

Pyrmont Baths - Discovering a Lost Treasure

Talk to Pyrmont History Group by Trish Curotta - September 2013

I started my research on the Pyrmont Baths for the Pyrmont History Group's display at the Pyrmont Community Centre's Open Weekend in September 2013. I was interested in this landmark, having walked so many times past those rows of wooden piles that mark out the remains of the pool at the end of Pirrama Park.

There was a story to be told and apart from mention in the literature of the pool as a gathering place, and it being such a focus of the community, there was not a lot of detail about how it got going, and the events that took place there.

There is of course a beginning and there is an end. It all started in 1877 when the first baths were opened, and then in 1902, a grand rebuild, but alas in 1929 a planned demolition which did not eventuate until 1945.

Basically I'll be looking at the evolution of harbour baths generally, the impetus to regulate and why, the construction of the Pyrmont baths drawing comparisons with other baths, and the activities that took place there.

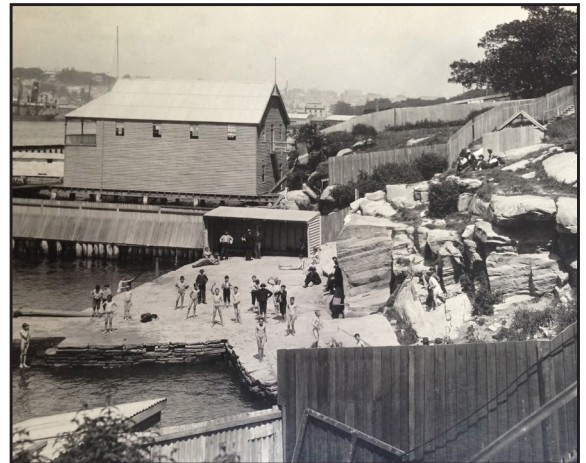
There appear to be three main reasons why harbour baths were built, and arguments and public lobbying for such facilities reached a head in the mid 1850's:-

1. To screen the nudity of swimmers (swimmers at beaches and harbour inlets habitually swam naked despite government's efforts to restrict swimming hours),
2. for improved hygiene, and then
3. of course a place for recreation – safe recreation with enclosures to protect from sharks.

The first public baths were in Woolloomooloo Bay. The swimming hole which became a public baths in 1825 was at the old Fig tree and was named the Fig Tree or Domain baths. The Domain was a popular bathing spot because of its fine white sand and position on the eastern side of the harbour.

Screening naked swimmers was definitely a consideration in enclosing and building high fences around the baths:

Leone Huntsman in her book *Sand in our Souls: The Beach in Australian History* talks about the building of baths being a reaction by authorities to screen the nudity of the colonists who insisted on bathing in the sea. She provides a wonderful photograph showing young boys naked within the enclosure of the Fig Tree Domain baths showing off at the photographer. This in spite of the high wooden fencing – a structural privacy feature used in all of the later baths including Pyrmont's.



The second consideration was that of hygiene:

From 1850s on there was concern amongst govt bodies about the sanitary state of Sydney where open sewers ran beside houses and emptied into the waterways.

A series of reports were published in the SMH in March 1851 documenting almost street by street the stench not only of industrial pollution but the poverty in evidence, the living conditions and filthy surroundings endured by so many.

Cholera had broken out in England and there was certainly some kind of alert to its happening out here.



Support from both residents and govt officials for public baths mention the subject of hygiene and cleanliness. In a letter to the editor of the SMH in Jan 1855 a resident of Surry Hills addressed the need to enclose the bathing area at Woolloomooloo at the Fig Tree to prevent shark attacks. However, his main argument was for the urgent need for public baths which city commissioners had apparently been talking about for years but about which nothing had been done. He included in his letter an article from a Manchester newspaper in England claiming that the establishment of baths and washhouses improved habits of cleanliness and thereby reduced outbreaks of cholera and other diseases, especially among the poor and working classes.

The **Municipalities Acts of 1858 and 1867** gave local councils the power to build baths and other recreational facilities.

A year earlier in May 1857 the City Council passed a resolution to establish Public Baths in the City of Sydney as a “**sanitary measure**”.

The City Engineer’s report specifically recommended “sea water baths.. Distributed at convenient distances around the most eligible positions where the water is purest and most frequently changed by the ebb and flow of the tides. Near the Fig Tree in Woolloomooloo Bay is the most favourable and in fact the only recommendable site for a bathing place to be constructed on the sea shore”. However he also suggested that floating baths near the sea shore could be constructed at Millers Point, Dawes Point, Fort Macquarie, Potts Point, Elizabeth Bay, Pyrmont and one especially for females in Woolloomooloo Bay near the present bathing place.

The Improvement Committee adopted his report. And In 1874 recommended the construction of baths at Pyrmont Point.



There is not to my knowledge any existing photograph or drawing of the first Pyrmont baths of 1877. This photo of the Woolloomooloo baths(also known as Corporation baths) in 1867 built by the Sydney Municipal Council would surely have been a blueprint for the Pyrmont baths built by the same Council ten years later.

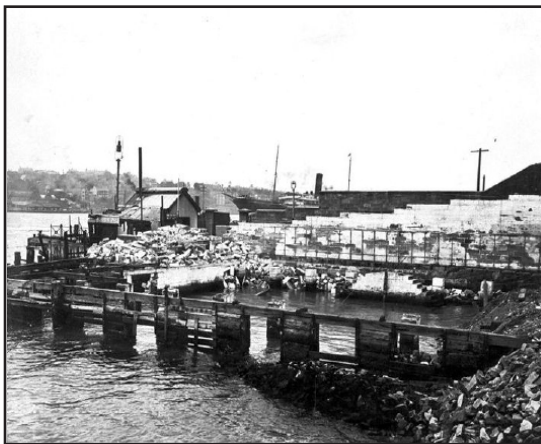
Council records do show that in 1872 it received a petition from the residents of Pyrmont for public baths to become available to them. There were 14 pages of signatures. The City engineer in 1870 had costed and surveyed the area and considered “the most suitable location is near Johnston’s Bay to the north of Harris St and a place known as Chownes (presumably near the Chownes shipyard). Tenders for lease of the pool

went out in November 1877 and Bylaws for regulations of the baths were drafted in December 1877.

