

The history of the Beresford Hotel, Surry Hills



John W. Ross

Cover photograph:

- Beresford Hotel, 2012 (Mark Stevens, City of Sydney Archives).

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Foreword

The Sydney suburb of Surry Hills was largely created between the gold rushes of the 1850s and the economic downturn of the 1890s. In the middle decades of this period, the increasing demand for housing and manufactured goods led to an influx of tradesmen, especially in the building, tanning and clothing trades. By the end of the nineteenth century, the streets were filled with the sounds of workshops and small factories turning out the necessities of life for an increasingly prosperous population.

This inevitably led to a proliferation of pubs, mostly constructed in the 1860s and 1870s. The Beresford Hotel at 354-358 Bouke Street began life as the Albion Inn in 1870 and was rebuilt only twenty-two years later to become Crowther's Family Hotel. A publican with Irish family roots renamed it the Beresford Hotel in 1897. The building was originally a grocer's shop, only expanding vertically until the large Brewer Tooth & Co. purchased it in 1924. The building was then extended along Bourke Street to include the adjacent shop, and by the modern era had extended to Flood's Lane.

World War II brought new challenges to pubs, as it did to all businesses and people. Alcohol production was limited to preserve grain supplies, leading to beer shortages for several years. Personal restrictions were imposed on the population, especially those in essential industries or liable for call-up to military service. The presence of African American servicemen in Surry Hills pubs exposed the locals to a new culture but also to the racial segregation enforced by the American military.

The modern era at the Beresford Hotel was shaped by the increasing gay and lesbian population in the neighbourhood. The annual Mardi Gras march that passed nearby inspired the transformation of a working-class pub to a glamorous gay-friendly venue that continues today. Subsequent owners have added to this with a nightclub and fine dining, making the Beresford one of the best and most popular pubs in the area.

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Surry Hills from boom to bust

The long boom

The inner Sydney suburb of Surry Hills was created as a residential district between the gold rushes of the 1850s and the severe economic depression of the 1890s. Surges in house building coincided with periods of economic boom, mostly in the 1850s and 1880s. In 1849, Surry Hills and Woolloomooloo together consisted of only 800 houses, but by the 1890s a tangled network of streets and lanes was crammed with nearly 5,300 houses in long terraces of two-storey brick buildings modelled on English architectural styles.

But the explosion in population came at a cost: in the 1850s, facilities for water, sewerage and drainage were primitive and often non-existent as the population growth far outstripped the provisions of sanitary services. Gold discoveries near Bathurst in 1851 turned the steady stream of immigrants into a flood as men of all ranks raced to the diggings. Shopkeepers abandoned their counters and mechanics left their workshops in the hope of making their fortunes.



Figure 1 Goodlet & Smith pottery, 1871 (State Library of NSW)

The more even social mix of the 1850s was replaced in the 1860s and 1870s by a growing middle class of mechanics, skilled artisans and shopkeepers. Much of the local economy was centred on the building trades, sustained by associated industries like the Bourke Street quarry, Ewart's Brickyards on Cleveland Street and Goodlet and Smith's pottery. The population was fed by produce from Nobbs' Garden, Michael Magill's Garden in Redfern and Baptist's Garden in Bourke Street.

The trades of tanning and currying were prominent in the area, principally William Pawley's Tannery in present-day Devonshire Street and William Alderson and Sons in Bourke Street. Through the length and breadth of Surry Hills there were scores of small workshops, and by the end of the 1880s every lane and alley was filled with the noise of blacksmiths' shops, flour mills, foundries and coal yards, accompanied by the smell of livery stables, ginger beer makers, biscuit factories and steam laundries. But towards the end of the nineteenth century, the sounds of textile knitting mills and printing works dominated the area, and new warehouses loomed over the nearby cottages.

1890s Depression and the new century

The long economic boom that peaked in the late 1880s culminated in a frenzy of speculation and in early 1893 with a widespread banking collapse. Sydney was hit by unprecedented levels of unemployment, with the building trades among the worst affected. Those lucky enough to keep their jobs faced massive wage cuts and a shorter working week. Thus, after a few decades of prosperity, Surry Hills had once again become a working-class district with the stigma of slum dwellers.

