



**Extract From:**  
***Mates and Lovers:***  
***A History of Gay New Zealand***  
***by Dr Chris Brickell***

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## 2. OF QUEENS & MEN

W

illiam Clarke, a cook who worked at the Stonehurst

Hotel in Auckland's Symonds Street, was arrested in 1936. He had touched a stranger on the arm amid the bustle of the main street, initiated a conversation about the weather, and taken his new companion, a warehouseman, to a movie at the Civic. During the intermission William invited the other man back to his room, and his unwelcome advances ended in the man making a complaint to the police. Charged with indecent assault, William appeared before the Auckland Supreme Court. The case against him was bolstered by numerous interesting exhibits: a tin of face powder, one bottle of brilliantine and one of strawberry lotion, a packet of henna powder, a box of rouge, and a powder puff. Having talked to the assistant cook at the Stonehurst, police reported that the accused was 'known among men in the city as a "queen", and associated with other men of the same class who it is alleged commit sodomy among themselves'.<sup>192</sup>

Forty years after the widely publicised trial of

*A Masterton man, a friend of Robert Gant, relaxes in the garden, c.1910.*

Oscar Wilde, Clarke, an effeminate working-class man, stood in the dock. His accoutrements, and the particular sexual style they indicated, caused others to bestow upon him a particular label: 'queen'. This was not the first time a man was described as a queen in a New Zealand courtroom. In a Wellington court in 1918, a soldier used the term to describe the military policeman who got into his bed and 'caught hold of me by the penis and asked me to stick it into him'.<sup>193</sup> Three years later the steward Albert Elworthy called Walter Smith, a master mariner, 'a bloody queen' in front of witnesses. Elworthy had been Smith's lover until a bitter quarrel led Smith to make an injudicious complaint to the police and, ultimately, ended in prison for both men.<sup>194</sup> In 1927 Napier gardener and florist Horace Hilton, a witness in another man's court case, was referred to as a 'queeny looking man'.<sup>195</sup>

The queen, as such, was nowhere to be seen in nineteenth-century New Zealand. He was born in the aftermath of Oscar Wilde's trial, some time between the turn of the new century and the end of the First World War. The aesthetic, dandyish style that some men adopted during the 1880s and 90s was re-evaluated in the decades that followed. This is not to say that nineteenth-century men could not be swishy — they certainly could, as Robert Gant's photographs illustrate so well — but such exuberance did not yet equate to a homosexual inclination in the eyes of society at large. After 1900 the wider public began to link dandyism and foppishness with homosexuality, and the term queen — derived from the Middle English 'quean', a disreputable woman — gradually came to describe this association.<sup>196</sup> The queen probably started his life in the underground, and for years many New Zealanders did not know what the term meant. The policeman who quizzed Walter Smith in 1921 had no idea of its meaning, and he had to seek clarification.



THE QUEEN WAS EFFETE IF not actually effeminate; he oiled and powdered, primped and preened, and more often than not took the passive role in sex. As Albert Elworthy described him to the police, 'You can either kiss him, jerk him off or fuck him'.<sup>197</sup> Effeminacy, though, was not always equated with same-sex desire. The connections were often tenuous, especially in the early years.

At the turn of the century, effeminacy implied physical 'weediness', excessive sentimentality, and aestheticism. *The Young Man's Magazine*, the organ of the St John's Young Men's Bible Class in Wellington, campaigned against unmanly indulgences. In



1902, its readers were instructed to reject 'effeminacy', 'namby-pambyism' and such other 'kindred faults obnoxious to ardent youth', and to embrace manliness instead.<sup>198</sup> The magazine encouraged involvement in athletics and rugby, a commitment to Scripture, and a hearty appetite.<sup>199</sup> The same philosophy — known throughout the West as 'Muscular Christianity' — caused the founders of the Young Men's Christian Association to advocate sportiness, religiosity and an inquiring mind.<sup>200</sup>

*Truth*, that tireless, scandal-mongering newspaper whose first New Zealand edition went on sale in 1906, began to connect the dots in new ways. The YMCA may have disclaimed effeminate weediness, but the organisation in turn became the newspaper's target. The YMCA, *Truth* declared, 'does not tend to inculcate robustness and virility

