



Cygnet Newsletter – Henley Issue

June 2015

From your Secretary

The annual Henley edition of the Cygnet Newsletter, with a newly updated A to Z of life at Henley Royal Regatta.

Apologies for sending this out rather late, but most of you know the score, the others will have just enough time to read it all before Henley Friday on 3rd July!

We will have a contingent of Benrath members coming over for the day and I am sure we will all make them welcome in the garden of Old Blades!

Marjorie Israel



House of Lords Reception – 17 July 2015

Just over two weeks to go before the House of Lords Reception, and only one week before we have to confirm numbers to the caterers. This is a great event, which doesn't come around very often, and it's your opportunity to rub shoulders with a real-time Lord and have a drink and canapé in the Centre of Democracy in the UK!



The Lord Moynihan

requests the pleasure of the company of

for Drinks and Canapés on behalf of Cygnet Rowing Club
in the Cholmondeley Room and the House of Lords' Terrace

on Friday 17th July 2015
at 6.00pm for 6.30pm

Please reply to: Paul Rawkins
Telephone: 020 8748 4415
email: prawkins@googlemail.com



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*** note that you do not have to provide us with your address unless you have moved house since the last Newsletter!**

Coming Soon: T-shirts for 50 years Friendship with Benrath

After Henley Friday and the House of Lords Reception, our eyes turn towards the autumn and the annual visit to Benrath/Dusseldorf in October.

This year we are celebrating 50 years of friendship with R G Benrath so watch this space for more information on how you can get your hands on a special T-shirt!

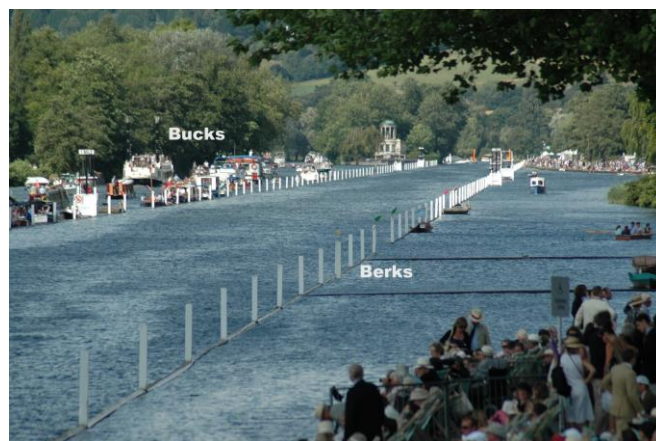


The picture shows the T-shirt design from 40 years' celebrations, as worn by our own Chairman, Nick Wylie, and "Mucha" Mucharowski from RG Benrath. You will see them again this year...

CYGNET'S ABC TO HENLEY ROYAL REGATTA 2015

A is for *amateur versus professional*, a distinction that dogged the sport of rowing from the second half of the 19thC until the mid-20thC. Having originally been conceived as a showcase of the best of English (ie: amateur) rowing, it was inevitable that Henley would eventually become caught up in this debate. And so it was, in 1879, that the Stewards set out to define what an 'amateur' oarsman was, ultimately settling on the '*manual labour bar*'. This rule would subsequently be invoked on numerous occasions, culminating in the indefensible rejection of an entry from the 1936 Australian Olympic VIII, on the grounds that they were all policemen. The lifting of the bar in 1938 opened the way for clubs like Cygnet (who were mostly post office operatives) to enter the regatta for the first time.

B is for *Bucks and Berks*, the respective stations on either side of the river. Throughout the Regatta's life the Course has adhered first to Berks (1839-55), then to Bucks (1886), before finally settling on the New Modern Course on Berks in 1924. While there is much debate as to which side enjoys an advantage – a strong running stream is said to favour Berks, while Bucks can benefit from a south westerly wind – statistically, the two sides have proved to be evenly balanced. B is also for booms and buoys, the curse of the bow steersman, particularly as he pulls clear of the 'end of the island'. The course has been boomed since 1899: it is a major operation and it takes approximately 11 weeks to construct the course.



