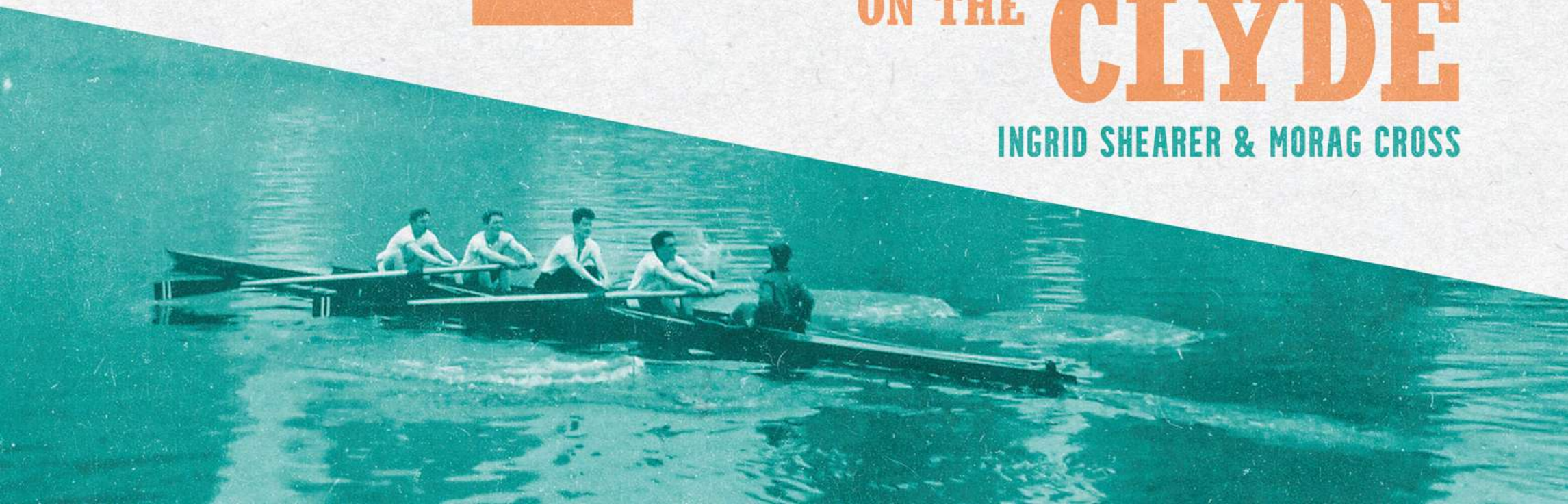




A-Z OF **ROWING**
ON THE **CLYDE**

INGRID SHEARER & MORAG CROSS



Thanks

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Key sources include the Clydesdale ARC minute books, historic newspapers, post office directories, and maps, many of which can be readily accessed via the British Newspaper Archive and National Library of Scotland. Works by sports historians Andy Mitchell and Ged O'Brien (*Played in Glasgow*, 2010), have proved invaluable sources; and many technical details have come from Christopher Dodd's *Story of World Rowing* (1992). Royal West of Scotland Amateur Boat Club's Tom Mackay and St Andrew's Boat Club History Group have produced histories of their own clubs that were a great aid in contextualising the story of rowing 'up the watter'. Special thanks to Tom and Joe Hefferman of RWSABC for their help and for kindly donating copies to the project. Thanks also to Kashif Javaid of McTear's Auctioneers for assistance in chasing down information on the 1829 King William IV rowing trophy, awarded at the first regatta on the Clyde, by Glasgow Green.

Images, unless otherwise stated, are culled from historic newspapers and maps, club and personal collections.

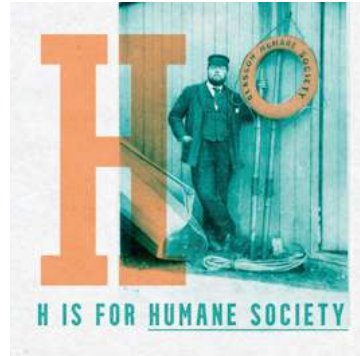
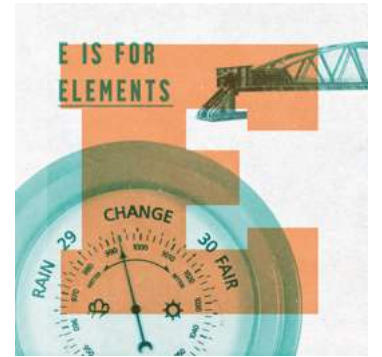
Introduction

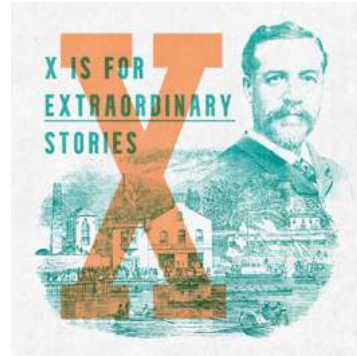
Glasgow Green, the cradle of sporting Glasgow, was shaped and moulded by the Clyde. Sitting on a flood plain of the river, it was fertile ground for many sports and has been home to the city's rowing community for over 200 years.

This book tells the story of the West Boathouse—a category B Listed boathouse built on the banks of the Clyde for Clydesdale and Clyde Amateur Clubs in 1905. With funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Glasgow City Council, Historic Environment Scotland, the Architectural Heritage Fund and many others, Glasgow Building Preservation Trust repaired and renewed the building, which reopened in 2023.

The project also included a community engagement programme exploring and celebrating the history and heritage of rowing and the river. This book attempts to condense this work—a 'long pull' but hopefully an enjoyable one.









Interest in competitive rowing in Glasgow began in the 1820s, and records of regattas date from 1829 onwards. Like many sports at the time, club membership rules enforced strict social divisions. However, the main annual day-long rowing competitions, or 'regattas', were all organised by the same Glasgow Regatta Club, formed around 1832-3 by prominent merchants and local gentry. They managed these events until smaller, rival sets of races were founded by other rowing clubs, starting with the Clydesdale Amateur Regatta in 1865 whose lacklustre crews suffered 'easy exhaustion'! Fortunately, the event rapidly improved.

The various rowing clubs considered themselves to be either 'professionals' (also known as 'trades'), or 'amateur', being for 'gentlemen', the distinction depending on whether members received cash prizes, and how they made their living. The clubs had separate governing bodies and competitions. Inevitably, there was no general agreement on exactly how to define amateur and professional status or whether you could transfer from one to the other. Members of amateur clubs were forbidden to receive any income from their winnings. This attracted wealthier participants who had the luxury of leisure time to indulge in sports and could meet the costs themselves. Amateurs were also encouraged to uphold the ideals of 'sports for sport's sake'—any financial reward was seen as corrupting the purity of the art of rowing. This claim was not entirely unfounded—professional rowers had been known to 'throw' a race, and one American sculler was even poisoned before his race.

The Scottish Amateur Rowing Association (SARA), founded in 1881, barred anyone who 'had been by trade or employment, for wages, a mechanic, artisan or labourer, or engaged in any menial duty.' This division was allegedly justified because 'professional' rowers employed in physical labour, were believed to have an unfair advantage over white-collar amateurs with sedentary office jobs. In reality, it merely excluded the working classes from joining amateur clubs and reinforced class divisions.

Professional rowing clubs emerged as access to the sport began to open up to the working classes from the mid-1850s onwards. The 1853 Factory Act gave all working men a half-day off per week, allowing some time for leisure activities. Because he competed under the existing professional rules, world champion Canadian sculler Ned Hanlan won £1,000 at the World and English Sculling Championship in 1882. At a time when the average wage for an unskilled labourer was around £45 per year, this was a small fortune.

Prize money was never as significant in Scotland. The top prize at the 1883 Glasgow Letterpress Printers Regatta was £5—not quite in the same league as the international competitions—but still worth the equivalent of over a month's wages. Professional regattas also attracted huge crowds, with thousands of spectators lining the river banks, eager to take a bet on the winning team.

But the prize-money usually didn't meet the ongoing expenses of competing. In 1891, a fan pointed out tradesmen spent their winnings on 'Carriage of boat, railway and steamboat fares, training, loss of work'. Even overhauling the boats cost about £15! Aquatics were 'a glorious opportunity to throw away money ... [artisans] suffered under a misnomer when called 'professionals', because they made no personal profit. Other mass-participatory sports, like cricket or football, subsidised players from their gate money, but watching rowing was free.

Professional rowing clubs, and temporary crews specially recruited for one-off races, often comprised members of particular trades, some surprisingly specific. In Glasgow, we find teams of iron-moulders, stage-carpenters, blacksmiths and policemen.

The printing trades, in particular, had a long-standing link with rowing, lasting from at least the early 1870s, until the 1960s. Crews were fielded by printing houses such as Blackie & Sons, McCorquodale, and Maclehose & Co. Printing. Although the professional/trades clubs are long gone, Glasgow Rowing Club (based in the Gorbals), still retains some inky, printers' DNA. The club's roots are in the Glasgow Printing Trade Amateur Rowing Club, formed in 1914.



Two separate associations oversaw the sport: SARA (Scottish Amateur Rowing Association) was responsible for the amateur clubs, and STARA (Scottish Trades Amateur Rowing Clubs) was for the professionals. They amalgamated in 1947 to form the Scottish Amateur Rowing Association (now known as Scottish Rowing).

Some 'amateur gentlemen' of Clydesdale ARC in the 1890s

The new organisation's constitution did not exclude blue-collar workers, finally eradicating an increasingly unpopular rift in the discipline. However, the question of payment for rowers, coaches, umpires and others who volunteered their time in high-level competition rumbled on for another fifty years. Rules defining 'amateur status' broadened gradually, but progress was slow. For example, in 1958, FISA, the world rowing governing body, barred any person engaged as 'trainers, instructors, and coaches teaching sport for gain or profit' from competing or umpiring. It wasn't until 1998 that British Rowing finally dropped the amateur requirement from their rules. Today, most full-time, elite rowers are funded by sponsorship, donations and bodies such as the National Lottery.



Finding suitable premises to store boats, gym equipment, and socialising space is a perennial issue for rowing clubs. The Clutha Boathouse (1854) was the first purpose-built rowing club boathouse on the Clyde, located on the current Glasgow Rowing Club boathouse site at Siverfir Street in Hutchesontown. Built for the Glasgow Regatta Club, the ground floor had a dual function as boat storage for clubs and business premises for boatbuilder James Banks McNeil. Social spaces occupied the first floor and a flat-roofed turret provided expansive views up the river towards Rutherglen Bridge. As rowing grew more popular, clubs struggled to find suitable storage space adjacent to the river. Clyde and Clydesdale Amateur Rowing Clubs found a temporary home in rented sheds on Adelphi Street from J & S Smith, carpet manufacturers. They began lobbying Glasgow Corporation for their own building in the 1890s.

In 1905, they got their wish. The West Boathouse opened in May of that year. The material cost of the building was £1,333 (roughly £166,000 in today's money) and was paid for by Glasgow Corporation with a generous donation from James Henry Roger, a local wine merchant and a founding member of Clydesdale Amateur Rowing Club. Roger was a canny and uncompromising character who stumped up the cash in exchange for Clydesdale's claim to occupy the preferred eastern half of the building.

Built by City Surveyor A. B. McDonald, the boathouse was a unique addition to Glasgow Green and the river frontage. The West Boathouse received listed building status as Category B in 1993 as a 'rare building type in Scotland'—a surviving timber-framed sports building built on the banks of a busy river. Viewed from Glasgow Green, the building is austere with little hint of the architectural flourishes seen from the riverside. Viewed from the water, the building rises dramatically from the banks. The large arched windows, deeply recessed eaves, and cantilevered balconies are playful and elegant. This attention to detail and investment in the sport is perhaps a recognition of the popularity and status of rowing at the turn of the nineteenth century. Regattas attracted thousands of spectators, and many of the club members were influential men within the city (there were no women members at this time), able to exert a little political pressure to get an impressive new boathouse in a prime spot on the river.

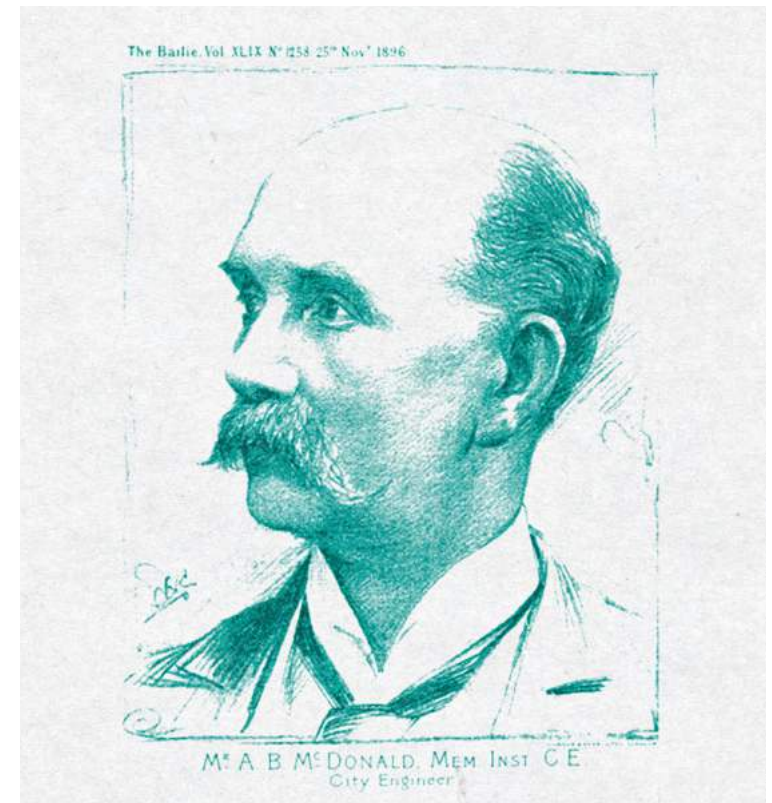
The building was pinned to the riverbank with deep timber piles, which allowed it to flex with the natural movement of the riverbank and ultimately contributed to its survival. In contrast, the heavier, brick-built East Boathouse built in 1924 has suffered from subsidence. This clever solution also allowed for a quick build—the timber frame elements were manufactured off-site and delivered as a flatpack-style 'kit build'. A metal lath was tacked onto the timber frame and coated with a 2-inch thick render layer to form the walls. Architectural details such as the quoins (corner stones) and string course gave the impression of a sturdy masonry building but were, in fact, built up of extra layers of render, akin to icing on a cake.

By the late 1990s, Glasgow City Council, who own the building, were becoming increasingly concerned with the condition of the West Boathouse. Historically, the clubs had carried out essential repairs and maintenance, but the building now faced significant structural problems. In 2015, Glasgow Building Preservation Trust, a charity that rescues and repairs historic buildings, began working with the rowing clubs and Glasgow City Council to explore options to save the building.

Time was running short—surveys of the building revealed the below-ground timber foundations were deteriorating rapidly. Twenty-eight of the original 30 timber foundation piles had wholly rotted through. The exterior cladding was in danger of collapse, and the roof leaked like a sieve. Interior facilities were outdated, and the accessibility of the building was, by modern standards, very poor.

After several years of hard work and generous funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic Environment Scotland, Glasgow City Council and many others, the £2.8 million Rejuvenation of the West Boathouse Project got underway in 2019.

Making old buildings fit for purpose, while remaining true to their origins is a balancing act and involves extensive consultation with building users, heritage bodies, regulatory authorities and the design team. Archival sources—old photos, architectural drawings and the 1904 Bill of Works—helped build a picture of the original construction techniques and materials.



City Surveyor, A B McDonald (The Baillie, 1896)

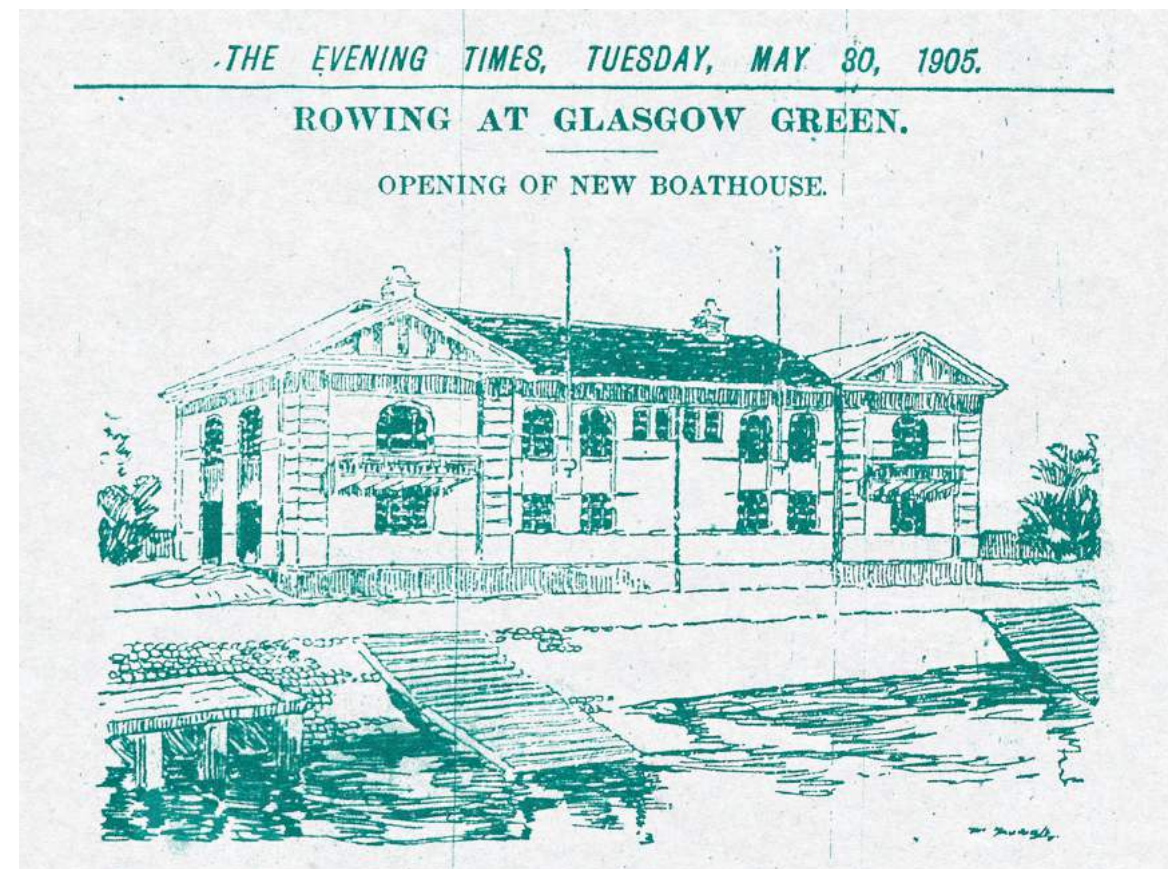
This research informed a sensitive repair, restoration, and reuse scheme, overseen by Advanced Level Conservation Accredited architect Rebecca Cadie of ARPL Architects.

The eventual design comprised a significant renovation and upgrade programme:

- Ground floor boat sheds were converted to a larger single, shared space which can accommodate longer boats.
- The ground level was lowered on riverside to increase height for additional boat storage capacity
- Extensive repair and replacement of decayed timbers throughout the building
- Timber foundations replaced with concrete piles and foundations
- Roof retiled and ventilators repaired and reconstructed
- New, insulated structural cladding and flexible render system to form exterior walls
- Quoins and string course reinstated using 'Buildlite' architectural mouldings
- Insertion of 2 new 'Diocletian' style arched windows facing onto river, and original ground floor windows repaired and unblocked
- New, widened front entrance created, balconies restored and new flagpoles
- Original colour scheme reinstated
- Interior timber panelling, windows and doors repaired and reinstated
- New services installed including gas central heating system, electrics, fire and security systems
- Improved facilities and accessibility within interior, including: accessible changing and toilet facilities; shared club room, gender-neutral changing rooms and platform lift access to upper floor
- A new pontoon and gangway to increase accessibility to the river

The project also aimed to change how the boathouse is used and who it is used by—embracing new audiences and encouraging people to re-engage with the River Clyde. The community engagement programme included boat-building, developing nature walks, celebrating the sporting heritage of the city's east end, and recording the rowing clubs' heritage collections.

The Rejuvenation of the West Boathouse project has seen the boathouses' future safeguarded as a home to Clyde and Clydesdale rowing clubs and a homecoming for former tenants Strathclyde University Boat Club. A line from the Clydesdale ARC first annual report of 1865 seems apt here: 'A long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether.'



Evening Times article from May 1905



The rapid rise in the popularity of rowing from the 1840s onwards resulted in a bewildering proliferation of clubs and crews, particularly amongst the trades—stage carpenters, tailors, compositors, carriers, boilermakers, drillers, riveters, potters, boatbuilders, calendermen (who eventually had their own regatta), and the police, all had separate clubs. This was in addition to the many clubs fielded by the printing houses—MacLehose, McCorquodales, Glasgow University Press, Blackie & Sons, Collins and Wm Hodge & Co, who held their own regatta from 1872. On the amateur side, there was the Glasgow Regatta Club, Phoenix Amateur Rowing Club, The Carrick RC, The Northern RC, The Western RC... the list goes on. Many were mayflies and only ran for a few years. However, a handful have persisted.

