

The Liffey Swim: The 1950's Decade – Part 2

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The 1955 Liffey Swim

For the 1955 Liffey Swim a handicap of 5 min separated the limit men from the scratch men.^{91,92} Three previous winners entered – J.J. “Jack” Fagan (1951), Gerry Boland (1953) and Jimmy Markey (1954).^{91,92} However, with strong entries from all four provinces, a second win was no given.

Other notable entrants included Paddy Arrigan (Curragh SC), the back-stroker who was 2nd in 1954^{86–88} and Michael Williams (Tullamore SC), Irish 200 m Champion,^{91,92} as well as recent big swim winners: Tiernan McBride (Pembroke SC), Kilmartin Cup, Bray^{93,94}; Gerard F. Callanan (Pembroke SC), Vartry Swim, Wicklow, setting record time of 22:20 for the 1-mile race⁹⁵; Freddy Parkes (Wellington SC), who had won the Lough Owel 1-mile Swim at Portnashangan, Co. Westmeath in a new record time of 17:43 and the Lagan Swim from Scratch,⁹⁶; and two scratch-men challengers from Belfast – Peter Bedlow (Wellington SC) and Albert Meli (East End SC).^{91,92} The Pembroke SC trio of Tiernan McBride, Ward Fleming and Gerard F. Callanan had also swum across Dublin Bay from Red Rock Bathing Place, Howth to the East Pier, Dún Laoghaire covering the 5-mile swim in approx. 3 hours.^{97–100} McBride chose to emerge from the water at the boat slip of the National Yacht Club. Gerard F. Callanan won the 1½-mile Dún Laoghaire Harbour Swim in 1954 and 1956¹⁰¹ and was second in 1953 and 1955.^{40,41}

While Richard N. “Ritchie” Case had won the *Independent Cup* four times in the 1930's (1934, 1936–38), three of ‘Liffey Swims’ had taken place from Bull Wall to Dollymount Strand (1936–38) and all four had been scratch races.^{66–69} Now in its 36th year, no swimmer had yet won two races in the River Liffey under handicap. Another year was to pass without this goal being achieved.

The Liffey Swim has never been short of surprises. The 1955 race was no exception. The individual prizes went West, East and North to three of the four provinces. The winner's laurels went to a swimmer who had never won anything outside Galway. Pat Broderick (Galway SC, handicap 3 min), a 19-year-old medical student studying at University College Galway and native of Galway City, surprised the host of better-known swimmers when he claimed the *Independent Cup* and Gold Medal in a time of 26:40, ahead of limit-man Leslie Lyons (North Dublin WSC, handicap 5 min) by 50 yards and the Ulster scratchman Freddy Parkes (Wellington SC, Belfast), studying physical education at Stranmillis Training College, Belfast, in 3rd place a further 20

yards behind. In his first Liffey Swim Broderick became the first Connacht swimmer to take the winner's laurels.¹⁰²⁻¹⁰⁵



**First three in Liffey Swim (left to right): Freddy Parkes (Wellington SC, Belfast) 3rd, Pat Broderick (Galway SC) 1st and Leslie Lyons (North Dublin WSC) 2nd.
(*Irish Independent*, 27 August, 1955, pg. 13)**

Leslie Lyons, a 15-year-old pupil at O'Connell C.B.S. School, in his first attempt at the Liffey Swim led from 50 yards, which he did free-style at racing pace to get away from the bunch of limit-men before adopting the breast-stroke. He held the lead until he was passed by Broderick near O'Connell Street Bridge.¹⁰³

Also with the leading group was Butch Moore (North Dublin WSC, limit man), born James Augustine Moore, a 17-year-old back-stroke practitioner from Finglas, who was in 3rd place at O'Connell Street Bridge when he got cramp which put him out of the prize winning group, although he managed to finish.^{103,106} He would go on to have a career as a show-band icon in the 1960's. His big break came with the Capitol Showband in 1958 and as its lead singer he became one of the most popular Irish showband vocalists.



