

Edinburgh Diving Club

Founded in 1971

History

A History of diving in Edinburgh



The Club Committee asked Bill Law to write this brief history of diving in Edinburgh.

Bill was one of the founders of the Edinburgh Diving Club in 1971. He served on every diving committee in Scotland and was a life member of the Scottish Amateur Swimming Association. He was National Coach for many years and has been Manager of the British Diving team at international events. Sadly, Bill passed away on 19 December 2009.

In the beginning..

To look at, Warrender Baths today would give no indication that the sport of diving had ever been practised in the pool. However, when opened in 1888 the facilities for gymnastic activities compared favourably with those in many parts of the world. There was a diving platform 10 feet above the deep end with various steps from which beginners could dive. Also there was a springboard two feet high which was little more than a plank of wood, a chute, rings and a trapeze over the pool. One might think that all those activities into a pool barely 6ft deep would be dangerous, but at that time most indoor pools in the country were limited to that depth and divers developed a technique which made for safe entry into the water. Edinburgh at that time boasted another six pools with similar facilities, at Portobello, Glenogle Road, Leith Victoria, Infirmary Street, Dalry and Drumsheugh. All of these baths produced divers at club level who held District or Scottish titles.

It was not until the mid forties to early fifties that a real interest in competitive diving developed due to the emergence of Sir Peter Heatly who became Scottish Champion, British Champion, dived for GB in the 1948 and 1952 Olympic Games and won Gold in the 1950, 1954 and 1958 British Empire Games (now the Commonwealth Games). His achievements ignited a greater interest in the sport.

Around this time a group of divers from most Edinburgh clubs met as a training group at the Naval pool at HMS Caledonia (Rosyth) on Sundays. This was part of the East District Development Plan. The pool far outshone any other at that time. It was not surprising that

anyone interested gravitated to these 1 and 3 metre springboards and 5 metre platform with a water depth of 12ft 6ins.

With the influence of Peter, a small group of divers formed. Val Marion and Bill Law from Warrender, Drew Kennedy, Elsie Melville and Geoff Berry from Portobello, arranged to meet regularly at either Portobello indoor or outdoor pool. This group formed the nucleus of Scottish Diving for many years to come. Despite the lack of a coach or any financial help, the group developed and three Scottish divers competed in the 1958 British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Cardiff. These divers were Val Marion - 3m, Peter Heatly - platform, and Bill Law - 3m and platform. Peter won Gold in his event and retired from diving after the Games.

After the 1958 Commonwealth Games, the Edinburgh divers continued to meet at the Rosyth Pool on Saturday afternoons and Wednesday evenings. The journey by car and ferry took over an hour in each direction, leaving just over an hour for training. During the summer months diving was available at Portobello Open Air Pool but, due to the extreme cold, little more than performing one's dives one or twice per session was possible.

Prior to the summer months, it was necessary to travel to Aberdeen for a weekend to obtain 10 metre facilities. Again this was at our own expense, without a coach and relying on one's fellow divers to suggest a remedy for being "short" or "over".

However, the Edinburgh group did a great deal of open air exhibition and competition diving in North Berwick, Port Seton (10m) and Dunbar in the East, and travelled to Arbroath (10m), St Andrews Step Rock Pool, Burntisland, Prestwick and Cumnock, giving displays in Crail harbour and as far afield as Cambeltown harbour and Pickie Pool in Bangor, Northern Ireland.

In the Sixties..

In the early sixties, rumour abounded that Edinburgh was to bid for the Commonwealth Games and that an indoor pool would be needed for swimming and diving events. This gave great heart but seemed a long time away - particularly to those whose 30th birthday was looming!

Into the sixties came Malcolm Taylor and Linda Phillip. Both were diving in Edinburgh University teams and scoring successes in British University Championships, with Linda (now Lockerbie) winning Scottish Titles and representing Scotland.

The display team continued to thrill holiday makers throughout Scotland and attracted a number of young divers into the group such as Caroline Millar, Jenny Cowper, Susan Weston, Susan Bowie, Jimmy Todd and Alistair Urquhart. All of these divers won titles or medals at Scottish Championships. Training at this time continued at Rosyth.

