

## AND THE BEATS GO ON.....

Male homosexual acts are no longer criminal in NSW – the law was amended in 1984, and ‘gay’ men can live quite open lives, with a range of venues where they can socialize in ways similar to their heterosexual counterparts. Also, the two worlds now softly collide, with gays and straights mixing quite easily in many places in Sydney’s inner suburbs.

But there has always been another world, hidden away from public gaze; and this was the world of covert - but also overt, in a way - homosexual sexual activity, in places known as ‘beats’. Here the important aspect was – and still is - sexual access: usually for fast, impersonal sex [*casual, consensual, non-commercial sex*], but quite often simply as a place to meet other people of similar sexual preference (particularly important in a world where your values and lifestyles were often suspect and, for a long time, also illegal). And if a sexual encounter occurred there as a result, then so much the better!

Technically, any place for picking up other men constitutes a 'beat', and the term ‘beats’ was sometimes used to refer to hotels, restaurants and coffee shops (and perhaps not incorrectly – they could be pick-up places). However, it is arguable whether it would be accurate to call sex-on-premises venues, like steam baths, beats – or their 19<sup>th</sup> century equivalents, the ubiquitous Turkish Baths - which were also places to which homosexually-inclined men could go on the chance of having a sexual encounter. In this, such baths were no different to the hammams of Paris, the Turkish baths of Budapest, or indeed the baths dotted around London, in that they were certainly meeting places for men seeking out other men for sexual purposes, as they have been since the times of ancient Greece or Rome. So they could be beats.

In late nineteenth-century Sydney, an era when adequate bathing facilities were simply unavailable in many working-class households, public baths had a very necessary role, and such sex-segregated bath houses also played an important role in providing a space for homoerotic contact.<sup>1</sup> Sydney had a number of such baths, particularly in areas where there were boarding houses and a large itinerant population, and three in particular were fairly well-known in the city’s history. The public baths in Bligh Street in the city were occasionally mentioned in the press, while another in Liverpool Street, just east of its intersection with Oxford Street, was

mentioned in one of the case studies included in Havelock Ellis's ground-breaking 1897 work, *Sexual Inversion In Men*.<sup>2</sup> But probably the best known was in Oxford Street, the Turkish Baths operated by Charles Wigzell, and its main clientele were not the lower classes.

Mr Wigzell's baths on Oxford Street - open only to men all day Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and on Monday and Thursday afternoons - provided similar spaces where men could meet other men. While targeting its services specifically to the 'gentlemen' class in Sydney, it also provided opportunities for cross-class meetings through its special offer of "cheap baths ...for workmen every evening from 5 to 7 pm at 2s each."<sup>3</sup> Such places fulfilled an important role for men seeking sexual contact with other men, in reasonably safe circumstances. But discretion was required. It is a nice twist of fate that Mr Wigsell's baths were in the area that became known as 'gay ghetto central' in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Sydney's gay life.

But it was the more public spaces that were usually referred to as 'beats'. For Sydney, as in many other cities over the centuries - Paris, Amsterdam, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Lisbon, London, New York and San Francisco are cities where such activities have been recorded - parks and particular streets were often convenient meeting places for those seeking out other illicit sexual pleasures.

Over the past two centuries, there have been a large number of these outdoor beats around Sydney, and they had to fulfil several criteria: there had to be a legitimate reason why men could be there, and where one could legitimately strike up a conversation with another person - to ask for a light, for example, or ask the time. These were the opening moves in what might or might not become a pick-up, depending on a range of responses from the other party.

This hidden world has long been a part of our history, going well back into colonial times, and references to it come from many sources.<sup>4</sup> Court records, with material on sodomy and buggery cases that were prosecuted in NSW from 1796 till 1930, mainly in the Supreme Court, but also increasingly in the Quarter Sessions, give much detail, particularly in the Court Depositions. The *NSW Police Gazette* also gives some detail.

Apart from court records, including the police depositions, newspapers provide a rich source. For example, even though the documentary evidence for Sydney is generally reticent on

this score, one late nineteenth century news-sheet, *The Scorpion*, gives some details of this secret world. In an article headed “The Oscar Wildes of Sydney”, it condemned what we would now call homosexual cruising, focussing on those men “whose presence is advertised by an effeminate style of speech and the adoption of the names of celebrated actresses”. Apart from alluding to night-time activities in the city’s parks, it also asserted that a “haunt is said to exist in Bourke-street, Surry Hills, and that part of College-street from Boomerang-street to Park-street is a parade for them”.<sup>5</sup> In Sydney over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hyde Park and the Domain were often referred to as places where transgressive sexual activities could occur; they were gathering place for those who acted outside accepted sexual morés, and this certainly included activities by ‘sodomites’ and ‘poofs’, as they were known in Australia.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, both Hyde Park and Boomerang Street were still operating as beats nearly a century later.

