

another island recruit, explaining to the police: ‘... me sleep long a him ... me dream and think him woman’. Five cases involved Chinese men between 1890 and 1914 and one case a Japanese defendant.

An emerging subculture: employment, boarding houses and hotels

A small, but visible, urban subculture based on public space emerged in Brisbane around this time. Boarding houses and places of employment were an important part of this network: men propositioned others in workplaces, especially when employees bunked down together, and a number of lodgings, including the Newstead and ‘Woodlands’ boarding houses in inner Brisbane, provided sexual opportunities under the right circumstances. Cinemas and risqué coffee houses were another feature of the subculture, and in 1907, the *Truth* described a man of the ‘coffee-room class’ alleged to proposition young men in certain establishments. In regional centres too boarding houses could bring together like-minded men, and hotels in small towns offered potential contact. Even men living on isolated pastoral stations played a small but integral part in forming a wider identity based on more than just sexual release. In 1907, one shearer looking for male contact spent the night at the Dornville Hotel in Millmerran, near Pittsworth, rather than staying at his mother’s farm nearby.

Urban subcultures, Beats and behavioural codes

Patterns of urbanisation and industrialisation ensured that Brisbane remained the primary centre of any rudimentary homosexual identity in this period, and the use of public space, especially around transport hubs, was an important feature of this terrain. By enacting practices on naturally formed or constructed terrain, certain men imposed meanings on a given locations. By the end of the nineteenth century some men began to rely upon the visibility of difference to meet like-minded others. They marked their sexuality through dress, demeanour, or affection meeting suitors on public trams and city streets. A well-known Brisbane case in the early 1900s described one ‘city queen’ with an elaborate dress code. Those ‘in the know’ could spot a potential suitor and sometimes a simple gaze was enough. Beats – a uniquely Australian phrase that designates any (public) space that men might convene to socialise and have sex – sprang up in urban areas, although they can be traced as far back as the 1860s. They blended together working-class and middle-class men, married and unmarried men, those who considered themselves as homosexual, and those who did not. By 1900, Brisbane’s Botanic Gardens and Wickham and Albert Parks were known meeting spots. The area around William Street and Victoria Bridge was also popular. The introduction of ‘gross indecency’ to Queensland’s *Criminal Code*, in force from 1901, signalled a growing awareness of this community. The offence covered acts of mutual masturbation and oral sex in public or private, giving the police a new tool to control and contain unwanted homosexual behaviour as they ramped up efforts to keep certain locations under surveillance. There is also some evidence that newspaper articles on male sex in public may have served as a guide to Brisbane’s sexual underground even though their primary purpose was to proscribe such activity.

Outside the public eye others were more outrageous. Patterns of effeminacy and gender-inversion were accepted forms of self-expression in some circles and were certainly an embedded part of homosexual identity by the 1920s. One group of ‘Cissies’ turned up to a bachelor party with ‘carmined lips, powdered faces, painted eyes and long marcella waved hair’. They feminised their personal space marking their abodes in ‘soft and seductive colors [sic] of pink and mauve’ embellished with ‘shaded lights and exotic flowers’. They also called each other ‘girlish names’. Indeed, female names and pronouns could be employed as code in public and were used as far back as the convict period in Australia. Along with other slang, they became significant markers of social cohesion. The word ‘puff’ for example – an effeminate term used in London from the 1830s onwards – appeared in a Brisbane court case in 1905. ‘Dropsey is a



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puff one the youths explained. ‘There are plenty of others in Brisbane who do it besides us mob, so I am not the first’.

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