

## Billiards and Billiard Saloons

*...continued from April May Issue*

The billiard rooms were colourful places that usually were a front for illegal activities. The saloons, in most instances, had a barber shop and tobacconist at the front and were a hive of activity, especially on horse racing days. Customers could join the billiard room's 'club', which, in many cases, entitled members to illegal access to poker machines, SP bookies and liquor. Many shady dealings took place in these interesting establishments, which, despite flaunting the law, were seldom raided by police.

My column, Bulli Bits, in the now defunct Bulli Times, on May 16, 1996, reveals the following information on local billiard saloons:

...[Bulli Bits contributors] George and Ben Channell [both of Bulli] said they remember all the local billiard saloons [during the 1930s and 40s]. They were always frequented by men and incorporated a barber shop at the front, billiard tables and usually an SP bookie (even one local saloon had poker machines hidden in a large cupboard). One of the saloons had a small bar, which was supplied by a local hotel. They were certainly colourful places that attracted colourful identities. Ben can recall the 'pencils' (persons filling out the betting tickets) sitting in a row in a tin shed behind one of the saloons [the Bulli saloon]. They were always busy places on Saturdays. The radiogram which the punters listened to the races on at the Bulli saloon is now with the Bulli Museum....

The first purpose built billiard saloon in the Bulli district was opened by John Pritchard in 1886. Pritchard's saloon was probably located on the main road at Old Bulli, beside the Black Diamond Hotel.