Butch Moore, Screenshot of the Eurovision Song Contest 1965

In 1965 Butch achieved celebrity status as Ireland's first contestant in the Eurovision Song Contest in Naples singing *Walking in Streets in the Rain*. Ireland placed 6th of the 18 countries entered. He recorded *Foolin Time*, the first ever recording of a Phil Coulter composition.^{107–111}

Freddy Parkes, who also played rugby and basketball, slipped the other scratch men Peter Pedlow and Albert Meli early on. He passed Gerard F. Callanan (Pembroke SC) at the Father Mathew Bridge, Eric Briggs (Pembroke SC) at the O'Donovan Rossa Bridge and Michael Williams (Tullamore SC) at the Halfpenny Bridge. While Parkes had hoped to achieve a unique treble (Lagan, Lough Owel, Liffey) and to become the first Northern swimmer to take the *Independent Cup* across the Boyne, he had to be content with a podium position. However, in taking the prize for the fastest time of 24:36, he emulated Cecil Young's achievement of the previous year. He became the first Northern swimmer to place in the top three.^{102,103}

Paddy Arrigan placed 7th, Gerard Callanan 9th, Peter Pedlow 13th, and Eric W. Briggs 15th, while previous winner Jack Fagan finished the race. In 1958 Arrigan (Blackrock SC, Galway) won the Connacht 1-mile freestyle championship¹¹² and Salthill Prom Swim for the *Connacht Tribune Cup*, swimming backstroke.¹¹³ Dermot Moloney (Tuam SC), holder of the Connacht freestyle, breaststroke and backstroke championships placed 16th. At the Castlerea Swimming Gala in July 1955, Moloney became the first schoolboy in Ireland to break 60 sec for the 100 yards freestyle in winning the Connacht Championship. His time, verified by three time-keepers, was 59.6 sec. For this feat by a schoolboy, Dermot Moloney won the Gold medal put up by the I.A.S.A.^{114,115}

Top 10 finishers:^{102–105}

Place	Name	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Pat Broderick	Galway SC	3 min	26:40
2	Leslie Lyons	North Dublin WSC	5 min	29:26
3	Freddy Parkes	Wellington SC, Belfast	Scratch	24:36
4	Tommy May	Crusade Aquatic Club	3 min	27:40
5	Michael Williams	Tullamore SC	30 sec	25:28
6	M. Burrows	Pembroke SC	2 min 30 sec	27:35
7	Paddy Arrigan	Curragh SC	1 min	26:10
8	James "Jim" Kavanagh	North Dublin WSC	4 min	29:12
9	Gerard F. Callanan	Pembroke SC	30 sec	25:44
10	Gerry Boland	North Dublin WSC	5 min	30:15

*Time ahead of scratch man

North Dublin WSC, which had the biggest team entry, reclaimed 1st place in the team competition – Leslie Lyons (5 min) 2nd, James Kavanagh (4 min) 8th, Gerry Boland (5 min) 10th, and P. Kinsella (1 min 40 sec) 12th = 32 pts. Tullamore SC, founded in 1948, came 2nd, demonstrating that swimming in the Midlands was alive and well – Michael

Williams (30 sec) 5th, Don Rungay (1 min 20 sec) 11th, Ed Williams (1 min 20 sec) place unknown and Oliver Lawless (30 sec) place unknown.^{102–105}

The 1956 Liffey Swim

The entry fee for 37th edition of the Liffey Swim was 2 shillings and 6 pence (2/6; half a crown), the same as it had been for the inaugural swim in 1920.^{116,117} Five trial tests were held at Blackrock and Clontarf Baths for swimmers who had not previously competed in the Liffey Swim or who did not finish within the automatic qualifying time in 1955. The qualifying standard was again set at 880 yards in 16 minutes or under.¹¹⁵ All competitors were required to wear numbered caps obtainable on a returnable deposit of 2/6.¹¹⁸ The idea was to make competitors identifiable to on-lookers.

Pat Broderick's win in 1955 and the holding of the I.A.S.A. National Championships in Sligo in 1956, both of which had heightened interest in Connacht, resulted in nine entries from Tuam and Galway.^{119,120} The limit handicap was set at 5 min 20 sec.¹¹⁹ Among the competitors was S. Fitzpatrick (Clontarf SC, limit man) who was competing for the 19th consecutive year – he placed 49th in the 31st Liffey Swim in 1950.¹¹⁹

Of the 102 entrants, only 68 faced the starter, of whom all but one finished. No reason for this high drop-out rate (33%) was given in reports. Teenagers filled the first three places. The title of "King of the Liffey" was won by 17-year-old Tommy May (Colmcille SC, Dublin – Club Snàmh Columcille) with a 2-min handicap in a time of 25:32.^{121–123} This was the first win for Colmcille SC, which had only been newly founded. In his debut Liffey Swim in 1955, also with a 2-min handicap but under the banner of Crusade Aquatic Club, May had placed 4th in a time of 27:40.^{102–105}



The Liffey Swim podium places 1956 (left to right): Winner Tommy May (Colmcille SC, Dublin), 2nd John King (Dalkey SC), and 3rd Patrick Broaders (North Dublin WSC)
(*Irish Independent*, 15 August, 1956, pg. 10)

