

THE HIDDEN CIRCLE GAZETTE

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CULTURE

Sophie Lancaster

BY CURT WOODMAN — 2025-04-15



Murdered for Being Goth

Sophie Lancaster was a vibrant, creative, and deeply compassionate young woman. Born in 1986, Sophie was known for her kindness, intelligence, and love for literature. She found a sense of belonging in the alternative scene, where music, fashion, and philosophy aligned with her values of self-expression and individuality.

Sophie was instantly recognisable with her multiple facial piercings and often multicoloured dreadlocks. She'd been a vegetarian from the age of six, used to proselytise to her family on issues such as world poverty, and was a voracious reader. At the time she was on a gap year, after which she was planning to study English. Some of her favourite bands were My Chemical Romance¹, Korn² and Slipknot³) and, while she's been commonly referred to as a goth in the media, she didn't like to be pigeonholed.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Chemical_Romance

²<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korn>

³[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slipknot_\(band\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slipknot_(band))

⁴<https://blizzardcomedy.co.uk/2024/02/25/rob-maltby-art-2402/>

She and her boyfriend, [Rob Maltby](#)⁴, stood out in a small town like [Bacup Lancashire](#)⁵. Sophie had met the 21-year-old art student from Manchester through a friend two years earlier. The couple had quickly formed a deep bond.

We'd see friends at weekends, but day-to-day it was just the two of us. It was always just Rob and Sophie. Rob Maltby

On the night of August 11, 2007, the couple met a group of teenagers at a petrol station, where Maltby had been buying cigarettes after spending the evening at a friend's house. Together they went to [Stubbylee Park](#)⁶. As the couple chatted with the group and shared cigarettes, *Ryan Herbert* and *Brendan Harris*, both 15 at the time, suddenly began kicking and punching Maltby in a frenzied attack that left him unconscious, his brain bleeding. Before Maltby received the first blow the gang was heard to say "*let's beat him up*" and "*we'll bang them*".

When Sophie moved to protect her defenceless boyfriend, the attackers turned on her. Witnesses said she was cradling Maltby's head when she was set upon. They kicked and stomped on her repeatedly, leaving her with catastrophic injuries.

Some of the other teenagers tried to stop what was happening. A boy repeatedly called for help, opening his second call by saying: "*Please, they're fl*!*\ing dying, please, please.*" A 14-year-old girl also called in: "*...this [mosher](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/mosher)'s been banged because he's a mosher...*" That was the only explanation given for the attack that summer's evening.

Watch: <https://youtu.be/IYLqVpC9fiY?feature=shared>

Sophie's valiant action that night saved her boyfriend's life, but she never regained consciousness. She passed away thirteen days later, on August 24, 2007 when her family agreed to turn off life support.

Her death shook the alternative community. It was a stark reminder that prejudice and violence against subcultures were still very real. The timing of the attack did not help; it was one of a series of unconnected crimes that triggered a period of intense media coverage and national soul-searching.

My initial memory was seeing the coffin and thinking, that's too small. Her entire life shouldn't have fitted into that small box. Rob Maltby

Her mother, Sylvia Lancaster, refused to let her daughter's death be in vain. She founded the [Sophie Lancaster Foundation](#)⁷, working tirelessly to raise awareness about hate crimes against alternative subcultures. The foundation campaigned for better recognition of these attacks as hate crimes and worked to educate young people about tolerance and acceptance.

She was a beautiful girl with a social conscience and values which made her a joy to know. Not being able to see her blossom into her full potential or even to see her smile again is a tragedy beyond words. Sylvia Lancaster

Sophie's story became a symbol of resilience. The goth and alternative communities rallied together, holding vigils, creating artwork, and raising funds in her memory. At the alternative electronic music festival [Infest](#)⁸ in Bradford on 26 August 2007, just after Lancaster's death, *Ronan Harris* of [VNV Nation](#)⁹ dedicated the song [Illusion](#)¹⁰ to her and contacted the family to offer his condolences. Festivals like [Bloodstock](#)¹¹ dedicated stages to her, and bands like [Delain](#)¹² and [The Damned](#)¹³ paid tribute in their music.

⁵<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bacup>

⁶<https://maps.app.goo.gl/BtfRMQMchSuS6Rym8>

⁷<https://www.sophielancasterfoundation.com>

⁸[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infest_\(festival\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infest_(festival))

⁹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VNV_Nation

¹⁰<https://youtu.be/mVf2EeTMNJo?feature=shared>

¹¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloodstock_Open_Air

¹²<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delain>

¹³[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Damned_\(band\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Damned_(band))

Watch: <https://youtu.be/QzRTySDnaQI?feature=shared>

--- @youtube(<https://youtu.be/Kpvh1bGxxZ4?feature=shared>)

For Sophie's boyfriend, the media focus on how they were different has always been a difficult thing to come to grips with. As if it somehow explains the violence that was inflicted upon them. In an [interview](#)¹⁴ to [The Guardian](#)¹⁵ in 2017 he said:

It was always like: 'Sophie Lancaster was killed because she was a goth.' No she wasn't: she was killed because some arseholes killed her. Why can't we ask what it is about them that made them want to murder someone? Not what it is about someone that made them be murdered. Rob Maltby

To this day, Sophie Lancaster's name is spoken not just in sorrow, but in defiance ~ her legacy a reminder that no one should suffer violence for simply being who they are. She lives on in every person who dares to be different and refuses to conform, in every act of kindness toward those who stand apart.

Listen: <https://new.thehiddencircle.com/media/2025/04/sophies-song.mp3>

In the end, Sophie's story is not just about loss, but about the ongoing fight for a world where people are free to express themselves without fear.

With special thanks to Vibrent and Daveeee

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¹⁴<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/15/robert-maltby-on-the-of-his-girlfriend-sophie-lancaster-the-goth-thing-was-an-oversimplification>

¹⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Guardian