

The Liffey Swim: The 1970's Decade – Part 5 1979

Cyril J Smyth

***Dublin University Central Athletic Club, Sports Centre,
Trinity College, University of Dublin, Dublin 2***

The 1979 Liffey Swim

The year started with a prosecution of Dublin Corporation, in an action by the Dublin Board of Fishery Conservators, for polluting the River Dargle, a tributary of the River Dodder, between Kimmage and Churchtown in May 1978.¹ Corporation workers were alleged to have pumped raw sewage into the Dargle. The Corporation accepted that its workers had discharged the effluent directly, but pleaded that they had been dealing with an emergency during a survey of the sewers and that it was an isolated incident. The Corporation was fined £10 with costs of £137.11. At the AGM of the Dodder Angling Club, reference was made to this incident.² Assurances had been received that by the end of 1979 effluent from the tiphead at Bohernabreena would be piped into the sewers.

Dublin County Council was fined £100 in Kilmainham Court for permitting sewage to flow into the River Tolka after power in a pumping house was turned off because of a pipe blockage.³ The Dublin Board of Fishery Conservators argued that it was not acceptable that local authorities were doing patch-up jobs on outdated and broken down sewage treatment machinery. It was to be expected that County Councils, more than private people and private bodies, should be complying with the legislation on control of pollution. In an editorial in the *Irish Independent*, it was posited that one of the country's greatest assets was clean water and that there was insufficient public awareness of its destruction through many and diverse causes.⁴ There was a need for tighter controls over the management of waste and effluents, in particular the disposal of toxic and hazardous waste.⁵ The use of sewage sludge for land spreading in Ireland was a cause for concern as there was evidence that some sludges contained considerable amounts of heavy metals such as zinc, lead and copper.⁵

In June CIE was fined £18 with costs and expenses of £132.50 for showing carelessness in relation to pollution of the River Liffey by oil which had been caused by a leakage at a depot in the CIE premises.⁶ CIE pleaded that they had spent a considerable sum of money to remedy the situation and planned to spend a further £15,000 to ensure that such an incident could not happen again. In the July there was a fish kill of trout in the River Dodder due to pollution from a culvert.^{7,8} The public were warned not to eat any of the dead fish. Concern was voiced about a proposal by Dublin County Council to use a gravel pit at Ballinascorney, near Brittas in the Wicklow Mountains as an industrial chemical dump which might lead to poisoning of Dublin's

water supply.⁹ It was argued that any development in the area unrelated to its amenity value or farming use should not be permitted. The company advancing the project argued that the waste would be held in bays lined with plastic to prevent leakage into the surrounding ground.

Oil tankers delivering to Dublin Port were accused of flushing their huge tanks in the Irish Sea with consequent pollution of beaches at Killiney, Shankill and Bray.¹⁰ It took time for dispersants to have any effect such oil slicks. Local harbour authorities in whose area oil pollution occurred were responsible for dealing with it. Concerns were raised over pollution of the sea and inlets by sewage in the Fingal area from Skerries to Malahide.¹¹ Sewage pipes from the Swords, Ashbourne and Malahide areas were discharging directly into amenity waters used for sailing, water skiing, swimming and wind surfing. The western extreme of the inner Broadmeadow estuary was becoming silted up with sewage sludge. At low tide in Malahide the area in the vicinity of a sewage pipe was littered with domestic sewage detritus. The sewage system operated by Dublin County Council from Balbriggan along the coast came under fire as totally inadequate and at a crisis point.¹² Sewerage services operated by the County Council were being overwhelmed by building developments. It was stated that new E.E.C. regulations on maximum coliform counts would not be met.

The question of the desirability of building an oil refinery in the Dublin Port area was brought into focus again by the Whiddy Island disaster in Bantry Bay on 8 January 1979 when a series of massive explosions tore apart a French supertanker, the *MT Betelgeuse*, owned by Total, at the Gulf Oil storage terminal, killing 42 French crew and 8 Whiddy Island staff, seven Irish and one British.^{13,14,15,16,17,18} Emergency staff fought the blaze to prevent it spreading to the storage facilities onshore containing between 300,000 to 400,000 tons of crude oil.



