

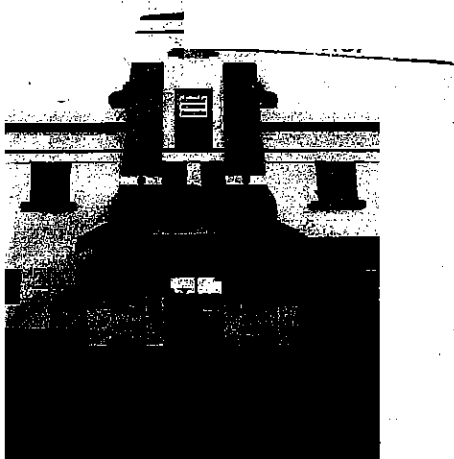
Newcastle City Council

## Ocean Baths Newcastle, NSW

*final report*

### Conservation Management Plan

*"Like a giant Hollywood film set, the facade of the old  
Newcastle Ocean Baths rises majestically above the azure seas."*



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\*Cover quote taken from Newcastle Morning Herald, 14 December 1994.

## Executive Summary

### History

late 18 <sup>th</sup> C	English medical tracts recommend cold salt water bathing beneficial for health
1810	Governor Macquarie bans bathing at the Government wharf
1818	Governor Macquarie advised bathers to avoid the surf and keep to the harbour
1820	The Bogey Hole constructed by convict labour for Commandant Morisset
1825	First formal baths in NSW constructed on the shore of The Domain, Sydney
1838	Law prohibiting daylight bathing in all waters throughout entire Colony within view of a public place
1850	Bathing accommodation for women established on Newcastle Harbour
1861	Segregated bathing for women established on the southern end of Newcastle Beach
1853	Four public harbour baths in Sydney exist
1882	Lands Department allows Newcastle Council to occupy and construct Soldiers' Baths beneath Fort Scratchley
1884	The Bogey Hole enlarged by Council
1893	Newcastle Council passed by-law permitting beach bathing at all hours for both sexes
1905-1911	Council considered numerous plans for baths on a section of Newcastle Beach, north east of the hospital
1911	Tenders called on design for baths by City Engineer L.B. Blackwell – construction commenced September
1912	Local architect F.G. Castleden appointed to remodel Blackwell's plans
1913	Baths opened to the public on New Years Day
1918	Admission charged; new dressing accommodation constructed
1922	Construction commenced on Ocean Baths Pavilion, including new dressing accommodation – opened November
1927	Pavilion façade remodelled by local architects Pitt & Merewether
1937	Young Mariners' Pool completed to the south of the baths, including concrete map of the world
1939	New boat pool completed on the ocean side of the Young Mariners' Pool, later known as the Canoe Pool
1968	Map of the world demolished

### Physical Evidence

The Newcastle Ocean Baths are set in a rocky outcrop on the southern side of a natural headland forming the southern entrance to Newcastle harbour, within the suburb of Newcastle East. The immediate context is dominated by residential development, with some commercial buildings such as hotels and restaurants, fronting Shortland Esplanade.

The immediate landscape of the Baths is that of a hard landscape. The Baths and pavilion itself are masonry, surrounded by masonry paving surfaces. To the east lies rock shelves which lower into the Tasman Sea; to the west lies bitumen of carpark and roadways. Further to the west and atop the natural headland is a small parkland called Tramway Reserve, however due to the difference in level, this park does not visually link well with the Ocean Baths.

The pavilion is in the main, a rendered reinforced concrete building, housing a kiosk, male and female change rooms and first floor residence. This building replaced earlier dressing sheds (1918) and was approved for building in 1921. Later extensions to the pavilion were constructed in brick cavity with render finish. The pavilion is an elongated structure that shelters the pool from the city.

The pavilion as it appears today is detailed in an Inter-War Stripped Classical / Art Deco style, although as outlined in the history this has been adapted from an earlier style of building. The façade is dominated by engaged piers and is distinguished by the vertical parapet of the central block and two decorative parapets of each wing, both having shell motifs. The 1927-1928 alterations included amendments to the existing central block for a new pavilion entrance in the Stripped Classical / Art Deco style, raising the parapet and the addition of simplified palmette motifs to the parapet. An early photograph shows the porch entrance existing before 1927. There is also mention of a residence for the first caretaker from 1922. The main entrance is a large opening, not in the centre of the façade

through the porch as expected, but adjacent to the central section to the north. The change rooms are simple open-air structures behind the pavilion façade, which enhance the ocean beach nature of the bathing experience. The central structure is essentially a two storey block with offices and kiosk at ground, and residence above.

The Ocean Baths before alteration in 1922 was a typical Federation style façade. Although altered in 1927, the modified style appears to be most strongly that of Inter-War Stripped Classical, with Art Deco decorative elements. This style was not uncommon for recreational buildings, as it portrayed an air of fun and frivolity. The 'stage set' façade of the structure and the current Art Deco pastel colour scheme reinforces the playful mood of the building.

Features of the Inter-War Stripped Classical style which are dominant in the Ocean Baths include the symmetrical façade, division into vertical bays indicating classical origins, elements of other styles (e.g Art Deco), emphatic portal, and simple surfaces.

### Significance

The Newcastle Ocean Baths is an icon of the city. It stands alone, dominating the city coastline – the pavilion a stage set for the cultural pursuit of ocean bathing. The size and prominence of the structure represents the significance which has been placed on swimming and beach culture from the early 1900s.

The ocean Baths is aesthetically significant and unique, believed to be the only Inter-War Stripped Classical ocean baths pavilion found in New South Wales. The landmark baths and pavilion is an early, and possibly the first example of this style in Newcastle. Socially, the place greatly contributes to the local community's sense of place.

The continued public enthusiasm and use of the Ocean Baths even during its construction is testament to the community value of the place.

The continued care of the place by the City Council represents local government public service.

### Conservation Policy

Newcastle Ocean Baths is a place of cultural heritage, and should be conserved and interpreted in its historical recreational use as a rare example of its style in Newcastle and New South Wales.

Conserve the setting and landscape of the Ocean Baths.

Conserve the built highly significant fabric of the Ocean Baths.

Enhance the significance of the place through interpretation.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

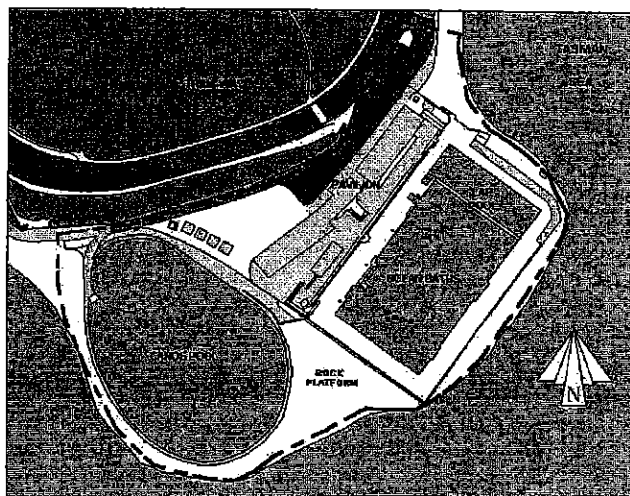
This report represents a Conservation Management Plan for the Newcastle Ocean Baths, located at 30 Shortland Esplanade, Newcastle. The study area, referred to in this document as the Ocean Baths Precinct, comprises the baths and associated dressing sheds and pavilion, the Canoe Pool (children's pool), the western forecourt and parking area including four picnic shade structures, and the western retaining wall which incorporates a shaded seating area. The Ocean Baths Precinct is shown in figure 1.1 below.

This report considers the following principle issues:

- history and social context of the baths, as researched by Hunter History Consultants;
- physical assessment of the precinct, including a photographic record of the building detailed in the inventory datasheets;
- a statement of significance for the place, and identification of significant elements;
- conservation management policies, and guidelines for implementing those policies.

## 1.2 Authorship

This Conservation Management Plan was prepared by Linda Smith (M.Herit.Cons.) and Elizabeth Evans, and supervised by Edward Clode of Suters Architects between November 2001 and June 2002 for the Newcastle City Council.



**Figure 1.1**  
The Ocean Baths Precinct, as defined by  
this Conservation Management Plan.  
source: Suters Architects, from NCC data

### 1.3 Methodology

The assessment the Ocean Baths has been prepared generally in accordance with the requirements of the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter, 1999, guidelines issued by the NSW Heritage Office in 1996 (and updates), and *The Conservation Plan* by James Semple Kerr (2000).

### 1.4 Definitions

The terminology used in this conservation plan is specific, and the understanding of such is essential for the effective use of this document. The terminology is that defined in the ICOMOS Burra Charter, which is included as Appendix F.

### 1.5 Limitations

The following limitations are placed on this assessment in relation to the gathering of evidence:

- Physical evidence was limited to visual inspection of the interiors and exteriors of the building. The roof was not inspected. A general structural inspection was carried out, and is included in this report. An electrical assessment was not undertaken.

### 1.6 Acknowledgements

Documentary evidence has been researched and provided by Rosemary Melville, Hunter History Consultants.

The authors acknowledge the assistance provided by Paul Beck and Peter Walmsley during the research phase of this report.

## 2 Documentary Evidence<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of the following history is not only to trace the development, construction and uses of the Newcastle Ocean Baths but also to locate the Baths within the broader historical context of public bathing in the city of Newcastle and New South Wales. In an attempt to assist in the interpretation of significance, this history reveals the Newcastle Ocean Baths as a site for the convergence of politics, culture and community.

### 2.2 Public Bathing in New South Wales & Newcastle

#### Colonial Days

By the late eighteenth century English medical tracts were recommending bathing in cold, salt water for health and therapeutic benefits. However, seaside bathing was an intimidating prospect for the early European inhabitants of New South Wales. "Waves, currents and sharks threatened and took the lives of bathers"<sup>2</sup> and only a small minority actually braved the open beach. But physical dangers were not the only deterrents to public bathing. The display of flesh in public was considered sinful by many and it was not long before colonial authorities were policing bathing habits. In 1803 a proclamation was issued to Sydney bathers warning that:

This bay and harbour in general, - being full of voracious Sharks and Stingrays only, it is recommended to the convicts not to go into the water without the utmost precaution and they are positively prohibited from bathing in front of the encampment.<sup>3</sup>

The development of public bathing places in New South Wales arose in part as a response to protect bathers from the physical dangers of the ocean as well as an effort to restrict the public display of bathing bodies in accordance with contemporary values and standards of behaviour.

Men swam naked in the early days of the Colony but this practice prompted intervention from the newly arrived governor, Lachlan Macquarie. In 1810 Macquarie banned bathing at the government wharf as well as the dockyard describing it as an 'indecent and improper custom'.<sup>4</sup> Of course, informal bathing by colonists continued in secluded spots.

#### Convict Newcastle

The inhabitants of the convict settlement at Newcastle had little chance of avoiding colonial regulations issued at Sydney. Since 1804 a permanent settlement had been established at Newcastle as a place of secondary punishment for convicts who had re-offended after transportation to New South Wales. For the vast majority of prisoners, life in the settlement was marked by regimentation, monotony and deprivation.<sup>5</sup>

The original Aboriginal inhabitants of the Newcastle coastal area, the Awabakal tribe, had used the local beaches for both recreational and food gathering purposes. The Awabakal regarded certain areas of the local coastline as sacred and were well tutored in both the dangers and the bounties of the ocean. However, for the early Europeans at Newcastle, activity in the penal outpost revolved around the harbour rather than the beachfront.<sup>6</sup>

Instructions sent from Governor Macquarie in 1818 to the new Commandant at Newcastle, Major James Morisset, do indicate that some bathers had ventured into the ocean at their own risk. Morisset was told to advise bathers to avoid the surf and keep to the harbour:

<sup>1</sup> The Documentary Evidence has been researched and provided by Rosemary Melville, Hunter History Consultants.

<sup>2</sup> Nancy Cushing, "Newcastle's Beaches, Found and Lost", in R. John Moore & Michael J. Ostwald, (eds.), *Hidden Newcastle, Urban Memories and Architectural Imaginaries*, Gadfly Media, Ultimo, 1997, p.104.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in EJE Landscape & Christa Ludlow, *Survey of Harbourside & Ocean Pools of the Sydney Metropolitan Region, Report & Inventory Sheets*, Prepared for the National Trust of Australia (NSW), September, 1994, section 4.2.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Booth, "Nudes In the Sand and Perverts In the Dunes", in Richard Niles, (ed.), *Fatal Shores, Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 53, University of Queensland Press, 1997, p. 170.

<sup>5</sup> J.W. Turner, *Newcastle as a Convict Settlement: The Evidence Before J.T. Bigge in 1819-1921*, Council of the City of Newcastle, Newcastle, 1973, p.34.

<sup>6</sup> See, Cushing, "Newcastle's Beaches ...", pp. 101-103.



Some lives having been lost by persons bathing on that part of the beach where there is a heavy surf, you are to caution all persons against bathing in any other place than on the beach within the harbour to the westward of the wharf.<sup>7</sup>

One of the landmarks of Newcastle's convict era is the rock pool known as the Bogey Hole at the foot of Shepherd's Hill. Originally about 15 feet long by 7 feet wide and 6 feet deep, the Bogey Hole is believed to have been excavated by convict workers around 1820 for Morisset's personal use.<sup>8</sup>

### Regulated Bathing

The first formal baths in New South Wales were erected several years later on the shore of the Domain in Sydney c.1825.<sup>9</sup> According to the *Sydney Gazette*, bathing was increasing in popularity, however, the display of bathing bodles continued to present problems for the Colony's moral regulators. In 1833 an Act was passed prohibiting bathing at Sydney Cove and Darling Harbour between the hours of 6am and 8pm. As this law was flouted, an 1838 amendment to the Act prohibited daylight bathing in all waters throughout the entire Colony within view of a public place.<sup>10</sup> These early regulations helped to create a practice that lasted throughout the nineteenth century that attempted to confine public bathing to enclosed baths and segregated by sex.

