



HENLEY TOWN & VISITORS' REGATTA

President: Dr Iain Reid

REPORT OF THE HONORARY GENERAL SECRETARY FOR 2013

At the 2013 Annual General Meeting, which was held at Millennium Court on Thursday 14th March, Dr Iain Reid was elected to serve as President with John Friend as Deputy President.

A working party considered ways of increasing the level of interest from clubs. The resulting changes included shortening the course from approx. 1,000m to approx. 850m, adding an additional wave to separate events into 3 waves (giving competitors more opportunities to race), increasing the number of events offered and offering the same mix of events in both Open and Women's categories. We also added Primary events for crews who are new to the sport and we are grateful to Paul Lorenzato, Participation Development Team Leader at British Rowing, who assisted in delivering entries and equipment.

These changes, allied to a small marketing push directed at relevant clubs, resulted in 270 entries being received via the British Rowing Online Entry system - a significant increase over previous years. After withdrawals and some events being cancelled due to insufficient entries, a record 239 crews went into the Draw, beating the previous record of 234 set in 1999 and reversing the slump that had occurred ever since the 2007 cancellation. As well as the new Primary events, we were also able to run a number of Junior events - something that we'd attempted with little success in the past. Hopefully the foundations that have been laid this year bode well for in the future.

As well as a record level of entries, the Regatta itself went very well and benefited from good weather. In fact it was one of the most successful and enjoyable events I have experienced and feedback from all quarters was excellent, epitomised by the following from a member of Stratford-upon-Avon Rowing Club: "We had a superb day and thought the event was simply brilliant. I don't think any of us could remember such a great day's racing and everyone we came into contact with was so positive and helpful." It doesn't come much better than that!

Other innovations this year included an increase in the capacity of the President's Enclosure, which was very well received by subscribers, and new steps into the world of the internet social media. As well as our web site, we have a Facebook page and a Twitter account with over 500 followers. Given that most of our target market also use these platforms, I have no doubt that they will play an increasingly important role in our marketing and communications.

As the programme of racing progressed, Thames, Henley and Maidenhead Rowing Clubs emerged as the main contenders for the victor ludorum and the result wasn't decided until the last, and fastest, race of the day, the final of the Elite Eights, in which all 3 crews were overlapping at the finish. Thames Rowing Club, with wins in six events, received the Sutherland Cup from Mrs Diane Sutherland in memory of her late husband Peter Sutherland OBE, along with a special commemorative shield to keep in perpetuity.

The Regatta's stock of ties was finished off by members of Corio Bay Rowing Club who travelled over 12,000 miles from Geelong, near Melbourne, to take part in Regatta. They competed in several events and won two Masters titles. Subsequently, a new tie has been designed and produced thanks to the efforts of Helen Davis. An example is available for inspection at the AGM and orders are being taken for delivery in time for the 2014 Regatta.

As usual, I will leave it to the Treasurer to cover the financial details in his report, but the bottom line is that we are on the right track thanks to improvements in several areas, led by a significant increase in entry fees, and an increase in sponsorships (thanks to the efforts of

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Cllr. Elizabeth Hodgkin in her first year in this role). As a result, we have been able to reduce the size of our grant application to Henley Town Council for 2014, but we must continue to work hard to consolidate our position and build a secure long term future. One of our targets for 2014 is to market the Regatta more successfully within the town in order to generate a greater number of spectators and a stronger feeling of support for the "Town" regatta. However, it should be noted that this may not result in significant additional revenue as we can no longer charge to enter the enclosure.

As ever, we are reliant upon the support we receive from many sources. The Stewards and Secretary of the Royal Regatta are instrumental in allowing us to use their land, we particularly thank them for their cooperation in 2013. We are also very grateful to Henley Town Council, Henley Rowing Club and Dr & Mrs Walter Scott for their support. We are similarly thankful to our subscribers, sponsors and advertisers, many of whom are local families and businesses, the volunteers who help us run the Regatta and the *Henley Standard* which helps raise awareness.

By pulling together we can continue to secure the future of one of Britain's longest surviving, traditional, river-based regattas.



Mark KC Davies
Honorary General Secretary
March 2014