

Research Article

Queens Gardens, 1949: The anxious spaces of post-war New Zealand masculinity

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Abstract: One evening in 1949, five met men on the steps of the Cenotaph in Queens Gardens in Dunedin, New Zealand. Two were under arrest by the end of the night, charged with indecently assaulting the others. Stressing the importance of a historical geography of masculinity and sexuality, this article explores these five men's sexual encounters, the space in which these took place and the meanings given to both. It reflects on these particular relationships in relation to wider global patterns of masculine spatiality and the post-war emergence of new sexual categories. In exploring the anxious negotiations of masculinity and homoeroticism in this period, the article suggests that men's intimate and sexual lives have been highly contested within the sexualised spaces of the city.

Key words: masculinity, New Zealand, sexuality, urban space.

Public spaces are always 'up for grabs' (Turner 2003, p. 46). They have many uses, some of which are acknowledged and others unacknowledged. While some such uses are socially accepted, others are transgressive (Cresswell 1996). At the same time, the meanings of space are fluid and changing and are contested by a range of individuals and groups (Valentine 1996; Johnston & Longhurst 2010).

These double movements are especially clear in relation to male same-sex encounters. Officially, parks and promenades are places for loitering and observing life, but, unofficially, these spaces also facilitate men's meetings for erotic pleasure (Howard 1995; Chauncey 1996; Brown 2008; Hornsey 2010). Street cruising, Turner (2003, p. 46) suggested, exploits this very ambivalence. A very few steps divide watching the world go by from watching a particular man, desiring that man, and approaching him with a carnal purpose in mind. However, this multiplicity of eroticised spaces is not an 'error' that threatens to distract us from the 'truth' of space.

Instead, the tensions are inherent in the ways spaces, meanings and people interact.

In a more general sense, spaces permit, shape and constrain particular interactions and performances of masculinity (Van Hoven & Horschelmann 2005; Hopkins & Noble 2009). For instance, the street occasions different masculine iterations than the bar room or bedroom. At the same time, some masculinities – and some men – are positioned differently from others, and the meanings of these differences can be highly contested. When we look at the broad field of masculinity, we see degrees of instability and contingency; men's lives, self-expressions and power plays change over time and from context to context (Berg & Longhurst 2003). As McDowell explained, masculinity is 'an uncertain and provisional project', subject to constant 'change and redefinition' (McDowell 2001, p. 182).

Sexuality, masculinity and city space can form a potent mixture. Some urban masculinities involve displays of aggression and physical

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1 strength, and gay men are sometimes publicly
2 harassed on the grounds of their sexuality
3 (Kirby & Hay 1997; Brownlow 2005). Cities,
4 then, are contact zones where differing mascu-
5 linities meet and sometimes clash.¹ I will
6 suggest that those who seek erotic adventures
7 in city spaces may be the recipients of legal and
8 physical violence – not only from bystanders
9 but also from those with whom they become
10 sexually involved.

11 In order to explore the intricate relationships
12 between space, masculinity, violence and homo-
13 eroticism in such zones, I offer up a single case
14 from the archives of the Dunedin Supreme
15 Court. One night in 1949, two young Dunedin
16 men met three visitors off a naval ship, tested
17 out the erotic possibilities in the city's Queens
18 Gardens and found themselves in trouble with
19 the police. Markedly different versions of the
20 evening's activities played out in court, and
21 these versions tell us about the ambiguities of –
22 and anxieties over – space, sexuality and mas-
23 culinity. To discuss this case is to glimpse both
24 its particularity and its broader local and global
25 connections. New Zealand's public spaces –
26 squares, parks, alleys and gardens – have
27 received less attention than their equivalents in
28 London, New York or Sydney, but they are just
29 as suggestive.

30 This singular example gestures towards the
31 complex character of homoeroticised spatiality
32 and the skirmishes that ensue under particular
33 historical conditions. This is a significant step.
34 Historical geographies of male homoeroticism
35 remain underdeveloped, and most of the exist-
36 ing literature comes out of history rather than
37 geography (Mort 1999; Houlbrook 2001, 2005).
38 Some geographers do acknowledge that in
39 general terms, 'sexualized and gendered norms
40 and conventions' are historically specific, but
41 they provide few detailed examples (Browne
42 *et al.* 2007, p. 4). This Dunedin court case shows
43 how space, time, masculinity and sexuality
44 intersect while revealing the richness of male
45 lives and embedded homoerotic practices.

