

From the Archives of South Maroubra Surf Club.

Part 2. The founding in 1959 and early struggles.

By Bob Wurth.

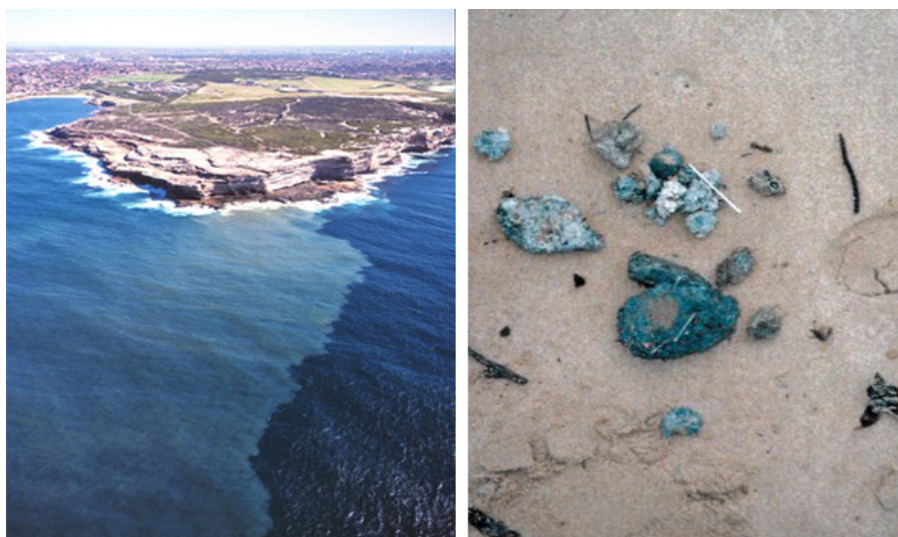
Malabar Surf Life Saving Club, situated at the end of usually calm Long Bay just over the headland from Maroubra beach, was in trouble by its 33rd season in 1957-'58. Malabar was never a great surfing beach. Frequently, there was very little surf rolling into the beach at the far end of Long Bay. Unless a big storm whipped up the seas, Long Bay was placid. It was a great place for kids.

Life was slow on the beach. Lifesavers with the Malabar club undertook only ten rescues during that '57-'58 season, and most of the rescues were minor. The club's lifesaving committee was having trouble with 'enthusiasm' issues and it made a call for greater effort and keenness with patrol obligations in the coming season of 1958-'59. But there were rumblings within the club. The annual report spoke of 'the indifferent attitude' of members in regard to club property. The club also was having difficulties in raising money for a new clubhouse. Among the membership there were some very good surf swimmers, but alas there was very little surf to make it interesting.



Malabar Surf Club at Long Bay (photo above) had developed from the Long Bay Life Saving and Amateur Swimming Club which was formed at the end of World War One and was originally affiliated with the Royal Life Saving Society. Malabar had been named after the Burns Philp cargo passenger ship wrecked on the rocks of the northern headland of Long Bay in 1931 (photo above). The local residents had been keen to change the name of the suburb and beach from its original name, Long Bay, because that was also the name given to the large prison just up the road from the beach. So with government support the suburb was renamed Malabar. In 1922 a new dark brick clubhouse was built and the Malabar club competed in many Royal Lifesaving Society carnivals.

There was another reason why members of the Malabar Surf Club in the 'fifties were becoming disenchanted. As 1959 approached, pollution from the huge treatment plant at Malabar, Sydney's largest and operated by the Metropolitan Water Board, severely affected water quality at the beach.

