

1919 to 1939

Somerset County ASA between two wars 1919 to 1939

The first Executive Meeting started with some more sad news that the President, N J Reynolds, had been killed in action and the meeting stood in remembrance of all of those from the County Association who had died during the war and those who had suffered injury as well.

The accounts covering the period 1915 to 1918 showed the county with a balance of £7 9s 2d and that:

Bath Dolphin

Bath Police

Bridgwater

Frome

Frome Ladies

Highbridge

Weston super Mare

Weston S M Ladies

Yeovil

Yeovil Ladies

swimming clubs had maintained their affiliation throughout this period.

It took the Officers of the County several months to begin the process to re-vitalise swimming. Special meetings were held, letters of encouragement written to all clubs including those which were in suspension.

It seems that it was decided that it would be advantageous to start from the bottom up and the conditions were written for a new Schoolboys Championship. It must be remembered that at this time schooling was only compulsory up to the age of 14 years. The conditions set the age limit at 13 years and under. The County was divided up into localities to minimise the need for travel. Each school would hold its own championships first and the winner was then eligible to take part in the local rounds of the competition. The winner from these elimination rounds would then swim in the County final. The County would choose the venue and the finals were to be two length races for trophies presented by the County. Sadly this burst of enthusiasm to codify the conditions took so long the event had to be postponed until 1920.

The mens and boys club championships went ahead in 1919 as did the life saving event. The Bath Dolphin Ladies came 'a creditable second' to the Weston super Mare mens team. As might be expected this result lead to a decision to separate the mens and ladies - 'in fairness to the ladies' so it is reported, but perhaps the men could see that they just might be beaten by the ladies! Also in 1919 four members of Weston Water Polo played in the World Championship held in Antwerp.

The name of Paul Radmilovic comes up time and time again over many years as a swimmer and water polo player. In 1922 the County decided to give him the 100yds trophy - he having won it on so many occasions and a new trophy was provided.

Reference to matters concerning meetings of the Western Counties ASA are quite rare except for those times when money had been discussed. In March 1923 it seems that the District needed to raise any (nothing changes) and the WCASA Hon. Treasurer had put forward proposals to raise affiliation fees. This was roundly rejected by all of the Counties. Local Authorities had also sought to increase pool hire charges significantly and the County lead a campaign through deputations to authorities to resist this but with mixed success.

In January 1924 the general industrial unrest in the County brought progress to a sudden halt when a rail strike stopped all travel. The AGM at Bridgwater was held with greatly reduced attendance! This gloomy time must have been relieved later in the same year when it was agreed that water polo players would be supplied with costumes on which SOMERSET was embroidered in white on the front -

for the team photograph, no doubt.

There are times when an astonishing story jumps out of the pages of the minutes, such as the one recounted in the Minutes of 12th September 1925.

The Secretary was dealing with correspondence and read a letter from a father:

"I have just seen the results of gala which was held in Taunton on 30th June. I entered my boy, F C Penburthy, for 3 events and he was unable to come up owing to having been kicked in a Water Polo match the evening before. Well Sir, someone has dived and most likely swam in his name. Whosoever it was must return the prize or I must take the matter further....."

Letters had also been received from the Devon County Secretary, a Mr. H J Twitchem of Exeter and also from a Schoolmaster. The report concluded saying that the impersonator had admitted the offence and was asking for leniency in any punishment inflicted.

It seems that the young man had asked if he could make a late entry for the diving event and was told no by an official. He also asked if he could take the place of a finalist in the 100yd race, who had left before the race was swum and was again told he could not. Nevertheless he took part in both events and was awarded prizes. The impersonator was banned from competition for 15 months and ordered to return the trophies. The Exeter and Devon officials were asked to consider their role in the affair, but no criticism was levelled at the Taunton officials - gosh what a cheek!

In March 1926 the County turned its attention to the sport of diving and wrote conditions for the "Graceful Diving Championship for Ladies" - how quaint.

Even then Diving was restricted in shallow pools in the following manner:

In pools with depth greater than 5 ft 6 ins, dives from a stage not more than 16 ft high.

In open water where the depth exceeds 8 ft, dives from a stage not exceeding 20 ft high.

