

The Swimming Pool in Bishop's Waltham



Introduction

The Bishop's Waltham swimming pool remains the most ambitious project ever undertaken by the growing community of our small market town. Building the pool involved several hundred children, their parents, and one man, committed to an indoor swimming facility for his school: John Watts, (the then) Ridgemedede Junior School's first Headteacher.

The project started in 1975 with fund raising and the pool opened just 4 years later. Once the shell was erected, parents built the interior in a tight-budgeted DIY project, lead by John Watts as project manager.

Since then, thousands of young people have learned to swim in the pool, hundreds have learned life-saving skills and dozens of swimming teachers, lifeguards and committee members have served the local effort that is now Bishop's Waltham Community Swimming. Today the pool provides swimming opportunities for everyone from babies to older people: lifesaving instruction, beginner swimming to development coaching, age group and Masters' competition, aqua exercise and recreational swimming for the local area – nearly a thousand swimmers a week at the start of the 21st century.

We would like to recognise all the volunteers who have contributed to the nearly 50 years of the community pool: as a parent or child fund-raiser; a DIY builder; an RSSA or BWCS Committee member; a lifesaver, lifeguard or trainer; a swimming teacher or a coach. If you have been involved in a volunteer capacity at the pool in some of your leisure time, we invite you to add your name to the historical record below, so that future generations may understand the scale of energy, enthusiasm, commitment and organisational effort that has underpinned the development of swimming in this part of Hampshire. And on behalf of swimming, now and in the future, thank you.

Information contributed by:

John Watts, Chris Bigham, Gen Marsh, Helen Hills, Barry Jerome, Gill Cooper, Dave Miles, Trish Simpson-Davis, Judy Marsh, Lynne Bate, Lara Barnett, Mandy and Malc Harling, Hannah Wiggins, Vicky Mazzarra, Penny Copeland and Bishop's Waltham Area Oral History Group.

Compiled by Trish Simpson-Davis and Penny Copeland

A time-line of swimming in Bishop's Waltham



Early photo of The Hatches (©Pauline Henderson)

Pre-1979, swimming made a slow start in Bishop's Waltham. Although the Great Pond was used for bathing in the 18th century, it was not generally used for swimming. Most people living locally did not or could not swim by the early 20th century. The exception was dips in the shallow Meon or Hamble rivers or trips to the coast made by bicycle or bus. In the 50s, the nearest public pools were the outdoor Eastleigh and Winchester Lidos: not much use in the winter and a bus ride away. Even in the 1960s there were few cars in Bishop's Waltham to transport families to the new 25m pools in Fareham and Eastleigh, and the outdoor pool at the new Swanmore School was not popular.

1950s local families picnicked at The Hatches in Lodge Farm where there was a swimmable pool made by the flow over two Medieval sluices on the upper River Hamble. Traces of The Hatches still exist adjacent to the current Lodge Farmhouse.

1969 Ridgemedede Junior School opened, Head Teacher John Watts.

1973 Fund raising began for indoor 20m pool with children collecting newspaper and silver foil. Later there were discos and an impressive Christmas Fair. When the pool was about to open and to finance essential fixings, Bishops Waltham Parish Council lent £12,000 which was paid back for the first 3 years (about £3000). The Parish Council decided that the remainder could be written off in 1983.

1976 Building began with the erection of a steel frame and roof by a company (probably Hills, who supplied many building structures locally for agricultural use). The hole for the pool tank was then excavated. Volunteer parents included Mark Weller, who dug the footings, and local builders Charles MacAndrew and Keith Henderson, who provided the digger. The Youth Training Scheme provided a team of 4 plus an instructor/foreman spent 6 months working on site, mainly laying concrete block walls and building the tank.



Digging Ridgemedede School swimming pool 1975 John Watts (headmaster) in dumper truck, Mark Weller (parent) in the digger. John Bosworth (BW01102416)

1979 (April) Pool opened by David Wilkie. The tank was just shy of 20m x 8m with a 1.1m shallow end and 1.9m deep end. Shallow steps were built to one side of the shallow end for small children



*Ridgemed School Swimming pool celebration at the end of first fixings, early in 1969.
John Bosworth (BW001102438)*

and beginner swimmers. Changing, shower and toilet facilities were basic. School staff trained to Amateur Swimming Association standard. Class swimming lessons begin throughout school for all pupils. Pool time available to other local schools.

Ridgemed School Swimming Association formed by Chris Bigham (Chairman), Ray Spanner, Wink Janes, Sylvia Bondsfield, Helen Hills, Barry Jerome, Mr and Mrs

Smith (caretakers), John Lawrence and others to enable the community to access new pool. Hampshire County Council initially advised that pool could only be used by the school. The negotiated settlement was that RSSA would provide a RLSS qualified lifesaver plus a trainee at every session. Recreational swimming for the community started with twelve public sessions of 1 hour from 5-9pm on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

Margaret Sprunt and Wink Janes qualified as ASA swimming teachers and trained first lifesavers to RLSS Bronze Medallion standard. First volunteer lifesavers for community use of pool included Barry Jerome, Helen Hills, Ray Spanner, Janet Williams, Dave Miles, Austin and Mark Arnold, Janet Guyler.