**The *MT Betelgeuse* on fire at the Whiddy Island Gulf oil terminal on 8 January, 1979
(Source: TV3 Ireland. (2015). Whiddy Oil Disaster: Islanders)**

Only 27 bodies were ever recovered, the others thought to have completely disintegrated in the explosions and/or been cremated in the subsequent inferno.¹⁹ The Smit Tak International Company, Rotterdam, was charged with salvage of the *Betelgeuse*.^{20,21} It would take a continuous 573-day operation to raise the wreck and remove it. By July 1979 the bow section had been raised, towed out to sea and sunk. The remaining middle and stern sections presented a whole series of problems, operations being hampered by the swell in the Bay and the depth at which the wreck was lying.²¹ The Irish government held a public inquiry under Justice Declan Costello to investigate the incident.²² The tribunal would take over a year to hear the evidence.

The exploits of long-distance swimmers continued to engage the public's interest. In the middle of July Italian swimmer Paolo Pinto, a lawyer from Bari, became the first man to swim the Strait of Otranto from Italy and Greece.²³ He swam from Porticciolo di Castro, Italy's most easterly point, to the island of Fanos in the Corfu archipelago, completing the distance of 53 miles, but probably more because of adverse currents, in 39 hours. He made the crossing in a floating steel anti-shark cage towed by a launch. In August on the other side of the Atlantic Diana Nyad completed an 89-mile swim from Bimini in the Bahamas to Jupiter Beach, Florida in 27 hours 38 mins without an anti-shark cage to become the first swimmer to conquer the Gulfstream.^{24,25,26} In 1978 she had attempted unsuccessfully to swim from Cuba to the Florida Keys because of problems with her shark cage.²⁴

An attempt in July by an American, John Eriksson, to swim the English Channel non-stop three ways ended in failure.²⁶ He had been the water for over 30 hours and was only six miles off the French coast on the final leg when conditions became too rough to continue. He completed the first leg for Dover to France in 8 hours 38 mins.²⁶ On 4 August 1979 South African Kevin Anderson, aged 12, became the youngest person to swim the Channel from England to France which he completed in 12½ hours.^{27,28} His claim to fame lasted two days when a London schoolboy Marcus Hooper, also aged 12 but three months younger than Anderson, wrestled the title from the South African in 14 hours 37 mins.^{27,28} John Kinsella, a 27-year-old professional swimmer from Chicago, won the international Channel swim race from Dover's Shakespeare Beach to Cap Gris Nez in 9 hours 9 mins, 35 mins ahead of Argentinian Claudio Plit, to take home the first prize of £1,000 provided by the Saudi Swimming Federation, sponsors of the race. It was his first Channel Swim.^{29,30} Three Irish swimmers – Michael Moore (36) from Lucan, Stephen Tisdall (26) from Baldoyle and Mary Power (21) from Wexford – attempted unsuccessfully to break the World underwater endurance record of 140 hours at the swimming pool in St Mary's Orthopaedic Hospital, Baldoyle. All three had problems with leaking suits.^{31,32} A swim across Belfast Lough from White Head to Bangor, which was sponsored by Jack McClelland, took place in August.³³ McClelland had swum the 6½ miles from Rue Point, Rathlin Island – the southernmost tip – to Ballycastle on the 11th June, 1959,³⁴ from Tory Island to the Mainland at Port Tory on 13th July, 1968,³⁵ across Galway Bay from Co. Clare to Salthill on 30 August, 1964,³⁶ and across the Straits of Gibraltar from Spain to Morocco on 20 September, 1961 in 7 hours 15 min.³⁷

The ‘hither-and-thithering’ Liffey waters from Guinness Brewery to Butt Bridge were still uninviting as pollution was still higher than acceptable for swimming in a city river. Given that there were attempts to move the Liffey Swim to the Shannon which led to the revival of the Shannon Swim at Athlone, Liffey veterans could possibly have taken some delight in reports of pollution of the Shannon.^{38,39} All along the Shannon, raw untreated sewage was being pumped into its waters with what was described as a “*criminally cavalier attitude to this precious resource*”.³⁸ All of the toilets in Athlone with a population of 10,000 flushed directly into the river. Cruisers on the Shannon used open sea toilets with the effluent from toilets going directly into the river. One correspondent indicated that he and his family no longer swam in the Shannon as “*the prospect of emerging from the water festooned with French faeces was too daunting*”.³⁹ The residues of human faecal matter were said to be accumulating at mooring points up and down the Shannon.³⁸

