

## **Waverley Council Oral History of Waverley Beach Inspectors Early 1900's.**

### **Interview with Brian Collins, Patricia Collins**

**Interviewer #1: Lawrie Williams**

**Interviewer #2: Elida Meadows**

**(Interviewer #3: Damon Maloney)**

LW: It's Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> of July, 2001, my name's Lawrie Williams. I am a team leader with Waverley Council at Bondi Beach and we are conducting an interview with Brian Collins.

Brian is 79 years of age, and Brian's wife Patricia.

Brian's father was Edward Frances Collins known as [Kim] Collins - he was the manager / caretaker of the pavilion for many years.

LW: Brian, I spoke to you on the telephone some weeks ago, and we talked about your life at the pavilion, living in the pavilion. And what are some of your earliest recollections? What sort of... When were you born...and ?

BC: I was born in nineteen hundred and twenty two. At that stage my father was employed by the Waverley Council and we lived – I believe we lived in Imperial Ave Bondi. Subsequently in 1926 he was appointed manager of the surf sheds after the sudden death of the previous manager, a Mr Watts.

From there, we moved from Imperial Avenue, he took up residence at the old surf sheds. They were... ah, my memory of it is not very good because I would have only been 4 years old then. And um, the um, ... far as I remember it was an old wooden building, very close to the now present Bondi Surf Club. And, subsequently we weren't there for very long, because they were going to build a new pavilion and we then moved to Bennett st Bondi, where for those years it took to build the pavilion, which I can't recall now, there we lived.

When it was finished completed, we had a residence, a cottage residence where the now auditorium or was, later on, where many parades and that sort of things, like beach quests and that were held. Also, there were Saturday night films etc etc were those days. And um, then they decided to pull the cottage after it had not been up very long and erect this auditorium.

After it was completed they built a residence, a flat residence on the top of it and that's where I lived, spent most of my main life. That would have been completed, I suppose in the 30's some time, I just can't recall the exact time.

LW: I think Aub Laidlaw in a taped interview some years ago, said around 1936, he recalls the building of the auditorium, your family who he could remember quite well, moving into that residence.

BC: That would be, he's right that part of it, because as I said in the 30's sometime...

LW: When did your father finish, when did he retire from that position in the pavilion?

BC: In nineteen hundred and fifty-ninet. He was from 1926 to 1959 the manager of it. And as far as I understand he was employed by the Waverley Council for 47 years. Prior to that he worked as an assistant on the council in various forms of work what they designated to him.

LW: Up at the old chambers?

BC: Well, that I don't know. Exactly what they were, they could have been around the surf sheds in those days, as I said, Mr Watts was the manager then.

LW: Did he actually live in the old surf sheds?

BC: Mr Watts?

LW: Was it, it was a Harry Watts?

BC: I think it was Harold Watts. Yes, yes, he lived there, I believe. I don't recall him at all. Because as I said he died at a young age and I would have only probably been about 3 years old or so.

LW: What are some of the functions of the pavilion that you remember best? What are the sorts of things that happened in there, in the use of the rooms and the various things that went on, in and around the pavilion?

BC: Well, I remember the esplanade as it was known as, that was the top portion of the pavilion, was run by a Roy Scarfield, and it was a very, very popular venue on Saturday evenings in those days for dances.

And, very large crowds of people would come on Saturday nights particularly, to these [functions] of which a charge was made for them. And out of there comes some of the best, probably, dance bands that were known in NSW, and finished at the Trocadero with it. Basically they were in there...

LW: And that was in, what we know now as a large ballroom called the... Seagull Room.

(voices concurring – three voices)

DM: Seagull Room.

EM: The Seagull Room

PC: Probably.

BC: That's right.

LW: ...it's the largest room in the Pavilion.

EM: Yeh, [ ].

BC: There were two rooms –

DM: On the first floor.

BC: - one was a dance floor and the other was what they termed a dining room in those days. So, they held pretty large functions in its early days, but seems then changed and it was not so popular with it.

EM: Was it, was it popular Sydney wide? Was it a place where people came from all over Sydney just [ ]?

PC: Oh, yeh.

BC: Yes, yeh, well there were no other really places as big as it, in 1929, I think it opened, was it?

So it was the largest place. But when the Trocadero opened in George st Sydney in the main part, that took a lot of the clientele away from the surf pavilion, or the Esplanade as it was known then.

LW: Was the theatre in existence from the very beginning – there is a theatre on the first floor.

PC/BC: No. No.

LW: On opposite sides.

BC: In those days, the only – well, they were known as picture shows. And ah, they – the main one was at the six ways at Bondi – But ah, no there was never any films. Never ever. It was mostly ballroom, they had ballroom dancing there.

It was written up as the one of best floor in those days that was in Sydney. I think a lot of money was spent on the laying of the dance floor with it, because ballroom dancing was the main type of entertainment in those days.

LW: So, on the first floor you had a ballroom where the dancing was conducted and on the other side of the stairs as you came up was probably the dining room.

BC: That's correct and as you come up the stairs there was a big soda fountain bar – in those days they called them soda fountains. No liquor was ever sold.

(laughter)

PC: No.

LW: That was prohibition was it?

(laughter)

PC: Yes, everyone had a flask in the hip pocket.

BC: That was different – none was sold but I wouldn't know whether any was brought in. None of my mates talked about that. As for the dressing shed themselves, nothing, anything startling I suppose. One of the most interesting thing would have been the Bikini Girl as she was known as...

Unfortunately we had the bikini here for 20 years.  
(laughter)

PC: we had it for 20yrs here. Don't know what happened to it!

BC: (laughter) I gave it away. Got rid of it and I regret now that I ever did. And that was a publicity stunt, by a newspaper which is ah, I think the Daily Telegraph it was, in those days.

EM: What year as that?

BC: Oh, look I could not tell you a year, but the people, the beach inspector, and my father and police were well aware that it was going to happen. It was what probably is known in those days as a publicity stunt. And the newspaper photographers and all that type of thing was there and I [ ], I remember her. Basically I suppose the other thing, there was rescues and that sort of thing....

PC: And then there was Bea Miles.

