

# Alsager Swimming Club's Swimmers Past and Present



## Sam Pickford



Name: Sam Pickford

Years Active: 2003-2015

Favourite Stroke: Backstroke

Favourite Event: 200m Butterfly

Coach: Mike Barnes

Achievements: County and Regional Gold Medallist, County Record Holder and 3x National Swimmer

When did you start swimming with Alsager Swimming Club and how long were you a member for?

When did you start swimming with Alsager Swimming Club and how long were you a member for? I started swimming with Alsager Swimming Club in 2003 and have remained a member to this day. I stopped training properly in March of 2015, with my last competition being the Cheshire County Championships. After having a year away from the club to pursue other things, I returned to the club this time in a coaching capacity, after some consideration I decided to take on the then vacant position of our clubs Head Coach which I continued to do until October 2019. Currently I am still heavily involved with the club both as a committee member and regular coach.

How many times per week did you train?

I started the club when I was 9 years old and attended two sessions per week, as I became older and progressed to higher levels, training also started to increase. From 2008-2014 I was training 8 times per week which in total equated to 17 hours, this included 2 early morning sessions and a 2-hour session over at Manchester on a Sunday evening. Alongside this I did 2 land-based training sessions per week.

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## What was your favourite competition to compete in and why?

Having competed at meets all over the country such as Leeds, Liverpool, and Sheffield, I would have to say my favourite competition was a little closer to home. The end of year Biddulph Open meet which took place every July was the one I enjoyed the most. It was the last competition of the year which meant pressure to gain qualifying times etc was low which resulted in me producing some of my best swims. It always had a great atmosphere and Alsager's team spirit was exceedingly high especially the few years we ended up winning. Although Biddulph was my favourite competition Manchester was my favourite pool to swim in, not only did it have remarkable amounts of space to spread out whilst waiting endlessly for your event, it was a fast pool and carried a lot of great memories for me, after all that was the pool I got my first ever National Qualifying Time.

## What was the worst set you have completed?

Mike, our coach, very rarely gave us a set we enjoyed, we all knew that every tough set we went through would make us stronger and once completed we all felt great. However, there was one set in particular that I really disliked and to make it worse we had to regularly do it long course over at Manchester.

The set was... 22 x 200m Freestyle, 6 @ 3.15, 6 @3.00, 6 @2.45. The last 4 were max effort each broken at different points throughout the 200m.

## How has swimming helped you in day to day life?

Swimming has helped me in various ways, it has given me exceedingly high levels of organisation as previously I would have had to juggle training, competitions, schoolwork, and a social life. It has also formed the basis of my career, observing coaches, teachers and other swimmers over the years taught me a lot on how to develop strokes, create training plans and engage swimmers today.



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## What was your greatest achievement whilst swimming with Alsager Swimming Club?

I cannot choose just one achievement as I have had many special moments during my time at Alsager. First off, I was part of the 2012 relay team who smashed the Cheshire County Record which still has not been broken to this day. I was successful at both County and Regional levels achieving Gold in the 50m Backstroke at Summer Regionals in 2011. Finally, over the years I have achieved 3 national qualifying times, 1 of which qualified me for the British Championships In 2012.

## What factors have helped you achieve your goals?

Personally, I would put my success down to 3 things. Firstly, the coach I had, Mike knew when to push us and we all had respect for him. The majority of the time we did each session plan fully and to the best of our ability. Secondly our dedication and mental resilience, having been training 8 times per week and having competitions every other weekend, these 2 factors were extremely important in achieving my goals. Finally, and I believe most importantly was my teammates, without them I doubt I would have continued for as long as I did. Every 5.30am get up and 12-hour long competition they were there, we pushed each other along and got each other through every tough session and without them getting myself to training would have been a lot harder.

## What are you doing now? (career/university etc)

I completed 3 years at Keele University completing a degree in Biology and Biochemistry before becoming a full-time lifeguard at Alsager Leisure Centre, recently I have started to cover Duty Manager shifts. I have been a Level 2 swimming teacher now for 5 years and run various lessons for Everybody Sport and Recreation

## What is the best advice you can give to younger swimmers trying to achieve their goals?

The best advice I can give swimmers today is to push yourself each session. Even if the session is difficult, keep going because you will feel fantastic once you have completed it. I would also say that your teammates are the most important people there and that it is essential to support one another when training and whilst in competition. I believe that when you are in a group each individual can achieve a lot more.

