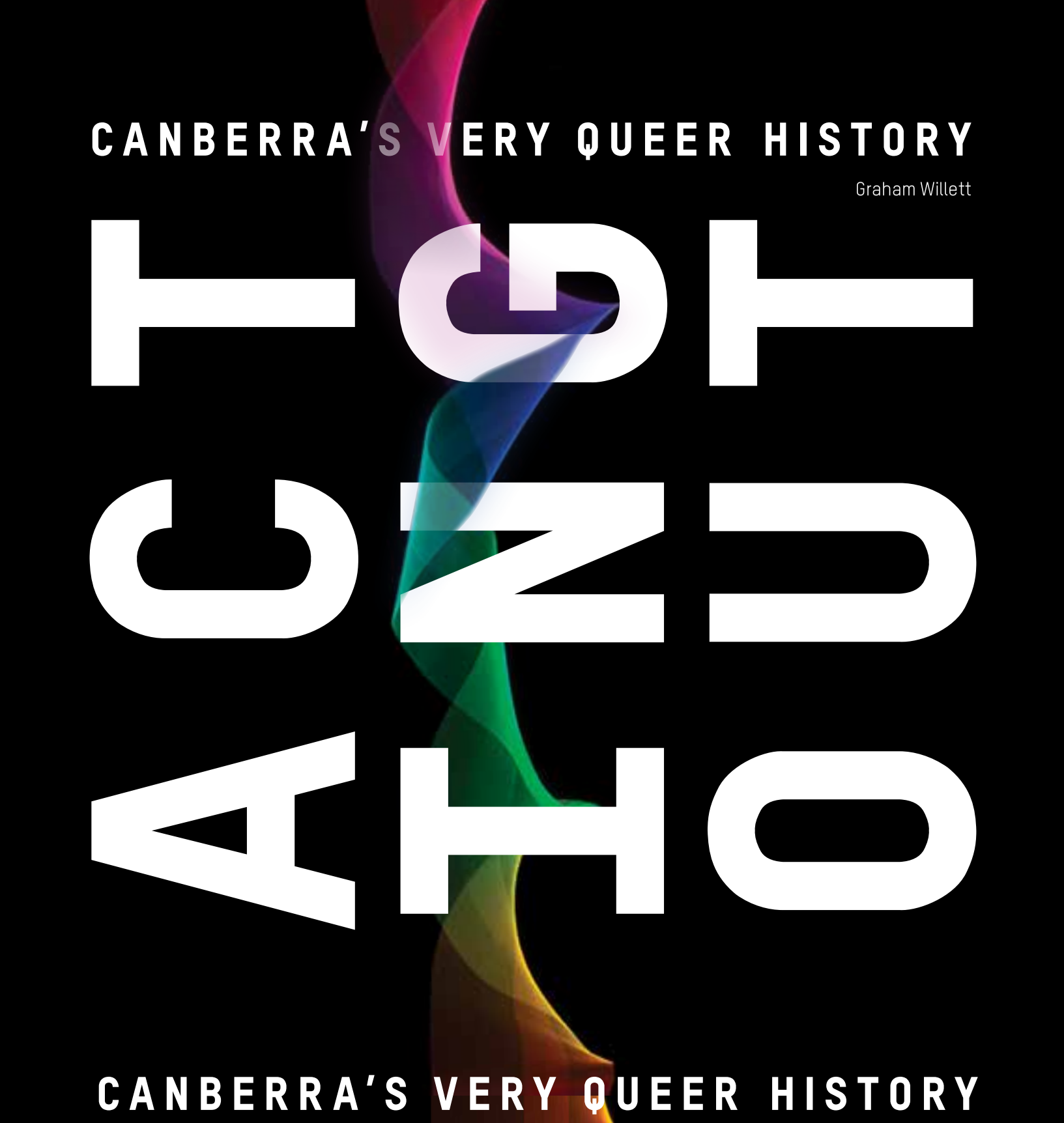
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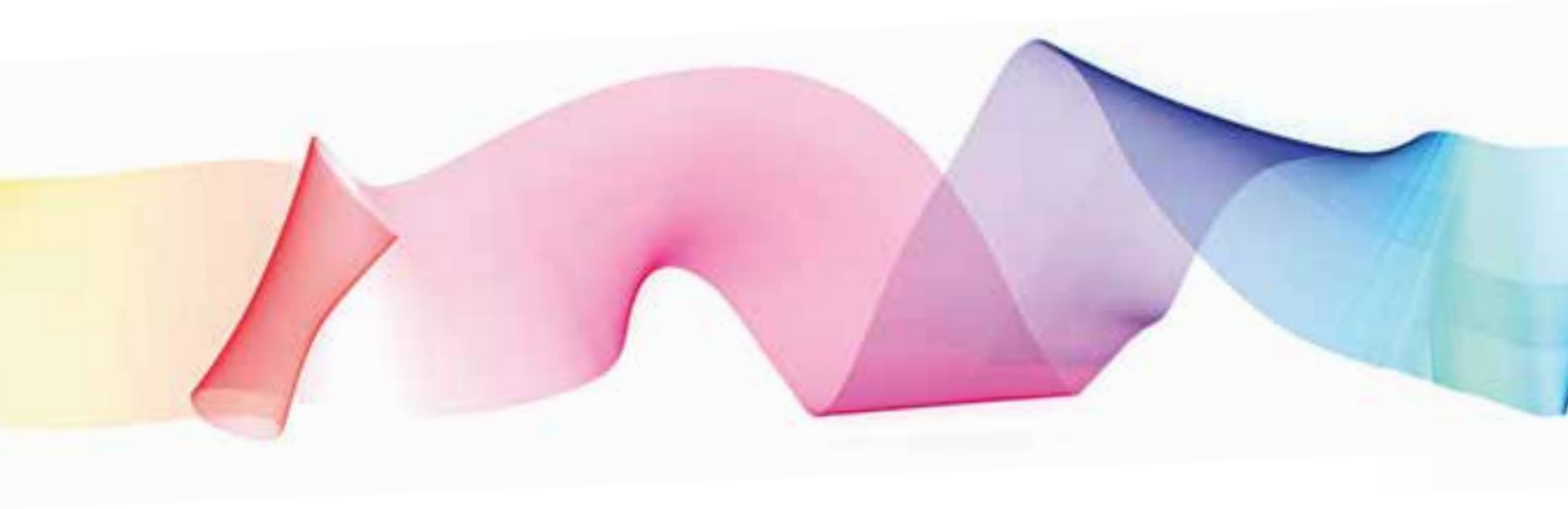


CANBERRA'S VERY QUEER HISTORY

Graham Willett

ACT OUT

INTRO-DUCTION

INTRODUCTION

‘I’M WORKING ON A HISTORY OF QUEER CANBERRA’, I WOULD SAY. ‘REALLY?’, THEY WOULD REPLY, ‘IS THERE ANY?’ THE SHORT ANSWER WAS: ‘MORE THAN YOU MIGHT THINK.’

The long answer was a list: the Homosexual Law Reform Society in 1969; the second place in Australia to reform its laws on homosexuality (so very, very nearly the first); the porn capital of Australia and home of the nation’s ‘largest gay-only retail/entertainment complex’ (for ‘entertainment’ read ‘sex’); a hard-core Belgian techno rave in parliament’s Great Hall; Tilley’s Devine Café (initially women-only, always women-first); households set up to challenge the nuclear-family model; anal sex on the sides of buses (advertisements, obviously); an extraordinary record of legislative reforms around discrimination, families, sex and gender diversity and relationships; a record turnout and a record yes vote in the same-sex marriage survey; the nation’s first gay head of government; the Qwire, Do-Dah Day and SpringOUT; school boys looking for love and sex – in the 1940s and the 1990s. And that’s not the half of it.

In the bigger cities like Melbourne and Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane, queer histories exist not too far beneath the surface. But gay life has also been unearthed in Darwin, Newcastle and the Hunter Valley, Daylesford, Cairns ... Clive Moore’s history of gay Queensland has many stories from beyond Brisbane.[1] And what we have discovered is that towns are not just cities writ small. They have very different cultures and values and experiences and need to be explored on their own terms. Small towns had fewer homo-friendly places to gather, but they were often easier to find than in a city where there might be scores of pubs and cafes and restaurants. In Cairns, Ian Thomas opened Marmaduke’s in 1972 and hosted Pepper Stephens All Male Review, a wildly popular drag show. Locals and visitors to the town could be sure of finding others of their kind there.[2]

Nor are country towns necessarily, contrary to the expectations of many city-dwellers, more homophobic than cities. Small communities consist of people having to get along and sometimes it is easier to do that by turning a blind eye, or by accepting that there are all sorts of eccentricities that, if not given too much attention, might do no harm. In Newcastle in the late 1940s, there were monthly dances attended by kamp and straight people, couples and singles alike, which were organised by two men: Spin, wildly flamboyant; and Ron who lived in an elegantly furnished house with his friend.[3] In Cairns George Welsh and Colin Bryant ran a number of restaurants over the years, stylish, and with excellent food. They brought elegance to the town and promoted tourism. Locals were very fond of these ‘confirmed bachelors’, intrigued by their knowledge of high culture and their style. Aart de Zeeuw and Brian Pelgrave also ran restaurants, but Brian was renowned for his boisterous, sexually explicit flirtations with straight male customers — which might have provoked trouble, but didn’t, being laughed off as mere ‘outrageousness’.[4] Outrageousness was a common protection for outspoken homosexuals. Strength and respect were also protective. Gurra, an Aboriginal man from Darwin, remembers a lesbian couple in town in the late 1950s – an Aboriginal schoolteacher and her rather masculine white lover, living openly. He put their openness down to the fact that the Aboriginal woman was ‘very, very strong’ and was much admired in the community.[5]

So, when we turn our attention to Canberra, we can be sure that there is a history to be uncovered.

SPECULATING ON CANBERRA

Selected to be the site of the capital of the recently-federated Commonwealth of Australia in 1908, with the first ground broken in 1913, Canberra could barely be called even a town for much of its history.[6] In 1930, shortly after enough had been built to permit the government to start to move in, the population was about 9,000 people — mostly building workers and public servants. The Great Depression and World War II slowed its development markedly and in 1945 it was still home to only about 13,000. In a town of this size, the opportunities for any kind of social life were pretty limited; and for the kind of privacy, even secrecy, that homosexual women and men required, opportunities were more limited still. The world before the 1970s was one in which sodomy between men was criminalised in all its forms, and any expression or, or suspicion of, homosexuality – in women or men – could easily result

in social ostracism, loss of employment, estrangement from family and friends. To be openly homosexual was a daring, arguably a foolish, act. Creating and keeping evidence, even privately, of such desires was dangerous. If such evidence did exist in letters or diaries or photographs it would often be destroyed by family members after death, either in horror or to protect their loved one's reputation. As a consequence, what we know, or think we know, about these early years is patchy, ambiguous, circumstantial. When Mr Marriott of Blandfordia (now the suburb of Forrest) appeared 'adventurously' as 'A Girl' at the 1925 Canberra Ball, was it a lark, or was he expressing some inner drive? Was Lyndhurst (LF) Giblin homosexual or bisexual as author Frank Moorhouse suggests? Was Giblin's wife Eilean trying to tell us something with her 'unconventional', rather masculine, style of dressing?[7]

Starting from the fact that same-sex desire exists in all societies (past and present) about which we know anything much, we are driven, where there is no clear, unambiguous evidence to engage in what historian Ruth Ford has called 'speculating'. By this she does not mean guessing, or inventing, or imposing contemporary ideas onto figures in the past. Rather, we work a bit like archaeologists do — bringing the accumulated knowledge of our discipline to fragments of the past that do not, in and of themselves, tell their whole story. It might involve giving figures from the past the benefit of the doubt, rather than imposing impossible criteria for certainty.[8]

The clearest case we know of from the Canberra record — and the association is rather fleeting — is that of Eirene Mort (1879–1977).[9] Mort was an artist of the Arts and Crafts school, remarkably talented and with a range that allowed her to work in embroideries, woodwork, book illustration, painting, etching, and more. She was an entrepreneur, a teacher, and an art therapist who worked with victims of the Great War. As a child she visited relatives at Duntroon and Gungahlin (then homesteads rather than suburbs). In 1927, as a fully-trained artist, she returned to capture in pencil the passing of the old Canberra region. Her trip was made by motor-car — a somewhat adventurous way for a lady to travel — and she was accompanied by Nora Weston, known to all as 'Chips'. Weston was a devotee of 'mannish' clothes, and outspoken in her views, rather than demure. She and Mort had met in London in 1903, immediately started living together and were companions for the rest of their lives, for 63 years, working and living together as business partners, and more. Mort and Weston are exemplars of what was called at the time the New Woman — women who had broken out of the ornamental role expected of middle-class women in the late Victorian era to engage with a world of political activity, professions and work, travel, business, rational dress and new kinds of relationships … As a well-travelled couple, well-read, actively engaged in the world, they may indeed have encountered the emerging lesbian subcultures of London and Europe ('sapphic' in the language of the time). But whether they did, whether they ever used the word to describe themselves, whether they engaged in sexual behaviour (and, if so, of what kind) we are unlikely to ever know. But they were unambiguously a devoted couple. And if the vagaries of history (Mort's meticulous record-keeping and her family's decision to hand over her papers to the National Library), have preserved her and Weston's relationship for us, how many more must there be whose lives have not been uncovered and may, in fact, now be unrecoverable?

LESBIAN (IN)VISIBILITY

It is notable in this book, that in the chapter on Canberra between 1945 and 1969 only a single lesbian story appears (and even that appeared very late in the research). The surprise is not that there are so few women, but that we know anything about anyone at all. The male history of the pre-1969 period that is revealed here is based on very thin sources. Because sex between men, in all its forms, was illegal, we have records of men being arrested — almost always for soliciting for sex or having sex in public. That *The Canberra Times* started to report such cases in the 1960s (demurely as 'indecency') — and that it is digitised and word-searchable; and that the Supreme Court of the ACT has given me access to its case ledgers … all of these facts have facilitated the uncovering of this history of male homosexuality. We also have an interview conducted in 2000 with a man who remembers the 1950s and 1960s, and a memoir of a man who remembers the 1940s. If such interviews and memoirs exist for women, they have not surfaced.

So how might we find the history of lesbians in 1950s Canberra? One tiny example has been unearthed – Douglas Vann, consulting psychiatrist, who between 1958 and 1961 treated five 'tribadists' (a very old word for lesbians). Lucy Chesser's research into lesbian lives in Melbourne in the 1960s found that women found other women in 'sporting clubs, particularly women's cricket, the army, motorcycle and car clubs'.[10] Wendy's reminiscences (see Chapter 1) tend to confirm this. A difficult process awaits researchers into pre-1969 lesbian history, and the awful truth is that very little might ever be found.

TRANS AND INTERSEX

At the other end of the book there is an absence that will be just as surprising to many – namely of trans and intersex people and issues. In many ways, trans and intersex people have been going through similar processes of emergence that lesbians and gay men did from the 1970s and bisexuals from the early 1990s. Identities have cohered, and organisations have been formed, which have set out to reshape laws and attitudes in the wider community. Key moments include, for trans people, the release of the Human Rights Commission's *Sex Files* report in 2009, and for intersex people, the release of the community-developed *Darlington Statement* in 2017.[11] The most obvious difference is that this emergence has occurred very recently and is unfolding in a much more concentrated timespan. It became apparent fairly early on in the process of interviewing people that to do justice to the history of trans and intersex communities and reform in the ACT was a bigger task than this project allowed. It is a history that warrants its own dedicated project, because trans and intersex activism has unique and important stories of its own.

My work on gay and lesbian history presented here has involved much original research (archival collections, publications, interviews and oral histories) but it has drawn, too, on narratives and analyses that have been developed and honed by many historians over many years. The progress on trans and intersex issues is too new to have yet developed narratives in quite the same way. Trans and intersex histories are still very much in the process of unfolding, and although there are some striking similarities and overlap with the development of gay, lesbian and bisexual histories, there are also nuances and differences that warrant more focussed research and analysis than this project allowed.

It is important that we find ways for trans and intersex communities to collect and tell the stories of identity and community building and change that have been of such significance over the last decade. There is currently a major research project looking at the history of trans in Australia underway, and I am hopeful that this and other projects will start to build the depth of research that is required for unearthing, recording and analysing trans and intersex histories.[12] It is clear already that there is a richness to these histories and that they should be given their own moment to shine. It is for these reasons that I have, with some regret, elected to limit the scope of this publication to focus on sexuality-based histories.

BUT WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'CANBERRA'?

Whether Canberra is a big town, or a small city is the kind of question that can make for a diverting conversation over coffee but ends up revolving around population estimates and definitions of cities and towns. More interesting and enlightening perhaps is to think about Canberra in its various roles: national capital, city (or town!), community, even region. It is through these lenses we get some sense of how same-sex desire has been lived.

It matters greatly that, whatever else Canberra is, it has been since 1927 the capital city of Australia — seat of government (executive and parliament and, over time, of the public service), home of national institutions and memorials. Home to lobby groups, industry associations and the press gallery. It has been a site of pageantry and protest aimed at celebrating and condemning. It is in Canberra that federal laws are made, federal policies developed and promulgated, federal spending allocated, and no attempt to understand the history of homosexuality in Australia can ignore the federal realm and those who manage it. But this is not my focus in this book. I am interested in other aspects of Canberra, aspects which are all too often swamped by the national/federal realm.

TERRITORY AND REGION

In terms of legislative and administrative power, Canberra's location within a specially created jurisdiction — the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) — has been less important than we might assume. For most of its history the laws applied in the ACT were those of New South Wales (NSW). These could be amended insofar as the territory was concerned by the designated Commonwealth minister issuing an Ordinance. (Formally, Ordinances were made by the Governor-General acting on the advice of the Executive Council). There was no local level of government at all. (Nor is there still.) From 1930 there was an Advisory Committee, partly elected, partly appointed, which did little more than its name suggests. In 1927 an ACT Police Force and in 1934 a Supreme Court were separated out from those of NSW. So, for most of Canberra's history, when it came to homosexuality, the ACT authorities have had only a limited relevance. The decriminalisation of sex between men — the first great breach in the wall of homophobia that stretched back 1,500 years in the Christian West — was done in 1976 by the federal government acting *for* the people of the ACT.

In 1988, self-government was foisted upon largely unwilling Territorians, though prior to that more and more power had been delegated from the Commonwealth Parliament and ministers to the Assembly which had been created in 1974 — again with advisory powers — and to other authorities especially created to manage areas such as health and education. These were areas of considerable importance in the ACT, developing policy, implementing and funding it. In the 1990s and after, the now self-governing territory government began to use its powers vigorously to promote an LGBTIQ equality program.

We can also think of Canberra as sitting at the heart of a region. The ACT is one obvious such region; but only a tiny proportion of the population lives outside the city and over half of the territory is nature reserve. Other regions surface in response to other histories and experiences. Indigenous people offer complex, sometimes competing, versions of country, and none of them, of course, coincide with the ACT's boundaries which are a product of a 1911 NSW law. Ngunnawal, Ngambri and Ngambri-Guumaal countries encompass lands stretching in all directions.[13] Tourist promotion presents Canberra at the centre of a region that sprawls a couple of hours drive around — including the Alpine and Tablelands regions and the NSW south coast (where, in fact, Jervis Bay is a small enclave that is part of the ACT). These towns provided places of resort for homosexual men in the 1960s, places to party, away from the prying eyes of neighbours, employers and police. The size and resources of Canberra compared to the towns nearby means that the city has long been at the centre of an extensive service delivery network. In the UBD Business and Trade Directory of 1967–68 this region was identified as encompassing southern NSW as far as Cooma, Goulburn and Yass. In the 1950s and 1960s, Cooma played an important, if surprising, part in Canberra's homosexual history — the jail was there; a jail which was specifically designated by the NSW Government to house homosexual prisoners.[14]

CITY

But Canberra is above all else a city — designed and founded in the first quarter of the 20th century — which has grown, not steadily but in fits and starts, since then. From 1,777 residents in 1911 to 16,905 in 1947 to 400,000 today. The physical city has undergone remarkable transformations over the past century; especially in the 1960s. Its basic geography was transformed. In 1963 the Molonglo River was dammed and within 12 months had become the lake, more or less, that Walter Burley Griffin had intended. The river flats disappeared, along with a dairy farm, a racecourse, a golf course. Far from dividing the city, Lake Burley Griffin seems to have provided it with an aesthetic and conceptual unity. The parliamentary zone and Manuka in the south, and Civic, in the north, were no longer small isolated villages separated by the river valley, as they had been for so long, but parts of a whole.[15] In the 1950s and 1960s, as the population grew, new suburbs were laid out and settled — Woden (1960), Weston Creek (1965), Tuggeranong (1973). A broad plan of expansion north and south in a Y shape was decreed. The Sands and McDougall street directory for 1961 listed 44 localities ('suburbs'). Separated by swathes of bushland, they were connected by a sleek network of roads.[16]

Canberra's growth was carefully planned — and always had been. Creating a city out of nothing, in the middle of nowhere was always going to be a challenge. Creating a city that would embody the nation, 'symbolise the way of life, the aspirations, the ideals of the nation itself' was something else again.[17] Enticing people to come there — especially public servants, without whom the whole project would have been rather pointless — meant that issues of town planning took on an importance not seen elsewhere in Australia. A series of planning authorities came and went, taking up the work that in other places was largely the work of private enterprise. In the 1950s, chivvied along by Prime Minister Robert Menzies, the post-War Commonwealth Government started to take development more seriously. In 1955 a parliamentary committee drew up a vision of Canberra as a world-class city, to be reflected in its 'landscaping, entertainment, shopping, arts, enlightened causes and expertise in the corporate as well as public sectors'.[18] The university expanded markedly. Recalcitrant Commonwealth departments and agencies were dragged in from Melbourne and Sydney. Thousands of public servants were forced to follow their jobs. Their ministers were expected to move their offices and staff in too. A National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) was set up to make sure they had houses to live in, schools for their kids, shops — and footpaths for their wives to wheel their prams along. (The ban on married women working in the public service was not repealed until 1966 and planners almost always thought about women in terms of their wifely and maternal duties.)

Housing was perhaps the NCDC's most pressing problem. No matter how fast it built there was never enough. In the pre-War years, hostels had been constructed to house public servants and labourers and their families. They continued in use after the War, and well into the 1970s there were housing shortages. As late as the mid-1970s Robert French, coming in from Sydney to work at the National Archives, was forced to live in a hostel for some time.[19] Others remember living in converted sheds and garages.

The physicality of the city shaped homosexual life. Living in hostels allowed little in the way of privacy — not none, but bringing someone home could be risky. On the other hand, the vast open spaces, filled with trees by Charles Weston's great planting project of the 1920s, allowed for public spaces that could be made to serve the needs of men looking for sexual encounters, as did the building of public toilets — the kind of places men could legitimately loiter while waiting to see what opportunities might present themselves. For women, not, for the most part, in the habit of wandering around in the dark looking for sex, the city presented rather fewer opportunities of this kind.

COMMUNITY

The population increase of the 1950s reshaped Canberra as the city began to sprawl north and south. But so too did changes in the population's characteristics. The higher level of education, the need to bring creative thinking to new and complex problems, the existence of career-ladders to inspire commitment and effort — all of these started to change the nature of Canberrans. Which brings us to the third way in which we need to think of Canberra — as a *community*. A community marked by increasing diversity, sophistication and tolerance. Migrants played their part in this beyond their physical exertions. European foods were grown in the workers' gardens of Narrabundah. Austrian-born Gus Petersilka put tables and chairs on the footpath outside his cafe in Civic in 1962. Very sophisticated. The authorities removed them — unsightly, unsanitary, they said. He put them back out and finally, by dint of perseverance, won the point.[20] The Good Neighbour Councils — a government policy of encouraging the Australian-born to get to know the New Australians (as migrants were called) — disarmed the fear of difference on both sides as people mingled at numerous public events and found that they rather liked these different ways of doing things.

A rich cultural life developed — increasingly through the efforts of community-based associations. A film festival was launched in 1950; an eisteddfod and a repertory society a few years later. The ABC, the national radio and television network, organised a regular schedule of concerts. The major churches expanded their parish systems. The Commonwealth played a role in this — many of its nation-building projects also served to enhance the quality of life in Canberra. Between 1969 and 1970 the National Library, the Treasury Building, the National Carillon, the Captain Cook Jet, the National Botanic Gardens were completed. *The Canberra Times* was revamped to raise it to the standard of a national paper and *The Australian* was launched in 1964 as Rupert Murdoch's contribution to the modernisation and liberalisation of Australian society. Ernest Burgmann, Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, moved his seat to Canberra in order to enjoy its 'high-minded liberalism'.[21] When it came time in the late 1960s to be thinking about the place of homosexuality in society, and especially of the laws governing it, the Canberra community was ready.

Civic engagement developed, facilitated by a dense network of community organisations – more than 200 associations and societies, 300 sporting clubs, 100 employers' and professional associations, 60 trade unions. Increasingly, civic concerns focussed on the newly-discovered social problems of the 1960s: transient populations of public servants; young mothers without family support; few apprenticeships; teenage gangs; migrant melancholia.[22] These challenges were tackled with optimism by groups as diverse as the Housewives Association and the Communist Party. The Advisory Committee provided a forum for increasingly tense debates about the future of Canberra, as well as national and even international issues. Canberra, like the rest of Australia, was in transition.

And then Menzies made his last major contribution to Australian political life — he committed troops to the American War in Vietnam, and reintroduced conscription to provide young men to be sent off to kill and be killed. Slowly, but with increasing confidence, a movement opposing this was built. Students were drawn in. The Australian National University became one of the hotbeds of this new radicalisation. In the course of the radicalisation of the struggle, new issues exploded onto the public agenda — Aboriginal issues, women's liberation, gay liberation, the environment …

Canberra has a reputation — less now than in the past — of being a rather sleepy place. In fact, this is not at all true. Particularly since World War II as a city and a community, it has been subject to unceasing change and development, shaping and reshaping the lives of those who live there. This is as true for the lives of homosexual people as it is of everybody else. As we shall see.

FROM KAMP TO QUEER … AND BEYOND

Inevitably, when it comes to discussing same-sexuality, we confront the question of language. How do we and others describe us? Usage has varied greatly over time — and acceptable usage even more so. In the 20th century the word 'homosexual' came to be used more and more, drifting across from the world of European sexology (the scientific study of sex and sexuality). It was a perfectly respectable word, even if the phenomenon which it described was not. In the vernacular, a plethora of words — to a greater or lesser extent abusive — coexisted. In Australia 'poofter' and 'lezzo' were the most common. Homosexual people in Australia, from at least the 1940s, mostly described themselves as 'kamp' (sometimes 'camp'). It was said to have crossed over from police language: 'Known Associate of Male Prostitutes'.[23] In Australia the word was a simple synonym for homosexual, lacking the connotations of flamboyance and theatricality that it had in the United States and Britain (or at least extending well beyond these). 'Homosexual' and 'kamp' remained the dominant terms until the early 1970s, though 'kamp' became 'camp' as it started to appear in print. In 1972 'gay' was imported from the USA and 'lesbian' was taken up by feminist lesbians keen to establish their visibility within the new gay movement and in the broader society. The movement soon adopted the usage 'gay and lesbian' — or, for extra visibility for women, 'lesbian and gay' — which prevailed for many years. In the 1990s bisexual people, seeking to challenge their invisibility started to insist on their being included. This adoption of sexual identities and the assertion of their centrality to the struggle for equality generated a proliferation of labels, which shows no sign of abating.

Today the most common term in Australia is LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex). In the last couple of years Q has been added, variously interpreted as 'queer' or 'questioning'. A for 'asexual' or occasionally 'ally' has not yet broken through. 'Sex and gender diverse' has been championed by some in recent years, including the ACT government. Most of this takes place entirely within the world of those affected and the professionals who work with them (media, politicians, policy-makers) — it has not made its way strongly into the wider world. Indeed, only a tiny minority of people within the LGBTI world identify as anything other than gay or lesbian.

For a period in the 1990s, it looked as though 'queer' might work as an umbrella term for all those whose sex, gender or sexuality did not conform to dominant social norms. That moment passed. Where the language question becomes difficult is in the insistence by some that there is a correct usage and that those who do not use it are causing offence. The problem is that 'correct usage' changes — often rapidly. The use of 'tranny' by and about trans people was very common in the 1990s; now it is generally thought to be beyond the pale. If there were an agency in a position to make definitive rulings on language we would all be better off. In the meantime, my own preference is to use the terms that were generally used at the time about which I am writing, varied for readability. Or occasionally to apply contemporary terms to the past, where that seems helpful to the discussion.

When it comes to naming names, those of us working in the field of queer history haven't really come to any consensus. For many people, especially older people, their sexuality has been a source of danger – where it became known it could lead to public disgrace, estrangement from family and friends and loss of employment. For some, it was itself a source of shame, or at least deserving of discretion. Where people who I or others have interviewed have consented to the use of their names or, alternatively, indicated a preference for the use of a pseudonym I have respected their wishes. Where I know people are dead, I have used their names. Where I don't know whether they are alive or not I have erred on the side of caution – even when names are used in newspaper reports or other publicly available sources. In government files, names are usually suppressed, and I have invented names in the interests of readability. Pseudonyms appears in inverted commas at first use.

SEX, GENDER, SEXUALITY

One of the earliest achievements of the women's liberation movement, which erupted in the United States in the late 1960s and flowed through the rest of the Western world in the years immediately after, was to identify a distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'.[24] It is a distinction that has almost disappeared now in public life when every form, official or otherwise, will ask for name, date of birth and *gender*. When they say 'gender', they are actually asking about 'sex'.

The distinction is a rather simple one. *Sex* is a universal biological fact among humans, an expression of our X and Y chromosomes and visible in what used to be called the secondary sex characteristics — the ways in which we would recognise a naked person as male or female (genitalia, breast or chest, Adam's apple or not, extent and location of body hair, general body shape). For the liberationists (and for those on whose work they drew), there were two sexes, male and female. Today we acknowledge the existence of a variety of intersex conditions, where this simple dichotomy is challenged, albeit by a tiny proportion of the population, whose chromosomes express themselves in the characteristics of both sexes.

Gender, on the other hand, is a social phenomenon, a set of rules as to how men and women should express themselves: as either masculine or feminine. Gendered characteristics include a plethora of behaviours determined by social expectations (and sometimes enforced by laws) to be appropriate to each sex. There are masculine and feminine clothing, hairstyles, given names, occupations, hobbies and interests, emotional expression, tone of voice, bodily carriage … These vary greatly between societies and within them, and over time. And while any given individual will be definitively male or female or intersex, few individuals will be definitively masculine or feminine. Sex is a matter of ticking a box; an individual's gender is more of a sliding scale — more masculine or more feminine. Or, more accurately, a series of sliding scales because an individual's hairstyle might be rather masculine, their clothing rather feminine; their name sex-neutral. Conceivably one could construct an index of all an individual's gendered features and declare them to be X-percent masculine and Y-percent feminine — but who would decide? And what would be the point? It was the gender norms that the women's liberation movement set out to challenge and overthrow. Women should be able to dress, walk, talk however they liked. They should be allowed to be ambitious and aggressive and to take on men's jobs, from driving trams to CEOs. Men should be doing childcare and housework. It was a revolution whose ramifications were to spread into every nook and cranny of public and private life. People's sex would remain unaltered; the gender order was to be eradicated, leaving everyone free to be and to behave as they liked.

A third term enters the discussion here: *sexuality*.[25] Sexuality – sexual desire and the objects to which it is directed — is partly biological. For the most part the wish for sexual contact is triggered at puberty and involves a number of physiological reactions, some shared, some specific to men and to women. The direction of the desire may be biological ('born that way', or produced by hormones released at puberty). Or it might be a product of upbringing and family relations, as psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud thought. Or by other experiences (childhood seduction has commonly been identified). Or as a choice — there are women who, having decided to withdraw their emotional energies from men and redirect them towards women, found that their sexual desires followed. When it comes to any individual it might be any of these, or something else entirely — there is no reason to think that all people who desire sexual contact of a particular type will have it for the same cause. A further complication is that sexuality may be expressed as an inner desire, as behaviour or as a publicly-available identity. This distinction became especially important during the AIDS years when it became necessary to be able to reach out to men who had sex with men (behaviour) but who would never have thought of themselves as homosexual or even bisexual (identity).

The history of sexuality is mightily entangled – in its concepts, its geographies, its social and political and lived experiences. The history of same-sexuality in Canberra is no less complex than anywhere or anywhen else.

CHAPTER 01

BEFORE GAY

BEFORE GAY

A Camera Life-Class. Teach yourself to draw or, 'Whacko!'

OVER THE COURSE OF THE 1940S AND 1950S AND INTO THE 1960S, CANBERRA GREW, BOTH PHYSICALLY AS A CITY AND SOCIALLY AS A COMMUNITY, AND IT WAS IN THIS CONTEXT THAT A HOMOSEXUAL SUBCULTURE WAS ABLE SLOWLY TO COME INTO BEING. BUT EVEN BEFORE IT DID, DESPITE HOMOSEXUALITY BEING CRIMINALISED, MARGINALISED AND VILIFIED, SAME-SEX DESIRE FOUND WAYS TO EXPRESS ITSELF. THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT MADE THIS POSSIBLE, BUT MOSTLY IT DEPENDED ON THE WILLINGNESS OF PEOPLE TO TAKE RISKS, TO SEEK EACH OTHER OUT, REGARDLESS OF THE PERILS.

ROD ANDERSON

Rod Anderson is one person who sought and found, if not love, then sex, certainly.[1] By the age of 15 he was already well-aware of the nature of his sexual desires. Workmen's bodies caught his attention; attractive men reminded him of Hollywood stars. He was pretty sure that many of his classmates were as interested in male bodies as he was. When his mother moved the family from Melbourne to Canberra in 1941 so they could be with their father they travelled by night train (virtually the only way to get there in those days). In his memoir, Rod reported that he hovered near the men's toilet, smoking, trying to look old enough for someone to pick him up. He was always reluctant to make the first move, though, frightened of being branded a poofter. But this seems to have changed once he got to Canberra.

His first serious encounter came almost as soon as they arrived there, with Ron, a young bank clerk. They ran into each other one day at the National Library of Australia and ended up back in Ron's room in Brassey House hostel, Barton, 'thrashing around naked on the bed'; Rod later having to explain the stubble rash to his mother. Soon after there was Henry, an American medical officer posted to the Canberra Hospital who looked, Rod thought, like the actor Cary Grant. They had sex a few times, mostly in Rod's room at the Ainslie House hostel; on another occasion, in a bus shelter. Then there was Kim, an athletic young civil servant, who Rod met while performing in a school play and later ran into around town. Kim ended up living in the flat above Rod's family. This relationship lasted; Rod would wait every night until his family was asleep and slip away to Kim's room.

