

Magistrate orders a gay book burning

LONDON: One hundred copies of the gay thriller *Frost* will burn — on the orders of a North London magistrate. Signing the book's destruction order, he claimed it was "obscene and wholly indecent".

In court to defend Richard Amory's novel was GN editor Denis Lemon. But it turned out that the verdict against the book was almost a foregone conclusion.

ON THE BENCH: Christopher John Bourke, former pupil of Stonhurst, the exclusive Roman Catholic public school, and twenty years on the staff of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

IN THE WITNESS BOX: Customs and Excise Officer John Hobley, member of a religious sect known as the Church of Christ.

IN THE DOCK: *Frost*, a novel that deals with homosexuality in approving terms.

Frost was published in this country some years ago and was freely available in ordinary bookshops. It was one of the first titles to be stocked by Gay News mail order. When finally it went out of print, GN ordered copies from the States.

In June last year, one of our orders for a hundred copies arrived at Mount Pleasant Sorting Office where it was opened by Customs man John Hobley.

He declared it obscene, and told Gay News it would be destroyed.

COURT

But GN challenged his ruling and the case came up on April 25 at Clerkenwell Magistrates Court.

The trial was a joke.

Defence solicitor Richard Creed drew the magistrate's attention to several specific pages in the book; the magistrate did not bother to look them up.

And halfway through the proceedings, Christopher Bourke interrupted to ask if he had to listen to the defence case? Wasn't



it his job to make up his own mind?

VERDICT

Clearly he had. Giving judgement at the end of the case, he said:

"Homosexuality in this country is an accepted fact, and it is not — in certain circumstances — any longer a crime. But I have no doubt that it can still be considered indecent and obscene.

"Acts of sodomy and buggery between males are still grossly offensive to standards of decency."

OBSCENE

Eventually turning to the book itself he said: "*Frost* is a cheap book to look at, and consists of a series of descriptions of homosexual activities.

"This book is obscene, particularly in its tendency to deprave and corrupt, and would be regarded as wholly indecent in its continued description of homosexual acts.

"I think that one word will suffice to describe the claim that it has some literary merit and moral worth — and that word is 'ludicrous'.

"I declare this book to be liable to forfeiture."

The judgement only refers to 100 copies of Frost which the Customs opened. GN is still entitled to sell copies that it already has in stock, so there is no need to worry if you ordered a copy recently.