THE FIRST WAVE

The Making of a Beach Culture in Sydney, 1810-1920

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the creation of a beach culture in Sydney between 1810 and 1920. It argues that the roots of ‘modern’ Australian beach culture, which existed in Sydney by 1920, lay in nineteenth century uses of, and attitudes towards, Sydney’s ocean beaches. The factors which influenced the development of this culture were diverse and complex. Local influences such as geography, climate and the geological formation of Sydney’s coast enabled a culture to emerge in which local day-trippers were the most prominent beach users, and sun, sand and surf primarily occupied their attention. Imported concepts in which the coast was understood to be inherently healthy, and a suitable subject of Romantic appreciation, also underpinned attitudes towards Sydney beaches. These were fundamental to the primacy of nature in Sydney’s beach culture. The various levels of government were also influential to the shaping of a beach culture in Sydney. The New South Wales government determined whether certain beaches would be private or public spaces, controlled the ways in which these spaces were used, and provided the means for residents of Sydney to reach the coast. Coastal councils contributed to the debates surrounding the governance of the beaches, weighing the demand for public coastal spaces from within their municipalities against the potential revenue which could be gained through competing uses of these beaches. But by far the most influential group in the creation of a beach culture in Sydney were the users of the beach themselves. They relentlessly lobbied the local and New South Wales governments, demanding unrestricted access to the beaches not as a privilege but as a ‘right’. They chose to entertain themselves on the free natural spaces of the beach rather than in the hotels and amusement structures provided by entrepreneurs, and later challenged the very presence of these structures on or near the beaches as anathema to the purpose of the beaches. And in the early twentieth century, they successfully contested the moral codes restricting the display of the body on the beach, insisting surf and sun bathing were healthy, natural ways of using the beach, and mobilising themselves to make the former safe. In these ways, beachgoers played a decisive role in the making of a beach culture in Sydney.
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It is a neat coincidence that I submit this thesis in 2007, the centenary of surf lifesaving in Australia, and the Year of the Surf Lifesaver. The foundation of surf lifesaving clubs in Sydney in 1907 had an immense impact on the local, and later Australian, beach cultures. The centenary of the movement has also created great opportunities for me both on a personal level, and in the development of this thesis. I would like to thank Surf Life Saving Australia for taking the brave and somewhat rare step of employing a historian, and keeping me on board for over three years. Surf Life Saving Australia is not just a great location with friendly people, but a place where I was able to develop and sharpen a range of skills. Here, I saw first hand the importance of history to everyday Australians – the passion which could be aroused by the question of which was the first surf life saving club, and the emotion in discovering the role a father, grandfather, or even great grandfather played in the development of a proud Australian movement. Under the guidance of Sean O’Connell, I also learnt to negotiate the complex politics of community history.

Working in an office at Bondi Beach, it was easy to dismiss my university commitments. I was fortunate, however, to be constantly reminded about the importance of my PhD by a number of historians I met through SLSA, and in particular Sean Brawley, Leone Huntsman, and Doug Booth.

And Brano. What can I say but thankyou – for your companionship, your support and your patience as you travelled the journey with me. I look forward to enjoying a hedonistic summer day at the beach without being distracted by thesis musings. And I bet you do too.
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Introduction

The Australian novelist Robert Drewe, author of *The Bodysurfers* and *The Drowner*, and editor of *The Picador Book of the Beach*, once described himself as ‘someone who prefers to live where I can catch a glimpse of the sea at least in my mind’s eye’. His long relationship with the coast began when he moved from Melbourne to Perth at age six, when, he recalls, he instantly envied the ‘sand people’, whose appearances had been ‘rearranged’ by the sun and wind, giving them ‘darker skins, red eyes, raw noses and permanent deep cracks in their bottom lips’. In cherishing his memories of a childhood on the beach, Drewe is not alone. He shares his personal connection to the coast with many other Australians, most of whom live along Australia’s coastal fringe. He therefore considers Australians to be ‘the world’s great beachgoers’.

Other cultural commentators are similarly fond of hyperbole: Philip Drew considers the beach to be ‘the heartbeat of the nation’, while Geoffrey Dutton wrote that the beach is the nearest to ‘sacred sites or temples’ that white Australians have.

This thesis seeks not to replicate such hyperbole but to explore the origins of the Australian connection with the beach. It argues that ‘modern Australian beach culture’ emerged out of a set of practices which were in many ways distinct to Sydney, and that Sydney’s beach culture was in turn significant in the creation of a world beach culture. All the most recognisable features which characterise modern beach culture – not only in Australia but internationally – could be seen on Sydney’s beaches by 1920. And at the start of the twenty-first century, it is two Sydney beaches, Bondi and Manly, which have a claim to being internationally accepted archetypes of a certain kind of beach.

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There are eight distinct characteristics which are shared by the 'modern' urban beach and Sydney’s early beach culture. First, beachgoers predominantly consisted of local residents, who enjoyed the beach after work and on weekends, rather than holidaymakers. Second, the hedonistic recreation of these beachgoers was understood to be the primary function of the beaches, rather than any therapeutic purpose, although the third factor was that this hedonistic recreation was underpinned by a belief in the healthiness of the beach. Fourth, Sydney’s beach culture was primarily enacted in summer, and by 1910 had moved from being centred on the dry, sheltered spaces of the beach to the surf and sun. Fifth, the recreation of beachgoers in the surf was guarded by the presence of surf lifesavers. Sixth, by 1910, the tan had been established as the symbol of a regular beachgoer, proudly displayed by surf lifesavers, surf bathers and sun bathers alike. Seventh, the beach was appreciated as a natural space despite the gradual encroachment of urban development onto the edges of the beach. And finally – and perhaps most importantly – Sydney’s beaches were free. They cost nothing to enter, and access was unrestricted. This free access to the beaches was considered to be a fundamental Australian ‘right’.

This beach culture was itself the product of a meshing of a variety of influences. Some of its traits, such as the primacy of sun and surf, the dominance of day-trippers and the establishment of the ‘right’ to a free beach, had emerged through local circumstance; some, such as the discourses of romanticism and health which underpinned articulations of the beach space, had been imported from elsewhere, most notably Great Britain and America. Other characteristics had developed concurrently with similar developments overseas, and we see the sport of surf bathing, and the emphasis on hedonistic recreation as the primary purpose of the beach, emerging around the same time on other international beaches. However the particular blend of these characteristics on Sydney beaches distinguished its beach culture of the early twentieth century from that of other coastal strips around the world.

The international beach

The strong link between the practices of Sydney’s beachgoers, and those of their British cousins, forms a common thread of this thesis. The roots of British seaside culture pre-dated the arrival of the First Fleet on Australian shores, evolving from the
practices of health seeking aristocracy and gentry who began to visit the coast in the mid-eighteenth century. Within a century, the British coast had been discovered by the middle classes, for whom it became a popular holiday destination, and was also beginning to attract urban working-classes. For these holiday makers, bathing tended to play only a minor role; it was initially engaged in for therapeutic rather than recreational reasons. Recreation – as at Sydney’s beaches in the nineteenth century – was largely confined to the land. In the Victorian period, the primary site of middle class seaside culture moved from the formal entertainment of Assembly rooms outdoors to the beach, promenade and pier, where bathing was enjoyed rather than endured, and informal entertainment was provided.

The history of the British seaside has been the subject of numerous historical investigations, through which it has been explored in detail, and its complexities, contradictions and distinctive characteristics have been revealed, questioned and debated. John Walton has made the most substantial single contribution to British seaside history, exploring the factors which enabled the development of this culture, with a particular emphasis on the predominantly working-class resort of Blackpool. This thesis draws on these histories to establish a point of comparison between Britain’s seaside culture, and that which was emerging in Sydney during the

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nineteenth century. Such a comparative analysis provides a better understanding of the ways in which Sydney's beach culture replicated British customs than what has so far been established, and more importantly, the points at which it diverged from what may have been the expected norm.

Alain Corbin's *The Lure of the Sea* broadened the perspective of these British seaside histories, considering the European connection to the sea and beach, in addition to that of Britain.\(^{11}\) That a significant portion of his book is dedicated to British customs reminds us, however, of the dominance of their seaside culture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In particular, the Mediterranean owed its development in this period largely to British tourists seeking therapeutic or other respite in the sea.\(^{12}\) Because these leisured classes had to travel in order to spend time at the coast, a culture emerged along the Mediterranean coast which centred on the holiday-maker—people who spent weeks, if not months, by the sea each summer. Such a culture, like the centrality of holidays to British domestic seaside culture, sits in stark contrast to the day-tripper dominated beaches of Sydney.

Sydney's beaches, like New York's Coney Island, are situated on the outskirts of the city and have therefore been predominantly used by day-trippers since means of transport were developed in the mid-nineteenth century. They are historically distinct from similarly situated beaches at Miami, Los Angeles, Rio de Janeiro and Honolulu, which were still in the process of developing modern urban beach cultures in 1920. The easy accessibility of Sydney's coast from the city, and the shorter Australian working hours,\(^{13}\) meant there has been a longer tradition of mingling of the classes at Sydney beaches than at many beaches on the British and Continental coasts, and even those of Victoria which also relied heavily on long term holiday makers from

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Melbourne during the nineteenth century. Whether they were working or middle class, or had their own means of transport, Sydney day-trippers tended to use the beaches in much the same ways. In Britain and the Continent, and even North America, by contrast, there had been a greater distinction between the uses of the beach by coastal inhabitants, and the behaviours of visiting gentry. Corbin noted that there were some occasions where ‘different models coexist together’, but ultimately the ‘popular bathing’ of working class coastal villagers differed inherently from the morally prescribed practices of the visitors. And when working-class holiday makers reached the coast in the Victorian era, they tended to be separated from their ‘betters’ both within and between resorts.

Sydney’s beaches were further distinct in that their close proximity to the city meant that Sydney’s coast was not lined with luxurious hotels or guesthouses for summer visitors, like those on the New Jersey coast in America, Blackpool and Brighton in England, and the French and Italian Rivieras. Fred Inglis described the ‘dreamers on the quayside’ in the Mediterranean, who ‘lean over the iron railing, eyes on the middle distance, watching the waves tranquilly gather, swell, curve and break with a thud on the stone below, wetting the spectator with a slight, pleasant spray’. He suggested that ‘such interludes are the stuff of holidays.’ In Sydney, however, they were the ‘stuff’ of day-trips, and became, for so many residents, part of the everyday – or at least every weekend.

In their close proximity to the city, and the mingling of the classes, Sydney’s beaches perhaps shared more with Coney Island than any other prominent seaside resorts of

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15 Corbin, The Lure of the Sea, pp.82-3.
17 By 1900, for example, Atlantic City had four hundred hotels which accommodated around 50,000 visitors each summer. Lena Lencek and Gideon Bosker, The Beach: The History of Paradise on Earth (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), pp.115, 147; Blume, Cote d’Azur, p.38; Debbie Ann Doyle, “The Salt Water Washes Away all Impropriety”: Mass Culture and the Middle-Class Body on the Beach in Turn-of-the-Century Atlantic City’ in Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia and Bonj Szczypiel (editors), Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating Morality and Space (London: Routledge, 2005), p.96.
18 Inglis, The Delicious History of the Holiday, pp.121-122.
the period. And there were other notable points of comparison between the two locations. In particular, many of the entrepreneurial enterprises which were attempted at Sydney's beaches directly replicated existing ways of using the beach in Coney Island, and to a lesser extent Blackpool. Gary Cross and John Walton's *The Playful Crowd* examined these 'pleasure places' in an international context; their analysis helps to explain why entrepreneurs were so keen to construct such sites in Sydney. Yet in Sydney they failed to take hold. The culture was different: at Coney Island and Blackpool, vast numbers of working and middle class people sought diversion from New York and the Lancashire region in idle amusement, and were willing to pay for their fun; Sydney beachgoers, in contrast, seemed to choose a more relaxed mode of recreation which could be enjoyed on the natural beach. Climate was an important factor in this; it was more pleasant for more of the time to be at the beach – and in the water – in Sydney. By the opening decade of the twentieth century, Sydney beachgoers were also passionately opposed to any attempted appropriation of the foreshores by seaside entrepreneurs.

It is this belief that residents of Sydney had a 'right' to freely access the beach which enabled Sydney's beach culture to emerge the way it did, and which underpinned its international significance. It was not until 1923 that Coney Island’s foreshores were made accessible to all visitors, and by then a beach culture already existed in Sydney which was fundamentally driven by the desires of beachgoers, rather than the interests of private stakeholders. The hedonistic pleasures of the sun and surf which characterised this beach culture before 1920 only came to be internationally recognisable symbols of the beach during the interwar period.

Despite the notable contribution of Sydney's beach history to international beach cultures which were still emerging or yet to emerge by 1920, Sydney has been completely overlooked in Lena Lencek and Gideon Bosker’s *The Beach.* While

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20 Cross and Walton, *The Playful Crowd*.


22 Lencek and Bosker, *The Beach*.
Lencek and Bosker purport to examine the history of all beaches, Richard White has shown that they favoured private beach resorts to any other type of Australian beach. But just as international beach historians have neglected to consider the contribution of Sydney’s beach history, so too, have Australian beach historians struggled to highlight the importance of Sydney’s and Australia’s beach culture on the world stage.

The Australian beach

The celebration of the beach as a national space, and of the surf lifesaver as a national icon, has been explored by Australian cultural historians who focused on the inter-war period as the great formative era of Australia’s beach history. However the origins of Australian beach culture prior to the twentieth century have been acutely neglected. This study covers the period from 1810, when the first of Sydney’s ocean beaches at Bondi and Manly were included in land parcels granted to European settlers, to 1920, by which time beaches and surf culture were recognised as central to the Sydney ‘way of life’ — although we can see all the elements of ‘modern’ beach culture were present prior to the First World War. According to the established historiography of the Australian beach, there are two, clearly distinguishable periods in this timeframe. Firstly, the nineteenth century, during most of which daylight surf bathing was banned, and the dominant beach culture was therefore enacted out of the water. Secondly, from 1902 onwards, when restrictions against daylight bathing were lifted, creating a beach culture which centred on activities in the surf. Implicit within most distinctions between the two periods is an assumption that nineteenth century Australian beach culture was more English, or less ‘Australian’, than its twentieth century counterpart.

The privileging of the latter period over the former—by virtue of its close relationship to modern beach culture and Australianness—has led Douglas Booth to suggest that 'government sanctioning of daylight bathing marks the official birth of Australian beach culture', an origin myth echoed by other beach historians and social commentators. This thesis questions such assumptions. While most histories of the Australian and Sydney beach have highlighted the differences between these two apparently conflicting periods, it traces the continuities which existed. It recognises that the behaviour of beachgoers did change over the period under investigation, but argues that the meanings which were ascribed to the beach were characterised as much by their consistencies as by any significant shifts. That is, the beach culture of the twentieth century which has historically and historiographically attracted attention because of its 'modern' and 'Australian' nature, was firmly rooted in nineteenth century understandings of the beach space. Further, the teleological tendency to simplify the nineteenth century beach into a series of progressions leading to the onset of the surf culture which Australians now enjoy not only elevates the twentieth century beach culture, but denies the complexity of that of the nineteenth century. Because much of Australia's imagined collective beach culture, and to a significant extent the world's, largely revolves around images and experiences which first appeared in Sydney, an in-depth analysis of the early history of Sydney's beaches illuminates the history of the Australian beach more generally. It helps us to understand how and why Australians use the beach, and think about the beach, in the ways they do.

When I commenced this thesis, academic historical inquiry into the origins of Australian beach culture was limited to a number of articles published in the 1990s by Douglas Booth, Edwin Jaggard and Kay Saunders, which focused particularly on
various aspects of surf lifesaving. 26 2001 saw the publication of the first books to challenge existing understandings of Australia’s beach history. In *Australian Beach Cultures*, Douglas Booth focused on three key groups – surfers, surf lifesavers and surf bathers – to try and understand the history of the Australian beach. 27 Leone Huntsman’s *Sand in our Souls*, by contrast, examined literature, art, and forms of popular culture in an attempt to understand and explain the Australian fascination with the beach. 28 Essentially though, in both *Sand in our Souls* and *Australian Beach Cultures*, the nineteenth century Australian beach served only to contextualise the main theses presented, rather than being explored in its own right. While this does not detract from what was achieved in these books – that is, very thorough analyses of various aspects of the ‘modern’ beach culture of the twentieth century – it nonetheless leaves a substantial and crucial gap in the history of early white beach cultures of Australia. By examining the nineteenth and early twentieth century beach cultures of Sydney in depth, this thesis seeks to re-think our understanding of the Australian beach.

Before Booth and Huntsman established the Australian beach as a subject of scholarly interest, early histories were more popular. While they did not neglect the nineteenth century altogether, these earlier histories of the Australian beach also focused almost entirely on the sun and surf, beach fashions and surf lifesavers of the twentieth century, without exploring the origins of this culture in the nineteenth century. Partly this results from a lack of easily identifiable sources about the beach, and is also symptomatic of the popular nature of these early beach histories. Geoffrey Dutton preceded Huntsman in analysing the Australian beach through art and literature,


27 Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures*, p.xxiii.

28 Huntsman, *Sand in our Souls*.
seeking to explain the ways this ‘legend of pleasure’ was ‘created from reality’.

He offered far more insight into the history of Australians’ relationship with the beach than the first Australian popular beach histories, written by C Bede Maxwell and Lana Wells, which relied heavily on anecdotal evidence. Maxwell’s reliability was further brought into question by surf lifesaving historian Sean Brawley, who refuted a number of the facts presented in her book, such as the rescue of the famous aviator Charles Kingsford Smith by an early belt and reel, and the date of the formation of Bondi Surf Bathers Life Saving Club (SBLSC).

The history of surf lifesaving in Australia has also been the subject of extensive historical enquiry since the mid-1950s. Histories of individual surf lifesaving clubs have proliferated, but like Maxwell, they do little more than skim the surface of Australian beach history, reiterating rather than challenging well-worn myths. This focus on an institution of the beach to some extent takes historical attention away from the popular use of the beach; it is also a consequence of the relatively proliferate and easily accessible records created by the surf life saving clubs and governing body.

Sean Brawley’s histories of Palm Beach, Collaroy and Bondi Surf Life Saving Clubs provide a welcome exception to this standard. Between the Flags, a collaborative history of Australian surf lifesaving, offers the most detailed history of the movement

29 Dutton, The Beach, p.6.
30 C. Bede Maxwell, Surf: Australians Against the Sea (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1949). This was deliberate, Wells noting that Sunny Memories ‘is not a formal history book. Facts and figures are here... but on the whole I have relied on the remembered experiences of those whose lives have been affected by the sea.’ Lana Wells, Sunny Memories: Australians at the Seaside (Melbourne: Greenhouse Publications, 1982).
31 Sean Brawley suggested that the myth that Smith was the first to be rescued by the reel and belt, which continues to pervade popular understandings of surf lifesaving history, originated with Maxwell. Maxwell, Australians Against the Sea, pp.22, 28; Sean Brawley, ‘Surf Bathing and Surf Lifesaving: Origins and Beginnings’ in Ed Jaggar (editor) Between the Flags, p.34; Sean Brawley, The Bondi Lifesaver: A History of an Australian Icon (Sydney: ABC Books, 2007), p.205.
as a whole, considering its subject in the broader context of examinations of Australian cultural history, and the international surf lifesaving movement. Its publication boosted the recent scrutiny of the Australian beach by academic historians. The emergence of the surf lifesaver in Sydney in 1907 is of interest to this thesis because it was a particular response to a problem which emerged on Sydney’s ocean beaches. But this study is distinguished from those histories which explored the growth of surf lifesaving itself, by focusing on the impact of the surf lifesaver on Sydney’s beach culture. Furthermore, by the very nature of their subject, most of these histories were limited to an examination of the twentieth century.

In addition to those histories which consider Sydney beaches in the broader context of the Australian beach, a number of local histories examine specific coastal suburbs. Pauline Curby’s history of Manly is the most recent among a long line of local histories of coastal suburbs and municipalities which shed light on the development and uses of particular Sydney beaches since the mid to late nineteenth century.35 This thesis intersects with and builds on such accounts through detailed case studies of a handful of coastal locations.

Despite its contribution to local histories, this study ultimately considers Sydney’s ocean beaches as a collective group. While individual beaches were subject to localised campaigns and modes of development, many of the issues which affected the beaches, and which were addressed by local councils, residents, visitors and the colonial and state governments, were common to beaches north and south of the harbour. Cameron White’s doctoral thesis, Pleasure Seekers, is the only other historical work which addresses Sydney’s beaches as a group. His main focus was the gendered nature of the beach, considering Sydney’s beaches as a site where ‘middle

34 Jaggard (ed), Between the Flags.
class male masculinity was reformed’. While not diminishing the importance of gender in distinguishing beach experiences, this thesis emphasizes the ways in which Sydney’s beach culture was shaped by a wider range of social factors, and particularly by the governance of the beach. It considers the influence of the actions and ideals of all beachgoers on this emerging culture – the conflicts and potential conflicts around social class, property ownership, party politics, coastal residents and day-trippers, as well as gender.

John Fiske, Bob Hodge, and Graeme Turner suggested that ‘the beaches that most clearly stand for the dominant myth of the Australian beach’ are Bondi and Surfers Paradise, both of which characterise, in different ways, Australia’s east coast. Richard White, however, pointed out that many Australians consider Surfers Paradise and the Gold Coast to be particularly ‘unAustralian’. Nonetheless, it is the case that Australia’s east coast dominates conceptions of the imagined ‘Australian beach’; so too, have Australian beach histories, while purporting to be about the ‘Australian’ beach generally, focused overwhelmingly on the beaches of the east coast, and especially Sydney. This study diverges from this collectivising tendency by highlighting the distinctiveness of Sydney beaches and early beach culture. It recognises that both the physical make-up of the beaches and elements affecting their use differ significantly around the Australian coast, and that this has contributed to the importance for studying Sydney’s beaches specifically. At these beaches a different culture emerged that would have wider influence.

Geologically, Sydney beaches are distinct from the rest of Australia’s coast because they are relatively small surf beaches, divided by cliffy headlands, unlike the long surf beaches of Queensland and Western Australia, or the gentle bay beaches close to Melbourne and Adelaide. The beaches on Australia’s north coast, from Western Australia to Queensland, are also affected by dramatic tides, often leaving little more than mud flats for long periods of time. Swimmers there are cautioned against

39 White, ‘A Short History of Beach Holidays’.
crocodiles and potentially fatal marine stingers rather than the painful but comparatively harmless bluebottles which invade the beaches further south. And swimmers off Australia’s southern and south-west coasts are at far greater risk of being attacked by perhaps the most feared predator of the sea, the great white shark. Sydney’s temperate climate means that its beaches can be enjoyed with relative comfort and safety all year round. The beaches on Tasmania’s coast, by contrast, are amongst the coldest in Australia, which, when combined with their comparatively mild summers substantially reduces the swimming season for most coastal residents and visitors. 40

Tim Winton brings a Westralian perspective to the differences between the east and west coasts of Australia. The west coast, he wrote, is ‘a mostly flat and barren affair’, where ‘there are still places to be alone and have the mariner’s sensation of being merely a speck’. The east coast, by contrast, is ‘the pretty side, the Establishment side, the civilized side... It is the social coast, the sensible coast, at times the glamour coast.’ 41 But there are in fact more similarities between Sydney and Perth beach cultures than any other Australian state capitals, by virtue of the close proximity of their surf beaches to the city. This closeness to the urban centre enables many residents to swim or visit the beach before or after work. What others equate with holidays, Sydney and Perth incorporate into everyday leisure. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, residents of Perth were only just beginning to discover their beaches. 42

Despite their inherent differences, in the nineteenth century, Sydney’s beach culture shared many characteristics with the seaside cultures of other urban centres around

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40 A useful tool for comparing the swimability of the beaches is by comparing the patrolling seasons of surf lifesavers in the different states. Sydney’s patrolling season, from October to April, is second in length only to Queensland’s, which is eight months long. Tasmania’s season, in contrast, is only four months long, from December until the end of March. And surf lifesavers in the three Northern Territory clubs patrol during the winter months, finishing as New South Wales commences. This information is based on the patrolling seasons for 2006-07, as supplied by Surf Life Saving Australia. See also Matthew Higgins with Joanne Bach and Pip McNaught, Between the Flags: One Hundred Years of Surf Lifesaving (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2006) for varieties in surf lifesaving uniform and cultures around Australia.


Australia. Andrea Inglis’s exploration of Victorian seaside resorts in the nineteenth century forms a neat parallel with many elements of this thesis, highlighting some of these commonalities. In particular, Inglis’s analysis of the very strong influences of the British seaside over the Victorian coast, the lure of health, and romantic ways of viewing the sea, parallels popular perceptions of Sydney’s beaches in the nineteenth century. But it would be Sydney’s beaches that would come to epitomize modern Australian beach culture, while Melbourne’s remained locked in a nostalgic, English, nineteenth century glow.

**Australian History**

A fuller understanding of the origins of Australian beach culture contributes to a number of other fields of historical study. In the history of health and eugenics, Grant Rodwell identified a strong link between Sydney’s emerging surf culture and the search for a strong and healthy ‘race’ of Australians. This connection provides a useful starting point for this thesis’ exploration of how and why the beach was articulated as an inherently healthy site, and its implications for the shaping of Sydney’s beach culture. This thesis also takes the history of European romanticisms in Australia in new directions, exploring the romantic aesthetic at the beach. Existing histories of the romantic outlook in nineteenth century Australia – Julia Horne’s foremost among them – have concentrated particularly on mountain landscapes as sites of romantic appreciation. In Sydney, the Harbour and Blue Mountains have often been identified as the primary sites for romantic appreciation of the landscape.

However Horne’s suggestion that ‘for colonial tourists a sense of wonder at natural
attractions was there because of what they had learned' applies as much to beaches as to any other landscape of the nineteenth century. Tourists visiting Sydney travelled to the ocean beaches specifically to view the coastal landscape, and employed romantic terms to communicate what they saw, describing the beach, as they did the mountains, as sublime and picturesque. These tourists had been educated to appreciate the romantic outlook, and by adopting such language in their travel journals, reinforced what they had learned from Sydney’s guide books. This particular relationship between culture and nature did not disappear in the twentieth century.

Sydney’s beach culture evolved in the broader context of the development of an Australian leisure culture, which, like the beaches, was aided by the creation of more leisure time for workers, and better and more affordable methods of transport out of the urban centres. This thesis therefore gains from a consideration of other histories of Australian leisure, including Richard White’s and Jim Davidson and Peter Spearritt’s histories of Australian holidays, and Richard Waterhouse’s analysis of Australian popular culture.

Public recreation spaces were provided along Sydney’s coast only after substantial public campaigns in which coastal councils, coastal residents and beachgoers lobbied the New South Wales government to either resume privately owned foreshores, or dedicate Crown land to public recreation. This demand for such spaces along Sydney’s ocean coast cannot be attributed to a single motivation or ideology. An appreciation for nature prompted by the Romantic aesthetic was just one reason for the calls for foreshore reservation. They were also part of a wider movement for public parks of which the reservation of the (Royal) National Park south of Sydney in 1879 was the most notable development. This movement was an Australian manifestation of the middle-class concern with providing ‘healthy’ spaces away from the city slums for the urban working classes in industrial Britain and the United

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47 Horne, The Pursuit of Wonder, p8
States.\textsuperscript{49} The demand for these spaces on the beach by members of the public also demonstrated a belief that the public had an inherent right to such spaces. This belief, which was present not only in debates about the reservation of foreshores but also concerns with the ways in which they were used, reflected broader debates which have been engaged in Britain for centuries over the rights of the public to the countryside.\textsuperscript{50} But crucially, their articulation in Sydney allowed the vital condition of Sydney’s beach culture – the beaches were free and public.

While the impact of European settlers on the Australian landscape has been explored in detail, until now, the beach has escaped such scrutiny. Tim Bonyhady’s consideration of the ‘environmental aesthetic’ in Australian history, partially informs the approach of this thesis.\textsuperscript{51} While Bonyhady’s inquiry did not extend to the ocean beaches, \textit{The Colonial Earth} examined the ‘relationship between environmental ideas, policies and practice’ across a broad spectrum of Australian locations and issues. In a similar manner, this thesis seeks to explore and explain how Sydney residents and governments rationalised changes to the beach environment: what led some to oppose and some to support developments, and what informed their choices.

One area of Australia’s beach history which is not covered in this thesis is the use of the beaches by Aboriginal people. Alice Garner’s \textit{A Shifting Shore} demonstrated the ways in which the occupation of the shore by fishermen and other coastal traders had to be negotiated – and these communities ultimately shifted or removed entirely – in order to allow uninhibited use of the Arcachon foreshores by the French leisured classes, and a similar process occurred elsewhere as beaches became the site of holiday recreation.\textsuperscript{52} The changing of Brighthelmstone’s name to ‘Brighton’, for


\textsuperscript{51} Tim Bonyhady, \textit{The Colonial Earth} (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

\textsuperscript{52} Alice Garner, \textit{A Shifting Shore: Locals, Outsiders, and the Transformation of a French Fishing Town, 1823-2000} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); See also Ken Cruikshank and Nancy B Bouchier, “‘The Heritage of the People Closed Against Them.” Class, Environment and the Shaping of
instance, reminds us of the importance for this increasingly Royal town to distance itself from its working class past. Sydney’s beaches were not exempt from this matter. Although it is barely documented, it is apparent that as Sydney’s beaches were colonised by Europeans during the nineteenth century the coastal Kooris moved – or were moved – elsewhere. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the removal and relocation of Aboriginal people from Sydney was necessitated, suggested Maria Nugent, by Sydney’s modernity. At the beach, Sydney’s emerging beach culture was similarly predicated on exclusion, because, like Garner’s fishermen, Aboriginal people used the space in ways that did not accord with modern understandings of leisure. The Aboriginal use of the beaches is therefore conspicuously absent from European writings about these places. Huntsman provides some insight into this area of study, but it needs substantial further examination.

**Methodology**
This thesis challenges Dutton’s claim that ‘in the nineteenth century nobody wrote about the beach’. It may be the case that Australian novels and literature were overwhelmingly focused on the interior rather than the coast during the colonial period, but such a claim denies the wealth of writing about the beach which did exist. This thesis draws from a rich but relatively untapped variety of primary sources in its attempt to explore and explain the complexities driving the development of Sydney’s beaches and beach culture. These include newspapers, tourist guides and the travel journals of visitors, which shed light on the priorities and motivations of beachgoers, the ways they spent their time at the beach, and the ways they interpreted and understood their time there. They also help to establish where ocean beaches fitted in with the many other popular day-tripping sites around Sydney. How many people were going to the beaches compared with spots along the Harbour or Parramatta River? Which beaches were they favouring? And when and why did shifts in the most common destinations occur?


55 Huntsman, *Sand in Our Souls*, pp.17-19.

Letters to the editor and advertisements contained in newspapers also provide vital clues to the beaches of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Advertisements highlight the main attractions of the beaches, including hotels, amusement structures, sports and games and provision for picnics, and inform the reader, if not what beachgoers were necessarily doing, at least what entrepreneurs expected they desired. The letters columns of the early twentieth century, which have been heavily relied upon by other beach historians including Booth and White, were witness to vigorous debates about the appropriateness of surf bathing, complaints about lack of amenities for beachgoers, and other concerns about the ways the beaches were being used. Out of them we see assumptions emerging as to what the beach should be — the way beachgoers should behave, the demand for free public access to the beaches and beach amenities, and the importance of health as an incentive to spend time at the beach.

Evidence of the development of the central assumptions within Sydney’s beach culture is also embedded in other locations. Minutes from Waverley, Manly and Randwick Municipal Councils document these bodies’ attitudes towards the beach spaces, and increasing pressure from local ratepayers to take control of the beaches and govern them in specific ways. These minutes complement the extensive collections held in the New South Wales state archives which relate to Sydney’s beaches: correspondence received by the Department of Lands in particular records the details of campaigns for the reservation of beaches including Bondi, Tamarama, Bronte and Maroubra in the eastern suburbs of Sydney, and Narrabeen, Collaroy and Newport in the north. Some of these bundles span decades, and reveal not only who agitated for such land, and their motivations, but the Department’s responses to requests, and reasons for either reserving the foreshores, or, in the case of Tamarama, refusing to do so for over thirty years. This vast collection of records, which is fundamental to the inquiry of this thesis, have not before been utilised by Australian beach historians.

Broadly speaking, this study approaches its subject from a cultural perspective. It considers the history of Sydney’s beach culture to be an investigation into constantly changing relationships; like Rickard’s cultural history of Australia, it inquires into ‘the ways in which Australians have related to their environment (in this case, coastal
environment), and each other'. Although at times it also emulates social, environmental or even political histories, it emphasises the importance of interpreting meaning, rather than taking historical evidence at face value; that is, it emphasises the role of emotional, sensory and physical responses in history, not just imagining history as a set of rational responses. It considers the past to be fluid and interpretable, rather than an easily identifiable and universal 'truth': the beaches were to some a home, to others a place of recreation, and to many more, a source of income.

What exactly do I mean by 'the beach'? Within this study, the 'beach' encompasses both the coastal foreshores – that is, where the water meets the land – as well as the broader 'beach space' – the larger coastal area which was used by day-trippers specifically because of its proximity to the beach. The headlands, bushlands and coastal walks which surrounded the beaches were encompassed within a day-trip to the 'beach' because the beach and ocean could still be seen, heard and smelt from these areas, enhancing time spent there. The parks and roads which were constructed behind the sand also formed part of the 'beach space', and for the same reason they were popular places for picnicking and strolling while at the beach.

The beaches discussed in this thesis stretch from Palm Beach around 25 kilometres north of Manly, to Cronulla in the south, and exclude the 'still water' beaches of Sydney Harbour, Botany Bay, and rivers and lagoons. The focus is on those beaches which experienced development, or were the subject of public discussion, prior to 1920. Manly, Bondi and Coogee, as the most used and talked about beaches of this period, consequently form the main subjects for much of this thesis.

Through its investigation into Sydney beaches, this thesis seeks to shed light on why and how the culture – evident by 1920 – emerged. In exploring the origins of this culture, two closely related questions continually emerge. Firstly, how derivative or distinctive was Sydney's beach culture? That is, were its origins influenced more by local or international factors? And secondly, where did the pressures to create these

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57 Rickard, *Australia*, p.xii.
particular elements of beach culture come from? The British influences over Sydney’s early beach culture have been noted by other beach historians but the local factors have been paid less attention. In particular, the question of why particular British seaside traditions were not successfully replicated in Sydney, despite substantial funding by entrepreneurs keen to exploit day trippers, is key to understanding the intricate relationship between the factors driving Sydney’s beach cultures. This study asks not only what Sydney day-trippers were doing instead of patronising such seaside amenities, but why, and where the origins of their preferred activities lay. It considers the driving forces behind the particular beach culture which did emerge, and highlights the crucial role played by beachgoers themselves, over and above government authorities and entrepreneurs, in shaping this culture.

A further driver of this study is an examination of change over time. There was no sudden beach culture in Sydney in 1902; rather the behaviours and attitudes of beachgoers were the result of nearly a century of a local beach use, and those continuities need to be considered alongside the shifts which occurred in modes of behaviour or structures on the beach.

This thesis is broadly chronological, but is structured thematically. The first chapter examines the period between 1810 and 1850, and describes the first tentative steps made by Sydney’s early European settlers towards an appreciation of the ocean coast. We see in the habits of beach users even in this early period an articulation of the romantic appeal of the coast, a recognition of its healthy qualities and a desire to use the beach for leisure, in addition to its more economically viable uses. Chapters two and three consider the emergence of Sydney’s beach culture between 1850 and 1880. Chapter two explores the processes by which access to Manly, Bondi and Coogee was improved during the mid-nineteenth century, and documents the emergence of the first campaigns for public ownership of some of Sydney’s largest ocean beaches. Chapter three considers the behaviour of beachgoers during the same period, when day-trips to the beach were dominated by groups of families or friends engaged in picnics, walking by the sea, playing games and sports and patronising the hotels.
The next three chapters explore the period between 1880 and 1920. Chapter four examines the growing campaigns for public ownership of the foreshores during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fifth chapter examines the behaviour of beachgoers over the same timeframe, with a particular emphasis on how their beach experiences were affected by class differences. Chapter six considers the debates over what were ‘appropriate’ uses of the foreshores during this period, especially as they related to entertainment structures on the beaches, sand mining, and using the beaches as garbage dumps. Through these contests, we see that leisure and recreation were being articulated as the primary purpose of some of Sydney’s beaches during the nineteenth century, and that the natural beach spaces were being seen as fundamental to the beach experience.

Chapters seven and eight span the entire period covered by the thesis, examining the ways of understanding the beach which were common to the entire period. Chapter seven extends the emphasis on the ‘natural beach’ which is a prominent part of chapter six, and considers the development of the Romantic aesthetic as it related to Sydney’s ocean beaches. Chapter eight considers the ways in which the beach was understood to be an inherently healthy place, and the centrality of this concept of health to the construction of the beach as a nationally important site – and the surf bather as a ‘national type’ – in the early twentieth century. The cult of the sun and of the tanned body can be understood most clearly in this context of the healthy beach.

The ninth and final chapter traces the rapid rise in popularity of surf bathing during the opening decade of the twentieth century, and the greater demands this placed on local councils and the state government to commit substantial funding to support beach recreation, especially through the provision of amenities.

Between 1810 and 1920 Sydney’s beach landscape was transformed from wind-swept sand dunes to landscaped parks, with paths, benches, sea walls and even ocean baths excavated out of the rocks. The ways in which these beaches were used and understood also underwent significant transformations and developments, so that, by 1920, Sydney’s beachgoers had forged a new and distinct culture of the beach.
Map of Greater Sydney, showing location of ocean beaches, and proximity of the city to the ocean coast.
1. Discovering the beach, 1810-1850

The arrival of the First Fleet on the sands of Kurnell in 1788 marked the start of the relationship between Sydney's first European inhabitants and its beaches. In the tradition discussed by Greg Dening, Sydney's beaches became the sites of first encounters for Aborigines and white Europeans alike. But in dropping anchor in the protected Botany Bay, and then the sheltered bays of Sydney Harbour, the first colonials sailed past the ocean beaches. The ocean coast, which forms the subject of this thesis, offered nothing more than a passing glance through the first window into their new home. As the colony grew, these beaches continued to offer the first glimpses of Sydney for arriving passengers, but, with dense bush and sand dunes dividing the town from the coast, it was to be over two decades before Sydney's ocean coast came to be used by the settlers.

This chapter seeks to uncover the relationship between Sydneysiders and their ocean beaches during the first sixty years of colonisation. This was the period in which Sydney's beach culture was born, the era in which later uses of, and attitudes towards the beach, were emerging on Sydney's coast. And yet this crucial period has been overlooked by other historians of the Australian beach, who largely begin their analyses in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Where the greater nineteenth century is considered, there has been a tendency to consider only Sydneysiders' bathing practices. This chapter also considers bathing in Sydney in the early nineteenth century, but its scope is far broader. It argues that the roots of Sydney's beach culture as it began to emerge between 1810 and 1850 lay as much in the attitudes towards the coast by the Colonial authorities and local landowners as in the recreational desires of beachgoers. The ways in which foreshores were granted to individuals or reserved by the Crown shaped future restrictions on beach usage, while

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2 Huntsman examines swimming, bathing and health resorts in Sydney during this early period, but does not turn to the ocean beaches until the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Huntsman, Sand in our Souls.
the appreciation of the coast by early coastal settlers demonstrates that the aesthetics of Romanticism and health were being applied to Sydney’s beaches in this early stage of Sydney’s beach history.

The first coastal land grants
Sydney’s earliest coastal land grants were issued shortly after the colony of New South Wales celebrated its twentieth anniversary. The first two were located at Manly, and were subsequently joined by the owners to create what was commonly known as ‘Cheers’ Farm’. This area, one hundred and thirty acres in total, stretched from the harbour side of the peninsular to the ocean beach, and lay roughly between what is now the Corso and the North Head reserve areas. Issued in November 1809, the Manly grants were followed just over a month later by two in the Bondi area, directly east of Sydney. The larger of these comprised two hundred acres to William Roberts, a road maker; it included most of the ocean beach, and stretched back a significant distance from the coast. John Hurd was granted an adjoining thirty acres on the northern headland of Bondi Beach, now known as Ben Buckler, which also included a small portion of the beach itself.

These land grants can be seen as the starting point for Sydney residents’ relationships with the ocean coast. They mark the first official use of coastal beaches for any purpose, and are the first evidence of European habitation of the coastal area. They also roughly coincided with the construction of South Head Road in 1811, which, although not providing access to any ocean beaches, did provide the first land access from Sydney Cove to the ocean coast. The South Head Road was intended to provide a leisure space for the residents of Sydney, and was an important part of the colony’s

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3 Land Grants, Book 4, 202, 6 November 1809, Land Titles office of New South Wales
4 Land Grants, Book 4, 265, 28 December 1809.
5 Land Grants, Book 4, 266, 28 December 1809. These grants were two of the last to be issued by Governor Paterson before his replacement by Governor Macquarie. Concerned by the recent abundance of land grants, Macquarie had been instructed to recall and ‘examine on merit’ all of Paterson’s grants. The grants at Bondi and Manly were subsequently confirmed by Macquarie. Lynne McLoughlin, ‘Landed Peasantry or Landed Gentry: a Geography of Land Grants’ in Graeme Aplin (editor), A Difficult Infant: Sydney Before Macquarie (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1988), p.124; Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, p.39.
defence system; its construction indicated the increasing awareness by Colonial administrators of their coastal boundary.\(^7\)

There is no way of knowing what, if any, interaction these early landowners had with the foreshores contained inside their properties. Local historians of both Manly and Bondi suggest they used their land for cattle grazing, and consequently cleared much of the forest from the vicinity, but that they did not use the beaches specifically.\(^8\)

There is also evidence indicating that they did not live on these coastal properties: Roberts lived on Castlereagh street, where he owned a hotel, and according to an 1828 census, the only residents listed as living in Manly were an 87 year old man who owned a farm west of Cheers' farm – and therefore at some distance from the coast – and a young family.\(^9\) Given that Richard Cheers owned a butcher business in the Rocks, it is likely that he lived in the town.\(^10\)

They may not have been occupied by their owners, but the accessibility of these new coastal properties – Manly via the harbour and Bondi through the South Head Road – made them susceptible to theft and trespass, demonstrating that Sydney's coastal region was not entirely unused during the 1810s. In 1814, Robert Campbell, owner of land close to Cheers' farm, published a warning against trespassing, 'by stock or otherwise', on his land.\(^11\) And only five years later, 'Boondye Farm on the South Head Road,' close to Roberts' grant, was apparently being targeted by wood thieves.\(^12\)

Such pockets of information reveal that by the 1810s, land close to the coast at Manly and Bondi was being used or travelled across by more than just the local landowners.

Between 1810 and 1830, settlement gradually spread along Sydney's coast north from Manly. In the late 1810s in particular, this coastal strip was subject to several very large grants, including 500 acres at Long Reef, 700 acres 'between Pittwater and the sea', and 410 acres at Narrabeen, a parcel of land which was named 'Ramsay's

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\(^7\) Faro, *Street Seen*, p.39.
\(^8\) Brawley, *The Bondi Lifesaver*, pp.19-20; Curby, *Seven Miles from Sydney*, p.40.
\(^9\) Dowd, *The History of the Waverley Municipal District*, p.2; Curby, *Seven Miles From Sydney*, p.47.
\(^10\) Curby, *Seven Miles From Sydney*, pp.39-40.
\(^11\) *Sydney Gazette Supplement*, 14 May 1814, p.3.
\(^12\) *Sydney Gazette*, 4 September 1819, p.2.
Estate'. These spaces were severely isolated from other areas of granted land, as demonstrated below. Together with the Manly and Bondi grants of a decade earlier, these grants existed as small pockets of land hugging the coast, with vast tracts of unclaimed land between them and the town.

![Figure 1.1: Map of New South Wales, showing isolation of coastal land grants (on the right) prior to 1821.](image)

Early uses of the beach
How do we account for this gradual occupation of Sydney's coastal areas? Why did the government grant some portions of coastal land, and leave vast sections of the coast bare? And was there any sense of the value in occupying land specifically because of its coastal location? As we have seen, it is unlikely the coastal location was

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13 Land Grants, Book 11, 37, 19 August 1818; Book 11, 39, 21 August 1818; Book 11, 49, 31 August 1819; Book 12, 32, 31 August 1819; Shlagh and George Champion, *Profiles of the Pioneers in Manly, Warringah and Pittwater* (Sydney, 1996).
important to either Cheers or Roberts, and there is no evidence to suggest that the coast and beaches were specifically sought by these landowners. Pauline Curby suggested that coastal land was ‘less favoured’ than ground further inland, and was settled only because of the necessities of the quickly expanding colony.\textsuperscript{14} Certainly the Manly and Bondi grants coincided with a period of expansion initiated by Governor Paterson, in which the ‘forest lands’ of the south-west Cumberland plain, identified as less prone to flooding than existing river districts, were largely settled.\textsuperscript{15} In this context, it is possible that these first coastal grants were selected to test the coastal land for its cultivation capacities.

The location of the subsequent grants between Manly and Pittwater, however, were specifically selected, and according to Lynne McLoughlin they represented deliberate attempts to exploit irregularities in the soil. While she admitted most coastal land was undesirable due to its sandy base and topography, McLoughlin showed that these grants were taken up ‘where a remnant capping of Wianamatta shale on top of the sandstone produced some better soils on the main ridge, or where pockets of alluvium had been deposited along the coast by rivers draining the plateau’.\textsuperscript{16}

Whether because their soil was better than that at Bondi and Manly, or for other reasons, there is strong evidence of interest by landowners themselves in much of this land between Manly and Barrenjoey.\textsuperscript{17} D’Arcy Wentworth, a surgeon who personally worked for Governor Macquarie, was one individual with a keen interest in this coastal land, in addition to his substantial holdings elsewhere in the colony.\textsuperscript{18} He purchased Cheers’ farm in around 1815, and was subsequently granted 380 acres at North Harbour in 1818.\textsuperscript{19} In 1822, he purchased Robert Campbell’s farm near Newport, and bought the Long Reef grant three years later.\textsuperscript{20} James Jenkins, described by Curby as ‘a successful emancipist’, was another landowner who was keen to build

\textsuperscript{14} Curby, \textit{Seven Miles from Sydney}, p.41.
\textsuperscript{15} McLoughlin, ‘Landed Peasantry’, p.124.
\textsuperscript{17} The major exception is Robert Campbell, who sold his grant of 700 acres near Newport within three years of receiving it in apparent dissatisfaction of the soil. Curby, \textit{Seven Miles from Sydney}, p.41.
\textsuperscript{18} McLoughlin, ‘Landed Peasantry’, p.137.
\textsuperscript{20} Champion, \textit{Profiles of the Pioneers}, p.78.
large holdings on the coastal strip between Manly and Pittwater. In 1823, he applied for and was granted 700 acres of ‘chiefly rocks and swamps’ adjoining the 410 acres at Long Reef he had already purchased.\(^{21}\) Two years later, he bought 730 acres from Wentworth, and was granted two further portions of land of 250 and 100 acres each, north of Narrabeen lagoon.\(^{22}\) Between them, at different times Jenkins, Wentworth and their descendents controlled thousands of acres of coastal land in the Manly and Warringah region.

Again, neither Wentworth nor Jenkins lived on their coastal properties, although Jenkins made significant improvements to his land and constructed a number of dwellings at Long Reef.\(^{23}\) Crucially, however, their and others’ keenness to acquire land along the coast north of Manly demonstrates that this land was not worthless. Rather, it was valuable as both farming land, and, for Wentworth, as investment property. If ‘large free grants secured the fortunes and social status of Australia’s “first families”’, then these additional holdings on Sydney’s north coast undoubtedly contributed to the wealth and standing of the Wentworth family in ensuing decades.\(^{24}\)

In the case of at least one grant, however – Long Reef – its position on the coast was fundamental to its value. The inclusion of ‘salt works’ as a key attraction of the site in advertisements for its sale in 1825 provided the earliest evidence that European settlers were exploiting the natural resources of Sydney’s ocean coast for financial gain.\(^{25}\) Given the extent of land which was privately owned along this coastline, it was unlikely to be an isolated use of the foreshores. William Govett’s description of the beaches north of Manly in the 1830s also took a very utilitarian perspective of the coast. He noted the geological features of the beach near Long Reef, as well as the location where fresh water may be found, thereby reflecting the needs and priorities of the young colony.\(^{26}\)

\(^{21}\) Champion, Profiles of the Pioneers, p.40.
\(^{22}\) Champion, Profiles of the Pioneers, p.40.
\(^{23}\) Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, p.44.
**Governing the foreshores**

The Bondi and Manly grants and those of the northern beaches were distinguished from later coastal grants by the inclusion of the entire beach—that is, the sand to the water line—within the boundaries of the land. According to the terms of the grants, Roberts' land at Bondi was bounded 'on the north east side by a line... to the beach and on the south east side by the beach being part of the sea coast.' Cheers' grant was also bounded 'by the water of the sea.'

As we have seen from Govett's descriptions, in the decades following the settlement of New South Wales, the utilitarian needs of the young colony were a primary part of attitudes towards the landscape. The value in river, lake and ocean coasts therefore lay principally in the role of water as an important transport route. The distance from Sydney by land meant access to water was crucial to the value of Cheers' farm and that of other Manly residents; their land was accessible by boat, without having to leave the mostly sheltered waters of Sydney Harbour. Water access also led to the settlement at Pittwater, north of Sydney, before the land between there and Manly had been settled. Although they expressed no concern with including the foreshores inside the boundaries of private property, the British authorities did recognise the value of having access to water, and were therefore careful to ensure access was shared as much as possible. Consequently, in 1809, the Colonial Office instructed Governor Macquarie to ensure land grants were extended inland from the banks of bays or rivers, rather than along the length of the foreshores, so that grantees could share 'what accommodation the said harbours or rivers may afford for navigation or otherwise.'

In the 1820s, the Colonial Office, perhaps aware of the implications of having lost so much coastal land to private interests, issued new instructions regarding the foreshores of the colony. In 1825, Governor Darling was instructed to reserve land which may be appropriate for a range of uses and purposes, including

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28 Land Grants, book 4, 202, 6 November 1809.
what particular lands it may be proper to reserved... for public roads and other internal communication, whether by land or water, or as the scites [sic] of towns, villages, churches, school houses, or parsonage houses... or as places fit to be set apart for the recreation and amusement of the inhabitants of any town or village, or for promoting the health of such inhabitants, or as the scites [sic] of quays or landing places, which it may at any future time be expedient to erect, form or establish on the sea coast or in the neighbourhood of navigable streams, or which it may be desirable to reserve for any other purpose of public convenience, utility, health, or enjoyment.31

Nearly four decades after the first convicts had arrived in Sydney, these instructions indicated a recognition by the Colonial Office that the needs of the growing colony exceeded simply food, land and defence, and was beginning to extend to more aesthetic needs. As the population of free settlers grew, and more land became occupied, it became necessary to set aside land out of town for future demands. Perhaps this was an attempt to remedy the lack of public recreation spaces which had been reserved during the suburban expansion of the colony in the 1820s, which was a ‘danger period’ for parks, according to Chris Cuneen.32 Nonetheless, while these instructions did not relate to coastal land specifically, the reference to ‘quays or landing places’ indicates that it applied to foreshores as well as inland areas. The potential for the coast to offer residents a space for recreation, amusement or the attainment of health, in addition to its more obvious utilitarian functions, was by now well established in Britain.33 Through these instructions, we can see the same values being imposed onto Australian shores, enforced not by colonials themselves, but by their British rulers.

31 George R, instructions to Governor Darling, 17 July 1825. Frederick King (editor), Historical Records of Australia, 12, Series,1, p.117. Emphasis added
33 Corbin, The Lure of the Sea; Walton, The English Seaside Resort.
Three years later, as part of his highly contentious reforms of the Lands system, Governor Darling refined these instructions. He informed residents that ‘the government will further reserve to itself all land within one hundred feet of high water mark, on the sea coast, creeks, harbours and inlets.’\(^{34}\) This was the first attempt to directly secure Crown ownership of the colony’s foreshores, and was therefore the first recognition of the value of, and a ‘public interest’ in, coastal land specifically. The context of Darling’s statement, as part of a paragraph outlining the rights of the government to reservations for roads and bridges, and minerals and materials found on and in the land, suggests a utilitarian function for this foreshore reservation. However while he offered no explanation, it is likely this was an expansion of the Colonial Office’s earlier instructions, and that recreation was also a possible use of the foreshores. A third order, issued in 1831, stipulated that no coastal land should be sold ‘unless for the purpose of commerce or navigation’, reiterating the functional worth of the foreshores generally.\(^{35}\)

The most important of these rulings for the development of Sydney’s ocean coast was the 1828 order for the reservation of all land within one hundred feet of high water mark. It ensured a clearly identifiable boundary for all future land sold or granted along the coast and adjoining beaches. The reservation of foreshores did not immediately open these spaces to public recreation – as explored in chapters two and four, they had to be identified as appropriate and dedicated specifically for such purposes by the Colonial government. But it did ensure that they remained public property, allowing the government, rather than individual landowners, to decide the fate of these spaces. Above all else, it was a recognition of a public interest in Sydney’s foreshores, which came from London rather than Sydney.

**Foreshore reservations: the international context**

What were the implications of the decision to reserve all the remaining foreshores in New South Wales from private ownership? Was this the first initiative of its type by

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\(^{35}\) Peter Cabena, *Victoria’s Water Frontage Reserves: An Historical Review and Resource Appreciation* (Victoria: Department of Crown Lands and Survey, 1983), p.16. This order doesn’t appear to have been followed in later years, unlike the 1828 reservation ruling.
industrialised nations? It is difficult to ascertain the ease with which public access to and recreational use of England’s beaches was attained in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Tim Bonyhady is virtually alone in investigating British law as it relates to the foreshores, informing us that, according to the Roman law which governed England’s early history, ‘air, running water, the sea and the seashore were regarded as incapable of ownership but open to public use’, but that the public’s rights were largely reduced over the following centuries. By the nineteenth century, a court case over contested land resulted in public rights to the foreshore being restricted to navigation and fishing; however where the Crown owned the foreshore, according to Bonyhady, public access, and even public recreation, were permitted. John Urry, in contrast, claimed that the British coastline ‘could not be privately controlled since ownership of the shoreline and beach between high and low tide were invested in the Crown’. Nonetheless, the status of the foreshores above high water mark remains unclear. Alain Corbin described the beach at the most notable of England’s early seaside resorts, Brighton, in the late eighteenth century, as ‘nothing more than a vacant lot, a communal property’, which according to Bonyhady’s definition would have allowed for general public access and recreational use. These are some of the few clues we have into the question of ownership of England’s coastal zones; generally, there do not appear to have been as many contests over English beaches as those which would impact so heavily on the development of Sydney’s beach culture in the second half of the nineteenth century. Perhaps there was a greater sense in UK of ‘traditional’ rights; in the Australian colonies, such rights did not always exist a priori, and had to be fought out and negotiated.

The reservation of foreshores did, however, create a crucial distinction between the beaches of New South Wales and those elsewhere which were, or are, privately owned. Italy is particularly famous for its private beaches, which demand a fee for entry, and sometimes sit beside free beaches with fewer or no amenities. In America in the nineteenth century, the coast at Maine accommodated three ‘exclusive’ resorts

36 Bonyhady, Law of the Countryside, pp.3-5.
37 Bonyhady, Law of the Countryside, pp.5-6, 15-16.
38 Urry, The Tourist Gaze, p.18.
on private beaches,\(^{40}\) and the beaches of New York’s Coney Island were leased by bathhouses which permitted only their patrons to bathe, until free access was provided in 1923.\(^{41}\) Members of the public were also deprived of free access to lake beaches in Ontario, Canada in the late nineteenth century, prompting one angry letter writer to declare that ‘nothing can undo the mischief the city has done in ruining and closing forever what might have been one of the most desirable parks in Ontario.’\(^{42}\)

The reservation of foreshores in New South Wales also meant that any future structures or businesses on the beach had to be approved – first by the Department of Lands, then Park Trustees and eventually municipal councils. This public control of the use of the beach space sits in stark contrast to many beaches in America and on the Riviera where bathing amenities in particular were provided by hotels keen to attract patrons.\(^{43}\)

**The subdivision of Coogee Bay, Sydney’s first coastal town**

We can see then, that by 1830 a pattern for coastal settlement had been developed which centred on the privileges of grantees to large sections of Sydney’s ocean foreshores at Bondi, and between Manly and Pittwater on the northern beaches. As we have seen, the decision to reserve to the Crown all foreshores within one hundred feet of high water mark marked an important turning point in the governance of Sydney’s coast; but this development occurred shortly before an even larger transition in attitudes of the general public towards Sydney’s ocean beaches. If 1809 marked the first attempts to cultivate coastal land, then the 1830s marked the earliest articulation of the concept that Sydney’s coast may be an aesthetically desirable location in which to live, or spend leisure time.

From the 1830s onwards, European settlement and occupation of Sydney’s coast grew steadily, as land sales, which were replacing the earlier system of land grants, boomed.

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\(^{40}\) Lencek and Bosker, *The Beach*, p.155.


\(^{42}\) Quoted in Cruickshank and Bouchier, ‘The Heritage of the People’.

around the colony. Remarkably, this important development in Sydney’s beach history coincided with the ‘discovery’ of Cannes by British tourists, which is often claimed to be the birth of the Riviera culture. South of the harbour, two sites, Nelson Bay and Coogee, were specifically sought for residential – that is, non farming – purposes. In contrast to the area north of Manly, these areas south of Bondi had remained completely unoccupied by Europeans until the 1830s. Not only were they far more difficult to access, without any sheltered river routes like that afforded to Manly by the Harbour, but McLoughlin argued the region was also inappropriate for cultivation, consisting largely of ‘sandstone ridges, old sand dunes or swamps’. The portions of land which were subsequently sold in the district were considerably smaller than those earlier grants north of Manly, a reflection perhaps of the 1830s boom in land sales close to Sydney. Lynch and Larcombe wrote that until the 1830s, the area around Coogee, a large beach several kilometres south of Bondi, was frequented mainly by woodcutters, hunters and shooters. In 1835, the area first came to the attention of the Colonial Secretary’s office following an application by Thomas Chapman for ‘three portions of land of thirty acres each at Great Coogee Bay’. In the following years, several other applications for land ‘in this neighbourhood’ increased the necessity of the government preparing the land for sale. One in particular, from Robert White in 1837, prompted a request by the Colonial Secretary for the land to be measured ‘with as little delay as possible’. Until this time, the Surveyor General had been prevented

47 Lynch and Larcombe, Randwick, pp.9-10.
48 Lynch and Larcombe, Randwick, pp.12-16.
49 Colonial Secretary’s Office to Surveyor General, 26 March 1835, State Records New South Wales: Colonial Secretary: CGS 1001, Letters sent to the Surveyor General, the Land Board, Assistant Surveyors and the Commissioners for apportioning the Colony, 6 Oct 1826-8 Oct 1856, [35/217], AO reel 3018, p.418; Surveyor General to Colonial Secretary, 26 March 1838, State Records New South Wales: Colonial Secretary, CGS 905, Main series of letters received, 1826-1982 [38/130], with Bundle 38/10878, box 4/2431.1.
50 Surveyor General’s note on the back of Robert White’s application for permission to purchase land, 2 March 1837, dated 2 June 1837, SRNSW: CGS 905 [37/4157], with bundle 38/10878, box 4/2431.1.
51 Colonial Secretary to Surveyor General, 12 August 1837, SRNSW: CGS 1001 [37/515], AO Reel 3019, p.145.
from doing this work by the ‘preference of more immediate business’, but it could no longer be delayed.\textsuperscript{52}

After visiting the shores of Coogee Bay to prepare the land for measurement, Samuel Perry, who was Acting Surveyor General in Thomas Mitchell’s absence, found the area to be suitable for a town. He wrote to the Colonial Secretary early in 1838 that considering the Bay in question favourable for the erection of marine villas, instead of merely giving directions for the survey of the ground into allotments of 30 acres each, I directed the Surveyor’s attention to its eligibility for building, and having obtained his plan, and having gone over the ground myself, I have now to submit a design for a village for the laying out of which I found the ground particularly favourable.\textsuperscript{53}

In accordance with Governor Darling’s 1828 instructions, the beach and headlands were reserved from sale. Unlike other sections of Sydney’s coast which were reserved by the Crown but not made available to the public, Coogee beach was made accessible to any who might like to use the space for recreational or other purposes.

The appeal of Coogee Bay

It is unclear why Thomas Chapman requested land on the shores of Coogee Bay, especially given the area was still largely inaccessible.\textsuperscript{54} However Robert White’s application for 50 acres at ‘Big Coodgee’ [sic], and his subsequent correspondence with the Colonial Secretary, offers some insight into his motivations, and suggests that the perceived healthiness of the seaside was imperative to his appeal. In the initial application, White acknowledged that the land he sought was ‘of... small a quantity’

\textsuperscript{52} Surveyor General’s note on the back of Robert White’s application. SRNSW: CGS 905 [37/4157].

\textsuperscript{53} Surveyor General to Colonial Secretary, 26 March 1838.

\textsuperscript{54} O’Keefe describes the difficulty of accessing the Coogee Randwick area as late as the 1850s being an impediment to settlement there. Brendan O’Keefe, Simeon Pearce’s Randwick: Dream and Reality (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 1990), pp.24-25.
and in a ‘barren spot’. Yet he was motivated, he claimed, by his ‘large young and sickly family’, which made him ‘anxious to erect a residence on the coast within the shortest distance from Sidney [sic] for the benefit of the air.’ Indeed, he was so determined that the refusal of his application until the ‘division [of Coogee] takes place’ prompted a second, more emotional letter to the Colonial Secretary, in which he declared himself ‘prepared to stand all risks as to the purchase as I am determined to go the utmost extent of my means to secure it and to cultivate the same at whatever expense until the time of purchase arrives.’ Again, however, permission was refused until the area could be surveyed.

Curiously, neither Robert White nor Thomas Chapman purchased portions of the subdivided land at Coogee when it was auctioned in October 1839. Perhaps the urgency with which White clearly sought land by the sea led him elsewhere along the coast following the swift refusal of his application. In any case, the lots that were eventually sold were much smaller than those requested by each of these men, and therefore probably not suited to their requirements.

Figure 1.2: Robert White’s sketch of Coogee Bay. The detail of his depiction of the area, which includes Wedding Cake Island on the right, demonstrates a familiarity with the land, despite its inaccessibility.

56 Robert White to Colonial Secretary, 6 June 1837, SRNSW: CGS 905 [37/5240], with bundle 38/10878, box 4/2431.1.
Perry's decision to build a 'marine' village at Coogee represented the first steps towards major settlement anywhere on Sydney's ocean coast. The subdivision of Coogee Bay reveals much about the attitudes of the Colonial Secretary and Surveyor General towards coastal land – not just in their decision to subdivide, but in the size and prices of the lots upon which they agreed. Despite the interest of a number of individuals in purchasing substantial portions of land, the subdivision of Coogee reflected a belief that greater numbers of people would want to live by the sea, and, in particular, on the shores of a large ocean beach. At half an acre each, these lots were designed solely to facilitate the construction of 'marine villas', most likely intended for use by persons of some standing and wealth, and were entirely unsuitable for farming or large-scale cultivation. While Perry did concede to the Colonial Secretary that portions of between five and ten acres could be measured if deemed necessary, he believed that the sale of any larger portions would be 'objectionable'.

At £10 per acre, these lots were substantially more expensive than might have been expected for uncultivated, sandy land. Indeed, when asked to suggest a price for land in the new village of Coogee, the Surveyor General thought £2 per acre a 'fair' minimum price, 'considering its locality', by which he most likely meant its distance from Sydney. The Colonial Secretary considered this price to be 'rather low in this situation', arguing instead that £10 would be more appropriate, but suggested they 'wait and see what land sells for at Vaucluse at Mr. Wentworth's sale.' In making a comparison between Coogee and Vaucluse, Deas Thomson, the newly appointed Colonial Secretary, demonstrated a recognition of the value which water frontage might add to land – the only feature these two localities had in common. Situated on an ocean beach, however, Coogee was considerably different in nature to Vaucluse, which lay on the sheltered waters of the harbour; the latter was also closer to town, and easier to access, via both water and land. The opinion that land at Coogee might be equal in worth to land at Vaucluse, therefore, suggests that they anticipated the appeal of living on the ocean coast would equal the already established attractions of the harbour. The substantial asking price represented a strong faith in the attraction of

57 Surveyor General to Colonial Secretary, 26 March 1838.
58 Surveyor General to Colonial Secretary, 3 July 1838 SRNSW: CGS 905 [38/266], with bundle 38/10878, box 4/2431.1.
59 Note on bottom of letter, Surveyor General to Colonial Secretary, 3 July 1838.
living on the ocean, and was further indication of the type of person they expected to buy the ‘villas’.

Thompson and Perry’s grand expectations of Coogee’s potential were not immediately realised. A decade later, the only lots which had been sold were those bordering the beach reservation. There is no evidence to suggest whether these lots were occupied or built upon, but their sale nevertheless justified the subdivision of Coogee Bay. Although fewer were sold than may have been hoped, the sale of the land fronting the foreshores was evidence of a desire to own property – for whatever purpose – on Sydney’s ocean coast in the late 1830s. The purchase of land at Nelson Bay at around the same time, situated half way between Coogee and Bondi Beaches, offers further evidence of the desire of some colonials to live by the ocean. The decision of the Surveyor General to sell all the land behind this beach to one individual, rather than subdivide it for greater access, provided a stark contrast to Coogee. This willingness suggests both that the larger Coogee Beach was seen to be a more appropriate site for a town, and that the government considered that public needs had been met by the provision of public access to this beach alone.

**Bronte House: a seaside estate**

Mortimer Lewis, the New South Wales Colonial Architect, first purchased twelve acres at Nelson Bay – now known as Bronte – in 1836, and following further neighbouring purchases, he created an estate totalling forty-two acres. Despite apparently refusing an offer to sell his land for £4000 in 1841, by 1845, Lewis had fallen victim to the depression, and his estate was reclaimed by the Mortgagee. In that year, it was sold at auction to Robert and Georgiana Lowe for just £420. The Lowes had been in the colony for three years when they purchased the Nelson Bay estate. Robert Lowe, an albino ‘of great intellect and integrity with a commanding power of eloquence’ had commenced his radical career in New South Wales politics, after
which he went on to a career as a conservative in Britain. His wealth was central to his purchase at Bronte, and as we shall see, his desire to escape from controversy became central to the location's appeal.

The land acquired by the Lowes extended inland from the beach at Nelson Bay. It included the gully, but excluded the beach itself from one hundred feet from high water mark. The estate they inherited had already been considerably shaped by the architectural ideals and vision of Mortimer Lewis, including the design and position of the house, which was 'romantically sited on a rocky outcrop with views down the combe to the sea'. James Broadbent suggested that the plans for the house may have been altered to suit Georgiana's tastes. But regardless of whether it was inspired by her or Lewis, the drawing or reception room on the eastern side of the house, with double doors opening onto a large verandah which had 'magnificent views towards Bronte Beach' was designed to exploit the coastal position of the house, and is a crucial marker of an admiration of coastal views.

![Figure 1.3: Rear view of Bronte House, showing verandah overlooking the ocean.](image)

How important to the Lowes was the proximity of Bronte House to Sydney’s ocean coast? In addition to the primacy of the coastal views within the design of the house, there is evidence that Robert and Georgiana Lowe also used the beach space itself. In particular, a number of Georgiana’s sketches either depicted the beach or were seen looking out from the beach. In an early letter home to her mother, Georgiana described the property she and Robert had bought ‘on the sea’ as ‘lovely beyond conception’. The beach and sea views were not the only attractive feature she wrote of, although they were a prominent component of her illustration of their new home: the scenery resembles Jersey, but is far more beautiful – the vegetation is so lovely. We have a beautiful bay to ourselves – I may say it is our own – the trees line the shore with drives through them; we have a waterfall of sixty feet, and this runs through a fine valley; it is a most romantic spot and just suits my tastes.

The Lowes’ guests also enjoyed walking along the beach, or admiring the ocean view from the garden. Although they participated very little in Sydney society, their home famously became ‘a favourite resort of a select few’, with men including Sir Thomas Mitchell, William Sharpe Macleay, and Sir Alfred Stephen becoming regular guests. The room and verandah which overlooked the beach was the most popular among these guests, indicating again the appeal of the ocean view. Here, ‘in view of the Pacific Ocean’, Nelson Bay was the site of ‘lively and brilliant conversations on all subjects’.

Seeking the sea

Leo Schofield, who occupied Bronte House for many years in the late twentieth century, suggested that in choosing to settle in view of the Pacific Ocean rather than Sydney Harbour, Mortimer Lewis had a ‘more original eye than most of his fellow

68 T.B. Boulton, quoted in Patchett Martin, Life and Letters, pp.283-284.
69 Patchett Martin, Life and Letters, p.286.
70 Boulton, quoted in Patchett Martin, Life and Letters, p.283.
Settlers.²⁷¹ Such a statement overlooked the likelihood that Lewis was not alone in admiring the ocean scenery, and ignored the requests for land at Coogee by Thomas Chapman and Robert White which were likely for similarly aesthetic reasons.

Nonetheless, it is apparent that many of those who eventually settled on Sydney’s east coast in the mid-nineteenth century did so only after failing to secure land within sight of Sydney Harbour. One such individual was William Charles Greville, who in 1827 requested land ‘on the road leading to South Head, or somewhere in the vicinity of Sydney’, specifying a vacant spot of rocky land near Elizabeth Bay.²⁷² Whether he secured such land is unknown. His only substantial purchase in the subsequent period was a property of twenty acres on the shores of Little Coogee – now Clovelly – in 1834, for which he paid £44.²⁷³

In the mid-1850s, upon arrival in Sydney from England, Bishop Frederic Barker and his wife Jane expressed a similar desire to live on Sydney Harbour.²⁷⁴ They wanted a house away from the town, with a view of hills and water that would remind them of their home town, Brathay, in England’s Lakes District.²⁷⁵ They were consequently quite dissatisfied with the Episcopal reserve at inland Newtown, Frederic dismissing it as ‘a most uninteresting, uninviting spot, not a bit of the bay visible.’²⁷⁶ Rather than an admiration for the Harbour specifically, having a water view was the most important feature for the Barkers, and the position of Bronte House overlooking the ocean consequently appealed to them.²⁷⁷ But it was on the hills overlooking Coogee Bay where they eventually settled, and having found vacant property with a water view to suit their tastes, they exchanged their six acres at Newtown for fifty-nine here, in Randwick.²⁷⁸ The Lowes had also moved to Nelson Bay after having lived in a small

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²⁷² William Charles Greville to Lieutenant Ralph Darling, Governor in Chief, 1 May 1827, SRNSW: CGS 907 [27/6307, AO reel 1134].
²⁷³ Colonial Secretary to Internal Revenue Officer, 17/7/1834; Indexes to registers of land grants and leases, 1810-56, SRNSW: CGS 1217 [7/499], reel 2562. Lynch and Larcombe, *Randwick*, p.20.
²⁷⁵ Cable, ‘Mrs Barker and Her Diary’, p.92.
²⁷⁶ Diary of Bishop Barker, 30 May 1855, quoted in Cable, ‘Mrs Barker and Her Diary’, p.92.
²⁷⁷ Cable, ‘Mrs Barker and Her Diary’, p.92.
²⁷⁸ Cable, ‘Mrs Barker and Her Diary’, p.93.
house in Macquarie street, ‘overlooking the Domain and the beautiful salt-water lake, as we should call it in England, which forms the peerless harbour’.  

