



BOATHOUSE CHATTER

Welcome to Boathouse Chatter.
Thank you to all who have contributed to this issue.

The Boat House is approaching the big '50' which we had planned to celebrate in style. Sadly the celebrations we had planned have had to be postponed due to COVID. As an intro to the birthday celebrations, in this edition, we share the memories of those involved in making the boathouse a reality in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It's fascinating what they achieved.

Please send your news to anita@newlandmail.com by Sunday 13th September 2020. Next issue Sunday 20th September 2020

Let's work together to keep the chatter going...

Robbie Coleman is updating our Twitter account. Follow us on Twitter @PBDRC

DIARY DATES

- **26TH SEPTEMBER 2020**
BOATHOUSE 50TH BIRTHDAY
POSTPONED
- **AGM - TBC**

➤ Trustee Update

August has been a big month for getting more boats back onto the water which is great news. Doubles and Pairs from mixed households were back on the water at the start of August followed by quads and fours in the middle of August. British Rowing is working towards the re-introduction of eights by the end of August (assuming no resurgence of the virus). The gym, showers and changing room facilities remain out of bounds for now. We will update you as the British Rowing and government guidelines change.

Cheryl has arranged for the tea urn to be placed in the hall for those who fancy a brew after their outing. Please remember to maintain social distancing at all times.

The Trustees continue to meet regularly. If you have any queries or concerns, please contact me directly at danbartlett1@btinternet.com.

➤ Health & Safety Reminder – Nick Paul

Thanks to all who are continuing to adhere to the guidance in terms of booking outings and the hygiene routines. Please keep the following key points in mind during all outings:

- ✓ Wash hands regularly and use the hand sanitiser provided.
- ✓ Wipe down all handles & door plates using the blue paper towel & disinfectant spray or use the wipes provided.
- ✓ Adhere to social distancing at all times and be mindful of the 2 meter rule. This will become increasingly important as numbers using the boat house increases.
- ✓ Please use your own face mask /face covering and gloves.
- ✓ Wash down all boats and sculls using the soap provided.
- ✓ Remember to have your phone with you at all times.
- ✓ Pull the boathouse doors together if you are the last boat out.
- ✓ Crews to remain constant to reduce the number of different close interactions between rowers

➤ The Bar

The bar is open with social distancing. Please remember to book ahead...



OPEN FROM FRIDAY 24TH JULY 2020

WE CAN'T WAIT TO SEE YOU ALL...!!!

OUR NEW OPENING HOURS ARE:

FRIDAY	4PM – 10PM
SATURDAY	12PM – 10PM
SUNDAY	12PM – 8PM

Sticking to the current guidelines, we will be operating a ring up & book system. You will need to call up and book your space in order to secure your place.



- **You will need call 0207 538 9869 or 07903 228 244 to secure a place (we can't guarantee entry without a booking in place)**
- **You will notice lots of signs around the club, we kindly ask that you all follow these rules.**
- **You can still order a drink at the bar; however, you will not be able to sit there. You will be required to sit at a table.**
- **No children will be permitted (we hope to change this soon)**
- **Restricted opening hours are subject to change.**

➤ Get Involved

Share what you are doing to keep fit despite social distancing....

➤ Circuits

Monday, Wednesday & Friday from 5.45pm – contact Bev on samjunior135@gmail.com

➤ Ladies Crew Training

Tuesday and Thursday at 6.30 pm - Contact Szigyi.szogyi@gmail.com

➤ *The Boat House – Happy 50th Birthday on 26th September 2020- by Anita Newland in conversation with John (Rasher) Skelton, Ronnie Watkins and Alan Butler.*



Firstly, I would like to say a big thank you to John, Ronnie and Alan who have shared their memories with me so that I can share them with you.

The Boathouse as we know it today is 50 years old on 26th September 2020. Mrs Fisher (Club President), along with Club Captain, John (Rasher) Skelton, Treasurer, Ronnie Watkins and Secretary, Alan Butler lead the 'Boathouse Appeal' to raise £50k, (the eventual cost was £65k), to build a brand new Boathouse. To put the size of the task into perspective, Google equates £65k in 1970 to around £750k today ... so a massive achievement and one which we all benefit from today. The achievement is even more amazing when you consider there were less than 60 members and most of the members were earning an average of £9 per week working as Thames Watermen and Lightermen.

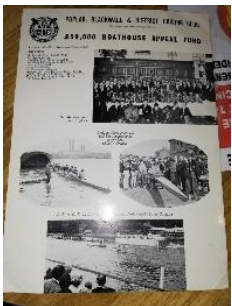


The original boat house was very basic and was built on the site of the old railway. The picture on the right, taken in the 1950s shows how long and thin it was. It was wide enough to store two rows of boats with a centre aisle long enough to store an eight. There was no gym. The members broke through a wall between the changing room and an old warehouse to create space to do weights but soon found out that it was not a healthy option as the warehouse had



previously been used to store dangerous chemicals. The only option remaining was to use a small space in the boathouse for weights. Winter training meant a long trip to Putney to use London Rowing Club's tank. This was an awful long drive for an hours training. The members were able to rig up some plumbing to provide cold running water but there were no other creature comforts. There was no bar in the original boathouse. The Princess of Wales pub on the Island served as the Club Headquarters and watering hole. All the club trophies were displayed there behind the bar and committee meetings were held there. The Vale of Evesham trophy, won by the club in 1966, was stolen from the Princess of Wales pub shortly after.

