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Stride: A History of Competitive
Women's Rowing in Britain, 1945–2000

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PhD 2020

Stride: A History of Competitive
Women's Rowing in Britain, 1945–2000

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of Manchester
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of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of History, Politics and
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University, in collaboration with the
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Henley-on-Thames

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stride, v.: to walk with long or extended steps; figurative: to make progress
(Oxford English Dictionary)

Rowers: you know the drill. You sit on the start line, slide forwards and bury your blades. You look forwards, and suddenly it starts. The first couple of strokes feel slow, and heavy. Once the boat is moving, you scramble for speed, winding it up, and after a few, short pumps of the legs, you start to lengthen out. The boat moves faster and faster, hands, blades, legs, working to keep up. Then comes the call: *stride*. You press the strokes out, longer, harder, looser. You hit your rhythm, and settle in for the long haul. Soon, your legs and lungs will burn; for now, it feels like flying. Stride is a demand, and a response. It is also a feeling.

Abstract

Since the turn of the century, the British women's rowing team has enjoyed unprecedented success and profile. Yet such success belies a more chequered history of female participation in rowing in this country. This is the first academic study to consider the trajectory of competitive women's rowing in Britain. It focuses on the period from 1945 to 2000, with particular interest in international competition and the domestic structures underpinning athletes' engagement with it. It addresses the ways in which historic barriers to female participation in sport, and the wider social subjugation of female needs and ambitions to male ones, continued to manifest in women's rowing throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Using a mixed methodology, juxtaposing archival sources with oral histories, it foregrounds the lived experience of a cohort of women who competed for Great Britain over this period. It makes no claim to a comprehensive account; rather, it advocates for the value of the individual, and necessarily partial, insight that characterises oral history. This thesis contributes to the growing literature pertaining to women's sport in two important ways: firstly, as a close analysis of women's rowing in Britain, and secondly, as a case study of the intersection of gender and sport in social history. It identifies increasing – yet, uneven – individual and collective excellence, ambition and achievement in international rowing, and argues that the alignment of personal and institutional understandings of sport was a driver of fulfilment and of success. It suggests that increased centralisation and funding, notably from the introduction of the National Lottery, created new and different costs to the individual, as well as opportunities.

Thanks and acknowledgements

First, perhaps, we learn to learn, and for the love of learning, I have only my parents to thank. It is my privilege to have parents who are not only loving, but also curious; parents who have unfailingly encouraged and supported my sister and I to follow our passions and interests, however unknown or unexpected; parents who, at a substantial remove from the academy, also love to learn. The warmth, generosity and friendships that I enjoy in our extended family and beyond remain a huge source of strength and happiness. Thank you all, so much.

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I owe a substantial debt of gratitude to these women themselves: the narrators who were able to tell me more about the sport, and what it could mean, than I could have learned anywhere else. I loved hearing your stories. Thank you all for

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Introduction

Rowing is a minor participation sport in Britain, for men and women alike.¹ It remains, however, a high profile, extensively funded Olympic sport, and since 2000, the women's international team has enjoyed unprecedented success.² London 2012 offers the most striking example: having never won an Olympic gold medal before, the women's team won three, making Britain the most successful rowing nation at those Games.³ Domestically, the Women's Eights Head of the River Race, held annually in March and attracting more than 300 crews – almost 3,000 athletes every year – now lays claim to being the largest women's rowing race in the world: a phenomenal increase from the five crews that took to the course for the first time in 1930.⁴ The Oxford and Cambridge Women's Boat Race now takes place on the same course and date as the men's. Henley Women's Regatta is more than thirty years old and now hosts more than 1,500 athletes in twenty-seven events each year. In 2020, Henley Royal Regatta – long the male-only pinnacle of the domestic rowing season – will offer eight open events for women, and sixteen for men.⁵ The 2020 Olympic Games, meanwhile,

¹ Between 2017 and 2018, 0.3 per cent of the population participated in rowing at least twice per month. By comparison, 4.5 per cent did so in football and 10.5 per cent in swimming. Sport England, *Active People Survey*, November 2017–18 (most recent data available at: <https://activelives.sportengland.org/>; last accessed, February 11, 2020).

² For Tokyo 2020, UK Sport awarded a total of £30,524,595 to rowing: more than any other sport (UK Sport, 'Tokyo Olympic Funding Figures', available at: <https://www.uksport.gov.uk/our-work/investing-in-sport/current-funding-figures>; last accessed February 11, 2020).

³ Britain won nine medals in total, four of which were gold; by both metrics, it was the highest performing team.

⁴ 'The Women's Eights Head of the River Race' (available at: <https://www.wehorr.org/>, last accessed February 11, 2020).

⁵ See <https://www.hrr.co.uk/events>; last accessed February 11, 2020. The history of this event is addressed in a wealth of texts, including C. Dodd, *Henley Royal Regatta* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1989) and R.D. Burnell, *Henley Regatta*:

will be the first to offer equal numbers of rowing events for male and female athletes.

Recent advances, however, belie a more chequered history of female participation in competitive rowing in this country. Such participation was located at the intersection of a number of historical anxieties relating to women's social roles and responsibilities, their physical abilities and, distinctly, their participation in sport. The demands of international competition would imbue debates around it with financial and logistical concerns as well as cultural ones. This thesis, then, explores the history of British women competing in rowing in the second half of the twentieth century. It focuses on the experiences of women who rowed for Great Britain in the formalised international competitions that opened up to them from the 1950s: European Championships from 1954, World Championships from 1974 and the Olympic Games from 1976. It is a history of uneven ability, ambition, and provision; a history of compromise and concession; a history of multiple negotiations.

The history of the men's sport in Britain (primarily, in England) has been explored in some depth by rowing historians such as Christopher Dodd, Neil Wigglesworth and Eric Halladay, whose work provides important context for the project at hand despite their lack of focus on women's rowing.⁶ Dodd is a prolific author and

A History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957). While its historic exclusions on the basis of class are given some attention, those pertaining to women are absent, as are critical approaches to the dynamics of power underlying such exclusion.

⁶ E. Halladay, *Rowing in England: A Social History: The Amateur Debate* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); N. Wigglesworth, *The Social History of English Rowing* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1992). C. Dodd, *The Story*

rowing correspondent for the mainstream press and a former editor of *Rowing* magazine, and his writing therefore constitutes both primary and secondary material in this thesis. Wigglesworth and Halladay, both academic authors, explicitly locate their work in a social history framework. They explore constructions and expressions of amateurism in English rowing in depth, and, in challenging the centrality of the south east of England in historical narratives around amateur rowing, make subtle analyses of the ways in which class and geography interacted with the sport. Amanda Schweinbenz laid important analytical and historiographical foundations for this research, examining the administrative machinery of international women's rowing, and the experiences of some women – primarily, administrators – within it.⁷ Her analysis is key to understanding the international landscape that British women would, increasingly, access over the second half of the twentieth century.

of World Rowing (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1992); *Pieces of Eight: Bob Janousek and His Olympians: A Memoir* (Henley-on-Thames: River & Rowing Museum, 2012); *Henley Royal Regatta* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1989); *The Oxford & Cambridge Boat Race* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1983); and H. Matheson and C. Dodd, *More Power: The Story of Jürgen Gröbler: The Most Successful Olympic Coach of All Time* (London: Harper Collins, 2018).

⁷ A.N. Schweinbenz, 'Paddling against the Current: A History of Women's Competitive International Rowing between 1954 and 2003' (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2007); 'Against Hegemonic Currents: Women's Rowing into the First Half of the Twentieth Century', *Sport in History* 30, no. 2 (2010): 309–26; 'Selling Femininity: The Introduction of Women's Rowing at the 1976 Olympic Games', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 5 (2009): 654–72; 'Little Girls in Pretty Shells: The Introduction of Lightweight Women's Events in Competitive International Rowing', *Sport in History* 28, no. 4 (2008): 605–19; 'Conspicuously Absent: An Analysis of the Introduction of Lightweight Women's Rowing into the 1996 Olympic Program', in *Proceedings: International Symposium for Olympic Research* (Lausanne: International Centre for Olympic Studies, 2006), 324–30.

Alison Maitland's 2012 PhD thesis offers a detailed, ethnographic exploration of coach-athlete relationships in the pseudonymous Bethany Rowing Club. Her work does not focus on gender, but engages throughout with issues of power and influence; as such, it offers useful insights into the structural and systemic inequalities experienced by women in a mixed, performance-driven, sporting environment.⁸ It is also eloquent on how the specifics of rowing as a sport influence such inequalities. Claire Parker's MA dissertation views women's club rowing through the lens of social history, focusing on one rowing club between 1920 and 1963: Weybridge Ladies' Amateur Rowing Club (WLARC), an important site of women's rowing at that time.⁹ Its scope is necessarily narrow, and, by contemporary standards, its analysis of gender and its intersection with sport is rudimentary. Nevertheless, it is an academic work that explicitly sought to address a gap in British sporting and social historiography that is only now, some thirty years later, being given greater attention.

As in other women's sports, an extensive library of autobiographies is lacking in women's rowing, with Dame Katherine Grainger and Alison Mowbray as notable exceptions.¹⁰ Most recently, and with direct relevance to this research, is the

⁸ A. Maitland, 'Organisational Culture and Coach-Athlete Relationships: An Ethnographic Study of an Elite Rowing Club' (PhD thesis, Brunel University, 2012).

⁹ C. Parker, 'The Social History of English Women's Rowing 1920–1963: A Case Study of Weybridge Ladies' Amateur Rowing Club' (MA Dissertation, University of Warwick, 1993).

¹⁰ K. Grainger, *Dreams Do Come True: The Autobiography* (London: André Deutsch, 2013); reprinted under the titles of *Katherine Grainger: The Autobiography* (2016) and *Katherine Grainger: My Autobiography* (2017); A. Mowbray, *Gold Medal Flapjack, Silver Medal Life: The Autobiography of an Unlikely Olympian* (Leicester: Troubadour, 2013). While not an autobiography, Annie Vernon's experiences of high performance rowing underpin her *Mind*

online *Rowing Story* platform, authored and edited by Helena Smalman-Smith.¹¹ The site was launched in 2017 and aims to build an encyclopaedic record of the sport, listing all the women who have rowed for Great Britain since 1954, and offering accounts of particular years and biographies of individual athletes. New content is regularly being published at the time of writing this thesis. It is a valuable and freely available resource, written for the rowing community and presented in an accessible format. There are evident parallels between the aims of *Rowing Story* and the scope of this research. Yet, as an academic history, this thesis is less interested in the minutiae of training, selection and competition than in the social and cultural meanings attached to the sport, and to their intersection with gender.

This thesis does not dwell on the important developments in women's rowing that took place in Britain from the end of the nineteenth century and, importantly, in the 1920s and 1930s. Research into these developments has been published separately, in two single-authored journal articles and one book chapter.¹² 'From Pleasure Rows and Plashing Sculls to Amateur Oarswomanship' explicates and interrogates the cultural meanings ascribed to rowing from the late-nineteenth

Games: Determination, Doubt and Lucky Socks: An Insider's Guide to the Psychology of Elite Athletes (London: Bloomsbury Sport, 2019).

¹¹ *Rowing Story* (available at: <https://rowingstory.com/>, last accessed: February 10, 2020).

¹² L. Taylor, 'From Pleasure Rows and Plashing Sculls to Amateur Oarswomanship: The Evolution of Women's Amateur Rowing in Britain', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35, no. 14 (2018): 1490–506; 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963: A Prosopographical Approach', *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (2018): 307–30; 'Mrs K.L. Summerton: The Forgotten Founder of the Women's Amateur Rowing Association?', in N. Piercey and S.J. Oldfield eds., *Sporting Cultures: Global Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019), 166–80.

century to the interwar period, as well as the specifics of its practice in a small selection of locations, and the different connotations of sweep-oar rowing and sculling.¹³ ‘The Women’s Amateur Rowing Association, 1923–1963’ is important in tracking administrative change in women’s rowing by means of understanding its administrators, and emphasises the need for greater critical attention to the ways in which gender interacts with amateurism. ‘Mrs K.L. Summerton’ also approaches the administration – and administrators – of the sport in the interwar years, interrogating the aims and objectives of the Women’s Amateur Rowing Association (WARA) itself as well as questioning the trustworthiness of archival sources considered in isolation.

British sporting cultures: amateurism, class and gender

Amateurism is a thematic cornerstone of this research. The roots and manifestations of amateur ideology and practice in British sport have been explored extensively, at least with reference to men.¹⁴ Around a relatively

¹³ In sweep-oar rowing, each athlete in a crew uses one oar (or ‘blade’) to move the boat. It is an asymmetric motion, thus, cannot be pursued alone. The sweep-oar boats involved in international competition are the pair, four, and the eight. In sculling, each athlete uses two ‘sculls’ simultaneously in a symmetrical motion. As such, it can be pursued individually. It is contested internationally in single, double, and quadruple sculls.

¹⁴ L. Allison, *Amateurism in Sport: An Analysis and a Defence* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001) is an important exposition of amateur sport as a sporting and social construct. See also D. Day and T. Carpenter, *A History of Sports Coaching in Britain: Overcoming Amateurism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); N. Baker, ‘Whose Hegemony? The Origins of the Amateur Ethos in Nineteenth Century English Society’, *Sport in History* 24, no. 1 (2004): 1–16; D. Porter, ‘The End of the Amateur Hegemony in British Sport, c. 1960–2000’, *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 43, no. 2 (2011): 69–80; R. Gruneau, “‘Amateurism’ as a Sociological Problem: Some Reflections Inspired by Eric Dunning”, *Sport in Society* 9, no. 4 (2006): 559–82; S. Wagg, “‘Base Mechanic Arms’? British Rowing, Some Ducks and the Shifting Politics of Amateurism”, *Sport in History* 26, no. 3 (2006): 520–39.

consistent core of values – the rejection of material gain, overtraining and specialisation, good sportsmanship, ‘love of the game’, and the aesthetics of sport, for example – amateurism encapsulated a range of ideals and practices. Indeed, as Day and Carpenter have observed, ‘amateurisms’ in the plural may be the more appropriate term.¹⁵ Allison’s analysis usefully draws on how amateur sport evolved and adapted in the latter decades of the twentieth century, and its relative decline from the 1960s onwards, a trend that Porter has also analysed in some detail.¹⁶ The understanding of this period as one in which amateur norms, values and practices were interrogated and reformulated is fundamental here – not least, because of their intersection with gender and gendered social norms in Britain.

Allison, importantly, advocated for an understanding of amateurism as being anchored in motivation. Its defining characteristics, he argued, pertained more to individual psychology than to outward signs of practice and competition: ‘a human activity is amateur in so far as it is chosen in order to enrich experience and that choice is not coerced by economic or social forces’.¹⁷ Such an interpretation allows understandings of amateur norms and values to sit alongside evidence of some amateurs undertaking extensive training and coaching, with a clear interest in winning, that Day, for example, has brought to the fore.¹⁸ It also offers an explanation for the difficulties facing organisations that attempted to use amateur

¹⁵ Day and Carpenter, *A History of Sports Coaching in Britain*, 24.

¹⁶ Allison, *Amateurism in Sport*, 165–70; Porter, ‘The End of the Amateur Hegemony in British Sport’.

¹⁷ Allison, *Amateurism in Sport*, 10.

¹⁸ D. Day, ‘Massaging the Amateur Ethos: British Professional Trainers at the 1912 Olympic Games’, *Sport in History* 32, no. 2 (2012): 157–82.

definitions as a mechanism to manage and control a sport: how could a governing body legislate on the grounds of individual psychology and internal motivation? Oral histories offer important insight in this regard: narrators reflected extensively on the meanings they attached to sport, and how these intersected with their motivation and their practice.

Amateur sport as constructed in the nineteenth century was a masculine pursuit, explicitly concerned with the masculine ends of courage, teamwork, and gentlemanly sociability. Allison characterises sexual prejudice in amateurism as inherent but 'purely contingent': the principles of amateurism, he suggests, could apply equally to women and to men had they shared the same social status and permissions.¹⁹ Such abstraction is unhelpful in developing understandings of amateur sport for women. Social status and permissions were intrinsic to male amateurism, too, largely manifested in issues of class; and in developing middle- and upper-class men towards leading men, in business, politics or public service, it was, implicitly, geared towards helping them to lead – or at least, to manage – women.²⁰ The broader social agenda and objectives embedded within it would

¹⁹ Allison, *Amateurism in Sport*, 71.

²⁰ B. Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997) and 'Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu's Analysis of Class, Gender and Sexuality', *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 2 (2004): 19–33. In the latter, Skeggs cites and interrogates Bourdieu's claim that 'sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon is from its acidity: a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the two sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions'. See also J. Acker, 'Women and Social Stratification: A Case of Intellectual Sexism', *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 4 (1973): 936–45; T. Koditschek, 'The Gendering of the British Working Class', *Gender & History* 9, no. 2 (1997): 333–63.

also need to be reconfigured if they were to be legitimate and respectable for women.²¹ Logically, then, they would cease to carry the same meaning.

A number of women's amateur sporting organisations that emerged in the interwar period, including the WARA in 1923 and the Women's Amateur Athletics Association (WAAA) in 1922, explicitly adopted the amateur label. Yet it is too simplistic to argue that in doing so, women simply adopted established male discourses and values. In pursuing the logic of viewing amateurism as a historical product, infused with contemporaneous values and assumptions, it could not have been seamlessly adopted by women. These organisations were the product of distinct individuals, operating in a distinct social climate, with distinct values and concerns.²² This has largely been overlooked in the consideration of amateur women's sporting organisations, culture and practice, with the exception of Joanne Halpin, whose work on women's hockey advocates for more subtle analysis.²³ The issue is particularly pertinent in rowing, given the historic

²¹ On women leading women, see J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War Continuities of Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); C. Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928–64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

²² As distinct from amateur sport, Langhamer highlights the increasing popularity of active leisure pursuits for women, such as rambling and cycling, during the 1920s and 1930s in *Women's Leisure in England, 1920–60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 77–80.

²³ J. Halpin, "'Will You Walk into Our Parlour?': The Rise of Leagues and their Impact on the Governance of Women's Hockey in England 1895–1939' (PhD thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2019); "'Thus Far and No Farther': The Rise of Women's Hockey Leagues in England from 1910 to 1939', *Sport in History* 37, no. 2 (2017): 146–63. Williams has considered the neglect of the working-class female amateur in 'The Most Important Photograph in the History of Women's Olympic Participation: Jennie Fletcher and the British 4 x 100 Freestyle Relay Team at the Stockholm 1912 Games', *Sport in History* 32, no. 2 (2012): 204–30, but does not explicitly question the amateur paradigm itself.

preoccupation with amateur definitions and segregation evident in the men's sport, and the different conditions in the women's. The process of recalibration in women's rowing over time would necessarily differ from men's rowing in practical and ideological ways. While administrative change in the interwar period is out of scope here, understandings of amateur sport, among women, are at its core. Narrators offered more subtle understandings of amateurism and amateur identity than the codified behaviours and exclusions laid out in official regulations.

