TOGETHER WE SAIL

A social history of the Surrey Park Model Boat Club

SURREY PARK MODEL BOAT CLUB

Together We Sail

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We all sail together

Surrey Park Model Boat Club Inc. 2025

https://spmbc.org.au

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Together We Sail

PROLOGUE

There's something different about the Surrey Park Model Boat Club.

The Commodore walks into the clubrooms. Greets a group of guys – some sitting looking out the clubroom window to the small lake beyond where a few members have already launched their model boats, others are adjusting the rigging of their impressive yachts, and a couple of guys are solving a problem to do with a motor, whilst one or two stroll across to the sink and make themselves a coffee. Members slowly trickle in, lift their boats onto a table and prepare them for launch. Another day, another gathering of mostly retired guys as they focus on their interest – model boats. It could almost be a floating men's shed.

Nothing new about this I hear you say. Man has been building model boats ever since boats existed. The Egyptians used their papyrus rafts to move through Mesopotamia, Columbus sailed to the new world, the Spaniards, Portuguese, Dutch and British built fleets of elaborate warships, the Incas plied the massive South American rivers, the Polynesians used their balsa rafts with outriggers to explore the wide Pacific, wooden dhows were the backbone of coastal trade from Arabia to Africa and the Inuit hunted seals from their seal skin kayaks in the Arctic. For millennia the Australian Aborigines had used canoes and the Aztecs sent out canoes to engage with the Spaniards. Wherever there has been rivers and seas, there have been boats. Boats are the foundation of most civilisations and are integral to human history.

And model boats have long been a part of that tradition. Strange folk squeezed model boats into bottles and amazed everyone, pirate ships became popular with kids and with the advent of World War II plastic models warships captured the imagination, often replacing the Napoleonic lead soldiers which formed the basis of many boys' dreamings.

And then at some point closer to the present, along came Ed Billing.

'A former RAF pilot named Ejnar (Ed) Billing worked as an architect in the town of Esbjerg in Denmark in the early 1950s, whilst his wife ran a hobby shop called Vestjydsk Hobby. During this period in time, there were no model boat kits from which a boat could be built. Instead, there were ready made model boats. Mr Ejnar Billing usually displayed his built up model of a Danish Fishing Boat in his shop. On one sunny day, a Danish magazine saw this beautiful model boat displayed in the window of the hobby shop and requested that Mr Billing produce 50 built up models that could be bought for use in a competition in the coming summer. The work and time that would be invested in building so many models was a huge task for Mr Billing, so he came up with the idea of making the models as a kit that can be assembled together the same way you will build a ship. It was at this time the concept of 'plank on frame' construction which is now employed by all model boat manufactures around the world, was created by Mr Billing. The model boats used to be produced under the name

'VHT' Vestjydsk Hobby Teknik which was changed in 1958 to Billing Boats due to its increasing popularity among model boat builders around the world'.[1]

It is hardly surprising that model boats have become part of our DNA. Our history can be traced through model boats. Not just simple craft, but also sophisticated scale model reproductions. Whilst static boats dominated, in the past few decades we have moved into the wonders of steam and then radio-controlled boats and this has given new life to the hobby.

Wherever there are model boats, there are groups of men getting together. This is the story about one community group in suburban Eastern Melbourne.

So where do we start? Would you like a list of the original committee, all of the Commodores by date and of course the Secretaries to the club.[2] Would you like to know about a constitution and club rules? Or the number of members over the years? Well, we *will* cite some of this essential information, but mainly we will tell the story of those make up the Surrey Park Model Boat Club located in Box Hill, an eastern suburb of Melbourne.

[1] (https://premiershipmodels.com.au/product/wasa-2-model-ship-kit-billing-boats)

[2] See Appendix 1

FOUNDATIONS

The Surrey Park Model Boat Club story starts 141 years ago.

Melbourne had passed through the great gold rush of the 1850s and by 1880 it had grown to 280,000, and by the end of decade 445,000. For a time it was the second-largest city in the British Empire, after London. During the boom of the 1890s, Melbourne had reputedly become the richest city in the world. In terms of area, Melbourne was already one of the largest cities in the world.[3] Ornate office buildings up to 12 storeys high rivalled those of New York, London and Chicago. 'Marvellous Melbourne' was the greatest Victorian city of the British Empire.

Our area of interest, East Burwood and surrounds, had been under cultivation since the middle of the nineteenth century. Apple, cherry and pear groves were in abundance, and they became a major source of produce for Melbourne's burgeoning population. The land boom was underway. Housing estates were starting to replace the orchards, main roads were well established and the rail service had reached Hawthorn.

But by 1890 the boom had drastically slowed. The average price per acre of Melbourne land, once at £303, fell back to £154. The average home value was 56.5% of previous peak levels and one-in-ten houses were repossessed. The number of vacant homes in Melbourne rose to over 12,000 and Melbourne's population fell by 50,000 between 1891 and 1893.

Forty land-boom companies and building societies in Melbourne and Sydney had failed by March 1892 and by May, fifteen of the twenty-eight banks in Australia had either closed or suspended withdrawals.

House prices in Marvellous Melbourne would continue to decline until 1903 and not recover to their previous heights until 1917.

Into this environment in 1884 steps a hero of our model boat club, the Haughton Park Brick Company, for without it there would be no hole in the ground, no lake and no Surrey Park Model Boat Club as we know it today.

Haughton Park was a new estate on the corner of Canterbury and Elgar Roads Box Hill. The Haughton Park Brick Company Ltd was established and the Box Hill Brickworks formed in 1880. In 1886 it changed its name to the Box Hill Brick Co Ltd. just in time for a land boom followed by a bust. The hole was already deep and when workers struck water, operations became unviable. In 1891 it failed to pay a dividend, and production was suspended the following year. It included 44 acres and an old deep clay pit half full of water. The pit was abandoned and the company started a new quarry to the north.[4]

Ownership changed in 1905, but the site remained as a vacant quarry and became known as the 'Surrey Dive' which was used as a local swimming hole by the locals.

Brick production recommenced in 1911 and in 1913 the company changed its name again to the Standard Brick and Tile Co. Ltd. in line with rising demand for bricks. The

[3] Wikipedia

[4] HO 217 354 Elgar Road Box Hill. HLCD Pty Ltd

surrounding land was also known as Haughton's Paddock and it was regularly used by the Surrey Hills and Box Hill cricket and football groups.

The original quarry gradually flooded and was left as a hole with 60-foot cliffs towering over a deep lake. The mythology was that the pit was bottomless. Not that this mattered to the locals. Kids would ride their bikes down to Haughton Park, and braver souls would dive in from the cliff heights. This became a local attraction, with watchers coming to see the spectacle.

