

The Halliwick Story

By the late Phyl McMillan MBE (1915 -2003)

In 1949, Southgate Seals Swimming Club in London promoted a swimming gala for a local charity - 'The Halliwick School for Crippled Girls'. Six of the girls were invited to attend. Mac, as club coach, organised the gala, and I had the job of looking after the girls.

While discussing the gala on the bus home - no car then! -Mac asked how the girls enjoyed it. My reply was, "The look on their faces told me that two were bored stiff - 'what's it got to do with me and my life?' and the other faces said plainly 'If only we could get in there and do that!'"

Mac was quiet for a long while (which did not often happen) and then he said, quite suddenly. "Why not?" We did a lot of thinking and talking during the next week. They were children just like ours, so why shouldn't they have a sport and wasn't water an ideal playground? So Mac talked to Matron, who consulted their Honorary Surgeon - two wonderful people, Kathleen Alford and Oliver Vaughan Jackson - who considered and then approved the scheme, although everyone else thought we were quite mad to start it.

Our intention was to integrate the girls with Southgate Seals Juniors, but people were not ready for that in 1950. We were informed that 'cripples' could not swim with 'normal' children!! So we were given a private session at the pool and it was only through a slip-up by the local Authority a few years later that we welcomed 'Normal' children into our club.

But, going back to the first swim! Oliver Vaughan Jackson agreed for 12 girls to start. Each had a differing disability. You name it – we had one! After a wonderful time (for them) splashing around and a promise (from us) that they could come again next week, we went home tired but happy with Mac saying, "We now have to get working a method of teaching, and a method that will be able to be applied to ALL DISABILITIES"

The years 1950-51 saw important developments. It was obvious from week one that the five of us - Mac, George, Pat, Geoff and Phyl needed to enlist further help; so a rota of cars and drivers was set up, and the Wood Green Trefoil Guild kindly provided helpers in the changing room. This left us free for the water work.

At that time, Mac was catching up on his engineering studies (interrupted by seven years in the RAF) and he quickly realised that the principles of water - hydrodynamics and hydrostatics - and the knowledge given to us by all the scientists such as Archimedes, Bernoulli, Pascal, etc was the basis we needed for interrelating bodies of varying shapes and sizes with water - with control, skill and safety in that element.

Our first 12 girls were aged between 9 and 15 and all through that first year we learned from them, as they learned from us. They were our 'guinea pigs'. We started a diary, which I still have and will always treasure. In this, they would write their achievements; later this was laughingly called "The Boasting Book". It did, however, give us valuable comeback, with entries like "I swam two widths ON MY OWN" – "Two lengths WITHOUT HELP" - "Four widths WITH NO-ONE WITH ME". This showed us the importance of Point Two (Disengagement) and of our maxim - Help-is-only-help-if-it-is-needed!! Independence is still highly prized.

The need for Rotational Skills and control was emphasised by the problem for one swimmer, an achondroplastic, or dwarf. From tears to smiles, she finally conquered Lateral Rotation. For all our swimmers, with their asymmetric shapes, finding and controlling balance was essential in the learning programme; and as flotation aids such as rings and armbands in no way help in achieving this, they have never been considered.

So gradually the teaching plan developed, embracing the swimmers' need for safe and happy progress in the water. Because of the involvement of our swimmers, and our agreement that all helpers used only 'first names', Mac named the Ten Teaching Points 'THE HALLIWICK METHOD'.

With two aims in mind - ABILITY and NORMALITY - we set out to develop the ability in the water, which rarely relates to the Disability on land. Normality demanded we form a swimming club - with a name! Everyone was happy with 'Penguins' (not very mobile on land, but wonderful in the water!) and so, with the name of their school included, it was affiliated to the ASA as the Halliwick Penguins Swimming Club. This was the first swimming club with a teaching method embracing ALL disabilities.

In line with normality in swimming clubs, the year finished with their first gala. Though small by today's standards, events included: club 100yds; one length backstroke; two widths freestyle; Novices width; three times one length relay; blowing-the-ping-pong-ball; diving (from bathside & springboard); walking width; and plunging (the winning distance being 18 feet 4 inches). Five certificates for 100 yards were presented. The rest of the school came down to watch - and guess what happened next!! The end of 1951 added fifteen more girls added to the swimming register. Transport was provided free by Universal Coaches, with their staff driving voluntarily on rota.

