Charing Cross Hotel: a brief history

The naming of Charing Cross

Charing Cross's original name was Madden's Corner, this does not seem to have ever been an official name, but the area was well-known by this name to local residents. The village of Madden's Corner had grown up on the 19th century road running from Sydney to Botany Bay.

In 1859 when Council was busy naming streets and defining suburb boundaries in order to manage the newly created municipality of Waverley, it decreed:

> *"That the corner formed by the junction of Vickery Street [now Carrington Road], Cowper Street [now Bronte Road] and Victoria Street be called Charing Cross." Waverley Council Minutes, 6 September 1859.*

Charing Cross, named after the London suburb of the same name, was planned by the Council to be the commercial and retail centre of Waverley. At this time Bondi Beach was nothing more than a series of remote sand hills and the only other business district was the Tea Gardens (now Bondi Junction) which had a small collection of shops and one hotel, the Tea Gardens Hotel, established in 1854.

Transport links favour Bondi Junction's growth

The trams came to Charing Cross in 1881, travelling down the main road (now Bronte Road) turning at Macpherson Street and heading down the hill, firstly to the Bronte shops - which was also the stop for Waverley Cemetery - and later to Bronte Beach. Another tram service linked Charing Cross with Randwick. Today buses run on these earlier tram routes.

However, the junction for the trams was at Bondi Junction and the accompanying commercial activity around this junction saw this suburb naturally evolve into the retail centre for the Waverley area. This left Charing Cross as a sleepy rural village. Until the latter half of 19th century much of the land around Charing Cross was still bush, mainly ti-tree scrub.

Charing Cross Hotel's convict heritage

The builder and first licensee of the Charing Cross Hotel was London-born William Newland (1807-1883). In 1826 he was tried at the Old Bailey for selling stolen goods, transported to Australia for 7 years, arriving in 1830 and finally gaining his freedom in 1833. On the way to Australia his ship stopped in Bermuda and he spent over two years of his sentence there. Convict records describe him as '5' 1" tall, ruddy freckly complexion, light brown hair, hazel eyes with tattoos on both arms.'

In 1839 he married Frances (Fanny) Ruttel, a free woman and Irish-born servant who was working at a household in Sydney. They had a large family of 10 children many of whom died in infancy, a sad, but common, fate at this time.

William Newland borrowed £600 from the Saving Bank of NSW to build the Charing Cross Hotel which he opened in 1857. He had some difficulty getting a licence, but after some unnamed 'influence' (not elaborated upon) was brought to bear, Newland succeeded. In 1858-1859 his occupation is listed as 'builder', his home address as Glenmore Road, Paddington. By 1861 he is described as an 'Hotelier of Charing Cross'.

The hotel's first name was either Newland's Hotel or Newland's Inn (both appear), but in 1859 when the Council applied the name Charing Cross to the locality the hotel took the name of the Charing Cross Hotel. It also sat directly in front of the 'cross' of Charing Cross.

The hotel was a strongly constructed two-storey stone building. As public halls were in short supply, a large room on the second floor was much sought after for holding meetings, including early meetings of Waverley Council.

Charing Cross Hotel, 1925, showing the original hotel architecture. The hotel has now been completely renovated and no traces of the original building remain.

In an article in the newspaper *Eastern Suburbs Daily* on 11 November 1924 one of Charing Cross's oldest residents, Henry Brailey, recalls of the hotel:

> *"This is a fine pub – built of stone, two stories high, erected and kept by William Newland, afterwards an alderman of Waverley…. It was a very well conducted house, with a fine room over the bar, used as a Council room by the Waverley Council by lodges, and public meetings. There was a large family of the Newlands – five boys and two girls, who were a credit to their parents."*

Newland, his wife Frances and his large family were highly respected and the hotel had an excellent reputation. As a prominent businessman it was unsurprising that William Newland became a member of the first Waverley Council, being a Councillor 1859-1860.

Waverley Council finds its first home

Waverley was only the second local government area proclaimed in Sydney, with the first Waverley Council meeting held on 16 June, 1859. However, Council had no Council Chambers in which to meet. Given its location, reputation and facilities, and William Newland's involvement with Council, it is not surprising that he offered his hotel as a meeting place.

At the second meeting of Waverley Council, on Thursday 28 July 1859, it was revolved that the offer of Councillor Newland be accepted, 'giving a room for a Council Chamber gratuitously for six months'.

The old hotel saw some stirring scenes during election periods when most of the speeches were delivered from the balcony of the inn. After the meetings, friend and foe retired to the bar to drink the future politician.

William Newland ran the hotel until about 1863 when he became insolvent. He claimed in bankruptcy documents that the cause of his financial problems were 'depression in business and sickness in his family'. This was not the first time he had serious financial woes, he had also previously declared bankruptcy in 1852.

The hotel then passed to R. H. Wilkinson, then to William Glading in 1867-1868. Other proprietors included Mr. Browne of the Coach and Horses Hotel, Randwick and Thomas Bolger.

In about 1935 the original Charing Cross Hotel was completely rebuilt into a modern-looking hotel and all architectural traces of the original Newland's Hotel disappeared during this extensive renovation.

William Newland arrived in Australia in chains, yet went on to built the Charing Cross Hotel, an establishment with an excellent reputation, and found respectability as a member of the first Waverley Council - quite a journey! Newland Street, Bondi Junction is named after him.

Published by Waverley Library from sources in the Local History Collection, 2009.