

Thomond Swim

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Braving the icy waters: at the Thomond Swim from Barringtons Pier to Limerick Boat Club, Mary Ryan gives our photographer Owen South a wave before hitting the river (LL)

Shannon swim revived after a break of 21 years

Mike Dwane

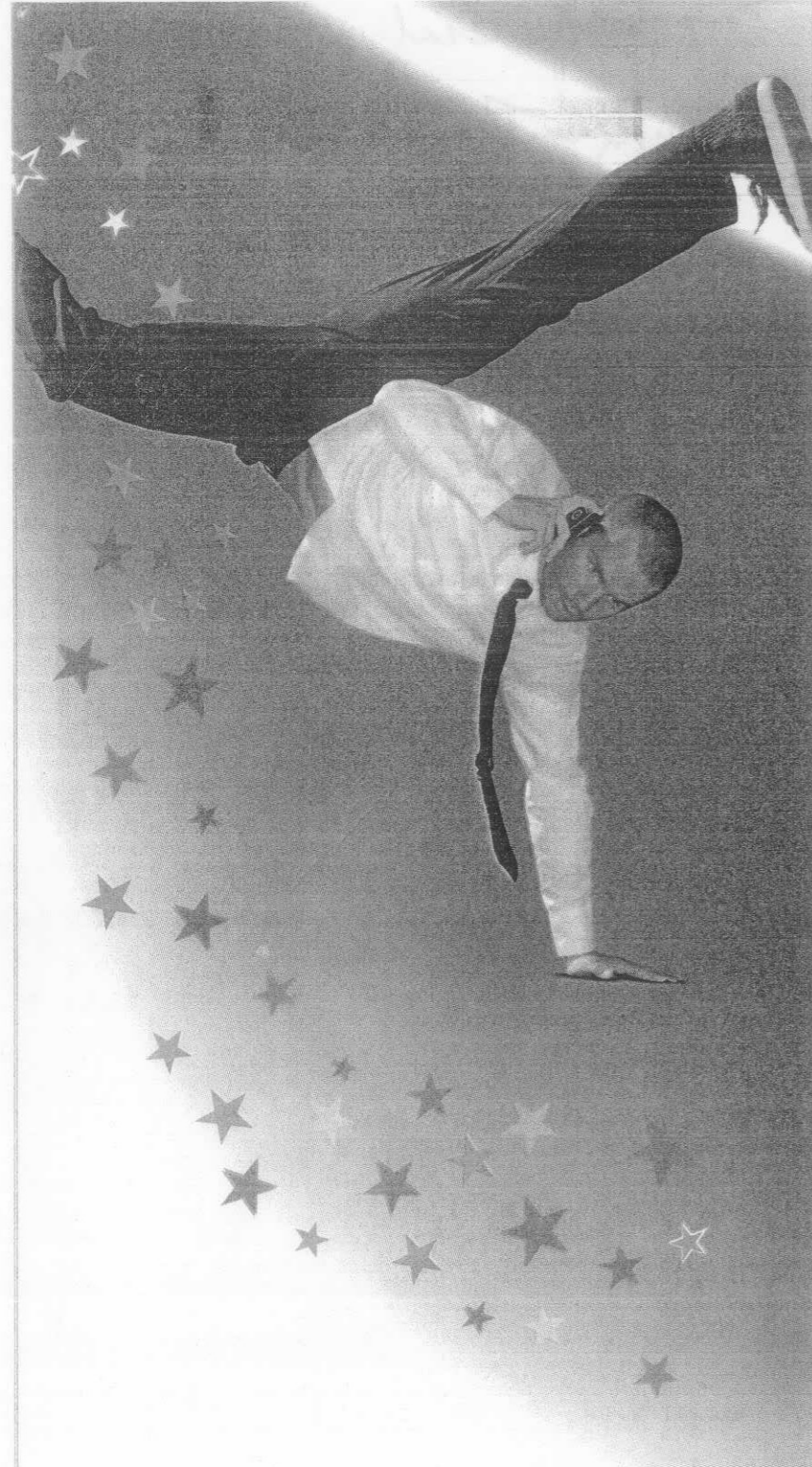
FORMER rugby international Dr Harry Harbison and Monaleen's Mary Fitzpatrick won out as 25 hardy souls took to the Shannon in the biting cold for the Thomond Swim, a tradition that has been revived by Limerick Masters Swimming Club after

hension prior to taking the plunge last Friday.

