

## **Presentation to the U3A Gisborne History Group 14<sup>th</sup> July 2022**

Thank you for inviting me to speak about the history of Surf Life Saving in Gisborne. I must admit when I was first asked I declined, my reason being that there are two far more knowledgeable people in Gisborne to talk on the subject. Dick Glover from Waikanae and Rocky Hall from Midway. They both fancy themselves as bits of historians and so they should but I think I drew the short straw purely on the fact that I am a bit younger than both of them! Not much mind you.

I knew that I would have to do a bit of research on Waikanae and Wainui and as luck has it they both have a written history on their respective Clubs so I could draw on that along with what I knew. As far as Midway goes I have to apologise in advance that I know far more of it's history so the Midway part is in a bit more detail.

I will tell you about the 3 Gisborne Clubs, 1 of the Tairāwhiti Clubs and then a little bit about my involvement with the movement.

So first up I will talk about Wainui which is the oldest Surf Club in Gisborne.

### **WAINUI**

Wainui was the first dedicated Surf Life Saving Club in the Gisborne District . It was formed at a public meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1937 in the Gisborne Borough Council Chambers with the prime purpose of preserving and safeguarding life. Meeting Convenor, Dawson Muir, became the first Club Captain. Wainui was officially affiliated to Auckland but representatives from Wainui, Waikanae, Whakatane, Waihi and Mt Maunganui decided to form an East Coast Surf Life Saving Association. By the outbreak of WW2 Wainui had withdrawn from competition as most members had been called up for active service. 6 of those current members lost their lives during the war. The Club got underway again after the war ended in 1945. The following year an old army hut was purchased and added to the existing building, then a bunk room between the sheds to provide accommodation for members over the weekends. Together these buildings formed Wainui's Clubhouse through to 1973. Some early written history from the 1950s tells us that the members who mostly lived in town would bike or run out to Wainui for the weekends. The Clubhouse had a bunk room and they had a kitchen with a hot plate. They lived on boiled saveloys, bread and butter and milk which was thruppence a pint. They would run from the Surf Club to Tuahine, swim to the rocks, pick up ½ dozen crayfish, take them back to the Club and boil them up for lunch or dinner. Travelling away to carnivals in the BOP generally involved a donated truck. There were several open water courses to cross in the Waioeka Gorge and the route taken would be via Taneatua to Whakatane where the Clubbies would be met by someone at 10 or 11 at night to guide them over the hill to Ohope.

In 1955 Wainui hosted its first Carnival attracting teams from the other 4 local clubs, Waikanae, Midway, Gisborne and Gisborne Ladies. This carnival served to boost interest in the Club's revival. In 1963 the Gisborne Surf Life Saving Association installed a series of boxlines consisting of a semi-buoyant belt, 300 yards of line and a reel along the coastline from the Waipaoa River Mouth to the Tatapouri Headland. 5 were planned for the Wainui / Okitu stretch. Despite this enthusiasm the Club again came close to going into recess in the mid 1960s and an amalgamation with Midway was suggested. Patrols had fallen on the shoulders of only ½ dozen members and young Surf Life Savers were occasionally seconded to the committee to ensure a quorum. One Wainui member recalled "during this time Brian Cairns came out from town to patrol in the summer. He parked his little Morrie Minor on the other side of the creek and put the flags out. Maybe he was at University then as he studied in his car." The Gisborne Association stepped in to train more members and to support the Club through a difficult time. A new enthusiastic group of Wainui youngsters began to join and in 1969 a Junior Six Man R&R team made the finals of the National Championships. Membership increased from the late 1970s after a strong recruitment drive. The drive culminated in the Club winning the top NZ award for the number of members gaining their Surf Life Guard award. An award which they received more than once. The Club's 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee in 1987 coincided with the opening of a new \$110,000 Club House.