The willingness by Greville, the Lowes and the Barkers to substitute land with views of the Pacific Ocean for that fronting the harbour legitimised Thompson’s perception that land at Coogee Bay was of equal value to that on the harbour – although the Barkers settled in the hills above Coogee beach rather than in the subdivided lots closer to the shore. While the seascape remained inherently different between the two locations, the surf and ocean nonetheless fulfilled these landowners’ desires for water views. Their willingness to settle so close to the ocean suggests that perhaps the slow development of the coastal areas owed more to distance and the difficult terrain of the land between the coast and town, which included sandhills and swamps, than any specific English sentimentality for calmer waters. The disparity between the value of land at Newtown and that in the Coogee Hills as demonstrated by the Barker’s exchange does, however, indicate that coastal land continued to be substantially cheaper than that further inland and closer to the town.

There were two key elements of the attraction of Bronte for the Lowes, and the Coogee Hills for the Barkers. Firstly, the aesthetic attraction of living so close to the ocean was primary within their decision to purchase on the ocean coast. The romantic appeal of Sydney’s ocean beaches will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven. However it is worth noting here that the appeal of the ocean coast to these new colonials, and the perception of its appeal to the Colonial Secretary, was likely a reflection that the wilder ocean scenery was gaining ascendancy as Romanticism took popular hold towards the mid-nineteenth century. Furthermore, Bronte House followed the tradition only recently established in Britain, whereby ‘fishing villages and ports [which] had traditionally been built with their houses huddled together for protection, turning their backs on the sea,’ were being replaced with grand houses built along resort coastlines, with large windows from which ‘visitors could contemplate the waves as they ate their breakfast.’

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seaside also probably contributed to this aesthetic desirability of the coast which we can see being set by the cultural elite.

The Lowes and Barkers were also lured to the ocean coast by its seclusion. Robert and Georgiana Lowe treasured the sense of escape they felt at Nelson Bay from 'the narrowness and hostility' of a colonial society which shunned them.81 The Barkers also appreciated the refuge offered by their home overlooking Coogee Bay, Kenneth Cable writing that 'the five miles from Miller's Point seemed to take them into another and better world.'82 A number of other residents of Coogee and Maroubra were also reportedly 'virtual recluses', having chosen their property for its 'splendid isolation'.83 However the distance from Sydney was far more important in creating the seclusion of these coastal properties than their specific location on the coast. Until a proper road was built in later years, the area remained for many 'a country estate or gentlemen's retreat.'84

We have seen then, that between 1809 and 1850, Sydney’s ocean coast was increasingly subject to private ownership. But the nature of that ownership was changing. In the 1830s, land sales replaced the grants system, indicating that any new coastal residents specifically sought land fronting the ocean; and the decision to reserve the foreshores ensured at least part of those beaches which were still Crown land remained public property. We can also see that the purposes of coastal land were gradually shifting throughout this period, as the aesthetic appeals of Sydney’s ocean coast began to gain prominence over earlier attempts to farm the land.

This chapter has so far considered the attitudes of the first settlers and emancipists to own land on Sydney’s coast, but what did inland residents think about the coast? To what extent was the coast, and in particular the ocean beaches, visited by tourists or sightseers from further inland during this early period? And in what ways did they use the beach?

82 Cable, ‘Mrs Barker and Her Diary’, p.93.
84 Randwick: A Social History, p.13.
Bathing in early New South Wales

Sydney's first settlers brought with them concepts of the seaside in which bathing played a central role. By the time New South Wales was settled in the late eighteenth century a strong seaside culture existed in Britain in which therapeutic bathing among the leisured classes was central. In some places, this culture replaced, and in others, co-existed alongside, a longer tradition of bathing by coastal villagers. Locals had been bathing in the sea for many years before it was 'discovered' by the leisured classes, not only in Britain but throughout Continental Europe, and the supposedly strict moral codes of bathing dress and sex segregation of the visitor were rarely if ever followed by the locals. For these bathers, according to Corbin, the seaside was above all else about recreation; it 'was an extension of the free-splashing of childhood and adolescence ... it occurred within the framework of collective activities, festive or playful, and always noisy.'

Situated on the shores of the harbour, the position and climate of Sydney encouraged the earliest settlers to bathe close to home. These settlers, primarily convicts, emancipists and soldiers, were not the class which had enjoyed sea therapy in Britain; consequently, they did not bathe for therapeutic purposes. Citing descriptions of Sydney residents 'frolicking in the water', Leone Huntsman suggested that 'bathing seems to have gained early popularity as an enjoyable activity in its own right, not just as a way of cooling off in the hot weather.' Condemned by the Governor as an 'indecent and improper custom', by 1810, bathing in Sydney had far more in common with the 'popular bathing' of British and European coastal villagers than with the more widely recognised and recorded trips of the British elite to the seaside.

There is substantial evidence of Europeans bathing in a number of spots around the harbour, including Darling Harbour, Farm Cove and Woolloomooloo, early in the nineteenth century: in addition to Huntsman's descriptions of bathers were the complaints about the immorality of public bathing, and reports of sharks attacking

85 Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, p.82; See also Walton, *The Blackpool Landlady*, p.15.
86 Huntsman, *Sand in Our Souls*, p.20.
87 Sydney Gazette, 6 October 1810, p.2; Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, pp.82-83.
bathers, which were very occasionally reported in the Sydney press.\textsuperscript{88} Anthony Trollope declared later in the century that Sydney’s baths, ‘guarded by palisades from the sharks... and fitted with all requisites’ had no equal anywhere in the world.\textsuperscript{89} There is far less evidence, however, of surf bathing among the earliest Europeans in Sydney. Virtually all that exists from this period is the report of the death of a young clerk in the surf at Bondi (termed ‘Bundye’) in 1818, ‘from the force of which, when once involved, he could not extricate himself’.\textsuperscript{90} It is not clear why this man was in the surf, which was reported to be ‘very high and rapid at the time’, although given it was mid-winter it is possible the surf offered a means of suicide, rather than hedonistic pleasure or a means of cleansing. It is also possible he was bathing for therapeutic reasons, since cold water bathing had long been recommended on the British coast.\textsuperscript{91}

The lack of evidence relating to ocean bathing close to Sydney does not necessarily mean that the new settlers did not engage in this activity, or that they feared the surf. But the distance of the surf beaches from the city, which made them very difficult to access during the first decades of settlement, made it unlikely. Whether they were bathing to cool off from Sydney’s comparatively harsh climate, to clean themselves, or for pure enjoyment, the close proximity of the harbour to the town made it unnecessary to travel to the ocean beaches for bathing purposes.

There is evidence, however, of surf bathing on Newcastle’s ocean beaches from as early as 1804.\textsuperscript{92} By 1810 enough people had drowned while ‘bathing on that part of the beach when there is a heavy surf’ to compel the Governor to issue instructions to the Commandant at Newcastle ‘to caution all persons against bathing in any other

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\textsuperscript{88} Sydney Gazette, 18 January 1807 p.1. For more on bathing in the harbour, see Huntsman, \textit{Sand in Our Souls}, pp.19-21.


\textsuperscript{90} Sydney Gazette, 18 July 1818, p.3.

\textsuperscript{91} Corbin, \textit{The Lure of the Sea}, p.73; Walton, \textit{The English Seaside Resort}, p.11.

\textsuperscript{92} Nancy Cushing, ‘Ocean baths and arc lights: Newcastle City Council and control on the beach’ in Jane Long, Jan Gothard and Helen Brash (editors) \textit{Forging Identities: Bodies, Gender and Feminist History} (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1997), p.90.
place than on the beach within the harbour, to the westward of the wharf. The apparent popularity of surf bathing in Newcastle, where settlers could choose between bathing in the surf or the protected waters of the harbour, suggests that far from fearing the surf, as Wells suggested, Australia’s earliest European settlers had the capacity to enjoy surf bathing. In charge of a penal settlement, the Newcastle authorities do not appear to have expressed concern with the immorality of public bathing. Sydney, in contrast, was not only a penal settlement but a quickly growing colonial city, with free settlers and emancipists among its population. Transgressions of morality therefore had to be closely guarded against, and bathing in public caused increasing concern to the Governors.

The bathing bans
In 1833, alarmed by the ‘gross violation of decency’ public bathing in Sydney Cove posed, the New South Wales Governor, Ralph Darling, made bathing at any hour of the day in Sydney Cove illegal, and instructed constables to ‘identify and prosecute to conviction’ any bathers they found. The specification of Sydney Cove only in this ruling reflected both the regularity of bathing in this area, and the fact that in Sydney Cove, bathers’ bodies were on display to large numbers of passers by. In 1838, however, the ban was extended to other major New South Wales towns, and incorporated into the colony’s Police Act, re-iterating the moral anxiety about bathing within public view. Located between a clause restricting the keeping of swine, and a prohibition of burning shavings in the streets, this ban made it illegal to ‘bath near to, or within view of, any public wharf, quay, bridge, street, road or other place of public resort’, between the hours of 6am and 8pm in New South Wales towns. The punishment of such an offence was a fine of up to one pound, a considerably hefty sum for the period in question, but far less than the £5 fine for public exposure.

93 Instructions for the guidance and government of Lieutenant Purcell, of the 73rd regiment, Commandant at Newcastle, from Lachlan Macquarie, 1 October 1810, Historical Records of NSW, vol.7, p.426. Emphasis added.  
94 Wells, Sunny Memories, pp.15-17.  
96 NSW Government Gazette, 13 February 1833, p.59.  
97 NSW Government Gazette, 22 August 1838, pp.659-660.
Sydney's ocean beaches were too secluded from the town to be immediately affected by this legislation, although the declaration of Coogee as a town in the same year meant Coogee beach would have been subject to the ruling. The bans did, however, have a severe and lasting impact on the relationship between Sydneysiders and the 'sea'. It was not until the twentieth century that this ban on daytime bathing would be officially lifted by Sydney's coastal councils, necessitating any legal bathing in the interim to be experienced inside the static confines of officially-sanctioned, sex-segregated, bathing facilities, or a secluded spot out of view of the public. Despite these bans, people did bathe in the surf at Sydney's ocean beaches. However, as the beaches became popularised among day-trippers, and therefore more crowded, it became near impossible to bathe on Sundays and public holidays without being in public view. The 1838 Police Act meant that the mainstream beach culture of the later nineteenth century was consequently enacted on the dry parts of the beach — that is, out of the surf.

Other recreational uses of the beach

There is little evidence regarding the recreational use of Sydney's ocean beaches in the first half of the nineteenth century. But from the minimal evidence which does exist, what can we learn about the ways in which the beaches were used during this early period? Historians of Bondi and Randwick agreed that Bondi and Coogee in particular were visited by picnickers from the 1830s onwards. Lynch and Larcombe suggested that the woodcutters' track to Coogee and Little Coogee was used by picnickers by the early 1830s, 'for even at this early date Coogee was becoming known as a "resort"'. An 1841 advertisement for land at North Bondi declared that picnics 'constantly take place at this charming spot', and Sean Brawley, citing an 1843 novel, also argued that by the 1840s Bondi 'was a popular picnic site for Sydneysiders. The presence of a bushranger between Bondi Junction and the beach — and warnings of his existence in the press — is further evidence that people were travelling in the close vicinity of the beach at this time, although this may have been for a variety of purposes.

98 Lynch and Larcombe, Randwick, p.19.
99 Australian, 29 June 1841, p.4; Brawley, The Bondi Lifesaver, p.19.
100 Brawley, The Bondi Lifesaver, p.19.
In addition to the woodcutter’s track, these picnickers possibly used a number of rough roads in the vicinity of Sydney’s coastline which existed by the late 1830s. Lynch and Larcombe described a track which was cut in 1817 from South Head through Bondi, Coogee and Maroubra to La Perouse, on the north head of Botany Bay, along the cliffs.\textsuperscript{101} It is also possible that the opening of the Randwick Racecourse in the mid 1830s brought additional visitors to the Coogee area.\textsuperscript{102} And those who visited the Bondi area were likely to have used the South Head Road for most of the journey. By the mid 1830s, there was also a road north from Manly to Barrenjoey, which was as much a ‘bush track’ as it was a road, according to William Govett. It ran parallel to the coast until it reached James Jenkins’ farm, around Long Reef, and continued from there along ‘a narrow sandy beach of three miles in length, which divides the waters of Narrabeen Lagoon from the Ocean.’\textsuperscript{103} While Govett did not describe the uses to which this track was put, and who by, at such a distance from Sydney it was unlikely to have been used by recreational beachgoers from outside the area.

During the 1840s, the beach at Nelson Bay was also occasionally visited by members of the general public who were not guests of the Lowes. T.B. Boulton, a regular visitor to the Nelson Bay Estate during the 1840s, recalled an incident he observed as he read ‘under the shade of one of the beautiful honeycombed sandstone rocks’. Here, he witnessed a confrontation between William MacLeay and Robert Lowe, who were ‘walking on the shore’, and ‘two hulking larrikins’, who had ignored the false warnings of the former that they were on private property. The intruders eventually left after Lowe hit them on their backs with a piece of bamboo which had been ‘washed up by the lazy tide’.\textsuperscript{104} One of Georgiana’s sketches taken from the southern headland of the beach also depicted a woman and a child on the rocks. It is not clear whether these people were really there, or included for artistic purposes, but, together with the events recounted above, suggest that people did occasionally visit this beach.

\textsuperscript{101} Lynch and Larcombe, \textit{Randwick}, p.20.
\textsuperscript{102} Waterhouse, \textit{Private Pleasures}, p.18.
\textsuperscript{103} Govett, \textit{Sketches of NSW}, pp.55-56.
\textsuperscript{104} Boulton, quoted in Patchett Martin, \textit{Life and Letters}, pp.283-284.
There is some evidence, then, that Sydney’s ocean beaches were emerging as sites of leisure by the 1830s and 1840s. Although they remained difficult to access, Coogee, Bondi and Nelson Bay were starting to attract picnic parties, who were no doubt drawn outdoors by Sydney’s warm climate. We know nothing about who constituted these picnicking groups, but it is likely they were wealthy residents who travelled at least part of the way by carriage. These beachgoers were perhaps unaware of the role they played in the making of Sydney’s beach culture. But in using the beach for leisure, and overlooking its established utilitarian purposes, they were pioneers in the entrenchment of recreation in Sydney’s beach culture.

**Conclusions**

By 1850 the ways in which Sydney’s beaches were used were still a long way from 1920. However, through the occasional beach picnics enjoyed by residents of Sydney, and the articulation of a desire to live on the coast, which was driven largely by the aesthetics of health and of nature, we can see the beginnings of the culture which would later come to dominate the ocean coast emerging by the 1830s. While there may have been little specific interest in the beaches themselves, especially in the
earlier part of this period, crucial decisions were made which later impacted heavily on the ways in which Sydney’s beaches could be used and understood. In particular, the banning of daylight bathing helped to shape the dry beach culture which gained in strength later in the nineteenth century, and the reservation of foreshores ensured most beaches remained public property. The latter decision may have been influenced mostly by the functional potential of the coast, but it would later be interpreted according to the recreational needs of the public, leading to the declaration of beaches as the ‘rightful inheritance’ of the New South Wales people. The foreshore ruling consequently influenced Sydney’s beach culture far more than the bathing bans ever would. The latter restricted bathing only until the end of the century – and even then not entirely effectively; the land ruling ensured most of Sydney’s coast would remain in public hands for the future.
We have seen that Coogee’s inaccessibility was fundamental to its slow development following the first land sales in 1839. In the 1850s, Coogee was still substantially isolated, causing one local to complain to the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the main road into the area:

> is not sufficiently wide to enable two vehicles to pass each other without the risk of one or both being precipitated into a loathsome gully, where, if the vehicles should escape being shattered to atoms, the horses and drivers miraculously escape without loss of life or broken limbs, it is more than probable that some venomous snake or adder might take direful vengeance on the unexpected intruders. Let any *disinterested* person drive, ride or walk from the water works to the *classical village* yelept ‘Randwick’, and he must enter into all the horrors of the ancients sailing between Scylla and Charybdis.¹

Although he perhaps overstated the dangers of the road, J.N.’s letter hinted that the lack of easy access between Sydney and Coogee remained a deterrent to both potential settlers and day-trippers. In the following decades, the Waverley Council expressed similar concerns about the inaccessibility of the neighbouring Nelson Bay and Bondi Beaches. But in time the roads would be built; the bigger battle would be about who owned the beach.

This chapter examines the attempts to create public spaces on Bondi, Coogee, Nelson Bay and Manly beaches between 1850 and 1880. During this period, the creation of the town of Manly and improved access to Manly, Coogee and Bondi established these beaches as primary recreational day-tripping destinations in Sydney, building on

¹ J.N., Letter to the Editor, *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH), 6 March 1855, p.3. Original emphasis
the foundations created in the first half of the century. But on the beaches south of the harbour, the provision of public spaces and improved access to the coast was highly contentious, and formed the subject of heated debates between the Department of Lands, coastal councils, coastal landowners and pleasure seekers. At Manly, in contrast, there were no competing interests in the area when development commenced. Its transition from privately owned grants of land used only by a handful of Europeans before the 1850s, to a town and tourist resort with streets, hotels, shops and houses by the end of that decade, was born entirely of private entrepreneurialism, and therefore achieved with considerable ease. In the south we see a more protracted debate before a notion of public space emerged victorious.

In focussing on the human culture of the beach, historians have left the mid-nineteenth century contests over beach and coastal land in Sydney unstudied. They tend to concentrate on the later decades of the nineteenth century, when the importance of the beach as a site of leisure for residents of Sydney was already established – that is, the demand for public beaches was already evident, and the infrastructure supplied. This, coupled with a collective emphasis on picnicking, bathing, and other activities which dominated the twentieth century beach, has left silences in the story of Sydney's beach development, creating a need for a more detailed analysis of the ways in which the beaches were made available for public recreation in the mid-nineteenth century. As Alice Garner has demonstrated in her detailed history of the transformation of the French fishing town Arcachon, careful examination of government archival documents can expose some of the complexities behind decisions that were made regarding the use, appropriate or otherwise, of coastal land. Such a study looks beyond what people were doing on the beach, and asks how it is that the beach space came to be used in certain ways, an approach which has not yet been applied to Sydney's beach history, with the exception of Manly.
In an attempt to understand the mid-nineteenth century contests over some of Sydney's beaches and coastal land, I have drawn on the extensive collections of the Lands Department correspondence held at the State Records office of New South Wales. In this correspondence we find arguments being fought out about public and private ways of using beach space, and whether any individuals should have exclusive right to the foreshores. Local residents and municipal councils contested the rights of individual landowners to coastal spaces in the name of a wider 'public' interest, and surveyors were invariably instructed to decide on the best course of action. Responses and notes by staff in the Lands Department, together with the Under Secretary and Minister, also reveal the government's attitude to contested land, helping us to pinpoint where the desires of the public 'need' fell within the priorities of public expenditure. We learn from this correspondence that Sydney's ocean beaches were not merely an unequivocal site of health, joy and recreation available to all who made their way there, hindered only by an inability to enter the surf, as we might understand from existing accounts of the mid-nineteenth century Australian beach. Rather, modern ways of understanding the beach, as a site of recreation which all members of the public have a 'right' to access, were developing and even being created in the 1850s and '60s. These records allow us to properly understand, for the first time, how such modern ways of using and understanding the beach were not inherent to the colonial mindset, but were being negotiated and fought out in mid-nineteenth century Sydney.

The creation of Manly: Sydney's first seaside 'resort'
The development of Manly as a seaside village and tourist resort occurred under circumstances which would become extraordinary in Sydney's beach history. In the early 1850s, an entrepreneur named Henry Gilbert Smith purchased and subsequently leased over 200 acres of land at Manly on the peninsular between the ocean and harbour beaches, with the express intention of 'drawing villas and... laying out the ground and streets'. From the outset, Manly was therefore markedly different from coastal areas south of the harbour, such as Coogee and Bondi; rather than being developed or made accessible by the Lands Department, the grantee of the land, or

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5 Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, p.54; Henry Gilbert Smith, Letter to nephew, Charles, 22 March 1853, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, 1827-1857, ML MSS 660, p.35
local agitation, Manly was solely the project of a single entrepreneur. No Europeans but Smith had vested interests in the region in the 1850s, and so he encountered no opposition to his ‘improvements’ to the area, neither by the government, residents nor members of the general public; neither did any questions arise as to whether he was using ocean and harbour-fronting land ‘appropriately.’ Rather, through the roads he laid out, the hotels, villas and other buildings he constructed, and the steamers he employed to bring visitors from the city, Smith created the first interest in Manly, both as a leisure destination, and as a residential town.

Pauline Curby has pieced together a detailed description of Smith’s activities in the early days of Manly, recording that between 1853 and 1855, he purchased most of the

Figure 2.1:
Map showing Manly Peninsula. Smith purchased Cheers’ Farm (centre) as well as substantial land to the north west. The south east corner of the peninsular was reserved as a Quarantine ground, while the land bordering Quarantine was later granted to the Roman Catholic Church.
available land at Manly, which he then called ‘Clifton’, and later ‘Ellensville’, with a
view to creating a Marine Village modelled on British and European examples. Curby and other historians of Manly observed Smith’s entrepreneurial background, but cited health, and personal enjoyment, as major incentives for Smith’s considerable expenditure of both time and money. It is apparent however that the health and lifestyle improvements enjoyed by Smith occurred only in the years following his initial purchases in the region, and therefore cannot be drawn on to explain his considerable financial investment in the area. Rather, Smith was ruled entirely by commercial motives when making purchases at Manly, a fact confirmed by his status in the 1850s as a settler preoccupied with making profits.

Upon their arrival in the colony in 1827, Smith and his brother were engaged in an importing and exporting business, and in the following decades, Smith was occupied at different times in foreign trade, running a ferry service from Sydney to Parramatta, and real estate in the Illawarra area. The fact that in the fifty years he was in the colony there were approximately 300 transactions of land sales alone under his name further attests to Smith’s business acumen. Smith’s letters to his family in Britain contained constant references to these enterprises, exposing him as a man obsessed with money. In the letters which date from the early 1820s, Smith not only updated his parents and brother on his personal profits, but offered them detailed and regular insights into the changing fortunes of the colony, describing at different times property sales and prices, the wages of labourers and small business owners, housing shortages, and even the price of potatoes, wheat and hay.

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7 Muir, Henry Gilbert Smith, p.1-17; Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith

8 Muir, Henry Gilbert Smith, p.8

9 Smith to parents, 24 September 1832; Smith to mother, 24 January 1835, 23 March 1836, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, pp.15-18.

10 Smith to mother, 23 March 1836; Smith to John, 20 January 1845, 31 January 1853, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, pp.18, 21, 33.

11 Smith to John, 28 December 1852, 14 July 1854, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, pp.32, 41.

12 Smith to John, 28 December 1852, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, p.32.

13 Smith to John, 21 November 1854. He also compares the fortunes of Sydney with Melbourne, Smith to John, 18 May 1856, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, pp.43, 47.
It was in this context, as an entrepreneur obsessed with the fortunes of the colony and making money for himself, that Henry Gilbert Smith made his first purchases at Manly. His initial involvement in Manly was for no other reason than financial gain, as he hinted early on to his nephew: ‘with Mr Squirhill’s assistance… Clifton (Manly) would go ahead and pay me handsomely, £8 only the acre being my purchase money.’ It was only as he came to spend more time at Manly, and after significant developments had been made, that he began to personally enjoy the place.

Smith’s extensive work in laying out Manly as a ‘marine village’ and promoting it to tourists and potential residents in the early 1850s was the first attempt to properly develop any of Sydney’s ocean coast, although much of Sydney’s harbour foreshores were by now recognised as valuable real estate. He understood that the project was a financial risk, but remained determined, writing that ‘I shall have the laugh’ at those who ‘think I am far gone on this point’. His enthusiasm and optimistic outlook undoubtedly took strength from the long term success of British seaside resorts, as well as those emerging in other colonies. His own preferences for coastal land, demonstrated by his earlier residence at Wollongong in the Illawarra district, also suggest a confidence in the attraction of the ocean coast. Furthermore, Smith’s faith in the advantages of seaside exposure was no doubt reinforced by the benefits he himself later attributed to living in Manly, and in particular the improvements to his health.

The provision of transport to and amenities at Manly was ultimately designed to cater to a demand for recreational space by the seaside that Smith guessed existed within the Sydney community. In 1855, he declared to his brother that he really believed he was ‘doing good in forming a village or watering place for the inhabitants of Sydney’. Smith relied heavily on the attractions of the natural spaces of Manly to lure visitors, and provided ways for people to access this space; the roads he built and parks he cleared were designed to maximise access to the ocean beach and other bays.

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16 Smith to Charles, 22 March 1853.
17 Smith attributed his considerable health improvements to being away from Sydney rather than the fresh ocean air specifically, although chapter seven will explain that escape from a congested city is a crucial element of the perceived health benefits of being near the sea. Smith to John, 21 November 1854, 4 June 1855, *Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith*, pp.43, 45.
18 Smith to John, 4 June 1855.
in the area, which themselves became the primary tourist attractions of Manly. In constructing hotels as well as homes, he deliberately established Manly as a tourist destination from the outset. Smith was therefore not merely a property investor, but one of Australia’s earliest leisure entrepreneurs.

Henry Gilbert Smith was certainly not the first colonial to identify the desire of the public for spaces by the ocean, or to try and cater to this demand. His motivations and rationale were hardly, if at all, removed from those which led to the subdivision of the Coogee area just over a decade earlier. South of Sydney, Brighton on Port Phillip Bay had also been successfully subdivided and sold to members of Melbourne’s elite in the 1840s. Here, coastal land was purchased by the professional classes keen for a summer or weekend escape from the city, and by 1846, only five years after the first subdivision of the locality, Brighton boasted 509 residents, a figure which was sure to inspire Smith.19

Brighton’s proximity to the city and easy accessibility by land differentiated it from the adaptability of Manly for similar purposes, perhaps adding to the doubts of Smith’s many critics. But steamer travel tended to be more convenient than land travel during this period, and had proved a popular way for Londoners to travel to British seaside resorts such as Margate and Gravesend.20 In this tradition, Queenscliff, at the mouth of Port Phillip Bay (positioned similarly to Manly on a peninsular between bay and ocean water), had attracted day-trippers on steamer excursions from Melbourne during the 1840s. Following this success, in the 1850s, at the same time as Smith was making his first purchases at Manly, Queenscliff was being surveyed as a town which was hoped to become ‘a place of recreation for the citizens of Geelong.’ 21 This initiative by local and colonial government in the early 1850s led to the development of one of the first seaside resorts a significant distance from Melbourne.22 Queenscliff’s success was ensured by its close proximity to Geelong, but in addition it offered wealthy Melbourne residents the same

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21 Inglis, Beside the Seaside, p.12.
22 Inglis, Beside the Seaside.
opportunities for a day-trip or extended holiday that Manly did Sydneysiders: a seaside village a steamship journey away from the town. The crucial difference was that Manly was the enterprise of an individual, rather than government. It was not until the 1870s that George Coppin, Smith’s Melbourne equivalent as a seaside entrepreneur, began to develop Sorrento, and by then Smith’s entrepreneurial efforts had been fully rewarded; Manly had been long established as the ‘watering place, par excellence, of Sydney.’

A road to the sea beach: negotiating the Coogee Bay Road

Simeon Pearce was another individual who greatly influenced the development of Sydney’s coast, although his role differed in nature to Smith’s. Whereas Smith had purchased Manly with the intention of transforming the area into a ‘resort’, Pearce was one of several residents of Randwick with an interest in promoting the district. He may have focussed more on the attractions of Randwick, up the hill from Coogee, than on the seaside town itself, but it was Randwick’s proximity to the ocean which made it so appealing to Pearce; it boasted views of the ocean while being far enough away to be protected from its harsher elements. For similar reasons, Smith, too, had chosen a site overlooking the more sheltered harbour for his Manly residence. The Randwick/Coogee area did not have the harbour frontage or some other natural elements which Manly possessed, but was deemed attractive by virtue of its distance from Sydney, and fresh ocean air.

As the Commissioner for Crown Lands for the region, Pearce took the opportunity to promote the area to many potential settlers. In 1853, he was said to have persuaded the composer Isaac Nathan to buy land at Randwick rather than Coogee because the former ‘will be the Brighton of Sydney.’ He also drew people such as the District Court Judge, Thomas Callaghan, to Randwick, where he built his country villa overlooking the Coogee sand hills to the ocean. As Smith had experienced at Manly,

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23 Queenscliff was developed from the mid 1850s on, but the potential of this resort was first identified by local and Colonial governments, not individual entrepreneurs. Inglis, Beside the Seaside, p.12.


26 O’Keefe, Simeon Pearce’s Randwick, p.22.
the difficulty of getting from Sydney to Randwick in the early 1850s was a substantial obstacle for potential residents, and Coogee was even less accessible. Hence, although subdivisions at Coogee had been available for more than fifteen years, by 1854, according to Simeon Pearce, Coogee had only five residents: George Doddery, who had complained to the government of a lack of Coogee representation on the Randwick Coogee Roads Trust, and ‘four poor labouring men’: a stark contrast to the earlier expectations for the subdivision.

In 1853, Pearce and a number of other locals began to petition the government to allow them to establish a Randwick, Coogee and Botany Roads Trust, and collected subscriptions to repair and build the main roads in the area. The proposed road would both make their own transport to Randwick significantly easier, and open the area up to further, and hopefully substantial, development. In their first application for government funding for the roads in September 1854, the group which would later form the Roads Trust outlined three reasons for their application. Firstly, they argued, these roads formed the only thoroughfare to all the land between Sydney and the ocean, and secondly, in connecting Old Botany Road (now Anzac Parade) with the Frenchmans Road which led to Waverley, ‘a long and healthy public drive’ would be created. Thirdly and finally, they cited the price of the most recent land sold at Randwick as an indication of the money which could be made by the government if the roads were to be improved, suggesting that the formation of a road would triple the price of that land. Their rationale combined the economic potential of the road with a consideration of its less practical, but more aesthetic purposes.

Despite the reiterations by the Committee Secretary and one of the government’s own surveyors regarding the ‘public’ benefit that such a road would offer, the Colonial authorities considered the project only in terms of economic potential. They phrased all their internal communications in this context, entirely ignoring the first two

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27 O'Keefe, Simeon Pearce's Randwick, pp.24-25.
28 Simeon Pearce to Colonial Secretary, 16 October 1854, State Records NSW: Department of Lands; CGS 7933, letters received, 1856-1866; [54/9108] with bundle 57/1368, box 5/3571. The Executive Council also considered the matter and approved the application, see minutes of the Executive Council held on 6 February 1855, SRNSW: CGS 7933 [53/10789] with bundle 57/1368, box 5/3571. The Executive Council also considered the matter and approved the application, see minutes of the Executive Council held on 6 February 1855, SRNSW: CGS 7933 [53/10789] with bundle 57/1368, box 5/3571.
29 TFL Nathan to Colonial Secretary, 30 November 1853, SRNSW: CGS 7933 [53/10789] with bundle 57/1368, box 5/3571.
reasons outlined above. A prime example lies in the margins of an 1854 letter from the Committee, in which a member of the Colonial Secretary’s staff, if not the Colonial Secretary himself, wrote: ‘before any decision is given on this application I should like to know what quantity of land has been sold in this locality? What amount has been realised for it? What has been the average price obtained per acre?’

Funding was eventually granted to construct a road through Randwick to Coogee, but it was promised for the sole purpose of opening up new land ‘for sale along the coast.’

Despite the case presented by the Randwick and Coogee Road Committee members, and later Commissioners, the Colonial government did not consider access to the beach alone as sufficient justification for public expenditure on constructing a road in the mid-1850s. The appeal of increased revenue through higher land sales as a result of the road was a far more appropriate reason for any financial involvement in the infrastructure, and the only one that was evidently considered by the authorities. In the final years of direct British rule of New South Wales, the colonial authorities were far more preoccupied with the health of the budget than any other definition of ‘public interest’.

Whatever the financial incentive, the construction of the road achieved the effects desired by the Committee members, including Pearce. It opened up the area around Randwick and Coogee for substantial real estate development, as well as making the beach at Coogee more easily accessible for those seeking recreation and health benefits. Within only a couple of years, omnibus trips were advertised from Sydney (Wynyard) to Coogee on Sunday afternoons, catering, it would seem, purely to pleasure seekers. This development surpassed even the intentions of the Randwick residents, who had anticipated only carriage access to Coogee; the provision of

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30 Notes in margin, unsigned: Secretary Randwick Coogee Roads Committee to Colonial Secretary, 8 June 1854, SRNSW: CGS 7933 [54/5042] with bundle 57/1368, box 5/3571. The Executive Council later approved expenditure not exceeding £500 on the grounds that ‘the repair of these roads tends directly to enhance the value of Crown Lands in their vicinity.’ Proceedings of the Executive Council, 17 July 1854, SRNSW: CGS 7933 [with 54/6004] with bundle 57/1368, box 5/3571.


32 SMH, 6 March 1858, p.1.
omnibuses, even though they were privately run, allowed those from Sydney without private means of transport to visit the beach. The circumstances for future battles between residents and day-trippers had thus been set. Coogee was no longer only a residential suburb but, as had likely been the intention with its subdivision in 1839, the road transformed it into a popular destination for day-trippers from Sydney. By the time the Randwick Council was formed in February 1859, the first Municipality to be incorporated in New South Wales, the needs of leisure-seeking beachgoers was an important local issue, and one which instantly attracted their attention, and time.33

This Randwick and Coogee Road Committee was not the only group to struggle for government support and funding for a coastal road in the mid nineteenth century. In the following decade, the Waverley Municipal Council attempted to construct roads to both Bondi and Nelson Bays. Unlike at Coogee, however, their efforts were primarily obstructed by the private ownership of the foreshores or surrounding areas. Yet as with Coogee, the considerations made by the Colonial authorities and Waverley Council regarding the formation of a road to Bondi, initially at least, were again preoccupied with the question of commercial benefit.

The battle for Bondi beach

As a privately owned space since 1809, it was not until the mid 1850s that Bondi beach came to the attention of the colonial government. In 1854, following a failed attempt to sell the land two years earlier, Edward Smith Hall, owner of the Bondi Estate and publisher of the Sydney Monitor, offered to exchange some of his land with the Crown for a portion elsewhere in Sydney.34 Reporting on the possible exchange, the Surveyor General, Thomas Mitchell, saw new potential in the land. He proposed that the government take the opportunity of the land exchange to open up the beach for public access, and construct a road from Belle Vue to Bondi Bay. He considered it ‘important’ to give the public free access to the sea beach, and upon discovering that the beach itself was still privately owned by Hall, called for a full resumption, ‘if

33 H.E. Maiden, The History of Local Government in New South Wales (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1966), p.72; Randwick Municipal Council, Minutes, 1859
34 Colonial Secretary to E.S. Hall, 16 September 1854, Land in Compensation to Mr F. O’Brien, 1854-1855 (Local History File: Waverley Library); ‘Bondi’ (advertisement), Sydney Morning Herald, 3 July 1852, p.6.
necessary at the public expense, for the health and recreation of the inhabitants of Sydney.\textsuperscript{35}

Hall exchanged more than 21 acres at Bondi for just 9 acres on the Newtown road, but this did not include the road to the beach or the beach reservation itself, and while Hall was evidently keen to exchange further land, this did not eventuate.\textsuperscript{36} It later became apparent that the Governor General ‘did not consider it desirable that any negotiation should be opened in this matter,’ perhaps because there would be no way of recouping the considerable expense which would be spent on the project.\textsuperscript{37} However even had they seen merit in the proposal, it is unlikely the government would have acted on Mitchell’s request in this late period of his career when his professionalism and the efficiency of his department were being constantly questioned.\textsuperscript{38}

Thomas Mitchell appears to have been the only government official on this occasion who considered the public benefits arising from making Bondi Beach fully accessible as justification for the government expenditure. However, as Henry Gilbert Smith’s correspondence demonstrates, he was not alone in his identification of the potential of coastal land for recreational purposes. As with Smith, in suggesting the provision of a road to Bondi Bay was ‘amongst the greatest desiderata around Sydney,’ Mitchell was also responding to a need or desire which he perceived existed, rather than acting to create a demand. Regardless of whether the Governor General was aware of this demand, as we saw with the Coogee road, the provision of public drives or recreation spaces was not deemed to be sufficient justification for public expenditure on infrastructure in newly settled areas.

\textsuperscript{35} Surveyor General’s Report, 28 & 29 September 1854, \textit{Land in Compensation to Mr F. O’Brien}.

\textsuperscript{36} The land initially offered by Hall did not include these areas, and although he agreed to exchange further amounts of land for public access to the beach, this information was conveyed to the Civil Crown Solicitor too late to be included in the arbitration agreement. Civil Crown Solicitor to Colonial Secretary, 12 July 1855; E.S. Hall to Colonial Secretary, 16 August 1855, \textit{Land in Compensation to Mr F. O’Brien}.

\textsuperscript{37} Principal Under Secretary to Civil Crown Solicitor, 31 April 1855, cited in letter from Surveyor General’s office to Department of Lands, 23 August 1861, \textit{State Records NSW: Surveyor General; CGS 13751, Letters received, 1856-67 [61/2631]}, with Bundle 62/5441, Box 5/5617.

In late 1859, only three months after the proclamation of the Municipality of Waverley, the young Council appointed a deputation to request from the Minister for Lands a completion of the road from Belle Vue to Bondi Beach 'as promised by the Government,' and a resumption of the ocean beach. This road would provide direct access to the beach, going 'round the Bay, from the headland of Ben Buckler to the recreation ground, Southern headland of Bondi'.  

Their plans were largely based on those of Thomas Mitchell from six years earlier:

- About two thousand pounds was voted by Parliament and expended (upon fencing the Point Piper Estate) that the three roads meeting at 'Belle Vue' should merge into this one which ought therefore to be 100 feet wide and planted on both sides. The Terrace would encircle Bondi Bay and be 100 yards wide, taking in the headlands from Ben Buckler in the North to the Recreation reserve in the south. By taking advantage of the natural facilities a fine sea wall and pier could be formed at the north and south extremities of the Bay affording safe anchorage for steamers or Sailing Vessels of Large Tonnage...

The aesthetic and health benefits which may be gained from access to the beach were implied in the description of this grand 'terrace', by creating a substantial public space by the sea, but were never specifically stated as the primary reason for forming the road. In fact the argument that 'the sum of two or three thousand pounds will indeed be but a trifle when the importance of the object to be gained by the Public is considered' was rather ambivalent. However, towards the end of the letter the Council Chairman revealed a financial incentive for the Municipality in this project, which was a driving factor behind the Council's application. Namely, such a reserve would give 'the public' land and water access to 'an inexhaustible quarry of the finest road metal'. The 'public' to which he referred here, translated to 'the authorities', and especially Waverley Council. Such access, he argued, would benefit not only

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39 Waverley Municipal Council, Minutes, 8 & 15 November 1859
40 Chairman, Waverley Council to Premier and Minister for Lands, 14 April 1860, SRNSW: CGS 13751 [60/111], with Bundle 62/5441, Box 5/5617.
Waverley but the surrounding councils, and ‘a saving of thousands of pounds to the combined Municipalities would be in reality a saving to the Government.’ Financial incentive therefore appears to have been the greatest motivation behind the Council’s push for the resumption of land at Bondi beach. The potential savings and even income from ownership of, or free access to, such a reportedly large quarry of road metal would be invaluable to a body which was extremely busy in this period forming roads throughout the Municipality. The incentive of public benefit from access to the beach space was at the very least an additional inducement to quarry access. It is also possible that public access to the beach may have even been the primary motivation of the council, whose funds would be substantially bolstered by income from the quarry. Even on the financial grounds argued by the Waverley Council however, the Department of Lands could not agree to either the reservation of Bondi beach or the acquisition of the metal quarry. Bondi Estate was now controlled by Francis O’Brien, Hall’s son-in-law, and according to the rate he demanded for compensation the land for these two purposes would cost the government £18,000, an excessive sum, given the 1861 Crown Lands Acts fixed the price of Crown Lands at £1 per acre for free selection, and that the Colonial Secretary earned around £2,000 per annum.

Francis O’Brien was fervently opposed to the government constructing a road through his land, and reiterated his ownership rights over the entire beach - if the public had no right to be on the beach itself, then what was the purpose of building a road there?  

41 Chairman Waverley Council to Premier and Minister of Lands, 14 April 1860.
42 A reading of the Municipal minutes from this period reveals making and fixing roads as among the primary occupations of the Council, and concerns of its ratepayers.
43 Notes on the back of letter: Waverley Municipal Council to Surveyor General’s Office, 16 April 1860 SRNSW: CGS 13751 [60/2979], with Bundle 62/5441, Box 5/5617. Although it would have been a considerably smaller parcel of land, John Rae was awarded just £34 in compensation for his land that was used for Bondi road nearly a decade later. Waverley Council Minutes, 26 May 1868.
45 O’Brien argued that in the original grant ‘the Beach is conceded to the Grantee without reserve and the Ocean or Coast is made the South Eastern Boundary, therefore a Public Road made to the ocean would virtually take the rights of the seafrontage from the Estate, and, for which loss I would claim compensation.’ Francis O’Brien to Clerk of the Executive Council, 15 July 1861 SRNSW: CGS 13751 [61/2631], with Bundle 62/5441, Box 5/5617; Original emphasis.
O’Brien’s apparent concern regarding public access to Bondi beach was as ambivalent as the Council’s intentions with the space. Did he dislike having members of the public using his private land as recreational space, or was he trying to protect its commercial value? By the time of O’Brien’s complaint to the government, he had already begun acting to stop members of the public accessing Bondi by building a wall at the southern end of the beach, a construction the Acting Surveyor General argued would ‘shut out the public from the only convenient access to the beach, and that which has probably been used ever since Bondi has been frequented by Europeans’.46 Yet if the Council were aware of the road metal stores contained in O’Brien’s land, then it is likely that members of the general public were too, and theft was perhaps a motivation for traversing his property. Certainly this metal was also very valuable to O’Brien. He had constructed a road towards the coast to these quarries ‘at great cost’, a portion of which had a tramway ‘which I am carrying for a mile and a half to the Metal Quarries on the Coast’.47 At the time of this dispute he was also ‘extensively engaged’ with supplying this metal to various road trusts and municipalities.48 These quarries were highly lucrative for O’Brien, and ensuring he did not lose exclusive right to them was no doubt paramount in his efforts to protect his property, and central to his arguments for compensation. Nonetheless, he also recognised the potential value of the beach itself as a site of recreation when he demanded compensation for proposed public access.

Consistent with their earlier decisions regarding Sydney’s ocean coast, the Department of Lands ruled in favour of O’Brien, and refused to resume any portions of his land for either a public reserve or for Municipal access to his quarry. This was most likely due to the large cost of doing so, but it also reflected a favouring of private rights to the foreshore over public desires – a crucial marker of the government’s priorities regarding the foreshores. They did concede to Waverley Council that the original Bondi grant to William Roberts allowed for a road to be built through the land, however, and it was to this roadway that the attention of the Council

46 Acting Surveyor General to Under Secretary for Lands, 4 June 1861 SRNSW: CGS 13751[61/1763] , with Bundle 62/541, Box 5/5617.
47 Francis O’Brien to Clerk of Executive Council, 15 July 1861.
48 Francis O’Brien to Minister for Lands, applying for land to store the metal on. 27 August 1861, SRNSW: CGS 7933 [61/3013] , with Bundle 61/3902, box 5/3630
now turned.\textsuperscript{49} After several years of disputes between the Lands Department, Francis O’Brien and Waverley Council over the most appropriate route for the road, and accusations by the latter of unfair delays, the road afforded public access to the beach as early as 1864, and was eventually completed in 1866.\textsuperscript{50}

The road to Bondi, which was the only progress during this period towards the provision of public space at this part of the coast, was entirely a municipal rather than colonial project.\textsuperscript{51} In addition, the beach itself remained owned by O’Brien: the public used the recreation reserve to the south of the beach, and O’Brien informally tolerated their use of his beach. The difficulty the council encountered in negotiating with the government for public access to Bondi beach contextualised the ease with which Smith earlier transformed Manly. It also confirmed that the provision of coastal recreation spaces remained immaterial to the colonial government. Nonetheless, the determination of the council to construct such a road, even when they would not benefit from control of the quarry, strengthens the increasing evidence of a growing public desire for coastal recreational space by the mid-nineteenth century.

\textbf{The battle for Nelson Bay}

At around the same time that they were petitioning the government over Bondi in the early 1860s, the Waverley Council were also engaged in a battle to secure the beach at Nelson Bay as a public site. These actions confirmed their unspecified objective of providing public access to ocean beaches within their municipality. In attempting to have this beach dedicated to public recreation, the council faced similar challenges to those regarding Bondi. As with Bondi, their battle against the local landowner was fought on two fronts – to secure access to the beach via a public road, and to ensure the public had a right to be on the beach itself. However there were two crucial differences between Nelson Bay and Bondi. Firstly, there appears to have been no ulterior motive for securing Nelson Bay other than public recreation. Secondly, and perhaps for the same reason, whereas the Council took the first initiative regarding

\textsuperscript{49} Notes on back of letter, Waverley Municipal Council to Surveyor General’s Office, 16 April 1860 \textit{SRNSW: CGS 13751 [60/2979]}, with Bundle 62/5441, Box 5/5617.

\textsuperscript{50} Waverley Council to John Robertson, 9 December 1862 \textit{SRNSW: CGS 13751 [62/284]}, with Bundle 62/5441, Box 5/5617; \textit{SMH} 2 January 1864, p.4. Waverley Council Minutes, 1860-1867.

\textsuperscript{51} Waverley Council Minutes, 1860-1867.
access to Bondi beach, their lobbying for Nelson Bay occurred only as a reaction to the attempts by the local landowner, J.B. Holdsworth, to privatise the beach. Nonetheless, it is evident through Waverley Council's correspondence with the Department of Lands that the struggles for Bondi and Nelson Bays were inextricably linked in the minds of the Aldermen.

Unlike Hall's Bondi Estate, the Nelson Bay Estate, having been granted in the 1830s, was subject to a one hundred foot reservation from high water mark. In early 1862, Holdsworth's representatives wrote to the Minister for Lands requesting a 'rescission of the reservation of land within 100 feet of high water mark' contained in the two original land grants to Mortimer Lewis of 1836 and 1837, which made up part of the 'Bronte Estate.' In a reflection of the inefficiency of the Surveyor's office, which had barely improved since the 1830s, and despite a further four letters from Holdworth's representatives asking for progress updates, it was not until December 1863, nearly two years after the initial request, that the land at Nelson Bay was eventually surveyed. At no stage during their consideration of Holdsworth's application did the Department of Lands reveal any opposition to his request, and the anonymous note on the margin of his third letter explicitly stated that 'I see no objection to the rescission of the reservation in question'. Again, the government identified no public need for this foreshore. Rather, the delay in surveying the land applied for was administrative, a situation exacerbated, as it had been in Coogee twenty-five years earlier, by the lack of available Surveyors.

A notice published in the *New South Wales Government Gazette* in March 1864 brought Waverley Council's attention to the proposed rescission of the beach at

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52 Rowley, Holdsworth & Garrick to Minister for Lands, 24 February 1862, *State Records New South Wales: Lands Department, Miscellaneous Branch; CGS 8258, Letters Received, 1867-1979* [62/1186], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.
54 Notes in margin, no signature: Rowley, Holdsworth and Garrick to Minister for Lands, 26 November 1862.
Nelson Bay for the first time.\textsuperscript{56} The Council instantly opposed the proposal, and in addition to writing a detailed letter outlining their position to the Secretary of Lands, they arranged for a deputation of the Council ‘for the purpose of explaining to the government the great public inconvenience which would arise from alienating the land in front of Mr Holdsworth’s property.’ They further voted £10 for clearing roads leading to the bay, purportedly to allow for easier public access, but essentially as a way of demonstrating a vested interest in the site.\textsuperscript{57}

In order to understand the position of Waverley Council, it is worth quoting their letter to the Department of Lands at length.

\begin{quote}
\ldots to comply with Mr Holdsworth’s application [to resume the beach] will be to do an act of great injustice to the residents and proprietors of land within the boundaries of the Municipality of Waverley who have hitherto enjoyed the advantages of the beach and considered that it had been set apart for the use of the public.

The only places within the Municipality of Waverley where the inhabitants have access to the sea beach for the purpose of recreation are at Nelsons [sic] Bay and Bondi and if they are deprived of free access to these there will be no place for sea bathing or recreation within the Municipality.

It is true that no attempt has been made to deprive them of the use of the Bondi beach but it is feared that if the government should accede to Mr Holdsworth’s application \ldots the proprietor of the lands fronting Bondi will have equal right for claiming to have the exclusive use of that beach also.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56} Waverley Council to Secretary for Lands, 7 April 1864, \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [64/1943]}, with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641. This was expanded in a further letter dated 19\textsuperscript{th} April 1864.

\textsuperscript{57} Waverley Council Minutes, 5 April 1864.
[This action will also] be deemed by many persons who have purchased land in the locality a violation of good faith on the part of the government inasmuch as it was known when the lands were offered for sale that the beach had been reserved from the grants for public purposes, and the government map shows a government reserved road extending from the Nelson Bay road ... down to the ocean at the northern end of the beach at Nelson's[ sic] Bay and if this reservation is cancelled in accordance with Mr Holdsworth's application one of the principal inducements for persons to purchase or hold land in that neighbourhood will be taken away.

The Chairman of Waverley Council also pointed out that Holdsworth's home was too far back for his privacy to be invaded by those on the beach, an attempt to counter one of his principal arguments, and that they were in the process of arranging for a road to be built to the beach for public access. They asked that the government not only refuse Holdsworth's request, but that 'the reserved beach may be placed under the control of the Council for the use of the public generally.'58

As O'Brien had before him, and only a few kilometres away, Holdsworth instantly defended his rights to the land, and argued against the claims of the Council. He, too, drew on the appeal of access to the beach as crucial to his decision to purchase Bronte Estate, claiming he was 'influenced in his purchase by a knowledge of the circumstances that he would have exclusive right to the enjoyment of the beach,' although for what purpose it is not clear.59 A section of his land may have been reserved by the Crown, he admitted, but this was not for public purposes, and another section which included a portion of the beach had no reservation. This directly contradicted the arguments of the Waverley Council that other residents in the district of Nelson Bay assumed a right to access the beach and that this may have been an incentive for purchasing land in the area. At the same time, the fact that Holdsworth

58 Chairman, Waverley Council to Secretary for Lands, 7 April 1864 SRNSW: CGS 8258 [64/1943], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641. This was expanded in a further letter dated 19th April 1864, requesting the government to 'place the control of the sea beach under this Council for the purpose of recreation and sea bathing.' Waverley Council Minutes, 19 April 1864. Emphasis added.

59 Rowley & Holdsworth to Minister for Lands, 19 April 1864 SRNSW: CGS 8258 [64/2195], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.
had to purchase this reserved land also detracts from his assumptions of a 'right' to exclusivity.

Not only had there been no consideration for public use of the beach space at Nelson Bay in the past, but the Department saw no need to reserve the site for the public in the future. They were not persuaded by the arguments of the Council, declaring that 'we have carefully inspected the localities and do not think the public interests will be in any degree prejudiced by rescinding the reservation in question.'\(^6^0\) However what must have seemed like a fait accompli to Holdsworth was disrupted within a week by a petition to the Minister for Lands, signed by 54 landholders and residents of the Waverley area, protesting against the rescission as 'detrimental to the interests of the residents of the locality especially and the general public.'\(^6^1\) Whether in response to this petition or the protests of the Waverley Council, or independently of these, John Bowie Wilson, the Secretary for Lands, ultimately ruled that it would be 'inexpedient' to alienate the entire bay to Holdsworth, and recommended that any decision regarding alienation be held off until the public acquired a legal access path to the beach. He asked Holdsworth and Waverley Council to work together to come to an understanding 'which would enable the government to decide this matter at once.'\(^6^2\)

\(^6^0\) Lands Department Correspondence, author unclear, 21 April 1864, *SRNSW: CGS 8258* [with 64/3004], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.

\(^6^1\) Petition to Minister for Lands, received 25 April 1864 *SRNSW: CGS 8258* [64/2263], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.

\(^6^2\) J.B. Wilson internal correspondence, 13 June 1864, *SRNSW: CGS 8258* [64/1943], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.
Figure 2.2: First page of the petition sent to the Minister for Lands regarding the reservation at Nelson Bay

Within two months, staff at the Department of Lands had gone from refusing to consider any possible public value of the beach at Nelson Bay, to sacrificing a sale of the land to allow for public access. This turnaround is curious, and even if it resulted from differing personal opinions by department staff, the petition remains the strongest indicator of public opinion on the matter. The fact that residents were willing to mobilise themselves for this cause highlighted to Wilson that in supporting Holdsworth’s application to privatise the beach the Lands Department was in fact...
acting against a real community interest. Although Wilson took an active role generally in improving the city’s recreation areas, this was the first recognition by any department of the self governing colony of the importance of public access to coastal spaces specifically. In this case, unlike Bondi, public expenditure was not needed to secure the site. Rather, the government merely sacrificed a potential sale of a small portion of land.

The Waverley Council and Holdsworth failed to reach an agreement on the question of a path or road to the beach, and after Holdsworth discovered the government were now considering dedicating the beach to the Council for public recreation, his representatives issued another protest letter reiterating his assumed sole rights to the ocean beach at Nelson Bay:

Mr Holdsworth purchased the Estate of ‘Bronte’ under the full conviction that as the beach has been exclusively enjoyed by the former owners of the property for nearly 30 years his rights would never be attempted to be interfered with... there is no reserve for public recreation of the beach at Nelson’s Bay as at Cogee [sic] and other places...

Despite Surveyor Debenham’s recommendations to the Surveyor General that it was ‘quite practicable’ to open a road to the 100 foot reservation at the sea beach at Nelson Bay, the matter appears to have been put aside, the doubt over the purpose of the initial reservation of the beach which Holdsworth had raised having been sufficient to stop the Department of Lands from pursuing the matter. The Waverley Council, finding no success in their attempts to negotiate public access to the beach with Holdsworth, appointed a Committee which found a different route for a public

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63 In the second half of the nineteenth century, petitions were ‘more than just token gestures. They were an important method by which ordinary citizens and interest groups could bring their concerns directly to the attention of government.’ David Clune and Gareth Griffith, Decision and Deliberation: The Parliament of New South Wales, 1856-2003 (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2003), p.36.


65 Rowley & Holdsworth to Secretary for Lands, 29 September 1864, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [64/3084], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.
path. The 100 foot reservation was neither rescinded for sole use by Holdsworth, nor dedicated specifically to public recreation. It was not until 1880 that the issue of public versus private rights and access to what was now commonly known as Bronte Beach was again raised. On this occasion, a public petition with 95 signatories was sent to the Lands Department, calling for the dedication of the reserve for public recreation, on the basis that it would be ‘of great sanitary advantage’. Again, public demands were not met without a fight. This subsequent debate will be explored in chapter four.

Administering the one-hundred foot foreshore reservation

As with attempts to create a public reserve on the beach at Bondi in the 1860s, the ambiguity of the laws regarding reserves on New South Wales coasts and river banks made communications regarding the Nelson Bay reservation in the same decade frustratingly difficult. There were three reasons for the confusion surrounding these coastal reserves. Firstly, as discussed in chapter one, they applied only to land granted after 1828. The inconsistency in foreshore reservation along Sydney’s coast – which differentiated land granted before and after that time – led to constant uncertainty as to exactly where it did apply. At Nelson Bay in particular, there was some confusion as to the legal status of the foreshores. Holdsworth attempted to purchase only the portion of the beach granted to Mortimer Lewis, believing the later neighbouring purchase by Robert Lowe had been exempt from the reservation. The Department of Lands confirmed that there was no ‘reservation of 100ft on that portion of the land’, although they may simply have accepted Holdsworth’s word on the matter rather than checking for themselves.

Holdsworth’s ownership of the entire northern headland – if it did exist – further complicated the issue by causing any beachgoers to trespass on his land in order to reach the reserved foreshores. Hence an 1857 advertisement for Bronte Estate

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66 Waverley Council Minutes, 23 August 1864.
67 Petition sent to Lands Department, 12 January 1880, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [80/510], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/364. The ensuing debate and its consequences will be discussed in chapter four.
68 Rowley & Holdsworth to Minister for Lands, 19 April 1864 SRNSW: CGS 8238 [64/2195], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/364.
69 Internal Lands Department correspondence, author unclear, 21 April 1864, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [with 64/3004], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/364.
described a ‘frontage of nearly half a mile to the Pacific Ocean ... which can only be approached through the property’. The encirclement of a reserved beach by private property would also come to complicate matters at Tamarama, between Nelson Bay and Bondi. Regardless of his admission of the foreshore reservation, however, Holdsworth insisted the public had no right to the beach, citing Robert Lowe’s earlier claims to the beach, and writing that the public ‘were always taught by the former owners of the property (by Mr Robert Lowe in particular) that no such right existed and that they were committing an act of trespass in going on the beach without permission,’ a claim we saw violently played out in chapter one.

At Bondi, where nearly the entire beach had been included in William Roberts’ grant, and was therefore not subject to reservation, there were fewer questions as to the title of the land, but the foreshore did not escape scrutiny altogether. In 1861, the Surveyor General had disagreed that O’Brien had exclusive ownership of the ocean beach, arguing incorrectly that the grant ‘clearly excludes the beach irrespectively of the general rights of the Crown to land between high and low water mark.’ However as late as 1880 it was clear that the beach itself remained the property of O’Brien, the Government Surveyor reporting to Waverley Council that ‘it seems clear from the information he had received that Mr O’Brien possessed the right to close the beach to the public.’ The authorities in Victoria had similar problems with the one hundred foot reservation on parts of Melbourne’s coast: at Brighton the initial reservation had been included as part of the first allotments sold, and while the Council thought they had rights to the affected strip of beach, and governed the foreshores accordingly, there were contentious attempts by a local landowner to sell these ‘valuable beach lands’ in the 1870s.

The second point of confusion regarding the one hundred foot reservation was the lack of clear instructions, at least by the mid-nineteenth century, as to how it was to be

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70 SMH, 5 October 1857, p.7.
71 Rowley & Holdsworth to Minister for Lands, 19 April 1864.
72 Surveyor General’s Office to Department of Lands, 23 August 1861 SRNSW: CGS 13751 [61/2631], with bundle 62/5441, box 5/5617. There are no surviving documents which reveal how the matter was immediately resolved.
73 Waverley Council Minutes, 6 April 1880.
74 Bate, A History of Brighton, p.346.
defined. Only a week prior to Holdsworth’s complaint about the survey of the beach at Nelson Bay, Surveyor Debenham had informed the Surveyor General that Parkinson’s initial survey had incorrectly recorded the line of the reservation, remarking on the difficulty of being accurate with the water’s ‘windings among the broken rocks against the cliffs and along the sloping beach.’ Holdsworth, in turn, raised questions over Debenham’s subsequent survey of the one hundred foot reservation, which was less favourable to him. He asserted that the surveyor had taken high water mark to be where debris was washed up by the highest waves, arguing that this was ‘absurd as the cases have well established that the line of high water mark is the height of the water in a state of quiescence taken at high tide midway between the spring and neap tides’, a difference of some two to three hundred feet on the recent survey, he claimed. Searches to identify the correct method of determining the boundaries of the reservation have been fruitless to this date.

Thirdly, the uncertainty over the purpose of these reserves further clouded the issue. As we have seen, Alexander MacLeay offered no explanation when first notifying the public of the decision to reserve the colony’s foreshores in 1828. And over three decades later, the Waverley Council’s claims that the reserve at Nelson Bay was made specifically for public recreation were disputed by both Holdsworth and the Department of Lands, Holdsworth insisting that the reservation had been made for purposes of defence. Without specifying the purposes for which they understood the reservation to have been made, internal Lands Department correspondence advised that ‘these reservations of 100 feet from high water mark were clearly not made for any Municipal purposes’, or for public recreation. Such an interpretation maintains a functional reading of the reservations as discussed in chapter one, and denies the increasing sense that public recreation was an appropriate way of using the space.

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75 Surveyor Debenham to Surveyor General, 22 September 1864, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [64/1772], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.
76 Rowley & Holdsworth to Secretary for Lands, 29 September 1864, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [64/3084], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.
77 Rowley & Holdsworth to Minister for Lands, 19 April 1864, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [64/2195], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.
78 Internal Lands Department Correspondence, signature unclear. 21 April 1864, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [with 64/3004], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.
Holdsworth’s motivations for applying for the rescission of the foreshore reservations are also unclear. It may be that he wanted to use the beach as an exclusive recreation space, or perhaps he sought economic value from the beach – either through the sale of natural resources such as minerals, sand, or sea-life, or perhaps by charging entrance fees to the general public. Whatever the incentive, his persistence and willingness to purchase the disputed foreshore confirmed that the beach at Nelson Bay was of considerable value to him.

Contesting the meaning of the foreshore reservations

By the 1860s, over thirty years after their implementation, the one hundred foot foreshore reservations were being contested in two contrasting ways. Firstly, and most importantly, they were becoming the subject of changing interpretations. Perhaps in response to a growing demand for recreational space by the coast, the Waverley Council interpreted the existence of these reserves as an opportunity for creating public recreation spaces. Regardless of whether this had been the intention of the Colonial Office in reserving the foreshores, this was the first recognition by a public body within the self-governing colony of their potential and worth for such purposes. It was indicative of the decisive role seaside councils would come to play in securing foreshores for public use – often in defiance of the government – over the following half century.

Paradoxically, in either ignorance or denial of the growing demands for coastal recreation spaces, the early 1860s also witnessed attempts by the liberal government to obliterate the foreshore reservation system altogether – a system which had been established by the colony’s British rulers to protect the foreshores of New South Wales. The Act under which Holdsworth applied for a rescission of the reservation at Nelson Bay – and under which the Department of Lands favourably considered his application – was the 1861 Crown Lands Alienation Act. Section 12 of this Act stated that:

The Governor may ... rescind any reservation of water frontage on the sea coast or any bay inlet harbour or navigable river or land adjoining such frontage contained in any Crown grant ... and the
land being the subject of such rescission shall on payment of an adequate money ... be granted to the owner of the land conveyed in the original Crown grant accordingly.\footnote{NSW Government Gazette, 18 October 1861, clause 12, p.2196.}

The Alienation Act was part of a larger campaign for land reform on which platform the liberal government was swept to a resounding majority in 1860. John Hirst interpreted this reform, which legislated for ‘selection before survey’, as an attempt to assist the poor man in acquiring land, as well as offering a solution to the well known delays of the Survey department.\footnote{Hirst, \textit{The Strange Birth}, p.136.} In an environment of contempt for squatters, such an explanation appears valid; however it does little to elucidate the purpose of the Act as it related specifically to the foreshores. Given that the resumed foreshores could only be purchased by the owner of the adjoining property, such a provision did not assist landless men in any way. D. Baker drew a different conclusion about the 1861 selection acts, arguing that land reform was a weapon in the ‘class war’ between ‘pastoral wealth and bourgeois wealth’ rather than between rich and poor. He regarded the Acts as ‘primarily intended to help establish middle class values and institutions in place of the patriarchal or planter type of society of the squatters’.\footnote{Baker, ‘The Origins of Robertson’s Land Acts’, p.104.}

It is in this context that the preservation of the rights of coastal land owners may be more clearly understood. When this legislation was being drafted in the late 1850s, foreshore reservations were not considered in the context of the rights of the ‘public’ to recreation spaces; unless they had been dedicated for a specific purpose, they were effectively useless portions of land attached to privately owned spaces. The initial purposes of the reservations, which were designed for defensive, economic or public purposes, had either been forgotten, misinterpreted, or their relevancy denied. By allowing landowners to purchase these foreshores, perhaps the government was attempting to render these spaces ‘useful’ once more.

Regardless of the usefulness or otherwise of the foreshores for local landowners, it was undoubtedly apparent to the government that these empty spaces were an
untapped source of potential revenue. In a period in which the main sources of revenue for the government— in the absence of central taxes— were ‘import duties and receipts from the sale and lease of crown lands’, the foreshore reservations represented an impressive potential source of income.\textsuperscript{82} The Waverley Council were the first to directly challenge this attitude, and in doing so, bought the colonial government’s attention to alternative ways of using the ocean foreshores. While Lands Department representatives may have initially disputed the value of providing public recreation spaces by the coast, their subsequent decision \textit{not to} rescind the reservation at Nelson Bay, and to allow the Council to negotiate for access to both Bondi and Nelson Bay beaches was a substantial concession. It suggests that while public access to the coast still did not validate government expenditure on resuming land, increasing numbers of government staff were starting to either recognise the public desire, or understand the value of providing such spaces.

\textbf{Drawing the battle lines: contesting the meaning and worth of ‘public’ benefit}

We have seen that the early development of Manly was governed entirely by a single stakeholder— a private entrepreneur. At Bondi, Nelson Bay and Coogee, in contrast, individual landholders, members of the general public, local interest groups and councils and the colonial government all clashed over the future of the beaches. As this chapter has demonstrated, in mid-nineteenth century Sydney, these beaches were becoming contested sites. There were questions regarding who owned the title to foreshores, which resulted in complex arguments over who \textit{should} have that right. The ways in which the beaches should be used, and who should have access to them, were also the source of much conjecture. A distinction which appeared to polarise economic gain and public benefit was central to all the disputes over rights to, and ways of using, the beach. It, too, was played out on several levels; not only were local landholders and government authorities unabashed in their attempts to protect or create economic value in the beach areas, but the apparently altruistic motives of some other groups who fought for the rights of the public masked deeper and perhaps more selfish financial incentives. In particular, the Waverley Council and members of the Randwick and Coogee Roads Trust understood that the public right of access also translated to property values of neighbouring land.

\textsuperscript{82} Hirst, \textit{The Strange Birth}, p.262.
In order to fully understand the complexities driving the foreshores debates, it is essential to ask who argued on behalf of public benefit and why? The Department of Lands may have refused to resume foreshores or build infrastructure to the beaches for the purpose of public recreation alone, yet there were suggestions by several staff members that this was in fact a justifiable public expense. Such an understanding of the value of public recreation was far from common during this early period.

The Surveyor John Thomson had been one of the first public figures to promote the advantages of making the coastal region of Sydney accessible to the public, declaring his support in early 1854 for the Randwick and Coogee roads: ‘the forming and making of the roads is of course desirable because nothing is more needed in the neighbourhood of Sydney than an extension of the carriage drives in order to afford to the inhabitants increased facilities for inspecting the beautiful scenery with which the City is surrounded.’ 83 Such roads, he suggested, were crucial for the future when ‘the time may ... come when the recreation and the health of the increasing population of Sydney will call for a still further extension of the drives judiciously connected with each other all round the city’. 84 This assertion, ignored by his superiors in the Lands Department, was followed later in the same year by similar calls for public coastal space by Thomas Mitchell, then Surveyor General, who suggested a road be built to Bondi Bay ‘with a view to give the citizens of Sydney free access to the sea beach of the Pacific, which I consider an important reserve to the public’. 85 Neither Mitchell nor Thomson defined the advantages they expected the public to gain, although the Secretary of the Randwick Coogee Roads Trust was more transparent in his faith in this concept, predicting the road would become ‘one of the most pleasant and healthful in the colony,’ by ‘affording the citizens a healthful drive to a sea beach within a short distance from the city’. 86 As with Henry Gilbert Smith the previous year, these men were undoubtedly influenced by the promotions of the

84 John Thompson to Surveyor General’s Office, 5 January 1854.
86 Letter Secretary Randwick Coogee Roads Committee to Colonial Secretary, 24 August 1854, SRNSW: CGS 7933 [54/7514], with bundle 57/1368, box 5/3571; Letter Secretary Randwick Coogee Roads Trust to Colonial Secretary, 27 March 1855, SRNSW: CGS 7933 [55/1930]; 2 April 1856 [56/3114].
English coast as an inherently healthy and beneficial place to spend time, which will be discussed in chapter eight. But the influence of the British parks movement, which was gaining strength at around the same time, on the ideals of Thomson and Mitchell are also worth considering.

From the 1830s onwards, there was a growing awareness in England of the need for open spaces which ‘provided a source of fresh air, opportunities for financial investment, a means of diffusing social tensions and improving the physical and moral condition of the urban citizens.’ Such spaces were understood to be particularly important in the large industrial cities of England, where population booms had led to increasingly unsanitary and crowded living conditions for working class residents. It was thus a response to the conditions created by industrialisation. While there were obvious differences between Sydney and the industrial cities of Liverpool, Manchester and London, where these parks were believed to be in greatest need, Mitchell and Thomson echoed the ideals of the English park proponents when implying the moral, social and health benefits which could be obtained by access to the open spaces of the coast away from the unhealthy and cramped city.

There was one crucial distinction between Mitchell and Thomson and the middle class advocates of the park movement of this period, however, in that the latter argued for the benefits of public spaces to the working classes, a need which had arisen from the fast urbanisation associated with industrialisation. Mitchell and Thomson’s schemes, in contrast, catered only for the accessibility of Coogee and Bondi to the wealthy and middle classes – those with independent means of transport. Thomson especially clarified that he was referring only to the need for ‘carriage drives’, and Mitchell is unlikely to have foreseen a level of public transport which would lead to widespread accessibility and affordability of Bondi beach to the working classes. In constructing the road to Coogee specifically for the purpose of opening up the land for real estate, and thereby making money, the government was perhaps ironically doing more for ‘public benefit’ than these two individuals hoped to, although it is likely that the owners of villas were to be gentlemen.