The oldest surviving rowing club on the Clyde, Clydesdale Amateur Rowing Club, were officially founded in 1856 as 'Clydesdale Gentleman's Amateur Rowing Club'. However, there are tantalising hints that the club may have existed in some form, slightly earlier, though perhaps under another name. The Glasgow Courier in 1856, reported on a Clydesdale Rowing Club match: 'the winning crew were the same who at former regattas have appeared as the Young Glasgow Club', perhaps the same personnel as the 'Young Glasgow Team', first mentioned in the press in 1853. The club is fortunate in having retained many of its original minute books and other archival documents, an invaluable mine of information for early rowing history. The first club annual report from 1856 records "in a small meeting, convened in Steele's Coffee-Room [90 Argyle St], where, with Arethusa Albert Small Esq. as chairman, your secretary moved, the creation of a humble rowing club".

The club held their inaugural annual regatta, still a major fixture on the rowing calendar, in 1857. The Glasgow Saturday Post, and Paisley and Renfrewshire Reformer, stated this was their 'seventh' annual regatta, again suggesting an earlier formation date than the accepted date of 1856. Originally based on the north bank of the river near the Suspension Bridge, they moved into the eastern half of the West Boathouse in 1905, the home they still share with Clyde ARC.

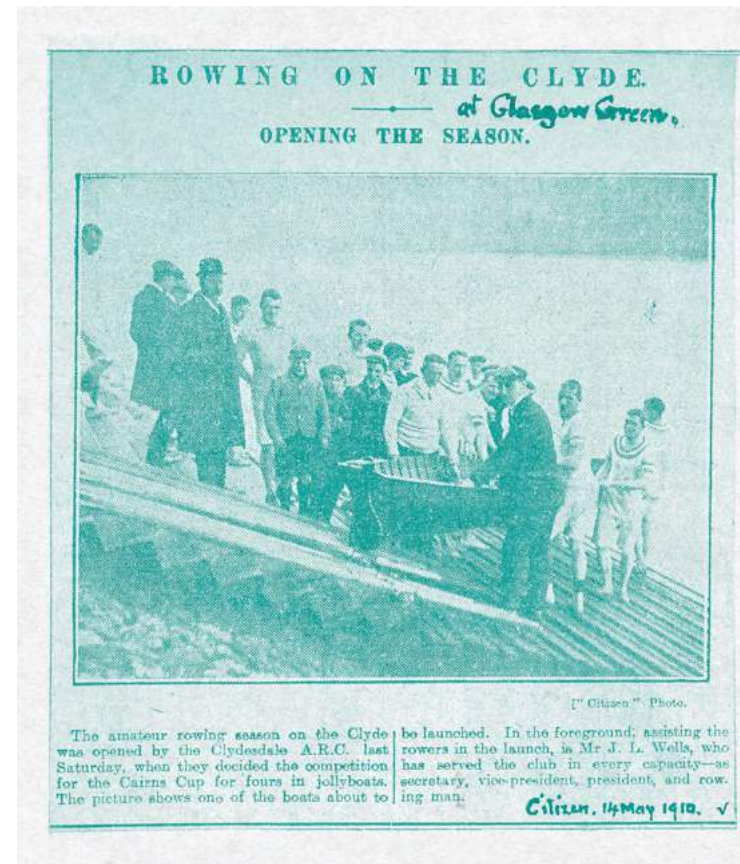
Over the years, Clydesdale ARC have produced some outstanding athletes and coaches. One of the club's earliest champions was Harold Paterson Murdoch, winner of the Senior Sculls at the Tailteann International Regatta in 1928. Renowned coaches include Alex McIlwraith, who won Scottish Coach of the Year in 1958, Peter Grieve and Jimmy Ross. Iain Somerside, past president of SARA, played a major role in developing our National Rowing Academy. Former Community Coach, Miki Lee Dale won SportsScotland's Young Person's Coach of the Year in 2017 for his work in nurturing young talent and reaching out to children and young people in more deprived parts of the city. Three former reigning Club Presidents and veteran squad members—Gordon Simpson, Duncan Paterson and Owen McGhee—hold the accolade of having attended both the centenary regatta in 1957 and the 150th-anniversary event in 2007.

Women joined as full members in 1979 and flourished. Gillian Lindsay was both World Champion and Olympic silver medallist, as well as holding the distinction of being the most successful woman sculler of all time at the point of her retirement in 2001. Dame Katherine Grainger is currently the most decorated female Olympian from Great Britain. While not an alumna, she is a long-standing friend of the club, whose first outing was in a Clydesdale tub pair. Ali Watt holds the record for the fastest time in winning the British Women's Sculling Championship in 1999. Former club president, Karen Barton is a former World University Champion and silver medallist in the women's four. She then rowed in eights, becoming a European Champion in 2016, and took a silver medal at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.

Former alumni Harry Leask (coached by Clydesdale ARC's Chris Phillips as a Junior), won bronze in the double scull at the Glasgow 2018 European Championships and recently won the silver medal in the men's quad sculls (M4x) at the Tokyo Olympic Games.

Clyde Amateur Rowing Club were founded in April 1865, at a meeting held in their club room at the Clutha Boathouse in 'Little Govan' (Hutchesontown), their first home. The Post Office Directory entry for 1865 lists a membership of thirty, with George Geddes of the Glasgow Humane Society acting as club-master. They held their first annual regatta the same year.

Clydesdale ARC 1910 season opening



The Sportsman, recorded the first annual 'festival' of Clyde Amateur Rowing Club, at the Mechanics Hall in Calton, in December 1865. It was, by all accounts, a good bash—'members, assisted by a number of friends, enlivened the company with some capital singing; afterwards, a ball took place, which was kept up with great zest until morning'. A small group of early members are thought to have abandoned boats for balls and were instrumental in founding Rangers Football Club in 1872 (see G for Glasgow Green).

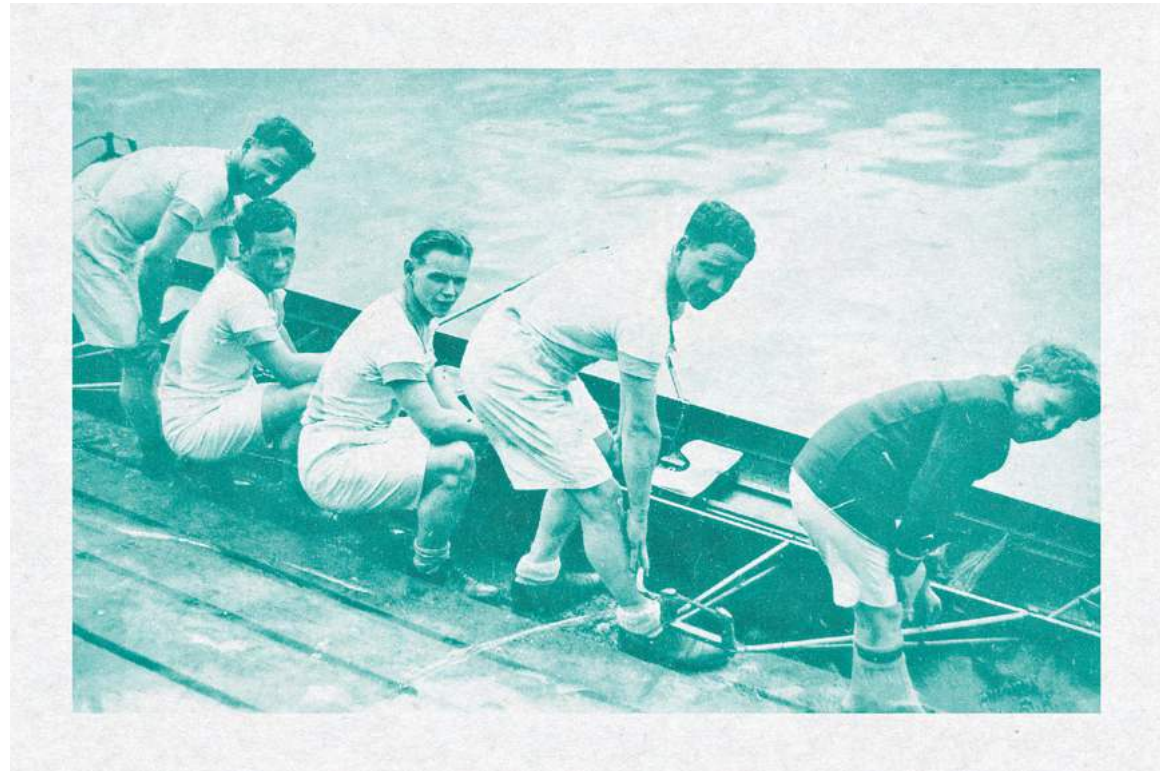
In 1884, *Sporting Life* stated 'this club now numbers upwards of seventy rowing members, and has removed to their new boathouse [they moved from the Clutha Boathouse in 1882], in part of Messrs. Barbour and Miller's [Adelphi Street carpet manufacturers] premises, to the east of the Suspension Bridge at Glasgow'. The club relocated to the West Boathouse in 1905.

The club celebrated its twenty-first regatta in 1886. Traditionally, this event was held late in the season—usually in September—and was often subject to inclement weather. In this instance, it was postponed for a whole month, to accommodate the Dumbarton Regatta. When the time came for their own event, 'the Glasgow oarsmen sacrificed much to suit the convenience of Dumbarton oarsmen, they received sorry return, not a single rower from Dumbarton patronising their regatta'. They suffered further indignity by being beaten by old rivals, Clydesdale ARC. On a positive note, the occasion was blessed with 'delightful' weather.

One of the early leading lights of the club was the Penny brothers—Tom, Laurie, Sandy, Bill and Jimmy—who were active during the late 1920s and 30s. They were known on the circuit as the 'Fourpence Ha'ppeny Crew'—the 'ha-penny' referring to the youngest and smallest member of the crew, 10-year-old Jimmy, who acted as team cox. They took the junior Scottish title in both 1929 and 1930 and won the senior race in 1931. The Riverside Museum in Glasgow has an exhibition dedicated to the Penny Brothers, with items donated by Tom's son. It was opened by Jimmy, the 'ha'penny', then aged 91, in 2014.

When women joined in 1979, the club was given a further boost. Notable alumni include Polly Swann, an Olympic silver and bronze medalist, and World and European Champion; and Imogen Walsh, one of GB's most successful lightweight women's rowers, winning multiple medals at World and European Championships, as well as on the World Cup stage.

Smaller than their neighbours Clydesdale, Clyde has periodically faced the prospect of extinction, particularly struggling to rebuild their membership after WWI and WWII (when rowers were evicted from the West Boathouse and the building was requisitioned by the RAF), and faced a challenging period during the 1990s.



Yet, they have persisted and are again on the up. Clyde have regularly opened their doors to other clubs—sharing facilities and providing a temporary home for Glasgow University Boat Club, Glasgow Schools Rowing Club, Strathclyde University Boat Club, and students from Aberdeen University. This generosity of spirit was also a canny investment, funnelling prospective members to Clyde once they had completed their studies.

Penny Brothers, from left, Tom, Sandy, Bill and Laurence, then wee Jimmy the cox, at Clyde Amateur Rowing Club



Even the most competent and experienced rower will end up in, rather than on, the water at some point. Many factors can prompt an unexpected dip—the inherently unstable nature of the boats, poor technique, hitting obstacles and choppy waters. Even getting in and out of boats is something of an art form! Racing shells are designed for speed rather than stability. Keeping your balance and maintaining equal weight distribution in slender, lightweight boats takes skill and years of practice to perfect.

“Catching a crab” is one of the most common ways to end up in the water. This is a term used to describe when a rower gets their oar blade caught in the water during the rowing stroke, instead of cleanly slicing through the water. When this happens, the rower loses control of the oar, which can cause it to fly out of their hands or be pulled out of the oarlock. This mistake can cause the boat to slow down or even stop, and can be especially dangerous if the rower loses their balance and is catapulted out of the boat.

Unsurprisingly clubs take safety very seriously and mitigate these risks through regular safety practice, capsize drills and intensive training to improve technique. Close proximity to the Glasgow Humane Society, has also been a bonus for the clubs based upstream of the weir.

Other hazards are harder to control and predict—floating branches, logs, and all manner of material can float down the river, from fridges to dead cows(!). The remnants of long-gone industry—piers, jetties, landing stages and relic bridge piers—also provide obstacles. Collisions are unusual but not unknown.

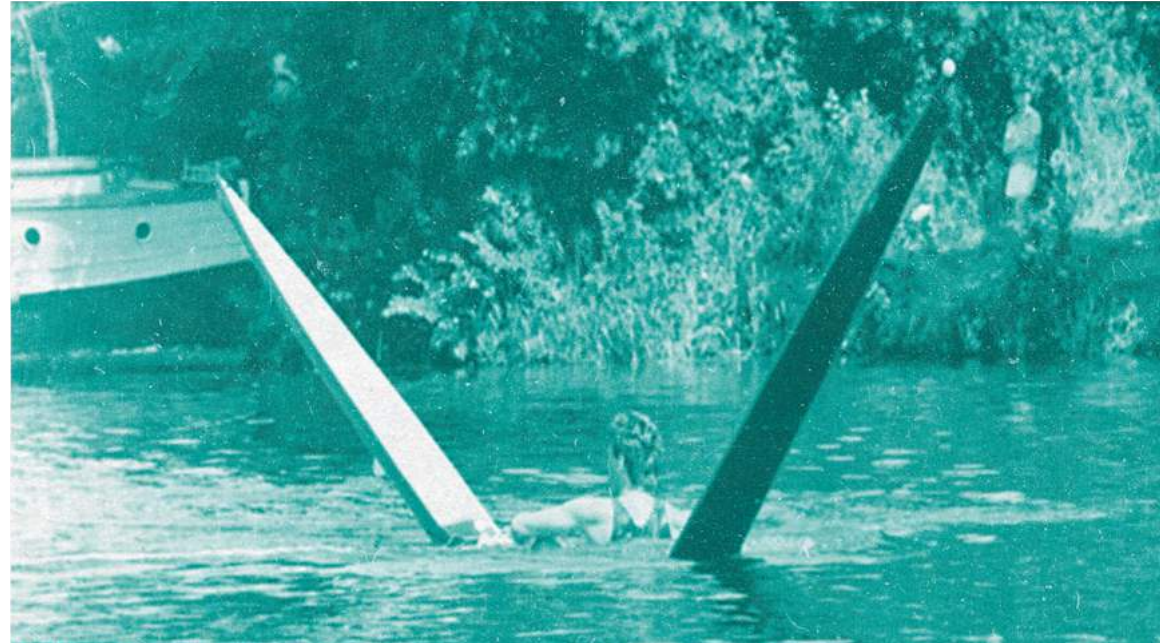
Sometimes accidents occur as a result of boat-to-boat incidents. In use from the late 1800s, the bow ball—a rubber ball attached to the front of the boat—protects both the thin hull of other boats and the soft flesh of rowers from the sharp bow end of the boat.

In 1888, a Cambridge University rower, Thomas Campbell, was fatally pierced through the heart by the bow end of a rival boat during the Cambridge University 'Bumps' race. This odd event, which continues today, actually encourages physical contact—boats start in a line along the riverbank and attempt to catch and “bump” the boat in front of them. Following an inquiry into his death, the use of bow balls was recommended to increase safety. However, it took another fifty years for them to become commonplace.

Though traffic on the river is virtually nil today, in the past, this stretch of the river was bustling with craft. Rowers had to contend with other small rowing boats, fishing boats delivering to the City Fish Market, barges transporting coal downstream from collieries at Rutherglen, and even a 113ft paddle steamer. The 'Artizan' was built and operated by Rutherglen shipbuilder Thomas Seath, and she plied the route from Rutherglen Quay to the Broomielaw several times a day from 1856 till 1859. Seath had a hard-nosed policy for any craft who ventured in his path and was known to souse boaters with buckets of water from the stern of his ship.

More serious accidents occurred, including the striking and sinking of a rowing boat at 'the New Club House', (Clutha Boathouse), as reported in the Glasgow Sentinel, in August 1856. Perhaps as a peace offering to the rowing community, Seath contributed 5 medals to the 1856 Glasgow Annual Regatta, and loaned his steamer, Royal Burgh, to accommodate spectators for the 1858 Glasgow Royal Regatta. He also sponsored the Stewards Cup. One of the surviving 'Artizan' medals is held in University of Glasgow's Hunterian Museum collections.

Spectators are also not immune to danger. In the nineteenth century, huge crowds gathered on the banks of the Clyde to watch races and inevitably, with all the jostling for a good spot, a few fell in. Some spectators watched races from the water—at a Glasgow Regatta Club scratch match in 1854, an overloaded spectator boat capsized, and the occupants had to be rescued by George Geddes and James Banks McNeil. The Glasgow Herald recorded one of the earliest regattas in August 1830, as being particularly rowdy.

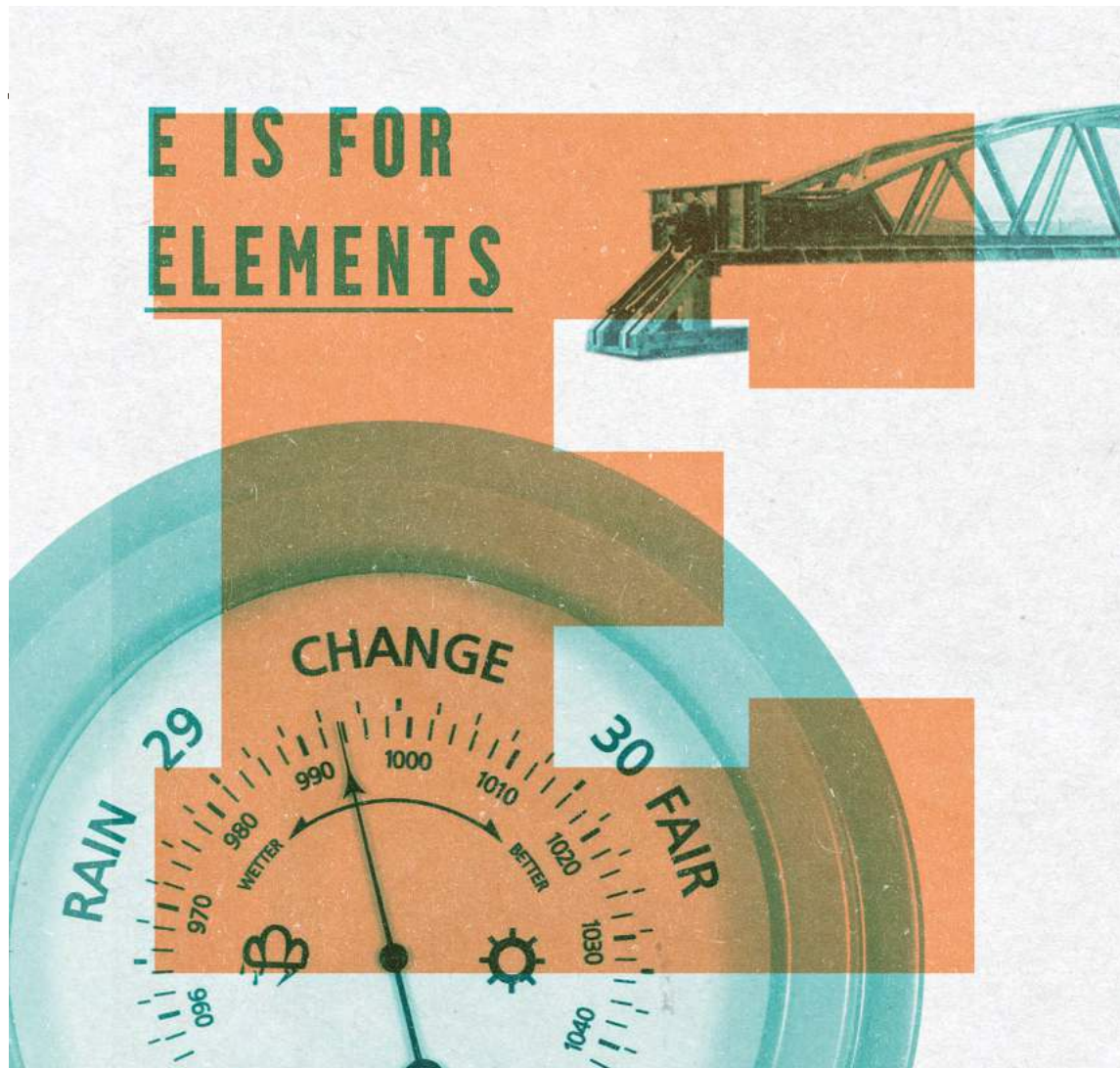


Above: Tony Hamilton in a split boat (1980s). Photo by Tom Finlay



Left: Thomas Seath's 'Royal Burgh' paddle steamer ferry en route to Rutherglen, from 'Rutherglen Lore' by W. R. Shearer (1922)

There were reports of cheating due to misleading instructions shouted from the crowd, broken oars, a drunken man jumped into the water, while another physically fought with the judges, and was generally 'obstreperous'. Quite a day for all!



