

Parade Oxford Street History Walk

CITY OF SYDNEY



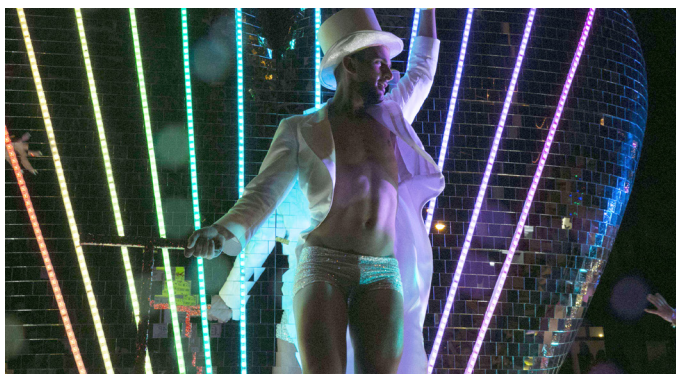
Parade Oxford Street History Walk

A major thoroughfare for Aboriginal people and colonists, it was named Oxford Street in 1875, and like its London namesake, became a centre for shopping. In the 1960s, a scattering of nightclubs catering to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) crowds began to appear along Oxford Street. In following decades, more bars, clubs, restaurants, saunas and shops appeared giving the strip its celebratory name, 'The Golden Mile'. It became associated with LGBTIQ life in Sydney. Along Oxford Street, and in surrounding neighbourhoods, a once hidden community burst into vibrant and visible life. To wander this strip today is to walk through a rich history of parties and protests, so important to the emergence of Sydney's LGBTIQ communities.



Allow 1.5 hours for this walk.

There are many cafes and pubs en route, and buses run along Oxford Street frequently. Start at the southern end of Hyde Park at **Whitlam Square (1)**.



Dancing Boy, Sydney Mardi Gras 2014
(Photograph: C.Moore Hardy, City of Sydney Archives.)

This self-guided walking tour of Oxford Street was developed in partnership with Pride History Group, a community history group that aims to preserve Sydney's LGBTIQ past. Archivist, historian and activist Robert French has led LGBTIQ history walks in Sydney for nearly 30 years and we are grateful for his advice and guidance in the development of this tour. The Pride History Group has a collection of over 100 oral history interviews that bear witness to the queering of Sydney. An overview is online at www.pridehistory.org.au/oral-histories

1

Whitlam Square – Mardi Gras 1978



Participants in Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in 2013 celebrating the 35th anniversary by carrying historical placards and banners
(Photograph: C.Moore Hardy, City of Sydney Archives)

Sydney's first Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras took place on the night of 24 June 1978. The original plan was to parade down Oxford Street from Taylor Square towards Hyde Park. A truck driven by Lance Gowland led revellers along the route. When Gowland parked the truck on College Street, police shut the event down. Rather than dispersing, parade participants made their way up William Street to Kings Cross. Fifty-three people were arrested during an ensuing riot on Darlinghurst Road. In the early 1980s, the date of the parade was moved from winter to autumn and the route was reversed and extended. Thousands of spectators flock to see the annual Mardi Gras parade along Oxford Street.



Cross to the other side of Liverpool Street, where the **Paris Theatre (2)** once stood.

2

The Paris Theatre



The Paris Theatre in 1965
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

A cinema designed by Walter Burley Griffin was opened on this site in 1916. It was named 'The Paris' in 1954. In the late 70s, the Paris theatre had a brief life as an independent cinema and live performance venue run by Johnny Allen, an openly gay man. He hosted 'Dirty Cabaret' events and screened underground and avant-garde cinema. Sydney's first large-scale gay and lesbian film festival was held here in May 1978. One of the films screened at the festival inspired local lesbian and gay rights activists to hold their own pride parade, dubbed a 'mardi gras', just a month later.



Continue uphill along **Oxford Street (3)**.

