

# A history of the Beaumont Society



by Alice L100

Initially there were four of us who were members of Virginia Prince's organisation Phi Pi Epsilon (standing for Full Personality Expression) based in the States which supplied a Journal called 'Transvestia' who were from the British Isles.

A European Chapter of FPE formed, which gradually subdivided into the UK based Beaumont Society (named after the Chevalier D'Eon de Beaumont), ABC in France and the Scandinavian Groups of FPE North Europe. Giselle was an American FPE Member living in Europe, and Alga and Sylvia were her deputies in FPE Europe.



The Beaumont Society was founded as a branch of FPE. It was a secret Society based in California. Its purpose was

1. To provide information and education to the general public, the medical and legal professions on transvestism and to encourage research aimed at fuller understanding.
2. To provide TV's with an opportunity for a social life together.

Giselle, Alga and Sylvia were all in the UK in the summer of 1965 so they met up to get the thing started.

We eventually corresponded through the FPE Contact System before setting up and using the original BM 3084 Box number. Alga Campbell from Dublin initiated the first UK grouping, starting the numbering from 100 (me) and back and forward from that. This was to give the impression that there were more of us than actually existed at that time in the Society. The Society had almost as many overseas members then as in the UK, with members in Malaysia, Kenya and the old Empire. Liaison with other European groups was close.

I was chosen as overseas contact as I speak French and a little of various other European Languages. Alga was President and Sylvia Carter was Secretary. Regional Contacts were appointed, often being at first the only person in that Region.

After an initial meeting in Hampstead our first 'full meeting' was in 1966, in a Southampton hotel. I think there were twelve of us if you include two wives. My dog Ollie also attended, he felt he was a person - species dysphoria.

You could not be a full member and attend meetings unless you had been 'vetted' i.e. sponsored by a member of the Committee (not in the same way my dog had been vetted!).

The Society was founded at a time when there was little knowledge about Trans and even less tolerance from public, the Law or the police.

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Although it was not in 1966, and is not illegal to 'Dress in public' you could and probably would be arrested for disturbing the peace, importuning or worse. Most people thought 'Trannies' were the same as drag queens and only 'dressed-up' to attract men for gay sex. Shame, fear of public exposure, divorce or blackmail were real threats. So much ignorance, confusion and prejudice existed then.

This is why it was felt that, although we were never anti-gay, we had to exclude any hint of being a homosexual society by stating and insisting as the membership application form demanded and sponsorship insisted that no hint of overt gayness would be tolerated. It was also to provide some comfort for wives and girlfriends who were often as confused about the whole thing as the general public.

It was also risky meeting others to sponsor them. I remember a character from Gibraltar who was very cagey indeed, who I arranged via the contact system to sponsor so she could attend meetings when in the UK; (you could not do so if not sponsored as they were often in people's homes). At the meeting in a car park this person told me my date & place of birth, schools and University, bank balance and workplace. I was horrified. He had discovered all this via our Secret Service for whom he worked in the Colony.

He said he did this to secure his own confidentiality in case we breached his. I felt disinclined to sponsor him and was really horrified that even then governments held so much info' on all of us. I did sponsor him after discussion with Alga. It was a bit of a mutual standoff, but what an invasion of my own privacy!

Pamela produced the first Beaumont Bulletin; a three-page purple typed and copied Official newsheet of the Beaumont Society UK.

In January 1968 the Society produced an 8 page typed Bulletin (vol. 1) on coloured paper at first, published each 2 months.

Someone coined the terms 'GG or RG' (genetic-girl or real girl) when referring to wives etc. I can barely believe how mutually offensive those terms were. Crossdressers were called 'TV's'. This covered TV, TG and TS at first.

As a point of interest electrolysis cost 12/6 to 15/- a visit in 1968 (75p per hour).

The Society stated it was 'for heterosexual transvestites and gender motivated transsexuals'. We had very strong rules on confidentiality. The BS produced 'An introduction to the Beaumont Society' - three sheets of A4 typed and folded to make a six-page document, printed and designed by Caroline (228).