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The Waverley Council were primarily concerned with the rights and needs of their ratepayers — who as we saw in the Bronte petition was largely literate — during their struggles to gain control of the beaches at Nelson Bay and Bondi in the 1860s. They, too, recognised the ‘public benefits’ which could be gained through securing the beach as a site of leisure, and in so doing also implicitly acknowledged the British discourses of the parks movement and health of seaside localities. In their communications on the subject, the Council articulated two further motivating factors — access to the metal quarry at Bondi, and the desires of their ratepayers. So what was the precise relationship between these three incentives, and which were the most important to the Council?

At Bondi, Waverley Council’s initial primary concern regarded gaining control of the metal quarry, a financially appealing venture. Yet even after they accepted the government’s refusal on this question, they still spent considerable funds on constructing a road to the beach. As with their earlier campaign for the beach at Nelson Bay, the Council celebrated the opportunities this road offered for public recreation:

Waverley street has been extended to Bondi Bay, so that parties can now have access to the Beach, on a good metalled and gravelled roadway, this delightful place for recreation having been almost unapproachable, even for pedestrians, is now becoming everyday more known, and will no doubt be largely availed of by the Inhabitants...

On the face of it, the apparent altruism of the young Council in funding and building a road to a beach which was not reserved for the public purely to provide a site for seaside recreation for both ratepayers and the greater public was incredible. Less than three years earlier, the Waverley Council had demonstrated, as Thomas Mitchell had before them, faith in the public benefit which could be gained through

88 Stephen Dickson, Chairman of Council, to Councillors. Waverley Council Minutes, 28 January 1867.
89 O’Brien allowed ‘the privilege of a permissive right to the public to use the grounds’ at Bondi, although complained about the practices of visitors in 1877. Waverley Council Minutes, 5 June 1877.
unrestricted access to Sydney’s ocean beaches. They phrased their objection to
Holdsworth’s attempted resumption of the beach at Nelson Bay entirely in terms of
the land’s potential for public recreation, and, crucially, outlined for the first time the
ways in which this space might be used when ‘sea bathing’ was highlighted as an
acceptable activity at the beach. In comparing the situation at Nelson Bay to that at
Bondi in their correspondence in 1864, the Council also demonstrated for the first
time the value they placed on the ability of members of the public to enjoy
‘recreation’ at Bondi beach, reinforcing this as a key incentive for constructing the
road there.

The Waverley Council was aware, however, of the benefits they stood to gain from
the construction of the road to Bondi, and dedication of Nelson Bay to public
recreation. In the case of Nelson Bay, the Council were acting to protect the interests
of their current and future ratepayers, who were understood to lose the most from a
privatisation of the beach. Even in this early period in the history of European use of
Sydney’s ocean beaches, the Council acknowledged that people bought land with an
expectation of access to the beach, and such expectations potentially impacted on land
values. The road to Bondi beach served not only to open up new land to potential
residents, but increase the value of existing land. As pleased as they were with the
improved opportunities for public recreation in their Municipality, the Waverley
Council also understood that the road would ‘eventually prove a benefit to the
Municipality by the increase of revenue from New Residents’, thereby justifying their
expenditure.

In constructing roads to the beach, the Waverley and Randwick Councils and the
Randwick Coogee Roads Trust found a neat nexus between financial advantage and
public benefit – they gained increased revenue from new residents and increased land
values, while members of the public gained access to ocean beaches close to Sydney
for public recreation. Henry Gilbert Smith, also motivated by potential earnings but
aware of the ‘good’ he was doing for the public, had performed a similar role at

90 Stephen Dickson, Chairman of Council to Councillors, 28 January 1867.
91 Although the road had been commenced before they were founded, the Council moved in one of
their first meetings ‘that the first improvement made by this Council shall be in making the road from
Nathan st (now Carrington rd) to Coogee (sic) Bay’. Randwick Council Minutes, 8 May 1859.
Manly. Ultimately however, as with Smith, these councils prioritised the health of their budgets over philanthropic acts.

Both the liberal and conservative governments of New South Wales continued to refuse to acknowledge the potential for public recreation on Sydney's beaches, and considered applications for resumptions only in the context of their economic merit. They offered concessions to Waverley Council in the form of allowing them to construct roads to the beaches, without resuming the foreshores as requested. And while the Department of Lands did agree with Thomson that a road to Coogee and Randwick was needed, they justified this only by the residential land it would open up for sale, ignoring his pleas for a carriage drive. The requests of Mitchell were ignored altogether.

Clearly the Lands Department were highly accountable in all decisions they made regarding public expenditure, and this impacted heavily upon the above requests. But in an international context, granting such reservations was still rare at this time. Hazel Conway argued that while there was recognition from the 1830s of the need for public parks in England, and the creation of a few such spaces in the 1840s in cities including Manchester, it was not until well into the second half of the nineteenth century that the movement gained government support in that country.92 Even New York's Central Park, the first 'deliberately planned example of an urban park in America,' was not begun until the close of the 1850s.93 Sydney had public spaces close to the city, such as Hyde Park and the Botanical Gardens, and recreational areas further out, including the cricket ground and the racetrack, but as with England, governmental support for general recreational spaces at a distance from the city did not gain significant momentum until the 1880s, as will be discussed in chapter four.

By the mid 1860s, we can see the attitude of the government starting to shift. In addition, the rapidly increasing popularity of Coogee, Manly and Bondi once they were accessible, together with the public subscriptions offered for the construction of a park at Coogee and the Bronte petition of 1864, suggests the citizens of Sydney, or

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92 Conway, People's Parks; p.18.
93 Chadwick, The Park and the Town, pp.189-190.
at least those who could afford it, also entertained a desire for recreational space away from the city and close to the ocean. Whether this was born of a perception of health or simply an enjoyment of the beach environment is not immediately clear, but it was likely a combination of the two.

**Beach skirmishes: the international context**

The establishment of seaside resorts in Sydney in the 1850s and '60s coincided with similar developments along the foreshores near Melbourne, and was more than likely a reflection of the recent increases in the popularity of the English seaside. Other Western nations experienced similar contests over coastal space to Sydney, as leisure increasingly dominated ways of using beaches throughout the nineteenth century. In stark contrast to Sydney, however, the issue of turning the beach into a site of leisure was often difficult not just because of the attempts by entrepreneurs and landowners to privatise the beach space, but also because of the complication of long term fishing communities who worked, lived and played by the sea.

Before they could concede the beach to the new demands of public recreation, local governments first had to negotiate with the traditional users of the area. This was exacerbated in some cases by the unattractiveness of these local communities, although in some places they became part of the tourist attraction. In Sydney, despite the long tradition of coastal Aboriginal communities using the beach for a variety of purposes, beaches which had not been granted to European settlers were considered vacant spaces.

The provision of public transport and road infrastructure to some Sydney beaches in the mid-nineteenth century followed the construction of railways to the British seaside, and roughly coincided with the arrival of the railways at the French Mediterranean coast. The implications of these transport developments varied considerably between the three locations. In Britain, the railways had been credited

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94 This occurred, for example, at Burlington Beach on Lake Ontario, Canada, and the Arcachon region in France. Cruikshank and Bouchier, 'The Heritage of the People'; Garner, *A Shifting Shore*, Urbain, *At the Beach*.


with bringing working class holiday makers to the coast for the first time, and in large numbers, but as Walton demonstrated, the effect was more gradual than has been suggested. While the 1850s and '60s saw a substantial influx in working class day trippers at the seaside, it was not until the 1870s that 'rising living standards released a flood of new visitors.' Walton, 'The Demand for Working-Class Seaside Holidays', p.249; Walton, The Blackpool Landlady, pp.40-42.

The railways were crucial in affording access to the seaside, but other social conditions including increased wages and improved holiday provisions had to be met before the working classes could enjoy the seaside at length. Walton, 'The Demand for Working-Class Seaside Holidays', p.252.

In stark contrast to Sydney, the improved transport did not create seaside resorts, or coincide with their creation in Britain, but rather transformed sites which had been catering to visitors since at least the previous century. As Cunningham wrote, 'before mid-century ... before the railway, the seaside resorts were developing but they were not popular. It was after mid-century that growth became rapid.' Hugh Cunningham, Leisure in the Industrial Revolution: c.1780-c.1880 (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p.161.

On the French Riviera, too, the railways increased patronage of towns which had been frequented by English visitors in recent decades. Roderick Cameron, The Golden Riviera (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975), p.5; Nelson, Queen Victoria, p.9; Howarth, When the Riviera was Ours, pp.32-4.

Conclusions

The infrastructural developments of the 1850s and 1860s allowed for greater accessibility to some beach areas close to Sydney by members of the general public, and led to vigorous debates regarding the opening up of others. The debates surrounding the potential of these areas were encased in questions of their monetary value and potential, and the idea of public benefit through recreation, health and sea
bathing. It was these two interests – both of making money and providing the public with appropriate leisure sites – that compelled Henry Gilbert Smith to purchase and build Manly, and the Waverley and Randwick Councils to extend roads to Bondi and Coogee beaches.

Contrary to the attitude of the colonial governments – both under British and self-rule – those lobbying for public access to the beaches understood that financial gain and public benefit were not mutually exclusive concepts. The possibility of a leisure economy would slowly gain credit throughout the late nineteenth century and featured prominently in the debates over daylight surf bathing in the early twentieth century.

The period between 1850 and 1880 was thus crucial to the history of Sydney’s beach culture. It was during this period that the circumstances which would enable Sydney’s beach culture to thrive in the later part of the century were being negotiated, that is, the beaches were being made accessible for public recreation, and the belief that the public have a ‘right’ to use the beaches for these purposes was being formed.

This chapter has also exposed the shifting and contested meanings of the foreshore reservations during the mid-nineteenth century. Contrasting interpretations of both the purpose and appropriate uses of these spaces prompted beach users, and their representatives in local government, to articulate the desire for coastal recreational spaces for the first time. In so doing, they established new ways of understanding the beach which had not before existed in the colony. By the 1880s, the purpose of the one hundred foot reservations on many of Sydney’s beaches, which were now half a century old, were being reinterpreted and renegotiated according to the demands of public recreation.
At the Pier Hotel, the usual holiday sports were in vogue, in addition to the now established attraction of the maze. An excellent table d'hôte was also held here from one to three o'clock, but owing to some breach of agreement on the part of the band engaged for the occasion, there was no dancing in the long room of the hotel.

The Steyne Hotel thronged with visitors during the day, the private parlous [sic] being occupied, with permission, three deep ... The proprietor of this hotel had also added the actual attraction which his situation offered by the erection of a commodious tent in which the votaries of la danse might amuse themselves at their will. This, as was the hotel, was crowded throughout the day.

The Fairy Nook had also its share of visitors, many of those preferred the quiet cup of tea to the fast glass of spirits, selecting this post to 'sit down'. At the same time, Birch's arena of manly sports, and the several other booths, tents and edifices which competed for public favour, were all more or less patronised during the day. In all spots in which music, even of the rudest kind, could be found, there dancing most certainly formed the most favourite amusement.¹

The improvements in access between Sydney its ocean coast in the 1850s and 1860s made it easier for residents to enjoy day-trips to Manly, Bondi and Coogee. The period between 1850 and 1880 was therefore marked by a sharp increase in the numbers of Sydneysiders seeking recreation on the ocean coast. The ways in which they passed their time on the beach forms the subject of this chapter.

Of particular interest is the distinction between indoor and outdoor recreation. Entrepreneurial attempts to cater to beachgoers by luring them into hotels were less successful than hotel proprietors may have anticipated. This chapter seeks to determine why that was. To what extent did Sydney beachgoers prefer outdoor recreation to that provided by local hoteliers? How did they pass their time on the

natural beach space? And in what ways did ocean beach recreation differ from experiences at other popular day-tripping sites, including the many harbour resorts?

Following the substantial development of Manly initiated by Henry Gilbert Smith in the 1850s, that suburb was the first to become popular as a seaside resort for residents of Sydney. However as we shall see, by the 1870s, Bondi and Coogee were emerging as serious competitors for Sydney's day-tripper market. The similarities between the activities of beachgoers on all three beaches signalled the emergence of a beach culture which was common to Sydney's coast, but particularly to Sydney.

**Manly: a new seaside playground**

Henry Gilbert Smith was one of few residents of Manly in the mid-1850s, following his substantial purchases in the area, as discussed in the previous chapter. In an attempt to advance the appeal of the locality Smith quickly began to construct a town, immediately ordering a ‘brick and tile machine and men to work them’. By 1856 he had started on a building for a church or school, and was pleased to announce that the buildings which existed were giving Manly the appearance of a village:

The Hotel is really a grand affair, adjoining it we have a Vauxhall garden. The Tower and Camera are all but finished as well as three cottages, a building for warm baths is now in progress, and many other improvements in the way of walks and clearing out the bush …

From the outset, Smith's intentions of creating a place primarily for entertainment were apparent. The tower, camera obscura, Vauxhall garden and walks around the bays were all designed specifically to attract and entertain tourists. Despite these attractions, visitation levels were initially low, and the lack of trade made it difficult for Smith to keep licensees in his hotels. The Pier Hotel, for instance, which was the

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2 According to the 1848 census, there were 24 houses in the Parish of Manly Cove, which stretched from North Harbour to Narrabeen Lagoon. It is unlikely to have grown significantly in the following half-decade. Curby, *Seven Miles from Sydney*, p.50.


first built at Manly (1855), and greeted visitors as they stepped ashore, was under its fourth licensee in the space of five years. The Edmund Blackett designed Steyne Hotel, which was closer to the ocean beach, had similar misfortunes, and was vacant for many months following its completion in 1859. Its first licensee stayed less than two months. And yet Smith remained optimistic, claiming that in addition to his two hotels at Wollongong and first one at Manly, ‘everybody wants me to erect one more on the sea side, or some lodging houses – they would pay’. Such confidence is further evidence of his strong conviction in seaside enterprise.

In the 1850s, the major obstacle to Smith’s success at Manly was the lack of reliable transport to and from Sydney. Although only eight miles by water, the journey by road was long and arduous, and included two ferry crossings. A steamer service between Circular Quay and Manly was established in 1855, however Smith realised that this did not meet all the needs of day-trippers and commuters. In another effort to

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5 The first licensee was John Griffiths. In May 1857 Philip Cohen took over, then James Grocott in March 1859. By December 1860 William Lambourne held the license for this hotel. SMH 27 May 1857, p.6; 6 July 1859, p.1; Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, pp.59-62.
6 Shelagh & George Champion, cited in Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, p.61.
7 John Campbell, who took charge of it in January 1860, had been replaced by Russell Clark within three months. Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, p.62.
8 Smith to John, 18 May 1856, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, p.47. He later wrote to his brother that ‘I am told by all that Manly must go ahead,’ although ‘at present it is all outgoing, and no incoming,’ Smith to John, 11 August 1856, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, p.49.
9 Smith to John, 24 January 1855, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, p.45.
improve the appeal of the suburb, he therefore established its first permanent ferry service in mid 1859.10

This new transport service, together with the other constructions and promotions undertaken by Smith, immediately established Manly as an accessible and desirable holiday resort, especially for day-trippers from Sydney. This led Paul Ashton to argue that ‘tourism was perhaps more important [than residential growth] in this period of Manly’s development’.11 However while Manly attracted many more tourists than residents during this early period, Smith recognised that the town’s fortunes would be boosted by a greater permanent population. Despite his desire to do ‘good’ for Sydney’s residents by providing a place of seaside resort, he stood to gain more financially from land sales, and the development of Manly as a residential town consequently remained foremost. With this in mind, Smith continually promoted the benefits of living in Manly, highlighting in an 1859 advertisement that the new steamer service meant that ‘the man of business may suffer no inconvenience’ if he were to purchase a ‘marine villa’ in the locality.12

The new steamer service did not immediately or substantially improve the fortunes of Manly’s hoteliers, and they continued to spend considerable efforts improving and increasing as well as promoting their services. There were two obstacles in the way of their success: firstly, as Curby pointed out, a lack of longer term visitors, from either Sydney or rural New South Wales, meant a stable or regular income could not be ensured. For several days a year, namely public holidays and the Christmas period, local businesses were overwhelmed by large influxes of day-trippers. The comparatively small number of visitors for the remainder of the year severely impacted on potential tourism earnings.13

Curby also noted the second barrier faced by the hoteliers – that they were in direct competition with the natural attractions of the area – although she placed less

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10 Curby describes the reliability of the 1855 service as ‘doubtful’. Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, pp.58-60.
12 SMH, 13 December 1859, p.1.
13 Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, p.60.
emphasis on its implications than is perhaps warranted. The ‘other options’ for day
trippers she described, including pony rides, target shooting and gambling, did not
simply emerge in response to increasing numbers of visitors, but were the initiatives
of entrepreneurs desperate to draw the crowds into their establishments and secure a
decent financial return from those who did visit the suburb.\textsuperscript{14}

Both day-trippers and longer term visitors were attracted to the natural features of
Manly, and the unique position of the town between the waters of the ocean and
harbour was especially appealing. The outdoors tended to be more desirable than the
hotels not only because it was aesthetically pleasing, but because it was free, once the
steamer fare had been paid. The hotel proprietors recognised the attractions of
Manly’s position and natural features, and exploited these in their attempts to lure
visitors to the suburb. Philip Cohen of the Pier Hotel wrote in an 1857 advertisement
that ‘for natural beauty, romantic scenery and salubrity of air [Manly] unquestionably
stands unrivalled in Australia.’\textsuperscript{15} Once at Manly, it was hoped visitors would stop for
refreshments at the various hotels and small businesses, even if they were not to use
the accommodation on offer.\textsuperscript{16} The more savvy businessmen recognised the earning
potential from day-trippers intent on staying out-of-doors, and advertised food and
other materials and services for visiting picnic parties.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite the efforts of the hoteliers, their businesses continued to play a minor role in
most experiences of Manly. In 1858, the Sydney Morning Herald described those who
patronised the hotels as having ‘less time, convenience or provident friends’ than the
‘streams of excursionists, many laden with carpet bags and baskets’ who ‘thronged
along the path’ to the ocean beach. The former group, once they had enjoyed the
provisions supplied at the hotels, ‘subsequently followed the rest to the sandy shore of
the Pacific’.\textsuperscript{18} This account, confident that the ocean beach was far more favourable
than the indoors, confirmed the primacy of the ocean beach in a day-trip to Manly as
early as the 1850s. Visitors may have been drawn to Manly by the myriad of

\textsuperscript{14} Curby \textit{Seven Miles from Sydney}, p.60.
\textsuperscript{15} SMH 27 May 1857, p.6.
\textsuperscript{16} See for instance \textit{SMH} 18 December 1858, p.9.
\textsuperscript{17} SMH 8 November 1858, p.1.
\textsuperscript{18} ‘Manly Beach’, \textit{SMH} 27 January 1858, p.4.
advertisements placed by the hotel proprietors, but it was nature that they primarily sought, and the beaches where they spent most of their time.

**Seaside entertainment**

By the close of the 1850s, the competition from rival businesses was growing, and the numbers of day-trippers visiting Manly was steadily increasing. Local entrepreneurs therefore began to look at new ways of increasing their business potential, and turned to traditional British seaside entertainments as a solution. When Philip Cohen took over the Pier Hotel in 1857 he remodelled it, advertising that it was 'now in a fit state to receive invalids, persons requiring change of scene, and the fine sea air, bridal and pleasure parties &c.' Two years later the new licensee James Grocott built a ‘true copy’ of the Hampton Court maze ‘for the gratification and amusement of visitors at a very considerable expense.’ In addition to the maze, by Christmas he was promising visitors fireworks, a band, donkey races and Russian skittles. By this time there were also the everyday attractions of public gardens and vapour baths in the seaside suburb. The following year, George Birch of the New Brighton Hotel advertised the large range of games he would be providing for Manly visitors over the holiday period:

> The amusements will consist of a grand wrestling match for several prizes, a wheelbarrow race blindfold, jumping in a bag, climbing the greasy pole for a new hat, a race for a pig with a greased tail... A gentleman will be in attendance that will wrestle any man in NSW for the sum of £50 or £100.

Against the challenge of the unfading appeal of the natural scenery of the beach, headlands and views in the district, Manly businessmen were moderately successful in their attempts to draw crowds into their hotels to enjoy games and other forms of entertainment. By the early 1860s the hotels ceased changing hands as often as they

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19 *SMH* 27 May 1857, p.6.
21 *SMH* 13 December 1859, p.1.
22 *SMH* 20 July 1859, p.1.
had in the late 1850s, as the sports and games they offered visitors became part of the expectations of entertainment at this holiday resort. Visitors continued to enjoy the natural attractions, but now there was a larger variety of ways to spend time at Manly, and a larger crowd to spread themselves throughout the area, as described in an account of Boxing Day 1859:

Manly itself throughout the day was alive with holiday seekers, who dotted the seashore, ascended the rocks leading to the fairy bower, wandered hither and thither around and about and through the maze, clambered up to the camera tower, where a magnificent landscape lay glorious before them, and lingered about Grocott’s Pier Hotel, where there was no lack of good things for sustenance and refreshment. Some of the more lusty among the people hurled quoits, whilst not a few played at a game in which the chances were twenty to one in favour of the individual who promoted it.24

Those who were interested in spending their day at the seaside among the natural features did so, but others who wanted to be entertained were more than accommodated by the competing ventures at Manly.

From 1859 onwards, the entrepreneurial attempts to entertain and make money from visitors challenged the otherwise informal and relaxed nature of a day at the beach. Following the success of the Pier Hotel maze and other attractions of the late 1850s, in the early 1860s several of the hotels at Manly began providing facilities for dancing, which quickly became one of the most popular amusements for the ‘labour-released daughters of Australia’.25 Just as they were in many British seaside resorts, bands were engaged and advertised on the ferries to Manly, along the harbour promenade and in the dance-halls and pavilions attached to the Hotels. By 1873 a pavilion had been erected in Ivanhoe Park for the purpose of dancing, and the park soon became the central site for the other games and sports which were by now

24 SMH 27 December 1859, p.4.
25 SMH 2 January 1864, p.4.
tradition at Manly.\textsuperscript{26} The location of Ivanhoe Park a short walk inland from both the harbour and ocean beaches meant that some of the more active Manly visitors were effectively taken away from the coast, which had proven the initial attraction of the seaside suburb. But the various beaches continued to be the main lure for most day-trippers.

In the late 1850s and early 1860s, as a result of heavy advertising and improved transport, Manly had become firmly entrenched as a site of leisure for residents of Sydney. In the mid 1850s, dictated by the limited transport options, those who had gone there tended to do so as part of an organised excursion, rather than impromptu picnic parties. Such was the case with around 300 members of the Sydney Yacht Club who enjoyed a Manly picnic in late 1856.\textsuperscript{27} By early 1858 the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} was reporting that ‘from the first steamer to the last which left the city for that favourite retreat, Manly Beach, all were densely freighted.’\textsuperscript{28} In 1859, the \textit{Empire} claimed that up to 13,000 people visited Manly on the Queen’s anniversary holiday in May, and the \textit{SMH} estimated 10,000 went there on boxing day of the same year.\textsuperscript{29} Within several years, visitor numbers had jumped from only a few hundred to tens of thousands pouring into the town on a single day. By the close of the 1870s, entrepreneurs proposing to build a pier on the ocean beach at Manly estimated annual visitation to the town to be around 156,000 people.\textsuperscript{30}

By the late 1870s, competition from other seaside and harbour resorts around Sydney was increasing. Yet the appeal of what had become a reliable and enjoyable ferry ride to Manly combined with the natural attractions of its harbour and ocean beaches and the good range of services available, so that Manly continued to be among the most popular day-tripping sites for Sydney holiday makers.

\textsuperscript{26} Many advertisements can be found for sports and dancing at Ivanhoe Park. See \textit{SMH} 24 December 1873, p.10; 25 December 1875, p.2; 31 December 1877, p.2; 25 December 1878, p.2. It was also mentioned as popular in accounts of public holidays spent at Manly. See \textit{SMH} 2 January 1874, p.5; 28 December 1875, p.5; 27 December 1878, p.5; 2 January 1879, p.5; 27 December 1879, p.5; 2 January 1880, p.5.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{SMH} 22 December 1856, p.4.
\textsuperscript{28} \textit{SMH} 27 January 1838, p.4.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Empire}, 25 May 1859, p.4; \textit{SMH} 27 December 1859, p.4.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Illustrated Sydney News} 20 April 1878, p.6.
Enjoying the beaches south of the harbour: Coogee and Bondi

The ocean beach may have been popular among visitors to Manly, but with so much variety on offer by the 1860s it was not the sole attraction for day-trippers. It had even been secondary for Smith, who concentrated his developments and advertising more on the harbour side of the peninsula. At Coogee and Bondi, in contrast, the ocean beaches themselves were the only point of attraction when they were initially made accessible to the public, and it was only in response to their subsequent popularity as day-tripping destinations that other facilities and sources of amusement emerged in the vicinity of the beaches. Compared with Manly which was deliberately constructed to attract visitors, the beach landscapes at Coogee and Bondi were sought out by leisure seekers even when the latter was still strictly privately owned, and no amenities had been provided.

There is an assumption in some of the correspondence from Waverley Council to the Department of Lands in the 1860s that members of the public – or at least local residents – had always used the beaches at Nelsons Bay and Bondi, regardless of issues of ownership. However there is little evidence to indicate how many people accessed the former until it was officially dedicated for public use in the 1880s. There is clear proof, in contrast, of a rapid increase in the popularity of Bondi following the completion of the road to the beach. This was despite most of the foreshores remaining the property of Francis O’Brien and his family. In addition to the Waverley Council Chairman’s claims of the growth in visitor numbers following the extension of Waverley road (now Bondi road) as outlined in chapter two, newspapers also noted the marked increase of day-trippers in the mid 1860s. According to the Sydney Morning Herald, New Years Day of 1864 was one such occasion on which Bondi shined:

The recently formed road to Bondi Bay has opened up another charming resort for holiday excursionists, and along the shore for

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31 Smith recognized the appeal of the ocean beach by building a road there early on, but his early buildings were along the Harbour, where he built his own home, and along the Corso. He opened the first hotel on the ocean beach, the Steyne Hotel, four years after the Pier Hotel, which faced the Harbour.
some distance the place was dotted with groups of people, before whom the good things of life were spread in abundance.  

In the early 1860s Coogee was also being identified as a desirable day-tripping destination. On Anniversary Day 1860 (now celebrated as Australia Day), Randwick Council officially opened a park and bridge at north Coogee, and newspapers reported large number of day-trippers and picnic parties on the beach. The ‘improvements’ to the area included some paths through scrub which formed a rough maze, and a number of seats overlooking the sea. The *Sydney Morning Herald* commended the Council for the work they had done in the area, and suggested it would become a ‘formidable’ rival of Manly – if it was not already, Coogee would soon become a regular destination for Sydneysiders on public holidays and days of leisure.  

Reports of the occasion also noted that the park had been paid for by public subscription. Although most of the contributors were not named, their willingness to donate to the creation of a public park is an interesting indicator of the desire of members of the public – or at least wealthy locals – for such a space. Furthermore, this project was one of the first major ventures for the Randwick Council, which was just eight months old when the park was officially opened. The strong representation of members of the Randwick Coogee Roads Trust in the new Council – including Aldermen Pearce and Hebblewhite – is further evidence that the former committee had been keen to secure public access to Coogee beach for recreational purposes from the outset.

Compared with Manly, there were far fewer local businesses at Coogee which stood to gain from an increased popularity of the beach. Nonetheless, following the successes of Manly there were some entrepreneurial attempts to boost Coogee’s popularity with the provision of various sports and games which were commonly associated with seaside and general recreation during the mid-nineteenth century. In December 1860, John Hogan from the Pickwick Arms Hotel at Coogee offered all the

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32 *SMH* 2 January 1864, p.4.
33 *SMH* 28 January 1860, p.5.
34 *SMH* 28 January 1860, p.5.
same amusements as those advertised in the same publication for Manly, the only difference being that wrestling was replaced by ‘racing on the beach for a purse of sovereigns.’ At Bondi, in contrast, there were no entertainment or accommodation provisions for visitors in the 1860s, most likely due to O’Brien’s disapproval of leisure seekers on his beach.

Entrepreneurial interests in Bondi and Coogee rose in the early 1870s, as more people became aware of their potential as recreation resorts, possibly buoyed by Manly’s improving fortunes. By Boxing Day 1871, John Grice, from Randwick’s Vauxhall Gardens, had provided a refreshment booth at Coogee for visitors, with the added attractions of music and ‘all kinds of sports.’ Omnibuses plied between the eastern suburbs beaches of Bondi and Coogee and the city regularly throughout the week, with extra ‘buses provided to cater for increased demand on public holidays and Sundays. How many made the journey is unclear, although the traffic to Coogee by the close of the 1860s was such that the Municipal Council of Sydney insisted that an interval of 30 minutes be left between each bus. Waverley Council, in contrast announced only two years later that three buses were sufficient to convey passengers between Bondi and Sydney. Perhaps this was in response to an excess of entrepreneurial attempts to provide services for beach-going day trippers; since Bondi beach remained privately owned, most financial exploitations of beachgoers occurred away from beach.

By the mid 1870s, the media reports of Bondi and Coogee on holidays closely resembled those of Manly which had hardly changed in a decade and a half:

On arriving at the seaside ... the excursionists dispersed in different directions to seek amusement in such fashions as suited their several directions. Games of cricket, croquet, rounders, football, and quoits were instituted in suitable localities, and rambles were indulged in either by the seashore or in the bush. Many of the youngsters found

35 SMH 31 December 1860, p.1.
36 SMH 26 December 1871, p.8.
37 SMH 25 March 1869, p.1.
38 Waverley Council Minutes, 5 December 1871.
amusement in wading in the pools among the rocks, while others employed themselves in climbing the most precipitous places they could find ... The hotel of Mr Monteith, at Coogee and that of Mr Bluck, at Bondi, were both well patronised throughout the day.\textsuperscript{39}

Again, the most common amusements ranged from enjoying the natural elements of the beach scene, to playing games and sports, to spending time in hotels. In 1875 dancing was happily introduced to Bondi with the opening of the Bondi Recreational Grounds, and was an instant success.\textsuperscript{40} Certainly, as with Manly, picnic parties continued to ‘dot the hills’ of Bondi and Coogee and picnicking never strayed from being among the most popular ways to spend a day at the beach.\textsuperscript{41}

In the 1870s, the three seaside ‘resorts’ of Bondi, Manly and Coogee began for the first time to actively compete against each other for the Sydney ‘day-tripper’ market, and the Sydney presses weighed in on the debate surrounding which coastal destination was the best. In 1873 the \textit{Town and Country Journal} declared that ‘no visitor to Sydney from the country ought to leave town without going to Coogee’\textsuperscript{42}, and just two years later Manly was described by the \textit{Illustrated Sydney News} as ‘decidedly the watering place \textit{par excellence} of Sydney’.\textsuperscript{43} Aside from the slight natural and structural advantages of Manly there was little material difference in the attractions of the three beaches. The crowds who flocked to these seaside destinations had a common motive: they wanted to escape, both physically and mentally, from their daily urban lives. Whether they chose Manly, Bondi or Coogee, once there, day-trippers passed their time in similar ways regardless of the location.

\textbf{Recreation resorts in mid-nineteenth century Sydney}

A recognisable and celebrated tradition of seaside amusement had thus been established in Sydney by the 1870s. This incorporated modes of entertainment

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{SMH} 2 January 1874, p.5. See also \textit{SMH} 2 January 1879, p.5; 27 December 1879, p.5.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{SMH} 28 December 1875, p.5.

\textsuperscript{41} This is evident through a close reading of contemporary newspaper articles which habitually describe the most popular places of resort for Sydney-siders on public holidays; See also Cameron White, ‘Picnicking, Surf-Bathing and Middle-Class Morality on the Beach in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney, 1811–1912’, \textit{Journal of Australian Studies}, no.80, (2004), pp.101-110.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Town and Country Journal}, 26 July 1873, p.112.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Illustrated Sydney News} 16 January 1875, p.2. Original emphasis.
provided by hotel proprietors and other entrepreneurs, but was largely determined by the desires of the beach-goers themselves, who ultimately decided whether to patronise the services provided, or shun the establishments in favour of the natural attractions of the beach. However the ocean beaches offered only several leisure spots among many similar destinations for Sydney day-trippers. So in what ways did these beaches differ from comparable resorts inside Sydney Harbour and elsewhere such as the Cook’s River and Botany Bay? And how were they differentiated by contemporary commentators? What, if anything, made them unique?

Historians of nineteenth century Australian popular culture have focussed on the more organised elements of spectator sports such as cricket, football and horse racing, rather than their high participation rate in the context of informal leisure activities. Similarly they have detailed the pub, theatre and dance hall culture of the second half of the nineteenth-century, without considering the spontaneity of similar leisure pursuits in the context of holiday recreation.44 It is evident, however, that the holiday culture discussed above – including the games and sports enjoyed at the seaside as well as dancing and picnicking – were not limited to the ocean beach resorts of Manly, Coogee and Bondi. They were rituals which were constantly re-enacted by day-trippers at picnics and gatherings all along Sydney’s harbour, and elsewhere around the town, on every holiday and many weekends throughout the mid-nineteenth century.

Contemporary press reports and visitor observations indicated that by the 1860s picnics and harbour excursions were among the most popular ways of spending public holidays in Sydney, as residents capitalised on a climate which was generally ‘conducive to outdoor activity’.45 These reports implied there was little material difference between the myriad of resorts where bands were engaged, dancing was popular, picnics were brought along or catered for on site, and games such as football,

cricket, rounders and quoits were played en masse.\(^{46}\) Manly was easily among the busiest locations on such occasions, but other sites on Sydney Harbour such as Watson’s Bay, Cremorne and the bays of Middle Harbour including Clontarf and Balmoral also emerged during this decade to compete for the day-tripper market. In the 1870s, as Coogee and Bondi began to be included in the press holiday reports, ‘Mossman’s [sic] Bay’, Chowder Bay and Athol Gardens, also on the harbour, offered day-trippers even more variety.\(^{47}\) Despite the *Sydney Morning Herald’s* suggestion in 1869 that ‘several new watering places ... have served somewhat to diminish the attendance at Watson’s Bay and Manly’,\(^{48}\) it is nonetheless evident that Manly remained one of the favourite destinations on such occasions. Indeed, only five years later the same publication declared that ‘this well-known retreat has lost none of its hold upon public favour’.\(^{49}\)

Manly was also among the most popular tourist destinations for visitors from overseas and other colonies. In 1865, George Angas described it as ‘the marine watering-place of the capital’.\(^{50}\) And in the same year, the *Illustrated Sydney News* declared that ‘a visitor to Sydney who has not been to (Manly) is looked upon as a visitor to Stratford-on-Avon would be if he neglected to see Shakespeare’s house.’\(^{51}\) But again, Manly was just one of many tourist destinations for visitors to Sydney, which also included the Parramatta River, the Botanical Gardens, the Blue Mountains and the Domain in addition to the various other waterfront resorts.\(^{52}\) By the close of the nineteenth

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\(^{46}\) See for instance, *SMH* 2 January 1863, p.40; 27 January 1863, p.5; 14 April 1868, p.4; 2 January 1869, p.7; 2 January 1874, p.5; 28 December 1875, p.5; 27 December 1877, p.5; 27 December 1878, p.5.

\(^{47}\) *SMH* 2 January 1874, p.5; 27 December 1877 p.5; 27 December 1878, p.5.

\(^{48}\) *SMH* 2 January 1869, p.7.

\(^{49}\) *SMH* 2 January 1874, p.5.


\(^{51}\) ‘Christmas in Australia’, *Illustrated Sydney News*, 16 December 1865, p.3.

century, visitors to New South Wales would remark that ‘no city in the world is so well provided with places of pleasurable resort, and the people of Sydney make the most of the goods the Gods have given them’. 53

By the 1870s, Manly, Bondi and Coogee were fully established alongside the various harbour resorts as sites for leisure and recreation. In merely describing the activities of holiday makers, contemporary press reports overlooked the crucial differences between the ocean and harbour beaches close to Sydney. Since surf bathing was not articulated as a common beach activity during the mid-nineteenth century, there were few differences between the physical experiences of day-trippers and tourists at Manly, Bondi and Coogee, and those at other popular resorts along the harbour and elsewhere in Sydney. In describing Bondi and Coogee collectively, however, while the picnic grounds of the harbour, including Manly, were individualised, there was some recognition in most of these press reports of the similarities between the two former locations. Such recognition highlights the inherent differences between the ocean and harbour beaches. The unadorned ocean beach was where day-trippers spent most of their time on the coast, and was identified in tourist guidebooks as the only reason to visit the beaches. Furthermore the willingness of holiday makers to travel the extra distance to Bondi and Coogee, which had to be reached by road rather than a more pleasurable ferry ride to harbour resorts, suggests that the surf and other elements of the natural beachscape were specifically sought by these beach goers. Nonetheless, and despite the inherent differences in setting, we can see that Sydney’s ocean beaches of the mid-nineteenth century were considered to be little more than another option in the already crowded list of recreational resorts sought after by Sydney day trippers and visitors.


The international origins of beach entertainment

The fairly basic activities and amusements promoted in the 1850s by local entrepreneurs established Manly very early on as a location that was not just close to the beach but also a place of entertainment. This dual role of offering a natural beach setting as well as man-made attractions and amusements spread in the following decades to Bondi and Coogee south of the harbour, and would come to characterise Sydney's ocean beaches and beach culture until the early twentieth century. It was a reflection of the way British and European conceptions of the beach as a place of escape from daily concerns and business had been incorporated into colonial understandings of the beach. The emphasis on outdoor recreation on Sydney's ocean beaches was a result of both the appeal of the natural beach landscape, and the suitability of Sydney's weather for spending time outdoors; it was therefore driven largely by local factors. It is possible, however, that it was influenced by a simultaneous shift in British seaside entertainment - driven by the new middle-class seaside visitors of the mid-nineteenth century - in which the beach and pier replaced the 'assembly room and circulating library' as the focal point of resort entertainment.54

The types of entertainment offered on Sydney's ocean beaches were more obviously linked to British modes of entertainment. The similarities between the activities of visitors to Sydney's harbour and ocean beach resorts between 1850 and 1880 was due largely to the fact that most of these games and sports were imported directly from the British coast. Not only did light-hearted sports where 'amusement, not athletic achievement, was the main object' feature at the British seaside, but the early amusements provided by the hoteliers, such as chasing a pig with a greasy tail and climbing the greasy pole, were re-enactments of a seaside amusement that had been practised as far back as 1835 in Southport, England.55 Dancing was also central to British resort entertainment from the late eighteenth century.56

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55 Pimlott, The Englishman's Holiday, p.133.
56 Walton, The English Seaside Resort, pp.159-160.
American beach goers and summer holiday makers engaged in similar pastimes, although there tennis and bowling were also popular, the latter becoming ‘a universal in watering-place life’, according to Cindy Aron.57 The constant reporting by the American press of ‘the happenings at fashionable summer resorts’ also paralleled the interest Sydney’s press took with its emerging beach culture.58 The crucial difference between the seaside cultures of Britain and America, and that of Sydney, however, was the primacy of bathing on both the American and British coasts. The bathing practices in Britain were far more contained than in America, where, according to Aron ‘men and women were more frequently entering the surf together’ in the second half of the nineteenth century.59 But even in Victorian Britain, where mixed bathing was severely restricted and beachgoers complained of the immodesty of female bathers, public bathing was an everyday element of seaside experiences.60

Despite the constant complaints, the normality of bathing at the seaside in both England and America highlights the uniqueness of Sydney’s beach culture at this time. In the mid-nineteenth century, Sydneysiders were negotiating an entirely new relationship with the beach. The primary ways of spending time by the sea – picnicking, dancing, and playing games and sports – reflected the sense of freedom they felt while at the beach. However this willingness to challenge some of the norms which dictated appropriate Victorian behaviour, which was especially manifested in dancing and romantic flirtations at the seaside, did not extend to a widespread challenging of the bathing bans. If we believe the press reports of public holidays, Sydney day-trippers remained content to contain their leisure activities to dry land. As we shall see, this was not necessarily representative of all beachgoers. Nonetheless, the willingness of most Sydney beachgoers to stay out of the surf, may have characterised these beaches differently to those overseas, but did not restrict the capacity of day trippers to have fun on the beach.

58 Aron, Working at Play, p.88.
59 Aron, Working at Play, p.76.
60 Pimlott, The Englishman’s Holiday, p.130. See also Walvin, Beside the Seaside, pp.70-1.
Surf bathing in mid nineteenth century Sydney

The bathing bans introduced in the 1830s were not completely effective in stopping all daylight bathing in Sydney. Jean Allan found no evidence regarding the practice of surf bathing on the ocean beaches for much of the nineteenth century. She therefore concluded in her doctoral thesis, which detailed the history of swimming in Sydney, that the daylight bathing bans must have been effective in stopping the activity.\(^61\)

Cameron White, in contrast, discussed in some detail the illegal bathing which occurred on Sydney’s ocean and harbour beaches, but focused on the earlier and later decades of the nineteenth century, where most of the evidence lies, rather than the 1850s and ‘60s.\(^62\) Doug Booth and Leone Huntsman similarly overlooked this important period in their analyses of surf bathing in Sydney. Although there is no mention of surf bathing in the press reports of day-trippers and holiday-makers at Manly, which discussed only bathing in baths, there is strong evidence of the practice at some of Sydney’s eastern beaches, south of the harbour. As baths were slowly provided later in the nineteenth century, many bathers contained their activities to these structures. But in the mid-nineteenth century, there were few options for those wishing to bathe on Sydney’s east coast but to enter the surf.

In 1859, its first year governing the Randwick and Coogee area, the Randwick Municipal Council acknowledged that bathing in the ocean was already a common practice, requesting its Surveyor to ‘report as to what can be done at Coogee Bay for the accommodation and safety of the inhabitants and others in sea bathing.’\(^63\) He recommended the use of two natural basins on the north side of the bay, which were consequently excavated, although it later became apparent that this spot was only appropriate for bathing during some parts of the tide.\(^64\) In the mid 1870s, a short article on Coogee claimed that the rollers stopped all but expert swimmers from bathing in the surf, ‘except at one spot at the north end, where there is a sheltered pool excavated in the rock.’\(^65\) Bathing at Coogee was not only common, but it seems to have been tolerated as an acceptable activity at this time, despite the daylight bathing

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\(^62\) White, *The Pleasure Seekers*, pp.131-133.

\(^63\) Randwick Council *Minutes*, 28 October 1859.

\(^64\) Randwick Council *Minutes*, 4 November 1859; 4 January 1861.

\(^65\) *Town and Country Journal*, 26 July 1873, p.112.
bans, and the Randwick Council quickly took responsibility for creating safe bathing areas.

Further evidence of sea bathing comes from reports of the opening of Coogee Park and bridge in 1860: the otherwise happy occasion was marred by the drowning deaths of a father and son who formed part of a picnic party on the beach. The inquest found that while the female members of the group had bathed in the rock pool, the men, some of whom could not swim, had chosen instead to bathe in the open surf. Surf bathing was also listed by Waverley Council as a primary reason for reserving the foreshore of Nelson Bay, suggesting not only that residents expected to use the beach for this purpose, but that the Council supported the activity. Furthermore, an 1864 advertisement for land at Little Coogee (now Clovelly), highlighted its good location for 'sea and fresh water bathing.'

Such fragments from a variety of sources collectively provide evidence that surf bathing, though perhaps limited, was a part of mid-nineteenth century beach experiences in Sydney. Furthermore, it was neither publicly condemned nor restricted by local authorities. It is curious that while the gentlemen who drowned at Coogee and their friends broke the law by bathing in public view during the day, no judgement was passed on their actions in the subsequent inquest and press reports. Nor did the Waverley or Randwick Councils express concern at the practice occurring in their municipalities, choosing instead to help secure appropriate and safe sites for bathers. Perhaps while the beaches were still not overly populated, discreet bathing was not viewed as a social aberration. Certainly the party at Coogee did not engage in mixed bathing, a far more heinous offence, and it appears they did not bathe in direct view of the picniciners. Those who continued to bathe in the surf illegally in the mid-nineteenth century were most likely too few and far between, or careful to conceal their bodies from mass-gaze, to arouse public complaints or criticisms, or even comment.

66 SMH 28 January 1860, p.5.
67 SMH 31 October 1864, p.7.
Conclusions

At Manly, Bondi and Coogee between 1850 and 1880, day-trippers largely continued the practices established by their very few predecessors of the first half of the nineteenth century. Some indulged in surf bathing, but most contained their activities to the dry land; and although dancing and games were increasingly popular, picnics remained primary within beach experiences. We can see the roots of twentieth century concepts of the Australian beach as a site of free leisure and entertainment in these many uses of the beach in mid-nineteenth century Sydney. Even more prominent was the lure of the outdoors. Its primacy over indoor – and paid – entertainment between 1850 and 1880 highlights the crucial role beachgoers themselves played in shaping Sydney’s emerging beach culture. Their preference for the natural spaces of the beach, together with their tendency to confine trips to the beach to less than a day, ensured that Sydney’s beaches would not be subject to large scale resort development like so many on the British and American coasts. The mixed successes of Sydney’s coastal hoteliers between 1850 and 1880 did not deter seaside entrepreneurs completely; in the 1880s their successors would attempt to completely transform the nature and scale of Sydney’s beach entertainment. But the lure of the natural beach would remain a serious competitor.
In 1887, David Fletcher applied for a special lease of the one hundred foot reservation above high water mark at Fletcher’s Glen, for the exclusive use of the new Royal Aquarium Company. Fletcher was the owner of Fletcher’s Glen, a small beach between Bondi and Bronte, measuring only eighty metres between headlands. The beach was subject to a one hundred foot reservation from high water mark, but was enclosed by private land and therefore inaccessible except by water. The Metropolitan District Surveyor, John Deering, recommended Fletcher’s application be refused, arguing that ‘I fail to see why the public should be deprived of the enjoyment of this reserve and beach, except upon payment of an entrance fee to the Aquarium’. Deering’s recommendations were ignored by the Department of Lands, however, and Fletcher was successful.

Twenty-five years later, in 1912, the Waverley Municipal Council wrote to the Minister for Lands, requesting that a portion of land at Fletcher’s Glen – by now known as Tamarama beach – be resumed to create a public recreation reserve:

The proposal embraces the resumption of what is known as Wonderland City and also certain intervening lands in order to link up the Bondi and Bronte reserves. Wonderland City is, as you are doubtless aware a natural beauty spot, and there is no doubt that at very little cost, it could be made one of the most attractive pleasure resorts in the eastern suburbs. Its easy accessibility to the Bronte and Bondi trams also renders it most suitable for public recreation purposes.

In his report into the proposal, Thomas Furber, the Metropolitan District Surveyor, conceded that ‘there is no doubt that many persons would appreciate the acquisition of

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1 John W Deering, Metropolitan District Surveyor, Report to the Chairman, Local Land Board Sydney, 18 August 1887, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [accn: 87/10479], with bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.

Fletcher's Glen'. However he recommended against the scheme, citing 'the cost of acquisition, the future great cost of development, and of the fact that there are such ample seaside resorts in the immediate vicinity'.

These extracts are characteristic of the correspondence between coastal councils and the New South Wales Department of Lands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They demonstrate both the demands of these councils and local landowners, and the conflict within the Department when considering the issue of the foreshores. Between 1888, when the Royal Aquarium Company – the proprietors of the northern headland of Tamarama beach – first fenced off access to the beach, and 1920, when the Department of Lands acquired the Aquarium site for public recreation, Tamarama beach was the subject of constant disputes. During this time, the Waverley Council demanded on at least fifteen occasions that fencing be removed from the vicinity of the beach, and that the beach reserve be dedicated to public use. They were supported in their campaigns by a number of local representative groups, such as the Bondi Ratepayer' Association and Waverley Vigilance Association who were adamant that the beach should be made accessible to the general public. In response, the beach was the subject of dozens of surveyor reports, all of which – until 1920 – resulted in a refusal to dedicate the land, on the grounds that it was not needed in 'the public interest'.

This chapter seeks to understand the rationale behind coastal land transactions between 1880 and 1920. Why did Tamarama Beach remain an undedicated reserve – to which the public had no legal rights of access – while so many others along Sydney's ocean coast were dedicated to public recreation during this period? What were the critical factors in determining whether certain foreshores were 'needed' by the public? As with the consideration of the mid-nineteenth century, this chapter does not examine the New South Wales government in isolation, but considers the complexity of debates surrounding foreshore reservations. The New South Wales government, municipal councils, coastal land owners, residents, day-trippers and local

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4 Letters received by Department of Lands, Miscellaneous Branch, on the subject of Tamarama Beach, 1887-1922. SRNSW: CGS 8258 [Bundle 22/1517], box 20/9052.
business owners all fought over access to, and control over, beach spaces. So what were the attitudes of these key stakeholders? How did they change over time? And more importantly, why? To what degree did the onset of all day surf bathing in the early twentieth century affect the provision of recreation spaces on Sydney’s ocean coast?

The creation of coastal recreation reserves enabled residents of Sydney to enjoy free—that is, both unrestricted and free of charge—access to increasing numbers of beaches; they provided the space on which Sydney’s beach culture could be built. As with the creation of beach reserves and infrastructure in the mid-nineteenth century, however, the ways in which public spaces were secured by and for beachgoers have been overlooked by historians of the beach. Only Cameron White has discussed the transport infrastructure and surf bathing accommodation of the early twentieth century, considering the latter as a solution to the immorality of larrikins at the beaches. In examining the circumstances surrounding the provision of public spaces on, and transport to, the coast, this chapter argues that the growing intensity of campaigns for the foreshores was rarely matched by genuine commitment from the government. That is, the lead was coming—not from landowners or entrepreneurs or government—from the users of the beach themselves.

Reserving the foreshores: 1880 – 1900

The 1880s marked a major shift in the attitude of New South Wales government towards the provision of public spaces on Sydney’s ocean coast. Whereas they had earlier refused to resume or dedicate foreshores for the purpose of public recreation, during this decade they demonstrated the first recognition that the desires of some members of the public for coastal space were worth considering. Nowhere was this attitudinal swing more evident than on the beaches of Sydney’s eastern suburbs. During the 1860s, the New South Wales government had considered their sanctioned negotiation between Waverley Council and local landowners to be a generous compromise. Just two decades later, the government not only dedicated the foreshores of Bondi and Nelson Bay to public recreation, but in the course of compulsorily acquiring the land surrounding these bays, expended considerable funds to do so.

5 White, Pleasure Seekers.
In 1882, following extensive lobbying by the Waverley Council, the New South Wales government resumed 25 acres at Bondi Beach from Francis O’Brien, and dedicated the area as a public park. The Council had feared O’Brien might act on his earlier threats to close the beach to the public, after learning he had the legal right to do so. We have seen that during the 1870s Bondi was becoming increasingly fashionable among leisure-seeking day-trippers. The government’s willingness to preserve the site for future public recreation indicated both a recognition of this growing popularity, and an acknowledgment of the importance of providing such spaces for the public. Had they also sought financial assurance in return for the purchase expenses, the established success of multiple businesses at Manly, and the immeasurable potential tram income from holiday makers would have eased their concerns.

The creation of Bondi Park was followed several years later by another at Nelson Bay. The earlier debate regarding access to the beach at Nelson Bay was resurrected in 1880 by the presentation of a petition to the Department of Lands in which nearly one hundred signatories demanded a reserve and road which, they claimed, ‘will not only be of very great sanitary advantage to the immediate neighbourhood but also to great numbers of visitors and others.’ This campaign was supported by Surveyor Maitland who reported the following year that a road to Nelson Bay and a reserve there would ‘prove a very great boon to the public generally’.

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6 Dowd, The History of the Waverley Municipal District, p.129.
7 Waverley Council Minutes, 6 April 1880; 4 October 1881
8 See also SMH 27 December 1879, p.5; 2 January 1880, p.5; 3 January 1881, p.6.
9 Petition to Under Secretary for Lands, 12 January 1880 (97 signatories) SRNSW: CGS 8258 [80/510], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.
10 Wav Council to Under Secretary for Lands, 6 October 1881 SRNSW: CGS 8258 [81/18636], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641; Surveyor Maitland to Surveyor General, 3 November 1881 [81/20384].
As they had been over the two previous decades, the government was initially reluctant to act. The subdivision of the Bronte Estate at Nelson Bay by Holdsworth’s son in 1882, following his father’s death, created the first impetus for the government to provide a public recreation reserve on that beach. They were encouraged by the inclusion in the subdivision of a road to the beach, which made their task considerably easier. Surprisingly, given their longstanding indifference to Nelson Bay, now known as Bronte, the Department of Lands went beyond simply dedicating the existing reserve to the public, also purchasing portions of dozens of the subdivided lots which

[Image 4.1: Advertisement for subdivision of Bronte Estate, Nelson Bay, 1882, showing (below) location of subdivision]


11 Holdsworth named the subdivision ‘Bronte: the new seaside suburb’, after the name given to the area by Lowe, and from this point onwards ‘Bronte’ replaced ‘Nelson Bay’ as the name of both the beach and immediate residential area. Advertisement for subdivision auction, April 1882. SRNSW: CGS 8258 [86/15232], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641.
adjoined the beach in order to create a 14 acre park.\textsuperscript{12} Not only did the government finally succumb to the collective pressure of local residents and the Waverley Council, but as with Bondi, it demonstrated a willingness to expend public funds on the project, a remarkable turnaround from its earlier miserliness.

Together at Bondi and Bronte, the New South Wales government spent more than £10,000 to secure two beaches and surrounding land for public use. Though substantially cheaper than O'Brien's asking price of two decades earlier, this sum was considerable. Initially, the Department of Lands had underestimated the cost of these resumptions: the reserve at Bondi had been valued at £2,296, but following a lawsuit by Francis O'Brien, he was awarded £6,000 in damages.\textsuperscript{13} The slow pace of progress in the Department also significantly increased the cost of Bronte Park: by 1887, when the Department eventually dedicated the reserve, most of the subdivided lots of Bronte Estate had already been sold. The government was subsequently forced to spend over £5,000 in compensation to land owners for alienation of their properties.\textsuperscript{14}

Even had they spent the much smaller amount which was anticipated, however, the two parks were major purchases for the Department. The reservations at Bondi and Bronte marked the first occasion on which any government had purchased coastal foreshores near Sydney for the sole purpose of public recreation.\textsuperscript{15}

\textbf{A new Act, a new attitude?}

The government was enabled to make the purchases at Bondi and Bronte by the 1880 'Lands for Public Purposes Acquisition Act', which was designed to 'prevent the

\textsuperscript{12} Waverley Council \textit{Minutes}, 3 May 1887. Dowd, in his history of the Waverley District dates the reserve from September 1886, but provides no evidence supporting this date. Dowd, \textit{The History of the Waverley Municipal District}.

\textsuperscript{13} Francis O'Brien bought an action against the Minister for Works, claiming £30,833 6s, 8d as compensation for just over 10 acres of land which was resumed by the government at Bondi. He was initially awarded £6888.18 in damages, but at a retrial, this amount was reduced to £6000. \textit{SMH} 31 August 1886, p.4; 4 September 1886, p.10.

\textsuperscript{14} The Indexes and Registers for correspondence received by the Parks Branch of the Lands Department list £5420 paid in compensation to land owners affected by Bronte Park in 1887, in addition to interest and other payments which were in negotiation but not listed. \textit{State Records New South Wales: Department of Lands, Miscellaneous Branch}; CGS 8268, Indexes and Registers of letters received, 1867-1915 [box 9/4229].

\textsuperscript{15} The public already had unrestricted access to both Coogee and Manly ocean beaches through other means.
delay which so frequently took place in obtaining land for various public objects'.

The New South Wales Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council debated this Act, which was introduced by the Premier Henry Parkes, at length. Some members were concerned about the possibility of gaols, hospitals, asylums or cemeteries being forcibly erected close to dwellings, while others questioned the proposed methods of determining compensation, and opposed Supreme Court involvement in the process.

There was also a substantial debate about whether the government should have the power to resume freehold land, with a number of members protesting against the 'arbitrary power' of a single Minister to 'take land from any person he chose to select to be so treated', labelling the Act 'tyrannical'.

Yet while the parliamentarians debated the nature of the new Act, contested some of the definitions of 'public purpose' and suggested the inclusion of additional categories, the inclusion of 'public parks or grounds for public recreation or places for bathing' as one of fifteen different definitions of 'public works' was not questioned, or even discussed. By 1880, the parks movement had gained such momentum not only in Britain and America but in Australia too, that the government considered the provision of public parks and reserves to be an essential service to the community. They confirmed this support for public parks several years later when they passed the 'Public Parks Act' of 1884, which provided for the vesting of public parks in Trustees, preferably municipal councils, rather than the Minister for Works.

The 1880 Act facilitated the creation of many new public parks and recreation spaces throughout the colony, and the Bondi and Bronte reservations can therefore be seen as part of the more general trend towards providing public spaces in New South Wales.

For the year 1875, for example, the NSW Government Gazette listed only a single portion of Crown Land dedicated to public recreation. By 1880 this figure had jumped

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16 *Henry Parkes, NSW Parliamentary Debates* 17 December 1879, p.645.
to 55, and by 1886, it had nearly doubled to over 100. The most notable parks of the period were the National Park, south of Sydney, in 1879, and Centennial Park in 1888, but there were many other less prominent reservations. Furthermore, Bondi and Bronte were not the only public recreation reserves to be created on Sydney’s ocean coast during the 1880s. Separate reserves totalling over 45 acres were created at the entrance to Manly lagoon (Curl Curl) in 1886, as were 259 acres at Cronulla beach, and 412 acres at the north head of Port Hacking, on the Cronulla peninsular. In simply reserving from future sale large portions of Crown land, the Cronulla and Curl Curl reservations involved no financial outlay on the part of the government. Yet as with Bondi and Bronte, it was further demonstration of their willingness to provide substantial public spaces not only in established towns, but along the coast.

**Critical factors for the creation of public foreshores**

The new commitment by the New South Wales government to creating public parks was sincere, but it did not result in the reserving of all the spaces the public desired. In 1887, the Minister for Lands, Thomas Garrett, rejected St Leonards Council’s protest against alienation of the foreshore at Little Sirius Cove, a harbour beach, where they argued the public’s rights to the land were greater than that of the potential landowner. He disagreed, stating that ‘the government could only resume land if it was required for some great public purpose’. This comment, which coincided with the opening of Bronte Park, gives us some insight into the value of Bondi and Bronte. The perceived importance to the public of Bondi and Bronte parks was not only demonstrated by the government’s willingness to purchase this land, but was reinforced by their refusal to dedicate many other coastal reserves which were requested during the 1880s and ‘90s. Why were Bondi and Bronte understood to serve ‘some great public purpose’ while other sites such as Tamarama, Shelly Beach, and the ocean foreshore of the Randwick Municipality were not? What were the key factors influencing and motivating the Lands Department during the closing decades of the nineteenth century? More

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21 *NSW Government Gazette*, 1875, 1880, 1886.
22 *NSW Government Gazette* 3 April 1886, p.2495; 26 June 1886, p.4313.
24 Randwick Council *Minutes* 31 May 1882; ‘Shell Beach Reserve, Manly’, *SMH* 28 February 1903, p.10.
specifically, on what basis did the government determine ‘public interest’ and ‘public needs’?

The methods for determining whether the reservation of a public park was in the ‘public interest’ were complex. The Department of Lands considered each application according to a short list of criteria, taking into account the cost, public demand, future needs, existing alternatives, who would benefit, the size of the space, and its physical attributes. By examining which spaces were — and were not — reserved for public recreation in the late nineteenth century, we can begin to understand the ways in which all these factors were combined to enable the Department to reach a decision.

The Bondi and Bronte resumptions were deemed to be in the ‘public interest’ because they provided the first public access to any ocean beaches between Coogee and the harbour. They were chosen over Tamarama because of their size and road access: they could comfortably accommodate many more beachgoers than could Tamarama, and were easily accessible for day-trippers from Sydney. The benefits to the wider Sydney population were favoured over locals in these deliberations, as the New South Wales government recognised their duty was to the colony as a whole. Conversely, once the parks at Bondi and Bronte had been created, repeated requests for dedicating the Tamarama reserve to the public were consistently dismissed on the grounds that sufficient recreation grounds were provided in Bondi and Bronte. These sites, situated close to populated areas and within easy distance of Sydney were distinct to Cronulla and Curl Curl, which were virtually inaccessible, and not close to any towns or centres of population. The reservation of these spaces was consequently most likely a preservation measure for the future; their reservation was cheap and easy to secure while there were no competing claims to the land.

Councils and lobby groups often justified their demands for public reservations by describing the beauty of the foreshores in question, implying the physical attributes of a beach made it more worthy of being made accessible to the public. While surveyors sometimes took the aesthetic appeal of the site into their considerations, reservations do not appear to have been made on these grounds alone. In 1885, the Surveyor of
Public Parks suggested that the Quarantine area at North Head – bordering Manly – should be dedicated to the public because of its unrivalled beauty: as a site for a park it is in respect to the number, extent and variety of the views to be obtained from it perhaps unrivalled in the vicinity of Sydney, and difficult to exceed, or even to equal, anywhere – embracing the ocean, south head, the Harbour as far as Garden Island, Middle Harbour, North Harbour, the coast stretching away to the north with promontory beyond promontory as far as the south head of broken bay, and inland to the Blue Mountains. 25

His report was dismissed outright, his superiors arguing there was not 'any present necessity to interfere with the quarantine ground'. 26 At Tamarama, too, the occasional reference to its beauty or 'picturesqueness' was dismissed by the Department as irrelevant to the question of public needs, and we shall see that the reported beauty of Bronte was irrelevant to considerations regarding that beach. 27

The physical attractiveness of a beach was consequently the least influential factor for determining its worth as a public space. The Department interpreted 'public interest' to be measurable not by aesthetics but by the material value of a site, weighing accessibility and size of a potential space against any cost which might be incurred. If a space existed nearby which was deemed sufficient to meet public need, applications for new reserves stood little chance of being approved. Such scrutiny ensured only minimal requirements would be met, and that only those spaces deemed absolutely essential would be made available for public recreation.

25 Cooper, Surveyor of Public Parks to Under Secretary for Mines, 24 June 1885, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [94/6934]. Box 20/7440. Original emphasis.
26 Notes in margin, Cooper, Surveyor of Public Parks to Under Secretary for Mines, 24 June 1885.
27 Charles Moore, Director, Botanic Gardens, to Messrs. Mills & Pile, 8 August 1885, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [with 04/12559], with bundle 85/1532, box 10/3641.
Weighing public need against private demands

With the creation of the 1880 Lands for Public Purposes Acquired Act and subsequent resumptions at Bondi and Bronte, we can see the government beginning to favour public amenity over private property. Sascha Jenkins argued that in the harbour foreshores debate of the 1880s, 'the private landowner had lost the power to influence the government against other interest groups, especially other interest groups that were proclaiming more communal aims'.

On the ocean beaches however, most landowners – O’Brien aside – maintained some level of control. At Manly, the government favoured the Catholic Church over the Council and residents campaigning for a one hundred foot reservation allowing free access to Shelly Beach. At Tamarama, the ‘improvements’ which the Royal Aquarium Company were considered to be making to the foreshores warranted a permissive occupancy of the beach, and resulted in constant inaction by the department over their illegal fencing off of the beach. And at Harbord north of Manly, the Department of Lands decided to sell allotments bordering a public park in 1886, despite the Surveyor’s contention that they ‘protrude so awkwardly [into the reserve] as to largely destroy its value if excluded from it, whereas if they are thrown with it the reserve would make a remarkably fine public park.’

Nowhere was the government’s support for private rights to the foreshores over public interest more evident than Bronte, where Holdsworth demanded a portion of the beach reserve – that is, land within one hundred feet of high water mark – in exchange for part of his private land. In considering his offer, the Department of Lands weighed any potential public gain from access to this additional space against the subsequent loss of a portion of land initially reserved by the Crown. Despite Surveyor Maitland’s contention that the ground they were losing was far superior to that they were gaining, the Department considered only the comparative size of land being exchanged, and

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28 Jenkins, Our Beautiful Harbour, p.73. For a detailed examination of the struggle to resume Cremorne Point for public use, see Tim Bonyhady, The Colonial Earth, pp.310-337.
29 Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, p.107.
31 Metropolitan District Surveyor to Under Secretary for Lands, 7 August 1886, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [86/14820], with bundle 86/14820, box 10/3715.
decided in favour of Holdsworth’s proposal. In further demonstration of the insignificance of ‘attractiveness’ in resumed land, Maitland’s argument that ‘the part which is particularly asked for is undoubtedly the best and most picturesque portion’ was ignored.

Following complaints from Waverley Council in which they questioned the ethics of the proposal, the Department modified the area to be rescinded for Holdsworth’s subdivision, but did not reconsider the matter otherwise. The Council were informed following further protests that ‘ample provision has been made from public requirements.’ The rescission of this portion of the 100ft reserve from high water mark never took place, as Holdsworth failed to furnish proof of title. The incident demonstrated, however, that despite their recent acquisition at Bondi, the Department of Lands remained willing to compromise complete public access to the foreshores in order to appease an individual landowner.

Reserving the foreshores – 1900-1920

For the remainder of the nineteenth century, the New South Wales Department of Lands continued to respond to requests for coastal land reservations with the same cautious and primarily tight-fisted attitude. Where individual sites were deemed to be in the ‘public interest’, and worth the cost, if any, of securing them, new reserves were created. In most cases, however, requests were denied on the grounds that they did not meet ‘public needs’, which usually meant that there were ample alternative public recreation spaces nearby.

In the opening decade of the twentieth century, the legalisation of all-day surf bathing transformed the ways in which Sydney’s ocean beaches were used, and magnified their prominence in the public mind. The developments which led to the legitimisation

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32 Internal Correspondence, Department of Lands, signature unclear. 17 July 1883, SRNSW: CGS 8258 (83/13147), with bundle 85/1532, box 10/3641.
33 Report, Surveyor Maitland to Surveyor General, 12 December 1882, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [82/20084], with bundle 85/1532, box 10/3641. Original emphasis.
34 Lands Department internal correspondence (unsigned) 16 April 1884, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [84/6955], with bundle 85/1532, box 10/3641.
35 Notes on letter, Waverley Council to Department of Lands, 21 May 1884, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [84/10176], with bundle 85/1532, box 10/3641.
36 Crown Solicitor’s Office to Under Secretary for Lands, 7 August 1885, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [85/1219], with bundle 85/1532, box 10/3641.
of daylight bathing and the ultimate institutionalisation of surf bathing in Sydney’s summer calendar will be discussed in detail in chapter nine. But the implications of this development for the governance of the beaches are worth considering. It created a new excuse to provide public spaces on Sydney’s ocean beaches, and contributed to a greater demand along the coast by beachgoers, coastal residents and local government. Nonetheless, the state government continued to assess demands according to the same definition of ‘public need’ and financial worth. Towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century however, the language of the public campaigns shifted as the government began to recognise the vote-winning potential of the widespread demand for more spaces.

Surf bathing impacted on the demand for coastal recreation reserves in two ways. Firstly, it was said to have generated a boom in seaside real estate, which saw residential settlement spread along Sydney’s ocean coast, as will be discussed in chapter nine. New coastal residents, enthused by the new-found opportunities for beach recreation, demanded unimpeded access to beaches which had hitherto been used only by very few. Consequently, the Warringah Shire Council lobbied the government for public reservations on beaches including Collaroy and Bongin Bongin following their establishment in 1906, on behalf of the rapidly growing population of these areas.37

Secondly, by 1907 the popularity of surf bathing drastically increased the size and regularity of the crowds on established beaches such as Bondi, Coogee and Manly. This in turn prompted many beachgoers to travel further in search of more secluded, or at least less crowded, beaches, again increasing the demand for greater public access to new beaches such as Freshwater north of Manly, and Maroubra, south of Coogee.

It may have intensified the demand for new coastal spaces and improved means of accessing the coast, but to what extent were successive Ministers and the Lands

Department influenced by surf bathing when considering creating new foreshore reservations? Support for surf bathing specifically was far more pronounced within debates over bathing amenities on beaches, for which the government consistently dedicated funding from 1908 onwards.38 This added strain on the public purse perhaps even hindered further foreshore resumptions, as ocean beach recreation was already heavily funded. But when it came to creating foreshore reservations, the issue was more about the rights of all members of the public to access and use the beaches, not just surf bathers. Surf bathing consequently played a minor role in the considerations of Surveyors reporting on proposed beach reservations, even though it was occasionally cited by councils and local lobby groups keen to attract beachgoers to their areas.39

Public ‘rights’ to the beach
The growth of the popularity of surf-bathing also coincided with a major shift in the language of the foreshore campaigns, as lobby groups began describing foreshores as a ‘public right’ rather than merely a ‘public need’. By insisting that all members of the public had a ‘right’ to enjoy the foreshores, campaigners demonstrated the importance of these sites to the state as a whole, declaring them to be the ‘rightful heritage’ of the people of New South Wales, and even Australia. Throughout the opening decades of the twentieth century, this language quickly became embedded within popular understandings of Sydney’s foreshores, and was constantly articulated in letters to newspaper editors regarding ocean and harbour beaches. It was also adopted by some Ministers attempting to tap into public sentiment.

The idea that the public had a right to use the beaches contrasted starkly against the attitudes of the first Colonial administrators, who had included entire beaches in land grants until 1828, and one of the first democratically elected governments of New South Wales, which gave landowners the opportunity to purchase foreshore reservations from 1861. The resumption of selected foreshores in the 1880s signified an increasing sense of the importance of providing such spaces, but even then, only

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38 This issue will be discussed in detail in chapter nine.
39 Randwick Council to Under Secretary for Lands, 3 August 1910, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [10/12677], with bundle 10/20096.
several sites were deemed to be needed by the public – Bondi and Bronte were provided not because the public had a ‘right’ to them, but because the government conceded that there was a ‘need’ for coastal recreation spaces close to Sydney. The subsequent entrenchment of the concept of public ‘rights’ to the foreshores in the early twentieth century therefore represented one of the most significant attitudinal shifts in the history of Sydney’s beach culture.

The first reference to a public ‘right’ to use Sydney’s ocean foreshores was made in 1901, regarding the land separating Narrabeen Lagoon from the ocean. At this early stage, petitioners campaigning against the possible alienation of these foreshores qualified their claims, arguing that ‘the alienation of it would deprive the public of an advantage to which they had been accustomed and had come to reasonably regard as their right.’ It is unclear whether this group were successful on the basis of these ‘rights’, or if the government merely agreed such an alienation was inappropriate for other reasons. But regardless of the outcome, in drawing on a sentiment which likely reflected public opinion, these locals and beach goers played an unwitting role in creating a new language for Sydney’s foreshore campaigners.