Rowing is an outdoor sport, and as such, rowers are exposed to a variety of elements that can affect their performance. Too much rain causes the river to run in a spate, and the fast-moving currents can be dangerous. Too much wind can cause waves and choppy water (even on a river), making it difficult for rowers to maintain their balance and rhythm. Strong winds can also slow down boats. Too much fog and mist, and you risk hitting obstacles. In Glasgow, extreme heat is less of a danger(!), but there is a real risk of hypothermia in the winter.

The water is, of course, the most crucial concern for rowers. No Clyde, no rowing. Seventy metres downstream from the West Boathouse is the Clyde Tidal Weir, completed in 1901 to designs by City Surveyor A. B. McDonald and the fabulously monickered engineer Francis Gould Moroney Stoney. Constructed to protect the wharves, quays and bridge piers downriver, it is the second of its kind on this spot on the river, replacing a weir and lock system (1852-79). Three earlier weirs had existed downstream, the first constructed at the new Jamaica Street Bridge in 1772. Three enormous sluice gates, weighing 25 tons apiece, regulate water flow and maintain a constant depth upriver of around 4.5m.

As well as protecting the banks, the tidal weir enables rowing 'up the watter', creating a flat, non-tidal surface. The river in its natural state is around 1.5-2m lower, though levels can rise rapidly in a spate, and there were several catastrophic floods throughout the 1700s—washing away the Huthesontown Bridge in 1795. A flood in 1941 damaged the weir to the extent that it had to be substantially rebuilt, reopening in 1943. With the weir out of action, the resulting subsidence along the river's south bank meant many buildings along Adelphi Street had to be demolished.

Industries upriver, particularly water-hungry textiles and the new water works at Dalmarnock, relied on a predictable water supply abstracted directly from the river. Balancing their needs alongside maintaining navigation upriver for small vessels became a long-running issue, with both sides aggressively lobbying the Corporation officials. Textile works (dye works, printworks and bleachworks) lined the river.

One of the earliest, Barrowfield Dyeworks, was established in 1785 by George Mackintosh, a well-known local dyer, and David Dale, founder of New Lanark cotton mills, introduced the Turkey Red dyeing process to Britain. Turkey Red was a process of dyeing cotton a bright red colour. The colour produced was much less susceptible to fading and highly prized. Macintosh and Dale invited Pierre Jacques Papillon, a French dyer, to guide them through the complex dyeing process and the three partners established a new works on a site to the east of Rutherglen Bridge. In 1802, Mackintosh, Dale and Papillon sold the Dalmarnock Works to Henry Monteith, who turned the mill into a bandana factory.

The fixed weir and lock were removed in 1879. Pollution and sewage lingered longer in the shallower water along the Green, causing an 'odoriferous' stench, and the banks upstream began to erode and silt up the river further downstream. For the rowing community, the effects were devastating—the removal of the weir impacted the racing line, which was now too narrow to permit racing boats abreast. The Glasgow Evening Post's aquatics correspondent's review of the rowing year in 1884 noted, 'removal of the weir cast a wet blanket over both rowing and swimming in the river. Only during alternate weeks could rowers obtain a suitable stretch of water, and as for swimming, the filthy state of the water and the removal of the weir made a dip impossible.' Newspapers of the 1880s and 1890s are littered with pleas to reinstate the weir, and there were real concerns that its absence could 'end rowing on the Clyde'. Factory owners upstream were equally vocal. A solution (finally) arrived in Stoney's ingenious design for sluice gates that could be raised and pivoted horizontally to allow boats to pass below. A complex build, the project took six years to complete.

In 2017, the north sluice gate failed, and Glasgow got an abrupt lesson in the importance of the weir. Within three days, a large section of the south bank walkway had subsided, and there was further damage upriver at Shawfield. These were tense moments for the West Boathouse—pre-restoration, the building's foundations were already in a parlous state, and there were worries that it, too, would succumb to subsidence. Luckily, McDonald's timber frame had enough flexibility to weather the storm, and the building emerged unscathed.



Above: Damage to the Gorbals riverbank caused by a weir failure in the 1970s. Photo by John Eadie

Left: Moroney's sluice gates for the tidal weir, photographed in 1895 for 'The Engineer'



A healthy, balanced diet is essential to maintaining performance and aiding recovery for any athlete. Rowers may also be paying close attention to what they eat to meet weight category restrictions for competition. But it's not just the athletes who are thinking about food. Ask anyone attending a regatta or chewing the fat in the club room—the scrán on offer is a key part of the rowing experience, whether you're competing or not. The home bakes and bacon rolls at Clydesdale, Clyde's BBQs, or the legendary burgers at Strathclyde Park stick in the memory (and, sadly, the thighs!) in a way that a protein bar can't.

From the early 1830s to the 1880s, the Glasgow Regatta Club organised the two biggest aquatic galas on the Clyde. The club's social side was always prominent—it held fundraising dinners and suppers in local taverns to celebrate each year's successful races. In the 1850s, celebratory post-regatta dinners were held in Mrs Crawford's Waverley Hotel in George Square, decorated with the winners' pennants. The Trades Club held post-race 'tattie and herring' suppers in 1889 and 'smoking concerts'—which immediately undid the benefits of exercise!

Before the 1860s, Glasgow's water supply was often polluted, and weak beer was a safer alternative. The campaign against drink was hugely influential in the 1800s, and sports were promoted as a morally uplifting distraction. By 1855, '100 members [of the Regatta Club] were connected with the Temperance Society', and sobriety prevented men from drowning. Of course, publicans of both sexes, and the council, made money by licensing alcohol tents erected during boat races. The teetotal activists took court action, but municipal liquor control was too lucrative to lose. Subsequently, 'refreshment rooms' were included underneath temporary private grandstands. The general public consumed 'a host of gingerbread, soda water, apple and nut stalls ... at very small prices'.

Working-class rowers had to spend their money on travelling to competitions, entry fees and equipment. They were far less able to purchase special 'sports nutrition', when feeding their family was their main priority. Details of their intake aren't readily accessible, though urban dwellers might have had poorer food than farm workers. Attempts at serious training diets were of varied scientific worth, for instance vitamins were only identified in the 20th century. Until the 1870s, recommended diets were usually adaptations of those developed by renowned boxing coach Captain Robert Barclay Allardice. They were generally consumed by wealthier rowers, like university students, during prolonged race preparation.

Suggested breakfasts included boiled mutton or beef ('no grease'), 'with light biscuit or dry toast', egged sherry was an occasional tonic; for evenings, more beef, and tapioca pudding, and milk and tea were permissible. The heavy reliance on carbohydrates, and general exclusion of vegetables, might even have encouraged scurvy, which develops over three months. Despite sweating during training, some trainers discourage 'excess' liquid intake. There was no standard system of training, and each coach or club probably developed their own nutritional practices. It was only at the end of the century that more reliable scientific principles were developed.

We've come a long way since the 1870s in understanding how our bodies work and how to fuel them for optimal performance. The sports nutrition industry was valued at \$34.8 billion in 2020 and aggressively promotes products, often wrapped in single-use plastic packaging, to aspiring athletes looking for that 'extra edge'. However, most nutritionists agree that shelling out on expensive supplements and drinks wastes time and money. 'Food-first' is the advice from British Rowing; just don't follow the diet above!

A good spread at a Clydesdale ARC Regatta





Long before there was a Hampden Park, Kelvin Hall or an Emirates Arena, Glasgow Green was where the city came to play and compete. Gifted to the people of Glasgow in 1450, it is the oldest public park in Scotland and has long been a focus for public gatherings. Over the years, it has played host to the Glasgow Fair, numerous shows, the odd public execution, political protests, military training and music events. However, its long-standing role in nurturing the city's diverse range of sports is often overlooked.

As a large, relatively flat piece of ground positioned close to the river and town centre, it is little wonder that it became a focus for sports. There are records of foot races around the Green dating back to 1675, the town's first formally constituted sports club—Glasgow Golf Club—was established on the Green in 1787, using a 7-hole course and commandeering the Herd's House as a clubhouse. Bowling, tennis, archery, boxing, football, hockey, shinty, cycling, cricket and many more sports have all found a home on the green at one time or another.

By the mid-1800s, interest in all sports was growing exponentially, and Glasgow Green was the city's epicentre of games and recreation. Many clubs shared members across several sports and would switch from rowing in the summer months to football, athletics or boxing over the winter to keep themselves fit, try out new sports and develop new skills. Glasgow Green was particularly fertile ground for sporting crossover.

Glasgow Rangers Football Club were founded in 1872. One of the first of the Rangers' greats was Tom Vallance, from Cardross. He came to football via the Clyde Rowing Club. He was also in the Clydesdale Harriers. His pals were the McNeil brothers, Henry, Moses and Peter—Henry played for Queen's Park FC, and Moses and Peter founded Rangers. The Harriers also contained the Maley brothers: Willie and Tom. They co-founded Celtic FC in 1887.

There is still some dispute as to whether Clyde or Clydesdale ARC were most instrumental in forming Rangers FC, though the truth likely lies in a mix of the two.

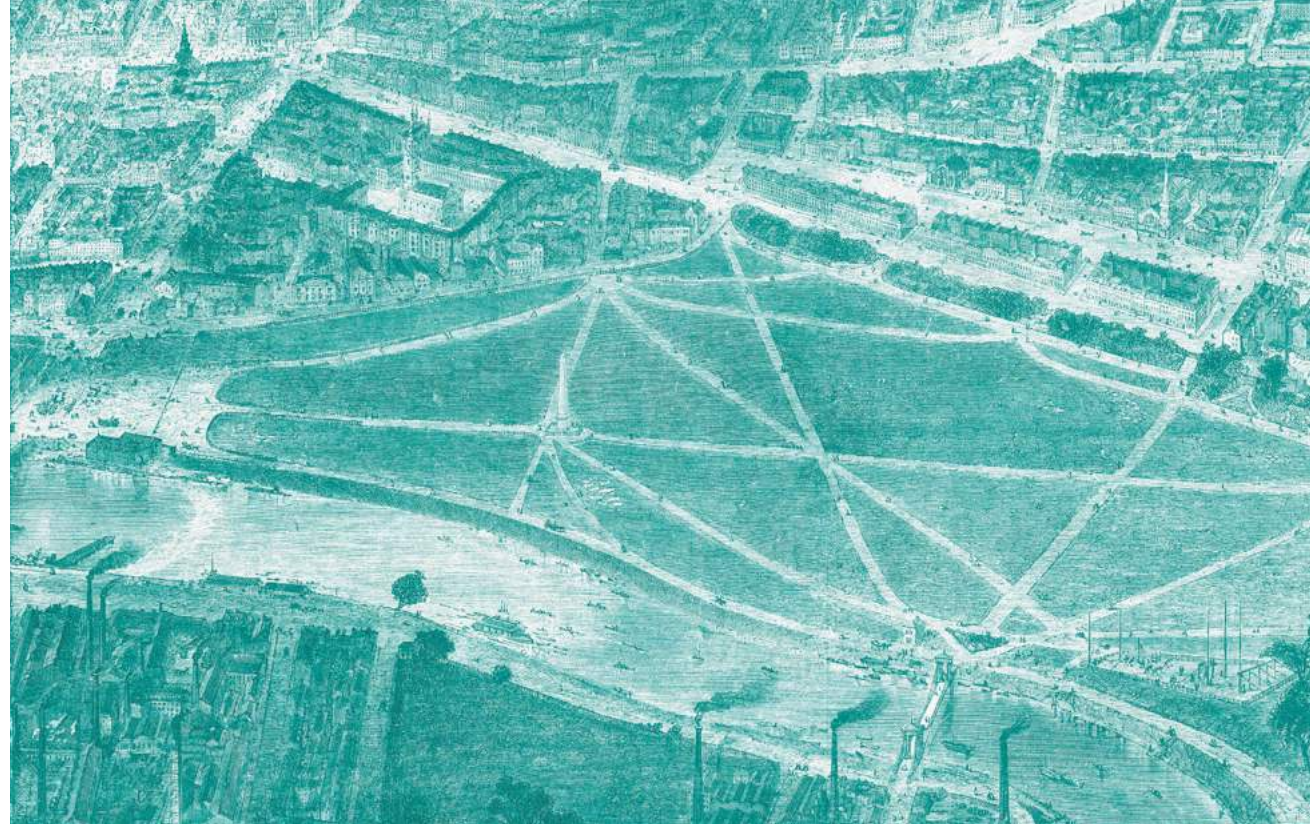
An early team photograph of Rangers FC in 1877 shows players in their original team strip, which featured a six-pointed star on the jersey—the traditional badge of Clyde ARC, still in use today. This suggests a potential connection between the clubs in the early days. There are also tantalising hints that Clydesdale ARC had some hand in the clubs formation. Club minute books from this period document complaints that some members were spending too little time on the water and too much time of the Green playing football!

Swimming was also popular along the river banks on both the Green and Gorbals sides of the river. Shallow beaches and the deep pool at 'Dominies Hole' at the tip of Flesher's Haugh enticed bathers in the summer months, while across the river at the Hutchesontown Bend, the outflow from a cotton mill discharged a pleasant stream of hot water to keep swimmers toasty in the winter.

A swimming medal in Glasgow Museum's collection, dated to 1837, shows divers leaping from the boards here. Ordnance Survey maps from the 1850s show 4 springboards projecting out into the river, with stone steps leading down to them. The Corporation even installed stone benches so bathers could dry their clothes.

By the mid-1800s the practice of swimming in the river was in decline—increased river traffic, including the regular ferry from Rutherglen to Broomielaw, made this a busy and potentially hazardous spot. In addition, pollution levels were growing exponentially—the river was filthy by this point, not aided by the opening of the Dalmarnock Sewage Works upstream.

However, for the Victorians, it was concerns over public decency rather than safety brought about the end of swimming in the Clyde. Traditionally men swam naked, and in 1831 the Corporation issued an order banning naked swimming on certain stretches of the Clyde in town, and imposed a hefty £5 fine on anyone caught. Most had abandoned swimming in the river by the 1870s, and moved to cleaner outdoor spots such as the quarry at Alexandra Park. In 1878 the Corporation opened its first public baths at nearby Greenhead, providing safe, comfortable indoor swimming facilities. Greenhead Baths are well-known, but the tale of Glasgows 'lost lido' is (literally) a buried history. Glasgow Corporation began plans to build an Olympic-sized outdoor pool in 1939.

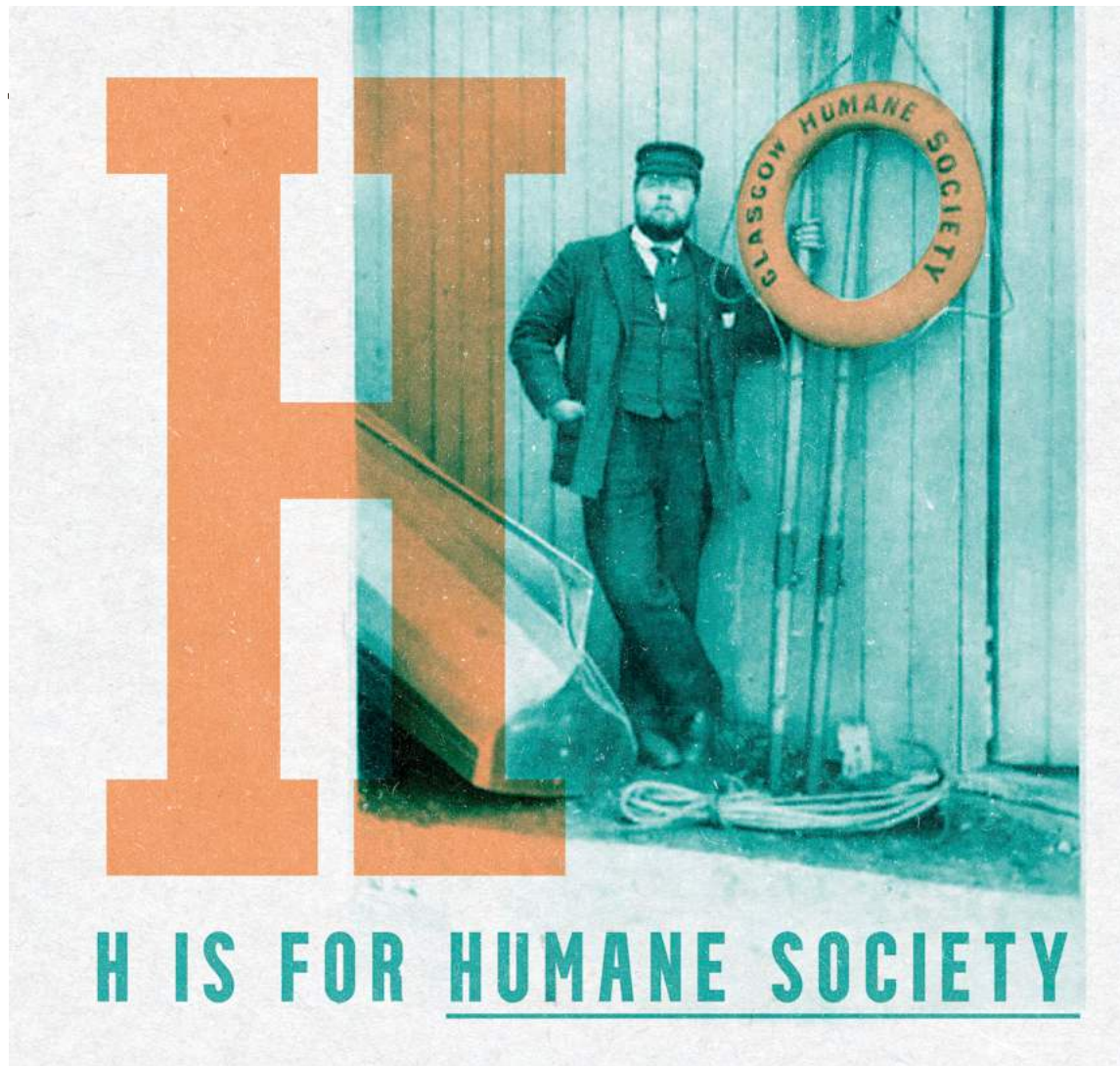


The site chosen was an area immediately north of Nelson's Monument, and excavations were underway when war broke out. Aerial photographs taken by the German Luftwaffe show the project's vast scale. Post-war, no funds were available to complete the project and the site was backfilled in 1950.

Thomas Sulman's aerial view of Glasgow Green from 1864

In the late 1990s, the City Council undertook a large-scale scheme to upgrade parts of the Green. Forty years on, the exact location of the pool had been lost, and there was a concern that it may have been filled in with potentially hazardous chemical waste from land around Shawfield Chemical Works. Archaeologists from Glasgow University were brought in to conduct geophysics across the Green in search of the lost pool. In addition to finding the swimming pool, the team also located a small village of WW2 air raid shelters. The site was decontaminated and capped in 2000.

Wild swimming is again gaining popularity, and although the Clyde has improved significantly in terms of water quality, we still have some way to go before we'll see swimming in the river again.



The Glasgow Humane Society is a charitable organisation based on Glasgow Green dedicated to promoting water safety and preventing drowning. They provide rescue and recovery services for people in distress in the waterways throughout the Glasgow area and along the River Clyde; advise councils, emergency services, universities and schools, businesses, and riverside users; and work to educate the public about water safety and accident prevention. The Society relies on the support of volunteers and donations from the public to carry out its work.

Established in 1790 by members of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and local businessmen, the Society is the oldest practical lifesaving organisation in the world. In 1795 funds were acquired for a house and boathouse on Glasgow Green to accommodate a full-time officer. The building, which doubled as a morgue for recovered bodies, was ghoulishly nicknamed the 'Deid Hoose' by Glaswegians.

The Clyde was a busier waterway at this time—numerous working and recreational boats bustled up and down the river. There were no barriers along the banks or lifebuoys. The lack of safe swimming spots meant those who entered the water voluntarily risked unpredictable currents, being run down by river traffic, or entanglement in underwater hazards. Many couldn't swim at all, and drownings and accidents were frequent.

The history of the Society is dominated by two dynasties—the Geddes family (James, John, George I and George II), society officers and assistant officers from 1841—1932, succeeded by the Parsonage family (Ben and son, George) from 1932 till 2019. Both families were, and (in the case of the Parsonage family) still are, active in competitive rowing. Various members of the Geddes regularly pop up in dispatches from the trades regattas, and George Geddes II even travelled to Paris in 1900 to compete in an international competition for lifesaving societies, bringing home the gold. George Parsonage rowed for Clydesdale ARC for many years and (along with Duncan Paterson) holds the record of winning the most regattas in the club's history. His sons are members of the Strathclyde University Boat Club.

A lone oarsman passes the Humane Society with the 'Deid Hoose' in the background (Glasgow Museums)



George Parsonage, former Humane Society Officer and former Clydesdale ARC member (centre) with son Ben (right) and Glasgow RC Team GB rower Sam Scrimgeour (right)



The women of the family were also involved in the sport. In 1883, George Geddes' wife Mary founded the Glasgow Ladies Rowing Club—the first of its kind on the Clyde. The news was positively reviewed in *The Scottish Referee* at the time, 'encouragement should be given to this branch of athletics for our girls... I am in favour of every girl acquiring the art of rowing'. Stephanie Parsonage, married to George, is a former international rower, whom he met when she capsized while training on the Clyde.

