

# 94th Dublin City Liffey Swim Ireland's Premier Open Water Swimming Race Leinster Open Sea

## Post Race Report



*Swimmers in the men's race passing the Cill Airne*

### **The Race**

The 94th Liffey Swim was successfully run this year on Saturday 24 August 2013. The Liffey Swim is the most prestigious swimming race in Ireland and attracts competitors both nationally and internationally. This year we had overseas competitors from New Zealand, Denmark and Canada.

There were 114 women and 218 men competing in this year's Dublin City Liffey Swim. In order to compete in the Liffey Swim, swimmers must complete four qualifying races from the Leinster Calendar of Open Sea Races to show that they are capable of swimming the 1,600 metre course.

### **Liffey Festival**

Dublin City Council launched the inaugural Liffey Festival on the same day as this year's Liffey Swim. The festival was held in Grand Canal Square. If this festival is to be an annual event, we will look at ways that we can work together to increase audience participation.

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## Press Launch



It is a long standing wish of Leinster Open Sea to see a serving Lord Mayor compete in the Dublin City Liffey Swim. After the Liffey Swim in 2008, the then Lord Mayor Emer Costello took up swimming and swam in one of our races in 2009. This year we got one step further when Lord Mayor Oisín Quinn, dived into the Liffey for the press launch. We hope that the Lord Mayor has set a precedent which will be followed in future years.

## Race Course

Because of construction work in the river on the new Rosie Hackett Bridge, both in 2012 and this year we swam a course from Butt Bridge to the O2/ Point Depot. The River Liffey along that stretch is wider and straighter than the traditional course. The Committee was worried that the character of the race might be reduced by not swimming under the iconic bridges such as the Halfpenny Bridge and O'Connell Bridge.

On completion of the Rosie Hackett Bridge, Leinster Open Sea will consult with both the wider swimming community and Dublin City Council as to which course to run the race in 2014. The committee is mindful that we are approaching the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Dublin City Liffey Swim in 2019.

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*Eithne Kenny of Dublin Swimming Club encouraging the ladies to sing Molly Malone before the start of the Ladies' Race*

### **History of the Dublin City Liffey Swim**

We are fortunate that Cyril Smyth, a retired TCD professor, is compiling a detailed history of the swim. So far he has completed the history from the 1920's to the 1960's and this is available online on the Leinster Open Sea web site at [www.leinsteropensea.ie](http://www.leinsteropensea.ie).

Leinster Open Sea is conscious that we are building towards the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Liffey Swim and we will seek ways to increase competitor participation, spectator participation and the media profile as we head towards the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

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## Men's Race

The winner of the men's race was Ciaran O'Driscoll of Half Moon Swimming Club.



'Oh my God, I can't breathe'! That was my initial reaction when I dived into Blackrock baths as an 8 year old on the morning of the annual Dublin Swimming club Christmas day swim. Nothing had prepared me for the cold, even though I had spent the previous summer months swimming in the club races in the outdoor baths every Tuesday evening and Saturday morning. It took me a few seconds to overcome the shock, regain my composure and complete the 30m sprint across the pool to finish last!

I spent the next two summers competing in the club races in the baths and on occasion venturing outside the confines of the pool walls into the sea for some of the longer club races along by the railway track. All good preparation then for my first participation in the Leinster outdoor sea swims in the summer of 1975 at the 'ripe old age' of 10.

My active participation in the sea swims during that summer hardened me for my first attempt at the 'big one', the Liffey swim in August. Unperturbed by the shouts of 'watch out for the rats under O'Connell bridge', I set off 2 minutes 30 seconds after the 'Go man' and managed to make good progress down the river passing some of the more seasoned competitors along the way. By Capel Street Bridge, I had taken the lead and my light frame was carried forward on the significant 'flow' that the Liffey possesses. I passed O'Connell's bridge still in the lead and was winning the race with less than 25 yards to go when I was caught by the 'scratch man', David

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Cummins, who beat me by a few yards in the end. For a 10 year old, second place was no mean feat and I had the consolation of a nice mantle piece clock as a prize and my name in several newspapers.