In 1965 Greenwich council were rumoured to be planning to build a new boathouse for the Globe rowing club on the south side of the river. This concerned Rasher as he thought that the improved facilities across the water would attract the Poplar crews. He decided that action was required and enlisted Mrs Fisher's help to upgrade facilities at Poplar and so the 'Boathouse Appeal' was born. The local MP – Ian Mikardo arranged for Ronnie and the team to go to the House of Commons to officially launch the 'Boathouse' appeal.



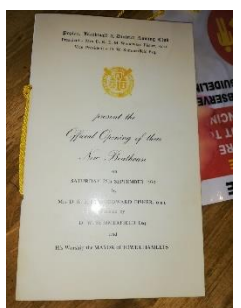
Ronnie remembers the fund rising very slowly in the early days, only getting up to around £3.5k in the first 6 months. However, things seemed to improve shortly after this time when the City Parochial Council made a significant donation of £10k followed by another £10k from the National Sports Council which Ian Mikardo worked hard to secure. This seemed to provide the much needed kick start and soon other donations started coming in.



The team have very fond memories of Mrs Fisher (Club President). She was a very flamboyant, eccentric lady, with lots of energy. The stories of committee meetings at Mrs Fisher's house in Blackheath sound very entertaining especially

when her pet parrot was present. She was a very good leader and was well known and well connected in the local area. She and her husband, Bill were able to introduce the team to lots of potential contributors to the Boathouse fund. Her energy and connections provided the much needed momentum to keep the appeal moving forward.

The team employed various creative methods of raising funds including the precursor to the current 'Crown Club' which was called the '200 Club'. The lucky winners were able to choose from £500 or a mini! They had the usual horse racing nights and dinner dances but the one event that the whole team talk very fondly of is the weekend in Battersea Park. As a result of their connection with Doug Sommerfield, (owner of Calders Wharf and designer of the new Boathouse), they were able to borrow the original James Bond silver Aston Martin complete with all gadgets. Doug was a prolific Aston Martin owner. At the time he owned a pink Aston Martin – which attracted most of the guest! James Bond's Aston Martin was made available throughout the weekend for people to sit in and have their picture taken. This raised significant funds for the pot. The then little know DJ – Alan (Fluff) Freeman provided the music. Raffles were also employed as part of the fund raising effort. The one attracting most attention had tickets to the 1966 World Cup Final as first prize which went to Mike Jameson (Vice Captain of Curlew).



In all, it took 5 years of hard work by the members and their families and donations from several local organisations to raise the £50k. The work to build the Boathouse had commenced before all the funds were available and took around 9 months to complete. The eventual cost of the build had risen to £65k and so the fund was slightly short. The team were advised to approach Tower Hamlets council who at the time were very keen to increase sport in the community. Very generously the council donated £1,000 and provided a loan for the £14k at a very affordable annual interest rate which meant that the purchase could be completed.

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So now the members were able to train in the Gym, rather than running around the Island and doing circuits at local schools. They had the benefit of the Rowing Tank, which meant that they no longer had to make the trip to Putney to use another club's tank. In addition, they had their own bar to socialise after training.



We had planned to celebrate the 50th anniversary this year. However, due to COVID we are unable to properly mark the occasion. This celebration has been postponed and definitely not cancelled and we will be celebrating as soon as we are able.

Explanation of pictures: Para 1 :John (Rasher) Skelton Club Captain: Para 2 LHS : Old boathouse L-R Harry Read, Kenny Dwan, Kenny's granddad, Ronnie Watkins (Treasurer). RHS aerial photograph of the boathouse taken in the 1950s. Para 4: LHS boathouse appeal leaflet front and RHS reverse of the leaflet showing the original design for the boathouse abandoned because planning permission was rejected. Para 6 : Programme for the official opening of the new boathouse. Para 7: LHS list of organisations contributing to the build cost. RHS newspaper clipping detailing the opening of the new boathouse. You can see Mrs Fisher with Rasher, Ronnie and Alan in the bar; the rowing tank in operation and a good view of the boathouse.

➤ ALL HALLOWS BY THE TOWER - the church of the Watermen and Lightermen - by Kate Boyle

All Hallows by the Tower is the official church of the Port of London, H.M. Customs and the Watermen and Lightermen Company and so is a bit of history that I thought would be of interest to the Club. It is the oldest Church in the City of London with the first wooden church being built on this spot in 675 A.D. It was rebuilt shortly afterwards using materials from the abandoned buildings of the Roman period, extended by the Normans while building the nearby Tower of London and added to during the Middle Ages, the C17th and the Victorian period. With the restoration after the Second World War, the church is now a delightful patchwork of many styles; its contents ranging from a Roman pavement through to the new Thames Memorial which was installed last year.