EM: Oh, Right...

BC: Oh, Yes I remember. Bea Miles, that's another thing I remember. A very excited taxi driver, I suppose, you'd hear of Bea Miles?

EM: Oh yes...

BC: And Bea in those days was one of the strongest swimmers, I believe, well I'm told, that there was and this taxi driver brought her out from the city. And she got out of the cab in South Bondi where in that time, era was a very dangerous swimming place with it. Anyway, she had a cape on or a dress, and she took it off with her swimming costume was underneath and she had a belt with a knife in it, (laughter), and she told the taxi driver that she was going to go out and kill every shark she saw.

EM/LW: (laughter)

BC: Well, he panicked... and he came to the dressing sheds with it, and he came in a terrible excited and agitated way, that he'd, ...what had happened, he'd brought this woman out and she'd just swum out to sea, he can't she wear she went, and that I believe is correct, because the people, the lifesavers, and my own father verify the fact that she went out that far that she was out of sight.

PC: Couldn't see her.

BC: ... couldn't see her... with it. Well, the surf boat, the surf club got their surf boat out and subsequently she was hauled into the boat and brought back to shore.

EM: Without a shark.

BC: Without a shark...

PC: Not a shark in sight.  
(laughter)

BC: By that time the police has been called and they escorted her off the beach. So um, Bea used to cause a little bit of trouble with it. I remember a very prominent policeman in those days was a man called Bumper Farrell. Bea was out in the park on the beach, selling her poetry, making a nuisance of herself accosting everybody and thrusting paper and demanding that they buy it, with it. So, my father had to go, and try and appease Bea, he'd learned his lesson with her, I feel quite sure, many years before, because he would never ever try by force to do anything. And he was, he could do it, he was a big man, with it, but he would never ever do it.

So he liked to have little joke. And when he came back, Bumper Farrell was arrived, he was in charge at that time of the police in the area, I think. So Dad said to him; "there's a woman around there, Bumper, she's causing a lot of trouble and annoying people, I've asked her to leave and she won't go," but he did not tell him who it was.

So Bumper went around, I believe this is the story I hear, and he came back and he used some language saying, "You, Kim, can go to so-and-so, I am not having anything to do with that woman," and Bea just went on selling her literature.

(laughter)

PC: She wasn't doing any harm.

LW: Brian, can I just take you back to the pavilion. We talked about the Turkish baths, and the fact that the former chief librarian Ron Lander...

EM: Brian, can I just show you the photograph as well...

LW: ...had shown you this photograph... which was in the pavilion.

BC: I have seen this, somebody from the library came and picked us up...

PC: Yes, yes...

BC: ...quite a number of years ago, to verify that. No, that was never, never, ever there. That I would think, is something on a ship. Without any doubt, that was never ever there.

LW: Aub Laidlaw in his interview back in 1983, mentioned that there were Turkish baths in the south east corner of the pavilion, what later became the Bondi Boys Club. He said that they piped up the seawater from South Bondi...

BC: That is correct, yes.

LW: Could you tell us a bit about that?

BC: Yes certainly. My recollections of that is this: what... would be correct I think... that they had a shed at the south end of Bondi with rocks with a pump, to pump water to the Turkish baths which was in the south end of the pavilion... and it was forever breaking down because sand was getting into the pump and it would have only lasted maybe twelve months to 2 yrs and they had to close it down.

Now they imported – I believe, imported special Turkish baths from overseas at a large expense which meant they could not carry on with the actual Turkish baths. But in this area there were five different temperature steam rooms. It was a very large area. We started off with a warm room, and you moved to the next room and it would be warmer, til you finally got to the fifth room which was extremely hot.

LW: Was it all partitioned between the rooms... and tiled?

BC: Oh Yes... all, yes all tiled. Beautifully tiled, beautiful position, and that was run off a boiler which was underneath the main part of the Turkish baths. it actually faced out on to the ladies dressing sheds... and that's where they generated the steam for the Turkish baths. That was subsequently run by a number of people. One I remember very well was a man called Charlie Saunders. Charlie was a very good masseur and a prominent person. A lot of the leading jockeys who came from Melbourne – one I remember was Harold Badger, who at that time was a champion Melbourne Jockey, for the spring and autumn carnivals. And they would stay at the Astra hotel. And they made their main place of – as they called it in those days “sweating” to get weight off, - the old Turkish baths. And I, as a young person was very impressed by meeting these people of ...notoriety, I suppose you might say. They were well known, written up in the paper and that... and ah...

LW: Jimmy Pike was another.

JS: Jim Pike, - yes Jim lived up in Beach Rd, Jim at that time had fallen on bad times. But, a very nice man. I remember Jim well. I knew his son, who was about... about my age I suppose. As I say, he had fallen on bad times.

LW: Did the Turkish baths actually have bath tubs, as opposed to the photograph you saw that looks like a swimming pool.

BC: Nothing like that. They got baths – big baths.

LW: They were above ground like a bath tub.

BC: Oh yes, like a home bath, but much larger. And when they couldn't get the salt water they'd then mix salt and water I believe, to give people a hot bath. I think people - lot of people did it for arthritis and for that sort of complaints. And they did get...

EM: When you say "people", do you mean men and women...

BC: Beg your pardon?

EM: Men and Women? Or was it just for men?

PC: No, they were both...

BC: No. Not together, they had different days, as far as I can remember now, I know that as far as the hot rooms were concerned. I don't know about the baths.

LW: What about at the northern end of the pavilion? You had the baths down in the spacious southern end...

BC: The Northern end? They were ah, refreshment rooms, [on Sundays] as they were known as those days. One of the main ones in latter years was Sergeants, they were a big catering firm in Sydney, well known for their meat pies, I suppose.

LW: Sergeants Pies.

EM: Yeh.

BC: Mm, they were in it for many, many years. Actually they were there when the trouble happened in 1937 with the..., that's right in 1937, I think with the ah, bank collapsing as they called it, on a Sunday afternoon and so many people getting drowned.

EM: Black Sunday.