Group teaching next developed mainly to grade the progress of each swimmer through the 'Ten Points', but also as a means of training new helpers. Also, there was more fun and challenge in working one-to-one within a group of five or six swimmers. The group leaders set their programmes, checked by the chief instructor and games were constructed as a way of furthering each teaching point. This was when 'Kangaroo Jumps' came into being (invented by our daughter, then aged six, who called them 'Robin Hops') as both knees are lifted so there is no contact with gravity and the pool-floor.

Berthe Bobath visited us during our first year and enjoyed being a Halliwick instructor for a day. Soon after, we had three volunteers who were in training for the Helsinki Olympics. One was a diver, so the swimmers added diving to their achievements. The chairman of the school governors was so astounded by the diving event in the 1952 gala that he presented the club with a diving trophy (springboard and five foot firmboard).

Two swimmers left school during that year; one went to the local baths to show her Mum what she could do - and was refused admission. Were we teaching frustration??? More would be leaving shortly, so what was the solution? To inaugurate a national body under whose auspices we could work for the formation of similar clubs throughout the country, and therefore - in May 1952 THE ASSOCIATION OF SWIMMING THERAPY was founded. How quickly requests poured in for guidance in starting similar clubs was amazing!

To promote and expand the Halliwick Method, the inaugural meeting of the Association of Swimming Therapy was held in May 1952 at Halliwick School. Those present included Alderman Harold Fern, Secretary of ASA, many representatives from the medical field and from organisations for the Handicapped.

We were still tied by the Local Authority for the Penguins to remain a 'closed club', so how and where to start! Mac decided to 'GO-FOR-IT!' So in August 1952, the Optimists SC - an open club in the centre of London for all ages and all disabilities - was started (The manager of Ironmonger Row Baths was so interested that he came to all the swims and personally provided the hot drinks for the swimmers.)

The first members came from the Infantile Paralysis Fellowship and the children of the newly formed Association of Parents of Spastic Children (later to become The Spastics Society, & more recently, Scope.) The following year membership had doubled, and then quadrupled to cope, we were using three Pools - two at Ironmonger Row plus one at Greenman Street (known as 'Tib!').

Swimmers and helpers were travelling long distances for their swim, and expansion was vital so Mac started 'Operation Strawberry'. As this plant sends out runners in all directions, so we started developing clubs within a radius of about 20 miles.

We had great problems at this stage due to the polio outbreak in the mid-1950. The general opinion then was that 'one caught polio in a swimming bath'. Bath managers were sympathetic to our cause, but many said that if anyone were seen coming into their Baths with a limp, the public would stay away, and revenue would be lost.

So helpers came to Optimists SC to be trained in the Halliwick Method; then we helped them to start up their own clubs around London. - Finchley, Octopus; Woodford, Barnardo Dolphins; Kingston, Spartan; Kensington Emperors; Enfield, Venturers; Enterprise and Scampi in Croydon - and many more in quick succession.

In 1956 we had a call from the Kingston Bath Manager who had recently transferred to Crewe, Cheshire. "What about a Club like Spartan up here?" - and so Crewe Seahorse SC was formed. It was a similar pattern when the Halliwick girls left school and went home to Yorkshire, etc. Word got about and we went wherever we were asked, to talk to people and help to start an open swimming club for all people with disabilities - Aquarius & Aquadis in Cheshire, Seals in Solihull, Terrapin in Exeter - to name but a few, and with the formation of Cardiff Whales, clubs started springing up in the South Wales Valleys.

The 1950's were a very busy decade. Added to the expansion of Clubs, Mac and John (one of our instructors) organised the first international swimming gala to be shown on television. This was held in April 1953 at Ilford Baths in London. The Evening News sponsored it, with profits going to AST (though by the time we had settled all the expenses of the French and Danish competitors, the AST received a very nominal sum.)

In 1957 the Proficiency Badge Tests were introduced - coloured red, yellow and green like the traffic lights - and they have altered very little in the following forty-five years. These were not meant to teach 'Halliwick', but as a check that the Ten Points had been successfully mastered.

We only awarded strips of coloured tape for some while - there was no money available for 'real badges'. AST did not raise money - it looked to raising people! Actually, one of our earlier publications, by its very title, shows that for the first sixteen years the Association of Swimming Therapy ran successfully on:

'LESS THAN 30 SHILLINGS A YEAR'.

