In 1102 the Council of London decided that they needed to impress upon the people that sodomy was a sin. Until then, the general attitude, even towards priests who had sex with each other or with their male parishioners, was one of indifference. Whether the Council’s decision had much effect upon the English folk is not really known. As in Europe, the Church seemed to be preaching one thing and everyone — clerics, laity, even kings and Popes — just went on doing what they had always done.

But big changes lay ahead. In the years from about 1250 to 1300 AD, and perhaps as a flow-on from the moral reforms of Bernard of Cluny and other powerful clerics, Europe had so changed attitudes that sodomy became a capital offence in almost every country.

However, for the man in the street, such legal reforms were probably fairly meaningless: throughout the following centuries, most of the common people did not associate the “abominable sin of sodomy” with the “messing around” and “bit of fun” they had with their mates and others when the opportunity arose.

And there were many opportunities: for example, throughout most of recorded history (and presumably before that), it was common practice for men and boys to share beds — brothers shared with brothers, cousins, visiting uncles and other male relatives while servants and apprentices rarely had a bed to themselves. Most of these men and boys would not have had the education to make them realise that their nocturnal fumblings and groping with each other was the sin the Church preached would cause God to rain fire and brimstone, visit plagues upon their community or destroy the annual crops. Even the homosexual behaviour of the King, Edward II, would probably not have upset most of the people except the nobles who, for political reasons used the the King’s love-life as an excuse and not only deposed Edward but also murdered him allegedly by thrusting a red-hot poker up his bum.

King James I/IV
A good example of a well-known homosexual in the 17th Century was King James I (of England, VI of Scotland). His affairs were so well-known that a
Latin epigram circulated freely which said: *Rex fuit Elizabeth: nunc est regina Jacobus*—"Elizabeth was King: now James is Queen."\(^1\)

It would be an understatement to say James came from a dysfunctional family. Neither could you say he was handsome. However, he was very intelligent with an enquiring mind, although his dominant quality, according to his biographer, Lady Antonia Fraser, was "an inability to resist love."\(^2\) And he saw no reason to resist anyway: in 1617 he told the Privy Council

*I, James, am neither a god nor an angel, but a man like any other. Therefore I act like a man and confess to loving those dear to me more than other men. You may be sure that I love the Earl of Buckingham more than anyone else, and more than you who are here assembled. I wish to speak in my own behalf and not to have it thought to be a defect, for Jesus Christ did the same, and therefore I cannot be blamed. Christ had John, and I have George.*\(^3\)

While the Duke of Buckingham, George Villiers, was certainly the most famous of James’ lovers (and perhaps the most handsome — he was generally described as the most beautiful man in Europe), some of the many others should not be forgotten. One, and perhaps the most devoted, was Robert Carr of whom a courtier once wrote:

*The Prince constantly leaneth on his arm, pinches his cheek, and smoothes his ruffled garment. Carr hath all favours; the King teacheth him Latin every morning [and Greek every night?].*

But it was to Buckingham ("Steenie") that James considered himself married. In one of the last of the love-letters he wrote to Villiers over a decade or so, he said\(^4\):

*I desire only to live in the world for your sake, and I had rather live banished in any part of the world with you, than live a sorrowful widow-life without you. And so God bless you, my sweet child and wife, and grant that ye may ever be a comfort to your dear dad and husband.*

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
One of the reasons it is important to know who the male lovers of politically powerful people were (or are!) is that it enables us to make some assessment of the influence, as we do in the case of wives, which they might have had upon decisions and events of the time. Because James was so open in his affections towards Villiers, such assessments can be made. For example,  

\[5\]

It is equally difficult to assess Buckingham’s effect upon the state of the nation, though on the surface his presence beside James seems to have nearly caused a civil war. 

\\[\ldots\ldots\] 

Buckingham not only received high titles and wealth himself, but he raised up his entire family through second-cousins-once-removed, easily ruining anyone who got in his way. What he asked, James granted, and already by 1617 the national debit of England had risen to £726,000. At the same time, however, Buckingham brought about a great deal of reform and efficiency to the government, albeit the centralization placed him at the centre, and modern historians are increasingly recognizing that he quite probably eliminated much more court corruption than he engendered.

