



Cygnet Committee Annual Report

Neil Pickford, Assistant (Hon) Secretary

1 January 2026

The Cygnet Management Committee presents its one hundred and thirty-fourth report for the year ending 31 December 2025.

2025: On the up

No huge leaps forward from 2024 but definite progress with more Cygnet crews out on the river racing – and in a couple of cases winning events! There were also a fair few close races where Cygnet were pipped at the post in semis and finals.

Club Members and Friends

Just one Learn to Row course was held in 2025 yielding a very promising intake of 11 graduates a good proportion of whom will be signing-up for full membership in January. Huge thanks Sian, Charlotte and Clara for putting them through their paces.

Aside from those who took the LTR course, three new members were elected in 2025

In September we lost club stalwart and vice-president **Richard Du Parcq** after a prolonged but mysterious illness. Not just a significant loss to Cygnet, where he was treasurer for many years, but to the rowing community as a whole. Richard was an umpire for 35 years and the Fours Head entries secretary for as long as anyone can remember, receiving awards from both British Rowing and The Civil Service for his dedication to Rowing.

Shortly after Richard, we lost another dedicated, if less flamboyant member in **John Ellis**. John was more inclined toward a supporting role, especially of his wife Di, whom he met when she was rowing for St. George's and she went on to become Chair of British Rowing!

Training and Racing

The active squad is still a little on the small side but we have some good athletes and this is borne-out by Cygnet crews being far more competitive throughout the year. It was our best HERR result for well over a decade in both overall finish and the relative position in our category, we narrowly missed out at multiple regattas (e.g. Barnes and Mortlake in both a 4x- and a 4+), as well as across multiple boat categories at Kingston and Henley T&V. It was also our busiest year for entries in regattas for some years.

The squad still contains a good proportion of Civil Servants and Civil Service is still the club's primary focus for recruiting new members. However, Learn to Row courses continue to be our main source of new members and the captain would like to thank **Clara, Sian and Charlotte who have been instrumental to the success of the LTR courses**. Special mention also to vice-captain Tom Clarke for all his administrative efforts organising these courses.

Our racing programme for 2025 comprised the following events:

26th February, Hammersmith Head

Cygnet #293 (Open 8+ Dev). Finish position 11/20 in 12.18.4

22nd March, Head of the River Race

Cygnet #320 (Small Club 8+). Finish position 269 (4th in Category) in 21.26

23rd March, Veterans Head of the River Race

Ruder-Gesellschaft Benrath #122 (Masters E 8+). 9th in Category in 21.27.1)

Ruder-Gesellschaft Benrath #39 (W Masters D 8+). 15th in Category in 23.49.52

8th June, Walton & Weybridge Regatta

4+ Clara, Jim A, Tom C, Dom M, Jordan H

4x- Benjy H, Theo T, Ollie R, Mustafa O

Chiswick

2x-: Ollie R, Mustafa O

Peterborough

2- Dom M, Tom C

Walton & Weybridge

4x- Charles J, Peter R, Jordan H, Benjy H

Barnes & Mortlake

4+ Clara, Dom M, Tom C, Mickey W, Jordan H

4x- Charles J, Ollie R, Peter R, Will P

4x- Mustafa O, Octavian P, Alex H, Martin D

Kingston

4x- Charles J, Ollie R, Peter R, Will P

4- **Dom M, Tom C, Benjy H, Jordan H (WIN)**

Henley Town & Visitors

4+ Clara, Dom M, Tom C, Benjy H, Jordan H (second place)

8+ Clara, Dom M, Tom C, Benjy H, Jordan H, Ollie R, Mickey W, Martin D, Matt G

4x Mickey W, Peter R, Ollie R, Matt G

2- **Dom M, Tom C (WIN)**

4th October, Rhine Marathon, Düsseldorf, Germany

Neil P, Apollo, Nick W, Mucha (coxed by Tichel), 6/8 in Masters G in 2.43.56

Whit M, Iain G, Tom B and Brad B (coxed by Kett), 5/5 in Masters F in 2.46.21

Cris, Liz [subbing for Martin], Mustafa and Wes (coxed by Frank), 13/15 in Masters C in 2.51.48

Matt G, TomC, Benjy H, Charles J (coxed by Julie), 8/12 in Open in 2.39.38

25th October, Upper Thames Autumn Head

Morning division

2-of Benjy and Jordan, came 6th /6

4x Will Mickey Tom C and Matt G, came 4th /5

Afternoon division

2x Will and Matt G came 8th/10

4- Benjy Tom C Mickey Jordan, came 2nd/4

Masters 4x D Tom B Ryoji Mustafa and Chris Peskett (Putney Town), came 3rd/3

15th November, Fours Head

Cygnets #118 (Open Club 4x), 32nd in Division in 23.25.0

Cygnets #265 (Open Club 4+), 27th in division in 21.59.2

16th November, Veteran Fours Head

Cygnets/Guildford #169 (Masters F 4-), 4th in Division in 24.52.8

Compared to last season, quite a few more events (and crews in events) were raced by Cygnets this season and although the squad is still a little on the small side, there are definite signs of improvement and a lot of potential.