Swimming was becoming more popular in Melbourne and around 1892 a licence had been issued to Captain William Kenney to build baths at Brighton Beach in the Shire of Moorabbin. The baths were not well built and there were various complaints about their safety and they were considered 'a disgraceful eyesore' by many. New baths were constructed and leased to an operator in 1910, and in 1928 Brighton Council took over management of the baths. Men had access between 6:00am and 9:00am and mixed bathing was permitted until 10:00pm.[5]

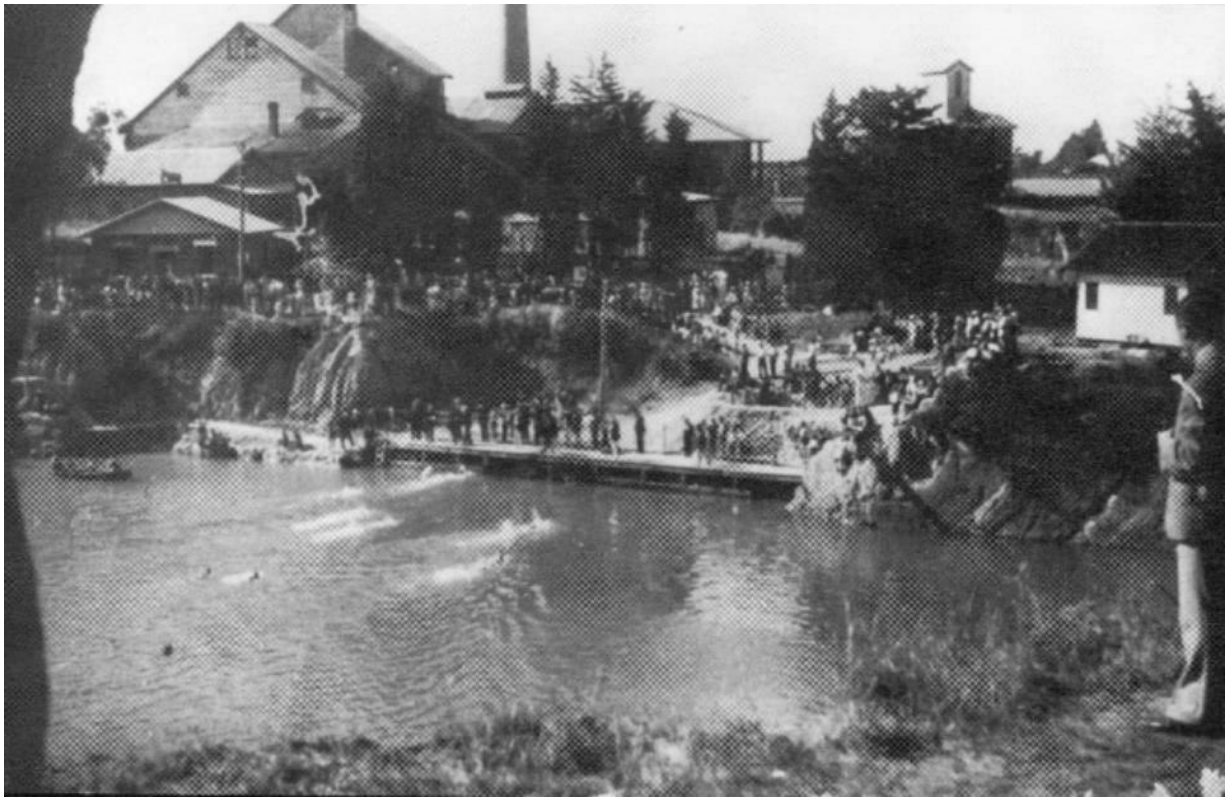
Whilst all this was happening in the affluent southern suburbs, the Box Hill boys were on the move looking for opportunities to have a serious swimming facility in their area. In 1904 a group of Box Hill footballers gathered at the abandoned clay hole in Surrey Hills. They got seriously organised and formed the Surrey Park Swimmers' Club. They prepared a community petition and pressured the Nunawading Council to purchase the clay hole which was to become the Surrey Dive. There was considerable opposition to it, with Councillors arguing about the huge cost 'of levelling and filling the virtual moonscape.' [6] The area was fenced, not that it stopped our intrepid Surrey Park Swimmers' Club.

Council in 1906 resolved to purchase the reserve for £3,000 for the growing community and convert the quarry into a 45 feet deep swimming facility with surrounding picnic areas. After more controversy, Council agreed to lease the Dive to Surrey Park Swimmers' Club for a guinea a year provided the club spent £10 a year to make it safe. The quarry hole was 100 metres across and 110 metres the other way. Swimming was restricted to those aged over 16 and Council was relieved of any responsibility for people who chose to swim there, and the wearing of swimming trunks was to be rigidly enforced.[7]

[5] https://localhistory.kingston.vic.gov.au/articles/660

[6] O'Donnell G, Fog On The Dive p17

[7] Tim Callahan, ABC News 2018, The Secrets of Box Hill's Surrey Dive, Melbourne death trap lake