Three years later, in 1904, this concept was first articulated by a member of the government when the Minister for Lands, James Ashton, admitted that the public may have a ‘right’ to access Tamarama beach. In 1904, after close to two decades of lobbying by Waverley Council and local residents for public access to the beach, the Department of Lands was called on to resolve a dispute over the attempts of the Bondi Aquarium proprietors, to fence off the one hundred foot reservation. After detailed research, the Under-Secretary for Lands concluded that:

> the Crown cannot, on account of the 100ft reservation, cause the removal of the existing fences, as they are not on the 100ft reservation, also that the only public access to the 100ft reservation known to the Crown is from the ocean. The 100ft reservation has not yet been dedicated to the public, so the public has not any right of entry. A permissive occupancy to


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one person does not, in my opinion, preclude entry by any other person entitled to entry. Unsatisfied, Thomas Jessep, the member for Waverley, raised the issue in Parliament, prompting Ashton to personally visit the beach. Ashton was aware that legally, ‘the public has not any right of entry’, but declared that ‘the public should have the unrestricted right of entry to a 100ft reservation above high water mark’, and subsequently cancelled the permissive occupancy. His suggestion that the public had a ‘right’ to access the foreshores suggests a major turning point in governmental attitudes towards Tamarama specifically, and Sydney’s ocean foreshores more generally.

This was not a revolutionary moment: it did not result in a revision of Lands Department policy, nor did the Minister ever consider dedicating Tamaramama beach to public recreation. Despite their rhetoric, the government treated public access in this instance as a bonus, rather than a right. But this was the first recognition by a government Minister that the public could legitimately claim, over private stakeholders, a ‘right’ to access and enjoy Sydney’s ocean foreshores. It was also the first admission that not being specifically dedicated to public recreation was not a barrier for public access to reserved foreshores, which had been the government’s previous argument regarding Tamaramama.

The articulation of foreshores as a public ‘right’, and a site of state or national significance was not exclusive to Sydney’s ocean beaches, however, and was used far more prominently by lobby groups campaigning for the preservation of Sydney’s harbour foreshores. It is even likely the concept of a public ‘right’ to the foreshores originated at the harbour – in Sydney at least – as campaigners opposing a colliery at Cremorne Point in the early 1890s described the harbour as ‘national heritage’. The Harbour Foreshore Vigilance Committee, which was established in 1905 and enjoyed

41 SMH 19 October 1904, p.8. Emphasis added. Department of Lands report into encroachment by fencing on Tamarama reserve, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [04/12559], with bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
42 SMH 9 November 1904, p.8. Emphasis added; See also NSW Parliamentary Debates, 8 November 1904, vol. 16, p.1304; Ministerial Minute, 7 November 1904, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [04/13349], with bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
substantial support from the Sydney press, played a huge role in consolidating the concept of public rights to the foreshores in the public mind. In 1906, Dr Richard Arthur, a politician and social reformer who campaigned for public foreshores and surf bathing, wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* declaring that if Balmoral Beach were lost to private interests, 'the Sydney people will have lost their rightful heritage forever'. An editorial in the same paper concurred, insisting that

> the purchasers of the foreshores ... stand between the people and the enjoyment of the people’s birthright ... They belong to the people and must not be alienated. If already alienated, they must be redeemed.

By the time some residents of the Manly area called for the resumption of land at Queenscliff so as to allow easy access between Manly and Freshwater beaches in 1907 on the basis that it was of ‘national importance’, they were adopting a language which was by now largely associated with the harbour specifically:

> If [the resumption] is not done generations yet unborn will in future years stand shut off from an important access to the beach at Freshwater, and will be debarred from enjoying what should be their rightful heritage.

The Harbour Foreshore Vigilance Committee enjoyed their greatest success when Neils Nielsen, the first Labor government’s Minister for Lands, announced a £150,000 Foreshores Resumption Scheme in 1911. This scheme was designed to resume as much land fronting Sydney Harbour as possible ‘in the interests of the present and future generations’, and was largely a response to the groundswell of support for public foreshores, owing to the work of the Vigilance Committee. At the scheme’s announcement, Nielsen agreed that Sydney Harbour ‘belonged’ to the

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44 For more on the work of the Harbour Foreshores Vigilance Committee, see Jenkins, *Our Beautiful Harbour*, pp.86-91.
people of New South Wales, confirming the entrenchment of this concept in the public discourse of the foreshores. 49

At least one letter writer connected the work of the Harbour Foreshores Vigilance Committee with ocean beaches, insisting their resolution regarding 'the necessity for the permanent dedication of all reserves available for recreational purposes' applied equally to beaches on Sydney’s south east coast as it did to the harbour foreshores. 50

And several months after the announcement of the Foreshores Scheme, Neilsen’s successor as Minister for Lands, George Beeby, announced the proposed parks at Long Reef and Cronulla together with a proposed resumption at Vaucluse inside Sydney Harbour, describing all three as ‘parks for the people’. 51

The similarities between both the campaigns for harbour and ocean foreshores, and corresponding language of government Ministers, suggests there was little distinction between the two types of foreshores for either the public or government representatives. Ultimately, however, campaigners for Sydney’s harbour foreshores had more success in creating public reservations than did their ocean beach counterparts, suggesting the government supported the public ‘right’ to the harbour far more than to the ocean. Perhaps they perceived greater electoral success through the former campaign, or, being a Labor government, perhaps they saw more opportunity for working class recreation on the harbour. Furthermore, although ocean beach campaigners had argued the public had a ‘right’ to the beaches prior to the establishment of the Harbour Foreshores Vigilance Committee, the latter group was responsible for its consolidation in the language of the foreshores, and therefore its widespread dissemination in the public mind. The subsequent insistence that ocean beaches were the heritage of the New South Wales people – strongly echoing the harbour campaigns – suggests the crusade for ocean foreshores may have gained strength from the more prominent harbour movement.

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This comparison of the ocean foreshores debates with those regarding the harbour foreshores is further testament to the relatively minor influence of surf bathing on the former — although its influence cannot be denied altogether. Surf bathing may have been identified as a reason for providing coastal space, but the campaigns for ocean foreshore reservations, and increasing willingness of successive governments to accede to such requests, reflected as much the growing sense that the public had a ‘right’ to foreshores generally, as it did the concept of surf-bathers’ ‘needs’.

Critical factors in the provision of public spaces, 1900 – 1920

The construction of beaches and foreshores as national or state-wide important sites, which were the ‘birthright’ or ‘rightful heritage’ of the general public — which continues to inform attitudes towards Sydney’s harbour and ocean foreshores — had become embedded within the rhetoric of Sydney’s coast by the close of the first decade of the twentieth century. To what extent did it affect the administration of the foreshores? The government may have been more likely to embark on foreshore reservations than they had during the nineteenth century, but in many cases, their rhetoric was not followed with action. In 1907, after yet more controversy regarding the domination of the beach by the Aquarium proprietors, the government finally constructed a path to Tamarama beach to allow unrestricted access; and yet as we have seen, it would be 1920 before they eventually dedicated the reserve to public recreation.52 Requests for reservations all along the coast, including Newport, Freshwater, North Bondi, Maroubra and Cronulla continued to be refused on the grounds that the public benefit did not warrant expenditure.53 Nonetheless, coastal residents and councils continued to demand access to more and more foreshores, as a right.

52 Internal lands Department Correspondence, 14 February 1922. SRNSW: CGS 8258 [22/958], with bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
53 P Hunter, Director, NSW Immigration and Tourist Bureau to Under Secretary for Lands, 20 May 1909 (And subsequent response from Metropolitan District Surveyor, 28 May 1909), SRNSW: CGS 8258 [09/8616], bundle 09/8616, box 20/8321; Metropolitan District Surveyor, Report into Warringah Shire beaches, 19 March 1909, [09/2642], with bundle 11/20637; Surveyor Madsen, report into proposed resumption of Ben Buckler, 4 June 1908, [08/10403], with bundle 24/3208; Metropolitan District Surveyor, Report into proposed resumption at Maroubra, 3 December 1910 [10/20096], with bundle 10/20096; Surveyor Madsen to Metropolitan District Surveyor, 28 May 1908, [08/9918], with bundle 08/10642, box 20/8253.
Between 1900 and 1920, the New South Wales Department of Lands was subject to relentless campaigns for both the dedication of existing reserves to public use, and the resumption of privately owned foreshores and coastal land to create beachfront parks. Sascha Jenkins marked the dedication of Bradley’s Head as a public reserve in 1908 as the point when ‘the State Government was now generally supportive of the move toward reserving foreshore land’ on the harbour. On the coast, too, the government began to favour public access over private amenity at around the same time, although they continued to act with caution. A 1909 land exchange at Maroubra which resulted in the entire frontage of the beach being reserved for the public – a project that was initiated by the government themselves and approved by the land board as one ‘entirely in the public interests’ – was the most substantial public provision on Sydney’s ocean coast during this period.54

Increasing government sympathy towards surf bathing – on the basis that it was a ‘healthy’ recreation but also with a knowledge that it increased the rate revenue of seaside municipalities – contributed to a growing willingness to provide substantial beach spaces up and down the coast during this period. But as we have seen, there were far more influential factors at work. Publicly, the New South Wales government wholeheartedly supported the public demand for coastal spaces and improved transport to the coast. The Labor government, elected in late 1910, was the more vocal on this subject than its predecessors. In 1910, the Minister for Works, Arthur Griffith, stated that ‘in his opinion, facilities to get to the ocean and erect residences along the foreshores had been neglected in the past. It would almost seem as if we were only just discovering the Pacific Ocean’.55 In reality though, the government continued to be guided more by established criteria than by public demands. Consequently, it did not commit funding for the proposed tramway to Maroubra beach, to which Griffith

54 The Daily Telegraph and Sydney Morning Herald differ over the size of the exchanged portion. The Telegraph reported that the government exchanged 11,000 acres for 14,000. The Herald reported that the exchanged land was little over 5 acres, but that the different areas were valued at £11,000 and £1440. This was undoubtedly the correct report. ‘Maroubra Bay Reserve’, Daily Telegraph 20 October 1909, p.10; ‘Maroubra Beach: A Deal in Land’, SMH 21 October 1909, p.4.
was referring above, and which he had publicly supported nearly two years earlier, until nearly 1920.\textsuperscript{56} As had been the case in the late nineteenth century, the existence of alternative public spaces remained the most important factor for departmental considerations of applications for recreation reserves. This explanation alone was used to justify refusals for foreshore reservations at Tamarama, Newport, Bongin Bongin and Cronulla during the opening decades of the twentieth century. Conversely, the Department considered the provision of public space at Maroubra and Collaroy beaches to be essential to the needs of locals and day-trippers from the town, specifically because they were both somewhat isolated and initially had no alternative public space nearby. These beaches were also favoured because of their substantial size over the smaller beaches; as with Bondi and Bronte in the 1880s, their sheer size alone meant that large numbers of beachgoers could be catered to by a single reservation.

The growing intensity of the foreshore campaigns of the late 1900s created increasing difficulties for the Lands Department which was accountable to a government trying to appease the public, but had limited resources. Thomas Furber, the Metropolitan District Surveyor from 1904 to 1914 who was aptly described as ‘incisive rather than conciliatory’, insisted on applying strict criteria to applications.\textsuperscript{57} He may have personally favoured creating public reservations on Sydney’s foreshores,\textsuperscript{58} but his job dictated that he weigh the cost of proposed reserves against any ‘public benefit’ which would be obtained – and he often found that the cost was not justified, even in the face of strong recommendations by subordinate surveyors in favour of resumption.

Rarely if ever did Furber’s refusals, which were routinely endorsed by the Under Secretary, put an end to the public lobbying. Nowhere was this demonstrated more clearly than Tamarama, where the Waverley Council and local lobby groups such as


\textsuperscript{58} Wood, ‘Furber, Thomas Frederick (1855 – 1924)’, pp.99-600.
the Waverley Progress Association campaigned relentlessly until the site was eventually resumed. In other cases, the intrusion of the Minister into the matter resulted in an overturning of Furber’s recommendations. One such instance related to Collaroy. The departmental correspondence regarding Collaroy Beach in 1908 and 1909 clearly demonstrates the tension the increasing insistence that the public had a ‘right’ – even over private landholders – to use and access Sydney’s ocean beaches created for the Lands Department.

The subdivision of Mount Ramsay Estate, Collaroy beach

Collaroy, between Narrabeen and Curl Curl on Sydney’s northern beaches, first attracted the attention of Sydneysiders following the beaching of a ship, the *SS Collaroy*, its namesake, in 1881.59 Despite the attempts of one property owner to subdivide in the early 1880s, the area remained relatively isolated for the rest of the nineteenth century.60 Following the onset of daylight bathing in the early twentieth century, real estate interest in the beach at Collaroy increased, spurred largely by the subdivision of the Mount Ramsay Estate, which spanned the Collaroy and Narrabeen beaches.

In 1908, an enquiry by the new Warringah Shire Council regarding the ‘advisability’ of resuming the land fronting Collaroy beach in order to make the entire beach a public recreation reserve was recommended by government surveyors, but quashed by Furber. At issue was the uncertain status of the foreshore within the subdivision of the Mount Ramsay Estate. While admitting that Collaroy beach had not been subject to a one hundred foot reservation when it was first granted to Ramsay in 1808, Furber insisted there had been no public complaints of impeded access to the beach in the past, and argued that ‘there can be no doubt that ever since the earliest days of settlement in this locality the general public have had unrestricted access to this beach’. He was also sceptical of the intentions of the property’s vendors, cautioning

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59 Brawley, *Vigilant and Victorious*, pp.5-6.
60 Brawley, *Vigilant and Victorious*, p.6.
that ‘it is not advisable to resume a beach of this character for public recreation, unless there are guarantees that no claims for compensation would be alleged.’

Furber’s insistence that public demand would be adequately met by permitting access to a beach which remained strictly private property conflicted against popular sentiment, which demanded outright public ownership of the foreshores. The Council consequently pursued the issue, sending a deputation directly to the Minister for

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Lands, Samuel Moore, who was no doubt aware of the popularity of such schemes among the electorate. As a direct result of this Council campaign and the sympathy of the Minister, the government subsequently purchased a portion of the Mount Ramsey Estate fronting Collaroy beach for public recreation, at a cost of £250. Departmental incompetence rendered this purchase largely useless however. The surveyors and Government Land Valuer had incorrectly identified the boundary definitions of many of the allotments which included all the land to high water mark; as a result, the Crown in fact only purchased some streets which led to the beach [the white spaces between the shaded areas on figure 4.2], and the land to high water mark at the end of each of these streets.

Subsequent attempts to ‘test the matter’ – whether the government could secure the foreshores within individual allotments – were abandoned following one landowner’s insistence that the Crown should purchase his land. Furber reiterated his conclusion of eighteen months earlier that ‘I am not aware of any instance in this district in which an owner of land having ocean frontage has succeeded in excluding the public from the beaches.’ He further assumed that if the government were to improve the foreshores in the future, landowners would ‘probably’ surrender their land voluntarily.

The campaign for Collaroy beach, and the varying attitudes towards the spaces by the Minister and government employees demonstrates two important developments. Firstly, the early surveyor reports of the site reveal the continued importance of ‘the future’ in departmental considerations. In contrast to Furber’s initial refusal to consider resuming parts of the Mount Ramsay Estate, both Surveyors Madsen and

62 Warringah Council to Minister for Lands, 28 April 1909, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [09/7260], with bundle 16/799; 27 May 1909 [09/8926].
63 Internal Lands Department Correspondence, 2 February 1910, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [10/1651], with bundle 16/799.
64 Internal Lands Department Correspondence, 23 March 1910, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [10/4819], with bundle 16/799; Crown Solicitor to Under Secretary for Lands, 26 April 1910 [10/6887].
66 Report, Metropolitan District Surveyor, 12 December 1910, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [10/16552], with bundle 16/799.
Roberts recommended resumption in consecutive reports on the site. Madsen expressed concern that despite the exclusion of the beach above high water mark from the Estate subdivision, claims could legally be made for the space in the future. He wrote that ‘this beach is one of the prettiest in the neighbourhood of Sydney and is likely to become a most favoured resort for the public’.\(^67\) Surveyor Roberts, asked a year later to report on Collaroy beach among other matters, also considered the future potential for this beach, and submitted a bold plan for the reservation of the entire coast north of Manly:

Looking to the future of this locality in its relation to what is destined to be one of the greatest cities of the world I am of opinion that something more is needed not only in connection with Collaroy beach but in connection with the whole of the coast from Manly beach to, at any rate, the mouth of Narrabeen lagoon.\(^68\)

Madsen had estimated that the cost of resumption ‘cannot be very much, seeing that the part required is useless for any other purpose and is subject to overflow at high spring tides.’ Roberts, on the other hand, calculated that his grand scheme would possibly cost between £15,000 and £20,000; admittedly ‘a formidable figure’ but ‘warranted’, he argued, by the ‘importance of the scheme as affecting the future’.\(^69\) While he contended that Roberts’ scheme was ‘in my opinion an admirable one’, Furber rejected the recommendations put by both surveyors. He suggested that Roberts’ proposal ‘would not be a fair charge on the State’s revenue’, suggesting instead that it was more appropriate for a local body with a large revenue source to secure the headland.\(^70\)

While Long Reef Point and other sections of this foreshore were ultimately not reserved for public recreation as Surveyor Roberts would have liked – Long Reef


\(^{69}\) Report, Surveyor Roberts, 8 March 1909.

point remains the site of a private golf course – the consideration of ‘future
generations’ at the northern beaches, where the population was quickly growing and
further growth was predicted following the opening of the tram line, was nonetheless
influential. It alone prompted the Minister to resume parts of Collaroy beach for
public recreation and support the provision of bathing amenities when the population
and visitor levels were still relatively low.\textsuperscript{71}

Secondly, the debates over Collaroy demonstrated that the ability of the public to
informally access a space which was not specifically dedicated to public recreation, or
which in the case of Collaroy remained privately owned, was beginning to be
recognised by the government as inadequate. In overruling Furber’s verdict that the
public would not be stopped from using privately owned foreshores and that this
would meet public ‘needs’, Moore reinforced the perception that public access to
beaches was not a bonus, but a right; demonstrating a clear shift from the
governments’ attitude of just a few years earlier. But the government and Department
of Lands were not completely convinced, or convincing, on this matter, and in reality,
they remained reluctant to act. They gambled on the integrity of individual
landowners to not make claims over the foreshores spaces, only resuming the
foreshore when there was an easy and cheap means of doing so available.

This case demonstrates clearly the tension between the very open support of public
foreshores by the New South Wales government, and the financial difficulty this
posed. Theoretically, the government may have favoured public ownership over
private property, but they remained reluctant to resume land. However, towards the
end of the first decade of the twentieth century, we can see the influence of the public
lobby groups campaigning for ocean foreshores being extended. Even where
individual foreshores were not deemed by the Department to be in ‘the public interest’
– that is, worth the cost of securing them – the Minister, acutely aware of the growing
demand for coastal foreshores, was more likely to concede.

\textsuperscript{71} Report, Metropolitan District Surveyor, 4 January 1912, \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [11/20637]}, with bundle
16/799; 26 May 1910 [10/8713]. The provision of bathing amenities will be discussed in greater detail
in chapter nine.
'The public'

Just who exactly constituted 'the public' in the government's definition of 'public interest'? We have seen that for most of the nineteenth century, and indeed into the twentieth, 'public interest' referred not necessarily to the desires of members of the public, but to the health of the public budget. In the early twentieth century, coastal councils similarly grappled with the concept of 'public interest' when faced with the high cost of complying with the demands of surf bathers, some of whom were ratepayers, as we shall see in chapter nine. From around 1908, however, we can see a clear shift in the definition of 'public interest', towards catering to leisure seekers from Sydney and elsewhere in New South Wales. This was strengthened by the Labor government who from 1910 onwards expressed a concern with city workers, and articulated the provision of public spaces on the beach and new tramlines to the coast in the context of catering to these city workers. But in considering the health of the budget, the Labor government also relied on the potential of new transport infrastructure to create new living spaces for residents of Sydney.

The articulation of the foreshores as a state asset rather than local concern was more than just a way of justifying their resumption by foreshore campaigners – it often represented the attitude of councils keen to share the economic burden of the cost of foreshore development, as will be discussed in chapters eight and nine. The coastal councils and lobby groups understood that the government was far more likely to look favourably on their applications if they could demonstrate reservations would serve the greater Sydney or New South Wales community, rather than just locals. In addition to the size and location of Tamarama, this helps to explain why the campaign for that beach was unsuccessful for so long. The 'public' who were so concerned with the loss of access to Tamarama were strictly local residents, who had been unofficially using that beach for many years. The Sydney Morning Herald admitted as much when it suggested that 'residents of Bondi and Waverley' should be pleased with Ashton's decision in 1904 to cancel the permissive occupancy.\footnote{SMH 19 October 1904, p.8; 9 November 1904, p.8.}

The creation of a recreation reserve fronting Maroubra beach is a good example of coastal space created specifically for the use of day-trippers from Sydney. The site of
a wool-washing plant, Maroubra had attracted very little attention from the Randwick Council throughout the nineteenth century, and in a reflection of Collaroy’s discovery by Sydney residents, only began to attract day-trippers following the beaching of two ships there in the late 1890s. Shortly after the wreck of the second, the *Hereward* in 1898, Maroubra became an established picnicking site for day-trippers. Accordingly, the beach was mentioned in press reports of public holidays for the first time following New Years Day 1900, when the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported ‘a large number of pleasure seekers scattered along the green and on the extensive sands’. In 1909, when the foreshore was eventually resumed, Maroubra was still not a residential suburb; the ‘public’ to which the government were catering were day-trippers, who within a decade of discovering the beach had presented petitions demanding the resumption of the foreshore and the construction of a tramline to the beach. Surveyor Roberts had similarly cited the importance of the northern beaches to ‘the vast middle and poorer classes of this great City’ when reporting on Collaroy beach, reminding Furber that such groups ‘must be supplied with recreation grounds, outside [their] ordinary domains and parks, for future requirements’.

Making beaches accessible to the wider Sydney public was also central to the deliberations over providing means of public transport to the coast. As we have seen in chapter two, the rise of mass railway travel in Britain had enabled members of the working classes to travel to the seaside on excursion fares from the 1840s, transforming once genteel resorts such as Blackpool into an ‘unmistakable plebian’ town. Transport developments had facilitated a similar shift at Coney Island on America’s east coast later in the nineteenth century. While there was some opposition to this ‘transport of the masses’ by those whose favourite resorts were transformed, there was generally a recognition that this was beneficial to the working

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73 The only attention paid by Randwick Council to Maroubra prior to 1908 related to the nuisance of trees being cut down, and the formation of a road to the Bay. This road was constructed as a joint project between the Randwick Council and Mr Vicar, the landowner, in 1884. Randwick Council Minutes 19 August – 11 November 1884; 5 June 1888.
74 *SMH* 2 January 1900, p.7. See also 2 January 1902, p.6; 1 April 1902, p.6.
75 *SMH* 19 March 1909, p.3; 21 October 1909, p.4.
classes, in terms of their physical and moral well-being, which was a primary factor in the provision of cheap excursion fares.\textsuperscript{78}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{hereward_wreck.png}
\caption{The wreck of the Hereward on Maroubra Beach in 1898 attracted crowds of sightseers to this previously little used beach.}
\end{figure}

The New South Wales Labor government shared a belief in the benefits of coastal recreation for residents of Sydney's inland suburbs. In his speech at the opening of the Cronulla tram in 1911, Arthur Griffith, the Minister for Works, stated that 'it was the business of the government to give the residents of closely settled cities and inland towns every facility to reach the beautiful seaside resorts of the state'. The following year, the same Minister spoke at the opening of the Brookvale to Collaroy beach tram extension, declaring, according to the \textit{Town and Country Journal}, that he wanted to make the beautiful seaside districts available to the men and women who had to do their work in the city. That, said he 'was the motive that actuated me in carrying out this particular tramway construction and any other similar ones'.\textsuperscript{79} A proposal to link trams from Dulwich Hill in Sydney's western suburbs to Maroubra was also met with enthusiasm, one writer to the \textit{Sun} declaring that 'the experiment must prove a success,'

\textsuperscript{78} Cruickshank and Boucher, 'The Heritage of the People' (no page numbers supplied); Garber, \textit{A Shifting Shore}, p.112; Urry, p.22; Walton, 'The Demand for Working Class Seaside Holidays', p.250; Walvin, \textit{Beside the Seaside}, p.38.

\textsuperscript{79} 'A new tram line: Sutherland to Cronulla', \textit{SMH} 27 June 1911, p.7; 'Opening up a beautiful district: Tramway and water supply for Narrabeen', \textit{Town and Country Journal} 7 August 1912, p.32.
as the enormous population of the western suburbs will eagerly avail themselves of the opportunity of spending their leisure hours at the seaside.\textsuperscript{80}

We shall see in chapter five that the provision of affordable public transport to Sydney’s ocean coast in the closing decades of the nineteenth century was only achieved after substantial lobbying by the Waverley and Randwick Councils to a reluctant government, and by the actions of residents of Manly keen to reduce their commuting costs. Within two decades, and largely due to their recognition of the health benefits of surf bathing, the New South Wales government deliberately sought greater access for the working and middle classes to Sydney’s ocean beaches, and initiated the construction of new tramlines. Such a shift reflected the growing importance for the government in catering to the general public over coastal locals, and was a sign that the construction of the beaches as a state concern was effective in this context.

However, the provision of coastal recreation spaces and improved means of transport to the beaches was not only designed to cater to day-trippers, and the construction of the Cronulla and northern beaches tramlines were equally favourable because they opened up substantial new spaces for residential development.\textsuperscript{81} Indeed, the Warringah Shire Council and the New South Wales Government were celebrating the residential potential for the northern beaches before that line had even been completed. Whereas in 1909 the Metropolitan District Surveyor reported that neither Curl Curl nor Bongin Bongin beaches were ‘frequented by the public enough to warrant public expenditure’ in the form of surf bathing accommodation,\textsuperscript{82} the Minister accepted the argument of the Warringah Shire Council that the imminent opening of the Brookvale tram line would contribute significantly to a growth in the popularity of the former beach, and justified expenditure ‘as far as possible and within reason.’\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80} Letter to the editor, \textit{Sun}, 18 December 1910.
\textsuperscript{81} ‘Picturesque Cronulla: Opened by tram’, \textit{SMH} 12 June 1911, p.9.
\textsuperscript{83} Report, Under Secretary for Lands, 18 June 1909; \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [09/09571]}, with bundle 11/20637.
And at the opening of the Cronulla tramway in 1911, Griffith was pleased to note that it would improve access to the suburbs between Sutherland and Cronulla.\textsuperscript{84}

As we have seen with the construction of the Coogee and Bondi roads in the 1850s and '60s, public transport was understood to be crucial to opening up new districts to residential development. The New South Wales government, keen to make further coastal spaces available for such development, also considered public parks to increase the attractiveness of coastal areas to potential new residents. While they may not have publicly stated it, the need to justify large and expensive projects made this equally influential on decisions to create new transport lines as the opportunities they created for day-trippers.

**Post war**

From 1914 onwards, the financial burden of the war in Europe prevented the government from committing any further funding on public reservations — although the condemnation of sport in wartime Australia also suggests a moral influence on decisions regarding the beaches.\textsuperscript{85} In September of that year, Thomas Furber returned to his surveyors a number of applications for new parks or park improvements, instructing them to 'refrain from making recommendations involving increased expenditure':

> Under the financial difficulties arising out of the war, it would seem that these questions should be deferred to a more opportune time. This course is also recommended as a means of reducing the present cost of administration. I would further suggest that the Government Land Valuer be instructed that any cases he may have in hand relating to park acquisitions be not proceeded with.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{84} 'A new tram line: Sutherland to Cronulla', *SMH* 27 June 1911, p.7.


\textsuperscript{86} Circular, Metropolitan District Surveyor, 2 September 1914, *SRNSW: CGS 8258 [14/12718]*, with bundle 18/8557.
Limited funding due to the war was specifically cited in refusals for resumptions at Tamarama and Gordon’s Bay, as well as a strip of land immediately south of Bondi.  

This policy was maintained until the end of the war, and the 1917/18 government estimates stated that ‘it is presumed that expenditure in the direction of acquiring new park sites will not be favoured except in very special and urgent cases.’  

Within only a few years of peace having been declared in Europe, however, Peter Loughlin, the Labor Minister for Lands, resumed the government’s pre-war enthusiasm for the foreshores. According to a circular issued by his Under Secretary in 1921, he was keen to ensure that wherever possible, any remaining water frontages could be secured, extending Nielsen’s 1911 scheme to the ocean foreshores:

The Minister has had under consideration the advisableness of adopting a proposal whereby the people of the State may secure for all time what should have been regarded from the outset as their natural heritage, viz. free access along the banks of tidal and navigable rivers, and the foreshores of the sea and all inlets thereof.

The Minister warmly approves of the proposal, and, with a view to giving it effect, has directed that a consistent policy be adopted of reserving from sale a strip of land at least 100 feet wide in future alienations and disposals of lands...  

It is not desired that the principle indicated be indiscriminately followed in all cases, but that it be kept prominently in view when disposing of Crown Lands... so that the policy may be judiciously introduced by the preservation of all requisite existing facilities of access to the foreshores of the sea and

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87 Arthur Hare, Under Secretary for Lands to Randwick Town Clerk, 22 January 1915 SRNSW: CGS 8258 [15/313], with bundle 18/8557; Hare to Waverley Town Clerk, 22 February 1915 [15/418] with bundle 67/2146, box 12/3141; Internal correspondence, Department of Lands, 8 September 1914, [14/4526], with bundle 18/8557.

88 Copy of Estimates 1917/18: Park &c Acquisition vote, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [with 17/383], with bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
inlets thereof, and the main interior waterways; and the gradual extension of these facilities whenever opportunities present themselves.\(^89\)

The clause cautioning against indiscriminate reserving meant that despite this declaration in favour of the foreshores, less than five months later, Loughlin was able to refuse to see a deputation from the Bronte-Waverley Progress Association agitating for a resumption ‘for public purposes a strip of 100 feet above high water mark along the foreshores of the Municipality of Waverley’. Citing lack of funding for ‘new park or foreshore acquisitions’, it appears very little had changed in the past decade of land decisions: on the surface the government were keen to secure foreshores for public recreation, but they remained reluctant to repeatedly reach into government coffers to transform this enthusiasm into expenditure.\(^90\)

Nonetheless, this policy indicates that the New South Wales government had come full circle since the first attempt to reserve Sydney’s foreshores close to a century earlier. There were crucial differences however. In 1828, multiple purposes had been signalled for these reservations, the most important being military, navigation, water access and the exploitation of natural coastal resources. By the 1920s, there was only one identifiable and accepted use for Sydney’s ocean foreshores: public recreation. In subsequent decades, the primacy of public rights over private ownership of Sydney’s foreshores – both ocean and harbour – continued to inform attitudes towards the coast, and became highly influential to the governance of these spaces.

**Conclusions**

The shift from emphasis on the rights of private property owners to those of the general public began in the 1880s with the forced resumption of Bondi and Bronte beaches, and was nearly complete by the early 1920s, when most of Sydney’s ocean beaches were accessible to the public in some form. Surf bathing played a crucial role in increasing the visibility of the beaches and prominence of beach-related issues, but

\(^89\) Department of Lands, Circular no. 21/35: ‘Retention of river frontages by the Crown’, 29 November 1921, *SRNSW: CGS 8258* [21/7561], with bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.

\(^90\) Acting Under Secretary Lands, to JW MacArthur Onslow MLA, 3 March 1922, *SRNSW: CGS 8258* [22/1517], box 20/9052.
the first verbal commitments by the government to secure public ownership of Sydney’s foreshores reflected far more the growing influence of the parks movement generally, and foreshore campaigns specifically, than any favouritism for surf bathing.

We can see that the relentless lobbying by beachgoers and coastal councils for public recreation spaces was the single most influential factor in the provision of these spaces between 1880 and 1920. When they eventually agreed that the public had a ‘right’ to the foreshores, the government was not showing initiative. Rather, they were conceding to a concept which had been gaining strength in Sydney since the foreshore campaigns of the 1860s, and which had become such a dominant feature of Sydney’s beach culture, it could no longer be ignored.
Historians of Australian leisure have reached different conclusions regarding the class divisions in nineteenth century recreation. Richard Waterhouse argued that Australia’s late nineteenth century urban popular culture was mainly ‘shaped by and reflected the values of the working classes’, but it was also engaged in, to some extent, by the middle classes.¹ Beverley Kingston, in contrast, suggested that ‘leisure activities, invented by the wealthier members of society for amusement and exercise, began to attract recruits lower down the economic scale.’² Ian Turner disputed that there was any element of class interaction at all within Australian leisure, writing that ‘the colonial recreations were, from the first days, divided between the traditional popular pastimes of the working class and the organised games and field sports of the middle class and gentry … The appeal to ‘classlessness’ is probably best to be explained as a rationalisation developed by those whose class privilege might be reinforced by that belief.’³ Historians of Australian sport have also tended to highlight its strong tradition of class distinctions.⁴

None of these historians consider beach culture specifically, and none of these models can be simply applied to Sydney’s beaches. So who went to the beach? In what ways did Sydney’s ocean beach culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries differ from other mainstream leisure cultures? Was the beach classless? Or, more specifically, to what extent was it shaped by the values and behaviours of specific class groups?

¹ Waterhouse, Private Pleasures, pp.84-85.
In examining the influence of class on Sydney’s emerging beach culture, this chapter considers three elements of this culture which traditionally had close links with specific class groups: larrikinism, seaside entertainment, and the promenade. It adopts the latter two as a useful point of comparison to similar beach cultures overseas, and particularly at Blackpool and Coney Island. This chapter then, seeks to contextualise Sydney’s beach culture within the history of Australian leisure more generally, and other popular beach cultures worldwide.

**Creating a leisure space for the masses**

In the mid-nineteenth century, a beach culture had been created in Sydney largely by and for the middle classes. By the 1880s, however, we can see considerable changes in the class make-up of day-trippers visiting Sydney beaches taking place: in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Sydney’s working classes found both the time and the means of access to join their middle class neighbours at the beach.

Australian workers had been the first in the world to win an eight-hour day in the 1850s, and by the close of the nineteenth century, many – although not all – also enjoyed a Saturday half-holiday. Public holidays were also a highlight of the Australian workers’ calendar. Richard White argued that the emergence of this leisure time as distinct from work time was ‘the first condition for the development of the holiday’ in Australia. It was similarly crucial to the development of a mainstream culture of leisure on Sydney’s beaches in the second half of the nineteenth century. It created time for workers to pursue recreation outside the home. However, since most workers in Sydney did not live within walking distance of the ocean coast, public holidays and Sundays became the most crowded on Sydney’s beaches; unlike weekdays and Saturdays, they allowed an entire day – or what was left of it after church – to be spent on the beach. The overwhelming popularity of Sydney’s ocean beaches on Sundays compared to any other day might appear to be a reflection of

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working-class presence on the beach; however it was more likely a marker of the general weakening of religious authority in the colony than the specific working class attitudes towards the Sabbath.

By the late nineteenth century, Sunday recreation was becoming increasingly tolerated in Sydney. It was also beginning to be enjoyed by members of both the working and middle classes, and celebrated as a sign of the health and happiness of the Sydney population. Visitors to Sydney, informed by their guidebooks that Manly ‘is seen to its best advantage on Sunday afternoon in summer weather, when every steamer leaving the city is taxed to its utmost capacity’, noted the popularity of seaside picnics on Sundays as well as public holidays. James Froude, describing Sydney in 1886, noted that ‘Sunday afternoons were holidays’, and Francis Adams, a journalist and ‘social observer’, wrote that in Sydney, ‘Sunday is rapidly becoming Continental’. Nat Gould similarly observed in 1896 that on Sundays in Sydney ‘people are glad to leave the hot pavements, and either take tram, rail, road or boat to one of the numerous pleasure resorts’. He considered that avoiding church was a standard part of colonial culture by the close of the nineteenth century, writing that Colonials ‘prefer sermons from Nature to dreary discourses from the pulpit’.

Officially, Sunday recreation continued to be opposed, and a ruling by the Supreme Court in 1890 which pronounced ‘Sunday entertainment for which money is paid’ illegal, was welcomed by some as a reassurance that Christian moral values remained primary to the colony. The larger backlash against the ruling, however, led by the usually conservative Sydney Morning Herald, demonstrated that general opinion

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9 Gould, Town and Bush, pp.152-5.

10 SMH 26 May 1890, p.3; 28 May 1890, p.8.
regarding Sunday observance was slackening by this time. An editorial in the \textit{Herald} labelled the application of these traditional British laws in the colonies as ‘a rank absurdity’, and cited the similar perspective of Justice Windeyer, who presided over the case and regretted being unable to arrive at a different decision:

\textit{The anomaly of the State preventing the public from enjoying the elevating delight of listening to noble music on Sunday because the[y] pay for the privilege, while it allows and even invites its citizens to travel by tram and rail, is as glaring as it is absurd.}\footnote{SMH 23 May 1890 p.4.}

\textit{The Bulletin} was even more critical of the ruling, dismissing the \textit{Herald} attitude as ‘a thin veneer of Liberalism and toleration’, and arguing that ‘all music worthy when allied to decent words is “sacred” in the highest meaning of the word’. It cited the crowds of visitors to Bondi Aquarium one Sunday in 1890 as evidence that ‘the laws which prevent people from resorting to harmless amusements on Sundays are not aids to morality, but ... the agents of licentiousness’. Having exploited a loophole in the ruling by not charging for admission but relying on ‘voluntary contributions’, the aquarium was visited by 8,000 people on this day alone.\footnote{Bulletin, 31 May 1890, p.5.}

Windeyer’s reference to Sunday travel reminds us that regardless of the legality of Sunday concerts and entertainment, by 1890, Sunday picnics and other modes of entertainment were already an institution of Sydney. This was not unique to Sydney; in Britain, proponents of free Sunday leisure were enjoying limited successes against the powerful sabbatarian lobby, and John Walton attributed the regularity of Sunday recreation at mid-Victorian British seaside resorts to the ‘relative anonymity and flexibility of seaside life’.\footnote{Bailey, \textit{Leisure and Class}, pp.82-83; Walton, \textit{The English Seaside Resort}, p.169.} In Sydney, where the beaches were on the outskirts of the city, there was perhaps less anonymity at the beach, but this did not detract from their Sunday appeal. Rather, the provision of affordable transport to the coast enabled and
perhaps even encouraged residents to engage in ‘free’, and therefore acceptable, recreation on the beach, which Australians were already showing a preference for.

Of equal importance to the creation of leisure time in bringing the working classes to the coast was the provision of affordable transport. In recognition of the importance to their tourist trade of having effective transport systems, the Waverley and Randwick Councils lobbied the New South Wales government for the extension of trams to Bondi, Bronte and Coogee beaches from the early 1880s.\textsuperscript{14} By 1883, the tramline to Coogee beach had been constructed, and while there was a tram to the Bondi Aquarium on the northern side of Tamarama from 1887, those wishing to get to Bondi Beach still had to walk down the hill from the terminus. It was not until 1894 that a tram bought day-trippers directly to that beach.\textsuperscript{15}

North of the Harbour, too, the beaches were made more easily accessible during the 1890s, with a substantial reduction in the cost of ferry fares to Manly. The reduced fares were the result of a large campaign against the expensive fares of the Manly and Port Jackson Steamship Company, and the subsequent establishment of a rival service in 1893; the campaign had been instigated by residents keen to secure a more affordable commute, but the reduced fares which resulted transformed the tourist trade.\textsuperscript{16} On Boxing Day, 1889, when the steamer fare was still considered expensive, 7-8,000 day trippers were reported to have visited Manly.\textsuperscript{17} By 1895, Manly regularly attracted close to twice this number – over 15,000 were estimated on Labour Day 1895, and 16,000 on Boxing Day in 1896.\textsuperscript{18}

The provision of the new tram services to Bondi and Coogee, and reduction of ferry fares to Manly, put the beaches within easy reach of most of the working class for the first time. A day at the beach was no longer predominantly the preserve of those with

\textsuperscript{14} Waverley Council Minutes, 6 September 1881, 3 April 1883, 15 March 1887, 4 October 1887, 3 July 1888, 21 September 1888, 17 July 1890, 3 March 1891, 1 December 1891. Randwick Council Minutes 9 August 1881.

\textsuperscript{15} The delay in constructing the tram extension to Bondi beach was considerable given the government were alleged to have promised it four times by 1891. Letter to the editor, \textit{SMH} 19 February 1891, p.3; Waverley Council Minutes 1881-91; Lawrence and Sharpe (eds), \textit{Pictorial History: Eastern Suburbs}, p.134; Lawrence, \textit{Pictorial History: Randwick}, p.41.

\textsuperscript{16} For more information about the Manly ferries, see Curby, \textit{Seven Miles from Sydney}, pp.78-85.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{SMH} 27 December 1889, p.6.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{SMH} 8 October 1895, p6; 27 December 1896, p.5.
private modes of transport, or those who lived within walking distance. By the close of the nineteenth century, the working classes of Sydney had both the time to go to the beach, and the means to get there.

**The classless beach?**

We have seen then, that by the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Sydney’s working and middle-classes had equal access to Sydney’s beaches. There was consequently a *physical* classlessness on Sydney’s ocean beaches: different beaches were not associated with specific class groups like many on the British coast, or even those outside Melbourne, where ocean beaches enjoyed an exclusivity over the more easily accessible beaches of Port Phillip Bay. By the second half of the twentieth century, some Sydney beaches would come to represent specific class groups: Maroubra became associated with the local working class population, and Palm Beach and Whale Beach on the northern peninsula of the Warringah Shire became exclusive retreats for the wealthy. During the late nineteenth century, however, and especially while Manly, Bondi and Coogee were almost exclusively used by day-trippers, there were no such class distinctions between Sydney’s beaches. They were shared equally.

While the beaches may have been physically shared, this on its own does not mean they were classless. Australian historians have noted that the late nineteenth century was marked by a common assumption of egalitarianism, that Australia was said to be a ‘workingman’s paradise’. However while Australian living standards were generally higher than those in Britain, Europe and America, only a small portion of the working-class enjoyed the benefits of this ‘paradise’. At the beach, day-trippers occupied a space which was geographically marginal to the urban centres. Was it also marginal to the class restrictions of daily society, or was the egalitarianism of the beach as much a myth as the ‘workingman’s paradise’?

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20 Huntsman, *Sand in Our Souls*, p.177.

In order to determine whether there was a distinct class basis to any elements of Sydney’s beach culture, it is necessary to examine larrikinism on the beach, as well as two sites of interaction: seaside amusements parks and the promenade. Each of these three elements of beach culture had traditional links to specific class groups: larrikins were associated with the plebeian elements of society, seaside amusement parks primarily provided for the working classes of Britain and America, although also enjoyed by the middle classes, and the promenade predominantly a site for the display of social refinement by the leisured classes at Brighton and Scarborough in Britain. On Sydney’s ocean beaches, we will see that the traditional definitions of these types and sites of social interaction were challenged; their meanings lost or diminished in the meshing of classes on the beach.

The larrikin invasion

For some beach users and local residents, the new visitors who exploited the tram and ferry reductions in the 1890s were entirely undesirable. A resident of Manly complained to the Daily Telegraph in 1894 that cheaper fares had attracted ‘hucksters, alien hawkers, barrel organs, fire-eaters, “try your lungs” men, pick pockets and petty thieves’ to the area. Two years later, the Manly Council complained of the ‘indecent and disorderly’ conduct of ‘a certain class of holiday keeper’ at Curl Curl Lagoon, who several years later were still reported to be bathing naked in public view. Poor conduct was not new to Sydney’s ocean beaches, however, which had a minor history of unruly behaviour that began before affordable public transport had been provided.

We have seen that Robert Lowe encountered what were later termed ‘larrikins’ on Bronte beach in the 1840s; during the early 1880s, this association between the beaches and larrikinism would become more widespread.

Following what The Bulletin described as a larrikin ‘orgy’ at Clontarf in 1881 – an account for which the magazine would be sued – the Sydney press became obsessed

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22 See Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, p.118.
23 ‘Resident’, Letter to the Editor, Daily Telegraph, 4 January 1894, p.3.
24 Manly Council Clerk to Under Secretary for Lands, 23 December 1896, SRNSW: CGS8258 [96/6724 ind.], bundle 96/9325; Evening News, 13 October 1897, p.2.
for a short time with the constant threat of larrikins to seaside and harbour picnics.\textsuperscript{25} They reported minor and major incidents alike at popular holiday resorts, and also noted when holidays were not disturbed by poor behaviour, such as Coogee in 1882 where ‘no freaks of rowdyism occurred’, implying such moments of peace were rare.\textsuperscript{26} A report published in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} the following year lamented the presence of such undesirables on public holidays:

Too often public holidays are regarded as days of licence when all that is worst and most degrading in the community is shipped out of the city to run riot at a picnic, which means unlimited drink, and complete abandonment to the worst passions.\textsuperscript{27}

The worst behaviour was associated with dance halls and licensed hotels, the same paper reporting that on Boxing Day 1882

Wherever only temperance drinks were retailed order and enjoyment prevailed. Wherever hotels were opened and intoxicating liquors were disposed of disorder and rowdyism occurred, and the presence of several constables was necessary.\textsuperscript{28}

The presence of hotels and the popularity of dancing, which had become an institution of the coast by 1880, condemned Bondi, Coogee and Manly to be associated with larrikin behaviour between 1881 and 1884, the height of the epidemic. But this association was short-lived, and according to contemporary reports did not affect the patronage by more respectable visitors of these resorts.\textsuperscript{29} The report of a larrikin ‘fracas’ at Bondi on Boxing Day 1884, cited as evidence of larrikin control of the

\textsuperscript{25} ‘A boxing day picnic’ from The Bulletin, 8 January 1881 in C.M.H. Clark (editor) \textit{Select Documents in Australian History, 1851-1900} (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1955), pp.48-9.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{SMH} 27 December 1882, p.5. See also \textit{Daily Telegraph} 27 December 1882, p.3.

\textsuperscript{27} ‘Harbour excursions’, \textit{SMH} 2 January 1883, p.6.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{SMH} 27 December 1882, p.5.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{SMH} 27 December 1881, p.6; 3 January 1882, p.6; 26 December 1882, p.5; 27 December 1882, p.5; 27 December 1883, p.5; 26 December 1884, p.6.

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beaches by Cameron White, was a rare inclusion in the usually positive holiday reports of that location and nearby Coogee;\(^{30}\) Coogee, in fact, was the least likely of Sydney's coastal resorts to host larrikins. Overwhelmingly, larrikin misbehaviour was confined to the resorts of Sydney's Middle Harbour, and especially Clontarf and Chowder Bay, which were accessible by foot from North Sydney.\(^{31}\) 'Larrikins' were also attracted to the harbour resort of Manly.

By 1884, such acts of 'rowdyism' were notably declining, a fact attributed by Sydney's daily press to the strong police presence at popular picnic spots on public holidays.\(^{32}\) The Daily Telegraph considered that 'it is gratifying to be able to report that the conduct of the immense crowds of visitors, both at these places and the harbour picnics, was in nearly every instance conspicuous for good order, forming in the respect a marked contrast to previous years'.\(^{33}\) In the following year, the Sydney Morning Herald was pleased to report that 'the various places were for the most part visited by well-dressed and well-ordered people, whose conduct was most exemplary', and soon, whether because larrikin disturbances were becoming rare or because the media had decided such incidents were no longer newsworthy – perhaps swayed by the substantial advertising revenue from such establishments – reports of public holidays on Sydney Harbour and the coastal resorts returned to their happy tone of the 1870s.\(^{34}\) Visitors to Coogee in 1887, for example, were a far cry from the larrikin type, being depicted as 'pater and mater familias and their olive branches, and the scene at the bay was one of pure domestic, not to say connubial, felicity'.\(^{35}\)

Reports of dancing at the various resorts, which had been inextricably linked to larrikin misbehaviour, also lost it negative connotations in press reports by the second half of the 1880s, the Sydney Morning Herald reporting that dancers 'thronged' the Bondi

\(^{30}\) White, Pleasure Seekers, p.114.
\(^{31}\) SMH 27 December 1882, p.5; 2 January 1883 p.6; 2 January 1884, p.6; 27 December 1884, p.8, 2 January 1885, p.6; Daily Telegraph, 27 January 1882, p.3.
\(^{33}\) Daily Telegraph, 27 December 1884, p.5.
\(^{34}\) SMH 2 January 1885, p.6.
\(^{35}\) SMH 4 October 1887, p.4. Original emphasis.
Aquarium from open until close on Labour Day 1887. However dance halls continued to be associated, in the minds of the Waverley Aldermen at least, with immoral behaviour. In an attempt to distance its beaches and parks from other public resorts where dancing was popular, the Waverley Council banned dancing anywhere in the Municipality in 1888, frustrating the Bondi Aquarium proprietors who had applied for a dancing licence. Dancing continued to be advertised at neighbouring Coogee aquarium into the twentieth century, however, and appears to have been reinstituted at the Bondi aquarium by New Years Day 1902, when it was said to be the ‘principle amusement’ at these two establishments.

To what extent was Sydney’s ocean beach culture shaped by larrikin interference during the 1880s, and was this a reflection of a working class invasion of the beaches? Cameron White suggested that middle class enjoyment of Sydney’s beaches was marred by the presence of larrikins throughout the late nineteenth century, and argued that ‘the battle between picnickers and larrikins waged on into the 1900s.’ But he cited no evidence of violent incidents on the coast during the late 1880s and 1890s. We can see instead that the larrikin invasion was limited to a few incidents during the opening years of the 1880s, and overwhelmingly more relevant to the harbour rather than ocean beach resorts. Even the Sydney press, keen to report ‘orgies’, ‘riots’ and other scenes of larrikin depravity, admitted that such types represented the minority of beachgoers. Their sensationalised reports reveal far more about Sydney’s general obsession with the larrikin element than about working class behaviour on the beach specifically. In 1884, in the same edition of the Sydney Morning Herald which described the Bondi ‘fracas’, and the very article which recounted the arrest of several ‘roughs’ at Clontarf, the behaviour and dress of members of Sydney’s working class holiday-makers was even commended:

For two hours in the morning and a similar period in the afternoon the stream of picniers [sic] to the quay was well

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36 SMH 4 October 1887 p.4.
37 4 October 1887 p.4.
38 Waverley Council Minutes, 4 October 1887, 5 June 1888, 16 October 1888, 3 November 1888, 18 December 1888. NSW Government Gazette, 22 January 1889.
39 SMH 2 January 1902, p.6.
40 White, Pleasure Seekers, p.115.
maintained, and it was remarkable for being composed of well-dressed men, women and children, whose appearance in every way betokened the absence of the poverty and misery which some people delight in talking about, and showed that in New South Wales the labourer and artisan of every grade are renumerated sufficiently well to enable them and their wives and families to go holiday-keeping. 41

The Daily Telegraph also noted the pleasant temperament of Sydney’s holiday makers, remarking in the same year that ‘very few drink to excess, and very few swear at all. Good temper and good manners are the general characteristics’. 42

It is therefore evident that with the exception of the occasional lout, Sydney’s beachgoers tended to be well-behaved, regardless of their socio-economic background. Richard Cashman drew a similar conclusion about the behaviour of Australian Cricket crowds during the same period. 43 John Hirst suggested that ‘in the Australian cities a working man could be accepted as a respectable citizen’ during the second half of the nineteenth century, and certainly, at the beach, we can see that this was the case. 44 If we assume working class behaviour is by definition larrikinism, then this could be evidence of a victory for middle class values. However Janet McCalman has highlighted the importance of self-determination to working class respectability; so while this behaviour might be commended by middle class observers, we can see that the working class were still pursuing their own entertainment – they chose to engage in respectable recreation on the beach. 45 In the second half of the 1880s, the proprietors of newly constructed Aquariums at Manly, Coogee and Tamarama based their expectations of success largely on these respectable working class beachgoers.

41 SMH 27 December 1884, p.8.
42 Daily Telegraph, 2 January 1884 p.5.
43 Richard Cashman, 'Ave a Go, Yer Mug! Australian Cricket Crowds from Larrikin to Ocker (Sydney: Collins, 1984), pp.33-34.
44 Hirst, Australia’s Democracy, p.264.
Seaside amusement structures

In 1886, in an attempt to confirm Manly as the premier day-tripping destination of Sydney, two Manly Aldermen built the first aquarium in New South Wales. Described by one journalist as ‘a solid, permanent structure, without pretending to architectural magnificence’, the building was constructed in a little over eight weeks. It was situated on the Corso at Manly, a little way towards the ocean beach but facing the harbour. In addition to the fish tanks which were to ‘exhibit every fish, from a shark downwards, and all other marine objects of interest that can be obtained’, the Manly Aquarium boasted a seal house, fernery, buffet, and a concert hall. The aquarium was an instant success, boosting the confidence of Aldermen Griffin and Evans. Unfortunately for them however, less than a year later other entrepreneurs tried to capitalise on their success when they built competing aquariums at both Tamarama and Coogee, which opened in September and December 1887 respectively.

By far the most elaborate of the three, the Royal Bondi Aquarium and Pleasure Grounds at Tamarama offered day-trippers a number of different modes of entertainment within the single compound, in the tradition established by Raikes Hall in Blackpool. The land surrounding the site, which encircled most of Tamarama beach, had been landscaped; with pathways, seats and summer houses catering to those who wished to enjoy the scenery and fresh ocean air, one observer described the area as ‘remarkably attractive’. In addition to the main attraction of the Aquarium, the complex also boasted a skating rink, merry-go-round, camera room, shark pond, and a concert hall. Like Manly before it, it was lit up by electric lights at night, still a great novelty and source of much attraction, and also hosted fireworks.

46 Sydney Mail, 8 January 1887, p.77.
47 Prospectus of Manly Aquarium Company Ltd., SMH 22 April 1886, p.13.
48 SMH, 24 December 1886, p.4.
49 SMH 1 October 1887, p.8; 24 December 1887, p.6; Daily Telegraph 29 September 1887, p.6; 24 December 1887, p.6.
50 Cross and Walton, The Playful Crowd, p.39. Although this aquarium was located at Tamarama, the small beach immediately south of Bondi, it was named after its more famous northern neighbour for commercial purposes.
51 Daily Telegraph 29 September 1887, p.6.
52 Although the skating rink had not been completed upon the opening of the Aquarium, the managers did have a license for the activity and the rink was constructed by the end of the year. Waverley Council Minutes, 4 October 1887; Daily Telegraph 29 September 1887 p.6, SMH 1 October 1887, p.8; Bulletin, 22 October 1887, p.7.
The Coogee Aquarium, completed within months of the Bondi building, was a domed structure with a ‘striking appearance’ on the northern shore of the beach.\textsuperscript{53} It offered few additional attractions to the aquarium itself; like Bondi and Manly it contained seal caverns and a concert hall, but also boasted swimming baths, which would subsequently become one of its main attractions for visitors to Coogee.\textsuperscript{54}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{coogee-aquarium.jpg}
\caption{Coogee Beach, c1887-1890, showing the domed aquarium on the northern corner of the beach.}
\end{figure}

The Aquariums which were built at Manly, Tamarama and Coogee in the mid 1880s were a commercialised extension of the games and entertainment provided by hoteliers at these beaches and Bondi in the previous two decades. Concert halls facilitated dancing in a grand space well away from the restrictions of Sydney society, replacing the earlier, more modest seaside dancing pavilions. Exhibits of fish and other marine creatures offered insight into the workings of the ocean which previously had only been glimpsed through the anemones and shells which had been collected from the shore or rock pools, and the skating and rides which quickly appeared evolved the games and sports which had been earlier enjoyed into a more structured

\textsuperscript{53} SMH 24 December 1887, p.6.
\textsuperscript{54} SMH 24 December 1887, p.6; Daily Telegraph, 24 December 1887, p.6.
mode of physical exertion. Even the side-show type entertainments which reflected an
evolution that had appeared on beaches in Britain and the United States, and were
largely new to Sydney’s seaside culture, reminded visitors of some of the more crass
entertainments traditionally offered at Manly’s hotels.

Initially, the Manly Aquarium attempted to look respectable, announcing itself as a
‘high class’ establishment, which was not only a place of amusement but of
‘instruction’ too. But its proprietors were astutely aware that they needed high
visitation numbers in order to stay viable, and therefore consciously advertised to the
working classes. Hence nearly half of an advertisement announcing the opening of the
aquarium was devoted to the affordability of a visit:

Arrangements have been made with the directors of the Manly
Steamers to issue return tickets daily from MONDAY to
FRIDAY for TWO SHILLINGS, which will also admit to the
Aquarium, thus making the cost of the trip to Manly ONE
SHILLING to Aquarium visitors, being the same price as is
now charged on SATURDAYS and SUNDAYS.

SEASON TICKETS at REDUCED RATES...

ONE SHILLING ADMISSION, ONE SHILLING.
CHILDREN, HALF PRICE. The proprietors of the Royal Aquarium at Tamarama were less anxious to emphasise
the price of entry (also 1 shilling for adults, and 6 pence for children), but were the
first to introduce entertainment for the masses. Their immediate popularity prompted
the proprietors of the Coogee and Manly institutions to offer similar amusements.
Soon, visitors to the Coogee Aquarium could be entertained by a ‘serio-comic
vocalist’, ‘acrobatic clown’, aerial gymnast, American Clog Dancer and plate spinner,
and those at Bondi by the ‘Australian Negro’ Comedian, comic song-man, and later

56 SMH 9 December 1886, p.2. Original emphasis.
blondins, illusionists, minstrels, acrobats, and wire walking ‘from cliff to cliff over the raging pacific ocean’. Even the sea creatures were incorporated into the side show here, with a ‘monster man eating shark’, ‘terrible turtle’ and ‘the elegant alligator from Shanghai’ advertised within months of opening.57

While each of the Aquariums had boasted substantial crowds following their grand openings – 15,000 within the first five days at Manly and 5-6,000 on the first public holiday following Bondi’s opening – the scale of visitors quickly declined.58 The intense competition between the three – which were of equal distance from the city – necessitated their quick evolution and development. Manly added roller skating in 1887, Coogee offered human aquatic exhibitions, and the revamped Bondi Aquarium of 1891 included a switchback railway and ‘flying machine’.59 Such improvements were insufficient to maintain high long-term interest however, and the Aquariums encountered financial difficulties just as Manly’s first hotels had during the 1850s and ‘60s. The Manly Aquarium, which opened with much fanfare in 1886, was the first to fall victim diminishing popularity. Within only four years it was no longer displaying fish or marine objects, and was mainly used thereafter as a baths and a public hall.60 Coogee and Bondi lasted considerably longer as Aquariums, but not without some difficulty. In October 1890, after just three years in operation, the Royal Aquarium Company of Tamarama went into liquidation, and the site was ordered for sale by the mortgagee the following year.61 Fortunately for the owners of the Aquarium, it burnt down soon afterwards in what appeared to be unsuspicious circumstances, and was quickly rebuilt a bigger and better complex, ‘one continuous whirl of delight’, funded largely by the insurance payout of £5,000.62 In the same week as this fire, Coogee’s Aquarium was also destroyed, although by the less doubtful circumstances of a

58 The Manly Aquarium may have catered more to those already visiting Manly, rather than attracting additional day trippers. Sydney Mail, 8 January 1887 p.77; SMH 28 December 1886, p.3; 4 October 1887, p.4.
59 SMH 23 December 1887, p.2; Bulletin, 26 September 1891, p.16.
60 Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, p.113.
62 SMH 23 September 1891 p.11, Bulletin, 18 July 1891 p.9, Daily Telegraph 26 September 1891 p.6. The new aquarium was built at a total cost of £7,000.
cyclone.\textsuperscript{63} It, too, was quickly rebuilt, and the two continued to operate throughout the 1890s and into the 1900s, each changing hands several times, and with few major additions being made. Nundo Doss, a visitor to the colony, described his experiences at one of these Aquariums in the early 1890s:

The place was provided with various modes of amusement. There was the inevitable Merry-Go-Round with its wooden horses ready for mounting, swinging round and round under a large umbrella-shaped canopy. There was the ever-exciting Switchback Railway, with its lofty undulatory ride, which is unsafe for people of weak nerves. It was funny to see how hats flew off the heads of the riders, as they descended violently down the slopes of this aerial railway. The greatest favourite of all was the Skating Rink, which was patronised by crowds of both young and the middle-aged, who vied with each other in gliding quickly on the wooden floors, with roller skates on.\textsuperscript{64}

Although they continued to attract some visitors, the initial hopes that the new complexes would be able to 'recover from the depression which has fallen on suburban seaside places of resort' were unfounded.\textsuperscript{65} By the turn of the century, Sydney's newspapers displayed few advertisements boasting of the attractions of the two remaining aquariums, the occasional advertisements which did exist being so small as to easily be lost among those of theatres and other attractions. But the ever faithful descriptions of Sydney on public holidays detailed the attempts of new proprietors to 'restore (the) former prestige' of the two remaining aquariums.\textsuperscript{66} They also prove that beachgoers continued to file through the turnstiles, although in diminishing numbers; visitor levels at Coogee Aquarium continued to peak on holidays, with between 7 and 800 visitors on Anniversary Day in 1900 – a substantial

\textsuperscript{63} Bulletin, 18 July 1891 p.9.
\textsuperscript{64} Nundo Lall Doss, Reminiscences, English and Australasian: Being an Account of a Visit to England, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania and Ceylon, etc (Calcutta: M.C. Bhomick, 1893), p.195.
\textsuperscript{65} Daily Telegraph, 26 September 1891 p.6.
\textsuperscript{66} SMH 2 January 1900, p.7.
decline from earlier, more promising figures. By now dancing was among their strongest attractions, but the merry-go-rounds, swing boats, swimming baths and variety programs continued to appeal. By 1903 the aquariums were only receiving minimal attention in these usually very obliging columns.

In the opening decade of the twentieth century, despite the difficulties of the aquariums, seaside entrepreneurialism in Sydney boomed, influenced by the new found popularity of the beaches and the new craze of surf bathing. But initial excitement at new seaside attractions never lasted long enough to ensure long term success. In 1903, the ‘Manly Water Chute and Amusement, Limited’ [sic], secured a site facing the ocean beach for their enclosure which boasted a 55 foot high water chute, a ‘camel-back toboggan’, band stand, kiosk and ‘continental shooting gallery’, at a cost of between £8,000 and £10,000. It lasted just three years. In 1906 William Anderson, a successful theatrical manager in Sydney and Melbourne, spent a substantial sum in completely rebuilding the Bondi Aquarium and grounds, reopening the complex as ‘Wonderland City’, a ‘glorious panoramic playground’, the ‘Mecca of merriment’, the ‘home of hilarity’, the ‘true gospel of recreation’. This was the third major reconstruction of the entertainment site. The following year, a figure 8 railway was opened at Coogee. Described as a ‘spasm producer’, the railway was half a mile long, and was reportedly the first of its kind in New South Wales. It was advertised in Sydney’s press for just one year.

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67 SMH 27 January 1900, p.12.
68 SMH 2 January 1897, p.27, 27 December 1898, p.5; 27 December 1899, p.4; 2 January 1900; p.7, 27 January 1900, p.12.
69 SMH 4 July 1902, p.5; 11 November 1902 p.6; 27 December 1902, p.7; 2 January 1903, p.5; 9 July 1903, p.9; 28 December 1903, p.8.
70 SMH 24 November 1903; p.3, 15 December 1903, p.9.
71 Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney, p.180.
72 SMH 29 December 1906; p.2; 24 January 1907, p.2.
73 Evening News 10 October 1907, p.6. In October 1908 the Figure Eight was still being advertised, but these advertisements had disappeared by Christmas of that year. SMH 10 October 1908, p.2; 24 December 1908, p.2; 25 December 1908, p.8; 31 December 1908, p.2.
Following the substantial and expensive reincarnation of the Bondi Aquarium into Wonderland City in 1906, Anderson, like many seaside entrepreneurs before him, found it exceedingly difficult to maintain the Tamarama site as a viable commercial entity. By the time Wonderland City opened its gates, the newly discovered thrills of the surf were beginning to replace the thrills of the seaside fun ride, so that, by 1909, while Bondi and Tamarama beaches were teeming with life, Wonderland City could be described as a ‘gone-bung amusement resort ... wherein a depressing array of ragged amusement-device spectres flap their torn canvas in futile protest at a forgetful world.’ A defensive employee of William Anderson insisted the complex was ‘not dead but sleeping’, but it had evidently lost its appeal to beachgoers and was forced to close in 1911, nearly ruining Anderson financially in the process. The difficulties faced by these entrepreneurs was not a new feature of Sydney’s ocean beach culture;

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but as we shall see, even once the beaches were emerging as primary sites of recreation for all classes of Sydney holiday-maker, the lure of the natural beach continued to overpower the thrills of artificial entertainment.

Figure 5.3: Wonderland City, Tamarama, c.1906

Seaside amusements in an international context

The ultimate failure of Sydney’s seaside Aquariums provides a useful opportunity to consider the links between Australian and international beach cultures, especially Britain and US, in the late nineteenth century. A key characteristic of Australian seaside entrepreneurialism in the second half of the nineteenth century was the tendency for businessmen to look overseas, and particularly to Britain, for models for their seaside ventures. In Sydney, it was manifested not only through the aquariums, but the earlier games and sports which had been carried on, the donkey rides, and the several attempts to construct ocean pleasure piers, which were consciously and
proudly modelled on existing British structures. Elsewhere around Australia's coast this was also a key feature of seaside resorts, and according to Richard White, Adelaide's beaches became the closest imitation of the English seaside to be found in Australia. In Adelaide and also Melbourne, the bathing boxes and machines, piers, pavilions and hotels which were built in the second half of the nineteenth century were all strongly and intentionally based on popular elements of English seaside resorts.

In this context, it was certainly not surprising that at Manly, the first of Sydney's seaside aquariums modelled itself on British examples. The financial success of similar enterprises back in England was central to the imitations which occurred. The climate, geography and beach landscapes of Sydney may have been distinctly dissimilar to that of England and Europe, but the entrepreneurs had faith in the desire of colonists to pass their time in the same ways as they would have in their native Britain. The aquariums and winter gardens were financially successful on the English Coast, so why wouldn't they be in the colonies?

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77 Inglis, Beside the Seaside, pp.25-34, White, On Holidays p.78.
In the 1870s, substantial aquariums had been erected in Brighton, Blackpool, Great Yarmouth and Scarborough in Britain, and Coney Island in New York. They were a far cry from these elaborate and ornate structures — the Manly and Bondi Aquariums were built at around £25,000 and £30,000 respectively, while Birch’s Brighton Aquarium cost closer to £130,000 ten years earlier. Yet within their means, the colonial proprietors modelled their structures as best they could on these earlier examples. The concert halls, skating rinks, and ferneries of the Sydney aquariums could all be found in English aquariums, and the Japanese tea house at Coogee was analogous to the similarly themed Japanese theatre and villages at Scarborough. In its 1886 Prospectus, the Manly Aquarium Company’s similarity to existing overseas structures was listed as evidence of their likely success in Sydney:

The principal object of the formation of the Company is the erection of a high-class Aquarium... thus supplying Sydney and its neighbourhood with an attraction similar to the well-known Brighton, Scarborough and Crystal Palace Aquariums in England, and to those in other countries, which have proved so successful both as places of amusement and instruction, as well as financially.

Proprietors of the Bondi Royal Aquarium looked elsewhere for inspiration. Although the British influences were evident, this site had more in common with the Aquarium at Coney Island. In addition to ‘an aviary, zoo and aquatic tanks’ which appealed to the middle classes, that Aquarium provided ‘performing bears and ostriches, Punch and Judy shows, a music hall, and even displayed Siamese twins’, similar attractions to the sort first displayed in Sydney at Tamarama. In following the lead set at Tamarama, the other aquariums also began to replicate this American model. Soon

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79 Daily Telegraph 29 September 1887, p.6; SMH 22 April 1886, p.13; Pearson, ‘The People’s Palaces’.
80 SMH 24 December 1887, p.6; Pearson, ‘The People’s Palaces’.
81 SMH 22 April 1886, p.13.
82 Cross and Walton, The Playful Crowd, p.15.
they had far more in common with the thrills and side show entertainment of Coney Island and Blackpool than the aquariums of the more refined British resorts.

At first subtle, the shift from British to American influences in Australian seaside entrepreneurialism was consolidated by Wonderland City, which, in stark contrast to Manly’s decades-old allegiance to Brighton, boldly advertised itself as ‘An Australian Coney Island’.83 This shift was less demonstrative of Australia’s fading Imperial ties to England than a reflection of the continued entrepreneurial attempts to mimic and replicate successful overseas enterprises on the beaches of Sydney – and Britain, as elsewhere in Europe, was itself looking by now to the US, and especially to Coney Island, for successful commercial seaside models.84 Richard White argued that America was the model for New South Wales of a ‘new society’,85 in the context of the beaches, it offered entrepreneurs an alternative model to the customs of the British seaside. Coney Island was a symbol of prosperity and entertainment, and was much more ‘modern’ than what was represented as a more staid British seaside culture. However, as we will see, neither the British nor the American model would be successful in Sydney.

The fate of Sydney’s entertainment complexes

Sydney’s beach entertainment sites all opened amid much hype and fanfare, but within a couple of years faded to either be boosted again by another hopeful entrepreneur, or be discarded and dismantled altogether. They were not unique in their lack of longevity. In the face of excessive competition, many of the British and American seaside resorts and entertainment complexes on which these Australian enterprises had been based suffered similar fates. In the case of the British aquariums, however, that generally occurred over a much longer period.86 And at Coney Island, according to Cross and Walton, this was more a reflection of the transitory nature of

83 SMH 14 November 1906, p.4.
84 Cross and Walton, *The Playful Crowd* pp.36, 50.
86 The Brighton Aquarium was successful for nearly thirty years but ran into financial difficulties in 1901, ‘A Brief History of the Brighton Aquarium’, http://www.virtualmuseum.info/collections/themes/aquarium/html, accessed 14 April 2005; The Scarborough Aquarium was sold after 9 years, in 1886, and the structure at Great Yarmouth, although it initially encountered difficulties, was very successful after it reopened in 1883. Pearson, ‘The People’s Palaces’. See also Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*, pp.149, 177, for the difficulties of Blackpool in the 1890s and the Brighton Aquarium in the early twentieth century.
entertainment structures than of declining interest in seaside amusements specifically: artificial entertainment sites successfully co-existed alongside the natural beach at Coney Island until the inter-war period, and at Blackpool until the 1960s. Given that Sydney’s beaches were just as popular with local middle and working class residents seeking light hearted recreation as their overseas counterparts, and were similarly understood as a site free from the usual moral codes governing behaviour and courtship, why did Sydney’s coastal amusement structures collectively struggle so much more than their equivalents in Coney Island and Blackpool? Why was their careful replication of overseas models of entertainment – a guarantee of success according to the proprietors – not sufficient to ensure their longevity on Sydney’s shores?

