

# The Liffey Swim: The 1950's Decade – Part 1

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## The 1950 Liffey Swim

The limit handicap for the 31<sup>st</sup> Liffey Swim was set at 5½ min.<sup>1</sup> The scratch man was W.P. Hawkins (Dublin SC). Six previous winners of the race were among the entries – William F. Case (Clontarf SC, 1930), C.P. Cloake (Dublin SC, 1942), Patrick G. Condon [North Dublin Winter SC (WSC), 1944], J.P.D. “Jack” Cassidy (Clontarf SC, 1945), Jimmy Rafter (Half Moon SC, 1946), and Frank Donovan (North Dublin WSC, the holder).<sup>1</sup> Five first-time entrants were from Shannon SC – Niall Heffernan (handicap 4 min), Joe Grant (handicap 4½ min), Derry Foley (handicap 4½ min), Tom Lane (5 min) and Jim Dooley (handicap 2½ min), winner of the Lee Swim in 1949.<sup>2</sup> The Limerick Leader recorded “*much will depend on the generosity of the handicapper, but unfortunately he knows little of the form of these young swimmers, whose main object in travelling is to gain experience, and may be a trifle harsh on them*”.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the race the Royal Life Saving Society gave an instructive life-saving display.<sup>3</sup>

The first three places in the 31<sup>st</sup> Liffey Swim were filled by schoolboys.<sup>3-7</sup> The race was won by the sixteen-year-old Limerick lad, Joe Grant, a pupil of Clongowes Wood College, in a time of 25:42. His winning margin was 40 yards from fifteen-year-old Eric W. Briggs (Pembroke SC, handicap 4 min), a pupil at Wesley College, who was followed home by seventeen year-old D. Lawlor (Clontarf SC, handicap 5 min), a student at Belvedere College, 50 yards behind.

Joe Grant took the lead near the Capel Street Bridge and was never headed. There was a rousing tussle for the third spot, with Lawlor just getting the touch at the barge by a matter of inches from 4<sup>th</sup>-placed P.J. Murray (Dalkey SC, handicap 5 min). The long-handicapped swimmers were assisted by a strong current.<sup>3-7</sup> Interestingly, the President of the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A., Patrick G. Condon (North Dublin WSC, handicap 2 min), who placed 32<sup>nd</sup>, was a Vice-President of Shannon SC.

This was the first time that the Liffey Swim *Independent Cup* had been won by a native of Limerick. He was erroneously reported as “the first Munster winner of the Liffey Swim”.<sup>2</sup> That accolade went to Andrew Crosbie (Sunday’s Well SC, Cork) in 1935<sup>8,9</sup> when the Liffey Swim was a scratch race as it had been in 1934.<sup>10</sup>

The fastest time of 24:40 was clocked by J.P.D. “Jack” Cassidy (Clontarf SC, handicap 1 min) who finished 17<sup>th</sup> in the race.<sup>3,4,7</sup> He had won the Liffey Swim in 1945.<sup>11</sup> The team prize went to North Dublin WSC – Norman Hannigan (5 min) 5<sup>th</sup>, Jimmy

O'Donoghue (5 min) 6<sup>th</sup>, P. Murphy (4½ min) 10<sup>th</sup> and B. Lyon (3½ min) equal 11<sup>th</sup> = 32 pts, while Clontarf SC placed 2<sup>nd</sup> – D. Lawlor (5 min) 3<sup>rd</sup>, F. Blake (4½ min) 11<sup>th</sup>, Jack Cassidy (1 min) 17<sup>th</sup>, G. Carthy (2 min) 21<sup>st</sup> = 52 pts.<sup>4,5,7</sup>



Mr W. King, Independent Newspapers Ltd, presenting the *Independent Cup* to Joe Grant (Shannon Swimming Club). To the right of Joe Grant are Eric W. Briggs (Pembroke SC) and D. Lawlor (North Dublin WSC). Standing beside Mr W. King are P.G. Condon, President Leinster Branch IASA and Mr L. Hand. Hon. Secretary Leinster Branch IASA. (*Irish Independent*, 8 July, 1950, page 7)

