

Articles

Police Persecution of Adelaide's Homosexual Culture: 1945-1972

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Abstract

The flowering of Adelaide's homosexual culture in the years immediately following World War II and before the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the 1970s was accompanied by persecution at the hands of the South Australian police. This essay draws substantially on extensive oral history records previously unavailable to researchers to delineate police abuse of powers during that period. Particular strategies explicitly designed to identify, control and destroy the homosexual culture – including informants, entrapment, verballing, coercion and harassment – were employed by the police throughout these years.

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Introduction

We seem to have a very good police force here ... I fondly imagine that they're not as corrupt as a few others. But, you know, they're only men and we all have our weaknesses.

John Lee interview with Bill B and Lyall, 29 August 1980

The scope for personal intimacy dramatically altered during World War II when the rules of social engagement were disrupted. No other section in Australian society benefited as much, perhaps, as the homosexual culture. The war's impact on sexual norms, explains the historian Garry Wotherspoon, led to 'a widening and deepening of homosexual experiences in Australia.'¹ South Australia was no exception and I have written previously about how war-time experiences facilitated the development of South Australia's homosexual sub-culture into a more defined albeit incipient culture. A flowering of Adelaide's homosexual world emerged that continued throughout the post-war years and that afforded its participants a sense of belonging and community.²

This flowering, however, was accompanied by a sustained and deliberate opposition by the State's police. Dire injustices suffered by South Australia's homosexual citizens were exposed in 1972 by the murder in May that year of Dr George Duncan, a legal academic. Duncan died at a homosexual beat (a public site, such as a city park, where men with a shared homoerotic interest could meet). While Vice Squad members were widely believed to have been implicated in the murder there was no conclusive proof. The death sparked public concern about police abuse of powers. Outrage over the murder and worry about injustices cemented widespread support for initiatives leading to South Australia becoming the first Australian jurisdiction to decriminalise homosexuality.³

The oral history interviews of the late historian John Lee provide detailed accounts of police persecution during the post-war years. From September 1978 to October 1980, Lee recorded thirty-six interviews involving forty-two people: homosexual men and one

woman. Lee's interviews are unparalleled in Australian archives for their vivid depiction of life in the homosexual culture during this period. Following his death in 1991, a paper was published describing Adelaide's homosexual sub-culture in the pre-war years.⁴ In 2010, thirty years after the last interview, Lee's literary executor, Ian Purcell, made available the transcripts for further research work. I am indebted to Purcell for access to Lee's material.

Pre-war and Post-war Policing

Analysis of Lee's interviews reveals that in the pre-war period the police appear as a major strand of comment but in the post-war period the police constitute a dominant theme. Interviewees discussing the pre-war period make frequent passing comment on issues concerning police practices. However, accounts of the post-war period contain a dramatic shift in the frequency and intensity of comment about police such that in some instances entire interviews focus on police abuse of powers and the consequences. Lee's interviewees share the same outlook on the abuse of police powers in the post-war period. The historian Susan Marsden summarises Lee's material:

He investigated the manner in which homosexuals themselves perceived their subculture ... and their means of anonymity which, he noted, were indispensable in a close-knit provincial city in which homosexuals feared police coercion, jail, and scandal.⁵

The self-reflection by Lee's interviewees on their lives in the pre-war period reveals an awareness of engaging in an illegal activity and therefore belonging to an underground culture. The sense of

self in the post-war period is characterised by an acute sense of persecution arising from police activities.

The post-war period saw the emergence of new policing imperatives associated with the cold war. In 1947, the South Australian Police Commissioner, William Johns, issued instructions about the work of the Subversive Section (eventually to become Special Branch) in gathering information on persons suspected or know to be engaged in subversive activities. Johns declared that the Subversive Section records were strictly confidential however '[e]very assistance was to be given to the Intelligence Sections of the Armed Forces and confidential information given to them.'⁶ A Special Branch officer, Bob Huie, in a history of Special Branch he wrote in 1967, recalled that 'particular attention was being given to the *vetting of persons*' (Huie's emphasis) to be employed with the Australian-Anglo joint project weapons testing facility initiated in 1946 at the remote South Australian location of Woomera.⁷ Police focus, recorded Huie, was not limited to communists but included,

a number of other organisations and groups. To name but a few and the reason for Special Branch interest ... Sex Deviates. 1. Sex deviates can always be classed as being [sic] the potential for compromise, and it is an established fact that in the field of espionage, a sex deviate who has access to classified information is a prime target.⁸

