ABSTRACTS
21st Australian Queer Histories Conference 2026

Teishan Ahearne and Nici Stott, 'Queer Histories Queer Futures'
Queer Histories Queer Futures is a fourteen-episode podcast series and audio-tour of Merri-bek's queer history told by the people who shaped it. Produced by Merri-bek Libraries with 3CR Community Radio, it is the first published LGBTQIA+ history of the area now known as Merri-bek. This presentation will bring together Teishan Ahearne from Merri-bek Libraries and 3CR producers Nici Stott and James McKenzie to discuss the project. Including the approach of blending local history, oral history and radio documentary, and the importance of queer people telling our own histories as both interviewees and producers. The discussion will feature edited audio excerpts from the podcasts and provide space for audience discussion. https://www.3cr.org.au/queerhistoriesqueerfutures

Angela Bailey, 'Remembering and forgetting – Queer Collective Memory'
Through a series of collection of 3-5 objects from the collection of the Australian Queer Archive – I'll explore the nature of collective memory for the Queer community and it's reading alongside queer histories and their unconfirming non-linear past. How do our archives generate memories and opportunities for shared remembering and how do we remember the silences and absences of an archive. This paper explores the relationship between queer collective memory, archival objects and the telling of queer histories through a selection of collection material from the Australian Queer Archives (AQuA). Rather than approaching the archive as a repository of fixed historical evidence, the paper considers how objects can act as prompts, which memories are activated, shared and contested. Collective memory disrupts the linearity of institutional history and although our historical timelines archive might work chronologically, memory doesn't necessarily do so. A photograph from 1978 can evoke a memory from that time, which can then be understood differently in 2026. The object becomes a point where multiple temporalities intersect.

Jacquelyn Baker, "My age may seem young… My interests vary from feminism to raging": Finding traces of young lesbian activism in Melbourne in the 1980s
According to historian Emily Gallagher, the notion that finding children's and young people's voices in archives is difficult or challenging has been considerably overblown or exaggerated. This paper follows Gallagher's lead by taking young people 'seriously as authors of their own lives' by examining the writings of young lesbians published in *Lesbian Newsletter*, a Melbourne-based publication, in the 1980s. Drawing on archival research and oral history, this paper seeks to understand how girls and young women were navigating their sexual and political identities. Ultimately, this paper builds on the burgeoning field of histories of young people and seeks to expand upon the histories written thus far about feminist and lesbian activism in Melbourne.

Dr Jacquelyn Baker graduated with a PhD in history from Deakin University in 2023. Her thesis traces the Women's Liberation Movement in Melbourne over time and space. Broadly, she is interested in gender, sexuality, feminism, oral history and 20th century Australian history. She works in the GLAM sector.

Will Bryant, "Bush town hit by AIDS fear": Gay men and HIV/AIDS on Australia television
On 15 September 1986, The Flying Doctors (1986–1992) became the first Australian television drama to depict a gay man living with AIDS, as the epidemic ran rampant through at-risk communities. By the time antiretroviral therapy became available in 1996, nearly all Australian medical dramas featured storylines involving characters living with or dying from HIV/AIDS. Despite the cultural significance of these dramas, there has been limited historical engagement with how they responded to the epidemic. This paper asks how and why Australian television portrayed gay men living with AIDS, comparing The Flying Doctors' 1986 episode "Return of the Hero" and A Country Practice's 1989 two-part storyline "Apparitions" with G.P.'s 1990 AIDS trilogy. It argues that while the first two rendered homosexuality palatable for mainstream audiences through archetypes of Australian masculinity – the war veteran and the sporting legend – G.P. reported from inside the inner-city gay community, bringing audiences closer to the lived realities of the community hardest hit by the virus.

Jonathan Butler and Jeremy Eaton, 'He's artistic': Contemporary portraits of closet-era gay art world figures'
This in-conversation draws together artist Dr Jeremy Eaton and writer Jonathan Butler to discuss their recent projects that engaged with the archive of two key art world figures of the twentieth century, James Gleeson and Brian Finemore. Eaton drew from the once-embargoed papers and artistic work of gay artist and critic James Gleeson (1915-2008) for his PhD exhibition, An Indexical Otherwise: A Queer Reading of James Gleeson' (2025). The papers revealed that he not only drew heavily from beefcake portraits but also from erotic photos he took of his long-term partner Frank O'Keefe. Butler's forthcoming biography of the nation's first curator of Australian art, Brian Finemore (1925-1975), reveals a man who possessed considerable institutional power while society demonised his private life. Both Gleeson and Finemore were flamboyant and visionary Australian tastemakers who play a contested role in our cultural memory.

Laura Castagnini, 'Lesbian Sex in the Archives'
Public sex is a crucial part of forming LGBTQ+ sexual identity, building community networks and a sense of belonging. However, LBQ+ women and transgender people have historically lacked the commercial infrastructure available to gay men such as saunas, darkrooms and leather bars. The culture of LBQ+ public sex is necessarily ephemeral, radical and creative. This panel discussion will bring together Tracey Wall (Caviar Club) and Tiger Salmon (Wicked Women)* to give oral history about creating spaces for their community to cruise, have sex and explore their desires in Australia in the early 1990s. This included 'takeovers' of gay male sauna venues by the Caviar Club in Melbourne and the infamous Ms Wicked competitions where participants performed their sexual fantasies onstage. It will be chaired by Laura Castagnini, curator, writer and soon-to-be UNSW PhD candidate, on a project that examines representation of LBQ+ women in sexual health campaigns. *These choices of speakers are open for discussion, given that Tiger has proposed another presentation for the AQUA conference.

Cherry Charleston, 'Love letter to the 90s contacts'
I have a show that I have written about coming out in the 1990s - it features storytelling, videos and photos of the 1990s and then the audience sings along to 1990s anthems.

Accompanying the show is an art work I made for Midsumma 2026 - Letters to our Queer Future - it is an analogue collage of photos and prints from my own collection, and a personal reflection of things that happened.