Joe Grant had some previous notable swimming successes to his name – the under-14 Munster 50 yards title in 1947<sup>12</sup>, the U16 Munster 50 yards title in 1949<sup>12</sup> and the *Olo Cup* for the 1¼-mile Treaty Swim (10<sup>th</sup> edition) on the Shannon in August 1949.<sup>13,14</sup> He had completed the Treaty Swim as a thirteen-year-old and the youngest competitor in 1947.<sup>15</sup> The *Olo Cup* was won that year by Jimmy Dooley.<sup>15</sup> In 1950, Joe Grant placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Treaty Swim, winning the Geraghty Cup, and recorded the fastest time of 22:09.<sup>16</sup> He also won the 75-m Leinster Schoolboy Intermediate title in 53 sec and the Munster Youth's 100-m Championship in 75.4 sec.<sup>17,18</sup> Lawlor went on to win the Plunkett-McAllister Cup for the 1,000 yards open sea race at Clontarf Baths hosted by Clontarf SC in July 1950<sup>19</sup> and was the inaugural winner of the "Henry Case Memorial Cup" at the Clontarf SC Gala for the Men's 100 m Open Handicap.<sup>20</sup>

**Top 10 finishers:**<sup>3-7</sup>

Place	Name	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Joe Grant	Shannon SC	4 min 30 sec	25:42
2	Eric W. Briggs	Pembroke SC	4 min	25:33
3	D. Lawlor	Clontarf SC	5 min	27:06
4	P.J. Murray	Dalkey SC	5 min	27:11
5	Norman Hannigan	North Dublin WSC	5 min	27:13
6	Jimmy O'Donoghue	North Dublin WSC	5 min	27:18
7	Niall Heffernan	Shannon SC	4 min	26:20
8	Jimmy Dooley	Shannon SC	2 min 30 sec	25:15
9	Ronnie Wilson	Sandycove SC	4 min	26:52
10	P. Murphy	North Dublin WSC	4 min	27:26

\*Time ahead of scratch man

Shannon SC with Joe Grant 1<sup>st</sup>, Niall Heffernan 7<sup>th</sup> and Jimmy Dooley 8<sup>th</sup>, who had the 2<sup>nd</sup> fastest time of 25:15, and Derry Foley 42<sup>nd</sup> were recorded “as most unfortunate in not securing the team prize”.<sup>6</sup> It was contended in the *Limerick Leader* report on the Liffey Swim that some mistake had been made in the placing of Tom Lane and that, but for this presumed error, Shannon SC would have won the team prize.<sup>6</sup> Lane does not appear in the list of 52 finishers published in the *Irish Independent*.<sup>4</sup> For Shannon SC to have won Tom Lane would have to have finished 15<sup>th</sup> or better. No further comment was published on the team result. Shannon SC had won the Irish Life-Saving Championship in 1949.<sup>6</sup>

During the 1950 Liffey Swim competitors had to contend downstream with interference from swans which had a pecking competition.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the swans showed no respect for the Leinster Branch President Patrick Condon who received a particularly hefty peck.<sup>21</sup> As in previous years hot Bovril was provided to competitors after the race at the Tara Street Baths where the presentations were made.

## The 1951 Liffey Swim

The entry list for the 32<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Liffey Swim included five previous winners – C.P. Cloake (1942), Patrick G. Condon (1944), Jack Cassidy (1945), Jimmy Rafter (1946) and Joe Grant (1950).<sup>22–24</sup> The limit handicap was 6 min 40 sec.<sup>22</sup> The field also included 25 first timers, all youths.<sup>25</sup> Tiernan McBride, winner of the P.J. Coughlan Perpetual Cup for the 1-mile Lough Owel race in Co. Westmeath that year, was noted as a contender.<sup>26</sup> The field included three brothers from Republican SC – John, James and William Kearney. North Dublin WSC topped the club entrants with 19 swimmers.<sup>22–24</sup>

Swimmers who had not previously competed were required to swim trials at either Clontarf or Blackrock Baths to meet the qualification standard of 880 yards in 16 min or less.<sup>27,28</sup> The limit handicap was set at 6 min 40 sec. The Cork Red Cross Water Safety Corps, the 1950 winner’s of the President’s Cup contested for by aquatic life-saving teams of the Irish Red Cross Society, gave a life-saving display from the finishing barge moored between O’Connell and Butt Bridges prior to the start from Guinness Warf.

