

## Australia pre 1950s

On-line photo archives are a rich source of information about early surfing, with libraries and museums having on-line photo collections, both in Australia and New Zealand.

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(a) Duke Kahanamoku at Freshwater - 1915. Three handboards and a possible bellyboard can be seen in the crowd.



(b) Dr. Huntly Gordon Higgins with fellow Scarborough Scouts (1932): H. Gorham, Higgins, R. Royce, C. Moore, C. Spivey, G. Knapton, Smith and Hosking. Recorded as absent were B. Forster and J. Atkins.

Source: Scout photo courtesy Robert Hosking.

## 1 New South Wales

Interestingly there are very few photos of prone surfing or boards in NSW, prior to the 1950s. In the 1915 photo with Duke Kahanamoku, small handboards are evident and possibly a longer board. It may be the case that the popularity of surfboards, then surfoplanes negated interest in wooden boards. There was also the issue of prohibitions on the use of surf-shooters from about 1911. While a letter from 1913, suggested use from at least 1906, the dangers

of surfshooting were reported in a number of articles such as the the 1919 Newcastle article calling for the ban on surf-boards to be re-introduced and a 29 January 1912 article in The Sun (page 8) reporting "numerous mishap" and that a woman was knocked down at Coogee and had to be resuscitated. A Melbourne Argus article of January 7, 1911 reported that surfboards were forbidden in Sydney and there were also concerns the local ordinances weren't being enforced (Sydney Morning Herald January 1913). NSW surfboard collectors have old wooden boards in their collections, though the origin of these boards is often difficult to establish.

**THE BATHING SEASON.**

**COUNTRY VISITORS PLEASED,**

The bathing season is now in full swing in Newcastle, and bathers say the facilities were never better.

Hundreds of country visitors have enjoyed their stay in Newcastle, and they can be expected to come again next year. Fortunately, the conditions during the holidays have been favourable for surf bathing, and the visitors spent hours in the water daily. The only objectionable feature was the re-introduction of the surf boards, and steps will have to be taken to put a stop to the practice, which is highly dangerous, when hundreds of men, women, and children, are disporting themselves in the breakers. Notices are posted on Newcastle Beach prohibiting the use of the boards, and the beach inspectors should see that the regulation is observed.

(a) Put a stop to this dangerous practice.

**SURF-BOARD SHOOTING.**

—♦♦♦—

"Board-shooter" writes:—

"In the 'Sun's' edition of January 22 I read with much regret that the Manly Council intend to suppress the splendid sport of surf-board shooting.

"I more than agreed with Alderman Heaton when he said that 'a number of young fellows get excellent sport from the boards, and if they keep away from the crowd they can't do any harm.'

"I and my six brothers have been board-shooters for over seven years, and have never had or caused an accident to anyone.

"In my opinion, board-shooting is infinitely safer than the ordinary method of shooting, as a man with a board never has to bury his head, and can therefore see all the time where he is going, which is not the case without a board.

"Again, a man who can use a board can steer as well as if he were in a boat. I, or any of my brothers, would undertake to steer through the thickest of crowds without touching a soul.

"It seems hard that the king method of breaker-shooting should be abolished by a few too old to acquire the art.

"Besides, surely Manly Beach is large enough to permit of both classes of sport. Why, then, be dog-in-the-manger, and prohibit board-shooting by reserving the beach for the paddlers?

If Alderman Neale had his way, he apparently would stop shooting altogether, and consequently surf bathing.

"I noticed in your issue of some months past that Mr. Cecil Healy mentioned that board-shooting was indulged in in South Africa. Why not here?"

(b)

Source: Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners Advocate, January 7, 1919 and The Sun 23 January 1913, page 9.

**SURF-BOARD SHOOTING.**

The Manly Council has instructed the bathing inspectors to see that the ordinance relating to the practice of surf-board shooting at Manly is in future enforced. Alderman Neale stated that he had seen no fewer than 10 surf-boards among the thick of the bathers.

Surf-board shooting, Sydney Morning Herald, Friday 24 January 1913, page 7.



Australian redwood board found under a house at Umina Beach. Photo Wayne Priestly



(a) Fanny and Ellie Cook, from Failford with cedar boards.



(b) Grays brand wooden bellyboards bought out to Australia by a Mr and Mrs Milne when they moved out to Australia in the 1950s. When visiting Port Macquarie they used their boards at Flynn's beach.

Source: Photo from Doust, J: Past days around Wallis Lake, its rivers and villages. c. 1999 and Port Macquarie Surfing Museum



## 2 Northern Territory

The Northern Territory is not known for surf and little is known about indigenous surfing in Australia, prior to the 1950s. The excerpt from a US documentary narrated by Ray Forrest demonstrates there might be a lot more to the story.



Aborigines of Arnhem Land, Australia, (ca 1950)

(a) Excerpt from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJ9tGC8fMvC> Aborigines of Arnhem Land



(b) Bill Gordon, 30-40s. Arnhem Land

## 3 Queensland



Greenmount 1912. Photo: Baker, T. Australia's Century of Surf



(a) Maroochydore c. 1924



(b) Winnie Moore 1924, Kirra

Source: Photos courtesy Gary Clist and Mooloolooba Surf Museum



(a) Ted Crease 1920s, Main Beach



(b) Ted Crease 1920s, Main Beach

Source: Photos Karen Wright



Main Beach c.1922. Longhurst, R (1994). Southport images of Yesteryear 1880-1955



(a) Wood boards from different eras.