The worst effects of the depression began to dissipate by 1896, but it was prolonged until 1906 by a terrible drought. In 1905, the Sydney Municipal Council was given powers to resume and remodel whole areas for urban renewal and street widening. The dream of avid slum clearers like Lord Mayor Sir Allen Taylor was to demolish the old houses and replace them with business premises and factories. The middle-class view at the time was that poverty was caused by slum housing, whereas it is now realised that poverty is caused by unemployment and low wages and that poor housing is simply a side-effect of this.



Figure 2 Brisbane Street resumption, 1928 (City of Sydney Archives)

Much slum clearance was undertaken, initially in Wexford Street in 1906 and continuing with the troubled Brisbane Street resumption in 1928. In the latter scheme, the Council was caught out by the Great Depression of the 1930s and the largely demolished area remained empty for decades (it was eventually occupied by the Surry Hills Police Centre and Harmony Park). Streets such as William Street, Oxford Street and Flinders Street were widened after the Council demolished one side of the street then sold or leased the empty blocks after the widening was completed¹.

The Albion Inn

The pub-building decades

The discovery of gold near Bathurst in 1851 propelled Sydney into its first “golden age”. Thousands of hopeful diggers arrived at Sydney, the gold was sent to Sydney for export, and the failed miners drifted back to Sydney, many of them permanently. All this movement of people and goods stimulated economic activity in the town. Sydney’s population exploded from just under 40,000 in 1851 to about 150,000 in 1871 and then to nearly 500,000 in 1901. Wool, meat and minerals joined gold as the major exports in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

But a drought from the mid-1880s, followed by a banking collapse in 1893 and the subsequent Great Depression, caused a downturn in the manufacturing and construction industries by the late 1880s². This rapid economic expansion followed by stagnation was reflected in the rise and fall of hotel construction during this period. The result is that the nineteenth century pubs that survive to the present day were mostly constructed in the 1860s and 1870s, with very few built from the 1880s onwards. The Beresford Hotel is one of the pubs built to cater for the boom in demand at this time.

The nearby pubs and their original construction dates are:

- Hopetoun Hotel, 416 Bourke Street – 1846
- Dolphin Hotel, 412 Crown Street – 1856
- Forester’s Hotel, 336 Riley Street - 1863
- Clock Hotel, 470 Crown Street – 1864
- Athletic Club Hotel (now apartments), 48 Alexander Street - 1865
- Flinders Hotel, 63-65 Flinders Street – 1870
- Rifleman’s Arms Hotel (now commercial use), 75 Fitzroy Street - 1872
- Cricketers’ Arms Hotel, 106 Fitzroy Street – 1876
- Carrington Hotel, 565 Bourke Street - 1877
- Local Taphouse, 122 Flinders Street - 1878

The Albion Inn

The site occupied by the Beresford Hotel was part of seventy acres of land granted to John Palmer (1760-1833) in April 1794, which he named George Farm. Palmer was a colonial administrator and farmer who arrived on board the First Fleet ship *Sirius*, where he was the purser. He was appointed commissary general of New South Wales in 1791, making him responsible for the receipt and issue of all government stores³. *Sands’ Directories* from 1861 record that the site on the southern corner of Hill Street at (then) 398 Bourke Street was occupied by the grocer William Love⁴.

In 1870, Thomas Gregan purchased the shop and demolished it to build the Albion Inn, a brick building with two stories and eight rooms⁵. The pub was often called the Albion Hotel in the newspapers and was presumably named after Albion Street, a major street in Surry Hills that ran from Elizabeth Street to Durham Hall and was extended to Flinders Street after it was widened in 1917. Hill Street was named after George Hill, a wealthy butcher, hotel owner, major landholder and Lord Mayor of Sydney who built Durham Hall in 1835.

Thomas Gregan probably arrived in Sydney as a convict in the *Calcutta* in August 1837 under a 14-year sentence for receiving stolen cloth in Dublin⁶. He received a Ticket of Leave in 1844⁷ and was

recommended for a Conditional Pardon in 1847⁸. His occupation in Sydney is not known, but he clearly did very well because at his death he was living in a large house named *Greganhurst* on Bondi Road, Waverley. This was one of several “gentleman’s residences” or villas constructed on the south side of the road incorporating spacious grounds on original purchase grants in the 1850s and 1860s⁹.



Figure 3 Beresford Hotel, 1923 (Tooth & Co. collection)

By 1867 he was referred to in the press as “Thomas Gregan Esquire” when he was elected to the Waverley Council, serving until 1870¹⁰. He died in October 1872, aged 69, at his home in Bondi¹¹. Ownership of the pub passed to his wife Anne¹² until her death in September 1901¹³.

