

Chairman's Report for 2020-21

1. This is technically a report covering the year from April 2020 to end of March 2021: a year when swimming pools were open for about one-third of the time; Meadowlands for even less than that; and, even when there was swimming, we had paperwork, and bubbles, and social distancing, and not enough time and no galas and different rules for over 18s and any number of other challenges.
2. However, we survived.
 - (1) That is principally thanks to you, the club members. Instead of cancelling your membership and putting then money into Netflix, you stayed with us, generously continued to pay your membership fees even when there was no swimming and put up with all the inconveniences and annoyances when there was.
 - (2) Secondly it is thanks to the coaches. James devised a land-based programme; and got to grips with both technology – delivering the zoom sessions – and the weather – on Whitchurch Down. Meanwhile, when pools reopened, Amy and Izzy's help meant we could run two sessions at once at Mount Kelly and thus make the best possible use of our limited pool time.
 - (3) Thirdly, the pools. I think in this respect we have been luckier than we realise. Meadowlands did reopen – for which thanks to the council and everyone who got involved with that – and when it wasn't open, we had Mt Kelly on our doorstep, while other clubs were travelling all the way from Penzance for it. We have also been treated very fairly by both pools and, unlike some clubs, have not been afflicted by eye watering price increases.
 - (4) Last but not least, thanks to our Covid-19 officer, Claire Palmer, who made sure we obeyed the rules, kept the bubbles apart and deserves the credit for us not having had to cancel a single session due to an outbreak amongst the swimmers.
3. Financially, we achieved the extraordinary result of breaking almost exactly even over the year. That is thanks to people continuing to pay membership contributions during lockdowns and it is for that reason we haven't had to put up prices since swimming restarted. Membership numbers have dropped, however, from about 100 in March 2020 to around 80 in April 2021, coming back up to about 85 now. This is principally the crystallisation of 2yrs's leavers but, until recently, very few joiners to balance them out.

Developments since April 2021

4. The main development has been the return of proper competitions: first, with the Festival of Swimming and then with ordinary galas. It has been lovely to see our younger swimmers discovering the fun of competition for the first time and we've also had some excellent results further up the club. Elsie Maguire has been selected for the Swim England talent pathway and so far 17 members have achieved Devon consideration times.

5. On the coaching side:
 - (1) We've bought the headsets which we've been coveting for a while. These mean more and better timed feedback for the swimmers and less strain on the coaches.
 - (2) James, who had been suffering so badly with his back that I'd had to lend him first my crutches and then my wheelchair, has had surgery and is building back to fitness.
 - (3) We've got a new experienced assistant coach, Gareth Davis, volunteering for us.
 - (4) Two of our 16 year olds have achieved or are waiting for the results of coaching and/ or teaching qualifications: Claire Small as a swimming teacher and assistant coach and Sam Palmer as an assistant coach. The club has long tradition of encouraging members to develop their skills into teaching and coaching, and can provide support both financially and in mentoring. Meanwhile, I did the assistant coaching course along with them, and learnt chiefly that I'd prefer to stick to sending emails.

6. Also on the qualifications front, congratulations to Pete France, who is now a J2(S), which means he's allowed to start races and to take charge of our club championship; and to Claire Palmer and Sarah Rice, who are now J2s, which mean they are qualified as stroke judges as well as turns judges. We need both a J2 and a J2(S) to run our club championships, so these qualifications really matter. From there to qualifications which we hope will never be used: following the sad incident in December last year at Mount Kelly, when some club members were involved in a pool rescue, four of us who did not have an up to date CPR qualification did a basic life-saving and first aid course.

Looking ahead

7. That's the review of the past 21 months. Looking ahead, there are three things, in particular, I am concerned about.
 - (1) We'd like more pool time – we hope we'll get this as the need to leave a gap for cleaning between sessions reduces. Meanwhile, if your child would like to swim more, there is plenty of space in the morning sessions. These are very worthwhile: for reasons James understands but I don't, morning swimmers improve much more rapidly than those who only do evenings.
 - (2) We'd like more members. Please, please, tell your friends how great the club is.
 - (3) Thirdly – and this is the most directly within your control – we desperately need more volunteers. We need volunteers to help with running the club, and we need volunteers to help at galas. Every gala, whether run by us or not, needs from us officials (to help with the judging) and team managers (to look after the children). If we can't provide enough, our swimmers won't be allowed to swim. The jobs aren't particularly difficult; the club arranges and pays for all the training; they can save you money because helpers get in free even if spectators are charged for admission; and you get to watch from poolside instead of from far away up in the stands. If your child competes, you really should be getting trained unless you have a compelling excuse. Alternatively, if that doesn't appeal, help with running the club would be invaluable. It has taken over my life more than I would like; if you can help, there is a role for you.

Caroline Furze 30/11/21