

# Gay victims' memorial raises questions

Stefan Bialoguski

A MEMORIAL to people victimised for being homosexual has been unveiled in Darlinghurst, opposite the Sydney Jewish Museum.

But academics have questioned the memorial's promotional material blurring homosexuals' experiences under Nazism with the Holocaust.

The \$100,000 structure is the brainchild of child Holocaust survivor Dr Kitty Fischer, who says she owes her life to a homosexual inmate at the Auschwitz death camp who brought her and her younger sister food to supplement their meagre rations.

"I don't know what happened to him, but I made a promise that if I ever got out of Auschwitz alive, I would tell the story of the 'pink triangle man' who brought me two hot-jacket potatoes every day and saved my and my sister's lives," she told the *Australian Jewish News*.

Chiefly funded by South Sydney Council, the memorial comprises a large, pink triangle bearing an image of prisoners at Sachsenhausen concentration camp, on whose uniforms can be seen the pink triangle identifying them as homosexual. Intersecting the pink triangle is a black triangle of columns representing victimised lesbians.

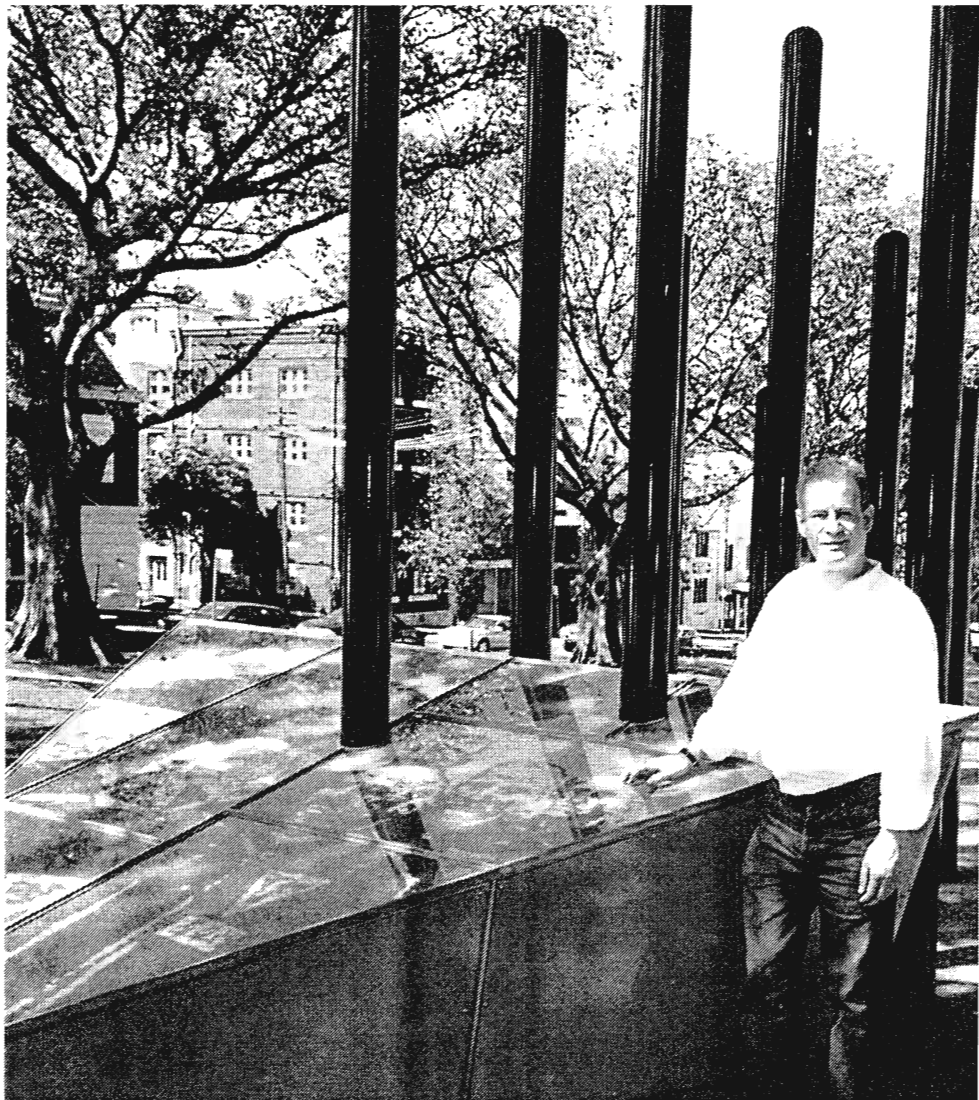
Critics say the program circulated at last week's dedication ceremony conjures up an equivalence between the homosexual and Jewish experiences under Nazism; it describes the memorial as a "fractured Star of David", talks of homosexuals "killed and tortured during the Holocaust" and stresses the memorial's proximity to the Sydney Jewish Museum.

