

# **The Liffey Swim: The First Thirty Years 1920–1949**

*Cyril J Smyth*

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

Like the Oxford v Cambridge boat race on the Thames, the Liffey Swim is a unique event which has been held continuously since 1920 on the River Liffey, except for four years 1936–1939, inclusive. Since its inauguration it has been hailed as a free-to-watch event in the centre of Dublin, with claims of between 20,000 to 100,000 spectators in its early years. In Irish swimming circles winning the Liffey Swim came to be viewed as equivalent to winning the Grand National or the Derby in English horse racing. It was and still is one of the most distinctive competition events in the world of swimming and one of the longest annual competition distances in swimming in these Islands. So how did the idea of a swimming race in the River Liffey come about?

## **Origins**

When the Liffey Swim was inaugurated there was only one long-distance swim in Ireland, the annual race over approximately a mile from Dún Laoghaire East Pier [then Kingstown East Pier] to Sandycove Point, initiated in 1905, which was an institution with the forty-footers.<sup>1</sup> The nearest to contemporary account of the beginnings of the Liffey Swim is that given by Henry F. Brennan in 1936.<sup>2</sup> In 1920 he was Hon. Secretary of the Leinster Branch of the Irish Amateur Swimming Association. He related that the idea for the swim “*arose out of a jocose offer of a cup*” by Brendan G. Fagan for a swimming event in the River Liffey, when, with Augustus J. “Gus” Cullen, they were crossing Butt Bridge after a Clontarf S.C. training night at the Tara Street baths.

The idea of a swim through Dublin City as a means of popularising swimming struck a positive chord with Harry Brennan. He put this concept on the agenda for the next meeting of the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A.<sup>3</sup> Samples of Liffey water at a flood tide were taken and analysed bacteriologically and chemically by Brendan Fagan, then assistant public analyst to the City of Dublin (he became the public analyst in succession Sir Charles Cameron in 1921, a position he would hold for 35 years). At the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. meeting Brendan Fagan fully explained his chemical and bacteriological analyses. His technical exposition and expertise silenced opposition to the proposal for the swim. The meeting decided to hold the race – the competitors to take the consequences. At its May meeting the Leinster Council initially approved Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> June 1920 for the Liffey Swim from King’s Bridge to Butt Bridge, a course of approximately 1½ miles<sup>4</sup>, but the date was subsequently changed to Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> July to allow more time for all necessary arrangements to be made.

In 1925 at the presentation of the Liffey Swim prizes at the Corporation Baths at Tara Street, Dr William Lombard Murphy, Chairman of the Independent Newspapers Ltd., reportedly made the following statement<sup>5</sup>:

The idea of the race occurred to the Independent Newspapers some years ago, and they placed it before the Leinster Branch of the Irish Amateur Swimming Association, who took it up very keenly and cordially and undertook to make all arrangements in connection with the event.

In 1933 Dr W.L. Murphy, reiterated this claim:<sup>6</sup>

We, of the *Independent*, are very proud of having had the idea originally. We suggested it to the Amateur Swimming Association, who took it up with a good heart and did the whole of the organisation.

The Independent Newspapers Ltd. had no recorded involvement in the inaugural race in 1920. Indeed both the preview of the race and the report on the race published in the *Irish Independent* on consecutive days made no reference to any involvement by Independent Newspapers Group, but rather indicated that the Liffey Swim was under the direction and control of the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A.<sup>7,8</sup> However, the race report did record – “*it is hoped that a trophy will be secured for the event by next year*”.<sup>8</sup> It may very well be that, following the success of the 1920 race, the Independent Newspaper Group approached the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. with a proposal to sponsor the race by providing a Perpetual Challenge Cup and a gold medal for the winner each year and that the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. undertook to be responsible for the organisation of the Liffey Swim.

The Liffey Swim of 1920 does not appear, however, to have been the first such race over the classic course. In 1935 a race that took place in 1886 from Guinness’s Wharf to Butt Bridge was recalled by a Peter McCaffrey.<sup>9</sup> A number of swimming enthusiasts of the Benburb Street area had organised a swim over the course used for the Liffey Swim. The race was won by J. Hayden, 2<sup>nd</sup> was Peter McGrath, and 3<sup>rd</sup> was Peter McCaffrey, the only member of the podium trio from the 1886 race to be present at the 1935 Liffey Swim race. Peter McCaffrey remarked that “*swimming in the Liffey nowadays was a most pleasant affair compared to his time*”. Given the decision taken by the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. to relocate the Liffey Swim to Dollymount in 1936,<sup>10,11</sup> the water quality in 1886 must have been truly appalling.<sup>9</sup> The winner of the race in 1886 received £1, the second place 15 shillings and the third place 10 shillings.<sup>9</sup>

In 1943, in addition to the race under the auspices of the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A., a ‘Liffey Swim’ was organised by the Local Defence Force (L.D.F.) and the Soldiers’ Comforts Fund Committee on 8 July, confined to members of the Defence Services.<sup>12,13</sup> It was the first sports event in connection with the L.D.F.–S.C.F.C. fête. There were only six competitors. The race, however, was only from O’Connell Street Bridge to Butt Bridge and was won by Harry Boyd (Ordinary Seaman, Maritime Inscription), who finished two yards ahead of D.F. McAllister (6<sup>th</sup> Field Signals). In 3<sup>rd</sup> place was L. Cassidy (Ordinary Seaman). Refreshments were sponsored by the *Irish Press* and prizes awarded by Col. Liam Hoolan, O/C Eastern Command.<sup>13</sup>

## **The Liffey Swim Became the Dollymount Swim for Four Years**

On the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1936, the Annual General Meeting of the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. voted by 26 to 7 to discontinue the annual Liffey Swim race for health and safety reasons.<sup>10,11</sup> Several speakers, including Irish Olympians Noel M.J. Purcell, Dr Henry G. Ellerker and Major Michael A. O'Connor, voiced particular concerns about the quality of the water which, in their view, posed a real danger of serious consequence to the health of the competitors. Others cautioned against a hasty decision as other swimming contests posed potential health risks. The advocates for the race stated that the popularity of the race had contributed to an upsurge in the sport and that the *Irish Independent* Cup for the race had rendered a significant service to Irish swimming. The meeting agreed to approach the *Irish Independent* with a view to holding the race at another venue.<sup>10,11</sup>

After discussion with the sponsor, the race for the *Irish Independent* Liffey Trophy was moved to Dollymount. It was billed as the old Liffey race in a new form in the clear blue water of Dollymount with the Bull Wall acting as a natural grandstand for spectators<sup>14,15</sup>. For three years from 1936 to 1938 the swim started at the first shelter on the Dublin side at the lighthouse end of the Bull Wall. The competitors swam parallel to Bull Wall and under the bridge or arch into Dollymount Inlet to finish at the jetty opposite to the Dollymount Hotel. A private pleasure-cruiser and the *Irish Independent* launch were moored at right angles to Bull Wall to act as the take-off platform. This course was approximately 1¼ miles long. The first race over the Dollymount course was scheduled for Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1936, but was postponed until Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> July on account of the Irish Open Golf Championship which was due to commence at Dollymount on 14<sup>th</sup> July.<sup>14</sup>

