

Kamp Melbourne in the 1920s and '30s

Kamp Melbourne in the 1920s and '30s:

Trade, Queans and Inverts

By

Wayne Murdoch

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To Peter, with my deepest thanks.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ALGA	Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives
BMJ	British Medical Journal
MLSV	Medico-Legal Society of Victoria
PRO	Victorian Public Records Office
SLV	State Library of Victoria

INTRODUCTION

I've always been interested in social history, and Australian social history in particular. This was probably sparked from an early age by the story-telling abilities of my grandfather, who was born in 1892. A great raconteur, as are my parents and most members of my extended family, he lived until 1986. Most of his stories drew on family lore and humorous anecdotes which stretched back to his parents, who had been born in the 1850s, and his grandparents who were born in the 1820s. Listening to his tales after dinner of an evening, the past seemed so close and I was interested to know how people had lived in the past.

But growing up in regional Queensland in the 1970s and '80s and knowing from a fairly young age that my desires and romantic interests ran counter to those around me, I didn't think there was a history that included people like me. That changed when I moved to Melbourne in the late 1980s for postgraduate studies and became involved in the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives (ALGA). The Archives, founded in 1978, has collected the stories of gay men and women for nearly four decades now and, perhaps just as importantly, has brought together a community of gay and lesbian historians and has fostered the research and writing of Australia's homosexual histories.

I started researching and writing gay men's history in the early 1990s, and will always be thankful for the support of the Archives and the historians I met through it. It was with their encouragement that I eventually undertook studies for a PhD in Melbourne's homosexual history. This book is the result of that encouragement, having grown out of the research that I did towards the degree.

So much work has been done and published in the area of homosexual history in the past three decades, both in Australia and overseas. Starting with Garry Wotherspoon's *Being Different: Nine Gay Men Remember* in 1986 and *City of the Plain: History of a Gay Subculture* in 1991 (which was re-issued in a revised edition in 2015 as *Gay Sydney: A History*), Australian homosexual history has grown and developed steadily. Overseas historians such as Matt Houlbrook, George Chauncey and Chris

Brickell have tackled the geographically diverse historic scenes in London, New York and New Zealand respectively. The importance of telling our stories and of showing that gay people, both men and women, existed in the years before the onset of gay liberation, the development of a modern gay scene, and before decriminalisation, cannot ever be too highly stressed. Telling their stories validates their existence. And shows too that history does include people like me.

This book deals with the homosexual male world of Melbourne in the period between the two world wars. In the course of my research I did find traces of an equally strong lesbian world co-existing with Melbourne's male homosexual world at the time, and some work has been done towards reclaiming this history and the stories of women such as mechanic Alice Anderson, landscape gardener Edna Walling, and champion swimmer and gym owner Harriet Rowell. The world which these women inhabited and the telling of their stories is outside the scope of this book and belongs more properly in the hands of those who specialise in lesbian history. I look forward to reading a lesbian history of Melbourne as good as that of *Unnamed Desires: A History of Lesbian Sydney*, recently published by Rebecca Jennings.

In telling the story of homosexual Melbourne between the wars, a couple of things have to be remembered. Firstly, the period is now outside the range of living memory. No one who was active on the scene in the 1920s and '30s is still alive and very few records actually produced by homosexual men have survived; much of the material which a historian usually relies on, such as letters, diaries, photographs, and memoirs, just doesn't exist. As members of a criminalised group, homosexual men tended not to keep anything which might incriminate them or be used as legal evidence (in fact some of the few remaining love letters between two men that I've been able to find, are in the evidence files of the Crown Prosecutor at the PROV). Even an address book could be used to track down and prosecute your friends and acquaintances. Any letters, diaries, and photos that a man might have kept were often destroyed on his death by family members and friends who were keen to "straighten up" the record and preserve reputations.

This being the case, I've had to draw on other sources of information including memoirs which mention homosexual men, transcripts of a few recorded interviews (part of ALGA's collection of oral history interviews recorded in the 1980s and 1990s), newspaper reportage (and here a vote of thanks has to be made to the National Library of Australia for the

wonderful resource that is TROVE), and records of criminal prosecutions held at the Public Records Office of Victoria (PROV). Much of the material is scrappy and incomplete, much of it is written from the point of view of the dominant society and, in the case of newspapers and the records of the Victoria Police and the court system, is actively hostile. But there is information. Gaining any insight from it often requires a diligent reading between the lines of the records of the dominant society, a skill that I think homosexual people have long been versed in.

