

## TURTLES SWIMMING CLUB NEWSLETTER



**The Turtles Swimming Club is for anyone with a physical, mental health or learning difficulty. Based at Highgrove Pool in Ruislip, the club meets every Saturday between 5pm and 6pm.**



## **R.I.P. Sylvia Smith OBE— our beloved Club President**



**It was with great sadness that we heard of the awful news that Sylvia had passed away on Wednesday 24th August. Sylvia was a truly inspirational lady. She was a wonderful and dedicated ambassador for disability swimming which was recognised by her highly deserved OBE. However, her resilience, positivity, kindness and care for others shone through in the adversity she faced in recent years. In my eyes, that is what made her such a unique and special person and someone I can only aspire to be like. It was always a pleasure visiting Sylvia, she will be sorely missed.**

**Alison Grey, Turtles Secretary**



# Looking back.....



**The Turtles Swimming Club nominated Sylvia Smith for an OBE in recognition of her services to Disability Swimming. In 2009 the club announced the following:**

*Turtles Swimming Club is proud to announce that Sylvia Smith (Turtles Competitions Secretary and Child Protection Officer) has been awarded an OBE (The Order of the British Empire) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List 2009.*

*The Turtles Club was founded in 1964 and Sylvia Smith attended the club from the outset as a young Red Cross poolside volunteer. Her award is for her 45 years of dedication and commitment to the development of swimming for those with disabilities, not just for the Turtles but also at a national level through the NASCH organisation (National Association of Swimming Clubs for the Handicapped).*

*Sylvia was appointed to the position of President of NASCH in 2007. Prior to this time, Sylvia was the Vice President of NASCH (from 1999 to 2007) and Vice Chairman from 1991 to 1998. From 1976 to 1988 Sylvia was the NASCH Social Secretary.*

*Sylvia Smith has therefore become synonymous with the development of swimming for those with disabilities on a national level. Through NASCH, Woodlarks and the various swimming galas, Sylvia has worked tirelessly to ensure that everyone enjoys themselves, can participate in new opportunities and events and in doing so optimise their abilities in an equitable and challenging environment.*

*Sylvia's sustained work for NASCH together with her local work for the Turtles has encouraged a huge number of special needs swimmers to obtain achievements that many would not have thought possible. Besides her great swimming achievements, Sylvia is also a committee member of the Healing Gardens organisation.*

*The organisation funded by grants from the Primary Care Trust is part of the Thames Valley Groundwork Scheme specialise in adapting gardens for the disabled. Sylvia is the VIP committee member (responsible for Visionary Impaired People) so not only does she capture the minutes of the meetings for club members, but she also records and distributes audio tapes of the minutes for the poorly sighted and blind members.*

*As a former primary school teacher and later as a teacher for the deaf and hard of hearing, Sylvia has dedicated her life to those that are less fortunate than herself.*

*The OBE is richly deserved and the Turtles Club Committee is proud of her tremendous achievement.*

**Sometimes it seems that the very good are just so unlucky.....**

Sylvia never complained, but she had strong grounds for a 'why me?' claim in recent years.

When diagnosed with breast cancer, rather than feel sorry for herself, Sylvia just threw herself into fundraising mode raising substantial funds for Breast Cancer Research.

Her love and devotion to husband John was there for all to see. Their retirement years were cruelly sabotaged though by John's illness and incapacity. But Sylvia encouraged John to swim with the Turtles every Saturday, complete with armbands!

After several unsuccessful hip operations, Sylvia underwent a leg amputation in 2003, leaving her wheelchair bound. But this in no way limited her activities, dedication or work rate. Sylvia maintained her independence, utilising cabs and Hillingdon Community Transport (an organisation that John, as local bank manager, had been instrumental in setting up).

Sadly in October 2010 (significantly on the day of a Turtles Gala) Sylvia suffered the first of a number of strokes that left her bed-bound for the rest of her days. Sylvia was determined to get home from hospital as soon as possible (she hated hospitals and tried to avoid at all times) and she and her family provided a care package allowing her to be at home whereby she could still see all of her friends and family who could pop in at any time to be cheerfully greeted.