In 1939, after considering arguments as to the non-ideal nature of the race route, the Dollymount course was modified.<sup>15</sup> The race started at the second shelter on the Bull Wall to Clontarf Baths, a distance of over approximately 1¾ miles and was a challenging test for swimmers. The race had to start promptly at 7.00 pm as high water was expected at 7.40 pm, followed by a heavy sweep back on the turn of the tide.<sup>15</sup>

The Liffey Swim had since its inception in 1920 been the best advertisement for Irish Swimming. For six years the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. had juggled with the event in terms of format (handicap or scratch race) and venue (River Liffey and Dollymount) without demonstrable evidence of success or of progress to a higher level of competition. Indeed, some critics judged the race's removal to Dollymount as an abject failure. The change of venue from the Liffey to the Dollymount course had had a detrimental effect on participation numbers and was regarded by the I.A.S.A. as "a definite set-back to the growth of swimming" in Ireland.<sup>16</sup>

At the Annual General Meeting of the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. on 23 February 1940, two motions concerning the *Independent Cup* race were considered, one from Bray Cove S.C. that the race be changed from Dollymount to Bray, the other from North Dublin S.C. that the race be held over the original course in the Liffey.<sup>17</sup> The North Dublin S.C. motion was carried to revert to the original Liffey course from Guinness's

Barge to Butt Bridge as the “*best course for the Independent Cup*”,<sup>16</sup> albeit with no substantive evidence that conditions in terms of water quality and risk reduction were any better than they had been in 1935.<sup>17,18</sup> The Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. was subsequently granted permission at a meeting of the Dublin Port and Docks Board to hold the race on a suitable day in the first three weeks of July.<sup>19</sup>

## **The Liffey Swim Prizes**

The reports on the Liffey Race of 1920 in newspapers made no references to any prizes that might have been presented to the winner, the runner-up or other placings for this first ever long-distance race promoted by the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A.<sup>7,8,20,21</sup> The race proved to be a big draw, with spectators, densely packed, lining the Quays for the entire distance of the course on both the North and South sides of the River Liffey.

In view of the intense interest that had been shown in the Liffey Swim and to help the sport of swimming in Ireland, The Independent Newspapers Ltd donated a handsome silver cup for the event in 1921.<sup>22</sup> The Cup was made by Messrs. Hopkins and Hopkins (H&H hallmark) situated at O’Connell Street Bridge, with a value of 50 guineas. The same company was commissioned to make the original Sam Maguire Trophy, although the work was contracted to silversmith Matthew J. Staunton, who had his business in D’Olier Street, Dublin.<sup>23</sup> In addition to holding the Perpetual Challenge Cup for a year, the winner received a solid Gold medal.<sup>22</sup> Further prizes were awarded by the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. to those placing 2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> and a special prize to the swimmer completing the course in the fastest time, assuming all started off scratch.<sup>24</sup> To heighten spectator interest an official programme was printed for sale which indicated the numbered cap worn by each competitor.<sup>24</sup>

## **Handicapping and Time Trials**

With the exception of five years from 1934 through 1938 inclusive, the Liffey Swim was a handicap race. In 1920 the limit handicap was set at 5 min, but in 1921 and 1922 it was reduced to 3 min. From 1923, the handicap was extended up to 9 min to increase participation and to give each swimmer as fair a chance as possible of winning.<sup>25</sup>

In 1933 a new rule introduced by the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. specified that each competitor had to return an accurate time registered over a “440” when filling in the official entry form.<sup>26</sup> This had unforeseen consequences. Instead of assisting the handicapper in his task in determining handicaps for the Liffey race, it hindered him because the rule did not specify whether the time for 440 yards was to have been achieved in an official race or not, with the result that intending competitors stated exorbitant times for the “440” on entry forms.<sup>26</sup>

In 1934 the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. decided to make the Liffey Swim a scratch race and to introduce an inter-club competition.<sup>27</sup> Teams swam in club colours with

designated, numbered caps. The idea of a team race had been mooted as far back as 1922 in a letter to the Sporting Editor of the *Irish Independent*.<sup>28</sup>

Would it not be possible for some generous citizen or citizens of the City to put up a Cup to be competed for annually in connection with the "Liffey Swim", and awarded to the club which gets a team of six finished first, whether ladies or gentlemen? This would give a fillip to the swimmers out of the running or rather swimming for the individual honour, to strive for a place for their club team.

By having all the swimmers start from scratch it was hoped that the Liffey race would eclipse its predecessors in terms of excitement all the way to the finish. The club teams consisted of five swimmers, with the placings of the first four members of each team to count as points. The team with the lowest aggregate points was deemed the winner of this subsidiary competition for a special prize.<sup>27</sup>

In 1935 the combined scratch and club race format was maintained. In order to ensure that swimmers were capable of competing under this format, trials were held for the Liffey race at the Clontarf and Blackrock Baths. A qualifying standard of 18 min for a ½ mile (about 805 m) swim was set for participation in the Liffey Swim.<sup>29</sup> The idea of imposing a proficiency standard on competitors was not new. Harry Brennan, Snr, President of the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A., at the presentation ceremony for the 1929 Liffey race had stated that he thought the time had arrived for imposing a proficiency standard for those competing in view of the number of competitors who failed to finish the Liffey Swim.<sup>30</sup> At the 1934 Annual General Meeting of the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A., Harry Brennan, the Hon. Secretary, again raised this issue:<sup>31</sup>

The secretary, in his report, passed some caustic remarks regarding the quality of the entry for the Liffey Race – for the *Independent Cup* – last year.

He said that the race had become so popular that last year a heterogeneous mass of swimmers, near-swimmers, and drifters started, but some only got as far as the first bridge. The number was so great that guaranteeing the safety of the competitors was a big undertaking.

This year he sincerely hoped that only the elite of the swimming fraternity would be allowed to compete, men who would last the distance and make the race a more exciting and spectacular event than in previous seasons.

With the change of venue from the Liffey to Dollymount from 1936 through 1938, the scratch and club race format was maintained. The race, indeed, became somewhat more 'elitist'. In order to ensure that only the best swimmers competed, all Leinster swimmers had to be able to swim a ½ mile in less than 16 min at an officially timed trial in a two–three week period before the Dollymount race.<sup>32</sup> Entries from clubs outside Leinster were only accepted on the recommendation of the Hon. Secretary of the Provincial Branch.<sup>32</sup> However, the change of venue robbed the event of much of its popularity, and in comparison with the ranks of spectators who lined the Liffey banks, much smaller numbers followed the race on foot along Bull Wall or in boats or on Dollymount Strand.

