

# Mayor reflects on two amazing Channel swims, 23 years apart



By STAFF REPORTER

"I HAD this skill, so I wanted to put it to good use," says Councillor Dr Julie Bradshaw MBE as she talks about her amazing swimming career.

It is at this time of year that Cllr Bradshaw, the Mayor of Charnwood, finds herself reflecting on two of her most remarkable achievements.

Forty-five years ago - on August 19, 1979 she swam the English Channel at the tender age of 15. It took her 10 hours and nine minutes.

And 23 years later, on August 5, 2002, she achieved the feat once again, but this time swimming butterfly rather than front crawl.

Her finishing time of 14hrs 18mins set a world record for the fastest swim across the Channel using that stroke, and it still stands.

Cllr Bradshaw combined her sporting feats with fund-raising and was awarded an MBE in the 2006 for "services to swimming and charity".

Her fund-raising efforts have continued and in her role as mayor this year, she is helping chosen charities Dogs Trust Loughborough and Living Without Abuse.

Cllr Bradshaw is planning several fund-raising events drawing upon both her sporting past and career as a life coach. She is offering organisations the chance to book her for a motivational talk, with the proceeds going to her chosen charities.

"The great thing is that everything I've done in terms of swimming, I've raised money for charity," she said.

"I've got this skill, so I wanted to put it to good use. I always say it's not just about who I become in that process and also about using my skills to raise money for charity."

There were 23 years between Cllr Bradshaw's two Channel swims - after overcoming an initial setback.

She recalled: "A few years back, I spent some time in Canada. I was coaching swimming at the time and they had an open-air pool. I always had in the back of my head that I wanted to do some distance fly, so I went down to the open-air pool and just started racking up the lengths.

"This would have been 1991, so I came back to the UK and built up my fly repertoire.

"I went and swam Windermere,

which is 10.5 miles, and in the mid-90s, I did Ullswater (7.25 miles) and Conistone (5.25 miles) and then I turned my attention to the Channel.

"I'd always done free-style but after I came back from Canada I was known for fly. The ultimate was to do the Channel again, so that's what I did."

But her first attempt had to be aborted as a result of an arm injury suffered while swimming 18 hours of butterfly in horrendous weather conditions in Windermere a few weeks earlier.

"One thing I didn't take into account was that I couldn't recover as quickly as I could when I was a 16-year-old," said Cllr Bradshaw, who still swims every day.

"I knew I could do it, and the time was possible. It had only ever been done by one person - a Canadian lady back in 1989 - and she took about 23-and-a-half hours.

"I knew I could break the record if my arm didn't give way again, and I

**"I've got this skill, so I wanted to put it to good use."**  
 Mayor of Charnwood Councillor Dr Julie Bradshaw, who in 2006 was made an MBE for services to swimming and charity

swam it in 14 hours 18 minutes and broke the record' by just over nine hours.

"I finished in the dark and I just remember getting on to the beach and I wanted to get some pebbles to bring back. I remember sitting on the beach thinking, 'wow, thank goodness that's done!'"

"I was glad to finish. Doing fly all the way, I was tired, but I was feeling fit and if I'd had to swim a bit more I could have done. Luckily, I could get a lift back on the boat!"

The record still stands. Two men - one French and one American - have crossed the Channel swimming butterfly, but not as quickly.

"It's great to have the record, but if it goes in the future, it goes," said Cllr Bradshaw. "We'll have to wait and see."

Any organisation or group that would like to book Cllr Bradshaw for a charity talk can contact her via the Mayor's Office at:

mayor@charnwood.gov.uk

## 50mph stretches on M1 until the spring

WORK to create more emergency areas on sections of the M1 smart motorway in Leicestershire is on schedule, National Highways has said.

Six new emergency areas are being added between junctions 23a, near East Sandiacre, over the Derbyshire border. The areas, which should be complete by spring next year, will provide a place to stop in an emergency if drivers cannot exit the motorway or reach a motorway service area.

National Highways said it has been listening to motorists' concerns about all-lane running smart motorways, where the shoulder is lost to become an additional lane.

Speed limits of 50mph are in place in lanes two, three and four while the overnight work takes place with the inside lane closed.

Emergency areas will be clearly signed at regular intervals along the motorway and have bright orange road surfaces to help motorists identify them. As long as they are equipped with emergency phones linking directly to control rooms.

**In Your Area**

### 'I SAID, I WANT TO SWIM THE CHANNEL, AND THE REST IS HISTORY'

"I'D always been into lots of different sports at school and excelled at swimming, especially in the colder water, and I started doing a bit of training outdoors," Blackpool-born Cllr Bradshaw, right, recalled.

"I kind of got into it that way. My parents did quite a lot of caravanning in the Lake District, and I swam across Lake Windermere when I was 12 years old.

"That first swim, I did breaststroke as I was absolutely petrified about putting my head under the water!"

"But then the next year I went back and did it front crawl and won it.

"Then, obviously, the ultimate was the Channel, so I



just said 'right, I want to swim the Channel' - and the rest is history, really.

"We'd gone down to Dover a couple of times, because we were supposed to get off in July and the weather was cold, wet and windy, so we went back down again and then in August there was a 50-50 chance of conditions being good enough.

"We decided to take the opportunity and the weather did turn halfway across, but I made it across and that was the aim of the game.

"I recall walking down hundreds of steps at Shakespeare Beach and then getting greased up.

"I had butterflies in my stomach, but I was just glad to be getting going after all the

waiting. I was kind of in my own world, if that makes sense. I was nervous, obviously, but I always trained well, so I had that self-belief.

"When you swim outside, you are beholden to the conditions - it's not like being in a swimming pool.

"The first two hours, for me, were the worst, but once I got into my rhythm, I was okay.

"When I had finished, I can recall being greeted by some Frenchmen as I walked to shore in the dark.

"It felt amazing and a sense of relief to some extent that I'd finished it in 10hrs 9mins.

"I felt over the moon, then after some time ashore, was taken back in the dinghy to the main vessel to return to England."

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