The duals between the similarly handicapped swimmers and between the different handicap groups maintained the interest of the spectators all the way. A fairly strong current favoured the long-handicapped men. John King (Dalkey SC, handicap 4 min

20 sec), a 17-year-old boy at Presentation College, Bray, took the lead near Capel Street Bridge and was soon 25 yards ahead of the following swimmers – J. Conroy (Clontarf SC) and D. Murnane (North Dublin WSC). However, by O'Donovan Rossa Bridge (Winetavern Street Bridge), May had worked his way up on the leaders. May was a close 2nd to King at the Halfpenny Bridge. He caught King going under O'Connell Street Bridge. The race turned into a stroke-for-stroke frenzy cheered on by the watching mass of spectators. Tommy May just managed to pull ahead by a couple of strokes to get the touch at the finish. Patrick Broaders (North Dublin WSC, handicap 3 min 50 sec), an 18-year-old from Crumlin, came in 3rd some 20 yards behind King.^{121,122} John King won his first major long distance swim in 1956, his club's 1000 m Sandycove to Bullock Harbour Swim and, like May, was making his 2nd effort at the Liffey Swim.¹²²

The scratch men of the field had a hard time gaining grounds. Freddy Parkes (Wellington SC, Belfast) finished in 11th place but retained the fastest time accolade finishing in 24:05, 30 seconds faster than he achieved in 1955. Pat Broderick (Galway SC, handicap 2 min), the holder, placed 9th. The following year Broderick won the Salthill 1-Mile Prom Swim to win the *Connacht Tribune Cup* when for the first time the event was open to the whole country.¹²⁴ Other contenders who placed in the top ten finishers were Gerard Callanan (Pembroke SC, handicap 1 min), 5th, Eric Briggs (Pembroke SC, handicap 1 min 20 sec), 6th and Don Rungay (Tullamore SC, handicap 2 min), 8th.¹²¹⁻¹²³

Top 10 finishers:¹²¹⁻¹²³

Place	Cap	Name	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	82	Tommy May	Club Snámh Columcille	3 min 20 sec	25:32
2	55	John King	Dalkey SC	4 min 20 sec	26:34
3	68	Patrick Broaders	North Dublin WSC	3 min 50 sec	26:20
4	36	J Conroy	Clontarf SC	4 min 20 sec	27:34
5	100	Gerard F Callanan	Pembroke SC	1 min	24:14
6	98	Eric W Briggs	Pembroke SC	1 min 20 sec	24:40
7	81	A. Kelly	Clontarf SC	3 min 20 sec	28:15
8	94	Don Rungay	Tullamore SC	2 min	25:34
9	95	Pat Broderick	Galway SC	2 min	25:34
10	89	Brendan Watson	Galway SC	3 min 20 sec	27:00

*Time ahead of scratch man

The team awarded went to Pembroke SC – Gerard Callanan (1 min) 5th, Eric Briggs (1 min 20 sec), 6th, J. Bailey (3 min 20 sec) 12 or 13th and Tiernan McBride (3 min 50 sec) 14 or 15th = 38 pts. Clontarf SC were 2nd – J. Conroy (4 min 20 sec) 4th, A. Kelly (3 min 20 sec) 7th, J. Lee (4 min 20 sec) 12th/17th and Michael J. Kelly (3 min 20 sec) 17th/22nd = 45 pts.¹²¹⁻¹²³ Michael J. Kelly won the National 200 m Breaststroke Championship four times from 1956–1959.¹²⁵

The single competitor who did not finish was taken from the Liffey by the Crusade Aquatic Club launch when he developed severe stomach cramp.¹²²

The 1957 Liffey Swim

For the first time in the history of the Liffey Swim, it took place at the beginning of September. Weather conditions were ideal for the Swim, although the skies were somewhat overcast. The limit handicap was set at 5 min 5 sec.¹²⁶ The field included previous winners – Gerry Boland (1953), Frank O'Donovan (1949) and Tommy May (1956). Tommy Dorgan (Dublin SC) was taking part in his 16th Liffey Swim, his best placing of 3rd coming in 1945.¹²⁶

Among the competitors for the 38th Liffey Swim were: Dermot Moloney (Tuam SC) as scratchman¹²⁶ — 1956 and 1957 Connacht Mile Champion, 1957 Irish 1500 m Champion^{127–131}; Eric Briggs (Pembroke), a well known competitor in the Liffey Swim, twice winner of the fastest swim prize in 1951^{29–31} and 1952^{50–53}; Gerard F. Callanan (Pembroke SC), the holder of the record for the Dún Laoghaire Harbour Race¹⁰¹; Michael J. Kelly (Clontarf SC), 4 times Irish 200 m Breast-stroke Champion 1956–1959¹²⁵; Dáithí Ó Bruadair (Sandycove SC), a breaststroke exponent, formerly Blackrock College, then studying at University College Dublin, and N. Furlong (Wicklow SC), winner of the Vartry Swim in 1956.¹³² Tommy May (Club Snàmh Columcille) had his two younger brothers, Jimmy (15-years-old) and Joe (14-years-old) among his rivals.¹²⁶ The youngest swimmer was Eric Kinsella, a 13-year-old from Club Snàmh Columcille.¹²⁶