Johns' instructions in 1947 introduced an era of intense police surveillance of people associated with a range of groups, such as unionists, peace activists and homosexual men. Police created files on suspect people and catalogued these in an extensive record management system.⁹ In the 1970s, records on homosexual men came to be known as the 'pink files'.¹⁰ It was such Special Branch

activities that caused the Dunstan Government in 1977 to order a judicial inquiry that culminated in 1978 with the destruction of many of the files,¹¹ and with the dismissal of Police Commissioner Harold Salisbury for misleading the Government about the nature and scope of Special Branch activities.¹²

The Lee interviews reveal that the post-war police persecution commenced with a comprehensive program implemented during the period 1948-52, referred to by some interviewees as ‘the blitz’.¹³ Following the blitz, Keith remembers,

[I]t had repercussions for a long while after that. People weren’t game to show themselves anywhere ... because you were hounded and kept down all the time.¹⁴

A second period of intense activity occurred in 1960-62, although police persecution continued unabated throughout these decades until 1972.¹⁵ During the second period, relates Robin, ‘there was this awful purge and people used to get picked up, about eight or nine a night, and they used to publish them in the paper.’¹⁶ Homosexual men in Adelaide prior to the 1970s had not yet established community organisations through which they could publicly remonstrate against police pressures or abuses of power.

Lee’s interviewees explain that police charges against homosexual men in the pre-war period tended to be opportunistic and generally came about when individuals were brought to their attention. Such instances occurred because men had been discovered in a compromising situation, for example by a fellow worker walking into a colleague’s unlocked office at an inopportune moment, or because men had been reported by third parties such as neighbours complaining about a noisy party, or when mail was delivered to the wrong address and read by a stranger. After the war, by contrast,

the police adopted an organised approach: they actively located and identified homosexual groups, and maintained a comprehensive database of suspected and known homosexuals. Analysis of Lee's interviews makes explicit the strategies to destroy social networks that police employed in their persecution of the homosexual culture. These strategies were implemented consistently until Duncan's murder.

Post-war Policing Strategies

The many and diverse instances cited in Lee's interviews make clear that the various strategies employed by the police included use of informants to gather intelligence about homosexual men, meeting places and parties; surveillance of venues known to be meeting places; and raiding and searching of private residences. Police no longer mounted the occasional patrol of beats; instead it became an established procedure to use one of their own as a decoy to entrap men by luring them into engaging in discussion or physical contact.

The interviews expose the risk that this latter practice presented in encouraging police to claim that a man had behaved inappropriately even when nothing had actually taken place. This temptation was potent because, as interviewees claim, in court a police statement would be accorded greater weight over any denial by the man concerned. If a man had been at a beat, police could allege that he had been acting suspiciously for an extended period, ranging from ten minutes to several hours, and then bring a charge of loitering. There are repeated instances in the Lee interviews of men complaining that they had only just arrived at a beat, or had not been doing anything other than sitting on a park bench when such allegations were made and charges laid. The raising of charges against homosexual men using Adelaide's parks is in stark contrast

to the absence of charges brought by police against heterosexual people using the parks for the same purposes. The historian Patricia Sumerling's account of policing of the city's parks acknowledges the problems faced by homosexual men, and records that heterosexual couples, even if caught *in flagrante delicto*, risked little more than a verbal reprimand from police.¹⁷

The police also encouraged men to identify themselves and their friends as homosexual. Questioning of suspected homosexual men would occur either at private parties that had been raided or at police headquarters in the city. Men would be separated from their friends and taken into a room for questioning by police officers. During questioning police could then suggest they had been given proof of illegal activities as one or more of their friends had already confessed. This shuttle questioning technique of cross-interviewing more than one man simultaneously, while in breach of Judges' Rules, enabled the police to draw out bit-by-bit enough information to be able to lay charges against men so questioned.¹⁸ Once in custody it was possible that coercion, sometimes including violence and verballing, would be used to elicit information or to encourage men to sign fabricated confessions. On occasion a particularly resistant man would be shown such a pre-prepared confession with details of his alleged involvement in order to break his will and secure his signature.