Sylvia of course could not really swim and she was petrified of the water. Norman Abbott tried several times to teach her. John would often joke that he married the only girl who could not stand the water and then she signed up for every Saturday at the Turtles!



# Tributes



Sylvia, you were such a lovely lady. I always looked forward to my weekly visits and chats and consider our friendship inspirational and very special. Although I will have happy memories, as you would wish, you have left a void and Wednesdays will never be the same again. **Ann Chivers**

I was introduced to the Turtles through John Smith, Sylvia's late husband in 1978. Sylvia's calm encouragement from the pool side to the swimmers was an inspiration. Her enthusiasm and dedication to the Turtles was unequivocal and despite failing health and severe physical problems it never wavered. We became good friends and I will miss her cheerfulness and her wisdom. You are an exemplar to us all and we will miss you. **Rosemary Noyes**

It was a pleasure and a privilege to have known Sylvia for over 40 years, and her ability to make everyone feel important was outstanding. Her quiet and calm approach to all matters relating to the Turtles is still a major influence. She will be greatly missed. **Joan and Norman Abbott**

Erica and I have known Sylvia for more than 30 years when we joined the Turtles. Not only regularly at swimming but also on many social occasions, driving to NASCH, NASCH weekends, and lunches locally in Ruislip. Since moving to Wiltshire, Erica stayed in Harrow, but I visit regularly and tried to include a visit to Sylvia and also talking on the telephone every Sunday. She will be greatly missed. **Marion & Erica Beckwith**

I have known Sylvia since 1964 at the start of the Turtles, She has been a very good friend to all the Turtles and will be greatly missed! I have many happy memories when she was Camp Leader at Woodlarks for several years, and many, many Swimming Galas & Outings. I only wish I could have visited her more recently but I have become less mobile myself.

God Bless you Sylvia Rest in Peace, with love from **Margaret and Audrey Buckingham**

Thank you for letting me know the sad news of Sylvia's passing. Sylvia was a stoic upholder of everything that was fine in our way of life and a living example of goodness. **Bob Gasper**

A wonderful lady who was so encouraging to my wife Ronnie and to me in our early Turtles days. When Ronnie was unable to attend on Saturday evenings Sylvia would always enquire and make sure we were managing. I will miss her warm welcome and cheery smile... God bless you Sylvia. **Don Lamb**





# Tributes



My early memories of Sylvia go back to when Gary was just 7 years old and we joined the Turtles. In those days we lived in Pinner, but the lady running the Harrow Kingfishers would not allow children with learning difficulties to join—only those with physical disabilities. The contrast when we went along to Highgrove for the first time was wonderful. Sylvia encouraged Gary (who could not swim back then) and encouraged the whole family to join, emphasising that it was a family club and a family experience. That message has stayed with me ever since and much of our subsequent swim teaching success has flowed through the inclusion of family members and especially siblings.

With the support of a couple of teenage girls helpers, Gary was soon swimming and then Sylvia was encouraging Gary to swim in the galas. This was progress beyond our wildest dreams when we first enrolled! But Gary was so responsive to Sylvia's encouragement, in fact he adored her and continued to do so for 25 more years.

But Sylvia did not stop there. She very gradually seduced me into being the Gala Team Manager with Sylvia continuing on as Competition Secretary. This was the start of my ever increasing responsibility with the Turtles, with Sylvia firmly steering from behind. When I took early retirement back in 2008, Sylvia was quick to nominate me as the Club Chairman. As Sylvia became bed-bound, believe it or not, we held our Committee Meetings around her bedside! When she felt unable to participate as an active Committee Member, I proposed that Sylvia be elected as Club President, a position she was overjoyed to accept.

So since 2010, the Saturday routine en-route to Highgrove would see us calling in at Copthall Road East for our regular catch-up, running through all things Turtles and then time to put the world to right. Sylvia was delighted and proud how under my stewardship the Turtles continued to move forward. It was a period of substantial change, but everything was talked through with Sylvia at the weekly sessions and she would use her years of experience and immense wisdom to support the club that she had created and loved. She was forward thinking and was appreciative of the changing external world that we were having to anticipate.

