

# MEDIA RELEASE

17 September 2015



## **An Open & Shut Case?**

### **An exhibition celebrating 40 years of gay law reform in South Australia**

On 17 September 1975 South Australia made history when it became the first state in Australia to decriminalise male homosexuality. To celebrate 40 years of gay law reform in South Australia, the State Library of South Australia is hosting the exhibition ***An Open and Shut Case?***

This enlightening exhibition tells the story of how the tragic drowning in the River Torrens of law lecturer Dr George Duncan in 1972 led to legislation being introduced into South Australian Parliament to enact gay law reform. Two further bills were introduced in 1973 and 1975 before law reform was finally achieved.

Traveling back to 1837, the exhibition takes you on a chronological journey of the attitudes towards homosexual men, through to the present day. Displays draw extensively on original materials from the State Library's collections including archived books, posters, photographs, newspaper articles and other documents. The centrepiece of the exhibition is the original decriminalisation Act document signed into law in 1975 by the State Governor, Sir Mark Oliphant.

Co-curator Ian Purcell AM says, "In telling the story of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in South Australia, we've also included what happened before 1972-1975, and what happened after, up to the present day. What's been achieved over the last 40 years is remarkable and deserves to be celebrated, even more so given the history of persecution and oppression that came before. It's important for people to know that history."

As a cultural institution the State Library has a proud tradition of connecting people with the history about our State. Alan Smith, Director of the State Library says, “At a time of debate in our society, we are pleased to be hosting this exhibition about an important part of our State’s history. By sharing the memories and stories of previous generations, we can learn from the past and help to improve our understanding of society as it is today and into the future.”

The exhibition will be opened by the Honorable Anne Levy AO, Member of the Legislative Council from 1975 to 1997. Reflecting on how far our society has come, Anne comments, “In today’s Australia it seems incredible that sexual acts in private between consenting adult males could lead to jail terms, but this was the case only 40 years ago! Thank goodness cultural values do change with time!”

A series of entertaining and thought-provoking community events have been planned around the exhibition. This includes a talk on the life of Dr Duncan from historian Tim Reeves, and a panel discussion, *From Camp to Queer*, when members of the LGBTIQ<sup>i</sup> community will share their lived experiences and changing priorities over 60 years. Dr Gertrude Glossip, celebrity exhibition tour guide, is also stopping by the State Library to entertain us with her knowledge of the historic events shown in the exhibition.

The exhibition, ***An Open and Shut Case?***, opens on September 18 in the Treasures Wall area at the State Library of South Australia and continues until 8 November 2015.

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#### **EXHIBITION DETAILS:**

18 September – 8 November 2015  
Open during library hours  
Treasures Wall  
State Library of South Australia  
Free entry

#### **FOR MEDIA ENQUIRIES CONTACT:**

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<sup>i</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer or Questioning