

# The Grand Parade Brighton; real estate and recreation



Leonie Bell

Ron Rathbone Prize 2019

**Cover photo: The Grand Parade, date unknown. Courtesy of Bayside Council Library**

The Grand Parade

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## Introduction

The Grand Parade follows the shores of Botany Bay from Kyeemagh to Sans Souci, a key transport route from the south to the city. As they edge slowly from traffic light to traffic light, it is doubtful whether modern commuters stuck in a traffic jam pause to consider its origins. When was it built and what was its purpose? How has the road and changed since its inception?

Today's Grand Parade can be highly congested with commuter and truck traffic, but this was not always the case. While there is much talk today of extending the F6 freeway south through the area and discussion of the best possible route to remove gridlocked traffic from The Grand Parade, the road was not originally conceived as a thoroughfare.

Instead, it led to early recreational opportunities for Sydneysiders who wanted to leave the pollution and crowding of the inner city to swim in the pure waters of Botany Bay, stay at its resort hotel, picnic beneath the shade of towering Norfolk Pine trees and indulge in the pleasure of boating in the relatively safe waters of the bay.

Much of the road was created by land speculators, as access to the new suburban land divisions of an expanding city. These businessmen enticed prospective purchasers by promoting the healthy recreational facilities of Brighton and Ramsgate as key benefits of home ownership in the region.

This work will seek to answer questions about the origins and development of The Grand Parade, and reveal how it was instrumental in the metamorphosis of the wild, sandy dunes of Brighton Le Sands into housing estates and leisure grounds.

It will demonstrate how real estate developers promoted the benefits of the seaside to encourage buyers and how the leisure industry was a key factor in the development of the suburbs around the southern shores of Botany Bay.

It examines the contributions of two prominent entrepreneurial businessmen; firstly, Thomas Saywell, who was instrumental in opening up the area, investing heavily in real estate and infrastructure, and secondly, Arthur Pemberton, who built a popular bathing facility which attracted tens of thousands of people to engage in year-round sea bathing.

It describes the rise and fall of selected recreational opportunities along The Grand Parade, including the Brighton Hotel, Brighton Baths, Pemberton's Ramsgate Baths, lifesaving organisations, the Grand Pines Tourist Park, and the Roxy Restaurant.

It also discusses the role of government departments in upgrading and expanding the road infrastructure, and council initiatives adjoining The Grand Parade, including the building of Brighton Municipal Baths, and the maintenance and preservation of the famous Norfolk Pines in Cook Park.

## Part 1

Real estate developers create a road

## Early days at Ramsgate and Brighton

With such an expansive name as The Grand Parade, it is tempting to think that this broad thoroughfare was created as part of a magnificent architectural and town planning model, with the goal of opening up the bayside area of Rockdale Municipality. In fact, the picture is the exact opposite. During the late 1800s the area was largely primitive and untamed, consisting of sandy dunes and swampy land, of which a mere remnant remains in Hawthorne Street Natural Area.

Surveyor Sir Thomas Mitchell illustrated the area in 1850, showing a series of land grants and a single dirt road from the dam at Cooks River to Rocky Point. Access to the land grant areas would have been on foot or on horseback through the scrub.



**Left: 1850 Tracing from Messrs. Darkes and Gorman's surveys showing the road from the dam at Cooks River to Rocky Point. Rocky Point Road is the only track leading to the southern end of the bay. Photo: State Library of NSW <sup>1</sup>**

**Below: Parish of St George map showing early land grants but few roads. Photo: Bayside Library**



The Hurstville Propeller printed a retrospective of this era in 1944, recalling the landscape of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is highly likely that the description is culled from the first-hand stories of old residents of the bayside area.

'Thoroughfares in those days were mere cart tracks. Later they were formed into Rocky Point Road and West Botany Street. Another unnamed track, now Bay Street, wound down over a hill from Rockdale, across a swamp, and petered out in the sandhills near the beach. Soon after another track was made from West Botany Street and across Muddy Creek towards the beach. It was eventually called Goode Street and afterwards rechristened Bestic Street....the last signs of civilisation on the Botany Bay side of Rockdale (towards Brighton) were Francis' duck farm, in Bay Street, about a half-mile back from Lady Robinson's Beach; the lonely home of a German butcher, George H. Hook, on the site of the Present Brighton Public School; and Godfrey's place, well back on Bestic Street. Between Francis' and Godfrey's, but closer to Muddy Creek, were the pioneer homes of families by the name of

Napper and Bowmer. The area that was eventually to become Brighton-le-Sands then comprised part of a great belt of wilderness varying from a half-mile to a mile in width, and extending parallel with Lady Robinson's Beach from Cook's River, right through to Doll's Point and Sandringham. No one, as far as I can trace, excepting perhaps a few wandering bands of blacks or an odd fisherman, lived in that huge tract of virgin country. For the most part it was inhospitable; comprising arid stretches of sandhills, a dense, blanket of scrub and thick forest.' <sup>2</sup>

The Municipality of West Botany was incorporated in 1871. Sometime in the 1870s the five mile stretch of sand, known locally as Seven Mile Beach, was renamed Lady Robinsons Beach, reputedly by land owner and Colonial Secretary, Thomas Holt M.L.C. During their residency in NSW (1872-1879), Governor Sir Hercule Robinson and his wife visited the beach, at Holt's invitation, for a picnic luncheon. They enjoyed it so much that afterwards, Lady Robinson would return frequently, to escape the hustle and bustle of the city by horse-riding along the silvery white sands. <sup>3</sup>

The Sydney Morning Herald declared in 1883,

'There was and is a splendid stretch of hard sandy beach seven miles long, upon which a gallop with the surf washing almost to the horse's feet, and the sea-breeze beating on her face, was a pleasure which none knew better to enjoy than the Hon. Lady Robinson. Lady Robinson's Beach is crescent-shaped, and the smooth sandy bottom shelves gradually into deep water without any sudden descent. The water is so clear that on a still day the seaweed, and the fish swimming among it, can be seen at a depth of many feet.' <sup>4</sup>



**Saywell's Tramway runs down Bay Street to the fledgling Grand Parade c. late 1880s Map: Bayside Council Library.**

By the 1890s there were two small settlements near the edge of the bay. One led from Crae Street to a hamlet in the north, near today's suburb of Kyeemagh. The other road was Bay Street, leading directly to the water's edge. At the end of Bay Street, The Grand Parade extended a most unimposing four blocks north. Later the Esplanade extended south of this point. Early maps show a small settlement at Sans Souci, but no bayside roadway north of this at all, until the Esplanade commences just past President Ave.

During the early part of the twentieth century land developers increasingly saw the potential of the area, blessed with beautiful sandy beaches and sparkling clear waters of a seemingly calm Botany Bay. That calm could be deceptive. Over the years many storms tore up the beaches and assaulted the coastline, but on a balmy, sunny day, the emerging real estate subdivisions at the edge of the bay attracted home-buyers to an apparently idyllic seaside location.

As each subdivision grew, stretching in parallel streets west from the bay, there was not necessarily a road connecting them at the water's edge and they simply ran directly onto verdant Cook Park.



The various roadways at the water's edge each received a different name; The Esplanade, Riverside Drive or The Grand Parade.

By the 1930s, the southern section of The Grand Parade ran from Sandringham Road to Emmaline Street, at which point it morphed into Riverside Drive from Culver to Scarborough Road. The Esplanade continued from Bath to King, although disconnected from the adjoining Riverside Drive. The Grand Parade resumed at Brighton from King Street to Bestic Street.



### c. 1930s Brighton Map

Map: Bayside Council Library.

The Esplanade is shown at left and right on this map, interspersed with a disconnected Riverside Drive, and also the disjointed portion of the Esplanade north of President Avenue. This is clearly not yet a gateway to the Rocky Point punt and southern Sydney.

Rockdale Council received approval from the Minister for Local Government on 9 July 1934, to rename The Esplanade (also known as Cook Road) between Sandringham Street at Dolls Point and Ramsgate Avenue. The whole thoroughfare from Dolls Point to Bestic Street in Brighton Le Sands was now officially designated The Grand Parade. The road was no longer a discontinuous series of streets, but a major thoroughfare leading south along the bay.<sup>5</sup>

Naturally this had required substantial roadworks to be undertaken prior to uniting the various sections of roadway. Originally it had been decided to construct The Grand Parade for two blocks from Pemberton's Baths at Ramsgate Road in a southerly direction to Sandringham Road, but the decision was made to extend construction as far as Russell Avenue, increasing the projected expenditure from £989/17/- to a massive £1,429/6/-. Initially it was intended to fund the project from a loan, and council now had to find the extra money from Scarborough Ward's annual allocation.<sup>6</sup>

The development of the Brighton area from outer Sydney wilderness to seaside suburbia was not only the realm of property developers and land speculators. It was spearheaded by entrepreneurs who created innovative recreational facilities such as bathing pavilions and hotels and invested in transport infrastructure to entice prospective patrons to travel to the seaside. The first of these was Thomas Saywell in the late 19th century, followed by Arthur Pemberton in the 1920s

Rockdale Council, which was famed for its progressive health and recreation policies, built additional publicly owned sporting facilities along The Grand Parade, both for the benefit of its residents and to attract the domestic Sydney tourist market.



## Thomas Saywell invests in Brighton

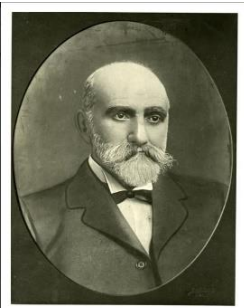
Thomas Saywell was chiefly responsible for opening up Lady Robinsons Beach by lobbying Rockdale Council to extend roads from Rockdale to the beach. He subsequently created tourism infrastructure along the fledgling Grand Parade.

Thomas was born in Radford, Nottinghamshire in 1837. His father George and step-mother Isabella migrated to Australia with their eight children, departing Plymouth 16 June 1848 on the 669-ton barque 'Agincourt',<sup>7</sup> when Thomas was just 11 years old. They were in good company, being well acquainted with many of the other families on board. In common with the majority of the children from these families, the three youngest Saywell children were born in Calais, France. Thomas' father was a lace maker. After a period of economic and social unrest in England, many lace makers from Nottinghamshire had moved to France in search of work, from 1816.<sup>8</sup>

The 1848 French Revolution brought the downfall of King Louis Philippe and the ascension of Napoleon III to power, and now the lace-makers moved again to escape the turmoil. With the destitute English workers' savings locked in French banks, they appealed to Britain for help. A relief fund was set up and the Emigration Commissioners chartered three ships to convey the distressed lace-makers to Australia.<sup>9</sup> The English refugees on the Agincourt numbered 264; an entire ship full of lace-makers' families from northern England, sharing the 111-day voyage to a new life in Australia, arriving 6 October 1848.<sup>10 11</sup> Half were subsequently sent to Bathurst, with the other half, including Thomas' family, shipped to Maitland for employment.<sup>12</sup>

The migrants could not pursue their former trade in the colonies, but their skills and dedicated work ethos brought success to many. Thomas' parents were initially employed as general servants and their son briefly gained work with a tobacconist. In 1854 Thomas moved to the goldfields, where his uncle Jasper worked as a cook at a pub in Bathurst. The entrepreneurial young man operated a lending library for the miners. Looking to the future, he asked for payment in gold. No doubt this was the basis of the capital finance he later required to set up in business, initially in tobacco manufacture, and later investing in mining.<sup>13</sup>

Thomas became a highly successful businessman with diverse and extensive interests in coal, copper, tobacco, finance, building bricks, machinery manufacture and sales, furniture, wine, transport and real estate.<sup>14</sup>



**Thomas Saywell** Photo: Bayside Council Library

He began astutely investing in property, initially at Macquarie Fields, then Redfern, Beaconsfield estate in Alexandria, and Queens Park Estate in St Leonards. He became a director of the Haymarket Permanent Land, Building and Investment Company Limited in 1886, which invested across the city including the Rockdale and Sans Souci areas.<sup>15</sup>

In 1886 the government foresightedly resumed a narrow strip of land along Lady Robinsons Beach for the purpose of creating Cook Park. The 105-acre property extended from the Cooks River to Sans Souci, although its area was eroded over time by the action of the waters of the Bay and numerous storms. Thomas Saywell saw the great potential of the Brighton area, with its clear waters, sandy beaches, unpolluted fresh air and plenty of land ripe for development. He viewed the area as the ideal location for an upmarket hotel and bathing pavilion in the grand European style. In support of this vision, he was willing and able to invest a substantial amount of money in creating a resort.

Although there was no transport available to bring tourists into the area, Saywell was an entrepreneur prepared to lobby the authorities to build new roads and grant him permission to build the transport links necessary to realise his dream. <sup>16</sup>

Saywell purchased extensive land in the region. In 1882-1883 he purchased 3 lots of land at Lady Robinsons Beach. Saywell's agent T. S. Huntley, made representation in 1883 to get a road opened from Rocky Point Road to the beach. Today this is Bestic St.

The Hurstville Propeller reported in 1944;

'In the early eighties Saywell bought about one hundred acres of the wilderness and sandhills, facing the beach, extending from Bay Street to Bestic Street. It has been written that he paid £10 an acre for it, and that in twelve months he sold it all for £25 an acre to a building society. Later he bought back half of the area at £37/10/- per acre, conditionally that he erected a hotel. Much land other than that was also acquired by Saywell nearby, some acres being on the south side of Bay Street; where he laid out the popular "Shady Nook" park. On the northern side the frontage to his land ran from what is now Francis Avenue down to the beach.' <sup>17</sup>



**New Brighton Estate 1886.** Photo: State Library of NSW <sup>18</sup>

The New Brighton Estate poster of 1886 shows the recent development from Bay Street north to McRae Street. Cook Park stretches the length of the bay, but The Grand Parade consists of a mere five blocks. Saywell was a major shareholder of The Metropolitan Permanent Building and Investment Association which auctioned the land, and Thomas Sellwood Huntley was the principal. Saywell was also a director of the Sydney Investment Land and Finance Co. which was incorporated in 26 May 1886. <sup>19</sup> The NSW Government Gazette records that he purchased an additional four acres of land in Bay Street in 1890, adjoining the New Brighton Estate. <sup>20</sup> Saywell moved to the area with his family in 1887, to a residence he named 'Nevada', located at 8 The Grand Parade.

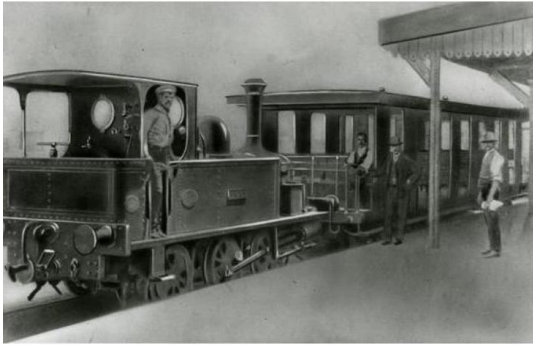
The Illawarra Railway line commenced construction of a double line to Hurstville in late 1882. In 1883 the government announced the location of stations in the St George area, including one at Rockdale. <sup>21</sup> Huntley approached the council on Thomas's behalf in 1883, for permission to build tram tracks and operate a steam tram to the bay from Rockdale Station. A bill was passed in parliament on 6 March 1884, granting him a 30-year lease.

The Illawarra Railway line to Hurstville opened 15 October 1884, with Rockdale Station conveniently located along the route for thousands of prospective home buyers, who snapped up the land lots as soon as they were released. <sup>22</sup>

That same year, in anticipation of completion of his latest project, a splendid bathing pavilion located on The Grand Parade opposite Bay Street, the entrepreneur invested £15,000 to open a 1 ½ mile tram from Rockdale Station to The Grand Parade, connecting the railway with the seaside, and making the beach at Botany Bay easily accessible for the first time. Saywell's tramway opened within a year, on 9 November 1885, designed by Messrs Kenwood and Kerle, who later designed the New Brighton Hotel and Saywell's Baths. <sup>23</sup>

Although the Brighton Baths were not quite finished, the tram was an immediate success, carrying 15,000 to Lady Robinsons Beach on its opening day, for a bargain thruppence per adult and a penny for children. It was a boon too for the real estate salesmen, who could now advertise the benefits of an economical transport option from the city to the new suburbs and bring buyers to bid at seaside auctions. <sup>24</sup>

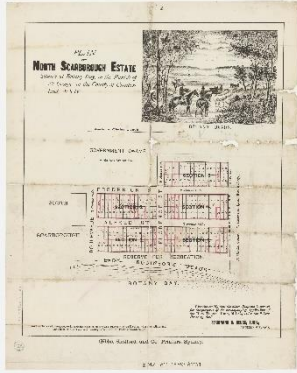
The 'Saywell' and the 'Pygmy' steam engines hauled thousands of people to enjoy the delights of the beach, where they alighted at a 100-foot-(30m) long tram shed at the entrance to Saywell's New Sea Baths, which opened almost a year after the tramline, in October 1886. The entry fee was a mere tuppence per adult and a penny for children, with combination transport and entry tickets available.



**Saywell's Tram** Photo: Bayside Council Library

## Promoting a road to recreation

Botany Bay was promoted as a potential recreational resort from as early as 1877, when real estate agents Richardson and Wrench were advertising large plots of land along The Esplanade, Florence Street, Alice Street, Alfred Street, Frederick Street and The Boulevard at North and South Scarborough Townships on Lady Robinsons Beach;<sup>25</sup>



‘Which is the largest and most beautiful beach near Sydney, and admirably adapted for the use of bathing machines...The whole township is laid out with great judgment and forethought, with a view to make it a GREAT PUBLIC RESORT, and the most beautiful and charming marine suburb of the AUSTRALIAN METROPOLIS. THE-BEACH – Too much cannot be said in praise of this magnificent stretch of clean snow-white sand, so hard at ebb tide as to furnish a beautiful carriage drive or equestrian promenade. In point of salubrity the position of this estate can hardly be surpassed, and for beauty of situation scarcely equalled, as the eye never tires of dwelling on the magnificent sheet of water of the Bay of Botany.’

**1877 North Scarborough Estate Plan. The Vice Regal carriage and horse-riders enjoy the delights of Lady Robinson Beach, on property owned by Thomas Holt M.L.C. Photo: NSW State Library<sup>26</sup>**

Maps, from the 1880s to the 1930s, graphically illustrate the gradual development of the bayside region as a prime recreational area accessed by The Grand Parade. Real estate speculators produced large advertising posters to promote land auctions. In contrast to the official, no-nonsense, County and Parish maps, these brochures highlight the benefits of living on Botany Bay, through both text and illustrations.



**1881 Filey estate subdivision plan, Lady Robinsons Beach. Photo: State Library of NSW<sup>27</sup>**

In this early estate sales poster, rustic views of Botany Bay are employed to appeal to buyers, but so far there is no Grand Parade in sight at this end of the beach. The rear of the properties run directly onto Lady Robinsons Beach. Later the Esplanade would run along this section. The insert at right shows only two roads in the area; Rocky Point Road and Bay Street, which were essentially dirt cart tracks.



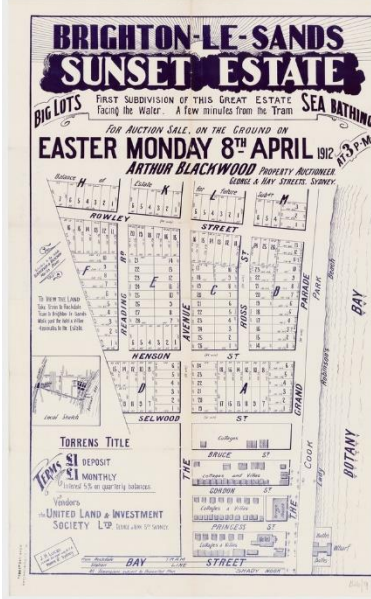
**1883 Georges River Frontage and Illawarra Railway Line Photo: State Library of NSW<sup>28</sup> Hardie and Gorman's auction poster advertises 781 acres of land, now more readily accessible by the Illawarra Railway Line. Bay Street runs to the waterfront, but there is little development at this time and The Grand Parade has not yet been commenced. Small settlements exist at Dolls Point and on the fringes of Scarborough Park, which was pristine bushland and swamp in this period.**





1886 Fairlight Estate New Brighton Photo: State Library of NSW <sup>29</sup>

The Grand Parade, which extends a mere five blocks north of Bay Street, first appears in real estate posters in January 1886 in the New Brighton Estate and subsequently in February for the Fairlight Estate auction. The illustrations imply that although this land is located on the outer edges of Sydney, it is easy to reach. A steam train wizzes the prospective buyer through the verdant countryside, to connect with Saywell's tram to Botany Bay. The sun rises romantically over the waters of the bay, perfectly framed by the Botany Bay heads, which are the future suburbs of La Perouse and Kurnell.



1912 Brighton-Le-Sands Sunset Estate. Photo: State Library of NSW <sup>30</sup>

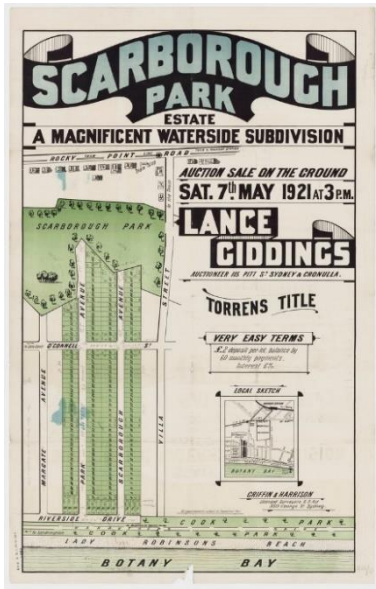
In the new century, The Grand Parade is reaching ever further north at the top of Lady Robinsons Beach



1912 Beach Frontages, The Esplanade, Brighton-Le-Sands. Photo: State Library of NSW <sup>31</sup>

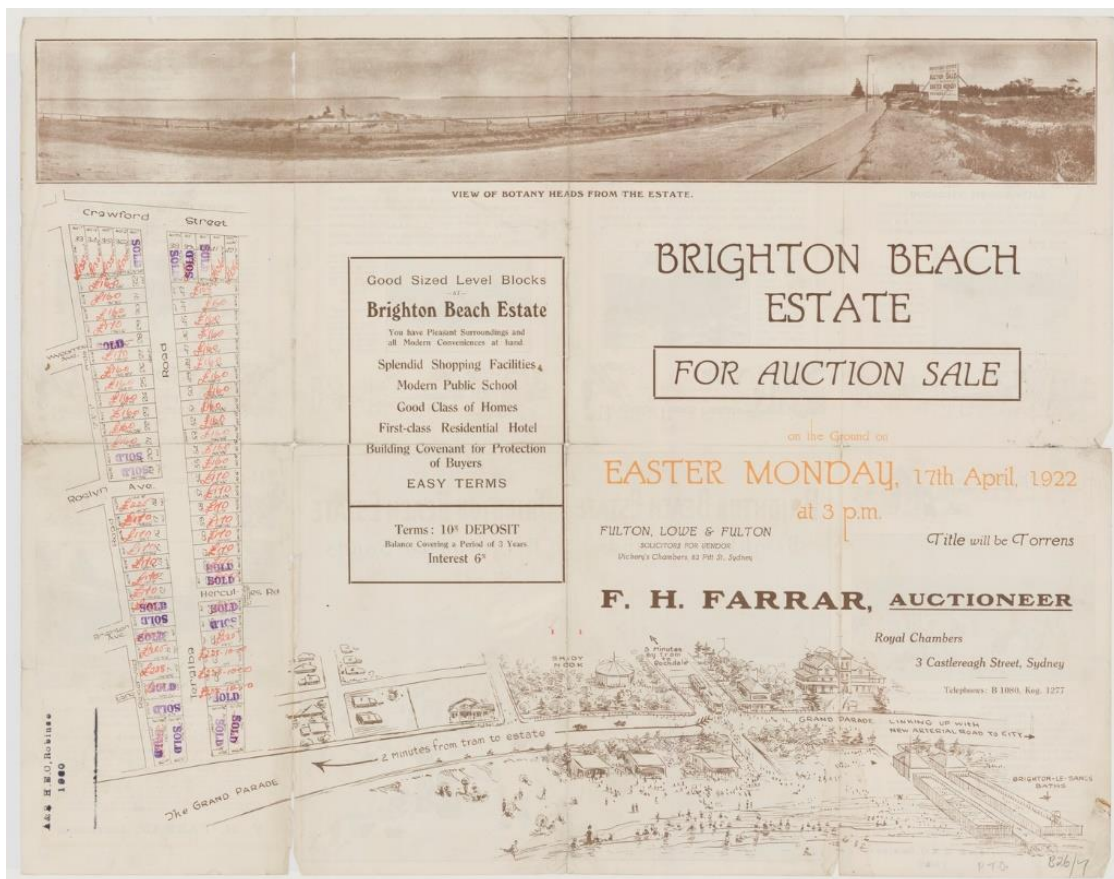
Meanwhile, the southern end of The Grand Parade is taking shape under the name The Esplanade. This portion is located south of President Avenue.

