

KOGARAH WAR MEMORIAL OLYMPIC SWIMMING POOL:

A GRATEFUL COMMUNITY REMEMBERS ITS PAST

**A REPORT PREPARED FOR THE
KOGARAH BAY PROGRESS ASSOCIATION**

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I am indebted to Progress Association member Theresa Kot, my invaluable research partner, who also provided insight into local culture. Special thanks are due to Elise Borg and Natalie Mort who provided encouragement in the work and essential connections; and to Suzanne O'Connor and Brian Shaw who willingly furthered my enquiries and interview opportunities.

The Local Studies Team located in the Hatton Room in the Clive James Library are an inestimable resource, caring for a rich collection of historical materials, readily sharing their expertise, and making the collection accessible. The resources held at Rockdale Library also proved invaluable.

Images

Included in this report are a number of images of the pool through history sourced from Kogarah Bay Progress Association and the significant collection of digitised images available in the Community History Collection of the Georges River Council Library network. As the pool has been closed since 2019, it has not been possible to provide more recent photographs. Some recent photographs, taken prior to its closure, are available on the Save Carss Park Pool website and Facebook pages.

Introduction

The Kogarah Bay Progress Association received in 2021 a Community War Memorials Grant from the NSW Government to research and document the planning and building of the Kogarah War Memorial Olympic Swimming Pool at Carss Park. The Progress Association was concerned that with the recent closure of the Pool (in July 2019) and the resulting uncertainty about its future, the history of earlier generations and their ambition to build on the legacy of those who had served in wartime would be lost.

The Kogarah RSL Sub-branch endorsed the Progress Association's grant application.

The Pool was unveiled in 1966 following a lengthy campaign to finance and build in-ground swimming pools in the St George and Sutherland Shire regions throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Another, proximate contemporaneous initiative was the Sans Souci Olympic Swimming Pool unveiled in 1965.

The story of the pool at Carss Park reflects a desire in the years that followed the Second World War to bring up to modern standards a range of local, community amenities across Australia. New facilities such as pools, along with parks, libraries, community centres, clubs and sportsgrounds all proved attractive to a population freed from the constraints of wartime, and to meet the population boom, particularly in urban growth areas. The building of new pools and other recreational infrastructure also reflected a desire to capture some of the enthusiasm generated by Australian competitors at Olympic Games as medal winners at the games in 1956 and 1960, and through the successful hosting by the City of Melbourne of the 1956 Games.

This report will relate the story of how the Kogarah War Memorial Olympic Swimming Pool came into being, highlighting the people behind the plans for the Pool who saw the project through to fruition. This story will be placed in the context of swimming pools in the post-war era, and those designated as war memorial swimming pools. Further context of the features of war memorials after the Second World War will be offered, before some conclusions are made about the Kogarah War Memorial Olympic Swimming Pool at Carss Park.

Much of the research for this report was conducted at the Clive James Library in Kogarah, prompting the question of how did a young Clive learn to swim? Clive James was born in 1939 in Kogarah and learnt to swim as he recounts in his autobiography, *Unreliable Memoirs*, in the early post-war years when aged 8 or 9 in 'creek water as brown as oxtail soup' (James, 66). Later, he recalls travelling further afield to swim at the Domain Pool in the Sydney CBD, as well as at Ramsgate Baths, which he describes as 'one vast urinal' (James, 97).

In his early pursuit of swimming, Clive encountered future Olympic champions, including John Devitt, gold medallist in 1956 and 1960, and Jon Henricks, gold medallist in 1956. He recounts how in the absence of suitable facilities, neither for safe swimming, nor for swimming training, students would trek to North Sydney Pool, if a competitive swimmer, or, if not, to other pools along the city's eastern suburbs' coast at Rushcutters Bay, Redleaf, Bronte or Coogee. Again, noting his encounters with future stars of the sport, Clive met the younger and soon to be legendary Australian Olympian swimmer John Konrads, who attended Sydney Technical High School with Clive and went on to win a gold medal at Rome in 1960 (James, 97-100).

Two themes relevant to this report emerge with clarity from James' account of his growing up in Kogarah – the lack of, and inadequacy of local swimming facilities, and the era's growing obsession with the Olympic dream.

Clive James' experience was of course not uncommon. Many residents and schools were dissatisfied with their experience of local swimming. Members of the Kogarah Bay Progress Association and the Carss Park Amateur Swimming Club were unhappy too. This report is an account of what they did about it, and how the story of the Carss Park Pool captures a particular era in Australia, one of rapid urban development in the post war years that was born of the release from wartime hardship and economic constraints. The generation that worked to rebuild Australia after the war sought to both recognise those that had endured, and to harvest the fruits of peacetime, fuelled by the nation's familiar thread of sporting culture.

