



PRESSING MATTERS

PETER BURTON, THE WRITER AND STALWART OF BOTH NATIONAL AND LOCAL GAY JOURNALISM, TELLS GSCENE'S ROGER WHEELER ALL ABOUT HIS LONG CAREER, WHAT'S GOING ON WITH BRIGHTON AND WHAT HE REGRETS MOST ABOUT LAS VEGAS...

With 19 books to his credit, Peter Burton is one of the country's leading gay authors and has been writing for the gay press for 40 years. Born in 1945, he has lived in London, Ibiza and New York before settling in Brighton in 1977. He was partially responsible for the success of *Gay Times* and is now literary editor of *3Sixty Magazine* and contributes book reviews to its sister publication, *one80news*. He also writes book reviews for the *Daily Express*.

Peter, you have lived in Brighton for the past 30 years. What made you choose this town?

After a year in New York, London seemed very provincial – so I decided to move to the provinces.

Would you live anywhere else?

Bath. It's so beautiful, or maybe Manchester, where I have friends.

What is your happiest memory?

I have many happy memories but not one that especially stands out.

What's your opinion of Brighton today?

I love Brighton but it remains a seaside town with ideas above its station.

If you had the power, what would you change in Brighton today?

The traffic. Brighton is now as difficult to get around as London or New York.

What is your opinion of the current Brighton Festival?

The Brighton Festival gets duller every year and seems almost totally oblivious to what is being created here.

You have met many famous people in the world of literature. Who stands out as the most memorable?

The novelist – and former Brighton resident – Francis King. He's been a friend for 40 years and I admire him as both a man and writer.

You are highly committed to the gay press and gay literature and you were partially responsible for the success of *Gay Times*. What do you attribute this success to?

It followed on from *Gay News*, which had been the first commercially successful British gay publication. But I like to think *Gay Times* did it better – as a magazine we had colour and we were glossy and quite simply looked much better. And, of course, the content was terrific – news, night life, literature and the whole range of cultural events.

What is your opinion of the current attitude towards HIV/Aids?

I am afraid it seems to be rather slipping from our consciousness. And that's dangerous.

Of all the authors you have reviewed, which one would you like to have dinner with?

Noel Coward or W Somerset Maugham. Both highly successful writers not taken particularly seriously by the critics and commentators.

Who, in your opinion, has contributed the most to the cultural life of Brighton?

The Prince Regent. He set the whole ball rolling.

What is the most important decision you have ever made?

To spend almost my entire working life within the gay press. In some respects it marginalised me, but I've spent 40 years doing something I believe in and love.

You have been involved in many major events in Brighton. Which of them do you think is the most important and has made the greatest impact?

I'm very pleased to be involved as literary co-ordinator with the Clifton, Montpelier and Powis Festival – we are Brighton- and Sussex-focused and are just at the planning stage of our third year.

Have you achieved your ambitions?

I think I've mostly achieved my ambitions.

We've all thought about what we would do if we won the lottery – what would be your first act?

There are lots of things I'd like to do if I won the lottery but the first would be a very alcoholic dinner with close friends.

What is your favourite book?

The Wind In The Willows by Kenneth Grahame.

Favourite play?

Hay Fever by Noel Coward.

Favourite piece of music?

La Mer by Charles Trénet.

What is your favourite holiday destination?

I don't do holidays.

“The Prince Regent contributed the most to the cultural life of Brighton. He set the whole ball rolling”

What is your biggest personal fault?

I am very insecure.

Any regrets?

Not going to see Elvis in Las Vegas when I was invited.

If you had a magic wand and could change just one thing, what would it be?

I'd make myself taller – I've always been irritated by my height – and thinner. No chance!

Do you have a guilty pleasure?

Wanking (*That famous small town in China* – Ed).

Are you happy?

Yes.

What do you consider to be your greatest personal achievement?

Surviving.

What do you dislike most in other people?

Meanness, selfishness, self-pity.

What makes you frown or upsets you?

The man I love.

What makes you smile or makes you happy?

The man I love.

What was your happiest moment?

Too many to list, but falling in love (again) at the age of 63 was surprising, unexpected and has totally blown me away.