'Good level allotments facing Lady Robinsons Beach, close to the tram at Shady Nook can be purchased for £2 deposit, with 20 shillings per month repayment at 5% interest.



1921 Scarborough Park Estate. Photo: State Library of NSW <sup>32</sup>

By the 1920s significant development has taken place at Brighton and numerous roads lead to Botany Bay. This post-war plan shows the disjointed nature of the bayside road system as each developer divided his own property without consideration of the larger picture of road transport, which was in its infancy. Riverside Drive, which would eventually form part of The Grand Parade, runs directly into Cook Park at Scarborough Avenue. Carruthers Drive, which would also later form part of The Grand Parade, runs through Cook Park, parallel to Riverside Drive, but is not connected to it.



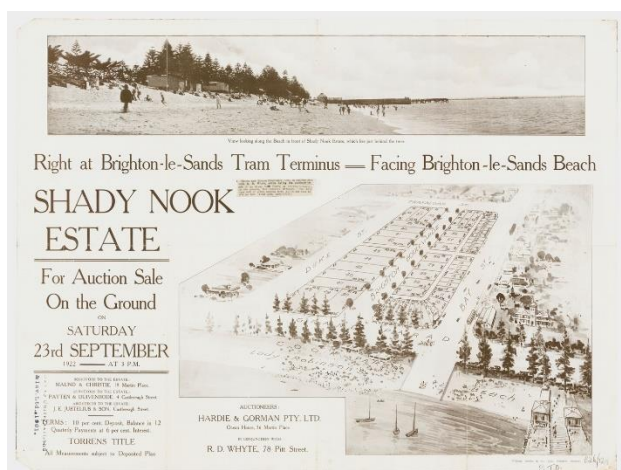
April 1922 Brighton Beach Estate subdivision plan Photo: NSW State Library

In this 1922 subdivision plan, the illustration at the top of the page shows the area around the bay as largely undeveloped, with blocks of land to the right, running directly onto the beach. The Grand Parade features briefly, north of Bay Street. The sketch below this highlights the desirable recreational facilities along The Grand Parade; the Brighton Hotel with its Refreshment Rooms on the corner of Bay Street and The Grand Parade; the soon-to-be-demolished Shady Nook pleasure grounds opposite. Shady Nook was auctioned off for homes five months later in September 1922. Saywell's Baths, several boatsheds on the beach, and numerous bathers enjoying the healthy pleasures of sea bathing and beach activities, add substantial appeal to the advertisement.





These details from the reverse of the brochure show the delights of seaside bathing, depicting virile sun-bronzed males, beautiful bathing beauties and happy families. The developer entices families to purchase property; 'Buy where the fresh air and open space calls...The seaside is the place for growing children where the invigorating air from the ocean can be inhaled and the healthful pastime of swimming and surfing can be indulged in' <sup>33</sup>



**Shady Nook Estate sales brochure 1922 shows the delights of sea bathing at Saywell's Baths, vast expanses of sandy beach, sailing in the bay and verdant parkland in Cook Park.** Photo: State Library NSW <sup>34</sup>

The Shady Nook Estate brochure, issued a few months later, picturing a lush treelined landscape, emphasises the joys of the surf beach and sea bathing, sailing on the balmy waters of the bay, plus the recreational facilities of the Brighton Hotel located

opposite the subdivision. The property is described euphorically as 'The place which will make tired people fresh, and where one sunny hour will build up the body for the week's work...a Home-Ground, Health-Ground and Playground'. Ironically, the demolition of Shady Nook Recreational Grounds, to create this new estate, caused the destruction of the hugely popular picnic area which had been created by Thomas Saywell.



The sales pitch pinpoints the future of The Grand Parade, emphasizing its imminent role as a thoroughfare to the south;

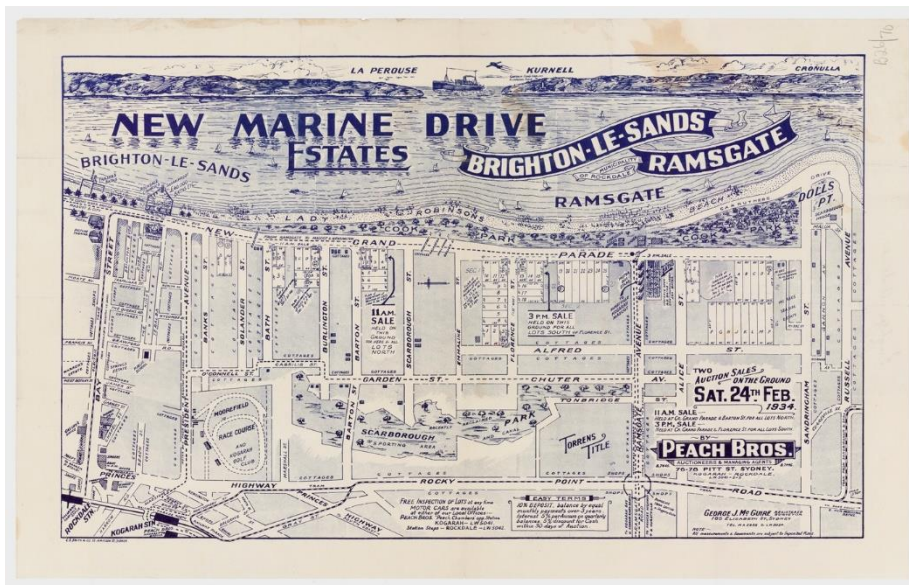
‘The wide avenue which runs past the estate is designed to link up with the City by one splendid motor track from Elizabeth Street via Sir Joseph Carruthers Drive, which when completed will run past the estate to Taren Point Punt. It will be the coastal motor drive of Sydney.’<sup>35</sup>

The reality of this vision was still some way in the future.



1929 Spring's and Warren's Estates map. Photo: State Library NSW<sup>36</sup>

This publication shows the motor bus and electric tram routes down Bay Street, which would have been the primary form of transport to the beach. The Grand Parade runs north of Bay Street, while to the south it is still The Esplanade.



1934 New Marine Drive Estate. Photo: State Library NSW

The newly declared Grand Parade stretches to Dolls Point, allowing easy access to the delights of the seaside for bathing, sailing and picnics.

## Real estate and road development – early 1900s

Thomas Saywell was not the only property investor to see the potential of the bayside area. A number of land grants in the Botany Bay area had been made during the early 1800s, but between 1881 and 1886 several new real estate subdivisions were offered for sale including Filey, Ailsa, New Brighton and Fairlight Estates at Lady Robinsons Beach. The Grand Parade first appeared on subdivision maps in 1886 on the New Brighton Estate. Despite this land speculation, the area was still a relatively remote wilderness of sand dunes, swamp and scrub, reached from the city by Rocky Point Road and then dirt tracks to the water's edge.

From 1908 through the 1920s and into the 1930s the area was progressively subdivided by developers who promoted lots for sale as the ideal spot to build a home along the beach, away from the city, yet easily accessible by steam tram and steam train, a mere 12 minutes from Rockdale Station. As they measured out land plots, they created The Grand Parade piecemeal, although it was in several sections under different names. <sup>37</sup>



The Beach Estate 1908, bounded by the Grand Parade, Bay Street and The Kings Road. Photo: State Library of NSW<sup>38</sup>



Official opening of Carruthers Drive Friday 26 February 1909. Photo: Bayside Council Library

In 1908 the council created a new drive from Dolls Point to Brighton Le Sands. Initially it had no name, but Rockdale aldermen suggested naming it after the Premier of NSW Sir Joseph Carruthers, who had represented the district for 21 years. Most of Carruthers Drive is now part of The Grand Parade. They hoped the Premier would be sufficiently

flattered to open the road officially and thus promote 'the beauties of the district'.<sup>39</sup> Instead, it was opened by the Governor of NSW, Vice Admiral Sir Harry Rawson, on 26 February 1909, with Carruthers and his wife in attendance. An ornate silver shield, portraying a section of the drive, was presented to the Governor. Hundreds turned out for the festive event as banners fluttered in the breeze. The St George Call reported;

'His Excellency was received at the local Town Hall by Aid. William Taylor, Mayor, at 3 o'clock. A procession of motor cars and other vehicles was then formed, and the party were driven to the scene of the opening ceremony. A number of the members of the Automobile Club were present, including the president and Secretary, and twelve motor cars led the procession...The procession proceeded by way of Rocky Point-Road, Sandringham Street and Russell Avenue to Doll's Point, Brighton-le-Sands being reached about 3.30 o'clock, where a guard of honour, consisting of a battalion of cadets, attended Sir Harry Rawson.'<sup>40</sup>



**The shield presented to Sir Rawson. Photo: St George Call 6 March 1909 p.1**

Mayor William Taylor declared it 'One of the finest marine drives in Sydney', although it was only constructed of ironstone gravel, and lined with a 'ti-tree' [sic] hedge and Marram grass planting to prevent the encroachment of sand.<sup>41</sup> Trees were ceremonially planted in Cook Park by the guests of honour, who then retired for refreshments in the Brighton Hotel.<sup>42 43</sup> The Mayor suggested it was merely the first instalment of a major Public Works Department scheme to construct a sweeping thoroughfare from Watsons

Bay to Cooks River, where a new traffic bridge would be constructed. Following this, the road would eventually connect to Rocky Point Road.<sup>44</sup>

They were still championing the idea in 1914 when the St George Call advocated;

'It must be continued still south to George's River and must not stop even there, but go to join up with the main road between Sutherland and Cronulla. If the road be not completed as far as to join the Cronulla-road, it will not fulfil its purpose of giving a new outlet to Sydney's commerce — a new route, which will save some distance of travel, will avoid the Arncliffe Hill, will open up new stretches of Crown lands, will afford access for parched and crowded people of Botany, Waterloo, and Redfern to Lady Robinsons Beach, and will afford an opportunity for the workers of these crowded industrial areas to a garden city, and yet live within an easy and quick reach of their work.'<sup>45</sup>

The concept did not go away. F.H. Farrar's 1922 auction brochure, advertising Brighton Beach Estate, promises a major tourist drive along the bay, slightly exaggerating its progress,

'The Arterial Road is under construction by the government, and on the point of completion, and will form one of the prettiest Waterside Drives around Sydney....This gives you a magnificent 7 mile drive with the Bay and white sandy beach on one side and parklands on the other and when completed will be the Motor Drive of Sydney. The construction of this Drive must ultimately bring nearer Electric Tram connection right along the beach and will considerably enhance values in the locality'.<sup>46</sup>

Again, the forerunner to The Grand Parade was connected to a utopian ideal of recreation, leisure and beauty, but this grand vision has not yet materialised. The Grand Parade has become a congested through route to the south, but not exactly a scenic tourist drive. Even if the F6 should proceed, releasing the pressures on The Grand Parade. it will be for more prosaic purposes, touted

as a way of untangling traffic snarls rather than a highway to natural beauty and a worker's paradise 'garden city'.

In fact, in its early days, the road was not about to transport anyone anywhere, except to a state of frustration. The area was subject to regular destruction and erosion by storms. In August 1910, less than two years after the glorious opening ceremony, a substantial portion of Carruthers Drive was washed away by storms and remained impassable by motor traffic for over a year.<sup>47</sup> The Cook Park Trust blamed the delay on politics, with preparations for the election, and the subsequent change of government, stalling their efforts to obtain funding for repairs.<sup>48</sup>

The problems continued. In 1923, Mr. P. Somerville, Rockdale Council's Town Clerk, wrote to the editor of The Sun newspaper in response to a reader's criticism;

'My attention has just been called to the remarks of "Progress" (which appeared in your Monday's Issue) calling attention to the disgraceful condition of what was once a beautiful waterside avenue.'

The key issue was that Carruthers Drive did not form part of Rockdale Council area, or indeed any council area. It was administered by the Cook Park Trust who funded little or no maintenance. Where the tarred metal road of The Esplanade ended, so did Rockdale Council's authority. They campaigned for some time to gain control of the parklands and roads within their boundaries.<sup>49</sup>

Carruthers Drive was not the only road in poor repair. In the same year President Ave, which led to Carruthers Drive, was in a deplorable state with ruts and potholes up to 2 feet deep (60cm) near the bridge over the swamp at its midpoint. It too was considered a danger to vehicular traffic, and the cause of frequent bus breakdowns.<sup>50</sup>

Four years later in 1927, a further 200 yards of the drive was washed away, causing Rockdale Council to request a grant from the Lands Department to repair the road and restore the traffic flow from Ramsgate to Dolls Point. The Lands Department were not interested. They no longer considered Carruthers Drive as a potential route for a through-road to the south.<sup>51</sup>

In this long-running saga, it took until July 1933 for the Main Roads Board to grant the money and Rockdale Council to reconstruct the two mile stretch at a cost of £10,000, although there was still insufficient finance to construct a promenade alongside the road.<sup>52</sup>



## Road development v. pine trees

With an increasing population in the area and a corresponding increase in motor traffic as more and more people could afford to purchase a vehicle, council felt that the maintenance of The Grand Parade should be handled by the Main Roads Board. In 1927 the Council petitioned the Main Roads Board to reclassify The Grand Parade as a main road. At this point the MRB declined to act, protesting that it had more important projects to prioritise. It claimed there insufficient funds to proceed at this stage, although it would be considered at a future date as part of a plan to construct a main road connecting Botany Road and the Princes Highway.<sup>53</sup>



Photographic evidence shows that Thomas Saywell planted the first Norfolk Island pines in the area in front of his New Brighton Hotel in the mid-1880s and the park was progressively planted with hundreds of the majestic trees. They had also been grown successfully around the Prince of Wales Hotel at Sandringham since the early 1870s. Most of the original pines planted by Saywell were destroyed by raging gales, but others were the victims of road development.<sup>54</sup>

**Norfolk pine tree-planting ceremony at Brighton 1932. Another 50 pines were planted along the beachfront in 1938.**<sup>55</sup> Photo: Bayside Council Library

The Main Roads Board saw a pressing need to widen The Grand Parade in 1931. Rockdale Council resisted widening it on the western side, as this would mean the loss of many trees, prompting a revision by the Board to widen the eastern side. The matter appeared to be resolved, but the following year the Board decided to knock down a series of 40-year-old pine trees along General Holmes Drive and the Grand Parade to facilitate widening of the road from President Avenue to Bay street, by 14 feet, to a total width of 80 feet.

The move was vigorously opposed by local residents, Rockdale aldermen, and the Council Engineer, who described it as a "wanton act of desecration."<sup>56 57</sup> Eventually the project went ahead with Council constructing the roadworks and the Board paying the costs, to everyone's satisfaction.<sup>58</sup>

The Department of Main Roads tried again to demolish 21 Norfolk Pines for a planned widening of The Grand Parade in 1977. The bureaucrats wanted to resume a 4-metre-wide strip of Cook Park between Bruce Street and The Boulevard, to enable a right-turn lane into Bay Street. The trees had become synonymous with Brighton and Ramsgate, and essential to the amenity and ambience of the area. An outraged Alderman Rae declared it, "the greatest act of proposed vandalism to be perpetrated on this municipality", while Alderman Whiteoak described it as "desecration" and the council unanimously rejected the idea. The Bay Street turn was eventually achieved without sacrificing the trees.<sup>59</sup>

There are always residents who consider trees an obstruction to their sea views, and in 1933, many locals were outraged when an unidentified neighbour used disinfectant to poison seven Norfolk Island Pines along the Parade.<sup>60</sup> However, over the years, most residents became passionate and highly protective of the 850 Norfolk Pines and Cook Pines situated in Cook Park along The Grand Parade.

The majestic trees averaged 20-30 metres high, with a 5-metre spread of canopy and a trunk girth of around 450-750 cm. In 2005 some trees were leaning at an alarming angle, although arguably still healthy. Cook Pines are naturally quite flexible and can easily bear the weight and loading on their stem.

However, councils get nervous about the possibility of being sued for negligence. Some councillors, concerned the pines might fall and crush someone, argued for lopping them, while others disagreed strongly.

Two arborists were called in. Their reports were perhaps a little ambiguous, stating that the trees were reasonably healthy, but they would probably have to be removed if their health declined. One encouragingly pointed out that,

‘Cook Pines (*Araucaria columnaris*) are known to grow with a lean to the north-east to optimise solar access, however in instances where Cook Pines grow in close proximity to each other the lean can be more pronounced.’

The other concluded,

‘The existing site and environmental growing conditions are most likely the primary reason for poor health and vigour of the Norfolk Island Pines. The Cook Pines are affected to a lesser degree. If the health (vigour) and condition of the Norfolk Island Pines continues to decline their eventual removal would seem a foregone conclusion. This would likely occur within 10-15 years...the Cook Pines are quite mature and despite the poor growing environment are displaying generally good vigour. These trees may have as long as 50 years where they can be retained as useful amenity trees’

A third arborist declared in 2007, that in his opinion the pines were probably suffering a little from the drought, but an inclining tree trunk and thinning of the lower foliage was quite typical of the Cook Pine species and they were generally in good health.<sup>61</sup>

In October 2007 councillors were still discussing the apparent decline of the trees. The Manager - Technical Services, William Woodcock, produced an arborist’s report advising that there was some deterioration in the health of the pines, which could be ameliorated by fertilisation and aeration of the soil in the root zone. The specialist consulting firm used a Sonic Tomograph test to confirm the extent of the cavity and decay in one of the trees. They attached sound emitters to the tree trunk and measured the velocity of sound waves passing through the tree. A computer then extrapolated the data to produce graphics showing areas of decay. It was stated that the pocket of decay in one of the trees was small, but fungal growth can exacerbate the problem, and therefore careful monitoring was required.<sup>62</sup>

Another specialist report, dated September 2007, stated that the trees’ life expectancy varied from 15-40 years.

‘Whilst both trees have suffered decline health, there are no visible structural defects and therefore the trees are not considered hazardous. Remedial action as specified should improve the health of the trees over the long term and extend their remaining Safe Useful

Life Expectancy.... It should be noted that the current poor health of the trees does not render these trees hazardous.’<sup>63</sup>

Despite this, some councillors unequivocally considered that the trees were a menace to life and property and should be replaced with mature size pines.

Three councillors voted to monitor the trees over a 5-year period while remediation was carried out, but they were overruled (8 to 3) by the majority, who wanted the seven trees cut down and replaced with mature trees.

The debate was ongoing in May 2008, when the Manager - Development Assessment & Compliance, Greg Raft, presented his report. He pointed out that the 25 to 30-metre-high trees were growing close to the kerb of The Grand Parade, and that the root systems of most of the trees were covered in pavement, asphalt and concrete.

However, he also rated the importance of the trees in the local landscape;

‘The mature Cook Pines and Norfolk Island Pines authenticate the northern portion of Cook Park of its landmark qualities, forming a distinctive gateway to the beachside suburbs. They are a dominant element in the landscape and significantly contribute to the visual character of the locality.’

Council had also commissioned a Heritage Report prepared by Garry Stanley Heritage Architect and Jane Rothschild of Dickson Rothschild. The report addressed the historical significance of the trees, noting,

‘The Grand Parade in the Brighton- Le-Sands town centre has a distinct character formed by the hard edge of the unit development on the western side and Cook Park on the eastern side with its planting of pine trees and filtered views through the tree trunks to Botany Bay and the heads to the Tasman Sea....The streetscape of Princess Street is characterised by the avenue of trees on the south side contrasting with the built form on the northern side. The trees link visually with the Cook Park pine plantings. The most important part of Princess Street however is the view to the east across Botany Bay to the heads framed by the Norfolk Island and leaning Cook Pines.’

A risk assessment was commissioned by council, received 13 March 2008. The report naturally assessed the consequences of a falling tree as catastrophic, with potential loss of life, major property damage and risk of litigation, while acknowledging that was not possible to ascertain absolutely the probability of the trees toppling. It admitted that heritage and aesthetic values were relevant but asserted, not unexpectedly,

‘The assessment should be conducted conservatively, and greater consideration is given to safety issues rather than matters of amenity or aesthetic appearance.’

Their final recommendation was to remove the trees within two years, replacing them with mature specimens.<sup>64</sup>

The basis of their argument was disputed by Rockdale Council's Manager Operations on 8 April 2008,

‘We advise that, in our opinion, a number of the assumptions upon which the likelihood of failure has been determined are questionable.’

Despite this evidence, after some debate at a Development Application hearing, the committee voted on and carried the motion; moved by Councillors Green and Saravinovski, to cut down five



pine trees and to prepare a Conservation Management Plan for Cook Park which would include a policy for the gradual replacement of the pine trees over time. <sup>65</sup>

From the anguished arguments of the local residents, one gains the impression that council were anti-trees. This view needs to be balanced with the understanding that council officers proposed that the trees would be replaced by semi-mature Norfolk Island Pines, planted in an improved position.

Eventually, in November, after about two years of dithering, the council decided to remove them for health and safety reasons, against the wishes of the local populace and the advice of the arborists. They had effectively painted themselves into a corner. Having commissioned a risk assessment, which predictably suggested that in the unlikely event of the trees toppling, people could be seriously injured or killed, they were now obliged to follow its advice. If by remote chance a tree crashed to the ground, the council would be culpable for damages, with lawyers able to offer damning evidence that the risk assessment recommended the tree removal.

