

MANLY CHUTE

(1903-1906) Situated in the harbour and beach-side suburb of Manly, some eleven miles north-east of Sydney's central business district, the Manly Chute water and amusement park was built in 1903 by a local syndicate. It operated during the warmer months of each year - approximately October to April. While the feature attractions were a Canadian water chute and a Toboggan ride, the management also provided various alternate entertainments, including variety concerts and film exhibitions. The park was leased to music director/manager Lewis De Groen from October 1905 to April 1906. It remained open until the end of June that year, however, and then closed permanently. The site was sold in November 1906, around the same time that the Manly Chute and Amusements Company went into liquidation.



The Manly Chute

Source: www.panoramio.com (photo uploaded by Craig Tindale)

Situated in Manly at the corner of South Steyne and Ashburner Street (an area known as Steyne Court), the Manly Chute was established in 1903 by a syndicate called the Manly Chute and Amusements Company. The site had previously operated for some three years as a place of amusement known as The Maze,¹ before being purchased sometime around September/October 1903. Included in the sale was a building that had operated as a refreshment room. The new company was incorporated on 6 November, and shortly afterwards, General Manager, Archibald Baird, struck a deal with previous refreshment room operator, Henry Bardolph, to buy his business. The deal included employment for Bardolph, his wife and son, Donald, who continued on as managers of the Manly Chute's refreshment service. The company subsequently stocked the premises with wine and other goods.²

After securing the rights to the refreshment room, demolition of the maze began. The company then set about erecting the water slides that were to be the park's main attraction. The Manly Chute's official opening, timed to coincide with the school holidays, took place on 14 December in the presence of Sir John See, members of the New South Wales Ministry and the Mayor of Manly. The first entertainment was presented by a military band under the conductorship of Mr L. De Groen.³ The *Sydney Morning Herald* indicates that the park was open at night, with illumination provided by "fairy and other lamps."⁴



Sydney Morning Herald 4 Feb. 1904, 1.

¹ The Maze reportedly opened for business on 1 May 1901.

² "Law Report," 8; and "Equity Court," 9.

³ Lewis De Groen (1865-1919) had previously been music director to the Governor of New South Wales (see "Mr. De Groen's Concert." *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* 13 Mar. 1897, 6.).

⁴ "Manly Chute." *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 Dec. 1903, 14.

In February 1904, the Manly Chute and Amusements Company opened a new building which they named the Bijou Theatre.⁵ This gave management an opportunity to enhance its patrons' experience by providing a space for live entertainment. Artists from vaudeville and circus were subsequently engaged. Two of the earliest acts identified to date were Percy and Mdlle Verto, and the Leopold Family of acrobats (both 1904/1905). The Verto's shows included conjuring, transformation acts, and a "Biotint cinematographe," exhibition called "A Trip to the Moon."⁶ In late-1905 the management began presenting a series of "Continentials." Among the artists and acts to have been engaged during 1905 and 1906 were the Golden Trio (1905), Charles Pope (with and without his Georgia Cakewalkers, 1906)⁷, Blutch Jones (1906), Fred Davys (1906), Tom Edwards (1906), Master Leslie Holman (1906), the Gotham Trio (1906), Stewart and Stirling (1906), Harry Wilkie, and the Cathedral Quartette (1906). The musical entertainment offered to patrons varied from local bands, orchestras and military bands (including the Vice Regal Military band).

Among the side show novelties introduced by the park's managements were punching machines, slot machines, a Punch and Judy show, and a shooting gallery. A "Great Dragon" also travelled around the grounds at one stage. One of the most popular attractions at Manly Chute from 13 April 1904 onwards was the sensational feat of "shooting the chute" on a bicycle. The first to do this was Bert Scott, with Professor Adrianna taking over in 1905.

STEYNE COURT, MANLY
WATER CHUTE and TOBOGGAN.
SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS FOR ANNIVERSARY DAY.
 Opening of the New Bijou Theatre.
 FOUR PERFORMANCES DAILY.
 PERCY VERTO and MDLLE. VERTO,
 from Opera House Melbourne.
 First time in New South Wales :
 "A TRIP TO THE MOON."
 LEOPOLD FAMILY OF ACROBATS, all day.
 LIVING AUNT SALLY—First time in Australia.
 The Mystery of Mysteries—JOE IN THE GLOBE.
 Steyne Court Band all day. Refreshments at Sydney prices.
 American Fountain Drinks. Colonial Wines, Punching Machines, Side Shows, Novel Bush Sport, the Great Dragon.
 ADMISSION, 6d ; Children, 3d. Open all day Anniversary Day.