In April 1892, the licence of the Albion Inn was transferred from Catherine Quinlan to Rowland Crowther¹⁴. But at the Water Licensing Court two months later, the renewal of the licence was refused. Inspector Bremner uncharitably informed the court that “the building was kept in a filthy state”. The magistrate, who had inspected the pub, also considered it unfit and refused the application¹⁵.

Anne Gregan decided to substantially rebuild the hotel, although it was only twenty-two years old, and advertised for tenders to pull it down, stack the materials and clean the bricks¹⁶. It was common in those days to reuse bricks, timber, roofing iron and other material from demolished buildings or sell them for use in other buildings. In January 1893, Rowland Crowther was granted a temporary licence to operate the Albion Hotel during the alterations¹⁷.

The hotel was rebuilt in the Victorian Italianate style¹⁸ and reopened as Crowther’s Family Hotel in August 1893¹⁹. The rebuilt pub had three-stories and 13 rooms²⁰. While it was a taller building than the original, a 1923 photo prior to Tooth’s purchase shows that it was still only as wide as the original grocer’s shop²¹.

In April 1896, Rowland Chowther transferred the licence to Henry Joseph Furlong²², and from 1897 was listed as the Beresford Hotel in *Sands’ Directory*²³ and in newspapers²⁴. By then the address was

354 Bourke Street, and neighbouring buildings were occupied by Mrs. Bridget Garahy at 356 and the dealer Mark Solomon at 358 on the corner of Flood's Lane (now Mary Place)²⁵.

It is not known why Henry Furlong chose the name Beresford for the pub. However, his marriage notice in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in July 1882 recorded that his father was the late Dr. R. J. Furlong of Wexford in Ireland²⁶. Dr. Furlong is mentioned in Wexford newspapers giving evidence at an inquest in 1859²⁷ and reporting cases of cholera from the Wexford workhouse in 1866²⁸.

Web searches reveal a prominent family of Irish peers named Beresford in the adjoining County Waterford²⁹. My best guess is that after Henry Furlong migrated to Sydney and eventually took over the licence from Rowland Crowther, he wished to commemorate something meaningful from his homeland, and chose the Beresford family name.

It was not unusual for publicans with Irish heritage to choose a name from the Emerald Isle when they took over a new pub. Nearby examples in Bourke Street are the Hopetoun Hotel, which was renamed the Kilkenny Inn in 1873 by licensee Magaret Conlon³⁰, who had an Irish father. The Carrington Hotel was renamed the Athboy Hotel in 1884 by the Irish licensee Patrick Knowles³¹, after a small town in County Meath.



Figure 4 Cricket luncheon, 1897 (*Sydney Morning Herald* 12 November 1897)

Henry Furlong only operated the Beresford until June 1897, when the licence was transferred to James H. Bloome³². The new licensee saw a marketing opportunity when the English cricket team arrived in Australia for a Test series in 1897-98 by advertising the Beresford's counter luncheons to cricket fans during the match against New South Wales in November 1897³³. This was a warm-up match for the visiting team, who were eventually beaten 4-1 in the Test series that summer³⁴.

It was common for retired sportsmen to become publicans to take advantage of their popularity in attracting customers. The former Australian featherweight boxer Billy Elliott was the licensee of the Beresford in 1921³⁵. His boxing debut was in 1908, and during his career he won the New Zealand Boxing Association Featherweight title in 1908 and the Australian Featherweight title in 1910³⁶. Another famous boxer who ran a Sydney pub a few decades later was world bantamweight champion Jimmy Carruthers, who took over the licence of the Bells Hotel, Woolloomooloo, in 1954³⁷.

The large brewer Tooth & Co. purchased the Beresford in May 1924, adding it to their stable of hundreds of pubs in New South Wales which operated as outlets for their beer. The company's Yellow Cards for the 1920s reported that the "house trade was very small", the nearest hotel was thirty yards away (the Flinders Hotel on Flinders and Hill Streets) and there were nine hotels within a quarter mile radius. Clearly the Beresford had a lot of competition at that time.