Afraid of protests, the council acted surreptitiously to have them cut down in the dead of night. Whilst it is true that they could rightly claim that the demolition needed to be at night because the Roads and Traffic Authority would only permit partial closure of The Grand Parade between dusk and dawn, there was skulduggery involved. The council notified the Novotel Hotel management of the removal date, because the operation of their underground car park would be severely restricted and their guests' rest would be disturbed. Council didn't inform the local residents, who woke to the sound of chainsaws and heavy machinery. It was too late. There was nothing they could do to prevent desecration of their beloved trees. <sup>66</sup>

This was not the end of the saga. The press indicated that local campaigner Peter Olsen had reported deterioration of the trees' health to council, concerned that they were rotting, suggesting that little or no action was apparently taken. Public outcry again ensued over neglect of the trees when another tree was felled in June 2009, and it was found to be almost completely hollow. The complex operation took three hours from midnight and had to be repeated three times over the following month when additional trees were discovered to be diseased. <sup>67</sup> In August 2013 three more pines near the Novotel overpass were removed due to dieback. Although the residents were alarmed at this state of affairs, and Olsen again accused the council of neglect, in fact these seven trees represented a fraction of the Norfolk and Cook Pines scattered along an 8 km stretch of coastline in Cook Park. <sup>68</sup>

The trees were also vulnerable to pests and diseases. In 2006 a massive mealy bug infestation attacked the trees, covering them in white flakes and a sticky mess. Local residents wanted council to spray the trees, to prevent the bugs spreading to their own gardens, but council gardeners were reluctant to do so. Destroying the bugs with chemical sprays would also kill their major predator, the lady bird beetle. Eventually, they selectively sprayed the most vulnerable trees, effectively curbing the problem. <sup>69</sup>

## Hazards on The Grand Parade

In October 1933 The Grand Parade was declared a Highway from Brighton Le Sands to Ramsgate. It was officially opened by the Minister for Local Government Mr. Spooner. A large procession afterwards traversed the route along the shores of Botany Bay, accompanied by cheering bystanders.<sup>70</sup>



**Opening of the new Highway at Grand Parade, 1933.**  
Photo: Sydney Mail

The Council was so proud of its new expensive, upmarket Highway, that it declared the area from President to Ramsgate Avenue a 'brick' area, refusing permission for any further weatherboard cottages to be erected on this stretch of road.<sup>71</sup>

The area was moving upward in its attractiveness and pricing, with real estate agents boasting of Council investments;

'Recent attractions to this locality are the £40,000 spent on the Council's baths, dressing shed, promenade, etc., at Brighton-le-Sands; 79 acres of Cook Park Recreation Area upon which £6000 is now being spent in improvements; Doll's Point Park recently acquired and now being developed at a cost of £4500 and last of all, the splendid recently opened Marine Drive, the grand parade of nearly one mile, between Brighton-le-Sands and Ramsgate, constructed at a cost of over £10,000.'<sup>72</sup>



**Shady Nook brochure 1922 promotes the proximity of the beach.** Photo: State Library NSW

Of course, one of the delights of a waterside recreation area is a large expanse of sandy beach. Although difficult to imagine now, when the area is mostly levelled and covered with housing, Botany Bay was rimmed by sand dunes.

What the real estate brochures failed to mention, was that the new Highway was not immune to effects of sand drift and was periodically un-trafficable. Sand would regularly blow across the road, particularly at the northern end between Bay and Bestic Streets. Despite the road running along seven miles of beachfront there was no promenade or seawall to control erosion and sand-drift, problems which would continue for decades.<sup>73</sup>



**Sand Dunes on Grand Parade. Undated, but probably circa 1930s. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

A deputation had been formed in 1930 to approach Rockdale Council with a request to build a retaining wall to prevent the drift. The local taxpayers' rates could not cover the estimated £200,000 needed to construct such a huge seawall. At one point, Council constructed a galvanised iron fence, but the sand simply built up behind it and buried the fence.<sup>74</sup> During the Depression the government had used Relief Labour to level some of the sandhills along the Bay, but the huge undertaking had not been completed. The best Council could offer was turfing the area once the sandhills had been completely excavated.<sup>75</sup>

Residents were still complaining in 1940. The new concrete footpath was three feet under sand, and the Council had not yet actioned its pledge to complete the sandhill removal or completely turf the sandhills. The Aldermen were sick of the complaints. An unsympathetic Alderman Fred Beehag complained the residents were too lazy to shovel sand from their own driveways, and furthermore,

"If people choose to live in unsheltered areas near beaches they should be prepared to put up with the obvious inconveniences."<sup>76</sup>

This issue would crop up again and again over succeeding years, with the Council at a loss as to how to resolve the issue permanently, although by the mid-1940s the sandhills around the Ramsgate end had been more or less levelled and grass was growing well along this section.<sup>77</sup>

Sand was not the sole road hazard. There were 11,587 road accidents in NSW in the year ending 1937-38, of which 92.1 % involved motor vehicles (cars, lorries, solo and pillion motor cycles), but there were other hazards, including collisions with trams, trolley buses, scooters and bilycarts, horses, horse-drawn vehicles, pedestrians, dogs and cats.<sup>78</sup>

As private vehicle affordability increased, an rising number of traffic accidents occurred along The Grand Parade, involving crashes between cars, trucks, motor cycles and pedestrians, who, in the absence of a concrete footpath, often walked on the roadway. Adding to the chaos were the trams turning from Bay Street into The Grand Parade without sounding warning bells,<sup>79</sup> and the hazards of poor street lighting on the busy road.<sup>80</sup>

Like much of outer suburbia, Brighton was poorly lit in the early 1900s. Rockdale Council requested the Gas Company erect a street lamp on the corner of The Avenue and Bruce Street in 1909, but they refused, although they later relented and offered to erect one on The Grand Parade.<sup>81</sup> The provision of street lighting continued in a haphazard fashion for several decades. The one exception was the Princes Highway, through Rockdale town centre, which had become a so-called 'White Way' in 1924 when fitted with 75-watt lamps suspended over the roadway every 30 feet (9 m).<sup>82</sup> It was considered that The Grand Parade did not warrant such innovative lighting for many more years to come.

Although the Brighton Lifesavers didn't patrol at night, in 1924 they proposed that Rockdale Council should install lighting along the beach to counter loutish behaviour and peeping toms.<sup>83</sup>

The aldermen considered that electric light would encourage the dangerous practice of night bathing, with increased probability of shark attacks and so refused the request. Alderman Toyer succinctly expressed the views of the council when he exclaimed, "Only Idiots would indulge in such a dangerous pastime." <sup>84</sup>

In September 1938 there were only 1,381 electric streetlights in the Rockdale council area, rising to a meagre 1,514 streetlights in 1941. Rather than engage in a major lighting project to illuminate a given area or street, the authorities added a pathetic one or two lights at a time to each district in an ad hoc fashion. Electric lights in both street and home were considered a novelty of topical interest for several decades. As late as the 1950s, local newspapers such as the Hurstville Propeller reported weekly on the number of new streetlights and electrical connections to homes in the area.

However, by the end of 1938 St George County Council was persuaded to schedule the progressive replacement of street lights on The Grand Parade with the new, efficient mercury vapour type, with its distinctive blue-green light. <sup>85</sup>

In wartime the paucity of streetlights was exacerbated when the government limited equipment supplies, and the transportation facilities needed to implement further electrification. <sup>86</sup> Wartime also saw an increase in road accidents at night, as the newly installed lights along Botany Bay had to be switched off to prevent Japanese aircraft targeting the bay. <sup>87</sup>

Poor lighting was only part of the hazard of driving on the road. As cars improved, speed increasingly became an issue. The Commissioner for Main Roads H.H. Newell spoke at the 1936 Shires Association annual conference on the difficulties of designing roads for modern traffic, observing foresightedly that,

"We do not know what the speed of the motor car will be 12 months hence, but it will be a great worry to the highway engineer. The speed problem is world-wide. You will have motor cars here before long with a cruising speed of 80 miles [128km] and 90 miles [145km] an hour, and capable of travelling 120 miles [193km] to 130 miles [210km] an hour." <sup>88</sup>

Speeds of 80 miles per hour were many years off. Council petitioned the Police Department that year to reduce the speed limit on The Grand Parade to 20 miles [32km] per hour. <sup>89</sup> The police spokesman responded that they had no power to do so, as speed limit regulations had been abolished. Consequently, officers were monitoring the road and taking people to court for negligent driving, rather than speeding offences. <sup>90</sup>

The issue of road speed was hotly debated. The Road Safety Conference held in Sydney later that year was divided in opinion as to the desirability of following the UK example of imposing speed limits. Some, including the Commissioner of Police, proposed 30 mph (48 km) in built up areas and 50 mph (80 km) elsewhere, while others such as the Royal Automobile Club vociferously opposed this on the grounds that,

'The majority of accidents were caused by a handful of reckless drivers who were bringing reputable drivers into disrepute. If the police did more to enforce the existing laws amending legislation would not be necessary.' <sup>91</sup>

Road speed limits were finally introduced in January 1938. <sup>92</sup>

## Social housing development

By the late 1930s Rockdale Council was giving permission to an increasing number of developers to build unit blocks of flats along the Parade, which were considered ideal for a beachside setting.<sup>93</sup> As wartime impacted construction of homes in the 1940s, the government was eager to support construction of multiple unit dwellings in order to make the best use of building materials, which were in short supply.



Looking north along Grand Parade in the 1930s there is sparse settlement along the sand dunes. These photos show both the "Old Brighton Baths" (built by Thomas Saywell) and the "New Brighton Baths" built by Rockdale Municipal Council.



Looking south along Grand Parade in the 1930s.

Photos: Bayside Council Library

Not all residents were part of the real estate boom of this recreation paradise along Botany Bay. Unemployment reached a peak in 1932 when 29 per cent of Australians were officially out of work. The working class was the hardest hit. There was no unemployment benefit, so loss of a job during the Depression meant no income to pay rent, and consequently many people were evicted from their homes and left destitute. These people were often vilified by locals as bludgers or drunkards, but many respectable families desperately sought refuge in the camps that sprung up in various Sydney locations.<sup>94</sup>





**North Brighton Unemployed Camp.** Photo: Bayside Council Library

The undeveloped land at the northern end of Lady Robinsons Beach was taken over by people rendered homeless. In stark contrast to prosperous Brighton Le Sands, the North Brighton Unemployed Camp, known as 'Happy Valley', was located in the sand hills along Cook Park at Kyeemagh, to the north of where Cooks River now enters Botany Bay. Rough makeshift shacks littered the sandhills, constructed from scavenged scraps of corrugated iron, hessian, wood and even cardboard. Walls of calico cloth flourbags were painted with a mixture of lime and fat boiled up in salt water to make them weatherproof. The roofs consisted of corrugated-iron sheets and the sand floors were covered with a 'carpet' of more flourbags.<sup>95</sup>

Local charities staged fundraisers to assist the poverty stricken, but charity alone was insufficient to combat the problem. Post-war government policies evolved to deal with the housing shortfall. Investment along The Grand Parade was no longer confined to the private market. The government began to develop low-cost rental properties to combat the desperate situations confronting numerous Australian families.

In the wake of the Depression, the Housing Improvement Board was established under the Housing Improvement Act (No.59, 1936), with the goal of raising the standard and availability of housing. This was followed by the Housing Act of 1941 (Act no. 65), which set up the basis for the provision of public housing in NSW. Although a statutory body was created the following year to replace the Housing Improvement Board, wartime delayed significant policy development and implementation. The NSW Housing Commission was initially tasked to investigate methods of providing adequate housing at reasonable rentals and to provide affordable housing for the unemployed.

During the war it focused much of its attention on the provision of housing for munitions workers. Consequently, it did not commence effective operations until the war ended in 1945. When the Commission began its work in earnest, it selected tenants based on need, inability to afford properties on the rental market, overcrowding or living in properties which had been condemned.<sup>96</sup>

Now that the war was over, there was will amongst Labour Government politicians to address the severe housing shortage for low-income families and to rectify the appalling housing conditions endured by thousands of people in the wake of the Depression and the War. The government was in full flight, investing in public housing in a big way. Ballots were held for 40 Housing Commission homes in Rockdale in July 1948 and in October at Palings Concert Hall in the city, to choose tenants for an additional 200 properties in the St George area. These events were part of a program of 13,500 new dwellings being built across the city.<sup>97 98 99</sup>

In 1947 Rockdale Council granted the Housing Commission approval to build a three-story, 30-unit block of one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments on The Grand Parade at Brighton Le Sands,

bounded by Duke Street and Brighton Boulevard. The location was considered ideal due to its proximity to the tram line and the Brighton Baths. It was one of the first public housing developments in the area.

The Commission's innovative social housing program was still a novelty enough to generate excitement amongst the large crowd which turned up on a damp Friday in October 1948 to witness the dedication of the foundation stone for Curtin Court on The Grand Parade at Brighton. Progress was steady, with a completion date just in time for Christmas the following year.



**Opening of Curtin Court, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1949**

Photo: State Library of NSW <sup>100</sup>

In his unveiling address, Clive Evatt, Minister for Housing, claimed that the Housing Commission was building over 100 houses per week, both directly and through sponsorship programs. He optimistically repeated the government's election pledge that 'every family with a housing need would be adequately housed'. The Commission had recently built 500 houses in the Sutherland and Rockdale council areas, with another 600 under construction and a

further 350 under contract for imminent commencement. Houses were reserved for families with young children, while flats such as Curtin Court were offered to those with teenage children.

By today's design standards the building appears squat and a little grim with its heavy brick façade, but Rockdale Mayor Norman Guess acclaimed the building design as 'splendid'. The building's architect, Walter Bunning, declared that NSW Housing Commission properties were the equal of any in the world. <sup>101</sup>



**'Curtin Court', corner of The Grand Parade and The Boulevard, Brighton Le Sands, early 1970s. It was designed by architects Bunning and Madden, built by C. Thompson, and named in honour of war-time prime minister John Curtin. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

Public Housing was a relatively new concept, so the opening ceremony was graced by the presence of the Federal Attorney-General,

Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Herbert Vere Evatt (M.H.R. for Barton), <sup>102</sup> Minister for Housing Clive Evatt (M.L.A. for Hurstville), Alderman P.J. Ferry (Chairman of the St George County Council), Mr W. York (President of the Brighton Le Sands Progress Association) and similar political luminaries. Dr Evatt's wife, Mary Alice Evatt, officially opened the flats. Mrs Evatt spoke at length, reminded the 200-strong crowd that Curtin was Prime Minister at the time when the Commonwealth and State Housing Agreement was drawn up, prompting the construction of Curtin Court and thousands of Housing Commission homes around the country. <sup>103</sup> <sup>104</sup>





**New units on The Grand Parade, date unknown. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

The dark brick block of units of Curtin Court stands in stark contrast to the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century glass and concrete buildings that line the bay today.

In 2016, Housing Commission tenants were concerned that the Coalition government was pursuing a policy of selling valuable harbourside social housing sites, such as the Sirius building in The Rocks, to developers, and allocating the money for construction of new social housing on the city outskirts. Long-term residents of these properties were often relocated in remote suburbs, where they were forced to create a new life and form new friendships far from their established communities.

The Curtin Court residents could see the distinct possibility of the State Government selling their homes, due to the building's desirable bayside location. They became anxious for the future of the building and its tenants.

Although there was a mix of ages and situations amongst its tenants, many of them were aged or infirm and such a move would be traumatising. The Department of Family and Community Services was upbeat, with talk of the Communities Plus program 'redeveloping some under-utilised sites, where we can get more social and private housing, to create a mixed community with better social outcomes.' Despite the Curtin Court residents' fears, in 2016 there was apparently no plan in hand to sell the land to private developers. <sup>105</sup>

## Saywell's Terraces, decay and rebirth

By 2005 Saywell's Terraces were a shadow of their former selves. Only 5 terraces remained of the original 12 built by Thomas Saywell in the 1890s on the corner of The Grand Parade and Princess Street, and where he had lived until his death in 1928. Although heritage listed in the Local Environmental Plan 2000 (LEP 2000), they were a decaying, sad remnant of their former glory, with rotting timbers and pernicious attacks of mould. Councillor Gary Green called it, "An ugly blight on the face of Brighton," claiming further that, "Saywell would turn in his grave if he thought his relatives would have to maintain them solely because a vocal minority in the community overly cherish nostalgia. He built them to turn a profit, not for posterity." Green produced a document titled 'Heritage Listings Often Just Façade', advocating a review of the Heritage Act and removal of the burden on owners to preserve the terraces and other similar heritage buildings.<sup>106</sup>

The late Harry Seidler (1923-2006), architect of Australia Square, Grosvenor Place, MLC Centre and Blues Point Tower, and arguably Australia's greatest post-modern architect, formed an architectural design firm; Harry Seidler and Associates. A partner in this company, Harry Feiner, designed a residential development which would incorporate and preserve the terraces, one of which was owned by Brighton International land developer Rudy Sasic. The new multi-story building would sit behind the existing terraces, elevated three stories to enable light to reach the rear of the historic buildings. A sinuous white, curved façade fronted an 11-story apartment block, which featured an extravagant glass-bottomed pool above the lobby ceiling.

Local residents were concerned that the structure would overshadow the beach and voiced their opinion in 24 submissions to council. Moreover, although Seidler and Associates were keen to preserve the heritage buildings, the ultra-modern design was not considered sympathetic to the adjoining classic 19<sup>th</sup> century terraces.<sup>107</sup>

The residents no doubt rejoiced that a not insignificant glitch to the developer's plan was the need for re-zoning from the existing Residential 2(c) under LEP 2000. The developer's request was brought before council in December 2005, but still unresolved by the following March.<sup>108</sup> Seidler's claimed,

'The proposal will facilitate the construction of an iconic building as proposed in DA2005/538 of high design quality and architectural interest...The scale of a 13-storey development will be consistent with the surrounding 14 storey Novotel Hotel and 8 storey residential flat buildings, and will not be overbearing or out of character.'

They noted that a 13-story development was essential to fund the restoration of the adjacent terraces, as the sale of units in a 5-story block (permitted by the current zoning) would raise insufficient money.

The application was accompanied by a Heritage Impact Assessment prepared by Graham Brooks and Associates, which confidently asserted,

'On balance, it is considered that the impact of the proposal on the heritage significance of Nos. 64-68 The Grand Parade, on the streetscape in general, and neighbouring heritage items is not only within acceptable limits, but will make a positive contribution to the foreshore of Brighton-le-Sands.'

The Manager - Urban Planning, Alexander Sarno, believed in light of the council's Destinations Rockdale plan, which was being concurrently formulated, the development would most likely be approved if Seidler's proceeded with their application. A motion was passed asking the architects to submit full designs for council's consideration, while a draft amendment to the Rockdale LEP 2000

was prepared, which would allow the height restriction to be altered in the developer's favour.<sup>109</sup> A motion to suppress the change to the height restrictions was again lost in February 2006,<sup>110</sup> but the matter was taken out of the council's hands. Rockdale MP and NSW State Planning Minister Frank Sartor was not about to let the matter drop.

Despite the favourable Heritage Report, Sartor described the design as a "mangled car crash." Finally, after much public discussion, in August 2006, he vetoed re-zoning the area from 5 stories to 13 stories, which effectively blocked the development. He cited the substantial height increase and the lack of context with the Victorian terraces as his reasoning, but one must wonder if ultimately it was the modern design itself which so offended him<sup>111</sup>

Perhaps ironically, by claiming he was acting to the benefit of the terraces, because the modern building was out of character with its historic neighbour, Sartor condemned the terraces to further decay, denying them the vital investment dollars needed to restore the historic structures.

The developer lost patience with the convoluted process and the constant requests for expensive reports, revisions and new development applications, not to mention PR battles with the Minister. They advised they no longer wished to proceed and an opportunity to save the terraces from further decay was lost.<sup>112</sup>

It took another decade before the issue was revived. In March 2016 Rockdale Council resolved to support a re-zoning application with the aim to, 'enable the development of a landmark building incorporating adaptive reuse of existing heritage structures.' Consequently, they sought a Gateway Determination from the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE), which was received in May 2017.<sup>113</sup> After years of haggling, the land was finally rezoned by Bayside Council and gazetted on 25 June 2018.

The building was by now in terrible shape, with loose bricks and a cracked facade, requiring stabilisation with reinforcing framework. To improve its viability as a development opportunity, the maximum permitted building height had been increased from 13 metres to 36 metres and the maximum floor space ratio from 1:1 to 4:1.

The council invited three architects to submit plans for restoration of the original terraces and construction a building of between 11 and 12 floors. The developer would fund the competitive process, which would be judged by a panel of 5 architects on both its contemporary and heritage merits. The Saywell Terraces would be retail or commercial in usage, with residential accommodation towering behind them.<sup>114</sup>

In 2019 the plans for the terraces are still in limbo. It remains to be seen whether the architects can address the issues to the satisfaction of heritage experts, council and residents.

## Transport to the seaside

Public transport to The Grand Parade was initially supplied by the tram built by Thomas Saywell from Rockdale Station down Bay Street to Brighton Le Sands, to allow city dwellers to easily access his baths and hotel. Saywell operated the Rockdale Tramway from 1885 to 1900 by steam traction and with electric cars from 1900 to 1914, along the 1.8km route. By 1906 it was carrying 150,000 passengers per year from Rockdale to the seaside.<sup>115</sup> When his lease expired, the NSW Government Tramways took over the business, running the Rockdale to Brighton Le Sands trams as part of the public transport network.



Poster advertising Saywell's Tram. Photo: Bayside Council Library<sup>116</sup>

The service was so popular that on one particularly busy summer Sunday in January 1929, 53 scheduled tram departures carried 13,720 passengers from Rockdale to Brighton. Each departing tram was crammed to capacity, leaving hundreds waiting at the terminus for the next departure. Consequently, in March 1929 the line was extended 20 chains (402 m) along the Esplanade (later to become part of The Grand Parade), from Bay Street south to Teralba Rd, costing £5,848, but it remained a single line track. A further 8-block extension along the Esplanade to Barton Street was considered, but the one-mile extension would attract the same basic fare as the existing track, and the authorities did not consider the additional expenditure to be a sound business case, suggesting that people were quite capable of walking the extra distance.



Tram tracks along The Grand Parade, Brighton Le Sands, date unknown. Photo: Bayside Council Library

As the population of the new suburban subdivisions expanded, and the beachside amenities attracted increasing crowds, the Rockdale to Brighton tramway operated at a profit for most of its working life, bringing residents, day trippers and holiday makers to the accessible seaside of Botany Bay.

The profit for the financial years were: 1926-1927 £3,924; 1927-1928 £7,427; 1928-1929 £5,181. The popular seaside run carried 2,020,482 passengers in 1927-28, rising to a peak of 2,187,230 in 1929-30, gradually declining to 1,831,025 in 1931-32 as the effects of the depression were felt<sup>117</sup>



Trams persisted until Saturday 3 September 1949, when the last tram trundled along the 1 mile 40 chains (2.4km) track from Rockdale to Brighton Le Sands, after 63 years operation. The rolling stock was absorbed by the Sydney tram system.