46 Stephenson suggests that mid-century sexual
47 geographies are difficult to map 'because of the
48 illegality of homosexuality and the illicit nature
49 of sexual tourism' (Stephenson 2005, p. 52). I
50 disagree. We can begin to map these geogra-
51 phies *precisely because* sex between men was
52 illegal and, as such, generated official documen-

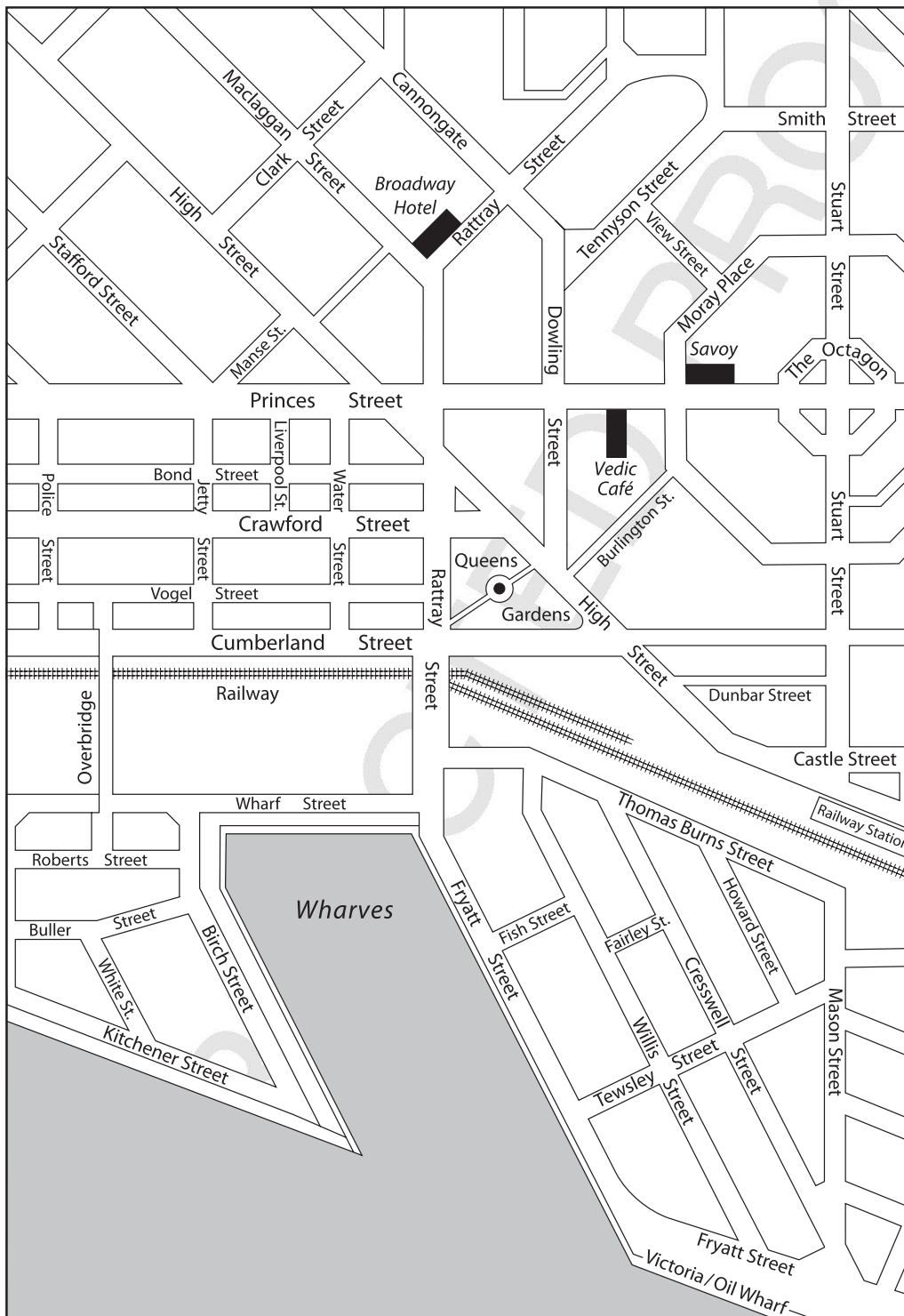
53 tation. Court files include detailed depositions
54 statements and testimony from credentialised
55 experts: doctors and probation officers in par-
56 ticular. On the one hand, the spaces in which
57 these accounts are put together – police sta-
58 tions and courtrooms – interpellate men as
59 criminals and fashion their accounts accord-
60 ingly. Still, researchers can read these files
61 'against the grain' and look for discourses of
62 resistance – as well as those of accommodation
63 – in the interplay of dominant and marginal
64 voices (Brickell 2008a). I will begin to untangle
65 these voices, and the spaces they evoke, by
66 exploring five young men's interactions in
67 Dunedin's inner city.

