

Waverley Council Oral History of Waverly Beach Inspectors Early 1900's.

Interview with Jim Spencer

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KOS: This is an interview with Jimmy Spencer on the 22 of March 2006.

Jimmy is being interviewed by Lawrie Williams and Kimberly O'Sullivan Steward, who are employees of Waverley Council. It's about 10.30 I think, in the morning, and we're Jimmy's home, which is Unit 1, 253 Birrell Street.

LW: Jimmy, what the project is about, is we're doing a history of the beach inspectors, Council Beach inspectors, going way back to the first one, which was Dennis [Dinny] Brown. Not long after, followed by Stan McDonald.

JS: My memory only goes back, to Stan McDonald, who in my opinion was one of the loveliest man that ever breathed.

When I first came to Bondi in Nineteen Hundred and Twenty, I was 9 years of age. And of course I went to the beach on many occasions and he was my hero. He was always happy to talk to the young fellows and help them in any way possible.

He was, I think, the only, ah beach inspector on the [], on the beach at the time – of course they had the honorary beach inspectors from the surf clubs on the weekends – but Stan was a wonderful gentleman, and when I say a gentleman, he spoke very, very softly but his work as a beach inspector was impeccable...

...and I happen to know like, I got to know him of course, when I joined the surf club, I got to know him very well, and of course even in his retirement he was a great friend of mine.

LW: You were talking about Stan but did you ever meet Dennis Brown?

JS: No.

LW: [Dinny] Brown?

JS: No – never knew of him as a matter of fact.

LW: He actually started before Stan and he finished in about 1923, and then...

JS: Oh, yeh...

LW: ...his family took over the Surf Sheds at Bronte...

JS: That's right.

LW: ...and then later on Dave Brown the famous footballer...

JS: I remember that...

LW: Dave took over from his father.

JS: That's right.

LW: But if we go back to Stan and you know, just talk about him on the beach, you say at the time he was the only one that you knew of for... a certain period.

JS: At that particular time, yes.

LW: What do...

JS: He used to, [] did work on the beach during the summer months, and in the winter he was a ski instructor – a skating instructor at the Glaciarium in... Railway Square. And we used to watch him there later on, he used to waltz, he was a very, very good skater.

KOS: Is the Glaciarium where the Victoria Park pool is now, just at the back of the railway.

JS: No, the Glaciarium is just right... right at Railway Square... you had, like, orchards, just in that area. It was, well, it was actually in George St West you'd call it... the beginning of George Street West.

LW: How did people, how did people view the beach inspectors back then? They obviously came from the surf clubs, yet they all came from the surf clubs...

JS: Yes, well Stan was a member of Bondi Surf Club and that made no difference, he was still in charge of the whole beach. While we looked on Stan as a hero and a man – due to the fact that he performed some wonderful rescues, even one-handed – and ah, as a man. He was a man and a great father to Basil. Did you know Basil at all?

LW: I did, yes, I did know him and Neil.

JS: You know Basil. He used to live just down at... and of course, his grandson, I see a fair bit of him too.

LW: Neil?

JS: Neil – yes, lovely bloke. Yes. Yes, ah Stan – [] you would say he was revered by everyone who had the privilege of knowing him. There’s nothing more I can say about him than being just a wonderful man.

LW: Maybe we can talk, because a lot has been said, and documented about Stan, so what if we talk about some of the lesser known characters that you, you would know. We can start with your mate, Bob Malleson.

JS: Bob – yes, Bob Malleson he was a WWI member of the Bondi Diggers Club – it wasn’t Diggers Club then. It was the Eastern Suburbs Returned Soldiers and Sailors Club in those days, and Bob was a very, very good swimmer, and ah, he was actually responsible for getting me into ah, the ah, what is (now) then the Diggers - or what is now the Diggers Club. It was very, very difficult to become a member of that club. It was all run by WWI fellows and they didn’t want anyone else. On one occasion, [Chum] as we used to know him, approached me and said “Jim, they’re allowing 10 members from North Bondi surf club and 10 members from Bondi - ex-servicemen of course, to join our Club.”

So that’s how I got as a member of the Bondi Diggers – what is now the Bondi Diggers of 1946 – right after I was discharged.

LW: Did he, did you know him in his time as a beach inspector?

JS: Oh, yes...

LW: Was he a full time or a casual...?

JS: Yes, he was a full time – his full name is Robert, he [went round] as Bob.

LW: Why [Chum]?

JS: Well because he was ah, I think it was due to the fact that he was born in England... Yes, they called him [Chum], [Chum] Malleson. He was always a very, very approachable bloke – he worked on the beach for many years and he finished up working for the Motor Transport Authority as a Roadie – as a [] directing people where to go and that. He was a very, very great man, and I, well, he was responsible for, say, helping me a lot to get into that Bondi Diggers which was very, very hard to do.

LW: How many years did he spend on the beach? Do you know when he started and finished?

JS: No, I wouldn’t know the exact number...

LS: There’s a picture of him here. That’s him there in the middle... It’s not very – it’s an old newspaper clipping.

((KOS: Lawrie is showing Jim some photos that came with Warren Riley's interview material.))

LS: You might recognize some of those faces... that would be taken in...

JS: Just a [] I'll put my glasses on. I can see much better – a little bit better then.

LW: I don't think [Chum] is in there. But I know that Jim Lapthorne...

JS: I know Jimmy Lapthorne.

LW: He's in that picture. Aub's in that, Aub Laidlaw is in that picture. Tommy Maher is in the middle – he's the chief beach inspector.

JS: That's right, I knew Tommy [] He was from Bondi club, and I went to his, I went to his funeral as a mater of fact.

LW: Roger Riley from Bronte.