In 1939, with the change in course from Bull Wall to Clontarf Baths, handicapping was re-introduced, with the limit handicap at 16 min.<sup>16,33</sup> With the return of the race to its

original course in 1940, trials continued to operate to ensure that swimmers were capable of completing the course, with the qualification standard set at 16 min or less for a ½ mile at an officially timed swim at the Clontarf or Blackrock Baths. In 1942 entrants were informed that “*trials must be swum by those who have not competed in the Liffey Swim during the past five years.....evidence of such trials must be sent to the Hon. Handicapper*”.<sup>34</sup> This rule was continued in the subsequent years through 1949.<sup>25</sup>

## Women and the Liffey Swim

Although a ladies race was not introduced as part of the Liffey Swim in a continuous series until 1991, championing the case for female participation dates back to the early years of the race. A letter to the Sporting Editor of the *Irish Independent* in 1922 proposed that greater interest in the Liffey Swim would result if the ladies were allowed to compete.<sup>28</sup>

The correspondent argued that the ladies would be only too willing to show what they were capable of and that there was no specific rule debarring them. Moreover, as ladies were allowed to compete in the Lagan Swim, why were they not allowed to compete in the Liffey Swim?<sup>28</sup> In terms of championships and swimming galas in Ireland at that time, women swam 50 yards, 100 yards and 220 yards. The Lagan Swim was run under the auspices of the Ulster Branch I.A.S.A. The results for the 1921 race reveal that women placed 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> on the basis of a sealed handicap.<sup>36</sup> The informal response from an unnamed Leinster I.A.S.A. official was that “*such a contest was not possible, as very few of our ladies were fit for the ordeal*”.<sup>28</sup>

There is ample evidence that women of that era were well able to compete in long-distance swimming events. In 1916 Gladys Wright won the long-distance championship of the River Medway, completing the course of 9 miles in 3 h 6 min and beating the runner-up, Staff-Quartermaster-Sergeant Hamper, by nearly half an hour.<sup>37</sup> In 1919 Windsor Ladies’ Swimming Club held a long-distance race over one mile 600 yards from Boveney Lock to the Corporation Baths with 11 competitors which was won in 37:50 by Miss L. Missen.<sup>38</sup> In July 1920, in a long-distance swim in the Thames by members of the Surrey Ladies’ S.C., Ivy Hawke, aged 17, of Surbiton won the club’s shield and medal by swimming 16¼ miles.<sup>39</sup>

Ladies long-distance swimming championships of England, inaugurated in the same year as the Liffey Swim, were held over the same 5 mile and 60 yards course used for men from Kew Railway Bridge to Putney Pier on the Thames from 1920.<sup>40,41</sup> There was no shortage of competitors for these ladies races, e.g., 31 in 1921, 37 in 1922, 23 in 1923, and 17 in 1924.<sup>40–45</sup> Constance M. Jeans, who was 100 yards and 220 yards English champion and who won Silver medals in the 4 × 100 m freestyle relay at the Olympic Games in Antwerp in 1920 and in Paris in 1924, was also the inaugural ladies long-distance champion in 1920 in 1:12:59 and in 1922.<sup>41,43,46</sup> In 1923 the 8-km swimming race through Paris under the auspices of the Fédération Française de

Natation et de Sauvetage was won by Hilda James (ENG) in 2 h 32 min versus the men's race won in 2 h by Jean Rebeyral (FRA).<sup>47</sup>

In 1927 the Ladies' Branch of Dublin S.C. deferred to their male colleagues by postponing their club races owing to the Liffey Swim.<sup>48</sup> Following the 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the Liffey Swim in 1932, a Miss E.M. Kiersey wrote to the *Irish Independent*: "*It seems strange that there has not so far been a Liffey swim for ladies*" which she felt sure would attract a fair number of entries.<sup>49</sup> It was to prove to be unlucky thirteen as the suggestion fell on deaf ears.

The mid-1930's saw the emergence of the influence on sport of the Most Reverend John Charles McQuaid, Catholic Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland from December 1940 to February 1972. The decision of the Annual Congress of the National Athletic and Cycling Association of Ireland (N.A.C.A.I.) in favour of women competing at the same athletic meetings as men, unleashed protests against the Association.<sup>50-52</sup>

In a letter to the *Irish Times*, McQuaid protested that the N.A.C.A.I.'s decision was "*un-Catholic*" and "*un-Irish*" and sought its annulment.<sup>53</sup> He reinforced his protest by the threat: "*I hereby assure you that no boy from my college will take part in any athletic meeting controlled by your organisation at which women will compete, no matter what attire they may adopt*".<sup>51</sup> McQuaid had sent copies of his letter to other clerical schools to orchestrate further public criticism of the Association, which rapidly sparked endorsement of his stance: "*Boys and Girls should have a natural respect for one another. They would lose that respect through the familiarity bred on the athletic arena and in the conditions in which sports contests have to be conducted*".<sup>53</sup> The Secretary of the N.A.C.A.I., Mr James J. McGilton, replied to McQuaid that while he appreciated the motive that had prompted the Reverend President of Blackrock College's protest on the question of athletics for women, the matter would have to be considered by the Council of the N.A.C.A.I. He commented to the press that "*up to now women had competed in reserved events at men's meetings and no objection had been taken*".<sup>51</sup> Provincial newspapers joined McQuaid's attack. The *East Galway Democrat* in an editorial fired shots across the bows of the N.A.C.A.I.: "*On the grounds of delicacy and modesty there is a grave objection to women taking part in athletics with men, and women should not be blind to this*" and that McQuaid's protest "*should not go unheeded by those concerned*".

In response to McGilton, McQuaid upped the ante by publishing his reply in an open letter in the *Irish Times*, *Irish Press* and *Sunday Independent*. He pointed out that, just because other countries had adopted mixed athletic sports, the issue was not simply that Ireland should not lag behind.<sup>53-55</sup> Rather he stated: "*It is a Christian duty, incumbent on all of us, not to adopt what is morally wrong. God is not modern; nor is His Law.....Mixed athletics are a social abuse, outraging our rightful, national tradition*". He continued that "*mixed athletics and all cognate immodesties are abuses that right-minded people reprobate wherever and whenever they exist*" and that "*mixed athletics are a moral abuse, formally reprobated by the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius*

*XI. It was a truth clearly proved by the letter of Pius XI, Divini Illius Magistri, in which he invoked 'God's plan for the different sexes against the deceptive system of modern co-education which is the enemy of Christian upbringing'.*"<sup>53-55</sup>

McQuaid cited the official source of Papal documents, the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol xxii, no. 2, pp 72-75, and the Latin text, which was printed in the newspapers.<sup>53-55</sup> He provided his translation of Pius's warning that *'the Christian modesty of girls must be, in a special way, safeguarded, for it is supremely unbecoming that they should flaunt themselves and display themselves before the eyes of all'*.

During a lecture at the Men's Confraternity of the Sacred Heart, Rev. Fr. Toohey C.C. reminded the congregation that the Holy Father condemned women taking part in athletic events, which were solely adapted for men, and that *"women were unsuited for athletic events, as their duty was in the sphere of domestic affairs"*.<sup>53</sup> Others objected to the N.A.C.A.I.'s decision as firmly as they did to mixed bathing.<sup>51,52</sup>

The general view of prominent women in Irish sport at that time was reflected in the reaction of Marguerite D. Dockrell, Irish swimming champion and Olympian, that the ban was hard to understand as there was no question of 'mixed athletics' but rather of conjoint competition.<sup>56</sup> Indeed Miss Eileen Bolger, an Irish runner, stated that she did not see what objection could be taken to girls competing in reserved events.<sup>51</sup> However, bowing to the pressure in a crisis atmosphere, a joint meeting of the General and Joint Councils of the N.A.C.A.I. refused to carry into effect the decision of its Congress.<sup>56</sup> Despite pleas that this decision would drive women out of sports, the N.A.C.A.I. chose not to challenge Papal doctrine and the clergy. In his Lenten Pastoral in 1950, McQuaid reiterated his grave disapproval of allowing young women to compete in mixed public sports as it was *"unbecoming for them to display themselves before public gaze"*.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the idea of women swimming through the centre of Dublin in full public gaze, even in a Ladies Liffey Swim, was unlikely to occur during McQuaid's lifetime.