Queering Queens Gardens

68 Queens Gardens sits halfway between the
69 Fryatt Street wharves and Princes Street, the
70 commercial centre of Dunedin (Fig. 1). Conve-
71 niently located on the sailors' walking route
72 from their ships to the middle of town, and
73 dominated by the Cenotaph, a First World War
74 memorial unveiled in 1927, Queens Gardens
75 was once a well-known beat: a place for
76 Dunedin men to meet other locals or visiting
77 seamen for sex. This is exactly what happened
78 that cool autumn evening in 1949, when five
79 young men gathered on the Cenotaph's steps.
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81 Rupert Vale and Isaac Walters, both 20 years
82 old, had been friends – and occasional lovers –
83 since the age of 18.² Both worked downtown:
84 Vale as a hotel cook, Walters as an office assis-
85 tant. According to their court statements, the
86 men went to the Broadway Hotel in Rattray
87 Street late in the evening on April 24 and met
88 three stokers from the Navy ship HMNZS [4]
89 Hawea: Jim Harrison, Hugh Wilton and Charlie
90 Hamlin, also aged 20 or thereabouts. The five
91 youths chatted for a while, parted company and
92 soon reconvened in the Gardens (Fig. 2). 'We
93 sat on the Cenotaph', Vale recalled, 'and drank
94 some beer' (Vale 1949).
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96 What happened next is difficult to recover
97 with any certainty from the official files,
98 although it ended in the arrest of Vale and
99 Walters. All five men agreed that the stokers
100 had settled in at the base of the Cenotaph and
101 called out to the local pair to drink with them.
102 From that point on, Vale's court statement
103 accorded with Walters', and the three stokers'



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Figure 1 Inner city Dunedin in the early post-war years. Sailors walked from the wharves, through Queens Gardens, to the hotels and other entertainments of the city centre. Our men met in the Broadway Hotel, not far from the gardens. Some of the local queer crowd socialised at the nearby Vedic café and the Savoy tearooms. Map by Les O'Neill.



Figure 2 Queens Gardens, with the Cenotaph as its centrepiece. Alexander Turnbull Library, PAColl-7985-44.

statements were broadly consistent with each other, but there were substantial differences between each set of statements. I will begin with the two local lads' recollections. Isaac Walters told the court:

As it was cold we went and sat on the steps of the cenotaph. While there [Jim Harrison] asked me to put my hand round his 'chopper', meaning his private part, which I did. I did this with the other two in turn. The sailors did not interfere with us in any way, one asked me to kiss him on the cheek. That one was [Harrison. He] asked me to put my mouth round him, his private part, which I did, this took place in the Queens Gardens the other two sailors with [Harrison] also asked me to do the same to them, which I did. This all occurred in the Queens Gardens. We all then walked down to the boat. [Harrison] and I separated from the others, near the entrance to the Victoria or oil wharf. We walked north along past the end of the wharf (oil) and behind some trucks. There [Harrison] penetrated me. He did this with my consent. This took place at 2.30am (Walters 1949).

Rupert Vale, meanwhile, had this to say:

I touched [Hugh Wilton's] private parts and played with them. I just touched them and put my hand on them. He did touch my

private parts and caressed them. [Wilton] the sailor who I was with to-night asked me to go for a walk with him and I left [Isaac] and went a short distance away from the others and then [Wilton] asked me to suck his penis. He forced me to do this. I put his penis in my mouth and I played with my lips with his penis. I know [Wilton] and would know him again anywhere. [Wilton] made me handle his penis and put it into my mouth (Vale 1949).

