



SASA Midland District Roll of Honour

Cissie (Sarah) Gillow Marshall Stewart (19.07.1911 - 08.01.2008)

Listed 2017

Cissie Stewart was a Dundee girl, the youngest of a family of 7 children. She learnt to swim by watching her older sister Margaret and trying to copy what she was doing. She was a member of the Belmont club, but had no coach, and trained in the Dundee Corporation Baths with members of the public swimming around her. Despite these challenges, at the age of 16 she swam for Great Britain in the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam, winning a Silver medal in the 4 x 100m freestyle relay. Two years later she travelled to Hamilton, Canada, for the inaugural British Empire Games (later to become the Commonwealth Games) where she was again successful in the relay, winning Bronze. This marked the end of her career as a competitive swimmer, as she then caused a scandal by eloping with her boyfriend Bill Hunt, a sports journalist who was reporting on the Games. However, although she had to devote herself to home and family, as was the custom at the time, she continued to swim regularly right up to her nineties.

As a working girl, Cissie had to be at the baker's shop at 6.30 every morning to wash the windows before the rest of the staff arrived. "Things were different then – no sponsors, no warm weather training, no electronic timing." Decisions on placing were made by a judges' panel. Swimwear for girls was very strictly regulated by the ASA for modesty, with costumes of heavy fabric and restrictive to movement, and if there were men present in the pool hall girls had to wear a long bath robe immediately before and after being in the water. Cissie used to try to swim 30 lengths (in a 22 yard pool) twice a day, and was taken to task by the manager of the baths for overusing the facility! When the team returned home from the Olympics in 1928 no fuss was made, with just a small announcement in the Courier. Her solid silver medal was not presented in Amsterdam, but rather during a gala 2 months later in Dundee Central Baths. It was reported that she was sick from nerves just before the team were to meet the Queen of the Netherlands, so perhaps she missed out on the medal presentation because of that.

The trials for the Olympics were held in Blackpool, and despite being a Scottish distance Champion Cissie was daunted when she first saw the pool because it was so big – all of 33 yards. She qualified for the 400m free, but the relay selection process took place during the games in Amsterdam, when six girls raced each other to qualify. On paper Cissie should not have been successful, but the pool was not cleared for their swim-off and one of the other girls was obstructed, so Cissie went through. The team went on to take the silver medal, losing out to the USA, who set a new world record in the final – the first girls to go under 5 minutes for the 4 x 100m freestyle.



Cissie Stewart in Olympic uniform 1928 (SH)

Year	Competition	Venue	Event	Placing	Time
1928	Olympic Games	Amsterdam	4x100m freestyle	Silver	05:02.00
			400m freestyle	4th	06:07.00
1930	British Empire Games	Hamilton, Canada	4x100y freestyle	Bronze	
			400y	Bronze	