Rod never had any qualms about these affairs. His reading told him that his homosexuality was a stage that he ought to grow out of, but it became pretty clear to him that he wasn't going to, despite his efforts with girls. He knew, too, from church and family, that sex ought to be connected to love, and the fact that he did not love these men worried him a bit. But he enjoyed the uncomplicated nature of these relationships: 'Why bother with girls? They expect you to take them out, paying all the expenses, and then when you put the hard word on them they say, "No!". With men you don't have to go through all those tiresome preliminaries, to-ing and fro-ing … You needn't even say a word. Just make it obvious you want to and if you both do, it's on.'

Rod had a great deal of freedom. He cycled to school and back; could go to the library; could get involved in amateur theatre and the like. Canberra and this freedom gave him many opportunities to find what he was looking for. But this is not to say that there were not risks. Rod's father caught Kim tossing pebbles one night at Rod's bedroom window, trying to attract his young lover's attention. His father's response was to pack the family up and move them back to Melbourne. Presumably unleashing the police on his son and his friend was not something he was prepared to do, but had he done so things would certainly have gone badly for Kim, as the older partner. We know that it was common for the courts to punish the older partner in a relationship between a man and a teenager more severely than the younger. Indeed, often the lad was not punished at all, or even charged.[2] But in a small community like Canberra it would not have taken long for word of their activities to spread, and the risk to the family's reputation was severe. Better for all concerned to remove the lad from the environment. Rod's next stop in life was the Air Force which provided, if anything, more opportunities for sex with men.

BILL WELLS

By the age of 20, Bill Wells had already served in the Air Force when he moved to Canberra from Perth in 1948.[3] Men with longer service records than his were getting preference in Perth's rather limited jobs market but In Canberra there was work aplenty. He was also keen to get away from his family. He knew that he was homosexual and the distance, he thought, would make things easier for him. It didn't really; not initially anyway. It would be some years before he became sexually active. He was 'a bit terrified in those days'. He had 'too much to lose' and he worried about 'all the repercussions if you did overstep the mark'. 'It wasn't worth your job! You just couldn't do anything! So you just sublimated it all by keeping yourself busy and doing other things'.

He lived in a series of hostels in the dozen years before he was able to get into private accommodation. Given that the hostels were hardly salubrious, and there was limited privacy, Bill felt driven to get out and about, and the 'other things' in which he sublimated his desires included the social and cultural life of the city — walking clubs, bicycle clubs and, most significantly, the ABC classical music concerts and the choral societies' events. Men who attended such events were all considered a 'bit odd' anyway and the more relaxed atmosphere made it possible for him to start to meet people like himself.

It was in the late 1950s that he met Hedley, his first and only 'friend' (in the language of the time). They had similar interests and they started living together — initially in the hostel, later in a shared flat. They were together for four years before Hedley died in a boating accident in Melbourne in 1957.[4]

ALEXANDER GRANT AND MATTHEW GRAILL

Living together was a risky move, especially because Hedley was employed in the Department of External Affairs. During the early years of the Cold War (and indeed, in the later years, too) homosexuality was illegal, of course, but it was also seen as both a scandal *and* a threat to national security — specifically given the danger that homosexuals in the public service would be subject to blackmail by the nation's enemies. Blackmail was not the only concern though. ASIO was strongly of the opinion that homosexuals, by their very nature, as a result of what it called 'character defects', were unsuitable for almost any sort of public service. The 'characteristics found in many homosexuals,' ASIO asserted, included 'instability, willing self-deceit, defiance towards society … [which] gave them a special propensity for treacherous behaviour.'[5]

Bill knew of one man, an External Affairs officer, sentenced to three years, which he served in Cooma Gaol, a prison which was, after 1957, dedicated to holding men convicted of homosexual offences.[6] Clyde Cameron, a senior ALP member of parliament and later a minister in the Whitlam government, reports from his diaries that when the Liberal Party came to power in 1949 a number of people suspected of being homosexuals were removed by the new Speaker of the House of Representatives from their public service positions.[7] Careers, then, were easily ruined. But there is one case about which we know a great deal which reveals just how dangerous it was to be found out.

'Alexander Grant' and 'Matthew Graill' were officers in the Department of External Affairs.[8] They met in late 1952 at the Hotel Canberra and ran into each other again some time later at the Hotel Wellington. Graill visited Grant a couple of times in his room at Havelock House where he was shown copies of the physique magazine *Health and Strength*. These magazines depicted men wearing as little as possible, usually just loincloths, posing and flexing their muscles, and were ostensibly directed at encouraging men to develop and take care of their bodies. They were popular in homosexual male circles in the 1950s and 1960s for rather more salacious reasons.

At one of their meetings, Grant suggested that Graill might agree to have similar photos taken of himself — perhaps even entirely naked? Graill raised the issue of payment (jokingly he says) and a fee of 30 shillings was settled upon. The following Saturday, they met on the road to Duntroon, near the weir on the Molonglo River, by the Power House (Lake Burley Griffin did not yet exist), Graill disrobed and presented himself, in various poses, sitting and standing, while Grant took a number of photos. If this seems daringly public, it is worth noting that the area was isolated enough that it could operate as a daytime beat (a cruising ground for men seeking men for sex). On one occasion Graill encountered a young man there and was propositioned by him — unfortunately he found him a bit 'drack' (unattractive).

In early 1953, shortly after the two men met, Grant was posted to an embassy overseas, but they kept in touch via mail. Graill sent reports of his life in Canberra: of 'sitting in the sun[;] you know what I mean'. He also wrote of a 'mild liaison … pleasant but desultory' with a man who worked in the Department of Immigration and of a four-week holiday with him at Kings Cross, during which time they hosted a number of 'select soirées, bal masque, shrieks' — homosexual gatherings that could be held in the safety of Kings Cross in a way that would have been very much riskier in the small-town atmosphere of Canberra. He reported on the excitement generated by the Queen's visit to Canberra in 1954 — or, more precisely, generated by the appearance of dozens of sailors attached to the tour, some at least who seem to have been quite happy 'to be had', in the argot of the time, by kamp men. Graill knew of a 'belle' who worked in the Department of the Territories and had 'had' two sailors himself.

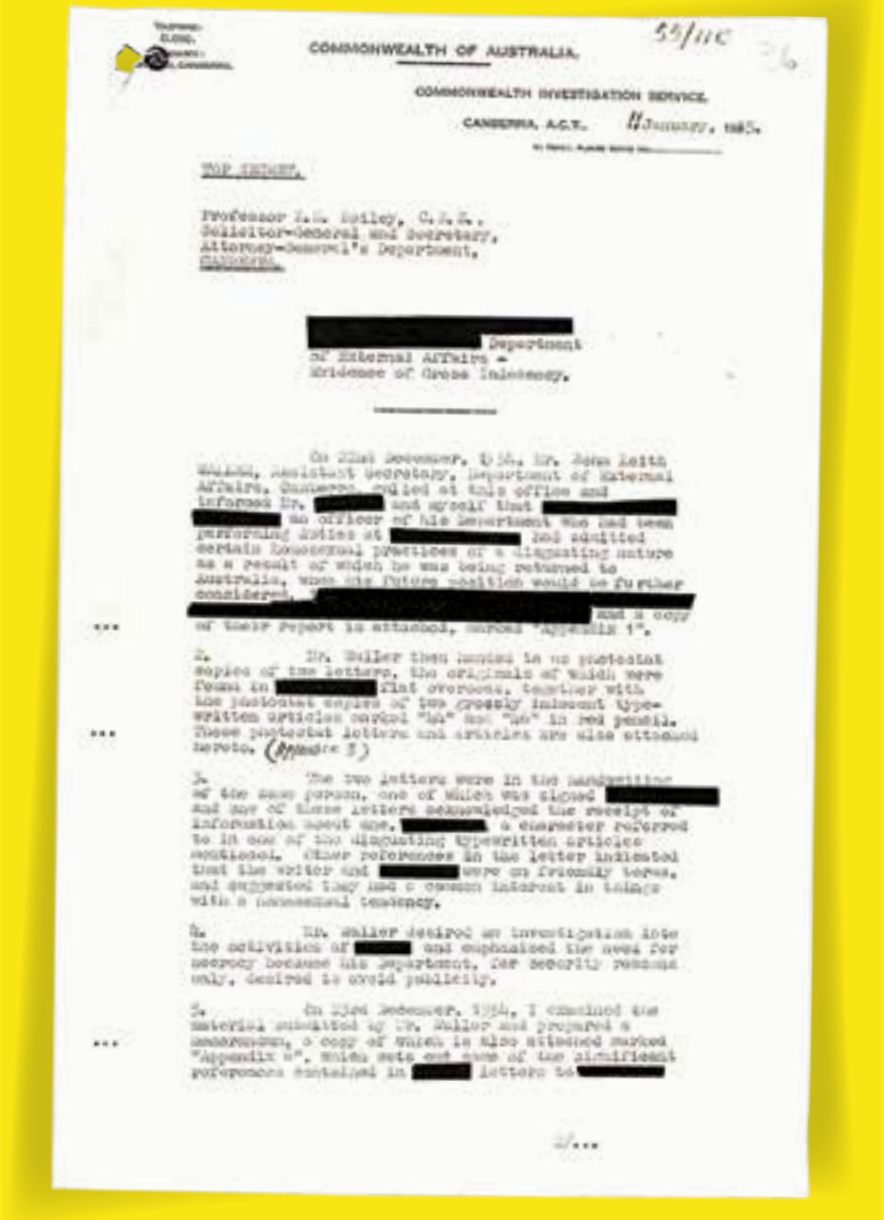
From his letters Graill seems to have been having a pretty gay old time in Canberra, which is not perhaps the image that we have of the town in the 1950s. If Rod Anderson had to wait and see, and to seize opportunities as they came his way, for adult men like Grant and Graill, with jobs and incomes, and access to pubs, the opportunities were rather more abundant. Clearly there was an infrastructure through which men who desired men could find ways to meet each other. The Molonglo beat was active, indicating that there were enough men interested in sex with other men to keep it operating. There were the pubs — the Canberra and the Wellington are mentioned specifically. Pubs have long been a place where men could drink enough to lower their inhibitions and strike up conversations with strangers or friends of friends. Even Bill Wells came to find love eventually through his cultural activities, and perhaps could have had a richer sexual and romantic life if he had been a bit less afraid.

In late 1954, police in the overseas city where Grant was posted arrested a 17-year-old youth for homosexual offences. In the course of their interview they persuaded him to reveal details of his friends. Grant was one of them. Though he was unaware of all this, having been in hospital for some weeks as a result of an accident of some kind. After consulting with his doctors, the embassy dispatched an officer to interview him. This is why our knowledge of the lives of Grant and Graill is so patchy (and why these names are inventions) — it all comes from a file passed from the Commonwealth Investigation Service to the Department of External Affairs, and from there to the National Archives of Australia. Much of the information is redacted: the names of all the men involved, the location of the embassy to which Grant was posted, many of the sexual activities. Some of the material collected was destroyed; some parts of the file are entirely suppressed. But we can glean from what is available a clear enough picture of what it meant if your homosexuality came to the attention of the wrong people in the early 1950s.

On 1 December 1954, an embassy *chargé d'affaires* visited Grant in hospital, who immediately admitted everything and even gave the officer the key to his flat. There, the officer seized 'a quantity of literature, letters and hundreds of photographs'; a suitcase full. The materials were described by the official as referring to 'homosexual activities of the most crude and disgusting kind'.

Which is where Graill, back in Canberra, got drawn into the vortex. His letters of February and October 1953, which for us are evidence of the kind of life a homosexual might live in Canberra with its liaisons (desultory and otherwise), beats, nude photo shoots, meetings in pubs, trips to Kings Cross, the language of 'queen' and 'belle' and 'drack' young men — these became evidence of something rather more sinister for the departmental authorities, who asked the Commonwealth Investigation Service to look into the matter.

On 6 January the investigating officer, accompanied by a member of the Peace Office Guard, interviewed Graill in Canberra at his workplace. While Grant had been reported as being depressed during his interview overseas, and certainly behaved foolishly by handing his pornography collection over to the embassy official, Graill was remarkably level-headed. Undoubtedly, Grant had been in touch to warn him and he had destroyed a great deal of incriminating material. (The investigating officer thought the warning probably came to Graill in a Christmas card sent by Grant.) Graill simply refused to admit to anything. Nothing of a



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

55/11C

COMMONWEALTH INVESTIGATION SERVICE.

CANBERRA, A.C.T. 11 January, 1955.

TOP SECRET.

Professor K.H. Bailey, C.B.E.,
Solicitor-General and Secretary,
Attorney-General's Department,
Canberra.

[redacted] Department
of External Affairs -
Evidence of Gross Indecency.

On 22nd December, 1954, Mr. John Leith Waller, Assistant Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, called at this office and informed Mr. [redacted] and myself that [redacted] an officer of his Department who had been performing duties at [redacted] had admitted certain homosexual practices of a disgusting nature as a result of which he was being returned to Australia, when his future position would be further considered. [redacted] and a copy of their report is attached, marked "Appendix 1".

2. Mr. Waller then handed to us protected copies of the letters, the originals of which were found in [redacted] flat overseas, together with the photostat copies of two grossly indecent typewritten articles marked "A" and "B" in red pencil. These photostat letters and articles are also attached hereto. (Appendix 2)

3. The two letters were in the handwriting of the same person, one of which was signed [redacted] and one of these letters acknowledged the receipt of information about one, [redacted], a character referred to in one of the disgusting typewritten articles mentioned. Other references in the letter indicated that the writer and [redacted] were on friendly terms, and suggested they had a common interest in things with a homosexual tendency.

4. Mr. Waller desired an investigation into the activities of [redacted] and emphasized the need for secrecy because his Department, for security reasons only, desired to avoid publicity.

5. On 23rd December, 1954, I examined the material submitted by Mr. Waller and prepared a memorandum, a copy of which is also attached marked "Appendix B", which sets out some of the significant references contained in [redacted] letters to [redacted]

2/...

'There is nothing sinister in these books [but] they might indicate somewhat [redacted] inclinations'

Canberra in the 1950s: queens and belles and drack young men

sexual nature had ever happened between him and Grant, he said. The desultory liaison was just a friendship. Presented with the evidence from his own letters of parties in Kings Cross, he described their contents as exaggerated. When his room was searched and photographs were found, he asserted they were from Adelaide in 1948, just him and other lads engaging in the kind of 'silly things' that mates get up to.

The only other suspect materials identified were 21 issues of *Health and Strength* physique magazine; a copy of *A Camera-Life-Class*, a book of photographs of naked men and women dressed in posing pouches which the owner could use to teach himself life-drawing; and a postcard of Michelangelo's David. The investigator was compelled to admit in his report that 'There is nothing sinister in these books individually, but it is suggested that, as emphasis is generally placed on the male physique, they might indicate *[redacted]* mental inclinations.' Graill had admitted to homosexual tendencies but assured the investigator that he was working hard to resist them and was planning on consulting a psychiatrist when he returned home to Adelaide for a holiday. The interview concluded, statements were typed and signed. And Graill went straight back to his office and resigned his position. His resignation was accepted and the department, desperate to avoid scandal and, with the threat posed by the presence of a homosexual in their midst removed, called a halt to all further investigations.

Grant and Graill paid a heavy price for their discovery. Grant was sent back to Australia in February and he very likely lost his job. Graill certainly did lose his (by resigning). And their friends were caught up in all this too. Graill's friend with whom he had holidayed in Kings Cross was interviewed. Like Graill he kept his head and denied all wrong-doing. But the investigating officer recommended that 'his movements be watched, and suitable action taken when the occasion warrants it'. The 'belle' who had had such success in picking up sailors, was also investigated and a 1949 police report on his homosexual behaviour in Brisbane was unearthed. For Grant and Graill, things had gone catastrophically — and it is not impossible that Bill Wells, living and working in the close-knit world of the public service may well have heard about this episode. Even if he didn't, what happened to Grant and Graill was exactly what he feared for himself.

The Rex Hotel: When Alfred met Allan

ALFRED GOTTSCHALK

It wasn't only the police and employers that posed a threat to homosexuals in Canberra. In April 1962, Dr Alfred Gottschalk, a medical researcher of international renown, met up with Allen Donelly, a 21-year-old labourer, at the Rex Hotel.[9] They fell to talking and Gottschalk invited him back to his flat in Northbourne Avenue for a coffee, or a beer. Shortly after, Gottschalk was found in the street by a passer-by, bleeding and dazed, wearing only a shirt and tie. The police were called, and he was taken to hospital. He had a severe cut on his head, severe swelling of the nose and lips and had lost a tooth.

Two very different accounts of what happened were offered. Gottschalk says that the young man suddenly pulled a knife, pushed him into the bedroom, told him to undress and demanded money. He was told that if he reported this to the police he would tell them that Gottschalk was 'indecent'. Donelly's version of events was that Gottschalk had 'put the hard word on him' and that in reaction he 'saw red' and 'belted him with his fists'. He denied having stolen any money.

Donelly was charged with assault but when the case came to court, suspicion was soon turned upon Gottschalk. In the witness box he was asked whether there hadn't been a claim of indecency levelled against him a year or so previously? He denied this, until he was shown a name on a piece of paper. Well, yes, he admitted, but pointed out that the dean of his faculty had been satisfied with his explanation. He insisted that for the past three years he had had no sexual 'feelings, drive or desires' of any kind. We can gauge what a humiliating experience this was for him by the fact that he did not turn up to court the next day. Police officers went to his home, where they found him on the bed in a semi-conscious state. He had taken a dose of barbiturates, perhaps in an attempt to kill himself. When the case resumed a week later, and evidence was taken from the police, a doctor, from Donelly and from Gottschalk himself, it was again Gottschalk's behaviour that was subject to closest scrutiny. Why were there so few signs of struggle in the flat? Why were his trousers folded neatly on a chair? Why was his statement to the police at variance with his evidence in court?

Remarkably, given that Donelly did not deny having beaten Gottschalk, he was acquitted. The newspaper reports do not say so, but it is likely that there was something approaching 'provocation' in the magistrate's mind: that Gottschalk had propositioned Donelly who had reacted with violent anger. This idea of provocation — that a reasonable (heterosexual) man might be so frightened or enraged by a homosexual proposition that he might lose all self-control and react violently — had not yet been articulated as a defence in law but it existed in practice, rooted in simple common sense at the time. (These days it is usually called 'homosexual panic defence' and it has been in recent years removed from the law codes of Australian states and territories.)

For Gottschalk, it was a terrible affair. He had been assaulted in his own home by a very much younger and fitter man. He had (probably) been robbed. His name had been splashed all over the newspaper and he must have been the subject of extensive gossip at work and among his friends. He had been made, morally if not legally, the guilty party. It is not surprising that within a few months he left Australia, returning to his native Germany. Australia lost one of the world's leading virologists, a man who had made, and would continue to make, a remarkable contribution to the scientific understanding of human disease. (But by way of a happy ending, it is also clear that, far from being traumatised by these events, he resumed a healthy, happy social life and was not deterred from propositioning much younger men).

WENDY

Very late in the research for this book, 'Wendy' appeared. Her story gives us an almost unique insight into how lesbians lived in Canberra in the 1960s. It is striking how similar it is to the stories of kamp men.

Wendy and her partner 'Donny' arrived in Canberra in 1958.[10] They were a couple, and both librarians, but they had rather different experiences of lesbian life in the 1950s and 1960s. Donny worked for a federal government agency and was being transferred to the capital. Wendy was keen to go with her. When Wendy was offered a position in an academic library, she was in a position to negotiate terms — getting people to come voluntarily to Canberra in this decade was something of a challenge for employers. She negotiated a good arrangement for her superannuation, and Donny was offered a two-bedroom flat. As a result, they were able to live together as a couple. Not that they would have announced this, of course. Donny's employer was an especially conservative department and it would have cost her her job if departmental officers had found out. But neither were they closeted, to use a later term. Rather they lived a 'don't ask, don't tell' sort of life. These were not times when anyone's sex life was a proper topic of discussion in respectable society; and the more aberrant aspects of someone's sex life even less so. Discretion was the norm on all sides, which left people to get on with their lives if they were prepared to be discreet. Wendy and Donny met other gay people at work and when playing squash and golf and skiing. Social life involved the cinema and theatre, dinner parties, picnics, swimming and nightspots like the Copacabana. This socialising often involved other couples — lesbian, gay male and heterosexual. On occasion when one of her friends (gay or straight) needed a partner for a social event, Wendy would be happy to be the partner, or, as happened when she was a guest at an official function, she would take a (gay or straight) single man.

Canberra in the 1960s was a more interesting city than many assume, and it was noticeably loosening up. A 'scene' was emerging, and Wendy's experience was of a tolerance that she thought was 'the essence of Canberra society'. She used to enjoy dancing and would drive down to Sydney to the Cross and Oxford Street to spend time with the gay crowd down there — or, staying in Canberra, she would slip into the side bar at the Rex where same-sex couples could — and did — dance together. Mostly boys, she remembers, but girls were welcomed too. This is where Donny and Wendy's attitudes diverged somewhat. Donny was very much more cautious; Wendy somewhat less so — though not reckless, or wild. She has no recollection of any of their friends falling foul of the law or of employers, but that was because their discretion worked.

SUBCULTURE AND SCENE

These lives, with their good times and their catastrophes, were possible given certain circumstances — the way women and men became aware of and found ways to act upon their desires; the degree of privacy that a community offered and, conversely, whether there were places to gather, either openly or discreetly. These women and men, and many others like them, of whose lives we have no record, found ways to be, as they would have said, homosexual or kamp. As had always been the case in Australia, and perhaps everywhere in the urbanised world, homo-sex happened and could be found (for men, especially) in the streets, parks, cafés and pubs. By the 1960s, though, the world of kamp men and women was developing, intensifying. There were more venues, more people, more visibility. The risks remained, but with luck and discretion, people like Bill Wells and Wendy could be more out and about than they would have been a decade earlier. In the 1960s, after the drowning death of his friend, Bill started to get out a bit more. Partly because, as he says, there was more to do; the scene was developing. Wendy agrees.

Homosexual subcultures are known to have existed in the major cities of Western Europe, like London and Amsterdam, as early as the 1720s.[11] They have a collective, or social, quality that makes them an important development in the history of homosexuality. As subcultures, they are defined by their having gathering places (typically pubs and clubs, parks and other public places), a shared argot of their own by which participants recognised each other and concealed the subject of their conversations from outsiders, a sense of commonality or identity shared by the participants, strengthened by the recognition that people like them lived in a hostile world.

Such subcultures have been identified in Sydney and Melbourne by the early twentieth century.[12] Canberra, being a smaller place, developed rather later. Homosexuals described themselves as 'camps' or 'kamps'. They met in pubs or in cafés where their presence was welcomed or tolerated by management. Men would refer to each other by feminine names, partly for fun, partly to encode their public conversations. They met for sex or to find others like themselves at the beats.

Bill Wells met Grant McIntyre (of whom more later) at the Civic Hotel, where kamp men would gather on Friday nights. Although the Civic gatherings were small — Bill says they consisted of a dozen or so men huddled in a corner, hoping to avoid the hostile attentions of 'the ockers' — they provided a social life of a sort. And it seems as though the pub provided a way for Bill to get out of himself a bit. He was always afraid that he would be exposed and would lose his job, and avoided the beats and even for a long time, the pubs. But he became a bit more confident after a while and his memories offer important insights into the workings of kamp Canberra and the emergence of the scene.

Pubs were important. Or perhaps 'the pub' — back then Canberra seems to have been able to sustain only one at a time. On one occasion, Wells found himself driving a friend to a meeting with the Ainslie Hotel's management. This friend, 'more forward' than Bill, wanted to know if the Ainslie would welcome — or at least tolerate — the regular Friday night gatherings of kamps. Management agreed. The scene, this reminds us, was a result of work — there were always men prepared to do something to make it happen, sometimes just to go out; sometimes, as with Bill's more forward friend, to take some initiative.

The history of the beats is rather more obscure. We have seen that there was one operating on the Molonglo River in the early 1950s, where Graill was approached by the drack young man, but that one will have been destroyed by the creation of Lake Burley Griffin. Bill's memories from the 1960s identifies three beats and he offers important insights into their operations. He knew of Telopea Park, but never went there. He remembers Haig Park as one of the safest, in so far as policing was concerned — it was a long strip of pine forest and anyone approaching across the roads flanking the park could be seen well in advance. At the first sign of police 'you just took to your heels and ran, up a side-street and got into your car', says Bill. Corroboree Park he remembers as having lots of bushes which on busy nights was, he says, in a rather literary turn of phrase, 'like Burnham Wood out of Macbeth, [the shrubbery] all moving.' But if police could be a problem, there was at least one night of the year when beat-goers could relax. The night of what Wells called the 'Wallopers' Ball', with the entire police force dressed up and socialising in a hall or a hotel somewhere, was always a safe night for men to get out into the parks.

Bill says that the beats were for sex, rather than meeting people or making friends. But this may simply reflect his own preferences. On the evidence of other cities and towns, beats were very often important social institutions, where men could, as well as having sex, meet each other, find relationships, find their way into the kamp world.

Sydney, being so close, provided an opportunity for weekend getaways. Wendy was frequently on the road eastwards. Bill Wells thought that the roads were atrocious and preferred to fly. Weekends were filled with adventures at the notorious nightclub the Purple Onion and the whole Kings Cross kamp scene: a scene that was larger and more vibrant than anything Canberra could provide. Bill thought that the proximity of Sydney and its pleasures may have slowed down the emergence of the Canberra scene, but perhaps it also provided something of an inspiration for greater courage and visibility. And he remembers with delight the Blue Mountains Queen's Birthday long weekends, organised by a man whose father was a member of parliament, when carloads of kamp men would head north. They would rent a fully furnished house and stage wonderful parties. One of the stars was Musical Maude, who managed to have a different costume for every event of the entire weekend. 'A lovely time', Bill remembers.

GRANT MCINTYRE

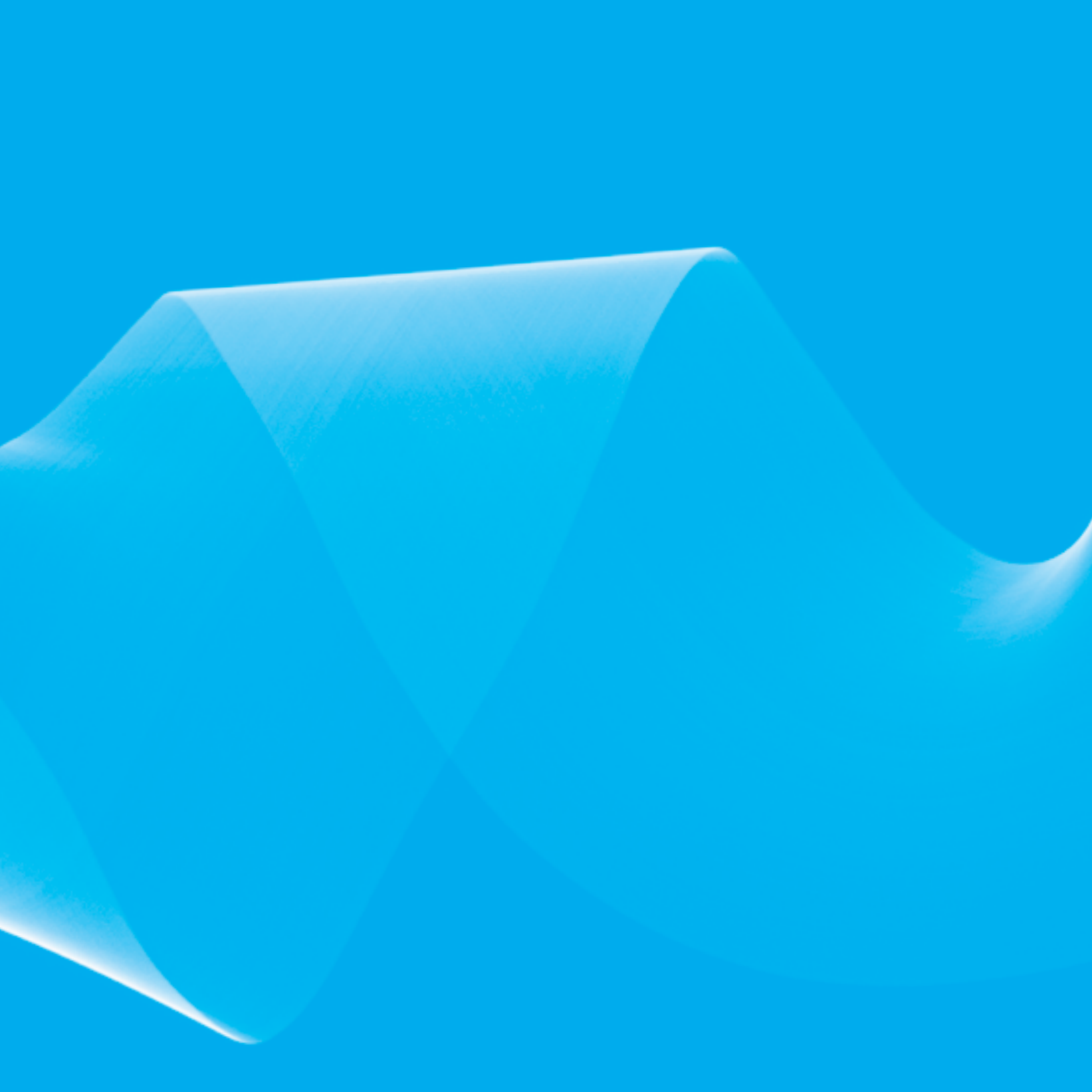
One of the key players in this newly emerging scene was Grant McIntyre, a significant figure in Canberra politics.[13] A friend of Harold Holt since their school days, and his private secretary as minister for immigration, the two continued to work closely even after Holt became prime minister. McIntyre had a topflight career. He had served in World War II and was a prosecutor at the Japanese War Crimes trials. He designed his own house in Canberra and the city's elite flocked to his parties.

But he had another life too. He was, Bill Wells remembers, 'pretty-over-the-top, very theatrical'. David (Beatrice) Williams remembers him in Sydney in about 1967, at the Purple Onion, as 'this old queen … applying hideous make-up to sing as a guest artist, "All the Pansy Faces"'. His home became a centre of kamp life in the 1950s and 1960s. Wells remembers a certain seediness to McIntyre's domestic arrangements. His home had the feel a junk shop, its chaos concealed to some extent by the use of candle-lighting for his smaller soirees. But still, one friend would, on hearing of a social event, make his way round early and wash every piece of cutlery and crockery that he could lay hands on. Care had to be taken when eating roasts to pick out the pieces of plastic wrapping not removed before the cooking. If the gin and tonics he served were too strong for many of his guests, and ended up watering the aspidistras, this was all part of the 'wild days … [h]ilarious days' that Bill Wells remembers so fondly.

McIntyre was living what historian George Chauncey has called 'the double life'.[14] In his working life and public social life he was a respectable public servant, confidante of the powerful, known for his sharp mind and connections to political and cultural circles. On the other hand, away from this world, he was flamboyantly homosexual. This was a common way of life for homosexuals in the 1950s and 1960s. And, as was so often the case, his sexuality must have been known to many of his colleagues. It is hardly possible that Harold Holt, for example, given their life-long friendship, did not know, and McIntyre's very senior position must have made him the subject of security reviews. Like Wendy and her circle, Holt and McIntyre's other colleagues almost certainly practised 'don't ask, don't tell'. Rumours abounded about members of parliament and even about senior Cabinet ministers but were not publicised. And, as for the security services, McIntyre's connections probably protected him. David (Beatrice) Williams' recollection about McIntyre as an old queen at the Purple Onion is tied to a story of a couple of local policemen turning up to demand their usual payment from the club manager and finding themselves being introduced to McIntyre as the prime minister's private secretary, which was enough to send them high-tailing it away empty-handed. However much his 'character defect' might have been of concern to ASIO, for his colleagues he was one of the chaps, his loyalty beyond doubt.

In Canberra, as in Australia generally, after World War II, there were very good reasons for those who were attracted to their own sex to keep that fact to themselves. It was a criminal act for men to engage in any kind of physical intimacy in public or in private. And for women and men it was, if discovered, a source of scandal and likely to result in the loss of friends, family, careers and jobs. Some will have taken the threats to heart and may well have eschewed all expression of their desires — physical, written, verbal. But there were others who did not — who knew perfectly well what their desires were and believed to some extent that they had a right to express them. These women and men set out to find, or to make, opportunities to meet others like themselves. By the 1960s a scene was developing in Canberra. There were, almost certainly, more kamp people out and about, and more places to go to. The beats seem to have been very active; there was a pub where kamps could gather on Friday nights, where men and women could dance with their partners; there were trips to Sydney and the Blue Mountains to let off steam. For many, with a bit of luck and some discretion, life could be pretty good.