One of Wainui's competitive strengths lay in canoe racing, both male and female and they won numerous National titles in the early 2000s. Wainui's IRB prowess came to the fore in the late 1990s and their crews dominated the IRB scene in NZ boasting several NZ representatives. In 1998 Wainui beat both town clubs in a carnival for the first time in 60 years and was equal with Midway as the best patrolling club in the district. In 2001 Wainui won the top NZ award with the most Life Guard and Instructor awards in one season per capita of members.

In the 2010s Wainui experienced one of its golden decades. Nippers, Ocean Athletes, National Rep Teams and Patrols were performing well, supported by excellent coaches, a booming committee and hard working parents.

Wainui is an institution amongst the Wainui community and most Wainuite's children have learnt valuable life skills from being part of the movement.

## **WAIKANAЕ**

In 1913, as a result of some fatalities and several near drownings at Waikanae Beach, Ralph Morse erected a flag post on his property at the end of Grey St, across the road from the present Waikanae Clubrooms. Attached to the post was a length of rope and a life buoy. The buoy consisted of cork encased in canvas, with rope hand-holds with the line being ½ inch hemp rope about 200 metres long. The idea was that the buoy was to be pushed or towed out

by the rescuer. Today it would seem an impossibly primitive and unwieldy piece of equipment but it has been recorded that it did assist in a number of rescues over the next 7 years. Ralph Morse's prominent place in the history of Surf Life Saving in Gisborne is commemorated in the Shield presented annually for Club supremacy at the Gisborne District Championships. The Waikanae Club was initially the Surf section of the Gisborne Amateur Surf and Swimming Club which was formed in 1919. The Club operated somewhat spasmodically during the late 1920s and 30s until revived again in 1946 with Ken Morse and June McGregor taking leading roles. The minutes of the 1947 AGM record that a resolution, officially forming the "surf section" was passed. Even though the surf section grew to a reasonably significant membership by 1950 the members were becoming increasingly frustrated that in matters of finance and business the full meeting of the swimming club seemed to pay little attention to the requests of the surf people. Eventually a letter was sent to the Executive of the swimming Club stating that the surf members had resolved to break away from the parent body and were calling a public meeting for the formation of a new Club. This new Club was formed and named Waikanae Surf Life Saving Club. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Club's existence the minutes of the 12<sup>th</sup> Nov 1952 meeting reported the formal resignations of Jack Griffin and Blackie Reid. The 2 founding members moved up the beach to form the Midway Surf Life Saving Club. The formal explanation for this decision was that they, along with Ken Morse, were advocates of the necessity for another Patrol operating towards the Abattoir end of the beach. However, another version is that the recently married seniors resented the fact that their wives were not welcome – and, anyway, the surf at the more western end of the beach was superior. Reading between the lines records also seem to indicate that another factor in the move was that there was some disgruntlement with decisions taken at the recent Waikanae AGM, in particular a suspicion that a move by Junior members who block voted for candidates in opposition to nominations by a group of seniors brought about a reaction. Whatever was at the core of the break, Jack Griffin's departure was a real loss to the Waikanae Club.

In 1961 the membership of women was raised but it wasn't until 20 years later that the AGM voted in favour of admitting women to the Club. Heather Dyer became Secretary, the first woman to be on the Executive of the Club. By 1986 the growth of women's membership was such that there was a further demand for expanded facilities to cater for the women. That same year the addition of women resulted in membership reaching a peak with an active compliment of 43 males, 10 females and 45 nippers.

Although there are those who feel that the competitive side of Surf Life Saving is given too much emphasis it is true that sporting participation plays a vital part in preparedness, efficiency and morale. Sport is the life blood of all Surf Clubs and Waikanae's achievements in the competitive arena mirror the strength of the Club.

Waikanae's first 50 years ended up with more of a whimper than a bang. The mid 70s to the early 90s saw the Club in a downturn but these periods were followed by such a revival of enthusiasm and commitment that the Waikanae name rose to the fore again. Fast forward to today where Waikanae is a force to be reckoned with on the competitive scene in NZ and acquits itself admirably against Clubs with a much wider population base to draw from. Waikanae has been fortunate to have had the services of some outstanding individuals but, in the end, it is true that the Club's strength depends on the participation of all its' members.

