

EIGHT HECTIC DAYS IN SHEFFIELD

AS SOON AS the Commonwealth Games came to a triumphant close in Manchester the National Age Group Championships and the National Youth Championships got under way for eight successive days at Ponds Forge pool in Sheffield. The decision to replace competition best performances, previously set by ages determined as of 31 December, with ages determined as of last day of competition, meant that many new best times were set. With 11-year-olds competing in their own right for the first time and a staggering 1600 competitors gaining the qualification times for Sheffield, the eight days were guaranteed to be hectic.

Stephanie Proud stole the show for the second successive year. The 13-year-old from the Durham Aquatics club broke the British junior records for the 100m and 200m backstroke. Other notable performances came from **Daniel Waslin**, **Francesca Halsall**, **Christopher Robinson** and **Benjamin Branch**, who all won their respective age groups.

The inaugural Youth Championships saw boys competing in 15-16 years and 17-18 years groups, and girls in 14-15 years and 16-17 years groups. The concept of a 'Youth final' was introduced to demonstrate who was the fastest overall Youth swimmer over two age brackets with a four-year span.

Grace Callaghan, 14, from Coventry demonstrated that age was no barrier in the Youth final of the 100m breaststroke when she beat 17-year-old **Lauren Greenshields** to claim gold in a time of 1min 11.85sec. **Christopher Alderton**, 15, set new British junior records at 800m and 1500m free – in the same race. **Joanne Jackson**, **Rebecca Shaw**, **David Davies** and **Ross Davenport** were also regular visitors to the top step of the podium.

Durham Aquatics emerged as top club in the Age Groups with 11 gold, four silver and two bronze medals.

City of Leeds came out on top in the Youth Championships with eight gold medals, four silver and six bronze.

Inter County Championships

Swimming magazine and the ISTC sponsored the Inter County Swimming Competition at Sheffield on 20 October with a total of 33 counties competing against teams from Scotland and Wales. The Division 1 winners were Lancashire with the County teams of Oxfordshire and North Buckinghamshire, Worcestershire and Devon relegated to Division 2 next year. The Division 2 champions were Hertfordshire and they are promoted to swim in Division 1 next year along with runners-up Cheshire and third-placed Gloucestershire. The Ponds Forge pool yielded some impressive individual performances that made for exciting racing as the country's top junior swimmers showed inspired early season form.

Lancashire County swimmers celebrate their victory in the Inter County Competition at Sheffield's Pond Forge pool in October