The Geddes family were also boatbuilders, boat hirers and oar makers, supplying the Victorian rowing community. The Parsonage family continued this tradition of tweaking and innovating boat design, though the objective was stability rather than speed.

The Bennie, a lifeboat custom-designed by Benjamin "Bennie" Parsonage, is on display in the Riverside Museum. Several of the Society's boats are replicas of the Bennie, as it is the fastest boat that can still be tipped far enough to allow a person to be lifted over the side.

The current Society officer is William Graham, taking over from Dr George Parsonage (MBE), who retired in 2019 after forty years of service and the rescue of hundreds of people from the river.



There are plenty of inspirational figures to choose from in rowing, and plenty more involved in the project—from volunteers who stuck with it through a global pandemic, to the numerous partner organisations who sparked new ideas and reinvigorated us when we flagged. For this section, we'll focus on volunteers from Glasgow Disability Alliance, who, working with community boatbuilders Archipelago Folkschool, spent two weeks in November 2019 building two 'Caravelle' skiffs in a chilly backspace at the Briggait.

Run by and for disabled people, Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA) is based locally in Templeton Business Centre and over 5000 members across the Greater Glasgow area. They support and advocate for diverse disabled people, people with long-term conditions, and member organisations led by disabled people.

In 2018, the West Boathouse Project commissioned Govan-based community boatbuilders GalGael Trust, to build us 'Dratsie', a small 'picnic-class' traditional rowing skiff. Her function was to provide an alternative, more stable boat to access the Clyde. Since her launch, she has participated in litter picks, carried a Lord Provost, delivered a flag for Glasgow Women's Library and transported musicians, Sequoia Duo, as part of their film 'Clota's Journey' released for UN World Water Day in March 2023. The need for more accessible craft prompted the subsequent boatbuilding project.

The following year we began working with an enthusiastic team of volunteers from GDA—Ashley Booth, Adam Graham, Izhar Hussain, Shug Kennedy, Boudiala Kouyate, Ross McMaster, Jane Proudfoot and personal assistant Karen White. Over the course of the project, volunteers learned about boatbuilding and maritime heritage, how to use traditional boatbuilding tools, the principles of boatbuilding and oar-making, and working with different woods and materials.

In exchange, they helped the boatbuilders adapt the programme and process of boatbuilding to make it easier for people with different abilities. The Covid pandemic brought the project to an abrupt halt and the boats were put into storage.



Left: Making oars as part of the boatbuilding project

Below: Boatbuilding at the Briggait



We continued to work with GDA members on other projects—nature walks and other outdoor activities, and online workshops on local history and heritage, but finding an accessible space to finish the boats proved tricky and they were mothballed. More recently, GDA members have been working with artist Fiona Fleming on the design for the specially commissioned West Boathouse flag. The original team members finally completed the artwork, paint schemes and names for the boats over three years later, in 2023. Working on the same principle that engagement with craft skills can be a powerful tool for building a sense of community, the Skylark IX Recovery Project was getting underway around the same time, downriver at Dumbarton. Volunteers from Alternatives Community-based Recovery, Dumbarton Area Council on Alcohol

(DACA), and local community members worked with the same boatbuilders (Archipelago Folkschool) to gain boatbuilding and joinery skills, confidence and purpose as part of their journey of recovery from addictions. Our two projects have run parallel and we were delighted when an opportunity arose to collaborate, and volunteer boatbuilders from Skylark came to assist with completing our skiffs.

The Skylarkers have recently founded the Dumbarton Rowing Club, a new coastal club, rowing the boats they handbuilt themselves. In addition to supporting a new generation of rowers, the club marks a new chapter in Dumbarton's long history of rowing and boat building.



Photo by David Collie

Young people have been rowing competitively in Glasgow for over 170 years—Glasgow Regatta Club held races for 9-14 year-olds in 1854, and a cup for under-18s began in 1857. But in these early races, all the rowers were boys. Boys training to be skilled tradesmen could join the various sports clubs associated with their workplaces, and children of both sexes did watch the various colourful regattas. In the 1870s, apprentice printers competed for their own 'Four Oared Race for Boys' (prize £1). The Glasgow Rowing Club was a specifically working-class body that pioneered beginners' classes taught by experienced members. Smaller statured teenagers also acted as coxes—'young Harry Geddes', of the Humane Society family, won the 'neatest dressed coxswain' prize in 1886, steering the winning crew, at the age of 14. Glasgow Trades Rowing Clubs formed a boy's section, the 'Clyde Youths' in 1894, with new, 23-ft clinker-built jollyboats for training.

Young people got their own, dedicated club in 1942. Glasgow Schools Rowing Club was founded by teachers who wanted to share their own passionate interest in the sport. Founder, Colin Murchison, received an MBE in 1964 for services to Scottish Rowing; another, Harry Wylie, lived to 103. Harry aimed to educate 'the whole child', both body and mind, for a life after school and exercised on his rowing machine until his final months.

In 1943, 50 boys from a third of eligible Glasgow schools participated in the programme, funded by the Corporation Education Department. Clydesdale ARC generously supplied boats, equipment, and a home for the new club at the West Boathouse for their first decade. Clyde ARC provided accommodation for the next fifteen years (by this point, numbers had risen to over 500 practising pupils). They moved into their current home at the East Boathouse in late 1960s/early 1970s.

From 1956 onwards, annual rowing camps were held at Irvine each summer. Groups of boys and teachers concentrated on training, using boats brought from Glasgow, with Ayrshire pupils as guests. Half the attendees were from Catholic schools and the camps represented a rare opportunity to break down sectarian barriers at a time when tensions ran high in the city.

Glasgow Schools Fours Trophy



A young Harry Leask (right) with coach Chris Phillips of Clydesdale ARC (left)



Schools regattas at Glasgow Green attracted huge crowds during the 1950s, 69 crews competed in the 1958 event, increasing to 139(!) by 1964. Girls joined the club in the late 1970s.

In 1992, the club celebrated its 50th anniversary with a regatta and dinner in the City Chambers. Funding from local government was reduced during this period, but sponsorship and promotional deals kept the club ticking over and introduced new equipment.

The success of rowers such as Gillian Lindsay, the youngest member of the 1992 Olympic squad, further boosted the sport at youth level, and a combined SARA, City Council and Steve Redgrave Trust project donated indoor rowing machines to every secondary in Glasgow in 2006. In 2013 GSRC revived their Glasgow Schools Rowing Championship and in 2016 joined 'Project Rio', a national programme designed to encourage more youngsters into the sport before the Rio Olympics. Former alumni include two Junior World Champions, Josh Armstrong and Gavin Horsburgh.

Other initiatives aimed at getting youngsters out on the water include Firhill Youth Project and Community Sports Hub, founded in 2019 and based at the Forth and Clyde Canal's Firhill Basin in Maryhill. Firhill provides local young people aged 11-25 with free, accessible, and sustainable opportunities to become active and stay active in their local community through rowing.

Clydesdale ARC are also key to developing young talent on the Clyde, and have had an active juniors section for many years, introducing many kids to the sport through their 'Learn to Row' introductory program and working with local schools.



Suppose you were a well-bred 18th-century gentlewoman. What would you wear while blatantly admiring the male of the species exerting himself at rowing? From the very start of 'regattas', the grand aquatic galas and post-race concerts of the 1770s, women's fashions were as much a part of the spectacle as the fireworks and music. From dressing in white, to contrast with the Thames swans (who were specially dyed-black), to reading about the regatta parties in the 'Ladies' Almanack for 1775', upper-class women were expected to be knowledgeable about such entertainments.

To attend Glasgow's regattas was to participate in a live-action pageant, 'on horseback and in gigs, which by their moving up and down, gave ... animation to the scene' (1829). From then onwards, 'seeing to be seen' was an integral part of attending. The ever-present military bands were colourful enough, but the press always complimented the 'gaily dressed throng of ladies' (1841). Written descriptions suggest that the actual pullers' 'uniforms' were inspired by those of the famous Oxbridge crews, with striped jumpers, white canvas trousers and caps.

Of course, there were individual variations, according to budget and before the days of specialised sporting gear. Straw 'boaters' and neckerchiefs were derived from naval uniforms, and rowing manuals show the athletes in close-fitting, and frequently long-sleeved tops and again, like early footballers, in breeches resembling 'long johns'. One 1866 manual recommended expensive, tailor-made kit—woollen layers to gradually strip off, above a thin Merino jersey, a 'pilot-cloth boating coat' with elasticated wrists for warmth, and canvas shoes. Leather-lined flannel trousers prevented chafing, but also hardened due to sweating and just getting wet. The coach would as soon omit the chamois lining as 'row without the trousers themselves'!

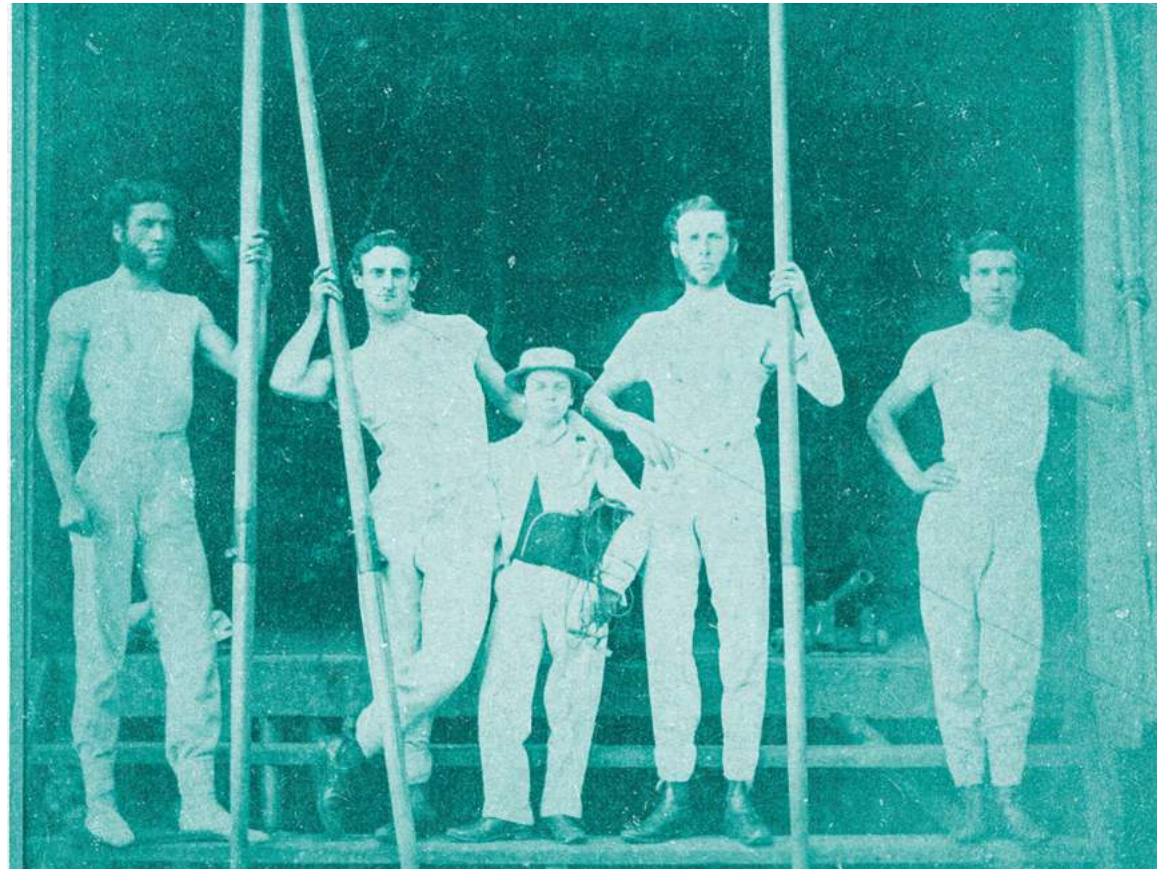
Artisan crews on modest budgets probably had to adapt clothes more readily to hand—much early sports kit resembles 'combinations' or underclothing made of cheaper cotton and woollen fabrics. There is inevitably less information about how working-class teams (or, more probably, their wives and mothers) created their training and competitive gear in the 1860s-80s. As sports became more mass-participatory, the strips and footwear for one discipline were often adapted for another activity.

Regattas and textiles have always been intertwined—as demonstrations of wealth, and latterly as the name of a vertical-striped, hard-wearing twill cloth. Loose ‘regatta’ work-shirts were advertised in the 1840s as ‘best Glasgow regattas in stripes and figures’.

A (male) journalist suggested the rowing ‘uniform’ for the ephemeral Clyde Ladies’ Club of 1893, with predominantly naval colours imitating contemporary men’s kit. It comprised ‘blue serge [woollen] walking skirt, blue and white striped Garibaldi [loose blouse], and a tricky straw boater with broad ribbon’. Although we imagine that their corsetry may have restricted deep breathing –women still undertook heavy work while wearing it, so it was more flexible than modern clichés suggest. Appearance and ‘correct turnout’ mattered to men too—the smartness of a crew’s clothing ‘presented a grand and imposing sight’ (1849), and drew praise during each season’s opening flotilla.

Today, the most ubiquitous piece of rowing kit is the ‘onesie’ or unitard, usually printed with club colours and logos. Most are made from spandex, a stretchy, form-fitting synthetic material invented in 1959, though perhaps better known by its trademark name, ‘Lycra’. Like many synthetic fibres, the production and disposal of Lycra has negative environmental impacts. Lycra is made from petroleum-based chemicals, and the production of these chemicals contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental issues. In addition, Lycra and other synthetic fibres do not biodegrade.

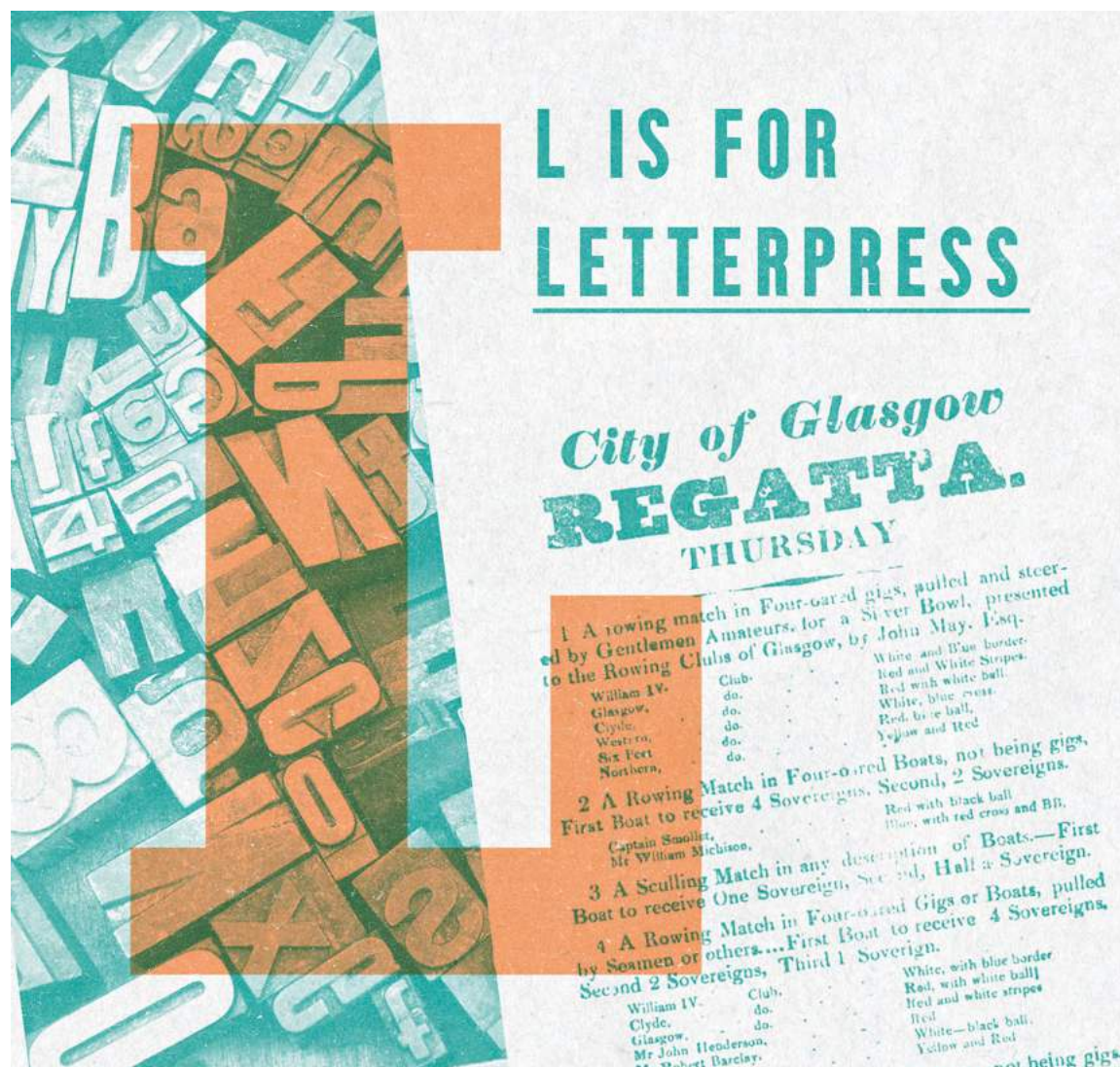
Microfibres shed during washing can end up in waterways and oceans, where they are ingested by wildlife. While rowing does not have the same environmental impact as other sports, such as football, where a vast fan base is encouraged to purchase this season’s kit on an annual rotation, there is a growing awareness of the need to rethink our current practices. As part of the West Boathouse project, club members have developed an Environmental Policy, with some handy advice on ways to reduce our impact.



Off-duty casual in 1862



Gillian Lindsay's onesie from the 1995 World Championships



Rowing handbill from 1830 (University of Glasgow Special Collections Eph E/24)

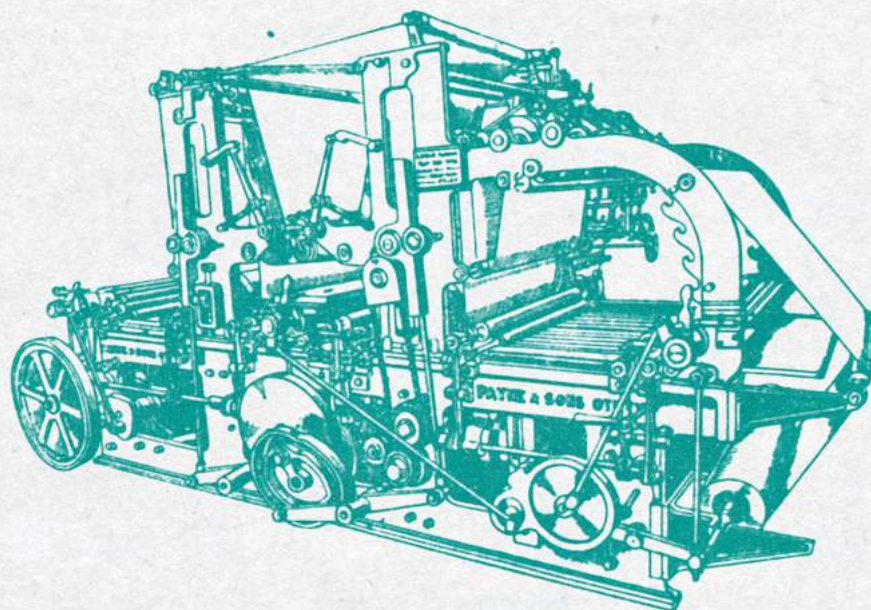
What's 'letterpress'? It's printing using inked, raised metal type, which is 'pressed' onto paper, a skilled and physically demanding process. The official rules restricting when working-class 'professionals' and wealthier 'amateurs' could compete together (see A for Amateurs) led to separate clubs for each group. In 1868, the Glasgow Rowing Club became the city's first specifically 'artisan' rower's association. In 1871, the Regatta Club, sensing growing workers' resentment at being excluded, introduced a '£25 prize to promote rowing among tradesmen'.

Special races were insufficient, and the Regatta Club's monopoly on staging the city's main annual races was broken in 1872, when the first Letterpress Printers' Regatta was held. Glasgow held many educational institutions, and thousands of industrial firms and shops, most of which required printed adverts, instruction booklets and packaging, hence the number of printers and publishers. The printers were the first specialist trades association to organise their own regatta, and the longest-lasting. Many workplaces had their own rowing clubs, although from the 1870s onwards, football proved an increasing rival attraction. The earliest racing jollyboats were named after firms, like McCorquodale's or Blackie's and newspapers ('The Sentinel'), and the contests ran over two weekends.