In the mid-sixties, a new pool was opened in Wishaw which was more accessible than Rosyth and provided Edinburgh and the rest of Scotland with first class facilities plus a 5 metre platform. The pool manager, the late, great John Bell, did everything possible to support diving and divers, providing times mid-week and weekends for training, and was responsible in no small measure for the development of diving in Scotland.

At the announcement in 1964 that Scotland would host the Commonwealth Games in 1970, all the diving fraternity were excited by the prospect of a new pool with state of the art facilities which would be ready by early 1970. Thoughts then turned to the further development of diving in Edinburgh.

In the Seventies..

Prior to 1970, all diving in Edinburgh was controlled by swimming clubs. As mentioned earlier, Warrender BC and Portobello ASC had the majority of divers, with Leith ASC and, latterly, Inverleith ASC producing some young aspiring competitors. As far back as the fifties, those training in Rosyth had talked about the formation of a club which would deal solely with diving, and the preferred name for such a club was Caledonia Diving Club. With the opening of the Royal Commonwealth Pool in January 1970, Bill Law, Linda and Allan Lockerbie started talking to the Edinburgh Baths Department about the formation of a diving club within the brand new pool. It was evident from the start that we would never gain facilities within the pool with the name "Caledonia" so "Edinburgh" Diving Club it had to be. Even with the city's name, we were not allowed to form the club until the honeymoon period of the pool was over, hence the formation date of November 1971.

Needless to say, all those diving in the previously mentioned swimming clubs joined EDC as their second club. The newly formed club elected Bill Law as their President, with Linda Lockerbie as Secretary and Allan Lockerbie as Treasurer. Allan, though never a diver himself, fulfilled the role of Treasurer with the skill of a banker. Malcolm Taylor took on the role of SASA Eastern District Diving Convenor and sat on the Scottish Diving Committee which at that time was fully represented by all four districts. The strongest diving district at that time was the West with star divers Ann McCarroll (no relation to Monique) and Danny Downs. The North district too had strong male divers in Brian and Alan Davidson and Maurice Campbell. It was Edinburgh's and the East's challenge to topple these districts and win the Inter District title at the earliest opportunity. This competition was a keenly contested, league event with junior and senior divers, male and female, competing over four months at four district venues and was directly responsible for much of the development of diving at that time.

The 1970 Commonwealth Games gave to Edinburgh the finest facilities in Great Britain. The Royal Commonwealth Pool and Meadowbank Stadium were the envy of the land. The overall success of the games saw the title of the "Friendly Games" used for the first time.

Meanwhile, back in the pool, the Scottish Diving Committee set about planning the future use of the brand new pool. The immediate aim was to establish a series of events based in the pool. These included Squad training weekends, National 3m and Highboard championships and league fixtures. In fact the hub of diving was now Edinburgh. The previously mentioned Inter district events plus the National 1m events continued to be staged in the district pools around Scotland, the intention being to maintain an interest in diving throughout Scotland, and to try to attract the main events to Edinburgh. This alas was extremely difficult as funds were not available at SASA level and the demands on the City too, with all its fine new facilities, made funding difficult. The first big event we were able to attract to the pool was the 1976 European Diving Cup.

The club, in the meantime, was developing with the number of full members rising steadily. One “star” was emerging – Fiona Hotson. She won the Junior 1 metre in her first year and set about learning a range of dives to enable her to compete at senior level, both in Scottish and British events. Her target was Christchurch, New Zealand – the 1974 Commonwealth Games.

The success of Fiona Hotson in the early seventies was an inspiration to many divers in the club, male and female. Among those who took up the challenge were the Ogden sisters, Lesley and Jane, Mary Hamilton (now Sless), Ronnie Hurst and Fraser McBlane. All the afforesaid made a marked impression in Scottish and ASA Championship events. Around that time, the diving committee set about arranging away matches for the first time outwith the UK. The first of these were with Norway in the town of Tonsberg. These matches were on a home and away basis and did much to help the cause of diving. In 1976, the first major diving event to be staged in the RCP (other than the 1970 Commonwealth Games) was the European Diving Cup. This event put Edinburgh fairly and squarely on the International diving circuit. During that event, Bill took the opportunity to speak at length with the manager of the French team, M. Pouzet of the Isle de France club in Paris. The result being a biennial fixture with that club. This proved very popular and continued for many years. The European Diving Cup did much in the way of contacts, resulting in invitations to Denmark and Czechoslovakia for the Scottish team, mainly filled by EDC members.