JS: He was there. Roger Riley –

LW: You remember Roger Riley?

JS: He did the big job at the Bronte Carnival...

LW: The rescues?

JS: The Bronte Surf Carnival. He did some wonderful rescues on that particular day.

LW: I think he gained a number of Royal Humane and Shipwreck Society – I think he got a number of Bravery Awards.

JS: Yes I remember...

LW: They tell me he worked at Bronte for something like 40 years.

JS: He was there for a long time.

LW: Was he?

JS: The Bronte Carnival – was a one-off. They've never had once since.

LW: That's right.

JS: That was the day they had the Captain Cook – they were picking up Juniors – to start off it was the juniors surf race – and they were picking them up at Clovelly...

LW: That's how bad it was?

JS: Couldn't get... Only 3 finished the race... [] won it... North Bondi. He even... the only surf boat to get out on the day was [North Stein's] boat with [Rastus] Evans as the swig. And he got out – none of the other boats could get out. But Roger Riley did some wonderful... He was bringing them in, and Roger Riley was – out into the break – and Roger Riley was bringing them in from there.

LW: Was that in his capacity as a beach inspector on the day?

JS: Yeh, well, he was on the beach and in charge more or less.

LW: On the beach, yes, yes.

KOS: So was this quite a renowned surf carnival at Bronte?

LW: There was only ever one...

KOS: Oh, there was only ever one, was there. What year was that, do you remember?

JS: Normally they had... this carnival and that was the only way really, we as surf clubs were able to get finance, there was no sponsorship as we know today. And they used to run their surf carnivals. It was on a Saturday and in the morning, it was a beautiful morning. I and my friend, we entered in to the canoe race, and kept our canoe over at the Boat shed. And round about 11 o'clock we went over to [] got our boat, and you wouldn't want to know, [inside] 10 mins, quarter of an hour, we got off at Mackenzie's point, and the sea came up.

Well, we got off Tamarama, was hit by a wave and finished up on Tamarama beach. But what they did then, they started the race – they always, the surf guards – started with the juniors surf race, and they started off and that is what happened. And from then on they never had a carnival there, it's a treacherous little beach you know. And they never ever started a carnival with a junior surf race anymore.

KOS: And do we know what year this was, Jim?

(JS: hmm?)

KOS: When was this?

JS: What year? I would say... about 19- ah, 1932... something like, roundabout early 1930's. So they've never had a carnival since. And some wonderful rescues were done that day.

LW: Tell me about Joe Dobson...

JS: Joe Dobson, I knew very well.

LW: He was a beach inspector...

JS: He was, for a while, yes. Joe was a good member of the club, and he... finished up, he was in the air force in England and served over there. And ah, it was when he came back that he was beach inspector for a while.

LW: From the second world war...

JS: Oh yes, World War II. Yes, he had an accident, during ah, with a boat... crew and it incapacitated him to a great extent and he dropped out of the club, and lived as a... he would... never came down to the club anymore after that. We missed him very, very much but he was a great member.

LW: What about Charlie Brooks – does that name ring a bell? He may have worked at Tamarama.

JS: Look, I don't remember. Chooksie Brooks, I know there was a bloke by the name of Chooksie Brooks but I didn't ever – I don't know how he got his name, and I can say I don't know Chooksie Brooks.

LW: [Rolf Bassingthwaite.]

JS: Well, he was another great friend of mine. Yes...

LS: [Basso?]

JS: (laughter)Yes. He was the bloke who – he was in the police force for a while, til he was... He was one of the toughest blokes to strike in a days outing... I remember he had the lobster. It was fishing, had the nets too, he used to have the nets running [] catch lots of fish on Bondi beach, and Basso used to catch them. Used to run out the nets. I was always an early morning swimmer, and I used to help him pull the nets in, and he used to get some very good, ah, very good catches.

LW: Salmon?

JS: Beg your pardon?

LW: Salmon?

JS: Salmon – mostly salmon, yes. Then he had the lobster pots, out, further out and that's when someone, a chap by the name of Jack Watson from Bondi Surf Club... a big tough bloke, was robbing his lobster pots. So, he was in the – Watson was a very good boxer –

a heavy weight boxer. And Basso approached him on that issue, and a fight eventuated, and Basso cleaned him up. Yes.

LW: He played first grade for eastern suburbs...

JS: Eastern Suburbs, yes, and his wife was a great member, ah, supporter too.

LW: Was he a Casual on the beach do you remember? He would have worked under Stan.

JS: Yes. He was, he was really tough, but a lovely bloke, yes a lovely bloke was Basso [] he was Bondi surf club of course...

LW: And, ah, what about a chap by the name of Rowbottom, at Bronte? Does that name ring a bell?

JS: No.

LW: Jimmy Laphorne?

JS: Oh, yes, Jimmy Laphorne was a member of our club and he was a member of the R&R Five and yes he was quite a good member and a good swimmer.

LW: George Proudfoot?

JS: Oh, God Yes, I knew George very well.

LW: These are all, incidentally, they're all beach inspectors...

JS: That's right, that's right.

LW: ... whether they were casual or worked at some stage.

JS: George Proudfoot I knew very well. I knew his son Eddy, he became a dentist. But George was a good bloke and surf [belt] champion of Australia, and he swam trudgeon. (laughter)... whether you can see it but he used to pull [that belt]with an old trudgeon kick, you know...

LW: Oh, ok...

JS: He finished up...

KOS: What is a trudgeon... Jim, what's a trudgeon kick – what is that? A trudgeon kick?

JS: Well, it was the one before the six-foot crawl, put it that way... where you...

KOS: You'd kick back?

