

# ***History of Combined Services RSL sub-Branch***

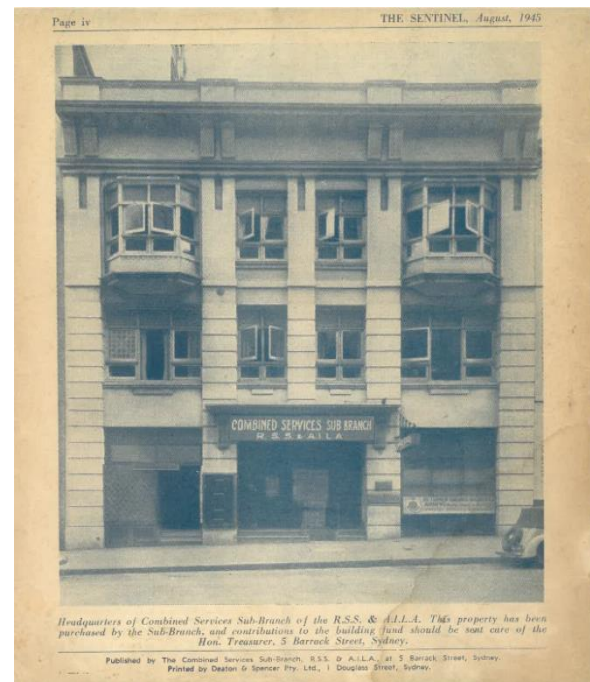
## ***1943-2023***

### **OUR SUB-BRANCH – THE FORMATIVE YEARS**

This year our Combined Services RSL sub-Branch celebrates its 80th anniversary.

We were conceived during the latter months of 1942, when a group of WW I veterans – gentlemen of standing and substance, concerned by the lack of accommodation and amenities for thousands of Australian troops on leave and in transit in this city – came up with the idea of forming a special RSL subBranch to remedy affairs. Arising from this, Mr WC (Bill) Allen placed some advertisements in the Sydney papers, calling a series of meetings at the Hotel Australia (of glorious and affectionate memory), to discuss ways and means. In due course, approval was given by the RSL for the formation of a sub-Branch, with an initial membership of 13 full members and 14 associates. In the event, a provisional committee was formed, consisting of M WC Allen – President; Mr J Black – Honorary Secretary; Mr G Winn (of Winns Limited, a major department store) – Treasurer; Messrs WL Waldron, JD Westwood, Anotole Ivanoff, Colonel KM Morrice and the Reverend AG Cowie – Committeemen. The committee's job was to get things moving and the first meeting was held on 21 January, 1943. The Returned Sailors', Soldiers' and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia Charter issued to the new sub-Branch shows that date and the name Combined Services Sub-Branch. This name had been determined by our founding fathers during their meetings prior to formation. "Combined Services" suggested

by Mr. Black was adopted because it would envelop all services. There have been suggestions from time to time that "Combined Services" was suggested by Lady Wakehurst, wife of the then Governor Lord Wakehurst, VC ... perhaps, but this can't be dismissed out of hand, for in those days we were not without friends in high places.



The committee was empowered to establish hostels and clubs to cater for the needs of serving and discharged personnel, men and women, to establish the necessary sub-committees and to cooperate with any persons or organisations whose services could be of use or benefit to the sub-Branch.

Our founding fathers did not let the grass grow under their feet, for shortly after the first meeting President Bill Allen reported that, with other members of the sub-Branch, he had inspected various properties that would be satisfactory for hostels.

On 2 February 1943, three influential and knowledgeable foundation trustees were appointed: • Mr Alan Russell Taylor, KC, a senior lawyer in Sydney, eventually appointed to the Supreme Court Bench and in 1952 to the High Court; a Privy Councilor and knighted in 1955 • Major Roy Hendy was the City of Sydney Town Clerk as well as currently serving with HQ I Division in the AIF. • Mr CR (Roy) McKerihan was the President of the Rural Bank of NSW and Federal Administrator of the Australian Comforts Fund.

These trustees provided strong support to the trustee role in the sub-Branch for managing property – by providing knowledge of the law, council regulations over property, and financial management and diligence.

