



SLSA History Fact Sheet #1

'First surf reel'

Who was the first person to be saved by the surf reel?

Within surf lifesaving lore the answer has always been a young Charlie Smith, who would grow up to be non-other than Charles Kingsford Smith. The reality, however, is different. While it is true that a young Charlie Smith nearly drowned at Bondi over the Christmas holidays of 1906/07, the surf reel had not yet been invented.

The collaborative effort of Bondi Surf Bathers Life Saving Club foundation members John Bond, Lyster Ormsby and Percy Flynn, the reel was not designed until March of 1907, making its first appearance on the beach during a public display on Sunday 24 March 1907. The *Sydney Referee* noted of the demonstration: 'An example was given of the proper method of handling the life-line, which was fastened upon a reel, which is strong and portable, weighs 50 or 60lbs., when equipped, and proved to be effective in the quick handling of the line. There is no unnecessary slack, nor is there any risk of entanglement'.



Bondi SBLSC Members with their first reel

- **Dr Sean Brawley**
Contributer to the SLSA History
Book (due out Oct '06)