Both men – Walters and Vale – told of their erotic encounter in and near the Cenotaph in Queens Gardens. In their statements, the local pair said the sailors re-established contact at the Gardens by asking the two men to have a drink and initiated the sex: '[he] put my mouth round him, his private part'; '[he] asked me to suck his penis'. These are explicit accounts in which the sexual encounters are recounted in matter-of-fact detail. Preliminaries took place on the plinth of the monument, although more intimate activities required a quieter spot.

These events, as described by Vale and Walters, were typical of men's cruising practices in New Zealand and internationally (Cook 2003; Houlbrook 2005; Brickell 2008b). This 'subcultural sexual economy', as Stephenson (2005, p. 53) described it in the London context, involved 'a cautious, if recognisable and solicited, system of glances, gestures and slang'. Men struck up a conversation in a public space – a bar, a street, garden or waterfront – before repairing to a quiet spot for a drink, a cigarette or just a chat. There the conversation turned to sex and events took their course: on a seat or bench; in a doorway, an alley or the bushes. The more interactive and intimate the encounter, the quieter the spot.

Sailors were commonly involved with local men at their various ports of call, and many a local 'shippie' or 'shipboard Suzy' – to use terms common in New Zealand during the 1950s – sought out seamen during their leisure hours. Sailors and 'landlubbers' spent many happy nights together aboard ship, enjoying the booze and sex. Ships' cooks and stewards were often keen, and stokers could sometimes be persuaded 'if the time was right and nobody was watching and they were horny enough' (Brickell 2008b, pp. 233–4; Mark 2010). Trevor



2 **Figure 3** Friends sitting at the base of the Godley Statue in Cathedral Square, Christchurch, c.1949. The
3 statue commemorates John Godley, founder of Canterbury. On the left in the second image is the US Hotel,
4 popular in queer circles at the time. Author's collection.

5 Rupe – now the well-known celebrity Carmen
6 – recalled that sailors in 1950s Dunedin would
7 readily accept a 'cup of tea and a blow-job'
8 (Rupe 2010).

9 Stephenson (2005) also reminded us that
10 memorials were popular locations for queer
11 curiosity. This was as true for New Zealand's
12 cities as it was for London. In Figure 3, Jameson
13 (pseudonym used) and his friends pose on the
14 base of the Godley Statue in Christchurch's
15 Cathedral Square one afternoon in 1949.
16 Jameson was a pivotal figure in a circle of homo-
17 sexual men who occupied a range of spaces
18 together in the 1940s and 1950s: the streets,
19 beaches and private homes of Christchurch and
20 its environs (Brickell 2008b). In the city centre,
21 Cathedral Square was an important site for
22 pickups as well as casual socialising, and the
23 Godley Statue marked the middle of this space.

24 The accounts of the three Queens Gardens
25 stokers, though, disavow this kind of subcul-
26 tural sexual economy – and, indeed, any willing

sexual involvement at all. The seamen insisted
27 they did not initiate the sex at the base of the
28 Cenotaph in Dunedin nor, they said, did they
29 agree to take part in it. The anxieties of these
30 spaces and activities become clearer in the
31 stokers' accounts. Here is part of stoker Jim
32 Harrison's depositions statement to the
33 Dunedin Magistrate's Court:
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36 The accused tried to put his hand on my
37 penis but I knocked his hand away and then
38 he waited a couple of minutes and then tried
39 to put his hand on the outside of my trousers
40 on my penis. After some time [Walters] and
41 [Vale] offered to show us the way back to the
42 ship. [Walters] and I walked ahead of the
43 others to the ship as far as I can remember.
44 When we got to the gate of the wharf the
45 accused invited me to go and get some more
46 beer and I went away with him. After we
47 proceeded about 100 yards from the others
48 he asked me for my chopper. He started to

1 undo his trousers then I noticed in his hand a
2 small tin which is now produced and shown
3 to me in Court. He then asked me for my
4 penis, and when I asked him why he said he
5 wanted me to have intercourse with him. I
6 repelled him and asked him where the beer
7 was we had come to get. When he told me
8 there was no beer I returned to the ship. I
9 refused to commit an unnatural offence with
10 him. It is not correct that I penetrated him
11 (Walters 1949).

