Coding Desire: The Emergence of a Homosexual Subculture in Queensland, 1890–1914

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Dropsy is a puff. It is not the first time he has done it. I can bring a witness who will swear that he got ten bob from a black fellow that stuffed him. I knew what he wanted when he went up the stairs so I followed him ... there are plenty of others in Brisbane who do it besides us mob, so I am not the first.

— *Conversation between Albert McNamara and
Police Constable Lipp, Brisbane, 1905¹*

Introduction

The conversation between Albert McNamara and Police Constable Lipp raises questions about when we might begin to discern a distinct homosexual subculture in Queensland. While some scholars have traced homosexuality back to Australia's convict origins,² little research has been conducted into the nature of homosexuality between the end of the convict period and the 1920s.³ Major studies of homosexuality have focused on the unmistakable rise of an urban homosexual identity after World War I when both oral and written sources are more easily obtainable, or have mapped the Gay Liberation Movement in its various forms from the late 1960s to the 1980s.⁴ Men in rural and regional areas are rarely considered in these analyses of urban subcultures. Evidence from the Queensland criminal justice system calls for a revision of these historians' assumptions and omissions regarding Australian sexual identity. The example of *fin de siècle* Queensland — largely a man's world, overpopulated by men and boys, characterised by hard physical work, a strong drinking culture and limited access to women — is a good case study. It allows historians to access intersections between the dominant urban subculture and parallel rural and regional developments. This paper offers a corrective to a largely neglected period in Australia's history of homosexual identity construction and

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demonstrates that the germination of Queensland's homosexual subculture began in the late nineteenth century, assisted in part by the fluidity between urban and rural spheres. Part of the evidence for this conclusion is the behavioural codes used across these spheres by men looking to attract like-minded others.

Approximately 116 definitive charges⁵ of homosexuality came before the Queensland courts during the period under review. This paper draws on the 76 criminal depositions that remain for these charges, along with corresponding newspaper reports, information contained in prison admission books, judges' notebooks and police personnel files. While depositional evidence may provide invaluable data on homosexuality, the nature of the research process also poses various methodological and theoretical problems for historians. Paula Byrne's study on criminal law in colonial New South Wales in the early nineteenth century reminds us of the difficulties in interpreting and extrapolating evidence from archival sources, emphasising that when speaking in court people are likely to fabricate information and to overstate or to underplay their roles.⁶ It is important, therefore, to acknowledge the speculative nature of this argument. While all histories are provisional to some degree, some — such as homosexual histories, working from limited sources — are more speculative than others. Just as the actors in this paper must decode perceived signs that each offers the other in the pursuit of sex, so must the historian speculate on the meanings of these signs and the associated practices. There is a self-reflexive twist underpinning this paper as we consider, conceptually and methodologically, the different layers of speculation in the research.

Albert McNamara's claim that 'Dropsy is a puff' — a nineteenth century British term for an effeminate homosexual male, closely linked to the word 'poof' and used in London from about the 1830s onwards — is one marker which might indicate the existence of a common identity in Queensland at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷ However, scholars undertaking research in Britain and North America stress that facets such as specialised argot and a variety of social and sexual interactions between like-minded men are all contingent upon the appropriation of public and commercial space. The beginnings of London's subculture in the eighteenth century, and the making of the modern gay world in New York from the 1890s onwards, were both concentrated in and around parks and fields, public toilets, certain public houses, public bathing places, saloons and restaurants where homosexual men could meet.⁸ In London, there were certain public houses where men met for homosexual rendezvous amid drink, song and dance. These men sometimes imitated heterosexual familial behaviour, even acting out scenes of childbirth. They had sexual relations at these places, mostly for love and sometimes for money.⁹ There is no evidence to suggest that these 'Molly' houses, as they were known, or any equivalent, were evident in Australia until well into the twentieth century. It is clear that the kind of subculture that existed in the major gay capitals of the world did not translate into the late colonial and early federation period in Australia. Robert Aldrich argues that turn-of-the-century colonial societies such as Australia 'remained too preoccupied with taming the continent to provide a hospitable environment for a dandified coterie of aesthetes'.¹⁰ The limited intellectual

infrastructure and the small scale of bohemian lifestyles within Australia did not facilitate the romanticisation of homosexuality in the classical periods as it had for Oxbridge scholars in England. Australian men, as Russell Ward suggests in his famous book about the making of the bush legend, were 'sceptical about ... the value of intellectual and cultural pursuits generally'.¹¹ It is not my purpose to argue that a fully formed and sophisticated subculture was evident in Queensland during these years, but rather that patterns of homosexual behavioural codes and male uses of public space indicate that the major threads of a nascent subculture were slowly being knitted together. Such an analysis is dependent on the interplay between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