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Liffey Swim was won by J.J. “Jack” Fagan (North Dublin WSC, handicap 2 min 40 sec), captain of the North Dublin WSC water-polo team, in a time of 26:44.<sup>29–32</sup> His best prior placing was in 1941 when he finished 3<sup>rd</sup> with a handicap of 8½ min.<sup>33,34</sup> The same year North Dublin WSC swimmers had taken the first four places and 6<sup>th</sup> place. Fagan had placed 34<sup>th</sup> in the 1950 Liffey Swim with a 3 min handicap.<sup>2</sup> Jack was the son of Brendan G. Fagan, city analyst, one of the founders of the Liffey Swim.<sup>35</sup> This was Jack Fagan’s 10<sup>th</sup> attempt at the Liffey Swim.

The race produced a photo-finish between 28-year-old Jack Fagan, a commercial traveller for Messrs Williams and Woods, manufacturers of preserves, pickles, sauce

and confectionery, and John “Jack” Vaughan (Half Moon SC, handicap 4 min), a seventeen-year-old apprentice tiler with George Tully & Sons, Cabra, who was competing in his second Liffey Swim.<sup>36</sup> Jack Vaughan had placed 27<sup>th</sup> in the 31<sup>st</sup> Liffey Swim with a handicap of 5 min.<sup>2</sup> Ronnie Wilson (Sandycove SC, handicap 1 min), who had placed 9<sup>th</sup> the previous year with a handicap of 4 min, finished 3<sup>rd</sup>.



Mr G. Dunne, Publicity Department Independent Newspapers Ltd., presenting Jack Fagan (North Dublin WSC) with the Gold medal as winner of the Liffey Swim  
(*Irish Independent*, 14 July, 1951, pg. 7)

A. Redmond (North Dublin WSC, limit man) was an early leader, but was soon passed by D. Cassidy (Clontarf SC, handicap 6 min). Vaughan passed Cassidy, who would finish 8<sup>th</sup>, at Winetavern Street Bridge (O’Donovan Rossa Bridge). Fagan, who started 4 min after Cassidy, caught him at the Halfpenny Bridge. Seán Nolan (Dublin SC, handicap 2 min) and Ronnie Wilson were making up ground on the long-handicapped individuals. Vaughan was leading from Fagan by 20 yards coming under O’Connell Street Bridge, when Fagan put on a spurt. Yard by yard he crept up on Vaghan and just got his hand to the finishing barge before Vaughan touched. Vaughan admitted that he had been breathing to his right and never saw Fagan surging on his left-hand side. Seán Nolan, a back-stroker, finished 4<sup>th</sup>.<sup>30,31</sup>

**Top 10 finishers:**<sup>29–31</sup>

Place	Name	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	J.J. “Jack” Fagan	North Dublin WSC	2 min 40 sec	26:44
2	John “Jack” Vaughan	Half Moon SC	4 min	27:15
3	Ronnie Wilson	Sandycove SC	1 min	25:10
4	Seán J. Nolan	Dublin SC	2 min 20 sec	27:49
5	Eric W. Briggs	Pembroke SC	Scratch	24:33
6	Fergus Barron	Dublin SC	3 min	NR <sup>†</sup>
7	R. O’Flynn	Clontarf SC	6 min	NR
8	D. Cassidy	Clontard SC	6 min	NR
9	Tiernan McBride	Pembroke SC	3 min 30 sec	NR
10	Ken Reade	Dublin SC	6 min	NR

\*Time ahead of scratch man

†Not reported in *Irish Independent*, *Irish Press*, *Irish Times* and *Evening Herald*

In 1950 Jack Fagan had won the Kelly Cup for the Ireland’s Eye to Howth race in 32:01 with a 4 min handicap.<sup>37,38</sup> In winning the Liffey Swim he became the fourth

Leinster swimmer to complete a Liffey Swim and Ireland's Eye race double after Richard N. Case, Patrick G. Condon and Jimmy Rafter. The Gold Medals presented by Irish Independent Newspapers to the winners of the Liffey Swim and the Ireland's Eye to Howth race were the most cherished prizes for Irish long distance river and open-sea events.

