



Poplar Blackwall & District Rowing Club

Recollections from 1854 to 1980

Foreward

The clubs history is distorted with former President Dorothea Woodward-Fisher claiming that the club was formed in about 1854, others have claimed 1845 and in 1953 Dick McPherson informed a London reporter that the club was formed at around about 1900. The truth is that no one will ever know and little documentation was kept and what was is probably sitting in some attic somewhere in London's East End.

Early names of the club include Poplar Blackwall United Rowing Club, The Poplar Blackwall Athletic Club and finally in the mid thirties, the Poplar Blackwall & District Rowing Club.

So unclear is Poplar's founding that the club celebrated its 100th birthday in 1968 and seventeen years later it again celebrated it's 150th in 1985.

The Company of Waterman and Lightermen have backboards recording Poplar Blackwall and District regattas going back as far as 1835 however these were probably lighterage companies based within these districts competing against each other. In past years most companies were based in public houses as the labour was mostly casual. A lighterman would report daily with the hope of being given a days work.

The roots of the club evolve from Watermen and Lightermen and until 1951, many of the club members were deemed to be professionals and so consequently were disqualified from racing in Amateur Rowing Association events, simply because they were watermen and possibly had competed for a wager or against someone who had.

A key date in the clubs history was 1956, which saw the first crew from Poplar to be permitted to compete at Henley Royal Regatta, a feat which captured great interest with the national press – The first crew of formally professionals to compete in what was then and still is one of the greatest rowing events in the World.

In December 1964 the club was granted a piece of land, 240 feet by 50 feet, which is its current site by the London County Council at £100 per year. Imagine the price of the land today, with a view of the Royal Naval College.

Poplar is noted amongst the rowing fraternity as being a club for scullers due to its connections and success in sculling events including Wingfield Sculls, Scullers Head of the River and sculling events at both Henley Royal Regatta and National Championship events. As mentioned previously however it has produced a number of oarsmen that have won medals at both World and Olympic regattas.

Poplar Blackwall & District Rowing Club can also boast to having more winners of the Doggett's Coat and Badge Wager than any other club on the tideway – 45 in total. Poplar also has the distinction of having more Junior National Medallists and Champions in the single sculls event than any other club or school in the United Kingdom. Kenny Dwan still has the distinction of having had more wins of the Scullers Head in modern times.

PBDRC – Our History

All opinions and stories expressed in this record are of course just that, a collection of memories from past and current members in their own words.

A number of attempts have been made to record the clubs history. In 1966 Club President Dorothea Woodward-Fisher recorded her own version of the clubs history.

Poplar Blackwall & District Rowing Club

From records this club was formed roughly about 1854 by a group of young boys who wanted to row a boat. They could of course have been called “Would be oarsmen”. These young lads, and possibly their fathers, cadged from all and sundry and got one or two old boats together. They made their headquarters a pub known as the “Lifeboat” – later pulled down for the new tunnel (Blackwall). The boys evidently kept their boats in publicans backyards, and the boats were launched at Chalkstone Bouys, Millwall Stairs and the Dust Shute at Poplar Dock Causeway before it was closed, and sometimes at the upper end of South Dock.

My late husband joined the club sixty years ago. We made an arrangement with Samudas Wharf and the Dockland Settlement, Farm Road. My late husband won the Doggets Coat and Badge in 1911, whilst of course, still a member of the club.

About 30 years ago the members were able to obtain permission from a Mr Calder, who owned Calders Wharf, Millwall, to build a ramp –which the boys did themselves. At a later date Mr Calder kindly gave them a little more room and there was an old railway station at the back of Calders Wharf and they got permission to still have a little more land and they built between themselves a Heath Robinson building of a boat house. The Governor and I put in showers and ascot heaters etc. First of all Mr Calder charged them 10s.0d. a week rent – this eventually increased to £4. 10s. 0d. a week plus rates.

In 1956 – 57 we heard that Messrs. Calders were willing to sell the wharf. There was some correspondence about it all, but the figure asked was too high for us. Many approaches were made to the poplar Borough Council, the L.C.C. (London County Council) and the N.E London Youth Service. Everybody has been very sympathetic and kind, but seemingly unable to help. However, the Governor and I fought on.

Absolutely adjacent to Calders Wharf is a draw dock known as Johnson’s Draw Dock. In the old, old days large barges and small ships were discharged there with bricks for the horses and carts, but that type of trade has ceased for many years, and the draw dock has been “adopted” by a man named Pitman to break up old and derelict barges. We approached the Port of London Authorities to know if we could have use of this draw dock, pointing out that as it was so adjacent to our rented ramp from Calders, pieces of scrap iron often damaged our craft, as you know, need to be treated with due care. The Governor and I have for the last twenty years insured all boats and owing to the scrap iron unseen, often sticking out, we had so many claims on our underwriters that our premiums were doubled. I have seen Mr Pitman many times and he has tried to be helpful, but he has had to employ people, and

these said people were not always too careful, as you will appreciate. As you probably know we are all lightermen really, and eventually Calders Wharf was sold to a very fine Company known as Summerfield & Sons, who gave us the same concessions as Calders had done. Purely coincidentally, but very helpfully, I got Mr D Summerfield very interested in the club, and he granted then further amenities without any increase in rent.

We then heard some 8 – 10 years ago that the L.C.C. intended to buy out Calders Wharf to enlarge the adjacent park on the other side of the wharf. I think that the parks proper name is Island Gardens, but to my husband, who was one of the poor boys from Millwall, it was always known as Scrap Iron Park. When we heard that there was a chance of the L.C.C buying this land we, of course wrote to them. I think that my letter went from pillar to post but never came back, nor did we get a reply. From the efforts of a very good friend, we were able to write another letter that definitely reached the correct source, and in August, 1957 we received a letter from the L.C.C, signed by W Hart Esq, Clerk of the Council, assuring us that in the event of the site, Calders Wharf, ever being purchased to increase the amenities of Island Gardens, due consideration would be given to our need for a club house. This letter was kept very securely in a safe for many years. Sometime around 1961, we again were informed through our good friends Messrs. Summerfield and Sons, that the London County Council were approaching them with an idea to purchase Calders Wharf. Mr Summerfield, The Governor and I “after much” were able to get an interview with the London County Council and this was the start of many such interviews, and on 7th December 1964 (seven months after we had lost the Governor) the London County Council notified me that they would allow us a 50’ River frontage by 240’ for 60 years at a rental of £100 per year inclusive.

The one condition was that the club should have a gymnasium and should cater for the poor boys and men of Poplar, Blackwall, Stepney and surrounding Districts. We had never aspired to an up to date gymnasium but, of course we agreed. I then started to work to get the Poplar Blackwall & District Rowing Club registered as a charity and I approached my solicitors – Messrs. Keene Marsland & Company, of 52 Marks Lane, London EC3 -who have been most helpful. I was advised to get trustees and I am proud to say that I was able to ask Mr. Davis Beasant himself to be a trustee. The Trustees names are as follows:

D.E.B Besant Esq, C Chataway Esq, Sir Lionel Denny MC, D.W. Summerfield Esq, Admiral Sir Robin Durnford –Slater K.C.B. , Rev. E.S.Michael, The Hon M.S Rothschild, Sir David Burnett BT, MBE, TD. , The Rt. Hon. Lord Cottesloe, GBE. TD. DL , I Mikardo Esq, and Mrs D K E M Woodward-Fisher OBE.

I then approached and encouraged Ian Mikardo, who is Member for Parliament for Poplar, and he has been wonderful and is going to launch the appeal. Meanwhile we are doing all the odd and incidental things to raise money. The club will directly face Greenwich College, and the L.C.C insist that it shall be in the keeping with that particular part of the river.

I personally feel, as a very old English woman loving the river and the sea as I do, that England is after all an island and we are all surely sailors at heart. Also with the 40 hour week and so many home now in flats with no backyards

the demand for rowing for the young men of tomorrow is more and more necessary, and I am going to fight hard to get this money. Plans have been passes and I now wait for the ok from the L.C.C and my solicitors to start. Meanwhile I am cadging where ever I can or, if not talking.

The club has :

20 members under 14years of age

57 members between 14 and 20 years

53 members over 20 years of age

There seems to be a bigger demand than ever these days for a club this side of the river basin, we have the Globe and Curlew who seem to cater for the Greenwich side and the Poplar, Blackwall and District Rowing Club caters for all types of boys. We did have some blind boys, and we have even had blind boys trained to row in races, this would have been much safer if we could possible have had our own tanks.

The club now owns 15 boats. We do get help from Up – river clubs at Putney, and this year we are very proud to say that two of our boys J McCarthy and R Easterling competed for the Silver Goblets at Henley and reached the finals. They were beaten by a German crew. This they did entirely at their own expense. Up until 7th July 1966, this year we have has 27 wins at various regattas as far as Birmingham, Evesham, Huntington etc and the club altogether has had 23 winners of the Doggett's Coat and Badge.

Lifelong member Harry Read recorded his version of the club's roots and history:

The Birth of the Club

As far as can be gathered from old records, the Club was first formed about 1854 by a group of young lightermen and their friends. The boats were kept in the backyard of a pub near Chalkstone Buoy, also at times, in the dust chute at Poplar Dock, South Dock, Palmers Wharf and Samuda's Wharf. Then, in 1906, they were taken to the Docklands Settlement in East Ferry Road. They carried them from there, to boat at Johnson's Drawdock, which is alongside the present boathouse. There does not seem to be any record of the type of boats they had.

