



WAVERLEY COUNCIL

BONDI MERMAIDS

A Waverley Library Local History Fact Sheet



On 3 April 1960, the two iconic Bondi Mermaid statues were installed on the Big Rock at Ben Buckler, North Bondi. Modelled after two local women- Jan Carmody (Miss Australia Surf, 1959), and Lynette Whillier (champion swimmer and runner-up in the Miss Australia Surf, 1959), the statues were created by sculptor Lyall Randolph.

The mermaid's reign over Big Rock (now dubbed Mermaid Rock) was short lived, as a mere month after they were installed Mermaid Jan was chiseled from the rock by university students as part of a Commemoration Day prank. She was later recovered under mysterious circumstances at the Engineering School, Sydney University.

Lyall tried to sell the idea of the mermaid sculptures to Waverley Council, but the Council refused to pay for them. At his own expense, Lyall mounted them on Big Rock and claimed that because they were placed a certain distance offshore the space they occupied was not under the jurisdiction of Waverley Council, but the Department of Lands. He also claimed that the Department of Lands had approved the statues.

Repaired, she was restored to the Big Rock to rejoin her fellow mermaid Lynette. The cost of repair was met by public subscription – the public loved the mermaids so much that they paid for Jan to be put back together again.

Heavy seas claimed Lynette in 1974; swept off the Big Rock in a storm she disappeared forever. Jan lost an arm and her tail in the same storm.



WAVERLEY COUNCIL

BONDI MERMAIDS



For two years Jan sat alone on her rocky throne until Waverley Council removed what was left of her in 1976, storing her in a Council Depot where she was forgotten for many years.

Rediscovered in the late 1980s she was moved to Waverley Library, where, in 1999, the Friends of Waverley Library paid for her remains to be preserved by Sydney Artefacts Conservation. Jan the mermaid remains at Waverley Library today, held safe in her perspex box.

Images from top:

Bondi Mermaids on Big Rock, 1960. By Wally Glover.

Jan Carmody (nee Percival), 1959.

Mermaid Jan rediscovered at the University of Sydney. Photo courtesy of Ben Selinger.

Bondi Mermaids and local surfers, North Bondi, 1970.

Mermaid Jan, Waverley Library 1990.

Published by Waverley Library from sources in the Local History Collection, 2020