

A Short History of Para-Rowing

Level 1



May 1915 “a little army of girls, living in all parts of London, regularly getting up very early to come to steer the St Dunstan’s boats”

Rowing – A Sport for All

The earliest mention of rowing for individuals with a disability was in Great Britain at Worcester College for the Blind, a residential school for young people with visual impairments. Pupils were encouraged to take up rowing and compete against their sighted peers in regattas, including The Thames Challenge Cup at Henley Royal Regatta in 1927.

The boathouse was established in 1913 by George Clifford Brown, a progressive Headmaster. Brown appears to have decided to resolve the problem of demonstrating equality by only promoting the sports in which his students could compete without modifications, so that they would be regarded as equivalent to their fully-sighted peers.

The headmaster wanted to provide the same sports as a public school, not only for their own merit and the contacts that could be made, but also for the ethos they promoted. When Brown went to New York in 1931 to attend the first World Conference on Work for the Blind, he stressed his goals and the ambition his school was striving to inspire:

“In the official games I include only those which can be brought to the same level of excellence as those of the schools for the sighted, and in which competition may take place on equal terms with the schools for the sighted.... These games ... enable [the boy] to keep in constant contact with the seeing world. This proves, too, that excellence is merely a matter of opportunity”.

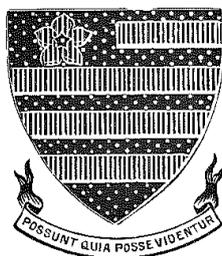
Rowing was foremost amongst the activities that Brown selected in 1913 when he became Headmaster, the sport having already gained popularity for blind males as a result of the impact of the First World War. It was adopted by the blinded veterans sent for rehabilitation at St Dunstan’s, a charity created by a blind former newspaper owner Sir Arthur Pearson. With a sighted cox, blind men and boys could compete with no real disadvantage and demonstrate their athleticism as equals. Pearson was to be Chairman of the Worcester Governors and promoted the purchase of a boathouse for the school on the River Severn, opened by Guy Nickalls in 1923.

3.45 p.m.	HEAT 15
Bucks. Thames Rowing Club	Berks. Worcester College for the Blind
(Crew as before)	st lbs
	A. R. N. Cross, bow 9 2
	2 P. A. Hughes 8 2
	3 A. Brace 9 6
	4 G. W. Brown 10 12
	5 A. C. Threlfall 10 13
	6 J. G. Curran 12 6
	7 H. F. Carter 10 2
	A. E. Martin, str. 8 13
	P. Price, cox..... 7 12
Won easily.	

Henley Royal Regatta, Thames Challenge Cup 1927
Rupert Cross at Bow became an Oxford Law Professor and academic
(the first Law Professor in the United Kingdom who was blind)

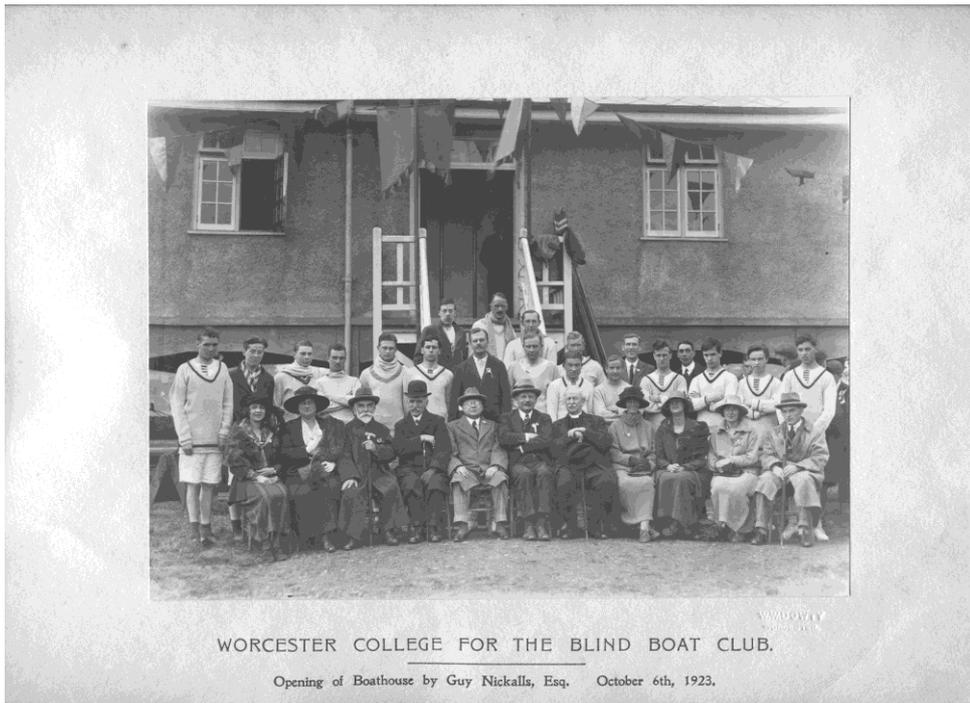
Worcester College for the Blind BOAT CLUB