The club's original name was The Blackwall Rowing and Athletic Club, with their headquarters in the Lifeboat Public House near the entrance to Blackwall Tunnel. In the late 1800s, however, the name was changed to Poplar and Blackwall United Rowing Club.

After the 1914-18 war, membership increased with shipwrights, boilermakers and stevedores from the nearby shipyards and docks taking up the sport as boats could be hired from Corbett's Raft at Greenwich, which ran along the front of what is now the Trafalgar Rowing Centre. Boats of all types could be hired from there. The racing boats were 'chock' fours of course, which meant no outriggers or sliding seats. The same boats were used for all club races and local regattas. The club race course at that time was from Limehouse Pier to Blackwall Pier, some distance in that type of boat. The passenger boat that followed the races in those days was quite infamous. It was a converted steam tug, named the Ich Dien, which had apparently been used to transport non-union labour during the 1926 General Strike. There was a lot of controversy in the club over the hiring of it, but I suppose it must have been the cheapest, for it was always used. When it was underway the noise of the engines was almost deafening, and everybody went ashore looking a little bit sooty.

The club prospered for a time, but went into a decline during the Depression years and faded when Corbett went out of business in the early 1930s. Then, in 1935, Bill Macpherson and Harry Read (Sr.) cadged enough money from local publicans and businessmen to purchase some old boats, so the club was reformed and given the name that is still with us: Poplar, Blackwall and District Rowing Club (P.B.D.R.C.). The boats they bought, along with a few private best boats, were housed at the back of the Swan Public House, Blackwall, until 1937 when the club moved to the site where it still stands.

1937 onwards

Although I had followed the club races when my father rowed, and watched them go afloat from Blackwall Stairs, I never joined the club until 1937. One of my earliest memories was going to this long, narrow building that ran at a right angle to the river alongside the Greenwich Foot Tunnel. I watched the older

members put up boat racks and discuss the method of getting the boats in and out of the water, as it was a six-foot drop to the foreshore. At first a floating raft was used, being made from a barge ceiling and forty-gallon oil drums, which halved the distance, so the boat could be taken down in two stages. The boats that were brought from the Swan were, by today's standards, laughable. Four very old clinker fours, single action slides, fixed pin and leaking like sieves. Three even older 'rum tums', one of which was nicknamed 'Low Water Annie'. I believe they cost about £10 for the lot, mind you that was a considerable sum of money in those days.

The war years

We managed to get a couple of club races out of them, before they became completely unusable. Then, for a short period, we borrowed boats from the Globe Rowing Club at Greenwich. They had managed, in 1938, to get a grant from a government scheme called the National Fitness Campaign. We found out in 1939 what they were getting us fit for.

We had also applied for a grant but, under the rules of the scheme, the government put up half the cash, provided you had the other half. By various dances, raffles and other fund raising schemes the Club Committee had raised £150. The estimate for the boats we needed, four IVs from Sims of Hammersmith and four Rum Tums from Turks of Kingston, plus blades and sculls, came to approximately £500. It was a stalemate, until a club member, a Waterman and Lighterman named Andy Lyons, offered to lend the Club the other £100 without any collateral. A wonderful gesture. So we got our new boats, just as war broke out, with no chance of using them.

Wartime regulations required all rowing boats on the river to be kept under lock and key, or have a plank removed from them. The Globe boats were kept on the old Corbetts' raft at Greenwich, so they had them removed and stored away from the river.

Towards the latter part of the war, restrictions were eased. But as the Globe boats were still away in storage, a loose amalgamation was formed between the two Clubs. Once hostilities ceased, we separated and went our own ways.

Harry Read – Captain 1951 – 1954, Former Club Secretary and Life Member

Recollections of the club pre 1950

In the middle of the River Thames there is an island several miles square and on it you will find the Poplar Blackwall and District Rowing Club, organised and run by London men who have lived all their lives within sound of the noises of London River. There on the Isle of Dogs, most of the youngsters that take out the club's boats every week are East End lads.

I stood on the Thameside opposite the Greenwich Naval College – for this is one of the below bridges clubs, going towards the sea from London Bridge –

with Club Captain Harry Read who started rowing at fifteen: and Dick McPherson who rowed for the club in 1904 and is now an honorary member.

McPherson told me how the club started nearly fifty years ago. In those days most of the members were lightermen born and bred to a life on the Thames, which resulted in the club being classed as professional. But, as time passed, new recruits were not always professionals. Some came from the factories that were springing up all over the island.

Somehow the club kept on its feet during the First World War, but after the Armistice came depression in the East End and the club sank under it. Not until 1933 were the club boats again seen below bridges. Yet within a year it had almost a hundred members.

Although funds were low it was necessary to have a larger boathouse, a changing room, general headquarters. To the rescue came Percy Muggleton, landlord to the Princess of Wales and known affectionately all over the Island as just Percy. Why not use his pub club room as meeting place?

Three years later, in 1937, came the offer of boathouse and changing room facilities. Not far from the Princess of Wales was an old disused railway station which once served the Poplar Blackwall system (North Greenwich Railway Station) It is a bit dusty said Jim Calder, Master Lighterman and owner of the property, but you could change in the ticket office. And in a breakers yard nearby, he let them have a boathouse.

The ticket office was small and draughty and the boathouse was wide open to the weather. But they were on their way.

The Government now showed interest and made a grant of £300. Andy Lyons, a local boy, and another club member produced another £100. It looked like plain sailing and new boats were joyfully ordered. A man who did more for the club at this critical time was Bill McPherson, Queens Swan Upper and one of the best know lightermen of the Thames.

Then came September 1939. The new boats, actually being tried out on the morning we found ourselves at war with Hitlerite Germany, were resignedly put back into the boathouse. As would be expected most of the members went into the Royal Navy or Merchant Navy. Ten of the old “uns” were left to carry on. Rent for the boathouse and changing rooms still needed to be paid and those frail shells of boats exposed to the elements had to be looked after. There are big hearted people in London’s East End, “They came forward”, Percy Muggleton, W J W Woodward Fisher, Master Lighterman and winner of the Doggett’s Coat and Badge Race in 1911, and now President of the club, the late W Duke, bookmaker, and for many years Vice President: George Tidd, veteran Thames Pilot and later Club Captain, newsagent Bill Smith and John Yallop, scrap iron merchant.

London reporter Peter Lewis – 1953 Interviewing then Captain Harry Read and Dick McPherson

Conditions within the station were very primitive and former Club Secretary Ron Orwell recalls his memories of 1946.

“In 1946, we used the station waiting room of the North Greenwich Railway for changing. There were no washing facilities just a barrel of cold water about

four feet high which some would jump into. I recall that an old member Tom Yearsley, would always jump into the barrel after his outing.

All the privately owned boats were stored beneath the station. The clubs entire boat compliment consisted of five coxed fours, all rum tums of clinker construction.

The ramp on the foreshore was of timber covering onto a steel framework, which when wet was very slippery, Tony Adams and others dismantled the old timber ramp in about 1949 and then formed a solid concrete one burying the steelwork. Not having any water supply they used Thames water, which to say the least was filthy and unfit to use for such a purpose. None the less the ramp did not break up until the new boathouse was built.

Ron Orwell 1946

I joined the club in April 1948 and am still a member today paying the Veterans membership.

My first recollection of the club was seeing the Secretary on the ramp collecting the subs. His name was Bill Winkel Smith. He would write your name on his bag of winkels and when he had eaten them all he would throw the bag away, How our cons were paid, I will never know.

The club had 4 wooden clinker fours and five wooden Rum Tums, the club was based on the derelict North Greenwich Railway Station on Calders Wharf. We used the waiting room as a dressing room. We had an electric light but no water. There was a tap over a barrel on the wharf which we used for washing.

Ronnie Watkins – Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

I joined in the club in 1949 as a coxswain and I think that Tommy Yearsley was Captain at the time. I started as a coxswain and coxed in a few races, mainly for the Murray's until I became too heavy. I remember that at the time there was a small dressing room near the wooden gate entrance by a tin shed, but most of the time we got changed in the boathouse. After rowing we would go to Calders Wharf where we would wash ourselves down in a barrel of cold water.

Kenny Orwell – Life Member

In about 1949 we asked the wharf owner, Mr Calder if we could run a pipe from his tap in the middle of the wharf to the club house so he said it was ok. We had to leave it as it was for his men to work on Monday morning so we had to move barrels of tallow to dig the trench across the wharf. We dug a trench 18" deep to the club house and Johnny Glasses Orwell, a member, fixed the pipe. This all happened on a Saturday afternoon and Sunday. We replaced all the barrels and we had a cold shower in our club house.

Ronnie Watkins – Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

I remember that Terry Adams arranged the working party to dig out the earth from underneath the old railway station to make a larger dressing room. The floor was fitted by Ron Watkins, Tony Newman, Myself and my brother Ron.

Kenny Orwell – Life Member

In the old days there was no ramp and the boats were passed down to members standing in the mud on the shore. They were then taken to a small wooded mobile ramp which we wheeled to the waters edge.

Kenny Orwell – Life Member

We had a ramp on an iron frame with the barges ceiling boards so we decided to make a concrete ramp instead. The first attempt was washed away and after a few goes we were successful. We finally had a solid ramp.

