personal reflections on RWKC, the team were presented with a number of useful research documents. These included:

- the 'Red Folder', a list of RWKC's private books and papers and their location within the house
- a review of these books highlighting those that contain private messages and inscriptions from their respective authors (prepared by a volunteer);
- a bibliography of published sources that reference RWKC
- an analysis of the Felbrigg Hall visitors books highlighting regular or notable visitors in RWKC's lifetime (prepared by a volunteer)

The team were informed that there was a large body of material relating to RWKC that had never been closely examined. The team were also asked to document any materials (i.e. papers, photos, notes) that might be relevant for the 2019 exhibition.

Key materials and sources

Over the four days spent on site, the team found many useful sources and materials. Initially the team's approach was guided by our three potential narratives (see above). However, as materials were gradually uncovered, and on the basis of conversations with volunteers and staff, these narrative frames began to shift.

Key to the development of the final narrative that would then be translated into the film, were the following sources and events in RWKC's life:

i) Poetry

Over the course of the research, the team found a number of books that contained RWKC's original published poetry. Some of these had been previously catalogued in the Red Book, while others were found in the cabinets among other materials. These included:

- *Mount Everest and Other Poems* by R.W. Ketton-Cremer; London (1923)
- *Public School Verse 1923-24*; Heinemann, London (1924)
- *The Oxford Outlook, No. 33. Vol. VII*; Basil Blackwell, Oxford (1925)
- *Two Poems* by R.W. Ketton-Cremer; Self-published, Norwich (1925)
- *The Oxford Outlook, No. 37. Vol. VIII*; Basil Blackwell, Oxford (1926)
- *The Best Poems of 1933*; Moulton, Thomas (ed); Jonathan Cape, London (1933)

The team were surprised by both the quantity and intensity of RWKC's poetry, given that most public discussion of his written output focuses on his biographical and historical work. The poems from his days at Oxford were particularly notable. Clearly, they were also hailed at the time, given that they feature prominently in the *Oxford Outlook*, and alongside well known writers including Christopher Isherwood, Harold Acton, Graham Greene and W. H. Auden. These materials also helped to reveal more about the young RWKC and an aspect of his life that seemed to have been lost, before obligation and duty took hold following his father's death.

ii) Horace Walpole manuscript and Thomas Grey publication

An article in *The Independent* ("*Hero of His Own Gothic Romance*", McGlynn 1996), previously seen by the research team, raised the prospect that RWKC's original draft for his 1940 biography of Horace Walpole openly discussed its subject's same-sex desires. However, these passages were removed by the book's editor, Wilmarth Lewis:

The best-known life hitherto, by Ketton-Cremer, was 'directed' by Lewis. That is to say, Ketton-Cremer submitted his manuscript to Lewis and Lewis struck out whatever 'could not have been' the case - i.e. that Walpole was

homosexual. Mowl now sets the record straight by detailing his subject's numerous same-sex encounters, notably with the 9th Earl of Lincoln. Lewis's feat in keeping this aspect of Walpole under wraps is remarkable, for he was actually "outed" in a contemporary pamphlet in 1764." (McGlynn 1996)

The location of this un-edited, original manuscript was unknown until discovered by the research team. Both the original handwritten and typed manuscripts were found. The team suggests that careful study of the published version as compared to these manuscripts should be the subject of further research.

Given this finding, the team also revisited RWKC's 1955 publication, *Thomas Gray: A Biography*. The published version of this book again demonstrates RWKC's compassion towards and openness to acknowledging same-sex desire, remarkable given the stigma surrounding homosexuality that characterised the time in which the book was published.

All his defences were swept away – the life so carefully organised, the formal deliberate manner, the refuge he had sought in books and antiquities and the interleaved Linnaeus. He was filled with disquiet, for he understood the secrets of his own nature; he knew the existence of temptations which could not for one moment be contemplated by one who had been, all his life long, a strict observer of the laws of God and the laws of man. At the same time the very presence of Bonstetten brought him unimagined happiness. For a few short weeks he had enjoyed once more what he had never known since his childhood days, 'the sunshine of the breast.' (Ketton-Cremer, 1955: 251).

These two sources suggested that RWKC was someone who recognised, or at least understood and was compassionate towards same-sex love and desire. Furthermore, it underlined his skill as a biographer and approach to his subjects' lives: to write as honest and insightful a portrait as possible.

iii) Details of Richard Ketton-Cremer's death and RWKC's relationship with the National Trust

While it is well known that Felbrigg Hall was bequeathed to the National Trust on RWKC's death in 1969. What is less well known seems to be that this decision had been made 24 years earlier.

