

## **HRH The Princess Margaret Countess of Snowden's Speech**

### **On the Occasion of the Opening of the Second Commonwealth Conference**

**18th July, 1966**

**St. James's Palace**

"I had hoped to be able to open your Conference five years ago and so, when your Grand President invited me to open this your Second Commonwealth Conference, I was particularly glad to be able to accept. As he has said, the Queen and I have both qualified for our proficiency awards of the Society. As you know, the Queen is your Patron and takes a very keen interest in your progress.

It is a happy coincidence that this Conference should take place during your 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and your discussions will, I am sure, have particular significance as you make your plans for the next 25 years leading up to your centenary.

What great pleasure this meeting would have given to your founder, William Henry, and his enthusiastic band of followers! He realised the fearful toll of life which would result unless urgent and energetic action was taken to tackle the problem of death by drowning.

In the years 1891 and 1892 this had caused the death of 2,000 people in the United Kingdom inland waters alone. Seventy-five years later, at least ten times as many people go in for a bathe. So if nothing had been done, the annual death rate would have risen to 20,000. Last year, despite the tremendous increase in all forms of activity in and on the water, the total figures for accidental death by drowning in the United Kingdom were under 700, only one-third of the 1891 figure.

In this room today are representatives of many countries of the Commonwealth which shared the pioneer work which William Henry did in this country and elsewhere which bore fruit in a very wonderful way. In 1964, the total number of proficiency awards issued by the Society passed the 5 million mark, and each year well over 300,000 are gained throughout the Commonwealth. These achievements are a great tribute to your voluntary workers everywhere and to the vision and foresight of your founder.

But there is, unfortunately, no room for complacency in any way, nor can there be until every child of school age is taught how to swim and how to act in an emergency and save a person from drowning by his own individual skill.

Seven hundred deaths by drowning is still too high a figure, and to reduce it significantly calls for tremendous effort by your society and by all those Societies who cooperate so splendidly in this task, as well as by parents, by teachers, by local authorities and, indeed, by us all.

Although your main work lies in the teaching of individual methods of rescue and resuscitation, we must not forget the team aspect of your work in the Life Guard Corps. I know that the ways in which the Society encourages and assists the work of the Life Guards differs according to conditions in the various

countries of the Commonwealth, but I think we all recognise that this work has its proper place in our scheme of things, giving as it does an opportunity for young people in particular to give their services to the community.

The mastering of life-saving techniques is a physical and mental challenge, in itself providing a splendid form of physical recreation for people of all ages, but particularly the young, combined with its humanitarian purpose.

Shortly before the last Conference you had carried out a major reorganisation of the Society under the leadership of your Grand President. You have had five years in which to settle down, and now it is time to see what closer co-operation can be achieved so that the Society may be one in deed as well as in name.

I am sure you will not overlook the problem of those countries in the Commonwealth where the use of water for recreation is still in its infancy. Here are wonderful opportunities to prevent loss of life by drowning from the very outset. Too often---and I think this applies to the United Kingdom---the shock of tragedy is required to rouse the public conscience. With the experience of 75 years, cannot we help others to avoid the same mistakes?

I hope, therefore, that you will bear these thoughts in mind, and I am sure that you will approach your work at this Conference with the will to achieve unity and to determine a course of energetic, purposeful action for the future throughout the Commonwealth.

So it gives me great pleasure to declare this Second Conference of the Royal Life Saving Society open.”