

Boys only policy saw historic change at South Maroubra



An all-boys patrol at South Maroubra – even the dog is male! How things would change in the eighties.

The BATTLE Of The BEACHES

By A STAFF CORRESPONDENT

EXACTLY A WEEK AGO 300 of Sydney's bewitching beach girls put on their form-fitting swim suits and their surf caps and—with no other thought than to enjoy themselves and raise money for a good cause—high-stepped down Maroubra beach in a surf carnival march-past.

They marched right out of their depth into trouble. For officials of the Surf Life Saving Association—all men—looked askance at the newspaper pictures next day and said (in effect) "what's the meaning of this?"

Girls and women becoming lifesavers didn't just happen... It was a struggle.

An active role for women as lifesavers in South Maroubra Surf Club took years in coming following the foundation of the club in 1959. It was the same in all surf clubs. On Friday 9 August 1968, just as our new clubhouse was being fitted out, the first ladies auxiliary was formed. That was the first step forward, but the introduction of female lifesavers was still a decade or more off. Maureen Murphy, wife of Ken (former club captain who passed away in May 2018) was the first president of the auxiliary and was the real 'mover and shaker', according to Shirley Arthur. Maureen was joined by Jan Milne, married to Ross Milne, another earlier club captain. Jan became honorary secretary and Rhonda Mason became treasurer. For a season or two, the women organised their own beach and water events. Jack Ryan's wife (at the time) Velvanie was also heavily involved whilst Jack was club captain. Others involved were Lyn Bailey, later married to Paul White, Leonie Stephens, Meryl Ludlow, Jan Brown, Sandy Parker and many others.

Looking back, as the newspaper article above shows, girls and women had already well and truly proven themselves in the surf as perfectly good lifesavers during the Second World War which began in 1939. But after the war women on patrol were banned and females becoming lifesavers was still a long way off.

Looking back at the history, soon after the end of the Second World War, when the Diggers returned home, the continuing role of women in surf clubs was stifled by officialdom. Women somehow were no longer good enough to patrol the beaches. And besides, clubhouses didn't have facilities, it was stated. Terrigal on the Central Coast was one such surf club that had needed help as the boys and men left for overseas service. When the war was raging, 72 of Terrigal's 76 patrolling surf club members had enlisted in the Army, Air Force or Navy. With just four male members remaining, there were not enough male lifesavers to man patrols, so their wives, girlfriends, sisters, daughters and female friends took over the Terrigal surf lifesaving duties.

Another excuse later used after the war was that surf clubs 'had no proper facilities to cater for women' and male officials were relentless in banning women from patrolling Australian beaches. Arguing that women were not strong enough to operate lifesaving equipment or swim in a heavy surf, 'head office' banned women and girls from qualifying for the surf bronze medallion and therefore from patrolling the beaches. [Common sense, women's rights and an urgent need for more surf lifesavers in 1980-81 saw the first 'authorised' females become accepted lifesavers and they went on patrol in NSW. But this change of heart didn't always translate into complete acceptance by all men from within the surf clubs. \(SMH of 21/9/1942.\)](#)

TERRIGAL CLUB WANTS WOMEN LIFESAVERS
GOSFORD, Sunday.—With 67 of its 71 active members now in the Army, Navy or Air Force, Terrigal Surf Club has only four beltmen and proposes to train girl members of its women's committee to handle the line and resuscitate patients. Because of the drain on manpower, the club will make application immediately to the Surf Lifesaving Association of Australia to put the plan into operation. The association at present bans women from lifesaving.



Despite the ban, many women had worked behind the scenes and had been valuable fundraisers. Others formed their own women's surf clubs and competed in their own carnivals, especially outside Sydney, where clubs were less concerned with the rules and more focused on their immediate community. Women had made strident efforts at Maroubra (*photo above Maroubra women marching at Manly*), with support from some male members. An 'unauthorised' women's carnival was held at Maroubra in 1953. But when the carnival concluded officialdom banned further lifesaving activities by women. The issue goes back much further...



Australian author C. Bede Maxwell (*pictured*), in her 1949 book *Surf, Australians Against the Sea*, wrote: **"The surf remains in one sense almost the last stronghold of entrenched masculinity extant in the world. 'No women – No worry!'** is graven in the tissue of every Surf Life Saving Association's official's heart, no matter how gallant a gentleman is in his unofficial capacity. The opposition, firmly maintained over the years to the extension of membership to women, or the granting of recognised surf proficiency awards, is probably based on sensible recognition of the fact that a raging gale surf, in which so many rescues have to be made, is no place for any woman." **But Maxwell as points out, '...strong-swimming girls have brought off surf rescues in big seas and had been honoured even with meritorious awards.** But officially the movement will have none of them. Even the glamour girl parades put on by some clubs to boost gate takings at surf carnivals in time were frowned on and withdrawn from the carnival programmes, according to Ms Maxwell.

Believes Women "Too Weak" For Surf Events

SMH 11 MARCH 1953

The N.S.W. Surf Life Saving Association was not in favour of women competing in surf carnivals, an association official, Mr E. Sier, said last night.

Women endangered their lives and the lives of others by competing in surf and belt races, he said.

[A carnival restricted to women was held at Maroubra beach last Sunday.]

"The association feels that women are not strong enough physically to carry a heavy belt and line or to swim competitively in surf races," Mr. Sier said.