During the on-site research, the team found a letter to RWKC from the Under Secretary of State at the Air Ministry, detailing the news that his brother Richard was missing, presumed dead. The letter was dated 20th March 1942.

In finding the letter from the Air Ministry, the team were able to consider a connection between the news of his brother's death and RWKC's initial meetings with James Lees Milne. RWKC's decision was made in the knowledge that he would not have any children and that there was no heir to the estate.

iv) RWKC's social and literary circles

The numerous inscriptions within the books in RWKC's private collection, from well-known authors and unconventional figures, suggested that he had a wide and varied social and academic circle, beyond the confines of Norfolk, and beyond the public life that is already well known. To help structure and unpick this aspect of his life, the team held a small workshop with volunteers to visually map his social circles.

This exercise revealed several distinct groups, including his childhood friends; Norfolk society; Oxford acquaintances; literary friendships; academic and business relationships; and local friendships. The team were keen to consider these more deeply alongside his family relationships, which have already been well documented.

The conclusion reached from this exercise was that – as well as his official public life – RWKC was, in fact, deeply connected with others around the country and internationally, and a part of several creative circles. Again, this differed from the perception that he was a quiet, academic and isolated figure. The team began to consider why this aspect of his life, including his poetry, was not publicly known.

v) The Wolfenden and Vassall Reports

The Red Book indicated that RWKC had a copy of the 1953 *Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution* (commonly known as the Wolfenden Report). The team located this, alongside another government issued document, the 1963 *Report of the Tribunal Appointed to Inquire into the Vassall Case and Related Matters*. Although now held in a store within the main house, these reports formed part of a smaller selection of papers and books that RWKC kept in the Retreat, a smaller self-contained property where he spent his final years.

As Justice of the Peace for Norfolk, RWKC was likely to have been in possession of government or legal reports such as these. However, the team didn't find any other legal documents of this type among his stored papers. These two reports reflect the main concerns of homosexual men of the time, and the (il)legal status of homosexuality.

The Wolfenden Report is now recognised as a landmark document that went on to inform the 1967 Sexual Offences Act. Although the Vassall Report is lesser known, it

details the rising problem of blackmail against gay men, and the high profile consequences. RWKC's copy of the Wolfenden Report featured a handwritten label on the spine.

vi) Violet Powell's remarks in the *Sunday Times* article

The bibliography detailing references to RWKC (Clarke & Gretton 1995) included a mention of a *Sunday Times* interview with Robert Powell. The team located the article, in which Powell refers to RWKC's sexuality with some ambiguity:

Meanwhile, Powell has moved on to the idiosyncrasies of his late friend Wyndham Ketton-Cremer (Norfolk Squire and author of Felbrigg). "Quite sexless, I think... Violet said he was in love with some local archdeacon or something, some dignitary of the church... but he never showed the slightest sign." (Taylor, D. J, A Question of Upbringing: Interview with Anthony Powell; The Sunday Times Book Section, 29th June 1995: 8-9).

Violet Powell's reported comments led the team to investigate further who the 'local archdeacon' might have been concluding that, in all likelihood, this would have been Robert Meiklejohn, Rector of Felbrigg with Metton and Sustead, Rural Dean of Repps, and Archdeacon of Norwich.

Robert Meiklejohn was a longstanding and close friend of RWKC. RWKC's book, *Country Neighbourhood* includes an inscription: "To Robert Meiklejohn / Rector of Felbrigg with Metton and Sustead, Rural Dean of Repps, Honorary Canon of Norwich Cathedral / Priest and friend for twenty years".

Meiklejohn can be seen sitting on RWKC's left hand side in the Roman Camp Bowls Club 1936 team photograph (currently hanging in the Book Room at Felbrigg Hall). In later life, it is understood that he was given a grace-and-favour flat in the grounds of Felbrigg Hall. It is unclear whether Robert Meiklejohn was married, but his gravestone at St Andrew's Church, Metton, does not reference a spouse. Despite Violet's assertion that RWKC was 'in love with an archdeacon', no further details or materials were found on the nature of RWKC and Meiklejohn's relationship.

vii) Interview with [Felbrigg volunteer]

The team were made aware that a Felbrigg Hall volunteer with personal connections to and first-hand knowledge of RWKC, was keen to talk with them. The team made contact with him on the 30th May 2017 and carried out a telephone interview.