BC: They provided the hot water, that ah, for the Bondi Surf Club for bodies, that were laying, people that were laying in it. That I remember well because you could not walk... on the floor because there were that many people there, and I remember as a boy I could get in the club in those days, and it was one of my jobs with the others, was carrying boiling water, or hot water from the fresh [ravines] to the surf club for bags and that to [ ] it right.

LW: What were some of responsibilities that your father had in and around the pavilion as the manager? What were some of the jobs that he had to do on a daily basis?

BC: As far as I can remember, he would [arrive] at 5.00 and he would always open the sheds or pavilion at six a.m. Because he had the regular people, there were judges, lawyers, doctors who were likely to have a swim before they went to their offices or their

work. There were a big lot of people did come early in the morning for swimming, where they would start the day off that way. So he would work from possibly 6 o'clock till maybe 8 or 9 o'clock at night. Depending on the day, you know, the weather.

LW: Did he have any cleaning duties, outside of his opening and closing, or was there someone else employed to clean...?

BC: Oh no, there were others employed. There were others employed, yes, and he was in charge of the beach inspectors in those days...

LW: They had a chief – they had chief beach inspectors, didn't they? But you're saying the manager of the pavilion was actually in charge of the chief beach inspector?

BC: That's right – [ ] Chief of Beach [ ]. They had a... In early days in winter time there was no one where. But later on in – years, I wouldn't know who the first one was, was employed for the full twelve months. I think there was someone before Aub.

LW: Dinny – from the research we've done, Dinny Brown – the father of the footballer Dave Brown was the first beach inspector back in 1913, then Stan MacDonald came on a short time after.

BC: They didn't work twelve months of the year. See, Stan MacDonald – his was ah, work for the Glacierium. I don't know whether you know the Glacierium was a skating rink.

LW: We've seen pictures of it...

PC: Down at Central.

BC: Well, that was his winter time job. As [ ] Brian Davidson's winter time job was in the snow fields. So they all had winter time jobs – they weren't there 12 months of the year. It might have been Bill Willis who might have been the [ ] – but at some stage in that era, they ah... it was 12 months - I don't think George Proudfoot was 12 months, nor Jimmy Laphorne...

LW: They're some of the names that have come up when we've been talking to other people.

PC: Other people, yeh.

LW: Jim Laphorne, George Proudfoot, [Roth] Bassingthwaite.

BC: [Rolf], yes...

LW: He was a casual I think you said...



BC: Yes, [Rolf] was, because they had the swimming – ah, not swimming – fishing business over at the north end of the beach there. [Rolf] was more or less part time. You know depending on the day and that sort of thing, depended on what area, the people you require. And that went for the dressing sheds too in latter years. If it was raining and that sort of thing, you didn't want anybody.

EM: But in the summer you'd be really busy, wouldn't you?

PC: Yes [ ] terribly, terribly busy because they came in trams, People always came in trams. [ ] vertical cars. When the tram would arrive they'd be queued outside the dressing pavilion waiting to get in, for quite some distance. And trams used to arrive then I suppose on a, well they came from the railway, central railway, and they came from the quay, about every five minutes. And they were double car trams and there were a lot of people on them.

LW: Yes, I think Aub said around 200-250 people...

BC: Well, could be, yes...

LW: ... would disembark.

BC: That's right, and the tram terminus in those days was ah, up in Campbell Parade, it never went to North Bondi like it does now.

LW: Some of the other names we spoke about were [Cappa] Johnson – [Cappa's] an interesting name...

BC: Would be a nickname...

LW: He was a beach inspector. Suey Harris – does that ring a bell with you?

BC: No.

LW: Cappa Johnson – he was a, you said, as good a pugilist as he was a swimmer...

BC: Yes, I believe so...

LW: ...and I believe in those days – unlike the modern entertainment people have these days, - engaged in wrestling bouts and boxing matches, using the Indian clubs. Do you recall all that?

BC: No. No, I don't concur with that.

LW: Mainly through the surf clubs, I think it was.

BC: No... I know at the Bondi Surf Club – well, I was engaged there myself, amateur wrestling, we had. That was ah, getting back to the Turkish baths, when they closed the baths and ah...

LW: What year was that do you remember? Was it after the second world war?

BC: No... it was before the second world war – it would have been in the late 30's. The baths were closed for quite some time. In those days there was, at the Sydney stadium, wrestling became a very popular time and it was held there on Monday nights. And one of the first people to rent the old Turkish baths, because one end of the Turkish baths had a very fine gymnasium, and the wrestlers there, when I can remember now, Brother Jonathon, Sammy Stein, Dean Lukin, a number of them I just can't think, and they would come there on a Thursday or a Friday in the gymnasium, the two wrestlers that were to wrestle at the stadium on the Monday night,. And they would rehearse of how they were going to wrestle. So ah, anybody who ever thought it was fair dinkum what they saw, is living in a fools paradise.

(laughter)

LW: Sounds like nothings changed.

(Laughter)

EM: I've got a picture of Brother Jonathon advertising some sort of elixir, health giving tonic, from the pavilion.

BC: That's right – well he invented that. He was a very, very nice man. He ah, I was only, ah you know would have been in my teens and ah he, [ ] friends sort of thing I'd say.

EM: So, he rented some space to sell some products from the pavilion.

BC: I didn't know that. No, I didn't know – no, he was a wrestler, an American wrestler himself. And that, I don't know exactly, no, I wouldn't know what he did, other than that.

DM: So, as a teenager growing up on the beach, in the, in the, near the pavilion, what was that like? And did you go to school around the Bondi beach area?

BC: I went to St Anne's at Bondi til I was oh, about 7-8 I think, then I went to Christian Brothers Waverley College and that's where I spent my years at school. I suppose one of the things I can remember very well too, in those days, I think by virtue of the fact that this man became famous, that I remember it; his father was a man called [Mayor] O'Keefe.

PC: O'Keefe...

BC: And had a son...

(noise)

PC: Oh, God! (laughter)

BC: ...and he's called "The Wild One" now... and he probably was. Mr O'Keefe asked my father whether Brian could take Johnny down to the beach and introduce him to the beach inspectors so that they could keep an eye on him when he went in the water. Which I did do. And that's the sum total. But now, that was Johnny O'Keefe. So he was a wild one...

