

Sontoy Ballroom (Dance Hall)

Mandurah Terrace.



Les Price – Sax, John Price – Drums, Alan Norris – Piano, playing at Sontoy, c 1960

The decade was the 1950s and Australia was coming out of the Second World War which followed the economic Depression of the 1930s. Holiday makers were flocking to Mandurah to spend time by the sea and the estuary. Open air pictures at night were packed and Roy Tuckey was set to commence a new enterprise – building a dance hall.

On Mandurah Terrace right opposite the estuary a general store owned by J Dowling was sold to Roy and permission was given in 1955 to commence building. This building was designed and built by Roy Tuckey. In 1955 there was still occasional flooding across the road, so like many other shops in the area, there were masonry steps to access the upper part of the entry. Jarrah floorboards were especially sprung to provide a really good dancing surface; these still remain underneath the current flooring. At the time it was believed to be the biggest dance hall outside of Perth, possibly the biggest in Western Australia.

Roy Tuckey was to name this hall, Sontoy after a boat owned by his father who had used it along the coast of Western Australia. This is one boat the museum has failed to identify in other records.



Sontoy Ballroom cont'd

Like other dance halls of that period, the Sontoy was extremely popular with young people who arranged to meet at the dance. At one time in the height of summer there were midnight dances commencing at 12am on a Sunday to allow the experience without causing controversy with religious groups. Many local and Perth bands and groups came to entertain them.

Refreshments and supper were provided from the tearoom in the hall and also were available from Warne's deli which was close to the Sontoy. As time moved on, the land next door to the hall was leased and the Lanyons ran a hamburger stall there for several years. This was to become a highlight of the dances with one of the doors opening directly out to it. Consequently, there was the pleasure of fresh sea air just outside the front doors of the hall. The front door was the only way to leave the dances to go outside, and Nesta Tuckey manned this for both entry payment and with Pass Out tickets.

The Sontoy quickly became the place to hold important personal events, wedding receptions, cabarets, balls and on one memorable occasion a Debutante's Ball organized by the Mandurah Police and Citizen's Group. In January 1957 soon after this ball had commenced, the call went out for assistance in rescuing a small boy from down a borehole. This boy, Graham Davies was to become headline news throughout the country and indeed the world. His successful rescue the next day was due to a huge community effort, both local and statewide.

The Sontoy became an exhibition space for other events; from 1960 the Mandurah Parents and Citizens ran their annual spring show there.

Vox Adeon Howards had come to the corner of Smart Street and with television commencing in Perth in late 1959, by the '60s there was often a crowd around watching this new entertainment through the shop's windows.

Eventually, when the Lanyons left, Kevin Green moved from Pinjarra Road where parking had become a problem onto the same site.

By 1968 the popularity of dances was waning and managing that business as well as the shop and farm was becoming more difficult for Dudley and Nesta Tuckey. Roy Tuckey applied to the Minister for Planning for permission to convert the building into a shopping arcade. He placed the management of this enterprise in the hands of his son Brynne.

The building remains to this day (2021) and has been used by numerous different businesses. For many years the front shop was a men's clothing store. Parts of the building have also been used for dance lessons.