Ron Watkins – Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

1950's

The club was recovering from the war years and was boosted in 1951 with its inclusion in which finally gave the club amateur status.

In 1953 it produced a credible crew of Sam Spencer, Jack Spencer, Don Murray and Wally Murray and coxed by Roy Cottage that won the Vale of Evesham.

Three years later in 1956 the club entered the Henley Royal Regatta for the first time. The crew of Lightermen and Dockers great media interest as it was one of the first crews of “former professionals” allowed to compete in the races. They made the semi – final of the Thames Cup and featured in a sporting almanac, “The Great Book of Sports” alongside sporting greats like boxing legends Archie Moore, racing driver Sterling Moss which emphasises the interest and status that the crew attracted. National Newspapers published daily reports of their progress.

The club had 4 wooden clinker fours and five wooden Rum Tums, the club was based on the derelict North Greenwich Railway Station on Calders Wharf. We used the waiting room as a dressing room. We has an electric light but no water. There was a tap over a barrel on the wharf which we used for washing. In 1950 we asked the wharf owner, Mr Calder if we could run a pipe from his tap in the middle of the wharf to the club house so he said it was ok. We had to leave it as it was for his men to work on Monday morning so we had to move barrels of tallow to dig the trench across the wharf. We dug a trench 18” deep to the club house and Johnny Glasses Orwell, a member, fixed the pipe. This all happened on a Saturday afternoon and Sunday. We replaced all the barrels and we had a cold shower in our club house.

Ron Watkins – Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

The Doggett's Coat and Badge Race was a professional race and in 1950 there were six entries, one professional and five amateurs. The professional said that if he won then he would want the prize money himself, this made the other five professional as well. In 1951 the entrants were asked if they wanted the prize money and all said no. The race has been an amateur race ever since.

Ron Watkins – Club Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

We had to leave the club house on the station. Mr Calder said that we could have 2 bays underneath so we dug out about 20 tons of earth and bricked it up. We put a boiler in and finally had hot showers. We stayed there until the new boathouse was built.

Ron Watkins – Club Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

In the early 1950's the majority of members were Lightermen and Watermen. They were considered as professionals by what is now the Amateur Rowing Association. This meant that these members could not race at regattas organised by the ARA but could only race at regattas organised by the Tradesmen's Rowing Association. It was not until the National Rowing Association and the Amateur Rowing Association amalgamated that all Poplar members could race in any regatta provided that they had not raced as a professional or against professionals.

Bernard Spencer – Life Member

I was elected Vice Captain in 1954 and Tommy Scott was Captain. I went to Henley and saw the rowing and decided that we could enter the Thames Cup. It was about this time that we were all reinstated as amateurs and for the first time could take part in NARA (National Amateur Rowing Association) races. NARA later became the ARA.

I was elected Captain in 1956, 57 and 1958 and so a crew was entered for the Thames Cup in 1956 and the regatta was over four days.

Ron Watkins – Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

The crew was coached by Jack Beresford who at the time was about 88 years old and almost blind. His eyes were the launch owner and old professional Ted Phelps who also helped coach us. Even at Jack's old age he would still demonstrate technique to us on the tank. His father won the famous 1936 Berlin Olympics against the favoured German crew.

We boated from Putney for the ten weeks leading up to the regatta and during this time not one of us missed any sessions and we trained six days a week for the entire ten weeks. We never had any spare men. Ray Easterling was only 17 years old and George Cole was under 20.

In the run up to Henley we raced at Reading and in our heat we had a three boat dead heat. We won the re row but were beaten into second in the final.

After that we raced at Marlow and beat Peterhouse who went on to win the Ladies Plate that year at Henley.

Bernard Spencer – Life Member and 5 man of the 1956 Henley crew.

The first day we beat University College Dublin. The second day Queens University, Belfast and the third day we beat the University of Bristol. So we were in the Semi-final on the Saturday against R.A.F Benson who beat us. They went on to lose to Princeton University, USA.

Ron Watkins – Club Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

On the first day we raced Dublin and recorded the fastest time of the day, then we raced Belfast and Bristol University in the quarter final. During that race the lead changed three times and we eventually won by three feet.

Bernard Spencer – Club Member and 5 man 1956.

The Big Book of Sports – 1957 which reviewed the Sporting events of 1956 printed a picture of the crew and wrote;

Welcome entrants in the Thames Cup at Henley this year was an eight from the Poplar Blackwall and District R.C. This team of seven lightermen and one docker reached the semi-final, where they were beaten in a very close finish by the R.A.F.

Lumpers Win – Daily Telegraph - July 1956

London – An eight oar crew of London waterside workers defeated a University College, Dublin, team at the Royal Henley Regatta.

They covered the course in the fastest time of the day.

The crew from the Poplar Blackwall and District Rowing Club passed the winning post 2 ½ lengths ahead of the Irish College students in their heat of the Thames Cup.

The husky dockers, all in their early 20's were forfeiting wages for the pleasure of competing with rowing's "upper crust".

Their style was compared to that of the Russians.

My first introduction to rowing was in the club races. After being taught to row in a tub pair by Doc Mac on Sunday morning with Micky Neicho, my first race was the Presidents Fours, which I won and my prize was a leather wallet with a gold plated edge. This was 1957.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

We went on to win our novices and juniors that year and were lucky enough to have Micky's Dad, George, transport us around in his mini bus to regattas. We had some good years winning Junior, Senior eights and coxless four events right up to 1960.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

The first time I rowed was in a clinker four with Laurie Holdeman, Peter Holdeman, my brother Alan and myself. We were about 13 years old in 1959. Dicky Holdeman, Laurie and Peter's older brother, said he would take us out. It was high tide so he said he would take us over Deptford Creek, there were tugs and barges everywhere as the river was very busy in those days, especially at high tide and the waves and the wash seemed about 6ft high to us young boys on our first row. We made it over there - when it was time to go back it was dark and the river was very rough. Halfway back Dicky, who was coxing, said 'if you don't f...ing row better, I'll jump out and swim and leave you here!' That was our introduction to rowing at 13. So much for being politically correct!

Micky Lane – Captain – 1987 - 1990

1960's

The 1960's begun well for the club with sculler Charles Dearsley winning the Wingfield Sculls in 1962, the highest achievement of any Poplar member to date. He then went on that year to win the Doggett's Coat and Badge Race.

In 1965 the club had an entry at Henley of Ray Easteling and Jerry McCarthy that made the semi final after beating the reigning Olympic Champions.

In 1966 Poplar also had the distinction of being the first club to win and lose the prestigious Vale of Evesham trophy. The winners brought the trophy back to the club's headquarters, the Prince of Wales pub and subsequently the 2000 ounces of solid silver trophy was stolen from the bar.

In 1968 a young sculler called Kenneth Victor Dwan won the Wingfield Sculls. He went on to represent Great Britain in the Mexico Olympics at the age of 18 finishing 6th in the Olympic final in a single scull.

Sid Ord was a good Captain and often after club races would take us out in his American Chevrolet. Frankie Barrett took over and the club become more adventurous entering bigger regattas like the Met, Staines, Henley Town and Maidenhead.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

My first memories of Henley were of the 1961 Thames Cup crew. As a 14-year-old cox, I deputised for their coxswain in training at the club when he was unavailable. The stroke-man was Charlie Byford and he didn't suffer fools, especially coxes. I got the sharp end of his tongue on several occasions and often went home in tears. I wasn't sorry to lose that job!

At the regatta they got through two rounds before going out in the quarter-finals. The crew were as follows: Bow: L. Ball, 2: M. Neicho, 3: J. Bidmead, 4: B. Gould, 5: A. Butler, 6: E. Franklyn, 7: R. Cottage, Stroke: C. Byford, Cox: F. Dowler. Unfortunately most of this crew defected to the Argosy Rowing Club the following year. They had a similar result reaching the quarter-finals again.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

In 1962 Charlie Dearsley dropped out a four to scull. He became the first Poplar sculler to win Wingfields. The club had many scullers at the time, Ray Easterling was always top ten of the Head, Kenny Usher and George Cole were up there with the best of them. Kenny Usher went to to be one of the finest strokes in the country.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

"Worthy Sculling Champion"

C, Dearsley, of Poplar Blackwall Rowing Club who fought back from a seemingly hopeless position yesterday to win the Wingfield Sculls and so become a worthy new British amateur sculling champion.

Birkmyre at 37, and Barry at 29, led off the start, with Tubbs close behind and Barry with the longer more relaxed stroke soon led by a length. Barry reached the mile in 4min 42secs, leading Tubbs by two lengths and Birkmyre by four and Dearsley by at least six. Dearsley caught Birkmyre at Hammersmith Bridge (8mins 30sec). Barry still led Tubbs by two lengths with Dearsley now four or five lengths behind. The result already seemed certain.

Above Hammersmith Bridge there was a stiff headwind as Barry, never at home in these conditions dropped to 24. Tubbs kept going at 29 but lost ground by staying out in the middle of the river. Barry still led by three lengths at Chiswick Steps (13mins 59sec) and at the crossing Tubbs caught a crab, and dropped back. Dearsley quickly moved into second position but the race still seemed in Barry's pocket.