But parks were not the only outdoor areas used as beats. One of the more contentious uses of society’s institutions relates to those generally ugly but ubiquitous facilities: public toilets, whether in the outdoors or within public buildings. The use of these as beats was contentious, not only because of the alleged ‘nuisance’ problem and the alleged ‘danger to minors’, but also because it could involve the issue of ‘public’ - and multiple partner - sex, notions that parts of our society have long found distasteful. Needless to say, for many male homosexuals, public toilets provided a venue for both fast anonymous sex<sup>7</sup> and also - and more than just occasionally - a place where one could simply meet others of one’s own kind. So beats therefore - and public toilet sex - serve useful social functions for homosexuals, and sex there can be indulged in with that special frisson that comes from the dangers - and therefore excitement - involved.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, public health concerns led to the construction of a number of public toilets around the city, for those people who might be ‘caught short’. So such beats soon caught on. Then, from the 1920s, with the construction of Sydney’s underground railway system, a new set of beats was provided - in their stations’ toilets. The City Circle was built in stages, with the first stations to open being St. James and Museum, in 1926. Next was the “western limb” through Town Hall and Wynyard, which opened in 1932 in conjunction with the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. A railway station is a place where a lot of people travel

through each day, so there are a lot of possibilities for sexual encounters in a railway station toilet. And railway stations became known as places where all kinds of sexual encounters could occur.

But these have been the subject of constant surveillance by police and transport officials, sometimes with disastrous consequences. In 1996, Franca Arena, a member of the state's Legislative Council, used Parliamentary Privilege to name Justice David Yeldham and former New South Wales MP Frank Arkell as possible paedophiles, and her action came at time when paedophilia was under intense public scrutiny, with constant allegations at the NSW *Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service* about men who'd cheated the law for years. Under public pressure, the *Royal Commission's* powers were widened to also investigate alleged paedophile activities within the police service, and whether police had given protection to paedophiles

In this climate, Yeldham, a distinguished former judge, was forced into an extraordinary public situation. It has since been alleged that as early as 1956, David Yeldham, an ambitious young solicitor in his late 20s and moving towards the traditional trappings of marriage and family, was also seeking sex in a railway station toilet. A man who said he had sex with David Yeldham in 1956 was then aged 18. He alleged that Yeldham picked him up at St James railway station and from there the two men walked up to the solicitor's rooms, where Yeldham paid 10 shillings to have sex<sup>8</sup>. The two men then saw each other off and on for 10 years. But Yeldham continued to frequent railway station toilets: in the late 1970s, he approached a now prominent member of Sydney's Bar in the toilets at Wynyard Railway station, in the centre of Sydney's business district. But the barrister decided not to report the incident. Then, in 1980 a police officer saw the judge acting suspiciously around Wynyard toilets and filed a report to his superiors.

Rumour began to spread, and it all threatened to unravel for Yeldham. In 1980, allegations about the judge went to the highest levels of the NSW judicial system. Not only did the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court hear the rumour, but it is probable that the then Attorney-General of the State also knew of the allegations. Ultimately though, there was no accountability because there was no system to find the truth. But in 1996, after the Arena public

outing, and when questioned *in camera* at the Royal Commission, Yeldham tried to bluff his way through: *I'm bisexual, let's face it*, he said. Finally he admitted to an indecent act on the stairs at Wynyard station, but said he regarded it as relatively minor. Within hours of making his partial admission, he gassed himself in his car at home. The suicide of Justice David Yeldham, after his secret life had been revealed, scandalized the judiciary and shocked an unbelieving society.

Despite such risks and consequences, the usefulness of public toilets as beats, as meeting places, was particularly important in the suburbs where, prior to decriminalization, many of those hidden-away homosexuals, or men-who-have-sex-with-men, lived. They might never have been to a 'camp' bar in their lives, but a well-known public toilet, either in their own locality or nearby, may well have provided the only contact point they knew. Two such well-known meeting places for many decades were the toilets in Petersham Park in Sydney's inner south-west, and those in the park at St Leonards on the lower North Shore - and there is little reason to doubt that countless other public toilet beats similarly existed, and still exist, around Sydney.<sup>9</sup>

It is rare to hear of what goes on inside a beat, but here is one published description of the inside of a darkened public toilet at night:

*Figures moved in the shadows. [He] could hear them breathing, watching. He stood stock still. Vague shapes began to loom around him, timid and inquiring.... He felt hands reach out to touch him. It was eerie, like the blind identifying an object by touch alone.... A cigarette lighter flared its fire for a moment. It was held high. For a second, faces were illuminated around him, then darkness. In the flush of light it was like a witches' coven. Faces illuminated against dank walls... male heads, eyes staring, like ancient cave paintings. Then darkness again. The unity was primeval.<sup>10</sup>*