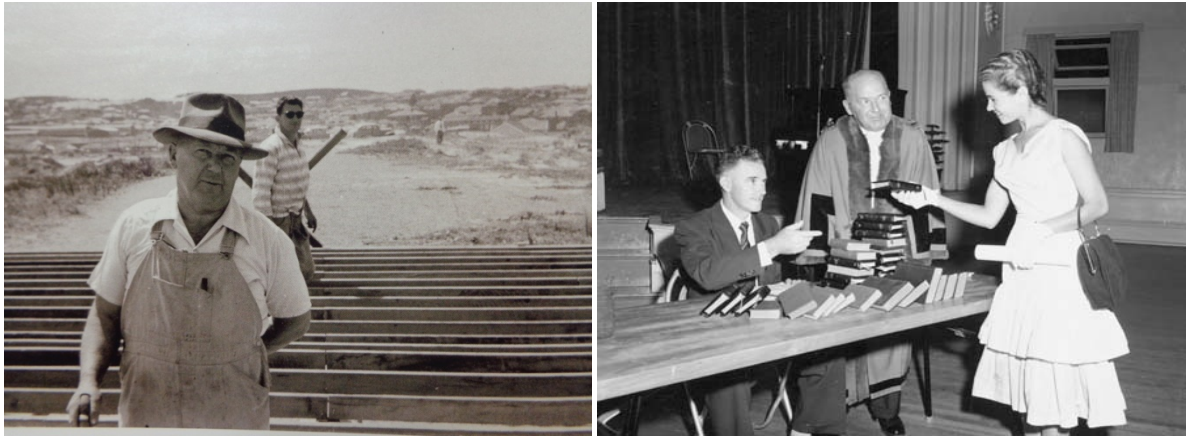


Not only was Long Bay affected by the filth from the outfall on the northern headland at 'Yellow Rock' (see photo above left), but later on other beaches, especially Maroubra, were badly also affected by barely treated sewage from the 'Yellow Rock' outfall washing up on the beaches (photo on right of untreated sewage on the sand). Despite promises of action, the problem continued to worsen for decades. Often the sewage was barely treated and the smell was appalling in the heat.

In time Malabar club members became utterly disillusioned and the pollution gradually ruined their club which was finally was disbanded in 1973 and the building handed over to the local Scouts. South Maroubra Surf Club, formed in 1959, would also feel the effects of filth on the beach and in the surf. In time the South Maroubra club would play a leading role in campaigning for underwater pipelines to take the sewage well out to sea. *(More on that campaign later.)*

The movement for a significant number of Malabar Surf Club members to abandon their beach and club centred on a public meeting of some 50 people held inside the tiny Malabar surf clubhouse on Sunday, 31 May, 1959. On that day the following motion was carried: "That a Surf Life Saving Club be formed at the southern end of Maroubra Beach to be called South Maroubra S.L.S.C. and that it be run in conjunction with the Maroubra club." The latter part of the motion had been suggested by the Mayor of Randwick, Alderman Charlie Molloy, a long-time member of the Maroubra club. But once underway, the southerners ran their own affairs. Molloy said his Council believed that the southern end of the beach had to be opened up in the near future anyhow and there would be a need for the new club. How right he would be with the start of the Ocean View estate in the former bushland at South Maroubra. Randwick Council gave the new club a cheque for \$300 and a site would soon be selected for a clubhouse, approved by the Council and the NSW Lands Department. How things had changed. In February 1929 the president of Maroubra Surf Club, Alderman Thomas Wild, contended that there was no room for two surf lifesaving bodies at the beach.

Rick McKeon, convenor of the May 1959 gathering, said there was a need for another surf club on Maroubra beach and said the Surf Life Saving Association and Randwick Council were in favour of such move. The meeting elected a committee of ten. The foundation executive comprised Brian Chenhall (secretary), Rick Smith (captain), Kevin Quinn (treasurer) and Bill Lucas (president).



Alderman Bill Lucas (above) of Matraville would become the first president of South Maroubra Surf Life Saving Club in 1959. He had been elected by the alderman as Mayor of Randwick in 1957, the first Randwick mayor to wear a robe of office (photo right). The controversial robe, costing almost 100 pounds, was made in London. Despite this Bill Lucas actually was a down to earth character and soon had his overalls on to play a leading role as a builder of the new ten by ten metre timber and fibro clubhouse at South Maroubra. A huge effort had been put into forming the new surf club at the rather lonely southern end of Maroubra beach in 1959.

Many Malabar members left their old club to head over the headland to start the new surf club. Not only had the Malabar club lost many of its keenest members to South Maroubra, but it also suffered severely from its location. Long Bay Jail was named after the bay and that's why residents had successfully petitioned the NSW Government to change the name of the suburb from Long Bay to Malabar, the name of a ship wrecked there after running on to rocks.

But even worse, the Malabar sewage treatment plant, run by the Sydney Water Board, catered to a vast area of Sydney and also discharged 'approved' chemical waste into the ocean. The stink was often appalling and the sewage problem year by year only worsened. Malabar beach more often was closed, depending on wind and tide. A beautiful little beach and bay had been ruined. Maroubra beach too was amongst the worst affected of the eastern suburbs beaches. Members of the club at South Maroubra would find themselves swimming among barely treated sewage and frequently beachgoers would tread in the stinking white mess that washed up on the sand at both ends of Maroubra beach. The problem only got worse over the years.

