

The creation of Stonewall

Duncan Campbell

The Stonewall Group was formed for the defence of lesbian and gay people after the notorious, now repealed, Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act became law.

Clause (later, Section) 28 was first proposed as an amendment to a new Local Government law in December 1987.

Action against the proposed law began in January 1988. Arts, media, medical and other anti-clause groups formed. The "Stop the Clause" campaign organised meetings and street protests. Professional groups organising against Clause 28 included the Arts Lobby (Ian McKellen, Michael Cashman and others), the Media Group (Matthew Paris, Lance Price, Rose Collis, Simon Fanshawe, Duncan Campbell, and others) and the Medical Campaign (Dr Peter Rivas and others).

The groups co-operated to generate, fund and publish a full page newspaper advertisement in the Independent newspaper on 1 February 1988, prior to a House of Lords debate on Clause 28. Matthew Parris and Ian McKellen wrote the text for the advertisement, which was published under the headline "A Sense of Alarm". 280 people signed the declaration.

On Tuesday 16 February 1988, at a meeting at Ian McKellen's house in Limehouse, Doug Slater (a civil servant working as a House of Lords clerk) privately briefed the groups on how best to operate in the parliamentary environment. Out Conservative MP Matthew Paris was present, and said he would approach Peter Mandelson to join in campaigning (Mandelson declined to be involved). Sadly, the initiatives were unsuccessful. The Bill, and Clause 28 (thus becoming Section 28) passed third reading on **24 May 1988**.

During the summer of 1988, Ian McKellen continued to work with the Arts Lobby, and reconnected people in some of the groups who had worked on the advertisement proposing further meetings. He proposed a meeting at his house to turn back the tide of hate.

The first meeting, of six people, was **Sunday 11 September 1988**. Ian suggested the group bond by making a statement of common purpose and intent to mark the day. Duncan typed the agreed declaration on his computer, and printed copies for everyone to sign. This became referred to as the "second Limehouse declaration".

Six copies of the declaration were printed and signed. Four copies are believed to have survived. [The later Douglas Slater signed, but asked that his name not be printed.]

Within eight months, this simple statement of common purpose became Stonewall. The founding group met many times again during 1988 and 1989, raised funds from themselves and recruited 9 new members to register and form The Stonewall Group Ltd.

Stonewall was publicly launched one year after Section 28 became law, on **24 May 1989**.

24 May 2019 will be the 30th anniversary of the launch of Stonewall by the fourteen founders and group members (names listed on the group press release of 20 May 1988).