John Vaughan was encouraged to take up swimming at Cabra Technical College.<sup>36</sup> He also took up boxing as a featherweight (9 stone class, 57.2 kg) and represented Dublin City Vocational Schools against London Schools' A.B.A. in April 1950 in Dublin, when he beat the British Champion, Phil Fitzgerald.<sup>36,39</sup> In 1953 Ronnie Wilson won the 1½-mile Dún Laoghaire Harbour scratch race<sup>40</sup> and regained this title in 1955.<sup>41</sup> He also placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 1953 Kilmartin Cup 1½-mile swim from Bray Harbour to Bray Cove and returned the fastest time in very choppy sea conditions.<sup>42</sup> The Bray Swim that year was won by Tiernan McBride (Pembroke SC), son of Seán McBride TD, Nobel Peace Prize laureate in 1974.<sup>42</sup>

Eric W. Briggs (Pembroke SC), off scratch, who was 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1950, placed 5<sup>th</sup> and returned the fastest time of 24:35.<sup>29-31</sup> The team prize was won by Dublin SC – Seán J. Nolan (2 min 20 sec) 4<sup>th</sup>, Fergus Barron (3 min) 6<sup>th</sup>, Ken Reade (6 min) 10<sup>th</sup>, and Niall Kennedy (3min 40sec) 13<sup>th</sup> = 33 pts. Pembroke SC placed 2<sup>nd</sup> – Eric Briggs (scr) 5<sup>th</sup>, Tiernan McBride (3 min 20 sec) 9<sup>th</sup>, Gerard F. Callanan (1 min 40 sec) 11<sup>th</sup>, and J.C. “Joe” Hogan (40 sec), a water-polo international, 14<sup>th</sup> = 39 pts.<sup>29-31</sup> It should be noted that the *Irish Press* erroneously reported North Dublin WSC as the winners of the team prize and S. Nolan (Republican SC) as 4<sup>th</sup> in the race.<sup>29</sup>

Just over a month after the Liffey Swim, John Vaughan saved the life of a fourteen-year-old, Henry Barnwell, at Islandbridge where he trained. Vaughan, who had the Bronze Medal and the certificate from the Royal Life Saving Association as well as the Unigrip award in life-saving, was able to bring Barnwell safely to the bank.<sup>36,43</sup>

In August 1951, the Liffey Swim spun off a race in the Shannon. The General Textiles Swimming Club, Athlone, announced that it would hold a Shannon Swim on the same lines as Dublin's Liffey Swim (The Gentex Swim).<sup>44</sup> The club promoted the swim to call attention to the need for provision of proper swimming facilities on the Shannon which each year claimed drowning victims.<sup>45</sup> Only sixteen swimmers faced the starter. The race was won by 15-year-old G. McMahon (Shannon SC) who received the Twomey Cup. Scratch man Mick Nolan (Dublin SC) clocked the fastest time of 17:45.<sup>53</sup>

## The 1952 Liffey Swim

Trials for qualification were run at Clontarf and Blackrock Baths.<sup>46</sup> For the 1952 Liffey Swim, the limit handicap was 8½ min.<sup>47,48</sup> By extending the limit, the handicapper was attempting to cater for all swimmers because of the large numbers of first-timers in the race.<sup>49</sup> The scratch man was again Eric W. Briggs (Pembroke SC), who had recorded the fastest time the previous year and had placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1950 and 5<sup>th</sup> in 1951.

