

Annette Kellerman (1887 – 1975)



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Annette took up swimming at the age of six to strengthen her legs after a bout of polio as a child. Up to 1912 women were disbarred from Olympic competition so Annette travelled the world entering long distance swimming events. She became famous for swimming 21 kilometres of the River Thames in London.

Annette went to America to break a long distance swimming record at Boston Beach. At a time when female swimmers wore bathing costumes from their necks to their knees, Annette came up with the idea of a one-piece swimsuit that wasn't so heavy. However, the Boston Police arrested her and took her to jail because she had shown too much skin! The judge was sympathetic and dismissed her case. Annette made headlines and became famous in America.

Known as the Australian Mermaid, Annette had a long theatre career in Europe, the United States and Australia and was the first Australian woman to star in a Hollywood Movie, *Jepthah's Daughter*, in 1909.

During the World War Two years Annette lived in Queensland. During this time she worked with Sister Elizabeth Kenny assisting those with polio and was also a hard working Red Cross volunteer.

In addition to her acting career Annette wrote several books, was successful in business and was a passionate advocate for healthy living. She retired to the Gold Coast, and continued to swim into her old age. Today many of her original costumes are housed at the Sydney Powerhouse Museum.