

IS YOUR GUESSTIMATE BETTER THAN MINE?

With respect to building the UK Swimming Pool Park as reported in various publications written by John Dawes, FISPE.

In the financial world of equity investment, we are constantly reminded that 'past performance is no guarantee of future returns'.

When I joined the *pool world* in the late 1960s, there was no 'past performance' published for the UK, which meant my leap from a booming motor car industry into an unknown – for me – swimming pool trade, offered 'no guarantee of future returns' for my investment in time and effort. And, I regret to say, forty years later, the state of that *swimming pool park* is still only an informed guesstimate, unlike the detailed *motor car park* data-bank gathered in the motor industry by the SMMT (Society of Motor Traders).

Perhaps in the 1960s, the numbers game didn't count for much to the 'Big Four' (Gilliam, Rutherford, SwimQuip & Unit Swimming Pools) of the ASPC (Association of Swimming Pool Contractors), for they knew exactly how many pools they had built in the decade since sales had first lifted off, and were quietly preparing to build at least as many again residentially for the boom decade ahead.

The Big Four dominant players in the market place had got together to form ASPC at the time when the building of big baths meant big business, confirmed by core publications quoted in the inaugural pool industry standards of the day. This referred to key bodies such as ASA (Amateur Swimming Association), BSI (British Standards Institute), IBM (Institute of Baths Managers), MH&LG (Ministry of Housing and Local Government), etc. along with passing mention on the *public pools park* having yet 'to reach the first thousand'.

In revising industry standards for SPATA (Swimming Pool & Allied Trades Association) I must admit to winning some insider figures through my work with Rutherford of the Big Four, and further details through my contacts with the TUS (Technical Unit for Sport) of the newly formed Sports Councils. When compiling their first indoor pool design bulletin, I could lay claim with some conviction that there were then 'nearly

40,000 varied swimming pools in Britain', as quoted later in *The Swimming Pool & the Garden* written for John Bartholomew & Sons, 1974.

This figure was soon revised to 50,000 in a 1975 UK/USA comparison table (see Table A) prepared for *Design & Planning of Swimming Pools* published by The Architectural Press, 1979: this book also included a 'possible pool park' forecast of 80,000 pools for 1980, of which, it was claimed, between 80 and 90 per cent represented the private pool market share.

A wind of change developed in 1981, when the *SAVE-IT in Sport* research & publication programme was launched with The Sports Council. We published first a *Select Bibliography* of 290 'sources of information for improved cost effectiveness in swimming pools and sports halls', followed over the next few years by 21 *Energy Data Sheets*. These described specific energy saving technologies for all kinds of swimming pools and sports centres, public to private, indoor to outdoor.

During this time, a series of innovative *Energy Electric Case Studies* were also researched and written for The Electricity Council's ongoing annual energy awards. Their *Think Electric* campaign did its job rather better than the DoE's (Department of Energy) *Monergy Year*, but neither of them exist today.

Nevertheless, in consequence of *SAVE-IT*, the focus of the next book, *Take the Plunge: handbook & product directory to leisure pools & spas*, written and published for ETB's (English Tourist Board) 7000 registered hoteliers in 1983, was 'energy saving and effective conservation' set alongside the means to improve 'occupancy efficiency ratings'.

This very business-like basis for pool cost effectiveness and energy efficiency was re-emphasised in the 1986 *ISPE Handbook* reprint of *Design & Planning of Swimming Pools*, though the total pool park was not revised at the time.

The *SAVE-IT* series lead onto *Energy*

Efficiency Technologies for Swimming Pools published by ETSU (Energy Technology Support Unit) in co-operation with The Sports Council in 1985. Then it was estimated 'there are at least 110,000 swimming pools in all, although the 10,000 public and semi-public pools account for three-quarters of all (swimming facility) activities', yet 'private pools account for over half the total energy consumption.' (See Table B.)

