

MEDIA RELEASE:

Shoal Bay Country Club Hotel – A Brief History

The story of the Shoal Bay Country Club begins in 1934 when an advertisement was placed in the Sydney Morning Herald requesting partners in a fishing venture at Port Stephens. The venture began with three partners, Bob Elliott, Alex Kufner and Tony Raper, with its original base at Bundabah (located across the bay). The boats of the era were sluggish, and made the journey out to the Broughton Island fishing site a long and arduous one. The search began for a new site and on one of their fishing expeditions, it was found to be too rough to head out to the usual fishing grounds and anchor was made in Shoal Bay. During their explorations of the land, it was discovered that Shoal Bay offered them a good place to build a club house, with the bay's close proximity to the Port's entrance.

The club approached the land owners at the time, Realty Realisations, who offered the club the land free while the building remained in the hands of the club. When the venture went commercial some years later a payment of £345 was made. In 1935 the building was completed, a jetty erected and a dirt track from Nelson Bay was opened up.

The building soon underwent its first of many refurbishments with the large dormitories converted to private rooms making it a suitable destination for married couples. Some time later Pioneer Tours, who ran trips to Port Stephens, began utilising the building. It was, however, the years of The Depression and due to a lack of patronage this venture soon came to a close. The Club remained closed until Alex Kufner re-opened the club and ran it for three seasons.

Then, in December of 1941, Japan entered the Second World War and the tranquil setting of Port Stephens was shattered, with the arrival of American, British and Australian troops. Alex Kufner cancelled all holiday bookings as the club was requisitioned by the US Military and converted to the headquarters for the amphibious army training area known as J.O.O.T.S (Joint Overseas Operations Training Services).

During the war, more than 14,000 American and British troops were based in the Shoal Bay area. Historians believe that with maps of the Pacific War laid out, the plan for the Pacific War was made and taken to General Macarthur in Melbourne.

At the cessation of the hostilities, the Country Club was returned to Alex Kufners who upon his discharge from the AIF and together with R Browne, refurbished the club again with compensation monies received from the military. They reopened the Country Club as a guest house.

The Shoal Bay Country Club Hotel was purchased by the Randall family in 1947, and so began a new era for this historic site. The club stayed in the Randall family for over 40 years, with the business growing successfully and the premises metamorphosing from a small guest house with a maximum of 124 guests, to a Resort that at present can house up to 600 guests.



After his purchase, Mr Randall made an application for a hotel license to capitalize on the growing tourism in the area. With approval from the Port Stephens Shire Council. The Country Club Hotel was built and opened on New Years Eve 1954-55. These early days were, however, far from plain sailing - just 9 short months after the hotel opened, a fire broke out and the building sustained extensive damage. It is thought that the fire was accidentally started by a client who was smoking in bed. Perhaps with fear of accountability, they didn't raise the alarm that the fire had started and never came forward.

The Randall family remained committed to the venture, and the hotel was rebuilt and opened again fifteen months later on the 6th December 1957. Additions and alterations were made to both the hotel, bar and accommodation as the business expanded and the area became more popular.

The current owners, Shoal Bay Property Corp, purchased the hotel in July 1989. This consortium has been dedicated to substantially improving the hotels facilities and services. Significant funds have been invested to revert the location to its legendary status as a unique holiday destination.

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MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

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