In no time, hostels for servicemen and women were in operation. “Hoylake” of Leura was for AANS sisters on leave. This was eventually open to all service women. The largest, a three-story general hostel, was at 208 Clarence Street, Sydney. It operated until the end of May 1959. In the post war years it had provided as well as for our veterans, for sponsored British ex-service immigrants. After closure, operations were transferred to Macleay Street, Potts Point, the building being acquired with a 10% mortgage. Another hostel was at Croydon, and in 1946 a further hostel to provide accommodation for veterans undergoing CRTS courses was established at the corner of Wentworth and Everton Roads, Strathfield. In addition, another two were established at premises in Victoria Street,

Darlinghurst and 86 Flinders Street, Darlinghurst. In all, many thousands of men and some hundreds of service women passed through our hostels, which were largely under the control of the Hostels Treasurer, Mr. Norman Winn, brother of Gordon, until 1959. In that year, control was taken over by the subBranch honorary treasurer.

Back to the early days – in no time, a Women’s Auxiliary and a Younger Set, centred in Bryants Building, George Street, had been formed. The Commonwealth Bank had generously granted the sub-Branch free use of half of the ground floor of 5-7 Barrack Street. Subsequently, the building was offered to the sub-Branch for £ 2,000. The sub-Branch acquired this property with £ 1,000 cash and a loan of £ 1,000 pounds from Mr Wilmore, of Wilmore and Randall Real Estate, who was one of our founders and president from 1945-1948.

Then came the famous Stage Door Canteen, fondly remembered by veterans for many years afterwards. At its meeting of 26 October 1943, the sub-Branch offered the Stage Door Canteen use of the basement of 5 Barrack Street for their purposes, an offer gladly accepted.

Both the Ladies Auxiliary and the Younger Set were successful in fundraising by means of social dances and so on, and help with the Stage Door Canteen. In the years to come, the ladies, led by Bill Allen’s sister, Mrs Ella Mauver, who became Mrs Westwood, raised large funds for the building of Anzac House in College Street, Sydney. Joe Westwood, MC, a foundation Member, was sub-Branch secretary from 1944 to 1960. Mrs Westwood was to be awarded the OBE for her work, on the nomination of the Combined Services SubBranch. Joe and Ella are unique in that they both received their OBE on the nomination of the sub-Branch.

By the grace and favour of Gordon and Norman Winn, a number of our functions in the early days were held in Winns Auditorium in Oxford Street, as were also our children's Christmas parties up until 1959. In 1960-61, the parties were held at Randwick Racecourse. For many years, sub-Branch President Gordon Winn, made his staff available for secretarial work and also sent a group of them, all volunteers, to sell badges for us in the area centred in Martin Place, on Tin Hat and Poppy Days. This was discontinued by Winns Board of Directors a few years after Gordon's death.

By 1945 the sub-Branch was fairly well established and flourishing at Barrack Street with Joe Westwood, Bill Allen's brother-in-law, as Honorary Secretary and Gordon Winn as President.

In 1945, the sub-Branch felt the need for certain activities to be managed under a club type organisation, notably the Stage Door

Canteen activities, rather than directly under the sub-Branch.

And so on 4 October that year a provisional committee was formed under the chairmanship of George Wilmore, with Joe Westwood as Honorary Secretary, to create a Combined Services RSL Club. The club's first AGM was held on 17 March 1946 and its financial report showed, after paying for establishment costs, a profit of £ 46/11/8. At that meeting the executive elected was comprised of George Wilmore – President; GR Winn – Hon Treasurer and J. Westwood – Hon Secretary. Joe was sub-Branch Hon Secretary from 1945 – 1960 and club Secretary from 1945 – 1962. In the meantime, he had become State Hon Treasurer of the RSSILA of NSW and, in 1964, Custodian of the Cenotaph in succeeding the late Col Tinkler. By the time Joe Westwood, MC, OBE had retired in 1960, the Combined Services Sub-Branch and Club were firmly established.