The team's questions were in relation to RWKC's character, to find the source of his drive and discipline, how he managed his personal life, and whether he had any close or personal relationships.

The interviewee described 'the Squire' as 'happy, generous but reserved.' Asked whether RWKC shared his life with anyone, or whether he had any relationships, he replied: 'He was a homosexual, but you couldn't be gay in those days because it was against the law. My boss was also the same way. It was impossible for these men to live open lives.'

This first hand, unequivocal account supported the view of numerous staff and volunteers who stated that RWKC's homosexuality was widely assumed (with varying levels of comfort) amongst staff, volunteers and local residents.

viii) Published references

A final source of information which helped to shape the film's position and narrative were a number of published sources. Although the Wikipedia entry for Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer at the start of the project¹⁰, plainly stated that he was homosexual (with a certainty that is somewhat unusual in discussion of past LGBTQ lives), the team were interested in locating any further references to his sexuality that were already published.

The team was keen to follow up on the published references to RWKC, as listed in the Clarke & Gretton 1995 bibliography. Of these, two were felt to be particularly significant in the context of the materials that had already been found and the team's emerging understanding of RWKC's life.

James Lees-Milne by Michael Bloch contains several references to RWKC. Lees-Milne was a senior figure in the National Trust in the 1940s and 50s and is known to have had relationships with both women and men:

Jim also touched the heart strings of several bachelor squires, such as Ted Lister of Westwood and Wyndham ('Bunny') Ketton-Cremer of Felbrigg (though his relations with such men were always correct) (Bloch 2010: 144).

More directly, Bevis Hillier's acclaimed 1988 biography of John Betjeman, *Young Betjeman*, is more explicit on RWKC's sexuality:

¹⁰ The Wikipedia entry has since been updated to incorporate the controversy that unfolded after the release of the film.

The Balliol wit Denis Kincaid made ironic reference to this feeling in a distich about John Bowle and another Balliol man, Wyndham Ketton-Cremer (the future historian), on whom Bowle had a passionate ‘crush’:

*John Edward Bowle
Had a superflux of soul.
He was more beautiful than Rima
But not as beautiful as Ketton-Cremer" (Hillier 1988: 134).*

And:

If he had looked about him he would have been bound to conclude that Oxford was full of men for whom homosexuality was no passing phase, but a permanent condition. A don’s life had always had attractions for homosexuals – a life of monastic seclusion with a constantly renewed supply of young men. And it is no exaggeration to say that the majority of John’s undergraduate friends at Oxford were homosexual; among them Brian Howard, Patrick Balfour, Robert Byron, John Bowle, Lionel Perry, Michael Dugdale, Gyles Isham, Wyndham Ketton-Cremer, Hamish St Clair-Erskine, Mark Ogilvie-Grant, Edward James and of course Tom Driberg, who made a career of his homosexuality to which his political activities were secondary” (ibid: 178).

This important source, in particular, added depth to the team’s understanding of RWKC’s personal life, and confirmed that knowledge of his sexuality was already known and in the public domain after his death.

Narrative development

With much of the on-site research complete, the team revisited the three potential narratives with which they began and rethought them in light of the research findings.

In Felbrigg’s Great Hall hangs a striking portrait of RWKC painted by Allan Gwynne-Jones in the last few years of the squire’s life. The painting remained unfinished on RWKC’s death in 1969. The team drew parallels between the incomplete nature of this portrait, and the similarly incomplete public knowledge of RWKC’s life and passions. This ‘unfinished portrait’ become a new guiding narrative for how to approach the project output. Rather than a ‘definitive’ re-positioning of RWKC’s life, this narrative frame would allow an open and respectful approach which added some ‘fine detail’ to the existing broad brushstrokes.

At this stage, the team felt that a short film would be the most compelling and accessible medium for telling this story, rather than just text and images. The possibility for a scripted narration was discussed. Stephen Fry’s connections to

Felbrigg Hall had already been mentioned to the project team by staff and volunteers. This connection, and the potential for raising the profile of the film and RWKC's story, led the team to invite Mr Fry to participate in the project, to which he happily and generously agreed.

Script development

Having decided on the overall approach and focus, and with the research complete, the team began working on a script that reflected the aims of the project and included the material that had come to light.