**Homosexuality and the Working of the Law in Renaissance England**

One of the consequences of the nationalisation of the Church by Henry VIII in 1533 was that this also nationalised ecclesiastical law and the courts which, until then had been responsible for trying men accused of the sin of buggery. Even this, however, seems to have been something of a non-event except in a few isolated cases in which, for various reasons, details of someone’s sex life came to public attention.

A measure of the implementation of the law can be seen in the statistics quoted in Alan Bray’s landmark book, “*Homosexuality in Renaissance England*”  

But whatever the legal theorists implied, the actual practice of the courts was not at all in line with this. Alan Macfarlane’s search in the Essex Quarter Sessions records for 1556-1680 did not produce a single case concerned with homosexuality, and his search of the Essex Assize records for 1560-1680 produced only one (dated 1669). A similar conclusion was the result of GR Quaife’s study of the Somerset Quarter Sessions depositions for 1601-1660: the Somerset Justices took a lively interest in sexual immorality, but in all this period only two of the depositions involved homosexuality."

\[5\] Ibid. 

One of the reasons Justices took a “lively interest in sexual immorality” was in an effort to keep as low as possible the number of illegitimate children who would become a financial burden upon the parishes. In a society in which marriage was undertaken fairly late, as was the case in Renaissance England, homosexual relations had the advantage of not producing unwanted offspring so, while condemning sodomy as “A detestable and abominable sin” which in Sir Edward Coke’s words, “deserveth death,” communities tended to turn a blind eye — or give a knowing wink — if word got around that men were having sex together.

People probably also tended to keep their counsel rather than denounce the men to the Magistrates because, chances were, the various parties concerned had known each other all their lives. It is hard for us to realize just how circumscribed the lives of ordinary people were in those days. In our own times, when transport is rapid and widely available, when people live in large communities and especially in cities, men are nowadays able to meet not only a much wider variety of men but also strangers with whom they might have anonymous sex. In Renaissance England, however, this was not possible for most men. In 1688, 74% of the English population lived in rural settlements, in villages and hamlets. To place this on an a time-line of English history, this was the year in which James II was deposed and his Protestant daughter Mary and her Dutch husband, William of Orange, jointly ascended the throne as the first Constitutional monarchs. Even though William was known to be homosexual (he was rather more circumspect about his relationships than was James I), it is not in the Court but in the hamlets and villages that we see how localised people’s lives were. There, in rural England, one’s social horizons included probably no more than three or four hundred people so that, as Bray infers:

\[
\text{........ for the great majority of the people homosexuality was not — could not be — a relationship with a stranger or a casual acquaintance: it was overwhelmingly something which took place between neighbours and friends.}
\]

Although such personal knowledge of each other would generally work to the men’s advantage in that each knew how dependable and trustworthy the other

\footnote{7 Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634), often called “Lord Coke”, was one of the most eminent jurists in the history of English law and in his time prosecuted Sir Walter Raleigh and the Gunpowder Plot conspirators as well as impeach Sir Francis Bacon. In his “Institutes of the Laws of England (1628-44),” he also identified sodomites with sorcerers and heretics, and considered this infernal trio part and parcel with “pride, excess of diet, idleness, and contempt of the poor.” See Bray, ibid. p.16, 19.}

\footnote{http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761555059/Coke_Sir_Edward.html}

\footnote{8 Ibid, pp 42-43.}
was, sometimes things went wrong and one or both partners were denounced to the Magistrates. After his survey of court records, Bray indicates that prosecutions occurred in general in three kinds of circumstances:

- **At times of social upheaval when society was looking for scapegoats,** and sodomites were ready-made scapegoats, along with witches and Papists (homosexuals, along with abortionists have replaced communists in the United States as the monsters responsible for all the social upheaval and pain many people feel there nowadays). These occasions were mercifully few and short-lived. England did not have the extended, organized persecutions of sodomites which occurred on the Continent. It is interesting however, to remember this when later on we look at the homophobic excesses of the 18th Century.