Permissions and conditions: female leisure and participation in sport

A cluster of works written in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, including seminal contributions by Patricia Vertinsky, Jennifer Hargreaves and Kathleen McCrone, constitute a robust and enduring critical platform for the analysis of women's sport and female physical culture.²⁴ Jennifer Hargreaves' *Sporting Females*, published in 1993, has been instrumental for scholars engaged with these issues in foregrounding the systematic gender bias and structural, sexual inequalities embedded in sport. Patricia Vertinsky's *The Eternally Wounded Woman* remains the touchstone for considering how women have been culturally defined by weakness and fragility, and understanding the resulting mechanisms of control

²⁴ P.A. Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors, and Exercise in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); J. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London: Routledge, 1993); K.E. McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women 1870–1914* (London: Routledge, 1988). See also S. Cahn, *Coming on Strong. Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Women's Sport* (Oxford: Macmillan, 1994); M.A. Hall, *Feminism and Sporting Bodies: Essays on Theory and Practice* (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1996) on more specifically feminist practices and implications of women's sport history.

imposed upon women and the female body.²⁵ McCrone's work on female participation in higher education and women's sport is valuable in analysing the perceived connections between women's physiological and intellectual capacities, the process of challenging such connections, and the importance of universities as respectable sites of sport for women in Britain.²⁶ She also foregrounded the ways in which characteristics of particular sports, and, distinctly, the performance of them, influenced perceptions of their legitimacy.²⁷ Although British schools have not, historically, played a significant role in junior women's rowing, Sheila Fletcher's *Women First* offers valuable insight into female physical culture, and sporting careers for women, in Britain.²⁸

The prominence of Victorian ideologies of sport and understandings of gender in this discussion is indicative of their enduring influence in British sporting culture.²⁹

²⁵ See also B. Harrison, 'Women and Health', in J. Purvis ed. *Women's History: Britain, 1850–1945: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1995), 133–62 on the British context specifically; and H. Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1986) on sexuality and the heteronormative impulse in sporting culture

²⁶ McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women*, 62–4. See also K. McCrone, 'Play Up! Play Up! And Play the Game! Sport at the Late Victorian Girls' Public School', *Journal of British Studies* 23, no. 2 (1984): 97–129; J. McDermid, 'Women and Education', in J. Purvis ed. *Women's History*, 91–110; C.M. Parratt, 'Athletic "Womanhood": Exploring Sources for Female Sport in Victorian and Edwardian England', *Journal of Sport History* 16, no. 2 (1989), 142.

²⁷ See also J.A. Hargreaves, "'Playing like Gentlemen While Behaving like Ladies": Contradictory Features of the Formative Years of Women's Sport', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 2, no. 1 (1985): 40–52; C. Parker, 'Swimming: The "Ideal" Sport for Nineteenth-Century British Women', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 4 (2010): 675–89.

²⁸ S. Fletcher, *Women First: The Female Tradition in English Physical Education, 1880–1980* (London: Athlone Press, 1984). Several oral history narrators trained and worked as PE teachers. Boys' schools, by contrast, are a significant feature of the men's rowing landscape.

²⁹ See for example J.A. Mangan, *A Sport-Loving Society: Victorian and Edwardian Middle England at Play* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); R. Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Yet as scholars including Skillen, Osborne, Duval and Halpin have shown, the interwar period was notable for the extension of more sporting opportunities to women, including to those outside of the privileged walls of private schools, universities and elite private clubs.³⁰ More women played more sport, with more freedom, than in previous years; while the acceptability of women's physical activity and sport remained contested, the conditions imposed upon it were becoming notably less stringent.³¹ Yet there is little evidence of any structural challenge to the patriarchal machinery of sport. As Skillen has argued, understandings of female physical activity as a tool to shape women into more effective wives and mothers continued to compromise the legitimacy of women's sport as a moral, social or physical benefit for the individual herself.³² Sport reflected the broader social emphasis placed on conformity, of girls and women, to relatively conservative norms and aesthetic ideals – conformity explored by Tinkler and Dyhouse, who identify and critique the anxieties provoked by any deviation from it.³³

³⁰ F. Skillen, "'Woman and the Sport Fetish': Modernity, Consumerism and Sports Participation in Inter-War Britain', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 5 (2012), 750–765; C. Osborne and F. Skillen, 'Women and Sport in Inter-War Britain', in J. Hargreaves and E. Anderson eds., *Routledge Handbook of Sport, Gender and Sexuality* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), 48–56; L. Duval, 'The Development of Women's Track and Field in England. The Role of the Athletic Club, 1920s–1950s', *The Sports Historian* 21, no. 1 (2001): 1–34; Halpin, "'Thus Far and No Farther'".

³¹ I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'The Making of a Modern Female Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Interwar Britain', *Women's History Review* 20, no. 2 (2011): 299–317.

³² Skillen, "'Woman and the Sport Fetish'", 753–5.

³³ P. Tinkler, 'Cause for Concern: Young Women and Leisure, 1930–50', *Women's History Review* 12, no. 2 (2003): 233–62; C. Dyhouse, 'Was There Ever a Time When Girls Weren't in Trouble?', *Women's History Review* 23, no. 2 (2014): 272–4.

Gendered dynamics of power, and the historic control and oppression of women by men, are important in considering how female choices and agency have been limited by the social, political and economic forces and structures that surround them. Kent's *Gender and Power in Britain*, which traces the theme from the seventeenth century to the twentieth, is illuminating in this regard, exploring the ways in which political change over time has repeatedly reinforced and relied upon defined gender roles that have been detrimental to women.³⁴ Spanning such an extended period, her work also evidences a cycle of positive change for women being followed by a significant, corresponding, negative change: a recurrent pattern of progress and backlash.³⁵ Holloway carefully considers the ways in which the patterns and structures of paid employment have served to reinforce the subjugation of women in all spheres, not only the professional, since the middle of the nineteenth century.³⁶ An important aspect of her work is her focus on the double burden borne by women of domestic and professional labour, a recurrent theme in works addressing the systemic inequalities faced by women. Class recurs in these works as a key determinant of public and private behaviours and discourses, and an important influence on their legitimacy. Martin Pugh's *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain Since 1914*, meanwhile, provides useful insight into the ways in which women have sought meaningful social and political change, and to what extent they have been successful.³⁷ It is noteworthy

³⁴ S.K. Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640–1990* (London: Routledge, 1999).

³⁵ The recurrence of this pattern is central to S. Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1992).

³⁶ G. Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005). See also C. Briar, *Working for Women?: Gendered Work and Welfare Policies in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: UCL Press, 1997).

³⁷ M. Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain Since 1914* 3rd ed. (London: Palgrave, 2015).

that the preface to the third edition, published in 2015, reflects on performance in international sport as one of the key areas of change for women since the first edition, which had been published in 1991.

This thesis focuses on the pursuit of competitive sport, but understands time for leisure, broadly conceived, as a prerequisite of sporting participation at any level. It views women's time as more contingent upon the needs of others than men's, and, consequently, the simplistic binary of paid work and leisure as more easily applicable to male lives than to female ones.³⁸ Claire Langhamer advocated for a more nuanced understanding of what leisure might mean for women in *Women's Leisure in England*. Taking up the discursive mantle laid down some years earlier by Rosemary Deem in *All Work and No Play?*, she explored the limitations of attempting to locate female behaviour in masculine structures and patterns of leisure.³⁹ 'A preoccupation with certain forms of leisure', Langhamer argued, 'has led historians actively to ignore or misrepresent women's experiences';⁴⁰ an essential and incisive observation, bound to one of her central conclusions, that life stage represented the most important determinant of women's leisure. Yet in the context of research focused on formal participation in sport, which required conformity to a schedule over which the individual might

³⁸ C.M. Parratt, 'Little Means or Time: Working-Class Women and Leisure in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 15, no. 2 (1998): 22–53. See also S. Todd, 'Young Women, Work and Leisure in Interwar England', *The Historical Journal* 48, no. 3 (2005): 789–809; H. Lenskyj, 'Measured Time: Women, Sport and Leisure', *Leisure Studies* 7, no. 3 (1988): 233–240.

³⁹ C. Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England, 1920–60* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); R. Deem, *All Work and No Play?: A Study of Women and Leisure* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ Langhamer, *Women's Leisure in England*, 1.

have little control, the agility of female leisure may be immaterial. Participation in international rowing relied upon the guarantee of time: a privilege that has not historically been accorded to women.

Women in sport and sport history

This research is predicated on an understanding of sport as a gendered social and cultural construct, and an important site of sexual inequality.⁴¹ As such, it considers sport as a valuable context in which to explore social values, behaviours and power relations, especially as they pertain to sex and gender. Writing in 2020, this is neither a new, nor a particularly controversial, position. Yet the historiography of sport remains dominated by male narratives, especially in Britain: a problem identified by Carol Osborne and Fiona Skillen in 2010, and reiterated by them, albeit with more optimism, in 2015.⁴² Jean Williams has written extensively on women's football, as well as addressing the structural and systemic inequalities in sport, and – distinctly – in the writing of sport history.⁴³

⁴¹ Hargreaves makes this case most comprehensively in *Sporting Females*. See also J. Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture: A Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

⁴² C.A. Osborne and F. Skillen, 'The State of Play: Women in British Sport History', *Sport in History* 30, no. 2 (2010): 189–95; 'Forum: Women in Sport', *Women's History Review* 25, no. 5 (2015): 655–61. On the limitations and opportunities within sport history and its historiography, see P. Delheye ed., *Making Sport History: Disciplines, Identities and the Historiography of Sport* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

⁴³ J. Williams, *A Contemporary History of Women's Sport, Part One: Sporting Women, 1850–1960* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); *A History of Women's Football: Gender, Power and the Rise of a Global Game* (London: Routledge, 2002); *A Game for Rough Girls?: A History of Women's Football in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2003); 'The Fastest Growing Sport? Women's Football in England', *Soccer & Society* 4, no. 2–3 (2003): 112–27; 'The Revival of Women's Football in England from the 1960s to the Present' (PhD thesis, De Montfort University, 2002). Williams' work on sport heritage, and how this intersects with women's sport, is also of relevance; see 'Introduction: Women's Football and the #MeToo Movement 2019', *Sport in History* 39, no. 2 (2019): 121–9.

Skillen engages with the development of women's sport, and changing social constructions of the female body in the interwar period, as well as more contemporary issues in sports policy and events.⁴⁴ Osborne's work on gender and climbing is important both for exploring female participation in a sporting activity not confined to a pitch, court or track, and for foregrounding the ways in which male authority pervades the academic practice of history, and affects perceptions of its validity. Not only, she argues, does 'male achievement and endeavour invariably [take] absolute precedence, but it does so from a basis of largely unquestioned circumstances of production and reproduction of knowledge': an epistemological polemic that this thesis directly addresses.⁴⁵

Osborne and Skillen's consideration of oral history within the discipline, and in developing sporting heritage, has particular resonance with a research project that uses oral history and is conducted in partnership with a museum.⁴⁶ Their optimism in 2015 has been at least partially justified by the efforts of a growing number of scholars working on increasingly diverse topics.⁴⁷ Research into British

⁴⁴ F. Skillen, "Woman and the Sport Fetish"; *Women, Sport and Modernity in Interwar Britain* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013); "It's Possible to Play the Game Marvellously and at the Same Time Look Pretty and Be Perfectly Fit": Sport, Women and Fashion in Inter-War Britain', *Costume* 46, no. 2 (2012): 165–79; "When Women Look Their Worst": Women and Sports Participation in Interwar Scotland' (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2008). On contemporary issues in sport, see for example F. Skillen and M.L. McDowell, 'The Edinburgh 1970 British Commonwealth Games: Representations of Identities, Nationalism and Politics', *Sport in History* 34, no. 3 (2014): 454–75.

⁴⁵ C.A. Osborne, 'Gender and the Organisation of British Climbing c.1857–1955' (PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 2005).

⁴⁶ F. Skillen and C. Osborne, 'It's Good to Talk: Oral History, Sports History and Heritage', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1883–98.

⁴⁷ See C. Adams, and M. Cronin, 'Sport and Oral History', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 36, no. 13–14 (2019): 1131–5.

women's sport history is expanding in breadth and depth: Rafaelle Nicholson and Joanne Halpin, for example, have made important contributions to the discipline through historical treatments of cricket and hockey respectively; Samantha-Jayne Oldfield has begun to address the administration of netball, and Lydia Furse is developing a social and cultural history of women playing rugby union.⁴⁸ Yet much of this work continues to rely on established investigative and interpretive frameworks. Jean Williams has criticised the tendency to view women's motivations and behaviours as determined by men and male influence, and the treatment of women as a homogenous, heteronormative group: both relatively common threads in histories of women, sporting and otherwise.⁴⁹ Osborne and Skillen, distinctly, identify a hierarchy of historical merit that, structurally, retards the progress of the discipline as it pertains to women. As well as the assumed priority of political, economic or legal histories over those of sport and leisure,⁵⁰ they highlight that women's sport has largely been interpreted through systems and practices that resemble those of men. Populating a predefined sporting

⁴⁸ R. Nicholson, *Ladies and Lords: A History of Women's Cricket in Britain* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019); "Like a Man Trying to Knit"? Women's Cricket in Britain, 1945–2000' (PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2015); "Our Own Paper": Evaluating the Impact of Women's Cricket Magazine, 1930–1967', *Women's History Review* 24, no. 5 (2015): 681–99; 'Who Killed Schoolgirl Cricket? The Women's Cricket Association and the Death of an Opportunity, 1945–1960', *History of Education* 41, no. 6 (2012): 771–86. Halpin, "Will You Walk into Our Parlour?"; "Thus Far and No Farther"; S.J. Oldfield, L. Taylor and D. Day, 'Spreading the Word: British Sportswomen and the International Diffusion of Sport', in M. Derks ed., *Building Bodies: Transnational Historical Approaches to Sport, Gender and Ethnicities: Yearbook of Women's History* 38 (Hilversum: Verloren, 2019), 41–54; L.J. Furse, 'Barrette: Le Rugby Féminin in 1920s France', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 36, no. 11 (2019): 941–58 (her PhD thesis, from De Montfort University, is forthcoming).

⁴⁹ J. Williams, 'Introduction', *A Contemporary History of Women's Sport*, 1–24.

⁵⁰ Osborne and Skillen, 'The State of Play'.

historiography with women, and women's sporting histories, then, is a valuable endeavour, but not a radical one.⁵¹

This thesis is susceptible to both critiques. It is organised around women's access to rowing clubs, their training and competition in traditional formats, and their introduction to the previously male-only international rowing circuit. It views points of comparison with (and divergence from) the men's sport as productive lines of enquiry. It is interested in their relationships with men, and their negotiation of domestic responsibilities and professional and sporting careers.⁵² Yet, in reflecting on the experiences of individual women, it resists and challenges understandings of women as a homogeneous group, and emphasises how contingent – on how many factors – each life in sport had been. For the same reason, it does not draw directly on feminist theoretical frameworks, nor does it prioritise histories of feminism in examining social and sporting context. Explicit engagement with feminist ideology or activism was absent from oral history accounts: a notable absence, but by no means a unique one.⁵³ Oral historians listening to women who do not, in the space of the interview, engage with feminism face difficult critical choices: an issue directly addressed by Katherine

⁵¹ Osborne and Skillen, 'Forum: Women in Sport', 655–61.

⁵² On the ways in which female 'careers' differ structurally from men's, see S. Spencer, *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Spencer defines female careers as 'a life pattern [...] a progression through life which can include time spent in and out of the workplace', challenging the androcentrism of more widely accepted definitions based purely on paid activity outside of the home.

⁵³ Nicholson encountered a similar silence in the course of research into women's cricket, but elected to address it with more active intervention in interviews and explicit theoretical analysis ("Like a Man Trying to Knit", 3, 299–305).

Borland in “That’s Not What I Said”.⁵⁴ The decision to challenge or to accept such absences depends not only on the thematic interests of the researcher, but also on their position regarding authority in the practice and analysis of oral history.⁵⁵ Here, the explicit narrative interests of the individual have been allowed to take precedence: a pragmatic balance of analytical opportunity and cost, rather than a judgment on the inherent value or validity of either approach.

Methodology

This research is founded upon a mixed methodology, drawing on oral histories and archival research. Having emerged as a more prominent academic methodology in the social sciences in the 1970s, oral history has developed into an established method of historical enquiry.⁵⁶ Key theoretical foundations for oral history were laid by Alessandro Portelli, who staked a fundamental claim for the inherent validity of its ‘difference’ in comparison to other historical sources, and Paul Thompson, who located it within history as a discipline driven by social purpose.⁵⁷ *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair

⁵⁴ K. Borland, “That’s Not What I Said”: Interpretative Conflict in Oral Narrative Research’, in S.B. Gluck and D. Patai eds., *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991), 63–75.

⁵⁵ M. Frisch foregrounded issues of ‘shared authority’ and later, distinctly, ‘sharing authority’ in his edited collection *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990) and ‘Sharing Authority: Oral History and the Collaborative Process’, *Oral History Review* 30, no. 1 (2003): 111–3.

⁵⁶ F. Cosson summarises its development over this time in ‘Introduction to OHJ@50’, *Oral History Journal: The Voice of History 1969–2019* (Egham: Oral History Society 2019), 2–5 (available at: <https://www.ohs.org.uk/journal/ohj-50/>; last accessed February 13, 2020).

⁵⁷ A. Portelli, ‘What Makes Oral History Different’, in R. Perks and A. Thomson eds., *The Oral History Reader* 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 48–58; P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Thomson, provides a wide-ranging survey of established and more recent work, and highlights the diversity and complexity of the field.⁵⁸ Lynn Abrams' combination of theoretical insight and a practitioner's pragmatism in her *Oral History Theory* is particularly valuable resource for the academic researcher.⁵⁹ The feminist practice of oral history is an important methodological and political legacy; Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai's *Women's Words* remains a foundational text in this regard.⁶⁰ *Beyond Women's Words*, edited by Katrina Srigley et al., offers welcome and new contemporary perspectives, simultaneously reaffirming the continued relevance and value of their predecessors' work,⁶¹ while insights into gender arising from another collection – *Bodies of Evidence*, edited by Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramirez – extend beyond the practice of queer oral history.⁶² Despite having no direct thematic relevance, Lana Dee Povitz's reflections on method and the writing of oral history in *Stirrings* resonate quietly behind this research.⁶³

⁵⁸ R. Perks and A. Thomson eds., *The Oral History Reader* 1st ed. (London: Routledge 1998) and 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015). The content as well as the critical framing differs between the two editions.

⁵⁹ L. Abrams, *Oral History Theory* 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

⁶⁰ Gluck and Patai eds., *Women's Words*. Feminist theorists also advocated for the use of oral history as a means of reaching and representing different minority groups more sensitively – and more effectively – than traditional analytical and methodological frameworks allowed. See S.B. Gluck, 'Advocacy Oral History: Palestinian Women in Resistance' in Gluck and Patai eds., *Women's Words*, 205–19.

⁶¹ K. Srigley, S. Zembrzycki, and F. Iacovetta eds., *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practices of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁶² N.A. Boyd and H.N. Roque Ramirez eds., *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶³ L.D. Povitz, *Stirrings: How Activist New Yorkers Ignited a Movement for Food Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

While some critiques of oral history endure, they have lost traction. Proponents of the method, following Portelli, understand the basis of critiques around memory, narrative and the intervention of the researcher not as issues to be overcome, but as some of its most important, and most powerful, characteristics. They understand it as a complex and dialogic product of a complex set of environmental, cognitive, temporal and emotional factors – and as such, better able to explore and express the multiplicity of human experience than many other historical sources. In recent years, oral history has also become established as an important methodological instrument in the sports history toolkit.⁶⁴ Its relative prominence in histories of women compared to those of men, and, to a lesser extent, in ethnic minority and otherwise subordinate social groups, should give some critical pause: to what extent is it understood as an intervention to be used when other sources fail, rather than an active analytical and interpretive choice?⁶⁵ Yet with a greater quantity of oral history scholarship has arrived an increasing impulse towards more creative and theoretical approaches, as articulated

⁶⁴ *The International Journal of the History of Sport* addressed this in depth in a recent special issue: 'Sport and Oral History 1', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 36, no. 13–14 (2019). The use of oral history in sport history, and its connection to sports heritage – pertinent here, given the relationship with the River & Rowing Museum – were addressed by Skillen and Osborne in 'It's Good to Talk'.

⁶⁵ See M. Maynard, 'Methods, Practice and Epistemology' in M. Maynard and J. Purvis eds., *Researching Women's Lives From a Feminist Perspective* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 10–26. J. Hall, 'An Oral History of England International Rugby Union Players, 1945–1995' (PhD thesis, De Montfort University, 2018) offers one example to the contrary. Skillen and Osborne note the 'pragmatic' use of oral history as a 'recurring theme' in 'It's Good to Talk', 1892–3. Oral history has been deployed extensively in North America and Australia to address indigenous communities. Amerdeep Panesar's forthcoming PhD thesis on South-Asian cricket in England, out of the University of Leicester, will explore the sporting experiences of men within an ethnic minority community in Britain.

recently by Booth and Thorpe.⁶⁶ There are more reasons to be optimistic about its potential to decentre authority and power in the writing of history than to be concerned at the lack of scholarship pertaining to white, middle-class men.

