

KEYWORD-HIT

80 years since the first reel was installed

By STEPHEN LAMBLE MAROOCHYDORE surf club, the oldest sporting and service club on the Sunshine Coast, celebrated its 80th anniversary last week, recalling the day on January 1, 1916, when a life saving reel was officially installed on the beach. In Queensland, only Southport, established in 1913, is older.

Maroochydore life member and leading Brisbane barrister Ralph Devlin wrote a history of the club for its 75th anniversary in 1991. In his detailed and entertaining account, Mr Devlin said the Royal Life Saving Society and Nambour Progress Association were instrumental in establishing the club after Frank Venning the man credited with founding the lifesaving movement in Australia and other officials visited Maroochydore Beach in 1915.

"The Nambour Chamber of Commerce arranged transport and accommodation (in tents) as well as paying the 10/6d (\$1.05) affiliation fee of the RLSS and Pounds Sterling 16 (\$32) for a reel and belt," Mr Devlin wrote. "As there was no road to Maroochydore in those days, the party travelled by cane train to Bli Bli, then by launch down Petrie Creek and the Maroochy River to Cotton Tree wharf.' When Frank Venning and the officials finally arrived at Maroochydore they found about 2000 people camped there. The only surf rescue apparatus was a copper life buoy and 300m of rope hanging in a tree with a sign "For Life Saving Only".

Venning - **who was also instrumental in later establishing Ithaca Royal Life Saving Club at Bulcock Beach, Caloundra** - became heavily involved personally in the fledgling Maroochydore club where he and Brisbane gymnasium instructor Joe Betts worked together to maintain patrols after many locals enlisted during World War I.

At the time Venning lived on a sugar cane farm near Coolum Creek and Betts bought land at Cotton Tree. Venning is quoted in Devlin's book as saying of this wartime period: "It was hard going for a year or two, but eventually the Shire Council provided a tent for our use." The tent was later replaced by a shed, about 3m by 6m, which housed the reel and other gear. A two-storey weatherboard clubhouse building was erected in 1925 on the present site. The Queensland branch of the Australian Surf Life Saving Association was formed in 1930 and clubs including Maroochydore began competing outside their immediate areas. What was to become Maroochydore's long tradition of outstanding competitive successes, was given further impetus during the 1930s when a road was built linking Nambour and Maroochydore via Kunda Park. When it flooded there was an alternative access along Mons Road and over Buderim. During World War II, Maroochydore scaled down its operations after about 25 members enlisted for active service.

The war over, the clubhouse was extended in the 1947/48 season with the addition of a gear shed and first aid room. The same season also saw the club take possession of its first surf boat. In 1950 the first telephone was installed. A new brick building, which forms the basis of the current clubhouse, was finished in late 1956. Extensions were carried out in 1963-66 and again in 1974 _ the year a combination of floods and high tides caused seawater to flow through the ground floor and into the street behind. In 1978 a Nippers' room was added _ and a function room in 1980. The club hosted the Australian titles over three days in 1980. Total attendance exceed 45,000 people.

Today the club has around 180 active patrol members, 200 Nippers and about 4000 social members. Competitively, it is one of the top four clubs in Australia.

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