

Ca 1930 : Brighton Pier



THE ROSE SERIES P. 13998

FORESHORE SHOWING PIER, BRIGHTON BEACH, VIC.

Pictures Collection State Library of Victoria

ACTIVITY: Treading water

CASE: [GSAF 1930.02.15](#)

DATE: Saturday February 15, 1930

LOCATION: Middle Brighton, Port Phillip, Victoria, Australia.

NAME: Norman Clarke

DESCRIPTION: He was an 18-year-old male. Well-built and tanned he was an excellent diver and swimmer and was fond of swimming in the deep water at the end of the pier.

BACKGROUND

MOON PHASE: Full Moon, February 13, 1930

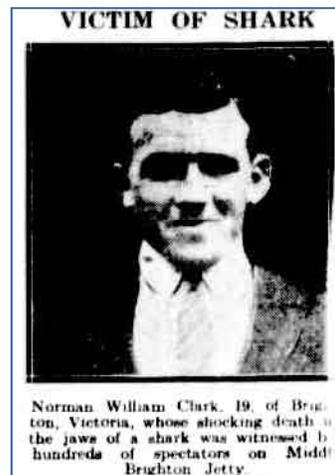
ENVIRONMENT: Fisherman at Brighton had been warning people for weeks that sharks were around the pier.

DISTANCE FROM SHORE: A quarter mile

DISTANCE FROM PIER: Nine feet

DEPTH OF WATER AT INCIDENT SITE: "Deep water"

TIME: 16h30



Norman William Clark, 18, of Brighton, Victoria, whose shocking death at the jaws of a shark was witnessed by hundreds of spectators on Middle Brighton Jetty.

NARRATIVE: The beach was crowded when Norman Clarke dived into the water off the end of the Middle Brighton pier. He was alone in the water and treading water when the shark glided through the water as if it had just come from beneath the pier. A man called out, "A shark," but Clarke apparently did not hear the warning.

Suddenly, Clarke threw up his hands, called out, and was dragged beneath the surface. He reappeared and the shark was seen holding him by the leg, the boy was across the shark's snout and punching the fish with both hands.

They submerged and resurfaced moments later. The boy was still beating the shark with his hands, although it was clear that his strength was failing, and the water for yards around him was stained with blood.

The shark released Clarke. Then with "fin and tail out of the water" it charged him again. The impact lifted the boy out of the water, and the shark seized him around his chest. The shark submerged with the boy about 50 feet from the pier and neither were seen again.

INJURY: Fatal

SPECIES INVOLVED: The shark was clearly seen by 80 to 100 people on the pier. It was thought the attack involved a white shark, *Carcharodon carcharias*, 16 feet in length.

SOURCES: Northern Territory Times, Tuesday February 18, 1930, page 6

The Bee (Danville, Virginia), Friday, April, 18, 1930, page 3

Victor M. Coppleson.V2.(1933) (Lists the date as February 16, 1930 but in later publications revised the date to February 15, 1930)

Victor M. Coppleson (1958), pages 110 & 24

Dick Whitaker, <http://passingparade-2009.blogspot.com/2011/11/brighton-shark-attack-of-1930.html>

NOTE: During the great depression the Brighton City Council built bluestone walls to protect the beaches from erosion. The stones were taken from the outer walls of the Old Melbourne Gaol and included the headstones (initials and date of execution engraved on a stone at the head of the graves) of those executed and buried on the grounds. Although most were placed with the engravings facing inwards, the stone of The Black Widow, Martha Needle, was faced outwards and the initials MN and the date of October 22, 1894 is still clearly visible in the Green Point wall.

Monster Devours Youth Bathing While Hundreds Watch In Horror

MELBOURNE Australia April 17—(INS)—For the first time in fifty years a shark devoured a man in Melbourne Bay the fashionable bathing resort here

The struggle between the man and the sea beast took place before the eyes of a large crowd of horrified spectators

Norman Clark aged 18 was bathing off the pier when people on shore and on the pier heard piercing screams coming from him

He suddenly disappeared beneath the surface and then appeared again fifty yards to the left of the pier To the horriification of the spectators it was seen that a shark had him firmly grasped by the chest

With another terrified scream he went under again leaving a trail of blood fifty yards long

Once again the shark and his victim came to the surface and it was apparent that Clark was gamely struggling with the monster He was frantically beating it on the nose with his hands and so tenaciously did he resist the persistent attacks of the shark that the struggle continued over seventy yards

The battle finally terminated when Clark disappeared under the water for the sixth time

Shortly before the incident occurred, scores of swimmers had been in the water but most of them came out to watch the start of a boat race The crowd was so stupefied by the horror of the spectacle that no one made any attempts to rescue the young man.