Oral history narrators were recruited for this research opportunistically, with only one basic qualifying criterion: to have rowed for Great Britain at a women's European or World Championship event, or the Olympic Games.⁶⁷ Several of these had continued into administrative and coaching roles, and as such offered reflective insights into the mechanics of the sport, as well as their athletic experiences. Although presented here as transcribed quotations, I have approached oral histories as, distinctly, oral (and, aural) sources.⁶⁸ The recordings will, in due course, be deposited into the archives of the River &

⁶⁶ See for example D. Booth and H. Thorpe, 'Form and Performance in Oral History (Narratives): Historiographical Insights from Surfing and Snowboarding', and G. Osmond, and M.G. Phillips, 'Yarning about Sport: Indigenous Research Methodologies and Transformative Historical Narratives', both in *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 36, no. 13–14 (2019), 1136–56 and 1271–88 respectively; J. Williams, "'We're the Lassies from Lancashire": Manchester Corinthians Ladies FC and the Use of Overseas Tours to Defy the FA Ban on Women's Football', *Sport in History* 39, no. 4 (2019): 395–417; T. Evans, "'Swimming with the Spit": Feminist Oral Sport History and the Process of "Sharing Authority" with Twentieth-Century Female Swimming Champions in Sydney', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no. 8 (2016): 860–79.

⁶⁷ Nineteen narrators were recruited, seventeen of which met these criteria. The other two were male administrators.

⁶⁸ Portelli emphasised the distinct 'orality' of oral history, viewing transcription as a second stage of mediation. Raphael Samuel characterised the process as the 'mutilation' of the spoken word in 'Perils of the Transcript', *Oral History* 1, no. 2 (1972): 19–22. More recently some theorists have attempted to improve the ability of text to capture oral nuances. Abrams cites the work of Dennis Tedlock, for example, who manipulates font and typography to represent some non-verbal detail (*Oral History Theory*, 145–6); see also D. Cameron, *Working with Spoken Discourse* (London: Sage, 2001).

Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, so that they can be listened to by others, not only encountered as textual quotes presented in relative isolation.⁶⁹

The archives of the River & Rowing Museum hold a substantial part of the primary material examined within this thesis, and its library of rowing texts is an invaluable source of published material on the sport over the past century. Yet the historic subordination of women's rowing to men's is clearly evident in this archive. Sources ostensibly catering for both men's and women's rowing contained relatively little detail on the latter, and decisions taken around collection and preservation implicitly prioritised the stuff and stories of men.⁷⁰ Despite some more recent efforts to extend the collection and to address the women's sport in exhibitions, the historic priorities of a conservative male amateur rowing community still shape the contents of the archive and the public galleries.⁷¹ This was also true of the other archives and collections consulted in the course of this research, the most important of which being records held at British Rowing Headquarters in Hammersmith, UK, and at World Rowing Headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland.⁷² Such caveats notwithstanding, more extensive and

⁶⁹ Both the (British) Oral History Society and (North American) Oral History Association position the deposit of oral history recordings in a publicly accessible archive as an important objective for the oral historian, if not a responsibility.

⁷⁰ 'Archives and collections are not innocent but marked by selections, omissions, exclusions, partiality, fragmentation.' N. Moore, A. Salter, L. Stanley and M. Tamboukou, *The Archive Project: Archival Research in the Social Sciences* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 24.

⁷¹ In more recent years, a number of acquisitions have related to the women's sport, and some commentary pertaining to the women's sport has been added to the permanent gallery. In 2019, 'the unbeaten boat' raced by Olympic champions Helen Glover MBE and Heather Stanning OBE was installed in this gallery, along with display addressing 'The Evolution of British Women's Rowing: Sydney 2000 to Tokyo 2020'.

⁷² A list of archives and collections consulted is provided in the 'Sources and Bibliography' section of this thesis.

localised archival research constitutes an important, future line of enquiry in developing a fuller historiography of British women's rowing. The lack of material on the women's sport is relative, rather than absolute.

The critical agenda of this thesis, however, demanded a different approach. The mix of methods is neither purely additive, nor straightforwardly used as a means of triangulating data.⁷³ Archival sources were important in providing information such as names, dates, events, and formal details of administrative change. They also proved to be a rich source of opinion and commentary on the sport, publicly through reports and articles, and, to a lesser extent, privately, through correspondence. This research actively resisted, and resists, the simple deployment of oral history as a means of factual recovery, and oral history narrators were given more discursive space to focus on their experiences rather than on the retrieval of such information.⁷⁴ They brought new information to light, but extracting such information was not the primary aim; indeed, such an aim would run contrary to the 'different credibility' at the heart of Portelli's understanding of oral history.

Instead, this research acknowledges the disparity between understandings of the reliability and, distinctly, the validity of different sources. Mindful of the

⁷³ Summerfield, for example, suggests triangulation should be used to enable more sound judgments around the validity of oral history within a historical record. P. Summerfield, 'Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice', *Miranda: Revue Pluridisciplinaire du Monde Anglophone* 12 (2016): 1–15. Importantly, she distinguishes this from questioning the truthfulness of narrators, aligning with Portelli's argument that oral history – distinct from details within it – cannot be considered false.

⁷⁴ On the rationale and critiques of oral history as a method of historical recovery, see Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 5–6.

characteristics of oral history, it emphasises the need for commensurate critical attention to bias, omission and errors in the written words of the archive. It advocates for the individual and the importance of lived experience within the historical context itself and within its written account in the historiography.⁷⁵ As such, it confronts what is perhaps the most difficult challenge for oral history to address: that is, the extent to which personal accounts can lead to broader reflections on communities, societies and historical moments.⁷⁶ Some theorists position individual memory and narrative as being constructed – and communicated – within a broader social and collective context, arguing this context will infuse into narrators’ language, into the structures and patterns of their stories.⁷⁷ More important to this research, however, is to challenge the impulse to extrapolate and to generalise, and the conviction that the general is inherently more valid than the specific. Rather than using individual accounts to build one master narrative, in revealing particularity and difference, oral history encourages a more iterative and dialogic approach to historical enquiry. Far from a limitation, it is an invitation to practise history with greater subtlety, agility and humility.

⁷⁵ On the problematics of analysing individual experiences within collectives, especially in a feminist context, see M. Jolly, P. Russell, and R. Cohen, ‘Sisterhood and After: Individualism, Ethics and an Oral History of the Women’s Liberation Movement’, *Social Movement Studies* 11, no. 2 (2012): 211–26.

⁷⁶ T. Lummis, ‘Structure and Validity in Oral Evidence’ in Perks and Thomson eds., *The Oral History Reader* 1st ed., 273–83.

⁷⁷ S. Schrager, ‘What is Social in Oral History?’, in Perks and Thomson eds., *The Oral History Reader* 1st ed., 284–91.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured chronologically. Each chapter opens with a brief discussion of the broader social and sporting context, with particular reference to women, to frame and inform the material and analysis that follows. Oral history narrators appearing in each chapter are named in each introductory section, with biographical notes provided in Appendix 2 to avoid the need for repetition. International and domestic narrative threads are woven together differently in each chapter, reflecting the ways in which they were approached by the governing body, and experienced by oral history narrators, at different times. Given that in more recent decades the national team participated more often in a more regular cycle of international regattas and international Championships than in the early part of the period, the analytical return on in-depth consideration of every competition reduced significantly between the 1950s and the 1990s.

The focus is unapologetically trained on the British national team, considering domestic structures and developments in terms of their interaction with the international sport. Somewhat more apologetically, it is dominated by the perspectives of those who came of age as athletes in the south east of England. With regard to regional representation, this reflects the high concentration of rowing activity in the Thames Valley, and the location of the administrative Headquarters and the national squad in London.⁷⁸ The dominance of English narratives, meanwhile, reflects not only the historic composition of the British

⁷⁸ The assumption that such characteristics – sheer volume of athletes and the administrative headquarters – should give the south east of England priority in historical treatments of the sport was heavily criticised by Wigglesworth in *The Social History of English Rowing* and, to a lesser extent, Halladay in *Rowing in England*.

team – which draws on athletes from all the home nations – but also, relatedly, the administrative structures behind it.⁷⁹ Close examination of the sporting and social conditions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and athlete experiences within them, would undoubtedly be a further, valuable contribution to the literature. With no claim to offering a comprehensive view of the sport, nor to having sought a ‘representative sample’ of oral history narrators, however, such examination falls outside of the scope of this work.⁸⁰

Chapter 1, then, considers the process of reviving the domestic sport in the austerity of the post-war period, and the advent of international women’s rowing competition sanctioned by the Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d’Aviron (FISA, now World Rowing) between 1945 and 1960. It draws on the reflections of two oral history narrators: the least of any chapter, a consequence of the number of years elapsed and the relatively small number of women involved in international rowing at this time. Yet this thesis prioritises depth over breadth in its use of oral history, and these women powerfully evoke their experience of a club sport deeply embedded in their local community. Their shock as they arrived on the international stage, discovering a world of rowing that would have been

⁷⁹ As an organisation, British Rowing is responsible for GB Rowing and for rowing in England, with responsibility for the sport’s delivery and development in the home nations devolved to Welsh Rowing, Scottish Rowing and Rowing Ireland. Rowers born in Northern Ireland are eligible for both GB Rowing and Rowing Ireland teams. The links between all these organisations, especially with regard to the pathways into high performance rowing that they offer, have been substantially improved in recent years.

⁸⁰ The notions of a comprehensive account, or of a representative sample, run counter to the epistemological positioning of this research. Summerfield attributes the historical impulse to source representative samples in oral history research to its roots in social science, and argues this impulse has increasingly been tempered (‘Oral History as an Autobiographical Practice’, 3).

inconceivable to them before, is a powerful illustration of how access to new opportunities would also provoke new challenges, and new insecurities.

Chapter 2 positions the years from 1960 to 1972 as a period of 'cautious progression' in the women's sport, despite women participating only sporadically in international competition. It assesses the importance of Britain hosting a European Championship in 1960, for individual athletes and for administrative reasons – notably, the subsequent amalgamation of the WARA into the ARA. It features four oral history narrators, one of whom – Penny Chuter – emerges in the course of the thesis as one of the key protagonists in international rowing coaching and administration, both men's and women's. Chapter 3 offers analysis of more radical changes implemented between 1972 to 1980, the most significant of which being the introduction of a national squad system under Penny as a professional coach. This was a response to the announcement of women's rowing being included on the Olympic programme from 1976: a major shift in the international rowing landscape. The range of views around sport and womanhood expressed by this cohort of seven oral history narrators is a strong indicator of the extent of sporting and social change in this period.

Chapter 4 argues that the women's sport achieved a sense of critical mass between 1980 and 1988. In parallel, it examines an apparent reduction in vociferous challenge to anti-feminist discourse and behaviour at this time: a suggestive coincidence. While there was less evidence of generational divide between the five narrators that feature in this chapter in their practice of the sport, there were marked differences in how they negotiated sexual inequality and

approached their relationships with men, both on and off the water. Finally, Chapter 5 studies the shape of the sport in the years before and after the introduction of National Lottery funding: a paradigm shift in British sport. It necessarily draws on some policy analysis, but, in keeping with previous chapters and the core drive of the thesis, it remains focused on lived experience and broader thematic concerns. Most prominent of these are the sense of receding feminist activism identified in Chapter 4, and, simultaneously, the rise of female leadership in rowing: a provocative incongruity. It is perhaps in this chapter that the lack of a more diverse cohort of oral history narrators is felt most keenly, in part because the national team was drawing more successfully on talent from across England and, albeit to a lesser extent, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. One of the strengths of the cohort – that the majority of narrators had held, or continued to hold, senior roles in sports administration and leadership – is also a limitation. These were agentic, politically minded individuals, articulate and accomplished storytellers. They were, also, practised interviewees, accustomed to speaking on the record; as such, their narratives are of a different tenor.⁸¹

Taken collectively, these chapters offer one, linear account of how the sport of women's rowing developed and adapted, under internal and external pressure, over a period of fifty-five years. Yet narrators' reflections on the social and sporting conditions they lived and competed in were neither linear nor exclusively

⁸¹ Abrams highlights the need for oral history to focus not only on marginalised groups but also on participants in positions of authority and power – 'elite oral history'. Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 161–2. See also A. Seldon and J. Pappworth, *By Word of Mouth: 'Élite' Oral History* (London: Methuen, 1983).

focused on the sport. More fundamentally, then, the thesis explores the lived experience of change in different parts of one small community, and the impact of sport and international representation on individual women's lives. In writing it, I have striven to represent and to share their stories with sensitivity, compassion and respect. It is a work of sport history, but it is not purely a history of rowing. It is, however, wholeheartedly a history of women.

Chapter 1

1945–1960: rowing revival

This chapter explores the revival of women's rowing in Britain after the Second World War, and the advent of formalised, international competition for female rowers from the early 1950s. This new exposure to an international competitive community forced individual athletes and the Women's Amateur Rowing Association (WARA) to consider their sporting practices differently, and initial enthusiasm for these new international endeavours was gradually replaced by more critical self-assessment. The ambition and ingenuity evident in some parts of the women's rowing community was in marked contrast to the comfortable, local outlook in others, the range of perspectives on sporting practice reflecting generational, geographical and social divides. Importantly, while traditional amateur perspectives on the sport retained some currency, they were increasingly challenged. Exposure to foreign practices, and a changing social climate for women in Britain, would prompt questions around the extent to which the sport should adapt and innovate, or to which it should try to preserve its British amateur heritage: a different heritage for women than for men. The WARA, still largely under the control of the same women who had formed it during the interwar years, showed less agency and agility than some of the clubs and athletes under its governance. The debates prompted by the advent of international competition for women explicitly engaged with long-standing anxieties around amateur sporting culture, and over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, men's and women's rowing would both – differently – grapple with how to negotiate competitive aspiration and amateur ideology.

Rita and Valerie feature in this chapter as oral history narrators.

Social and sporting landscape

The Second World War, and return to peace in 1945, had a profound impact on British society. Addison's observation that the main domestic results of war were 'the welfare state, the mixed economy [and] a class structure mitigated by greater economic equality' is illustrative of a fundamental shift in state priorities, underpinned by the 1942 Beveridge Report and the election of a Labour government in 1945.¹ Although too simplistic to claim that the war had – or would – overcome class or gender divides in Britain, there is evidence of a recalibration of understandings of class and relationships between class groups, and some reconfiguration of women's role and status in British society.² During the war, more women had been mobilised into the paid workforce and into historically male roles: given the high levels of employment in the late 1930s, the more significant 'shift was not from housework to paid employment, but from various types of peacetime employment [...] to war work'.³

¹ P. Addison, 'The Impact of the Second World War' in P. Addison and H. Jones, eds., *A Companion to Contemporary Britain, 1939–2000* (London: Blackwell, 2007), 18; D.W. Dean, 'Education for Moral Improvement, Domesticity and Social Cohesion: Expectations and Fears of the Labour Government 1945–51', *Oxford Review of Education* 17, no. 3 (1991): 269–86.

² See for example J. Hinton, *Women, Social Leadership, and the Second World War Continuities of Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); B. Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18–21.

³ See P. Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1989); Addison, 'The Impact of the Second World War'.

Summerfield explores the logical consequence of such a shift, namely that the weight of the double burden borne by women – the pursuit of paid work in addition to the domestic and emotional labour of the home and family – would only increase. ‘If the experience of mobilising women for war shifted the assumptions and ideologies of policy-makers and employers about women and work at all’, she argues, ‘it was in the direction of the idea that women could combine paid and domestic work without damage to industrial productivity and without undermining the concept that their first responsibility was to their homes’.⁴ Greater, if uneven, conformity to conservative concepts of femininity and of women’s position in society at this time was reflected in government policy, which offered evidence of both forward thinking, and sexist nostalgia.⁵ While the Education Act (1944) and Family Allowances Act (1945), for example, both had some positive consequences for women, they also incentivised women to conform to relatively conservative ideals and behavioural norms.⁶ Summerfield’s conclusion – that ‘official policy during the war did little to alter but rather reinforced the unequal position of women in society’ – offers important contextual framing for approaching women’s sport and leisure at this time.⁷

⁴ Summerfield highlights the personal cost to women of legislation that allowed them to participate in limited paid work, and the benefits such participation offered the patriarchy. Summerfield, *Women Workers*, 188.

⁵ See K. Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); M. Pugh, *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain Since 1914* 3rd ed. (London: Palgrave, 2015), 240–242; J. Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 16–26; C. Langhamer; ‘The Meanings of Home in Postwar Britain’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 40, no. 2 (2005): 341–62; C. Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women’s Movement in England, 1928–64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁶ M. Donnelly, *Britain in the Second World War* (London: Routledge, 1999), 24.

⁷ Summerfield, *Women Workers*, 185. Summerfield acknowledged that such a conclusion is ‘quite contrary to the standard interpretation, by men, of the role of the Second World War in the social history of women’. See also S. Brooke,

British state interest in sport remained negligible after World War Two, and it would be several decades before female participation became a distinct policy concern. War, and the period of austerity that followed, inevitably made sport and leisure less pressing concerns for government departments. Yet the formation of the Central Council for Physical Recreation (CCPR) in 1935 had set a precedent for governmental involvement in physical activity, offering an indication that sport and physical activity would gain more political importance over the second half of the twentieth century. Hill argued that 'industrial efficiency and output were the watchwords of the period' after the war, and that while this did not preclude government interest in sport and leisure, it framed the need to invest in leisure as part of building and supporting an efficient workforce. He points to a document drafted by the 1947 Labour Policy Committee entitled 'The Enjoyment of Leisure', which aspired to 'helping the citizens of Britain to live full and varied lives through the different ways of spending leisure'.⁸ It promoted flexible responses to regional preferences and needs and the reduction of class divide, with the implicit understanding that this would create a more productive and resilient workforce. In sport specifically, Nicholson observed an 'unprecedented growth in membership [of various sports] over the decade following 1945, and girls and women fully shared in this boom' – a boom, she argued, that included spectating as well as participating.⁹ This increased interest in spectating may have

'Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s', *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 4 (2001): 773–95.

⁸ J. Hill, "'When Work is Over": Labour, Leisure and Culture in Wartime Britain', in N. Hayes and J. Hill eds., *'Millions Like Us'?: British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 256–7.

⁹ R. Nicholson, "'Like a Man Trying to Knit'?: Women's Cricket in Britain, 1945–2000' (PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2015), 45–6. Nicholson explicitly interrogates Williams, *A Contemporary History of Women's Sport*, here. Addison emphasises the importance of local sports clubs and societies in *Now*

underpinned investment in the 1948 Olympic Games, and the provision of sporting events at Festival of Britain in 1951 – both illustrations of a national commitment to the symbolic power of sport, if not to its ability to meet immediate policy needs.¹⁰

The years before and immediately after 1945 necessarily shaped perceptions of Britain and its relationship with Europe and the rest of the world. Competitive sport, located at the intersection of domestic and international interests, offered an important platform for renewing international relations: an important opportunity to affirm mutual understanding and solidarity between nations and, simultaneously, to offer a relatively safe space for the assertion of political power and values. Britain's hosting of the 1948 Olympics, in a context of extreme austerity, offers a powerful example of the understanding of sport as a unifying force in international relations, albeit an increasingly contested one.¹¹ Men's rowing events at the 1948 Games would be held on the regatta course at Henley, although no women's events would be offered: women's rowing was not included in the Olympic programme until the Montréal Games in 1976. The London Games did however prompt some factions of the British women's rowing community, once more, to lobby for inclusion, and following the Games, in November 1948, it was recorded that one representative

the War is Over: A Social History of Britain 1945–51 (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1975), 119–26.

¹⁰ I. Wilton, "A Galaxy of Sporting Events": Sport's Role and Significance in the Festival of Britain, 1951', *Sport in History* 36, no. 4 (2016): 459–76.

