Attempting a comprehensive account of the history of Brighton's queer politics, would inevitably leave some hurtful gaps. As a historian I'm also aware that it would probably end up privileging the sorts of activism and politics that leave the most public trace, in newspapers, court records and the statute books. Those that might be transformative in very different ways:

in communities, in relationships and in our emotional lives can easily get sidelined.

Instead I thought I would just outline the complex relationships within queer politics and how they intersect with Brighton's own messy history and close by suggesting why I think an anthology like this is the perfect way into the very heart of what makes queer politics so important. Important not just for queer history, but for the history of the City as a whole.

Brighton has its moments in the big national history of queer politics. What happens in Brighton can be a useful illustration of the over-riding political narrative. The variety of ways in which queer people have experienced marginalisation and repression is written into the history of the City. And we can certainly find the points at which the LGBT community, and families and friends, have kicked back against it. We can see Brighton pop up in all the big moments in the queer politics. Brighton was a backdrop to some of the key campaigns around what we now call LGBT politics. Some key political figures were informed by their experience of the queer scene in Brighton, for example Tom Driberg, left-wing MP and gossip columnist, and apparent Cold-War traitor, used to frequent Brighton cottages in his teenage years. Brighton has also been the site of sensational crimes that caught the early press fascination with the 'underworld' of gay
lives, such as in 1962 when the ‘Twilight’ killer’s murder of two men gained national press coverage.

In terms of traditional formal politics, Brighton’s conference season brought a series of political debates to Brighton’s doorstep. TUC, political party and pressure group conferences have been picketed, invaded and politely addressed by LGBT activists. Its cultural industries have raised issues of representation and marginalisation (when activists picketed John Inman’s performance for example). If we were to write a national history of political activism since the 1960s, Brighton and its queer activists would be at the heart of every major event and issue: work and employment legislation; challenging Section 28 and building community organisation around AIDS; reproductive rights, women’s peace camps; fighting domestic violence; ethical trading; the age of consent and the role of institutions like the military, marriage, and religion.

Resistance and self representation are therefore woven into Brighton’s political history in ways that illuminate all of queer politics different forms. The Brighton Gay Liberation Front was set up in 1971, by academics and activists attached to the city and to the relatively new University of Sussex. Some of these went on to spearhead LGBT academic work. The more formal, sometimes derided as ‘respectable’, organisations like the Campaign for Homosexual Equality similarly saw Brighton as the political gay capital, holding their own annual conferences in the city. Although often artificially set up as one form of politics subsuming, or ‘winning out’ over the other, the liberal, revolutionary forms of queer activism have always co-existed with those focussing on law reform, commercial enterprise and more grassroots community support - although not always harmoniously. The most public event of Brighton’s activist history, Pride, seems like a useful way to explore the changes, and tensions amongst queer activists.

In 1973 Brighton’s first Gay Pride march was organised by the Brighton Gay Liberation Front. Explicitly tied to the playful, public, performative styles of liberational activism, Brighton’s Gay Pride was a Carnival -- not in the ticketed commercial sense, but in the sense of Carnival’s deep folk roots as a form of irreverent dissent. It took until 1990, under the onslaught of Thatcherism, for Pride to be taken up again in Brighton as a form of political resistance and public celebration. Since its earliest days queer politics had been grappling with the tensions around the need for safe space. It was often the commercial market that seemed to be capable of organising and maintaining these spaces, which were then accused of putting profit over the political possibilities of...
organising from within such spaces. The debates about the bars and clubs of the 1960s and early 1970s, were replayed over Pride. By 1998 activist zine The Evening Argue described Pride as a 'boozing and cruise march'. Whilst going to your first Pride might give you a sense of you're not the only one. Then in later years you realise you're just fodder for the niche marketing of companies.[1] This tension between personal investment and commercial interest has continued in the history of Brighton Pride. In 2013 Pride organisers recognised that 'Pride was born out of protest', but made it clear that there were limits to what sorts of politics would be allowed on the Parade. Criticism of sponsors or institutional participants was not to get in the way of the Carnival. 2013 too saw the first ever Trans Pride event suggesting official pride is not the only model and questioning Pride's claim to universality.

Pride shows how Brighton is a handy case study through which to track the tensions, creative contradictions and innovative possibilities of queer politics more generally. But sometimes it is Brighton that takes centre stage in the wider history of queer politics. Brighton demonstrates that this isn't a simple story where one political approach disappears as a single problem is solved, instead the challenges and victories of queer politics in the past re-appear, re-imagined and re-experienced.

In this context the Queer in Brighton anthology and project helps us collect and preserve the myriad of experiences, creative tensions and faultlines within queer politics. The importance of being heard, being seen and demanding to be able to tell one's own story is at the heart of the history of queer politics. As activist academic Alan Sinfield wrote, 'Every lesbian and every gay man is a walking library of information on our life and times.' They are the key to the history of LGBT experience and go beyond it. Oral History is messy. It slips between the personal and political, the remembered and the re-evaluated, the individual and the shared collective stories. Each person's story fits into, complicates and challenges the stories of the city that are already in circulation.