

Miscellaneous Comments and Articles on Scottish Rowing.

Boathouses on the River,

Glasgow Humane Society; Geddes Boathouse; Parsonage Boathouse; McWhirter's Aquatic Salon; John Carrols boatbuilding Yard; Reilly's Boats; McFarlane's Boats; Walker Brothers; McNeill's Boats; McGruer Boats; McNicol's Steam Launch.

Loch Lomond Regatta, 1903 there was a Lady and Gentleman's mixed pairs race,

During the 2nd world war, the boathouse (Glasgow University) was taken over by the RAF, after the rowing had gradually declined since 1938 when electricity was first installed in the boat house. Disaster struck in 1942 when the weir below Glasgow Green broke during a flood. The resulting surge of water caused a "Bore" which reached Greenock and the river banks collapsed, when the boathouse sank by 2ft and tilted by 15 degrees. In their hurry to vacate the building during this calamity, the RAF left the doors open and most of the boat fittings were stolen, a deficiency which was not made good until after the war.

Professional racing in Scotland.

Copied from handwritten sheets. Torn from book, found lying in boathouse by Ben Parsonage.

14th. December 1896

Articles and conditions to guide bind and govern a rowing match to be signed and adhered to by them.

The undersigned James McMillan 50 Sauchiehall Street and John Caskie 95 Mathieson Street hereby agree to row a sculling match on the undernoted terms.

1st The stakes to be £10 a side say Ten pounds.

2nd The match to be rowed on the river Clyde at or near the Green District.

3rd The course to be from foot of Thistle Street or nearby, to the St Andrews bridge foot of McNeil Street

4th The distance same as competed to be half a mile which we acknowledge.

5th The boats to be used may be those at present in existence or may be built but the boat or boats to be rowed in this match must not exceed twenty-two feet in length.

6th The start t be made from stake boats moored sufficiently apart to the satisfaction of the starter and referee.

7th The boat drawing the south station to steer a course under the south arch of the Albert bridge and the boat drawing the north station, to steer a course under the centre arch of the same bridge.

10th The race shall be considered finished when the bow of the leading boat reaches the west side of the Suspension bridge.

11 The date of the match to be February 1897

12 The match to be rowed about o'clock say about one hour before high water.

Should the river be in flood or in any way.....?

No date given re the following.

The undernoted Conditions are drawn up for the purpose to bind, guide and govern the crews in a boat race for a sweepstake and will be termed "articles".

Article 1. That the crews named herein are specifically known as the Young Unity,
Lizzie, Young Dumbarton.

The Young Unity crew consists of the following members Francie Kane; Alex Stewart; George Banks; Rob Dunn Brady.

The Lizzie crew consists of the following members, William Stirling; Connelly scored out; W H Birch; John Caskie.

The Young Dumbarton crew to consist of the following members, Thomas Garry; McKennes; Garry .

Article 2 The course to be rowed is locally known as the short Regatta course. Viz from a short distance west of the Green Suspension Bridge round buoys moored a short distance above the new Tidal Weir and return to a point a few yards short of the start to be known as the winning post. The winning post to be marked by two flags one flag on each side of the river.

Article 3 The date for this race to be Saturday 29th day of September 1900.

Article 4. The time fixed for the race to be 4 o'clock prompt. The three crews must be at the starting post a few minutes before this time. This is most important article the time of tidal high water being 4 pm

Article 5. The amount of the stakes will be Fifteen Pounds in all which is made up by a sweepstake of five pounds put down by each crew.

Article 6. The five pounds to be posted in the following manner. Viz. One pound to be ledged in the stakeholder's hand at the signing of the articles to be termed the 1st deposit.

Two pounds each crew to be ledged in the stakeholder's hands on Saturday 15th Sept. between the hours of 9 and 10oc to be termed the second deposit.

Two pounds each crew to be ledged in the stakeholder's hands on Thursday 27th Sept. between the hours of 9 and 10oc to be termed the third and final deposit.

Article 7. The starter and referee to be mutually agreed upon and appointed at the final deposit.

Article 8. The start to be from moored boats. Each crew to appoint its own man for the purpose. All to be under the control of the starter.

Article 9. The boats to be rowed in this match are to be termed first class racing jollyboats and may be those at present in existence or may be built but in any case, need not exceed 23feet in length nor be less than 4feet in beam.

Postage 1d 5/8/00

Wednesday 5th September 1900.

John Crossan acting for the Young Unity Crew has just lodged in my hands the sum of Two Pounds for the purpose of rowing a match in 23ft first class Jollies not less than 4ft beam for a sweepstake of Two pounds. The Lizzie crew are quite willing to go on with the match and Mr Wm H Birch has lodged in my hands the sum of 1/ for the purpose of calling a meeting to make arrangements draw up articles same articles to rece....is

With the sanction of the two crews the undernoted letter has been sent to the Young Dumbarton crew per Mr Jack Patrick Qu...hana Place Dumbarton.

Dear Mr Patrick

There has been lodged in my hands by the representatives of the Lizzie and Young Unity crews a sum of money by both parties for the purpose of a match for a sweepstake of £5 a boat to be rowed at Glasgow over the usual regatta course, on or about the end of September say the 29th inst. Please be good enough to let me know at the earliest possible moment if the young Dumbarton crew is willing to take part. On receipt of a favourable reply from you I will call a meeting of interested representatives to arrange details and complete arrangements for the race.

