



Cygnets Rowing Club Annual Report

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1 January 2021

The Cygnets Management Committee presents its one hundred and thirtieth report for the year ending 31 December 2020.

2020 - the Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The year started as normal, with head races scheduled, and the squad continuing their winter training. The weather gods were not particularly clement to the rowing world, with bad weather cancelling races like the Hammersmith Head. The Captain was optimistic about the training that had been done, with two land training sessions on the rowing machines, and three water sessions every week.

The Club was looking forward to celebrating its 130th birthday, the Bungalow's 100 year anniversary party as well as the 90 years the club had been based at the Civil Service Boathouse.

All these big plans were not to be. By the end of February, an airborne virus which had been diagnosed in China in December 2019 threw the largest spanner in the works in living memory by spreading rapidly all over the world. On 20 March 2020 HM Government announced a lockdown from 23 March, closing all sporting facilities and all organised sports. Offices were closed, people were told to stay at home and not to travel, Head Races were cancelled, the Boathouse was closed, and members and friends alike were informed that there would be no access allowed for any reason. The initial lockdown restrictions were relaxed from 13 May, by allowing singles to go out, as well as doubles (as long as both were from the same household). The rules were further relaxed to allow crews of different households in fours and then in eights, but the spread of the virus proved to be relentless and by year end, the country had just come out of a second lockdown into the next period of severe restrictions on sports and movements.

No regattas were held in 2020, BBLRC organised a very restricted Pairs Head for local clubs only, to ensure social distancing was possible before the rules were tightened again in November and the Fours Head, Veterans Fours Head and Scullers were all cancelled.

Everyone got used to doing exercise around their home on their own, wearing face masks, keeping a 2m distance from one another, not seeing their friends and family in other homes and areas around the country. Even the most technically challenged member became a whizz at attending Virtual Meetings on Zoom.

The Rowing Community has pulled together, and virtual regattas on rowing machines, head races being run along the river by a 'crew' of four runners, culminating in hundreds of rowers and non-rowers from all over the world participating in Zoom Ergos sessions run by well known rowers such as Sir Matthew Pinsent, Jonny Searle, Guin Batten and many other Olympians.

Closer to home, Coaches Beth Davidson and Charlie kept the members motivated with remote and socially distant training sessions, the Boathouse Executive Committee took the opportunity of a closed Boathouse to carry out security improvements by installing cameras, as well as major refurbishment works in the changing rooms by repainting to walls, doing up the floor and adding our colours and history on the walls. It was completed during the spring/summer time and, although under the rules use of the changing rooms is prohibited, they look amazing.

Club Members and Friends

Five new members were elected during 2020. Encouraged by new CSSC membership rules, the Club continues to encourage non-Civil Servant members to apply for so-called "linked" membership of CSSC to further strengthen our association with the CSSC.

In 2020, we sadly lost two Cygnets members. In June, David Webb passed away at the age of 77. David joined Cygnets in 1970 as a coxswain, starting in a Novice Four and continuing to steer a host of club crews to victory, and coxing Cygnets' first post-war entry at Henley Royal Regatta in 1972. He also took part as cox in the 1976 and 1980 Olympics. An insatiable socialite who always knew where the best parties were, and how to get in, David also had a lifelong interest in music and the arts; starting as manager for the Festival Ballet/English National Ballet followed by a career in the Civil Service and British Telecom.

Greg Steene died suddenly on 20th November at the age of 70. Greg joined Cygnets in the 1970s and was a breath of fresh air hailing from the world of boxing and introducing his crew members to the bloodier side of sports.

Both will live on in the stories being told by old crew mates and friends.

Rowing

As described in the introduction above, the club did not participate in any racing this year; training took place on the Tideway under the guidelines from HM Government as interpreted by British Rowing.

An added complication, as if there weren't enough already was the sudden closure of Hammersmith Bridge in April for traffic crossing the bridge, but from August it was also closed for water traffic going underneath the bridge. By time of writing, these restrictions are still in place as repairs are ongoing. A replacement river crossing is being discussed, but no decisions have been made.