Eastleigh College began Community Education classes: beginner to intermediate swimming for children, Beginner adults and Waterbabies. First swimming teachers were Wink Janes, Joss Helsen, Gill Bailey.

1981 Pool membership widened to include all local people. Pool opened in the school summer holiday as an experiment. 36 life-savers on the books



*John Watts after his inaugural dunking at the official opening of the Swimming Pool in 1969
(donated by Gill Cooper)*

1985 RSSA had 440 members and £3618.93 in the bank. Fees were 30p for children and 50p for adults in a swimming session, with an annual membership of £4 for adults and £2 for children.

1987 Early morning swim training started by Gill Cooper for school swim squad.

1990 Independent swimming classes started to augment overcrowded Eastleigh College classes: first Bishop's Waltham Swimming Club instructors were Trish Simpson-Davis, Debbie Stubbington, Margaret Tuckey, Helen Hills.

1994 Lynne Bate started competitive swimming development as a Saturday Seals class.



Diving into the newly refurbished pool in 2012. Gill Cooper

1994 Learning to swim by the age of 11 became a National Curriculum requirement, with funding for one term in Year 5. Other local schools using pool at time: Durley, Curdridge, Droxford and Bishop's Waltham Infants (from 1988, when they moved to the Oak Road site).

1999 Volunteers replaced by paid lifesavers.

2001 First modern risk assessment written by Trish Simpson-Davis and Helen Hills with advice from Hampshire County Council Health & Safety Team and Dennis Freeman-Wright CEO of the Institute of Swimming Teachers and Coaches.

2005 Bishop's Waltham Junior School swim team qualified to compete in National Schools' Swimming Championships.

2006 Mitres Swim Club formed by 43 children coached by Lynne Bate; start of competitive swimming. Application for ASA affiliation.

2007 Bishop's Waltham Junior School swim team qualified to compete in the finals of the National Schools' Swimming Championships for the second time.

2009 HCC decided to continue funding and upgrading of 14 out of 62 existing pools (mostly outdoor). Criteria for selection were: indoor pool; community use; use by other local schools for Key Stage 2 swimming lessons (Swanmore Primary, Upham, Curdridge, Wickham and St John's). 8 pools eventually survived. A difficult period for RSSA due to uncertainty over date of pool

closure for refurbishment; membership numbers fell. Start of fund-raising activities by a determined Committee.

2010 RSSA became Bishop's Waltham Community Swimming following the change of name from Ridgemedede to Bishop's Waltham Junior School.

July 2011- April 2012 Refurbishment of pool to existing standard by Hampshire County Council, costing approx. £800,000. Improved and extended changing rooms, showers, toilets and disabled facilities cost an additional £50,000, raised by Community Swimming. Grants from Friends of Bishop's Waltham School, the Co-operative, Bishop's Waltham Parish Council, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and many others. Fund-raising activities included a 2009 sponsored swim, regular bingo sessions and Bad Hair Boogie discos.

2015 Bishop's Waltham Junior School swim team qualified to compete in National Schools' Swimming Championships for third time.

2021 Mitres Swim Club ASA accredited for Swim 21.

Case Studies: at home and abroad

Lara May Barnett, passing on a passion for swimming

Lara is a great example of the difference the swimming pool has made to young people's lives in Bishop's Waltham since it was built. Here is her story:

Lara's involvement with the then Ridgemedede Pool started in 1998 when she was only 2 weeks old. Lara's Mum had attended Aqua classes while pregnant, and returned to show her off to the rest of the class. The class had a surprise present for baby Lara – a pint-sized swimsuit!

From there, Lara progressed to Fishes + Trish parent and baby classes, run by Trish Simpson-Davis, and was swimming by the age of 4¹/₂ with Erica Gamblin and Katrina Shaw, who ran small group lessons at Bishop's Waltham Swimming Club. It wasn't long before Lara was joining Lynn Bate's intermediate class, at first with Eastleigh Community Education and then to the Mitres when Lynn started to offer competitive training sessions.

By the time Lara joined Ridgemedede Junior School as a Year 3, she had been 'spotted' by class teacher, Gill Cooper, who coached the School's Swim Team. A place in the team was usually reserved for pupils in Years 5 and 6, but Lara was strong enough at the age of 7 to train with them.

