In April 1849 William WALKER Jnr. was the first person to select land at Tathra, this being Lot 1, consisting of 1,000 acres. Whilst Kianinny was first used as a port in 1858, tenders to build a wharf at Tathra weren't called for until October 1861. By May 1862 the new wharf was being used, but yet to be completely finished. In March 1864 a portion of Crown Land was declared to be set aside as a site for the township of Tathra. The auction sale of 31 blocks at Tathra took place on 26 July 1864.

The arrival and departure times of the coastal steamers quite often depended upon the prevailing weather conditions at the time which, on occasions, delayed the ships. This unreliability made it necessary for accommodation to be available close to the wharf. However, it wasn't until November 1876 that Mr. BRAINE made the suggestion that a joint stock hotel should be seriously considered to be erected at Tathra as ‘it is thought that such a building, in connection with a secure bathing place, would ensure a stream of visitors during the summer, and be a paying concern to shareholders.’

On 25 March 1878 Tathra’s first hotel, the Brighton Hotel was opened. The licensee was George HARDING while the owner was John CONNELLY of Bega. By January 1879 the Australian Town and Country Journal reported that there was a second hotel in Tathra, this being owned by Mrs. Ann WHITE who had previously owned the Victoria Inn in Bega. However, she initially was refused a licence to operate this hotel. This was soon rectified and on 1 February 1879, Mrs. WHITE was in possession of a licence to operate the Tathra Hotel situated in Bega St. Tathra.

By July 1879 Thomas RIXON had leased the Brighton Hotel whilst the Tathra Hotel was later managed by Mrs. WHITE’s son and daughter-in-law, William Isaac and Jane WHITE. On 13 August 1880 the unoccupied Brighton Hotel was mysteriously destroyed by fire. By October Jane WHITE along with a married couple had been arrested and charged with maliciously and feloniously setting fire to the house known as the Brighton Hotel, at Tathra. The married couple was later discharged and Jane WHITE was committed for trial at the Bega Quarter Sessions, which were held in March 1881. Mr. RAWLINSON defended the accused and the case was quite involved and drawn out. It wasn’t until 10 pm that evening when the jury finally delivered their verdict of ‘not guilty’. In 1905 Thomas (Dick) SPENCE had a handsome brick residence built on the vacant allotment where the Brighton Hotel once stood.

In July of 1881 George BROOKFIELD became licensee of the one remaining hotel at Tathra, namely the Tathra Hotel. It would appear that John GLEESON was the owner of the premises and tenders were put out by him in mid 1882 for additions to be made. In November 1882 the licence of this hotel was transferred to Joseph William TWYFORD who realised that a large dining room was required for the hotel to operate successfully. Two years later the Tathra Hotel’s licence was transferred from TWYFORD back to the owner, John GLEESON. In July 1886 the Tathra Hotel was advertised for sale.

The Candelo & Eden Union reported in the following month of August 1886 that ‘a licence was granted on Tuesday to J.W. TWYFORD for an hotel to be built at Tathra. This building is indeed necessary not for the sale of liquor certainly, but for accommodation.’ J.W. TWYFORD had the plans for his new hotel already drawn up prior to having the licence granted. The architect whom he had engaged for this twelve roomed two storied hotel was Robert Wallis THATCHER from Bega. The contract was let in March 1887 to builders James Peter TANG and Ernest ZINGEL.

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Meanwhile in June 1887 John Thomas GLEESON, owner of the Tathra Hotel, had become insolvent. The hotel at this stage consisted of 13 rooms, kitchen, stable and outbuildings situated on half an acre of land, section 6, allotment 4, township of Tathra. Henry EVANS and Thomas BARBER were licensees following this period. The last recorded licensee of the Tathra Hotel was Thomas DUNN who obtained a licence mid 1891. He was the father of William DUNN who was employed on the Tathra wharf in the years prior to WW1 and who lost his life in the Great War.

By the end of October 1887 J.W. TWYFORD was granted the licence for the newly completed hotel which operated under the name of Ocean View Hotel, Tathra. The hotel was opened for business in November 1887 and the local newspapers reported extensively on the positive experience that holiday makers could have whilst staying in this commodious, modern building which offered amazing views from the wide balconies. Fishing parties were accommodated with all necessary tackling and a boat was kept at the wharf enabling them to go deep sea fishing. Those being not so adventurous were catered for by having a boat moored at the river.

Joseph TWYFORD remained the licensee of the Ocean View Hotel up until 1902 with the exception of three small periods when his father-in-law, George BINSTADT, took over the reins in 1890/91, Thomas George ROBIN managed it in 1893 for a number of months prior to being declared bankrupt, and in mid 1897 Edward BOFINGER became the licensee for approximately two years.

During the 1890s and early 1900s Tathra had a Jockey Club in addition to a Pony Club and the Ocean View Hotel played an important role during these race days. Joseph TWYFORD also catered for shooters who stayed at his hotel as he, himself, was a keen sportsman.

At the end of 1902 Joseph TWYFORD finally sold the freehold of the Ocean View Hotel to Arthur Edgar PIPER who was the grandson of Captain John PIPER after whom Point Piper had been named. As Tathra’s climate did not agree with his wife’s health, Arthur PIPER sold the business to Harry LEE mid 1904 and returned to Coonamble which had a drier climate. Harry was an experienced gardener and soon had an array of flourishing vegetables growing in the plot adjoining the hotel. However, less than twelve months later he had sold out to local Tathra man Thomas RIXON who, many years earlier, had leased the Brighton Hotel. It was reported that during the summer holiday break of 1906/07 that the patrons of the Ocean View Hotel under the supervision of Thomas RIXON were able to enjoy the latest tunes being played on Tathra’s only gramophone.

