

City of Rochester

Swimming and Lifeguard Club

Synopsis of the First 100 Years of the Club and its Members:

In the nineteenth century, swimming was a simple recreational activity with no formal competitive events, it was a popular activity then as it is today, because no specialist equipment was required, and it was free from financial restraint. Furthermore, it was and still is an extremely refreshing experience to swim in a clear river with a sandy bed or in the sea on a hot summer's day.

In the latter half of the century groups of people had gathered together to formalise their respective activities, and thereby established swimming clubs in various parts of the county. In Kent the following swimming clubs were established: Maidstone (1844), Blackheath Harriers (1869), Tunbridge Wells Cygnus (1875), Canterbury (1877), Lewisham (1884) and Dover (1886).

The Medway Swimming Club was founded in 1896, little or nothing is known about the club in its early days other than all its training and swimming activities were centred on a raft moored in the river quite close to Rochester Bridge. This raft was called "The Sphere" and it was there, in the modish costumes of the time that the club members trained and swam in the summer months for quite a few years. There was in those days little or no co-ordination or organised galas or swimming meets, and competitions were always arranged on an ad hoc basis. The Sphere was eventually disposed of when the club moved to the Watts Baths, a small indoor pool on Willis Avenue, shortly after the end of the 1914-1918 war.

Life was not always easy in those early days and whilst the club had its share of promising young swimmers, they never set the world alight. Following the demolition of the Watts Baths which had been converted into a slipper baths, the City Fathers provided an open air swimming pool further along Willis Avenue (now known as The Esplanade) on the river side which was opened in 1935. The opening gala was indeed a lavish affair and was, in fact, staged not only to mark the opening of the pool but also to mark the Silver Jubilee of HM King George V. The City Corporation presented a magnificent Silver Cup to the recently formed Rochester & District Swimming Association (later to become the Medway ASA) commemorating the King's Silver Jubilee.

This swimming gala became an annual event of prestigious importance and even to this day the Jubilee Cup is competed for annually by clubs affiliated to that body.

We are extremely proud of the fact that our amalgamated partners the Medway Swimming Club were the first winners of the King George V Silver Jubilee Trophy in 1935.

Along came the 1939-1945 war and the clubs activities like many others in the country went into suspended animation, from which it never recovered. In 1946 the Rochester Swimming Club came into being through the hard work and dedication of the Mayor of the City at that time Alderman J C Lyle JP who, with Mr F W Carver, began to revitalise swimming in the city once again.

The membership of the Rochester Swimming Club began to grow and competitions in swimming, diving, and water polo were organised by the then Medway ASA and the club began to compete annually with the other clubs of the association, namely Maidstone SC, Gillingham SC, Sheerness SC, Gravesend SC, and RN Barrack, Chatham.

In 1948 the officials of the Medway Swimming Club and the Rochester Swimming Club got together and agreed to amalgamate into one club, all the championship trophies of the Medway Swimming Club were given to the newly formed club which became the Rochester and Medway Swimming Club. The club had a total membership of 126 members at this time.

This established the continuity of the Medway Swimming Club from 1896. The club continued to function under this title until 1957 when it was thought prudent to change the name once again in the light of the name of the local Amateur Swimming Association, the change was agreed and the new title became the City of Rochester Swimming Club.

In 1978 following the numerous successes of the Lifeguard section of the club it was decided to embody Lifeguarding into the club's name and from that time onwards the club was called the City of Rochester Swimming & Lifeguard Club.

Our water polo team of pre 1939-1945 war and post war years was never a top flight one and almost nothing is recorded about its activities. The team only lasted a few years competing in the water polo leagues of the Medway ASA in 1950, and eventually, for a variety of reasons, ceased to exist.

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The above is an extract from the City of Rochester Swimming and Lifeguard Club Centenary book 1896-1996