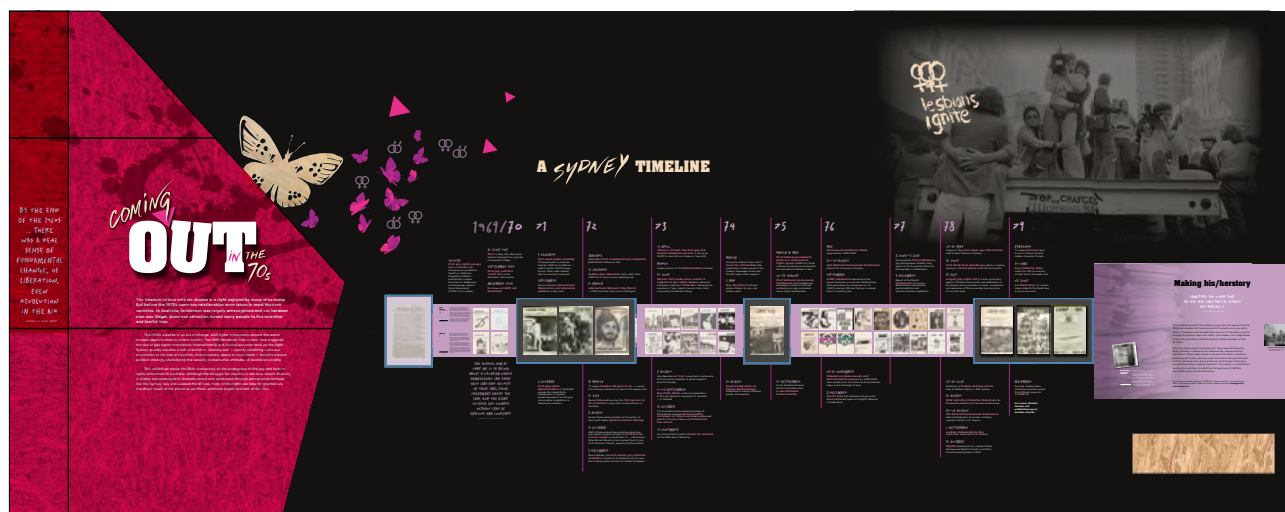


COMING OUT IN THE 70s

Large print captions



Introduction & timeline



Coming out in the 70s

Before the 1970s same-sex relationships were taboo in most Western societies. In Australia, lesbianism was largely unrecognised and sex between men was illegal. Same-sex attraction forced many people to live secretive and fearful lives.

The 1960s ushered in an era of change. Civil rights movements around the world created opportunities to reform society. The 1969 Stonewall riots in New York triggered the rise of gay rights movements internationally and Australians soon took up the fight. Sydney quickly became a hub of activism. 'Coming out' — openly admitting same-sex orientation at the risk of rejection, discrimination, abuse or even death — became a brave political strategy, challenging the sexually conservative attitudes of Australian society.

This exhibition marks the 50th anniversary of the emergence of the gay and lesbian rights movement in Australia. Although the struggle for equality is not over, sexual diversity is widely acknowledged in Australia today and celebrated through annual pride festivals like the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Many of the rights we take for granted are the direct result of the personal sacrifices and hard-fought activism of the 70s.



Why a butterfly?

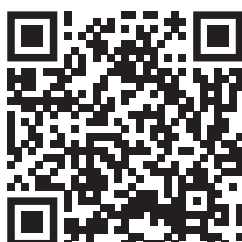
Emerging from its cocoon proud and free, the 'coming out' butterfly symbolised metamorphosis and change. The butterfly motif featured in this exhibition is taken from the poster promoting the 1978 Day of International Gay Solidarity (Sydney's First Mardi Gras).

Other common symbols of gay pride from the time are the double Venus (woman) and Mars (man), representing same-sex love, and the colours purple and lavender. But the most politically charged was the triangle. Used in Nazi concentration camps to identify suspected homosexual men (pink) and women (black), it was reclaimed in the 70s as powerful expression of pride.



Tell us your feedback or story

Scan here to leave a comment about this exhibition, or to share a story or experience





For full details

of the items on display and large-print captions visit



A note on terms

This exhibition uses descriptive terms commonly used in the 1970s, including 'homosexual', 'camp', 'lesbian' and 'gay' and the umbrella term 'same-sex' (attracted/oriented/relationships). Some of these terms have since been replaced by words that are more inclusive of diverse gender and sexual identities.



Help or support?

If this exhibition raises issues for you, these are some of the community groups that offer information and support:

ACON

acon.org.au

Twenty10/ Gay Counselling Service of NSW

twenty10.org.au

Minus18

minus18.org.au

First Nations Rainbow

firstnationsrainbow.org.au



A gay manifesto

by Carl Wittman, 1970

Carl Wittman's *A Gay Manifesto* is one of the most influential early statements about gay liberation. Written in San Francisco in 1969 and published by the Gay Liberation Front in New York City in January 1970, it discusses society's oppression of same-sex oriented people and challenges all lesbians and gay men to 'come out'. Wittman's manifesto was reprinted in the third issue of *CAMP Ink*, and later again as this leaflet. Produced at Women's Liberation headquarters in Glebe, it was authorised by feminist Kate Jennings and handed out at the University of Sydney on 10 June 1971.

Sydney University student broadside collection



CAMP Ink

Fifty years ago, in July 1970, Australia's first political organisation for same-sex oriented men and women was set up in Sydney. The group called itself the Campaign Against Moral Persecution Inc, generating the playful acronym CAMP, a word commonly associated with homosexuality.