Coaching

Coach Chihiro Calvin left the area after the birth of her baby, and Beth Davidson agreed to continue coaching. As it turned out, her amended land training programme during the Pandemic kept many a rower fit and sane. Once allowed, Beth coached outings of singles and doubles on the water.

As ever, coxing continues to be an issue at Cygnet and we are hopeful that, once we are allowed out on the water, we can count on club members and BBLRC members alike to enjoy outings in eights and coxed fours.

Additions to the Cygnet Fleet

No new boats were purchased this year. Maintenance was carried out on the existing fleet as required, under the capable management of Mr Iain Golder.

300 Club

The 300 Club administration was taken over by Thomas Broadhurst, with support provided by Guy du Parc Braham. The usual draws were held through the year and the results were published on the Website and through Twitter. It is recognised that these marketing efforts, to promote this important fundraising tool to all club members old and new, carried out by Guy has had a positive effect on the sale of 300 Club tickets. The Committee hopes that this progress can be maintained in future years.

General Meetings

Annual General Meeting –Held at the Boathouse on Sunday 23 February 2020

Was attended by Vice-President and Chairman N J Wylie, Vice Presidents Dr R P du Parcq, P L Rawkins, A Cox and A Rawkins also Ms M Israël, Captain C Cabrera, S Gourevitch, T Broadhurst, I Golder, M Drage, A Cox, J Berry, S Sears, M Ozyurt, R Walters, J Durack and M Byrne. Apologies for absence were received from N Pickford, S Gibbons and R Bailey.

The existing eleven Vice-Presidents were re-elected. Re-elected were N J Wylie as Chairman; Ms M Israël, Hon Secretary; M Byrne, Hon Treasurer; Mr N Pickford as Assistant Secretary and Mr R Bailey as Social Secretary. Committee Members elected were P L Rawkins, Dr R P du Parcq, A Rawkins, I Golder and M Drage; Mr Cabrera was elected as Cygnet's first official Social Media Coordinator. No one was nominated as Assistant Treasurer. A Cox, P L Rawkins, N V Pickford and M Byrne were re-appointed Trustees and M Burman and A Naylor were appointed Honorary Independent Examiners.

The Annual Report had previously been circulated and was adopted. The Captain presented his report with his plans for the year ahead. The Chairman and Dr du Parcq reported on progress at the Bungalow. The Annual Club Accounts were presented by Mr Byrne; these were accepted without conflict pending sign-off by the Hon Examiners.

Ordinary General Meeting & Election of Captaincy held on Tuesday 14 July 2020

Chaired by N J Wylie – Vice Presidents Dr R P du Parcq, P Rawkins, A Rawkins attended. Also attended M H Israël, Hon Secretary, M Byrne, Hon Treasurer, Captain C Cabrera, S Sears, M Drage, R Bailey, C Pretzlik, C Jageurs, M Ozyurt, S Gourevitch, T Broadhurst and V Todorov. Apologies were receiving from N Pickford, S Gibbons, H Jonstromer.

The Captain Mr Cabrera presented his report, The administrator of the 300 Club presented drafted accounts; these would be presented to the Hon Examiners. There being no other nominations the following were elected to Office: Captain: Cristobal Cabrera; Deputy Captain: Sam Sears; Vice-Captain: Martin Drage.

Club Management Meetings

Five committee meetings were held during the year with an 87% attendance record. The dates of meetings were mostly set at the end of each meeting; from the emergency committee meeting in May to discuss the COVID-19 restrictions on rowing, the meetings were held remotely, via Zoom, rather than in person at the Boathouse. British Rowing was advised that the number of members for whom affiliation payments were due was 62. Items of special note are detailed below.

Civil Service Sports Council

The Civil Service Sports Council continues to support the changes to CSSC membership that allow for linked membership – the number of Linked members a full member is allowed was raised from 3 to 6 this year. Even more encouraging is the CSSC decision to allow Linked Members to have their own Linked Members after more than 1 year of membership from September 2019. Informal feedback from CSSC HQ is that they are pleased with the way Cygnet is making use of the new membership categories. They have kept in touch through the year and we are determined to get as many members into CSSC as possible.