My own health though 'hit the buffers' in January 2015 and I informed the Committee that I would have to take a less active role. Sylvia's concern for me was overwhelming especially considering her own plight. Our Saturday 'surgeries' continued on, but now rather than me wanting to know how she was, she insisted on hearing every detail of my treatment. Sylvia as ever caring for others and not complaining about her own awful suffering.

Sylvia had an incredible knack of making her visitors feel extra special. I am told that this was a quality that she picked up from John. Sylvia would often attend business or community functions with John where she would watch him 'work the room' making every connection feel extra special. I have seen first hand how Sylvia would do just the same and I can say for sure that she made Gary feel very special every time. He will miss her a great deal, Sylvia was a very important part of his life. Sylvia and the Turtles have given Gary a wonderful time with gala success that has changed his whole life. His confidence and self-belief has developed as a consequence. That is just how wonderful Sylvia Smith was.

But Sylvia made me feel very special as well. I have produced the Newsletter for 7 years (Sylvia was on the cover of the very first edition) but Sylvia has always been the most appreciative reader. She would read each issue cover to cover, study the Gala Results, even though many of the younger members had joined since her last pool attendance.

Sylvia was determined to attend the Turtles 50th Anniversary Party in 2014 and without trying to deter her, I could not see how it would be possible. But the photos prove that when Sylvia put her mind to something, she could overcome the most incredible obstacles. She really loved that evening and was so proud to have been there wheel chair dancing!

I know that Sylvia would not want us to be sad about her passing, but the Turtles Club has lost a wonderful, inspiration friend and President. I have lost a wonderful friend, the word 'Respect' though does not even get close to it!

Rest in Peace now Sylvia.

**Dave Lee (and of course Gary Lee)**



# Tributes



I feel so sad that Sylvia has passed away—it is a moment I have dreaded for years. As I wrote on her last birthday card, she was ‘My Very Bestest Friend’, one who through the 79 years that I have known her, however busy she was, would always drop everything to listen to my troubles when I had them. That is true friendship.

I just cannot find the words to praise Sylvia enough and I miss her so much. She helped me apply to Teachers Training College at 18, introduced me to a local Stanmore 20’s Club, which she had helped form, where I met my future husband Ron and later she brought her future husband John. Subsequently, Ron and John became great best friends as Sylvia and I were. Sylvia and John were Godparents to my son Michael. Later, my husband, though suffering from terminal cancer, carried John’s ashes up their favourite Lake District mountain to be left at a cairn as promised.

When my daughter Claire developed epilepsy 48 years ago, Sylvia introduced me to the Turtles, where I have been ever since.

I am so relieved that my eldest daughter took me to see Sylvia on this last birthday. Sylvia was her friendly, kindly self right to the end. God bless her. .

**Patricia Bonney**



# Tributes



In 1954-55, I was a newly married man, released from National Service and the father of a son of two or three. I had joined a cycling club and formed a close friendship with someone called Derik Braham. I lived some seven or eight miles away and often visited 42 Woodlands Avenue, Eastcote, with my young son sitting in a seat on the back of the bike.

Derik introduced me to the young couple who lived next door – a Sylvia and John Smith. I remember them so well as such a pleasant and happy couple but little did I know then how fate would bring us in such close contact many years later.

Moving forward some twenty or more years, still a close friend of Derik, he introduced me to a George Adams who lived a couple of roads away from Woodlands Avenue.

George and I joined together in a business partnership and so became friends of the family. George had a son with what I think is now called ‘learning difficulties’, a lovely lad called Terry.

At that time, my wife, Doris, had become increasingly disabled with arthritis and, through the connection - Derik Braham, George Adams and Terry - we were introduced to a swimming club specifically for those with a disability which was called ‘*The Turtles*. We, Doris and I, at the persuasion of Derik, became members and there we found Sylvia.

We discovered that, in her quiet and unassuming way, Sylvia was the driving force behind this club which was (and still is, of course), based at Highgrove Swimming Pool. Within a short time, Doris became the club secretary and I became a Timekeeper at the wonderful galas which is where we met so many other Groups, all affiliated to NASCH.

