

BILLIARDS AND BILLIARD SALOONS

... *continued from May/June Issue*

Pritchard closed the saloon after the delicensed Black Diamond Hotel was destroyed by fire in 1891. The saloon may have also been destroyed or badly damaged. Pritchard began a new business venture when he opened the Woonona Music Hall in 1899. Located on the main road, just south of Russell Street, the weatherboard music hall was ironically destroyed by fire in 1906.

The next purpose built saloon opened in April, 1889 when Henry Anderson licensed rooms at Woonona. The saloon was most probably located in the vicinity of the Woonona Royal Hotel. The address given over the saloon's life varies from "Main Road, Woonona" to "Main Road, Bulli". There was some confusion as to where Bulli and Woonona actually met and the area along the main road between Hopetoun Street and Hillcrest Avenue was often referred to alternatively as Bulli or Woonona. This leads me to believe that this was most probably the location of Anderson's Billiard Saloon.

Michael McKitten, who operated the premises from 1890 to 1903, was one of the most prominent of the licensees. He was a natural for the business and was a keen sportsman. Originally a coal miner, he knew his customers well. He himself excelled in billiards and was a champion quoits player. He had a keen interest in horse racing, trotting, foot racing and cycling, besides other sports, and organised many foot racing handicaps and cycle races in the district.

After leaving the Woonona billiard saloon in 1903, McKitten established another in Corrimal. Although the Corrimal Billiard Saloon was not licensed to McKitten, he most probably was engaged as the saloon's barber and tobacconist or as manager. He died in 1935 and is buried in the Corrimal Roman Catholic Cemetery.

Woonona received another billiard room when Edward Von Heyman obtained a license in October, 1902. It is most probably that the license was obtained for the Woonona/Bulli School of Arts, located on the main road just north of Grey Street. The Bulli Times reported in August, 1903 that a billiard room is to be erected in the School of Arts building.

Joseph Sharpley was fined 20 shillings in the Bulli Courthouse in April, 1903 when he used "indecent language" in the Woonona billiard saloon. Evidence for the prosecution was given by the proprietor, John Henningsen Junior and the bench remarked that they were "pleased to see the proprietors of these rooms endeavouring to stop the use of such language".

Billiard saloons also opened on the mountain above Bulli when the Cataract Dam was being constructed. William Woson and George Phillips both operated billiard rooms in the temporary town of Cataract in 1905. The two saloons were not within the Wollongong Licensing District and were under the jurisdiction of the Campbelltown Magistrates. The saloons disappeared with the rest of Cataract township when works on the dam wound-up.

Following on after Woonona, a purpose built billiard saloon was licensed at Thirrour by David Birch (b.1863 d.1944) in about 1913. The Thirrour saloon was located nearly opposite Jackson's Hardware Store on Lawrence Hargrave Drive and the elongated weatherboard building survives today as a private residence.

The Thirrour Billiard Saloon was robbed of its snooker balls in 1923 according to the South Coast Times. The newspaper reported on November 30th, 1923 that Norman Middap, who was arrested in Kogarah and had just finished a stint as a barman at Ryan's Thirrour Hotel, was found in possession of the balls by the police. David Weir, caretaker of Ern Valle's Billiard Saloon, told the Bulli Court that two sets of snooker balls went missing and he identified the balls in the possession of Middap as one of the sets missing from the Thirrour saloon.

Middap pleaded guilty and was sentenced to three months in prison for the offence. He was also convicted of stealing a broach from Thirrour and was given another three months stay in gaol.

The weatherboard Bellambi Billiard Saloon was licensed in about 1913 and was located west of the Bellambi Hotel in Bellambi Lane near the general store. It wasn't re-licensed in 1917.

During the 1920's several more saloons were established in the district. Another was open at Bulli, in the present Bulli Hardware Man Store, by Ronald Rankine. Local builder, Charles Percy Gray built a new shop opposite the Bulli Family Hotel in 1924 which was later licensed as a billiard saloon. Rankine advertised the "Bulli Billiard and Hairdressing Saloon" in the 1924 December issues of the *Illawarra Mercury*. The advertisement stated: cleanliness observed; billiards for all; all smokers requirements stocked and that it had two "new" tables.

Another saloon opened at Thirroul, in the present take-away food shop to the west of Thirroul's proposed new library, by Edward Davies, in 1925.