(b) Wood skim boards (2'10" x 13 3/4" and 2'6" x 14") occasionally used as bellyboards on Stradbroke Island and Dicky Beach. Made c.1930s by Samuel Blunt, a Brisbane cabinet-maker. Grandson Harold recalls riding them as a child.

Source: Currumbin Surfworld museum and Gary O'Donnell.



"Young Surfers Paradise Life Savers preparing for the first ever flipper race at a Broadbeach Surf Carnival, 1947". Source: City Council, Local Studies Print Photographs LS LSP013723.





Flippers paved the way for bellyboards to be more than a shorebreak adventure. Source: City Council, Local Studies Print Photographs LS LSP013723.

#### 4 South Australia

Although poor quality the two photos below depict early surfing at Victor Harbour:” FAVOURITE SUMMER PASTIME. In the surf at Victor Harbour, South Australia, where swimmers are very expert in the use of the surf-board. Surfing has gained in popularity in New Zealand of recent years, and similar scenes may be seen, on summer days at Lyall Bay and other beaches round Wellington” (<http://images.slsa.sa.gov.au/>) and ”Surfers using wooden planks, near Victor Harbor. Petrel Cove and Rosetta Head (the Bluff) are behind the surfers” (<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>).



'Surfers with planks in Petrel Cove, c. 1926'. Source: EVENING POST, ISSUE 57, 7 MARCH 1936, PAGE 23. National Library of New Zealand.



'Favourite summer pastime, 1936'. Source: Photographer: Barnes, Doris Constance, 1894-1994. Victor Harbor Collection, State Library of South Australia .



(a) 1940s 4'6" South Aust. Hire board. SDR -Surf Dumper Riders.

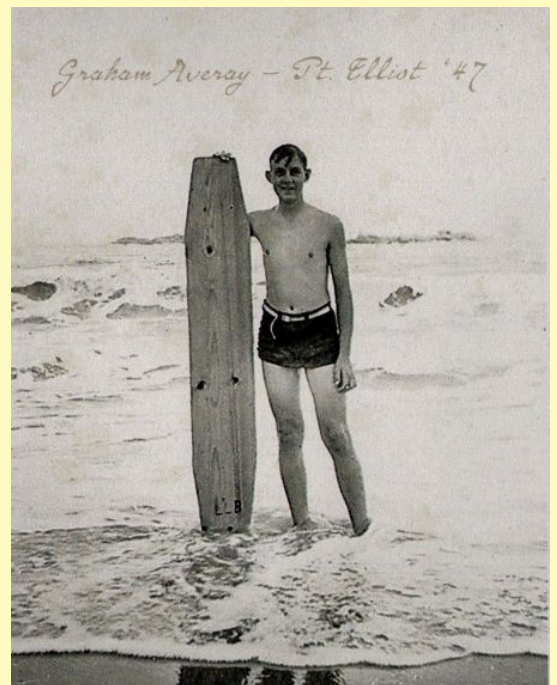


(b) 1940s 4'6" South Aust. Hire board. Bottom view

Source: Mike Brown collection.



(a) Jack Holder- 1944 in Bougainville.".. it was safer lying down"



(b) Graham Avery -Pt Elliot 1947.

Source: Tracks Oct 2003, p. 41 and Source: Reid, C (2019). Cactus.





(a) 1930s 5' oak and maple board. Deck view



(b) Copper plates fasten the board.