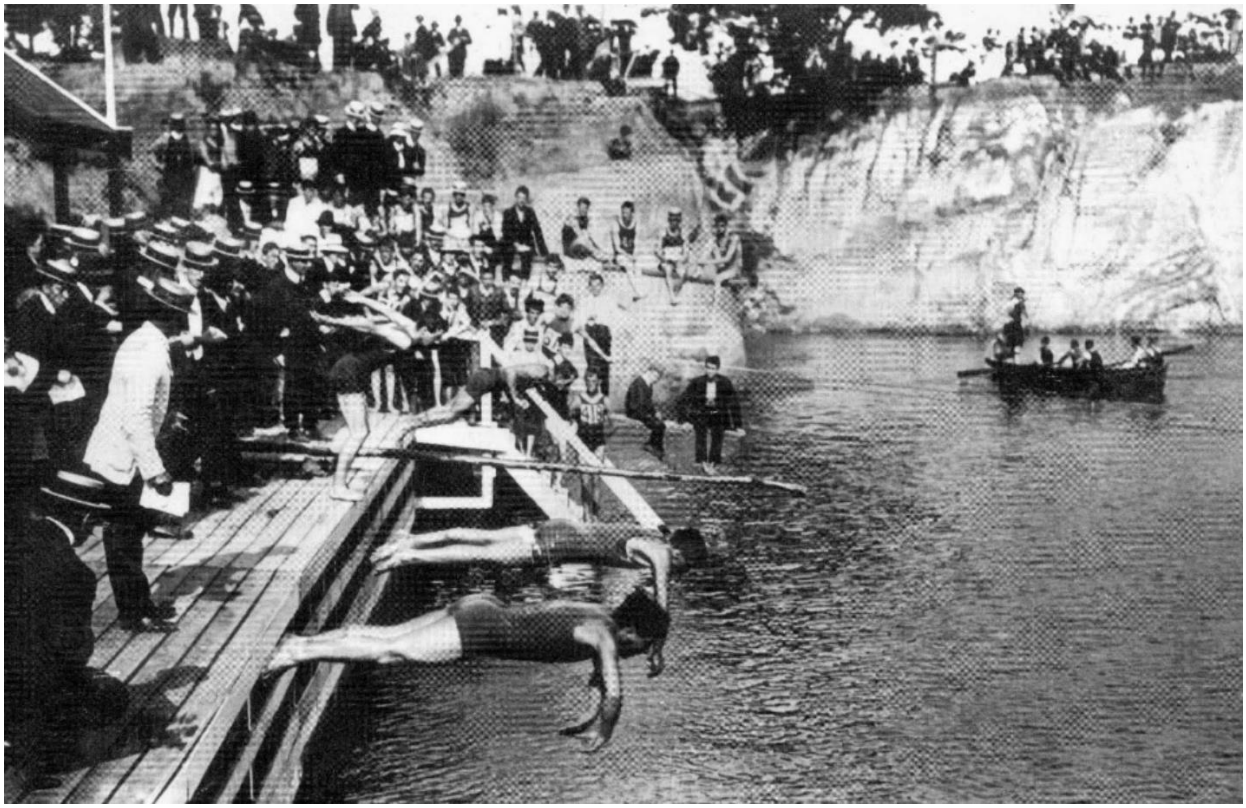
Surrey Park Dive 1914

"To get down to the Dive you had to pass through a wire gate that was patrolled by Mr Pruden. We learnt ways to sneak in without him being distracted. Then once in you had to confront your fears and jump into the green water."[8]

Another local (A R Bacon) was also in for some fun:

"Accordingly, we climbed the fence, stripped off our gear and spent a happy hour at the Dive. You can't beat leaping off the Crow's Nest at about 1:00am in the raw. After swimming was all over we donned our suits, climbed back over the fence and walked home in our suits that unfortunately did not wind up in very good shape.".[9]

[8] R Whitelaw from Melbourne Australia. https://swimmingholeheaven.com/vic-surrey-dive.htm
[9] R Bacon ibid 2022



Surrey Park Swimming Carnival 1905

So, let's sign off on the history of the site at this time. The Standard Brick and Tile Company operated on the adjacent site to the Dive from 1913 and included an 18 chamber Hoffman Patent kiln and developed four additional brick presses. The brickworks were taken over by the Co-operative Brick Company in 1938, which ceased production in 1942 during the war and reopened in 1946. In 1952 the works were converted to electricity, and in 1966 were taken over by the Brick & Pipe Company which operated the brickworks until August 1988 when the plant was closed. Today one can see the impressive industrial legacy of the tall brick kiln chimney and associated buildings which serve as a reminder to the origins of the site.

Box Hill Brickworks

Disused Brickworks Quarry

Now turning to the role of swimming on the Dive. A history of dedication and struggle had eventually led to the establishment of a pre-eminent swimming club with a glorious history. You can read all about it, warts and all, in *Fog On The Dive* by Gerard O'Donnell.[10]

Here are some highlights, as we take up the commencement of an entirely different type of club:

- **1904**: a group of Box Hill footballers and others form the Surrey Park Swimmers' Club and significant swimming carnivals were organised.
- **1918:** 12 Surrey Park swimmers killed in action during the Great War. The club was nearly defunct.
- **1923:** there was almost no interest in the club and the decline of the Dive lead to many complaints by Surrey Park residents. 'Lusty rodents have taken possession of the Council's white elephant Surrey Park' wrote one correspondent to the Box Hill Reporter.
- **1929:** disaster struck and all the Club's records were lost in a blaze that completely destroyed the Club rooms and men's dressing sheds.
- **1930:** a new constitution changed the name of the club to the Surrey Park Amateur Swimming Club. A new brick club room was built but abnormal rainfall raised the water level by 20 feet in a single night and the foundations were undermined and the rooms collapsed. Another club house was built on a new site.
- **1930**: women were finally allowed to join as full members. And membership rose to over 300, including 156 women and girls.
- **1933**: a 10 lane course had been laid-out over 100 metres making Surrey Dive the first Olympic standard pool in Australia, and the deepest.
- **1939:** the Club moved to a newly built Box Hill City Baths.
- **1968**: a severe drought hit Melbourne and the Dive's water resources were used to clean the roads and to water plants.
- **1972**: another severe drought. Council closed the Dive as it was a 'dirty stinking waterhole.'
- **1981:** the dilapidated Surrey Dive was redeveloped as an ornamental lake**.**

The Surrey Park Model Boat Club has a lot to thank the Swimming Club as guardians of the Dive and for developing its aura, glamour, majesty and reputation.

[10] O'Donnell G, Fog on the Dive -100 years of the Surrey Park Swimming Club. Published by the Surrey Park Swimming Club Inc. 2004

Surrey Park redeveloped as an ornamental lake

Surrey Park Lake Bicentennial Project Opening 1988

EARLY DAYS

So, the Surrey Park Swimming Club had found a new home at the adjacent Box Hill Aquatic Centre and the brickworks was no longer.

It's late 2024 and my car is weaving through the traffic snarl in Box Hill – buses, trucks, shops displaying every service and wares, but most particularly Vietnamese and Chinese Australians industriously making a life in a land of opportunity. This is not the community that existed when the SPMBC was formed in 1988. So I drive into the car park of the Box Hill Town Hall to find out more about the origins of the model boat club. I weave my way through a series of passages to the door of the Box Hill Historical Society Inc.

I am greeted by Helen Harris the Secretary– enthusiastic, organised and dedicated. Fortunately, Helen was a former Box Hill Mayor (always handy to have good connections - saves a lot of time) only to be told that she also had connections to the Surrey Park Model Boat Club in its earlier days - bonus.

Helen directs me to a catalogue of local newspaper clippings and a folder dedicated to our model boat club. I sleuth may way through the gripping articles and order copies of photos of the early days of the Dive.

And then one of the Club members, Colin Smith emerges from the woodwork and is introduced to me. He can talk and then some. Then other notables in the club also start to show their light.

