

March Meeting - Second Speaker

Channel Swimming

A Talk by Mike Read

Reported by Terry Sutton

Dover, because of its geographic position, has always been the centre for the international sport of swimming the English Channel.

Mike Read, who has swum the Strait 33 times was our guest speaker at St Mary's parish centre on March 16 when he claimed channel swimming injected some £5 million into the economy of Dover and Folkestone.

Mr Read, President of the internationally recognised Channel Swimming Association, commented it was a pity that locally there was not more active interest in the sport. He appealed for any volunteers who might like to join the team of official observers who went on swims to ensure crossings were completed correctly.

With his 33 successes (three from France to England) Mr Read is the CSA's "King of the Channel". But there are now two rival associations (the other is the Channel Swimming and Piloting Federation) and their Kevin Murphy has logged up 34 successful solo crossings. So Kevin also claims to be King of the Channel!

Since Captain Webb's pioneer channel swim in August 1875 the English Channel has been swum by around 1,426 people who have made nearly 2,000 solo crossings (some have done it more than once).

Mike Read, who screened images of his and other swims, told us how the sport was much more professional than when he started. Today there are more official safety



Mike Read

regulations while the French authorities were far stricter about what was going on in their territorial waters.

He also explained that today many swimmers went into the water from Samphire Hoe instead of the traditional starting off point of Shakespeare Beach.

The reason for this was to take swimmers, and their accompanying pilot boat, away from the normal approach route of the ferries heading for Dover harbour. Today, he reported, all the CSA pilots were based at Folkestone.

Mike also explained why, because of tides and currents, it was more difficult to swim from England to France than in the other direction.

Captain Matthew Webb's pioneer 21-hour swim would not be recognised today as a success under CSA rules because he went into the sea by jumping off one of Dover's piers. Today all successful swimmers must set off from dry land and walk clear onto dry land on the other side of the channel.



Channel Swimming Association 1901