Figure 5 Beresford Hotel, 1930 (Tooth & Co. collection)

The adjoining shop at 356 Bourke Street was also purchased by Tooth & Co and rented back to the shopkeeper³⁸. The shop was eventually demolished, and the hotel was enlarged and the street frontage of the pub in Bourke Street extended. A 1923 photo of the pub, just prior to Tooth's purchase, shows the three-storey pub with two adjacent buildings leading to Flood's Lane³⁹. A 1970 photo shows that Tooth's renovations created an Inter-War style building that has been extended to the adjacent site at 356 Bourke Street, while the second shop at number 358 has been demolished⁴⁰.

World War II

World War Two (1939-1945) presented Australian pubs with new challenges, especially after Australia entered the Pacific war following the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941. The country was put on a war footing and experienced shortages of goods and personal restrictions from that time. Rationing of some goods lasted until well into the 1950s.

Beer shortages

Wartime beer rationing took the form of limits on production. In March 1942, breweries were required to cut their output by a third to conserve barley and wheat supplies. Pubs were supplied with beer on a quota system and sometimes ran out altogether. Pint glasses were eliminated from pubs in New South Wales to help limit consumption.



Figure 6 World War II beer shortages (Australian Pub Project)

The amount of beer that could be served to an individual, either draught or in bottles, was restricted. Deliveries to other premises were prohibited, even to someone waiting outside in a car. The restrictions on legally available beer led to an increase in home brewing, which was illegal at the time. There was also a degree of profiteering and black marketing⁴¹.

Although wartime restrictions on beer production were lifted in March 1946, it took breweries many years to recover. Shortages persisted well into the 1950s, caused by delays in repairing and replacing worn-out equipment and by continuing labour and materials shortages⁴².

Elizabeth Ann Hoogwert was the licensee of the Beresford Hotel in December 1944 when she was among six publicans fined for refusing to sell bottled beer on demand⁴³. The following month, twenty publicans in city and country hotels were similarly charged with failing to supply bottled beer on demand to customers at the fixed price. When Customs Department officers raided these pubs, some of the publicans claimed they were saving their quota of bottled beer for regular customers, which contravened the National Security Regulations at the time⁴⁴.

The 1957 song *A Pub With No Beer* by the country singer Slim Dusty contains the line “the publican’s anxious for the quota to come”. The song was based on a 1943 poem by the North Queensland farmer Dan Sheahan. One day he rode 32 km from his property to the Day Dawn Hotel in Ingham only to find the pub had used up its ration of beer. The publican told him apologetically that a group of American servicemen drank the pub dry the night before and she was still awaiting delivery of more supplies⁴⁵.

Manpower regulations

Labour controls were introduced during World War II to meet a crisis in manpower and to provide administration across the often-competing needs of the armed services and industry (almost a million Australians eventually fought in World War II⁴⁶). Manpower regulations possibly affected individual liberties and the day-to-day activities of Australians more than any other executive decisions of Government during the war.

The first significant regulation in the first two years of war was to reserve certain occupations from military service, those deemed essential for the production of equipment and supplies for the war effort. But in early 1942, during the crisis caused by the Japanese advance in the Pacific, more than 100,000 men were called up for full-time military service.

The regulations covering reserved occupations were not strong enough to overrule the demands of the armed services, and a labour crisis developed. So, a Manpower Directorate was established in January 1942, taking over responsibility for administering the list of reserved occupations. The list was devised to prevent the voluntary enlistment in the military of skilled workers from essential services such as munitions production. By April 1942, the government had the power to say what every man could do, whether in the armed services, war industry or civilian industry⁴⁷.

A schedule of reserved occupations was issued by the Minister for Labour (Eddie Ward) in March 1942 was reported in the press.

- Industries of the highest priority which had to remain at maximum capacity included munitions, hospitals and iron and steel manufacturing.
- Industries where production could be allowed to fall off only to a limited extent included newspapers, wireless radio stations and dairy farming.
- Industries where production could be allowed to decline substantially included pickle and sauce manufacturers and moving pictures⁴⁸.
- Clearly, the manufacture, distribution and selling of alcohol was not regarded as important enough to keep people working in the industry (so getting pickled in a local pub was a lower priority than making pickles in a factory).

The Beresford Hotel was affected by manpower restrictions in June 1944 when Grenville James Mann’s licence application was refused by the Licensing Court, because he was unable to supply an exemption certificate from the Manpower authorities. Mann had enlisted in the Army in January 1942⁴⁹ but by 1944 had not been required to report for active service. However, magistrate John Scobie had been notified that Grenville Mann was liable for Army call-up in August that year⁵⁰.