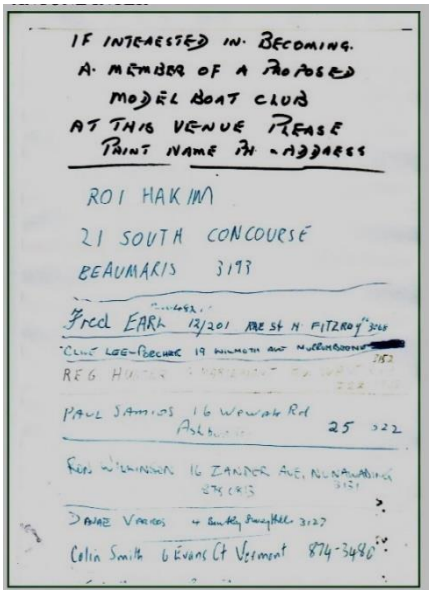
It all started around 1986 or so when a flood of leaflets were distributed to model shops and car parts stores, seeking interest from those who would like to form model boat club. Memory of names is a bit rusty, but Colin thinks that Ron Wilkinson may have been the author and distributor of the leaflets.

Eventually a date was set for a meeting at the Dive and an enthusiastic group volunteered to form a committee.

- Ron Wilkinson – a dedicated yachty. Member 1 of the club
- Grant Riddell - a maintenance electrician at Holden. Member 2.
- Reg Hunter – a furniture factory manager (?) Member 3
- Colin Smith – self-employed structural and design engineer. Member 4
- Stuart Andrew – shop owner. Member 6
- Graham Ryan – tram mechanic. Member 10
- Adrian Brewer - model boat shop owner (Float a Boat) and designer of the club logo. Member 27
- Doug Merrie – Council officer. Member 29

Colin recalls at the very first committee meeting they argued and pontificated about a name with suggestions such as Nautical Models Club and Melbourne Maritime Models Club and other posh sounding names, but they eventually settled on Surrey Park Model Boat Club (SPMBC).

These were heady days. The garnering of potential members was not a sophisticated process, but it was effective. A handwritten notice was posted on a board inviting '*anyone interested in becoming a member of a proposed model boat club at this venue to please print your name and address below'.* Some of the names of the early adopters who were to become founding fathers of this fledgling club included: Roi Hakim from Beaumaris, Fred Earl Fitzroy, Clive Lee-Porcher from Murrumbeena, Reg Hunter, Paul Samois from Ashburton, Ron Wilkinson Nunawading, Graham Ryan from Reservoir, Don Armstrong Blackburn, Jan Mitchell Ferntree Gully, David Mc Leof Blackburn, and so the list goes on. Some of the names scribed on the board have faded into history, but we get a sense of the catchment area of interest.



Colin Smith (Member 4)

The Start: Early recruitment drive

There are three current members of the Surrey Park Model Boat Club who attended the first AGM in 1989: Adrian Brewer, Colin Smith and Ken Burnell..

The Club was finally legally registered with the Box Hill Council and operated under an annual operating licence of $300 per annum.

Activities and organisation details were quickly arranged and in 1989 Graham Ryan the Hon Sec. called the first AGM. That meeting considered the 'finally adopted' interim Constitution. The Certificate of Incorporation was officially granted on the 25th of October 1989 (No. A 0019663 P).

The Constitution, along with occasional amendments remained largely unchanged until 2024, when the Club decided to move to the Model Constitution for incorporated bodies, an umbrella document that applies to all such bodies.

In the first year, 1988/89, there were 32 members, but it soon grew to 60, and then in a rush it grew to 71, but due to 8 'not bothering to pay their dues' and 2 resignations due to health, the total was 61 by year's end. If you then add family members (hope

you're keeping up with the arithmetic) 'we are up to just on 80 members'[11]. By June 1990 membership had grown to 90. According to a reliable authority (*Bilgewater*) 'this makes us the biggest model boat club in Victoria and one of the biggest in Australia'. According to the Secretary (Graham Ryan) the Boat Register included 250 models with another 50 in the slips. Twenty-three classes of boats were represented and the club classified anything that floats as a model, and this included ducks, a kettle, a RC controlled plastic Coke bottle, flashing light beacons, a lighthouse and two flying boats. Then there were the club barges, an oil rig, and a hydroplane.

It is to be noted that there were 11 'steamers' on the boat register in July 1989, and this is an appropriate place to acknowledge the role and expertise of steam propulsion within the club right up to the present. Steam model boats require a depth of expertise, together with stringent guidelines for safe operation. The steam enthusiasts in the club form an important niche group and their models demonstrate the depth of expertise within the club.

Early members of the SPMBC started to machine their own steam plants, and with the emergence of commercial products (Monaham in the USA and Baylis engineering in Britain, followed by Saito in Japan) steam engines and boilers became more available for model boats. In more recent times the trend has been to turnkey engines and boilers. Now China has entered the market and it offers a comprehensive range of products[12].

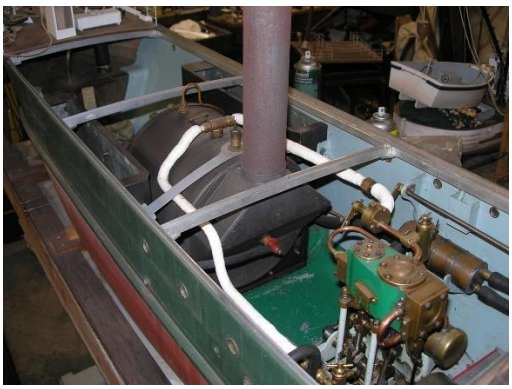
The ingenuity of the Surrey Park Model Boat Club members is constantly on display. The steamboats are not only a pleasure to watch but also demonstrate high levels of construction skills. These craft require a high level of expertise, and the club operates steamboats within a strict safety framework as the boilers are under constant pressure.

[11] Bilgewater Christmas 1989

[12] Information sourced from John Godfrey and Philip Ham, SPMBC members 2025.

Steam boats

Coal fired steamer boiler



Coal burner furnace installed

The coal fired steamer, **Earl of Pentland**

It is necessary to jump around a little here. Let's return to a more chronological history of events as we dig deeper into the early years of the Club.

We can get a sense of the scope of the boating activities from the register compiled in February 1989 and updated in July of that year (Table 1).