Sylvia, of course, was the luminary of NASCH and its President. The Regional Galas, those splendid week-ends at Stoke Mandeville. Sylvia was there; she made little noise, spoke less, but presided - a maternal influence over it all.

There were also the week-ends at *Woodlarks* – Sylvia was there – naturally. Most of all I remember Sylvia and the Turtles’ Galas; the Turtles’ parties and the music, the uninhibited joy as I played the recordings of *The Birdie Song*.

It was a cruel twist of fate that Sylvia, who had spent her life doing things for others, should be smitten with breast cancer. Of course, being Sylvia, she started a charity for fellow sufferers and called it *SOB* (Save our Boobs). Under her guidance I produced much of the literature.

Throughout these years, husband John, a Nat West Bank Manager, proved a steadfast supporter; in fact, he decided to retire early in order to help more and to look after Sylvia. To ensure his continued well-being, he was advised to have an operation for a ‘heart murmur’ – something minor, nothing to worry about. Instead it all went wrong and John became disabled himself and it was Sylvia who became the Carer; why is fate so often so cruel to those who deserve better?

The years that followed were not kind to Sylvia but she served almost to the end, she received an OBE but it should have been a Sainthood. **Jim Burgin**







**Sylvia's Funeral and Remembrance Service will take place at Ruislip Crematorium, Breakspear Road Thursday 15th September 1pm- 2pm**



**After the service everyone is welcome at the Ruislip Rugby Club (opp. The Barn Hotel) on West End Road. No flowers please, but donations instead to The Mountain Rescue (Lake District). There will be a box at the venue after the service and will be detailed in the next Turtles Newsletter.**

## Newsletters Revisited

# Turtles Newsletter

**November 2009 Newsletter Re-published September 2016  
For members of Ruislip Turtles Swimming Club**



November 2009

## Sylvia's Royal Appointment

Friday 4th December 2009 is a very important day for Sylvia Smith because she will be travelling with her son and two of her daughters to Buckingham Palace, to collect her OBE (Order of the British Empire Medal).

Sylvia was notified of her award in June when the Queen announced her Birthday Honours List following the nomination by the Turtles Club.

The Turtles Club was founded in 1964 and Sylvia attended the club from the outset as a 'young' Red Cross poolside volunteer. Her award is for her 45 years of dedication and commitment to the development of swimming for those with disabilities, not just for the Turtles but also at a national level through the NASCH organisation (National Association of Swimming Clubs

Sylvia was appointed to the position of President of NASCH in 2007. Prior to this time, Sylvia was the Vice President of NASCH (from 1999 to 2007) and Vice Chairman from 1991 to 1998. From 1976 to 1988 Sylvia was the NASCH Social Secretary.

Sylvia Smith has therefore become synonymous with the development of swimming for those with disabilities on a national level. Through NASCH, Woodlarks and the various swimming galas, Sylvia has worked tirelessly to ensure that everyone enjoys themselves, can participate in new opportunities and events and in doing so optimise their abilities in an equitable and challenging environment.



As a former primary school teacher and later as a teacher for the deaf and hard of hearing, Sylvia has dedicated her life to those that are less fortunate than herself.

The OBE is richly deserved, so enjoy your day at the Palace Sylvia!

# Turtles Newsletter



January 2010 (Issue 3) (Re-Published September 2016)  
Newsletter for the members of the Ruislip Turtles  
Swimming Club

**‘Yes.....your Royal Highness....’**



On Friday 4th December 2009 Sylvia collected her OBE (Order of the British Empire Medal) from Princess Anne at Buckingham Palace. Sylvia travelled with her son and two of her daughters to Buckingham Palace, following the nomination by the Turtles Swimming Club.

Sylvia's award was for her 45 years of dedication and commitment to the development of swimming for those with disabilities, not just for the Turtles but also at a national level through the NASCH organisation (National Association of Swimming Clubs for the Handicapped)

As a former primary school teacher and later as a teacher for the deaf and hard of hearing, Sylvia has dedicated her life to those that are less fortunate than herself.