"By doing so they are taking a grave risk.

association officials

Mr. Sier said last night that S.L.S.A. officials were forbidden to act at women's carnivals.

The constitution of the S.L.S.A. also provided that officials cannot take part at an unauthorised carnival without express permission from the association, he said.

"The fact that several women got into difficulties at Maroubra on Sunday illustrates our point.

"The association is primarily a lifesaving movement and does not favour women taking part in any form of surf competition."

Mr. Sier said that the Sydney branch of the S.L.S.A. was holding an inquiry into the women's surf carnival held at Maroubra.

DISQUALIFICATION

The supervisor of the southern branch, Mr. Jack Marsden, and the Maroubra Club have been asked to supply written reports on the part they took in the carnival.

Mr. Marsden and club officials are liable to disqualification if allegations that they officiated at the carnival are proven.

Mr. Marsden told the branch committee on Monday that he had acted as referee at the carnival, but that he and other officials did not wear any S.L.S.A. badges and did not act in the capacity of association officials.

The ban on women who couldn't join a surf life saving club

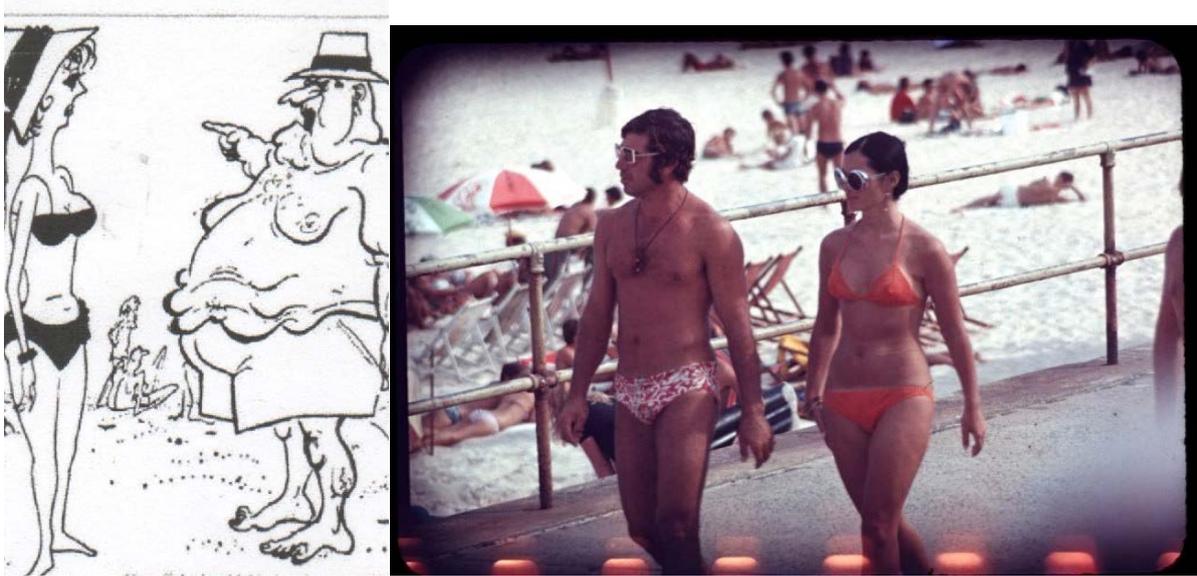


The victorious Maroubra ladies march past team in 1953. Note their banner reads 'social club' (Maroubra SLSC)



Left: Maroubra ladies' march past team in 1963. Their banner reads 'social club'. Women weren't allowed to join the surf club. Top right: First female honorary member, Jan Brame, with husband Greg. Below, Ken and Shirley Arthur, farewelling surf club members, including Ken, heading off to Japan in 1969 on the SS Orcades.

“Get off the beach! You’re obscene!”



Cartoonist Les Tanner in *The Bulletin* in October 1961 neatly captured the hypocrisy of the early 1960s ‘bikini war’, as the media called it. While beach inspectors paid little attention to what men wore in those years, women in the new costumes called bikinis were hounded for a time. Most of the attention was at Bondi where some 75 girls and women in the new bikinis were ordered off the beach in one season in the early sixties because their swimsuits didn’t conform to Waverley Council regulations. In 1961 Joan Barry, 25, an actress, was fined three pounds at Paddington Court for wearing an offensive swimming costume on Bondi Beach. It was stated that the costume was ‘at least five inches below the navel’.

After much agitation by women, by the end of 1961 an old Local Government Act was abandoned and a new ordinance was introduced which simply required bathers to be ‘clad in a proper and adequate bathing costumes’ – without defining exactly what this meant. The ‘bikini war’ had been won by the bikini wearers. – *Published by Waverley Library from Local History source material, 2009.*

Tough days! It’s the early ‘sixties & the boys have only 24 bronze accredited lifesavers



From left: Peter Hale, Col Freestone, Brian Chenhall and Barry Williams. Sitting: unidentified, Dave Duffy and Ross Milne.

Meanwhile, South Maroubra struggled to attract new (male only!) club members.



(Left Lindsay St. Leon, left, Barry Williams and Warwick Stitt, standing on the right. Anyone identify the others? c 1959-60.)

From the club's formation in 1959 South Maroubra required ever more youths and men to patrol the beach. The need was urgent as housing estates began to spring up at South Maroubra. In the 1962-63 season a record 158 rescues were performed at South Maroubra, the most ever recorded. How the club could have done with female lifesavers then! The club had to resort to pleas for more members in local papers.