There is an interesting background to the baths’ construction. Correspondence between City Council and the Depts of both Public Works and the Dept of Lands in 1877 reveal that the City Council had gone ahead without authority building the Pyrmont baths in a location which Council in response admitted to have “commenced inadvertently”. There is no indication given to how far the building had progressed. But we do know that the baths were relocated to the end of Point Street as Council was questioned by the Dept of Lands for constructing the baths in front of land which formed part of the Pyrmont Estate (owners being Sir William Macarthur and others) and could Council state what title if any the City Council had over the land.

It wasn’t until some time later in 1893 that the Dept of Lands in a letter to Council insisted that Council make an application for the special lease of crown lands below the high water mark on which the public baths, boatshed and jetty were erected in Johnston Bay. Council without delay forwarded their application with descriptions provided by the City Surveyor.

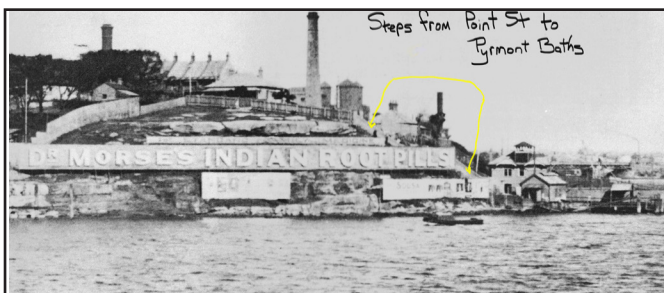
But at this stage the baths were well and truly up and running.



This photograph of the derelict Dawes Point baths built just before the Pyrmont baths shows a simple outline of the baths and again something that Pyrmont may have had from 1877 until 1902 and with a similar industrial backdrop.

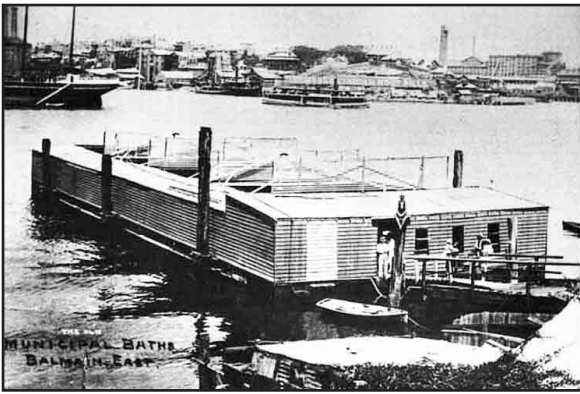
Baths were usually constructed of timber with changing facilities and enclosures extending out into the water providing safety from sharks. High fences were constructed of wood particularly in residential areas so that bathers could not be seen. Wharf building technology was used to construct the baths, using turpentine which was driven into the seabed or rock. Ironbark was also used for the platform areas.

In 1878 the City Architect recommended heightening of the fence at Pyrmont baths to remove the clear view of the bathers.



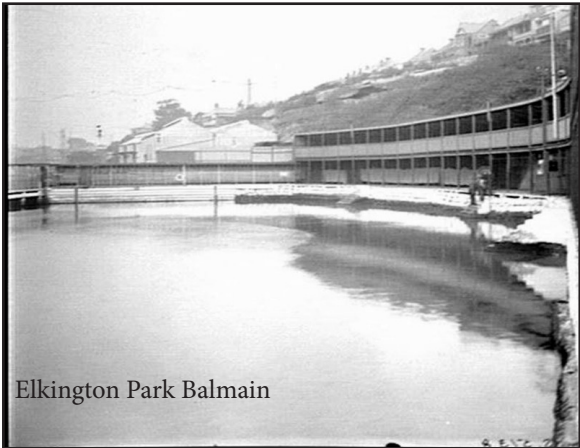
Left: A great shot of Pyrmont peninsula c.1900 with a dreadful ad. for Dr. Morse’s Indian Root Pills (a cure for constipation and pretty much everything else) and to the left shipyards, blacksmiths, boilermakers, up on the hill Pyrmont residences and to the right the Pyrmont pool ... and to the right of there is the CSR refinery.

In 1886 City engineers constructed a flight of what was described as “handsome stone steps erected so as to enable ladies and gentlemen to reach the Pyrmont baths from Point street”.



Left: Behind and to the right of these floating baths of Balmain East, Pymont Point peninsula is visible

Floating baths or 'natatoriums' were popular before 1900. An attraction of their design was that they could be sold and moved to another location if required. They were however unstable in bad weather. Lavender Bay and Farm Cove had floating baths owned and operated by the famous swimming dynasty, the Cavill family. They were made of timber slats, square in shape supported by iron tanks with an upper structure for dressing rooms. In 1909 the Farm Cove natatorium was pulled from its moorings in a fierce storm, blown across the harbour and smashed on rocks. Wharf design technology surpassed the floating baths design for stability and endurance.



Other pools at the time included Elkington Park in Balmain which boasted the first Swimming Club. However, none of the pools that existed up to 1900 were free of pollution. It was a definite deterrent for swimmers. In 1882 there was mention to Council of sewage emptying into the Pymont baths. Again in 1892 Alderman Harris reported to the Mayor the filthy condition of the water at Pymont baths and recommended repairs take place. It wasn't until the city's sewage was being pumped to Bondi by 1900 that funding was made available for the expansion and rebuilding of many of the harbourside baths.

However, despite all these obstacles, the 1877 Pymont Baths did have a Swimming Club which was formed in 1886 to teach and promote swimming. Ladies were permitted to use the pool 2-4 days of the week and Pymont Public School held its first carnival there in 1893.

East Sydney Swimming Club's baths were the Domain baths.

The Woolloomooloo Corporation baths or Fig tree baths were government run. Part of them became known as Farmer's baths as this was run by the lessee Mr. Farmer and there was a charge for use of the change rooms and jetty bathing.

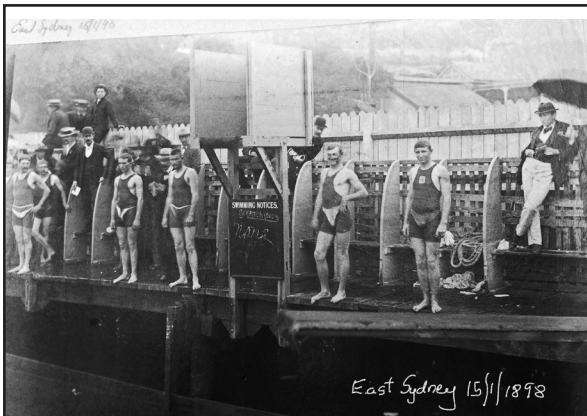
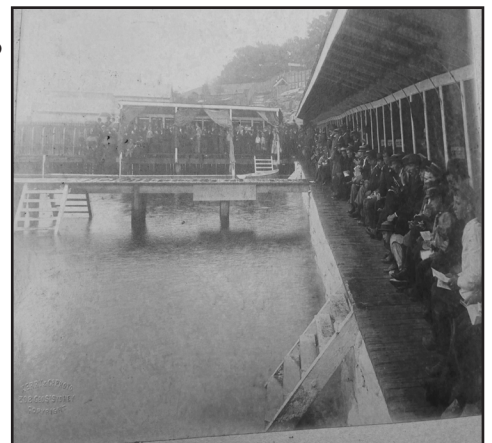
A Mr. Hellings who was later to become lessee of Pymont baths, also operated a Gentlemen's baths and a Ladies baths close by.

