



gosford.rsl

Our History - created in 1992 to celebrate the Gosford RSL's 30 year anniversary.
All information extracts from the 30 year Souvenir Edition 1992.

In 1838 Governor Gipps instructed the Surveyor General to make a survey for a 'Maritime Township' at Brisbane Water. A map was produced and titled The Township at Point Frederick in 1839. The then Governor Gipps used his prerogative and gave the name Gosford to the township.



The settlement grew slowly and by 1841 had five houses and a population of 21.

The town had seen many changes in the early days from lime burning and grazing to the booming industry years of the 1880s which brought shipyards and orchards to the area. Before too long, the citrus orchards began to dominate the local farming, thanks to climate and soil. In fact, it was such a success that by the late 20s, the district was producing 34 per cent of the State's citrus crop. The booming years during the 1880s really laid the foundation of Gosford, a centre of rapid growth and development.

The key to it all was the construction of the railway line from Sydney which brought hundreds of visitors each year to enjoy the sunshine, fresh air and glorious beaches. By the time World War II had ended, Gosford was quickly becoming a part of Sydney's metropolitan area.

The end of the war also began an era of the RSL Club in Gosford – now a cornerstone in

Gosford's history. It was founded by Ernest White, an ex-AIF Captain in the First World War who was born and bred in town.



The very first RSL members in the area met in the Brisbane Water District Club which was at the rear of the Anglican Church in Broadwater Avenue and was built by the First World War Diggers in 1921. The land was donated by Dr James Paul who requested no intoxicating liquor was to be sold on premises. But that didn't stop the thirsty men from getting their long earned drink each night. They simply bought coupons which were exchanged for beer or spirits at the bar.

Apparently, about 90 per cent of returned World War II soldiers joined the Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia in those days and were proud to wear the badge that neither wealth, nor influence, nor social standing can purchase.

It wasn't easy, but as time passed, they began to see the beginning of the club we know today. Their toughest battle by far, was the fight for a liquor licence which began in the late 50s.

Although the Secretary, Owen Gannon, an ex-Airforce bloke, encouraged many of

the members to dip into their pockets to help see the licensed club off the ground, it couldn't be achieved that easily. To make matters worse, there were plenty of members who preferred the 'sly grog' served from the basement of the old house in Broadwater Avenue.

About 60 members threw in a couple of quid each and started the club's first licensed premises in an empty Ford garage in Mann Street owned by Fred Richardson.



The Foundation Committeemen formed in 1959-1960.

The luxuries of today such as air-conditioning and carpet were something only to be dreamed about in the early days. The new club was a dirty old building, really a garage, with corrugated iron walls, tarred floor and no ceiling – just the rafters in the roof. It's unlikely that anyone would have realised how much this club would grow and develop into one of the finest clubs on the Central Coast.

The members knew that it was time to form the first committee of the club, 20 men took the challenge, headed up first by the President, Bert Ashwell.

The women had already started their own auxiliary some years earlier. Only nine women attended the first meeting in 1949 which was held in the Brisbane Water District Club and chaired by the Sub-Branch President, Mr Errol Hickey. By the time the first meeting was held in November that year, the auxiliary had already grown in size and could boast a bank balance of twenty pounds thanks to a donation from the Sub-Branch.



The women who founded the auxiliary were totally dedicated to the work of the RSL. The first President, Mrs Ivy Keever, held this

position for over thirty years and eventually received an Order of Australia Medal in 1987 for her dedication and service to the RSL. Similarly, Mrs Pearl Elliott and Mrs Evelyn Wilson each held the position for over twenty years.

While the club was looking for new premises, a block of land was purchased on the corner of Donnison Street and Henry Parry Drive. Although the land was about four thousand quid, the club had yet to pay any money for it when the premises in Mann Street was offered to them.

Bert Ashwell, who was then a real estate agent, sold the Donnison Street land for a profit without paying a cent on the land to begin with.



After much hard work and alterations, the new club in Mann Street was ready to be opened and was finally granted a liquor licence in 1960. The club was off to a good start and only three years later began the first of many major alterations. The club that had started with a membership of less than 180 a few years ago, had now formed into a bustling metropolis with over 900 members.

Ladies were not allowed to join the club until much later, which was ironic considering that the Ladies' Auxiliary had been raising funds for the RSL work for the past 11 years.

The club made yet another important step in its progress in 1962 by purchasing the property adjacent to the club which was previously occupied by C H Brown and Son, a furniture retailer.

By 1966 Gosford RSL Club was really starting to move toward a new decade. For Mr W D Davis, in his first year as President, membership hit the 1500 mark. After extensions and alterations, members could now enjoy Indoor Bowls, Snooker, Billiards, Squash, Table Tennis, Darts or dine in one of the restaurants that had been established.

