

1965

The trial  
of  
John Clarkson  
at  
Nottingham  
Assizes



Gay men were routinely imprisoned until the 1967 Sexual Offences Act partially decriminalised gay sex.



**John Clarkson in 1985**



**Ray Gosling**

**Nottingham-based  
reporter and  
TV documentary maker**



The Galleries of Justice museum contains a court room. The court was originally used as the Nottingham Assizes court and continued to be used as a court until 1991.



The picture shows the court room where the trial of John Clarkson took place.

The court room now forms part of the tour of the Galleries of Justice museum.

In 1987 Ray interviewed John for a Channel 4 TV programme called "Socially unacceptable". John talked about his experience 22 years earlier in 1965.

In 1965 John was investigated by the police in connection with a shoplifting incident. During this investigation they found out that John was living with a 28 year old man, Billy, and the police became inordinately interested in the bedroom. They also found a Christmas card which said "To Billy, with all my love as ever - John".

John was bullied into admitting that he slept with Billy. Held separately at the police station, each being told the other one had confessed, they both allegedly gave statements incriminating each other. The statements are unlikely to have been genuine: they were written in "police speak" and both ended with absolutely identical wording.

Eventually a trial took place at the court which is now in the Galleries of Justice Museum.

The journalist who reported on the case was Ray Gosling. He said that the trial involved the most humiliating things he had ever seen in his life. Two ushers held up bed sheets and a clerk pointed out stains to the jury. A jar of lubricant was passed around the jury ... “notice the pubic hair”, they were told. A police constable produced a list of items including a soiled towel and two pairs of pink briefs.

The end result was that John was sent to prison for two years and his partner was given three years.

Ray Gosling was so incensed by the proceedings that it became the trigger for him to become a gay rights activist. One of the first things he did was to write to the then chief constable and say “why don’t you arrest me too”.

John was one of thousands of gay men who suffered under pre-1967 legislation.

One of the most significant was the mathematician Alan Turing, famous for breaking the German Enigma code.



In 1952 he was arrested because he was gay. He was given a choice: go to jail or take “the cure”.

He chose “the cure”, but the effect of the drugs he was given was so depressing that he took an apple, injected it with cyanide, bit into it and died.