

## HISTORY OF N & E TOWNS (BUILT) SURF BOAT

**provided by Geoff Stott original Warrnambool Boat Captain and Sweep from his history  
of Early Boating in Victoria**

Christmas time 1950 saw some members of the Warrnambool Surf Life Saving Club billeted as guests at the Sydney Surf Life Saving Club of South Narrabeen for a ten day stopover.

In that era, South Narrabeen had been dominant in the Blue Ribbon Rescue and Resuscitation Event competed for at surf carnivals in N.S.W. over a whole season, on an aggregate basis.

During 1949/50 season they again amassed the points which enabled them to win a trophy surf boat donated by David Jones Department Store and the well known Aeroplane Jellies Company of West Ryde, Sydney. Needless to say in that season it was very keenly competed for.

Beautifully crafted by renowned Boat Builders, N & E Towns of Newcastle, it was a much lighter and faster running boat than anything previously made, With its buoyant type bow design it had the "lift" necessary to get out and through a heavy surf while its sleek lines from amidships aft provided very fast running qualities. Either side of its bows, it bore the bright silver aircraft transfer of the Aeroplane Jellies Company, a byword in the dessert field in N.S.W.

Crewing up with the South Narrabeen oarsmen, the Warrnambool guests spent a lot of time rowing and wave cracking in the "Aeroplane Jellies" ably swept by the then welterweight champion of N.S.W. Johnny Naughton and Boat Captain Peter Doherty.

Impressed with the all round performance of this surf boat in the notoriously tricky South Narrabeen surf, feelers were put out as to whether it might be for sale down the track. The signs were encouraging. Although not normally crewed up together, five of the Warrnambool visitors delighted their hosts by making a post entry in the New Years Day 1951 Senior "A" Surf Boat Race at the South Curl Curl Surf Carnival.

Their entry was history making in Australian Surf Boating, it being the first time a Victorian crew had rowed in open competition in a Sydney Surf Carnival.

The crew was Geoff Stott (sweep), Stan Stevens (stroke), Steve King (second stroke), Ron Blackney (second bow) and Jack Ford (bow).

Renowned as a big wave beach, South Curl Curl really turned it on that day. With a huge sea running, water judges had to be brought round by motor launch from adjacent Freshwater Beach.

That morning two members of the host club were admitted to hospital after their surf boat was swamped and rolled by heavy dumping surf as they were attempting to lay the buoys for the day's competition.

Warrnambool beat the other three local crews to win their heat and on the day were one of only five crews to complete the course out of thirty crews on the programme.

During the heat after the buoy turn, a shark took up position and cruised along behind the blade of the sweep oar. Ron Blackney and Jack Ford weren't over keen when ordered over the side to get the nose of the water-logged boat up during the run in to shore. After a startled first look, over the side they went and surfed in like champions.

Stan Stevens recalled that on the way out to the buoys, he only heard snatches of the sweep hand's orders to the crew because of the combined roar of the dumping surf and high wind.

Following this heat, the referee, Lionel McDonald cancelled the carnival, deeming it unsafe to proceed in view of the deteriorating conditions and re-scheduled the uncontested events to the following Saturday.

The Warrnambool crew weren't able to contest the finals as their fortnight annual leave time had expired and they had to start the trip home on that Saturday.

After returning home to Warrnambool and following Committee discussion, it was decided to purchase the "Aeroplane Jellies" Surf boat when it became available. On the 30<sup>th</sup> October 1951 a cheque for £ 207-2/6' was sent off - £180 for boat, balance for oars.

Transport was arranged with Frank Collins Transport Service, at a cost to the Club of £18-15/- the boat being delivered in the month of November, 1951.

When the "Aeroplane Jellies" competition days were over in the early 1960's due largely to hull changes in the new tuck-stern type surf boats, Warrnambool Club's long serving Secretary, Harold Stephenson, being history-minded, sought and received permission from the Committee to purchase the boat for the nominal sum of one shilling thus preventing the boat captain from using it as fuel fodder for a barbecue.

Lacking storage space after selling his Fairy Street Bakery Business he arranged to have it shedded and stored at the nearby Nullawarre Bakery.

When the disastrous Ash Wednesday Bushfires swept through the Nullawarre District, by great good fortune the Surf boat survived the holocaust as very few, if any, of these N & E Towns double-ended surf boats can be found in Australia today.

After Harold Stephenson's passing, the Stephenson family stored the "Aeroplane Jellies" in the City of Warrnambool's Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum where it is currently awaiting restoration for incorporation in a static display of Early Surf Rescue Craft, for the interest of the many tourists to the City of Warrnambool, known statistically as 112,000 yearly.