

Bedford School Rowing

I joined the school in September 1949 and started rowing in the following January at the age 14½. There was no limit on rowing with sweep oars and I don't think that sculling was encouraged for juniors.

We learnt to row initially on fixed seats and for some years with fixed pins. For those who do not know what I am talking about, the gate consisted of two upright wooden lined posts with a plated string between them, usually omitted on the tub pairs or tub fours. The buttons on the oars were shaped and fixed (no adjusting for gearing etc.) and had to be kept greased. It was important to keep the button against the rigger and more so in the tubs to stop it jumping out altogether. I do not remember when the first VIII

changed to swivels but by the time I left in 1954 I think that certainly all seniors had changed and maybe juniors as well. I understood that Eton was the last school to change and that was well into my time. There is an Appendix setting out all the history and arguments for and against Fixed pins and Swivels in R D Burnell's book "Swing Together" written in 1951 so the matter was still to the fore in my time. Also, there is a video of the CUBC crew training in 1948 with fixed pins (www.britishpathe.com/video/cambridge-crew-in-training)



L to R: John Jenner with Michael Bevan and Hugh Maltby at Henley



Angus Robertson, officiating at Henley Royal Regatta

When I was at the school there was no rowing in the Autumn term, rugby being the main sport, but after Christmas rugby was less formal, no football or hockey, and rowing started with various minor sports filling the rest of one's spare time. (in my case Gymnastics). Being light and short I didn't succeed much until my final year in 1954 when Paulo Pontine won the senior fours, rowed in the tub fours. The crew was stroked by Angus Robertson (later for many years "the voice of Henley") and at

bow was John Hockey, then still a junior, both of whom subsequently rowed in the 1st VIII at Henley. I recall that in the final, stroke's blade was due to enter the water right in the centre of a large ice flow and of course he missed a stroke, however the rest of us kept going as though nothing had happened.

In the summer of 1954, I rowed in the 3rd VIII, coached by Mr Agelasto who had coxed Thames Rowing Club and British national crews before the war and taught in the Lower School. Early in the term our boat "The Lady Craig" which had raced at Henley in 1938, was borrowed by the 1st VIII. The new first VIII, which was of a new rib-less design, had developed a crack all along the keel and was taken back to Sims to be repaired and they didn't like the second boat "The Wells".



Jerry Agelasto

We went to Pangbourne Regatta but came second of three in the first round. On the way home Mr Agelasto took us all, as was his annual custom, for a drink at Leander Club at Henley. It being the day that the school drinking scandal had come to a head and the Headmaster suspended most of the monitors and options at the one o'clock prayers. We rung to find out the situation and discovered it included some of the crew, and one was made one of the temporary triumvirates to act as Head of the School until the last week of term. We were therefore reluctant to accept a beer, however Mr Agelasto would not allow such action in Leander regardless of the Headmaster, so we were probably the first Bedford School boys to drink after that fatal day!



The 2nd VIII racing at Bedford Regatta in 1959

Our next and only other regatta was at Bedford, then held on the last Saturday of term, the 1st VIII lost to Worcester RC in the first round in the top event, called Senior Eights, won by London RC, the 2nd VIII won the Junior/Senior Eights (coached by Mr Galbraith) and we won the Junior Eights, having equalled the record time of 3 mins.41secs



Douglas Galbraith

(set by a Dutch crew in 1947), against Magdalen College School in the semi's and beat Oundle School 2nd VIII by 1 1/2 lengths in the final. I knew Mr Agelasto after he retired to Cambridge and in the six years that he coached the 3rd VIII they won four times and lost in the final on another occasion.

While I was at school Pointer and Baker of Bedford RC (which then occupied the central two bays of the boathouse), started to experiment with a double scull with fixed seats and sliding riggers (see below). Their trials went on for many years without much success although they did eventually do a demonstration row at Henley Regatta and the boat is now in the Rowing Museum at Henley. Find out more [HERE](#) about the 'Ups and Downs' of the sliding rigger story.

Source: 'Hear the Boat Sing'

SLIDING THOLE PIN.
SLIDING RIGGER, SINGLE SCULLER.
FIXED SEAT.

ACCELERATION OF LEGS, SLIDING RIGGER, AND SCULLS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE STROKE TENDS TO INCREASE SPEED OF THE BOAT.

AT THE FINISH OF THE STROKE ACCELERATION FORCE OF RECOVERY OF LEGS, RIGGER AND SCULLS TENDS TO RETARD THE BOAT. DURING TIME BETWEEN STROKE, WEIGHT OF BOAT AND MAN GIVES BOAT CARRYING POWER AGAINST THE WATER, AND THE SLIDING RIGGERS IT IS CLAIMED, CAUSE FURTHER CARRY BETWEEN STROKES.

SLIDING THOLE PIN.

WITH THE SLIDING RIGGERS IT IS CLAIMED THAT THE UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORT USED IN MOVING THE BODY ABOUT IS AVOIDED.

SLIDING SEAT DOUBLE SCULLER.

IT IS CLAIMED THAT THE "TRIM OF THE BOAT" WHEN OARS ARE "FEATHERING" IS IMPROVED BY HAVING MOVING RIGGERS AND FIXED SEATS.

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING FEATURES OF THE 1934 REGATTA SEASON; AND THE FIRST MAJOR ALTERATION IN BOAT DESIGN SINCE 1872: A SLIDING RIGGER INSTEAD OF A SLIDING SEAT—AN INVENTION WHICH MAY REVOLUTIONISE ROWING.

One of the most interesting features of this year's Regatta season, apart from some very excellent racing, has been a new invention, devised by Mr. C. E. Poynter, of Bedford Rowing Club, which may well revolutionise rowing. He has fitted a seat in a double-sculler which, instead of sliding, is fixed, while the rowlocks are attached to a sliding cradle which also incorporates the stretcher. The whole of this cradle slides up and down the boat on metal runners. And so, instead of this cradle moving backwards and forwards on his sliding seat, it is the stretcher and riggers which move. By this means it is claimed that the boat is given more momentum. One of the drawbacks of the sliding seat, which the fixed seat will obviate, is that the crew, which weighs considerably more than the boat, has to move some 18 ins. backwards and forwards every stroke, thus shifting the centre of buoyancy of the boat. This causes the bows and stern to dip alternately some two or three inches into the water each stroke. With the sliding rigger the crew no longer has to shift its own weight about unproductively, the momentum of the boat is almost unimpaired, and the crew saves a lot of energy. The sliding seat was introduced in 1872, and since then no major improvement in the design of rowing and sculling racing boats has been made. It must have been a disappointment to all oarsmen that Mr. Poynter could not get his boat ready for this year's Henley Regatta. It remains to be seen, therefore, whether his sliding rigger will prove efficacious when on trial under racing conditions.

DRAWN BY OUR SPECIAL ARTIST, G. H. DAVIS.

John Jenner (49-54)