

SWIMMING POOL.

Councils were empowered to provide public baths by the Municipalities Act 1858 and 1867. The Municipal Baths Act 1896 gave further powers to councils. This act enabled 'a council to acquire land to erect baths thereon, lease or acquire baths already erected'.¹ The Local Government Act 1919 then empowered councils to construct and manage baths on specially acquired sites or on municipal reserves.

Baths were established by the proprietor John F. McKinlay, an Armidale businessman and investor by January 1891. McKinlay had purchased the City Brewery in November 1889 and the baths were situated at the rear of the brewery on the southern bank of the Dumaresq Creek. Ladies days were held on Tuesdays and Fridays from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and the bath was emptied prior to each of the above days. The proprietor promised a constant supply of fresh water passed through night and day. In October 1892 McKinlay advertised the baths open from 6 a.m to 6 p.m. daily at 6d admission.

It is uncertain when the baths closed. McKinlay sold the brewery in March 1893 but in May he was still advertising the pool open daily. In October 1896 P.J. Snape and Co. asked council at what rate could council supply 70 000 gallons for the swimming baths. In reply the company was told council was not in a position to determine a rate at present. On the casting vote of the mayor that November, council refused to supply water to fill the pool to A. Pearce for £1.

In September 1897, N.S. Lea wrote to council 'asking the price for supplying the swimming baths with water at per 1 000 gallons, or a lump sum for filling the bath once or twice a week'.² At that stage, council had not taken over the water supply from the Department of Works and they could not give an answer.

Because of a petition signed by over 100 people, council called a public meeting in the town hall in December 1897 to consider the re-opening of the swimming baths. But 'Only five persons, including the Acting-Mayor and an alderman, put in an appearance'.³ Not surprisingly, no further action was taken until October 1899 when council took a lease of the swimming baths and adjoining vacant allotments of land 'for a period of five years, at rental of £15 per annum, with option of purchase for £450'.⁴ Council was to lay on water, erect showers and complete repairs and in November, Thomas Jones, the council clerk called tenders for lease of the pool.

¹ H.E. Maiden, *The History of Local Government in New South Wales*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1966, p.87.

² *Armidale Express*, 17 September 1897, p.4.

³ *Armidale Express*, 10 December 1897, p.5.

⁴ *Armidale Express*, 13 October 1899, p.5.

By-laws and regulations for the management of the swimming baths were adopted early in December and the pool was officially opened on Saturday 16 December by Dr Wigan under the control of lessee James P. Bonnar. At the opening it was revealed the pool had been closed for a period of some six years. Previously the pool was only flushed on certain occasions but the pool was now to be fresh with water 'constantly flowing in from the bottom of the bath and overflowing at the top'.⁵ A ladies day was set aside for their exclusive use. At the time of opening it had taken 74 000 gallons to fill the baths and at the deepest end it was 10 feet deep and at the shallow end about 4 feet deep.

In August 1900 council announced that tenders would be called for the lease of the pool. Council took action to complete repairs to the drainage of pool, erection of a urinal and the provision of hooks for clothes etc. The tender of J.P. Bonnar was accepted for lease £2 per week in September.

The ballot for the bath's tender in September 1901 was won by Messrs Davidson and Bliss at a rental of £2 4s 0d per week for 6 weeks. The new lessees of the baths removed the dangerous inlet pipes from the bottom of the baths and installed 'an inlet spray ... at the shallow end, ensuring a continuous flow'.⁶ A handrail was fixed round the basin for swimmers to support themselves.

In October 1903, council accepted the tender of Arthur Trim and Thomas Foran at a rental of £2 10s 0d per week and in October 1904 a letter was received from William M Harris, manager of the Bank of New South Wales 'accepting the Council's offer to again lease the baths for two years at £15 a year, and to allow a deduction of £5 for repairs'.⁷ Council again called tenders for lease of the baths. In September 1905 the swimming baths were leased to P.R. Easton for a tender of £1 13s on supply of the necessary bonds.

With the decision taken by council to surrender the lease of the baths, J.E. Chant secretary of the Swimming Club informed council in October 1906 'his club would take over the baths ... provided the Council would make a liberal concession in regard to the charge for water'.⁸ The club was affiliated with the N.S.W. Swimming Association and council moved it that the club be supplied with water at 3d. per 1000 gallons with a minimum of 5000 gallons weekly. Council retained the right to discontinue supply if a crisis developed.