3

Oxford Street – ‘The Golden Mile’



Fabulous drag performers at Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade in 2003 (Photograph: C.Moore Hardy, City of Sydney Archives)



Oxford Weekender News, 1980s (Image: Pride History Group)

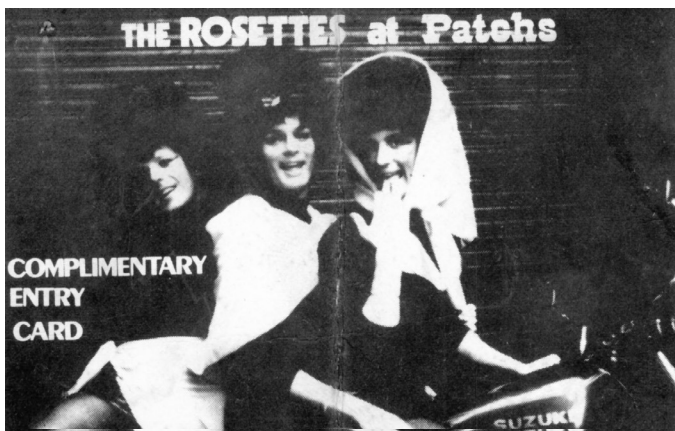
Oxford Street was once known by Sydney's LGBTIQ communities as 'The Golden Mile'. As Oxford Street's grand retail reputation was fading by the 60s, LGBTIQ bars and clubs began to migrate here from nearby Kings Cross, taking advantage of cheap rents. Within 20 years, 'The Golden Mile' was home to a string of openly LGBTIQ bars, clubs, shops, saunas, cafes and restaurants.

→

Continue to 33 Oxford St, the former site of popular gay bar **Patches (4)**.

4

Patches



Advertisement for Patches night club, c1970s (Image: Pride History Group)

When it opened in 1976, Patches was something new for the Sydney gay scene. While earlier venues followed a more British nightclub model, Patches was a disco. The largest space was set aside for a dance floor and a DJ played all of the latest disco music coming out of America and Europe including Giorgio Moroder, Donna Summer and Thelma Houston. After Patches closed, there was a gay disco or nightclub here in subsequent decades: DIVA in 1989 followed by DCM in 1990.

→

Continue along Oxford Street and turn right into Crown Street. Your next stop is 272 Crown Street, former site of **Ruby Reds (5)**.

5

Ruby Reds



Dawn O'Donnell and her partner Aniek Baten enjoying Mardi Gras pre-festivities, with bar manager at Ruby Reds, date unknown (Photograph: C.Moore Hardy, City of Sydney Archives)

Ruby Reds was Sydney's first lesbian-only bar when it opened in 1976. It was run by Roger Claude Teyssedre and Dawn O'Donnell, a colourful local identity. Roger and Dawn went to open many more bars and clubs along 'The Golden Mile'. Men were only permitted into Ruby Reds if accompanied by lesbian friends. It was an extremely popular place to party with friends and maybe meet someone new. Ruby Reds closed in 1986.

→

Retrace your steps and turn right back into Oxford Street. The celebrated **Capriccio's (6)** was at 163 Oxford Street.

6

Capriccio's



Capriccio's, 1981 (Photograph: William Yang, National Library of Australia)

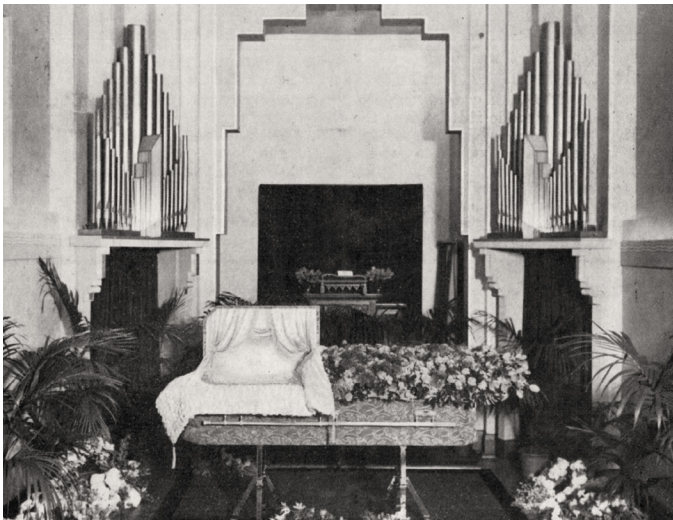
Capriccio's was one of the first LGBTIQ venues on Oxford Street when it opened in 1969. It quickly became famous for its spectacular drag performances. Advertised as an 'international style' nightclub, the venue had shows on 2 floors, as well as a dance floor and cruising bars. Capriccio's originally had a theatre restaurant licence, meaning it could stay open until 3am but was required to serve food. The food, of course, was not the point of spending the night at 'Caps'. It was an opportunity to mix with an LGBTIQ crowd and marvel at the elaborate shows. Capriccio's closed in 1982.

