

Waverley at Federation



225 Bronte Road, Charing Cross, 1895

The Municipality of Waverley was established on 13 June 1859. Initially there was no venue for the council to conduct its business and so meetings were held in a variety of places, including the Charing Cross Hotel.

Discussions were held during the early 1900s about the need for a new Council Chambers to replace the original building constructed in 1861 and now totally inadequate to the growing Council's needs. However the Council staff had to be patient as this new Council building, on the site of the current Council Chambers adjacent to Waverley Park, was not completed until 1913.

The 1890s was a period of general economic depression across Australia, sometimes known as the Great Crash, which was characterised by bank failures, high unemployment, business closure and a drop in wages. This was felt locally in Waverley as it was across the nation. When Waverley Council held its first meeting for the new century, in early 1900, the Council's affairs, according to a Minute by Major H.C. Evans, were not in a good position. He said,

"...the very serious position in which we are placed necessitates the strictest economy and the imposition of an extra rate... the amount set apart for wages, works and maintenance is about £1,000, to cover the whole of the Borough, comprising 52 miles of streets - a sum totally inadequate to meet necessary repairs, ...disbursements under this head for the past seven years from 1893-94 have been £7,554 ... more streets may require attention ... I ask for a 3d [3 pence] rate on all rateable property in streets requiring watering ... the extra property rate should provide about £500 or £600 ...If refused, the watering must be discontinued and the staff ... reduced." The rate of 1½ pence in the pound was proposed at next meeting of council, but it was defeated.

Given this grim situation it is not surprising that the following year, when the first proposal to grant a Mayoral Allowance of £100 was put forward, that it found no support. However, by 1905 a Mayoral Allowance was granted, an amount of £50 for the purpose of 'preserving or increasing the dignity of this office'.

Waverley Council was soon in need of an operator for the new typewriting machines which were so useful to deal with Council's increasing correspondence. In 1903 the first appointment of 'a typiste', Miss Vial, to Council staff was made, her wages were 12/6 per week.

That same year Council was decided that no new subdivision estates would be approved until the streets and lanes were laid out to the satisfaction of the Council. This reflected the new rapid subdividing of land and the growth of housing estates. In 1901 there were 2,538 houses in Waverley with a total value of £106,635 and an assessed rateable rate of £107,849 pounds.



O'Brien's bush, Bondi, c.1880-1900

Bondi and Bronte boom and Tamarama entertains

One of the key reasons for Bondi's development as a residential suburb was the creation of a regular tram service from this new beachside suburb to the city. The first steam tram arrived at Bondi Beach on February 19, 1884 and soon after a weekday service, of two trams per day to the city began.

These steam trams could reach a speed of 40 mph and when a non-stop express was run to the beach on weekends the saying 'shot through like a Bondi tram' entered the Australian vocabulary. As well as attracting increasing numbers of residents the trams drew a horde of summer visitors to Bondi Beach.

In 1902, the attention of council was drawn to the dangers of bathing at Bondi Beach because the lifebuoys and line, which had been placed there, had disappeared through misuse. It was suggested that others be placed in a suitable position again. Complaints were also being made of half-naked bathers in the surf. In 1903 two lifebuoys for Bondi and one for Bronte were procured.

Spectacular outdoor entertainment could be found at Tamarama where the Royal Aquarium and Pleasure Grounds, (known as the Bondi Aquarium, although was not located at Bondi) an amusement park located in behind Tamarama Beach in the area now occupied by Tamarama Park. In a grand pavilion on the northern headland of the beach, headline acts from the Tivoli Theatre performed and sacred and classical concerts were held every Sunday.

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