The Molonglo River in the 1950s: 'sitting in the sun; you know what I mean …'

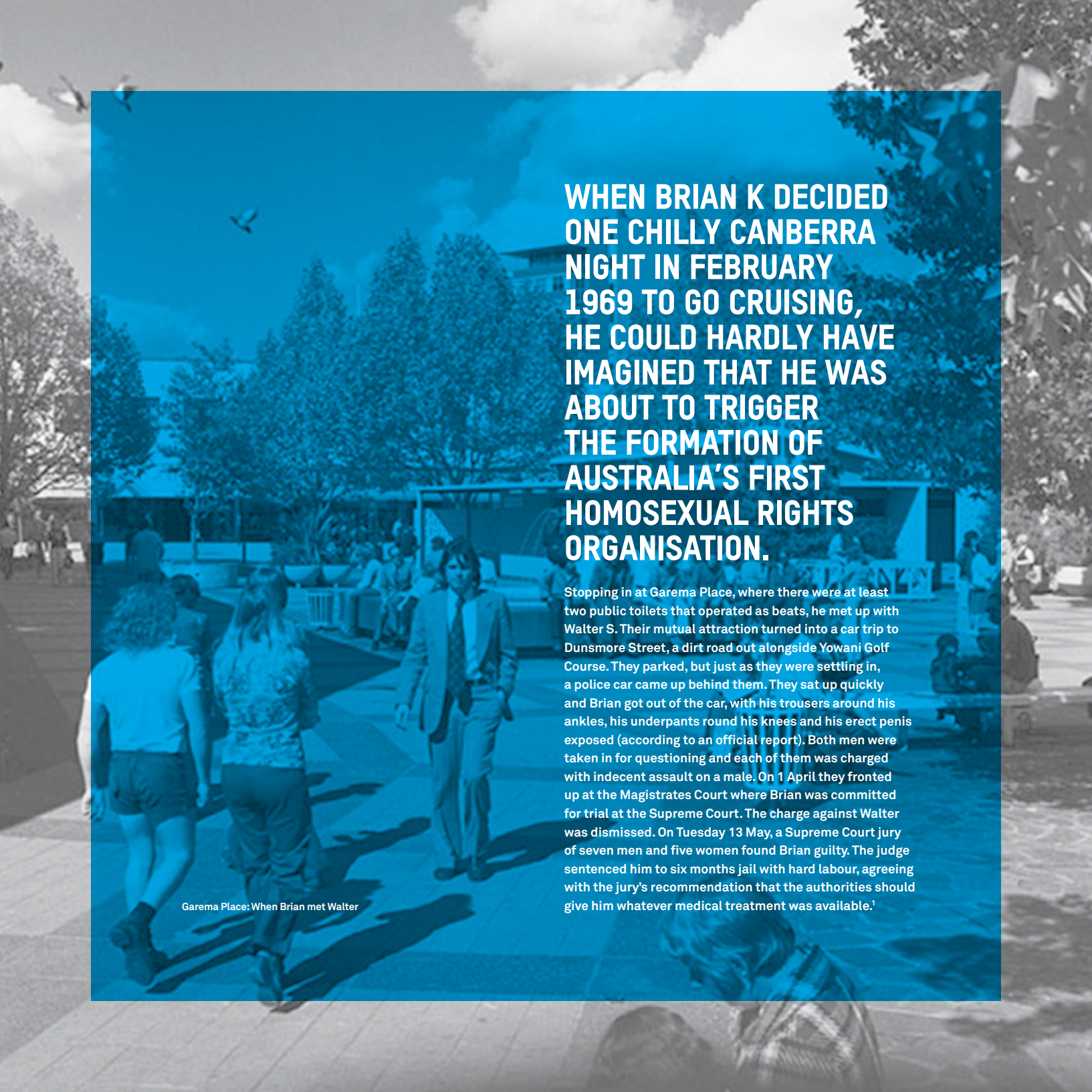


CHAPTER 02

"WE BLEW OUR TRUMPET AND...": THE HOMOSEXUAL LAW REFORM SOCIETY

"WE BLEW O
TRUMPET A
THE HOMOS
LAW REFOR


UR
ND...:
EXUAL
M SOCIETY



WHEN BRIAN K DECIDED ONE CHILLY CANBERRA NIGHT IN FEBRUARY 1969 TO GO CRUISING, HE COULD HARDLY HAVE IMAGINED THAT HE WAS ABOUT TO TRIGGER THE FORMATION OF AUSTRALIA'S FIRST HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS ORGANISATION.

Stopping in at Garema Place, where there were at least two public toilets that operated as beats, he met up with Walter S. Their mutual attraction turned into a car trip to Dunsmore Street, a dirt road out alongside Yowani Golf Course. They parked, but just as they were settling in, a police car came up behind them. They sat up quickly and Brian got out of the car, with his trousers around his ankles, his underpants round his knees and his erect penis exposed (according to an official report). Both men were taken in for questioning and each of them was charged with indecent assault on a male. On 1 April they fronted up at the Magistrates Court where Brian was committed for trial at the Supreme Court. The charge against Walter was dismissed. On Tuesday 13 May, a Supreme Court jury of seven men and five women found Brian guilty. The judge sentenced him to six months jail with hard labour, agreeing with the jury's recommendation that the authorities should give him whatever medical treatment was available.[1]

Garema Place: When Brian met Walter

The laws against buggery had come to Australia with the First Fleet, and the lesser offence of 'gross indecency' had been adopted by the various colonies and states following the United Kingdom's lead in an 1886 law. 'Gross indecency' covered a much broader range of activities than did 'buggery' and included any physical contact that could be interpreted as sexual.[2] ACT police had been targetting homosexual offences — sometimes casually, sometimes intensively — for decades. The arrest of Brian and Walter was not, in itself, very unusual. Except that, unlike many men who pleaded guilty in the hope that they would be spared the public exposure of a court hearing, Brian pleaded not guilty and appealed to the High Court against both his conviction and the severity of the sentence. His barrister argued that 'as the evidence disclosed no assault in the usual sense of the word' (mutually consenting assault flew in the face of common sense, but legally the argument revolved around the wording of the statute and its relationship to the common law). The two justices refused the appeal.

Such appeals were not at all common, but in other ways, too, this was a notable case. There was the severity of the sentence — six months jail with hard labour was a heavy penalty for this sort of offence at the time. There were questions about why the police happened to be in the rather isolated Dunsmore Street just in time to catch the two men. And, more striking still, how was it that Brian was tried and convicted, while Walter was not? Fifteen months later, James Grieve, a lecturer in French at the Australian National University (ANU) published an article in *Woroni*, the student newspaper, addressing some of these issues. He claimed that Walter escaped prosecution because he refused to incriminate himself whereas Brian blurted out to the arresting officer, 'He touched me', which was sufficient evidence to convict. Subsequently this has been confirmed in all substantial details by the Commonwealth's Deputy Crown Solicitor in a 1972 report. The severity of the sentence related to the fact that Brian had a conviction for homosexual acts six years previously for which he had been given a good behaviour bond.

At this point Brian and Walter disappear from history, Brian into jail. But the case, although tucked away in *The Canberra Times* law reports, caught the eye of Thomas Mautner — whereupon what appeared to be nothing more than a slightly unusual prosecution, came to be a history-making event.

Mautner was a lecturer in philosophy at the ANU and in April was talking to Dennis Rose, a senior official in the attorney-general's department and until recently a lecturer in law at the ANU, about the possibility of setting up an abortion law reform group in Canberra. At some point, the conversation turned to the case of Brian K and Walter S. Rose referred Mautner to Brian's solicitor, Michael Landale. Landale was a young barrister at the time, recently back from England where he had witnessed the last days of the decade long debate that led to decriminalisation there.[3] It was he who organised Brian's appeal to the High Court, believing that this was a case that might lead to the striking down of the 'indecent assault on a male' law. At a subsequent meeting, Mautner, Landale and a journalist, Peter Sekuless, decided to act and the next day a front-page article in *The Canberra Times* announced the formation of a homosexual law reform society. A public meeting was held on 27 July at Red Cross House, Hobart Place, at which thirty-odd people voted the society into existence. They adopted four aims and elected a committee of seven which was to be responsible for drafting an Ordinance to repeal the anti-homosexual provisions of the law code. (At this time, the ACT's legal system still operated under NSW laws — an arrangement entered into when the ACT was established as a separate territory. Amendment to such laws as they applied in the territory was within the power of the relevant federal minister who had the power to amend by Ordinance.)[4]

A POLITICAL WORLD

We enter here, a very different world to the kamp subculture or scene which had been emerging in Canberra since the late 1950s. The subculture was veiled in a protective secrecy. For the most part, social life took place in private homes, in weekends away and in night-time encounters in parks and public toilets. The hotel bars where public gatherings were tolerated required respectable behaviour. The history of the decriminalisation of homosexual acts in the ACT, on the other hand, is a history of lobbying, public debate and discussion, opinion pieces and surveys, draft legislation, of politicians and reformers.

The Homosexual Law Reform Society of the ACT (HLRS) was not a part of the kamp world and, in fact, none of its most prominent leaders identified publicly (or as far as I can tell, privately) as homosexual. Nor would they have been expected to. The HLRS represented something very new in Australia: 'homosexual politics'. This politics had nothing in common with the gay politics which arrived in 1970 which rested on notions of pride and defiance, and demanded that society's laws and attitudes change. Nor was homosexual politics an expression of the older 'homophile politics' long practiced in Europe and the United States which was undertaken by homosexuals (or 'homophiles', as they often called themselves) speaking openly from and about their own experience, even if they often felt compelled to use pseudonyms to ward off the danger of victimisation.

Homophiles showed no great interest agitating for law reform, preferring to engage with professionals of various kinds, to educate them about the realities of homophile lives and to bring about a change in views. Thus enlightened, it was assumed, these opinion-leaders would contribute to wider attitudinal change in society which would, in turn, eventually, bring an end to discrimination and unjust laws.

'Homosexual politics' was a different thing again, being concerned almost entirely with the decriminalisation of sex acts between men. It was conducted by citizens whose sexual identity was irrelevant to their work. It was reforming rather than transforming; and it involved working within the structures of normal political life to persuade politicians and opinion-makers of the need to legislate. Homosexual politics, in this sense, has been largely overlooked in the histories of sexual politics in Australia. In Britain it had history dating back to the 19th century and was the central form of decriminalisation efforts through the 1950s and 1960s. In Australia, it lasted less than a decade, emerging as a small part of a broader movement for the modernisation and liberalisation of Australian society by middle-class reformers. The HLRS was, in the words of James Grieve, one of its members, the end of an earlier phase of reform politics — a phase within the rise of modernising liberalism in Australia and of a politics centred on humanism and civil liberties. The decriminalisation campaign was an expression, not of identity, but of a politics. In this politics citizens — regardless of their sex, gender, sexuality, or other characteristics — were entitled, even expected, to take up their responsibility to create a modern, liberal society, stripped of all backwardness, irrationality and unfairness.

The members of the HLRS committee were precisely of this world. Along with Landale, Thomas Mautner was a key member of the HLRS and became its main spokesperson. He had a history of supporting various reform issues. As mentioned above, when Brian K's case came up, Mautner was talking with Dennis Rose about the formation of an abortion law reform society. They were working from a suggestion of Beatrice Faust, one of Australia's leading humanists and civil rights campaigners. Faust and Mautner met during the campaign against the death penalty at the time of the Ronald Ryan hanging. She was an outspoken supporter of homosexual law reform and was for a time the chief spokesperson for the Melbourne-based lesbian group, the Daughters of Bilitis, despite not being, herself, a lesbian ('homosexual politics' in action again). Mautner was, as James Grieve says, someone who knew everybody, including prominent figures in the ALP and the media. This provided an invaluable means for lobbying and publicising the issue. Most of the committee members were politically aware and interested in public affairs. James Grieve and Elizabeth Reid were both active in many of the reform issues that were current at the time. Many were academics and two were prominent figures in the main political parties — Landale in the Liberal Party, Gordon Walsh in the ALP.

These were well-established networks with a history of agitating for reforms of various kinds in various public forums. The HLRS was well-connected to the media right from the start, mainly through Peter Sekuless, a reporter. *The Canberra Times* had published articles promoting the HLRS at the time of its formation and continued to be 'most generous in opening its columns for a detailed and penetrating discussion of the laws on homosexuality', with six articles in July and August 1969 and many letters. As Peter Sekuless observes, the editor of *The Canberra Times*, John Allen, was a Catholic who might have been expected to oppose coverage of homosexuality. As a liberal, however, who took his responsibilities to his paper seriously, Allen was keen to have *The Canberra Times* operate as a paper of record and to have it reflect accurately what was happening in society.

In these circles, the idea of decriminalisation of homosexual acts was near-universally accepted, with the case having been made for at least a decade in various publications in Britain and other countries, including Australia. When the committee of the HLRS started work on its reform proposal, it began with a study of the basic documents including the Wolfenden Report (the British government report which in 1957 had recommended the legalisation of homosexual acts, finally enacted in 1967), as well as an Australian 1967 public opinion survey, and articles and editorials from the *Medical journal of Australia*, the *Australian and New Zealand journal of psychiatry* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*. By the middle of October 1969, under the leadership of Des O'Connor of the ANU Law School, a draft Ordinance and an accompanying submission had been prepared. The proposal, guided by the Wolfenden Report and Britain's Sexual Offences Act 1967, relied upon the notion of the consenting adult in private, but with two main differences, namely: the age of consent was to be 18 rather than 21 and 'private' was not to be interpreted in the narrow sense of 'in the presence of not more than two people'. Courts would be required to seek a medical opinion before passing any sentence of imprisonment upon a homosexual. It was considerably more liberal than its British model. Once drafted, the proposed Ordinance was submitted for approval to a public meeting, on 15 October 1969.

Hobart Place, where the HLRS's first public meeting was held

THE HLRS AT WORK

At the very heart of homosexual politics in the way that I am using the term here, was the right and responsibility of citizens to work for change. And this is reflected in the HLRS' work.[5] It set out to bring its demands and arguments for reform to the attention of legislators, opinion makers and the wider public. To help them with this, the committee undertook some public opinion research of its own. This was intended to address the concern that 'the main obstacle [to change] is ... the belief of politicians that they would become unpopular if they introduced law reform'. The 'Report of a Survey on Homosexuality' by the Faculty of Law at the ANU gives the results of a survey of 100 Canberra men. Of the 24 questions, 13 related to homosexuality and found, among other things, that 68 per cent of those interviewed favoured decriminalisation. The research team concluded that 'one thing seems certain — the Canberra public in general is in favour of homosexual law reform'. (This was substantially at odds with the national survey conducted by Chappell and Wilson in 1967 which showed a mere 22 per cent support for homosexual law reform among the public. The result likely reflected, among other things, more liberal social attitudes in Canberra.)[6]

The society also published three issues of a newsletter which had a national mailing list of about 130. The newsletter provided updates on progress, details of the draft Ordinance, reports of lobbying activities and it encouraged supporters of law reform to write to the attorney-general, members of parliament and parliamentary candidates. Members of the committee also took up the debate in public in newspaper articles and letters and public meetings. The second issue of the *Newsletter* listed those with whom the committee had consulted: the ACT Law Society, clergymen, members of the medical profession, members of the Bench and the general public. Finally, sometime after forwarding the draft Ordinance and associated papers, members of the committee were invited to meet with the federal Liberal government's attorney-general, Tom Hughes. This was a less than satisfactory experience. Hughes had clearly not read the submission and his adviser produced a string of ludicrous objections to the proposal along the lines of the territory's responsibility *in loco parentis* to the students at Duntroon military college. But one outcome of the meeting was Hughes's suggestion that he would prefer to address the issue as part of a broader discussion of a new law code, rather than via an Ordinance.[7]

Aside from these activities the HLRS operated as a lightning rod for all those concerned with the issue of homosexual law reform as part of their broader commitment to liberalisation and modernisation. It was assisted in this by prominent articles by Don Aitkin in *The Canberra Times*, Henry Mayer in the *The Australian* and Michael Richardson in *The Age*. All three writers spoke out strongly in support, marshalling the by-then familiar range of liberal arguments. All reported the work of the HLRS and (except for Richardson) provided a contact address.[8] The result was a wave of letters to the HLRS from people praising its efforts and proposing to set up branches or similar organisations in other cities. Although the committee's view was that the state-based nature of anti-homosexual legislation made a national organisation impracticable, it offered considerable support to those who had written from interstate. In Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide, the committee provided a list of names and addresses to potential organisers.[9]

There was surprisingly little adverse reaction to the Society's work. Its papers contain no hostile correspondence (other than one piece from a typing service that refused their business) and, overall, Mautner was able to report to a correspondent in November 1969 that 'it does appear as if there is virtually no opposition to the kind of law reform that we have in mind'.[10]

‘a dirt road out alongside the Yowani Golf Course’

EARLY SUPPORT

In the medium term, significant public figures began to take up the question of law reform. In the churches, individuals such as the Rev. R.W. Lawton, a minister of the Churches of Christ, called for decriminalisation in a radio broadcast, declaring forcefully that 'This churchman adds his cry of "shame" at the gaoling of consenting adults, and adds his cry for the repeal of legal prohibitions and penalties'. At the Anglican Synod on 12 August 1969, the Reverend K. Brewer of Canberra moved a motion condemning the law, only to have a motion to close the synod moved and passed. In response to radio reports of this episode, two other delegates dashed off letters to *The Canberra Times* to explain that the decision to close the synod related to a dwindling quorum and the lateness of the hour, rather than any opposition to the content of the motion.[11] Even those who had been initially dubious were coming around. On 27 May 1970, the federal attorney-general, Tom Hughes, who only a few months before had been involved in that very unproductive meeting with some of the leaders of the HLRS, addressed the national conference of the Australian Council of Social Services in Canberra, suggesting that homosexual acts ought not necessarily to be within the ambit of the criminal law. Better was to follow: the next day editorials in *The Canberra Times* and *The Age* in Melbourne supported Hughes' position and called for law reform. A few months later again, Gough Whitlam, leader of the federal parliamentary Labor Party, expressed his agreement with Canadian justice minister Pierre Trudeau's dictum that 'the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation' and pledged his support for a conscience vote in the parliament.[12]

Well into 1971, the group was actively promoting its cause. Perhaps the most dramatic episode was the attempt to convene a meeting of interested members of the federal parliament. In October 1971, Mautner wrote to Bill Hayden, a prominent ALP frontbencher who had a long history of support for homosexual law reform, suggesting a briefing for interested members of parliament. Hayden responded favourably and called a meeting for the evening of Tuesday, 2 November 1971. On that morning, however, the Labor caucus executive discussed the issue and Frank Stewart and Charlie Jones, prominent members of the party's Catholic wing, expressed hostility to the idea of a meeting. Hayden's initial reaction was to go ahead anyway — in the absence of any party policy to the contrary, he saw no reason not to at least discuss the matter. Stewart and Jones demanded a special caucus meeting to thrash the issue out, and although the executive rejected this, the bitterness aroused was by now so intense that Hayden decided to back off. Stewart was a powerful figure in the NSW right and had friends in Queensland (Hayden's home state) and was in a position to make life difficult for him. But fellow parliamentarian, Moss Cass (a Victorian), organised 11 members of the caucus to reissue Hayden's original circular, convening the meeting for a week later. Among the signatures on this reissued call were those of senior parliamentary figures such as Lionel Murphy, Jim Cairns and Tom Uren (all members of the caucus executive) as well as, *The Daily Telegraph* noted, four backbench doctors.[13]

Even then, the controversy was not finished. On the evening originally scheduled for the meeting, Mautner and his fellow speakers, along with Moss Cass, Gough Whitlam and several other parliamentarians were standing in King's Hall, Parliament House when Frank Stewart ('a bit under the weather', as both Cass and Mautner recall) passed by. Approached by Cass to discuss the matter and possibly invited to attend a meeting, he refused, red-faced with fury, any suggestion that he might sit in the same room as 'bum-fuckers', threatening, for good measure, to punch Mautner in the nose. Things were defused and a week later the meeting went ahead without incident. Indeed, James Grieve remembers it as very productive — attended by 18 ALP parliamentarians, with a Liberal (Bob Solomon), who may have been defying a party decision not to attend, sitting away from the table at which the speakers and audience were seated. Mautner, Grieve and Elizabeth Reid presented the case for law reform, rehearsing, yet again, the nature of the draft Ordinance and the state of public opinion.

'A RATHER DORMANT BODY'

In view of the overwhelmingly favourable response to the HLRS's demands, it comes as something of a shock to discover that homosexual law reform was not achieved in the ACT until 1976 — some seven years after the HLRS was established. By this stage, the HLRS itself had ceased to exist. Its activities had scaled down over the course of 1971 and the federal parliament furore of November 1971 had been something of a last hoorah. As early as July of that year Mautner described the group as 'somewhat inactive'. A few months later, James Grieve described it as 'a rather dormant body'.[14]

It is not as if the timing was wrong. In fact, it was very right indeed. On the very day that *The Canberra Times* reported the case of Brian K and Walter S, the federal attorney-general was tabling in parliament a report proposing a draft criminal code (DCC) for the ACT. Government by Ordinance was widely felt to be unsatisfactory in a modern democratic society and in 1969 the Law Council of Australia had submitted, after five years work, a draft criminal code for the territories. In its introduction, the Co-ordinating Committee noted that:

> We are aware that there are some areas of controversy with respect to the criminal law, particularly relating to homosexuality, abortion and suicide. We have not attempted to answer the problems raised by these controversies, the answer to which must depend upon a government's appreciation of social conditions in the widest sense.[15]

This attempt to evade controversy failed entirely. If the immediate trigger for the formation of the HLRS was the prosecution of Brian K, the DCC provided the focus for much of the public campaign. After all, if the ACT law was to be entirely rewritten, this was the obvious time to decriminalise homosexuality. James Grieve makes the point that it was the coincidence of the two events that was crucial:

> there had been many more scandalous, cruel, unjust and stupid prosecutions than this one, yet they had never aroused public indignation nor precipitated the formation of a law-reform society. But this case happened about the time when the Government had published, and invited comment on, the new code of criminal legislation that it intends to introduce.[16]

(The reference to the scandalous, cruel, unjust and stupid prosecutions in the past was right. In late 1964, and extending into 1965, police conducted a concerted campaign against the Telopea Park beat which involved blatant entrapment. Responding, the police claimed, to public complaints, officers were sent into the park at night to chat up men who were there seeking sexual encounters. As soon as the victim touched the policeman, he was arrested. On one night, two constables arrested three men in three different encounters. On 12 December, one of two men charged was reported as having attempted suicide — and was charged with that as well! These episodes were reported in *The Canberra Times*, but without any visible public response of any kind.)[17]

The opportunity to decriminalise homosexual acts took on a certain urgency once it was realised that the effect of the code was to *broaden* the scope of homosexual acts that fell under the law's sanction.

The DCC's proposed offence of 'sexual connection against the order of nature' did not restrict itself to acts committed by men, thus opening the possibility that heterosexual couples could be prosecuted under its terms. And the vagueness of the formulation meant that behaviour that fell outside the established offences of buggery, attempted buggery and indecent assault on a male might be now offences. (It also opened the possibility of prosecution of lesbian acts, though no-one at the time other than activist Paul Foss seems to have commented on this aspect.) The DCC, then, was both trigger and a target for much of the HLRS's activism, pushing the general issue of the role of law in society onto the public agenda in a way that made the specific issue of homosexual law reform a relevant part of the debate.[18]

THE LIMITS OF LIBERALISM

All of which makes the failure of the HLRS to achieve its goal that much more surprising. But a welcoming political climate and even friends in high places are not, on their own, any guarantee of success. It is often assumed that decriminalisation would be an easy task, compared to the broader goals of shifting public opinion and overthrowing religious and medical paradigms. James Grieve wrote to the founders of the national gay rights group the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (established in Sydney in mid-1970) declaring that CAMP's task (which they had described as 'much wider than law reform' and included the changing of public opinion and professional attitudes) would be 'a much harder job' and that 'no doubt we [the HLRS] shall succeed long before you do'.[19] In fact, this was not the case at all: professional and public opinion was changed very much more rapidly than the law. And the reason for this is that law reform rests on winning majority support from a particular group of people (members of parliament), who may or may not be open to the efforts of the reformers. Public opinion, on the other hand, is everywhere; and even the medical profession and the clergy are composed of large, diverse groups of people in which pools of supporters and opponents can be identified and targeted. Activists could (and did) operate on many fronts simultaneously and serially; moving around blockages towards opportunities.

In relation to homosexual law reform in the ACT the main obstacle was not any great hostility to the demand; it was the fact that, despite the pool of support within party political circles, the issue was simply not a pressing one for politicians. The earliest sign of this came with Tom Hughes' unceremonious dumping of the issue. From his cautious public suggestion in May 1970 that homosexual acts ought not necessarily be within the ambit of the criminal law, he retreated rapidly.

In a September television interview, the prime minister, William McMahon, unambiguously opposed any change to the law and Hughes followed on, declaring that he had been 'kite-flying' to test public opinion and had found more opposition than support. (Michael Richardson, of *The Age*, while not denying that there may have been a flood of hostile letters, saw the chief source of opposition to law reform as being members of the Liberal and Country parties.)[20] The ALP had a better record of support — in July, the WA State Conference had passed a motion calling for law reform.[21] But the federal party turned out in power to be surprisingly dilatory and actually failed to decriminalise at all.

This was despite the fact that on 18 October 1973, the House of Representatives voted in favour of a motion that read: 'That in the opinion of this House homosexual acts between consenting adults in private should not be subject to the criminal law' moved by former Liberal prime minister John Gorton and seconded by Labor minister for the environment Moss Cass. A free vote (that is, one in which party discipline was not imposed) resulted in a 64–40 majority in favour of the motion.[22]

The motion had been an expression of opinion only, but Labor's attorney-general, Lionel Murphy, started work anyway. He commissioned his department to prepare an Ordinance, which he hoped to have ready within month or two. There were obstacles. While public discussion was muted, the Catholic Archbishop of Canberra–Goulburn spoke out against reform. And there were practical, problems too. In the first place there was no real model for the decriminalisation of homosexuality. The HLRS had been very critical of the British Act of 1967, and the 1972 South Australian reform was so unsatisfactory that there was immediate and almost universal agreement that it would need to be scrapped and re-legislated. The repeal of a few sections of the Act seemed fairly straightforward, but the question of public soliciting, age of consent, privacy and various other niceties surfaced at various points in the discussion. There was a concern to get it right, given that the Ordinance was likely to be taken as a model when the states started to legislate. The attorney-general's department sought advice from Julian Phillips, a well-known legal scholar (who was to play a central role in the decriminalisation in Victoria in 1978–80). But other voices were being raised, too. The ACT Advisory Council wrote to the attorney-general expressing a wish to be consulted. CAMP NSW wrote to the prime minister about the Brian K and Walter S case and about consenting acts between adults in private more generally.[23]

Reform of law sought by new society

The Homosexual Law Reform Society of the ACT, which was formed at a public meeting attended by more than 30 people last night, decided to draft an ordinance seeking to repeal the existing laws relating to homosexuality in the ACT.

A Canberra solicitor, Mr M. A. S. Landale, who convened the meeting, said he believed the society was the first of its kind in Australia.

The society advocates that all sexual conduct between consenting adults in private should be beyond the scope of the criminal law.

The society's aims are: "No reasonable theory of punishment supports the making of such conduct into an offence. We con-

Reporting the formation of the HLRS, Canberra Times, 28 July 1969

unknown tonnage, were sunk at the base, the announcement said.

One pursuing Communist gunboat was sunk and a second damaged outside the harbour.

No Peking comment

The number and type of Nationalist vessels involved in the raid was not given. The Government said only that they returned safely to their bases.

There was no immediate comment from Peking.

The Formosa Strait separates the two Chinas by about 100 miles.

The spokesman said the battle spilled out into the Formosa Strait, with a

This was the first sea battle since January 18, 1966.

On November 24, 1967,

Nationalist Government was driven from the mainland by Mao Tsetung's Communists in 1949.

barely visible from the base of the steps only a hundred feet away.

Canberra airport was

MOVES ON HOMOS

A meeting between a lawyer and a university lecturer in a Canberra solicitor's office yesterday may lead to the formation of a society seeking changes in the law on homosexuality.

The lecturer, Dr Thomas Mautner, of the philosophy department at the ANU, had been disturbed

by press reports of a Canberra man who was recently sent to gaol for six months for indecent assault.

Dr Mautner arranged to meet the convicted man's solicitor, Mr M. A. S. Landale, of Davies, Bailey and Cater, to find out more about the case. The two men decided to try to form a society aimed at reforming the laws relating to homosexuality in Australia.

The Homosexual Law Reform Society was established in England in 1958 with the aims of modifying the law and alleviating some of the social difficulties experienced by homosexuals.

In 1967 the Sexual Offences Bill legalised the commission of a homosexual act between two

The new ACT Legislative Assembly had its first sitting in October 1974, and so, in debating the issue on 2 December it at least was moving promptly on the matter, but it still only had advisory powers at this stage and was limited to urging (in a motion that passed unopposed) the attorney-general to introduce reform 'without further delay'. The final Bill for reform was presented to the Assembly in May 1975 where it passed on July 22. But by the time the federal ALP government fell in November of that year, the Ordinance had still not been signed into law and in mid-1976 the whole process began all over again under the new Liberal attorney-general, Bob Ellicott.

He found his efforts being obstructed by the executive council which thought altogether too much effort was being put into the issue. The final decriminalisation of male homosexual acts took place in November 1976.

The law was, as Ellicott observed, rational, proper and reflected community standards'. It decriminalised homosexual acts in private, with an age of consent of 18 years.[24]

The ACT was very nearly the first jurisdiction to enact this reform, but it was pipped, because of the various delays, by South Australia. In the end, the reform of the law in the ACT owed much to agendas other than those raised by the HLRS and the liberal humanist imperative. We can see this in the way in which it was argued for during the December 1974 ACT Legislative Assembly debate. While the well-established liberal arguments were made, they were supplemented, even over-shadowed, by a more parochial concern with the right of the Assembly to make social legislation on behalf of Territorians. Susan Ryan, the mover of the December 1974 motion, argued at some length along the lines that:

xpected today unless over-
ight winds shifted the
g. Experiments to dis-
rse fog. — Page 8.

and executive powers, it would be approaching the Senate again as that body was their only avenue.

SEXUALITY

onsenting adults (over 21 ears) in private. In no ustralian State or Ter-tory does the law allow e commission of a omosexual act in public r private.

It is expected that if a omosexual law reform ociety is formed in Can-erra it would press for e amendment of the raft Criminal Code for ustralian Territories which was tabled in Federal Parliament on May 14.

The draft code made no attempt to change the laws relating to homosexuality.

A spokesman for the ACT Council for Civil Liberties said the council would be in favour of a body devoted to the reform of the laws on homosexuality.

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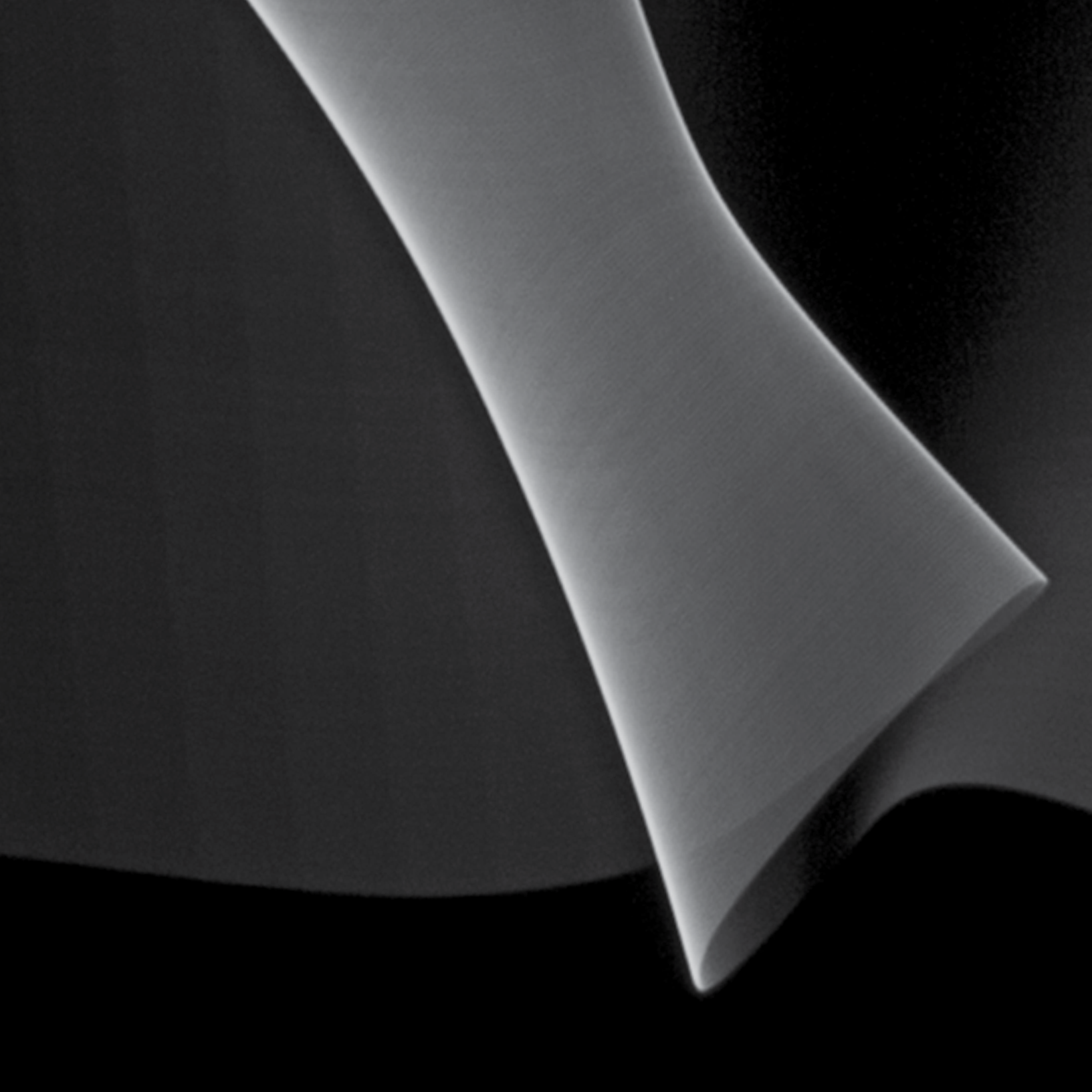
Planning the HLRS, Canberra Times, 4 July 1969

> There is no justification for elected members of Parliament from all over Australia formulating social legislation that affects the lives of the people living here [in Canberra]. We are a community. We are about to have self-government and this is the sort of area where I think we must, very speedily, move into legislation.

Fully three-quarters of the Ryan speech was to do with this aspect of law reform, rather than with the merits of the case itself.[25]

The HLRS had done remarkable work — it had put the issue of law reform on the public agenda, drafted an impressive and practical proposal to change the law and lobbied successfully to elicit statements of support from significant numbers of influential people.

It had even undertaken the research to show that there was real public support for decriminalisation. It had a national significance via the newspaper coverage that it received, and as letters came in from all over Australia it put people who wanted to do something in touch with each other and encouraged them to take action in their own states. But in the end, it lacked the capacity to overcome the relative insignificance of the issue to those who alone had the power to change the law: politicians. Its inability to achieve its goal merely affirms that processes of social and political change are more complex — full of vagaries and chances — than a single organisation can necessarily deal with. It was the role of the *social movement*, of which the HLRS was but the founding moment, and which was to take off in 1970, to show just what was required to carry through the reform of Australian laws and attitudes.



CHAPTER 03

THE GAY MOVEMENT

THE GAY MOVE-MENT

ON 17 SEPTEMBER 1971 A LETTER APPEARED IN *THE CANBERRA TIMES* ANNOUNCING THE FORMATION OF THE ACT BRANCH OF THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST MORAL PERSECUTION (CAMP). IN THE LETTER, PAUL FOSS, A PHD STUDENT IN CHEMISTRY AT THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY (ANU), DESCRIBED AS THE BRANCH'S ACTING SPOKESMAN, SPELLED OUT THE GROUP'S AIMS AS: 'POLITICAL AGITATION IN FAVOUR OF LAW REFORM AND THE RIGHTS OF HOMOSEXUALS. MEASURES WHICH WILL PROMULGATE THE PLIGHT OF THE HOMOSEXUAL IN OUR SOCIETY AND THUS CAPTURE THE ATTENTION OF THE AUSTRALIAN CITIZEN SHALL BE CARRIED OUT'.

AFTER THE GENERAL MEETING HE TOLD A REPORTER THAT THE GROUP WOULD BE OPPOSING THE DRAFT CRIMINAL CODE, WOULD SET UP A FUND TO CHALLENGE POLICE PROSECUTIONS OF HOMOSEXUALS, DELIVER SERVICES AND ADVICE ON LEGAL, MEDICAL AND EMPLOYMENT MATTERS AND ARRANGE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS.