*The queenly look: Author James Courage pictured in flapper-meets-American Indian drag, probably in Peel Forest c.1920.*

in its young male followers but develops instead effeminate and priggish sneaking mollycoddles, entirely lacking in all the qualities that go to make up robust manhood'.<sup>201</sup> The initials YMCA, *Truth* ambiguously proposed in 1910, might best stand for 'Young Men's Cuddling Association'.<sup>202</sup> In the same year as *Truth*'s outburst, the *Observer* took Lady Anna Stout to task for suggesting that New Zealand had 'no class of men who are effeminate in dress or intellect or degenerate in morals'. 'Oh, geewillikens!' responded the newspaper. 'High-falutin' balderdash'.<sup>203</sup> Unfortunately, neither *Truth* nor the *Observer* spelt out exactly what it meant by effeminacy.

Three years later, in 1913, *Truth* connected effeminacy and homoeroticism more clearly. The newspaper reported the English case of a young man who died in mysterious circumstances. 'Effeminate Eric', as *Truth* called him, 'lisped like a girl' and 'painted his face and rouged like a society belle'. 'His lips were reddened, and his eyebrows pencilled . . . He looked, in fact, like a lady of Leicester Square'.<sup>204</sup> Not only did Eric have 'an aversion to the fair sex', it was said, but he was 'closely attached' to his male friends. According to another report in the same paper, Sydney police nabbed an effeminate thief who stole women's clothing and was given perfumes by a male lover.<sup>205</sup> In other articles, though, effeminacy meant quite the opposite. In 1925, for instance, *Truth* disparaged the 'cissy boy': a flamboyantly dressed young man whose striped ties, colourful shirts and sophisticated accessories were aimed at attracting the opposite sex.<sup>206</sup>

While the effeminate man may or may not have desired sex with other men, the opposite was also true: the queenly type was not the only one who sought out same-sex pleasures. Many of those arrested for sodomy in Auckland, Wellington and Dunedin in these years were burly labourers with tattoos and missing teeth, as much a contrast to Oscar Wilde as one could hope to find.

In Lyttelton Gaol, too, those with feminine personae mingled with rougher characters. Fed with a constant stream of revelations from a former prisoner, *Truth* railed against goings-on in the stale air of the gaol's cells, the close confines of its yards, and the immoral spaces of its bathrooms. One group 'have fancy monikers like "Rosebud," "Ruby," "Queeny," "Violet," and the like', *Truth* complained in 1908. "'Rosebud" is at the disposal of all and sundry for an inch of Juno [tobacco], and has been known to behave blastiferously in the bath-house with five persons in an afternoon. It is a howling satire on the holy church that the gaol choir is mostly composed of these sexual beasts'.<sup>207</sup> These men's partners received fewer column-inches, but they attracted more masculine descriptions: 'degenerate brute', 'great lump of an Irishman' and 'rascal'.<sup>208</sup> A kingpin in this second group was derided as a



'nigger', a 'disgusting lump of charcoal' and a 'soot covered Oscar', presumably after Wilde.<sup>209</sup>

This was more than just a moral crusade. As it described these men for its readers, *Truth* reinforced new understandings about male sexuality. The newspaper's distinction between Rosebud's friends and the other prisoners owed something to international trends. In his study of working-class life during the early decades of the twentieth century, American historian George Chauncey explains that in institutional settings the queenly types like Rosebud were called 'punks' or 'fairies', their masculine partners 'wolves'.<sup>210</sup> 'Wolves combined homosexual interest with a marked masculinity', Chauncey writes. They 'generally did not seek sexual encounters with other "men," in which they might have been forced into sexual roles that would have compromised their own masculine identification, but only with punks or fairies, males ascribed lower status because of their youth or effeminacy'.<sup>211</sup> There is no sign of the American terminology in the New Zealand context, but locals seem to have

*Lyttelton Gaol, c.1900: The prison was on a tiny site, sandwiched between the road and the hill behind, and the crowding exacerbated the public panic about its inmates' carryings-on.*