In line with the broader principles and values underpinning the national public programme as a whole, the team wanted to plainly state the truth of RWKC's homosexuality, and then explore other themes and aspects of his life that had been revealed during the research. By dealing with his sexuality in an honest way, the team wanted to resist the euphemisms and associated negative attitudes towards same sex love and desire, which were so prevalent in his lifetime.

The team was also keen to acknowledge and move beyond the aspects of RWKC's life that were already well known to offer new insights into the man, his life and the motivations behind his decision to leave Felbrigg to the National Trust

Out of the rich material uncovered through the research process, five key elements were chosen on which to hang the narrative: RWKC's poetry and the sense of passion and freedom it conveys; his compassionate and empathetic understanding of same sex desire in his biographies of Thomas Gray and Horace Walpole; his unconventional, creative and broad social circles; the impact of his brother's death on the future of Felbrigg Hall; and the presence of the Wolfenden Report in among RWKC's private papers, and its implications for contemporary LGBTQ lives.

The team felt that these particular elements were the most significant in developing a richer understanding of RWKC. They were all supported by the research process and fitted well with the broader context and values underpinning *Prejudice and Pride*.

Some well-known aspects of RWKC's life were not mentioned, a result of the small scale of the project (short running time of the film), the feeling that they detracted from the new insights the research team had uncovered and that their significance for understanding his personal life were difficult to understand and evidence. These included his childhood rheumatic fever, which recurred throughout his life and left him with a weakened left arm. Although some staff and volunteers had raised the possibility that RWKC's impairment potentially helped to explain why he did not get married, the team felt that this was unsubstantiated. Similarly, RWKC is known to

have had a very close relationship with his mother. A very religious woman, this relationship may well have prevented RWKC from living more freely. He was also known to be an astute businessman and generous estate manager who made a lot of money for the estate. However, the team felt this was an aspect already well-covered and detracted from RWKC's lesser-known talents.

Lastly, the research suggested that 'Bunny' was not an affected adult nickname, but something he had been called from an early age, used by both family members and close friends throughout his life. The team decided that the script worked better retaining his full and formal name.

Visual devices

The script was approved by Felbrigg Hall staff prior to production. The team then moved to develop the visual language for the film, first as a storyboard, then as an animatic, and finally as live footage combined with animation.

The team learned that a Felbrigg Hall volunteer had previously 'doubled' for the squire in a previous film. As the team's ideas developed, the Trust was asked whether he could appear in the film. With their approval, the volunteer consented to act in the film. Using the dialogue between the portrait and live footage allowed the team to bring Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer 'to life'. The team felt this was key to building empathy with the audience, and to see his story in a fresh light.

In addition to the portrait, other key images referenced in the film include:

- *Bird animation*: a pigeon is the subject of one of RWKC's most powerful poems, *Sonnet*, read at the end of the film. This bird appears as an animation overlaid onto an outline of RWKC's head, representing his inner life, and the freedom and passion of his early years at Oxford.
- *An uprooted tree*: this striking tree, on which 'the squire' stands, is found close to Felbrigg Hall. It represents both RWKC's love of nature and his deep Norfolk connections. This image is also knowingly brooding, referencing the sacrifices that he made to live the life he did, and the sadness he felt over the loss of his brother.
- *Family tree*: as mentioned previously, RWKC's has hitherto been referred to as 'the Last Squire'; however, in the film, the heteronormative device of the traditional family tree has been used as a counterpoint to RWKC's creative and social 'family'.
- *Ink blot*: this simple animated device flows through several scenes, referencing RWKC's tools of work – pen and ink – and the less formal side of his character

- *Wolfenden Report*: the team felt that this original copy of the hugely important document provided a powerful image.

The film – available for viewing online

<https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/rcmg/projects/prejudice-and-pride-1/the-unfinished-portrait-at-felbrigg> and at Felbrigg Hall – was produced with subtitles and with accompanying British Sign Language translation to ensure the widest possible access for audiences. Large print versions of the script as well as a version with additional description for visually impaired audiences were also available online and onsite.

7. Conclusion and Postscript

Many staff and volunteers contributed to the research process and generously and openly shared their knowledge, experience, expertise and insights. However, the film and related events generated considerable discussion in the media and – amidst the controversy, rumours and misreporting that surrounded and followed its launch at Felbrigg Hall at the end of July 2017 – a number of individuals who had been involved, subsequently experienced harassment from parties that either disagreed with the film’s content or questioned the premise behind the broader initiative. Given this context, many of the names of individuals involved have been removed from this report.