The following photos are the only pre 1900 pictorial record I could find of swimming races at harbour baths; they show the facilities, the spectators, the swimming attire, crazy shenanigans of swimmers all of which would have been on display at the earlier and later Pymont baths



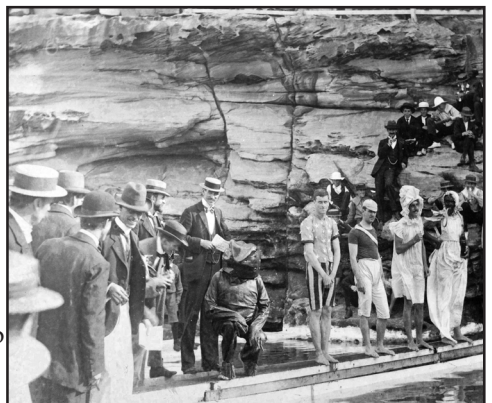
East Sydney Swimming Club 1898

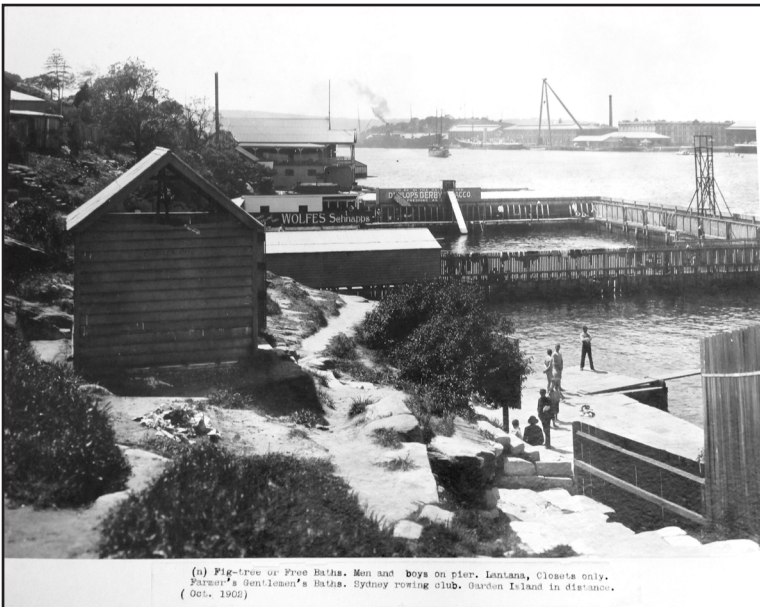
We are struck by the strange swimming costumes - this overgarment used by men in swimming races. Possibly some kind of support garment since the outfits would have been woollen and given to sag and stretch. Maybe this was where the idea for the speedo budgie smugglers came from.



Right: Fancy dress races seem to have been a tradition to end the swimming carnival.

Programmes of Pymont swimming carnivals (which will follow) list such Events as an interclub fancy costume race.