The annual open sea and river swims produced their surprise winners and predictable fastest swimmers. Otter SC staged its first open sea swims for men and women at Scotsman Bay, Dún Laoghaire on 29 June.^{40,41} The races started at the Elbow beside the Grand Stand of the East Pier, the Ladies race finishing at the Dún Laoghaire Baths and the men’s race at the Forty Foot. The *Irish Independent* commented that the races “*had little to commend them*” as they took place when there was a low tide and the men’s race over a shortened course started an hour and forty minutes late. The men’s race over approx. 1 mile was won by Lenny Byrne (North Dublin SC), from Christy Carty (Dublin SC), 2nd who also clocked the fastest time and David McLoughlin (North Dublin SC, 3rd. The men’s team prize went to North Dublin SC.⁴¹

Place	Name	Age	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Lenny Byrne		North Dublin SC	1 min 00 sec	20:30
2	Christy Carty ‡		Dublin SC	4 min 00 sec	17:35
3	David McLoughlin		North Dublin SC	3 min 00 sec	18:37
4	Jimmy Seery		North Dublin SC	3 min 00 sec	18:40
5	D Hawthorn		North Dublin SC	2 min 00 sec	19:55
6	Andy White		North Dublin SC	3 min 00 sec	19:18

‡ Fastest time

The women’s race over some 600m was won by Patricia Doran (Dublin SC), who was followed home by her clubmate Orla Kenny, who clocked the fastest time, with Dolores Kenny (Atlanta SC), 3rd. Dublin SC took the team prize.⁴¹

Place	Name	Age	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Patricia Doran		Dublin SC	1 min 00 sec	8:30
2	Orla Kenny ‡		Dublin SC	1 min 30 sec	8:10
3	Dolores Kenny		Atlanta SC	0 min 30 sec	9:13
4	Susan Kelly		Half Moon SC	At "Go"	9:55
5	Susan Linnane		Otter SC	1 min 30 sec	8:29
6	Sandra Reid		Dublin SC	1 min 00 sec	9:15
18	M Kenny		Dublin SC		

‡ Fastest time

A week later the 49th Dún Laoghaire Harbour Swim, sponsored by *The Irish Times*, took place. Among those mentioned as challengers were Chris Carty, fastest in the recent Otter SC open sea swim, Lenny Byrne (North Dublin SC), winner of the Otter SC race, and veteran Mick Fitzgerald.⁴² Francis "Chalkey" White, now swimming for King's Hospital, was named as an entry going for his fourth Harbour Swim win,⁴² but it is unclear whether or not he started as he was not mentioned in reports. David Cummins, the winner in 1978, was absent, having just returned from the F.I.S.E.C. Games in Spain.⁴²

It was Terenure SC's 20-year-old Kevin Williamson who added another laurel to his already impressive swimming CV.⁴³ The 20-year-old was home on vacation from the University of Michigan where he was majoring in physical education on a full-level sports scholarship. Under the guidance of former U.S. Olympic coach Gus Steger, he had greatly benefitted from the demanding collegiate competition circuit. He had clocked 4:31 for 400 yards, equivalent to about 3:56 for 400m.⁴⁴ Williamson overcame the deficit of 11 min 15 sec after the first swimmer set by the handicapper to take the lead at the three-quarter distance stage with his clubmate Mick McCann close behind. In securing his win he beat the handicap, had the fastest time and led Terenure SC to the team prize. Francis Kelly (King's Hospital SC) came home third.⁴³ At the triangular swimming international between Ireland, Iceland and Israel the previous week at the E.S.B. Sports Pool, Williamson set an Irish record for the 400m freestyle of 3:58.64 to become the first Irish swimmer to break the 4-min barrier for the distance.^{43,45}

Place	Name	Age	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Kevin Williamson †‡	20	Terenure SC	11 min 15 sec	21:00
2	Mick McCann	18	Terenure SC		
3	Francis Kelly		King's Hospital SC		
4	Eamonn Flynn	16	Clontarf SC		
5	Joe Browne		North Dublin SC		
6	Lorcan Shelley		Terenure SC		21:17

*Time after limit swimmer at "go"