A few months later, CAMP's founders put together the first issue of *CAMP Ink*, Australia's first gay rights magazine. They printed 500 copies, priced at 20 cents each, and within a year the print run rose to 5000. Initially intended as a news magazine, it soon became a key source of information for and about gay people, as well as building momentum for the group's political activities, and connecting gay people around the country.

Gay Counselling Service of New South Wales records

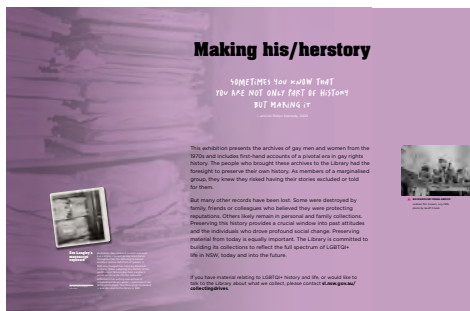
The overall aim of CAMP Inc is to bring about a situation where homosexuals can enjoy good jobs and security in those jobs, equal treatment under the law, and the right to serve our country without fear of exposure and contempt

— *CAMP Ink*, vol 1, no 1, November 1970

A Sydney timeline

Visit the Pride History Group's '**Decades of Pride**' project for a detailed timeline.

www.pridehistory.org.au/decades-of-pride



Making his/herstory

Sometimes you know that you are not only part of history but making it

— activist Robyn Kennedy, 2020

This exhibition presents the archives of gay men and women from the 1970s and includes first-hand accounts of a pivotal era in gay rights history. The people who brought these archives to the Library had the foresight to preserve their own history. As members of a marginalised group, they knew they risked having their stories excluded or told for them.

But many other records have been lost. Some were destroyed by family, friends or colleagues who believed they were protecting reputations. Others likely remain in personal and family collections. Preserving this history provides a crucial window into past attitudes and the individuals who drove profound social change. Preserving material from today is equally important. The Library is committed to building its collections to reflect the full spectrum of LGBTQI+ life in NSW, today and into the future.

If you have material relating to LGBTQI+ history and life, or would like to talk to the Library about what we collect, please contact **sl.nsw.gov.au/collectingdrives**.



Eve Langley's manuscript cupboard

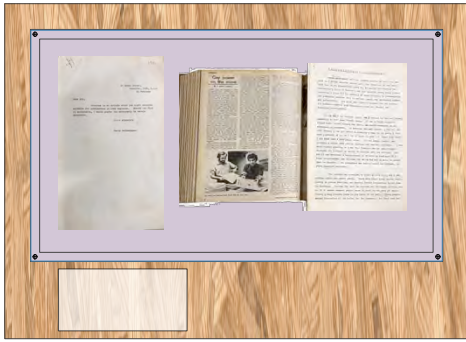
Australian-New Zealand novelist and poet Eve Langley crossed gender boundaries throughout her life. Refusing to accept society's narrow definition of gender, in 1954 she changed her name by deed poll to Oscar Wilde, adopting the identity of the world's most famous gay man. Langley's unconventional life choices were also reflected in her writing. Her archive of unpublished literary works — seen here in her 1970s photograph 'The Manuscript Cupboard' — was donated to the library in 1981.

Eve and June Langley collection



Background image above:

Lesbian film makers, July 1978, photo by Geoff Friend.



A special reporter

On 6 February 1971 the inaugural meeting of CAMP Inc was the first open public meeting of gay men and lesbians in Australia. A month later, an eyewitness account of this event, credited anonymously to 'a special reporter', was published in the *Bulletin* magazine.

The cover letter and manuscript for the article were recently donated to the Library by the author, Sydney historian Garry Wotherspoon. At risk of losing his job at the University of Sydney to spread the word about Australia's newest gay organisation, Garry persuaded the *Bulletin* to protect his identity.

Bulletin, 13 March 1971; letter and manuscript from Garry Wotherspoon papers



Being seen

You have to imagine a time when there was nothing positive in the media, or anywhere, about homosexuality

— broadcaster and activist Julie McCrossin, 2019

In the 1970s few Australians had any understanding of sexual difference, and the mainstream media rarely mentioned homosexuality except as sinful, criminal or sick. Fed up with lies, ridicule and abuse, a small group of lesbians and gay men decided to speak out.

Sydney friends and neighbours Christabel Poll and John Ware started the Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP Inc) as a letter writing campaign to challenge public statements misrepresenting gay people. On 10 September 1970 *The Australian* reported the formation of CAMP with an invitation to join the group. A week later Ware was interviewed on the ABC television program *This Day Tonight*.

The effect of this prominent media coverage was electric. Newspapers, magazines, radio and television rushed to report on the 'new-found' minority group and public attitudes began to shift. The media coverage also let gay men and women across the country know they were not alone.



Captions to background graphics:

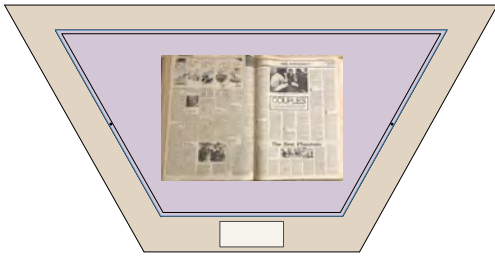
TOP: Sydney Mardi Gras, 24 June 1978, photo by Branco Gacia.



BELOW LEFT: Women's Gay Solidarity March, morning of first Mardi Gras, 24 June 1978, photo by Sallie Colechin.



BELOW RIGHT: Domain following May Day March, 5 May 1974, photo by Anne Roberts.