Coaching

Cygnets parted company with Wes Ma as head coach in July. As you can see from the amount of racing and the results, under Wes' guidance some really positive progress has been made on the water. We're confident that the new coach will be able to build on this solid foundation. While we were looking for Wes's replacement, the active squad continued to receive voluntary coaching from Matt, Gareth and Charlotte.

Towards the end of the year we were able to recruit a new head coach, Charlie Noel, who has come to us from Vesta and they are looking forward to being put through their paces by a new voice.

The new captain has also introduced a "Breakfast club" - 7am on Friday morning for an extra session on the erg, before work each week to help with fitness. Breakfast after for those who want it, on a rota basis.

Safety

Always a priority, there is nothing particular to report about safety except that some CPR and defibrillator training was arranged at the club. The session was run by St. John's Ambulance and was well received and very worthwhile. While not a direct consequence of the fatality that occurred during the Vets Eights Head in March, this training very much put into perspective why such training can be vital. This incident also prompted a check and update to the club's AED and we're grateful to form captain Dr Drage for carrying out this vital servicing.

Club Safety Advisor, Rupert Bailey, has been hard at work updating and improving the Steering and Navigation Test as well as trying to arrange capsizing drills locally. Sadly, Rupert is planning on stepping down from the role and is on the hunt for a new Safety Advisor.

Additions to the Cygnet Fleet

At the OGM in July it was agreed to make a significant addition to the fleet this year: a mid-weight Filippi, stern-loaded, coxed four. The purchase of such a high-end boat was enabled by a very generous legacy from Phil Brown, after whom the boat will be named. It is due to be delivered in January.

And on the subject of Filippis; for a much smaller sum, an 80kg single was also purchased from a member returning home to New Zealand.

The fact that Cygnet 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.

Iain Golder has passed the fleet maintenance role onto Martin Drage and Filippo Corticelli and we thank him for his efforts in managing the fleet for the past 10 years.

300 Club

Having taken on the 300 Club administrator role on a temporary basis in 2023, the Hon. Treasurer, Matt Byrne, is very relieved to have finally found a volunteer for the role: Mustafa Özyurt, former bar steward, has kindly agreed to take this role on. Issues with the way Santander now operate are ongoing and will be quite a challenge for Matt and Mustafa to resolve.

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 Club 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.

Club Management Meetings

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

General Meetings

Annual General Meeting – Held at Ye White Hart on Sunday 15th February 2025

Chaired by C Pretzlik, this meeting was well attended. Nine Vice-Presidents were re-elected; Messrs M J Hughes, Dr R P du Parcq, Mr N J Wylie, Mr P L Rawkins, Mr C F Shea, Mr A Cox, Mr S D Bush, Dr N M Jackson, Mr 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; N Pickford, Assistant Secretary; C Johnston, Social Secretary. Committee Members elected were P L Rawkins, I Golder, C Cabrera R Bailey and M Drage. A Cox, P L Rawkins, N V Pickford and M Byrne were re-appointed Trustees. A Naylor and M Kearney were re-appointed Honorary Independent Examiners.

The Annual Report was unavailable due to significant changes in the secretariat. The Captain presented a brief report. The Chairman presented the Bungalow Report. The club's accounts were

delayed in February pending the arrival of some late invoices and were adopted at the OGM in July after this late completion.

Ordinary General Meeting & Election of Captaincy held at the Boathouse on 23rd July 2025

Chaired by C Pretzlik, the outgoing Captain, D Marshall provided a report and the meeting thanked T Clarke and M Özyurt for their work as Deputy Captain and Vice Captain respectively. The committee thanked Mr Marshall for his time as captain. There being no other nominations the following were elected to Office:

Captain: J Hunt; Deputy Captain: M Gutteridge; Vice-Captain: T Clarke.

*J Hunt, was serving as Hon. Secretary and obviously can't hold the role of Captain at the same time. Therefore W. Passey, who had kindly volunteered to take on the role, was duly co-opted as Hon. Secretary, with grateful thanks from the committee.

Civil Service Sports Council

Despite over half of the active squad comprising Civil Servants and a seemingly reasonable relationship with the CSSC, we continue to wonder how long that relationship will continue. 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) but precise details of our status as sub-tenants remain obscure. The CSBE is doing it's best to find out but the CSSC are very reluctant to engage with any enquiries, despite several attempts.