This special appeal was reported in the local weekly newspaper, The Messenger: *"The surf club is now feeling the urgency for new members. The club has now only 24 bronze medallion lifesavers. Any male over the age of 14 with a good character, a fair surfer and swimmer and a will to carry out the surf lifesaving motto 'vigilance and service' is eligible."* Yet through the sixties females were still ignored and couldn't be accepted as lifesavers, as ordered by national and state surf life saving bodies.

As the housing estate at South Maroubra expanded even further, and the club worked hard to get new members, membership levels rose. In those days all members would go on patrol from cadets to seniors, even if they hadn't obtained the bronze medallion. They would be considered 'in training'. As the annual report for the 1963-64 season stated: ***'During the rush and desperation that took place in the Boxing Day rescues, a squad of juniors stood on patrol in waist deep water, literally for hours, holding back a mass of surfers eager to sample the surf. They did this without complaint after completing a morning of frantic rescues.'*** How the surf club would have welcomed and employed female lifesavers then!

But the membership did build. The beginning of work on the new clubhouse around 1968 attracted additional members. Greg Goddard, Jan's partner, was one of 11 members who gained their bronze medallions. Greg also gained a patrol efficiency pennant in the 1967-68 season in the number four patrol, as did three others in his patrol, Pat Jollow, Ron Malcolm and Brian Lawrence.

There were a number of "South Maroubra" weddings that season, among them Pat Jollow married Maureen Lawrence, Brian's sister. The ladies' auxiliary at South Maroubra elected Maureen Murphy, Ken's wife, as the foundation president, Jane Milne honorary secretary, Rhonda Mason treasurer and Dawn Murphy as social director. Ladies auxiliary committee members were Meryl Ludlow, Lyn Hammond, Gay Wilkinson, Maureen Jollow, Leonie Jamieson and Diane Pentecost. That season said the ladies put forward many suggestions for helping the club. 'It was heartening to see the keenness of the girls present', the 1967-68 annual report for South Maroubra Surf Club said.

At last equality on the beach and in the clubhouse despite the Muppets

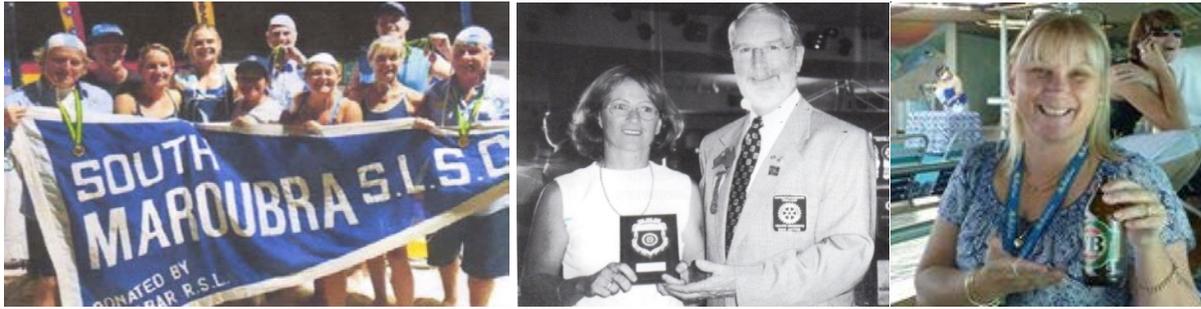


It took time for women lifesavers to get recognition after their important role (see photo left) during World War Two. Female lifesavers finally made it into surf lifesaving clubs in the early eighties and they were soon patrolling the beach. Many Nippers went on to become surf lifesavers at South Maroubra and at other beaches. But reaching parity was a long haul.



Jan Brame (pictured in the sixties), later club member Greg Goddard's wife, was one of the early South Maroubra regulars from around 1966. Jan became the first female to be made an honorary member of South Maroubra Surf Club as a result of her administrative work for the club.

Jan would hang out on the beach with girlfriends Shirley, Lyn and Sharon on most Sundays getting a good tan and chatting while Ken Arthur, Paul Duffy, Joe Knight-Smith and Greg Goddard were on patrol. Jan says she didn't spend too much time in the surf. But even the sand could be a tad dangerous. She recalls being on the beach one day when a severe 'whirly whirly' swept up the beach and everyone had to lie flat on the sand until it passed over. She hasn't easily forgotten the time when Greg and 'the boys' headed into the new clubhouse while it was still under construction to inspect the building work: *"I sat outside for a good hour on some concrete blocks waiting for Greg to join me. The boys were inside having a drink or three. Greg must have spun me a tale that women were not allowed in the building. It wouldn't happen these days!"* she insists. Jan's story brings back recollections of a 'tap room' downstairs that required much discussion and planning given that it stored the kegs for the planned bar upstairs. Jan recalls the bliss of the new surf club when it was completed where at long last the womenfolk could come off the beach, have a hot shower and join the boys in a rather nice upmarket lounge. In Jan's time there were no women lifesavers in our club. But things were changing!

