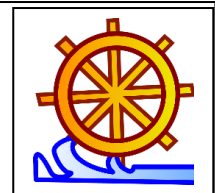


# HELM



## Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

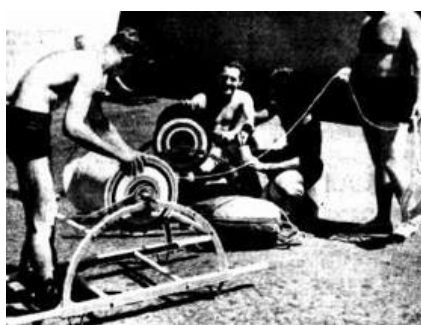
MARCH 2019

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### NINE MILE

Technically, Nine Mile Beach is the long sandy stretch of coastline between Redhead and Blacksmiths beaches. It is actually 10.4 km or 7 miles, not 9 miles long. The last 3 km in the south before the northern entrance wall to Lake Macquarie is officially known as Blacksmiths Beach, but to the locals who have been here for a while, Blackies is popularly known as Nine Mile Beach.

In 1927 the **Swansea Surf Club** was founded, adopting the colours of green, cream and gold. Joe Charlton was elected President and so their first headquarters was at Charlton's Cake Shop in High St, Swansea (now the Pacific Highway). With the support of Captain Boyd, they used a life boat, named "Rose" from the Pilot Station every Sunday as their first boat. Their first club shed was made of timber and iron; 12ft by 10ft; with a tent on the beach as a canteen, run by Mrs Charlton. She also handmade the Club's first banner and competition caps. The Charltons were the grandparents of the world famous snooker player Eddie Charlton, who was also a member of the Senior Boat Crew, Aust. Champions at Coolangatta in 1949-50. After a lean period in the mid 30's - few funds and members - a great resurgence came after WWII, with the launch of Tom Humphreys' innovative "tuck stern" surf boat in 1946. In 1949 the name was changed to "Swansea Belmont Surf Life Saving Club". Nine Mile has been the venue for many major regional, state and Australian surf carnivals. The club has recently hosted the State Championships for 3 years, 2017 – 2019. The event attracts about 6,000 competitors from all over NSW, along with some 600 volunteers and up to 15,000 supporters and spectators.



*"Rose" 1927 – George Boyd; Typical equipment, SMH 1952; Club wall mural 2019*



We are now on **FACEBOOK!** Check us out at:  
**HELM (Heritage of East Lake Macquarie).**  
Tell your stories will help keep our heritage alive!

- Swansea SLSC 1
- Women's crew 2
- Dance hall 2
- Surfing history 3
- Tirriki St 4



**Kindly supporting the community –**  
**including Caves Beach Surf Life Saving Club; this edition of HELM newsletter.**

**4972 1066 - NOW AT SWANSEA!**  
**SWANSEA PLAZA ARCADE**  
Near Coles and Blondies.



**The Newcastle Sun (NSW : 1918 - 1954) / Mon 28 Nov 1932** ; *Lake Macquarie Herald 17/10/1974.*

The summer of '32 was a big one for the women of the Swansea club. "...spectators at the Stockton Surf Carnival were treated to an unusual sight. Some of them probably rubbed their eyes in disbelief when they saw a surf boat from Swansea Surf Club take to the water manned by a male sweep and five young women. The sweep was Harry Mitchell and the five women were Misses D Hughes, E Hall, A Chapman, T Partridge and E Watkins." In 1974 in an interview with the Lake Macquarie Herald, "...Two of the crew recalled how they came to row in the Stockton Carnival. Mrs E Bruce (formerly E Hall) and Mrs T Gilmore (formerly T Partridge) both living at Pelican....."

"We were never off the beach in those days," Mrs Bruce said. "I remember we talked the boys into letting us try rowing the boat. We harped and harped until they gave in; but they insisted we rowed under strict supervision. The surf was flat and we had no trouble. But when we appeared at Newcastle the seas were rough and they would not let us on to the beach" .....

