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**ALL
NEW**

**Big pool of
talent
at Sandy Beach**

P6





Everyone's in the swim at **Sandy Beach**

Sandy Beach at Oatley Park is a naturally occurring swimming pool and the home of Oatley Amateur Swimming Club for all of its 84-year history.

WHEN the Oatley Park baths were built in 1909, with wire netting to keep the sharks at bay, they attracted swimmers from all over the district.

A regular bus service brought swimmers from Oatley station on Saturdays and Sundays.

The Depression years saw the construction of most of the infrastructure that visitors to Oatley Park still enjoy – the Castle, the road system and the present stonework at the beach. There was a dressing shed at the swimming enclosure, but it had room for only 12 people at a time.

Oatley Amateur Swimming Club was started in 1927 by a local alderman, Hedley Mallard, who lived in Douglas Haig Street.

His daughter Dot Walker, and her siblings, were all members of the club and Dot's children and grandchildren have followed the family tradition.

One of the controversial aspects of the club was that women and men could compete in the same races – which scandalised the conservative NSW Ladies Swimming Council in the 1950s.

They said it was immoral!





The netting enclosed baths are 365 yards long (about 330 metres). The swimming club holds regular races, depending on the tides, in the straight line along the nets.

All races are handicaps.

As well as having regular swimming carnivals, social functions – dances, tennis nights, bingo – were an important part of the club calendar.

For many years, the club trained their members in lifesaving skills and held “learn to swim” campaigns in the 1950s and ‘60s. After 1945 the club produced

a regular newsletter and organised film nights called “flix for nix”.

The most famous swimmer to wear the club’s distinctive blue-and-yellow cossie was Frank Stevens, who represented Australia at the 1950 Empire Games.

The club today has more than 100 members of all ages.

Juniors and seniors swim together in races such as the “kilometre” and the length of the baths, and regular 50-metres races are mixed with breaststroke, backstroke and other events.

Top left: racing at the Oatley Park baths in the late 1920s. **Left:** Harold and Betty Belcher. At 81 and 80 respectively, they are Oatley Amateur Swimming Club’s oldest competitors. Harold, who was born in Lloyd Street, first joined the club in 1930, competing regularly for 35 years. He re-joined 17 years ago when he retired. **Facing page photos:** Oatley’s distinctive blue-and-gold cossie has hardly changed since 1937 when the lower photo was taken.