

Book Review: Queer Footprints: A Guide to Uncovering London's Fierce History

Reviewed by David Fryer, University of Queensland

Glass, D. (2023). *Queer Footprints*. Pluto Press. ISBN: 978 0 7453 4621 2. 350 pages.

Dan Glass is a flaneur extraordinaire, a discoverer and ransacker of archives, a quasi-obsessive collector of case studies (at least 2000 case studies drawn on by Dan contribute to this book's authenticity), a consummately skilled interviewer, a riveting story teller, consciousness raiser, alliance builder and – I have it on good authority – ace cicerone. He is an extraordinary, inspiring, and fascinating activist, who it is impossible to pigeon hole. It is no surprise, then, that his latest¹ book, *Queer Footprints: A guide to Uncovering London's Fierce History* is extraordinary, inspiring, fascinating and impossible to pigeon hole too.

Queer Footprints: A guide to Uncovering London's Fierce History is in some ways a *tool kit* (“how to plot the treasure of your community's story”) in some ways a *City-Guide*, which can “change the way we all experience our city, whether you're LGBTQIA+, an ally or someone hungry for freedom”, in some ways a *homage* to “legendary people, moments and movements”, and in some ways an *arc lamp* “shedding light on the lives, spaces, identities, repression and resistance that form the backdrop of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual and other . . . lives today”.

In *Queer Footprints: A guide to Uncovering London's Fierce History*, Dan does not flinch from truth telling which is viscerally shocking in itself and in its detail. To give but one example, Dan reminds us that on 30th April 1999, in Soho, London “the Admiral Duncan pub was the scene of the worst homophobic attack to occur in Britain on a gay venue. A nail bomb blast killed three people: Andrea Dykes, 27, who was pregnant, and her friends John Light, 32, and Nick Moore, 31. The blast wounded around 70 others.” Dan does not spare us the sickening details: “The nails fired out from the bombs had been dipped in rat urine and faeces, further infecting survivors.” Elsewhere, Dan does not let the reader forget the age old and continuing “fascist hatred, xenophobic ‘othering’ and homophobic and transphobic thuggery” directed relentlessly at LGBTQIA+ people. He makes clear that the Neo-Nazi who attacked people in Soho with a nail bomb was not only a homophobe but also a racist who attacked British members of ethnic minorities in Brixton and Brick Lane too.

In *Queer Footprints: A guide to Uncovering London's Fierce History*, Dan Glass emphasises queer solidarity with “anyone marginalised by white patriotic patriarchal culture” including: migrants seeking asylum; homeless people; ethnic minority members; disabled people (within the frame of reference of the social model of disability); survivors of psychiatry; and others. Dan emphasises queer opposition to racism; fascism; and misogyny as well as transphobia and homophobia.

Moreover, Dan has not flinched from making it clear that mainstream queer spaces are, themselves, not always free of class prejudice, racism, disablism and white washing: reminding us that working class gay men were often treated with disdain by higher socio-occupational class gay men frequenting elite London clubs; that even today as Marc Thompson argues black gay men are at risk of being “fetishised in mainstream queer spaces”; that spaces which are accessible by non-disabled “white cisgender gay men” may not be for “queer disabled people with different access requirements” as Josh Hepple [suggests](#); and that

¹ Dan Glass previously published *United Queerdom: From the Legends of the Gay Liberation Front to the Queers of Tomorrow* (2020, Sydney: Bloomsbury).

“Soho has become synonymous with the ‘whitewashed’ frontier of gay nightlife” but Dan reminds us that in the 1990s there was “a nightclub for queer Black women in Soho”.

Queer Footprints: A guide to Uncovering London’s Fierce History consists of an introduction, 8 chapters and 55 pages of very valuable “Resources for Further Reading and Action”. It is all written in a hugely enjoyable, accessible style peppered with tongue-in-cheek humour. It is a mine of information and fount of inspiration about what LGBTQIA+ activism was, is and could be.

Dan Glass’ book focuses on LGBTQIA+ activism mostly in London but it could be argued that every town could do with a book like this. Moreover, Dan’s approach to LGBTQIA+ activism is a ‘how to...’ manual for activists to resist any assemblage of oppressive knowledges and practices.

In an interview published in GCN (<https://gcn.ie/dan-glass-queer-footprints-guide-londons-history/>), Dan Glass explicated how the book was framed: “My friend Ntombi Nyathi, who is at the heart of the popular education Training for Transformation movement, really helped me frame the book and ask critical questions – *How do we speak our truths? How do we build a movement? How do we meet our needs? How do we become fully visible? How do we become fully alive? How do we become fully awake? How do we honour our ancestors? How do they make us feel? What have they left us? And how do we become the people we’ve been waiting for?*” (my italics).

Dan’s framing summarises, in a nutshell, the key themes of the book and prefigures wider, diverse, forms of potent contemporary community activism.

To find out more about Dan Glass and his work as an activist visit:

<https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/profile/dan-glass>

<https://guerrillafoundation.org/dan-glass-queer-liberation-in-the-heart-of-london/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/profile/danglass>

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