## **MIDWAY**

Midway Surf Life Saving Club was incorporated in 1952. The club was formed as a breakaway group from the existing Waikanae SLSC. The driving force behind this was Mr. Jack Griffin, supported by a group of older members from Waikanae. These foundation members were mostly returned servicemen from WW2. The principal reason for forming Midway was the growth of the Churchill Park Motor Camp on the old Gisborne Jail site. You will note that this explanation differs markedly from the explanation given in the Waikanae history. I guess it depends which Club you have allegiance to as to what version you prefer.

The clubhouse was then three old Army Surplus Huts joined together. As the Centennial Marine Drive developed and with more available public parking this area became the most popular area for public swimming and family activities, resulting in Midway being required to carry out more patrolling, with greater service. This expanded to the point that the old Army Huts were insufficient as a lifeguard base. In 1963 a building programme became essential and in 1964 the now demolished building was completed directly opposite the now Olympic Pool complex. Since 1964 it had become necessary to extend the original building adding more member changing and toilet facilities and extended gear storage areas to meet expanding demand. This new Clubhouse had a large upstairs lounge which was used extensively for Cabarets when they were the fashion. In 1988 a Restaurateur approached the Club with the idea of creating a restaurant in that space and it operated as such until the demolition earlier this year.

During these developing times Midway grew into an organisation that has become respected for its direct community involvement and outstanding contribution to Gisborne. Midway Life Guards, along with Life Guards from Waikanane and Wainui were pivotal in helping with the evacuation of families and public during Cyclone Bola, for which they received recognition from SLSNZ, their parent body. Midway Life Guards provide Lifeguarding backup for numerous community water based sports such as Waka Ama regattas, Triathlons, and public events. Midway has a dedicated Call Out crew that are on standby for any community disasters. Leadership pathways are provided for members who are contributing in a great range of community roles. Midway members have served the community in many roles, one past

member serving three terms in various positions on the Gisborne District Council, another member three terms as Chairman of New Zealand Surf Life Saving Association and two members being awarded the ultimate accolade from SLSNZ of Life Membership.

For 69 consecutive seasons, Midway has patrolled every Saturday and Sunday plus statutory holidays from the beginning of November until the end of March. Every season presents different challenges brought about by changing weather and sea conditions and numbers on the beach.

Boxing Day 1985, a very warm day, extremely big surf, on shore wind, an outgoing tide and an extremely huge crowd. Despite the dangerous conditions and after much deliberation the Patrol decided to keep the beach open, and to guard it by calling in extra Midway Lifeguards. In a period of 3 hours they carried out 24 tough and some critical rescues. The club delivered to its purpose and in doing so justified the many hours of lifeguard training. I have to say here that this scenario would not play out in today's world. The beach would probably be closed and members of the public kept out of the water.

Seasons vary markedly, with annual rescues ranging from 2-3 through to the above mentioned 24. Since Midway's inception a conservative estimate of rescues carried out exceeds 400. Irrespective of what the season produces, training, vigilance and diligence are conducted by lifeguards at all times. During any season numerous 'Preventative Actions' are carried out by the Patrols keeping the Public informed and away from danger. Each season these actions are always in the hundreds.

The training and fitness of Surf Lifeguards is paramount to their ability and performance in rescue situations. Midway attended their first National Championships at Waihi in 1955. It took until 1971 for Midway to win its first National title. Since then Midway has won numerous titles at every National Championships. At the 1981 Nationals Midway emerged as winning the coveted Allan Gardener Memorial Trophy as the top club in New Zealand. Midway then enjoyed a golden era in a period 2004 - 2014 in which the club was overall New Zealand champion 6 times, and runner-up on 4 other occasions. In the 1990's in two International Tests versus Australia, Midway provided 8 of the 15 person New Zealand team. Midway continues to have members selected in recent biannual world championship teams and on 4 occasions Midway members have captained the New Zealand team.