JS: Yes... you'd swim trudgeon. Then he finished up as a representative of the National Mutual Insurance Company – ah, life insurance and what not - got all the blokes there to take out policies, including myself. But ah, yes he was quite a good bloke.

LW: Tommy Maher? From the Bondi Surf Club.

JS: Well yes, I didn't – he was Bondi Surf Club... he was a great R& R man, a great member. But I can't, why he died – well he died, I think he died in about 1956... that was the time that I represented, I was president of [Dover Lake] Bowling Club at the time, and I represented the club at his funeral.

LW: He was actually, in charge of Bondi Beach on Black Sunday. He and Aub...

JS: Oh, yes, [he would have been.]

LW: He and Aub were working, and Jimmy Lapthorne I think...

JS: Jimmy was on. Unfortunately I was away that afternoon. I wasn't there. I had a swim in the morning, I know, I had to go to Kirribilli for something and missed it, and I got the news when I come back. And they were very, very, a little offhand about that, of course.

LW: Jack... What about Jack Johnson – “Cappa” – a chap they nicknamed Cappa Johnson.

JS: No.

LW: Doesn't ring a bell?

JS: No..

LW: Ken Mackenzie?

JS: Yes... I knew Ken Mackenzie. He was in our R&R side. Yes, I knew Ken very well. A good Swimmer.

JS: Billy Pugh?

JS: Billy Pugh – well, he was from Bronte.

LW: He was a Bronte boy?

JS: He was a Bronte lad. He was, he was the chap, I think it was the Duke of Gloucester came out there and said “that man has the finest physique of everyman I've ever seen.” That was Billy Pugh, from Bronte.

KOS: Wow, that was a claim to fame.

JS: What?

KOS: That was a claim to fame, from Royalty.

JS: Yeh, 'course we had a few of them out here. We had the Prince of Wales, when he first... and [Al Pierson] looked after him.

LW: []

JS: Bill [Rivers] was always on the job.– you'll come to him, no doubt.

LW: Bill Willis and Davo.

JS: Davo?

LW: Brian Davidson.

JS: Well, he was another one and the same. He was a chap I'm not, I'm not going to, I never had a terrible lot of time for. Something, you know we had a little altercation over a little matter, and I never really took [the time], he was a bit of lady's man, you know and he looks a lot like me... I got blamed on 2-3 occasions for, you know, something I didn't do, through Davo.

I was in Bondi Hotel having a drink there on one occasion, next thing, you know's 'whack'... I got a whollop and the bloke ran for his life... but someone put me foul [] on to Davo. Anyway, that's []...he was another one who spent his time in the winter months in Perisher...

LW: At the ski hills.

JS: ...he was a ski man.

LW: Basil McDonald used to tell the story that he would sit in front of Basil's in one of the deck chairs and pretend to be looking out to sea with his sunglasses on and of course he was asleep.

JS: He was, [] after a big sea. He was always looking for money on the beach. Used to get a lot of money, pick 'em up. Waves used to come up.

KOS: We have an interview with Aub Laidlaw at the library as part of this, and he talked about that. He said an enormous amount of money used to, come up and used to see the coins shining.

JS: Yes. People used to go down there with their money and lose it on the beach. Then the big seas would come up and they'd all show up.

LW: Did you know I had a dream last night about that, because Pierce Byron, who was an ex-beach inspector, taught me how to go looking for coins. When the tide'd wash out.

JS: Yeh... I used to...

LW: I had a dream last night that I was doing it.

JS: Get away...! Well I used to, see I used to go down there in the mornings at half past five, every morning, winter and summer, and do some exercises and then go for a swim. And I'd been always advocating for walking up and down the beach. Someone told me it's the greatest thing in the world for your nerves to walk on wet sand or wet grass. And I used to go, I've done that for 30- 40- 50 years. And that's why I been used to see the money on the beach.

LW: It was good sport.

JS: Yes.

LW: The only other one was Bill Willis.

JS: Bill...

LW: Tell us what you know of Bill.

JS: Bill, well you would say this much, he was my number one pal, and he and Doc were a wonderful people to my wife and my children. Inasmuch as when Maureen and I went on holidays, they would mind the children. Bill was a great man. He died in 1969, unfortunately, I was in South Africa when he died, but I did go to see him before I left. And he was such an enormous man, strong as they make, he was 7 stone. And, actually he didn't want people to see him really. But Bill was a great man.

He did, ah, he swam, which was quite a big thing in those days - he swam 12 laps of the beach there one Saturday morning and it was in December and ah, our water gets cool in December - right up til early in the new year, and it was very cold - because I swam, quite a few of us swam one lap with him, you see, for company.

Anyhow he swam the last, the twelfth lap with a cramp and I heard they got a photo of him finishing at the rocks at the northern end and they're giving him a drink of beer. And I've got his foot, trying to relieve the cramp. I got it in the, I noticed it in the ah...

LW: The history book?

JS: The history book...

LW: The history of North Bondi Surf Club.

JS: There's quite a fair bit about him in there, by the way.

LS: Was he a beach inspector for many years? And when did he start?

JS: Bill [] was funny set up. He came from... Forbes. He learned his swimming in the old [] and he go for all day and never []. Anyhow he came to Sydney and he played first grade rugby league with western suburbs. Then he came to Bondi. Still a good swimmer but he wasn't a surfer. Did you know Bill couldn't crack a wave?

LW: I didn't know that.

JS: Because he never learned, as a boy. You know, you catch on how to crack a wave when you're young. But Bill could never do that, and he was never a very fast swimmer but he could go all day. And we went on picnics together and goodness knows what, and Bill was a very, very great friend of mine, and my family.

LW: Tell me, they used to, just aside from that, they used to hold an annual beach inspectors dinner. And it was held at the diggers club on occasions, but it was all from the beaches up and down the coast...