The sum of two pounds ten shillings a side to be lodged in the hands of the stakeholder and such to be considered the first deposit.

On this date a deposit of two pounds ten shillings a side to be lodged in the hands of the stakeholder on January and such to be considered the second deposit.

A deposit of five pounds aside to be lodged in the hands of the stakeholder on February and such to be considered the third and final deposit.

The above deposits are to be lodged in the hands of the stakeholder between the hours of 9 and 10 o'clock pm at the places herein after mentioned.

1st deposit to be made in Mr Wm Cairns premises corner of Rose Street.

2nd deposit to be made in

3rd deposit to be made in

Important. The clauses regarding the deposit to be strictly enforced and any competition not conforming to the above conditions is to be considered a defaulter and his portion of the stakes in the hands of the stakeholder to be considered forfeit.

Glasgow 10th September 1900

The undernoted conditions called articles are hereby drawn up to bind, guide, and govern the crews taking part in a boat race.

No.1. That the undermentioned crews are known by the names of
 "Young Unity" "Lizzy" and "Young Dumbarton"

No.2. That the "Young Unity" crew consists of the following
 members Francis Kane, Alexander Stewart, George Banks Robb
 D Brady stroke Representative John Cowan. Initialled in margin for
 Young Unity RDB

No.3. That the “Lizzy” crew consists of the following members William Stirling

Wm. Birch James Connelly John Caskie stroke Representative Peter Bruce. (In the margin it states “name William Stirling deleted that of Wm. Scouler substituted”). Initialled in margin for Lizzy JC

No. 4. That the “Young Dumbarton” crew consists of the following members, Thomas Garry, James McKenna, Andrew Malloy Daniel Garry stroke Representative William Paxton. Initialled in margin for Young Dumbarton JG

- 5 That they agree to compete for a sweepstake of five pounds each crew.
- 6 That they row on the River Clyde at the Glasgow Green Glasgow.
- 7 That they agree to row the race on Saturday 29th September 1900.
- 8 That they agree to row and be at the starting post at four o'clock prompt.
- 9 That we agree to start from moored punts. Each crew to supply a person to hold their boat.
- 10 That the course be from a short distance above the Green Suspension Bridge round buoys moored a short distance above the new tidal weir and back.
- 11 That the crews turn their buoy on the coxswain's right-hand side.
- 12 That the boats to be rowed in this race to be first class jolly boats not exceeding twenty-three feet in length and not less than four feet beam.
- 13 That the jolly boats to be rowed in this match may be those at present in existence or may be built but must conform to article 12.
- 14 That the starter be mutually agreed upon and appointed at the final deposit. 1st call Thomas Duncan
 2nd call Alex Fairley
 3rd call Referee.
- 15 That the stakeholder be George Geddes Humane Society House Glasgow Green.
- 16 That the starting arrangements be in the hands of George Geddes as well as the setting of the buoys.
- 17 The sweepstake of £5 five pounds to be posted in the following manner.
 - (a) One pound each crew to be lodged in the stakeholders' hands at the signing of those articles to be termed the 1st deposit.

- (b) Two pounds each crew to be lodged in the stakeholders' hands on Wednesday 19th September between the hours of 9 and 10 o'clock at the stakeholders' address to be termed the 2nd deposit.
- (c) Two pounds each crew to be lodged in the stakeholders' hands on Thursday 27th September between the hours of 8 and 10 o'clock at the stakeholders' address to be termed the 3rd or final deposit.
- 18 That each boat will keep it's own water from start to finish. Any boat departing from its own water shall do so at its peril.
- 19 That the Referee's decision will be final and without dispute in a court of law.
- 20 That should the match break down from any cause or dispute the moneys in the hands of the stakeholder will be forfeited and be equally divided between the crews who conform to article 17.
- 21 That the representatives of the crews draw for stations when the boats are on the water.
- 22 No boat to be allowed to change any of it's crew, from date of signing articles without the sanction of the referee and then only under pressing circumstances.
- 23 Each crew to provide ten shillings each towards the expenses of this match. Young Dumb 10/ pd. Lizzie 10/pd. Young Unity 10/pd.
- 24 On receiving the decision of the Referee, the stakeholder is empowered to hand over the stake money to the winning crew and to be freed from all responsibility.
- 25 The colours to be worn for distinguishing purposes and to avoid confusion are
Young Unity to be in Green.
Lizzie to be in White
Young Dumbarton to be in Blue.
- 26 The unanimous request of the three crews is that William Taylor Esq. of Helensburgh be appointed referee.
- We agree to abide by the above articles.

Signed K N Brady for Young Unity

James McKenna for Young Dumbarton

John Caskie for Lizzie

John Crossan witness

Peter Bruce “

John Frank “

Notes on Historical rowing and sculling including professional races.

The following has been taken from "A short history of rowing on the river Clyde in Glasgow", compiled by Andy Mitchell.

