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Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

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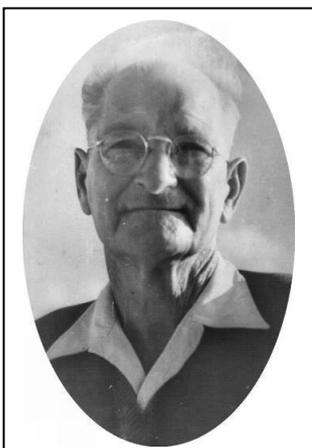
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JUN-JUL

The **TOM HUMPHREYS** CONNECTION

2022



Born in 1883, Tom inherited the boating gene from his grandfather Captain Thomas Boyd. He worked with his uncle, James L. Boyd, for a number of years before establishing his own boat yard on Swansea Channel in 1917 near the reserve that now bears his name. A variety of boats were built and launched – rowing, fishing, sailing, and surf boats; launches; cruisers; trawlers; even a ferry. During WWII, additional staff were employed to the family business of sons and nephews to fulfil the Government contracts to build lifeboats and launches for the services. Being a keen sailor and fisherman, Tom was involved with the 2 local surf clubs and was a foundation member of the Belmont 16ft Sailing Club; all 3 being established in the 1920's. He became well known for his 16ft "skiffs" – not only as a builder and designer; but also as a skipper. He built the surf boats for the Swansea- Belmont and

Swansea-Caves Beach Surf Life Saving Clubs, starting with the traditional design of the time, being pointed at the front and rear. He rose to the challenge of developing a faster surf boat, developing the tuck stern – with a squared back like a sailing boat, which created less drag. After initial scepticism by some, this design proved to be faster and soon became the standard world-wide, standing the test of time to still be in use today. Sadly, Tom lost his life on a fishing trip accident off Caves Beach which wrecked his boat. "He died as he had lived – doing the things he most enjoyed... in a boat he had built, on the water he loved." *G & N Boyd; LMCC*

VALE: **GORDON HUMPHREYS 1927-2022**

Gordon may have been a man of few words, but was a well-known figure around Swansea, with great knowledge, many experiences, his own museum. Some of his early memories were of Boyd St and a parcel of land called "The Farm". He gained his boat building skills from his uncle, Tom Humphreys, in the Channel Street boat yard. Afterwards he worked in the Newcastle Dockyards and on the William the Fourth Restoration project. With a passion for white water rafting, he built many kayaks for his fellow canoe club members. Gordon was also a member of motor bike clubs and the Land Rover Club, enjoying many adventures travelling, and exploring Australia.



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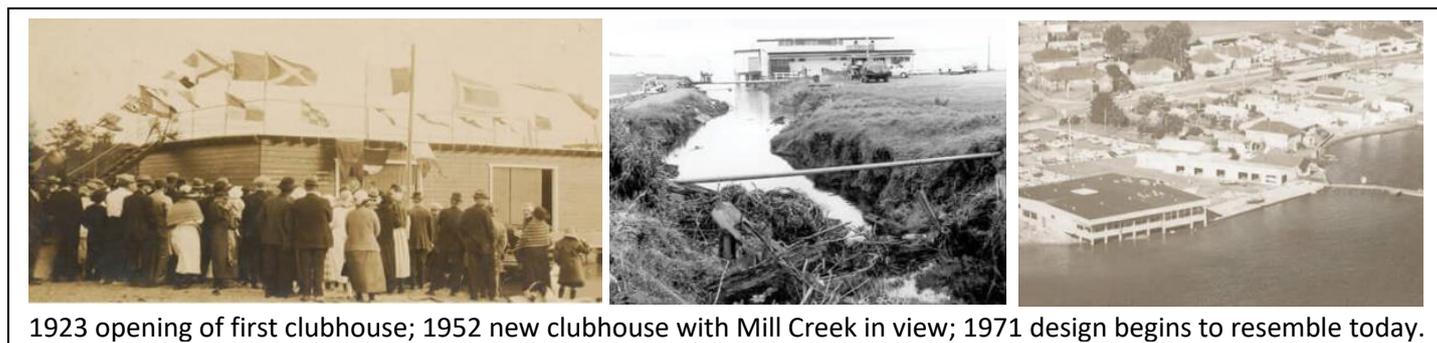
Thank you to Pat Conroy and staff, kindly supporting our community; and encouraging the preservation and sharing of our heritage.