Being a homosexual man meant, for most of the twentieth century, being a criminal. Until 1981 homosexual acts between men were a criminal offence in Victoria; other states decriminalised over a period of twenty years, from South Australia in 1975 and the A.C.T. in 1976 to Tasmania in 1997. Before decriminalisation, being homosexual meant that you had to be careful of what you did and said. Being caught with another man could mean a fine or prison, but men also lived their lives under the possibility of being blackmailed, socially outcast, fired from jobs, cast out from families, socially and financially ruined. No wonder they weren't keen to keep records of their lives.

Another thing to keep in mind when talking about homosexuality in the early twentieth century is nomenclature – what should we call these men, and what did they call themselves? The word *homosexual* was coined in Germany in the late nineteenth century as a scientific term for what were otherwise called at the time *sodomites*, *nancies*, *molliques*, *queens* or *poofers*. The word *invert* appeared around the same time from the same scientific background. Both terms were used by the courts and doctors, with homosexual gradually replacing invert by the 1930s. Both words were the words of the dominant society and the legal and medical establishment, and not necessarily of the streets. In early twentieth century Australia, men who liked other men would have been more likely to have called themselves *camp* (often given as *kamp*). Members of the broader, heterosexual society were referred to as *square*. Kamp in this context had none of the over-the-top, flamboyant connotations which the word has in its modern usage, imported from the U.S. The old Australian use of the word kamp was replaced by another American import towards the end of the 1960s, when *gay* appeared in Australia. For this reason, I have tended to use *camp/kamp* in this book, with the occasional use of *homosexual* or *invert*, but not the anachronistic *gay*.

As this is a history which has been researched largely from the hostile records of the dominant society, it is important to try not to impose the

mores of today on the past. I am interested in the lives of those who would now be considered adult men, that is, over the age of 18 (or at least above the age of consent in Victoria, which is 16). However, prior to the early 1970s the Australian age of majority was 21 and the average school-leaving age was 14 or 15 and the heterosexual age of consent by 1920 was 16. In the eyes of the law and society at the time any type of homosex was illegal no matter the ages of the participants, and the criminal case files that I have used include cases of sex between men, sex between men and youths (aged 16 to 21) and sex between men and boys under the age of 16. I have referred to some cases where the participants were under what is now the age of consent, but this has been done mainly to illustrate the way in which laws were enforced, or to illustrate particular social situations at the time.

This book may seem to end on a note of cautious optimism regarding the situation for homosexual men in 1939. As will be seen, the interwar years in Melbourne were a period without concerted police persecution of homosexual men, when the general public were largely innocent of the existence of homosexuals in their midst, a time when many men were able to live quietly and therefore escape detection, and a period which ended with some slight glimmers of understanding on the part of some members of the medical and judicial professions might have led some to think that society could possibly come to some sort of understanding and accommodation of homosexuality, albeit as an illness or condition requiring treatment.

The Second World War changed this situation. Homosexual scandals in the Australian and U.S. armies serving in the Pacific led to a heightened awareness of homosexuality in the armed forces and a desire on the part of the authorities to find and remove homosexuals from the services. For the first time homosexuals came to be seen as potential risks to national security, being morally weak and susceptible to blackmail. This situation intensified after the War. After the social upheavals of the war years, post-War Australia sought a return to what was seen as the normal state of society, the way things had been supposedly ordered before the War. Official policies and popular attitudes sought to get women out of their wartime roles in industry and work and back into the homes, as mothers of future Australians. Society was to be centred round the nuclear family, with the husband and father as the breadwinner. Sexual roles were to be strictly enforced, and any deviation from these roles was to be discouraged and punished.

