

About CUSWPC

Cambridge University Swimming & Waterpolo Club (CUSWPC) consists of two teams which represent Cambridge University in swimming and water polo. The water polo team is further split into men's and ladies teams who train separately. The swimmers are split into the first and second teams, who train separately but are all entitled to swim in competitions and trial for the Varsity Match.

The teams all achieve good results in BUSA (British Universities Sports Association) competitions making CUSWPC one of the top university clubs in the country. In the 1999-2000 to the 2003-2004 seasons the swimmers came at least fourth in the national final of the BUSA league behind only Loughborough, Bath and Coventry or Stirling and in the 2000-2001 season the team came second behind Bath. In 1999-2000 the ladies' water polo team made it through to the semi-finals of the BUSA league and in 2000-2001 the men's water polo team reached the finals of the BUSA league.

Swimmers also have the opportunity to race at the BUSA short-course and long-course nationals and other galas (with the season kicking off with our annual Relay's gala). Water polo players compete regularly in league and friendly matches. The focal point of the year, however, is the annual Varsity Match against Oxford for which full and half blues (University recognitions for sporting achievement) are awarded. The swimming teams currently have an unbeaten record since 2000 whilst the polo teams have seen a mixture of resounding wins and nailbiting finishes in recent years.

The establishment of the Marlins (2nd team swimmers) has meant that the swimming club now has a much wider talent base and those that are unsuccessful at trials in their first year are more likely to stand in good stead in their second year they have had a full years training in the preceeding year.

While the teams train separately a single committee oversees the Club. The squads are very friendly and there is a lively social scene: all members, both past and present, are eligible to join the social society known as 'the Tadpoles'.

From its earliest days the Club has been fighting for a university pool. In 1892 the Cambridge Review commented that "... he must be an enthusiast of no common kind who would venture on bathing during such weather as we have had this term. When it is remembered that a swimming bath is now beginning to be considered as a necessity in most of our large public schools, it seems strange that we are still without one. "

History

The earliest records of swimming at Cambridge date back to 1567, when Walter Hadon of King's was tragically drowned while bathing in the Cam. Swimming was subsequently banned by an injunction for many years; members of the University were forbidden to enter any pool or river by night or day in the County of Cambridge subject to drastic punishment. However the Cam was to lure undergraduates back to its murky depths and by 1705 the first university pool had been built a mile and a half upstream of the town.

The swimming club itself was founded in 1855 and is one of the oldest in the country. Training took place in the River Cam at the University Bathing Sheds at Grantchester Meadows. Here the course of the river is reasonably straight for 120 yards and hence is suitable for racing. On the grassland by the river there were horizontal bars, a trapeze and a 15 foot diving tree.

Swimming in these days was described by someone who obviously did not enjoy the sport;

"Here on summer afternoons and evenings crowds of naked undergraduates may be seen enjoying the doubtful pleasure of plunging about in the narrow muddy stream, going head foremost at intervals through a coating of terrible looking scum, an accumulation of unclean matter which the sluggish stream has not the energy to carry away. "

The club quickly established an emphasis on competitive swimming with most galas held against London swimming clubs and inter-collegiate competitions taking place. The events competed in were various distances from 30 yard to a quarter mile depending on the venue, plunging, steeplechase, a race in clothes and water polo.

In 1882 CUSC sent a challenge to Oxford for a Varsity match between the Universities. This was rejected as they had no organized club. In 1891 Oxford founded their club and the annually repeated challenge of a match against Cambridge was accepted in October of that year, with the first men's water polo Varsity Match. The next year the first men's swimming Varsity Match was added to the programme. During these years the club also fostered many other galas, most notably against Otter SC the first of which took place in 1890 and which began a long tradition of links with that club.

The team was heavily handicapped however by the fact that Cambridge had no swimming pool and consequently members of the club only had the Easter term (April to June) in which to practice. Fortunately in 1906 the new pool at the Leys School allowed training to be extended.

Between the wars the club flourished, with the bathing sheds playing host to scores of undergraduates. Every year, at the end of the Easter term the Varsity Team would embark on a two week tour of London, culminating in the match against Oxford watched by crowds of several thousands.

The date when the CU Ladies Swimming Club was founded is less clear. In 1903 the Girton College Review records that the college swimming club had 80 members and organized an annual inter-year water polo match, played by girls in long flowing white dresses. In 1921 the ladies swimming Varsity Match was initiated.

1970 saw the merging of the men's and ladies' clubs. The following year ladies were even allowed to use the bathing sheds despite fierce opposition from more traditional members.

There was a major dispute between the two universities in 1982, when Oxford selected a lady international to play in the men's water polo team. The selection was forbidden by a special ruling of the ASA. Cambridge were quick to come up with a solution, challenging Oxford to a ladies' water polo match the following year, and so completing the four match competition.

In 1997 the club changed its name from Cambridge University Swimming Club (CUSC) to Cambridge University Swimming and Water Polo Club (CUSWPC).