¹¹ D. Bolz, 'Welcoming the World's Best Athletes: An Olympic Challenge for Post-War Britain', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 6 (2010): 1006–28.

urged that the Association should again press for the inclusion of women's rowing [...] it was agreed that the Secretary should consult the Hon. Secretary of the A.R.A. as to the best steps to take.¹²

While such attempts were sporadic and unsuccessful, they offer important evidence of the international awareness and ambition of this community – and indeed, of the strength of conservative male control of sporting institutions like the Olympics.

Women's inclusion in formalised international sport, then, would remain partial and conditional. Yet the contemporaneous impulse towards internationalism in sport, as well as towards increasingly meritocratic and, distinctly, professionalised approaches, identified by Harrison, are visible in women's sport as well as men's.¹³ Kay's observation that between 1948 and 1960, women constituted less than fifteen per cent of the British Olympic team but secured thirty per cent of the medals highlights the strength of their performances relative to their international opponents; an important reminder that the profile of women's sport, in a male dominated environment, may not adequately reflect its status or successes.¹⁴ Although women's rowing in Britain at this time enjoyed neither domestic status nor international success, the increasing acceptance of

¹² Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, November 1, 1948. Sporadic interest in lobbying for this inclusion is recorded from 1926; a letter from Amy Gentry as Honorary Secretary of the WARA its President, Lady Ethel Desborough, described competing at the Olympics as the 'our dearest wish'. Amy Gentry to Lady Desborough, October 3, 1927; copy held in the collection of the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames. WARA Committee meeting minute books from 1923–53 are held at British Rowing Headquarters, Hammersmith, UK.

¹³ See Harrison, *Seeking a Role*, 385–92 on sporting trends over the period.

¹⁴ J. Kay, 'A Window of Opportunity? Preliminary Thoughts on Women's Sport in Post-War Britain', *Sport in History* 30, no. 2 (2010): 196–217.

competitive female sport in Britain, and the greater visibility of high-achieving women within it, is significant.

Wartime rowing

Rowing in Britain did not stop completely during the Second World War for men or women, although there is evidence of substantial disruption to club activities, membership and competition.¹⁵ The wider restrictions and limitations on British consumption more generally were compounded in sport, and Baker argues that 'efforts to overcome practical difficulties were pursued against the background of a vigorous debate over the appropriateness of playing and watching sport'.¹⁶ Resources, both financial and spatial, were scarce. Spaces for sport were destroyed by military action, but also in some cases repurposed by design: while some attempts had initially been made to protect playing fields, for example, increasing priority was given to more immediate needs such as food production.¹⁷ Local amateur sport, which was largely dependent on access to such spaces and facilities, was thus placed in an uncertain position; and, even if the space remained available, there was no guarantee of any necessary maintenance or repairs.¹⁸ In rowing, although the river as a space for sport was largely uncompromised, it depended on equipment and usable access to the river. Clubs

¹⁵ E. Halladay, *Rowing in England: A Social History: The Amateur Debate* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 177.

¹⁶ N. Baker, 'A More Even Playing Field? Sport During and After the War', in Hayes and Hill eds., *Millions Like Us*, 130; M. Taylor, 'Sport and Civilian Morale in Second World War Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 53, no. 2 (2018): 315–38.

¹⁷ Baker, 'A More Even Playing Field?', 130. The Alexander Stadium in Birmingham was initially requisitioned for use by the Home Guard, and subsequently for prisoners of war. Moon, 'A New Dawn Rising', 141–2.

¹⁸ Nicholson, "Like a Man Trying to Knit"?, 44.

and boathouses, like any other sporting premises, would face material difficulties in remaining operational.

In men's rowing, two of the highest profile amateur rowing events in Britain – Henley Royal Regatta and the Oxford and Cambridge University Boat Race – did not take place in their usual form, although alternative competitive meetings were held. The Henley Stewards, for example, decided to 'organise races for schools similar to those during the last war' in place of Henley Royal Regatta.¹⁹ Their desire to maintain some of the sport's traditions within the considerable constraints of war is clear, even if the event would be 'unheralded and unsung, for the authorities were most anxious that big crowds should not gather'.²⁰ Four races between Oxford and Cambridge universities were held between 1939 and 1945, but these were 'regarded by both universities as "unofficial"'.²¹ Even if 'the standard was inevitably low', a columnist in the *Sphere* highlighted the perceived importance of maintaining the tradition: 'it is right to keep such fixtures going, for that keeps us sane. We need all the lighter distraction we can get when life is as grim and earnest as it is.'²² There was considerable contemporaneous criticism of such 'distraction', especially with regard to spectating rather than participating

¹⁹ 'Rowing: No Henley Regatta Next Year', *Scotsman*, December 11, 1939, 9; 'Schools' Henley', *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, July 21, 1944, 52.

²⁰ 'Schoolboys' Henley', *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, July 11, 1941, 30.

²¹ Races were not held on the Putney to Mortlake stretch of the Thames, and competitors were not awarded Blues for their selection. C. Dodd, *The Oxford & Cambridge Boat Race* (London: Stanley Paul & Co, 1983), 11; R.D. Burnell, *The Oxford & Cambridge Boat Race, 1829–1953* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 99–101.

²² Burnell, *The Oxford & Cambridge Boat Race*, 99; 'Boat Race', *Sphere*, February 3, 1940, 131.

in sport, but the idea that it might form a valuable, even necessary, foil to the 'grim and earnest' realities of war also had currency.²³

Aside from these high profile events, there is evidence of more local attempts to offer rowing races, often to raise money for charitable causes and the war effort.²⁴

A number of clubs also identified an important social need for leisure and entertainment. In 1940, for example, at Evesham Rowing Club it was felt that 'competitive rowing would be at a standstill' but that the river might 'come back into favour from the point of view of pleasure-boating'.²⁵ Reflecting the needs of its members, the function of sport and the sports club – and the provision of sport, leisure and recreation more broadly – would be reconfigured during wartime. Later that year, regular Boxing Day 'scratch regattas' on the Tideway and in Richmond were held as usual 'to provide men on leave with an opportunity of competing', while in 1940 'a simple little regatta at Putney' organised by Barclays Bank Rowing Club 'gave much pleasure to oarsmen in the Services and their friends'.²⁶ The claim that 'such affairs as these take no one from work of national importance but do much towards helping us to keep in good heart' reiterates the value of sport in offering some respite from the gravity of war.²⁷

²³ Baker, 'A More Even Playing Field?', 131.

²⁴ The Red Cross was a frequent beneficiary of these events; see for example 'Rowing: Bedford Schools at Oxford', *Bedfordshire Times and Bedfordshire Standard*, July 3, 1942, 1.

²⁵ 'Evesham Rowing Club Not to Hold a Regatta This Year', *Gloucestershire Echo*, March 16, 1940, 1.

²⁶ Clifford Webb, 'As I See Sport', *Daily Herald*, December 20, 1939, 10; 'Back to the Tideway', *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, July 19, 1940, 84. The 'Scratch' racing is a format used when the purpose of racing is primarily for entertainment. Crews are formed at the point of racing, mixing athletes from different clubs and of different levels of ability.

²⁷ 'Back to the Tideway'.

In November 1939, the WARA Committee discussed its wartime 'procedure', including a request for a 'nominal annual subscription' from members, for clubs to provide a point of contact for the WARA for when the war was over, and for any club 'finding itself in difficulty during the war period' to contact its Trustees immediately.²⁸ The minutes record that 'the majority of clubs said they were hoping to carry on as normally as possible', and, although there was no mention of any WARA-organised races, a representative of Alpha Ladies' Rowing Club suggested that 'scratch events should be arranged by the individual clubs, as often as possible'.²⁹ The uncertainty about what might be 'possible' is clear, and the scratch racing format could mitigate the problem of insufficient numbers from individual clubs, and the difficulty in being able to commit in advance. It also suggests that there would be more interest in light-hearted, recreational racing rather than serious inter-club competition.

No decision to cease regular meetings of the WARA was taken in 1939, but it was 1943 before any further minutes were recorded. This 'Emergency Wartime Meeting' in April 1943 was the only meeting of the WARA recorded between November 1939 and October 1945, and despite the urgency implied by the 'emergency' label, it was primarily concerned with fairly mundane issues. These included a 'lengthy discussion' about amateur status, the resignation of one of the officers, and plans for a "Riverside Revels" day' on Whit-Monday of that year,

²⁸ Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, November 8, 1939.

²⁹ Ibid. This was a change to established practice, the WARA ordinarily being responsible for organising the major regattas and head races for its members. 'Women's Amateur Rowing Association: List of Committee and Affiliated Clubs; Constitution, Rules for Regattas and Laws of Boat Racing', 1930, 5. Part of the collection held at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, UK. It is the earliest known Rule Book.

which it was suggested should include ‘an exhibition row of two fours, one crew dressed in old fashioned clothes and the other in modern rowing dress’.³⁰ With no urgent issues recorded, the timing of this meeting suggests that it was prompted by the start of a national conversation about reconstruction rather than internal need: only the previous month, Churchill had presented a four-year plan for reconstruction, aiming to focus British minds on a vision for and of the country after the war.³¹ Although another meeting was proposed for the end of the season, it does not appear to have taken place. Regular WARA meetings would resume at the end of 1945.³²

Rebuilding a women’s rowing community

The cost of reconstruction following World War Two was felt in almost every area of British social life well into the 1950s, with sport and leisure no exception.³³ For the WARA, lack of funds and facilities was not a new problem. It was not an organisation that had needed to learn to ‘make do and mend’, but one that had been under pressure to seek funds and support in order to survive since its inception.³⁴ In October 1945, the balance of funds held by the WARA after the

³⁰ Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, April 28, 1943. While this event did take place, including races for women in fours, there is no evidence of the proposed exhibition row. ‘Whitsun Riverside Revels: Hammersmith’s Stay-at-Home Entertainments’, *West London Observer*, June 18, 1943, 5.

³¹ See Addison, *Now the War is Over*, 227; Donnelly, *Britain in the Second World War*. The Women’s Amateur Athletic Association appears to have been similarly prompted to action: after the outbreak of war, only occasional meetings were held until March 31, 1943, after which time they took place on a monthly basis. Moon, *A New Dawn Rising*, 139–140.

³² The first meeting recorded after the war was on October 26, 1945.

³³ See D. Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945–51* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

³⁴ ‘Make Do and Mend’ was the title of a popular pamphlet issued by the British Ministry of Information, which aimed to equip and encourage women to do just that, in light of rationing and other limitations posed by war. WARA Committee

war was recorded as just over seventy-three pounds and fifteen shillings, a balance largely raised by fundraising drives in 1938 and 1939.³⁵ Even prior to the war, many women's rowing clubs had been small, independent groups that formed and easily dissolved, hiring equipment and facilities as required.³⁶ Thus, while a 'warm welcome' was extended to the new clubs that had joined since 1939, at the first meeting of the WARA after the war only one of the attendees represented a club that had not been documented previously: Hoover Women's Boat Club, which does not appear in any subsequent documentation.³⁷ Administrative records, however, are incomplete and inconsistent. Sporadic club listings, attendees named in minutes of WARA Committee Meetings, and clubs named in race results, offer only a partial record of all the clubs in operation.³⁸ Such sources do not, therefore, offer a conclusive assessment of the size of the

Meeting minutes regularly recorded the need for fundraising initiatives towards particular purposes.

³⁵ Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, October 26, 1945.

³⁶ T. Koch, 'Good Times in a Rat Infested Shack – Tom Green's Boathouse', *Hear The Boat Sing*, March 24, 2014, explores this issue by considering one of the boathouses that supplied boats and equipment to a number of women's clubs (available at: <https://heartheboatsing.com/2014/03/24/good-times-in-a-rat-infested-shack-tom-greens-boathouse/>, last accessed January 20, 2020). Neil Wigglesworth, *The Social History of English Rowing* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 157–60 offers more detailed analysis focusing on male clubs.

³⁷ Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, October 26, 1945. This club appears to have been attached to Hoover Ltd., then based in Middlesex. On sport connected to professional workplaces, with some specific reference to women, see N. Robertson, 'The Business of Leisure: Sport, Labour and Co-Operation in Post-War Britain', *Labor History* 55, no. 5 (2014): 638–53.

³⁸ With the exception of the 1930 Rule Book, full lists of affiliated clubs were not published by the WARA until the 1956 *Almanack*. The 1930 Rule Book names twenty-four clubs in print, but has been annotated by hand, without a record of the date, including striking through eleven of the club names. The 'List of Clubs Affiliated to the Women's Amateur Rowing Association', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1956, 36, names forty clubs.

WARA's membership before and after the war so much as indicative comment on the scale and practices of the women's sport at the time.³⁹

The revival of women's rowing after the Second World War required renewed efforts to drive participation and engagement in the sport, and to rebuild the administrative structures underlying it.⁴⁰ In October 1945, the WARA committee declared its intention to run two regattas in 1946, in May and October, and these regular events appear to have been reinstated from this point.⁴¹ In 1950, a report in *Rowing* magazine announced that 'after a lapse of twelve years' the WARA would revive its Head of the River race, although it would now be rowed over a shorter, two-mile course between Barnes and Hammersmith rather than the established four-and-a-quarter-mile course between Putney and Mortlake.⁴² The writer of the report, Phyllis Plumtree, acknowledged the difficulty in planning for this event: 'as a new generation of wet-bobs has arisen since the last race, any estimate of the number of entries becomes pure guesswork'.⁴³ As well as the obvious difficulties around provision on the day of the race, the lack of consistent participation and engagement from individual clubs and members of the women's rowing community at this time made it difficult for the WARA to anticipate their needs.

³⁹ This is not a problem unique to rowing, or indeed to women's sport. See J. Kay, "Maintaining the Traditions of British Sport"? The Private Sports Club in the Twentieth Century', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 14 (2013): 1655–69.

⁴⁰ Efforts in the sport reflect the broader social impulse towards autonomous action, among women, to serve their own interests and meet their own needs. See L. Abrams, 'The Self and Self-Help: Women Pursuing Autonomy in Post-War Britain', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 29 (2019): 201–21.

⁴¹ Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, October 26, 1945.

⁴² P.M. Plumtree, 'W.A.R.A.', *Rowing*, First Spring no. (1–4) 1950, 26.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Plumtree's reference to 'a new generation of wet-bobs' is further telling. She herself was forty-one years old by 1950, having competed regularly in the 1930s, and by this point the WARA committees were dominated by rowers of the previous generation.⁴⁴ Baker's argument that in the years immediately after the war 'continuity prevailed over change in the practice and organisation of sport' is evident within women's rowing.⁴⁵ The continuity of individual involvement in its administration meant that the WARA committees remained largely as they had been before the war, and events were resurrected in similar forms. No radical rethinking of the structures and practices of clubs or sporting administration is evident within the records at this time. More significant changes would only start to be implemented from the early 1950s.⁴⁶

A separate organisation, also formed in the interwar period, was similarly attempting to reinstate competition and communication: namely, the University Women's Rowing Association (UWRA). The UWRA had been formed in 1933, as a private arrangement between Cambridge, Liverpool, London, Reading and, subsequently, Bristol Universities.⁴⁷ Regattas hosted in different cities were of a different format to WARA regattas, with every club racing each other rather than

⁴⁴ In public schools, a 'wet bob' was a student who pursued rowing in preference to sports played on land. 'Dry bobs' did the opposite. References to 'women wet-bobs' can be found in interwar reporting; see for example Margaret Pike, 'Women as "Wet-Bobs"', *Britannia & Eve*, June 1929, 127. Plumtree had been a strong advocate for the women's sport in the 1930s (see for example R. Hewins, 'Women Rowers Have Got the Blues: Revolt Over Sex Bar in Boathouse', *Daily Mail*, February 1, 1938, 9).

⁴⁵ Baker, 'A More Even Playing Field?', 127.

⁴⁶ L. Taylor, 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963: A Prosopographical Approach', *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (2018): 307–30 discusses important changes in the committee structure and composition from this point.

⁴⁷ 'The University Women's Rowing Association', 1. Undated, two-page, typed document held at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames.

participating in a knockout draw.⁴⁸ This was in part because ‘most clubs held challenge [sic] trophies for their intervarsity fixtures’ – particular crews needed to race one another and to generate a stand-alone result – and consequently, ‘the programme usually lasted several days’.⁴⁹ The UWRA presented its own ‘challenge cup’ to the crew that won the most races, as well as a ‘style cup’.⁵⁰ In 1949, correspondence between some university and UWRA administrators expressed a desire to reinstate the network and revive its regattas, albeit in the more customary form: they would be one-day, knockout events ‘owing to difficulties of accommodation, expense and so on’.⁵¹ Eleven universities and the United Universities’ Women’s Boat Club (UWBC) were affiliated at this stage.⁵² There is documentary evidence that the UWRA was still in existence in 1957, and regardless of when it was dissolved, university clubs remained important sites of women’s rowing into the 1960s and beyond.⁵³ Correspondence from Margaret Ashcroft, as Captain of Leeds University Women’s Boat Club, at the point of the UWRA attempting to revive its network and events is particularly suggestive,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. On style rowing, see L. Taylor, ‘From Pleasure Rows and Plashing Sculls to Amateur Oarswomanship: The Evolution of Women’s Amateur Rowing in Britain’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35, no. 14 (2018), 1498–500.

⁵¹ ‘The University Women’s Rowing Association’, 1.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ H. Freestone, Honorary Secretary of the WARA, to ‘Dot’ of the UWRA, sending thanks for a donation to the WARA International Fund. March 16, 1957. Part of the collection held at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, UK. The United Universities’ club, comprising a network of university graduates, was a particularly important contributor to the women’s national team throughout the 1950s and 1960s. This issue is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

highlighting established links between ‘northern’ universities, and with national organisations like the Women’s Inter-Varsity Athletics Board (WIVAB).⁵⁴

The first rowing *Almanack* published after the war in 1948 was the first to include information from the WARA. (Such information was, however, scant: in 1948, the *Almanack* was 128 pages long, and only four pages pertained to the WARA.) The *Almanack* had served the male amateur rowing community since 1861, as an annual publication of ‘things fitting for such a work’, including race reports, results and information, tide times (relevant for those based on the tidal Thames) and miscellaneous items of interest.⁵⁵ As well as introducing women’s rowing to the regular contents of the *Almanack*, the 1948 edition also began to dedicate some space to the National Amateur Rowing Association (NARA),⁵⁶ at that time a distinct organisation with a less exclusive definition of amateurism than the ARA.⁵⁷ It was claimed by the editor that the ‘break in continuity, owing to the war [...] has provided an admirable opportunity to produce a more comprehensive

⁵⁴ M. Ashcroft to Miss Cyriax, March 15, 1949. Part of the collection held at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, UK.

⁵⁵ *The Rowing Almanack and Oarsman’s Companion* 1861, 1; this edition describes itself as ‘our first number’ (W.H.R., ‘Preface’, 7). The first mention of the ARA – distinct from amateur definitions, which were printed earlier – was in the 1887 edition. From 1890, it began to include more detail of its constitution and regulations, committees and activities.

⁵⁶ For fuller discussion of the NARA, see N. Wigglesworth, *The Evolution of English Sport* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1996), 3, 97–8; Halladay, *Rowing in England*, 84–9; Dodd, *The Story of World Rowing* (London: Stanley Paul, 1992), 234–6.

