

A Brief History of Stocksbridge Pentaqua

Stocksbridge & District Pentaqua Swimming Club was established in 1974, the founder and Head Coach being Brian Wilgos.

Stocksbridge Pentaqua is based at the Stocksbridge Leisure Centre on Moorland Drive, Stocksbridge, approximately 15 miles from the City of Sheffield, and bordering onto Penistone, Barnsley and Rotherham townships.

During the club's 35 year existence there have only been 4 Head Coaches of the club; Brian Wilgos, Les Webster, Robert Inglis, and the current one - David Wright who has been Head Coach since 1988.

Since the club's conception in 1974 Stocksbridge Pentaqua was and still is a comparatively small club in terms of membership, this being mainly due to the location of the training facilities. As a consequence of this, like many competitive swimming clubs it was limited by the amount of pool time available. However, even with these restrictions the club has produced Yorkshire, North Eastern and National swimmers.

In 1988 the club had some 60 members and 7 hours pool time available. The club operated from the pool's cafe/foyer area where gala entries, team selections, and costumes were sold to club members. There was one pace clock, the backstroke flags were tied to the balcony railings at one side and attached to a nail in the wall at the other. The diving blocks were wooden, archaic, and as old as the Leisure Centre itself. There was five hours pool time available at Stocksbridge, the home pool, 2 x ½ hour sessions at Hillsborough which is 10 miles away, and 1 hour a week at Hoyland which is 8 miles away, with each session having 7 or 8 swimmers per lane in order to get maximum pool time. Communication between club members was difficult, as was getting swimmers to training and trying to reduce lane congestion.

1991 saw the opening of Ponds Forge International Sports Centre, hailed as one of the fastest pools in Europe, with the added advantages of having 10 x 50m lanes and the possibility of having long course or short course training. This introduction of a new pool with better facilities and less pool congestion was a major draw factor for a lot of the club members. As a consequence the club was left with just 35 members and the headache of trying to maintain the club's existence whilst continuing to pay the ever increasing pool fees with little subsidence from the Local Authority.

The club reduced the training to 5 hours per week in order to reduce the cost of pool fees, and worked closely with the Leisure Centre management in an attempt to attract more swimmers from the lessons programme. Most of the 'top' swimmers had gone, along with a lot of committee members and pool side assistants. In essence it was like starting a new club on one hand whilst looking over your shoulder waiting for the bailiffs to call and close you down.

Over the next few years the club took over the operation of the Leisure Centre's 'Development Squad', whereby swimmers came from the lesson programme to gain an incite into competitive swimming, with the view of either joining the City of Sheffield's Training Scheme or Stocksbridge Pentaqua.

Fortunately in the main the Development Squad members joined Stocksbridge Pentaqua and the club began to increase in membership once again.

By 1995, through much negotiation with Leisure Centre management, the club now had a much needed club room whereby swimming matters could be conducted for the progression of the club. No longer were club matters operated from the pool cafe/foyer area.

The membership was now approaching 60 swimmers, getting back to where the club was some 5 years previously. However, for the club to progress and continue to attract new members and maintain its existence it was essential to take the club further.

New diving blocks, new swimming equipment and office equipment were needed but there was still pool fees, registration fees, insurance and gala entries to pay for. There was only so much that the membership fees could be increased by, and only so much fund raising activities that could be done with still such a small club membership.

After much deliberation, discussion and negotiation it was decided that the club would host its own 'Spring Sprints Open Meet' at Stocksbridge Leisure Centre. However, the event needed to be a little different to attract clubs and swimmers to ensure it would be a success. From the committee discussions it was decided to make the event totally sprint orientated and that events would be no more than 50 metres in duration, which very few galas at that time catered for. The other main innovation was to introduce the concept of swimming 'Age on the day', whereby swimmers would swim at what age they were on the day of the event. Currently a lot of galas now cater to 'Age on the day' however at that time this was unusual and consequently attracted a lot of entries.

After many sleepless nights, and much worrying, the first Spring Sprints Gala was well subscribed by quite a few clubs and was found to be a great success, so much so that the event is now an established event in the calendar.

The continued success of the Spring Sprints and the money obtained from the events has enabled the club to expand and progress at a steady rate. The foresight and forward thinking of the Club's Committee has seen many achievements since 1995.