JS: The coast, that's right.

LW: Do you know how far back that went... when they first started doing that?

JS: Oh, that would be around about '65 I'd say.

LW: Oh? That late? They started.

JS: Could be earlier, look, I don't know. I wasn't entitled to attend that, of course, never being a beach inspector.

KOS: Jim, I wanted to ask you a little bit about WWII. We don't have a lot of information about WWII down at Bondi beach. We have a couple of photos and little bits of memories. But I'd really like some of your personal memories...so...

JS: But I can give you the whole [] WWII. I don't know whether this is what you want. But it was regarded in early days, very risqué to walk around on the promenade in a bathing costume. So the council, in its wisdom – or otherwise – built the 2 piers. The northern pier for the gents. And prior to that people would come down the beach, the trams – people would come down with a collar and tie and everything. And go to the old dressing sheds and get undressed, and had lockers and that. It was before [] by the way, and that's how the two piers went out.

And the idea was, you were in the dressing sheds, you went under the promenade, and you were in your [] bathers, but you wasn't on the promenade at all. And that's how, why they were put up. Well... its hard to understand, but, people would come dressed up and of course, on Sunday afternoon, and Sunday night, Bondi Promenade, there would be - and I'm not exaggerating when I say there would be thousands and thousands.

But people, young people would go home, had a day on the beach and go home and get dressed up, all the men in their [creams] and two-tone shoes and blazers and even more, and go there. The idea of course was looking for talent. And sometimes you did alright, but there was such a big crowd there...

KOS: And would you just walk back and forth... [] ?

JS: Yes, walk up and down...

KOS: So when you were looking to meet someone, would you just speak to someone – [] such as say “Good Evening.”

JS: You just say, “Would you mind if walk with you?” The girls were there for the one purpose only, to pick up blokes. And, look, they came from all over from the western suburbs and everything, you've got no idea what Bondi was like. And they were lovely... The beach, I remember, I had some wonderful times on that beach.

Like, there were no hotels or anything open in those days, and on Saturdays and Sundays of a weekend you'd go down the beach and you all get in little groups and sing, Ukelele's everyone [] I had one the most beautiful ukeleles, I've had for just on 80's years, and I used to play that and she used to sing songs and we'd all get round in groups, it was really lovely, there. When I look back on those wonderful times, I never even thought of grog.

KOS: People didn't drink down on the beach?

JS: Oh, God no!.

KOS: Would the beach inspectors look after that kind of thing?

JS: I can't remember, never occurred to anyone... []

KOS: And would the beach inspectors just let you go as long as you weren't causing any trouble, [other than minding...]

JS: The beach, well, there was, no, look those days, there was no trouble at all. There was never any trouble.

KOS: So you don't remember...

JS: Everyone was law-abiding, and lovely, and it was more interested in music and things like that. It was really lovely...

KSO: So at that time you don't remember any trouble down there and the beach...

JS: Not once do I know...

KOS: ...inspectors having to step in ...

JS: I can't recall any trouble on the beach as far I can [].

LW: The story's told about how one of the jobs that the beach inspectors had to do was to prevent people from changing on the beach...

JS: Well that's it...

LW: ...and they sent them up to the pavilion.

JS: Yes, well you couldn't, that was [] but see it's all so different now, they just come down... no one cares anymore... Of course, the world... the ladies had the neck-to-knees, the men had – apart from their full one piece, had to wear these – on top of that – so you had these [] over on patrol and everything. And then eventually of course, [] was wiped and we had just a two piece costume, and then it went in to the one piece.

KOS: So at that time what would have been the main work of the beach inspector? You said there wasn't a lot of training []

JS: Well. No, there was not a lot of ... it was mainly, to know the danger parts of the beach, to keep the bathers within that area and also be ready for any rescues that might happen, that was their main job.

But ah, there was never any other trouble – later on of course, in the days of Aub Laidlaw, it was pretty well, he had to ah, in the bikini days, they were barred, and Aub had the job of making them cover themselves up. Which he just wasn't overriding, but it was last thing he'd worry about, because ah, look, he like ladies very much indeed did old Aub. That was his job as a beach inspector as a direction from the camp.

KOS: Can I take you just back to WWII again, and you were telling me a bit about what it was like on the beach before the war. Do you remember how the outbreak of WWII affected life on the beach? We know that the beach was barb-wired.

JS: Well, ah actually it was in 1939 and I'd just turned 28, my birthday was the 2nd of September and we was having a party and we was all listening. And the third of course was the outbreak of the war. Ah, I can't tell you much about that because I was in the services most of the time.

KOS: So, you were not living locally when the shelling happened.

JS: Yes I was, my wife was living here, they were living here, but I was in New Guinea and the highlands, not all but most of the time.

KOS: Do you remember servicemen coming to the beach? American Servicemen, or any stories of American servicemen coming to the beach... ?

JS: Well, no really, I s'pose a few of the yanks and that used to come down. They weren't very popular of course.

KOS: I wondered if there was any trouble, like there was in Kings Cross between the Australian and the America servicemen.

JS: No, I don't think so. Not down at the beach.

KOS: Not down at the beach?

JS: No.

KOS: And do you know if the pavilion still operated during that time or maybe you'd know Lawrie, whether it was [] social centre.

JS: Yes, well I don't know... what year did the pavilion start?

LW: 1928 it was opened.

JS: Yes that's right. Well, that was open during the war...

KOS: Yes, I just wondered if they were trying to discourage people going on to the beach. We don't have events bringing people to the beach because they're going to want to walk down on the beach...