The first Liffey Swims for women were not held until 1977 through 1979 when the race had to be moved from the Quays to Islandbridge.<sup>58-62</sup> The 1977 Liffey Swim for Ladies over 500 yards (handicapped) was sponsored by Tommy May, the 1957 Liffey Swim winner.<sup>60</sup> It was won by Ann Cummins (Cormorant S.C.), 2<sup>nd</sup> was Fiona Canning (Otter S.C.) and 3<sup>rd</sup> was Joyce Palmer (Guinness S.C.). The fastest time of 6:18 was recorded by Caroline Green. In 1978, the Women's Race (600 yards) for the Tommy May Cup was won by Yvonne Smith (Guinness S.C.), who was followed home by her club-mates Adrienne O'Rourke and Joyce Palmer.<sup>61</sup> In 1979 Mairead Doran (Dublin S.C.) took the honours with Louise Keogh (Dublin S.C.) in second place and L. Ridgeway (Clontarf S.C.) taking the 3<sup>rd</sup> spot.<sup>62</sup> In 1980 the Liffey Swim reverted to a men-only event on its return to the Quays.

### **The Confusing Numbering of Editions of the Liffey Swim**

The inaugural Liffey Swim took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1920,<sup>7,8,20,21</sup> but the inaugural presentation of the *Irish Independent* Cup for the Liffey Swim took place on 10 August



1921.<sup>22,24,63</sup> In 1922, the donor newspaper stated that the Cup was to be won for a third time, when in fact it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Liffey Swim and the 2<sup>nd</sup> time that the trophy had been competed for, albeit that it had been engraved with the 1920 winner's name retrospectively.<sup>64,65</sup> In 1923, the sponsoring newspaper referred to the "*the third annual swimming race in the Liffey for the Irish Independent Perpetual Challenge Cup*".<sup>66</sup> It was indeed the third race for the Cup, but the fourth annual Liffey Swim. The 1924 report referred to "*the fifth race for the Cup*" – the correct numbering of the Liffey Swim, but the 4<sup>th</sup> time the Cup was presented.<sup>67</sup> In describing the Liffey Swim of 1925, the race was referred to as "*the sixth annual Independent Cup swim in the Liffey*" and "*the sixth annual swimming race in the Liffey for the Independent Cup*" – correct numbers of Liffey Swims, wrong number of Cup presentations.<sup>5,68</sup>

The preview of the 1927 race announced "*The Eighth Annual Swimming Race in the Liffey for the Irish Independent Cup*".<sup>69</sup> In 1928, the Liffey race was stated to be both "*the eighth annual race for the Irish Independent massive silver Cup and gold medal*"<sup>70</sup> and "*the ninth annual swimming race of 1½ miles in the Liffey for the Irish Independent 50 guineas cup and gold medal*".<sup>71</sup> In 1929, a statement similar to the latter was made for the tenth annual swimming race<sup>72</sup> and in 1930, the race was so described as the 11<sup>th</sup> annual race.<sup>73</sup> However, it was also recorded confusingly as follows:<sup>74</sup>

Ever since the race was instituted in 1920, the Liffey Swim for the *Irish Independent* 50 Guineas Cup and Gold Medal, organised by the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A., has received wholehearted support from all our leading Irish swimmers.

The report on the 1936 race included the statement "*This was the seventeenth race for the Irish Independent Cup*".<sup>75</sup> It was the 17<sup>th</sup> Liffey Swim, but the 16<sup>th</sup> race for the Cup. The preview in 1937 described the old annual Liffey Race at Dollymount as "*the eighteenth race for the trophy*"<sup>76</sup>, whereas it was the 18<sup>th</sup> race but only the 17<sup>th</sup> for the trophy. In 1939, the *Irish Independent* stated that Dr William H. Ashmore had won "*the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Independent Cup race*"<sup>33</sup> – true, but it was the 20<sup>th</sup> Liffey Swim. In 1941, the Liffey Swim was recorded as the 21<sup>st</sup> race of the series<sup>77</sup>, whereas it was the 22<sup>nd</sup> edition. The report on the 1944 race includes the statement that "*twenty-two years had passed since the swim was inaugurated*"<sup>78</sup> – in fact 25 years had passed! The reports from 1945 through 1949 numbered the editions of the race correctly from 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, respectively.

As can be seen there was a confusing mixture of newspaper statements as to number of editions of the race, the number of years the *Irish Independent* Cup had been presented and the numbers of years that had elapsed since the inauguration of the Liffey Swim. Leaving aside the issue that for four years the race was swum at Dollymount, there had been 30 editions of the race from 1920 through 1949. The Cup and winner's gold medal had been presented 29 times.

Should the four years at Dollymount be discounted as 'Liffey Swims'? There are plenty of examples in the history of sport where the venue of a titled sporting event has been moved from one venue to another for a variety of reasons. Moreover, adjustments to the start and finish of the Liffey Swim have had to be made in more recent years. In

1977 it was proposed to hold the 'Liffey Swim' over the former Gentex Mile Race on the River Shannon because of fears about the cleanliness of the river at the Quays.<sup>58</sup> The race was to be known as the "One Mile Athlone Swim for the Liffey Swim *Independent* Trophy and Medal".<sup>58</sup> When Dublin Clubs learned of this proposal, they were outraged. Through initiatives of the Half Moon S.C. and Dublin S.C., the race was held from 1977 through 1979 at Memorial Park, Islandbridge, from about one mile upstream of the finish at the Trinity Boat House slipway,<sup>59-62</sup> before returning to the city centre from Watling Street Bridge to Butt Bridge in 1980.<sup>79,80</sup> While it should always be remembered that four editions of the 'Liffey Swim' were contested at Dollymount, and three at Islandbridge, the sequence of 'Liffey Swims' remains intact from 1920 through 2012.

Nonetheless, it is understandable that confusion created by newspaper reporting, changes in sponsorship, and changes of venue resulted in the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liffey Swim being celebrated in 1995 instead of 1994!<sup>81,82</sup> Someone slipped up on the arithmetic, forgetting that the inclusiveness of years and editions is equal to  $1994 - 1920 + 1 = 75$ .

### **Entry Fee, Calendar, Race Start Times, Regulations for Swimmers, and General Arrangements**

The entry fee remained unchanged at 2 shillings and 6 pence (2/6; half a crown) from 1920 through 1949.<sup>83,84</sup> The Liffey Swim from 1920–1949 was raced on a weekday Monday to Friday over those first 30 years. With the exception of the inaugural swim in 1920 which started at 5.30 p.m., all other races had scheduled start times between 6.00 p.m. and 7.15 p.m. The fixing of the date was and still is regulated by the time of the tide.