By the late 1870s, now the 'Daily and Letterpress Printers', crowds of about 7,000 turned out, and 'open' races were contested in 'Clear Well', and 'Royal Blue'. The Letterpress Printers' Challenge Cup, 'in specie; only for bona fide employees in other than daily newspapers', for 1878 'was disregarded—the competition was miserable in both heats!' Disappointments aside, by the early 1880s it was 'now the most important fixture on the Clyde's upper reaches', obviously outshining the old Regatta Club fixtures. Over 1,000 watching from the Albert Bridge saw the Evening Times' 4-man crew beat The Citizen for the Daily Press Challenge Cup and £8 cash prize (1880).

By the 1890s, the Trades Rowing Club held annual scratch races and its own regatta, as did the Calendermen (textile workers), while the Glasgow Telegraphists awarded their own captancy to a winning stroke and vice-captancy to his team-mate.

OUR NEW PRINTING PRESS.



'Cossar' flatbed printing press in
Strathearn Herald July 1907.
Patented by Tom Cossar of John
Cossa & Sons, printers in Govan

The Police ARC Regatta excited humour, miscalculating the tide and showing all the style of 'the fishermen of the Western Highlands' (where many of them came from, anyway!). So numerous were the multiple artisan's events, that they clashed, with many anxious to avoid the Fair Holiday. However, 'Trades rowers cannot be considered professional until they have paid all their training and competing expenses', a constant struggle.

Glasgow Printing Trades Amateur Rowing Club was founded in 1914, and had their own premises on Glasgow Green in the 1920s, which formed the hub of an active sports and de facto social club. It was open to non-printers, and competitors wore the printer's white shirts with blue chevron ('V' shape).

The Scottish Trades Amateur Rowing Association (1920), which included Printers', Co-operative and Paisley rowers, emphasised that workers' clubs were really self-funding amateurs, in the modern sense, and not full-time sportsmen. Female members didn't row competitively but, as in the 19th century, ensured the catering was always available.

The adverts for the 1954 GPTARC regatta illustrated a coxed quad, or sculling boat, in front of the East Boathouse, with the McAllister's and Licensed Victuallers' Trophies on offer. As in the 19th century, there were also 'in kind' goods on offer, such as furniture and towels, so winners might end up with multiple sets of crockery!

Fundraising dances, wedding receptions and transporting boats to regattas on makeshift trailers and lorries—all formed part of the rich oral history of the GPTARC. They competed against other regional and national clubs, from Dumbarton, Greenock, Loch Lomond and further afield, continuing the tradition of inter-trades contests.

Printing firms increasingly left the city from the 1960s onwards, loosening rowers' links to the trade. GPTARC merged with Glasgow Argonauts in 1983, creating the more inclusive Glasgow Rowing Club, who opened their new boathouse in Silverfir Street in 1997, on the south bank of the Clyde facing the Green, where their predecessors began their regattas in 1872.



Coastal rowing takes place on the sea and along sea coasts and is generally practised in larger and more stable boats (with fixed-seats) than traditional flat-water rowing boats. Coastal rowing has very practical origins—to get goods and people from ‘a’ to ‘b’—rather than as a recreational or sporting pursuit.

Yachting regattas on the lower Clyde were the first to include rowing, which would now be classed as ‘maritime.’ These open-water pulling contests were a minor part of the programme, added to allow professional mariners to provide entertainment for the crowds. They involved general-purpose manually-propelled ‘gigs’ and ‘jolly boats’, which serviced larger sailing ships. As early as 1826, specially-chartered steamships conveyed crowds of spectators from Glasgow to Greenock, for ‘the rowing and sailing matches of the Northern Yacht Club’, while ‘viewing some of the most romantic scenery on the Firth of Clyde’. The rowing saw ‘four-oared boats ... five gigs to pull from Largs to Cumbray’, over 2 miles, and another match at Greenock saw a ‘very numerous assemblage of the beau monde from Glasgow’.

Naturally, coastal rowers wanted their own dedicated clubs and regattas, with multiple coastal rowing clubs formed to meet demand. Many from the southern Clyde estuary are documented in Tom Mackay’s history ‘Old Clyde Pullers: Inverclyde’s Coastal Rowing Clubs’ (2015). They included amateur, trades and ‘trades amateur’ clubs, reflecting the contested and often-shifting division between the pretensions of gentlemen and financially poorer manual labourers. The well-appointed Port Glasgow Amateur Rowing Club (founded 1868) had a diverse fleet to practise with in the 1870s, offering ‘outrigged skiffs, sculling boats, jolly boats, gigs and pleasure boats’.

There were also one-off contests, whose rowers frequently also entered the up-river Glasgow Regattas. In 1853, Hundreds arrived on a special train of 28 carriages from Perth, to watch the Scottish rowing championship on the Gairloch.



Skylark volunteers in their skiffs
'Happy Days' and 'New Beginnings'

Mike Lekakis approaching the weir
from downriver in the skiff 'Dratsie'

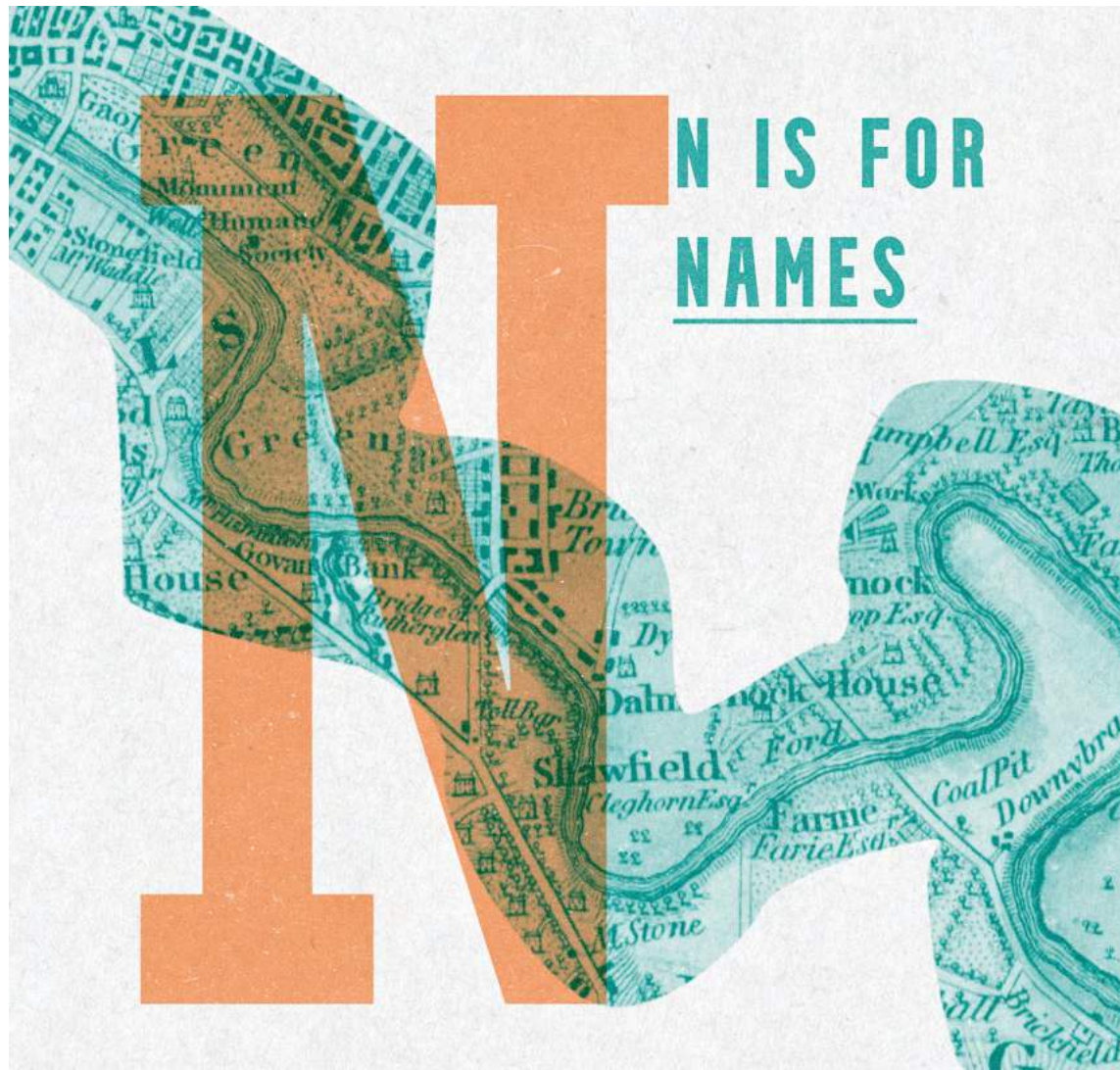


Vast sums were bet on each 4-man gig (the famous James Banks McNeil was on Glasgow's team), but Perth won in a mahogany vessel by Claspers of Newcastle, covering 5.5 miles in 32 minutes. There was a predictable outcry because the winning boat 'was of English construction'!

The sport has recently undergone a considerable revival, and the Scottish Coastal Rowing Association (SCRA) now has over 70 member clubs around the Scottish coast and on large freshwater lochs. Much of this is due to the success of the Scottish Coastal Rowing Project—a community-based initiative launched in 2009 to encourage people to build and row traditional wooden boats called St Ayles Skiffs. The project aims to promote community involvement in the sport of rowing and to revive interest in traditional boat-building skills.

The project was started by the Scottish Fisheries Museum in Anstruther, Fife, in partnership with the Scottish Coastal Rowing Association (formed in 2010). The idea was to create a low-cost, easy-to-build rowing boat that could be constructed by local communities using traditional boat-building techniques. Since the launch of the project, more than 200 St Ayles Skiffs have been built by communities around Scotland, as well as in other countries around the world. The boats are used for recreational rowing, as well as for racing in local and national regattas.

The Scottish Coastal Rowing Project has been hugely successful in promoting the sport of rowing and in bringing communities together around a shared interest in traditional boat-building and rowing skills. It has also helped to revive interest in Scotland's rich maritime heritage and has provided a platform for the promotion of coastal tourism and economic development.



Extract from William Forrest's 'County of Lanark', 1816 (National Library of Scotland)

Names, above all other kinds of words, have always had their own special magic. The long lists of club, team, gig and prize-winning vessels are inspired by humour ('Win if I Can', 1885; 'Hard Egg', 1880), fate (Avenger, 1850), speed (Gazelle, Thunderbolt, 1841), politics and literature. Placenames too, can tell us much about the history of an area—freezing lost languages, former residents and past uses in time.

A few examples from the imaginative 1850s illustrate this. 'Clutha', the ancient British name for the River Clyde, was applied to various gigs from 1845 onwards, and to the boathouse which opened in 1854. The novels of Walter Scott prompted both 'Waverley Station', and boats 'Jeanie Deans' and 'Rob Roy'; 'The Corsican Brothers' by Alexander Dumas appeared as a play in 1852, and as a jolly-boat in 1853! Technology motivated the 'Telegraph'—rowed by Glasgow Humane Society's James Geddes—as attempts to lay the first trans-Atlantic cables began in 1854. Aquatics itself created its own heroes and icons—the skiff 'Clasper' (1857) the 'Tyne' celebrate the legendary Newcastle rowing champions. Local pride was upheld by the 'Lennox Lass' (1857) and 'Maid of St Rollox', of 1851.

From 1829 until 1853, the competitors pulled between the Wooden Bridge (rebuilt as 'Hutchesons' in the 1830s), at Glasgow Green, upstream to Rutherglen Bridge, and back. Buoys and the commodore's barge were moored to mark turning points, and any temporary variations. The military band of 1831 occupied a 'floating ark' at Dominie's Hole, an old bathing spot preserving the traditional Scots word for 'schoolteacher', and easily accessible for swimming. Flesher's Haugh (riverside meadow) once belonged to the butchers' guild or Incorporation of Fleshers, and provided them with rental income. The racing course was altered in 1854, so that it was better visible from the new Regatta Club (later 'Clutha') boathouse opposite Flesher's Haugh.

The 'Peat Bog' turn appears to have indicated the first bend above Hutcheson's Bridge, though the exact location isn't clear, and competitors went upstream to Rutherglen Bridge and back, maintaining the event's 'traditional' distance of 2 miles.

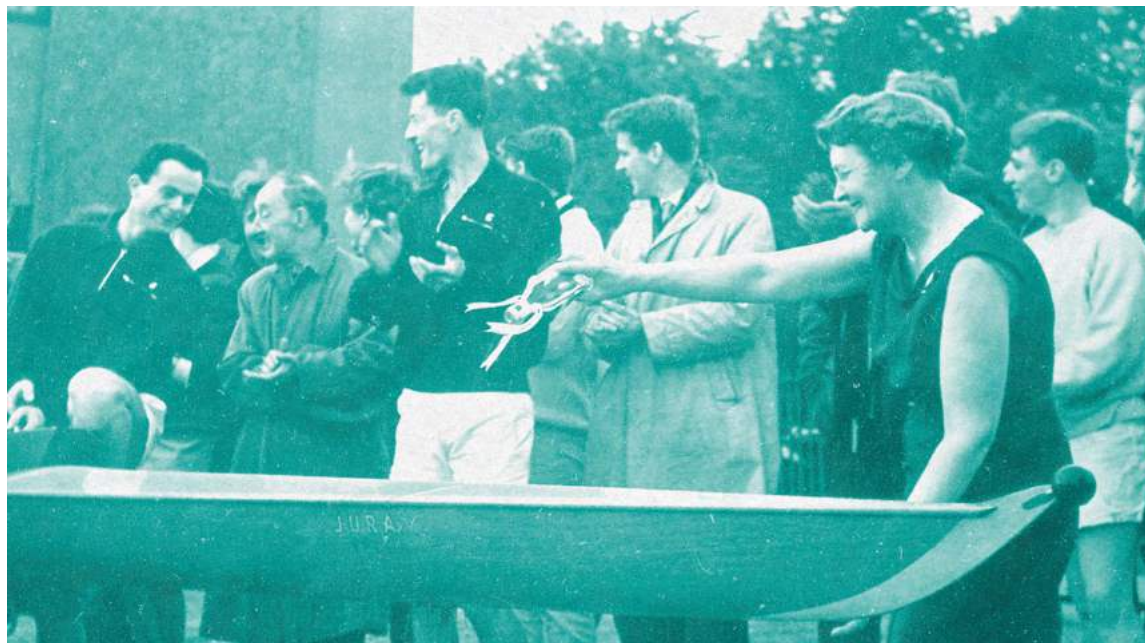
Various local landmarks are used as informal starting points and markers, such as Allan's Pen(d), a private, partly-underground tunnel. A public path to the river was illegally roofed-over in the 1790s, but the landowner was halted by court order in 1801. Another starting line was Nelson's Monument, a good example of adapting a grandiose statue for leisure purposes! In 1847, the course 'extended to Jenny's Burn, at the [diving] spring board near the head of the Green'. In 1866, a different route ran from 'opposite Rankine's boatbuilding yard to Jenny's Burn, and back'. The identity of the eponymous 'Jenny' is debated (if she ever even existed!), but this stream is also known as the Polmadie Burn, a relic placename from over 1000 years ago when people living in the area still spoke Gaelic. Dalmarnock is also amongst the oldest placenames along the river—the 'Dal' part derived from the Gaelic for 'meadow lands', (haugh in Scots) and the second part of the name is a dedication to St Marnock, one of the first Christian missionaries in Scotland.

Veteran pullers recalled that 'The Old Tree at the foot of South Wellington St was the starting post ...long ago', but they don't give any date. However, the street, now under Ballater Place, Gorbals,

ended on the bank slightly west of Nelson's Monument, so that breadth of water obviously invited lineups of eager sweepers and scullers. The existence of the single, solitary 'Old Tree' shows that industry was encroaching 'above the bridges', including the 'Nursery Mill', and Higginbotham's two textile factories, the Springfield and the Adelphi works.

Names and markers shift and change with each generation. 'The Spaceman' graffiti, which once acted as the 3km start mark has long since worn away, Cowan's Bend (commemorating the confectionary works) and 'the outflow' (a patch of warm water emitted from the long-demolished Dalmarnock Power Station, survive in name only.

The name of the Clyde itself is the oldest of all. The earliest known reference to the river appeared in AD 150 on Greek geographer Ptolemy's map of Scotland. It is shown as 'Clota'—the Latin version of the ancient Celtic 'Clut', meaning 'she who washes' or 'the noisy one'. The river is traditionally associated with the Celtic river goddess 'Clota', and from this the name evolved into 'Clutha' and finally morphed into our modern name for the river: 'Clyde'.



Launching 'Jura' at Clydesdale ARC in 1962

Clutha Boathouse, built in 1854



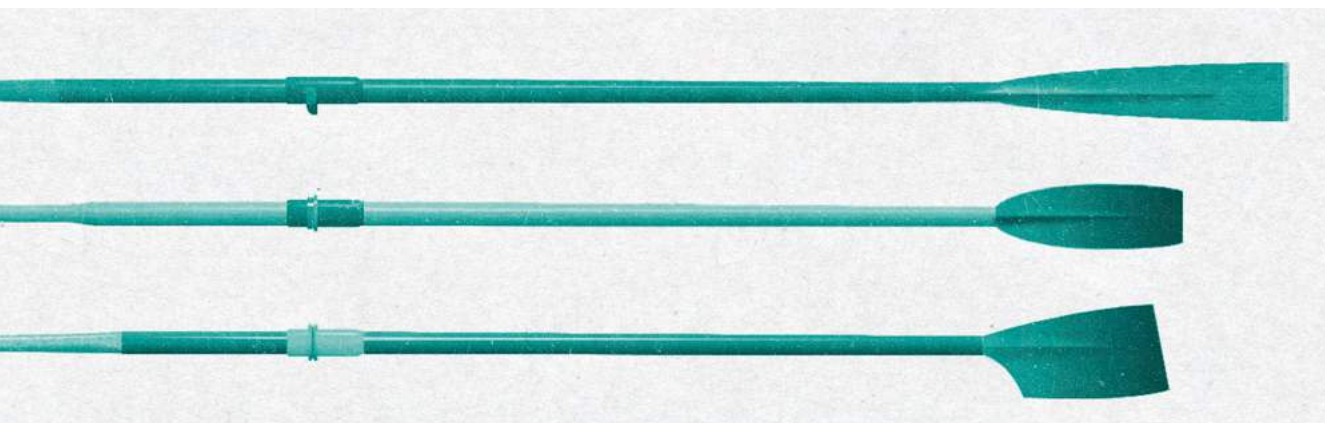
In addition to a boat(!), oars are the second most essential piece of rowing kit. They are fastened to the sides of a vessel by projecting through rowlocks, or upward-projecting pins called 'tholes'. These form a fulcrum, or balance point, and the rower can pull on the pole, or handle, which drops the broad end into the water, and pushes the boat forward. As the edge of the vessel takes the weight of the oar, they can be much longer, generate more power and move bigger boats than paddles do.

Competitive rowers face the rear, or stern, away from the direction of travel, and either have to periodically look over their shoulders or carry a cox to steer.

Boats are classed according to the number of oars each crew member holds. The styles are either sculling (a pair of oars, one in each hand), or sweeping (two hands pulling one oar, arranged alternately over both upper edges, or 'gunwales'). Leather 'buttons' formed a collar round the oar, to stop them slipping through the rowlocks. All the equipment has developed over the last 150 years of intense competition and experimentation. Sliding seats allowed rowers to add the power of their legs to the force of their strokes; various shapes of blades and new materials were tested, as were rowlocks and outriggers.

The commonest blade shape used today is the Cleaver, (sometimes called a Hatchet). Roughly rectangular, it has a slightly angled upper, and much deeper lower portion, to increase blade efficiency in the water. Cleavers largely replaced the symmetrical, tulip-shaped 'Macon' style blade in the 1990s. Carbon fibre has now replaced wood, combining greater rigidity with less weight.

The Victorian mania for invention produced multiple examples of 'new, improved' and 'patented' rowlock forms. The 'swivel' allows the bracket to move with the oar, rather than impeding it, letting the rower rotate and manipulate the oar freely. By mounting rowlocks on projecting lightweight frames, or 'outriggers' the oars' leverage is increased, while the boat is narrower, literally streamlined, and hence even faster. These developments all prioritised elite athletic efficiency and speed.



Oar types, top to bottom: Square, Macon, Cleaver



Detail of an illuminated oar from the 1927 Boat Race, held in Clydesdale ARC club collections

As with any claims to being the earliest, various dates appear for when swivel rowlocks were invented, or first appeared in Glasgow races. The Claspers, a family of Tyne boatbuilders and rowers, used outriggers in 1844, and Oxbridge soon adopted them. By 1847, the Claspers' 'oars were shorter than usual, but with blades of an extraordinary width', and in 1851, the Great Exhibition committee had a special aquatic technology demonstration at Richmond in London, previewing outriggers.

The 1851 Glasgow regatta was also the first to specify '4-oared 27 ft outrigger gigs, 'and separate '23 ft rowlock gig' races. The city's oarsmen were, literally, at the cutting edge of design.

Because of the cost of equipment, it was offered as prizes to both amateurs (who were better-off) and 'professionals' (financially poorer, despite the terminology). Glasgow boatbuilder G McGruer donated a pair of oars in 1853, and rival craftsman James Geddes (Humane Society officer, and oar-maker) spectacularly outdid him by offering a 'new four-oared gig with new oars, worth £10'. Each prize was a blatant advert for their own boatyard businesses!