It is crucial for historians attempting to map the emergence of a homosexual subculture in Queensland to understand homosexual codes within a broader context of the production of urban space. The dominant use of public space in Queensland at the turn of the century was both male and heterosexual, based on the gendered spatial division of labour, and stratified according to class and ethnicity. Physical, emotional and material exchanges within the spaces of homes and workplaces, as well as in public areas set aside for urban infrastructure and leisure, presumed privilege and reproduced a heteronormative and patriarchal order.¹² For most young men at the turn of the century, access to private space was a luxury and single men lived either with their family or in cheap, shared accommodation. Living conditions gave little privacy for sexually active men, and privacy was especially luxurious for homosexually inclined men. Single, wage-earning, working-class men pursued their relaxation in public places such as pubs, boarding houses and within city streets, rather than in the private sphere of the home.¹³

The court records used for this study include disproportionately large numbers of men with limited education and lower social status. The occupations of most defendants placed them clearly in the working class — labourer, miner, storekeeper, clerk, shepherd, station-hand, sailor, gardener, builder and carpenter — an indication that the subculture was anchored in the lower classes and that the upper classes possessed sufficient private space to indulge outside the public eye. Public space is closely associated with the production and consumption of commodities and with white heterosexually identified men, yet it is always subject to dominant and subversive uses. Reading space correctly depends on the lens being used to view the terrain.¹⁴ Public spaces are socially constructed, contested and contingent — they illuminate a variety of social forces seeking to define and regulate the production of meaning.¹⁵ According to William Leap, these contingent and contested meanings emerge 'when forms of human activity impose meanings on a given location, and transform neutral terrain into landscape, that is, "a particular way of seeing" relevant to that particular locale'.¹⁶ Men disposed to male-to-male sexual contact reapply meaning to spaces which have other, more dominant and traditional, meanings. This reapplication of meaning occurs when men who engage in certain 'rules of play' subliminally code their behavior, posture and dress in order to display their desire and make homosexual contact.¹⁷ This public display of behaviour enacted in public areas such as parks, toilets and beaches is neither masculine nor feminine, but markedly and specifically homosexual.¹⁸

The events surrounding the case mentioned at the outset of this article occurred in an abandoned oyster saloon in Queen Street, Brisbane. Albert McNamara makes it clear during his conversation to the police constable that he was familiar with a particular 'way of seeing' within this space, claiming: 'I knew what he [Dropsy] wanted when he went up the stairs so I followed him.' However, what exactly did this particular way of seeing entail? How did young McNamara know what Dropsy was after? What cues were used to indicate sexual availability? What meaning, if any, was encoded within the physical space itself? The analysis that follows examines how certain men in urban, regional and rural Queensland used a particular way of reading space to locate other homosexually inclined men and how these processes helped form an embryonic subculture based on public space.

Urban Space and Brisbane's Emerging Homosexual Subculture

Garry Wotherspoon, writing on male homosexuality in Sydney at a time when homosexual men in London were involved in a sophisticated underworld, notes that one of the most difficult problems for Australian historians has been how to define a gay subculture in the antipodes:

If it is seen as only small groups of people, who knew about each other's sexual preferences, who could meet occasionally at a sympathetic hotel (probably near the waterfront), or in the bush away from prying eyes, or in their own rooms, then the makings of a subculture existed in early Sydney. If it is seen in terms ... of large groups of people engaging in a range of activities with well-known beats and meeting places, then one probably did not exist in Sydney in the early years.¹⁹

Given the lax morals that dogged colonial authorities in Sydney in the early nineteenth century, Wotherspoon speculates that an amorphous homosexual subculture may have emerged in Sydney from about the 1830s, while suggesting that small, fragmented homosexual subcultures were also emerging in Australia's other major cities during the nineteenth century.²⁰ The evidence given to the Molesworth Committee in the late 1830s implies that some form of primitive subculture existed among convict transportees in Sydney. Also in the 1830s, complaints were made that a Sydney hotel, the Crown and Anchor in George Street, was a meeting place of 'sodomites and mariners': men who behaved with 'lasciviousness and riotousness'.²¹ While Sydney is now commonly touted as the gay capital of the Southern Hemisphere, Robert French suggests that the subculture would not have reached maturity until the 1890s.²² Bruce Baskerville's study of homosexuality in Western Australia hints that an urban middle-class subculture may have existed in the Perth-Fremantle area by the turn of the century, through analysis of court records between 1870 and 1905.²³ Lamentably, few articles have been written on the early homosexual subculture of Melbourne, Australia's largest city at the time.²⁴

