

## **NOWRA RSL SUB-BRANCH AND THE SHOALHAVEN EX-SERVICEMENS CLUB A BRIEF EARLY HISTORY**

The initial organisation that ultimately led to the Nowra RSL Sub-Branch was formed in May 1919 as a support group for Returned Servicemen and families of those who were lost in the line of duty serving Australia in the First World War. Initial meetings and functions utilised local community facilities such as West's Picture Theatre and the School OF Arts. Events were held for entertainment and to raise funds to support Diggers.

In 1932, 'Diggers Hall' was built on the current site of the Sub-Branch in Junction Street, catering for Sub Branch activities and community events in general. In the 1940s the Sub-Branch worked towards establishing the Shoalhaven Ex-Servicemens Club. With the granting of a liquor licence (only the second in Nowra at the time) the Club commenced operations in May 1948 utilising the Diggers Hall premises, being officially opened in September that year.

In the following years the Club was very popular. Several additions were constructed to Diggers Hall to cater for the increasing numbers using the Club. The adjacent block of land was purchased by the Sub-Branch to cater for future expansion of the Club given this popularity. In 1954, the Sub-Branch agreed to transfer this land as a gift to the Club to facilitate the construction of new premises to house the Club.

With initial planning and approvals secured, A new, purpose designed Club building was constructed on the Junction Street site adjacent to Diggers Hall, which is the current premises the Club occupies today. The Club premises were officially opened on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1956 by His Excellency General Sir John Northcott, Administrator of the Commonwealth.

On completion of the new Club building, the Sub Branch entered into an agreement with the Club to transfer the remaining Sub Branch land to the Club, again as a gift, so that additions to the Club building could be constructed to house the Sub Branch in a separate dedicated section of the combined building. This led to Diggers Hall being moved to Shoalhaven Street in January 1960 and converted to a Pre-school Kindergarten, in preparation for the construction of the new additions.

The new Sub Branch premises, including the RSL Memorial Hall, were constructed soon after and officially opened on the 25th February 1961 by the then State President of the RSL Sir William Yeo. The development also included a bowling green adjacent to the building. The Sub Branch continues to occupy this building and manage the Memorial Hall to this day.

This new building and the negotiated lease marked the separation of the Sub Branch and the Club from a management perspective which continues to this day, although history has meant that the Club supports the Sub Branch in an informal manner.

Reference: Florance, Robyn (2019), "Nowra RSL Sub-Branch: The First 50 Years 1919-1969"