1. The Kogarah Pool Story

On 29 June 1962, 28 people attended the first meeting of the Kogarah District War Memorial Olympic Pool Committee. Those gathered established the Kogarah District War Memorial Olympic Pool Building Fund which in one undated record identifies by name and address forty-five registered members.

The Committee had been established by the Carss Park Amateur Swimming Club to give substance to their efforts of previous years to improve their swimming facilities. Since the 1920s the Club had conducted its competitive meets and learn-to-swim classes at the coastal baths, known as the Carss Park Swimming Baths, a saltwater enclosure built in 1924 soon after the Kogarah Council had purchased the Carss Park estate, later shark-proofed in the 1930s, but subject to tidal flows that delivered unwelcome disturbance and rubbish.

The Club's efforts were to result in the raising of £4,000 (\$8,000) in less than two years, enabling, in June 1964, the presentation to Council of a cheque for £3,000 (\$6,000). Two years later, on 22 June 1966, the Committee advised a further \$2000 was to be made available for a wading pool and seating adjacent to the main pool.

The Carss Park Amateur Swimming Club, along with the Carss Park Ladies Amateur Swimming Club and the Carss Park Lifesaving Club, through its representatives Messrs Devine and Hopkins, had first approached the Kogarah Council addressing their meeting on 17 February 1958 with a proposal for an Olympic Pool at Carss Park. The proposed pool would replace the existing tidal pool that bore the nickname, the Mud Hole. Nevertheless, the tidal pool with its enclosures and shark-proofing was the home of the Swimming and Life Saving Clubs swim classes and competition carnivals. Representatives of the Sans Souci Progress Association also presented to the meeting of Council, proposing an Olympic standard pool for Sans Souci. In both cases, the Council indicated that it would 'investigate the practicability of the proposal, prepare an estimate of the proposal, and also for an alternate proposal if considered necessary', and once these considerations had been made, it promised to invite a further meeting with the groups to consider what financial contributions they could make towards any project that went forward.

Some official initial responses to an inground pool at Carss Park were not supportive – a "pipedream" screamed one headline citing a reluctant Councillor. Carss Park Swimming Club member J. Conlon was advised that the cost of construction and probable annual losses were likely to prevent an Olympic Pool being built in the foreseeable future.

The Council's Town Planning Committee reports that followed, after the presentations to Council, were sceptical. Experience from other municipalities was cited as evidence that the plans submitted so far by the Swimming Club were inadequate from an engineering point of view, unlikely to be successful anywhere that has free access to water suitable for swimming (e.g. near the coast) and, in any case, benefitted to date from only rough estimates of cost. The Town Planning Committee went on to record its own estimates: £50,000 to £160,000 all up (the same for Sans Souci), was the consultant's advice. The Council Engineer's own estimate put the cost at a more precise £15,950, based on the Club's initial proposal, stating that this was an 'unnecessary expenditure of public monies' and that Council should 'adhere to its previous decision to inspect sites for the construction of a full Olympic Pool away from the foreshores where admission may be charged' to recoup some of the building costs.

By June of that year, the dreams of the Clubs appeared dashed. Council resolved, on its Engineer's recommendation, that the proposal for Carss Park be put on hold until the Club could obtain firm quotations for the proposal, and for an alternate pool within the existing sea enclosure, and provide an assurance to Council that it would undertake to make substantial contributions to the project cost. Council was indicating that, for the reasons earlier shared with Conlon, it did not believe that the Pool could proceed in view of the cost of construction. They had been persuaded by a sceptical in-house professional that coastal areas did not need Olympic Pools. Nevertheless, following through on the Council's request for sites to be identified, ten potential sites in the St George area, not including Carss Park, were put to Council by its officials as suited for an eventual Olympic Pool.

Council was not alone in scouting for sites to meet increasing demands for improved facilities. Many competing proposals across the St George and Sutherland Shire districts were being pursued by enthusiastic organisations like Rotary Clubs, and other groups of individuals keen to see improvements in swimming opportunities, including in Oatley Park, Riverwood, Olds Park, and Peakhurst, as well as at a number of individual schools (Danebank High School and Peakhurst West Public School were to be among the successful school-led initiatives). Amidst this range of competing proposals, efforts in Kogarah began to move from pipedream to exploratory.

In late 1960, in lieu of a large-scale undertaking of Olympian proportions, a more modest set of improvements at Carss Park Swimming Baths were offered by Kogarah Council: 55-yard markers to assist with Olympic standard training, and a refurbished retaining wall to improve safety.