PRESIDENT - G. C. BROWN, ESQ.

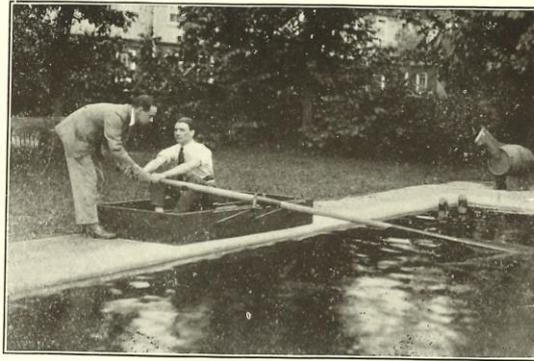


Annual Regatta

FRIDAY, JUNE 24TH
AND
SATURDAY, JUNE 25TH
1938



St. Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors in Marylebone, London, also offered rowing opportunities for the blind, including a detailed programme of care, guidance and training for men who had lost their sight because of war. This included regular rowing sessions on the boating lake in Regent's Park.



Receiving Instruction in the Dry Tub, in the Swimming Bath.

The College Boat Club.

The Boat Club was founded by the present Head Master in 1913, when for the first time rowing was taken up as a serious sport for the blind. The following dates give some idea of the progress which has been made in fifteen years :—

- 1913. Two pair-oar crews were trained in tubs.
- 1914. One four was trained in a half out-rigged tub boat and engaged in two races, against the Old Boys and the Worcester Boy Scouts (winning both races).
- 1915. The 1st Four were put into a light clinker built racing boat, the 2nd remaining in the tub. Races were rowed against Emanuel School and King's School 2nd IV. in light boats and against the Old Boys and St. Dunstan's in tubs.
- 1918. The first and second IV.'s in light boats took part in nine races, of which they won seven.
- 1922. Five fours raced in light boats. Three other fours were trained.
- 1923. Opening of the Boat House by Mr. Guy Nickalls and the first Eights race v. the Eiresian VIII.
- 1925.—The VIII. made their first appearance in a shell boat.
- 1926. The 1st IV. reached the Final for the Freeman Cup at Saltford Regatta.
- 1927. The 1st VIII. rowed at Henley Regatta.

In July 1914 St. Dunstan's Hostel were victorious in a regatta at which they beat the students of Westminster College in two out of three races.

**B.F. SIGHTLESS SOLDIERS
RECREATION**

After working at useful trades during the day, blind soldiers from St. Dunstan's Hostel, enjoying a row on the Regent's Park lake, with a lady as coxswain.