"Cygnet's" Bungalow

The Bungalow committee has spent a considerable sum ensuring that the bungalow is fully compliant with the most up-to-date fire safety standards so that this valuable resource can continue to be enjoyed by our members and friends. The committee would like to extend their thanks to Alan Cox for his considerable work in ensuring that this vital work was carried out satisfactorily.

Supported by the Bungalow committee, administration continues in the capable hands 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 visit www.cygnet-rc.org.uk for regular updates. Social Secretary, Charles Johnston has kindly agreed to help with contributions to the website and be in a position to keep things ticking-over if or when Neil is unavailable.

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.

WhatsApp and FitClub, rather than email, are used for day-to-day communications between the captaincy and the active members. Google Group emails are only used to promulgate important notices of General Meetings or significant events and to circulate items such as this newsletter.

Social Events

The main focus of our social diary this year was the 60th Anniversary of our relationship with RG Benrath in Germany, with three events taking place during the year:

Firstly, a more significant effort was made to entertain Benrath when they came over at the end of March for the **Head of the River** weekend.

The second (and main) event was based around **Henley Friday**. Almost 30 Benrath members made the journey over to the UK, where Pat Sly very generously agreed to host a much larger than usual club contingent on her lawn. A coach was provided to get our German friends (plus many Cygnets and BB Ladies) to and from Old Blades and outside catering was also laid on. Even the weather played it's part and an estimated total of 130 people from all three clubs attended a very pleasant event indeed - including some real blasts from the past!

After a lie-in (or a guided tour of Richmond Park kindly arranged by Martin), on Saturday afternoon a little side-by-side event was arranged so that many of the new Benrath members could experience the Tideway for the first time – the winning VIII was declared on the basis of 2 crabs to 3! These shenanigans were followed by a formal dinner at Ye White Hart on Saturday evening at which some beer was drunk and speeches and presentations were made.

Thanks must be recorded to; Pat and Pru Sly, Neil Pickford, Paul Rawkins, Matt Byrne, Nick Wylie, Martin Drage, Rupert Bailey as well as Mucha and Nick from Benrath and the Cygnet captaincy for their efforts in ensuring all this went off smoothly.

Cygnet was very well represented in Düsseldorf in early October for the third and final event of this 60th Anniversary year – **The Rhine Marathon**. 14 members raced in the marathon itself with a further 8 coming over to support and to enjoy the festivities. Not to be outdone by the event in July, Benrath RC, hosted a fantastic supper on the Friday evening before the race. It really was another splendid event with some more speeches and presentations, including one from Ferdi Picker, one of the 'original' Benrath hosts from 1965, appreciated by own 'original', Lawrence McVeigh. Sadly the weather for the Marathon was less accommodating, brutal might be a better description but unlike the Pairs Head back in Blighty, went ahead after some delay. All the Cygnet crews survived to tell the tale over a beer and dinner afterwards.

Details and photos of all these 60th Anniversary events can be found on the club website

The **End of Season Dinner** (organised by Mr Johnston) once again took place at Ye White Hart on 29th August. A good turnout of blazers, were well wine and dined before the winners of our annual awards were announced, as follows:

- **Peter Rice-Evans**, *G.P. Jefferies Cup* (Clubman of the Year)
- **Tom Clarke**, *Wally Wheldal Cup* (Sportsmanship & Endeavour)
- **Benjy Heffer**, *Tim Senior Cup* (Novice of the year)
- **Neil Pickford**, *1920s Novice Cup* (Senior of the Year)

The University Boat Races provided a good opportunity for an inter-season social: along with a BBQ, a public alcohol licence for the day saw the event bring in over £1000 in revenue for the Exec. funds. Huge thanks to Peter R-E for his efforts organising much of this event.

Due to particularly awful weather on the day, a change of plan for this year's **Club Day** which took place on Sunday 14th September: instead of side-by-side racing, members of both clubs did some much needed maintenance around the boathouse, with beers and pizza after.

In early September, a group from the squad enjoyed a very nice row up to Twickenham rowing club. A combined rowing and social event which took place on a very sunny Saturday, whereby a pub lunch (and a pint) was consumed before paddling back with the tide.

Christmas season saw our annual pilgrimage to the **BBL Christmas Party** on 12th December, naturally preceded by the traditional Cygnet Waddle from the club via Strand-on-the-Green and Chiswick.

On 15 December, 16 'mature' members of Cygnet sat down to the **Vets Christmas Lunch** in the Battle of Britain suite at the RAF Club, courtesy of Chris Tarry (who is a member of the latter). Those present spanned five generations stretching back to Lawrence McVeigh's era, who was kind enough to organise the gathering for yet another year. The event is open to all past and present members.

At the End of the Year...

Looking forward to 2026 the captaincy has plans to compete at all the Tideway Head races as well as a selection of regattas.

The club is still quite small in terms of membership but continues to be increasingly active both on and off the water. Growing the 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.

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