In this new order homosexuals were seen as a threat to the natural order and to the future of society. The 1950s were, as Graham Willett has called it, “the darkest decade” for homosexuals, and the 1960s were not much better. Official persecution of homosexual men and lesbians became a stated fact, police entrapment of homosexual men became common, the numbers of prosecutions for homosexual acts increased dramatically, and social belief that homosexuality as a problem facing the future of Australia was driven by increased reportage in the press, and pressure from the Church and State. This state of affairs began to be challenged by homosexuals in the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of the gay liberation movement, and by the late 1970s some Australian states had either introduced legal reform decriminalizing homosexual acts between men, or were starting to consider doing so. The Australian road to law reform was a long one, only ending with Tasmania’s decriminalization laws in 1997. By then, the homosexual world of the 1920s and ‘30s had almost completely faded from memory.

CHAPTER ONE

THE SUBCULTURE AND THE CITY

“Queer Exotic Cults Invade Melbourne – Strange Orgy in a City Basement ... Women dressed as men, and men as women, in a low transformed cellar.

“A blue haze of incense tinged smoke curled slowly from a brass brazier; soft hangings on the walls threw darkened shadows from the shaded light of a yellow candle; a china Buddha grinned complacently from a pedestal – ... It seemed strange that, within a stone’s throw, Melbourne, with its busy streets and clanging tramcars, hurried to its Saturday’s pleasures, while within that low grey building such strange scenes were being enacted. ... Cars parked discretely around the corner while their occupants alighted ... a knock at the basement door admitted them [to] a converted cellar on which careful hands had worked wonders. Its whitewashed walls were clothed in soft hangings and cushions and low divans replace the chair and couch of the modern home.

There were about twelve to fourteen persons in the room ... somewhere in the corner a gramophone started. It was wild chaotic music ... dance followed dance ... a strange figure appeared. It was a man clothed in yellow pyjamas ... on his head he wore an ash grey wig... [and] ... he commenced a dance that was graceful despite his apparent masculinity. ... a late couple arrived in the person of two youths, full-lipped and effeminate ...”¹

So reported the Melbourne edition of the scandal sheet *Truth* in August 1931, warning that “Queer cults with queerer customs are enjoying an increasing vogue in Melbourne.” This “strange orgy” in a basement which appeared to be something out of the *Arabian Nights*, veiled as it was in silks, scarves and incense, was taking place in the outwardly respectable upper-middle-class suburb of East Melbourne, a few hundred metres or so from Spring Street’s Parliament House, the heart of Victoria’s legislature.

The reporting of such a gathering in an exotic, purposely created, venue on a winter’s night in 1931, drew the attention of Melbourne’s newspaper

¹ “Queer Exotic Cults Invade Melbourne.” *Truth* (Melbourne), October 8, 1932, 8.

readers to a little-known subculture that had existed in Melbourne since the late nineteenth century, and which had been gathering strength and visibility for the past decade or more; that of the Kamp. In other words, the invert, the homosexual, the poofter.

Melbourne in the years between the World Wars had a reputation for worthy, plodding, pedestrian middle-class, low-church conformity. However, Australia's second largest city and national capital (until 1927) offered all of the opportunities and amenities of modern urban life. The city was the financial and cultural hub of the new nation and the pace of life moved faster in Melbourne than anywhere else in Australia, save Sydney. Electric trams and new motor cars ran through neon lit streets past Australia's tallest buildings and workers, shoppers and pleasure-seekers commuted to city offices, shops, theatres and cafés via an extensive suburban railway system. From the late nineteenth century, Melbourne was seen as "the metropolis of the Southern Hemisphere ... There is a bustle and life about Melbourne ... The Melbourne man is always on the look-out for business ... And as it is with business, so it is with pleasure."² With a population of three quarters of a million people in 1920, Melbourne offered the chance for residents to meet and mix with a wide range of people with an equally wide range of interests and beliefs, and the opportunity to encounter new ideas and theories as they developed or were imported from elsewhere. This was fertile ground for the development of a range of subcultures within the wider population, and for one group in particular, that of homosexual men.

It's a common assumption that a recognisably modern gay identity emerged only with the arrival of gay liberation in the late 1960s, and that the decades before were a homosexual Dark Age of unconstructed identities, isolation, legal and social persecution, and fear. The 1950s are acknowledged as a particularly bleak period for homosexuals, and the 1940s as a period of questioning and emerging identities and experiences. But the years before this, the years before the 1940s, what were they like? How did *kamp* men, perceive themselves, act out their identities and desires and experience life? Did those kamps living in Melbourne in the years before the Second World War identify themselves as belonging to a specific group, did they socialise in the group (or groups), and did they define themselves by the membership of the group? Could they be defined as a subculture, recognised by the wider society and by themselves?