The spectators at O'Connell Street Bridge were provided with a running commentary by means of communications from a boat that kept abreast of the leaders. The race was a case of "Nice one Cyril, Nice one son".¹³³ The winner of an exciting and keenly contested Liffey Swim was a tall, red-headed, 19-year-old, Cyril Hardy (Crusade Aquatic Club, handicap 1 min 30 sec), from Donnycarney in a time of 26:30.^{134–136} An apprentice cabinet maker by trade, he had been swimming for three years. It was his second entry in the Liffey Swim. He placed 23rd in 1956. The second man home was Brendan Watson (Galway SC, handicap 2 min 20 sec), a 15-year-old who had placed 10th in 1956^{121–123}, and third was P. Flood (Half Moon AC, handicap 40 sec).^{134–136} Brendan Watson had won nearly every Connacht Championship in his age group and placed second in the Boy's U16 100-m freestyle Championship of Ireland. As scratch man, he also won the Toft Cup in 1957 for the Salthill Prom Swim in Galway.¹³² In 1958 he was selected to represent Ireland at the International Catholic Youth Games in Louvain, Belgium.¹³⁸

Conditions did not favour the back markers. Early on in the race it was evident that the well-handicapped swimmers would likely take the spoils. Joe Kyne (North Dublin WSC, handicap 5 min), who was 2nd in 1952, led out the race to the half-way mark. He would finish 7th. Kyne was followed closely by Norman Hannigan (North Dublin WSC,

limit man), P. Flood (Half Moon SC, handicap 4 min 25 sec), J. Kearney (Dublin SC, 3 min 35 sec) and Séamus Heffernan (Clontarf SC, 4 min 45 sec). Flood then forged into a 20-yard lead from this group. Cyril Hardy overtook Flood at O'Donovan Rossa Bridge (Winetavern Street Bridge). Approaching O'Connell Street Bridge Hardy surged and held the lead until the end by 4 yards.



Cyril Hardy (right) being presented with the winner's trophy, the *Independent Cup*, by Mr G. Dunne, Publicity Manager, Independent Newspapers Ltd. (*Irish Independent*, 3 September, 1957, pg. 6)

The battle for the 2nd and 3rd places looked to be set for a dead-heat until Brendan Watson (Galway SC) put in a tremendous final burst to take the touch by 5 yards from a gallant Flood. Harry Skelton (North Dublin WSC, handicap 4 min 25 sec), who placed 6th, had won the Howth Swim from Ireland's Eye to Balscadden Beach for the Independent Newspapers Gold Medal and the Kelly Cup in 1955 as a 15-year-old, the youngest ever winner of this race at that time.¹³⁹

Top 10 finishers: ¹³⁴⁻¹³⁶

Place	Name	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Cyril Hardy	Crusade Aquatic Club	3 min 35 sec	26:30
2	Brendan Watson	Galway SC	2 min 45 sec	26:44
3	P. Flood	Half Moon SC	4 min 25 sec	27:30
4	J. Kearney	Dublin SC	3 min 35 sec	29:50
5	Gerard F. Callanan	Pembroke SC	15 sec	25:01
6	Harry Skelton	North Dublin WSC	4 min 25 sec	29:25
7	Joe Kyne	North Dublin WSC	5 min	30:08
8	Tommy May	Club Snàmh Columcille	1 min 25 sec	26:32
9	Tommy Dorgan	Dublin SC	3 min 35 sec	28:44
10	George Sommerville	Dublin SC	3 min 35 sec	28:47

*Time ahead of scratch man

Thomas May (Club Snàmh Columkille, handicap 1 min 25 sec), the holder, placed 8th. The fastest time of 25:01 was recorded by Gerard F. Callanan (Pembroke SC, handicap 15 sec), who placed 5th.¹³⁴⁻¹³⁶

The team prize was won by North Dublin WSC – Harry Skelton (4 min 25 sec) 6th, Joe Kyne (5 min) 7th, Peter Mulhall (4 min 5 sec) 11th and Jim Kavanagh (4 min 25 sec), place unknown. Second was Dublin SC – J. Kearney (3 min 35 sec) 4th, Tommy Dorgan (3 min 35 sec) 9th, George Sommerville (3 min 35 sec) 10th, and one other.^{134–136}