Table 1: SPMBC Model Boat Register

Model types	**February 1989**	**July 1989**
Miscellaneous	20	25
Paddlers	1	3
Motor launches	8	18
Small wooden vessels	3	3
Coastal	1	2
Fishing trawlers	7	12
Oil rig/supply	2	2
Yachts	13	21
Funny boats	3	6
Fast electrics	4	13
Square riggers	2	6
Steamers	3	11
Lifeboats	2	9
Freighters	3	4
Battleships/cruisers	3	14
Destroyers	2	5
Frigates	0	3
Corvette	2	6
M.T.B.	7	14
Tugs (port)	11	22
Tugs (ocean)	3	6
Aircraft carrier	2	6
Submarines	4	8
TOTAL	**105**	**219**

This is an impressive start and has not been exceeded since that time. A 109% growth rate in 5 months is good going. The *Bilgewater* of September 1989 reported that "There are many more that the owners feel are not yet complete enough to go on the list, so the final number is anyone's guess. Some of our members still think that a static model is not good enough to be nominated – this of course could not be further from the truth as there about 30 such in the club, and it comes to mind what a member said recently when talking about this subject – I wish I was good enough to make static models. As one member said at the time, 'I am very proud of my collection (of static models) and will be even prouder the day I get round to finishing them'. Some things never change. There were around 18 (8%) static models on the register, owned by 8 members."

The new model boat club took off with a bang. By Christmas 1989 there was not only an effective Committee but also a range of sub committees including a Safety Committee (Lawrie Barber) which focussed on safe battery charging, a Programme

Committee (Des Priest), the organisation of a Display Group (Grant Riddell) and Fast Electrics Committee (Daryl Wilkinson) and the 1990 Fixture Committee.

It did not take long to establish a calendar of events. This included a sailing competition, Healesville Agricultural Show display, a Club model run down the Yarra, a Night event, Barge Towing competition, a Pairs competition, Skipper & Engineer competition, Buy/swap/sell auction, Round the Island Yacht Race, and a Family Party at the Dive for Christmas. Not bad for the first year. Anniversary Trips were also organised around this time. Jumping forward to 2005, it is interesting to note that the club held a ladies' day at Surrey Park.

The second Anniversary Trip took 65 members on the old steam tug "Wattle" along the Yarra and around the docks, accompanied by a jazz band. This was repeated in late in 1990 when 30 members, families and friends converged on Hastings marina for a sail on the Lady Nelson, a square rigger. Don Armstrong of the SPMBC Research Department then made a static model of the Lady Nelson for the Polly Woodside Maritime Museum. Two new lighthouses were added to the Club's water features.

The club met every Sunday but due to increasing demand there was increasing interest on Saturday meetings as well.

The club held two Regattas each year - the Frostbite Regatta in July and the Sunburn Regatta in February. Also annual events soon became established, including a Night Regatta. The model boats sail quietly within the shadows of the lake, decked out with coloured lights. Today some of the models come with the sound of big band music. This event and others are a thrill to behold, especially for the very young, not to mention the young at heart.

Bilgewater newsletter soon became established as the voice of the SPMBC. The Christmas edition was 40 pages. It was a major effort to produce, and the following description demonstrates the commitment of the members. The October 1990 edition describes the initial compilation which was done on a Wednesday each month. 'I send out word and about a dozen or so of the gang come to the clubhouse and help to put the odd 5000 or so sheets in order, to be clamped in the power stapler. I do all the envelopes at home before I go, so that on the night, as the issues come off the stapler, they are put in the envelopes among with any supplements. Then each item is checked back off a master list. Next step is that those members who can drop in and take those particular ones. Next step is postage to all others'[13].

[13] *Bilgewater Christmas 1989. Graham Ryan*

Night sailing regatta

The story of model boat developments at the Club is for another document but suffice it to say that there have been a wide range of models built and they represent a very proud part of the history.

A footnote to the history of boat modelling needs to be added here. Model radio controlled boats in the earlier years were operated on set frequencies. Originally there was only one frequency band available for both aircraft and surface (car, boat etc) models, 27MHz which only allowed for 7 radio controls to be used simultaneously. Most boats were on 27MHz but you had to carefully select which frequency to use in case of interference. For example, Citizens Band (CB) radio was on 27 and clashed. The club later changed to 29 MHz but still operated on crystals. The frequencies used by club members are shown on a board in the clubrooms today, and it represents an historical artifact.

Over time the mix of boat models changed. In the early years most of the model boats were plank on frame construction, and with the introduction of fibreglass a whole new era of model building took hold. Hulls were designed, carved out of polystyrene foam, then covered in brown paper and white glue for the plug. Great innovators included Grant Riddell, and Geoff Clarence who designed a parallel sided freighter hull that could be split apart and a large or small section added. Grant also created very large-scale Murray River paddlers and made his own Stuart Turner steam engines all on a tiny Taco lathe, according to club member Colin Smith.

There was also a strong focus on scaled electric powered models as sailboats became available at an affordable price.

There was a future design breakthrough in later years with the introduction of 3D printing. More of that later in our club story.

But back to the main story. In 1987 Box Hill Council adopted the construction of an ornamental lake on the site of the famous Surrey Dive, on which the SPMBC was located. Work commenced in January 1987 with the grading of the site and the sealing of the base. The Dive which had been partly filled in the 1970s, was levelled and sealed with a clay layer, a small island was constructed as part of bird sanctuary and the shoreline was attractively landscaped by 1988. A playground was built on adjacent land. The project was funded by Council ($300,000) and Federal and State Governments funded the balance of $79,500. The Lions Club donated two electric barbecues. These works provided a template upon which further developments were to be undertaken. Photos from around 1990 show a red brick clubroom, a set of steps leading down to the lake, and two short docks protruding into the lake.

On 23 July 1990 a licence agreement had come into force and Council signed and sealed it on 22 October. SPMBC was to be the committee of management and an annual fee of $300 was applied.[14] That was the time when the Club took over formal management.

Colin Smith, a long time club member, takes up the story:

'The clubroom was very dilapidated with rough bare board floor, a big sliding door opening onto the lake and a side door. There was a dark and very damp shed at the side with no lights. I remember scrubbing, then painting the floor and walls to brighten things up. Outside the facilities were basically non-existent with only a gravel path down to a timber edge to the lake. There was no jetty. Probably its best feature was a large rock in the lake and on the left hand side a small channel to sail through but only for the brave. There is no record of the demise of the big rock.

The quay was in dire straits, so we replaced it and did all the digging ourselves. I think Johnny Johnson supervised the works. I know it was hard yakka slicing all that sticky mud out while the water level was at its lowest due to a drought. We got it done before it rained, but boy it was hard graft.

