



Cygnets Committee Annual Report

Neil Pickford, Assistant (Hon) Secretary

1 January 2025

The Cygnets Management Committee presents its one hundred and thirty-third report for the year ending 31 December 2024.

2024: Business as usual

In many respects it was business as usual in 2024 with the club paddling along in the fairway, celebrating a few small successes and suffering no major setbacks.

Club Members and Friends

Two learn to row courses were held in 2024 yielding a very promising intake of 6 graduates. We also recruited 5 new members with rowing experience, giving a total of 11 new members.

The club would like to record our many thanks to Laurent Coucaud (who was also presented with a little gift in January) for all his efforts in coaching the Learn To Row courses these last few years. Sadly for us Laurent has moved back to his native Mauritius with his family but remains the exemplar of a dedicated, behind the scenes club member.

Mucha, our very good friend and main contact at Benrath, finally managed to celebrate his 60th Birthday this year (delayed but Covid amongst other things). Cygnets was represented by Messers Wylie and Cox who travelled over in June to help Mucha consume some beer!

In July we lost Len Hoskins, a veteran of the post-war squad, who's family generously requested that, rather than flowers, donations were made to Cygnets RC in his memory. In November Roy Ellison also passed away. Rowing a decade after Len, Roy's claim to fame was as one of the four Cygnets that appeared in the "Only here for the beer" advertisement for Double Diamond!

Rowing

The size of the active squad is still smaller than we would ideally like which, in turn, has an impact on training participation and thus our competitiveness as a club. Nevertheless a dedicated squad of athletes continue to turn up and push hard both on and off the water and we were able to field crews many Heads and regattas this season.

Many of our newer members, both from the LTR course as well as oarsmen with experience, are Civil Servants, emanating from a range of departments. Approximately 75% of the active squad are in the Civil Service which appears the best current avenue for recruiting new members and one the club is trying to build on.

Learn to Row courses continue to be our main source of new members and the captain would like to thank Beth, Simon, Gareth and Wes for their continued commitment to coaching these courses and in particular our principle coxswain Clara who has been instrumental to the success of the LTR courses. Special mention also to vice-captain Mustafa for all his administrative efforts.

Reflecting our more limited numbers, our racing programme was again more selective in 2024 and comprised the following events:

20th January, Quintin Head

Guildford/Cygnets #250 (Masters G/H 8+). Finish position 257 in 13.11.2

18th February, Hammersmith Head

Cygnets #37 (Masters F/G/H 8+). Finish position 7/10 in 12.07.2
(Handicap 19 seconds, actual time 12.26.2)

23rd March, Head of the River Race

Cygnets A #294 (open 8+). Finish position 279 (144 in Category) in 21:04.3

24th March, Veterans Head of the River Race

Cygnets A #61 (Open Masters E 8+). Finish position in Category 20/21 in 21.22.1

(Ruder-Gesellschaft Benrath #60 (Open Masters E 8+). Finish position in Category 16/21 in 20.36.7)

8th June, Walton & Weybridge Regatta

Novice 4x- (Charles, Jordan, James, Dom). 2nd placed overall.

15th June, Barnes and Mortlake Regatta

Open 4- (Charles, Tom C, James, Dom). Losing semi-finalists (to Fulham Reach)

11th–15th September, Masters Wold Championships, Brandenburg, Germany

Guildford/Cygnets (Iain Golder). 4th place in Final 3 of the Masters F 4-, in a time of 2.01

14th September, Scullers Head

Race Cancelled

5th October, Rhine Marathon, Dusseldorf, Germany

Neil, Martin, Mustafa, Cris (coxed by Mucha), 2.29.42

Charles, James, Tom, Rupert (coxed by Tichel), 2.26.43

12th October, Pairs Head

Dom and Jordan finished third in their category, Open Club 2-

23rd November, Veteran Fours Head & 24th November, Fours Head

Both cancelled due to Storm Bert

It's certainly not all doom and gloom, but like many clubs and organisations, increasing membership is still a struggle post Covid. Those that do train and race still very much enjoy the sport and the club and it promising to see that the momentum established so far this current season could yet lead to greater breadth, depth and success as squad and club.