Undeterred, Grenville Mann appealed the refusal in the Court of Quarter Sessions. His appeal was upheld after Mann gave an undertaking that he would answer any Army call-up, and he that he went

into running the Beresford with his eyes open. Judge Barton could not see how the transfer of this licence “would embarrass the Manpower authorities”⁵¹. The licence was duly transferred from George Kennedy to Grenville Mann in July 1944⁵².

But the new licensee’s gamble that he would not be called up for active service was dashed later in 1944, and he was forced to give up the licence to Elizabeth Hoogwert⁵³ and don the khaki uniform in March 1945⁵⁴.

Too busy to run a pub

George Albert Kennedy, the publican who was trying to transfer the pub’s licence to Grenville Mann, was also a controversial figure. In May 1944, he was refused an application for the renewal of the licence. In the Licensing Court, the police opposed the application on the grounds that he was a licensed bookmaker and had a farm at Pennant Hills, which occupied most of his time.

The magistrate, John Scobie SM, said that a licensee should put in his whole time into the management of a hotel situated in an area where people of immoral character were accustomed to congregate (clearly, he meant areas like Surry Hills). He also disapproved of publicans attending races on Saturday afternoons⁵⁵. Kennedy’s legal representative, Mr. Laidlaw, told the court that his client’s absences, his wife and two experienced men ran the hotel⁵⁶.

Jim Crow comes to Sydney

The attack on Pearl Harbour by the Imperial Japanese Navy in December 1941 abruptly brought the United States into World War II, and by early 1942 there were 250,000 American servicemen (GIs) stationed in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. At this time, very few Australians travelled overseas, and their knowledge of Americans was largely gained from Hollywood movies.

For young Australians, these Americans represented wealth, glamour and modernity. They were very polite (addressing everyone as “Ma’am” or “Sir”), wore better-looking uniforms than the baggy Australian outfits. They were also paid twice as much as the Australians and were ready to spend their money on a good time⁵⁷. They were dubbed “overpaid, oversexed and over here”.



Figure 7 African American GIs in NSW, 1943 (State Library of Victoria)

A major part of the impact of GIs in Australia was the presence of African American troops. American troops were segregated by colour, and Australia was predominantly Anglo-Saxon. The African Americans usually had labouring, engineering, construction and transport jobs. The so-called Jim Crow laws of the late nineteenth century in the United States enforced a racial segregation after the slaves were freed when the Civil War ended.

For almost a century (until the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 ended discrimination by race), Americans were segregated by race in all public facilities, especially in the southern states. The American Army maintained segregated units and made attempts to enforce segregation in public places in Australia.

It should be pointed out that this legalised segregation was foreign to Australians and was objected to by many. Most Australians simply saw American servicemen, regardless of colour, as allies who were here to save them from the rapidly advancing Japanese army. In Sydney, the African American troops were stationed in camps in the Moore Park Showgrounds and were restricted to entertainment venues such as the Booker T. Washington Club for black servicemen in nearby Durham Hall and pubs in Surry Hills, such as the Beresford⁵⁸.

The Beresford Hotel was in trouble in May 1944 when Police Sergeant Brady alleged in the Licensing Court that he had frequently seen reputed prostitutes consorting with black American servicemen in the hotel. He said that until six or eight weeks ago the Beresford was one of the worst-conducted hotels in the metropolitan area, and it had sometimes been necessary to station a squad of policemen around it. He had often arrested girls there and charged them with vagrancy⁵⁹. This coincided with the time that the multitasking publican George Kennedy was running the pub.

Maternity hospital customers

Life was quieter at the Beresford after the war ended. It was reported in August 1952 that the pub was the scene of many celebrations as happy fathers wet the heads of their children newly born at St Margaret's Hospital for Women across the road. On the hotel wall was a large coloured picture of a sleeping child and a collie puppy with a mother collie watching over them⁶⁰.

The former St Margaret's Hospital was founded by Gertrude Abbott (1836-1934), the founder of an unofficial religious community, reportedly out of the experience of a poor, pregnant girl being brought to her in 1893 by a local policeman. The following year she opened the hospital, initially located on Elizabeth Street in Strawberry Hills, as the St Margaret's Maternity Home. It was founded "to provide shelter and care for unmarried girls of the comparatively respectable class"⁶¹.