PC: And he started at the auditorium down [here] at the beach. Didn't he, Johnny...?

BC: That's where he first sang...

PC: Yes, first sang. I lived down after we got married for a while, and ah, they'd have Sunday night concerts. Well, Johnny'd rock and roll down there til I was nearly out of my brain... (laughter). He was a bit noisy, let's put it that way...

LW: You lived above the auditorium...

PC: Yes... (laughter) Right above it!

LW: High up.

EM: He was a Waverley College boy, wasn't he.

PC: Yes.

BC: That's right. But, you now, [ ] I can't remember much about him, that's all you know sort of – I never knew him other than that. It was just um, to get him, ah, down on to the beach and someone to keep an eye on him, I think his father was a bit worried about him.

LW: Brian, when did you eventually move about, you and Patricia, when did you move out from the pavilion and move on from the area?

PC: In 1959...

BC: in 1950? About – in 1959, was it?

PC: Yes, yes, May of 1959.

LW: So at the same time, you'd lived there all along and at the same time as your father retired...?

BC: No, no – we never moved. But my mother got very ill. So we had to come back there and I went to the war, I was away at the war for nearly six years. Subsequently I came back from the war and married Tricia and we lived away from the beach. But she

got very, very ill and I was an only son and ah, dad was still working there and, to help him out we moved back to look after her and look after him too because she was unable to. Then we subsequently moved up to Hurstville in 1959.

EM: So did you grow up in Bondi as well?

PC: Yes, I wasn't a beach girl though, I didn't like the beach very much.

LW: What street did you grow up in?

EM: In Knowles Ave off [Maroubra] road...

LW: I know where that is, it's a nice part of Bondi.

PC: Yes, we... I would have lived there all my life, nearly.

EM: Where did you go to school?

PC: Well, I went to St Anne's, then I went across to Waverley to St Clair's College.

EM: I'm a St Clair's girl!

PC: Were you? Oh gee, well I went there for a while. Dad had a shop in Waverly, opposite the post office.

EM: Oh really?

PC: Yeh, so ah...

EM: Near the hotel...?

PC: Yes... like it was there and the hotel was across...

EM: Right. Yeh they've got those great Milk bars.

PC: Yeh

EM: Yes I know.

PC: So that's where we went to school.

EM: So, you talked about the war. Did your father tell you any stories about Bondi during those war years?

BC: Yes! A very interesting one, yes. Um, this Roy Scarfield I mentioned that run the esplanade, went on a shooting trip to Scone. And he shot apparently a Kangaroo, a

wallaroo it was... that's a kind of wallaby. She had a baby in its pouch. She – how can I put this – threw, got rid of the baby out of its pouch and Roy took it and brought it back to Sydney for his daughter.

Well, apparently every time the kangaroo or wallaby hopped, the daughter screamed, so it couldn't stay there. So he brought down to my father and said, well could he, would he do something with it, either get rid of it, or take it or look after it or give it away or something so he decided to keep it himself.

Sum total was, he – Josie, as it was known – was reared at the beach, and this was the war years, and I'm only repeating what's been told to me, that there used to be a lot of Americans probably sleeping with a hard night over at the beach, and that sort of thing and one particular morning he used to go down to the toilets at the north end of the beach and open them, every morning. And Josie – the wallaroo – used to go with him, hopping along the promenade.

Well it was a very, very faithful animal. And this day, this Americans said to one of the beach inspectors 'there's a wild animal jumping up there' and it was explained to him what it was. But another day, an American again, thought that he was seeing – he'd had too much to drink and was seeing imaginary objects.

It caused quite some concern this animal it actually stopped all the trams in Bondi for a while because it was caught underneath one of them. The animal was oh, it lived there for about 5-6years, I think, and become part of the establishment. It did – in those war years – cause some [ ]. Course in those days, in that era too, they destroyed the, the army destroyed the piers that came out on to the beach, because of the fact they considered them to be a defense hazard.

LW: Now those piers, with the northern and southern courtyards, where the various dressing sheds were, there were male and there were female. They would walk out and under the promenade and come out on the piers?

BC: Yes, there was, um – you came out – it went underground and you came up a walkway and it led you onto the beach. But they lead directly down to the waters edge and it took a terrible lot of um, I believe, blasting and etc to rid them because of the foundations that had to be there because of the water tides.

DM: So they were destroyed on the basis that they could assist an enemy in invading?

BC: Well, my father said the fact was that they considered it would impede their machine gunning from various parts of the beach if there was a landing to take place. That was the military's reason for them, for destroying them. They were a defense problem. But in actual fact it never ever happened. So they might, probably never should have been [ ] but people weren't to know that.

DM: But the tunnels, those tunnels underneath from the sheds out on to the beach, those tunnels remained in place and were operational?

BC: No...

DM: They were. They were, sort of shut down at the same time?

BC: Yeh. Um, well Stan Macdonald took Chair hire part of it took the men's portion where they came out. I don't know whether it's still there now.

DM: Run by his grandson....

BC: Oh, by, By Neil?

DM: Yes yes... and they've been there for many years.

LW: And we occupy the other one.

BC: Oh, do you?

LW: We occupy the life guards or the beach inspectors [ ], we occupy that for storing our equipment.

BC: I don't know, I don't think that was used.. must have been...

LW: Did you ever go to the Ledo, was it called the Ledo at North Bondi, the big dance hall?

PC: No...

BC: Well, it was nowhere near as big at the Esplanade, and when the esplanade opened the Ledo only became basically a restaurant or a take away food place – and served the north end of the beach part you know, with ice-creams and all that sort of thing, But it was not near, not as big as, in fact when the esplanade opened, it put the Ledo out of business.

LW: ...because people recollected there that at night time, there were thousands of people, throngs of people along the promenade walking...

BC: Oh, yes...

LW: ...coming and going from the Ledo. And the pavilion, or the esplanade if you like.

BC: Well, I think they mainly came from the Esplanade. New Years Eve, every News Years eve, was a big, a very big thing, the North Bondi surf club and the Bondi surf club met at midnight. They, in those days had dances and that sort of thing on New Years Eve.