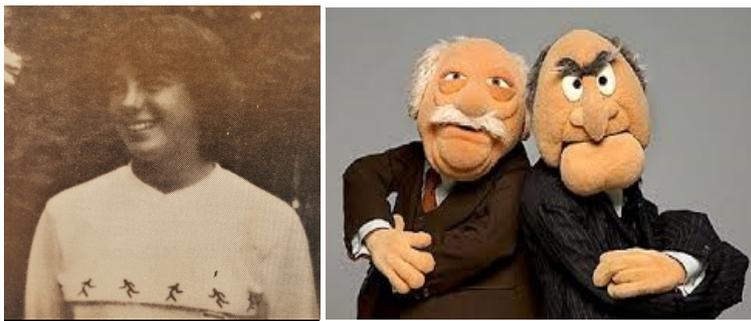


Holding the flag with women aplenty (left) and (middle photo) in 2001 when Linda Perin is awarded the Rotary 'Pride of Workmanship Award' for commitment and dedication to surf lifesaving. The 2000-2001 annual report said: "Linda has for many years coordinated South Maroubra Surf Club's men and women to ensure that the beach is proficiently and professionally patrolled." That season Yvette Rutherford (right) was secretary/public officer at that time. Other female members had begun to take part in the organisation of the club. At the same time Linda Perin was Registrar, Bettina Christie was R & R coordinator and Dimity Holt was youth registrar.

'Physically daunting ... walking right into the male culture'

Patricia Thompson, nee Beazley, had been a Nipper at South Maroubra and was a keen competitor. In the 1980/81 season South Maroubra was one of the first surf clubs in Australia to admit female lifesavers to full membership and a few of the blokes weren't at all happy with the new arrangement. Ken Arthur was club president at the time the Surf Life Saving Association sanctioned qualified female surf lifesavers. Ken guided the proposal through an annual meeting, but at least one of the older fellows was strongly opposed to the admission of females. According to young women at the time, the fellow had made grumpy comments, to put it mildly, when he walked past any female lifesaver member in the clubhouse. Patricia had applied for full membership and was one of the first of three females to be accepted for beach patrol work.

The first to gain bronze medallions were Aileen Wilson, Bronwyn Roberts and Helen Veale. The first females to gain the qualifying certificate (then called) were Patricia Beazley, Kathy Mazeri, Gillian Cargill, Michelle Stuart and Renee Dever. Patricia was most outstanding cadet, when the photo, *left below*, was taken.

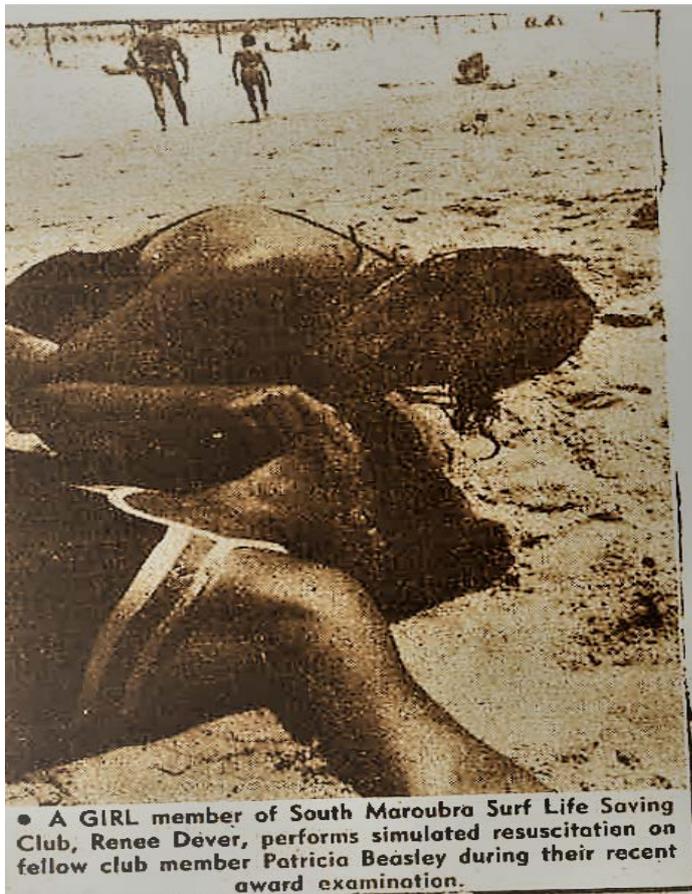


Patricia Thompson recalls that a few of the menfolk (she called them 'The Muppets') at South Maroubra resented that she would be on beach patrol and have full access to the clubhouse: *"I was one of the club's first three female lifesavers, along with Bronwyn Wright and Aileen Wilson. I got my bronze medallion when I was 15 in the early eighties. There was a big surf running on the day of the bronze examination and the instructors nearly drowned me.*

"The waves were three to four metres. Some of the men were supportive of the women in the club, but others were behaving like those old men you see in the Muppet Show on TV.

Our first females to gain their bronze medallion award in the 1980-81 season were Aileen Wilson, Bronwyn Roberts and Helen Veale. The first females to gain their qualifying certificate (as it was known then) were

Patricia Beazley, Kathy Mazeri, Gillian Cargill, Michelle Stuart and Renee Dever. Patricia Beazley, later Thompson, went on to win multiple awards for lifesaving and competition.



First girls pass lifesaving tests

EIGHT girls from South Maroubra Surf Life Saving Club recently became the first girls in the Randwick Municipality to gain their awards in surf lifesaving.

This season, the South Maroubra club opened its books to girls, and 12, aged from 14 to 21 have joined.

In obtaining their awards, the girls underwent the standard tests as set down by the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia, including rescue with reel, line and belt, surf-board rescue and resuscitation tests.