⁵⁷ Feeling ‘the urgent need to move with the times’, the ARA would amalgamate with the NARA at the start of 1956. ‘ARA Report’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1956, 13. Other sports were starting to show new lenience in their approach to class segregation – in 1952, for example, Len Hutton was the first professional cricketer to captain an England side – and provision for sport was being extended to a greater proportion of the population. See for example R. Holt, ‘Sport and Recreation’ in Addison and Jones eds., *A Companion to Contemporary Britain*, 110–26.

book, dealing with British rowing as a whole', a move which was described as both 'logical' and 'useful' for the rowing community.⁵⁸ Yet as Halladay argues, the appetite for reform evident in many areas of British social life after the war was less apparent within amateur rowing, where 'pragmatism, poverty as well as some confidence, mingled together a little uncertainly'.⁵⁹ The *Almanack* makes no mention of any financial imperative to change. Yet it is likely that the rationale for including NARA and WARA information was at least in part a commercial one: for a small proportion of the total editorial space, a larger market could be targeted.⁶⁰ This pattern of cultural change within the ARA being effected as a response to tangible incentives or imperatives would repeat throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

The inclusion of WARA information in the *Almanack* anticipated greater collaboration with the men's sport in the future, and, although detail on the women's sport was limited, it was an important indicator of the appetite within women's rowing administration for greater visibility in a formerly male domain. Yet it also represented the first significant means of building a more connected, more public, women's rowing community in Britain.⁶¹ The subsequent launch of *The Oarswoman* as 'the official bulletin of the Women's Amateur Rowing Association' in June 1950 was a further, important step, allowing the

⁵⁸ R.D. Burnell, 'Preface', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1948, 5–7.

⁵⁹ Halladay, *Rowing in England*, 177.

⁶⁰ The *Almanack* may have been of some interest to these communities even without the inclusion of their details, but its appeal would necessarily be limited.

⁶¹ On building female sporting communities, see Jean Williams, 'The Revival of Women's Football in England from the 1960s to the Present' (PhD thesis, De Montfort University, 2002), 56–105; 'The Fastest Growing Sport? Women's Football in England', *Soccer & Society* 4, no. 2–3 (2003), 117.

administration to communicate with its members without mediation or limitations imposed by any external editors.⁶² It was also a more scalable model of communication than private correspondence, in theory enabling the WARA to deal with an increasing membership more efficiently.

The Oarswoman was circulated twice yearly from June 1950 until October 1962, with the exception of 1960 and 1962, when only one issue was produced.⁶³ Although the October 1962 issue does not declare itself to be the last issue, the editor notes that 'no contributions were received' earlier in the year, and that publication in April 1963 would depend on 'sufficient material' being received.⁶⁴ The content of *The Oarswoman*, being under the control of women and aimed solely at the WARA membership, had different priorities to the *Almanack*. More space allowed for more detailed reports, but also for more informal, magazine-like content. A significant amount of space was dedicated, for example, to reports of club histories and the day-to-day aspects of club life provided by various members: in the first four issues, nine clubs were profiled, and more followed in subsequent editions.⁶⁵ These were unlikely to be attempts to gain new members

⁶² *The Oarswoman* no. 1, June 1950. A continuous run of copies from June 1950 until October 1962 is held at British Rowing Headquarters, Hammersmith, UK. Prior to inclusion in the *Almanack* and the publication of *The Oarswoman*, communications from the WARA were primarily delivered through private correspondence.

⁶³ In 1960, no April edition was published since 'practically no material was received', and 'as the Editor was moving she was quite unable to chase people for material'. J. Sagar, 'Editorial', *The Oarswoman* no. 22, October 1960, 1.

⁶⁴ J. Sagar, 'Editorial', *The Oarswoman* no. 25, October 1962, 1.

⁶⁵ Barnes Women's Amateur Rowing Club, Alpha Ladies' Amateur Rowing Club, British Insulated Callendar's Cables Rowing Club (*The Oarswoman* no. 1, 7–9); Savings Bank Department Rowing Club, Bideford & District Ladies' Rowing Club, Edinburgh University Women's Boat Club (*The Oarswoman* no. 2, 10–2); Stour Boat Club (*The Oarswoman* no. 3, 19); Weybridge Ladies' Amateur Rowing Club, Norwich Union Ladies' Rowing Club (*The Oarswoman* no. 1, 14–8).

– the target readers were already actively involved in club rowing – but rather an illustration of a genuine interest in how the sport was practised and how clubs operated across the country, and the opportunity for readers to engage directly with the publication. Many of these profiles position clubs as performing social and sporting functions simultaneously. This impulse towards sociability as a means of retaining and developing membership in sports clubs was not unique to women, to rowing, or indeed to the post-war period; but for a sport reliant on daylight and relatively benign weather conditions, retaining membership year-round would require more creative approaches. At Bideford Rowing Club, for example,

a weekly Club Night is held during the winter when the girls can get together and either talk of the past season, or the future one, play table tennis or knit. For this purpose they hire a small room and consider that it does help to keep the girls interested in the club all year round.⁶⁶

The interest in having activities running throughout the year was also evident in oral histories. Rita explained that at her club, Weybridge Ladies', they did very little training in the winter', and while 'now and then we'd meet up and run [...] we didn't *train*'.⁶⁷ Relatedly, she observed that 'you never lost your contacts', in part because Amy Gentry, as club captain, encouraged 'nearly all' the members to

⁶⁶ 'Bideford & District Ladies' Rowing Club', *The Oarswoman* no. 9, May 1954, 14. The description of club life at Bideford is strongly reminiscent of Furnivall Sculling Club some fifty years earlier. See Taylor, 'Pleasure Rows and Plashing Sculls', 1494–6. On the non-sporting functions of men's rowing clubs, see Halladay, *Rowing in England*, 71.

⁶⁷ R. Sheldrake, oral history interview by the author, January 17, 2018, Ampthill, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

join the Desborough Players as ‘a winter activity’.⁶⁸ Their accounts clearly emphasised the broader social function of their rowing club, and, importantly, that this community extended to include members of the other local (men’s) club.

Valerie presented the club as

part of this – big section of people that came together, in so many different ways really [...] we were a fantastic when you – group when you think back. And they were just local people. They had to be. Because we didn’t have the facilities for travelling [...] you made your life locally, didn’t you.⁶⁹

She was unsure about what other opportunities for socialising might have existed outside of rowing.

In Weybridge? There was no, well, there were pubs, but we never thought of going to pubs. We’d go there for coffee, or tea, tea time tea there. Just to keep together. So when there was a, a big dance, like the men’s rowing club or the ladies’ rowing club at High Pine [...] it was a *big* thing in our life. And we wanted, *all* of us, would be going.⁷⁰

Despite Valerie’s awareness of her own lack of financial resources, she offered evocative descriptions of a varied and fulfilling life in Weybridge, in a community centred around the river.

Oh gosh, they are the most amazing memories for us [...] we would all dance, and have a great time. And then of course, often there was something after a regatta that you’d stay for. And, and then of course

⁶⁸ Ibid. The Desborough Players was a local amateur dramatic and musical society.

⁶⁹ V. Tester, oral history interview by the author, October 18, 2017, Hurst, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

we would go to Henley, every year, in our little groups, and that was wonderful. And it was just the most – idyllic time of my life.⁷¹

1951–1954: international prospects

Reviving domestic events was an important step for the WARA and the athletes under its purview, but a significant shift in outlook and effort would be required with the advent of formalised international competition for women from 1951. British women had rowed in competitions overseas prior to the Second World War: as early as 1925, one member of the WARA asked permission ‘to row a crew at Brussels’, and during the interwar years, a number of crews made their own arrangements to travel to the continent under club colours, usually to countries close to Britain.⁷² (When invitations to Poland were received, no clubs sent crews since ‘all expressed the view that being business girls it was impossible to find the time take a crew over’.)⁷³ An exceptional trip to Australia was made by six women in 1938, but, although they had been selected by trials, they were not sent under the auspices of a national team.⁷⁴ Only on returning unbeaten did they request permission from the WARA ‘to add the word “England” to the badge on their blazer’, a request which was duly granted.⁷⁵ Thus, while

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, July 9, 1925.

⁷³ WARA Committee Meeting minutes also record, for example, opportunities for club crews in Lucerne, Switzerland (March 9, 1931); Paris and Joinville-le-Pont, France (March 27, 1933 and May 2, 1939 respectively); and Germany (July 4, 1938). The invitation to Poland and the WARA’s response was recorded in meeting minutes on May 4, 1927.

⁷⁴ The trip was exceptional for its distance from the UK and the time and money it required. The Australian hosts were to cover all expenses once in the country, but the WARA estimated the need to raise around £500 for travel – a vast sum of money to the organisation at this time.

⁷⁵ Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, September 28, 1938.

British athletes had raced foreign opposition, these were not considered meetings of representative national teams.⁷⁶

Between 1951 and 1953, three international women's regattas were held in Mâcon (France), Amsterdam and Copenhagen, leading to the European Women's Rowing Championships in 1954. The first official request for the Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Avion (FISA) to include women's events in the European Rowing Championships was made by the German rowing federation in 1937.⁷⁷ In 1950, FISA began to reassess opportunities within the women's sport once more, and in response to a detailed proposal from the Dutch federation in 1953, allowed for the introduction of European Women's Rowing Championships from the following year.⁷⁸ There is no evidence that the WARA, or the ARA, had been directly involved in any negotiations relating to these competitions.⁷⁹ The prospect of international competition was first raised at a WARA meeting in March 1951 by its Chair, Amy Gentry, who had received an invitation to race crews from France, Denmark and the Netherlands at Mâcon. This invitation, the minutes claim, 'gave the impression that these races were to

⁷⁶ A.N. Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current: A History of Women's Competitive International Rowing between 1954 and 2003' (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2007), 322. Similar patterns can be observed in other sports. See for example, G.P. Moon, 'A New Dawn Rising: An Empirical and Social Study Concerning the Emergence and Development of English Women's Athletics until 1980' (PhD thesis, University of Surrey, 1997), 73–7; Nicholson, "Like a Man Trying to Knit?", 18.

⁷⁷ Minutes of the FISA Congress held at Montreux, May 28–30, 1953, in French, held at World Rowing Headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland.

⁷⁸ Ibid. For fuller discussion of FISA policy and decision-making with regard to international women's rowing, see Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current', 96–108.

⁷⁹ Minutes show that the ARA did send a delegate, Nickalls, to this Congress, but that he did not contribute to the discussion of women's events. Minutes of the FISA Congress held at Montreux, May 28–30, 1953.

form part of the European Championships': an overstatement clarified in further correspondence.⁸⁰ Yet the involvement of FISA and the connection to the European Championships was an important and distinguishing feature of this event compared to existing regattas. One consequence was that the WARA's aspiring international rowers would now need affiliation to the ARA in order to compete, marking the start of necessary collaboration between the ARA and the WARA.⁸¹ Importantly, though, the regattas represented a statement of purpose from the European women's rowing community with regard to international competition, and a degree of acceptance from the international governing body, albeit limited: women could race, but over half the distance that men did, and in fewer, and different, boat classes.⁸²

Gentry's reflections on the event emphasised her 'earnest hope' that the event would 'open up a new era for all our affiliated Clubs' and are heavily framed in terms of legacy.⁸³ These new opportunities, she suggested, were 'a reward which I feel we richly deserve for our long fight in the interests of women's rowing'.⁸⁴ Her accounts stressed the need for the next generation of oarswomen to understand how far the sport had come. Fearing that 'many of the girls rowing today do not know how desperately some of us struggled to keep alive the friendly links between rowing women in other countries and ourselves between 1925 and

⁸⁰ Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, March 21, 1951 and April 30, 1951. The costs of travel and accommodation were to be shared between the Fédération Française des Sociétés d'Aviron (FFSA) and the competitors, not the WARA. Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, July 23, 1951.

⁸¹ Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, April 30, 1951.

⁸² See Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current', 103–4.

⁸³ A.C. Gentry, 'What Great Britain and her Rowing Women Can Learn from Macon [sic]', *The Oarswoman* no. 4, October 1951, 4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

1939', she reiterated her conviction that this struggle had 'led to the opportunity we have just had of competing at Macon [sic]'.⁸⁵ She also made a more suggestive inference: that 'whether actually put into words or not, I cannot help feeling that this year's events are to put women on trial to see if they are worthy of inclusion in the Championships at some future date'.⁸⁶

Following the 1951 event, in which each British crew placed third of four (except the double scull, which was third of three), Gentry acknowledged that in committing to it 'we knew we were biting off a big mouthful, yet we were optimistic enough to hope that it wouldn't be more than we could chew'.⁸⁷ Having witnessed continental practices, however, her concerns around the level of support for the sport in Britain were significant: 'I cannot see how we can expect to meet foreign competition on a level footing'.⁸⁸ She viewed 'government help for the Rowing Federation, which legislates for men and women' in France, and the prevalence of mixed-sex clubs in France and the Netherlands, as highly advantageous – not least since 'few people are rich enough to finance their own particular sport at international levels these days'.⁸⁹ The practical advantages, like 'considerable help from the men with coaching', are emphasised alongside the ideological merit of co-operation, shared goals and mutual support.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ A.C. Gentry, 'Women's International Events at Macon [sic], France: Thursday, 23rd August, 1951', *The Oarswoman* no. 3, June 1951, 3. This interpretation is supported by comments in 'International Women's Regatta', part of the collection held at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, UK.

⁸⁷ Gentry, 'What Great Britain and her Rowing Women Can Learn', 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 7.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

In contrast to Gentry's critical commentary, however, a report from one of the athletes who raced there, Irene Helps, suggested it had been a hugely positive experience. She emphasised the hospitality extended by the French hosts, and importantly, the sense of inclusion in the build-up to the men's European Championship events, describing how

the various men's crews were, of course, practising daily for the European Championships, and it gave us a sense of some importance to find that we – mere women – had some place in this centre of bustling rowing activity.⁹¹

Helps further appreciated the acknowledgment of women as athletes in their own right: her claim that 'we shall always remember the little printed cards on which we were described as "Athlete"' is suggestive of a deeper sense of belonging in a sporting environment, and connection with an athletic identity, than she had felt before.⁹² Her wistful reflection that 'it really was wonderful while it lasted', meanwhile, reiterated her enjoyment of having been part of a thriving rowing community at the event, implying that such an experience was ordinarily denied her and her teammates in Britain.⁹³

The next international women's regatta, in Amsterdam in 1952, offered the same racing categories, to the same four nations, as in 1951.⁹⁴ By this time, a 'Joint Advisory Committee on International Regattas' for British rowing had been

⁹¹ I. Helps, 'In Retrospect', *Rowing Autumn* 1951, no. 1, 264.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ The WARA only entered two events – the eight and the coxed four – selecting existing club crews from Stuart Ladies' Rowing Club and Reading University respectively, in light of the difficulties in building composite crews identified after Mâcon in 1951.

formed, comprising representatives of all three governing bodies (the ARA, the WARA and the NARA): a temporary solution that met FISA's administrative requirements without fundamentally reconfiguring domestic rowing administration.⁹⁵ Such reconfiguration would later follow, the ARA amalgamating with the NARA in 1956, and the WARA in 1963.⁹⁶ Whether as a consequence of the formation of the Joint Advisory Committee or not, a striking effect of the racing at Amsterdam was an increasing domestic drive towards expanding international opportunities for women in Britain. The WARA resolved to petition the ARA for a 'formal application' to FISA for inclusion of women's events at the European Championships, and to share such an application with the governing bodies for rowing in France, Denmark and the Netherlands as a prompt for them to do the same.⁹⁷ The organisation also expressed a desire to lobby the British Olympic Association (BOA) for women's events to be included in the Olympic and the Empire Games.⁹⁸ Such ambition and enthusiasm was bolstered by the success of one British crew, the eight from Stuart Ladies' Rowing Club, which won the event: a result that was reported as 'just the tonic needed for women's rowing in England'.⁹⁹ Apart from any potential 'tonic' effects on motivation and aspiration among female rowers, this result staked an important claim for external support

⁹⁵ Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, February 6, 1952; 'Women's Amateur Rowing Association: Affiliation to F.I.S.A. and Rules governing Entries for various Types of Events abroad', *The Oarswoman* no. 6, October 1952, 2–3. The NARA was an organisation that also legislated for men, but had taken a less exclusive stance on amateurism and had an extensive regional network.

⁹⁶ The amalgamation of the WARA and the ARA is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2; the time elapsed between the two is suggestive of a greater readiness to overcome issues of class than of gender.

⁹⁷ Minutes of the WARA Committee Meeting, July 24, 1952.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ M.A. Bywaters, 'The International Regatta – Amsterdam: July 6th, 1952', *The Oarswoman* no. 6, October 1952, 4–5.

and recognition for the women's sport. A report written by one of the athletes explicitly expressed the perceived links between success, legitimacy and opportunity for sportswomen within these established international events: 'everyone must aim for better international standards so that the Cinderella of women's sports, namely rowing, will be included in the Olympics of 1956'.¹⁰⁰

A greater number of countries entered the 1953 event at Copenhagen than the previous international regattas, with Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland and West Germany all fielding crews. Only one British crew – an eight from the University of London – competed, however, placing second of three. Gentry commended how the crew 'battled every inch of the course, [...] never giving up the fight', going on to describe how, although 'the Dutch crews inadvertently stopped too soon [and] it looked as if they might snatch a win right on the post', she '[didn't] think our girls would have liked to win by a miscalculation of that kind by an opposing crew'.¹⁰¹ Such commentary affirmed the desirability of traditional amateur etiquette on the water.¹⁰² Aside from the sport, Gentry evoked the social aspects of the event with great warmth, describing a party following the racing, at which the various teams sang songs from their countries, as 'a scene [...] nobody there will ever forget'.¹⁰³ The results of racing were not the only criteria upon which the success of the event, and the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 5. Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current', 105 explicitly connects national success with greater advocacy for international opportunities for female rowers.

¹⁰¹ A. Gentry, 'Copenhagen', *The Oarswoman* no. 8, October 1953, 3.

¹⁰² Ibid. S. Wagg, "'Base Mechanic Arms"? British Rowing, Some Ducks and the Shifting Politics of Amateurism', *Sport in History* 26, no. 3 (2006): 520–39 details an apocryphal amateur story of a superior crew ceasing to row, mid-race, in order to avoid outperforming its opposition.

¹⁰³ Gentry, 'Copenhagen', 3.

team's attendance, might be judged. Indeed, later in the same report, Gentry makes the much bigger claim: that 'if that spirit prevails at all our meetings, world understanding is much nearer than mere politicians think'.¹⁰⁴ This, she felt, was 'the greatest achievement of the visit'.¹⁰⁵

1954: launching the European Women's Rowing Championships

Lacking basic resources, including boats of its own and experienced coaches, the WARA approached 'the European Championships proper' with trepidation as well as enthusiasm.¹⁰⁶ It used personal connections to address the necessities: 'Jock' Lane, a male coach from Thames Rowing Club was enlisted; the Civil Service Ladies' Rowing Club offered its boathouse to use as a base; and Reading University made the 'magnificent gesture' of lending their new women's eight.¹⁰⁷ Contrary to the decision taken in the two previous years, in 1954 the WARA reverted to creating a composite eight rather than selecting an existing club crew.¹⁰⁸ Whether driven by a sense that no one club was capable of building a crew of a sufficient standard, a desire to appear rigorous and well organised, or an impulse to include more athletes from outside of London and the Thames Valley, it would prove problematic. Selectors were 'not a little disappointed at the small number of girls sent by Clubs': only sixteen names were received for the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ A.C. Gentry, 'First Women's European Rowing Championships, Amsterdam 20th–22nd August, 1954', *The Oarswoman* no. 10, October 1954, 6. Other coaches were also involved during the crews' preparation, including Geoffrey Page. See D. Newman, 'Readers' Letters: Coaching and Racing', *Rowing* February 1958, 252.

¹⁰⁸ 'Selection of the Composite VIII for the European Games', *The Oarswoman* no. 9, May 1954, 4.

eight, three of which were withdrawn during the early stages of selection.¹⁰⁹ Aware of the shortage of available athletes, Valerie modestly joked that Gentry and the selectors had been 'desperate'.¹¹⁰

Rita remembered knowing that trials were taking place, speculating that 'Amy must have put it to us' to get involved.¹¹¹ Her reticence stemmed from issues of self-belief, but also of resources:

I don't think I thought I was good enough, but I – it would have been money, I would just think I couldn't afford to do something like that. Because you did pay your own way, and even having the uniform and everything, they said, you know, get some clothes.¹¹²

As young women from a modest background, still feeling the effects of post-war austerity – rationing was only fully lifted in the summer of 1954 – the barriers could have appeared insurmountable without the direct influence and support of Amy Gentry as their club captain.¹¹³ Both alluded to the fact that 'Amy had a lot of – pull' on their selection, and Valerie claimed that 'for sure she [Gentry] wanted one of her girls from Weybridge Ladies' to represent us'.¹¹⁴ Their analysis binds Gentry's motivations as a selector to her club loyalties and aspirations. While qualified with the observation that 'she equally was very competitive, that she wouldn't have wanted rubbish', Valerie acknowledged that, tasked with forming

¹⁰⁹ Gentry, 'First Women's European Rowing Championships', October 1954, 6.