Going public

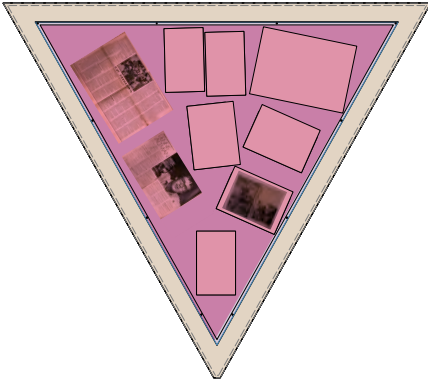
On Saturday 19 September 1970 Australians opened the magazine section of the country's only national newspaper to see something that had never appeared in print here before. With their faces clearly visible and using their full names, psychology student John Ware and public servant Christabel Poll became the first publicly self-identified gay man and lesbian in Australia.

These founders of CAMP Inc were launching an attack on the decades-long culture of concealing same-sex orientation. They wanted to change public opinion and the law. With its wide readership, *The Australian* gave the group an enormous promotional boost. The article included contact details for the newly formed organisation, and within a year CAMP Inc had 1500 members.

Pictured:

John Ware (right), partner Michael (back to camera) and Christabel Poll (centre)

The Australian, 19 September 1970

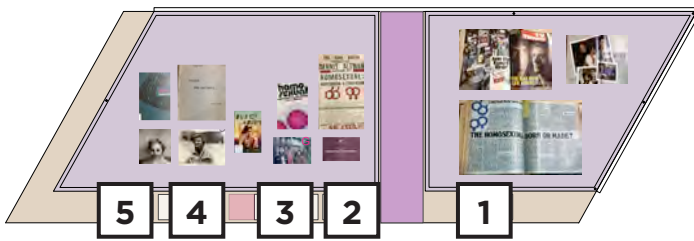


Media monitors

The hundreds of clippings seen here were gathered in the 1970s by Sydney activists determined to document any mention of gay men and lesbians in the media. Clipped from local and international newsletters, periodicals and newspapers, they give a compelling account of the issues facing gay men and lesbians at the time and the impact of the gay rights movement on commentators of the day.

Browse the media scrapbooks of Terrence Bell and David McDiarmid via the Library's catalogue.

Clippings (at back) from Dennis Altman, Terrence Bell and Peter de Waal papers



1

Mainstream media

Gay rights activists made good use of the mainstream media to challenge society's attitudes and build momentum for change. Publishers and journalists responded to growing public interest in gay rights issues, and books and articles by and about lesbians and gay men were soon in print. But nothing brought gay life into lounge rooms better than television. In March 1972 Australia led the way in shattering social taboos when lawyer Don Finlayson and partner Dudley Butterfield from *Number 96* became the world's first regular gay characters in a prime-time TV serial. Another world first followed, when transgender Sydney identity Carlotta appeared on the same show as a trans character in 1973.

TV Times, 29 June 1974; *Cleo*, July 1976; *Women's Day*, 3 September 1973

Gay liberation will have achieved its full potential when it is no longer needed, when we see each other neither as men and women, gay or straight, but purely as people
— Dennis Altman, 1972

Homosexual: oppression and liberation

by **Dennis Altman, 1972**

One of the best-known of accounts of gay liberation, this influential book explores misunderstandings about same-sex orientation in society, literature and philosophy. Australian writer and academic Dennis Altman began writing the book while living in New York, where he witnessed the rise of gay and lesbian political activism and was quick to join in.

First published in the US, *Homosexual* was widely acclaimed and Altman became a spokesperson for the gay liberation movement. Back in Sydney, invitations to the 'Gay Book Launch' of the Australian edition on 2 July 1973 were highly sought after by young gay activists and the first print-run quickly sold out.

Dennis Altman papers; photo by Gregg Blachford of John Lee, David McDiarmid, Robert Tucker and another going to Altman's book launch in July 1973

3

Black hours

by **Wayne King, 1996**

As a gay Aboriginal man living in racist, homophobic Australia, Wayne King was doubly marginalised.

Born in Ipswich, Queensland, in 1948, he moved to the Sydney suburb of Paddington in the late 1960s. He began visiting gay bars in Bondi and met other homosexuals. King experienced racial prejudice from the Australian community, and homophobia among sections of the Aboriginal community. But it was the depth of racial prejudice and rejection he experienced in gay society that he found most hurtful. He wrote his life story in the 1990s as part of his own healing process and to help white Australia understand Aboriginal Australia's hidden history.

Gays may have been outsiders, but as a gay aborigine, I might as well have been from Mars

— **Wayne King, 1996**

Shadow and substance

by Joyce Geake, 1973

Sydney social worker and CAMP member Joyce Geake wrote this manuscript when she was in her 50s. She discusses her experience of growing up as a lesbian and addresses common misconceptions about homosexuality. After qualifying as a social worker in the late 1940s, Geake spent most of her career working as a librarian. In the 1950s she consulted a psychiatrist about her same-sex desires, and spent nine months in therapy in England to no avail. She travelled to Europe in 1972 to study counselling services that helped same-sex oriented people accept their sexuality.