Beyond these police efforts, the media raised public fear to such an extent that the public felt encouraged to report anything of concern. In his interview with Lee, Keith explains that 'in those days you only had to see very little and people would go to the police.'¹⁹ In some cases the means of exposure remained a mystery. One couple, Laurie and Bernie, were reported anonymously in the early 1960s and the police walked into their flat to arrest them. Using the shuttle interview technique at police headquarters, the police

managed to obtain enough information to have both convicted and jailed.²⁰ A lawyer who defended many homosexual men during the late 1950s and the 1960s, later recounts of another couple:

I can remember very early in my practice there were a couple of gay boys charged with the offence, and they went to jail for about six months or a year or something, and they just couldn't believe it. They had been living together for about twenty years and then suddenly the police came and searched their house and they were charged.²¹

In the Lee interviews there are instances of men coming to the attention of the police through being reported either by their own families or by the families of their friends. In one instance in 1949, the mother of one young man found love letters hidden under the mattress of her son's bed. The young man immediately conveyed what had happened to his lover, who fled to Melbourne and would not return to Adelaide for fear of arrest.²²

In other cases, police were able to secure convictions arising from love letters. One interviewee, John A, recalls being taken into custody for questioning following a 1948 police raid on a private party:

My friend and I had written letters to one another, although we didn't live very far away. I kept his letters; he kept mine. ... And they [the police] kept on and on until finally they got it out of me that I still had his letters, and then they went down to my home and confiscated the letters. Presumably they've been burnt now, but there were details in them – not actually details, I suppose – but [we wrote about] the way we felt about one another.²³

John A was subsequently convicted of buggery and jailed. He claims the charge was based on a false confession and explains that the sole corroborating evidence was these love letters.

Informants and Entrapment

More often than not, though, men were identified and convicted as a direct result of police actions. While there is speculation as to whether or not informants were paid by police, some of the interviewees raise the possibility that police would employ blackmail to persuade homosexual men into becoming informants.²⁴ Lee's interviewees explain how, as the use of informants became a common practice, men started to realise the connection between specific individuals and raids on parties:

I think what used to happen [was the police] would pick up some guys and say, 'Look, give us information and we will leave you alone.'... And so a lot of these guys would go to the hotels and they would ring up [the police later to] say that there is a party on at such and such tonight. ... We knew a few faces that would dob us in, and they would tell the police and, bang, it was on.²⁵

Police reliance on informants was complemented by their own efforts of intelligence gathering. Rob recalls:

One night I was going home ... and the car boiled on Number 1 [beat] on the Torrens. And I was sitting there waiting for the car to cool down and I was surrounded by police for two and one half hours firing questions at me – where I was going, who I was going to meet, what was his name, where had I been – and when one finished, the next one would start.²⁶

Police patrols also entailed the more sinister element of entrapment, as Bill A reports:

There used to be a group of them that used to do [the toilets] in these three cars, in these old type Holdens, and they used to use this decoy. ... I knew the cops' faces and they were in there [at a toilet I went to]. One was actually standing there and pulling himself, and I plonked myself at the urinal and luckily enough I wanted to piss anyway. And when I turned around there was another one standing in the cubicle, [from] which he could see me as well as the guy at the urinal – and he was just waiting for me to do something, and they are all bastards.²⁷

Discussions about police decoys appear in various Lee interviews dating from the late 1940s onwards.²⁸ Dennis and John B's belief that decoys 'were used regularly' stems both from their own experience and that of many other people as well. Robin reflects on an abbreviated form of entrapment by police, experienced when he was sitting in a city park one evening in 1962 enjoying a moment of quiet reflection. A police decoy approached him and enquired, 'Do you give it or take it?' This wording is the same as that reported by Roger James, who was the second man injured in the attack against Dr Duncan in 1972.²⁹ This suggests possible continuity of police methodology over at least a decade. Robin describes his arrest:

I didn't do anything, but they made allegations that I had been there for hours ... [T]hey took me up to the police station and tried to extract it out of me that they had seen my car there and all sorts of thing. They locked me up in the cells overnight.³⁰

Ray, who came onto the scene in 1961, recalls that for him the danger to which one had to be alert at beats was not from bashers but from police.³¹ Robin also discusses the same issue:

[W]henever you went and did the beats, you weren't really worried about bashers or anything like that – it just didn't exist. It was just the police that you were worried about. Continually.³²

Coercion and Brutality

Before the war, a handful of men were known to host lively parties at their homes and these were considered within the emerging culture as key meeting places. Bert Hines, who lived above his lampshade shop at the east end of Rundle Street in central Adelaide, is repeatedly identified in the Lee interviews as one of these trail-blazers. A police report from 1933 notes Hines was known by police as a 'quean.'³³ Pre-war raids on Hines' parties would be relatively relaxed:

The cops would raid Lampshade Lil's every now and then, and Bert would just sit back and cheek them and offer them a drink.³⁴

However once the blitz started such raids took on a different nature and increasingly parties were targeted:

Just because they were gay. They would just barge in. There was no knocking on the door. ... There was no politeness at all about it. ... They would drag you in one room, and then drag someone into another room.³⁵