However, using such places as 'beats' was not free from danger. This could come from two sources. Firstly there were groups of marauding youths, now known as 'poofter-bashers'. These often frequented beats and bashed men they suspected of being homosexuals. But it was only rarely that details of this surfaced in the newspapers. Most often, any homosexual so bashed would simply not report the matter to the police, since to do so would be to draw both unwanted attention to oneself, and unwanted questioning about what one was doing at such a place at such a time.<sup>11</sup> When one man died as a result of the bashing, then there was publicity. And this

occurred in the case of 33-year-old Richard Johnson, and his murder in Alexandria Park in inner Sydney in 1990.

Johnson was murdered in a toilet block in the park late at night on 15 January 1990. It was a well-known and well-frequented beat, and he had previously left his phone number on a cubicle wall. He responded to a phone call offering sex, turning up at the toilet block late that night. His body was found the next morning on a footpath near the toilet in the park, and a post-mortem examination and scientific tests revealed that all regions of his body had suffered severe assault; he had been kicked and bludgeoned to death. Six juveniles and two adults were later arrested and charged with the fatal bashing, and three men were later jailed for his murder.

Not all beat murders were investigated with such efficiency. A few years earlier, another case initially had a very different outcome. This was the murder of Scott Johnson, a gay American whose naked and dead body was found at the bottom of Blue Fish Point, Manly, in December 1988. A Coroner's Inquest ruled Scott's death a suicide in March 1989. Since then, new evidence has emerged that was either not known or not given to the Coroner at the time; this evidence clearly indicated that Scott Johnson's death fitted a pattern of anti-gay hate crimes in Sydney during the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was never brought to the initial Coroner's Court's enquiry that the area where Scott died was indeed a gay beat where men would disrobe and sunbake until a sex partner appeared for a quick, anonymous tryst. The magistrate never learnt that another gay man survived a stabbing after having sex with a stranger at the exact spot where Scott died. The court didn't hear that three men had been arrested a few miles from Manly, in Reef Beach, for a series of assaults against gay men around the same time. The court was never informed of a witness who heard one of those same men bragging about driving around the Northern Beaches with his mates to "bash poofers". Former Manly constable Troy Hardie, who recovered Scott's body, was never asked whether the location and manner of Scott's "suicide" was unusual. Wayne Plant, a former police rescue squad and air wing member who had retrieved many suicides from the area, later stated: *"It does not fit with the type of suicide we normally found around North Head. You would have to have known that place or have been led there by someone with local knowledge."*

It was in 2007 that new, credible, and compelling evidence that the area near where Scott died was a known "beat" where homosexual men would go to have sex emerged; Ulo Klemmer, an outreach worker for the AIDS Council of NSW, has noted that he patrolled the same area in the late 1980s, as a beat worker during the early AIDS education campaigns, and it was "definitely" a beat, one of about 500 or more that operated at the time around Sydney. Some of the Manly beats were merely meeting places, and men would then head for the hills to have sex. There was also documented evidence that incidents of violence against gay men were prevalent along the Northern Beaches from Narrabeen to Manly during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

South of the harbour, in Sydney's eastern suburbs, the cliff-side path from Bondi Beach to Tamarama Beach, near Marks Park, was also a long-time beat, and a beat that also saw numerous bashings and murders. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, roving gay-hate gangs in the eastern suburbs near Bondi routinely terrorized gay men, chasing some off cliffs and brutally bashing others. Less than a year after Scott Johnson's death in December 1988, the body of 31-year-old John Allen Russell was found at the bottom of a cliff at Bondi, crumpled and bloodied. At first, Russell's death was also ruled a suicide but, as with Scott Johnson, nobody could figure out why he would do such a thing. Among other things, Russell had just inherited \$100,000. And almost exactly a year after Scott died, a 24-year-old gay man was bashed at Bondi and his attackers threatened to throw him off a cliff. "You're going over the side, you poofter," one of them screamed. The victim later said the attackers "tried to remove my clothing". Another gay man, television newsreader Ross Warren, had gone missing in the same cliff area around the same time, and his body has never been found.

It was only in 2005 that the police Operation Taradale, conducted by Det. Sgt Stephen Page, after four years of research detailed a widespread pattern of attacks against homosexual men in the Bondi area, where there had been more than several deaths, now known to have been gay murders. The patterns of attacks against gay men, including the fact that several had been run off of cliffs in the Bondi area, seemed similar to what was known about Scott Johnson's death.