Also, on 6 July 1960, the Mayors of Hurstville, Kogarah (Alderman K. Dalglish) and Rockdale met to confer on new swimming pool prospects, concerned that residents had to leave their municipalities to enjoy safe, clean facilities, or to learn to swim. Citizen pressure to provide suitable facilities was being felt (a report of the meeting was carried on page 1 of the second edition of the new weekly local newspaper, the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*, followed by an editorial the next week in support of the Mayors), but with so many proposals, there was no obvious groundswell behind any one of the projects and, at this time, not behind the Carss Park or Sans Souci dreams.

At the time, it was a Hurstville Rotary Club plan that seemed the most viable, presumably in terms of a Rotary Club's fund-raising ability and stature. The 1960 Olympic Games in Rome were imminent, and the Rotary President was reported as noting that there was 'No pool of the

type necessary for training and making Olympic stars, although the district is teeming with potential talent.'

By early 1961, options considered by the three councils, who were continuing to cooperate through a St George Swimming Centre Central Executive, included Fry's Park for Kogarah, and for Rockdale, Moorefield Racecourse/Swamp, and for Hurstville, Penshurst Park or Evatt Park.

But at an estimated cost of £300,000 the Rotary three-pool solution failed to muster enthusiasm, even with local Olympic champion John Devitt offering public support. Eventually, the St George Central Executive folded on 25 November 1963 and forwarded monies to other groups including the Carss Park project. Carss Park Pool Campaign Director, Ken Cavanough was on hand to secure for Carss Park some of the £600 the Executive held.

Kogarah Council, through Mayor Dalgleish, continued to publicly support the Hurstville proposal, and appeared to be cooperating with Rockdale and Hurstville Councils, but gradually each Council was working on other ideas, and Kogarah began looking in earnest for more local solutions. The wider St George plan was still supported in principle by Kogarah (although Dalgleish is reported as saying his public endorsement does not place Council under any obligation), but the Council was already proceeding with the Sans Souci location, citing more pools were going to be needed anyway.

By mid-1962, the Carss Park Amateur Swimming Club intensified their efforts to secure an Olympic pool. In response to the announcement in May 1962 of in-principle approval by Kogarah Council that it would support the raising of funds for a Carss Park location near the Sea Scouts Hall, the Club, in its 1961-62 Annual Report (27 September 1962), announced the formation of a special pool committee to further the 'long and arduous work' undertaken to date. Conlon, a prime mover behind the early Carss Park work, along with Messrs T. Devine, H. Fibbins, and P. Sheehan, were joined on the Kogarah District War Memorial Olympic Pool Committee by 'fresh faces'. At this early stage, Ken Cavanough was already singled out with the Club President noting that 'the tremendous amount of time and work put in by Mr Ken Cavanough will never be fully appreciated'.

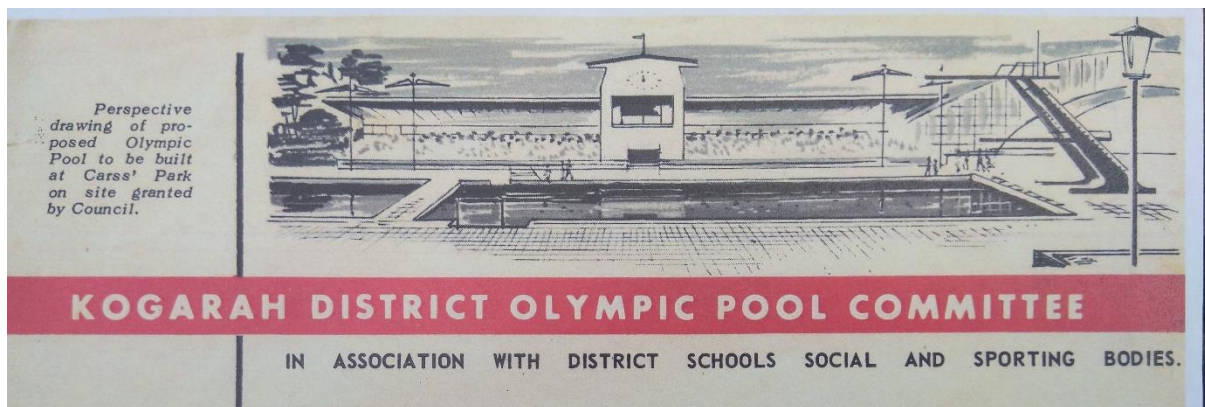
The granting of in-principle approval in 1962 by Kogarah Council represented a change of heart. The answer to why this occurred may lie in shifting allegiances on Council. A rapid succession of mayors in the early 1960s suggests Council numbers were in flux – Mayor Dalgleish, who had appeared to be less than committed to a pool at Carss Park, was replaced in 1961 as Mayor by a succession of one-year term incumbents - William Robinson 1961-62, Arthur Hardiman 1962-63, and Albert Oakey 1963-64). George Neal followed, also for one year (1964-65). Neal was succeeded by two full-term Mayors, William Duggan (1965-68) and Ken Cavanough (1968-1971). These latter three, Neal, Duggan, and Cavanough, were all members of the Kogarah Bay War Memorial Olympic Swimming Pool Committee, indicative of the powerful presence and eventual success of the campaign to see a new pool built at Carss Park also being recognised on a broader political level.