In 1928, the Leinster Branch, I.A.S.A., published the following regulations for the Liffey Swim.<sup>85</sup>

1. Competitors will undress on Messrs. Guinness's premises, and will answer their names at 6.05 p.m. [the start time was 6.15 p.m in 1928; a 10-15 min roll call was the general practice]. Each competitor should bring a bag to contain his clothes, and must arrange for its transport to Tara Street Baths, where the competitors will dress after the race.
2. Each competitor may be accompanied by a friend to the dressing rooms for the purpose of custody of the competitor's clothes. With this exception, only officials and competitors can have access to Messrs. Guinness's premises.
3. None but officials and competitors will be allowed on the Victoria Wharf or the starting barge.
4. No boats will be allowed to be on the course during the race except those holding permits issued by the Commodore of the Clontarf Yacht and Boat Club, or the Hon. Secretary of the Port of Dublin Sea Scouts' Association. It is necessary that the rescue boats kindly provided by members of the Clontarf Yacht and Boat Club and the Sea Scouts' Association should not be hampered in any way, and boats containing passengers will not be allowed on the course in any circumstances. Rescue boats will take up positions allotted to them by Mr. G.F. Porter, Clontarf Yacht and Boat Club.

In addition a competitor had to be stripped and ready to answer the roll call, otherwise he was not allowed to compete. Any competitor who had not entered his

name for the race was not allowed to compete, as all entries with their handicaps were published prior to the race date. Races were started with the command “Go” to the limit men and so on down the list.

When the race was switched in 1936 to Dollymount, competitors undressed at the men’s shelter at the lighthouse end on the Dublin side of Bull Wall and were required to make arrangements for the transport of their clothes to the dressing room in the Dollymount Hotel.<sup>86,87</sup> Competitors had to provide their own towels. In 1939, dressing facilities were provided at Clontarf Baths.

## **Anecdotes, Milestones and Liffey Swim Ephemera**

### ***The Inaugural Liffey Swim***

The Guinness’s Jetty being rather high for taking off, in 1920 the competitors started in batches from a rowing boat anchored alongside.<sup>2</sup> When the handicap-limit group of swimmers comprising some 10 individuals descended from the jetty to the rowing boat which contained two officials, it almost went down to its gunwales.<sup>2</sup> In subsequent years a barge placed in the Liffey by Messrs. Guinness was the starting platform. The swimmers not only had to negotiate the bridges but also dodge what was coming from the spectators above.<sup>2</sup>

The gas main under O’Connell Street Bridge was undergoing repair at that time and there was a heavy smell of gas in the middle arch. Moreover there was a hole in the centre of the bridge through which spectators could catch a glimpse of the swimmers and roar encouragement to them. One of the swimmers, when he got the smell of the gas and heard the cheers of the crowd, concluded that he must be losing consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

Each competitor had sent a friend with his clothes to Tara Street Baths from Messrs. Guinness’s premises. The first of these ‘helpers’ to arrive dumped his friend’s outfit on the stairs, and this charming example was followed by the 27 other friends. This resulted in a chaotic sorting of clothes, but eventually all but one competitor’s hat found its correct personage.<sup>2</sup>

Check-in of the swimmers at the finish left one of the starters unaccounted for. The last to finish had been half an hour behind the others. Much to the relief of the organisers the missing swimmer turned up at the Tara Street Baths. Apparently he had gotten out at some of the steps and had finished his journey to the Baths in a roomy two-wheeled, horse-drawn cart with a low-slung chassis, which was known as a ‘float’ – a suitable sort of conveyance for the occasion!<sup>2</sup>

### ***The First Winner of the Irish Independent Perpetual Challenge Cup***

In 1921 J.C. Hopkins was the first winner to receive the Challenge Cup and Gold medal. He was only 15 years old and a member of Pembroke S.C. He had a handicap of 65 secs. Earlier that year he had won the one-mile handicap of the Pembroke Club for the third time, thus making the Dr Beckett Cup his own property.<sup>63</sup> Hayes Dockrell,

another 15 year old, finished 12<sup>th</sup> off a handicap of 40 sec. Dockrell would go on to win the Cup the following year.<sup>64</sup>

Twenty-seven years later Jack Kennedy related how his name, as the first winner of the Liffey Swim, came to be inscribed on the *Irish Independent* Cup.<sup>65</sup> Hopkins insisted that Kennedy's name be inscribed on the Perpetual Trophy for the 1920 race and remained adamant on that point. Through Hopkins's sense of history and chivalry and by the courtesy of the *Irish Independent*, Kennedy's name heads the list of winners on the Cup. Kennedy stated that "*this gesture was a typical instance of the great camaraderie and good sportsmanship which exists amongst individuals and clubs of the Leinster Branch, Irish Amateur Swimming Association*".<sup>65</sup>

Had the second Liffey Swim taken place two weeks later, competitors might have had refreshments of Guinness instead of Bovril, as the steam lighter *Lagan* loaded with casks of porter and stout sank at Victoria Wharf on 26 August, her deck load of full casks floating seaward on the outgoing tide.<sup>88</sup> Several of the casks were reported to have afforded much refreshment to beach combers before being recovered.

### **The 1922 Race**

The recollections of a visitor to Dublin at the time of the 1922 Liffey Swim attest to the throngs that watched the race, which had been estimated as up to 95,000, lined along the walls up and down the Quays, congregated at the finish, festooning the Loop Line Railway Bridge and blotting out the Butt Bridge:

The river walls were flanked with people five, six or a dozen people deep as far as the eye could see, and there was a thick moving and crushing crowd on both roadways, and on the inside footwalks. The evening sun lit up the thousands of faces of the onlookers on the ground, in the windows, and on the parapets and roofs along its whole length.

The (O'Connell Street) Bridge ...was like a great human lake on which a storm had suddenly burst from the mountains and every moment the human tide pouring into it was becoming more and more an impossibly congested impasse.

It was like a human amphitheatre, with thousands of faces looking down on the river all around, from almost the level of the water to the sky-lines of the houses.

Butt Bridge could not be seen for people. They stood jammed on its central support just above the tide, clung to the flanges along its sides, and balanced themselves on its arched balustrade.

A broad band of humanity spanning the river indicated the position of the Loop Line Railway

Such an excited, enthusiastic, apparently frantic, and yet jolly crowd has surely never been. They seemed to be quite mad about the race, yet not one in a thousand could, or would, see the finish, for which they were in such a desperate and reckless hurry. On they rushed towards Butt Bridge – on foot, bicycle, outsider, cab, private horse carriage, motor car, char-a-banc, coal cart, bread cart, timber wagon, and every conceivable conveyance; and everybody who could get a foothold tried to stand up on the very highest vehicle that carried him.

They all ended in gay laughter, for good humour and good fellowship seemed to be the prevailing note in what I could not help thinking must surely have been the most extraordinary and most memorable scene ever witnessed along these old granite walls since they were built, in the great days when Gratton and Charlemont, with their cannon over there in College Green, opened the Anna Liffey to the free trade of the world.