Clive Moore has traced homosexual behaviour in Queensland from the 1860s. From the last decade of the nineteenth century, clear patterns of sexual activity based on the subversive use of public space were evident to the astute observer in Queensland.²⁵ Let us take an incident from 1907, when 42-year-old James Stuart, described by the *Truth* as a piano-playing, 'Western man of the "coffee room" class', made unreciprocated sexual advances towards 26-year-old itinerant worker Joseph Cavanagh in a Brisbane boarding house (see Figure 1).²⁶ In the early 1900s, some coffee houses in Brisbane had risqué reputations and were meeting places for homosexual trysts and, like the example outlined at the beginning of this paper, this case allows us to clearly read the signs and symbols used by homosexual men to attract like-minded others.²⁷ Arriving at the inner city Woodlands boarding house on a Saturday morning in March, Stuart had repeatedly struck up conversations with young Cavanagh during the day. Later that same night at about 8.30 p.m., Cavanagh went to Stuart's room after being 'told something' by his mate who was also staying at the boarding house. The two entered into a conversation together and Stuart asked to be woken the next morning at 7.00 a.m. Then Stuart confessed to Cavanagh that:

There is a dreadful rumour going about me and the Mrs of the house told me I would have to leave through it ... there were two men at Newstead boarding house and I was keeping them there and they said I was using them. It is all lies. The only thing I ever done when I was out west, there was no women, I got a boy to rub me off.²⁸

Stuart admitted that, regardless of the rumours, 'I always have a boy undress me'.²⁹

Figure 1: James Stuart
Truth, 31 March 1907

During their discussion, Stuart asked Cavanagh to undo his collar stud, which the younger man obligingly did before he returned to his room, got under the quilt with his face to the wall and fell asleep. Soon after he 'awoke to find someone [James Stuart] had hold of me by the penis ... he was moving up and down, trying to insert his penis into my rectum. He had an erection at the time.'³⁰ Upon being woken, Cavanagh exclaimed: 'What the hell are you doing? ... You are a dirty low cow to do a thing like that, you call yourself a man?' Stuart replied: 'What's up? What's up?'³¹ Cavanagh proceeded to beat Stuart until the proprietor of the house, Edna Boyce, came to the door and said: 'That will do. I have sent for the police.'³²

The choreographed nature of the case's verbal cues suggests that Stuart had given Cavanagh a very clear indication of his intention. Stuart established a time frame by announcing that he would have to leave tomorrow as the result of a 'dreadful rumour', hinting at both his sexual orientation and the time constraint of any potential interlude. He then announced to a virtual stranger that he was an accused homosexual with a penchant for younger men, before finally admitting that he was always undressed by young boys. It was at this point that Stuart asked Cavanagh to remove his collar stud. While the intentions of the younger man are harder to deduce, Cavanagh's violent outburst suggests that Stuart mistook Cavanagh's availability (although without exact details it is impossible to know). By reading the codes in this case, we can be quite certain that James Stuart was a 'coffee house queen', soliciting young men in Brisbane's boarding houses and part of a small but discernable gay subculture in Brisbane. The jury in Stuart's Supreme Court trial did not find the evidence to convict on this occasion, but perhaps his rather unpleasant beating by Cavanagh ensured that he refined his 'way of seeing' in order to secure more fulfilling future interludes.

Apart from boarding houses, beats in and around public transport systems, parks, streets, public toilets and baths were also areas where sex and social contact between like-minded men was readily available to those men attuned to 'particular ways of seeing'. The homosexual sense of the word 'beat' is uniquely Australian, and while a beat designates any place where men might meet to arrange sexual activity, the term traditionally refers to urbanised outdoor space where meetings, pickups and physical sexual activity take place. As Graham Carbery explains: 'Virtually anywhere could be a beat; however, they are usually found in places like parks, public lavatories, railway stations, streets, beaches, libraries, universities or hotels.'³³ Given the subversive use of public space for illegal male-to-male sexual purposes at the turn of the century, and the continued proscription of indecent sexual behaviour in public space, the legitimacy of any meeting place has always been an important feature of any beat. As Wotherspoon contends: 'They had to be places where one could legitimately strike up a conversation with another person — to ask for a light, for example, or ask the time.'³⁴ Queensland beat activity has historically been located in parks, public toilets and secluded but public urban areas around transport systems.³⁵ Brisbane's Botanical Gardens, Wickham and Albert Parks, along with parks in other smaller regional areas such as the Strand

in Townsville or Bundaberg's Botanic Gardens, were used by men searching for clandestine homosexual trysts.