Source: Mike Brown collection

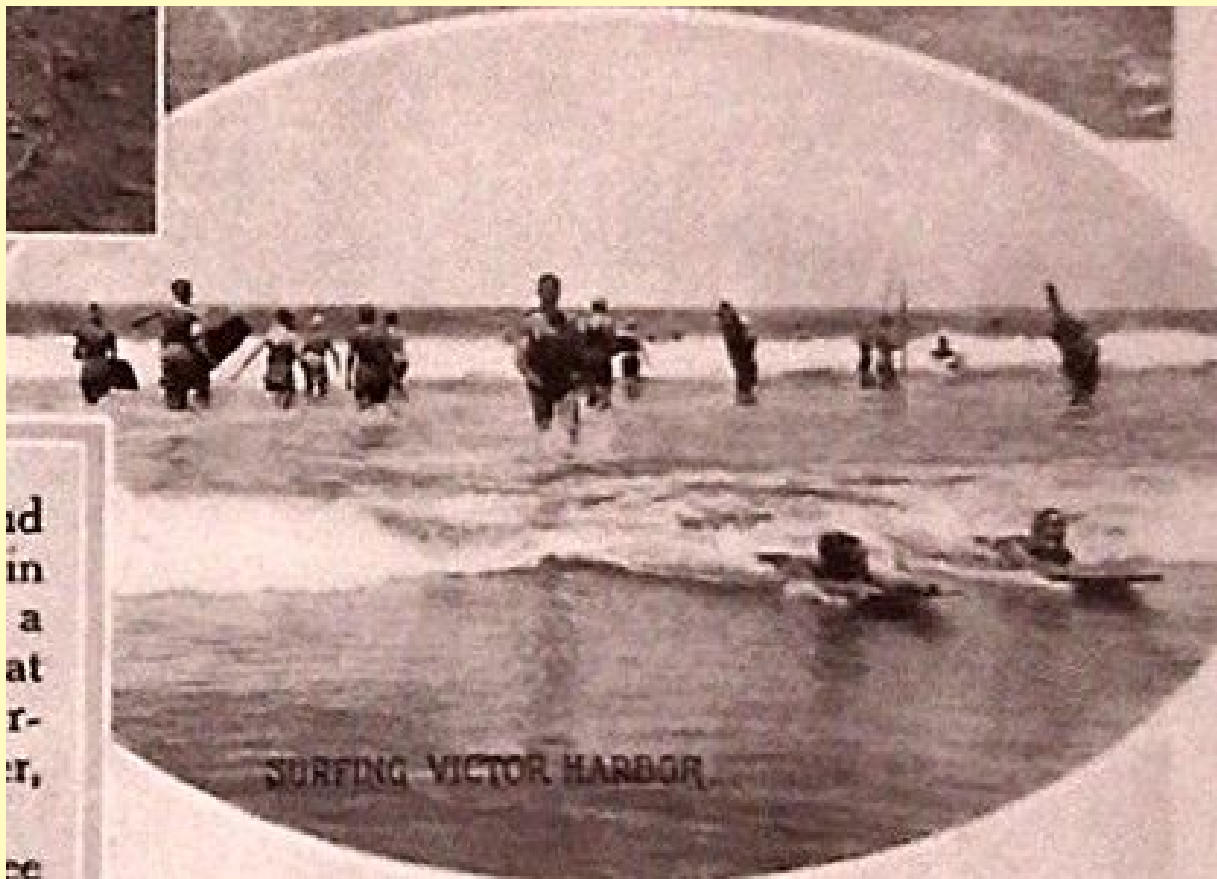


(a) Lamaroo reported to have been rented by Victor Harbour Hotel 1930-40



(b) Lamaroo nose

Source: 'Red Robo'



(a) Victor Harbour. Picturesque Australia c.1930.



(b) Lamaroo bottom

Source: [Insert by South Australian Government Publicity and Tourist Bureau, Adelaide](#) and "Red Robo" photo.



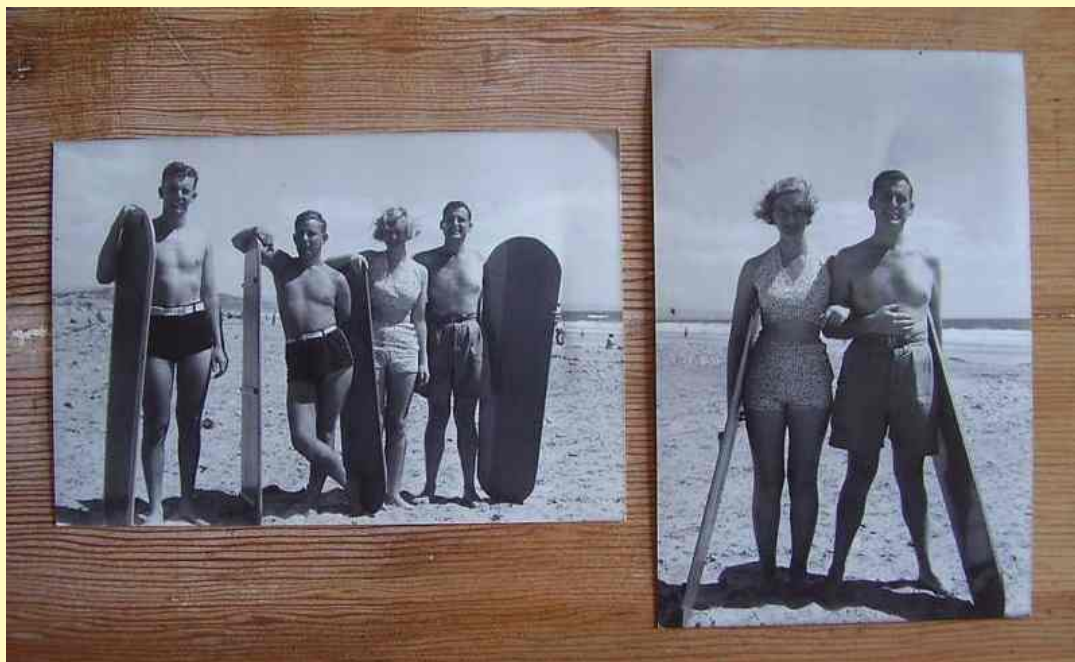
(a) Six foot, 1940s board



(b) 5'5" board

Source: Photos by Mike Brown

Mike Brown advised: "Story goes the guy who made them was a Patternmaker for Holdens down here at Peterhead Factory. This was in the 40's. The Yanks used to send down car parts for re assembly at this place Packards Caddys etc. Anyway he was a "Surfer" as was his wife The parts for cars came in wooden boxes. They were made of Cherrywood a hard timber ... He painted them "Holden Blue" ... Vee in the nose as you can see, 6' one for him, 5'5" for Mum. He made the brackets to clamp on the passengers side of his car. Very clever guy except his wife couldnt open her door as it was clamped with the board carrier."



Henley Beach. The boards were made (1939 and 1941) by the man on the far right (on war leave), next to his wife to be. Simon McLean sold the boards and a copy of the letter by the board maker at the first Mick Mock auction.

