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**South Yarra**

**Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives  
 History Walk 2016**

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 in Friday, 15 March B.Y.O.G.

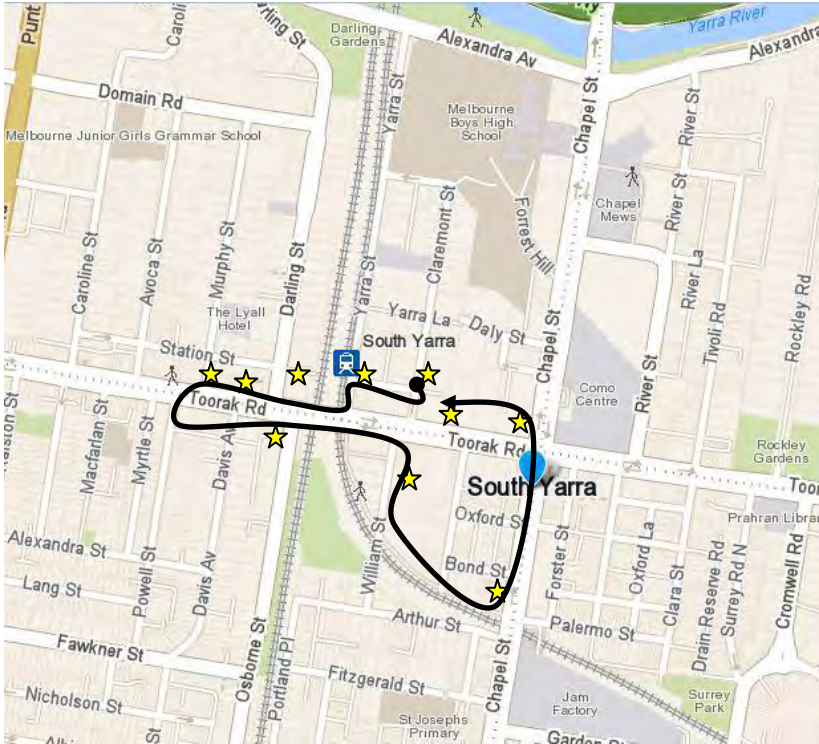


# South Yarra

## 2016 History Walk Guide to Places and Acknowledgments

★ indicates stopping points Total distance is about 2 Km

From [Whereis.com](http://Whereis.com)



### And nearby

Freddie Asmusen's house early 70s at 86 Punt Road West  
Mae West's Coffee Lounge, 12 Oban Street (near Hawksburn Station)  
Daughters of Billitis' early 70s home at Skorus Books, 409 Chapel Street.

### ALGA in 2016

If volunteering for ALGA interests you, we'd love to hear from you. All skills welcome ... archiving, IT, fundraising, promotions, design, data entry, admin ... We try to match up volunteers with projects that fit their interests and time available. See details on back cover.



### Stop 1

**Victorian AIDS Council**  
6 Claremont Street, looking to Melbourne High School

### Stop 2

**South Yarra railway station**  
cnr Yarra Street and Yarra Lane

### Stop 3

**Darling Street,**

### Stop 4

**Maisies and Val's Café Adlib,**  
cnr Toorak Road and Davis Street

### Stop 5

**Kevin O'Neill, Melbourne florist**  
cnr Toorak Road and Murphy Street

### Stop 6

**The lost cafes**  
cnr Osborne Street and Toorak Road

### Stop 7

**Bachelor life**  
William Street

### Stop 8

**Imperial Hotel**  
cnr Palermo and Chapel Streets

### Stop 9

**Capitol Bakery**  
cnr Toorak Road and Chapel Street

### Stop 10

**The old Regent Theatre**  
Cnr Toorak Road and Chambers St.

### Thank-you

... to the State Library of Victoria for photos on pages 1,2, 3 and 4.

ALGA acknowledges the support of the Board, staff and volunteers of the Victorian AIDS Council



### Front page graphics:

Kevin O'Neill, *Harpers Bazaar*, October 1985;  
leaflet for one of Jan Hillier's dances, 1973



## Stop 1: Melbourne High School

How gay kids are treated tells us a lot about how a society works. In the 1940s, 50s and 60s, camp young men met others like themselves at school and found strategies to live their lives, in the closet, with clandestine sex, enduring the bullies. Today, Melbourne High has proclaimed itself a safe place for queer students and their friends.

AEU News (Victorian Branch), March 2010.

## Stop 2: South Yarra Railway Station

Queer folk have always been quick to put public places to good use (that is, to find ways to turn it to sexual ends!) Trains and trains stations provide opportunities for loitering, meeting and getting off.

South Yarra Railway Station,  
[www.vicrailstations.com](http://www.vicrailstations.com)



## Stop 3: Darling Street

Before the 1960s, most camp social life took place in people's homes – quiet dinners, smallish parties that were careful not to draw the attention of the neighbours. Except for the night of 6 September 1969, which really went off! Including right here in South Yarra.