And at fixed date, they would both move out on the promenade and meet in the centre of it. And that would be very, very big crowds and, for New Years Eve celebrations.

LW: What do you know, in those days, the swimming flags were generally in the middle of the beach and at North Bondi. But what happened at the southern end of the beach? Which has become very popular now. But in those days what sort of things happened down there? Did people actually go down the end of the beach, to the southern end?

BC: Not to any large degree.

LW: We were talking about the southern end of the beach, and you were telling us that it wasn't very popular, because it was dangerous.

BC: Plus the fact that mostly, it was a very rough sea, there was no surf, because of the protection it got from the rocks and etc. And it became very popular with the Jewish people after the war. They came here as refugees and they were, they were afraid of the surf. They didn't like the surf. But they liked still water and that's mostly what this was. And I, having experienced this myself, had to rescue one particular man who just laid on his back and floated out to sea on the tide. And it was unbelievable.

But ah, the Bondi Surf Club had to put a reel down there, and two, two personnel, to ah, just watch these particular Jewish people, because it was still water and the tide taking them out, they weren't to let them get too far. Because they didn't realize that they were just floating out to sea.

LW: You've spoken now about Jewish migrants after the war, who fled from Europe. You would have probably witnessed, you know, the post-war migration of lot of people from Greece, and Italy... do you recollect that at all?

BC: Not in very largely in the era that we there. Um, it was mostly people coming to settle in Bellevue Hill and that sort of the thing, that I think with the Catholic people would have been, or the refugee people, from those countries in Germany and etc, But there was no general population, of ethnic population there. I think that happened after we left.

LW: You talk about Bellevue Hill and a lot of Jewish people moving into that area. We know that Bellevue Hill these days is a very affluent area, there's a lot of money there. At that time what type of area was it? Would land have been cheap, or housing cheap for these people that had come from war-torn Europe?

BC: No. No it wouldn't have been. Actually my father was brought up in Bellevue Hill. He was born in Paddington of [ ] ah Irish parentage. And he spent his younger days in Paddington, then his father and mother brought property in Bellevue Hill. And in those days, it would have been reasonably cheap, yes. But it grew, it gradually got very, very costly.

EM: Can I just ask you, when you were growing up in Bondi, you mentioned the Jewish people, were there any people of different backgrounds, Chinese for instance, in the area at all [ ]

PC/BC: Not at all. No.

EM: Because we do have Chinese market gardens in the early years of Waverley around the area. I wonder what happened to the people.

PC: No, there was never...

BC: It surprises me, that you ever had the Chinese Gardens in the...

EM: At Waverley Park, amongst other places.

BC: Did they? I never knew that.

PC: No, there wasn't there.

BC: No. That must have been in the very, very early...

EM: It was yes.

BC: But down at the beach itself, it would be too sandy to ah, [ ]

EM: So you didn't have like, aboriginal people/kids or anything in the schools?

BC: No, no. I wouldn't say there was anything, other than probably would be of Italian origin like they had the fruit and vegetable shops or something. That would be all, there'd be nothing else.

LW: When you were kids, do you remember were any of the old farms still around? Because very early on, even in the early part of last century, the first two decades, there were still farms around the area. People still had cattle...

EM: Dairy.

LW: Dairy... those things had gone?

PC: When we come up here, it was a dairy (laughter).

BC: No I don't recall that, but I do recall when I started going to school, I would have been five years old then or six, walking over sand hills to the school, which was in [ ] street. That's the only thing I can remember of the sort of wilderness you might say.

EM: Was the golf course up there back then?

BC: No.



EM: Right. Did you know about the Aboriginal rock carvings back then?

BC: Yes. I think one of the jobs that father had to do, I had actually seen those when I was very young... down, they had a light reel or a boil reel down underneath the Merc I think they called it in those days...

LW: Yes it's still known as the Merc.

BC: ...and you had to inspect the reel there and that, regularly to make sure that it hadn't been vandalized or that it was in good working condition. Because with so many fishermen, it was a very popular fishing spot, and they had to keep that under control, or watched, I supposed you might say.

But then I had, but I remember when I was a young lad, seeing those carvings there of the aboriginal works. Actually the military had a part up, I think they might have had that where the golf club, the gold course was, a bit further too, pretty large area...

EM: Up near Darling Bay, maybe...

BC: No it was where the old golf course was mainly, round there.

LW: You had the Hotel Astra, which... and the Hotel Bondi which have been there... Bondi Hotel has been there for a very long time.

BC: It was the first...

LW: That's right. Do you remember some of the other commercial shops along the front, things that, you know, places that you remember when you were...

PC: [ ] Milk Bar...

BC: The old Milk Bar – Revici's.

LW: Revici's?

BC: That was a very popular milk bar too. And ah, the um, King's theatre, when that was on, came. Also the Six Ways Theatre, which was a Hoyts theatre, apparently. Anything else, I don't...

EM: Did you ever go to Bondi Junction?

PC/BC: Oh, yes.

EM: Do you remember Spring street before the Eastern Suburbs Leagues Club? Do you remember what was there?

BC: Mainly shops...

EM: You don't remember the skating rink?

BC: Yes, yes, yes, a skating rink, That became [ ] town, after skating, I never went there, I was never interested in skating. But, when the popularity of skating finished, it became [Seatown] Studios.

EM: And they made "On Our Selection" there.

PC: Yes... (laughter)

BC: that's correct...

PC: ...that was a long time ago.

DM: Was Bondi park and the Bondi beach, was it as popular as it sort of currently is on a busy summers day...

PC: Oh Yes... you'd think so

BC: Oh yes, well, the tables in the collanades of the pavilion, around the back – not terribly many of them, but people used to arrive early in the morning to sit there and reserve them for the rest of the family to arrive later in the day. Otherwise they had to sit, go into the park, it'd be a bit hot I suppose, for them but they had the shade and the table and everything was more comfortable.

DM: Yes having a look at pictures I've seen mainly around the 50's and 60's with crowds of 50- or 60000 people all down on the beach, in the park, on the promenade, on any given day but there are a lot more cars, a lot more vehicles bringing people down...