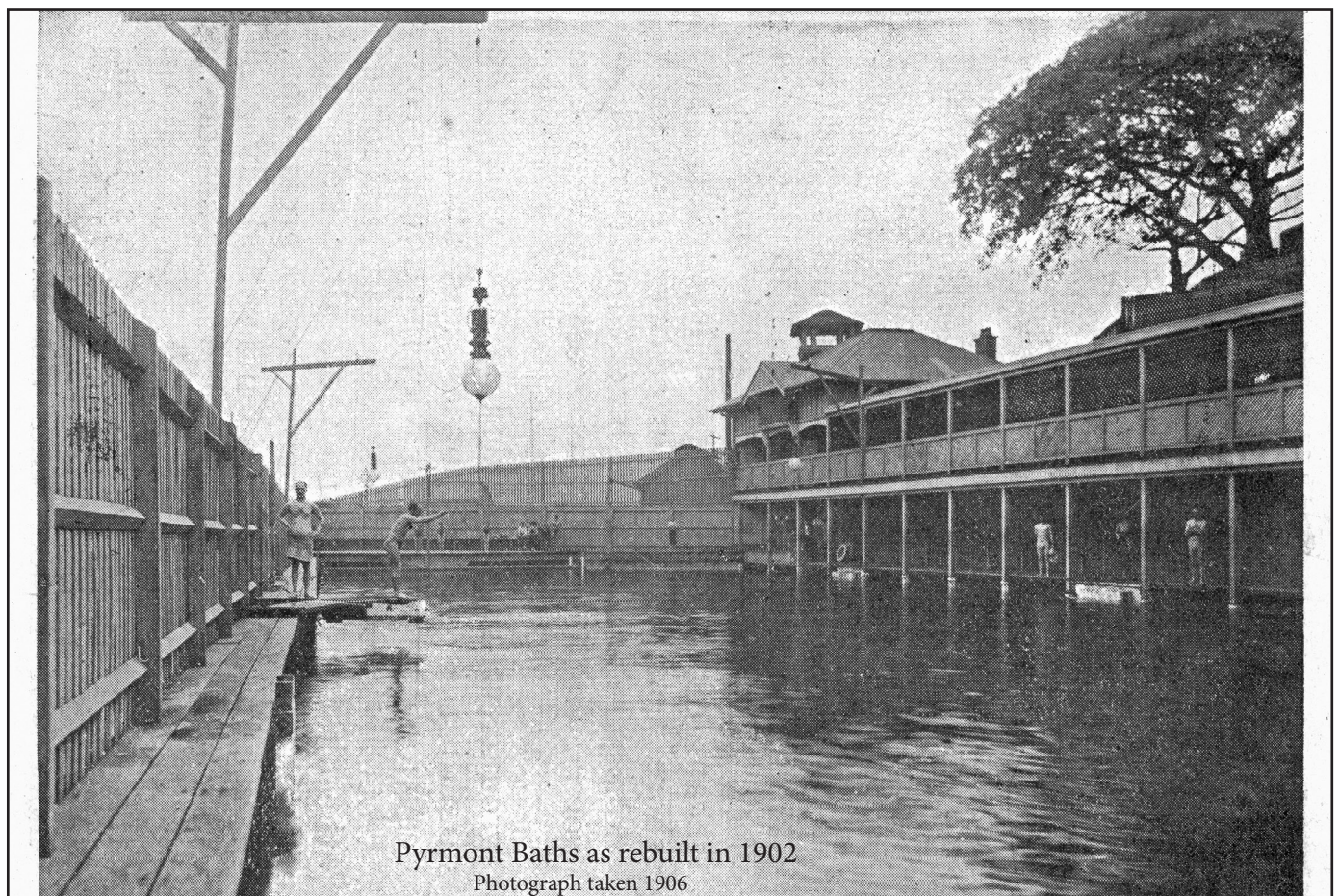




There were a number of photographs taken in 1902 of the Domain baths and their surroundings by government photographers.

At this stage the Pymont baths rebuild had taken place and consideration was being given to pulling down the Farmer's baths/ Figtree baths in Woolloomooloo and replacing with one grand pool similar to Pymont's.

Immediate foreground is the old fig tree free baths (enclosed) and next to that is the Farmer's baths where the swimming carnivals took place.



In 1902 the new Pymont baths were opened.

As reported in the Sydney Morning Herald of Sept 1902, the work took 8 months to complete and now "the (tidal) baths rank well up amongst the best of the port. They have been lengthened by between 50ft and 60ft, giving a swimming basin of 50 yards in length. The whole of the bottom has been well dredged and a considerable quantity of rock excavated. The depth of the water at the eastern end of the enclosure at high tide is now 12ft while at the western end a depth of 18ft has been reached. The shallowest depth at high tide alongside the baths is 6ft3in. The depths of water at various places are shown by neatly painted boards.

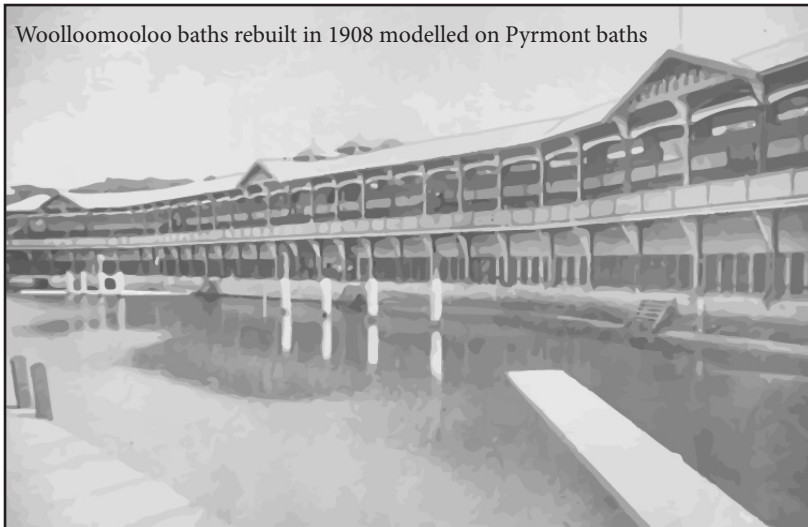
The shore building contained 85 dressing boxes, showers, club rooms, refreshment rooms and a gym. A promenade with about a 10ft side ran the full length of the baths forming a "splendid place for spectators to view swimming contests".

Cost of the baths was £2400

In 1904 the baths had electricity connected.

In 1910 sand is brought in from Middle Harbour and deposited in the baths.

Woolloomooloo baths rebuilt in 1908 modelled on Pymont baths



Since Pymont baths were so highly regarded, the rebuild of Woolloomooloo baths in 1908 was modelled on that of Pymont baths.

It was reported in the SMH on 24 September 1908, that at a meeting of the health committee of the City Council it was recommended that the bylaws in force for the government of the Pymont baths be adopted for the new Corporation Baths at Woolloomooloo. This record is worth looking at, as it reveals systems operating at Pymont baths: it gives for example the details of the price of admission 12 single adult tickets to cost 2s 6d and every person entering the baths on Sundays and holidays to pay 3d. Children must be admitted one afternoon a week free. Full bathing costumes were required at carnivals during continental or mixed bathing.

The age of boys bathing without bathing dresses however was reduced from 12 to 8 years. It is not clear when nude bathing for men and boys actually ceased but presumably it was when segregation of men and women ceased and what was known as continental bathing became the norm. Certainly as late as 1914 boys were bathing without costumes at Pymont baths.



This photo from Michael Matthews book *Pymont & Ultimo A History*, shows local Pymont bathers relaxing. Taken in 1900.

Mark Foy's descriptive Advertisement for their bathing costumes

QUESTION,
WHAT IS A PROPER
BATHING COSTUME?

ANSWER:
ASK
MARK FOY'S
TO SHOW YOU
**SILLS' NAVY ZEPHYR
BATHING COSTUMES.**

WE ARE SOLE AGENTS in the State for these, the most DECENT, GRACFUL, COMFORTABLE, and CONVENIENT NECK-TO-KNEE GARMENTS IN EXISTENCE.
STRONG, SUPPLE, and GIVING FREE ACTION TO LEGS and ARMS. APPROVED OF and OFFICIALLY RECOGNISED as the CORRECT GARMENT by the BRITISH AMATEUR SWIMMING ASSOCIATION.
PRICE, 2s. { THE CORRECT COSTUME.

The Heroes

- *1898: A little girl named McQueen
- *1902: Charles Kelly a lad from Caledonia Hotel
- *1902: Constable Lambert
- *1906: Harry Hellings Caretaker of the baths (assisted by Miss Amanda Rasmussen) Ladies night

In the Pymont baths' 69 year history many people were rescued. Being an ocean tidal pool the depths were irregular and dipped sharply down to 18 feet at one end. Both children and adults assisted in these rescues and many stories were reported in the media of the day. Some of the headlines of the day and their stories are below

A Narrow Escape (January 14, 1898) Albury Banner and Wodonga Express

Mr. Davis, the lessee of the Pymont Baths, a few days ago, found himself in a perilous predicament, and it would have gone hard with him had it not been for the presence of mind and pluck displayed by a little girl named M'Queen. Five children - three belonging to Mr. Saunders quarry-master, of Pymont - were in the baths. One while in the water was seized with a fainting fit. Its condition was noticed by Mr. Davis, who sprang in to the rescue. Mr. Davis caught hold of the child, and was about to convey it ashore, when the other children became panic stricken, and clutched the rescuer round the neck. four of them were clinging to him desperately; the other he held in his arms. He was some distance from the landing place and all he could do was to shout for help. It came in the shape of the girl M'Queen, who is aged about 12 and resides at the corner of Harris and Johns Streets. She promptly went to Mr. Davis' assistance, and relieved him of some of the frightened children, all of whom were safely got out of the water. The one taken ill soon recovered.

