



Picture by COLIN TOWNSEND

Words of warning....Gary Cox and Sergeant Gately check out a well-marked Moore Park lavatory block.

## The time of year the gay world dreads

By JOHN STAPLETON

Inside the public lavatories in Moore Park, a well-known meeting place for homosexuals, are the words "Slave wants Master."

Next to this: "Poofs are dead". And outside, in capital letters, "BEWARE BASHERS".

With the arrival of warm weather, the practice of "cruising" for sex partners goes outdoors — and the gay bashings start to increase again.

In the last three weeks a man has been attacked on Oxford Street and later admitted to hospital with a broken pelvis, while another had his arm broken in three places. In Newtown, a gay man was attacked by two skinheads and left with two black eyes, abrasions and an injured neck.

But before these, only 11 bashings had been reported to police since January — seven in Moore Park, two in Green Park, Darlington, and two in Rushcutters Bay

Park. Police and gay groups agree that many bashings at any time of year go unreported.

Street Watch, a project to monitor violence against lesbians and gay men, begins today. It is being conducted by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, in conjunction with the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service and Lesbian Line.

"Street Watch has been made necessary because it is clear that lesbians and gay men do not report assaults to the police," said Mr Gary Cox, co-convenor of the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby.

"There remains a level of distrust towards the police, even though improvements have been made in the last few years. There is a belief that police are unable to do anything about assaults."

Street Watch aims to collect the information via a questionnaire administered by staff of the Gay and Lesbian Counselling Service and Lesbian Line. The results will be collated

to identify trouble spots and areas requiring special attention.

This information will be passed to the Police Gay and Lesbian Liaison Unit, which was established in 1984 and began a period of distinct improvement in relations between the gay world and the force.

Senior Sergeant Brian Gately, recently appointed to the Liaison Unit, says everybody is entitled to protection by the police — "we want people to report bashings."

Bisexual men might fear that if they report a bashing to the police their families could find out about their sexuality.

However, said Sergeant Gately, such fears were unfounded unless a serious injury was involved. "Discretion is paramount in everyday police duties," he says.

And police are governed by community attitudes, he adds.

"There are 12,000 police, and there is obviously a range of attitudes, but amongst the upper echelons the attitude towards gays

has become much more tolerant."

What motivates the gay bashers?

Mr Cox said he knew of no studies about it, "but raping a lesbian is seen as an accolade in terms of sexual prowess."

"Many members of teenage gangs are insecure about their own sexuality, which is probably the major reason for assaults on gay men. You are seen as a real man if you go out and bash a poofier," said Mr Cox.

"Gays are one of the most hated sections of the community. While racist comments are no longer socially acceptable, derogatory comments about gays still get widespread approval."

He says every gay man and lesbian knows the fear of being bashed, the fear of walking home, alone or in groups, and the degradation of being taunted from cars or by passers-by.

Many also know what it is like to comfort their bloodstained and distraught friends after a bashing.