

Sailing Secretary's Report 2020-2021

This is in fact my fourth report in this role and my last as Club rules prevent me carrying on. So very much tinged with sadness as I am leaving a role that I have really loved.

When I reported last year we were back sailing with a varied sailing programme as we worked our way through the various Covid-19 restrictions of what we could and could not do. Little did we know at our last AGM that Christmas was going to be cancelled and we would be back in lockdown.

As we came out of lockdown the Covid 4, Jeremy Riley, Jenny Snow, Fraser Hayden and I, again looked at what we could do to get going again. As restrictions were lifted or modified we adapted our sailing programmes accordingly to comply and give the best sailing offer possible.

We innovated throughout the summer with an Early Summer Programme, then modifying arrangements for the Late Summer Programme as restrictions continually changed. I completed clubhouse signage to inform members of restrictions and was a little bit miffed when one set of laminated signs only had an operational life of six hours before the rules were again changed!

More latterly, on Saturdays we scheduled Novice races followed by a pursuit then a GH race. This has provided a very good pathway for those undertaking training on Saturday mornings to initially join in Novice races especially designed to be easy to enter and take part, then a pursuit with multiple starts, again ensuring not too many on the start line at any one time, followed by a slightly more competitive GH race.

Our latest offering is the autumn series which started two weeks ago, where we now run a pursuit race followed by a GH race on the Sunday morning and two GH races in the afternoon. This format appears pretty popular as we had a record 29 racers on the start line last Sunday, plus about eight to ten cruisers during the day with many newer faces. Talking of cruisers, we have continued to encourage as much cruising as possible building on this work over the last few years.

In addition to our standard series we have run various one-off specials for different cups and awards, turning them more into celebrations of sailing. (bank holiday fun day and regatta, Tom Wells Trophy, Lawes Trophy and Champion of Champions to name a few)

Over the past year we have run 14 different race series, with over 50 helms taking part in each of the major series. A total of 183 races with 360 race entries. Thank you to everyone who has been Safety Boat Officers, Crews, Race Officers and Assistants.

I give much thanks to the Sailing Committee who have met more times than normal to help develop each of the programmes and I feel we provided a very varied and popular programme. The one bit that we were not able to implement this year, due to Covid, was running mid-week racing, but plans are in hand to introduce it next year.

The Members' Survey gave us a great opportunity to take stock and listen to ideas coming from the membership. It was good to see that no less than 58% of respondents took part in racing and 40% took part in cruising, with very high satisfaction levels. The overall membership rated the Club with a 98% satisfaction rate so we appear to be getting pretty much all right! GH races were marginally more popular, followed by pursuit then sprint racing, but no stand out winner.

The Sailing Committee took time to look at all the other suggestions proffered; introducing those which had merit, noting suggestions where they had already been introduced and rejecting those that were unworkable or been tried before and found to be unpopular, or failed. The Sailing Committee confirmed that we should be a sailing club concentrating on racing, training for members and cruising, offering the widest possible depth and breadth of opportunity for all. We also confirmed that other than some "specials" we would not restrict participation or lake usage to any one dinghy class or group.

The Training Committee also reaffirmed that Club training is for members only and they do not want to develop into a training centre. As you may have heard, ICS (International Competitive Sailing), run by Jae Willis son of Brian Willis, have moved their operation to Somerset so that leaves spare capacity on the lake during the Easter and summer holidays. We are looking at ideas to either put on some of our own courses or look for another contractor who may wish to use the lake.

Adding to that breadth of opportunity my thanks go to Mike Tozer who came up with the idea of "Launch and Lunch" on Tuesday mornings and has implemented it now with the help of a small band of volunteers crewing the rescue boats. So sailing is available to members on nearly every day of the week (so, if you are a female Solo sailor that helps with Sailability then you have the whole week to go sailing – what's not to like).

Earlier in the year we refurbished the Committee Boat basically re-glassing her bottom so that she no longer takes on water. Thank you to Ray, Roger and the other members of the Work Group. Turning the boat upside down and back again was no mean feat!

Training is a fundamentally important element of our Club and you will hear more from Jeremy on this subject, but suffice to say the trainers have been working their socks off dealing with the huge uptick in membership, many of whom have wanted to learn to sail.

Despite Covid our ladies sailing evenings have taken place again this year on most of the first Mondays of the summer months, with some really strong numbers now attending. Thank you to Jackie Bonella who has looked after our "Ladies Who Launch" but now hands over to Jan Baynham, who I know is looking to expanding the offering for this group next year.