The Quarter's Accounts (October 2, 1902)The Sydney Morning Herald

Rescue from Drowning. - Shortly before 5 o'clock last night a boy named Ernest Dalton, aged 8 years, fell into the deep water at the Pymont baths. He was unable to swim, and immediately sank. A lad named Charles Kelly, who resides at the Caledonia Hotel, Pymont seeing the boy's danger, immediately went to the rescue. The drowning boy clutched his rescuer round the neck, and it was with considerable difficulty that Kelly was enabled to release his grip. He then towed the boy to the landing stage, where both were assisted out of the water in an exhausted condition. Kelly was loudly cheered by those in the baths for his plucky act.

Eight Hours' Day (October 7, 1902) The Sydney Morning Herald

Rescue from Drowning - Shortly before 11 o'clock yesterday morning a lad named Morris O'Connell fell into deep water at Pymont baths. He was unable to swim, and quickly sank. Constable Lambert, who was on duty in the vicinity, hearing the boy's cries immediately ran to the rescue. The boy had then disappeared, but the constable jumped into the water, and after diving several times was successful in bringing him to the surface. He was taken ashore, and after receiving medical treatment, was able to proceed to his home.

Nearly Drowned. Exciting Incident in Pymont Baths (January 6, 1906) Evening News

An exciting incident happened at Pymont Baths last night, and nearly resulted in the death of a young woman of 20, Miss Irene Brodie, who lives at 25 Albert street, Pymont. It was 'ladies' night' at the baths, and the attendance was large. Being unable to swim, Miss Brodie soon got into difficulties when she ventured beyond her depth. She had twice disappeared, when the attention of Mr. Harry Hellings, caretaker, was drawn to the distressed woman. Without hesitation he and Miss Amanda Rasmussen, residing at No.2 off Mills Street, Pymont, both fully dressed, plunged into the water and rescued her. Miss Brodie, who was unconscious when taken out of the water, was, with the assistance of Miss Abigail Ross, of 64 Union Street, Pymont, resuscitated and conveyed to her home.

The Casualties- deaths at the baths

- *1888: Arthur Carter aged 17 struck head on rock
- *1908: Donald Livingstone died spinal injury
- *1914: William Bruce 6 years “status lymphaticus”
- *1920: Mary Moynahan 11 years drowned
- *1921: Bernard Hunt aged 19 an apprentice, struck head on rocks

There were casualties and deaths at the baths. Some are listed here. Two stand out for their tragic circumstances and the effects on their Pymont families and friends: William Bruce and Mary Moynahan.

A BOY FRIGHTENED TO DEATH. (April 4, 1914). Barrier Miner(Broken Hill) CALLED FOR HIS MOTHER

On March 4, a small boy named William Bruce, aged 6 years and 2 months, died suddenly at the Pymont municipal baths as a result of fright received in being splashed.

An inquiry regarding his death was held this morning by the acting city coroner (Mr. J. W. Fletcher). Frederick Ferguson, aged 10 years, said that at about 5.10 p.m on the 4th inst, he was at Pymont baths with the deceased. He went into the water and left deceased standing at the foot of the steps. He saw some boys splashing him with water, some of which went in his face. When splashed deceased called out “Mamma,” and seemed very frightened, the water appearing to take his breath away. Witness then told the boys to stop, which they did. When he got to the top of the steps deceased could hardly walk, and had to be carried to his bunk. Charles Proudfoot, caretaker at the baths, said that when deceased was brought to him his face was discolored particularly about the lips and ears. He tried to revive him without success. He had seen no skylarking in the baths and, apparently deceased had not been in the water. The boy’s father, William Bruce, a wharf labourer, living at 39 Point-street, said that his son could not swim, and it was the first time he had had his clothes off in the baths. Dr. Palmer (Government medical officer) said that he had made an examination of the body. Deceased was not a robust lad, and any excitement or fright might have brought about his death. There were no signs of violence Death was due, in his opinion, to a disease, known as status lymphaticus A verdict of natural death from status lymphaticus was recorded.

FAMILY NOTICES (1915, March 4)The Sydney Morning Herald IN MEMORIAM

BRUCE.-In sad and loving remembrance of our dear son Willie, who died at Pymont Baths on March 4, 1914, aged 6 years and 2 months.

The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Do not ask us If we miss him,
There is such a vacant place; Can we e'er forget his footsteps
And his dear familiar face.
One year has passed, and still we miss him,
Words would fail our love to tell; But in heaven we hope to meet him,
For Jesus doeth all things well.
Far and oft our thoughts do wander
To the grave that's far away,
Where we laid our darling Willie
Just one year ago to-day.
Inserted by his sorrowing father and mother, 39 Point-street, Pymont.

SCHOOLGIRL DROWNED. (1920, February 9). Evening News

PYRMONT BATHS FATALITY City Coroner's Suggestions

The death of Mary Moynahan, pupil of St. Bede's Convent School Pyrmont at the Municipal Baths, Pyrmont, on February 5, was inquired into by the city coroner (Mr. Jamieson, S.M.), to day. The evidence was that about twenty five children went to the baths from the school under the supervision of three or four older girls. Mary Moynahan and two other little girls were playing 'ringy rosie' in the shallow water, and intent upon their game got into water over their heads. One of the children, managed to get her head above the water, screamed, and an older girl came to their assistance and brought two of them to the platform. It was not noticed until the children dressed to go home that Mary, was missing. The caretaker, assisted by several men, dived for the body, which was recovered at the deep end of the baths in 18 feet of water. A Sharp Dip Sergeant Butcher, of the Water Police, said that the dip from the shallow into the deep water at the Pyrmont baths was particularly sharp. Mr. Proudfoot, the caretaker of the baths, said that the schools usually sent teachers in charge of the children and when this was done no charge was made for admission. On this particular afternoon the St. Bede's children brought a letter from the school authorities asking that the children be admitted free under the supervision of three or four older girls who were with them. Witness, though he did not consider the older girls competent to look after the children, admitted them, as he believed he had not the authority to keep them out. He was in the office at the time of the fatality, and was not informed of the occurrence until about three-quarters of an hour later. The Coroner, in returning a verdict of accidental drowning commended the resource and courage of the girl, Elsie Wilson, who rescued the two children and said that undoubtedly had she known of the other girl's plight she would have saved her too. He suggested that in future it should be within the power of the caretakers of baths to refuse admission to schoolchildren unaccompanied by some responsible adult person charged with their supervision.

