Monday 24th May



Third reading - question the author

LO: To check my understanding as I read a blog

What have you learnt from this inspirational story?

You could:

- draw a mind map about Mercedes
- write a set of questions which you'd love to ask Mercedes
- write about a person who inspires you.

	Glossary
notorious	famous or well known, typically for some bad quality or deed.
currents	a body of water or air moving in a definite direction, especially through a surrounding body of water or air in which there is less movement.
plummeting	fall or drop straight down at high speed.
consumption	the action of using up a resource.
feat	an achievement that requires great courage, skill, or strength.
turbulent	causing or being in a state of unrest, violence
legacy	something (as memories or knowledge) that comes from the past or a person of the past
prowess	great bravery especially in battle.

Here are some newsreels about Mercedes Gleitz:



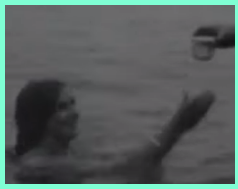
Mercedes Gleitze swims the Straits of Gibraltar (1928)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-1H_5ey_uI



Mercedes Gleitze attempts to swim English Channel (1930)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZtDupNY1-Q



Read the text out loud with your partner.

Remember:

Use your reading ruler

Look at your partner when they are reading

Sit still

Help your partner if they are stuck on a word

Read to your partner in a voice that only they can hear

Write down any words you don't know the meaning of onto your whiteboard

Once you have finished reading aloud, read silently.

Champion swimmer and record breaker Mercedes Gleitze

posted in: 100 Pioneering Women of Sussex, Blog | 4

On 6 April 1928, a pioneering female swimmer became the first person to swim the 8 mile Straits of Gibraltar. Find out more in this edition of our 100 Pioneering Women of Sussex blog series.

A few months before this record-breaking achievement, at 2.55 a.m on a foggy morning just over 92 years ago, this Brighton woman, clad only in a swimsuit, dipped her toes into the sea at Cap Gris-Nes, Calais. Her name was Mercedes Gleitze (1900-1981). A typist by day, Mercedes was of German origin but had been born in 1900 in Freshfield Road. On this cold day, during which the sea temperature never rose above fifteen degrees, she was making her eighth attempt to become the first British woman to swim the Channel. The going was tough. The fog was so dense that her pilot boat (a Folkestone fishing boat) had to lead the way, sounding its horn to warn her and her accompanying rowing boat, of passing ships. Fifteen hours, fifteen minutes later when Mercedes staggered, triumphant, on to a beach in Dover, her place in sporting history was secure.

But it wasn't the last time this keen open-water swimmer, who fitted swimming practice in the Thames around her day-job, was to have the words 'first' or 'fastest' attached to her name. In 1928, just 6 months after her Channel conquest, Mercedes travelled to southern Spain with the aim of becoming the first person ever to swim the notorious Strait of Gibraltar from Tarifa to Morocco. From the tourist beaches on the Costa del Sol, just a stone's throw away from where Mercedes began her historic swim, this stretch of sea is the stuff of holiday brochures. According to the Gibraltar Strait Swimming Association's website, however, '*unpredictable and changing currents, plummeting water temperatures,*

sudden sea fog, vomiting and passing out from excessive consumption of sea water, exhaust fumes from boats, oil spills, pollution,' are just some of its hazards. Despite the catalogue of horrors, Mercedes succeeded, on her sixth attempt, reaching the Moroccan coast in just under thirteen hours. Today the few swimmers who attempt this feat manage it in around four hours but, unlike Mercedes, have the advantage of hi-tec wetsuits and sports nutrition. At a time when female sports celebrities were rare, Mercedes' career took her all over the world, competing in over 50 endurance tests and swimming some of the world's most iconic stretches of water, such as Wellington Harbour in New Zealand, Capetown to Robben Island in South Africa, as well as making eight traumatic attempts to conquer the cold, turbulent waters of the North Channel between Ireland and Scotland. She drew crowds wherever she went and became a newsreel star.

Closer to home, she set up 27 endurance swims in corporation pools and gradually increased the British endurance swimming record from 27 hours in Edinburgh's Infirmary Road Baths in 1930 to a staggering 47 hours in 1933 at Worthing Baths, with spectators shouting

In Mercedes' time, most people still believed that a woman's place was in the home and that excessive physical exercise could be injurious to a woman's health. Mercedes was a true pioneer, sticking to her guns and showing a steely single-mindedness. Rejecting one fiance because, as she told a newspaper, '*What is the use of letting a man make a home for me when in my thoughts the sea spells 'Home Sweet Home' to me?*' When she did eventually marry, the newsreel footage shows her moving the reporter's congratulations swiftly on to excitedly tell him she's just about to set off for Turkey to swim the Hellespont.



Robbie's Point, Donaghadee, 23 June 1928:

Breaking these amazing swimming records wasn't Mercedes' only legacy, however. Known for her generosity - she once shared the prize money at an Australian endurance contest she'd won with a hard-up runner-up - she used her prize money to set up a homeless refuge in Leicester during the Great Depression, and the charity that bears her name, The Mercedes

Gleitze Relief in Need Charity continues today.

A new book published by the History Press last year, In the Wake of Mercedes Gleitze, by her daughter, Doloranda Pember, describes her early life, her association with Brighton, and her 10-year swimming career. It covers over 50 pioneering swims (with complementary details on her website www.mercedesgleitze.uk). All royalties from the sale of this biography will go into Mercedes' Trust Fund, which is being administrated by Family Action.

'Sea swimming is a beautiful thing, in fact an art – an art whose mistress should be not the few, but the many, for does not the sea and its dangers cross the paths of thousands? Nay, millions! What could possibly speak more for man's prowess as an athlete than the ability to master earth's most abundant, most powerful element – water, no matter what its mood.' *Mercedes Gleitze: 1931 Diary of New Zealand Tour*

Today, women are still breaking swimming records. The exhibition, 100 First Women Portraits, by Anita Corbin, features the incredible Beth French. Beth was not only the first woman, but the first person, to swim from Cornwall to the Isles of Scilly, a rough stretch of water with strong currents, in 17 hours and 28 minute on 22 July 2014.