The Swimming Club's new committee included Ronald York, advertising manager, as President, Cavanough, who identified himself as a cost investigator for the NSW Railways, as Secretary and Campaign Director, and George Wardman, a builder, as Treasurer. The Patron was The Hon Bill Crabtree, State Member for Kogarah.

Other members of the committee included:

- Mr A Sparkes
- Mr K Reilly
- Mr A Dunn
- Mr J Reddish
- Mr J Malcolm
- Mrs Hungerford
- Mr H Fibbins
- Mr T Devine
- Mrs Scaysbrook
- Mrs Cavanough

Like the Hurstville Rotary Club proposal, Carss Park proponents expressed the 'hope to attract world champions to the pool.' Their letterhead displayed an artist's impression of the pool, released that month, suggesting a deal of planning work already prior to the announcement.



Fund-raising

The new Committee set to work forming a 100 club and a 200 club as vehicles for the collection of myriad small donations at swim meets, at local park festivals, and in informal engagements. They approached businesses and institutions, in particular veterans' organisations and schools. South Hurstville RSL, formerly the South Hurstville Soldiers Memorial Hall Club, with £150, gave one of the largest donations, matched by Kyle Bay Bowling Club. Another veterans' organisation, Hurstville Legion Club, contributed £10. From the four letters sent to RSL sub-branches and Clubs, two did not make contributions - Hurstville RSL sub-branch said no, as did, in a letter dated 6 Dec 1962, Kogarah RSL sub-branch which declined to contribute 'at present'.

The Committee undertook a comprehensive survey of schools (fifteen in Kogarah Municipality and nineteen in Hurstville Municipality) identifying 2,060 pupils who would need access to a Sans Souci pool, and 2,550 for Carss Park, but this detail did not elicit financial support from School P&Cs even though it was to be children that would benefit the most from the Pool projects. A grant of £5,000 from Rockdale Council towards Sans Souci was not to be repeated by Hurstville Council (for Carss Park) despite the best efforts of the committee, and the highlighting for the Council of the Committee's schools survey results.

Sidebar: War memorials and tax deductions

Care should be taken not to read too much into these rejections from RSL sub-branches and school P&Cs. Organisations and institutions always have their own fund-raising priorities. So, it is not surprising that veterans' groups and school parent bodies might not respond at an official level to calls for contributions. Ironically, perhaps, Penshurst RSL Youth and Swimming Clubs and Hurstville RSL Youth Club, as early as 16 November 1964, applied for reserved access to the Carss Park pool when open.

And, although named a War Memorial Swimming Pool, the Carss Park project did not depend upon the endorsement of local veterans' organisations. Fund-raising was assisted by the Federal Government's long-standing war memorial tax deduction laws first introduced in 1915 to foster local community recognition of war service and sacrifice, and to aid consequent fund-raising efforts. In 1927, the donation threshold of £5 was reduced to £1 and in 1942, the Second World War was included in war recognition. (In 1973, the deduction ended for new memorial projects shifting the focus of Federal Government support to the repair and maintenance of existing memorials.)

Another local example at the time that the Carss Park Fund was operating is that of the Salvation Army War Memorial Centre. In August 1960, the Salvation Army opened the Centre to provide youth accommodation 'to stand as a reminder of freedom gained at personal cost and noble ideal'. Benefitting from the tax deduction, funds had been raised by the Salvation Army to place before all those passing by and those using the facility, a reminder of the sacrifices of war that now enabled the opportunities of peace. The aim was 'the development of character among local youth, and suitable recreational attractions to meet the challenges of idleness and delinquency.'

Swimming pools also embodied this ambition – providing venues for healthy socialisation and personal development, including the discipline of competition and training that could also equip young people in resisting the 'challenges of idleness and delinquency'.

In discussions of the tax deduction for war memorials, reference is occasionally made to the National RSL Congress in 1963 resolving that indiscriminate use of the term "war memorial" be discontinued where recognised memorials are established (see for example, Inglis, 336).