Shannon SC fielded a strong team.<sup>48</sup> Five previous winners faced the starter – William F. “Billy” Case (1930, handicap 4 min 10 sec), Patrick G. Condon (1944, handicap 4 min 10 sec), J.P.D. “Jack” Cassidy (1945, handicap 1½ min), Joe Grant (1950, handicap 1 min) and J.J. “Jack” Fagan (1951, handicap 1 min 50 sec).<sup>47,49</sup> The race was portrayed as a contest between youth and knowledge of the race stretch of the Liffey and the more experienced swimmers. Fergus Barron (Dublin SC, handicap 3 min), a native of Ennis, who had placed 6<sup>th</sup> in 1951, was a breaststroke specialist and mooted as one to watch for.<sup>49</sup>

The race was won by a 20-year-old C.I.E. worker, Gerry Best (Half Moon SC, handicap 5 min),<sup>50-53</sup> who was coached by the 1933 Liffey Swim winner, Johnny Ellis.<sup>54,55</sup> His winning time was 25:03. Best was a former James’s Street C.B.S. student. Halfway between Capel Street Bridge and O’Connell Street Bridge, he made his effort and touched 50 yards ahead of Joe Kyne (North Dublin WSC, handicap 5 min). Best’s win was described as “*a powerful and polished exhibition*” with a smooth crawl from start to finish. It was Best’s third time to compete in the Liffey Swim. He placed 23<sup>rd</sup> in 1950 (handicap 5 min).

It was Joe Kyne’s fifth Liffey Swim. He placed 5<sup>th</sup> in 1947 when he was fifteen. The previous weekend Kyne had won the “Harry Case Memorial Cup” over 100 yards at the Clontarf Swimming Gala.<sup>50</sup> Ward Fleming (Pembroke SC, handicap 3 min 40 sec), an eighteen-year-old former Mungret College pupil, placed 3<sup>rd</sup>, 15 yards behind Kyne. Fleming was ‘flying’ at the finish and took the touch from Niall Kennedy (Dublin SC) with his last few determined strokes.

One of the features of the 1952 Liffey Swim was that the veteran swimmers and those who had competed several times stated that they had never found the water as warm.



Gerry Best (Half Moon SC), winner, holding the “Independent Cup with Joe Kyne (North Dublin WSC), 2<sup>nd</sup>, on left and Ward Fleming (Pembroke SC), 3<sup>rd</sup>, on right. (*Irish Independent*, 2 July, 1952, pg. 5)

For the second year running Eric W. Briggs (Pembroke SC), the scratch man, returned the fastest time of 23:07, faster by 1:28 than his time in 1951.<sup>50-53</sup> Previous winner Patrick Condon placed 10<sup>th</sup> in 25:23, while Jack Cassidy finished 20<sup>th</sup>.

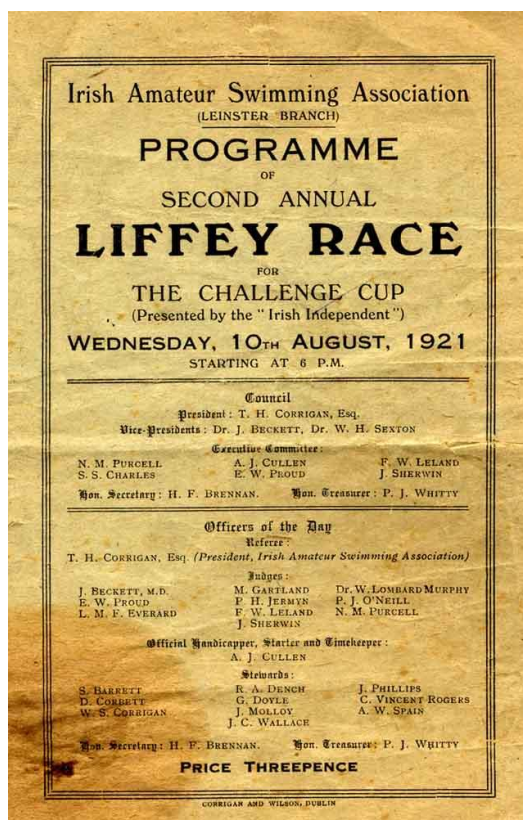
**Top 10 finishers:** <sup>50-53</sup>

Place	Name	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Gerry Best	Half Moon SC	5 min	25:03
2	Joe Kyne	North Dublin WSC	5 min	25:25
3	Ward Fleming	Dublin SC	3 min 40 sec	23:23
4	Niall Kennedy	Dublin SC	4 min 10 sec	24:58
5	Tommy Dorgan	Dublin SC	3 min 50 sec	24:43
6	Ultan Kerrigan	North Dublin WSC	5 min	26:02
7	Peter Mulhall	North Dublin WSC	5 min	26:03
8	Mickey Morran	North Dublin WSC	4 min 10 sec	25:19
9	F. Esby	Half Moon SC	5 min 30 sec	26:40
10	Patrick G. Condon	North Dublin WSC	4 min 10 sec	25:23