**Extracts from Liffey Swimming Race Spectacle: A Visitor's Recollections. *Irish Independent*, 20 August, 1923, pg. 6.**

### ***Father Opposes Son and the Swimmers v. The Swans***

In the 1923 race two father–son pairs are known to have competed. Henry F. Case, Jnr (Clontarf & Pembroke, 4 min) placed 12<sup>th</sup> and his father Henry F Case, Snr (Pembroke SC, 3 min) completed the course (placing unknown). William Kay, Snr (Dublin SC, 6 min) finished 10<sup>th</sup> and his son, Edmund “Eddie” Kay (Dublin SC, 6 min) also finished (placing unknown).<sup>66</sup>

At the start of the race what attitude a handsome swan with her brood of six cygnets might adopt towards the swimmers gave some concern. For 30 minutes before the start of the race she cruised “*with proud majestic mien*” in the water in the vicinity of the Guinness’s barge. Despite considerable efforts to get the swan to pass the barge westward towards Kingsbridge, she firmly, but courteously declined. The swan behaved as if she and her brood were parts of the upcoming swimming pageant. Despite concerns as to whether she might challenge the rights of the swimmers to invade her river, she “*proved her complete unselfishness and, having viewed the start of the race with equanimity, she turned eastward with her family and accompanied the swimmers for a considerable distance*”.<sup>66</sup> In 1927, a dozen swans with three cygnets “*looked with suspicion on the trespassers*” and appeared agitated until the race was concluded.<sup>89</sup>

### ***Youngest Competitors in the First 30 Years***

The limit swimmer in 1924 was D. Sheridan, a Belvedere College schoolboy, aged 14 years. He led under Barrack Street Bridge and was joint 2<sup>nd</sup> at the next bridge. Beyond Church Street he was fourth.<sup>67</sup> There is no specific report as to whether he finished the race. In the Liffey Swim’s 30<sup>th</sup> year in 1949, Larry Flood (Half Moon S.C.), aged 14 and off a handicap of 6 min, placed 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>90</sup>

### ***Tightest Finish of the Early Years and Disqualification of a Prize Winner***

The 1925 race provided one of the closest finishes in the first 30 editions of the Liffey Swim, in spite of the heavy rain which fell for a considerable time before the race and continued during it. The duel was between Gerald C. “Gerry” Higginbotham (Captain of Sandycove S.C., 8 min) and Eric F. St. John Lyburn (Dublin University S.C., 7½ min). Near Capel Street Bridge Higginbotham led. Lyburn was swimming strongly and at the Metal Bridge went into second place. Higginbotham went under O’Connell Street Bridge with a 25 yards lead. Both he and Lyburn were swimming strongly but inch by inch Lyburn shortened Higginbotham’s lead and was only 3½ yards short of the winner’s honours when Higginbotham passed under the winner-line rope.<sup>5,91</sup> During his time as a Trinity College student, ‘Toller’ Lyburn, as he was nicknamed,

was a knockout specialist in the heavyweight boxing division who always appeared in the ring resplendently attired in an Irish Poplin dressing-gown.<sup>57</sup> Whether he appeared on the starting barge so attired is unknown!

The 1947 Liffey Swim provided another nail-biting finish. Although the winner, Kenneth E. Ruddock from Carlow, was never headed, he had to put up a sterling fighting effort from O'Connell Bridge to hold onto his lead.<sup>92,93</sup> He held off the challenge of his water safety trainer and a former winner, Patrick G. Condon (North Dublin S.C.), who reduced a margin of 60 yards at the Metal Bridge to just two yards at the finish line.<sup>92,93</sup>

In 1925 J. Resk (Clontarf S.C., 7 min) finished in prize-winning 5<sup>th</sup> place, but was disqualified for going off before his time at the start.<sup>5</sup>

### **Swimming Chivalry**

J.J. "Jack" Kennedy (Sandycove S.C.), the winner of the inaugural Liffey Swim, abandoned his chance in the 1925 race by going to the rescue of his club-mate H. Lewis. Lewis was seized with cramps in both legs near the Four Courts. Kennedy supported him until he could be taken into a rescue boat provided by the Port of Dublin Sea Scouts' Association.<sup>5,94</sup> Kennedy lost about 3 min as a consequence.

### **Paulo Francesco Radmilovic**

In 1925 the *Irish Independent* reported that Paul Radmilovic was a likely starter in the Liffey Swim.<sup>95</sup> Radmilovic was at that time a three times Olympic Gold medallist in water polo for Great Britain (1908, 1912, 1920) and 4 × 200 m freestyle relay Gold medallist in 1908. He competed in five Olympiads (London 1908, Stockholm 1912, Antwerp 1920, Paris 1924 and Amsterdam 1928) as well as the Intercalated Games in Athens of 1906. He was a member of Weston-Super-Mare S.C. However, the *Irish Independent* reported that, as a member of Clontarf S.C., he was eligible to take part even although he was a Welsh and British international swimmer and water polo player.<sup>96</sup> However, in a later report the newspaper commented "*We are informed that no definite information is forthcoming with regard to the intention of Radmilovic to compete in the 'Independent' Cup swim in the Liffey*".<sup>97</sup> There is no evidence that Radmilovic was ever a member of Clontarf S.C.

The suggestion that swimmers from England and Scotland should be allowed to compete was put forward again in 1932, with handicapping based on their performances in Tailteann Games events.<sup>98</sup> It is unclear whether the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. rejected the idea or whether none of the 'overseas' swimmers was interested in participating.

### **The Choir Boat Song**

A novel feature of the 1926 race<sup>99</sup> was the presence on the Liffey of the *Irish Independent* Choir on a large motor ferry boat placed at their disposal by the City Commissioners.<sup>100,101</sup> The choir boat arrived at Guinness's Wharf from Butt Bridge prior to the start of the race and returned to Butt Bridge after the scratch swimmer had

started. The choir sang a “*delightful programme*” from its repertoire including the “*Song of the Volga Boatmen*”, which was “*thoroughly enjoyed by the enormous crowds*”. It is unclear what the swimmers thought of the entertainment!

### ***Controversy Over Finishing Placings***

The classification of the 1927 Liffey Swim did not give satisfaction. Several “*swimming notabilities who were near the finish line*” claimed that Conor A. Brady (Sandycove S.C.) had finished in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. He had been among the first six from the start of the race, but somehow was apparently lost sight of at the finish.<sup>102–104</sup> In 1933, a Joseph Daly (Dublin) wrote to the *Irish Independent* complaining of “*the inadequate arrangements for giving correct minor placings*”.<sup>105</sup> He alleged that there were errors with regard to the placings after the first three in that year’s race. He felt that it was discouraging for young swimmers who finished well up in the race to find that they were not observed finishing by the judges appointed for this task. Daly insisted that a system had to be adopted whereby no mistakes were made. He also proposed that prizes should be given to the first eight finishers.