Barry led by a length at Barnes Bridge (19mins 42sec) from Dearsley, who was now in the middle of the river. Above the bridge he passed Barry and went into the lead for the first time. Dearsley continued to increase his lead. The result was now indeed beyond doubt.

For Dearsley it was a day of triumph, though he still has plenty to learn he has proved his capabilities beyond doubt.

The Times – Thursday May 10th 1962.

I started at Poplar RC in September 1962. I'd been introduced to the rowing club because the men my Dad worked with needed coxswains and it must have been a drive to get some of the kids to the rowing club. My first mate was Phil Skelton . He was the main Cox. The main rowers then were, Frankie Walker, Kenny Collins a really good 4 was Freddy Bradshaw, Vicky Brown, Sid Cottage and Harold Shaw. Others in the club who were worth having in your boat were Roy Gould and Nigel Holman. The older members of the club but the back bone where Harry and Charlie Read, Sid Cottage, Harry Parish, these guys were not the ones you wanted in your crew for club races though. Ronny Watkins played a big part in the running of the club along with Johnny Skelton and Alan Butler.

I can remember going out in the tub pair , which then was a wooden clinker boat which weighed a ton. Harry Read and Harry Parish took me out , it was fantastic, I can remember thinking that none of my mates do this , I'm the only one I know allowed on the river.

John Roberts – Captain 2005-7

I joined the club on a cold Sunday morning at the age of 9 with my cousin Eddie exactly one week after John Roberts. Eddie and I were taken afloat in the old clinker tub pair by Dickie Mac and Ronnie Watkins. We shared a "toggle" each as we were both small enough to fit in the coxswain seat. I remember at the time thinking what am I doing here!! They are all nut cases and frightened the living daylights out of me.

At the time the club had 2 eights - 4 clinker fours named Jimmy Jenkins - A G White - Dorothea and Arthur Bird.4 rum tums and a tub pair and one "best pair" and one "best four"

John Hall – Club Member

I took over as Captain in 1963. The club had been through a lean spell but we started to get some new blood and some good lads like Kenny Dwan, Micky and Alan Lane, Ritchie Brown, Brian Cole, Nigel Holman, Martin Spencer and many more, all keen to learn and race. Our winter training was primitive circuit Training, sprinting up and down Ferry Street and down the subway. Terry Adams made our first ergo.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

Both myself and Bobby Prentice made a "huge" impact on the club in our first year. He smashed the bow off the Dorothea whilst steering, and I was coxing a four from Putney down river to the club (the boat had been repaired and we could not afford the transport back) and subsequently as we passed the Tower a group of young ladies was waving at us and I steered straight into a buoy whilst waving back. I was not very popular, but between my Dad, Stan, and Harry Read the minor damage was repaired.

John Hall – Club Member

Then in 1963 this crew with a majority of Poplar boys on board reached the final of the Thames Cup getting beaten by Queens College Cambridge in 6.53 by 2.¾ lengths. The Poplar boys in this crew were C. Byford, E. Franklyn, B. Gould, M. Cox, and G. Baldock. Argosy was the National Dock Labour Board club and as most of the crew were Dockers and Lightermen this was the reason they rowed for them, I suppose it was like representing your firm.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

We also used to have a boatman on Sunday morning who would wear great big waders and wheel the ramp down the foreshore in all weathers to help members go afloat at the price of 6 old pence per time. He never lasted long. Simply because Kenny Collins always "knocked" him and would "puncture" his waders !!!

John Hall – Club Member

Similar to now the club had 4 coxed 4's , again all of wooden clinker build, there was Dorothea, Violet Trott , Johnny George and one other . The rudders were kept by the boathouse door on their own pegs . They had to be taken off the boats otherwise the doors to the river wouldn't close. These rudders were the equivalent to a medium sized flag and had ropes on them similar to the rope my mum hung her washing on. Every now and again one would be damaged and good old Harry Read would get his tool box out and the odd piece of wood and patch up the hole , usually caused by me, or one of the other new coxes . Soon the show their faces as new coxes were Bobby Prentice and Johnny Hall , along with Phil and Me the club now had enough coxes for the club races. These were always hard fought occasions , with the race usually going to the line.

John Roberts – Captain 2005-7

The Prince of Wales was the club house HQ. We would keep the cups that we won there and we held all of our meetings there. Committee meetings were held in the kitchen and General Meetings were held upstairs.

Ron Watkins – Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

We had great times for working class boys. Every weekend we would attend regattas at Erith -Gravesend- Medway Towns-Lea etc. Means of transport was on the back of a lorry with the boats on top of us, which was great especially when it rained!! It was always best to get a position behind the drivers cab as one incident nearly proved fatal for an unlucky club member at the rear of the lorry at the tailgate. Terry Hunter was drinking a bottle of pop

and decided to throw the bottle over the side of the lorry. The bottle by a million to one chance "bounced" off a lamp post and hit another club member on the head at the rear of the lorry !! He survived. Just !!

John Hall – Club Member

It was 1964 when heard that Greenwich Council were thinking of building a new boathouse on the south side of the river. I went to see Mrs Woodward-Fisher, our President and told her that if this happened it could affect our membership. We then had meetings with her about what we can do and sat down and talked about raising money. We had some good people in the club, the likes of Ronnie Orwell, Architect and Freddie Adams who was an Accountant and Club Treasurer.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

The building of the new boat house was not a happy affair as far I was concerned. Summerfield purchased Calders Wharf and Mrs Woodward-Fisher engaged an architect – the designer of Harrison and Gibson's in Ilford. A meeting was held at Mrs Fisher's home in Lewisham. It was fairly obvious from the dialogue that no one had any concept of the cost of the project until I put forward a square foot costing based on the area that they were talking about. This brought them down to earth, and no doubt the cost was too high. As far as I can recall nothing further was done, until there was a meeting at Percy Muggleton's pub, The Prince of Wales – one of the Summerfield's attended and again the old ground was gone over. My experience of the costing was not well received, in fact Summerfield was so arrogant that he threatened me with a wild claim, "He would see that I never worked in the UK again". Obviously this was nonsense, but, I considered that I could no longer work upon reason. The plans were drawn up and I recall Costain had been approached, and not surprisingly they gave some figures much the same as mine. I took no further part in the building of the club house. I was so disenchanted with the whole set up. The one redeeming factor in all this was that Mrs Fisher's business acumen obtained the best deals possible for the club.

Ronnie Orwell – Club Secretary

At a General Meeting in 1964 we announced that we were going to build a new club on the site of the old one at a cost of £50,000. Ian Mikardo was MP for Poplar and so a working dinner was arranged in the House of Commons for about 20 people. The three evening papers were there. We launched an appeal and after about 3 months we had only raised about £3000. Money was very slow coming in when suddenly the City Parochial Council, a church body, gave us £10,000 to be paid to us in £2000 stages as the work progressed.
and Life Member

Ron Watkins – Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

We had to acquire the land to build upon. Meetings were held at Belmont Hill, the home of Mr and Mrs Fisher and included her husband Bill in the early days but he sadly died during the negotiations. He was always at her side with his favourite parrot perched on his shoulder and Bill's jacket showing signs of the parrot's frequent resting place. We had to keep off the subject of work on the river as some of us were Lightermen and Trade Unionists, as she had some very strong views on unions which were not the same as ours. This did not detract from the fact that she was a remarkable woman and later became known as "Mother Thames" after a television programme on her work which some of us took part in. She was a chain smoker, drank Ballantynes Whiskey and wore the most eccentric clothes and was never without her monacle. She was always a soft touch for needy causes including the Poppy Appeal standing all day in Lewisham. She ran a constant Jumble Sale from her home for Lewisham Hospital. Nevertheless, the meetings always ended in good humour and on one occasion I remember she was taking our names in order to form the Charity. Sam Spencer was my Vce Captain, his full name was Samuel Taylor Walker Spencer – she said "Good God, it sounds like a brewery" and he replied "Yes my Dad's favourite".

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

In 1965 the club made headlines in the newspapers such as 'Dockers strike at Henley'. Ray Easterling and Jerry McCarthy were in the Silver Goblets event. They beat Hungerford and Jackson from Canada who were the reigning Olympic Pairs Champions. They won by 1¼ lengths in a time of 7.49. They went out in the semi-final to the eventual winners from Germany, Gorny and Bergau. This pair went one better the following year reaching the final before getting beaten by another German pair, Lucke and Bothe.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977

The club was a long narrow boathouse with 4's down one side and the rum tums on the other .At the back of the boathouse were the changing rooms and showers. We later knocked through into the disused station which the building use to be many years before .Nigel built a few pull up bars and we accumulated some weights so we could do some strength work , the only thing was some years before the station must have been a store for some old salt or chemicals , whatever , anyway it always had a very sharp smell about the place and when training before long your throat and eyes were being affected. By the front doors of the club out to the river was always a large bucket of tallow. This was to smear onto the leather buttons so as to ease the blade when it was feathered , the tallow was not always used on the blades as the new coxes found out as any misbehaviour or a few cheeky words always ended up with a large deposit down the front of your shorts.

John Roberts – Captain 2005 – 2007

I remember going to Eton Boat House in 1965 to buy the clubs first plastic sculling boats. Ronnie Watkins, Teddy Murray and myself struck a deal – 5 boats for £500 and they stood the club in good stead for many years after.

