

CHAPTER 56 Seasons of success for Muir swimming: a detailed account of achievements in the 1930s

The following is from the text of the 1934 magazine report:

In reviewing the past swimming season, one hardly knows where to start, as so many successes have fallen to Muir boys. The events of the season have greatly enhanced the reputation of Muir as a swimming school, and it is evident that we have a champion in Peter Elliot, who has already annexed no fewer than two Junior and three Senior Eastern Province Championships.

PETER ELLIOT'S E. P. CHAMPIONSHIPS

1. 100 yds. Junior
2. 220 yds. Junior
3. 22 yds. Men's. 2 min., 45 secs. (E.P. record)
4. 440 yds. Men's. 6 min., 3/5 secs.
5. 880 yds. Men's.

He also won the annual 250 yards, Redhouse river championship, in which he tied with Hammond. He is quoted in the "Weekly Telegraph" as being "the Muir College wonder." This youthful swimmer ended the season by breaking the 440 yards men's E. P. record by 2-3/5 seconds.

THE CLIFT CUP

At the annual Scout Gala held in Port Elizabeth, the "A" Swimming team won the Clift Cup, after a most exciting tussle with the Grey High School. Peter Elliot swimming first against Probert, gave his team a lead of two or three yards. P. Sellick maintained this lead, while Bacon hung grimly on to the advantage. Gillmer swimming last, made the most of the lead and finished three yards ahead of de Lange, in 2 minutes, 6 seconds. The Muir College "B" team (B. McClelland, F. McLachlan, G. Mandy and N. Cherrington), were placed third.

A TRIPLE VICTORY

In February nearly a hundred boys witnessed a triple victory over the Grey in Port Elizabeth. The first race, which concerned Muir, was the Junior teams race in which the respective Clift Cup teams participated. The Muir team (P. Elliot, R. Bacon, P. Sellick and G. Gillmer), won comfortably. The Senior team (L. Gilbert, P. Elliot, I. Currie and G. Cherrington), were also victorious over the Grey first team while the Old Muirite team (C. Sellick, D. McDowell, F. Wheeler and J. Fulton), defeated the Old Grey quartet in an exciting race, thus showing "how swimming is brought to the fore at Muir", writes "Aquarius". A return contest was fixed for the annual Muir Gala, in which again the Muir teams were victorious.

Muir has produced swimmers competing from 100 yards to a mile. Desmond McDowell won the Redhouse river mile in fine style, touching the boom 15 yards ahead of the second swimmer. G. Mandy and N. Smith also put up a creditable performance in the mile. G. Gillmer, another promising swimmer, finished third in the Junior E. P. 100 yards Championship, while G. Cherrington

was chosen to swim for Uitenhage in the team which won the 440 yards E. P. teams race championship.

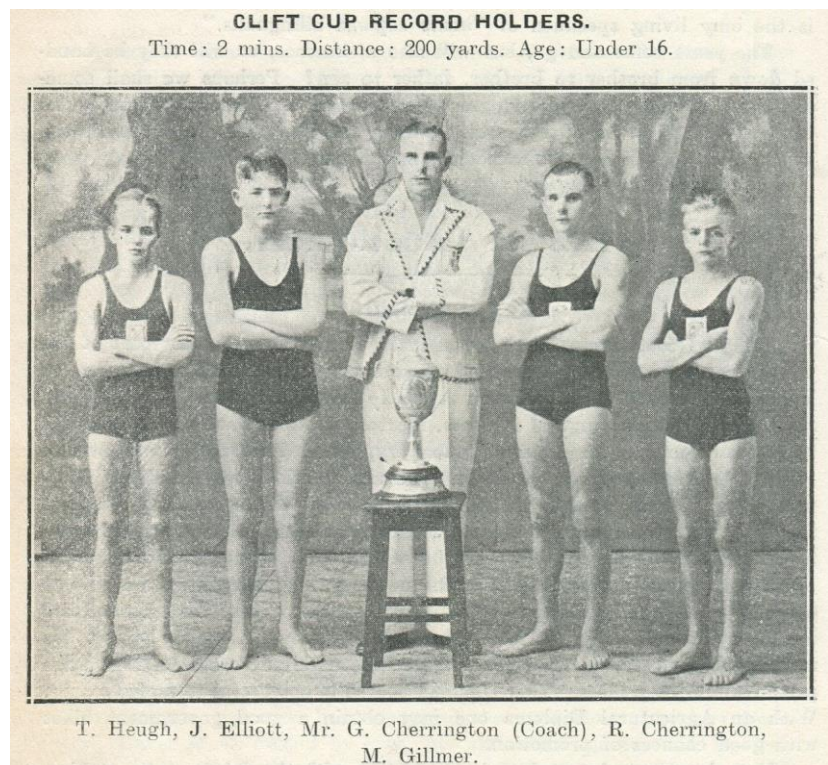
The school may well be proud of its swimmers. There is great promise among the juniors, and we predict many more successful swimming seasons.

