



A Brief History of Luna Park Sydney

Luna Park Sydney opened on 4 October 1935 and quickly became a Sydney institution. The Park was built on the Dorman Long Workshops site, used for the construction of the Harbour Bridge, which opened in 1932. The original concept for Luna Park Sydney was based on the success of Luna Park in Melbourne, which opened in St Kilda in 1912. Many of the rides at Luna Park Sydney were bought from a short-lived Luna Park in Glenelg SA. The entire Sydney site was constructed in just over three months and involved 800 structural workers, 70 electricians, 35 artists as well as many others. When the doors opened at 8.00pm on 4 October, it cost 6d to enter (3d for children) and 6d for most rides. The Park was an instant success, and after its first year, the admission charge was removed and Luna Park proudly advertised 'Admission Free'.

During the war years Luna Park's lights were 'browned out' and it became a magnet for servicemen. The Park closed every winter, giving an opportunity to move, overhaul and paint the rides and add new attractions. The Park ran smoothly under the control of showmen from 1935 to 1970 when Ted Hopkins retired.

In 1969 Luna Park's lease and equipment were sold to World Trade Centre Pty Ltd, who applied to develop the site as a trade centre consisting of seven multi-storied buildings. Approval was refused. Leon Fink, head of the consortium bought out the principal shareholder with Nathan Spatt, formed Luna Park (NSW) Ltd, and continued to run the Park. The Park was then altered from its original state, with some older rides removed, and new portable rides introduced. The changes meant that the charm of the artistic facades so characteristic of the Park were lost. Luna Park Sydney stopped closing for its regular winter maintenance schedules and in 1979 a tragic fire in the Ghost Train ride finally caused the Park to close down completely.

In 1981, an auction was held at the Park with many of the original amusements and artworks auctioned off, and buildings and rides were bulldozed and burnt. After three rounds of tenders, a new lease was won by Harbourside Amusements Pty Ltd. A selection of new and second-hand rides were installed and in 1982 the Park reopened with a distinctive American theme-park flavour. This was short-lived with the lease transferred and another proposal submitted to redevelop the Park with high-rise towers. This was refused and after its closure in 1988, Luna Park remained dilapidated and empty. The lease was withdrawn.

In 1990, after years of lobbying by the Friends of Luna Park, assisted by North Sydney Council, the NSW Government passed the Luna Park Site Act. This act made the site Crown land dedicated for public recreation, amusement and entertainment. The Luna Park Reserve Trust was formed and took control of the Park in October 1990, with major restoration of all its buildings beginning in 1992, including Coney Island, Crystal Palace, and a new steel rollercoaster was installed. The Harbour foreshore was opened up with a boardwalk connecting Luna Park to Lavender Bay. In 1995, with substantial investment from the State Government, the Park was re-opened for just over a year, when residents' complaints about the new Big Dipper caused its closure in 1996. Without the revenue from the Big Dipper, running as an amusement park was not viable. In 1997, the precinct of Luna Park and its associated heritage items were classified and placed on the Register of the National Estate. In July 1999 the NSW Government announced the current operators, Metro Edgley, as the preferred proponent to lease and run the Park.

In 2001 The Big Dipper was moved to Dreamworld on the Gold Coast. Two years later building work began on the Big Top (a new 3,000 capacity venue), onsite carpark, restaurant/brasserie as well as a complete refurbishment of existing rides and facilities.

Reopened on 4 April 2004, the major redevelopment of the Park is based on keeping the site's unique identity and heritage features while providing a range of new entertainment, tourism and social facilities. Many agree that Luna Park Sydney's prominent position and crazy architecture, plus the countless smiles it has generated, gives it a special place in the hearts of Australians and visitors alike.

The story of Luna Park Sydney cannot be told without mentioning just some of the many people involved:

- **David 'DA' Atkins** One of Australia's great carnival showmen, Atkins was instigator and manager of Luna Park Glenelg, SA. After it closed, Atkins conducted an exhaustive search until deciding on the site at Milsons Point. He supervised the construction of Luna Park Sydney under the watchful eye of Herman Phillips. Throughout the 1950s DA and Ted Hopkins travelled the world, looking for the latest rides and attractions to bring back to Sydney.
- **Ted 'Hoppy' Hopkins** Hopkins had the enormous task of dismantling the rides at Glenelg, shipping them to Sydney and rebuilding them at Lavender Bay. Once the Park opened, Hopkins was the maintenance engineer, not only supervising the efficient and safe running of the Park, but also recording it's history with detailed black and white photographs of the amusements and rides, including the 'nuts and bolts' of the famous Dodgem Cars. He became a shareholder in 1950 and Park manager in 1957 after the death of Atkins.
- **Rupert Browne** A scenic artist from Palais Pictures and Luna Park Melbourne, Browne designed the first entry Face and original artwork during the Park's 1935 construction phase.
- **Arthur Barton** Artist-in-Residence from 1935–70, Barton was responsible for all the murals in Coney Island and other artworks scattered throughout the Park, as well as the 1950s version of the Face.
- **John S Ross** A silhouette artist who started working at Luna Park Sydney in 1949, Ross stayed for 30 years. Ross was born in Detroit USA and learnt the art of cutting silhouettes in the 1930s from Bud-Jack, acclaimed as one of the world's great silhouette artists. Ross came to Australia in 1942, and helped set up General Douglas MacArthur's office in Sydney. In his career, Ross has cut innumerable silhouettes including: Al Jolson (when Ross was working at a 5 & Dime on Hollywood Boulevard); Ernest Borgnine, Angela Lansbury and John Mills (when they were filming *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* at Luna Park in 1956); Australian celebrities Johnny O'Keefe and Little Patti; and Prime Minister Robert Menzies. Ross still makes guest appearances at the Park.
- **Martin Sharp, Peter Kingston and Richard Liney** The three artists were commissioned in the 1970s to revitalise the Park's murals. In 1973, Sharp re-designs the Face into what became known as the 'famous clown face'. In 1979 Sharp and Kingston set up Friends of Luna Park, organising exhibitions, public meetings and a protest concert.
- **Tony Maloney** Now the Park's longest-serving employee, Maloney began working at the Park in 1961 as a casual games attendant. In 1963 he began a motor mechanic apprenticeship and continued to work part-time at the Park. Throughout the 1970s Maloney worked full-time at the Park as a mechanical fitter. In 1992 he was made Maintenance Manager and is now the Park's Special Projects Manager.
- **Ashley Taylor** Taylor is the Park's Artist in Residence (and first person to hold the title since the much-loved Barton). Taylor studied art in Sydney and Lismore and was a travelling artist with the Bicentennial touring exhibition in 1988. Taylor first worked at Luna Park in 1994 under the guidance of Peter Kingston in restoring Coney Island and recreating the Rotor.

For further media information: Maryann Sulic, Publicist at Mollison Communications

Ph: 02 8302 2922 Mob: 0419 221 805 Email: maryann.s@mollison.com