### A 'New Brighton'

Meanwhile, in post convict Newcastle, sandy beaches and convenient bathing were used to promote the town. The author of an 1828 article in the *Sydney Gazette* suggested the town would "rank, in fact as the future Brighton of New South Wales...crowds of Cumberland squires and Sydney citizens...taking weekly trips for health and amusement, or making it the summer retreat of their families when in pursuit of health or pleasant recreation."<sup>11</sup>

By 1850 bathing accommodation for women had been established between the ballast wharf on Newcastle Harbour and Nobbys. John Askew, a visitor to Newcastle in the 1850s, mistakenly took this as a public bathing place:

I went to the harbour every morning, at five o'clock, to bathe. The first morning I saw a small wooden house, with a narrow stone jetty, a few feet high, running out from it to beyond the high water mark. I proceeded along this, and entered the place, which I found to be a neat little bathing house, with several rooms to dress and undress in, and a space in front entirely surrounded with a sharkproof netting of wattles.<sup>12</sup>

Askew only realised his error when he surprised a group of women at the baths early one morning who told him that he had "no business in the place, it was built entirely for the ladies."<sup>13</sup>

A segregated bathing area for women known as the Ladies Bathing Place was also provided for on the southern end of Newcastle Beach leaving the central area of the beach for the men. However, as the *Newcastle Chronicle* noted in 1861, fenced segregation was not enough to secure the women's privacy. Men had been observed along the top of the cliffs overlooking the Ladies Bathing Place:

amusing themselves by watching the flounderings of the lovely fishes disporting themselves in the waters below...It is a positive fact that some men go so far as to get behind the rocks, over top of which they level spy-glasses, in order that they may enjoy a nearer and more distinct vision.<sup>14</sup>

In the mid 1860s funds were raised to install a flight of steps from the edge of the above cliff to the Ladies Bathing Place<sup>15</sup> and in time dressing sheds and tea rooms were also erected. This location

<sup>7</sup> J.W. Turner, *Newcastle as a Convict Settlement: The Evidence Before J.T. Bigge in 1819-1921*, Council of the City of Newcastle, Newcastle, 1973, p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> John Askew, *A Voyage to Australia and New Zealand, Including a visit to Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney, Hunter's River, Newcastle, Maitland, and Auckland with a Summary of the Progress and Discoveries made in each colony from its Founding to the Present Time, by a Steerage Passenger*, John Askew, Simpkin, Marshall & Co., London, 1857, p.261; 3-D Exhibitions, *Bathers Way Coastal Walk Interpretive Signage - Newcastle Draft Text & Image*, Prepared for Newcastle City Council, August, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> These baths were privatised in the late 1830s. See, EJE Landscape & Ludlow, *Survey of Harbourside...*, section 4.2.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Booth, "Healthy, Economic, Disciplined Bodles, Surfbathing and Surf Lifesaving in Australia and New Zealand, 1890 - 1950", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 32, 1, 1998, p.44; Lana Wells, *Sunny Memories, Australians at the Seaside*, Greenhouse Publications, Richmond, 1982, p.21.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Cushing, "Newcastle's Beaches...", p.102.

<sup>12</sup> Askew, *A Voyage to Australia and New Zealand...*, p.259.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in John Turner and Jack Sullivan, *Photos of Old Newcastle*, ....p.31.

<sup>15</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 28 February, 1866.

was always considered a dangerous swimming site due to the presence of large boulders in the water and several drownings occurred at the Ladies Bathing Place.<sup>16</sup>

In their attempts to foster the tourist potential of Newcastle, the town's leaders bemoaned the lack of "a suitable bathing place for the city."<sup>17</sup> In 1866 the *Newcastle Chronicle* complained, "It has long been a reproach to Newcastle, that no proper bathing place has ever been erected",<sup>18</sup> and claimed that such a facility "would recommend the city as a pleasant watering place and refuge from the heat, dust, and ennui that render inland towns in hot weather intolerable and unbearable."<sup>19</sup>

The *Chronicle* also called for an amendment to the Act which prevented daylight bathing in public view, claiming that the bathing regulations were hindering Newcastle's potential as the 'new Brighton'.<sup>20</sup> An incident where the Act was enforced in Newcastle raised the ire of the *Chronicle's* editor who observed that most Novocastrians were ignorant of the public bathing hours specified by the Act and of the penalties that could be incurred for violating the law. In tongue-in-cheek style, the editor commented:

Fancy a dripping damsel gorgeously arrayed in a blue flannel negligé fitting rather close to the figure, or a jacket and trouser à la Chinoise, being escorted down Watt-street to the stationhouse, there to be kept in durance vile until brought up before Mr. Scott, and fined for the enormous offence of taking a cold bath.<sup>21</sup>

### Sea Bath Schemes

In Sydney, by 1853, there were four harbour public baths as well as several other privately owned baths including those restricted to women only.<sup>22</sup> From the late 1850s onwards, several schemes to erect public sea baths at Newcastle were proposed by private syndicates.<sup>23</sup> At a public meeting attended by the town's leading citizens and several aldermen in September, 1879, a Mr. Mullen stated that for the past 17 years he had been trying, unsuccessfully, to persuade the Council to undertake such a project.<sup>24</sup> At a subsequent meeting between Mullen and the Council, the City Engineer tabled a report outlining seven schemes for sea baths on various sites stretching along the Newcastle coastline.<sup>25</sup>

A site was finally chosen in early 1882 and the Lands Department gave approval for the Council to occupy "a portion of the foreshore under the Signal Hill"<sup>26</sup> and construction soon began on the excavation of what was known as the Soldiers' Baths beneath Fort Scratchley. This semi-circular pool with a sand and shale bottom was approximately 180 yards in length and enclosed by a sea wall and a reef.<sup>27</sup> Managed by the Council, the Soldiers' Baths were plagued with problems from the start when in June 1882 heavy seas washed away the partly constructed baths.<sup>28</sup> Opened in 1883, not only were the Soldiers' Baths considered dangerous, but by the end of the nineteenth century, storms had damaged the sea wall and the pool had filled with sand making the baths unswimmable.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 12 September, 1884; Nancy Cushing, "Ocean Baths and Arc Lights: Newcastle City Council and Control on the Beach", in Jane Long, Jan Gothard and Helen Brash, (eds.), *Forging Identities: bodies, gender and feminist history*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1997, pp. 91-92.

<sup>17</sup> *Newcastle Chronicle*, 15 September, 1866.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* See also, *Newcastle Chronicle*, 17 November, 1866; *Newcastle Chronicle*, 12 November, 1868.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 September, 1866.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 January, 1866.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 January, 1866.

<sup>22</sup> EJE Landscape & Ludlow, *Survey of Harbourside ...*, section 4.2.

<sup>23</sup> For eg. see *Newcastle Chronicle*, 31 October, 1866; *Newcastle Chronicle*, 20 January, 1868; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 18 September, 1879; Cushing, "Ocean Baths and Arc Lights...", p. 91.

<sup>24</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 24 September, 1879.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 October, 1879.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 February, 1882.

<sup>27</sup> Cushing, "Ocean Baths and Arc Lights...", p. 100.

<sup>28</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 10 June, 1882.

<sup>29</sup> 3-D Exhibitions, *Bathers Way...*, p. 8.

In the Sydney area, coastal pools had also been built, often from the naturally occurring sandstone sometimes incorporating timber pavilions and bathers had also taken advantage of natural rock pools. A natural rock pool at Bondi was used from early in the nineteenth century and sea baths with dressing sheds were completed on the site in 1887.<sup>30</sup>



**Figure 2.1**  
The Soldiers' Baths, with Nobbys in  
the distance, 1908.  
source: Newcastle Region Library

A rock pool to the south of the Soldiers' Baths was also a popular public swimming spot for Novocastrians in the second half of the nineteenth century. Known as the Square Hole or the Cowrie Hole, it is believed that this cavity, long since covered with sand, was originally cut into the rock platform as a footing for a bathing house.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 2.2**  
The Square Hole, or Cowrie  
Hole, c1860-1865.  
source: Newcastle Region Library

The Council had also taken control of Newcastle's other ocean baths, the Bogey Hole. In 1884, the pool was enlarged to seven times its original size and deepened, an iron safety rail constructed along with access track and bridges, stairs and ledges cut into the rock face. Men and women

<sup>30</sup> EJE Landscape & Ludlow, *Survey of Harbourside...*, section 4.2.

<sup>31</sup> 3-D Exhibitions, *Bathers Way...*, p. 8.

swam on different days and new dressing sheds were constructed in 1893.<sup>32</sup> However, despite the improvements, the rock pool was not considered a safe or respectable enough bathing site for the good citizens of Newcastle. The *Newcastle Morning Herald* commented that "the Bogey Hole has become the aquatic hunting ground of the Newcastle larrikin."<sup>33</sup>

### Indoor Pools

Indoor pools were also popular in Newcastle by the end of the 1880s. Turkish Baths built by local businessman and medico, F.W. Reay, were opened in 1880 at the corner of Hamilton Road near the Castlemain Brewery.<sup>34</sup>

The Corporation Baths were opened seven years later in Newcomen Street. This two storey complex was erected by the Council at a cost of £4,050 and sea water was pumped into the 90 feet long by 35 feet wide concrete pool from the ocean. Women were only permitted to swim at set times. Initially, the Corporation Baths proved popular although the baths did not meet everyone's approval. Complaints were often received about dirty water and the larrikin element. By the end of the 1890s the baths were in much need of repair.<sup>35</sup>

### To the Beach

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the beach was becoming popular, although more for leisure purposes rather than swimming. A carriage road built by 1890 around Flagstaff Hill enabled people to drive or walk around Fort Scratchley on the Hill. Coastal land subdivision and enhancement of Parnell Place "led to greater appreciation of the seaside environment for homes and for enjoyment."<sup>36</sup> Promenading by the seaside soon became a favoured pastime.

Newcastle bathers were sometimes prosecuted for swimming outside the prohibited hours<sup>37</sup> but it would appear that the restrictive regulations were not as rigorously observed in late nineteenth century Newcastle as elsewhere.<sup>38</sup> Under the New South Wales Local Authorities Act, municipal councils had taken over as bathing regulators and in 1893 Newcastle Council passed a by-law permitting bathing along the beach at all hours for both sexes. (However, after 1901 when the Police Offences Act was passed, bathers could still be prosecuted.)<sup>39</sup> Despite the relaxation, swimming remained segregated.

Ironically, the growth in beach popularity led to an increase in surf accidents, drownings and shark attacks. By the turn of the twentieth century, Newcastle Council had renewed its calls for better, safer, bathing accommodation for the citizens of Newcastle.



**Figure 2.3**  
View from King Edward Park area  
looking toward the rock platform on  
which the Ocean Baths is now  
constructed, c1907.  
source: Gov't Printers Office #3276

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 2 September, 1884.

<sup>33</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 9 December, 1884.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 December, 1879; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 3 April, 1880.

<sup>35</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 14 February, 1888; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 17 January, 1889; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 24 November, 1898; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 31 August, 1900.

<sup>36</sup> "Sign 12 Newcastle Ocean Baths", in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

<sup>37</sup> For eg. see *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 14 January, 1878.

<sup>38</sup> See, Booth, "Healthy, Economic, Disciplined Bodies...", pp. 45-47.

<sup>39</sup> Booth, "Nudes in the Sand...", p. 171; Cushing, "Newcastle's Beaches...", p. 105.

## Newcastle Ocean Baths - Origins

One of the various schemes proffered was that by Dr. J.L. Beeston proposing to erect the largest baths in the Colony on a section of Newcastle Beach to the north east of the hospital. Beeston's plan was for two segregated swimming pools created out of the rock platform.<sup>40</sup> However, the Minister for Public Works rejected the private syndicate proposals claiming the baths should be the Newcastle City Council's responsibility. With mixed bathing in New South Wales finally legalised, the minister promised a £3,000 subsidy to the Council provided the baths would be open to both sexes and be at least 200 feet in length.<sup>41</sup>

The location decided, Council considered numerous plans and specifications between 1905 and 1911.<sup>42</sup>

### 2.3 Newcastle Ocean Baths Construction

#### Original Plans

In October 1907 the City Engineer was instructed to prepare plans, specifications and costs for the "establishment of a suitable bathing place at that plateau of rocks on the sea-coast near the Tram Terminus about 100 yards in length by about 50 yards in width to include dressing boxes, refreshment rooms and all necessities for an up-to-date bathing place."<sup>43</sup> However, it was not until a Council meeting in July, 1911, that Council finally adopted plans presented by the City Engineer, L.B. Blackwell, and called for tenders.<sup>44</sup>

Situated below the hillside where the city trams terminated at Parnell Place, the site chosen for the baths was just south of the Cowrie Hole, on a slightly inclined tidal rock platform approximately two feet above high water spring tides. Fluctuation in tides played prominently in the design. Outlet design had to coincide with low water level for frequent emptying of baths. A pumping scheme was necessary because high water level would not provide sufficient depths for diving.<sup>45</sup>



**Figure 2.4**  
The Ocean Baths under construction, c1911.  
source: Newcastle Region Library

<sup>40</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 20 April, 1899.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 July, 1911, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths – Photographs and Paper Cuttings, October, 1986.

<sup>42</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 13 January, 1906; *Newcastle Morning Herald* 5 April, 1906; Newcastle City Council Minutes, 14 November, 1905; Newcastle City Council Minutes, 11 June, 1906; Newcastle City Council Minutes, 5 November, 1906; Newcastle City Council Minutes, 22 October, 1907; Newcastle City Council Minutes, 16 December, 1907.

<sup>43</sup> Newcastle City Council Minutes, 22 October, 1907.

<sup>44</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 26 July, 1911, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Blackwell reported that under certain weather conditions the seas would break over the southern edge of the rock ledge following the dip of the strata in a northerly direction resulting in flooding of the baths. This could minimise the necessity for pumping. A natural bell-mouth shaped fissure in the rocks could also be utilised for emptying, replenishing and scouring.<sup>46</sup>

The proposed pool was to be oblong shaped, 45,000 feet in area, 300 feet long by 150 feet wide. It would have a natural sand bottom on top of the underlying rock shelf. The depth would vary across the baths with an average depth of six feet across the centre, two feet at the northern end opposite the ladies change rooms and three feet on the southern end facing the men's quarters. An extra 18 inches could be pumped in for carnivals.<sup>47</sup>

8,500 cubic yards of rock would need to be excavated. This material would be used in the construction of a raised area approximately 360 feet long by 66 feet wide about seven to eight feet above the rock level making it level with the ocean promenade. Several buildings were to be erected on this area. The excavated material would also be used to create a retaining wall that would be faced with fine concrete.<sup>48</sup>

Access to the buildings would be from a promenade via a 33 feet long gangway flanked by ticket boxes and leading to a vestibule 64 feet long by 20 feet wide. The vestibule would lead to gymnasiums, refreshment room, dressing boxes, baths and promenades. A flight of stairs would lead from the vestibule to a balcony, 82 feet by 10 feet, overlooking the baths.<sup>49</sup>

152 dressing boxes for women and 210 for men, each five feet by four feet were provided for in the plans. The women's gymnasium was to measure 35 feet by 20 feet and the men's 55 feet by 30 feet. Hot water would be provided for those willing to pay.<sup>50</sup>

Blackwell estimated the total cost at £6,000 and Mayor Shedden intended to apply to the Governor for approval to borrow the extra £3,000. In order to pay off the interest from such a loan it was proposed to levy ratepayers at the rate of one thirtieth of a penny in the pound on the unimproved capital value of municipal land or one sixty sixth of a penny on the improved capital. It was estimated that the yearly net profit from the baths would be £657.<sup>51</sup>

## Construction Progress

### 1911-1913

Blasting of the rock ledge was well underway by September, 1911 with an estimated 10,000 tons of rock already excavated. The *Newcastle Morning Herald* reported on public opinion that the work was being done too slowly but the paper claimed there were valid reasons for the delays in progress.