I mentioned last year the benefit of more immediate communications through Whats-App groups and Jenny Snow has been encouraging and introducing these. I am sure these have in large part helped the greater participation we are now seeing especially the cruisers and those transitioning into racing. Thank you Jenny.

Sailability has had to reduce its offering this year but they too adapted; primarily using the Wheely Boat to provide continued on-water, experiences for their clients. Sue Michelmore ably steering that group through the various Covid-19 hurdles.

As you will hear in our Treasurer's report, there has also been a substantial upturn in hire boat use, probably attributed to lots of new members, many whom have not taken the plunge to buy their own just yet. To support this we have been refreshing the fleet with a newer Topper, an additional Vision (thanks to Tom Key and Fraser for sourcing and collecting), and your Committee has allocated funding to buy two more boats to replace our ageing Wanderers. Our hire fleet always seem to need repairing and this year Paul Walker, Jamie Wright and Jon Paton have, between them, really improved the boats.

We have also seen the arrival of many new boats bought by members and the RS Aeros really are increasing quickly. Nice to see the newest Solo occasionally doing well!

Although not strictly sailing, enhancements have been made to the hire dinghy stands to make it easier to park and recover hire boats and next month we will be resurfacing parts of the dinghy park to make it less muddy, less hilly and less slippery to benefit all our sailors. We are also planning to reduce the slope of the west launch ramp and repair the east ramp next year when water levels have dropped. The lake is already full this year and has been for a month.

Moving back to sailing and especially racing, there are three further unsung heroes in Fraser Hayden, who has looked after sailing results with technical help from Alan Fuller, and Jenny Snow, who has taken on trophies this year. This has been especially difficult because many of the regular series have not been run. That said we have a record 37 different members who have won trophies or medals this year, all personally invited to the Awards Evening/Laying Up Supper next month. Again we (well more to the point, Evelyn Tinker, Jenny Snow and the Social Committee) are running a slightly different event than usual in the clubhouse. This has proved so popular it sold out within 24 hours. Look forward to seeing many of you there.

I extend very special thanks to our Duties Team, Jill Hamment and Michaela Saparona, who allocate all our duties in good order. Made all the more complicated this year with many changes and restrictions due to Covid-19, but they have risen to the occasion again this year, providing first class service to the Club – thank you. By the way, Jill has also catered for a number of open events.

My report would not be complete if I did not mention the three W's - weeds, woods and wind. Over the many years we have been managing the weed it has behaved in different ways each year, and this year has been no exception. As before we harrowed earlier in the year to slow growth. Early on we had a large crop of a comparatively new weed, Sago Pondweed. The Canadian Pondweed was comparatively slow through the summer and then, in the middle of September, when we are normally expecting it to die back, it grew with great vigour. In addition to Weedasaurus we brought in the weed push boat so as to get on top of it and recruited another weed cutter to help on the team. Next year

I will recruit a couple more cutters to add resilience to the team and we will, subject to Natural England approval, cut nearer to the banks on the east and west shores up to the point.

We continually look to see if there are better ways or new technologies for dealing with weed and if they become available we will deploy. When speaking to the RYA it is clear many clubs had high and late growth and when we discussed other methods they commented that we already had a 'Rolls Royce' system in place with Weedasaurus, which both cuts and harvests weed, taking the biomass out of the water, supported by the push boat for bulk weed shifting.

With my Estates Committee hat on - we continue to manage our land in an effective and sympathetic way. If you have walked round the lake recently you will have seen Ed and his team undertaking the winter maintenance. This is especially important, not only to keep our site looking neat and safe, but to reduce growth to ensure as good a wind as possible across our lake. We planted wild flower meadows on the two banks at the entrance to the Club. These were a real picture in the spring and will be further enhanced this year.

As you will see from my resumé of the year, this Club is a great members' club, run by the members for the members, and with members getting involved in the sections that appeal to them. You see different members on a Wednesday to what you will see on a Tuesday or at the weekend – it really is a club for everyone.

As I mentioned at the beginning, I stand down as Sailing Secretary but I am really pleased to say that Tom Key has requested to be your Sailing Secretary going forward. He is well embedded in the Club, is a regular sailor, has been on the Sailing Committee for many years and - even better - has done the job before and was absolutely excellent last time. I am really pleased to be proposing him, and having talked to him I know he has ideas to continue to innovate and develop our club, and its offer to members.