## 5 Tasmania

Despite very cold waters, surfing was popular in the 1930s. Surfing featured in newspapers of the day and at least one time merchant did a sideline in selling wooden boards. For more photos and information about early Tasmanian surfing see the Paipo interview with George Bills which includes photos of the Bill's family and other boards and as well as newspaper photos.

On 23 May 2013 Elizabeth Adkins, Maritime Heritage Coordinator (Department of Economic Development, Tourism



and the Arts) advised: "As for when these boards were first used in Tasmania? That's a tricky question to answer for certain. I think I mentioned a photograph in the Tas Archives & Heritage Office collection that shows three young men with two approx. 5-6 ft paipo style boards on a rocky beach in Southern Tasmania. That photograph is dated to between 1924 and 1927, so about the same time that the Thompson family were surfing at Clifton. I've not found a photograph in the newspapers earlier than 1928, which was a young boy holding a short belly board in the surf at Burnie in the north west. But by 1930 people were surfing on boards from the north west to the south and photographs of surfboards during the summer months were quite common as it became very fashionable. My best guess is that during the period of about 1910-1920, when 'surfing' is frequently mentioned in Tasmanian newspapers that this was a combination of surf-bathing, body surfing, a few belly boards and general messing about in the water. Tasmanians who went to the mainland could have surfed when they stayed at beach cottages and brought it home individually, but the Thompsons and Canes were the first known and named so far."

Elizabeth Adkins provided information regarding a J Fotheringham & Co., Launceston bellyboard from the 1930s-1940s, from the Low Head Pilot Station Museum. The board is described as follows: "Construction: Single plank of Huon pine, with two nailed battens on bottom, steam curved nose, square tail with hole for a rope. This board has a small metal maker's badge near the nose on the deck that reads 'J Fotheringham & Co., 118 Charles St. Launceston'. Fotheringham & Co Sport Store made and sold 'surfing boards' of Huon pine in Launceston and advertised them in the Examiner from the 1930s to the 1940s. These boards were made from 4 to 6 ft., were painted in a variety of colours, and would have been enjoyed from Bridport to Burnie along the North Coast, by men, women and children".

**RISBY'S SAY:**

To complete the joy of holiday time, secure one of our Special Surf Boards. They can be obtained in the following sizes at prices shown:—

4ft. long . . . . .	at 12/ each
4ft. 6in. long . . . . .	at 14/ each
5ft. long . . . . .	at 15/ each
5ft. 6in. long . . . . .	at 16/6 each

Varnishing, 3/ extra.

**RISBY BROS. LTD.**

Timber Merchants, Sawmillers, and Joinery  
Manufacturers,

175 COLLINS STREET, HOBART.

(Just across Harrington St. intersection.)  
Telephone 6545 (3 lines).

"FOR EVERYTHING TO BUILD ANYTHING."

(a) Risby advertisement

**SOLVE THE  
GIFT PROBLEM!**

**BUY**

**A SURFING  
BOARD**

All sizes now available.

'Phone or Call.

**RISBY BROS. Ltd.**

16 Elizabeth Street,  
Hobart,

"For Everything to Build  
Anything."

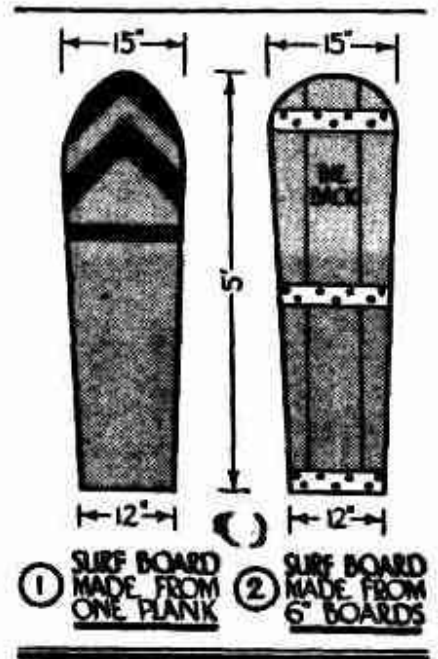
(b) Risby advertisement



(a) J Fotheringham & Co board, 118 Charles Street, Launceston, Tasmania.

**T**HERE are two types of surfboard—a free surfboard, and a towing surfboard, or, as it is often called, an aquaplane. Even boys who do not swim well will find that a free surfboard is buoyant enough to carry them safely through breakers. An aquaplane, however, should be handled only by experienced swimmers.

**FREE SURFBOARD.**—The easiest way to construct a free surfboard is to buy a plank of 7-8in. dressed pine measuring 5ft. x 15in. Shape the board according to the measurements given in Fig. 1; round off the edges; smooth



all the surfaces, and give three coats of lacquer in any colour you desire. If you wish you can paint or stencil a design on the end of the board. There is no need for battens. If it is not possible to obtain a plank of the dimensions given, a surfboard can be made from three pieces of 7-8in. x 5ft. x 6in. T. and G. flooring boards. Make battens to fit across the back of the boards at three places, and fasten them into position with several brass screws (Fig. 2). It is advisable to use brass screws, because they resist the action of salt water better than do iron screws. The shape can then be cut out as shown in Fig. 2, and the board can be lacquered. Carry the board out into the breakers as far as you wish, by holding the board edge on. When a large wave comes, turn towards the shore and throw yourself with the board on to the crest of the wave. You will be carried swiftly into the shallow water. It is great fun!