Sunday Times (Sydney) 24 Jan. 1904, 1.



From an undated postcard. Courtesy of *The Past President*. [sighted 17/06/2022]



A 50 horsepower engine was used to winch a boatload of eight people to the top, and then the boat was released, making the thrilling ride down the chute and into a lake built at the base.

MANLY WATER CHUTE.
 Sole Lessee and Director Mr. L. De GROEN.
 OPEN DAILY, 2.30 TILL 10 P.M.
 HOSTS OF ATTRACTIONS.
 GRAND CONTINENTAL EVERY WEDNESDAY
 AND SATURDAY NIGHT.
 THE VICE-REGAL MILITARY BAND, THE
 GOTHAM TRIO, ADRIANNA (wonderful cyclist),
 VAUDEVILLE ARTISTS.
 "You couldn't spend a dull moment at the
 Chute if you tried."

Sunday Times (Sydney) 7 Jan. 1906, 1.

From an undated postcard. Courtesy of *The History Spot* [sighted 17/06/2022]

⁵ "Manly Water Chute." *Hebrew Standard of Australasia* (Sydney) 5 Feb. 1904, 11.

⁶ "Visit to Manly Water Chutes." *Worker* (Wagga, NSW) 6 Feb. 1904, 2. "A Trip to the Moon," involved 32 films illustrative of remarkable adventures in the lunar world."

⁷ The Cakewalkers troupe reportedly comprised "14 American negroes."

Another popular attraction was the daily screening of moving pictures. On 24 November 1905, a little over six-weeks after reopening for the summer, new lessee Lewis De Groen announced that "well-known bioscope expert versatile entertainer" Fraser Shaw would begin showing films by means of the latest Warwick Biograph." Shaw, who had previously spent time under management of Harry Rickards, premiered his "first-class programme" the following day in the park's Bijou Theatre.⁸ Sessions were given in the afternoon and evening. Although not reported by the Sydney press, New Zealand's *Wanganui Chronicle* records that the park's bioscope caught fire one night in late February 1906 (possibly while the entertainment was under the direction of Fred Davys). The writer notes that some £80 worth of film was destroyed in a minute.⁹

By early-1906 the Manly Chute and Amusement Company was in financial trouble, and the park never re-opened after the closure of its 1906 season. This had been extended until late-June. It is presently unclear if the park remained under De Groen's management after his lease expired on 21 April.¹⁰ His name has not yet been identified in connection with its activities from that date onwards. Rumours of the park's demolition began to emerge publically in July.¹¹ The two allotments on Ashburner Street (portions of the Manly Chute Estate) were eventually sold in November for £552.¹² That same month the Manly Chute and Amusement Company filed for bankruptcy.