Ellen Coates, 'Collecting Queer History'
The PMI Victorian History Library has been collecting the history and stories of Victoria since the 1980s and has existed as an organisation since 1854. With the advent of a new collection policy and changes in staff in 2018, the queer history of Victoria was identified as a gap in the PMI Library's collection, along with other minority voices. This identification began an active project to ensure as many and varied queer voices as possible were included in the collection. This presentation will explore how this was achieved: looking at reaching out and building networks, to running queer events, and expanding formats to ensure diversity of collecting. The presentation will then examine the future of queer collecting and cataloging, and how the PMI Library is actively working to ensure that queer history in all forms will never become a gap again.

Jane Connery
'Consent, Censorship and Community: Curating Queer Kink Histories through Australian and British Archives'
This paper reflects on the development of *Queer Graphic Histories: The Cane and the Visual Cultures of Discipline, Desire and Resistance*, a research-led exhibition examining how posters, flyers, zines and other graphic ephemera have documented the colonised history of the cane and transformed it from a symbol of institutional punishment into one of consensual power, identity and resistance within queer BDSM communities. Drawing on collections from the Australian Queer Archives and the UK Leather & Fetish Archive at the Bishopsgate Institute, the presentation compares Australian and British queer visual cultures. A particular focus is the representation of dominatrices, where women wielding canes reframe authority through consent, agency and erotic power. The paper explores how community archives preserve these often-overlooked histories while negotiating censorship and interpretation, arguing that queer archives are active sites where communities shape how their histories are preserved, represented and shared across generations and national contexts.

Sophie Cox, 'SOS Men'
SOS Men' is a presentation of a photo album and scrapbook about my cousin, Michael, as a vehicle to talk about the importance of multi-generational queer family. Michael was born exactly sixty years before me and passed away around a decade before my birth. I have been researching his life through traditional means, i.e. digital and physical archives, but also through reading literature and viewing visual art, calling into question what it means to connect to and find meaning in a life, especially with someone who has passed away. It explores how love and familial bonds can continue through time, in both a biological and chosen familial sense. The title 'SOS Men' refers to the signage on the building Michael lived in before his premature death from complications related to AIDS. It also refers to how the research into Michael's life has helped me manage grief and loss.

Mel Deerson and Spiros Panigirakis, 'Open Garden'
Open Garden is a project exploring how queers have engaged with gardens through art, activism and actual gardening in an Australian context. Taking its name from the Australian Open Garden Scheme (1987–2015), which ran from the height of the AIDS epidemic to the fever pitch of the gay marriage debate, the project considers the garden as a space where public and private, respectability and transgression, visibility and concealment rub up against one another. Open Garden brings together historical and contemporary artworks and archives, among other things: the We're Not All Straight in the Garden State sticker [1979]; Edna Walling's garden designs and images of women dancing in her garden-theatre [1945]; ACT UP's desecration of Melbourne's Floral Clock [1991]; Destiny Deacon's Over the Fence [2001]; Fiesta Carrera's Drosophilia in lesbian S/M magazine Wicked Women [1990]; and Textaqueen's Eve of the Apocalypses [2022]. We propose using this presentation to crowdsource further histories, works and archival leads, including within the Australian Queer Archives collection, informing the project's future development across exhibition, publication and public programming.

Gary Dowsett and Jennifer Power, 'Investigating sexuality, health and queer social worlds in Australia'
Queer lives have been invisible for much of history on most of this planet. A 'project' documenting queer life, originally termed 'gay history', began with gay liberation scholarship and activism in the early 1970s, eventually coalescing into 'queer studies'. Australian queers have been part of those endeavours since the beginning, but Australia also has one research institution that has contributed significantly to this work for over 30 years—the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS) at La Trobe University in Melbourne. The centre has been a national HIV research centre, a major player in sexuality education, a staunch ally of queer young people, and focused on LGBTIQ+ health, welfare, policy and social change. First, this paper discusses some key ideas, concepts and social drivers of the centre's work, particularly in sexuality. Next, some of ARCSHS's current and emerging work will be outlined.

Kerryn Drysdale and Kate Manlik, '(Im)possibilities of being: the spatialized relations of non-binary lesbians in Australia'
The increasing adoption of gender and sexuality diversity in the form of a non-binary lesbian (that is, a person whose gender lies outside of the binary structure of man/women, but who is nonetheless deeply invested in the politics, promises, and legacies of a lesbian identity) presents new challenges for Australian queer historicity, which has previously evidenced the long history of lesbian-inflected feminist activism and advocacy that carved out hard-won spaces for women who are attracted to other women. We – a lesbian woman and a non-binary lesbian – engage in our own version of situated 'bar talk' to contest the theoretical and/or empirical (im)possibility of being. Indeed, the non-binary lesbian encourages us to consider a new possibility of Australian queer history that sees the lesbian out of (the space of) gender.

Scott East, 'Creative responses to the queer archive: anarchiving sodomy'
This presentation discusses two contemporary art projects, Todd Fuller's *1727: Adriaan for Pieter* (2021) and Drew Pettifer's *A Sorrowful Act* (2020) which engage with Australian queer histories. Both these artworks take a 1727 sodomy trial as the inspiration for creative

reimaginings which revisit archives to rescue queer stories. A close reading of these two art projects is undertaken engaging with Erin Manning's concept of the anarchive which disrupts linear concepts of time: unsettling the event from a historical occurrence towards the transformative power of historiographical resistance (Manning 2020). This resonates with ongoing struggles to contest queer legal erasure and physical and political invisibility. This presentation argues for the role of art in contesting histories of silencing through the practice of anarchiving sodomy.