Finally, a coroner's inquest ruled that John Alan Russell's "suicide" was due to "multiple injuries sustained when he was thrown from the cliff on to rocks, by a person or persons unknown." So finally, Ross Bradley Warren, Gilles Jacques Mattaini, Richard Norman Johnson, William Allen, Raymond Keam, Kritchikorn Rattanjurathaporn and Wayne Rick Tonks were all listed as victims of similar, deadly violence.

Marauding youths were not the only dangers. There were also the police, and their involvement at beats could be in several forms, either as poofter- bashers themselves - as was the case of Dr Duncan in Adelaide, thrown into the Torrens River where he drowned - or by harassing and arresting gay men at the beats.

Even a casual reading of the newspapers over the years after World War I - when public awareness of 'sexual deviation' became more prevalent - indicated how large a proportion of arrests for homosexual behaviour were made in areas known to be 'beats'. Police knew that male homosexuals used toilets in this way, and often set out deliberately to entrap them. And the evidence goes back a long way. As one medical doctor - often called as an expert witness to government committees - later admitted,

*'in 1935... two policemen gave sworn evidence that their vice-squad had arrested in the course of two years over a hundred and fifty men for homosexual offences in one single lavatory in Hyde Park, Sydney. One policeman used to act as decoy within, while the other observed all from outside through trellis work six feet from the ground'.<sup>12</sup>*

Here the most amazing thing is the public admission that police were actively acting as decoys – as *agents provocateurs* – to entice men to commit a crime.

While our court records are littered with cases of police arresting men in beats, it was usually only the high profile cases that made the newspaper headlines. And reporting of these cases certainly increased after World War I. In the 1930s, one of the most spectacular cases was that involving the NSW Commissioner for Road Transport, Sydney Aubrey Maddocks. It was a curious case, but it highlights some important aspects. In particular it was a case of very detailed reporting: it incidentally gave some insights into police activities, and it also gave some indications of prevailing attitudes.



The facts of the case are that Maddocks was arrested by police at Lane Cove on the night of 1 March 1937 in the company of an 18-year-old who gave his name as Michael John Peterson (the name Maddocks knew him by). Police charged Maddocks on 2 March with indecently assaulting Peterson, and to that charge was later added another, that of attempting an unnatural offence with the younger man. The main police witness was to be Peterson.<sup>13</sup>

At the committal hearing on 16 March, further details were given, and these received wide reportage: Peterson admitted that his real name was Mikiel Adams, and that he had previously been in trouble with the police, while police acknowledged that they had had Maddocks under surveillance for some time, and confirmed that no charges at all were to be laid against Adams.<sup>14</sup>

More details came out at the formal trial, two weeks later.<sup>15</sup> Adams, under questioning from Maddocks' counsel, made what should have been damaging admissions: he acknowledged that on 1 March, the day he made an appointment by telephone to meet Maddocks in the afternoon, he had been brought into Sydney from Liverpool by police, and had gone with them to the lonely spot at Lane Cove where later that night police were to find and arrest Maddocks. The police had then driven Adams back to where he was to meet Maddocks in the city. Indeed, as Adams admitted, he had in effect arranged for Maddocks to be caught with him.<sup>16</sup>

As to why the police should wish to entrap Maddocks, there are several quite plausible explanations. Maddocks had served a brief period as Secretary of Police in 1930, and this had left him with enemies in the force. Then, within the Department of Road Transport, Maddocks' appointment, as an outsider, to the lucrative position of Transport Commissioner

*was resented by senior departmental officers, and ensuing years were full of behind-the-scenes battles for Maddocks, whose closet sexuality had leaked to his enemies although still hidden from friends and family. There were many people in responsible positions with an axe to grind ... who would relish Maddocks being forced from his position in disgrace.*<sup>17</sup>

Maddocks had clearly been 'set up' in this case by the police. As Maddocks' counsel pointed out in his summing up, *'This is not a case of a young innocent boy who was found in the arms of a man, but a filthy pervert who was the easiest type for criminals to use to prey on a man in a big*

*position ... On the evidence, this boy framed that man...*<sup>18</sup> What counsel did not have to point out was that the 'criminals' in this case were the police, who had used the boy to entrap Maddocks.

It was perhaps because of such overwhelming evidence of police involvement that the judge felt constrained to acknowledge to the jury that '*Adams may be a pervert of the worst type. He may have laid a trap.*' But then he added: '*Even if you find he laid a trap, this fact is no defence unless the accused was ignorant of the conditions under which he was found.*'<sup>19</sup> In saying this he made it clear that Maddocks ought to be found guilty. And the jury, undoubtedly offended by Maddocks' obvious sexual interest in Adams, found him guilty, despite the unethical police inputs into the case.