² R.E.N. Twopenny, *Town Life in Australia* (London: Elliot Stock, 1883), p.3 Be consistent with fn format

Evidence shows that a significant number of the kamps of Melbourne in the interwar years did define themselves as a particular type of person and they did recognise the existence of a kamp subculture in the city; even if they didn't consider that they were part of it, they were aware of its existence.

The development of a subculture requires several ingredients: the recognition of a distinct "type" who can be characterised by a constructed identity, the willingness of those who perceive themselves to be of that type to adopt that identity, and the ability to recognise each other and gather together. Over twenty years ago, in his pioneering work on London's eighteenth century molly (homosexual) culture, *Mother Clap's Molly House*, Rictor Norton defined the five points necessary to form and recognise a subculture and classified them as:

- Social gatherings attended exclusively by members sharing the 'significant factor';
- A network of communication between members which is not generally recognised by the larger society;
- Specialised vocabulary or slang, used to reinforce a sense of membership in the group or to establish contact secretly;
- Self-identification with other members in the group, reinforced by common patterns of behaviour which distinguish the members from society at large; and
- A self-protective community of shared sympathy caused by being ostracised by society for being 'different'.³

More simply, a subculture can be defined as "a group that has an identifiable reason for being or a set of beliefs that set them outside the main or dominant culture, the hegemony."⁴

Such developments take place most readily in urban areas where a large population offers both a greater number of potential members of the subculture as well as the ability to operate with a degree of anonymity among the broader society. Cities have always acted as "a magnet for homosexuals, as for others made 'deviant' by the law, the church, medicine and social opprobrium ... Migrants [from rural areas] could break out of the strictures imposed elsewhere, locating new 'sub-cultures'

³ Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House* (London: GMP, 1992), 9-10.

⁴ Shaun Cole, *Don We Now Our Gay Apparel: Gay Men's Dress in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

to satisfy reprobate desires. Soldiers, workers, tourists, students swelled city populations, joined by women domestic servants, factory workers, clerks and prostitutes. Libido, hope for friendship and romance, and a need for money, drove them to search out casual, situational or long-term partners or patrons.”⁵ Cities also provide venues and locations where men who have sex with men (and women who have sex with women) can meet: pubs and clubs, cafés and cabarets. “In times of clandestine homosexuality, public baths and toilets, parks and back streets were especially hospitable to trysts.”⁶

In addition, George Chauncey, discussing New York City in the early twentieth-century, agrees that the complex social and spatial organisation of urban areas allowed homosexual men to create multiple public identities which allowed them to participate in the homosexual subculture without losing the privileges of the straight world; “assuming one identity at work, another in leisure; one identity before biological kin, another with gay friends.”⁷ Urban life made possible a number of separate, individual social worlds. The separation of these different spheres allowed men to adopt different identities in each, “without having to reveal the full range of their identities in any one of them.”⁸

Nineteenth and early twentieth-century society was a sex-segregated society; “Victorian morality separated the sexes, leading to homosociality: in schools, the army, the clergy and, in the colonies the Australian convict system and goldmining, from where the term ‘mate’ derives.”⁹ In the cities an urban bachelor subculture developed, which drew together men from a variety of different backgrounds and fields, including “the cultured elite, sportsmen, theatricals, journalists, and petty opportunists [who] retreated from family life, at least for a time, into the company of other men, with whom they enjoyed gambling, smoking, drinking, prize-fighting, blood sports, variety theatre, and non-marital sex.”¹⁰ The existence of a distinct

⁵ Aldrich, Robert. "Homosexuality and the city: An historical overview." *Urban Studies* 41, no. 9 (2004): 1719-1737.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 133-134.

⁸ Chauncey *Gay New York*, 133-134.

⁹ Lucy Sussex, *Blockbuster: Fergus Hume and the Mystery of the Hansom Cab*, (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2015), 212

¹⁰ Jill Julius Matthews, “Blue Movies in Australia: A Preliminary History” *Journal of the National Film and Sound Archive, Australia* 2, no.3, (2007): 5.

male world, centred on venues such as inner-city billiard halls, hotels, cheap cafés and lodging houses, gave ample opportunities for a homosexual subculture to develop within it.

