



## Friends of Manuka Pool

February 2021

### Welcome to Newsletter #6

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### 1. President's report

Our last newsletter was in early 2019 and a lot has happened since then. The ACT Government invested over \$2.4 million into upgrades for the pool with works including repairs to the building façade, painting, upgrades to pumps and the widening of the scum gutters.

The most difficult part of the renovation was obtaining replacements for the original imperial-sized tiles. They were eventually sourced in the Czech Republic. A graphic artist on the Gold Coast was found to replicate the original font used for the depth markers and 'deep' and 'shallow' signs.

For their excellent work, Friends of Manuka Pool nominated the ACT Government and ABA Construction for a National Trust Award, for which they were recognised for their *Outstanding Contribution to ACT Heritage*.

In July 2020, we sadly lost our most dedicated swimmer, Mervyn Knowles and his wife Beth. Merv was with his family at the opening of 'The Swimming Pool' in 1931 and swam at the later-renamed Manuka Pool every season he was in Canberra. His

last swim was in March last year and lane one will always feel a little emptier without him.

Manuka Pool has experienced some of its most difficult seasons in decades. Last season we had choking smoke from the bushfires, then damage from the hail storm and the onset of the COVID-19 lockdown.

This season the pool continues to operate under the new 'COVID-normal' while also celebrating its 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. The arrival of La Niña has given us a cooler and damper summer, which has been great for Canberra's vegetation but not so good for ticket sales at the pool.

We look forward to manager Bryan's celebrations on 9 February and FoMP will host evening talks with Frances McGee sharing stories about the servicemen on our Honour Board. David Hobbs from Philip Leeson Architecture will discuss the revised Conservation Management Plan.

We are also hoping to collect images of Manuka Pool across the decades, so if you have any old photos or memorabilia to share please contact us at [friendsofmanukapool@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofmanukapool@gmail.com). We also hope to have other celebrations later in the year.

Please enjoy the newsletter.

Rebecca Scouller  
President



Merv Knowles inspects Manuka Pool's new tiles Nov 2019  
(photo Karleen Minney, Canberra Times)

### 2. 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary swim caps

This is our third year producing limited edition FoMP swim caps. For the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of Manuka Pool in 2021, what better way to celebrate than a very special cap in gold and black, with art deco font and a birthday message. Only 50 of these have been produced and they are going fast at only \$15, so don't miss out!



If you would like to purchase one, please email [friendsofmanukapool@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofmanukapool@gmail.com) with your name, address and phone number, and make payment of \$15 by Electronic Transfer to: Friends of Manuka Pool, BSB: 325-185, Account Number: 03620765.

Please include your surname in the transfer. Delivery of caps can be made by arrangement, either personally or left at reception at Manuka Pool.

### 3. Swimming pools and war service

In the middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Australia became a nation of swimmers, creating a demand for town pools to augment rivers, creeks and lakes. After World War I, public pools increasingly replaced 'swimming holes' as they were safer; that was the rationale for the approval of Manuka Pool.

But it was after World War II that 'memorial pools' sprouted across the nation. Manuka Pool, named simply 'The Swimming Pool' until 1956, was officially opened on 26th January 1931. Canberra's first pool was not a memorial pool but it is intimately linked to the sacrifices of the World War II.

An Honour Board was installed in 1947 in memory of nine young men who were avid swimmers at the pool and gave their lives during World War II. In recent years, the Board had been sadly neglected.

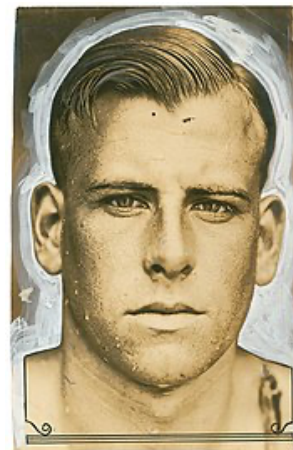
As part of its campaign for greater recognition and protection of the pool's heritage values, Friends of Manuka Pool commissioned the restoration of the Honour Board. At a ceremony on 12 March 2018, a refurbished Honour Board was unveiled in the presence of a number of senior military leaders and public service department secretaries.



The restored Honour Board

Drawing on various records, including war service records, Frances McGee and Nick Swain of the Canberra District Historical Society wrote a booklet containing biographies of the nine. (Copies of *Swimmers Who Gave Their Lives* are available from FoMP). Visitors to the pool are encouraged to take a moment to study the restored Honour Board located in the pool's entrance foyer.

Although often forgotten, Manuka Pool had a 'famous and idolised' swimmer, Andrew "Boy" Charlton, who was [captain](#) of the Manuka swimming club from 1934 and represented Canberra in the NSW state swimming championships in 1935. He was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of fame in 1972, having represented Australia in the 1920s and 1930s, winning a gold medal in the 1924 Paris Olympics.



