

Downing Centre: A Year in Review

As 2015 draws to a close, it's time to reflect on the year that was in Downing Centre Court.

1. Riot Squad Halts Court Case

Back in February, a jury trial in Downing Centre District Court ground to a halt after police [received information about a plan to disrupt the proceedings.](#)

The trial concerned an armed robbery allegedly carried out by two men outside Broadway Shopping Centre in 2013. One of the men was charged with stealing a car, aggravated break and enter, shooting at a home, larceny and participating in a criminal group.

The NSW Police Riot Squad responded with scores of heavily armed specialist officers descending upon the courthouse.

Several black Riot Squad vehicles were seen outside the courts, and a police helicopter circled overhead.

Despite the commotion, the building was not evacuated. The trial in question was adjourned until the following week.

2. Man Escapes Custody at Downing Centre Courts

You might recall our earlier blog about Ali Hussain Chahine, the 33-year-old man who escaped from the dock in courtroom 3.1 of Downing Centre District Court in September this year, in the presence of one of our very own criminal lawyers.

Mr Chahine was in court for the purpose of a bail application – but he made a run for it at around 4pm after his application was refused by Judge Scotting.

Upon escaping the dock, Chahine ran out a fire escape and boarded a bus on Castlereagh Street, reportedly disembarking near Central station.

He was [arrested at a unit in Alexandria the following week](#), and charged with 'escaping lawful custody' and 'assault occasioning actual bodily harm' for supposedly assaulting two corrective services officers.

3. Drug Charges Dominate Court Lists

As usual, drug charges featured heavily in Downing Centre court lists.

The year kicked off with [214 people arrested and charged for drug offences](#) at the Field Day music festival, held in Sydney's Domain on New Year's Day. The majority of those charged appeared in Downing Centre Court in January and February.

High-profile drug cases included those of Rebecca Hannibal and Matthew Forti, both charged with supplying ecstasy to Georgina Bartter, who tragically died of a drug overdose at Harbourlife Music Festival in 2014.

Ms Hannibal was sentenced on 26 June to a 12 month section 9 good behaviour bond. [Matthew Forti](#) received a 22 month prison sentence, with a 12 month non-parole period on 29 August

In an unrelated case, high-profile DPP lawyer Lisa Munro fronted the Court on 28 September charged with the possession of cocaine, after police observed her carrying out a drug deal in Potts Point in July. She pleaded guilty was handed a 12 month section 10 bond (now [conditional release order](#) without conviction), without criminal conviction.

Finally, Olympic kayaker Nathan Baggaley appeared alongside his younger brother Dru on the 18 December for charges of drug manufacturing and conspiracy. Both men are alleged to have

played a role in the production of 18,000 tablets of 2CB and were planning to manufacture ice. Both were sentenced to a non-parole period of two years and three months imprisonment.

4. Police Officers Facing Court

Although they are entrusted with enforcing the law, a number of NSW Police Officers fronted the Downing Centre Court this year.

46-year-old Senior Detective Andrew John Clarke pleaded guilty to high-range drink driving after blowing a reading of .170 during a random breath test on the 10th of July.

Subsequent investigations revealed that he had been driving unlicensed for over 20 years.

Mr Clarke was sentenced in October to a fine of \$2,000 and an order preventing him from applying for a licence for nine months.

Another former police constable, Allan Robert Simon, was sentenced in September after [helping his drug dealing girlfriend evade police detection](#). He received a sentence of 1 year and 10 months imprisonment, but was ultimately released on an intensive corrections order.

5. Father Attacks Child Sex Offender

In an emotionally charged incident in August this year, the father of a young girl who was sexually assaulted by a former serviceman [bashed the man after he was sentenced to 6 years imprisonment](#).

The 64-year-old South Coast man, who remains unnamed for legal reasons, was convicted of two charges of aggravated sexual assault on a child under the age of 10.

According to eyewitnesses, it took five people to restrain the father.

It is unknown whether he has been charged for the attack.

The Downing Centre Court is sure to once again be the centre of high drama and controversy in 2016.