During the war-years, as in the years before, police continued their harassment of homosexuals at beats. This related not only to enforcing the law but, as with the Maddocks case, to acting as *agents provocateurs* to gain convictions. While this surfaced occasionally, in evidence and allegations in various cases coming before the courts, it probably received its most public airing at this time in the case of Clarence McNulty, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Daily Telegraph*. McNulty was arrested by two policemen in 1943 in a public toilet in Lang Park, off Grosvenor Street near the Rocks area. He denied any guilt, and indeed accused one of the arresting policeman of trying to entice him to engage in sexual activity.<sup>20</sup> After a very long hearing, he was eventually discharged by the magistrate, who found some aspects of the police case unpalatable. While the magistrate denied he was concerned at the amazingly high arrest rate of these two officers - it was about five times the average for similar policemen - he WAS concerned at several aspects of their *modus operandi*. In particular, he was concerned that they didn't follow the usual procedure of both policemen observing the crime and making the arrest, a practice which, he noted, they hadn't followed for a long time - an oblique way of acknowledging that one of the police officers was in the habit of being in the toilet acting as a decoy. It was only because in previous cases the defendants had pleaded guilty that the evidence, given by a single policeman, had never been contested.

While nicely sidestepping the need to make any condemnations of the police actions in this specific case, the magistrate did note that, as he had '*not been able to accept the evidence of*

*the police witnesses as against the evidence of the defendant, the defendant is entitled to the benefit of any doubt.'* He did note in his judgement, however, that *'if the accusations of the defence be true, a serious, indeed an alarming, condition has been revealed which will shock the public conscience.'*<sup>21</sup> But given public knowledge about, and attitudes to, homosexuality at the time, this knowledge about illegal police methods made little impression on the authorities.

Police activities during the war years were certainly no less homophobic than they had been during the 1930s or were later during the 1950s; some police were clearly acting as *agents provocateurs*, with either the explicit or implicit connivance of their superiors.

A later case that made the headlines was that of Douglas Annand, a Sydney designer who had been three times winner of the Sulman Award for murals. He was arrested by police at Chatswood Park toilet in 1953, and charged with soliciting one of them for immoral purposes. Despite character evidence from such notables as retired general Sir Leslie Morshead, and Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Hal Missingham, he was convicted, on the evidence of three policemen. Annand not only appealed, but also took out writs against the police. At his appeal not only was his conviction overturned, but the judge chose to comment that the arresting sergeant's evidence was a *'wicked lie... I disbelieve the whole of his evidence.'* Indeed, the judge suggested that the police's supporting evidence was put together 'in collaboration', rather than reflecting any individual policeman's recollections. It was clear in this case, the judge noted, that the police themselves were the real 'agents' in the commission of the crime. The arresting police sergeant was briefly suspended.<sup>22</sup>

Another high profile case of that decade was that involving the visiting Chilean pianist, Claudio Arrau, who was charged in 1957 with offensive behaviour. It was alleged that late one night he went into and out of a toilet in Lang Park – that same Land Park that Clarence McNultu had been arrested fourteen years earlier - and winked at one (of two) policemen who just happened to be waiting in there. In this case Arrau was found guilty,<sup>23</sup> but on appeal the judge, although he thought the offence *might* be legally proved - since two witnesses (the police) said it had, while only one witness (Arrau) said it hadn't - dismissed the charge without conviction, as

he thought it of a 'comparatively trivial nature.'<sup>24</sup> With such a famous international figure, this case had received considerable attention in both the local and world-wide press. After the story first broke, on the night of Arrau's first appearance on the stage at Sydney Town Hall, it is said that he was given a standing ovation before he had even time to seat himself at the piano. Such was a more sympathetic Sydney audience's response to the case.<sup>25</sup>

Clearly, despite occasional exposures, police actions of harassing homosexuals at beats – and indeed of actively provoking homosexual activity at beats - never ceased. Many times the police themselves were found to be more than just passive 'agents'; they were indeed *agents provocateurs*. And it was only the high-profile cases - those that were contested – that saw evidence of police involvement surface into public knowledge. But it wasn't only the closer scrutiny by the higher courts that was the main source of evidence of police involvement as agents in sexual crimes. Even a sociologist working in England at the time, preparing reports on a range of 'social problem areas' for the British Home Office, could note simply in passing in one of his books in the early 1960s that the decoy system, utilising '*good-looking young C.I.D. officers is still used in Sydney, Australia.*'<sup>26</sup>

As mentioned, several of the better-known beats in Sydney's CBD area from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were Hyde Park, and Boomerang Street, just down the hill from Hyde Park, towards Woolloomooloo. And the Archibald Fountain, constructed in Hyde Park in 1937, provided a major new focus there for homo-erotically-inclined men. Not only was it in a park that had long had a reputation for being a beat; it was a striking piece of architecture, with its subject matter including a variety of hunky naked men very publicly on display adding a nice homoerotic ambience to the setting; and it was floodlit at night. Thus it had all the reasons for people to be 'legitimately' there, casually loitering, admiring the fountain, either by day or night.<sup>27</sup>