Moore has described in detail an early incident which occurred at Townsville's Strand in 1871 and argues that Queensland beats may have existed in a rudimentary form as early as the 1860s.³⁶ Queensland records from 1890 to 1914 contain at least two other examples where public toilets have been used for sexual purposes. One of these incidents occurred at the urinals behind the Toowoomba Town Hall in 1910, while charges levelled against an 18-year-old man living on Brisbane's northside suggest that toilets at Nudgee and Eagle Junction railway stations were also being used for sexual practices in 1911.³⁷ Another case from Brisbane in 1892 suggests that men were using a public toilet behind a hardware store in Queen Street as a beat — linking commercial space, semi-public space, company employees and customers. Between two and three o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon in late January, Oscar Medhurst, a packer with Alfred Shaw & Co, was in the water closets behind the store when he heard scuffling in the next toilet stall. Peering over the partition, he observed two men, John Anderson, another young employee of the store, and Job Allen, a middle-aged customer of the store, engaging in sexual practices. Medhurst quickly resumed his seat and then exited the stalls with the intention of alerting the managers to what had just occurred. Back at the store later that afternoon, Medhurst confronted Anderson over the incident, asking: 'What game is this you and Allen were at in the water closet together[?]'.³⁸ Anderson smartly replied: 'Which end?' to which Medhurst responded: 'If it was known you would get ten years.'³⁹ In evidence given to the Brisbane Supreme Court, Medhurst explained that: 'The phrase "which end" is a slang phrase which I have heard used among the boys in the shop ... [w]hen one boy speaks to another he is frequently answered [sic] which end?'⁴⁰ As Medhurst was leaving the stalls earlier that afternoon he passed Arthur Ridley, a cabinetmaker with the company, who was also on his way to the closets. Ridley, called to testify in the case against Anderson and Allen, recalled to the court that:

[The] Accused Allen passed me. He came from the direction of the far closet. He came and put his hand to my face and said 'You should have been here long ago' or words to that effect. He then put his hands down and attempted to take hold of my privates.⁴¹

The case illustrates how homosexually inclined men coded their desires through the use of certain timeframes, words and actions, and we can draw several parallels between this case and the contemporary use of beats for male-to-male sex. Modern research into the use of beats indicates that the time of day influences the temporal structure of cruising for men.⁴² Public toilets are semi-private spaces and always offer a certain level of seclusion; they are busiest around lunchtime and just after work when there is a high turnover of clientele, and the possibility of meeting like-minded others is high. It is impossible to know whether Andersen and Allen initiated contact in the hardware store and then retreated to the toilets for a quick clandestine encounter, or whether they initiated contact within the toilets themselves. The verbal and visual codes used by Allen towards Arthur Ridley are

the best indication that these toilets were used for cruising. Within beat culture, simply walking up and placing one's hand on another's crotch — especially where sexual receptiveness is assumed and contact is immediately initiated — is not an uncommon experience.⁴³

By the late nineteenth century in Brisbane, some men also began to rely upon the visibility of difference to meet other homosexual men, marking out their sexual difference through a codification of dress, posture or deportment in public places. Closely tied to ideas of social space and time availability, appearance is an important aspect of communication between gay men.⁴⁴ According to Ganapati Durgadas, appraising 'others' looks and acting accordingly becomes the quickest and shortest method by which to find and form relationships within these limits'.⁴⁵ One interesting case mentioned in the *Brisbane Courier* in 1895 concerned 23-year-old James Moore, who was caught crossing-dressing in Stanley Street, South Brisbane.⁴⁶ While we cannot be sure of the circumstances surrounding this particularly colourful excursion on to the streets of Brisbane, the details of a 1907 Brisbane case leave little doubt of an evolving subculture that included effeminate behaviour, dress codes and public space.

William [Willie] Johns, a 23-year-old gardener and general labourer, met 26-year-old John Lowry outside the Pike Brothers store in Queen Street in Brisbane in 1906. As Johns passed the store, Lowry, with his back against the storefront, allegedly caught hold of Johns' hand and said 'Goodnight'. Johns returned the salutation (see Figure 2).⁴⁷ After chatting briefly and perhaps using a verbal code, Lowry allegedly told Johns that he knew his brother and asked whether he could spend the night with him. The two men then caught the tram back to the suburb of Toowong. The next morning, Johns accused Lowry of stealing four rings from his room, but soon made a more grave accusation that Lowry had also sodomised him. Lowry's Defence Counsel portrayed the complainant, William Johns, as an effeminate 'queen' with an elaborate dress code who regularly trawled the streets looking for men. Under cross-examination, Johns admitted that he had seen Lowry in the same spot six weeks prior and stated to the court:

Of an evening I do nothing. I come into town every night. I don't stand at the Queen St corners ... I am not a well-known character about the town. I have a good character. I do not know what a 'city queen' is. (Mr Watson explains the meaning of the term to me.) I am surprised to hear that is the term that is applied to me about the City. I have another hat similar to the Panama hat I have in court. I also have two straw hats at home. The band on my hat signifies nothing ... I don't know if it has a particular signification ... I don't know if the tie I am wearing bears a particular signification ... the red flower I am now wearing ... has no particular meaning. I was dismissed from Sir Alfred Cowley's. My father has disowned me since this case happened.⁴⁸