¹¹⁰ Tester, oral history interview.

¹¹¹ Sheldrake, oral history interview.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ On the extended period of rationing after the war, and the impact this had on British culture and, particularly, on British women, see I. Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939–1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹¹⁴ Tester, oral history interview.

the best representative crew, selectors could easily be influenced by pre-existing loyalties, preferences or prejudices.¹¹⁵ They were the first to articulate one of the most prominent, and consistent, themes in oral histories: that selectors' conflicts of interests and personal biases had decisive consequences for their athletic careers.

Selection was not only a measure of performance but also a tangible expression of sporting values. The immediacy and singularity of a side-by-side race was insufficient. Selection required broader metrics of success and achievement, and as such empowered individuals to make decisions based on potential as well as performance – decisions that were inherently subjective. In men's rowing, with almost seventy years' experience of international competition, the process of selection remained problematic, and highly contested. Historically, ARA selectors had observed the performances of particular crews at events such as Henley Royal Regatta or the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race, and from these performances, nominated which should go on to represent Britain at an international level. Such a method aligned neatly with an ideological touchstone of amateur rowing: the sublimation of individual into crew, most particularly in the eight.¹¹⁶ It was also a pragmatic solution to the problems posed by the sport itself. Regular practice in set crews improved performance, and without centralised

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ The description of the 'high perfection' of rowing in eights, the 'entire uniformity and machine-like regularity of performance for which the eye looks at once in a University crew, and which is the glory and delight of the oarsman' in Lehmann's *The Complete Oarsman* neatly captures this moral and aesthetic reverence. R.C. Lehmann, *The Complete Oarsman* (London: Methuen & Co., 1908), 15. This method of selection also introduced an additional social filter, a further guarantee that traditional amateur values would be upheld.

structures for training and a consistent technical model, it was prohibitively difficult to deliver outside of individual clubs. Gentry's sense that 'unless we are offered experienced but adaptable oarswomen for a composite crew the policy is not altogether practical' acknowledged the lack of experience exacerbated by the substantial differences in technique and style learned in different clubs.¹¹⁷ Her conclusion was sound, but – arguably – overdue.

A more specific technical problem identified by the WARA related to a fundamental difference between the practice of rowing in Britain and on the continent, namely, the popularity of crew sculling compared to sweep-oar rowing. Gentry reported that 'we shall most probably not be able to enter at least one of the events – the Quad sculling race, because no boats of this type exist in this country'.¹¹⁸ In 1955, a report in the *Almanack* noted that 'double sculling has come to stay and quadruple-scullers have made their appearance – particularly in the international field of Women's rowing', suggesting that the quickness and skill required would make for 'more enjoyable' rowing.¹¹⁹ One women's rowing club, however, took a more proactive stance. Stuart Ladies' Rowing Club, based

¹¹⁷ Gentry, 'First Women's European Rowing Championships', 6. These differences were in part due to the boats themselves, which showed far more variation in structure and build than more modern boats, and, relatedly, coaching as craft rather than scientific method. See Dodd, *World Rowing*, 87–95 and D. Day, 'Craft Coaching and the "Discerning Eye" of the Coach', *The International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, no. 6, 1 (2011): 179–95. This was a specifically British phenomenon: in amateur rowing specifically, 'everything was handed down, whether it was orthodoxy, Fairbairnism, or the stirrings of the modern international style'. Dodd, *World Rowing*, 129.

¹¹⁸ Gentry, 'Copenhagen', 3. This observation was not limited to the women's sport. Crew sculling was a novelty for men as well, and the men's quadruple scull was only introduced to the Olympic programme in 1976: the same year that women's rowing was offered for the first time.

¹¹⁹ 'Review of the Year: Productivity', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1955, 9.

on the River Lea in Hackney, was a successful competitive club. In 1953, for example, one of its crews won the WARA Head of the River Race in 'a clinker boat (and borrowed at that)': a result that suggests the crew had vastly outperformed its opposition.¹²⁰ The club expressed an interest in racing in the quadruple sculling event, and 'on the strength of this they purchased a coxless four and converted it to a coxxd [sic] four then ordered four pairs of sculling riggers, which can be dismantled when the boat is needed for a rowing four'.¹²¹ In order to test and learn to move the boat, the (male) Stuart Ladies' coach and another male athlete joined two women to form a crew, which 'gave the girls confidence' and meant that 'the boat was soon running smoothly'.¹²² This was a knowledgeable, competitive and tenacious amateur sporting community, able to take a proactive and collaborative approach to an absolute lack of provision.

In contrast to the three test events held in previous years, in April 1954 – some four months before the Championships – a fundamental change was made to the programme: the complete separation of the men's and women's events. *Rowing* magazine reported that FISA had decreed that the women's racing would take place some days before the men, in order that female athletes would 'be out of the way before the men arrive'.¹²³ The report dismissed 'the extraordinary attitude of F.I.S.A. who seem to think that the spectacle of young women standing about anywhere in the vicinity of the boat tents is distracting to the men', as

¹²⁰ 'W.A.R.A. Head of the River: 25th April 1953', *The Oarswoman* no. 7, April 1953, 17. This race awarded pennants for both 'shell' and the slower 'clinker' boats.

¹²¹ B. Benzing, 'Quadruple Sculler', *The Oarswoman* no. 9, May 1954, 15.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ 'Nonsense!', *Rowing*, April 1954, 296.

'nonsense'.¹²⁴ It further highlighted the practical implications of this 'short-sighted decision': the British women's team would no longer be able to share transport for their boats with the men, and would therefore incur significantly higher costs.¹²⁵ As Schweinbenz argues, these practical limitations reflected the dominant cultural values of male sporting administration: holding the women's events separately, over a shortened course, 'de-emphasised the importance of the event and established them as a sideshow to the men's regatta'.¹²⁶ It also marked a departure from the 'wonderful', inclusive experience so fondly remembered by Irene Helps in 1951.

Such administrative changes, however, did not affect Valerie and Rita's enthusiastic anticipation of the event. For Valerie, it 'was a *dream*, for me, and I was terribly proud that I was going to do it'.¹²⁷ Rita more cautiously recalled that while it was 'nerve-wracking',

I was very excited about going, the whole thing. And I know I thought that when we were going we could win. Cos I – I thought these girls were great, and they were terrific, and I liked them very much, and – you know, they did row hard, there wasn't anybody in the boat you thought wasn't pulling their weight, they were all, you know, committed.¹²⁸

As well as the prospect of competing, she noted that

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current', 15–6.

¹²⁷ Tester, oral history interview.

¹²⁸ Sheldrake, oral history interview.

that – I think, was my first aeroplane. [Pause.] I think so. I can't think that I could have flown anywhere before, it was the first aeroplane trip.

And, I – I'm sure I was – quite, you know, taken with all of that.¹²⁹

She was, however, keen to emphasise that the excitement she felt, and her enjoyment of the sport, in no way compromised the seriousness of her approach.

It was a sport, and it was enjoyable, but it was important, you know?

And you did know that. You did feel that, and I know I felt that about going to the 1954, I did.¹³⁰

Thirteen countries participated at the inaugural Championship event in 1954, with the British entry comprising the composite eight (including Rita and Valerie), a coxed four and coxed quadruple scull from Stuart Ladies', and a single sculler.¹³¹ Racing was assessed to have been 'of a very high standard', and the event as a whole deemed 'an outstanding success'.¹³² For the British team, however, for all but one crew the results highlighted how much remained to be done in order to be competitive. The superior physical conditioning and the technical ability, particularly of the Russian crews was marked. 'Not only did crews row strongly and look the peak of physical fitness, but they also looked good when rowing': a marked contrast to the frequent descriptions of them in later years as the 'fat

¹²⁹ Ibid. Harrison positions the UK in 1952 as 'at once more and less insular than later'; while leisure travel was difficult in the post-war years, media coverage of the war and the number of men who had fought overseas meant that to much more of the population, geographical divides appeared easier to cross. Air travel, however, remained relatively exclusive, and he argues that travel was a marker of privilege. Harrison, *Seeking a Role*, 1–2.

¹³⁰ Sheldrake, oral history interview.

¹³¹ A.C. Gentry, 'First Women's European Rowing Championships', 1–2.

¹³² Ibid, 8.

Russians'.¹³³ All the British crews placed last in their races except the coxed four, from Stuart Ladies', which came third in a field of eight; yet even celebration of this bronze medal performance appears to have been fairly muted. Gentry's report in *The Oarswoman* attributed the result to the 'plucky efforts' of the crew, but went little further than to state that those involved 'really are to be congratulated on their performance'.¹³⁴ Even this was more effusive than the ARA's report in the *Almanack*, where the whole report on the women's event comprised two sentences:

Our women-folk also visited Amsterdam, where, with the rest of Europe, they were outclassed by the Russians, who won convincingly in each of the five events. Our only place was a third in the coxed fours.¹³⁵

More striking than this relegation of the women's results in the ARA report was the absence of this crew's success – indeed, even of their attendance – from Rita and Valerie's memories of the event. Their crew operated independently; while the recorded entry for the Championships included some twenty athletes in four different boats, on being asked directly about the British team, neither woman thought any other crews had competed. Valerie raised this discrepancy herself before the interview, recalling the astonishment she felt in learning that so many British women had been involved.¹³⁶ Rita, too, was shocked, primarily by 'how

¹³³ Ibid, 1. This issue is revisited in Chapters 3 and 4. On the 'fat Russians', see multiple references in Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current'.

¹³⁴ Gentry, 'First Women's European Rowing Championships', 1.

¹³⁵ 'Review of the Year', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1955, 6.

¹³⁶ Valerie had read '1954 Women's European Rowing Championships', *Rowing Story*, available at: <https://rowingstory.com/year-by-year/1954-2>; last accessed January 19, 2020).

blinker I was': 'I *only* remember our crew. I don't think there was a quad. Was there! I wonder who the quad were then.'¹³⁷

In reporting on the event, Gentry assumed a different tone to that of previous years. While she had enjoyed 'the opportunity of seeing the standard to which women's rowing has risen in recent years', the utopian reflections which featured so prominently in her report of the 1953 event were conspicuously lacking in 1954.¹³⁸ She foregrounded the importance of supporting the event 'and thus keeping faith with the Dutch and French Federations who have for years worked hard to get women admitted to the Championships', and noted 'the pleasure of meeting young women from so many different countries under ideal conditions and with a common interest'.¹³⁹ But whether as a consequence of the decision to segregate the women's competition from the men's – a significant compromise, given such positive reports of the integrated test events – or the team's results, her enthusiasm for the endeavour had been subdued.

1955–1960: reassessing women's rowing

Despite the initial enthusiasm of British female rowers and the WARA at the prospect of international competition, the reality proved much more challenging than they had anticipated, athletically and ideologically. Access to an international sporting community brought with it clear evidence of the limitations of training and

¹³⁷ Sheldrake, oral history interview. Beyond the direct inferences that can be made about relationships between the different crews – and the lack of a cohesive sense of a national team – this absence offers an instructive reminder of the limits of the individual field of vision.

¹³⁸ Gentry, 'First Women's European Rowing Championships', 10.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

selection systems in Britain; yet, lacking the resources or the expertise within the administration to address these in any meaningful way, women's rowing showed no significant signs of change. Following the inaugural European Women's Rowing Championships, Britain's attendance was sporadic. Four crews raced at Amsterdam in 1954, but between then and the 1960 Championships, only two crews were selected, both for the 1957 event in Duisberg: a United Universities' eight and a Stuart Ladies' coxed four. The decision to attend the 1957 Championships was in part driven by the 'shorter and less expensive journey' than required in the previous two years, when the Championships were held in Bucharest and Bled, and the WARA 'determined to find the means to send any entry put forward reaching the requisite standard'.¹⁴⁰ Gentry described the 'modest foundations' laid for these entries, including the building of two boats, travel arrangements, and a series of six weekly training sessions organised by the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR).¹⁴¹ On the one hand she lamented that 'by comparison with preparations possible in other countries, pitiful would be the only word to describe our own efforts', yet on the other, argued that for the WARA as 'a body representing not much more than 250 working women to pay £500 cash on delivery for the two boats [...] is a pretty solid achievement'.¹⁴² This 'stout effort to show what a truly amateur country can do in women's rowing' is a clear illustration of the extent of the difference perceived between British and Eastern European sporting cultures.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ 'Women's ARA Annual Report, 1957', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1958, 42.

¹⁴¹ A.C. Gentry, 'Women's Amateur Rowing Association: Annual Report 1957/58', *Rowing*, April 1958, 298.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 298–9.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 299.

Such 'stout' logistical efforts were arguably more commendable than the team's performance on the water: it was reported that 'the English eight were a poor last and it was obvious that they lacked both style and strength'.¹⁴⁴ A response to this 'correct but rather sweeping statement' from Dorothea Newman, one of the women who raced in the crew, highlighted the dominance of Eastern European countries, and suggested that the lower level of competition faced by the other British crew – described by the same reporter as 'a happy and determined little four' – had 'made them appear less out-classed'.¹⁴⁵ She further emphasised that women's rowing was 'a wonderful sport providing it is not compared with men's rowing'; in both cases, she relied upon relative rather than absolute understandings of performance within the sport to defend her team.¹⁴⁶ Over time, absolute and relative standards were applied inconsistently, whether to judge between male and female athletes or different national sporting cultures. Such inconsistency reflected differences in the immediate priorities of those making the judgment, but also a more fundamental moral uncertainty around sporting practice and values.

The difficulties the British team faced internationally were matched by broader issues in domestic women's rowing participation. The WARA reported a 'sharp decline in the number of scullers, which led to the abandonment for the lack of support of two senior events, as well as the Scullers' Head and the Sculling Championship'.¹⁴⁷ Such decline was felt to be 'a very disappointing state of

¹⁴⁴ S.A. Mackenzie, 'The Women', *Rowing*, September 1957, 140.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 141; D. Newman, 'United Universities W.B.C.', *Rowing*, November 1957, 180.

¹⁴⁶ Newman, 'United Universities W.B.C.', 180.

¹⁴⁷ 'Women's ARA Annual Report, 1957', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1958, 42.

affairs', and attributed in part to 'the steep rise in costs [...] and the low standard of maintenance of the boats'.¹⁴⁸ The following year, club membership was reported still to be in decline.¹⁴⁹ By 1959, one reader of *Rowing* magazine was driven to enquire why no British crews were sent to the Women's European Championships. They suggested that 'in spite of the fact that the following for women's rowing, in this country, is not great, I feel sure that one or two of this year's crews could reached [sic] international standard', and expressed 'hope that those in authority will not allow this state of affairs to continue'.¹⁵⁰ Gentry claimed that no crews had 'offered themselves for consideration' or been identified by selectors as being sufficiently prepared, but beyond this, that 'no money was available to send anyone even if they had been of the necessary standard without incurring further heavy debts'.¹⁵¹ Further highlighting the limited resources at the WARA's disposal, she explained that 'there is literally **not one** double sculling boat available for any of our members to prepare themselves and compete in that class in the Championships', and that 'it is one hard, long and continuous struggle to keep our clubs going – let alone finance international competition'.¹⁵² As a point of comparison with the men's sport, Gentry highlighted the difference between the takings from regatta levies, which for the WARA amounted to 'about £50–£60 in a good year while I understand that the men produce £800–£1,000 [...] yet we are expected to meet the same kind of expenditure'.¹⁵³ She also identified a gulf in provision between Western European nations and 'the Eastern States which

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ 'Women's ARA Annual Report, 1958', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1959, 66.

¹⁵⁰ G.V. Strebor, 'Letters: A Question Answered', *Rowing*, September 1959, 150.

¹⁵¹ A.C. Gentry, *ibid*, 151.

¹⁵² *Ibid*. Emphasis Gentry's.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*.

we understand receive so much more help'.¹⁵⁴ Her hope that 'enquiries now taking place here will lead to the right kind of help being provided for those of our young people who would be prepared to make the necessary sacrifices to make themselves worthy representatives of their country' would not be answered for some decades.¹⁵⁵

In her defence of the WARA and its international activities, or lack thereof, Gentry was careful to emphasise that practical obstacles, not lack of volition, had led to Britain's limited attendance at Championship events. Her argument, and the evidence she mobilised to support it – notably, the absolute lack of equipment, and a clear estimation of the income that was supposed to support international attendance – offered reasoned justification for Britain's lack of participation. It also foregrounded the extent to which the WARA was dependent on private support and individual efforts. By framing these as 'just a few of the headaches which face the "authorities" here when they wish to take part in such events', she underlined that women's rowing was not governed by a wealthy or well-resourced organisation, but managed by a small group of individuals operating under significant material constraints.¹⁵⁶ She highlighted the personal costs incurred by athletes and administrators, and claimed 'it was the bitterest pill I have yet had to swallow when it became obvious that [...] we would not be able to send even one crew to Macon [sic] because we have the longest history of friendship with the French Rowing Federation'.¹⁵⁷ The notion of individual involvement and mutual

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

responsibility is clear, as is the importance of such informal, personal networks in building new opportunities for female athletes. Domestically too, the WARA's operations depended upon such connections; even if 'friendship' might not initially present as a compelling reason to attend, it may have functioned as an organising principle in the first years of women's international rowing.

Coaching, training and selection: new approaches to amateurism

Gentry's defence of the WARA and its selection and preparation of international crews in 1959 highlighted the limits of the structural support it could offer. Yet it also obscured some of the fundamental reasons that British clubs were struggling to produce competitive crews. The material difficulties were considerable, but so were the cultural constraints, tied to British amateur ideology and, distinctly, to gender. A lengthy letter to *The Oarswoman* in 1956 was highly critical of an environment in which

every year it is the same two or three crews which make an effort to train [...] obviously what is required are more clubs and greater competition, but although we cannot do so much about the first we can make an effort to improve rowing in the clubs that do exist.¹⁵⁸

The author – Pam Body, an athlete at Alpha Women's Amateur Rowing Club, who raced in the 1951 test event and the 1960 Championships – highlighted how easily material and cultural barriers to success were conflated in reports, and was much more critical of the lack of hard training than of material provision.

¹⁵⁸ P.M. Body, 'Improve the Standard of Women's Rowing', *The Oarswoman* no. 15, October 1956, 17–8.

Women coaches seem to have very haphazard ideas of training a crew, and little knowledge of any training programmes. Standards have improved in all sports, rowing being no exception, and as a result it is more necessary than ever before to train harder to win.¹⁵⁹

Existing knowledge could help the sport to resolve what she saw as its most fundamental problem – that, ‘with the exception of Stuart L.R.C., I don’t believe any crew in this country trains seriously enough, either in or out of the boat’.¹⁶⁰

She urged readers to seek such knowledge out:

several famous rowing men have written on the training of crews, and I would like to suggest that both coaches and club members make themselves more familiar with these works. Also, we can learn much from other sports, on how they train, and how much they train, and especially on how to get fit.¹⁶¹

Following up her appeal to the women’s rowing community to consult the works of these ‘famous rowing men’, she asserted that ‘it is about time that club captains faced up to their lack of ability in themselves and their women coaches, and started now to enlist the services of rowing men to coach’.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 18. Such commentary was not unique to rowing. In athletics for example, despite a significant number of female coaches, the ‘idea that men are intrinsically better coaches than women’ had currency. Moon, ‘A New Dawn Rising’, 325–7.

¹⁶⁰ Body, ‘Improve the Standard of Women’s Rowing’, 18. It is noteworthy that at Stuart Ladies’, this training knowledge was at least in part supplied directly by men, notably, the husband and brother-in-law of one of the female athletes, Marjorie Lutz. See ‘1954 Women’s European Rowing Championships’, *Rowing Story*.