GAY POLITICS HAD ARRIVED IN CANBERRA.

CAMP ACT

The Campaign Against Moral Persecution had been set up in Sydney in mid-1970 and it publicly announced itself in September of that year. Within twelve months, it had 1500 members, a nationally distributed magazine, and branches in all capital cities some of which had clubrooms for meetings and social events. Initially its politics looked fairly liberal, directed at changing minds and laws through argument and lobbying. But it marked the beginnings in Australia of something new — *gay politics*, which put homosexual people at the centre of the struggle for equality, a struggle which demanded that society had to change and not just its laws.[1]

At the inaugural general meeting on September 30, CAMP ACT's members elected a governing body and three committees to handle social functions, law reform, and advice and counselling.[2] The group's establishment took place within a wider discussion about homosexuality sparked by the Draft Criminal Code and the formation of the Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS). The timing was right, and ambitions were high. There were early hopes that CAMP in Canberra, like Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane would soon have clubrooms, so 'essential to a sense of community', a place where 'we [would be] slowly gaining the confidence to reject society's definitions of us as sick and to see ourselves more realistically as an oppressed minority'. The plan was to hold a public meeting on law reform, 'the most important function of CAMP', after consultation with the HLRS and to do some lobbying of members of parliament in relation to the Draft Criminal Code. Experts from various disciplines were to be invited — 'legal, sociology, medical, ecclesiastic etc'. A third subcommittee to assist with legal, medical and psychiatric health referrals was mooted. Very little of this actually happened, although the churches were approached. In November 1971 the committee conducted a survey of 71 representatives of 20 religious organisations offering to meet with them to discuss matters of interest pertaining to homosexuality. Of the 13 replies received 10 were favourable and three were not. They found enthusiastic support from the Society of Friends (Quakers) who did meet with them and a supportive letter was received from the Anglican Bishop. It is telling that the favourable responses received the most attention in the report of the survey; positive responses were always more newsworthy to gay activists in the 1970s than hostility.[3]

ACT Gay solidarity 1979

Canberra at the second Mardi Gras in Sydney, 1979

The law reform subcommittee set to work in late 1971.[4] At what was probably the first meeting, held on 18 October 1971, Thomas Mautner and Elizabeth Reid (both, as we know, associated with the HLRS) attended and offered this advice to the two other attendees: contact the Australian Labor Party's backbench committee on legal affairs; and contact the ALP's Bill Hayden to thank him for his supportive statements and to urge him to proceed with a private member's bill. Over the next few meetings, with usually four or five in attendance (Mautner and Reid did not attend again) there were reports on research into criminal cases in the ACT dating back to the early 1960s, a proposal for a booklet on homosexual rights and plans for a seminar.

The social committee seems to have organised the most successful of the group's activities. There were fortnightly gatherings in a church hall 'which for obvious reasons, will remain unnamed'. There were a number of film evenings and a Christmas party. Its most successful event was its chicken and champagne picnic in late 1971. This was run in the way that such social events had been staged in larger cities for decades, with those in the know (in this case, about 50 people) gathering in a carpark to be told in what 'secluded' location it was being held. As usual after eating, there were sporting events — a tug of war between 'the boys and the girls' ('Winners — the girls!?' described as only 10 'tiny demure ladies'), a three-legged race, a piggy back race. The day was a great success — 'all were happy and gay (although not all were gay)'.[5]

But the organisation had not taken off in the way that its founders had hoped — membership numbers were low, attendances at events small and patchy. The group seems to have petered out sometime in 1972. Part of the problem was, of course, the fear that many felt about coming out, or even being seen in the company of other homosexuals. These were not unreasonable fears. David, who had been a public servant in Canberra, wrote that after a 'partial' coming out at work, 'the general attitude of the staff has been hostile; giving the "mock hand wave bit" and many vile remarks re buggery and associated methods of sexual action'. He felt himself 'lucky that this has not reached my top bosses in my department', expecting that he would lose his job if they found out. Even worse, though, was that as he came out to friends many of them fell away; only four out of 30 sticking with him.[6]

Partly, too, the problem was the small numbers actively leading the group. Three subcommittees, numerous events, liaison with Sydney (which tended to feel rather proprietorial about the branches in the other cities), mobilising locals … all these put considerable strain on the active members, of whom there seem to have been fewer than a dozen.

GAY LIBERATION

But radical, even revolutionary, currents were also stirring during these years, so it was no surprise that when news of a new politics, *gay liberation*, arrived in Australia from the United States in about 1972, it found a receptive audience. Gays, as many now chose to call themselves, accused CAMP (unfairly, as many would now concede) of being too respectable, too interested in dealing politely with the institutions of social and state power when they ought to be confronting them. Gay liberationists wanted a complete transformation of society, by any means necessary. This included aggressive protests, solidarity with other oppressed groups (notably women and Indigenous people) and living differently (in collective households, dressing in defiance of gender norms, engaging in public displays of affection). In their manifestos they issued totalist demands such as 'smash the family'. Paul Foss describes the establishment of Gay Liberation (Gay Lib) in Canberra as a local manifestation of the decision by a group of activists in Sydney to break with CAMP. (This was a nationwide process with Gay Liberation groups being established in a variety of ways in a number of cities at about the same time). Foss recalls that he had never at that time believed in political reform as a solution to what we would later call homophobia but rather had seen CAMP as a convenient ally in the general struggle for sexual rights.[7]

Today 'gay' usually means 'gay male'. This is not how the term was used in the 1970s when it unambiguously meant 'out, proud homosexuals', both women and men. (If you were not *out*, liberationists often said, then you were not 'gay', you were just 'homosexual'.) Gay organisations and activities aimed to involve both women and men working together. And while many lesbians chose to withdraw from these mixed groups, often into the women's movement, many others stayed with their brothers. There was one other change in language that is worth noting: somewhere in the late 1960s, 'camp' replaced 'kamp' as the most commonly used spelling of our name. The Sydney founders of the Campaign Against Moral Persecution were reflecting this shift when they chose that name, working backwards from the acronym CAMP. (it's called a backronym).

Gay Lib started meeting in Canberra in 1972 on Wednesdays at Bruce Hall on the university campus. During Orientation Week in 1972, a panel of speakers addressed the question 'Sexist Oppression: Is Gay Liberation Relevant?'.[8] Some 200 people turned up to listen to three speakers. Elizabeth Reid (a philosophy tutor, a prominent women's movement activist and a founder of the HLRS) addressed women's oppression. Lex

Watson, a member of CAMP New South Wales (although the report did not say so, confining itself to mentioning his academic position at Sydney University) spoke on the Draft Criminal Code which, we have seen in Chapter 2 was a matter of some discussion in Canberra at the time), condemning its 'self-negating language, its obscurantism [and its] practical inapplicability'. By no means a liberationist, Watson nonetheless went on to identify the ways in which the decriminalisation of sex between men was only the tip of the iceberg when it came to the elimination of inequality. He noted that single people were discriminated against in 'income tax, financing of loans, seeking accommodation and housing'. He called for the abolition of all legislation that discriminated on the basis of race, religion or sex. 'Sex' here included sexuality.

The third speaker was Tony Crewes, from Sydney Gay Liberation. He talked about the origin of the movement, locating it in the Stonewall Riots in New York City (though he does not name the bar itself) and in the counterculture, rather than in the law reform groups. He identified the obstacles to full and fulfilling lives in the deep structures of society: the patriarchal family, law, religion, sociology and psychiatry and the medical profession and, insidiously, in self-oppression (the internalisation of society's hostile views and the shame, guilt and sense of failure that results). From the deep-seated nature of these forces, it was clear to him that only a radical transformation of life and society could bring liberation, and he asserted that gay people (women and men) were well-placed to contribute to this: 'Gay shows the way. In some ways we are already more advanced than straight people. We are already outside the family and we have already, in part at least, rejected the 'masculine' or 'feminine' roles society has designed for us'. Gay Liberation envisioned a world without 'possessiveness, elitism, inflexible roles and personal inequality'. It saw a 'new pluralistic, role-free social structure … [with] the freedom and physical space to live alone, live together for a while or a long time, either as couples or in large numbers'. This is a pure statement of the liberationist vision. Asked why Gay Lib adopted the 'language and aggressive style of revolution', Crewes asserted that homosexuals had been 'taking shit for long enough, and that the only way out from under the oppressor's boot was to take positive and equally aggressive action'.

The following year, in March 1973, *Woroni*, the ANU student newspaper, reported that Gay Lib was holding weekly meetings of about 25 people, perhaps half of whom were not students and came from off-campus.[9] But in another piece, an anonymous first year student (a gay man) wondered where Gay Lib had been during Orientation Week. Unlike Women's Liberation that ran a stimulating forum, open and advertised to all, Gay Lib seemed to be absent: 'Where was the gay liberation stall pushing law reform, or pushing anything for that matter? Where was the gay theatre? Where was the gay forum? Where are the open and advertised gay meetings?' It must have been there somewhere, because he remembers Paul Foss's 'discourse on "bum-fucking"' as part of a broader panel discussion of 'masturbation, contraception, abortion and frivolity'.[10] Foss responded in *Woroni* on 23 March, beginning with the blunt acceptance that 'Gay Lib. has been fucked at ANU for a year'. He blamed a lack of interest, procrastination on the part of those who had the 'consciousness and ability' to organise meetings, and widespread closetry. The university was, he said, a 'radical gay desert'. Challenging this would require 'some real shit stirring and radical gay persistence', but he offered little hope. He invited the fresher to come and visit Gay Liberation in Sydney and recommended that 'if you want some fucks hang around Bruce Hall or John XXIII [the College, not the Pope] for awhile [sic]'.[11] In Foss's comments and language we can see the emphasis that liberationists put on provocation, outrageousness, explicitness about sex and bodily functions, and earthy language, reflecting a belief that shocking people out of their complacency was a weapon in the war for liberation.

The university was an obvious location for Gay Lib to meet and carry on its activities. Universities were hotbeds of radicalism and the ANU was one of the most left-wing of them all. In Australia, the radical left had responded enthusiastically to the emergence of the new social movements including gay liberation. The radical demands of Gay Lib and its critique of society sat well with socialists and other revolutionaries, who had, after all, emerged in Australia out of the same milieu — the opposition to the American War in Vietnam.[12] On a very pragmatic level, it was easy to hire rooms for meetings, and demos and protests and other public actions were generally well-received.

University newspapers were vital, too. In publishing these articles, the ANU student newspaper, *Woroni*, was promoting debate on the issues that faced activists, in a way that the mainstream press was not interested in doing. Until 1975 the only national gay newspaper was CAMP's Sydney-based *Camp Ink*, and that had become increasingly irregular in its production schedule from 1974. The student press, however, offered a regular supportive space for intense political discussions. In 1977, for example, *Woroni* published an article called 'Homosexuality is Bullshit'. Reprinted from the radical gay American

journal *Fag Rag*, it was not homophobic in content (as the title might suggest) but was rather a close consideration of what gay liberation really entailed and why a politics based purely on sex was never going to successfully challenge society's power structures. It offered a lengthy analysis radically at odds with that offered by the 1972 piece 'Sexual Oppression: Is Gay Lib Relevant?' discussed above. In the next issue of the paper there were two replies taking up some of the points advanced. Radical liberationist ideas were in abeyance by this time, but here in the student press they could still get a hearing.[13]

In the meantime, Gay Liberation had ceased to exist. As well as Paul Foss's angry letter to the anonymous fresher, we get some further insight into its problems from a report in *Woroni* in March 1973. Frances (no surname was used) pointed to the difficulty that women had experienced at the meetings — the 'triviality, ignorance of small group dynamics and unstructured "organisations" and the emphasis on primarily male problems (dealing with cops and the various beats)' — as feeding women's discontent. Even before her article went to print Gay Liberation in Canberra had broken apart. In a postscript, Frances reported on a new group whose interests were to be 'more serious, political and theoretical'.[14] She does not name the group — if indeed it had a name at this early point — but it was certainly Cell One.

A FLURRY OF SUCCESSORS

Cell One was founded by, among others, Liz Ross and Michael Harrington. It held its first meeting in February 1973 and was intended to provide an alternative for the 'thinking gay', those interested in more than socialising. It was run on 'radically unstructured lines', like most of the liberationist groups, 'but even more consciously egalitarian'. The group was to work on the 'theoretical implications of being homosexual in our present society, the development of ideas and actions to bring about a more desirable socio-political structure and the fuller realisation by the members of what being gay — male and female — means'. It was intended that the group would remain small and that if it grew in numbers it would split, in order to avoid the domination inevitable in larger groups. The group held several meetings before it, like so many of the gay liberation groups around Australia, collapsed.[15]

In 1977, a new group was set up on campus — Homosexuals at ANU (HANU).[16] It was primarily a social group, open to male and female, straight or gay — basically, anyone interested in the problems of homosexuality. Robert Taylor, in announcing the group, promised lots of pamphlets to browse through at the Orientation Week stall and declared that he would be speaking at the Sexuality Forum on the Friday. He suggested that counselling would be available. The shift to a social focus was one that took place on most Australian campuses around this time, filling the gap left by the collapse of politically driven groups in the mid-1970s. In the *Woroni* debate over whether or not homosexuality was 'bullshit', described above, Taylor's vision for the group becomes clearer and contains strong echoes of liberationist thinking. Gay liberated zones, as promoted by HANU, he said, were places in which 'there is nothing to fear from loving your brothers and sisters. Where loving in all ways is encouraged and supported'.[17] In this formulation, socialising is not simply relaxing together with similarly minded people, rather it has a powerful transformative effect, reflecting an attempt to bring liberationist ideas to a new, less radical climate. While Tony Crewes in 1972 had uncompromisingly expressed himself with revolutionary rhetoric, by the second half of the 1970s activists were more likely, to the extent that they had radical hopes at all, to be presenting the message in a much softer and more appealing manner. In April 1977 the first (and probably only) issue of HANU's newsletter, *CAMP US*, was published. In June 1978, the group was pronounced 'dead' and efforts to start a social club were announced.

ACT Gay Solidarity was established in 1978. It initiated and participated in events as diverse as demonstrations, discussions on the politics of oppression, providing speakers to community groups such as Rotary and co-sponsoring the Rock House Heavy gay dance in March 1979. Robert French, one of its members, recalls its main activity as the 2XX gay radio program. 2XX, Canberra's community radio station, was granted its licence and took to the air in 1976. It was, like all political projects, also a social space where people inevitably encountered like-minded others. Erin got involved in 2XX and describes finding other lesbians — lots of lesbians, very out and very political. In 1984, Jocelyn also joined 2XX and 'found herself in the midst of a lesbian (feminist) community and 'the dyke scene in Canberra'.[18]

Based at the ANU, it saw itself as providing a voice of all those who wished to participate. Within a few months HANU had a 15-minute program on Fridays. Eventually the program was taken over by a collective of women and men, almost all of whom were members of the Gay Solidarity Group, and expanded to a half-hour show called

Gay Viewpoint. Programs ranged widely. There were interviews with prominent entertainers like Dame Edna Everage and British gay rocker Tom Robinson, and local activists such as John from the long-standing gay social group Club 19. Like the ANU student newspaper *Woroni*, 2XX was happy to discuss gay and lesbian issues long after the mainstream press had lost interest. In 1979 to mark the tenth anniversary of the Stonewall Riots in New York City (long taken to the be the founding moment of the gay liberation movement) the collective organised a whole day of gay radio, only the second place in the world to do such a thing (the first was in Amsterdam). The group broadcast interviews, discussions, documentaries, and music for and by gay people. At noon, as Robert French remembers, the station took the ABC news program with its report of the New York Stonewall Parade: 'we felt joyfully proud as if we were part of a worldwide movement'.

In February 1979, the group hired a bus and went to Sydney for the second Mardi Gras. French makes the point that there was a particular kind of courage required here — after all, no one had expected the police violence that marked the first parade the year before. People went to the second with that possibility very much in mind. On the way back to Canberra on the Sunday, they picked up a hitchhiker. The conversation turned to what the group had been doing — the gay Mardi Gras, he was told. So, you're all gay, he asked. Yes. And some time later: even the chicks? Yes. One more consciousness raised. Gay Solidarity Group was still advertising its meetings as late as September 1980 but petered out some time after this.[19]

ACTIVISM IN CANBERRA

These consciously political organisations were something very new — homosexuals had organised themselves socially for a long time but the idea of intervening in the world, *as homosexuals*, to change it, marks something not hitherto seen in Australia. That said, although the issues were new, the activities tended to draw upon the established repertoires of politics — demonstrations, manifestos, flyers and stickers, educational articles, talking to community groups. Arguably the only original contribution the gay movement made to the activist repertoire was coming out, publicly proclaiming one's sexuality to all and sundry, forcing the world to acknowledge and deal with the existence of homosexuals.

But in the late 1970s, all the social movements shared an expectation of a backlash, a belief that capitalism/the patriarchy could not tolerate the freedoms extracted by a decade of campaigning, and that what had been won would be rolled back. Activists were hyper-alert to any signs of this. In the late 1970s the Christian Right did indeed start to organise in Australia, inspired by moves in the United States and Britain. The most prominent organisation of the backlash was the Festival of Light which campaigned against homosexuality, the new women's rights (abortion, contraception, no-fault divorce), new forms of child-care and sex education. Its efforts to build its profile and mobilise its supporters included touring the British morals crusader Mary Whitehouse to Australia in 1978. In response the Campaign Against Repression (CAR) was set up, with branches in several Australian cities. In Canberra, CAR greeted Whitehouse's supporters (she herself was spirited in through a side door) at the Lakeside Hotel with leaflets and chanting, and rousing choruses of adaptations of popular songs such as 'What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor?' and 'By the Light of the Silvery Moon'.[20]

Being part of a national movement was important to Canberra activists and in 1982 the city took on the task of hosting the 8th National Homosexual Conference. These conferences had been gathering gay and lesbian activists in their hundreds from across Australia every year since 1975. At plenary sessions and workshops people who had been involved in gay politics shared their experiences and planned new ones. In Canberra, some 350 people turned up, though not many locals according to reports. Topics included the relationship between the gay movement and the gay community (reflecting new thinking about this issue — 'a real developing maturity' according to one observer), links to other social movements and, in workshops, issues such as racism and anti-Semitism among gays, lesbian politics, Marxism and other radicalisms.[21]

LIVING DIFFERENTLY

One of the ideas adopted by some gay activists was one that had appealed to women's liberationists, too — living differently. Reflecting the idea that the 'personal is political', everyday life became a site for politics. This might involve something as simple (but potentially dangerous) as dressing outside dominant gender norms, but some counterculturally influenced gay men looked to emulate the new kind of household that women's liberationists were setting up. In Canberra, Euree Street was such a household or, as Jim Arachne, a founder and long-time member of the household, says, a new kind of family: 'no

Heaven with its cool look, hundreds of patrons, rowdy and bawdy

'an experiment in a different way of living': Jim Arachne (long dark hair and beard), John Westlund to his left

fathers, no mothers, no children — just us'. In 1982 a house that could be adapted for eight was located and the men involved set out to create a household. This meant sharing the cooking, shopping together, eating together, exchanging stories, taking group outings to the bush, to the local beat, to Sydney. Television was banned from the shared spaces. There were weekly house meetings 'for airing gripes, sorting out problems [and] finances'. From a distance it all looks like hard work, but Jim says that 'for me at least, this was the easiest group house I've ever lived in. We recognised we were trying something new, an experiment in a different way of living for each of us and we wanted to give it the best chance of succeeding that we could. It wasn't so much that our socialization [sic] as men was the problem (we had all resisted that to one degree or another) but more that the culture does not give anyone models of effective ways to solve conflict and disputes'. So, they undertook some basic counselling and communication training and worked out a process for managing disputes and difficulties as they arose. Jim realised that the search for the one perfect partner was redundant when, between his eight housemates, a whole range of needs were met: 'I had sex with Mike, talked politics with Ross, did lots of fun stuff with John, was lovers with Charlie, worked in the garden with Phillip, became immersed in spirituality with Paul etc.'

The house became an organising centre for Canberra activists and their projects, even a brief list of which gives some indication of the range of work that was going on: a gay coffee shop, monthly gay film nights, the phone counselling service, the AIDS Hotline, the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (a theatrical-political order of gay male nuns), a gay student group. Eventually, the housemates decided to set aside two nights a week when visitors were actively discouraged so they could have time to spend in each other's company: 'We had loads of visitors and this was one way to have time to ourselves.' Looking back on Euree Street's decade-long existence (the household broke down as it became harder to find men willing to put in the substantial time and energy to make it work), Jim Arachne reflects on its impact: 'Over a decade we touched many people's lives. We made a difference. We cleared a small space to begin exploring what being gay could be and created and experienced many things we never could in our usual family groupings and living situations. We were sure we had made a better alternative that could, with intention, last through time'.[22]

THE SCENE

The Canberra social scene was small in the 1970s. This was true of most Australian cities, where a few hotels would welcome the gay crowd as long as they were reasonably discreet. Robert French arrived in Canberra in 1975 to work for the National Archives. He lived in hostels for some time and met other gay men at the Spring Music Festival, and at the professional and community theatre, just as Bill Wells had done in the 1960s. Lynne O'Brien worked at Sammy's Taverna on Garema Place in the early-to-mid-1970s, a restaurant that welcomed the queens after midnight, when 15 or 20 would turn up, to drink and have a good time. Sammy himself played the bouzouki to entertain them.[23] This sort of sociability could easily have been going on for a very long time without leaving any traces for historians. But for those in the know, things were stirring. A bit less obviously than in the larger cities, but undeniably, social groups were venturing out of the loungerooms and into the cafes and restaurants.

Private parties remained a feature of camp life (it was in the late 1960s and early 1970s that 'camp' supplanted 'kamp' before being replaced by 'gay'), but this history is not easy to uncover. Stephen Hughes remembering the early 1970s, described how after the Rex Hotel closed at 10pm on Friday nights, 'someone would always, always, nominate their house for the after-party, everyone invited, regardless of whether you were a High Commissioner, Hairdresser, or Lawn Mower Mechanic.'[24]

The hotels had been important and increasingly visible from the 1960s but in the mid-1970s Robert French visited the Rex Hotel on Northbourne Avenue and found a place that he imagined is what Sydney's commercial camp scene was like in the 1950s: a place for discreet socialising, to meet people and to pick up a fuck. He did not find it particularly friendly. Physically, it was a bland, anonymous kind of space with a circular bar against one wall. At one table would sit the 'Royal Family', a self-selected elite presiding over all, who were widely accepted as purveyors of taste, as trendsetters. Stephen Hughes says that the name came from the fact that the hosts for some of the best private parties were a gay uncle and his gay nephew and the family connection became, in the way of camp language, the Royal Family. In about 1976–77 the management of the Rex decided that it no longer wanted this particular clientele and set out to drive them away. It did this by bringing in pool tables and a crowd of aggressive, hostile young men. French remembers vividly the final straw — one young man got up on the pool table and exposed his arse to the dozen or so poofters cowering, as he says, in the corner. They fled and never returned.

In a story remembered by Bill Wells too, Robert French tells how one of the camp crowd, the owner of a motor shop business (it was, in fact Brian Luton, later to become one of the promotors of the Meridian Club, about which we will hear more) in response to this loss of a venue approaching the managers of the Ainslie Hotel who agreed to welcome the crowd to the back bar. It was a quieter and more private place. It was here that French observed the passing of the Royal Family who he saw sitting one night as usual at a table of their own but looking now a rather 'sad sight'. The kamp/camp world was slowly becoming gay.

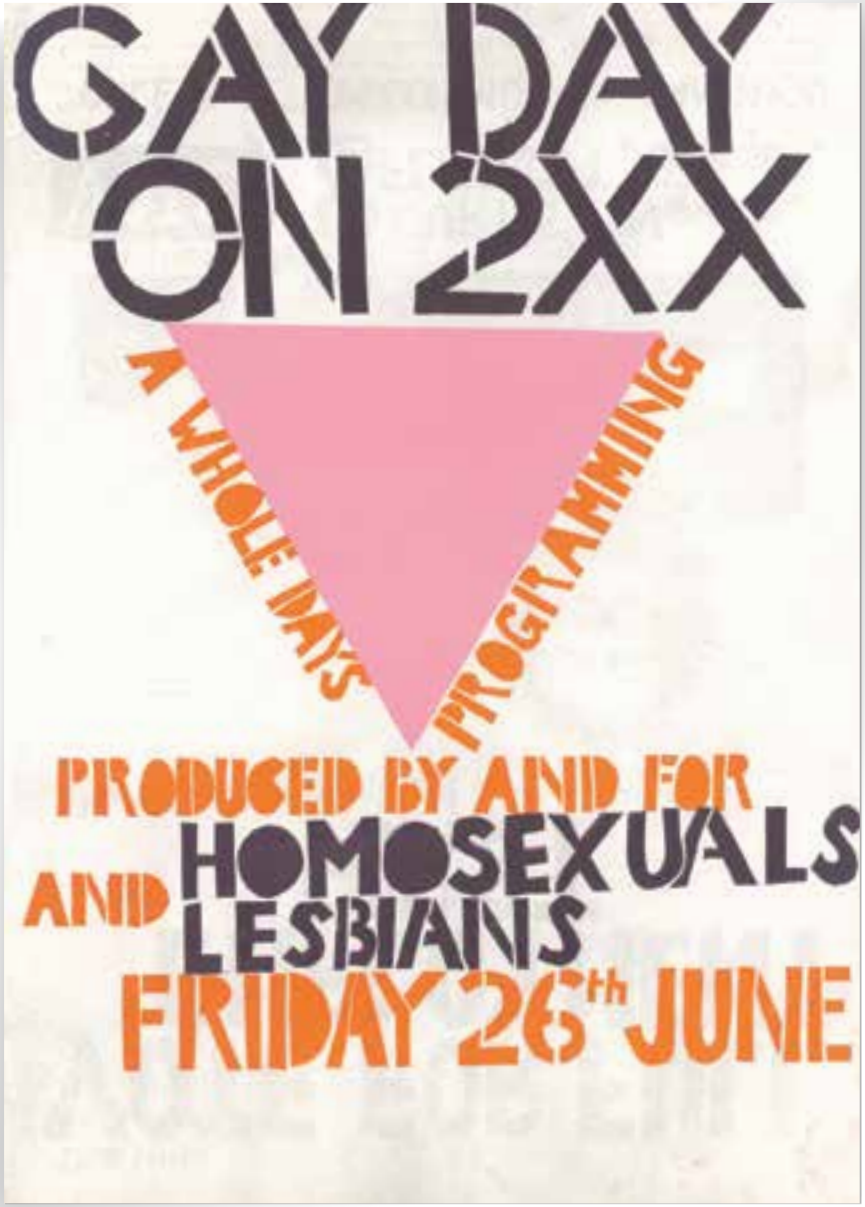
Given the small size of Canberra's gay population it is not surprising that there was rarely more than one venue being patronised at a time, or that in the early days, while women and men tended to attend the same pub, the sexes do not seem to have mingled much. But in about 1981, after the Dickson succeeded the Ainslie as the place to go, Emma found the atmosphere rather more congenial with men and women mixing well and developing social lives that involved picnics and parties and barbecues.[25]

Slightly more structured social networks emerged during this period, as they had in other cities somewhat earlier. In Melbourne a social club of friends, the Boilers, which still exists, dates back to 1958. In Sydney, the Pollynesians began meeting in 1964. These groups had organised the social lives of groups of kamp men and women in members' homes or occasionally in halls or functions rooms. In Canberra, Club 19 was an expression of the same impulse.[26] The club was established in 1974 as a way for homosexual males to 'meet each other in a relaxed and informal atmosphere'. It rented premises which were open on Friday and Saturday nights. The organisers had 'no wish to belong to Gay Lib or other pressure groups that exist as we are definitely not wanting to be a lobbying group'. In 1980 it started producing a newsletter that reported on its social activities, which took place in members' homes or in cinema or theatre nights. These activities were organised by a committee elected at the annual general meeting by the 20 or so members. The older model of sociability, organised around friendship groups, was evolving into something different. And as gay people changed society, society changed gay people, most noticeably in a greater willingness to be visible. By 1982, Club 19 was running a coffee shop on Saturday nights from 9 pm to 1 am as an 'alternative venue … for gay people in Canberra to meet each other' and it staffed the bar at the 8th National Homosexual Conference which was held in Canberra that year. By 1984 it was actively promoting the film showings of the ACT Gay Film Group. The gradual shift of Club 19 from its purely social world to engagement with the wider gay world reflected the way in which a community was emerging. By 1984, AIDS was well and truly on Club 19's agenda. The group donated money to the AIDS Action Council for its telephone advisory service and on another occasion in memory of the club's long-time secretary/treasurer, and its president attended the AIDS Vigil Service at All Saints Church, Ainslie. The group was still going, if not as strongly as in the past, into the 1990s.

The largest and most visible social club was undoubtedly the Tennis Club which was established in 1978 by a group of friends who were meeting regularly to (as the name suggests) play tennis.[27] Within a year, the half-dozen or so were joined by a couple of dozen more. They played on Monday nights because they could book all four playing courts, creating a safe space for gay people, 'a place to come out, to meet other gay men and women, to chat, make friends, and even fall in love'. Activities expanded to include picnics and barbecues, and weekends away. A dance was held in a community hall at Tharwa in 1979 which became a much-loved community annual event, the Bush Dance, held at Yarralumla Woolshed. We shall see in Chapter 4 that Kate and Pat first met at the Tharwa dance, and the Tennis Club reports a number of other relationships launched at the dances. The group had a strong membership and few expenses and was soon donating significant amounts to various community organisations — AIDS-related activities and groups, the Meridian Club (on which more soon) among them. It is still going strong.

These social clubs are often overlooked in histories of homosexual life (partly because they exist, quite intentionally, in the realm of private life) but they are extremely important. They were not explicitly political in any ordinary sense but they provided (and still provide in some cases) opportunities to gather informally, to meet up with old friends, make new ones, find relationships, educate each other on issues (the law and AIDS, most obviously), fundraise for and promote important causes, to play their part in the construction of something new — a community.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the transformation of homosexual life in Canberra, as in all Australian cities. The decision to openly take up the task of gay rights/gay liberation, by gay people themselves, was historically unprecedented. The adoption of the words 'gay' and 'lesbian' and the notion of gay pride deeply affected lesbians and gay men. In many groups, with many kinds of political outlooks, with varying degrees of confidence, anger and pride, gay people were transforming Canberra.



Gay Day on 2XX, 'we felt joyfully proud as if we were part of a worldwide movement

CHAPTER 04

LESBIANS ARE LOVELY

LESBIANS
ARE
LOVELY

‘It was important for us to be a feminist identified band … we were open, we were out but we were not all lesbian in the band and so we didn’t ever promote ourselves as a “lesbian” band.’

THE GAY MOVEMENT IN CANBERRA WAS DOMINATED NUMERICALLY BY MEN, THOUGH WE SHOULD BE CAREFUL, IN ACKNOWLEDGING THIS, NOT TO ERASE OR UNDERESTIMATE THE CONTRIBUTION THAT WOMEN MADE TO WHAT WOULD LATER BE CALLED THE 'MIXED' OR 'MIXED-SEX' ACTIVITIES OF THE MOVEMENT. BUT IN CANBERRA, PERHAPS MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN AUSTRALIA, FOR MANY LESBIANS THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT PROVIDED A MUCH MORE CONGENIAL ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH TO WORK.

As historian Judith Ion observes, over the course of the 1970s, there was a shift from an 'ever-so-slightly-lesbian-tinged feminist community' to a 'feminist-tinged lesbian community'. The interaction between (straight, feminist and liberationist) women and lesbians was a reality from the early 1970s; over time it reshaped lives, politics and social life.[1]

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) emerged out of the ferment of the 1960s. Putting women at the centre of its thinking, this movement raised new issues: abortion, divorce, contraception, the representation of women in advertising and the use of their bodies to sell products, attitudes towards rape and domestic violence, how women were allowed to dress and where they were allowed to go, whether they had a right to sexual autonomy. And new issues required new thinking. Identifying the deeper roots of what came to be called women's *oppression* — the way in which discrimination was deeply rooted in society's enduring power structures — was the work of theory, and women's groups read and wrote voraciously. 'Patriarchy', 'sex roles' and 'sexual objectification' provided new ways to think about women's subordinate place in society, and new targets for action. Identifying the ways in which these structures of oppression were embodied within women's own everyday lives, in their thinking and behaviour, was tackled through consciousness-raising sessions where small groups of women gathered regularly and, on the basis of trust, talked through their own experiences and ideas with a view to changing themselves. Theory and consciousness-raising were among the most important new tools in the women's movement armoury.

Many became convinced that only a revolution could eradicate the systems of oppression — not (necessarily) the violent revolution and seizure of power as traditionally understood on the left, but a deeper, more fundamental transformation of everyday life. This meant that in the here and now there was plenty of work to be done. Liberationists set up abortion advice services, women's refuges, telephone advice lines, trade union caucuses, support for women prisoners, new kinds of childcare, women's centres to house these operations. Initially, at least, these were rarely government-funded, making the movement's activists responsible for establishing and maintaining these services.[2]

Canberra, with its educated and liberal middle-class population, was quick to embrace women's liberation. A group began meeting weekly in June 1970 attended by about 15 women. They initially eschewed attention: 'we were anxious not to attract publicity: everyone felt the need to talk, read, write, and work out the facts and the arguments'. But a couple of months later, in September 1970, three members appeared on a local ABC television program putting their case to a panel of five interviewers. The show was 'an unexpected success' and a follow-up public meeting at the Griffin Centre attracted 130, a much larger crowd than the organisers expected. For months afterwards new faces turned up at every meeting.

It soon became necessary to establish branches north and south of Lake Burley Griffin to manage meeting size. Theirs was 'a growing movement in a very real sense', they realised. A movement of and for women had obvious attractions for lesbians — though not, in fact, all lesbians. There were any number of ways of being a lesbian in Canberra in the 1970s and we can detect three different strands of lesbian life and politics.[3]

ORDINARY LIVES

Judith Ion in her study, 'She Gave Me that Look', brings to light the experiences of eight Canberra lesbians who were not involved in the activism of the early 1970s. (In the thesis all of Judith Ion's narrators are given single names. Where there is mention of Dee, Emma, Erin, Jocelyn, Kate, Kim, Leigh, Pat, Teresa in this study that is who we are referring to.) These women — representing perhaps a majority of lesbians, though there is no real way to know — lived discreet lives. They found their way to an awareness of their sexuality in the many ways that homosexual women and men had always done: friendship circles, social and sports clubs and the like. Their lives *as lesbians* were not in any immediate way shaped by the changing social and political climate of the early 1970s and were probably not all that different those lived by lesbians in the 1950s and 1960s. The well-established ways of meeting friends and lovers remained in place. Emma met her first female sexual partner in the late 1960s when they were playing hockey together. For Pat, it was playing basketball. For others again, it was with school friends. While some of Judith Ion's narrators were aware of feminist politics before the mid-1970s, none of them were involved in the movement at that time.