ALL ABOUT PEOPLE: Tittle Tattle. (February 12, 1920)

The Catholic Press

A sad drowning fatality occurred at the Pyrmont baths on Thursday afternoon last, when Mary Moynihan, aged 11 years, one of a party of school-children from the local Good Samaritan Convent, who were in attendance for a swimming lesson, by some unknown means got out of her depth. She was not missed for some time, and when her body was eventually discovered in about 18 feet of water she was found to be beyond all human aid. A touching incident at the funeral was the impressive expression of charity by her school-mates, who marched in the procession from her parents' home to the mortuary station, during which, and later at the graveside, they sang hymns, and recited the Rosary for the eternal repose of her soul. Most of these little children were visibly affected, and the scene was a most touching one. The deceased is a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Denis Moynihan, of Murray-street, in the parish of St. Bede's, Pyrmont.— R.I.P.

Pre 1900 COMPETITIVE SWIMMING

- *1846 - first recorded swimming races at Domain
- *1884 - Balmain Swimming Club was formed
- *1891 - the mens' swimming clubs supported the formation of the NSW Amateur Swimming Association
- *1899 - Pymont Swimming Club had its first annual carnival with 500 spectators

What began partly as therapy and hygiene with the establishment of the harbour baths, transitioned into sport and competitive swimming. Clubs were linked to specific baths.

In 1846, the first recorded swimming races in Australia were held at Robinson's Gentlemen's Baths at the Domain.

In 1884 Balmain Swimming Club was formed and is the oldest in NSW

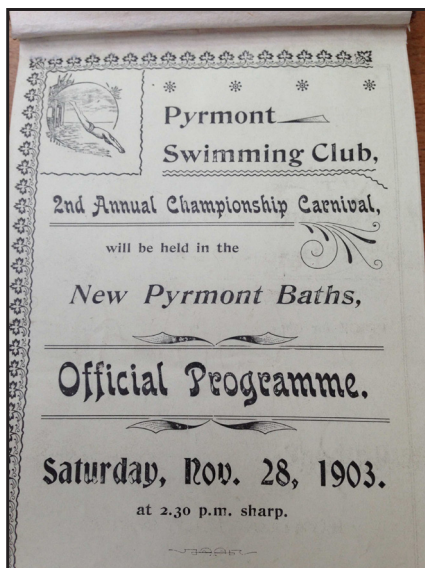
In 1891 the mens' swimming clubs from the pools supported the formation of the NSW Amateur Swimming Association.

In 1899 Pymont Swimming Club had its first annual carnival with 500 spectators.

In Pymont it was the rebuild in 1902 with greatly improved facilities that saw the inter-club carnivals take off. Although these carnivals were for men and schoolboys a Pymont Ladies Club was formed and had a handicap competition with trophies in 1906.

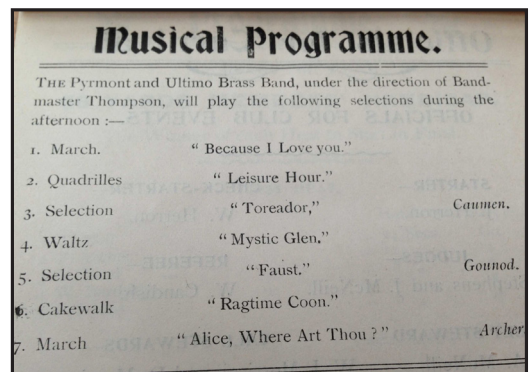
1906 also saw the Pymont Club's first annual championship under electric lighting.

In 1908 the water polo team was undefeated for two seasons and in 1912 2000 people turned up at the baths for the 440yd championship of NSW.

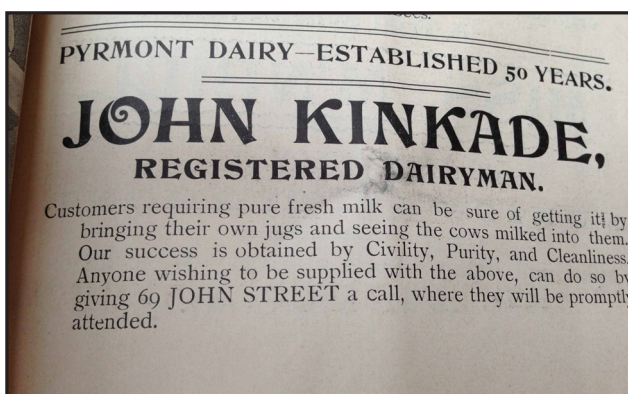


Left: Programme from the Swimming Carnival at Pymont Baths in Nov 1903. Part of the E.S. Marks collection at the Mitchell library. The printing of the programme has been paid for by advertising of local businesses and every page has ads.

It was the second annual carnival at the baths, the first having taken place earlier in February.



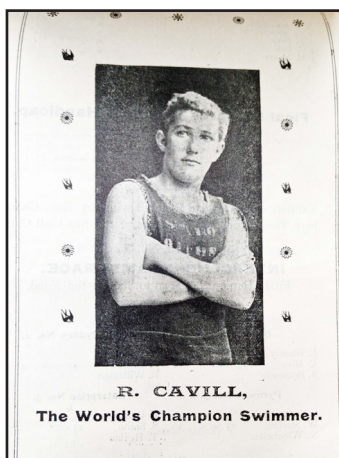
The Pymont Ultimo Brass Band played at the 1903 carnival. Their selections of songs reflected not only the mood of the times with the mixture of light opera and popular waltzes but also the racial prejudices of a bygone era in No. 6



An eye-catching advertisement for fresh milk from the local Dairyman. Bring along your own jug to put under the cow.

THE CHAMPIONS

Following its upgrade in 1902, the Pymont baths were considered the equal of any of the ocean pools on the harbour. Electric lighting, washing and amenities, a second storey of 42 bunks, plus a ten foot wide promenade running the full length of the baths for spectators. A perfect venue for swimming championships and for the training of future champions. Caretakers like Harry Hellings and Charles Proudfoot played an enormous role in coaching and running competitions, as did Jim Watkinson in his role as coach of the Pymont water polo team who were premiers for two seasons.