The 1958 Liffey Swim

The entry fee for the Liffey Swim was still 2/6 (2 shillings and 6 pence).¹⁴⁰ Entrants who were competing for the first time or who had not competed in the three preceding Liffey Swims or were 7 min or slower than the fastest time in the preceding event were required to swim a qualifying trial to cover a ½-mile in 16 minutes or less. Intending competitors from outside the jurisdiction of the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. were required to submit trial times signed by an officer of the Branch to which their clubs were affiliated.¹⁴⁰ Competitors were drawn from 14 clubs in 7 counties.¹⁴¹ Tralee SC was represented for the first time by J. O'Hara.¹⁴² The field included three previous winners – Gerry Boland (North Dublin), Thomas May (Dublin SC) 1956 and Cyril Hardy (Crusade Aquatic Club) 1957.¹⁴²

Robin Power (Sunday's Well SC, handicap 2¾ min), a small, ginger-headed 15-year-old from Cork and pupil at St Finbarr's College, Farranferris, won the Liffey Swim with 50 yards to spare from Dáithí Ó Bruadair (Sandycove SC, handicap 3½ min) to become the third winner from that Cork Club.^{143–145} Power had the additional distinction of sharing the fastest time for the 39th Liffey Swim with Gerard Callanan (Pembroke SC), the scratch man, of 22:42. This was only the 3rd time in the history of the Liffey Swim under handicap that the winner also had the fastest time. In 1932 Leo Maher (Republican SC) won in the fastest time^{146,147} and in 1946 Jimmy Rafter accomplished this double.^{77–79} Three weeks later Robin Power placed 4th in the Lee Swim.¹⁴⁸

Power thus became the 3rd Cork swimmer to lift the *Independent Cup*. Leesider Andrew Crosbie (Sunday's Well SC, Cork), also a 15-year-old, had won the 16th Liffey Swim in 1935.^{149,150} In 1934, the Leinster Branch I.A.S.A. had made the event a real championship test by converting the Liffey Swim from a handicap race to a scratch race, which was adopted again in 1935.^{151,152} The *Independent Cup* went south for the first time in the history of the race. Crosbie was a double winner of the Lee Swim.^{153–156} The Pearl Jubilee Liffey Swim was won by Frank O'Donovan, an 18-year-old Cork youth and Sunday's Well member, then swimming under the pennant of North Dublin S.C.⁸⁴ Donovan also won the Lee Cup in 1946.



First three in Liffey Swim (left to right): 1st Robin Power (Sunday's Well SC, Cork), 2nd Dáithí Ó Bruadair (Sandycove SC), 3rd Kevin King (Crusade Aquatic Club)
(Irish Independent, 9 August 1958, pg. 13)

In the early stages Ultan Kerrigan (North Dublin WSC), a limit man, set the pace and led from James Kavanagh (North Dublin, handicap 5 min), and Gay Moloney (Dublin SC, handicap 5 min) up to the Four Courts. Kevin King (Crusade Aquatic Club, handicap 4½ min) was making up ground rapidly and joined the leader but at Capel Street Bridge the complexion of the race changed. Power, swimming strongly, swept past his rivals and quickly established a leading margin. When Power reached the finishing barge he had 40 yards to spare.^{143,144}

Ó Bruadair, using breast-stroke, was also forging his own way up the field. A tussle ensued with King for second place, but Ó Bruadair gradually wore his opponent down to claim the second spot. The Liffey Swim cognoscenti accorded Ó Bruadair a big ovation for his outstanding breast-stroke performance. Bartley Kiely (Sunday's Well SC, handicap 2¾ min), a 16-year-old, and William "Billy" Fitzgerald (Galway SC, handicap 2 min 50 sec) decided the 5th and 6th places, respectively, on the touch.¹⁴³⁻¹⁴⁴ Bartley Kiely went on to win the Lee Swim three weeks later.¹⁴¹ In its inaugural year, a member of Cormorant SC, Ciarán Beattie, placed in the top ten. Billy Fitzgerald, a student at St. Joseph's College, Galway, in 6th place, was 5th in the Galway Swimming Gala Prom Swim for the *Toft Cup*¹³⁷, 2nd in the 1958 *Toft Cup* swim^{157,158} and placed 2nd in the Salthill Prom Swim in 1958.¹¹³