- **Where there was malicious intent:** as Bray says, “Since the thirteenth century a charge of homosexuality was a convenient one to bring against someone who could be charged with nothing else.” Bray suggests that the trial and execution for sodomy of John Atherton, Bishop of Waterford and Lismore in Ireland in 1640 was undertaken more as a way of destroying the hated political figure who had appointed him to this high office. And he cites as a second example, the indictment in 1615 of the more humble Edward Bawde, a “yeoman victualler”, who was a thoroughly disliked man in his neighbourhood already convicted of selling ale and beer in short measure. As it happened, Bawde got off, his accusers being charged with conspiring to wrongfully accuse him.

- **The third — and most numerous — class of prosecution was those involving a breach of the peace or a breach of social order** for one reason or another. Two kinds of situations were most common here: first was one in which a man sexually assaulted another (i.e., this was not consensual homosexuality); the second arose when a seduction — often an attempted seduction — went horribly wrong. Commonly, this involved an older man’s interest in a youth whose outraged parents complained to the authorities.

It is also hard for us to imagine how thoroughly our ancestors, especially in the late Middle Ages and Pre-Modern periods, were convinced that the supernatural was real. It was as though all the ancient beliefs in were-wolves, demons, incubi and succubi, spells, incantations and charms, familiars, ghosts and the Devil incarnate had all been press-ganged into the service of homophobia. Added to these netherworld images, our ancestors’ heads were filled with revisionist accounts of the Sodom and Gomorrah story which had by then been twisted and misinterpreted for propaganda reasons by Church and other scholars. Piling fear on fear, threatening anti-Christ depictions of the “Papists” and the King of Spain had been inculcated by the Reformation in

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9 Ibid, pp 71-73.
10 See Bray, ibid, p. 73.
Britain, the Puritan and Calvinist ethics and the Civil War. And, adding insult to injury, this mountainous concoction of superstition and fear was all topped off with a good sprinkling of Classical myths which by then were gradually percolating through into the general culture.

But, if ordinary people did not rush off to the Justices of the Peace with complaints whenever two men had sex, it was not because they did not fear and detest all this superstitious stuff about homosexuality — they did and were genuinely afraid of Divine Wrath and English Justice. Neither was it because they were simply tolerant of homosexuality. Bray suggests that ordinary people were in fact unable to reconcile the concepts involved, that they were almost literally “in two minds” about homosexuality, dissociating the abstract theological and legal aspects from their every-day real-life experiences, either
first-hand if they had tried it themselves, or at further remove when they knew
friends or relatives had done so.

Such a dissociate state of mind becomes even more necessary if it is your own
son or friend who is called a sodomite when, as Church and State both asserted,
sodomites were the offspring of intercourse between a witch and the Devil! An
example of this widely accepted belief is *The Moone-Calfe*, by Michael
Drayton (1563-1631), a fantastic poem in which twins are born as the offspring
of a woman and the Devil. One is female and becomes a debauched
heterosexual; the other is a debauched sodomite who — to underline just how
detestable a sodomite is — is rejected by his own father, the Devil himself! But
we must ask, “Why is sodomy so detestable that even the Devil cannot find a
place for it in his black heart?” Bray\(^{11}\) makes an interesting observation on this
point: he suggests that certainly people took the Sodom and Gomorrah story
literally, and believed if anyone broke God’s law according to Leiviticus,
everyone would be punished, not just individually but collectively, and so the
actions of just two men would invite catastrophe for the multitude. He goes
further, adding that sodomy appeared so threatening, not only because it might
precipitate God’s wrath, but also because sodomy was then understood as part
of human-kind’s proclivity to debauchery and excess. This meant we were all
susceptible if given half a chance, not — as we believe these days — that only
a certain class of men are likely to seek and enjoy sex with their fellow men.