\*Time ahead of scratch man

The team prize went again to North Dublin WSC on count-back – Joe Kyne (5 min) 2<sup>nd</sup>, Ultan Kerrigan (5 min) 6<sup>th</sup>, Peter Mulhall (5 min) 7<sup>th</sup> and Mickey Morran (4 min 10 sec) 8<sup>th</sup> = 23 pts. Dublin SC placed 2<sup>nd</sup> – Ward Fleming (3 min 40 sec) 3<sup>rd</sup>, Niall Kennedy (4 min 20 sec) 4<sup>th</sup>, Tommy Dorgan (3 min 50 sec) 5<sup>th</sup> and Seán J. Nolan (2 min 40 sec) 11<sup>th</sup> = 23 pts. <sup>50-53</sup> North Dublin WSC finished five in the top ten.

## The 1953 Liffey Swim



1921 Programme for the Liffey Swim (source credited as Michael Fitzpatrick)  
Memorabilia from the Early Liffey Swims © Dublin City Public Libraries

In the middle of June 1953, the Liffey Swim lost one of its founders with the death of Augustus J. "Gus" Cullen.<sup>57</sup> He was a co-founder of Clontarf SC, a former President of the I.A.S.A. and an Irish official at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam.<sup>57</sup> He was the handicapper, timekeeper and starter in the early years of the Liffey Swim as evidenced by the programme for the 1921 Liffey Swim.

As in previous years, trials were run at Clontarf and Blackrock Baths to ensure that swimmers were able to meet the qualification standard of 880 yards in 16 min or less. Swimmers from outside the Dublin area had to have their times certified by a senior club official and by a member of the local branch executive of the I.A.S.A.<sup>56</sup>

The limit handicap for the 34<sup>th</sup> Liffey Swim was 7 min. Although Gerry Best did not defend his crown as he had left the country to take up a position in Scotland,<sup>58</sup> past winners included Jack Fagan (1951) and Patrick G. Condon (1944).<sup>59,60</sup> Patrick G. Condon, former President of Leinster I.A.S.A., was competing for his 16<sup>th</sup> and last time, having over that period finished 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> in previous editions.<sup>61</sup> The field included most of the crack swimmers in Leinster as well swimmers from Sligo, Limerick, Tullamore and Belfast.<sup>59,60</sup> Before the race started a display of life-saving was given by the Red Cross Water Safety Corps.

The race was won by Gerry Boland (North Dublin WSC, handicap 5½ min), a 36-year-old commercial traveller for films, Walt Disney Productions, who got in the picture on this occasion.<sup>62-64</sup> His winning time was 26:03. It was his 6<sup>th</sup> attempt at the distance. He had finished 14<sup>th</sup> in 1950 (handicap 5 min).



**Mr G. Dunne (Left) presenting the *Independent Cup* to Gerry Boland (right)  
Winner of the 1953 Liffey Swim  
(*Irish Independent*, 21 July, 1953, pg. 7)**

At Capel Street Bridge, Kenneth Reade (Dublin SC, handicap 7 min) was leading from Boland and A. Redmond (North Dublin WSC, handicap 7 min). At the Metal Bridge (Halfpenny Bridge), Boland was challenging Redmond, passed him and made ground on Reade. The two leaders Boland and Reade went under O'Connell Street Bridge

together. Boland emerged in first place and held on to win by 10 yards, with Reade holding off Redmond by a couple of yards.<sup>62,63</sup>