Club captain Jim Parker is elated at the result and the girls have been rostered for patrol duty.

• A GIRL member of South Maroubra Surf Life Saving Club, Renee Dever, performs simulated resuscitation on fellow club member Patricia Beasley during their recent award examination.



Club captain Jim Parker elated at female members going on patrol at last

Then club captain Jim Parker, later president, an early supporter of female surf lifesavers within South Maroubra Surf Club. Jim told the local press that he was 'elated' to have girls rostered for patrol duties. Newspaper cutting above, believed to be the Weekly Courier/Southern News, Randwick, 1980.

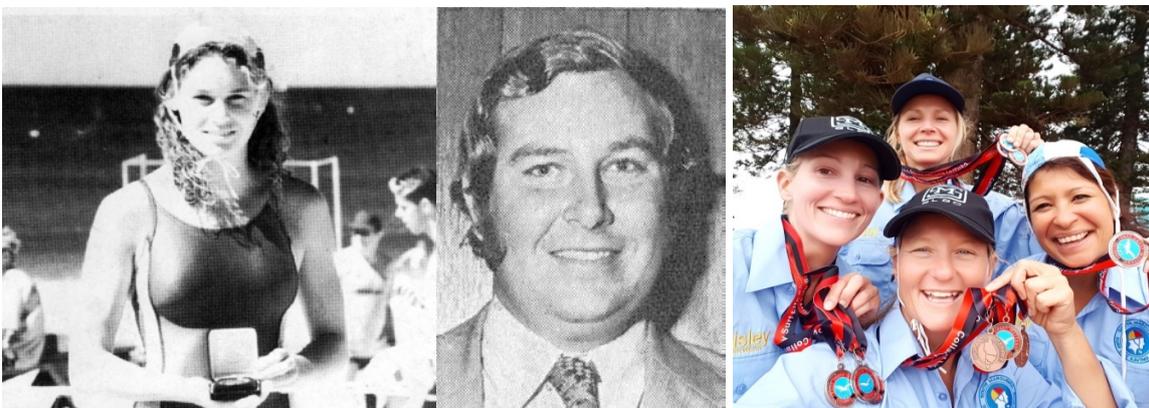
Above: In the photo left, Patricia Thompson (nee Beazley) is in the centre. Dennis Clarke is on the left and Patricia Garvie is on the right of the three. Pictured far right is club captain Jim Parker.



Patricia recalls how club member and one time club captain, Paul White, handled this fundamental change of females becoming active members of the surf club: "I regularly would swim the length of the beach in the company of Paul. We usually swam together. When it came to the issue of female members on patrol, he was a gentleman."



Paul White (*photo from early years*) recalls the lingering opposition from a few of the fellows in South Maroubra Surf Club: "I personally didn't have any problem with the introduction of the girls or women on patrol because it meant more active patrolling members on the beach - and that was a very good and useful change, especially when big or dangerous surf was running." Paul added: "Obviously, too, they were better on the eyes."



Much decorated athlete Samantha O'Brien, Ken Arthur (centre) and awards aplenty!

Life member and former president Ken Arthur (*above*) believes any resentment was not to a great extent back then: "It was a different time and of course there was no precedent for women's involvement as lifesavers in

more recent decades, although we would have all been ignorant of some of the historical roles of women as lifesavers. Also there were those few women who had young families so they had enough on their plates and most other women seemed to be there supporting their husbands/boyfriends. I can't recall any push to compete or be on the beach, although I'm sure a few of the younger ones might have had ambitions."

Ken Arthur as club president remembers being initially cautious but supportive of the push by the girls and women to become accredited as surf lifesavers: "I wanted to think through any obstacles (real or imagined) that could prevent successful integration." He remembered having quite a few conversations with former president John Dynan about the issue. "I can't recall anyone on the committee opposing the move but of course there were always the few jokes. Looking back, these were more insecure attitudes regarding change rather than direct opposition to female lifesaving members. Remember we had a fairly involved Women's Auxiliary as it was called in the 1970's. It was dwindling due to those early wives/girlfriends starting families, moving homes etc. as well as the younger females not just wanting to be "Women's Auxiliary" members but something more involved in the lifesaving and competitive aspects of the club and movement."

Another step forward - a rose amongst the thorns



Yvette Rutherford (interview below) pictured here with fellow 'lifers' became a life member of the surf club in 2008. Ken Arthur, life member and former president when females became members, is fourth from right.

'Club may have struggled if female lifesavers hadn't come to the rescue'

Ken Arthur acknowledges that the girls and women produced some top competitors: "We had Olympians and Australian and State champions from our female ranks and they all have done their bronze and patrolled the beach just as competently as the male members. **In my view the club may have struggled over a few years had we not had the involvement of female lifesavers.**"

Ken Arthur believed that South Maroubra probably was the first club to introduce full membership to female members: "If not first , we were well up there as being leaders in this area."

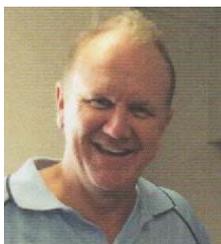
The 1986/87 season saw Yvette Noon as the surf club's Chief Instructor. Club captain Jack Shaw said Yvette with fellow instructors Patricia Beazley, John Park, Patrick O'Neil and others had done a tremendous job in the training of the many squads that were examined. In the special awards for 1986/87 Linda Wrightson was named 'Clubman of the Year', (*note title*), an award which no doubt lent itself to a future name change. The female members brought had an impressive season in the surf against the toughest competition. South Maroubra's Jacqui Robinson won the women's surf race in the Australian Surf Chamionships at Scarborough W.A. that season together with a string of other competition feats including second in the women's metropolitan championships surf race. Samantha O'Brien and Jacqui Robinson brought home gold in the national women's Malibu championship and the national women's surf race final in the Australian titles.