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13 In its broad approach, stoker Hugh Wilton's
14 account is similar to Jim Harrison's:

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16 It is correct to say that we shifted and sat
17 down on the seat by the Cenotaph to get out
18 of the wind. And the five of us sat down in a
19 row and drank beer. My condition had then
20 not altered a great deal. I remember leaning
21 back without a care in the world. I was
22 leaning back and drinking a bottle of beer,
23 the accused [Vale] had his hand in the flap of
24 my trousers. I told him to desist. He started to
25 kiss me. I repelled him again. He then tried to
26 put his mouth on my penis. It was still in my
27 trousers. The accused then sucked my penis. I
28 tried to stop him I knocked his head away as
29 soon as he touched it (Vale 1949).

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31 In this version of events – which differed
32 markedly from Vale's and Walters' – the sex was
33 entirely the local men's idea. The stokers said
34 they had no desire to fool around with the cook
35 and the office assistant, even though Vale had
36 told the court that Wilton had pressured him to
37 'suck his penis'. Nevertheless, there are some
38 interesting ambivalences in the seamen's
39 accounts. One wonders how easy it would have
40 been for Vale to get his hand inside Wilton's
41 drop front trousers, remove the man's penis
42 from behind the top-buttoned flap and suck it, if
43 Wilton – as he insisted – objected all the while.
44 The more we ponder Vale's manoeuvrings
45 around and inside the tricky space of the sailor's
46 trouser flap, the less Wilton's account rings true.
47 There is another catch, too: if Wilton was so
48 affronted by Vale's approach, why did he agree
49 to head off with Vale in the dark to the ship?

50 Days passed, separating the night in the
51 gardens from the witnesses' appearance in
52 court, and the stokers no doubt synchronised

53 their story in the meantime. This had the effect
54 of standardising stories for the court but was
55 also an attempt to stabilise the men's masculin-
56 ity and its spatialised components. Charlie
57 Hamlin's statement contains a discourse of
58 ambush, surprise and physical retaliation:

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60 The five of us then went to the base of the
61 Cenotaph to consume beer. We were in a row
62 round the Cenotaph. I heard Stoker [Wilton]
63 abuse the accused. He said 'Fuck off you
64 dirty Bastard'. I was leaning back drinking
65 and then next thing I know the accused put
66 his hand inside my flap. He grabbed hold of
67 my penis. I pushed him away and I had no
68 further trouble with him. Had I been sober I
69 would have knocked his head off. I was in a
70 tolerant mood, and I allowed these two men
71 to remain in my company (Vale 1949).

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73 Hamlin's tolerance had its limits, though: he
74 approached a passing policeman and dobed in
75 the two Dunedin men. Constable Augustine
76 McAlvey arrested Vale and Walters and took
77 them to the local police station. What trans-
78 spired over the following weeks was cata-
79 strophic for Walters in particular. Seen by
80 authorities as 'instrumental in leading [Vale]
81 into vicious habits', Walters was imprisoned for
82 two years, and Vale had to report to a probation
83 officer for three.

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85 The contestation over this particular space,
86 the activities of its inhabitants and the meanings
87 bestowed upon those activities is reasonably
88 clear. It is rather more difficult to disentangle
89 the motivations at play. Given the ambiguities in
90 Wilton's account, in particular, and the global
91 sexual patterns echoing throughout this case, it
92 seems likely the stokers were, in fact, willing
93 participants. In order to further tease apart
94 these tensions, I need to look in greater detail at
95 the erotic geographies at play here, their spatia-
96 lised aspects and their relationships to social
97 difference. The diverging masculinities of the
98 men are particularly significant.

99 **Erotic geographies and** 100 **spatialised differences**

101 I have already suggested that public spaces are
102 subject to multiple interpretations and that
103 some of these interpretations are bestowed

with social credibility and others not. The case of Vale, Walters and the others shows that these multiplex understandings divide homoerotically involved men from one another just as they privilege heteronormative uses and definitions of space. As Jon Binnie observed in his work on erotic geographies, we need to pay close attention to 'the differences between and within sexual dissident identities and communities' (Binnie 2009, p. 173). In the Queens Gardens case, at least three (implicit) definitions mediated the five men's actions.