The rock type was proving difficult to bore and blast despite the use of sophisticated compressed air drills such as the large Ingersoll-Rand drill and the small Siskol drill which could put down 23 holes, four and a half feet deep in one day. Problems were also being experienced with the electrical connection to the compressor.<sup>52</sup>

Stones of up to two tons were being cut and trimmed for use in the wall surrounding the site of the bathing sheds but windy conditions hampered operations. Former Caretaker/Manager, Mr Peter Walmsley believes that those who built the Baths "must have been men of iron, hard men...You've got workers by steam winches and 10-metre sandbagged barricades battling against incoming tides to jackhammer the rock away and using draught horses to haul pieces off."<sup>53</sup>

Construction of buildings could not commence until the walls were completed and the excavated material used in laying the site had settled. Most of the lower section of the 400 feet long eastward facing wall had been completed but the southern end of the site needed particular reinforcement.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 September, 1911, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 September, 1911, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 November, 1997, cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 September, 1911, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

The *Newcastle Morning Herald* optimistically declared: "Given a free hand to complete the work, Mr. Blackwell should be able to construct baths that will be unequalled in Australia, and which will not only be appreciated by Newcastle residents, but by the people of a large portion of the northern district."<sup>55</sup>

However, Mr. Blackwell was not given a free hand to complete the work and in December, 1912, the Mayor announced that architect, F.G. Castleden, had been appointed to remodel Blackwell's original plans for the buildings. The *Newcastle Morning Herald* reported that under Castleden's design, "The roof would be a flat one, of compressed asphalt, carried by strong steel girders, and would thus form a promenade."<sup>56</sup> Castleden also intended to raise the platform carrying the buildings by 2ft 6in and to take the buildings back 16 to 18 feet from the wall. Such remodelling plans required extra funding and the Mayor intended to ask the government for a further grant.<sup>57</sup>

By 1913 the 100 yards long by 50 yards wide swimming pool had been constructed along with the wall and side promenades.<sup>58</sup> The Newcastle Ocean Baths was by no means the first public pool in New South Wales built on an ocean rock platform. Bondi Beach Pool and Bronte Beach Baths in Sydney were amongst the earliest enclosed concrete ocean pools in New South Wales and both predated the Newcastle Ocean Baths.<sup>59</sup> However, *Newcastle Morning Herald* readers were told that the swimming area of the Ocean Baths, "is certainly larger than that of any other enclosed ocean baths in Australia..."<sup>60</sup>

As a public relations exercise, perhaps in part to deflect complaints regarding slow progress and rising costs, the Mayor, Alderman Shedden, opened the Baths to the public for New Year's Day, 1913. Little in the way of excavation work remained but the Baths, being referred to as the 'Griffith Ocean Baths' (in honour of the Minister for Works) were far from complete. Temporary dressing sheds were erected for the occasion and inspectors from the Newcastle Surf Club were asked to patrol the Baths "and assist the council's officers in seeing that decorum and order were observed."<sup>61</sup> The Mayor saw the temporary opening as an opportunity for country holiday visitors to become acquainted with the Baths. He told the *Newcastle Morning Herald*:

As a matter of fact...we look upon the throwing open of the baths, even in its present unfinished condition as an advertisement which will amply repay the council for any slight delay or expense which might be occasioned by them being availed of temporarily before they are quite ready. No charge will be made, and the visitors will certainly appreciate the opportunity of being able to indulge in a swim in the new baths, and will tell their friends about them when they go home.<sup>62</sup>

Although the New Year's Day opening was only meant to be temporary, it would appear that the Baths remained open to the public and by 1915 swimming carnivals were being held.<sup>63</sup> With the exception of such carnivals, admission was not charged until 1918.<sup>64</sup>

#### 1913-1922

Storms and heavy seas that damaged some of the already finished work wreaked havoc with the completion of the Baths but rising costs had become the real headache for the Council. The total cost of the work by early 1914 had already exceeded Blackwell's original estimate of £6,000 by more than £3,000. Several aldermen were opposed to Castleden's elaborate plan for the building at a further cost of £6,500. Alderman O'Mara claimed that "the whole matter is a monument to the incapacity of those who had anything to do with the work."<sup>65</sup> The Mayor, Alderman John Reid, admitted that "there had been some bungling somewhere. They had got into a muddle and they would have to get out of it."<sup>66</sup> Castleden submitted a modified plan for half the cost.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 December, 1912, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 November, 1922, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>59</sup> See EJE Landscape & Ludlow, *Survey of Harbourside...* Inventory, Section 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 27 November, 1922, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 December, 1912, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 February, 1915.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 November, 1922, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 March, 1914.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 January, 1915.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Despite the cost complaints, the pool was described in 1915 as "probably the finest salt water bath in Australia",<sup>68</sup> but the onset of World War I further delayed the completion of the project. Various options for completing the Baths together with various schemes for financing the work, such as the issuing of season tickets in advance, were often discussed by Council.<sup>69</sup>

New dressing accommodation was built in 1918. At the end of the same year, the raised rock platform was completed under the supervision of the new City Engineer, J.F. Shine, and a sluice channel with automatic gate to reduce sand accumulation was built on the north western end of the site.<sup>70</sup>

Other improvements were implemented and the growing popularity of the Baths prompted the Council to call for new plans to replace the existing dressing accommodation. On the 10 January, 1921, the Mayor recommended that expenditure of £6,000 for new buildings as per plans submitted by the City Engineer be carried out.<sup>71</sup> It has been suggested that the plans for this new construction, known as the Newcastle Ocean Baths Pavilion, were also designed by the architect, Castleden<sup>72</sup> but the signature on the plans is that of City Engineer, Shine, who is also named as the person responsible for the project in the programme for the opening of the Pavilion.<sup>73</sup>



**Figure 2.5**  
The Ocean Baths, c1918.  
source: Newcastle Region Library

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 February, 1915.

<sup>69</sup> For eg. see, *Ibid.*, 13 January, 1915

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 November, 1922, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>71</sup> Newcastle City Council Minutes, 10 January, 1921.

<sup>72</sup> Australia Street Company, Professor Barry Maitland & Manidis Roberts Consultants, *Newcastle Ocean Baths, Heritage Places Strategic Plan, Part II*, p. 69, cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

<sup>73</sup> "Official Opening of New Buildings, Sat., 25<sup>th</sup> Nov., at 3 p.m., by His Worship the Mayor (Ald. H.P. Cornish, Esq), Ocean Baths Newcastle", cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.



### 1922 Newcastle Ocean Baths Pavilion

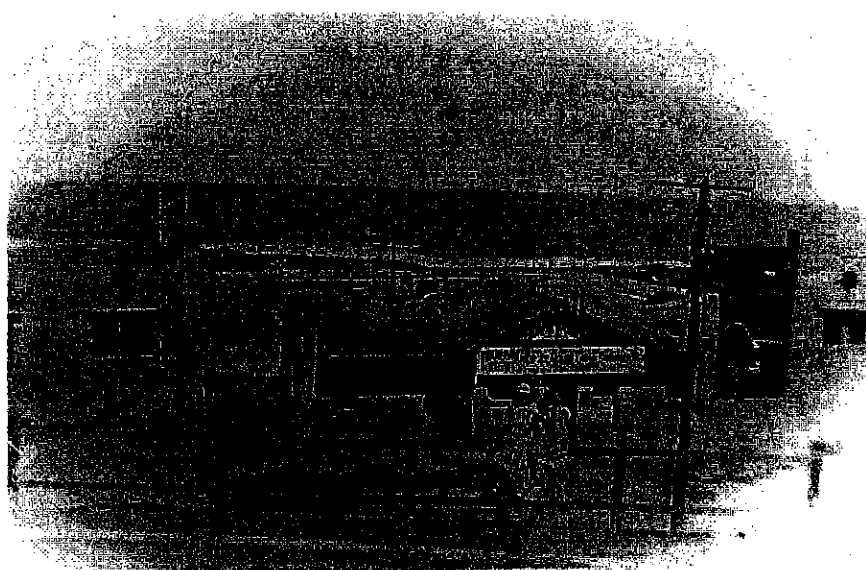
The Government provided a £5,050 loan for the erection of the Pavilion and building commenced early in 1922 with some alterations being made in the course of construction. Costs for the building of the Ocean Baths had blown out from the original £6,000 estimated in 1911 to £16,400 by the time the Pavilion was opened on the 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1922.<sup>74</sup>

The Mayor, Alderman H.P. Cornish, officiated at the opening ceremony in front of a large crowd. Before declaring the Baths open he unveiled a tablet bearing the names of the Council's aldermen as well as the Town Clerk, Mr J. Glassop and the City Engineer, J.F. Shine, (Castleden's name is absent from the tablet).<sup>75</sup> The people of Newcastle were told that they "indeed have an asset than any city would be proud of."<sup>76</sup>

The Edwardian façade of the two winged Pavilion included a central entrance portico. The central block behind the portico contained the caretaker's residence and refreshment rooms. The men's accommodation was provided for in the southern wing and the women's quarters in the northern wing. In its description of the Pavilion, the *Newcastle Morning Herald* reported:

...the overall dimensions of which are 300ft. and the width 40ft. The materials used in the construction is reinforced concrete, and the whole is supported by piers, carried down to the original rock. The western side of the buildings have been louvred, which adds to their appearance, and will prevent the uplifting of the roof by the strong winds and gales that not infrequently prevail about the coast. With these additions, the baths are probably the finest in the Commonwealth.<sup>77</sup>

The separate women's and men's dressing sheds incorporated cubicles, showers, toilets and lockers. There were also spare rooms for gymnasiums and swimming clubs at the end of the wings. It was believed that the Baths could handle 7,000 patrons a day. The official opening programme for the Pavilion boasted that the Baths could now also cater to visitors with the provision of a "Refreshment Room, where light luncheon and afternoon tea can be partaken of at city prices, together with a shop where ice cream, cool drinks, confectionery, also tobacco and cigarettes, can be obtained, makes everything ideal from a picnicker's standpoint."<sup>78</sup>



**Figure 2.6**  
The Ocean Baths prior to remodelling, c. mid-1920s:  
source: Peter Walmsley

<sup>74</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 27 November, 1922, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...; "Official Opening of New Buildings...", cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

<sup>75</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 27 November, 1922, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>76</sup> "Official Opening of New Buildings...", cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

<sup>77</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 27 November, 1922, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>78</sup> "Official Opening of New Buildings...", cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

## 2.4 Alterations and Remodelling

### Inter-war Years

Throughout the 1920s the lessee J.L. Clayton frequently requested improvements to the Baths including shelters, lunch tables, fencing, promenades, diving tower and changes to the caretaker's residence. The issue of efficient lighting was also a common topic for Council discussion.<sup>79</sup>

In 1927 plans for a complete remodelling of the Pavilion's façade were drawn up by architects, Nigel Pitt and Edward Merewether.<sup>80</sup> Pitt & Merewether remodelled the original Edwardian façade in the inter-war Stipped Classical style by building up the parapet which was decorated with Art Deco motifs. The two wings were joined over the original Edwardian entrance portico by a tower like structure. The entire 300 feet long façade was rendered and the original windows were infilled with geometric concrete blocks.

Included in the proposed additions were a garage for the caretaker, a room for the Northern Amateur District Swimming Association and provision for a substation.<sup>81</sup> The remodelling scheme also included the demolition and rebuilding of the existing central block. Pitt & Merewether were also appointed to carry out this design work.<sup>82</sup>

The 1928 report on the remodelling project in the *Newcastle Morning Herald* stated:

...the whole front of the building is being remodelled, and quarters are being erected, which include bed, sitting, dining rooms upstairs, and shops, club rooms, costume rooms, and other conveniences downstairs. The old central block is being altered, and a new feature is being substituted, and when the whole building is completed, it will be an ornament to the baths.<sup>83</sup>

As part of the improvements, a new three platform, steel diving tower was erected to replace the wooden structure that was continually subjected to damage in heavy seas.



Figure 2.7

The Ocean Baths pavilion, c1930.  
Note the diving tower, and the public toilets built  
against the facade of the women's dressing shed.  
source: Newcastle Region Library

<sup>79</sup> Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1911-1938, A 2533, File No. 92.

<sup>80</sup> The business set up by Pitt & Merewether in 1913 became Newcastle's busiest architectural practice during the inter-war period.

<sup>81</sup> Newcastle City Council Minutes, Works & General Purposes Committee, 24 March, 1927; 21 September, 1927, Council Meeting 26 September, 1927.

<sup>82</sup> Newcastle City Council Minutes, Council Meeting 8 August, 1927, Works & General Purposes Committee 1 March, 1928.

<sup>83</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 16 August 1928.

The remodelling drew praise from visitors. In 1930, the *Newcastle Morning Herald* reported, "only last weekend Ald. R.H. Nott, of the Waverley Municipal Council, visited the baths and remarked to the Newcastle City Council Engineer, Mr. J. Cummins, that there was not a bathing pool in Sydney equal to the Newcastle Ocean Baths."<sup>84</sup>

The early 1930s saw various schemes for lighting installation considered by Council including the temporary installation of floodlights borrowed from the Sports Ground and the suggestion for underwater lighting.<sup>85</sup>

Within a few years of the façade remodelling there were claims that the buildings were obsolete and calls for the erection of a colonnade along the front of the women's and men's sections as well as other improvements. In 1934 a Baths Committee was established by the Council to consider whether the Baths should be modernised. The Committee concluded that such a major overhaul, including altering the Baths to comply with Olympic standard measurements, would be too expensive but minor improvements such as painting the buildings as well as the provision of pontoons and picnic tables would be carried out.<sup>86</sup>

In August, 1938 tenders were called to build a brick electricity substation adjacent to the Baths.<sup>87</sup> A year later, the design plans proposed by Chief Architect, F.A. Scorer and City Engineer, L.J. Price, for shelter colonnades providing canopies, tables and seating in front of the women's and the men's wings of the Pavilion were approved by Council. These improvements at the Baths were part of a £400,000 Council Works Programme for the city.<sup>88</sup> It would appear that the proposed colonnade in front of the men's wing was never built.