JS: No, there was a lot of animosity towards the Americans, because they used to come, their privates would be dressed up like our generals, beautiful uniforms, plenty of money; and I hated the fact, I know I came on leave on two occasions and I got onto Central Railway Station and I've got my kit and everything, and I'm trying to get a cab back.

You could not be, for love nor money, get a taxi, and I had to wait and wait til I get the Bondi tram. Because they're going [] with the Yanks. 'Cause the Yanks... and of course, I saw blokes nearly go mad up in our islands, with they get abused, this is not interesting [], but they get a... word or something that their wife was playing up with a Yank, you see. The yanks had all the money, and they did look the part, there's no doubt about it.

The blokes went, they used to say 'you've gone troppo'. It was due to ah, mostly their wives playing up. Because a lot of the blokes would come on leave, and they get a girl

like a little, [] looks like a girl, maybe a prostitute, who'd marry her so they'd get the allotment. And of course they were young silly blokes, I wasn't...I was in...

KOS: You weren't a young fellow then Jim...

JS: No, I wasn't a young then I was ah, 28.

KOS: Do you remember any of the beach inspectors from that time. I'm just wondering, Lawrie was asking the other day what they might have done during the war if the beach was closed and you were discouraging people from going to the beach. Were they still on patrol?

JS: Well, yes, the club still had patrols. Because I had, yes I []

KOS: Do you remember if the council had the beach inspectors still on patrol?

JS: Oh yes, even Aub Laidlaw was on...

LW: He wasn't enlisted, because he had club feet

JS: No, he didn't enlist, but his brother did...

LW: Douglas?

JS: Jeff Laidlaw.

LW: Oh, Jeff?

JS: He finished up as a Colonel, he was in charge of the Sparrow Forces.

KOS: In Timor...? In East Timor?

JS: (whisper) Yeh...

KOS: I know all about that...

JS: Did you?

KOS: Yes, I did a whole series of the interviews, with Paddy Keneally from Sparrow Force, from about... I know quite a lot about that time in East Timor.

JS: I was in WWII [], he was in charge of [] I was with the other number one independent company. I was in a commando unit – anyhow forget that we won't talk about me...

KOS: So the beach inspectors were still there during the war, doing some kind of patrolling?

JS: Yes, it was still there, and the surf clubs carried on too.

LW: Because Charlie Christensen talks about how, although the beaches were barb-wired off, at certain times there were passages through the barb-wired where you could still get down and have a swim, so there was a way around it. People did a lot of it after and before hours...

JS: Yes.

LW: They were...

KOS: Well, it's pretty hard in summer if it's nearing 30 degrees and you're looking straight at the water, they are probably going under the barbed-wire to it.

JS: Yes. Sunday night, you go down there you'd see them catching sharks off the beach.

LW: Was that the Platt brothers, they were two of ...

JS: Who?

LW: The Platts...

JS: Yes, there was a Platt, the main one, I'm trying to think of his name... They used to catch the sharks and I'd go and have a look at them... that was at night time.

KOS: Was that just shark fishing, or was that part of the local fishing industry, that you were talking about... []

JS: No, no, they just wanted to catch a shark. You see, as I've mentioned before, there was lots of fishing in Bondi Bay. Even to the fact of having nets there, and the sharks used to come in for it.

But it was, the ah, actually, what made me join, I got interested in Surf Life Saving was, I lived in Ramsgate Avenue up near the point, and it was a Saturday afternoon and down the bottom of the street there was a lot of commotion. (and) I went down to see, and there was girl called Doreen Douglas, she was the daughter of Dan Douglas who was president of the North Bondi and they talk about the great rescue by one of the North Bondi Surf Life Savers at the Coogee Carnival.

And that was the time when Jack Chalmers was assisted by, to a smaller extent by Frank Beaurepaire, that he rescued Milton Coughlan with a... out of a group of seven sharks... he brought Milton Coughlan ashore and of course, he died.

But then I think it was the Daily Guardian started off a big [] news on this for Jack Chalmers, and to a lesser extent Frank Beaurepaire. Now [Frank] (Jack) Chalmers, well, he was a hero as far as North Bondi – he was our belt champion at the time, and he got the Albert – he finished up getting the Albert medal which is the equivalent of the Victoria Cross.

And he started up a carrying business and lived quite a few years and I used to see him in his very later years. Frank Beaurepaire also got a benefit, and it was enough for him, Frank was an Olympic swimmer you know, apart from being a member of North Bondi surf club. He was an Olympic swimmer and ah, he started a tyre retreading business and he called it Olympic, and that was how we get the Olympic tyres.

That was Frank Beaurepaire with the money he got from that []. Frank went to Melbourne and ah, for the 1956 games, they made him the honorary lord Mayor of Melbourne but he died a week or so beforehand.

That was the, ah, that was the first really, shark tragedy we had. Then there's a girl taken at Bondi called Nina [Gerritt], then another one at North Bondi – ah...

LW: - Steele...

JS: [Ashley Steele], he [lived] but then we haven't had any for so many years.

LW: 1928 was the last...

JS: Was it? Well I've been all over that bay in a canoe – I used to have a canoe and I've never ever seen a shark at Bondi.

LW: Tell us a bit more about the fishing, Jim.

JS: What?

LW: Tell us a bit more about the fishing, I remember hearing a story of Basso and his mates when they'd net the fish in and they'd bring them in upon the beach, and pull the nets in and then somebody had a flat bed truck. And they'd sell the fish... did they sell the fish locally... on the spot...?

JS: That's right That's right! And he give half, or I was always took a feed home, because I helped pull in, I was down there having my early morning swim and that, and I used to help him.

LW: It would have helped a lot during the depression, when ah, bringing in the fish when there wasn't much around, by way of food, or money, rather.

JS: Ah well, that was ah, you'd really talk about [] the depression.