ROWING ON THE CLYDE

When boat-racing was begun on the upper reaches of the Clyde, the crack rowers on the river were the famous Blue Bell crew. About thirty years later scratch crews were made up year by year, and included such as John Carroll, the celebrated Manchester oarsman (who, at that time had a boat-hiring establishment on the Clyde (Adelphi Street)); James McFarlane (boat hirer Adelphi Street); George Geddes, (present keeper of the Humane Society house); Robert Glen; and last, not least, the late Banks McNeil (boat hirer Adelphi Street), who for so many years took a prominent part in all aquatic sports on the Clyde. It is not matter for surprise that they won some of the highest prizes for which they contended. In one season they defeated the celebrated Duffy's crew, of Dumbarton, at Loch Lomond, and next year beat the famous McAllisters. Robert McAllister, one of this famous crew, is now the principal boatbuilder in the West of Scotland for small rowing craft (Dumbarton). About that time a regatta took place on Kilbirnie Loch, at which some of the "crack" Glasgow oarsmen competed. The singles race in particular between Robert Campbell (Champion) and George Geddes caused a great sensation. After a splendid race the champion was beaten by half a length. No other regatta has since taken place on the loch.

On July 22nd 1858 the great professional Harry Clasper beat R Campbell in a sculling race on the river Clyde for a prize of £200 and the Championship of Scotland. Clasper beat Campbell again on the 6th October in a championship race on Loch Lomond for another prize of £200. Clasper had raced in Scotland before as in 1853 along with Ault, Wood and Davidson he won two fours' races in Glasgow. It is a pity that George Geddes is not recorded as having raced Clasper.

During the past season there has been greater interest in aquatic sports on the upper reaches of the river. After a lengthened period of great activity, during which Glasgow produced some oarsmen of more than local celebrity, a number of adverse circumstances arose. The principal was the removal of the weir, The removal of the weir itself was a slow

process, and during the transition stage of its demolition little or no spirit was shown in aquatic circles, and the Glasgow crews, which were formerly so much dreaded at Dumbarton, Port Glasgow, Greenock and all the prominent regattas at the coast became demoralised. No English crews were tempted to visit our waters, and the regatta gradually fell off in interest. The only exception to this general decadence has been the Printers' Regatta, established some nine summers ago, which has year by year grown in reputation, and is now one of the most important fixtures of the season. The obstructions are now happily all removed, and at high tide there is a clear waterway from Broomielaw to Rutherglen Bridge. Owing, however, to a recent bye-law of the Clyde Trust the water-course is only available for training above the Albert Bridge, but during regattas the Trust will no doubt grant permission to start the long races from the Broomielaw. This would ensure a magnificent straight-away course of fully a mile, and tend to greatly foster the interest in aquatics.

The excitement of boat racing in Scotland in the 1850s

SKIFF MATCH FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP OF SCOTLAND AND £150

This match, which came off yesterday on Loch Lomond, has excited more interest amongst the lovers of aquatics than, perhaps, any former event of a similar kind. The men - William Brown, John Carroll, and Robert Campbell, are more or less known to fame by the lovers of aquatics. Brown beat McNeill in two different skiff matches. Brown was trained by Robert Chambers, of Newcastle; Carroll, by Harry Clasper of Newcastle; and Campbell by John McKinney, of Richmond. Betting: Even on Brown against the field; even on Carroll; and 6 to 4 against Campbell. The result of the race had the effect of causing several hundred pounds to change hands - the "knowing ones" betting heavy in favour of Brown. A special steamer was hired for the occasion, on board of were the Umpires, Messrs. Clasper, Chalmers, and McNeill, and the Referee, Captain Brown of the Queen Victoria Loch Lomond Steamer, and a large concourse of gentlemen interested in the contest. All the preliminaries having been arranged, and after two false starts, the boats went off in beautiful style, Brown and Carroll, who were on either side of Campbell, taking a slight lead. On nearing Inch Murrin, Campbell improved his speed, and got ahead of his opponents, the boats continuing bow for bow for a short distance. As they reached the Island,

Campbell put on a most beautiful and determined "sprint" and despite the efforts of his opponents, he shot ahead, and was a length in front, in less time than we take to note the fact. He continued to improve his distance, and although Brown, who was second, and Carroll, made energetic attempts to regain their lost ground, their efforts were unsuccessful. Carroll, in rounding the above point, pulled somewhat out of his course, and lost way; but by this time, it was evident to all that the race was decided. The men continued to pull with spirit, but Campbell gradually widened his distance between Brown, as did the latter between Carroll, and when the winning-post was reached, Campbell was at least 150 yards ahead of Brown, the same distance being between the latter and Carroll. The race was pulled in 23 minutes and 40 seconds. Thus, ended a contest in favour of a Scotchman over opponents of the sister countries, which, as we have already said, has excited more interest in aquatic circles in this quarter than any event of a similar kind. Campbell belongs to Alexandria, a village situated little more than a mile from the scene of the contest, and the enthusiasm manifested in the district was general. The winning boat was built in the boat-building establishment of Mr J. B. McNeill, Glasgow.

Six months later, the prize money had risen to £200, and this is how Bell's Life reported this famous piece of action in its edition of 25 July 1858:

THE GREAT SKIFF RACE BETWEEN HARRY CLASPER AND ROBERT CAMPBELL FOR £200 AND THE CHAMPIONSHIP OF SCOTLAND

This great event in the aquatic world came off on Thursday last, under the most favourable auspices. The attendance of spectators was very large, for the interest taken in the match arose from various causes. The Championship of Scotland being the stake at issue, the national spirit was called into play, and a feeling of anxiety prevailed lest, perhaps, the best sculler that Scotland had ever produced should have to succumb to the science of a stranger. With that feeling of anxiety, however, was mingled a feeling of confidence and, although Clasper had a slight call in the betting wherever layers were to be found, there were takers also. It was thought - and there was good reason for the thought - that, great as was the fame of the aquatic hero of Newcastle, the youth, strength, and scientific acquirements of the present champion of Scotland should

enable him to pull through with even more formidable antagonist; but the result proved that those who held these expectations had been very much in error.