Conditions in nineteenth-century Melbourne were ideal for the development of a bachelor subculture. As the entry and exit port for the colony of Victoria, Melbourne had attracted thousands of young, unattached men on their way to work in the pastoral industry of the hinterland in the 1840s or to the goldfields of the 1850s. Those who were unsuccessful at these pursuits often drifted back to the city to find work; those who were successful visited for entertainment and socialising. The population of Melbourne was overwhelmingly masculine, with men often outnumbering women. By the late nineteenth-century a clearly observable homosocial male urban subculture had developed and a certain degree of homosexual visibility was evidenced by complaints to the police regarding homosexual meeting places and/or beats. By the early 1920s, the tabloid press was openly reporting police arrests of men for acts of indecency in the city's parks, streets and toilets and publishing editorials decrying the existence of "male flappers" and "painted queans". Such reportage clearly identified in the public mind the homosexual "type" with defined characteristics, mannerisms, haunts and activities and led to the adoption in the popular imagination of the effeminate and flamboyant "quean" as the most obvious and common expression of homosexuality.

The *Queans* accepted the equation of homosexuality with effeminacy and adopted feminine mannerisms and characteristics to signal their homosexuality to others and to attract potential sexual partners. They adopted the characteristics of the opposite sex and were seen by society at large as pseudo-females. There were, however, other identities at large in the Melbourne homosexual subculture during the Great War and interwar periods. *Trade* consisted mainly of men who had sex with other men for money, gifts or opportunistically in situations or at times when female partners were unavailable or unwilling. They moved from encounters with men to encounters with women, with no perception of themselves as anything other than ordinary men. Many were married, or were looking to marry at some future stage and would have had recourse to sex with other, usually more effeminate, men as the need arose. Before the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the social expectations which held that respectable women had little interest in sex and were not sexually available outside of marriage meant that the population of Trade was larger than might exist in later times.

A third group, *Inverts*, could perhaps be located between the queans and trade. Inverts were those men who, based on their understanding of the theories of sexuality and sexology emerging from Europe and Britain in the late nineteenth-century, identified themselves as a third sex between true men and true women. Social abhorrence of homosexuality meant that kamp men had to maintain a high level of discretion and vigilance in their daily and sexual lives, while at the same time, a public largely uninformed about the topic and holding stereotypical views of what a homosexual looked like and how they behaved, allowed many men to escape suspicion or detection and allowed a certain degree of freedom to live their lives without unduly negative outcomes.

The stereotypical image of the quean linked homosexuality with effeminacy at a time when the nation and the Empire were beset with fears regarding the future of the British (white) race and the dangers of racial degeneration due to “soft” urban living and a decline in the white birth rate. Effeminacy and its manifestations, including homosexuality, were seen as dangers to the continued health and vigour of the nation and the Empire. To this end, any information which might be seen as encouraging or spreading this contagion was strictly controlled; sources of information such as books and films, particularly from overseas, were censored and the domestic production of works which discussed or explored issues of homosexuality, or sexuality in general, were rigorously suppressed.

Some information did find its way into the hands of the public and by the end of the interwar period there was a growing number of Australian sexological works being published and finding a local readership. For the majority of the population, however, the source of information which was most easily available and which had the most influence in shaping attitudes to social issues was the press. The newspapers, both broadsheet and tabloid, reported on scandals and criminal cases involving homosexual acts and also published opinion pieces and items relating to scientific and social research. Such stories were often reported in a sensationalistic manner and focussed on the tragic and shocking aspects of the story, thereby further associating homosexuality in the public mind as being something out of the ordinary and unrelated to everyday life. The reminiscences and published memoirs of many people who lived through the interwar period, however, do point to a degree of acceptance of homosexuality being exhibited at the time; or rather to a degree of acceptance of individuals that the memoirists knew.