However, that is not the end of Bray’s explanation: he goes on to add what is
perhaps the fundamental thesis, one which is generally overlooked when trying
to understand the condemnation of homosexuality in the Abrahamic religions:
In the beginning God/Javeh/Allah created Order out of primeval Chaos and any
action we do which could disrupt that Order could result in a return to Chaos.
That Order has certain rules associated with it — as witness Noah’s taking a
pair, male and female, of every animal into the Ark. Had he taken two males of
one or more species, that Order would have been destroyed. We still hear
echoes of this line of reasoning when fundamentalist preachers proclaim what
is now a cliché, “*God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve.*”

**The Enlightenment**
The so-called “Enlightenment” began in France in the early 18\(^{th}\) Century. It was
a wide-spread secular and humanitarian movement which rethought everything
from economics to the appreciation of art. This change in Western philosophy
sought to replace Faith with Reason, challenging in the process the traditional
dogma of the Church. Not surprisingly — as we might say today — traditional
values fought back so that, although at one level, this was a century renowned
for libertines and some of the most erotic works in English (including *Fanny*

\(^{11}\) Ibid, p. 23ff.
In 1749, and Cassanova’s Memoirs\textsuperscript{12}, it was also a century which saw some of the worst homophobic episodes in English history and a corresponding escalation in executions for sodomy, both in the civil jurisdiction and in the Royal Navy.

**In the Navy**

There used to be an old joke that the Royal Navy kept afloat on “rum, bum and baccy” while another — perhaps landlubber’s myth — alleged that it was not only to be flogged that sailors were spread-eagled over a barrel … Despite the jokes and even though it is well-nigh impossible to judge how prevalent homosexuality was in the Royal Navy in the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} Centuries, records of Courts Martial and other sources show that the Navy, like the villages on the green and pleasant land had its share too of buggers and buggery.

Naval officers had three ways of avoiding charging a man with the capital crime of buggery. First, as clearly many did, they could simply look the other way rather than report the incident. Or, second, as evidence suggests that some captains did, was to put a man ashore rather than deal with the situation. The third method, as A. N. Gilbert in *Buggery and The British Navy, 1700-1861*\textsuperscript{13} indicates, was to charge them with a lesser offence. A popular one was “uncleanliness”, a vaguely defined crime for which the unfortunate sailor could be flogged but not hanged.

It is worth noting in passing that a similar “dodge” was often employed on land where, to avoid the death penalty, offenders were charged with lesser offences.

It is clear, however, that there was a great deal more buggery in the Navy than the historical record reveals. Gilbert also quotes a rare eye-witness account of sexual behaviour on board Naval vessels:

> *I have been stationed, as you know, in two or three ships and I think they have been thoroughly representative of the best sort of British Seamen. On the D --, homosexuality was rife, and one could see with his own eyes how it was going on between officers. ………nobody was ”shocked” on board either the A -- or the B --. There were half a dozen ties that we knew about. On buggery in particular he wrote, ”To my knowledge, sodomy is a regular thing on ships that go on long cruises. In the warships, I would say that the sailor preferred it.”*

\textsuperscript{12} Cassanova’s Memoirs were written in the 1790s but were not actually published as a complete work until 1960-62).

Sodomy, like rape, always presented problems of proof, the difficulty being to determine exactly at what point the crime had been committed: at penetration, emission or both?

From 1781, both were required in sodomy trials, but this made it almost impossible to prove the crime and so, in 1828, proof of penetration alone was legislated sufficient. However, even penetration was difficult to prove because eye-witnesses had to be able to observe the fact for themselves. Even when eye-witnesses were prepared to swear such evidence, courts martial were often reluctant to convict, given the unreliability of such evidence. Gilbert cites an example from 1762 when in the case of Martin Billin and James Bryan, the witness Joshua James testified that when he saw the men apparently having sex, he ran his hand in between their bodies and: “…..laid hold of Bryan's yard & pulled it out of Billin's fundament ....

This was not sufficient for the court and he was questioned further:

   Q. When you had Bryan's yard in your hand, did you observe whether there had been any emission from it?

   A. I cannot tell whether there was any emission but my hand was moist after handling it ....

   Q. By what means are you sure Bryan's yard had penetrated the body of Billin?

   A. Because as I laid hold of part of his yard, the other part came out with a spring, as if a cork had been drawn out of a bottle.'

Even this graphic evidence was not sufficient to convince the court and so they sentenced Bryan and Billin to only a 1000 lashes.....