“Cygnet” Bungalow

In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, members and friends managed to visit the bungalow during the 2020 summer when restrictions were lifted. As with the Club itself, it has been an eventful year for our second important fund raising source. The two annual sculling camps and one training camp for the Club were regrettably cancelled, due to the rules for social distancing with non-household people. Management of the Bungalow has been carried out by Mr D Bush as Bungalow Manager. Mr Bush will present a full report at the Annual General Meeting. The Cygnet Management Committee expresses its heartfelt thanks to Mr Bush who is and who always has been a staunch supporter since it was built in 1964.

The Website

The website continues to be updated by Neil Pickford, with Club officers able to post information themselves. It provides most relevant information about the club and its activities. All members and friends are urged to log on to www.cygnet-rc.org.uk.

Members and friends alike can now also follow the Club's activities with the official Cygnet Twitter account @CygnetRC, and through this have access to regatta results, Tideway news from the PLA and British Rowing initiatives. The website is also the main link for the Cygnet photo archive, which we can highly recommend to all members and it has been the main means of communicating the COVID-19 restrictions throughout most of 2020. The Club recognises the increasing importance of social media and is thankful for members' efforts in keeping the outside world informed about all things Cygnet.

Social Events

The Pandemic put a stop to many of the usual social events although the Club did manage to make the most of the early months in the year with plenty of whisky and haggis and a poem or two for light entertainment in the bar for Burns Night in January. This was followed by a long evening beneath the Cygnet blades at the White Hart Inn in Barnes to celebrate Cygnet's 130th birthday. Unfortunately, the Club Picnic at Old Blades in Henley on Henley Friday, the End of Season dinner in September and the Club Lunch at Leander Club in Henley on Thames were all cancelled, the latter permanently. The usual Cygnet waddles also saved for better days. The annual Clubs' Day had a different format this year, with a socially distanced mixed boat trial on the water, and followed by a socially distanced picnic on the lawn in place of the traditional barbecue, joined by our new kit supplier Crewroom. In November a BBL/Cygnet Online Quiz Night was held, organised by the respective Social Secretaries Rupert Bailey and Samantha Weston.

This year, the annual rewards were issued to the following club members:
The G.P. Jeffries Cup for Cygnet Rower of the Year. This goes to the oarsman who has improved most over the past 12 months - and there were several to choose from but ultimately the award went to Sam Sears.
The Wally Whedal Cup for Cygnet Sportsmanship & Endeavour, also known as 'Clubman of the Year', is awarded to the rower who showed willingness and eagerness to lend a helping hand wherever needed: Chris Jageurs.
Rupert Bailey was awarded the Lockdown Special Award, for organising special events during Lockdown.

At the End of the Year...

We look back at an extraordinary year without head races, regattas, limited training sessions on the water, and even worse, without being able to catch up at BBQs, picnics or in pubs. It has been wonderful to see how the rowing community has pulled together, with virtual regattas, online erg sessions, training schedules that accommodated the rules for social distancing, training without crew members, making ergs available to individual members at home. The Boathouse has facilitated every change in the restrictions, making the boathouse COVID-secure to enable as many member as possible to get out on the water, in the knowledge that everything had been done to keep club members safe and healthy.

The captaincy continues to plan training sessions, in the hope that one day crew outings will be possible again, to ensure that once rowing races can be held, we are ready to get out there and do it. At the time of writing this report, the Quintin Head, and the Head of the River had already been cancelled. Looking ahead, that will give us more time to get ready for the Regatta season.

The Club continues to be active both on and off the water. The Captaincy follows the policies laid down by previous holders of office and encourages club members to be further involved in club organisation. There is a constant hunt for coxswains, experienced or willing to learn and it is hoped that coaching will continue on both a professional and amateur basis. It is expected that 2021 will bring a very restricted racing season and the need for a high level of individual fitness will be necessary, so circuits remain on the menu.

The relationship with many other clubs both on and away from the Tideway are excellent, in particular that with Barnes Bridge Ladies Rowing Club remains as strong as ever. The camaraderie between members is remarked upon and Cygnet remains a very friendly and happy club.

Marjorie Israel
Hon Secretary
1 January 2021