Once the research was completed and the film was in production, several individuals approached the RCMG team keen to share their personal, first-hand experiences and recollections of the squire. Although these accounts fell outside of the research process and did not influence the film’s content, they nevertheless subsequently confirmed that RWKC was widely understood by those who knew him to be homosexual.

Launch and press response

The Unfinished Portrait was completed on 14th July 2017. The RCMG research team travelled to Felbrigg Hall on the 24th July in order to launch and discuss the film with staff and volunteers.

All staff and volunteers were invited to attend the launch event. During a two hour presentation by members of the research team (held at Felbrigg Hall on the afternoon of 24th July) the rationale for *Prejudice and Pride* was discussed with more than fifty volunteers and staff, the reasons for making the film explained, the research methods and process shared, and the research findings (and their relationship to the script) was explained to the audience. The film was then shown to the room, after which an open question and answer session was held.

The film generated considerable discussion in the media with, at the height of the controversy, over one hundred news outlets featuring the story. Although this report is not concerned with a detailed analysis of news reporting, it is helpful to highlight some of the key features of the controversy.

Initial stories questioned the research behind the film’s acknowledgement of RWKC’s homosexuality and the ethics of ‘outing’ someone who could not be open about their sexuality during their own life. Richard Sandell explained the research process and key sources behind the film and showed how reference to RWKC’s sexuality were already in the public domain long before the film was created. He explained

the case for openly discussing same-sex love and desire (in much the same way as we routinely refer to heterosexual lives in Trust properties) and the carefully researched and considered ethical position that underpinned *Prejudice and Pride*.¹¹

Soon afterwards, E.C. Coryton and Tristram Powell, both godchildren of Ketton-Cremer, wrote to the *Telegraph* (26 July 2017), expressing dismay at the Trust's decision to talk openly about his sexuality and accusing them of betraying his gift and his trust. Tristram Powell wrote;

Of course he was gay, but what's the story? He was already "out", given the constraints of the period in which he lived. The "outing" of him by the Trust for its own commercial reasons feels exaggerated and mean-spirited – another kind of intolerance.

On 16 August, RWKC's personal secretary from the late 1950s until 1964 wrote to the *Telegraph* stating;

I never heard any suggestion that he was gay, and am heartbroken that the National Trust has shown no remorse for "outing" him. He would never have left his ancestral home to them had he known they would defame him.

A further set of news stories focused on the Trust's decision to ask staff and volunteers at Felbrigg to wear rainbow lanyards to signify their welcome to all visitors. A number of other properties participating in *Prejudice and Pride* had made these available to staff and volunteers earlier in the year with considerable success but this was the first time that a property had told all public-facing staff and volunteers to wear them. A number of volunteers spoke to the press expressing their concerns and disappointment at the way they had been treated.¹²

The language used in some of the press coverage and related public debate is both revealing and troubling with accusations that open discussion of someone's

¹¹ A selection of these stories can be accessed online:
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/07/28/godather-not-gay-country-squires-godchildren-attack-stephen/>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/07/21/national-trust-outs-norfolk-squire-gay-48-years-death/>
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4731470/Fury-National-Trust-outing-gay-country-squire.html>

¹² A selection of these stories can be accessed online:
<http://www.edp24.co.uk/news/felbrigg-volunteers-sent-home-over-gay-squire-debate-1-5132308>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/08/05/national-trust-backs-gay-campaign-threat-volunteers-boycott/>
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/aug/05/national-trust-reverses-decision-on-gay-pride-badges>

homosexuality in the public realm constituted defamation and besmirched an individual's reputation.

As the debate grew, the Museums Association – the UK's national body for sector professionals – expressed its support for the Trust's position and the organisation's broader commitment to LGBTQ heritage. This prompted numerous heritage and culture professionals to also highlight and challenge the expressions of homophobia inherent in some of the criticisms of the film and *Prejudice and Pride* more broadly.¹³

Conclusion

The events surrounding the making of *The Unfinished Portrait* and the debate it generated amongst visitors, staff and volunteers, the media and wider publics are familiar to many museum, gallery and heritage practitioners working in the UK and internationally. Although the proliferation of exhibitions, television and radio programmes and public events that have marked fifty years since the decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales have drawn attention to the enormous social changes that have heralded greater equality today, the challenges that some of these projects have encountered and the reception that some have received are also reminders that negative attitudes towards LGBTQ communities persist and are sometimes deeply held and fiercely expressed.