However, as the years passed by I realised that while second place was good, it was not the same as winning! I also realised that I had missed out on being the youngest ever winner of one of the most iconic sporting events in the Irish sports calendar. Chalkie White still holds that honour as an 11 year old.

I continued to swim the race year after year, but despite a number of top 10 places, I could not 'get my name on the Independent Cup'. I joined Half moon swimming club in 1985 to further my Waterpolo career and came into contact with a long list of winners of the cup from the 1970's and 1980's. This deepened my desire to try and win the race.

In 1991, my then girlfriend and now wife Siobhan (Hoare) O'Driscoll, swam the first ever Ladies Liffey swim. I listened intently to commentary on the quays, while waiting to enter the Men's race which followed. I was overjoyed to hear that she had taken the lead just after O'Connell's bridge and then went on to win the first ever Ladies event. 'Boosted' by Siobhan's success, I tried my utmost to 'do the double' but could not catch a few of the early starters and I finished fourth that year.

Many years passed, and while I continued to swim the race as often as I could (I was working away from the Ireland for a few years and therefore could not always compete), I never really got into contention and felt my chance may have passed by.

My desire to win the race deepened further in 2009 when my brother Pat won the race and his son Daire took the fastest time prize on the same day. I was delighted for Pat as he has competed in the race since the early 1970's. I knew that it would be unlikely that the handicapper would 'allow' siblings to win the race in consecutive years, so I decided that night to allow a couple of years pass before making my next serious attempt at winning the race.

2013 was to be that year and I trained particularly hard during the summer, with some extra sessions in the morning before work, to ensure that I was in optimum condition for the race at the end of August.

On the morning of the swim, I arrived to the start in good time to soak up the pre-race atmosphere (always a fantastic occasion). The sun was shining brightly and the race course looked spectacular with bright sponsor buoys illuminating the course for the swimmers. As always the 'craic' was mighty before the race, with great interaction between the competitors in their swimming togs, the numerous officials and the passing public going about their business in the city centre.

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We lined up to descend the steps under the Loop link bridge and slowly made our way down onto the starting pontoon in hat number order. I dived in at my allotted time of 3 minutes along with fellow club mate Joey O'Dea who later joked 'that I lost him on the dive'. I made steady progress through the early starters and got into a nice rhythm by the time I reached the Sean O'Casey Bridge. As I came to pass another swimmer under this bridge, I lifted my head to breathe at the same time as he decided to kick, and unfortunately took a gulp of Liffey water for my troubles! However, this minor hiccup did not set me back too much, and I pushed on through the crowd of early starters that spanned the river ahead of me.

Siobhan and my kids ran along the quays enthusiastically waving me on and rushing past the other well wishers lining the banks. On some occasions when I have swum the Liffey, there is time to soak up the atmosphere and take in the sights of the city from this unique vantage point. However, this time I had only one thing in mind and that was to keep focussed and try to reign in the remaining competitors ahead of me. By the time I passed the the Cill Airne, the indications from Siobhan were that I was going well. However, memories of my 'near miss' in 1975 were still strong in my mind and I was determined to put my head down and push on as hard as I could.

I was out on my own now and all I could think of was 'please let the finishing line come soon'. I could see the 4 orange buoys that marked the finish in the distance, but my arms were starting to burn with lactate and I thought the line would never come. I looked up to my family again and they encouraged me to keep going as I had a good lead.

It seemed like an age, but eventually, I reached the finish line at the Point and looked up to check that I had in fact won the race. I saw some familiar faces from the Irish swimming world hanging over the railings and the greetings of 'well done Ciaran' were music to my ears. I made my way to the finishing pontoon and shook hands with Oisín Quinn, the Lord Mayor.

My 38 year wait was now over and my sense of satisfaction was complete. I feel deeply honoured to join the 'who's who' of Irish swimming that adorn the Independent Cup since it's inauguration in 1920. A long night of revelry followed and I wish I had a 'fiver' for every person who has come up to me since and said I heard 'you won the Liffey'!