Geake's manuscript was never published but is now fully digitised and can be read via the Library's catalogue

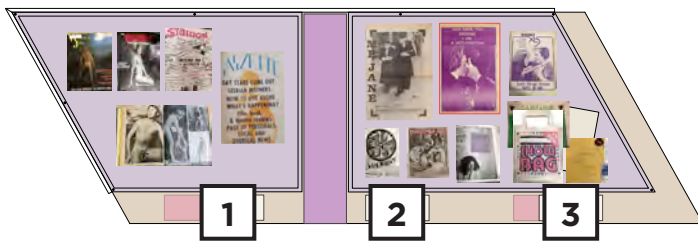
5

All that false instruction

by Elizabeth Riley (Kerryn Higgs), 1975

Billed as ‘a novel of lesbian love’, *All That False Instruction* was Australia’s first lesbian novel. Written in England in the early 1970s by University of Melbourne graduate and Radicalesbian Kerryn Higgs, it was strongly autobiographical and daringly explicit for its era. It tells the story of Maureen Craig, who defies the rules set down for lesbians in Australia at the time — she is not discreet or ashamed of her love for women and doesn’t think she is sick or unnatural. When Higgs’ mother threatened to sue her for libel over the manuscript, Higgs transferred the novel’s events from Melbourne to Sydney and published it under a pseudonym.

Photo by Anne Roberts, 1975



1

Gay press

A vital ingredient to the success of any political movement is the creation of its own media. Australia's first community-based gay news magazine, *CAMP Ink*, was quickly followed by a more commercial gay press that moved away from political activism as its primary focus.

Launched in January 1972, *William & John* combined serious feature articles with raunchy pictures — although censorship restrictions required full-frontal nudes to be 'masked' in its Victorian edition. Facing a costly obscenity trial in 1973, it closed after just eight issues.

A flurry of short-lived, lifestyle-oriented newspapers and magazines followed, with titles like *Butch*, *Stallion* and *Gayzette*. Australia's first monthly gay magazine, the long-running *Campaign* (1975–2000), helped gay people connect with each other and strengthened the growing sense of community.

William & John, vol 1, no 1, 1972; *Butch*, vol 1, no 1, 1972; *Stallion*, Aug 1974; *Gayzette*, Sept 1974

The taboo against lesbians [has] conspired to prevent women from discussing their sexual feelings for each other

— *Refractory Girl*, summer 1974

2

Feminist press

Beginning with *MeJane* in 1971, the women's liberation movement in Australia produced a range of newspapers and magazines expressing feminist ideas. This 'alternative' women's media included articles by and about lesbians, and put out the occasional lesbian edition.

It was ground-breaking publishing. *Refractory Girl*, Australia's first women's studies journal, distributed its summer 1974 'Lesbian' issue with a covering letter telling how one Sydney printer refused to print the magazine on the grounds of obscenity and destroyed the plates.

Smaller 'creativity' magazines like *Pandora's Box* — published by CAMP member Gaby Antolovich — and *Cauldron* — by the Cauldron Hall Collective in Sydney's inner-west — celebrated women's political writing and literature, including lesbian feminist poetry.

MeJane, March 1973; *Cauldron*, vol 1, no 2, 1975; *Pandora's Box*, 1976; *Refractory Girl*, summer 1974

Why do straight sisters sometimes cry when they are called lesbians ?

— *Tharunka*, September 1973

3

Student press

Gay lib swept noisily through student politics in the 1960s, adding momentum to the countercultural rebellion in Australia. By the early 1970s, university campuses were becoming safer places for gay men and women to come out and find acceptance. Gay activist groups distributed their newsletters and manifestos to students and posted flyers on campus noticeboards. Student publications discussed same-sex orientation and regularly reported on gay issues.

Tharunka at the University of New South Wales printed a 'Gay Pride' edition in September 1973, while the University of Sydney's *Honi Soit* produced the landmark 'Homo Honi' issue for Homosexual Solidarity Week in May 1976, with its attention-grabbing cover declaring 'How dare you presume I am a heterosexual'.

Honi Soit, May 1976, lent by Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Sydney Library; *Tharunka*, 8 Sept 1973; O'Week sample bag, University of Sydney, c 1976, Peter Murphy papers



Chequerboard

This is only part of me

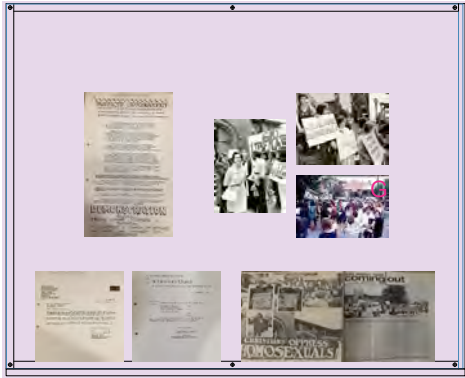
— Peter Bonsall-Boone, 1972

Tolerance is not the same as acceptance

— Sue Wills, 1972

On 31 October 1972 two gay couples came out on prime-time television in an episode of the ABC's documentary series *Chequerboard*. Peter Bonsall-Boone and his partner Peter de Waal, and Sue Wills and her partner Gabrielle (Gaby) Antolovich were members of CAMP who agreed to appear on the show as a political statement. The program also broadcast Australian television's first kiss between men.

The ramifications were swift. A week after the show went to air, Bonsall-Boone was sacked from his job as church secretary at St Clement's Anglican Church in Mosman.



St Clement's demo

Two hundred demonstrators from CAMP and Sydney Gay Liberation joined forces on 12 November to stage a noisy protest outside St Clement's Church, disrupting its Sunday service. Demonstrators accused the church of hypocrisy, claiming that the minister and others had 'tolerated' Peter Bonsall-Boone's sexuality until it was made public.

Angered by the church's blatant discrimination, the protestors wore black crepe-paper armbands emblazoned with the pink triangle that suspected homosexuals had been forced to wear in Nazi concentration camps. With banners, placards, Gay Lib T-shirts and badges, it was the biggest demonstration by the gay rights movement yet seen in Australia.