BELMONT 16 FT SAILING CLUB REACHES 100

The celebration of the club's centenary has been featured by the club and in the Newcastle Herald. After the interruption of WWI to the sport of sailing it flourished, especially the 16 foot "skiff" class. The advertised meeting on 13 May, 1922, to gauge interest in establishing a club for this class was well attended and decided to proceed to start a sailing club in Belmont. Soon the club had about 50 members – Tom Humphreys being one of the foundation members. Fund raising began straight away with euchre card parties and dances being organised. The first race was held on 7th October, without the benefit of a clubhouse. A crowd of 400 gathered along the foreshore to watch the handicap race; the course being 3 times around Belmont Bay in a Nor-Easter. The following year the clubhouse was completed by volunteers, jutting out over the water on Brooks Parade, Belmont between the jetty and the baths; opening on October 6, 1923. The Humphreys name featured prominently as championship title winners. Up until 1955, Tom and his sons, Colin and Boyd, dominated in boats of their own design and build - Swansea, Opah, Aeneas, Blue Fish and Echo appeared repeatedly on the Championship Board.

After 30 years at the end of Short St, the club relocated to its current position on reclaimed land by Mill Creek, off Ross St. The club has continued to make improvements since then and has great plans to begin a \$20 million redevelopment due to be completed later next year.

Source: Belmont 16ft SC; Revolutionise.com.au



1923 opening of first clubhouse; 1952 new clubhouse with Mill Creek in view; 1971 design begins to resemble today.

STORYPLACE



A large grant has been made available to six regional councils across NSW, including Lake Macquarie to improve access to important regional collections of artworks, objects and archives by photographing a selection of special items, writing up their stories, and then showcasing them on the Museums and Galleries NSW (MGNSW) website, which will give Australia-wide access. To kickstart the program specialised equipment, training and resources were acquired.



HELM has been working with **Caves Beach Surf Life Saving Club** and **LMCC** to bring our surf culture to prominence. WOW! what an amazing collection of heritage memories, items and photos. We were very excited when the club agreed to share their amazing treasures with us and the wider world. Unfortunately, there were limits on the number of items and their portability to the studio set up at Speers Point. Alan Wallace shared his amazing knowledge of the history of the club, along with Phil Rowe and Steve Smith. Meg O'Donnell from LMCC, pinpointed items of interest and facilitated their progress to the studio, where a professional photographer captured the pictures.

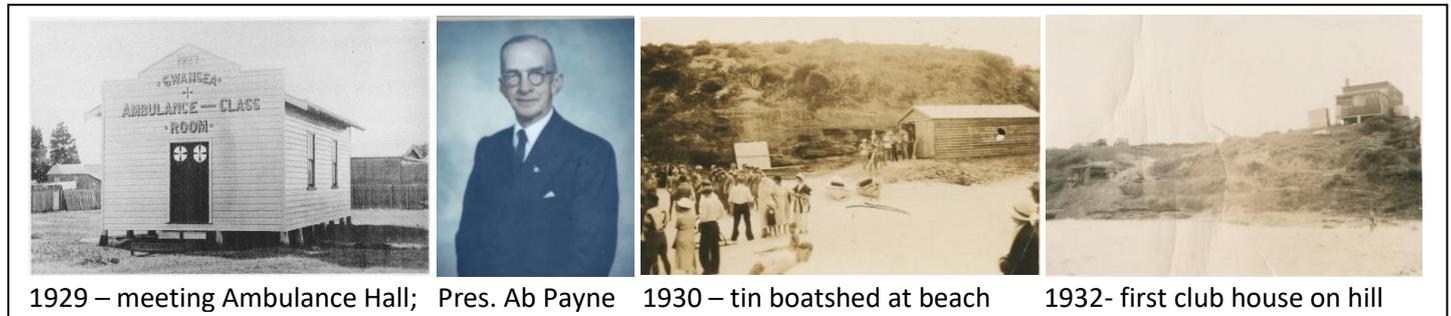


HELM's Lindy Wallace then spent a lot of time conferring with Alan and the club's history to put together the back stories, which will be sent to MGNSW for further polishing along with the photos. It was amazing how much some of these stories are taken for granted - that everyone knows them. It is important that our heritage is recorded for visitors, newcomers to the area, and future generations of our area and further afield. The items will start to be added gradually in a month. Others taking part are West Wallsend Heritage Group, Lake Macquarie History Society, Morisset Hospital Museum, LMCC. The fascinating stories about the history and culture of NSW can be found at: storyplace.org.au

CAVES BEACH SURF LIFE SAVING CLUB

Starting out - 1929

Nearly a century ago, a group from Swansea saw the need to establish a separate Surf Lifesaving Club between Swansea Heads and Pinney Beach to service the needs south of the entrance to the Lake, (The original Swansea Club being at Blacksmiths and Nine Mile.) The best spot was judged to be near the big cave at Caves Beach. Soon many firsts occurred. The first meeting was held in the Ambulance Hall (where the RSL stands now). The first minute book reveals the club was to be called Swansea Caves Beach; Mr A Payne was elected President. That minute book eventually made it's way back to the club from a deceased estate and is now an important part of the club's heritage. An interesting anecdote tells that despite being President, Ab Payne never entered the surf; did not have any swimmers; or a surf bronze medallion.