Although the club was beginning to progress quickly with more renovations in 1967 and 1968 costing more than

\$350,000, parking began to be a problem which plagued the club for many years. The club even considered building a multi-deck car park at the rear of the club but the cost was astronomical. The remodelling of the club ranked it as one of the most modern of its kind in Australia and was officially opened by the Governor Sir Roden Cutler. The success and expansion of the late 60s was soon overcome by the death of the club's Foundation President and Patron, Mr Bert Ashwell.

Finally in 1968, ladies were permitted in the club at all hours however, they were still refused entry into the Members' Bar area of the Billiards Room. The trading hours were also extended this year and the new gym was opened. Gosford RSL Club was now one of the biggest clubs on the Central Coast with almost 2000 members and a turnover of more than \$320,000.

Ralph Mortimer replaced W.D. Davis as President in 1972 but after only a few months in office, disaster struck.



On January 22nd, 1973 a sudden fire outbreak quickly swept through the luxurious Gosford RSL Club causing about half a million dollars in damage.

The building was gutted within minutes and was beyond restoration. 41 poker machines were destroyed and little more than a few bottles of spirits, a

small amount of cash and a few records survived the inferno.

One of the saddest moments for the management and members of the club was when they discovered that the club was insured against fire but not against loss of profits in rebuilding.

Since the fire, the new Board of Directors met constantly to investigate numerous possibilities for the re-establishment of the club. Less than 30 days after the fire damaged the premises, the members overwhelmingly endorsed the Board to purchase the Galaxy Motel at West Gosford at a cost of approximately \$1 million.

The motel was located on the 10 acres of land with direct access to the Narara Creek on the east, the Brisbane Water to the south and fronting directly onto the Pacific Highway. Not only did the land have ample room for expansion, but it also solved the club's parking problems. It seemed perfect and history shows it most certainly was the move of the decade.

Originally, the area of the Galaxy Motel site was owned by George and Agnes Fagan who built a home on this land and called it 'Oak Haven'.



The property was later bought by a Hungarian emigrant, Zoltan Kamenitzky



who built the motel he called "The Galaxy".

There were some criticisms regarding the move to the west of the town. Many thought the site was too far from the centre of town but little did they know how Gosford would expand over the coming years.

It was decided that the 34 room motel would run as a separate identity from the club while plans for a new complex were being developed. The motel seemed perfect already. It could accommodate 100 people and seat 170 in the dining room – terrific potential for future development of the club no matter what they decided to do.

Since the relocation, the club has never looked back. Work began on a new mixed lounge, members' bar and dining room. Meanwhile, the remnants of the clubrooms in Mann Street were sold for almost half a million dollars.

The new Gosford RSL Club opened on July 18th, 1973 only six months after the fire in the old clubrooms. Already, the occupancy of the motel was around 98 per cent and new members were pouring into the club daily, many just to see the new premises.



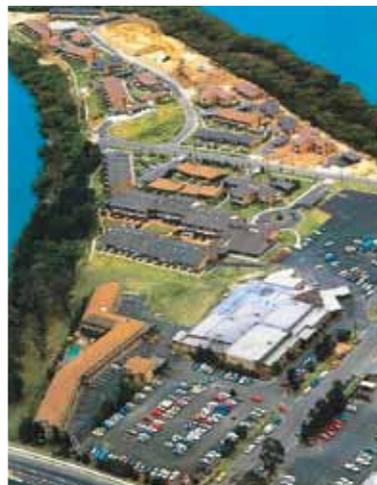
Not long after the club's 5th anniversary at the new site, plans were under way to extend the club premises. The extensions costing \$150,000 would extend the auditorium, kitchen and bars as well as improving the reception area. The amazing recovery from ashes to thriving growth was evident when the final extensions were completed in 1980.

Since the fire in 1973, Gosford RSL Club had gradually grown to become a focal point of West Gosford and become known as Gosford's friendliest club.

The club management's dedication and determination to improve the club was unwavering with the decision to amalgamate with A and C Bowling Club in 1986 and become another valued addition to the growing RSL complex. The Bowling Club site was sold to Gosford Race Club in 2001.

While demolishing the old Galaxy Motel, the concept of a retirement village on site was born. With the construction of the luxurious 49 unit motel continuing as planned, the concept of the retirement village never died in the eyes of the club's management. After much research and investigation, it was evident that a retirement village could be built once more land was purchased nearby. With 13 acres, plans began for the new village. Word of the RSL's plans soon spread and interest in the village was overwhelming.

The village now known as Gosford RSL Leisure Living, promised to be one of the most exciting new retirement living developments on the Central Coast. Leisure Living Retirement Village now has 143 independent living units, 94 Ageing in Place units and a Community Centre. In 2006 Gosford RSL donated the land on which Leisure Living is built to Gosford RSL Leisure Living Ltd, valued at \$8.9 million.



For the first time in the club's history, it was becoming a centre that totally serviced the needs of all its members. The new Galaxy Motel was opened in 1986 and paved the way for the continuing stages of the retirement village. In essence, the entire project was a successful mixture of a total commitment by the management and Board of Directors to ensure the club's early dreams became a reality.