One of the more developed friendship circles about which we know was the 'army dykes', a network of lesbians who served in the defence forces where they found each other and established friendships, and perhaps other more intimate connections. Lesbians in the military had good reasons to keep themselves concealed because, while lesbian sex has never been a crime, military regulations made sexual contact between women a punishable offence, and, as historian Ruth Ford, and more recently the Serving in Silence project, have demonstrated, there was a widespread purge of lesbians in the Australian Defence Force in the 1960s. But they were visible within the safety of the women's subculture that was emerging through the 1970s and 1980s. Kim found them at the Ainslie Hotel in the mid-1970s and pretty quickly became part of their crowd. They eschewed politics, and rarely discussed their sexuality openly, preferring simply to 'socialise, drink and dance in the company of one another.'[4]

RADICALESBIANISM

At the other end of the social and political spectrum was political lesbianism and its most famous organisational expression, radicalesbianism. This politics offered a way of putting lesbianism at the centre of one's life and political work. The very word 'lesbian', rather than 'gay woman', 'camp', 'homosexual', was chosen, says one of the participants, as a marker of defiance: 'the most "out" and outrageous name we could confront our various oppressors with'.[5]

The politics of radicalesbianism was on full display at the Radicalesbian Conference held in Sorrento, outside Melbourne, in July 1973. Here some 60 women from around the country gathered to discuss a series of papers written by a number of those attending, which argued that the point of the movement was not equality for lesbians but rather to fundamentally change the world. The ultimate goal was the eradication of patriarchy and of the gender system which sustained it. New kinds of relationships were needed, new ways of everyday living: 'We will not set up copies of marriage, of role-playing, of power dominance', the Radicalesbian Manifesto declared.[6]

There were certainly Canberra women present at Sorrento. Liz Ross was one of them. But unlike Melbourne and Sydney and Adelaide, where participants returned exhilarated with new ideas and new energy, the impact in Canberra was negligible. Partly the problem was Canberra's size — there were simply too few political lesbians to work with the new ideas. But there was also a problem with the ideas themselves. Liz Ross, an enthusiastic supporter of women's liberation and lesbian rights, found most of the discussion rather inward looking compared to the sort of activism she was interested in.[7]

This is not to say that radicalesbianism had no impact at all. Rather its effect was more molecular than dramatic. In particular, the idea that women ought to focus their lives on other women — socially, politically, sexually — was embraced by increasing numbers, and lesbian separatism emerged, where women lived with as little contact with men as possible. Sometimes this took the form of physical separation — moving away from cities to women's communities in the country. Women-only households were set up. But even short of this, the women's community offered scope for a largely male-free life. It was perfectly possible for women in Canberra to live women-centred lives, to encounter men at work, for example, but rarely in social situations or in their political work.

ACTIVIST LESBIANS

Over the course of the 1970s, lesbian political organising became more common. In 1978 a Lesbian Group started meeting fortnightly on Thursday nights, at the Lobelia Street Women's Centre as a 'contact point for lesbians all over Canberra, so we can support each other', and as a 'forum for lesbians to get together, discuss and act around our collective needs and interests'. The organisers were strongly of the opinion that lesbians needed to break with their habits of hiding themselves away. But in doing so, they should not fall into the trap of 'mixing only with a small group of (ghetto) lesbians'.[8]

Over the two days of 7–8 October 1978 the Lesbian Group organised a Lesbiindependence Day, the purpose of which was to give lesbians the opportunity to gather, to think about ways to change society, and just to enjoy being together. The emphasis on being together gives some indication of the extent to which Canberra could still be a rather isolating experience. Lesbiindependence Day also recognised the need to resolve the big questions: 'How fundamental is our position to the way society works? Will the changes be easy to make or will they have to be profound and radical?' The practical consequences of this was emphasised: 'What can we do to change the things we don't like about how society treats us?' But by the end of the year the Lesbian Group was faltering — attendances were small, and discussion turned inevitably to what to do about this. Would it help if the group were to choose definitively between being a social, a political or a support group? By February the group had renamed itself the Lesbian Lounge, a name which suggests a welcoming, even cosy, atmosphere — which is certainly how Kate found it: mostly, if not exclusively, social.[9]

LESBIANS IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Like the gay movement in Canberra in the 1970s, the women's movement grew in strength and scope during the decade. And it was primarily through participation in the broader women's movement and community that many Canberra lesbians found their voice. For politically minded lesbians, the movement provided opportunities to get involved in congenial environments around issues that mattered to them. The women's community that developed over the course of the 1970s was a place where lesbians were welcomed and felt at home. As Judith Ion has noted: 'The constantly evolving women's movement was one of the few places where lesbianism was being talked about in positive terms'.[10]

In the United States' movement there was a considerable degree of hostility by some mainstream organisations to lesbian participation or even visibility. In Canberra, there were certainly difficulties. In 1972, Helen Shepard, a participant in the Canberra movement, described the 'invisible manifesto' generated by women's liberationists, a lengthy set of rules about how to live politically. One of them was that 'Thou shalt not be sexually attracted to or live with a [sic] m.c.p. [male chauvinist pig] or a woman'.[11] But sometimes there was a rather more overt and personal hostility. Another woman, Marion Paull, who was central to the formation of the lesbian group Daughters of Bilitis in Melbourne in 1969-70, describes the reaction that she encountered from women's liberationists in Canberra:

> We were asked to go to our local WLM meeting to talk about living as lesbians in a straight society, and of course, they all looked at this six-footer with short dark hair and trousers, accompanied by her lover, who was five feet four with shoulder-length light brown hair, and they accused us of role playing, imitating heterosexual couples. They expressed their disappointment in a very aggressive way, I recall.[12]

What Paull was experiencing here was a result of the way in which, in their efforts to break with socially-enforced system of gender norms (sex roles), many women's liberationists had developed a critique of *all* gendered behaviour that might in any way be seen as masculine or feminine. Confronted with a butch dyke and a butch-femme relationship, such as were very common in the lesbian world, liberationists were often nonplussed and as, Marion Paull says, 'They never stopped to look at what we were doing' — failing to think about the ways in which lesbians had been able in the 1950s and 1960s to craft lives for themselves. Kate experienced something similar. At university, she became aware of her own lesbian desires by about 1974 while working at the ANU with women who were feminists. But even after she graduated, she preferred to remain politically active on campus, having found that many of the older feminists in the off-campus movement were uncomfortable with her presence.[13]

Against this, there is early evidence of openness to lesbianism in the Canberra women's movement. In mid-1971 two lesbians from CAMP NSW were invited to speak at the northside meeting of Women's Liberation. In September 1972 Claire and Louise led a discussion on 'Lesbianism and feminism' and in October a meeting discussed 'Perspectives on

lesbianism'. The *Women's Liberation Newsletter* advertised the Radicalesbian Conference in Sorrento and the Gay Camp in Adelaide in 1973.[14] In 1974 the Women's Electoral Lobby endorsed a number of resolutions on homosexuality addressing law reform, child custody, and discrimination in public service recruitment. The relationship between women's liberationists and lesbians was one that had to be developed over time, but through the 1970s it was one that strengthened as differences were overcome.[15]

At the heart of the women's movement, and offering some indication of what a women's community might look like, were the two women's centres which were established to accommodate the movement's activities — at 12 Bremer Street Griffith (from February 1972) and from the late 1970s, Lobelia Sreett. Pat Eatock, who lived for a while in Bremer Street, describes the atmosphere as 'electric': 'Hardly an evening passed without some sort of meeting, with twenty to sixty women. Consciousness-raising was a twice-weekly event. General meetings, action groups, the embryonic Women's Electoral Lobby had a weekly time and space. Days were filled with the comings and goings of newsletter production, the preparation of leaflets, classes in screen printing, the establishment of the feminist library, or just dropping in'. Liz Ross remembers the same high levels of energy and activity as giving her a 'real political education'. Lobelia Street housed Women's Liberation, Women's Electoral Lobby, the Abortion Counselling Service, the Women's Information Service, and the Feminist Book Exchange. In the later 1970s, the Lesbian Group/ Lesbian Lounge met there.[16]

THE EARLY- AND MID-1970S

By the mid-1970s, the revolutionary hopes of the early years had ebbed. Susan Magarey, one of the earliest members of Women's Liberation in Canberra, described the 'loss of those expectations and commitments which were essential for many of us to our continuing engagement in the feminist struggle'.[17] This phenomenon was by no means confined to Canberra, or to the women's movement. The ebbing of revolutionary expectations, the fragmentation of the broad-based groups (women's liberation, gay liberation) was nearly universal in the movements at this time. And yet the work of social change went on, albeit in rather new ways.

Many activists redirected their energies and applied them to what might be seen as smaller scale issues. Action groups took the place of theory and consciousness-raising, as Suzanne Dixon discovered when she returned to Canberra from Ghana with her husband in 1975.[18] The movement was no longer expressed in one or two organisations but, as Magarey noted, in 'an amorphous, shifting collection of groups and individuals whose objections to aspects of the subordination of women [brought] them together at particular junctures to argue around particular issues, to campaign for particular goals … or to celebrate women's creativity, energy and humour'.[19]

The myriad activities of the women's movement provided opportunities for lesbians to find politically satisfying work (almost always as volunteers) for themselves. Services around rape counselling, abortion, childcare, counselling, half-way houses/refuges, trade union collectives and caucuses, legal networks and arts collectives proliferated and were always in need of time and energy and expertise. Sometimes this was policy development, or lobbying, or writing grant applications. Mostly it was hands on — directly helping women who had been victimised by the system. Those who were qualified as lawyers or social workers were in demand — but if a woman could screen-print (or was willing to learn), or write and layout a leaflet, or talk to community groups, or go on radio or television, she too could find a place. It was in the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and its collective that Erin found a real sense of community with other lesbians after she left the ANU in 1982.

It is striking that many of these activities were directed at women's issues rather than those affecting lesbians as such. At a roundtable discussion with a group of women in Canberra in 2018, it was suggested that at least four of the key services for women were run by lesbians (Lynne O'Brian remembers the incest advice service as being staffed entirely by lesbians, with one exception) and a number of reasons for this were put forward. Some of this was political — this was socially useful work, providing support to women and usually organised through collectives rather than hierarchically, all of which appealed to the 'feminist' in lesbian feminists. Some of it was practical. Lesbians were less likely to have domestic duties (husbands and children to care for) and therefore more time to volunteer. It was also possible to be out as a lesbian in these environments. While many employers were likely to discriminate, the women's services sector was being rapidly transformed into a welcoming, actively anti-discriminatory field of work. But it was not *necessary* to be out — feminism itself provided an explanation for why a woman might want to work in a woman-centred environment and it was not necessary to name lesbianism as such.[20]

The role of the women's movement's many conferences was also important. They provided a platform for lesbians to raise concerns, debate policies, name new issues, release manifestos, critique their sisters, express their feelings — and to meet each other. We should not underestimate the social role of conferences. Kate and Julie found that they met more lesbians at women's conferences interstate than they did in their everyday life in Canberra until after about 1977.[21]

The key conferences in the 1970s were the second national women's liberation conference (Sydney 1972) and the Mount Beauty conference in January 1973. At both, lesbians spoke out about their marginalisation within the broader movement. The Mount Beauty Conference (27–29 January 1973) was organised by Canberra women and focussed on a number of high-level themes: the origins of women's oppression, sisterhood, patriarchy, varieties of feminism, sexism. Not for nothing was it self-mockingly described by the organisers as the 'Hevvies Conference' reflecting the attention to often high-level theory. About 100 women attended, from all parts of Australia. On the Sunday afternoon, members of the Hobart Women's Action Group presented a paper entitled 'Sexism and women's liberation or … why do straight sisters sometimes cry when they are called lesbians'. The paper included evidence of bad behaviour towards lesbians at women's social events and meetings but focussed on what this revealed about the women's movement's negative attitude to sex and sexuality and its approach to the lesbian minority in its midst. This launched an extended debate within the movement nationally, though as Judith Ion notes, Canberra was largely untouched by this. Nonetheless, those who were there and those who read or heard about the debate knew that lesbianism was a live issue and that the movement sheltered many lesbians.[22]

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Given that its atmosphere was left-wing and imbued with the spirit of the new social movements, the Australian National University (the ANU) was a place where lesbians and gay men could be more comfortably out than anywhere else in Canberra. Leigh, for example, doubts that she would have become aware of her sexuality if she had stayed living at home and attributes her awareness of lesbian issues and their relevance to her participation in an environment where women were interested in talking about sexuality — and practising it.

In 1974 a campaign for the democratisation of the university led to the establishment of a Women's Studies course, the content of which was to be decided by women staff and students. The course was instituted after an occupation of the chancellery in April 1974, in which women played a prominent part. Teaching started in 1976 with Anne Curthoys as the first staff member (1976–77) and Susan Magarey the second (1978–83) and grew rapidly in terms of enrolments, range of subjects and general acceptance. Although published accounts of the course rarely, if ever, mention lesbians or lesbianism, several of Judith Ion's narrators were enrolled and remember it as an eye-opening experience for them as they came to terms with their sexuality. Leigh enrolled at the ANU in 1982 and in the Women's Studies course encountered lesbians for the first time (that she was aware of). Some found the feminist theory exhilarating; others found its strictures off-putting. Some thought there was too much consciousness-raising going on; others that there was not much of that at all. There was certainly a lesbian 'in group', that developed among staff and students, involving drinks at the university bar or private parties to which some women were invited. There were also Women's Studies camps, weekends away at which readings on various topics would inform the discussions but which seemed to at least one participant to have been 'enormous piss-ups'.[23]

Canberra's 'very talented and gorgeous'

Celebrating women's creativity, energy and humour

THE SCENE

When Susan Magarey commented on the new political climate of the mid-1970s she emphasised both campaigning for political goals *and* the desire to 'celebrate women's creativity, energy and humour'. Judith Ion reports the same expansion in the women's scene: 'In late 1970s and early 1980s Canberra when women's dances, women's theatre and women's bands became part of the rapidly expanding feminist social scene, such events were attended by women regardless of their feminist identity and beliefs. This social space was reserved for fun, not fights. It was in this environment that the lesbian (feminist) community came to exist in Canberra'.[24]

The interactions that this coming together of two worlds made possible is captured wonderfully with Judith Ion's story of Canberra's first lesbian 'mixed marriage' — between Kate, a lesbian feminist, and Pat, a social dyke. They first met at the 1979 Tharwa Ball (organised by the Tennis Club, a gay community event which featured drag shows and dancing). Pat saw Kate on the dance floor but couldn't work out if she was a man or a woman. When they finally met up again at the Ainslie Hotel, they entered into a relationship that lasted 10 years.[25]

The university remained an important site for lesbian life, and for information about it. A 1980 article in *Woroni* offered suggestions on how to meet lesbians noting the Women on Campus group which met on Mondays in the Women's Room, the Women's Centre in Lobelia St and its Sunday lesbian discussion group, women's dances at the Ainslie and Dickson hotels, the Dickson Hotel's Friday night gathering which was 'mixed' (that is was open to women and men) and the 2XX Gay Radio Collective. It mentioned ACT Gay Solidarity but noted that it was mainly for male homosexuals.[26]

At the very end of the 1970s, after coming out, Teresa found herself mixing with a group of women known as the Duffy Street Dykes, who lived in a household at the foot of Mt Ainslie. The Duffy Street Dykes were 'activist lesbian feminists' and through them Teresa encountered discussions on the theory and practice of lesbianism and feminism, hard-to-find feminist literature, and the lesbian feminist social scene. At lesbian feminist household parties, she started to meet more lesbians and to find opportunities for romantic and sexual encounters.[27]

Women's theatre had been established in Canberra as early as 1972 with the Women's Theatre Workshop, 'brainchild of Canberra Women's Liberation'.[28] As with all women's movement activities, theatre became more and more welcoming of lesbians. In the late 1970s Theresa met a lesbian in her women's theatre group who provided her with a positive model for how to be a lesbian. Hers will not have been the only such story. As more and more lesbians felt comfortable being out, it was easier for lesbians, and those who thought they might be, to find each other.

In 1980, the first women-only dances were organised in Canberra. In January 1980 the 'People without Penises' pub night and dance was held at the Ainslie Hotel, which had been welcoming lesbians and gay men for a couple for years. It was a fundraiser for Reclaim the Night and the Summer Offensive and featured recorded women's music. Attendees were invited to bring their own music to add to the mix. Women's dances, usually entertained by women's bands (famous and otherwise), became increasingly common. In 1982 there were at least two women's dances — in March, community radio station 2XX hosted two Sydney bands for an International Women's Day dance at the Civic Hotel; and in June the ANU Arts Centre was the venue for women's band Salvation Jane at a women's dance. The 1980s were the high point of women's bands in Australia, and Canberra was on the national circuit. But well into the 1990s women's bands and women's dances were a staple of lesbian life. In mid-1995, to ward off the winter blues, Susan Carcery organised a series of gigs to provide opportunities for Canberra's 'very talented and gorgeous dykes' to perform. Women's bands had too few chances to get out and play to live audiences, and this winter series delivered headline and support acts performing monthly at the North Canberra Bowling Club. This kind of entrepreneurial spirit was important to the women's community in Canberra. Anne-Marie Delahunt and Lynne O'Brien remember W.E.T (Women's Entertainment Troupe) and Amazon Entertainment Consultants which organised monthly women's dances at Gorman House '(with childcare!)', Anne-Marie adds. The lesbian feminist community was visible too in WRPM, (Women's Revolutions Per Minute), a 2XX radio program, in Canberra Youth Theatre and TAU (Through Art Unity)'.[29]

Most of these events were usually labelled 'women-only', and all women were welcome including 'heterosexual, bisexual or celibate women', but there was, as Judith Ion says, an 'underlying assumption that they catered primarily to a (lesbian) feminist audience'.[30]

Everybody went there. 'university students, teachers, workers from Women's Services, feral dykes and army dykes', lesbian and straight'

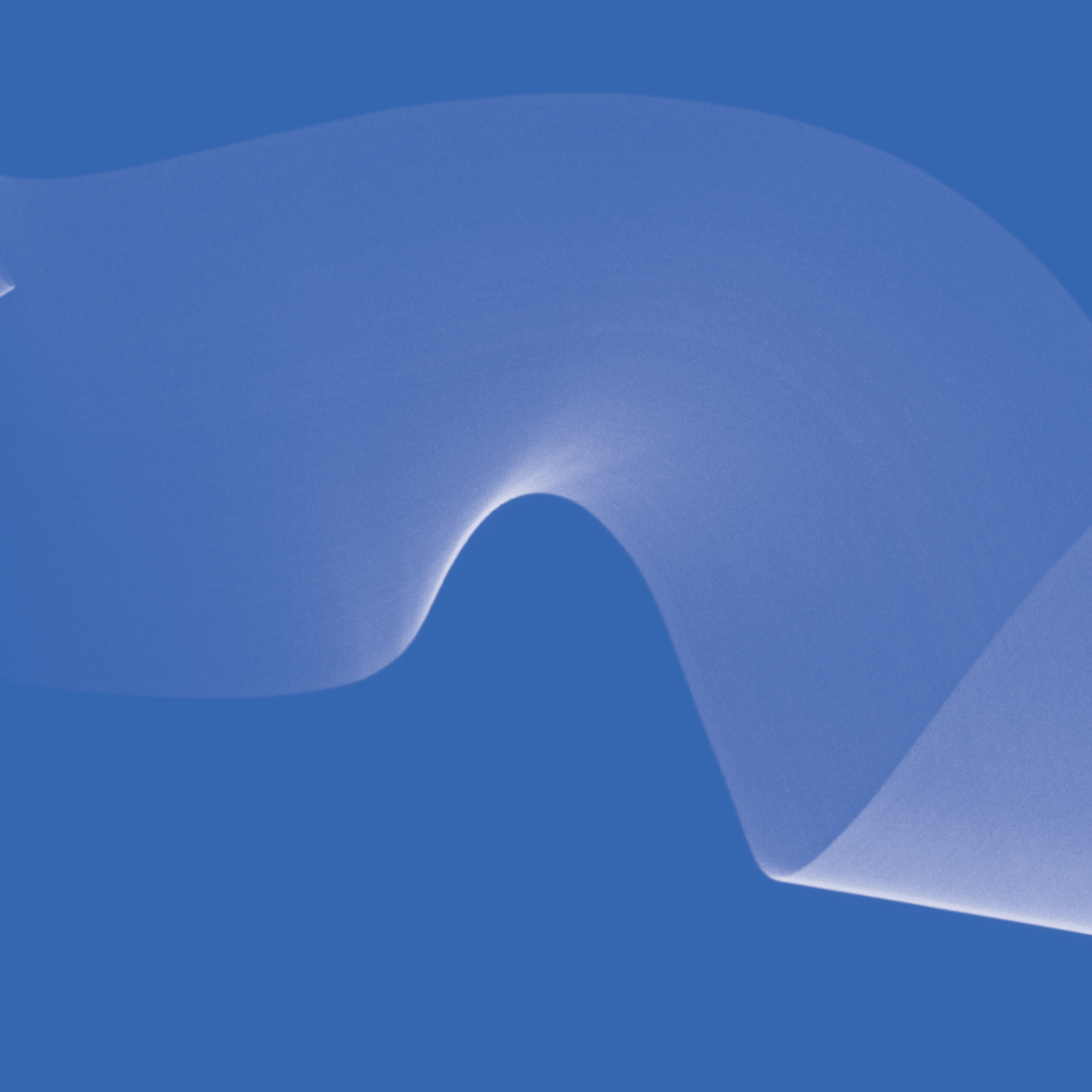
TILLEY'S

Unquestionably the most famous example of a women-centred space in Canberra was Tilley's Devine Cafe-Bar, set up in Lyneham by Pauline (Paullie) Higginson in 1984. It was a venue to be run by and for women. It opened in January 1984 with some 400 turning up to the first night (to a venue that seated 60) and was usually packed-out thereafter. Within a couple of months, it found itself the centre of controversy for a policy that excluded men on Friday and Saturday nights and admitted them at other times only if they were accompanied by at least one woman. There were plenty of men prepared to take umbrage at this and on 18 March 1984, *The Canberra Times* published three different pieces attacking Tilley's — cartoons by Geoff Pryor; the winning entry in a nursery rhyme competition which mocked anti-discrimination laws and Tilley's policy; and an opinion piece bewailing one man's experience of discrimination.

The response was a swift flurry of letters. Notably, for a controversy that was presented as women versus men, women and men actually lined up on both sides. The reality was that this was about political attitudes to feminism. One woman wrote to *The Canberra Times* to complain about Tilleys's exterior — 'intimidating … black, blank, unnamed facade and darkened entrance … far from welcoming to women passing by'. Against this, a group of five women wrote to defend the bar as providing a space away from 'the unwanted attentions of predatory males', where they 'can gain strength from each other and share common interests'. Jim Arachne pointed out that the reaction from the male writers in the paper indicated that a sore point had been touched among those who were used to exercising, rather than experiencing, sex discrimination. Tom Uren, the federal minister for the territories, expressed doubts. Not about the policy: 'I actually think there is a reason for it; in fact, I am supportive of the women's approach'. His concern related to the celebration of Tilly Devine (after whom the cafe was named) — 'a notorious brothel-keeper and a tough woman …'. The debate was a little livelier than it might have been because at that time the Canberra Club was determinedly defending its men-only policy and, on the other hand, Senator Susan Ryan, a minister in the federal Labor government, was sponsoring legislation that would prohibit discrimination against women and men alike.[31]

After a couple of weeks, the debate subsided and Tilley's settled down to be what it had always intended to be — a space that was welcoming, safe and comfortable for women, where musicians could perform, and artists could display their work. It was the kind of place you could go and be sure of meeting up with someone you knew. Leigh remembers lots of drinking and dancing and one-night stands. The crowd included 'university students, teachers, workers from Women's Services, feral dykes and army dykes', lesbian and straight, and if most women mixed with their own little groups, others ventured out more broadly. Everybody went there. Lynne O'Brien, who worked there for six years, remembers nights when 200 women would pack the place out and that, while it was open to all, there was definitely a 'short-hair-sensible-shoes vibe going on'. 'Frock Friday' was of course ironic; no one wore a frock. The army dykes had relocated their social life there, gathering at big tables — two or three groups of eight or more, and Jocelyn heard stories of them heckling and groping women, though she dismisses these as an urban myth. They rarely identified their military identities (attitudes in the military were no better in the 1980s) and Lynne O'Brien remembers them as being 'really freaked out' about the possibility that they might have been followed by the military police. Erin says that word of mouth identified them, and as a bartender she got to know them. Tilley's continued success meant that Higginson was able expand the premises steadily over the years, taking over more and more of the adjacent buildings. It is still operating today.

Lesbian life and politics in Canberra in 1970s and 1980s were profoundly shaped by the existence and evolution of the women's movement which provided an environment that was, right from the start to a large extent, and became increasingly, welcoming to the lesbian sisters and their issues. Women's services, women-only social events and political organisations were at the heart of the emergence of Canberra's lesbian community.



CHAPTER 05

AIDS ACTION


AIDS
ACTION


BUS
MOBILE UNIT
(NEEDLES)
THE NO HASSLES
AIDS EDUCATION
MOBILE UNIT
JIR-098

IN 2002, THE AIDS ACTION COUNCIL OF THE ACT PUBLISHED *THE LIVING QUILT*, A SMALL VOLUME IN WHICH A NUMBER OF CANBERRANS REFLECTED ON THEIR EXPERIENCE OF LIVING WITH, WHAT WAS FOR EACH OF THEM, A LIFE-DEFINING DISEASE. IN HIS PREFACE, HIGH COURT JUDGE, MICHAEL KIRBY, SPOKE OF THE DUAL NATURE OF THE HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC.[1] ON THE ONE HAND, THINKING OF THE POLICY ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEES AND THE UNITED NATIONS' HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES WHICH HE HAD SERVED ON LEFT HIM REASONABLY 'UPBEAT'.

Quilt Displayed In Sydney & Canberra

The week commencing March 5th was a highlight in the short history of the Quilt Project, an Australian AIDS Memorial.

After receiving the news from the US that the Names Project Quilt had been nominated for the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize with the Australian Quilt receiving a mention in the recommendation, the Quilt went to the Syendy Opera House. On Sunday, March 5, it was hung as a backdrop for the AIDS Trust *Stars of the Australian Opera* Benefit Concert. As the artists sung a programme which included Mozart, Verdi and Bernstein, the audience gazed at the memorial panels of the Quilt.

"That night the Quilt was over 87 square metres," said it's convenor and founder Andrew Carter. "Appropriately, the last panel added only days before was for the late Mick Campbell who has worked as a lighting technician at the Opera House and we were honored to have his mother, Helen, who made the panel, attend the concert with us." Andrew and Helen discussed the goals of the Quilt Project during the interval with the Governor of NSW, Rear Admiral Sir David Martin, who said he had been moved by it's positive message.

Wednesday, March 8, saw the Quilt in Canberra. It was united with a block of recently completed memorial panels from Victoria to create a total area of just over 100 square metres. At a ceremony in front of the New Parliament House, Andrew Carter and Elizabeth Reid introduced the Quilt and it's meaning to the Capital. With others, including Senator Peter Baume, they read the names of those memorialized. Senators Baume, Puplick and Tate (The Minister for Justice) offered messages of hope and understanding.

"The Quilt was a focus that day, not only for people involved with AIDS in Canberra, but for the whole nation," said Andrew Carter later. "We will never forget that each and every person we have lost in this epidemic was a human being who was loved and loving and is still loved. We are proud to have known them and will take this message around Australia. We saw in Canberra how a display of our Quilt draws people from all walks of life; parliamentarians, health workers, people with the AIDS virus, their families and friends, and people who still consider themselves unaffected by the epidemic. The gathering of such a cross section of the general community around the Quilt creates a solidarity not seen before in this epidemic."

Arrangements are being made now for a National Tour during the second half of this year with the Quilt returning to Sydney for World AIDS Day, December 1st, 1989.

ON THE OTHER HAND, FACED WITH THE EXTENT AND DEPTH OF SUFFERING EXPERIENCED BY THOSE INFECTED AND BY THEIR LOVERS AND FAMILIES AND FRIENDS, HE UNDERSTOOD DEEPLY THE DREADFUL PERSONAL IMPACT OF THE EPIDEMIC.

The contributors to *The Living Quilt*, drawing on their own lives and experiences, show us the scope and nature of the AIDS epidemic from the viewpoint of those infected and affected, a view that is often overlooked in discussions that focus on activism, governments, the medical professions, policy responses, organising, activism and protests.[2] The contributors are gay and straight, infected and not, of many ages and had been living with the epidemic for anything between a few months and many years. These 19 contributors have one thing in common — the uniqueness of their experience. As Kenn Basham writes: 'This is a personal account of a journey with HIV. It can only be what I … have experienced and learnt, as it is always such a personal account of life that not even other people with HIV can experience all the things I have'.[3]

In the first 15 years or so (until the availability after 1996 of the combination therapies that started to save lives), AIDS was very often a death sentence and, as Paul observed, every funeral raised the question: 'who would be next?'.[4] For the living, life was often a nightmare. Luke was diagnosed in the early 1990s and died in 2001. In the years in between he spent much of his time in a wheelchair, he was in hospital 13 times, he had several operations and spent two weeks in a hospice. He felt he was 'just surviving'. Even twenty years into the epidemic, people were still being infected, and the impact could be as devastating as it had been in the early 1980s. David Sullivan, who discovered his positive status in six months before he wrote his piece, described himself as feeling 'unclean', unable to explore his sexuality and living a life that was 'stalled'.[5] Luke's reaction when he was diagnosed in the early 1990s was similar: 'I thought my whole world had collapsed and my life was over'.[6]

Peter Canavan was diagnosed in 1988 and, looking back in his piece in *The Living Quilt*, he described the 'discrimination, alienation, vilification, stigmatisation and isolation' that he was subjected to. He remembered 'diet, exercise, stress reduction, support and counselling … the Wills and Powers of Attorney, the superannuation battles and the suicides and euthanasia … ' But he remembered, too, 'some very original and creative funeral ceremonies in celebration of life, together with the love, grief and loss borne by the family and friends'.[7] Robert Shearman also saw how grief and loss were tangled up with lessons on how to live: 'too many people have died but god have these people shown me how to live, how to enjoy life for every single moment that it is worth, how to endure pain, and how to die with dignity and leave such happy memories. Memories of pain and laughter. Memories of dying, memories of living … The most wonderful time of my life has been spent with people who are LIVING yes LIVING not dying with AIDS'.[8]

Stephanie Buckle wrote as a straight, HIV-negative woman who served on the AIDS Action Council Board and set up the counselling service — an experience she describes as her service to the community but also as 'lonely and sometimes isolating … battling so much ignorance, fear and discrimination'. But she observes that 'death established a presence in my life that has never gone away'. In some ways it was 'a blessing, because it helps me make life-affirming choices in my own life'.[9]

'THE MOST POLITICAL OF DISEASES'

But this intensely personal illness was also, as Dennis Altman once wrote, 'the most political of diseases'[10] in which fear and ignorance, maliciousness and mendacity created challenges that very few diseases were burdened by. Challenges responded to with courage, persistence, cooperation, compassion and mutual respect.[11] Initially it was not at all clear what the cause was. The virus — always the most likely culprit — was not identified until 1984, leaving those hoping to avoid the disease at risk. Robert Shearman remembers the very earliest days when he came to believe (from press reports and even from his doctor) that AIDS was an American disease and that if he stayed away from the United States, from Americans and from guys who had been there, he would be safe. He wasn't. Even after the virus was found, the public was still

being bombarded with health warnings which were often more frightening than enlightening — most (in)famously, the National Advisory Committee on AIDS' Grim Reaper campaign of 1987 — but also with a drumbeat of disturbing headlines in the mainstream press: 'a plague', 'a gay plague', 'a new Black Death' 'a killer sex bug'.[12] In June 1983 one of Canberra's leading activists wrote to the producers of the current affairs television program *60 minutes*: 'Appalling, frightening, shocking. No, not AIDS but your report on it'.[13] It was a remark that could have been made many times over in relation to the mainstream media's coverage of the issue. Even when it was not intentionally malign, it was too often sensationalist.