→

Keep walking along Oxford Street until you reach the intersection at **Taylor Square (8)**. **Kinselas (7)** is just around the corner in Bourke Street.

7

Kinselas



The Australian Funeral Director, 1935
(Photograph: Society of Australian Genealogists)

In the early 1930s, funeral director Charles Kinsela oversaw the conversion of this building into a multi-storey funeral parlour. The spectacular art deco interiors were designed by renowned architect C Bruce Dellit. In 1982 the premises became a theatre-restaurant, then a bar and nightclub, taking advantage of the boom in Oxford Street nightlife. Drag artiste Rose Jackson performed her successful one woman show, *Rose's Turn*, here in the early 1980s. Kinselas has hosted many LGBTIQ events, including the 'On the Other Side' lesbian parties in the 1990s.



A little further up Oxford Street you'll pass the former site of **Ivy's Birdcage (9)** and at 207 Oxford Street is **The Bookshop (10)**. You may like to pause for a browse.

8

Taylor Square



Protest on Oxford Street, October 1989 (Photograph: Robert French Collection)

On 2 October 1989, Reverend Fred Nile, politician and Christian campaigner, held an anti-LGBTIQ demonstration along Oxford Street, described as a 'Cleansing March of Witness for Jesus', which culminated here in Taylor Square. Local LGBTIQ activists organised a counter-protest which far out-numbered those who had gathered in support of Nile. While Christian marchers carried placards inscribed with anti-LGBTIQ messaging, including 'What's so gay about AIDS?', the counter-protestors responded with chants such as 'Repent, Relent, Redecorate'. Nile complained to journalists that his campaigners hadn't been able to use the portable toilets they had organised, for fear of contracting HIV/AIDS from the counter-protesters. The conservative marchers failed to make Oxford Street any less gay.

9

Ivy's Birdcage



Enjoying a show at Ivy's Birdcage, date unknown
(Photograph: Pride History Group)

In the 1960s, Ivy Richter was the owner of a wine bar in Bondi Junction named *Chez Ivy's*. Although straight herself, Ivy became friends with a group of gay (or 'camp') men and decided to turn *Chez Ivy's* into a camp venue. Word spread and the bar became a huge success with a mixed gendered crowd. In 1969, Ivy opened a second venue, called *Ivy's Birdcage*, on the upper levels of 191 Oxford Street. The club was known for its fabulous drag shows featuring performances by Claudia Wagner and Judy Burnett.



Ivy's Birdcage, date unknown (Photograph: Pride History Group)

10

The Bookshop



Visiting international author and LGBT cinema authority Vito Russo (author of *The Celluloid Closet*) who died during the HIV/AIDS years with Les McDonald, (The Bookshop owner), c1980s (Photograph: The Bookshop, Darlinghurst)

Australia's longest running LGBTIQ bookstore, The Bookshop has been operating for more than 30 years. One of its founders, Les McDonald, was inspired by the number of lesbian and gay bookstores he encountered travelling in America in the 1970s, and imagined something similar in Sydney. The business began as a mail order service before opening on Crown Street in 1982 and later moving here to 207 Oxford Street.



Use the traffic lights to cross over Oxford Street to the other side of **Taylor Square (8)**, site of a number of important events in Sydney's LGBTIQ history. The former **Darlinghurst Police Station (11)** is on the corner of Forbes and Bourke streets.