The outcome of the case is unclear, but the remaining deposition leaves no doubt that male-to-male sexual partners were readily available in central Brisbane

Figure 2: William Johns
Truth, 13 January 1907

streets. Codes clearly were employed, which made it easy to find a partner for short sexual trysts. Unfortunately for Johns, it seems he had chosen his 'trade' badly, been robbed in the process, and brought the subsequent allegation of sodomy against Lowry as revenge.⁴⁹

Rural Space and Homosexuality

In 1901, just over 21 per cent of Queensland's adult males lived in Brisbane, 43 per cent were domiciled in other smaller urban areas strung along the Queensland coast, and 35 per cent lived in rural areas.⁵⁰ In the same period, Queensland's economy pivoted around primary industries such as agriculture, pastoralism and mining, which required migratory male itinerant workers on a perennial circuit. Regional towns outside Brisbane were economically integral to Queensland's development and facilitated different social and spatial changes. Rockhampton was the second major seaport in the 1890s; Townsville the principal financial city in the northern district of the colony/state; and the gold-mining city of Charters Towers was for many years Queensland's second biggest urban centre. When engaged in itinerant work, many men slept in rough huts and shared accommodation with other men. The depositions are littered with examples of itinerant workers engaging in male-to-male sex. George Isap, for example, a 34-year-old South Sea Islander who shared his bed at Kalamina Station, sodomised another Islander station-hand named Semby at crushing time in early January 1900, while Robert Marshall, a 32-year-old farm labourer, seduced the son of his employer, 13-year-old Boyle Hill, on a Monday in April 1907.⁵¹ Rural Queensland was largely a man's world. Men significantly outnumbered women at this time: 132.2 to 100 in 1890 and 125.3 to 100 in 1900.⁵² The imbalance decreased in the twentieth century, but remained quite marked: 119 men for every 100 women in 1910, dropping

slightly to 118.5 men for every 100 women by 1914. Unlike other colonies such as Victoria, which was urbanising and industrialising behind a protective tariff, Queensland's focus on rural industries prioritised the male sphere.⁵³ A significant number of men involved in criminal cases, many in their sexual prime without access to women, engaged in situational casual male sex. While historians have readily acknowledged the place of situational homosexuality in harsh climatic conditions of the Australian bush, little emphasis has been given to relationships that might have formed beyond these casual and sexually expedient encounters. Some rural men, like their urban counterparts, chose to spend their sexual and social company exclusively with other men, reading the signs of availability of like-minded others in public spaces.

Not all homosexual activity in rural Queensland was quick, clandestine and alcohol induced. As Bruce Baskerville has argued, frontier environments, despite all their dissimilarities with urban subcultures are also 'constructed around a central idea of men having sexual and emotional relationships with other men in a colonial society officially hostile to such relationships'.⁵⁴ An excellent example occurred at Talgai West Station, about 10 kilometres from Allora, in 1910. John Talty, a 17-year-old horse boy, had been sleeping on a bunk on the verandah of the men's hut for a few months until Edward Jordan, the station's cook, came and asked him to share his room to stave off the cold nights early in April. Given that April in Queensland is not especially cold, Jordan may have been testing young Talty to gauge his interest. Accordingly, some of the men were suspicious of the situation and on a Thursday evening at about 8.00 p.m., labourer Herbert Warfield followed Talty to Jordan's room where he overheard a conversation take place between the two men: 'Aren't you finished yet, Jordan? ... Don't squeeze my balls so hard.'⁵⁵ According to another labourer, John Drew:

They slept in the same room and in the same bed. They only wore shirts in bed. Accused had a bed for himself if he had wanted. They were generally together and mostly in Jordan's room when they were not working — when they were in the room the door was generally bolted.⁵⁶

These two men clearly chose to share each other's social and sexual company. When confronted by some of his mates, Talty admitted that Jordan had been 'riding him'. Talty was charged with permitting Jordan to have carnal knowledge of him against the order of nature, although interestingly it is unclear how the charge arose. The two men had been sharing the same room for months and Talty confessed to crime apparently without cause. In his statement to Police Constable John O'Brien, Talty acknowledged:

After Jordan arrived at the station, he became friendly with me. I used to go to his room of a day and at night and talk to him. I continued to sleep with Jordan for four months ... he used to stick his penis into my arse twice every week. Jordan asked me to do the same to him and I did so about once a week.⁵⁷