The Law sought to curb, and punish, homosexual acts. Colonial Victoria's legislation dealing with sexual offences, including homosexuality, took its lead from England and applied English legislation largely without change; the only difference to the manner in which the legislation was enacted being in the timing of various amendments to it; for example, the abolition of the death penalty for sodomy, which took place in Britain in 1861 and 1864 in Victoria. Until 1919, the legislation governing homosexual acts recognised three offences; sodomy, attempted sodomy and indecent assault on a male person. In 1919, the new offence of gross indecency with a male person was introduced in Victoria, 34 years after it had been introduced in Britain as the infamous Labouchère amendment. This new offence made any sexual contact between men punishable by a maximum sentence of two years' imprisonment. Cases involving these four offences were tried in the Supreme Court of Victoria and the Court of General Sessions, while a number of other minor offences which were also used to police male (homo)sexual behaviour, including the offences of public nuisance, disorderly conduct and indecent exposure, were tried in minor courts, such as magistrates' courts and courts of petty sessions. Court records for the higher courts have been preserved and are readily available, whereas the records for minor courts are not so readily available, many having been destroyed.¹¹

Based on the records of the higher courts, the number of actual prosecutions for homosexual offences during the interwar period was small, averaging about 18 per year. The majority of these were for offences against boys and youths under the age of 16, acts which obviously remain illegal today, while those prosecutions involving consenting adult men were mostly the result of sexual contact which had taken place in public places, such as parks or public conveniences, thereby laying the participants more readily open to being discovered. Although the number of prosecutions which made it to the higher courts was small, the rate of convictions was high, running at about 75% annually, again due largely to the high proportion of cases involving offences against youths and boys. At the same time, new medical and scientific theories regarding the causes (and possible cures) of homosexuality influenced a growing belief among the judiciary that prison was not the most appropriate avenue of dealing with "sexual perverts"

¹¹ In his Foreword to Susan Priestley's centenary history of Echuca in 1965, R.M Crawford, University of Melbourne professor of history, confirmed that many minor court records had been pulped "by official order" during wastepaper drives during the Second World War. Susan Priestley, *Echuca: A Centenary History*, (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1965), vi.

who were coming to be seen as either psychologically ill or hormonally unbalanced; treatment rather than punishment was required. The difficulty facing the judiciary at the time was a lack of medical facilities to deal with sexual offenders.

Investigation of trial records for the period point to several issues.¹² Firstly, the number of cases involving youths, consenting or not, indicate a thriving youth culture based around the streets and public places and the existence of a culture of gift giving in return for sexual favours, if not actual prostitution. The large number of prosecutions involving sexual acts in public places compared to those in private also illustrates that those men who had the luxury of privacy for their sexual lives were much less likely to be prosecuted.

The interwar period saw the increasing medicalisation of many aspects of human life and behaviour. New discoveries in science and medicine, including new drugs, surgical procedures, cures and vaccines, meant that the public were more likely to trust scientists and doctors and believe that science and medicine held the keys to solving many of the world's problems. Homosexuality had emerged as a matter for scientific study in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth-century and by the first decade of the new century the theories of the European sexologists were available and gaining ground in Australia and the homosexual "type" was reported as a scientific fact by the Australian popular press. The hunt was on for a cause/cure for "sexual inversion".

In the 1920s the cause was thought to be hormonal and glandular in nature and surgical intervention was seen as offering a possible solution. The success with which the new fields of psychiatry and psychology had in dealing with the mental traumas left by the Great War was recognised in Melbourne as early as 1919 and as the 1920s turned into the 1930s, the idea that sex inversion was a psychological issue gained currency and overtook glandular theories. Popular interest in psychology gave rise to a growing literature of sexual theory in the 1930s, both in Australia and overseas. This in turn led to a more general acceptance of theories of sexuality which was reflected in the increasing acceptance of psychologists as experts in matters of sex, and an increasing use of psychologists and psychiatrists as expert witnesses in the court system. Medical practitioners

¹² Criminal Trial Briefs are held by the Victorian Public Records Office in North Melbourne. PROV, VA 667 Office of the Victorian Government Solicitor, VPRS 30/P0 Criminal Trial Briefs,

had been used as expert witnesses in sex cases since the nineteenth-century when they were called upon to describe the physical condition of witnesses and the accused; by the 1930s they were giving expert testimony on the mental state of the accused and were influencing the judiciary. As mentioned above, judges began to believe that gaol was not a proper place to treat mentally ill offenders (if that's what they were) and consideration was being given to more appropriate ways of treating such offenders. Key to this discussion were the medico-legal societies to be found in most states, including Victoria. These associations of doctors and lawyers were interested in the medical and mental causes of offending, and how such offenders might best be dealt with.