KOS: I wanted to ask you a bit about that, about your memories of the great depression in this area because we don't have a lot of material about that at the library, just some little bits so I wondered what your memories were.

JS: Well, I was very fortunate that I had a job all the way through. I was with the department, ah, well, the public service put it that way. But, [one] of a great mate of mine from the surf club, Johnny Hannah? He got the sack and was out of work for three years, that's how it was. You could not, you'd go and, if you went to the hotel for a drink you'd buy one and get the next one for nothing, and the counter lunches they used to put on. Out of this world. Things were so cheap.

The fare from Bondi beach to, the tram fare, was fourpence, four pence, and ah, everything was, I know ah when I started work I was only getting fifteen shillings a week and I was working for 48hours a week for that. So you were getting about thruppence an hour. And ah, that was for [] but then the beach, the ah potatoes [] and I always remember those potatoes, seven pounds for sixpence. That's less than a cent a pound.

KOS: Do you remember the vegetable farm? The council ran a thing called the vegetable farm and they used to have meetings at the pavilion, and encourage people to grow vegetables locally and sell them?

JS: No I don't remember anything about that.

KOS: You don't remember the vegetable farm? There were a number of council programs that went on during the depression where they had short term work for people to do, and the council received money from the state government.

JS: Well that was due to [] in the depression

KOS: Do you remember any of that... [there's some talk that the walls were built then?]

JS: Well, I didn't know, I don't know so much about that. But that was the idea – if you were out of work you got what was known as the dole. Now if you was receiving the dole you had to go a labour exchange and report, be ready to take any job that you might...

KOS: Do you remember where the labour exchanges were, Jim?

JS: No, I don't, really. No...

KOS: And do you remember any of the council work schemes or those public works?

JS: Not at this particular council.

KOS: Not around here?

JS: Usually, a beach inspector was usually a good style of a bloke, usually a good physique and what not, and the girls always appreciate a little bit of physique don't they? (Laughter) and even to these days!

KOS: I'm not complaining!

JS: I think that they ah, had no difficulty in getting lady's company by any []. They ah, I was never a beach inspector but I was never short of girls. (laughter).

LW: Jim, let me, when I started in 1978, how you became a beach inspector was very much you came from a surf club...

JS: A club, that's right.

LW: You had to come from a surf club – you couldn't be a board rider.

JS: No...

LW: And I know that I didn't do any specific test as such but I became known to the chief beach inspector at the time...

JS: ...and a good swimmer...

LW: His name was George and I would be given a reference by someone in the club "Lawrie Williams can swim, he can paddle a board." And I would assume that that's the way it was...

JS: It was...

LW: ... over the many, many decades before. You just knew that this fellow was...

JS: Yes – that's right, he was a member of the surf club, he had his bronze, and he was a good swimmer and was available to the council.

LW: Alan Johnno Johnson once told me when I first started, he said; "You know you're lucky, because most of the beach inspectors had to have been an Australian champion, and when you look back over the names that you've just talked about, a lot of them were.

JS: They were.

LW: A lot of them were Australian champions.

JS: Well, the only ones that I know would be Aub Laidlaw, Aub, yes he won the belt championship.

LW: He won a belt championship

JS: And so did...

LW: Johnno was an Australian champion

JS: Yes well he was in ah, he was captain of Australia in the Royal Carnival...

LW: That's right, yeh... No, I was interested to know that, about... what certificates they had to have, because I recall...

JS: No, all you need to do was say he was a good member of the surf club, he had his bronze medallion and he would be capable of carrying out a rescue.

LW: Well, that it existed until I started working.

JS: Yes, then they got []

KOS: It seems very casual to get a council job like a local government job, doesn't it.

LW: Back then it did.

KOS: So, the head of your surf club would recommend you to the head of the beach inspectors or someone at council.

LW: Someone high up...

JS: Yes.

LW: ...Someone high up that knew the head beach inspector, talk to him.

KOS: So if a job was going, would the council start putting the word out in the clubs, that there was a beach inspector position available...

JS: There always seemed to be enough blokes to take the job on.

LW: It was all talk. You knew that so-and-so wasn't coming back next year, you found out that one or two jobs were going and then you'd do the work.

KOS: You put your hand up.

LW: Can I ask you a little bit about the weekenders. Wally Weekes...

JS: Ahhh, now you're talking!

LW: We know that Wally owned one or two of them...

JS: Wally Weekes.

LW: Wally Weekes...

JS: Yeh, well, he was our first president. Yes, well they were all located, it was the start of the surf club, through these weekenders. People, [chaps from] Paddo, and some, come and take one. But the one that I was entered into was known as Camp [Doreen], that went right up til, oh, in the end you had to be a member of the camp. There was 20 of us paid one shilling a week to Arthur Morgan, who was a real estate agent in Bondi.

Ces Mack was, [] used to run it really, but we had some wonderful times. We had a keg there, an 18 gallon keg every Sunday right throughout the war, and Ces Mack [] our [] you could, he could get anything in. He was very, ever hear of Ces?

LW: I've seen his picture.

JS: He was president of the Sydney branch of the Surf Life Saving Association. His [] He worked in the public works department, he was chief (whispering) – but he had the most plausible vocabulary – I used to reckon if he couldn't think of a word he'd make one up one the spot.

KOS: I think that's a good theory. I do that.

JS: What?

KOS: I do that...

JS: But he was marvelous. And we used to get our beer through [Dave Smith] at the hotel Bondi, and one day, he said "Look Mr Mack", he said "I can't continue giving you, but come in on Sunday [Wes Wigram you know his father] used to come [] and pick up the keg and take it. He said 'People are beginning to talk and it doesn't look good. But what I will do, I will give you the equivalent in bottled beer', "ok". So, that was 8 dozen bottles of beer... [] you couldn't, no-one had the... and it was my job, I had an Austin A40, to back up there early on Saturday morning, and they'd fill these 8 dozen... and I used to take it to where I lived in [] avenue. That was for the camp.