A tram and trolley bus on The Grand Parade, at Brighton Le Sands Terminus, near Teralba Road, 1949. Photo: Bayside Council Library

The area was still served by trolley buses which had been introduced in July 1937, powered by overhead wires like a tram, but without the need for tracks. They ran from Kogarah to Sans Souci, Ramsgate Avenue, Sandringham and Dolls Point, a total route mileage of 6 miles 32 chains (10.3km),<sup>118</sup> carrying an impressive 3,694,552 passengers with earnings of £34,450/17s/5d in its initial year (ending 30 June 1938).<sup>119</sup> It lost £7,831 in the 1937-38 financial year, however this was favourably comparable to the previous steam tram service, which had lost £9,213 in the 1936-37 financial year.

120



**Police Call Box on The Grand Parade, scene of a macabre accident in Brighton Le Sands. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

The Grand Parade may have been swarming with cars by mid-century, but traditional forms of transport existed alongside modern vehicles. A freak accident occurred near the Police Call Box on Grand Parade in 1952. In a period where few people had private phones and public phone boxes in the streets were few and far between, a Police Call Box could be used by the public to call the police to an incident.

A 10-year-old girl named Yvonne Murdoch was riding her horse along the street when it became skittish, causing her to dismount. Two witnesses rushed over to assist the child control the horse, which then collapsed in convulsions. Tentatively touching the horse's body, they were astounded to receive a sharp warning shock of electricity, and within moments the unfortunate horse died. Subsequent investigation by the Sydney County Council established that an electrical wire ran through iron pipes under the road, from a fuse box to the police call box. The wire short circuited, electrifying the pipes. Apparently, the horse was electrocuted when its iron horse-shoe touched the electrified conduit.<sup>121</sup>

Eventually buses ran the length of the road. In 2019, bus route 303 runs the length of The Grand Parade, connecting Sans Souci with Redfern, but from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, private car ownership increasingly impacted on both the road and the residents. Initially this was simply a parking issue, but by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century there was an additional problem with the behaviour of young drivers, known colloquially as 'hoons'.

With the increase in development and the popularity of the area for aquatic sports and family picnics in Cook Park, parking along The Grand Parade became an issue as early as 1930, when visitors were charged to park at the popular swimming beaches. Residents asked council to forgo the fees, as it was felt the cost was deterring visitors from the area. The situation did not improve. The police asked council to ban parking on the Western side of the road near the Ramsgate Baths in 1934.<sup>122</sup>





**1949 Cars and trams share the road on the intersection of Grand Parade and Bay Street. No clearways were needed in the forties. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century The Grand Parade had become a major thoroughfare to the south, and clearways were installed during peak hours to improve traffic flow. It had little effect, as poor signage remained an issue. It only took one or two cars parked illegally to cause a major traffic snarl during the morning or

evening peak, but most days it was more likely to be 10 cars, which took hours to remove by tow truck.<sup>123</sup>

Local resident and campaigner Peter Olsen was convinced that people were being caught unawares because they didn't see the sparsely erected signage. He petitioned for improved signage, taking his cause to The Leader newspaper when he could not get action by either Rockdale Council or the Roads and Traffic Authority. Never one to sit back and give up, he proved his point by installing 30 homemade signs on trees and signposts, warning people that they were in a tow-away zone. The results were startling. Within a couple of days the problem disappeared. The RTA agreed to install new signage.<sup>124</sup>

As cars became faster and young people had more disposable income to indulge in purchasing and modifying sporting cars, there were other, less socially responsible, forms of leisure activity on The Grand Parade. Young hotheads have always loved to race and do burnouts along this tempting, wide straight road. Not only was this dangerous to road users, but local retailers were concerned that families were discouraged from visiting restaurants on the bay due to safety fears.

At one point, gates were installed on Bay Street, which closed on weekend evenings, to prevent cars doing a race circuit. Lateral thinking was applied in 2003 when pink lighting was installed in selected carparks and mellow Barry Manilow music played to discourage restless hooligans from hanging around the area.<sup>125</sup>



**2019 Cars and commercial vehicles jostle for space along The Grand Parade. Photo: Leonie Bell**

Police would periodically implement special operations to curb their dangerous activities. Taskforce Taipan was formed in 2007, with a three-pronged attack from St George Police, the Middle Eastern Organised Crime Squad and the Highway Patrol.<sup>126</sup> This was a city-wide high-visibility operation over several months, that issued several thousand traffic infringement notices and arrested several

hundred offenders, including many on Botany Bay, who viewed the long wide thoroughfare of The Grand Parade as a testosterone-fuelled raceway. Some vehicles were subsequently confiscated.<sup>127</sup>

## Part 2

# Recreation along The Grand Parade

## Saywell's Baths

Saywell's Baths was the first recreational facility on the bay. It enticed thousands of people to take a day trip to Brighton Le Sands for over four decades, from its triumphant opening in October 1886 to its demise in 1928. Although the real estate developers, including Saywell himself, were investing heavily in the land between Rockdale and Botany Bay, the bathing pavilion was the key element that sparked interest in the area, inspiring businessmen to invest in the recreation industry, and positively influencing the growth of the emerging suburb.

The bathing structure was constructed of timber and corrugated iron, encompassing an area of around 250 square feet (23 m<sup>2</sup>), with dressing cubicles arranged along the sides. The enclosure was said to be capable of hosting 1,000 bathers at a time, and around 25,000 bathers patronised the establishment during one particularly busy January.

Naturally, there was no mixed bathing in this period. Scandalously, although it was enclosed from the street, women could still be glimpsed bathing in their modest neck to ankle bathing costumes between 10am and 2pm. The three yards (2.7m) of heavy cotton used to make the costumes was not exactly helpful for the purpose of swimming, but preserved modesty.



**Thomas Saywell's extravagant New Brighton Hotel, Brighton Baths and Brighton Race Course is shown with a skewed perspective, in which The Grand Parade, appears to have more or less disappeared. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

Respectable beach clothing remained an issue for another five decades. In 1928 there were calls for council to introduce ordinances requiring male bathers to wear shorts and women to wear kimonos when purchasing refreshments in the nearby street cafes, while Brighton P & C Association criticised the 'scanty attire' of 'persons undressed on the beach and in motor cars.'<sup>128</sup>

Bathing remained a chaste affair until the late 1930s, with the NSW Amateur Swimming Association rules requiring competitors wear neck to knee bathing costumes. Swimming trunks were increasing in popularity by 1938, forcing the Boy Scouts Association to declare that trunks were banned unless worn with a white singlet for modesty, particularly as an upcoming carnival would boast Girl Guide competitors alongside the Boy Scouts.<sup>129</sup>

Later Saywell modified the pavilion design, offering men only and women only sections to his pool, separated by a promenade pier, and covering a vast 1 ½ acres of beach and water. The facilities offered fresh water showers, hot sea water baths, a refreshment room in which to partake tea, and a boathouse on the northern end.

A famous feature of Saywell's Baths was a prominent sign in huge lettering, painted on the galvanised iron sheets enclosing the women's baths, visible to people walking along the decking

towards the end of the jetty. The message warned, 'Blackguards peep in, gentlemen pass on.' Mixed bathing was introduced in the early days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Saywell's own family enjoyed swimming. His sons were members of the Nautilus Swimming Club based at the baths,<sup>130</sup> and the venue was so popular that the railways ran a special Sunday morning service for city-dwelling early-morning bathers, departing Redfern Station at 6am and returning from Rockdale Station at 8am.

Just as he would elect not to personally manage his hotel, Saywell leased the baths to a series of managers. Charles Lineke ran the baths in 1900. Ten years later, the baths proprietor was James McGrath, followed by Henry Riley in 1915. In 1921 Saywell sold the baths lease to one of the Saywell Terrace tenants, renowned sculler Neil Matterson, who also ran the nearby boatshed for some years.<sup>131</sup>

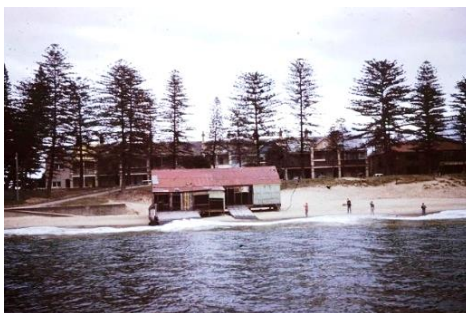


**The Grand Parade at Lady Robinsons Beach, with Thomas Saywell's Brighton Baths, Brighton Le Sands, circa 1910. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

The Saywell Tramway company asphalted a pavement along the beach by the baths. By 1924 this was in poor repair, with Saywell expecting Rockdale Council to maintain the footpath. The Council finally took action to repair the path, but Saywell was outraged when the Council demanded half the cost be reimbursed by the

company for the section directly outside the business property. Saywell argued that they had generously paid for the original work and it was therefore incumbent on the Council to maintain it at ratepayers' cost. Council sought advice from the Local Government Association, who argued dubiously that donating a path to the local community was not in the legal definition of 'paid', as Australia did not operate on a barter system of payment of goods and chattels in kind. They therefore could not claim they had 'paid' for the path in the first place, and the argument was consequently invalidated. Saywell owed them £84.<sup>132</sup>

In June 1927 a company, Brighton Baths Ltd, was formed to acquire the baths, boat shed and refreshment rooms. With an initial investment of £10,000 and shares issued at £1 each, the Company Directors were D. R. M. K. Rogers and C. Fraser, but the venture did not last long.<sup>133</sup>



After Saywell's death, his Baths closed, replaced by the new council-run Brighton Baths (1928) at the end of Bay Street. Although commercial boatsheds continued to operate for some time, the provision of beach amenities shifted from private interests to publicly owned facilities, with the council beginning to provide free amenities at the beach, such as the 1931 picnic shelter. measuring a massive 140 x 30 feet, with revenue-producing structures above.<sup>134</sup>

**The timber boat shed on Lady Robinsons Beach, Brighton Le Sands, with Saywell's Terraces in the background. Photo: Bayside Council Library<sup>135</sup>**



## Pemberton's Baths

The other significant recreational facility along the Grand Parade was Arthur Ashely Pemberton's Ramsgate Baths, which were located at the corner of The Grand Parade and Ramsgate Road (a site now occupied by a Coles Supermarket). The baths opened in 1924 and closed in the late 1960s.



**Well-appointed dressing sheds and a sandy beach at Pemberton's Baths.**

Photo: Bayside Council Library

Owner and operator Arthur Pemberton was an astute businessman who built the baths without assistance from council or its aldermen. Pemberton even lent the council money to build roads in the vicinity of his pool. In later years

Rockdale Council Alderman Peter Depena would state admiringly that Pemberton was one of the men who 'made' Ramsgate. <sup>136</sup>

Arthur Pemberton extended an invitation to the Rockdale Mayor to officiate at the 1924 opening ceremony. When the Aldermen of Rockdale Council were apprised of the Mayor's invitation to this auspicious occasion, there was much revelry in chambers.

Alderman Hattersley joked, "You'll have to appear in a silk swimming costume and take the first dive off the spring board" to which the Mayor Alderman George Fortescue, replied, "I'm afraid I'll not distinguish myself in that respect." Alderman Farrar added swiftly, to much merriment, "But you will have to try, if you don't we'll shove you in." Alderman Hattersley cheekily riposted, "There'll be a high tide after that", causing the council chambers to resound with laughter. <sup>137</sup>

The Baths opened with great fanfare on Saturday 27 September 1924 at a gala in aid of the St George District Hospital, a tradition which would continue for the opening of the season for the next 20 years. <sup>138</sup>

The sun shone brightly on a warm spring day as the crowd was entertained with swimming, diving, life-saving and water polo displays. The NSW Amateur Swimming Association organised races for young swimmers, and the air rang with a selection of merry tunes played by Rockdale Municipal Band. <sup>139</sup> The Mayoress, Mrs Fortescue, cut the ribbon. The hospital was pleased to receive the entire proceeds of the day, £46/15/1/. <sup>140</sup>

The modern baths were the envy of the Sydney swimming world, being constructed of glistening, white-tiled concrete, filled with fresh sea water pumped from Botany Bay. <sup>141</sup> They measured 50 yards (45m) long, 12 yards (11m) wide, 3 ½ feet (1m) at the shallow end and 8 ½ feet (2.5m) at the deep end. An innovative runnel along the length of the pool siphoned off excess water, reducing the rebound of the water agitated by the swimmers. Today, this is considered a standard part of pool design. <sup>142</sup> Diving boards elevated on high-diving platforms provided scope for further water sports for the more daring youngsters.

Unlike the beautiful weather which graced the opening of the pool, rain drenched the spectators at the swimming gala which was held two months later on 1 November, but the downpour did not dampen the spirits of the crowd. Despite the inclement weather, the swimmers were in a festive mood, as the day commenced with a fete and exhibition swim by famous Olympian long-distance



swimmer Andrew 'Boy' Charlton. The champion swimmer was highly complementary of the new facilities,

"They are the best in Australia and very favourable for breaking records. I only hope they build the new baths at Manly on similar lines."<sup>143</sup>

The pool rapidly gained in popularity, opening 6am to 9pm daily, with thousands of people making the trek to Ramsgate by tram on a weekend during the heat of the summer season,<sup>144</sup> and thousands more school children attending swimming carnivals and regional schools' competitions.<sup>145</sup>

There were some proponents of the netted swimming enclosures who preferred the open nature of the waters of Botany Bay, but Pemberton vigorously defended the cleanliness of his pool, assuring the public it was scrubbed four times per week and the sea water replaced every evening, pumped directly from the bay by a 15 horse-power electric pump.<sup>146 147</sup>

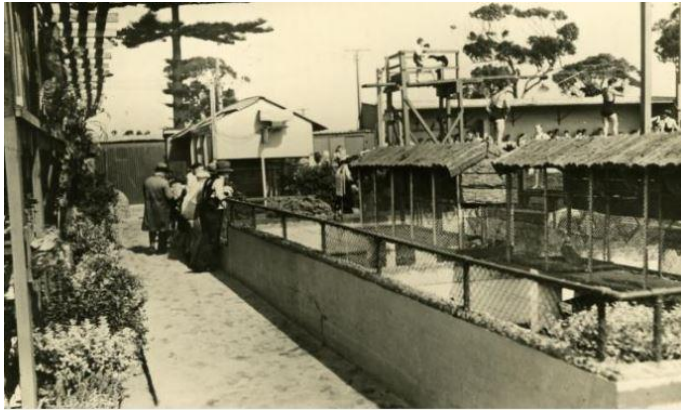
When critics attempted to blacken the reputation of his establishment, Pemberton took action, publishing a public notice in the local newspaper, including a letter from the Rockdale Council Town Clerk endorsing the cleanliness of the pool. He threatened to prosecute anyone spreading false and malicious rumours about his business.<sup>148</sup>

The rumour mill was always ready to grind however, and in 1926 rumour-mongers claimed that pools such as Ramsgate Baths were the source of cases of typhoid, which was patently untrue.<sup>149</sup>

Despite its detractors, the business was so successful that Pemberton built a second pool in 1926, of a similar size to the first.<sup>150</sup> The following year he added a dance pavilion and tea rooms.<sup>151</sup> In 1929 Pemberton commissioned a tiled baby's pool 6 inches (15cm) to 18 inches (45cm) deep, while the older children ran around under a cascade of water issuing forth from the spraying machinery, which was capable of spraying 30,000 gallons of sea water per hour.<sup>152</sup>

Pemberton was an entrepreneur, regularly adding attractions to attract large crowds. In the winter of 1931 he opened the baths for a season of swimming and fishing, just in time for Good Friday when everyone, devout or otherwise, ate fish. The second Olympic pool was filled with four hauls of fish per day, around 2 tons of bream, trevally, flathead, whiting, tailor and mullet. For a small fee of sixpence per day, the fishermen could hire a fishing line and purchase bait. Patrons were encouraged to catch as much fish as they were able and take them home for dinner. To keep the toddlers entertained, he turned the children's pools into an aquarium for the youngsters to view the fish in their 'natural' state. As an added incentive, prizes were offered for the best catch each weekend.<sup>153</sup> In 1937 he took it a step further and instituted a miniature zoo attraction with cute ringtail possums and cheeky monkeys.<sup>155</sup>

The zoo's monkeys made good security guards. During 1948, Olympic hopeful Bruce Bourke worked all day and could not get to the pool for swim training before its daily closure. Concerned that he might not make selection for the team, he soon had a bright idea to jump the fence at night and train alone in the dark. Things did not turn out quite as expected. When he leapt the boundary, he was greeted by the screeches of the alarmed monkeys. The next evening, he returned with a bag of peanuts to successfully bribe his way in. The determined swimmer completed his late-night swim undisturbed. The daring trespass paid off when he gained a place on the London Olympics team.<sup>156</sup>



**Animal enclosures at Pemberton's Baths.** Photo: Bayside Council Library

Pemberton also held a lease on a camping area in Cook Park at Ramsgate. Council asked him to construct lavatory blocks on the site at his own expense in 1935. Aldermen Barton and Depena suggested the council approach Pemberton to ask under what terms he would consider relinquishing his lease on

the picnic area, as they felt it should be under local government control.<sup>157</sup> Later that year he was accused of taking over public land not designated in his lease.<sup>158</sup> Finally, council took over the area at the lease expiration in 1938. Pemberton had erected 60 picnic tables in the park, which were always packed with families enjoying the great outdoors in the summer. When the camping area closed, he generously allowed them to remain in place for the benefit of the local community.<sup>159 160</sup>

Arthur Pemberton was the king of promotional activities. In 1933 he held daily 'Pennies Parties', where he tossed 350 pennies into the air for the children to catch.<sup>161</sup> The youngsters loved the addition of a steep slippery dip, which landed them into the water with a mighty splash. It was claimed to be the first of its kind in the state.<sup>162</sup> When fishermen caught 8 feet (2.5m) long shovel-nosed shark in the Bay, Pemberton purchased it for £2/2, placing it in an aquarium on site. People marvelled at the fish's distinctive, triangular, shovel shaped head and two large dorsal fins on its light brown, faintly spotted body.<sup>163</sup>

The bath's home club, the newly inaugurated Ramsgate Amateur Swimming and Lifesaving Club, already boasted over 50 members,<sup>164 165</sup> and the pool rapidly attracted top-level swimmers and important carnival competitions and championships.<sup>166</sup> Within a short period of time the baths became the competitive headquarters of four additional clubs—North Ramsgate Amateurs and Ramsgate League men's clubs, Ramsgate Amateurs and Ramsgate League ladies' clubs. The clubs described Arthur Pemberton as eager to offer assistance and of a 'bright disposition'.<sup>167</sup>

Many schools, including St George Girls School and St George Boys School, held their annual swimming carnival, at the Baths, with Pemberton regularly sponsoring swimming trophies. He actively supported the Ramsgate Amateur Swimming and Lifesaving Club.<sup>168</sup> The pool hosted weekly club competitions, water polo, diving, life-saving championships, district school's carnivals and championship swimming events, attracting the best swimmers from around Sydney for the inter-club competitions.



**11 October 1931, Baptism at Ramsgate Baths.** Photo: The Sun  
169

In 1931 Ramsgate Baths was the setting for a full-immersion baptism ceremony conducted by the Assemblies of God Church, which had recently opened its first church in Sydney at Rockdale. Both fully clothed church members and bathers in swimming costumes lined the pool to observe the white-robed baptismal candidates being immersed in the water.

Although the Baptist denomination had practiced adult immersion since the 17th century, adult baptism was still a novelty in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The local newspapers considered this a rather unusual event, especially as it was to be held in a public place rather than a church.<sup>170</sup>

A similar event held in Newcastle the following year drew forth accusation and protest from the both the established churches and the Newcastle Council, who called it a 'travesty'.<sup>171 172 173</sup> In contrast, there was barely a ripple of comment following the Brighton baptism ceremony, although admittedly this was a privately-owned establishment rather than a council run swimming baths.

Pemberton's agreement to allow the ceremony at Ramsgate demonstrates how open-minded he was, as this was a relatively controversial move. Alternatively, perhaps Pemberton simply considered any publicity was good publicity.

Pemberton was a philanthropic, generous man who demonstrated exemplary civic pride and community spirit. He supplied his function hall for numerous community meetings and opened the baths venue free of charge for many carnivals including a fundraiser organised by the Scarborough Ward Unemployed Relief Association. The event opened spectacularly with Stan Thomas parachuting from a plane at 10,000 feet to make a notable entrance to the site. Unfortunately, he missed the drop zone by 200m, landing in the swamp with a 32-foot (10m) spread of silk billowing around him. Undeterred, the crowd sallied forth to meet him on the ground and formed a procession back to the baths to meet the Mayor, Alderman Barton.<sup>174</sup>

Children rushed around clamouring for sweets and toffee apples, while adults purchased tickets for a spin of the wheel, hoping to win aluminium products, chocolates, or groceries for the pantry. Contestants vied for bingo prizes or competed in informal games such as the balloon basket race, where entrants inflated a balloon then batted it into a bucket placed some distance away.<sup>175</sup>

Pemberton's hall was also offered without fee for a weekly Thursday night dance in aid of Scarborough Ward Unemployed Relief Association, which was extremely active and inventive in organising a proliferation of fundraising events. The money raised at these evenings was used to subsidise a wage for men undertaking Relief Employment activities for Rockdale Council. In this way the community benefited from projects such as laying footpaths or removal of sand from the dunes, while enjoying a variety of local entertainment options, and feeling a sense of pride that they were contributing to the relief of families suffering hardship during the Depression.<sup>176</sup>

Pemberton also supported Cudgelo, the Junior Red Cross seaside home located near his own home in Alfred Street, Ramsgate, by placing a wishing well in the pool grounds, where donors could toss a coin into the waters for the benefit of the charity.<sup>177</sup>

The Ramsgate League of Swimmers was based there in the 1930s, flourishing despite a significant proportion of their members being unemployed during the Depression. Pemberton was a patron of the club,<sup>178</sup> and in 1928 the Ramsgate Amateur Ladies Club was formed, with Mrs Pemberton nominated as its patron,<sup>179</sup> while her husband was elected President of the Ramsgate Amateur Swimming and Lifesaving Club.<sup>180</sup>

Pemberton built an above-ground beginner's pool especially designed for children learning to swim, featuring figures of the seven dwarves, dogs and frogs. Australian student Frank Whitebrook was studying for a Doctorate in Physical Education in California. As part of his thesis work he devised an innovative swimming method of teaching children firstly to swim backstroke rather than dog paddle, and Arthur Pemberton was only too eager to give him the use of the pool for his experiments. Whatever the benefits of this new approach, it never took off, but at the time it was claimed

children could learn to swim more swiftly and without fear. It was a long way from the era when being taught to swim involved throwing children into the water to sink or swim.<sup>181</sup>

In latter years the profitability of the pool declined dramatically. When Pemberton died of a heart attack 2 October 1968, his estate was valued at \$29,175, consisting of shares, his modest brick cottage at 107 Alfred Street, real estate investments and cash. However the last Profit and Loss Statement for the period 1 June to 2 October 1968 shows that his wages bill alone stood at \$1079, for the four-month period, exceeding the bath takings, which were a paltry \$124, leaving him (and his estate) with a loss of \$693.83.