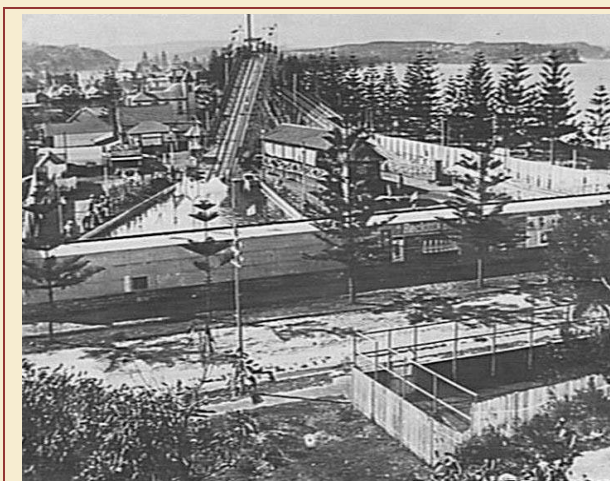
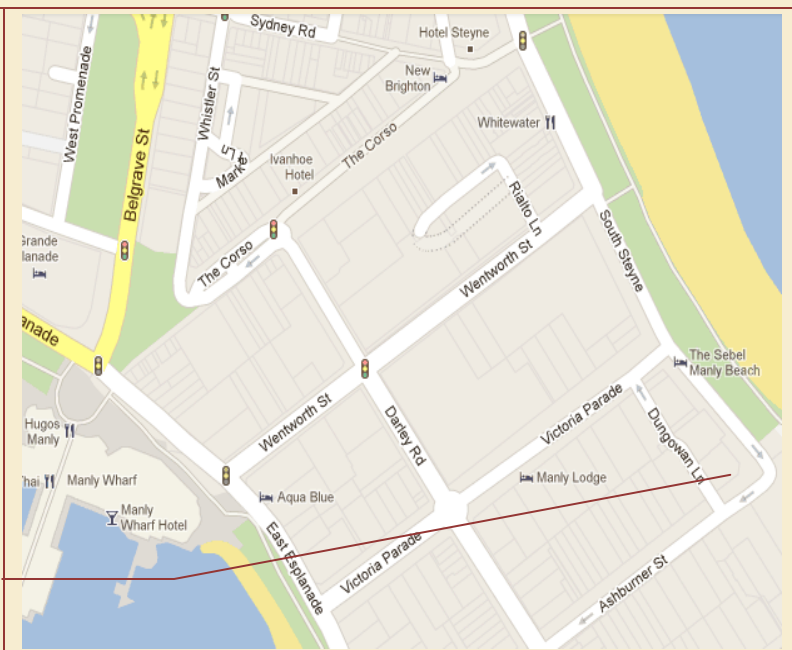


Photo courtesy of Michael Raynor

**Manly Chute location
(1903-ca. 1907)**



MANLY WATER CHUTE.
A new Bijou theatre has been opened at Steyne Court, Manly, in connection with the Manly Water Chute and Amusements, Ltd, and greatly enhances the large number of attractions at this popular resort. On Wednesday evening some excitement was supplied by Toboggan racing for gentlemen. More excitement on February 10, when ladies' races will take place.
Hebrew Standard of Australasia (Sydney) 5 Feb. 1904, 11.

MANLY WATER CHUTE.
The first appearance of Messrs. Charles Pope and Blutch Jones at the chute continental last Saturday night proved successful. Mr. De Groen has re-engaged them to appear at next Wednesday's continental. The toboggan races announced for tonight have been postponed for a few days, pending the completion of the special racing cars.
Sydney Morning Herald 19 Feb. 1906, 10.

MANLY WATER CHUTE.
The series of Continentals at the Manly chute grounds will be continued to-night, when the Golden Trio will introduce new specialties. The Vice-Regal Military Band will be presented in full strength. Amongst other items the band will play Overture to "Zampa," The "Boston Commandery" March, grand selection, "Un Ballo," and "The Gondoliers."
Sydney Morning Herald 10 Jan. 1906, 12.

MANLY WATER CHUTE.
The last of the Wednesday Continentals at the Manly Chute was given last night. There was a large attendance, and the programme was an attractive one. Mr. Tom Edwards gave several humorous items, and Master Leslie Hallman a number of song and dance items. Mr. De Groen's Vice-Regal Band played overtures from "Zampa," "Il Trovatore," and other items. On Saturday night, the last night of the season, an open-air concert will be given. The employees' benefit has been fixed for Saturday week, April 28.
Sydney Morning Herald 19 Apr. 1906, 11.

⁸ "Manly Water Chute." *Australian Star* (Sydney) 24 Nov. 1905, 7.

⁹ "By 'Masque'." *Wanganui Chronicle* (NZ) 24 Feb. 1906, 7.

¹⁰ "Manly Water Chute." *Sydney Morning Herald* 23 Ap. 1906, 3.

¹¹ "Sydney - Manly Items." *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express* (NSW) 27 July 1906, 25.

¹² "Property Market." *Sydney Morning Herald* 3 Nov. 1906, 15.