The rising fame of Campbell having attracted the attention of Clasper, the veteran challenged him to row a race for £100 a side and the championship of Scotland, and hence the match which we this day have to record Campbell, who has been for the last three weeks at Loch Lomond, taking his breathings under the superintendence of George Drewitt of Chelsea, rowed in boat built by Mr J. B. McNeil, her length being 33 feet and weight about 29lb. not including the weight of the rowlocks. Clasper arrived in Glasgow on Wednesday week, having, as we understand, not gone through any lengthened course of training, and many of his friends expressed some anxiety lest his four-oared race with the Taylors would have interfered in some respect with his sculling. He rowed in a boat of his own construction which is said by his friends to be one of the best he ever built. The dimensions are-length 33 feet, breadth 10 inches, height of steer-post 2 inches, and weight 33lb.

In consequence of the necessity of catching the tide at the ebb, the start was fixed at ten o'clock, and the weather being very fine for some time before that hour, the river presented a very animated appearance. The Petrel and Emperor, and three other steamers had brought down a considerable number of spectators from Glasgow; and a crowd of small boats of all descriptions, their oars glittering in the sunlight, were seen skimming over the surface of the Clyde. As the hour for the start drew nigh, speculation was at its height; the friends of Campbell, probably in consequence of a rumour that the veteran could not stay the distance, adventuring their money more freely on their favourite. As the men came slowly to the post their condition and form were closely scanned. The condition in which Clasper appeared at the starting point reflects great credit on his trainer; and Campbell, too, looked well and confident.

At about a quarter-past ten an admirable start was effected, both men darting off with lightning velocity, but in a few strokes the nose of Clasper's boat began to show in front, and the veteran shortly after drove his boat clear, and continued to increase his lead until they had pulled about 400 yards, where the Craignish Castle, though hailed by the umpires and referee and ordered to back her engines, continued most reprehensibly to follow so close in the wake of Clasper's skiff that

the surge from the paddle-wheels extended to him and for a time retarded his progress. At this period Campbell came up, and for a second or two the skiffs were close together. When Clasper got into smoother water he again shot ahead and regained his former position, improving his lead at every stroke, and rowing well within himself, came in a victor by about 200 yards, thus adding another to his many victories. He pulled on the north and Campbell on the south side of the course. The winning post was a boat bearing the Union Jack, placed about half a mile below Bowling Pier - a distance from the starting point of about four miles. All around, it was a swarm of small boats, numbering, we should suppose, nearly 200, filled with people, who sent up a most enthusiastic burst of cheering, which was also swelled by those on board the steamboats, as Clasper came triumphantly past the winning post, with Campbell, as nearly as we could calculate, between 200 and 300 yards behind. Thus, was decided what, by a numerous class, will be reckoned an event of national importance. After the race the rowers were taken on board, and the steamers with their freights returned to Glasgow. The stakes shall be forwarded to Clasper on Tuesday next.

Programme showing **Campbell** Glasgow sculler entered for the Newcastle Handicap

**ACCEPTANCES AND DRAW FOR
COOK, WINSHIP AND HAILS'
220
Half-Mile Christmas Open-Boat Handicap,
To commence on
Xmas Day, Dec. 25th, 1903.
T. WINSHIP, Referee. J. JOBLING, Starter. T. DOBSON, Distance Judge.**

*The Top Man in each Heat denotes the Red Flag.
FIRST HEAT AT 10 O'CLOCK.*

| Seconds. | Seconds. | Seconds. | Seconds. |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Heat 1. ... 58 | Heat 17. ... 34 | Heat 33. ... 29 | Heat 39. ... 31 |
| Heat 2. ... 57 | Heat 18. ... 37 | Heat 34. ... 37 | Heat 40. ... 38 |
| Heat 3. ... 55 | Heat 19. ... 35 | Heat 35. ... 38 | Heat 41. ... 32 |
| Heat 4. ... 56 | Heat 20. ... 31 | Heat 36. ... 41 | Heat 42. ... 38 |
| Heat 5. ... 40 | Heat 21. ... 40 | Heat 37. ... 31 | Heat 43. ... 38 |
| Heat 6. ... 48 | Heat 22. ... 37 | Heat 38. ... 42 | Heat 44. ... 38 |
| Heat 7. ... 42 | Heat 23. ... 38 | Heat 39. ... 36 | Heat 45. ... 38 |
| Heat 8. ... 32 | Heat 24. ... 31 | Heat 40. ... 41 | Heat 46. ... 38 |
| Heat 9. ... 39 | Heat 25. ... 30 | Heat 41. ... 43 | Heat 47. ... 38 |
| Heat 10. ... 35 | Heat 26. ... 37 | Heat 42. ... 35 | Heat 48. ... 38 |
| Heat 11. ... 40 | Heat 27. ... 41 | Heat 43. ... 43 | Heat 49. ... 38 |
| Heat 12. ... 39 | Heat 28. ... 40 | Heat 44. ... 31 | Heat 50. ... 38 |
| Heat 13. ... 35 | Heat 29. ... 39 | Heat 45. ... 42 | Heat 51. ... 38 |
| Heat 14. ... 37 | Heat 30. ... 38 | Heat 46. ... 36 | Heat 52. ... 38 |
| Heat 15. ... 30 | Heat 31. ... 39 | Heat 47. ... 42 | Heat 53. ... 38 |
| Heat 16. ... 36 | Heat 32. ... 43 | Heat 48. ... 31 | Heat 54. ... 38 |
| Heat 17. ... 37 | Heat 33. ... 45 | Heat 49. ... 42 | Heat 55. ... 38 |
| | | Heat 50. ... 36 | Heat 56. ... 38 |
| | | Heat 51. ... 41 | Heat 57. ... 38 |
| | | Heat 52. ... 43 | Heat 58. ... 38 |
| | | Heat 53. ... 31 | Heat 59. ... 38 |
| | | Heat 54. ... 42 | Heat 60. ... 38 |
| | | Heat 55. ... 36 | Heat 61. ... 38 |
| | | Heat 56. ... 41 | Heat 62. ... 38 |

