



WAVERLEY  
COUNCIL

## THE HISTORY OF THE PAVILION:

In 1909, Waverley Council awarded the tender for the design of the Pavilion to Taylor and Bills for £3,000.

This first Bondi Pavilion was affectionately known to the locals as 'The Castle,' or the 'Castle Pavilion' because of its whimsical fairytale-like turrets. Its official name was the Bondi Surf Sheds. Despite its pretty appearance, the building was simply a dressing shed; a private place to get in and out of your swimming costume. It opened on 3 October 1911. It was equipped with 1,000 'dressing boxes', 750 for men and 250 for women, each one containing a seat and several books for people to read while on the beach. The Castle Pavilion had a short life span and was demolished on 6 June 1928.

The rationale for the replacement of the Castle Pavilion lay in the rising popularity of beach swimming and surfing. With more people than ever using the beach, services needed to improve accordingly. The design competition for a new Pavilion was fierce, with tenders coming in from around the world. The architectural firm Robertson and Marks won the competition, though the Pavilion design changed frequently over the following years.



Caption: Workers on the roof of the Pavilion in 1928

Building began on the new Pavilion in May 1928, before the Castle Pavilion was demolished, with the design including changing areas, Turkish baths, shops, lockers, a gym and a ballroom. Built in a mixture of Georgian revival and Mediterranean styles, the colonnade façade was as exotic then as it is iconic now.



Caption: The Pavilion, 1934

'The Esplanade' was a restaurant-cabaret in the new Pavilion. It was very classy, boasting 'Private Dining Rooms, Palm Court and Alcoves, Cabaret and Private Ballroom'.

The Turkish and Hot Sea Water Baths opened in the Pavilion on 20 July 1929. They had a massage room, a lounge, an electric fan for drying hair, and free 'medical' weighing machines. Unfortunately, they weren't particularly successful – by 1932, the Turkish baths had been shut down, and the space leased to the North Bondi Surf Life Saving Club by mid-1933.

In October 1933, the space was converted into an amusement parlour, though by 1934 it had reverted back to its bath house origins. There had been substantial structural deterioration and the original equipment had become outdated. Limited operations continued throughout the 1940s until after the war, when the Bondi [Beach] Boy's Club took over the space.

During the Second World War, Bondi was identified as a potential invasion point and in 1942 Council, on the recommendation of military authorities, destroyed the concrete entrances to the underground passages leading from the beach to the dressing sheds at the back of the Pavilion. The amount of explosives needed was overestimated, and the resulting blast damaged the Pavilion, the Surf Life Saving Club and several buildings on Campbell Parade. Almost all the windows of the Pavilion were broken and the roof badly damaged. In January 1944, the first floor of the Pavilion in the rooms which had been the former Esplanade Cabaret were requisitioned by the American Red Cross and U.S. military officers who ran it as an officers' club until the end of the war.



The rear of the Pavilion in the 1930s

In 1948, the Pavilion obtained a liquor licence, and the concerts, dances and cabarets that had continued though the war spun merrily on. By the mid-1950s, the popularity of the Pavilion as an entertainment venue had faded. Advances in synthetic swimwear materials and design meant that changing sheds were becoming a thing of the past. People simply wore their swimming costume to the beach and home again as it would be able to dry during the day. By 1959, the building was deteriorating and unlicensed. By the 1960s a third of the men's changing rooms had been closed and functions were rarely held.

## The Pavilion becomes a cultural hub

In 1973, the Bondi Theatre Group made a proposal to Waverley Council to convert the old Palm Court Ballroom into a theatre. With the help of a \$50,000 grant, work was completed in March 1974 and heralded the start of the transformation to a cultural and community centre.



Caption: Theatre opening night in 1974

The new theatre was opened in 1974 by then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. With a new influx of creativity, the Pavilion was re-born, becoming a centre of cultural programs in the Bondi area. The Pavilion was also classified in 1977 by the National Trust in recognition of its historical significance. On 28 June 1978, the revitalised Bondi Community Arts Centre was officially opened by the Premier Mr Neville Wran. By its 50th birthday the Bondi Pavilion had re-established its place as an integral part of the local community.

In 1993, Bondi Beach and surrounds, including the Pavilion, were listed on the Register of the National Estate. Administered by the Australian Heritage Commission, the listing meant that any development or redevelopment of the Pavilion has to take into account the historical and social significance of the area.

In 1996, an upgrade plan was approved for the Pavilion. Costing \$2.3 million, and lasting four years, the upgrades involved building an all-purpose hall, recording studio and rehearsal rooms. Construction finished in 2000 just in time for the Olympics with the beach volleyball held at Bondi Beach.

Bondi Pavilion is included in the Australian Heritage Council's National Heritage listing for Bondi Beach, Campbell Parade, Bondi Beach, NSW, Australia, included in the NSW Heritage Council's State Heritage Register listing for the Bondi Beach Cultural Landscape and it is also listed as a heritage item by Waverley Council.

The Pavilion continues to hold a special place in the local landscape and is one of the most recognised features on Bondi Beach.

**Our heritage. Our community. Our future.**