"I was nervous beforehand but I was pleasantly surprised by the temperature once I got in. It was a bit muddy. If you had asked me to drink a pint of muddy water beforehand I wouldn't have taken it and I did end up drinking some. The wind was whipping

letes, recorded the fastest swim in the men's race, at a staggering 27 minutes and 27 seconds, while former international swimmer Deirdre Kearney was the fastest woman, with a time of 31 minutes and 40 seconds. Despite these two athletes clocking the fastest times, once handicaps were taken into





...tion in the drink cold for the Thomond Swim, a tradition that has been revived by Limerick Masters Swimming Club after a break of 21 years.

It is now hoped that the swim can again become an annual event after last Friday's success. Despite interest from Cork and Dublin swimmers, this year's race was only open to members and associate members of Limerick Masters. It is now hoped that the Thomond Swim will be reinstated as a national event on a par with the Liffey Swim, said Dee Maguire, chairman of Limerick Masters.

The challenging 2km course took the swimmers upstream from Barrington's Pier to Limerick Boat Club. Despite competing in the 1.3km Kilkee Bay Swim every year, Mary Fitzpatrick admitted to appreciating the muddy water beforehand I wouldn't have taken it and I did end up drinking some. The wind was whipping across the water quite strongly as well so it took me a good 10 to 15 minutes to settle into it and start to enjoy it," Mary said.

"During the first stretch, the only thing I had guiding me was the Clarion Hotel, which just seemed so far away. Once I got there though, I knew Sarsfield Bridge wasn't too far away. I was delighted at the end of the day when they told me I was the ladies winner," she said.

Dr Harbison, who is a GP based in the city, won the men's race. He is no stranger to sporting success having won eight caps at hooker for Ireland in the 1980s.

Mark Dempsey, one of the country's top triath-

lete, took part in the swim. Despite these two athletes clocking the fastest times, once handicaps were taken into account, Ms Fitzpatrick and Dr Harbison were declared winners.

Mr Maguire said that "amazingly, the original cup presented by Thomond swimming club was located at JJ Keneally's, cleaned and presented" to the winners.

Sean Mulcahy, who won the last Thomond Swim in 1987, also took part in last Friday's event. He recalled how the event had to be called off a year later over pollution, recalling "a strange taste off the water around the Locke bar" 20 years ago.

The €200m Limerick Main Drainage Scheme has immeasurably improved water quality in the city, however. Another



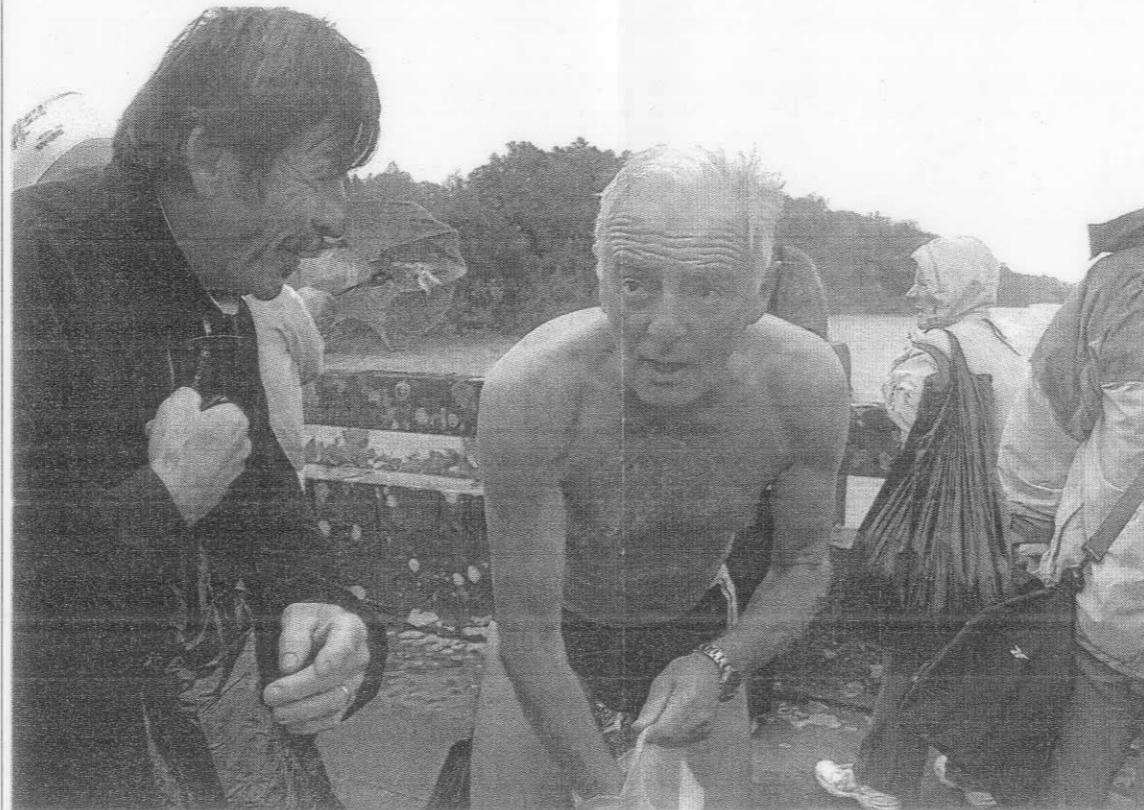
Congratulations: Mark Dempsey (fastest male), Deirdre Kearney (fastest female), Dee Maguire (chairman Limerick Masters SC, Mary Fitzpatrick (female winner) and Harry Harbison (male winner)