And then things really started to move. When Jan Hillier discovered in the 1960s that Melbourne's camps were crying out for Places to Go and Things to Do she launched herself into an entrepreneurial career that was to last for forty years. Jan's Dances were held all over Melbourne but south of the river was her heartland

Jan's Next Dance, 1973 (Poster, ALGA Collection)



## Stop 4: Maisies and Ad Lib Toorak Rd, cnr Davis St

We take the existence of venues for all kinds of queer folk for granted today. But one of the earliest pubs to welcome camp people was Her Majestys. In the 1960s, Ron Philp (Maisie to his friends) provided a place where the queens could let down their hair – and the Beautiful People of the swinging sixties started to flock there too. Camp was becoming cool.



Meanwhile, across the road, Val (famous for her cafe in central Melbourne in the 1950s) was continuing her cafe career with Ad Lib.

Maisies: J.T. Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Val Eastwood in the kitchen at Cafe Ad Lib (ALGA Collection)

## Stop 5: Kevin O'Neill, Melbourne's florist Toorak Rd, cnr Murphy St

Camp men were notorious for their sense of style, their flamboyance, their business acumen. Sometimes it was even true. Kevin O'Neill operated a florist store from here that all Melbourne embraced. Like Freddie Asmussen, of Myer, he manoeuvred through a society that preferred not to think too carefully about what all this flamboyance meant – he delivered beauty, and sometimes that was enough.

Kevin O'Neill (ALGA collection, courtesy John Graham)



## Stop 6: The Lost Cafes Toorak Rd, cnr Osborne St

From our oral histories, we know that South Yarra was sprinkled with cafes that welcomed camp customers. Some of these we know about – Val's cafes, for example, and Mae West's. Others are just names: The Devil's Inn, The Other Place, Flowers. But cafes provided a place to meet friends and make friends, to relax, to drink that most sophisticated of beverages – coffee.

Mae West's Cafe (ALGA Collection)

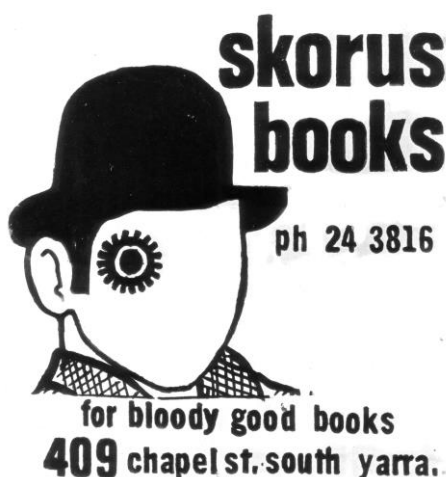


## Stop 7: William Street and the Bachelor Life

### William St

Flats – which developed in Melbourne from the 1920s on – were an intrinsic part of camp life. Living alone, or sharing with a ‘friend’, camp women and men found refuge from the prying eyes of family. They could entertain and decorate to their heart’s content. But even in these sanctuaries could be breached if you were not careful – and *Truth* would be there to tell (almost) all.

‘Bachelor Living in Melbourne’, *Australian House and Garden*, December 1962



## Stop 8: Imperial Hotel and Skorus cnr Palermo and Chapel Sts

For much of its history, Melbourne’s pub scene in Melbourne – gay and straight – was largely a male scene. What, after all, would a respectable woman be doing outside the home? And while there is a secret history of lesbian bars waiting to be told, here is one of the earliest places where women who liked women (and beer!) could meet. And down the road a bit, Skorus Bookshop where Melbourne’s first camp political organisation, the daughters of Bilitis, had its home for a while.

Skorus Bookshop flyer (ALGA Collection)

## Stop 9: Capitol Bakery cnr Toorak Rd and Chapel St

South Yarra wasn’t always charming little boutiques and PE queens. The Capitol Bakery once actually produced bread, which working class folk made and delivered. Among them, Jan Hillier – a bread carter before she was an entrepreneur and queen of the scene. It is a reminder of the often unspoken secret – class mattered.

Capitol Bakery: J.T. Collins Collection, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.



## Stop 10: The Regent Theatre

cnr Toorak Rd and Chambers St

Long gone now, before the Regent Theatre was replaced by this attractive seventies blockhouse and before there were gay films to show, Friday night at the movies was an experience. The stars filled the silver screen and in the audience camp people and their friends escaped their often-harsh everyday life. These dark places were one of the sources of our sense of community.

Regent Theatre (State Library of Victoria Collection)



South Yarra

History Walk on Sunday 24 January 2016

was conducted by Graham Willett, with Gary Jaynes and Helen Pausacker. Gary Jaynes, Helen Pausacker and Graham Willett produced this programme. This is the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives' 22<sup>nd</sup> History Walk of Melbourne.

Check out the latest books from ALGA and our friends:

Secret Histories of Queer Melbourne	\$40/\$35*
Queen City of the South	\$30/\$25*
Out Here: Gay and Lesbian Perspectives VI	\$35/\$30*
Intimacy, Violence, Activism	\$35/\$30*

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