Due to its position near to the River, All Hallows has long been associated with groups which work on the Thames or at sea. The South Aisle is known as the Mariners' Chapel. The annual Merchant Navy Day and Relief of Malta Services take place here. The Vicar is the Company's honorary chaplain and members in their glorious red Doggett costumes take part in the annual Beating of the Bounds and the Knollys Rose Ceremony.

We had hoped to be able to arrange a tour of the Church for club members. However, due to the Coronavirus, the church is only open a few hours a day for private prayer. All tours have been cancelled until further notice. The tour will be arranged as soon as we are able – watch this space!

➤ Blond birds and Poplar Boys – by Richie Brown & Rasher Skelton



Firstly a disclaimer - I realise that a lot of the older members and indeed ex-members who may read the newsletter, whilst probably not being able to remember what they had for dinner last night or what they have gone upstairs for, will recall some of these stories from years ago with perhaps different interpretations and will be wondering why they are being reminded, but really it is for the more recent members from far and wide, and Sheffield, to learn a bit about our distant past.

Princess Grace of Monaco and PBDRC - what could the two possibly have in common? Many of you will know the history of the club from the club's website. In particular, the fact that because we were a rowing club consisting mainly of manual workers we were not allowed to race at events like Henley as it was considered that manual workers had an advantage because the nature of our work helped with our strength and fitness. I think we could find many holes in that argument but that was the way of the world in those days. It wasn't until the 1950's that the rules were changed and we were allowed to compete at these events.

So where does Princess Grace, or Grace Kelly the Hollywood actress in her earlier life, come into this?

Let me just say before we continue, I'll brook no argument that she was the most beautiful, classy actress ever. End of. Although, if Brigitte Bardot or Marilyn Monroe had come calling, I might have given them a chance - I digress.... back to the subject. Simply this, Grace Kelly's dad Jack Kelly was an American sculler who tried to put an entry in for the Diamond sculls at Henley in 1920. He was at the time a businessman who owned a building company, but as he had started off as a bricklayer this disqualified him under the rules of the regatta.... Same boat as Poplar!

As he was coming to Europe anyway, he decided to race at the 1920 Antwerp Olympic Games, as you do, where he beat the chap who won the Diamond sculls to win the Gold medal in the final of the single sculls event. He also went on to win a total of 3 Olympic gold medals in his career, so no slouch. His son Jack junior set the record straight by winning the Diamond sculls twice, in 1947 and 1949. And just to complete the circle Princess Grace presented the prizes at Henley Royal Regatta in 1981. How times change eh?

While we are on the subject of Beautiful Blondes..... What could PBDRC and Mary Rand possibly have in common? Any of our youngsters under the age of about 70 will probably be asking Mary who?? So firstly a history lesson.... The former Mary Bignal was a Great Britain Olympic athlete who won a complete set of medals, i.e. Gold Silver and Bronze, at the Tokyo

Olympics in 1964. Being a very attractive young lady and blonde, she was dubbed by the press the Golden Girl of British Athletics. Having achieved success such as this the only way to possibly top it was to marry an oarsman. Probably similar thoughts to that which some of our Lovely Ladies have after winning a club race.....just joshing with you girls.....maybe ☺ Anyway back to the story, Miss Bignal caught the eye of Sid Rand, an Olympic oarsman of some note, becoming Mrs Mary Rand. Keeping up? Good, because I'm losing the will to live writing this. So, whilst the rest of the Poplar squad were staying at Medmenham village hall in the Summer of 1967, one of our own, Ray Easterling, was staying with Mr and Mrs Rand at their home in Oxfordshire as Ray and Sid were entered at Henley Royal Regatta in the Silver Goblets pairs event. This pairing came about because Ray's original partner, Jerry McCarthy, was injured. Ray and Jerry had beaten the current Olympic Champions in this event a few years before, and reached the final in 1966 so were disappointed not to be able to attempt to win this event at the third time of asking. Rowing with Sid was really just an option to give Ray a row at Henley, and not an unreasonable choice given his new partners history as an International oarsman and sculler. When Mary came to watch them train while we were there it certainly pepped us up and Golden Girl was about right, she was stunning. There was some controversy over the entry for the regatta as the clubs named on the entry form were Poplar and Leander but this was vetoed by the Henley Stewards as they felt that this would give the press open season on the class issue, not something that they wanted the regatta associated with. John Skelton (Rasher) the Club Captain was called to a meeting with the Stewards, where, knowing Rasher, he probably told them Poplar didn't particularly want to be associated with Leander either, but would suffer it in this instance but had to agree to a compromise and Sid Rand represented Wallingford Rowing Club where he was also a member. The end result was that Mary's gloss never rubbed off on them as they were knocked out in the second round.

Regards and best wishes all. Here's to seeing more of our members on the river soon.

Richie, - who will probably be shielding from his non-blond wife when she sees this.