And there was one patrol at South Maroubra that season which deserved attention. Five members of the patrol number two patrol at South Maroubra were females who in the 1986/87 season won 100 percent patrol efficiency awards in the company of Chris Locke. It was a long haul but the 'girls' had well and truly arrived!

Fear of the unknown and 'unwillingness to embrace change' defeated

Ken Arthur, looking back, only recently commented: "*I was aware not so much of any resentment towards women becoming full patrol members but I'd put it down more to ignorance of their capabilities and advantages in the role as well as a 'fear of the unknown and unwillingness to embrace change'. This was an era where change in society increasingly saw women becoming involved in roles traditionally exclusive to men e.g. police force, parking cops, armed forces (other than during wartime) etc. and men supporting them.*" And as the 1980/81 annual report reveals, the day of the female lifesavers at South Maroubra beach came into being...

1980/81 Female Lifesavers are admitted to our club. The first girls to qualify are (QC) Patricia Beazley, Kathy Mazeri, Gillian Cargill, Michelle Stuart and Renee Dever. Bronze - Aileen Wilson, Bronwyn Roberts and Helen Veale. A Mayne Nickless Branch Carnival is held. Ken Arthur is granted Life Membership. Alan Johnston, Mark Manning, Bob Byrne, Mick O'Brien and James Parker are placed second in the State Stillwater Boat Championships. Rod McDonald is placed first in the State Junior Stillwater Board Championships, second in the State Open Stillwater Board Championships. Our IRB squads attend the first State IRB Titles at Soldiers Beach, Newcastle. Bill Lucas our former President and Patron passes away.



The club had signed up a whopping 72 new members that season bringing membership to 685, including 329 Nippers. Chairman Paul Fownes, pictured, said the club had attained 'a reservoir of young talent of sporting ability and leadership potential.' Tara Holt had won three gold medals in NSW and interstate titles. In the same season Jacqui Robinson won gold at the Aussie Masters and five first places in the World Championship in the USA.

MAROUBRA HIGHLIGHTS

Club where 'weaker sex' is strongest

By ADRIAN WARREN

In an era when greater emphasis has been placed on increasing female participation in surf lifesaving, the South Maroubra Club can claim to possess one of the strongest women squads in Australia.

South Maroubra's impressive line-up includes two national title holders, surf swimmer Jacqui Robinson, 16, and Malibu champion Samantha O'Brian, 17, as well as a host of other talented performers.

Women now constitute about one-fifth of South Maroubra's total membership, according to club secretary Linda Wrightson.

Some of surf lifesaving's more conservative institutions have occasionally been accused of behaving diffidently towards women, but these days encouragement rather than apathy is the norm among the clubs.

One person well qualified to assess the status of women in surf lifesaving is South Maroubra's first female competitor, Kim Rutherford, a former national surf silver medalist who has been involved in surf lifesaving for most of her 18 years.

Her recollections of her initial competitions with the senior club confirm it is only recently that women have established themselves independently from the men.

"When I started there weren't any ladies' events. I had to swim against boys at various carnivals.

"The first ladies' events were in 1985 and a lot more women had started to join surf clubs because of this," said Kim.

Because neighbouring Maroubra is not yet equipped to cater for women competitors local girls gravitate towards South Maroubra.

"They've always appreciated us here," said Kim. "We came up with the nippers and were always with the boys."

If Kim Rutherford represents the old



Picture by PHIL LOCK

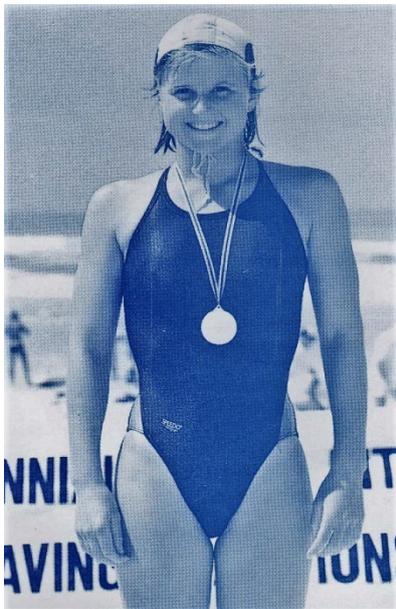
Jacqui Robinson, 16, and Samantha O'Brian, 17, ... two national title holders.

guard at South Maroubra, Jacqui Robinson is one of the club's up-and-coming stars.

A talented stillwater swimmer who has

won national short-course medals, Jacqui is one of several South Maroubra girls trained

Continued Page 23



Eastern Herald of 10 December 1987: Jacqui Robinson (*left*) told the Eastern Herald that she trained twice a week in the surf with her female colleagues at South Maroubra: "We compete against each other all the time... it helps me and it pushes the other girls out there." She labelled a recent win in the national championships as a nice surprise. By then she had her sights firmly set on the world championships at Southport in 1988. The formation of a women's representative team was 'another positive step in the battle to gain further recognition for female surf lifesavers.' But Kim Rutherford believed there was plenty of room for improvement: 'It would be good to see more of them with the guys.' She said the club's imbalance with the sexes was pretty ridiculous. Jacqui and Samantha were part of the 1988 NSW Inaugural Women's overseas touring team to New Zealand. Samantha also represented Australia in a surf festival in Hawaii. She also won the 1988 World Nutri-Grain bicentennial life saving championship and there were more wins to come.