**Figure 2.8**  
The Ocean Baths, c1930. Note the  
concrete-based lamp posts in the  
centre of the pool.  
source: Newcastle Region Library

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 January, 1930, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>85</sup> Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1911-1938, A 2533, File No. 92; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 30 August 1932, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>86</sup> Inspection Report, 2 November, 1933, Memo from City Engineer, 7 August, 1934, Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1911-1938, A 2533, File No. 92; *Newcastle Sun*, 15 December 1933, *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 29 August, 1934, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>87</sup> City Engineer's Report, 8 August 1938, Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1938-1940, A2547, File No. 50/1

<sup>88</sup> Memo from City Engineer to Chief Architect, 18 August, 1939, City Engineer's Report 19 January 1940, Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1938-1940, A2547, File No. 50/1.

### Post War to Present

Night swimming had been popular before the war, attracting between 500 and 600 people a night, but after wartime lighting restrictions were imposed, the lighting equipment deteriorated due to lack of use and poor maintenance.<sup>89</sup> In 1946 Council decided to approve a scheme for the installation of thirteen 500 watt lamps around the pool and eleven 1000 watt flood lights at a cost of £200.<sup>90</sup>

The swimming clubs had long urged for adequate seating for observing swimming races but it would appear from photographs that the distinctive curved concrete seating wall on the north eastern side of the site was not erected until the 1940s. It was first proposed in 1946 and constructed under the supervision of the City Engineer, Mr. Knott.<sup>91</sup> Also in line with improvements called for by the clubs, foundations for the concrete pillars to support a bridge spanning the swimming pool commenced in 1948.<sup>92</sup> This catwalk was used to create a separate pool for racing.



**Figure 2.9**  
The Ocean Baths from the east, with Zaara Street  
power station in the background.  
source: Newcastle Region Library

In the immediate postwar years there is no recorded evidence of major structural changes to the buildings although the Baths underwent numerous repairs and improvements. These included the replacement of washed away promenade, installation of box drains and reinforced concrete piping in 1948, new flood gates in 1949, and rebuilding the pumphouse in the early 50s.<sup>93</sup>

Improvements costing £5,263 were carried out during the winter of 1958 including a new club room for the Premier Men's Swimming Club, a storeroom, painting of dressing sheds and cementing of the northern promenade which was raised by one foot at the side of the pool. Brick rooms were also built for the Premier Women's Swimming Club.<sup>94</sup> In April 1959, an amount of £600 was allocated for the construction of a shelter and ten sets of seats and tables on the eastern wall of the dressing sheds.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>89</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 12 January, 1946, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 June, 1946, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 May, 1946, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 October 1948, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Bath...

<sup>93</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 11 August 1948, *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 1 September, 1949, *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 19 April, 1950, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths ...

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 August 1958, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 April 1959, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

The Council announced in November 1960 that construction of a reinforced concrete colonnade attached to the western wall of the women's dressing sheds would commence at the end of the current swimming season. However, new tenders were called in June, 1961 when the original tenderers informed Council that they were unable to carry out the work for the colonnade due to credit restrictions.<sup>96</sup>

In 1962 the Council Works Committee recommended that additional lighting be installed on two new poles along the line of the catwalk and that the existing lighting be improved along with new lighting on the eastern side of the racing section. The cost was estimated at £500 and further lighting improvements were to be considered after the first stage had been completed.<sup>97</sup>

By the 1980s the Ocean Baths was in dire need of renovation. In January 1981 a conservation order under the Heritage Act was placed on the façade.<sup>98</sup> In the early 1980s improvements and repairs were made to club rooms, the Pavillon was repainted in Council heritage colours and new floodlighting was installed. The Council recommended that the catwalk be replaced in 1987 and the installation of hot showers was approved in 1989.<sup>99</sup>

The earthquake that struck Newcastle on 28 December 1989 caused serious damage to the Baths but Insurance helped to pay for almost half of the estimated \$190,000 spent on much needed repairs and restoration.<sup>100</sup> As part of the restoration, the Pavilion's façade was repaired and repainted in six colours reflecting a maritime/heritage theme. The renovation was described by the *Newcastle Herald*, "Like a giant Hollywood film set, the ...restored façade of the old Newcastle Ocean Baths rises majestically above the azure seas."<sup>101</sup>

Other improvements in the early 1990s included the installation of a ramp for disabled bathers – the first at a public pool in the Hunter region. Other amenities for disabled visitors were also erected including change room, shower and toilet facilities as well as designated parking bays.<sup>102</sup>

There have been no major alterations on the site since the mid 1990s when an upgrade to the kiosk, costing \$24,000 was required.<sup>103</sup>

Much of the repair work needed throughout the history of the Baths has been as a result of the forces of nature. The very location of the Baths made it vulnerable to damage from storms and heavy seas. As one alderman complained, "every time there was a storm and heavy seas the council was up for a few thousand pounds to repair damage..."<sup>104</sup> Former caretaker/manager, Peter Walmsley, can remember many occasions when heavy seas created hefty repair bills. Such episodes included the 1974 cyclonic storm that wrecked the *Sygnia* on Stockton Beach and during 1983 when 14 metre peaks buffeted the port entrance. In May 1997, seven metre waves "pounded the baths unmercifully, flooded his kiosk, ripped one of the wooden front gates off its hinges and left a \$50,000 disabled access ramp mangled."<sup>105</sup>

## 2.5 The Canoe Pool

When the *Newcastle Morning Herald* reported on the construction progress of the Ocean Baths in 1911 it noted that sand was already being swept up against the southern wall of the site which could be utilised as a sandy beach for children.<sup>106</sup> It was decided to take advantage of this phenomenon and what was known as the 'Young Mariners' Pool' was completed in 1937 adjacent to the southern end of the Ocean Baths.<sup>107</sup>

Two years later, the children's pool was extended and on the 19<sup>th</sup> October, 1939, the *Newcastle Sun* reported that "The new boat pool for children on Newcastle Beach was completed to-day. On

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 November 1960, *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 28 June, 1961, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean...

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 June 1962, *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 28 June, 1961, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>98</sup> Newcastle City Council Correspondence, File No. 50/606/-/06

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 9 November 1960, *Newcastle Post*, 9 November, 1983, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>100</sup> *Newcastle Herald*, 17 April, 1997.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 December, 1994.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 December, 1991.

<sup>103</sup> Newcastle City Council Correspondence, File No. 50/606/-/06

<sup>104</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 24 March, 1950, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 November, 1997, cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 September, 1911, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>107</sup> Letter from Clive Hocquard to Town Clerk 10 May, 1938, Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1938-1940, A2547, File No. 50/1.

the ocean side of the existing Young Mariners' Pool, it has shelving bottoms and should prove very popular with the youngsters in the summer months."<sup>108</sup>

In the early 1940s the two sections of this 100m x 70m elliptical pool were still being referred to separately as the 'Young Mariners' Pool' and the 'Canoe Pool'<sup>109</sup> but in time the pool was simply known as the Canoe Pool.

On the floor of the Young Mariners' Pool, was an oval map of the world about 40 metres wide and coloured in pigmented cement; "the countries, red-dyed concrete for those of the Commonwealth and the rest in green, were about 60cm thick, with 20cm jutting above the waterline."<sup>110</sup>

Initially, the Council regularly cleared the sand from the map's surface and used the excess sand as fill in local parks and gardens.<sup>111</sup> However, sand build up continued to be a constant problem over the years.

Sea lice was often a problem for children using the pool and complaints of dirty water were raised in the early 1960s when calls were made for the pool to be closed.<sup>112</sup> In 1962 the City Engineer, Mr. Baddeley, said the pool could be more effectively filled with fresh water by installing a pipeline between the Ocean Baths and the Canoe Pool at a cost of £500.<sup>113</sup>

The map "was demolished in 1968 because of the constant siltation by both windborne and waterborne sand in times of high seas, thus forming a harbour for bacterial contamination and rendering the facility a health hazard."<sup>114</sup>

Many Novocastrians have fond memories of the Canoe Pool. Ben Lexcen, who grew up to become one of Australia's most famous yacht designers, is said to have sailed his first boats in the Pool. Peter Walmsley can remember sailing boats across the map of the world at the age of six with his school mate Lexcen.<sup>115</sup>

The Council received many inquiries regarding the loss of the map of the world and in the city's bicentennial year in 1997 a feasibility study on rebuilding the map was carried out. The estimates for restoring the world map at a cost of \$500,000 or alternatively a map of Australia for \$60,000 were considered too expensive to undertake.<sup>116</sup>



**Figure 2.10**  
The 'Young Mariners' Pool' showing the map of the world in the foreground, with the larger 'Canoe Pool' beyond, 1950.

source: Newcastle Region Library

<sup>108</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 19 October, 1939, cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*.

<sup>109</sup> City Engineer's Report 21 January 1942, Newcastle City Council Correspondence, 1940-1951, A2548, File No. 50/1.

<sup>110</sup> *Newcastle Herald*, 14 May, 1988.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 February, 1941.

<sup>112</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 16 February, 1962, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, *Newcastle Ocean Baths...*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 April, 1962, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, *Newcastle Ocean Baths...*

<sup>114</sup> Letter to Mrs. E. Stoker from W.H. Grant, General Manager, 29 April, 1992, Newcastle City Council Correspondence, File No. 50/00606/00000/05-2.

<sup>115</sup> *Newcastle Herald*, 14 May, 1988.

<sup>116</sup> Engineering Services Division Report, 20 February, 1997, Newcastle City Council Correspondence, File No. 50/606/-/06

## 2.6 Operations Management

By the time that the Ocean Baths Pavilion was ready for opening in November, 1922, Council had decided that the cost of running the Baths was too expensive and put the management of the Baths out to tender. The successful tenders at the rental rate of £600 per annum were local businessmen, J.L. Clayton and R.E. Moxey of Clayton & Moxey, Auctioneers.<sup>117</sup> Clayton lived on the premises in the caretakers residence as have all caretaker/managers. He was succeeded by Clive Hocquard who took over as lessee at the end of 1928 until October 1948 when James Stewart was appointed and he remained in the position until Maurice Burn commenced as subsidised licensee in October 1956. The longest serving caretaker/manager was Peter Walmsley who took over from Mr Burn in 1976.<sup>118</sup> The current caretaker is Paul Beck.

In 1922 the opening hours for the Ocean Baths were from 6am to 10pm daily from October until May. Admission was 2d. for adults and 1d. for children with costumes and towels available for hire.<sup>119</sup> Free admission was introduced in October, 1953 and by the time of Walmsley's appointment in 1976, the swimming season commenced the first Saturday of the August/September school vacation and ran for 36 weeks.<sup>120</sup>

Apart from the general management of the Baths, the lessees were responsible for maintaining and overhauling the pumping equipment and the removal of sand build up in the pool. Initially, the Council employed a pump attendant but in time the lessee became responsible for emptying and filling the Baths.

A pumping plant was installed in the early construction of the Baths. The electrically driven 12 inch centrifugal pump was capable of filling the baths in four and a half hours with 1,200,000 gallons of sea water.<sup>121</sup> The pool was emptied and refilled on a daily basis. In 1930, rumours circulated that the Baths were not being emptied daily and the lessee, Mr. C. Hocquard refuted these allegations claiming that the baths were emptied every night after closing time. Hocquard described the process to the *Newcastle Morning Herald* stating that emptying took about three quarters of an hour and after cleaning and whitewashing, the electrically driven centrifugal pump began to refill the baths with the capacity of pumping 235,000 gallons of sea water an hour. Water flowed in through a 12 inch pipe taking three to four hours to fill. There was also a reserve pump with a capacity of pumping 184,000 gallons an hour through an 11 inch pipe. A fresh supply of sea water greeted bathers when the pool was reopened at 6.00 am.<sup>122</sup>

A warning alarm was sounded before the gate was opened to empty the Baths. On one occasion a teenage girl almost lost her life when the alarm did not sound, however, she managed to hold onto the gate as she was being swept out of the Baths and was rescued.<sup>123</sup>

The 'dirty water' accusations answered by Hocquard were not the first or last questions over the quality of pool water faced by management. A bather at Christmas in 1917 claimed, "if a man got a mouthful of the water he would lose his appetite for any Christmas dinner. Why, it is so thick you can cut it with a knife."<sup>124</sup> By the early 1960s, water quality had become a serious issue for the Council and the Council Health Committee discussed ways to ensure water purity of the pool. The Chief Health Inspector, Mr. Graham, said all baths and beaches were inspected regularly and water samples taken and tested. "At no time has analysis proved that the water in Newcastle Ocean Baths had, by pollution, reached a condition where it would be dangerous to the health of swimmers," Mr. Graham reported.<sup>125</sup> Despite such reassurances, Council continued to receive complaints. An investigation revealed the accumulation of stagnant sand and rotting seaweed on the bottom of the pool to be the source of the problem.<sup>126</sup>

Sand build up on the bottom of the pool has been a problem since the early days of the Baths. Excess sand dumped by heavy seas has also caused safety problems by lowering the diving

<sup>117</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 27 November, 1922, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...; "Official Opening of New Buildings...", cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

<sup>118</sup> Newcastle City Council Correspondence

<sup>119</sup> "Official Opening of New Buildings...", cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

<sup>120</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 13 May, 1953; Premier Club's Racing Programme, 1 February, 1959, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean...; Newcastle City Council Correspondence, File No. 50/00606/00000/05-2.

<sup>121</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 27 November, 1922, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 January, 1930, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean...

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 February, 1961, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>124</sup> "Ocean baths arrived through stormy seas", cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

<sup>125</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 5 April, 1961, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 June, 1961, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

depths in the pool. Today the Ocean Baths are dredged of sand annually. The Baths are drained and cleaned on a weekly basis and walls are whitewashed and scrubbed weekly. Weekly water samples are taken.