Andrew "Boy" Charlton

While Manuka Pool is not a memorial pool, many public pools in Australia are dedicated to the memory of the war dead.

Tobruk Memorial Baths in Townsville is of particular interest because it shares architectural characteristics with Manuka Pool. Commenced in 1941, but not completed until 1951, Tobruk Pool has



an art deco façade similar to Manuka Pool's. Built in memory of servicemen who died at Tobruk, its Hall of Champions also honours great swimmers. Dawn Fraser trained there.



Tobruk Memorial Baths, Townsville

Along with Tobruk Pool, Townsville also hosts Long Tan Memorial Pool (built in 1972) and Kokoda Memorial Pool (built in 1963). Rockhampton also has a Memorial Pool, completed in 1945 to honour those who served.



Moruya War Memorial Swimming Pool was [opened](#) in 1965. On the way to the coast, many of us stop near the pool in Braidwood. It is in fact the Braidwood Memorial Swimming Pool, opened in 1966.

Memorial swimming pools can also be found in Gundagai, Camden, the Adelaide Hills, Glenorchy in Tasmania, [Mackay](#), Redcliffe (north of Brisbane) and the Corrigin War Memorial Swimming Pool in Western Australia's wheatbelt.

The Parramatta War Memorial Swimming Centre, 'dedicated as a memorial to the memory of those who gave their lives in the 1939-1945 war', was [opened](#) in 1959. It was demolished in 2017 to make way for a sports stadium.



Just why swimming pools have become linked in the national psyche to war service is a mystery to us. Perhaps readers can offer an explanation.

Auriol Weigold &  
Clive Hamilton

#### 4. Original pool tiles with artwork

When it was built in 1930, Manuka Pool (known then as 'The Swimming Pool') was tiled by master tiler Adam Ingram, whose son Ian is remembered on the Honour Board. So well laid were the tiles that they served their purpose for almost 90 years.

You may be wondering what happened to the old tiles when they were removed from the pool to make way for the upgrade in 2019. Well, all unbroken tiles were placed in crates and are in safe keeping in the Plant Room – about 400 of them. FoMP asked if we could have them for their heritage value and the ACT Government agreed.

The committee has discussed many options, from artwork to tiling projects and memorabilia, so that they are usefully preserved. Caroline Luke-Evered took several tiles and decided to experiment with decals, initially on Bunnings white tiles and then onto the pool tiles.

The artwork used is that of Mick Ashley (commissioned by FoMP). Pictures are printed onto Inkjet Clear Waterslide Decal Paper (thanks to Dr Decal and Mr Hyde), sprayed with clear acrylic, a picture cut out and placed in water then carefully transferred to the tile, sliding off the backing and bubbles wiped out. Another coating of acrylic spray and here are the results!



If you'd like one, or more, please contact FoMP at [friendsofmanukapool@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofmanukapool@gmail.com)

*Limited edition artwork prints*

In 2016, FoMP commissioned artwork by local artist Mick Ashley and we have made 10 copies of the 'lap lane' image. They are printed on the finest quality A3 Canson rag paper, thanks to Lucent Imaging who are experts at this type of artwork reproduction.

We have only five left. At \$60 each they are a bargain when similar quality artwork sells for at least twice that. We may do another run if there is a lot of interest, including production of the other artwork featuring the toddler pool.



For purchase of one of the last five, please email FoMP using above details and we will be in touch.

Caroline Luke-Evered

## 5. Rotorua Blue Baths

As children bought up in the bush near Okere Falls, compared to the local lake the water at Rotorua's famous Blue Baths was always bluer, better, brighter, and much more fun to be in. With throngs of noisy friends, a visit to the Rotorua Blue Baths was a highlight of many summer holidays.

My Whanau (family) and I lived in a little place about 14 km out of Rotorua. There were six of us kids, roaming the lush green countryside of Okere Falls, free and unsupervised, building huts, playing in the lake and walking through caves and tracks to the beautiful nearby water fall .Our brothers, sisters, mates and cousins were always full of mischief.

Even so, to leave our home turf for the big smoke of the Rotorua and the Blue Baths was a thrill. We would often be meeting cousins and spending the day there under the supervision of the eldest brothers and sisters while our mums and Dads worked.

Diving, swimming, and racing each other or playing tag filled the day. Buying an ice cream and drink was always an added treat. Eating a meal was a no no—in those days we were told no swimming after eating otherwise you'll drown from cramps. So it was a day for swimming until the chlorine had rendered our eyes bloodshot red and the sun turned our fair skin friends bright red too.

We loved it and remember fondly the smells and sounds and fun we all had.



My younger sister remembers having the choice of two pools, one smaller and warmer, the other cooler and refreshing, as she moved between the two. Learning how to swim at the blue baths helped us all to be confident swimmers in the lake.