**Draw will take place at "Cannon" Inn. Close, at 7 o'clock.
Admission to Draw, Sixpence.**

Boats and Dressing Room at J. Cook's, "Cannon" Inn, Close, Newcastle.

Stevenson & Dryden, Printers, Newcastle.

Rowing and Glasgow Green

Rowing as a sport has taken place on the river Clyde at Glasgow Green since the early 19th century.

Many factories/works/types of employment had their own Clubs i.e., the Glasgow Printers and the Chairmakers.

Regattas attracted thousands of people to the river and it was not unknown for crowds of 50-60,000 to watch a race.

Professional rowing was gradually ousted in favour of amateur rowing and University Clubs joined the activity on the river. This occurred at the same time as persons left the rowing clubs to set up football clubs (Glasgow Rangers acknowledge that they branched out from rowing and Glasgow Celtic acknowledge that they started on Glasgow Green).

Heavy gambling during rowing events was passed to other sports.

At present there are about 14 Clubs on the River, (Open, University, and School).

Around 24 regattas take place on the river each year varying from 500 metre sprints to 5000 metre Head of the River Races.

World and Olympic medallists are among those who learned their rowing on the River Clyde at Glasgow Green

At weekends there can be 400 craft using this excellent 5000 metre stretch of river for rowing.

There is a Cruising Club at Rutherglen with some 50-60 cabin cruisers and yachts. The Clubhouse at Downiebrae Road is used mainly for wintering. The craft make the long sail downriver for the summer and return for the winter to repair clean and paint.

One of the main benefits of this stretch for rowing and sculling is that it is except for the emergency services and the Rutherglen Cruising Club, there are few motorised craft on this section of River, which gives a wash free stretch to row on (and the banks and the water life benefit).

Many Clubs are represented among the number of canoeists who use this stretch of water. The canoeists operate from Rowing Club premises and usually hold two races and one long distance paddle each year.

All Club websites can be reached through their Association websites.

Local area

The area is rich in history with Glasgow Green being the oldest public park in Europe. Bonnie Prince Charlie reviewed his troops at the Fleshers Haugh. Public hangings took place on the Green. The Green boasts the first monument to Nelson. This artificial obelisk was erected by public subscription. The Glasgow Humane Society is the oldest practical lifesaving organisation in the World founded in 1790. Its Officer still looks after the welfare of river users on the Clyde.

The Old Glasgow Museum and Winter Gardens known as the Peoples Palace is worth a visit and the Winter Gardens have a restaurant/cafeteria open most days. One of the most modern football centres in the country exists on the Fleshers Haugh. There are plenty of shops, café's, restaurants and bars on the perimeter of the Green. Cyclists have a local repair shop at the foot of the Saltmarket. Model Boat enthusiasts can cross the Polmadie Bridge into Richmond Park where most weekends there are displays. Two play parks are provided in Glasgow Green, one to the west at the Saltmarket and one beside Templeton's at Arcadia Street.

In recent years Glasgow Green has been the venue for the World Pipe Band Championships, the Gig on the Green, the Glasgow Half Marathon, the Glasgow Firework Display and the May Day Rally. Shettleston Harriers meet and train/race in Glasgow Green and the Cycle route along the towpath forms a haven for walkers, runners and cyclists.

A fascinating history was published in the Glasgow Herald on 24 December 1881. It captures not only the key personalities and events, but also highlights the challenges facing the rowers as the river in the heart of the city was developed.

ROWING ON THE CLYDE

It is only about forty years since boat-racing was begun on the upper reaches of the Clyde, the pioneers of the movement being the famous Blue Bell Crew, at that time the crack rowers on the river. These were succeeded by the Bannatynes, better known as the Jem Brown crew, who successfully carried off many of the chief prizes. The celebrated Reid brothers' crew proved worthy successors and during a couple of

seasons were seldom defeated. The Campbells were the next oarsmen of note who attained more than local celebrity, and for several seasons they carried almost everything before them, while portraits of the brothers were exhibited in almost all the sporting houses in the city. The Milligans were also first-class rowers in their day, and the Browns, better known as the "Navvie's crew", were for a number of years the terror of the Clyde. About thirty years later several scratch crews were made up year by year, and as these included such pullers as John Carroll, the celebrated Manchester oarsman (who, at that time had a boat-hiring establishment on the Clyde); "Bolts", so called from his connection with an iron-foundry; James McFarlane; George Geddes, present keeper of the Humane Society house; Robert Glen; and last, not least, the late Banks McNeil, who for so many years took a prominent part in all aquatic sports on the Clyde, it is not matter for surprise that they won some of the highest prizes for which they contended. In one season they defeated the celebrated Duffy's crew, of Dumbarton, at Loch Lomond, and next year beat the famous McAllisters, who were the originators of the outrigger as applied to skiffs or other racing boats.

