

Swimming  
a long way  
together



**Swimming a long way  
together  
Sunday 24 April, 5 – 9.30pm**

**An event in Donaghadee by artist Vanessa Daws to commemorate Mercedes Gleitze's perseverance, the history of the town as the centre of North Channel swimming, and the experiences of swimmers today.**

**Marking pioneer swimmer Mercedes Gleitze's eight attempts to cross the North Channel, the event will take place at eight locations around the town connected to her story and Donaghadee's swimming history.**

**Locations and timings:**

**1. The Commons/ Robbie's Point,**  
from 5pm  
Installation

**2. Green by Donaghadee  
Community Centre, 5.30pm**  
Performance, Donaghadee Ladies  
Choir

**3. Pier 36, from 5pm**  
Installation

**4. Kelly's Steps, 6pm**  
Performance

**5. Grass area outside Donaghadee  
Sailing Club, 6.30pm**  
Traditional Music Performance

**6. Community Centre, 7.15pm**  
Talks: 'Mercedes' Nemesis:  
Attempting to Swim the North  
Channel'

**7. Harbour, 8.15pm**  
Performance

**8. Lighthouse, from 9pm**

**Mercedes Gleitze** undertook many challenging and pioneering swims in the 1920s and '30s, across Ireland, Britain and beyond. She was the first British woman to swim the English Channel, the first person to swim the Strait of Gibraltar, and she also completed record-breaking endurance swims of up to 47 hours in public swimming pools. From humble origins Mercedes became celebrated for her swimming achievements, huge audiences would come to cheer her on or to greet her whenever she emerged from the water. Music played a central role, as an accompaniment and support, often helping to create a festive atmosphere on the pool deck and raise her spirits as she swam vast stretches of open water.

Donaghadee is a very important part of Mercedes Gleitze's story. Between 1928-1929, Mercedes attempted to swim across the North Channel eight times, aided by many people from the local area: as boat pilots, navigators, hosts and supporters cheering her on. Mercedes was the first person to ever attempt this swim. Local swimmer Martin Strain has described the North Channel as "Mercedes' Nemesis" – today the North Channel is still known as the most difficult channel to swim, due to the freezing temperatures and lion's mane jellyfish. Although Mercedes never completed the swim, her many attempts are a testament to her perseverance and tenacity.

**Vanessa Daws** is a visual artist and long distance swimmer. Her art practice explores place through swimming. Swimming as part of the research, process and live event. 'Place' being the watery space that is navigated and swam through and the social space created by this shared activity. Vanessa uses film, sound, drawing, publications, sculpture and live events to create her work.

## Event Contributors and Performers

### Speakers

**Anna Maria Mullally** is a Lecturer in Media Studies in the Department of Humanities at the Technological University of Dublin. She is currently researching a PhD in the area of women's swimming and bathing practices in early 20th century Ireland as they were reflective of questions of gendered citizenship and of sporting and leisure participation. Anna Maria is also a swimmer and has completed, as part of a relay team, two successful English Channel crossings.

**Jane Wright** joined the Donaghadee Historical Society at its inaugural meeting twenty-one years ago which was when she first came to the town. She later took her turn in the Chair and is now the Society's President. She became interested in Mercedes Gleitze when she heard fellow members talking about her.

### Musicians

Donaghadee Ladies Choir, Deborah Dickey, Susan Hughes, Marie-Therese Davis-Hanson, Ruth Clinton, Méabh Meir, Cormac mac Diarmada

### "Mercedes" Swimmers

Dina Parkers, Catherine Vincent, Lynsey Crawford, Therese Molyneux, Kathleen Monteverde, Grace McLaughlin, Nicky Such, Nuala Glynn.

### Event Team

Rosie Hermon, Barry Lynch, Brian Cregan, Paul Moore, Catriona McGowan, Rowena Neville

Many thanks to Patricia Hamilton, Emily Crawford and the rest of the team at Ards and North Down...

The project is also incredibly thankful to Doloranda Pember, Mercedes Gleitze's daughter, for her ongoing support and advice.

Swimming a Long Way Together in Donaghadee is a partnership with Ards and North Down Borough Council. The event is supported by Pier 36, Ultimate SUP, Safer Waters and Donaghadee Chunky Dunkers.

Please share your photos of the day with the hashtag #SwimmingALongWayTogether

[swimmingalongwaytogether.com](http://swimmingalongwaytogether.com)