According to the first definition, mobilised by the stokers in court, the base of the Cenotaph was primarily a public place for men to drink. Having settled in, the three seamen told the judge, they invited numerous passers-by to drink with them, but Vale and Walters were the only two to take up the offer.

In the second definition, mobilised by Vale and Walters, this was a spot where horny locals might pick up men for sex. Queens Gardens had a history as a cruising spot; during the 1920s, one man repeatedly tried to kiss male passers-by there and was eventually arrested when he took a young plumber's apprentice into a darkened doorway nearby (New Zealand Truth 1928). Both sexes were implicated here: since the 19th century, female prostitutes had patrolled the general area looking for custom (Lucas 1985). This pattern – in which men's cruising grounds were simultaneously zones of heterosexual prostitution – was replicated elsewhere, including Chicago and Brisbane (Romesburg 2009; Smaal 2010).

The third definition is the inverse of the second: seamen might consider sex with the local men, as long as the locals agreed to the sailors' terms. In turn, these terms were structured by the differences between men involved in homoerotic relations. Houlbrook lays out the London schema as follows: some manual workers – referred to as roughs, renters, trade or 'to be had' – might be willing to have sex with middle class, often effeminate men – sometimes known as 'queens' or 'poufs' – as long as 'these encounters were constrained within particularly narrow limits': trade would take the insertive role in oral or anal sex (Houlbrook 2005, p. 172). Trade usually saw sex with a queen as a substitute for women and thought of themselves as perfectly 'normal' (Houlbrook 2005, p.

169). This understanding was common elsewhere: Reay (2010) discussed the same pattern in New York, and as one gay New Zealand man remembered of the 1960s, 'straight sailors wouldn't go to bed with a man, but they would have sex with a poof, so the more effeminate you were, the easier it was to pick up trade' (Woodhead 2005).³

This distinction between the effeminate shore-based man and the sexually 'normal' seaman played out in the Queens Gardens case. As stoker Jim Harrison said of both Walters and Vale, 'by the way the men were talking we soon discovered that these men were different from ordinary men'. The seamen played the role of Houlbrook's trade. Charlie Hamlin's language – 'I was in a tolerant mood' and 'I would have knocked his head off' – were expressions of social dominance. Where sex was spoken of, the seamen were positioned in the active role. According to Walters, stoker Harrison penetrated the office assistant, not the other way around, and Vale's depositions statement suggests sexual aggression: '[Wilton] asked me to suck his penis. He forced me to do this . . . I was frightened that if I did not do this for [Hugh] that he would hit me'.

The encounter at the Queens Gardens clearly inscribed the differences between the rough stoker trade and those 'different from ordinary men' (in Jim Harrison's words). Those differences were written into the official record too. The superintendent of Seacliff Mental Hospital examined Walters and told the Crown Prosecutor that the youth was 'an effeminate type', even though he showed 'no signs of mental disorder'. As if to underline the point, Walters' probation officer added, '[o]ne is not surprised to hear that he is interested in the stage and that he has taken up tap dancing, musical comedy and ballet dancing' (Walters 1949).

With these deliberations in mind, let us consider why Charlie Hamlin reported his new acquaintances to the constabulary in spite of his self-declared 'tolerant mood'. Consider, first, the possibility that Vale and Walters misinterpreted the seamen's invitation to have a drink on the steps of the cenotaph, made unwanted sexual advances and that Charlie Hamlin felt duty-bound to report them to the authorities. This is not a particularly convincing scenario. It is difficult to believe that Hugh

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1 Wilton – a young man who clearly fancied
2 himself as a tough – protested, but did nothing
3 while Rupert Vale felt his way inside Wilton’s
4 trousers to the point of sucking the stoker’s
5 penis. Wilton’s narrative, with its overtone of
6 passivity, is oddly inconsistent with his own
7 claims of masculine strength. This contradiction
8 is undoubtedly a testament to the power of the
9 courtroom to structure a story (Brickell 2008a).
10 In such a space, in such a moment, an assertion
11 of innocence was needed, even though Wilton
12 could not resist a reference to his masculine
13 prowess (‘I knocked his head away’).

