

Downing Centre Court Gets a Much-Needed Upgrade

[The Downing Centre Court](#) is undergoing some much-needed redevelopment.

While the court will still be in session as usual, the lower ground level and the popular café are both undergoing renovations which will improve facilities.

The renovations will include a new court for hearing multi-accused cases, new hearing rooms, as well as new areas for court officers and jurors.

It will also house new Civil Registry Offices, and the judge's library will be relocated.

The [redevelopment](#) will cost \$26.5 million and is expected to be completed by mid-2015.

The Downing Centre houses both Local and District courts and is the busiest court-complex in NSW.

Local courts across NSW hear hundreds of thousands of cases each year, and thousands of them are held in the Downing Centre.

In 2013, local courts across Australia determined 248,389 charges, according to the [Bureau of Criminal Statistics and Research](#).

Many of these matters start in Downing Centre Local Court or nearby Central Local Court— even the initial stages of proceedings for serious charges like murder, sexual assault and commercial drug cases.

Those serious cases will ultimately progress to the District or Supreme court, where they will be finalised.

However, most cases are not so serious and will be concluded in the local court.

Some of the most [common cases include drink driving](#), drug possession, common assaults and AVOs.

The Downing Centre courts and those contained in the attached John Maddison Tower deal with 60% of NSW state matters.

The Downing Centre building has been around for a long time, but it wasn't always a courthouse.

Until 1980, it housed Mark Foys, which was one of the most upmarket department stores of its day.

The store even had Australia's first escalator.

After Mark Foys closed its doors to shoppers, Grace Brothers occupied the premises briefly until 1982 when it relocated to the Pitt Street shopping precinct.

The building sat empty for three years before it was turned into the Downing Centre Courthouse Complex in 1985.

While the interior is undergoing renovations, the exterior will still retain the original Mark Foys floor tiles and façade.

And while renovations are happening, the courthouse will still be hearing cases.

The Downing Centre, located in the Sydney CBD, has seen many familiar faces over the years.

Last year we watched and waited to see what would be the outcome in Freya Newmans case, after she reportedly exposed the questionable scholarship granted to Frances Abbot, daughter of the Prime Minister.

Margaret Cunneen appeared there in proceedings relating to the allegation that she had abused her position, and in December

2014 former labour powerbroker Eddie Obeid appeared facing charges of misconduct in public office.

Man Haron Monis, the Sydney siege killer, unknown until the tragic events of last December, was no stranger to the Downing Centre.

He made several appearances there, including the time when he chained himself to the steps of as a protest against the war in Afghanistan.

He also faced the initial stages of sexual assault charges there.

Haron's partner, accused of being involved in the murder of Haron's ex-wife, had her bail revoked at the courthouse in December.

And in 2011, Judge Marcus Einfield was famously exposed for lying about his a speeding ticket.

Even the brother of Lara Bingle appeared at the Downing Centre a few years ago facing assault charges.

Downing Centre is sure to see more well-known personalities walk through its doors this year.

It is business as usual in the court complex, despite the ongoing renovations.