Coaching

With assistance from club member Simon Suthers, the bulk of the Cygnets squad's coaching 2024 has been supplied by Wes Ma. Wes is now coaching both on the water and in the Shed. His Monday night weights sessions are proving a particular hit with the squad, even if the 10 minute 'finishers' make movement the next day difficult! These sessions are often followed by a squad meal.

Wes has been really enjoying coaching us. He was initially available certain days and hours but is now coaching us for all the weekend sessions and also running weight lifting club as well as occasional stretching and yoga classes. He goes above and beyond with both he and Simon determined to bring back some pewter. Simon is working hard giving a lot of 1:1 attention to certain rowers in smaller boats to speed up their progress.

Great progress has been made on the water with the club buying floats for newer members to train in singles and pairs, getting the basic technique quickly and more safely. At the top end of the squad, the water sessions have seen many racing pieces from UL to the island, which has boded well for the 2025 racing season.

Additions to the Cygnets Fleet

Maintenance and refurbishment was carried out as required, under the capable management of Iain Golder with some assistance from Filippo Corticelli but no new boats were added to the fleet in 2024.

The fact that Cygnets has a range of good racing boats reflects both the success of the long-standing boat buying programme and the continuing generosity of members old and new in providing the necessary funding, much of it through the 300 Club.

300 Club

Having taken on the 300 Club administrator role on a temporary basis in 2023, the Hon. Treasurer, Matt Byrne, is still seeking a permanent volunteer for the role. This is rather an imposition on Matt, who is also operating without an assistant treasurer. The role is to ensure that draws take place on a regular basis and to also shake-down new members for tickets and an interest has been shown by a former member Gavin Escourt, now returned to the club. There are also considerable issues with the way Santander now operate, so the 300 Club account requires significant, if not critical changes to ensure it continues to run smoothly.

Draws were held through the year, although slightly more sporadically than in recent times, the results of which are published on the website. While new active members are encouraged to purchase as many tickets as they can afford, the legacy of The 300 Cub continues to be a major fundraiser for the club. However, it has been noticed that a large proportion of winners have not claimed their winnings and efforts are underway to encourage them to come forward, lest the books show an unrealistic surplus.

General Meetings

Annual General Meeting – Held at The Crossing in Barnes on Sunday 11th February 2024

Chaired by C Pretzlik, this meeting was well attended

Nine Vice-Presidents were re-elected; Messrs M J Hughes, Dr R P du Parcq, N J Wylie, P L Rawkins, C F Shea, A Cox, S D Bush, Dr N M Jackson, A J Rawkins.

On the Committee of Management, C Pretzlik was re-elected as the Chairman; Also re-elected were J Hunt, Hon Secretary; M Byrne, Hon Treasurer; Mr N Pickford, Assistant Secretary. Committee Members elected were P L Rawkins, I Golder, C Cabrera Rupert Bailey and M Drage. A Cox, P L Rawkins, N V Pickford and M Byrne were re-appointed Trustees. A Naylor was re-appointed Honorary Independent Examiner and joined as second examiner by M Kearney.

The Annual Report was unavailable due to significant changes in the secretariat. The Captain presented a brief report. Mr Chairman presented the Bungalow Report. The Annual Club Accounts were presented by the Hon Treasurer; these had been satisfactorily examined and were adopted.

Ordinary General Meeting & Election of Captaincy Held at the Boathouse on 14th July 2024

Chaired by C Pretzlik, the outgoing Captain, Mr Drage provided a report and the meeting thanked Mr Clarke and Mr Özyurt for their work as Deputy Captain and Vice Captain respectively. The committee thanked Mr Drage for his captaincy, having taken on the role last minute in 2023

There being no other nominations the following were elected to Office:

Captain: D Marshall; Deputy Captain: T Clarke; Vice-Captain: M Özyurt.

Club Management Meetings

Four committee meetings were held during the year. The dates of meetings were mostly set at the end of each meeting.

Civil Service Sports Council

Despite 75% of the active squad being comprised of Civil Servants and a reasonable relationship with the CSSC, it has to be wondered how long that relationship will continue, as the CSSC tightens it's belt even further. A mixture of arcane historical circumstance and politics have seen both Cygnet and BBLRC remain 'on the books' at the Civil Service boathouse as both a London region and National asset. However there are strengthening indications that we may well be cut lose in the not to distant future. It is something of a concern but perhaps also something of an opportunity but either way, when it happens there is no doubt that it will be the end of an era. C'est la vie.