Melbourne Saturday.—Seized by a monster shark while bathing off Middle Brighton Pier at 4.30 this afternoon Norman Clark aged 18 who had just dived into the water was terribly mauled and dragged into the Bay. His body has not yet been recovered. Clark's fiancee was on the Pier and witnessed the shocking tragedy. The tragedy is the first since 1876. It occurred in the presence of hundreds of people who had gathered to watch the Dinghy race.



**SEIZED BY SHARK
YOUTH'S TERRIBLE DEATH.**

**OFF MIDDLE BRIGHTON PIER.
MANY WITNESS TRAGEDY.**

HORRIFIED WOMEN FAINT.

Attacked by a shark off the end of the Middle Brighton pier on Saturday afternoon, Norman William Clark, aged 19 years, of Point Nepean road, North Brighton, was mutilated and dragged to his death before assistance could be obtained.

Between 80 and 100 persons saw Clark disappear. So sudden was the attack that few people realised what had happened until they saw the shark grip Clark in its huge jaws. It came at him again and again, and eventually it disappeared with the body 50ft. from the pier. Witnesses described the shark as being at least 16ft. long.

The shark was seen a few seconds before it attacked Clark, but there was not enough time to give him warning. Some time before the tragedy Clark had been diving from other parts of the pier. He then went to the lower platform at the end of the pier, and after sitting there with his brother and the girl he dived in. He went out about 50ft. and returned to the platform.

A few minutes later he dived in again, and swam out the same distance, returning to within 12ft. of the edge of the platform. He was treading water when the shark first attacked him. A few seconds later, a man on the pier, according to statements by witness, saw the shark glide through the water as if it had just come from beneath the pier. He called out, "A shark," but Clark apparently did not hear the warning, or perhaps thought that someone was joking.

The next second he cried out, "Oh," and, throwing up one hand, he disappeared under the water. Even then few people realised that a shark had seized him. As he came up, however, the shark could be seen holding on to his leg. Clark appeared to be sitting across its nose, and he was punching it.

Horrified by the sight, many women on the pier fainted, and they had to be given stimulants. The girl who had been with Clark also fainted, and several men carried her along the pier. It was some time before she recovered. In the meantime, other women and men tried to frighten the shark away with noise, and it suddenly disappeared, dragging Clark down through the water. It carried him round to the south side of the pier.

When Clark came up again, he was still trying to beat off the shark, but his strength was fast ebbing. The water for yards around was stained red. The shark, with its fin and tail out of the water, made another rush at Clark, and almost lifted him out of the water as it seized him round the chest in its jaws. That was the last that was seen of Clark. He went down suddenly, several witnesses said, as if the shark had carried him away.

Aftermath

Clark, whose father died several years ago, lived with his mother. He was a winch driver by occupation. Frequently he visited the Middle Brighton beach. Well-built and tanned by the sun, he was a splendid swimmer and diver, and it had been mentioned that he was fond of swimming in the deep water at the end of the pier.

Mr. David Clark, an elder brother of the victim, said yesterday that his brother was a Sea Scout, and he took an active interest in all kinds of sport. "Norman was a keen cricketer, and on Saturday I wanted him to play in a team of which I am a member," he added. "We were a man short in my team, and I wanted him to fill in the vacancy. He said that he had made arrangements to go swimming."

Although not mentioned in the newspaper account, from the description of the shark and its method of attack it seems likely that the monster was a white pointer.

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[Alex](#) *October 31, 2012 at 6:01 AM*

My Grandmother who lived around that area at the time used to tell us this story when we were kids in the 1970s and 1980s. She would embellish the story, eventually telling us that the poor lad had dived straight into the gaping maw of the giant shark.

[Peter Hamilton](#) *December 25, 2012 at 2:10 PM*

Dave Clarke went on to serve Brighton as head of the Works department. He enjoyed hiring high school and uni students for the summer and other breaks. He was a very short man, and always wore a hat. We always knew that his brother 'dived off Brighton Pier into the jaws of a great shark.' We had great respect for Mr Clarke because we made very good money working on an interesting range of jobs, from repairing the Brighton Baths to garbage collection. We always knew that there was a tragic story, but no one raised the matter directly with him. Thanks for posting this informative report!

Anonymous *November 14, 2014 at 4:10 PM*

Dave Clarke and Norman are my family members, brothers of my Great Grandmother and I was fortunate enough to meet his best friend's son some years later, who also gave the same account and was a direct witness to the tragic attack so the truth of the matter was told and has been mentioned by Alex and Peter above that he dived off the Brighton Pier into the jaws of a great white shark!

SOURCE: Dick Whitaker, <http://passingparade-2009.blogspot.com/2011/11/brighton-shark-attack-of-1930.html>