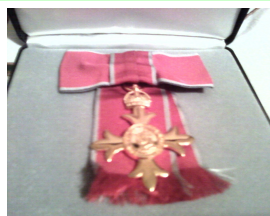
The OBE is a just reward for a truly great lady—Congratulations Sylvia!

For more photographs of Sylvia's special day at the Palace and a report from Sylvia herself, please turn to pages 4 and 5.

The OBE



**Sylvia Smith OBE**





## Tea with the Queen by Sylvia



Except that it wasn't tea and it wasn't the Queen. It was orange juice or water and Princess Anne. Friday 4th December 2009 was my big day at Buckingham Palace where, along with 98 other people I received my OBE.

I was accompanied by my son and two of my daughters. We had to arrive at the Palace at 10am and those of you who have experienced the early morning traffic into London will know why we

left home at 7am to travel 15 or so miles. It only took us an hour and a half – plenty of time for a sustaining breakfast in a handy café (with a parking space right outside!)

Once inside the Palace I was whisked off by a footman and taken along a back corridor to the lift, whilst everyone else ascended the grand staircase to the Ballroom. No, it wasn't a dance! We, the recipients were ushered into the picture gallery for refreshments, and our guests were shown to their seats to be entertained by the orchestra of the Band of the Irish Guards who played throughout the ceremony. After having the procedure explained to us by the Master of Ceremonies, and being shown how to curtsy or bow, we were ushered into the anteroom to the Ballroom and lined up in the correct order. I was looked after by 'my' footman who, when my name was called (Sylvia, Mrs Smith President of the National Association of Swimming Clubs for the Handicapped) wheeled me up to Princess Anne, bowed and stepped back. I did not try to curtsy! I bowed my head, but only slightly, in case my hat fell off!

What did Princess Anne say to me? She commented on the length of time I had been involved with NASCH (45 years) and I explained how I started off at the opening Gala of Highgrove Pool as a Red Cross nurse, and never looked back. The Princess remarked that swimming was a good sport for disabled people, and that it was very nice to see me there. She then shook my hand, my footman bowed and wheeled me away to sit with my family.

When the ceremony was over the band played 'God Save the Queen' and Princess Anne, followed by her escort of 2 Ghurkas and 6 Yeomen of the Guard, left the Ballroom, smiling to left and right as she went. I thought she was charming, with a lovely smile.

Then another ride in the lift and out to face the official photographs in the Palace yard. It was all extremely well organised and great fun. We were the first car to leave and there were lots of tourists with cameras outside the gates. I wound down my window, smiled at them and waived graciously. Lots of people will be saying 'I wonder who she is?' when they see their photographs. We rounded off the day with a celebration meal with the rest of the family at The Grove, Watford.

**It now seems like a dream!**



Sylvia with son Michael.....



The Royal Photographer.....



and daughter in law, Angela



Created by George V in 1917, The Order of the British Empire (OBE) recognises distinguished service to the arts & sciences, public services outside the Civil Service and work with charitable and welfare organisations of all kinds.



An OBE is awarded for: a distinguished regional or country-wide role in any field or through achievement or service to the community including notable practitioners known nationally.



Sylvia with daughters Mandy and Nicky with the official photographer.



Once every 4 years approximately 2000 members of the order attend a special service at St.Paul's Cathedral to celebrate the order.



Sylvia with daughter Mandy at the Giraffe Café.





## Turtles AGM Newsletter 2014

### Turtles President Report



*As we are celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a club this Summer, we asked our Club President, Sylvia Smith OBE to tell us how it all began.....*

It was June 1964 and the new swimming Pool in Ruislip (Highgrove) was about to be opened. A group of us was invited along by Freddy Kaye and his wife (always known as Mrs. Kaye) to the opening day gala at the new pool. Highgrove looked splendid on that opening day with plants and flowers beautifully displayed. Sadly, they were all removed as soon as the gala finished.....