In 1910 the hospital moved to 435 Bourke Street, Darlinghurst, in a large art deco building⁶². Despite its religious name, Abbott established the hospital as non-sectarian and was never under the authority of the Catholic Church. With the assistance of the members of her small community, she administered the hospital until 1924. At the time of her death at the hospital in 1934, St Margaret's was the third largest maternity hospital in Sydney. It treated 760 mothers that year, without any maternal deaths⁶³.



Figure 8 St Margaret's Hospital, 1951 (Find and Connect website)

The hospital closed in 1998. The site began redevelopment into high density housing in 2004, which was completed by about 2010. Today the site includes 216 apartments across four blocks placed around a public square.

Mardi Gras and the Beresford

Sydney Mardi Gras

The Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras is a march that has been held every year since 1978 through the streets of inner Sydney to celebrate creative expression, gay rights, to challenge injustice and to elevate diverse voices. The event had a troubled beginning when police descended on a street festival that was bravely celebrating gay rights when homosexuality was still illegal.

The first Mardi Gras Parade in 1978 ended in violence and 53 people arrested, but the heavy-handed police crackdown fired up a community who would no longer be silent. From then, gays were out of the closet and into the streets. Every year since, members of the LGBTQIA+ community have gathered in a glittering and colourful explosion of self-expression, celebration and protest⁶⁴. The route of the march runs from Hyde Park along Oxford and Flinders Streets to Moore Park, passing about fifty metres from the Beresford Hotel.



Figure 9 Sydney Mardi Gras march c2020 (Yusuka Oba)

The march and associated festival have become one of the nation's biggest tourist drawcards⁶⁵. It is the State's second largest event in terms of economic impact (second only to Vivid Sydney, which had a modest beginning in 2009) and is the longest running event of its kind in Australia⁶⁶.

In 2025, Mardi Gras contributed an estimated \$39 million to the New South Wales visitor economy, attracting more than 30,000 visitors to Sydney. More than 11,000 people participated in the Parade across 180 floats⁶⁷.

Transformation to a gay-friendly pub

In 1980, the former Qantas staffer Barry Cecchini, who was living in the increasingly gay neighbourhood of Surry Hills, became the licensee of the Beresford Hotel. He took a former working-class pub and created a new style of gay venue. As a street-level pub, it was very different from the nightclubs of Oxford Street's Golden Mile. It proudly advertised itself in the *Star Observer* newspaper as the first pub in Sydney owned and operated by gays, for gays⁶⁸.



Figure 10 Laneway party 1994 (City of Sydney Archives)

The Laneway party is a recovery event held the day after the Mardi Gras march, taking over the whole of the Beresford Hotel and the adjoining Hill Street right to the Flinders Hotel on Flinders Street. The party runs from 2pm until the pub's Sunday night closing time. Laneway was originally a free event where partygoers sat on milk crates borrowed from nearby shops or on the footpath⁶⁹. Tickets for the 2026 event ranged from \$109 (general entry to Hill Street) up to \$129 for VIP entry to live music at Beresford Upstairs⁷⁰.



Figure 11 Laneway party, 2024 (Concrete Playground, 16 February 2024)

The Drag Industry Variety Awards (DIVAs) were the Oscars and Golden Globes for the drag industry but with more glitter and sequins. The DIVA Awards is an independent volunteer community group run by a dedicated team of community members. The awards commemorate the achievements of drag artists and the LGBTQIA+ community and wider industry in Sydney's performing arts.



Figure 12 DIVA Awards, Beresford Hotel 1996 (COS Archives)

The DIVA Awards were founded in 1991 as a way of showcasing and celebrating Sydney's drag scene and the many talented people who make up the LGBTQIA+ community⁷¹. The 1996 awards were held in the Beresford Hotel, and the occasion is commemorated by several photos from the event on the City of Sydney Archives website⁷².



Figure 13 Carmen Rupe, 1978 (*Evening Post* collection)

The well-known drag performer and anti-discrimination activist Carmen Rupe (1936-2011) attended the 1996 awards⁷³. Other events have been held at the Beresford, such as a fundraiser for the Aids Council of New South Wales (ACON) in 1994⁷⁴.

A lamp for Mary

In 1996, a lesbian woman named Mary was brutally beaten, raped and left for dead by two men in Flood's Lane, next to the Beresford Hotel. The neighbourhood is a well-known gathering place for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras celebrations, and Mary had attended a women-only night at nearby Kinselas Hotel, to which the men had been refused entry.