The dives described as 'plain' or 'swallow', had equal merit and diving boards were to be covered with coconut matting. Rather different to modern safety standards but I expect there are those amongst us who have rashly dived into gravel pits or the like.

On the 29th January 1927 the Mayor of Taunton, Councillor Howard Westlake, announced that a new pool was to be built in Taunton and would be one of the finest in the country. However, it would be 1929 before the foundation stone was laid.

In March 1928 the Somerset County Police donated a trophy for a 100 yd Police Championship (retained by our current Secretary Ben Batley). Special conditions were written for the event which included the following, "Each competitor must wear the ASA regulation costume in addition to drawers (to be worn under the costume)." It seems as though the County Executive had a premonition of the cartoon in which a recent Prime Minister wore his underpants outside his trousers.

In the same year the County Officers decided that they should take another step to promote swimming. This concerned correspondence with the Somerset County Education Authority, seeking the introduction of swimming lessons for young school children. As so often in County affairs, the results of such initiatives are not recorded but we know that swimming did not become part of the national curriculum until the 1990's.

The 1930 AGM records the first instance of the ASA seeking to increase affiliation fees substantially. All of the Counties in the District protested that the proposal only gave benefit to big clubs at the expense of the small clubs.

Another shocking affair is recorded in the minutes of October 1931. It seems that passions had been high during the WCASA Senior Water Polo Championships which had recently been held at Knightstone Baths. After the game, a small gathering in the Baths office was obviously talking matters over when it was joined by the referee. An incautious remark infuriated the referee and he threw a punch which broke the skin on the face of the critic as there was a ring on the assailant's finger. As can be imagined, this led to a complaint and hearing at which the referee was suspended for a long period. It can still happen, that those involved in competition become too committed to success and unpleasant incidents happen. (In later minutes it is recorded that the referee became a senior

officer of the County - showing that there was no long term bad feeling towards him).

The County Treasurer had concerns for the well being of the County finances in 1933. In 1928 the District had published a Handbook and the County purchased a stock of books for purchase by Clubs. His order was too large and Clubs had not taken up their purchases. He also had concerns about the cost of medals won in competition. Gold medals were still being presented for winners, silver with gold centres for those who came second and silver for those who came third. Those receiving the medals obviously kept them. He proposed that trophies - perpetual cups and shields, should take the place of the medals and this was approved. Many of these trophies, donated by clubs and individuals, are still in use today. In the same year proposals came from Cornwall County ASA that competitions should be mixed and this was supported by Somerset - except for Water Polo. (If you are wondering about this - the proposal was that the competitions be on the same day not that ladies and gentlemen should race against one another - how prudish they were).

The first record of the County being involved in the education field is in 1934 when ASA courses were held in Bath and Taunton. Whilst the material for these courses was produced by the ASA, the tutors were people generally acknowledged as experts by experience rather than qualification. By 1937 courses had become quite common for swimming and diving and the instructors were able to claim expenses for their time and travel. Also in 1937 the manner in which officials were appointed to the District list was reviewed. The 'old boys network' to recommend individuals had become unsatisfactory. It was decided that a simple form of examination should be followed, conducted by two or three elected officials forming a panel who would observe those wishing to attain District status in action at a gala.

In 1936 the Executive Committee decided that a blazer badge should be available for gentlemen to wear on their blazers and the advice of the County Solicitor was sought on whether receipts for affiliation fees needed a 2p stamp to make them official.

In 1939, even as the war clouds were gathering, the ASA decided that the National Championships should be held in the swimming pool at Minehead between 11th and 14th of July. R J Jordan from the County was appointed to assist the ASA Officers in staging this event and was congratulated for his efforts. The photograph in the following chapter illustrates this fine outdoor pool on the

promenade at Minehead.

The AGM held on the 27th January agreed that the officers elected in 1939 should serve for the duration of the war and a War Emergency Committee was formed to try to maintain as much as was possible in the sport of swimming until the war came to an end. Matters became so difficult due to bombing, evacuations, food rationing and on so on that in 1941 the Emergency Committee was suspended for the duration of the war.

The next meeting of substance was an AGM on 27th January 1945 by which date the officers were confident that swimming could move forward, that hostilities would cease in the near future and as a result new Officers were elected for the coming year.

<http://www.somersetasa.org/sasa/en/about-us/History/1919-to-1939?pdfview=1>