The Newcastle City Council Correspondence files reveal that the lessees were often recommending improvements and repairs to the Baths that Council could ill afford. In 1948, Council's Finance Committee was asked to report on terms of leasing of the Baths, as it was believed the income of the lease was small compared to the cost of maintaining the operation.<sup>127</sup> In 1950, Alderman McDougall called for a thorough investigation of the cost of maintaining the Baths to decide whether it was economically viable to keep them open.<sup>128</sup> The report revealed the cost of restoring storm and other damage over the last ten years totalled just over £8,043.<sup>129</sup> As to suggestions that the Baths would be better moved elsewhere, the Council was told it would cost about £150,000 to construct new baths of the same size in another location. Alderman Edwards said the Baths were a community service and the Council could not expect the Baths to pay.<sup>130</sup>

Caretaker managers were also expected to ensure that visitors to the Baths behaved in an appropriate and safe manner. The diving tower no longer exists but for many years a notice on the tower warned people that they used the tower at their own risk. Unfortunately, a number of diving accidents, a few resulting in deaths, occurred over the years.<sup>131</sup> At a meeting of the Newcastle City Council Beaches and Baths Liaison Committee in November, 1961, it was suggested that depth signs be erected in three languages for the benefits of migrants. Despite complaints from one alderman that migrants should be forced to learn English, the committee recommended to use Roman numerals.<sup>132</sup>

'Hooligans' have also presented problems for the lessees who were expected to ensure that 'order and decency' were observed at the Baths.<sup>133</sup> In his report for the week ended 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1959, Mr Burn noted that a boy acting suspiciously near clothes was asked to leave as were "six German seamen wearing brief continental costumes".<sup>134</sup> Signs were erected at the Baths in 1960 warning 'Any person offending against decency by the exposure of his person in these premises is liable to a penalty not exceeding £10.' This was the consequence of complaints about men "indulging in nude sun bathing in the dressing sheds."<sup>135</sup>

## 2.7 A Newcastle Institution

The Ocean Baths have played a prominent social role in the lives of generations of Novocastrians. When there was talk of relocating the Baths in the early 1950s, the City Engineer, Mr Baddeley, said, "The baths are an institution in Newcastle and I don't think the people could do without them."<sup>136</sup>

As Newcastle's only enclosed concrete, ocean pool before the construction of Merewether Baths in 1926,<sup>137</sup> the Ocean Baths enjoyed a deserved popularity. Easy transport access meant that the Baths catered not only to the inner city residents but also to the wider region. One of the more unusual services provided by the Baths was during the early 1930s when the facility was rented to a Mr. Van Eyk for use as a baptismal pool.<sup>138</sup>

At the height of the popularity of the Baths in the mid twentieth century, the Ocean Baths attracted over 500,000 visitors annually and hosted 28 carnivals each season.<sup>139</sup> Upon his retirement as licensee in 1976, Maurice Burn reflected on the popularity of the Baths before the development of the region's suburban swimming pools. "Those were the days when people were not so surf-minded

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 January, 1948, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 March, 1950, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 April, 1950, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 April, 1950, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>131</sup> See for eg. Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1911-1938, A2533, File No. 92.

<sup>132</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 24 November, 1961, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>133</sup> *Newcastle Post*, 14 October, 1981, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>134</sup> Newcastle City Council Correspondence, 1958-1961, A2550, File No. 50/1.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 19 April, 1950, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>137</sup> 3-D Exhibitions, *Bathers Way*..., p. 16.

<sup>138</sup> Letter from Town Clerk to Clive Hocquard, 28 October, 1932, Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1911-1938, A 2533, File No. 92; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 25 October, 1932.

<sup>139</sup> Premier Club's Racing Programme, 1 February, 1959; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 21 April, 1960, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...



and they came to the ocean baths because there were not really many other places to go...There were not many cars and whole families could come to the baths together."<sup>140</sup>

Thousands have taken their first swimming lessons and undertaken surf lifesaving training at the Ocean Baths. The first lessee, J.L. Clayton, employed a swimming tutor who provided half-hourly lessons at the rates of 1/10/- for adults and 15/- for children.<sup>141</sup> The popularity of the Baths, especially for school children was noted by the *Newcastle Morning Herald* at the end of the 1920s when the art-deco remodelling was undertaken:

The Ocean Baths are a feature in the northern district, and are one of the greatest conveniences in this State, being used by people from all parts, and particularly by the school children in the Newcastle district, special days being set apart for them to learn swimming and have their races.<sup>142</sup>

A 1929 Council promotional publication boasted that "thousands of school children attend in classes weekly, during the summer months."<sup>143</sup> At the end of the 1950s, 29 schools held weekly swimming lessons.<sup>144</sup> Lessons were also conducted by local swimming clubs. Races were also put on by the different swimming clubs of the State, and the 'topnotchers' made their appearances at these meetings.

### Swimming Clubs

Other studies have noted the close links between the development of public baths and competitive swimming, especially in the transition of the concept from 'bathing' to 'swimming'.<sup>145</sup> The first recorded swimming races were held in Australia on 14 February 1846 at Robinson's Gentlemen's Baths at the Domain. The Balmain Swimming Club formed in 1884 is regarded as the oldest swimming club in NSW. Such clubs supported the formation of the New South Wales Amateur Swimming Association in 1891. "As competitive swimming began to increase in popularity municipal councils began to build larger public baths with competitions and spectators in mind."<sup>146</sup>

In 1908 a surf-lifesaving club was formed at Newcastle, two years after surf-lifesaving began in Australia on Bondi Beach.<sup>147</sup> When the Ocean Baths were first opened to the public on New Year's Day 1913, inspectors from the Newcastle Surf Club patrolled the Baths and from the earliest days, several clubs held their swimming carnivals at the Baths. Thousands of people attended the Newcastle Surf Swimming Club's annual carnival at the Baths in February 1915 and watched the display by Olympian champion swimmer, Duke Kahanamouka, organised by the Northern District Amateur Swimming Association (NDASA).<sup>148</sup>

Established in 1897, the NDASA was one of several Newcastle swimming and surfing associations that played an important role in the history of the Ocean Baths. The NDASA organised the inaugural aquatic programme for the official opening of the Ocean Baths Pavilion in November, 1922. Appearing on the programme were events featuring the Newcastle Premier Amateur Swimming Club that kept a room at the Pavilion until the club moved premises to the Mayfield Pool in the early 1980s.<sup>149</sup> The club continued to provide honorary inspectors to the Baths after its transfer to Mayfield.<sup>150</sup>

By the mid 1960s there were four swimming clubs, each with approximately 300 members, using the Baths on a weekly basis.<sup>151</sup> As well as their contribution in popularising the Baths through carnivals and swimming classes, the clubs played key roles in bringing about improvements.

<sup>140</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 4 May, 1976, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>141</sup> Letter from J.L. Clayton to Town Clerk, 26 October 1926, Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1911-1938, A 2533, File No. 92.

<sup>142</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 16 August, 1928.

<sup>143</sup> Newcastle City Council, *Souvenir of Newcastle Civic Week*, 14-12 December, 1929, cited in Newcastle City Council Landscape Architects Library, *Ocean Baths*, n.d., n.p.

<sup>144</sup> Premier Club's Racing Programme, 1 February, 1959, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>145</sup> EJE Landscape & Ludlow, *Survey of Harbourside...*, section 4.4.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Ed Jaggard, "Australian Surf Life-saving and the 'Forgotten Members'", *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 112, April, 1999, p.27.

<sup>148</sup> Wooden seating was erected for the event. *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 5 January, 1915; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 15 February, 1915; Cushing, "Ocean Baths and Arc Lights...", p. 101.

<sup>149</sup> Letter from Newcastle Premier Amateur Swimming Club to Town Clerk, 10 March 1981, Newcastle City Council Correspondence, File No. 50/606/-/05

<sup>150</sup> Newcastle City Council Correspondence, File No. 50/00606/00000/05-2.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from M. Bum to Town Clerk, 14 January, 1966, Newcastle City Council Correspondence, File No. 50/2.

From the early days of the Baths, the clubs and, in particular, the NDASA lobbied the Council and the lessees for upgrading of facilities. The NDASA's main concern was ensuring that the Baths met the required standards for holding racing events. In September, 1934 the association wrote to the Town Clerk urging that the NDASA's recommended improvements be made for the upcoming championships:

My association is making great endeavours to place the sport of swimming in the position it deserves, and in a city like Newcastle, which depends for tourist traffic a good deal on its swimming facilities, it is not only in their interests but is in the interests of your Council I should think, to cater for the crowds attending the Carnivals at the Ocean Baths.<sup>152</sup>

In the early 1940s, the NDASA moved the Northern District championships to Maitland with claims that the Ocean Baths were antiquated. Improvements, including the erection of the catwalk, were made so the association could hold its 1949 championships at the Baths, however, the Council's promise to deepen the water depth below the diving tower was not carried out and the diving events were held at Maitland.<sup>153</sup>

One of the main criticisms levelled against the pool was that it did not meet Olympic standards. The Newcastle Premier Amateur Swimming Club used an enhanced photo in its programme for the 1958/59 carnival to show how the Baths could be turned into a racing pool with standard championship specifications.<sup>154</sup> Since 1938 the NDASA had been lobbying for "a swimming pool in every suburb"<sup>155</sup> and the growth of suburban Olympic standard pools in the post war period saw the gradual removal of championship racing from the Ocean Baths although carnivals continued to be held.

The swimming clubs were also instrumental in extending the swimming season at the Baths. In 1947 the recently formed Newcastle Veterans' Swimming Club lobbied to have the Baths open during the winter months.<sup>156</sup> However, it was not until the 1980s when efforts by the Prince of Wales Pirates Winter Swimming Club resulted in the public being able to swim during winter months between 6.00am and 2.00pm.<sup>157</sup> The Prince of Wales Pirates together with the Dixon Park Coldies continue to maintain club rooms at the Baths.

### Current Uses

For many Novocastrians, a daily visit to the Ocean Baths has become a way of life. But whilst the Ocean Baths continue as a popular swimming and hydrotherapy facility for the general public, recent years have seen a rise in the cultural appreciation of the Baths.

Peter Walmsley believes the renovations carried out in the wake of the Newcastle Earthquake helped to bring about a rejuvenation of the Baths. Today the Baths have developed as a drawcard for tourists, artists and even wedding parties. "It's the art deco atmosphere and they know its heritage value," Mr Walmsley said.<sup>158</sup>

With its Art Deco façade and stunning ocean backdrop, the Baths have become a source of inspiration for photographers, and filmmakers; the site served as a location for the movie "Bootmen".<sup>159</sup> As a cultural and evocative visual subject, the site is also a popular cultural focal point for artists including Newcastle artist Kerrie Coles and Sydney-based James Willebrant.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Letter from Northern District Amateur Swimming Club to Town Clerk, 7 September, 1934, Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1911-1938, A 2533, File No. 92.

<sup>153</sup> Letter from Northern District Amateur Swimming Club to Town Clerk, 26 April, 1939, Newcastle City Council Correspondence 1938-1940, A2547, File No. 50/1; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 17 January, 1946, *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 23 October, 1948, 1 February, 1949, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>154</sup> Newcastle City Council Correspondence, 1958-1961, A2550, File No. 50/1.

<sup>155</sup> *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 17 May, 1938.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 April, 1947, cited in Newcastle Region Public Library, Newcastle Ocean Baths...

<sup>157</sup> Newcastle City Council Correspondence, File No. 50/606/-05

<sup>158</sup> *Newcastle Herald*, 17 April, 1997.

<sup>159</sup> Letter from 'Bootmen' co-producer, 31 March, 2000, Newcastle City Council Correspondence, File No. 50/00606/00000/05-2.

<sup>160</sup> *Newcastle Herald*, 17 April, 1997.

## 2.8 Conclusion

For almost ninety years, the Newcastle Ocean Baths has served as a popular recreational and sports facility for the general public, swimming clubs, and schools. The complex was the first of only two concrete, enclosed ocean pools erected on Newcastle city's coast. With the development of suburban swimming pools in the post World War II era and the rise of backyard swimming pools, some people regard such pools as the Ocean Baths as merely the vestiges of a bygone era. However, the Ocean Baths complex is more than a reminder of the past; it continues to occupy a physical and social presence in the life of the city and its inhabitants.

As Newcastle strives to promote its beach and swimming culture in the wake of the collapse of local industrial manufacturing, the Ocean Baths serve as an integral link within the history of that culture.

## 2.9 Time Line

The following represents a time line of the major developments leading to the construction of the Newcastle Ocean Baths.

late 18 <sup>th</sup> C	English medical tracts recommend cold salt water bathing beneficial for health
1810	Governor Macquarie bans bathing at the Government wharf
1818	Governor Macquarie advised bathers to avoid the surf and keep to the harbour
1820	The Bogey Hole constructed by convict labour for Commandant Morisset
1825	First formal baths in NSW constructed on the shore of The Domain, Sydney
1838	Law prohibiting daylight bathing in all waters throughout entire Colony within view of a public place
1850	Bathing accommodation for women established on Newcastle Harbour
1861	Segregated bathing for women established on the southern end of Newcastle Beach
1853	Four public harbour baths in Sydney exist
1882	Lands Department allows Newcastle Council to occupy and construct Soldiers' Baths beneath Fort Scratchley
1884	The Bogey Hole enlarged by Council
1893	Newcastle Council passed by-law permitting beach bathing at all hours for both sexes
1905-1911	Council considered numerous plans for baths on a section of Newcastle Beach, north east of the hospital
1911	Tenders called on design for baths by City Engineer L.B. Blackwell – construction commenced September
1912	Local architect F.G. Castleden appointed to remodel Blackwell's plans
1913	Baths opened to the public on New Years Day
1918	Admission charged; new dressing accommodation constructed
1922	Construction commenced on Ocean Baths Pavilion, including new dressing accommodation – opened November
1927	Pavilion façade remodelled by local architects Pitt & Merewether
1937	Young Mariners' Pool completed to the south of the baths, including concrete map of the world
1939	New boat pool completed on the ocean side of the Young Mariners' Pool, later known as the Canoe Pool
1968	Map of the world demolished

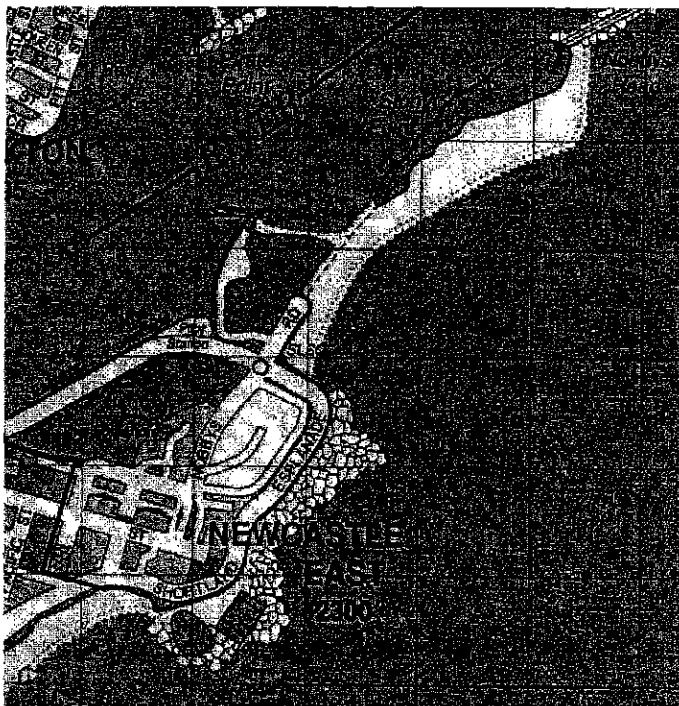
### 3 Physical Evidence

#### 3.1 Context of the Site

The Newcastle Ocean Baths are set in a rocky outcrop on the southern side of a natural headland forming the southern entrance to Newcastle Harbour, within the suburb of Newcastle East. The immediate context is dominated by residential development, with some commercial buildings such as hotels and restaurants, fronting Shortland Esplanade.

