

# Thomas Dugmore (1877-1941)

**The first Engineer appointed to Stirchley Swimming Baths.** (Also known as Bournville Lane Baths)

Thomas was born in Salford, Manchester, and his father was a Master Clogger who competed and taught swimming at Tyldesley Amateur Swimming Club where he gave exhibitions of ornamental and scientific swimming, what we call today synchronised swimming.

His daughter and son, Thomas, followed in his footsteps, with daughter Elizabeth turning professional and exhibiting all over the Northwest.

Thomas teamed up with another young boy who was seven years old named Addin Tyldesley, who eventually went on to represent England in the 1908 Olympic Games. Their performances were extremely popular and they represented their club at many Gala performances.

Thomas was only thirteen when his father died in 1890. We do not know when his mother passed away. He moved to Ladywood, Birmingham to live with his Uncle and at the age of fourteen was apprenticed to a machine maker and fitter.

Thomas married Sarah Ellen in 1903 at St. Barnabas Church, where they were members of the choir and continued to live in Ladywood at 78 Grosvenor Street.

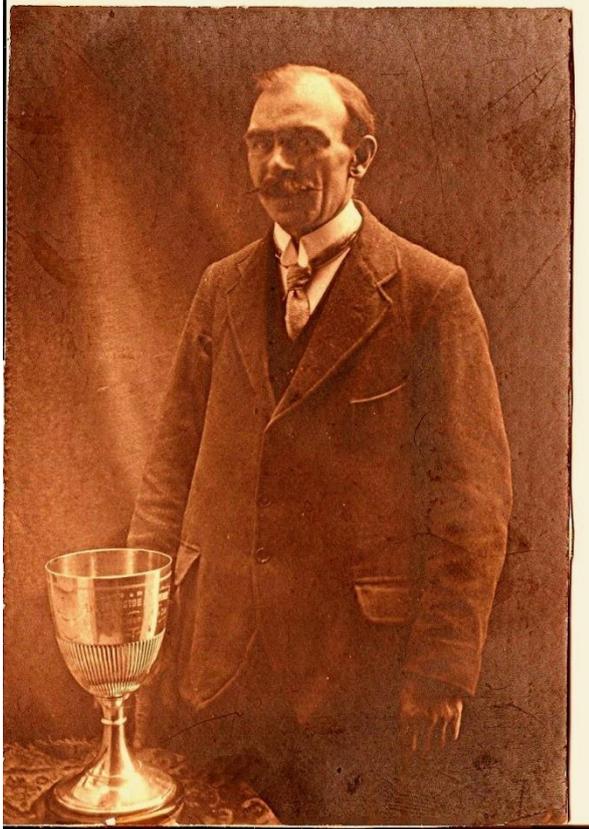


**THOMAS DUGMORE**



**SARAH ELLEN DUGMORE**

Thomas must have kept close contact with his early roots in Salford because he won The Islington Grosvenor All Round Championship in 1904. There was an Islington Baths in Manchester and we can only assume that the championship was between many different organisations. He won the championship again in 1905 and 1906 and was allowed to keep the 12" high silver trophy.



Whilst we have no record as to what the All Round Championship involved, family word of mouth suggests that it included normal run of the mill strokes, racing, diving and synchronised swimming. From Gala programmes of the time unusual activities included undressing in the water, smoking and drinking under water and Thomas would sing in a bucket under water. Racing fully clothed was featured, as was water polo and hurdling. Races were considerably longer than those of today and the prizes were usually items donated by local businesses.

A hat, watch, clock, bat and ball, belt and cap, fruit and books were typical. There were monetary prizes but they were in the order of £1 or 15s (75p in today's money) for a first place.

This trophy, and the prestige it represented, would have been a true prize for all the effort and hard work that went in to winning it, particularly three times in succession.

Still living in Ladywood, Thomas was appointed Engineer for Stirchley Baths in 1910 at a salary of 32s a week (£1.60 in today's money). Not only was he responsible for the operation of the plant he had to open and lock up each day, and was generally in charge. Generally swimming baths from this era sourced water from bore holes but Stirchley took its water directly from a Corporation main which was a relatively new technology.

He eventually moved to 28, Bond Street, Stirchley just around the corner from his new job. It must have been quite a long haul from Ladywood in the early days. Apart from the engineering aspect his job dictated that he had to be a good swimmer.

Thomas and Sarah Ellen, who already had a daughter Jessie, had twins in 1914, only one of whom survived, a son called Howard Thomas, who was also destined to become an engineer like his father.

Thomas volunteered for military service in 1915 but was turned down on medical grounds. His military career lasted sixty two days and the documentation indicated his profession as a fitter and turner. He is recorded as being 5ft-3 inches tall (1.6m), with blue eyes and a weight of 123lbs. (55.80 kg). He had a mark between the shoulder blades and his chest expansion was given.

Thomas and Ellen eventually moved to Small Heath where Thomas started teaching swimming, calling himself "Professor", just as his father had done all those years previously, and he used the Championship trophy to promote his business. They finally moved to Castle Bromwich where Thomas started an Engineering business. Sarah Ellen survived Thomas by some years and passed away in 1970.

**Duncan Dugmore** - Grandson. September 2015

### **Extracts from early Swimming Gala Programmes**

3<sup>RD</sup> Nov1886

9<sup>th</sup> Event DUCK HUNT (with live ducks)

26<sup>th</sup> Sept 1877

Swimming two lengths of bath under water.

Great Race, four lengths with complete set of clothes on.

23<sup>rd</sup> Sept1896

All Swimmers to appear in A.S.A. Costumes, and Bathing Drawers to be worn **under** the Costumes

27<sup>th</sup> Aug 1896

Two Lengths Lighted Candle Race Handicap (Each competitor to compete in Night-cap and Shirt, with Drawers and Costume)