The gala was organised by Ruislip and Northwood Swimming Club and a special display was organised by Freddie Kaye for the interval. Freddie had arranged for a group of swimmers with disabilities from another club to come along and demonstrate the Halliwick method of teaching swimming to those with disabilities. The Halliwick system is still employed today by many swimming clubs but has never been adopted by our club.

When the demonstration was concluded, Freddy approached several of the invited guests to see if we would help form a Disabled Swimming Branch of the Ruislip & Northwood Swimming Club. It was subsequently arranged with Highgrove Pool for the provision of a free of charge, weekly delegated pool session for swimmers with disabilities. As a Red Cross Nurse, my role was clearly defined and I can assure every one that I was not there for my swimming prowess. Over the years, I rarely ventured into the water in fact.

Although Highgrove was officially opened to the public in the Summer of 1964, the facility was not really ready for use. There were no disabled changing rooms and no lifts to the first floor. Many of the club members had to be carried up and down the stairs to the changing rooms. Health and Safety was very different in those days of course! It took some time before such luxuries were afforded to our group.

We soon discovered that all the other clubs had aquatic names for their teams and so we decided to rename our group 'The Turtles Swimming Club' and to amicably leave Ruislip & Northwood Swimming Club in favour of independence.

The club grew very quickly, mainly due to a tie up with St.Vincent's Home for Disabled Teenagers. St.Vincent's sent a group along in their ambulance (mini-bus) every week. We had 3 ladies who helped in the water (2 who were called Mary I recall.....)

Polio was a major concern back in the sixties and we had a large number of club members who benefited from swimming as a consequence. Audrey Buckingham remains a member of our club today and joins me as the only other founder member still associated with the club today. Pat O'Shea was the club's first Secretary and she later left the Turtles to form the Harrow Kingfisher Club when the Harrow Civic Centre opened. Several of our Harrow based members left at that time (1975) and the Turtles Club membership dropped.

## Turtles AGM Newsletter 2014



### Turtles President Report

celebrating  
**50**  
years...

*(Contd.)*

Harry Parker was on hand back in 1964 and he was involved in the formation of many swimming clubs for the disabled. My good friend, Ann Lynch (Treasurer of NASCH even today) was heading up the Eltham Lion Swimming Club at that time. Together with Harry (who was later appointed President of NASCH) they came up with the idea for a National body. A group of us got together and within a year of the opening of Highgrove, NASCH 'National Association of Swimming Clubs for the Handicapped' was formed operating out of a caravan in the car park of Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

By 1968, we had an established gala team, competing against many of the teams that we still compete against today. We still have the detailed results going back to 1968.

By the mid 1980s competitive swimming for the disabled was buoyant and our team competed at galas at Putney, Ealing, Eton, Stoke Mandeville, Feltham and, Hornsey. We also attended the Southampton Penguin Invitation Galas and they in return travelled to our invitation galas. In the 90's we travelled to Southsea for the Havant Endeavours Invitation Gala. Later, Barnet and Feltham were also added as regular venues.

NASCH continued to grow and the NASCH Annual Championships (before settling at Leamington Spa from 1991 onwards) used different locations every year including Solihull, Harrow, Ipswich Cambridge and Birmingham. Whereas the NASCH Region One Finals were often held at Slough and one year we even travelled to Orpington in Kent for the Regional event!

But a big part of the Turtles has always been the friendships and the social outings. Trips to the seaside were always the most popular and we would regularly fill two full size coaches for our day trips. There are a few other 'newcomers' still with the club today like Patricia Bonney who has been a member of the Turtles for 45 years and been responsible for the raffle for much of that time.

The club has evolved from the days of Ruislip and Northwood SC through our separation and formation as an independent club and then the decision to become a registered charity in 1995. It is incredible to think that the club is still going strong, helping others 50 years after we started with Freddy and his vision. The club has developed and prospered when so many of the other clubs have folded and I am so pleased that although times have changed so much, the old values remain true today. The social, competitive and training & supporting activities still carry on today and I am proud to have been part of the Turtles back in 1964 and part of the Turtles in 2014. I am so grateful for the wonderful times and friendships that the club has given me over the last 50 years.....long may it continue!