Bloody weed infestation of the lake was another challenge. There was time when the useable water was only about 6 inches deep due to the weeds. Allen Hicks loaned us his 12 foot speed boat and he made a drag bar which hung below the boat and sat on the lake bed. As the boat powered forward, it dragged along cutting the weeds. I think we filled four skips on that weekend and lots of fish came out as well. Great fun was had by all but again it was hard yakka. I seem to recall that we did it twice over the next few years.

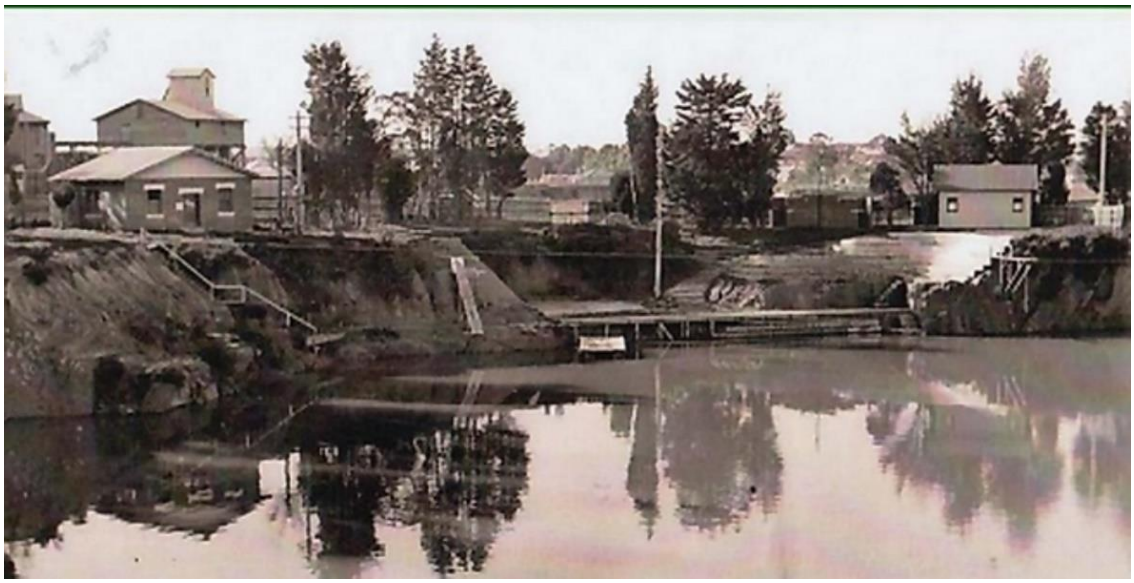
Around this time Council installed a wooden jetty that we didn't want but were overruled. We said it would be covered in bird droppings in a short time and no one would use it. We were proven right and it fell into a state of disrepair and eventually fell down and Council removed it'.

The next significant development in the club's facilities occurred 11 years later. The Committee had become increasingly aware that the club's facilities were at capacity and Council invited the Club to make application for a Victoria Community Facilities Funding grant in the 2007/2008 round. With additional funding from the Federal

14 (G Limmer, Group Manager, Administration and Deputy Town Clerk. 12 November 1990).

Government a major extension was added to the eastern end of clubrooms, including well-constructed docking and viewing platform added. The extension was officially opened on 13 April 2011. These improvements resulted in the magnificent facilities that remain to the present. Surrey Park Model Boat Club is the proud manager of a world class feature through the on-going support of Council.

The evolution of the clubrooms



Surrey Dive pre-1988

New dock constructed by club members 1995

Clubroom 2010

Clubroom extension opened 2011

Clubroom extension opening plaque

Whilst the club grew internally as a highly active organisation, it also turned its attention externally and started to develop links into the community. From its earliest days the club was represented at a wide range of community events, and this has been maintained to the present. Several times a year club members present their model boats at aged care expos, wellness promotions, community fun days and many more. These occasions provide an opportunity to present the club to the public and recruit potential new members. But the primary motivation is just good citizenship. Who can tell the impact on young children who are attracted to the lake to see the tug boats sailing by with their funnels pumping out a plume of smoke, or the thrill of seeing fast boats racing around the course or the grace of the yachts as they tack around the course. It is not just the children whose fascination is satisfied but also the dads who look on with admiration. What value can you place on these opportunities for families and community members.

These are the source of childhood dreams and imaginations, which, as the years go by, grow into professional interests in sailing and trades. The models on display are of the highest order and showcase the talent of the members. These events also contribute to community development. The Surrey Park Model Boat Club activities on the lake add colour, depth and interest to life in the district. At a time when digital technology can lead to dislocation and introversion, boat club activities contribute to social cohesion.

Model boat building skills on display

Naval Boat Day

Launch

Historic Yacht

Cabin cruiser

Paddle boat

Yacht

Snow rigged

The club draws together a group of men with a wide range of skills and experience. It includes engineers, boat builders, sailors, a plethora of tradespersons, not to mention members who have neither technical skills nor experience, but bring a willingness to learn the art of model boat building. As at 2025, some of the professional backgrounds of the membership includes a former Airforce Officer trainer of FA18 jet pilots, an accreditation professional responsible for ensuring that helicopters meet strict airworthiness standards, a former boat builder whose interests include model boats design and construction not to mention model trains, trucks and all sorts of transport, engravers, TAFE teachers, musicians, car and model aeroplane enthusiasts, and so the talent list goes on. No matter what the problem, there is someone in the club who often has a high level of skills. And it is this factor that makes the Surrey Park Model Boat Club far more than a group of men playing around with boats.

Skilled model building on display

Peter Eames: one of his many models

Paul Candela: Best Model 2024

Feeding the Sailors

For most members, the club also provides a source of companionship. Members meet twice a week for boating activities. A steady trickle of boats can be seen wheeling in from the car park every week. And as they arrive at the clubhouse there is already a group of men huddled over the models discussing the frustrations and joys of their boats. Others just come sit by the lake and take in the picturesque setting as boats sail around the course, and talk about everything – but mostly about boats. A barbecue is provided each club day and this draws everyone together, as the tomato sauce runs down their chins.

The depth of the social interaction extends beyond social chit chat. There is genuine care for the welfare of every member. Each year around two to four members die, and on most occasions the club is represented at their memorials. The majority of members are retired, but not all. Many have been members for decades. This is both a strength and a challenge, and the club constantly seeks ways of achieving renewal and growth. It achieves this through the dedicated work of a very professional committee of management. The Surrey Park Model Boat Club not only has facilities which are the envy of many, but also matches this with professionalism and care for each other.