During the 1920's the Home Recreation Shield Billiard Competition was contested between local school of arts, the Thirroul Railway and Tramway Institute, Wollongong Diggers and Port Kembla Memorial Institute. The school of arts involved were Woonona/Bulli, Wollongong, Balgownie, Thirroul and Austinmer.

Billiards was growing in popularity during the mid 1920's with the district producing many talented players. The *South Coast Times* reported in January, 1925 that Mr. G. Gilchrist, "the champion billiardist of Woonona", was presented with a miniature model of a billiard table by his "many friends" prior to his departure on a holiday.

The *South Coast Times* again reported on January 9th, 1925:

Billiards is a past time which apparently is very popular at this end of the district (Bulli/Woonona). There are seven public tables already in operation and provision is now being made for four more.

A new license was granted for Woonona in 1925 when Cornelius Quilkey opened a saloon. The two storey billiard room was located opposite the present Strachan Park on the Prince's Highway in Woonona shopping centre. A two storey brick arcade now replaces the original weatherboard building. Percy Ackroyd obtained the license of the Woonona saloon in 1928. His daughter, Beryl Merrick of Corrimal recalls some of her memories in the *Bulli Times* on May 30th, 1996:

My father, Percy Ackroyd ran the billiard room where the Woonona Arcade now stands, from 1928 until 1937. There was a barber shop at the front and a man named Mr. Clarke was the barber. A narrow door at the side of the barber shop led into the billiard room. We lived in the residence above. The other billiard room in Woonona was owned by Viv Mott and Con Quilley (Quilkey?). It was situated opposite the Royal Hotel. As mentioned the billiard rooms were a hive of activity on a Saturday afternoon with the SP betting going on. My mother had a pie shop next to the Royal Hotel in the early 30's. My brother used to ride his bike to Woonona school, carrying a bread basket full of pies in one arm, steer the bike with one hand, with a billy can of sloppy peas on the handle bars. He then sold pies at Woonona school gates for three pence each ... I have plenty of memories. There were times when I was in trouble for playing billiards when the billiard room should have been shut. The cloth on the billiard table was often torn, putting the table out of operation until such times as it could be repaired.

The Thirroul Billiard Saloon ran into trouble from the law in 1930 when a police raid discovered local S.P. bookie, George Kay, 48, taking bets in a room. The *South Coast Times* reported on November 28th, 1930 that a constable entered the saloon and made several bets with Kay. There were 16 men in the premises listening to the "wireless set" at the time and the bookie was charged along with the punters.

Although this was Kay's first offence, he was given a hefty fine of 10 pounds with 4 pounds 5 shillings costs. The 16 punters were fined five shillings each.

The NSW Licensing Magistrates wrote to the Wollongong Licensing Inspector, Sergeant George Keith on May 11th, 1933 asking for a list of billiard licenses and tables in the Wollongong Licensing District. These documents reveal that there were 13 billiard saloons in the Wollongong Licensing District – four in the area covered by this book.

The following billiard saloons operated in the Bulli district in 1933:

Name of Licensee	Locality	Number of billiard tables
Edward D. Davies	Thirroul	2
John Floyd	Bulli	2
Percy Ackroyd	Woonona	2
James Quilkey	Woonona	3

Meanwhile the Woonona Bulli School of Arts continued to offer two billiard tables to members "at a reduced rate" during the late 1930's. Besides the billiard tables the School of Arts provided a library of 1600 books, daily and weekly newspapers, cards, chess, draughts, table tennis and a "wireless" set.

The demise of the billiard saloon (and the School of Arts) came with the popularity of licensed clubs and TABs in the 1960's. Billiard and snooker players were accommodated by local licensed clubs which incorporated billiard and snooker rooms on the premises. The district's clubs offered comfortable surrounds boasting legal licensed bars, poker machines and other attractions which soon emptied the local billiard saloons. The introduction of TABs throughout the district also contributed to the death of billiard saloons. Punters were able to legally place bets on horse and dog races in State government controlled outlets, which sounded the death knell for the illegal activities carried out in the region's billiard saloons. The two saloons at Woonona, and the Bulli and Thirroul rooms, were closed during the 1960's and early 1970's ending a traditional and colourful chapter in local history.