

A Complete Portrait of Arthur Jeffress

1961 Death in Paris

Arthur Jeffress was an attentive host, especially in the summer months in Venice at home and on the lido, but lived on his own. He travelled extensively often in search of sexual adventure and as a queer man was obliged by severe laws and penalties to take many risks. He paid for sex throughout his life but spent time in France, Italy and Greece, and later Japan, where homosexuality was not illegal although discretion was still essential.



Roloff Beny,
Jeffress in his gondola 1960,
image Roloff Beny Estate,
Southampton City Archives



The last image of Arthur
Jeffress,
Corfu 1961,
Southampton City
Archives



Jeffress in his gondola
the carpet of which
changed to match the
evening's cocktails,
Southampton City
Archives



Arthur Jeffress c 1955
Southampton City Archives

Returning from a holiday to Greece in 1961 the Italian authorities prevented him from landing in Venice and Jeffress was banned from Italy. No reason was given but there was a newly aggressive approach to homosexual foreigners in Venice at the time. It is believed that Jeffress had specifically offended the city's mayor. Jeffress was finally allowed to leave Venice and, because of delays, could not immediately return home to London although Edna Fleming and Robert Melville urged him to.

Arthur Jeffress went instead to his favourite Paris hotel and took an overdose of barbiturates (not poison from his ring as widely believed) and died aged fifty six.

He bequeathed his "subversive" collection to the Tate, Southampton and close friends. The monies from the sale of the gallery and his London flat were left to a cancer charity (his fortune had derived from tobacco) and the bulk to a sailors' charity to be used, he specified, for male naval ratings only for the pleasure they had given him throughout his life. There is still £2.5m in the fund.