SUB - BRANCH				CL B			
YEAR	PRESIDENT	HON. TREASURER	SEC. ETARY	YEAR	PRESIDENT	HON. TREASURER	HON. SECRETARY
1943	ALLEN W. C.	WINN G. R.	BLACK J.	1946.47	WILLMORE G. M.	WINN G. R.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
			ON. SECRETARY	1948	LAST A. E.	WINN G. R.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
1944	ALLEN W. C.	WINN G. R.	RUSSELL I.	1949	PARCELL A.	MILES J. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
1945.48	WILLMORE G. M.	WINN G. R.	RUSSELL I.	1950	GRIMWOOD W. E.	MILES J. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
1949	JACKA C. K.	WINN G. R.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.	1951	MITCHELL C. D.	MILES J. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
1950	WINN G. R.	GRIMWOOD W.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.	1952.53	DUNLEA T. J.	MILES J. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
1951.52	WINN G. R.	CALNAN H. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.	1954	WINN G. R.	MILES J. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
1953	WINN G. R.	ATKINSON R.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.	1955	WINN G. R.	CALNAN H. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
1954.55	WINN G. R.	CALN H. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.	1956.57	WINN G. R.	MILES J. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
1956.57	WINN G. R.	MILES J. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.	1958	COOPER R. G.	MILES J. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
1958.59	COOPER R. G.	MILES J. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.	1959	COOPER R. G.	MILES J. E.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
						HARRINGTON N. S.G.	
1960	COOPER R. G.	HARRINGTON N. S.G.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.	1960	McNAB D.	HARRINGTON N. S.G.	WESTWOOD J. D. M.C.
1961	McNAB D.	HARRINGTON N. S.G.	MILES J. E.				SECRETARY
1962	NEHL W. B. E.D.	HARRINGTON N. S.G.	ROBISON S. Y.	1961	McNAB D.	HARRINGTON N. S.G.	ROBISON S. Y.
1963.68	NEHL W. B. E.D.	WILLIAMS A. K.	NEILSON J. H.	1962	BOYLE H. A.	DAVIDSON R. W.	ROBISON S. Y.
1969	NEHL W. B. E.D.	WILLIAMS A. K.	FITZPATRICK T. E.			RODGERS R. D.	ROBISON S. Y.
1970	NEHL W. B. E.D.	ALLEN D. M.	FITZPATRICK T. E.	1963	BOYLE H. A.	WILLIAMS A. K.	ROBISON S. Y.
1971.7	NEHL W. B. E.D.	ALLEN D. M.	NEILSON J. H.				WAKELY R. J. E.D.
1974.75	ANDERSON F.	ALLEN D. M.	NEILSON J. H.	1964.67	BOYLE H. A.	HARRINGTON N. S.G.	WAKELY R. J. E.D.
1976.77	SMITH W. S.W.	ALLEN D. M.	NEILSON J. H.	1968	WILLIAMS A.	HARRINGTON N. S.G.	WAKELY R. J. E.D.
1978	HEALEY R. J.	ALLEN D. M.	NEILSON J. H.	1969	WILLIAMS A.	HARRINGTON N. S.G.	WAKELY R. J. E.D.
1977.80	HEALEY R. J.	ALLEN D. M.	NEILSON J. H.			HUGHES R. G.	
1981.82	HEALEY R. J.	ERWIN W. J.	GAVIN M. V.	1970.71	HEALEY R. J.	HUGHES R. G.	WAKELY R. J. E.D.
1983	HEALEY R. J.	PECK W.	GAVIN M. V.	1972	HEALEY R. J.	HUGHES R. G.	WAKELY R. J. E.D.
1984.88	PICONI R. W.	PECK W.	GAVIN M. V.			PICONI R. W.	
1989.92	WESTAWAY H.E.	PICONI R. W.	GAVIN M. V.	1973.74	HEALEY R. J.	PICONI R. W.	WAKELY R. J. E.D.
1995	WESTAWAY H.E.	PICONI R. W.	GAVIN M. V.	1975.80	WESTAWAY H. E.	PICONI R. W.	JONES L. W.
1996	WESTAWAY H.E.	SKILLICORN P.P.	GAVIN M. V.	1981.83	PICONI R. W.	COWAN S.	JONES L. W.
1997	WESTAWAY H.E.	SKILLICORN P.P.	GAVIN M.	1984	POLMEAR W. J.	COWAN S.	JONES L. W.
1998	LAWS A.G. LLB	SKILLICORN P.P.	GAVIN M.	1987	POLMEAR W. J.	COWAN S.	DONOHUE L. W.
1999.01	KELLY P. OAM	SKILLICORN P.P.	GAVIN M.V.	1988.90	GAVIN M. V.	COWAN S.	DONOHUE L. W.
2002	E.E. HAND	R.B.S. TASKER	GAVIN M.V.	1991	GAVIN M. V.	FERGUSON C. J.	DONOHUE L. W.
2003	E.E. HAND	R.B.S. TASKER	A-VALENTINE-FLINT	1992	GAVIN M. V.	WILLIAMS A. K.	LIAKATOS G.
2004	E.E. HAND	R.B.S. TASKER	A-VALENTINE-FLINT	1995	WESTAWAY H.	SKILLICORN P.P.A	LIAKATOS G.
2005	E.E. HAND	R.B.S. TASKER	A-VALENTINE-FLINT	1996	WESTAWAY H.E.	SKILLICORN P.P.A	LIAKATOS G.
2006	E.E. HAND	R.B.S. TASKER	A-VALENTINE-FLINT	1997	WESTAWAY H.E.	SKILLICORN P.P.	LIAKATOS G.
2007	E.E. HAND	R.B.S. TASKER	A-VALENTINE-FLINT	1998	WESTAWAY H.E.	SKILLICORN P.P.	LIAKATOS G.
2008		MS - M.J. BLACK	A-VALENTINE-FLINT	1999	WESTAWAY H.E.	SKILLICORN P.P.	LIAKATOS G.
				2000	WESTAWAY H.E.	H.W. CUMINES	LIAKATOS G.
				2001	WESTAWAY H.E.	H.W. CUMINES	LIAKATOS G.
				2002	P. KELLY OAM	M. ROSE	LIAKATOS G.
				2003	P. KELLY OAM	P. KITSON	LIAKATOS G.
				2004	P. KELLY OAM	P. KITSON	LIAKATOS G.
				2005	S.O. GREEN	P. KITSON	LIAKATOS G.
				2006	S.O. GREEN	P. KITSON	LIAKATOS G.
				2007	S.O. GREEN	P. KITSON	LIAKATOS G.
				2008	S.O. GREEN	P. KITSON	LIAKATOS G.