After outgrowing the local 20 metre pool, Lara swept into the ASA Fareham Nomads Club about the time she moved on to Swanmore College. In her first year at the ASA County Championships she won the 50 metre backstroke title in her age group. At the age of 13 she competed for Hampshire in the team relay for the Nationals. So, from the ages of 11 to 17, dedicated Lara won medals – over 300 – in every competitive stroke. After qualifying for the ASA Regional Championships, the talented swimmer was selected for the Beacon national scheme, training at

the local elite centre, Portsmouth Northsea SC. At one stage, the Barleycorn in Basingwell Street was sponsoring some of her costs.

Like most young swimmers, Lara had to make the choice between a promising swimming career and furthering her education. "I wanted to go to University and had to make my grades," she said, but that is not the end of the story. Lara was accepted onto the University of Chichester's BSc course in Sport and Exercise Science with a Sports bursary to help out with the fees. During her time there she competed nationally for the University team.

She had several health and fitness-oriented jobs after graduating and currently works as an Occupational Health Technician for Hampshire's Fire and Rescue Service.

During her spare time, Lara's first love is still swimming at Bishop's Waltham's pool. She qualified as a swimming coach and now works with youngsters swimming in the Mitres Swim Club, recently ASA affiliated and now competing with its own teams, including Masters. She also became a life-saving instructor and continues to work for Bishop's Waltham Community Swimming on a weekly basis. She is passing on her passion for swimming to today's local young people.

I asked Lara what the swimming pool had meant for her:

"The whole pool has built the foundations of my life. The discipline and stuff have built me."

Si Harling – swimming to the States

Si was another youngster who started swimming at Ridgemedede Junior School's pool and excelled in the School team towards the end of the 1990s. He moved on to Penguins SC in Winchester and by 2001, the teenager was swimming national times qualifying him to compete at the ASA Championships in his age group in Freestyle events and relays. For the next 3 years, he represented not only the Penguins, but Hampshire North and the Southern Counties at national level. During these years, Si progressed to the elite Portsmouth Northsea SC to extend his swimming training schedule.

It was at the Penguins though, that Si met Steve Parry, who had recently won an Olympic Bronze medal, following a move to Florida as an undergraduate. Si was inspired to apply and was accepted for a Sport Science degree at Concordia University on a scholarship. He gained the coveted NCA 'All-American' accolade for his swimming successes in the US in this period.

After graduating, Si worked for the TYR performance swimwear in California, but has now switched careers to IT with Oracle, the giant multinational software company. He is still swimming, so a World Masters title may be out there for him some time in the future.

The development of competitive swimming strokes

Swimming developed as a competitive sport in Victorian times. There were three strokes at the time: breaststroke, sidestroke and trudgen, (which could be swum on the back or front). Sidestroke was a steady, non-competitive stroke, which is still used today in life-saving. Trudgen was copied from native South Americans and brought to England in 1873 by John Trudgen. It had arms that came out of the water alternately and scissor kick legs – the forerunner to front crawl.

Breaststroke had strict rules so that it has continued with a symmetrical action over the years. What did develop as a new stroke was an overarm action (like a butterfly's wings) with breaststroke legs, called butterfly. In the 1950s, a faster leg and body undulation emerged, like the tail fin of a fish and was called dolphin butterfly, usually now just 'Fly'.

'Freestyle' rules allowed more development from trudgen stroke with an alternating leg kick taking over. The arm action was rather like catch-up, but refined into the much faster front crawl and backstroke actions we swim today.

Learning to swim is just the start ...

The main reason why most people learn to swim as children is to prevent drowning. These days there is lots of fun to be had in modern pools with inflatable sessions, flumes and wave machines, jogging and aqua classes, all of which are great exercise but do require some water confidence.

Apart from the 4 disciplines (freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly) good swimmers can go on to diving, water polo and synchronised swimming competitively, for example at The Quays in Southampton.



Swimming lessons in the pool, March 2023. Trish Simpson-Davies

Putting in an active session at your local pool regularly is a bit like adding to your personal pension pot for a healthy old age. Like all forms of physical activity, swimming increases metabolic rate, helps to control weight, blood sugars and cholesterol, reduces blood pressure, improves mood,

boosts the immune system and maintains cardio-vascular fitness. Physical activity is now thought to be particularly useful before surgery in reducing recovery times. From (the late) Greta Eustace's weekly aquafit sessions aged 84 to Lara Barnett's first dip in the pool aged 2 weeks, swimming is good for you throughout life. It develops strong muscles in children's bodies, especially the heart for cardio-vascular health as adults; it's particularly useful in alleviating lung conditions such as asthma. Like all physical activity, it keeps bones strong in later life and because the human body is weightless in water, it is a particularly low-impact form of exercise for those with weight or skeletal problems. Swimming a mixture of strokes or working out in an aqua exercise class is a great way of maintaining flexibility over the long term.

For the recreational swimmer, being water confident and safe opens the door to enjoying other water sports in the open air: sailing dinghies and yachting, water ski-ing, kayaking, surfing, wind and kite surfing, stand-up paddleboarding, snorkelling, sub-aqua and deep-diving as well as open-water swimming races in sports like triathlon.