In January 1910 John Charles BEHL, a Pambula resident, became the new licensee of the Ocean View Hotel whilst Thomas RIXON retained the freehold. In August 1912 Myrtle FUCHS took over the running of the hotel. She proved to be a fine businesswoman and had great skills in promoting the hotel and the village of Tathra to visiting guests.

In May 1913 newly married Thomas A. RICHARDSON took over the control of the hotel. However, in mid 1914 owner, Thomas RIXON, once again became the licensee and remained in that position until 1921 when the licence was transferred to George Frederick BRERETON.

From this point onwards the Ocean View Hotel quickly changed hands with the following people becoming the licensees – 1922 Jack HEFFERAN and late 1922 George CARPENTER who also purchased the freehold after the recent death of Thomas RIXON. Eighteen months later George sold the business and property of the Ocean View Hotel to Captain O.V. WILLIAMS. It was Captain WILLIAMS who installed electric light and had tennis courts constructed for his guests’ use.

By 1925 the hotel was no longer referred to as the Ocean View Hotel and from then onwards became known as the Tathra Hotel. The following year it was advertised for sale by public auction in the Sydney newspapers. It was described as being on 4 acres of land, a two storey building built of weatherboard, containing 20 rooms, including bars, two garages, engine room, washhouse, fowl run with 70 fowls, two cows, ample water supply, all new fencing, electric light plant, two cedar boats, nice lawns, flower and vegetable gardens and well furnished. It was passed in at £2,400 but was sold the following month to Robert McDONOUGH. The weekly tariff at that time was £3 3s. weekly and 12s daily. The McDONOUGHs remained at the Tathra Hotel until 1931 when Daniel John LAVERY became the new licensee, however, they retained the freehold of the property. 1932 saw Timothy DWYER take over the management but this lasted approximately for only six months when Thomas NATION, the father-in-law of Robert McDONOUGH became the licensee. He remained at the Tathra Hotel until his death in September 1941.

By 1943 Maurice Graydon TAYLOR had become the inn keeper at the Tathra Hotel and in 1945 John M. O'DWYER took over the licence of the hotel.

John Eric George GREEN owned the hotel during the late 1940s until 1963. He was instrumental in building a skating rink over the top of the tennis court on the land adjoining the hotel and this proved very popular with locals as well as the tourists. In the early 1960s he leased the hotel to Ted BISHOP. In the late 1970s Kenneth Warren HACKETT and his wife Noreen were managers of the Tathra Hotel Motel.
Popular couple Rob and Val LITTLE from Merimbula became the licensees of the Hotel in 1980. Rob LITTLE was also part of the push to introduce Australian Rules Football to Tathra and a team was formed in 1983 with Rob becoming the first President. It was during the LITTLE’S time of residence when fire gutted the top floor of the Tathra Pub in April 1984. The family was sleeping upstairs when Val awoke to the smell of smoke and found that the upper section of the Hotel was alight. The family quickly made their escape and the Tathra Bushfire Brigade was soon on the scene. In addition the local people arrived to assist and the Bega Fire Brigade was summoned. Luckily the blaze was contained to the top floor but the bottom section was damaged by water and smoke. However the LITTLES soldiered on and were adamant that they would be open for business as usual while the significant repairs were being undertaken.

It was during the 1980s when the LITTLES were instrumental in introducing some of Australia’s top live bands to play at their Hotel and young people throughout the Bega Valley would flock to Tathra for this entertainment. This entertainment continued through well into the 1990s. Some of these famous Bands to have performed at the Tathra Pub were Cold Chisel, INXS, Rose Tattoo and Mental as Anything, amongst many others.

Unfortunately one year after the fire the Tathra Hotel-Motel went into liquidation in 1985. By 1987 the new hosts of the hotel were Jim and Coral RYAN.

In 1994 the Tathra Hotel was advertised for sale by auction stating that it had a $400,000 annual return, was situated on 2.5 acres and in addition there were 10 motel units. The red brick motel units had been constructed at the side of the hotel C1975. In 2005 Stephen and Maree CLOSE were the couple who were responsible for operating the hotel.

In 2015 the Tathra Hotel was bought by Cliff WALLIS who was already the owner of the Sundeck Hotel in Perisher. A major restoration was planned so that the old building could be restored to its former glory. The Hotel was closed for business during this time and the decision was made to remove the poker machines whilst adding a micro brewery. The heritage features were retained and the broad balconies upstairs were restored in order that the guests might enjoy the ocean views once again.

It took 18 months to complete owing to structural problems being discovered as well as building a glass fronted extension which allows the public to take in the sweeping views across the headland. The work was completed by craftsman Chris BRIGGS. Finally in November 2017 the heritage old pub was opened for business once again.

Having survived the devastating Tathra bush fires on 18 March 2018 which destroyed many homes, cabins and caravans within the township, the Hotel played a major part in the mental recovery of the residents of the town. The regular live music afternoons that are put on for the guests, locals and their families have given an atmosphere of relaxation and enjoyment. The art exhibition on the theme of regeneration and recovery after the fire was displayed in the Hotel’s Cool Room Gallery on the anniversary of the fires in March 2019 and this helped to reinforce just how far this small community had come within the last twelve challenging months. The recently formed Tathra Pub Choir, funded by the Bega Valley Shire Council, is another example of how the Hotel has really supported the local community during its hour of need.

We trust the Tathra Hotel will continue to flourish for many years and remain a vital part of this small, close knit community.


Researched by Pat Raymond