Chequerboard rushes, Peter de Waal papers, reproduced with permission from Gabrielle Antolovich, Peter de Waal, Sue Wills and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation – Library Sales © 1972 ABC

This video features segments from the following programs:

Chequerboard, 'This just happens to be part of Me', ABC TV

31 October 1972, featuring Peter Bonsall-Boone, Peter de Waal, Sue Wills and Gabrielle Antolovich.

Reproduced with permission from Sue Wills, Gabrielle Antolovich, Peter de Waal & the Australian Broadcasting Corporation – Library Sales © 1972 ABC

Monday Conference, 2 July 1972, featuring Dennis Altman.

Reproduced with permission from Dennis Altman & the Australian Broadcasting Corporation – Library Sales © 1972 ABC

Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofers, producer Digby Duncan, a film by One in Seven Collective, 1980. © Digby Duncan

Running time: about 25 minutes

BEING HEARD

Talking openly about homosexuality sparked hope in many lesbians and gay men living in isolation around the country. As activists fought for change, they created one of the most successful reform movements in Australian history.

Activists lobbied politicians and community leaders for law reform to address discrimination and violence. They used humour and catchy slogans to attract media attention and gain public support. They made the personal political, marching in solidarity and 'shocking the straights' with spontaneous actions known as 'zaps'.

Graffiti affirmed that 'Lesbians are lovely' and 'Gay is good', while newsletters, manifestos, flyers and posters spread the word about gay issues. Badges and T-shirts proudly displayed a connection to the cause. Gay and lesbian groups encouraged shared identity and offered safe meeting places.

Festivals and conferences created temporary havens of community and the chance to build new fields of study. Gay Pride Week 1973 was a highpoint for Sydney's gay rights movement, but it was also a turning point as groups began to change or split apart, looking for different ways to achieve their goals. In 1978 and 79 Sydney activists joined tens of thousands in solidarity in International Days of Gay and Lesbian events around the world.

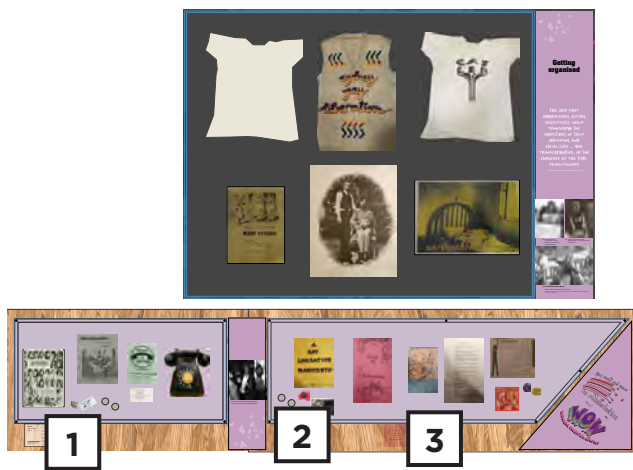
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Getting organised

The idea that homosexuals, acting collectively, could transform the conditions of their individual and social lives ... was transformative; in the language of the time, revolutionary

— historian & sociologist Jeffrey Weeks, 1993



Photo captions:

Robert Tucker at St Clement's Church, Mosman, 1972.

Courtesy Gregg Blachford.

John Lee outside the ABC headquarters, 11 July 1972, photo by John Storey.



Background image above:

CAMP member Gabrielle Antolovich, 1972.

Reproduced with permission from Gabrielle Antolovich and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation – Library Sales
© 1972 ABC

1

Reform

CAMP Inc NSW

Australia's first gay political group involving both men and women, CAMP Inc grew to 2000 members in the 1970s. Branches formed around the country, and the *CAMP Ink* newsletter was an important national platform for gay rights issues.

With male homosexuality still a criminal act and discrimination rife, CAMP's subtly branded membership cards carried an anonymous number to avoid the risk of unwanted social exposure. But some chose to display their membership openly, wearing CAMP T-shirts and badges with pride. In April 1973 the organisation launched its 'Phone-a-Friend' telephone service, Australia's first gay and lesbian helpline. CAMP was later renamed the Gay Counselling Service of NSW, and the work of this pioneering initiative continues today as part of Twenty10.

Robert French and Lex Watson collections; badge, phone and CAMP T-shirt (above) lent by Peter de Waal AM, CAMP Inc foundation member



Photo caption:

Protesters outside ABC headquarters, July 1972, photo by John Storey. Courtesy Gregg Blachford.

2

Revolution Sydney Gay Liberation

A group of younger activists found CAMP's agenda too conservative and broke away to form Sydney Gay Liberation in January 1972. Identifying with more radical and militant gay rights movements overseas, the group published its own 'Gay Liberation Manifesto' and quickly became a key force in Australian gay rights activism. It set up consciousness-raising groups to explore sexual liberation and social revolution, and provoked media attention with raucous street protests and public displays of affection. Facing fragmentation within its ranks after the success of Gay Pride Week, Sydney Gay Liberation ceased to exist on 20 October 1973.

Robert French, David McDiarmid, Lex Watson and First Ten Years of Sydney Women's Liberation collections

To be a lesbian is to be identified not by men or by a society made by men but by me, by a woman

— US writer and activist Sally Miller Gearhart, 1972

3

Radicalism

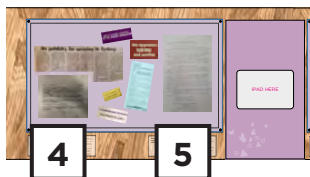
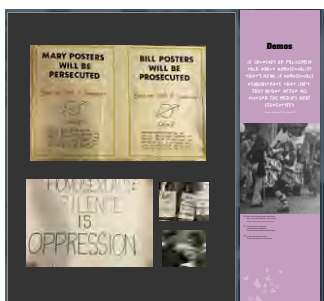
Lesbian feminism

Lesbians joined CAMP and Sydney Gay Liberation but many felt unwelcome in these groups dominated by gay men. Some formed their own subgroups within CAMP, while others joined Women's Liberation or the Gay Lib Group. Lesbian feminists choosing to organise separately formed the Sydney Radicalesbians in March 1973. Meeting at the women-only share house in Crystal Street, Petersham, the group changed its name to Women-Oriented-Women, or WOW, in 1974, noting in their minute book their intention to change their name as often 'as the whim takes us to prevent type casting'.