Top 10 finishers: ^{143–145}

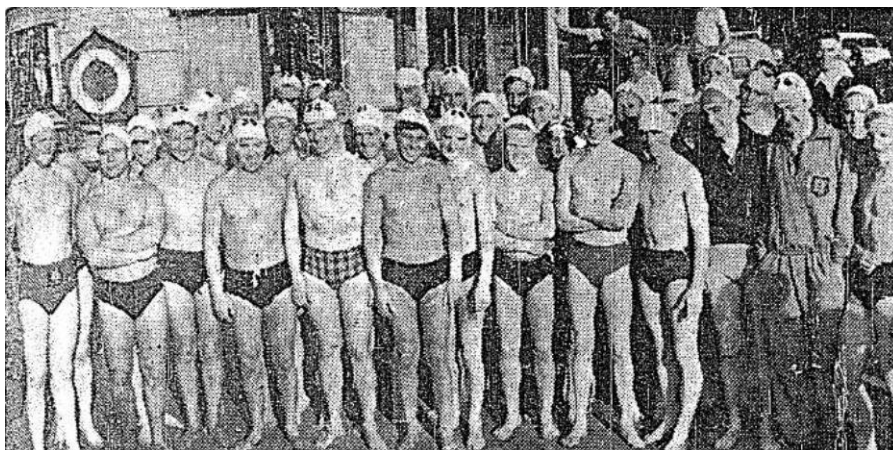
Place	Cap	Name	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	45	Robin Power	Sunday's Well SC, Cork	2 min 45 sec	22:42
2	35	Dáithí Ó Bruadair	Sandycove SC	3 min 30 sec	24:20
3	20	Kevin King	Crusade Aquatic Club	4 min 30 sec	25:27
4	9	James "Jim" Kavanagh	North Dublin WSC	5 min	26:15
5	48	Bartley Kiely	Sunday's Well, Cork	2 min 45 sec	24:02
6	38	William "Billy" Fitzgerald	Galway SC	3 min 30 sec	24:47
7	43	Ciarán Beattie	Cormorant SC	3 min 10 sec	24:30
8	58	Cyril Hardy	Crusade Aquatic Club	1 min 30 sec	22:52
9	6	Ultan Kerrigan	North Dublin WSC	5 min 30 sec	27:03
10	15	J. Lee	Clontarf SC	5 min	26:34

*Time ahead of scratch man

The team prize went to North Dublin WSC – Jim Kavanagh (30 sec) 4th, Ultan Kerrigan ("go") 9th, H. Brian Dennis (1 min) 13th and Harry Skelton (1 min) 16th = 42 pts. Clontarf SC came 2nd – J. Lee (30 secs) 10th, Michael J. Kelly (3 min) 12th, Seán Heffernan (1½ min) 18th, Séamus Kelly (1 min) 25th = 65 pts. ^{138–140}

The 1959 Liffey Swim

The portents for the Ruby Jubilee Liffey Swim were good. The tide promised to be of considerable help to the competitors. Hopes were high that the record time of 19:02, set on the occasion of the Pearl Anniversary Swim in 1949 by Jack Wardrop, might be broken. ^{84,159} Shorter handicapping was welcomed by the back markers – the scratch man was off 3 min 50 sec after the limit men. ¹⁶⁰



Competitors in the Ruby Jubilee Liffey Swim in 1959 at Guinness Wharf
(*Irish Independent*, 13 August, 1959, pg. 11)

The field of entries included many international swimmers, past and present, stars of provincial and national championships and a host of young pretenders.¹⁶⁰ Former winners Thomas May (1956), Cyril Hardy (1957) and Robin Power (1958) were listed. Strong challenges were expected to come from: H. Brian Dennis (North Dublin WSC), 2nd in the Ireland's Eye to Howth race and captain of the Irish water-polo team^{160,161}; Barry Hodgkinson (Sandycove SC), winner of the Curtis Cup for the Dún Laoghaire to "40 foot" at Sandycove race^{162,163}; Tiernan McBride (Pembroke SC), former Irish swimming international and 2nd in the Lough Owel 1-mile Swim^{160,164}; and Michael J. Kelly (Clontarf SC), Irish Senior breast-stroke champion 1956–59 and captain of the Leinster team.^{125,160}

Other contenders included: D. McDowell, winner of the 1,000 yards open sea race at Clontarf for the Plunkett-McAllister Cup¹⁶⁵; Noel Stewart (North Dublin WSC), winner of the Ireland's Eye to Howth race in record time of 21:07, 28 sec inside the record set by Gerard F Callanan in 1956¹⁶¹; Jimmy O'Connor (Sandycove SC), winner of the 1,200 yards Talbot Cup race at Bray in 1957¹⁶⁶, winner of the 1-mile Kilmartin Cup race at Bray in record time in 1958,^{167,168} and 3rd in the Dún Laoghaire to '40 foot' at Sandycove race in 1959^{162,163}; and Gerard Callanan (Pembroke SC), who recorded the fastest Liffey Swim times in 1957 and 1958.^{134–136,143–145} Robin Power, the holder, and Gerard Callanan were the scratch men.^{159,160}