Tiny crossed oars and anchors, on gold or silver lapel pins, were commonly awarded as prizes for gentlemen's races. However, they were worth as much as the 'professional' prizes, showing the discreet hypocrisy of enforcing the various social divisions.

Wooden 'illuminated' oars, showing various team liveries or colours, also formed trophies, as did painted rudders, on which sign-writers wrote team and boat names in gold letters. Because rowing is often a communal effort, these were retained by the winning club.

Each (successful!) club accumulated their own collection, some of which are now on display in the refurbished West Boathouse. This includes illuminated oars from the Oxford Cambridge Boat Race and an oar by Edward Ayling & Sons, famed racing oar and shell manufacturer established in Putney in 1859. This family-run business survived till 2007.



Rowing is an aquatic sport, reliant on clean water. While there have been huge improvements in water quality along the River Clyde over the past few decades, pollution, littering, and biohazards can all have serious implications for the health and well-being of rowers (as well as our scaly, furry and feathery friends).

From the earliest days of industry, rowers anxiously monitored the condition of the Clyde's waters. From the mid-1800s till the 1970s, the many mills, yards, factories and chemical plants that lined the riverbanks poured industrial waste into the water. The Glasgow Sewage Disposal Works completed in 1894, emptied untreated sewage directly into the Clyde. By the 1880s, some regatta organisers banned swimming and novelty races due to 'the filthy state of the Clyde'. With no weir in place between 1879 and 1901, sewage from the Dalmarnock Works washed downstream to fester at Glasgow Green, 'at low-water the bed of the River... is revealed in all its slimy hideousness'. In 1872, a Royal Commission Report highlighted the River Clyde as one of the most heavily polluted rivers in Britain. This report was the catalyst for the Rivers Pollution Act of 1876. However, it had little practical impact on improving water quality.

A principle offender was J & J White Chemicals, more commonly known as The Shawfield Chemical Works, established in 1820 on the southern bank of the Clyde at Shawfield. The works were notorious for their appalling working conditions, even by Victorian standards.

Employees were known locally as 'White's whistlers' as exposure to the toxic chemical dust burned holes in their skin and perforated the septums in their noses. Labour leader, James Keir Hardie, took up their cause in the late 1890s and campaigned for better conditions which the owners reluctantly agreed to.

The works closed in 1965, but left a toxic chemical legacy that is still being dealt with today. Swathes of the southside and east end of the city were used as dumping grounds for chromium waste from the works. The Polmadie Burn, which runs just west of Richmond Park, turned a luminous green in 2019 from chemicals leaching from the surrounding soil. The task of decontaminating areas around Shawfield, Polmadie and Oatlands has been a major priority for the Clyde Gateway initiative.



A water sample from the Clyde from 1874 (Glasgow Museums)

Today, the River Clyde is a 'recovering river' with much-improved water quality and bio-diversity. River pollution is still a hot topic—the contamination of rivers by various pollutants—sewage, industrial waste, agricultural and urban runoff, and other hazardous materials—can cause a variety of environmental and health problems, including the destruction of aquatic habitats, the spread of disease, and the contamination of drinking water supplies. For rowers who come into contact with contaminated water, it can cause skin conditions, tummy bugs and long-term health issues.

Plastic pollution is also a major threat to life on the river. Keep Scotland Beautiful estimates that 80% of marine litter originates on land—crisp packets, cigarette butts and drink bottles are dropped in streets and washed into drains or blown into our streams. Cotton buds, pharmaceutical drugs, wet wipes and sanitary products are flushed down toilets and end up in our rivers. The impact on wildlife can be devastating.

The West Boathouse project offers an opportunity to review and rethink our environmental practice, both as clubs and as tenants of a refurbished historic building. In consultation with clubs, we are developing a Green Policy for the West Boathouse, which could be adopted or adapted for use by other clubs. More information on this initiative is available on the website.

What can YOU do to help? Remember the five Rs...



Volunteer litter pick in the Gorbals in 2019

Refuse Reduce Reuse Repurpose Recycle

- Check domestic cleaning products for harmful detergents and switch to eco-friendly cleaning products where possible
- Do less laundry and consider buying a fibre-catcher to reduce synthetic microfibres from clothing escaping into our water systems
- Report spills, discharges and pollution events to the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency—take photographs, videos and record the location
- Never flush medication, sanitary products or plastics down the toilet
- Be a river advocate! Raising awareness of the issues facing our rivers and the steps we can take to help protect them is a big part of helping to reduce pollution, increase biodiversity and keep our waterways clean.
- Join a wildlife observation project such as iNaturalist to help track life along the riverbanks and map invasive species
- Join (or create) a local litter-picking group



*Not an image of a quad, but a coxed four.

'Q' is another rather tricky letter, so let's use 'quads' (one of the most common boat configurations) as a jumping-off point to look at crews, boats and some tricky terminology. 'Sculling' and 'sweeping' are the two main types of river-rowing. Put simply, sculling is rowing with two oars, while sweeping uses one oar per rower. All racing boats can be called shells; however, sculls refer specifically to boats with scullers in them, i.e. all sculls are shells but not vice versa.

A key (non-rowing) member of a boat crew is the coxswain (often shortened to 'cox')—responsible for steering the boat, coordinating the rowers' strokes, and providing tactical guidance during a race or practice session. Sitting in the stern of the boat facing forward, they use a rudder to direct the boat's course. Coxes are traditionally smaller and lighter than other crew members to reduce overall weight in the boat. Historically, it was a role often assigned to children. In 1933, the Evening Telegraph reported a lucky escape for the 12-year-old cox of a Clyde ARC boat which had sunk near Rutherglen Bridge. The boy had been 'strapped into the boat'(!) but was freed by two of his crewmates and was, apparently, none the worse for his 'mishap'.

Sculling allows each rower to have control over both sides of the boat, which can lead to greater stability and efficiency in the rowing stroke. However, sweeping allows for the use of longer oars (almost 1m longer than sweep oars), which can generate more power. Sculling and sweeping each present their own advantages and technical challenges. Each discipline is further subdivided into classes depending on the number of rowers, again with their own unique pros and cons.

In sculling boats, the number of rowers is shown by describing the boat as a 'single' (abbreviated as '1x'), double ('x2'), quad (x4), or (very rarely) an octuple (x8). The quads and eights can have a cox, who steers, or can be 'coxless', when the rowers steer themselves.



Above: A sweep-style 'four' in the early 1960s, with Gorbals high rises under construction behind. Photo by John Eadie

Right: Clydesdale ARC Juniors sculling in a double. Photo by David Collie



Sweeping also its own boat classes—and, unsurprisingly, no singles, as you need two oars to manipulate the boats. These 'sweeping' layouts always specify whether or not they are using a cox to steer, so it is possible to tell if you're describing sweeps or sculls:

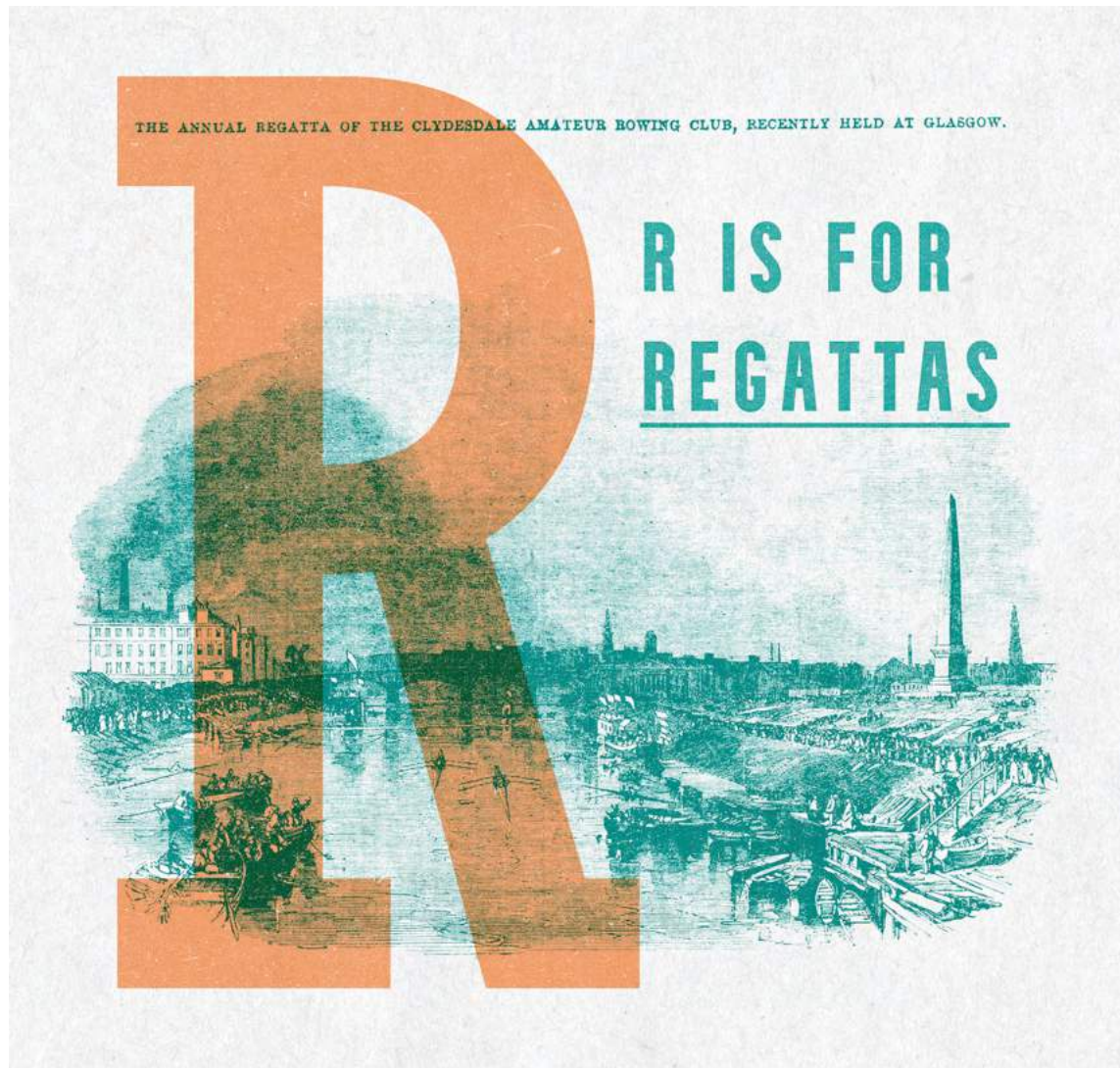
Coxless, or 'straight' pair—two rowers, one oar on each side, written as '2-', meaning 'no coxswain'. A coxed pair, or '2+' shows that the vessel carries a cox who is steering.

Coxed four (4+) or 'coxless four' (4-)—sweep boats, four crew and four oars, plus or minus a cox; The cox can sit in the front (bow), or back (stern) of the boat.

If it's 'coxless', the steering is done by a foot-guided wire attached to the rudder. In a coxed eight (8+), the boats are so long, (almost 20m!) that they always carry a cox for safety reasons.

During the 1830s and 40s, decades before these modern terms were officially defined, the early Glasgow Regatta results used much longer descriptions. For instance, in 1830, 'a sculling or rowing match by one man in any description of boat'—obviously, the categories were rather looser! In 1847, the following races were held: 'for four-oared gigs, any length'; 'a match with two-oared boats, not exceeding 23 feet' ('Gigs' were light working boats).

Now, with quads for sculling, and fours for sweeping, competitors have firmer guidelines to work within.



Clydesdale ARC Regatta, 1863, Illustrated London News

The word regatta sounds Italian—and like so much with sports history, disputes exist about its origins! It probably means ‘competition or struggle’, referring to the teams in 17th-century Venetian boat races. Venice had a long tradition of staging grand, theatrical ceremonies. When British royals visited Venice in 1764, their hosts laid on extravagant boat races (a ‘regatta’) to celebrate George III’s birthday. London copied the idea in 1770—vast crowds lined the Thames, the wealthy hired decorated barges and professional ‘watermen’ (ferry and cargo operators) in colourful coats competed for fully-equipped boats as prizes.

Regattas became a popular entertainment nationwide. Several wealthy textile merchants held Glasgow’s first regatta by Glasgow Green in 1829. Cheering crowds on bridges, floating bands, aquatic sports and liquor stalls on the Green, combined to create a new, exhilarating experience. Boats from Gourock and Largs, as well as from specially-formed rowing clubs, entered. ‘Gentlemen’ and ‘seamen’ were strictly divided by holding separate races, with trophies for gents and money prizes for the sailors.

The same businessmen founded the Glasgow Regatta Club, and from 1830-53, they used a course from Hutchesontown Bridge to Rutherglen Bridge and back. In 1853, Saturday afternoons became official time-off for male workers, allowing many to play sports, including rowing, for the first time.

The Regatta Club’s annual Glasgow Regatta was reorganised that year. James Banks McNeil, a champion rower (though classed as ‘professional’!), became the ‘indefatigable’ club secretary. A clubhouse and modern gymnasium (the ‘Clutha’ Boathouse) opened in 1854, and the course was changed so it was visible from the boathouse—starting at Nelson’s Monument, towards Jenny’s Burn/ Polmadie Burn and back.

More rowing clubs were founded, both ‘select’ (the Clydesdale Gentlemen ARC, 1856) and ‘artisan’ (Glasgow ARC, for tradesmen, in 1868), and races were either amateur, professional or ‘open to all’. From merely sponsoring separate prizes (Engravers or Licensed Victuallers’ stakes), trades groups began holding their own regattas.

A general Trades Regatta was launched in 1871, and the Letterpress Printers' Regatta in 1872. Newspaper, publishing and print workers had long been keen supporters of aquatic competitions, and within the decade, the Printers' Regatta had 'grown in importance till they are... the best on the Clyde'.

The events became ever more elaborate—fireworks, swimming matches (from 1857), English competitors, and novelty contests, like 'hunting the punt', 'fancy natation' and 'duck hunts', and the boats more technically advanced. The Glasgow Regatta Club first held races for outrigger gigs in July 1851, and began listing special 'rowlock gig' matches that same year. Spectator numbers were high—even small events pulled in crowds of around 10,000, and regattas often exceeded 30,000 attendees.

Transporting people and equipment to regattas and events was usually done by rail, or steamship for coastal events downriver. In 1853, the Perthshire Advertiser recorded 28(!) special carriages had left Perth, laden with spectators bound for races on the Gairloch. For the same event, The City of Glasgow Regatta Club chartered the steamer 'Reindeer' for its own members. The boats were strapped to the roofs of the carriages. Latterly, boats were transported on the back of flatbed trucks, and clubs now use special trailers.

Rennie Witt, a former Clydesdale ARC member, recalled that in the 1950s 'the club had the use of a flatbed lorry from an ink company, owned by an ex-president of the club, Kit Hall. The flatbed had been drilled to allow a purpose-built pair of trestles to be bolted firmly to the lorry. These trestles could hold two fours, the oars being stacked between the legs of the trestles.

Two benches were tied with ropes to either side of these structures. The occupants sat on the benches on either side of the flatbed with nothing more than a rope stretched over their laps. It may not have stopped them from falling off but it would have at least kept them attached to the lorry till it came to a halt!' The same benches have been restored and are reinstated in the West Boathouse, though unlikely to see such mobile (and dangerous) usage again!



By the late 1880s, rowing came under pressure from other sports and leisure pursuits for spectators' attention. Crowds along the banks fell away as football, in particular, began to eclipse rowing as the most popular sport in the city.

Today, spectator numbers are more modest, mostly comprised of ex-club members, friends and family. However, the season's big events, whether on the Rivers' Clyde, Dee or Nithsdale; Castle Semple Loch or Strathclyde Loch, are still free and fun to watch. The years' calendar can be found on Scottish Rowings website.



Above: Pennant flag from 1958

Left: 1907 souvenir programme from Clydesdale ARC



Once upon a time, the waters of the Clyde were alive with boats and rowing was the primary means of transporting goods and people along the river for millennia. Over 30 ancient 'logboats' have been discovered along the Clyde; a crude but effective transport from the Neolithic into the early Medieval period. Two of the best surviving examples come from Hutchesontown, on the river's south bank, found in 1880 and at Rutherglen Bridge, discovered in 1880. Both are on display in the Riverside Museum.

Historic views of the river at Glasgow Green show a wide array of craft bustling up and down and crisscrossing the river. You can often pick out the narrow, slender hulls of racing 'shells' among the small sailing boats, ferries, skiffs, barges, and steam dredgers. These competitive rowing boats were direct descendants of naval boats—the gigs and jollyboats (a misnomer according to anyone who rowed them), once used to ferry personnel to and from ships. Carbon fibre and plastic have replaced wood as the dominant construction materials today, but the basic form of the racing shell has changed little from the mid-1800s.

Glasgow may be more commonly associated with shipbuilding, but there were plenty of small boatbuilders dotted around the city. Those specialising in racing boats included James Banks McNeill, based at the Clutha Boathouse and George Geddes at the Glasgow Humane Society. The two were fierce rivals, though Geddes appears to have had the edge—in 1851, the Glasgow Chronicle noted that the majority of regatta-winning boats were built at the Humane Society yard.

In the 1890s, McGruer's Shipyard, based on Adelphi Street, built and attended to many 'racing boats' before expanding into yacht construction and relocating downriver to Clynder. The first racing shells in the early 1800s were known as 'lapstrake', or clinker boats, and had hulls made from thin, overlapping wooden planks (typically cedar). As the century progressed and rowing became more competitive, boatbuilders began experimenting with new materials and designs to create faster and more efficient shells. This included hulls constructed of papier-mache coated with waterproof varnish in the 1880s (an early form of 'moulded' hull construction), aluminium in the 1920s, and fibreglass from the 1930s onwards.

Tyneside-based professional rower and boatbuilder Harry Clasper was instrumental in many of these technical advances—including inboard keels (to reduce drag) and refining the design and construction of outriggers (1840s). Outriggers provided greater stability and allowed for longer oars and more length to the strokes. This meant hulls could be built even narrower and longer to reduce resistance on the water and increase speed. Clasper was a regular visitor to the Clyde, competing in the 1840s and 50s.

Another major innovation was the introduction of sliding seats, first seen in the aptly named 'Experiment' shell, built in Chicago in 1857. The seat is mounted on a frame which runs along a set of tracks at the bottom of the boat, allowing it to move back and forth. This movement helps to increase the power and efficiency of the rowing stroke, as the rower is able to use their legs more effectively.

Changes in technology also had a knock-on effect on form and technique, as well as influencing the 'ideal physiology' of the rower—as a result of the longer, narrower boats, 'tall and lean' became the norm.

In the 1970s, the introduction of carbon fibre shells revolutionised the sport of rowing, providing significant advantages over traditional wood and fibreglass shells. Carbon fibre shells are much lighter and more durable than their counterparts, allowing rowers to achieve faster speeds and better performance.

The hulls of modern racing boats are typically constructed by layering sheets of carbon fibre, fibreglass, and Kevlar over a mould, bonded together using epoxy resin. The layers are applied in specific patterns and orientations to create a strong, lightweight, and streamlined hull. The boat is then placed in a temperature and humidity-controlled curing room for the resin to set. The process is highly specialised and technologically advanced, from design to materials to construction. Despite this, wood has remained a staple of boatbuilding—handbuilt craft are still available, much sought after, and admired (if considerably pricier!).