Alga (101) was President and published and printed the Beaumont Bullitin, Sylvia (92) the Secretary, and Margaret (67) was the Chairwoman of the Representative Committee, and there were Regional Officers who made up this group, with Area Representatives. All offices were elected after the initial appointees had sorted the basics out, and all were volunteers (those who did not step back got the job if they were suitable and willing to do it).

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In 1969 Pamela took over editing the BB. The BS remained an affiliated to FPE, but was an independent Society, with similar rules and aims.

In 1969 Virginia said she would be visiting the BS in England, so on August 9th that year a Dinner was planned in London to celebrate this, after Virginia did a tour of 'her UK girls' in Scotland, Leicester and London. Nine of us attended the London dinner also three wives and the honorary members the Cordells.

By 1970 the BB was 24 pages, the first jokes appeared in vol. 2#8, we had about 140 members by then and the highest membership Number was 210. Input from two wives was included in the May '70 issue as was the membership list. The contact system was working and small local meetings in people's homes were taking place. Also braver members went to clubs (usually gay clubs) where dressing was not a problem, but the gays seemed to have as little understanding of TV as the public, though they did not mind the 'dressing'.

Membership by 1970 cost £3 per year.

In 1970 the Library was set up, a librarian was appointed.

In 1971 (Sep 24th) the 'Inaugural Dinner of the BS' was held - wives free - full evening dress. Several memorable things happened. The management of the Restaurant had been told about the 'TV Situation' and so the staff got a pep talk from the manager, but they got it all wrong and called everyone including wives 'Sir' instead of Madam!

At the Dinner we found by a show of hands that about 30% of members were engineers and most of these were into steam trains.

One member was Colonel of a Guards Regiment; he arrived with an Elastoplast over his moustache and looked very odd in a frock, which must have once belonged to Queen Alexandra with a diamond choker over his Adam's apple.

One poor soul who hadn't the courage to come 'in mode' got so drunk he passed out and had to be carried out by four rather tall ladies in full evening dresses.

The commissionaire, an ex RSM, said to me he thought these folk had more courage than he had needed in Korea facing the enemy.

He thought I was someone's wife so asked me what it must be like married to someone with such a great secret. Many member who passed well were let down by deep voices and male body language, mind you I have met quite a few women for whom that is also true.

In the Jan'72 BB we saw the first (B/W) photos of 7 the members. There were articles by understanding wives, "My first time out" stories and so on. Margaret Elizabeth (67) was by then the editor; using stencils, cutting and pasting, in glorious black and white were still producing it. Later that year London brought out it's own regional newsletter.

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Alice, Alga, Virginia and Sylvia at the first Beaumont Society Dinner in 1971

We created a new Constitution that year. Local groups like Candida and Fairlawn started to produce their own journals. Virginia stayed at my house during that year's visit among other things. We had a lot of liaison with our European sisters during this period The second dinner (£4.50) was in the BBC's Forum Restaurant, a very grand affair. We had good contact with the BEEB because of my doing a Home Service Programmes with Claire Rainer, which later went out on the World Service. I was shocked to hear my voice on the wireless when in France that summer. June did a radio show for Leeds local radio. Hinge & Bracket provided the super Cabaret at the dinner, which was attended by 140 members and 25 wives and included people from Ireland France and Belgium.

We had 'arrived' and the 'T pound' had made it's mark, the restaurant really wanted us back.

Local groups within the BS like Birchette Belles were going strong, but the hostess had a run-in with the local police. She had gone out dressed, had been 'read', she was arrested paraded at the police station wig off and frock on, and the 'story' appeared in the local rag. The wife was so enraged she stood out against the local community and the abuse from the police and the press and stood by her husband. It was silly to go out at 1 am 'to post a letter' though.

By mid 1973 there were 233 members and the highest member number was 696. People came and went and gradually and generally the Society seemed to be a little middle aged middle class if slightly twee, rather the same image as the Women's Institute without the jam, knitting (or thank God, the nude Calendar!). It was however safe for members and their families.