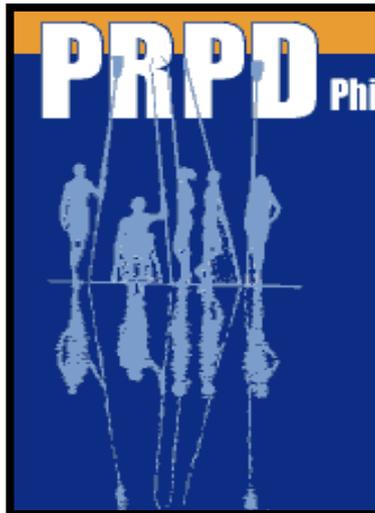
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Sightless Soldiers Recreation 1916 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=783vQjMm350>

Blind Oarsmen's Regatta (1922)



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOB4NGTJ_KE



In October 1945, American veterans blinded in World War II decided to organise an entry into the Navy Day Regatta which took place on the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia. Men from the Army, Navy and Marines would enter blind rowers into the events, and they would race against one another. The scene was empowering to say the least, as these men made the best of their life changing injuries.

This milestone set a precedent for adaptive rowing and while it would take a while to gain worldwide momentum, the seed was now planted.

Over subsequent years efforts were made to continue rowing programs for athletes with disabilities. Ted Nash, an Olympic rower and coach for the University of Pennsylvania and Penn AC, worked to bring rowing to people with visual impairments. In 1980 Chris Blackwall, the executive director of US Rowing, started the Philadelphia Rowing Program for the Disabled (PRPD), the first US rowing club solely for people with disabilities.



Philadelphia Rowing Programme For the Disabled (PRPD). Host club for the Bayada Regatta, which has grown into one of the oldest and largest continuous adaptive rowing regattas in the world.

In the 1970s a number of adaptive rowing programmes sprang up in Australia, France, Great Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and the USA. The first FISA (Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Aviron) recognised 'adaptive rowing' World Cup event took place in 1991 and was held in the Netherlands. In 1995 an exhibition of 'adaptive' events were hosted at the World Rowing Championships in Tampere, Finland.

Subsequently, between 1996-2000 FISA held several adaptive rowing seminars in Berlin, London, Rotterdam and Philadelphia.

In 2001 FISA formed an Adaptive Rowing Commission (now Para-Rowing Commission) to work on establishing a classification system and pathway to Paralympic accreditation. The World Rowing Championships in 2002 was the first time that adaptive rowing events were integrated into the championship programme.

After the Championships, FISA informed the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) that it would apply for the inclusion of rowing in the 2008 Paralympic Games.

As part of the IPC application approval process, FISA was required to demonstrate that adaptive rowing was widely practiced in a minimum of 24 countries and three regions (America, Africa, Europe, Middle East, Asia or Oceania) by 2005. This also required the national federations of at least 24 countries to have participated in international competition or regularly held national championships. FISA asked these national federations to sign the 'Seville Protocol' as a statement of support for adaptive rowing in their countries.

The sport continued to develop, with adaptive events at the 2003 World Rowing Championships in Milan and the 2004 World Rowing Senior and Junior Championships in Banyoles, Spain. The discipline reached its highest level in 2007 during the World Rowing Championships in Munich, when 116 adaptive rowers competed in 58 boat classes.

When FISA was admitted as a member of the IPC in 2005, its inclusion in the Paralympic movement, helped to boost participation after the sport's debut at the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games. This gave national federations more incentive to promote Para-Rowing and broadened the worldwide public exposure of the sport.

At the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, 26 countries competed in Para-Rowing for 12 medals in four boat classes. There were a total of 48 boats and 96 rowers. The medals were spread among seven countries, with Great Britain winning the most medals.

Para-rowing is uniquely integrated with the World Rowing Federation and FISA, and para-rowers participate alongside able-bodied athletes at some of the World Rowing Cups and the World Rowing Championships. With a new event added in 2013, para-rowing is currently divided into five boat classes: PR3 mixed coxed four, PR3 mixed double sculls, PR2 mixed double sculls, PR1

women's single sculls and PR1 men's single sculls. The PR3 and PR2 are mixed gender boats. Since 2017, the race distance for all five events changed from 1000m to 2000m.