**Secretary Report 2021**

As an interim secretary following Lynn’s many years of service to this role I feel my secretarial skills have never been truly tested as sadly COVID continues to impact on the swimming world as it does in day to day life. Hence, there has been little engagement or updates from the local and regional teams.

The Club has worked hard throughout the year to comply with guidance and maintain swimmers, coaches and parents safety. The early morning and evening COVID registers continued until August with us eventually finding a sense of normality and seeing the return of Don’s meet and greet table firmly back in its place indoors. I would like to thank Don for his commitment to the Club though what has been one of the most prolonged and challenging disruptions in swimming. His relationship with Tees Active afforded us opportunity for early discussions and subsequent flexibility in swim times which has been invaluable and put us back on the right path to recovery.

The Club was at the forefront of returning to holding swimming gala’s with our annual Autumn meet in September and a ground breaking long distance meet in November with swimmers travelling from Scotland and Wales to attend. Thanks to Mark who as always pushes our Club to be ahead of the curve… I can only imagine the debate at the annual N&D competition planning meeting with other clubs wanting to follow suit. The buzz on poolside amongst the army of new volunteers and visiting clubs was positive and welcoming, building on the family friendly feel we work so hard to promote. It was great to see this in action in December with the annual Club Championship. The younger swimmers loved the events as much as the more competitive more experienced swimmers with a rolling queue at the medal table! Although I have to say I am sure there was a fair bit of cheating and moving goal posts in the relay!

In regard to memberships we have noted a slow reduction in numbers in the previous 3 years from 121 to 99 swimmers, mostly in the category 2 (competitive) swimmers. It will be interesting to see how our numbers compare this year with a number of new swimmers starting over recent months. It is estimated that the north east region has lost 20% of its swimmers as a result of COVID. Due to lockdowns and limited club activity there appears to be a gap emerging in 9 – 11 year old ‘gala ready’ swimmers with many clubs commenting being in a similar position. From recent Tees Valley meeting this is becoming problematic with many clubs struggling to have sufficient proficient swimmers to enter a ‘Diddy League’ team.

Behind the scenes the creation of a Club WhatsApp has been beneficial for all. Thanks to Lynn for supporting this and coordinating membership. Despite initial reservations as to the etiquette on this chat it has in the main remained informative and another route for getting messages out promptly to parents.

I would like to thank all the coaching staff led by Guy for their hard work, commitment and dedication week in and week out. We have a fantastic group of coaches, teachers and helpers who give their time to help the swimmers go from the activity pool to the top lane. There has been some changes over the year with Jordan Mogford stepping back from coaching and Eve Cook qualifying as a teacher. The addition of Eve and Josie Blackmore as a helper helps keep the average poolside age down which can only be a positive!

No update would be complete without thanking the committee for their continued commitment to supporting our Club. Being married to the Chairman, Interim Treasurer and Gala coordinator (yes it is all one man) I can confirm the hours committed to the Club cannot be underestimated. In fact we have had many a debate about where we are storing the speakers, backstroke starts, printers and laptops… Don continues to be the smiley friendly face we all know and love who has an uncanny knack in getting money from almost everyone who passes him by. Leanne creatively considered alternate fundraising events within the confines of COVID restrictions and has been in the top 2 easy fundraising members throughout the year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Leanne for all her hard work and commitment to the Club over the years as she steps down from the Committee this year. We have been lucky to have Dawn as our welfare officer as she comes with the experience and necessary skills required to support the Club; both swimmers and parents. Lynn has worked hard this year to ensure the Club gained its Swim 21 accreditation so a particular thanks to her for taking the lead for this. A big thanks too for both the coordination of memberships throughout the year but also in readiness for the busy period after Christmas collating the membership fees.

To the remaining members of the Committee and those coaches, teachers who have not been mentioned by name the Club would not succeed without your enthusiasm and loyalty. This comes in the form of not only daily, weekly, monthly commitments throughout the year but also in the passion that you display to parents and swimmers alike.

The value of volunteering has never been as high profile as it has been through the COVID pandemic. We are in a fortunate position to have regular volunteers although in the words of Sherry Anderson ”volunteers don’t get paid, not because they’re worthless, but because they’re priceless” so please actively encourage others to get involved.

Rachel Blackmore

Interim Secretary