Identified by the Congress motion were swimming baths, sports ovals, public buildings, and churches. The motion was reacting to the question of motivation – was a project using the title "war memorial" just for the tax deduction or did it have a purpose, like the Salvation Army project, that aligned with the honour of those who had served their nation in war? In any case local RSL sub-branch independence, especially from the State branch, was then and continues today to be prized, and it was not therefore uncommon for local groups to pursue local agendas and projects in conflict with edicts from distant hierarchies. A relevant example from this time was that of Cowra RSL sub-branch which throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s was leading efforts in the rural town to welcome visiting Japanese officials to the grave sites of Japanese Prisoners of War buried in the local cemetery, following their ill-fated breakout during the Second World War, even though the State RSL President was highly critical of the Commonwealth Government's restoration of trade and diplomatic relationship with the former enemy. The efforts of the Cowra RSL members and other local leaders were soon recognised by the 1964 establishment of the Japanese War Cemetery in Cowra, Japan's only official extra-territorial war cemetery.

Kogarah Council, on 30 August 1963, resolved to invite tenders for the construction of pools at Carss Park and Sans Souci, having allocated £7,500 to each project, and obtained loans for the works to proceed.

Both sites were to be home to a 50-yards, seven or eight lane, non-tidal, filtered pool. A change to metric length of 50-metres in keeping with the Olympic standard was achieved prior to construction commencing. The construction process was subject to lengthy delays, and eventually attempts by Council to cancel the contract with the Builder, Ferrum Engineering, claiming faulty engineering that was causing cracks in both pools and trouble with the filtering system at Carss Park, a situation that was to bedevil the Carss Park pool from its earliest days of operation.



Sans Souci Pool opened on 2 October 1965, but delays at Carss Park led to a number of postponements in the opening. Pool Committee President York and Secretary Cavanaugh

published an apology in the local press prior to an unheralded opening on 26 December 1965. The need for amenities was considered crucial and a decision to proceed with their addition led to extra costs and further delays. The unveiling finally occurred in the next summer, on 1 October 1966, with Mayor Duggan in attendance along with Hurstville Council and St George County Council representatives, the Kogarah Bay Progress Association, and Carss Park Swimming Club members.



The Mayor revealed the full cost: \$91,000 plus \$74,000 for the amenities block – a total of \$165,000 (reported as \$156,000 by *The Propellor*, in a probable transcription error). The Town Planning Committee's consultant estimates which had advised in 1958 a cost upwards of £50,000 (\$100,000) proved to be closer to the mark than many fund-raising declarations of the time. Once again, Ken Cavanaugh featured in the dignitaries' public remarks with the Mayor paying tribute to Cavanaugh in particular for his efforts, along with the Pool Committee.



The repeated reference to one man, Ken Cavanough, a “first among equals”, in many stories about the Carss Park pool fits the claim of Hannah Lewi (a scholar of public swimming pools) that a tenacious individual can make the difference between success and failure in community projects (Lewi and Nichols, 116). As Campaign Director for the Pool Committee Cavanough drove toward success for a collective dream. Undoubtedly, stories like these are the work of many hands, but Ken Cavanough stands out as the tenacious individual this project needed to go from knock-backs in the late 1950s to fulfilment in the mid -1960s. Certainly, he is given by his contemporaries a great deal of the credit.

Evidence of Cavanough's public contribution to the St George area, and to Carss Park in particular, stretches back to the early 1930s. He served as Blakehurst Primary School P&C President for some years in that decade during which time he helped achieve the shark-proofing of the Carss Park Swimming Baths, a new building for the school, and conducted successful annual school carnivals at Carss Park.

Later, he was to establish the Middle Ward Progress Association, and the Kogarah Ratepayers and Residents Association in 1966. He was on the Blakehurst High School P&C for eight years and led the St George District Council of P&C Associations. He was instrumental in the agitation for a local library, which eventually bore his name (although, now it is the Clive James Library). Ken Cavanough AM (1905-2006) and his wife, Mabel Cavanough OAM (1907-1984), worked for many decades with and alongside others for common purpose, culminating in his election as Mayor of Kogarah (1968-71). He followed these endeavours with many years of advocacy for Kogarah senior citizens and the founding of the Kogarah Historical Society.

The Primary School was to say of him', presciently, at his farewell in 1937, that it was expected his 'future activities would meet with the same success as those he had undertaken for the school'. There was another three and a half decades of successful community service ahead. He was the difference between success and failure for the Kogarah War Memorial Olympic Swimming Pool.