From pioneer to a life member of the boy's club

One of the first women in NSW to try their hand at surf lifesaving, Yvette Rutherford has just been made a Life Member of South Maroubra Surf Life Saving Club. The first woman to hold the position, Yvette spoke to Hannah Parkes about the recognition, her love of lifesaving and proving it to the boys.

Name: Yvette Rutherford
Club: South Maroubra
Joined: 1981
Age: 42

How does it feel being made a life member?

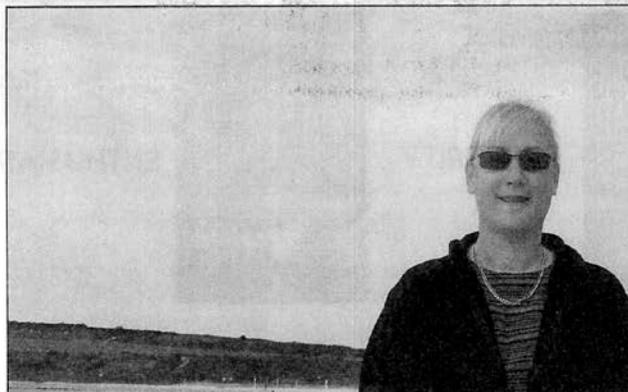
I am absolutely honoured. Being the first woman at the club to become a life member is just fantastic.

What do you enjoy most about being part of the club?

I like the friendship part of the Surf Life Saving Association as a whole.

You have the same mates from 28 years ago. I love being outdoors, the swimming, the water.

Also, being able to bring my chil-



dren into the club and see them progress and make friends is one of the best things about it.

What was it like being one of the

first women to join the club?

South Maroubra was one of the very first clubs to accept women so it was daunting in that there were no female toilets or change rooms.

We were walking right into a male culture but we persevered with it.

It was physically daunting as well, but we had to prove we could do it.

That is how we dealt with it, we worked so hard. Some fantastic women lifesavers were produced through those years because we had to work so hard to prove ourselves.

How will your duties change now that you are a life member?

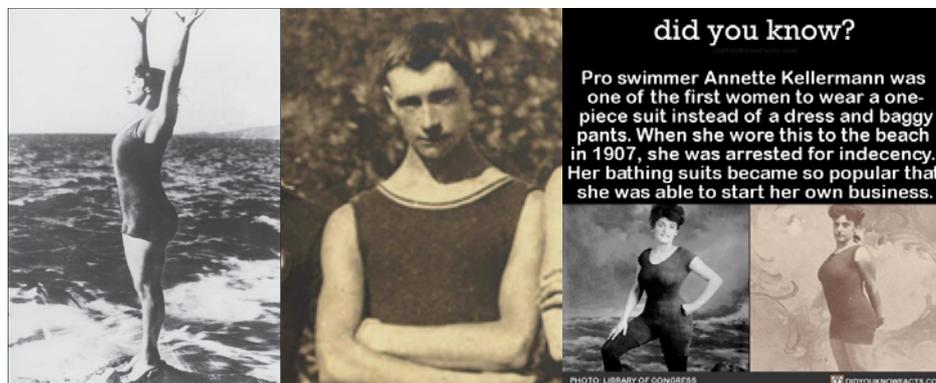
I feel responsible now to ensure that the club grows and prospers.

I am behind every woman who wants to be a part of the club.

I just want people to see that young women can join a club, have a career and have children, because I have done it.

Yvette Rutherford (above) in the Village Voice, September 2008. Linda Perin became a life member in 2010.

Annette Kellermann: turn of the century link with South Maroubra's history



Annette Kellermann (left) and one of South Maroubra's top young swimmers, young Harold Baker, a brilliant lifesaver, and (right) Kellermann later in daring swim suits in the USA.

Looking back, many of the all-male members of the South Maroubra Surf Club of 1907-08 were friends with one of Australia's greatest female swimmers of the early 1900s. She was also a keen surf bather at Sydney beaches when such exposure was quite daring. Annette Kellerman left for the United States in 1907 where she became an internationally known swimmer and later actress. South Maroubra Surf Club is recorded in the Mitchell Library and elsewhere as existing in its own right in 1907 and 1908 before being forced to amalgamate with the Maroubra club. The bush camps adjoining the beach were out of bounds for females who occasionally wandered along Maroubra beach from the northern end. But Annette Kellermann certainly knew many of the lads who made up the club's membership of the Pioneer surf bathing camp from 1906. She knew the lads through her early career at the Domain baths where many of the first South Maroubra boys, including Ernest Marks, Harold Baker and others would compete in swimming competition.

But in time Kellermann's outspokenness and daring would become a growing thorn in the side of those who thought that surf bathing was the work of the devil.

(For more detail on South Maroubra Surf Club 1907-08 see the publication 'Origins of a Surf Club' in the Randwick City Library, Maroubra Junction, and the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.)