One man who frequented the Archibald Fountain beat remembers an unusual approach. He had a friend who, when he went out at night to the beats to pick someone up, '*would put nail polish on two nails... and when he'd ask a man for a match [someone he thought might be a homosexual] he'd show those two nails to him as he thanked him for the match. In other words*

*he used a display of effeminacy to signal to the man'.<sup>28</sup>*

The fact of the Archibald Fountain being a beat was known to those 'in the know'. In Kylie Tennant's novel *Tell Morning This*, published in 1967, there is an acknowledgment of the Archibald Fountain being a homosexual 'beat'. One particular scene in the novel opens at a public meeting at the Fountain where, however, a fracas occurs, caused by *'a number of young men with little feathers in their hats.'* The heroine of the novel, Nonnie, confronts their leaders, and finds that there is a misunderstanding: the young men thought that the meeting was to have the Archibald Fountain pulled down, and they were there to show their opposition.

Afterwards, Nonnie talks with a companion, Dr Cranitz:

*'You saw those young men?' Nonnie asked. 'They thought we were trying to get the Archibald Fountain removed. So extraordinary.'*

*'Homosexuals,' Dr. Cranitz said blandly.*

*'But why should they worry about the fountain? I admit it's a beautiful thing, and I wouldn't like to see it removed myself...'*

*'It is their meeting place.'*

*'Surely not! How do you know?'*

*'My dear lady,' Dr. Cranitz said resignedly, 'it is so. I assure you.'*

*'He looked quite a nice young man,' Nonnie said doubtfully...<sup>29</sup>*

Interestingly, *Tell Morning This* was written in the 1940s, and describes life in Sydney then. It had originally been published in 1953, in a bowdlerized version, as *The Joyful Condemned*, with the homosexual scenes cut out – such were the sensibilities of the times.

Like many of Sydney's famous old beats – Boomerang Street, Giles Baths at Coogee, the Bondi Pavilion dressing sheds among them – the Archibald Fountain probably no longer works as a beat; but late at night, the ghosts of adventurers past probably come out and loiter, hoping.... Legend has it that the other nearby beat, Boomerang Street, below St Mary's Cathedral, provided a convenient place for homosexually-inclined priests to meet outsiders; but this could simply reflect commonly held mythology.

In general, virtually any park in the city could legitimately be claimed to have been a beat, as the numerous police arrest statistics attest. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, apart from the central city area, the Darlinghurst area became a focal point for many of the men who came to the city in pursuit of jobs, and increasingly in the period after World War I. Part of the reason was the large number of boarding-houses that abounded there. For an increasing number of men, including parts of Sydney's bohemia, one attraction of many of these boarding houses in the area was the discreet non-inquisitive landlady, a very necessary prerequisite for any of those men who were seen as 'outsiders' by the population at large or by the police (if these men's activities were 'illegal', even if victimless). Then, from the 1920s, it was also the area that saw the construction of large numbers of the new, modern high-rise buildings that began to proliferate in Sydney, many crammed with small apartments. Thus the area had both high population densities and large numbers of single men.

That there was a high gay content to this population is attested to by many writers. The Lindsay brothers, Ray and Phil, mention the local homosexual population several times in their autobiographies, while one of the most readable books depicting life in the area during World War II - Jon Rose's *At The Cross* - is filled with descriptions of the abundant gay life there. Much of this was also fairly widely known, and certainly among inner-city denizens, and Vince Kelly's various detective sagas set in Sydney often note the police arrests in the various Hyde Park and inner-city toilets, as well as the existence of the 'Queer House' in Margaret Street, near the Lang Park toilets.

Thus, in Sydney, virtually any parks (and in particular those in the inner-city area, where population densities are highest) have served - and in some cases, still do serve - as beats. But sometimes other factors not directly related to police activities or homosexual men's desires intruded to affect the levels of homosexual men who passed through an area, and so who might use the various beats there. For example, amendments to the state's liquor laws in the 1950s (which now permitted hotels to stay open till 10.00pm, instead of 6.00pm) ended the need for city workers to drink frantically after work till the pubs closed (the so-called 'six o'clock swill'). Thus city workers now took on new socializing patterns: they could go home, have a meal,

change from their work clothes, and go out for the evening. This led to the closure of many famous inner city pubs which were prominent gay venues - the Long Bar at the Australia Hotel, the Carlton Rex's Dugout Bar, the Metropole, and Ushers - as they saw their business die away. This declining business also had an effect on those inner-city beats which had functioned well for some of these drinkers: thus Hyde Park and Boomerang Street, both major city beats during the early post-World War II period, began to lose their appeal, due to declining patronage, although their life as a beat continued on for many decades more.