2. Pools and swimming in the pre-war and post war era – building communities

A shift from the provision of baths to pools occurred in the early twentieth century. Bathing had long been acknowledged as an aid to cleanliness as well as for its invigoration of the body and mind and gained in appeal during the mid- to late-nineteenth century as the time for, and pursuit, of leisure became an increasing reality, which in the Australian climate, typically meant outdoor activity. However, it was not until the interwar years that in-ground pools became widely achievable – improvements in materials and construction methods enabled concreting and waterproofing sufficient to make them viable as community, and domestic, installations. A post-First World War push for bodily fitness took hold and provided incentive to learning to swim, not only for survival in dangerous sea waters, but for health and well-being.

Suburban pools emerged in noticeable numbers in the 1930s, surprisingly perhaps given the depression years, but the availability of unemployment relief funds ensured the completion of many local projects. With a period of wartime hiatus in non-war related spending by governments, the post-Second World War era saw a period of catch-up with a return to community infrastructure projects. The “lost” years of depression and war demanded new civic amenities. Between 1945 and 1972, thirty-two pools opened in Sydney (Lewi, 12). Across a similar time period – 1950-1980 - over 200 were built in the state of Victoria (McShane, 195).

Kogarah's expansion was rapid in this period, as was that of neighbouring suburbs such as Blakehurst, adjacent to Carss Park. With the population boom of the post-war years, burgeoning numbers of families were taking up residence in growth areas along the Georges River and in the Sutherland Shire. Community facilities, "public places of shared social significance" as Lewi terms them, became the markers of a suburb's successful post-war economic, geographic, and demographic growth. The challenge of post-war renewal is evidenced in a report on Blakehurst Primary School from the mid-1930s. A Health Inspection report to the Minister for Education remarked that the school building's 'walls and ceilings are dirty, windows in places broken, woodwork white ant eaten, guttering in a broken and rotten condition. A small verandah is in use as a classroom, and the sanitary conveniences have broken floors and defective seats.'

The report recommended that the building be demolished and replaced. The P&C, led by Ken Cavanough, got behind this need and helped ensure there was a new school building within a short time. Similarly, enclosures and creeks were no longer considered "fit for purpose" for a modernising, post-war nation. These 'places of shared social significance' were products of shared endeavour. Not uncommonly, local councils, when approached by enthusiastic community groups, tested the waters so to speak, inviting proponents, as was the case with the Carss Park Swimming Club in 1958, to commit to raising a sizable contribution as indicators of the seriousness of those involved, their ability to follow-through over a period of time, and as evidence that their dream had wide public support. The realisation of modern sporting facilities has always depended upon community support as well as individual tenacity.

Schools had long been at the forefront of Learn to Swim programs, an activity that emerged in NSW in 1897. The post-war population boom renewed pressure for access to local safe swimming options, as did outbreaks of infectious disease such as polio – new healthy, accessible facilities were increasingly demanded by school leaders and parents. The creation of the National Fitness Council in 1941, by federal legislation, also fostered impetus at local school levels to improve the fitness of Australian youth and, as a wartime creature, the new institution promoted the aim to better prepare them for roles in the armed services and industry. In post-war years, a mixture of peacetime reconstruction, growth, and the pursuit of a restored body, understood both individually and corporately, conjoined into a preparedness for future fighting capability: 'to create a citizenry ready to defend the nation' (Fischer).

This had been the official rhetoric after the First World War too. In 1920, the Federal Director General of Health, Howard Cumpston had spoken of his 'dream of leading this young nation of ours to a paradise of physical perfection'. The physical vulnerability of the body and mind had been made manifestly evident by the First World War's destructive force. Returned men and women carrying significant wounds presented for years afterwards a confronting reminder of war's devastation. It was inevitable that reconstruction after the war would be framed in both individual and collective terms, as well as an ambition in the present, and in a hope for the future. Images from classicism, commonly appropriated through the period's still-powerful Christian lens, portrayed the body in art and commemoration as an ideal as well as a hope in its resurrected glory. (Arden-Coyne, 2).

This perfection was rendered by artists and memorial designers alike in not only individual healing, a body restored to perfection, but in a community future. The State's principal memorial to those who serve in war, the Anzac Memorial Building in Hyde Park, illustrates these "before and after" messages – images of the devastating effects of battle, its fallen and its broken, are seen in its bas-reliefs and sentry-like figures on the external fabric which inside the

Memorial are transformed into hope for a future, represented in the child borne by its mother who, along with other women-folk, holds aloft the sacrifice of a dead soldier. The soldier's form has the sheen of a classically proportioned specimen of humanity awaiting the resurrection day (Stace, 41, 81).

