

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

Tony Pearce pays tribute to his old friend Dave Mace while Spencer Swim Team founder **John Gordon** recalls highlights from the club's distinguished history



I wanted to comment on Dave Mace, who died late last year. I knew him for well over 55 years, having first met him when I was 13. It was the summer of 1958. Dave, a renowned open water swimmer at the time, used to train at Wimbledon Baths. I would sometimes join in with his training group and swim length after length.

From that day on, he always called me 'young man'. Now that Dave has passed away, I realise that there are actually three stages in life - youth, middle age and 'You're looking well'.

I have many fond memories of our friendship through swimming. I remember meeting Dave at Tooting Bec Lido one sunny Saturday afternoon. He had successfully swum the Channel in one of the fastest times ever recorded.

As one of the founder members of the Spencer Swim Team a few years earlier, I got Dave to join the club. He then teamed up with my great friend and coach at Spencer, John Gordon. In my opinion, both men pioneered masters swimming in this country.

My fondest memory of Dave was at the 1990 FINA World Masters Championships in Rio, where he swam the open

water race, the length of Copacabana Beach and back. Dave was not feeling well at the time and there was concern. But he decided to swim it. I remember myself and Antonia Glynn-Jones waiting at the finish line on the beach. The sea, somewhat blustery, was converted by the glorious sun and the background of Sugarloaf Mountain. Swimmers continued to finish but still no Dave. We waited rather anxiously.

The sun was beginning to set, but as with all such sunsets there was true glory, and lo and behold Dave was to be seen, albeit somewhat wearily, coming to the finish line. It was this moment that I will always remember. Dave momentarily stood up, then fell down, but got up again and finally crossed the finish line.

Antonia and I raced down the beach to help him in. The measure of the man. Did he get up? Yes, he got up all right, and won a bronze medal. Talk about any old iron! (Dave was an ironmonger by trade.)

Dave's popularity was based on the belief that swimming was not only for everyone, but also that everyone had a lot of fun along the way. Yes, a challenge can be fun. Thanks, Dave.

Tony Pearce

Following the passing of Dave Mace, Spencer Swim Team's much-loved, longstanding team manager and assistant coach, I thought *Swimming Times* readers might be interested in a brief history of the club, particularly as its roots stemmed from just a 20yds by 10yds school pool.

The club was founded by myself, a former GB international, within the framework of an Inner London Education Authority Youth Centre and Adult Education Complex in 1977. I was a tutor at the centre at Spencer Park School, in Wandsworth, south west London.

Recognising that the pool was just long enough at 20yds to accommodate training as opposed to just teaching, I was given the go-ahead to encourage competitive swimming. Provision for training was created in 1976, attracting age group swimmers, which proved successful and led me to form the club in 1977 and get it affiliated with Surrey County ASA.

Successes included the winning of the boys' under 16 freestyle relay in the Surrey championships as well as members competing in the national age group championships. However, being a supporter of senior swimming, I encouraged friends and friends of friends to join and the club soon developed into a masters organisation - the second in the UK to my old club, Otter.

In 1978, the late Vic Lohr, Tony Pearce and I became the first to go as a team from a club in the UK to compete in an overseas masters meet. This was to Brown University, Rhode Island, for the USA Long Course National Masters Championships. I returned with a gold (50m freestyle), two silvers and a bronze, Vic and Tony with top 10 positions.

A rich assortment of swimmers started joining - novices, keep fit enthusiasts, disability (winning medals in Paralympics) and a former double Olympian, John Mills. Former Channel swimmer Dave Mace joined in 1980, became team manager and very soon had recruited a thriving long-distance group.

In 1981, Spencer launched the first of several annual London



Masters Open Swim Meets, which at their height attracted over 500 competitors and more than 2,000 entries from all over the UK and Europe. It was believed to be the biggest meet of its type held in Europe at that time. Following the weekend of hectic non-stop swimming, I introduced 'over-the-top-starts', whereby the previous swimmers stayed in their lanes to allow the next race to start, then made their way to the side, thereby saving time. This was agreed with the overworked officials. Functions followed with Spencer celebrating a greater points tally than any other club on every occasion.

In 1987, Spencer emerged from the European Masters in Blackpool and the GB Masters Championships as the most successful club, bringing home an individual total of 34 gold, 12 silver and 13 bronze medals plus team medals together with world and European records.

The same year, I introduced the club to Club La Santa in Lanzarote for a week's training. I took the sessions informally from the water and then formally from poolside for several years and again in 2012 with Dave Mace as assistant - a position he kept until ill health a couple of years ago unfortunately limited him to watching from the poolside.

In 1988, following a request for a 'celebrity team' of Spencer members, the late Jack Hale, pioneer of dolphin butterfly and a legend in his own lifetime, and Alison Streeter, Queen of the Channel, were presented to Princess Diana at the Royal launch of the Swimathon. The team also included the famous Hunt twins, Sarah and Carol (the first twins to swim the Channel). Princess Diana's family, the Spencers, owned the land where the club started, hence the name Spencer Swim Team.

With the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority and the demolition of the Spencer School pool to build flats, the club moved its headquarters in the early 1990s to Putney Leisure Centre, where it still trains.

John Gordon
Surrey



Above: Dave Mace swimming the Channel; left: the late Willy van Rysel, one of Spencer's most successful masters swimmers; opposite: Dave Mace (centre) with Tony Pearce (left) and John Gordon

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