1929 – meeting Ambulance Hall; Pres. Ab Payne 1930 – tin boatshed at beach 1932- first club house on hill

To the rescue:



The very first equipment consisted of six members, a belt, a reel, and a shark bell. The club's first surf boat was built and donated by James L Boyd in 1929; and named in his honour. The search was always on to improve speed, safety and flexibility. The next major innovation was the tuck stern design by Tom Humphries in 1945 – Seaswan II. Another important development was the use of surf skis. 1981 saw the first IRB arrive at the club.

Serious biz:



In 1955 the call went out for assistance during the devastating flood at Maitland. Club members loaded their boat on the truck and set out to help. The extent of the flood can be seen by the level at the railway station. A feature of annual carnivals is the march past, such as this parade by Caves lifesavers in Dec 1984. Although no longer used for rescues, the reel is still carried in the march past. (Above: M and D Ellercamp, R Ham 2015. NH)

Fun biz:



Motoring in Caves colours - maroon and white; Swansea street parade; pillow fights; chariot races. CBSLSC; NH

SWANSEA BELMONT SURF CLUB FACEBOOK FLASHBACKS

Club formed in 1927

Entwined amongst Jock Gregory's memories of the very early days was that the boat used every Sunday for patrol was the lifeboat from the Pilot Station which was situated at Swansea Heads under the control of Captain Boyd. There was only a track from Swansea to the Heads in the



days when nobody had cars. It was shorter and quicker to get there via the channel. After diving in from the north breakwater, they would swim across the bar to pick up the boat. They would return the boat in the afternoon and swim back to Blacksmiths beach. The boat was the "Rose"; (possibly the one in the photo), described as being "built like a battleship and almost just as heavy".



In the 1930's Saturday night dances were very important to the club, both socially – to give everyone an outlet and keep everyone together - and financially, so that the club could survive. It was a big occasion for all, complete with MC and "orchestra".

The green, cream and gold clad members soon gained a reputation as the travelling club. A number of trucks were fitted with special cradles to carry the boats – (Joe Charlton, Proudlock, Ben Druery). "Dooley" Gilligan's truck also served as a bunkhouse, kitchen and refreshment stall, as they travelled as far as Wollongong and Taree. Before WWII ships carrying produce would leave Newcastle Friday night, arriving Sydney early Saturday morning; some used this mode of travel as they were only charged 2/6d (25 cents) as passengers on the deck; 5/- (50 cents) in the lounge.



Tom Humphreys name surfaces again in the keen rivalry between Swansea-Belmont and Caves Beach. Both clubs tasked him to build the fastest surfboat possible in 1945. As a result, the revolutionary tuck stern was designed. The two boats were to be launched together from Tom's boat yard on Swansea Channel. While Swansea Belmont went to change into their uniforms, the Caves boys who had arrived in ordinary clothes and no caps, jumped in their boat and created history by being the first in the world to row a tuck stern surf boat.



"A helicopter plucked two youths from mountainous seas off Blacksmiths Beach yesterday afternoon. Kevin Brown, 18, and Glen Jones, 16, both members of Swansea-Belmont Surf Lifesaving Club, battled 4.5m swells and a savage rip for an hour and a half before being rescued by the helicopter. The helicopter, which was flown from Ocean Beach near Umina, is leased for rescue work by Central Coast branch of the Surf Lifesaving Association. Brown was a crew member of Swansea-Belmont's duty boat, the 'Bill-Ben', during a competition between the club and the Central Coast representative team. The

'Bill-Ben' was outside the line of breakers in front of the clubhouse when it caught a wave. The force of the wave threw the crew – Brown, Trevor Ham, Jim Purcell, Ian Richardson and Alan Russell – into the surf and smashed the boat. The other crew members managed to get ashore, but Brown swam to the calmer waters outside the breakers. Jones paddled a surfboard out to assist the crew but was washed from his board and swam to sea with Brown. Belt swimmers and ski riders tried to reach the youths but the seas, which were getting bigger on the rising tide, and a strong rip running toward Redhead, thwarted their attempts." *Newcastle Herald 23/12/1974*