Following the request by the swimming club in August 1907, council again granted use of water for the baths at the same rate as 1906. But in October 1908, a deputation from the club presented a balance sheet and requested water at 11/2d per 1000 gallons in lieu of 3d. Owing to the financial position of the

⁵ *Armidale Express*, 19 December 1899, p.5.

⁶ *Armidale Express*, 16 November 1901, p.4.

⁷ *Armidale Express*, 14 October 1904, p.5.

⁸ *Armidale Express*, 26 October 1906, p.3.

waterworks account, council informed the club in November it could not reduce the water rates.

Coleman Savage, a former tailor in Hillgrove and later Armidale was proprietor of the baths by May 1909. He advertised the opening of the baths for the 1910 season in the *Armidale Express*, 11 October 1910:

Armidale Swimming Baths.

THE BATHS will be OPENED to the Public on and after OCTOBER 8th. Season Tickets 17s 6d. Ladies Swimming by appointment.

In September 1916, Savage applied for a reduction of cost for 1000 gallons from 6d to 4d 'as a very big percentage of the swimming public had enlisted'.⁹ Council would not accept the application as the Railway Commissioner then paid 9d.

A representative of the Department of Education visited Armidale in June 1919 to collect data as to the possibilities of conducting swimming schools at an increased number of country towns in the next summer vacation. The scheme had commenced in 1916 and Armidale research indicated approximately that 80% of those nine years and over attending local schools were non-swimmers. Teachers from local schools were encouraged to meet with Mr Cummins and schools outside Armidale were allowed to close on that day to permit teachers to attend. The *Armidale Chronicle*, 28 June 1919 felt there was a need for swimming classes but council was 'not in a position financially to do anything to assist in carrying out this proposal'.

John Savage, the son of Coleman Savage offered council the block of land on which the old baths were situated in March 1941. Initially council rejected the offer, but two weeks later on 24 March accepted the land.

William Taylor conducted a market garden between Allingham and Markham Streets but encountered problems because of flood damage to his crops and fencing. In December 1921 he announced to council his intention to construct public baths on his premises in Dumaresq Street, 'as near as he could to the plans he had obtained from Council'.¹⁰ He intended to use a spring on his property to get the necessary water. The move was supported by council and referred to the building committee. Council gave permission for the construction of bathing cubicles in May 1922.

The area on which the swimming pool was constructed was seven acres of land occupied by George Allingham in 1853. William Taylor bought the land in 1910. The baths were opened on Friday 3 November 1922 by the Deputy Mayor Morgan Stephens and a carnival was arranged to inaugurate the event. The pool

⁹ *Armidale Express*, 15 September 1916, p.3.

¹⁰ *Armidale Chronicle*, 14 December 1921, p.8.

was a large concrete excavation enclosed by a corrugated fence with 'a large number of dressing rooms on the south side for both lady and gentleman swimmers' and 'a spring board for diving'.¹¹ Council approved construction of a grandstand in March 1923.

Mayor Morgan Stephens chaired a meeting in the council chambers on Thursday 18 January 1923 to form a swimming club. The club called the Armidale Amateur Swimming Club, was formed to improve swimming and to hold competition events. The mayor became the first president.

In November 1926 Thomas G. Monckton informed the public by advertisement the City Baths was now under new management. Daily sessions were now held with mixed bathing and he stated, 'Water will be continuously changed by special pump' and 'Only clean spring water used'.¹²

During the 1929 winter period, the proprietor Mr Monckton installed an electric vacuum pump for the purpose of cleaning the bottom of the pool and erected a water chute near the diving tower. The Amateur Swimming Club had a new clubroom constructed with a gymnasium and new dressing shed for men and the women's shed shifted to the opposite side of the pool. Fifty thousand gallons of continuously flowing water per day was to be maintained from a spring and the water was to be 'carried away by a pipe-line to cool the engines at the city electric supply station'.¹³

In June 1930 Monckton informed council that six months ago he offered to give council an area of land adjoining Albion Park in return for a culvert across the creek. To that stage he had not received a reply and he said 'he would be prepared ... to assist in building the culvert and the acre of land would add considerably to the park and improve the creek'.¹⁴ In August council approved the payment of £35 to Monckton to provide a footbridge over the creek to the baths. The plan also provided for the entrance to the baths from Beardy Street.