More and more Swimming clubs were being started ~over a much wider area, with Helpers being trained in Halliwick Method. We would work with a new Club for up to a year if possible, and Helpers from nearby Clubs assisted.

Inter-Club Galas were greatly enjoyed, this being a completely new experience for Disabled Swimmers. For these, Mac set up a system of Time-Handicapping, which, with few alterations, we still use in our Galas to day. This is successful because, whatever the Swimmer's degree of disability - all stand a chance of winning.

For many years, Halliwick Penguins S.C. held a Competitive Splash Evening in the spring, inviting about 12 Clubs from quite a wide area. (Transport in those days was usually

supplied free by the Boroughs, or cost of petrol). The Event was 'Points only'; no medals, and the winning Clubs competed in the Club Gala in July.

Our expansion to overseas came in 1964 when we were asked to talk about Halliwick Method at a Conference of Bobath Physiotherapists in Bad Ragaz, Switzerland. That was the beginning of the two-week Training Courses at Easter for the Thermalbader Physios who came from many Countries to work there for the Summer Season; many taking our Halliwick Ideals back all over Europe and even to Canada. From then on, Mac and I spent all our "Holidays Abroad" starting Clubs and running Courses for Teachers, Physios, Doctors and Parents. It was a very busy era!

I will quote "One Day" at a Children's' Hospital in Switzerland;

7am.at the Hospital for a Conducted Tour; being shown an amazing "Rocking Horse" made by a grateful parent, to help with balance for CP children

8am-10am - Halliwick Lecturer

10.30 -12.00am - Practical Water Session for Course Attendees: Lunch scrapped in favour of a visit to the Children's Riding Stables with Icelandic Ponies (who always have three feet on the ground, we were told), where the Children's skills built up to riding without using stirrups or reins.

The afternoon consisted of further lectures, water sessions with the children, ending with discussions and questions. An invitation to dine with the Children's Hospital Sponsor followed, giving us no time to change, so a special dispensation was granted by the 'Maitre D' of the very grand Hotel, for Mac and I to be admitted in Tracksuits. While dining, we received a message from a well-known Physiotherapist to call at her home afterwards. She and her husband were very interested in Halliwick and we finally reached our Hotel at midnight.

Over the years there have been quite a few similar days, but many less strenuous

As the '60s drew to an end and the number of Halliwick Clubs grew and spread, it became clear that we had to Regionalise; so The British Isles was divided into 19 AST Regional Associations or ASTRAS. Much thinking went into this - Head of Population - Special Schools & Training Centres - Road & Rail access (as it was at that time!)

1969 saw the start of Ten ASTRAS – 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 12. The very first Regional Galas were held, culminating in the first NATIONAL HALLIWICK GALA held at Swiss Cottage Baths, North London on December 6th 1969 with seven ASTRAS competing for the Barnardo Cup.

It was a great Event, attended by 13 Mayors, plus many VIPs. The Programme gave 23 Events - 8 Heats & 10 Finals; these being interspersed with a Diving Display, a Survival Demonstration, a Water Ballet and a Water Ball Game - all of these by disabled Swimmers.

Presentations concluded the evening, with Medals and 4 Cups, which was all the AST had acquired then.

Results were close - ASTRA One with 35 points; ASTRAS Two and Eight tied with 32 points each; ASTRA 5 in 4th place with 15pts.

Mac was already working on a great idea for the Association in 1970 -

A TEAM of HALLIWICK SWIMMERS to SWIM the CHANNEL.

By January 1970 Mac was plunging into the next project involving our swimmers -a Team Relay to swim the English Channel - keeping strictly to the rules of the Channel Swimming Association (CSA). This had never yet been attempted by a team of severely disabled people.

Mac went to discuss this with the Secretary of the C.S.A. who politely informed him that no exception to the rules could be made for people disabilities; to which Mac replied that our Swimmers did not want any, they wished to swim strictly to the rules. The attempted swim had to be registered, controlled and observed by the C.S.A. so, our swim, was No. 70057 (the 57th entry for that year).

What a mountain of planning was needed for the Project to take off! Sponsorship, accompanying Ships, large and small; a Base-camp for sea training. Transport, a Pilot, a Quartermaster, Medical Officer to name just a few. So many people helped, especially Kensington Emperors S.C. Everything had to be planned, down to the last detail. Soon our home was awash with Charts, tide-tables, moon-phases. C.S.A. Rules etc. Mac researched back 20 years of Channel Tides. In February he forecast that the last week in August would seem the best time, and the team might complete the swim in just under 14 hours.