(b) 'Surfboards for Summer'

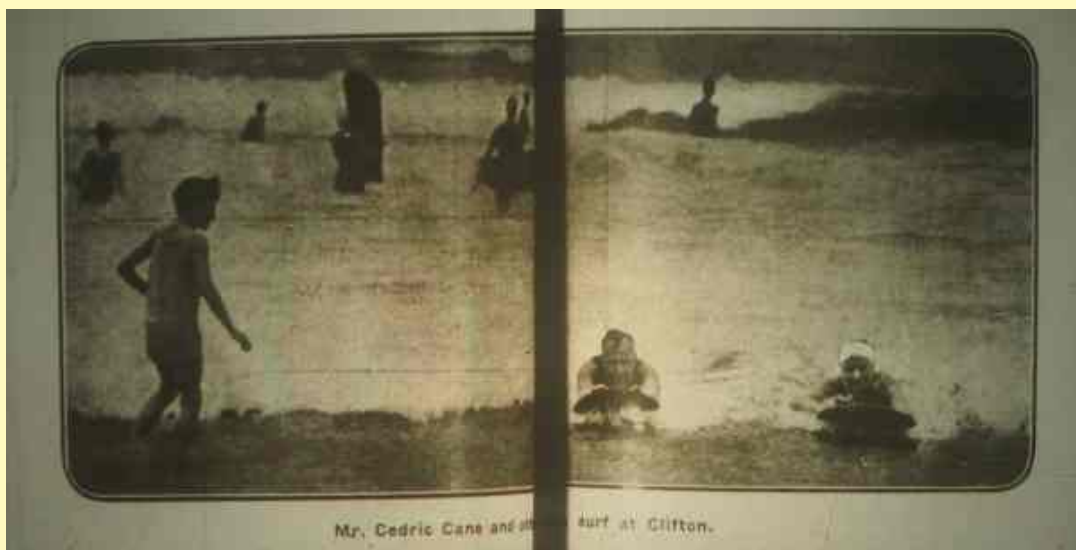


(a) Solid slab of Kingbilly pine bellyboard



(b) Tasmanian bellyboard

Source: Photos by Wayne Priestly and Murray Walding.

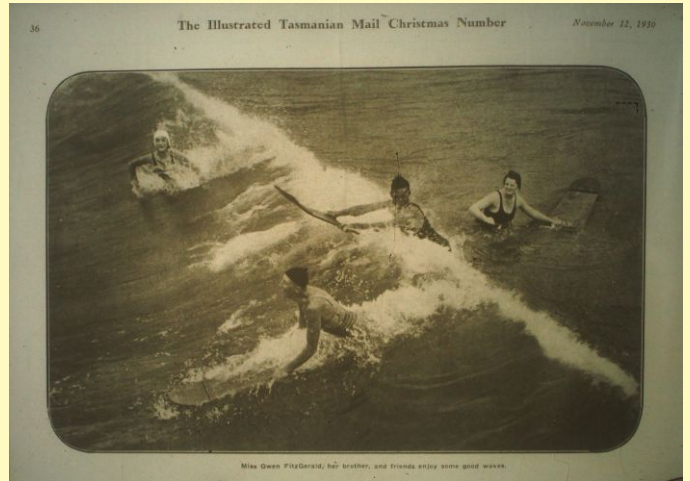


'Mr Cedric Cane and others in the surf at Clifton'. Illustrated Tasmanian Mail, January 14, 1931, pages 34-35





(a) Clifton Beach, late 1930s.



(b) 'Miss Gwen Fitzgerald, her brother, and friends enjoy some good waves'. Illustrated Tasmanian Mail, Christmas Special (November 12, 1930), p.36.

Source: Dianna Gee and W. Fellowes



(a) Bev Wright and friends.



(b) 'Surfboards and Beach Pyjamas': 'Mr Tom and Miss Gwen FitzGerald and Miss Betty Risby with their surf-boards'.

Source: Cliff Wright and Illustrated Tasmanian Mail, Christmas Special (November 12, 1930), p.39

The photo above of Bev Wright was taken 1948-1950. From the left: Pat Sharp (became a Carmelite nun), Val Feltham, Mary Allen and Bev Wright. The photo was taken at Dodges Ferry. Cliff's sister, Bev was about 5'4" so the board is approx 6'. Cliff's father had an upholstery business and the board was made by one of his contacts. Cliff's brother, Rex had been to Lorne for an interstate Commonwealth Bank swimming carnival and seen similar boards. His was the small board on the left (coloured red and cream). The other two boards were coloured blue, with a white boarder and black pinstripe. On each board is the respective owner's name - Bev and Sue. These boards were used at Park Beach in the 1950s; "Mr Tom and Miss Gwen FitzGerald and Miss Betty Risby with their surf-boards".