More optimistically, it is important to note that *Prejudice and Pride* and *The Unfinished Portrait* have generated an overwhelmingly positive response from visitors (as well as staff and volunteers). Several thousand responses to the programme are currently being analysed as part of the audience research component of the NT/RCMG collaboration, the findings of which will be publicly available on completion of the research in summer 2018.

¹³ See

<http://www.museumsassociation.org/news/07082017-ma-backs-national-trust-over-pride-programme>

8. Additional references

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Appendix A: 'The Unfinished Portrait' Script

How can we paint someone's *true* portrait?

We very often start with official sources, looking for their notable achievements, the positions they held in public life or the works they published.

For Robert Wyndham Ketton-Cremer, the Last Squire of Felbrigg, these sources reveal a life of public duty: a Justice of the Peace; High Sherriff of Norfolk; a respected and much-loved local patron; a celebrated biographer and scholar.

They reveal a shy, generous, unmarried man who restored his exquisite ancestral home and bequeathed it the nation.

(PAUSE)

But is our portrait complete?

Official accounts of Robert's life tend to offer only a partial story, and neglect to incorporate what was widely accepted by those who knew him.

Some adopt a language of codes and suggestions, describing him as 'the bachelor squire'...or 'not one for the ladies'.

But the truth is, when researching Robert's life, we find many accounts that openly acknowledge his homosexuality, adding – of course – that to be gay when he lived could lead to prosecution under the law.

Researching Robert's life highlights the problems we encounter when looking back at the lives of people who defied the conventions of their day. If we ask questions about these individuals' personal lives we often find that records have been destroyed, we find deafening silences and awkward euphemisms that reflect and perpetuate the pernicious attitudes of the times in which they lived.

What fine detail, then, can we add to our portrait of this remarkable man to help us build a full, fair and respectful likeness?

We can add that he had a free and expressive life before duty and obligation took hold.

At Oxford in the 1920s, Robert's deeply-felt poetry was published alongside the work of his contemporaries: Christopher Isherwood, Harold Acton, Graham Greene and W. H. Auden.

We can add that Robert had an instinctive understanding of human nature. In his acclaimed biographies of Horace Walpole and Thomas Gray, he didn't shy away from his subjects' same-sex desires. He acknowledged the challenges they faced, chronicling their lives with honesty and compassion.

["All his defences were swept away... He was filled with disquiet, for he understood the secrets of his own nature..."]

Far from the sad sense of his being the last name on the last branch of his family tree, we can add that Robert was rooted physically, intellectually and socially in his beloved Norfolk.

He was admired and befriended by creative, unconventional people. His private books overflow with personal dedications and intimate notes – from Stevie Smith, A.L Rowse, and Anthony Powell among others.

But his portrait isn't complete without considering his greatest legacy.

Aged just 35, Robert's resolution to leave Felbrigg Hall to the National Trust came soon after learning of his younger brother's tragic death in 1941.

Robert's decision was made in the knowledge that he himself would never marry, and there would be no heirs.

(PAUSE)

Finally, we must add, that among a pile of Robert's books lies a small, blue government report published in 1957. On its spine, Robert has written its unofficial title: the Wolfenden Report.

Its recommendations to decriminalise homosexual acts did not become law until 1967, two years before Robert's death.

What would our subject have made of the changes it heralded, and the lives it has helped to liberate?

(PAUSE)

Fifty years on, beyond the language of clues, hints and broad brushstrokes, today we must celebrate our LGBTQ histories in plain sight.

To do anything less is to suggest that same-sex love and gender diversity is somehow wrong, and lets past prejudice and discrimination go unchallenged.

As a tolerant, generous and honest biographer himself, this fuller portrait of Robert is perhaps one that he would recognise and appreciate.

Sonnet, published in *The Oxford Outlook*, May, 1925.

As a pigeon startled up from under trees,
Scattering leaves with the stir of its rising, goes
Blundering through the shifting sunlight, and flies
Slanting up, seeking the open skies:
Then batters its wings through yielding twigs, and sees
The waving green of the woods recede, and knows
Its power, and loves higher and higher to rise,
Its breast and wings by the sun flushed golden and rose—

So a thought of you rises up with keen swift flight
Out of the prisoning thickets into the light,
Forgetting a little while all doubt, all pain:
Thinking never to pause and descend again
To the cold perilous earth and the dark of night,
Up into measureless heavens the wild wings strain.

(END)