During a raid the police would record names and addresses of those present and would pressure the men to confess to being a 'practising' homosexual. There was little the police could do with a group of people partying in a private residence but as soon as someone admitted to engaging in a criminal activity then the police

had a legitimate reason for their actions. There are reports of intimidation and even physical beatings being employed to elicit such a confession.³⁶ John B recalls what happened is someone was unlucky enough during a police raid on a party to be taken to police headquarters for questioning:

[Y]ou would get some bastard that would try and get you to say that you were a homosexual or that you are a practising homosexual. Somebody got picked up at a party and they knocked the hell out of him and tried to make him confess.³⁷

A raid in 1961 on a small party of half a dozen men in a flat at Glenelg is discussed by Ian who was twenty-one years of age at the time. Taken to police headquarters with the other party-goers, Ian was questioned over four hours and denied access to a lawyer. He recalls various intimidating behaviours including being slapped and punched. During this time the police were leaving and returning with bits of information implicating Ian which they claimed another man at the party had confessed to. Eventually Ian broke, agreed to the details the police put forward and then signed a typed statement that had been pre-prepared – being fabricated details of sexual activities which, Ian explains in the Lee interview, had not actually taken place.³⁸

Another interviewee, John E discusses what happened when one young man was told by police that he would be let off if he provided the names of all the men he knew. The youth named one of John's friends who, who up to that point, had been leading a discreet and settled life with his partner:

The police went [to his house] and made a lot of accusations ... they were quite rough with him and forced a confession out of him, and he admitted having frequent sex with his friend – but I think they got them individually and said, 'The other one had

confessed.’ ... Anyway, a court case came up and they were fined something like \$250 and forbidden to see each one another again, and the other one went to Sydney to live.³⁹

Bill A recalls that, while one of his friends was kicked by police, this was not his experience when he and a friend were caught in a car in the late 1950s and taken in for questioning:

They were throwing tables around and chairs around, and they never actually hit me but they were trying to scare the shit out of us ... I got away with it, and he was sent to jail and then deported.⁴⁰

Roger A discusses a time in the early 1960s when he and a friend were picked up by the police one evening for wearing drag in public. They were taken to police headquarters into separate rooms for questioning:

Chris was terrified and he was in one cubicle with the detective and I could hear him crying and saying that, ‘My father is dying of cancer.’ And I was just very bold ... The detective said to me, ‘What would you mother and father say?’ and I said, ‘My mother and father couldn’t care less’ and they said, ‘Shall we ring them?’ ... They did say at the time that they couldn’t charge me for anything, and he said, ‘You be careful for the next eighteen months because the law will be changed and you will be in trouble.’⁴¹

This last threat appears to be a falsehood designed to scare an unfortunate young man who was not worldly enough to appreciate its hollowness.

Destruction of Networks and Harassment

A great deal of effort was made by the police to identify and destroy sites where homosexuality flourished. As police built up a

working knowledge of individual members of the culture, they began to track people's movements in order to identify further information about key figures and meeting places. During the 1950s the police became more focused on arresting and charging people.

As noted above, the home of Bert Hines (known as 'Lampshade Lil' or 'Bertha') above his city lampshade shop was a celebrated party venue from before the war. It was also a venue known by the police but while they would raid his parties, no arrests had been recorded. During the blitz, however, the police in 1950 launched an operation to round up networks of men who had some affiliation with the lampshade shop. Lee's interviews included two of the thirteen men who had been jailed in this action, who explain:

This is the first time this had ever happened ... And of course, each one dobbed the other in. ... It snowballed and snowballed. ... But it wasn't anything to do [with] the connection with Bertha, they were just individual charges, but the police linked it to the shop. ... There was hundreds questioned, but they ... were older people who had a bit more brains than the kids that they charged.⁴²

Nine of these men came before Justice Ligertwood for sentencing in what became publicly referred to as the 'lampshade shop scandal,' and he declared: 'It must have come as a shock to the citizens of Adelaide to learn that there were centres of homosexuality in this city.'⁴³ One of the men who was jailed later suicided, and the community historians Ian Purcell and Will Sergeant report that Hines joined the many who 'simply fled town for Melbourne or Sydney, some never to return'. They cite Lee's conclusion that, 'the destructive effect of the police actions went well beyond the convictions'.⁴⁴