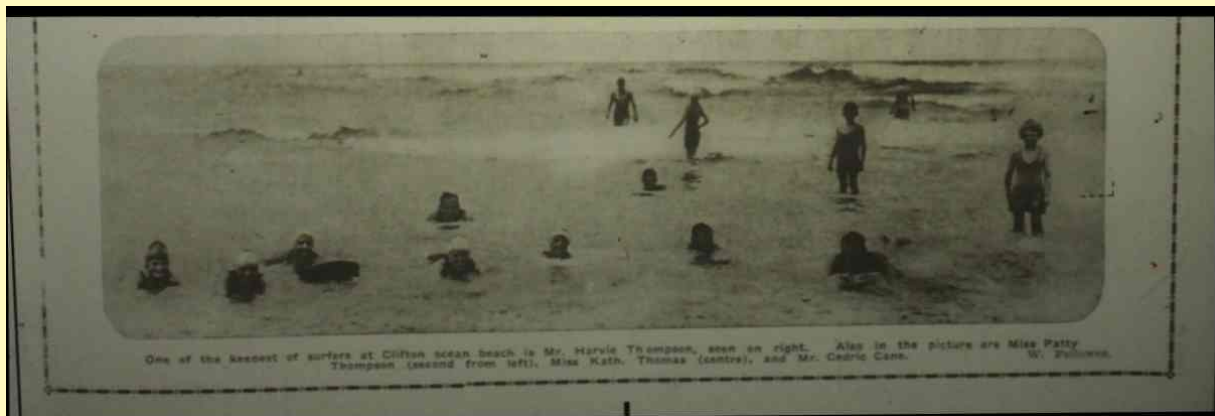


(a) 'Happy holiday-makers on the beach at Burnie'.



(b) Three happy surfers at East Beach, Low Head.

Source: Weekly Courier, February 15, 1928. Photo M.F Nichols and Weekly Courier (Tasmania), February 19, 1930. The Courier Pictorial, p. 27.



How they spend the summer'. Illustrated Tasmanian Mail, December 31, 1930, p. 29.



'How they spend the summer'. Mr Harvie Thomson's family at Clifton Beach'. Illustrated Tasmanian Mail, December 31, 1930, p. 29.



Bellyboard display - Carnegie Gallery in Hobart, Tasmania. Left to right: (1) Made for George's Bill's son, David, c. 1960s. (2) Nigel Bills ply bellyboard made for wife, Sue, c. 1960s. (3) Harvie bellyboard, hoop pine, made for his daughter Sue, c. 1925. (4) Harvie Thompson for his daughter Sue - 1940's (5) Harvie Bellyboard - solid timber, c. 1940. (6) and (7) - unidentified. Photo George Bills.



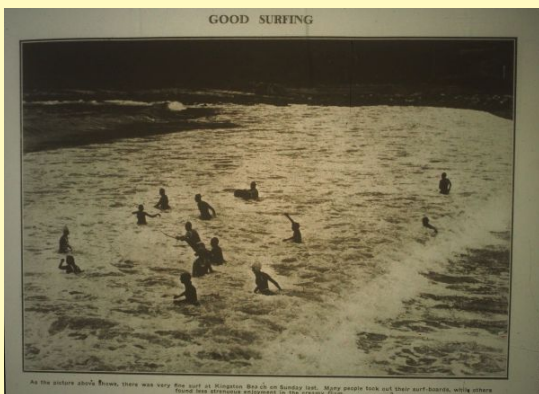


(a) H Thompson on cedar board



(b) Alan White's car. The board has an interesting sun design on the deck.

Source: Gee, Diana (1997). To Clifton or bust: a review of eight decades at Clifton Beach in Tasmania. Sandy Bay, Tasmania



(a) 'Good surfing'. "As the picture above shows, there was fine surf at Kingston Beach on Sunday last. Many people took out their surfboards...'

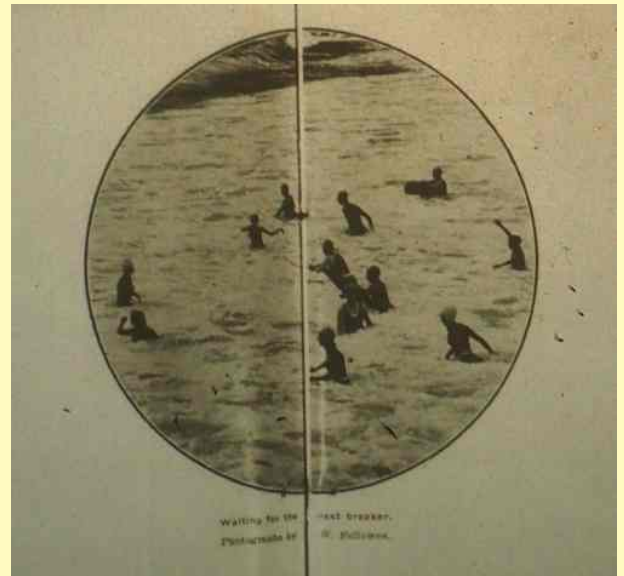


(b) 'Mr Cedric Cane and some young friends going down to the beach with surfboards and boats'.

Source: Illustrated Tasmanian Mail (1930, January 15), p. 37 and (1931, January 14), p. 34



(a) 'Snapshots that are winning "Weekly Courier" prizes: 'The Joys of Surfing '. Five shillings awarded to Miss J. Lade, Box 191 Burnie



(b) 'Waiting for the next breaker'.

Source: Weekly Courier, March 5, 1930, p. 34. and Illustrated Tasmanian Mail, Christmas Special (November 12, 1930), photo W. Fellowes.



Marion and Charlotte Smith in the foreground with their surfing parents. Photo from Gee, Diana (1997).