C is for *Cold Showers*. Anybody who has rowed at Henley Royal Regatta will know that the showers in the changing tents are pumped up from the bowels of the earth at zero degrees centigrade and stun the human body on contact. Few male or female competitors remain under them for more than a minute at a time. Still, hot showers are for wimps, and the Stewards show no sign of relenting in favour of a more tepid alternative.

D is for *Dress Code*. If you possess a stripy blazer (the louder the better), this is the place to wear it. However, if you are hoping to go into the Stewards Enclosure, beware the ever vigilant 'dress code' police: men must wear jackets and ties, no jeans; women must come attired in skirts and dresses that extend below the knee – nothing shorter will be tolerated and trouser suits are outlawed. Thankfully, head gear remains regulation free. There is a General Enclosure next door to Stewards, which is open to all, subject to an entry fee and a less stringent dress code. Out on the towpath, anything goes!



E is for *Entries*. Angus Robertson, a longstanding Steward, recalled some years ago that "Entries are a constant source of trouble. For some peculiar reason, oarsmen always leave their entries until the last minute". He went on to recall that entries frequently arrived by fast cars and motor cycles and, on occasion, couriers on airlines and even by helicopter. Frazzled telephone calls, often from abroad, alert the Stewards to entries that are 'on their way'. Once the entries are received, they are scrutinised for inaccuracies. The Stewards are sticklers for the Rules and have, for example, been known to disqualify a schoolboy from rowing in the Princess Elizabeth Challenge Cup because he was four hours too old!

F is for *Flannels (ideally white), Fawley (3,435 feet from the Start) and the Flower Pot*. On flannels, Punch, a 19thC periodical always ready to dispense advice on society events, noted "*Flannels in moderation are pardonable, but they are slightly out of place if you can't row and it rains*". Fawley is just under half way along the course; the second half is sixty feet longer than the first. The Flower Pot is a Victorian fishing inn, located at Aston, about one mile above the Start, and much favoured by the Cygnet Chairman and his cronies at Regatta time.

G is for the *Grand Challenge Cup*. The 'Grand' for eight-oared boats is the premier event at Henley. Established in 1839, it has been rowed annually except for the years affected by the two World Wars. From 1890 until the mid-1950s, the 'Grand' appeared to be the exclusive preserve of Leander Club, who won it on numerous occasions. Thereafter, it increasingly became the sparring ground of 'national' crews rowing under the guise of top rowing clubs. In 1891 Leander won the 'Grand' in a record time of 6 minutes and 51 seconds; in 2013, the British Eight,

rowing as Leander Club and Molesey Boat Club, set a new course record of 5 minutes 54 seconds, shaving three seconds off the previous course record set by R-C Hansa Dortmund of Germany in 1989.

H is for Hampers. The Victorians were among the first to embrace hampers on an industrial scale at Henley. Thus, Mrs Beeton's Bill of Fare for a picnic for 40 persons in 1859 reads like a feast for an army and includes mountains of roast meats, game and fish, followed by copious desserts and cheese and biscuits, plum cakes and tea (but not coffee, 'being too difficult to make'). Beverages included three dozen quarts of ale, 6 bottles of sherry, 6 bottles of claret, champagne 'at discretion' and 2 bottles of brandy. "Water can usually be obtained, so it is useless to take it". Today, big London stores will deliver hampers 'on course'; others may take more precarious routes.

I is for Imbibing. Drinking (and eating) are essential parts of the Henley experience. The alcoholic drinks of choice are Brakspears real ale (sadly no longer brewed locally) and Pimms, the last usually sold at elevated prices in Stewards and elsewhere. On course, the best place to sample a pint of Brakspears, is at The Barn at Remenham, about 250 yards down from 'Old Blades' (see below) going towards the start. Henley itself is not short of pubs and restaurants. There is also a range of less formal eating establishments dotted along the course.



J is for Janouseks and their like. Boats come in all makes and shapes and sizes. While the rowers slog it out on the course in the likes of Janouseks, Sims, and Empachers, the leisured classes drift up and down in all manner of craft. One hundred years ago, the regatta goer would have been greeted by serried ranks of houseboats, all decked out for the occasion and the booms would have been packed with race goers (see opposite in 1905). Today, the scene is as eclectic as ever embracing punts and skiffs, steam canoes and slipper launches, paddle steamers and canal boats and even the occasional gondolier.