According to the will, which was drawn up in 1960, the estate was divided four ways, between his wife and business partner Sarah, and his three children Henry Lewis Pemberton, Albert William Pemberton and Emma Nellie Jean Sjostrum. Consequently, the bathing business was sold.<sup>182</sup>

There were now more free leisure options along The Grand Parade, such as the council's Municipal Baths at Brighton and Sans Souci. Tastes were changing and the public no longer required extravagant bathing pavilions. Families enjoyed swimming in the bay in the netted enclosures and picnicking along the foreshores under the pine tree in Cook Park. With Pemberton's Baths showing such poor financial performance, even if Arthur Pemberton had not died, it is doubtful the swimming pool would have remained open for much longer.

After Pemberton's death, various options were considered by developers. Mr J. Evans proposed building an aquarium but opted not to take up the vendor's offer of \$300,000, which he considered exorbitant, 'ridiculous' and at least \$100,000 over the expected price.<sup>183</sup>

Much to the dismay of many who retained fond childhood memories of their days at the baths, the site was sold for a supermarket development project. Coles submitted an application to Rockdale Council and the State Planning Authority for a 25,000 square feet (2,322 m<sup>2</sup>) retail structure with 49 car spaces. Eventually council agreed to the development, with an increase to 70 car spaces and several beautification modifications.<sup>184 185</sup>



**Former site of Pemberton's Baths, Coles New World supermarket, corner of The Grand Parade and Ramsgate Road, Ramsgate Beach, early 1970s. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

In 2018 The council decided to beautify Pine Park alongside The Grand Parade at Ramsgate, an area that had once been the site of Pemberton's camping grounds in the 1920s. The park was looking tired and run down, with patchy grass,

practical, but ugly, concrete walkways, and views obstructed by the clutter of parked cars. The \$4.5 million plan would include seawall repairs, construction of a new Ramsgate beach plaza, complete with new tiered stairs to the beach, grassed terraces, modern paving, scenic lookouts, contemporary park furniture, and enhanced lighting. Installation of accessibility ramps, together with enhancement of the existing pedestrian promenade and cycleways, completed the picture.

The masterplan had been on a slow boil since 2013, but new funding from the Federal Government’s Stronger Communities Fund and the council’s Special Rate Variation would be available to undertake a comprehensive overhaul of the area, with an expected completion date of June 2019. A key component would be removal of the Carruthers Drive parking area and restoration of the waterside area to cyclists and walkers. Carruthers Drive at Sandringham Street was formally closed to vehicles following a motion passed by Council at its meeting in August 2018.<sup>186 187</sup>

Bayside council gave the go-ahead to commence construction in February 2018 and by July a marvellous children’s playground had been added to Pine Park, although the main project work was yet to commence.<sup>188</sup> Parents kept a watchful eye as their children enjoyed the active play areas; clambering in it nets, and precariously balancing on the logs and stepping boulders. The project was designed to keep active youngsters amused, with one mother declaring it “pretty fantastic”, although inevitably others found fault. Some parents were inclined to quibble that it was unfenced, and toddlers might run onto The Grand Parade.<sup>189</sup>



In September, Bayside Council Mayor Bill Saravinovski turned the first sod for the next stage of the project, announcing,

“This upgrade will provide a safer waterfront promenade with better foreshore access for pedestrians, park users and cyclists. These improvements to our open spaces will create a dynamic recreational resource our community can enjoy. There will be some inconvenience, but it will be worth it.”<sup>190</sup>

**Brighton Le Sands beachfront 2000.** Photo: Bayside Council Library



## Brighton Municipal Baths

The Council's semi-circular mesh-enclosed 'new' Brighton Baths commenced construction in 1927, a few hundred yards south of the decaying Saywell's Baths. They were completed in February 1928 at a cost of £14,000 for the pool and £16,000 for the dressing sheds. Stretching 118 yards (108 m) along the beachfront, the netting extended 75 yards (68 m) into the Bay, encompassing an area of 2.5 acres of water to a depth of 15 feet (4.5m), and 0.75 acres of sandy beach. A wide promenade ran atop the flat-roofed dressing sheds, with a central rotunda, which hosted summertime band concerts.<sup>191</sup> Brighton Baths were well-equipped with 30-foot (9m)-high diving boards, diving wheels and slippery dips and offered popular night swimming sessions. Fourteen electric flood lights illuminated the promenade and enclosure for night swimming, and swimmers could take a steamer from Kurnell to the wharf at the end of the promenade.<sup>192 193</sup>



**The diving tower at Brighton Baths. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

The Council advertised the position of Baths Manager in late 1928, calling for a married couple, preferably with lifesaving and ambulance experience, to run the operation for £8 per week for the 1928-1929 season commencing in September. They appointed Mr and Mrs Seaburn for the opening season.<sup>194</sup> Seaburn was only employed for one season, although he re-applied

for the job the following year. Possibly the decision not to retain him was influenced by an argument he had with the Town Clerk P. Sommerville, who Seaburn accused of sacking pool staff without consulting him, and subsequently appointing the bureaucrat's own choice to the positions. Sommerville hotly denied this.<sup>195</sup>

As opening day dawned the temperature was ideal for swimming, as sunshine sparkled on the clear waters of Botany Bay. The official ceremony by Rockdale Mayor E. J. Gardiner took place on Saturday 15 September 1928 where a crowd of around 5,000 witnessed the raising of the flag, while his wife cut the ribbon. Embarrassingly, the flag was hoisted upside down, prompting a few snide comments from the public, which he rebutted glibly with, "It's a good flag no matter which way it flies."<sup>196</sup> A guard of honour was formed by the swimming club and the Brighton Lifesaving Club, and the ceremony was accompanied by robust strains of music rendered by the Rockdale Municipal Band. The day concluded with a concert played by the Kogarah Municipal Band.<sup>197 198</sup>

The baths were an immediate success. On its first October holiday Monday opening, 10,000 people passed through the gates, with 1,000 of them travelling across the bay from Kurnell by public steamer.<sup>199</sup> The Council congratulated itself on the popular and financial success of the new facilities.

In its 1928 opening season almost half a million people swam at Brighton Baths, and it either made a profit or broke even for the first few years, although this was not to continue indefinitely.<sup>200</sup> For the beginning of the season October to December 1931, Rockdale Council recorded 57,044 persons paying for admission to the shark-proof swimming baths, with an attendance of 4,532 visitors in the final week of the year.<sup>201</sup>

The bathing enclosure remained hugely popular, but it soon became apparent that such facilities required ongoing council funding to remain viable. By the early fifties, the baths lost about £486 per year, but continued to be heavily patronised. The usual weekend attendance of 7,000 people did not cause congestion, as the venue was capable of holding a massive 10,000 people.<sup>202</sup>

In late 1929, prior to the Brighton Baths' second season, Rockdale Council advertised the Manager's job and 27 additional positions in the local press. The running of the Council was a more modest affair than today, so the Rockdale Council Aldermen were expecting to choose the successful candidates themselves. They were therefore quite shocked when 400 people applied, and the council chambers were swamped with applications for this highly desirable work. It was obviously impossible for the aldermen to read each resume in a single council meeting, let alone make a decision. They convened a Special Meeting to discuss the problem. It was eventually resolved to appoint only the Baths Manager, who would then personally interview and select his new staff.<sup>203</sup> They selected Frank Sandon for the management role and left him to sort through the huge pile of resumes over the next month.<sup>204</sup>

Joe Cahill, Premier of NSW was an early morning regular at Brighton Baths, finding swimming a great way to keep fit and meet the strenuous demands of politics.<sup>205</sup> He commenced early morning dips at Brighton in 1929, as the first customer of the new manager. The aldermen's choice had been sound, with Frank Sandon managing the baths for the next 29 years, retiring in 1958. As Cahill presented a parting gift to the outgoing manager, he commented that, "whether the weather was rough or smooth, the geniality of the Brighton Baths' manager remained unruffled."<sup>206</sup> The politician was popular with his aquatic mates, who sent a wreath to his 1959 funeral with a card stating simply, 'from the early morning swimmers.'<sup>207</sup>



**Brighton Baths promenade, 1959. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

The Brighton Baths Promenade rapidly became a popular place for entertainment during the mid-1930s, with Rockdale Municipal Band, Rockdale Boys Band and the Salvation Army brass band playing around 20 open-air concerts a year from October to April.<sup>208</sup>

An Amusement Hall was constructed in 1930 at a cost of £17,864, which housed an eclectic selection of entertainment over the years; Merry-Go-Round and kiosk (1930-1933), Dodgem Boats (1934-1935), Miniature Cars (1935-1937) Skating Rink (1948-1969), picnic shelter with chairs and tables. By the late sixties it was dilapidated both structurally and aesthetically, and in sore need of investment. The clientele for the skating rink was in decline, prompting the owner, Mr Wardop, to declare he was prepared to forfeit the lease for a satisfactory settlement.<sup>209</sup> Baths Manager Mr Sandon suggested converting it into an indoor heated pool.<sup>210</sup>

Mr Kalyk of Belmore Smallgoods Pty Ltd offered to purchase the lease and refurbish the structure as a restaurant, function space and takeaway kiosk. He encouraged council to open the baths free of charge in order to increase patronage. The councillors debated on the matter for some time. There was concern over the parking issue on the busy Grand Parade.

As for free admission, the Baths Manager, Mr Sandon, did not consider this advisable. The argument was that it would save council money, but he pointed out that there was always a need for supervision, lifeguards and cleaners and therefore the wages bill would not be substantially reduced.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the baths were losing money when one considers the entrance charges stood at 10 cents for adults, 5c children and pensioners, 2c for school groups and a bargain \$9 for the season ticket. The year's budget deficit stood at \$9,657.86 in 1965, rising to \$15,404.47 in 1968. Council's Finance Committee considered the idea of offering free admission as simply a cost-cutting measure designed to reduce budget losses. They recommended the opposite course of action; an increase in entrance fees to match those of similar pools. They suggested 15c for adults and 10c for children, which was the rate at Ramsgate Baths.

Eventually the council decided to call for tenders to remodel the Amusement Hall, Seniors Citizens Hall and Baths Amenities Building.<sup>211</sup> After advertising, a disappointing two tenders were received. Initially, Mr Wiles' tender for a 5-year, \$1,000 per annum lease was accepted. Wiles, who was an experienced pool operator from Sans Souci Baths, had plenty of ideas to attract patrons, including installing floats, trampolines, sauna, and offering swim classes.<sup>212</sup> The contracts were never signed. Council decided to defer the lease of the pool, and instead raised entrance charges to 15c per adult and 5c per child, despite numerous letters of complaint about the increase.<sup>213 214</sup>

They readvertised for tenders again the following year, this time for a 21-year lease.<sup>215</sup> The issues of the pavilion redevelopment were not resolved until 1971, when popular restaurant Le Sands opened in the former dressing sheds.<sup>216</sup> The baths took a little longer.

By the late 70s the once magnificent baths were in a sorry state of decay, with crumbling timbers and rusty wire mesh. There was little room for swimming in its shallow waters, due to shifting sands. Visitor numbers to the pool, which had formerly attracted 10,000 swimmers on a summer's day, had dwindled to a handful, and the structure was unsound. Legal liability was becoming an issue and in 1978 on the advice of their insurance company, the council decided the wooden promenade surrounding the baths had to go. After demolition, all that remained was a rusted wire enclosure and a few skewed piles emerging from the water. The following year Rockdale Council petitioned the government for a \$300,000 grant to replace it with a modern concrete and nylon-mesh pool.

When interviewed by the Sydney Morning Herald, Alderman Moore stated that, "The new pool will be nothing like its forerunner, there's just no demand any more for majestic structures like this. It will have two concrete walls from which youngsters and adults can fish and a concrete platform at one end with the mouth closed by nylon, mesh."<sup>217</sup>



**The demolition of Brighton Baths, 1978.**  
Photo: Bayside Council Library

One local club lost its home as a result of the demolition. The Brighton Baths Athletic Club was formed in 1910 by Newtown footballers, whose fitness routines involved walking two hours each Sunday to enjoy a swim. The council offered the men alternative rooms underneath the dressing sheds,

where they continued to meet for an early morning swim or to race on a Sunday.

The club remained old-style, sparsely furnished with a snooker table, table tennis table, a few chairs and an eclectic mix of gym equipment. The simple furnishings didn't deter new members. By the 1980s the membership was 300, with a waiting list. In the 1990s membership had reduced to 240 and women made a push to join the club, much to the indignation of the old-school members, who were highly resistant to change.<sup>218</sup> Although the membership is aging, it continues today, tucked away in the lower level of the old pavilion, adjacent to Le Sands restaurant.<sup>219</sup>



**Brighton Baths pavilion and dressing sheds 1950s. Photo: Bayside Council Library.**

In 2007 Rockdale Council decided to spend \$1 million on upgrading the Brighton Baths amenity block and creating a new entrance from the boardwalk. The building housed the Botany Bay Coastal Patrol and Greek Hall of Fame, who were moved to other premises. It also included the Brighton Kiosk, Signature Café and a function room, all leased for 21 years by restaurateur Peter Antonopoulos, who

agreed to 5-yearly rental reviews, which would fund the project.

Council undertook to upgrade the boardwalk to the tune of \$2.4 million. The result was the addition of al fresco restaurant tables ranging along the boardwalk, shaded by an awning, with expansive views of the sparkling blue waters of the bay and its swimming enclosure. Today the facility is shared by a café and three restaurants, Le Sands, Republiq and Hurricane's Bar and Grill.<sup>220</sup>



## Ramsgate Baths- shark-proofing the bay

Rockdale enjoyed a reputation as a progressive and innovative council with excellent civic facilities. The mesh swimming enclosure at Brighton was the envy of other councils such as Manly and Randwick, who contacted Rockdale Council to ask for information on the costs and organisation of the baths, as they were considering offering similar facilities.<sup>221</sup>

A netted bathing enclosure was, and still is, perceived as a necessary precaution to prevent shark attack in the Bay. In 1930 a huge 9 feet 7-inch (2.92 m) tiger shark was seen cruising the waters. Local fishermen tried to net it several times without success, with one local tossing a tomahawk in its direction, striking it near the dorsal fin. Eventually the unfortunate fish was captured and killed. It struggled violently in the nets, but, 'all its contortions were of no avail, and after a fierce battle, it was dragged, beaten, onto the beach.' Positive identification of the offending animal was made by observing the tomahawk damage to its back.

According to Macquarie University researchers, sharks will bite when they mistake humans for food, although they don't like eating human flesh and will swim away after realising their mistake.<sup>222</sup> Misconceptions abounded, and still persist today, so naturally the shark was melodramatically classed as a 'man eater' in the local press, in a sensational article titled 'Ramsgate Menace Dead'.<sup>223</sup>

By 1935 the Ramsgate Park Beach and District Improvement Association was agitating for a shark-proof enclosure at Ramsgate Beach, which would rival Pemberton's Baths with its concrete pool.<sup>224</sup><sup>225</sup> There were also proposals to investigate construction of pools at North Brighton and Dolls Point.<sup>226</sup> Later that year a mother and her seven-year-old daughter were paddling in 2 feet (60 cm) of water at Ramsgate, when a large group of Public Works employees working nearby spotted a shark and the cry of "shark" went up, causing the panicked woman to flee the water. She narrowly escaped being bitten by the creature, which no doubt, proponents of the netted pools saw as vindication for their plans.<sup>227</sup>

Arthur Pemberton weighed into the argument, writing in a missive to council that he considered that there were already sufficient bathing facilities in the area (presumably an oblique reference to his own baths business), and they should defer the erection of a shark-proof net until such time as the Brighton Baths were making a profit.

Despite the fact that his stance was self-serving, the aldermen agreed with him.<sup>228</sup> Brighton Baths were running at a huge £2,000 deficit annually, so it was unlikely that Rockdale councillors would vote in favour of costly projects like pool netting. Meanwhile the Ramsgate Lifesaving Club tried netting the beach for the holidays period in 1936, snaring a large shark in the process. This caused some dispute amongst aldermen as to whether a club should be allowed to conduct netting activities when it was council's responsibility to maintain the beaches and baths, and further netting by the club was refused.<sup>229</sup>

The council placed an unfixed net at Ramsgate the following season. The net had to be dragged in and out of the water each weekend, requiring considerable time and effort. Consequently, they made the decision to erect 2 piles, placed 60 feet (18 m) out from the low tide mark and 250 feet (76 m) apart, for the purpose of affixing the net.<sup>230</sup> By the end of the year the matter had not been resolved. The Lands Department offered Rockdale Council 'permissive occupancy', but the council only wanted permission to erect two piles, rather than the financial implications of a netted pool enclosure. Thus, the matter was stymied for the time being.<sup>231</sup>



By 1941 various clubs and associations were vying for the erection of a new netted enclosure in locations up and down the Bay. However, although the state government had finally offered to assist with the cost, some Rockdale Council aldermen felt that such expense would be a frivolous luxury in light of the huge government expenditure needed for the war effort. Others considered the ongoing maintenance costs a burden, while Alderman Guess argued that if everything was to be stopped because of the war, then the council might as well close down. He lobbied for a more long-term planning approach for life after the war.<sup>232</sup>

It was a pity the council had not taken up the NSW Government's offer, as the following year the state government was more cautious with its spending and conscious of the need to preserve supplies for the war effort. The Director of Supply informed the Council that they would not be permitted to purchase chain wire mesh for repair of the existing net at the Brighton Baths. Interestingly, it was referred to as a blubber net rather than a shark proof enclosure. Of course, the net could not keep out jelly blubbers, so this was patent nonsense, no doubt down-playing down its importance and ignoring the public safety issue in favour of policies it considered more important than the needs of the bathing public.<sup>233</sup>

Eventually the shark-proof enclosure was constructed at Ramsgate in the late 1940s, but in 1956 some practical jokers carried out a dangerous prank. A diminutive 3-foot 6 inch (1.06 m) grey nurse shark was discovered cruising the waters inside the enclosure. After sounding the alarm and ushering swimmers from the pool, two enterprising lads from the Ramsgate Lifesaving Club secured a fishing line and a couple of mutton chops from the café at the baths, with the aim of catching their prey. The shark took the bait eagerly, but when they tried to push it through the net, it was found to be an impossible task. Obviously, someone had dumped the shark in the pool and the net was secure. Eventually the shark was removed with some difficulty.<sup>234</sup>



**Swimmers at Ramsgate Baths suffer from a surplus of sand 3 October 1970** Photo: Bayside Council Library

The baths at Ramsgate Beach have had a mixed fate, with most of the enclosure filled with sand in 1970, offering a slim crescent of water for swimming. The original enclosure was demolished in 1973, leaving a few timber piles protruding from the sand. A new netted structure was installed in 1975, but the baths closed from 1991-1997 due to beach erosion, when the reverse problem occurred.<sup>235</sup> All but 10 of the old piers were removed in 1999 and a contemporary floating net installed. This was renewed in 2015 at a cost of \$10,000.<sup>236</sup>

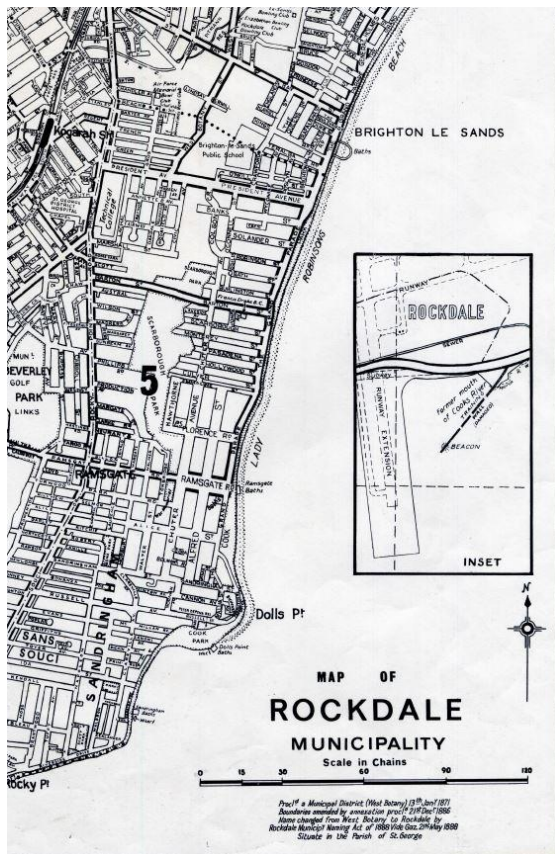
Much to the dismay of the Ramsgate Lifesavers, and particularly the Nippers, the problem re-occurred in 2017, with shifting sands and the complete disappearance of the beach, allegedly caused by dredging for the Port Botany expansion. There was no capacity for races to begin on the now non-existent beach, as the partially submerged, mossy rocks were hazardous to negotiate, and the water lapped the promenade.<sup>237</sup>

The matter was not resolved until the following year, when the NSW Office of Environment offered Bayside Council a \$245,000 grant to combat beach erosion at Ramsgate, provided they matched it dollar for dollar. Council accepted the offer but were unhappy that ratepayers had to foot the bill, as the State Government project at Port Botany had been the primary cause of the problem. To add insult to injury, the grant was only a fraction of the real cost of beach restoration along the full length of Lady Robinsons Beach.

An indignant Councillor Andrew Tsounis told the Leader newspaper;

“It’s just an ongoing problem given by decisions made by the State Government including extending the runways, deepening the port, dredging the desalination plant pipework through the years.”

