

Beach Court (1920-1966)

In 1920 Beach Court was built on the corner of Ramsgate Avenue and the Bondi Beach promenade at North Bondi, its official address being 65a Ramsgate Avenue, Bondi Beach. It replaced dressing sheds which had formerly stood on the site. With its beautiful location right on the beach, this complex of flats, refreshment rooms and a dance hall became a popular local venue.



Beach Court, 1959. Photograph courtesy of State Library NSW

Tiny's Dance Hall opened in Beach Court soon after the building was completed and initially it had quite a respectable reputation. It was very popular and on weekends people queued outside to get in. Beach Court's reputation started to slide in 1932 when its new owners became Alexander Ernest Anderson, notorious criminal dentist Freddie Goldsmith and the 'flamboyant' medical practitioner Dr. Reginald Stuart-Jones. Trouble started soon after.

During the 1930s Stuart-Jones was involved numerous illicit businesses, including illegal gambling (particularly horse race 'fixing'), sly grog and drug dealing, partnered in these various activities by Sydney's most infamous criminals. He was known to them as 'The Doc' and many of them were grateful for his discreet treatments after gun battles. One of Stuart-Jones' companies was ominously named Terminal Investments.

In late 1932 Freddie Goldsmith, on behalf of Alexander Ernest Anderson advised that he had changed the name of Beach Court to 'The Lido' and applied to Council to build dressing cubicles on the property; the cubicles were rejected by Council.

They turned the Dance Hall into a nightclub and at The Lido patrons could expect after-hours alcohol, drugs and access to prostitutes. Later, during World War II, it became a popular place for visiting American servicemen to let their hair down.

One night in December 1932 The Lido was raided in the early hours of the morning and 37 people were arrested including the manager, Leo Mandrell, who was charged with selling alcohol without a licence. Despite pleading guilty

Mandrell wasn't dissuaded from his activities and when he was raided again two months later he was charged with the same offences. The raids continued, but so did the late night revelry with the club advertising 'special decorations, cabaret and an a-la-carte menu' at its all-night New Year's Eve party to welcome in 1934.

The premises became so notorious that surf life saving clubs banned their members from going to The Lido in their club blazers, believing it brought the surf clubs into disrepute. One Bondi surf life saver, Bill Jenkins, who worked as a crime reporter recounted a memorable night there in the 1930s in his memoir, *As Crime Goes By*:

'On this particular night, a dozen or so surf club members, making sure we weren't wearing our club blazers so we wouldn't lower the name of the surf club, went to [the nightclub].

'My first alarming experience that night came when I went to the toilet. A fellow came at me with a knife, and I flattened him with a right-hand punch, before returning to the main hall to rejoin my mates.

'This place had come under the notice of the police following complaints from locals. While we were enjoying ourselves and playing up, the cops raided the place, arriving in two large paddy wagons.

'It was about 3.00am and the band had gone. The only patrons left were drinking sly grog – the club did not have a liquor licence.

'A couple of smarties slipped out the back door and let some of the police wagons' tyres down. This made the constabulary extremely hostile. They pumped up the tyres and began to herd the patrons into the vans.

'I had an inspiration. I jumped up onto the stage and sat at the piano. One of my mates grabbed the saxophone. When the sergeant told us to get outside and into the van with the rest, I said to him: "Crikey, give us a break, we're only the band. Do you have to pinch us as well?" '

Jenkins was saved from arrest, with the police officer telling him that he was "closing this joint down".

The property as a whole was often referred to as 'The Lido'; however, this was the name of the nightclub within the Beach Court premises which still housed flats and a kiosk.

By the late 1930s Beach Court was coming to the attention of Waverley Council who began agitating for the owners of the property to exercise more control over their customers. If they didn't do this the Council warned that they would close The Lido. By 1940 Alexander Anderson had passed away and this pressure from Council, to clean up the premises, may have been behind an offer from a local real estate agent to sell the property to Waverley Council on behalf of Anderson's Estate. The asking price was £6,000 and Council declined.

The Lido nightclub continued until the mid-1940s, briefly known by other names such as The Mirrors and The Palms.

Beach Court appears in the background of a series of photos taken in 1939 by George Caddy which are owned by the State Library of NSW. The Library put these on show in a 2008 photographic exhibition called 'Bondi Jitterbug'. These photos show couples jitterbugging on the Beach Court veranda and women dressed up in fur coats and waiting to get into The Lido.

Beach Court survived its racy period. In later years was better known for its community meeting rooms and its beachside kiosk, Tiny's Café, which provided classic beachside food to hungry beach goers at the northern end of Bondi Beach.

In 1957 the community meeting rooms were hired by a group who discussed the formation of a rugby leagues club for the Eastern Suburbs. The club was formed and the Eastern Suburbs Rugby League Club began operating from Thursday to Sunday at Beach Court, moving to the first floor of the Bondi Pavilion the following year. It was also the first home of the Bondi Boys' Club which itself also later moved to the Bondi Pavilion.

Waverley Council bought Beach Court in 1958-1959, it was demolished in 1966 and the site is now occupied by the North Bondi park Biddigal Reserve.

Published by Waverley Library from Local History source material, 2012.