K is for Kings and Queens. Royalty have been associated with the Regatta since 1851 when Prince Albert agreed to become a patron. However, Queen Victoria did not visit until 1883, in the year of her Golden Jubilee, and even then this was not an official fixture. Edward VII affirmed Henley's Royal Patronage in 1901 and each successive monarch has done so upon accession to the throne. That said, though, the monarchy has not shown any great affinity with rowing or the regatta. Indeed, the last reigning monarch to visit the Regatta was King George V in 1912. Gloriana, the royal row barge, was much in evidence in 2012 for the Diamond Jubilee, but the Queen kept a low profile.

L is for Leander Club. Many of you will be familiar with the Pink Palace, home of pink socks and pink ties (see opposite, modelled by the Chairman), and lately the site of Cygnet's annual lunch in the autumn. Tracing its history back to 1818, Leander is the UK's oldest and most famous surviving rowing club. Although not formally linked to the management of the Regatta, for many years the Regatta was organised from two small rooms on the Club's premises. Leander provided the Regatta's first umpire in 1839, one J.D.Bishop, who rode a horse, and the club has enjoyed many successes in all the major events ever since.

M is for Merchandise. From the moment you step off the train or out of your car, there is no shortage of retailers waiting to relieve you of your hard earned cash. All the main enclosures and clubs – Leander, Stewards and Remenham – have their own dedicated shops, while the Regatta Shop, adjacent to the Boat Tents, offers a full range of regatta memorabilia. Further down the course, there are all manner of stallholders offering art, head ware, foot ware, rowing kit, rowing machines and countless varieties of food and drink. And in this Cygnet's 125th year, do not forget the splendid array of club attire currently on offer including stripy blazers, new ties and club cuff links.





N is for Nerves. Race nerves, to be precise. For many competitors these will have been bubbling below the surface for days beforehand. On the day, crews will be found huddled earnestly together in the Competitors' Café or the Boat Tents. Having received the coach's final words of wisdom, crews will push off from the rafts and thread their way up the Bucks station through all manner of leisured craft to the Start. Getting on to the stake boats can be an art in itself. For the oarsperson looking over his or her shoulder, the view down the Course can be terrifying and (were it not scientifically impossible) distinctly uphill, with Henley Parish Church but a dot in the distance.

O is for Old Blades, a superior piece of real estate located midway along the course at Remenham and the home of the late Peter Sly, President of Cygnet Rowing Club (1975-2015), and his wife Pat. Sadly, Peter died in March, shortly after the club's 125th anniversary, and for those of us fortunate enough to make his acquaintance over many years, the Regatta will be a very different place this year. However, Peter's spirit lives on and the Sly family – Pat, Prudence and Oscar – are determined to maintain tradition. As always, members of Cygnet and BBLRC will, therefore, be welcome to join the Sly family on 'Club Day' on Friday 3rd July at what is the most exclusive enclosure on the Regatta course.

P is for Presidents. Cygnet presidents have had a long association with Henley Regatta. One of our early ones – R B (Ethel) Etherington-Smith (1902-13) – won the Grand Challenge Cup on three separate occasions between 1901 and 1905 (but, sadly, he was rowing for Leander rather than Cygnet). Another, Rudy Lehman, was Captain of Leander in 1894-95. Peter Sly, our most recent president, held the post for forty years and was reputedly the longest serving club president on the Tideway, as well as one of the sport's great extroverts.



Q is for Qualifiers. There was a time in the late 1970s when Henley Royal Regatta was dying on its feet; today, it is a victim of its own success and the permitted number of entries was exceeded in 14 out of 20 events in 2014. Consequently, qualifying races have become increasingly necessary in recent years. These take place on the previous Friday, 26th June. Starting in the afternoon and continuing until the early evening, they are a spectacle in themselves without all the pomp and circumstance of the following week.