Jody Ekert, 'The Advocacy and Mystery of Vernon Marshall'
Vernon Marshall was a German migrant who arrived in Tamworth in the 1950s. He was known as a local accountant. He formed the Tamworth CAMP/Gay Liberation Movement in 1972 when he was in his early sixties. He held meetings, started a newsletter, debated on rights publicly, and opened a mailbox to connect regional homosexuals. He passed away in 1984 with his contributions to early advocacy mostly forgotten. Through archival research and interviews, I have formed a theory that Vernon was in fact, Werner Scharte, a disgraced priest from the German Old Catholic Church. I'd like to present my work - sharing both his early advocacy and writings around equality and acceptance, and the evidence that he may have been hiding a completely different identify with his move to Australia.

Alex Ettling, 'Queer Culture in the Australian Rules Football Cheer Squads, c1950s-1990s'
When Australian Rules football cheer squads emerged in the late 1950s, sexually diverse people were amongst the teenage leaders of what became a spectacular queer subculture. Through the shared activities of supporting a team, barrackers of different ages mixed in ways where informal mentoring could flourish. The social activities surrounding the cheer squads — preparing runthroughs and floggers, queuing for tickets, travelling to games, meeting up before and after — created opportunities for friendship, networking between club fanbases, and occasionally openings for sexual encounters. The performative nature of cheering encouraged a degree of flamboyance, and footy's unique cultural acceptance of sledging allowed for creative provocations. Fertile ground for a number of cheer squad identities to become pioneering figures in the emergence of Melbourne's drag scene. Rebellious elements within some of the cheer squads also intersected with other anti-establishment movements, including anti-war activism and the punk scene, leading to some spectacular moments. In footy, tribal loyalties often transcended prejudice around sexuality, yet perceived difference could also be a weapon used against rivals. It produced a curious culture that simultaneously provided both acceptance and vilification — a fascinating social arena full of contradictions.

Todd Fuller, 'Pernicious practice, myth, fact and fancy yellow socks in animation'
In the late 1940s and early 1950s, at least ten men were targeted by the police vice squad in Newcastle. Through court proceedings, judicial commentary, and sensational newspaper reporting, the city was labelled "Australia's Berlin", the men were outed and shamed alongside their prosecutions, and the city was portrayed abroad as home to an "evil gay gang" identified by its yellow socks and accused of recruiting men into its pernicious practices. While the story endured in local folklore, oral history recordings suggest the myth bore little resemblance to lived experience. This paper examines the history as explored in a new three-channel video installation that combines drawing, archival material, hand-drawn animation, and drag performance. Mobilising queer lip-sync to reanimate oral histories and

media reporting of the past, the work challenges the authority of archival narratives while exploring the complexity of queer history itself. The paper argues that drawing and performance can function as forms of queer historiography, unsettling myth, exposing the construction of historical memory, and creating space for more complex and embodied accounts of Australia's queer past.

Ted Gott, 'Agnes Martin (1912–2004): 'I paint about perfection that transcends what you see'

The National Gallery of Victoria recently acquired its first painting by Agnes Martin, *Untitled #16* 1995, one of a series of delicately coloured and finely textured abstract canvases that Martin created in the last decade of her career, when she was in her eighties. This paper will examine the influence upon Martin's work of her favourite region in the USA, New Mexico, with its panoramic desert vistas and seemingly endless skies. Martin was never open about her sexuality during her life, which reflected the oppressive times during which she emerged as a celebrated abstract-expressionist artist in the 1960s. State persecution in America of people with non-heteronormative sexualities in the 1950s will be considered; as well as Martin's foundational relationship with the influential but enforcedly closeted art dealer Betty Parsons; and the atmosphere of queer acceptance in Coentes Slip, an abandoned area of Manhattan where impoverished artists squatted illegally in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and where Martin found a supportive community before darkness struck her life and career.

David Gould, 'Where are the Gay Male AFL Players? Masculinity, Mythology and Belonging'

Until the introduction of AFLW in 2017, Australian rules football at the elite level belonged solely to men – who were characterised as tough, strong, physically fit, competitive, hyper-masculine and with an unspoken assumption they were heterosexual. Yet, public discussion of the possibility of gay male footballers has surprisingly occupied media space at regular intervals over the past half century, though for most of that time it has been a negative and exclusionary narrative. This paper interrogates firstly, the presentation of Australian masculinity. Secondly, it probes the meanings and impacts of a player coming out and why the game has the potential to foster positive change. Lastly, it asks if there is a place for queer people in Australian rules football and how belonging can be nurtured. The presentation is a precursor to the release in 2027 of Dr Gould's second book.

Kate Harris, 'Community and continuity in Naarm / Melbourne's drag king costuming'

This presentation focuses on the recent history of drag king costuming practices in Naarm, from 2000 to today, connecting todays materialities with those of the past. During research centred on the current monthly drag king and thing events Genesis and Stink Tank, ethnographic participant-observation, material analyses, and in-depth interviews have revealed resonances with previous kinging in Melbourne, namely King Victoria (which ran from 2000-2011). Across both communities, similarly DIY, resourceful and collaborative costuming practices are evident. Across the 21st century in Melbourne, drag king (and thing) communities have carved out queer spaces in which to explore gender identity and sexuality divorced from heteronormativity. Costuming is a tangible, material practice through which their mutual support and community building becomes evident. Despite some stoppages

across the last 26 years, this presentation ultimately argues that there is a continuity of drag king practices in Melbourne.

Meredith Johnson, '30th anniversary of the ChillOut Festival'
2027 marks the 30th anniversary of the ChillOut Festival, and we are producing a coffee table book documenting its history as part of the celebrations. We'd love the opportunity to present on ChillOut's 30 years at your conference. For three decades, ChillOut has been the beating heart of queer pride in country Victoria — a place where rural life and LGBTIQA+ identity meet not in contradiction, but celebration. What began in the mid-1990s as a simple idea — "Daylesford should have its own lesbian and gay event" — has grown into Australia's largest and longest-running regional pride festival, proof of what community vision can achieve far from the cities. ChillOut was born from Springs Connections, a small group of locals who saw possibility in Daylesford's growing gay and lesbian community. They imagined a festival embracing the bush rather than mimicking urban pride — a declaration that queer people belonged there, and that rural pride could be loud, joyful, and transformative.

