

Background

The beginning and history of swimming in the County is recorded in Minute Books which have been carefully preserved by the many Secretaries who have served the County in the first 100 years. In the first 50 years most of the record was written out by the Secretaries. The introduction of typed minutes produced on typewriters and then by the use of word processors improved life for the Secretaries and readers of the documents.

The first recorded County meeting was in fact to form a 'Somerset Water Polo Association'. This meeting was held on 2nd March 1901 and the clubs represented were Bridgwater, Bath YMCA, Bath Dolphins and Weston super Mare with apologies received from Taunton, Yeovil and Shepton Mallet. It is clear at this early stage that the team element and robust nature of the game made water polo enjoyable to play and watch. Believe it or not, during development the game was played by players sitting astride inflated and tethered barrels, who threw and passed the ball to score goals. The game quickly developed to the form of water polo we know today. The need to play games between rival teams encouraged the formation of clubs who in turn formed associations to organise competitions. Such Clubs sprang up in several of towns in Somerset.

These first steps in swimming in Somerset were part of a national development. Indoor swimming pools were built in the large metropolitan areas such as London, Manchester and other cities and towns. The pools were a feature of civic pride which also provided public booths for washing as the need for personal cleanliness was recognised - 'cleanliness being next to godliness'. Many pools were also built by public benefactors. Some of these early pools are still use today. Swimming races became popular and the need to codify rules and introduce regulations, as well as the separation of amateurs from professionals increased the need for overall governance of the sport.

In January 1869, a meeting was held at Kings Cross in London which is now taken as the date that the governing body - the Amateur Swimming Association - was formed and its constitution quickly followed.

Not surprisingly the advantages of some regional division was recognised and five districts were established. The Western Counties Amateur Swimming Assatiation made up of the six western counties was formed in 1901 and 49 clubs were affiliated.

The 1901 Financial Records of the Western Counties ASA show that Bath Dolphin, Bath YMCA, Bridgwater Amateur, Frome, Shepton Mallet, Taunton, Taunton YMCA, Weston super Mare, Weston super Mare YMCA, Weston super Mare Ladies and Yeovil Swimming Clubs had affiliated to the District. Two had paid affiliation fees of £1-11s-6d, two £1-1s-0d and seven 10s-6d making a total of £8-18s-6d according to their membership.

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