

President's Report

On Thursday 12 February 1987, Rob Thurling's reign as President of the Australian Gay Archives came to an end. A recent promotion in his job meant that Rob now has less free time, and he felt that he had no alternative but to resign as president. However, Rob intends to remain involved in our activities as much as he can. All of us at the Archives enjoyed working with Rob and appreciate the significant contribution he has made to our development and progress over recent years.

Our team of volunteers is still small, which means that we are not able to achieve as much as we would like, or as is necessary. At a meeting a few weeks ago we decided to set ourselves some short term goals, for although we have a number of major projects on the go we felt that to maintain our enthusiasm and feelings of achievement we needed to undertake and complete some less daunting tasks. Further information on these projects can be found below.

I am pleased to say that the Oral History Project, which had been on hold for quite some time, is now once again underway, thanks largely to the efforts of Mark Riley. Future newsletters will keep you informed on how the project is progressing. We hope to publish excerpts from some of the interviews in the not too distant future. I'm sure that many people in the gay male and lesbian community will find them of great interest. In the meantime, if you know of anybody who would be an interesting person to interview, do let us know.

Our secretary, Louis, has been doing a great job. Lately he has been writing to groups throughout Australia asking them to send us material, particularly newsletters. Unfortunately the response has not been good so far, but it's the sort of thing we have to keep doing, eventually we'll get results.

This leads me to the final comment I'd like to make in this report. The Archives has been fortunate over the last few years in that while our numbers may be small, the people we have are a dedicated and persistent bunch. It takes both qualities to continue to work, over a long period, on a project like cataloguing the collection of journal articles in the way Mark Sarrazin has. The same qualities have been shown by Louis, Greg, Mark Riley, and Willem in wading through the boxes of unsorted material. Likewise Rob Thurling and Mel have immersed themselves in cataloguing our large collection of newspaper clippings. Willem's donation of a poster rack, and his cataloguing of the poster slides has been of great value.

The progress of the Archives is a direct result of the efforts of this exceptional group of people. They don't look for kudos, but I wanted to record publicly my appreciation and respect for the work of my fellow archivists at the Australian Gay Archives.

Graham Carbery

Graham Carbery.

Goals for 1987

At a meeting earlier this year the AGA put together the framework of a series of projects for 1987. It is envisaged that most of these will have been completed - and that other, more far-ranging, goals will be well under way - by the end of the year.

The first of these is the issue of a quarterly newsletter. As well as containing current news-worthy articles (as current as a quarterly permits, that is) each newsletter will include a 'job-description' of the various types of day-to-day work that are essential to the continued running of the AGA.

The next project is fundraising. Preparations for a wine bottling have begun, and it is intended that all should be ready by mid-July. Notice will be sent to members and friends of the official wine tasting (read sale) date in plenty of time - we are sure that the response will be favourable.

The AGA also plans to design and produce a new publicity brochure this year. It will include information as to the function and needs of the AGA, while with a flyer format we hope to elicit the desired response from the public.

The next, more in-house, project is the transcribing of the archives' oral history collection. These tapes are a large and much-valued collection, and transcribing them will make the information they contain more accessible, as well as providing a safeguard against the tapes' eventual deterioration.

Something else scheduled for this year is the comprehensive subject indexing of news items published in Campaign magazine. The index will eventually serve as a valuable point of reference to any researcher on gay topics, both in Australia and overseas; though at the moment only covering one source, the oldest still continuing magazine for gays in Australia, this project can be expanded at a later date to include others such as Gay Community News (Melb.), or Camp Ink.

The AGA also plans to re-investigate the possibility of obtaining tax deductible status. A portfolio containing information on our function, our value to the community supporting our claim is being prepared and will be presented to the authority concerned.

The projects discussed are those which we have come to regard as focal points for 1987, points around which the usual tasks of the archives may be carried out. The principle aim of the AGA has been, and always will be, the providing of a centre for gathering together and preserving our history, while making it available to as many as possible. That is the most important project of all.