† Scratch swimmer

‡ Fastest time

Some of the fancied swimmers in the Women' race were Clodna Johnston (Cormorant SC) who was back to defend her title, Vivienne McDermott (Aer Lingus SC), Patricia Doran (Dublin SC), Susan Linnane (Otter SC) and Susan Kelly (Half Moon SC).⁴³ Nonetheless, it was Ann Cummins (Cormorant SC), who was the joint scratch swimmer with her clubmate Anne Shalloo on a 4-min handicap, who swept to victory.⁴⁴ She caught the leading swimmer with about 150 metres remaining and won with 29 sec to spare. Cormorant SC with five swimmers in the top six finishers took the team prize. Ann Cummins also recorded the fastest time.⁴⁴

Place	Name	Age	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Ann Cummins †‡	20	Cormorant SC	11 min 15 sec	21:00
2	Ann Shalloo		Cormorant SC		
3	U Johnstone		Cormorant SC		
4	Orla Kenny	16	Dublin SC		
5	Dymphna Kenny		Cormorant SC		
6	Ursula McCarroll		Cormorant SC		21:17

*Time after limit swimmer at "go"

† Scratch swimmer

‡ Fastest time

The annual Island Swim from Ireland's Eye to Balcadden Beach at Howth for the Senator P.J. Kelly Cup took place on 20 July.⁴⁶ The results of this race were not published in the *Irish Press*, *Irish Independent*, *Irish Times* or *Evening Herald*.

On 22 July the Shannon Swim at Athlone, sponsored by the *Irish Independent* and under the auspices of the Leinster and Connacht Branches of the I.A.S.A, took place as the major sporting event around which the Athlone Summer Festival was built.^{47,48,49} More than 3,000 spectators watched the races from the promenade and other vantage points along the river including the town bridge. For the four McCann brothers from Terenure, Dublin, the 1979 Shannon Swim was a memorable event with Robert winning the race and his brothers Mick, Frank and Derek placing 3rd, 8th and 23rd, respectively.^{50,51}

At the halfway stage Robert McCann (Terenure SC) took the lead, dismissing challenges from veteran swimmer Mick Fitzpatrick (Half Moon SC), Mick McCay (Athlone SC), Brian O'Regan (Terenure SC) and Kevin O'Byrne (Galway SC). McCann finished strongly winning by 10 metres from Peter Byrne (Central Remedial Clinic SC) with his brother Mick McCann, a close 3rd. The fastest time was clocked unsurprisingly by Irish international Kevin Williamson (Terenure SC/Univ Michigan). Terenure SC took the team prize with seven swimmers in the top ten placings.^{50,51}

Men^{50,51}

Place	Name	Age	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Robert McCann	13	Terenure SC	5 min 00 sec	23:42
2	Peter Byrne	15	Central Remedial Clinic SC	3 min 00 sec	25:59
3	Mick McCann	18	Terenure SC	10 min 25 sec	18:47
4	Peter Sinclair		Terenure SC	7 min 30 sec	21:52
5	Kevin Williamson †‡		Terenure SC	11 min 45 sec	18:03
6	Lorcan Shelley		Terenure SC	10 min 15 sec	19:43
7	Boyd Freeman		Cormorant SC	10 min 25 sec	19:29
8	Frank McCann		Terenure SC	9 min 30 sec	20:49
9	Frank "Junior" Nolan		Athlone SC	4 min 00 sec	26:20
10	Paul Murphy		Terenure SC	10 min 00 sec	20:24
13	Tommy Smith		Claremorris SC		
23	Derek McCann		Terenure SC		

*Time after limit swimmer at "go"

† Scratch swimmer

‡ Fastest time

The ladies open half-mile race, sponsored by the *Westmeath/Offaly Independent*, proved to be a triumph for the local club, Athlone Swimming Club. The race was won by Catherine Faulkner with her clubmate Mary Lynam in second place. Dymphna Morris (Terenure SC) recorded the fastest swim and Roscommon SC retained the team title [5, 10, 11, 14 = 40 pts].^{50,51,,52,53} There was drama when Aoife Doyle (Athlone SC) got into difficulties and had to be rescued by members of Athlone Sub-Aqua Club.⁵⁴