**Top 10 finishers:** <sup>62-64</sup>

Place	Name	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Gerry Boland	North Dublin WSC	5 min 30 sec	26:03
2	Ken Reade	Dublin SC	7 min	27:55
3	A. Redmond	North Dublin WSC	7 min	28:00
4	C. Bennett	Dublin SC	5 min 30 sec	26:30
5	M. Connolly	Dublin SC	5 min	26:04
6	Mickey Morran	North Dublin WSC	3 min 30 sec	24:45
7	W. Egan	Half Moon SC	5 min 30 sec	26:50
8	Eric W. Briggs	Pembroke SC	1 min	22:22
9	M. Doyle	North Dublin WSC	3 min	24:25
10	Ultan Kerrigan	North Dublin WSC	3 min 30 sec	25:09

\*Time ahead of scratch man

Boland won the Ireland's Eye to Howth race in 1949.<sup>65</sup> He thus became the fifth Leinster swimmer to win both *Irish Independent* Gold medals for Ireland's Eye–Howth race and the Liffey Swim. The four previous dual winners were Richard N. Case (Clontarf SC) – Liffey Swim 1934, 1936, 1937, 1938 and Ireland Eye–Howth 1936, 1937, 1938, 1946)<sup>66-73</sup>, Patrick G. Condon (North Dublin WSC) – Liffey Swim 1944 and Ireland's Eye–Howth 1944)<sup>74-76</sup>, Jimmy Rafter (Half Moon SC) – Liffey Swim 1946 and Ireland's Eye–Howth 1940 )<sup>77-81</sup> and Jack Fagan (North Dublin WSC) – Liffey Swim 1951 and Ireland's Eye–Howth 1950).<sup>29-31,37,38</sup>

The 1953 Liffey Swim was notable for a number of reasons. For the first time Belfast swimmers competed in the Liffey Swim. Twelve-year-old Frank McDermott (Templemore SC, Belfast) became the youngest ever competitor in the race at that time.<sup>62</sup> With a handicap of 4 min 40 sec, he finished the course in 55<sup>th</sup> place. Cecil Young (Neptune SC, Belfast), the scratch man, who placed 20<sup>th</sup>, recorded the fastest time of 22:00, which was reported as the fastest time ever by an Irishman for the event. Thus, Young became the first Ulster swimmer to take one of the major awards in the Liffey Swim.<sup>62</sup>

North Dublin again took the team prize – Gerry Boland (5½ min) 1<sup>st</sup>, A. Redmond (7 min) 3<sup>rd</sup>, Mickey Morran (3½ min) 6<sup>th</sup> and Maurice F. Doyle (3 min) 9<sup>th</sup> – 19 pts. Dublin SC was 2<sup>nd</sup> – Ken Reade (7 min) 2<sup>nd</sup>, C. Bennett (5½ min) 4<sup>th</sup>, Mick Connolly (5 min) 5<sup>th</sup> and John Kearney (3½ min) 11<sup>th</sup> = 22 pts.<sup>62-64</sup>

Eric W. Briggs (Pembroke SC), now an engineering student at Trinity College Dublin, who was the fastest swimmer in 1951 and 1952, had the shortest handicap (1 min) other than the scratch man, Cecil Young. He placed 8<sup>th</sup> in a time of 22:22, the second fastest time.<sup>62-64</sup>

## The 1954 Liffey Swim

The qualifying tests were run as usual at Blackrock and Clontarf Baths.<sup>82</sup> The handicap limit was set at 5 min.<sup>83</sup> The scratchman in 1954 was Frank O'Donovan (Pembroke SC), the winner of the 30<sup>th</sup> Liffey Swim in 1949.<sup>84</sup> Eric Briggs (Pembroke SC) was the other scratch man but did not compete as he was selected to represent Irish Universities, along with Tiernan McBride (Pembroke SC), in Manchester.<sup>85</sup> Among the competitors was Paddy Arrigan (Curragh SC), Irish back-stroke champion 1951 and 1953, and Frank McDermott (Templemore SC, Belfast), the youngest competitor up to 1953.<sup>83</sup> Former competing winners were Jack Cassidy (1945, handicap 2 min) and Jack Fagan (1951, handicap 2 min) and defending champion Gerry Boland (North Dublin WSC, handicap 3 min 20 sec).<sup>83</sup> The Liffey Swim was favoured with fine weather, which brought out thousands of spectators along the quay walls and on the bridges.