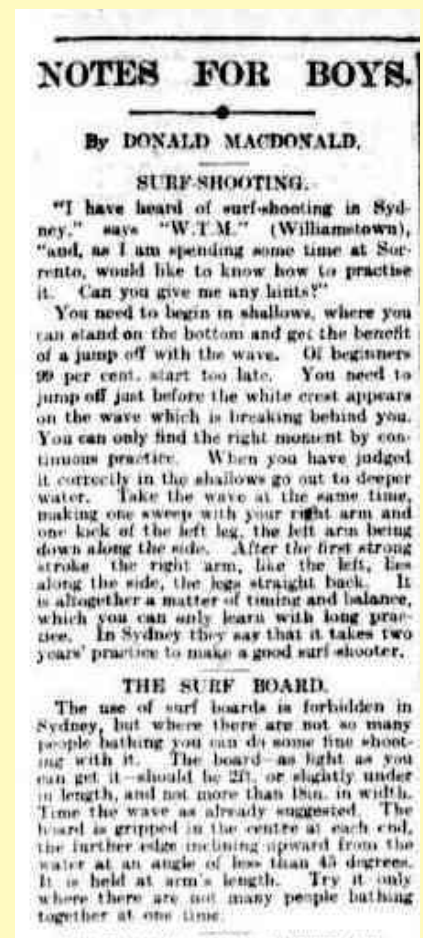
Two bellyboards at Von Weirdos Surf Shop, Bicheno. Telfords was possibly a guesthouse; Board on far right is 3'6" x 13.5" x 5/8" Risby, Source: <https://www.surfresearch.com.au/00000335.html>



Walding (2012), the author of Surf-o-rama (Walding 2008) describes the boards below, as follows: "The longest (green and cream) board is 1440 x 330 and appears to date from the late twenties. It has a metal plate slotted into the nose and held with brass nails. This board came from under an old holiday home and had been there since the house was built. Its solid timber as are all the others except the blue Hotel Pacific board which is ply and is the youngest of them. Underneath the Pacific wording, the words Kia Ora can be seen. This was an early Lorne guest house which no longer exists. The red board is from the Carinya - another long gone guest house. It's solid timber with metal nose plate. The red and yellow boards also came from under an old house and although they are made from solid timber the nose 'plate' is ply so I'm guessing they are WWII vintage to early fifties. Interestingly the 1911 Argus article recommends boards be less than 2' and 18" wide.

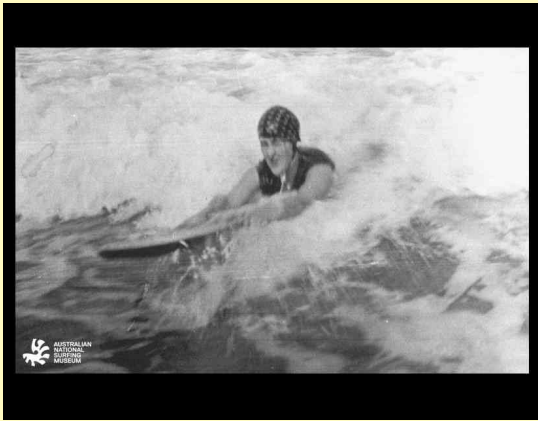


(a) Murray Walding boards



(b) Donald McDonald writing on surf-shooting

Sources: Murray Walding and The Argus, 17 January 1911, page 9



(a) Harriott Gill Pt. Lonsdale c1910.



(b) Grace Wooton, with friend W. Harrison 1915

Photos: Ian Duckworth and Wells, L. Sunny Memories..



(a) Grace Wooton, 1915 Pt. Lonsdale



(b) Grace Wooton, with friend W. Harrison 1915. Pt Lonsdale

Wells, L. Sunny Memories.



(a) Lorne c. 1918-19.



(b) Lorne c. 1918-19.

Photos courtesy Henry Marfleet.



(a) From the film Wonderful Warrnambool, c.1921



(b) From the film Wonderful Warrnambool, c.1921

Photos courtesy National Film & Sound Archive.





(a) From the film Wonderful Warrnambool, c.1921



(b) From the film Wonderful Warrnambool, c.1921

Photos courtesy National Film & Sound Archive.

On the East coast surfing was also popular. 'Two Girls and Three Men with Home Made Surf Boards, Cowes Beach, Phillip Island, 1934' shows Ivy Russell, Jimmy White, Frederick Russell, and friends, with home made wooden surf boards. Photograph copied from Mrs Nola Jones. Photographer unknown.



(a) Two Girls and Three Men with Home Made Surf Boards 1934.



(b) Cowes Beach 1930s

Photos courtesy Museum Victoria collection and Emma Haylock.



(a) From the film Wonderful Warrnambool, c.1921



(b) From the film Wonderful Warrnambool, c.1921

Photos courtesy National Film & Sound Archive.



Bellyboards in the surf: December 1947. Items held by State Library of Victoria. Collection is part of Victorian Railways collection

Source: [Surfing, Summerland Beach](#)



Bellyboards in the surf: December 1947. Items held by State Library of Victoria. Collection is part of Victorian Railways collection

Source: [Surfing, Summerland Beach](#)



Phillip Island 1934, Phillip Island 1950s and Summerland Beach (Source: Phillip Island Historical Society. Photos courtesy Laurie Thompson)



(a) Lightning Bolt



(b) Boards: 4 to 5'6 x 11 -15" used at Lorne and Torquay guesthouses

Photos courtesy Laurie Thompson and Bob Smith



Laminated hollow bellyboard and Terry Klemms 1934 whitewashed Tasmanian redwood board. Photos courtesy Laurie Thompson





(a) While the origins of the boards below are not specifically known, they are located in the Torquay area



(b) While the origins of the boards below are not specifically known, they are located in the Torquay area

Photos courtesy Bryan Hayden



An original Lightning Bolt, Nose with reinforcement, Protective brass insert in nose area. Bryan Hayden collection.