Robert McAllister, one of this famous crew, is now the principal Boatbuilder in the West of Scotland for small rowing craft, and this year supplied the two new racing skiffs to the St Mungo Rowing Club. About that time a regatta took place on Kilbirnie Loch, at which some of the "crack" Glasgow oarsmen competed. The punt race in particular between Robert Campbell and George Geddes caused a great sensation. After a splendid race the champion was beaten by half a length. No other regatta has since taken place on the loch. The four-oared race, for the championship of Scotland was rowed on the Gareloch about that period. The scratch Glasgow fours were favourites, but the Perth crew easily carried off the honours, along with a handsome money prize. For several years afterwards there were no Glasgow crews of any note, though scratch fours occasionally made their mark on the Clyde. Duncan Cameron made a creditable appearance as a sculler, and also took a prominent part in pair and four oared races. Among the amateurs, the most prominent were Thomas Lindsay, who about 16 years ago, was considered to have the finest style of rowing on the rivers; and the brother Graham and the brothers Fletcher afterwards greatly distinguished themselves. The Grahams were powerful men,

fought some determined struggles, and almost invariably won. The last time the brothers contested in an open race, they only defeated their opponents by half a length. The Grahams have never since entered a rowing boat, although the brothers are in request to act as umpires at most of the regattas on the Clyde and at the coast. Having thus briefly referred to rowing on the Clyde in its palmier days, we shall proceed to give some details about more recent events.

During the past season much, greater interest has been evinced in aquatic sports on the upper reaches of the river than at any time during the last six or seven years. After a lengthened period of great activity, during which Glasgow produced some oarsmen of more than local celebrity, a number of adverse circumstances arose which tended to damp the ardour of lovers of aquatics in Glasgow, The principal of these was in conjunction with the removal of the weir, and the consequent erection of an unsightly structure for the purpose of carrying water pipes across the Clyde, to supply the mills on the South Side from West Thorn New Water-works, instead of the former supply from the river.

The arches of this temporary structure were so narrow that first-class jolly boats or skiffs could not pass with safety, and it necessarily divided the old time-honoured regatta course, from the weir to Jenny's Burn, in two, and all the races had to be turned at the Suspension Bridge. The removal of the weir itself was a slow process, and during the transition stage of its demolition little or no spirit was shown in aquatic circles, and the Glasgow crews, which were formerly so much dreaded at Dumbarton, Port Glasgow, Greenock and all the prominent regattas at the coast became demoralised. No English crews were tempted to visit our waters, and the regatta gradually fell off in interest.

The only exception to this general decadence has been the Printers' Regatta, established some nine summers ago, which has year by year grown in reputation, and is now one of the most important fixtures of the season. The obstructions are now happily all removed, and at high tide there is a clear waterway from Broomielaw to Rutherglen Bridge. Owing, however, to a recent bye-law of the Clyde Trust the water-course is only available for training above the Albert Bridge, but during regattas the Trust will no doubt grant permission to start the long races from the Broomielaw. This would ensure a magnificent straight-away course of fully a mile, and tend to greatly foster the interest in aquatics.

The excitement of boat racing in Scotland in the 1850s

A couple more articles on the drama of competitive rowing in the west of Scotland from the late 1850s, the first dated 6 November 1857 from the Glasgow Herald:

SKIFF MATCH FOR THE CHAMPIONSHIP OF SCOTLAND AND £150

This match, which came off yesterday on Loch Lomond, has excited more interest amongst the lovers of aquatics than, perhaps, any former event of a similar kind. Glasgow has for a number of years past taken the lead in the exhilarating and healthful exercise of boating; and apart altogether from anxiety to obtain a notoriety as first-class pullers or successful competitors for money prizes, competitions of a character similar to a the one we are about to notice have enervated the youth, we may say, of the city to perfect themselves not only in the propelling of boats but in that invaluable accomplishment, swimming. This latter art, it will be admitted by all, is an accomplishment of which everyone should be in possession, and the fact that racing boats have been brought to that degree of proficiency for swiftness, if not of peril, in waters other than the Clyde (or similar rivers) stimulates the pullers to perfect themselves in, the useful art of swimming. Thus far, we think, the enjoyment of aquatics on the Clyde has been beneficial.

We now come to the match to which reference has been made. The men - William Brown, John Carroll, and Robert Campbell, are more or less known to fame by the lovers of aquatics. Brown, one of the celebrated "Nancy" crew, who were so eminently successful in the Clyde in years gone by, beat McNeill in two different skiff matches. However pretty, and however much admired the pulling of McNeill was, he failed while competing with his more powerful opponent. The next competitor in course is Carroll, one of the champions of the world four-oared crew, the race for which took place in England several years ago. Carroll is a puller of no mean ability, but, unfortunately for himself, after gaining "golden opinions" in this quarter (for he originally hailed from Manchester) he did not keep up the perfect condition necessary for a competitor in aquatics, and was beaten during the present year by young Clasper of Newcastle, and Campbell of Glasgow. Campbell was one of the celebrated Duffy's crew, which were very successful. After

being several years in McNeill's establishment, he entered the lists against Carroll, whom, as we have remarked, he vanquished.