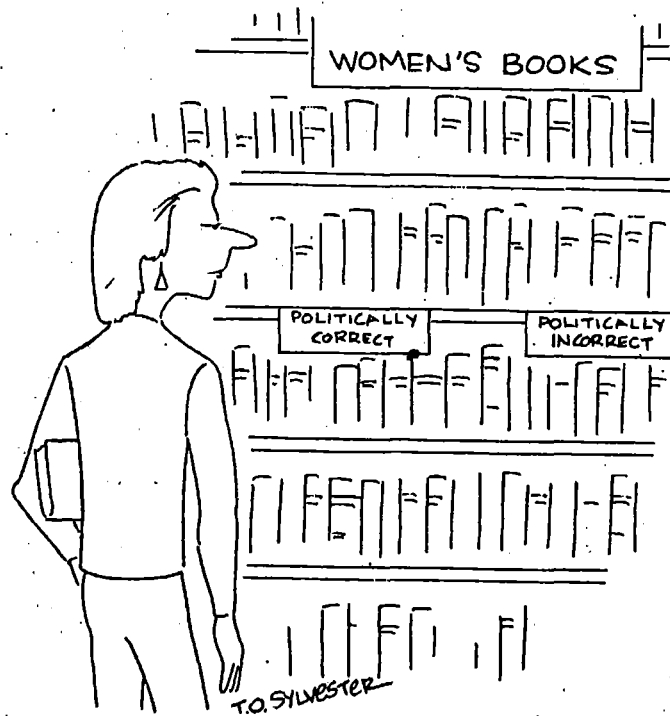
ALSO Foundation Evening

On the 12th of March this year the AGA held a meeting to which members of the ALSO Foundation were invited. The principle aim of the evening was to acquaint the ALSO Foundation with the work, aims and the extensive collection of the AGA. (It is intended that this be the first of a series of visits by other gay groups to the AGA.)

The meeting was well attended - there were also members of the Christ's Community Church congregation present - and began with a welcoming address by the AGA president Graham Carbery. John Willis then gave a short talk on the pleasures and perils of book collecting. John had arranged an impressive display of books selected from his collection to illustrate his talk, which was well received by an appreciative audience.

Then followed a screening of slides of posters from the AGA's collection, a talk by Mark Riley on the seemingly endless task of ephemera catalogueing, and later, much needed refreshments. The evening also provided a suitable occasion for Graham to make known and explain the goals that the AGA has set for 1987.

The Archives were pleased to have the opportunity to welcome another gay group to one of our meetings - we see these occasions as means of fostering better communications between groups, a way of getting to know each other's work at an informal level. We sincerely hope that the ALSO Foundation found the evening equally rewarding.



The Pamphlet and Article Collection

To complement other collections housed at the Archives the catalogue of the article and pamphlet holdings grows week by week. The catalogue covers items (mostly donated) whose nature is as diverse as our community, and represents almost every type of view on - gay male / lesbian lifestyles, the law and gays, police and gays, gays and psychiatry, and so forth.

So that the articles can be readily catalogued and located, a keywording system based on that of the Canadian Gay Archives (Toronto) has been developed, with additions made by Mark Sarrazin and Helen Pausacker. Each article receives a unique number, and is filed away according to this numerical sequence. The cataloguer in reading the article decides which keywords to list it under, and writes the number of the article (or pamphlet) down on the keyword card. This means that an easy subject access to the collection is available, alongside the usual author/title indices.

The items are stored in archival storage boxes in batches of approximately fifty, and at this stage the collection numbers more than 1,000 individual pieces - a cataloguing task surpassed only by the newspaper clippings!

We greatly appreciate the work put into the gathering of articles given to us (and would appreciate any more out there-) as this sort of material, written as it so often is "about" gays rather than by and for gays, supplements the rest of the Archival collection. It is important that this also be preserved, unpalatable though they sometimes are - who enjoys reading Festival of Light pamphlets? Correct cataloguing procedures and careful use of the keywording system ensures the continued availability of all the material.

Updated List of Periodicals

In March of this year the AGA published an update of its list of periodical holdings, which we first put out in 1985. This comprehensive listing of all the periodical holdings kept at the Archives contains details of the title, number of issues held, dates published and a brief description of each publication. Copies are available upon request at \$1.00 each, to cover postage.