For right-wingers and moral conservatives, the disease was, literally, a god-send, providing a basis on which to organise against the achievements of the gay and lesbian movement over the previous decade. In August 1985 Fred Nile, a Sydney-based but nationally-known campaigner for 'traditional Christian values' came to the Australian National University (ANU) to debate Philip Chown, an outspoken and energetic Sydney gay activist, on 'The Immorality of Homosexuality'. Nile relied not only upon scripture to defend his position but also upon the evidence of the 'gay plague' which was the result, he said, of male homosexuals and their 'abominable activities'. Nile's supporters, organised as the Family Team, were represented in the ACT House of Assembly and had been early opponents of the AAC. In 1985 its leader Bev Cairns had formally complained to the Advertising Standards Council about advertisements in *The Canberra Times* which had raised and answered questions about AIDS, such as 'Can my kids catch it at school?' and 'Is it a gay disease?'[14]

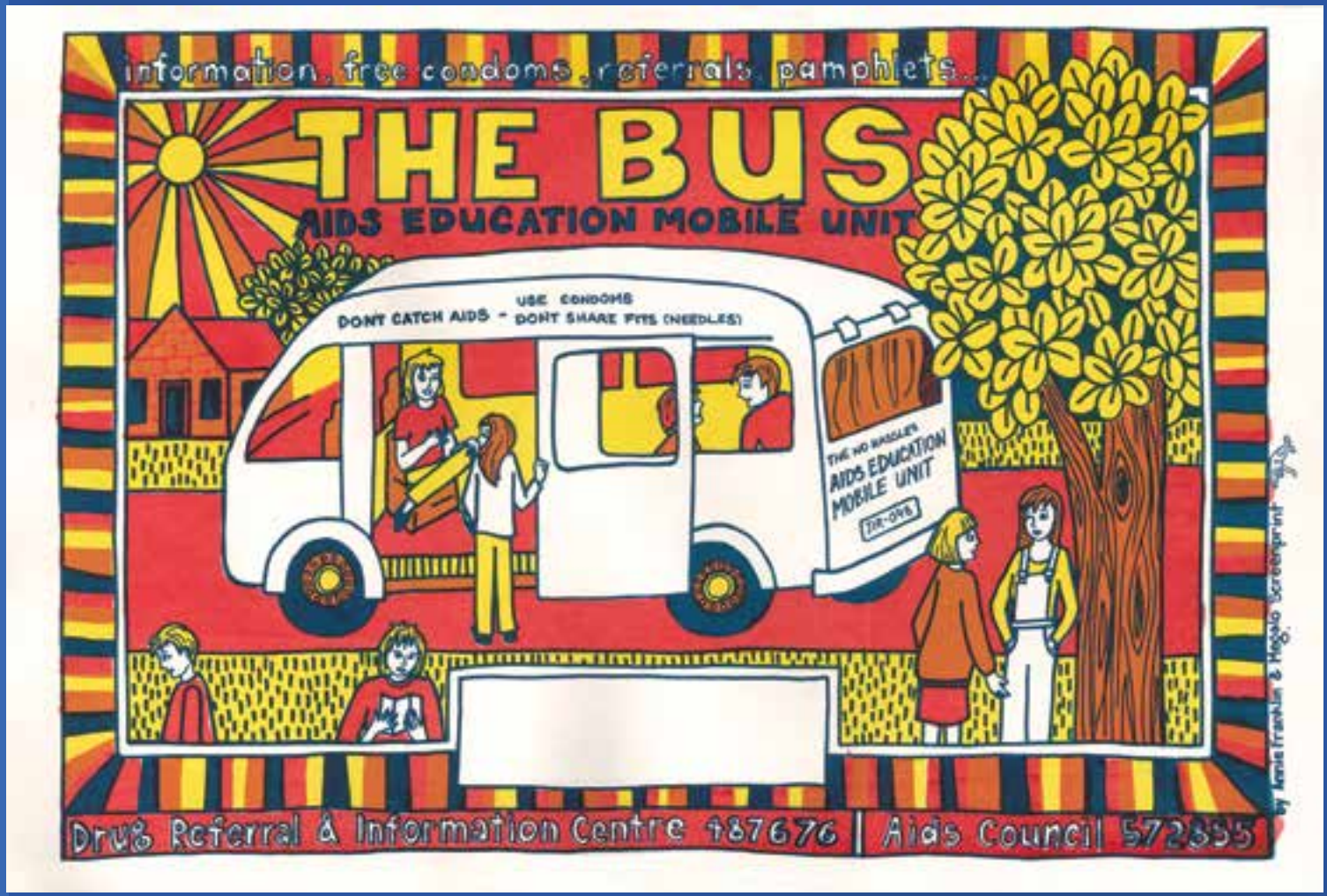
Ultimately, the Right's efforts to use the fear that the disease aroused in the wider community failed. Their fundamental problem was that the strategy adopted by gay and AIDS activists, governments and the medical profession actually worked. Infection rates dropped remarkably after a year or two and remained low thereafter. It was clear that the coercive measures demanded by the Right were simply not necessary — that educating at-risk groups elicited the behavioural change that slowed the spread of the virus. The Right's assertion that irresponsible sodomites cared only for their own selfish sexual pleasures, that safe sex was a myth, that education was more about recruiting more and more men into the sodomitical lifestyle … all of this was disproved by the cold hard facts of falling infection rates.

Some of the attacks, though, came from much closer to the political mainstream. As late as August 1987 the ACT Chief Education Officer discovered that officers of the ACT Health Authority were discussing condom use with students in schools. He issued a blistering response, arguing that, while sexual intercourse was necessary for the survival of the species, it was most certainly not 'a necessary part of the behaviour of children or adolescents'. Condoms were never 100 per cent effective, he said (an argument widely used at the time as an argument in favour of sexual abstinence), and their distribution was promoting youthful promiscuity with partners of unknown health status. Educators had no right to 'encourage or condone' promiscuity in children without the consent of parents, the school's board and the Education Authority's Board. (The Board had already decreed that there would be no condoms machines in schools, nor direct sales, nor free distribution. And condoms distributed in class for demonstration purposes were to be returned to the instructor at the end of the lesson.)[15]

ORGANISING

The instinctive response by activists to any challenge was always to organise, and so it was that between May and September 1983 AIDS action committees were founded in capital cities across the country. Established by gays rather than by governments or the medical profession, they had at their heart a determination to ensure that the response to AIDS would be developed in partnership with, rather than at the expense of, gay people. The main political parties, the medical profession and gay people came together around the action committees. Of particular importance was the election of a Labor federal government in March 1983, with its strategy of governing in consultation with the country's many and varied communities, which meant that ministers and senior public servants were more than willing to work collaboratively with the gay community and its action committees.

In Canberra in about November 1983 a group of 13 men met in the loungeroom of the Euree Street house, which we have seen had become a centre of gay political organising, and founded an AIDS action committee. They had been called together by Jim Arachne and John Westlund with help from Ross McMurtrie, all of whom were experienced political activists. The group immediately set about organising information sessions for gay and bisexual men, health care providers and the general public. They also prepared information kits for members of the ACT House of Assembly (the body elected to advise the federal government on ACT affairs between 1976 and 1986) to help its members make informed responses to the coming crisis.[16]



AIDS Bus, Taking it to the streets

Tim Mackay, one of the foundation members of the AAC and its second executive officer, remembers, with pardonable exaggeration perhaps, that when he and a couple of others went early on to talk to the health department they were greeted by officials 'with an open cheque book saying "OK how much do you need to get out there and work with your community to do something about this disease?"'[17] The cheque book was opened in the first instance to the tune of $13,400 in 1985 and $90,000 in 1986 — not much for the task at hand but the amount would increase steadily as the council demonstrated that it was spending the money effectively and bringing the threat under control.

The grant made it possible for the AAC Board to employ two staff and to rent accommodation. Finding accommodation turned out to be difficult — there were a number of knockbacks from landlords once they realised the nature of the AAC's work. In response, the AAC lodged a complaint to the ACT branch of the Human Rights Commission — partly to draw attention to the kind of discrimination that people living with AIDS were subject to, but also to make the point that they did not have to put up with it. In the middle of 1986, the doors were opened upstairs at 8 Lonsdale Street, Braddon.[18]

John Westlund was appointed office administrator in mid-1986 at the age of 30, bringing a background in adult education, radio and television. He came to Canberra from Western Australia with his child and his mother and immediately threw himself into community-based social work and theatrical activities. He was one of those who lived in Euree Street, that 'sanctuary for many men on their way out of the closet'. During his years with the AAC he was a tireless and effective promoter of the work of the council — usually with an exuberance and a cheeky wit. Warren Talbot, executive director of AFAO, remembers John turning up to address a 'gathering of conservative churchies' wearing jeans with the bum cut out and a skimpy jock showing. It was Westlund who insisted the 'action' remain part of the AAC's name, when all over the country it was being quietly removed.[19]

THE AIDS ACTION COUNCIL

Right from the start, the AAC took on all the tasks required for responding to the crisis — educating the general public and the at-risk populations, gathering the views of those at risk and presenting them to the authorities, answering enquiries. It had to train professionals and volunteers, push for long-term and short-term policies and resources, and advocate for individuals. It worked with, and for, those who had contracted or were at risk of contracting the virus, but also their lovers, families, friends and workmates. Unlike the social and political groups of the scene which had emerged in the 1970s, the AAC was responsible to all Canberrans: gay and straight, and those who were both and neither, old and young and in-between, out and not-out. HIV did not discriminate.[20]

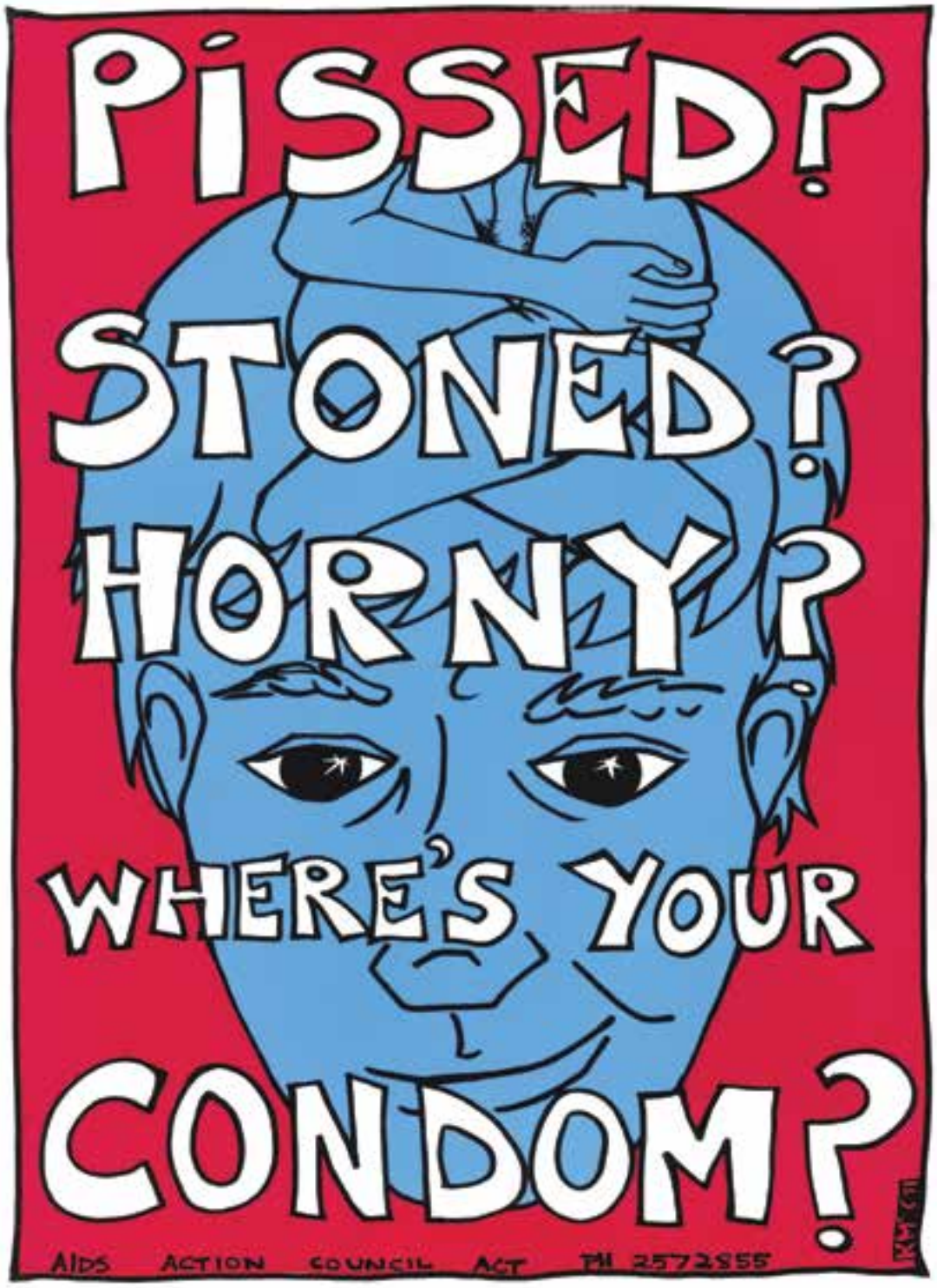
In June 1987 John Westlund spelled out the size of the AAC's target audience. The first Canberra case had been announced in March 1986, a man of about 40 years of age being treated in an isolation ward in Woden Valley Hospital.[21] By the time of Westlund's speech there were four cases diagnosed with Category A AIDS (what was usually referred to as 'full-blown AIDS'), 70 who had tested positive to the virus, and 200 more who were thought to be HIV-positive. These were not large numbers in themselves, but in a city of 280,000 they were significant. Men who had sex with men (regardless of whether they identified as gay, bisexual or heterosexual) made up the largest affected group — about 8,400 men. But these people were embedded in wider circles and networks of 'this small country town' as he called it. There was a relatively large, but notoriously underground, group of intravenous drug-users: about 4,000 people. Like the men who had sex with men, they were by no means a homogeneous set — drug use patterns varied. A small number were seriously addicted, 80 per cent injected a few times a week, and others maybe once or twice a year. But a single episode of needle-sharing could lead to infection and getting that message out was important. There were, in addition, maybe 60 sex workers in Canberra (mostly women) — a somewhat transient group which ebbed and flowed according to demand, peaking when parliament was sitting. (Fiona Patten who discusses in her memoir her employment during these years as an outreach educator and advocate for Canberra sex workers, remembers, at most, one or two men who worked with male clients.) Then there was a group of about 40 people with haemophilia who, until the blood supply was subject to universal testing from 1985, were at risk of infection. Add in the partners of all these groups of people (so, another 16,000) and about one-in-nine Canberrans might be thought of as affected in one way or the other. [22]

The diversity of these groups meant that the AAC's message had to be spread widely. Inevitably, given that it was talking about sex and drugs, its campaigns ran into controversy. In 1986 the AAC set out to broadcast its safe sex and safe injecting message with advertisements on the city's buses, using the slogan 'You don't just catch AIDS (You have to let somebody give it to you)'. The text of the ad explained that 'If you enjoy anal intercourse, be sure you're protected with a condom every time you do it. If you use hard drugs, be sure you don't use anyone else's needle … And if you want to have sex with anyone who is involved in either of these risky activities, be sure to protect yourself by using a condom as well'. It was pretty frank, and it is not surprising that the general manager of ACTION, the ACT's bus service, immediately declared that the ads would not be accepted. But he also suggested he would consider 'a more suitable' wording, keeping the door open despite the controversial nature of the campaign. Bev Cairns of the conservative Family Team, was, not surprisingly, opposed to the whole thing. She noted that the ads would be viewed by those 'who do not share a prurient interest in homosexual practices'. The ads, she said, were part of a casual approach to sex: 'get with it and give it a go'. But even worse, she maintained, the campaign had a 'secondary and surreptitious purpose … [to raise] curiosity and attract more people to experiment with unnatural homosexual practices'. The result of the campaign, she asserted, would be more AIDS cases, rather than fewer. The AIDS Action Council should be disbanded.

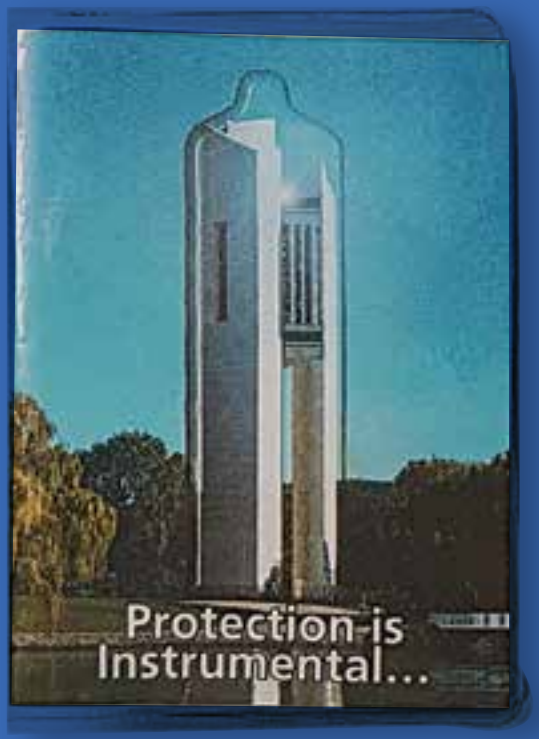
More surprisingly, the ACT Health Authority announced that it, too, was opposed to the ads and would not fund them: 'With community pressure against the campaign we can't be seen to be offending the community', a spokesperson explained. The health authority claimed to have surveyed territory and interstate education and health authorities, Canberra youth and community groups, and reported back that 'they had all indicated that the wording was not acceptable'.[23]

And yet, the ads went ahead. They only appeared on the outside of the buses and the text was modified — anal sex could be *had* but not *enjoyed*. Never had the importance of the AAC's independence been more obvious. The council understood the need to reach out to those who were not part of the gay scene — men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, sex workers — to alert them to condom use as the only way then available to protect themselves. Public transport advertising was a cost-effective way to do this. But if it had been up to conservative politicians and the health authority it would not have happened. It was the AAC's board members and staff who had both the willingness and the expertise to negotiate and compromise. They also had money — and they were able to pay for the bus campaign themselves because their funding was untied. The Hawke Labor government and its health minister Neal Blewett established the model by which AIDS would be fought — fund the AIDS councils and let them get on with their work. In the ACT, authorities followed this lead quickly. Tim Mackay's recollection of the open cheque book reflects this reality.

It has to be said, though, that government support came with administrative burdens. Marion Watson, an early executive member, remembers the first call for applications for federal funding had a three-week deadline attached. And the demands and expectations of government agencies were always time-consuming tasks that had to be juggled with a range of other responsibilities. In January 1987, John Westlund listed, without further explanation, the units within the health authority that he and his small team were working with: the CEC (the GM and all his DCMs), the AMG, the HAB, the APO and the APC.[24] It didn't help that with ACT self-government being promoted by the federal government, powers were being delegated in an ad hoc manner to territory authorities, and that reorganisations were frequent.


PISSED?
STONED?
HORNY?
WHERE'S YOUR
CONDOM?
AIDS ACTION COUNCIL ACT TH 2572855

Canberra-specific condom ads



Cover yourself in Canberra

FUN AND SAFE

By 1989 the AAC was ready to stretch its wings and it devised a campaign entirely of its own: 'Winter '89 … Fun and Safe'. It spread over four months and featured almost two-dozen separate events. It was designed to ensure that the AAC was seen 'as part of the social mainstream of the [gay] community rather than a serious education/political/ welfare agency that should be ignored at all costs'. It was launched by the president of AFAO, but in keeping with the desire to put the 'fun back into safe sex', the launch took place on a country property with a bonfire on the Queen's Birthday weekend under the 'spiritual guidance' of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, an order of gay male nuns known for their highly theatrical interventions into gay life. There was a booklet *Winter Stories*, featuring Canberra people and places; a gay men's film festival featuring almost a dozen films; luncheon cruises on Lake Burley Griffin; photography and well-being workshops; a leather and denim party; tenpin bowling and bingo; and a 'crazy mid-winter barbeque' (crazy indeed given Canberra's winter climate). It was promoted with much merchandise: pillowcases, sweatshirts, a poster, a calendar, cards. And at all these events, amongst the fun the message of safe sex was prominent. The campaign was supported by the local community groups that we will meet in the next chapter. The Meridian Club hosted a dinner and presented awards for service to AAC stalwarts Peter Rowland and Jeanette Baldwin. Community groups like the Tennis Club, the Griffins, the national peak body the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, People Living with AIDS, the AIDS Memorial Quilt Project, and the Positive Support Group all joined in with events and publicity and promotion. As much as anything, the range of organisations participating is evidence that a *community* was (as we shall see in Chapter 6) at last emerging in Canberra. And this community was enmeshed in the wider Canberra society. When the Australian AIDS Memorial Quilt was brought to Canberra in November 1994, it was unfolded (in a highly ritualised ceremony) by volunteers from the AAC and gay community as well as people from the Oncology Unit at Woden Hospital, the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health, the Canberra Independent Church and the Interchange General Practice.[25]

VOLUNTEERS

With its small staff and its small (albeit growing) budget, the AAC understood that its volunteers were vital to its work. In 1988 the Board told the membership and the wider community: 'We need you to volunteer, to become educated, to speak out on Aids [sic], to educate your communities and groups. It will take all of us to beat Aids'.[26] Mobilising such support, though, was only the first step. When volunteers stepped forward, they faced a steep learning curve. As Tim Mackay put it, people who had been doctors, graphic designers, lab scientists, theatre workers had to become community advocates, counsellors, policy advisors, treatments specialists, managers of people and of budgets.[27]

Volunteers had to deal with the full range of the AAC's work. Some of this was administrative — newsletter production and mail out, producing condom packs for distribution and red ribbons for sale, office work. Some of it was supporting public events — the unfolding of the Quilt, the Candlelight Memorial, World AIDS Day. Some of it was direct service to HIV-positive people by care teams and the Positive Support Network or cooking for and staffing the soup kitchen. Much of the AAC's information material was developed from scratch and produced by volunteers: the discrimination pack; modules on care and support, loss and grief; and volunteer training. This material was directed to the wider world, but it was also used to support volunteers, who themselves needed organising: 'recruiting, training, rostering' as well as emotional care.

Reviewing 1994's activities, Helen Lightburn, the ACC's Volunteer Coordinator, counted 777 individuals who had volunteered at some point in the year. Total hours contributed: 3,337. The annual report for 1994–95 identified 1177 individual volunteer contracts involving 4,920 hours of work. In a small place like Canberra, volunteering took on a particular shape that marked it off from the bigger cities: it was necessary for volunteers to take on a range of different activities for each of their clients, rather than being able to refer them to the specialist services that existed in the larger states' AIDS Councils.[28] The number of people volunteering at any one time was impressive. Allowing for turnover, the total number must have been very large indeed for a city of Canberra's size.

AIDS demo, Knowledge and confidence and hope

Volunteering was not just a form of service to others (though it was that). Volunteers often spoke of the benefits they received from their work. In 1991 Chris described their efforts as:

> an expression of faith and support … making a commitment to stopping the spread of HIV and caring for people with the virus … I believe in the organisation, in what it is trying to do and how it is trying to do it … I also believe that its [sic] important for people to support things that they think are important … *I call it putting your thumbprint to it …*[29]

PEOPLE LIVING WITH AIDS

However wide-ranging the threat of AIDS was, it was people who were living with the disease who had the most immediate and compelling needs and the AAC had been advocating from its earliest days for individuals, for funding, and for policies, laws and regulations to protect HIV-positive people. Eventually, those most affected started to move to the fore, taking up more and more of this work.[30]

At the national HIV/AIDS conference in Hobart in 1988 people living with AIDS had asserted their right to speak for themselves and be listened to, and shortly thereafter a formal organisation, People Living with AIDS (PLWA), was established with branches around the country. In January 1989, the AAC Board decided to 'foster' the formation of a branch of PLWA in Canberra. On 31 January a dozen people met and founded the group and decided to begin work on their own newsletter to replace the 'Living Well' supplement that the AAC had long published in its monthly newsletter *AIDS Action*. PLWA was invited to nominate a representative to sit on the Board, and to provide a member for staff selection panels. By March 1991, relations between the two bodies had 'declined' with some evidence of acrimony between the two groups. But things were smoothed over and a formal agreement was signed and the PLWA was able to point to a range of achievements around education and information including a directory of HIV/AIDS services, information folders of HIV discrimination and drug and alcohol issues, a monthly newsletter, expanded clinical services and social events. Its members had provided 2,000 episodes of client support and fielded 1,400 requests for information.

In late 1989, ACTUP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) was founded in Australia, with a chapter in Canberra set up by Kenn Basham and Phil who were living at the Euree Street house, with (among others) John Westlund and Jim Arachne. It described itself (in a description taken from the US group on which it was modelled) as 'a diverse, non-partisan group united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis. We research and distribute the latest HIV/AIDS medical information. We protest and demonstrate; we are not silent'. Among the targets of its demonstrations were the Australian Press Council, the 4th National Conference on AIDS at the National Convention Centre, Parliament House, the Therapeutic Drugs Committee, the health minister's office.[31] Kenn Basham describes his activism as living an AIDS lifestyle — from being open about his HIV status to serving on the AAC Board and preparing grant applications, to wearing badges and t-shirts and putting up stickers and posters, to being brash, obnoxious and rude as the occasional demanded.[32]

THE AAC AT WORK

The AAC's tasks were many but in relation to stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS its priority was education — which involved both spreading information (what was safe and what was not when it came to sex and needle use) and finding ways to encourage people to act on that knowledge, to change their behaviour. Spreading information meant reaching out to where those who were at risk (which was, essentially, anybody) were to be found. We have seen already that this might include people seeing buses go by or reading newspaper advertisements. But speakers, leaflets and stickers and posters were sent to anyone who would listen — audiences as diverse as prison guards, high school students and ski instructors. In the 1990s, the AAC was regularly turning up at events such university orientation weeks, International Women's Day, markets and schools.[33] In 1993 women staff and volunteers from AAC and WISE (the sex worker outreach program funded by federal and ACT health departments) ran a Safe Sex Workshop for Lesbians that offered advice and support in the explicit way that AIDS educators had long realised was the best way to get their message out.[34]

At the very core of the AAC's work, though, was its orientation to gay men, the group most at risk of infection. Because they constituted a real group in the form of social networks and friendship circles stretching back to the 1950s and had come increasingly over the course of the 1970s to be a visible one ('the scene'), it was also the group that could be most readily targeted for education work. The key concept that drove the AIDS councils was 'community attachment', referring to the ways in which people might participate in the social, political, sexual and cultural activities of, in this case, the gay and lesbian community.[35] As the AAC Board said in 1993 'a cohesive, supportive and informed gay community provides a receptive environment for raising awareness about HIV/AIDS and safe sex, which in turn encourages responsible attitudes and behaviour'.[36]

In big cities, there were pubs and clubs, social groups, hobby and interest groups, bookshops, beats, activist and advocacy groups, collective households and a host of other institutions which provided ways for AIDS educators to reach out to the sexually-active with the information they needed. In the early years of the epidemic, it is doubtful that Canberra could be said to have a community in this sense at all, lacking as it did most of these institutions until the late 1980s. But early on the scene was a means through which knowledge could be spread. And over time the effect of the services delivered and from the interaction between volunteers, HIV-positive people, people attending AAC events or exposed to the information services was to strengthen and shape a community such as had not existed at the end of the 1970s.

But outreach also encompassed more obviously sexualised spaces — including the beats, those public places where men went in search of other men. Paul Kehoe, the beats project co-ordinator for the AAC, explained that the beats hosted a 'whole heap of guys … who don't think of themselves as gay or as a faggot or anything like that, thank you very much! [Many] identify as straight and 'live a "straight" lifestyle'.[37] Because of this, they were often not exposed to the safe sex information available in the gay press and in the bars and clubs. Like all the AAC's projects, the beats project was based on careful research. Over four weeks in May–June 1992, the city's main beats were identified — Yarramundi Reach (the site once designated for the National Museum of Australia), Target, toilet blocks in Kambah, Mawson, Charnwood, Telopea Park, Erindale and the ANU. Some 337 men were counted during this period (in the middle of a Canberra winter). From talking to many of these, a need for resources, support and information across a range of issues (HIV, STDs, sexuality) was identified. In the 1990s, the commercial sex industry expanded in Canberra and a number of sex-on-premises venues opened. These were not brothels but more like commercialised indoor beats: men paid to enter and cruised for sex with each other. The AAC's Beats Outreach project started working with the venue operators to bring information and referral opportunities to the customers. At one point it staged a series of events for women at the Adam and Eve sex shop.[38]

In 1993, the AAC partnered with AFAO to establish a telephone service for bisexuals. Funded in part by the ACT Health Department, ads in the personal columns of *The Canberra Times* resulted in 21 phone calls in its first four days of operation. The AAC had been working with sex workers and injecting drug users, both as individuals and through their organisations and continued to do so through the 1990s. (Indeed, as early as 1986, the AAC had played a pivotal role in persuading the ACT government to initiate a needle-exchange program after conducting a survey that found that very few pharmacists were prepared to support such a scheme. An education campaign turned this around in less than a year). In 1996, the AAC and Cultural Perspectives, an organisation representing people from non-English speaking backgrounds (about nine per cent of Canberra's population), held a conference to explore how best to reach out into this remarkably diverse population.[39]

Over the course of the AIDS epidemic, some 400 people in Canberra were diagnosed as HIV positive, a toll very much lower than would have been the case without the work of the AAC's staff and volunteers and those who rallied around them. They had seen off a right-wing attempt to take advantage of the wider community's fear. They had promoted knowledge and confidence and hope. They mourned the dead, sustained the sick, celebrated life and endurance. And they had, in doing all this, helped to bind Canberra's early, rather fragile institutions into a community that would take up struggles and demands that no-one could have imagined in 1983.

CHAPTER 06

COMMUNITY

'Fun, not fights'

IN 2013 CANBERRA CELEBRATED ITS CENTENARY. IN THE ONE HUNDRED YEARS SINCE THE TERRITORY WAS CARVED OUT OF NEW SOUTH WALES AS THE SITE FOR THE NEW NATION'S CAPITAL CITY, ITS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT HAD BEEN SLOW AND PATCHY. BUT FOR MANY, 2013 MARKED THE MOMENT THINGS BEGAN TO ACCELERATE, WHEN THE CITY 'SHRUGGED OFF ITS STODGY REPUTATION AND FORGED AN EDGY PERSONA'. RESTAURANTS, COFFEE SHOPS, HOT YOUNG BANDS, 'CREATIVITY, FOOD AND FASHION', LONSDALE STREET, A NEW ENTHUSIASM THE CITY'S WHIMSICAL CONCRETE BUS SHELTERS, THE HANDMADE MARKETS, APARTMENT LIVING IN STYLISH NEW 'PRECINCTS' — ALL WRAPPED UP IN THE CBR BRAND ('CONFIDENT. BOLD. READY.').[1]

Gay men and lesbians were caught up in all this. In a city of about 400,000 there were simply more gay people. More people to meet, more people to dance with, more people to lobby and advocate, more people to set up businesses and to consume those businesses' products and services. But there was more to it than that. There was a widespread belief in urban planning circles that vibrant cities needed a social climate that valued and respected diversity, non-conformity, creative thinking. Gays became desirable residents of these new cities. Far from the vilified, marginalised and criminalised population of the 1950s, gays were now social assets. Their visibility and inclusion spoke to the liberal, progressive, creative social climate of cities, and if they happened to have a 'lifestyle' (a consumerist mentality, and high disposable incomes) — well, so much the better.[2]

If cities were more open to, and welcoming of, diversity than they had been in the past, so too was the gay world. New identities emerged and old ones were transformed, and issues emerged that would have been unimaginable in the 1970s. The terms, 'gay' and even 'lesbian and gay' which had served for 20 years, started to come under challenge. By the 1990s, bisexual people were speaking up, followed by trans and intersex people. Attention was devoted to trying to find a way to name these newly assertive identities with one label. For a while in the 1990s, 'queer' worked as an umbrella term. Beginning in the late 1990s, there was a shift towards LGBT, LGBTI, LGBTIQ, LGBTIQ+ (and variants). It's not clear that the realities of sexuality, gender and sex had changed all that dramatically in terms of numbers. What was new were the visibility and the demands for social inclusion and social equality. Bi and trans and intersex people were coming out, as gay men and lesbians had in the 1970s and after.

The other great change during this period was the replacement of the scene that had developed in the 1970s and 1980s, with a community. 'Community' had been used in a casual sort of way from the 1970s for gay and lesbian life. This new community was still a place for gay men and lesbians (and now bisexuals, trans and intersex people) to socialise, but it was culturally and socially richer — more diverse and more interconnected, composed of a very much more visible network of community groups, media, venues, lobbyists and activists and advocates, support groups, artists and culture workers, an annual calendar of festivals and events … the language of 'community' was reflected in the wider public discussion. As politicians and social and commercial leaders caught up with, and began to celebrate, Australia's multiculturalism in the 1980s, the gay community could be thought of as just one more community. As the term 'multiculturalism' came under assault in the 1990s, the reality persisted, rebadged as 'diversity' — and the queer world followed this shift.

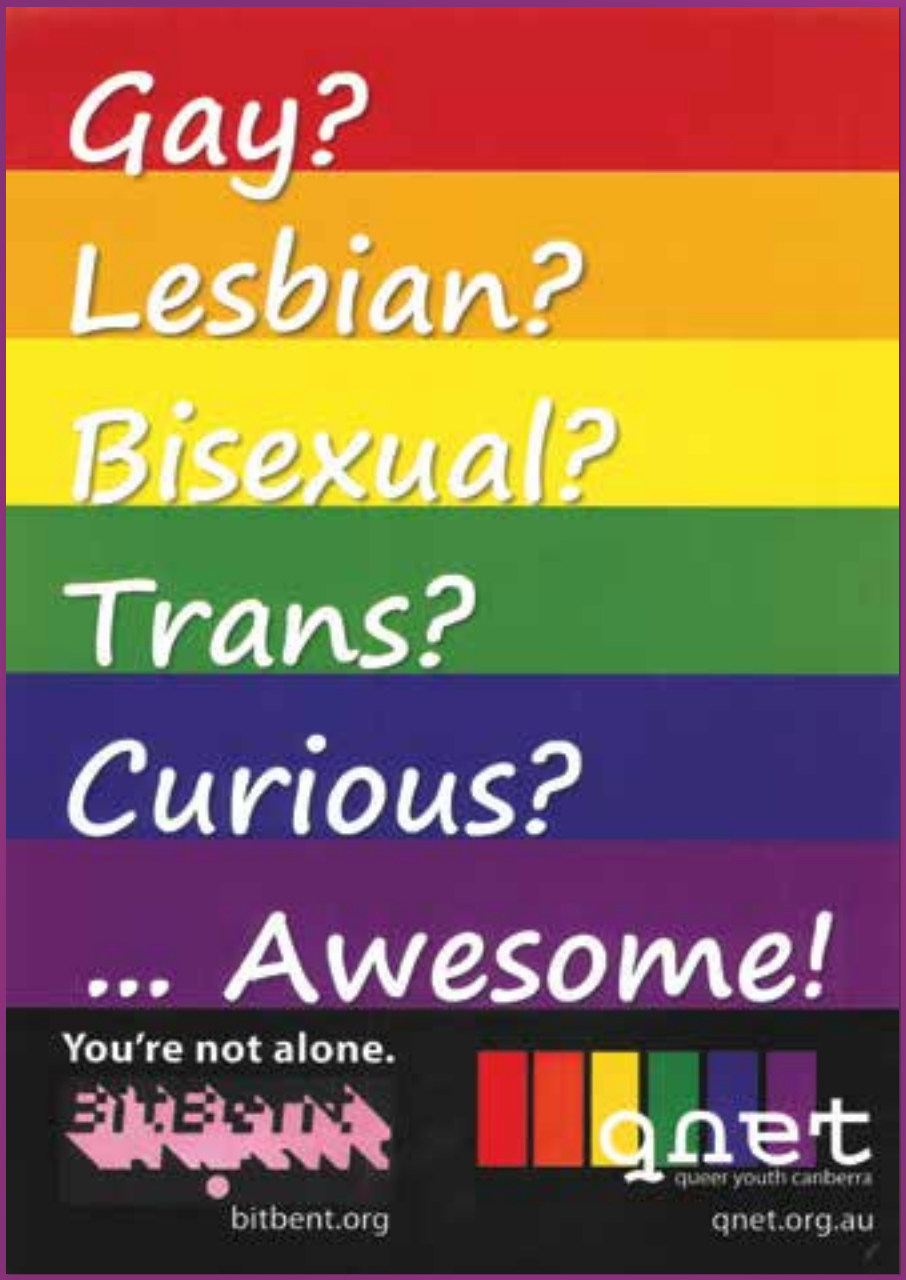
WHO ARE WE NOW?