John “Rasher” Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972

I can remember the Dinner and dances at the end of the season in the Tavistock Rooms in Mincing Lane near Fenchurch Street , where the Club Race prizes were presented .It use to take all night , and the worse thing was being kissed by Dolly Fisher , Bobby Prentice told me she could scar you for life so I used to rub the spit off as soon as I collected my prize.

John Roberts – Captain 2005 - 2007

Mrs Fisher was wonderful and got all sorts of people on board. Ex Mayor of London Lord Rothchilds, Lord Cottesloe and many charities to help our cause. The hardest job that I had was to convince her to meet the local MP Ian Mikardo, a left wing Socialist. Dolly was a true Tory so this was always going to be a hard task, but when I told her that he could be good for £10,000from the Sports Foundation she agreed and true to his word he came up trumps which really pleased her and that year at the Club’s dinner at Tavistock Square she even agreed to sit next to him.

John “Rasher” Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

The club race prizes were given out in the Eastern Pub in Burdett Road. We then went Panes in Lewisham for two years and 150-200 people would attend. The following year we went to the Co-op in South Woolwich and about 300 attended. Mrs Fisher, the Club President, would not attend the one at the Co-op as she said that it was run by communists so for the first time we had our club dinner without a President. We then moved to Plantation House in the City for a few years before moving to Hanover Grand in the West End.

Ron Watkins – Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

We started winning lots of races in all events. We became the most successful club around 1965 winning the Evening Standard Trophy for top club. We won it again the following year.

John “Rasher” Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

Kenny Collins comes to mind along with Roy Gould who were "experts" at the fine art of dodging paying and the initiation of young coxswains. We all endured this initiation routine, which I remember always involved a steel comb, a bottle of Domestos and black paint!! It is a small wonder that John Roberts, Bobby and myself managed to have a family (Philip Skelton always got away with it because his brother was the club captain)but the unluckiest of all the young coxswains was Aaron MacPherson. Poor Aaron spent most

Sunday mornings adrift on the river starkers tied to a wooden pallet with black paint where most people had hair when they reached puberty. He was even seen at the top of the old clubhouse flag pole, hoisted up there by the usual suspects, who proceeded to leave him up there for most of the morning!! Aaron had a great sense of humour and I remember one day he was coxing in a club race and the stroke man bellowed at him "shout something" All Aaron shouted was "All puff together" brilliant !!

John Hall – Club Member

My first experience of Henley Regatta was 1966. The club entered an eight and a single scull. We stayed at a church hall at Medmenham for 3 weeks. We arrived Saturday afternoon to find the sewage drain was overflowing. Someone went and got the caretaker. When he came he had roll your own fag in his mouth, he lifted the manhole cover to reveal brown sewage floating on top of the water. He threw his cigarette down, rolled up his sleeves, knelt down and put his arm right in to reach the blockage. Wiggling his finger and arm it suddenly went slurp slurp and the drain cleared - he then stood up with wet and brown slime on his arm, he wiped his arm on his trousers and calmly rolled another fag! I bet he lived to a ripe old age!!

Micky Lane – Captain 1987 -1990

The Vale of Evesham.

The club headed to Evesham regatta over the Whitsun bank holiday in the sixties. We usually took a large entry and a coach, the motorised type, was hired to take us. We would stay over the weekend travelling back on the Monday. We would tend to win a few pots, but the big attraction was the trophy for senior fours, the Vale of Evesham. The club had won this trophy in the '50s but had not managed to repeat this success as this event always attracted some top crews.

The trophy was a solid silver model of Evesham Abbey, quite a large trophy housed in a cabinet and thought to be valuable. In 1966 the club again won the event, bringing the 'Vale' back to the East-End. The crew was Freddy Bradshaw, Frank Walker, Kenny Collins and Vic Brown.

The silverware at the regatta was guarded by one of Worcestershire's finest and the policeman's words when he heard who had won the 'Vale' would live to haunt us. 'We won't be seeing that again then' were his immortal words. Well, he was right. That year, 1966, a number of sporting trophies were stolen including I think it was the Whitbread gold cup, and of course the World Cup. Unfortunately the 'Vale of Evesham' trophy was the third cup to be stolen, and naturally the press picked up on the story.

As we know, the World Cup was recovered, found by Pickles the dog, whose owner I believe was a Lighterman - funny that! I don't recall what happened with the other trophy but Pickles was no help with finding the 'Vale' it vanished without trace from the club's headquarters 'The Princess of Wales' pub, known as 'Macs'.

In those days the pub housed all the clubs trophies and they were quite a spectacle on show above the bar. Because the 'Vale' was such a big trophy it had to stand on the bar counter and the fact that it was thought to be valuable made it an easy target for thieves.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977

The news was broken to me by the Landlord Benny Davenport whilst I was on my way to work on the Monday morning. At first I thought that he was joking until I looked in at the pub. We were all devastated and in a state of disbelief. Sadly it was never recovered even though we had given the Police good leads. Sadly no price could be put on its value. The workmanship was incredible but its melt down value was only that of scrap.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

The following year we had a lone entry at Evesham a sculler, Roy Gould, and he had the job of returning the miniature flag poles that stood atop the tower on the trophy. They had been removed as it was feared they would be stolen!

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977

Roy Gould had to take back an empty box with just some flag poles inside. We placed a skull and crossbone on one of the flag poles hoping that they had a sense of humour and to try and lessen the guilt at the loss of the trophy.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

I remember vividly one Sunday morning a young man came into the changing rooms wearing a club blazer holding a large paper bag full of "hundreds and thousands". This young man had a pair of shoulders that just fitted through the changing room doors, and spontaneously he proceeded to give all these sweets to all us young coxswains!! I was in awe of this generous man, and I should have been his name was Kenny Dwan.

John Hall – Club Member

In about 1966 John Hall, Phil Skelton, Bobby Prentice and me used to meet in the summer holidays and scull up to Wapping , we couldn't have been 12 or 13, but that's how we learnt about the river and where to go and where not to. As most of the guys we steered were watermen we soon learnt how to look after ourselves when afloat and that knowledge has stayed with us to this day.

John Roberts – Captain 2005 – 2007

Bobby Prentice, John Roberts, Colin Seymour and myself were desperate to scull and would therefore "sneak" down to the boathouse in our summer school holidays and think nothing of sculling to the Tower and back on our

own. We even ventured over to Deptford Creek on high tides to practice "starts". We were probably about 13 at the time and obviously had no fear but had been well coached and informed about the ways of the river by our lightermen peers.

John Hall – Club Member

Mrs Fisher got Doug Somerfield to become Vice President. We then formed a charity and Doug managed to get a 99 year lease on the Calder's Wharf site. The first set of plans were drawn up by Ronnie Orwell, they looked super but were not acceptable to the GLC so we went back to the drawing board and Doug took charge of the project. All we had to do was raise £75,000, not an easy target unless we won the pools.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

Apparently 1967 was the summer of love, but we, the Poplar contingent at Henley wouldn't have known much about that, being the sad Bastards pulling boats along the river that we were. By the time we heard about the permissive society we were too late to join! All we had out of it was three weeks of listening to the newly released 'Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' brought to the Medmenham village hall by Nobby Clarke.

That year the club had an unprecedented 3 entries at the regatta. In the Silver Goblets Jerry McCarthy was injured so Ray Easterling partnered Sid Rand from Wallingford RC. Sid was married to Mary Rand who was the golden girl of British athletics who had won a gold medal at the 1964 Olympic Games in the long jump. When she turned up to watch them train she had many admirers, not least the Poplar squad who were competing! This crew went out in the second round so the golden connection didn't work for them.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

In 1967 Jerry McCarthy broke his wrist at the start of the season so was unable to row. Ray Easterling was lucky as he was approached by Sid Rand from Leander Club to see if he would like him to take Jerry's place. Can you imagine and Poplar / Leander composite – both ends of the spectrum in the rowing world. The week before the regatta I got a call from the Stewards who were unhappy about the combination as they thought it bad publicity and so the pair had to race as Poplar / Wallingford.

That year we also had a very good eight. I managed to talk Teddy Murray into taking the coaching side of the club which he did. We went up to Henley before the regatta to find a base to use for pre-regatta training. We were lucky enough to have met Jack Beresford before when we were filming "Half a Sixpence" with Tommy Steele. Jack put us on to Medmenham Hall which became our training camp for any years to come

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

There were other lads at the club, Johnny Bidmead started coaching some lads known as the Biddy Boys. They were a good bunch and stayed at the club for some time .

Every few weeks 4 guys use to turn up and want to row , they were not regular members , but on this one occasion Rasher asked me to look after them and take them to Lenanton's, which is Sea Con now. I gave the orders , "Hands on , lift , take her out" There was a crash of riggers on wood , the boathouse doors swung back violently , 2 of the guys had bleeding heads where they had butted the riggers on the boat above . It was then that Rasher came running down the boathouse and told me they were all blind and I had better be careful with them , but I must say they all rowed ok and I managed to get them to Lenantons and back without losing any of them.

John Roberts – Captain 2005 - 2007

1967 - Kenny Dwan entered the Diamond sculls for the first time this year but lost in the first round to Burgin from Switzerland. I believe Kenny was only 18 years old at the time, very young for this event. We also had a Thames Cup crew entered this year. It was my first taste of Henley and left me with an enduring love of the place. We won through two rounds before going out in the quarter-finals to Severn Scullers. The crew was: Bow: R. Brown, 2: P. Holderman, 3: J. Clarke, 4: N. Holman, 5: A. Lane, 6:B. Cole, 7: M. Spencer, Stroke: M. Lane, Cox: R. Prentice.