11

Darlinghurst Police Station



Taylor Square 1961. The round turret of the Darlinghurst Police Station can be seen behind the men's convenience (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



Protest for Gay and Lesbian (LGBTIQ+) rights outside Darlinghurst Police Station, photographed by David Urquhart 1979 (Photograph: State Library of NSW)

Through the late 1960s and into the 1970s, as this area became known as the gay heart of Sydney, Darlinghurst Police Station maintained a notorious reputation for homophobia and corruption. In 1978, participants arrested at the first Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras were brought back to this station and several were bashed by police in the cells. One of those arrested, Gail Hewison, remembered '... a high point was hearing the chanting outside the gaol and realising that a community was mobilising in our support'. In 2016, NSW Police issued a formal apology for their actions that night. The closure of the police station in 1986 was cause for celebration among local LGBTIQ communities, with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence marking the occasion by holding an exorcism of the building.



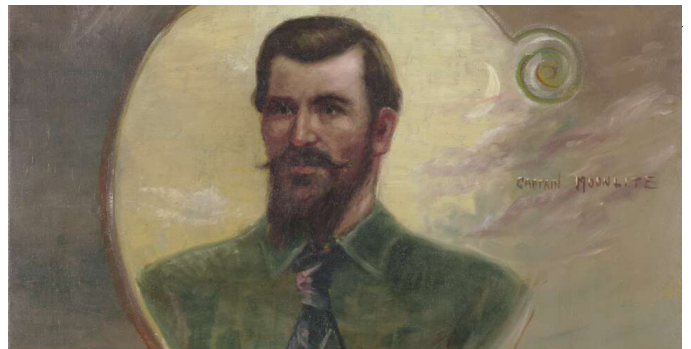
Walk along Forbes Street to the entrance of the former **Darlinghurst Gaol (12)**. Now the National Art School, its NAS Gallery within the historic campus is open to the public.

12

Darlinghurst Gaol (former)



Darlinghurst Gaol, 1887 (Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)



The Moonliters by P W M, 1894 (Image: National Library of Australia)

Darlinghurst Gaol opened in 1841. One of its most famous prisoners was the bushranger Captain Moonlite, who was hanged here on 20 January 1880. Real name Andrew George Scott, Moonlite met James Nesbitt in 1869. The 2 formed a passionate friendship and, possibly, a romantic relationship that lasted until Nesbitt was killed during a police shoot-out. A police officer also died in the shoot-out and Moonlite was sentenced to death. Of Nesbitt, Moonlite wrote, 'We were one in hopes, one in heart and soul and this unity lasted until he died in my arms'. Since 1921, the old gaol has been home to the National Art School whose list of famous alumni include a number of LGBTIQ artists, including Jeffrey Smart and James Gleeson.



Turn right into Burton Street. In the next block you will encounter **The Wall (13)** and, within Green Park, the **Sydney Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Memorial (14)**.

13

The Wall



Green Park with 'The Wall' in the distance, 1986
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The sandstone perimeter wall of the former gaol on Darlinghurst Road between Burton and Oxford streets has long been known in Sydney's LGBTIQ scene as 'The Wall'. The Wall was a popular beat conveniently located between the clubs of Kings Cross and Oxford Street from the 1960s. It was a friendly site where you might run into old friends, or meet someone new to either take home or to venture with across the road to the public restrooms in Green Park. The Wall became a cruising site for male sex workers into the 1980s.

14

Sydney Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Memorial



Sydney Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Memorial in 2005
(Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

This memorial was installed in 2001 in memory of homosexual men and women that were tortured, murdered and persecuted because of their sexuality. The memorial was designed by Jennifer Gamble and Russell Rodrigo. In Nazi Germany, homosexual men sent to concentration camps were required to wear a pink triangle sewn onto their clothing. Gay and lesbian liberation activists in the 1970s proudly displayed the pink triangle on banners, posters and badges, a defiant act of reappropriation that rejected fear and hate in favour of celebration and joy. The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Holocaust Memorial is located opposite the Sydney Jewish Museum on Burton Street, which has a permanent Holocaust exhibition.