Wonderland City was the last major beachfront amusement park in Sydney. Partly, the lack of new entertainment structures was due to an increasing backlash against their presence on the foreshores in the opening decades of the twentieth century, as will be discussed in chapter six. But the decline and ultimate failure of the aquariums and entertainment structures which already existed was far more complex. At least five crucial factors led to the decline and eventual closure of the entertainment sites at Manly, Tamarama and Coogee. Some of these represented inherent differences between Sydney’s beach culture and those of Coney Island and Blackpool, while other elements were shared.

Firstly, the substantial cost of building and running such enterprises created a heavy burden from the outset, and the meagre turnover was often insufficient to repay the debts of construction. The economic recession of the 1890s placed additional strain

87 Raikes Hall, the earliest amusement park at Coney Island, lasted little more than twenty years, but ‘it took the fierce competition of new central amusement companies to bring about its downfall.’ Cross and Walton, *The Playful Crowd*, pp.46, 131-132.
89 Luna Park was built on the Harbour in the 1930s and continues to operate.
upon these resorts, and made it more difficult for ordinary Sydneysiders to take their families out for the day – although this does not help to explain the short duration of earlier or later enterprises. Aquarium and fun park proprietors both in Sydney and overseas attributed diminishing patronage, at least partially, to boredom with stagnant amusements, and regularly reinvented their attractions, adding further to the cost. Cross and Walton argued that, at Coney Island at least, regular turnover of amusements was also necessitated by their nature, as cheap and quickly erected structures, to be destroyed easily by fire or other means. The proprietors of the Bondi and Coogee aquariums discovered this physical fallibility in 1891.

Secondly, the presence of three amusement complexes so close to each other created insurmountable competition. The relatively small population of Sydney, which was the third factor, exacerbated this problem. Three aquariums were simply too many for a town the size of Sydney: the fierce competition between the three beaches not only forced owners to continually spend money in increasing and improving their attractions but severely limited attendance figures at each one. The sheer volume of people who travelled to Coney Island and Blackpool on a single day far outweighed the population of Sydney beachgoers – at Sydney, visitors to any one beach could be counted in the tens of thousands on a sunny summer public holiday; at Blackpool and Coney Island they were regularly counted in the hundreds of thousands. Even if all the visitors to a Sydney beach were to patronise a single amusement site – and their numbers always fell far short – these figures were entirely insufficient to sustain entertainment sites which were so expensive to maintain.

The fourth factor which contributed to the collective failure of Sydney’s seaside entertainment structures related to the inherent differences between Sydney’s and British beachgoers. In England, and elsewhere throughout Australia, where urban residents had to travel some distance to get to the beach, the success of seaside entertainment businesses was much safer: in contrast to the day-trippers of Sydney, seaside visitors elsewhere tended to holiday by the sea for extended periods of time.

91 Cross and Walton, The Playful Crowd, p.50.
92 Walton, Blackpool Landlady p.29; Kasson, Amusing the Million, p.38; Peiss, Cheap Amusements, p.124.
They were consequently in search of entertainment beyond the attractions of the sea, and usually had set money aside for artificial amusements. In Sydney, while repeat seaside visitors may go occasionally to the aquariums, they certainly would not do so on every visit to the beach. The aquariums, crystal palaces and winter gardens of England also provided ‘somewhere to go when it was wet’ – not only did Sydney have substantially better weather but day-trippers, like those at Coney Island, were far less likely to go to the beach during poor weather.

Finally, and possibly the most influential factor in the lack of long term success of Sydney aquariums and seaside amusements parks, was the competition posed by the natural – and free – attractions of the beach. The decline in attendance at aquariums and fun-parks should not be confused with a decline in visitation to the ocean beaches on which they were built. On the contrary, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw massive growth in the popularity of taking a day-trip to the beach in Sydney, as will be demonstrated in chapter nine. But the natural beach was the core attraction for Sydney’s working and middle class beachgoers. Unlike the bay beaches of Melbourne and Adelaide where similar entertainment structures were built, the ocean beaches of Sydney, with their thunderous and often violent surf offered a unique appeal to those with affection for nature, as will be discussed in chapter seven. And in distinction from Blackpool where the ‘loud and boisterous sea’ attracted working class visitors as it repelled his ‘betters’, in Sydney, those with Romantic sensibilities admired the same beaches where working class day trippers enjoyed picnics and other forms of beach recreation.

The aquarium proprietors were certainly aware of the large groups of picnickers who were interested primarily in the natural spaces of the beach, and tried desperately to cater for them, as had the hoteliers of the 1850s and ’60s. So the hotels at Manly advertised cheap and quick picnic baskets, and the proprietors of the Bondi Aquarium transformed the land overlooking Tamarama beach into an attractive, peaceful place.

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94 Walton, *Blackpool Landlady*, pp.42-4. In Coney Island, the beach culture only became more pronounced than the amusement parks following the provision of free access to the foreshores in 1923. Cross and Walton, *The Playful Crowd*, p.18.
for picnic parties, with ample shade, seats, and even ‘romantic summer-houses’. But a different type of entertainment could be had on the beaches for just the cost of transportation; for most Sydney beach goers this was equally, if not more attractive than the aquariums and entertainment complexes. When they entered the surf en masse at the start of the twentieth century, beachgoers also found all the physical thrills they could desire – previously found in the amusement park rides – in the surf for free. The Bondi Aquarium had the added difficulty of being situated not on Bondi beach, but at Tamarama, around a fairly substantial headland from its larger neighbour. Once the tram lines had been fully extended to the beach at Bondi in the 1890s, the aquarium was also on a completely different tram stop, and so could be easily by-passed by beachgoers.

The artificial entertainment culture of Blackpool and Coney Island was so successful because of their popularity among predominantly working class beachgoers. In Sydney, these same groups shunned artificial entertainment for the natural thrills of the beach. Sydney’s seaside amusement parks did not capture the imagination of the local working classes as they did their overseas counterparts. They failed to secure interest beyond any initial novelty, and were consequently unable to secure an enduring position in Sydney’s beach culture. The failure of Sydney’s amusement complexes to permanently embed themselves in Sydney’s beach culture is therefore a marker of the minimal impact of class distinction on Sydney’s beaches. Sydney’s coastal promenades were similarly marked more by social interactions than by any class divisions.

**The promenade**

The promenade had a much longer history in British seaside culture than aquariums, and was linked to a more socially refined class of beachgoer than those the aquarium proprietors – and particularly the subsequent amusement complexes – sought to attract. Promenading was a prominent ritual within Britain’s eighteenth and nineteenth century seaside culture; and promenades, esplanades and piers were constructed for seaside visitors who wanted to walk. Initially, the purpose of such walks was to

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inhale the fresh sea air, a practice that was especially popular among the ‘invalids’ who formed the mainstream of early seaside visitors, but as more people flocked to the shore during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and as seaside towns were transformed into exclusive resorts for the leisured classes, the promenades themselves were transformed into ‘parades of high fashion’.97 Young men and women treated the promenade as a platform on which they engaged in highly ritualised acts of courtship based on performance. Due to the exclusivity of most early seaside resorts, the promenade was primarily a site for defining and ‘designating’ the social status of those passing by, with an emphasis on social refinement for potential courtships.98 At the British seaside the promenade itself was consequently a very class-conscious zone.

This type of promenading had been practised among Sydney’s leisured classes for most of the nineteenth century. Initially, the creation of beaches as leisure spaces merely offered another setting, away from the traditional location of the parks and gardens of Sydney such as the Domain.99 But by the closing decades of the nineteenth century, we can see that promenading was enacted differently on Sydney’s beaches. In particular, it differed from such class rituals because most visitors to these beaches were less preoccupied with signs of wealth. It was less a privilege of the elite than a common way of experiencing the spectacle of the beach.

In 1886, Douglas Gane wrote that the promenade at Manly, ‘though not like the fashionable promenades of Eastbourne and Scarborough at home, is yet the scene of much local mode and elegance’.100 Other observers described the promenades of Bondi, Manly and Coogee as part of an overall ‘picture full of life and action, colour

100 Gane, *New South Wales and Victoria*, p.83.
and interest' at the beach.\textsuperscript{101} It was a place for ‘young and old’, where beachgoers ‘strolled’ as they observed both the natural spectacle and human action of the beach.\textsuperscript{102}

If any ‘scrutiny’ or ‘performance’ were to occur, it was far more likely to be in the light-hearted context of seaside lust and romance than a class-conscious display.\textsuperscript{103} In this it shared ‘an easing of inhibitions’ with Coney Island, but stood in stark contrast against the promenades of most British seaside resorts.\textsuperscript{104} Even in Blackpool, which was inhabited by both the respectable middle classes and the working class masses by the end of the nineteenth century, these different class groups did not share the promenade, occupying different sections of the same strip of beach.\textsuperscript{105}

By the opening years of the twentieth century when the respectable middle classes of Coney Island were searching for spaces away from the madding crowd,\textsuperscript{106} Sydney’s beaches were becoming even more marked by a mixing of classes, as the working classes totally abandoned the structured entertainment aimed specifically at them in favour of the surf. Furthermore, the emergence of the tan as a desired and desirable physical trait, which will be discussed in chapter eight, further embedded the shift from a hierarchy of class to a hierarchy of beauty and physical appearance on the beach. Through the sharing of the coastal promenade, and the centrality of lust within the ‘gaze’ of beachgoers, we can see that what has subsequently been celebrated as the ‘egalitarianism’ of the Australian beach partially had its roots on the nineteenth

\textsuperscript{101} Town and Country Journal, 11 May 1889, p.25.
\textsuperscript{102} Sydney Mail, 26 July 1884, pp.164-5; Town and Country Journal 22 October 1892, p.28; 19
\textsuperscript{103} Ford, ‘Gazing, Strolling, Falling in Love’, pp.5-6.
\textsuperscript{104} Kasson, Amusing the Million, p.42. See also Cross and Walton, The Playful Crowd, pp.70-71; Peiss, Cheap Amusements, p.133.
\textsuperscript{105} Walton, Blackpool Landlady, p.140.
\textsuperscript{106} Cross and Walton, The Playful Crowd, pp.54-55.
century coastal promenade. It was on this space more than any other that the irrelevance of class at the beach was highlighted—Sydney’s beach culture was marked more by a common sharing of the beach experience and beach space than by any attempts to create an exclusive environment.

Conclusions

Cross and Walton argued that ‘Coney Island and Blackpool created something new: not merely cross-class male pleasures, but the relaxed mingling of the “respectable” plebeian and the middle-classes across gender lines.’ We can see the same process occurring on Sydney’s beaches, which were marked more by egalitarianism than by any class distinctions. And in the context of Sydney society, this was also unique. Hirst suggested that ‘the interest in sport—racing, cricket, football—was a very important bond between men of different classes.’ But women were excluded from this bond. On the beach, however, men, women and children of different social classes mingled. They shared the experience of the beach, in a similar way that, in the twentieth century, surf bathers, surfers and surf lifesavers, who otherwise are distinctly different, ‘each share a collective conscience based on common experiences’.

The popular beach culture which emerged in Sydney by the turn of the twentieth century represented a merging of the values, expectations and behaviour of different social groups. On Sydney’s ocean beaches, beachgoers from different classes shared the same space, and enjoyed the same activities: they walked along the beach, danced, held picnics, and played games and sports. This does not mean that Australia was classless, but that forms of leisure could be. As a site of ‘temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order’, Sydney’s beaches shared more with the medieval carnival than with everyday Sydney society. Kathy Peiss argued

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110 Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures*, pp.7-8.  
111 For more information on the lack of class distinction on Sydney’s beach promenades, see Ford, ‘Gazing, Strolling, Falling in Love’.  
that ‘rather than being bystanders in the process of cultural change, working women (in America) pioneered new manners and mores’.\textsuperscript{113} We can see a similar process occurring by Sydney’s working classes, as they shunned forms of entertainment designed specifically for them, to join other beachgoers on the natural spaces of the beach.

Two months later, in February 1906, they held a number of special meetings to

Sydney’s aquariums and amusement structures gambled their success on the regular attendance of members of Sydney’s working classes. They ultimately failed however – not because the working classes did not visit Sydney’s beaches, but because Sydney’s beach culture was inherently different to those of Britain and the United States which entrepreneurs attempted to emulate with such structures. Sydney’s turn of the century beach culture may have shared much with Coney Island. The two were close to large centres of population, and visited on hot summer Sundays by members of the working and middle classes alike in search of fun and escape. Both coastal sites offered young men and women in particular, freedom from the strict moral codes governing sexual conduct. But what the two did not share – in addition to their substantial population disparity – was unrestricted access to the foreshores. And this ‘right to the beach’, so fervently fought for in late nineteenth century Sydney, created the setting for Sydney’s dominant beach culture. Just as it had been in the mid-nineteenth century, for most beachgoers, the beach itself remained the main attraction of a day-trip to the coast.

\textsuperscript{113} Peiss, \textit{Cheap Amusements}, p.8.
In December 1905, the Waverley Council considered an application from a resident of Woollahra to erect a ‘shooting the chutes’ amusement structure on Bondi Beach.\(^1\) Two months later, in February 1906, they held a number of special meetings to discuss another proposal by entertainment proprietor A.J. Metcalfe to erect a building on Bondi Park for the amusement of the general public. At these meetings, the Aldermen debated the proposal at length. They argued about whether the Council had the ‘right to take away any portion of the park from the people’, and about whether it was appropriate that they should do so. They questioned the size and location of the land he requested, and whether it should be fenced, and visited the beach to examine the site themselves.\(^2\) The Mayor was particularly supportive of the proposal, dismissing any moral concerns about leasing what would otherwise be publicly accessible land:

> The Mayor agreed that we had a right to protect the public, but he did not like to see the opportunity offered of progress at Bondi pass away. He referred to the expense the Council were put to from time to time in filling up the large hollows in that portion of Bondi park caused by the sand drifts. Mr Metcalfe would maintain this portion and save the Council much expense and would otherwise make large improvements thereon.\(^3\)

These comments by the Mayor demonstrate that the rights and comfort of the beach going public were not the only points of contention for the Waverley Aldermen; financial considerations were equally, if not more important to the Council. We can see that public use of the beach was by now far more influential than it had been prior to 1880, but older concerns about entrepreneurial ‘progress’ and council expense were still relevant. These issues were debated and fought out in relation to many other

\(^1\) Waverley Council Minutes, 12 December 1905.
\(^2\) Waverley Council Minutes 27 February 1906, 1 March 1906, 6 March 1906, 13 March 1906.
\(^3\) Waverley Council Minutes 27 February 1906. Original emphasis.
entertainment structures proposed or erected on Sydney’s ocean beaches in the opening decades of the twentieth century. These debates, which pitted private enterprise against public interest, form the subject for this chapter.

We have seen that coastal councils, the New South Wales government, local residents and general beachgoers clashed over the provision of public space on Sydney’s coast. Once they had established that the public had a ‘right’ to Sydney’s ocean beaches, the question of what was the most appropriate way of using the beach became a further point of contention between these four groups. Should the natural beach be maintained and protected to satisfy those seeking aesthetic and romantic pleasures at the beach? Or should artificial entertainment be provided for tourists keen for a day of thrill seeking? Where should coastal councils draw the line between Municipal profit and the comfort of beachgoers? And was the New South Wales government responsible to private industry or the ‘rights’ of the public? In addition to the controversy surrounding the erection of amusement structures, this chapter considers the removal of sand and shell-grit from beaches, and the pollution of beaches which resulted from different methods of human waste disposal, all of which were subject to hotly contested debates about whether they were ‘appropriate’ uses of the beach space.

The claims of the Royal Aquarium Company to Tamarama beach

The Bondi Royal Aquarium and Pleasure Grounds was one of the largest and – in its different incarnations – longest lasting entertainment sites on Sydney’s coast between 1880 and 1920. We have seen that its failure was due to a complex combination of factors which impacted equally harshly on its competitors at Coogee and Manly. But this Aquarium was under additional pressure. Even before it had opened, the Waverley Council was contesting its very use of the beach space. The Manly and Coogee Aquariums did not interfere with the natural beach space, being situated back from the water, and their proprietors made no attempt to transform the external area surrounding their aquariums, largely containing their entertainment space – baths aside – indoors. Their presence as foreign buildings close to the beach therefore did not raise concern among either locals or beach users from outside the area. Neither did the ‘Royal Aquarium’ itself cause concern for the Waverley Council – except for
illegal dancing and skating on Sundays. They did oppose, however, its expansion onto the foreshores of Tamarama beach.

The debates over whether the appropriation of the foreshores by the Aquarium was ‘appropriate’ were an early manifestation of later controversies relating to Sydney’s ocean beaches. The 1887 contest therefore set the scene for future battles between private and public users of the beach in Sydney. The issues which concerned the Waverley Council in this case, and the arguments they raised, would be repeated by other councils, beach users and the press in relation to other Sydney beaches in the opening decades of the twentieth century. In addition, the shifts in attitude of the key players regarding Tamarama beach reflected broader shifts regarding attitudes towards the beach space.

There were two objections raised by the Waverley Council against the Royal Aquarium Company (RAC) in 1887 and 1888. Firstly, they were concerned that public access to the beach was being restricted, and complained specifically that the beach had been fenced off. As we saw in the contests over the Tamarama foreshore, debates between the Council and Lands Department over this issue centred on whether the public should be given automatic access to the beach, which was not dedicated as a public reserve. Secondly, the RAC’s initially illegal occupation of the Crown foreshore reservation with an engine house raised ire amongst Waverley Aldermen. The Council complained to the Department of Lands about this ‘encroachment’ on at least two separate occasions, but were unsuccessful: the Department supported the RAC and accepted that their use of the beach was essential to their business.4 So while they warned the RAC that the engine house should not have been constructed without permission as it was an illegal use of Crown Lands, the Minister, Thomas Garrett, issued a ‘special lease’ to the RAC which allowed them to keep the engine house on the beach.5

That this special lease was approved by the Cabinet demonstrates a commitment by the Parkes Government to private enterprise over what the local council perceived to

4 Report, Metropolitan District Surveyor, 18 August 1887, SRNSW: CGS 8327 [87/10479], bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052; Waverley Council Minutes 16 August 1887, 6 December 1887, 28 March 1888.
5 Internal Lands Department Correspondence, signature unclear, 31 October 1887 SRNSW: CGS 8327 [87/11400], bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
be the needs of their ratepayers at this time.\textsuperscript{6} Speeches at the opening of the Manly Aquarium in late 1886 in which the Colonial Secretary, George Dibbs, and Thomas Hungerford, MLA, applauded the enterprise of the Aquarium proprietors and cited the very existence of the structure as evidence of the progress of the Colony, highlight the importance of such enterprise to the government.\textsuperscript{7} The department justified the decision by pointing to a lack of intensity in the opposition to the 'encroachments' by the RAC; the Waverley Council were the sole challengers, and their case, according to the Surveyor, was unsubstantiated:

\begin{quote}
No special grounds are advanced by the Municipal Council for the resumption of this land, there is nothing but the bare request, neither in the reports herewith is there any general information as to present provision or as to requirements (if any) of the locality for further provision in respect to recreation grounds.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

It is likely however, that the Minister was swayed by the self-serving arguments of the RAC that their expenditure on the foreshore and surrounding space earned them the right to expect special treatment from the government in return. In October 1887, a representative of the Company informed Garrett that they had expended a large amount of money on their property with a view to making the Aquarium a source of instruction and entertainment for the public, and the Government perceiving the usefulness of such an undertaking have extended the tram line to the entrance; such being the case I venture to surmise that they do not intend to give encouragement on the one hand and to ... [illegible] the benefit thereby conferred on the other, by insisting upon opening up the frontage to the general Public, which would entail utter ruin on the undertaking by

\textsuperscript{6} Internal Lands Department Correspondence, signature unclear, 31 October 1887.
\textsuperscript{7} SMH 24 December 1886 p.4.
\textsuperscript{8} Report, Surveyor (name illegible), 19 July 1888, SRNSW: CGS 8327 /88/6672], bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
admitting trespassers [sic] of all sorts (more especially of the larrkin element) to the grounds of the Company.9

On this issue, staff members of the Department of Lands were divided. One employee of the Occupation Branch, ‘RY’, deemed this argument ‘a novel one’, which ‘savours much of the oft quoted proverb about gratitude being “a sense of favours to come”’. He was especially concerned, as Metropolitan District Surveyor Deering had been two months earlier, that the poorer classes, unable to afford entry to the park, would lose their ‘rights’ of access to the foreshore. The Surveyor, however, disagreed with RY’s dismissal of the company’s claims for special treatment:

The removal of the fences ... would not confer such immediate benefit or advantage on the public as would warrant the loss and irretrievable damage to the interests of the Aquarium Co., which certainly has shewn enterprise in this undertaking and deserves support accordingly.10

On this occasion, the government supported the RAC at the expense of free and unrestricted access to the beach by members of the general public. As we have seen in chapter four, the battle raged on throughout the rest of the century, with little success by the Waverley Council, fighting for the rights of their ratepayers to use the beach. In 1906, with the re-construction of the Aquarium into Anderson’s ‘Wonderland City’, the battle over both access to and illegal encroachments on Tamarama beach was resumed. But the terms of the contest had shifted in two crucial ways. Firstly, the Waverley Council were no longer its most vocal opponents; they had even permitted the construction of an aerial railway over the beach because they did not consider it to obstruct ‘the fullest use of the reserve by the public’.11 Secondly, the campaign demanding free public access to the beach had gained strength, and became more widespread; it was no longer being articulated by coastal residents alone.

9 Philip Richardson to Minister for Lands, 6 October 1887, SRNSW: CGS 8327 [87/10084], bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
10 Report, Surveyor (name illegible), 19 July 1888, SRNSW: CGS 8327 [88/6672], bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
11 Report, Metropolitan District Surveyor, 5 November 1907, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/19614], bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
The campaign for ‘public rights’ to the foreshores was by now so potent in Sydney that it posed a dilemma for the government, who supported the revival of the defunct Aquarium. In November 1906, the Metropolitan District Surveyor, Thomas Furber, who a year earlier had recommended allowing full public access to the beach, filed a report to the Acting Under Secretary stating:

It is now found that Mr William Anderson (Theatrical Manager) has acquired land adjoining (formerly the Bondi Aquarium grounds) and proposes to cater for the patronage of pleasure seekers at that place; for this purpose the beach at Tamarama Bay is one of the main attractions, and Mr Anderson has erected buildings, etc., as accessories to the pleasure grounds, without authority, upon the 100 feet reservation.

It may be conceded that Mr Anderson’s occupations are in the public interest in so far as they aid in making the beach attractive for visitors, but the difficulty is that the general public are inclined to resent anything in the nature of an encroachment upon public reserves and the Department is likely to incur a certain amount of odium by authorising such occupations.12

The Acting Under Secretary agreed with Furber’s analysis, weighing the ‘many thousands of pounds’ Anderson was spending against the expectation that ‘there will certainly be some resentment if public rights to the reserve are interfered with’.13

Rather than finding entirely in the favour of either the general beach-going public or the Company, the government compromised; James Ashton, the Minister for Lands, agreed to allow the erection of a pumping station on the beach on the condition that Anderson remove the summer house, bathing houses and other structures which had

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12 Report, Metropolitan District Surveyor, 8 November 1906, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [06/19627], bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052. Emphasis added.
13 Acting Under Secretary, notes, 13 November 1906, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [06/19627], bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
already been erected. Following the illegal erection of dressing sheds on the beach shortly after this order, the Department approved of them remaining ‘on sufferance’ provided that the public had free access to them, demonstrating again their desire to appease both members of the public who were keen to use Tamarama beach, and the proprietors of Wonderland City.

The use of the beach at Tamarama by Wonderland City in 1906 was virtually no different from its predecessor two decades earlier, although they did attempt to build several additional structures. Furthermore, the attitude of the government towards these so called ‘encroachments’ did not change; they approved of this use of the beach in recognition of the large expense which these companies had gone to in order to ‘improve’ the locality, and considered these improvements to be in the ‘public interest’. So what had changed to elicit such a markedly distinct response by the New South Wales government? By 1906, public claims to Sydney’s foreshores had intensified, aided by the strength of the Harbour Foreshores Vigilance Committee, forcing the government to rethink their attitudes towards private users of the foreshores. We can see here a new recognition emerging of how the beach was used. Surf bathing had increased the desires of larger proportions of Sydney’s population to use beaches including Tamarama, and the campaign for public harbour and beach foreshores was by now gaining momentum. The ‘public’ was therefore no longer so easily dividable between locals and visitors, and the emerging concept of ‘public rights’ to the foreshores was starting to negate any earlier demand for private ‘rights’.

As had been the case regarding the resumptions of privately owned land to create public recreation spaces, the heart of the contention over both the Royal Aquarium and Wonderland City was the issue of what constituted the ‘public interest.’ Was ‘public interest’ best served by the improvements the RAC were making to coastal land that was otherwise largely unused, and at their own expense? Or was the ability of all members of the public to use the space unrestricted by fencing or buildings more important? This seemingly unresolvable question was fundamental to the hotly contested debates over a number of other entertainment structures which were

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14 Ministerial Minute, 21 November 1906, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [06/20339], bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
15 Internal Lands Department Correspondence, signature unclear, 18 January 1907, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/570], bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
proposed to be erected on other Sydney beaches between 1899 and 1916. These new battles over seaside amusement structures were played out at town meetings, in the press, and through letter campaigns to local and state government representatives.

By the opening decades of the twentieth century, Sydney’s ocean beaches had been established as sites of both unstructured and artificial entertainment; they were subject to constant entrepreneurial attempts to transform the natural beach space, and to exploit beachgoers. Although there were therefore many attempts – both successful and unsuccessful – to establish artificial entertainment sites on Sydney beaches, there were four proposals which were notable for the amount of debate they raised in both the press and among the local community: a merry-go-round at Manly in 1899, A.J. Metcalfe’s proposal for Bondi in 1906, a picture pavilion at Manly in 1913, and a ‘Gold Rush’ enclosure, again at Manly, in 1916. Whether discussing the Aquarium and Wonderland City at Tamarama, or these proposed amusements, there were two main points of contention. The first was an extension of the already established arguments regarding free public access to the beach; the second represented an aesthetic anxiety which questioned whether man-made structures on the beach ‘improved’ or ‘desecrated’ the natural beach.

**Public rights to the beach**

The erection of amusement structures on Sydney’s ocean beaches and beach parks became a new site for the battle between private and public use of the foreshores during the opening decades of the twentieth century. The arguments which constructed the beach as the heritage of all people of New South Wales, which were articulated in favour of resuming beaches for public use, were seen to equally apply to the issue of the *uses* of these beaches, once they had been made public. Not only were they concerned by the general occupation of public land by entrepreneurs, but opponents to amusement structures were infuriated by attempts to charge people for access to these spaces, on what should be, they insisted, free public land.

In 1899, following numerous complaints over several years to the Manly Council of the nuisance of merry-go-rounds around the town, the Council’s decision to allow only one merry-go-round to be run in the Municipality, on a site on the Steyne
Reserve, caused similar debate to that at Tamarama just over a decade earlier. Unlike the Council campaign for Tamarama, this issue was primarily fought out in public, and was documented in the press. The Reverend A.G. Stoddart was among those who spoke against the proposal at a town meeting in 1901:

The proposed merry-go-round was, he said, an infringement of the people's rights and liberties. The beach was a reserve for the people and their children, and no persons, Council or Government had any legal right to divert any portion of the reserve to private purposes.

At the same meeting, another Manly resident, Mr H.S. Badgery, echoed Stoddart's concern, moving that 'the erection of a merry-go-round on the ocean beach is an obstruction to the free use of the beach by the general public... These opinions, it was later argued, represented those of Manly 'and the State generally in protesting against the rights of the citizens to the ocean beach being taken away for the benefit of an individual.' However they were only articulated – both at the public meeting and in the letters columns of the press – by residents of Manly.

On this occasion, the 'rights of the citizens' were triumphant. Concerned about the cost of potential compensation and loss of revenue from cancelling the lease altogether, which had been agreed at £52 per annum, the Manly Council agreed to move the site of the lease off the reserve, and away from the beach.

Several years later, members of the Waverley Council found themselves debating the same issues of public rights to the beach following a proposal by A.J. Metcalfe for an amusement structure to be erected in Bondi Park in 1906. Those who opposed the proposal outright argued that 'the Council had no right to take away any portion of the park from the people, it would not be right.' Other Aldermen, who were in favour of providing amusements in the park, also struggled with the concept of charging

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16 This site would presumably limit the noise nuisance to residents, the primary reason for complaint until this time. SMH 9 November 1899, p.8.
17 'Public Meeting at Manly: proposed 'merry-go-round', SMH 23 May 1901, p.8.
18 'Public Meeting at Manly: proposed 'merry-go-round', SMH 23 May 1901, p.8.
19 SMH 7 June 1901, p.8.
20 SMH 7 June 1901, p.8; 16 July 1901, p.7.
members of the public for use of park space. The Mayor's solution was to include a clause 'that nothing should preclude the public from free access to that portion of the park, except entrance to his building'; Metcalfe was ultimately granted a site, albeit smaller than requested, for his amusement building, the Council satisfied that they had appropriately dealt with the question of providing 'free' access to the beach, while still appeasing private enterprise.21

In 1916, a proposal for a 'Gold Rush', in which people would pay to dig for money in an enclosed area at North Steyne, again aroused the ire of those who deemed the 'free' beach to be threatened by this private enterprise.22 The Sun, which claimed to represent not just locals but residents of Sydney generally, played a crucial role in the subsequent debate, and ran a sustained campaign against the enclosure, fearing that 'if a show of the gold rush variety were allowed to block the people's playground temporarily, there is very little doubt that attempts to place permanent structures on the beach would follow'.23 The paper's attitude was evident from the title of their first report of the proposal: 'Manly Beach: showman wants two acres: blocking the kiddies' playground'. They were irate not only because the children's playground would be fenced off for several hours on a Saturday afternoon, but also because spectators would be charged, describing a section which would be reserved specifically for 'the sightseers, who would be mulet [sic] of a small sum for the privilege of standing up on a patch of sand that belongs to them in common with the rest of the public'.24

A week later, the Sun was even more disgruntled by the Manly and District Commercial Association's in-principle support of this scheme:

How the desire to lease the beach for show purposes, even of a temporary nature, can exist alongside the expressed desire not to take the beach from the people is a problem which Mr

21 Waverley Council Minutes 27 February 1906, 1 March 1906
22 There was also some moral anxiety regarding the nature of the amusement in promoting gambling, especially articulated by a number of local Reverends.
23 Sun, 17 November 1916, SRNSW: CGS 8238 [16/12822], with bundle 16/12822.
24 Sun, 17 November 1916.
Mann [secretary] could not solve. Nor was he altogether clear who besides the promoter would reap the benefit.

Apart from this expression in favour of leasing portion of the beach, the voice of Manly is clear and its opinion unanimous.

The beach is owned by the people, and must be kept for the people's free use.²⁵

Crucially, the Sun brought this matter to the attention of the Department of Lands, which also considered the Gold Rush to be an inappropriate use of the beach reserve. W. Lawrence, in charge of the Miscellaneous Branch, was particularly opposed to the proposal:

It is considered that to permit the ocean beaches, which have been set apart for public recreation, to be utilized for schemes of the nature above indicated would be opposed to the general public interest.

Such beaches should, as far as practicable, be available for the free use and enjoyment of the general public, and should not be allowed to be exploited for the benefit of any amusement promoter...²⁶

Lawrence’s colleague, the Lands Department Under Secretary A.J. Hare, concurred, recommending ‘that the Council be warned that the Minister is utterly opposed to the scheme, which is not consistent with the object for which the park was dedicated, viz., its free use by the people’, and threatened to remove the entire reserve from the control of the Council if they approved of the scheme.²⁷ William Ashford, the Minister for Lands had been similarly opposed to the same entrepreneur’s application to erect a merry-go-round on the beach facing the Corso several months earlier, declaring, according to the Evening News, that ‘he would not allow anything of the

²⁵ Sun, 25 November 1916, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [16/12822], with bundle 16/12822.
²⁶ Internal Lands department Correspondence, 28 November 1916, SRNSW: CGS8258 [16/12822], with bundle 16/12822.
²⁷ Internal Lands department Correspondence, 28 November 1916, SRNSW: CGS8258 [16/12822], with bundle 16/12822.
kind where people congregated and where the ocean view would be obstructed'. By 1916, then, we can see that the contests over amusement structures on Sydney’s beaches had attracted far more attention than those at the turn of the century; the heavy involvement in the press ensured the debates would not be limited to local residents alone.

**Amusements and governing the beach**

By tracing the debates surrounding entertainment structures on the beaches between 1899 and 1916, we can see the development of the concept of ‘public rights’, and its growing influence on beach governance. In particular, we see an affirmation of increasing government sympathy towards the concept that the beaches should be preserved for public recreation, that began to take hold in the 1880s. They may have been going slowly on the issue of resuming the foreshores, but the New South Wales government remained adamant that those foreshores which had been reserved for public recreation should remain entirely free to public use. During the 1910s, in stark contrast to their earlier attitude, the Department of Lands consistently sided with campaigners who insisted amusement structures threatened the ‘rights’ of the public to free beach spaces. In 1913, the Under Secretary for Lands refused to sanction a proposal by the Waverley Council to lease a portion of Bondi Park for an amusement ground similar to Luna Park at St Kilda, writing that ‘in my opinion the leasing for private business undertakings of portions of Public Parks is utterly opposed to the object for which these areas are provided’. At around the same time, Thomas Furber remarked that the use of Coogee Beach for a theatrical show was ‘undesirable’, and referred to the pavilion at Manly as ‘a serious interference with the proper use of the reserve’.

By 1915, the new Labor Minister for Lands, William Ashford, was adamant that public parks should not be alienated, according to a memo released by his Under Secretary:

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28 *Evening News* 5 April 1916, From J Watson’s Clippings.


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Mr Ashford finds that his Department is frequently approached with requests to allow portions of the public parks to be occupied or used for purposes other than those for which the lands were originally set apart.

He points out that these areas were wisely intended to provide open air space for the recreation and benefit of the people. They are none too many nor too liberal in area at present, and as the suburbs grow the need of them will become increasingly evident.

... Mr Ashford states that he will not entertain any proposal that may be made to the Department for the taking of portion of a Public Park or Recreation Reserve for any other purpose, unless there are *vital reasons in the general public interest* to warrant such action.\(^{31}\)

This declaration suggests Ashford saw himself as instituting a new regime more favourable to public use. It was made in response to an application for a garbage destructor in a park, but was cited in response to a request by Waverley Council for a portion of Bondi park for a bowling green or tennis court, and no doubt was central to the Department’s subsequent concern over the ‘Gold Rush’ at Manly. However, while the Department of Lands admitted that ‘the playing of bowls and tennis are not in themselves purposes alien to the purpose of a park or recreation reserve, and it is not clear that the Minister intended his decision to extend to occupations of this character’\(^ {32}\), a report by the Metropolitan District Surveyor recommending *against* granting permission was accepted. His main argument was that ‘the present Park Area, as an ocean frontage, is not more than sufficient to meet present demands on Sundays and holidays, and although (the proposal) would not mean the absolute exclusion of the public from the grounds, it would restrict the use of the land by


ordinary members of the public.'\textsuperscript{33} The priority of the Lands Department in this case, as it was at Manly in 1916, was to ensure 'that there may be no derogation of public rights nor undue interference with the general use and enjoyment of the Park.'\textsuperscript{34}

Such pieces of correspondence demonstrate how important unrestricted public access to parks generally and foreshores specifically had become to the New South Wales government by the mid-1910s. It was no longer a concept peculiar to public lobby groups, articulated only by members of the public with a vested interest in specific park locations; 'public rights' were now recognised by the New South Wales government as central to the governance of the beaches, and worth overruling coastal councils to secure. The support entrepreneurs enjoyed from the coastal councils was driven purely by financial terms – the councils stood to gain through leasing the land they controlled, as trustees, and through the potential increase in tourist trades. The Labor government's insistence that free, public beaches should not be interfered with demonstrated that this issue was far more important to them than any revenue which may be derived through tourist tram traffic – by now a major factor within considerations of expenditure.

**Aesthetic concerns**

Opponents to coastal amusement structures were not only concerned with the risk they posed to public access to the beach. They also articulated an aesthetic concern that such structures were a blemish to the beach scenery. As with the issue of 'public rights', the concept of whether man-made structures 'improved' or 'desecrated' the beach was again a source of much contention in debates over coastal enterprises. It was certainly central to the question of the Manly merry-go-round. In addition to the loss of beach space, locals complained that 'the music up till 10 pm is objectionable to those who live within the sound of it, that the structure will be an obstruction to the beach and an eyesore, also that it will affect the value of property.'\textsuperscript{35} The first and last concerns articulated here were reiterations of the well established arguments against merry-go-rounds in the borough, and the position of the merry-go-round was irrelevant to them. The concern about the appearance of the merry-go-round,

\textsuperscript{33} Metropolitan District Surveyor to Under Secretary for Lands, 22 October 1915, \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [15/14167]}, with bundle 15/14167.

\textsuperscript{34} Memo, Lands Department, 30 August 1915, \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [15/11035]}, with bundle 15/14167.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{SMH} 17 May 1901, p.3. Emphasis added
however, was a new fear; the positioning of the structure on the beach space was represented as a visual threat to the integrity of the natural beach as a tourist attraction.

At the same public meeting that he questioned the occupation of the beach space by the merry-go-round, the Reverend A.G. Stoddart, who by his occupation was the least likely to be concerned with property value, expressed further revulsion at its appearance, describing it as 'a disfigurement'. In 1913, similar concerns were raised about a pavilion which was proposed to be built on the Steyne. This pavilion, which was to replace an existing 'Continental pavilion' and would be a source of considerable revenue for the Council, was again the subject of heated debate regarding the appropriate use of beach space. Opponents to the structure, including 'A lover of Manly', argued it would be 'another eyesore' and would desecrate the beach: 'as the beach belongs to the public, it would be a pity and a sin to allow any structure to be built which would be a great calamity not only to the people of Manly but to the colonists and visitors in general.'

This concept was also an element of the debate surrounding the Royal Aquarium at Tamarama even before it had been built, when in 1885, Charles Moore of the Botanic Gardens protested that the 'singular romantic beauties' and 'great natural charms' of Fletcher's Glen should be preserved, and that 'there is not now any other place left almost untouched within such easy access from the city, where so little has been done to interfere with our native trees and shrubs'.

The threat of the merry-go-round and pavilion was not limited to their physical occupation of the site, but also stemmed from their potential to interfere with the beach vista, and 'disfigure' the beach. This opposition to coastal structures on aesthetic grounds was a practical application of the principles of romanticism, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter seven. Such arguments demonstrate the importance to some beach users of maintaining the natural beach vista, and coastal residents were the most likely to articulate affection for the natural beach; this was often what attracted them to the coast in the first place. But the love of the natural was not common to all coastal residents, and at the other end of the spectrum were those

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36 'Public Meeting at Manly: proposed 'merry-go-round', SMH 23 May 1901, p.8.
37 Letter to the Editor, SMH 28 January 1913, p.10.
38 Charles Moore to Messrs Mills and Pile, 8 August 1885, with SRNSW: CGS 8238 [04/12559], with bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
who considered entertainment and other structures to be an 'improvement' to the natural beach. For these supporters of amusement structures, private enterprise was represented as a sign of progress; the beaches were not valued for their inherent natural qualities, but considered to be empty spaces waiting to be ‘transformed’ into something more materially useful and immediately profitable.

Some such as ‘Manlyite’ considered the value of these ‘improvements’ to lie in their potential to lure generous spending tourists to the suburb. Dismissing opponents to the pavilion as ‘hysterical screechers’, this resident wrote that ‘I hope to see a good many more improvements effected on the reserves, and so make Manly what it is justly entitled to be, “the playground of the State”’. Some government representatives also questioned the need to maintain the ‘natural beach’. We have seen that members of the Parkes government applauded the Manly aquarium as a sign of progress. In the case of the Royal Aquarium in 1887, a government Surveyor also commended the RAC for their ‘improvement’ of the space:

In its natural state the area covered by this reservation at Dixon’s Bay would be nearly useless to the public for recreation purposes, but as now improved and used by the Aquarium Co., it certainly enlarges their means of providing a pleasant place for public amusement.

A writer for the Daily Telegraph concurred, writing, on the occasion of its opening, that the site of the Royal Aquarium was ‘by nature bleak and rugged, by art the surroundings of the aquarium have been rendered remarkably attractive’. And as late as 1906, discussing the new ‘Wonderland City’ on the site of the old Aquarium, Thomas Furber, the Metropolitan District Surveyor, suggested that the ‘accessories to the pleasure grounds’ which occupied the foreshore ‘are in the public interest in so far that they aid in making the beach attractive for visitors’.

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39 Letter to the Editor, SMH 1 February 1913, p.28.
40 Lands Department, Report, 19 July 1888, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [with 91/1263], with bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
42 Report, Metropolitan District Surveyor, 8 November 1906, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [06/19627], with bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052.
Figure 6.1: Members of the Bondi Surf Bathers Life Saving Club on Bondi Beach, 1907. The amusement structure in the background, possibly Metcalfe’s, shows that entertainment structures were a fundamental part of the beach landscape in the early twentieth century.

The Manly Council debates over the picture pavilion in 1913 encapsulated both sides of this contentious issue. On the one hand, the substantial revenue which could be gained would enhance the spending power of the Council, but they were forced to concede that a substantial portion of ratepayers was opposed to this use of the beach space, regardless of revenue. According to the *Daily Telegraph*,

Alderman Smith said he believed the Council had made a mistake in coming to the decision to have a picture show erected. Their duty was to keep the beach free from such unsightly structures. Alderman Walker said the paltry sum of money they would derive from the scheme would not compensate the Council for the injury they were doing.

Alderman Olgivy disagreed, arguing that:

The decision of the Council to provide healthy amusement for the people was a step in the right direction. The day had
passed when visitors came to Manly to look at the beach and gaze upon the ocean, the bulk of them came to enjoy themselves.\textsuperscript{43} Although they insisted that the natural beach should not be interfered with, we can see that the opponents to coastal amusement structures were selective in their criticism. They were less concerned about man-made interference with the natural integrity of the beach generally, than they were opposed to specific amusements on the beach. Stoddart, for example, while criticising the merry-go-round, had no concerns about a potential pier with a bandstand, which he deemed to be an 'appropriate' structure for the beach.\textsuperscript{44} And the coastal councils received no opposition to 'improvements' to the beach in the form of sea walls and promenade paths, which were generally deemed to be sympathetic to the natural beach.\textsuperscript{45} From 1909 onwards, the Waverley Council also earned some revenue through permitting a private company to lease chairs on Bondi and Bronte beaches; by 1914, Manly Council alone was earning an estimated £600 per annum in this way.\textsuperscript{46} Furthermore, councils received little opposition to leasing sites on beach parks for refreshment rooms. Despite one complaint to the Waverley Council that the chair house on Bondi beach was 'unsightly', all of these uses of beach reserves were permitted, or at least tolerated, by beach users because they were deemed to enhance rather than hinder uses of the natural beach.\textsuperscript{47} Refreshment rooms and chair hiring provided practical services to beach goers, while sea walls made the beach easier to use, by providing a clear boundary between the beach and beach park, and minimising sand drifts. We can therefore see that the nature of entertainment structures was inherent to the anxiety they aroused.

\textsuperscript{43} 'Manly Beach: Picture Pavilion Squabble', \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 14 February 1913, p.11. 
\textsuperscript{44} 'Public Meeting at Manly: proposed 'merry-go-round', \textit{SMH} 23 May 1901, p.8. 
\textsuperscript{45} 'Manly Improvements', \textit{Daily Telegraph}, 2 February 1915 (from Watson's Clippings, Mitchell Library) 
\textsuperscript{46} There were 2000 chairs on Manly beach. Waverley Council \textit{Minutes}, 27 March 1906, 26 February 1907, 9 November 1909, 20 January 1914, 10 February 1914; 'Commercial Morality: Waverley Council's Obligations: Bondi Beach Chair Contract', \textit{Evening News} 15 February 1914, with SRNSW: CGS 8258, [14/3021], with bundle 14/2376. 
\textsuperscript{47} Waverley Council \textit{Minutes}, 20 July 1915.
Shifting attitudes
Regardless of whether the main point of contention was the threat to public access to the beach, or aesthetic concerns about the nature of the structure in question, at the core of all these debates – as we saw in the case of Tamarama – was a question of the purpose of the public beach. Was the beach primarily for the use of locals and visitors who valued the beach on its own, or was it a site to be exploited for the financial gain of the council? Did tourists prefer the natural beach or the artificial thrills of amusements and rides? And what, exactly, constituted an ‘improvement’? The differing responsibilities of the coastal councils and New South Wales government – whereby the councils were answerable to ratepayers while the government represented all New South Wales residents – helps to explain their divergent attitudes. But the matter of amusement structures on the beach was far more complex than the issue of creating public foreshores, for while the coastal councils were unwavering in their support for public spaces on the beach, their ability to raise revenue through entrepreneurial schemes made the former issue less clear-cut. The approval of Metcalfe’s proposal by the Waverley Council in 1906, and Manly Council’s support for the ‘Gold Rush’ in 1916, represented a major shift in council attitude towards seaside entrepreneurialism. This sits in stark contrast to the simultaneous shift by the New South Wales government away from private interests, which was consolidated by the Labor government in the 1910s. A notable consequence of these diverging attitudes was the increasing clashes between the coastal councils and state government over such proposals during the 1910s.

In the 1880s, the Waverley Council had been the sole complainants against the Bondi Aquarium, arguing that ‘public interest’ was best served by permitting unrestricted access to the beach for general recreational purposes, because their ratepayers’ traditional use of and access to the beach was deemed to be threatened by the RAC. At the turn of the twentieth century the Manly Council had also quickly conceded to ratepayers concerns and prevented the construction of a merry-go-round on the beach. Only a few years into the twentieth century however, they began to understand the potential revenue which could be made through such entertainment sites, and became more sympathetic to the demands of entrepreneurs. In the opening decade of the twentieth century, the seaside councils and New South Wales government consequently shared a favourable attitude towards seaside entertainment structures. In
1907, James Ashton, then Minister for Lands, had been supportive of a proposal for the erection of a building for amusements in Bondi park not dissimilar to that erected in 1906, informing the Mayor he was ‘very favourable’ and ‘would assist the Council in every way’.\(^{48}\) In refusing a grant for their reserves, he also suggested to the Manly Council that they pursue revenue by leasing portions of their parks to this type of enterprise.\(^{49}\)

As we have seen, however, by the start of the next decade, the government ministers, and Department of Lands as their agency, were actively preventing any encroachments of this nature on public recreation reserves. In 1887, the New South Wales government had supported the Bondi Aquarium because they considered that day-trippers were more likely to be attracted to the aquarium than to the natural beach space, and also favoured the RAC because it was both contributing to the economy and deemed to be ‘improving’ the beach. The success of the RAC was also inextricably linked with the status of the Tamarama foreshore as undedicated Crown Land. The concern of some staff at the Department of Lands about the rights of all beach users to the Tamarama foreshore was countered by the argument that since the beach was not reserved for public recreation, the public had no right to even use the space, let alone complain about other uses of it.

In 1907, the provision of an access path to the same undedicated foreshore was a sign of the strength of the concept of ‘public rights’ to the beach. Subsequent intervention into attempts to build other sites of entertainment on the beaches demonstrates that by the 1910s, the government, who still acted in the interests of all residents rather than coastal locals, recognised that beachgoers overwhelmingly sought the natural beach. Regardless of whether they still considered large-scale private enterprises generally to be a sign of ‘progress’, they did not consider their presence on the ocean beaches to be an ‘improvement’.

Whether due to the financial problems of seaside entertainment sites, or difficulties in getting initial approval for their erection, due to local opposition, the twentieth

\(^{48}\) Waverley Council Minutes 27 February 1907.

\(^{49}\) ‘Manlyite’, Letter to the editor, SMH 1 February 1913, p.28; Daily Telegraph, 14 February 1913, p11.
century beach was marked more by the natural than by these artificial sites. Certainly, Olgivy was right in suggesting that by the 1910s most beachgoers were intent on physical enjoyment rather than passive observation, but the surf increasingly became understood as the primary site for this. For many surf bathers, regardless of their opinion on the debates between improvement and desecration of the beach parks, the surf could not be artificially ‘improved’; it was already ideal.

The involvement by so many members of the public in the debates about the appearance of these proposals was a logical extension of the concept that the public had a ‘right’ to the beach, and that the beaches were state or national property. But the passionate pleas by locals in particular were a manifestation of the sense that coastal residents ‘own’ the beach, and that they have more of a right to determine the ways in which the beach is used than those who are simply occasional visitors. The fact that by the twentieth century Sydney’s ocean beaches were part of residential suburbs – rather than being purely holiday resorts – was therefore fundamental to the hotly contested debates over the ways in which the beaches were used, and the types of structures which were appropriate to the space.

By the twentieth century, recreation was emerging as the primary use of Sydney’s beaches. The debates over types of recreation, as we have seen, were therefore central to the governance of the beaches: amusement parks were contentious specifically because they were deemed to interfere with other types of coastal recreation. But there were other competing ways of using Sydney’s beaches which also raised concern among beach users. In particular, exploiting the beach’s natural resources, either through sand mining or using the space to bury garbage, had been accepted for much of the nineteenth century, but by the early twentieth its interference with the recreation of beachgoers was being bought into question. The second half of this chapter examines these competing ways of using the beach.

Exploiting the natural coastal resources

Sydney’s ocean beaches had been a rich source of life and food for coastal Aboriginal communities prior to European settlement. Land clearing and the spread of the settler population towards the coast resulted in these Aboriginal groups moving away from many of Sydney’s beaches early in the nineteenth century, but their dual use of the
beach, as both a source of recreation and of useful natural resources, was continued by its European inhabitants. Some took advantage of the opportunities for mineral wealth at the beach, but timber, fish, gravel and sand would all be exploited, affecting the nature of the beach, and causing contestation.

As we have seen, by the time members of the public and coastal councils sought recreational space at Sydney’s ocean beaches in the mid-late nineteenth century, some beaches were privately owned, a substantial obstacle which had to be negotiated before public access could be achieved. Mostly, these landowners had not radically altered the beach landscape, choosing to settle and build slightly inland from the beaches, although they may have cleared surrounding vegetation. O’Brien’s road metal mine at Bondi appears to have been the exception.

We also saw briefly in chapter four that those lobbying for public access to some beaches overseas during this period, first had to acquire the beaches from those for whom they were both homes and places of livelihood. These communities, who had lived by and from the sea for generations, were perhaps closer in kind to Sydney’s coastal Aboriginal communities than wealthy landowners such as O’Brien and Holdsworth, who were willing to sell their land for the right price and were not financially dependent on the foreshores. Several of Sydney’s ocean beaches which were not privately owned, however, as with those in the harbour, were the sources of livelihood for many Europeans, offering a rich variety of resources. Those who exploited these resources changed the beach environment to some extent, most notably through the removal of sand and sand grit, which had existed in large dunes along the New South Wales coast prior to European settlement. Mostly this was inadvertent, although as we shall see, the government did encourage the removal of sand from Coogee beach as a cheap means of land clearing, which irrevocably changed the natural beachscape of the area.

In the 1830s, the hills around Coogee had reportedly been a rich source of timber for the felling industry. Anecdotal evidence suggests this area had once been covered in forests, but after only a few decades the hills around Coogee were sparsely

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vegetated. The beaches themselves were also utilised by both Aboriginal, and later European fishermen, although they had little permanent impact on the peripheral beach space. There is scant evidence regarding the extent of beach fishing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, or the degree to which fishing was embarked on by either commercial fishermen or recreational anglers. Complaints regarding fishermen leaving rotting shark carcasses on the beach attest to this use of the beach environment, although fishermen did not create enough of a physical nuisance for bathers in the opening decades of the twentieth century to be commented upon in the press – and given the scrutiny all matters relating to the beaches and bathing received in the early twentieth century, it is likely that had fishermen caused a nuisance other than the offence of rotting carcasses this would have been covered in the press or raised in local council meetings.

Sand mining

One of the most contentious uses of Sydney's ocean beaches during the early twentieth century was the removal of sand. As with the erection of amusement structures, a practice which had been tolerated and even supported during the late nineteenth century became a source of concern as sand mining began to be seen to threaten the comfort of recreation-seeking beachgoers in the early twentieth century. In the mid-nineteenth century, the private ownership of the Bondi sandhills had forced sand carters further south, where they found a rich supply of sand at Coogee and Long Bay. Far from creating a nuisance, these carters were welcomed as a solution to the problem of sand drifting off the beach and onto nearby roads. In response to the same problem, the Waverley Council had discussed planting marram grass in the dunes at Bondi, but the Randwick Council had been less proactive. In the 1890s, they consequently granted permission on several occasions for carters to remove sand from Coogee Beach. In 1904, the Minister for Lands deemed the excess sand at Coogee such a menace that he announced sand carters would not need a licence to remove

52 Between 1859 and 1920, the Waverley Council recorded just one complaint about fishermen leaving rotting shark carcasses on Bondi Beach. Waverley Council *Minutes*, 6 December 1898.
53 SMH 17 October 1902, p.7.
sand from this beach, declaring that the removal of thousands of cart loads a year would be 'a service.'\(^{55}\)

By 1907, the Randwick Council had completely reversed its attitude towards the removal of sand from Coogee beach, and it now vehemently opposed the practice. Hence, despite the fact that sand removal had again been limited to licensed carters and was only permitted on the northern portion of the beach, they complained to the Department of Lands in July that year that the removal of so much sand was ‘very injurious’.\(^{56}\) There were two elements to their unease. Firstly, they expressed concern that the beach was being physically damaged by the removal of too much sand. On this matter, the Randwick Council echoed the concerns of the Trustees of Long Bay reserve south of Coogee that continued removal of sand or shell-grit from the beach might lead to the undermining and eventual collapse of existing sea walls.\(^{57}\) Secondly, the Council complained that the ‘comfort’ of visitors was being impeded by the removal of sand. This complaint was less environmental than aesthetic; it was a reflection of the role of the beach in attracting visitors and residents to the Municipality, and an awareness of the importance of maintaining the natural integrity of the beach to secure this.

On both these matters, the Department of Lands was unsympathetic: despite the shift in the Council’s attitude, they continued to support the removal of sand. The Cumberland Ranger inspected Coogee Beach in August 1907, and reported no damage caused by the removal of sand. He noted that sand was blown up in stormy weather, endorsing the arguments of the marble industry who wrote in defence of sand removal that ‘every storm replaces more than is ever likely to be taken by the carts.’\(^{58}\) And yet it was these very ‘gales’ which concerned the Council so much; they did not ‘replace’ removed sand, argued the Council, but were rather ‘responsible for the disappearance of thousands of loads from the beach’, as sand was blown over the

\(^{55}\) Lands Department, internal correspondence, 1 June 1904, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [02/13619], with bundle 09/17507.

\(^{56}\) Randwick Council to Under Secretary for Lands, 24 July 1907, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/12997], with bundle 09/17507.

\(^{57}\) H.J. Dudley, Brand recreation Ground Trust to Minister for Lands, 29 August 1907, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [09/17508], with bundle 09/17508. See also SMH 18/11/1908, p.7.

\(^{58}\) Cumberland Ranger to Metropolitan District Surveyor, 29 August 1907, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/12997], with bundle 09/17507; William Rooke to Minister for Lands, 10 August 1907 [07/12997].
wall onto the road. On the question of public comfort, the Ranger noted that carters were only licensed to remove sand from the northern portion of the beach, which was not yet part of the public reserve, and limited removal to weekdays, when fewer people visited the beach. The Department evidently considered the ‘nuisance’ of the sand carters to lie in their physical presence on the beach, rather than their transformation of the beach site.

At Coogee beach, the Department of Lands were supportive of the removal of sand because they considered the natural dunes to be an excess of sand; its removal was an ‘improvement’ rather than destruction of the natural beach. Despite the protests of the Council, sand hills were not seen by the Department to have an aesthetic value, or to add to the ‘comfort’ of the visitors. Such an attitude was also evident in the removal of Bondi’s substantial dune system, as part of the ‘beautification’ of that beach in the 1920s. The comparative lack of sand at Shelly Beach at Manly, however, elicited a different response from the Department of Lands, who were concerned that on this occasion, the removal of shell grit would negatively impact that beach.

At the same time as the Cumberland Ranger and Metropolitan District Surveyor, Thomas Furber, were refuting the concerns of the Randwick Council and Long Bay Reserve Trustees of the destruction being done to those beaches by the removal of large quantities of sand and shell grit, they were using the full force of the law to punish three individuals for removing shell grit from Shelly Beach at Manly. Clearly these cases were distinguished by the fact that sand carters at Coogee and Long Bay held licenses whereas those arrested at Shelly Beach were acting illegally; but in stark contrast to the former cases, these government representatives also expressed moral indignation at the damage to the natural beach. At Shelly Beach, not only was the removal of shell-grit a crime, but Furber reported that ‘there could be no greater act of vandalism than the destruction of this pretty beach.’ Whereas huge amounts of sand had been removed from Coogee through horse-drawn cartloads over twenty-five

59 Randwick Council to Under Secretary for Lands, 8 October 1908, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/18000], with bundle 09/17507.
60 This area was proposed to become part of the public reserve. Cumberland Ranger to Metropolitan District Surveyor, 29 August 1907, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/12997], with bundle 09/17507.
62 Report Metropolitan District Surveyor, 6 May 1907, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [with 07/7781].
years, one of the offenders at Shelly Beach was found with only a single ‘barrow’,\textsuperscript{63} which had a relatively minor impact on the physical surface of the beach. Shelly Beach, however, was considerably smaller than both Coogee and Long Bay, and without the excess sand and sand dunes behind it, the removal of even a small amount of sand was deemed to have a heavier impact. Nonetheless, this value judgement based on an aesthetic outlook was rare for a senior member of the Lands Department, and for Furber in particular, who was more used to ordering beaches according to their size, locality and accessibility.

By 1909, the Wade government had conceded to public and council pressure and refused to issue new licences at both Coogee and Long Bay beaches.\textsuperscript{64} The turnaround regarding Long Bay is particularly remarkable; within a year of Furber reporting that the weekly removal of shell-grit from the beach ‘is not causing any damage or disfigurement to the beach’, the Forestry Department’s Chief found that, in fact, ‘the removal of shell-grit from this locality has caused damage and disfigurement to the beach.’\textsuperscript{65} Despite the apparent impartiality of the finding, the pressure of public campaigns had doubtless played a substantial role in the decisions regarding both these beaches. Not only had the Department been inundated by complaints from the Council and Trustees of Long Bay, but the sand and shell-grit removal was also the subject of public complaints, including two written protests, a representative of the local lobby group arguing that ‘everybody at the Bay is opposed to the continuance of the permits to shift the stuff from the beach.’\textsuperscript{66}

What are the implications of these contrasting attitudes towards sand removal? What had changed between 1907 and 1909 to lead the government to consider the removal of sand from the beaches in an entirely new light? Had so much sand been removed by now that damage was irrefutably evident, or did this shift reflect the broader shift

\textsuperscript{63}William Rooke to Minister for Lands, 10 August 1907, \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258} [07/12997]. with bundle 09/17507; Cumberland Ranger to Metropolitan District Surveyor, 6 May 1907, \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [with 07/7781]}.  

\textsuperscript{64}Internal Lands Department Correspondence, 31 October 1911, \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [with 09/17507]}.  

\textsuperscript{65}Lands Department internal correspondence, 28 August 1908; RD Hay, Chief Forest officer to William Woods, 19 June 1909, \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [with 09/17508]}. The administration had been transferred to the Forestry Branch of the Lands Department. Memo, Lands Department, 1 October 1909, [09/17508]. Emphasis added  

\textsuperscript{66}A Duckworth to WF Latimer MLA, 25 November 1908 \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [09/17508]; SMH 18 November 1908, with [09/17508].}
in the attitude of the government towards the beaches which was evident in so many other aspects of beach governance at around this time? The opposition by both the Randwick Council and Long Bay Reserve Trustees to the removal of sand offers yet further evidence of the growing importance of the beach as a tourist site by the early twentieth century. It also demonstrates that despite a general support of amusement structures by coastal councils around this time, they were aware, in this aesthetic sense at least, of the importance of maintaining the natural integrity of the beach. But the councils also did not gain financially from sand removal, the licenses for the practice being controlled instead by a government department, and this undoubtedly influenced their unwillingness to support it.

The support of the nationalist Carruthers government for sand mining at Coogee and Long Bay reinforced their support for the exploitation of Sydney’s beaches for the benefits of private enterprise. However the censure of sand removalists on a ‘pretty’ beach which was used solely for public recreation demonstrates that, as with their strict action against the Wonderland City proprietors at Tamarama, government representatives were beginning to understand the importance of aesthetics in public ‘rights’ to the beach. The subsequent abandonment by the Wade government of sand mining at Coogee and Long Bay – on instruction by the Minister – was likely more a reflection of the increasing public dissent against such exploitation of the beach than an independent concern by the government with the practice itself.

**Coastal pollution**

In addition to their exploitation through sand and mineral mining, Sydney’s ocean beaches were impacted at different times by severe pollution, as a direct result of human methods of waste disposal. There were three main ways in which the beaches were polluted, which caused differing levels of concern among coastal councils, residents and beach users during the late-nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries: burying garbage on or near the beach; sewage pollution via ocean outfalls; and the washing up of garbage which had been dumped at sea. Again, an examination of the debates – or lack of – regarding these types of pollution of Sydney’s beaches, reveals a shift in attitudes towards a favouring of beach protection and preservation during the opening decades of the twentieth century.
At the turn of the twentieth century, with diminishing options for garbage disposal, some coastal councils considered local beaches, as physically empty and partially unused spaces, to be potential sites for the dumping of household garbage. Waverley Council, in search of a new site for the Municipal tip, considered burying their garbage near Bondi Beach, and in 1903 they wrote to the Department of Lands requesting permission ‘to deposit and cover up well with sand, house garbage within the Bondi Park area.’ The Department was not opposed to the prospect of clean garbage – which excluded vegetable matter and rotting animals – being buried in this location, especially since the Surveyor reported that, away from the foreshore, this area of the park was not visited too much by the public. However since the Council could not enforce any discrimination of garbage, and the site was within the limits of a proposed road, they refused permission.

By the time the Department returned their ruling on the matter, and after considerable debate, the Waverley Council had independently decided not to bury their garbage in Bondi Park. Although ambiguous, the Mayor’s declaration that the proposal was ‘most objectionable’ hinted at an awareness of the nuisance that might be created by dumping garbage inside a park dedicated to public recreation. The Manly Council, in contrast, actually had used their ocean beach as a dumping ground for local garbage, and only stopped doing so in 1899 following the complaint by a local that it was ‘offensive to the inmates of houses and a menace to public health’. This Council, primarily anxious that the ‘plague of flies’ created by the tip were ‘likely to carry infection’, did not demonstrate any concern about potential damage to or interference with the beach space on an aesthetic level.

Several years later, the coastal councils were concerned by the pollution of their beaches from external sources, and on this matter they were united with local residents and beach users. The positioning of Sydney’s beaches on the margin of the ocean and the land made them affected not only by the actions of those directly

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67 Waverley Council Minutes, 20 March 1900, 14 October 1902, 16 March 1903, 14 April 1903; Waverley Council to Minister for Lands, 20 April 1903, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [Indiv 03/2677], bundle 03/4017, box 20/7886.
68 Report, Surveyor Madsen, 9 May 1903, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [with Dep. 03/4017].
69 Waverley Council Minutes, 14 April 1903.
70 SMH, 28 April 1899, p.3.
71 Daily Telegraph, 1 May 1899, p.5.
governing and using the beaches and beach parks, but by the actions of others, far from the beaches, who were not necessarily aware of the impact they had on the beach environment. The construction of the Bondi sewerage outfall, which was finished in 1887, and a proposal for an ocean sewage outfall off Manly the following decade, were initially the sources of little contention — the residents of Manly were initially far more concerned with the cost of the proposal, than they were with the potential pollution it may cause, and the Bondi Sewer was the subject of only a single complaint by the Waverley Council. 72 Even had they raised more vocal concerns about potential coastal pollution it is unlikely they would have found a sympathetic ear in the government, who no doubt considered the sewage outfall a symbol of progress, just as Melbourne’s smokestacks ‘symbolised the productiveness of colonial manufacturing, not damage to the environment’. 73 In the 1880s, Sydney’s new sewerage system was viewed not as a pollution threat but as an answer to the city’s pollution problems, and was seen as a powerful tool in the fight against infectious diseases. 74 However, the onset of daylight bathing in the early twentieth century aroused substantially more concern in the drift of sewerage towards the beach, because pollution of the water directly affected this type of beach recreation. The Waverley Council consequently received a number of complaints by local residents concerned by this type of pollution of the beach, and from this point it became an ongoing concern up and down Sydney’s coast throughout the twentieth century. 75

72 SMH, 3 November 1893, p.6; Waverley Council Minutes 6 April 1880.
75 Waverley Council Minutes 13 March 1906, 10 March 1908; SMH 10 March 1904, p.6.
Figure 6.2: 'At Bondi' (1886)
Visitor: 'What a peculiar twang there is about the ozone here'
Waverley Alderman: 'Ozone be blowed! That's our 'shoot' on them there hills!

The decision by Sydney's City Council to deposit the city's garbage at sea in 1900 caused greater contention and debate. In 1891 the Council, aware that the traditional method of disposing of garbage via a tip at Moore Park was becoming increasingly unfeasible, had considered two alternative methods: destroying the garbage by fire, or hauling it out to sea and disposing of it there.\(^76\) Both these methods of garbage disposal aroused considerable debate and opposition within the Council Chambers, and the Council consequently continued its established method of a land tip for the

\(^76\) SMH 6 February 1891, p.5.
rest of the decade. In 1900, however, the Council was more desperate for a viable alternative to the Moore Park tip, and the latter proposal was adopted. Despite the reservations held by the Under Secretary for Works regarding the appropriateness of this method for disposing of rubbish, the project had the full support and determination of the Premier Lyne, who ordered the Works Department to assist.

Again, 'progress' took precedent over the coastal environment.

Sydney's coastal councils were among the most vocal opponents to the dumping of garbage at sea, arguing that the potential for rubbish to be washed back onto the beaches made the proposal 'an undesirable and unhealthy means of dealing with the refuse.' Yet it was not only the coastal councils who were concerned with the proposal; councils situated on the harbour foreshores, including Woollahra, Balmain, North Shore, Lane Cove and Watson's Bay also presented petitions to the City Council against the plan. Furthermore, a number of City Aldermen, including the Mayor, expressed reservations against the idea.

If Kent Street must not be polluted with the carting of refuse, why should Woolloomooloo Bay, Circular Quay, Miller's Point, Darling Harbour, Pyrmont and other places have to suffer this expected dreadful infection of odours, destructive alike to the health and comfort of the people and to the value of adjacent property?

Individuals who opposed the idea echoed the complaints of these aldermen – that the scheme was too expensive, and that nuisance would not be caused only by the floating of garbage in the sea, but by the difficulty of the barges travelling far out of the heads in poor weather. WA Notting, who had written to the editor of the Herald in 1891, repeated his initial complaints again in 1900, fearing that 'winds and tides will convey

77 SMH 21 March 1900
78 SMH 18 February 1891, p.4; Waverley Council Minutes 17 February 1891
79 SMH 18 February 1891, p.4.
80 Mayors Minutes, City Council Meeting, reported in SMH, 13 February 1891, p.3.
81 Letters to the editor, SMH 9 February 1891, p.9; 12 February 1891, p.6; 16 February 1891, p.6.
the rubbish that will float back to our harbour and coastal water frontages, there to cause a fearful annoyance and menace to the health of the public'.

Within just two months of the scheme being adopted, the Waverley Council was complaining to both the Premier and the Health Department of excessive waste being washed onto Bondi Beach, including fruit and vegetable matter, and ‘a rat, a cat and a kitten’, the latter of which had been immediately buried. The harbour and coastal councils were primarily concerned by the threat floating refuse posed to the health of coastal populations. The issue of aesthetics did not impact heavily on either the 1891 or 1900 debates; and when the issue of the appearance of garbage was raised, it was more likely to be in relation to the harbour than the ocean beaches. ‘Bobstay’, writing in 1891, referred to the famous tendency of Sydneysiders to ask visitors what they thought of our harbour:

Should this nuisance increase ... we should have the pleasant satisfaction of asking our visitors, not what they thought of our beautiful harbour, but what their opinion was of our “dead menagerie”.

By the 1910s, however, the continuing opposition to the practices of the City Council had shifted in two ways. Firstly, the complaints aired in the press were now focussed squarely on the physical detriment of the ocean beaches, rather than those of the harbour. Secondly, the language had shifted from being one of health, to one of environmental aesthetics, although health remained intrinsic to the complaints. The rise of surf bathing was particularly responsible for these shifts, as people in the water were far more affected by floating refuse than those on the sand. In 1912, Arthur Bowman, a surf bather, was more concerned with the future of a favourite pastime than any other factor when writing to the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

It is a shame to see our beautiful beaches strewn with such rubbish. This morning it was positively offensive bathing in

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82 W.A. Notting, Letter to the editor, *SMH* 22 March 1900, p.8; 9 February 1891, p.9.
83 Waverley Council *Minutes*, 1 May 1900.
the surf. If this nuisance is not put a stop to at once, surf bathing at Manly, Bondi and Coogee will be doomed. 85

A writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald* took the matter even further, equating littering with drifting rubbish, and declaring that ‘any one who leaves rubbish or broken glass about a beach ought to be driven out of the community.’ Again, it was ‘bathers’ who suffered the most from such nuisance. 86 Consolidating the impact this method of garbage disposal had on surf bathers was the interest shown by the Surf Bathing Association of New South Wales in the matter, when they initiated a collective deputation to the Minister with the coastal councils in 1914. 87

Around the turn of the twentieth century, we can see Sydney’s coastal councils were barely concerned by the prospect of pollution on their beaches. Both Waverley and Manly Councils either used or considered using their beaches as garbage tips, and they protested only minimally against ocean sewage outfalls. Where they did question the appropriateness of these methods of garbage disposal for the beaches, they were far more concerned by the threat to the health of the local population, and the potential cost of cleaning up, than the comfort of beachgoers. The government, too, completely overlooked the implications to the comfort of beachgoers when they constructed the Bondi sewer, and approved of the dumping of garbage of sea. Furthermore, their decision to refuse the use of Bondi Park as a garbage tip was based more on practical than aesthetic considerations.