A letter went out to all Halliwick Clubs, inviting names of entrants who were prepared to train for this. There was much enthusiasm from the Southern ASTRAS, but the Midlands and the North were very sceptical. The Final Selection for Sea-Training took place in the Serpentine in Hyde Park, London in July 1970 with all entrants swimming for 2 hours, being monitored for distance, endurance, fatigue, etc. 8 Swimmers were selected to go to Folkestone for sea-training; from these the team of 6 would be finally picked.

With accommodation kindly provided by the Army at Shorecliffe Training Camp, the team spent two weeks at Folkestone, with sea-training three times each day – one hour every morning - one every afternoon - and one every night! The weather was very unpredictable, but at last, on August 26th, it was decided to GO. With a dash across the Channel, the Team Captain, Mick entered the water at Cap Gris Nez at 17.45. He swam for 1 hour, then, with 5 minutes alongside allowed for take-over, Mick was followed by Barry, Lyn, Bill, Maureen, and Charles.

The second hour for each had to be swum in the same order; this brought them so near to the English Coast, but due to the tide, it took three of the team a third swim before Lyn, the youngest member at only 16 years, crawled up the beach giving the necessary 5 yards of dry land for a successful finish. The time - 14 hours and 1 minute - and the landing - exactly opposite the Metropole Hotel, Sandgate, as forecasted by the Pilot.

The Climax to this outstanding feat came three months later in November. Each year the Channel Swimming Association holds a Celebration Gathering, when Certificates etc. are awarded for the successful crossings. As our Team took their seats there were curious looks from those assembled, and when the GARNETT MARTIN TROPHY for the fastest Team Crossing of the Year was announced and our Swimmers locked their callipers and picked up their elbow sticks to collect the Cup, the applause was terrific! They were the fastest by 9 minutes!

That was a great moment for them - they were accepted into the fraternity of Channel Swimmers. All arrived home safe and sound, which happily gave the media no reason for front-page news. They could concentrate on the Isle of Wight Pop Festival which took place on the same weekend.

A postscript, to 'The Story of Halliwick'
by Dr Joan Martin MBE, President of Halliwick AST

In the forgoing, the late Phyl McMillan ended with 'The Channel Swim' I have been asked to fill-in, in greater detail, this truly remarkable achievement, to which I was an 'eyewitness'.

In 1966, The Guide Association planned a Relay Channel Swim with a team of six guides. I was part of the 'back-up' team as their Medical Officer, the team were successful.

Jim ('Mac') McMillan, the then General Secretary of the AST, was very interested in the event and suggested that the AST should attempt a Relay Channel Swim with a team of disabled people. It was agreed that we would promote it and set about organising the event. We learnt the rules of the Channel Swim Association (CSA), how to communicate with Bracknell Weather centre and who were the most reliable Skippers of the accompanying fishing boats. We were fortunate to have Bert Reed for both the Guide Association swim and AST swim.

A selection event was organised to take place on July 26th 1970 in the Serpentine Lido in London. 4 swimmers took part and from that number 8 were chosen. On August 17th the swimmers and back-up team left for Folkestone in an ILEA coach with two drivers, who remained with us until we returned to London. Twice daily the coach took the swimmers and back-up team from the Shorecliffe Army camp to the sea for practice swims; there were two swims every 24 hours, the first in the morning and the second in the afternoon or evening. The swimmers swam between two anchored rowing boats parallel to the beach. 'Mac' and a rota of lifesavers, all friends of Wagg Whenmouth from his Aqua club watched them from the beach. Because of their disabilities, none of the swimmers could walk into the sea unaided. Normally two of us, often Joyce Wackrill and myself walked into the sea with the swimmers arms across our shoulders. When the depth was suitable, they swam away. Sometimes the next large wave deposited them back on the beach and we had to repeat the process!

After a week of practice, the swimmers had greatly improved in their ability to cope with the sea, both physically and mentally. After ten days the Zodiac inflatable craft arrived – the swimmers had already had two practice swims that day but they insisted on using the boat for a swim in the dark. The eight swimmers and myself sat round the sides of the boat and we sped about ¼ mile out to sea. The man controlling the boat explained that the only way out of the boat was by somersaulting backwards. Before he had completed the sentence, all eight swimmers did just what he had said! The man was horrified and immediately switched on powerful searchlights; the swimmers unused to the light on the water, shouted and swore - after a few moments of confusion, 'Mac' shouted from the beach, 'will everyone swim back to the beach at once!' which they did. The problem was that the coast guards thought we were illegal immigrants!