Men and their boats

Hard at work in retirement

And still engaged at any age

The committee keeping the club afloat

INTO THE FUTURE

Recent technological advances have made it possible for hobbyists to literally print a model boat. This process is called 3D printing and it opens up exciting new possibilities for model boat builders, whether they wish to print an entire model or just some fittings.

3D printers come in many shapes and sizes and your choice will depend on your budget, the type of material that you wish to print and the size of the objects that you want to print.

There are basically two processes on offer. Additive Printing, builds models by progressively adding layers onto a heated build plate, while Resin Printing, using liquid resin and a beam of light from a photo-electric cell, sets the resin in the set shape.

So how does this technology help the budding model boat builder? One option is to print the parts from a plan using the same techniques as traditional model building. Alternatively, you can search the internet where you will find 20 million sets of files from a vast array of options, and print the parts required.

For example, the model of the Grand Banks 46 cabin cruiser shown below has only 26 printed pieces, mainly hull and superstructure, with the balance of the model being hand made from wood and other materials.

3D printed cabin cruiser

So is 3D printing the way of the future? Well, maybe, but there are still limitations. The process, while faster than traditional wooden model boat building, is still slow. A large object may take as long as 3-4 days to print on an open frame printer, meaning that a large boat hull could take weeks to complete. Another limitation which is particularly relevant to model boat building is waterproofing.

Whilst 3D printing is exciting, it is doubtful that it will ever totally replace traditional wooden model boat building. If you feel inclined to move into the future, here's some starting advice. First, find someone who speaks 'digital English'. The current 2025 Commodore of the SPMBC, Garry Bellairs, is a leading edge exponent of this new skill, so start with him. Second, take a look at the Appendix to this history. If after that you wish to proceed, and do master the required skills, you can boast of being a New Age model boat builder.

WHAT SUSTAINS US

After all this, I finally sit staring at my computer screen and wonder just what is the Surrey Park Model Boat Club and what does it all mean?

Is it just a men's shed? Well, yes, it is, but that does not encapsulate it as an organisation. Certainly, the club includes members with an amazing set of skills and experiences, and this is evident in the range and quality of the models on display. Model boat building is not for dummies, but, if you are challenged by technology there is someone who will step forward to give you a hand.

And this is the point of the club – every member has something to contribute.

The members are sustained by their common interest and by the opportunity for companionship. We are blessed with marvellous facilities and a very hard-working committee of management. Every day as you come down to the club, chomp into a barbecued sausage and make yourself a coffee, you will find another person to chat to. Often, you'll talk about boats, have a sail or just sit an enjoy the natural vista of the Surrey Dive. And sometimes, you will become a part of the challenges in people's lives and have the opportunity to be a good listener or to provide support.

The Surrey Park Model Boat Club is the complete package.

What started as a hole in the ground has been transformed into a community treasure.

6. PHOTO GALLERY

A. More Than Boats: a pictorial record 2025

Video Duration: 18:27

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bMnSyYwqsY

Printed version: Copy & paste into a browser & press enter

Digital version: Highlight link, press control & left click on the above link to play

B. Surrey Park Model Boat Club, 21st Birthday, 2009

Video Duration: 21:33

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPZS1_k2sCU

Printed version: Copy & paste into a browser & press enter

Digital version: Highlight link, press control & left click on the above link to play

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Commodores/Secretaries and Life Members

Year(s)		Commodore	Secretary
1988		Club President	Ron Wilkinson
1989		Ron Wilkinson	Graham Ryan
1990		Doug Merrie	Graham Andrew
1991		Graham Ryan	Dennis Champion
1992		Grant Riddell	Dennis Champion
1993		John Johnston	Dennis Champion
1994		John Johnston	Pat Knight
1995		John Johnston	John Kush
1996		John Johnston	Paul Noble
1997		John Johnston	Paul Noble
1998		Gary Foster	Paul Noble
1999		Gary Foster	Paul Noble
2000		Ken Clements	John Johnson
2001		Tony Smith	John Ferguson
2002		Tony Smith	Nessie Kinder
2003		Grant Austin	Nessie Kinder
2004		Grant Austin	Ken Burge
2005		Ian Jemmeson	Ken Burge
2006		Ian Jemmeson	Ken Burge
2007		Ian Franklin	Ken Burge
2008		Bruce Rodda	Ken Burge
2009		Bruce Rodda	Tony Goldsworthy
2010		Ian Jemmeson	Tony Goldsworthy
2011		Ian Jemmeson	Tony Goldsworthy
2012		Bob Owens	Tony Goldsworthy
2013		Neil Spencer	Tony Goldsworthy
2014		Neil Spencer	Tony Goldsworthy
2015		Grant Austin	Tony Goldsworthy
2016		Tony Weaver	Martin Hopper
2017		Tony Weaver	Tony Goldsworthy
2018		Tony Weaver	Tony Goldsworthy
2019		Gerard O'Donoghue	Tony Goldsworthy
2020		Gerard O'Donoghue	Tony Goldsworthy
2021		Gerard O'Donoghue	Tony Goldsworthy
2022		Gerard O'Donoghue	Tony Goldsworthy
2023		Gerard O'Donoghue	Tony Goldsworthy
2024		Garry Bellairs	Tony Goldsworthy

Life Members

John Johnston	Don Knowles	Tony Weaver	Tony Goldsworthy
Ken Burnell	Ross McCrae	Peter Eames	

Appendix 2

Surrey Park Model Boat Club Committee 2025

Commodore	Garry Bellairs
Vice Commodore	John Schuffelen
Secretary	Tony Goldsworthy
Treasurer	Don Knowles
Membership Officer	John Schuffelen
Events Officer	Lance Rawlings
Safety Officer	Peter McKenzie
Wellness Coordinator	Gerard O'Donoghue
Other positions	
Quartermasters	Paul Candela and Ken Burnell
Newsletter editor	Lance Rawlings
Webmaster	Michael Best
Club historian	Jack Sach

Appendix 3

Building Boats with a 3D Printer

Today it is possible for hobbyists to literally print a model boat. This process is called 3D printing and it opens up exciting new possibilities for model boat builders, whether they wish to print an entire model or just some fittings. **3**D printers come in many shapes and sizes and your choice will depend on your budget, the type of material that you wish to print and the size of the objects that you want to print. 3D printers for hobbyists can be purchased for as little as $100 for a small basic machine all the way up to $3-4000 models offering large build capacities and the ability to print a wide range of materials and multiple colours simultaneously.

3D printers heat plastic filament and then force the semi molten filament through a fine extruder nozzle onto a heated build plate. The build plate is able to move forward and back and the extruder can move left and right and up and down. By combining these movements, the printer is able to draw a desired shape in semi molten filament on the build plate. By repeatedly creating this shape on the build plate while slowly raising the extruder the height of the object being printed is built up. This process is called 'Additive Printing'.