The introduction of International events and trips abroad was a great stimulus for Edinburgh divers. Fiona, Jane, Mary, Lesley, Ronnie and Fraser were joined by Yvonne O’Neill, Elaine Brown, Gordon Brown, Mike Nicolson and Nigel Johnstone in Scottish competitions. The entries for Scottish Championships doubled from 1976 to 1978 and onward. The peak year for entries was 1978. In the womens events – 5 divers in highboard, 7 in 3m springboard, 12 in 1m and 11 in the junior event. In the mens events - 4 in highboard, 5 in 3m, 13 in 1m and 16 in the junior event. It must be remembered that these were purely Scottish entries as the Open Championships were not introduced until 1988. The competition tests were more demanding with Junior events at 6 dives, women's highboard 8 dives and springboard 10 dives. The men were required to do 10 dives on highboard, 11 dives on 3m and 10 dives on 1m. The above tests were standard throughout the world at that time and it was necessary to perform the full set to compete at ASA National Championships.

The year 1978 saw Scotland achieve three places in the Commonwealth Games in Edmonton, Canada. the three were Fiona Hotson, Ronnie Hurst and Fraser McBlane. Gaining three places in Scotland’s 1978 Commonwealth Games team in Edmonton, Canada, was just the stimulus needed for the younger divers in the club. In 1979, Fiona and Jane were studying at college in Edinburgh and Mary was at University in Aberdeen. New names appeared on the Scottish Senior medal lists – Yvonne O’Neill, Jimmy Dickson, Nigel Johnstone and Billy Ferguson. Jane established herself as number two to Fiona with Mary placed third. Fiona once again won all three boards as did Ronnie Hurst in the Men's events with the aforementioned boys placed second and third behind him

In the Eighties..

1981 saw things change with Mary and Jane battling for the gold medals, Mary winning her first National senior 3 metre springboard title and Jane taking her first Highboard title. A new name arrived in the ranks of the boys event, Gavin Young (otherwise known as Chunky), taking silver in the 1 metre. Nigel took Gold in the highboard with Gordon Brown winning the 3 metre and Nigel second.

Ronnie and Fraser were beginning their wind down but still managed gold and silver respectively in the 1 metre, thus making way for the younger divers. 1982 was Commonwealth Games year and very tough qualifying standards had been set by the SASA. Only Fiona and Jane made the necessary points and earned themselves a trip to Brisbane, Australia. This was Fiona's third games, a record for a female diver and a wonderful achievement.

After a year of intense activity in 1982, there is often a flat spot and retirements. Fiona Hotson and Gordon Brown decided to hang up their swimsuits/trunks for good. This resulted in Mary and Jane continuing their battle for top honours, Mary taking the National 3 metre title and Jane the National highboard title in the years 1983, 1984 and 1985. In the men's events, in 1983 Nigel Johnstone took Gold in the 3m and highboard with Gavin "Chunky" Young the silver and Jimmy Dickson the bronze. A youngster called Steve Forrest appeared on the scene with a 6th place in the junior and senior events. Come 1984, Gavin Young took all three senior titles, Nigel dropping to silver and a rapidly improving Steve Forrest winning the junior title on 1 metre, silver in the senior 1m, bronze on 3m and a creditable 4th place on highboard. Another name, although not from Edinburgh but readily recognisable, started to appear on the results sheets. In 1983 in the senior ranks, medalling in 3rd place in senior and junior 1m was one Peter Smith from Ayr Diving Club. With the Commonwealth Games returning to Edinburgh in 1986, the year of 1985 saw a concerted effort in learning the big dives so necessary to achieve a place in the Games team. The ladies results were reported above but the men's title race was transformed by Steve, who won Gold on Highboard and 1m, missing out on the treble to Gavin on the 3m, with Peter Smith taking bronze on all three boards.