14 There is a second possible explanation: one
15 that cuts to the heart of the anxieties at the
16 centre of masculine self-definition. Scholars
17 have pointed out that masculinity is con-
18 structed, at least in part, through alterity (‘other-
19 nerness’). Femininity is the ‘other’ against which
20 dominant masculinity defines itself, in a highly
21 unstable relationship (Gutterman 1994). This
22 othering process can translate into antagonistic,
23 even violent, social interactions in both public
24 and private spaces (Valentine 1996). Perhaps
25 one – or both – of the local men broke a tacit
26 understanding about public sexual exchanges
27 between queens and trade, thereby compromis-
28 ing the stokers’ sense of their own masculine
29 dominance. In making the first move, did the
30 ‘effeminate’ Vale and Walters perhaps offend
31 the stokers who presumed the right to take the
32 lead? When he said ‘the accused had his hand in
33 the flap of my trousers. I told him to desist. He
34 started to kiss me. I repelled him again’, Wilton
35 may not have meant that he was averse to the
36 idea of sex *per se* but that he took exception to
37 Vale’s presumptuousness. Vale was expected to
38 play the same passive role as the female prosti-
39 tutes who patrolled the area. Their own mascu-
40 line dominance threatened, the stokers – led by
41 Hamlin – may have sought retribution against
42 the presumptuous Vale and Walters.

43 The third scenario is the reverse of the
44 second. Simply put, Charlie Hamlin may have
45 been unhappy that he failed to get any action. If
46 Rupert Vale’s and Isaac Walters’ accounts are
47 accurate, Walters grabbed Hamlin’s penis and
48 then backed off when Hamlin pushed him away.
49 Some time after that, Vale and Hugh Wilton
50 moved to a quiet spot for oral sex, and Walters
51 and Jim Harrison went behind some trucks near
52 the oil wharf to have anal sex. Hamlin was left

out, with only Constable McAlvey for company.
Jealous, perhaps, and more than a little impul-
sive – his own sexual prerogative frustrated –
Hamlin shopped the local men to the constable.

Hamlin must have overlooked the possibility
that he and his stoker friends would have to fend
off counter-allegations by Vale and Walters.
Houlbrook observes that English trade saw
effeminate men as weak, outside of the law’s
protection and unlikely to be believed (Houl-
brook 2005). Perhaps the same presumptions
prevailed here, and Hamlin assumed – correctly,
as it turned out – that his dominant masculinity
would not be questioned by the agents of the
state.

Strong emotions – jealousy, desperation and
guilt – were all motivators here, and they defined
and refracted the masculine positions of the
different parties. This was a question of power, at
least in part. The stokers, it seemed, sought to
reinforce the ostensibly natural order of things –
within their interactions and perhaps more
widely. When dominant masculinities are at
stake, Connell noted, violence can be used ‘as a
means of drawing boundaries and making
exclusions’ (Connell 2001, p. 44). Charlie
Hamlin may have viewed recourse to the law as
an alternative to violence, in pursuit of much the
same ends. After all, and quite conveniently,
Constable McAlvey was on duty nearby. Which-
ever scenario we choose to believe, the stokers
underlined their gendered normality and emo-
tionally and physically reinstated their own
masculine prerogative whether or not that was
their deliberate intention. Through a highly spe-
cific set of social and sexual interactions in and
around the spaces of the Queens Gardens, these
men localised a much more widely applicable
set of assumptions, ideologies and practices.

The three stokers and the two Dunedin men
relied upon these assumptions in the courtroom
as well as on the street. In some respect, their
stories – carefully enunciated sexual scripts
(Brickell 2010) – were defensive moves. By
attributing sexual initiative to the other parties
(‘I told him to desist. He started to kiss me. I
repelled him again’), each of the three stokers
tried to avoid legal culpability. The stokers’
courtroom narratives were not only defensive,
though; they were also active, repeated perfor-
mances of dominant masculinities. As the
stokers reconstructed the night’s events, they

re-inscribed their toughness – and forcefully contrasted it to the less masculine performances of the two locals ('[t]hey were different from ordinary men'/ 'He said "... off you dirty. ... "). In the process, the stokers conveyed their identities and sought – successfully – to gain the confidence of the judge and jury, a confidence that withstood Wilton's momentary slide into passivity ('[t]he accused then sucked my penis. I tried to stop him'). These stories, with their evasions and troublesome tensions, tell us how these men understood the spaces of the Queens Gardens, their place within them, and their own masculine identities.