Women^{50,51,52,53}

Place	Name	Age	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Catherine Faulkner	17	Athlone SC	At "Go"	11:35
2	Mary Lynam		Athlone SC	At "Go"	11:59
3	Louise Keogh		Terenure SC	4 min 50 sec	08:08
4	Deirdre O'Mahoney		Claremorris SC	3 min 30 sec	09:17
5	Helen Kelly		Roscommon SC	4 min 00 sec	08:45
6	Dymphna Morris †‡		Terenure SC	5 min 15 sec	07:44
7	Karen Roche		Terenure SC	4 min 15 sec	08:45
8	Ann Shalloo †		Cormorant SC	5 min 15 sec	07:47
10	Miriam Halley		Roscommon SC		
11	Cathy O'Connor		Roscommon SC		
14	Tina O'Connor	17	Roscommon SC		

*Time after limit swimmer at "go"

† Scratch swimmer

‡ Fastest time

Half Moon SC had hoped to feature Fernando Canales, a young American Olympic prospect and roommate of Kevin Williamson at the University of Michigan who was staying with the Williamson Family, in the John Clarke Memorial Cup race at South Wall on 12 August, but it did not come to pass.^{55,56} He had competed in the Canal Swim at Robertstown the week before.⁵⁵ Derek Wilkes (North Dublin SC) proved the convincing winner of the 1-mile Clarke Cup swim in choppy seas.^{57,58} He was followed home by Christy Carty (Dublin SC) and M. Farrelly (Half Moon SC). Mattie Waine Guinness SC), who placed 4th, had the fastest time and Half Moon SC took the team prize.^{57,58}

Place	Name	Age	Club	Time
1	Derek Wilkes		North Dublin SC	
2	Christy Carty		Dublin SC	
3	M Farrelly		Half Moon SC	
4	Mattie Waine ‡		Guinness SC	21:22
5	Brian Sweeney		Half Moon SC	
6	Paul Emmett		Half Moon SC	
	Brian Stynes		Half Moon SC	
	Dermot Hughes		Half Moon SC	

‡ Fastest time

The women's race for the Ryan Cup over a half mile was won by Darina Thomas (Otter SC), who was followed home by Susan Linnane (Otter SC) and L Ridgeway (Clontarf SC). The fastest time was clocked Mary Rose Keegan and the team prize went to Guinness SC.^{57,58}

Place	Name	Age	Club	Time
1	Darina Thomas		Otter SC	
2	Susan Linnane		Otter SC	
3	L Ridgeway		Clontarf SC	
4	Mary Rose Keegan ‡		Otter SC	12:40

‡ Fastest time

The handicapped Toft Cup Prom Swim at Salthill, Galway, promoted by the Connacht Branch of the I.A.S.A , was won by Padraig Kenny (Ballinasloe SC) who also had the distinction of returning the fastest time of 22 min 50 sec.⁵⁹ He was followed over the finish line by Brian Desmond (Shark SC, Galway). Rough seas made conditions difficult for the swimmers. The annual Galway Swimming Club Prom Swims at Salthill took place in wet and windy conditions. The men's race was won by Kevin O'Byrne,

with second place going to Peadar O'Grady and third place to John Gill.⁶⁰ The fastest time of 21:45 was clocked by Michael Langan off a tough handicap of 6 min. He placed 4th. The Boys U13 race was won by David Cunningham. The Senior Ladies Race for the McDonough Cup was won by Orla Kennedy in the fastest time. A close second was Helen Woods and third place went to Julie O'Connor. The Girls U13 race was won by Miriam O'Connor in the fastest time.⁶⁰

The decision of the I.A.S.A. to allocate the National Championships to a northern venue, Bangor, gave rise to threats of a boycott by clubs and/or swimmers.⁶¹ The Ulster Branch had not hosted the championships since 1971 when they had been held in the Tower Pool, Larne. The championships had been regularly sited in Galway in the immediate past. However, at the AGM at the end of January, there was a strong vote in favour of Bangor.⁶²