In the subsequent publications taken over by BRECSU (Building Research Establishment Conservation Unit), an *Energy Efficiency in Buildings* argument was further developed for *Sports Centres* (1989). A quotation lifted from Sports Council EDS17 (Energy Data Sheet 17 Enclosures) stated that sports centres 'spend over £500 million on energy each year, over three times that consumed by pools'.

In the absence of official statistics, *SPidas (Swimming Pool industry directory and specifier)* provided further numbers and sources for an altogether different range of pool trade references: *Swimming Pool Directory 1986/87* made a detailed study of pool park numbers, as well as product development and distribution. Analysis was based upon a short survey sent to '1335 pool companies and organisations throughout Britain and Ireland ... when ... 34% responded to the request for survey information.'

The grand total of pools was estimated at 115,000 for 1985 (105,000 were private). The current annual growth in the world total pool park (then standing at 12 million) was thought to be around 2.5%: in Europe, the market was growing at between 4% to 5% per annum.

The 1999 edition of the *Swimming Pool Directory* included a new market survey published separately as *Volume III Trade Trends Report*. This 50pp assessment summarised the earlier 1986 overview; reprised the 1988 review when the 'grand total pool park for the UK was adjusted to 140,000'; and included a brief 1992 comment that the commercial pool sector, as opposed to public and private pools, was considered to 'represent the major growth area with doubling of numbers in 10 years'. This survey raised the grand pool park figure to 155,000. (See Table C.)

The *Trade Trends Report* concluded

with a 'swimming pool analogy' to illustrate that the 'modern swimming pool represents a microcosm of the world's environmental condition' in its operational balance. Therefore, by relating cause and effect, energy and pollution, new technology and economic growth, the fast expanding activities and solutions of conservation and regeneration – a fundamental part of everyday pool business – 'the trend' can be similarly applied to the wider world.

Environmental control and energy efficiency have become core disciplines in all new pool builds and in the world at large, whether we like it or not. For example, how would you now consider the question 'Should all pool tanks be insulated?'

Swimming Pool Directory 2002 recorded a reduction in pool organisation numbers, down from 1500 to a total of 1200 trading locations throughout the UK.

Note: information developed for all of these reports has been given freely over the years to many investigative swimming

pool market researchers on request. (Management consultants; Alfred Austen, Mintel, etc. Media researchers; BBC, Channel 4, ITV, newspapers, etc. National and international bodies, traders, individuals, etc.)

If guesstimates were to be made today to assess the UK Pool Park for 2005, the grand total could well reach 200,000. (See Table D.) But, to realise working forecasts for new pool business and to maintain the value of pool trade businesses, a serious co-ordinated statistical effort in an industry-wide census is really needed.

Another way to assess the vitality of the pool industry is to examine the literature produced by organisations associated with the swimming pool world. A series of summaries on such organisations has been published in recent *ISPE Magazines* – see *Information Sources*.

(Tables on next page.)

Table A - Pool Parks

Pool Parks	USA	UK
Camp	40,000	1000
Club	50,000	1000
Hotel	190,000	3500
Municipal	45,000	1500
School	30,000	8000
Residential	1,100,000	3500
TOTALS 1975	1,455,000	50,000

Table B - UK swimming pools – estimates (1984)

	Pool Numbers 1984	Pool Area m² (million)	Energy Use GJ/m²/year (million)	Energy Bill £/year (million)
Public	10,500	1.5	18	70
Private	100,000	5.0	20	80

Table C - Market Survey (1998) – Trade Trends Report (1999)

Companies trading on a regular basis	1554
Split between designers/engineers/manufacturers	5/15/20%
Split between distributors/ builders/retailers	20/25/15%
Pool traders working in the residential pool sector	80%
Total number of pools in UK Pool Park 1998	155,000
Split between public/commercial/residential pools	2/8/90%
New installations for the year	2750
Pool industry business growth for the year	3.5%

Table D - UK Pool Park (guesstimate for 2005)

Public	4,000
Commercial	16,000
Residential	180,000* (* 90,000 concrete, 60,000 liner, 30,000 other)
TOTAL	200,000

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