Shay Johnston, 'Trans-figuring the Past: Transgender representations in Queensland's Archives '
This research examines the representation of transgender people within Queensland's leading archives, applying critical discourse analysis to map how the stories of trans lives have been discursively constructed, and how institutional mediation of trans experiences has shaped and constrained the retrievable histories of transgender Queenslanders. Applying Butler's theoretical approaches to gender performativity and cultural intelligibility, this research interrogates the (trans)gender performances Queensland's archives allow and the circumstances through which transgender Queenslanders are rendered discoverable in archival research. Through bringing archival theory into conversation with queer and trans studies, the research considers what it means for trans Queenslanders to be simultaneously hyper-visible within media discourse and under-represented within cultural memory and asks how community-led and creative archival practices might begin to redress this imbalance.

Susan Long, 'Men Like Me'
Screening (25min) and discussion with Director of the documentary Men Like Me, which Susan Long produced in 1994 in collaboration with Dale Michaels (Dale Leighton Hewinson (Crane)). Also on display will be a small number of ephemera associated with the documentary. It is more than thirty years since the documentary Men Like Me was produced and screened at national and international film festivals. So much has changed in this time and sadly Dale died in December 2020, otherwise he would be here with me now to reflect on the making of this film, and dare I say would have a lot to say about the experience of making Men Like Me. I would be keen to have a discussion after the screening, where I would like to talk about the making of the documentary and my and Dale's collaboration as well as the driving ideas behind the final realisation of Men Like Me. As listed and described in the *Bent* lens: a world guide to gay & lesbian film, editors Claire Jackson and Peter Tapp, St Kilda Vic,: Australian Catalogue Company, 1997.

Amber Loomis, 'The B isn't silent: Tracing bi+ histories in Australian LGBTQIA+ movements
For decades, bi+ people in Australia have navigated marginalisation from mainstream and wider LGBTQIA+ spaces. These dynamics have resulted in distinctive forms of organising, community building, and advocacy, generating rich histories of resistance that remain underrecognised in narratives about LGBTQIA+ activism. Drawing on community archives and movement ephemera, this paper elevates bi+ organising, cultural production, and political struggle to demonstrate how bi+ people have shaped LGBTQIA+ politics in Australia. In doing so, it highlights the ways bi+ communities have created spaces of belonging, challenged erasure and biphobia, and contributed to broader struggles for social justice. By examining these histories, this paper argues that bi+ activism offers a critical lens on the politics of visibility, solidarity, and belonging in Australian queer movements.

Clem McNab, 'Trans oral histories and films'
As part of a volunteer role at AQuA, I have been writing summaries of the transcribed oral histories Noah Riseman undertook to research the book Transgender Australia. As a young trans man myself, I have found this engagement profoundly moving and am proposing the creation of a video work (already partially completed), where I conduct short oral interviews, based on questions asked within Riseman's own interviews, to the trans men of my community. I will be overlaying these oral interviews with footage shot of them over the past year, influenced by the experimental history of trans films including F2M (directed by Cayte Latta, starring Jasper Laybutt). As a young trans creative, I believe this work both engages with literal trans history and also transposes fundamental qualities of oral history into a modern, accessible work that will be visually stimulating within the potentially paper-heavy conference.

Aidan Magro, 'Archival Kinships: Photo Albums in the Archives'
While scholars, historians and archivists increasingly attend to photo albums as complex objects rather than simply containers for photographs, they have predominantly been understood through traditional familial structures of memory. This emphasis is unsurprising given the album's association with the traditional family, but risks overlooking the social, communal and intergenerational knowledge albums can preserve and transmit. In queer archives, where traditional familial structures have not always been available or adequate, I suggest we might instead attend to the archival kinships that form around these objects. Drawing on photo albums from the Australian Queer Archives collection, this presentation reflects on my experiences recording oral histories as people narrate their albums. These encounters have led me to consider the album not only as a record of existing relationships, but as an object capable of producing new ones. I ask how albums might facilitate kinship beyond the familial, and how oral history can activate these relationships. The presentation will take place alongside selected albums.

Seth Malacari, 'Masc Shortage: the forgotten history of trans masculine Australia'
Did you know one of the earliest gender affirming surgeries in Australia occurred in 1937 on a trans man named Peter Alexander? Or that infamous scrapbooker of queer history, Monte Punshon, minded Peter's beloved canary when he went overseas? Ever heard of Martin Able, a Kalgoorlie school teacher who staged their own disappearance in 1910 to live as their true self? Or how about Jackie Simpson, Thomas Parkes, or Peter Stirling? Apart from a handful of names, transgender history in Australia is notably lacking in the narratives of

trans masculine people. Through use of archival material, including from the Australian Queer Archives (AQuA), this paper aims to resurrect previously ignored, lost, or overlooked figures of Australia's trans masculine past.

Seth Malacari (he/they) is a PhD candidate at the University of Western Australia. Their research is concerned with how we find, restore, and narrativise the history of Australia/Aotearoa's trans masculine past.

Daniel Marshall, Mary Lou Rasmussen, Tim Jones, and Tinonee Pym, 'Queer Youth Histories'

The Queer Youth Histories project explores where LGBTIQA+ young people feature in Australian LGBTIQA+ histories, while also investigating the significance of these LGBTIQA+ histories in the lives of LGBTIQA+ young people today. We have been researching how LGBTIQA+ young people first learn about LGBTIQA+ history, what this knowledge of the LGBTIQA+ past means to them as LGBTIQA+ young people and their thoughts on how to connect other LGBTIQA+ young people with LGBTIQA+ histories. Our focus here is on interactive LGBTIQA+ histories workshops we held in Canberra and Victoria in the summer of 25/26, working with young people aged 16-25. We invited participants to first consider histories focused on LGBTIQA+ young people's experience and then to reflect together on how learning about these experiences impacted them and how it might impact other young people. This presentation centres the voices of young people who attended the workshops. We conclude with some reflections on the implications of this work in the context of ongoing campaigns to restrict the transmission of historical and cultural knowledge about diverse genders and sexualities to young people.