In the run up to the championships the potential rumbles in the pool between Kevin Williamson (Terenure SC), David Cummins (Cormorant SC) and Francis "Chalkey" White (King's Hospital SC) heightened interest in the contests at Bangor.^{63,64} In the three-day multi-nations gala at Crystal Palace, London in April, 17-year-old Cummins, a pupil at St Vincent's Castleknock College had set Irish Senior Records in both the 200m and 400m individual medley.^{65,66} At the Ireland v Israel v Iceland triangular international at the E.S.B. Pool, Ringsend on 4th July, he broke the seven-year-old Irish 100m freestyle record, which had stood to Andy Hunter (Queen's University Belfast SC), in winning the event.^{67,68,69} To this he added an Irish Record in winning the 100m butterfly and an Irish record in the 100m backstroke in the first leg of the 4 x 100m medley relay, paving the way for an Irish record for this relay (David Cummins, Patrick Carey, Francis "Chalkey" White, Patrick Mullally).^{65,66,67} On the second day of the international meeting he won the 200m individual medley in an Irish record, won the 200m backstroke and 200m butterfly events, and as a member of the 4 x 200m freestyle relay team (Tony Cruise, David Cummins, Liam Bohan and Kevin Williamson) broke the Irish record in winning.^{45,70,71} The following week at the F.I.S.E.C. Games in Burgos in Northern Spain, David Cummins won Gold medals in the 200m backstroke and 200m butterfly, both in Games Records.^{72,73,74} At the end of July at the British A.S.A. Championships in Coventry, Cummins again broke three Irish records (100m backstroke, 200m butterfly and 200m individual medley), won the Silver medal in the 200m individual medley and placed 4th in the 100m backstroke and 5th in the 200m butterfly.^{75,76,77}

In Bangor, however, the limelight was stolen by the outstanding performances of 15-year-old Catherine Bohan (King's Hospital SC) with a haul of 10 individual Gold medals with five Irish records – Women: 800m freestyle [joint 1st with Cathy Craig (Leander SC)],^{78,79,80,81} 100m^{78,79,80,81} and 200m [IR]^{82,83} breaststroke, 200m [=IJR]^{84,85,86} and 400m [IR]^{84,85,86} individual medley, and Girls: 100m^{82,83} and 200m [IR]^{78,79,80,81} breaststroke, 200m butterfly,^{82,83} 200m and 400m [IR] individual medleys^{84,85,86} – and two relay Gold medals in record times – Women: 4 x 100m medley relay [IR]^{82,83} and Girls: 4 x 100m medley [IR].^{78,79,80,81} In addition she won

Silver medals in the Girls 100m butterfly^{84,85,86} and 400m freestyle.^{78,79,80,81} Ann Cummins (Cormorant SC), also a 15-year-old, won the Senior 100m^{82,83} and 200m^{84,85,86} freestyle titles, the Girls 100m^{82,83} and 200m^{84,85,86} freestyle titles and Girls 4 x 100m freestyle relay with Cormorant SC (Ann Shalloo, Ann Cummins, C. White and S. Maxwell).^{82,83} She also became the first Irish woman to swim 100m freestyle under one minute when clocking 59.82 sec in the first leg of the 4 x 100m freestyle relay.^{78,79,80,81} Miriam Hopkins (King's Hospital) won the 100m^{78,79,80,81} and 200m^{84,85,86} butterfly and 400m freestyle^{78,79,80,81} titles.

David Cummins (Cormorant SC) added eight more National titles to his tally with five Irish records – 100m^{82,83} and 200m^{78,79,80,81} freestyle, 100m [IR]^{84,85,86} and 200m [IR]^{82,83} backstroke, 100m^{78,79,80,81} and 200m [IR]^{84,85,86} butterfly, and 200m [IR]^{78,79,80,81} and 400m [IR]^{84,85,86} individual medleys. Kevin Williamson (Terenure/Univ. Michigan), while beaten into Silver medal positions in the 100m^{82,83} and 200m^{78,79,80,81} freestyle and 400m individual medley^{84,85,86} events by Cummins, retained his 400m^{78,79,80,81} and 1500m^{84,85,86} freestyle titles and took the Gold medal in the 4 x 100m freestyle relay [IR]^{82,83} with his club mates (Mick McCann, Frank McCann and M. Fennelly). Francis “Chalkey” White (King's Hospital) had to settle for the Silver medals in the 100m butterfly^{78,79,80,81} and Bronze medals in the 200m^{78,79,80,81} freestyle and 100m backstroke,^{84,85,86} although he collected Gold medals with King's Hospital in the 4 x 200m freestyle relay (Francis Kelly, Liam Bohan, Patrick Carey, Francis White)^{84,85,86} and 4 x 100m medley relay (Francis White, Pat Carey, Liam Bohan, Francis Kelly).^{78,79,80,81} Liam Bohan (King's Hospital) won the 100m breaststroke title.^{84,85,86}