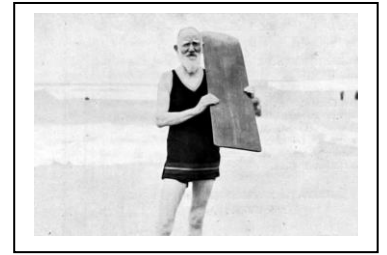
"The Swansea club was very small in the early 30s. Mrs Bruce believed the surf boat was a former lifeboat built by Mr Tom Humphries, of Swansea. The boats and other club gear would be taken to carnivals by Mr Joe Charlton, grandfather of Eddie and Jim Charlton. The girls rowed for only one season - they were the first women's boat crew in this area, but not in Australia. Mrs Bruce said most of the girls learnt to row in Swansea Channel....."

**A VERY SOCIAL CLUB** Many residents remember the very popular dances and Debutante balls, not just within their own club, but also with members of Caves Beach SLSC which broke away from Swansea in 1929. That is how many of our local couples, such as Keven and Joan Harman met. Money was raised and local businessmen were approached to support the building of an open air 60ft by 40ft dance floor with a large marquee over it around 1935, about 200m south of the present clubhouse. Unfortunately, in the first southerly gale, the marquee was ripped to shreds. A solid roof was then built and the floor extended which lasted until 7<sup>th</sup> Feb, 1945. People even came from Newcastle. After receiving an anonymous letter, "I'll stop your dance floor", a fire was noticed in the middle of the dance floor by caretaker, Charles Chant, at 2.30am, damage to the building and equipment was estimated at over 700 pounds. (3 surf reels and lines, piano, gramophone, amplifier, surf ski, surf board and radio pick-up.) Mr Chant found the fire blazing in the middle of the dance floor and leaping to the roof and out through the lattice-work sides of the building. The club house was 76ft by 54 ft with a stage of 28 by 10ft at the northern end. It was felt that the night had been carefully selected so that the wind would carry the flames away from any other buildings nearby. As the dance floor was their main source of revenue, a temporary dance floor was then set up on the beach with salvaged timbers. In 1948 the club lobbied Lake Macquarie Shire Council and the Joint Coal Board for a new building. Opened in 1952-53, it served as the club shed until the basis of the present building was completed 1972-73, with further renovations and extensions being carried out as needed. Now it also serves as a function centre for the community, capturing the stunning views over the beach.

*Source: Newcastle Sun*

## TIMELINE OF AUSTRALIAN SURFING HISTORY.

Before Waikiki surfer and Olympic swimmer Duke Kahanamoku visited Australia in 1914 to ride waves, Australians were already body surfing and using smaller paipo and belly boards. In 1903 the ban on ocean bathing during the day was lifted; but the archbishop of Sydney was advocating sex-segregated beaches. The first lifesaving methods were demonstrated at Manly. The Bondi Surf Club was founded in 1906 and soon joined by another 8 clubs in an association. The surf carnival at Manly in 1909 attracted many spectators to watch surf shooting, surf boat races and rescue drills.



In 1915 Duke and 15-year-old Isabel Letham demonstrated tandem surfing on a board locally made from a piece of sugar-pine, even though she was petrified. The board was 2.6 metres long, 60cm wide, 7.6cm thick, weighed nearly 32kgs. The shellac surface is said to have been as slippery as a dance floor. Born in 1899, Isabel, grew up near Freshwater Beach and had become a confident swimmer and diver by her teens. After initial objections, her father made her a surfboard out of redwood. She proved to be Duke's equal on the day, and became a celebrity after that ride; moving to California to become a swimming instructor; until she suffered a terrible injury falling down a manhole. She was one of the modern women at the

beginning of the century, breaking barriers; and watched Pam Burrige win the inaugural Aust. Women's surfing championship in 1980. She died in 1995, at the age of 95.