Work was expected to begin in 2019 during the off-season, with a projected completion date of November 2019, ready for the summer peak.<sup>238</sup>



1960s Extract from a map of Rockdale Municipality shows Brighton and Ramsgate Baths on The Grand Parade. Located further south, the Dolls Point Baths were closed and the nets removed in 2016, when repeated efforts to remove the build-up of sand failed.<sup>239</sup> Photo: Bayside Council Library

## Lifesaving along The Grand Parade

Drowning in the Bay has always been a risk. In 1929 a thirteen-year-old boy named Jack Royall was praised for his quick thinking when he saved a young fisherman from drowning. Donald Underwood was perched on a girder with his fishing rod in hand, when he suffered a fainting spell, and fell into the water. Young Jack was paddling about the Bay in a canoe, when he noticed the floating boy. He pulled Underwood's head above water and yelled for help for an agonisingly long ten minutes until someone on the beach recognised the dangerous situation. In a flash of desperation and quick thinking, nearby spectator Walter Holland broke the lock on the nearby boatshed to access a rowboat, which he used to row 25 yards into the Bay. He then dragged the youth into the boat and returned to shore. Once on dry land he was able to resuscitate the unconscious Underwood while waiting for the ambulance. Jack was modest when bystanders hailed him a hero, reluctantly accepting a shilling as a bravery reward. "I will mark it, and keep it as a memento of this day," he declared.<sup>240</sup>

While individual acts of civilian heroism are much applauded, there has long been a need for organised lifesaving along the beaches of The Grand Parade. Since 1915, local lifesaving club members have trained assiduously and rescued thousands of people who mistakenly think of Botany Bay as a calm, safe swimming area. To combat the general public's ignorance of treacherous rips,



and the foolishness of people who enter the water despite an inability to swim, several lifesaving clubs were formed along the route of The Grand Parade; Ramsgate Lifesaving Club, the Brighton Lifesaving Club, South Brighton Lifesaving Club, North Brighton Lifesaving Club which folded in 1937, and the Brighton Ladies Lifesaving Club, formed in 1930 with 16 foundational members. The Surf Lifesaving Society did not recognise women, so the women affiliated with the Royal Lifesaving Society.<sup>241</sup>

**Members of the Brighton Ladies Lifesaving Club; Joan Stewart, Anita Davey, Betty Humphreys, and Ilene Black pose for the Sun newspaper in 1941. Photo: The Sun**<sup>242</sup>

Most women's clubs disbanded around 1935, although the Brighton ladies club was revived in 1940, trained by the Manager of Brighton Municipal Baths Mr Sandon. During the war it was proposed that women's clubs should re-form to replace the male lifesavers who had enlisted. Somewhat condescendingly, the secretary of the Royal Life Saving Society H.W. Walker informed reporters that, 'Women could not stand the strain of surf rescues, but would be a great help to 'still water' clubs.' Some clubs refused point blank to consider enrolling women members, because they were not considered strong enough.<sup>243 244</sup>

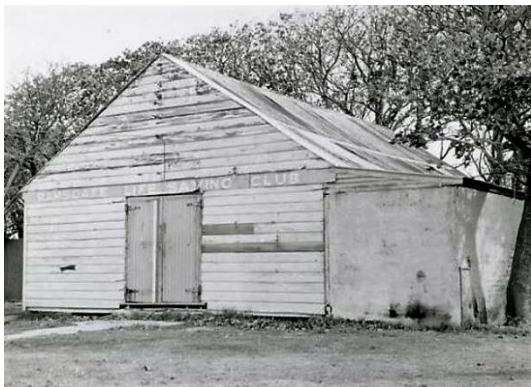
The formation of lifesaving clubs encouraged tourism along the bay. With the erection of a shark lookout tower, people felt even more secure, and numbers bathing at beaches along The Grand Parade doubled in 1923, compared with the recent years. There was an unexpected bonus in the reduction of crime along the beaches of 30% in the same year, partially attributed to the presence of the lifesaving clubs.<sup>245</sup>

The first club to be founded was the Brighton Le Sands Lifesaving Club, formed in 1915. Rockdale Council called for tenders in 1918, to build these civic-minded volunteers a lifesaving shed at Brighton Beach.<sup>246</sup> Although the shed was technically owned by the council, the club felt fairly possessive about the structure and was reluctant to hire it out to other organisations. When the St George Hospital Ladies Committee and the Brighton Ratepayers Association wanted to hire the

modest lifesaver's shed, the club refused, on the grounds that hiring it to outside organisations would exclude the people for whom it was constructed i.e. lifesavers. Rockdale Council eventually decided after some debate to leave it to the lifesavers to decide who should or should not use the shed.<sup>247 248 249</sup>

As the club grew, Rockdale Council built an extension to the Lifesavers Hall, opened by Alderman E.G. Barton In December 1936. The club began to share its new enlarged premises, which became a focal point for numerous local organisations such as the Scarborough Ward Unemployed Relief Association, the Brighton Le Sands Social Club and Brighton Masonic Lodge.<sup>250</sup>

North Brighton Lifesaving Club was dissolved in 1937. They had stored their equipment in a shed in Cook Park at North Brighton, the structure measuring 20 x 30 feet (6 m x 9 m), and valued at around £80. It was unrealistic to think that the unoccupied shed would remain free from vandalism. The council was startled to discover in February 1938 that the disused shed had disappeared overnight. Various locals had scavenged parts of the structure, one man selling his share to Mr Glendenning, who lived in one of the nearby cottages. His wife assured the council inspector that her husband possessed a sales receipt (an unlikely story in the circumstances), but subsequent enquiries could not ascertain the culprit. Councillors were mollified that they had not invested in the shed other than provide materials for the volunteers who constructed it. It was the height of the Great Depression. Presumably there were many people in desperate need of building materials, possibly even the 'residents' of the nearby homeless camp.<sup>251 252 253</sup>



The formation of Ramsgate Lifesaving Club was discussed by local residents at a meeting in the Ramsgate Beach Kiosk in 1933. It was officially affiliated with the Royal Lifesaving Society the following year. Rockdale Council, always keen to support community organisations, gave them an old shed, affectionately known as 'The Barn', located on the eastern side of The Grand Parade, in which to hold meetings and store equipment.

**'The Barn', Ramsgate Lifesaving shed. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

Lifesaving exams were initially held at Pemberton's Baths. The club asked council for 'permissive occupancy' of the beach but were refused. The aldermen were not amenable to the idea that public beach areas should be reserved for private interests.<sup>254</sup> During the 1950s the club was NSW State Champion for six consecutive years, but their headquarters, the old timber shed, was showing its' age and no longer met the requirements of the organisation. After a concerted fundraising program, and with the generous support of numerous local organisations, a light and airy clubhouse was built in 1959 in a contemporary style, on the corner of The Grand Parade and Ramsgate Road. The increased space for storage, training and functions, illuminated with natural light from large windows, was bliss compared with the old, rough, dark, windowless shed.<sup>255</sup>





**1959 opening ceremony, Ramsgate Lifesaving Club, corner The Grand Parade and Ramsgate Road.**

Photo: Bayside Council Library

The Brighton and Ramsgate clubs were soon very active, holding lifesaving displays and organising carnivals where the rivals strove to prove which was the best club.<sup>256</sup>

The South Brighton Club asked council for free admission to Brighton Municipal Baths for members on patrol. Their reasonable request was refused. The aldermen considered that sufficient concessions were already offered to the club through free use of the club rooms, provision of a secure deposit box and use of the baths for drilling exercises. They instead proposed a donation to the club. The Honorary Beach Inspectors, G. Grevett, J. Reid and J. Jenkins, were so incensed that they tendered their resignations from the role. Despite the willingness of some aldermen to reconsider the motion, the majority still stubbornly refused to budge, and they opted to receive the resignation letters. Undeterred, the club made several unsuccessful bids to gain free entry seven months later and again in the 1937 season.<sup>257 258 259</sup>



**South Brighton and Ramsgate Lifesaving clubs vie for supremacy in the March Past at a surf lifesaving carnival at Brighton Le Sands 1937. South Brighton is resplendent in their modest, but striking, blue and white striped bathing costumes. Ramsgate wore white with a green and yellow diagonal stripe. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

The local lifesaving clubs would hold a series of annual carnival competitions during summer. Competitions would include the March Past, sprinting on the sandy beach, lifesaving drills, and distance swimming.<sup>260</sup>

In winter, from July to October, they played beach sports competitively. Ramsgate and Brighton clubs would play a series of events to keep up fitness, such as sackball, relay races, hop skip and jump, broad jump, chariot races where they carried another member piggyback along the beach, and distance running on sand.<sup>261</sup>

Lifesaving organisations on beaches along The Grand Parade maintained a healthy number of members during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, during World War 2 the Brighton Lifesaving Club met infrequently and suffered a decline in membership, partially due to cessation of inter-club competition for the duration of the conflict and partly because numerous members had been called up for war service. Adding to their woes, the beaches were strewn with rolls of barbed wire to prevent enemy invasion, and therefore it was impossible to stage beach activities.



They were struggling to repay the £400 council loan which had financed the cost of their clubhouse and unsuccessfully asked council to waive the debt. It was only the hire of the hall to outside bodies that was keeping them afloat.<sup>262 263</sup>

Ramsgate Lifesaving Club's Secretary and Treasurer, Lyle Blackford, served in the armed forces during the war, but the club remained active in his absence.<sup>264</sup> South Brighton was struggling and forced to temporarily cease operations, with 95% of its active members supporting the war effort by enlisting.<sup>265</sup>

A massive storm did considerable damage to the Brighton Lifesaver's clubhouse in April 1945, when a stormwater pipe in the clubhouse basement burst.<sup>266</sup> The council engineer was concerned about future property losses. He proposed demolition of the clubhouse and the construction of a 5 feet (1.5 m) high, 600 feet (182 m) length of seawall along the beach front from the northern end of Brighton Municipal Baths, under the high piers of the amusement hall and the club house,



continuing to a point north, at an estimated cost of about £6,000.<sup>267</sup> In June Council sought funding from the state government and voted to demolish the storm-damaged Lifesavers Hall, where the Brighton club had been meeting, and to construct a new building 'in keeping with the future of the district and surroundings'. In the meantime, the lifesavers were given use of Seymour Pavilion as a temporary home.<sup>268 269 270</sup>

**Seymour Pavilion, temporary home of Brighton Lifesaving Club in 1945. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

Important swimming events frequently took place at Brighton Baths including participation in a ground-breaking international lifesaving conference in 1960. The plenary sessions took place at Sydney University, while practical sessions were located at Brighton. Delegates from 9 countries watched lifesaving demonstrations and discussed the merits of the new method of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Some Asian delegates viewed this advance dubiously, voicing the opinion that it would



not be appropriate in their countries for a man to rescue a woman in this way. In contrast, the Japanese delegate, the Director of Water Safety for the Japanese Red Cross, was inspired by the event, and vowed to return home to set up a lifesaving movement there.<sup>271</sup> Following the lifesaving demonstrations, delegates were entertained with a carnival at Brighton, complete with a simulated helicopter water rescue to thrill the crowds.<sup>272</sup>

**The Brighton Lifesaving Club building on The Grand Parade. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

The Ramsgate Lifesaving Club almost died in 1974. Falling membership, internal conflict, lack of volunteers for the organising committee, coupled with a disastrous swimming season, a jelly blubber plague and blue-ringed octopus invasion, dramatically decreased participation. To further complicate matters, the Ramsgate Baths swimming enclosure filled with 60,000 tons of sand, caused

by dredging of the bay for the airport runway expansion, and council was forced to close the baths temporarily.

With a new committee elected in 1975, excavation of the sand and enlargement of the baths, the club began to recover. That year also saw the \$100,000 installation of traffic lights at the corner of The Grand Parade and Ramsgate Road. Members were no doubt gratified with the comments of Jim Bradfield, local Member for Barton, who claimed that “it was safer on the waters than on The Grand Parade”.

Ramsgate Baths were temporarily closed in 1991 when storm erosion had torn away the sand to reveal rocks, exposing swimmers to the hazards of rough surfaces. The club was homeless, so the lifesavers removed operations to the Florence Street Beach, which council netted in 1993. They finally returning to their home base in 1997, when a temporary floating shark-net was installed inside the old Ramsgate Baths, and two years of beach restoration work began with sand deposits and the construction of groynes.<sup>273</sup>

During the years of banishment from Ramsgate Baths, the club had maintained its’ clubhouse, trekking back and forth along the beachfront between the hall and Florence Street Baths, carrying heavy equipment to the beach each patrol day.

The club may own the building, which was refurbished in 2013, but not the land in Cook Park on which it is situated. In 2018, pursuant to clause 47 of the Local Government Act 1993, Bayside Council proposed to renew the Ramsgate Lifesaving Club’s lease on the land containing the club hall, for a period of five years.<sup>274</sup>

## Saywell's Brighton Hotel

After setting up a bathing business on the water's edge, in 1886-87 Saywell engaged in the construction of a 57-bedroom Italianate style hotel named the New Brighton Hotel, located on the corner of The Grand Parade and Bay Street, costing £20,000. He commissioned architect William Kenwood to design a suitably grand brick structure with slate roof and cast-iron balconies.<sup>275</sup> Set in extensive gardens and shrubberies, complete with tennis lawn, the hotel boasted a tower with panoramic views of the Bay. He planted numerous long-lived Norfolk Island Pines in the hotel grounds and along the shoreline, as a wind break.



**This postcard shows a tram outside Thomas Saywell's Brighton Hotel. The minarets of the fanciful Assembly Hall can be seen at left. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

Alighting from the tram or carriage, the visitor entered through an impressive porch, proceeding into a lofty 10-foot-wide vestibule to the main hall. A timber staircase rose to the first and second accommodation levels of rooms and suites, where guests were pleased to discover the bathrooms had hot and cold running water flowing into the huge cast-iron bath tubs.

The features and fittings displayed a grand sense of style and taste, with the vestibule and hall tiled with encaustic tiles arrayed in a neat pattern on the floor, a style beloved by the Victorians and inspired by mediaeval cathedrals. The skirting boards were finished with a marble-effect known as scragiola marbling. Leading from the lobby were the public rooms; the Dining-room, Billiard-room, Coffee-room, Bar, and Parlour. The kitchens, offices and servant's rooms were tucked away out of sight in the western wing, and the public bar was situated distant enough from the guest rooms to alleviate worries of noise disturbing their slumber.<sup>276</sup>



**Shady Nook recreation area circa 1915, with Saywell's Hotel in the background. The park, which was created by Saywell was located on the southern corner of The Grand Parade and Bay Street. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

There were more wonders to behold when the guests entered the vast 170 feet x 41 feet Assembly Hall, a space slightly larger than a modern Olympic pool, and capable of accommodating 1,500 patrons. Its spacious high-ceiling with its domed roof, surmounted by picturesque minaret towers, supposedly in a Russian style, imparted a sense of grandeur. Its 1887 gala opening displayed Saywell's sense of the theatrical, with not only the venue, but Rockdale Station, the trams and the tram route to the bay, festooned with floral displays, flags, banners and bunting. Guests were entertained by three days of Promenade music concerts, a flower show and a canary show.



**Thomas Saywell poses with the Rockdale Fire Brigade Band outside his hotel. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

Although the hotel accommodation opened in early April 1888, there was a slight delay in gaining a liquor licence, which was obtained by transfer from William Dickson in November that year, approved by the Metropolitan Licencing Branch at the Central Police Court. <sup>277</sup>

In its heyday Saywell's Hotel was frequented by notable 19<sup>th</sup> century sporting identities such as champion boxers Albert Griffiths, Peter Jackson, Tommy Burns and Dan Creedon, who trained in the hotel's hall, where hundreds of enthusiastic spectators would crowd the venue to watch their sporting heroes spar in the practice ring.



**The wedding carriage of Thomas Saywell's third daughter, Leah Jane Saywell, The Grand Parade, Brighton Le Sands, 27 August 1896. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

It was also popular for weddings and functions, including events for Saywell's own family. Reverend Byng married Saywell's daughter Leah and New Zealander William Crawford Burt at her parent's residence in 1896. <sup>278</sup>

The eager onlookers crowded The Grand Parade in front of the hotel, hoping to catch a glimpse of the happy couple departing in their horse and carriage. The Australian Town and Country Journal reported that;

'The bride wore a handsome gown of white surah [soft, twilled silk], bridal wreath and veil, and was attended by the Misses Nellie, Zillah, and Vera Saywell and Miss Janie Burt as bridesmaids. Mr. J. Burt acted as best man.' <sup>279</sup>





**The marriage of Miss Leah Saywell to William Crawford Burt on the 27th August 1896 at Saywell's Hotel. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

**Standing at the rear: Claude Saywell, Mrs A. E. Burgess.**

**Standing in the second row: Dr Butler-Wood, his wife, Mrs R. A. Read, Dr Read, Mr Elias Saywell, Mrs M. M. Saywell, Mrs Elias Saywell, Mr W. C. Burt, Mr Tom Saywell, Mrs L. J. Burt, Mr Frank Saywell, Miss Jean Burt and Mr J. Burt.**

**Sitting in the second row: Mrs R. Saywell, Mr Ross Saywell, Mrs Ada Roseby, Mr Thomas Saywell, his wife Annie Ellen Saywell, Mr George Saywell and his wife.**

**Sitting in the front are: Mrs M. G. Barrett, Mrs V. B. Miller, Mrs Z. M. Menzies, Mr Gar. Saywell and Mr Bruce Saywell.**

The population of the tiny village enclave of Brighton Le Sands grew slowly but steadily throughout the first few years. Saywell engaged in significant property development, including the row of two-story terrace houses that still front The Grand Parade today. By 1892 there were 41 houses and 205 residents strung out along Lady Robinsons Beach.<sup>280</sup>

Buoyed by the potential of retail business along the beach, various facilities opened to service the needs of the day trippers who could now purchase refreshments, hire a boat or a fishing line, mail a postcard at Shady Nook Post Office, entertain their children in the Shady Nook playground, and enjoy a pint, eat a meal or attend amusements at the hotel.



**The terrace cottages built by Thomas Saywell along The Grand Parade at Brighton Le Sands. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

In 1895 Thomas Saywell's company, New Brighton Tramway Co., leased offices on the ground floor of the Camden building 416-420 George Street Sydney.<sup>281</sup> At Brighton, the centre of his business operations, The Grand Parade, occupied a mere five blocks, from Bay

Street to McRae Street, past Saywell's Terrace, which was tenanted by 11 people including Thomas Saywell himself, his brother George, and Boot's College. Accountant James Cameron lived nearby, and the only other property on The Grand Parade, listed by Sands Directory, is the Swimming Baths and Refreshment Room, run by Mrs F.A. von Hammer.

Saywell was not a hotelier or a bathing pavilion manager. He had many and diverse investment interests and was not in the slightest part interested in running the baths or the hotel himself. Although Saywell retained ownership of the hotel, he leased it to various hoteliers over the years. Initially it was operated by C.R. Smith and his wife, experienced caterers who advertised the hotel as



‘the great sanatorium of the South’, with a billiards room, sitting room, reading room, gas and electric bells throughout. The Smiths promised that,

‘Everything will be done to ensure the comfort of visitors. A first-class table will be kept, and an efficient staff of trained servants, the whole of the household arrangements being personally supervised by Mrs. SMITH.’<sup>282</sup>

The hotel offered fun, amusement, dancing, music, and skating in the adjacent Assembly Hall.<sup>283</sup> The New Brighton Skating Rink was opened in March 1888, easily accessible by Saywell’s tram.<sup>284</sup>

The hotel gained a rowdy reputation. In 1892 Saywell lost his publican’s licence due to the poor behaviour of the clientele.<sup>285</sup> At the court hearing four years later, when Saywell reclaimed his licence, the police objected in strenuous terms. Police testified that,

‘On Sundays and holidays the lowest larrikins went to the place. On holidays there were 10 and 12 constables at the place when it was licensed. They were assaulted and; persons convicted’

Senior-Constable Currie had been assaulted by mobs on three occasions, while Sergeant Agnew noted that,

‘The larrikins had always on holidays been an annoyance to the respectable people.’

Further police testimony declared,

‘Larrikins of the worst type frequented the dancing saloon. As a rule drunkenness prevailed on holidays.’<sup>286</sup>

Saywell was not deterred by the loss of his liquor licence. The site was briefly taken over by the Presbyterian Church as a campus of its new prestigious Scots College for young men. At the festive opening of the college in January 1893, the guests were welcomed at Rockdale station, which was festooned in bunting. A cadet corps from Fort Street and Paddington Public Schools formed a guard of honour, with the St George Brass Band playing enthusiastically. The St George Volunteer Firefighters stood to attention, resplendent in full uniform, as the official party boarded the special steam tram to the bay, to the delight of the crowd of sightseers. The Mayor, Alderman William Taylor, accompanied the Chairman of the Council of the Scots College, The Moderator Reverend James S. White M.A. and other civic and religious dignitaries, including His Excellency the Governor of NSW, Lord Jersey. Lady Jersey had declined to travel by rail and arrived at the former hotel by private carriage.<sup>287</sup>



**Scots College.** Detail from 1893 Illuminated Address of Welcome held in the Bayside Library Archives.

The guests toured the facilities of the renovated, re-purposed hotel. The ground floor public areas had been converted into classrooms, with the upstairs accommodation adapted for light and airy dormitories. Guests were impressed by the college facilities, which featured a gymnasium, six-acre sports ground and a farm to provide fresh fruit, vegetables and milk for the students.<sup>288 289</sup>

The opening ceremony was performed by Lord Jersey. The listeners cheered in response to the delivery of several lengthy speeches, which The Daily Telegraph reported in detail.<sup>290</sup> The School Principal, Reverend A. Ashworth Aspinall, quoted the aims of Rugby school in England; 'first, religious and moral principle; secondly, gentlemanly conduct; and thirdly, intellectual ability.' Reverend Aspinall assured attendees that Scotts College would pursue the same goals.<sup>291</sup>

Following the ceremony, Lady Jersey planted a tree in the grounds, before the Vice-Regal couple headed for the station to catch a train to their next appointment in Moss Vale.

Within a couple of years, the college was suffering terribly under the financial burden of leasing the building in the uncertain and difficult economic times of a recession. Their optimism about the location had also quickly declined.

'Terrific winds blowing in from the sea, and the sand being banked sometimes to the top of the college fence...[The tram rails] were constantly covered by overblowing sand. One of the tasks the boys really enjoyed was digging Saywell's tram out when it became bogged in the sand'.<sup>292</sup>

This became far too frequent an occurrence and eventually the tram terminated at the end of Bay Street instead of turning into The Grand Parade.

There was also the problem of the distractions offered by a seaside resort. How could the boys study effectively when they were surrounded by picnickers and holiday makers? When Thomas Saywell announced that he was building a race course nearby, that was probably the straw that broke the camel's back. The college negotiated a contract buyout and termination of the lease.<sup>293</sup>



**Thomas Saywell's race course at Brighton Le Sands on the land that is now bounded by Moate Avenue, Gordon Street, Francis Avenue and Bay Street. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

The college campus closed by mid-1895, relocating to Judge Josephson's former residence St Killian's, in Bellevue Hill, Double Bay. Ironically, in their 125<sup>th</sup> year, Scots College again opened a Brighton campus in the area they had rejected a century ago. In 2018

their new school was launched at historic Primrose House, several kilometres from the original premises. Apparently, there are less seaside distractions for today's students.<sup>294</sup>

When Saywell regained his Spirit Merchants Licence in 1896, after considerable courtroom debate and vigorous objections by the police, he resumed operation of the hotel under new management.