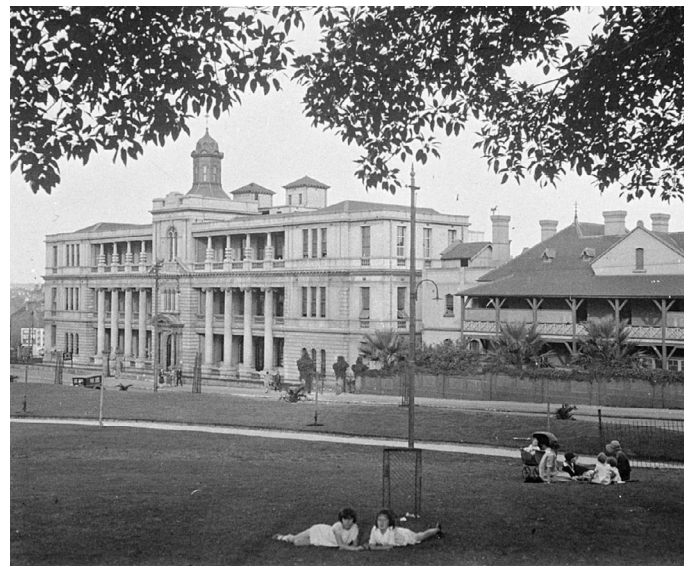
Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby at the Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in 1992 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



Walk through Green Park and then turn right and walk along Victoria Street. **St Vincent's Hospital (15)** is opposite.

15

St Vincent's Hospital



St Vincent's Hospital from Green Park c1927
(Photograph: Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW)

Situated in the heart of 1980s gay Sydney, St Vincent's Hospital was a critically important centre of research, care and treatment during the HIV/AIDS crisis. Professor Ron Penny diagnosed the first case of AIDS in Australia at St Vincent's in October 1982. Ward 17 South was established at the hospital to care for patients with HIV/AIDS in 1984.



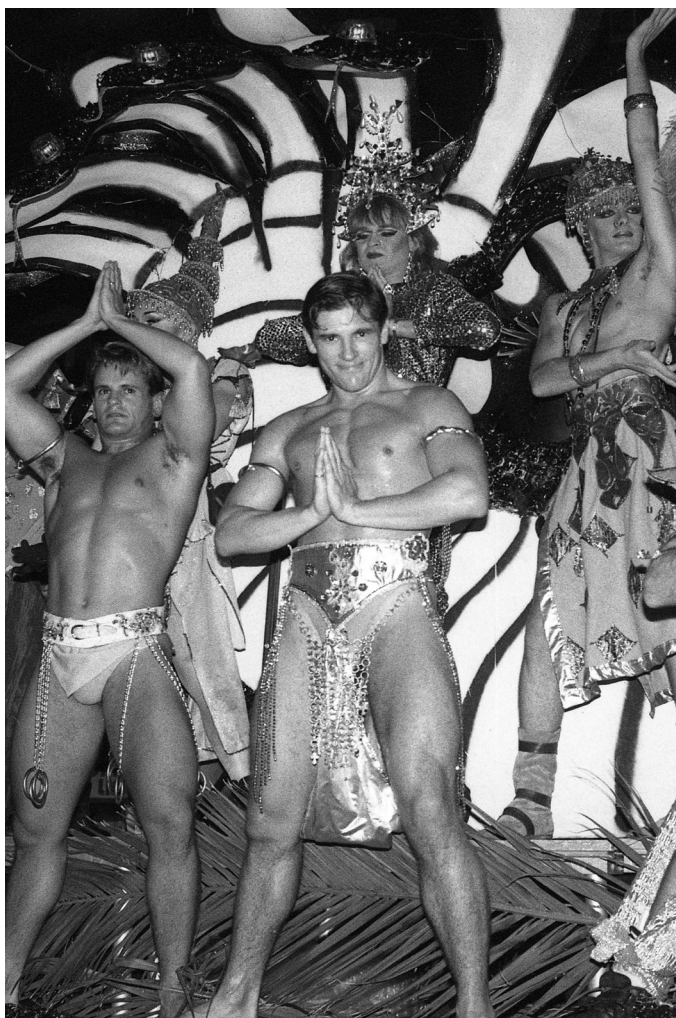
When you reach Oxford Street, turn left. The former **Albury Hotel (16)** is on the corner of Oxford and Boundary streets.