The weather was not good; the persistent NE force 3-4 winds did not encourage Channel swims. On August 26th we realised that the tides would only be suitable for the following two days. The *Yarmouth Navigator* (YN) with the swimmers and back-up team on board, with the Zodiac tied to it, plus a second Army boat the *Smoke*, Bert Reed in his fishing boat (with the CSA referee Angela Cook on board) sailed for France; the convoy was led by Bert Reed.

The rules of the CSA were that six swimmers, swim in strict rotation for one hour, the changeover time to be no longer than 5 minutes. The swimmers had practiced being lifted from the YN by hoist, being deposited into the Zodiac and from there, they somersaulted into the sea; the swimmers hated the hoist! When a swimmer had completed their hour swim, they were returned to the boat in the reverse procedure. We arrived at Cap Griz

Nez on the French coast about teatime and waited for the tide to turn. The first swimmer Mike Betts, a single amputee hopped down the beach for 5 yards and into the water at 17.45. The swim had begun!

The order of swimmers was: 1. Mike Betts, 2. Barry Couzens, 3. Lynn Prior,
4. Bill Adamson, 5. Maureen Skinner and Charles Raymond.

When not swimming, the swimmers wore in tracksuits and were wrapped in towels and blankets. When they requested drink and food the back-up team supplied it. The water was watched throughout the swim by two lookouts. I was one of the lookouts and my time was from ¼ hour before and after the changeover.

The swimmers were cheerful and cooperative throughout. It was an odd feeling as darkness fell. The Channel is a very busy seaway and ships have automatic steering and did not appear to respond to messages to say that a channel swim was in progress! (all shipping had been notified that a Relay Team were in the water). Had the swimmers been in danger they would have been removed from the water by the lifeguards by pulling them bodily into the Zodiac. Had this happened, the Channel Swim would have been terminated; fortunately this did not happen. Approximately half-way across, we saw the Varne Lightship and the lights of Dover in the distance, but the turn of the tide made us appear to swim halfway round the lightship. At that stage, the sea was rough with waves 4-5 ft high, the NE wind prevailed. The water temperature was 61°; for over nine hours the swimmers were in darkness! The swimmers each swam twice and one or two swam a further two hours. After 14 hours we were almost there. Lynn, the youngest swimmer on her third swim, only had to swim for one minute, before she laboriously crawled up the beach on all fours at 07.46 on August 28th. The CSA observer Angela Cook, stopwatch in hand, watched every move from the fishing boat during the whole swim.

We successfully completed the Relay in 14hrs 1min, as it was a 'bad' year for channel swims, we made the fastest time for 1970! (The Channel can be swum in 9hrs). Later that day we returned to London by coach.

In November 1970, we returned to Folkestone for a Reception given by the CSA and were awarded the Bill Floyd Challenge Cup and the Garnet Martin International Cup for the fastest time.

I would like to mention the following, who cared for the swimmers and helpers: the Lifesavers led by Norman (Wagg) Whenmouth, who with his friends were members of the Holborn Sub Aqua club in London; Joyce Wackerill and myself from Kensington Emperors SC and the two Swedish Observers, Anneka and Charlotte. The Army Youth Team supported us. The Army provided two boats, the *Yarmouth Navigator* and *Smoke* (in case one broke down).

The main cost of the enterprise, was the hire of Bert Reed's fishing boat @ £100, the CSA charged £14 and the Army charged 55p) a day per person for board and lodging in the Army barracks.