Jordan left the station on Friday and first thing the next day, Talty collected his cheque and moved to Warwick. Did Jordan leave because of a lover's quarrel, or was he afraid that rumours about himself and Talty might catch up with them? Upon appearing in court, Talty's Defence Counsel, Mr O'Rourke, asked the Bench for leniency, arguing that Talty had been the victim of Jordan's domination.⁵⁸ While the police were still searching for Jordan, the judge offered Talty 'some sound advice' and suspended his sentence on a 50 pound surety to be of good behaviour for three years.⁵⁹ There was clearly something special between the two men and if Jordan had dominated Talty, why did he wait almost four months to say something? In his statement, Talty did not want to elaborate on what had caused Jordan to leave, although he remembered that 'Jordan made me a present of a tie, two collars and one pair of socks also a [undecipherable] hat ... that was after he had been riding me'.⁶⁰

Along with men's quarters on isolated pastoral stations, hotels in small towns also played a smaller but integral part in fostering homosexual identity in Queensland. The example of Patrick Keating is a case in point (see Figure 3). Keating, a 47-year-old schoolmaster at Mount Dornville Provisional School, had been staying at the Dornville Hotel in Millmerran near Pittsworth for 10 months when, on a Sunday night in July, he was seen acting suspiciously in the hallway of the hotel.⁶¹ Cheese-maker Frank Roberts and William Connolly, the licensee of the hotel, were standing in the yard at the rear of the building when they saw the defendant walk along the verandah from the direction of his bedroom towards the bedroom occupied by heavy-set shearer John Conway. Conway was aged about 35 or 40 years of age and stayed at the hotel on occasion when he was away from his mother's farm.⁶² His mother's property was only about 6.5 kilometres from the hotel, which suggests that he might have had ulterior motives for staying. In their testimony, Roberts and Connolly told the court how Keating briefly entered Conway's room before leaving to return to his own lodgings. A few minutes later, he reappeared and returned to Conway's room. After hearing Conway calling out 'Are you there?', apparently to no one in particular, Roberts and Connolly went up to the room to discover Keating sneaking away from Conway's bed. Upon being caught, Connolly exclaimed that: 'He was trying to ride me ... look at his penis, he greased it. And look at my backside, he greased that.'⁶³ Why had Conway decided to stay the night when he only lived a few kilometres away, especially considering he was sober and there were rumours going around amongst the men staying at the hotel that 'the accused [Keating] would ride [them] if he got the chance'? What would offset the cost of staying at the hotel when Conway could easily have returned to his mother's farm for free lodging? Was he too tired to return home, or does the evidence suggest that Conway was using the hotel for sex? When questioned by the other men staying at the hotel, Conway admitted it was he who had asked Keating to return to his room for a tube of lanoline, with the apparent excuse: 'I wanted to see how far you would go.'⁶⁴ Despite Conway's description of Keating as 'the most degraded creature I ever met', it appears that he was probably a consenting party who had read the signs that sexual activity was available and quickly changed his story upon being caught.

Figure 3: Patrick Keating
Truth, 28 July 1907

Conclusion

The cases used in this study clearly extend beyond situational sex in paddocks and fields to include complex relationships and trysts in regional hotels and places of employment. Given that travel was a necessity for many workers at the turn of the century, homosexual activity in rural context and urban public space are inextricably connected, forming a subculture based on coding desire through behavioural, verbal and visual cues. The features of larger population areas, obvious in Brisbane and larger regional areas, were repeated in smaller urban settlements, on pastoral stations and in mining settlements. Small towns may also have had surreptitious homosexual meeting places. John Lee has argued that the Great Depression of the 1930s affected the ability of young men to socialise in South Australia, stymieing existing social interaction and curtailing the development of homosexual meeting places.⁶⁵ However, I would argue that similar circumstances in the 1890s might be read differently. The itinerant nature of individuals and groups of men and boys who travelled throughout the colonies looking for work might just have easily encouraged interaction between different groups of men subsequently transmitting different experiences and ideas. In this context, men and youths in rural environments contributed to the development of gay subculture in Queensland, although it is only large cities such as Brisbane that had the spatial and social complexity to support a substantial subculture.

