



↑ Lindsay Allen (as Rev Samuel Marsden) and Fabian Lo Schiavo (as Miss Lola Archivez) for the 'Skeletons in the Closet' workshop

Gary Fishlock reports ...

As the Mardi Gras Festival guide rightly points out, 'Skeletons in the Closet' is the first official involvement of State Records in the Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival. There may be people out there wondering what possible connection could be made between a body that archives family histories, convict records and old court documents and an organisation that, among other things, stages the largest and most fabulous gay and lesbian festival in the world. I wondered that myself when I first saw the 'Skeletons in the Closet' event listed in the festival guide. But after speaking with Lindsay Allen, Senior Archivist for Access and Information at State Records, the only thing I'm wondering now is why didn't anyone think of it years ago?

'We wanted to offer a family history presentation that'd be amusing and interesting, as well as pertinent to gays and lesbians,' Lindsay says. 'A lot of people who have come to us to research their family histories have been older gay men and we realised there was a particular level of interest in this kind of thing in the wider gay and lesbian community. Possibly a lot of these people have been excluded and alienated by their own families due to old fashioned prejudices and have now reached an age where they feel they'd like to consolidate their past and get a perspective on their family history, not just for themselves, but for their nieces and nephews and other members of the younger generation.'

Lindsay points out that it could also be particularly beneficial for gays and lesbians to see how and what

PHOTO: PENELOPE CLAY

A RATTLING OF BONES

Sydney newspaper *SX* was intrigued by the sound of 'Skeletons in the Closet', a Mardi Gras workshop presented by State Records and hosted by archivists Lindsay Allen and Fabian Lo Schiavo.

data is recorded as there are issues of particular significance to gays and lesbians, such as the as yet still non-legal recognition of relationships, lesbian motherhood, sperm donation and issues surrounding wills and probate.

So what kind of information can people expect to find once they go browsing through the data held at State Records?

'All kinds of things,' says Lindsay. 'We have a lot of the old court records of homosexual trials back in the 19th century. A lot of the statements show some of the practices of entrapment that police used at the time. We also have things called school punishment books, which were kept by schools to record discipline.

They tell who was on detention and the reasons why, which was usually 'indecent exposure' or boys looking up girls' skirts, that kind of thing.'

In other words, there's a chance you may find out more than you bargained for once you go scratching around in the past, such as who was married to who, who WASN'T married to who, who was born 'out of wedlock' (shock! horror!) and who appeared in court on an 'indecent exposure' charge, but who can resist the challenge of unearthing a bit of hidden family dirt?

'Skeletons in the Closet' was held on Saturday 16 February 2002 at the Sydney Records Centre, The Rocks

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