Vic Tantau, Torquay 1946. Photo courtesy Leonie Vrymoet

## 7 Western Australia

Rodney Hounslow recalled, surfing at age 7, around 1941 on boards like ironing boards (which they called surfboards) and catching waves off Big reef at Cottlesloe. They'd "crack" the whitewater and ride it to the beach, to calls of "beacher". The boards were reported to be made of pine, about 3' long, an inch and a half thick and narrower than a surfboard, with a square tail. He thought these boards wouldn't have survived as they were used for kindling in winter. These original boards were homemade as Rodney said there was no money to buy things after the war. He said over time boards got shorter like a bread board and handplaning took-over. These shorter boards would be swum out with the head down, while the longer boards were swum out, with one hand stretched out on the board and the free arm paddling. (Hounslow 2016).





(a) 1940s Wards Boat Builders (Cottesloe) 4'6 x 17 bellyboard.

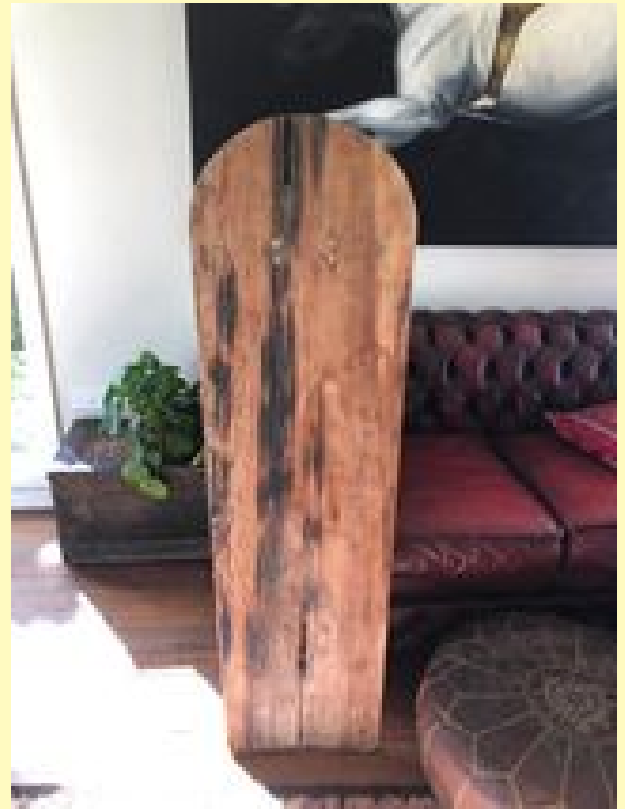


(b) Rod Hounslow believed the board belonged to John Jarrott.

Source: McKenzies Auction 2015 catalogue.



(a) Scarborough beach hire board - early 20th century



(b) Scarborough beach hire board - early 20th century.

Source: Photos courtesy Rhys Jones.



The surfing Scarborough scouts -1932. From the album of Dr. Huntly Gordon Higgins. Photo courtesy Robert Hosking.



(a) "Riding the Surf", c.1929



(b) "Swimmers with the type of board used at Scarborough" c.1929. Bros Kurvil & Freddy Bartlet on ends, others unidentified. Bob Brown photo.

Source: Originally in the Western Mail (1929, 24 January), p.63. Republished in Old Scarborough by Chris Holyday,.



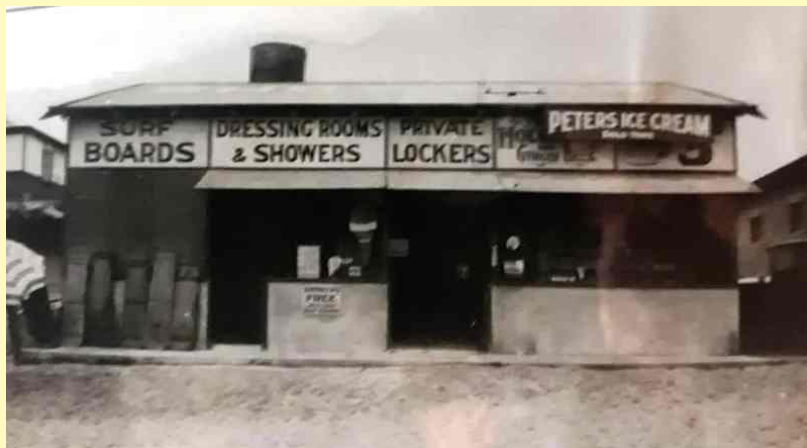


(a) Surfers at Scarborough - 1948



(b) 1932-Scarborough Beach, Geoff's mum 4-5 years

Source: Photo courtesy CBreez Kiosk Scarborough and [Surfing Down South](#); and Geoff ODwyer



McGovern's store c.1932, with boards to the left. Source: [Jim King's Surfing down south](#).