See the full Cauldron Hall Collective notebook via the Library's catalogue

Robyn Kennedy and First Ten Years of Sydney Women's Liberation collections

Detail (right): from the Cauldron Hall Collective notebook, 1974



Demos

If churches or policemen talk about homosexuality that's news. If homosexuals demonstrate that isn't. They might after all disturb the media's neat stereotypes
— *Nation Review*, 22 October 1971



Photo captions:

Mim Loftus leading chants outside the ABC, 11 July 1972, photo by John Storey.

Courtesy Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives (ALGA)



CAMP activists outside the Liberal Party headquarters, 6 October 1971, photo by Phillip Potter.



Arrest of David McDiarmid, 11 July 1972, photo by John Storey.

4

Demos

On 6 October 1971 a noisy Friday night protest organised by CAMP Inc became Australia's first gay rights demonstration. Facing the Sydney crowds during the evening rush hour, gay men and lesbians bravely 'came out' together to picket Liberal Party politicians and lobby for law reform.

Sydney Gay Lib's more radical 'pop-up' street protests sought to embarrass bystanders and grab media attention. A lunchtime demo outside ABC headquarters in the CBD on 11 July 1973 saw the arrest of artist and activist David McDiarmid. It was the first arrest at a gay demonstration in Australia. Gay rights demonstrations would grow steadily bigger throughout the 1970s, and were key to the movement's success.

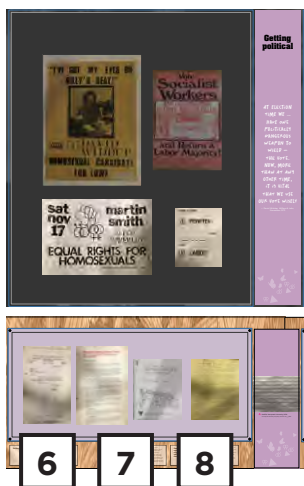
David McDiarmid, Peter de Waal and Lex Watson collections

Zaps, spray paint and stickers

Imported from the United States and popular with gay lib groups, zaps were direct political actions designed to shock society and attract the media. Ranging from same-sex public kissing to street theatre, leafletting and sit-ins, gay libbers risked arrest and public abuse to challenge the status quo.

Activists spray painted slogans on walls all over Sydney, and used stickers as statements of pride and as weapons in the guerrilla war against offensive statements in the media. CAMP and Gay Liberation co-funded a 'Homosexuals demand equality' sticker in 1973 for slapping on any surface that would bring attention to the cause.

Craig Johnston and Lex Watson
collections



Getting political

At election time we ... have one politically dangerous weapon to wield – the vote. now, more than at any other time, it is vital that we use our vote wisely

— David Widdup, *William & John*, November 1972

Getting political

- 6 Generating change meant getting political. At the 1972 federal election David Widdup became the first openly gay candidate to run for public office in Australia. Standing for the inner-western Sydney seat of Lowe, then held by prime minister William McMahon, Widdup polled only 218 votes. But his campaign got good media coverage with its catchy slogan ‘I’ve got my eyes on Billy’s seat’, and achieved its aim of helping to raise awareness in the wider community. In the next year, at the 1973 NSW state election, Gay Lib member and one-time editor of *Stallion* magazine Martin Smith won 1.44% of the primary vote when he stood in the eastern suburbs seat of Waverley.

Robert French and Peter de Waal
collections

Campaigning against psychosurgery and aversion therapy

Many psychiatrists in the 1950s and 60s viewed same-sex orientation as an illness. They administered 'cures' that combined aversion therapy with electric shock treatment or even lobotomies, particularly for lesbians. These atrocities were often imposed by the courts as the only alternative to jail time. Gay activists contributed to public debates and printed pamphlets to bring public attention to the issue. On 17 October 1973 the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists was the first major medical organisation in the world to determine that homosexuality was not a mental illness.

8

Campaigning against discrimination

Discrimination against two gay students at Sydney's Macquarie University brought support from surprising allies in 1973 and 74. Eighteen-year-old student Jeremy Fisher was expelled from his residential college for gay activism, and trainee-teacher Penny Short lost her scholarship after being ruled 'medically unfit' when her lesbian love poem was published in the student newspaper. The NSW Builder's Labourers' Federation instigated the world's first 'Pink Ban' on construction at the campus, forcing Robert Menzies College to reverse its expulsion of Fisher. Short never regained her scholarship despite several independent psychiatric reports and more than 1000 protestors rallying outside the Education Department.