The 40th Liffey Swim from Guinness Wharf to just below O'Connell Street Bridge was won by 17-year-old Kevin King (Crusade Aquatic Club), an auto-electrician at Messrs Buckley Motors, Santry, in a time of 25:07 with a handicap of 2½ min.^{169–172} Dublin-born King, a former pupil of Westland Row C.B.S., was making his 3rd appearance in the event and had placed 3rd the previous year and 'down the field' at his first attempt. He was the second member of Crusade Aquatic Club to win the Liffey Swim – Cyril Hardy won in 1957.^{134–136} Robin Power, the now 16-year-old Cork youth who had won the 39th edition of the Liffey Swim, placed 2nd with a handicap of 10 sec. The 16-year-old Heffernan twins, Séamus (handicap 3 min 20 sec) and Seán (handicap 3 min 50 sec), both members of Clontarf SC, battled it out for 3rd and 4th. Séamus just got the touch ahead of his brother Seán.^{170,171}

The Heffernan twins had set the early pace followed by Willy Kearney (Dublin SC), a limit man, and Peter Mulhall (North Dublin WSC, handicap 3 min 20 sec). At the halfway stage, Séamus Heffernan still held the lead but Kevin King had moved into a challenging position. At the Metal Bridge the Crusade AC lad went into the lead followed by the Heffernan twins, Robin Power and Peter Mulhall, who finally placed 6th. King drew away from the field until just before O'Connell Street Bridge, where Power put in his bid for glory. Power looked as if he might accomplish what no previous winner had done since the Swim was run as a handicap event – scoring a second success in the event – but as the applause and shouts of encouragement grew to a crescendo from the onlookers, King, sensing the danger, put in his own final effort and maintained a 7 yards' gap between himself and the surging Power to be crowned the winner of the Ruby Jubilee Liffey Swim.^{170,171}



The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Councillor Phillip A. Brady (left), Fianna Fáil TD for Dublin South-Central for 19 years, presenting the *Independent Cup* to Kevin King (Crusade Aquatic Club) (right), winner of the 40th Liffey Swim. Also in picture Mr Edmund Williams, Vice-President of Leinster Branch IASA (centre left) and Mr Paul Meehan, Publicity Manager, Independent Newspapers Ltd (centre right)
(Irish Independent, 13 August 1959, pg. 11)

Tommy May (Dublin SC, handicap 1 min 10 sec), the winner in 1956, took 5th position, and Cyril Hardy (Crusade AC, handicap 30 sec), the winner in 1957, claimed 7th place. Tiernan McBride (Pembroke SC, handicap 3 min 5 sec) placed 10th. For the first time, a member of Otter SC, T. Martin (handicap 2 min 10 sec), placed in the top ten in a time of 27:21.¹⁶⁹⁻¹⁷² In 1960 Martin placed 3rd in the Dalkey Swimming Club open sea swim for the Eileen Murray Trophy from White Cottage, Killiney Beach to the Vico men's bathing place.¹⁷³

Top 10 finishers:¹⁶⁹⁻¹⁷²

Place	Name	Club	Handicap*	Nett Time
1	Kevin King	Crusade Aquatic Club	3 min 30 sec	25:07
2	Robin Power	Sunday's Well SC, Cork	10 sec	22:52
3	Séamus Heffernan	Clontarf SC	3 min 20 sec	26:25
4	Seán Heffernan	Clontarf SC	3 min 50 sec	26:57
5	Tommy May	Dublin SC	1 min 10 sec	24:20
6	Peter Mulhall	North Dublin WSC	3 min 20 sec	23:43
7	Cyril Hardy	Crusade Aquatic Club	30 sec	23:48
8	T. Martin	Otter SC	2 min 10 sec	25:41
9	D. Murphy	Clontarf SC	2 min 30 sec	26:02
10	Tiernan McBride	Pembroke SC	3 min 5 sec	26:39

*Time ahead of scratch man

The fastest time was recorded by Robin Power of 22:52, the 2nd fastest being Cyril Hardy with 23:08. The team prize went to Clontarf SC – Séamus Heffernan (3 min 20 sec) 3rd, Seán Heffernan (3 min 50 sec) 4th, D. Murphy (2½ min) 9th and J. Conroy (3 min 35 sec) 13th = 29 pts.¹⁶⁹⁻¹⁷²