Such was the influence of psychiatry and psychology that by the late 1930s and early 1940s there were even glimmers of an acceptance of homosexuality as an aspect of the human condition, as evidenced by light sentences for those who were merely "behaving in a manner completely natural to them."¹³ In addition, psychology increasingly influenced the way in which homosexuals saw themselves and the way in which they presented themselves and explained their actions to the courts.

Against this social, legal and medical background kamp men lived daily lives. Their lived experience included the physical presence of the city, as reflected in the various places they frequented, aspects of the modern city which enabled the subculture to develop and flourish, the signifiers and indicators that allowed homosexual men to identify themselves as part of the subculture to others (and which also acted as ways in which the wider society might recognise them), and the various social groups and institutions which characterised the subculture and offered support and a sense of belonging to those who participated in them.

The physical presence of the city provided places for men to meet one another, as friends, associates and potential sexual partners. As an illegal or proscribed group, homosexuals had long been inventive in using and co-opting public spaces for their needs; the manner in which they met had to be clandestine and discreet, although sometimes the safest way of doing this is by doing so in plain sight. Places where men could congregate and loiter without attracting attention were particularly useful, and included streets, parks and gardens, beaches, baths and public toilets, hotels and cafés. Different venues served different purposes; some, such as bars,

¹³ "Judge Says Law Should Catch Up With Science-Homily on Homosexuality." *Truth* (Melbourne), February 14, 1942, 5.

cafés and coffee shops, were for meeting friends and making contacts socially, while others, including secluded parts of parks and gardens, changing rooms at public baths and toilets offered opportunities not just to meet new partners but for sex in a semi-public space. These spaces, known as *beats*, were not only a way for kamp men to make contact with each other; they were often the way in which men initially entered the kamp world.

Whatever the setting, many of Melbourne's beats had a long history, some dating from the middle of the nineteenth-century, and were well established, to the point of being recognised as such by some members of the public and the police by 1900. Information gathered from criminal trial records and other sources of information makes it possible to establish not merely where the beats were, and by doing so, establish a geography of kamp Melbourne, but also to learn what went on at different beats and who used them.

A major metropolitan area such as Melbourne offered many opportunities for kamp men to meet each other and carve out lives of relative anonymity. The ability to live discreetly was enabled and enhanced by modern developments in urban living, including the rise of apartment life, and technologies such as motor cars, public transport, and the telephone. Each of these developments allowed those kamp men who could afford them to live more independently, to travel more widely, and to communicate with others more easily and with increased privacy. Apartments and flats were an aspect of modern life that arose in Melbourne on the eve of the Great War, and the 1920s and '30s were the initial heyday of flat building in Melbourne's inner suburbs. Prior to the advent of the private flat, accommodation for single people outside of the family home had been supplied by boarding houses and lodging houses, which offered little privacy. Although some boarding houses attracted particular clienteles and may have offered a non-judgemental, or even supportive, environment, many didn't. Flats, on the other hand, offered privacy and anonymity and enabled kamp men to come and go as they pleased and to entertain whoever they liked, without interference from boarding house landladies and other lodgers. So successful were flats at encouraging this lifestyle, that they soon became synonymous with bohemian and loose living; the very word 'flat' was often enough in a tabloid newspaper article to act as a shorthand term for all sorts of depravity, as will be seen.

Other forms of technology which were introduced, or became more widespread in the interwar period also enhanced the kamp subculture. Motor cars and motor bikes allowed those who could afford them to travel rapidly around the city and beyond in search of new adventures; no longer was one confined to one's own neighbourhood where everyone knew you and your business. Those with motors could explore new beats in distant suburbs, where they could meet new men. The motor car provided mobile privacy with "parking" at local beaches and bushland picnic spots being noted as a developing problem during the period. Those with motors could also use them as an incentive to meet or lure to other men (or more often youths) who saw the car as a status symbol and an enviable luxury item; many a youth was initially attracted by the promise of a drive in the country. For those without access to a motor, Melbourne's extensive public transport system of trains, trams and buses, offered other opportunities. The tram and train system were systematically electrified and modernised during the interwar period and new lines were opened up, bringing residents of new suburban estates into easy reach of the central city. As well as the possibility of striking up conversation with a sympathetic fellow traveller while on the tram or train, the giant transport hubs, such as Flinders Street Railway Station brought together people from all over the metropolis and beats were established at many of them. Other technologies such as the telephone enabled easier and more private communication between members of the kamp fraternity. Although the phone offered immediate communication with potentially more privacy than the post, the postal service also played a part in communicating thoughts, desires, plans and information between lovers and friends, as will be seen from some cases where these communications were intercepted.