major engineering project, dredging for the Limerick Tunnel, has caused silt and mud to be stirred up but while this affected visibility in the first stage of the race, samples taken by Limerick Masters indicate

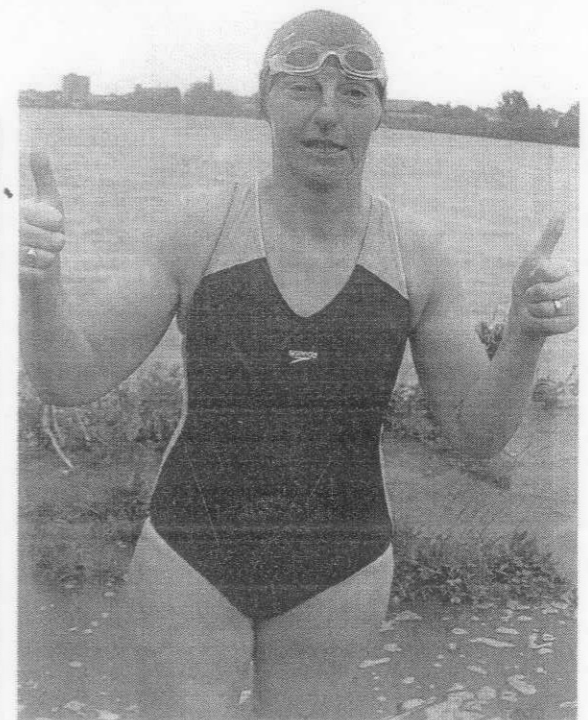
the quality of the water is twice as good as prescribed in EU water directives.

"It's actually cleaner than Kilkee Bay, you could drink it," Mr Maguire said. He added that the club

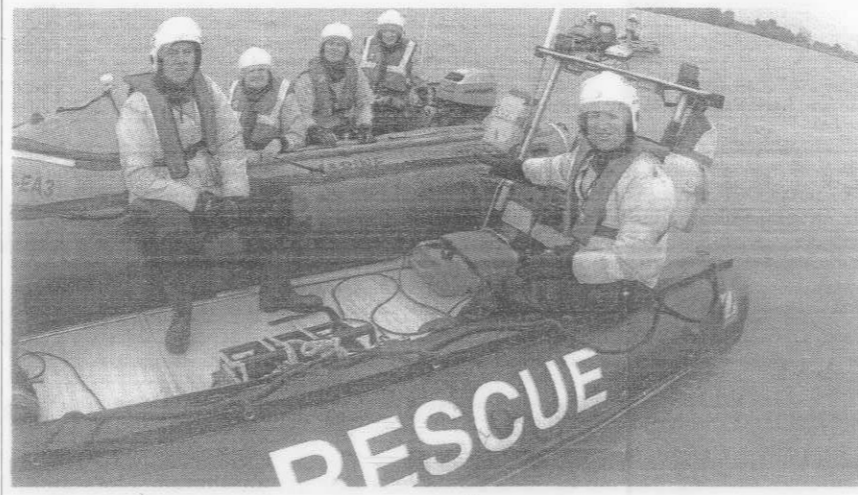
wished to express its gratitude to the gardai for directing traffic, Limerick Marine Search and Rescue for providing boat cover and the ESB for shutting down the turbines at Ardacrusha.



Bracing himself: Colm O'Shea, about to enter the water at the start of the Thomond Swim



I survived it! Mary Fitzpatrick gives the thumbs-up



Members of the Limerick Marine Search and Rescue who oversaw the event



Brrrr! Breda McNamara and John Allen braved the cold to take part in the swim

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