Peter de Waal collection

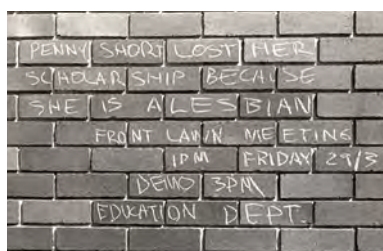
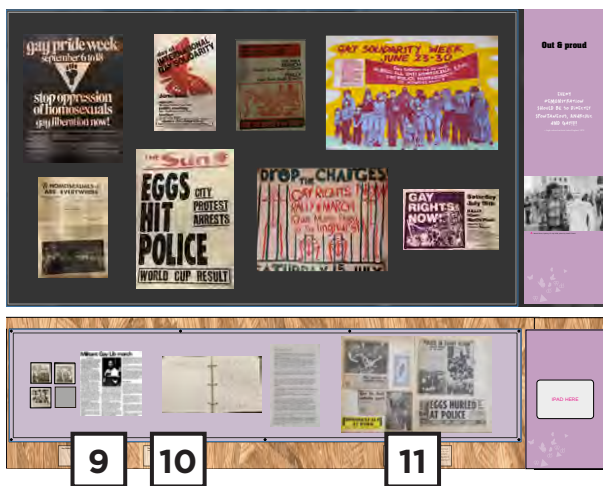


Photo caption:

Graffiti, University of Sydney, 1974.

Courtesy the University of Sydney Archives, G77_1_0488



Out & proud

Every demonstration should be so directly spontaneous, anarchic and gay!!!!

— high school activist John Englart, 1973



Photo caption:

Martin Place, Sydney, 15 July 1978,
photo by Geoff Friend.

Out & proud

Gay Pride 1973

Gay Pride Week in September 1973 was Australia's first nationally co-ordinated gay rights event and the biggest to date. Public 'speak outs' encouraged dialogue with mainstream society, while protests and spontaneous celebrations prompted gay men and women to 'come out' en masse. Eighteen-year-old high-school student John Englart from Epping wrote about his excitement at taking part in the Sydney actions. Englart's diary entries and photographs also record his eyewitness accounts of the 'zap' by gay liberationist Richard Jessop, offering sliced sheep's brains to passers-by outside psychosurgeon Dr Harry Bailey's Macquarie Street offices.

Barry Charles, John Englart and Craig Johnston collections

10

Homosexuals are everywhere

(wall)

Published in Sydney in 1977 by the group Socialist Lesbians and Male Homosexuals, this political broadsheet was printed in English with several sections translated into European community languages. It was designed to encourage migrant trade unionists to support gay rights and discourage discrimination against gay men and lesbians in the workplace.

Mardi Gras: Day of International Solidarity

In 1978 Sydney lesbians and gay men answered the call to join a Day of International Gay Solidarity. A morning march through the city's streets on 24 June was followed by an afternoon forum addressed by gay rights pioneer Dennis Altman. The evening street parade or 'mardi gras' saw revellers partying down Oxford Street before police attacked, bashing and arresting 53 activists. This public display of police brutality ignited a year of intense mobilisation, as the demand for gay rights exploded and media attention swayed public opinion towards law reform. Forged in the furnace of 70s activism, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is now a world-leading Pride festival and remains a platform for social justice.

Browse David McDiarmid's scrapbook via the Library's catalogue.

Robert French, David McDiarmid, Peter Murphy, Lex Watson and Garry Wotherspoon collections



Speaking up

If we wish to survive, we must work til we drop to ensure ... the continuation of the work of liberation

— Mike Clohesy, speech notes, 1975

12 Campaigning for law reform

CAMP continued its focus on anti-discrimination and law reform through the mid 1970s. Set up by the Whitlam Labor government in 1974, the Royal Commission on Human Relationships planned to investigate the ‘family, social, educational, legal and sexual aspects of male and female relationships’. When asked ‘What do you think?’, gay men and lesbians seized the chance to share their stories of discrimination, exclusion and trauma. Sydney teacher and CAMP secretary Mike Clohesy was sacked after speaking about CAMP’s submission and his relationship to the media. The commission’s final report in late 1977 recommended nationwide decriminalisation of homosexuality but determined that gay couples should not be allowed to marry or adopt.

Robyn Kennedy, Peter de Waal and *Refractory Girl* collections

Badges

**For 20c you too can be
blatant**

— *CAMP Ink*, February 1973

Political campaign badges were popular in the 1970s, and gay liberation supporters used them to proudly proclaim their sexual identity or point of view. These badges carry messages of self-affirmation that reflect key moments in the social and political life of the movement and the times. For some lesbians and gay men, pinning a badge on their chest took great courage and was a revolutionary act.

Robert French, Robyn Kennedy, Lex Watson, Pride History Group and First Ten Years of Sydney Women's Liberation collections

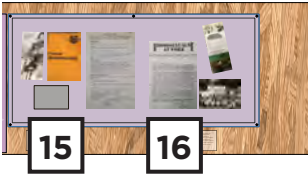
Campaigning for lesbian mothers

In a society that generally regarded lesbians as unfit to raise their own children, the Lesbian Mothers Group was formed in 1978 as a politically oriented self-help group. It provided advice about legal services and Family Court proceedings and kept track of custody issues and discrimination cases. Its meetings brought lesbian mothers together to discuss the problems they faced, helping each other with childcare, and offering community support.

First Ten Years of Sydney Women's Liberation collection

Homosexual families, so far as society is concerned, do not exist

— CAMP NSW, Homosexuals and Human Relationships, September 1975



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Speaking up seminars and tribunals

As the 1970s progressed, lesbians and gay men found their voice. Many took advantage of opportunities to speak out about the issues they faced. The first government funding for a gay organisation in Australia came in 1975 when CAMP received a \$4000 grant for its International Women's Year Seminars on Female Homosexuality. In 1976 CAMP's two-day Tribunal on Homosexuals and Discrimination heard evidence from 44 victims. Its report recommended drastic social and legal changes.

Robyn Kennedy, Garry Wotherspoon
and First Ten Years of Sydney Women's
Liberation collections

Talking together festivals and conferences

From the earliest days of the liberation movement, gay and lesbian groups organised retreats and festivals — together and separately.