But that didn't satisfy Ces. He got on to Marcus Miller, who had [Briton's] brewery at the time, and he would [still] got a keg from them. He used to take down to [Alan] during the week, be delivered to a butcher shop, Jack Murphy's butcher shop during the week and on Saturday we'd take it up to the camp.

But we had some wonderful times there. Had no water on, no sewerage on, oh we had sewerage there but we had no water. One of our members, Jack Russell was a plumber so he connected the water. We had running water all the time. We [even] had the cheek to put ladies night on there and the women would have to walk the plank to get to the toilets. It was [really]...

JS: Did you have any electricity?

JS: What?

KOS: Was there electricity?

JS: Only from Jack []... Do you remember Jack? Jack lived next door, he used to run a line from his unit across [].

KOS: Whereabouts were the weekenders?

JS: This particular one was in Hasting Parade, ah, [] near the point.

KOS: And where were the other ones?

JS: They'd all gone by this time, there were lots of little ones all over the place but they ah, course, buildings starting down there and take over, with the exception of Doreen and that lasted for many, many years.

KOS: About, what years are you talking about, the camps?

JS: I'm talking about the latter years, during the war, they were going, and after the war for quite a while.

KOS: I think about the first dates we have I think are 1929 aren't they? Late 20's?

LW: Wally Weekes' ones... Wally was behind the pool, wasn't he? The pool that he made, that he built...

JS: That's right, It was where, that place used to be the [] Lido, was the Lido. When there was one there. Quite a few little humpies nevertheless, and of course, the surf clubs carted [] from a few fellows from Paddo. And, so they used to drink at the Charge of the Light Brigade hotel there and they decided to come out and [meet] him.

LW: So tell me, the pool, they say Wally Weekes had one or two weekenders, I don't know how many he had.

JS: I think he only had the one...

LW: Just the one? But they say...

JS: ...then he built his home over the... up there too...

LW: Ok, they say...

JS: He had... 2 sons who were good members, Ray Weekes and of course, Kenny Weekes, who was the mayor of Waverley. [] Do you hear of Kenny Weekes.

KOS: No, tell us the stories, Jim.

JS: What?

KOS: Tell us about Kenny Weekes.

JS: Well, Kenny Weekes was one of the most handsome blokes you'd strike...

KOS: Another one of these?

JS: Yes... and Kenny...

KOS: They [] down there...

JS: Kenny used to walk along – he was a bit of a boxer – and Kenny - his father was Wally Weekes. But the girls all went, 'Kenny Weekes'. You know I used to say, we used to walk along the beach all dressed up, I remember walking along with a girl one time, there were two of us. She's taking no notice of me, [] eventually I found she was looking for Wally – Kenny Weekes.

Kenny finished up being married 5 times, and he became mayor of Waverley, and he had a wonderful, he could remember names and no-one – nothing's so beautiful as hearing your own name, and that's why he won everyone. And I know that when he became mayor of [leading numerous], [do you know anyone who won't be going on holidays], he was very visible, a member of the [] he believe there's a council there. Well, when he got in he said I can give you, for all those who [helped,] I know I had a car at the time and I was picking up people for him and I was invited to Kinsella's, you know, the ah...

LW The funeral Parlour

JS: ...the funeral people, a beautiful home Mrs [] Kinsella in [] street and he evidently got under [] – she made her home available. It was Thanksgiving, and we went in, and as soon as we got there we got a middy – a small beer. And there was all the mob in from the [Clarrick] and the – and he was running games. I finished up losing about \$30 on the night. But that was really Kenny Weekes. He was ah, he was a real personality, and he worked with Nortons in the newspapers and he finished up going up to Evan's Head. He took on a newspaper business there and he died up there.

LW: Tell me this – the Wally Weekes pool, - they say that Wally and a group of his mates, North Bondi members, they used steel bars to create that pool.

JS: No, that was before my day.

LW: Was it?

JS: Yeh.

LW: Ok. Jim, in the days that you remember most, you know, in respect of Aub Laidlaw and Stan McDonald, what was the view of the general public about beach inspectors?

JS: Oh, well, they were, they were more or less, honoured. You know, they were chaps who, we, oh, well... that general people would say he's a beach inspector and it is a prestigious job.

To be there, apart from being a good athlete, you have to have a good personality and you could to be approachable like old Stan Macdonald we'd all go around there, the kids and he'd never knock you back. He'd talk to you [] in his very quiet, soft voice. He was wonderful.

LW: Some, they've been described as Sand Police and Bull Dogs and Killjoys.

JS: Well, that, that started later on. Even in the days of Alan Johnson...

LW: Probably when the surfboards arrived.

JS: ...when the surf boards, oh yeh, he was only carrying out his instructions for Waverley Municipal Council, and he used to say 'you can't do this' and they used to get very nasty, [] and he confiscate their boards on occasions too. I know my son's a board rider, David Spencer... he's ah, he's ah... he's in Vietnam at the moment.

LW: OK...

KOS: So the beach inspectors would do that, they had, that was a source of [comfort] for board riders and keeping them in the right part of the beach...

JS: Oh yes, that was their job, well they had to keep, they were allocated certain spots for board riders, another for surfers and it was their job to make certain – that's why [Alan] a hell a lot of people. But not me, well, I didn't have a board. But ah, if ever I go up north he's there to meet me, at the plane [or anything]. Do you know Garry's address?

LW: I've got it down at work...