The Liffey swim is a unique event and I wish to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the race sponsors Dublin City Council, the race officials, the handicapper (Martin Monks) and the Open sea committee who do a tremendous job running this iconic event and indeed the full programme of over 30 sea swims across the summer months. I am certain the race will continue to develop in the coming years and further embellish itself into the folklore of Dublin city. If I had won wish, I would love to see more young swimmers encouraged to participate in the swim and maybe there should be a prize for the youngest finisher in future years to help drive this (watch out Chalkie!).

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*Ciaran climbing onto the Finish Pontoon*

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## Ladies' Race

The Ladies race was won by Gina Quinn of Glenalbyn SC



“I wonder when Captain William Bligh (yes, he of the mutiny on the Bounty) surveyed Dublin Bay in 1800 and ordered the building of the Bull Wall, did he ever think that the corralling of the Liffey waters would create one of the City's premier sporting events? An event so unique in the great cities of the world that Jack B Yeats, already a renowned painter in 1923, would immortalise it in oils on canvas?

I don't have to delve too deeply into my mind's eye to bring myself back to the start of the 2013 Liffey Swim; perhaps because smell is such a potent trigger for the memory. It's that deep boggy salty mossy smell that comes from standing low below the cap stones of Dublin's quay walls. The glinting water stretching down as far as you can see to the next bridge as the river flows away from your gaze.

I heard our starter Joe Brown, call my four minute time and I dived, the cool black peaty water parting as I came up to swim, the melody of Molly Malone still ringing in my ears as I paced myself down the course. You see the 'girls' have a tradition of belting out 'In Dublin's fair city' just before the start of the race, all of us rocking on the floating pontoon, with scant regard for our First Citizen, The Lord Mayor, as he waits to charge the starting gun. The

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three-four-time beat provides a welcome rhythm as you charge down the river after the earlier swimmers.

Last year's winner, Clodagh Nolan, had told me that when I got to the Cill Airne ship, to really push for home, and I did. But it wasn't until I came within sight of the large florescent orange finishing buoys, that I became aware that I was near the front. It was the animation of the onlookers that gave it away, and in particular the hollering of my husband Kevin, himself having just completed the men's race. I could only put my head down and sprint towards the finish line. It was a close race in the end, just a few seconds between myself and Ann-Marie Bourke of Dublin and Deirdre Dunne of Vincent's, and an enormous honour and thrill to win the Liffey Swim, my river, my city.

My club, Glenalbyn, have been a huge support throughout my years of open sea swimming and it was fantastic to win the Liffey Team prize, with Louise Searson, Thelma Jones and Lisa Howley. I must give enormous credit to Leinster Open Sea and all the work that goes on to make the whole season safe and fun and challenging every year. And for the Liffey race, the Sponsors Dublin Port Company and Dublin City Council must be thanked, their support is what makes this great sporting event possible.

Last word has to go to the ESB, as sponsor of the Liffey swim in 1981, they were the one's responsible for insisting on introducing a Ladies race. Now wouldn't it be a much less colourful affair if you didn't have Molly Malone rising over the quay walls from the starting pontoon every year?

***Gina Murphy***

***Ladies Liffey Swim Winner 2013***

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## **Fergus Cooney "Race Organiser"**

When I was younger and started to swim in the sea races in the '60's I said that I would never do the Liffey swim because it was too dirty.

I quit swimming in 1974 for almost 20 years and when I started sea swimming again in 1995 I said that I would go and watch and carry bags of clothes from the start to the finish for a few friends. They convinced me that it was clean enough to swim in so I entered the race in 1995. Unfortunately I was not very well that day and did not enjoy the swim, however the experience of swimming past the Four Courts and under the bridges, especially O'Connell Bridge, is something I will always remember. In fact it is this element of the swim which makes it unique.