### ***“The Liffey Swim” by Jack B. Yeats***

In 1924 “*The Liffey Swim*” was awarded the Silver Medal at the Olympic Games Art Competition in Paris.<sup>106,107</sup> Jack B. Yeats related an amusing story about the picture, which he apparently considered to be a laugh against himself.<sup>108</sup> The character in the brown fedora cap in the foreground of the picture is the artist himself. When it became known that Yeats had painted the well-known race, the news interested many of the swimmers who had participated. In particular, one tradesman who was a fine swimmer got very excited and asked the artist repeatedly about the painting. However, when it went on exhibition, the interested swimmers never mentioned it to the artist again. They had clearly hoped that they would recognise themselves immortalised by the artist. However, when they failed to recognise who was who in the impressionistic canvas, they were disappointed.<sup>108</sup>

### ***Bovril***

From its inauguration competitors in the Liffey Swim were supplied with hot cups of Bovril on their arrival at the Tara Street Baths. Bovril, a thick, salty, meat extract, was developed in the 1870’s by John L. Johnston and can be made into a drink by diluting the paste with hot water.<sup>109</sup> It derives its name from the Latin word for a cow, *bos*, and the suffix *vril*, the electromagnetic substance that gave powers to a superior race of people, the Vril-ya, in a popular novel written by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*.<sup>109</sup>

However, there is no evidence that Liffey Swim winners achieved their laurels by drinking this elixir. Luckier was the ‘half-dead’ swimmer who on being lifted into the Sea Scouts’ rescue boat was given Skipper Rum, traditional Guyanese dark rum made from sugar cane from Demerara and molasses, and hot coffee!<sup>110</sup>

### ***Started, But Did Not Finish***

There was a particularly low statistic for finishers in 1925. Of the 74 entries, only 58 answered the starter's roll call on the Guinness's Barge. Of the starters only 35 finished (60%).<sup>5</sup> Heavy rain fell for a considerable time before the start of the race and during it. Many of those who retired from the race suffered cramps or were benumbed by the cold water.

### **Backstroke Wins**

The win by William F. Case (Clontarf S.C.), an 18-year old, in the 1930 Liffey Swim was a remarkable feat. He had the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest handicap of 7½ min. He took the lead from the limit man, L. Tozer (Sandycove S.C., 9min), early in the race and held it, employing the backstroke from start to finish.<sup>111,112</sup> That year the Liffey was described as reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's "*Beautiful soup so rich and green*" [*Alice in Wonderland*]. There had been exceptionally heavy rainfall during the previous month and the water was thick and dirty. With the high flood on the river and the tide in their favour, 39 of the 43 starters finished, but made somewhat of a mockery of the handicaps. Willie Case finished 7<sup>th</sup> in 1931 and also completed the race in 1932, swimming backstroke on both occasions. Thirty-eight years would pass before a second backstroker won the Liffey Swim. Liam Lacy (Colmcille S.C.) took the laurels in 1968 by 50 yards off a handicap of 2½ min.<sup>113,114</sup> Two years later David Fitzgerald (Crusade Aquatic Club) became the third winner to employ the backstroke, touching out two yards ahead of the runner-up, John Cummins (St. Vincent's S.C.).<sup>115,116</sup>

### **Junior Club Winners**

The 1932 Liffey Swim saw the winner's laurels go to a swimmer from a Junior Club, Leo Maher of Republican S.C. (handicap 3 min).<sup>117</sup> Swimmers from Junior Clubs also finished 2<sup>nd</sup> (J. Jordan, Emerald Rechabite S.C., 2½ min) and 4<sup>th</sup> (M. Horgan, Garda S.C., 3½ min). Maher caught the limit man shortly after the Four Courts and held the lead thereafter. That year five of the previous 12 winners competed. Sixty-four of the 75 starters (85%) finished the race. The high number of finishers was attributed to the water temperature, the highest in the then history of the race. The competitors had to land on the North side of the Liffey as the steps near the old Butt Bridge had been removed in the course of the construction of the new bridge. Owing to the increased flow of water through the new bridge the course was shortened by about 100 yards to finish almost in line with Hawkins Street.<sup>118</sup> The start time was also put back to an hour after high tide.

### **Provincial Entries**

In 1935 the Liffey Swim was opened to individual entries from outside Leinster for the first time. The Munster challenge was led by Andrew Crosbie and his brother, J. Crosbie, representing Sunday's Well S.C., Cork, and by A. Russell, representing Highfield S.C., Cork.<sup>119</sup> The Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. had made the event a real championship test by converting the Liffey Swim from a handicap to a scratch race in 1934, which was adopted again in 1935.<sup>27,120</sup> The Leesider Andrew Crosbie won, taking the *Independent Cup* south for the first time in the history of the race.<sup>120,121</sup>



Crosbie was a double winner of the Lee Swim.<sup>118,120-123</sup> Owing to the introduction of qualification through time trials, the entry was smaller than usual, but all starters finished.

### ***Richard N. "Ritchie" Case***

Ritchie Case of Clontarf S.C. was the first swimmer to win the Liffey Swim twice in 1934 and 1936.<sup>75,126</sup> He went on to win it twice more in 1937 and 1938.<sup>127,128</sup> He is the only winner of the Liffey Swim to have won it four times and the only winner to have completed a hat-trick in consecutive years. All of his wins were from scratch, three at Dollymount and one in the Liffey. In 1935 he was strongly fancied to win, as a week earlier he had won the I.A.S.A. one mile championship at Lough Ramor, held in conjunction with the Virginia (Co. Cavan) Gala.<sup>129</sup> However, he was not at his best in the 1935 Liffey Swim and finished 8<sup>th</sup> despite a strong start.<sup>119,120</sup> In 1939, the swim was once again handicapped with Case off scratch.<sup>16,33</sup> He finished second after taking cramp in his legs at the three-quarter distance and had only the use of his arms.<sup>33</sup> He was lying third behind Jimmy Rafter (Half Moon S.C.) when within hailing distance of the finish, but produced a sterling finish to take second place on the touch. The Case family members, Ritchie and Willie, thus won five of the first 20 Liffey swims.<sup>130</sup> Ritchie Case also won the Ireland's Eye to Balscadden Beach (Howth Harbour) handicap swims off scratch in 1937 and 1938, winning the *Kelly Cup* and *Independent Gold Medal*, thereby becoming dual Liffey and Howth champion in both years.<sup>131,132</sup>

### ***Keeping It In The Family – Brothers Take Laurels***

In 1934, brothers Ritchie Case (Clontarf S.C.) and William F. Case (Garda S.C.), sons of Henry F. "Harry" Case Snr, former Hon. Secretary and Handicapper of Leinster Branch I.A.S.A., scooped the Gold medal and third place, respectively, for a unique family podium in the first Liffey Swim held as a scratch race.<sup>126</sup> While Ritchie won by a clear margin of 40 yards, the race for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> places between Dermot Murtagh and William Case produced a titanic struggle with Murtagh getting the touch by three yards. Clontarf S.C., with four swimmers in the first eight home, took the team prize.

