

WAVERLEY COUNCIL

BONDI BEACH RIOT



A Waverley Library Local History Fact Sheet

The southern end of Bondi Beach was a favourite spot for picnickers in the 1880's; these being the days before surf bathing, when adults could do little more than paddle "fully rigged in pants and shirts".

They would arrive in their spring carts and delivery vans and the horses could graze the grassy slopes amongst the trees and honeysuckle.

This peaceful summer scene was disturbed on Boxing Day 1884. According to the Sydney Morning Herald:

"A disgraceful fracas occurred at Bondi yesterday. The pretty little village was crowded with visitors, and amongst them were some members of the larrikin type. Having quenched their thirst in the Cliff House Hotel [later the site of the Astra], a group of drunken

rowdies descended upon the Bondi Dance Hall, located opposite the hotel. A row, begun over a young woman, came to blows and their mates joined in the fray. The hall had been decorated with gum saplings and these were pulled down and used as 'waddies'. The fight developed into a real 'ding-dong go' - the women partisans joining in, tearing at each others hair and clothing.

Senior Constable Stapleton and Constables Gray and Stove were on duty and immediately went to quell the disturbance. The crowd turned on the police and chased them from the hall into the scrub where they were caught and badly beaten.

The officers were later seen at the Waverley Police Station, their "white pants covered in blood and their heads bandaged".

Images from top:

Picnickers at Bondi Beach;
Sydney & Ashfield : Broadhurst
Post Card Publishers. State
Library of NSW – Call No.
PXA635/63

Bondi Beach c. 1888; looking
north towards Ben Buckler
headland. Cliff House Hotel in
frame.

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BONDI BEACH, BONDI.
BONDI PACIFIC PAVILION
 Open every SATURDAY AFTERNOON, from 2 to 6
 o'clock, for DANCING.
 The Finest Pavilion in the Southern Hemisphere.
 G. Bailey's Excelsior Brass Band and efficient M.C. in
 attendance.
 Admission, 2s; Ladies Free.
 A First-class Billiard Table and the Finest Double
 Skittle Alley in the Colonies.
 J. HEINZ, Proprietor.
 N.B.—Open for Engagements for Picnic
 Parties, &c.

A very enjoyable Saturday afternoon may now be spent at Bondi, at which place Mr. Alderman Heinz (of Waverley), has erected a very large dancing pavilion overlooking the ocean, and commanding a most picturesque view of the surrounding scenery. There is also attached a billiard-room and two skittle alleys. The ball-room is second to none in the colonies, and a first class brass band is in attendance. The arrangements are under the personal supervision of Mr. Heinz, and nothing is left undone which may conduce to the comfort of visitors.

Images from top:

Bathers at Bondi Beach, 1894.
 Photograph by Henry King.

Advertising for the Bondi Pacific
 Pavilion, Evening News 28
 October, 1881.

Description of the Pacific
 Pavilion in the Amusements,
 Evening News 29 October,
 1881.

A bystander named Harrison Kerwan went to the assistance of the police but was himself severely injured. Eventually police reinforcements arrived from the city to find the whole locality in an uproar and several rioters were arrested. The Bondi riot gave rise to the battle cry of "Give 'em Bondi!"

John Jones, James Kelly and Michael Healy went to trial on 26th March, 1885, and were sentenced to eight years imprisonment each on the charge of maliciously wounding Constable Stove, and five days later were sentenced to two years hard labour for riot.

Local residents sent a petition to Waverley Council claiming the dance pavilion to be a "nuisance and annoyance to the inhabitants" and this resulted in "the license granted to Mr John Henry for Dancing Pavilion at Bondi for the year 1885 be cancelled."

John Henry or Heinz was the license holder for the Pacific Pavilion. A Waverley Council alderman from 1880-1882, Mr Heinz was a local businessman and the leaseholder for the Cliff Hotel. The first dancing pavilion of its type in Bondi, the opening day was on October 3, 1881.

Open every Saturday afternoon, admission was 2s, but ladies entered for free. Following the events of the riots in 1884, Mr Heinz lost the license for the dance hall but the Cliff Hotel continued to operate until his death in 1894.