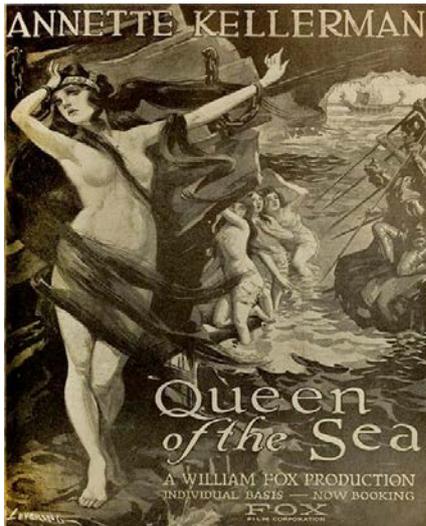
Women in the surf and (right) Domain baths where Kellermann and South Maroubra fellows swam.

Back in January 1902 Sydney's Referee newspaper reported that Annette Kellermann at the Domain baths was 'a young lady who has been giving such entertaining displays of high and fancy diving at our carnivals...' One South Maroubra Surf Club founder, Ernest Marks, and much later Lord Mayor of Sydney, had been the swimming club's timekeeper for a number of Kellermann's well-publicised swimming triumphs, including the day she won the 54 yards (49 metres) ladies race in 1902.

The Referee newspaper's swimming correspondent wrote: *'The official time given me (by E.S. Marks) was 41 seconds, rather speedy for ladies, and perhaps faster than any other lady swimmer has hitherto traversed in Sydney.'* At the time future South Maroubra club captains Harold Baker and Norman Martin were teenagers swimming at the same venue at the Domain.



Annette Kellermann was not only a fitness guru and actress, but also a women's rights advocate. She was a friend of many of the original South Maroubra Surf Club founders in the early 1900s and probably swam at South Maroubra. Kellermann was the star in 'Queen of the Sea', 1918. Her movie poster and photo is below.



Annette Kellermann began preaching the health benefits of surf bathing as early as 1906, saying: ‘What other form of exercise can you describe to me that give more beneficial results... secured by a plunge in the open air with the surf bath following?’

Breezy, unaffected and full of vibrant energy, Kellermann did much to make women's swimming popular and socially acceptable. In later life she regarded her part in emancipating women from the neck-to-knee costume as her greatest achievement.

Annette Kellermann became famous for her advocacy of the right of women to wear a one-piece swimsuit, rather than the cumbersome long frocks imposed on women at the beach and pool. She would often wear an Australian-style men's racing swimsuit, much like a brief pair of shorts, which had no skirt and half-revealed her thighs. The outfit was not permitted when in 1905 she was invited to give diving and swimming performances in front of the Royal Family at London's Bath Club. So she simply bought a pair of black stockings and sewed them on to her men's swimsuit, creating a full length one-piece outfit. She attempted to swim the English Channel but failed on three occasions, often running into foul weather. In 1906 she won a race over 22 miles (36 km) down the Danube. In June 1906 she won a 22 mile (36 km) challenge race down the Danube and on 7 August made a second unsuccessful attempt on the Channel. On her third attempt she swam three-quarters of the distance and stayed in the water ten and a half hours. 'I had the endurance', she said, 'but not the brute strength'. The regular swimmers at the Domain loved her.

Kellermann was the star in ‘Queen of the Sea’, 1918, photo and poster above.

Surf bathing: ‘an exercise in egalitarianism’ – Annette Kellermann



Left, 1906 and ladies enjoy a day at the beach. Right: all male members of South Maroubra Surf Club 1907-08.

“There is nothing more democratic than surf bathing”, Annette Kellermann once wrote:

*“It is a society event but swimming out beyond the surf line is just plain social. Everyone is happy and young and funny. No one argues. No one scolds. There is no time and no place where one may so companionably play the fool and not be called one.” – Kellermann in Douglas Booth’s book, *Australian Beach Culture*, Routledge, 2001, p 102.*

With the beginnings of the first surf clubs, surf bathers in the new clubs quickly organised themselves into a powerful and successful activist movement which enjoyed public support. It blocked the more extreme reforms being proposed, such as a ‘modesty skirt’ to be worn over men’s neck to knee bathing costumes. South Maroubra Surf Club’s influential founders played a strong role in this early struggle for both surf safety and common sense. They branded the additional men’s ‘skirt’, as being positively dangerous for swimmers in the surf. Women also were so heavily clad with layers of clothing that much restricted swimming.



Records show that a number of South Maroubra’s founders originally came from the same Hunter region of New South Wales, including prominent Sydney surgeons **Dr Cedric Victor Bowker** (*above left*), **Dr (later Sir) Herbert Maitland** (second from left), obstetrician **Dr John Cadell Windeyer**, later Professor, (*3rd from left*). Cedric Bowker and Jack Windeyer were the first honorary instructors in resuscitation with the club.

Pictured above right is another of the club’s founders, **E.S. Marks** (right), who became Lord Mayor of Sydney. The original South Maroubra Surf Club as an entity lasted only two years, despite its strong growth, because wanted only one club per beach, a rule later relaxed.

Our surf club was referred to in Randwick Council’s commemorative book *‘Randwick 1859 to 1909’*, which pointed out that there had been were two surf clubs on Maroubra beach; one at Maroubra and the other at South Maroubra: *“Eventually, a consolidation was effected and now there is one club with about 90 members, lifeguards and bathers disporting in healthy abandon.” – Randwick commemorative book published in 1909.*

***Photos and stories of the past, whatever the era, are always wanted by the club.
Please email to: bwurth@bigpond.com***