The *Independent Cup* and the Gold Medal for the Coral Jubilee Swim were won by Jimmy Markey (Dublin SC, handicap 4 min 20 sec), a salesman in Dublin fruit market, in a time of 24:57.<sup>86-88</sup> A former Newbridge College pupil, he was competing in the Liffey Swim for only the second time. He touched the finishing barge just three seconds ahead of the back-stroker Paddy Arrigan (handicap 1 min 20 sec).

The order at Capel Street Bridge was Markey, D. Byrne (Dublin SC, handicap 4 min 40 sec), F. Blake (Clontarf SC, handicap 4 min 40 sec) and Michael J. "Mick" Kelly (Clontarf SC, handicap 3 min 20 sec). At Bachelor's Walk Paddy Arrigan started to pick off the men who had led most of the way. At O'Connell Street Bridge, shouted warnings from spectators on the walls and in boats prevented Arrigan from crashing into one of the buttresses. However, in turning over to avoid this imminent danger he went through a side arch and lost the benefit of the faster-flowing current under the central arch. This possibly ultimately lost him the tight finish to the race.<sup>87</sup>



Mr G. Dunne (left) presenting the Independent Cup to Jimmy Markey (Dublin SC) with Mr Sean Lawlor, President of the Leinster Branch IASA (right)  
(*Irish Independent*, 9 July, 1954, pg. 13)

D. Byrne (Dublin SC), eight yards behind Arrigan, claimed the 3<sup>rd</sup> spot. Byrne, a 22-year-old former C.B.S. Synge Street swimmer, played rugby for Palmerston RFC as did Gerry Boland, the 1953 winner.<sup>62-64</sup> Boland (handicap 3 min 20 sec) finished well down the field in 36<sup>th</sup> place.<sup>87</sup>

**Top 10 finishers:**<sup>86-88</sup>

Place	Name	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Jimmy Markey	Dublin SC	4 min 20 sec	24:57
2	Paddy Arrigan	Curragh SC	1 min 20 sec	22:00
3	D. Byrne	Dublin SC	4 min 40 sec	25:30
4	F. Blake	Clontarf SC	3 min 40 sec	24:35
5	J. Bailey	Pembroke SC	3 min	24:00
6	Michael J. Kelly	Clontarf SC	3 min 20 sec	24:20
7	Philip Chatham	Dublin SC	5 min	26:47
8	M. Fanning	Dalkey SC	4 min	25:51
9	James Kearney	Dublin SC	3 min 40 sec	25:35
10	W. Parnell	Dublin SC	5 min	26:55

\*Time ahead of scratch man

The *Irish Times* recorded that Jimmy Markey, like Paddy Arrigan, had used the backstroke for the entire journey.<sup>88</sup> Not since the win of William F. Case (Clontarf S.C.), an 18-year old, in the 1930 Liffey Swim had swimmers employing the backstroke from start to finish placed in the first three.<sup>89,90</sup> Paddy Arrigan was a native of Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, and an army lieutenant stationed at The Curragh. His time of 22:00, the fastest, equalled the native record time of Cecil Young (Neptune, Belfast) set in the 1953 race.<sup>62-64,87,88</sup>

The team prize went to Dublin SC – Jimmy Markey (4 min 20 sec) 1<sup>st</sup>, D. Byrne (4 min 40 sec) 3<sup>rd</sup>, Philip Chatham (5 min) 7<sup>th</sup> and James Kearney (3 min 40 sec) 9<sup>th</sup> = 20 pts. Clontarf SC finished in 2<sup>nd</sup> place – F. Blake (3 min 40 sec) 4<sup>th</sup>, Michael J. Kelly (3 min 20 sec) 6<sup>th</sup>, J. Cassidy (2 min) 12<sup>th</sup> and P. O'Connor (4 min 20 sec) 13<sup>th</sup> = 35 pts.<sup>87,88</sup> Dublin SC finished with five in the top ten.<sup>86-88</sup>

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