Combined Services RSL sub-Branch & Club Office Bearers 1943-2007

## **STAGE DOOR CANTEEN, OCTOBER 1943 – SEPTEMBER 1945**

Situated in the basement of our building, was a place called the “Stage Door Canteen”, with its entrance by way of steps leading down from the street footpath into a large room with a stage for a band at the far end and a sandwich, tea and coffee service to one side of it. At night, dancing and feasting was all the rage.

The canteen became a welcome oasis for service men and women of Australian and Allied forces, where they could enjoy a meal, snack, dancing, young company, friendliness and entertainment by leading artists, e.g. Gladys Moncrieff, Peter Finch, Michael Pate, and “Mo McCakie” (Roy Rene). Our Member, Verona Rothwell, was one who sang there as a member of the Younger Set. Another member of the Younger Set, until he was old enough to enlist in the 2/13th Bn, was Keith Emery, who died in 1992, a long time and popular member of the sub-Branch and club.

No names, no pack drill, but here there comes to mind a dashing young Royal Navy Officer of impressive pedigree, none other than Lieutenant Philip Mountbatten, subsequently His Royal Highness, The Duke of Edinburgh, who used to be smuggled in the back door during leave in Sydney.

Both the Ladies Auxiliary and the Younger Set were successful in fundraising by means of social dances and so on, and helped greatly with the Stage Door Canteen.

The Japanese Surrender, on 9 September 1945, was followed by general demobilisation, with the men and women of our fighting services returning to civilian life. Patronage of the Stage Door Canteen rapidly diminished. A decision to close the canteen down was made and it ceased operating at the end of September 1945.

On 4 October 1945, the Combined Services RSL Sub-Branch, which had been the mainstay of the canteen, formed a provisional committee to establish the Combined Services RSL Club. Its inaugural Annual General Meeting took place on 17 March 1946, and the Combined Services RSL Club replaced the Stage Door Canteen.

## **Comments by Angie Valentine Flint, Secretary/Treasurer on our 75th Anniversary, 2018**

Now, after 75 years down the track in reflection, the sub-Branch has been well respected in the community and its members have enjoyed many good times.

On the occasion of our 50th Golden Jubilee Celebrations, HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, sent us a Telegram from Buckingham Palace saying:

I send my good wishes to all those attending the Golden Jubilee Celebration dinner on 18 August. I hope that the celebration will be a successful reminder of the past fifty years ...

Philip

The sub-Branch has always been highly regarded at RSL State Headquarters and the Eastern Metropolitan District Council, which are conscious of the sub-Branch's record in welfare activities, despite being a city based sub-Branch. Our affiliate Club, now trading as The Barracks on Barrack, provides a place where one can have a quiet drink without discomfort and is a very popular meeting place for RSL members and social members alike – although, in the early days, membership was restricted to members of the sub-Branch and one had to have the Returned from Active Service Badge to join!

On a sad note, our beloved Member Verona Rothwell, who entertained as a singer in the Stage Door Canteen, passed away in September this year, 2018. Verona attended all our functions until about four years ago and will be sadly missed.

May the present members continue to enjoy the friendship and company of fellow members and look forward to many more years in association with the League and surrounding community.

(Acknowledgements: This history was contributed to by Mrs Amy Taylor, AM; Mr. John McDermott; and Ms Angie Valentine Flint)