The Ocean Baths act as a visual centre to Newcastle and Nobbys beaches and the 'peninsula' of the city eastern precinct. The context is rich in cultural heritage, with numerous heritage items in the immediate vicinity, including the Soldiers Baths, Surf Pavilions, Royal Newcastle Hospital, the natural and man-made forms comprising Nobbys Head, the many residential and commercial buildings and varied landscape features of Newcastle East. Generally, the Ocean Baths is set within a culturally rich and diverse environment.

The Ocean Baths is set into the greater 'Bathers Way' ocean precinct, which extends from Nobbys Beach along the waters edge to Merewether Beach.



**Figure 3.1**  
The context of the Ocean Baths  
(noted here as Swim Pools).  
source: UBD

#### 3.2 Ocean Baths Landscape

The immediate landscape of the Baths is that of a hard landscape. The baths and pavilion itself are masonry, surrounded by masonry paving surfaces. To the east lies rock shelves which lower into the Tasman Sea; to the west lies bitumen of carparks and roadways. Further to the west and atop the natural headland is a small parkland called Tramway Reserve, however due to the difference in level, this park does not visually link well with the Ocean Baths.

The historical landscape of the baths is that of a natural rocky platform, into which the baths was later carved. The adjoining expanses of sandy beach stretch through to Nobbys Head in the north and the headland at King Edward Park in the south.



**Figure 3.2**  
The landscape of the  
Baths, with Pavilion at  
left, looking through the  
toward the Canoe Pool.  
source: Suters Architects

### 3.3 External Form and Fabric

The Ocean Baths is basically a pool carved into a natural rock with rubble stone and concrete walls. Blasting of rock for construction on the baths began in 1911 and building of a rock platform (completed in 1918) for the change sheds described as an island. In 1922 a sluice gate was built with an automatic gate on the north western side of the site. These flood gates were rebuilt in 1949. The pumphouse was also rebuilt in the early 1950s. An existing timber diving platform was replaced by a steel tower in 1928. The stepped seating was proposed in 1946 and the bridge dividing the lap pool constructed in 1948. Alterations have included repairs with raising of the northern promenade by one foot. The latest alterations, in 1990 for a ramp to allow disabled access into the pool. A shade structure has also been recently installed.

The pavilion is in the main, a rendered reinforced concrete building, housing a kiosk, male and female change rooms and first floor residence. This building replaced earlier dressing sheds (1918) and was approved for building in 1921. At this time it was called the Newcastle Ocean Baths. Later extensions to the pavilion were constructed in brick cavity with render finish. The pavilion is an elongated structure that shelters the pool from the city.

The pavilion as it appears today is detailed in an Inter-War Stripped Classical/Art Deco style, although as outlined in the history this has been adapted from an earlier style of building. The façade is dominated by engaged piers and is distinguished by the vertical parapet of the central block and two decorative parapets of each wing, both having shell motifs. The 1927-1928 alterations included amendments to the existing central block for a new pavilion entrance in the Stripped Classical/Art Deco style, raising the parapet and the addition of simplified palmette motifs to the parapet. An early photograph shows the porch entrance existing before 1927. There is also mention of a residence for the first caretaker from 1922. The main entrance is a large opening, not in the centre of the façade through the porch as expected, but adjacent to the central section to the north. The change rooms are simple open-air structures behind the pavilion façade, which enhance the ocean beach nature of the bathing experience. The central structure is essentially a two storey block with offices and kiosk at ground, and residence above. From 1918 a charge was required for swimming, hence the central entrance would have been used.

Additions to the building were undertaken in 1958-1959. These included separate club-rooms for the Premier Men's and Women's Swimming Club, storeroom, painting, raising of northern promenade and shelter on eastern wall of the dressing sheds. The latter shelter does not exist and may not have been built. Adjacent to each change room are the swimming club-rooms, a two storey addition which today houses the Dixon Park Coldies Swimming Club (southern addition) and the Newcastle Pirates Swimming Club (northern addition). At this time the original windows may have been removed and replaced with concrete blocks (date unknown).

A colonnade was planned in 1961 and was constructed on the eastern side of the women's change sheds. Repairs were undertaken in 1989 to the baths following earthquake damage. This included repainting in "six colours reflecting a maritime heritage theme. In 1990 with the building of an access ramp to the pool, a shower, change-room and toilets facilities were also altered for disabled users. In the same year the kiosk was upgraded.

The Canoe Pool was completed in 1937 and extended in 1939. The map at the base of the pool was demolished in 1968.

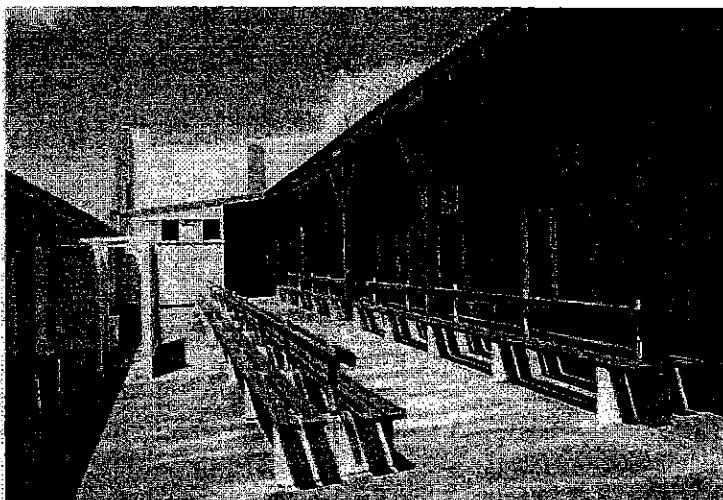
The pavilion is painted in an Art Deco colour scheme, while the pool walls are re-coated using a limewash mixture each week. The façade of the Baths was sand-blasted to a clean base during works undertaken in the 1990s, hence the original colour scheme of the building is not evident beneath the existing layer.



**Figure 3.3**  
The west elevation of  
the Baths Pavilion.  
source: Suters Architects

### 3.4 Internal Form and Fabric

The interior form of the change rooms is relatively unaltered from the original, each male and female rooms housing changing cubicles, showers and toilets, with the central areas having long benches. The cubicle, toilet and shower areas are within the roofed structure, however the main change area is not roofed. The finishes in the change rooms are predominantly painted brickwork, with tiling to the wet areas. The floors are bare concrete.



**Figure 3.4**  
The female dressing shed.  
source: Suters Architects

The central section of the pavilion has been renovated at various stages, and therefore does not exhibit many original features. The upper floor houses a three bedroom residence, with outdoor deck to the south. The interior is lined with plasterboard, and the kitchen and bathroom areas have been renovated. Some internal doors have fanlights and Art Nouveau style door hardware. The ground floor of the central section has also been renovated and now houses a large take-away food kiosk on the southern side and a staff area, workshop and first aid room on the north side. The finishes on this level are rendered and painted walls with remnant dado moulding in some areas, bare concrete floors in the staff area and tiling to the kiosk floors and walls. The ceiling throughout is predominantly sheeted.

### 3.5 Architectural Style

The Ocean Baths before alteration in 1922 was a typical Federation style façade. Although altered in 1927, the modified style appears to be most strongly that of Inter-War Stripped Classical, with Art Deco decorative elements. This style was not uncommon for recreational buildings, as it portrayed an air of fun and frivolity. The 'stage set' façade of the structure and the current Art Deco pastel colour scheme reinforces the playful mood of the building.

Features of the Inter-War Stripped Classical style which are dominant in the Ocean Baths include the symmetrical façade, division into vertical bays indicating classical origins, elements of other styles (e.g. Art Deco), emphatic portal, and simple surfaces.<sup>161</sup>

### 3.6 Movable Heritage

A thorough site inspection of the place has not revealed any items of movable heritage.

<sup>161</sup> Apperly et. al., p166.

## 4 Assessment of Significance

### 4.1 NSW Heritage Assessment Guidelines

The Heritage Office and Department of Urban Affairs and Planning sets out criteria and guidelines in their *Assessing Heritage Significance*<sup>182</sup> document to assist the assessment of an item's significance. This document outlines the method required to achieve a Statement of Significance.

*The steps in assessing the significance are:*

- Summarise what you know about the item
- Describe the previous and current uses of the item, its associations with individuals or groups and its meaning for those people
- Assess significance using the NSW heritage assessment criteria
- Check whether you can make a sound analysis of the item's heritage significance
- Determine the item's level of significance
- Prepare a succinct statement of heritage significance
- Get feedback
- Write up all your information

#### Heritage Significance Criteria

The NSW assessment criteria listed below encompass the following four values of significance:

- historical significance
- aesthetic significance
- research/technical significance
- social significance

*An item will be considered to be of State (or local) significance if in the opinion of the Heritage Council of NSW, it meets one or more of the following criteria:*

- Criterion (a)** *an item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);*
- Criterion (b)** *an item has strong association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);*
- Criterion (c)** *an item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of the creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the local area);*
- Criterion (d)** *an item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW (or the local area) for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;*
- Criterion (e)** *an item has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or local history of the local area);*
- Criterion (f)** *an item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area);*
- Criterion (g)** *an item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's (or the local area's)*  
*~cultural or natural places; or*  
*~cultural or natural environments.*

<sup>182</sup> Text shown in italics is taken from the document *Assessing Heritage Significance*, a NSW Heritage Manual update.



### Gradings of Significance

Gradings are used to assess the relative contribution of the parts of a place to its heritage value, and are:

- exceptional
- high
- moderate
- low
- intrusive

These gradings have been applied to the components of the Ocean Baths. The definitions for gradings and the graded components are found in the datasheets (Appendix A).

### Levels of Significance

The assessment of significance requires that the level of significance be determined. State significance is defined as significant to the people of NSW. Local significance means within the local government area.

*Some items of local significance may have values that extend beyond the local government area, or need a wider contextual consideration. Where this is the case these values should be included in the statement of significance.<sup>163</sup>*

## 4.2 Historical Themes

The relationship of a potential heritage item to its historical context is an underlying thread to assessing significance. There is a direct connection between historical themes and the evaluation procedure, with the themes providing a context within which an item can be understood, assessed and compared, especially when considering its historical value.

An historical theme is described by the Heritage Office as a major force or process which has contributed to our history. Themes may be identified as specific to state areas (themes which have been developed by the Heritage Council of NSW) or local areas (identified in the researched history of the place). Themes may also reflect a function.

Historical themes specific to the assessment of the Ocean Baths are:

Local historical themes: leisure, sport

State historical themes: leisure, sport

<sup>163</sup> NSW Heritage Office.

### 4.3 Significance Assessment

#### *historical significance*

**Criterion (a)** *An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).*

**Criterion (b)** *An item has strong association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).*

- The Newcastle Ocean Baths and pavilion are a record of the importance of beach culture and swimming as a sport and recreational activity to the people of Newcastle.
- The Baths and pavilion tell the story of the development of Newcastle's beachfront and are an integral part of the history of the beach promenade and Newcastle Beach.
- The Baths has a strong association with a significant cultural practice and represents the continuity of a significant human activity.

#### *aesthetic significance*

**Criterion (c)** *An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of the creative or technical achievement in NSW (or the local area).*

- The Baths pavilion (altered) is constructed in an architectural style that may be considered rare for its type in Newcastle and NSW.
- The Ocean Baths is a dominant physical landmark in Newcastle.
- The Baths exemplifies the Inter-War Stripped Classical/Art Deco style, and its use in recreational buildings, particularly as a style used in ocean/beach side development.
- The Baths is reputedly the largest of its type (rock excavated) in the southern hemisphere.

#### *social significance*

**Criterion (d)** *An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW (or the local area) for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.*

- The Ocean Baths contributes to the local community's sense of identity.

#### *research significance*

**Criterion (e)** *An item has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or local history of the local area).*

- The Ocean Baths is an important benchmark type in Newcastle, representing one of the earliest known examples of the style in the City.
- The excavation of the natural rock ledge, and the natural sand bottom, is of interest for the nature of its construction.

#### 4.3.1 Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of other baths and beach structures of similar age, scale and style helps to determine the significance of the Ocean Baths. Such an analysis facilitates assessment of the criteria outlined in the NSW Heritage Manual related to whether a place is rare or representative.

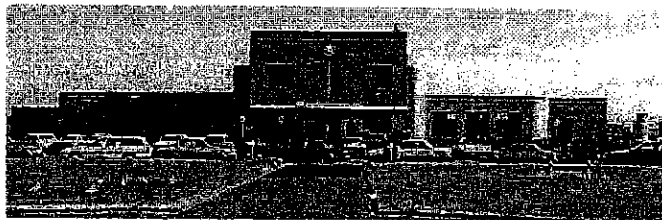
The building of the Ocean Baths began in 1911. The Ocean Baths pavilion was opened in 1922 with alterations in 1927 that created an Stripped Classical/Art Deco building. The large scale of both the baths and pavilion is a record of the importance of swimming as both a sport and leisure activity in Newcastle. From our research it would seem to be one of the few remaining bath pavilions in the Art Deco style in NSW and Victoria. The large scale of the Ocean Baths, the style and prominent location add to the rare qualities of the bath pavilion. No other similar bath pavilions have been identified in Sydney.<sup>164</sup> In Melbourne, the Brighton Baths appear to be similar in scale and style. The style however is more restrained and identified with the Functionalist Style.