Although some commanders might have fudged their reports to avoid charging crew members with sodomy and some courts martial were reluctant to convict on available evidence, it is clear however that the Royal Navy treated sodomy as a crime comparable to murder, mutiny or desertion. Gilbert\textsuperscript{14} says that

\textit{between May 1, 1705 and June 29, 1708......... twelve men were sentenced to death in the Royal Navy. Of the twelve, six were deserters, one was convicted of murder, and the remaining five were found guilty of buggery...Between 1703 and 1710, twelve sailors were tried for buggery or attempted buggery, and six of these men were sentenced to death.}

\textsuperscript{14} ibid.
Table 1. Convictions and Capital Convictions for Five Navy Crimes, 1756-1806

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crime</th>
<th>Convictions</th>
<th>Capital Sentences</th>
<th>Acquittals</th>
<th>Conviction Rate</th>
<th>Capital Conv. % of Conv</th>
<th>Capital Conv. % of Total Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buggery</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Striking an Officer</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutiny</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desertion to Enemy</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the Napoleonic Wars, only two officers were hanged for buggery, one of whom was the only ship’s captain hanged for any offence in the whole period of Gilbert’s study, viz. 1700-1861. He was Captain Henry Allen of the Rattler, who met his end in 1797. Accusations and convictions for sodomy declined sharply after the Napoleonic Wars so that between 1816 and 1829, there were no sodomy trials at all. The last British sailor to be hanged on this charge was a boatswain named William Maxwell who was executed on 7 January, 1829.

Daniel Defoe and the Virtuous Ear
If you have ever wondered, like I did as a boy, if Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday ever “got it on together” as Americans might say today, then forget it: Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) would never have imputed what he believed was the most ignoble appetite to a noble savage. Defoe indeed, was extremely homophobic. In his “On the Public Prosecution and Punishment of Sodomites”\textsuperscript{15}, 1707, he opens his remarks with:

\textit{It is hard to treat of a nauseous Subject, without some loathsom [sic] Expressions, but I shall take Care not to offend the Ears of the chastest Reader, and any one shall be able to read me without Blushes, tho’ I

think, we ought all to blush for the abominable Encrease of Vice in this Age..

He then goes on to argue that, as in Holland, trials of sodomites should be held in private as far as possible so as to avoid undesirable publicity.

_The open Trials of such Cases are accompany’d with so many publick Indecencies, such immodest and obscene Expressions, as are both offensive to the Ears of the Virtuous, and serve but to excite and gratifie the corrupted Appetites of the Vicious......... O tell it not in Gath, nor publish it in Ascalon; smother the Crime and the Criminals too in the dark, and let the World hear no more of it....._

**Mother Clap and her Molly House**

While homosexuality in rural areas was probably always more a matter of who you knew and making the most of opportunities, in the rapidly growing cities of Europe in the late Renaissance there were plenty of places where one could meet other men for sex. For example, for at least half a century before Daniel Defoe lamented the publicity given to “such Monsters”, London men had been meeting informally in St James’ Park. Similarly, men met on the piazzas of Covent Garden, in and around the toilets at Lincoln’s Inn, and on the grassy open space between upper and middle Moorfields.16

Apart from these _al fresco_ meeting places (in modern Gayspeak known as “beats”) by 1700, a network of meeting places, commonly called “Molly Houses”, had grown throughout the built-up area north of the Thames and west to Westminster. These were private houses, inns or other establishments where men could meet clandestinely and in relative safety. Many provided backrooms where in contemporary cant, men could “marry” each other, at least for the few minutes they were together. Privacy was not always an issue: often, several couples “married” each other in these rooms simultaneously; often too, couples left the door open so that patrons sitting or dancing in the main hall could see their every action.

Male brothels had existed in Tudor and Stuart times and they provided some of the features of the Molly Houses, but always for profit; many of the Molly Houses seem to have been run more for the pleasure than for the percentage the host might earn from selling drinks or other services. It is probable that some of the men available there were prostitutes, but for the most part, sex was given and received _gratis_. In this, the modern gay bathhouses, which charge admission but the clients themselves provide each other with the sex for free, seem rather similar to the Molly House.

16 For these geographical locations, see Bray, op. cit., pp 84-85.
The most famous of the Molly Houses was run by a Mrs Margaret Clap, affectionately known as “Mother Clap”. She seems to have been a rather fun-loving “fag-hag” in modern parlance, who opened up her own house to her guests and happily fetched them drinks from the ale-house next door. By all accounts she enjoyed watching the shenanigans of her patrons and joining in the often obscene conversations. The patrons, many of whom were young men dressed as women, flirted, danced and generally had a good time together before perhaps pairing off and disappearing into the back room “chapel” to “marry” each other.