A variation to this process allows the build plate to be slowly lowered vertically while the extruder moves left to right and front to back building up the height of the object being printed as the build plate is lowered. Both of these types of printers print or build the object being printed by adding layers progressively on top of the object.

Another form of 3D printing is known as Resin Printing. In this system liquid resin is placed in a glass bottomed tray and a beam of light from a photo-electric cell below the tray sets a very thin layer of resin in the desired shape or pattern. The process is repeated adding a new layer of resin to the bottom of the object until the object is built up to the desired height. Resin printing is capable of producing small objects with very fine detail. However, the printed object must be cured under ultraviolet light and carefully cleaned before it is ready to handle or paint.

So how does this technology help the budding model boat builder? Traditionally, model boats are built from a plan, that that has been either drawn by the builder or from a plan that is commercially available. The builder transfers the shape of the individual parts onto the material that is being used to construct the model and then the parts are cut out and assembled into the finished model. The process is much the same with 3D printing. If the builder is confident with CAD drawing they can design their boat or fitting on a computer using a CAD drawing program which will produce a 3 dimensional drawing of the object breaking it into a series of individual parts which can then be converted to a series of Stereo Lithography (STL) files which are then converted in a 'slicing' program such as Cura to provide a series of layer designs that a 3D printer can print on top of each other to build up the desired object.

Alternatively, you can search the internet for STL files of a model boat or fittings that you wish to print. Currently there are more than 20 million sets of files for almost any object you can think of available to download free in the Public Domain on the internet. A visit to internet sites such as www.thingiverse.com or www.cults.com or

www.yeggi.com will provide you with an amazing selection of items that you can download and print. However, as printable designs become larger or more complex it is not unusual that the original designer will want to sell copies of the files for a fee rather than allowing them to be downloaded for free. As a general rule printable files for generic objects such as simple model boat fittings will be free to download, whereas files for an accurate replica of a specific model may contain many individual files and therefore attract a fee to compensate the designer for their time spent preparing the files.

As indicated earlier printers come in various sizes with build plates ranging from 100mm X 100mm up to 400mm X 400mm square and this will determine the maximum size of the object that you can print. Files for small fittings are usually no problem on most printers, however, if you want to print a full hull that is, say 900mm long, then designers will usually divide the hull into smaller sections and provide a separate file for each section. You will need to print each section individually and then glue them together to achieve the complete object. Most 'slicing' programs will also allow you to scale up or down the object being printed. For example, the model of the Grand Banks 46 cabin cruiser (see photos) has only 26 printed pieces, mainly hull and superstructure in it, the balance of the model being hand made from wood and other materials. The Hydroplane #88 is almost completely 3D printed, likewise, the Canadian Boom Boat "Kenny Loggins" started out with 3D printed hull and superstructure but with a lot of scratch-built extras added to enhance the appearance.

Is 3D printing the way of the future, maybe, but there are still limitations. The process while faster than traditional wooden model boat building is still slow. A large object may take as much as 3-4 days to print on an open frame printer such as the Artillery SW1 shown in the photos, meaning that a large boat hull could take weeks to complete. This means that the printer may have to operate continuously for many days and some people may not be comfortable with the idea of a printer running unattended through the night. Recently released Core X type printers have much faster printing speeds and are usually able to print large files within a 12-hour period therefore avoiding the need to run overnight.

Another limitation which is particularly relevant to model boat building is waterproofing. PLA filament which is the most common material used in 3D printers is hydroscopic, that is, it absorbs moisture. In addition, the printing process can sometimes leave microscopic gaps between the printed layers; both of these attributes can lead to a very 'leaky' boat if not properly sealed and waterproofed. Whilst it is possible to print your boat in multiple coloured filaments and not bother with sealing and painting, it is not advisable.

It is often better to print the pieces of your boat or fittings in a single colour and then seal and paint them to the desired colour or finish. There are a number of reasons why this is recommended. Firstly cost, filament suppliers will often run specials on bulk quantities of filament in a single colour e.g. white. Also, purchasing single rolls of different coloured filaments can be wasteful if not used regularly as filament will absorb moisture from the atmosphere and become brittle and print poorly.

As you will probably need to seal and paint the object anyway the colour of the filament is not important. However, remember that dark coloured filaments will require more

coats of paint if a light final colour is required. Also, a hull printed in a light-coloured filament may become semitransparent if you plan to install lighting inside your boat; always paint the inside of your boat if internal lighting is going to be installed.

3D printing is a very useful adjunct to the model boat building hobby as it allows the hobbyist to easily build one-off designs for whole boats as well as fittings, although it is doubtful if it will ever totally replace traditional wooden model boat building.

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Acknowledgements

The Box Hill Historical Society as the custodian of local history maintains a separate folder relating to the history of the Surrey Dive and holds a photo gallery of the era. Helen Harris, Secretary assisted the early research for the SPMBC history project, and our thanks is extended to her and BHHS members for making its collection available to the project.

We acknowledge the invaluable information provided in *Fog on the Dive* by Gerard O'Donnell which includes a comprehensive history of the 100 years of the Surrey Park Swimming Club, and includes particularly well researched early history of the Surrey Park Dive.

SPMBC Committee of Management of the Surrey Park Model Boat Club works diligently to maintain a high standard for the club in all regards. We acknowledge the commitment of all members of the committee and others who keep the club relevant and active. Tony Goldsmith, Secretary, was a constant reference point for this project over many months.

Ken Burge, a former editor of Bilgewater, provided access to extensive information relating to developing years of the club. Colin Smith provided his robust recollections of life at the club in the early days and added colour to the project.

Several members dug out membership lists which assisted in building the story.

Phillip Ham coordinated a contribution from several members relating to the role of steam engines.

Garry Bellairs contributed an overview of the digital 3D printing and its role in a new development of model boat building design and construction.

The expertise of all club members in the design, build and operation of model boats is truly inspiring, and it is their contribution that makes the Surrey Park Model Boat Club a great organisation. The following members contributed photos: Garry Bellairs, Grant Austin, Graham McIntyre, Rob Page, Peter McKenzie, Claude Miller, Ross McRae and Graeme Hollis.

Graeme Hollis provided invaluable assistance with the layout and insertion of photographs. Without it, the author would have sunk faster than any boat anchor.

Jack Sach takes responsibility for any errors and omissions. This story seeks to provide a brief social history snapshot of the club.

SURREY PARK MODEL BOAT CLUB