R is for Races. Racing proper begins on Wednesday 1st July and continues until Sunday 5th. In contrast to previous years, finals day will not clash with the Men's Tennis Finals at Wimbledon in 2015. At least half of regatta goers – the corporate hospitality set – are completely unaware that any boat races take place at all! For the more dedicated spectators, racing begins at the crack of dawn on Wednesday to Friday, usually finishing around 7pm each evening, before settling down to a more civilised hour on Saturday and Sunday (semi-finals and finals day). If you manage to endure the full five days of spectating from the bank (far more demanding than racing), you deserve a medal.

R is also for 'row past': a Cygnet VIII composed entirely of captains past and present will row over the course at tea time on Friday 3rd July to mark the club's 125th anniversary.



S is for the Stewards' Enclosure. In the 19thC there were no formal enclosures. Some clubs set up informal enclosures on the Berks station, while throngs of houseboats would line the Bucks station. Photographs of the late 1890s show thousands of small craft moored along the booms. Little mention was made of sanitary arrangements and we can only guess how rudimentary these must have been. In 1919 the Stewards voted to erect a formal enclosure adjacent to the finish on the Berks side for members and their guests. Membership was initially limited to 300, rising to 700 by 1939; today it has grown more than ten- fold to almost 7,500 and there is a long waiting list.

T is for *Temple Island*, located a little over one mile downstream of Henley town and adjacent to the Start of the Regatta. The island takes its name from Fawley Temple, the folly which sits on the island and was designed and built by James Wyatt in 1771. Today, Cygnet is proud to count one of his descendants – Nick Wyatt – among its membership. Returning to Temple Island, this Etruscan gazebo had a chequered history in the centuries that followed and had fallen into a state of disrepair by the 1980s. Fortunately, in 1987, the Regatta acquired a 999 year lease on the island and the Temple has since been restored to its former glory. The annual rent is two quail's eggs, payable on Henley Saturday.



U is for *Umpires*, immaculately dressed, who sweep up to the Start in the Regatta's much loved slipper launches. Each launch carries a full complement of Umpire, Time-Keeper and Race Recorder. Their task is to officiate some 280 races over the course of five days to ensure that the programme runs exactly to time. Henley has its own rules and is not subject to the jurisdiction of either British Rowing in the UK or the International Rowing Federation (FISA), although both organisations recognise Henley Rules. No day at the Regatta is complete without a walk to the Start to see such finely tuned officialdom in action.

V is for *Venerable Old Souls* who turn up year after year, determined not to break their perfect attendance record. Every club has them: among Cygnet members and friends, Phil Beckett and Pauline Churcher have chalked up well over half a century each. The Chairman and his cronies are not far behind them!

W is for *Weather*. When the sun shines, Henley is a joy; when it rains, it can be grim! Phil Beckett, organiser of the Leander lunch, still recalls 1963 as being the wettest regatta on record; 1988 was not a lot better. By contrast, the Report of the Committee of Management (of the Regatta) for 2011 commented "spectators enjoyed one of the finest spells of weather ever recorded during a Regatta week – it could be described as 'perfect regatta weather'". So there you have it: basically, it's a lottery, so go prepared.



X is for *Xenophobia*, 'fear of foreigners', or in this case foreign entrants. Last year's entry included 107 crews from 20 countries. Israel was represented for the first time. It was not always so. Foreign crews had been entering Henley since the late 1870s, including a crew of French-Canadian lumberjacks from Michigan in 1878. However, the reality of (professional) foreigners overhauling domestic crews and walking away with our silverware rankled. So much so that in 1901 the Provost of Eton wrote to the Stewards protesting that '*in permitting Henley trophies to be contested for by all the world will endanger the best interests of amateur rowing*'.



Y is for *Yarns*. Chambers English Dictionary defines a yarn as 'a sailor's story, spun out to some length, and often having incredible elements'. Down at the Barn Bar at Remenham or, indeed, any enclosure after lunch, pretty much anybody who has ever rowed at Henley will have a yarn to tell.

Z is for the *zeal and zest* that Henley Royal Regatta continues to summon up in both the old and the young. As one senior Cygnet member opined not so long ago "everybody does Henley in their own way" and despite the profusion of enclosures and hospitality tents, it remains 'free to view'.

Bibliography: Henley Royal Regatta 1839-1989; Fawley Temple, Vanessa Orr; Regatta Programmes and HRR Committee of Management Reports