And patrons of these beats did not simply stop using beats: they relocated themselves elsewhere. Since Hyde Park, as a beat, now had the added disadvantage during the late Cold War era of being constantly 'cleaned up' by the Vice Squad, the nearest safe beats were up in the Darlinghurst/Kings Cross area. Kings Cross had long had a homosexual subculture, and from the early sixties, with the countercultural revolution, its gay life swelled. Two hotels in Kings Cross were prominent as gay places from the 1960s: the Back Bar at the Rex Hotel and the Quarterdeck Bar at the Chevron, both in Macleay Street. Other gay venues developed in the Cross in the same period - the Annexe, behind the Kings Cross Theatre, opened late at night; as did the Jewel Box; both of these were in Darlinghurst Road. Les Girls, a major drag venue, opened soon after, in nearby Roslyn Street. Other more peripheral bars appeared and disappeared.

From the late 1960s, several venues catering exclusively to homosexuals opened in Oxford Street: Capriccio's and Ivy's Birdcage, two nightclubs, were among the earliest, and they were soon followed by others. Several factors made Oxford Street an attractive proposition. It was close to Kings Cross and the existing night-life there, but rents were far cheaper in run-down Oxford Street than they were in the Cross. There was plenty of unused building stock available in the street. The old Turkish Baths at the bottom of Liverpool Street, near Oxford Street, continued to attract a homosexual clientele. Old wine bars turned themselves into trendy places for the young to meet, and several of these, like Martin's Bar, had many homosexuals among their patrons.

In Darlinghurst Road, just off Oxford Street, the block under the walls of the old Darlinghurst gaol, known as 'The Wall', became a major beat, and from the sixties, Darlinghurst Road near Green Park became probably the most well-known - and certainly best patronized - of Sydney's inner city beats, while in Kings Cross the Fitzroy Gardens also served as a beat.

Even the gradual closure over the years of many of the major gay venues in Kings Cross did not adversely affect Green Park's function as a beat, even though the traffic from the Cross possibly diminished: but the flowering of Oxford Street as a major gay precinct from the early 1970s ensured 'The Wall' an ongoing patronage.

Another development that affected patronage of the Darlinghurst Road/Green Park beat was the wider availability of the motor car. As hire purchase expanded from the 1960s, motor vehicle ownership likewise grew, and such a beat as Green Park became increasingly accessible to any car owner. As well, for the thousands of suburban young men who travelled by train for their evenings out, Oxford Street was easily accessible from Museum station. And the opening of the Kings Cross station in 1979 also gave easy access to the area: and if you were on your way to Oxford St (from Kings Cross station), or returning from it, you would go by way of Green Park and the beat at 'The Wall'.

Part of The Wall's unusual history has to do with its unique location, part of it has more to do with general Australian social trends. Its location in East Sydney places it squarely in the area of Sydney's long-standing sex industries: from the 1890s there were reports of sexual pick-ups occurring in the area east of Hyde Park; brothels have long flourished in the streets of East Sydney/Surry Hills (and still do today, in nearby Burton and Liverpool Streets). South Sydney Council has recognized the nature of this area with its official Brothels Policy (introduced in September 1996).

Green Park and 'The Wall', then, have had a long history as a beat. And while its hey-day as a beat may have been from the early 1970s to the early to mid-1980s - when Oxford Street first boomed as the location of many new gay venues - such a situation continues on today,



except that it is now almost exclusively ‘commercial trade’ - men selling sex for money. This change was fairly gradual: probably from the mid- to late-1980s. And while it has altered the type of the beat, it has not altered Darlinghurst Road's role as a beat.

Today, of course, this covert sexual life of Sydney continues on. An outreach beat worker for ACON - who worked during the early AIDS education campaigns and so developed an intimate knowledge of the city’s far-flung beats - pointed out that there were about 500 or more beats in the Sydney region around that time, and there is little reason to believe that such a figure would be any less now. There are still beats on the northern beach suburbs, out in the western and north-western suburbs, in the Shire and down in the south and south-west; indeed they are anywhere beyond the gay ghetto. They are there for those men who live far away from the gay spaces where they might easily meet other gay men; they are there for young men who are coming to terms with their sexuality; and they are there for men who do not identify as ‘gay’ [and so would not go near openly gay places]. And while many gay men use beats for fast impersonal sex, for others it is simply as a place to just meet ‘others like themselves’ – or, possibly, a place to meet ‘Mr Right’ and fall in love.

Outsiders always find a way to subvert the system.