PC: That's right.

DM: ... than just the trams. So, yeh, it's obviously still, it always has been the focus for Sydney-siders for a day out at the beach.

BC: That's right. We had a very, very bad hailstorm there, I just can't remember what year. Probably in the 30's...

PC: In the 40's... No.

BC: No, it'd be in the 40's...

PC: 40's...

BC: ...we were at the beach and these very large hailstones started...

PC: They were about that big...

BC: Yeh, big as golf balls... and um, we'd came home pretty quick. In those days a lot of the motor vehicles had...

PC: Canvas roofs.

BC: Yes, canvas covers.

PC: Made a mess of them.

BC: And I remember them very well driving along the driveway, the esplanade driveway all battered and broken, and what have you.

[ ]:

PC: I can't recall... (laughter) what year it was.

LW: Was anyone injured?

PC: Quite a few people, yes...

BC: Quite a few with hailstones, yes. Yes, they would have been treated by the ...

PC: [ambulance]

BC: ... first aid people at the club. [ ]

LW: So it was a sudden thing, where the weather was fine, and then...

PC: Then the hail.

BC: Well, it was in the respect that it didn't rain first, it hailed first.

PC: It hailed.

BC: But very, very black. It was all the signs of very nasty weather, [ ], but ah, in [ ] court, was a very large block of flats, don't know whether they're still there, no I think that is where the [ ] is,

PC: I don't think so.

BC: ...now but they had all their, ah, it was a large flat area, and they had all their windows broken.

PC: Every window.

DM: Do you remember any other sort of big storms that created big surf around the pavilion and onto the beach?

BC: Oh well ...the storms were there, they did come. I remember water coming up onto the promenade... and that sort of thing, and of course that used to bring the sand back up and banking up against the back sea wall there. That's why they had a tractor, which I think a Mr [Rifflen] used to be the driver of the tractor and worked between Bondi and Bronte.

DM: That still happens, too.

BC: Still happens?

DM: We still grade the beach, probably every couple of years, I think.

BC: Well I think he was permanently doing it, this chap. He was employed by the council. They owned the vehicle, and he was continually going.

DM: Oh, ok. That might be similar to what we've got now, in terms we have a rake... a big rake behind a big tractor.

PC: Oh.

BC: Well, yes...

DM: It's predominantly coming through to try and get the rubbish that's been collected in the sand from the day before. So it goes through about 4 times a week.

BC: In those days, too, when this tractor used to do this particular thing, a terrible lot of people what they used to term 'fossickers' were down there, because the tractor would...

PC: ... turn over.

BC: ... turn over the sand. And I believe that they used to make a living out of it.

DM: You'd find coins I suppose.

PC: Oh yes...[ ]

DM: Keys and things that had fallen out of pockets.

PC: I can remember when Brian's father retired, when he had to take everything, things back to the council. The False teeth!!! (laughter) He had a box full of false teeth.

(laughter) And every purse that had loose change in it, that all went back to the council.

But there was a cardboard box full of them. [ ] all these teeth, I thought 'God help me' ...

(laughter)

DM: Wonder what happened to [ ]?

PC: Somebody might try them on for size! (laughter)

LW: These days, you know, the media and people generally rejoice in the fact that at certain parts of the year we have a migration of whales, and dolphins, and you get fairy penguins down there sometimes, we get seals that get washed up. Back in your experience in your years at Bondi, do you recall those sort of thing?

BC: I recall penguins, yes. Had a number of those, and also muttons birds. But what my father used to do was ring the zoo up and they'd come and take them away, like there were no special...

PC:... no warden or anything like that in those days.

BC: ...people in those days. But nobody, a whale, or a dolphin... well, that was just part of the beach, that was no different to a shark arriving. It was not a big deal at all.

LW: And, of course you had a lot of people down there made a living or amused the crowds by pulling in sharks.

PC: (Laughter) Yes.

BC: Well...

LW: Fishermen, that could... caught them...

BC: There were a lot of beach fishermen in the very early days there, I'd say in the 20's and that, and the sharks, you could walk down to the beach and they'd be on the beach, and they had to employ, council use to bury them. And they had to come and do it.

EM: Do you remember any shark attacks while you were young?

BC: Yes... but I never saw it. It happened but I never saw it, no.

LW: Yes. I think the last shark attack, there were 2 in the one year, and that was 1928. A chap lost his leg, a chap from Bondi Surf Club. Max Steele? And a young fellow...

BC: I remember being told about that.

LW: ... yes, and a young fellow, I think, died as a result of a shark attack that same year. So you would have been fairly young...

PC: Yes.

BC: Possibly, when they put the nets... out on the beach it stopped. I think, would have stopped the shark attacks to a big extent.

LW: When did that happen? What year was that?

BC: I'm sorry, I couldn't recall that, but I remember, I remember them coming... I used to remember them regularly coming and laying them and taking them up... and going away with them and I believe that they could catch quite a number.

LW: Those fishermen on the beach who were catching the sharks were they meaning to catch the sharks, was that what they wanted to do?

BC: That was their sport.

LW: That was their sport?

BC: They did it at night. Well, there were people in the water in the day. So any noise that would be there would frighten them away.

DM: There's a boat club, at North Bondi, like a boat, boat shed really. Was that... Do you recall that being there during the 30's and 40's? It's just a simple boat shed, I'm intrigued by this boat shed...

BC: no... no, whereabouts would you say it is?

LW: It's out toward Ben Buckler... just next to the last block of units going out to Ben Buckler, it's the amateur swim, ah, fishermen's club.

BC: Oh, ok...

LW: I know that Aub...

BC: It's... not where [Roth] Bassingthwaite and those had their boats sheds, was it? See they used to go out fishing from there.

DM: Right. Ok.

BC: Would that be...

DM: That would probably be the site.

BC: ...probably where you mean? Oh yes...

LW: There's a slipway in the water.

BC: People called Platts. Platts, was, they were a very, oh, I'm guessing long before Basso. Um, that was their livelihood. They used to get, used to come up on the beach, big hauls of fish, particularly garfish. It was a lucrative business in those days, and they had, ah, well they weren't big boats, they were only say, skiffs, or that sort of thing...