The substantial protests against all three types of pollution on Bondi beach in particular by the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century demonstrates, however, that the comfort of recreation seeking beachgoers was beginning to be a major consideration in the governance of the beach. By the 1910s, we can see that the language of this opposition was expressed in terms of aesthetics rather than health. It was only then that the coastal councils fully understood such uses of the beach were anathema to their concurrent uses as recreation grounds, and the enjoyment of beachgoers.

87 Waverley Council *Minutes*, 3 November 1914.
The shift in emphasis from the potential injury floating garbage may inflict on the harbour beaches to the debate being dominated by concern for the ocean beaches also reflects a shift away from the dominance of the harbour within the city’s imaginings of its coast. The beauty of Sydney’s harbour had been long accepted, and a point of pride for so many Sydney residents during the nineteenth century. By 1910, we can see that the value of the ocean beaches had been established in a way entirely different from 1890. Certainly, the ocean did not replace the harbour as the primary body of water associated with Sydney, but the ocean beaches had by now become entrenched as a tourist site, and a primary recreation site, on their own.

**Conclusions**

We can see through the debates over both constructions on the beaches and the exploitation of the natural resources of the beach that the campaigns for Sydney’s ocean foreshores were not limited to securing public spaces and means of access to the beaches; by the opening decade of the twentieth century they were expanding to encompass the ways in which these spaces were used. Similarly, the transformation of government attitudes towards the beach that began to appear in the 1900s was far more complex than simply an acceptance that the public had a ‘right’ to the beaches. The New South Wales government, as they accepted the public ‘rights’ to the beaches, also conceded that most beachgoers desired a natural, unaltered beachscape; in seeking to secure this by the 1910s, they acted against the private entrepreneur on the beach. The coastal councils underwent a similar shift, whereby they began to lobby against the removal of sand from the beaches, and the pollution of the beaches, even where they had been implicated in the same process only years earlier. These campaigns were in line with public lobbying for the preservation of the natural beach space. However when it came to private enterprise, the councils were driven more by financial interests than public lobbying, and by the early twentieth century they were beginning to favour private enterprise over unrestricted public access to the beach.

The attitudes of public lobby groups and vocal individuals did not shift over this period; they just became louder, and more influential. At the core of all debates about Sydney’s ocean beaches between 1880 and 1920 was the question of what exactly the

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88 Jenkins, *Our Beautiful Harbour*. 
beach was for. Initially the cause of substantial dispute, by 1910, this question had been largely resolved in favour of public recreation. While this agreement helped to resolve the issues of sand mining and garbage disposal on the beach – which by interfering with the natural beach were seen to be anathema to public recreation – debates over what types of recreation were ‘appropriate’ on the beach continued to rage. These debates were underpinned by a second issue – whether or not man-made structures ‘improved’ or ‘desecrated’ the natural beach. Proponents of both sides of this argument fell back on established modes of colonial thought: the first constructed Australia as an empty space which through commercialisation and European-style development would be made valuable; while the other valued the natural as itself valuable, in the tradition of European Romanticism.

The emergence and development of the Romantic aesthetic as it related specifically to Sydney’s ocean beaches will be discussed in detail in chapter seven. While its importance to the experience of the beach was perhaps not acknowledged by the New South Wales government until around 1910, we will see that the lure of nature has been a constant element of Sydney’s beach history for a much longer period. The actions of the government in ending the removal of sand and intervening on the matter of seaside amusements was therefore in these respects, as with so many others, a rather belated response to the demands of beachgoers.
7. The Romantic Beach

In 1832, the *New South Wales Calendar and General Post Office Directory* published one of the earliest descriptions of Bondi Beach:

The bays on this part of the coast, closed in by rocky headlands, and backed by barren rising ground, have something of peculiar loneliness about them. The solemn roar of the breakers – the confined view of the ocean – the shining, sandy beach, unmarked by human foot – and the low, but beautiful, shrubs, make up a scene to be peopled by the imagination. The solitary traveller may recall the sound of Shakespeare’s lyre...

This brief sketch of Bondi evoked a scene where, ‘unmarked by human foot’, nature was the dominant feature, the sole attraction. Later in the century, Bondi, and the other beaches along Sydney’s coast, would come to be peopled by picnickers, day-trippers and tourists. However the appeal of nature was not diminished by their presence; rather, nature remained a strong lure for beachgoers – a constant feature of Sydney’s beach culture which remains central in the twenty-first century.

This chapter will explore the origins of the aesthetics of nature, and its articulation, at the Sydney beach. It argues that the prominence of nature within Sydney’s beach culture – which we have seen underpinned so many different elements of this emerging culture – has its roots in the traditions of British Romanticism. But how were the traditional romantic concepts applied to Sydney’s beaches and coastline? In what ways did these influence everyday experiences of the beach?

Historians of both Australian beach culture, and Australian romanticisms, have largely overlooked the importance of the romantic aesthetic to the history of the beach. Andrea Inglis alone considered the contribution of Romanticism to Australia’s

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beach history, describing the appeal of the ‘sublime’ to Victorian beachgoers during the nineteenth century. However there were sufficient differences between the Sydney and Victorian coasts and beach culture, both in the nineteenth century and the twentieth, to necessitate further investigation of Romantic imagery as it related specifically to Sydney’s ocean beaches.

The Romantic tradition

The Romantic tradition — a way of viewing, describing, drawing and thinking about the natural world — grew out of a European aesthetic theory which first emerged in the eighteenth century. Ian McCalman described Romanticism as ‘a notoriously slippery concept’ of which few scholars can agree on its ‘precise character or time period’. Generally speaking, it encompassed three distinct ways of classifying scenes of nature: the ‘beautiful’, the ‘picturesque’, and the ‘sublime’. The ‘picturesque’ was conventionally defined as ‘that which is suited to pictorial representation’; by the mid-eighteenth century ‘rough and irregular scenes of nature’ were considered especially picturesque. The ‘sublime’ and ‘beautiful’ were more specific concepts. According to Edmund Burke, the sublime referred to that which produced ‘the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling’. It was distinct from the beautiful:

Sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great [sublime], rugged and negligent ... beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate ... They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure.

Inglis, Beside the Seaside.


6 Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry, pp.237-238.
Grand and awesome scenes, such as craggy mountains and gushing waterfalls were a particularly valued element of this aesthetic; dangerous and demonstrative of God’s power, they offered all the features of the ‘sublime’ that Romantics craved. The appeal of the ‘sublime’ is of particular interest to a study such as this, which emphasises the importance of individual experiences within history, as outlined in the introduction.

The ocean – infinite, violent, mysterious, even terrifying – characterised the sublime equally to mountain scenery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although it was perhaps less prominent within many Romantic works. Andrew Taylor argued that the attraction of gazing at the sea is difficult to pinpoint, suggesting that the sea ‘represents something that is not just sea ... the sea is a signifier’. But Alain Corbin had less difficulty with the concept: ‘faced with the immensity of an ocean whose limits man is incapable of grasping, whose breadth he cannot conceive, the spectator experiences the emotion engendered by the sublime spectacle of nature’. Ocean scenes were not to be simply admired by the spectator; by the nineteenth century, the beach, like other locations of romantic appeal, was a site for contemplation of the self, a place which ‘inspired a generation of artistic rebels to experience the thrill of the sublime and to contemplate the depths of their own souls’. According to John Walton, the variety of Britain’s coastal landscape suited differing romantic sensibilities: ‘jagged rocks and tumbledown cottages on the shoreline could appeal to the taste for the picturesque ... while the devotee of the sublime and the awe-inspiring could achieve his pleasurable frisson of horror by contemplating the vasty deep, especially in a storm’. The variety and spectacle of Sydney’s coastal landscape attracted similar romantic reflection.

The Romantic appeal of the Sydney beach

Julia Horne argued that many of Australia’s earliest European explorers were ‘often disconcerted ... by the inappropriateness of applying eighteenth century European

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8 Corbin, The Lure of the Sea, p.126; See also Howell, The Seaside, p.43; Urry, The Tourist Gaze, p.20.

9 Corbin, The Lure of the Sea p.164.

notions of the Picturesque and the Romantic to Australia’s environment’. Nonetheless, by the middle of the nineteenth century, an aesthetic existed in the Australian colonies which had its roots firmly entrenched in British and European attitudes towards nature. Although the Australian landscape was distinctly different from that which British immigrants and tourists were used to, traditional definitions of ‘beautiful’ and ‘sublime’ were adapted to suit Australian conditions.

Historians of Australian colonial Romanticisms have emphasised the ‘rocky cliffs, gorges and ravines’ of Australian mountain ranges as the primary site of Romantic appreciation, and Julia Horne argued that Sydney’s Blue Mountains ‘made up a local version of the sublime’ for the first colonials. Sydney Harbour has also been identified as an important site of Romantic appeal, but while it was deemed ‘picturesque’ by some, it was lacking in qualities of the ‘sublime’ when compared to the majestic scale of mountain scenery. There is a wealth of evidence, however, in which Sydney’s ocean beaches were articulated according to the Romantic aesthetic. Far from restricting their Romantic appreciation of the landscape to mountain scenery or Sydney Harbour, colonial Australians and visitors to the colony were delighted by Sydney’s coastal scenery. The ocean beaches were deemed to be especially Romantic in wild weather when they offered a distinctly identifiable show of the raw power and energy of nature. They were also close enough to Sydney that a round trip could be undertaken in the course of a single morning or afternoon’s travel, which was particularly convenient for the time-restricted traveller. As we shall see, Romantics at Sydney beaches could be inspired either by simply looking at the sea, or by walking or trekking along the rugged coast.

Of all of Sydney’s beaches, Coogee was most often promoted as the ideal destination for Romantic tourists. ‘Wedding Cake Island’, a group of rocks not far out from the beach over which the breakers crash, provided a focal point for the contemplation of the power of the ocean at Coogee, although commercial interests undoubtedly also inspired the relentless promotion of the region. Sydney guidebooks consistently urged the visitor to see Coogee purely on account of its physical appeal. It is ‘wild and grand

in the extreme’, claimed one guide, and should ‘on no account be missed’, asserted another. It was especially worth seeing ‘when the fierce winds “blow” and whine, (and) the spray rises in white sheets above the rocky reef’, insisted the *Grosvenor Hotel Visitor’s Guide* in around 1888. At such times, it continued, ‘words and pictures fail to describe its awful grandeur’.

Guided by these descriptions, visitors to Sydney travelled to Coogee to inspect the beachscape, although just as many seem to have gone to Bondi and Manly for the same purpose, suggesting they were motivated by more than purely Romantic inclinations. Most did not spend too much time there; sometimes just long enough to note the ‘crashing’ and ‘dashing’ waves, with the beach inviting less discussion in

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some journals and published travel accounts than the journey there. For most travellers, the beach was nothing more than another tourist site on their itinerary, and appreciating its natural scenery merely a learned way of interpreting the space. Some travellers, though, occasionally spent enough time at the beach to more thoroughly appreciate its romantic appeal, and even to contemplate broader questions, the mind invigorated by the ‘sublimity’ of the scene. Josiah Hughes, an elderly British man holidaying in the Antipodes in 1890, was more moved than most by the display of surf at Coogee beach:

the continuous roar and boom, and far distant murmuring sound of these mighty waves as they broke on the shingly and rock-strewn beach, was very impressive, and filled my mind with a singular sadness and reverence. What power, what grandeur, what sublimity!

While few other travellers reacted so emotively or dramatically to Sydney’s beach scenes, the view of the surf nonetheless remained a key motivation for making the trip to Sydney’s coast.

The romantic appeal of Sydney’s coast featured just as heavily in newspaper descriptions of the beaches as it did the tourist guides, undoubtedly drawing nature loving day-trippers to the coast. In 1876, for example, the Australian Town and Country Journal published an article in which the author was inspired to declare that ‘whomsoever “can find sermons in stones and tongues in running brooks”’, would find the ‘grand chance of fully enjoying that “lonely talk with Heaven”’ at Bondi. He continued: ‘in the presence of the far stretching purple ocean, untamed and untamable … he feels his own littleness, and the awe of the majesty of nature and the might of God’.

An article written about Bronte in the same newspaper later that year evoked

18 Cesary, The Beautiful Countries, pp.188-189; W. F., Notes of a Trip to Tasmania and Australia (Lahore: Civil & Military Gazette Press, 1884), pp.13-14; Fazulbhoy Visram, A Khoja’s Tour in Australia (Bombay: Times of India, 1885), pp.33-34; Five Thousand Miles in the Australian Coast, With 28 Ports of Call, en Route ([Victoria]: Australasian united Steam Navigation Co., Ltd, 1899), p.44.


a similar image. At Bronte, the anonymous author related, "the earth seems to suddenly grow more lovely and heaven seems to come nearer, and the yearning spirit within us seems striving to interpret ... the whisperings of the hidden voices of nature". \(^\text{21}\) Many other contemporary newspaper and journal correspondents depicted the attractions of beach in similar language, describing the 'perfectly appalling' wash, the 'ever dashing' sea, and the 'terribly grand' scene of the coast during a storm. \(^\text{22}\)

There is evidence in some of these more flagrantly Romantic beach descriptions of writers who were consciously and deliberately situating themselves within the conventions of Romanticism. Indeed, there is sometimes quite significant overlap with some of the more prominent poems of the Romantic era. Josiah Hughes, for example, in observing the 'shingly and rock strewn beach' at Coogee, which is in fact a sandy beach, drew a clear comparison with the 'naked shingles' described in Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach*. This poem, an emblematic piece of mid-nineteenth century coastal Romantic poetry, was also echoed in a *Town and Country* article about Coogee, where the 'battle array' of the surf reflected the 'ignorant armies' at Dover. \(^\text{23}\)

Arnold was not the only late Romantic poet whose words and images were echoed and even borrowed by colonial writers and travellers who wrote about Sydney beach scenes. The articles about Bondi and Bronte which were published in the *Australian Town and Country Journal* in 1876 go beyond merely echoing the sentiments of Britain's best known Romantic poets, and interweave sometimes quite extensive citations throughout the text. While reflecting on Bondi, R.A. quoted the poetry of Lord Byron several times, as well as Tennyson and Keats, and he also included some slight misquotations from Shakespeare and the book of Nehemia from the Old Testament. Although he named the author of some of these citations, most went uncited, only the punctuation suggesting he borrowed the words. \(^\text{24}\) Likewise, the meditations over Bronte that were published in December of the same year, and which appear to have been penned by the same author, included lines taken from Tennyson,
Byron and Shelley, among others, and a misquotation from Wordsworth.\(^\text{25}\) The numerous mentions of the ‘purple sea’ at Bronte in this article also quite likely reflect the author’s knowledge of Shelley’s *The Cloud* more than his own interpretation of the beach.

It is revealing that the sentiments of these poets, among the most well known of the Romantic authors, should be so closely evoked in these descriptions of Sydney’s beaches. The *Town and Country* authors of 1876, in particular, appear to have been more intent on demonstrating their extensive knowledge of Romantic poetry, than describing the particular beach scenes they visited, and importantly demanded at least a basic knowledge of the same from their readers. Like Hughes, Wilson and several others, they demonstrated to the reader that they were capable of ‘feeling the finest sentiments of the poet’, consciously situating themselves within the Romantic genre.\(^\text{26}\)

It is possible only to speculate whether even the misquotations were intentional, but in this context it would not be entirely surprising. If contrived misquotations, they suggest to the reader that these writers were relying solely on their extensive although naturally imperfect knowledge of Romantic poetry, rather than merely ploughing through books for inspiration.

Through the tourist guidebooks to Sydney and descriptions of the beaches in other forums, we can see the attractions of the natural elements of the beach being articulated in the second half of the nineteenth century. That these authors were so conscious of situating themselves in the Romantic tradition does not detract from the authenticity of their depictions of the Romantic beach. Rather, their constant references prove the legitimacy of experiencing such emotions and sensations at the beach; they reinforced to everyday beachgoers that appreciation of the natural was a core attraction of Sydney’s beaches. But were these articulations – in the press and Sydney guidebooks – the only manifestation of the romantic aesthetic in Sydney’s beach culture in the second half of the nineteenth century? Romantics in Sydney did not limit themselves to merely observing and writing about the natural beach. Some went further, and attempted to physically experience nature on Sydney’s coast.


Walking on the Romantic beach

A central tenet of European Romanticism was the necessity of experiencing nature, rather than simply viewing it. As Lena Lencek and Gideon Bosker wrote, 'the Romantics worshipped dynamism. They loved to travel and were constantly on the move, scaling mountains, trudging across moors, prowling the seashore'.

Lord Byron was perhaps the most famous for his love of ocean swimming, although it was also endured or enjoyed by others including Percy Shelley and Swinburne. Most who wrote about the Romantic appeal of the beach in nineteenth century Sydney did not immerse themselves in the surf – or at least they did not write about it if they did. But they still managed to find ways of experiencing the natural beach, with walking being the most popular method.

In the mid-nineteenth century, before the beaches of Sydney’s Eastern Suburbs were made accessible by roads, and pathways along the beaches had been cleared, walking to or along Sydney’s coastline was both arduous and challenging, thereby satisfying the Romantic hunger for the treacherous landscape. It took one group of walkers over seven hours to walk from Bondi Beach to South Head, in 1857, a distance of around seven kilometres:

At 9 o’clock at night, with just a few pale stars overhead, we found ourselves still fighting our way through the dense scrub about a mile from the lighthouse. We were up to our hips in water; our precious face and fingers were most gloriously lacerated with the burrs and brambles; our nether integuments were thickly perforated with the rigid barbs of the grass tree.

This unidentified writer apparently derived no pleasure from negotiating the coastal walk, finding it ‘so fraught with fears and dangers that no-one but a Borrow or a Livingstone would care to take it more than once in a lifetime’. Rather than describing the walk or scenery in depth, they spent most of the article reflecting on the demonic nature of the sea, which fed ‘her “white flames” on the souls of men’. At

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27 Lencek and Bosker, The Beach, pp.99-100.
28 Lencek and Bosker, The Beach, pp.98-103.
30 ‘Sydney and its Suburbs: Bondi’.
night, they continued, ‘the waves shoot up like flame, and seethe and smoke in the
wild vortex of the inferno’, and the pebbles which are caught in the surf ‘shriek
demonically, or seem to be borne down with a low despairing wail’.  

Such dramatic descriptions reflect public sentiment in the period immediately
following the tragic wreck of the Dunbar against The Gap just south of South Head in
1857, from which there was only one survivor. They also reflect medieval fears of the
ocean as unknown; although by the nineteenth century, such fears were beginning to
be replaced by a celebration of the wonders of the ocean – due largely to the
Romantic influence.  

But the ‘glorious lacerations’ that were suffered on this
extremely difficult walk signify a Romantic endurance of the elements, even if this
was not overtly celebrated elsewhere in the writing.

A decade later, F S Wilson strode out for Bondi from South Head, and wrote about
his experiences on this same, still very rough track. He, too, spent several pages
dwelling on the ‘wild night at sea’ when the Dunbar ‘lay gashed and grinding in the
frightful turmoil; and the shrieks of the dying, the wild scream of the sea birds, and
the roar of the tempest, mingled in one direful midnight medley!’  

But since a decade had passed since these events, the writer was more easily able to abandon
contemplation of the wreck, and enjoy elements of the walk and cliff-scenery. Although Wilson also found the walk to be ‘toilsome’, and more a ‘scramble’ than a
ramble, unlike his predecessor his experience of the track was ‘rendered pleasant by
the bright sky overhead, the healthy salt wind blowing lusty and strong from the
ocean, and the sonorous boom of the breakers beneath the cliffs’.  

At Bondi beach, Wilson was soon moved to contemplation, declaring that the white
of the foamy surf ‘challenge[s] art to compare with it for purity’. Later he described
the way ‘our feelings for the beautiful have been stirred by the grandeur around us’.

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32 Corbin, The Lure of the Sea. See also Caroline Ford, ‘Squads of brown men in defiance of the
undertow and lurking sharks’: the rhetoric of fear and danger on Sydney beaches’ (Unpublished
paper, University of Sydney: 2002).
33 F.S. Wilson, ‘Loose Leaves from an Australian’s Portfolio: Along the Coast’, Colonial Monthly;
(September 1867), p.20.
34 Wilson, ‘Loose Leaves from an Australian’s Portfolio’, p.23.
eyed, warm-lipped partners’ of his boyish rambles, hinting at an interesting link between Romantic landscape and ‘romance’. Wilson shared with Hughes a sense of inspiration from the majesty and ‘grandeur’ of nature at the beach, and yet his writing encompassed a further element of Romanticism which Hughes’ did not. That is, rather than merely gazing at nature, Wilson physically experienced it. As Miles Jebb wrote, ‘walking was the best means of comprehending for oneself the cult of nature ... Effort, attention and sensory experience were all desirable ingredients, and walking provided them all’. Walking along Sydney’s coast, whether battling the coastal winds or fighting through scrubs and traversing cliffs, beachgoers endured a more physical experience of the beach environment than that which could be gained by merely picnicking or sitting on the beach on an ordinary day.

Another mid-century walker who deemed a coastal hike a worthwhile experience despite the hardships of the track interpreted the journey in a slightly different way. This anonymous rambler walked from Bondi’s south head to Nelson Bay in 1858, and subsequently described a familiar mixture of emotional satisfaction and physical hardship in the journey. The first few miles were described as ‘invigorating’, but soon the ‘rugged rocks, the tangled masses of scrub, the numerous ups and downs ... drive the poetry – for a while, at least – out of the traveller’s mind’. Fortunately, however, ‘repose is near’, and the writer’s brain was ‘soothed’ at the sight of the beach and sea. For this writer, the chief pleasure of the day lay in the destination; the walk itself was tiresome and difficult, and only allayed when, in sight of beach, he allowed himself to rest and gaze at the view. Wilson, too, had enjoyed the destination far more than the walk, but he placed more emphasis on the walk as imperative to his beach experience.

These writers all agreed that walking was more than just a way of getting to the beach; it was an event on its own. That Wilson and his companions walked only one


37 It is entirely possible that this was the same contributor who walked from Bondi to South Head in 1857, but difficult to be certain.

leg of their journey, and returned to Sydney by ‘bus, demonstrates that walking was specifically chosen, at least on this occasion, for its own distinct experience. The same was implied by The Month correspondent of 1857. All three writer-walkers were distinctly aware of, and drew on, their identity as walkers in the coastal landscape. Regardless of whether they actually enjoyed their walks, the difficulty of the terrain, and its status as pure wilderness made the ramble inherently ‘Romantic’. The even wilder backdrop of ocean and cliffs only served to enhance this. By using this environment as a setting for contemplation, whether of the terror of the ocean or the beauty of Bronte Bay, these walkers consciously placed themselves in the tradition of Romantic writing.

Corbin argued that in Europe, the new ‘intimacy between the walker and the elements’ followed the era in which the ocean was purely spectacle, only to be gazed at, and roughly coincided with the period which saw some Romantics dive into the sea. However, since all this occurred in Europe before Sydney’s beaches were popularised, there was no such chronological distinction in Australia. If anything, the ‘sensual’ walk preceded mass gazing at the sea, as it was virtually all that was possible at the popular beaches before they were transformed with benches and cleared walkways. But even despite this transformation of Sydney’s coastal landscape, walking remained a popular mode for viewing and experiencing the coastal landscape, and continues to be a primary element of Sydney’s beach culture – and some of the most popular coastal walks remain difficult and even dangerous in places, adding to their appeal. That walking – even by those who do not necessarily associate with the Romantics – offers an opportunity for escape, and for ‘physical, moral and spiritual renewal’, itself provides a strong link between casual walkers at the beach and these early Romantic walkers. The popular perception that walking along the coast offers unique opportunities for breathing fresh ocean air also reminds us of the link between nature and health at the beach.

Popular conceptions of the Romantic beach

Like walking, appreciation of the natural beach was not limited to those who were able to articulate Romantic sensibilities through publications. As we have seen,  

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tourists to Sydney were directed by their guide books to observe the natural features of the city’s beaches specifically. The natural elements of the beach were also important to residents of Sydney who took day-trips to the beach. Most notably, the natural beach provided an aesthetically pleasing backdrop to the social activities which many beachgoers were otherwise occupied with. Their experiences, while perhaps less articulated, were no less sincere or authentic than those of the Romantic walkers and contributors to the Sydney press described above.

Figure 7.2: The romantic appeal of Sydney’s ocean beaches was even noted by artists of popular magazines such as The Bulletin.
It is not surprising that day-trippers from suburban Sydney would share with tourists an appreciation of the natural beach, given that Romanticism had become part of the common discourse regarding the viewing of nature by the Victorian era. And this is also not unique to the Australian colonies. By the late nineteenth century, Romantic ways of viewing and valuing landscape and seascapes had become the norm for many European residents and travellers in particular. Anne Wallace writes that the suffusion of what she calls ‘Wordsworthianism’ into Victorian culture was necessarily an unconscious process, and that ‘his representations and precepts now seemed “natural”, obvious, not constructed by Wordsworth but fundamental to human experience’. While they have differing opinions as to exactly how conscious or unconscious this really was, many scholars agree that nineteenth century tourists were ‘schooled to appreciate’ the sublime and the beautiful, just as non-travellers ‘learned’ a taste for landscape. Indeed, according to Solnit, ‘to display a correct taste in landscape was a valuable social accomplishment quite as much as to sing well, or to compose a polite letter’. But it became more than simply a middle-class attribute as aesthetic appreciation of a range of sceneries became part of the norm for many in late Victorian Sydney.

It was in this context that most visitors to Sydney beaches spent time gazing at the sea and cliffs, and some later wrote about them. Perhaps the majority of beachgoers during this period were completely unselfconscious in their appreciation of the scenery. But we can see the influence of the Romantic approach to nature – and in particular the centrality of God within nature as articulated by German Romantics – in the practice of holding open-air Christmas Church services at the beach. These services, which were an ‘institution’ of Coogee by the mid 1890s, allowed and perhaps even encouraged local Christians to find God in nature – although they were

44 McCalman, p.1.
perhaps equally an attempt to reach those who preferred the beach to church.\textsuperscript{45} We can also see the Romantic influence on those who gazed out to sea from the beach – a normal part of any time spent at or near the beach captured in the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} in 1882 when it described 'some finding pleasure in watching the ever-changing breezy pacific with perhaps a book for a companion'.\textsuperscript{46} Furthermore, a battering by strong sea-winds could allow the non-walking non-swimming beachgoer to experience the elements in a physical way. This perhaps explains the disappointment of a traveller by the name of W.F., who travelled to Coogee but 'owing to the day being beautifully fine and sea calm ... did not see it to perfection'.\textsuperscript{47} Although this traveller seems to have made no effort to walk through the landscape or dive into the surf, he nonetheless believed it possible to experience the pure wildness of the ocean from the shore, and was disappointed by his inability to do so.

Those beachgoers who wrote about their experiences also adopted Romantic language to articulate what they saw. Many of the accounts of Bondi, Coogee and Manly incorporated terms which had by then become part of the everyday discourse of admiring scenery. Beach scenes were 'grand', 'picturesque', 'wild', 'rugged' and 'beautiful', and the waves 'dashed' violently, were 'lashed' by winds and 'crashed' against the shore. Hipple argued that through increased usage, the original meanings of the word 'picturesque' inevitably became vaguer, and the word accordingly came to represent a variety of meanings.\textsuperscript{48} This is certainly evident in the context of late nineteenth century beach descriptions, where 'picturesque' was frequently deployed to describe both wild and calm scenes. The same could be said for the initially specific connotations of 'sublime', a term which was eventually drawn on to describe the surf generally in Sydney more than a century after it was defined so specifically by Burke.\textsuperscript{49}

The widespread adoption of these terms and images when describing Sydney's ocean beaches demonstrates the extent to which the ideals of Romanticism were by now


\textsuperscript{46} SMH 3 January 1882, p.6.

\textsuperscript{47} W.F., \textit{Notes of a Trip}, p.13.

\textsuperscript{48} Hipple, \textit{The Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque}, p.188.

\textsuperscript{49} Hughes, \textit{Australia Revisited; Sydney Mail}, 3 November 1860, p.2.
understood among general audiences. Just as working-class visitors to Blackpool had 'derived enormous pleasure from watching the sea in a dangerous mood', so too were the surf and the endless sea a key attraction of the beach for Sydney beachgoers.\(^{50}\)

In the opening years of the twentieth century, surf bathing became incorporated into the natural spectacle of the beach. It became integrated into the existing Romantic aesthetic of Sydney's beach culture in two ways. Firstly, surf bathers acted in the tradition of Byron when they submitted themselves to the power and will of the ocean. Although many perhaps fell short of 'being transformed in some fundamental way by their immersions at the beach', the implications of experiencing this thrill of nature did not escape them.\(^{51}\) In 1907, Samuel Mills wrote of 'surf shooting', a specific form of surf bathing now known as body surfing:

> Every man who tries the game voices it as one of the best methods devised by nature for entertaining and invigorating her children. It is the sensation and the triumph, that game of cavorting down the face of the wave, that trick of beating it all the time, the delight of being shot like a bolt to the accompaniment of Nature's music, the crash and thunder of the billow.\(^{52}\)

In direct connection to the Romantic aesthetic, one modern Australian bodysurfer even described the sensation as 'sublime': 'despite the waves pounding, it is a sublime feeling, a sense of freedom and exhilaration knowing that I can still surf a big wave to its limits'.\(^{53}\) The intrinsic dangers of surf bathing – of drowning or of being attacked by a shark – which were embraced by some of the early surf bathers also placed them in the tradition of European Romanticism.

Secondly, observers of surf bathing were also thrilled by the sight of people in the surf; in the early twentieth century, the site of the beach spectacle for both visitors to,

\(^{50}\) Walton, *Blackpool Landlady*, p.44.

\(^{51}\) Lencek and Bosker, *The Beach*, p.104.

\(^{52}\) Samuel A Mills, 'Shooting the breakers', *Sydney Mail* (Seaside Number), 7 March 1906, p.606.

and residents of Sydney, consequently shifted in part from the violence of the waves to the performance of humans on and in those waves.\textsuperscript{54} The strong role of the Romantic 'gaze' was consequently maintained throughout this period, but with a specific focal point for the contemplation of the power of the ocean. As the \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} saw it, surf bathers became 'active participators in the scene.'\textsuperscript{55}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{The image on the cover of the Sydney Mail's 'Seaside Number' in 1906 portrayed the surf bather at one with the ocean.}
\end{figure}

In both these ways, the Romantic ethic, and in particular the fascination with and respect for nature which it preached, was not abandoned in a 'new' culture of the surf. Rather, the Romantic aesthetic was inherent to the cult of the surf – and the Romantic

\textsuperscript{54} See, for example, \textit{To Australia, And What we Found There} (London: Hill & Dale, 1912), pp.41-42; H. Hemmer, 'The Surf: Manly and the Beaches of the Old World', \textit{The Lone Hand}, 1 January 1915, pp.87-91.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{SMH}, 26 September 1911, p.7.
ways of appreciating the beach continued to underpin Sydney’s twentieth century beach culture.

Conclusions
We can see then, through one strand of Australian attitudes to the beach, a familiarity with the ideas and language of Romanticism as it had been practised in Europe up to a century earlier. But do we see a distinctive understanding of the beach emerging? Certainly a Romantically influenced appreciation of nature was intrinsic to most Western beach cultures by the close of the nineteenth century; but nature played a greater role at the everyday Sydney beach than many other prominent beaches around the world because Sydney’s beaches were marked more by the ‘natural’. On Bondi, Coogee and Manly, the most used and populated beaches, large-scale construction had been limited to seawalls and promenade paths – and often these did not extend the length of the beach. These beaches provided a stark contrast to the heavily constructed coastlines of Britain, America and even the Riviera, which were bordered by hotels, amenities and entertainment sites; structures which overwhelmed the natural beach.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, the importance of nature to Sydney beachgoers, which grew out of the Romantic aesthetic as it was practised on the beach, informed attitudes towards the beach space itself, and the ways in which it should be used: the campaigns against both sand mining and the erection of artificial entertainment structures at Manly were both at least partly attempts to preserve the natural beach physically, and the natural beach vista. The cult of nature also underpinned the extensive campaign for foreshore ‘rights’. But the natural environment was not the only aesthetic appeal of Sydney’s ocean beaches. As we shall see in chapter eight, the perception that the beach was an inherently healthy place – a concept which was closely related to and interconnected with the Romantic aesthetic – was equally articulated as central to the appeal of the beach during the period under study.
The musical roar of the surf at Manly sounds sweetly in the ears of the tired citizen at the close of a long day's work in a depressing, confined atmosphere; just as soothing to the nerves, too, as pleasing to the ear, is the ceaseless murmur. And how the spirits are revived by the deep, deep draughts of ozone, and what an appeal is made to the higher physical activities of natural manhood, which are apt to lie in a semi-dormant state at this period of the year. The advice is common enough to complaining Sydneyites. 'Go to Manly'. When you are ailing and you are dissatisfied with your appetite ... a brown complexioned surfer will pat you on the back and say 'Go to Manly', and the same advice is freely tendered to the old and feeble, who long for a dash of the spice of their former juvenility.  

[Surf shooters] are the embodiment of exultant and triumphant health and strength.  

The portrayal of the beach as inherently healthy has been a constant element of Sydney's beach culture since the ocean beaches were first visited by Europeans. In the nineteenth century, this healthiness rested on two foundations: ocean 'ozone' and a sense of 'escape' from everyday life. Between 1904 and 1920, the healthy beach underwent a substantial transformation, as the surf and sun became increasingly articulated as the primary sources of that health. 

Australian beach historians have agreed that health played a primary role in the shaping of Australia's beach culture. They point to the links between this culture and the construction of the British seaside as healthy in the eighteenth century, and also note the use of 'health' in attempts to justify surf and sun bathing in the early twentieth century. Historians of Australian eugenics have also highlighted a link between the healthy beach and the emergence of the surf bather as the 'Australian

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2 SMH 1 May 1909, p.5.  
3 Huntsman, Sand in Our Souls, pp.30, 70-74; Booth, Australian Beach Cultures, pp.23-25, 32-35, 42-44.
But the local evolution of the concept of the healthy beach has not been explored in and of itself. This chapter is devoted to an exploration of the construction of the Sydney beach as inherently healthy. What were the elements of the beach which made it so healthy? And to what extent was the popular perception of the healthy beach supported by medical science? This chapter also considers the connection between the healthy beach and the construction of the beach as a national asset—and of the surf bather as the national type—in the early twentieth century. Did this articulation of the 'national' beach emerge out of an internationally distinct beach culture, or was it a tool for nation building which overlooked the derivative elements of Sydney’s beach culture?

The healthy seaside

The popular designation of the beach as a healthy place originated at the British seaside, which largely came to prominence in the eighteenth century following the publication of Dr Richard Russell’s *Dissertation on the use of seawater in diseases of the glands*, which was translated into English in 1754. Historians of the British seaside agree that Russell’s ideas were not original, but rather expanded on theories which had been developing throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, and which themselves had origins in even earlier publications. Regardless of whether the popularisation of sea bathing was ‘part of a logical evolution in experience’, as Corbin argued, or began in specific response to Russell’s publication, it is clear that the widespread distribution of Russell’s work led to the large scale adoption of his recommendations: in the second half of the eighteenth century, British doctors increasingly sent their patients to the sea, and other invalids went there voluntarily, to bathe in the cold water, drink up to a pint of it a day, and even to be massaged with ‘freshly collected seaweed’.

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4 Rodwell, ‘The Sense of Victorious Struggle’.
5 Robert Burton referred to health of ‘the sharp, purifying air that blows from the sea’ in 1621. Floyer had examined the benefits of cold water bathing in 1701 and 1702, for example, and Dr Wittie had advised patients to bathe in the sea at Scarborough in the seventeenth century. Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, pp.57-69; Howell, *The Seaside*, p.14; Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*, p11; Walvin, *Beside the Seaside*, p.16.
By the nineteenth century, increasing emphasis was being placed on the quality of the sea air over the ‘merits’ of the water. 7 This faith in the healthiness of ocean air gained further credence from theories of ‘miasma’ and air-born diseases. According to Bruce Haley, doctors in Victorian England ‘increasingly turned to hygiene and the res non-naturales – air, water, food, sleep – as the basis of their therapeutics’. 8 By this time, the aesthetic qualities and moralising effects of the seaside were also understood to be important elements of the benefits of the seaside to an urban population. 9 The health of the seaside was no longer attributable to a single source, but to a variety of factors which were understood to be working in unison to maximise the benefits. Corbin argued that by the time European railroads reached some parts of the coast in the 1840s, ‘the image of the beach started to blur, the myths became confused, and the stereotypes piled up in disorderly rivalry’. 10

It is in this context that the Sydneysiders of the nineteenth century understood their local beaches. Beachgoers were not dictated by strict medical regimens, and bathing was not ‘something beneficial and rather nasty to be got over before breakfast and the pleasures of the day’, as Howell described the practices at the eighteenth century British seaside. 11 Rather, as with older British health resorts the beach was primarily a place of pleasure – but this pleasure was justified by the faith of beachgoers in the healthiness of their location, a belief supported by extensive medical and scientific publications, both in Britain and Australia.

**Sydney beaches as health resorts**

In nineteenth century Sydney, there were two main elements of the articulation of the healthy beach: firstly, the beach was understood to be healthy by virtue of the ocean air, and secondly by its offer of physical escape from the ‘unhealthy’ urban environment. The first of these stemmed from the discourse of seaside health developed in Britain over the past century; the second had closer ties to the parks movement of the nineteenth century – but together, they created a convincing

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10 Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, p.72.
argument for the health of the beach. The healthy elements of salt water — initially articulated as the chief source of health at the British seaside — were largely neglected in nineteenth century Sydney. Certainly drinking salt water, which had by now faded from British seaside practices, played no part in Sydney’s beach culture, and bathing in ocean baths, though undoubtedly a regular activity at the beach by the 1880s, was rarely discussed. Nineteenth century discussions of the healthy beach consequently concentrated on the benefits of the sea air; the changing perception of the health benefits of the beach meant the concept that bathing was healthy had to be largely relearned by Australians in the twentieth century.

The occasional medical texts which analysed or discussed the Australian seaside in the mid-Victorian era emphasised the healthy qualities of the ocean air. Isaac Baker Brown Jnr, the assistant surgeon to the London Surgical home, described the benefits of Australia for the ‘consumptive invalid’ in 1865. While he argued a sea voyage was far more beneficial than a trip to the seaside, he nonetheless recommended the latter, on account of the ozone and iodine to which ‘sea air owes some of its most health giving properties’. Ludwig Bruck, in his 1888 Guide to the Health Resorts of Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand, a comprehensive and scientific guide to spas and medical waters, closely echoed some of the medical texts of late eighteenth century Britain when he specified the source of the health in sea air:

The sea air and the air at the sea-side are influenced by the constant evaporation from the sea, and also by the temperature of the sea. Owing to these circumstances the sea air generally contains more moisture and is more equable in temperature, the summer being less hot and the winter less cold at the seaside ... A very important fact is the comparative purity of the sea-air from organic admixture and inorganic dust, while

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12 Baths were not provided until the 1880s on the eastern beaches south of the harbour, and even then, their proprietors did not advertise their health benefits. Manly was alone in advertising their baths in the context of health, although crucially they were harbour, not ocean baths. Waverley Council Minutes, 1880-1890; Randwick Council Minutes, 1880-1894; SMH 20 July 1859, p.1. For more on the provision of Harbour baths, see Huntsman, pp.32-34.


14 Lencek and Bosker, The Beach, p.79.
the presence of a greater or less amount of saline particles cannot be regarded as a disadvantage. The amount of ozone is greater; that of carbonic acid smaller ... 15

He recommended Manly and Coogee, among a number of other ‘sea-side health resorts’, for the treatment of ‘various nervous disorders, also for insomnia, anaemia, scrofula, impotence, phthisis, hysteria, blennorrhoea, lencorrhoea, and other diseases’. 16 The positioning of the Coast Hospital at Little Bay, which was opened in 1881 amid a smallpox epidemic but soon catered to patients with other infectious diseases, was a practical manifestation of this medical consensus that ocean air was beneficial rather than detrimental to invalids. 17 By the turn of the century, there was some debate over the medicinal benefits of ocean air as it related to specific ailments, and Australian doctors were starting to question the extent of its value. 18 But the popular faith in the health of sea-air was not diminished.

In addition to highlighting the importance of the air, some medical texts hinted at the health benefits people may receive at the seaside by virtue of it being an ‘escape’ from normal life. Such theories grew in part from medical opinion which suggested that disease stemmed from deficiencies in air, food and exercise, and that, by implication, improvements in these areas would lead to improvements in general health, which as we have seen, also inspired the parks movement. 19 While not talking specifically

16 Bruck, Guide to the Health Resorts, p.145.
17 The isolation of the hospital was equally, if not more important than its coastal location. Clement Boughton, A Coast Chronicle: The History of the Prince Henry Hospital (Sydney: The Board of the Prince Henry Hospital, 1963), pp.1-18; Lynch and Larcombe, Randwick, p.136; Nugent, Botany Bay, p.44.
about the beach, Baker Brown identified this value of change of scenery in his 1865
guide:

What a benefit even one day in the country will prove to a
man continually at work in London... How it enlivens and
invigorates a young person living a monotonous rural life to
pay a short visit to the excitement and bustle of the metropolis.
We may say, without multiplying instances, that change, per-
se, is of enormous advantage to almost every chronic or sub-
acute disease... Change, then, is so often the thing needed –
change of scene, change of occupation, change of air. 20

Doctors and social commentators applied this idea in their promotions of the seaside
as a site of ‘escape’. In the context of the beach, there were two elements which were
understood to contribute to the healthy benefits of ‘escape’, or of changing scene. The
first of these was physical – the ‘fresh’ air of the seaside was juxtaposed against the
apparently polluted urban environment; the city was associated with crowds, dirt and
dust, in distinction to the open, unpopulated seaside. 21 By ‘escaping’ the congested
and polluted city, beachgoers experienced a healthier environment.

Secondly, the less medically grounded concept of ‘rejuvenation’ was also promoted as
a crucial by-product of this escape. It was claimed that by temporarily moving from
the scene of daily life – whether it be the city or country – and engaging in outdoor
leisure activities, one’s body and mind would be rejuvenated, and recharged for work
upon return. 22 In mid-nineteenth century America, these ideas were already
underpinning attitudes towards the holiday. By the 1850s, according to Cindy Aron,
‘mental and spiritual renewal were becoming as important as physical regeneration.
Taking a vacation would make the businessman not only healthier, but more fit for his
daily tribulation’. 23 By the turn of the twentieth century, this was a common theme in

Health*, p.77.
23 Aron, *Working at Play*, p.34.
writings about the beach, as was demonstrated in The Town and Country Journal in 1900:

For the toil worn citizen no change is so pleasant and beneficial as that which takes him from the noise of the crowded streets and their dusty, heated atmosphere to the rest and quiet and health-bearing breezes of the seashore ... the Sydney resident renews his energies by a day at one or other of our ocean beaches...  

So how did the Sydney beach – close to the urban centre as it was – fit into the industrial discourse which traditionally juxtaposed the crowded, dirty, noisy city against the tranquility, open spaces and fresh air of the countryside? While in terms of its open spaces and supposed unpolluted air, the beach may have resembled the countryside, it did not merely sit alongside the country – and opposite the metropolis – in this dichotomy. Rather, the people of the country, together with their urban cousins, saw the beach as a place of escape from the hardships, the physical and emotional strains of their lives. The beach consequently occupied a space of its own: it was differentiated from both country and city, as a place of leisure, of universal escape, and a source of mental and physical rejuvenation. Such ideals built upon and extended the established sense of the beach as a healthy place.

**Popular representations of the beach as ‘healthy’**

As Corbin suggested had occurred in Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century, in Sydney, the concepts of rejuvenation, healthy air and ‘escape’ merged to create a popular belief that the beach was intrinsically and irrefutably healthy. Throughout the second half of the century, observers and promoters of Sydney’s most popular beaches drew on and constantly reminded their readers of these elements of the healthy beach. But even before the development of seaside resorts, we can see the importance of health to decisions to live by the beach for Sydney’s earliest coastal settlers in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

24 *Town and Country Journal*, 8 December 1900, p.31. See also Gould, *Town and Bush*, p.74; *Sydney Mail*, 7 January 1903, p.25.
Robert White declared his ‘large, young and sickly family’ to be the reason for applying for land at Coogee in 1837 before the area was gazetted, hoping they would receive ‘the benefit of the air’ by living on the coast. 26 Robert and Georgiana Lowe’s decision to live close to Nelson Bay was also likely driven partly by a desire for improved health for the near-blind albino. 27 And health was also crucial to Henry Gilbert Smith’s affection for Manly, as evidenced by the letter he sent his brother John, within two years of his first purchases in the region, in which he wrote that his health was ‘better than it has been for years.’ He attributed this to spending most of his time away from Sydney, and also to ‘the amusement I derive in making my improvements at Manly’. 28 This improved health was a significant step for a man whose physical condition was continually challenged while in the colony, and who at different times had taken to bathing and horse-riding in efforts to improve it. 29 Smith’s promotion of the health benefits of spending time at Manly were therefore not merely a means of advertising, but something he had a personal commitment to.

In the same decade, Thomas Mitchell requested public space at Bondi beach specifically for the purpose of creating an area for ‘health and recreation’, and the same was implied in the coastal councils’ subsequent demands for such space, and improved facilities and means of transport to the coast. 30 The 1880 petition for the reservation of Bronte beach articulated the otherwise largely undefined public desire for recreational space along the coast, when it referred to the beach’s ‘very great sanitary advantage to the immediate neighbourhood [and] to great numbers of visitors and others’. 31

Despite the rhetoric, health was not the primary motive for moving to the coast in most of these cases. As we have seen, the Lowes were initially attracted to position and landscape of Bronte, and Smith was driven by the financial potential of Manly.

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26 Robert White to Surveyor General, 20 March 1837, SRNSW: CGS 905 [37/4157], with bundle 38/10878, box 4/2431.1.
28 Smith to John, 4 June 1855, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, p.45
29 Smith to parents, 23 December 1828; to mother, 3 December 1835, Letters of Henry Gilbert Smith, pp.6-7, 18.
31 Petition to Under Secretary for Lands, 12 January 1880, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [80/510], with bundle 85/15232, box 10/3641. Emphasis added.
And it is difficult to know whether White was driven purely by perceptions of health, or saw economic potential in the unsurveyed land at Coogee like Smith did at Manly two decades later. Finally, while Mitchell may have legitimately seen the health benefits of making Bondi accessible to residents of the city, it is likely the residents of Bronte were concerned more about the loss of recreational space than a healthy space specifically. Nonetheless, the popular belief in the health of the seaside gave these residents a tool for legitimising their purchases and, in the case of White, desires. It similarly offered promoters a familiar and effective tool for attracting visitors to the beaches.

Manly was the first of Sydney’s ocean beach localities to be promoted as a ‘healthy’ place, and locals relied heavily on this tag to attract the first tourists. As early as 1855, it was being visited by ‘invalids and others seeking health and sea bathing’, according to an advertisement for the Pier Hotel. Proprietors were quick to establish health as a central attraction of Manly: it could be attained either through the sea baths which had been erected on the harbour side of the peninsula, or by exposure to the bracing sea air. Philip Cohen, new lessee of the Pier Hotel in 1857, declared that

For natural beauty, romantic scenery, and salubrity of air [Manly] unquestionably stands unrivalled in Australia. In proof of the beneficial results already obtained by many invalids who have sought this locality for its invigorating air and delightful sea-side walks, the whole of the most eminent medical practitioners in Sydney invariably recommend to their patients Manly Beach, in preference to any other watering place in the colony.

Within a year the suburb boasted hot and cold sea water and vapour baths, which, as ‘the most effectual cure for colds, rheumatism, and cutaneous diseases’ were directly aimed at invalids and health-seekers.

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32 SMH 5 December 1855, p.1. This advertisement was likely written by Gilbert Smith.
33 SMH 27 May 1857, p.6.
34 SMH 8 November 1858, p.1; 20 July 1859, p.1.
Sydney’s tourist guidebooks re-enforced these claims of the natural healthiness of Manly, informing their readers that pleasure seekers leave dusty streets ‘to breathe the invigorating sea-air at Manly Beach’, and that at Manly, the boarding houses were full with people ‘seeking to recruit their health and strength’. Edward Towers, a visitor to the colony travelling in search of improved health, consequently visited Manly, as well as Coogee. And special articles in the local press adopted this imported rhetoric, declaring that Manly offered ‘unusual facilities for this recuperation of energies’. Manly residents were said to be ‘men of business’, who ‘are glad, when eve returns, to escape from the worry and care of office work, and enjoy the health-giving breezes of the Pacific, removed entirely from the heat and oppressiveness of the pent-up city’. Country visitors to Manly ‘can obtain in abundance the health-giving ozone of the ocean, besides the advantage of a thorough change of scenery to what they are accustomed in the country districts’, and it was also reportedly beneficial to the ‘overworked citizens in habit of seeking health and relaxation from the heat and dust’. The fashion for referring to Manly as ‘our colonial Brighton’, which emerged in the 1860s, is a further nod to the healthiness associated with that famous English seaside resort.

Promoters and observers of Coogee and Bondi soon echoed these claims of Manly, the Illustrated Sydney News declaring in 1883 that at Coogee, one could ‘drink’ the ‘pure ocean air as it is blown over thousands of leagues of the Pacific’. Several years later, the Bondi Aquarium and Pleasure Grounds proclaimed itself to be ‘a haven for the weary, and the very spot for seeking pleasure, health and recreation’. In the early twentieth century, the popularisation of Maroubra saw similar rhetoric employed to...
describe that location, with the *Evening News* declaring it to be ‘a paradise for weary humanity’.43

The authoritative nature of the colonial and British medical texts discussed earlier enabled these sorts of claims to be so easily made, and more importantly, accepted and understood by the general population. They served the dual purpose of reinforcing existing attitudes towards the seaside, and transplanting British guides into the Australian context. They also legitimised the claims being made by promoters of such resorts as Manly and Coogee, as well as justifying day-trips to the beach on health and moral grounds.

The healthy surf

By the start of the twentieth century, a concept of health was firmly embedded in both the language and popular understanding of the beach in Sydney. As surf bathing quickly gained in popularity at Manly, Coogee and Bondi in the early years of the new century, the prominence of health within the rhetoric of the beach did not disappear, but surf bathing came to be incorporated into the existing discourse as an additional and even superior source of health. Because water had been established as a source of health at the British seaside – even if not heavily promoted on Sydney’s ocean coast in the nineteenth century – the new discourse of the health of surf bathing was easily accepted. Even those who opposed the activity on moral grounds did not refute its health benefits. That surf bathing was a healthy recreation was a logical extension of earlier promotions of the beach as a healthy place.

Like the promoters of coastal suburbs had done in the mid-nineteenth century, surf bathing advocates adopted the language of health as a tool to justify and gain legitimacy for their favourite pastime. They referred to the medicinal benefits of cold sea water which were heavily promoted in eighteenth century Britain, and implied that the ‘buffeting’ waves somehow enhanced this healthy quality. They pointed to the sun and sea air which surf bathers were necessarily exposed to at the beach, ‘the glory of this soulless vitality of nature’, which added the healthiness of the pastime.44 And they

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43 *Evening News*, 5 November 1909 (from Watson’s Clippings, Mitchell Library).
portrayed opponents to surf bathing as sinister individuals who were interfering with the health of future generations of Australians.

As early as 1902, surf bathing was said to have a ‘bracing tonic effect’, and by 1905, surf bathing was regularly labelled as ‘healthy’ in the columns of Sydney press and in letters to newspaper editors.\(^{45}\) Thos. Allridge declared that ‘if people of Sydney would bathe more there would be far less sickness and infectious diseases in our midst’, and H.L.P, blaming drowning victims for their own fate, wrote of ‘the healthful and cleanly indulgence [of] surf bathing’, which was ‘without a doubt the best and most healthful of all sports’.\(^ {46}\) In 1907, ‘Bather no. 1’ declared that ‘personally I am in better health, and so are all my children, for sea-bathing than we have been for years past’.\(^ {47}\)

As with the sea air in the nineteenth century, the surf was said to ‘invigorate’ the surf bather; the language of the health of the surf therefore lay as much, if not more, in its apparent rejuvenating capacity as in its scientifically identifiable medicinal properties. Many recognised this, including Dr John Kellogg, the American surgeon, health reformer and cereal manufacturer who admitted that sea bathing was ‘empirical and unscientific’, but nonetheless argued it was ‘a wonderfully beneficial form of hydrotherapy’.\(^ {48}\) Others were relentless in their promotion. In 1910, Arthur Relph wrote that ‘the surf is nature’s remedy for the slackened constitution’, and only three years later, surfing was proclaimed to be an ‘unfailing anodyne for the heat and the worries of the city’.\(^ {49}\) A report in 1911 listed the benefits which may be received:

> It has taken hold of the sedentary men and women workers of the community and lifted them into a new way of living. It has given robust health to legions who never before knew what it

\(^{45}\) Letter to the editor, *SMH* 27 March 1902, p.6.


\(^{47}\) Letter to the editor, *SMH* 2 January 1907, p.4.


\(^{49}\) *SMH* 12 November 1910, p.7; 10 January 1913, p.5.
was to be really well and fit. To go surfing is to enjoy a holiday in the fullest sense of the term. It costs nothing, brings the depressed man and woman into a scene of light-hearted, infectious gaiety, and acts as a stimulating nerve tonic the like of which has never been known.\

An article in the women’s page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1914 identified similar benefits in the surf, describing the way surfers ‘emerge with some of the strength of old ocean invigorating their limbs and heartening up their minds and spirits.’\

A 1910 endorsement of the healthy beach by the Premier, Charles Wade, demonstrated the extent to which health had become part of the mainstream rhetoric of the beach within less than a decade. ‘There was no better tonic for the weary man, and no better form of exercise to develop the muscular, courageous and other qualities of young men,’ he declared. James Ashton, the Minister for Lands, had earlier cited his own experience of the ‘advantages derivable’ from surf bathing, declaring that ‘owing to heavy Parliamentary duties, his nerves had suffered, but a course of battling with the breakers completely restored him to his natural condition’.\

We can see from these references that by the close of the first decade of the twentieth century, the articulation of the health of surf bathing had become part of the everyday lexicon of the beach — like perceptions of the healthy air in the nineteenth century, it was no longer a tool for justification but part of the celebration of the activity.

**The healthy beach in perspective**

In the tradition of the language of health, the beach came to take on almost mystical powers of well-being. A 1906 fictional short story described the way women at the seaside mistake a love ‘with nature, with the sun, the sea, the skies, the picturesque shores’ for a love for ‘some human being’. The beach then offered these women a way of renewing their lives:

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50 *SMH* 26 September 1911, p.7.  
51 *SMH* 28 October 1914, p.7.  
52 *SMH* 20 June 1910, p.10.  
53 *SMH* 11 March 1907, p.6.
We fight against truth year after year, until our hearts are worn out with disappointment and suffering... Then we come back again to the sea for sustenance, for hope, for rejuvenation. We listen again to its wooing and crooning, and if our hearts have been deeply wounded we mingle the salt of our tears with the salt of its waves and spray. And, too tired to think or to resist, we give ourselves up once more to the hot and bounteous caresses of the sun. And the sun that penetrates the solid earth and gives stimulus to the roots themselves penetrates to our hearts and brains... from the dead ashes of our exhausted natures the sun brings forth the buds and blossoms of life and hope renewed.54

The beach and surf were imbued with healing qualities that went beyond the mere physical, but into the realm of the metaphorical and even metaphysical.

Did surf bathers and nineteenth century beachgoers truly believe in the health benefits of the beach, or was it more an accepted and unquestioned cliché? And to what extent was health a motivating factor for spending time there? The strong emphasis on health in articulations of Sydney’s beach culture can perhaps be best explained in the context of middle-class anxieties about leisure. Peter Bailey outlined the key factors governing the search for rational recreation in Victorian England. He suggested that ‘unwilling or unable to deny the claims and attractions of leisure, yet anxious to maintain a sturdy and coherent code of values amid rapid innovation and social change, the Victorian middle classes sought a rationale which would relieve them of the need to apologise for their pleasures, yet still keep them within the bounds of moral fitness’.55 A similar need for justifying leisure was simultaneously emerging among America’s middle classes.56

Although ‘a general suspicion of pleasure’ remained in the 1860s, the church’s approval of rational recreation in subsequent decades led to a transformation of

56 Aron, Working at Play, p.5.
attitudes towards leisure. According to Bailey, ‘the recreations which recommended themselves to respectable tastes were those with some manifest moral or improving content’. Aron argued that in America, ‘summer resorts, because they promoted health, fit within even the narrowest definition of acceptable leisure'.

The extent to which the quest for rational recreation affected Sydney’s nineteenth century ocean beach culture has not been established. Certainly it is unlikely to have affected the working-class pursuit of pleasure at the beach, as was the case in both Britain and America where middle class social reformers battled the popular crowds’ desire for ‘having a good time’. But we can see the strong emphasis on health as a way of justifying beach recreation throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Middle class beachgoers undoubtedly enjoyed their time at the beach, but in articulating their beach experiences in the language of health and the aesthetics of the ‘natural’ at the beach – which they undoubtedly believed in – they were able rationalise their leisure time. Similarly, the attraction of surf bathing in the early twentieth century lay far more in hedonism than in its healthiness. The health benefits apparently derived from surf bathing were, for most surf bathers, nothing more than a positive by-product of an otherwise entirely satisfying experience; but they were used as a means of justifying what was done for pleasure. We can see that among both nineteenth and twentieth century beachgoers, the leisure experience was both justified and improved by a sense that the beach was an inherently healthy place to spend time.

**Summer at the beach**

The scientific theories promoting the medicinal qualities of ocean air in the nineteenth century simultaneously warned against the harmful effects of exposure to heat. Accordingly, in an attempt to escape Sydney’s intense summer heat, those who could afford it built ‘salubrious residences’ in the Blue Mountains, or took extended holidays to Tasmania, or even New Zealand, during the hottest months. Australian

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57 Bailey, Leisure and Class, pp.67-72; Peiss, Cheap Amusements, p.178.
58 Bailey, Leisure and Class, p.71.
59 Aron, Working at Play, p.43.
historians have likened this behaviour, which was noted by many observers of New South Wales and was most common to ‘wealthy professionals, politicians and businessmen,’ to the ‘hill station’ customs of other colonial outposts. And it was not exclusive to residents of Sydney, Tim Bonyhady writing that ‘Melburnians wanting to escape the summer heat looked to the Dandenongs for ‘pure oxygen’ to invigorate the soul, and ‘mountain ozone’ to cleanse the blood. Ferntree Gully was more fashionable, if not more popular, than Brighton, Sorrento or Queenscliff.

Despite this rhetoric in which the mountains were favoured over the coast as the ideal summer destination for those who could afford it, and which considered the coast to be ‘muggy’ or ‘too hot and relaxing’, there is much evidence that Sydney’s beaches were visited in summer by those ‘seeking to recruit health and strength’. As early as 1873, it was argued that the heat at Manly was ‘tempered by the cool sea breezes’, and that accordingly, winter was the only time when there was accommodation available at that suburb. In 1886, Francis Myers wrote that ‘all the glory of summer is in the sea. All the strength of summer’s heat is mastered by the sea, drunk in, transmuted, reflected’. And six years later, the Town and Country Journal advised its readers that Coogee Beach was the ideal place to spend a hot day.

With the incorporation of surf and sun bathing into Sydney’s beach culture, the surf was seen to offer a new respite from the heat of summer, a way of physically cooling

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64 Bonyhady, The Colonial Earth, p.112.
65 James, Shall I Try Australia?, p.261; Taylor, Our Island Continent, p.238.
67 SMH 29 January 1873, p.5
70 Town and Country Journal., 22 October 1892. See also Sydney Mail 23 November 1904, p.1311.
off. But we can see that the use of the beach as a desirable summer destination; as a 'healthy' place to spend hot days and an escape from the heat and dust of the city, was already developing throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The claim made in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1910 that 'in the heat of these midsummer days ones thoughts turn naturally to the surf', reflects both the longevity of the association between summer and the beach, and the more recent incorporation of the surf into the concept of the healthy beach.71

**Sun bathing for health**

Cameron White argued that 'the majority of complaints about the decency (or lack thereof) of surf bathing in the first decade of the twentieth century were directed towards sun bathing'.72 Certainly sun bathing – the same activity which we now refer to as sun *baking* and which is prominent in modern beach culture – was the source of many complaints to Sydney's daily press from around 1904 onwards.73 But it is important that sun bathing be distinguished from the closely related activity of surf bathing, for many *surf* bathers themselves complained about the disrepute bought to the beaches through the former activity.

There were two elements to the opposition to sun bathing. The first was a concern with the impropriety of male bathers lying on the sand in bathing costumes or rolling down their tops.74 Unlike opposition to daylight bathing, which will be explored in chapter nine, opponents to this type of sun bathing were not necessarily offended by bathing itself, or the impropriety of bathing costumes. Secondly, beachgoers and authorities complained of bathers 'loitering' out of the water. This practice – which included bathers who momentarily left the water to warm up or for another reason, but intended to return virtually immediately – while not necessarily a deliberate attempt to enjoy the sun specifically, was equated with sun bathing as immoral, because wet bathers' bodies could be viewed by any beach goers, and particularly women and children.75

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73 For a detailed description of these complaints, see White, *Pleasure Seekers*, pp.135-146.
74 *SMH* 28 January 1907, p.5; 1 February 1907, p.5; 12 February 1907, p.10; 23 January 1908, p.6; *Daily Telegraph*, 19 October 1907, p.12.
75 Coastal councils were the most vocal in opposition to this practice, drafting ordinances to restrict it. *Evening News*, 14 October 1907, p.5. See also Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures*, pp.43-44.
Those bathers who engaged in the ‘sun bath’ vehemently defended their right to do so, and they couched their defence in the language of the healthy beach. At the same time that salt water was being re-incorporated into the rhetoric of the healthy coast, the sun was emerging as yet another scientifically healthy element of Sydney’s beaches. ‘Sariba’ was one who complained of being ‘prevented from indulging in the health-giving sun-bath, which is the natural corollary of surf-bathing’.

As with the claims of the health of sea air and water, Sariba and his fellow sun-bathers did not have to prove the medicinal benefits of exposure to the sun. A mid-nineteenth century medical concern with the harmfulness of the Australian sun on ‘white’ skin was being replaced in both Australia and Britain at the turn of the century with a growing scientific belief in the healthiness of sunlight. The dissemination of this new attitude meant that as with surf bathing, opponents did not deny the health giving powers of sun bathing, but rather remained concerned by its challenges to morality and respectability.

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76 Daily Telegraph 6 February 1906, p.5.
At the turn of the twentieth century, sun bathing was not a part of Sydney’s ocean beach culture. By 1908, while the morality of public sun bathing was still being debated, the action itself was by now largely accepted as a means of gaining health and strength. And so, a ‘warning to sun-bathers’ printed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that year, which told of the death of a man who sun-bathed on the advice of a ‘medical man’ in order to ‘restore him to health’, did not advise against the practice, but rather cautioned ‘beginners’ to ‘practise their sun-bathing with extreme caution’.

For most, sun bathing was enacted for no other reason than the pure hedonistic pleasures it offered. But together with surf bathing promoters, they disguised their hedonistic motives – or at least attempted to – by articulating sun bathing through the language of health.

**The tanned body**

The construction of sun bathing as a healthy activity had direct implications on attitudes towards the tanned body, as articulated in the Sydney press. Lencek and Bosker traced the origins of ‘making sunbathing at the beach fashionable’ to Coco Chanel, who, as a young designer in 1923 ‘appeared on the Riviera as brown as a sailor’.

John Walton dismissed this account as little more than ‘persistent legend’, and argued instead that ‘the new cult of sun bathing transformed the Riviera season in Edwardian times’. But while it had its origins there before the First World War, due largely to a growing medical awareness of the health benefits of exposure to the sun, Walton located the development and consolidation of sun bathing into British seaside culture in the inter-war period. It was at this time that the two strands of health and eugenics were brought together, providing ‘a powerful boost to a fashion for sun-bathing which was growing of is own accord and also entailed a revised physical aesthetic, so that tanned, brown bodies became a symbol of health rather than a disfigurement brought on by outdoor labour’.

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78 *SMH* 3 February 1908, p.6.
79 Lencek & Bosker, *The Beach*, p.203. James Walvin also dates the cult of sun-bathing and the fashion of the tan to the late 1920s. Walvin, *Beside the Seaside*, pp.120-121.
Intrinsic to inter-war beach culture, Australian historians have also implied the cult of the tan and of the sun were most prominent in Australia during the 1920s and ‘30s. However it is evident that sun bathing, and more particularly the sun tan, had been fashionable on Sydney’s beaches for nearly two decades by this time, most prominently among male beachgoers. It was not only emerging, but firmly established as fundamental to Sydney’s beach culture by 1910 – because the moral opposition to sun bathing did not detract from the fashion of the beach tan. As early as 1904, the tanned body was being described as a positive attribute by the Sydney press. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in December of that year described a group of men – members of a swimming club – who ‘show rich brown bodies carefully toasted by many Saturdays and Sundays of deliberate basking on frizzling rocks’. Two years later, a *Sydney Mail* correspondent remarked that ‘a sun-browned skin always wins respect. After a dip it is quite common to see youths oiling each others’ backs prepatory to lying on the sand, so that the sun may give them a healthy tan’. In 1906, Samuel Mills alluded to the sexual appeal of the tanned body:

A good many of the men had skins of brown, and against these the white-skinned men looked weak and sickly ... A man feels he’s a man when his skin is a real good brown. And though the girl couldn’t tell why, she agreed that this was right, and that the best fellows were the brownest.

Not only were beachgoers lying in the sun to tan themselves, but they were using oil to enhance the effects of the sun, and create a darker body. They were said to be ‘intensely proud of their colour’, and ‘to secure it would again willingly undergo the tortures of sunburn’. The deliberateness of their actions and the pride they took in

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83 *SMH* 17 December 1904, p.4.
84 *Sydney Mail* (Seaside number), 7 March 1906, p.619. See also *SMH* 27 December 1905, p.7.
86 *SMH* 26 February 1908, p.8.
87 *Sydney Mail* (Seaside Number) 16 January 1907, p.157
displaying their tanned bodies indicate that the tan was a status symbol all in itself; even before surf lifesavers epitomised surf bathers, a tanned body was a recognised symbol that one was a regular beachgoer. Initially only desirable amongst the most regular surf bathers, as the practise became legitimised and increasingly popular towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the tan became desired by other members of the community.

In the same 1906 article, Samuel Mills' description of surf-shooters demonstrates that a strong link between regular surf bathers and the tanned body had been established:

All the Sun-boys, whose hair is full of sand ... all the talent, whose religion every summer is to get a brown pelt, or rather a brown hide with a real good outside cake of salt — all these hard-cases, whose bodies are rough as nutmeg cases, can be seen trudging, wading or swimming out to the breakers ... 88

A year later, a Daily Telegraph report referred to four men who enacted a rescue at Manly — and who by implication of their expertise with the line were regular surf bathers and likely future surf lifesavers — as 'the “brown-backs”'. The lack of an explanation as to who or what these ‘brown-backs’ were suggests an assumption the readership would be able to make the connection themselves between the tanned body and the regular surf bathers. 89

With the emergence of surf lifesaving in 1907, which will be explored in chapter nine, surf lifesavers, as the most identifiable surf bathers, quickly became closely associated with the tan. Indeed, surf lifesavers actively encouraged this connection through their ‘brown man competitions’, and the tanned body subsequently became part of the mythology of the movement. 90 Hence a Sydney Morning Herald report of the Bondi Gymkhana [carnival] of early 1909 described the surf lifesavers as ‘sun-tanned men who patrol the ocean beaches from Maroubra to Manly looking for whom they may

89 Daily Telegraph 21 January 1907, p.5.
Saunders, ‘Specimens of Superb Manhood’.
The same article described the way 'squad after squad of brown men carried out their sports in the white water in defiance of undertow and lurking sharks'. Part of their extra human strength seemed to come from, or be linked to, their extra tanned bodies, and this was central to their image of 'hero'.

Lencek and Bosker suggest that following Chanel's display, the tanned body came to represent the leisured class. In Sydney, we can see that the status of the tanned body was less about class than simply being a regular beachgoer. The location of Sydney's beaches meant one did not have to be a member of the 'leisured classes' in order to have sufficient leisure time on the beach to cultivate a tan, although it is true that most lifesavers were from the middle classes, and Douglas Booth points to notable distinctions between the tanned bodies of members of different classes.

Despite all the hard work of sun bathers in promoting their favourite pastime as healthy, and the increasing desirability of the tanned body, the authorities continued to view the practice of sun bathing in public as immoral, and the activity was the subject of numerous complaints to the Sydney press in 1907 and 1908 in particular. The 1911 Surf Bathing Committee reinforced the rule instructing bathers to walk directly between water and sheds, and recommended that sun bathing, defined as 'loitering on the beach, clad only in bathing costume' be banned outside dedicated enclosures. In 1913, the Waverley Council again banned sun bathing unless in a special roped off enclosure. A neat irony consequently emerged in which the tanned body earned the respect of those who desired more time by the beach, and was generally agreed to be 'healthy', but the exposed body itself, which was necessary to build a tan, remained an offensive sight.

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91 'Bondi Gymkhana: Sports of the Brown Men'
92 'Bondi Gymkhana: Sports of the Brown Men'
94 Booth, Australian Beach Cultures, p.6.
95 Sun bathing was permitted on 'less-used beaches' but only in 'full bathing costume'. Report, New South Wales Surf Bathing Committee (Sydney: 1912), p.21.
96 SMH 25 November 1913, p.8.
97 For more detail on opposition to reduced bathing costumes, see Booth, Australian Beach Cultures, pp.41-44.
The beach as a national icon

There is a consensus among Australian cultural historians that the beach emerged as a national icon, a ‘symbol of Australia at pleasure’ in the interwar period. Tied with this was a celebration of the surf lifesaver – a ‘super-fit, bronzed, able-bodied, muscular, controlled man’ – as the embodiment of the ideal ‘national type’, which was especially prominent during the same period. It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine why the beach and the surf lifesaver became such prominent national symbols in the inter-war period, and why these have endured throughout the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first. It is imperative, however, that the origins of the construction of the beach as a place of national significance, and the mechanics of connecting beach to nation, are examined in more depth. In particular, it is evident that these ideas did not originate in the inter-war period but were present in representations of the Sydney beaches in the early twentieth century, and that they in turn drew on concepts which developed during the nineteenth century – in particular the healthy beach.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the beach was said to be particularly ‘Australian’ in three ways. Firstly, and closely related to the representations of the tanned body, the surf bather was constructed as a ‘national type’. It was only later that the surf lifesaver specifically replaced the more general figure of the surf bather in this context. Secondly, by virtue of the widespread popularity of the pastime, surf bathing itself was popularly depicted as a ‘national sport’, even though it was initially a very Sydney-centric activity. Thirdly, and as an extension of the celebration of surf bathing, the beach itself was depicted as somehow uniquely ‘Australian’. The natural condition of the beach landscape contributed to this sense of the ‘Australian’ beach.