NOTICE.

The Committee reserve to themselves the right to refuse Admittance to the Carnival of any person without assigning a reason for so doing.

A. Cochrane R. Swinburne
Time.....Secs.

Event No. 6.

1-MILE CHAMPIONSHIP OF N.S.W.

PRESENT HOLDER R. CAVILL.

N.S.W. Record by Geo. Read, 24 minutes, 46 1/2 seconds, on 13th April, 1901. Standard time, 28 minutes 30 seconds.

R. CAVILL, Pymont S.C. M. JACKSON, Enterprise
R. BAKER, East Sydney. H. REGAN, North Sydney
J. CRAIG, Mori's Dock.

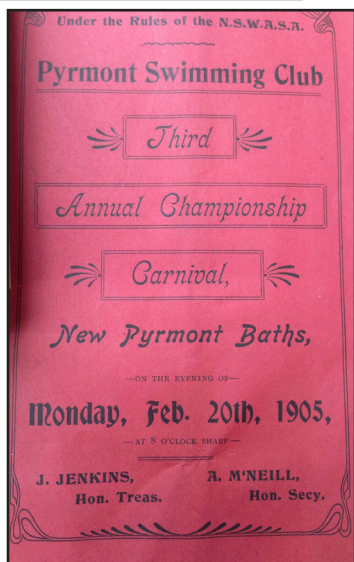
Time.....Min.....Secs.

Event No. 7

Dick Cavill was an Australian hero. He participated at the 1903 Pymont swimming carnival and convincingly won the 1 mile championship.

The Australian Town and Country Journal reported on the "immense attendance" at the carnival "including a large number of ladies". Dick Cavill was definitely a drawcard. The journal described his successful breaking of the world record "amidst tremendous cheering"

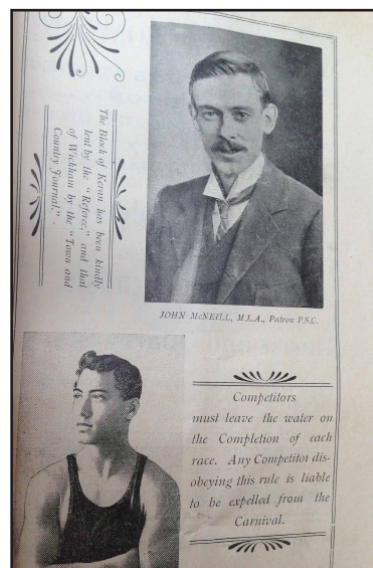
Cavill (Richmond) was part of a swimming dynasty: one of five brothers all champion swimmers and whose father Frederick narrowly failed to cross the English channel in 1877.



Programmes were full of details, listing names of officials. Even a costume steward was named.

Apart from the usual swimming events, water polo was also played and success in this interclub team sport was to prove one of Pymont's greatest achievements.

Alex Wickham was a swimmer from the Solomon Islands who was noted for his truncheon style of swimming which influenced swimmers like Dick Cavill and after some variations eventually became known as the Australian crawl or overarm style



The young champion Barney Kieran had broken world times in 200 yds and all distances in between to 1000yds.

He appeared at the Pymont carnival in 1905 as part of a fund raiser to send him to England.

Both Kieran and Cavill perfected the trudgen or overarm stroke that was to become known as the Australian crawl.

Tragically on his return from England in 1905 he died following an appendix operation.

S. LAW
5—A. WICKHAM East Sydney Sec
C. HEALY
T. TARTAKOVER

1..... 2..... Time.....

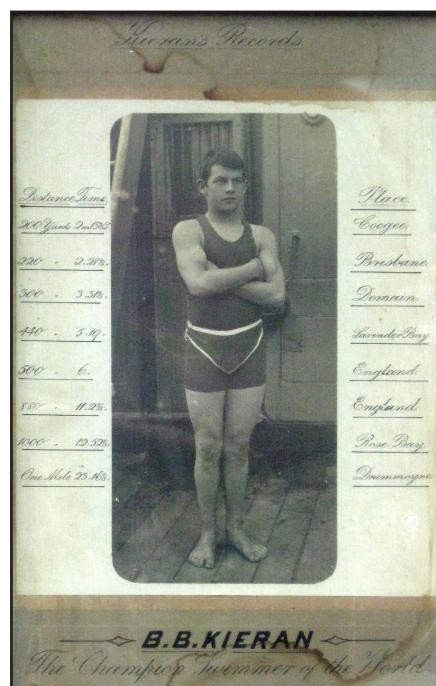
Sixth Event—Exhibition of Fancy Diving by the Sea Gull Club, led by Mr. Ken Chambers.

Seventh Event—Final Members' Handicap.

1..... 2..... Time.....

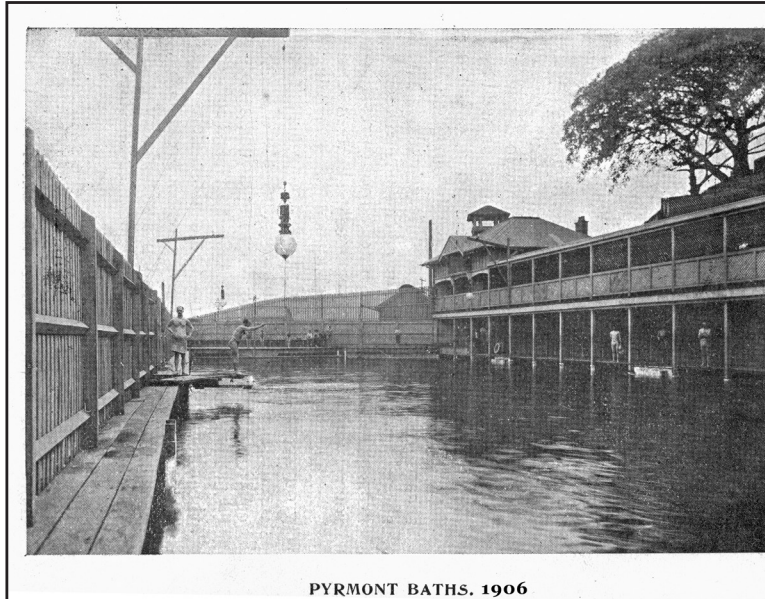
Eight Event—**440 Yards Championship of New South Wales. 8 Laps.**

B. KERAN (Soboran S.C.) H. BAKER (East Sydney).
R. R. CRAIG (Mori's Dock) L. Murray (North Sydney).
C. N. SMITH (Enterprise).