Increasingly from the late nineteenth century onwards, a small, but discernable number of men in urban areas began to form an embryonic homosexual subculture based on beats, coffee houses, street cruising and hotels. Geographic, economic and employment patterns impacted upon the movements of men throughout the colony/state, altering the development of any centralised subculture. Some men who visited Brisbane must have taken their 'big city experiences' with them back

to the bush, and others translated their homosexual experiences in the bush to the city. James Stuart, the Brisbane 'coffee house queen', was a wool wholesaler who hailed from the western Queensland districts. The boy who had 'rubbed him off' did so 'out west'. While there is a clear difference between the circumstances surrounding life and work in isolated pastoral stations and 'coffee room' classes, the depositions reveal a consistency in place and time when men met other men in hotels and boarding houses, whether such meetings occurred in the Dornville Hotel in Millmerran or in the Woodlands boarding house in Brisbane. In any of these locations, particular men adopted particular ways of seeing in order to locate other homosexually inclined men for sexual release and social stimulation. The example of *fin de siècle* Queensland allows us to glimpse male sexual behaviour in rural and urban public space at a time when the antecedents of today's homosexual identity began to form, illustrating the varied and complicated nature of sexual relationships between men.

Notes

- 1 *R v Albert McNamara and William Gullfoyle*, in Briefs, Depositions and Associated Papers in Criminal Cases Heard, 1 November 1905 to 30 November 1905, Queensland State Archives (hereafter QSA), SCT/CC173.
- 2 Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of the Transportation of Convicts to Australia, 1787–1868* (London: Collins Harvill, 1987); Joy Damousi, *Depraved and Disorderly: Female Convicts, Sexuality and Gender in Colonial Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 3 The most pertinent work on the formation of homosexual identity and subculture in Australia between the end of convictism and the rise of modern homosexual subculture includes: Clive Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows: The Development of Gay and Lesbian Culture in Queensland* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press in association with the API Network, 2001), esp. 25–89; Clive Moore, 'Just Mates? Masculinity and Sexuality' (unpublished manuscript, 2003), 1–17; Clive Moore and Bryan Jamison, 'Making the Modern Australian Homosexual Male: Queensland's Criminal Justice System and Homosexual Offences, 1860–1954', *Crime, History & Societies* 11(1) (2007): 27–54; Robert French, *Camping by a Billabong: Gay and Lesbian Stories from Australian History* (Sydney: Blackwattle Press, 1993); Clive Moore, 'The Frontier Makes Strange Bedfellows: Masculinity, Mateship and Homosexuality in Colonial Queensland', in Garry Wotherspoon, ed., *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives III: Essays in Australian Culture* (Sydney: Department of Economic History with The Australian Centre for Gay and Lesbian Research, University of Sydney, 1996), 17–44; Clive Moore, 'That Abominable Crime: First Steps Towards a Social History of Male Homosexuals in Colonial Queensland, 1859–1900', in Robert Aldrich, ed., *Gay Perspectives II: More Essays in Australian Gay Culture* (Sydney: Department of Economic History with the Australian Centre for Gay and Lesbian Research, University of Sydney Press, 1994), 115–48; Bruce Baskerville, '"Agreed to Without Debate": Silencing Sodomy in Colonial Western Australia, 1870–1905', in Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon, eds, *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives IV: Studies in Australian Culture* (Sydney: Department of Economic History with The Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research, University of Sydney, 1998), 95–115; Walter J. Fogarty, '"Certain Habits": The Development of a Concept of the Male Homosexual in New South Wales Law, 1788–1900', in Robert Aldrich and Garry Wotherspoon, eds, *Gay Perspectives: Essays in Australian Gay Culture* (Sydney: Department of Economic History, University of Sydney, 1992), 59–76; Adam Carr, 'Policing the "Abominable Crime" in Nineteenth Century Victoria', in David L. Philips and Graham