<sup>295</sup>

The incoming proprietor, Harry Figg, was an experienced hotelier from Queensland, and more recently at the Fitzroy Hotel in Windsor. He changed the New Brighton Hotel's name to the Lick House Hotel, perhaps attempting to persuade respectable clientele that they should not judge the premises by its former reputation. The curious name was in honour of the famous Lick House Hotel in San Francisco owned by ex-USA Senator James G. Fair, which boasted an enviable reputation. Figg opened his venture in 11 February 1896, inviting guests to inspect the elegant facilities and dine at a banquet. A big selling point was that, unusually for its time, all the rooms had running water and the hotel possessed a telephone. Although most people would arrive by train and tram, the hotel offered stabling facilities for horses.<sup>296</sup>

Unfortunately for Figg, the name change was insufficient to guarantee a better class of guest. The clientele could sometimes be rowdy and even riotous. Figg was in court in December 1896 offering evidence that he and a police constable were verbally abused and physically assaulted in the public bar over an incident on Christmas Day, which the press labelled a 'riot'.<sup>297</sup> Three men were refused service in accordance with the restrictions on trading imposed by the liquor licence. Figg's wife Edith asked one of them not to spit on the floor. A scuffle ensued, with bottles and punches being thrown.<sup>298</sup> The defence claimed they were not 'larrikins' or members of a push gang, but reputable members of a football team.<sup>299</sup>

Figg appeared in court again a few days later in January to accuse another of the perpetrators. Now the charge was more serious, with Figg witnessing that he had been knocked down, and kicked in the face and body by the three thugs, leaving him bruised and bloodied. He then called the police, who fortunately arrived just before the perpetrators returned, armed with a large stick to threaten the publican again. The judge remarked that, 'these brutal and cowardly assaults were getting too common, and would, have to be put down,' handing the defendant a six-month jail sentence with hard labour.<sup>300 301</sup>

Not all the clientele were as pugnacious as this incident would suggest. The hotel was a popular choice for banquets, wedding breakfasts, corporate picnics and events such as; the Farmers and Dairymen's Milk Co. picnic, attended by prominent politicians and cabinet members;<sup>302</sup> the Herald Quoit Club annual picnic and sports day;<sup>303</sup> the Fire and Marine Insurance Company picnic, with participants engaging in innocuous activities such as swimming competitions, cricket matches and formal dinners;<sup>304</sup> and the Daily Telegraph and Sydney Morning Herald Staff Reunion sports day. This latter event was an irony considering the press were only too eager to label the hotel a place of 'riot'.<sup>305</sup>

The name soon reverted to the New Brighton Hotel. Although Figg had taken out a ten-year lease, in January 1898 David Colling purchased the licence,<sup>306</sup> and by 1900 Saywell's agent T.S. Huntley ran the Brighton Hotel.<sup>307</sup>

The Grand Parade was still not terribly grand nor lengthy. The street was tenanted on the north side by Thomas Saywell, six residents of the Brighton Terrace (formerly Saywell's Terrace), and three more houses. On the south side were located the Swimming Baths and Refreshment Rooms, and adjacent to this, proprietor Mildwater ran a boat hire service from a shed on the water's edge. Presumably the hotel trade was predominantly derived from tourists and day-trippers, rather than residents visiting a local watering hole.<sup>308</sup>

By 1910 the boatshed had changed hands, owned by McMinn and Hawkes. Publican Martha Caldwell ran the Brighton Hotel, while the local population of The Grand Parade had increased to fifteen families, including Thomas and George Saywell.

In 1915 The Brighton Hotel was run by Leo Clifford, the Refreshment Rooms by Julia Hamilton. and the boatshed was managed by J. Franks. The modestly sized Grand Parade still boasted only Thomas Saywell and 16 other residents and their families, 11 of whom were renting the Brighton Terrace.<sup>309</sup>

Post-war, in 1920 the tourist business was apparently blooming, as four Refreshment Rooms were located on The Grand Parade, owned by George Cassimaty, Miss C. Ward, Mrs Julia Hamilton and Studwick Thomas. There was also a Post and Telegraph Office adjacent in Shady Nook. The population was beginning to swell with a dozen houses in addition to Brighton Terrace, while two boat proprietors and the swimming baths stood at the water edge. A resident of Saywell's Brighton Terrace, Neil Matterson, managed one of the boatsheds.<sup>310</sup>

With the 1922 sale of picnic area Shady Nook, opposite the hotel, the Post Office located within its grounds had closed. New recreational facilities had been constructed on The Grand Parade; including the sheds of the Brighton Lifesaving Club and the St George Lifesaving Club, on Lady Robinsons Beach. <sup>311</sup>

The Brighton Hotel's Tooth and Company sub-lease was purchased by a succession of licensees. C. Nicholson purchased a nine-year lease in September 1920, which he sold to J. McInerney in March 1921. McInerney managed to increase beer sales to a comfortable £3,462 for the year 1923.

Fred J. Farmer jnr. took over as licensee in April 1924 for the remaining 5 ½ years of the lease. Fred was a highly successful publican and his beer sales increased at a booming rate. Farmer's annual takings had risen from £4,664 of Tooth's beer in 1924 (74.4% of their total trade) to £13,190 by the end of his initial lease, sending the liquor sales graph off the top of the chart. The hotel business was so successful that he renewed his licence with Tooth and Co. for another five years in September 1929. <sup>312</sup>

When Saywell died in Mosman in 1928 at the age of 92, <sup>313</sup> Fred James Farmer jnr. was still running the Brighton Hotel as a sub-leasee.

Saywell's estate took some time to achieve probate, owing to its complexity. His assets were vast and he had been incredibly wealthy, with investments, real estate and shares worth an astounding £164,190 /15/7-, attracting death duties of £34,069/16/. <sup>314</sup>



**New Brighton Hotel 1930 – a remnant of its former glory. In the 1930s, the hotel featured a public bar, private bar, bottle shop and accommodation.**

Photo: from the collection of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University, <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/96624>. <sup>315</sup>



In later years the once proud Assembly Hall slipped a little more downmarket, hosting concerts, roller skating, dancing, boxing and functions. By the 1940s the grand hall had been demolished for the development of more prosaic structures; the Brighton shopping district.

Although Fred Farmer was the sub-leasee, on Thomas Saywell's death ownership of the Tooth and Co. head-lease transferred to Saywell's Tramway and Estate Ltd. Their name changed to Saywell Estate Pty. Ltd. in June 1937.

Fred took out a 5-year sub-lease from Tooth and Co. in September 1929, which was subsequently purchased by Alexander Todd McLauchlan in September 1934. McLauchlan successfully ran the business, with income increasing steadily each year, until he sold it to F. Tidswell in March 1946. <sup>316</sup>



Alexander McLauchlan purchased the licence again in March 1948 but died three years later. John Edward McLauchlan took over the licence on behalf of the estate but was accused of short selling measures of whisky in February that year. The matter was adjourned to August, but it came to nothing, as the lease was sold again in September.



**1949 New Brighton Hotel 1949 – an ugly extension forms an entrance on The Grand Parade.**

Photo: from the collection of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University,  
<http://hdl.handle.net/1885/96620> <sup>317</sup>

R. W. Miller and Co, an associate company of British Breweries, purchased the freehold of the old Saywell's Brighton Hotel site from Tooth's and Co. in 1952 for £200,000. <sup>318</sup> It remained under lease to Tooth and Co. until 1957 after which it became a tied hotel. The old hotel had been neglected and required extensive and expensive repairs to the value of £3,125. <sup>319</sup>

By the 1960s the ancient hotel was old-fashioned, no longer met current business or clientele standards for a new generation of pub-goers, and was expensive to upkeep. Millers demolished the original building, to replace it with a new two-story brick hotel, with tile and metal roof and a very contemporary feel to the design. The accommodation was less of a feature than in Saywell's heyday and was reduced to 33 rooms with 8 bathrooms along the hall, and a three-bedroom licensee's apartment. The modern airconditioned structure was laid with wall-to-wall carpet in the 52-seat dining room. Patrons had a choice of the Starboard Light public bar, Mast saloon bar, a lounge seating 900 patrons and a drive-in bottle shop. Additionally, the Quarterdeck Tavern was a contemporary bistro-style facility, accommodating 380 patrons. <sup>320</sup>



The hotel owned a tar-sealed carpark for 100 vehicles, but in 1960 they had the effrontery to petition the council for access to parkland in Cook Park to build an additional carpark. Their claim that it would benefit the community was stoutly refuted by the Brighton Progress Association, who accused the company of 'filching' public spaces for their own advancement. <sup>321</sup>

**Millers Hotel c. 1960s** Photo: Bayside Council Library



Opinion regarding the hotel was mixed. Many thought it a great hotel. They loved the live music and the famous Battle of the Bands competition. The dubious Lovely Legs competition was also popular, where girls stood behind a lowered curtain which revealed only their legs, so that punters could cheer for the sexiest set of legs. It was a favourite watering hole for rugby league stars, who would frequently be carried out in a highly intoxicated condition. Just as in 1892, when Saywell's patrons were criticised for loutish behaviour, history repeated itself, with more sedate members of the community deploring the noise, the drunken brawls, and the rough crowd.

Millers still owned the hotel, but the licensee changed numerous times between the mid-fifties and the seventies; Eric Norman Claude (August 1955), Angus Lloyd (June 1958),<sup>322</sup> Charles Hilary Beaton (March 1960),<sup>323</sup> Edmund J. Tracy (July 1972), Charles Howard Cupples (October 1972), John Edward Cottington (April 1975), Kenneth John Kemp (October 1977), Donald Desmond Smyth (August 1978), and James Francis Byrnes (July 1979).

Kemp and Cottington were both experienced hoteliers, yet it seems that by the seventies the business was not going well, in view of the short time they held the licence. Sales dropped steadily from mid-1974 until its demise at the end of 1978.<sup>324</sup>



Development company Dainford Holdings purchased the site for clearance in the 1980s, investing \$165 million to create a new resort style hotel. Not long after it was completed, Dainford went broke in 1991 and sold the 14-story, 308-room hotel to Novotel, a 4.5-star resort hotel chain founded in France in 1967.<sup>325</sup> <sup>326</sup> Today it is part of the AccorHotels group which boasts 20 brands and 4,500 hotels in 100 countries.<sup>327</sup>

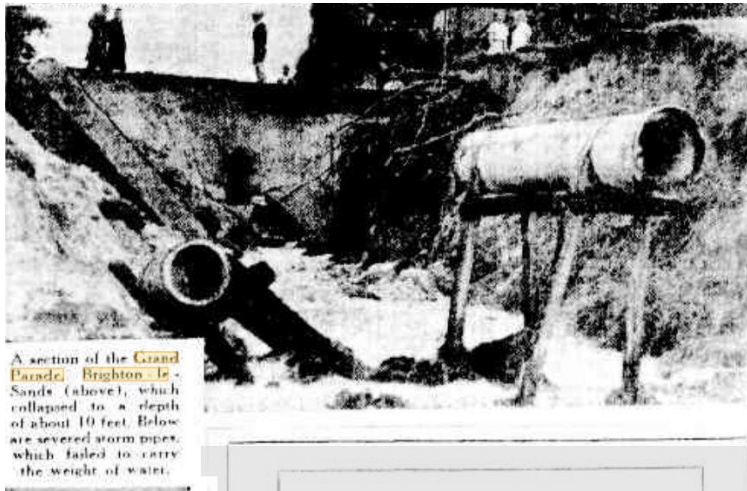
**Novotel Hotel under construction by Dainford Holdings, late 1980s, with the newly erected First Fleet Monument (1988) in foreground. Photo: Bayside Council Library**



**A 1980s aerial photo of Brighton Le Sands near the intersection of Bay Street and The Grand Parade, showing Lady Robinsons Beach and the construction of the Novotel Hotel Photo: Bayside Council Library**

## Stormy weather

Botany Bay may appear flat and calm, but vicious storms can rear up and destroy the bay's amenities with ease. Lying so close to the bay, The Grand Parade and Brighton Le Sands were often lashed by storms which disrupted traffic and caused severe damage to both road and recreational infrastructure. On Tuesday 3 December 1907 a storm struck the Brighton area. Jagged flashes of lightning lit the skies, striking a chimney in The Grand Parade, causing it to topple to the ground. Nearby, the storm fused phone-lines, while powerlines for the electric trams were downed, causing an accident which threw the driver from his carriage with tremendous force. Fortunately, although he was shaken up, he was not injured badly.<sup>328</sup>



A section of the Grand Parade, Brighton Le Sands (above), which collapsed to a depth of about 10 feet. Below are severed storm pipes, which failed to carry the weight of water.

### 1938 Sydney Morning Herald reports storm damage to The Grand Parade<sup>329</sup>

A thunderstorm and associated 10 inches (25cm) of torrential rain caused flooding and chaos across Sydney suburbs in February 1938. The power transformer at Brighton was struck by lightning and in The Grand Parade, a low-tension electric pole collapsed as the sandy soil underneath gave way. Homes and businesses suffered power

blackouts, while emergency services were disrupted. A major power cable was destroyed, leaving St George Hospital incommunicado for two days, with no phone lines in operation. St George County Council staff were busy effecting repairs for several days.<sup>330</sup>

The Cooks River flooded at Tempe, causing police to remove their boots and roll up their trousers to stand in knee-deep water directing traffic. Houses were flooded to the rooftops or even swept from their foundations, and the Chinamen's Gardens in West Botany Street near the Cooks River were awash, with vegetables scattered by the floodwaters, as far as the Barton Park Cricket Ground, which resembled a lake. Part of The Grand Parade collapsed, leaving a gaping hole which exposed shattered drainage pipes and rendered the road un-trafficable.<sup>331</sup>

In August 1947, Grand Parade resident Arthur Sainsbury's quiet Sunday night at home was disturbed by the doorbell. He was startled to find a soaking wet, half-drowned man gasping on his doorstep, the survivor of a sailing boat wreck. Waves on the nay had reached 10 feet (3m) high, causing the man and his mate to be wrecked on the shores of the nay. Arthur and his neighbour Ray Wymer rushed to the beach, to discover the man's friend lying in the water. After dragging him to safety and conveying both men to Arthur's home, the sailors were revived and then driven home to Marrickville by the Good Samaritans. Their 21-foot yacht was in pieces, but both survived the ordeal.<sup>332</sup>

The immediate effects of a storm were bad enough, but there were longer lasting consequences. Excavation of the sand dunes had been carried out in an uneven fashion, creating sand pits at Brighton, which filled with stagnant water after rain or high tides, and into which locals tossed rubbish, attracting rats and vermin. In the 1960s, residents wanted the pits filled in, as there were fears a high tide combined with a storm could potentially undermine The Grand Parade.

Rockdale Council had tried forming a partial erosion barrier by shovelling sand to create a sandhill between the pits and the bay. It was ineffective, and other proposed methods were considered too expensive.

The council then proposed filling the indentations with rubbish. Today this is a popular and effective method of creating fill for future recreational parkland, but at the time was a controversial move. Residents envisaged pollution and rats, rather than composting of the garbage over time. Even the Department of Health refused to grant a licence for this unsavoury solution. The Council sat on its hands, saying that it would fill in the holes as fill became available, adding facetiously that perhaps the proprietor of the old Sandringham Hotel, which was currently in the process of demolition, should throw the building waste into the pits as fill. <sup>333</sup>



**Storm damage to Brighton Baths stairs, 1962. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

Brighton baths and the shoreline of the bay were repeatedly affected by storm damage. Rockdale Council had erected seawalls in 1931 at Sandringham and Dolls Point to prevent erosion, but it was insufficient for the task.

Erosion of the foreshore was a continuing problem during the 1960s, exacerbated by the dredging of Botany Bay in preparation for construction of the new Kingsford Smith Airport north-south runway which extended into the bay, north of Lady Robinsons Beach. Rockdale Council asked the State Government to intervene in December 1965, requesting they sue the Commonwealth Government for £1 million (\$2 million) in compensation. It was estimated that 80 feet of beachfront had been lost in recent years. The sand bars which had previously protected the beach had been removed, leaving the beach exposed to erosion during times of heavy sea swells. The councillors were concerned that if action was not taken soon to construct a protective seawall, The Grand Parade would be swept into the sea in the next big storm. The estimated cost of building a seawall from the runway extension to Brighton Baths was £500,000, which they clearly could not afford. <sup>334</sup>



**Storm damage to Brighton Baths, 1965. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

The wheels of government move slowly. Early the following year, the council was granted a paltry \$5,000 for preventative work on the existing seawall (Australia changed to decimal currency in February 1966). It was insufficient and not soon enough. On 27-28 March 1966, a 400-foot (122m) section of the existing retaining wall near Brighton Baths was significantly damaged, which could potentially lead to the total collapse of the sea wall. The council was concerned that unless immediate action was taken, further undermining of the structure would occur, and they would be up for a disastrous \$200,000 repair bill.

The incident seemed to spur on the powers in Canberra, and finally in April 1966, the government offered Rockdale Council \$10,000 for emergency remedial works. The southern section would have to wait, with the promise of a further \$50,000 funding to the Commonwealth Department of Works,



who would carry out more extensive repairs to the seawall alongside Cooks Park. This meagre sum was a fraction of the original cost estimated by the Council engineers.<sup>335</sup>



**1966 Storm Damage to Cook Park, alongside The Grand Parade, nearly destroys a section of road.**

Photo: Bayside Council Library

The councillor's fears were justified. A massive storm struck the Sydney and Botany Bay on 15 May 1968. Chaos reigned across the suburbs from the Hawkesbury to the Port Hacking Rivers. Lightning flashed across the skies, striking powerlines, causing blackouts and halting trains across the rail network. Paddocks and parks were flooded, roads and bridges severed by floodwaters. Roofs were torn away, exposing homes to fierce wind and rain, while massive trees were uprooted, and waves battered coastal areas.

Along The Grand Parade at Brighton, tumultuous seas carried off tons of soil, wrenched a chunk of the promenade footpath and demolished two portions of the concrete seawall, between Teralba Road and President Avenue, and another section 20 feet (6m) wide and 300 feet (91m) long between Bay and Gordon Streets. The council immediately employed men to dump thousands of tons of rock in the area to prevent further erosion.



**May 1968 Storm damage to Brighton Baths.** Photo: Bayside Council Library

High tides in the Bay are generally around 1.2m to 1.8m, occasionally reaching more than 2 m. When a tide at the upper end of the scale is combined with a large swell, the effect can

be disastrous. At 10.30 pm, 16 May 1968, high tide reached 6 feet 2 inches (1.87m), with 20 feet high (6.09m) monster waves smashing into the retaining walls and spilling over the foreshore in a frothy spray. Two lamp posts and three Norfolk Pines were wrenched out of the ground and swept away into the heaving waters. More alarmingly, several buildings were threatened including; the Brighton Baths, Brighton Life Saving Club, the amusement pier and Brighton Le Sands Senior Citizen's Centre. It was a wonder that The Grand Parade was not swept away into the Bay as had been predicted so recently by the aldermen.<sup>336</sup>

In some ways, storm damage of this type was nothing new. A south-easterly wind causes a ground swell and huge waves which pound the beach mercilessly, resulting in the breakup of the embankment. Traditionally, numerous residents headed for the beach following storms, eagerly searching for lost treasures. When powerful waves tore at the shoreline and heaved sand, items would surface from the places they had been buried for years or even decades, revealing jewellery or money. During one big storm in 1940 hundreds of coins were discovered, some dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>337</sup> The difference was that in the 1940s the area's population was small and development

modest. Twenty years later, The Grand Parade was a busy thoroughfare lined with housing, multi-story buildings and high-profile commercial development.

The government commissioned Wallingford Hydraulics Research Station in Britain to test the hypothesis that the runway extension had caused disturbed wave patterns, resulting in the erosion which had devastated Lady Robinsons Beach and Brighton. Tests in the wave tank proved that the damage was only partially caused by the \$23 million, 4,600 feet (1.4 km) long runway extension, which was well on the way to its expected completion date of 1972. The proposal to prevent further damage was to dredge a bullet shaped area of 3,000 feet (915 m) past the end of the runway, and 3,000 feet from the shoreline.<sup>338</sup>



**Storm Damage to Cook Park 1966. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

While the Council had previously blamed the sand dredging in Botany Bay as a major cause of erosion, a new threat emerged in the late 1960s. Residents were concerned that the increasing numbers of ‘high-rise’ flats along the waterfront were causing erosion, and petitioned Rockdale Council to consider banning further development of this type until assurance could be made that there was no further threat. Vincent

Smith, a low-pressure aerodynamics expert who spoke to the Brighton Le Sands Progress Association stated that “because wind velocity increased as the wind rose over them and the buildings concentrated the wind to low pressure points they created, they could cause sand erosion because



of the added turmoil”. He added that “there was no reason why multi-storey buildings should not be built on Grand Parade between President Avenue and Gordon Street, Brighton, if they were properly designed to disperse wind”.<sup>339</sup>

**Footpath alongside The Grand Parade, Brighton Le Sands, date unknown. On a sunny day the threat of erosion seems far away. Photo: Bayside Council Library**

Problems continued into the 1990s when Ramsgate swimming enclosure had to be closed temporarily due to severe erosion along the seawall. Where there had once been a sandy beach there was now a three-metre drop from the top of the wall to the rocks at the water’s edge. Dredging associated with Port Botany development had escalated the problem. Rockdale Council felt that if the problems were caused by State and Federal Government activities outside of local council control, then those authorities should take responsibility for the cost of remediation and rehabilitation, as the costs were rapidly exceeding the council’s capacity to fund repairs. Talk of a third runway at the airport sparked fears that additional dredging would increase their woes.<sup>340</sup>

Construction of the third runway did indeed cause difficulties. Within three years a third of the bayside beaches were inaccessible and denuded of sand. Ramsgate Beach had not re-opened and Monterey Beach joined the list of closed beaches. After a storm, the sandbank had been torn away, leaving an unstable drop of 3-5 metres from the bank to the water below for another 500 metres. The Maritime Services Board pledged \$2 million to fight erosion, by constructing nine rock groynes, from Florence Street, Ramsgate, to Vanston Parade, Sandringham, aimed at stabilising sand movement along Lady Robinsons Beach.<sup>341</sup>



## The Roxy

The intersection of The Grand Parade and Bay Street has been the centre of a popular restaurant strip since the 1960s, with the area continuing to reflect the suburb's cultural diversity in the choice of restaurants today; Italian, Thai, Greek, American, contemporary Australian.

A little further down the road, The Grand Parade's oldest restaurant is the Grand Roxy. The first restaurant located at 128 The Grand Parade, opened around 1945 as the Roxy Café, styling itself as 'Brighton's high-class restaurant' with 'exclusive catering prepared by our French chef'.<sup>342 343</sup> In contrast to their marketing approach, the food was most likely fairly plain, as was most restaurant fare in Sydney at the time. When advertising for staff they requested applications from cooks (as opposed to high quality chefs), 'experienced in plain cooking – fish and grills.'<sup>344</sup>



It was renamed the Roxy Restaurant in 1951, serving 'fine foods', opening daily for lunches and dinners and catering for wedding receptions in a private room.<sup>345</sup>

In November 1954 the owners decided to relaunch the New Roxy Restaurant as a dining venue for dinner dances, accompanied by a pianist and eventually by the 1960s it had become a favoured function venue in the south.<sup>346</sup>

Hurstville Propeller 8 May 1952. p.3.

Restaurateurs John and Kath McLean purchased the wedding venue in 1975. They were chefs trained by the famous John Doyle of Watsons Bay. Theatre restaurants were quite the rage in Sydney in the seventies, and the Roxy made the most of its two-story premises by offering cabaret shows upstairs. They re-christened the venue the Roxy Revue, commissioning television personality, celebrity chef and controversial Pot of Gold talent contest judge Bernard King to create and perform a cabaret show four evenings per week. Bernard King also appeared with Rockdale Opera Company in 1975 in Offenbach's cheeky operetta *La Perichole*.

Bernard's first show was titled *Baubles Bangles and Boobs*, starring singer Jan Adele and talented dancer and choreographer Ross Hutchison, who performed a tantalising 'fan dance'. Ross would play the straight man to Bernard's wicked and witty jokes and the pair were a hit with audiences from the beginning. Ross also choreographed two shows for Rockdale Opera Company in 1975 and 1985.

The show was so successful that it rapidly expanded to six nights per week. Bernard applied his acerbic wit to another show called *The Roxy Rollocks On*, where diners enjoyed a show and a meal for a bargain \$14.50. He played the venue for seven years, with Ross writing 13 original shows, each of them complete with stunning new costumes and sparkling dance routines. His outrageous wit and titillating skits were crowd pleasers. Groups would arrive by the coachload eager for a hilarious, fun night out, and business was booming, with parked cars and coaches lining The Grand Parade each evening.