Ocean Baths are an early part of the history of this area. The Soldiers Baths (1882) and the development of a beach promenade along Nobbys are amongst the earliest beach developments in Australia. The Bogey Hole located south of the Ocean Baths and Newcastle Beach dates back to the Penal Colony period (1819-1822) and by 1863 was in general use as a segregated pool. The earliest baths in Sydney are the Bronte Beach Baths (c1888). Newcastle's coastline similarly to Sydney tells a story of the development of beaches and baths and the culture of surfing and swimming. Baths were also built to provide shelter from surf and safety from shark attack. In 1928 the Ladies baths were built at Merewether, Newcastle and in 1935, larger baths were built on the south side of Merewether Beach. Many of the baths in Sydney such as Balmoral, and the numerous Harbour baths were built with turpentine or ironbark timber and wire netting. In less sheltered areas such as the Wylie baths, Coojee, (1907), Bondi Baths (1908) and many other coastal beaches around Sydney, pools were carved out of the rock base with rock and concrete walls.

The beaches were also developed with the growth of surfing and Surf Lifesaving Clubs. Due to the exposure of these buildings, many of the original pavilions have been demolished both in Sydney and Newcastle. Some of these pavilions were designed in the popular Art Deco style. Merewether Surf House still survives as a restrained example of a pavilion in the Art Deco style (1936). Surf Pavilions in Sydney were often designed in the Free Classical Style with elements of Spanish Mission, such as the Bondi and Balmoral Pavilion. Nobbys Pavilion, located north of the Ocean Baths, is also designed in this latter style. The beach pavilion at South Steyne, Manly (now demolished) dating from 1938 was awarded the Sulman Award in 1939. It was a more modern building in the Functionalist Style with none of the decorative detail associated with Art Deco.

As the recreation of swimming and surfing grew the beach promenades, pavilions, kiosks and baths were also developed. Beach architecture had been forming in England since the late 1800s with the building of promenades, piers, hotels and guest houses in areas such as Brighton. However, the Art Deco style as a style for the beach and associated recreation was predominant in the United States at baths in New York and on beachsides such as Miami. At Miami South Beach, the beachside promenade is lined with Art Deco style hotels, picture theatres and shops, built in the 1920s and 1930s. As in the United States, this style in Australia became closely associated with recreation and could explain its use on the promenade in Newcastle.

**Figure 4.1**  
Middle Brighton Municipal  
Baths pavilion, Melbourne.  
source: Register of the National  
Estate website



<sup>164</sup> Survey of Harbourside & Ocean Pools of the Sydney Metropolitan Region, EJE Landscape Architects, 1994.



**Figure 4.2**  
Bronte Beach Baths  
source: Survey of Harbourside &  
Ocean Pools of the Sydney  
Metropolitan Region



**Figure 4.3**  
South Steyne Pavilion, Manly  
source: Architecture in Transition

*rarity*

**Criterion (f)** *An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW's cultural or natural history (or the cultural or natural history of the local area).*

- The Ocean Baths, with its Stripped Classical/Art Deco style pavilion, is considered to be aesthetically rare for its type in New South Wales. No other baths pavilions of this architectural style have been found to exist in the State.

*representativeness*

**Criterion (g)** *An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW's (or the local area's)*

- cultural or natural places; or
- cultural or natural environments.
- The Ocean Baths is representative historically for its association with beach and swimming culture; socially for its contribution to the community's sense of place; and representative of research value as a benchmark type and for its construction (the pool).

#### 4.4 National Heritage Assessment Guidelines

The Newcastle Ocean Baths is not considered to be a place of cultural heritage value in a national context, therefore assessment of the place within the National Heritage Guidelines has been omitted.

#### 4.5 Summary of Significance

The assessment of significance is summarised as follows:

criteria	level of significance local / State / national	degree of significance rare or representative
historical	local	representative
aesthetic	State	rare
social	local	representative
research	local	representative

It is considered that the Newcastle Ocean Baths is a heritage item of rare State aesthetic significance, and of representative local historical, social and research significance.

## 5 Statement of Significance

The Newcastle Ocean Baths is an icon of the City. It stands alone, dominating the city coastline - the pavilion a stage set for the cultural pursuit of ocean bathing. The size and prominence of the structure represents the significance which has been placed on swimming and beach culture from the early 1900s.

The Ocean Baths is aesthetically significant and unique, as it is believed to be the only Inter-War Stripped Classical/Art Deco ocean baths pavilion found in New South Wales. The landmark baths and pavilion is an early, and possibly the first example of this style in Newcastle. Socially, the place greatly contributes to the local community's sense of place.

The continued public enthusiasm and use of the Ocean Baths even during its construction is testament to the community value of the place.

The continued care of the place by the City Council represents local government public service.

## 6 Curtilage

### 6.1 Introduction

The NSW Heritage Office defines curtilage as 'the extent of land around [a place] which should be defined as encompassing its heritage significance. This area of land is known as a heritage curtilage.' There are four types of heritage curtilage:

**Lot Boundary Curtilage**, where the legal boundary of the allotment is defined as the heritage curtilage. The allotment will generally contain all associated features such as outbuildings and gardens within its boundaries.

**Reduced Heritage Curtilage**, where an area less than the total allotment is defined as the heritage curtilage, and is applicable where not all parts of a property contain places associated with its significance.

**Expanded Heritage Curtilage**, where the heritage curtilage is actually larger than the allotment, and is particularly relevant where views to and/or from a place are significant.

**Composite Heritage Curtilage** would generally apply to larger areas combining a number of separate places, such as heritage conservation areas based on a block, precinct or whole village.

### 6.2 Curtilage of the Ocean Baths

The Ocean Baths is uniquely located as an almost isolated element along Shortland Esplanade, enhanced by the curve in the roadway which heightens the dramatic effect of the building form and natural rock ledge protruding from the eastern headland of the city. This dominating landmark should remain as such, with no new structures likely to degrade this status allowed within the visual catchment of the Baths on approach along Shortland Esplanade.

Considering the above, an expanded heritage curtilage (as defined above in 6.1) is considered appropriate for the Baths and associated structures. Diagrammatically, the assessed curtilage is shown below in figure 6.1.

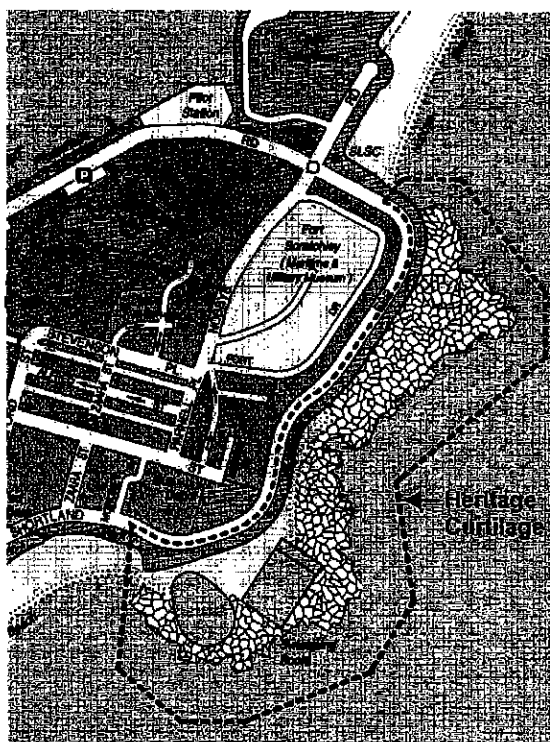


Figure 6.1  
Heritage curtilage.

## 7 Obligations and Opportunities

### 7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to assess the potential obligations and opportunities affecting the place, not only in terms of heritage, but also:

- Statutory Requirements
- Client Requirements

### 7.2 Obligations Arising from the Significance of the Place

The place has been identified as having State significance, hence any works that take place should be done so as not to diminish that significance. Adaptation may be carried out in relation to future use with regard for the assessed significance and within the recommendations of this Conservation Management Plan and any necessary community consultation. The place should continue to be used for recreational purposes, and any adaptation to the place should be done with this objective as a priority.

### 7.3 Obligations Arising from the Burra Charter

The Burra Charter is the *Australia ICOMOS* (International Council on Monuments and Sites) *charter for the conservation of places of cultural significance*. Guidelines set out by the Burra Charter are recognised as the basis for conservation in Australia.

The Burra Charter includes statements regarding conservation principles, processes and practice, and is supplemented by guidelines for the establishment of cultural significance and the formulation of a Conservation Policy and strategy for any item. While the recommendations of the Charter have no legal status, it is broadly accepted as a basis for heritage conservation philosophy, procedures and practice throughout Australia, and is consistent with international practice.

The following obligations for the Ocean Baths arise from The Burra Charter, with the relevant Articles noted in brackets.

- The cultural significance of the Ocean Baths should be retained and provisions made for its security, maintenance and future management. (Article 1.5, Article 2)
- All conservation work should be based on a respect for the existing fabric, use, associations and meanings and should involve minimum physical intervention. (Article 3)
- Traditional techniques and materials are preferred for the conservation of significant fabric. In some circumstances modern techniques and materials which offer substantial benefits may be appropriate. (Article 4)
- Conservation of the Ocean Baths requires the retention of an appropriate visual setting and other relationships that contribute to the cultural significance of the place. New construction, demolition, intrusions or other changes which would adversely affect the setting or relationships are not appropriate. (Article 8)
- Contents, fixtures and objects which contribute to the cultural significance of a place should be retained at that place. Their removal is unacceptable unless it is the sole means of ensuring their security and preservation; on a temporary basis for treatment or exhibition; for cultural reasons; for health and safety; or to protect the place. Such contents, fixtures and objects should be returned where circumstances permit and it is culturally appropriate. (Article 10)
- The contribution which related places and related objects make to the cultural significance of the place should be retained. (Article 11)



- Conservation, interpretation and management of a place should provide for participation of people for whom the place has special associations and meanings, or who have social, spiritual or other cultural responsibilities for the place. (Article 12)
- Conservation may, according to circumstance, include the processes of: retention or reintroduction of a use; retention of associations and meanings; maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation and interpretation; and will commonly include a combination of more than one of these. (Article 14)
- Change may be necessary to retain cultural significance, but is undesirable where it reduces cultural significance. The amount of change to a place should be guided by the cultural significance of the place and its appropriate interpretation. (Article 15)
- Changes which reduce cultural significance should be reversible, and be reversed when circumstances permit. (Article 15)
- Demolition of significant fabric is generally not acceptable. However, in some cases minor demolition may be appropriate as part of conservation. Removed significant fabric should be reinstated when circumstances permit. (Article 15)
- The contributions of all aspects of cultural significance of a place should be respected. If a place includes fabric, uses, associations or meanings of different periods, or different aspects of cultural significance, emphasising or interpreting one period or aspect at the expense of another can only be justified when what is left out, removed or diminished is of slight cultural significance and that which is emphasised or interpreted is of much greater cultural significance. (Article 15)
- Maintenance is fundamental to conservation and should be undertaken where fabric is of cultural significance and its maintenance is necessary to retain that cultural significance. (Article 16)
- Preservation is appropriate where the existing fabric or its condition constitutes evidence of cultural significance, or where insufficient evidence is available to allow other conservation processes to be carried out. (Article 17)
- Restoration and reconstruction should reveal culturally significant aspects of the place. (Article 18)
- Restoration is appropriate only if there is sufficient evidence of an earlier state of the fabric. (Article 19)
- Reconstruction is appropriate only where a place is incomplete through damage or alterations, and only where there is sufficient evidence to reproduce an earlier state of the fabric. In rare cases, reconstruction may also be appropriate as part of a use or practice that retains the cultural significance of the place. (Article 20)
- Reconstruction should be identifiable on close inspection or through additional interpretation. (Article 20)
- Adaptation is acceptable only where the adaptation has minimal impact on the cultural significance of the place. (Article 20)
- Adaptation should involve minimal change to significant fabric, achieved only after considering alternatives. (Article 20)
- New work such as additions to the place may be acceptable where it does not distort or obscure the cultural significance of the place, or detract from its interpretation and appreciation. (Article 22)
- New work should be readily identifiable as such. (Article 22)

- Significant associations between people and a place should be respected, retained and not obscured. Opportunities for the interpretation, commemoration and celebration of these associations should be investigated and implemented. (Article 24)
- The cultural significance of many places is not readily apparent, and should be explained by interpretation. Interpretation should enhance understanding and enjoyment, and be culturally appropriate. (Article 25)
- Groups and individuals with associations with a place as well as those involved in its management should be provided with opportunities to contribute to and participate in understanding the cultural significance of the place. Where appropriate they should also have opportunities to participate in its conservation and management. (Article 25)
- The impact of proposed changes on the cultural significance of a place should be analysed with reference to the statement of significance and the policy for managing the place. It may be necessary to modify changes following analysis to better retain cultural significance. (Article 27)
- Existing fabric, use, associations and meanings should be adequately recorded before any changes are made to the place. (Article 27)
- Investigation of a place which requires disturbance of the fabric, apart from that necessary to make decisions, may be appropriate provided that it is consistent with the policy for the place. Such investigation should be based on important research questions which have potential to substantially add to knowledge, which cannot be answered in other ways and which minimises disturbance of significant fabric. (Article 28)
- The records associated with the conservation of a place should be placed in a permanent archive and made publicly available, subject to requirements of security and privacy, and where this is culturally appropriate. (Article 32)
- Records about the history of a place should be protected and made publicly available, subject to requirements of security and privacy, and where this is culturally appropriate. (Article 32)
- Significant fabric which has been removed from a place including contents, fixtures and objects, should be catalogued, and protected in accordance with its cultural significance. Where possible and culturally appropriate, removed significant fabric including contents, fixtures and objects, should be kept at the place. (Article 33)

## 7.4 Statutory Controls

### 7.4.1 Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975

The Newcastle Ocean Baths is listed on the Register of the National Estate as an item within the Newcastle Conservation Area. The Baths is not listed as an individual item.