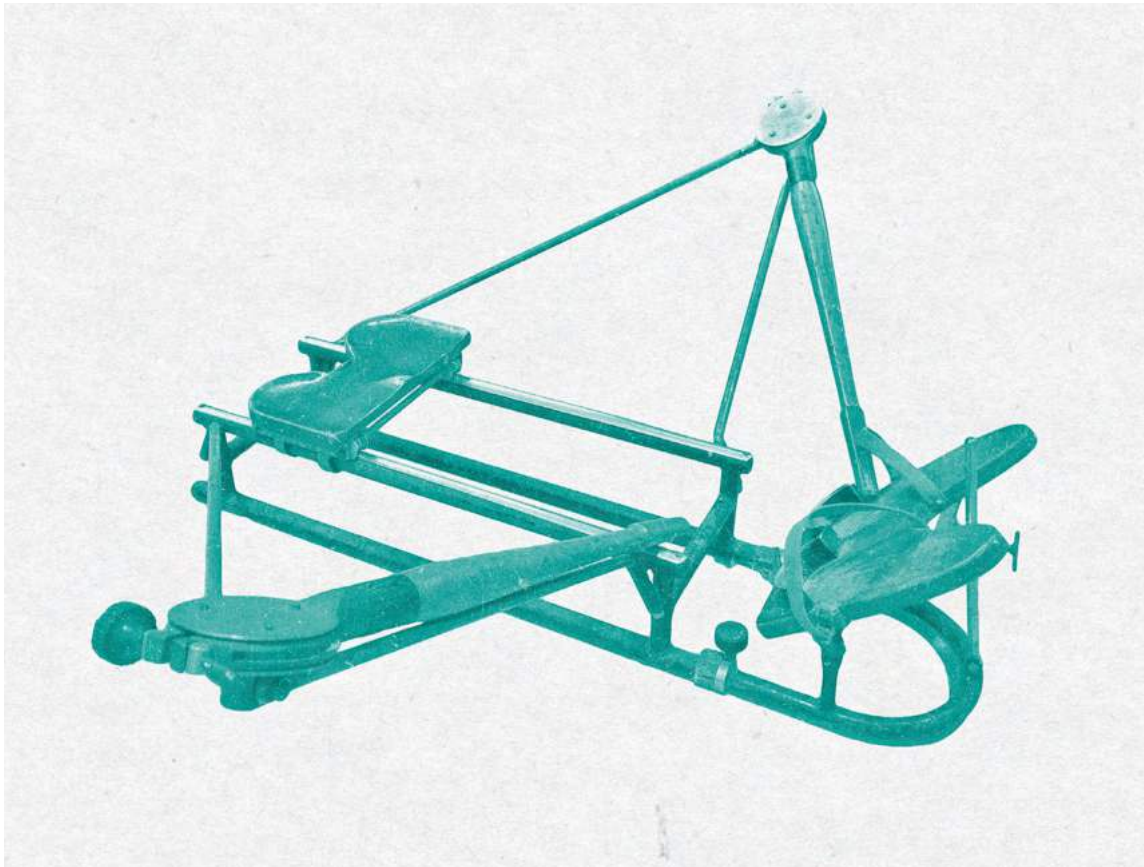
The boatshed, pre-restoration, filled with shells. Photo by David Collie



The first attempts at applying an organised, scientific training regime originate with a professional endurance walker. Captain Barclay from Stonehaven, published 'Training for Pedestrianism and Boxing' in 1816, and rowing coaches adapted this to 'pulling'. It could involve such horrors as 'emetics' (laxatives), to 'induced sweating', which meant drinking hot distilled cider after a fast run, and then dangerously overheating in heavy clothing, under 8 blankets on an insulating feather mattress. Smoking was even permissible 'between seasons'! For 'amateurs', who were generally richer sportsmen in the 1840s, they trained on a meat-heavy diet, dry bread and restricted liquid intake for several months, or for 'professional' working class competitors, for a few weeks before a race.

The thinking was well-intentioned but frequently contradictory; if captains selected men with the 'correct' physique beforehand, (strong lungs and thighs), anything extra was 'dead weight'. 1860s regimes included 2-4 miles of brisk walking, 30 minutes' easy rowing' and an hour's' water work', increasing from 35 strokes to 'racing gait' before a race. One sculler took 3 weeks' preparation for a 1-mile race, increasing his daily distance up to 10 miles. 'A crew of mechanics' already possessed toughened hands, and avoided blisters; 'Clerks, tape-measurers, etc generally require two weeks' more of training than men who have always been used to heavy lifting'. While true, it illustrates the 'privilege divide' between 'amateur' and 'professional' competitors.

Although physiology was in its infancy, coaches did emphasise regularity of repetition, and dumbbells and parallel bar work 'to develop the chest'. Muscle was just extra cargo; strength was the main aim. 'Rowing machines' (which usually meant farming equipment) and 'chest machines' are occasionally mentioned in private schools from the early 1850s, even if they didn't have any boats. The Clutha (Regatta Club) premises of 1854 included a gymnasium (and reading room), as did the later Paisley Trades ARC in 1889. They boasted 'dumbbells, clubs, [boxing] gloves, with open-air horizontal bars', baths and dressing rooms. Suitable fitness facilities were made available to artisans, possibly making competitions fairer. Glasgow Trades Club launched three clinker-built jollyboats for training new members in 1889; a considerable investment in their amateur sport.

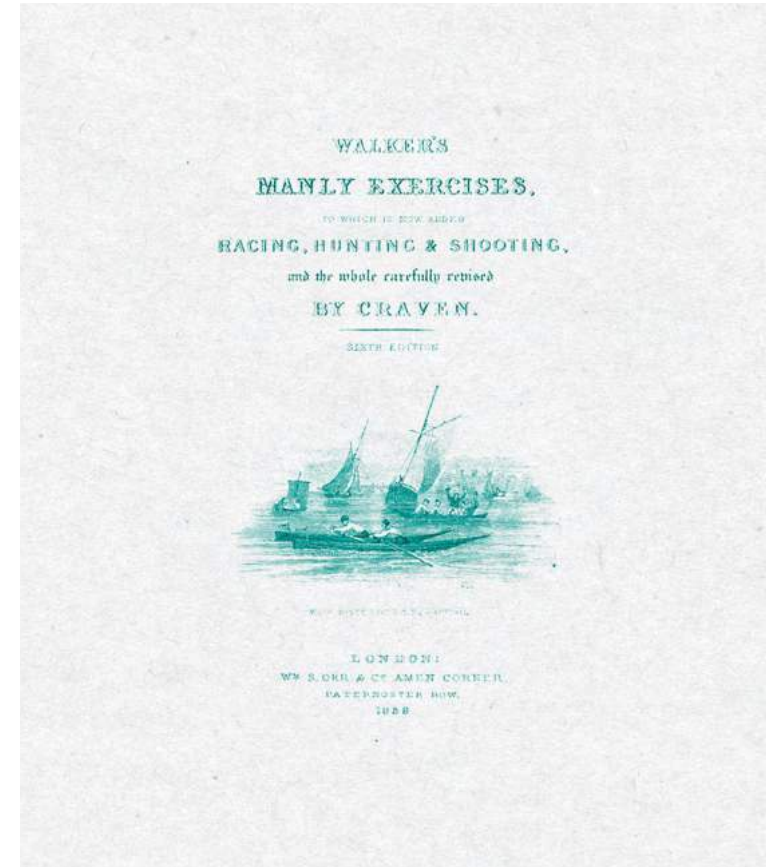


Above: A vintage rowing machine

Right: Walker's Book of 'British Manly Exercise' (1834)

The short-lived Clyde Ladies' Club was deterred from river training by unseasonably cold weather in spring 1893, and the spittle and 'cowardly' insults of 'cads' who felt rowing wasn't 'a blooming pastime for girls'. The Clydesdale ARC briefly had a women's section in the 1930s, but training in public was always easier for men.

A staple piece of 'dry land' training kit is the rowing machine, known in rowing circles as ergometers or 'ergs'. One of the first known ergometers was patented by American rower W. B. Curtis in 1872. The first modern ergometer was developed in the 1980s by Concept2, a company founded by two former rowers turned oar manufacturers. The prototype machine was mostly built from used bicycle parts and featured a moving seat and a flywheel which



used air for resistance. The Concept2 ergometer quickly gained popularity among rowers and became the standard for indoor rowing competitions and training. Since then, there have been numerous advancements in ergometer technology.

The new gym at the West Boathouse features ergs (of course), alongside a suite of top-notch, new gym equipment and the floor of the former Clyde ARC gym has been reinforced to take the weight of the assorted barbells, dumbbells (and rowers). For those who remember the distinctive 'bounce' of the old floors, no one need worry again about an unexpected drop into the boatshed below!



The Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, also known as the Boat Race, is an annual rowing race between the University of Oxford Boat Club (founded 1829) and the University of Cambridge Boat Club (founded 1828). The race takes place on the River Thames in London and is one of the world's oldest and most prestigious rowing events.

A little late to the party, Scotland's ancient universities took note and the University of Edinburgh formed a boat club in 1867. Glasgow followed suit in 1877 (not 1867, as often reported). 'Amateur' writing in the Glasgow Herald stated, 'the club once started would challenge to the Light and Dark Blue' (Oxbridge). The club committee was appointed on 19 February, and tenders for a 'club barge', were sent out in April.

The first intervarsity competition was held on the 'somewhat odoriferous' Clyde on 28 July 1877. Spectators climbed on roofs, and the more experienced Edinburgh University were favourites over Glasgow's novices who'd never rowed the 42ft outrigger gigs being used. Despite this, the Glasgow crew won in 10 minutes 45 seconds over the course of 1 mile, 7 furlongs. This contest is now the third oldest university boat race in the world.

The club was affiliated to Glasgow University Athletics Club in 1919 and met in the University Union before moving to the new East Boathouse at Glasgow Green in 1924. 1924 also saw teams travel to compete against the university in Oslo, Norway. A woman's section (the Ladies Boat Club) was established in 1966, with 40 members recorded in 1987. The GUBC united with the Ladies Boat Club in 2004, enabling teams to compete in the Henley, British University and College Sport (BUCS) and Home International Regattas and the Scottish and GB National Championships. In 2015-16, the women's team won the BUCS gold and the men won the Scottish Universities Head Race.

The yellow and black club colours can be seen at many events, as are such elite GURC graduates as Claire Aitken, who rowed for the Oxford Women's crew in the 2023 Boat Race. Miriam Payne (women's captain, 2020-21) rowed solo across the Atlantic in the Talisker Whiskey Challenge, a charity fundraiser, and set a new course record.

Strathclyde University Boat Club was founded in 1967 by former university alumni (date provided by Alan Easson). Since then, the club has had a somewhat peripatetic history, shuttling between the West and East Boathouses and most recently, a stint in a rather dilapidated shed. As of 2023, the club will return to its roots, sharing the West Boathouse with Clyde and Clydesdale ARC's.

Their first boat was a coxed four, 'Lady Valerie'—named for the wife of the club's Honorary President, shipbuilder Sir William Lithgow, who either paid for or heavily subsidised the purchase. Over the years the club has had various racing colours, maroon with white diagonal, plain red, maroon with a horizontal white stripe before settling on their current livery—white with maroon spots. SUBC were the first Scottish club to win at a foreign international regatta, taking gold at Bosbaan Regatta in the Netherlands in the early 1970s.

This was followed by Alec Snyder winning at Nottingham International in the mid 1970s. Another notable alumnus, Team GB rower Sam Scrimgeour, took home the gold at both the World and European championships in the coxless lightweight pairs in 2015 and 2016 and bagged an impressive two silver medals at the European Championships and three bronzes at the Worlds, between 2012 and 2016. The Parsonage brothers, scions of the Glasgow Humane Society dynasty, managed and coached while still students in 2021, with Chris Parsonage as Club Captain. Along with several finalists, including double and single sculls, two crews won medals at the BUCS regatta in 2023.

A graduate club, Lake of Menteith Boat Club, was formed in 1992 and raced with some success for a few years, including racing at the Barony Cup races, established in 2013, which pit graduates against current students.



Left: A SUBC crew in their distinctive spotty livery

Below: GUBC womens eight, Photo by Steve Selwood





We've relied on volunteers and interns throughout the project, working on many aspects of the project, including:

- Cataloguing, recording and sharing over 200 items from the West Boathouse sporting heritage collections
- Building two rowing skiffs with Glasgow Disability Alliance (see also I for Inspirational)
- Mapping Glasgow's sporting heritage—volunteer Tam McCann's epic trawl through the archives to map over 1000 sites and places relating to Glasgow's sporting heritage
- Play Like A Lassie—a collaborative, community-editing project aimed at tackling the systemic gender bias in Wikipedia entries relating to women's sport in Scotland and celebrating their contributions.
- The Living River—built around a series nature walk, digital trails and the iNaturalist app, recording and observing wildlife along the Clyde
- Developing the West Boathouse Environmental Policy—creating a policy and programme designed to encourage the rowing community to take a more active role in caring and advocating for the river
- 'Mon the Fish—a schools project in collaboration with the Clyde River Foundation, caring for and learning about brown trout and river ecology
- Helping to create a range of interpretation and education materials (including this book!), exploring sporting histories, and the natural and cultural heritage of the river
- Helping organise events and activities, walks and tours, litter picks and our opening celebration

Volunteers came from rowing clubs, partner organisations, special interest groups, and the local area. They each had their own passions and interests, motivations and needs, and somehow, despite the challenges thrown up by the Covid pandemic, they continued to give their time and energy to the project. We are eternally grateful to them all. Many of the individual projects are covered in more detail in other sections, so I will briefly focus here on the work of the collections volunteers.

A key part of the West Boathouse project is working through the heritage collections of the two resident rowing clubs—Clydesdale Amateur Rowing Club and Clyde Amateur Rowing Club. Both clubs are very proud of their long histories. Before its closure for renovations, the building was packed with photographs, vintage boats, oars, pennants, medals, and a wide range of rowing-related material dating from the 1860s to the present day. Very little of the collection had been catalogued or recorded, so the decant in advance of capital works provided the perfect opportunity to begin working through the material. With the help of volunteers from each club, we conducted a rapid inventory and photographed and recorded each room before the big move. Work began recording and cataloguing when Covid restrictions were eased in the autumn of 2021. With support from club members, a cohort of student volunteers from University of Glasgow Archaeology Dept began work. Several continued volunteering following graduation, going above and beyond to help us work through the material. We were also very fortunate to receive sustained support and advice from the Scottish Council for Archives.

Some clubs actively use their collections to engage with their members and visitors, and others are unsure what to do with it all. These small sports clubs face many challenges and pressures—declining memberships, decaying buildings, poor accessibility and facilities and a general lack of capacity and resources. Working through the collections gave us an opportunity to test the process of recording and sharing our collections, warts and all, and share that experience with other clubs and groups embarking on a similar journey. Getting sports clubs over the ‘fear factor’ when resources are tight is critical. Creating a practical, affordable and accessible model to help other clubs tackle their heritage collections was essential to the project.

Sporting heritage matters and is now formally recognised by the United Nations as a key driver for creating and supporting sustainable and resilient communities.

Right: Collections volunteer, Tita Janc

Below: Outdoor learning session at Cuningar Loop with The Conservation Volunteers



“Sport builds bridges between individuals and across communities, providing a fertile ground for sowing the seeds of development and peace.”

Wilfried Lemke, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace





Gillian Lindsay. Photo by David Collie

Women were involved in rowing far earlier than we perhaps realise. In one 1720 Venetian regatta, they formed one of 'five squadrons, the latter of which were rowed by women'. They were always among the crowds—at one of England's earliest regattas in 1770, 'Ladies... dressed in white... all the swans on the river [dyed] black, so the contrast between the different feathered animals [i.e. women and birds] is more conspicuous'.

Seventy years later, Glasgow women in 'bright dresses' filled a punt moored off the Green; their fashions and presence were always remarked upon, as people-watching was as much an attraction as the races. Women also sold tickets (at Mrs McFarlane's Temperance Hotel in 1844), and actresses ('Miss Aitken of the Adelphi Theatre') occasionally presented prizes on stage (a £10 cup for a race in 1847).

Actual physical competition remained men-only, but attendance as spectators was promoted as a respectable activity for women. 'The sport is harmless and many ladies who would not go to a horse race would gladly watch'. Women publicans and caterers sold food and drink, and temporary ladies' refreshment rooms were erected from the mid-1800s. In the 1880s, we see the businesswoman and theatre-owner Christina Baylis, sponsor the 'Scotia Challenge Cup', named after one of her music halls. With the opening of municipal pools in the 1880s, women were certainly holding, and watching indoor swimming contests, but in rowing circles, female competitions were treated as 'novelties' tagged onto charity events. Although the Rousay (Orkney) Regatta accounts belittled their inexpert female rowers in 1893, they thanked the housewives whose catering 'supplied the wants of the inner man'—baking, not athletics, was their expected contribution.

On the Clyde, this changed in 1893 when Mary Geddes, whose husband ran the Humane Society at Glasgow Green, pioneered a Glasgow women's rowing club, warmly supported by the Scottish Referee's aquatic correspondent, 'Ben Bow.' The cold spring weather hindered the twelve recruits from practising, though there were several crews "of good 'oarsmen'." Ben Bow suggested they wear 'blue serge walking skirts and a striped loose Garibaldi [shirt]', and straw hat.



Above: 1938 Clydesdale Ladies Crew

Right: Alice McVoy's membership cards, held in Glasgow Museums collections



They had to endure hostile thugs spitting from the Suspension Bridge: Bow reported:

“Such fellows... belong to the class of bipeds devoid of bone and muscle... Fortunately, their influence is about as effective as a blow from a penny balloon. Ladies your health, go on and prosper.”

Sadly, the Glasgow Ladies Rowing Club only lasted a few months. The respected Printer's Regatta held a ladies' punt race, 'open to Scotland', in 1894, another sign that women's competitive rowing was finally being treated seriously.

A ladies section existed at Clydesdale ARC from 1933 to 1939, each paying an annual fee of £10/6 (a third of the men's senior subscription), and were restricted to using the equipment on two evenings a week. The club minute books lists the members in 1933 as: Jean Letters, Jessie McCubbin, Doris Harkness, Agnes Harkness, Jean Campbell, Anna Rennie, May Rennie, Margaret Miller, and in 1934, some of the above, along with Isabel Letters, Ina Thomson and Lily McGladdery. Over the years, membership numbers varied between 8 and 18. Alice McVoy acted as treasurer. Her 1936 fixture card and 1937 membership card are now held in Glasgow Museums collections.

The Clydesdale womens section fell into abeyance after the war, though there were other clubs on the Clyde with female crews, such as Glasgow University's Ladies Boat Club, formed in 1966 and merged with GUBC in 2004. Women were also active as coaches—Maureen Simpson was instrumental in nurturing new talent in the 1970s, setting up the Elmwood School Rowing Club whilst working there as a teacher.

The proposal to open membership to women at Clydesdale ARC was voted on and approved at the Annual General Meeting in November 1979. Clyde ARC followed suit.



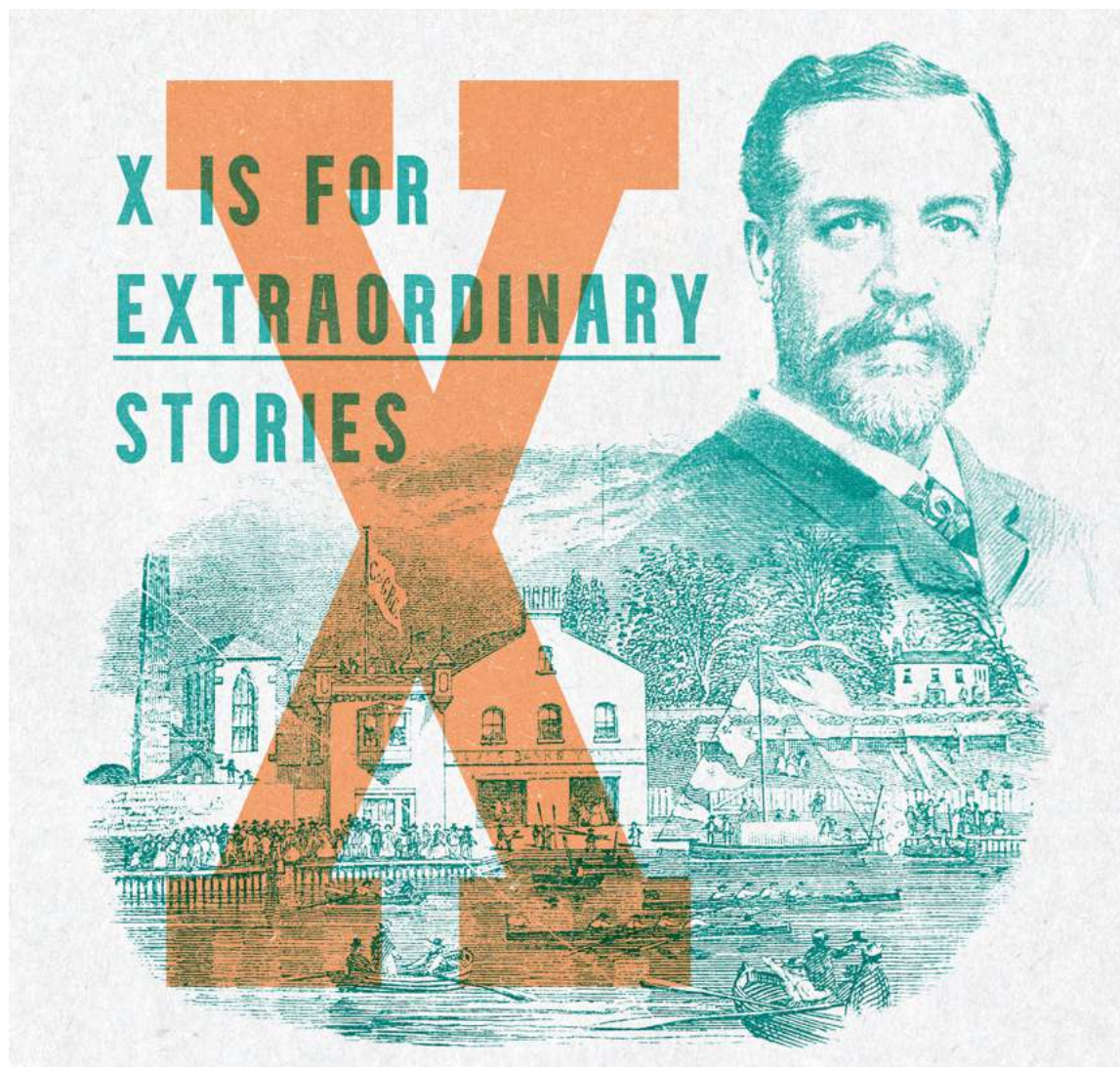
Clyde ARC alumna, Imogen Walsh

It was also around this time that SportsScotland enforced anti-discrimination, and promoted equality and opportunity in sport between men and women. In the first year, there totalled twelve women members, who used large boats and kit designed for men.