Adjunct Professor at the University of Sydney's Semitic Studies Department Konrad Kwiet said he had reservations about drawing too strong a parallel between the Holocaust — which specifically refers to the attempted extermination of the Jewish people — and the persecution of homosexuals.

"I don't want to compare who suffered most under the Nazis, but I can compare the policies. Despite a few similarities, there are fundamental differences between the policies directed towards Jews and those directed towards homosexuals. I have strong solidarity towards the homosexual movement, but I have a few question-marks in how they reconstruct their history. Within the gay community, there's an idea that homosexuals suffered a holocaust, which in my mind is not correct. Only German homosexual men were prosecuted [for being homosexual]. Those in other countries were not prosecuted, and lesbian behaviour was not a punishable act. The total death figure was between 5000 and 15,000 ... It wasn't a genocidal policy against homosexuals, and that's different to what happened to the Jews."

However, he stressed his support for a memorial to persecuted homosexuals.

"Homosexuals suffered and many perished, and after the war they were excluded from reparations because homosexual acts



Robert Green at the Gay and Lesbian Memorial ... No-one has a monopoly on suffering.

were still illegal in many countries, so an injustice was done."

Co-director of the Australian Institute of Holocaust and Genocide Studies Professor Colin Tatz agreed. "Homosexuals certainly were not the target of annihilation in the manner that Jews were. The Holocaust remains the singular mission of Nazi Germany; the 'cleansing' of others is, in a sense, a subsidiary interest, and many homosexuals were kept alive whereas with the Holocaust nobody was to be spared.

"People have to be careful of jumping on the coat-tails of one group's suffering and appropriating it for their own. Poles have been doing this for years by describing the Polish victims at Oswiecim, rather than the Jews at Auschwitz."

Memorial designer Russell Rodrigo agreed that the way the structure had been promoted may have contained "erroneous references", but said the design was not intended to make Nazi persecution of Jews and homosexuals synonymous.

"I guess what's in the program is a summary of the design and tries to relay it to a lay audience in a way that connects it to the Nazi era. That's why there are those refer-

ences to the Holocaust and the Star of David. It's possibly valid that there's no equivalence between the two [persecutions], so those references are erroneous. But the design is not based on that. Some may interpret it as a 'fractured Star of David', but it's based on the pink and black triangles representing gay men and lesbians."

Words written on the memorial itself make no reference to the Holocaust, and Federal Court Justice Marcus Einfeld emphasised the difference in his address to the 150 people at the dedication ceremony: "A memorial to the gay and lesbian people lost in the Holocaust does not, as some blinkered people might say, detract from the memory of the incomparable murder of fully one-third of the world's Jews during that horrific period."

Solicitor Robert Green, who lives near the memorial, said that as a gay Jew it was gratifying to see a memorial which showed that no-one had a monopoly on suffering. "Kitty Fischer was in Auschwitz with a gay man who was not Jewish, so different policies led to the same end. It doesn't matter what the policy was — how does it feel sitting in the concentration camp?"