

Brock's Folly

Brock's mansion was also known as Brock's Folly, La Corniche, Mona Vale Hydro, The Oaks, Pacific Paradise.

Built by Mr Brock from 1894 this was a splendid mansion with a billiard room, ballroom, stables and extensive grounds, including a lake and some villas providing accommodation.

By 1907 Brock had overspent on his mansion and was in debt. It had also not been very successful as a resort, partly because transport was inadequate. The estate was subdivided and auctioned.

The main building continued as a resort known as La Corniche, but was damaged by fire in 1912.

The building was restored to function at different times as a holiday resort, a school, and during World War II as an army base.

The estate no longer stands in Mona Vale, but once covered all the land east of Barrenjoey road, from Darley Street East to Hillcrest Avenue.

Memories

..."This palatial masterpiece of architecture called originally Brock's Folly, then Mona Vale Hydro, later La Corniche, and today Pacific Paradise, is trying once again to capture the imagination of the holiday-seeker with the attractions which it has to offer.

This beautiful and stately pile of buildings represented a grand – a masterly idea – which cost its unfortunate originator £25,000 and left him practically a beggar.

Fifty-six years ago – 1894 – the man with an idea noted the great unclaimed swamp at Mona Vale – a stagnant lagoon, the only point in its favour being its proximity to a beautiful ocean beach, one of the many that appear in that much-favoured stretch of coast from Manly to Pittwater and beyond.

It occurred to Mr. Brock, a resident of Enmore, who conceived the idea, that if the useless blot upon the landscape could be drained, an excellent seaside resort should result...

Brock's Estate once again came into the limelight when in 1910 it was opened by Mrs. Arthur Griffiths, wife of the Minister for Public Works, as a hydro. At the invitation of Mr. Arthur Rickard (lessor), and Mr. F. W. Fox (lessee) a large number of people attended the opening ceremony.

...A brief description of La Corniche in its heyday, shows what a magnificent edifice it must have been. The building alone was a source of never-ending delight. The decorations both

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externally and internally, were extremely artistic and must have been a constant pleasure to the eye.

...Even today one can spend a pleasant hour or so roaming around the grounds and viewing the old mansion and an inspection of the beautiful staircase is well worthwhile. Some of the stained windows can still be seen at the rear of the main building, while a few of the many huge columns are still intact.

...Previous to World War II, La Corniche was used as a school for children; then during the war the Army had possession of it as an Infantry Training School for NCO's.

For some time after the war ended the Junior Air League held weekend parades there. Now, once again, history repeats itself, La Corniche is being remodelled and the cottages surrounding it have been turned into flatettes, and an attempt is being made to attract tourists from overseas.

The present managing agent, Mr. Elliott has changed the name from La Corniche to Pacific Paradise, and the rental in 1952 was £1 per day per person, with meals extra."

HC Chippindall, "Mona Vale Its History and Progress", 1952.

Reading

The Brock Estate

"...The whole property is unique in character, nothing similar in this State has ever been on the market before....The Brock Mansion is a magnificent building, highly decorated externally and internally, built of brick on concrete foundations, Mansard roof; containing main entrance hall, billiard room, ladies' lounge, smoke room, 25 bedrooms, 6 bathrooms, etc. The Oriel windows on the eastern side are in the front of a very large dining hall, about 36 x 72 feet [12 x 24metres] , and at the rear ample provision has been made for the kitchens and servants' quarters. This portion of the premises being solidly constructed of timber, decorated and finished in rough cast cement.

There is scope for a grand promenade on the roof from which the outlook over the ocean, surrounding hills and adjacent grounds is superb beyond description"

Brochure advertising sale of estate, Tourist Guide Manly to Pittwater, 1907.

Further reading

HC Chippindall, "Mona Vale its History & Progress", Sydney Morning Herald, 1952.
Descriptive & historical article

Guy Jennings, "La Corniche", Manly Warringah Journal of Local History, Vol.6, 1995.
History and changing function

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Alan Sharpe, Manly to Palm Beach, 1983.
General history

Tourist Guide. Manly to Pittwater, 1907.
Brochure prepared for Brock's Estate subdivision sale