The era's campaigns to improve the fitness of populations were also prompted by a science of wellness in mind and body. Increasingly, media images portrayed outdoor pursuits including swimming and relaxing in water side settings as desirable, and a tanned body exercising in the sun evoked a healthy body and spirit. Schools were funded through the National Fitness Council initiative to provide physical education and local councils were encouraged to develop and create new playgrounds, recreation facilities and swimming pools. The Fitness Council provided a link between national aims post-war – forging a new reconstructed community, albeit one girded for battle, but also a people enjoying the fruits of peace. The eminent Australian historian of the First World War, Charles Bean, who was also the principal instigator of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra (opened in 1941), saw this commitment to healthy, fit children as the key to building a safe and secure nation, playing a leading role in the Parks and Playgrounds movement during the interwar years and after.

The success of the modern-day Olympics also contributed to the enthusiasm for swimming in formal pools designed for competition and record-setting. Beginning in 1896, the revived Olympic Games established a cycle of renewal, every four years presenting a fresh opportunity for another generation of aspiring competitors on land or in the water to go faster than their predecessors. Australia had enjoyed early success in world swimming, with Annette Kellerman (in the 1900s and 1910s, before women competed in Olympic swimming) and Andrew (Boy) Charlton, gold medallist in the 1920s, becoming household names and evoking pride and inspiration. Further inspiration for civic officials to capture this spirit and somehow find ways to provide the best facilities to promote it, came from the First International Recreation Congress held in Los Angeles in conjunction with the 1932 Games in that city. The desire of the Olympics movement not only to provide a platform for elite sportspeople as spectacle and wonder but also to motivate active participation of the masses in sporting pursuits was becoming firmly established and reached a zenith in the decades following the Second World War.

Australia was represented at the 1932 Congress and produced new champions during the 1930s for whom to barrack and claim as a product of a healthy and desirable nation, but it was the 1950s and 1960s that were considered an Australian golden era in Olympic sports, across swimming, cycling and athletics.

Olympic standard pools had already emerged in the 1930s: Enfield (1933), Bankstown (1933), Granville (1936), and North Sydney (1936), each taking advantage of Federal Government unemployment relief programs. Liverpool Memorial Olympic Pool (1959) and Blacktown War Memorial Swimming Pool (1961) were two early post-Second World War pools that sought identification also with the legacy of Australia's wartime effort.

In January and in June 1960, Olympics and Empire Games Galas were held in the St George district with Olympic champions present to build enthusiasm and raise money for athletes heading to Rome. The effect was also to instil the Olympic dream into local youngsters. The ambitions in Kogarah led not just to safe, clean, community-friendly swimming spaces, but facilities that supplied Olympic dimensions and fuelled Olympic aspirations.

One press article cited that the St George area was home to 10% of the Cardiff Empire Games team in 1958. The Hurstville Rotary Club President's assertion that the district was teeming with potential Olympic talent indeed seemed true.

3. The Memorial Pool and Second World War memorialisation

The national online Monuments Register lists 52 war memorial swimming pools in NSW (<http://monumentaaustralia.org.au>). The State War Memorials register hosted by the NSW State Library lists somewhere between 36 and 84 such pools, but after accounting for a number of double entries, probably also lists a little more than 50 (www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au).

Termed by Lewi as 'Commemorative structures, honouring war service and affirming their role as significant community places', war memorial swimming pools sought to commemorate the fallen and survivors, those who had returned, who by their very existence stood as testimony to a free people going about establishing infrastructure for wide community purpose and made a statement about the achievement of peace and security. As places where families with young children could gather in health and safety, their dedication as a war memorial was 'a commemorative act that gestured towards the future and youth' (Lewi and Jordan, 212).

During the Second World War, almost one million Australians served in uniform from a population of seven million people. Every family would have had a member who had served or lived near someone who did. Returning to civilian life entailed a continuing commitment to the 'safeguarding (of) a modern, egalitarian and enlightened society.' Those who had served their country, now sought new utilitarian tributes to recall that legacy, and to express confidence in the future.

In fact, the Memorial Pool is consistent with Second World War memorialisation practice, and with Australia's significant history of volunteer effort for the benefit of the wider community (including efforts associated with war commemoration and with sport). A memorial swimming pool, being an amenity, is in the tradition of most memorials constructed after the Second World War, especially in areas like Kogarah that already had a monument built to honour its First World War generation.

After a second world-wide conflagration, many communities believed that the best commemorative response was to contribute to the enormous challenge of post-war reconstruction, leading to memorials that beautified (gardens, fountains) or met a civic need (libraries for the mind, halls for the spirit, pools for the body) all of which became more common after 1945. Kogarah RSL sub-branch built its own community hall, Colvin Hall, in 1944 which after the war increasingly became a home for youth activities, including band practice and athletics training, uses that were not dissimilar to the ambitions of the Salvation Army War Memorial Centre in Kogarah and the war memorial pool in Carss Park.