"Cygnet" Bungalow

Despite it not being a 'commercial' property, recent changes in fire regulations meant that the bungalow is was unavailable for use by members and friends for some considerable time over the winter. The Bungalow committee have spend a considerable sum ensuring that the building now complies with the most up-to-date standards so that this valuable resource can continue to be enjoyed by our members and friends. Supported by the Bungalow committee, administration continues in the capable hand of Ross Stewart who would be pleased to accept any enquiries about staying there over the summer.

The website and communications

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

The Club also recognises the increasing importance of social media and is thankful for members' efforts in keeping the outside world informed about all things Cygnet. Members and friends alike can follow the

club's activities on those social media channels: Facebook and Instagram. Both the new social Secretary, Charles and in particular cox Clara are trying to post more on our Social Media channels (note that we no longer post to X/Twitter)

Increasingly, WhatsApp and FitClub, rather than email, have been used for day-to-day communications between the captaincy and the active members. This is partly because group email has become much less reliable, as suppliers put in stronger defences against spam and other nefarious online activity.

Social Events

Much to the relief of Bar Steward and vice-captain, Mr Özyurt, we finally found a Social secretary in Charles Johnston, who has continued Mustafa's great work in keeping vital social side of club life ticking over.

We started with a Burns Night supper at the end of January (thanks to Rupert for driving this one) which was closely followed by the Club's birthday on 11th February. This was held in conjunction with the AGM at The Crossing on White Hart Lane.

Another entertaining afternoon watching the uninitiated get soaked by launch wash – I mean the Boat Races – we moved onto another prestigious rowing event, Henley Royal Regatta. Once again the clubs were invited to picnic on the lawn at Old Blades, during Henley Friday and our thanks to Pat and Pru Sly for their continued generosity in supporting Cygnet and BBLRC. It is a wonderful, if rather damp afternoon and a great chance to catch-up with old friends (In 2025 this will be one of our main 60th Anniversary events).

The End of Season dinner (organised by Mr Johnston) once again took place at The Crossing in Barnes on 30th August. A good turnout of blazers, were well wined and dined before the winners of our annual awards were announced, as follows:

- **Jordan Hunt**, *Wally Wheldal Cup* (Sportsmanship & Endeavour)
- **Tom Clarke**, *G.P. Jefferies Cup* (Clubman of the Year)
- **Nathan O'Donnell**, *Tim Senior Cup* (Novice of the year)
- **Nick Wylie**, *1920s Novice Cup* (Senior of the Year)

Presented by the outgoing captain, Martin, this last award is a new one and the cup itself is a genuine Cygnet Novice cup from the 1920s.

Cygnet was again well represented in Düsseldorf alongside our wonderful friends of Benrath RC, putting in strong performances in both the Rhine Marathon itself and on the dance floor in the beer tent afterwards! 2025 is the 60th Anniversary of our enduring relationship with Benrath and over dinner we began to make plans for some events to celebrate this over the course of the year. Details are available on the website.

Christmas season saw our annual pilgrimage to the BBL Christmas do, naturally precluded by the traditional Cygnet Waddle from the club via Strand-on-the-Green and Chiswick.

Thanks to Lawrence McVeigh for organising the formal Christmas Lunch on 20th December at the RAF Club in Pall Mall. This event has filled the void left by the Vets Lunch at Leander and is open to all members.

At the End of the Year...

Looking forward to 2025 the captaincy has plans to compete at all the Tideway Head races as well as a selection of regattas. 2025 also represents both the clubs 135th year as well as the 60th Anniversary of our relationship with RG Benrath in Germany. Plans have been made to celebrate this anniversary both at Henely weekend in July and over the Rhine Marathon weekend in October

The club is currently quite small in terms of membership but continues to be active both on and off the water. Increasing membership is always the priority and the Captaincy follows the policies laid down by previous holders of office by encouraging club members to be further involved in club organisation – it's a members club after all!

There is a constant hunt for coxswains, experienced or willing to learn and it is hoped that coaching will continue on a voluntary basis, if not a professional one.

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