Also important to the sense of belonging to a subculture, and being able to recognise other members were those signifiers and identifiers which allowed an expression of subcultural life. Norton's definition of a subculture places importance on a network of communication, specialised vocabulary and slang, and self-identification with other members of the group reinforced by common patterns of behaviour. Each of these aspects will be discussed, starting with the use of language and slang to classify and identify the kamp group, and to communicate between its members. The terms that the wider society and kamps used to refer to themselves as individuals and as members of a group both call the group into existence and seek to describe it and give it substance. Names and words can be used by the wider society to identify and classify what a kamp or a quean is; the same names and words can be used by those in the subculture to claim identity with and membership of the group. In the same way,

mannerisms, such as overtly feminine walks, hand gestures, and facial expressions can be used by non-group (square) individuals to define what constitutes a member of the kamp subculture, but at the same time be used by members of the subculture to pronounce themselves to other members of the group and to claim membership of the group. Clothing, particularly flamboyant or outré clothing, worn at a time when most men dressed very conservatively, served the same purpose; only those wishing to be identified as a member of the subculture might wear a particular item or colour of clothing. Those wishing to claim membership of the wider society or to deflect suspicion from themselves that they might be a member of the subcultural group, would avoid those particular items or colours. The same would be true of the use of elaborate hair-styles and the use of make-up; only overt queans would wear “long” hair (at a time when most men had extremely short haircuts) or use any form of make-up or cosmetics, or show even a passing interest in the subject. For those who did embrace the use of such things as elaborate hairstyles and cosmetics, this interest would reach its absolute heights in the use of drag; the wearing of women’s clothes to act out roles, attract square men, and identify as a member of the sub-subcultural group, queans. All such identifiers and signifiers eventually became connected in the public mind with kamps and became stereotypes of how a kamp was meant to sound, act and look. The general belief in such stereotypical behaviours and modes did have a benefit that it allowed many kamp men who didn’t fit the stereotype to avoid detection and carry on their lives without attracting undue attention.

Perhaps the most important aspects of subcultural expression and belonging are social groups, friendship networks, and institutions. Although these groups are perhaps the most important aspects of lived experience within the subculture, and the forum in which most individuals will find the most important and validating expression of their group and individual identities, because they are private and ephemeral in nature, they are the aspect which has left fewest traces. Among the subcultural groups and gatherings discussed will be the role of the theatre in the lives of kamp men, both as performers and audience members and as a venue for meeting other members of the subculture. The theatre functioned as one of a number of “friendly careers”, others of which included the church, and such stereotypical kamp professions as window dressers and shop assistants, although an examination of the men who were prosecuted for homosexual offences during the 1920s and ‘30s proves that there was no one profession that was represented in court more than any other, apart from the very large group of “labourers” to which so many men belonged

at the time. Other important aspects of kamp life, particularly in the years before the advent of a commercial kamp or gay scene, included private parties thrown by friendship groups, and the ultimate expression of the kamp party, the Arts Balls. These large fancy-dress parties were ostensibly the preserve of the advertising industry and a fixture of the Melbourne social calendar, but in much the same way as the kamps appropriated public space for private subcultural purposes, the annual Arts Balls became a forum for the kamps of Melbourne to play and compete in plain view once a year.

The signs of homosexual culture which first emerged in Melbourne around the turn of the twentieth century, truly blossomed in the 1920s and '30s. By the beginning of the Second World War the kamp scene was well enough established to have regular large scale parties, balls, and at least one cabaret. It was as fully-formed and robust as those in other major cities around the world; albeit on a smaller scale.