The most notable thing about this year was the training camp that was established at Medmenham village hall. The hall was used for many years afterwards, but the first year was special. We stayed there for three weeks, being catered for by Johnny Skelton - the captain, and his wife Mavis along with Teddy Murray - our coach, and his wife Kim. They looked after us royally, cooking three meals a day and generally spoiling us. Great days!

In future years Kenny Dwan's mum and dad, Albert and Rene, and then John and Philip Skelton's mum and dad, John Sir and Ivy did their bit to look after the boys. John Snr was known as 'Eggs' and John Jnr was always called 'Rasher'. Don't ask, I think it was a docks thing!

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

Doug Summerfield had a friend who introduced us to the Sports Editor of the Daily Mail, Roy Moor. The story of Poplar at Henley appeared on the regattas first day on the back page with a large picture of my wife Mavis and Teddy's wife Sandra feeding the boys. The next day a local fishmonger sent us a large box of fish, butchers from Poplar sent up meat to help with our expenses, not forgetting Mrs Fisher who supplied all the beds and mattresses from her home. The beds were stored in the hall for many years thereafter.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

Our neighbours at Medmenham was the Dog and Badger pub, which we reluctantly visited sparingly due to the reason we were there, and a chap who lived in the cottage next to the hall who we knew as Mr Vassall-Adams.

Whilst he was married and had a son, who he was proud to tell us was an officer in the Royal Navy and been on the first submarine to go under the North Pole, he was also a gay old boy (in both senses of the word) who

couldn't believe his luck that all these Adonis's - ok, pushing it a bit there - had turned up on his doorstep. He was something of an expert punter and loved to parade along the river with his boys on board. He told us that he had joined the Navy for wine women and song, but all he got was rum, bum and gramophone records! A great character though.

Also a few miles up the road were RAF Medmenham. Some nights there would be disco's held there. Only problem was that we had a curfew at the hall. If anybody was still competing at the regatta than we had to be back by 10pm or else you took your chances with sleeping in the cars or somewhere else if you got lucky!

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

Trips to regattas were a real big high light of the year, Wallingford, Eversham , the Serpentine all attended by a coach load of supporters with bags of food and lots of drink , a real East End Beano.

We use to hire a lorry from Putney to come and pick up the boats from the club , then on Saturday morning a 52 seater coach would pick all the supporters up from the Princess of Wales just round the corner from the club . We use to fill the coach every trip

John Roberts – Captain 2005 – 2007

Back to fund raising. We were now having all sorts of events to raise money including race nights, boxing nights, charity rows, social nights, we even entered the Battersea Easter parade with a tub pair on the back of a lorry with all of our trophies on it and lots of youngsters and Doggett's in their impressive uniforms.

They allowed us to have a marquee in Battersea Park for the weekend and Doug Summerfield arranged to have the James Bond Aston Martin on show for the weekend and my wife Mavis made dresses in Polar colours for the girls to wear to add to its beauty. DJ Alan Freeman ran the disco and band. We were nearly there with our fundraising. We needed just £14,000 more.

John “Rasher” Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

I recall the fundraising that the club had to do. We ran horse race nights, river boat shuffles and Christmas Functions. Many of the prizes were donated by publicans and I remember that at one Christmas draw a large brewery made a donation of just two cans of stout!

Kenny Orwell – Life Member

In the '60s the Saturday edition of one of London's evening newspapers, I think it was the Evening News, started a Rowing League. One point was awarded for each win, no matter whether it was an eight, sculler or anything in-between. This suited Poplar as we had quite a few successful scullers. Also we had a Captain with an eye to the main chance who included any win anywhere. I'm not so sure club races weren't included!

We won this league most, if not every year and it was great to see the club's name above such club's as Leander, London etc. There was a method to John Skelton's (the Captain) conniving. Any publicity was welcomed in the club's fundraising efforts for the new boathouse and in this he was obviously successful.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

I think most of our success was down to the fact that we went to regattas as a club entering everything from novices to seniors with everybody supporting one another with lots of supporters as well. We always had a good social following. I remember at Wallingford regatta they likened me the RAF in the war, drop enough bombs and some are sure to hit target. The idea was to maintain the clubs spirit and this was proved right with the amount of success we achieved.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

When Johnny Skelton was captain we had an eight training for Henley. He entered us for a regatta at Wallingford, we were in an early heat and got beat. John said don't worry, hurry up and de-rig the eight, I thought you might lose so I've entered you at Greenwich this afternoon! That's confidence for you!!

Micky Lane – Captain 1987 - 1990

One year at Henley, Colin Seymour and myself thought we had struck lucky. We met a couple of girls at the RAF camp who came from Marlow. They invited us back to stay the night, and being as this was much more preferable than kipping in Colin's van (he was a plumber) we jumped at the offer. Unfortunately, they lived in probably the only squat in Marlow! When we went into this place there were all sorts of weird characters. Whilst we were a couple of young lads, and Colin was a big boy 6ft 4 inches or so, we both had the feeling that things weren't right and legged it. So it was back to the hall and kipping in the van until we heard the milkman arrive and Albert Dwan came out to meet the milkman. We related the night's events to the two of them, with the milkman telling us we had had a lucky escape as that area was notorious. The gut feeling we both had served us well. We might have only been Island boys but the first thing you learnt there was to be streetwise. Another place of ill-repute that was nearby was the Hell Fire Club which was situated on the river just down the lane from the hall. Unfortunately it was closed about two hundred years before we got there, otherwise I'm sure some of the lads would have foregone the rowing for a bit of the debauchery that took place there in the years of yore!

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

Kenny Dwan made his first Senior appearance at the Metropolitan Regatta at Putney where he met Britain's number one, Hugh Wardle – Yerburch. Kenny won. I had to persuade his coach Wally Pearce to enter Henley.

John “ Rasher” Skelton – Captain 1963 -1972 and Life Member

In 1968 Kenny Dwan was the sole club entry at Henley but did us proud by reaching the final. He lost to Hugh Wardell-Yerburgh by 4 lengths in 10.25. Maybe this was Kenny’s best shot at winning the Diamond Sculls, but fate was against him. The times tell the story of how slow the conditions were and having the Bucks station didn’t do him any favours.

Kenny had his revenge on Hugh by being selected for the Mexico Olympic Games in front of him a few months later.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

When the clubhouse was finished we had a bill for £65,000 so we had to arrange a meeting with the finance committee of Tower Hamlet Council.

Alan Butler, Club Secretary and myself as Treasurer, went to Patriot Square to meet them. We came away with a grant for £1000 and a loan for £14,000 at 1% over 14 years. The club house was paid for.

We started the 200 club with 134 members and gradually built it up. The prizes were £20 and three £10 draws each month. Each year we would offer a new Mini Minor as a prize which we could get for £485. This paid back Tower Hamlet Council.

Ron Watkins – Captain 1956 – 1958 and Life Member

As far as I can remember, Poplar crews in the 1960s seemed unable to progress past the finishing positions of 30s and 40s in the Head of the River. Whilst these were respectable positions it wasn’t until 1969 that we finally made a bigger impression. After finishing 5th in the Reading Head, being beaten only by the top Oxbridge crews and the like, we went to Kingston Head expecting to do well.

Having University of London’s Olympic crew from the previous year’s Mexico Olympics entered in the race, I said to Kenny Dwan “Do you think we can make 2nd? “ His reply was “No we’re going to win it”. I don’t know if he believed it, but it showed his attitude to racing. Well, I was right and we finished 2nd, but it was a lesson in positivity.

The crew was coached in part by Kenny’s coach Wally Pearce, and thanks to his and Kenny’s connections at Putney we did a lot of work with crews such as UL and Tideway Scullers. These crews were a class above us, being full of Internationals but the experience worked for us and we acquitted ourselves well. I think this gave us a belief in the crew and pushed us up into 14th place in the Head, a massive leap for the club. We were probably the fastest club crew in the race, considering that those who finished above us would have been University, International and clubs that would have been packed with top oarsmen in composite crews. The crew was R Brown, bow, P Holdeman, 2, J Clarke, 3, B Cole, 4, A Lane, 5, K Dwan, 6, M Spencer, 7, M Lane, stroke and R Prentice, cox.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

1969 saw two entries in the Diamonds from Poplar. Jerry McCarthy and Kenny Dwan were our hopes this year, but they were both knocked out by a fellow named Tytus who was entered by the Seattle Tennis Club! I think there was a sculler at Wimbledon that week playing tennis. Talk about adding insult to injury!

For the record, Jerry was beaten in the first round easily, and Kenny went out in the semi-final by $\frac{2}{3}$ of a length.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

Kenneth Victor Dwan

Born in [Rotherhithe](#), London in 1948 Kenny joined [Poplar Blackwall and District Rowing Club](#) at the age of 12 initially as a cox but soon as an oarsman. When he was 15 he was apprenticed as lighterman to his grandfather and this allowed him to enter the novice sculls in the National Dock Labour Board (NDLB) regatta at Putney. He won the race which included contestants of that year's [Doggett's Coat and Badge](#) Race. While he was sculling he continued working as a lighterman.