¹⁶¹ Body, ‘Improve the Standard of Women’s Rowing’, 18.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Body's position was provocative and polemical. She saw the limitations of a sporting community segregated by sex, in which female coaches were 'only too anxious to assure me that they haven't the people or sufficient weight' to succeed.¹⁶³ Having proven unable to model higher expectations or standards for themselves, she suggested, women needed to mobilise the confidence and expertise of their male peers. Her optimism about the availability or willingness of men to coach – and, indeed, the expectation that they would not adjust their own expectations or standards in coaching a women's crew – is clear. Yet a response to her letter from a long-term WARA administrator, Hazel Freestone, highlighted that while 'she does women's rowing a service in stressing the vital need for more determination in every respect, coupled with more serious training',

all Club Captains would be glad to have the help of a knowledgeable and experienced coach with the knack of stimulating and developing a crew, but there isn't an unlimited number of such people – men or women – and the whole rowing world is crying out for their services. To suggest that any member of a men's rowing club who is prepared to coach a women's crew can necessarily produce a crew of really high racing ability is little short of rash optimism.¹⁶⁴

Despite the convincing logic of her argument, however, in signing off, Freestone seems, unwittingly, to validate Body's critique.

My association with oarswomen over the past twenty odd years convinces me that winning crews are the one [sic] who love rowing and a good fight equally, rather than those who expect a coach to

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ H.B. Freestone, 'Correspondence', *The Oarswoman* no. 16, May 1957, 11.

produce a magic formula which will stop the boat rolling and make it run faster between strokes.¹⁶⁵

At the heart of the debate was a perceived contradiction between hard training and love of the sport: to seek more demanding physical training, especially on land as opposed to in the boat, was to deviate from historically conservative amateur practice.¹⁶⁶ A different respondent, Phyllis Plumtree, addressed this contradiction directly, emphasising that

when a girl joins a rowing club she does so because (a) she is attracted to the sport, (b) the exercise involved is 'just up her street' as regards providing her with the physical and mental relaxation she needs and (c) because she enjoys and derives pleasure from doing it. I feel sure she has no thought of winning pots at that time; she joins solely for love of the sport, which surely is the best reason.¹⁶⁷

While claiming that when she herself had been rowing, she

practically lived on the river, trained zealously six days a week, kept myself rigorously fit all the year round, I know I was the exception rather than the rule, and that fellow club members regarded me as a sport-mad crank.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ This problem was not unique to the women's sport, nor indeed to rowing. See N. Baker, 'The Amateur Ideal in a Society of Equality: Change and Continuity in Post-Second World War British Sport, 1945–48', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 12, no. 1 (1995): 99–126; D. Porter, 'The End of the Amateur Hegemony in British Sport, c. 1960–2000', *Hitotsubashi Journal of Social Studies* 43, no. 2 (2011): 69–80.

¹⁶⁷ P. Plumtree, 'Correspondence', *The Oarswoman* no. 16, May 1957, 14.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Plumtree's argument was predicated on the observation that

it will always be the handful who are prepared to devote themselves to the sport, who are willing to sacrifice time, money and pleasure for it, who more or less make it their major interest in life, the majority will assert it is only a sport and not an obsession with them, therefore they will only give so much time to it and no more.¹⁶⁹

She urged caution with respect to potential and new members, suggesting that the prospect of an intensive training programme (and the need to 'go to bed early, keep off pastries, parties and pleasure') would be off-putting.

We must break her in gradually so that enthusiasm grows as her oarswomanship progresses, and that finally she is so keen to achieve perfection, that she will want to give more if not most of her leisure time for just that.¹⁷⁰

The logic is sound with respect to novice rowing, but she fails to separate the needs of the aspiring, competitive athlete from those of the social club rower: a conflation that would recur, problematically, in later years. While she agreed that 'it is up to every club captain and coach to set as high a standard as possible and obtain the maximum of real solid training from every member', the caution she applied was telling: 'remember that the human and British element comes into it, namely, that it is only a sport which they took up for pleasure'.¹⁷¹

In drawing on such familiar amateur discourses, Freestone and Plumtree position themselves – and the women's sport itself – as products of a different sporting

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 15.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 14–5.

generation to Pam Body.¹⁷² The debate speaks to a contemporaneous uncertainty about British sport, but also about the balance of power within women's rowing, and its leadership and administration. As it had for the ARA in the late nineteenth century, international racing held a mirror up to the domestic conditions of the sport; here, it highlighted to athletes and administrators alike that the WARA was not able to lead the sport successfully into international competition.¹⁷³ What was less clear – to both – was what, precisely, needed to change, and how such change could be achieved.

Collaborating with men

Contrary to Body's critique, the WARA had long recruited male allies to help, albeit sporadically, with coaching, events, umpiring and training, and it would continue to do so as it moved into this new phase of competitive opportunity.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, another response to her letter clarified that 'every crew which has gone abroad since 1950 has been trained by men, and often has also been chosen by men, so it is difficult to understand what Pam is driving at', and further criticised a view of men as

¹⁷² Halpin's discussion of a 'changing of the guard' in hockey in the post-war years, whereby 'ageing, pre-war pioneers [made] way for a more meritocratic generation of players and administrators less tightly bound to the AEWHAs real or perceived founding principles' is instructive here. J. Halpin, "Will You Walk into Our Parlour?": The Rise of Leagues and their Impact on the Governance of Women's Hockey in England 1895–1939' (PhD thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2019), 279.

¹⁷³ See Dodd, *World Rowing*, 225–30.

¹⁷⁴ Male involvement with female sport and, distinctly, female-run sporting administrations is common to many women's sports, although the ways in which it manifests, and the extent to which it is understood positively, varies substantially. It is an important concern of this thesis, and more fully explored in Chapters 2 and 5.

the magic password to success. [...] No coach – whatever the sex – can wave his wand – or even crack his whip – over a crew, and make it good. The crew itself holds the key to success.¹⁷⁵

The agency attributed to crews and the athletes within them is admirable, as is the criticism of assuming that a male coach could, by virtue of his gender, guarantee success. Yet the argument overlooks the lack of knowledge and experience in some clubs. Some female athletes had been able to access the support they needed to improve themselves, but many – like Valerie and Rita – lacked aspirational models and experts to learn from. Their club environment was insulated from more aggressive, physical approaches to competition, and their preparations for international racing was insufficient – despite the involvement of experienced men.

For the most part, the men involved with WARA activities had long-standing relationships with individual committee members – although, importantly, not in the sense of romantic or marital ties but of local, sporting collegiality. They were largely enthusiasts and participants rather than administrators, but there were three important exceptions around this time: Guy Nickalls, who had been Secretary of the ARA from 1948 to 1952; James ‘Freddie’ Page, who succeeded him in the role; and his son, Geoffrey Page, who was later an ARA selector and

¹⁷⁵ E.M. Lester, ‘Correspondence’, *The Oarswoman* no. 16, May 1957, 13. Eleanor Lester, née Gait, was Vice Chair of the WARA from 1951 until its merger with the ARA in 1963, at which point she became Vice Chair of the Women’s Amateur Rowing Council (WARC).

Chair of its Technical Committee.¹⁷⁶ In an ‘amusing speech’ to a women’s club dinner in 1956, Nickalls was reported as admitting that

at one time he was rather lukewarm about women’s rowing, but that he had now been converted. Ladies’ crews had taken a very important part in rowing abroad and he wished all success to them.¹⁷⁷

These men are important in showing that, despite the ARA’s appearance as a monolithic, conservative organisation, the views enshrined in its legislation were not shared by all of its members or representatives, even its senior leadership. They also offer an instructive example of how instrumental individuals could be in driving institutional change: Freddie Page and Nickalls were increasingly involved in women’s rowing administration as it entered international competition and were instrumental in arranging the amalgamation of the WARA with the ARA in 1963.¹⁷⁸

Geoffrey Page, who was still an athlete at this point (and indeed, a competitor at the 1954 Commonwealth Games), performed some coaching for the women’s eight in that year.¹⁷⁹ Both Rita and Valerie recalled significant differences between his coaching, in preparation for the Championships, and their usual club practices. They suggested there had been some increase in training volume close to the event, but such differences were primarily qualitative. Rita described a marked change in the dynamic between coach and crew, and while she had no

¹⁷⁶ C. Dodd, ‘Geoffrey Page: Rowing Correspondent on the Inside Lane’, *Guardian*, April 6, 2002, 24.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Weybridge Ladies’, *Rowing*, June 1956, 314.

¹⁷⁸ See Taylor, ‘The Women’s Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963’.

¹⁷⁹ For biographical details on Geoffrey Page, see Dodd, ‘Geoffrey Page’.

doubt that the men Gentry drafted in to coach them were knowledgeable about the sport, she felt

they weren't actually *interested* in you. I mean, why should they be I suppose. But... It's um... [Pause.] You see in my rowing days at Weybridge Ladies', in those early days, Amy coached us and she sort of knew us inside out [...] So all our coxing [sic] 'til we went and joined that crew in 1954, you were – I suppose coaching had been different, this was quite different.¹⁸⁰

Reflecting on this process, she articulated a discrepancy in her understanding of the coach's role before and after her selection. Where previously she had expected personal involvement and support, she came to see the role in more technical terms. Her subsequent comments about the dynamic between coach and crew are further illuminating:

they were never very friendly, they were serious about what we were doing. And they weren't unkind or anything, cos I mean when – once we got there, I just knew we were totally out of our depth. That, that I can remember.¹⁸¹

She could only understand their aloof, serious approach to the sport in retrospect, having had direct experience of international competition herself.

This realisation was, in part, an inevitable consequence of a steep learning curve for two young club athletes who had never rowed in different clubs, or experienced different coaching styles. Yet for Rita – an adaptable individual who

¹⁸⁰ Sheldrake, oral history interview.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

would, in the course of her life, join and compete with a number of different clubs, it provoked a more fundamental shift in awareness. The sporting landscape they were being drawn into was far bigger, and more culturally diverse, than the local one they knew and loved. International competition would open their eyes to how women in other countries approached the sport, but also to how different some factions of the British male rowing community were from those in their local community. They observed a degree of sexual segregation in sport that was alien to them; on being asked if she had any interactions with the British men's team, Rita responded in a very low voice,

no. [Pause.] No, we just didn't [...] there were men milling around from other countries. But not our men. [...] I don't like to say it was a disappointment but it was a shock. Really.¹⁸²

Local clubs and international competition: the collision of sporting cultures

Rita and Valerie's recollections of the sport were deeply embedded in the locality of Weybridge.¹⁸³ Both expressed only positive memories of community and collaboration in their home environment; broadly, Valerie suggested, 'nobody felt, I can categorically say, that no one felt that they had less than anyone else', and in their sport, they enjoyed the feeling of being on an 'equal footing' with male rowers.¹⁸⁴ Although Valerie had 'never felt – I didn't experience that they felt better than us, or the Weybridge men thought we should be – you know, off the

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ See Halladay, *Rowing in England*, 5 on how rowing tended to operate locally or regionally, for men and women alike.

¹⁸⁴ Tester, oral history interview.

river', in further discussion she qualified this in terms of her own understanding of fundamental difference between men and women.

I never felt oh, you know, they don't care about the women [...] I think I had this acceptance, that the women didn't do as much as the men. And maybe even they would say things like, well women aren't as strong as men, and I could accept that. I – I never had it said to me in a derogatory way at all. I never felt that.¹⁸⁵

Her comments reflected a hegemonic acceptance of fundamental sexual difference and subordination; her experience was of happy coexistence, mutual understanding, and 'good comradeship [...] going back to that bit about the GB men's crew not really being interested in us, that didn't exist locally'.¹⁸⁶

Both women remembered extensive, inexpensive social opportunities, within their club and with local men's clubs, and an almost seamless integration of the sport and the wider local community. Such a degree of integration suggests that they comfortably shared, or assimilated, the values attached to sport there. Valerie also suggested that concessions were made on trust: commuting to London for work, earning 'four pound ten a week, I can remember that, train fare up to Waterloo – [...] I could never pay my subs [laughs]'.¹⁸⁷ She suggested that as club captain, Amy Gentry was willing to make concessions around the payment of subs in order to allow her to continue to participate in the sport: an important illustration of how local and personal networks might facilitate opportunities 'off the record'. In travelling to London, Valerie became more aware

¹⁸⁵ Sheldrake, oral history interview.

¹⁸⁶ Tester, oral history interview.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

of how tight-knit her home community was; and although 'it wasn't unusual, in Weybridge, at all, to belong to the rowing club', she found that

when I went to work it was very unusual, and I mentioned it and the girls there were um – you row?! And I said well I *live* on the river, you know, why wouldn't I, it's a club? But they thought that was strange.¹⁸⁸

Local competition was an important feature of club rowing, offering the opportunity to participate in a broader sporting community beyond individual clubs and immediate localities and to test crew and club performances against others. For Rita, the thrill of competition itself was a key driver of her engagement with the sport; she remembered her first experience of racing at the Head of the River, on the Tideway in London, in particular detail 'because that was *quite* exciting [...] as a crew we thought it was fantastic'.¹⁸⁹ Rita described only limited social interaction: at women's regattas, for example, 'we were pleased to see [people], and say hello, and you knew the faces, cos it would be the same people – but we didn't really socialise'.¹⁹⁰

I can't remember how we had tea or what eating we did at all. I – I don't think there was a lot. Because you know, the clubs didn't have a lot of money, did they. They didn't, we didn't have any money.¹⁹¹

While austerity might offer an immediate explanation for lean provisions at tea, it does not address the absolute limits of sociability between women's clubs and

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Sheldrake, oral history interview. As a cox, Rita was stimulated by the challenge of a new course, especially the Tideway where the stream and currents are significant, and highly variable.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

teams that Rita described – not least given the extensive social life she and Valerie enjoyed in their sport locally. It is suggestive of a diverse range of amateur sporting cultures under the umbrella of the WARA, and some lack of volition to build networks between them beyond the local.

Different sporting communities were, of course, predicated on different values. Rita and Valerie viewed Stuart Ladies' as a stark example of a different sporting culture. Valerie remembered that the crews were 'right up there [...] they could beat us at everything'.¹⁹² Rita similarly reflected that 'what I did know about Stuart were, I, I did always admire them. They were – they were *hard*, those girls. And they did know about training'.¹⁹³ Reports of Stuart Ladies' collaboration with men is instructive in this regard: while the club itself was for women only, in close proximity to a number of men's clubs, and able to draw on their experience, it trained the superior athletes. While rowing men featured heavily in the social narratives that Rita and Valerie attached to the sport in Weybridge, at Stuart Ladies' this interaction extended into the gym and out onto the water. These factors are suggestive of different class composition, or different understandings of class, within these two communities. Valerie both supported and problematised such an interpretation with her observation that 'most of the Weybridge Ladies' were rowing then, or – were, just working class girls. And certainly Stuart Ladies' were [laughs].'¹⁹⁴ She implied that what she observed of working class culture in Weybridge was quite distinct from that of the East End.¹⁹⁵ Both she and Rita felt

¹⁹² Tester, oral history interview.

¹⁹³ Sheldrake, oral history interview.

¹⁹⁴ Tester, oral history interview.

¹⁹⁵ Brooke identifies the fragmentation of the working class, and greater disparities between its cultural manifestation and the meanings attached to it, in

quite different from these ‘*hard*’ girls based at Stuart Ladies’. Their respective practices of the sport illustrated different expressions of amateur and local values.

International competition equipped athletes and administrators to reappraise the sport in a way that domestic competition did not. Rita was comfortable with the fact that Stuart Ladies’ ‘knew about training’ and would produce fast crews, but her observation of the differences in sporting cultures between Britain and Europe was much more problematic: ‘we were astounded’.¹⁹⁶ Both narrators sought to articulate the gap between their understanding of the sport before and after attending the Championships. As Rita explained, they had no concept of the extent of the challenge prior to going;

it was when you looked back on it, or when you – suddenly catch on about what other people are doing. [...] We spoke with these girls and they mentioned that they were eating steak. And [laughing] I didn’t really even know what steak – well I did know what steak was, but I don’t think I’d ever had a steak. Ever.¹⁹⁷

Both, also, recalled a moment where they suddenly, uncomfortably, became aware of being insufficiently prepared for this event. For Rita, it was after the first practice outing on the course:

I just my, after we’d been out on the water and seen the other crews out on the water, I wa-... You know, I, I knew we were – and there was

‘Gender and Working Class Identity in Britain during the 1950s’, *Journal of Social History* 34, no. 4 (2001): 773–95.

¹⁹⁶ Sheldrake, oral history interview.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

no way I wanted the girls to know that, it was um... You know you just – you just could feel it.¹⁹⁸

Valerie suggested this sense of foreboding had set in even earlier:

all of us when we got there, we had the same feeling. We got off that aeroplane and [...] we knew, then, I think, that there was not really – we're not gonna make this.¹⁹⁹

Like Rita, though, she remembered that 'we did – realise, by watching the other crews how together they were, how *smart* they were, how – um, organised and, the coach, right on them'.²⁰⁰

The material absence of a Great Britain blazer – something Valerie had been particularly conscious of – was just one tangible symbol of the absence of support behind them as a national team. From watching superior crews on the water, to hearing about steak dinners while they visited supermarkets 'to feed ourselves during the rest of the day', once they 'caught on' to what others were doing, they were forced to reassess their own position.²⁰¹ In contrast to the level of preparation and support they observed elsewhere, Valerie suggested that 'Amy was just trying to pull it together all the time, all the way through' for the British team.²⁰² Rita felt the discrepancy raised an important question: 'why did those Russian women and all those other crews know about having to – um – have been much more trained?'²⁰³ In the interview, at a substantial temporal remove,

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Tester, oral history interview.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Sheldrake, oral history interview. Valerie echoed this analysis.

²⁰² Tester, oral history interview.

²⁰³ Sheldrake, oral history interview.

she easily reflected that ‘I suppose their country took it more seriously than our country took it’,²⁰⁴ but at the time it had been more opaque, the realisation more shocking. After trying to explain what the absence of knowledge and its sudden acquisition felt like, her final comment was that whether it related to training or racing, clothing or food, ‘nobody had really – said’.²⁰⁵ The stark simplicity of her statement is eloquent: how could these women know what they didn’t know? For Rita, ‘it wasn’t, you know later on in, with rowing, later on in life I knew that commitment wasn’t much, compared to what commitment really should be’;²⁰⁶ as Valerie said, at the time,

we did *everything* that was asked of us. We didn’t, you know, not turn up, for training, or just – miss things. We did everything but we didn’t have enough, we didn’t do enough.²⁰⁷

Reports and recollections of the events between 1951 and 1957 suggest a pronounced move from enthusiastic support for international racing to dissatisfaction and disillusionment.²⁰⁸ The fluctuations in reports – celebrating ideals of mutual respect, shared interest and social opportunity, and commiserating on poor results and the lack of support – are indicative of the broader uncertainties around the future of British sport and the amateur values

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Tester, oral history interview.

²⁰⁸ The sense of initial optimism around international opportunities, equivocal assessments of Britain’s standing relative to other countries, and increasing disillusionment, are reflective of the broader social, political and economic climate in Britain during these years. See for example L. Black and H. Pemberton eds., *An Affluent Society?: Britain’s Post-War ‘Golden Age’ Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Harrison, *Seeking a Role*.

underpinning it. While careful to separate the issue from the specifics of her home club, Valerie felt that 'when I think back hard about it, I do feel – we weren't given enough – backing and – to, to go in for a Championship like that'.²⁰⁹ While she 'didn't feel bitter about that, at all, I just realised that – no wonder we came last [...] it couldn't have been any different'.²¹⁰ They had understood that

we were second – second-rate really, not, not in a bad way, we didn't let it bother us, but we were aware of that, and we knew there was no money. Um, and to... Move on, to this sort of thing, was very difficult.²¹¹

She felt the correlation between financial investment in the sport and its development was clear.