Other famous swimmers to take part in championships at Pymont baths were (left) Moss Christie and (right) Boy Charlton. In 1923 Christie in an exhibition swim at Pymont baths broke Barney Kieran's state record that had been established in 1905 for the 220 yards achieving this in 2 min 28 seconds.

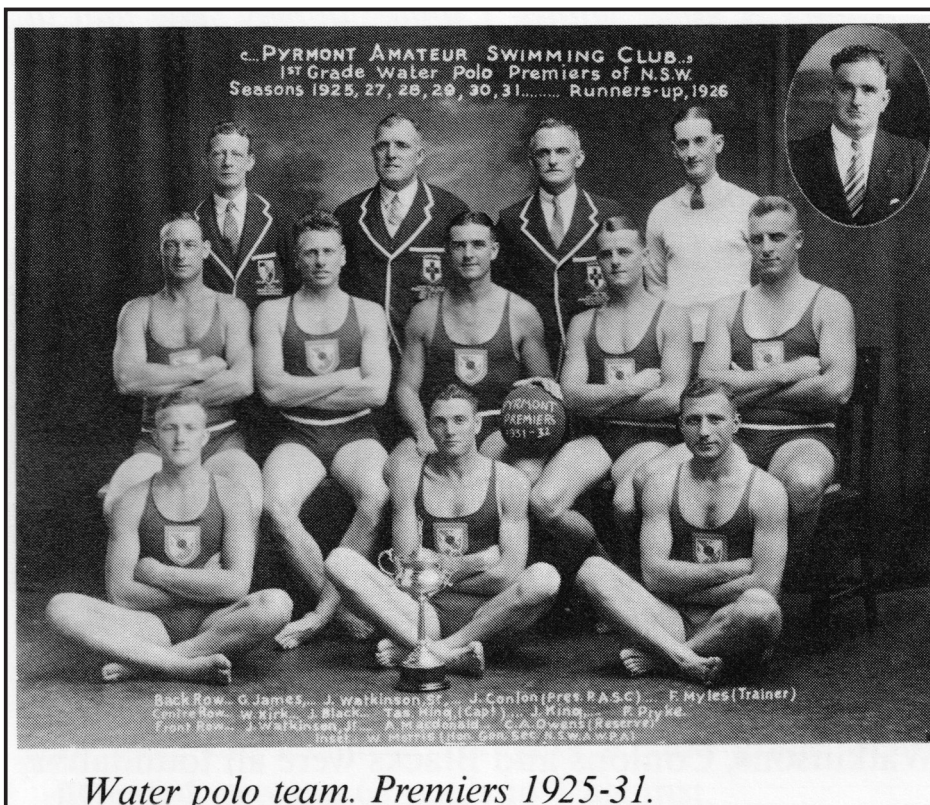


PYRMONT BATHS. 1906

So this was the pool that showcased the swimming greats and where world records were broken.

It was also the pool where hundreds of young schoolchildren were taught to swim. Schools held their swimming carnivals here. Family names such as the Watsons, O'Keefes, Kings, Blacks, Conlons, Proudfoots all had children who competed in these events and were champions of their day.

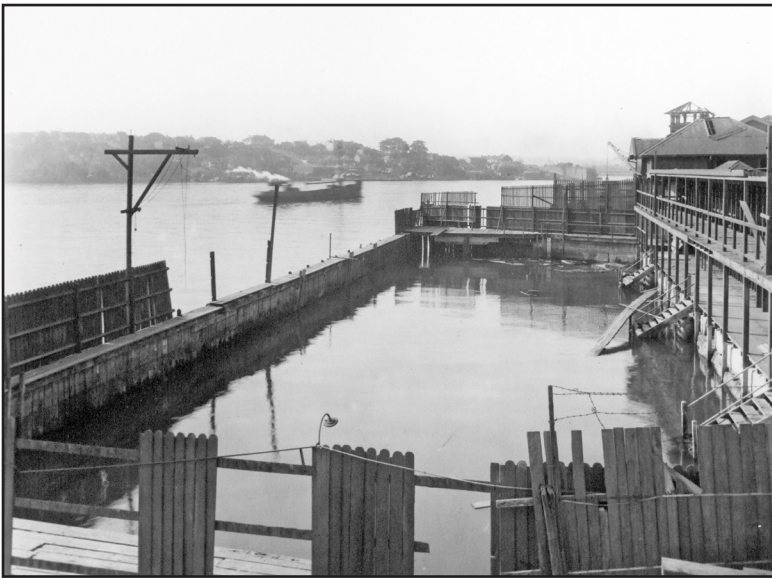
Recreational use of the pool was immense in terms of numbers. It has been estimated that based on the income statement of Pymont baths in 1923 the number of users per week about 1500 and number of users in a season around 25000



Left: Pymont Water Polo Team
Jim Watkinson back row second from left.

Jim Watkinson lived the whole of his married life in Bowman street and was a celebrated coach at the baths. He successfully coached the water polo teams to successive premierships and used his political contacts to fight tirelessly for the survival of the baths, ultimately to no avail.

Water polo team. Premiers 1925-31.



By 1929 the Baths were scheduled for demolition, citing the need to extend wharfage facilities. The Depression years delayed this enterprise.

Amazingly competitions were still held here until the 1930s but in 1939 the Swimming Club moved its headquarters to Drummoyne, operated there until 1954 and in 1955 the Club moved to the newly opened pool in Victoria Park.

Although the competitions went on, the recreational swimming for the Pyrmont community came to an end. A letter to Sydney Council from the Pyrmont Parents & Citizens Association in April 1928 deplored the imminent closure, and was echoed among Pyrmont residents expressing "it is all we have in the way of recreation". Despite Jim Watkinson's partial success in getting a stay of execution by lobbying the Sydney Harbour Trust, the baths were demolished in 1946.



It is a sorry fact that the most photos we have of the baths are those taken to show their dilapidated state and which were used as evidence that the pool needn't be pulled down.



The history of the Pyrmont baths from their opening in 1877 to their demolition in 1946 was a remarkable journey that saw their rise to prominence in the early 1900s as one of the finest ocean baths in Sydney, for coaching and showcasing champion swimmers, as well as providing an important meeting and recreational space for local residents. Amidst factories, warehouses, shipping wharves and daily pollution, the baths had given the community a place of its own.