By September 1930 the new entrance to the pool from Albion Park across a low level bridge was ready for patrons. Entry to the pool area was now through a well stocked shop. Increased seating accommodation was now provided, with cubicles for the ladies and new dressing rooms for the men and boys. A sun baking enclosure for men was provided at the rear of their dressing room. To meet recent Board of Health regulations, showers were provided for patrons before entering the pool. A separate children's pool was provided with a foundation in the centre and a new Olympic springboard was also installed.

¹¹ *Armidale Express*, 7 November 1922, p.2.

¹² *Armidale Express*, 24 November 1926, p.11.

¹³ *Armidale Express*, 4 October 1929, p.6.

¹⁴ *Armidale Express*, 18 June 1930, p.6.

A number of improvements were completed in the 1932 winter period. Water was pumped from wells and 'filtered three times through sand before being conducted to the fountain, to feed the pool'.¹⁵ Showers were provided for men and women; flowered gardens and lawns provided for sunbaking. By that stage, Mr Monckton had also purchased the Tamworth baths. That year, the New England Rugby League granted permission to council in 1932 to beautify lot 4 section 173 containing 2 roods 29 perches at the eastern side of the swimming baths.

In 1933 Monckton completed further improvements to the filtering system and the filter was now washed by water from an elevated 8000 gallon tank. The dressing room and cubicle space was enlarged, lawns were terraced and hot and cold showers provided. Council approved the construction of a suspension bridge over the Dumaresq Creek in June provided Mr Monckton accepted full responsibility for its maintenance. Council was prepared to provide £10 towards construction of the bridge and also approved the planting of trees in the Albion Park. The bridge over the creek immediately in front of the entrance to the baths was completed in October and the *Armidale Express*, 13 October 1933 commented, 'the strong ropes used to support the footway were formerly used in the old Hillgrove mines'.

During the 1938 winter season, Mr Monckton and his staff erected a series of arches and ornamental fencing with a solid brick and plaster wall to the eastern side of the entrance. An improved circulating system provided for the filtration of 200 000 gallons per day which meant a complete daily change of water. Lawns, shrubs, gardens and sun-baking areas were provided on the southern side of the pool and a further series of arches lead to a courtyard. A completely new building was provided for the women on the southern side; sewerage was installed and lighting was provided in the change rooms. Because of the improvements, the City Baths were 'admitted to the select membership of the Jantzen Clean Water Swimming Association'.¹⁶

Proprietor Monckton carried out further improvements in the 1939 winter period. He installed the chloramine system of water purification where the water was purified before it entered the pool. Tables and chairs were set in a pergola with palms and roses planted. Following a complaint of unsightly conditions at the nearby gasworks, council informed Monckton in December 1941 that steps were being taken to reduce the smoke fumes, to disassemble the old iron tanks and to plant a privet hedge in due course. Council also stopped effluent from the gasworks and powerhouse from flowing into the creek in September 1943.

During the 1947 winter period, the weatherboard entrance was replaced by a solid two-storey brick building. A concrete ramp provided access whilst 'coral, diving

¹⁵ *Armidale Express*, 21 October 1932, p.4.

¹⁶ *Armidale Express*, 5 October 1938, p.4.

and swimming diagrams and pictures¹⁷ adorned the walls. Refreshments were sold, easy chairs were provided for parents and the Monckton family resided on the top floor. The pool was lighted and a flood light situated on the creek bridge illuminated the main building. The pool was surrounded by lawns, flowers, shrubs and hedges. Aldermen were invited to inspect the pool in February 1948 and at the time, Ald. L.E. Dawson 'considered that they were the equal of any other baths in Australia'.¹⁸

For his services to swimming, Mr T. Monckton, was awarded a gold medallion by the Royal Life Saving Society (R.L.S.S) in September 1948. In October 1951 he was presented with a R.L.S.S. Long Service Star.

In September 1949, Monckton sought 'an annual subsidy of £250 or take over the pool at an estimated cost of £15,000'.¹⁹ Because the spring was damaged by the recent floods, he asked council to supply 500 000 gallons of water free of cost. Council rejected his proposal for a subsidy and although not supportive of the purchase, the *Armidale Express*, 21 September 1949 commented 'it is to be hoped that the City council will give the proposal further consideration'.