In 1968 Kenny was runner-up in the [Diamond Challenge Sculls](#) at [Henley Royal Regatta](#). He also competed for Great Britain in the [single scull](#) in the [1968 Summer Olympics](#) in Mexico. He reached the final and came 6th overall.

Also in 1968 he won the [Wingfield Sculls](#) for the first time. He won the Wingfield Sculls again in 1969, 1970, 1971 and 1972. In 1972 he competed again for Great Britain in the single scull in the [Summer Olympics in Munich](#) when he came 9th. Dwan was runner up in the Diamond Challenge Sculls in 1974 and won the Wingfield Sculls for the sixth time in 1975. He retired shortly after.

During his career Kenny Dwan represented Great Britain five times in the single scull event.

1970s

Probably the best period for rowing in the clubs history the 1970's were enthusiastic times after the club had enjoyed success in the late 1960's. Bobby Prentice was elected as Junior Sculler at the World Championships in both 1970 and 1971 regattas. Kenny Dwan reigned supreme as the country's top sculler winning both Scullers Heads and more Wingfield titles. He was again selected for the 1972 Olympics.

Poplar's new boathouse opened on September 26th 1970.

1974 saw the club produce its best ever win in the Head of River finishing 8th overall. The crew contained future International oarsmen that went on to win World and Olympic medals, John Roberts, Robert Milligan and Colin Seymour.

Martin Spencer and Bobby Prentice returned to the club after winning Henley in 1976 for London Rowing Club and represented England in 1977 and 1978. They also won the National Championships of Great Britain in 1978.

Ian Gold was Great Britain representative at the Junior World Championships in 1978 in the single sculls. The previous year he rowed in the quadruple sculls.

The boathouse finally opened in September 1970. Harry Read and his wife Pat were the first caretakers and were an excellent team. Harry repaired all the clubs boats for many years. Harold and Joan Shaw managed the bar. Harold was Vice Captain at the time at the club got off to a wonderful start.

John "Rasher" Skelton – Captain 1963 – 1972 and Life Member

The club managed four entries at Henley in 1970. Again two scullers, Kenny and Jerry. Both were beaten by Pat Delafield. Jerry in the quarter-final and Kenny in the semi-final.

In the Wyfolds the crew of Colin Seymour, Pat Sheehy, Bobby Prentice and Philip Skelton were a very young crew who went out in the first round to Molesey Boat Club. Both Bobby and Colin went on to be Henley winners and Internationals later on in their rowing careers. Phillip was later Captain, Secretary and all-round good egg, and Patsy went on to be what he was really good at, being Patsy. Every crew should have one! If Patsy was in a crew winning easily he would be winning more easily than the rest of the crew. His mantra was 'its money in the bank for when you need it'. Makes sense to me.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

The club had a bunch of "bushwackers" in the form of Harry and Teddy Roberts-Charlie Crouchman and of course Les MacPherson who at least once a week visited the local establishments not only to sample the beer but to "extort" as much sponsorship money for club racing as possible

John Hall – Club Member

Johnny Skelton, the Club Captain, suggested that we enter a Britannia Cup crew at the last minute. He reasoned that as we were going to be at Henley anyway we might as well have a row, thereby getting competitors tickets for the enclosure and a car park pass. Thus a crew was rounded up consisting of Maurice Coughlan, Richie Brown, Steve Pugh, Alan Lane and I think it was Billy Hickman cox.

We decided that with just about a month to train we would do our training over the Lea. The journey took us past Victoria Park Lido. Being weak-willed and what with the weather taking a warm turn we succumbed to doing a lot of swimming and not a lot of rowing. This lack of judgement told on us, big-time. There was a big entry in the Brit and we had two qualifying races. On the Friday we scraped home by a length from Townmead RC.

We turned up on Saturday for our next race against Garda Siochana, the Irish Police crew. We thought we would have no problem with this crew which looked like a novice crew. They turned out to be a big strong fit novice crew! Feeling the effects of the previous day's efforts we struggled to win by ½ a length. Needless to say our entry in the regatta proper didn't last long, being knocked out by Kingston RC in the first round. A lesson well learnt there.

An aside to this story. Garda Siochana went on to win the Thames Cup a few years later so they obviously took it more seriously than we did. I was in the press stand that day having just seen them win. As I looked towards the boat tents the victorious crew were mobbed by their supporters. The boat ramps weren't meant to hold that many people and within seconds it collapsed with the exhausted crew swimming for their lives along with everybody else! There was boaters and flowery hats all over the river. Luckily no harm came to them, except to their ego.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 – 1977 and Life Member

In 1970 club youngsters like Bobby Prentice was national youth champion. Kenny was the best sculler in the country and the momentum was growing.

John Hall – Club Member

1971 saw 2 entries from Poplar. We had a pseudo 3rd entry, Jerry McCarthy entered in the Diamonds for Argosy. Kenny Dwan reached the 2nd round before being beaten by Demiddi - the Argentine World Champion. In the Britannia Cup the crew of R Brown, M Lane, A Lane, M Spencer and cox G McCarthy won a qualifying race before going out in the first round to a selected Vesta crew. That year, 'Rowing' magazine assessed the speed of the crews and in this event Poplar were found to be the 6th fastest crew. Not bad for a semi-scratch crew.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

In came the seventies and Bill Shelton who generously purchased a brand new George Sims of Eel Pie Island eight. To us it was like winning the lottery and then several months later Brian Gold managed to get another eight from Wearwell fashions once again built at Sims. We had two fabulous boats that were state of the art for their time and had the obvious impact of improving the standard of rowing within the club.

John Hall – Club Member

The 1972 Henley regatta had 3 entries from the club. In the Thames Cup a crew that had started the season as an inexperienced crew, only to charge through the statuses, capped their season with a great Henley. After beating Vesta in their first race they came up against a selected Kingston crew on the Friday. They brought the crowd to their feet with a magnificent effort along the enclosures only to lose by 6ft. The crew was J Ward, bow, K O'Shaughnessy 2, M Coughlin,3, K Read 4, B Green 5, J Roberts 6, R Milligan 7, D Nankivell Stroke and T Sheehy cox.

We had a Wyfold crew of R Prentice, P Skelton, A Lane and C Seymour that were beaten in the first round by London, and in the Diamonds Kenny Dwan was a selected entry that year but lost in the semi-final to Sean Drea from Ireland.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

In the early seventies the club was well represented at Wallingford Regatta with a couple of fours ,two eights and Kenny Dwan in the elite sculls.Our transport for the day was a bright amber double decker bus with a black driver. The bus was full, with some rowers but mostly the usual strong contingent of supporters.We arrived at Wallingford at about 9 am. The rowers headed for the changing rooms and the supporters headed for the nearest pub to knock the door down until the landlord opened.

John Hall – Club Member

At a General Meeting in about 1973 in the club house, it was proposed to allow girls to join the club. It was approved.

Ron Watkins – Captain 1954 – 1957 and Life Member

Back in the early '70s there was no facilities for women at Poplar. Then Harry Read's daughter Sue began to go out on the river, which was no hardship for her as the Read family at the time were the tenants of the club flat, so no shower problems for her. She was joined by a few of her friends, Helen, who married Maurice Coughlin, and Pauline, who later married Milky.Actually this group of pioneers never lasted the course. Sue went over to Globe Rowing Club, traitor, as they had a developing women's section, and the other two nabbed a couple of our oarsmen.

Facilities only were made available a few years later when there was an influx of female members. The committee room was transformed into the women's changing room and the rest is History, It wasn't until 1979 that a shower was added.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

After the efforts of the previous years crew, we entered a Thames Cup crew in 1973 with great hopes. This crew met a very strong Garda Siochanna entry in the first round, going down by $1\frac{2}{3}$ lengths.

Kenny Dwan was our other entry that year going out to an up and coming British sculler, D Sturge in the 2nd round.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

1973 also saw the joining of another group within the club, The Dockers. I remember them well, they have the distinction of being the first Poplar members to row the 31 mile long Boston Marathon. A number of them like Bernie Steers, his brother Peter and Kevin Ashby went on to hold office within the club during the latter part of the 70s. Charlie Vincent would do a lot of fundraising for the club. George Presland became caretaker after Harry and Pat Read had left the flat.

Chris Spencer – Captain – 2000 – 2004 & 2010 -2018

In 1974 we had a squad of 16 oarsmen that trained 6 days a week and twice on Saturdays (we even had a hot lunch in the boathouse between outings). We were coached by Teddy Murray and Kenny Dwan. We also had permission to start to train in and use the West India Dock which was made up of 2 x 500 metre courses (one in each dock running parallel with each other !!) it was therefore 500 metres then full rudder hard on stroke side, then back full rudder hard on bow side. It was a wonder that we never had a banana boat. Mind you we were lucky to stay in the Dock as one Sunday morning Maurice's younger brother Jamie and his mate decided that they would open the sluice gates at the blue bridge entrance!! The Dock master was not happy. We never worried about weather or tide, it was fierce competition to get into the first boat. Nigel Holman would travel around all the local watering holes including Kate Hodders (our favourite pub) on a Friday night to try and catch people out drinking. If you got caught, you were out simple as !! Wednesday night it was Creek Road School for one hour of solid running and gym work non stop!! All the lighter boys were told sometimes to leave early as they were de-hydrating and losing too much weight. Unfortunately myself, John Roberts and Miggs never got that luxury. But we were told by the trainer that we could go and have one pint of Guinness after to rehydrate ourselves. TECHNOLOGY eh!!!

