It's 60 years since ...

Rede von Ferdinand Picker, anlässlich der Feier am 03.10.2025



I have been asked to say a few words about 60 years of partnership which developed into a real friendship between our two clubs. When it all started, we were five, three Cygnets and two Benrathers, and now only two survivors are present tonight, Lawrence and me. - It makes me sad to think that Fred Blasberg and Michael Augustus Arnold-Gilliatt are no longer with us. Another strong pillar on the English side was Peter Sly who supported this friendship in so many ways.

60 years is a long time in human life, and, in fact our two countries have experienced two historic events, the reunification of Germany, which we celebrate today, and Brexit, no reason for celebrating. I am glad to say that differences in nationality and language never caused any problems. The first difference we realised was that, for the Cygnets, rowing meant training in racing-boats for regattas while our kind of rowing in "tubs" was regarded as "social rowing," especially since many of our regular outings ended in a pub. So, in Benrath we were quite pleased to see huge posters with five Cygnet-members in a rowing boat, dressed in Benrath-vests, and one of them saying "I'm only here for the beer." Another beer-episode happened in 1970 when Benrathers went to their first start in the Head-Of-The-River- Race. The customs-officer saw a barrel in the boot of a car and asked: "What's that?" The answer was "That's Old Beer." – "Old beer? Ugh!" The venerable "Times" mentioned Benrath in an article about the race as "a foreign entry of unknown potential."

Rowing-tours were completely unknown to the Cygnets until Gordon Sandford took part in a tour on Moselle and Rhine and described it in the "Civil Service Sports Council." On our first Thames-rowing-tour in 1989, we arrived in Henley during the Royal Regatta. Of course, we parked our "tubs" on Peter's ground. The next day at the lock you could hear the following conversation: "Where are you from?" – "Germany." – "Did you row in Henley?" – "Yes."- "How did you get to England?"- "Across the Channel." – "Oh!"

Mutual visits had meanwhile become a tradition. The Cygnets liked Carnival, and one year there were seven dwarfs, plus Mike as Snow White in an opulent dress. I overheard a couple who had just looked inside to check if everything was all right: "No problem at all. There is even an elderly lady."

The first Rhine-Marathon with the Cygnets was in October 1980, and on the following day, we and the visitors from England went to Fühlingen-regatta where two boats from Benrath won their races. Great events on either side of the Channel always brought us together, like 75 years of RGB which we celebrated in a hotel in Düsseldorf, where Lawrence in his Scottish outfit was the great attraction. On the 100th anniversary of Cygnet RC in 1990 we came in a large number. At the centenary-ball with a big band in white dinner-jackets speeches were held, and our president introduced himself as "Günter Füth, United Germany." In 1995 at the Rhine-Marathon we celebrated three jubilees: 30 years of partnership, 25 years of RGB at the HORR, and 20 years of Cygnets at the Rhine Marathon. Let me not forget the 100th anniversary of RG Benrath in 2008 which ended on a pleasure steamer on the Rhine.

At least every ten years since the beginnings, quite a few members of our two clubs came together to remind us of this unique partnership. On two occasions fantastic vests were designed which we proudly wore on many occasions. Today I am proud and happy to see so many friends from two countries, which confirms my decision to become a teacher of languages and so help to bring people together.