In an ever changing social, climatic, financial, and political environment Midway's proud history will continue to provide significant strength to draw from to prevent injury and death on Midway beach, and will continue to produce well-rounded, mature and responsible citizens capable of making a significant difference to whatever communities and businesses they are involved with. The Club has identified some demanding social and community changes which

will require intensified and different responses to future beach usage. The proposed redevelopment of the Olympic Pool Complex, the extension of the cycle-walkway as far as the Waipaoa River mouth, the increasing usage of the Motor-home Park at the corner of Pacific St. All of these will increase considerably the public usage of a large extension of Midway's patrolling area and responsibilities. Midway's response to these developments will require new approaches, more Lifeguard rescue equipment and the constant recruitment and training of active Lifeguards.

A critical enabler for Midway to deliver the future required lifeguard services is to have a fit-for purpose building that has the structure and capacity to train lifeguards, to be effective as a lifeguard operations centre, and to securely store greater and more valuable lifeguard equipment. With this in mind it was moved at the AGM in 2017 that a building Sub Committee be set up with a view of doing major renovations to the Club House. The Club had been fortunate some years previously to have been bequeathed a considerable amount of money from an estate and so we had \$200k in the bank to start our project. A building sub committee was set up and the next two years saw some progress made but with it came the realization that it wasn't a renovation that was required. It was a rebuild. Things progressed with a feasibility study undertaken and an Architect consulted. At the Club's 2018 AGM an ex Midway member who had played an instrumental role in the rebuild of the Papamoa Surf Life Saving Club asked the meeting if there was anything the Club would like help with and so Matt Pickering was recruited on to the building committee. This building committee worked quietly in the background while other club activities continued as normal. December 2019 saw the coronavirus 19 disease emerge but it wasn't until February 2020 that it arrived in NZ. In early March Jacinda advised all over 70 year olds (that would be most of us I am guessing) to isolate and then on March 25<sup>th</sup> the whole country was put in lockdown. Our building sub committee decided to use this time to work on the project and the Club formed The Midway Surf Rescue Charitable Trust to facilitate and oversee the rebuild of the Club. When the Government announced funding availability for Shovel Ready Community projects the working group of the Trust was at a perfect stage to put in an application. Most of you will know that our application was successful and we are well underway with the rebuild. The Trust members had a vision that was more than just a Surf Club, they wanted to create a Community Hub where other water based sporting codes could take advantage of the facilities. This philosophy has been incorporated into the rebuild and bodes well for an exciting waterfront precinct complimented by the new Kiwa Pool complex.

## NGATI POROU

Ngati Porou is the 74th club to become affiliated to Surf Life Saving NZ.

The background of Ngāti Porou Surf Life Saving begins with the revival of waka ama in New Zealand in the 1980's and a subsequent 160km waka ama paddle from Onepoto (Hicks Bay) to Gisborne in 1999 with a group of Hicks Bay locals.

That historic journey was instrumental for a number of reasons, firstly that it was a journey of rediscovery for many of the participants, that retraced the ancestral water highways of their tūpuna (ancestors). But it was also during that historic trip that the seed was planted to start a Surf Life Saving Club based in Onepoto (Hicks Bay) in order to provide safer beaches and water safety education to rural communities along the East Coast.

Māori constitute approximately 15% of the total New Zealand population, however, they are over represented in drowning statistics. This was a further reason for the establishment of Ngāti Porou Surf Life Saving Club. Chairman Peter Boyd questions why this is the case. "What's happening here? We were once a great ocean-going people. We're an ocean culture. We sing and haka about it. We all relate back to our ancestral waka. But how do we reconnect with the ocean? That's the point of Ngāti Porou surf lifesaving," he says.

The importance of this reconnection is shown in the Ngāti Porou Surf Life Saving logo which is drawn by artist, waterman and surf lifeguard Owen Williams. It depicts Ngāti Porou ancestor Paikea who is arguably the first original surf lifeguard to come to the East Coast on the back of a whale. Also pictured are the Waiapu, Hikurangi and Tairāwhiti, which emphasises the genealogical links of people along the East Coast.

