

Basic Detail Report



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Title

Plaque presented to Mr Tom Gunning by Arthur N White for saving Mrs White from drowning in heavy surf at Manly on 9 September 1914

Date

1914

Medium

Metal, watercolour on paper, wood

Dimensions

Overall: 165 x 130 x 25 mm, 0.25 kg

Name

Plaque

History

From the early 1900s, swimming became an increasingly popular sport and leisure activity in Australia. As people turned to the surf, this called for a need to establish lifesaving clubs which adapted still-water rescue and resuscitation techniques. By the 1930s, the Australian lifesaver had become a familiar figure in promotional material targeted at attracting tourists to Australian shores. Another characteristic of the surf lifesaving culture that accompanied the prominent image of the blond, muscular lifesaver was the popularity of surf carnivals. Events featured during these carnivals included races, parades and relays. In 1903, Manly locals, including Tom Gunning, conducted a meeting and formed a committee. The hazardous surf conditions meant that many of those present in the meeting had rescued swimmers from danger. The group agreed to call their committee 'The Manly Surf and Life Saving Club'. From that point on, Gunning and stories of his lifesaving pursuits appear in several newspaper reports. One occasion received particular attention in 'The Sydney Morning Herald' and other regional newspapers in New South Wales. Late at night on 18 January 1909, 'there was a sudden cry of alarm' and a call for help from bathers saying a woman had been 'carried out' to sea. Tom Gunning was standing on the beach at the time and, as a member of the Manly Surf Club Life-Saving Squad, he 'at once rushed down to the beach' and went into the water, fully clothed, in pursuit of the woman, a Mrs Ward. By this point, she was 100 yards off the beach. Gunning located the woman in complete darkness and brought her to safety. The 'Northern Star' in Lismore went with the headline 'Bravo, Life-Saver!' on 1 October reporting that Gunning fought 'treacherous' conditions and was presented with the Manly Surf Club's special gold medal.