The first people to emerge from under the shadow of 'lesbian and gay' were bisexuals. In October 1994, Canberra's gay and lesbian newspaper *PanDA* extended its target readership from 'Lesbian/Gay' to 'Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual'. In a new column, Roger Garland reported on the formation of the Canberra Region Bisexual Network (CRBN). The network was proudly diverse, open to 'people of all ages, genders, ethnicities, cultures and sexual orientations' and from all walks of life: 'Students, parents, workers, unemployed, transgender people, singles, couples'. Its aims were both social and political — 'to discuss and articulate ideas about sexual diversity', 'to minimise social isolation', 'to create visibility in the wider community'. Like gay people before him, Garland took up the task of responding to misconceptions: what is bisexuality? Where are the bisexuals? Aren't bisexuals promiscuous, unfaithful? Don't they spread AIDS? Couldn't they avoid discrimination by just pretending to be straight? It is not clear just how active the network was, however: in May 1995 the 'Bisexual Social Calendar' listed just two events — a monthly gathering for coffee, cake and chat at Antigo's Cafe Civic. A couple of years later, there were still only monthly gatherings to 'chat, swap experiences and have a laugh'.[3]

TRANS

The word 'trans', which came into use in the 2000s, encompasses a myriad of identities including drag and transvestism, transsexualism, transgender. It has a complex history which is still unfolding.

Drag performance began in Canberra at the Dickson Hotel in the early 1980s and became increasingly popular over the years. In the 1970s activists had frequently condemned it as a misogynistic parodying of women but in following decades it came to be seen as harmless entertainment that was an expression of queer life. In the late 1990s, one observer gushed of one performance: 'The energy was electrifying. The music was vibrant and quirky … The lip-syncing and choreography encapsulated all the naughtiness and bravery that being queer is about'.


Gay?
Lesbian?
Bisexual?
Trans?
Curious?
... Awesome!
You're not alone.
bitbent.org
qnet
queer youth canberra
qnet.org.au

From the mainstream the question was often simply why men would want to wear dresses at all. In 1997, four Canberra drag queens responded with a political defence of their behaviour: 'in every human being there is a masculine and feminine side in their sexual identity', they said, and men who wear dresses, either in everyday life, or for performing were simply more aware of this, and more comfortable with it. As drag queens, they were expressing 'our gay culture, the feminine side of our sexuality and our creativity'. Love it or hate it, it was incumbent upon all to 'respect each other's right to be who we are'.[4]

If drag was essentially a public performance in which exaggeration was the point, transvestism ('cross-dressing', sometimes these days just 'dressing') had long been practised by men and women determined to pass, undetected, as the other sex. A branch of the national organisation, Seahorse (founded in Melbourne and Sydney in the 1970s), was set up in Canberra in 1994. In the absence of laws against cross-dressing, the issues for transvestites were social disapproval and their own lack of confidence. These were challenged with courses and workshops, regular meetings — and venturing out in public. In 1995, Seahorse held a formal dinner at the Lakeside Hotel with members making a grand entrance through the front door. This was an act of no little courage and many of those who participated felt that at last 'timidity and nervousness' had been thrown off. Their confidence shaped the reactions of others, too. Overwhelmingly they were treated by staff and other patrons 'in accordance with our appearance and behaviour'. Which is to say: as women.[5]

Then there is 'transsexualism' — 'sex change' as it was often called. In the Western world, the American Christine Jorgensen's very public coming out as a transsexual in 1952 brought the phenomenon (which has a very long more submerged history) to public attention. In a 1995 article in *Quirk* Katherine described her experiences of being a transsexual person in this mode. 'I hate using the word tranny', she said, speaking of being misrecognised in both gay and straight venues. She offered a tongue-in-cheek guide to the perplexed — if someone is out and about wearing high heels, or a dress, or obvious makeup, it is likely that 'she is a he'. Gail Theresa Bennett wrote of her transition from 'Geoffrey to Gail', describing herself as a transsexual, whose life was shaped by her 'gender dysphoria' and her experience of being 'a woman trapped in a man's body' (a concept that goes back to Germany in the 1860s).[6]

In 1999, Kelly Jones, editor of *Quirk*, declared that 'Transgendered people have officially joined the ranks of publicly recognised "minorities" — no longer simply a group of people who behaved in a certain way but were rather becoming a fully-fledged "identity"'.[7] Daniel, who had been Rebecca, offered a frank insight into his experiences which were not all that different to those of Gail Theresa Bennett, but which were understood very differently. He embraced the word 'trannies' and put sex and gender politics at the heart of his being, with a strong feminist ideology and outspokenness on gendered violence in particular.[8] Abbey Jane, one of the leaders of the lobby and advocacy group A Gender Agenda, dated the real shift in queer community attitudes to the opening of the Hush Lounge in 2008, a venue that welcomed trans and intersex people who were 'out there and doing it'.[9] But this was a very new way of thinking about trans issues and is beyond the scope of this discussion — as are intersex stories — for the reasons outlined in the Introduction to this history.

SEX FROM THE NECK DOWN

Meanwhile, life for lesbians and gay men was being shaped by the emergence of strikingly new sex cultures. In the 1970s, activists had often been accused of being 'gay from the neck up', that is, of talking about, and politicising, sex, but not doing much of it. This was not actually true, but a lot of the thinking of the early movement was shaped by feminism, and its critique of objectification (treating other people as sex objects). Promiscuity, anonymity, pornography and prostitution were generally (but not always — there were real debates about each of these topics) seen on the left as symptoms of capitalism's or patriarchy's incompatibility with human dignity. By the 1990s, with the decline of the Left, such ideas were being heard less frequently.

At the same time, the sex industry was on the rise, as old taboos declined and as sex became a political issue for the mainstream. AIDS required public discussion and action, and not just for men who had sex with men, as we have seen. In the ACT sex work was decriminalised and the territory and federal governments jointly funded a sex worker outreach officer through WISE (Workers in Sex Employment), a position that Fiona Patten held for some time.[10]

The decline of old taboos had also opened market opportunities. This was true in rather interesting ways in Canberra. The introduction of home video players in the 1980s made it possible for pornography to

A match made in Heaven. US gay porn star Blade Thompson picks up Lynne O'Brien


PHANTOM OF THE OPERA
SOUTH PACIFIC
CATS

Canberra Qwire 2014

be produced cheaply and consumed in private, and the federal and state governments agreed to regulate for restrictions on content. Under pressure from a public campaign, state governments responded by abandoning the agreement, banning X-rated video porn outright. This left its sale legal only in the ACT and the Northern Territory. But a constitutional provision which allowed for the sale of video porn across state and territory borders meant that an industry was born. Within five years, the production and duplication of United States porn videos in the ACT, and their distribution through sex shops and by mail, was said to be generating $34 million a year, making it the ACT's fifth largest industry. Fyshwick, originally established as the ACT's industrial suburb, became the home of sex work and porn production. Vast porn superstores were opened. Material produced for gay men was a significant part of this. A sex industry lobby group (the Eros Foundation) was established, and eventually the Sex Party (now the Reason Party) was formed to stand candidates in elections. Fiona Patten was active in both, bringing a wealth of experience, media-savvy and political connections to her work.[11]

Other opportunities were seized upon by the entrepreneurially-minded. As early as the mid-1980s a 'well-known gay couple' had launched a social club for gay men which offered opportunities for sex. It did not last long, but they tried again in the mid-1990s, apparently in the same location — upstairs, down a laneway in the O'Connor Shops. Clubroom, as it was called, had a pool table, a video lounge and a locker room where visitors could leave their clothes. Corridors led to the spa and sauna, massage rooms and other spaces — the smaller rooms, the darker spaces, the 'fantasy maze' where men could cruise and flirt and retreat for sex. The variety of options was intentional — Clubroom was a place for casual relaxation as well as sexual adventure. About the same time, Champions, a major porn distributor and sex-shop operator, opened Manspace, 'Australia's largest gay only retail/entertainment complex' in Mitchell which operated similarly.[12]

Women, of course, were not in the habit of seeking sex in public places. But a new sexualised lesbianism did appear. In 1988, Sydney-based lesbians had launched *Wicked Women* magazine to celebrate women's sexuality in all its diversity, and especially in its more provocative forms — s&m, pornography, explicit sexual performance. In 1993 Heaven nightclub played host to Australia's fourth Ms Wicked performance competition. The heats involved a contestant's introduction (verbal and non-verbal), fantasy, image, responses to questions. Racism was ruled out and safe sex was encouraged. Three hundred 'adventurous dykes and poofs' turned up to watch. At the first competition were two contestants. Karen won with her performance centred on 'cowgirl hands relieving her office-induced boredom, and whip/chain displays'.[13]

Lynne O'Brien, one of the managers of Heaven, remembers no particular controversy about this event — which is notable, given that at the time a fierce debate had opened up internationally within the lesbian and women's movement over whether women who engaged in sexually explicit or provocative behaviour were aligning themselves with the patriarchal oppression of all women. An example of this thinking hit Canberra in October 1992 when *PanDA* was launched with a back-cover ad for the Eros Foundation which showed a baby Cupid kissing a woman. Lynne O'Brien, who was involved in the new paper, remembers a storm of protest from some lesbian feminists who accused the paper of promoting pedophilia: 'awful', she remembers; 'incredible'; 'we were dumfounded'.[14] On the other hand, in 1994, the editor of *Wicked Women*, Kimberley O'Sullivan, spoke on a panel organised by women law students at the ANU. She denounced the 'lesbian sexual orthodoxy of the 1970s', with its rejection of 'all the many varieties of sexual desire and fantasy … under the banner of "sisterhood"' and politically correct sex'.[15] There was a surprising lack of debate and criticism from the audience — perhaps women who opposed these ideas had simply not bothered to turn up. By the mid-1990s a lesbian erotica shop (Club Femme) was opened down the back of Club X, with lesbian-oriented 'videos, magazines and things in boxes with curious names'. There was a call out for suggestions on 'genuine lesbian' porn titles (as opposed to 'male-fantasy lesbian videos').[16]

Not all lesbians were attracted to this new sexualised mode, nor were all repelled by it. For many, life as a lesbian in Canberra was shaped by access to a variety of choices. In 1995 Alyx reported a resurgence of pool as 'a cool thing to do' among 'young sometimes fashionable and often loud' groups of women who could be found all over the city — Manuka, Civic, Belconnen 'even in infernal Woden'.[17] Some of these were certainly groups of lesbians. Heaven, for all its dance club vibe, had four pool tables. And Tilley's continued on its iconic way, drawing in crowds — mostly, but not exclusively — of women, to eat, drink, caffeinate, enjoy bands and book readings or check out art shows. Generally, for lesbians, as for gay men, life was getting better. If they were not signing up for the lesbian feminist revolution as had been hoped by many in the 1970s, lesbians were 'stronger and more confident' than they had been, expressing themselves and their sexuality in a range of styles — butch, femme, individual; glamorous or

Wool Shed Bush Dance

Michael Moore, Richard/Rachel Allen and Kate Carnell

hippy, or in ripped jeans and flannelette shirts. Sam Broughton felt a real sense of community among women playing pool at Heaven or drinking and gossiping at Tilley's. 'Camp play' — a leather jacket combined with fishnets or tulle, or with a pencil thin moustache and sideburns, or male impersonation, butch-femme performance — all this reflected, Marion thought, a rejection of outmoded labels like male and female. It was a statement of sexual courage. And it was fun.[18]

A VOICE OF OUR OWN

The risk here was that the proliferation of identities would fragment the gay world at a time when collective action was still needed for the move towards equality. One of the forces that held all this together — or at least offered some common ground — was the press. Since the mid-1970s, newsletters produced by community groups such as Club 19 and Meridian had reported on their activities and there was some coverage of Canberra in the national gay press. But in the 1990s locally produced newspapers appeared: *PanDA* (1992–96) and *Quirk* (1997–2001). *Quirk* was actually a relaunch of *PanDA* with a new look and a new style, though the paper's statement of purpose was directly carried over, with an unchanged emphasis on serving the 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender community', 'recognising diversity, celebrating achievements and victories'. The titles, though, spoke to the changes that gay life was undergoing. *PanDA* stood for Poofs and Dykes Advocate, unashamedly using language that historically had been used abusively but had been reclaimed in the early 1970s. *Quirk* as a title was a response to concerns about *PanDA* that were both stylistic ('twee, cutesy or just not credible enough'), and political (excluding as it did reference to 'bisexual and transgender people'). The 'q' gestured towards 'queer', the then-popular (and also deeply unpopular) umbrella term. [19]

In December 1997, *Quirk* passed into the hands of new owners, who made it clear that the paper was a business which they hoped would be paying its workers 'as soon as possible'. *Quirk* covered, as *PanDA* had, events and organisations, political developments and campaigns, news and community issues and offered columns for marginalised voices. But it did so from a decidedly more queer or alternative perspective. Despite this, in a front-page editorial in January 1998, two of the editorial team responded to criticisms that the paper was turning away from its community focus. They forcefully asserted that *Quirk* was not a community paper, or a queer service provider, but was intended for those who were 'convicted enough to get out there and make something of their lives — even if that is, just having some fun'. They asserted the right of the editor to do whatever she wanted in the quest to make the paper 'the biggest and best queer publication in the country'.[20]

Both publications relied heavily on volunteers for content, production and administration. It was hard work: finding advertisers, chasing copy, navigating the internal conflicts of the community (and sometimes of the production teams), getting the artwork to the printers and bundles of copies back, distributing to venues and other outlets. Not surprisingly there was a heavy turnover of staff and volunteers. The business model for these community-based papers eschewed a cover price — the papers were distributed free of charge via venues (bars and cafes and bookshops). They paid for themselves with advertising.[21] Looking through *PanDA* and *Quirk* it is clear that the AIDS Action Council provided a fair share of income, along with the sex industry, including porn and sex premises for men, and male escorts (all to the dismay of some readers who thought it made the community look like a bunch of sex maniacs),[22] plus the dance clubs, and small businesses appealing to queer consumers. Making a go of this was difficult and, although in May 1999, *Quirk*'s editors announced that for the first time ever an issue had been produced without going into debt, the paper disappeared a few months later. [23]

After this, there was a long hiatus. Canberra was still small enough that word-of-mouth served much of the community's communication needs, and this was the period when list-serves and emails were starting to come into widespread use. Then Alex Thatcher and his partner came to Canberra and decided that a magazine was really needed. *Fuse* started in April 2009 and at the time of writing, it is still publishing. It operates on the same business model as had *PanDA* and *Quirk* (no cover price, advertiser-funded) but Thatcher and his partner have design skills which helps keep cost down — and quality up. *Fuse* is A5 in size, full-colour, gloss paper — an impressive looking product to be picked up in bars and venues and cafés around town. Content is a mix of advertorial (stories about advertisers' products — though this was more obvious in the early days) and community news and comment.[24]

PanDA: For poofs and dykes, and bisexuals and trans …

COMMUNITY SOCIAL LIFE

Canberra's lively social life grew in scope over the course of the 1990s. When Greg Moore came to Canberra on a five-month posting in 1991, he found the Meridian Club and Roxus nightclub. He made acquaintances — public servants, a police officer, academics and students. But he remembers most:

> Kambah Pool, a popular swimming spot on the Molonglo river which in part includes a clothing optional beach [which] was popular with gay men of all ages at that time, and I think it would be no exaggeration to say that it played a big part in the social life of the local community. The men who visited there at that time were usually friendlier than other Canberrans, I think in part because many were from interstate originally.[25]

When Club 19 went to the Kambah Pool as part of its 21st anniversary activities it went to 'the *interesting* part'.[26]

In August 1997 in an article in *Quirk* Stephen Lawton discussed where people might go to meet people. He recalled that when he arrived in the city some years before there was the Dickson Hotel on Friday nights, the Manhattan and Tilley's and the Tennis Club, the AAC's program Happy Healthy and Gay, and 2XX's Gaywaves. By the time he was writing, though, the list has expanded enormously — the Outdoor Group, the Bisexual Network, the Qwire, a gay reading group, several university groups, PFLAG, a spirituality group, a queer health and community workers group, the Anti-Violence Group, groups for transgender people and leather aficionados, Long Yang for 'Aussies and Asian partners'.[27] To this list we might add the Metropolitan Community Church, Lesbian Line and a lesbian mothers' group. Some lasted a long time; others folded relatively quickly. But they all provided opportunities to meet people, share problems, to offer and get advice and to get involved in shaping one's own life and community.

One example of what a community group could do is the Canberra Gay and Lesbian Qwire, one of the city's most-loved institutions. After Lynne O'Brien placed an ad in *PanDA* in January 1993, a small group of women and men started meeting in a garage in Dickson to rehearse. By the middle of the year, there were 18 members and invitations to perform were starting to trickle in. Rehearsals shifted to the rather more congenial library at All Saints Church in Ainslie. It started as, and continues to be, an open organisation, reflecting an ethos of community participation. Those wanting to participate are not auditioned, but rather trained up to be singers. At last count, 90 singers show up every week at rehearsals, including the whole gamut of LGBTIQ+ individuals and straight people as well, reflecting the broader outlook of inclusivity in the community.

The group's first public performance was with Judy Small, one of Australia's foremost political singers. Her song 'Never Turning Back' was sung at the end of rehearsals for many years, sending the choristers on their way inspired and emboldened, as Susan remembers. The first performance to the wider public came in Garema Place on World AIDS Day in December 1993. It was a big public event — stalls and speakers (including the Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn) and performances of all kinds. Chris Healy and Susan Nicholls remember being really nervous about this — singing in public was daunting enough, but at a queer event in such a public place? The risk of abuse, even violence, was real. And yet the choir did perform and, in the words of one observer, did so 'so beautifully that one wished that it could have warbled for more than just an abbreviated gig of two songs'. Since then it has have been a regular fixture of Canberra community life, singing at every World AIDS Day and Candlelight Vigil, at SpringOUT and at a host of community events. The Qwire was invited to perform live on ABC Classic FM's afternoon concert program and has recorded three CDs. It stages its own major shows twice a year and has performed overseas in San Francisco, Portland, Auckland, Dublin, Paris and Munich. In 2017, it headed up the celebrations around the legislation of marriage equality, singing the anthemic 'We are Australian' from the public gallery in the House of Representatives when the MPs voted for marriage equality.[28]

The AIDS Action Council continued its work. But things were changing. In 1996, the front page of *PanDA* proclaimed a '"Cautious Optimism": AIDS Treatment Breakthrough Announced in Vancouver'. The caution was understandable, but unwarranted — this was the treatment that people had been longing to have for 15 years. It reduced the death rate dramatically. The development of post- and pre-exposure treatments (PEP and PrEP as they are usually called) in the mid- to late-2010s have reduced new infection rates so much that it has become possible to start talking of a post-HIV Australia. But this did not mean that the AAC could pack up and go home. People were still living with the disease and its consequences; social attitudes had to be monitored and, where necessary, challenged; the flow of government funds had to be maintained. In 2017–18 the council was supporting 130 people with HIV or affected by it.[29]

In 1997, the AAC published a magazine called *Boyfriends*. It was part of a safe sex campaign, but it started from the fact that gay men were often left to make up their own rules about how to live and love — and it celebrated this: 'Never just two people, we share our experiences of relationships with families and communities, fuck buddies and friends, witnesses and confidantes and, most importantly, each other'. This reality of gay life remained at the centre of the AAC's work. One of the more surprising campaigns, but one which reflects the very broad scope of its understanding of community well-being, was the Gossiping Bitches Campaign of mid-1997. Its aim was to 'reduce the damaging effects of gossip', which could be perfectly good fun when done properly, but its toxic forms were challenged with short skits, fridge magnets and how to gossip booklets.[30]

Boyfriends was underpinned by a knowledge of just how different gay men's behaviour is to that dictated by social norms. Our knowledge of this varies from the anecdotal to the researched, but we are indebted particularly to a long-term project, the Gay Community Periodic Survey, conducted every two years by AIDS councils around Australia. What the survey reveals is that sexual behaviour among gay men is characterised by great diversity. The Canberra 2017 report revealed that there were men who reported having had no sexual contact in the previous year (12.8%); those who had only casual partners (21.2%); those in monogamous relationships (33.8%); and those in open relationships, where sex with the long-term partner is supplemented by occasional or regular sex with others (32.2%). More than half of the gay male couples reported that they had agreements regarding sex outside the relationship, especially focussing on safe sex and condom use.[31] The extent of open relationships of various kinds is so extensive that there is even a word for it: 'monogamish'.

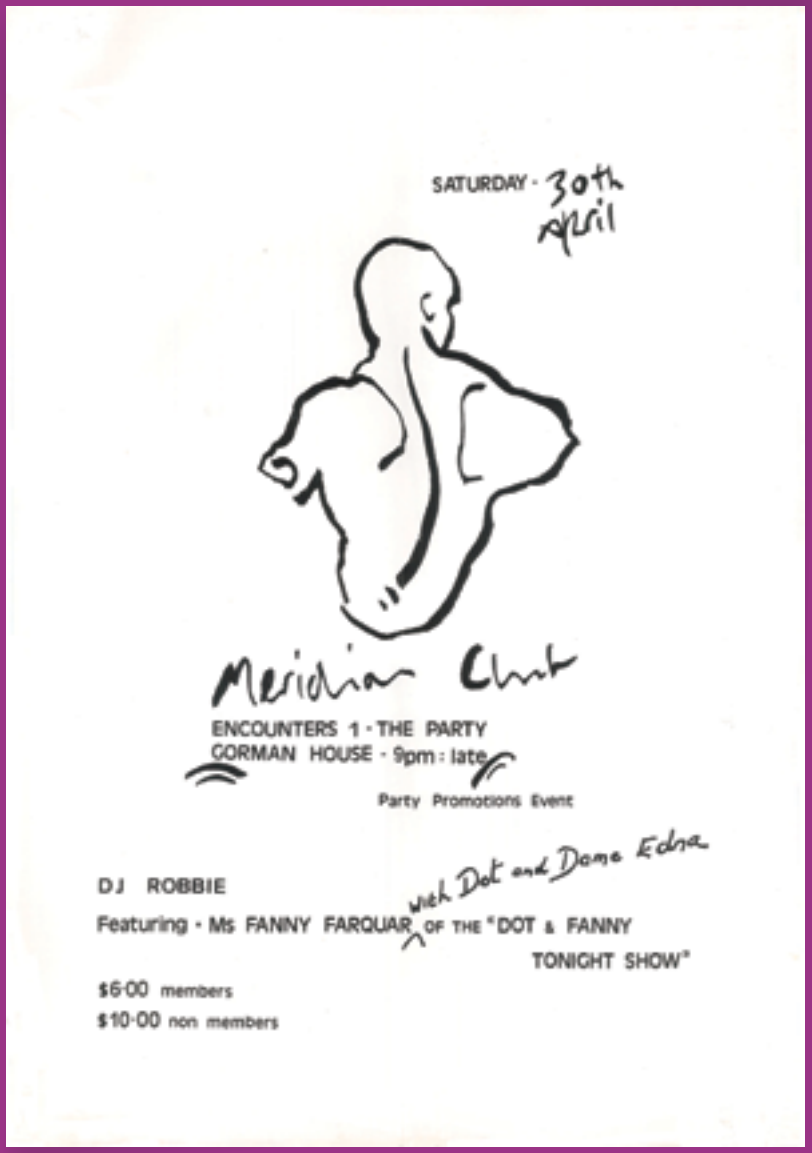
Pride had started to become a reality in the 1990s for gay people, reflected in ever-more-public activities: the Tennis Club's annual Bush Dance became a major event on the annual social calendar. Do-Dah Day was the kind of picnic that homosexuals had been organising since at least the 1950s in larger Australian cities. 1994's picnic, with its three-legged race, tug-of-war and Ironman competitions, the 69 race (not otherwise explained), a gold Volkswagen convertible, a screaming drag queen and the extremely cute straight boy dragged along for the day would not have greatly surprised people of earlier decades if they had visited Melbourne or Sydney. But in Canberra it was something new, though we have seen that CAMP organised at least one event along these lines in the early 1970s.[32]

Today, SpringOut is one of Canberra's premier community events, despite its modest beginnings in 1999. It began with 'two volunteers and a pride rally' of 300 marching to Glebe Park for a fair, followed by a week-long program of concerts, the Bush Dance, a Love Bus Tour and cocktail party. Today, it sprawls over three weeks with concerts of various kinds, plays, a performance by the Qwire, a women's dance, a Big Gay Breakfast and a Big Community Picnic. In 2014, the AAC was offering free testing for sexually-transmitted diseases — not common at mainstream community events. As late as 2013, SpringOUT received no government funding, relying entirely on the community and its organisations. In 2015, though, the Barr Labor government came through with $10,000 and has continued its support since.[33]

GOING OUT

It is never more obvious that Canberra is a relatively small town than when people turn their memories to the social venues. Richard Allen (more or less universally known as Rachel) reels off a list. Some of these dated back to the 1960s and 1970s: the Canberra Rex, the Ainslie Rex, the Dickson. Others came later, often managed by Richard himself for the owners: Booze and Balls, Hush Lounge, Spaggers, Deakin Inn. There was Speakeasy Bar, Tipperary's, Roxus, Cube, Manhattan. Some of these are remembered more than others. But the two great venues that everyone remembers were the Meridian Club (1985–2002) and Heaven (1993–2004).

Meridian, the longest running gay and lesbian venue in Canberra, had modest beginnings in 1985 as an after-hours gathering upstairs in Dr Peter Rowland's Lonsdale Street surgery. It became obvious pretty quickly that the appetite was there for something bigger and soon enough an organising group was convened. The aim was a club, owned by its members, that would offer the usual 'social, educational, & support services' to the gay community, but which aspired to more — a liquor licence, its own premises, dances and events. And that's just what it became. For most, it was a place to go to drink and dance and catch up with friends; initially weekly, later on several nights a week. By 1992 it had 472 members, 60 per cent under 34, spanning the age spectrum from 18 to 63. Only 10 per cent of its members were women, though the Womyn's Sub-committee worked hard and held a womyn's night every week for a while. It moved around — a lot.



Meridian: Canberra's longest running venue

The iconic Richard/Rachel Allen

At Gorman House (Blocks J, B and D successively), then the Bogong Theatre, the ANU Bar, until it finally settled in 1991 at (rented) premises of its own at 34 Mort Street, where the rainbow door jamb could still be seen until the building's recent demolition. In all of this, it relied almost entirely on volunteer labour.[34]

Heaven worked on a different model. It was opened in April 1993 by a number of community figures, including Lynne O'Brien, after the owner had been alerted to the need for a gay club by the boys at his gym. It aspired to a cool look: all-black decor, a raised under-lit dance floor, DJ box at the back, drag shows (drag queens and drag kings), with hundreds of people crowding in on weekends. And it could get rowdy and bawdy. It was a profitable concern for the owner and provided a steady income for its manager and staff, a significant break with the volunteer model of Meridian. It had a national profile and at one point it was voted most popular club in Australia — 'for some reason', Lynne O'Brien laughs. It was by no means exclusively queer — lesbians and gay men made up most of the crowd, but its open-door policy meant that it welcomed everyone who was prepared to enter into the spirit of the place. There was a code of conduct (The Heaven Ten Commandments) to reinforce behavioural expectations.[35]

If we imagine that we can draw a simple distinction been a community-based club like Meridian and the commercial operation that was Heaven, we are missing one of the key factors of Canberra scene life — it was small. Narrow, selective door policies would never have worked. Meridian described those attending its events as 'leather, drag, motorbike, lipstick or Bonds T-shirt Queen or Dyke'. Heaven had theme nights — Rocky Horror, Mermaids, Marilyn Monroe and ran an early evening dance party for under-18s after Lynne O'Brien noticed how little her kids and their friends had to do. Both venues worked with other groups like the AAC to promote a healthier and happier community.

For those looking for a wilder social life, Sydney beckoned. In September 1996 *PanDA* published tongue-in-cheek thoughts on whether Canberra might ever be up for staging anything like Sydney's notorious Sleaze Ball. The small size of the town told against it, opined the journalist: '… all those people you act sleazy with will probably be at Meridian the following week'; 'You might accidentally fuck a Coalition Frontbencher in the back room; or vice versa'; 'Who really wants to go to a dance party with 14,000 screaming public servants?'.[36] But there was, beginning in the 1990s, a thriving semi-underground scene of dance parties and raves, organised as one-offs in an ever-changing series of locations: the East Basin Pavilion, Base nightclub in Manuka, a Fyshwick warehouse, Canberra Theatre. On one memorable occasion, posing as a diplomatic function, 150 gathered in the Great Hall of Parliament House to dance to hardcore Belgian techno. The raves hovered on the margins of legality and were marked, of course, by the presence of party drugs. These were parties where Danny Corvini and his mates from Narrabundah College danced in the early 1990s. They were 16 or 17 years old, underage for licensed venues, all gay (at the time anyway) but none of that presented problems for anyone and they found a world that welcomed them, spoke to them and let them be themselves. But there wasn't enough of this life in Canberra and there was a constant threat of violence in the city. Not everywhere, though: there were pockets of safety — he had his first gay kiss at Meridian, for example. And Heaven was a sort of 'rave meets gay' venue where everybody was welcome. But Danny, like almost everyone he knew, went off to Sydney as soon as he could — in his case to a career as a DJ.[37]

Gorman House: Behind this unprepossessing exterior …

CHAPTER 07

PARTNERSHIP FOR EQUALITY

PARTNER-SHIP FOR EQUALITY

CANBERRA'S SUMMER OF LOVE, AS *THE CANBERRA TIMES* CALLED IT, WAS BRIEF BUT EXCITING. FOR FIVE DAYS IN DECEMBER 2013, ACT LAW ALLOWED SAME-SEX COUPLES TO MARRY. FOR VERONICA WENSING AND KRISHNA SADHANA, BEING MARRIED, EVEN FOR THREE-AND-A HALF OF THOSE FIVE DAYS, WAS A SOURCE OF JOY. THERE WAS A HUGE WEDDING AND THEIR CHILDREN WERE THERE TO GIVE THEM AWAY. THEY WERE NOT ALONE; 30 OTHER COUPLES SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY TO TIE THE KNOT.

And then, on December 12 the High Court unanimously struck down the law and the marriages that had been performed were annulled. For Veronica and Krishna, these five days were another milestone in an 18-year relationship; a source of pleasure and then of disappointment, but not one that challenged the bond in their eyes.[1] For Australia, they were another step in the long march to equality — one in which Canberra had surged to the forefront. And it reflected the way in which the state had come to play a central role in advancing LGBTI equality, albeit in partnership with the community.

As an alternative to this partnership model, Kelly Jones, editor of Canberra's *Quirk* magazine, argued in the December 1999 issue that queer people ought to take direct responsibility for creating for themselves the kind of world they wanted rather than relying on governments and the 'scraps' that they offered. She argued strongly that the community should meet its own needs, getting around government funding cuts and legal restrictions by self-funding and self-organisation. 'If you're unhappy that the AIDS Bus, Pathways, the Queer Health Coalition had their funding cut … then let's start doing something about it'. That something was to raise funds from the community, for the community — little bits of money put together could add up to a lot. If the authorities wouldn't allow access to IVF, ask your friends — 'Or damn it, let's create our own IVF clinic'. The task was to make Australia see that 'we are big and we are many', we needed to 'start acting like a majority group (regardless of numbers) …'[2]

It was a vision of a new direction for activists, one which eschewed the entangling machinations of the state machine in favour of autonomy, couched in intensely practical terms. But it did not come to pass. One of the reasons that it didn't was touched on early in the piece when Jones asked: 'Is it that we (gay, lesbian, bi, transgender, queer) have suddenly become politically "ok" to recognize [*sic*]?'. The

answer to this was, actually, a resounding 'yes'. Politicians, professionals and commercial interests had come to accept — sometimes slowly and cautiously, sometimes enthusiastically — that the world had changed; that there was little for them to fear from talking to the gay community, reforming laws, adopting new policies, thinking differently. Public attitudes had been transformed and the social, political and cultural leaders of the country followed on as best they could. Exciting new opportunities opened up to those gay people who wanted equality and respect; opportunities which required new ways of doing politics. If the 'activist' had been the key figure in the 1970s and 1980s, that role was now transformed. Gay men and lesbians, bisexuals, trans and intersex people were now advocates, educators, role models, facilitators, consultants. Collectives were replaced by committees and boards; demands by negotiations; demonstrations by grant applications. Advocates had the clout and expertise to do this, and there were plenty of people inside the corridors of power and at the negotiating tables willing to talk with them.

GOOD PROCESS

Perhaps the clearest example of this is Good Process, established in 2002 and for several years one of the principal actors in reform debates and policy development in the ACT. Unlike many such groups, its formation was somewhat serendipitous. In 2002, lawyer and ANU lecturer Judith Harrison presented a paper to the Access to Justice conference on the definitions of 'spouse' and 'de facto' that she had found in the law, definitions so ridiculously inconsistent that she was reduced to a 'spoof' paper, parodying what was there. Liz Keogh, a solicitor working at that time on an adoption case, was in the audience, already 'fired up' as she says, by her discovery that the ACT's adoption law explicitly referred to heterosexual relationships, consciously excluding all others. She realised that it was no accident that drafters had overlooked same-sex relationships.[3]

It was some months later the two of them found themselves at a café in Petrie Place with an advisor to an Australian Democrats member of the ACT Legislative Assembly, having previously met with an advisor to a Greens' member. By the end of the meeting, in a way that remains a bit unclear even to the participants, Good Process was born. Judith liked the name because it wasn't concerned about the question of whether particular changes should made, but 'was focusing on achieving the changes through processes which were "good" as in respectful, constructive, transformative'. Over the next few years, at various times, Judith, Liz Keogh, Heidi Yates and Nerida Cole led a team of people committed to intervening in public debates to shape policy. It did not aim to 'represent' the LGBTI community in the sense of assembling members of all the interest, advocacy and identity groups, but rather it aimed to be a 'voice', a 'mechanism for interested persons to express their views and lobby ACT and federal government'.

There were plenty of issues — this was a time when law reform was on the agenda in a variety of ways. Trans issues, relationships, parenting, human rights and discrimination — one after the other these pressed themselves forward and as they did so, Good Process was doing a lot of policy development work and advocacy to shape the reforms that were being drafted and enacted. Liz Keogh argues that the parenting reforms might not have passed at all in 2004 without the work of Good Process, noting especially its strong media presence. The group also 'played an important (though very preliminary) part in starting a real discussion about the legal reforms needed by sex and gender diverse people'. Good Process worked behind the scenes when necessary with meetings and submissions, but there were forums and roundtables and it agitated for public education campaigns to draw people's attention to the rights that had been won, to encourage them to use them.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The ACT's Assembly and governments had been doing good work with, and on behalf of, the LGBTI community even before self-government was granted (well, imposed) in 1988, as we shall see. In the 2010s, however, a new reality was dawning — queer people of all kinds were being taken on as *partners* by progressive governments all over Australia. The authorities and the community were working together, creating a social and political coalition that would reshape society. Andrew Barr, who was elected to the Assembly as a member of the Labor Party in 2006, identified the emergence of 'modern Labor values of responsible economic management and progressive social reform' as having occurred during John Stanhope's years as chief minister (2001–11).[4] As chief minister himself since 2014, Barr has done much to promote Canberra as 'Australia's most LGBTIQ+-friendly city'.

