



# Cygnet Newsletter

October 2017

In this issue, we welcome the new Captaincy, which was elected at the Ordinary General Meeting held on Tuesday 18 July, with Captain Jeremy Pugh saying goodbye to the captaincy after two years. Thanks are certainly due to him after all his hard work with Learn to Row, obtaining Tim Male as a coach and organising many a crew for a lot more club outings than in previous years. He handed over a healthy club to Matthew Byrne as the new Captain with Sam Sears as his Deputy Captain and Charles Pretzlik as his Vice Captain. I am sure everyone will join me in wishing the new Captaincy a successful time.

*Marjorie Israel, Club Secretary*

## **From the Captain**

Big thanks to Jez for leading the club for the last 2 years; let's keep pushing the envelope and continue on the upwards trajectory that we're on.

Racing Post: In mid July, a small but intrepid band of explorers travelled up the A1 to the wilds of Cambridgeshire in search of pewter at **St Neots Regatta**. Sadly, the team returned empty handed; erstwhile captain Jez sportingly decided to give his oppo a couple of lengths at the start before losing by the diameter of a bowball (we await publication of the photofinish) and the beardy pair are reported to have had a mid-race incident with some shrubbery.

The following weekend included a trip to **Henley Town and Visitors** for the novice 4+ (Anna, Niall, Cris, Jez, Vasil) and Jez/Cris warming up in a Masters D 2x. No wins to report, but a good day out was had by all, despite the rain.

Also a belated well done to Ian S on his 1:27.26 in the Sprint distance at the London Triathlon last weekend, 425th/2283.

A win for the self-styled "meatwagon" of Robin, Ian, Scott and Sam at **Peterborough Summer** in Tier 2 4+ (somewhere around IM2/IM3 in recent coinage). A good first win under the auspices of the new captaincy team, and we hope that the crew will be able to keep the winning mentality into the winter season with Pairs and Fours Heads coming up.

Unfortunately no pewterware to report from **Oxford Regatta**, but a good weekend of racing, drinking and camping was had by our most recent LTR graduates (and a couple of extras) who managed to take part in their first regatta in their first season at Cygnet, at the last regatta of our Calendar.

Summer racing is now over, so we're looking to get crews lined up and training for the small boats heads between now and Christmas, as well as developing the LTR graduates through the novice squad; a new poll for race interest will be released shortly.

We're also looking to give the seniors and development squads experience of coxing and steering, so don't be surprised to find yourself in an unfamiliar seat on the outing plans. (Don't worry too much - we won't let you out unsupervised).

Housekeeping: Nights are now drawing in, so please strongly consider lights for evening outings, especially in cloudy weather.

Safety Note: Unfortunately, the "number of days since a Cygnet boat hit a bridge" counter had to be reset to zero yesterday, we'd nearly got to 3570. The Alan Cox is therefore out of action for the foreseeable future until the boat has been to the menders.

In unrelated news, the "number of days since Stu steered into a bridge" counter has also been set back to zero from somewhere around 3570 ... welcome back to the Tideway, Stu.

The captaincy plans to ask the PLA to paint Barnes Bridge in a fluorescent shade of yellow to make it easier to spot.

*Matthew Byrne*

## **Dates for your diary:**

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Cygnet Henley Lunch 28 October

Veterans Fours Head 11 November

Fours Head 12 November

Scullers Head 2 December

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## Subscriptions and Donations

Are always due and can be paid by electronic payment (please inform the Treasurer by sending an email to treasurer'at'cygnet-rc.org.uk or by cheque.

If you prefer to pay by cheque, please return this tear-off slip with your cheque to Matthew Byrne, Flat 102 Westfields, Railway Side, Barnes, London SW13 0PL. Active Members: members of the Civil Service Sports Council - £290.00\*, Others - £360.00; Club Friends: Suggested minimum - £15.00.

Enclosed my subscription/donation for £.....

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**\* Club members paying the CSSC-member subscription fee are now required to show their 2016 CSSC membership card to a member of the Management Committee**

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## From the Club Secretary

Nothing to report from me, so I just thought I'd highlight the superbly written piece of history by Paul Rawkins about the History of Club members during the First World War, following intensive investigations by Ian Mountain. The information contained in this piece is a lovely continuation of the 125 years of Cygnet history as published in 2015.

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## 125 Years Cygnet History

'A History of Cygnet Rowing Club 1890 - 2015' is a high quality, hardback book which has been substantially rewritten by Paul Rawkins and contains 84 full colour pages of text and photographs, much of it unearthed since the previous edition, published in 1990.

You can order your copy by e-mailing Paul Rawkins direct on [prawkins@googlemail.com](mailto:prawkins@googlemail.com). If you do not have access to the Internet, please fill in the slip below and send it to Paul Rawkins, 30 Bracken Gardens, Barnes, SW13 9HW.



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### A History of Cygnet Rowing Club 1890 - 2015

YES, please send me 'A History of Cygnet Rowing Club 1890 - 2015' for the bargain price of £18.50 per copy (includes 2nd class postage and packing); or £19.00 for first class postage.

