

Eton Excelsior Rowing Club

There has been rowing on the river Thames at Windsor for many centuries but the oldest recorded boat club is dated 2nd January 1826 when ten young men residing in or about Eton organised themselves into a club for 'aquatic excursions in the summer season' and agreed rules and regulations. These stipulated *inter alia* that each member should pay sixpence weekly to the treasurer or stewards and that Tuesdays and Fridays be appointed for training and members absent at 8 o'clock to be fined 2d. Expenses for the first season amounted to £17.3s.3d and included £5 for hire of boat; £1. 5s. for straw hats; £3.3s.3d for striped shirts and trousers; £1.5s for checked shirts; 10s. for waterman and £5. for expenses at Clifton, Maidenhead, Monkey Island, Surly Hall etc; and £1 for supper at the finish. Fines totalled 10s.

By 1839 the founding of Henley Regatta introduced a more serious note into the rowing world and a local race in that year between two skiffs resulted in the decision to form an amateur boat club to admit 'gentlemen of Eton and Windsor and the vicinity'. This club was founded on 30th May 1840 and local people subscribed to its funds. In 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, the club amalgamated with the Windsor Albert Club and was renamed Eton Excelsior Rowing Club. The club celebrated its centenary in the festival year 1951 with a dinner at the White Hart Hotel on 22nd September. To quote from an historical note prepared for this event 'over the century the name of the club and its members have been engraved on challenge trophies at Reading, Henley, Marlow Maidenhead, Staines, Walton, Molesey, Kingston and the Tideway'. Club photographs dating back to 1869 were displayed together with 'a great array of silver cups including six won this season, and, four Windsor and Eton Regatta cups not seen since the fixture was abandoned in August 1914'.

Whilst EERC records prior to 1870 were lost in a fire, lists of Presidents, Vice-Presidents and Club Officials for the period 1870-1951 were prepared to celebrate the 1951 centenary. As a reflection of the importance of the club in local life it is interesting to note that in the period 1870-1918 three MPs, R Richardson-Gardner, Francis Tress Barry and JF Mason were successively Presidents of the club. Many others who were active in the community became Vice-Presidents. The lists of officials reveal a remarkable continuity within families, many of whom were associated with business interests in Windsor and Eton. Frank V Radnor, Hon. Secretary in 1951 was the fourth generation of his family to be a club member. His great-grandfather G Radnor was one of the 1826 signatories. Four members of the Dyson family are mentioned in the club records. CF Dyson was the Hon Secretary 1878-90 and Hon Treasurer 1891-2. AH Dyson, born 1861 joined the club in 1882 and in 1889 rowed in the four which won the Ruthven Cup, presented to the club by Lord Gowrie's father in 1872. He was Chairman of the building committee which sought to raise funds to

build a new clubhouse on Dead Water Eyot, and President 1936-48. His son CD Dyson was Captain 1930-2, Hon Secretary 1933-48 and President 1949. Mrs CD Dyson presented the Dyson Challenge Cup for ladies fours in 1949. Geoffrey Dyson, their son, stroked the winning four for the Kings Cup which marked the end of the 1946 season and in the words of the *Windsor and Eton Express* was 'the club's most successful oarsman in the recent Regatta'. He won the Herbert Points Cup the following year and became Hon Secretary 1949-50. Two families with business interests in Eton who were associated with the club were Bayley of Ganes and WV Brown (FC Bayley and GW Bayley) and Goddard. FE Goddard (Captain 1913-17) was a builder in Eton and Captain of Eton Fire Brigade. His grandson Robin Jackson, who joined the club in 1948, recently presented the Goddard-Jackson trophy for scratch fours to commemorate the family connection.

No reference to personalities associated with EERC in the twentieth century would be complete without the name of VH Hobbs. Vic, who had a dental practice in Windsor, lived and breathed rowing. His interest was aroused when, as an Eton College chorister, he served as cox. He was Captain of the club 1933-45 and again in 1951. In 1936, with the Captain of Mortlake RC, he presented the Captain's Cup, which was competed for annually on the Tideway by junior fours, junior senior eights and senior fours. The outbreak of WW2 resulted in the bulk of the members being drawn into the forces and the 1945 annual report listed 38 serving members. A Roll of Honour in the new clubhouse lists the nine members who lost their lives in WW1 and eight members in WW2. There were no regattas in WW2 but in 1943 a Rag Regatta was held as part of Windsor's *Stay at Home Week* and 'ladies came into their own as so many members were away'. Pat Holliday, Vic's daughter, recalls that although her father was opposed to women rowing on the grounds that it made them 'big and beefy', in the absence of male members he recruited her and a number of her friends to form a four. They did not use EERC facilities but rowed from Eton College rafts. In 1944 the club AGM report said 'Vic Hobbs, our Captain, is still rowing and manages to get up an eight or four and strokes them up to Monkey Island on Saturday afternoons.' On 7th March 1948 Vic, at the age of 55, in preparation for the annual Head of the River race from Putney to Mortlake, stroked one of two EERC eights from Windsor to Chiswick in a day-long row. He was the only member of either crew to have achieved the journey before - in 1935. In 1955 Vic was presented with the Desborough Award for services to rowing. He retired to Devon and there, up to the age of 70 he coached crews from the Royal Naval Engineering College.

In October 1996 EERC vacated the premises in King Stable Street in Eton which had been its base for many years. Rowing from 1826 was based on local commercial boathouses from which boats were hired and the committee usually met in a pub. Early in 1880s the club was able to rent a small wharf in King Stable Street