

Alderman Harold E. FERN, C. B. E., J. P.
Honorary Secretary of the Amateur Swimming Association
(of England) 1921 - 1970

Our friend Pat BESFORD, celebrated English sports journalist, has been kind enough to send us the following article which relates the exceptional career of a Secretary-General of an Amateur Federation.

The end of an era, unparalleled in sports administration, came on March 7 when Alderman Harold FERN retired after 49 years as the honorary secretary of the Amateur Swimming Association. And surely no sports governing body in the world can have received service to approach the length and quality given to swimming by Mr. FERN, who will be 89 in April.

Unhappily, illness prevented Mr. FERN from attending his final annual Council meeting of the A.S.A. (in Eastbourne on March 6/7, 1970) and from seeing his life's work placed in the hands of his successor. It was the first Council meeting he had missed in 65 years.

He first came into swimming administration in 1905 when, at the age of 24, he was elected honorary secretary of the Southern district of England. He held this office until 1921 when he became secretary of England's A.S.A.

If money is a measure of success - and Mr. FERN would not, in fact, think it was - then the A.S.A. has indeed progressed. In 1921, the assets of the A.S.A. were £339. Now the balance sheet stands at £141,522.

Internationally, Mr. FERN has received every honour that swimming has to offer. He was elected President of F.I.N.A. in 1936 and held this office through the second world war years until 1948. Between 1940 and 1946 he was also honorary secretary and treasurer and treasurer again from 1948 to 1960. He is now the honorary Life President of the F.I.N.A. and also of the L.E.N.

Yet for all the developments in swimming during his long term of office and his years of work at international level, Mr. FERN's greatest satisfactions come from less-publicised successes - from the educational side of the sport he loves so much.

He likes to remember the part he played in 1918 in getting swimming teaching, by methods advocated by the A.S.A., in the curriculum of schools in Britain. He considers this a red letter day in his life.

Before this, in the early years of the twentieth century, he campaigned for mixed bathing. This 'controversial' question split his southern district - but he won, as he has in so many of his battles for swimming.

As well as his sports work and his treasurership of the British Olympic Association, and his own business as a successful chartered accountant, Mr. FERN also found time to help the young people in his home county of Hertfordshire. He was a member of the County Council for 51 years, Vice Chairman twice and Chairman of the most progressive Education Committee for 20 years. He was also a Justice of the Peace.

Royal honours, too, have been bestowed upon him with an O.B.E. and later a C.B.E. But the accolade that means the most to this Grand Old Gentleman of swimming is the progress that his sport has made in the world and the knowledge that he has done his best as he saw it without fear or favour.



The centenary of the Amateur Swimming Association in 1969 was celebrated by a special swimming gala attended by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. For Alderman Harold FERN, who had been hon. secretary for 49 of those 100 years, it was a proud moment as he welcomed Her Majesty to the Crystal Palace pool in London. Behind Mr. FERN is Mr. Jack JORDAN, 1969 President of the Amateur Swimming Association.