DM: Well, that's similar to what's still happening there today.

BC: Oh, what's... are they the boat sheds you mean?

DM: Yes.

BC: Yes, that's what they are.

DM: So there's a lot of fishing within that, within, off the Bondi beach area, within the boat? Like, the boats went out regularly each night?

BC: Well, I think they only went when the fish were around... they seemed to know the reason... that um, to get them. Because, I know my mother used to love garfish and she'd send me off as a boy down to get the garfish to buy them off that skiff, [ ] down there off the beach with it.

PC: [ ]

DM: yeh.

BC: The word got around in Bondi that the trawlers were out and that a lot of people would arrive to buy fish.

DM: Buy straight from the trawler.

BC: Ah, I suppose it was cheap too, I never remember, in those days.

DM: Yeh, well the boats are still there, I don't think there's probably as many as there were...

BC: Well, there wouldn't be as many fish but in those days there were quite a number of fish, I used to get a lot of whiting off the beach.

DM: Ok.

LW: You still get a bit of whiting now but of course there's not as much, not as many fish out there as there was, you know, in the old days.

EM: And people still fish off the rocks and get swept off....

PC: That just doesn't make sense to me. You hear of the waves and all that...

DM: Particularly when the big... surf, and we've had a few...

PC: .. a few of them lately.

DM: ... of the big surf over the last month or so.

LW: Do you remember, did you have much to do with the Bondi Icebergs club?

BC: No. No, not really. You know, only probably what I was told, or read but that was of no great consequence.

LW: Was it a popular club in its time?

BC: Well, ah, not really I don't think. It was um, not with the younger people for sure. It was mostly the elderly men and I think it was a more social than anything that they went there. Because they used to have their beer and what have you and that was what it was. But mainly for younger people, the surf clubs were the main thing,

LW: And there were a lot, a range of activities outside of the normal boat rowing and surf-swimming and body-surfing, the clubs offered other activities?

BC: Oh, yes, the ah, as I mentioned about amateur wrestling, that was there, and boxing...

LW: Physical culture, was there such a thing?

BC: What?

LW: Physical culture?

BC: No. nothing like that.

LW: Gymnastics, any of those sorts of things?

BC: Oh well, yes there was a probably a bit of that.

DM: Just one thing sorry, just to change the subject slightly and pick on something, in 1950-, you left the pavilion in '59?

BC: Yes...

DM: In 1954 there was a visit by the Queen. Do you remember that at all?

BC: Yes.

PC: Yes.

DM: What did that look like? From pictures that I've seen it looked like it was quite a big day, in terms of ceremonies...

PC: It was, yes...

DM: ...and there was a surf carnival put on... as I understand it.

BC: It was,. She came from... my recollection of it, she came from Randwick Race Course where she was attending a race meeting there, to the surf carnival in the afternoon, and with Prince Phillip. That's right, yes, I remember that.

EM: Do you remember they decorated the pavilion? They put a whole... I've got a lovely picture of palm fronds and things on the columns...

BC: Yes...

PC: There were a lot of people there.

BC: A terrible, terrible lot of people

EM: Was your father involved in those preparations?

BC: Well, he would have been.

PC: Would have been.

BC: ...I should imagine, he never... he would have had to be, because the fact that they would have been using the pavilion as the place to do their work.

EM: But you don't recall if he was presented to the queen?.

BC: No, no, he never was.

LW: Do you know who succeeded your father after 1959?



PC: Yes. Carl

BC: Yes...Carl Walden, but he did not live very long, he was a very sick man. And then Mrs Walden took up residence in the flat that was above the ah.... For quite a number of years, I think.

LW: It was a two bedroom flat?

PC: Yes. Two bedroom.

DM: So Mrs Walden stayed there...

PC: She stayed there.

BC: Yes.

DM: ...there was no caretaker. Or was she doing some of the tasks?

BC: Oh, well I don't know, the council did pay her, but I think it was more or less a caretakers job.

PC: [ ]

BC: I don't know what her responsibilities would have been, I would not have known.

DM: Right, right. Because it was a caretakers one up until very recently as I understand it, up til about 1999. There was a full time live in caretaker, that changed in 1999. It stayed that way for quite a while.

It's now rented out as office space for some community ...groups who do work in and around the pavilion who put on festivals and put on events. We've certainly still got the role of caretaker still happening in the pavilion.

BC: The um, day that we were, at the Turkish baths that the council got us out there, the gentleman from the library there, took us around and showed us the pavilion, well I'd never been there and I haven't been back again, and it's [ ] changed all up.

PC: Oh, I'll say.

DM: How long ago was it that you visited?

PC: Oooh? Oh, must 4-5, 5 years?

BC: Oh, it was longer that, I think, Tricia.

PC: It's a good while, long time...

BC: Dad was [ ]...

PC: ...When I looked at the floor, and I saw all this mosaic floor. And I said, well I'm walking on mosaic today, but I was walking on concrete a few years ago...

(laughter)

Was none of this fancy floor for me!

DM: Well, you would noticed more changes now since, particularly after the Olympics.

PC: Oh, yes.

BC: Yes.

EM: Did you see the pavilion – on the television?

PC: Yes, yes.

DM: Where the beach volley ball was held....

BC: Oh yes.

DM: ...so the Olympics put in a lift and there's music studios in the southern courtyard courtyard,

PC: Dear, oh dear!

DM: ... and where the old Turkish baths are, is now is the process of getting converted into office accommodation, and ah, quite... quite big changes...

PC: I'll say! I wouldn't know my way around!

LW: Do you recall where the beach inspectors... did they have a room in the pavilion during that time, and if so whereabouts was it? Because I remember...

BC: I cannot recall and I do not think there was one!

LW: Where did they operate from? They just went down to the beach, did they and set up?

BC: Well, mainly, mainly... well as far as I know, all of them were either members of the Bondi Surf Club or the North Bondi Surf Club, and they arrived at work in their costumes and that was probably, well they had, yes, they changed at their various surf clubs.

LW: So although they were employed by the council they would just turn up at the surf club that they were a member of and get ready from there, and go down to the beach.