Community facilities were, in general, a different response to that made after the First World War, which had produced countless civic obelisks and honour rolls, although not without antecedent. For example, the nation's earliest First World War Memorial, erected in 1916 in Sydney suburb Balmain, which, as well as being a typical obelisk bearing on tablets the names of those who served, was a horse drinking fountain and streetlight taking advantage of the newly available civic water and electricity distribution.

The culmination of the First World War memorialisation in NSW, the Anzac Memorial Building in Hyde Park, dedicated eighteen years later in 1934, also has co-existent commemorative and utilitarian purpose. As well as its sacred spaces, it was a hub for veterans and widow services, dispensing pensions and medical consultations from its rooms, as well as providing spaces for returned servicemen's associations and other volunteer war support groups to meet.

The national RSL's resolution in 1963, criticising the 'indiscriminate use of the term war memorial' was aimed at projects motivated by tax advantages rather than those honouring wartime sacrifices. The war memorial tax deduction led to the strengthening of community commitment by generating a wider pool of funding sources and of community purpose through drawing on the recent wartime example of patriotic service.

Indeed, the resolution did not prevent the RSL getting behind many community war memorial projects that resulted in civic amenities, popular examples being the Remembrance Driveway between Sydney and Canberra (the longest war memorial in Australia, begun in 1954), and the El Alamein Fountain in Kings Cross (1961) shaped as a dandelion spraying water across a set of cascading pools.

The El Alamein Fountain evokes the association of Australia's aquatic and naval history with the War Memorial Pool such as that at Carss Park. The location of the Carss Park Pool has unique sea heritage associations – the proceeds from the sale in the 1920s to the Council of the original Carss family land grant were committed by the family trust to the Sydney Sailors' Home (located in The Rocks, Sydney), and the Park site provided homes for the lifesaving (1929) and later, the sea scouts, movements.

Similarly, in keeping with Australia's proud World War heritage of volunteering, the Carss Park Pool draws on the inspiration of volunteer forces raised in both world wars, the life-saving movement, and the war memorial movements after both wars which were commonly community-driven, developing community-funded projects with occasional assistance from local councils. The Carss Park Pool project was initiated by voluntary community organisations and funds were raised for its construction by these organisations using the encouragements provided by tax laws.



Conclusion

Kogarah War Memorial Olympic Swimming Pool is both reflective of its era and ambitious in its time, looking backwards to generations of hardship and forwards to a hopeful future, taking inspiration from both.

In the post-war years, the growth of a safe, free and peaceful nation was undergirded by community minded people. The pool is a tribute to such local initiative, and to tenacity to see a project through to its goal. After two world wars, active citizens sought to build, and rebuild, their communities, making their contribution by creating living memorials - civic infrastructure and recreational facilities that were a mark of respect and gratitude. Understanding how they endeavoured to express this respect and gratitude ensures we respect the commemorative integrity of the war memorial pool across successive generations.

Their respect was demonstrated through a continuation of the commitment made after the First World War to never forget; not only on Anzac Day and other days of official remembrance, but as citizens who could now return to their everyday lives because of the sacrifices made during wartime. The freedom fought for and achieved after almost six years of battle was expressed by people going about their business every day. Similarly, their gratitude was also demonstrated in this return to the everyday, thankful for the service and sacrifice that ensured a time of peace and the promise of a better future.

Many Australians, if not most, who had lived through the Second World War so soon after the First, knew full well the hardships that war brought, and they rose to the challenge. Post-war, Australians brought that same commitment to the task of rebuilding. They expressed hope, in body, mind and spirit, and in a spirit of community. The everyday was possible again, every day.

Passing through the doors of Kogarah War Memorial Olympic Swimming Pool fulfilled this ambition. Its proponents had dreamed of a facility that would serve the community in their time, and beyond into future generations. They shared their enthusiasm for providing a safe, healthy, place of recreation, suited to a modern nation, with others, working across organisations and allegiances to achieve their success. They imagined an Olympic standard facility that would be in keeping with the growing prowess of Australians in world competition. And, they sought to remind people as they raised funds, campaigned, and saw it through to its establishment, that the legacy of a wartime generation should not be forgotten. The new swimming pool at Carss Park was to be that generation's mark of respect and gratitude for sacrifices made during the wars. It was to be a War Memorial Swimming Pool in the tradition of Australian war memorialisation, particularly as it was practised after the Second World War.

We honour that generation, which dreamed and succeeded, by also remembering them, a grateful community that experiencing peace at last, sought to remember its past and take hold of its future, every day.

Sources

The account of the planning and building of the Pool is based on research of contemporaneous local newspapers, and the files of the Kogarah Bay Progress Association and those of Ken Cavanough, held at Clive James Library.

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