The lampshade shop scandal was the first of three court cases within a few years which were highly-publicised and considered by some to be held up as a warning for the culture to reduce its profile and activities.⁴⁵ In particular, the case of Peter Nation is recalled.⁴⁶ He was a well-connected antiques dealer who was prominent in the theatre world and ‘camp’ scene (as homosexual men named their world at the time), In 1954 he received a telephone call from a stranger, Richard Aldridge, seeking to meet up socially. This meeting resulted in Nation being charged with gross indecency. Aldridge was a member of the Vice Squad and during Nation’s trial reported that he had been directed to pursue Nation as part of an investigation into ‘an alleged circle of vice.’ He testified that he had repeatedly and ‘knowingly told [Nation] untruths’ but denied that this was a matter of entrapment. It is notable that, early in his testimony, he made a link between Nation and communism, stating that ‘When I spoke to the accused in the Hotel ... he mention[ed] the Petrov Affair.’ The jury placed greater faith in the testimony of the police officer over that of the defendant, and Justice Mayo determined that Nation should ‘be imprisoned, and kept to hard labour, for the term of six calendar months.’ A subsequent application for leave to appeal against conviction was refused.⁴⁷

In an interview with Lee, Nation confirms that this was a case of entrapment of a man in his own home and that the only evidence submitted was the statement by the police officer. Nation believes that there was a purpose driving the police:

[T]he idea was to get somebody prominent and make a show of it and do something about it. This would stop everybody being homosexual.⁴⁸

Bill A reports that, ‘once they got your name, they set onto you – then that was it.’ His experience was that the police periodically

would wait outside his place of employment until he finished his shift and then tail him. If it was apparent that he wasn't driving directly home, they would pull him over to find out where he was heading.⁴⁹

Police especially turned their attention to those figures who played key roles in the culture. Jan Hillier, who later relocated to Melbourne where she became a hero in the gay and lesbian community, was so well-known to the police that, 'you always knew that where ever Hillier was, the police would always arrive and you would be harassed.'⁵⁰ Another instance entails a particularly extrovert party-thrower, John, whose house was subject to frequent raids and anyone present would be intensively questioned. John eventually found this harassment too much to bear and suicided.⁵¹ The police tried to block the network nurtured by another party host, Victor:

[He] used to have the most unbelievable parties, but there again the police found out and the police raided, and he was actually ordered out of Adelaide. ... They reckoned he was the leader of the pack ... and he has lived in Sydney ever since.⁵²

The police implemented another method of breaking networks which was more efficient as it did not require confessions, evidence or court cases: harassment in the workplace. Keith describes an incident when the police wanted to catch all the members of one social network in a single operation. The police went to the men's workplaces to take them in for questioning; one waiter is said to have fainted on the spot when the police arrived to collect him.⁵³ Similarly, Peter A recalls:

[T]hey used to go to the places where they worked, the big stores for instance, and ask for them and call them out in front of everybody and say, 'Were you at so and so's [place] on such

a such a night, and did you know that this happened and that happened?’ ... And then just let them go, but they’d done the damage by calling them out.⁵⁴

By the late 1950s the police efforts to stymie homosexual networks expanded beyond raiding beats and private parties. The popularity of the inner-city Montmartre Cafe during the late 1950s proved to be too much for the police, who started to send in plain clothes officers every night to question patrons. The proprietor, Ron, explains the police tried to close the café:

I think they didn’t like the place because it was homosexual, but I can’t be sure of that. And then what they threatened to do was that they would park the police car out the front door every night and you would never get any customers ... [A]nd the police cars used to follow me.⁵⁵

The police eventually charged Ron of ‘running a place of business frequented by thieves’ and he recalls that this led to a front page newspaper report describing the cafe as ‘a den of evil’ and that ‘ministers were getting up in church telling people not to let their children go there because they would be seduced.’ By this stage, Ron became ‘sick of it’ and closed the Montmartre. Within months Ron opened a new city cafe, the Franklin, and while he did not have any problems with the police, ‘it was never the same atmosphere and I didn’t like it.’⁵⁶

Public toilet facilities, too, became the focus of intensive official activity that extended beyond the use ordinary patrols or decoys and entrapment. Those facilities that were known as popular meeting places for homosexual men would be closed and several were even ‘knocked down because they were busy.’⁵⁷ When in

1951 a judge who was sentencing a man for indecent assault on another male complained about the number of beats, one newspaper sent a journalist to investigate. A report was published,

[T]he prize of the most desolate and ill-lit disgrace must go to the men's convenience in the centre of Victoria Park racecourse.⁵⁸

Don A remembers during the 1960s that the toilet blocks would sometimes just disappear overnight, including the destruction in the mid-1960s of the facility at Victoria Park racecourse.⁵⁹