Harry Case Snr was a renowned long distance swimmer. He placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the inaugural Kingstown Pier to Sandycove Point swim in 1905.<sup>1</sup> In 1916 the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. offered to award a medal to any member of a Leinster swimming club who was able to swim from the Poolbeg Lighthouse to Kingstown West Pier or *vice versa* inside one and a half hours.<sup>133</sup> Harry Case completed the swim twice, his time in September 1916 being 1 h 37 min.<sup>134-136</sup> At the time of his death in 1946, his swims had not been emulated.<sup>136</sup>

### ***Sixth Time Lucky***

The winner in 1940 was Patrick Kinsella (Sandycove S.C., 2 min).<sup>137</sup> He had competed on five previous occasions, finishing second in 1935 and 1937,<sup>119,120,127</sup> and fourth in 1936 and 1938,<sup>75,128</sup> all of which were scratch races. In 1939 he spent four

months in a sanatorium to recover from tuberculosis and had not competed that year.<sup>137</sup>

### ***Clean Sweep for North Dublin S.C.***

In 1941 North Dublin S.C. became the first club to take the first three places in a Liffey Swim – 1<sup>st</sup> Tom Hannigan (7½ min), 2<sup>nd</sup> S. Thomas (7¼ min), and 3<sup>rd</sup> J. Fagan (7½ min).<sup>138,139</sup> Indeed the club filled the 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> spots also, and took the club competition honours.

### ***Handicapper Beaten By Tide and Wind***

The limit man, C.P. Cloake (Dublin S.C., 8 min), won the Liffey Swim for the first time ever in 1942 by a clear margin of over 100 yards.<sup>140,141</sup> The best laid plans of the handicapper, Mr E. Heron, went awry due to the conditions on the day. A strong tide and a powerful wind favoured the long handicapped men. Cloake led from start to finish and was never headed. There was a pronounced gap between the first three and the rest of the field, the remainder coming in as a squadron in rapid succession.

### ***Limit Man Wins Again***

The 1943 Liffey Swim was won by A.W. Kennett, a 17-year-old member of Pembroke S.C., who swam off the limit mark of 5½ min.<sup>142,143</sup> He led throughout to win by over 100 yards. However, except for the winner, swimmers from all parts of the handicap were right up behind the placed men.

### ***Silver Jubilee Winner Achieves Long Distance Double***

The winner of the Silver Jubilee Liffey Swim in 1944 was Patrick G. Condon (North Dublin S.C., 1 min).<sup>78,144</sup> Four days previously he had won the Ireland's Eye–Balscadden Beach (Howth Harbour) Handicap Swim, lifting the *Kelly Cup* and *Independent Gold medal*<sup>145</sup>, thereby emulating Ritchie Case's swim doubles in 1937 and 1938.<sup>131,132</sup>

### ***Brothers Achieve Liffey Swim Qualification***

Four pairs of brothers were among the qualified entries for 1945 Liffey Swim.<sup>146</sup> Jack Cassidy won the race and his brother Des placed 20<sup>th</sup>. F.P. Rafter finished in 8<sup>th</sup> place while his brother Jimmy Rafter took 21<sup>st</sup> place. S. Fitzpatrick (23<sup>rd</sup>) and P. Fitzpatrick (DNS) and J.G. Murren (27<sup>th</sup>=) and T. Murren (DNS) were the other brotherly entries.<sup>147,148</sup> For the first time a commentary of the swim was broadcast through a loudspeaker. Four previous winners contested the race – Tom Hannigan (1941, 22<sup>nd</sup>), C.P. Cloake (1942, 17<sup>th</sup>), A.W. Kennett (1943, 10<sup>th</sup>=) and Patrick G. Condon (1944, 14<sup>th</sup>).<sup>147,148</sup>

### ***First and Fastest***

In winning the 1946 Liffey Swim John Rafter (aka Jimmy Rafter) completed a unique double in the early years of the contest. Not only did he win the race, but he clocked the fastest time, to take the Perpetual Challenge Trophy and Gold medal and the special prize for the fastest swim in the race.<sup>149</sup> It was Rafter's 10<sup>th</sup> attempt at the race,

having placed 3<sup>rd</sup> at Dollymount in 1939 and 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1944 Liffey Swim.<sup>33,144</sup> He was the first winner from the Half Moon S.C. Two entrants from Carlow S.C. – N. O’Beara and Kenneth Ruddock – did not compete in protest against their allotted handicaps.<sup>150,151</sup>

### ***Beyond the Pale***

The 28<sup>th</sup> edition of the Liffey Swim in 1947 saw a 17-year old from Carlow S.C., Kenneth Ruddock, take the Challenge Cup outside the Pale for only the second time in the history of the race.<sup>92,93,120</sup> In one of the closest ever finishes to a Liffey Swim, Ruddock clung on to take the touch in his first attempt at the distance from a previous winner, Patrick Condon. Condon had reduced a margin of 60 yards at Metal Bridge to two yards at the end. Ruddock had twice lifted the Barrow Cup in winning the Carlow club’s annual one mile swim in 1944 and 1945 in the River Barrow at Carlow.<sup>92</sup> Curiously Patrick Condon had coached Kenneth Ruddock to a first class Red Cross Life Saving Certificate a few weeks before their encounter in the Liffey.<sup>92,93</sup> Condon had the consolation of the prize for clocking the fastest time.<sup>92,93</sup>

### ***First Time Lucky in Consecutive Years***

As in 1947, the 29<sup>th</sup> Liffey Swim was won by a novice at the event, David Griffin of North Dublin S.C.<sup>152,153</sup> Of the first 12 swimmers to finish, four were only 16 years of age.<sup>152,153</sup> Kevin Early, who placed 2<sup>nd</sup>, was the youngest competitor at 15 years and the smallest in build and height. Early was not passed by Griffin until O’Connell Street Bridge.

Eight weeks after his Liffey Swim, Griffin was involved in a swimming incident in the River Nore that demonstrated true sportsmanship and selflessness.<sup>154</sup> The first Nore Swim for 20 years from Greene’s Bridge to Kilkenny Castle was held on 26 August. During the race David Griffin rescued a rival who got into difficulties and then continued in the race to place 2<sup>nd</sup> to 17-year-old P. Lenihan from Kilkenny.

### ***Munster’s Second Win***

The 30<sup>th</sup> Liffey Swim was won by Frank O’Donovan, an 18-year-old Cork youth and Sunday’s Well member, then swimming under the burgee of North Dublin S.C.<sup>155</sup> He was a former winner of the Lee Cup in 1946. The youngest competitor in the Liffey Swim at 14 years, Larry Flood of the Half Moon Club, finished 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>155</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> Long Distance Swim: Kingstown Pier To Sandycove. *Irish Independent*, 23 August, 1905, pg. 6.
- <sup>2</sup> The First Liffey Race – Comic Interludes Recalled By A Promoter. *Sunday Independent*, 26 July, 1936, pg. 14.
- <sup>3</sup> Swimming: Leinster Branch Irish Amateur Swimming Association. *Irish Times*, 10 May, 1920, pg. 7.
- <sup>4</sup> Swimming. *Freeman’s Journal*, 17 May, 1920, pg. 6.
- <sup>5</sup> “Independent” Cup Swim: Great Race In Liffey. Two New Records. Thousands of Spectators – Heavy Showers Defied. *Irish Independent*, 30 July, 1925, pg. 7.
- <sup>6</sup> Great Liffey Swim: 105 Compete For “Independent” Trophy – 100 Finish. *Irish Independent*, 15 July, 1933, pg. 9.
- <sup>7</sup> Big Liffey Swim: Today’s Contest – Champions To Compete. *Irish Independent*, 22 July, 1920, pg. 7.

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