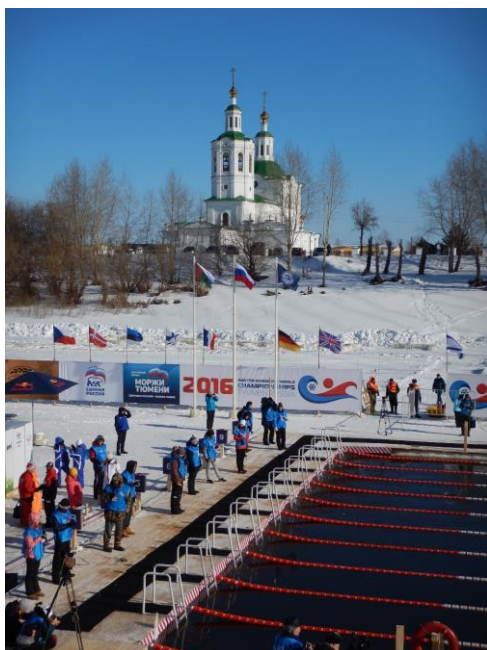


The 10th Winter Swimming World Championships (WSWC) took place from 9th to 12th March and, for the first time, were hosted by Russia in the city of Tyumen, capital of Siberia. Unperturbed by Siberia's reputation for icy, blizzard-scarred, wastes, 1275 swimmers from 42 countries took part. 100m and 200m Freestyle events were included for the first time, supplementing the usual fare of Freestyle and traditional "head-up" breaststroke over 25m and 50m, along with the 450m "Endurance" race. And among them was Surrey's own Winter Swimming superstar, Godalming's Ellery McGowan who already had six world titles to her name. Playing a supporting bit part was your County Secretary.



Around 700 overseas participants took part, with ages ranging from 8 to 91, competing in 5 year age-groups. The Russians certainly went to a lot of effort, creating a 10 lane, 25m long pool cut out of the frozen Tura River with excellent facilities for registration and socialising in an adjacent football stadium complex.

Fears of Siberian blizzards proved groundless with four beautifully clear days under bright blue skies and minimal wind. That didn't make it warm of



course, and the air temperature rose with the sun from -12C to around -1C at midday. Water was a steady -0.2C. The organisers worked hard to clear the ice each morning and nets were used between races as the ice reformed. Some competitors were sliced by the thin ice and needed treatment by first-aiders.

Success in these events depends as much on keeping warm during the day as does one's speed in the water. Competitors would change into warm, but easily removable layers, before moving to the "green room" near to the start. From there we are marched out to the start where the instruction "Take off your clothes!" sees you ready to race. At the end of the

race the adrenalin rush is so high you have a few minutes to talk to fellow competitors over a hot fruit tea before the need to cover up becomes compulsive!

Ellery's first medal came on day one with bronze in the 25m Breaststroke – only one of two UK-based swimmers to medal. Top 50m time was 33.73 seconds by one Russian – remember this is head-up with no underwater phase!

Cometh the Thursday, cometh Tasmania's Ice Empress, as Ellery landed a golden treble in the 25, 50 and 100m Freestyle events leaving the Russians in her icy wake. Her cumulative nine world titles is unrivalled in the world of Winter Swimming.

The UK finished 4th place in the medal table bolstered by Ellery who was the leading UK performer, 11th overall, with 4 medals and who knows what she might have achieved if she'd entered the 50m Breast and 200m Freestyle