Reactions to Police Behaviours

Not surprisingly, one of the first features to note about the manner in which members of the culture reacted to the police is avoidance of the police. Even when a specific need arose to seek police assistance, homosexual men avoided the police. One couple recall about a home burglary:

It was impossible – we would never have reported it. ... And again, there were so many people that were bashed and robbed and blackmailed, and couldn't or wouldn't report it.⁶⁰

Another negative reaction is found in the incidence of suicide during this period, also discussed in several of the Lee interviews.⁶¹ One interviewee recounts personal knowledge of a number of suicides, including one of a 'bloke with a quite high position' found in a compromising position at work by his employer. The employer considered that the matter was a criminal offence and so required the police to be called.⁶² Another interviewee attributes police harassment to a spate of suicides in the 1960s, explaining that once

a man had been caught at a beat and his details taken, then the police would contact the man's family and inform them:

'Your son goes to toilets.' ... [T]hat is why there were so many suicides. There must be at least a dozen guys that I know that have committed suicide all around that era.⁶³

Working lives were destroyed following public exposure in the newspaper court reports.⁶⁴ During periods of intense police activity, as well as the standard 'pillory column' reports, the press would issue dramatic and unfavourable front page stories:

When somebody got caught, then there was a song and dance about it in the paper. Everyday people that you didn't know you would read all about ... and they were all strangers to me ... You would only really notice if it was one of your friends, or one of the people that you knew.⁶⁵

The interviewees also state there was a general exodus from Adelaide over a number of years. In the late forties and early fifties, Keith believes the scene 'really swung' but that the police blitz frightened men into leaving Adelaide, often for Melbourne or Sydney where they could live more comfortably. As another interviewee describes for a later period, 'people were leaving the state in droves.' In at least two cases, men were convicted of 'indecent assault ... on persons unknown' because the sex partners had fled interstate and the men were convicted without any testimony other than that tendered by the police.⁶⁶

The survivors learnt from their experiences. As well as the use of discretion in the presence of suspected police informants, people developed other strategies for impeding police. Men realised that the police were keeping track of people's movements through a record based on the names, addresses and car registration numbers

of men at beats.⁶⁷ The unmarked police cars used to visit beats by plain clothes Vice Squad members in the 1960s eventually became recognised and, when men at beats saw the police, they would then go around to other people and cars alerting them of the police presence.⁶⁸ Eventually details about the registration numbers and descriptions of unmarked cars circulated more widely within the homosexual culture and, when the cars appeared at beats, people knew to leave immediately.⁶⁹

Men became increasingly aware of the importance of not admitting to anything. In one instance when a homosexual network was targeted by police, one man buckled under intense questioning reportedly involving police violence and signed a confession, but another member of the network avoided conviction, 'because he flatly denied everything – he was clever and he did the right thing.'⁷⁰ In the 1960s, a decade after the first blitz, police harassment was not quite so effective in frightening people from socialising. One interviewee recounts how over a period of two years 'just about every party that I went to on a Saturday night the police went to, and it was just an expected thing.'⁷¹ Police raids on parties reportedly became a weekly occurrence, although Rob and Ray explain how men avoided charges:

[T]he queens were smart enough to know that they had to give their names and addresses but unless you were caught doing anything, they [the police] couldn't very well prove it. ... In those days, [we] used to invite a lot of girls along to make it look good. It would be different if they went to a house and it was full of men.⁷²

The importance of good legal representation was understood. Some lawyers argued that the best option in court was to seek psychiatric treatment in order to secure a lighter sentence. The opinion put

forward by Bill A however, is that, ‘it might have been better to go to jail, than have to go through that.’ He discusses a case in the late 1950s of a young man who was arrested when he tried to pick up a police decoy. The man subsequently was subject to a court order detaining him at Hillcrest Psychiatric Hospital for shock therapy:

There was nothing wrong with him at all, but this therapy thing bugged him up completely ... He has never worked since ... The police really caused more strife than anyone else. They were a damn nuisance.⁷³

A couple of legal firms and lawyers in particular developed a favourable reputation within the culture. Rob and Ray recall that Pam Cleland became so well-known and respected in the community for defending charges brought by police that they estimated she represented ninety percent of the cases. It was reputed that:

Often the judges used to say, ‘Why, Miss Cleland, are you the defender of all the cases?’⁷⁴

Cleland, who was admitted to the Bar in 1957 and employed in the chambers of Genders, Wilson and Bray, regards her reputation as more likely a hindrance for her clients, explaining:

I seemed to act for a lot of homosexuals. I couldn’t understand why they came to me, because people knew I acted for them and therefore it sort of made them guilty, in a way, that I was acting for them.⁷⁵

It seems even the police understood Cleland’s reputation. Ian recalls in his interview being arrested in 1961 simply for being at a gay party and taken to police headquarters for questioning. He repeatedly requested a lawyer, without naming any one in

particular, but was told by the police, 'You can't ... because Pam Cleland is away on holidays.'⁷⁶

Cleland has more recently discussed one case that achieved notoriety within the community when she defended a man against charges brought by police who claimed to have watched him in a toilet by peering under the cubicle door. During the hearing, Cleland took the magistrate to the Victoria Park racecourse toilets to prove that it was not possible for the police to have seen inside the cubicle:

So we got the Magistrate to come out there – and a lot of men fled as they saw this great team of mixed people coming in – but then the poor old Magistrate lay down on the floor and ... when we got back he said, 'It's useless going on in this case. You can't see under that door.' And that was the end of the matter.⁷⁷

Another instance of a defence counsel succeeding in refuting police charges is recounted by Peter B in a case where a man pleaded not guilty to a policeman's claim that he had looked over a hedge and seen the man masturbating. The court adjourned to the park where the Magistrate could see that it was not possible to peer over a hedge four metres high.⁷⁸

Don Dunstan was another lawyer whose work exposed him to the nature of police relations with the homosexual culture. Dunstan recounts two cases he encountered as Attorney-General in the mid-1960s of men who hanged themselves as a result of police accusations.⁷⁹ Also, when Premier, Dunstan declaimed in the Parliament the practice of police entrapment of homosexual men through the use of decoys.⁸⁰ Further, at least one person in Dunstan's social world was affected in the second blitz, and

Dunstan visited jail to take books to a friend who had been convicted of homosexual activity.⁸¹

Reliability of the Lee Interviews

To what extent can the Lee interviews be regarded as reliable? Oral history informants are subject to the vagaries of memory, recalling some events and times more accurately than others. Dramatic events can be emphasised while the ordinary is forgotten. Lee's interviewees do recall the ordinary and, as noted in the Introduction, the daily lives that constituted the flowering of Adelaide's homosexual culture during the post-war years have been discussed in a previous article.

The interviewees also recall the extraordinary. They provide a uniform outlook that the pre-war experiences of policing were in stark contrast to the post-war experiences and, moreover, that the post-war policing was believed to be intentional, thoroughly systematic, and traumatic. In this regard, the body of interviews demonstrates a degree of internal consistency that is remarkable. A parallel can be drawn with the experiences during the 1980s and 1990s when the gay community was forced to confront the irrational hatred and vilification associated with the dramas of HIV/AIDS. Individuals still led rewarding daily lives and the gay community continued to grow during that period, but there can be no doubt that the gay culture as a whole suffered widespread stress and setbacks.

Beyond their internal consistency, the interviews are complemented and substantiated by opinions and documentation external to the South Australian homosexual population. Firstly, the experiences recounted are reflected in the research of the social commentator

Craig McGregor who, writing in 1966 about the NSW police, suggests an entrenched culture of police violence:

[T]he police force itself is one of the most dangerous power groups in the Australian community, and the wariness of the ordinary person in dealing with it is fully justified ...

The Vice Squad takes its work seriously ... It prosecutes homosexuals with such vigour that it is now commonly regarded as unsafe to visit certain public lavatories, not because they are used as a pick-up centre by homosexuals but because of the danger of being picked up by the police and charged with indecent behaviour ...

Finally there is the question of police brutality. The prevalence and consistency of charges of police bashing and strong-arm tactics in Australia is alarming. Every Australian metropolitan newspaper has bulky files on police malpractices, and newspaper campaigns against them are as common as they, apparently, fruitless.⁸²

McGregor considers one theory that explains the police attitude and violence as stemming from 'the conflict between the overt masculinity of Australian society and the latent homosexuality of many of its members' but concludes 'there simply has not been enough academic work carried out in Australia upon homosexuality ... to know.'⁸³

The Lee interviews are congruent with accounts describing the engagement of police with the homosexual culture in other Australian states during this period. Wotherspoon describes the situation in Sydney (and New South Wales generally), while Moore discusses events in Queensland, and Willett introduces a Victorian perspective and furthermore draws together such work with a national overview.⁸⁴ Notably, Roger James, a homosexual man

who was assaulted in the same 1972 incident in which Dr Duncan died, observes in a recent interview:

My experiences of living in Melbourne and Sydney during the 1960s led me to believe that the police harassment and persecution in those cities were insignificant compared to police actions in Adelaide.⁸⁵