Concluding thoughts: beyond one case/one space

As our five men – Rupert Vale, Isaac Walters, Jim Harrison, Hugh Wilton and Charlie Hamlin – sat on the steps of the Cenotaph that night in 1949, their interactions – on the steps, in the darkened spaces nearby, on the way back to the ship – evoked and reinforced important axes of social difference within the broader field of homoeroticism. By involving police in the situation, the 'normal' man reasserted his dominance over the effeminate, driving a wedge between different types of participant in male same-sex encounters. These identities and power relations played out in subsequent spaces and scales, too: the police station, the court and ultimately, for Walters, the prison.

These events also reflected broader social patterns. Other scholars have chronicled the anxieties of the immediate post-war years: the desire to stabilise gendered norms and identities following the disruptions of wartime, when couples were separated, marriages strained and the women moved into work spaces previously reserved for men (D'Emilio 1992; Houlbrook 2007). Perhaps our military men tapped into this moment of widespread cultural anxiety, and sought – however unconsciously – to counter the perceived crisis of post-war masculinity.⁴ After all, their individual prerogatives neatly dovetailed with the wider social concerns.

Stabilisation of the post-war gender order went hand-in-hand with worries about same-sex eroticism (Cuordileone 2000). In New Zealand, the term 'homosexual' entered widespread use, and started to displace the older distinction

between effeminate and sexually passive 'queens' (or 'queers') and 'normal' men, 'trade' who saw themselves as essentially indistinguishable from those involved exclusively with women (Brickell 2008b). As a new category, 'homosexual' casts a wide net. Even though it does not explicitly appear in this particular case, the category threatened to gather up 'trade' as well as 'queens' under a mantle of stigma and effeminacy. Their masculine dominance threatened in the face of a growing homosexualisation of same-sex activity, trade may have been increasingly vigilant boundary maintainers. A code violation was a threat to be dealt with, through strong language, physical force or recourse to the repressive apparatus of the state. While these sailors may have engaged in same-sex conduct, they would sooner repudiate their conduct than implicate themselves in the new cosmologies.

Having been established at the end of the Second World War, this reluctance remains with us today. In 21st century Paris, Amaouche argued, many hustlers deny their sexual involvements and distance themselves from their clients – and from others who hustle for male-male sex. The 'other' is homosexual; the self is not. Amaouche (2010, pp. 195–7) suggested these disavowals result from both the illegality of soliciting and the ongoing equation of 'homosexuality' with passivity and femininity. Where masculinity and sexuality are perilously interwoven, attributions of homosexuality are strongly contested.

Spaces enable and underline these dynamics. The hotel, the cenotaph, the wharf and the surrounding streets were settings within which a number of critical disjunctions played out: between trade and queens, willingness and reluctance, desire and retribution and, implicitly, homosexuality and its disavowal. These were 'spaces of dread and delight' (Johnston & Longhurst 2010, p. 80), structured through spatialised moments: the men sat at the base of the cenotaph, repaired down a dark alley or headed towards the oil wharf. The cenotaph and its ancillary locations provided the scenery and props for the tense scripts of homoeroticism and masculinity. These Dunedin men's negotiations – similar to those of their counterparts elsewhere – were tailored to particular spaces and given meaning by them.

Much information is missing from these court records, and the men's motivations are hard to read. There are, however, several possibilities in the context of shifting social patterns, and the ambiguities are revealing. There is more than one way to read this case, but that should come as no surprise. After all, the Queens Gardens, the Cenotaph and the surrounding spaces had more than one meaning for those who spent their days and nights there.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Yorick Smaal, Andrew Gorman-Murray and Carey-Ann Morrison for their insightful comments, and Alison Breese at the Dunedin City Council archive, and Les O'Neill at Otago University, for their help with the map.

Endnotes

- 1 Pratt (1991, p. 34) coined the term 'contact zone' to refer to 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power'.
- 2 I have given these men pseudonyms in order to protect privacy.
- 3 On the development of the distinction between 'queens' and 'normal men' in New Zealand, see Brickell (2008, ch.2).
- 4 On masculinity's definitional and relational 'crisis' over a long historical period, see Edwards (2006, chapter 1); Forth (2008, pp. 3–5). On the anxieties of masculinity, see Cuordileone (2000).

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