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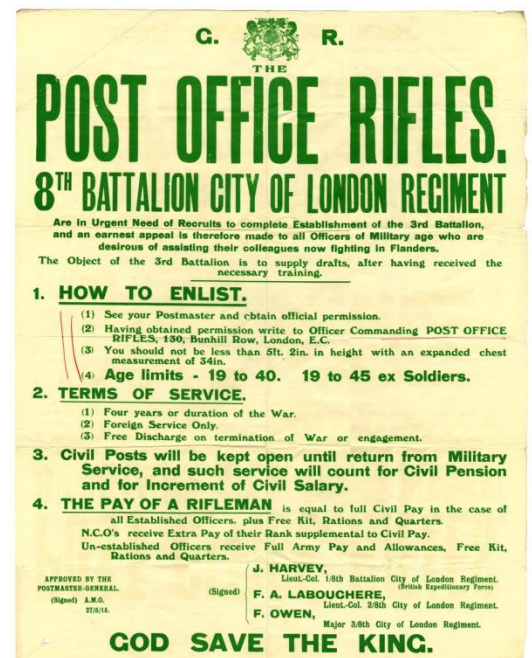
## From Rowers to Riflemen:



Any institution that has been around for over a century is unlikely to have escaped the dead hand of warfare; Cygnet is no exception. The outbreak of the Boer War, less than ten years after Cygnet's foundation, would be the first conflict to claim several members' lives. However, the First World War was a conflict on an altogether different scale and intensity that threatened the very existence of Cygnet Rowing Club, among others. By the time hostilities drew to a close in November 1918, seventy-nine active and honorary members had served with the Armed Forces; eleven of them would never return.

Up until quite recently, we knew nothing of the eleven deceased members beyond their names. Enter Ian Mountain – one of today's active members who recently moved north – who has devoted considerable time and effort over the past couple of years to uncovering these men's wartime identities. As Ian himself readily acknowledges, this is still very much a work in progress. Nonetheless, 2017 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of several notable battles, not least Passchendaele, and we thought this an opportune time to share his findings to date.

With the outbreak of war, most Cygnet volunteers signed up to the Post Office Rifles (POR), the General Post Office's dedicated regiment. The POR had a long history dating back to the mid-19thC; today, they are best remembered for their role as infantrymen on the Western Front. Such was the strength of patriotic fervor sweeping the country that the 1<sup>st</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Battalion, POR rapidly became overwhelmed with recruits and a 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had to be formed in September 1914. The POR served in all the main theatres of conflict on the Western Front from 1915-18, sustaining severe losses at Ypres and Passchendaele.



Source: British Postal Museum & Archive Blog

The 1<sup>st</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> Battalion embarked from Southampton on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1915, moving to the 'front' in early May in readiness for the Battle of Festubert, which endured from 15<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> of that month. This battle would claim the first Cygnet fatality, one Albert Dunn, a sergeant, aged 38, who died on 25<sup>th</sup>. His name is listed at the Le Touret Memorial, Festubert.

There would be many false dawns during WW1: to give but one example, a letter from the club secretary to all serving members at the end of 1915 dared to hope that before 1916 was out "Cygnet will have returned to greet the 'Old Crocks' (ie: those left behind to run the club)". It was indeed a false hope. By the end of that year, Cygnet had sustained a further two fatalities in conflict. The first, Ernest Erridge, a 26-year old corporal with 'A' Company, died on 8<sup>th</sup> April in circumstances we have yet to establish. Later in the year, Wilfred Doley, a lance corporal aged 27, expired on 15<sup>th</sup> September, quite possibly from injuries sustained in a British offensive during the Battle of the Somme, although we have yet to substantiate that.

As the war rumbled on into 1917 and the prospect of any early cessation of hostilities receded, reports from the secretary vainly expressed the hope that there would be an early return of all, and a rebirth of the desire for active sport. Almost inevitably, he would be disappointed: 1917 claimed seven of the eleven Cygnet lives lost during WW1. The year began badly. Bertie Valentine, serving as a sergeant in The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment), was killed on 20<sup>th</sup> January; Private John Rogers, Royal Marine Light Infantry, died on 17<sup>th</sup> February; Private A.B.Thaine was killed on 1<sup>st</sup> March; and Arthur Rixon, Company Sergeant Major in the London Irish Rifles met his death on 7<sup>th</sup> April.

The POR were at the forefront of the fighting throughout 1917, suffering exponential losses at Ypres and Passchendaele. The Third Battle of Ypres gained especial notoriety because of its focus, in its latter stages, on the village of Passchendaele, which was fought in appalling conditions, even by the standards of WW1. It was here, in what came to be known as the Second Battle of Passchendaele, 26<sup>th</sup> October to 10<sup>th</sup> November, that three Cygnet members – Robert Erridge (brother of Ernest), C.D.Gibney and Cecil Toms – met their deaths, seemingly on the same day (30<sup>th</sup>).



**Cecil Toms, Rifleman, POR**

Thanks to Ian's persistent searches on Ancestry, we are fortunate to have a photograph of Cecil Toms which has come to us through a shared family tree, one of two photographs, the other showing him pre-war as a GPO employee. By comparison with 1917, 1918 was relatively kind to Cygnet, with just one fatality recorded – Lance Sergeant Albert Russell, The King's (Liverpool Regiment) – on 8<sup>th</sup> May. Nonetheless, as surviving club members reconvened on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1919 for the first meeting since the war, many must have mourned the fallen eleven.

This year, to mark the sacrifice these men made, Cygnet will be making a donation to the Royal British Legion's Flanders Field of Remembrance, which will be recreated beside the Menin Gate at Ypres. Several Cygnet members' names are inscribed at this memorial; others appear at Thiepval and Tyne Cot. Cygnet plans to hold a more formal commemoration at next year's Henley lunch to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WW1. I should like to close by thanking Ian Mountain again for his tireless research, without which this would have been a much shorter and less informed piece.

Paul Rawkins and Ian Mountain