The run-up to the Commonwealth Games in 1986 was fraught with difficulties, not only in Diving. For political reasons, the pre-Games organisation did little to excite either those on organising committees or the public at large. However, in spite of the boycott by the African nations and the struggle we had to obtain new springboards, the diving events went well. HRH, Diana, Princess of Wales paid an enthusiastic visit to the diving events, much to the delight of the divers and spectators. Our representatives on the diving team were Jane Ogden, having won her fourth consecutive highboard title, Steve Forrest and Peter Smith. All three divers had to achieve stringent qualifying points to make the team, even with the Games being in their own pool. As mentioned previously, the year after a major event tends to be a little flat. Steve and Peter continued to compete at the highest level. Sadly, Jane's swimsuit didn't get wet too often and Mary kept hers for sunbathing. This allowed Fiona Moffat to emerge, winning the Junior 1 metre and silver in the senior 1 metre with bronze in senior 3m and highboard. The main challengers were coming from Dundee in the shape of Mandy Robbie, Kay Ingram and Angela Bishop.

To celebrate the centenary of the Scottish Amateur Swimming Association in 1988, the diving events included for the first time an open category on all boards, senior and junior. The early supporting clubs were Leeds, Oldham Diving Club, and Huddersfield, with such divers as Mark Shipman from Leeds and Naomi Bishop from Oldham competing in Scotland for the first time. Both of these divers represented GB in various Olympic Games.

The home divers in the medals that year were Steve Forrest who completed the double on highboard and the treble in the National events. Fiona Moffat took gold in the National category and silver in the Open category on Platform, despite a strong challenge from three Leeds divers. Our junior divers that year were outclassed by Dundee, East Kilbride and

Aberdeen divers, taking only 4th and 8th places in the boys and girls 1 metre events. Part of the Centenary celebrations included the staging of the European Diving Cup, which had already been held in Edinburgh in 1976. It was a good event, well staged (as always) by the Edinburgh Diving Club volunteers.

During the 1989 season, the focus was on the 1990 Commonwealth Games to be staged in Auckland, New Zealand. The only real contenders were Steve Forrest and Peter Smith, who, due to the lack of facilities elsewhere, spent much of his time travelling to Edinburgh.

A concerted effort was being made with the club's junior divers, with Scott Traynor and David Marshall emerging as potential champions. Unusually, for the first time, the club was short of up and coming girls. The clubs at Dundee and East Kilbride were emerging under the watchful eye of Dave Phinn at Dundee and Andy Love at East Kilbride.

The Commonwealth team chosen for the Commonwealth Games was indeed Steve Forrest and Peter Smith, but no provision was made by Scottish Swimming for a coach for the divers. Thanks to the good offices of the Bank of Scotland, I was able to travel to New Zealand with the boys, but under my own initiative. Peter hit the headlines (and the 1 metre springboard) in the manner of Greg Louganis, but, luckily was not badly injured. Steve on the other hand, dived well in the platform event, finishing ahead of Tony Ali and Jason Statham (now a famous actor), who were England's leading lights.

In the Nineties..

Since 1990, Scotland and particularly Edinburgh, have failed to produce divers who meet the criteria to compete in the Commonwealth Games Diving events. There have been many who have shown ability and potential. To make it to the top in any sport, there must be desire, commitment and dedication. The standard required to make it to the top is constantly rising and will continue to do so. The City of Edinburgh and especially Edinburgh Leisure are now giving more support to Diving than ever before and are being rewarded by the numbers attending the diving programme provided by Edinburgh Leisure. The future is looking good and this is where we must look if we are to fill the void of top level competitors. The top divers in Great Britain come from Sheffield, Leeds Plymouth and Southampton, centres with excellent facilities and served by coaches of the highest calibre.

What is now required in Scotland is a top National Coach who will show the commitment to our up and coming divers. The infrastructure is there and the base of the pyramid is laid. Let us all strive to see our talented performers rise to the pinnacle of our sport.

THE END..... surely
not.....a new beginning!