It has been suggested that one of the reasons for the great increase in interest in Molly Houses at that time was because the law made divorce well-nigh impossible and many married men, otherwise doomed to a bleak and loveless life at home, frequented the Molly Houses rather than women in brothels. This would have been not only a cheaper option but also probably one in which they could enjoy the light-hearted companionship of other men as well as sex if they wanted it.

(above): Alexander Pope
(below): Dean Swift

There were other places where men could enjoy the company of men, what the historians call “homo-social clubs”. Of these, the most brilliant was probably the Scriblerians\(^{17}\), whose famous members were John Arbuthnot\(^{18}\), the poets John Gay, Thomas Parnell, and Alexander Pope; Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, and Dean Jonathan Swift. Of these, only Parnell and Oxford were married, Parnell unhappily so. The club was started, largely by the efforts of Dean Swift, in 1723, as a meeting-place for men of “genius” and was intended as a friendship club. Although these friendships did not always run smoothly (the club actually disbanded for several years before re-forming), it was clear that the emotional bonds between the men ran deep, foreshadowing the Victorian and early 20\(^{th}\) Century “homo-affectional” relationships such as depicted in Waugh’s

\(^{17}\) [http://www.glbtq.com/literature/scriblerians.html](http://www.glbtq.com/literature/scriblerians.html)
\(^{18}\) Arbuthnot was Queen Anne’s Scottish physician
“Brideshead Revisited” or in Australia, the friendship between the Governor of
NSW, William Lygon, 7th Earl Beachamp and Henry Lawson. It is also clear
that the *Scriblerians* was the first group in the history of English literature in
which the members’ homo-social and emotional needs would form the basis for
a literary collaboration.\(^{19}\)

History was not so kind to the Molly Houses and their habitués. After a quarrel
with his lover, Mark Partridge — a mollie himself — seems to have talked
indiscreetly and probably unwittingly to members of the Society for the
Reformation of Manners about the Molly Houses his former lover had
frequented. Whether he was coerced into turning informer or whether the
members of the Society did not disclose their identities to him, is not known,
but the result was that during 1725 Partridge led men who might or might not
have been policemen on a guided tour of the Molly Houses. Now the object of
the Society for the Reform of Manners was to collect and lay information
before the magistrates against Sabbath-breakers, drunkenness and debauchery,
and the Society boasted of a long history of exposing sodomy in the
community. So, on a Sunday evening in February, 1726, Mother Clap’s Molly
House was raided and 40 of the patrons carted off to Newgate prison to await
trial. Other houses were raided throughout the month and more mollies
imprisoned. Trials were eventually held, but since none of the men had been
cought in flagrante delicto, most were released for want of evidence. However,
a few were imprisoned, fined, exhibited in the pillory, and three men were
hanged at Tyburn.\(^{20}\)

Apart from the scandal involved, the episode of the Molly Houses is significant
in modern gay history for several reasons:

- It is from the fact married men were caught in the Molly Houses having
  a good time with other men dressed as women that the modern argument
  “homosexuality is a threat to marriage” would seem to stem;
- Although cross-dressing was known in Tudor and earlier times, usually it
  was done to deceive, to make men think other men were women; in the
  Molly houses, cross-dressing was done for its own sake — the
  transvestites never sought to deceive; and
- The Molly Houses give us one of the earliest and clearest descriptions of
  a homosexual underground in which men were prepared to plan for sex
  with other men, not just take it where they found it, and to travel across
town to an area where the resources they wanted were concentrated in

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\(^{19}\) A very successful collaborative group of American gay writers was *The Violet Quill*,
formed in the mid-1970s, and included William White, Andrew Holleran, Robert Ferro,
Felice Picano, George Whitmore, Christopher Cox, and Michael Grumley. Of the six, only
White and Holleran survived the AIDS crisis.

\(^{20}\) Norton, R.: , "Mother Clap’s Molly House", *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century
much the same way as gay men in Sydney travel to Oxford Street or Newtown.