Kenton Miller, 'How to be a queer cartoonist in an epidemic'

Looks at my experience as a cartoonist and activist, working through the HIV/AIDS epidemic, unpacking how my work reflected life in the 1980s and 1990s, the growth of our understanding of safe sex and surviving being gay at that time. My regular cartoon in OUTRAGE, 'Bent at the Knees', was one of the first to have an openly HIV+ character, allowing people to process the challenges, and loss and grief that permeated those years.

Matthew Mitchell, 'Governing Gender: A History of the Legal Regulation of Gender-Affirming Care in Australia'

This paper examines the history of Australian legal regulation of trans young people's access to gender-affirming care, tracing how Australian courts have governed minors' access to puberty blockers and hormones. Drawing on findings from my forthcoming book, Governing Gender, it situates this history in relation to contemporary global efforts to curtail, prohibit, and criminalise such care. I argue that these regulatory practices should be conceptualised as forms of 'gender governance': means by which legal institutions regulate gender itself, not only by controlling access to particular gender-affirming practices, but also by shaping the discursive and material repertoires through which gender can be enacted. A critical analysis of this history reveals that the legal regulation of gender-affirming care has never concerned questions of medical or social legitimacy alone. More fundamentally, it has concerned the forms of gendered life that may be lived and the conditions under which institutions may claim the authority to determine those possibilities for others.

Michaël D. Monty. “But My Name’s On The Door!” – A night out clubbing on the scene in the late 1990s, early 2000s.
The presentation will showcase a typical night out on the Gay scene at the time in Melbourne, filled with raw, personal imagery and hedonism. It is a visual, musical and spoken conversation which will plunge the audience back to a time in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Disco lights will flash to simulate a nightclub setting, along with photographs and a soundtrack, that will enhance the experience. Bodies entwined to the throbbing sound track of the time where portable technology consisted only of either a digital or disposable camera. Come along as I take you on an intimate journey through time, lust and sensuality.

Grace Mooney, ‘Making the Invisible, Visible: RMIT's LGBTIQA+ Cultural Collections Audit’
Every collection holds stories that its catalogue does not tell. At RMIT, LGBTIQA+ histories were long present within the University’s Art Collection, Design Archive, and Australian Screen Research Collection. They were, however, hidden; obscured by outdated language, inconsistent tagging, and classification systems that were never designed to highlight them. This paper explores how RMIT Cultural Collections has addressed that disparity, not as a quiet internal fix but through genuine community-led engagement. A volunteer Advisory Panel worked alongside Collections staff over five months, guided by an external framework for "queering" archival description. Together they agreed on inclusive cataloguing language and expanded subject classifications – long-term changes that have been secured through amended Collection Guidelines. Offering a practical, replicable model for cultural institutions grappling with similar histories, this paper shows what it looks like when community isn't just consulted merely at a project's end, but shapes it from the very start.

Bruce Moore, ‘From Flash Mob to Poof Doof: A History of Australian Queer Slang.
This is the title of my forthcoming book, which examines the words and expressions created in Australia by queer people and about queer people. Flash mob 'a group of lesbians who wielded power in a female convict prison' appeared in 1839. Poof doof 'a queer party' appeared in 2012. In the 170 years between flash mob and poof doof Australian English created about 200 queer words and expressions. At the Australian Queer Archives our history is documented in books, manuscripts, and oral histories, and in collections of such diverse material as badges, T-shirts, posters, photographs, fridge magnets, and textiles. These are all part of the preservation and understanding of Australian queer history. Queer words are a core part of this history. So this paper asks: what can Australian queer words tell us about the development of Australian queer history?

Wayne Murdoch, "Mystery Solved: Whatever happened to John Irvine?"
When I finished writing "The Mystery of the Handsome Man: The Double Life of John Lempriere Irvine" in 2020, I was left with a tantalising mystery ... what actually happened to Irvine. His was a wonderfully documented life over a 50 year period; I had been able to track his movements via newspaper articles, family diaries, letters and his mother's scrapbook almost week by week for years at a time. And then suddenly, he disappeared. What happened to him? I had my theories, and other people offered me suggestions (some quite sensational), but I wasn't able to determine what happened to this 19th century sporting star, banker, bon vivant, and denizen of the demi-mode after he vanished after the Lady Mayoress's afternoon tea in Launceston in 1898. Solving what happened to John Irvine

brings closure to an intriguing mystery and allows us to fully reclaim a lost nineteenth century queer life.

Beau Newham, 'Auditing our Memories: Centring discoverability in response to material vulnerabilities'
Since the beginnings of the HIV epidemic in Australia there has been a conscious and open push for remembrance and a struggle against silence and forgetting. 45 years on from our first case, the material histories of the individuals, communities and organisations that have been central to the Australian response are at a state of heightened vulnerability. In 2025 NAPWHA launched the Tracing our Memories (ToM) with the goal to bring together a comprehensive list of the material history of people with HIV in Australia that are currently held in Australian archives, libraries, museums and art galleries. ToM now lists over 1400 items and collections across 41 intuitions. This paper explores the strategic role the database has been designed to fill, the challenges and successes of the project, and the goals of the database going forward.

James O'Brien, 'Wagga Wagga's LGBTQIA+ Community in the Early 1990s'
This paper details the development of the LGBTQIA+ community in Wagga Wagga during the early 1990s—a period marked by significant prejudice. Key catalysts included the 1992 visit of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Choir, which sparked local interest and led to the formation of the Riverina Gay and Lesbian Support & Social Group (RGLSSG). This era also saw significant national media controversy, fueled by editorials from our local newspaper editor, who would later become Deputy Prime Minister. The group navigated intense challenges, including media hostility, homophobic political rhetoric, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Despite these obstacles, the community successfully organized social events, marched in the Sydney Mardi Gras, and advocated for crucial representation, such as the appointment of a gay police liaison officer. This talk reflects on that transformative era as a vital foundational period for regional queer visibility and support. There are lots of audio/visual elements to the story.