Brown was trained by Robert Chambers, of Newcastle; Carroll, by Harry Clasper of Newcastle; and Campbell by John McKinney, of Richmond. Betting: Even on Brown against the field; even on Carroll; and 6 to 4 against Campbell. The result of the race had the effect of causing several hundred pounds to change hands - the "knowing ones" betting heavy in favour of Brown.

A special steamer was hired for the occasion, on board of were the Umpires, Messrs. Clasper, Chalmers, and McNeill, and the Referee, Captain Brown of the Queen Victoria Loch Lomond Steamer, and a large concourse of gentlemen interested in the contest.

All the preliminaries having been arranged, and after two false starts, the boats went off in beautiful style, Brown and Carroll, who were on either side of Campbell, taking a slight lead. On nearing Inchmurrin, Campbell improved his speed, and got ahead of his opponents, the boats continuing bow for bow for a short distance. As they reached the Island, Campbell put on a most beautiful and determined "spirit" and despite the efforts of his opponents, he shot ahead, and was a length in front, in less time than we take to note the fact. He continued to improve his distance, and although Brown, who was second, and Carroll, made energetic attempts to regain their lost ground, their efforts were unsuccessful. Carroll, in rounding the above point, pulled somewhat out of his course, and lost way; but by this time, it was evident to all that the race was decided. The men continued to pull with spirit, but Campbell gradually widened his distance between Brown, as did the latter between Carroll, and when the winning-post was reached, Campbell was at least 150 yards ahead of Brown, the same distance being between the latter and Carroll. The race was pulled in 23 minutes and 40 seconds. Thus ended a contest in favour of a Scotchman over opponents of the sister countries, which, as we have already said, has excited more interest in aquatic circles in this quarter than any event of a similar kind. Campbell belongs to Alexandria, a village situated little more than a mile from the scene of the contest, and the enthusiasm manifested in the district was general. The winning boat was built in the boat-building establishment of Mr J. B. McNeill, Glasgow.

Six months later, the prize money had risen to £200, and this is how Bell's Life reported this famous piece of action in its edition of 25 July 1858:

THE GREAT SKIFF RACE BETWEEN HARRY CLASPER AND ROBERT CAMPBELL FOR £200 AND THE CHAMPIONSHIP OF SCOTLAND

This great event in the aquatic world came off on Thursday last, under the most favourable auspices. The attendance of spectators was very large, for the interest taken in the match arose from various causes. The Championship of Scotland being the stake at issue, the national spirit was called into play, and a feeling of anxiety prevailed lest, perhaps, the best sculler that Scotland had ever produced should have to succumb to the science of a stranger. With that feeling of anxiety, however, was mingled a feeling of confidence and, although Clasper had a slight call in the betting wherever layers were to be found, there were takers also. It was thought - and there was good reason for the thought - that, great as was the fame of the aquatic hero of Newcastle, the youth, strength, and scientific acquirements of the present champion of Scotland should enable him to pull through with even more formidable antagonist; but the result proved that those who held these expectations had been very much in error.

Before describing the race, itself, we will give a brief description of the previous performances of the men. We will commence with Harry Clasper. Clasper was born in the year 1810, so that he is at present 48 years of age, and his name has been known in aquatic circles for a period of 23 years. He has rowed upon almost every river between the Thames and the Clyde, where aquatic entertainments are in anyway encouraged, and has contested, with varied success, against the ablest rowers of the South, both as a sculler and also in the celebrated four-oar, manned by the brothers known in the world as the "Clasper Crew." It was Clasper who first introduced the principle of out-riggers to boats intended for racing purposes, and the old-fashioned wager wherry is a thing now almost unknown.

Robert Campbell is some 15 years younger than his veteran antagonist, and his career, though short, has been a brilliant one. He is now in his 34th year, and his rowing weight is 10st. 10lb. His first public appearance in the aquatic world was in 1857, on the Clyde, when he

defeated John Carrol easily, the stakes being £10 a side. In the same year at the Glasgow Regatta, he defeated John Carrol and Wm. Taylor, of Newcastle; and last autumn he rowed for the championship of Scotland against John Carrol and Wm. Brown. The match took place on Loch Lomond, the stakes being £50 a side, and was won easily and in good style by Campbell. On that occasion, Brown was trained by Harry Clasper, and Campbell by John Mackinney, of London. In February 1858, W. Brown again contended for £50 a side, from Dumbarton to Howling, and Campbell again was successful, Brown being then trained by Clasper, and Campbell by Mackinney. From that match arose another between the two trainers. Clasper and Mackinney themselves, which was to have come off on the same course, but it came to no-thing, Mackinney being compelled by illness, it was alleged, to pay forfeit.