During his period of ownership Monckton completed extensive repairs to the pool. Such work included the construction of new re-inforced concrete walls inside the pool; the replacement of 7000 green tiles inside and outside the top of the pool and repairs to slippery dips and diving boards.

Council took action to appoint an independent engineer in November 1955 to prepare a report on the pool. At that stage, the pool was closed because of the illness of the proprietor T.G. Monckton. Don Nott a former Armidale cabinet-maker, had been appointed manager but some criticism was raised about council's intention to purchase the pool. Early in November the Armidale Chamber of Commerce supported council's move. Because of uncertainty about the lease, the Armidale Swimming Club offered to take responsibility for opening the pool from Friday 18 November 1955. Prolonged debate occurred in council over the terms of the lease which was to run until 31 March 1956. Ald. P.G. Love, president of the A.L.P. felt that council should not purchase the pool and in December the Sydney consultant engineer A.R. Blair tabled his report. He commented a new pool would cost £75 000 'without lawns, buildings and equipment, and from the swimmer's point of view would be no better than the Olympic Pool'.²⁰ Based upon the report, the Department of Local Government gave council permission to go ahead with the lease and purchase proposal.

¹⁷ *Armidale Express*, 28 November 1947, p.15.

¹⁸ *Armidale Express*, 4 February 1948, p.8.

¹⁹ *Armidale Express*, 14 September 1949, p.8.

²⁰ *Armidale Express*, 14 December 1955, p.8

Council leased the swimming pool from the former owner T.G. Monckton for a trial period. Council agreed to purchase the baths for £25 000 with a deposit of £3,000 and repayment of the balance over 15 years with an interest payment of 5%. The Armidale and District Ratepayer's Association asked council to reverse the decision by seeking a private investor 'in order that the £25,000 could be used for other work'.²¹ Council rejected the proposal.

A public meeting held in Armidale in April 1958 led to the formation of a committee to raise funds for improvements at the pool and public sports grounds. By that stage, council had applied for a £5000 loan for improvements to the filtering plant but there were further needs for improvements in sewerage, lighting and a new diving tower to replace the recently demolished unsafe tower.

The shortage of water in Armidale led to the discovery of a new well at the Olympic Pool in May 1958. Council hoped it would meet the demands of the pool without interfering with the supply from the recently sunk well at the nearby gasworks. Council announced in August 1958 that a new diving tower will be re-installed at the pool with the cost to be met by profits from the aquatic carnival earlier in the year. 'Both, the three-metre and the one-metre diving boards' were 'to be installed in their original positions'.²²

By June 1959, further difficulties were encountered with the filtration plant at the pool because the popularity of the pool and drought conditions had placed a strain on the plant. Council sought a grant for the installation of filtration works from the Department of Public Works that month and improvements costing £10,000 were completed in January 1960. The improvements included new sand filters costing £7,000, fencing of the main pool and improvements to the children's pool. A proposal by Ald P.G. Love to call a conference between council and the Ratepayer's Association to discuss the city's purchase of the Olympic Pool was rejected in March 1960.

Council announced its intention to sell the three metre diving tower in October 1961. The water was now too shallow for Olympic standard diving because of the construction of a new floor to stop a serious leak which had raised the level of the floor by eight inches. Council offered the diving tower to De La Salle College for £80 in September 1962.

In May 1962 council took action to seek a detailed report on the possibility of using the pool as a skating rink during the winter season. Additional filtration plant was installed in 1962 and in the 1963 estimates, council set aside £7500 for the provision of new women's dressing sheds. Following an application by the Armidale Swimming Club for a clubhouse in October 1963, the matter was referred to the next meeting of the joint baths committee. At the same time the

²¹ *Armidale Express*, 4 April 1956, p.8.

²² *Armidale Express*, 6 August 1958, p.8.

club announced plans for a pre-fabricated weatherboard shed to store its equipment.

In September 1964 council used a chlorinated rubber-based paint on the swimming pool ready for the new season. By that stage a new toilet block and greater lawn area was prepared on the eastern side of the complex. These improvements meant the eastern side fence was to be moved.