This attention to LGBTI people is not unique. Among the various groups whose special needs were acknowledged in the ACT's budget documents were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people with disabilities,

New communities emerging and organising

A grass roots movement

multicultural communities, kids, seniors, veterans, women and young people. *Diversity* was all. And *inclusion* was the strategy to hold this diversity together. Funding was spread widely to ensure that everybody's material needs were addressed (to a greater or lesser extent); respect and acknowledgment contributed to well-being. Many of these populations were served by advisory councils. The concern with LGBTI people was one element of this broader strategy.

In mid-2019, the ACT Government launched *Capital of Equality*, a four-year strategy aimed at making Canberra 'the most LGBTIQ+ welcoming and inclusive city in Australia', one in which 'LGBTIQ+ people, their families and communities are visible, valued, respected'. The strategy focuses on objectives (fostering awareness, undertaking service improvements and continuing reforms) to be achieved by a series of defined actions. The government was assisted in developing the document by its LGBTIQ+ Ministerial Advisory Council (established in 2012), by its Office for LGBTIQ+ Affairs (established 2017), by a multi-agency working group, and by wide consultations with the affected communities, their families and allies. It is a notable example of the community partnership model of reform, perhaps the most developed in Australia. The ambit of the affected groups extended beyond LGBTIQ people to include pansexual and asexual people, agender, non-binary, gender fluid as well as 'individuals who prefer to use specialised personal terms to describe their own sex, gender or sexuality'.[5]

There is a debate about whether the liberal and inclusive positions that various institutions have adopted in relation to queer people (especially the institutions that have historically been most hostile) are merely 'pink washing' — a cynical adoption of pro-LGBTI stances which conceal a history and present of bad behaviour more generally. The alternative view is that by the 21st century, the generation heading up Australian institutions has been, like the population in general, deeply shaped by the emergence (and vision) of a liberal, tolerant and diverse Australia. In either case, what these two positions have in common is that they recognise there have been changes in policy and approaches that need to be explained. And part of that explanation must include the role of queer people in shaping the politics of the times.

GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY

The new community that emerged in the 1990s was marked by a presence and an effectiveness in public life that far exceeded what had been possible in the 1970s or 1980s. It was not just that the new community groups and their constituencies could expect to be *listened* to by those in power, it was that they had an enhanced capacity to *speak*. Their advocates can certainly be thought of as agitators and activists, but they are so in a rather particular way. They are not, for example, merely lobbyists making the case they are paid to make, regardless of their own interests or identities. Rather, they have an organic, embedded connection to their constituencies. Nor do they, like lobbyists, simply roam the corridors of power and hold meetings in smoke-free rooms and over dinner. Community advocates are simultaneously inside and outside the realm of everyday political operations.

This 'inside and outside' model had emerged during the Whitlam years, and had permanently reshaped the relationship between activism and the policy process. Policy activists were those who straddled the insider-outsider divide — employed in the public service but with both personal experience of activism and close links to friends and colleagues and comrades still outside. (The femocrat is the paradigm case, but the approach applied much more widely than this).[6] This meant that when it came to lobbying, bidding for grants or arranging a meeting, advocates were never *entirely* outside the corridors of power, but nor were they constrained by the rules and regulations that bind public servants. Lynne O'Brien tells for example of how as early as the 1980s she was from time-to-time approached by people she knew in the public service who had money to spend: did she know of any projects that might fit the department's guidelines? But from about 2000 onwards, these relationships became much more regularised and formalised. The ministerial advisory councils, for LGBTI people, and all the others, were set up precisely to bring insiders and outsiders together on a basis of equality.

Inclusion was not just a slogan, but a strategy; and allowing communities access to power-holders through their representatives was one facet of this. This meant that advocates were effective to the extent that they were able to present not just demands to governments, but arguments and evidence to make their case. In order to do this, they needed to build relations of trust with their constituencies, so that they could identify what was important and acceptable and expected.

THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL

This model has much to recommend it, but there are limitations, too, that shape how it works. In the first place, there is always the danger that advocates would cut loose from their constituencies, to become gate-keepers, regulating what issues were heard and acted on. Advocates are, almost by definition, educated, articulate, well-connected. In a political climate where it is assumed that the needs of identity-groups can only be authentically represented by members of those groups, what happens to those who are not organised to speak for themselves? How do the young, the unemployed, the homeless, those damaged by drug and alcohol abuse, the inarticulate, the marginalised and unorganised, those with radically different perspectives get heard? As chief minister, and the driving force behind the 'friendliest LGBTIQ+ city' policy, Andrew Barr is well aware of this problem. In Canberra, income and education generate a geographic separation whereby the disadvantaged find themselves living in the outer suburbs. It is the role of government to recognise and respond to this, he says, to engage in 'capacity building', developing opportunities and structures to help those with less access to government to nonetheless be heard.[7]

The model is fraught with risks and challenges for the advocates, too. Ross Fowler speaks of himself as a member of a minority within a minority amongst a majority — a gay man, an Aboriginal man (Dharawal people) living on Ngunnawal country. He has no doubt that his Aboriginal identity comes first, his gay identity second. But he works in and with both communities. In the public service he sees a willingness to take up the issues of Aboriginal and LGBTI rights and well-being, both for staff and for the constituencies, and acknowledges they still have some work to achieve better outcomes. But out in the wider community, progress is patchy. Racism among LGBTI people and homophobia in the Aboriginal community are very real stumbling blocks. NAIDOC (the national week of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commemoration), he notes, has never had 'queer' as a theme. Meanwhile in 2016, the 'Consortium' of four LGBTI Canberra organisations published an extensive study of the problems of LGBTI communities, identifying heteronormative bias, especially against intersex, transgender and gender diverse people; social isolation among older people; unemployment; insufficiently inclusive service providers; and the particular needs of young people. Yet, remarkably, no issues specific to Aboriginal people were identified. Nor was there any recognition that the issues that were identified affect Indigenous queer people in culturally specific ways. In doing his advocacy work — in two different communities — Ross finds that he is often expected to bring an array of voices to the table, many of which he is not qualified to speak for, at least in terms of his own identities. If he tries to step back, there is not always someone willing to step forward. The partnership model puts real demands on members of minority groups.[8]

And, of course, relations with governments are always subject to vagaries over which even the best-connected advocates have very little control. When governments change, all established connections are unsettled. Even the same government may redirect its priorities. This is especially true when it comes to money. The risk is that community groups which receive government funding may end up dependent upon it — and if it is cut off, life becomes very much more difficult. One example of this is the group Diversity ACT that was launched with much fanfare in 2012. The brainchild of Ian Goudie, it was directed at young gay people who were excluded from the commercial scene by alcohol licensing laws, and at men in their thirties and forties who were coming out of heterosexual lives to gay ones. But after a strong start, funding was withdrawn. These days, the organisation relies on monthly sausage sizzles to help raise funds to support its work. Bruce Moore, ACT Diversity's vice-president, notes the service is accessed more these days by trans and non-binary young people. This change of cohort, he thinks, reflects the relatively easier time lesbians and gay young men have in finding each other and in accessing support and social lives. Non-binary, queer and transpeople face greater challenges.[9]

THEN AND NOW

The partnership between the government, its public service and community-based advocates is only part of the story. Change is always going on quite independently of all this. Nowhere is this clearer than when we compare institutions' pasts with their behaviour in the opening decades of the 21st century. In some cases, changes in policy have been imposed on organisations from above, regardless of whether these were welcomed or not. We know, for example, that the 1992 decision that lesbians and gay men should be allowed to serve in the armed forces was made by the federal Cabinet, rather than the Defence Force chiefs.[10] Sometimes changes came from within the institutions, from the top to be sure, but not imposed from outside as the Defence Force policy was. Those who run government departments and agencies never lived in isolation from the wider world. The kind of thinking that was simple common sense in the 1960s and into the 1970s — that homosexuals were unreliable and undesirable — has been undermined by decades

of activism and by the older generation of senior and middle managers changing their minds (as millions of Australians were doing) or retiring and being replaced by successors with newer, younger, fresher thinking.

Take the Commonwealth public service, for example, which employs thousands of Canberrans at any one time, and many more over the years. In late 1994, two departments (foreign affairs and trade, and immigration and ethnic affairs) formally recognised same-sex couples as 'partners' in their workplace agreements. In both cases, the public service union and its members had been pushing the policy, and eventually the ministers and their departmental heads had approved it. As Canberra's gay and lesbian newspaper, *PanDA* said: 'a good news story'.[11] But even before this, change had been going on in the incremental, molecular way that underpins all real social change. Terence Watson worked in the Commonwealth departments of communications and of health in the second half of the 1970s. He participated in the older, largely private world — he was a friend of Bill Wells and attended his parties — as well as in the emerging, slightly more public scene. He encountered little overt anti-homosexual feeling at work. In fact, he thought that public servants were pretty open-minded generally, and he was aware that he and people like him, including Wells, were more relaxed about their sexuality than they had been. There were limits. No one was openly gay, he says, in the way that we now take for granted. Maybe, he thinks, in a department like communications, the technical staff might have been a bit more backward than the professionals. And, of course, the more senior one's position, the more likely one was to be closely closetted. But he never heard of gossip or of anyone's career being affected. Perhaps it was different in the more traditional departments like Treasury and Foreign Affairs — but when he says this he laughs: the old-established descriptor 'The Department of Foreign A-Fairies' sprang immediately to mind.[12]

But even in Foreign Affairs things were changing, albeit discreetly at first. In 1986, long before anyone had thought of embracing sexual diversity in the workforce, Bruce Miller, fresh out of university and applying for a position at foreign affairs, decided that trying to conceal his homosexuality would be pointless. At the second round of interviews, he simply told the officer that he was gay. Whatever may have gone on behind the scenes, someone, somewhere in the hierarchy, decided that this ought to be no obstacle to his employment. Nor was it. His partner came to be extended the usual entitlements to travel and relocation and housing, although only after persistent lobbying over a number of years. Bruce's career took him to the highest levels when he was appointed ambassador to Japan, and with the exception of a snide remark one night from an ALP Cabinet minister, he encountered a degree of tolerance, albeit not full acceptance, and nothing much in the way of direct homophobia. Bruce recognises that his experience was at the 'good end of the spectrum' and that lesbians had it tougher, as did gay men 'who were not minted from the same mould' as him — white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, respected as hard working and capable.[13] But the fact that there was a spectrum, with a good end, is indicative of how far we have come from the early 1950s and the department's desperation back then to rid itself of homosexuals like 'Grant' and 'Graill'.

The police force had undergone a similar shift.[14] The 'historical distrust' between gay people and the police is a reality that the Australian Federal Police (AFP) is very open about now, tracing it back to 'when homosexuality was considered a crime'. But as with most broad-brush history, we need to be careful that the real picture does not end up being obscured. The police in Canberra did often behave badly (really, really badly), as we have seen. On the other hand, Wayne Severs reports that, after being forced to resign from the NSW Police Force when he accidentally outed himself in 1980, there were quiet conversations on his behalf and suddenly the AFP Commissioner Colin Wilson was on the phone offering him a job and a posting in Canberra. Discrimination, according to Commissioner Wilson, had no place in the AFP in the 1980s.[15] Today, the AFP celebrates its connection to the LGBTI community — flying rainbow flags, for example, outside police stations from time to time; with its Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers appearing at most events and LGBTI police officers serving openly and having their well-being taken seriously by their employer.

This did not just happen. In the early 1990s, the AFP incorporated its relations with gay and lesbian Canberrans into its Community Policing Section, as part of a wider opening up of police forces to Australia's many communities. But in 1993, after a couple of years of serious anti-gay violence in the streets and on the beats, a community-based Gay and Lesbian Police Liaison Network was set up to take practical steps to 'improve the relationship between the AFP, gay men, lesbians and bisexuals'; to get the police to do their job, as the organisers saw it. In May 1995, a number of organisations — the AIDS Action Council, the ACT Anti-Violence Project, the Canberra Council for Lesbian and Gay Rights, and *PanDA* — prepared a submission to the police, which, when nothing much happened in response, was taken to and endorsed by a public meeting. The pressure was mounting. Finally, in May 1997, two officers were appointed to liaise with gay and lesbian people. One of these officers was Mark Severs.[16]

The establishment of two Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officer (GLLO) positions was by no means the end of the process. Among the GLLOs' responsibilities was the re-education of the police force. Delia Quigley organised a variety of activities to make sure that the creation of the GLLO positions was not a merely pro-forma act and she brought a broad spectrum of people on board to reshape an organisation that had a long history and deep cultures of homophobia. One of those brought in was Sam Edwards who remembers speaking at police training courses and with the hierarchy. Edwards calls it 'an eye-opening experience' for her and was struck by the variety of people she encountered — from gay and lesbian police officers, often keen to serve as GLLOs, through to conventionally masculine old-school cops. With this latter group there was some quite basic educational work to do — and she saw the results of that in how they spoke at the start of their training, and how they spoke by the end. And she was able to raise new issues with all of them — domestic violence between same-sex couples, for example.[17]

LAW REFORM, AND REFORM, AND REFORM

The new liberal climate of acceptance and partnership was expressed most visibly and most forcefully in a slew of laws intended to bring new rights and new respect to queer people. If reformers imagined in 1976 that decriminalisation was the job done, they were to be, as it happened, disappointed. Buggery, attempted buggery and indecent assault upon a male had been swept from the statute books. What more was there to be done? As it turned out — plenty. Between 1976 and 2018, the ACT Assembly passed more than a dozen pieces of legislation, and amended many more as a consequence of these Acts. The conservatives had been right — decriminalisation was the start of a slippery slope — although we might prefer to see this as progress rather than decline. Certainly, it is hard to think how anyone is worse off today as a result of these reforms.

This is not the place to go through each piece of legislation in detail. It is best to consider them with a broader brush, and the best way to do this is in the four areas they addressed — decriminalisation, anti-discrimination, parenting, and relationships. These are not as clear-cut as this suggests, but it is a useful way to understand the scope and nature of the reforms. (There was a fifth area of reform — on trans and intersex issues. For reasons outlined in the introduction to this book, this is not discussed here).

DECRIMINALISATION

Even in the mid-1970s, decriminalisation, which had seemed so straightforward, was known to have problems. Specifically: the age of consent. In Australia and overseas, it was common for the age of consent for homosexual acts to be set higher than for heterosexual acts. In 1976, the ACT's Ordinance had opted for 18 for homosexual, as opposed to 16 for heterosexual, acts. (Eighteen was the age proposed by the HLRS.) In 1985, as part of a sweeping review of sexual offences, an equal age of consent was set at 16 — a move that attracted little attention.

Even then the issue was not done with. In late 2015, the ACT Government introduced a law to expunge the criminal records of men convicted of homosexual offences. The Bill was supported by all three parties (Labor, Liberals and Greens) with speeches reflecting on the injustice of the original laws, on the burden of shame placed upon homosexual men, on the discrimination that they were subjected to in having to report their criminal record in any number of situations. There was no way of knowing how many applications for expungement were likely to be received (the last convictions had been in the very early 1970s), but as Jeremy Hanson, the Leader of the Opposition made clear, that wasn't the issue: the law was intended as 'a very clear signal' that the world had changed. And while no-one believed that the law could 'undo the emotional wounds' to those convicted, Attorney-General Simon Corbell hoped that it might give comfort to them. [18]

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

Meanwhile, activists had moved on to the problem of discrimination. Federal Labor governments had legislated against discrimination in 1975 (for race) and 1984 (sex) and the states had followed suit. It was not common to include sexuality as one of the areas of protection, though in 1977, NSW had done so, making made it an offence to discriminate against homosexuals (while, notoriously, leaving the laws against buggery and indecency between males on the statute books). When Rosemary Follett became the ACT's first Chief Minister in 1989, she had already taken up anti-discrimination law as one of her projects. It took three years to get the law through the Assembly (during which time three different governments were in power) but in 1991 discrimination was prohibited on a remarkable range of attributes: sex; sexuality; transsexuality; marital status; being a parent or having responsibilities as a carer; pregnancy; race; religious or political conviction; physical,

mental or intellectual impairment. In her speech, Follett expounded on the protections the law offered: it covered people with HIV and AIDS, as well people who might be thought to have HIV/AIDS and people working in the HIV and AIDS sector. Given its scope, it is not surprising that her government had such trouble getting it passed with a 'long, and often difficult, passage through the Legislative Assembly'. But she persevered and it was done, making the ACT a frontrunner on an issue that was to become more and more important in the coming years.[19]

PARENTING

The history of lesbians and gay men as parents is a long one. In early days, children were often the product of heterosexual unions which had broken down, or were the result of self-insemination by lesbians, assisted by male friends. Most of this went on in private and the role of the state was rather limited. Later, against resistance from governments and the medical profession, single women and lesbian couples successfully fought to change the laws regarding IVF. Surrogacy and adoption added to the autonomy of gay and lesbian parents. In the ACT the decade of the 2000s expanded the rights of gay families. Laws to ensure that same-sex couples were treated the same as opposite sex couples when it came to adoptions, fostering and surrogacy were all subjects of legislation — driven by activists and advocacy groups and a shifting climate of opinion. But the everyday experience of many same-sex couples was of an absence of support. Such couples were not always accepted as families. (As late as 2006 prime minister Paul Keating had quipped that two blokes and a cocker spaniel did not a family make). It was up to queer people to take up the task of supporting each other. Sam Edwards remembers that when she and her partner decided that it was time to have children, she realised how little support there was for couples like them. So, she set out to create Rainbow Families. She was on the Board of SHFPACT (Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT) and wondered if they'd be interested in helping her get a group going. They were, of course, and off it went. Independently of governments coming forward with legal rights and protections, gay people were hard at work changing the social (and therefore the political) climate.[20]

RELATIONSHIPS

But it was in its attitude toward same-sex relationships that the ACT really made the running in Australia.[21] This did not come out of the blue. In 1996 the decades-long movement for equality, which had advanced fairly steadily, though at different pace in different states, ran into its first major blockage — the election of a Liberal federal government under John Howard, 'the most conservative Prime Minister Australia has ever had'. ('To that point', we would now add). Howard did not try to roll back the gains made by the gay movement, but neither was he going to allow further progress. In response, activists turned their attention elsewhere, focussing on the states and territories. Same-sex relationships loomed large. While the federal parliament had a monopoly on the power to legislate for marriage, states and territories had the power to regulate other kinds of relationships including *de facto* relationships. Beginning with NSW in 1999 same-sex *de facto* relationships came to be recognised in state law.

The ACT had recognised same-sex relationships in relation to the division of property after relationship breakdown as early as 1994. The draft law had applied to all domestic relationships of two or more years' standing *between a man and a woman* which involved 'personal or financial commitment and support of a domestic nature'. It is telling that during the months of community consultation, the government was persuaded to drop the heterosexual caveat. In 2003 and 2004 further reforms explicitly recognising same-sex 'domestic partners' were legislated. But in the mid-2000s the debate shifted sharply — towards marriage and/or its alternatives. In 2004, the federal Liberal-National Coalition government, supported by the ALP, amended the Marriage Act to ensure that same-sex marriages could not be performed or recognised in Australia. Far from putting an end to the issue, as the legislators had imagined, the ban triggered a long, hard-fought battle. Looking back, we can say that 2004 was the year that same-sex marriage in Australia became inevitable, although it was a long time before that became clear.

If the states and territories could not override the federal marriage power, what were the alternatives? This is the point at which the option of civil unions was raised, a form of relationship which granted the same legal rights and formal recognition as marriage without actually being called marriage. There was no doubt that the states held this power (and they started to use it), but the ACT was in a rather awkward position — its power to act was subject to a veto by the federal parliament or the Attorney-General. Between 2006 and 2013 the ACT engaged in a battle of wills with federal governments, first Liberal, then Labor, over whether and how it could recognise same-sex relationships. There were civil unions, civil partnerships, relationship registers. Marriage-like ceremonies were allowed and then not (or was it the other way around? Who could keep track?)

We think now that marriage was inevitable, but at the time civil unions looked like something worth fighting for. And 'civil unions with ceremonies' became the cutting edge of the campaign in Canberra for a while. Rebecca Leighton arrived as a student in 2005 and soon found herself caught up in the issue. Good Process was doing a good job lobbying, but there was a feeling among some activists that a greater public visibility was needed. In 2006 queer university students, Good Process and political and community groups joined forces to create an ad hoc Civil Unions Defence Coalition. On short notice it organised a demo of a couple of hundred people (a good number in Canberra) outside the Legislative Assembly. A couple of years later, better prepared, the Campaign for Civil Unions organised meetings with the ACT attorney-general, appeared in the media and launched a series of demonstrations. The group had no illusions that they could persuade prime minister Rudd to stand up against the Christian lobby but they had hopes that the ACT government might resist the federal ALP's pressure to go quiet and they wanted to make it clear there was public support for civil unions.[22]

The ACT Government was not intending to go quiet. Andrew Barr says that he was 'absolutely stunned' by Rudd's rejection of the ACT law in 2009 but he and his colleagues' response was to push on — 'to dare them a bit on certain things, compromise on others and every time you could inch forward we did'.[23] One opportunity that presented itself came as an interpretation of the constitution started to circulate suggesting that as the federal Marriage Act only applied to opposite-sex marriage, perhaps the states and territories retained the power to enact same-sex marriage. The ACT government implemented this in October 2013. The first marriages took place on 7 December, opening a five-day window of opportunity. Only 31 couples made it through before the High Court's decision put an end to their marriages. Legally at least, and despite all appearances to the contrary, they had never happened.

It had been quite a ride politically and constitutionally speaking. For those who married and were so suddenly unmarried and those who wanted to marry it was an emotional drama as well. Joel Player, whose marriage to Alan Wright had been the first marriage performed (at 12.01am on the Saturday), described how 'disappointed, angry, annoyed, upset, emotional' he felt, but added that he was proud of what he and the other couples had achieved, had many happy memories of the day and had been overwhelmed by the support that he and his partner had received.[24] Legally speaking, one good thing came out of it. In its decision, the High Court affirmed that the Commonwealth Parliament did indeed have the right to legislate for same-sex marriage should it decide to do so (a position about which there had always been some doubt). And for those waiting to marry, the national campaign was gearing up.

The early 21st century had seen a marked shift in the lives of gay people. Visibility for the newly emerging community and the overwhelmingly positive response to this visibility had created a new world. New identities were forged, new ways of organising and doing politics developed, and new partners were found among businesses, the professions and politicians — and among millions of perfectly ordinary Australians.

CHAPTER 08

YES! SO FAR, SO GOOD...

YES!
SO FAR,
SO GOOD...

Spring Out Parade


YES!

ON 15 NOVEMBER 2017, WE GATHERED IN OUR THOUSANDS ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY. IN SQUARES AND PIAZZAS AND HALLS AND PARKS AND FORECOURTS, IN THE CORRIDORS OF POWER AND AT KITCHEN TABLES WITH THE TV OR THE RADIO ON. WITH FAMILIES AND FRIENDS AND WITH CROWDS OF STRANGERS. THE AUSTRALIAN STATISTICIAN WAS FORMALLY ANNOUNCING THE RESULTS OF THE AUSTRALIAN MARRIAGE LAW POSTAL SURVEY, ORGANISED TO GAUGE SUPPORT FOR THE LEGALISATION OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE. THE RESULT: 7,817,247 VOTED 'YES' — 61.6%.

THOSE WHO HAS GATHERED WERE WILD WITH EXCITEMENT AND RELIEF (THOUGH IN REALITY THERE WAS NEVER ANY REAL DOUBT THAT 'YES' HAD THE NUMBERS). THERE WERE CHEERS AND TEARS. FLAGS AND PLACARDS WAVED. BALLOONS AND STREAMERS AND GLITTER FLOATED THROUGH THE AIR. PEOPLE HUGGED AND KISSED AND DANCED WITH JOY.

Canberrans could be especially proud. The highest return rate: 82 per cent; the highest 'yes' vote: 74 per cent.[1] They had fought as part of a national campaign but, as so often the case, their particular circumstances shaped their work. Jacob White, director of the ACT Yes campaign, described the 800 volunteers ('activists' would be a better description) who staffed stalls, handed out flyers, made phone calls and knocked on doors (30,000 doors over four days!). The physical compactness of Canberra, its educated, socially and politically engaged population gave the work a particular twist.

When it was time to watch the announcement, Canberrans gathered in Haig Park. When it was time to celebrate, they headed to Lonsdale Street, which is now the heartland of queer life in the city. The ACT Government had closed off the street. Danny Corvini, who we have met as a teenager going to raves with his mates, DJing under the pseudonym DJ Raydar with Sydney lesbian DJ Sveta at Hopscotch. Some 6000 people partied and, as Danny Corvini says: 'it seems like Canberra got its Sleazeball after all!'[2]

This win had been a long time coming. Many no doubt thought back to 2004, when the Liberal, National and Labor parties had ganged up against gay people to make sure they would never, ever be allowed to marry in Australia. But if members of parliament thought back then that this had settled things, they had forgotten who they were dealing with. Lesbians and gay men had been fighting against discriminatory laws for decades — and successfully. In 2004, many of them with newly visible communities of bisexuals, trans, intersex and queer people (and their friends) — took a deep breath and set off on yet another stage of the long journey towards equality. In 2017, we got that part of the journey done.

Probably no one thought back much further than that. But thinking back as far as we can is the job of historians — to unearth, to remember, to explain …

In the 1950s and '60s the idea of equality, much less of marriage, would have seemed absurd to people like Rod Anderson, Bill Wells, Grant and Graill, Wendy and Donny. They might have imagined decriminalisation — an idea that was in circulation in Britain in the 1950s. But for the most part it was enough to avoid trouble, to share comfortable lives with like-minded friends. In 1969, the founders and members of the HLRS did indeed imagine law reform and set out to make it a reality. But new forces were emerging, opening wider vistas. Talk of liberation filled the air. A new world was coming, one marked, in the most radical imaginings, by a genuine sexual freedom, the transformation of sex and gender roles, the abolition of marriage, that bastion of bourgeois-patriarchal oppression. And almost as suddenly as that appeared, it disappeared. And the talk was of equality.

Equality: we are not quite there, despite enormous progress. It is not clear that we will ever be there, or that there is any *there* there. Every time we think we've done it we find some new issue waiting to be addressed. And we take a deep breath and set off again.

ACT Government | CANBERRA

THANK-YOU

THIS IS A SMALL HISTORY OF A BIG SUBJECT AND IT OWES MUCH TO THE SUPPORT AND ENTHUSIASM OF MANY PEOPLE.

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Needless to say, final responsibility for errors of omission or commission is all mine.

Australia's historians are blessed by the extent and quality of the archives and libraries and institutions that preserve our histories. They are staffed by people whose dedication makes researching our histories a joy. In particular I am thinking of the ACT Heritage Library, the Canberra Museum and Gallery, the National Archives of Australia, the National Library and the Supreme Court Registry.

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A number of people provided interviews. I thank them for sharing their memories. These interviews were conducted by Graham Willett unless otherwise noted.

Richard/Rachel Allen, 26 July 2018

Jim Arachne, 11 April 2019

Andrew Barr, 18 March 2019

Danny Corvini, 15 January 2019

Ross Duffin, 5 January 2018

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Brian Luton, 17 February 2019

Bruce Miller, 19 September 2018

Bruce Moore, 21 February 2019

Greg Moore, 21 February 2019

Lynne O'Brien, 25 March 2018

'Peter', 26 February 2019

Susan Ryan, 28 August 2002

Alex Thatcher, 8 April 2019

Terence Watson, 2 March 2018

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In addition, I have relied on interviews with James Grieve, Thomas Mautner, Peter Sekuless, Moss Cass and Bill Hayden conducted in 1994-95 as part of my PhD research, and conversations with them and Elizabeth Reid during 2018-19.

PHOTO CREDITS

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Courtesy of Richard/Rachel Allen

45:
Courtesy of Robert French

52:
Courtesy of Ian Grey

55, 81, 93, 101, 109:
ALGA Collection

51, 65, 95:
Courtesy of Lynne O'Brien

59:
Courtesy of members of the band.
Thanks to Kathy Sport for her help with this.

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Life's a Drag: Family Album 1996
Meridian Club in association with AIDS Action Council

68:
Courtesy of Visit Canberra

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Annie Franklin & Megalo Screen Print, ALGA Collection

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Courtesy of University of Newcastle

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END-NOTES

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CHAPTER 02: 'WE BLEW OUR TRUMPETS AND...': THE HOMOSEXUAL LAW REFORM SOCIETY

This chapter relies heavily on interviews with James Grieve, Thomas Mautner, and Peter Sekuless conducted in 1994 as part of my PhD research, and conversations with them and Elizabeth Reid during 2018-19, as well as Moss Cass and Bill Hayden conducted in 1994, and on the HLRS *Newsletter* (holdings at ALGA and NLA), Records of the Homosexual Law Reform Society, National Library of Australia (NLA), MS 8898. The title comes from a jokey remark scribbled by James Grieve on a copy of Tom Hughes's paper 'Deviant Behaviour...' (see below) in HLRS Records. For a more detailed referencing see: Graham Willett, '"We Blew Our Trumpets and ...": The ACT Homosexual Law Reform Society' in Yorick Smaal and Graham Willett (eds), *Out Here: Gay and Lesbian Perspectives VI* (2011). *The Canberra Times* is digitised and fully text-searchable for this period on Trove, https://trove.nla.gov.au/.

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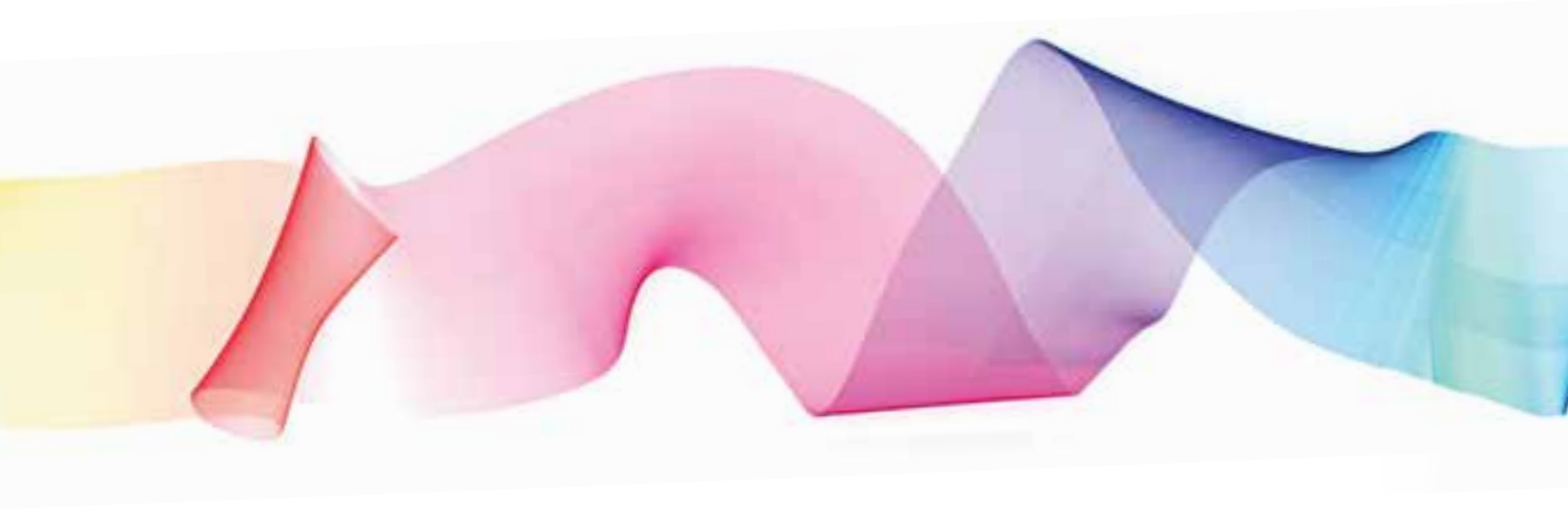
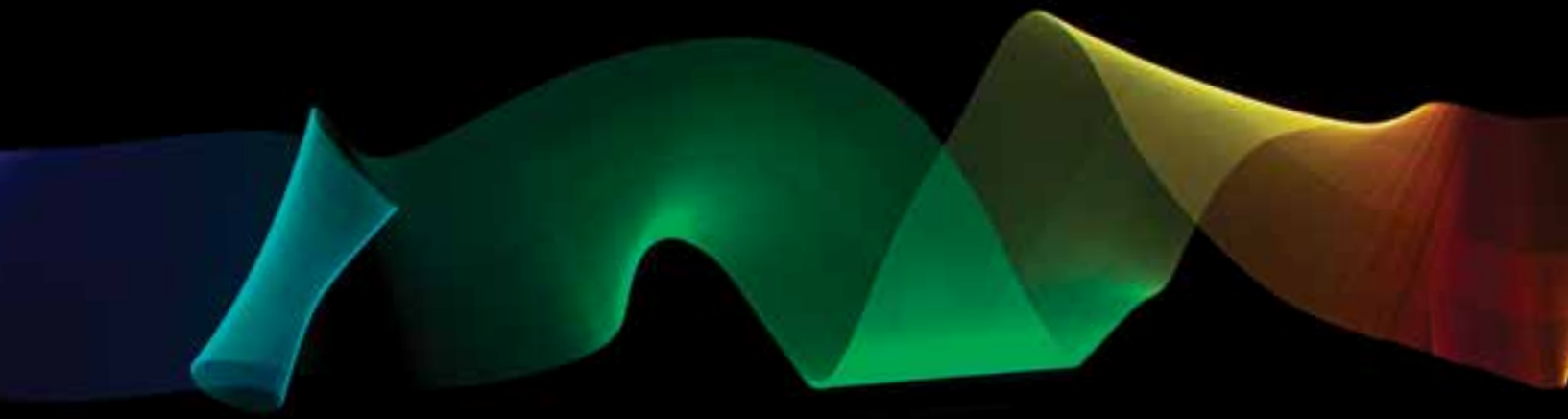


Once despised and persecuted as a threat to morality and security, Canberra's LGBTIQ people are now more recognisable as makers of business, partners of government and builders of community . Graham Willett explains how the position of LGBTIQ people was revolutionised, and what their pursuit of equality has meant for the city. He brings to his task a deep expertise in Australian gay and lesbian history as well as a mordant wit.

Frank Bongiorno AM, Professor of History at the Australian National University and author of The Sex Lives of Australians: A History



Canberra has a rich underbelly of gay & lesbian stories to tell. Historian Graham Willett has captured more than a snapshot for your reading pleasure. I couldn't put it down — reading with joy snippets of my life and loves in the well written pages. You can too. Highly recommended.

Lynne O'Brien, Canberra born, proud lesbian mum and grandmother, LGBTIQ activist and current Canberra SpringOUT President

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