

HRH Prince Michael of Kent speech for Cavalry & Guards Club Reception

The vision of William Henry to establish a lifesaving organisation was formalised on 7th February 1891, 125 years ago, when the first general meeting was held in London. At this meeting it was resolved to name the Society the Swimmer's Lifesaving Society, and to make the teaching of the principles of lifesaving its chief work.

Over the next few decades, through the development of rescue and resuscitation techniques, lifesaving and swimming proficiency awards, public lectures and instruction within England and beyond, the founders and in particular William Henry himself, spread the cause of drowning prevention, inspiring vast numbers of people; the effort of which has led to the Society of today, now firmly established in twenty-seven Commonwealth nations.

The humanitarian work that William Henry and his associates carried out in the early 20th century on their travels around the world laid the foundations for the Society as we are today, a Commonwealth-wide organisation. When Lord Mountbatten of Burma became President of the Society in 1945 he followed in the footsteps of William Henry, promoting the activities of the Royal Life Saving Society on his tours abroad. Lord Mountbatten was instrumental in the formation of our branch in Malaysia and his international visits stimulated the formation of many others. His passion and enthusiasm for the organisation has played a tremendous part in our history and we value the continued support from the Mountbatten family.

We have been fortunate as a Society to have the support and patronage of HM The Queen for the past 64 years but even before becoming our Patron, as Princess Elizabeth, Her Majesty was the first person to gain her Junior Artificial Respiration Award in 1941 having previously gained Proficiency Awards in 1937 and 1938.



125 YEARS OF
COMMONWEALTH
DROWNING
PREVENTION

Today drowning is one of the largest causes of preventable death in the world accounting for at least 372,000 fatalities every year with over 90 per cent of these occurring in low and middle income countries, and over half of them young people under the age of 25. This statistic is from the World Health Organizations' 2014 Global Report on Drowning and is the first report to show the scale of the problem particularly in poorer countries where people are in daily contact with water for work, transport and agriculture. Prevention is essential, because when someone starts to drown, the outcome is often fatal. Embedding basic swimming and lifesaving education, skills and leadership can make a real difference to communities around the world. The Royal Life Saving Society will now focus and align its activities to the ten key actions to prevent drowning highlighted in the World Health Organization report and to the recently announced Sustainable Development Goals.

Part of our Anniversary Programme has been to develop projects and initiatives that all our Member Branches can use or be involved in. One of these initiatives was to develop a Survival Swimming Guide for use in every Commonwealth nation and we are delighted to formally launch this today. One of the 10 actions to prevent drowning highlighted in the World Health Organization report was the importance of teaching survival swimming to school aged children and there are many excellent examples of survival swimming programmes already being used around the world. The implementation of survival swimming is not meant to replace traditional swimming lessons, but rather to teach the basic fundamental skills necessary to survive an unexpected fall into water – an important first step to being safe around water. The focus is on survival and getting to safety. The guide we have developed is designed to help instructors to plan, teach and evaluate three main survival swimming skills. This way the programme can be developed locally to meet specific needs within a nation.



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Since 1891, the work of countless Society volunteers and staff, with the support and encouragement of our many public and private sector partners and our Royal and national Patrons and High Commissioners, has resulted in millions trained and untold numbers of drownings prevented; either directly through rescue or indirectly through the acquisition of swimming and lifesaving skills and the development and promotion of safe swimming practices. 125 years is a tremendous milestone and one which could not be achieved without the incredible service and leadership provided by these members, partners and stakeholders and it is wonderful to see some of those involved in drowning prevention today here tonight.

I would like to finish by thanking Lord Norrie and RLSS UK for hosting such a wonderful occasion to mark this important milestone for the Society and I would like to thank you all for attending and for your support in our future activities.



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