JS: I can give it to you.

LW: Oh, thanks Jim. I think you may, someone gave it to me, the [Ives] gave it me.

JS: I [tell you Tom, you] was talking about...

LW: I can tell these days, that because of the type of people that use the beach, and the changing of the times, social values have changed, the beach inspectors or life guards

don't have the respect that they did in the days of the Stan Macdonalds and Aub Laidlaws...

JS: Well, no... no, well, god know, well, it was big [angle?]- I don't know...

KOS: Do you think they have more social problems to deal with too, on the beach,... as I was interested in what you said.. .that people didn't come [out]...

JS: Well, their job now is to look out for thieves, and ah people losing their... any little complaints that goes there...

LW: Ball games...

JS: That stuff.

KOS: And kind of a bit of social policing on the beach. One day I was there talking to Lawrie and the life guards took off because there was a hideous man up at North Bondi exposing himself, and that's like a criminal policing matter that you're expecting people to do without any power, to arrest anyone. It goes a lot further that just saving of lives... a safety []

JS: That would never have occurred to anyone in the older days. Everyone behaved themselves. Even had a period where there was topless down the north end well, not the southern end but right throughout the beach, but mostly on the sun end, that's when it became, that many people down there, it was standing room only, to see all the girls down there. Then I think the ah, campaign against sun cancers came, so they the girls decided to cover themselves up...

LW: They did...

JS: Though you did see the occasional one there where the breasts are exposed...

KOS: Jim, Brian Davidson's daughter, Cathy Mulcahy, she now lives in Melbourne, she contacted me...

JS: Who?

LW: Kathy, Brian Davidson's daughter...she now lives in Melbourne

JS: ...know her... . the [] girl...

KOS: She contacted me about something unrelated and I was doing some research for her. She wanted to know about Bondi Mary, the woman known as Bondi Mary...

JS: Yes, well...

KOS: ...I'm wondering if you remember her at all.

JS: Well, no, I didn't know her.

KOS: She was a vagrant woman, who lived around the beach. She was quite renowned and sometimes people got her mixed up with Bee Miles. Because she would be...

JS: Yeh, I remember Bee Miles of course. She []

KOS: There are some great Bondi stories with [] with Bee.

JS: Yes, she was funny... [funny girl]. She used to go in there [in the night], and [] killed the sharks

KOS: [In the night...] saying she was trying to kill the sharks down at Bondi Baths...

LW: I've got a quick question – two questions actually. There are pictures that show Davo helping, assisting the manager of the pavilion – just his name has slipped me, the manager's name, he was there for many, many years. Assisting him...

KOS: Not Jim Collins... or...

LW: No, Tim Collins! That's right... Tim Collins...

JS: Oh, yeh...

LW: Assisting Tim in handing out towels... and I wondered whether...

JS: He'd be doing it for money...

LW: Oh, it was for money?

JS: I don't know about...

LW: He had a beach inspectors uniform on...

JS: Yeh, he'd be getting a bit of a kick back...

LW: Oh, well, that answers that. Where did they live in those days? Did they live in the pavilion? There was a little side door, I remember when Johnno...

JS: No, I don't think... I don't think anyone lived there.

LW: I know that, I'm sorry, where the beach inspectors had a room.

JS: Yeh...

LW: I remember in the early 70's that room was around the side of... where the [] Guido's, Gelato House. You don't remember.?

JS: No... [] day on the beach was Bill Willis. Everyone liked Bill.

KOS: What do you remember about Bill? What do you remember about Bill?

JS: Well, think I told you about []... he was a country boy came down from Forbes, where he used to swim a lot then, and he was a great [rower] and he was, matter of fact he was going to, one time there he was waiting for sponsors to get him to swim the channel you know, the English channel, but it never eventuated. But he did the 12 laps of the beach there that time, and ah...

KOS: 12 laps - is that from the headland to the headland?

JS: No, from the icebergs to the rocks, about 300 yards out...

LW: The thimble – the old thimble – that was the diving board platform. Wasn't it?

JS: Just over, did 12 laps of that - it was very cold water, he was a big bloke, he could pick a keg a beer up over his head and cart it. He wouldn't roll it, he'd to pick up. You couldn't imagine a man fading away... but that's what he did...

LW: I've got a question, not really a question but Charles Christiansen; Charlie has often said to me that the person, the greatest beach inspector in terms of reading the water in his eyes....

JS: Aub.

LW: ...was Aub. No man read a surf better than...

JS: No, he'd go... he could read it, he'd knew, sometimes he would go down there, he'd said "would you go out for a swim and to see which way"... [] I used to go out, there's ah, quite a few of us would go out, and get out there and just see which way, trying to work out where all the rips were. No-one had a better idea of Bondi beach than Aubrey Laidlaw. Well, he'd been doing it all his life practically.

LW: 40 years...

JS: ...and funniest thing was his son wouldn't go near the water.

LW: We're trying to track down his son, John. He was a flight attendant, someone said.

JS: Was he? Well, I know he ah, for some reason or other, it broke's Aub's heart, he had a son there, and here's a beach inspector, the belt champion of Australia and his son

wouldn't come near the beach. He'd go to Campbell parade and he wouldn't go any further. Can't think of Aub's wife... I forget her name now. Memory's not so good you know.

LW: No, it's better than good.

KOS: Jim, your memory has been fantastic.

JS: That's right, I was trying to say, I was at North Bondi, I was only... in 1922. I was only 12, and I heard about, about Milton Coughlin, I said, that's when I said to myself when I grow up, I'm going to, I'm going to be a member of the surf club. I'm going to be a member of North Bondi... which I did...

LW: Longest serving, now.

JS: Yes, I'm the longest serving man.

Jim Spencer.