Remarkable Story of one Elizabeth Russel

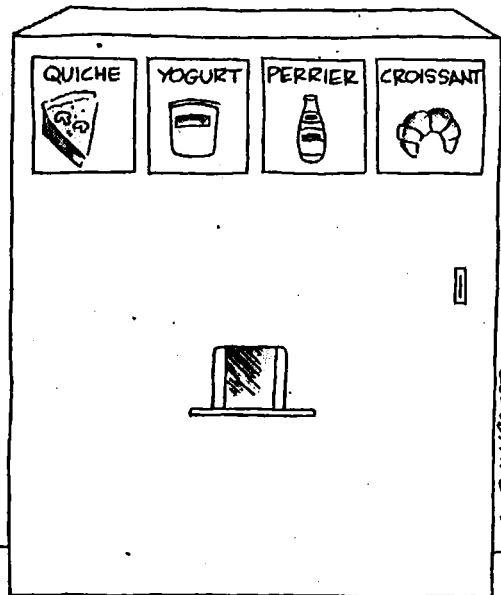
The following excerpt, taken from an English journal almost pre-dating European settlement in Australia, may seem a little out of place in the AGA newsletter. However, any archival bicentennial celebrations (could we all go out and dig up Adderley St.?) will have to wait till next year anyway. This piece was found by AGA member Frank Prain in an old book of his grandfather's, the Annual Register, or, a View of the History, Politics and Literature for the year 1792. Part II Chronicle, State Papers, Characters &c. London 1798, although it seems to have been originally published in the first volume of "Lyson's Environs of London" - so if anybody has access to a copy of this latter text, we'd like to hear from them. The first part of the article is reproduced from the original, but to avoid damage to the volume the rest has been typed out - and not even IBM typewriters have those old fashioned long 's' characters!

Extract from the Parish Register of Streatham.

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“—RUSSEL, buried April 14, 1772. N.B. This person was always known under the guise or habit of a woman, and answered to the name of Elizabeth, as registered in this parish Nov. 21, 1669, but at death proved to be a man.” In speaking of this extraordinary person, whose history I have taken some pains to inquire into, it will be necessary, in order to avoid confusion among the relative pronouns, to make constant use of the masculine gender, however oddly it may be sometimes combined. The various adventures of his life, had they been collected by a contemporary, would have formed a volume as entertaining as those of the celebrated Bampfylde Moore Carew, whom he accompanied in many of his rambles, and from whom probably he first took the hint of disguising his sex to answer some temporary purpose. Upon examining the parish register, I find that John Russel had three daughters, and two sons; William, born in 1668, and Thomas, in 1672; there is little doubt therefore that the person here recorded was one of the two; and that when he assumed the female dress, he assumed also the name of his sister Elizabeth, who probably either died in her infancy, or settled in some remote part of the country; under this name, in the year 1770, he applied for a certificate of his baptism. He attached himself at an early period of life to the gypsies, and being of a rambling disposition visited most

THE FIRST
GAY VENDING MACHINE



p.44 parts of the continent as a stroller or vagabond. When advanced in years he settled at Chipsted in Kent, where he kept a large shop. Sometimes he travelled the country with goods, in the character of a married woman, having changed his maiden name for that of his husband who carried the pack, and to his death was his reputed widow, being known by the familiar appellation of Bet Page. In the course of his travels he attached himself much to itinerant physicians, learned their nostrums, and practised their art. His long experience gained him the character of a most infallible doctress, to which profession he added that of astrologer, and practised both with great profit; yet such was his extravagance, that he died worth six shillings only. It was a common custom with him to spend whatever he had in his pocket, at an alehouse, where he usually treated his companions. About twelve months before his death he came to reside at his native place. His extraordinary age procured him the notice of many of the most respectable families in the neighbourhood, particularly that of Mr. Thrale, in whose kitchen he was frequently entertained. Dr. Johnson, who found him a shrewd sensible person, with a good memory, was very fond of conversing with him. His faculties indeed were so little impaired by age, that a few days before he died, he had planned another ramble, in which his landlord's son was to have accompanied him. His death was very sudden: the surprize of the neighbours may be well imagined, upon finding that the person, who, as long as the memory of any one then living could reach, had always been esteemed and reputed to be a woman, was discovered to be a man; and the wonder was the greater as he had lived much among women, and had frequently been his landlady's bedfellow when an unexpected lodger came to the house. Among other precautions, to prevent the discovery of his sex, he constantly wore a cloth tied under his chin; and his neighbours not having the penetration of Sir Hugh Evans, who spied Falstaff's beard through his muffler, the motive was unsuspected. After his death a large pair of nippers was found in his pocket, with which, it is supposed, he endeavoured to remove by degrees all tokens of manhood from his face. It may be observed that supposing him to be the younger son of John Russel, he would have been 100 years of age; if we suppose him to have been the elder, his age would have been 104. He himself used to aver that he was 108. He had a mixture of the habits and employments of both sexes; for though he would drink hard with men, whose company indeed he chiefly affected, yet he was an excellent sempstress, and celebrated for making a good shirt. There was a wildness and eccentricity in his general conduct, which frequently bordered on insanity; and, at least, we may fairly conclude, to use a favourite expression of Anthony Wood, the Oxford biographer, that he had "a rambling head, and a crazy pate" ' .

(Cartoons in this issue were taken from The Advocate)