Tom Palmer "Is not the CPA still a sexist, poofter-bashing party?": Communist Party of Australia and 1970s Gay Liberation
In 1974, a rank-and-file communist asked whether the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) was still a 'poofter-bashing party'. This paper seeks to answer this question. From the early 1970s, the Communist Gay Collective introduced the campaign for gay rights to the CPA. This paper explores the moments of internal party conflict that followed as sexual politics ran up against traditional class politics. In the opposite vein, it also reveals how, for many LGBTIQA+ communists, grassroots party life provided sanctuary from a more hostile Australian society. Beyond an internal examination of the CPA, the paper highlights the organising contribution that party members made to the broader gay liberation movement in the years running up to Mardi Gras. It also explores the role that party members played in organising trade union action in solidarity with those on the sharp end of structural homophobia, the clearest manifestation being the well-documented 'pink bans'.

Julie Peters, 'Steps forward and back – trans success and failure – a cabaret'
In the 1970s, trans lives were precarious, with very limited employment options, unless you were ultra-passable. In the 1990s, we started to see positive empowering stories and trans

people living more liveable lives. Currently, we see, life opportunities for trans and gender diverse people falling off a cliff in the USA and UK and tensions rising in Australia. Over the last few years, I reimagined my autoethnographic doctoral research as cabaret, mainly because, not enough people read my thesis. The proposed paper/performance examines trans and gender diversity from the 1950s until the present, both culturally and personally. It references my most recent cabaret "Identity Quest, a trans and gender demythology", for its ability to evoke empathy and allyship for vulnerable trans and gender diverse individuals. It is framed historically in reference to changing critical discussion on identity, normative gender coercion, conformity and non-conformity and theories of humour as social criticism.

Drew Pettifer, 'Pink Bans: Art, Archives and Solidarity'
In 1973 the NSW Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) enacted two extraordinary pink bans, stopping work at Macquarie University in solidarity with two students subjected to homophobic discrimination by university administration. Among the earliest industrial actions for queer rights globally, these events reveal an incredible, though often overlooked, history of solidarity between organised labour and Australias emerging Gay Liberation Movement. Developed through a Fellowship at the State Library of NSW, this practice-led project asks how creative practice might be able to recover and re-present this history beyond the conventions of the historical archive. Drawing upon archival materials, the research culminated in a video work and two stained-glass artworks that bring histories of queer liberation, collective action and solidarity into material and affective exchange. Though these works, the project considers creative practice not just an illustration of queer histories, but as a method for encountering, reinterpreting and memorialising its traces.

Yves Rees, 'Life Turned Inside Out: Amateur Drag and the Logic of Carnival in Pre-WWII Australia'
Drag has a rich and largely unexplored history in settler Australia. Alongside the theatrical tradition of professional drag performance, drag has long been practiced as an amateur artform in both underground and mainstream settings. In this paper, I consider three sites of amateur drag in early-twentieth-century Australia—the mock wedding, University Commemoration and community fundraisers—to consider how otherwise transgressive forms of gender crossing could be made permissible. By using Bakhtin's theory of carnival, the paper explores the conditions that sanctioned amateur drag in certain time-bound contexts, allowing otherwise 'straight' individuals to deviate from assigned gender roles without criminalisation or reputational damage. Although not always or even usually a self-consciously queer practice, amateur drag can be read as a portal into gender play and experimentation—an arena of inversion and parody that offered reprieve from, yet simultaneously reinforced, the strictures of normative gender performance.

Eric Ridler, 'Silent song: joy and loss in the art of Alan Brown (1954–2003)'
In June 1980, Alan Brown, an architect-turned-artist from Aotearoa New Zealand, was touring through North America, visiting family and looking for images to incorporate into his pop-influenced art and design practice. As he photographed San Francisco's Gay Freedom Day parade, the city's Gay Male Chorus marched past, singing. This group would one day be the subject of one of the more memorable photos of the AIDS crisis. Brown's passion for documenting mid-twentieth century design, celebrities and queer life in Parnell, Woolloomooloo and the Northern Rivers has left his personal photography, now in the

collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales National Art Archive, as a paradoxical celebration of joy, colour and nostalgia, juxtaposed with loss and grief, which gradually intruded into Brown's personal life. As Roland Barthes once observed, these are photos which can be read, at the same time, as 'this will be' and 'this has been'.

David Evan Richard, 'Tracing Australian Queer Community Television: Production, Problems, Progress'

This paper draws on archival material from the Australian Queer Archives and interviews with stakeholders to trace the development of queer community television in Australia in the 1990s. Although there are studies that examine the ambivalent relationship between LGBT+ folk and the commercial television industries, typically concerning representation of queer bodies, the labour and production of the community sector is less acknowledged. I argue that understanding the business and cultural politics of the contemporary queer media industries is incomplete without appreciating the queer community sector. This paper has two main aims: firstly, it charts the competitive 'race' for Australia's first queer community television production; and, secondly, it explores the struggle of queer production within the conditions of Australian community television. Using a production studies lens, this paper makes visible—and celebrates—the activity and activism of queer community television workers and audiences, and their role in shaping Australian queer content and identity.

Jonathan Sala, 'Oral edging with LLMs'

Can a human and an AI work as partners to understand the people, relationships, and life events described in queer oral histories? This paper introduces a practical tool for finding out. A novel transcript editor captures people, groups, events, places, and relationships as nodes and edges in a temporal graph, directly linked to the narrator's original words. A private large language model (LLM) identifies entities and relationships, highlighting them in the transcript for a human to review. The user can provide feedback to the LLM and make their own edits, before pushing the new and updated information to a graph database. Alongside the editor, a benchmarking tool tests which models best understand queer relationships, language, genders, and changing social contexts. This paper will demonstrate a working prototype and benchmarking results, sharing what worked, what didn't, and what this means for responsible AI-assisted oral-history work.

