

Berks & South Bucks MASTERS Activities

November 2022 - November 2023.

The Inter-County event in November 2022 was organized by Kent at the London Aquatic Centre (Olympic Pool). B&SB came 3rd in the region, which is very good as we are the smallest district. Although there were many fine performances, the only individual winner on the night was Amanda Heath (Maidenhead) in her favoured 50m breaststroke event. The result translated into 7th place nationally (from 33 districts).

At the South East Regional LC meet in January 2023 at Crawley, 11 different individual swimmers took 19 Gold medals between them. The pick of these would be Pip Williams (Wycombe) who won all 4 of her 50m discipline events. The next best were Caroline Jubb and Gregory du Tertre (also both from Wycombe) who took 3 Golds each. A 1500 freestyle (LC) was run at the same venue in March with a full complement of 51 swimmers (6 from B&SB). The evening session was devoted to relays for which, sadly, there were no B&SB entries this year.

Earlier in the month at Swansea Amanda Heath was setting another new European LC record for 200 fly. She broke this at the British MASTERS meet at Sheffield in June with a time of 3.16.19 sec on the way to winning 6 events. Dan John (Reading) was next in line with 3 Golds, hotly followed by Alfie Evans (Reading) and Dave Milburn (Newbury) with 2 each.

The Bracknell MASTERS Open meet in early March was as popular as ever with entries from 38 clubs spread out from Dover to Poole to Etwell (Derbyshire). Once again the top visiting club was Teddington, who provided the top male swimmer Mark Deakin. In fact the top 4 males were all from Teddington! The top female swimmer was Liz Woolner (Flitwick) with 2 more persons from Teddington in hot pursuit.

The World MASTERS swimming and diving championships were held in Fukuoka, Japan in August. Due to the distance there were notably fewer entries from UK than normal but Amanda Heath again performed out of her skin collecting 5 individual and 1 relay Gold medal - 6 in all. Probably most remarkable was her Silver medal in the Open Water 3K event. Guy Emerson (Amersham and Spencer) returned to competitive swimming after 3 years dogged by various injuries and also took a relay Silver medal. The diver Katie Bell (Amersham) took 3 Silver medals whilst her more senior former colleague Jenni Cluskey (now at Southend) achieved 3 Golds.

Like the Bracknell Open in March, the County Open in early September attracted entries from 38 clubs from as far afield as Medway, Ely and Poole. The Turner family (husband and wife Spencer and Fleur - both World and European Champions) brought a battalion of competitors from Basingstoke and easily took the trophy for top visiting club. Wycombe retained their hold on the top local club award with Reading just behind. Top male swimmer was Dave Milburn (Newbury) and top female was the afore-mentioned Fleur Turner.

There were a couple of new British records set by our swimmers at the South East Region SC MASTERS in late September. Kirsty Johnson (Bracknell) clocked 1.07.49 sec in 100 backstroke and Amanda Heath set 3.11.75sec on 200 fly, which was also a European record.

There were many entrants from B&SB at the British MASTERS SC at end of October in Sheffield, notably Dan John who took 4 Golds in 200,400,800 and 1500 freestyle - a full house! Not to be outdone Amanda Heath also bagged 4 Golds with the 100 breaststroke posting a new World record at 1.27.95 sec. Other top spots were achieved by Patrick Gore (Reading - 2), Kellyn Caldwell (Wycombe - 2) , Laura Cooke and Kirsty Johnson (both Bracknell). An EBP (event best performance) time for 1500 freestyle set in 2005 by Duncan McCreddie was finally beaten.

This report finishes where it began, namely at the London Aquatic Centre (Olympic Pool) which Middlesex had hired as hosts for the 2023 Inter-County event. There is no doubt that this pool provides a marvellous setting for this event with enough space all around such that all competitors are poolside. The only downside is the cost (ca. £4500 for pool hire - I believe) but may be worth considering cost share amongst the 7 districts?? A question for the future. On the day B&SB came 4th which will probably still be good enough to place us in the top 10 districts nationally. There were 9 individual wins for the ladies with Amanda making a clean sweep of 4, followed by Kirsty Johnson with 3 and Laura Cooke with 2. Best of all was the sight of the evergreen Duncan McCreddie recording our only individual male win of the day. Normally Sasha Forster takes care of everything on the day and in the build-up but this year, as she had to be away in Australia, much praise should go to Terry Wright who managed perfectly all aspects on the day.

Bob Odell - B&SB MASTERS