More glory was bound to follow: **1935** saw the breaking of the Clift Cup record first set up by St Andrew's College in 1925, while several Muir swimmers represented Eastern Province. Peter Elliot obtained 3rd place in the South African Championship senior events, while holding the Eastern Province championship titles in the 880 and 440 yards. Meanwhile, Geoff Mandy excelled provincially and nationally in diving, his most favoured branch of aquatic excellence.



ACQUABOKS PETER ELLIOT (left) and GEOFF MANDY (right) attended their school reunion in 1993

The **1937-38** season was dominated by the performances of Dick Cherrington in particular, along with Malcolm and Ralph Gillmer, Tony Heugh and Jack Elliott. Not only was the Clift Cup won for the fifth successive year, but the record established by the Muir quartet of 1935 was broken in a new mark of 2 minutes flat. It was expected that this record would stand for a considerable time – it was quite something, after all, for U/16 boys to average 30 seconds over a distance of 50 yards. The ‘considerable



time’ turned out to be just one year, however, as the **'38-39** season saw the mark of 2 minutes being lowered even further; ‘comprehensively smashed’ would be a true reflection.

The new time was 1 minute 55.25 secs. The team comprised M Gillmer, T Heugh, J Elliott and M Channer. Would this new record survive the following season? Time would tell. Muir swimmers were also victorious in the TC White Cup, a senior inter-schools team race.

1939 produced yet another Clift Cup record by a team now coached by Old Muirite Graham Cherrington, with new records being set in both the Clift Cup and the T.C. White Cup in **1940** and victory in the former for the next three years thereafter. It is worth reflecting on the fact that Muir swimmers led the way in setting high standards of swimming in the Eastern Province despite not having up-to-date facilities on campus, having to make do, year after year, with the Roberts Street bath situated far from the school. On the other hand, this would not necessarily be an unusual situation for schools generally. Muir College galas were always memorable events for their often close finishes and high standard of swimming. This was to be expected when the school's top swimmers produced such high levels of achievement.

'At our own gala, two new records were created, and in the course of the season we won nearly every Eastern province record in both men's and boys' events. Two of our swimmers, R. Cherrington and M. Gillmer, were chosen to represent the Eastern Province in the senior and junior events respectively', said the annual report. It was further noted that at the Eastern Province Championships for the **1939-1940** season, Dick Cherrington won the Men's 100, 220, and 500 yards freestyle, and the 150 yards backstroke. In the Boys' section Malcolm Gillmer, Tony Heugh and Mel Channer did well. Muir 'A' won the Clift Cup yet again, in a new record time for the third year in a row. Apart from the above, Dick Cherrington won the 250 yards River Championship in 2 mins. 29 seconds. He also came 2nd in the Red House River Mile, with Tony Heugh coming 5th, and as the Eastern Province representative, won the 200 and 100 yards in a match against Border.

At the South African Championships Malcolm Gillmer was placed second in the 100 yards junior event. Two Old Muirites also featured prominently on this occasion, namely Peter Elliot in the long distance swimming events and Geoff Mandy in the diving. The latter narrowly missed being crowned the diving champion of South Africa by a few points. 'Peter Elliot holds three Transvaal records, viz. 500 yards, 880 yards and 1,000 metres...At the S.A. Championships he won the 500 yards in 6 min. 4 2-5 secs., and the 880 yards in 11 mins. 2 4-5 secs', it was reported.

At the Inter-Schools Gala, at which over 26 schools were represented, Muir won both the Primary Schools' Teams' Race – the Kayser Cup – and the Senior teams' Race, the TC White Cup, 'creating a new record of 1 min. 52. 2-5 seconds. We were represented in the senior team by R. Cherrington, M. Gillmer, W. Evans and T. Heugh and in the Primary School team by D. McLellan, N. McLellan, E. Nicholson and N. Pullen.' The overall points scored were Muir 52 points, Junior Grey 25 points, Senior Grey 20 points.