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<sup>1</sup> For details see D. Higgs, *Queer Sites: Gay Urban Histories since 1600*, Routledge, London, 1999, pp25 and 45.

<sup>2</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Vol.1, *Sexual Inversion in Men*, Random House, London, 1936, pp185-6.

<sup>3</sup> Cheaper rates are advertised by Wigzell in the *Yearbook of Australia*, 1883, p885 and also on a calendar/poster, "Chas. E. Wigzell, Prize Ornamental Hair Worker, Stage and Street Wig Maker", 1885, Woollahra Municipal Library.

<sup>4</sup> One recent compilation, *Unfit for publication*, by Peter de Waal, is a CD with records material on sodomy and buggery cases that were prosecuted in NSW from 1796 till 1930, mainly in the Supreme Court, but also increasingly in the Quarter Sessions. In addition to transcribing the court depositions, relevant judges' notes, reports in Sydney and country NSW newspapers, and the *NSW Police Gazette*, in Appendix A, Peter gives us an incredible amount of personal detail on another 2,500 offenders who were not tried in the Supreme Court. The work is based on some 250-odd cases, and runs to a million and a quarter words. The court depositions would be of particular interest to you, and all the work has been transcribed and indexed. Peter took about seven years to do it all. The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition is an expansion on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition.

<sup>5</sup> *The Scorpion*, 1895, p2.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular David Higgs (ed), *Queer Sites: Gay Urban Histories since 1600*, Routledge, 1999, for details of homosexual meeting places in a range of European and American cities in the late 19th century. For New York, see G. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, Harper Collins, New York, 1994. See also G. Simes, 'The Language of Homosexuality in Australia', in R. Aldrich and G. Wotherspoon (eds.), *Gay Perspectives*, Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> See Laud Humphreys, *Tea Room Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (Aldine Press, 1970). Humphreys, using well-defined sociological techniques, made what was the then-amazing discovery that a majority of the practitioners of fast, anonymous public toilet sex were in fact heterosexually-married men.

<sup>8</sup> *Four Corners*, 17 February 1997; 'Courting Disaster', at <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/s72790.htm> accessed 29 February 2012.

<sup>9</sup> See G. Wotherspoon, '*City of the Plain*': *history of a gay subculture*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1991, pp68-69 for details.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Payne, *The Beat* (Gay Men's Press, London, 1985), p15.

<sup>11</sup> But see for example *Melbourne Truth*, 12 June 1920, for what was obviously a case of a gang of youths in Sydney setting upon someone they thought was homosexual and extracting an 'appropriate' vengeance.

<sup>12</sup> See for example, *Melbourne Truth*, 26 January 1924, 4 October 1924, 18 October 1924, 14 April 1928, 14 September 1929. The doctor was H.M. Moran, whose *Viewless Winds: Being the Recollections and Digressions of an Australian Surgeon* (Peter Davies, 1939), has details on p232. See also Vince Kelly, *The Bogeymen* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1956), particularly chapter 7, for details on the use of pimps and undercover men.

<sup>13</sup> See *Sydney Sun*, 2 March 1937, p9; *Sydney Truth*, 7 March 1937, p23.

<sup>14</sup> *Sydney Truth*, 21 March 1937, p24.

<sup>15</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April, 1937, p12, 10 April 1937, p10; *Sydney Truth*, 4 April 1937, p19, 11 April 1937, pp20-21; *Sydney Sun*, 8 April 1937, p21, 9 April 1937, p9; *Daily Telegraph*, 10 April 1937, p4.

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<sup>16</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1937, p4; 10 April 1937, p4.

<sup>17</sup> Donald King, 'Transport Commissioner Railroaded', *Campaign*, No. 42 (April, 1979), p11.

<sup>18</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April 1937, p10.

<sup>19</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April 1937, p10

<sup>20</sup> *Melbourne Truth*, 20 February 1943, p8.

<sup>21</sup> *Melbourne Truth*, 13 March 1943, p17.

<sup>22</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 July 1953, p5.

<sup>23</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August 1957, p9.

<sup>24</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 February, 1958, p7.

<sup>25</sup> See G. Wotherspoon, '*City of the Plain*': *history of a gay subculture*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1991, p123 for details.

<sup>26</sup> R. Hauser, *The Homosexual Society* (The Bodley Head, London, 1962), p48

<sup>27</sup> Robert Connell, 'The Way it Was', *OWN*, No.75 (20 October, 1983), p19.

<sup>28</sup> See G. Wotherspoon, '*City of the Plain*': *history of a gay subculture*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1991, p67 for details.

<sup>29</sup> Kylie Tennant, *Tell Morning This*, Angus & Robinson, Sydney, 1967, pp160-161