The town clerk, R.A. Browne asked the public in April 1966 to comment on advantages of establishing the pool in another part of the city or carrying out improvements on the present site. 'Provisional plans for extensions to the city pool, with a 50 metre pool and a diving pool running north and south on the present site of the dressing sheds, were presented to the baths committee²³ in May. The plans prepared by the city engineer, K.O. Gentle showed three other pools on the site with the entrance in Dumaresq Street.

In January 1967 the question arose of the need for a second pool which would cost about \$300 000. Plans for a \$250 000 swimming pool complex were outlined at a meeting of the recreation and playing fields advisory committee in June 1968. At that stage it was felt that it was a 1973 project because of the shortage of money. The existing pool formed the basis of the new scheme although it was to have a limited life. The entrance was to be placed north at the Dumaresq Street; parking space was to be provided and the existing pool was to be cut into two portions. A new Olympic standards pool was to be constructed with a grandstand for 2000 spectators at the western end of the complex.

Council announced plans for a \$275 000 swimming pool complex in November 1968. The scheme was being prepared for 1971-1972 and council expected a public contribution of at least £30 000 and a government grant of £20 000. In January 1969 council decided to replace the chlorination unit which had been installed second hand in 1959.

The editor of the *Armidale Express*, 7 January 1970 commented 'the City council must begin not only planning but preparing for a new pool in the near future'. In February council announced plans for a \$286 000 plan to build four more swimming pools at the site of the present Olympic pool and the first stage of the complex was included in the loans program that month. The city engineer K.O. Gentle recommended a three stage program for building the swimming pool complex.

Following inspections by the Department of Health officers in November 1970 and January 1971, a letter was forwarded to council by the Department at Tamworth. Concerned about conditions at the pool, the officer commented that a few improvements had 'been made in regard to the testing of water and the

²³ *Armidale Express*, 25 May 1966, p.6.

removal of refuse and an old building from the grounds'²⁴ but conditions were much the same as in April 1970. In reply, the town clerk replied that council intended to proceed with works in 1971 for construction of an Olympic Pool complex to cost £304 000 with the new entrance to be from Dumaresq Street. The first stage was planned to commence with purchase and removal of the house on adjoining land, fencing, demolition of the grandstand, construction of a wading pool and a learn to swim pool and a concrete area around these two pools. In April 1971 the Drummond Park planning committee offered Drummond Park as an alternative for the new Olympic Pool complex. Engineer Gentle recommended to council in June that the filtration plant be housed under the grandstand rather than in a separate building.

The tender for the work was awarded in December 1971 to Firth Civil Construction Pty Ltd of Tamworth at a cost of £250 899. The contract provided for construction of a new Olympic Pool, learn to swim pool, wading pool, construction of a grandstand and filter house. Negotiations for purchases of a cottage and land on the Dumaresq Street frontage were immediately commenced for the new entry and dressing rooms. At the same time, petitions were received for heating of the pool and council recommended in January 1972 that 'detailed investigations be carried out to enable an informed decision to be made on the possibility of heating, as opposed to providing diving facilities'.²⁵ Engineer David Hegarty informed council that month that winter heating would cost \$12 000 a year, consequently council was not prepared to act on the petitions' request. In April a further petition signed by 2 000 residents was presented to council.

Although the new pool complex was open for public use in November 1973, it was not until Saturday 2 November 1974 that the Minister for Sport and Chief Secretary Ian Griffiths officially opened it. A number of parental organisations in Armidale appealed to council in February 1976 to instal heating in at least one pool. A special committee was elected to investigate heating of the pool but decided against investigating the building of an entirely new complex. Ten years later in 1986, GHD Planners conducted a feasibility study to determine the need to heat the swimming centre complex.

A half-court tennis area was constructed in 1984 with a grant of \$6750 from the Department of Leisure Sport and Tourism. Council contributed an equal amount.

A quote for improvements to the footbridge over the Dumaresq Creek near the Swimming centre was given by Highdowns Partnership Sawmill May 1985. That year, council reformed and renewed the timber on the bridge at a cost of \$14 000.

²⁴ Armidale City Council File, Letter from the Department of Health, 28 January 1971. Olympic Pool 1971-1980, No 208, Box 15B, File No O1.

²⁵ Armidale City Council File, Olympic Pool 1971-1980, No 208, Box 15B, File No O1.

Armidale Chronicle, 20 November 1897- Editorial on the Swimming pool

Armidale Chronicle, 29 December 1897- Plans for the swimming pool- bank's proposal.