Secondly, by the late 1950s entrapment appears to have been regularly practised by the South Australian Vice Squad in at least one other area of their work. In 1958 the Officer in Charge of the Squad, Sergeant Giles, wrote to his superiors seeking an increase in their expenses allowances. Giles explains that the Squad had detected breaches of the *Licensing Act* by means of the ‘Agente Provocare’ system in which both male and female police had been entering ‘suspect premises [to] purchase meals and liquor during prohibited hours.’ The police were seeking extra money to cover excessive expenditure in the course of their duties to control restaurants and night clubs which were operating as ‘Sly Groggs’.⁸⁶ The memo establishes that the entrapment practices of the Vice Squad were known and endorsed within the police hierarchy.

Thirdly, the experiences with police violence of another minority population in South Australia are described in a further body of oral record. Interactions between the police and Nungas, Aboriginal South Australians, are discussed in the landmark history published as part of the 150th anniversary of European occupation of SA. An entire, if brief, chapter explores the dynamics of this interaction and provides details of events similar to those experienced by homosexual citizens.⁸⁷

Lastly, there are oral history interviews that I have conducted (including Pam Cleland, Roger James, Chris Winzar and others). One interview is with a former policeman, Mick O’Shea, who

joined the Vice Squad as a young man in 1971 and became entangled in the aftermath of the Duncan murder. He states that action had been initiated within the Police Force to arrest and charge the Vice Squad members allegedly involved in Duncan's murder, but that Police Commissioner McKinna, on the verge of retirement, directed that the action be stopped.⁸⁸ O'Shea regretted being implicated in the murder when he was pressured by his seniors to provide a false alibi for fellow policemen. More than a decade later, he spoke publicly about the events. Consequently, three other former policemen were charged in 1986 with manslaughter but there was insufficient evidence to secure convictions.⁸⁹

O'Shea's lengthy interview provides details of various Vice Squad practices, including gratuitous violence and assaults against homosexual men, verballing and false charges:

You could put a brief in about two or three blokes, loitering – fail to give satisfactory account – and if you dragged one aside and treated him the right way, like give him a biffing, he might admit to buggery ... Because of their homosexuality they are going to nod their scones [and sign fabricated confessions] ... [The Vice Squad] didn't have to be coy about it, because they were hardly ever likely to be called [to court] and challenged because the guys would just want to nod their scones and get out of there ...

But also you have got to remember that the thuggery that went on the in Vice Squad ... was really an area that I couldn't understand. Why we had to have this afternoon shift half-hour of funny man stories in the Vice Squad office about the previous night's activities in luring homosexuals out of the toilets and around the River Torrens, there or otherwise in the

parklands, and belt the fuck out of them or down the River just flicking them in – that was a huge game. It was a huge game.⁹⁰

The viewpoint of this policeman that the nature of police dealings with homosexual citizens was no more than a huge game was not shared by Mark Day, a police reporter in the early 1960s. Day also recalls of that time that police assaults on homosexual men were a regular event and that ‘these things took place and nobody was surprised because everybody [court and police reporters] knew they did.’ By the time of Duncan’s death in 1972, however, Day was editor of the weekly *Sunday Mail* and in this capacity he worked to ensure the murder remained front page news:

I think we were chasing the cops. The cops were in our frame – not ‘George Duncan was a homosexual [and] had been bashed.’ That wasn’t the story. The story was the cops who got away with it ... That the culture was guilty as sin was taken as read. Proving it was an entirely different matter, of course.⁹¹

There can be little doubt that the Lee interview accounts of police practices hold considerable reliability.

Conclusion

The plight of South Australia’s homosexual citizens has been poignantly documented by John Lee in interviews which constitute an astonishing and tragic record about police persecution of homosexual men in the decades following World War II. The interviews contain details exposing a deeply-entrenched culture of homophobia within the South Australian Police Force during the mid-twentieth century. This persecution was comprehensive and deliberate, comprising a range of strategies that were brutal and effective. It continued unchecked until the murder of Dr Duncan in

1972, although the destruction of many police records, or 'pink files', held on homosexual men did not take place until 1978.

About the Author

Dino Hodge's published work includes *Did You Meet any Malagas?* exploring sexual and racial identity in Darwin's gay community, and *The Fall Upward*, on spirituality in the lives of lesbians and gay men. He is co-editor of a secondary school social studies text on Aboriginal education and careers, *You Don't Get Degrees in Weetbix Boxes*. Currently Dino is working on a biography of Don Dunstan.

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