The following year I volunteered to help out and have done so every year since. I have just completed my third year as Event Manager and thoroughly enjoy the job even though it eats up countless hours that could be spent on other things.

I have swum in the Liffey on other occasions, in the Docklands race organised by NAC and also the Upper Liffey at Memorial Gardens.

For the past two years, because of construction work on the new Luas Bridge, we have used the course from the Loop Line to the Point. Some of the swimmers like this because it's a straight swim in wide open waters. Next year we will have the option to revert to our more traditional course from Victoria Quay to the Custom House. We are a democratic group. Make your feelings known in good time.

Since I have been involved in organisation of the race, it's special significance in the swimming calander has struck me. It's amazing how many people will say to me in July and August that they "have qualified for the Liffey" as if they had done their purgatory in the other races and were looking forward to their salvation in "the Liffey." The craic on the day has to be experienced to appreciate it. Many of the swimmers start their day on the quays up to 2 hours before the race starts and they are still there at throwing out time in the Gresham. After the swim there used to be a race to Mulligans, this is now somewhat overtaken by the presentation of the cups by the Lord Mayor on board the Cill Airne, leaving less time for Mulligans but it's on the way to the Gresham, so you might as well call in there.

The Liffey Swim would not be possible without the support of many people.

The cost of running a major event in the centre of the city makes the support of such sponsors vital. How else can we get Garda clearance on the traffic, boat and first aid cover from the Civil Defence, road and parking meter closures etc etc. Dubin port Company too have been

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very supportive and the presence of their Tugs, the Beaufort and Shackelton, at the awards ceremony add significantly to the spectacle.

Leinster Open Sea is made up of an incredible group of committed volunteers who gel together to make the season happen, not just the Liffey Swim.

The race depends also on volunteers. To every one of the 40 or so helpers I say thanks very much, it would not happen without you.

*Gus Cooney*

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## **Presentation of the Winners' Cups**

The Lord Mayor of Dublin presented the winners' cups on the upper deck of the Cill Airne. Before the presentation the Lord Mayor was greeted by the Dublin Port Tug Boats the Shackleton and the Beaufort.



*Mr. Anthony Kennett who won the Dublin City Liffey Swim in 1943 receiving a commemorative medal from the The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Oisín Quinn.*

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*In June this year Mr. Fergal Somerville become one of one fifteen swimmers in the world to swim the North Channel from Ireland to Scotland. Fergal is a regular competitor in the Leinster Open Sea Races and the annual Dublin City Liffey Swim. Fergal in the blue tea shirt received a commemorative medal from the Lord Mayor.*

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## **Community Benefits of the Liffey Swim**

The Liffey Swim is one of thirty Open Sea Races run by the Open Sea Committee in conjunction with the swimming clubs of Leinster. The Liffey Swim is the premier race on the calendar and draws many people into the sport of swimming. Open Sea Swimming is a low cost sport and Leinster Open Sea work to keep the cost of participation down, especially in these difficult economic times. The Liffey Swim provides benefit to the community by:

- encouraging people of all ages and all backgrounds to participate in the sport of swimming;
- encouraging people to join a swimming club and to train all year round;
- encouraging people to use and respect the great amenity of the River Liffey and Dublin Bay which is on Dublin Port's doorstep;
- providing entertainment and brightens up an often forgotten yet important part of our capital for the day;
- generating interest in the Liffey Swim both nationally and internationally; and
- showing that the public sector and community groups can work together to provide low cost sport and recreation for the greater good.