As the years progressed, female members competed successfully, with a coxed four winning silver at the National Championships in 1984. As a result, the ladies found sponsorship with Austin Rover, allowing them to purchase suitable kit to compete at the Commonwealth Games in 1986. Since then, hundreds of women and girls have passed through the doors of the West Boathouse and other clubs along the Clyde. Among them are several Olympic, World, Commonwealth and European champions, including Polly Swann, Gillian Lindsay, Lindsay Dick, Karen Bennet and Imogen Walsh (pictured left). As Ben Bow would say... 'Ladies, your health... go on and prosper!'

As part of the West Boathouse project, 'Play Like A Lassie' got underway in 2021 with support from Dr Fiona Skillen of Caledonian University and funding from Santander for two student placements (Jen McKeeman and Levi White) to help support research and volunteers. The project trained new editors and contributed new Wikipedia entries relating to women's sport in Scotland. This included the creation of biographies and entries for individuals, groups and organisations and significant places or events associated with women's sport. We are indebted to Wikimedia UK, particularly Dr Sara Thomas, Wikimedian in Residence for Scotland, for her support, enthusiasm, and patience in training our newly minted editors.

Women, particularly women in sports, are under-represented on Wikipedia in terms of content and editorial roles. Wikipedia is hugely influential and has given the public more access to free knowledge than ever before. However, it is heavily weighted towards men, with just 19% of biographies on the UK site dedicated to women, and only 9% of contributors identifying as female. This project aimed to contribute to redressing the balance—increasing the visibility of women in rowing and other sports.



Clutha Boathouse and James Henry Roger

In any alphabet, 'X' is always the awkward letter. So, a few 'tales from the riverbank' that don't quite fit under any other heading...

Wide As The Clyde

James Henry Roger (1839-1913) was a well-known figure in late 1800s Glasgow—a founding member of Clydesdale Amateur Rowing Club, wine merchant, owner and founder of Rogano's restaurant, partial funder of the West Boathouse and a man on a mission to eradicate meanders. Roger believed the bends in the Clyde, particularly the tight turn at Flishers Haugh on Glasgow Green, was inhibiting the growth of rowing in Glasgow. Long, narrow rowing boats are difficult to steer and rowers prefer straight lines. To accommodate this (so Roger claimed), Clyde boats were built slightly shorter than other boats of the time, giving the home teams an unfair advantage and making visiting clubs reluctant to attend regattas on the Clyde. In a letter to the North British Daily Mail in October 1899, he put forward his case for 'Straightening the Clyde' by diverting the river through the eastern end of Glasgow Green and infilling the old river channel.

This would create a mile-long, straight racing course, which, he claimed, would benefit more than just the rowers—the increased scour in the river would help maintain the banks downstream; the old bed of the river would be partly infilled and landscaped to create safe bathing and skating ponds; and a series of more convenient crossing points, boulevards and gardens would be built. He commissioned artist (and director of the Theatre Royal) William Glover to create a birds-eye view of his proposed scheme, (now in Glasgow Museums Collection).

The scheme was backed by Bailie Chisholm (later Lord Provost) who proposed it to Glasgow Corporation in the mid-1890s. Others were less enamoured, citing the expense and risk involved.

There was also resistance from landowners along the riverbanks, including The Corporation. Rogers stated: "When I suggested this scheme to the 'People's Tribune', the late Bailie James Martin, many years ago, he said, 'Na na, the East-Enders are not going to give away half their Green to the South-Siders.'"

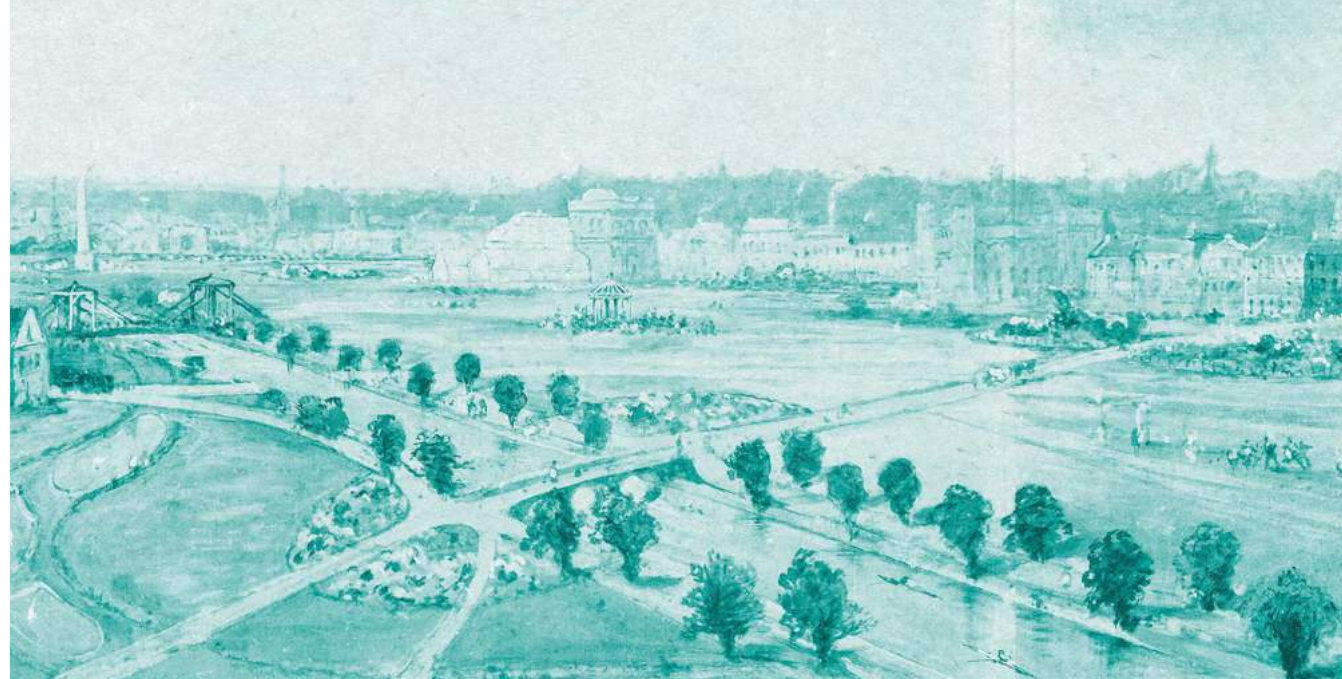
When Roger died in 1913, he left a substantial estate valued at £40k (around 5 million). A sizeable chunk of that fortune was left to Glasgow Corporation on the condition that they initiated his scheme within 5 years of his death. The Corporation never took him up on the offer and the river remains resolutely bendy. Rowers eventually got their poker straight racing course at Strathclyde Park in 1975 with the creation of the artificial Strathclyde Loch. The loch was created by diverting the River Clyde and flooding the low lying area to the east. The original course of the river follows the eastern side of the loch. Many will not be aware that as they glide over the surface of the loch, they are rowing over the flooded remains of the old mining village of Bothwellhaugh. Largely abandoned by the 1960s, the village was sacrificed along with Bothwellhaugh Roman fort and bathhouse (later rebuilt further east).

Napoleon's Prize Money

In 1856, the Glasgow Regatta Club secretary, James Banks McNeil, asked various foreign royals for donations to the contest's prize-money fund. The French emperor, Napoleon III, generously sent £50, which was spent on the 'Emperor's Cup', and the event's title was upgraded to 'Glasgow Royal Regatta.' As with anything involving old rivals, outrage and 'trolling' aren't new. Edinburgh mocked Glasgow, 'crouching ... to beg'; the English clubs sneered at the 'mere boating concern running small gigs', 'false pretences', the 'muddy river', and the Lord Provost was 'very displeased [at such] impertinence'. The Club hastily donated to French charities, but the council still withheld their prize funding for several years. Glasgow's civic pride and national image was all-important.

The Battle of Harvey's Dyke—reclaiming rights to the riverbank

Thomas Harvey (or Harvie) was a whisky distiller who bought the estate of Westthorn in Dalmarnock, with grounds extending down to the river. A public right of way ran along the north riverbank but Harvey built walls to block access and preserve his privacy. Local people were, understandably, very upset. In 1822, protestors gathered from Parkhead, Dalmarnock and Bridgeton and they set about destroying one of the walls with picks and hammers.



Above: William Glover's illustration of the proposed 'Straightening of the Clyde' (Glasgow Museums)



Left: Harvie's Dyke, from James Cowan's 'From Glasgow's Treasure Chest'

Several were arrested by dragoons dispatched from the army barracks at Gallowgate. A legal dispute ensued and Harvey was eventually banned from denying people access to the path by the Court of Session. A medal was issued in 1829 celebrating the court case win.

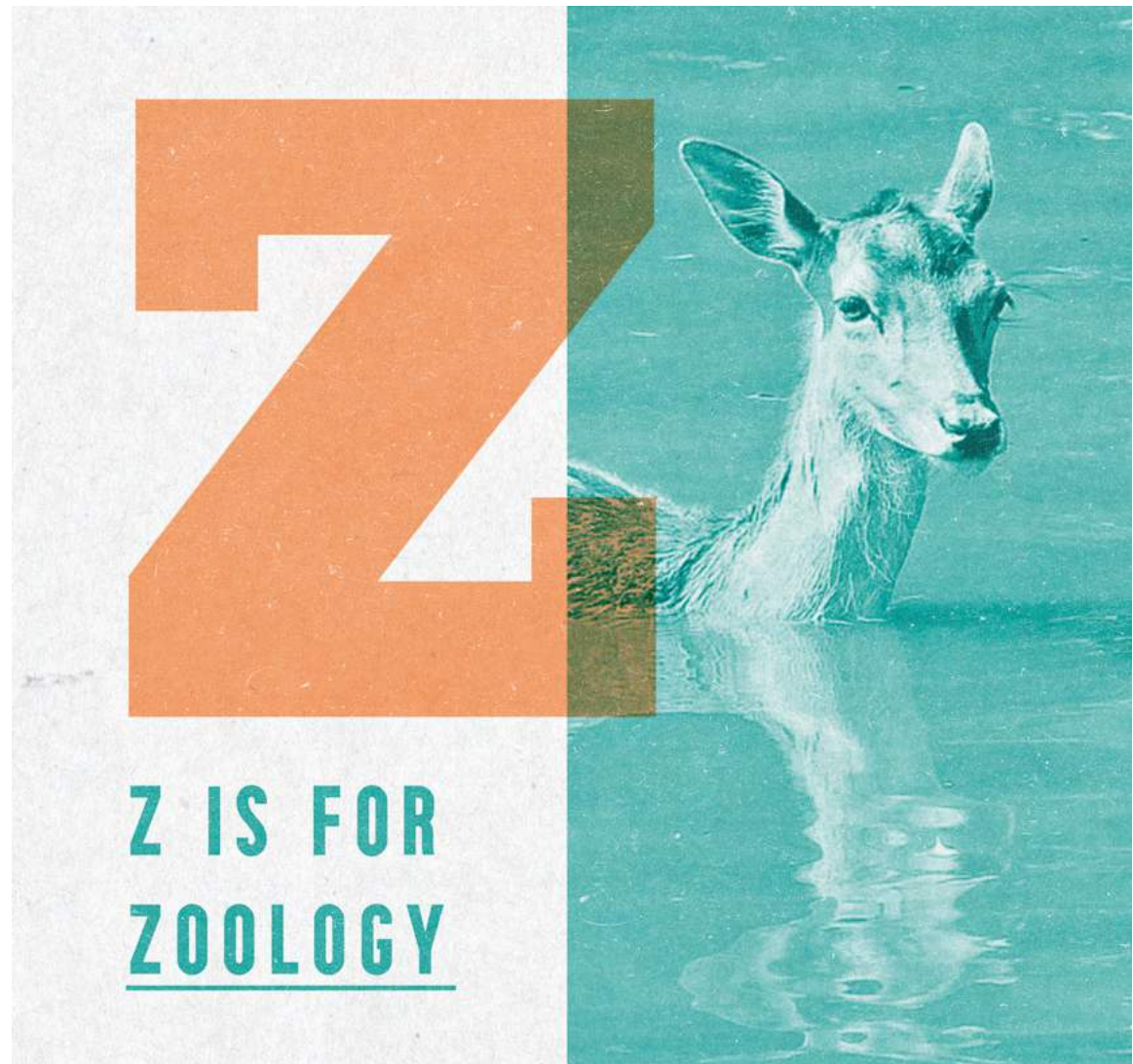


Fancy having a go? Competitive rowing does have something of an image problem and getting past those preconceptions is the first step to getting on the water. Some myths busted and realities recognised below:

- It's elitist and expensive: This is a biggie—many people perceive rowing as a sport that is only accessible to the wealthy or privileged. While it's true that rowing programs are often associated with private schools or universities, rowing is less than you might think. As of 2023, Clyde clubs typically charge around £30 per month membership for adults (less for Juniors) and some clubs offer bursaries.
- In terms of inclusivity, women now make up 50% of most clubs, though sexism still persists. It is also fair to say that the vast majority of rowers are white and middle class. However, most clubs are now working hard to address barriers to the sport and diversify their membership. Clydesdale ARC employs a community coach to reach out to schools and youth groups across the city, particularly in less wealthy areas. They have also developed close ties with LGBT Youth Scotland and LEAP Sports.
- It's a sport for tall people: Because rowing relies heavily on leg power, there is a belief that taller people have an advantage. While height can be an advantage in rowing, it is not the only factor that determines success. Rowing is also about technique, endurance, and teamwork.
- It's a sport for the physically fit: Rowing is a physically demanding sport, but it does not necessarily require athletes to be super-fit. Many rowers start the sport without any prior athletic background and build their fitness over time.
- It's an individual sport: Although rowing does involve individual effort, it is primarily a team sport that requires coordination and communication between all members of a crew.

- It's boring: Some people may think that rowing is a monotonous sport that involves doing the same thing over and over again. However, rowing is a dynamic and exciting sport that requires mental focus, strategy, and teamwork to be successful.
- Many people also find the meditative nature of rowing combined with being out on the water is beneficial to their mental health.
- If sliding-seat rowing isn't your bag, and you prefer salt water to fresh, coastal rowing offers a cheaper and more accessible option. Glasgow Coastal Rowing Club, founded in 2016, are based downstream at the Riverside Museum and is one of seventy coastal rowing clubs in Scotland.
- Para-rowing facilities are available at Strathclyde Loch and Castle Semple Loch for sliding-seat rowers with disabilities. Sadly, this is not an aspect of competitive rowing where Scotland (currently) excels. Greater investment is badly needed.
- Coastal rowing boats are wider, more stable, and generally better suited for people with mobility issues. As a result, this is a growth area of the sport. St Andrew's Coastal Rowing Club in Fife is at the forefront of adaptive coastal rowing, with disabled facilities and a specially modified skiff available.

If you fancy having a go at any kind of rowing, check out Scottish Rowing and the Scottish Coastal Rowing Association websites for details of your nearest club.



Another tricky letter, but happily one that allows us to look at wildlife along the banks and river. Despite coursing through one of Scotland's most heavily populated, post-industrial landscapes, the River Clyde is bursting with life.

The Clyde River was formed during the last ice age, about 10,000 years ago, when glaciers carved out the valley and left behind rich deposits of glacial till, which made the soil in the area particularly fertile. This makes the river banks and flood plains ideal for plant growth and an attractive habitat for a wide range of wildlife. Even in the heart of our busy city, you can catch a glimpse of badgers, foxes, deer and otters along the banks. In 2011 a harbour porpoise found its way upstream of the weir and was guided back out to sea by a team of rescuers, assisted by local rowing clubs members.

Grey herons, goosanders and cormorants are a common sight, and over thirty species of fish are recorded in the Clyde, including salmon, trout, roach, dace, perch, eels and barbel. Dalmarnock has been a popular fishing spot for centuries, and a much-used anglers hut is perched at the side of the river on the north bank. Seals are also commonly seen, looking to catch a passing fish before it falls prey to the angler's hook.

The Clyde is a 'recovering river'. Industrialisation from the mid-1800s onwards greatly impacted water quality and river flow. Weirs constructed to harness water for mills and manage water levels disrupted fish migration, and pollution from chemical works and sewage killed off many species living in the river. For many years, some stretches of the Clyde were devoid of life.

In 1983, biologists recorded the first salmon run on the Clyde in over 120 years. According to William Yeomans of the Clyde River Foundation, this event marked a turning point in the environmental history of the river—'one of the best "good-news stories" in the history of freshwater biology'. Post-industrial landscapes can and do recover, often with surprising results.

The Clyde River Foundation (CRF) is a Scottish charity dedicated to research and education throughout the River Clyde catchment—undertaking regular research, scientific monitoring and projects that raise awareness of issues affecting the river.



Fish release with Riverbank Primary School. Photo by Ally Bhatia

As part of the West Boathouse project, CRF worked with four local schools (Riverbank Primary, Dalmarnock Primary, St Anne's and St. Francis) on Clyde in the Classroom, a hands-on project which uses the life history of a native Scottish species, the brown trout, to promote awareness of river ecology. Aimed at P5-P7 classes, the project encourages children to engage with nature and develop a sense of pride in their local environment. The children are responsible for the care of brown trout within their classroom and worked weekly with CRF scientists. The fish were then released into tributary burns and to make their way into the Clyde.

Water quality has significantly improved along many stretches of the river, but the Clyde faces new challenges from invasive, non-native species such as Giant hogweed, Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam and American signal crayfish. A key aim of the West Boathouse project was to raise awareness of the river and better understand its natural and cultural heritage and how they are inextricably bound together. 'The Living River' project was developed in collaboration with environmental charity, The Conservation Volunteers, to explore, record and care for the wildlife of the River Clyde. This project focused on recording wildlife along a 6km section of the River Clyde from Glasgow Green to Cuningar Loop. Using the iNaturalist app, we worked with volunteers to observe and record all kinds of flora and fauna and identify areas where invasive species are present. Details of how to contribute can be found on the West Boathouse and iNaturalist websites.

Map of Glasgow and the Clyde

- 1 Site of the 'Wooden Bridge', Hutchesontown footbridge, (1803–1829) and stone-built replacement (1829–1834)
- 2 West Boathouse (1905). Clydesdale Amateur Rowing Club, Clyde Amateur Rowing Club and Strathclyde University Boat Club
- 3 Site of McWhirter's Aquatic Saloon (1860s)
- 4 Glasgow Humane Society (founded 1790)
- 5 Site of Clyde & Clydesdale ARC's pre-1905 boathouses
- 6 East Boathouse (1924). Glasgow Schools Rowing Club, Glasgow University Boat Club
- 7 Southern Necropolis. Burial place of shipbuilder Thomas Seath, George Geddes and family and James Banks McNeil
- 8 Glasgow Rowing Club Boathouse (1997) and site of City of Glasgow Regatta Club's 'Clutha' Boathouse (1854–1880s)
- 9 Route of Roger's proposed scheme to straighten the Clyde (1890s)
- 10 Site of Flesher's Haugh Diving Boards (1830s–1877)
- 11 Site of Allan's Pen (1796–c.1850)
- 12 Site of ancient logboat (discovered 1870s)
- 13 Site of Barrowfield Dyeworks and Monteith's Bandana Works (1785–1860s)
- 14 Spaceman Graffiti (c.1990s)
- 15 Site of White's Shawfield Chemical Works (1820–1967)
- 16 Site of Cranstonhill Water Works (1808) and Dalmarnock Sewage Works (1894)
- 17 Rutherglen Quay (Medieval–early 1920s)
- 18 Site of Thomas Seath's Shipyard, later Chalmers & Co (1856–1923)
- 19 Site of Dalmarnock Power Station (1920–1981)
- 20 Site of Glasgow Water Works, filtration tanks and pumping station (1806–1860s)
- 21 Site of Harvie's Dyke (1822–1823)



GLASGOW GREEN

CALTON

PARKHEAD

GORBALS

BRIDGETON

King's Bridge (1933)

THE PEAT BOG

SOUTHERN NECROPOLIS

DALMARNOCK

Polmadie Bridge (1901-2015, new bridge 2018)

RICHMOND PARK

Rutherglen Bridge (1896)

Cuningar Loop Footbridge (2016)

CUNINGAR LOOP

POLMADIE

SHAWFIELD

Clyde Smartbridge (2014)

Dalmarnock Bridge (1891), site of previous bridges (1821 and 1848) and Dalmarnock Ford

UPPER LIMIT OF NAVIGATION



0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 km

0 1/4 1/2 mile



Composite image of before and after photographs of the West Boathouse. Upper half by David Collie, (post-renovation, 2023); bottom half by Alisdair Woodburn (pre-renovation, 2016)

This book is a miscellany—a guddle, to use a suitably riparian term—of stories about rowing, sport, Glasgow and the River Clyde. The authors hope there are enough interesting snippets to hold the interest of both the committed sports historian and anyone interested in discovering how and why Glasgow rose to become one of the world’s great sporting cities (spoiler alert: it was the river!).

www.westboathouse.org.uk