16

The Albury Hotel



The Albury Hotel, February 2000 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



Spectacular All Men Albury Barmen and performers float at the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, 1991 (Photograph: C. Moore Hardy, City of Sydney Archives)

The Albury Hotel became a gay pub in 1980. Shirtless, muscled bartenders and outrageous drag shows made it an extremely popular venue with gay men well into the 1990s. The Albury's closure in 2000 and the conversion of the building into shops and offices was seen by many as a sign that the glory days of 'The Golden Mile' were over.



Continue along Oxford Street to the pedestrian lights. Opposite is Berkelouw books, 19 Oxford Street Paddington, once the site of **Club 80 (17)**. You may like to pause for a browse, otherwise continue along Oxford Street to the **Unicorn Hotel (18)**, 106 Oxford St.

17

Club 80



Lex Watson and Robert French, members of the Gay Rights Lobby, signing statutory declarations admitting to sexual offences and calling on the police to arrest them (Photograph: Robert French Collection)

Now a bookstore, this was once the site of Club 80, a sex-on-premises venue that was raided 3 times by police in 1983. Twenty-seven men were arrested. The raids on Club 80 prompted outrage among LGBTIQ communities and galvanised activists fighting for the decriminalisation of male homosexuality. Street protests were held and 28 members of the Gay Rights Lobby, including Lex Watson and Robert French, signed statutory declarations admitting to sexual offences and calling on the police to arrest them. Sustained pressure from activists saw the decriminalisation of sex between men over the age of 18 years old in 1984.

18

The Unicorn Hotel



The Unicorn Hotel, February 2000 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

The art deco Unicorn Hotel was built in 1941. In 1978, as Oxford Street was transformed into 'The Golden Mile,' the Unicorn became a gay pub. It was a popular venue with 'clones', gay men who dressed in boots, denim and tight t-shirts, usually teamed with a crew cut and moustache.



As Oxford Street inclines, on the right you'll pass the historic **Victoria Barracks (19)**. Stay on the left hand side of Oxford Street and continue on to 242 Oxford Street, former site of **Enzo's (20)**.

19

Victoria Barracks



Marching band, Victoria Barracks c1973 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Victoria Barracks was built by convicts and was first occupied by military forces in 1848; its military use continues today. In the colonial era, the single-sex environment would have afforded soldiers opportunities to pursue same-sex encounters. From the late 1960s onwards, gay and bisexual soldiers stationed at the barracks found other men like themselves and took part in the area's developing gay scene. Army captains, brigadiers and colonels could be spotted at Enzo's and Patches by those in the know.

20

Enzo's



Enzo's on Oxford Street, Paddington, in the 1970s
(Photograph: Woollahra Council)

For much of the 20th century, small venues known as 'wine bars' had a disreputable reputation and were commonly referred to as 'plonk shops'. But from the 1960s, a number of wine bars were taken over by new licensees who turned them into more fashionable spaces for socialising. Two wine bars on Oxford Street – Enzo's at 242 Oxford Street and Chez Ivy's in Bondi Junction – became very popular with LGBTIQ crowds.



Cross at the traffic lights to reach **Paddington Town Hall (21)**.

21

Paddington Town Hall



Paddington Town Hall, c1918 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)



Paddington Town Hall, 1955 (Photograph: City of Sydney Archives)

Paddington Town Hall has hosted several important events in the history of Sydney's LGBTIQ communities over the past 40 years, including the 4th National Homosexual Conference in 1978, which forged links between LGBTIQ activists and trade unions, and Australia's first public meeting to discuss HIV/AIDS in August 1983. Australia's first national lesbian and gay rights group, Campaign Against Moral Persecution (CAMP), held dances at the town hall throughout the 1970s, and the first post-parade Mardi Gras party was held here in 1980.



Your walk ends here. You may like to rest your feet at **Paddington Reservoir Gardens (22)** opposite the town hall or at one of the many cafes and pubs that line Paddington's Oxford Street. The bus stop outside the gardens will get you back into the city.

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