The sponsors of the championships, Coca Cola, put up a trophy for the top Club team. The first winners of the Club Championship trophy were Kings Hospital SC with 289 pts, with Cormorant SC 2nd on 175 pts, narrowly holding off Terenure on 174 pts for 3rd place.^{82,83}

The 60th Liffey Swim, sponsored by Tayto, took place on the Islandbridge course finishing at the Dublin University Boat House on the 11th September, 1979, the latest date on which the event had been held up to that year.^{87,88} Liffey stalwarts still continued to press for the siting of the race back to the city centre course under the bridges.⁸⁹ In July 1979, Tony Hennigan wrote in the *Irish Independent* what seemed like an obituary of the Liffey Swim in reviewing forthcoming events.⁴⁹

The Liffey swim was a part of historic Dublin. Oliver St John Gogarty is known to have braved what Joyce called “the hither-and-thithering waters” from Guinness Brewery to Butt Bridge.

Today those waters are less inviting. In fact the city's accumulating waste has caught up with its natural constituents. Analysed some years ago by T.C.D. experts, it was found that pollution was below the acceptable standard for a city river, and the Liffey Swim was abandoned.

If the tradition is broken, the idea has continued. Athlone has incorporated it into its summer festival which begins tomorrow. The Shannon Swim, sponsored by the Irish Independent, is now in its third year, and will be the major event of the festival.

The Liffey Swim had not been abandoned but translocated to another part of the River as had occurred in the late 1930's. The upper Liffey course had successfully kept the spirit of the Liffey Swim alive, albeit not in the classic 'hither-and-thithering' waters.⁹⁰ Entries totalled 75 for the men race and 52 for the women's race.⁸⁹ Among those mentioned in despatches as possible winners were Derek Wilkes (North Dublin SC), winner of the Clarke Cup, Lenny Byrne (North Dublin SC), Paul Emmett (Half Moon) who was 3rd in 1970 and won in 1973, and veteran Mick Fitzgerald (Half Moon SC).⁸⁹

The men's 1-mile race was won easily by Derek Hughes (Half Moon SC) by some 50 yards. He was followed home by clubmate Arthur Dunne, who had a real battle for the minor placings with Andy White (North Dublin SC) in 3rd place. The team prize was won by Half Moon SC (Derek Hughes, Arthur Dunne, Brian McLoughlin, R. Dalton).^{87,88}

Ten-year-old Mairéad Doran (Dublin SC) won the ladies race for the Tommy May trophy. Her clubmate L. Keogh placed 2nd with L. Ridgeway (Clontarf SC) completing the podium positions. The team prize was won by Dublin SC.^{87,88}

Men

Place	Name	Age	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Derek Hughes		Half Moon SC	2 min 20 sec	20:24
2	Arthur Dunne		Half Moon SC	1 min 15 sec	21:45
3	Andy White		North Dublin SC	4 min 30 sec	19:12
4	C Doran		Dublin SC		
5	Ivor Doran		Dublin SC		
6	Brian McLoughlin		Half Moon SC		
7	J Dunne		Atlanta SC		
8	D Hawthorn		North Dublin SC		
	R Dalton		Half Moon SC		

*Time after limit swimmer at "Go"

Women

Place	Name	Age	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Mairéad Doran	10	Dublin SC	0 min 10 sec	6:42
2	Louise Keogh		Dublin SC	At "Go"	7:16
3	L Ridgeway		Clontarf SC	0 min 30 sec	6:53
4	O Fagan		Half Moon SC		
5	C Morrison		Half Moon SC		
6	O Keane		Dublin SC		

*Time after limit swimmer at "Go"

For the first time since 1971 when Francis “Chalkey” White was one of the ten Irish sportsmen and sportswomen to be selected for the Texaco Sports Star Awards,^{91,92} a swimmer was among the awardees for 1979^{93,94,95} – David Cummins – and for only the fourth time since their inauguration in 1956 (formerly the Caltex Sports Stars Awards) , the other two swimmers being Ann O’Connor (1969)⁹⁶ and Donnacha O’Dea (1965).⁹⁷ The other nine nominees in 1979 were John Treacy (Athletics), Terry Christle (Boxing), Eddie Macken (Equestrian), Mike Sheehy (Gaelic Football), Des Smyth (Golf), Ger Henderson (Hurling), David Kennedy (Motor Sports), Fergus Slattery (Rugby) and Liam Brady (Soccer).^{93,94,95}

