



## Morpeth ASC

### Chair's Report 2021

Morpeth Amateur Swimming Club usually hold an AGM at the end of April and an annual report is written by the chairperson. This of course was my intention in 2020; to reflect on the year that had passed and to look to the future with great optimism. On March 18<sup>th</sup> last year, we shut our doors to you and started planning how we would proceed amidst a pandemic like none of us had seen before.

In 2019, Simon Watson the previous chair pondered 'could MASC really start to offer local swimmers the real chance to progress to Regional and National level rather than being a 'feeder club' and forcing swimmers to move to a larger club if they wanted to compete at the very highest level'. To answer that, in the 2019/2020 season, we saw a record number of swimmers competing at County, Regional and National levels and the number of swimmers making finals and winning medals being the highest ever. Morpeth ASC even ventured into the National Open Water Championships and also had swimmers (and coaches) taking part in the Great North Swim. I am especially proud of our Junior League swimmers, who at the end of the 2018/2019 season were promoted to Division 1. Whilst the next season was abruptly cut short, our 'Diddy' swimmers held their own amongst the biggest clubs in the county in their first Division 1 gala.

Our annual gala against Portobello resulted in another win for MASC in 2019 but unfortunately, the 2020 gala was cancelled because of COVID restrictions.

Club Championships 2019 were held in the November and after review, the format was changed and the gala took place over a full day with additional age groups added. The MASC presentation evening was intended to be held in a larger venue but due to changes in the N and D competition calendar, plans had to be abandoned and the usual smaller venue was used. Tickets were sold out and unfortunately had to be limited. It was still a great evening with many achievements being celebrated and an outstanding buffet supplied by those who attended.

In early 2020, MASC hosted their first Junior League gala which was a tremendous success and brought about compliments from the N and D team. We hosted at The Louisa Centre, Stanley and its success is because of the dedication of parent volunteers, club captains and older swimmers.

The Lions Club Swim, another annual event for MASC, resulted in over £600 being raised and the club retaining the shield.

Membership numbers continued to grow and we found that MASC was represented on more than one occasion at separate galas on the same day. One of the last galas before 'Lockdown' was the Northumberland and Durham Teams Day which proved to be one of our biggest successes to date. Morpeth ASC finished third on the medal table – another first.

By March 2020, the season was well underway when the unimaginable happened. The committee were faced with many decisions on how to move forward. It would be unrealistic of me to think that we managed to please all members but we have achieved more than many clubs.

Head Coach Becki McGuire quickly adapted and with the help of Andie Riches our strength and conditioning coach, a successful temporary programme began. Zoom became the new buzz word and I understand that there were guest appearances from siblings, parents, dogs, cats and even a rabbit.

Outside of training we were entertained with amateur productions. We will never forget the daily 'Freeman Family Film Extravaganza' or the efforts of coaches and parents as well as the swimmers. VE Day saw some members bravely singing, we gave a MASC salute to Sir Captain Tom. We had handstands, cartwheels, and makeshift swimming pools – I think we did a great job of embarrassing the kids.

MASC were amongst the first clubs in the country to get back into the water in July 2020. The preparation for this was endless and conditions ever changing. Coaches and volunteers were briefed and ready to go with our swimmers at the door 'pool ready'.

At the end of October, we started to compete but this was sadly interrupted by another lockdown. November saw us return to 'Zoom only' but December gave an opportunity to swim again. As Christmas came and went, we found ourselves in another 'lockdown'. Once again, our swimmers threw themselves into Zoom training supported by Becki and Andie.

In the last months of 2020, the committee reviewed the cost of the pandemic. On returning to the pool in July, we were faced with having to adapt to Swim England guidelines which forced us to have significantly fewer swimmers in the pool at any one time however, the reduction in number of swimmers per lane in most squads has enhanced the quality of sessions. We have continued since then to secure more pool time to try and meet the needs of all squads but to provide more, we have had to significantly increase our pool time which came at a significant cost and as a result, the committee made the difficult decision to increase fees. We are fortunate to have supportive members.

This season we are saying 'Thank you and goodbye' to two of our long standing coaches who have shown MASC many, many hours of dedication. Jenny Glossop who was a familiar face in the mornings and Sunday afternoons is a big miss as is Gordon Dixon who put in many morning hours with Performance squad. Both were coaching at Morpeth when my own daughter joined the club five years ago and like many, she benefitted from Jenny's nurturing and Gordon's no nonsense "KICK" approach. Like many of you, I am very grateful that my child had the benefit of their coaching.

The committee said goodbye to Nicki Hewitt who stepped down but has taken on another important role as the lead for aquatic helpers. Hopefully, soon she will get an opportunity to return the noticeboard to its former glory. We also recently said goodbye to Mark Atchison who has been with the club for many years and served as our Parent Liaison Officer. Mark often took on much work organising events and one of his great achievements was the redesign of the club kit.

I would like to thank the committee who have continued to give their time, a commodity that is in short supply for many of us. They have adapted to the recent way of working and responded at short notice to the frequent changes brought about by the pandemic.

I would especially like to thank:

Ruth Tweedie for spending so many hours as COVID liaison and keeping us safe.

The Coaching Team who increased the number of hours they give to the club without question or complaint. We are very lucky to have you.

COVID volunteers – without you we could not have done it. Special mention to Alison Smith who has taken more temperatures than the NHS.

Andie Riches who adapted land training to outdoor locations and virtual sessions.

Becki McGuire who despite all challenges she has faced over the last year is as determined and motivated as the day I met her. As well as her time spent at the pool, she spends many hours behind the scenes developing our swimming programme. She has recently joined the National Coach Support Programme being delivered by the Swim England Talent Team. I hope that you will all join me in congratulating her on an outstanding, if not unusual, two years.

I would especially like to say thank you to you all for being patient and understanding. To those of you who are key workers and those who find themselves working more hours than usual, to those of you who have struggled with the difficulties of the last 13 months and to those who have lost loved ones. There is not one of us who is unaffected by the pandemic and yet week after week parents have encouraged our swimmers to stay active and join in, done the swim run, collected wet children, waited in cars or stood at a distance in the car park, and all with a smile and positivity.

Finally, thank you swimmers. You have been amazing.

Lesley Kennedy

Chair