HISTORICAL NOTES AND CORRECTIONS

1. **Manly Chute and Amusements Company vs Henry Bardolph (1904):** Despite its immediate popularity with locals and the wider Sydney public, the new venture encountered some unexpected complications early on. In March 1904, barely three months after opening the park, the Manly Chute and Amusements Company was forced to take out an injunction restraining Henry Bardolph from occupying the refreshment rooms and from dealing with certain properties. The matter came to a head when Bardolph "refused to allow the managing director of the company or the acting manager to have access to the cash register or the money therein." The company subsequently gave them notice of dismissal, claiming that as employees they had demonstrated insubordination by disobeying legitimate orders given to them. The Bardolphs, however, were steadfast in their refusal to give up possession of the premises, the goods therein and the cash register.

The issues which led to the two parties ending up in court concerned payment to Bardolph for goodwill, the wine license (valued at £140) and the improvements he made to the original Maze (valued at £225) which had been demolished in order to erect the water slides. Bardolph's solicitor stated that his client and the company's General Manager Archibald Laidlaw Baird had agreed to several other conditions, namely a permanent position of employment, which Bardolph argued had been settled as a minimum of three years, and an increase in his wages after a specified date. Their argument was that the Manly Chute and Amusements Company had breached the agreement by instructing its solicitors to send a letter (26 Feb. 1904) demanding that Bardolph immediately transfer the license (to their nominated licensee) and give up possession of the premises. Bardolph further stated that no payment of moneys owed was forthcoming and the letter of demand breached the agreement made with Baird regarding permanency. It appears from the reports published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the disagreements between the two parties was the result of the promises made by Baird, whose employment had since been terminated, which may or may not have been made in accordance with the company's directives.

Although the Manly Chute and Amusements Company motion for the continuation of the injunction was granted on 22 March, with Bardolph ordered to abide by the ruling until the matter was heard in court, no details of an eventual court case have been located, suggesting that both parties may have eventually reached a mutual agreement without further legal proceedings.¹³

2. **Railway and Tramways Musicians Dispute (1905):** Manly Chute management was faced with a further problem in 1905 when the local council made a complaint regarding employees of the Railway service accepting employment as musicians at the park. This forced the Railway and Tramways Commissioners to refuse permission for its members to compete against professional musicians.¹⁴
3. **Manly Council vs L. De Groen (1906):** In early-February 1906 Lewis De Groen appeared in the Water Police Court on charges of keeping the Manly Water Chute open on Christmas Day the previous year. The incident had been brought against De Groen by the Manly Council. The charges were dismissed on a technicality, however, when the park manager's lawyer submitted that the Council's bylaws had not been tendered in evidence.¹⁵
4. **Theatrical Licence Application (1906):** A few days after his appearance at the Water Police Court on charges of opening the Manly Chute on Christmas Day, Lewis De Groen was once again at the court. In this instance he was attempting to have the Bijou Theatre's theatrical licence endorsed. The police objected to the granting of a licence, however, citing De Groen's non-compliance with the government architects recommendations regarding fire equipment and exit lighting. The magistrate initially refused to grant the license, but changed his decision when De Groen agreed to close the theatre until all conditions had been satisfactorily met.¹⁶



Image courtesy of *The Manly Daily*

¹³ See "Further Reference" section above for reports on the Equity Court injunction published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.
¹⁴ "Sydney Labour Council: Railway and Tramway Bands." *Sydney Morning Herald* 22 Dec. 1905, 3.
¹⁵ "Manly Water Chute: The Case Breaks Down, Bylaws Not Tendered." *Australian Star* (Sydney) 7 Feb. 1906, 7.
¹⁶ "Manly Water Chute: Question of Licence." *Australian Star* (Sydney) 15 Feb. 1906, 6.

FURTHER REFERENCE

"Equity Court (Before Mr Justice A. H. Simpson, Chief Judge in Equity), Motion to Continue Injunction."
Sydney Morning Herald 19 Mar. 1904, 9.

"Law Report: Friday March 11 - Equity Court, Motion to Continue Injunction." *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 Mar. 1904, 8.

"In Equity: Motion to Continue Injunction." *Sydney Morning Herald* 22 Mar. 1904, 7.

"Manly Chute, The." *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express* (NSW) 2 Mar. 1906, 15.

"Visit to Manly Water Chutes." *Worker* (Wagga, NSW) 6 Feb. 1904, 2.



Image courtesy of *The Manly Daily*

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