BC: And I think that probably'd be their wish... that would be their wish to do that. Apart from that, I wouldn't, I couldn't tell...

LW: I think I recall in the 1970's that there was a room, or two rooms, at the northern end of the pavilion, when a chap called Alan Johnson was the chief beach inspector. Alan worked under Aub for many years. There were two rooms there but it sounds like that came along later in time...

BC: I would think so, because, see ah, when my father was there, in those days he was responsible for the beach inspectors, then subsequently whether it was Aub or that, they made it an independent thing and the head beach inspector was the man in charge, so that's probably the day, the time that those rooms might have come.

LW: Do you remember any of the names of the people that were in charge? Tom Maher perhaps?

BC: Tom, yes. I knew Tom very well.

LW: Was Tom a chief beach inspector or in charge...?

BC: Yes.

LW: He was.

BC: He was the one in charge when the terrible drownings happened, and it subsequently caused him to have a nervous breakdown. He was a very dedicated man, Tom Maher... I served time in the islands with him actually, we started a life saving club at Toraketa beach in Bougainville because so many Americans had been drowned, that they were there before the Australians, the Australians came to take over from them so they could move on to the Philippines.

And ah, there were so many men had been drowned, they were very treacherous beaches that we decided, Tom was the main instigator of it, to set up a seal club and he got members from the Australian forces that were arriving there, that were members of surf clubs to join it. So ah...

LW: That's very interesting.

BC: A very dedicated man, Tom Maher.

LW: Stan McDonald finished on the beaches in 1933, when of course he took over the deck chair hire...

BC: yes, that's right...

LW: ...in ah,...

BC: ...surfer planes...

LW: That's right – was, in your recollection, was Stan McDonald a chief beach inspector?

BC: Yes! An only one...

LW: An Only one... So he served alone...?

BC: For a long time, for a long time... he lived in the Bondi Surf Club. They built quarters for him when they built the new surf... that Surf Club there. And Stan lived there – he was on call 24 hours a day.

LW: And when Stan finished as a beach inspector, was it Tom that succeeded him, Tom Maher?

BC: I think so... I think so.

LW: Until Tom left for the war of course.

BC: That's right... yes...yes.

LW: When he was living in the surf club was he the resident care-taker, or were the rooms just built for him as a beach inspector?

BC: No, he was a resident care-taker.

LW: He was the resident care-taker. Do you recall that when he started his deck-chair hire and surfer-plane hire, or aqua-plane hire, do you recall the sort of sun-tan oils back then? He had a mutton bird oil for a long time.

BC: Yes, in the pavilion and there was a gentleman chap there, and he had an oil business too, there was one in the surf pavilion, and then Stan opened a similar type of one on the beach. But uh, I don't know what sort of oil, no I can't remember what sort of oil they used and that sort of thing

LW: Because I've spoken with members of Bondi Surf Club over the years when I was the resident care-taker there, and they told me about some of the things they did to get a sun-tan, including using foil to reflect the sun, and using Kerosene, did you ever hear that?

BC: No, no...

LW: ... using Kerosene on the skin...

EM: Kerosene?

BC: I think a lot of that's in their mind...

LW: Is it?  
(laughter)

BC: I never heard of kerosene.

DM: Put a match to it and that it'd be the end of it...

EM: No, I don't have anything more to say. I just thought it would be interesting to ask both of you... this is a little bit off the track...but um, so ah you weren't a beach girl, and you lived down at the pavilion... How did you meet?

PC: At work.

BC: At work.

EM: At work.

PC: Yes!

BC: I worked for, we both worked for a...

PC: [ ]

BC: [ ] company...

EM: Oh? Where was that?

PC: Broadway

BC: Broadway. Birch, was the biggest [courier] in the southern hemisphere.

EM: Right. And then you found you both lived in Bondi...?

BC: Yeh, I just suppose it, just um, met at work, and lived in the same area, just probably [ ] we met going home, coming home... that sort of thing, and so on eventuated.

EM: Did you take her to the dances at the Pavilion?

PC: Oh No!!! I think [ ] thank you very much...

BC: No, I think they were finished then. See, what happened with those, they died off there, when the Astra was built they built a dance place there and Roy Scarfield went from there to the Astra and a chap called Herb Gilbert took over the Esplanade.

EM: So, what did courting couples do in Bondi, apart from dance?

PC: Go to the pictures.

BC: In latter years, to the Kings Theatre and before that, the Hoyts Theatre... that was all there was... [ ]

EM: And watch all those American films... [ ]

PC: Oh yes...

BC: Yes yes.

PC: [ ] He's not a film buff either, but I liked all of those!

EM: But he did take you to the pictures?

PC: Oh yes, he sat at the pictures!

EM: Walks along the beach...

BC: Oh, Yes yes... they were the main things I suppose.

PC: There wasn't very much to do in those days, when you come to think of it.

LW: If you had a dinner out, where would you go?

PC: Oh, probably Carls...(laughter) which was a big deal.

LW: Cars?

PC: Carls...

EM: Carls.

LW: Oh, Carls...

EM: Which Carls?...

BC: There wasn't much around in Bondi put it that way, it would have had to be in the city somewhere.

PC: ...Either in George Street or where was the other one, Castlereagh Street.

BC: There was a number of them.

EM: There were a few. They were still around when I was young.

BC: Though mostly in Bondi, there were...

PC: There wasn't very much there...

EM: [ ]

BC: Milk bars... as they were called.

PC: Milk Bars.

BC Palton's. Paltons were basically the big ones...well, there were no others I don't think.

PC: I don't think there were any restaurants.

BC: No, [ ]

EM: Times changed

PC: Very boring.

LW: Times have changed

PC: Yes, I wouldn't know how to get there now with all the one-way streets.

LW: Well, thank you very much for the opportunity to share your recollections.

BC: Oh, it's been a pleasure. All I can hope is that it's been of some benefit.

LW: I think it will be of immense value for us, compiling not just a history of the life-guards but just generally on the area and the pavilion.

BC: If there's anything in time that crops up, that I can help you with, just give us ring.

EM: Thank you, thank you.

LW: Thank you.