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#### **Acknowledgments**

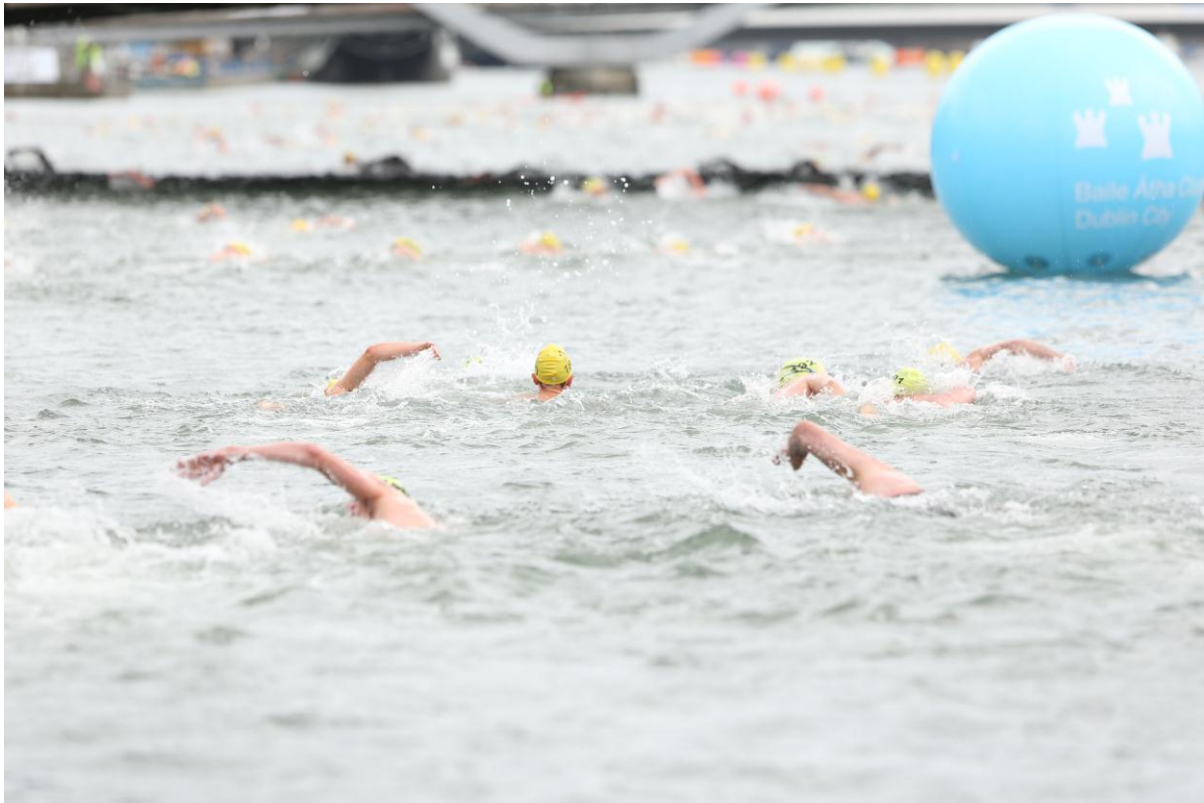
Leinster Open Sea would like to thank and acknowledge the contribution the following made in running the 94<sup>th</sup> Dublin City Liffey Swim:

- The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Oisín Quinn;
- Mr. Alan Shatter, Minister for Defence;
- Captain David Dignam Dublin Port Company;
- Captain Fergus Britton Dublin Port Company;
- The crew of the Dublin Port Company's Tug Boats Beaufort and Shackleton;
- Mr. Jimmy Reilly, Race Referee;
- Mr. Martin Monks and Mary Drumm Honorable Handicapper;
- Cosaint Shíbhialta (Civil Defense);
- An Cór Innealtoiri (Irish Army Engineer Corps);
- An Garda Síochána;
- Dublin Fire Brigade;
- Mr. Gus Cooney Event Manager;
- Mr. Gerry Cooney Electrician;
- Mr. Kevin Healy Start Manager;
- Mr. Paul Fitzgerald Finish Manager;
- Mr. Declan Harte and Padraic Grey (Walkers Managers);
- Over 40 Stewards from the swimming clubs of Dublin;
- Mr Neil Nissen, owner of Blade Runner;
- Mr Nick Roche, owner of the Merryfisher;
- Irish Water Safety;
- Dublin Docklands Authority; and
- Jon O'Neil of Dublin River Cruises and the Jeannie Johnston.

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