- The Molly Houses were also what might be termed “democratic” in the sense that men mixed there irrespective of age, wealth, social class or education.

**More Scribbers and Madge-Culls**

Towards the end of the 18th Century things were no more tolerant: in 1772, less than a year after Captain Cook had returned home after claiming the east coast of Australia for Britain, homophobic sentiments similar to those Daniel Defoe had expressed were published in a long and complicated series of “Letters to the Printer”, an early version of “Letters to the editor” of *The Morning Chronicle* and *London Advertiser*. They followed the pardon by the King of Captain Robert Jones who had been convicted and sentenced to death for buggering 13-year-old boy who might have been a prostitute and who certainly had been a consenting partner. The pardon had been granted because the court had convicted on the evidence of the boy alone, who might have been coached to give evidence of penetration, and subsequent legal opinion was that this was not safe. Rictor Norton when publishing these letters on-line, summarizes them thus:

> All of the legal arguments were discussed in great detail in the newspapers, and a very full summary of the trial was published in three newspapers. Aside from arguments about the facts of the case, many contributors to the debate also contrasted the British legal system regarding sodomy to the legal systems of other countries, from ancient Rome to modern France, and calls were made to reform the penal laws.

> ......... The context of the debate also has much of interest: Captain Jones was a well-known character in the fashionable world, famous for popularizing ice skating and fireworks, and this affair was connected with an attack on David Garrick as a sodomite which also occurred in 1772, when Garrick’s supposed lover Isaac Bickerstaffe had to flee to France. ......... Everyone in London (and probably most people in the rest of Great Britain) who read a newspaper during August–September 1772 ......... would have been made fully aware of homosexuality: from explicit detailed descriptions of anal intercourse and masturbation; to legal, religious, and social attitudes to homosexuality; to supposed characteristics of homosexual men; to its prevalence across society.

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22 ibid
The correspondence is long and written in the turgid and verbose style of the period, so it does not make easy reading in more ways than because of its content. A few snippets must suffice us here:

- *For God’s sake, Mr. Printer, what are you about? Surely you carry your ideas of impartiality too far! It is certainly commendable in you to side with neither party in personal and political disputes; but every man ought to be partisan in morals.*

- *I may venture to affirm, that the crime against nature will never make any great progress in society, unless people find themselves induced to it in other respects by some particular custom, as among the Greeks, where young people performed all their exercises naked……*

- *I importune your reflection on a subject that stands parallel, if not past, any of the horrid crimes that grace the page of infamy, that vile, unnatural, detestable sin of sodomy. A crime so destructive to human society to come within the circle of Royal approbation, stages my imagination. Mercy, when well administered, ought to be applauded by every man who holds commiseration in his breast for his fellow-creatures; but when I see these well-meant rules of lenity o’er-leaped by an extension of Royal mercy to a being which ought not be, whose actions are abhorrible both to God and man, claims the attention of every individual……*

- *[and because Captain Jones was apparently transported to the American colonies]…… Why, in the name of wonder, Mr. Printer, would you send your s[odomite]s over to us? Have we not enough of your rogues already, or would you plant that vice too in our once virtuous land……*

This last was signed “Americanus”.

A little later, in his “A View of Society and Manners in High and Low Life” George Parker writes about what he calls “Madge Culls”, one of the most abandoned and infamous characters that disgrace Society, who practice a vice which he says was imported into England from Italy:

> These wretches have many ways and means of conveying intelligence, and many signals by which they discover themselves to each other; they have likewise several houses of rendezvous, whither they resort: but their

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23 The Shorter Oxford Dictionary does not list this word which, presumably is intended to mean “abhorrant”.
chief place of meeting is the Bird-cage Walk, in St. James's Park, whither they resort about twilight.

They are easily discovered by their signals, which are pretty nearly as follow: If one of them sits on a bench, he pats the backs of his hands; if you follow them, they put a white handkerchief thro' the skirts of their coat, and wave it to and fro; but if they are met by you, their thumbs are stuck in the arm-pits of their waistcoats, and they play their fingers upon their breasts.

By means of these signals they retire to satisfy a passion too horrible for description, too detestable for language; a passion which deserves the punishment not of the law only, but an exclusion from Society on the most light glance of just suspicion of it.