



WAVERLEY COUNCIL

WAVERLEY LIFEGUARDS: FAST FACTS

A Waverley Library Local History Fact Sheet



Beach swimming, or 'surf bathing' was banned at Sydney beaches between 6am-8pm from 1838. This lasted until 1902, when the rules were relaxed.

The Surf Line and Belt (known as the 'reel') was designed by Bondi club member Lyster Ormsby in 1906, and was first used on Bondi Beach in March 1907.

Waverley Council Lifeguard service celebrated its centenary in 2013, but the Bondi Surf Bather's Lifesaving Club was first founded on 12 February, 1907 and is recognised by the SLSA as the oldest official surf club in Australia. The club first suggested the need for a permanent Lifeguard on Bondi Beach to Waverley Council in November 1907.

Lifeguards used to be known as Beach Inspectors and were colloquially called 'Beachies'. Members of surf life saving clubs were frequently nicknamed 'Clubbies'.

The first Lifeguard appointed was Dennis ('Dinny') Brown, a Bronte resident who started his solo patrol of Bondi in December 1913. Patrols on Bronte and Tamarama commenced soon afterward.

The most dramatic day for rescues on any of Waverley's beaches was 6 February 1938, known as 'Black Sunday', when on Bondi Beach approximately 250 swimmers required assistance, 150 were rescued, 60 suffered near drowning, 35 brought to shore unconscious and five drowned.

At the beginning of each day the Lifeguards carry out an



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Images from top:

Waverley Council's first Lifeguard, Dennis 'Dinny' Brown, with his family.

Waverley Council Lifeguards, Lyster Ormsby the inventor of the Surf Reel, back right, 1906.

Black Sunday, Labour Daily, 7 February, 1938.

Bondi Beach Lifeguard tower, 2013.

Waverley Council Lifeguards, 2008-2009 summer season.

assessment of the surf conditions including surf size, tide, wind direction and the location of rips and sandbanks. Based on this assessment sets of flags are erected in the safest swimming zones and their position is monitored throughout the day.

It is claimed that the first female honorary Beach Inspectors (Lifeguards) in NSW were appointed in December, 1971. They were Margery Keeble, Marilyn Myers and Robin Carroll, all members of Bondi Amateur Swimming Club. In 2006 Waverley Council employed its first full-time female Lifeguard when Brooke Cassell came to Waverley after 10 years as a Lifeguard for Wyong Council.

The first portable observation device owned by Waverley Council was a high ladder installed on Bondi Beach in 1928. Part of its popularity was that it could quickly be taken down by one man and moved to any section of the beach as

needed. The current Bondi Lifeguard tower replaced an earlier 1975 observation tower which had been built courtesy of a Lions Club donation. At Tamarama the Lifeguards have a distinctive round tower on the beach and at Bronte the Lifeguard room faces the promenade at the bottom of the Bronte Surf Life Saving Club building.

Today Waverley Council Lifeguards patrol Waverley's three beaches – Bondi, Bronte and Tamarama. Bondi Beach is patrolled every day of the year and Bronte and Tamarama beaches over the summer swimming season.

You can see the Waverley Council Lifeguards in action on your TV screen in the Logie-award winning television show Bondi Rescue, which has been running since 2006.

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