King had no family tradition in swimming.¹⁷¹ He related how he came to take up swimming. Four years previously his father, Kevin Snr, a commercial traveller, had been in Donegal. Kevin Snr had been involved in bringing a body ashore from Lough Swilly following a drowning. The tragedy had such an effect on Kevin Snr that, when he returned home to Dublin, he insisted on all of his family learning to swim.¹⁷⁰

Following the Liffey Swim an exhibition of water-skiing arranged by Balscadden Bay Club entertained the onlookers.¹⁷⁴ The evening and the 1950's decade of Liffey Swims closed with the final concert of Irish music and song at Dublin's Tostal Octagon watched by an estimated 7,000 people jam-packed into Burgh Quay and adjoining streets.¹⁷⁵

Overview of the '50's Liffey Swims

The last five winners of the Liffey Swim 1955–1959 were all under 20 years of age, marking a trend that was to continue into the 1960's.

For the first time the *Independent Cup* made its way to Limerick and Galway and for a third time in the history of the race, a swimmer from Cork won the Liffey Swim. From Dublin, Crusade Aquatic Club and Club Smàmh Columcille swimmers won Liffey Swim laurels for the first time. Crusade AC and North Dublin Winter SC each took the individual honours twice. There were individual wins for Half Moon SC and Dublin SC.

Four swimmers claimed the fastest swim accolade twice – Eric Briggs (Pembroke SC) 1951 and 1952, Freddy Parkes (Wellington SC, Belfast) 1955 and 1956, Gerard F. Callanan (Pembroke SC) 1957 and 1958 (tied with Robin Power), and Robin Power (Sunday's Well SC, Cork) 1958 (tied with Gerard F. Callanan) and 1959. In 1958 Robin Power became the first swimmer to win the race with the fastest time under handicap conditions – Richard N. Case had won four of the five scratch races in the 1930's. Paddy Arrigan (Curragh SC), who had the fastest time in 1954, became the first backstroker to lift those laurels. Cecil Young (Wellington SC, Belfast), fastest in 1953, claimed the first major Liffey Swim honour by a Belfast and Northern swimmer in the history of the race.

North Dublin Winter SC were the dominant force in the team competition, taking the title six times – 1950, '52, '53, '55, '57, '58. Dublin SC lifted the honours twice – 1951 and 1954 – and Clontarf SC and Pembroke SC, once each.

Coda

In 1977, Gerry Boland (aged 60), winner of the Liffey swim in 1953, lost his life in tragic circumstances.^{176–178} He had retired from competitive swimming in 1976. He was a spectator at the Leddy Cup sea race organised by North Dublin Winter WSC over an 800 m course from the boat slipway at Clontarf Yacht Club to Clontarf Baths. Some 30

swimmers were taking part including Gerry's son, Cormac. He was also lending support to his club colleagues and friends including James Kavanagh (aged 49). Both Gerry Boland and James Kavanagh were experienced swimmers. Kavanagh had taken part in the Liffey Swim 26 times, placing 8th in 1955¹⁰²⁻¹⁰⁵ and 4th in 1958.¹⁴³⁻¹⁴⁵

Gerry Boland observed that Jim Kavanagh had gotten into difficulties about halfway through the swim. Without hesitation, he took off his jacket and dived in to aid his friend. With the help of other swimmers he managed to bring Jim Kavanagh ashore. While efforts were being made to resuscitate Kavanagh, Gerry Boland went to his car for a rest and change of clothes. There, out of sight of his family, holiday makers, sunbathers and swimmers, he suffered a stroke and collapsed.¹⁷⁵ Gerry Boland was found by friends who had come to his car to tell him that attempts to resuscitate Jim Kavanagh had failed. Both were pronounced dead on arrival at Jervis St. Hospital. Each left young families of seven children – Boland - five sons and two daughters, Kavanagh - three sons and four daughters.¹⁷⁶⁻¹⁷⁸

Two weeks later, Cormac Boland placed 4th in the *Irish Independent*-sponsored 1-mile Shannon Swim at Athlone, organised by the Athlone and District Round Table and the I.A.S.A.¹⁷⁹⁻¹⁸¹ The event had been promoted as the "Liffey Swim at Athlone" in the Shannon. The Leinster Branch of the I.A.S.A. had decided not to hold the Liffey Swim over the classic course from the Guinness barge to between O'Connell Street Bridge and Butt Bridge on health and safety grounds because of the degree of pollution of the River Liffey. The I.A.S.A. decided to host the race at the alternative venue on the Shannon with the *Irish Independent* maintaining its connection. The event was to be known as the "One Mile Athlone Swim for the Liffey Swim Independent Trophy and Medal".¹⁸²⁻¹⁸⁷ The swings and roundabouts of this affair are a story in themselves, but that's for the 1970's!

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