- Willett, eds, *Australia's Homosexual Histories: Gay and Lesbian Perspectives 5* (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research and the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, 2000), 27–40; Anne-Marie Collins, *Women and Policing: Uncertain Histories*, PhD thesis, Griffith University, 1997.
- 4 See for example, Garry Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain: History of a Gay Subculture* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1994); Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000); Dino Hodge, *Did You Meet Any Malagas? A Homosexual History of Australia's Tropical Capital* (Night Cliff, NT: Little Gem Publications, 1993); Robert Reynolds, *From Camp to Queer: Remaking the Australian Homosexual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).
 - 5 For the purpose of this paper, a definitive charge is one that has been positively ascertained as relating to male-to-male sexual behaviour (as opposed to charges of bestiality or heterosexual sodomy). The charges have been calculated from information contained in the Register of Criminal Depositions Received held at QSA. The author acknowledges that the Register is a less accurate measure of the charges than the criminal indictments. Moreover, the taxonomy of criminal charges clouds the exact figure and the total number of offences is most likely higher than can be ascertained here. The numbers presented here are a criminal law estimate and it must be acknowledged that for every sexual story told within the criminal justice system many remain untold. The vast majority of homosexual incidences were never recorded. The information that remains is more accurately a reflection of the policing of particular offences than actual incidence.
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 - 7 Gary Simes, 'The Language of Homosexuality in Australia', in Aldrich and Wotherspoon, *Gay Perspectives*, 41.
 - 8 Randolph Trumbach, 'London's Sodomites: Homosexual Behaviour and Western Culture in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of Social History* 11 (1977): 15.
 - 9 Trumbach, 'London's Sodomites', 15.
 - 10 Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 2003), 239.
 - 11 Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality*, 239.
 - 12 Lawrence Knopp, 'Sexuality and Urban Space: A Framework for Analysis', in David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds, *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 154.
 - 13 David Bell, 'Perverse Dynamics, Sexual Citizenship and the Transformation of Intimacy', in Bell and Valentine, *Mapping Desire*, 306; Steven Maynard, 'Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialectics of Discovery, Toronto, 1890–1930', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5(2) (1994): 216–17; George Chauncey, 'Privacy Could Only be Had in Public: Gay Uses of the Streets', in Joel Saunders, ed., *Stud: Architectures of Masculinity* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1996), 225.
 - 14 Knopp, 'Sexuality and Urban Space', 154, 155.
 - 15 *ibid.*
 - 16 William Leap, 'Introduction', in William Leap, ed., *Public Sex/Gay Space* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 7.
 - 17 Graham Carbery, 'Some Melbourne Beats: A Map of a Subculture from the 1930s to the 1950s', in Aldrich and Wotherspoon, *Gay Perspectives*, 132, 142–43; Clive Moore, 'From Beats to Cyber Sex: Australian Gay Male Appropriation of Public Space', in Lynette Russell, ed., *Boundary Writing: An Exploration of Race, Culture and Gender Binaries in Contemporary Australia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 27; Ira Tattelman, 'Speaking to the Gay Bathhouse: Communicating in Sexually Charged Spaces', in *Public Sex/Gay Space*, 71, 82–83; Richard Tewksbury, 'Cruising for Sex in Public Places: The Structure and Language of Men's Hidden, Erotic Worlds', *Deviant Behaviour: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 17 (1995): 4–9.

- 18 Chauncey, 'Privacy Could Only be Had in Public', p. 238.
- 19 Garry Wotherspoon, 'A Sodom in the South Pacific: Male Homosexuality in Sydney 1788–1809', in Graeme Aplin, ed., *A Difficult Infant: Sydney Before Macquarie* (Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1988), 98.
- 20 Moore, 'The Frontier Makes Strange Bedfellows', 20–22, 24; Wotherspoon, 'A Sodom in the South Pacific', 95, 97; Wotherspoon, *City of the Plain*, 20; French, *Camping by a Billabong*, 9; Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, 31.
- 21 Wotherspoon, 'A Sodom in the South Pacific', 98.
- 22 French, *Camping by a Billabong*, 43.
- 23 Baskerville, '"Agreed to Without Debate"', 104–05.
- 24 Carr, 'Policing the "Abominable Crime"', 27–40; Wayne Murdoch, '"Disgusting Doings" and "Putrid Practices": Reporting Homosexual Men's Lives in the Melbourne *Truth* During the First World War', in Aldrich and Wotherspoon, *Gay and Lesbian Perspectives IV*, 116–31; Wayne Murdoch, 'Homosexuality and Melbourne *Truth*: An Annotated Listing, 1913–1945', in Philips and Willett, *Australia's Homosexual Histories*, 177–21; Carbery, 'Some Melbourne Beats', 131–45.
- 25 Moore, *Sunshine and Rainbows*, 70.
- 26 *R v James Stuart*, in Briefs, Depositions and Associated Papers in Criminal Cases Heard, 1 May 1907 to 30 May 1907, QSA, Brisbane, SCT/CC184; 'Back Block Bestiality: An Alleged Unnatural Offence', *Truth* (Brisbane), 31 March 1907; 'Police Courts', *Brisbane Courier*, 29 March 1907.
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- 51 *R v George Isap*, in Criminal Files, 1 January 1900 to 31 December 1900, QSA, A/18329; *R v Robert Marshall*, in Depositions, 1 January 1907 to 31 December 1907, QSA, A/4972; Her Majesty's Gaol, Entry No. 15/2302, in Register of Male Prisoners Admitted: Admission Book, August 1901 to May 1903, QSA, PRI 1/14A.
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- 55 *R v John Talty*, in Briefs, Depositions and Associated Papers in Criminal Cases Heard, 1 September 1910 to 30 September 1910, QSA, CCT4/N60; 'Supreme Court: Criminal Sittings', *Darling Downs Gazette*, 21 September 1910, 5.
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- 59 *ibid.*
- 60 *R v Talty*, QSA, CCT4/N60.
- 61 *R v Patrick Keating*, in Briefs, Depositions and Associated Papers in Criminal Cases Heard, 1 April 1907 to 30 September 1907, QSA, CCT4/N54.
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