Tiger Salmon, 'Curating *Wicked Women*'

My paper explores creative approaches to sharing archival material with contemporary communities. Drawing on my experience as custodian of the Wicked Women archive at AQuA, I will reflect on the ethical challenges of making queer histories accessible while protecting the privacy of the magazine's original contributors. Much of the archive is too sensitive to publish online without context, commentary, or appropriate safeguards. Rather than treating these limitations as barriers, I explore how they have inspired creative alternatives. These include recreating archival photographs with contemporary queer models, hosting spoken-word events centred on lived experience, and writing a Substack that connects historical material with current conversations in queer theory and community life. A richly illustrated presentation featuring images from the archive will demonstrate how queer histories can be shared responsibly, creatively, and in ways that honour both the archive and the communities from which it emerged.

Luciella Scarlett, 'You don't even have a dog": A short history of amatonormativity'
The term "amatonormativity", as coined by Elizabeth Brake, refers to the societal assumptions that all humans desire and aspire towards a central, committed, lifelong, monogamous, romantic and sexual relationship, that this relationship should be prioritised above all others, and that those who have this sort of relationship should be seen as more mature, trustworthy and valuable than those who do not. This presentation will explore the history of amatonormativity across Western Europe, the US and Australia, including impacts of authoritarianism, imperialism, medicalisation, HIV stigma and the deregulation and privatisation of healthcare. It will then also discuss the formation of modern asexual and aromantic identity, and offer a few insights into the growing visibility of the "invisible orientation" from the late 90s onwards.

I am the researcher and author of *Nonlimerent // Monosexual: An Aromantic and Asexual History*, an exhibition which ran from 1-20 February 2025 at the Louis Joel Gallery in Altona and which is now available as a digital exhibition: https://luciellaes.itch.io/nonlimerent-monosexual-digital-edition

Gary Schliemann and Mark Gillespie, 'Queer memory, defiance, radical faeries, back to nature movements and communal living: two 78ers reflect on acts of fun, resistance and strategies for challenging patriarchal power and violence'
Growing up gay (both male and female) in Australia in the 1960's and 70's meant living with stigma, shame, sexual repression, puritanism, hostility, fear and discrimination. Seeking freedom, it is no wonder many of us became sexual outlaws. Deep down we knew that any chance at liberation and being able to overcome all the silence about who we were and any success in dismantling all the taboos and imposed laws forbidding the natural expression of same-sex love, required a thorough critique of a deeply entrenched and oppressively supremacist male heterosexual system. We found common cause with feminism. This interactive workshop explores how, still in 2026, privileged masculinist social norms continue unabated to underpin all forms of domination, coercion, violence and war. What can we do about this?. Gary Schliemann is a foundation member of both MOP (Men Opposing Patriarchy), and the first Australian (and first international) chapter of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. Mark Gillespie is a human rights advocate and social anthropologist.

Jeremy Smith, 'Sydney: A Queer Counter-Atlas: Drawing Intersubjective Counter-Cartographies of Time, Place, Body, and Mind in the Post-PrEP Age'
Maps are not neutral depictions of the world, but visual stories that actively shape the worlds they represent. This paper presents "intersubjective counter-cartography," an original drawing-based methodology developed through my doctoral research (PhD, UNSW Art & Design, 2026), in which spatial knowledge is produced between subjects and maps are reconceived as co-authored visual forms shaped by history, embodiment, place, and lived experience. Centred on queer life in Sydney in the post-PrEP era, the research argues that mapping is a relational process through which meaning is constructed and made visible, not simply represented. Through four large-scale hand-drawn counter-maps tracing queer time, place, body, and mind, the project forms a counter-atlas that both documents and produces queer spatial knowledge, a history of the now as much as a record of the past. This paper

shares the completed doctorate's findings and outlines plans to develop the research into a book: a queer atlas of Sydney.

Sam Steigler, 'Learning From Kink: Queer Knowledge across Generations'
This paper explores how present-day queer kink leaders understand their connections to queer kink forebears. Pulling on interviews from a study of gay male kink communities in Melbourne, this paper explores how interviewees see themselves as part of queer and kink lineages in recent Australian history. It explores notions of generation and how queer knowledge flows through generations over time. By exploring how queer people today understand their connection to queer communities of the past, the paper considers the ways that dominant forces in society often make it difficult for queer people to connect across generations, especially concerning discussions about sexual health, sexual activity, and sexual relationships. By focusing on the history of kinship structures within kink communities, this paper explores how and what broader queer communities might learn from kink communities about building and sustaining queer knowledges across generations.

Jacob Sunter, 'Gay Pornography and the Idea of History '
This paper muses on porn's deferred temporality. Documenting an erotic encounter that casts itself forward, toward the space and time of the spectator's own pleasure (see: Adair Rounthwaite 2011), pornography archives our sexual cultures while also finding itself potentially resuscitated, re-enlivened, through the porn watcher's present touch. This paper argues that pornography - and the deferral of its erotic potential - is uniquely generative for thinking-through our affective relation to (queer) history. It takes into account Kristen Bjorn's trilogy of gay pornographic films set and filmed in Australia – A Sailor in Sydney (1992), Jackaroos (1992), and Manly Beach (1992) – to explore ethical, erotic, and ecological (dis)connection, across space and time. Filmed in the ongoing wake of the Gay Gang Murders, these films, in their present re-viewing, carry the potential to deepen our connection with the (queer) past, while also accenting what is lost, or unrecoverable, when reaching-out with this backward touch.

Amanda Swadling, 'Finding Pride at the Australian War Memorial'
The Australian War Memorial (AWM) is a shine, a museum and an archive; dedicated to recording and interpreting the history of Australians in conflict. Although evidence confidently suggests that the LGBTIQA+ community have actively served Australia in a military capacity since at least the First World War (if not prior to this), the presence of these narratives is underrepresented in the AWM National Collection. Recognizing this, I have been working on a research project to reevaluate what the collection already holds and to also connect with the Queer community to build new diverse perspectives into our collections. During my research I have uncovered collections which have been detached from their Queer heritage and reached out to people whose stories have never been told before. This presentation will cover where I started, how I am approaching the project, and what I am building towards achieving.