The formation meeting on Sunday 31 May, 1959, for the South Maroubra Surf Club was held at the Malabar Surf Club, from where many of the new South Maroubra members came. About 50 people crammed into the small, dark brick clubhouse at Malabar beach. The Malabar clubhouse and the club itself have long gone. The chairman of the meeting in May 1959 was Alderman Bill Lucas. The convenor was Rick McKeon, from the famous swimming family. Also present was the Mayor of Randwick, Alderman Charlie Molloy, of the northern club who was keen to see close co-operation between the Maroubra and South Maroubra clubs. Previous attempts over the years to form a surf club at the southern end of the beach had failed because of opposition from the northern club.

But Mayor Molloy said it was clear now that the southern end of the beach had to be opened up for swimmers. He said a new surf club would be essential owing to the development of housing which would occur behind the surf club and rifle range land. A unanimous vote was taken and the new South Maroubra Surf Life Saving Club came into being. But did those who joined the exodus from Malabar to South Maroubra really know what they were getting themselves into?



The first 'clubhouse' at South Maroubra was a tent (pictured inside, left) for changing and as a place to have the occasional beer 'in private' at the end of a patrol, as can be seen above in 1960 with Ken Murphy seated at left. People first visiting South Maroubra beach were amused at the small group of men who would put up their tent on the beach and go on patrol. Sometimes the wind was so great that members inside had to stand up to hold the tent up. Soon a large old shed was donated to the club from the Prince Henry Hospital at Little Bay. The timber from that was used to build the 10 by 10 metre clubhouse on the sandhill at South Maroubra towards the end of the first surfing season.



On Sunday 6 March, the South Maroubra lads were out in the *L.J. Hooker* surfboat to chase away a shark seen at the southern end of the beach. The crew rowed to the north and back without spotting the shark. One crewman said: "... we were about to return to the beach when this big wave hit us. We swam ashore and the boat was washed in after us. All the planks in the boat were sprung and one of its cross members was torn out." The South Maroubra lads quickly sought an interview and fronted Leslie Hooker (he was knighted in 1973) in his office and asked if he would be good enough to donate a second boat to the club, as the first had been wrecked 'taking part in critical lifesaving work'. Mr Hooker looked them up and down and understandably growled: "You blokes bugged the first boat I gave you. You're not getting another one out of me!" And you couldn't really blame him. But during the second 1960-61 season the Rotary Club of Maroubra donated the club a new surfboat. This was the year when South Maroubra staged its first surf carnival for the four surf clubs in Randwick Municipality. South Maroubra and Coogee dead-heated.

Soon after a fibro clubhouse was built by members at remote South Maroubra beach, the club began to experience major acts of vandalism at a time when the vast majority of houses in the coming Ocean View estate at South Maroubra hadn't then been yet built. The clubhouse was broken into on many occasions at night and equipment damaged, until caretakers guarded the premises.



(Below: Sun Herald, July 16, 1961.)

Vandals wreck surf clubhouse

Vandals held a "shooting orgy" in the South Maroubra surf club this week, causing more than £200 worth of damage.

They fired hundreds of rounds through fibro walls, glass windows and smashed light fittings. Then they stripped the aft section of the club's surfboat and carried it away. The vandals are believed to have used .22 calibre rifles and high-powered air rifles.

The club secretary, Brian Chenhall, said he believed the damage was done on Thursday night. He discovered it on Friday when he went to check on the security of the clubhouse, which has been the target of vandals over recent months.

Like sieves

Only two weeks ago vandals caused extensive damage to fittings in the club. Detectives from Daceyville Division are investigating the incidents.

"We finished last season with a few pounds in hand and thought we would have everything in order this season."

"But now we have to find at least £200 to cope with our duties next season."

"Our boat is unseaworthy and will have to have a lot spent on it before we can use it."

Mr Chenhall said the members of the club were becoming discouraged because of the repeated vandalism.



While vandalism did continue, significant steps forward were taken. The number of seniors, juniors and cadets rostered for patrols reached a record of 70. Public toilets were built. The vast swamp at the rear of the clubhouse was still being used as a training ground for rowers and paddlers and the dirt track from Fitzgerald Avenue had been replaced by a sealed road built by club labour. Revenue from car parking earned the club \$800 in the first year. A small kiosk shop attached to the clubhouse added to the club's revenue and before long members had the luxury of hot showers in the club.

Part three will review the expanding club and the poor shark that swam between the flags.