John Hall – Club Member

The club had managed to hold a position in the top 20 since 1969 culminating in a best ever finish of 8th in 1974 This crew was J. Hall, bow, D. Nankevell, 2, J. Dwan, 3, J. Roberts, 4, R. Milligan, 5, K. Dwan, 6, R. Prentice, 7, P. Skelton, stroke, and Billy Hickman, cox.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

PBDRC – Our History

All the training paid off in the end with the first eight starting 18th and finishing 8th. The race itself went so quick, but I knew we had done well as we had overtaken so many crews and my elation at the finish in Putney was shortlived as the pain and exhaustion "kicked in". Needless to say I have never rowed in that race since. Poplars 2nd crew also came in with an outstanding performance of 56th out of 400 entrants. But we then discovered that the Tideway Scullers crew that won the Vernon Trophy beating the national squad contained none other but a certain Martin Spencer-Colin Seymour-Jerry McCarthy all Poplar members. But I was pleased they rowed for Tideway Scullers otherwise I probably would not have got in the Poplar first crew.

John Hall – Club Member and Bow man 1974

In 1974 the club had 2 entries again at Henley. Kenny Dwan reached the final of the Diamonds before being defeated by Sean Drea. Our other entry was a Wyfold crew of R Milligan J Roberts D Nankevell and P Skelton. Leander were their first round opponents and they beat Poplar by 4½ lengths in 7.49.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977

In the 1970's we had the Met Police Rowing Club as tenant's at the new boathouse. This situation led to several things happening. Firstly, the black market in the changing room was suspended! Only joking (not).

Brian Gold was a Police Sergeant who really took an interest in the sport. He brought his three sons into the club, Alan, Ian and Andrew, and also took up residency as the boathouse caretaker. Through his contacts an eight was bought for the club, the Wearwell.

The boat was named after the clothing company owned by the donor. I can't remember his name (Asir Nadir) but I think he was the head of an organisation that went skint and he absconded to North Cyprus out of reach of the British authorities. Still, we got a boat out of it!

The Met Police had rowed at the Head of the Dart and introduced the club to the race. Poplar took a large entry to Dartmouth for quite a few years. We stayed for about 4 days in a holiday village in Dartmouth. When the weather turned cold and the chalets needed heating this could be expensive. Luckily amongst our ranks was an electrician. I don't remember too much money going into the meters!

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

I joined the club in 1973 as a coxswain as my Dad was a member as were my Uncle and cousin. My early memories were of Jerry McCarthy coaching the eights during the winter. We used to boat three very competitive crews, one made up of scullers, which was the fastest, one of the better rowers and one of the younger rowers. The fastest two would always finish in the top end of the eights head.

Chris Spencer - Captain – 2000 – 2004 & 2010 - 2018

The club was very successful at Dartmouth, winning from our first visit. The following year our first crew of P. Skelton, J. Roberts, R. Milligan and D. Nankevell (can't remember the cox, probably Billy Hickman) went off first. Unfortunately half way into the race and with no other crews to follow, they literally went up the creek! The river divides into two directions and they chose the wrong course. The club's second crew of R. Brown, B. Green, K. Read, A. Gold and cox Andrew Gold (a very colourful crew) had started 12th and were unaware of the drama ahead. Having overtaken all the crews in front with the exception of our first crew and a crew from Bideford, we reached the last stage of the race with Bideford in our sights. There was an unusual amount of cheering from our supporters which we couldn't understand until we realised our first crew was nowhere to be seen. We went on to win the race and then saw our first crew chasing along to the finish spitting blood. They weren't happy bunnies. Apparently, a course marshal had neglected to point them in the right direction. We bought him a drink afterwards and toasted him with our tankards! All's fair in love, war and rowing.

Ritchie Brown – Captain 1973 -1977 and Life Member

I began to cox a four of Terry Sheeny, Alan Bennett, Richie Vincent and Les Broom, they were all about nineteen at the time. We went to race at Nottingham which was my first time away from home and I was slightly naive. They told there was a time difference between Nottingham and London so when I would ring my mum in the morning everyone in the hotel had a laugh at my expense as I would ask her what the time was in London. I was only aged nine or ten but grew up fast after that.

I remember that in 1977, the Queens Silver Jubilee year, there were a number of events in London including a race through the London Bridges for London Clubs. I was coxswain for the crew and it finished second behind City Orient. The prize giving was performed by a young Ken Livingston in County Hall.

Chris Spencer - Captain – 2000 – 2004 & 2010 -2018

My cousin Martin and Bobby Prentice were in a double scull. They had won at Henley in 1976 for London Rowing Club but then people like Charlie Vincent raised enough money to buy them a boat, the "Corky". They were selected to row for England in 1977 and 1978. Although very fast, the Great Britain slot was taken by the 1977 World Champions and 1978 World silver medallists, Baillieu and Hart. They did race against them and the latter never had an easy race. Martin would go on to win the Scullers Head and Bobby was always in the top few. This attracted scullers to the club and at weekends there could be in excess of thirty scullers, all racing against each other.

The club had always had youngsters coming through aspiring to be faster than those slightly older than them. In the 70s the likes of Ian Gold and Martin Styles would aspire to be as good as Martin and Bobby, Kenny Dwan had retired from rowing in 1975. Martin Styles won a bronze medal in 1977 at the National Championships and Ian won Gold in the Junior Single Sculls in 1977 and went on to represent Great Britain at two World Junior Championships.

The club was rich with raw talent during this era and everyone trained to a high standard and every session was competitive. With the likes of Ian, John

PBDRC – Our History

Dwan and others that the club was attracting the future was looking very promising as both my brother and I were now aspiring to be as good as those before us. Simon McCarthy had just joined the club from Globe and so the club had a youthful squad all feeding off each other. Ian was the fastest of the younger squad and he and Jonny went on to win the Pairs Head in 1979.

Chris Spencer - Captain – 2000 – 2004 & 2010 - 2018

1979 – Another era in the club's history begun in 1979 when Billy Blunden introduced his footballing friends to rowing. The likes of George Bartlett, Alan Taylor, Dave Paul and Barry Blunden joined the club and would go onto hold office in the club as Captain and Secretary at various times. I remember seeing these men in their mid twenties, many of whom were athletic in build and suitable for rowing, then there was Dave Paul.

Chris Spencer - Captain – 2000 – 2004 & 2010 – 2018

Doggett's Coat and Badge Wager

Thomas Doggett was an Irish comedian who came to London in about year 1690. He appears to have taken great interest in the Thames watermen, who in those days were much more numerous than they are today and were the equivalent of the modern day London taxi drivers.

It was common custom for rowing wagers to take part on the Thames and so Doggett's was not the first race but has come to be one, if not the oldest annual sporting event in the World, outdating even the St. Leger. Doggett organised the race himself until his death in 1721, when he instructed his executors to endow the race. Doggett's will set out in detail the style and particulars of the badge and livery. It was to be rowed each year on the 1st August, being the anniversary of the accession of George 1, the German Protestant King, to the Throne of England.

The details laid down by Doggett were "Five pounds for a badge of silver weighing twelve ounces and representing Liberty to be rowed for by six young watermen".

Those entitled to take part in the race are young watermen who are in their first year of freedom to the Worshipful Company of Watermen and Lightermen.

The course has always been four and a half miles between London Bridge and Chelsea. Until 1873 it was rowed against the tide, and since then with the tide. The original boats were four seater wherries and in 1769 rules were introduced to prevent the lightening of the boats. In 1906 best boats were first allowed and were used until 1955 when it was thought that the expense of buying or hiring a boat was too great for young watermen. Gigs were introduced to make the race fair and in 1964 the Fishmongers Company provided new boats. These boats were replaced in 1981 and again in 2005.

The race has been raced for every year since 1715 and Poplar Blackwall has had forty-five winners, which is more than any other club on the Tideway. Many favourites have raced and lost, including International oarsmen. In 1908 Mr Guy Nickalls wrote "This long course is not so much a test of speed as a test of watermanship and endurance, which after all, are more the qualities of a man who will get his living on the water".

Although still called a "Wager" today the race is now an amateur event.

Poplar Winners of the Doggett's Coat and Badge Wager

1902 R G Odell	1911 W J Woodward-Fisher	1915 L P J West
1924 H C Green	1935 A Gobbett	1939 D E Thomas
1945 S Thomas	1948 H F Clark	1951 M A J Martin
1954 K C Everest	1956 C Williams	1957 K C Collins
1960 R Easterling	1961 K R Usher	1962 C A Dearsley
1964 F F Walker	1965 A G Collins	1967 C M Briggs
1969 L E Grieves	1970 M S Spencer	1971 K V Dwan
1972 P Wilson	1973 R A Prentice	1976 P Prentice
1977 J Dwan	1978 A L McPherson	1981 W D Hickman
1982 G B Anness	1983 P J Hickman	1985 R B Spencer
1987 C Spencer	1988 G A Hayes	1989 R A Humphrey
1991 L C Neicho	1995 S Neicho	1996 R G Coleman
2001 N Beasley	2002 N R Dwan	2004 R E Dwan
2008 T J Enever	2013 N E Brice	2014 H J McCarthy