The rising fame of Campbell having attracted the attention of Clasper, the veteran challenged him to row a race for £100 a side and the championship of Scotland, and hence the match which we this day have to record Campbell, who has been for the last three weeks at Loch Lomond, taking his breathings under the superintendence of George Drewitt of Chelsea, rowed in boat built by Mr J. B. McNeil, her length being 33 feet and weight about 29lb. not including the weight of the rowlocks. Clasper arrived in Glasgow on Wednesday week, having, as we understand, not gone through any lengthened course of training, and many of his friends expressed some anxiety lest his four-oared race with the Taylors would have interfered in some respect with his sculling. He rowed in a boat of his own construction which is said by his friends to be one of the best he ever built. The dimensions are-length 33 feet, breadth 10 inches, height of steer-post 2 inches, and weight 33lb.

In consequence of the necessity of catching the tide at the ebb, the start was fixed at ten o'clock, and the weather being very fine for some time before that hour, the river presented a very animated appearance. The Petrel and Emperor, and three other steamers had brought down a considerable number of spectators from Glasgow; and a crowd of small boats of all descriptions, their oars glittering in the sunlight, were seen skimming over the surface of the Clyde. As the hour for the start drew nigh, speculation was at its height; the friends of Campbell, probably in consequence of a rumour that the veteran could not stay the distance, adventuring their money more freely on their favourite. As the men came

slowly to the post their condition and form were closely scanned. The condition in which Clasper appeared at the starting point reflects great credit on his trainer; and Campbell, too, looked well and confident.

At about a quarter-past ten an admirable start was effected, both men darting off with lightning velocity, but in a few strokes the nose of Clasper's boat began to show in front, and the veteran shortly after drove his boat clear, and continued to increase his lead until they had pulled about 400 yards, where the Craignish Castle, though hailed by the umpires and referee and ordered to back her engines, continued most reprehensibly to follow so close in the wake of Clasper's skiff that the surge from the paddle-wheels extended to him and for a time retarded his progress. At this period Campbell came up, and for a second or two the skiffs were close together. When Clasper got into smoother water he again shot ahead and regained his former position, improving his lead at every stroke, and rowing well within himself, came in a victor by about 200 yards, thus adding another to his many victories. He pulled on the north and Campbell on the south side of the course. The winning post was a boat bearing the Union Jack, placed about half a mile below Bowling Pier - a distance from the starting point of about four miles. All around, it was a swarm of small boats, numbering, we should suppose, nearly 200, filled with people, who sent up a most enthusiastic burst of cheering, which was also swelled by those on board the steamboats, as Clasper came triumphantly past the winning post, with Campbell, as nearly as we could calculate, between 200 and 300 yards behind. Thus, was decided what, by a numerous class, will be reckoned an event of national importance. After the race the rowers were taken on board, and the steamers with their freights returned to Glasgow. The stakes shall be forwarded to Clasper on Tuesday next.

As a final footnote, the Campbell family had quite a sporting tradition: Robert's younger brother, Colquhoun was also a successful oarsman in the late 1860s; and one of Robert's sons was John Campbell, who played football for South Western and was capped once by Scotland in 1880. Another important character who appears in these stories is James Banks McNeil, Glasgow Boatbuilder and hirer, who is credited with founding the Glasgow Regatta.

A spot of difficulty on the river Clyde

The challenges facing sports clubs in the Victorian era were highlighted in an article from the Glasgow Herald, 25 June 1877. Rowing was a major sport on the river Clyde in the 19th century, with thousands lining the banks for regattas and competitions;

THE GLASGOW ROWING CLUB - DIFFICULTIES

On Friday last the effects of the Glasgow Rowing Club (including two boats, one of which was simply stored in the club-house and the other the private property of a member) were brought to the hammer in a somewhat summary manner. From the information we have received, it would appear that the club was in a state bordering on impecuniosity, or at all events the treasurer was unable to pay the rent of their premises.

Summary steps were threatened to realise, and some ten days ago a letter was, we understand, sent to the treasurer stating in effect that unless the rent, amounting to some-where about 10 guineas or so, was not forthcoming by a certain date the stock-in-trade of the club would be sold by auction. This letter was left in a shop near the club-house, where the treasurer's letters were generally left, but unfortunately, as it is said, the treasurer did not turn up within the given time, and an officer, armed with the proper authority, arrived at the club-house and caused the boats of the club, valued, we are told, at least £30, to be brought out for sale.

As usual at such summary sales brokers are not far distant, and on this occasion one of the "fraternity" had "smelt a rat." The auctioneer asked whether or not there was any member of the rowing club present, but he received no answer; but on putting the question a second time, he was answered in the affirmative. He then asked the member if he was prepared to pay the rent, and a negative reply was given. The sale then went on, and the boats and oars, which were disposed of in lots, were knocked down to a broker for £8 odds. As the story goes, the broker in "turning the penny" sold his bargain within an hour afterwards for £19 odds. One of the private boats thus sold will in all likelihood form the basis of litigation. When the news spread on Friday evening that the stock of the rowing club had changed hands several of the members, who were entirely ignorant of what had been going on, expressed themselves in no measured terms at the apathy of their "friends" who knew of the sale and who in their absence did not come to the rescue.

1856, In December John Hawks Clasper beat John Carrol on the Clyde from Dumbarton to Bowling for £10 a side. He beat Carrol again on the Clyde for £25 a side on the Glasgow Regatta Course. Clasper weighed only 8 stone 3 pounds (52 kg) and was 5 feet 5 inches (165 cm) in height.