We really had the best of both worlds, but it was only when we left home and later returned we realised the beauty of our childhood was in its



people and exquisite surroundings of pristine lakes, water falls, hills and natural bushland cascading to the Kaituna River, now a famous white water rafting wonderland for thousands of tourists each year.

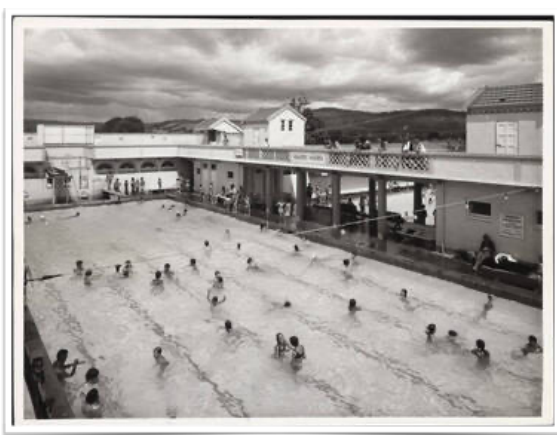
However, the beautiful Blue Baths and Government Gardens still hold special memories of our happy getaway to town.

(Some photos and words are shared from *A digital NZ story* by Zokoroa.)

The Blue Baths was built by Department of Tourism and Health Resorts to promote Rotorua world-wide as a geothermal spa. The first Blue Bath House was a smaller wooden building built in 1885 (see the photo above) and demolished in 1930.



The Blue Baths were opened in 1932 in a two-storeyed Spanish Mission-style building within the Rotorua Government Gardens. It was the first time in NZ men and women could swim together in a public facility rather than segregated bathing. Locals, out-of-towners and overseas visitors flocked to enjoy the thermal waters. Their popularity declined from the mid-1950s and in 1982 the Baths were closed, lying idle for many years until being modernised and reopened in 1999.



Blue Baths, Rotorua, 1971

The pool is now used as a special wedding and events venue. A small museum operates at the front of the building. It's definitely worth a visit.



The Blue Baths today

Arohanui  
Robby McGarvey

## 6. Where I learnt to swim

A popular history of Manuka Pool has the title *That's Where I Met My Wife*. For many of us who grew up in Canberra in the 1950s and 60s (population 50,000), Manuka Pool was where we learnt to swim.

My family came to Canberra in 1956 and we were allocated housing in Kingston until we moved to our own house in Narrabundah. At the time, Manuka Pool was very much an Inner South community centre. Our parents had taught us the basics of water safety and how to swim, but once we started school the formal swimming lessons began. After all, there were swimming carnivals to compete in and we had to be safe swimming in the nearby Murrumbidgee River too.



Close to 60 years on I asked my younger brother Colin if he could remember the name of our swimming teacher. He said of course, it was Mrs Job at Manuka Pool. She wasn't more than 5 feet tall he thought but she was a great teacher. Her lessons must have worked. I managed to do well enough to compete in the Interschool sports held at Civic Pool both in Primary and High School.

In *Stories of the Inner South*, collected and published after a Community Festival at Manuka Pool in 1992,

there are stories of Manuka Pool that bring back memories.

‘We lay on our towels in the sunning area at the back of the pool. The boys always nicked through the Manuka Oval and climbed the fence to smoke.’

‘I learnt to swim at Manuka Pool, and the boys used to stage rolled up towel fights.’

‘[My memories] are of learn to swim campaigns and it being freezing’.

After 30 years away from Canberra we returned in 2002. We agreed that we’d find somewhere in the Inner South, so we could be close to Manuka Pool. So 60 years after I learnt to swim at Manuka Pool, I’m there doing laps a couple of mornings a week – what a great legacy from Mrs Job.

Rosemary Hollow

## 7. Conservation Management Plan: Update

The current Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the heritage-listed Manuka Pool was prepared in 2006 and is well out of date. A new draft CMP has now been prepared by Philip Leeson Architects, who drew up the original one.

The update takes into account the various upgrades completed over the last 14 years, including the retiling of the pool and concourse undertaken in 2019.

The new CMP includes a brief comparison of Manuka Pool with other Federal Capital Style and Art Deco buildings in the ACT. It also has an overview of the works of the original architect, Edwin Hubert Henderson, and details on other pools erected in Canberra. It provides interesting commentary on bathing during the early 20th century, which reinforces the heritage significance of the Pool.

The views and requirements of stakeholders, including the manager Bryan Pasfield, are discussed in the CMP, along with findings from a workshop held with Friends of Manuka Pool. The workshop indicated that the pool was valued by the local community for both its historic architecture and the landscape setting.

David Hobbes  
PHILIPLEESONARCHITECTS



31 Days In, an image inspired by our very own Rebecca Scouller

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Like to become a member of  
Friends of Manuka Pool?

Contact us at [friendsofmanukapool@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofmanukapool@gmail.com)  
or pick up a form at the Pool entrance

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