Some articles seem to have been anti TS which is odd as half the executive were TS or TG.

By the end of 1974 the Executive Committee consisted of Alga still the Chair, Sylvia Secretary, Caroline 228 Asst Secretary, Treasurer Jacqueline 590, PRO Margaret 67, Chair of the Organisers Committee June 147, Social Co-ordinator Jacqueline and European Co-ordinator Alice 100

The first Conference on 'TV&TS in Modern Society' was held at Leeds University in March '74. Conference '75 was at Leicester University.

Rosemary 360, and Janet and Jacqueline and Vicky were doctors and I was a nurse and a couple of us were Samaritans. We felt there were problems, which involved more than the social aspect of the Society and a requirement to field complex questions with a rather more professional approach was needed. So the idea of an independent Charitable Trust was formulated. This eventually became the Beaumont Trust, in 1975, with its helpline, answering letters and produced leaflets and publications and provided speakers to educate others in the field. Its main benefactor was the Society. It has its own BM address, at BM CHARITY, WCIN 3XX. - Which is not the same as the society.

In April 1976 after Alga's 10 years in office she stepped aside and Sylvia became President, I gained 'Vice' as a title.

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The format of the BB was changed and we even included a crossword. Later that year I started editing the BB, which often meant using glue and scissors. Steve Whittle was a member and helped me with artwork etc, as well as baby sitting for us. That is how he met his wife Sarah as we had double booked them one night. The quality of the BB improved with time and experience, including some quite nice Art Deco covers from Steve.

By Jan '77 I became President (and Overseas Co-ordinator) and edited and compiled the BB with Steve using stencils and cut and paste methods. We separated the fun and fiction (jokes and fantasy) into a companion Beaumag. Janet Rainer took over as Editor in Sept'79, providing a tidier but somewhat less contentious BB and Beaumag was changed.

Meriel Latham was vice President. We provided a much more professional BB with a separate Membership list, which contained confidential information. Janet Rainer became Editor of BB, until 1982 when Claire Davis did this job. Barbara Ross founded Oasis, and groups like Northern Concord and others had very good relationships with the Society.

During 1982/3 we had several EC meetings to sort out a revised Constitution.

WOBS was set up by and for a support group for wives and partners, and continues largely thanks to Diana.

Meriel took over the Presidency in 1984 and I continued to act as Overseas elder-stateswoman and providing liaison with the Trust.

A revised Constitution was ratified and published in Sept 1986.

Helen Fisher took on the Presidency in August 1988, Gloria Black in June 1999, and Janett Scott in 1990. Over these 15 years she and the present EC have done much to modernise the Society. Tammy's input surely shows that the BS is definitely not anti-TS. The Police are no longer a threat. Society is growing up and diversity is celebrated. I hope never again to hear of the suicide of a friendless trannie or hate crimes.

Meanwhile local meetings were taking place as well as the Annual Dinner and larger events. Although entirely independent the Trust made regular reports. We also had good working relationships with many other Trans groups.

Meantime I was working in parallel in S.H.A.F.T., later setting up and founding Gender Trust and GENDYS and the running Conferences.

The issues for Transsexuals, Transgendered, Transvestites and crossdressers are similar and the Society remains the longest standing support group for all these people. Equally it has been helpful that there are other groups dealing with specific geographical areas and types of support in the trans spectrum.

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In the BS we went into much improved, larger professional publication glossy, colour, and the use of modern technology Website etc, which has meant the entire Organisation has moved into the new Millennium with gusto!

Over these forty years how society has changed, as well as the BS. Both continue to evolve. Many thanks are due to the hard work and commitment of all our volunteers and members and many partners over the years.

Why have I stuck with it over two thirds of my life, attending over one hundred and sixty EC meetings? I will not forget the sight of a small boy who had hanged himself dressed in his sister's clothes I saw on my way home from work in 1965. He was too ashamed to tell anyone how he felt, there was no one there to listen. Forty years on I hope that all types of 'trans-people' can feel at ease as part of the normal spectrum of humanity and be happy.

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