



Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Rowing is now a high profile national sport; we not only celebrate regular hauls of Olympic medals, but almost come to expect them. Pinsent, Redgrave and Cracknel reap their media rewards.

Modern Richians will be surprised to know that during the fifteen years or so around the 1970s rowing was high on the sporting agenda at the school. Masters David Terry and Robert Nind had resurrected the sport around 1963, prior to which small groups of senior boys had intermittently participated as a games option.

In 1965 this contributor unwittingly accepted rowing responsibility to accompany a more sought after Physics post. Head teachers have ways of unloading less attractive tasks!

I have hereafter promised myself that I shall mention no names of Boat Club members; it is inevitable that many loyal Richians will slip through the memory net. The rowing pyramid was large, and the successes gained by senior crews were earned by total club participation. Loyalty was our password.

We began on the Severn at Sandhurst, then Gloucester Regatta's tidal water. I well remember the tea break while the Severn Bore tore past, carrying tree trunks in its churning path. The sole school four celebrated success before a new generation took over.

A new season, new blood and success at Edgbaston Reservoir in Birmingham in our first event. We had a queue waiting to join! Silverware did not come cheaply! Two lunchtime circuits, a whole Monday evening wherein the cross country distance was covered simply as a warm-up. Saturday mornings became technique sessions on the canal. Life was as near as dammit public school!

Regional representation. The Betts and Prosser Cups at Hereford languished permanently in Doris Townsend's cupboard. I remember well the Saturday at Penarth when we hired a car (no school buses in those days) as we returned with 15 pint tankards, two silver trophies, a gigantic shield and England had won The World Soccer Cup. Tony Stocks became seriously worried about insurance. The rest of the school appreciated the successes. After all, who could complain of an activity that knocked half of first period off each Monday for presentation ceremonies!

Marathon rowing made its bow. The world's longest rowing race, The Lincoln to Boston Marathon over 31 miles was mooted. For two seasons we scratched at it. Then, an excited crew member presented me with a dietary schedule adopted by world class marathon runners, the glycogen shunt. Why not! No health and safety in those days! Crews gave up the final weeks of summer holidays to train for the September event. Even staff joined in the nightly 10 mile sculling sessions.



The event assault was an anticlimax. The school eight churned out a predetermined interval rate, timed every 5 miles, to win the event in a record time of 3 hours and 16 minutes. The timing organisers did not believe their clocks for two hours before cross referencing with other overtaken crews to give us the record which stood for over ten years.

Third and fourth form games options had been offered in boats. Masters Nigel Bates and Bill Spear, later to lead the club, provided loyal back up. Local rivalry with The Crypt, Kings and Saintbridge, all rowing schools, sometimes went far beyond gentle rivalry. Headmasters frequently discussed the situation as a priority!



We looked further. What's this? A Loch Ness rowing record! 22miles. Off we go! We started from Fort William at 6.00 am in darkness, knowing that the prevailing wind would sink us before eight. Indeed it did, but due to astute bailing, steering forgotten, as we passed Urquart Castle, we only went under as we scrunched on the gravel at

Lochend. We stayed in the Guinness Book of records for years before the race was taken out of print, considered too dangerous.

Parents should be mentioned. The logistical cavalcades that left Gloucester each weekend provided back-up without which the equipment-heavy sport could not function.

The Ball Cup, the national event for smaller schools, was won by first and second crews for seven successive years.

The first four sank in a squall with every other boat off Appledore. The lifeboat and helicopters did not know which crew to rescue first. Our stroke assured us that he did not get out of his rowing shoes until he was three feet under. Oh, yes, he added that he was convinced that he was about to die! All in a day's school sport; we consigned the broken boat to the deep, bought a round of chips and went home.

With Frank Henderson, whose kindred unconventional attitude made us brothers with the Venture Scouts, we were stopped by police returning from The Exeter University Head. "Bit of an unusual load, sirs. Can you tell me what that silverware is in the back? We've had a lot of local burglaries of late." Frank and Bill politely tried to explain matters while I gagged a heaving busload, all vying to present the world's most obscene and impossible explanations!

And so it was for many years. For all concerned Sir Thomas Rich's Rowing Club was an institution. Genuine athletic performances to a very high standard, a touch of the bizarre, comradeship that we would have difficulty in appreciating these days. Memories to last a lifetime.

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