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99 Saunders, ‘Specimens of Superb Manhood’.
101 Game, ‘Nation and Identity’; Huntsman, *Sand in Our Souls*, p.166.
The construction of the beach as a national space in the opening decade of the twentieth century was a conscious and deliberate act on the part of a number of beach and surf bathing advocates, and as with health, was often politically motivated. This paved the way for later depictions of the beach as a national asset through Australian advertising, product marketing, and suburban promotion during and since the interwar period. As with the adoption of surf bathing as the dominant activity on the beaches, it was not inevitable that the beaches would become representative of the nation – this was not a natural progression from the uses of the beaches in the nineteenth century, but rather a constructed representation of the beaches during the twentieth. And this construction relied heavily on concepts which were already established. The use of ‘national’ language in the local context and for local or municipal purposes even made the idea of the beach as ‘national space’ inherently contradictory.

Sun and surf: constructing a new Australian race

We have seen that by the opening years of the twentieth century, the rhetoric of the healthy beach in Sydney was more than simply an importation of British understandings of the coast. It was integral to the construction of surf and sun bathing as ‘appropriate’ behaviour, and a strong, although partly ineffective, weapon in the fight to make these activities morally acceptable. It was also adopted by proponents of eugenics, ‘a value system underlying the search for racial betterment’. At the turn of the twentieth century, ‘nation’ was becoming understood primarily in racial terms of Darwinian ‘fitness’, and Sydney’s moral middle class were preoccupied with questions of health, ‘race’, and reproduction, as demonstrated by the Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth-rate on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales of 1903-04. Accordingly, the theories of eugenics were also becoming more widely disseminated and accepted, and we can see such theories underpinning some of the language adopted in the surf and sun bathing debates. Surf bathing was particularly useful to those Australian eugenicists who, according to Carol Bacchi, ‘seemed to have preferred the leeway which environmentalism left for human intervention to the fatalism of hereditary determinism’.

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102 Rodwell, ‘The Sense of Victorious Struggle’.
104 Bacchi, ‘The Nature Nurture Debate’, p.206. For more on the Eugenics debates at the turn of the twentieth century, see Stephen Garton, ‘Sound Minds and Healthy Bodies: Re-considering Eugenics in
Huntsman and Cushing dated the links between eugenics and the surf to the 1920s, when ‘some people ... would have even argued that surf lifesaving improved the “Australian race”’. However as Grant Rodwell noted, such language was clearly evident within the debates surrounding surf and sun bathing in the Sydney press from at least the start of the twentieth century. Certainly at least one prominent eugenicist, Dr Richard Arthur, advocated surf bathing for health reasons in this early period. Eugenics was more than just about improving the health of the population—it was about improving the race. In adopting the language of eugenics while promoting surf bathing, therefore, some surf bathers went beyond merely reiterating notions of the healthy seaside. Rather, they engaged in and contributed to a discourse about the nation: about the nature of ‘Australian recreation’, and the ‘Australian type’.

Eugenicists and surf bathing promoters drew on the rejuvenation and invigoration widely claimed to be received at the beach in the late nineteenth century, as well as the scientifically established benefits of salt water, air and sunshine, to credit the surf with the creation of, or at least contributing to, a new, healthy and superior generation, or ‘race’, of Australians. One of the earliest and most vocal proponents of this outlook was Arthur Relph, agitator and co-founder of the Manly Surf Club, who contributed greatly to the growing discourse of surf bathing through letters to the press in 1907, and later articles on the subject. Relph was an outspoken advocate for the benefits of surf bathing in a number of realms, and was keen to see the sport supported on a greater level both through a reduction of existing restrictions, and through the provision of greater amenities. When lobbying for the formation of a ‘surf bathers’ club’ at Manly in mid-1907, he argued that surf bathing should be encouraged both because it improved the public health, and because it benefited Manly, with day trippers coming to surf or to watch others bathe in the breakers. He argued that surf bathers should take control and ‘help themselves’, and that a ‘proper system of control
and organisation' of surf bathing would mean there would be 'nothing about the pastime to offend anyone'.

In 1907, Relph wrote of the 'value' of surf bathing in 'helping our youth to grow up fine, strong, hardy, shapely men and women.' Two years later, he wrote that the sport was 'helping to build up a fine vigorous race from amongst the young people who live in the cities bordering our shores', and he followed this with an extensive article, published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1910, titled 'Surf bathing: influence on stamina and physique'. In this, he repeated his earlier claims that surf bathing would 'contribute in a marked degree to the general improvement of the physique and stamina of our race.' He argued that it was not surprising or harmful that surf bathing was apparently contributing to the decline in the popularity of cricket: 'are not those young men better employed in forming life saving clubs, competing one with the other for supremacy, with keen enthusiasm, developing their bodies, and helping to build up a fine race of young Australians' than 'loafing' on the cricket field, he asked.

Those elements of the healthy beach discussed earlier in this chapter were increasingly used as a familiar tool to persuade the reader of the physical improvements the growing generations of young Australians potentially received in the surf. The *Australian Town and Country Journal* reinforced this outlook in its 'special surf bathing number' in 1914:

The buffeting of the waves, the drenching of salt water, the exposure to the fresh air of the sea beach, all contribute towards the health of the surf-bather. Whether it be designated a sport or a pastime, it can certainly be claimed for surf bathing that it has done much to improve the health and physique of the rising generation.

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During the past few decades women have taken a greater share in health giving sports than their grandmothers did, with the result that they are stronger and healthier, and there is a smaller proportion of weakly and sickly women.\(^\text{112}\)

Bathers like Relph, when promoting surf bathing and the coastal suburbs such as Manly, consciously positioned themselves within the emerging language of eugenics, arguing that the surf not only improved the health of individuals, but had the potential to improve the ‘Australian race’. Once again, we see supporters of the beach deliberately drawing on established beliefs in the health of the seaside, fully aware of the endorsement such references would add to their appeals for more respect for surf bathers. Regardless of whether he believed in the arguments he was furthering – and it is apparent that he did – Relph and other proponents of surf bathing utilised existing ways of understanding the beach, and existing anxieties about the health of the urban and industrialised population, to sell their sport to the non-believers. As will be discussed in chapter nine, Relph and his contemporaries also looked to the potential of surf life saving clubs to lend legitimacy and increase approval for the pastime.

The racial implications of the tan

The emerging discourse of nationalism, and search for a national type, especially prominent around the period of Australian federation at the turn of the twentieth century, offered beach promoters an effective tool for articulating the benefits of the beach and surf bathing in particular.\(^\text{113}\) The construction of the surf bather as a ‘national type’ was not a smooth transition, however. It was especially complicated in relation to the symbolism of the tanned body.

In Sydney, some who contested the emerging superiority of the tanned body compared regular bathers to indigenous Australians and Pacific Islanders: ‘A bachelor’, for example, was a surf bather who was opposed to sun bathing in public, and argued sun bathers were turning ‘themselves into half-castes’.\(^\text{114}\) In his short story


\(^{113}\) Richard White identifies the search for a ‘national type’ from the late nineteenth century onwards. White, *Inventing Australia*, pp.64-84.

\(^{114}\) Letter to the editor, *SMH* 14 February 1907, p.8.
about Manly in 1906, Samuel Mills described the regular beachgoer as having ‘the brown-black hue of the Kanaka’. 115 Sun and surf bathing advocates disputed the negative connotations, but did not deny the racial link altogether. Instead, they celebrated the freedom with which South Sea Islanders and other natives apparently enjoyed and understood the surf compared with those who ‘clad in the latest creation of seaside fashion, dip daintily into the surge’:

Finest of all the wooers are the sun-kissed sons and daughters of the Pacific who, in all the glory of their bronze nudity, ride the crested breakers ... They are kings and queens of the surf, by virtue of their abounding love, their surpassing skill, and the grace of their wooing.116

Pacific Islanders, after all, were traditional surf bathers, and their tanned skin symbolised for surf bathers a unity with sun and surf. Surf bathing proponents took the good elements commonly associated with South Sea Islanders – their expertise in the surf – while ignoring other, more negative traits associated with natives at this time. The fact that Freddie Williams, self-proclaimed surf shooting pioneer (now known as body surfing) had apparently been taught the art by a South Sea Islander became cause for celebration, a sign of the authenticity of the activity being practised along the New South Wales coast.117 This connection made Williams an authority on the subject above all others.118

However the connection between the tanned body and South Sea Islanders was far less consequential to the history of Australian beach culture than the emerging link between the tan and the ‘Australian type.’ In Britain, a tanned body had traditionally been associated with the working classes; in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ‘perfectly pallid complexions’ were a sign of both class privilege and racial purity.119

115 Samuel A. Mills, ‘The romance of the breakers’, Sydney Mail (Seaside Number), 7 March 1906, p.634.
116 ‘The surf peoples and their ways’, Sydney Mail (Seaside Number), 7 March 1906, p.622.
117 Williams, ‘Shooting the breakers: what it is and how to do it’, Sydney Mail 16 January 1907, p.154
118 Williams published instructions on surf shooting, and was one of the first witnesses to the Surf Bathing Commission in 1911, labelled as ‘a prominent surf bather’. Evidence of the New South Wales Surf Bathing Committee, 15 November 1911, p.5; Sydney Mail, 16 January 1907, p.152.
119 Lencek & Bosker, The Beach, pp.86, 200. See also Corbin, The Lure of the Sea, p.72.
In Australia too, ‘whiteness’ was a sign of racial purity – an indication that one had pure British ancestry was crucial in the late nineteenth century environment of intolerance towards Pacific Islanders and Chinese especially.\textsuperscript{120} But as Warwick Anderson argued, ‘whiteness’ was an indication of racial heritage rather than relating to colouring specifically; as in Britain, there were differing degrees of ‘whiteness’\textsuperscript{121} The history of the tanned body in Australia has not yet been the subject of detailed historical enquiry. It is likely that the British connection between the working classes and the tanned body influenced colonial attitudes, but by the closing decades of the nineteenth century we can see a competing attitude towards the tan emerging, through the cult, or myth, of the ‘bushman’.

In the late nineteenth century, the concept that an ‘Australian type’ existed in the colonies was gaining credence, in which the ‘typical’ Australian male was associated with a number of characteristics including ‘independence, manliness, a fondness for sport, egalitarianism, a dislike of mental effort, self confidence, a certain disrespect for authority’.\textsuperscript{122} Due largely to the prominence of The Bulletin school of writers in the construction of the national identity, the ‘bushman’ came largely to personify this ‘Australian type’\textsuperscript{123} The tan was rarely articulated as a specific physical characteristic of the bushman, but was implicit in the recognition he was an ‘outdoors’ type.\textsuperscript{124} In ‘Clancy of the Overflow’, one of the best known pieces of Bulletin bush poetry, for example, Banjo Paterson compared the ‘pallid skin’ of city workers unfavourably against the romanticised lifestyle of the drover.\textsuperscript{125} Historians of the various incarnations of the Australian ‘national type’ agreed on a common timeline in which the ‘digger’ of the First World War inherited the characteristics from the nineteenth century ‘bushman’, and was succeeded by the surf

\textsuperscript{120} Anderson, The Cultivation of Whiteness. p.88; White, Inventing Australia, pp.69-71, 81. \\
\textsuperscript{121} Anderson, The Cultivation of Whiteness. p.2. \\
\textsuperscript{122} White, Inventing Australia, pp.76-7. \\
\textsuperscript{123} For more on the cult of the bushman, see Bill Gammage ‘The Crucible: The Establishment of the Anzac Tradition’ in Michael McKernan and Margaret Browne, Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1988) p.150; White, Inventing Australia, p.104; L. L. Robson, ‘The Australian Soldier: Formation of a Stereotype’ in McKernan & Browne, Australia, p.313. \\
\textsuperscript{124} White, Inventing Australia, pp.75-6, 128. \\
\textsuperscript{125} AB ‘Banjo’ Paterson, ‘Clancy of the Overflow’.
lifesaver in the inter-war period.\textsuperscript{126} According to most narratives, it was through the digger that the sun-browned body became explicit within descriptions of the ‘national type’ for the first time; both Australian and British observers of Australian soldiers in World War I celebrated the beauty of ‘their rose brown flesh burnt by the sun’, and C.E.W. Bean, the official war-correspondent described the Australian soldiers sun-baking at Gallipoli.\textsuperscript{127}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{SYDNEY_BRIDGE_CELEBRATIONS}
\caption{The tanned, healthy surf lifesaver who adorned posters and advertisements throughout the inter-war period embodied characteristics which were first articulated as ‘ideal’ and representative of the ‘nation’ in the opening decade of the twentieth century.}
\end{figure}

But as we have seen, the tan emerged as a signifier of physical superiority on Sydney’s beaches during the first decade of the twentieth century, prior to the First World War. The surf bather was healthy, strong, courageous, and active: we can see that those characteristics which had been attributed to the Australian bushman in the late nineteenth century were extended to the surf bather, by virtue of their physical similarities, before the invention of the ‘digger’. Furthermore, it was through the surf


bather that we see the tan *constantly* articulated as a positive physical attribute of the ideal ‘Australian type’ for the first time.\(^{128}\) What had been implicit within descriptions of the bushman became an explicit element of depictions of the surf bather. This interpretation of the tanned body, which was initiated by surf bathers keen to promote and legitimise sun bathing, soon became adopted by eugenicists. And through the eugenicist-driven construction of the surf bather as the ideal ‘national type’, the tan was first articulated as a nationally significant symbol – even if it was still largely restricted to Sydney – not in the bush, or in the trenches, but on the beach. The tanned body was not just a desired physical feature, but, in a reversal of eighteenth and nineteenth century modes of thought, had become a representation of racial perfection.

Like the bushman, the ‘Australian girl’ of the late nineteenth century was also noted to be a sporty, outdoors type. Accordingly, in the early twentieth century women enjoyed the thrills of surf bathing alongside their brothers and husbands.\(^{129}\) But a tanned body was not celebrated as an attractive physical trait for females in the Sydney press, as it was for men. The sun-browned skin of the Australian girl had not been considered attractive in the late nineteenth century either. R.E.N. Twopeny, for example, who spent five years in Australia, observed that among colonial girls, ‘“beauties” are rare, and the sun plays the deuce with complexions’.\(^{130}\) It is difficult to determine whether the cult of the tan extended to women in the early twentieth century, given their exclusion from its articulation in the press, but certainly as late as 1914 an advertisement for cosmetics was informing women that sunshine was ‘the complexion’s enemy’.\(^{131}\) The difficulty of women acquiring an even tan, by virtue of their cumbersome swimming attire also no doubt played a role in hindering the development of the female tan: women could not roll down their swimming costumes on the beach as men could. Jill Julius Matthews argued that it was not until the 1930s that ‘women’s devotion to beauty was revalued’ and that an association of the female body with ‘pleasure, self indulgence, carnality and narcissim’ became an acceptable


\(^{129}\) *SMH* 28 October 1914, p.7.


\(^{131}\) *SMH* 7 February 1914, p.6.
part of ‘modern femininity’.\textsuperscript{132} However we can see that by 1920, the female tan was being welcomed as an indicator of time spent on the beach. Consequently, \textit{The Lone Hand} commended the New South Wales Education Department on instructing all New South Wales children to swim, resulting in, it suggested, ‘the lithe, well-developed forms of Australia’s surfing and swimming girls, their sun-kissed, wholesome skins, their abounding vitality, seen on our shores…’\textsuperscript{133}

\textbf{Figure 8.3:} Women may not have been prominent within celebrations of the tanned body in the mainstream press, but an artist for the \textit{Lone Hand} considered them to be part of ‘a browning society’ in 1908.


\textsuperscript{133} ‘Our Girl Athletes’, \textit{The Lone Hand}, 1 October 1920, p.38.
Not only was the acceptance of the tanned female body slower than that of her brothers, but, as with other incarnations of the national type – the bushman and the digger – the surf bather was solely a male figure. In the inter-war period, the male-exclusivity of Australian surf lifesaving necessitated that the image of the lifesaver be male. However before the First World War, when the dominant beach figure was a surf bather, rather than lifesaver specifically, we can still see that women were largely excluded from portrayal of the ‘national type’ on the beach. Their exclusion was largely a result of the male-dominated discussion about surf bathing – because men were the most vocal proponents of surf bathing, they focused on the male body on the beach. Where women were mentioned, it was most likely in the context of innocent victims: they and their children were seen to be the inadvertent observers of the exposed male body on the beach.

The beach as ‘national space’

Not only were bathers’ bodies described as possessing ‘Australian’ attributes, but as part of the same process, the sport of surf bathing itself was also promoted as a ‘national pastime’. Sean Brawley has demonstrated that surf bathing was far from a uniquely Australian way of using the beach, and that surf bathing – and surf lifesaving – were practised along similar lines in places such as the American east coast in the late nineteenth century. However, advocates of surf bathing in Sydney did not shy away from referring to the ‘national importance’ of surf bathing: it was a ‘national recreation’, a ‘national pastime’, even a ‘national instinct’. Even as early as 1902, one letter writer recommended improved lifesaving resources, as a means of protecting what he anticipated would become ‘a healthy national exercise’.

Tied with the concepts of surf bathers as the ‘national type’, and surf bathing as a ‘national’ sport, was the representation of the beaches themselves, where ‘devotees of

135 Saunders, ‘Specimens of Superb Manhood’.
136 Letters to the editor, SMH I February 1907, p.5; 12 February 1907, p.10; 14 February 1907, p.8.
137 This will be discussed further in chapter nine.
139 Letter to the editor, SMH 21 January 1902
surf bathing, fresh air and sunshine gather to sport in the iridescent Pacific rollers', as a national asset.\textsuperscript{140} By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, a discourse had emerged in which these three concepts were fused to create pride in Sydney’s beaches, and a belief that the beach was an innately ‘Australian’ space: it was Australian by virtue of the apparently unique culture being engaged in the surf, and because the healthiness of these spaces was creating a new ‘national race’. The physical make-up of the beaches was also crucial, with the natural elements of surf and sand themselves being the source of much ‘national’ pride. This linking of the beach with uniquely Australian characteristics continues to mark the nation’s image into the twenty-first century, even if Fiske, Hodge and Turner argued that it is a false representation of the beach.\textsuperscript{141}

Manly, as one of the most popular of Sydney’s surf beaches, was endowed with apparent national characteristics in promotions of the suburb and press reports. While it was agreed that the beach could ‘belong to any watering place on the north coast of France’, it was nonetheless claimed that ‘the long curved avenue of Norfolk Island Pines, which is the hallmark of Manly, is nothing except Australian’.\textsuperscript{142} In 1914, it was assumed that ‘if a hundred people in this country were asked, on the spur of the moment, to name the place most typical of the Australia of today, 99 would reply, without hesitation, “Manly, of course.”’\textsuperscript{143}

However representations of the beach as ‘Australian’ were not limited to Manly, and the merging of these three themes to create a sense of the general ‘Australianness’ of the beach was also demonstrated in a report of a surf lifesaving carnival at Tamarama in 1909. Not only was it remarked that ‘the scene in all respects was purely Australian’, with surf lifesavers displaying their skills, but ‘the setting was also Australian – bright sea and sky, relieved by the sombre tints of the surrounding scrub.’\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{140} *SMH (Holiday supplement)*, 28 September 1909, p.6.
\textsuperscript{141} Fiske et al, *Myths of Oz*, pp.57-58.
\textsuperscript{142} ‘Manly: the Boulogne of Australia’, *SMH* 28 September 1909, p.4.
\textsuperscript{143} ‘Sunshine and surf: Carnival at Manly’, *SMH* 26 January 1914, p.7.
\textsuperscript{144} ‘Bondi gymkhana: sports of the brown men’, *SMH* 15 February 1909, p.8.
A further element of the nationalisation of the beach was the idea that the beaches should remain free to all. The belief in the ‘right’ of the general public to unimpeded access and use of Sydney’s beaches had to be fought for in the nineteenth century, and continued to be fundamental to attitudes towards the beaches in the early twentieth century. Part of the pride in Sydney’s beaches therefore lay in the fact that they were free and accessible: owned by and for the public. Consequently, as we have seen, when attempts were made, or even perceived, to charge for access to the beaches, the universal right to the free beach was vehemently defended. This sense that the beach was somehow inherently owned for and by the people was distinct from the idea that the beach represented ‘Australianness’, and the language of the beach as national space was rarely directly invoked in relation to this issue. However the awareness that many overseas beaches were not free to access, or did not have public amenities, underpinned arguments which implicitly connected the ‘free’ beach with a sense of national heritage. This attitude remains fundamental to perceptions of Australian beach culture today, and was articulated by Davidson and Spearritt when they wrote that ‘the Australian beach remains one of our few free-of-charge tourist landscapes’, and that ‘a society in which the beach is free is an unusual society’.145

Understanding the national beach

Essentially then, the construction of the beach as a ‘national’ space was an expression of collective pride in the beaches, both in their natural attractions, their apparent health giving qualities, and the opportunities they offered for the new thrill of surf bathing. We can see that by the opening decade of the twentieth century, Sydney’s beaches were being ‘seen’ and talked about in new ways; despite the strong links with past representations of the beach, in terms of health, the natural appeal of the beach or the public ‘rights’ to the beach, they were being given new associations. In some cases, such as with Relph, the language was adopted in a deliberate attempt to create interest in the beaches, whereas in others, it was used by promoters to highlight the attractions of seaside suburbs. The term ‘national’ was also adopted by local residents, councils and interest groups, who also identified the potential this language offered for gaining wider recognition and support for the beaches. In this context, the

construction of the beach and surf bathing as ‘national’ had a particularly local element, and was adopted to achieve very specific purposes.

From the 1880s, coastal councils and residents had hoped to avoid responsibility for beach funding by constructing the beach as a ‘state’ or ‘national’ space, imploring the government to assist financially in what was depicted as their obligation, by virtue of the use of the beaches by the wider population of Sydney. This language became standard in local government appeals for beach funding and for the dedication of additional coastal reserves in the opening decades of the twentieth century.146 This reference to the widespread popularity of surf bathing and beach-going more generally was more cynical than some of the other more celebratory accounts of the beaches advocated by surf bathers themselves, but the two distinct uses reinforced the legitimacy of each other by emphasising the apparent universal enjoyment of Sydney beaches.

As early as 1903, Waverley Council justified requests to the New South Wales Department of Lands for additional parks funding by claiming that Bondi and Bronte Parks were ‘of a national character being used by people all over the state’. They argued that ‘to think that no funds are available, or likely to be available for their maintenance is certainly not creditable to any civilized community’.147 Manly Council also suggested that the number of visitors to their beaches meant that the provision of toilets was more of a ‘national’ than a local demand.148 The provision of public transport to the beaches was similarly shrouded in language of the masses rather than locals, as one of its purposes was to provide access to the beaches for those who did not live nearby.149

146 SMH 30 August 1907, p.9. See debates over proposed reservations at Tamarama: Surveyor Report, 15 August 1912, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [12/14338], with bundle 22/1517, box 20/9052; North Bondi: Waverley Council to Under Secretary for Lands, 21 January 1908 [08/1471], with bundle 08/3577; Cronulla, Deputation to Minister for Lands, 2 November 1911 [11/18422], with bundle 13/16997; and Wollongong and Tathra on the South Coast: J.B. Nicholson to Acting Under Secretary for Lands, 21 January 1908 [with 08/3131], with bundle 13/5863; Alderman F. Ritchie to Mr W.H. Wood MP, 30 September 1907 [07/19136], with bundle 09/15438, box 15438.
147 Waverley Council to Minister for Lands, 25 June 1903, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [ind. 03/4350], with bundle 13/7977.
The very fact that the concept of ‘national’ was being invoked by local authorities, however, highlights that the beaches were, and remain, very locally important spaces. The term was designed to highlight the large numbers of people from outside the municipalities who used the beaches, but the fact that the most vocal on beach-related issues – measured by petition signatories, complaints to councils and the Lands Department and letters to the editor – tended to be local ratepayers, suggests that matters relating to the governance, funding and uses of the beach affected locals far more than those for whom the beach was the destination of the occasional day trip. Some individuals were even openly critical of the use of the beach by non-locals, with one resident arguing against the provision of dressing sheds specifically because they were a ‘means of … bringing people from other suburbs’. 150

This utilisation of the term ‘national’ by local councils and interest groups served not only to highlight the relevance of beach issues to locals, but that the beaches were used by residents from all over Sydney, and elsewhere in New South Wales. And accordingly, the beaches and beach culture were sometimes celebrated as unique to either Sydney or New South Wales. 151 Accordingly, in 1908 Charles Oakes, MLA argued films of Sydney’s beaches ‘at the height of the surf bathing season’, and if possible showing the work of the lifesavers, should be used to advertise the state at the Franco-British Exhibition. 152 Further evidence of the state-based pride in the beaches was published in 1914, when a contributor to the Sydney Morning Herald eulogised that

Sydney is herself again when surfing begins … The towel brigade occupy the early trams in great force, wherever the said tram is running on a surf beach route. That is one of the characteristics of our city that mark it out like no other city in the world. 153

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150 Letter to the editor, SMH 24 June 1905, p.12.
151 ‘Surf bathing: Mr Griffith and nationalisation’, SMH 10 November 1913, p.6
152 ‘Surf bathers as state advertisement’, SMH 18 May 1908, p.6
153 ‘Beaches and bathers’, SMH 28 October 1914, p.7. See also SMH 18 May 1908, p.6, for the suggestion that footage of beaches should be used to promote New South Wales overseas.
Such accounts stood in stark contrast to the language of the national beach which otherwise dominated analyses of Sydney’s beach culture. They hinted at the very real and tangible disjuncture between the language which described surf bathing as a ‘national’ sport or pastime, and the reality that it was an activity which was still predominantly exclusive to the beaches of the New South Wales coast, and in
particular, those close to Sydney. Furthermore, while the physical and cultural features of Sydney’s ocean beaches were undoubtedly a source of pride, this was only really present in the attitudes of those who used these beaches, and was therefore not a ‘national,’ or Australia-wide outlook. The use of the term ‘national’ in this context was therefore less a literal interpretation of the word than a reference to the widespread popularity of the activity, and an identification of its heralded potential to spread around the coast. It was also more than likely a continuation of the tendency of New South Wales ‘to simply regard itself as Australia’, which, according to White, was a reflection of the dominant status of New South Wales.

In the decades leading up to and following its federation in 1901, Australia underwent a period of nation-building, in which ‘a conscious attempt was made ... to create a distinctively national culture’. Richard White argued that this resulted in ‘a new image which was to prove more powerful than any other. It was essentially the city-dweller’s image of the bush, a sunlit landscape of faded blue hills, cloudless skies and noble gum trees, peopled by idealised shearers and drovers’. It was also in the context of this deliberate construction of the nation that the beach emerged as a ‘national space’, and the surf bather as a ‘national type’. The beach was able to be articulated in this way because it shared a common aesthetic with the bush. In particular, both the beach and the bush were natural, healthy, open spaces. They were romanticised by urban dwellers, and juxtaposed against the unhealthy, congested urban environment.

Did the suggestion that the beach was a ‘national space’ and that bathers’ bodies represented the ‘Australian type’ impact everyday beachgoers? It is likely that such celebrations of the beach encouraged those who might not have otherwise tried it to head to the beach and try their hand at surf bathing. And despite Booth’s insistence that ‘concerns about bathers and how they represented themselves in public preoccupied [Mrs Grundy] throughout the twentieth century’, it is also probable that the construction of surf bathing as not only an acceptable pastime but one which

154 By the formation of Western Australia’s first surf life saving club in 1909, a surf bathing culture was also emerging on Perth’s beaches. Jaggard, The Premier Club, pp.4-9.
155 White, Inventing Australia, pp.63-64.
156 White, Inventing Australia, p.85.
157 White, Inventing Australia, p.85.
epitomised all the positive and desired values of the young nation would have
discouraged the heavy opposition to surf bathing on moral grounds.\textsuperscript{158} We can see,
therefore, this new discourse was more powerful than the moralist opposition to
bathers’ bodies; the government and councils may have continued to restrict the
display of those bodies, but by the close of the 1900s, they were more vocal in their
adoption of the celebratory language surrounding the beaches and surf bathing.
Despite their political motives, the New South Wales government and coastal councils
contributed as much to the construction of the beach as a nationally significant space
as did the surf bathers; and given the authoritative position of the former, their
adoption of this language was perhaps its most powerful expression.

\textbf{Conclusions}
This chapter has demonstrated that in the articulation of Sydney’s beach culture
during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a language developed around
health and nation. The relationship between health and romanticism, already complex
in the nineteenth century, became more complicated with their integration into the
language of nationalism in the first decade of the twentieth century, and with the
incorporation of sun and surf into the rhetoric of health. By 1920, these three attitudes
had flowed together in Sydney to produce a shared way of understanding the beach
space which was so powerful it remains fundamental to Australia’s beach culture
close to a century later.

We can see, therefore, that far from being a twentieth century invention, the modern
meanings of the Australian beach had their roots in nineteenth century articulations of
the Sydney beach, and in British and European discourses and modes of behaviour
from an even earlier period. The depiction of the beach and beach bodies as ‘national’
was particularly reliant on the established construction of the beach as ‘healthy’; this
primary way of understanding the Australian beach had been directly imported from
Britain with the colonial settlers, but it took on a new significance as the beach
became a site for nation building immediately following the federation of Australia.
The role of surf bathers in being at the forefront of the construction of the beach as
national space, and the surf bather as a ‘national type’, was crucial in the creation of

\textsuperscript{158} Booth, \textit{Australian Beach Cultures}, p.41.
these concepts; their adoption of the language of health to gain legitimacy for the behaviours of bathers on the beach critical to the mainstream acceptance which followed. This initiative of surf bathers will be explored further in chapter nine, along with a consideration of the willingness of the government and councils to support these beach users.

By the turn of the twentieth century, we can see most of the elements which constitute modern Australian beach culture present on Sydney's beaches. Residents of Sydney had both the time to go to the beach, and ways of getting there. They had established a tradition of spending their leisure time at the beach, and justified this custom by emphasizing the aesthetics of health and nature within their articulations of the beach. Furthermore, by the opening years of the twentieth century, the suggestion that the public had a 'need' for beach recreation was turning into a demand that this was their 'right.' Some beaches had therefore been reserved specifically for public recreation, with parks, seawalls and seats provided to accommodate and provide comfort for beachgoers.

Recreational activities were still overwhelmingly restricted to the dry spaces of the beach, however. In the opening decades of the twentieth century, three developments relating to Sydney’s beaches led to the incorporation of surf bathing into the existing beach culture: public, daylight bathing was legalised, amenities were provided with lavatories and private spaces for changing clothes; and surf bathing was made safe by the presence of the surf lifesaver. In exploring these three developments, this chapter considers the impact of the popular movement for surf bathing on the governance of the beaches. To what extent were the New South Wales government and coastal councils willing to assist surf bathers? What were the key factors when determining who was responsible for governing surf bathing? And were the authorities proactive in this regard, or more reactive, as we have seen they were in the matter of creating public foreshores and providing public transport to the beaches?

1 ‘Manly’s Carnival Week’: SMH 19 January 1915, p.3.
Pass along to the ocean beach, where the bathers are shooting the breakers, in their thousands, and thousands more are seated on the deck chairs, or lolling lazily on the beach, watching the crowd in the surf... It is, in fact, a new world, something very different from the humdrum of our everyday city life, and a tonic for the tired and weary.¹

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¹ ‘Manly’s Carnival Week’: SMH 10 January 1913, p.5.
**Surf bathing in the late nineteenth century**

Cameron White traced the origins of surf bathing in Sydney to the 1880s, when, he argued, Sydney’s first ocean beach drowning occurred, and when ‘the question of bathing in the public gaze became most contentious … when people started bathing on the open beaches at Manly, Bondi and Coogee, in full view of the picnickers and promenaders’.2 These bathers, he argued, were ‘considered to be larrikins who threatened the moral authority of the middle-class male picnicker’.3 But how accurate is this account of public bathing, and attitudes towards it, in the late nineteenth century?

Firstly, as we have seen in chapter three, surf bathing was becoming a more common — although certainly not mainstream — use of Sydney beaches by at least the mid-nineteenth century, and was therefore long established as an unofficially accepted activity by the 1880s. But there was a gradual increase in the practice of discreet daylight surf bathing as greater numbers of residents used the beaches in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Surf bathers became so common that local guidebooks listed locations such as ‘the corner’ at Manly and ‘the basin’ at Coogee as popular spots for their recreation.4 White evidently mistook an increase in surf-bathing for its commencement. Secondly, White himself cited no evidence of opposition to surf bathing in the 1880s to support his argument, 5 and admitted that ‘concern about the decency of bathing reached its peak in 1907’ – two decades later.6

So just how contentious was surf bathing in the late nineteenth century? And to whom? The morality of surf bathing was not questioned by the guidebooks mentioned above; the potential dangers of sharks, or of heavy surf, remained a source of far

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3 White, *Pleasure Seekers*, p.149.
5 With the exception of an incident in 1889 at Forty Baskets Beach – a harbour, rather than surf beach – White cites examples of opposition to bathing not from the 1880s but the 1890s, with Parliamentary discussion of the issue, and the 1900s, when it became a source of debate within the daily press over a period of several years. White, *Pleasure Seekers*, pp.132-5.
greater anxiety. And there is little evidence of it having offended beachgoers specifically in this period, but given the range of moral attitudes which existed, it more than likely did. Sydney's coastal councils expressed no opposition to surf bathing generally, but were alarmed by daylight bathing specifically. In 1881, Randwick Council complained to the Inspector General of Police of daylight bathing at Coogee, and Waverley Council obtained a conviction against two daylight bathers at Bondi in 1888. In 1897, nearly a decade later, some Manly Aldermen complained that 'scores of naked men "wallow in the shallow water all day like pigs"' in the lagoon north of Manly. But wholesale opposition to daylight bathing was largely limited to these councils. The New South Wales Legislative Council, more tolerant perhaps than the coastal councils, was divided on the same issue during a debate in 1894, with at least some members advocating daylight bathing in appropriate attire.

And in contrast to New South Wales, daylight bathing was permitted in Glenelg in non-conformist South Australia from 1856 onwards, providing bathers were 'properly clad', hinting at the potential for the practice to be morally acceptable to members of Victorian society.

By the turn of the twentieth century, surf bathing had been firmly established as a common use of Sydney's ocean beaches, and was reportedly being enjoyed as far north as Narrabeen. Municipal by-laws and the Police Offences Act continued to legally restrict the activity to early mornings and evenings, meaning that daylight bathers were still liable to be fined for entering the surf, regardless of how appropriate their attire might be – and local authorities were active in pursuing daylight bathers. However it is apparent that large groups of bathers were flouting these laws by the turn of the century. And, more importantly, community resistance to public bathing when suitably clothed was weakening. Consequently, at Little Coogee, which, due to

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8 Randwick Council *Minutes* 5 April 1881; Waverley Council *Minutes* 20 March 1888.

9 *Evening News* 13 October 1897, p.2.


12 *Sydney Mail*, 14 April 1900, p.878.

13 Huntsman, *Sand in our Souls*, p.57; Booth *Australian Beach Cultures*, pp.27, 31.
its relatively calm water was especially popular among families, all day bathing was being reported without concern or condemnation in the Sydney press in 1900.14

Figure 9.1: Two surf bathers enjoy a 'dip' – probably naked – at Narrabeen, 1900

Shifting moralities: the legalisation of daylight bathing

The transition from daylight bathing being an illegal activity at the turn of the century – even if irregularly enforced – to its legitimisation and accepted status as ‘the latest popular amusement’ by 1905 has been explored in detail by Australian beach historians.15 Until recently, the overturning of the daylight bathing bans was most often attributed to William Gocher, a Manly newspaper proprietor who was supposed to have challenged the police to arrest him for swimming in the Manly surf on three consecutive Sundays in late 1902. Finding nothing improper about his bathing in neck to knee costume, Fosbery, the Inspector General of Police, was said to have refused to

14 SMH 27 December 1900, p.6.
15 Advertisement, SMH 26 December 1905, p.8. For a more detailed account of this transition, see Booth, Australian Beach Cultures; Huntsman, Sand in our Souls; Curby, Seven Miles from Sydney; Dutton, The Beach; Brawley, ‘Surf Bathing and Surf Lifesaving’.

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prosecute him, leading to the overturning of the daylight bathing bans in all Sydney seaside Municipalities.\textsuperscript{16}

As Booth and Curby have shown, the Gocher story, appealing as it may be, has neither been confirmed by independent primary sources, nor does it adequately portray the complexity of the campaigns promoting daylight bathing in turn of the century Sydney.\textsuperscript{17} No issues of the Manly newspaper in which Gocher was said to have written about the events exist, and no mention of them was made in other Sydney newspapers of the time; this does not in itself disprove Gocher's account, but makes it difficult to confirm. Regardless of whether Gocher did in fact defy the bathing bans – and it is more likely than not that he did, given the story was not disputed by locals when it re-emerged in the press five years later\textsuperscript{18} – his behaviour should be viewed in the context of a larger and more widespread movement for daylight bathing which had emerged by 1902.\textsuperscript{19} It was this movement, rather than the actions of an individual, which ultimately forced the councils to remove their daylight bathing bans.

Perhaps the most revealing factor which discounts the importance of Gocher's individual role in overturning the daylight bathing bans is that Randwick Council had already voted to allow bathing 'in the sea at all times and at all hours of the day at those portions of the sea beach... clearly set apart for such bathing' in October 1902, shortly after Randwick Council voted to allow bathing on its beaches. Waverley Council, as well as two constables standing Bondi Beach at the request of Waverley Council refused to arrest daylight bathers, reporting that 'as long as one man continues to bathe out in the sea, there can be no arrest of that man.' Following a resolution that it 'might be put in the waste-paper basket',\textsuperscript{20} in 1902, Waverley Council decided to allow bathing in the sea.


\textsuperscript{17} Curby, \textit{Seven Miles from Sydney}, p.151; Booth \textit{Australian Beach Cultures}, pp.29-30.

\textsuperscript{18} Curby, \textit{Seven Miles from Sydney}, p.151; Arthur Rosenthal, 'Topics of the beaches', \textit{Sydney Mail} 16 January 1907, p.158.

before Gocher’s actions were sanctioned by the Inspector of Police. And in November of that year two constables attending Bondi Beach at the request of Waverley Council refused to arrest daylight bathers, Fosbery reporting that ‘so long as bathers wear suitable costume and public decency is not outraged, I am unable to see that a practice permitted for so many years should be stopped.’ While daylight bathing was decreasingly contested from this point on, it was to be another year before the Manly Council would alter its by-laws to permit it (in December 1903), and it was not until 1905 that the Waverley Council followed suit.

By then, the coastal councils had been debating the appropriateness of public bathing for several years. The difficulty Waverley Council had in reaching a resolution is remarkable in the context of the ease with which Randwick lifted the daylight bathing ban on their beaches; the contrast between the two councils is demonstrated most clearly not only by the fact that the latter received a complaint from Waverley Council about indecent bathing at Little Coogee in late 1901, but in Randwick’s response to the letter, carrying a resolution that it ‘be put in the waste-paper basket’. In 1902, shortly after Randwick Council voted to allow bathing on its beaches, Waverley Council was debating the same issues, and upon receiving Fosbery’s approval of daylight bathing in appropriate attire, was divided between those who deemed the relevant sections of the Police Act as ‘obsolete and inoperative’, and those who considered his attitude to be ‘most unsatisfactory, as it appeared that he was shirking duties which he ought to perform’.

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20 A further clause in this by-law specified the terms of appropriate bathing dress. Randwick Council Minutes 7 October 1902.
21 Fosbery, quoted in Booth, Australian Beach Cultures, p.31.
22 Manly Council Minutes, 2 November 1903, 14 December 1903; Waverley Council Minutes, 8 August 1905, 26 September 1905, 14 November 1905, 28 November 1905.
23 Randwick Council Minutes 17 December 1901.
24 Waverley Council Minutes, 9 December 1902.
State Minister for Lands: "I propose to place the bay under proper supervision; and to frame such regulations as are necessary for removing every objectionable feature of the present practice."

The Coogee Copper: "Now, clear out of this, ma’am, an’ remove this objectionable feature; ’Tis the Minister’s ordering, an’ I’ll see that it’s done."

Figures 9.2 and 9.3: Attempts to regulate bathing at Little Coogee in 1902 were met with popular dissent.
The alteration of the councils’ by-laws to permit daylight bathing coincided with, and was undoubtedly influenced by, increasing backlash from the community against claims surf bathing was immoral. In April of that year, the *Daily Telegraph* sent a correspondent to Bondi Beach to investigate claims of indecency. The complainant, an ‘indignant correspondent’, had written that:

> Where once groups of children played in the sand, vulgar hoodlums are to be seen stripped or stripping, in full and open view of anybody who happens to be near. They care not for concealment to dress or undress. They belong to the class which knows not decency. Dirty, ignorant louts they are — dirty, bodily and mentally, for they go not there to bathe, but to indulge unchecked in their horseplay on the beach, naked if they so desire.  

The *Daily Telegraph* correspondent reported a very different scene upon inspecting the beach, and was entirely approving of the actions of bathers there. Far from nudity and horseplay, in the three hours spent there they found ‘nothing indecent or unbecoming in the conduct of the 200 persons’ bathing and on the beach. Furthermore, ‘in conversation with a police officer it was learned that very few of the undesirable class bathe at Bondi, and those of this designation who do patronise the beach find restraint in their surroundings’. The article went on to quote a Waverley Alderman who was adamant that the Council ‘were in favor [sic] of open bathing’.  

In the following months, several complaints echoing those above sent by ‘Decency’ to the *Sydney Morning Herald* were met with multiple defences of the pastime by those who advocated its health, and disputed the claims of immorality.

By 1905, we can see that the moral anxieties of the councils, and especially Waverley, which had opposed daylight bathing most fervently, were easing; although as we have seen regarding sun bathing, they continued to attempt to control the display of bodies

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on the beach. Whether swayed by public opinion, the construction of surf bathing as ‘healthy’, the complacency of the police or simply by seeing for themselves that daylight bathing could in fact be conducted inoffensively, their change of attitude legitimised an activity which had been enjoyed by Europeans in differing degrees of concealment for possibly close to a century on Sydney’s beaches. It also led to a rapid influx of ‘virgin’ surf bathers: bathers who were not familiar with the surf nor who could necessarily even swim. This swift rise in the popularity of surf bathing consequently created new headaches for the coastal councils on two fronts: firstly, it created an instant need for ‘accommodation’ for the bathers in the form of changing amenities, lavatories and somewhere to store their valuables. Secondly, as will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, the need for making surf bathing safe for all who wished to indulge in it quickly became apparent, and fell foremost on the shoulders of the councils, despite their reluctance to accept responsibility.

The provision of surf bathing amenities

Having finally agreed that surf bathing was not inherently immoral — so long as bathers were properly dressed — the coastal councils were initially unwilling to expend municipal funds on providing amenities for surf bathers, on the grounds that most surf bathers came from greater Sydney. Their reluctance exacerbated the debates about the morality of bathers, as those wishing to enter the surf in appropriate attire had no private places in which to change. While discussing ‘Mrs Grundy’s’ opposition to daylight bathing at length, Douglas Booth stops short of addressing that offensive behaviour which was forced on bathers through lack of amenities. Yet this was one of the key factors offending ‘innocent’ beachgoers at Bronte, Manly, Freshwater and several other beaches between 1905 and 1907 in particular — it was less bathing itself than the act of changing on the beach that raised most objections. In January 1907, a 19 year old bather was arrested for indecency on Bondi beach, having been found ‘in a perfectly nude condition, when a large number of persons were on the beach.’ The defendant pleaded that he had done so as there were no notices prohibiting undressing...
on the beach, and his actions were further defended in the *Sydney Morning Herald* the following day as entirely appropriate and unavoidable behaviour:

The offence, such as it was, appears to have consisted in undressing in the sight of men, a procedure which at holiday times, at any rate, can scarcely be avoided. Those convicted and punished seem to have been individuals chosen out of many hundreds who "sinned" likewise.

Other bathers, however, were more aware of their potential to offend, and attempted to find discreet places in which to dress and undress. 'John Freshwater' offered helpful advice to *Sydney Morning Herald* readers who were faced with a lack of dressing accommodation on the beaches, suggesting that 'the simple placing of a towel round the loins while adjusting the costume is all that is necessary.' At Bronte in 1908 there were no facilities save those devised by 'private individuals in a primitive fashion under the rocks at the northern end.' And Sydney beaches were not the only ones subject to problems caused by a lack of changing facilities: at Kiama, 120 kilometres south of Sydney, male bathers reportedly used the pig pens in the showground adjacent to the beach to change in privacy before surf sheds were provided, a practice that horrified both authorities and non-bathing locals alike. The Metropolitan District Surveyor was also concerned about indecency forced by a lack of amenities at Wollongong in 1908, where the beach was overlooked by both a street and the Mount Pleasant Colliery's tramway.

While the need was most evident from 1905 onwards, some surf bathers had been lobbying for amenities from the closing years of the nineteenth century. Debates raged in council chambers and in the pages of the press about whether the provision of surf

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30 Police Courts, *SMH* 22 January 1907, p.11.
32 Letter to the editor, 25 January 1907, p.8
33 Waverley Council to Acting Under Secretary for Lands, 21 January 1908, *SRNSW: CGS8258 [08/1471]*, with bundle 08/3577.
bathing accommodation was an 'appropriate' means of municipal expenditure for much of the first decade of the twentieth century. In addition to their opposition to the questionable morality of surf bathers, most influential in the earlier part of this period, there were four reasons for the reluctance of coastal councils on this matter. They reveal the shifting attitudes of both councils and the New South Wales government towards the increasingly popular surf bathing.

The first of these was an attitude which has not been specifically identified within existing Australian beach histories. That is, there was an assumption on the part of some local and state government representatives at the turn of the twentieth century – before the hoards entered the surf – that the still water bathing experience inside an enclosed space, such as in baths, was not only more morally appropriate, but better, or more desirable, than bathing in the surf.\(^{36}\) Partly, this reflected the strong tradition of still water bathing which had been transported to Australia from Britain. But it also represented an inability or perhaps even an unwillingness of those in power to understand the reasons behind the rapid growth in the popularity of surf bathing. The surf was attractive both because it offered an experience of bathing which could not be replicated in the baths – the power of the surf in washing over and around the bather was unique – and because it was free.\(^{37}\)

The government and council preference for baths was articulated most clearly by the District Surveyor when he declared that the still water baths on the harbour side of the Manly peninsula were 'well selected and should meet all reasonable local requirements' in 1900, despite repeated requests for ladies dressing sheds on the ocean beach.\(^{38}\) When lobbying for a legitimisation of the pastime and the provision of amenities, bathers found themselves forced to explain to non-believers the supremacy of surf bathing over that in still water. E.D. Hoben was one such campaigner who wrote to the Minister for Lands in 1902 arguing that 'there is no comparison between ocean water bathing and harbour bathing', a claim repeated by Thos. Allridge three

\(^{36}\) See SMH 30 June 1905, p.6.
\(^{37}\) The Sydney Morning Herald attributed the popularity of bathing at Little Coogee in 1904 to the fact it was free. SMH, 2 December 1904, p.4.
\(^{38}\) District Surveyor Report, 23 February 1900, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [00/1288], with bundle 02/4531. For letters complaining of the vested interests of Waverley Aldermen regarding the baths at Bondi, see SMH 16 June 1905, p.6.
years later who contended that ‘hundreds can testify (to this) who have indulged in both’. 39 Richard Arthur M.L.A., who later promoted the eugenic benefits of the surf, even admitted that ‘I myself, before I got into the breakers a few days ago for the first time, was inclined to think that the rights of the non-bathing public were being unduly encroached upon, but a few dips have scattered this belief’. 40

Secondly, and closely related to the first reason, coastal councils were concerned that in providing changing amenities on the beach they would be encouraging an activity which they considered to be inherently dangerous. Hence the Acting Under Secretary for Lands, when recommending a request for ladies change sheds on Manly ocean beaches be denied in 1900, wrote that ‘apart from anything else lady bathers should hardly be encouraged to incur the risks of surf bathing.’ 41 The Waverley Council expressed similar sentiment when refusing to sanction bathing at Tamarama Beach in 1907, and even went so far as to erect signs warning people not to bathe there. 42 For surf bathers, according to the Sydney Mail, ‘it is this element of risk that lends [surf bathing] some of its undoubted fascination.’ 43 But for the councils, this danger was a legitimate concern, and one which they were constantly reminded of until the formation of surf life saving clubs in 1907.

The third reason for the reluctance of the councils to provide surf bathing accommodation was financially motivated: they feared bathers would abandon municipal baths for the surf, diminishing their baths revenue. 44 This concern had been articulated as early as 1897, and was central to debates regarding the provision of surf bathing accommodation at both Manly and Bondi beaches. Alderman Towns, of Manly Council for example, ‘cried shame’ on the Council for supporting a pavilion on Steyne reserve, as he ‘considered it suicidal to erect bathing boxes and dressing-

39 ED Hoben to Minister for Lands, 8 April 1902, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [02/4531], with bundle 02/4531; Letter to the editor, SMH 17 June 1905, p.6.
41 Internal Lands Department Correspondence, 23 February 1900, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [00/1288], with bundle 02/4531.
42 Waverley Council Minutes, 11 June 1907
43 ‘Summer at the seaside’, Sydney Mail 16 January 1907, p.140.
44 The Manly Council expected to make a profit of nearly £500 in 1900, and £450 in 1902 and 1903 from their public baths. Manly Council Minutes, 13 March 1900, 24 March 1902, 23 March 1903. A drop in the revenue of the Domain baths was attributed to the rise of surf bathing in 1909. SMH 5 November 1909, p.6.
rooms, whose effect must be to compete with the existing municipal and ladies’ baths and diminish their receipts’. Aldermen Blunt, of Waverley, was less animated but no less concerned when he opposed a motion to provide bathing accommodation for men and women at Bondi Beach in 1905, because ‘he thought the revenue from the Council’s baths would be greatly depreciated’. Their fear was echoed by the lessees of municipal baths, who also stood to lose financially from decreased patronage. Police Inspector Fosbery consequently found that the source of a complaint against inappropriate behaviour by surf bathers at Bondi in 1902 was actually Mr Farmer, the lessee of the Bondi baths, who was apparently ‘annoyed at seeing so many people enjoying a free bath’ in the surf.

This attitude sparked outrage amongst surf bathers campaigning for changing facilities on the beaches. A.J. Phillippe and E.D. Hoben complained to the Minister for Lands of the bias of Manly Council in not providing amenities at Manly Ocean beach for fear of losing revenue through their baths. Hoben accused the Council of having ‘done all in its power by refusing proper facilities, by neglecting safeguards, and by urging police action to discourage bathing on the ocean beach, and force bathers into the Municipal baths on the harbour side’, while Phillippe wrote that ‘the Council (as owner of the Baths) is in distinct opposition to sea bathing in the open as encouraged in almost every other watering place of any importance in the world’.

The best defence against these concerns regarding baths revenue was a demonstration of the financial benefits of surf bathing, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The fourth reason for the initial lack of surf bathing amenities on Sydney’s beaches was also the most debated issue. Namely, most Aldermen did not consider the provision of accommodation for bathers who were overwhelmingly from other parts of Sydney and the state to be the councils’ responsibility, arguing instead that the New...

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45 Report of Manly Council Meeting, SMH 1 May 1897. Manly Council provided bathing accommodation on the ocean beach by 1903, and was therefore tolerant of surf bathing substantially before the Waverley Council.
47 Police report, quoted in Booth, Australian Beach Cultures, p.31.
48 A.J. Phillippe to Minister for Lands, 30 January 1900, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [ind. 00/596], with bundle 02/4531. Original emphasis; E.D. Hoben to Minister for Lands, 8 April 1902, [02/4531].
South Wales Government should meet the cost. We see here another manifestation of the argument put forward by foreshore campaigners in which the beaches were constructed as a 'state asset'; again the primary purpose of this claim was to share or evade financial commitments. The introduction of the Municipalities Act in 1906 helped to clarify the relative responsibilities of the councils and Government regarding foreshores and public reserves, but did not stem the flow of requests for financial assistance regarding the erection of dressing sheds and other forms of surf bathing accommodation.

Number-crunching: the impact of surf bathing

The insistence by the councils that surf bathing was a state, and not a local concern, was denied by the State Government. As the need for expenditure on the beaches grew, so too did the debate over who was responsible for surf bathing. The councils had the overwhelming support of the public in refusing to accept responsibility, as both bathers and those opposed to it argued against municipal expenditure on amenities, although for different reasons. 'Ratepayer', for example, protested against 'the Waverley Council using the ratepayer's money for what is a fad of a few local residents', while Richard Arthur sympathised with the Councils' attitude, declaring that 'it is altogether unfair that the whole expense of providing shelter sheds, lavatories etc, for these people, who come from every part of the State, should be thrown upon the Manly Council'. The most common argument was that the government should provide bathing accommodation because they were the ones who reaped financial rewards from bathing, through their tramway revenue. This attitude was voiced in the letters to the press as early as 1904, but remained a constant argument of such correspondence into the 1910s.

After 1905, government and council attitudes towards surf bathing began to change; they became more willing to consider about the needs of surf bathers, and more willing to consider about spending money on amenities for them. Increasing acceptance of the morality of daylight bathing cannot alone explain this shift. So how do we account for it? The support for surf bathing demonstrated by the Sydney press

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49 Letters to the editors, SMH 25 August 1905, p.11; Daily Telegraph 1 November 1906, p.4.
through their publishing of both letters advocating the pastime and editorials espousing the health benefits of the surf, played a large role in the increasing legitimisation of surf bathing. The popular movement for surf bathing was therefore undeniable by about 1907. During the second half of the 1900s, the potential revenue which could be made from surf bathers featured increasingly in the discussions about surf bathing in the Sydney press, and, as we shall see, this financial incentive was crucial in garnering the financial support of the local and state governments.

Number crunching: the impact of surf bathing

We can only go on the estimates of the press, but their obsessive reports of Sydney on holidays highlight a substantial increase in the numbers of beachgoers during the first decade of the twentieth century. According to their estimates, Coogee enjoyed the patronage of several thousand visitors on Boxing Day 1889, and between eight and ten thousand on the same day in 1896; by 1909, it was calculated that 30,000 people would visit on one day alone.51 By the mid-1900s, Manly could also regularly expect 30,000 visitors on a public holiday, up from a rare 20,000 on New Years day in 1900, and regular numbers in the vicinity of 15,000 during the previous decade.52 On a summer Sunday in 1912, as many as 45,000 people were reported to have gone to Manly Beach, giving the one constable there ‘a busy time’.53 Crucially most, if not all, Manly visitors were now going to the ocean beach, rather than spreading themselves evenly between the harbour and ocean sides of the peninsular; this jump in visitation consequently affected the ocean beach far more than it may otherwise appear.

It is difficult to determine what proportion of visitors to the beaches indulged in surf bathing, but certainly the numbers increased as facilities were provided and the beaches were made safer by the presence of surf lifesavers. On Boxing Day 1900, ‘over a thousand must have enjoyed a dip’ at Little Coogee, according to a report in the Sydney Morning Herald, and in 1903, surf bathers at Manly on Sundays and holidays were also reported to number in the low thousands.54 On a summer’s day in 1908, in contrast, there were approximately around 4,000 men and women surf

51 SMH 27 December 1889, p.6; 28 December 1896, p.5; 14 January 1909, p.8.
52 SMH 2 January 1900, p.7; Town and Country Journal, 11 January 1905, p.29.
53 SMH 23 December 1912, p.9
54 SMH, 27 December 1900, p.6; Sydney Mail, 7 January 1903, p.25.
bathing at Coogee by 11am, a figure which surely rose as the day went on. But in the following year, it was claimed that 20,000 or 30,000 bathed in the breakers at Manly at any one time. Though not entirely reliable, these figures point to a trend in which the beach was attracting more visitors in the opening decade of the twentieth century than previously, and surf bathing specifically was becoming a more popular beach pastime.

From around 1907, higher levels of visitation to the beaches and increased residential settlement along the coast were being attributed to daylight surf bathing by bathers, Aldermen and Members of Parliament alike. In January of that year, Arthur Rosenthal, swimmer, surf shooter and keen promoter of surf bathing, claimed that 'beach sport' at Manly 'has been the means of enhancing land values by 30 to 40 per cent'. James Ashton, a confessed surf bather and Minister for Lands, went even further, claiming that land 'had increased over 100 per cent in value in proximity to a much favoured bathing resort'. He also admitted what those campaigning for greater financial support had been claiming for several years, that the government benefited from 'increased tramway and other traffic' induced by surf bathing. In 1914, the Government Land Valuer confirmed that the coastal land boom was still taking effect, stating that

There has been a phenomenal boom in the last twelve months in all the land at the northern end of Bondi Beach, and the market value has risen, to my mind, out of all reason ... The extraordinary demand of the general public for these water frontage sites in favourite bathing resorts about Sydney has had the effect of changing values almost monthly, and

55 SMH 22 January 1908, p.9.
56 The Sydney Morning Herald did report, however, that these figures were 'probably exaggerated'. 'Manly: the Boulogne of Australia', SMH 28 September 1909, p.4.
57 The erection of 50 houses close to Coogee within a three month period was also attributed to surf bathing. Arthur Rosenthal, 'Topics of the Beaches', Sydney Mail (Seaside Number), 16 January 1907, p.158; 'Manly v. Coogee: A big fight on', SMH 18 July 1907, p.3. See also SMH 4 February 1908, p.7 (letter); 11 September 1907, p.5; The Sun, 11 July 1910, p.4, Evening News, 19 October 1907, p.9 (real estate advertisement).
58 'The advantages of surf bathing', SMH 11 March 1907.

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estimates made one year may be 50% out within twelve months.\footnote{59}

It is difficult to confirm the anecdotal evidence of soaring property prices, although Sean Brawley points out that Bondi enjoyed a record land sale in February 1907.\footnote{60} Certainly, statistical analysis demonstrates that the first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a population boom along Sydney’s ocean coast. During this decade, the population of both Manly and Randwick Municipalities roughly doubled: Manly jumped from 5,035 in 1901 to 10,456 in 1911, and Randwick rose from 9,753 to 19,463. In Waverley, the population also grew substantially, from 12,342 in 1901 to 19,831 in 1911.\footnote{61}

The specific impact of surf bathing on this growth of coastal areas is difficult to pinpoint. Surf bathing may have increased the profile of ocean beach recreation, making the desire to live by the sea more widespread, but residential populations along Sydney’s ocean coast had been growing steadily since the first subdivisions of large coastal estates in the 1870s and ‘80s. The speed with which Bronte’s beachfront allotments were sold in the early 1880s, and compensation claims by O’Brien on the basis of lost revenue through potential subdivision of the foreshores, attests to a desire to live by the sea during the nineteenth century, despite expert opinion that the land may not have been suitable for residential purposes.\footnote{62} Furthermore, the spread of development along Sydney’s coast was part of a larger real estate boom in the opening years of the twentieth century, which saw the populations of other areas on the outskirts of the city soar in similar proportion to the coastal municipalities.\footnote{63}

\footnote{59} Government Land Valuer, Report to Under Secretary for Lands re Ben Buckler Point Resumption, 9 January 1914, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [14/425], with bundle 24/3208.
\footnote{60} Brawley, \textit{The Bondi Lifesaver}, p.33.
\footnote{62} In the 1886 dispute over the compensation paid out to Francis O’Brien for the resumption of Bondi Beach, both O’Brien and the Government called expert witnesses who presented contrasting arguments regarding the suitability of the predominantly sandy land for building on. One ‘speculator in land’ even argued that the ‘ocean frontage’ was the least valuable portion of O’Brien’s property. \textit{SMH} 31 August – 4 September 1886.
\footnote{63} Between 1901 and 1911, for example, the populations of Canterbury, Rockdale and Willoughby roughly doubled, and Marrickville gained nearly 12,000 new residents. Trivett, \textit{NSW Statistical register 1912}, p.10.
Figures 9.4 and 9.5: Real Estate promoters portrayed surf bathing as a major attraction for coastal properties from as early as 1908.

Nonetheless, the Sydney press continued to attribute increasing popularity of the beaches and growing coastal populations to surf bathing. In 1910, this sentiment was endorsed by the Premier, Charles Wade, who noted the ‘great progress in settlement’ in the district near Bondi, and ‘he attributed a great part of that success to the popularity of surf bathing and the attractions of the beach’.64 The following month, *The Sun* argued that ‘there is little doubt that the immense progress manifested in the districts of Coogee, Bondi and Manly during that period is due largely to the development of surf bathing’.65

**Surf bathing in a new light**

What were the implications of this suggestion that surf bathing directly improved both the rate revenue of seaside councils and tram revenue of the government? Primarily, it

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64 ‘Future of Bondi: A visit by the Premier’, *SMH* 20 June 1910, p.10.
65 ‘Coogee and Sun-bathing’, *The Sun*, 11 July 1910, p.4. See also *SMH* 25 May 1909, p.3; 11 September 1909, p.5; 28 September 1909, p.6; 10 January 1913, p.5; 14 June 1913, p.8.
translated into an increased willingness by both these bodies to spend funds on increasing the attractions of the beaches, and specifically, providing amenities for surf bathers. Whereas in the opening years of the twentieth century some Aldermen were opposed to the provision of change rooms on the beaches for fear it would detract from the council revenue received at the baths, or encourage ‘inappropriate’ behaviour, within only a few years, every effort was being made to provide accommodation at beaches up and down the coast; in some cases, this was now a deliberate attempt to attract beachgoers. The perceived health benefits of surf bathing were also fundamental to the shift in governmental attitudes towards the activity.

In further demonstration of the importance of economics to the Waverley Council, Waverley Aldermen were among the first to articulate a recognition of the potential financial benefits surf bathing might bring to the municipality. In their 1905 discussions about providing surf bathing amenities, Alderman Parkhill stated that he supported the proposal because ‘Waverley could not lag behind in inducing the public to settle in the district’. His comment was hardly influential – the Council agreed to pay just £18 of a total of £148 for the erection of the sheds, with the balance comprising mostly of government funding and a small portion from ‘the public’. But through this statement we can see that in the tension between baths – and their revenue – and the ‘free’ ocean beaches, the needs and desired of surf bathers were beginning to hold some sway. In 1907, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that the ‘enthusiastic’ Aldermen at Randwick Council, ‘realising the enormous benefits which the municipality would receive from an inrush of thousands of bathers, (are) making strenuous endeavours to out-popularise Manly’, and were using £430 donated by the government for the purpose of extending and improving the bathing sheds and other features of the beach. The connection between improved fortunes and surf bathing also prompted local progress associations to take on issues regarding provisions of foreshore reserves and amenities on beaches in this period.

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66 Waverley Council Minutes, 24 October 1905.
67 Waverley Council Minutes 24 October 1905.
68 ‘Manly V Coogee: A big fight on’, SMH 18 July 1907, p.3.
69 This was especially the case in the Waverley district, where the Waverley Vigilance Association, Waverley Political Labor League, Waverley Liberal Association, Ratepayers Association, and Eastern Suburbs Railway League petitioned for the resumption of the Tamarama foreshore. Waverley Vigilance Association to Lt. Col. Onslow M.L.A, 20 October 1912, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [12/21505],
As had been the case regarding foreshore resumptions and reservations, the state government initially refused to concede any responsibility for the governance of those foreshores which were vested in the local councils, or commit to any expenditure thereon. In 1907 however, the Department of Lands gave the Randwick Council £430 to improve the accommodation and attractions at Coogee Beach.\(^{70}\) Several months later, the department set a crucial precedent by agreeing to a ‘pound for pound’ subsidy for the cost of erecting dressing sheds, which quickly became the standard way of funding accommodation on beaches along the state’s coast.\(^{71}\) In doing so, they demonstrated a willingness to accept some responsibility for ensuring propriety in surf bathing – the provision of amenities was now a responsibility shared equally by the coastal councils and the New South Wales government. By 1910, the Premier and Ministers had publicly declared that surf bathing, and the provision of amenities for that purpose, had their full support. Yet they continued to act with caution; the government’s refusal to grant the subsidy to any bodies other than local councils frustrated even the most altruistic efforts of other local bodies such as progress associations and surf life saving clubs, who were often keen to contribute to the construction of amenities in the absence of council support.\(^{72}\)

### The ‘right’ to free amenities

Debates over the provision of amenities did not end with the ‘pound for pound’ scheme. By 1909, although the most popular beaches had bathing amenities, the quality and condition of these structures was increasingly being called into question. Described as ‘dogbox structures’, the bathing sheds were said to be insecure, ‘filthy’ ‘pigstyes’.\(^{73}\) Some called for even greater state expenditure on the beaches as a solution:

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\(^{70}\) ‘Manly V Coogee: A big fight on’, _SMH_ 18/7/1907, p.3.

\(^{71}\) It is not clear which government established the ‘pound for pound’ funding scheme. Wade replaced Carruthers as Premier and Samuel Moore replaced James Ashton as Minister for Lands on 2 October 1907. The first report of this scheme was made regarding the Manly surf bathing accommodation, and was announced in the press less than two weeks after this government change. ‘The Manly Surf Club’, _Evening News_, 14 October 1907, p.3.

\(^{72}\) Under Secretary, Report on Corrimal SLSC request for funding, 15 December 1910, _SRNSW: CGS 8258 [10/20529]_, with bundle 11/11586. See also Correspondence between Wollongong Council, Wollongong Surf Life Saving Club and Department of Lands re surf sheds, 1908-1913, with /[13/5863].

\(^{73}\) Letter to the editor, _SMH_ 9 January 1909, p.11; _Evening News_, 17 October 1907, p.2 (letter).
Surf bathing has, indeed, developed into a national pastime, and in the opinion of the municipal authorities, whose districts are bounded by long lines of ocean beaches the necessities of the case have fast outgrown the capacity of the municipal purse. As a matter of fact, to one resident who uses the local beach hundreds use it from distant suburbs ... But it is pointed out that the real beneficiary is the tramway department ... 74

Others suggested that the easiest option would be to appoint caretakers to the bathing sheds and charge bathers a small fee for using them.75 This suggestion, articulated several times by Sydney’s daily press, stirred passionate debate about whether the beach should be free in every aspect, or a small fee for services was reasonable.76 Some critics compared the amenities on Sydney’s beaches unfavourably to those of the Continent, which were much better equipped: in northern France, wrote ‘Merman’, ‘the undressing was done in private houses, or in neat little cabins on the beach ... the bathers retired to their cabins after their baths, shut their doors, and did not emerge till fully dressed.’77 On the Jersey shore, on America’s east coast, at the end of the nineteenth century, those who could afford it either owned or rented bathhouses, which were ‘arranged in lines a hundred feet deep and at right angles to the beach.’78 In both these cases, as with other Continental and American beaches, changing amenities were privately owned, and largely the exclusive preserve of the wealthy. This was even the case on Melbourne’s Brighton beach, where bathing boxes similar to those at England’s Brighton allowed private access to their owners from as early as the 1870s.79

76 See for instance SMH 15 January 1909, p.6; 2 February 1909, p.9 (letter); 12 October 1909, p.6; 15 February 1912, p.8.
77 Letter to the editor, SMH 24 January 1907, p.10. See also Evening News 17 October 1907, p.2 (letter).
78 Lencek and Bosker, The Beach, p.141.
79 There were many attempts, however, both by the council and landowners to remove these boxes. See Bate, A History of Brighton, pp.348, 404.

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There was vocal opposition, however, to the suggestion bathers should have to pay to use amenities in Sydney. It was seen as a form of privatising the beach, and conflicted against the supposed inherent ‘right’ of the public to use the beach. The demands for free and unrestricted public access to both the beach and amenities, meant that Sydney’s beaches could not be developed along the lines established at many beaches of the northern hemisphere, where wealthy beachgoers had access to private dressing accommodation.

The alarm that coastal councils might revoke the ‘right to free bathing’ was first raised in 1904, when the Sydney Morning Herald demanded this ‘right’ be ‘preserved’ if the reserve at Little Coogee was vested in the Randwick Council. And in 1907, an attempt by the Manly Council to charge a fee for access to the surf sheds caused consternation among ‘a section of the residents’.

The dissentients contend that it is a public beach, and the council has a right to provide the necessary accommodation to ensure decency, and that the people should not be penalised when indulging in surf bathing. It is pointed out that at Bondi, Coogee and other places no charge is made, and hence the non-contents are using their influence with the Government to prevent the council from adopting a bylaw that would give it that right to charge for a dip in the ocean on a public reserve.

By 1911, with the accommodation on most Sydney beaches still substandard, surf bathing representatives – that is, representatives of surf lifesaving clubs and some prominent individual surf bathers, not the vast majority of casual beach visitors – were beginning to admit that they would be willing to pay for amenities if it meant their belongings could be secured and they could change in a clean, private space.

Giving evidence to the New South Wales Surf Bathing Committee, Aldermen from the coastal councils and shires explained that they could not provide such a service for

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80 ‘Bathing at Little Coogee’, SMH 2 December 1904, p.4.
81 ‘Manly V. Coogee: A Big Fight on’, SMH 18 July 1907, p.3.
82 NSW Surf Bathing Committee evidence, pp.16-17, 56.
free. They were adamant, however, that the principles of the ‘free’ beach would not be interfered with; they were not charging beachgoers to bathe, merely to use their facilities. Based on this evidence, the Surf Bathing Committee recommended that as a solution to the amenities crisis, surf bathing accommodation be built or improved immediately on most Sydney beaches, to be funded by the New South Wales government but repaid by the Councils. They further recommended that the councils be empowered to charge fees for the use of this accommodation, arguing that ‘the cost of providing accommodation should be borne by those who benefit by its use – the bathers.’

This attitude, which assumed all surf bathers could afford to pay for changing amenities, was challenged in an editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Many of those who had agreed most bathers would be willing to pay for surf bathing accommodation argued for the need for at least some free sections, which would be less secure and clean. The committee may have overlooked those who could not afford to pay even 2d. for a place to change and leave their belongings, but the *Sydney Morning Herald* did not:

The committee was divided in opinion as to the provision of free dressing sheds, but this is really the whole matter in a nutshell. The people who cannot afford to pay the few pence that would be demanded are precisely those whose interests have to be conserved. The beach offers them at present a healthy outing at the cost of a tram fare... The leading principle should be that the ocean beach is free to all.