Bernard and Ross engaged several great singers to work the revue after Jan Adele's departure, including star performers Judi Conelli, Lorrae Desmond,<sup>347</sup> and country stars Doug Ashdown and Mike McLellan. With Bernard's departure, *The Private Eye Show*, which had been a popular success at the Kirribilli Pub Theatre, was engaged for a season in 1982.<sup>348</sup>

The dinner theatre scene was changing and losing popularity, and the McLeans sold the business, to open the Freshwater Restaurant in a charming Federation style building at Harbord, which the Sydney Morning Herald voted as the Best Seafood Restaurant in Sydney in 1993.<sup>349</sup> Meanwhile, Ross and Bernard moved the Roxy Revue to Parramatta, where it ran for many successful seasons. Although Bernard King has passed away, Ross Hutchison continues to be active in the theatre scene, with a show titled The Roxy Road Show, launched in 2019, amongst his many theatrical and philanthropic ventures.<sup>350</sup>

The upper floor of the Brighton building was leased to the Surf Lifesaving Association of Australia (now Surf Lifesaving Australia), while the restaurant continued serving meals downstairs, until the property was purchased by current owner Bill Mougios, who revived the restaurant in 1983 as the elegant Botany Bay Seafood Restaurant on the ground floor and The Grand Roxy function centre upstairs.<sup>351</sup>

## 2005—2015 The Crystal and other extravagant marinas

Harking back to the glory days of the old 1930s Brighton Baths pier, when bands entertained the crowds on weekend afternoons and people thronged the promenade in search of entertainment, Rockdale Council devised a bold re-development plan in the new millennium, Destinations Rockdale, to rejuvenate and transform not only the pier, but the suburbs of Brighton and Rockdale. The concept was part of a major initiative involving the Rockdale transport hub, Bay Street and Brighton Le Sands. A huge glass dome was envisaged over Rockdale Station and its bus interchange. Bay Street would become a gracious broad boulevard, with traditional single-household dwellings replaced with high and medium density housing.

In lieu of the on-again, off-again F6 Freeway, The Grand Parade would be released from traffic gridlock by a Brighton by-pass road, preferably running underground in the existing F6 corridor. The corner of Bay Street and The Grand Parade would feature a new multi-story apartment block to complement the existing 14 story Novotel Hotel, with the design chosen from an architectural competition.

The extravagant Brighton seafront plan involved landscaping the promenade with cycle tracks and walkways, leading to a massive marina platform, which would attract glamorous yachts and million dollar watercraft. The marina would feature cafes, a boat chandlery, multi-media exhibitions, and shops. Crowning the end of the pier would be a family entertainment venue called The Crystal, so-named because of its unusual, irregular glass walls.

According to the project management team:

“The Crystal will form a dramatic focal point at the end of the Pier. This spectacular seven level building will house a state-of-the-art communications, entertainment and technology exhibition space and an undercover, giant screen amphitheatre.”<sup>352</sup>

The mayor had the plan drawn up by consultants, more or less in secret, in March 2005, at a cost of \$250,000, and released it publicly with a fanfare in September.<sup>353 354</sup> It was claimed that as it was only a ‘visioning’ exercise, public consultation had been deemed unnecessary at this early stage and consultation and feedback would come after more specific plans were developed.

Following the plan’s release, a range of consultation methods were employed, including an Expo at Rockdale Town Hall on 8 December 2005, which attracted 290 participants. One interviewer employed for the public consultation exercise summed up the mixed feedback as, ‘Most people I spoke with were both uneasy and a little excited by the vision.’<sup>355</sup>

Initial public and commercial interest seemed strong, with 43 formal registrations being lodged by representatives of the maritime industry, finance sector, development industry and consulting firms, for an industry briefing in Cook Park, which attracted 39 representatives. Public interest is valuable, but commercial viability and a willingness to invest is more important, and the economic climate was not considered conducive to the ambitious plan.

Furthermore, when the call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) was launched on 22 July 2008, with submissions closing on 21 November 2008, only two were submitted. Neither of them met the selection criteria and were therefore rejected. Portberg Properties PTY LTD concept, developed by the architectural firm Marchese Partners, included a striking, gleaming white, multi-layered pier, sweeping in a curve out into the bay, with adjacent marina, tourist water park, retail and commercial development.<sup>356</sup> Watpac Property designed a yacht club, with retail, commercial and residential developments, ferry stop and shops. The two curved arms of the jetty encircled a marina, providing

a haven for the moored boats. The distinctive commercial development boasted a roof suggestive of the sails of a yacht, or the wings of a white bird, reaching for the sky.<sup>357</sup> Both proposals were impressive, but non-compliant with local building and development regulations.

Consequently, the report recommended that the Department of Lands should be requested to make provision for inclusion of a pier and marina as a permissible development in the Cook Park Plan of Management, while council would develop the plan further in readiness for implementation when the economy recovered.<sup>358</sup>

This ambitious plan was thwarted by divided public opinion, and council apparently abandoned the marina concept in 2010.

In 2015 Rockdale Council revisited the idea of a complete redevelopment of the buildings fronting The Grand Parade. In a flashback to the glory days of Brighton as a seaside resort accessed by Bay Street steam trams, they audaciously proposed to bring in the tourists by running a tram from Wolli Creek, along The Grand Parade, looping back to Rockdale Station and Wolli Creek Station. Big ideas need big money and it was unrealistic to think that the state government would finance this portion of the plan when there were so many other major infrastructure projects in the system.

Head of the developer lobby group Urban Taskforce, former government architect Chris Johnson, compared the potential of the the area to the French Riviera. He foresaw 8-20 story apartments lining The Grand Parade; 10,000 dwellings constructed over the next 20 years, with cafes, restaurants, pier, marina, and swimming pools in the style of the historic seaside bathing pavilions. The idea hinged on closure of The Grand Parade to through-traffic and the implementation of the controversial F6 extension within the green corridor that runs parallel to the beach.<sup>359</sup> Politicians have been promoting the F6 concept for decades, including State Premier Nick Greiner who declared in 2007, "That area of the seaside would blossom if you take out the through traffic on The Grand Parade."<sup>360</sup>

Not all of the councillors agreed with the plan. Councillor Hanna protested, "It was an abysmal failure last time around. The more I peer into this the more I shudder to think."<sup>361</sup>

Back in 2008, council had originally sought Expressions of Interest (EOI) from companies,

'with the necessary vision, resources and experience in creating a marina, tourist development and recreational precinct that would strengthen Brighton Le Sands as a highly sought tourism and recreation destination.'

The companies had submitted proposals for non-compliant development, rendering it impossible for council to recommend a potential developer to the NSW State Government.<sup>362</sup> The project had been deemed unviable. By 2015, so much time had elapsed since the EOIs were submitted, that a complete reworking of the proposals would be required, and it was unlikely that the firms had retained an interest in the project over such an extended period.

In June 2015 councillors resolved to approach the NSW State Government to ascertain their interest in the idea, as implementation of a plan of this scale would necessitate their approval. The matter was thus held in abeyance for an unspecified period and remains unfulfilled today.<sup>363</sup>

## Grand Pines Tourist Park

The Grand Pines Caravan Park at Ramsgate was tucked away behind The Grand Parade, at number 289, with a vehicular entrance around the corner at 112 Alfred Street. The 7,429.5m<sup>2</sup> site was irregular in shape, comprising a central rectangular portion with regular lots either side, fronting both 40 m of vehicular access to Alfred Street and 13.46 m of pedestrian access to The Grand Parade. It featured a second plot of land on the southern edge at 295 The Grand Parade, which had formerly been a petrol service station. Residential housing filled the area between 289 and 295.

The business owner was Ramsgate Beach Caravan Park Pty Ltd, which registered as a company in 1958, owned by Albert and Caroline Weir.<sup>364</sup> Popular with both tourists and its permanent residents since the late 1950s, the park offered accommodation in 33 on-site cabins, 12 caravan/camper sites and 20 caravan sites, and inexpensive access to the pleasures of the seaside. The park's advertising promoted its proximity to swimming pools, sailing, picnic areas and fresh sea air.

It also briefly housed one of our most famous cricketing sportsmen. Fast bowler Glenn McGrath (b.1970) lived at the Ramsgate caravan park for 13 months when he first arrived in Sydney. The young 19-year-old boy from Narromine's Backwater Cricket Club was invited to join the Sutherland District Cricket Club by Steve Rixon, after Doug Walters had seen him play in an exhibition country match in Parkes.

Following an earnest discussion with his mum on the practicalities and financial implications of taking up the offer, Glenn and his mother purchased a caravan, which his mother set up in Ramsgate ready for his arrival in the big smoke. The choice was an economic one, as it only cost \$18 per night, but also a practical one in that it was the mid-point between his Caringbah Oval training ground and the State Bank at Hurstville, where Glenn had arranged a transfer for his job as a bank teller. It was a lonely life, coming home from the camaraderie of the workplace and the cricket pitch to a solitary walk along the beach, prior to retiring to his cosy van each evening, to cook a simple meal.

In his biography, Glenn asserted,

‘What kept me going during the hard times was that I’d tell myself I was here to play cricket and I had that dream to play for Australia.’

His time in Ramsgate built his mental stamina. His persistence, talent and hard work paid off. The rest as they say, is history.<sup>365 366</sup>

Many lovers of the great outdoors viewed with dismay the rampant development taking place up and down the coast of NSW, with the consequent loss of family-friendly, inexpensive holiday campsites. Echoing their sentiments, John Osbourne of the Camperhome and Motorhome Club lamented in 2005, “It’s going to be a sad day when Australia no longer has any caravan parks on the coast.”<sup>367</sup>

Developers were eager to snap up this priceless piece of vacation land. After 47 years of operation, the Weirs were nearing retirement and eager to sell. Consequently, Strata Development Pty Ltd lodged a development application (DA) with Rockdale Council on 4 April 2005, proposing demolition of the caravan park and requesting re-zoning to facilitate housing construction.

After consideration by the Design Review Panel, coupled with a public forum, it was initially rejected. Albert Weir presented the case for the caravan park, in person, at the council on December 7 December 2005, with local resident Edward Smith objecting. Additionally, Rockdale Council received 87 individual submissions and three separate petitions containing 88 signatures, opposing the



redevelopment for a variety of reasons including parking problems, loss of privacy, noise, overshadowing, loss of mature trees and the adverse effect on local tourism.

The proposal was to build 54 dwellings on the site, consisting of 4 villas, 20 townhouses, and two three-story buildings each with 15 units. The park was partially zoned for low density residential housing and partially for villas and townhouses. Although existing zoning did not allow for this type of construction, it was claimed that existing land use rights superseded the zoning.<sup>368</sup> Ramsgate Beach Caravan Park Pty Ltd sold the caravan park for \$7,020,000 in November 2007.<sup>369</sup> The former owners voluntarily liquidated their company in December 2008 and it was de-registered in March 2009.

The site was sold but experienced a temporary reprieve from demolition. However, with Sydney land prices skyrocketing, particularly for housing near the waterfront, its fate was inevitable. In July 2008 Barua Pty Ltd (a company established in 1978)<sup>370</sup> submitted another DA to council, halving the number of properties by dropping the idea of constructing unit blocks. They requested permission to subdivide the grounds into 22 strata titles, and build nineteen 3-bedroom townhouses, a three-bedroom villa and a two-storey attached dual occupancy, each with 3 bedrooms. Councillors supported the application 11 to 3, under conditions imposed by a 20-page document.<sup>371 372</sup>

Barua revised its plans in 2011, fractionally increasing the strata subdivision to 26 lots in the Alfred Street section of the park. They now wished to construct 23 townhouses, a single storey villa, an attached dual occupancy and ground-level car parking. Anthony Betros presented their case, and council was willing to support the revision, although it was not compliant with the Rockdale Local Environmental Plan 2000, which would require a variation. The plan was approved (with councillors voting 13 to 1), provided one townhouse was replaced with open space.<sup>373</sup>

The NSW government was concerned that local councils were obstructing the construction of essential infrastructure. The Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 was seen to be complex and focused on the approval process rather the achievement of positive outcomes for building major projects. They enacted the Infrastructure NSW Act 2011, with the object;

‘To secure the efficient, effective, economic and timely planning, co-ordination, selection, funding, implementation, delivery and whole-of-lifecycle asset management of infrastructure that is required for the economic and social well-being of the community.’<sup>374</sup>

A July 2012, the government released ‘A New Planning System for New South Wales’ Green Paper. A White Paper was being prepared whose approach was, ‘focussed on facilitating the economic and employment growth of the state in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner,’ coupled with the formation of Regional Planning Panels and Independent Hearing and Assessment Panels. New planning laws were being drawn up.<sup>375</sup> There was talk of the NSW Government acquiring the power to override council objections for large-scale projects. Perhaps this inspired Barua to a bolder vision for their project.

In October 2012 Barua Pty Ltd again submitted plans to Rockdale Council for a substantially increased development worth \$11.8 million. It consisted of 52 townhouse and duplex homes, with 70 basement car parking spaces. Their spokesman, Eugenio Sanhueza, argued that it was well under the allowed floorspace ratio and local streets would experience significantly less impact from residential traffic than from the caravan park’s customers. Local residents still disagreed, citing the same concerns as before, over loss of privacy, traffic flow and parking.<sup>376</sup>

The following year Anthony Betros presented a case to the council in a public forum, with a revised plan to demolish the caravan park structures and construct a strata townhouse development containing 51 dwellings within a landscaped setting, with basement carparking for 70 vehicles. Finally, the motion was unanimously approved, with twice the number of townhouses that Barua had initially proposed to build. Ironically, this was a similar number of dwellings to the unsuccessful Strata Development Pty Ltd Development Application in 2005.<sup>377</sup>

The uncertainty of the tourist park's future, with eight year's wrangling in the council chambers, was reflected in the lack of investment and decline in its recreational facilities. Although the cabins and amenities blocks were clean, by this time, the once delightful and popular park was looking battered, old and tired. There were none of the usual facilities such as BBQs, games rooms, inflatable bouncing pillow, kiosk or pool, nor the type of organised activities expected in today's competitive caravan park market. Despite this, some were sad to see it go, as they remembered many pleasant holidays by the bay.<sup>378</sup> By the end of November 2013, a handful of tourists continued to rent the aging cabins, but the developers had already placed signage on the site advertising luxury apartments for sale off the plan.<sup>379</sup>

The tourist park site was ultimately divided into three properties. Today, the site of 289 The Grand Parade boasts an ultra-modern two-story glass and concrete house which sold in 2017 for \$2.5 million.<sup>380</sup> Number 295 has disappeared, to be replaced by 4 contemporary townhouses, numbered 294, 294A, 296 and 296A The Grand Parade, which today are worth between \$1 - \$1.8 million each.<sup>381</sup> The remainder of The Grand Pines site, sleek apartments set in beautifully landscaped grounds, accessed from 112 Alfred Street, rented for around \$700 per week in 2018. Clearly there was much more money to be made from property investment than in running one of Sydney's last urban caravan parks.<sup>382 383</sup>

## Conclusion

The Grand Parade was an unplanned road, created by property developers as a series of disjointed access roads to the newly opened lots of residential land in southern Sydney in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The road originally connected a series of housing subdivision developments along the bay, which have significantly changed in character in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, from plots of land with single bungalow dwellings, to high rise apartments which allow thousands of people to enjoy sea views and the delights of the beach.

Pioneering work by entrepreneur Thomas Saywell, and the investment of land speculation companies, resulted in a lucrative source of income for the early hospitality providers, through the promotion of The Grand Parade as a gateway to the pleasures of the Botany Bay seaside, attracting thousands of bathers, day-trippers and hotel guests.

In recent years the area has declined as a holiday destination, as it experiences a change in demographics. While the Novotel Hotel, on the site of the original Saywell's Brighton Hotel, offers accommodation for leisure travellers, it conducts a significant percentage of its business in the business and events markets, known collectively in the industry as MICE, or Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions and Events. There is no longer the low-cost alternative of family camping by the beach since the Grand Pines Tourist Park closure.

The recreational facilities along The Grand Parade are popular, but used primarily by local residents, particularly on the weekends. However, the leisure patterns of Sydneysiders have significantly changed since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, prompted by greater mobility, increased disposable income and the availability of an enormous variety of entertainment options. While Bondi Beach may attract thousands of locals and tourists to the surf beaches, the thought of 10,000 people arriving by public transport, to swim at a single swimming pool on a sunny summer weekend, seems inconceivable today, yet was a common feature along The Grand Parade of the 1930s.

With tourism perceived as a desirable, key economic dynamo in Sydney, Bayside Council would like to reverse the tourism decline, restoring Brighton to its 1930s seaside resort heyday with a 21<sup>st</sup> century twist, as can be seen in plans such as the ill-fated Destinations Rockdale planning proposal.

With significant business investment and a simplified planning procedure, it may be possible to lure domestic tourists or the business trade to Botany Bay, but international visitors, with their blinkered vision of Sydney Harbour as their sole destination, are unlikely to be attracted to the suburbs. Sunday-trippers in times past may have been willing to catch a train and a tram or bus to Botany Bay, but overseas visitors would not view the public transport options to reach beaches along The Grand Parade as either easy or swift. Ultimately, Lady Robinsons Beach lacks the glamour and international standing of Bondi Beach.

Additionally, from examination of council meeting minutes and planning documentation presented to both Rockdale and Bayside councils during the last few decades, it is clear that nothing is simple when investing in tourism property. It is an extremely expensive, frustrating, lengthy and complex bureaucratic process. This could deter infrastructure investment in the area.

The provision of bathing facilities has shifted from private ownership in the days of Saywell and Pemberton, to public swimming enclosures and free facilities provided by Bayside Council. Indeed, there is a general expectation by the populace that councils should provide such facilities free of charge, beautify the promenade area and provide picnic areas, pathways and cycleways open to all.

The Grand Parade has been the site of decades of heritage battles over the fate of the Saywell Terraces, and the historic Norfolk Island and Cook Pines which line the promenade in Cook Park. The pines have been the lone constant feature of The Grand Parade since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, yet local residents who jealously guard the heritage and beauty of the area will need continue to monitor development to ensure that money does not speak louder than local amenity.

The road started as a dirt track, frequently overcome by sand drifts, and progressively asphalted as road transport became more sophisticated. The Grand Parade has evolved into a traffic nightmare in peak periods, as it functions as a thoroughfare south over the Georges River to the Sutherland Shire, and is used daily by commuters between southern suburbs, the airport and the city. Whilst this concept of a road to the south was a desirable outcome pre-World War 1, no-one then could have envisaged the gridlock this would produce in a city of more than 5 million people, in a state with 5.6 million registered motor vehicles,<sup>384</sup> and where 46% of households in Greater Sydney have access to two or more motor vehicles.<sup>385</sup> It remains to be seen whether the state government will proceed with the F6 extension, or if such a diversion will have a significant effect on the traffic flowing along The Grand Parade.

Bayside Council faces an ongoing challenge to entice significant tourism and recreational development in the area and reverse the trends. Sydney is changing rapidly in unexpected ways, particularly on the north side of Botany Bay in the Bayside Council area. Perhaps it is unrealistic and undesirable to expect to turn back the clock to a rose-coloured dream of yesteryears in Brighton, and The Grand Parade needs a radical new overarching vision, rather than the piecemeal development which characterised its early days. Only time will tell.



## Appendix

### The Grand Parade in 2019



Scots College campus at Primrose House, which opened in 2018. The original Scotts College was located on the site of today's Novotel Hotel



Ramsgate Baths at the corner of Ramsgate Road and The Grand Parade, opposite the former Pemberton's Baths site, no longer has a sandy beach.



Ramsgate Lifesaving Hall



Site of Pemberton's Baths, now an aging Coles supermarket



The Grand Roxy, formerly known as Roxy Café, Roxy Restaurant, Roxy Revue, and briefly a former Australian Surf Lifesaving Association headquarters



Site of The Grand Pines Tourist Park, 289 The Grand Parade





Site of The Grand Pines Tourist Park, 295 The Grand Parade, has now been subdivided into 294 and 296 The Grand Parade, omitting a number 295



South Beach, the site of the former vehicular entrance to The Grand Pines Tourist Park, at 112 Alfred Street



Restaurants on the site of Shady Nook Recreation Grounds



Brighton RSL Club, the site of Shady Nook Recreation Grounds



Site of Saywell's New Brighton Hotel and Millers Hotel, now the Novotel Hotel. Saywell's Baths were opposite his hotel.

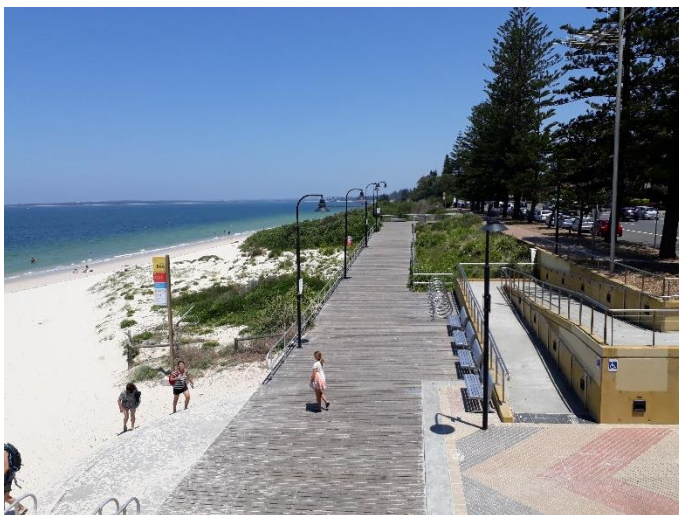


Brighton Baths, site of the former Brighton Municipal Baths, located south of the site of Saywell's Baths





A boardwalk promenade runs along the lower level of the former Seymour Pavilion, temporary home of Brighton Lifesaving Club in 1945, now home to Le Sands restaurant, Hurricanes Bar and Grill and Republiq restaurant



Promenade at Brighton Baths, constructed in 2007 near the site of Saywell's Baths



Brighton Baths Athletics Club on the lower level of the former Seymour Pavilion dressing sheds at Brighton Le Sands





Decay as Saywell's Terraces await renovation



Curtin House, an early example of Housing Commission buildings



The Norfolk Island and Cook Pines lining The Grand Parade and Lady Robinson Beach are thriving



The Grand Parade is a major traffic thoroughfare

### Note on place names

Brighton Le Sands has variously been spelt with a hyphen between each word and with a lower case or capital L. When quotations are used, I have retained their original format. However, I have generally named suburbs and streets in accordance with the Geographical Names Board, Geographical Place Names Policy, September 2018, Section 6 Universal Naming Principles – Language, paragraphs 6.1.4 and 6.1.5.

This states that punctuation, hyphens and apostrophes are not used in place names. e.g. Lady Robinsons Beach, not Lady Robinson’s Beach; Brighton Le Sands, not Brighton-le-Sands. Bayside Council’s website consistently refers to Brighton Le Sands with a capital L, which I have retained unless used in a quotation.

According to policy 6.1.7 ‘Geographical names shall not include the definite article (the) as the sole name element of a place name’. However, in this case I have followed the format of street maps and street signs, which refer to The Grand Parade, although technically it should be simply Grand Parade.<sup>386</sup>

### Acknowledgements

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