*Surfer today; ABC*

The 1920s saw wave-riding demonstrations and paddling races. The first surfboards were made of solid heavy timber, - coarsely grained redwood and about 2.7 metres long. To make life easier, the lighter hollow plywood boards were introduced in 1934. The surf ski was invented by an Australian, G Crackenthorp in 1937, and became a standard piece of surf life-saving equipment. Surfing became a popular recreational pastime; as boards became shorter and lighter. Innovations continued in the 70s with the addition of leg ropes, twin fins and the stinger – a step on the outside rail of the board. In the 80s, the Aussie 3 fin thruster came into prominence. The 90s removable fin concept made boards easier to manufacture and transport. With the growing "green" movement the "bambu" board was made – polystyrene with a bamboo exterior that reduced the need for resin and fibreglass + bamboo doesn't need fertilisers, pesticides, much water. *Maas museum* Balsa Malibu boards were introduced in 1956; followed by foam surfboards in 1960; kneeboards in 1962. The popularity of the sport was evidenced in 1964 when Midget Farrelly (Manly) and Phyllis O'Donnell (Gold Coast) won the first World Surfing Championship at Manly watched by some 65,000 people. The development of boards continued with Bob McTavish's first v- bottom surfboard, 1967. The Surfing Australia Hall of Fame was established in 1985 to recognise and celebrate some of our pioneers and icons. Snow McAllister and Mark Richards, the first inductees have been joined by many famous names, including Tom Carroll; Midget Farrelly; Nat Young; Wayne Bartholomew, Mark Occhilupo, Cheyne Horan. Our women surfers have included, Isabel Letham, Phyllis O'Donnell, Pam Burrige, Layne Beachley, Stephanie Gilmore.

Part of the surf culture has been the evolution of swim wear. In 1973 the iconic Billabong brand was launched.



From the 1920's neck to knees with brownie camera in hand; to the Jantzen brand ads 1930s, 1950s, 1960s.

“Surfing exploded in popularity through the 1960s as the Baby Boomer generation rebelled against the restrictions of the post-war years that they had been born into, and held surfing’s easy-going lifestyle up as the epitome of teenage counter-culture.”  
*surfsimply.com/surf-culture*



## **NINE MILE SURF BOARDRIDERS CLUB – TIRRIKI ST, BLACKSMITHS.**

Every year in October, a great reunion is held by the generation of surfers from Blacksmiths Beach in the 60s and 70s, marked by a surfing competition for the Nelson Staley Memorial Shield followed by an evening of celebrations and reminiscences. A number of other valued trophies are presented, recognising the support by local identities many years ago – The Allan McKenzie; Bub Smith; and Keven Harman Trophies. The title of the book by Greg Lunn and Phil Donoghoe, “NINE MILE: looking forward, looking back. A fifty year history of friendship through the culture of surfing, their stories, their memories” says it all.



In 1966 Nine Mile Beach Surfboard Club was formed in the garage of Nelson and Joyce Staley at the beach end of Tirriki St, Blacksmiths. Founding members, the Staleys kindly offered the use of their garage as a clubhouse and a place where the young surfers could hang out; and assisted with the running of the club. The club not only attracted members from the local Swansea, Belmont, Pelican and Blacksmiths areas, but further afield from Windale, Cardiff, Gateshead, Warners Bay, and Kotara. They could catch a bus to Blackies, pick up their boards, which originally were stowed away

under the houses of some of the local families, walk up to the beach and go surfing. With the advent of the clubhouse, they now had a secure place to leave their boards. A steady stream of surfers drove from Kurri and Cessnock. Learning to surf here was ideal as the beach was protected from the southerly swells by the breakwater and Moon Island. Official recognition came when they became affiliated with Newcastle Surfboard Association. As part of their calendar, social nights and interclub comps were held; and surf lifesaving training was undertaken. Many a night was spent at the other end of Tirriki St (on the Pacific Highway) in the Harmans garage, watching Keven making boards, and learning about the craft. By 1968 they were ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in Newcastle. Strong ties were formed with Kiama Boardriders.

*Source: G Lunn, Ninemile surf boardriders.*

Although the club officially folded in 1972, their passion for Blacksmiths Beach and the surf with their mates, children and grandchildren has never waned, even though many no longer live in the area. Their current energies are focused on lobbying for action to “**BRING BLACKSMITHS BACK**”. Sand dune stabilisation has stopped sand being blown back into the surf zone. The decline of the sand banks has badly affected body surfing and surfboard riding. The breakwater extension has caused the sand to not come around the breakwater and back onto the beach; further compounded by the dredging of Swansea Channel which has increased the speed and flow, taking sand further out to sea, and not depositing on the beach. If dredged sand were to be pumped into the surf zone to nourish sand banks, it would go a long way to remedy the problem and see waves return.

### **Disclaimer**

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WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR YOUR IDEAS FOR MORE HERITAGE STORIES!!!