1975 saw the launch of an ambitious series of 11 annual National Homosexual Conferences, initiated by the Australian Union of Students. It was a challenge to bring Australia's fragmented gay community together — how could lesbians and gay men meet openly when coming out could still be risky? But many took the chance to connect with each other, no matter how temporarily, and to be part of a gay community.

Robert French, Peter de Waal and Sydney Mardi Gras collections

Photo caption:

Fourth National Homosexual conference fundraising picnic, May 1978 by Sallie Colechin



Background images above from left:

Ash Street demonstration at ABC,
6 October 1971, photo by Phillip Potter.



Freedom March, George Street, 15 July
1978, photo by Geoff Friend.



4th National Homosexual Conference,
Paris Theatre foyer, May 1978, photo by
Sallie Colechin.

BEING TOGETHER

Gay culture came to life in the 1970s, and people began to feel its pulse. When lesbians and gay men left their past lives behind in search of personal liberation and sexual freedom, Sydney became their cultural heartland.

Artists, filmmakers, photographers and performers developed unique perspectives that sparked radical individual and collective creativity. Sydney's Feminist Bookshop promoted women's writing, and lesbian bands made 'wimmin's' music. CAMP put on a pottery workshop and social clubs, like Gay Men's Rap, offered cultural and sporting activities. Sydney's first weekly gay and lesbian radio program, Gay Waves, took to the air in 1979.

The movement offered new ways to hook up: at public demonstrations, political meetings, conferences, fundraising dances and parties, bars and commercial gay venues. In the turbulent aftermath of the 78 Mardi Gras, factions in Sydney's gay community began to unite. For many, celebration was a more potent tool than protest, and continued to attract public attention through vibrant poster art.

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If everyone just came out in the open and just did what they wanted — that's liberation

— Paul Hock, *Sylvia and the Synthetics, William & John*, December 1972

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Photography Sydneyphiles

Chinese Australian William Yang (then Willy Young) left Brisbane for Sydney in the late 1960s and was soon swept out of the closet. Picking up a camera to make ends meet, he turned from the fashion world to theatre and show business. By 1974 he was snapping glamorous events for magazines and starting to photograph the local gay scene. In 1977 his first solo exhibition, *Sydneyphiles*, became the first commercial exhibition to display photographs of Sydney's underground culture. Yang's frank images of gay life struck the right balance in capturing sexual frisson without being too explicit.

Sydneyphiles, 1977, photos courtesy William Yang.

All glitter, no talent

— Sylvia & the Synthetics' motto, 1972–74

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Performance

Sylvia and the Synthetics

The lifespan of Sydney's radical drag troupe Sylvia and the Synthetics ran from October 1972 to the end of 1974. Founding members Denis Norton, Paul Hock and Morris Spinetti were regularly joined on stage by a revolving cast of outrageous characters including Doris Fish (Philip Mills) and Danny Abood, backed by legendary local vocalist Wendy Saddington and bands like Mental as Anything. Following the lead of overseas drag acts like the Cockettes, the Synthetics offered total theatre, with bizarre costumes and faces painted not for prettiness but to shock. Part of Sydney's cultural demi-monde underground through the first phase of Australia's gay rights movement, the Synthetics were popular headliners at gay lib and women-only dances.

After a show at Sydney University, 1974, photo by Philip Morris.

Danny Abood papers

Art cannot be separated from
politics [and] from sexual
politics least of all

— 4th National Homosexual Conference
brochure, 1978

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Film

‘Images of Gays’ festival

Sydney’s first major film festival to focus on lesbian and gay themes opened in May 1978, curated by Johnny Allen and Dennis Altman. Allen had leased the Paris Theatre (now demolished) as an alternate space for radical cabaret, theatre, film and music events. On opening night of the week-long festival, 600 gay men and women gathered to watch *Word is Out*, a 1977 American documentary about lesbian and gay lives. Nearby, the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative in Darlinghurst hosted regular screenings of local and international experimental films including Digby Duncan’s landmark *Witches and Faggots, Dykes and Poofers* (1980), which captured the first Sydney Mardi Gras and the year of protest that followed.

(Top) Paris Theatre foyer, 1978, photo by Sallie Colechin.

Art

Exhibition of gay and lesbian artists

An exhibition of lesbian and gay artists was staged at Watters Gallery in East Sydney in July 1978 as a fundraiser for the Fourth National Homosexual Conference. The first explicitly gay and lesbian art exhibition in Australia, it featured mixed media by Vivienne Binns, the provocative textiles and needlework of Frances Budden, images by photographer Sallie Colechin and works by printmaker and sculptor Doug Erskine. Also on display were radical sexual and political artworks by agitprop activist David McDiarmid, illustrator and printmaker Robert Lawrie, artists Cathy Mitchell and Bill Morley, political poster-maker Toni Robertson and the avant-garde jewellery and body adornments of Arabic-Australian designer Peter Tully.

(Bottom) Doris Fish and Danny Abood heading to Watters Gallery, 1978, photographer unnamed.

Danny Abood papers



Visit the exhibition
online

[sl.nsw.gov.au/
comingoutinthe70s](http://sl.nsw.gov.au/comingoutinthe70s)

Terminology and inclusion

This project focuses on gay and lesbian activism in Sydney the 1970s and includes terminology in use at that time. It is part of a larger Library focus on LGBTQI+ history and life that will unfold over the next three years.

The Library acknowledges that many of the archival practices on which our collections have been built are laden with conscious and unconscious biases that have silenced or marginalised the voices of many, including LGBTQI+ people. The Library is committed to creating an inclusive space where LGBTQI+ people feel welcome.