This sentiment may have been successfully employed to stop attempts by entrepreneurs to charge for access to portions of the beach at Manly in 1913, but it was less influential on the matter of amenities. Tram and rate revenues were

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83 *NSW Surf Bathing Committee evidence*. See for instance interviews with Alderman Neale (Manly), 28 August 1911, p.70; Frank Donovan, Manly Surf Club, 15 August 1911, p.12;
84 *NSW Surf Bathing Committee Report*, pp.18-19.
85 *NSW Surf Bathing Committee evidence*, pp. 41, 56, 72.
86 *SMH* 15 February 1912, p.8.
insufficient to persuade the local and state governments to provide free accommodation, and most bathers, it seems, were willing to spend a small sum to ensure their belongings were secure and they could change away from the public gaze.\textsuperscript{87}

While they may have been reluctant to fund surf bathing amenities on the grounds that they would be heavily used by visitors to the municipality, that is, non-rate payers, by 1905, some Aldermen were clearly beginning to understand surf bathing in a new light. No longer was it viewed as a threat to existing modes of income for the coastal councils. Rather, it held potential for greater revenue: through increased patronage to businesses located in the municipality, through new municipal sources of income – either leasing refreshment rooms and costume hiring on the beaches, or charging for entrance to the changing sheds – and through increased rate revenue created by a greater demand to live by the sea.

By 1907 then, we can see that two of the developments which enabled surf bathing to become a mainstream beach activity had come into place: daylight surf bathing was legal, and councils and the New South Wales government were beginning to provide amenities for surf bathers. Even as they were constructing this accommodation, however, the coastal councils were faced with a third problem, and one they were even more reluctant to face: how to make surf bathing safe. The correlation between financial revenue and providing lifesaving provisions was less obvious; and again, Councillors argued that surf bathers largely came from outside their municipalities, and were therefore not their responsibility. On this matter, however, the New South Wales government refused to be drawn.

Making the beaches safe: a question of responsibility

As the numbers of surf-bathers increased dramatically in the first decade of the twentieth century, so too did the frequency of drownings on Sydney’s ocean beaches. Consequently, the evolution of daylight bathing was not just problematic on moral grounds; the dangers of the surf quickly created a new headache for the seaside

\textsuperscript{87} B.T. Dowd discusses the profits made by the Waverley Council through the Bondi surf sheds, which in 1914 stood at £1625. Dowd, \textit{The History of the Waverley Municipal District}, p.134.
councils. Between 1903 and 1907, the Sydney press, enthusiastic about the opportunities offered by this new-found craze on the beaches, reported obsessively on matters relating to surf bathing and Sydney’s surf beaches, and published astounding quantities of letters to the editor on these issues. In January of 1907 alone, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published twenty-six letters to the editor regarding the safety and propriety of surf bathing, and a further seven on the 1st of February that year. They further reported one drowning and six successful rescues on surf beaches, and published six articles eulogising various matters relating to surf bathing. The sensationalisation of the occasional drownings and more frequent near-drownings in the surf not only in this paper but the Sydney press generally, played on and exacerbated the existing fears of the ocean as an unknown, mysterious, powerful and, most importantly, demonic force.

Minimal buoys and lifelines had been provided by the coastal councils through the Royal Shipwreck Relief and Humane Society (later Royal Humane Society, or RHS) and the Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS), but they did not meet the increased demands of the early twentieth century. Older lines sometimes broke in the course of a rescue, and because they were attached to a fixed pole, could not be used to reach many bathers in difficulty. They were also subject to vandalism of varying sorts, including being used by fishermen. By the Australian summer of 1906/07, surf bathers were beginning to insist that something be done to secure the safety of the beaches. P.A Philips wrote in January 1907, following ‘yet another loss of life at Bondi from want of proper appliances’ that ‘somebody ought to be responsible for seeing that due provision is made for the safety of the public’. The *Daily Telegraph* also considered it imperative that either the local councils or state government take responsibility:

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88 *SMH*, 1 January – 1 February 1907.
89 See Ford, ‘Squads of Brown Men’.
90 Waverley Council Minutes, 7 June 1887, 11 November 1902, 24 March 1903; Randwick Council Minutes 20 February 1894, 17 April 1894, 6 March 1906; Manly Council Minutes, 20 February 1900, 19 June 1900; *Daily Telegraph*, 21 February 1896, p.6; *Evening News*, 19 March 1896, p.3
91 For reports of these incidents, see *SMH*, 4 January 1900, p.6; 18 January 1902, p.9; 23 January 1902, p.9; 17 April 1903, p.5; 2 January 1906, p.6; 15 October 1906, p.6; 1 February 1907, p.5; 5 February 1907, p.6; 12 February 1907, p.10; *Evening News*, 18 January 1902, p.2; Manly Council Minutes 6 April 1903.
92 P.A. Philip, letter to the editor, *SMH* 3 January 1907, p.4.
Surf bathing being comparatively new to the community, its risks and how to minimise them have yet to be properly understood. In the meantime, if the municipalities abutting the most frequented beaches cannot do more in the way of providing life-saving appliances, it would not be out of place for the Government to spend the little that is necessary to have means of rescue at hand for every emergency that is within the scope of reasonable anticipation. The beaches are the property of the whole community, and the use of them for surf bathing purposes is to be encouraged in the interests of public health and happiness, which it is the first business of civilised government to promote.93

But the question remained, who should take responsibility? Non-bathers demanded that bathers should pay a fee to support the provision of lifesaving equipment and boats, but, as one proponent recognised, ‘the spirit of wanting everything for nothing on the part of surf bathers appears to be too deep-seated to be altered of their free will’.94 The RLSS considered it the ‘duty’ of the local councils to supply lifelines, and the councils, as always, argued it was the obligation of the state government.95 The refusal of either local councils or the state government to take responsibility for the beaches, which had created difficulties in the provision of surf bathing amenities, again frustrated bathers who demanded better lifesaving equipment on the beaches.

Waverley Council was the most adamant of the three coastal councils in refusing to accept any responsibility for the safety of their beaches, despite a number of drowning deaths. In January 1906, in a letter of condolence to the parents of a ‘lad’ who drowned at Bondi beach, the Council wrote that they accepted no responsibility for this fatality.96 By the following summer, they were continually forced to respond to

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93 *Daily Telegraph*, 3 January 1907, p.6.
94 Bondi Bill, Letter to the editor, *SMH* 10 January 1907, p.10. See also RD Hatch and N. Guthridge, letters to the editor, *SMH* 14 January 1907, p.8.
95 *SMH* 31 July 1906, p.7; *Daily Telegraph* 7 January 1907, p.4.
96 *Waverley Council Minutes*, 9 January 1906.
public anxieties regarding the safety of the surf, but they remained reluctant to act.\textsuperscript{97} In the case of Tamarama, which the Waverley Council had been keen to gain control of since the 1880s, they used the fact the beach was not yet vested in the Council to call for government contributions to life saving equipment immediately following a drowning there.\textsuperscript{98} The inaction of this Council also forced surf bathers to purchase their own lifesaving equipment for Bondi and Bronte in 1906 and 1907.\textsuperscript{99}

Manly Council, in contrast, were far more pro-active in regard to improving the safety of the Manly Ocean Beach, their action triggered by a number of early drowning deaths. Following the deaths of Miss Thorpe and Mr Smallpage in a dramatic rescue attempt by the latter in January 1902, the Council approved a motion that six piles be fixed on the ocean beach for carrying approved lifelines, and in March 1903 the Council voted to erect notices warning of dangerous currents, and provide flags to mark dangerous spots immediately following another drowning incident.\textsuperscript{100} A further dramatic rescue in November of that year signified that such measures were still insufficient, leading the Council to discuss fixing floating buoys on the ocean beach for bathers to cling to.\textsuperscript{101} They also employed a lifeguard, ‘Appy Eyre, during the summer of 1906/07, and supported the construction of a boat for surf rescues.\textsuperscript{102} But even these measures were insufficient in completely quelling public concerns, or quieting the media on the issue of the dangerous surf.

\textsuperscript{97} Waverley Council Minutes, 1903-1906
\textsuperscript{98} SMH 10 January 1907, p.10.
\textsuperscript{99} SMH, 15 October 1906, p.6; Australian Star, 17 October 1907, p.5; Waverley Council Minutes, 13 August 1907, 10 December 1907.
\textsuperscript{100} Manly Council Minutes, 9 March 1903.
\textsuperscript{101} Manly Council Minutes, 1900-1903.
Despite the demands for their involvement by the Waverley Council and in the press, and notwithstanding their eventual financial commitment to providing surf bathing amenities, the New South Wales government flatly refused to accept any responsibility for making the beaches safe. Individuals who wrote to either their local council or the government with suggestions of life saving schemes consequently found themselves constantly being referred back to the other body as each denied their responsibility. In February 1907, John Hume wrote to James Ashton, the Minister for Lands, with a complicated life saving scheme involving ropes at 20-30 feet intervals going from a steel cable behind the breakers, to pegs in the sand, which would mean that a bather in trouble 'could never be more than 10 or 15 feet away from a rope'.

The Metropolitan District Surveyor's response to this suggestion was quite clear:

Mr. Hume might be thanked for his interesting communication and informed that this department does not provide funds for the object referred to in his letter. Suggest that he might

103 John C. Hume to Minister for Lands, 1 February 1907, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/2048], with bundle 07/4669, box 20/8165.
communicate with the Borough Council of Manly or the councils of other Boroughs, in which the natural advantages of surf bathing tends to add to the popularity of the Borough for residential purposes and thereby increase its revenue.\textsuperscript{104}

Despite a further letter to Ashton in which Hume appealed for funding on the grounds that ‘another life has been lost at Bondi for want of protections, and three others narrowly escaped’,\textsuperscript{105} the Lands Department again refused, prompting a third letter from Hume outlining his frustrations at the unwillingness of either the government or local councils to take responsibility:

I beg to state that I have waited on the Mayor and council clerk of Waverley and showed them your reply. They told me they have not the power to do the necessary work. They say it is the duty of the Government – as retain control of the beaches – to protect the lives of people who surf there. They also say that if they do anything for the benefit of the people on the beach, the government would be likely to make them pay dearly for it ... Now as the council will do nothing surely the government who get such large revenue from the surf bathers who patronise the Bondi trams solely to get a dip in the surf will do something to protect their lives when it will cost so little to do it. I beg also to mention that I in the first place submitted my scheme to the Waverley Council who told me that the Government were the proper ones to approach thus the reason I submitted it to you.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{104} Metropolitan District Surveyor, notes on back of Hume’s letter \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/2048]}, with bundle 07/4669, box 20/8165. Emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{105} John C. Hume to Minister for Lands, 12 February 1907, \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/2634]}, with bundle 07/4669, box 20/8165.

\textsuperscript{106} John C. Hume to Under Secretary for Lands, 19 February 1907, \textit{SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/3137]} with bundle 07/4669, box 20/8165.
Again, however, his appeal was dismissed. Mr P.D McCormick, proposing to drive piles into the ground in the surf for bathers to cling to, had similar difficulties. He was informed by the Waverley Council in January 1907 that 'the Council has really no control of the Ocean Beach and the water it being a governmental matter, and [the Mayor] would refer you to the Department of Navigation who may be only too pleased to consider the proposals you are suggesting.' It is unclear whether McCormick did contact the Department of Navigation, but likely that he did so because it was over a month later that he contacted the Lands Department with his proposal. Again, the Metropolitan District Surveyor was unwilling to consider the idea, referring McCormick instead to the usually more responsive Manly Municipal Council, who were already considering a similar scheme.

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Figure 9.7: P.D. McCormick’s proposal for life saving ‘piles’ incorporated piles for sitting, piles for resting on and piles from which surf bathers could dive into the water.

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108 Waverley Council Clerk to Mr P.D. McCormick, 29 January 1907, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/4669], box 20/8165.
109 P.D. McCormick to Minister for Lands, 13 March 1907, SRNSW: CGS 8258 [07/4669], box 20/8165.
This refusal of the government to accept any responsibility for the safety of surf bathing continued even after the successful establishment of surf life saving clubs along the New South Wales ocean coast. While they were willing to contribute half the cost of dressing and shelter sheds on the beaches, the Department of Lands maintained a policy of not assisting with providing life saving equipment. This, they argued, was up to ‘local bodies’ and ‘at their own expense.’ They also distinguished between assisting with accommodation which might have a small section set aside for the local surf life saving club, which was permitted, and funding a shelter which ‘while serving the purpose of life saving, is designated primarily for the exclusive use of a section of the community’, which was the case in a request for accommodation at Cronulla in 1909.

Why was the government so adamant it was not their place to make the beaches safe, when they were willing to share the burden of surf bathing amenities? Was it purely financially driven? Perhaps they were reluctant to fund something that was nothing more than an aid to leisure; although the same argument could be made for the surf bathing amenities, they, in contrast to lifesaving equipment, were a tangible, physical presence on the beaches. They also sanitized surf bathing, ensuring bathers bodies would only be displayed in a private space, which was undoubtedly of more importance to the liberal and nationalist governments than securing the safety of the bathers, who took a known risk by entering the surf.

In the face of this denial by the authorities of their responsibility for making surf bathing safe, or even just safer, bathers were forced to try and resolve the situation themselves. Hume and McCormick’s suggestions described above were just two of a huge range sent into the Sydney press in the form of letters to the editor, and suggested by journalists themselves, between 1902 and 1907. T.F. Willis suggested a ‘rocket line throwing apparatus’, for example, and C. Anderson recommended a net...
be stretched across the beach at Tamarama. Others looked overseas for suitable models: N. Guthridge referred to a system of ropes being used on the Atlantic Coast of the United States, not dissimilar to that proposed by John Hume, and asked why it could not be adopted on Sydney’s coast. There was also a tendency for experienced bathers to blame drowning victims for being ignorant or taking unnecessary risks, and lots of advice was subsequently issued about how to stay safe in the surf. ‘Bather No.1.’ even called for a rescued bather to be prosecuted for ‘entering the surf at such a [dangerous] spot’.

Why were so many, and especially those who were confident in the surf, keen to make the beaches safe? Local interest groups, such as the Bondi Progress League, and the Randwick Political Labor League, saw the economic benefits of making surf bathing a safer and therefore more popular recreation. Coastal councils also began to understand this potential, but like the government, they were far more concerned with providing dressing accommodation on the beaches, and therefore maintaining the propriety of these spaces, than they were with making the beaches safe. Some individuals no doubt considered life saving innovation to be a potential revenue raiser for themselves, while others thought that surf bathing would not gain the widespread acceptance and support they believed it deserved until it became more safe for regular members of the public to enjoy.

It was these individuals, regular bathers who were keen to promote the sport of surf bathing and the beaches themselves, and who featured heavily in the Sydney press – both as contributors through letters to the editors and articles about bathing, and as the

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112 Letters to the editor, *SMH* 5 January 1907, p.11; 10 January 1907, p.10. See also *SMH*, 10 April 1901, p.10 (letter); 21 January 1902, pp.6, 8 (letter); 22 January 1902, p.12; 23 January 1902, p.9 (letter); 28 September 1903, p.6; 2 January 1906, p.6; 5 January 1906, p.4 (letter); 9 January 1906, p.4 (letter); 3 January 1907, p.4; 14 January 1907, p.8 (letters); 24 January 1907, p.5; 29 January 1907, p.8 (letter); 1 February 1907 (letter), p.5; 12 February 1907, p.10 (letters); 14 February 1907, p.8 (letter); 15 February 1907, p.8 (letter); *SMH* 18 June 1907, p.10 (letter); ‘Summer at the seaside’, *Sydney Mail*, 16 January 1907, p.140.


114 *Daily Telegraph*, 16 March 1903, p.9 (letter); 26 March 1903, p.7 (letter); 3 January 1907, p.6; 21 January 1907, p.5; *SMH* 3 January 1907, p.4 (letter); 13 February 1907, p.8; 15 February 1907, p.8 (letter); Fred Williams, ‘the call of the surf’, *Sydney Mail*, 16 January 1907, p.152.

115 Letter to the editor, *SMH* 2 January 1907, p.4.

116 There were more references to moral issues regarding surf-bathing than to life saving issues at the Waverley Council Meetings between 1903 and 1906, Waverley Council *Minutes*, 1903-1906.

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heroes in tales of dramatic rescues in heavy surf – who ultimately provided the solution to the dangers posed by the surf, early in 1907. These were the men who formed Australia’s first surf life saving clubs.

The emergence of surf life saving clubs
In February, 1907, the Daily Telegraph announced the formation of the Bondi Surf Bathers’ Life Saving Club (SBLSC):

A number of prominent surf bathers at Bondi held a meeting on Thursday night at Penton’s Royal Hotel, Bondi, and decided to form a life-saving club. It has been arranged that the class shall commence next week, and during the ensuing month it is intended to give an exhibition on the beach of handling the life-lines and restoring the apparently drowned ... A combined effort will be made by the members to collect money from the surf bathers there for the installation of three more lines and jackets.

Waverley Council, no doubt relieved at the club’s potential to ease public pressure over the provision of lifesaving amenities with little or no cost to the municipality, had been involved in the formation of the club, and subsequently granted them permission for free use of the life-line, promising to ‘accord patronage to any display or exhibition’. Thus Australia’s first volunteer surf life saving club was formed on Bondi beach, with very little fanfare.

The question of which was the first surf life saving club is one which has plagued the history of the movement for many decades, despite C Bede Maxwell accurately recording in 1949 that Bondi SBLSC was formed before the Bronte club. Even now that historians such as Sean Brawley, Ed Jaggard and myself have demonstrated

117 Daily Telegraph, 23 February 1907, p.12.
118 Waverley Council Minutes, 12 March 1907; For more on the formation of the Bondi Surf Bathers’ Life saving Club, See Brawley, The Bondi Lifesaver, pp.33-41.
119 Maxwell, Surf, pp.22-24. As Brawley points out, while Maxwell got the order right, she was wrong about the date of Bondi’s foundation. Brawley ‘Surf Bathing and Surf Lifesaving’, p.34.
conclusively through primary sources including contemporary newspapers and council minutes that no surf life saving clubs existed on Sydney’s beaches prior to February 1907, club historians at Bronte, Maroubra, North Bondi, Tamarama, Clovelly and Manly continue to insist their clubs were formed in 1906 or even earlier. But the order in which surf life saving clubs were formed on Sydney’s beaches is far less consequential to the history of Sydney’s beach culture than the fact that they were formed at all.

In October 1907, representatives of seven surf life saving clubs, two swimming clubs, RLSS and the New South Wales Amateur Swimming Association, met to form the Surf Bathing Association of New South Wales (SBA). The catalyst for the formation of this organisation was wide-spread opposition to proposed by-laws which would impose greater restrictions on bathing costumes, and in particular, would force men to wear what were described as ‘skirts’. At the foundation meeting, Frank Donovan, chairman and inaugural president, condemned the interference of the seaside councils in the matter of legislating costume requirements. He stated that the object of the meeting was to ‘form an association which would do everything necessary to make surf bathing above reproach, and to approach the government with a view of securing proper recognition for members of the surf bathing clubs who were the best and most competent persons to know what was good or bad for the pastime’.

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120 These clubs rely on documents written decades later, relying heavily on the memories of those who were apparently there. Bronte SLSC relies on documents which were allegedly burnt in a fire in the clubhouse in the 1970s. Brawley ‘Surf Bathing and Surf Lifesaving’, pp.34-36; Vesper, Bronte; Elder, Ready Aye Ready.

121 This Association has had several reincarnations since, first as the Surf Life Saving Association of NSW (SLSANSW), then the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia (SLSAA). Since 1991/2 it has been known as Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA).

122 ‘Surf bathing: an association formed’, Australian Star, 19/10/1907. For more on the debates leading to the foundation of the SBA, see Evening News, SMH and Australian Star, 9-19 October 1907; SBANSW Minutes, 18 October 1907, Minutes Book 1, Surf Life Saving Australia archives.
Douglas Booth concluded that ‘humanitarianism played a minor role in the formation and organisation’ of Sydney’s first surf life saving clubs. He argued that the lifesavers of this period were driven by personal politics, volunteering their services in an attempt to forge a legitimate and accepted beach culture. 123 This is demonstrated not only by the objectives of the SBA but by those leading to the formation of many individual clubs – although it remains the case that some clubs, such as Bondi SBLSC, were formed with lifesaving as their primary purpose. 124 The non-altruistic agendas of many surf lifesavers are also another possible explanation for the refusals by the New South Wales government to support surf life saving clubs.

But the very existence of what Booth labels ‘personal politics’ among surf bathers is revealing in itself. The attempt by surf bathers to gain some control over their beaches, as demonstrated at the foundation meeting of the SBA, and through the

123 Booth, Australian Beach Cultures, pp.65-66. See also Booth, ‘War off Water’.
124 Bondi SBLSC was formed following two separate drowning incidents on that beach, and according to Sean Brawley the first meeting was called with the sole intention of finding a way to make beaches safe. Brawley, The Bondi Lifesaver, pp.33-35.
subsequent carnivalesque protests against the ‘skirt’ ordinances,\textsuperscript{125} was yet another manifestation of the sense of public ownership of the beach. As we have seen in the debates over the provision of bathing amenities, the legalisation of daylight bathing created another dimension for the contests over the beach which have been explored throughout this thesis: that between surf bathers and non-bathers. This was more than just the battle of morality as Booth explained it; bathers and non-bathers conflicted over the ways in which the beaches should be used, whether or not amenity buildings were appropriate uses of the beach space, whether public funds should be spent on surf bathers and whether surf bathers had a right to ‘free’ access of the beach like those beachgoers who preferred to stay out of the surf. In securing both council and government expenditure, the surf bathers won the battle over amenities; when it came to making the beaches safe, they were forced to play a more active role.

The reassuring role of surf lifesavers

Regardless of the political motivations of the first surf lifesavers, they became instant saviours for the bathing public and authorities alike. The appearance of club members in public displays and competitions was a visual confirmation that these men were capable rescuers. The first carnivals and ‘gymkhanas’ held by surf lifesavers had a strong link with past practises on Sydney’s beaches – they were a new manifestation of the games and sports which had been played out on the dry spaces of Sydney’s beaches for nearly half a century already. With such events as egg and spoon races, wheelbarrow races, foot races, ‘cock-fights’ and games of tug-of war, they resembled festivals far more than the serious sporting competitions they later evolved into.\textsuperscript{126} They were distinguished from the holiday sports of the 1860s and 70s which had been imported from England, however, in that they were exclusive: surf lifesavers were the only participants permitted, and all others were required to pay for the privilege of watching. Initially, these carnivals were held to exhibit the physical capabilities, athleticism, and prowess in the surf of surf lifesavers – rare at this early stage in surf bathing culture – but they soon evolved into a demonstration of the discipline and


\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Souvenir Programme, New South Wales Surf Bathing Association Combined Surf Carnival}, North Steyne, Manly, 22 October 1910, Surf Life Saving Australia Archives.
superior masculinity of the types of men who guarded the beaches, and were to become a major feature of inter war Australian culture.127

The ‘march-past’, which hinted at a military style training and discipline, and ‘Rescue and Resuscitation’ (R&R), which demonstrated their team skills, were particularly reassuring. These skills were evident from the very first demonstration of surf lifesaving at Bondi, when according to the Daily Telegraph, the lifesavers, ‘both in the land and water drill, moved to word of command. The men were well under control, and the movements were satisfactorily executed’.128 Surf lifesavers were heralded as heroes by the press; described as ‘our boy soldiers’, they, as regular surf bathers, were held to represent Australia’s ‘national characteristics’ from very early on.129

Drownings did not cease altogether following the formation of surf life saving clubs on different Sydney beaches, but that was overlooked by an overwhelmingly positive press. Prior to 1907, reports of both successful and unsuccessful rescues tended to focus more on the victims than the rescuers. From the summer of 1907/08, however, by which time surf life saving clubs had become firmly embedded in the beach landscape, they shifted focus solely to commend the work of the rescuers. The language of these reports was also modified, the term ‘rescuer’ quickly replaced with the soon familiar ‘lifesaver’. In January 1908 alone, the Sydney Morning Herald praised the surf lifesavers in headlines including ‘Purcell’s wonderful record: 7 saved in one day’, ‘Bondi lifesavers again’ and ‘Sensation at Bondi: Good work by the lifesavers.’130

Following an incident at Coogee in 1911 in which four people drowned, the ‘exceptionally fine life-saving work’ of one local rescuer was commended in a letter to the editor. The author, who was secretary of the Maroubra Surf Club, claimed that ‘his work in this direction must be close upon a record for the world. It is estimated

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127 Cushing and Huntsman, ‘A National Icon’; Saunders, ‘Specimens of Superb Manhood’.
130 SMH, 2 January 1908, p.5; 3 January 1908, p.6; 27 January 1908, p.8.
that during the past three seasons at Maroubra alone he has saved over one hundred lives, and mostly without the aid of a line.\textsuperscript{131} Although the letter accompanied more independent reports of his heroic act, we can see that the identification of the surf lifesaver as ‘hero’ was not always unbiased, and was constantly reinforced by the clubs themselves in attempts for increased recognition, public support and funding. While the SBA did not start recording or reporting the number of bathers rescued for over fifteen years,\textsuperscript{132} individual surf life saving clubs advertised and prided themselves on having no lives lost at their beaches, reinforcing public confidence in the organisation, and using this fact as justification for their existence and use of the beach space for private club houses.\textsuperscript{133}

During 1907, the positive reporting of surf lifesaving in the Sydney press led to overwhelming public support of these men. Consequently, the constant calls by the public of previous years for ‘something to be done’ to make surf bathing safe had completely ceased by the end of the year. Complaints now focussed on the problems occurring through people interfering with the work of lifesavers, with several calls for punishment of such action representing a manifestation of the belief in the right of lifesavers to carry out all rescue work on beaches.\textsuperscript{134} The fact that major interferences occurred suggests that some surf lifesavers were not efficiently organised at this time, but this did not detract from public pride in the movement – instead, non lifesavers were blamed for creating dangerous situations. The severe condemnation of bathers who played practical jokes on lifesavers, by pretending to be in danger, reveals the seriousness with which the bathing public took the work of the surf lifesavers.\textsuperscript{135} So too did the occasional calls for surf lifesavers to be made ‘special constables’, and be given power to arrest people for swimming in dangerous areas, a call echoed by surf lifesavers themselves in the summer of 2000-2001.\textsuperscript{136}

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\textsuperscript{131} Letter to the editor, \textit{SMH}, 31 January 1911, p.9.


\textsuperscript{133} \textit{SMH}, 20 June 1908, p.10; 17 August 1908, p.6 (letter); 26 February 1910, p.14. SLSA continues to claim that there have been ‘no lives lost between the flags’, although this is untrue, the most recent case being the drowning death of a man at North Bondi, within view of the SLSA office, in 2005-06.

\textsuperscript{134} 1 March 1909, p.7; 11 September 1909, p.5; 6 January 1914, p.8.

\textsuperscript{135} \textit{SMH} 6 January 1908, p.7.

\textsuperscript{136} This was one of the possibilities explored by the 1911 Surf Bathing Committee. Instructions to the New South Wales Surf Bathing Committee, bound with \textit{NSW Surf Bathing Committee Evidence}. See
\end{flushleft}
From 1907 onwards public support for, and faith in Sydney’s surf lifesavers grew from strength to strength. Surf lifesavers, by their mere presence on the beach, played a crucial role in calming the hysteria over the dangers of the surf, thus contributing significantly to the rapidly increasing popularity of surf bathing. While bathers continued to get into difficulties on Sydney’s ocean beaches, the numbers of fatalities decreased following the organisation of surf life saving clubs. But the general public confidence in the abilities of club members was far more significant in stemming the public rhetoric of fear at the beach. The surf, as the hostile gateway to the violent, dangerous and long-feared ocean, had been effectively tamed: it was seen to have been made safe by the presence of the surf lifesaver.

In the most comprehensive history of Australian surf lifesaving to date, Nancy Cushing and Leone Huntsman argued that ‘the surf lifesaving movement made beaches available to the public as part of the Australian cultural landscape’. Their most crucial role, according to these historians, was that they ‘facilitated leisure.’ Surf lifesavers did enable a beach culture to emerge in which surf bathing could be enjoyed by the masses without fear; and certainly this was their most important contribution to Sydney’s early twentieth century beach culture. But it is important to note that they were the last of a number of elements that facilitated beach leisure. Surf bathing in a relatively safe environment is just one element of Sydney’s – and Australia’s – beach culture, and given the trend towards accommodating surf bathers in the second half of the 1900s, if bathers had not created the solution to beach dangers by forming voluntary clubs, it is likely that the government or coastal councils would have eventually committed extra resources to secure the safety of surf bathers themselves.

Morality, amenities and the surf lifesaver

In a similar approach to Huntsman and Cushing, Cameron White attributed the making of surf bathing decent to surf lifesavers, arguing that they were ‘capable of
providing standards of order and common values for both the physical environment and for social intercourse'. But this perhaps overstated their role. The presence of surf lifesavers in making the beaches safe quelled the fears created by the sensationalisation of the press, but while their governing body may have accepted responsibility for the morality of surf bathers, surf lifesavers themselves did not necessarily police morality at the beaches. Rather, they inadvertently provided a respectable model for beachgoers to emulate. Furthermore, the emergence of surf lifesaving clubs and increasing respect for the SBA coincided with increased and improved accommodation for surf bathers, which undoubtedly played a far more important role in making surf bathing decent. The press, through their support of both surf bathers and surf lifesavers, also played an important role in making surf bathing appear respectable.

Surf lifesavers, through the SBA, came to represent and speak for all surf bathers in Sydney, as they had hoped. Following a joint deputation by the SBA and coastal councils demanding better amenities for surf bathers, in 1911 Arthur Griffith, Labor Minister for Works, appointed a Surf Bathing Committee to report on 'the general question of accommodation' at Sydney's beaches. He appointed John Lord, the President of the Surf Bathing Association, as Chairman of this Committee, and surf lifesavers were among the most prolific of those giving evidence. Surf lifesavers may not have gained complete control of 'their' beaches as they had hoped to do; but the respect they earned through the careful construction of a positive public image had given them the power to represent all surf bathers in negotiations with local councils and the New South Wales government.

The formation of the Surf Bathing Committee in 1911 was the first sign that the New South Wales government were willing to be involved in all aspects of beach governance: ensuring the beaches were safe, in addition to providing amenities. Griffith's initiative demonstrates yet again the contrast between McGowen's Labor

140 White, Pleasure Seekers, p.181.
141 Some surf lifesavers were, however, nominated as Council beach inspectors, who in this separate role did police the morality of beachgoers, in terms of both dress and behaviour.
142 John Portus, Acting Under Secretary, Public Works Department to John Lord, 10 August 1911; Bound with NSW Surf Bathing Committee Report.
government and the earlier nationalist governments of Wade and Carruthers. Wade had overseen the construction of surf bathing amenities on many Sydney and New South Wales beaches in a bid to encourage a sport which he himself enjoyed, but his government maintained that surf lifesaving was a municipal matter. As demonstrated in relation to the provision of coastal recreation spaces and opposition to artificial entertainment structures on the beach, although the governments of Wade and Carruthers had made some inroads into providing for beach recreation in Sydney, the Labor government was far more proactive. In the second decade of the twentieth century, it reserved and resumed beaches, constructed transport infrastructure to Cronulla, Maroubra and the Northern beaches, ensured the beach space was freely accessible, provided surf bathing amenities and encouraged and supported surf lifesavers.

To what extent can this greater involvement be explained by party politics? Certainly the Labor party have a greater reputation for being concerned with the welfare of 'the people', and this is reflected in their concern with making the beaches accessible to the working classes from western Sydney. Hancock also argued that Labor governments were more proactive than the non-Labor governments, and were more willing to extend the reach of government, which is certainly apparent when it comes to the beaches. However the timing of these shifts is also crucial: the Labor government were elected at a time when the popularity of beach recreation generally, and surf bathing specifically, was irrefutable. The Wade government had acknowledged this with their support for amenities and attempts to resume Collaroy beach between 1907 and 1910; a greater involvement by the New South Wales government in supporting beach recreation through infrastructure and securing spaces was in line with a greater state intervention in Australian society in a range of areas by the 1910s.

Surf bathing and surf lifesaving overseas

By the opening decade of the twentieth century, surf bathing was not unique to Sydney. In fact the earlier resistance against legalising daylight bathing is remarkable when we consider that mixed, daylight bathing had been enjoyed by middle-class Americans since the mid-nineteenth century. According to Debbie Ann Doyle, at the beach, vacationers clad in revealing bathing costumes gleefully displayed their bodies to their fellow bathers. They also abandoned the respectability that defined the early-nineteenth century bourgeoisie and reveled [sic] in playful, undisciplined motion that contrasted sharply with the stiff and formal posture the middle class maintained in most other contexts. The beach, with its own temporary morality, became a place apart from everyday life.

Cindy Aron argued this display of bathers' bodies – and particularly female bodies – was not so easily accepted. It caused contention among social commentators, and the question of whether or not to bathe, and what to wear in the water, created problems for female vacationers. Nonetheless, we can see that surf bathing was a well established element of America's east coast beach culture by the time it emerged as a dominant force in Sydney in the early-twentieth century. Even though Sydney beaches shared a 'temporary morality', during the late-nineteenth century these relaxed moral codes did not stretch to permit the viewing, let alone co-mingling, of wet semi-clothed bodies on the beach.

Sean Brawley also argued that surf lifesaving was not unique to Sydney, writing that 'surf lifesaving in Australia did not simply evolve from a curious set of unique indigenous phenomena. It was the result of significant developments in European and North American society dating back to the European Enlightenment'. Certainly the

145 Doyle, ""The salt water washes away all impropriety"", p.96.
146 Doyle, ""The salt water washes away all impropriety"", p.95.
147 Aron, Working at Play, pp.76-79.
148 See also Cross and Walton, The Playful Crowd, p.17.
first surf lifesavers had strong links with the British Royal Life Saving Society, and initially adopted rescue and resuscitation techniques which had been developed overseas to suit still water conditions. But a direct link between Sydney’s surf life saving clubs and similar volunteer and professional services which existed in the United States in the 1890s has not been proven. Indeed, the 1911 Surf Bathing Committee, on evidence provided by the Immigration and Tourist Bureau, concluded that ‘on none of the foreign beaches ... so far as the Committee can ascertain, do there appear to be such efficient life-saving equipment and organisation as are provided by the New South Wales life saving clubs with their lines, belts and reels’. Ivan Jackson also noted the influential role Australian surf lifesaving played in the development of a similar movement in New Zealand, implying it developed in Australia first.

So if both surf bathing and surf lifesaving already existed overseas, how did surf bathers and social commentators justify their celebration of surf culture as nationally important, and something which was distinct to Sydney? As we have seen in chapter eight, the centrality of the sun and the fashion of the tan were relatively distinctive to Sydney, although were simultaneously beginning to emerge on European and British beaches. Furthermore, the demand for a ‘free’ beach – a beach in which the government secured the ‘rights’ of the people over the desires of entrepreneurs – inhibited the opportunities for foreshore development which may aid the surf bather. This attitude ensured the only type of development which would be accepted by Sydney’s beachgoers and coastal residents was that funded by either local or state governments, in stark contrast to the myriad of financially driven private enterprises of the Riviera, and American and British coasts. Although it shared many features with existing beach cultures overseas, the combination of factors which had come together on Sydney’s beaches by the First World War created a beach culture distinct from any other; at the Sydney beach, the natural was primary, class distinctions were barely identifiable, health was fundamental and the entire beach experience was free.

150 Brawley, ‘Surf Bathing and Surf Lifesaving’, p38. For more on the link between surf lifesavers and the Royal Life Saving Society, see Brawley, ‘Our Life Savers’.
It was the merging of these characteristics, rather than any individual one, which made Sydney’s beach culture distinctive.

**Conclusions**

The entrenchment of surf bathing in Sydney’s beach culture in the opening decades of the twentieth century represented a substantial shift from the nineteenth century beach culture, which centred on activities outside the water, such as picnicking, games and sports, dancing, walking, and visiting Aquariums and fun parks. However this shift was not as marked as other historians have portrayed it. Surf bathing did not replace existing mainstream ways of enjoying the beach, but joined them to create a richer, more diverse beach culture. Most of the elements of this early twentieth century beach culture, which has come to be understood as ‘modern Australian beach culture’ as it has hardly changed in just on a century, were emerging or existed well before daylight surf bathing dominated Sydney’s beach scene. Surf bathing, itself a continuation of nineteenth century beach practices, merely co-existed alongside a continuation of these other older ways of spending time at the beach. It even incorporated some of these older practices: those who had gazed at the sea in awe of the power of the ocean were now mesmerised by the spectacle of bathers being thrown around in the rolling surf; and the shrinking swim wear of bathers enhanced the beach as a site of romance and lust.

There was one element of Sydney’s beach culture, however, which emerged in the early twentieth century, and which was distinct from nineteenth century modes of behaviour on the beach, and from other parts of the world: surf lifesaving. In making the beaches safe, and providing a respectable presence on the beaches, surf lifesavers enabled even those who had previously feared the surf to enjoy surf bathing. Under their watchful eye, and with the assistance of local councils and the state government in providing dressing accommodation along the coast, surf bathing boomed, and had become central to Sydney’s ocean beach culture by the close of the first decade of the twentieth century. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* declared in 1912, ‘there is no doubt that this healthy and desirable recreation has come to stay’.\(^{154}\)

\(^{154}\) SMH 15 February 1912, p.8. See also SMH 12 October 1909, p.6.
This chapter has demonstrated that the most influential factor in making daylight surf bathing a morally acceptable activity, securing amenities and making the beaches safe, was the popular movement of surf bathers, aided by the support of the press. In the history of Sydney’s beach culture, we have seen that public lobbying was crucial to securing recreation reserves along the coast, and in determining the ways in which these spaces were subsequently used. In the early twentieth century, in the face of councils and government largely unwilling to enact change and govern surf bathing, surf bathers forced change – they campaigned for all day bathing, lobbied for its legitimacy through the columns of the press, and after several years of complaints and proposals for improved lifesaving systems, initiated a relatively cheap solution to problems of safety in the surf, in the form of surf life saving clubs.

The surf bathing public were therefore far more influential to the development of Sydney’s ocean beaches than the coastal councils and New South Wales government. Indeed, as with so many other developments in Sydney’s beach history, we can see that the authorities were slow to react to the growing public support for surf bathing. The legalisation of daylight bathing was little more than permitting a practice which had been enjoyed for some time, but it still took the Waverley Council three years to act on the recommendations of the Police Inspector. Furthermore, the provision of surf bathing amenities was only considered once a financial incentive had been established – the authorities otherwise remained reluctant to provide services for what they considered to be a minority of beachgoers. The establishment of the Surf Bathing Committee in 1911 is evidence that the government had finally realised the magnitude of surf bathing – and that the needs of surf bathers required a carefully considered plan. The government and councils were no longer a step behind popular opinion, but had finally come to embrace surf bathing. By 1920, Sydney’s ocean beaches held no other purpose for either beachgoers or the government, than a recreation which remained guided by the principles of the ‘free beach.’
This thesis has explored the development of a beach culture in Sydney prior to 1920. Throughout the rest of the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first, this culture has undergone few transformations as far-reaching as those which occurred during the period under study. The sense that the beaches are the 'national playground', and are spaces which the public has the right to freely access, underpins modern Australian attitudes towards the coast. Furthermore, Sydney's beach culture continues to revolve around the surf and the sun; the cult of nature, the cult of the tan, the cult of inhibition.

In 1920, however, there remained just one issue which was later overcome to enable the total flourishing of Sydney's beach culture: the threat of shark attack. Swimmers and surf bathers had long feared sharks, and the fish had sometimes been cited as the reason for the absence of daylight bathing throughout the nineteenth century. Yet despite the constant scare-mongering by the Sydney media on the subject, the absence of any shark attacks on the surf beaches until 1912 allowed a surf culture to flourish free from the realisation of that threat. A series of fatal shark attacks on Sydney's most popular beaches in the 1920s turned the inherent fear of sharks into a reality, and by the mid 1930s, following further attacks, the government was forced to concede that sharks had the potential to seriously debilitating Sydney's beach culture. A 'Shark Menace Advisory Committee' which was established in 1935 to consider the problem of sharks at Sydney's ocean beaches and consulted experts from Australia and overseas, recommended shark meshing as the most affordable and effective means of

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1 David Dale, *The 100 things we loved*, p.90.
3 Between 1922 and 1936, there were ten fatal and seven non-fatal shark attacks on Sydney's beaches between North Narrabeen and Maroubra - including three at Coogee and six at Bondi. *Australian Shark Attack File* (Sydney: Taronga Zoo, accessed 2002).
making the beaches safe again. This program not only drastically reduced the frequency of shark attacks on the New South Wales coast, but its efficiency in removing sharks was demonstrated by the listing of the east coast population of the grey nurse shark, once common in Sydney waters, as a ‘critically endangered’ species. After four fatal shark attacks in Western Australia and South Australia during the summer of 2000-2001, the Western Australian government considered similar options to those explored in New South Wales in the 1920s and 1930s, including killing sharks blamed for fatal attacks, and netting the beaches.

As Australians attempted to return to some sort of normality in the aftermath of the Great War, the popularity of the beach, and its importance to Australian leisure culture, increased substantially – despite the increased threat of sharks. In the 1920s and ‘30s, an era of peace book-ended by two devastating wars, the beach was no longer synonymous with Sydney, but celebrated around the Australian coast as a symbol of the nation at play. The interwar period was the heyday of the beach as an Australian cultural icon: it was invoked in international tourism campaigns and domestic product marketing, surf lifesavers enjoyed record attendance figures at their carnivals, and women competed in ‘beach beauty’ contests. In the depression era especially, the beach was celebrated as a rare site of leisure and entertainment which could be enjoyed for free. The beach was more than just symbolic though – in the inter-war period, Sydney’s beaches enjoyed their largest crowds: on Boxing Day 1933, for example, 47,000 people caught the ferry to Manly, and Dowd reported crowds of 60,000 at Bondi to be ‘not an uncommon occurrence’. While the number of trams carrying passengers to Bondi Beach hardly differed between 1907 and 1937,

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4 Report, Shark Menace Advisory Committee (Sydney: New South Wales Legislative Assembly, 1935).
by the mid-1930s thousands of day-trippers were travelling by car to the beach, meaning the numbers were certainly greater.⁸

During the inter-war period, Bondi, over every any other stretch of sand around the nation’s coast, became an Australian icon. As Rickard writes, by the close of the 1930s, ‘Bondi was a national symbol’.⁹ The pivotal moment for Bondi was a major reconstruction of Bondi Park, in which the natural sand dunes were totally removed, the park was landscaped, a drive and parking spaces were created along the length of the beach and the unique Bondi pavilion and Bondi SBLSC clubhouse were constructed. This development, which cost £140,000 and was opened in 1929, created an instantly recognisable space: to Australians it was synonymous with Bondi, to the world it was synonymous with Australia.¹⁰ Further events such as the 1938 Black Sunday at Bondi beach, and the Royal Carnival held for Queen Elizabeth in 1954, helped to consolidate Bondi’s position as the most internationally recognisable of Australia’s beaches. In ensuing years, Bondi alone has come to signify the Australian beach and ‘Australian way of life’ both domestically and internationally, and the inclusion of Bondi surf lifesavers in the closing ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games was a manifestation of the beach’s fame.¹¹ The international popularity of the ‘reality’ television show, Bondi Rescue, has further cemented Bondi’s primacy within international perceptions of Australian beach culture.¹²

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⁸ On Boxing Day 1907, 190 tram cars travelled to Bondi Beach, and on New Years Day 1937, which was reported as a busy day for the beaches, 181 tram cars travelled the same route. SMH 27 December 1907, p.5; 2 January 1937, p.11.
⁹ Rickard, ‘For God’s Sake Keep Us Entertained’, p.348.
¹¹ For a more detailed discussion on the increasing prominence of Bondi beach over Manly, see Broeze, Island Nation, pp.159-161.
Following the Second World War, there was a gradual decline in the size of crowds on any one Sydney beach. Whereas there may have been 35,000 at Bondi beach on a hot summer Sunday in the 1930s, at the start of the twenty-first century, that figure was more likely to be less than 20,000.\textsuperscript{13} This decrease is partly owing to the rise in the ownership of home pools since the 1950s, as well as a boom in the construction of inground public swimming pools over the same period.\textsuperscript{14} But it was also affected by the spreading of beachgoers all along the east coast of Australia, as the car made other beaches more accessible, and the general sprawl of the population saw residential growth in new coastal areas. Increased mobility has been crucial in the colonisation of more and more beaches along the NSW coast. It gave Sydney-siders the opportunity to travel further for their summer beach experiences; the 1950s and ‘60s saw families drive up or down the NSW coast for summer holidays, creating gridlock on roads

\textsuperscript{13} Brawley, \textit{The Bondi Lifesaver}, p.133. The \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} reported in 2005 that Bondi Beach has 20,000 to 40,000 visitors on a ‘typical weekend.’ \textit{SMH} 17-18 December 2005, p.1.

back from the coast at the end of every summer, in a tradition of beach-going that remains strong in the opening years of the twenty-first century. The increasing affordability of aeroplane travel and resort travel packages has also enabled many to fly to distant beaches, and even enjoy ‘tropical’ beaches in far north Queensland, the south pacific or south-east Asia in the middle of winter.

Furthermore, the coastal fringe of NSW has been increasingly colonised by residents wishing to live out of the big cities such as Sydney and Brisbane. Philip Drew recounts that as the population of the interior declined from the 1950s onwards, settlement grew on the coastal fringes; but the coast has also attracted urban retirees seeking to settle by the sea. The two widely separated coastal regions of the south-east and east, and the south-west, remain the most densely populated regions in Australia, and the largest growth outside capital cities is occurring in coastal regions – the Gold Coast-Tweed had the largest increase in population between 2000 and 2005; Mandurah, on the coast south of Perth recorded the fastest rate of growth over the same period, followed by Hervey Bay on the North Queensland Coast, and the Sunshine Coast north of Brisbane. In recognition of the growing ‘population surge to the coast’, in early 2007 the New South Wales Government drafted a strategy to

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**Figure 10.2:** Summer holiday traffic along the New South Wales coast is so prevalent the state’s Roads and Traffic Authority warns drivers to be prepared.
cope with more than 150,000 projected new residents in the mid and far-north coasts of the state by 2032.\textsuperscript{20}

Drew attributed the growth of settlement on the coast to the ‘Australian preference for life in the sun’, but notes it is surely more complicated than this.\textsuperscript{21} Susan Kurosawa was one who made the transition from summer holiday maker to a resident of the Central Coast, seeking ‘an uncomplicated place where I would be woken by birds, wear no shoes and sweep sand straight out my door’.\textsuperscript{22} From the ‘smug posture’ of an ‘insider’, Kurosawa labelled the annual temporary visitors, of which she had previously been one, ‘the summer people’.\textsuperscript{23} For those residents of the coast who seek a ‘coastal life’, we see a shift in the relationship between leisure and work; work at the coast is rendered more pleasant by its location.

The nomadic rituals which are a common feature of beach culture not only in Australia but elsewhere in the world have led Urbain to differentiate between summer residents, who make a beach their home for a period of time, and tourists, who pass by

\textsuperscript{20} SMH 18 January 2007, p.1.
\textsuperscript{21} Drew, \textit{The Coast Dwellers}, pp.105-123.
\textsuperscript{22} Susan Kurosawa, \textit{Coasting: A Year by the Bay} (Sydney: Hodder Headline, 2000), p6
these beaches momentarily. But for most Sydney beaches, as distinct from those of regional New South Wales, the dominant users continue to be locals – residents of not only the coastal strip but greater Sydney who spend their summer weekends and public holidays at the beach. Even the back-packers who crowd the hostels at Bondi and Coogee become ‘locals’ in a sense during their stay. Consequently, in many ways, very little has changed between the period under study and the present day. Bondi, Manly and Coogee continue to be among the most popular beaches for Sydney residents and tourists, although the spread of Sydney has meant that beaches from Palm Beach in the north to those in the Royal National Park in the south also attract large crowds on hot days. Hot summer Sundays and public holidays continue to attract the largest crowds to the coast – accompanied by dedicated media reports like those of one hundred years ago – and the celebration of Christmas Day on Bondi Beach by thousands of mostly British backpackers has become a dependable annual event.

With houses encroaching on the foreshores, landscaped parks circled by car parks and shopping strips, and the virtual total removal of sand dunes, the beachscape may have changed significantly. But the beach continues to be used in the same ways it was 150 years ago. A constant stream of joggers and walkers who occupy the esplanades behind and between Sydney’s beaches all year round replicate the habit of nineteenth century promenaders to ‘check each other out’, as do bathers who lie on the sand sometimes wearing nothing more than a g-string. Such lack of clothing also reflects the continuing sense that the beach is a site which is free from some of the restrictions of everyday city living. Even more importantly, perhaps, the beach continues to be understood as a place of emotional ‘escape,’ and is also a site of romance and sexual encounters for many.

24 Urbain, *At the Beach*, pp.1-3.
26 Robert Drewe suggests that many Australians have their first sexual experiences at the beach. Drewe, *The Picador Book of the beach*, p.6. See also Kathy Lette & Gabrielle Carey, *Puberty Blues* (Sydney: Picador, 2002).
At Bronte, a popular picnicking spot in the eastern suburbs, families and groups of friends re-enact the customs of their nineteenth century counterparts out of the water, as they eat, drink, and play games and sports in the park. Not only do casual games and sports continue to be an important part of beach-going in Sydney, but they have become institutionalised, professionalised and televised in the form of beach cricket, iron-man events, and beach volleyball, to name a few sports. The large beach hotels, such as the Coogee Bay, the Bondi Hotel and the Steyne at Manly attract large crowds in summer who continue the behaviour established at these very same establishments close to 150 years ago—especially dancing and drinking—although the rise of the car means there is no longer such a violent rush for the ‘last ferry’.
In addition to these modern replications of the ways in which the beach was used, the issues which continue to affect the beach, beachgoers and coastal residents closely reflect those of the period examined in this thesis. Ideas discussed throughout this thesis, including concern with the degradation and pollution of the beach environment, an attraction to the ‘Romantic’ beach, a belief in the inherent health of the beach, demonstrations of local and national pride in the beaches and contests over appropriate uses of the beach space, all continue to pervade everyday beach experiences in Sydney and throughout Australia. And certain principles, in which the beach is deemed to be free, public and casual, underpin these attitudes.

Perhaps the most notable beach incident in recent years was what was later termed the ‘Cronulla riots’ of December 2005. These riots, the events surrounding them and the media frenzy which ensued, characterised the consistent nature of issues which continue to affect the beach. The articulation of the beach as a source of both local and national pride, and as a contested site, which have been discussed throughout this thesis, were central to the events at Cronulla.

While the riots were a direct response to an incident between surf lifesavers and ‘middle eastern’ youths, and were therefore portrayed as a boiling over of existing racial tensions in the Cronulla area, they were also symptomatic of a sense among Cronulla locals – which includes Sutherland Shire residents more generally – that they have an exclusive right to use the beach over ‘outsiders’, and particularly people from the western suburbs. Such a sentiment was a striking element of the text message which was received by thousands of Sutherland Shire residents in the week prior to the riots, which suggested that locals – referred to as ‘Aussies’ – essentially owned the beach, and that non-locals – ‘lebs’ and ‘wogs’ – had no right to use it:

Aussies...Bring your mates down and lets show them that this is our beach, and their [sic] never welcome back... forward this to all you know and help us protect our brothers and sisters... lets claim back our shire.27

27 Text message received by author, 8 December 2005, italics added
On the day of the violent demonstration at Cronulla beach, local youths reminded the media and visitors that the day was about protecting their rights to the beach, some scrawling slogans such as ‘We grew here! You flew here! 2230’ across their chests. Lebanese Australian victims of the attacks responded in the same language, declaring that ‘today the beach might be theirs. Tomorrow it will be ours.’

The struggle between locals and visitors over ‘ownership’ of Cronulla beach is a contemporary manifestation – albeit somewhat more violent – of the resentment by some coastal residents towards other users of the beach. It reminds us of the importance of the beach to the identity of the local community, and of the importance of a sense of public ownership. Such attitudes have been a constant within Australian beach culture throughout the twentieth century, as demonstrated by the brawls between surfers and other users of the beach in the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s. In 1963, Cronulla beach was the site of brawls between locals and intruders from the western suburbs of Sydney, and Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey disapproved of ‘Bankies’, from the ‘greasy western suburbs’, at Cronulla beach in the 1970s.

The behaviour of Maroubra’s ‘Bra Boys’, a group of local surfers notorious for violently protecting ‘their’ surf break from outsiders is perhaps the most recent expression of this physical exertion of local ‘rights’ to the beach.

The incident at Cronulla was also interpreted as a conflict which represented broader national issues, in addition to the local. Commentators focussed on the role of the riots in highlighting a latent racism in the Australian community, but also noted the importance of the beach location itself. The attack on the surf lifesavers was interpreted by some as an attack on ‘Australian values’, and the subsequent unrest was represented by perpetrators as a defence of a national space from ‘invaders’, one Shire sympathiser even likening it to the role of Diggers at Anzac Cove: ‘like our fathers,

28 Photo, the Australian, 13 December 2005 p.11. 2230 is Cronulla’s postcode.
29 'Unidentified victim' speaking from Sutherland Hospital, SMH, 12 December 2005, p.7. See also the Australian, 14 December 2005, p.4.
32 In July 2007, it was reported that the ‘Bra Boys’ were using standover tactics to take control of a reef break, named ‘Ours’, off Kurnell on the southern side of Botany Bay. ‘Bra Boys say it’s Ours and we’ll fight for it’, Sun Herald, 15 July 2007, pp.16-17.
our grandfathers, fought for these beaches and now it’s our turn’.33 The antagonists
drew on a sense of nationalism by collectivising the demonstrators as ‘Aussies’,
implying that those who had been involved in the altercation with the surf lifesavers,
which prompted the rally, were not.34

On this occasion, the beach was more than a coincidental setting for racial conflict;
the clash erupted specifically because of the cultural sensitivity of the beach. Whereas
other Sydney riots in preceding years remained relatively local affairs,35 other beaches
on Sydney’s coast became subject to violent behaviour in the wake of the Sunday
protest at Cronulla – approximately one hundred cars at Maroubra were damaged,
police ‘locked down’ 200 kilometres of beaches from Newcastle to Wollongong, and
race-motivated violence was even reported at Glenelg in South Australia.36

The week of violence at Sydney’s beaches was therefore another manifestation of the
complexities created by the competing local and national connections to the beach. It
stemmed partly from the place the beach held in national mythology, but was also an
attempt by locals to exert their rights to solely occupy, or at least control, the beach
space. In 1997 a group of Bondi locals rallied against a proposed railway line which
would bring tourists and day-trippers directly to the beach. The actors at the helm of
the movement had more in common with nineteenth century elite who had opposed
railways for fear it would bring the masses; but they recognised the strength of the
national connection to Bondi beach, and phrased their opposition within this,
ironically arguing that ‘Bondi beach was a sacred site to all Australians and it was the
duty of residents to protect it’.37

I have argued elsewhere that the Cronulla riots also replicated the contests over the
beach space of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the debates
over public access to private foreshores, and protests against the construction of

34 This also ties in with the concept of being ‘un-Australian’, a concept particularly vocalised by the
Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, from 1996.
35 See for instance the Redfern Riots in February 2004, and the Macquarie Fields Riots in February
entertainment structures on the beaches. While there are inherent differences both in the motivations and form of protest taken on these occasions, it is nonetheless the case that the beach has continued to be a hotly contested site – contested both in terms of who should be able to use it, and in what ways.

Protests against the construction of the Olympic volleyball stadium on Bondi beach in 2000 – the selection of this location further testament to the international repute of Bondi beach – bore a neat resemblance to the opposition to the Manly merry-go-rounds of close to a century earlier. Locals in both cases were concerned with the loss of access to the beach, and of public beach space, as well as noise pollution and the aesthetic concern of having an unsightly structure interfere with the beach vista, which was described as ‘desecration’ of the beach. Local opposition to the filming of Baywatch episodes at Avalon beach evoked similar concerns, depicting the presence of the crew as ‘directly challenging and threatening the ‘essence’ of the Australian beach as a public resource’. Douglas Booth compared the Baywatch encounter to the struggle against nudists at Reef beach earlier in the 1990s, noting that in invoking local and state government interference, both issues ‘exposed the extent of community division over the use of local beaches’. Certainly, we can see these three struggles continue the tradition of community debates over other uses of the foreshores in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Traces of earlier attitudes towards the beach are also evident within current methods of beach governance. The recent banning of cigarette smoking on the beaches – an attempt to stop cigarette butt pollution – is a result of increased environmental awareness by the general community, but at the same time it echoes the concern with pollution on the beaches expressed in the early twentieth century, and regulation of anti-social behaviour. And the extension of ocean sewerage outfalls in the 1990s reflected continued public campaigns against this type of pollution on the beaches, which have been unabated since the early twentieth century. In 2002, the ‘Keep

38 These were discussed in chapters two, four and six. Caroline Ford, Sean O’Connell, Chris Giles and Danya Hodgetts, ‘Surf lifesaving: An Australian Icon in Transition’, 2007 Year Book Australia, p.9.
39 Booth, Australian Beach Cultures, pp. 19-20; Letter to the editor, SMH 28 January 1913, p.10.
41 Booth, Australian Beach Cultures, p.122.
Australia Beautiful Clean Beach Challenge’ was launched, encouraging coastal councils to promote ‘anti-pollution and environment programs.'

Environmental awareness has also furthered the cause of those who opposed the removal of sand from the beaches in the late nineteenth century. A continuation of this kind of mining and subsequent removal of entire dune systems for beautification purposes has meant that the sand which is removed in large storms is no longer replenished by the vast stores once held behind the beaches. Consequently, ‘beach management’ has become an important focus for coastal councils who struggle to maintain the natural integrity of the beach site, and in some cases replace sand by dredging nearby rivers.

The aesthetic appeal of the natural, and the tension between being natural and being ‘improved’, also continues to form a significant part of the attraction of the sea and beachscape more specifically. The rugged coastline experienced by the 1850s walkers may be considerably harder to locate close to Sydney, but in the sea, surf bathers and surfers continue to expose themselves to the will of the elements. The coast continues to attract sightseers in particularly wild weather, and the media interest in heavy surf, and footage of surf crashing into cliffs or threatening boats on nightly news is a modern manifestation of romantic aesthetic of the beach.

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43 SMH 13-14 April 2002, p.7. The inaugural Sydney beach winner was Dee Why.
44 Broeze, Island Nation, p.251.
45 The Kurnell sand dunes are the only remaining dunes of any substantial nature along Sydney’s coast, and even they are nearly gone.
46 The sand at North Cronulla beach, for example, was replenished with sand dredged from the nearby Port Hacking River.
Finally, the notion that the beach is an inherently healthy place to spend time, discussed in chapter eight, continues to pervade Australian beach culture. The presence of out-door gyms on beaches and their increasing use by fitness trainers —
which has recently caused some concern to local councils – demonstrates that the beach is still considered a ‘healthy’ place to be, and therefore an appropriate place in which to exercise.\textsuperscript{47} Regular sessions in the cold surf was even cited as an explanation for the astounding lack of injuries of the 2005 premiership winning Sydney Swans AFL team.\textsuperscript{48} Contemporary commentators reinforce this perception, Philip Drew, for example, writing that ‘the beach exposes people to the healing regenerative powers of nature’.\textsuperscript{49} There is more caution coming from the medical and scientific authorities in this regard however, due to an increased awareness of the potential danger caused by too much exposure to the sun. The message of ‘slip slop slap’ which urges people to cover up while in the sun has been so effective that some experts are now concerned that Australians are not getting enough sun, which is a major source of vitamin D. The consequent information which informs beachgoers how to get the ‘right balance’ of sun exposure – and the conflicting advice which abounds – ironically mimics the dictatorial regimes of the eighteenth century European ‘healthy’ beach.\textsuperscript{50}

In Australia, 2007 was designated the official Year of the Surf Lifesaver (YSL). According to Surf Life Saving Australia, YSL ‘acknowledges the fundamental role surf lifesavers play in keeping Australian beaches safe and in the formation of Australian beach culture.’\textsuperscript{51} Certainly, surf lifesavers played a key role in making surf bathing safe – or at least safer – and more morally acceptable. However they played no role in the ‘formation’ of contemporary Australian beach culture, having arrived too late to do so. Rather, it is evident that most of the elements of this culture were emerging or existed well before daylight surf bathing dominated Sydney’s beach scene in the early twentieth century. Fashions may have changed and the beaches have certainly become urbanised, but the ways the beaches are used, the ways they are understood and the methods by which they are governed continue the traditions established by the first Europeans to use these spaces as sites for leisure and recreation in the early- to mid-nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{SMH} 22 September 2005, p.32.
\textsuperscript{49} Drew, \textit{The Coast Dwellers}, p.115.
Conclusions

Despite Leone Hunstman’s detailed description of beachgoers in the nineteenth century, the lack of popular awareness of the beach in contrast to the bush during this time led her to conclude that ‘late in the century the beach, and all it would mean in the century to come, was yet to be discovered’.¹ This thesis has demonstrated that this was not the case. While the beaches may not have yet been feted as overtly ‘national’ spaces, and the beachgoer identified as a ‘national type’, the nineteenth century beach — in Sydney at least — contained most of the crucial elements of modern Australian beach culture. The beach was a regular weekend destination for residents of Sydney. It was a place of escape, of health, and an ideal location for appreciating nature. It was a place where physical activity co-existed alongside more inactive ways of passing the time; where thrill-seekers enjoyed the fun-park rides, games and sports, nature lovers hiked in rugged conditions, lovers sat side by side, and, in secluded areas, men and women bathed in the surf. By 1920, surf and sun had become central to the beach, and the moral restrictions on public bathing had been removed, so that all of the most important elements of ‘modern beach culture’ were apparent in Sydney by then.

This thesis has traced why and how Sydney’s beach culture emerged in the ways it did. It is not enough to simply assume these were natural ways of enjoying the beach, imported from Britain and transplanted onto Australian sand. The origins of Sydney’s, and ultimately Australia’s beach culture lay in a variety of competing and complex factors, some of which were brought from overseas, some of which developed in tandem, and many of which had more local and distinctive origins. These cultural changes occurred both in a physical sense, in terms of infrastructural changes to the beaches, and in a behavioural sense, reflected in the ways in which the beaches were used.

¹ Hunstman, Sand in our Souls, p.52.
So what were the most influential factors for the development of Sydney’s beach culture between 1810 and 1920? And to what extent was its development derivative of, or distinctive from, other beach cultures around the world?

In part, Sydney’s beach culture was shaped by three local factors: geography, climate and the natural beach formation. Firstly, the close proximity of the beaches to the city enabled the development of a beach culture which was primarily enjoyed by day-trippers – residents of Sydney who regularly went to the beach on summer weekends and weekday afternoons. The incorporation of leisure time into the working week and provision of affordable transport further facilitated this leisure culture, creating both the time and means for residents of Sydney to reach the beach, contributing to the distinctive mixing of classes on Sydney’s ocean beaches.

Secondly, the popularity of out-of-doors entertainment in Sydney was widely attributed to the city’s temperate climate. It lay behind beachgoers’ preferences for picnics and other outdoor activities at the nineteenth century beach over the indoor amusements provided by entrepreneurs, making it difficult for such enterprises to turn a profit. In the twentieth century, surf-bathing offered a refreshing escape from the summer heat, and summer was the season of the beach. It was also because of the reaction of the sun on the skin that the tan had become a status symbol of the regular beachgoer before 1920.

The physical make-up of the beaches was the third local factor to shape Sydney’s emerging beach culture. The presence of surf in particular – which distinguished Sydney’s beaches from the more gentle bay beaches of Melbourne and Adelaide – enabled the evolution of beach culture in which the surf had pride of place. The inherent danger of the surf necessitated a way of making the beaches safe, and the surf lifesaver emerged as a solution to a problem which plagued Sydney’s beaches. The area surrounding the beaches may have been altered, with roads, landscaped parks and amenity buildings, but the beach itself – the sand, the surf and the rocky headlands – remained largely untouched, and the natural aspects of the beach were fundamental to the beach culture.
These geographical and natural factors played an important role in shaping Sydney’s beach culture. Those controlling the beaches, however, and those using them wielded far more power over the development of Sydney’s beach culture. The New South Wales government, for example, determined the extent to which the natural coastal resources would be exploited, whether beaches remained publicly or privately owned, the ease of accessibility to the beaches, and the extent of construction on the beaches. They also restricted the behaviour of beachgoers.

By 1910, when the first state Labor government was elected, we can see a distinct shift within their attitudes towards the beaches. Most notably, they demonstrated an increased willingness to provide public reserves along the coast, especially close to new centres of population, and focussed also on providing public transport to help non-locals reach these beach reserves. They attended the opening of tramlines and public reserves promoting the health and wellbeing benefits which the beach would now afford all citizens of New South Wales. They generously supported the construction of surf bathing accommodation on dozens of beaches along the New South Wales coast, and without financially contributing, also endorsed the authority of surf lifesaving clubs to represent surf bathers on a range of important matters, even appointing the president of SBANSW to head the Surf Bathing Commitee of 1910-11. Furthermore, by the 1910s the Lands Department had articulated an opposition to the construction of entertainment and amusement structures on ocean beaches and beach parks, and consistently enforced a policy which favoured free public access to public recreation reserves over the interests of private entrepreneurs.

In the name of different stakeholders, which included ratepayers, business owners and day-trippers, coastal councils clashed with the governments on issues ranging from usages and ownership of the beach space, the provision of amenities and making the beaches safe, to entertainment complexes on the beaches. They insisted the beaches were a state rather than local responsibility, in an attempt to share the financial burden of their administration and development. By 1920, coastal councils and the state government alike recognised the economic benefits brought by the beaches. For the
councils especially, it was this expectation of return, more than any other factor, which persuaded them to commit funding to the beaches.

By far the most influential group within the history of Sydney’s beach culture, however, were the users of the beach themselves, who engaged in constant lobbying and negotiation with these governing bodies over many different issues effecting the beach. Indeed, even just their presence on the beach created pressures for the government. They demanded free public access to the coast, and constructed this not as a privilege but as a ‘right’. This thesis has shown how the private ownership of beaches – and consequent restrictions on public access – which seems anathema to the Australian ‘way of life’, was as much a part of Sydney’s history as those of continental coasts. The concept that ocean beaches are the rightful inheritance of the public was not a widely shared belief in 1860 but had become a dominant – though still contested – view by 1890. Sydney’s beaches had to be fought for, and only became publicly accessible following extensive and enduring campaigns by coastal residents and councils, which sometimes lasted decades.

In choosing to spend their time making their own pleasure on the beaches, Sydney beachgoers shaped the direction of Sydney’s emerging beach culture. Day-trippers shunned the aquariums and other replicas of British and American seaside entertainment in favour of spending time on the beaches amusing themselves – although the failure of such enterprises was also due to other factors including climate, and the tendency of beachgoers to repeatedly visit the beaches rather than spend a longer amount of time stranded on the coast. Despite the repeated attempts of entrepreneurs to replicate successful forms of overseas seaside entertainments at Sydney’s beaches, the beachgoing public were more attracted to the natural beach. Their favourite ways of enjoying the beach, by walking, picnicking, playing, or sitting and gazing, remain central to Australian beach culture.

Furthermore, the complaints of beachgoers about sand mining and garbage disposal on the beaches led to changes in the attitudes towards beaches: governments and councils gradually stopped viewing beaches as empty spaces free for commercial
exploitation, and began to understand their value – both economic and in terms of public well being – as recreation sites. The opposition by coastal residents to construction on the beaches ensured that the natural spaces of sand, surf and headlands remained the primary setting for a day at the beach, despite the appeal to some of man-made infrastructure, and willingness of coastal councils to support such enterprises.

In challenging the laws and moral codes regarding bathing, surf bathers also played a pivotal role in the direction of Sydney’s beach culture in the opening decade of the twentieth century. Not only did they bathe during daylight hours, but they did so with the opposite sex. They defied restrictions on which sections of the beach a wet or costume-clad body may occupy. They formed themselves into groups of trained men in an attempt to make surf bathing safe and therefore more acceptable. They challenged long-established notions of the undesirability of the tanned or sun-browned body. And while they may have accepted most dress regulations, men refused to wear ‘skirts’, and many pulled their costumes down to increase their skin’s exposure to the sun. In doing so, Sydney’s surf bathers forced the acceptance of ways of using the beach which would not only henceforth become the norm on the Sydney beach, but central to future Australian and international beach culture. These bathers forced a change which one hundred years later seems ‘natural.’ In these ways, Sydney’s beachgoers created modern beach culture.

‘Mrs Grundy’s’ role in restraining hedonists, which is emphasised by Douglas Booth, is perhaps less remarkable than the fact that surf bathers and beach users were so willing to challenge existing norms. It was because the beach was a place of escape from the everyday world that they desired these changes, and felt safe to demand them. By utilising and expanding on the language of the beach as a healthy place, surf bathers successfully persuaded the mainstream public that the benefits of the surf far outweighed any moral transgressions.

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2 Booth, Australian Beach Cultures, p.40.
These beachgoers were therefore influenced by established ways of understanding the beach. Surf-bathing campaigners, for example, relied heavily on conceptions of the inherently healthy qualities of sea water and sea air which had been fundamental to Britain’s seaside culture for close to two centuries. The campaigns for public beaches similarly owed much success to a common faith in the potential for ‘healthy recreation’ on the coast, and reflected the core concerns of the public parks movements of Britain and America. Furthermore, the insistence of a public ‘right’ to the foreshores was concurrently voiced in relation to Brighton in Melbourne, and reflected the ideals of the opposition to poaching laws and support for rights-of-way in Britain. These decisive elements of Sydney’s beach culture demonstrate that the culture which emerged – although driven by local factors and local beach users – was nonetheless influenced by other seaside and leisure cultures around Australia and throughout the world.

This thesis has traced some of the complexities within the governance of the beaches in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, it has highlighted the substantial role beachgoers have played in shaping Australia’s beach culture – a far more substantial role than they have been given credit for. Overwhelmingly, the origins of this beach culture lie not overseas or elsewhere in Australia, but in the particular constellation of factors taking place in Sydney. Early British influences on the beach – whether visible in the behaviour of beachgoers or the way the beaches were understood – were adapted to suit the Sydney conditions and the desires of beachgoers.
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