Simo Tse, 'Wanting Each Other: Reading Desires through OG Magazine'
OG (Oriental Guys) is a gay magazine founded by Singaporean entrepreneur Edward Chew (1958–2017) and published between 1987 and 2003. Given Singapore's legal regulations, OG was based in Sydney and distributed internationally. Centring Asian male bodies, the

magazine began as an erotic pictorial combined with gay fiction and travel guides for Western travellers in Asia. Spanning 26 issues, the magazine's editorial content expanded to reflect the shifting perspectives and lived experiences of gay Asian people, addressing subjects such as interracial desire, immigration policies, and the AIDS epidemic in the gay Asian context. The racial specificity of the magazine's subject, together with its primary circulation in "Western" markets, calls for critical and nuanced analysis. Starting with the magazine collection at the Australian Queer Archives (AQuA), this presentation by artist Simo Tse intends to untangle the dichotomy between "Western" and "Asian" through a close study of the printed language of desire.

Kate Toone, 'Out of the journals and into the streets; art as queered dissemination'
Queers have historically been misrepresented or invisibilised in both academic literature and historical records. At the same time, much contemporary academic dissemination is inaccessible to the community due to a focus on publication via journal articles. If our motivation to conduct research is to further the common good, how can we approach dissemination in a queered manner? This paper will present three examples of arts-based creative research methods where the produced artifacts become both a vehicle to facilitate participant expression, and a dissemination tool. The first, a project about queer sex workers which includes a paper-doll collaging activity, exhibited in a queer nightclub, the second, a photovoice project looking at queer experiences of safety and belonging, travelling from lesbian pub to festival event foyers, and the third, a project exploring queer experiences of menopause with accompanying body maps displayed at this conference and set to continue as a travelling exhibition.

Janette Verlie and David Gould, 'When the World Looked Away: A Family's Story of Love, Loss and the Human Cost of HIV/AIDS. An interview with author Janette Verlie'
Janette Verlie Janette Verlie is the author of Glenn and Garry: A Story of Love and Loss. Both of her beloved brothers died of AIDS in the early 1990s, during one of the most challenging and disturbing eras of our time. Unlike the COVID years, Janette's family faced the heartache of HIV/AIDS alone, experiencing prejudice and silence while caring for Glenn and Garry. She and her family spent many hours at Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital, watching as waves of young men succumbed to the illness while shunned by their own relatives. Dr David Gould, a friend of 40 years, will interview Janette about this devastating but not-to-beforgotten part of our history. It is a deeply moving story and a perspective that has been unexplored until now. It reminds us that love, caring and resilience have always been at the centre of the queer community and its allies.

Jo Waite, 'Queer Cartoonists Talk'
I have been working in the Queer Archives on the collection of cartoons and illustrations donated by the artists that appeared in the Sydney Star Observer magazine from the early 1990s to the early 2000s. I would like to give an illustrated presentation of some of these cartoons, focusing on how the LGBTIQ+ community presents itself to itself, using humour, character, stories, relationships, melodrama... etc. in cartoons. There are two serialised strips in particular, one by a gay man and one by a lesbian, and the differences in how both artists approach their own communities is quite striking, and give a great portrait of the times. I would like to argue that they were inspired by the American lesbian comic strip

'Dykes to Watch Out For', by Alison Bechdel, which was like a soap opera in comic strip form.

Roz Ward, 'Safe Schools and Family Values in an Age of Gender Backlash: Queer Stories, Social Reproduction, and Contested Futures'

This session will profile my new book which uses the backlash and dismantling of the Safe Schools Coalition as a lens for understanding how 'family values' politics has shaped Australian public life. Combining autotheory with social reproduction theory, the book weaves my own story as Safe Schools co-founder with archival material and interviews to explore how queer lives became a battleground for contesting the family, the school, and the nation. This session previews the book's key arguments and some of the queer stories at its centre, reflecting on what it means to write queer history from the inside while the battles are still being fought. The paper offers a chance to hear about the book firsthand and discuss what writing recent, contested queer history involves.

Graham Willett, 'The Joy of Struggle'

In a world and in a time when there is much to feel bad about, it sometimes seems that safe spaces and resilience are our only options. In this presentation, I would like to look at the ways in which political struggles have provided opportunities for joy; at the ways in which courage and defiance have generated excitement, even exhilaration for so many. Decades of standing up for our rights, and standing with hundreds and thousands of others, has generated excitement, solidarity, collective joy. And when there aren't demos, working with others in media projects, union caucuses, election campaigns and a myriad of activities including the everyday presentation of new selves, has contributed to a virtuous circle of struggle, achievement, new demands, new struggles, new achievements. Not only do we have much to be proud of, we have shown that political struggle is more than a duty, it can be a pleasure.

Troy Wise and Ricardo Guzman, 'Held and Withheld: A Practice-Based Method for Reading Queer Lives'

The Relevant Queer (RQ), developed through our practice as a social media archive of queer cultural biography, reads a life through what it produces, withholds, discloses, and has recognised over time. RQ works through two concepts: carriers, the objects, records, and roles through which the figure's meaning builds and circulates, and pressure architecture, the cultural and institutional conditions under which a figure's visibility takes shape. This paper sets out the method, then tests it against two contrasting cases from Australian LGBTIQ+ histories. David McDiarmid's activist AIDS-era graphics entered Australian national collections through his estate's 1998 gift, three years after his death. In 1981, Patrick White publicly disclosed his sexuality while resisting the political identity that the disclosure might have brought. His corrected manuscript later entered the Mitchell Library. RQ reads these differences as methodologically productive: one traces changing cultural production, the other changing disclosure and its archival interpretation.