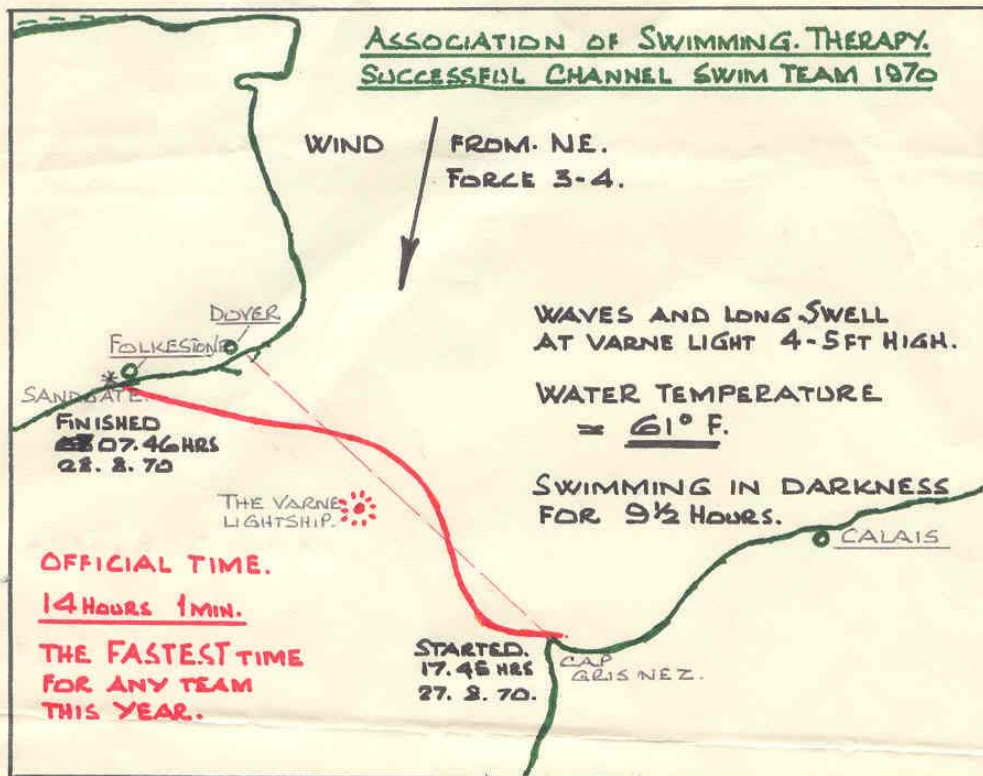
The order swimmers in order of swimming were:

1. Mike Betts - Flamingo SC - ASTRA 12
2. Barry Couzens - Optimists SC - ASTRA 1
3. Lynn Prior - Kensington Emperors SC - ASTRA 1
4. Bill Adamson – Enterprise SC - ASTRA 2
5. Maureen Skinner - Kensington Emperors SC - ASTRA 1
6. Charles Raymond- Octopus SC - ASTRA 1

Reserves: Yoitek Hoffman- Kensington Emperors SC - ASTRA 1 and
Bill Douglas - Flamingo SC - ASTRA 12

All were severely disabled, but they successfully swam the Channel by the official rules, no exceptions were made.

The whole event was masterminded by Jim ('Mac') McMillan and below is a copy of the route taken, which was drawn by him:



TEAM, IN SWIMMING ORDER

MICK BETTS (CAPT)	FLAMINGOES.
BARRY COUZENS	OPTIMISTS
LYNN PRIOR	KENSINGTON EMPERORS.
BILL ADAMSON	ENTERPRISE
MAUREEN SKINNER	KENSINGTON EMPERORS.
CHARLES RAYMOND	OCTOPUS.

WITH BOATS FROM THE BRITISH ARMY.
"YARMOUTH NAVIGATOR" AND "SMIKE"

VERY WELL
DONE!

CONGRATULATIONS!

HAVE YOU
SIGNED OUR
CARD!

OUR THANKS ARE DUE TO:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 21. MARITIME TRAINING WING - | ROYAL CORPS OF TRANSPORT |
| SIGNALS UNIT | - ROYAL ANGLIAN REGIMENT. |
| 43 ARMY YOUTH TEAM. | - ROYAL REGIMENT OF FUSILIERS |
| ST. MARTINS PLAIN CAMP. | - HQ 2ND BRIGADE DOVER. |
| PUBLIC RELATIONS | - HQ SOUTH EASTERN COMMAND. |
| SECURITY AND RECOVERY | - HOUNSBORN BRANCH BRITISH SUB AQUA. |
| PILOT. | - MR BERT REED of FOLKESTONE. |
| CHANNEL SWIM OFFICIAL | - MISS ANGELA COOK. |
| OBSERVER. - C.S.A. | |

TO THOSE THAT RAISED THE VITAL FINANCE.

PADDINGTON GIRL GUIDES, KENSINGTON EMPERORS S.C.
MRS EDNA BROWNING, MISS JENNY LOCHHEAD, ASTRA 2.



© Halliwick Association of Swimming Therapy
all rights reserved 1997 (Revised 2005)