North Dublin Winter Swimming Club celebrated the Golden Jubilee of its foundation in 1929.^{98,99,100} It held its Golden Jubilee gala, sponsored by Silvermints, on 21 July at the open air sea baths at Clontarf, the first time such a gala had been held at the venue in 20 years.^{101,102} The club also hosted an invitation gala at the E.S.B. Sportsco Pool, Ringsend.¹⁰³

The year saw the emergence of a new young talent at swimming galas^{104,105,106} and age-group championships at both Leinster^{107,108} and National^{109,110} levels in Boys U11 events – Gary O’Toole (Trojan SC) from Bray, Co. Wicklow, who was coached by George Gibney. His promise was even more highly rated when at the British Age Group Championships in Leeds he won two U11 titles in the 200m freestyle in 2:18.69 [CR] and the 200m individual medley in 2:42.91.^{111,112} In the 1990’s the names of George Gibney, Gary O’Toole, Francis “Chalkey” White and former Templeogue SC swimmer Frank McCann would become inter-twined in headlines as the Irish Swimming was rocked by revelations.^{113,114,115} It was the death of an age of innocence in swimming.

The end of the year Christmas swims in the Dublin area were held in the coldest conditions for many years at Blackrock, Sandycove, The Battery and Clontarf.^{116,117} A feature of the Dublin SC swim at Blackrock was the success of the Doran family who took the first three places in the Girls U15 race, 10-year-old Mairéad Doran being the winner.^{98,99}

Venue	Organiser	Event	Winner
Blackrock	Dublin SC	Henri Winterman Cup	Pat O’Driscoll
		Players Trophy	Sandra Trappe
		Boys	Ciarán O’Driscoll
Forty Foot Battery	Sandycove SC Half Moon SC	Girls	Mairéad Doran
		Men	William “Billy” Keogh
		Men	Paul O’Dea
Clontarf	North Dublin SC	Women	P Fogarty
		O’Reilly Cup	P Boyle
		Scully Cup	P Walsh
		Brady Cup	P Heffernan
		Women	B Horgan

And finally a heartening piece of commentary on swimming:¹¹⁸

A mighty blow for the rights of the downtrodden women of Ireland was struck this week, when for the first time in living memory, a little girl joined the boys swimming in the Grand Canal at Huband Bridge. The boys reeled with shock. Their dogs quivered to the tips of the tails with outraged indignation. Coming away after her dip the plump pretty little girl was on the edge of tears. "They jeered at me. They made a laugh of me," she told our reporter. Defeated? "I am going back tomorrow," she declared. A worthy heiress of all the great women of the country from Maeve of Connaught down.

Coda

Throughout the 1970's increasing reports of and concerns about pollution of the River Liffey led to the race being moved off its classic course for the second time in its history. For four years from 1936 through 1939, the Liffey Swim took place from Bull Wall to Dollymount Strand (in 1939 to Clontarf Baths) because of the degree of pollution of the course stretch of the River Liffey.¹¹⁹ In 1977 through 1979 the race was moved to Islandbridge finishing at the Dublin University Boat House. These three years saw the introduction of a Liffey Swim for women over a shorter course than used for the men and in line with the distances used for open sea swims for women and for the Shannon Swim. Seven of the winners of the men's race were teenagers. Ultan Kerrigan (North Dublin SC), the winner in 1971, was one of the oldest winners in the 60 year history of the Liffey Swim. Mairéad Doran (Dublin SC) aged 10 showed that very young female swimmers could do distance swims. Ann Cummins (Cormorant SC), the winner of the inaugural Liffey Swim for women, emulated her brother David Cummins (Cormorant SC), winner of the race in 1975. To date Ann and David Cummins are the only brother and sister to have achieved this. The efforts of members of the Half Moon and Dublin Swimming Clubs kept the Liffey Swim tradition alive from 1977 through 1979 to ensure that there was no break in the sequence of races. Far from abandonment, these three years showed the love Dublin swimmers had for the Liffey Swim. The Islandbridge course may have lacked the majesty of the classic course and race, as captured by Jack B Yeats in *The Liffey Swim*,¹²⁰ but it served the history and continued longevity of the Liffey Swim well. In 1980 Anna Livia would welcome her male devotees back to the classic course under the bridges.

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