In 1997, the South Sydney Council and the Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project began a project to bring attention to this tragedy and raise awareness of violence against gays and lesbians. A committee was formed to identify a violence prevention strategy and a street mural as part of their plan. In February 1997, the lane was renamed Mary's Place in a ceremony that included the unveiling of a mural painted on the laneway by several artists and a plaque on the wall of the hotel.



Figure 14 A Lamp for Mary (author photo)

In 2006, a fire in the Beresford Hotel initiated renovation work that caused the destruction of the mural when the laneway was resurfaced. The community rallied together again in 2009 to call for another artwork to honour Mary. A Lamp for Mary by Sydney-based artist Mikala Dwyer was commissioned and installed in Mary's Place in 2010. At night, the lamp casts a pink glow in the lane to create a meditative sense of remembrance and provide adequate lighting for the safety of passersby⁷⁵.

A gastropub in the Hills

New York-style pub and trattoria

In 2008, Ashod Nassibian paid around \$40 million to buy and renovate the Beresford Hotel⁷⁶. The new owner had previously built a fortune in cardboard packaging, from KFC to pharmaceuticals (Reference: Andrew Horner, Ibrahim's new cliffhanger, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 April 2010). He and his son Gerry Nass transformed the Beresford from a dingy inner-city pub to a 1920s New York style pub with a fine Italian trattoria⁷⁷. For a while it was Sydney's hippest bar.

However, by 2009, father and son disagreed about the direction of the hotel and their celebrity chef, Danny Russo, left. The intended changes to the hotel were never fully completed and so it did not achieve its full potential. For example, the upstairs live entertainment venue did not open⁷⁸.

Merivale expands its stable of pubs

In 2011, the Merivale Group, Sydney's largest hospitality company, bought the Beresford Hotel for the bargain price of \$14.6 million. Justin Hemmes was reportedly gambling that the Taylor Square end of Bourke Street would be the next hot entertainment precinct due to wealthy residents buying into apartments on the old St Margaret's Hospital site⁷⁹.



Figure 15 Justin Hemmes, Beresford Hotel (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 July 2011)

The pub was glammed up by the Merivale Group but still gave a nod to its heritage. A large circular bar dominates the front room with retro tiled walls. Out the back, another attractive room serves as the main dining area and is all low light, designer furniture and pot plants.



Figure 16 Beresford Hotel front bar (Australian Bartender)

But the best aspect of the Beresford is the beer garden, a huge area with nice features like fairy lights twined around several maple trees and an ivy-covered wall. The garden is a great place for a drink on a summer evening. Italian is the focus of the food menu, with pizza and pasta featuring heavily. Another attraction is the upstairs live music venue, opened in 2011⁸⁰.



Figure 17 Beresford Hotel beer garden (Australian Bartender)

The Merivale Group has been owned and run by the Hemmes family for over 60 years, beginning as a fashion house started by John and Merivale Hemmes. Merivale's fashionable beginnings were soon followed by a venture into hospitality, opening the Thai tea café within their Sydney CBD fashion building in 1970. Merivale is now led by CEO Justin Hemmes, who has grown the ever-expanding Merivale portfolio to over 90 brands and venues.



Figure 18 Beresford Upstairs (Beresford Hotel website)

The Beresford Hotel has no pool tables or bar games. DJs operate in the dog-friendly beer garden on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, playing Top 40 and House music. Upstairs Beresford operates as a nightclub until 1am on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights⁸¹.

Notes

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- ¹ Christopher Keating, *Surry Hills, the city's backyard*.
 - ² Economy, Dictionary of Sydney.
 - ³ Terry Kass, *The Builders and Landlords of Surry Hills*.
 - ⁴ Beresford Hotel including Interior, State Heritage Inventory, NSW Government.
 - ⁵ Rate Assessment Books, 1871.
 - ⁶ Convict Indents and Ship Musters, 1832-1837.
 - ⁷ Tickets of Leave Index 1810-1848.
 - ⁸ Pardons Recommended for Convicts, 1826-1856.
 - ⁹ Waverley Heritage Policy Final Draft, Waverley Council, May 2022.
 - ¹⁰ Timeline of serving councillors, Waverley Council website.
 - ¹¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October 1872.
 - ¹² Rate Assessment Books, 1877.
 - ¹³ *The Australian Star*, 13 September 1901.
 - ¹⁴ *The Australian Star*, 28 April 1892.
 - ¹⁵ *Evening News*, 24 June 1892.
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