Mr Boyd says Ngati Porou's core business of patrolling, training, qualifications and operating under Surf Life Saving New Zealand regulations will be the same, however, they are packaging it differently to attract a wider membership by including training in the use of waka ama and stand up paddle boards as part of their offering to members.

Mr Boyd, a seasoned Wainui lifeguard, started training two groups towards gaining their Surf Lifeguard Award. One group based in Gisborne and the other in Hicks Bay, with the support of the Water Safety New Zealand Kia maanu, Kia ora initiative. The success of the training resulted in nine newly qualified lifeguards. However, while the club was still in its initial stages, these new lifeguards qualified under the Wainui Surf Life Saving Club, but looked forward to patrolling the beaches in Hicks Bay and surrounds starting in the 2014-2015 season.

Ngāti Porou Surf Life Saving's philosophy is about learning how to minimise harm around the water but also about developing whānau so that they are fitter, healthier, more responsible and environmentally, culturally and community minded. "We want to share the excitement and energy that Tangaroa has to offer so that we can all enjoy our biggest playground with confidence and respect.

## MY INVOLVEMENT

I first became involved with the Midway club in the late 60s through my ex husband. Glen originally belonged to Waikanae but became a part of a break away group who moved over to Midway because of the bad blood at that time between the sport of surf life saving and the sport of surfing. Some of the guys who had been involved in surf life saving got interested in surfing and that did not go down well with some of the more old school thinkers. Surfing has come a long way since the 60s and is now a much respected sport on the national and international scene but back then it was considered a sport for the ratbags who bunked school, surfed all day and smoked wacky backy. And so there was a bit of an exodus to Midway and that started my involvement with the Club and the movement.

When I say involvement it was not much in those early days. Surf Life Saving was a male dominated sport and community service and us girlfriends and wives were very much in the background or if we were in the foreground it was as window dressing. There were no female members, it was a male domain. There was a female club which operated out of what is now the Tri Club just by the Beacon Reserve but it wasn't until the early 80s that Waikanae, Wainui and Midway admitted females as members to their clubs. Karen Griffiths along with Kerry Low, Kerry Ellis and Kerry McCullough (the 4 Ks) were some of our earliest female Life Guards. A motion had been tabled for the AGM in the 1980s that females be admitted as members into the Club. The girls were not allowed to attend the AGM but sat outside on the Clubhouse steps waiting for word. One of the male members emerged from the meeting with the words – Your'e in Girls!! The involvement in those early years was still minimal though but I'm pleased to say that females today like in many other sports are fully involved.

Once females became qualified Life Guards alongside their male counterparts and part of the Club it became easier for the girlfriends and wives to be involved. Not too involved mind you!! That didn't happen for me until after my divorce and that's when I flourished in my roles in the Club. In 1988, the year I was divorced I was approached by a committee member asking me if I would consider being the Club Treasurer. I had only myself to consult and so began my long association with Midway's finances. Funny thing happened at my first committee meeting. The then Chairman, ex City Councillor, Brian Wilson, said to me "Marice, you don't need to bother to come to the Club Meetings, just keep all our finances in order. We will take care of everything else. I told him in no uncertain terms that if I was volunteering my time to keep the finances in order I would be participating fully in all aspects of the Club. I thought I was so brave!

I am not a qualified Life Guard nor have I been a competitor but I have still found a place for myself in the movement of Surf Life Saving. One piece of advice I would give young parents is to be involved in your children's out of school activities. I was such a part of the Surf Club my

children never went through the stage of not wanting me around. They just accepted that it was something we were all involved in. I was fortunate enough to have a son who was in the NZ Team for several years and this enabled me to travel extensively overseas supporting him and the NZ Team so I have a lot of really good memories to look back on.

Just this month after 34 years I have officially resigned from the Club Committee. I'm not sure yet how long it will take me to get my head around this momentous change but I am on the Midway Surf Rescue Charitable Trust so I look forward to continuing my involvement in that way.

Marice Richardson