The Register of the National Estate is established under the Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975 (AHC Act). Inclusion of any place on the register makes it incumbent upon Commonwealth Ministers under Section 30 of the Act to avoid any action which would adversely affect that place. The National Estate Official Statement of Significance for the Conservation Area states:

To encourage the conservation of a visually interesting townscape and complementary landscape. The close packed streets of buildings in Newcastle Hill juxtaposed and contrasted with a variety of grassed and sparsely vegetated coastline parks provide many pleasing visual experiences. The sea and sky are ever present and form a backdrop for views of many fine late nineteenth century and early twentieth century buildings lining streets within the conservation area.

There are no formal regulations governing what may or may not be done to a place on the register, rather it is intended to highlight the importance of these places to the nation, and thus avoid any actions that would diminish their significance.

#### 7.4.2 State Heritage Legislation

The Baths is not listed by the Heritage Council of NSW under the NSW Heritage Act 1977 and Heritage Amendment Act 1998. This non-listing does not suggest insignificance, but rather indicates the Heritage Council's satisfaction that the building is adequately protected by other legislation.

#### 7.4.3 Local Heritage Legislation

The Baths is listed as a heritage item of local significance in the Local Environmental Plan 1987 (Amendment No.52). This listing requires that any works to the place be approved by the Council.

The Baths is covered by Newcastle City Council Development Control Plan No. 57: City East Urban Design Guidelines. Although this document is not a statutory document, future works to the Baths are compelled to comply with the guidelines set out therein.

Similarly, Newcastle Development Control Plan No. 44: Conservation Area Guidelines applies to the Ocean Baths.

#### 7.5 Other Listings

The Ocean Baths is individually classified by the National Trust, as well as falling within the Newcastle Urban Conservation Area, as defined by the National Trust.

The Ocean Baths is also listed on the Royal Australian Institute of Architects Register of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Significant Buildings.

A copy of the National Trust Classification listing cards, and the RAIA listing card, are included in this Conservation Management Plan in Appendix E.

#### 7.6 Client Requirements

The Newcastle City Council is eager to see further uses incorporated into the Baths and the precinct, encouraging the focus of the place as a recreational centre to beach culture in Newcastle.

#### 7.7 Physical Condition

The general condition of the fabric of the Baths appears to be fair. Previous repairs to the render are largely failing, with render drummy in numerous locations. Some sections of drummy and loose render present a danger to public safety, such as sections on the underside of the colonnade, which fall onto the seating area beneath with a single touch.

Some areas of the concrete floor surface in the changerooms is dangerously slippery when wet. This situation should be investigated further and rectified.

A structural inspection of the pavilion structure and the surrounding features such as retaining walls by Intrados Consulting Engineers reveals the precinct to be fairly stable, however the pavilion is in poor condition. Refer to Appendix C for further information.

A safety issue exists on the northern concrete seating steps, as the top step is not protected from a substantial change in height to the rock ledge below. A risk assessment should be undertaken immediately and changes implemented to protect the public from injury.

Asbestos is present in the roof sheeting, however the age of this sheeting is not known. A qualified assessor should be engaged to report on the health and safety risk present in this sheeting.

#### 7.8 Building Code of Australia Obligations

The current amenities provision for disabled users of the baths is a single disabled toilet/shower/change area which is accessed off the main entry passageway, and requires a key

from the Ocean Baths staff in order to gain access. Although this complies in theory with the Building Code of Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act states that "A truly accessible environment is one in which a person with a disability can freely express their independence in a dignified manner and one in which any impediment to integration is removed." The current arrangement of disabled sanitary amenities at the Baths is not considered to meet this definition, as the amenities do not allow for independence in use, and do not allow for integration with other Baths users. However, it must be recognised that in some cases disabled patrons may need to be assisted by members of the opposite sex, such as spouses or children, therefore the provision of a separate unisex facility is a necessity. It is suggested therefore, that accessible facilities be incorporated into the male and female dressing sheds to allow for true independence and integration, while maintaining the existing facility.

At a minimum, access to the facilities by way of key should be amended to allow independent use, and access to the change rooms should be altered to allow for wheelchair access.

## 7.9 Use Opportunities

The use opportunities at the Ocean Baths are considerable, and at present the place is considered to be under-utilised. Some uses which seem appropriate include the following:

### **Food Service**

Although the Baths currently incorporates a kiosk, the nature of the food service to the place could be greatly expanded to include a more structured café or restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and possibly dinner meals. Suggestions of a themed food service in line with the recreational/health theme of the Baths such as a health bar, is considered appropriate and is encouraged by this Conservation Management Plan. The continued operation of a kiosk serving 'fast food' is not seen to conflict with any additional food service use.

### **Therapeutic Use**

It seems appropriate for the current recreational/sporting use of the Ocean Baths to be extended to include related uses such as alternative therapies, yoga, massage, physiotherapy, gymnasium, etc.

### **Residential Use**

The continued use of the upper floor for residential purposes is considered appropriate for maintenance and security issues, however alternative uses for this space may also be considered appropriate.

Any change to the use of the place carries with it the increased expectation for parking spaces and amenities. This must be taken into account in any future planning.

## 7.10 Stakeholders

The following groups may be considered stakeholders in the conservation of the Ocean Baths. Newcastle City Council may choose to seek comment on any future works to the Baths from these, or any other community groups.

*Newcastle Historical Society*

*NSW Heritage Office*

*Newcastle Alliance*

*Newcastle East Residents Group*

### **Lessee**

Paul Beck and family (resident)

Peter Walmsley (kiosk owner)

## 8 Conservation Policy

### 8.1 Introduction

The NSW Heritage Office states a Conservation Policy 'explains the principles to be followed to retain or reveal an item's significance. The aim is to show how the heritage significance of the item can be enhanced and maintained.'

In *The Conservation Plan* James Kerr notes that there is a 'clear theoretical distinction between policies and the strategies for their implementation.' The Conservation Policy is largely dependent on the assessed level of significance which is unlikely to change drastically over time, while the strategy for implementation, which appears in the following section of this report, interprets this policy in light of client requirements and funding, which are highly liable to change over time.

### 8.2 General Policy and Strategy

*Policy 1 Newcastle Ocean Baths is a place of cultural heritage, and should be conserved and interpreted in its historical recreational use as a rare example of its style in Newcastle and New South Wales.*

- a) The Newcastle Ocean Baths is an item of cultural significance which is valued on many levels for its demonstrable heritage. The place and its context of beaches and other baths clearly demonstrates the significance of ocean bathing as part of the cultural life of Novocastrians. The place should be recognised as such in all future works and studies.
- b) The place should be conserved in accordance with the principles and methods set out in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter. This includes any and all work proposed for the building fabric, the site and context of the buildings, and the landscape.
- c) Conservation of the significant fabric (built and natural) is essential to the continued understanding and significance of the place. Any intervention in significant fabric, as defined in the accompanying Inventory Datasheets found in Appendix A, should be minimal and reversible.
- d) The landscape generally should be maintained. Refer to accompanying Inventory Datasheets found in Appendix A for specific recommendations.
- e) Future use of the place should be maintained as predominantly recreational, combined sympathetically with a commercial and/or residential use if so desired.
- f) Enhancement of significance should be further explored, possibly through interpretive displays.
- g) This Conservation Management Plan should be endorsed and adopted by Newcastle City Council, and the NSW Heritage Council prior to its use as a working document.
- h) A copy of this Conservation Management Plan should be held at the Ocean Baths and made available for viewing to interested parties. Copies should be available for purchase, if so desired. Copies should also be lodged with the following:
  - Newcastle Regional Library, Local Studies Section
  - Newcastle City Council, Strategic Planning Section
  - Newcastle City Council, Asset Management Section
  - NSW Heritage Council
- i) This Conservation Management Plan for the Ocean Baths should be reviewed and reassessed every five years.

### 8.3 Specific Policy Statements and Strategies

#### *Policy 2 Conserve the setting and landscape of the Ocean Baths.*

- a) The heritage curtilage as defined in section 6 of this document should be adopted and consciously protected by all departments within Newcastle City Council.
- b) Any intervention should be considered within the guidelines set out by this Conservation Management Plan. Intervention deemed essential should be appropriately recorded and that information lodged and stored with Newcastle City Council records.
- c) Any adaptation to the place which includes additional building works, or demolition, should be undertaken, or at the very least assessed, by a conservation architect. This would include small works such as the garage or other 'outbuildings', as well as large reconstructions and/or demolitions.
- d) Adaptive re-use of the place is considered appropriate for uses outlined the *Obligations and Opportunities* section of this document, or other uses with the approval of the Newcastle City Council Heritage Officer. Generally, the buildings and landscape should be strictly conserved in accordance with individual policies and datasheets contained herein.
- e) The existing hard landscape should be maintained, specifically in accordance with the Inventory Datasheets contained herein.

#### *Policy 3 Conserve the built fabric of the Ocean Baths.*

- a) Conservation work to highly significant built fabric should be limited to preservation, restoration, or to reconstruction where interpretation of significance would be subsequently enhanced. Adaptive re-use of spaces is encouraged within the guidelines outlined by this Conservation Management Plan.
- b) All works, unless restricted purely to maintenance or repairs, should be done under the guidance of appropriately qualified personnel. Any changes to material should be done only after consultation with a heritage architect or the Council Heritage Officer. All restoration or reconstruction should be based on a sound knowledge of its potential impact both on the significance of the place and on the condition of the fabric.
- c) Inclusion of any new services should be restricted, and concealed where possible. Replacement of original services should follow original details.
- d) All fabric, including built fabric and hardware, should be retained unless identified as intrusive, or further investigated and determined to be intrusive. Fabric identified as being intrusive should be removed. If this is unacceptable, sympathetic renovation alternatives should be investigated.
- e) Proposed conservation works should refer specifically to each room datasheet for relevant information on levels of significance and appropriate levels of conservation work and adaptive re-use.
- f) Routine maintenance should be carried out on a cyclical basis, with responsibilities of both Newcastle City Council and all leaseholders (i.e. caretaker; swimming clubs) clearly defined in a maintenance schedule. Neglect of responsibilities, by either party, is unacceptable and considered detrimental to the cultural heritage significance of the Ocean Baths.
- g) Deteriorated fabric that allows further damage, or deterioration to other fabric, should be repaired or replaced (as appropriate) immediately.
- h) Where intervention is proposed to significant fabric, such fabric and intervention work should be photographically recorded and documented.

- i) Intervention to fabric considered significant should be reversible.
- j) Specific recommendations for individual areas of fabric, where applicable, are set out in the relevant Inventory Datasheets contained in Appendix A.

*Policy 4 Enhance the significance of the place through interpretation.*

- a) Regardless of use, an interpretation plan highlighting the cultural significance of the Ocean Baths should be commissioned and implemented for the place. An interpretation plan should highlight the physical and social context of the Ocean Baths.

## 9 Implementation

### 9.1 Introduction

The implementation strategy defined in this document outlines suggested methods for commencement of conservation works. Implementation is not intended to be a scope of works. Following the adoption of this Conservation Management Plan by Newcastle City Council and other relevant authorities, a conservation architect should be engaged to prepare a full scope of works document.

The following strategy for implementation of policies, which appear in the preceding section of this report, has been formulated with respect to:

- items identified by Suturs Architects as requiring attention in order to retard further deterioration of fabric, and the priority of such works;
- items identified by Suturs Architects as requiring attention in order to maintain and/or enhance the significance of the place;

The strategy for implementation of Policy is liable to change over time, and regular review of the strategy should be carried out to assess:

- if the aims of the strategy to date have been achieved;
- the impact of any works on the significance of the place;
- what amendments to the strategy are required in light of altered circumstances, either in use, funding availability, or the recommendations of other strategies/plans.

The suggested review period for the implementation strategy is every two years.

### 9.2 Responsibility

The Conservation Policy for the Ocean Baths has been formulated after thorough research of its history and considered assessment of its cultural significance, and is therefore unlikely to change drastically over time. Following acceptance and endorsement of this Conservation Management Plan by Newcastle City Council, the Plan should form the basis of all future work to the place. This includes minor works such as repairs and general maintenance, as well as large scale restoration or reconstruction. All persons involved in the design or construction of such works should be made aware of the requirements of this Conservation Management Plan.



### 9.3 Essential/Desirable Priorities

#### Immediate Priority

The following should be undertaken within 3 months.

1. Investigate options for safety railing/balustrade at the top of the concrete seating area, and construct same.
2. Investigate options for increased safety regarding slippery concrete floor surfaces in the changerooms, and implement same.
3. Repair or remove the concrete roof structure shading the picnic tables adjacent to the female changerooms.
4. Inspect the integrity and condition of the roof sheeting and flashing to each building, and repair any leaks or defects, and replace any sheeting deemed to be unsafe. A full investigation of asbestos present in the roof sheeting should be investigated as part of this work. Roof sheeting, if replaced, should be in a material sympathetic to the building.
5. A maintenance schedule should be drawn up, highlighting cyclical maintenance and the party responsible for each item.
6. Works determined by the structural assessment, undertaken concurrently with this CMP, as being crucial to the protection of fabric should be undertaken.
7. An electrical assessment should be undertaken. Works determined by that assessment to be essential should be undertaken.
8. Investigate design options for including accessible facilities within each of the male and female changerooms.

#### High Priority

The following should be undertaken within 12 months.

1. Paint the exterior of the pavilion, and the interior of the changerooms.
2. Implement the Master Plan for the Ocean Baths, undertaken concurrently with this CMP.
3. Consider providing shaded seating directly adjacent to the Canoe Pool, thus allowing closer and more comfortable supervision of young bathers.
4. Undertake alterations to the change rooms to allow for adequate disabled access. Consider providing accessible facilities in each male and female change rooms.
5. Undertake a prioritised list of suggested works in each Inventory Datasheet, and implement a plan to complete same within suggested timeframes.

#### Moderate Priority

The following should be undertaken within 2 years.

1. Undertake a study to enhance the interpretation of the place.
2. Consider relocation of the substation (possibly offsite) and a re-use of the space for storage or other use.

#### 9.4 Long Term Priorities

##### Long Term Priorities

The following should be undertaken within ten years.

1. Consider amending some of the dressing lockers to a more usable size.
2. Investigate options for additional uses which would enhance user satisfaction.
3. Undertake full conservation works, as noted in the Inventory Datasheets. Depending upon the timing of this work, a review of the suggested works contained in those Datasheets may warrant review.
4. Consider options for adaptive re-use of some of the spaces.