Without money, you cannot move on. Not if you want to compete at that level. You can slosh around at Weybridge Ladies' Rowing Club and, like we did, going out in – terrible boats, not terrible boats, they – that's not true – but nothing was special.²¹²

Reflecting back at a distance of some sixty years, she could see that in contrast to her own experiences, 'today, if you were – picked to row, for Great Britain, my goodness you would be looked after'.²¹³

Conclusion

Formalised international competition had been a longstanding aim of the WARA, but when the opportunity presented itself, it was not equipped – materially, administratively or ideologically – to approach this level of competition without

²⁰⁹ Tester, oral history interview.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*

compromise. As athletes and WARA representatives gained greater understanding of foreign practices, and increasing experience of losses in international competition, they began to assess their sport more critically. Administrators in particular vocalised a need for greater state intervention in sport, reflecting calls for more intervention in other areas of British social life.²¹⁴ Yet other factions of the women's rowing community highlighted that failures of ambition and resourcefulness in training required more urgent redress, and would produce more immediate results. The investment required to race internationally, and the sobering implications for British rowing that became apparent upon racing, placed the WARA and its affiliated athletes in a state of double bind. Not attending the events suggested a lack of interest and ambition within the women's sport, while attending, and producing poor results, was costly in financial and reputational terms. As the WARA's awareness of the relative performance level of the British team grew, selection decisions would increasingly rest on whether particular crews were deemed to be of a sufficient standard to compete at international level. Resource-poor and largely unsuccessful, the British team's attendance was sporadic over this period, and would continue to be so during the years that followed; indeed, structural solutions to the problems they faced would not emerge until the end of the century.

²¹⁴ Gentry, 'What Great Britain and her Rowing Women Can Learn', 7; and 'First Women's European Rowing Championships', 9. On the broader social resonance of calls for state intervention at this time, not least as a way of reducing inequalities and divides of class, see Addison, *Now the War is Over*; Brooke, 'Gender and Working Class Identity'.

Chapter 2

1960–1972: ‘a path of cautious progression’

This chapter analyses the development of domestic and international rowing in Britain in the context of substantial, if uneven, social change for women during the 1960s. Significant shifts in the delivery of male amateur rowing – notably, the decision taken by the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) to employ first a National Trainer and, later, to introduce National Coaches – also carried important implications for the women’s sport. These years constitute an important period of administrative transition, the Women’s Amateur Rowing Association (WARA) engaging in more collaborative ventures with the ARA before the amalgamation of the two organisations in 1963. The chapter firmly connects the process of amalgamation to the hosting of the Women’s European Rowing Championships at Willesden in 1960. It argues that, in rowing, the process was neither hostile nor necessarily detrimental to the women’s sport – but neither did it bring visible, positive change. The women’s sport continued to struggle for resources and direction, and proved unable to build the momentum or critical mass required to sustain a community of competitive international athletes. As in other chapters, oral testimonies offer different insights from archival material: insights into training, competition and the balance to be struck with other commitments, professional or personal. Importantly, they also enable a more personal interrogation of amateurism and amateur ideology, focused on human emotion and motivation, than amateur definitions and codes alone allow.

Christine, Margaret, Pauline and Penny feature as oral history narrators in this chapter.

Sporting and social landscape

Despite significant continuities with previous decades, the 1960s were an important period of social change in Britain.¹ A generation of children born during and immediately after World War Two were coming of age, increasingly willing to challenge authority, and to resist conformity.² This generation enjoyed greater health, affluence and access to employment, with a corresponding shift in aspirations and a less certain concept of social hierarchy: a shift that logically extended into gender relations, towards greater rights and social agency for women.³ Lynne Segal's description of the 1960s as a 'crucible', out of which more radical feminist activism of the 1970s would emerge, reflects an understanding that this period was more formative than directly productive.⁴ Lewis, meanwhile, characterises social change for women throughout the 1960s as 'ambiguous', meanwhile: a judicious reflection on the limits to which changes to legislation would reconfigure gendered dynamics of power. Importantly, she emphasises that it would be inaccurate to equate some structural change with women's liberation.⁵

¹ See for example B. Harrison, 'The Sixties', in *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951–1970* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2009), 472–531; on the centrality of London to this narrative, see D. Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Little, Brown, 2006), 238–61.

² A 'backlash against permissiveness' can also be observed towards the end of the 1960s. See M. Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 151–7.

³ L. Abrams, 'Liberating the Female Self: Epiphanies, Conflict and Coherence in the Life Stories of Post-War British Women', *Social History* 39, no. 1 (2014): 14–35. See also Donnelly, *Sixties Britain*, 157–8; and M. Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain Since 1914* 3rd ed. (London: Palgrave, 2015).

⁴ L. Segal, 'Jam Today: Feminist Impacts and Transformations in the 1970s', in Lawrence Black et al. eds., *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 151. See also A. Lent, *British Social Movements since 1945: Sex, Colour, Peace and Power* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 7.

⁵ J. Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 42–3.

Even if progress was 'ambiguous', a continuum of change with regard to sexual equality and norms in Britain is evident from the 1960s. Thane identified a 'surge' of legislation relating to women starting in the 1960s and extending into the 1970s,⁶ and while Lewis' caution about equating legal and cultural change bears reiterating, the two share an important connection. The Equal Pay Act of 1970 followed, among other legislation, the introduction of the contraceptive pill in 1962, the legalisation of abortion in 1967, the Divorce Reform Act of 1969, and the Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act of 1970, all of which were of substantial and disproportionate benefit to women.⁷ The formation of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in 1969, and conspicuous examples of feminist activism such as the Dagenham Ford strike in 1968, challenged and consolidated some of the changes made at an institutional level.⁸

Against such a backdrop, substantial, yet contested, change was also evident in women's sport. Doustaly argues that 'married and middle-class women's perceived right to leisure was improved by their increased inclusion on the work market', even if, in practice, access was severely limited: 'the seeming *right* to leisure and *access* to it were not always compatible'.⁹ Yet there were some

⁶ P.M. Thane, 'What Difference Did the Vote Make? Women in Public and Private Life in Britain Since 1918', *Historical Research* 76, no. 192 (2003), 278.

⁷ H. McCarthy, 'Gender Equality' in Pat Thane ed. *Unequal Britain: Equalities in Britain Since 1945* (London: Continuum, 2010), 113; Thane, 'What Difference did the Vote Make?', 278.

⁸ On the particular importance of the Dagenham strike as an example of successful female collective action, see P. Thane, 'Women and the 1970s: Towards Liberation?', in Black et al. eds., *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, 173; and G. Holloway, *Women and Work in Britain Since 1840* (London: Routledge, 2005), 181.

⁹ C. Doustaly, 'Women and Leisure in Britain: A Socio-Historical Approach to Twentieth-Century Trends', in B. Bebbler ed., *Leisure and Cultural Conflict in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012),

reasons for optimism. Joyce Kay advocates for a far more positive assessment of the 1950s and 1960s for British sportswomen; her work highlights the extent of their achievements over this period, yet observes that such opportunities would 'fade away' during the 1970s.¹⁰ Beyond the explicit focus of her analysis, Kay's observations are also instructive in showing progress towards gender equality in sport to be fluctuating and uneven, rather than a series of incremental improvements. While a number of women's sports, including cricket, tennis and hockey, experienced a period of decline in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were also signs of growth. The Women's Football Association, for example, was formed in 1969, and between then and 1972, Williams shows that the number of affiliated clubs increased from forty-four to 182.¹¹

Developments within individual sports emerged alongside changes to patterns of leisure and greater state interest in British sport.¹² The 1960 report of the Wolfenden Committee on Sport, and the foundation of the Sports Council in 1965, both signified an increasing impulse to promote and regulate sport in Britain through government policy, even if such an impulse was tempered in political

192. Emphasis Doustaly's. Her observation that 'the Women's Liberation Movement, never fought on the front of leisure' is significant; the lack of feminist interest in sport and leisure is central to R. Nicholson, "'Like a Man Trying to Knit'?: Women's Cricket in Britain, 1945–2000' (PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2015).

¹⁰ J. Kay, 'A Window of Opportunity? Preliminary Thoughts on Women's Sport in Post-War Britain', *Sport in History* 30, no. 2 (2010): 196–217.

¹¹ J. Williams, *A Game for Rough Girls?: A History of Women's Football in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2003), 41–2. Williams notes the difficulty in assessing how many women participated outside of this structure, both before and after its formation. Such numbers in rowing are similarly difficult to identify precisely. In the 1960 *Almanack*, fifty clubs were listed as being affiliated to the WARA. On the general decline of women's sport, see Nicholson, "'Like a Man Trying to Knit'?", 92.

¹² See Doustaly, 'Women and Leisure in Britain'.

practice.¹³ The Sports Council was tasked with addressing issues of local and regional provision and participation, but also considering the international context. This latter point represented a significant departure from the remit of previous organisations such as the Central Council for Physical Recreation, reflecting the need to modernise approaches to international competition identified in the Wolfenden report. Among the priorities identified at the formation of the Sports Council were the ‘collation of information about the position in other countries’, ‘development of training and coaching’, and ‘participation in sporting events overseas by British amateur teams’.¹⁴ These developments are suggestive of an exploratory approach to the relationship between the state and sport. While some key issues in British sport were clearly identified, including questions of amateurism, agreement on how to resolve them was lacking.¹⁵ Debate in all areas was, however, clearly predicated on an understanding of sport as a male domain – albeit with some female participants.¹⁶

¹³ Central Council of Physical Recreation, *Sport & the Community: The Report of the Wolfenden Committee on Sport*, September 1960; B. Houlihan and A. White, *The Politics of Sports Development: Development of Sport or Development through Sport?* (London: Routledge, 2002) locates early sports development in Britain the 1950s and 1960s, and considers its expansion into mainstream British sport and sports policy from the mid-1970s. See also D. Day and T. Carpenter, *A History of Sports Coaching in Britain: Overcoming Amateurism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 171–7, and L. Allison, ‘Worth a Punt? An Assessment of UK Sports Policy’, *The Political Quarterly* 89, no. 2 (2018): 313–8.

¹⁴ D. Howell MP, *Sports Council*, House of Commons debate, February 3, 1965 (vol. 705, 1082; available at: <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1965/feb/03/sports-council>, last accessed December 3, 2018.)

¹⁵ Central Council of Physical Recreation, *Sport & the Community*, 110–1.

¹⁶ One of the fifty-seven conclusions of *Sport & the Community* addressed women’s sport directly, acknowledging that ‘provision for women’s team games is less adequate than for men’s’.

Documentary evidence from the ARA and the amateur rowing community it served clearly illustrates the emerging anxieties and ideological conflict around the purpose of sport in Britain more generally. The merger of the National Amateur Rowing Association (NARA) and the ARA in the 1950s had represented an important shift in institutional approaches to amateurism and class in rowing, even if cultural change in these areas was slower to manifest. Alongside the social conventions of amateur rowing were the athletic ones, with increasing demand for rigorous coaching and training, and for particular equipment and facilities. It is telling that issues of sexual equality were discussed with far lesser frequency and urgency than the sporting concerns perceived as specific to the men's rowing community, including those of class.

The WARA, which had overseen women's rowing in Britain since 1923, had struggled to move the sport forward following the Second World War. Many of the women on the committee had held their roles for a number of years; representatives were increasingly older and further away from active, competitive participation.¹⁷ Women's participation in international competition from its introduction in the 1950s had been sporadic and, largely, dispiriting, and in the years from 1960 to 1972, issues relating to the cost and standard of international racing endured. Domestically, too, the women's sport would remain marginal, although some important developments and interventions would begin to reframe its relationship with the men's sport and, to a lesser extent, with the British public.

¹⁷ L. Taylor, 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963: A Prosopographical Approach', *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (2018): 307–30.

The 1960 European Women's Rowing Championships at Willesden

The first Championship event sanctioned by the Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Avion (FISA) to be held on British waters took place on the Welsh Harp reservoir in Willesden, West London, in 1960. In the absence of the two thousand-metre course required for men's international regattas, Britain had never hosted a European or World Championship event, yet women's events, still raced over one thousand metres, could be accommodated.¹⁸ The difference in logistical requirements for men's and women's international racing thus placed the British women's sport in a unique position of advantage over the men's. The Chair of the ARA was supportive of the event: while he publicly acknowledged that 'amongst certain sections of our rowing community women's rowing is held in no great esteem', he argued 'our attitude in this country is gradually changing, and that we are pursuing a path of cautious progression'.¹⁹ He was also explicit that this 'cautious progression' addressed an important issue within the rowing community – that 'competitors, both men and women as well as officials who are the guests of various host countries year after year, feel acutely their position as the lame ducks in International Rowing'.²⁰ The women's sport offered the ARA a means of mobilising political capital within the international sporting community, regardless of any domestic reservations. For women's rowing administrators, a home Championship meant more athletes could be given the opportunity to race

¹⁸ For men, the European Championships were held annually from 1893. See A.N. Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current: A History of Women's Competitive International Rowing between 1954 and 2003' (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2007), 81–2 for a summary of their foundation. From 1962, they were held every other year, alternating with the World Rowing Championships or the Olympic Games.

¹⁹ G.O. Nickalls, 'W.A.R.A.', *Rowing*, March 1960, 36–7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

internationally: indeed, 1960 was the first and only year in the twentieth century in which Britain would field a full team for the European Championships.²¹

Competing at Willesden reduced the logistical burden on the team, but would deny athletes the novelty or excitement of international travel. For Penny, who had taken up sculling after her 'club coach, in ignorance, said you realise that it's the Rome Olympics next year, in 1960 – and if you can beat [the fastest single sculler at the time], you'll go to the Olympics', it would be doubly disappointing.²²

Olympic rowing events for women were not introduced until 1976:

I don't know when I came to realise, but [laughs] the realisation that it wasn't going to be the Rome Olympics was also the fact that the European Championships for that year were going to be held in London, on the Welsh Harp Reservoir, in Willesden, so literally not far down the road from where I lived. [...] Not only was it not Olympics, it wasn't even abroad.²³

The practical advantages were, however, substantial. A home Championship would reduce the amount of leave that athletes with jobs would need to request from work, and the time they would need to commit to spend away from home:

²¹ The British team comprised twenty-two athletes in five crews. The Championships as a whole attracted a 'record entry' of thirty-six crews from twelve countries, comprising almost 200 athletes ('Women's European Rowing Championships, 1960', *The Oarswoman* no. 22, October 1960, 3–4; 'Willessden Hosts to 200 Oarswomen', *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, August 4, 1960, 1). The European Championships were replaced with annual World Championships, but reintroduced as a distinct event in 2007.

²² P. Chuter, oral history interview by the author, October 30, 2017, Mylor, UK. Notes in possession of the author. A series of interviews were conducted with this narrator on October 30, October 31 and November 1, 2017; the specific date for each is cited as required in this chapter.

²³ *Ibid.*

arguably, the more delicate negotiation. It enabled Pauline, the mother of six-month-old child, whose partner voiced significant opposition to her participation in the sport, to take the opportunity to row for her country – even if she then felt compelled to recuse herself from the sport for almost twenty years.²⁴ Arranging childcare for a period of hours during the day far was less of a challenge than the multiple days required for an international trip. (While a press report suggestively claimed that Willesden Council had come ‘to the rescue of the rowing mothers’ at the Championships by offering childcare at the school where the athletes were housed’,²⁵ Pauline, insisted this was fiction, and that they had simply enlisted support from their families.) The limitations of marriage and motherhood on women’s pursuit of sport were significant, yet, following Williams and Nicholson, this case illustrates that some women were able to recruit the support they needed to balance these conflicting demands: a task made substantially easier by competing at a home Championship.²⁶

Athletes were ordinarily required to make a financial contribution towards competing in international events. The amount depended on WARA finances, the location of the event and the size of the team, and 1960 was no different: a press report claimed that British athletes all had to pay ten pounds in order to

²⁴ P. Rayner, oral history interview by the author, October 10, 2017, Teddington, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

²⁵ ‘Council to the Rescue of the Rowing Mothers’, publication title and date unknown. Part of the private collection of Pauline Rayner.

²⁶ Williams challenges a simple equation of marriage and motherhood with limited sporting participation in *A Contemporary History of Women’s Sport, Part One: Sporting Women, 1850–1960* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); specific examples from women’s cricket are explored by Nicholson in “‘Like a Man Trying to Knit’?”, 172–6.

participate.²⁷ Provision for the athletes was basic. Penny recalled staying in a school – ‘in sort of these class rooms, dormitories, all together’ – and while ‘for those days it was fine [...] it certainly wouldn’t be acceptable now’.²⁸ Hers was a more scathing description than the WARA’s, which claimed it was ‘a beautiful new building adjacent to the Welsh Harp’.²⁹ Yet neither Penny nor Pauline recalled being asked to contribute to the cost, both suggesting that arrangements must have been made to enable them to race without them having to bear the financial burden personally. Penny emphasised how young she had been at the time, claiming ‘I wouldn’t have had my own funding, I wasn’t even at *work* then’.³⁰ She is cited elsewhere as claiming that her father gave her the financial support she needed as a young athlete;³¹ as an eighteen-year-old with financially secure parents, this relatively small payment appears to have been unremarkable. Pauline was more surprised by the suggestion that there had been a cost, but speculated that she had been supported by her sporting network:

my club must have done that. My club must have paid for that. I can’t remem-, although *Pam* might have done, I tell you what, Pam might have done it. Pam might have paid for me.³²

Reflecting on the event as a whole, the ARA’s report claimed that ‘technically and socially [it] was a triumph, as well as an unqualified diplomatic success’.³³ J.H. ‘Freddie’ Page, then Honorary Secretary of the ARA, later reported that ‘sound

²⁷ ‘Selection Will Cost Oarswomen £10’, *Birmingham Post*, April 5, 1960, 15.

²⁸ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

²⁹ ‘Women’s European Rowing Championships, 1960’, 3–4.

³⁰ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

³¹ Schweinbenz, ‘Paddling Against the Current’, 124.

³² Rayner, oral history interview.

³³ ‘Annual Report’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1961, 45.

and television broadcasts of rowing events reached a peak in 1960' and deemed the programme of the finals at Willesden 'the outstanding rowing broadcast in 1960'.³⁴ The timing was perhaps fortuitous: this was a point of change in how sport and media were interacting, in part due to technological advancement, but also to changing consumption habits.³⁵ Penny, who went on to a distinguished athletic, coaching and administrative career, had herself been aware of the momentum behind the media's involvement:

even the first year at Willesden, as a result of that, it was amazing. Because rowing was relatively so small, particularly from the press and publicity point of view, and women's rowing was even smaller. But I started being invited to the [...] Sports Personality of the Year show, the BBC thing, way back as an athlete [...] it was really good! Little me, from – women's rowing, and who'd heard of women's rowing? You know, it's actually mixing with some of the sort of, real sporting icons of the time.³⁶

Despite these positive reports, however, the event placed significant financial demands on the WARA. Gentry reported to members that the organisation would now 'start 1961 with the cupboard virtually "bare"', and attendance was deemed

³⁴ J.H. Page, Honorary Secretary, 'Review of 1960: Rowing and Broadcasting', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1961, 20.

³⁵ See R. Haynes, *BBC Sport in Black and White* (London: Palgrave, 2016); R. Boyle and R. Haynes, *Power Play: Sport, the Media and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), notably 34–40; G. Whannel, 'Television and the Transformation of Sport', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625, no. 1 (2009): 205–18.

³⁶ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017. See Kay, 'A Window of Opportunity?' on how the changing relationship between sport and the media had identifiable benefits for women's sport and female athletes at this time.

'disappointing'.³⁷ Pauline claimed that 'nobody was really interested', and indeed, despite her family being based in London, 'in fact my mother and father couldn't bother, couldn't be bothered to come! [...] They had a holiday planned. So, off they went.'³⁸ As well as the relatively low profile of the women's sport, an article in *Rowing* magazine identified more logistical reasons for its limited appeal, with too few races on the final day, and for those who had come long distances to see what races there were [...] no licensed bar of any kind existed, as it had on the Friday and Saturday.³⁹

The latter was deemed a fundamental misunderstanding of 'rowing men', who 'do not like to spend their Sunday at the water's edge without an occasional adjournment for discussion over a noggin'.⁴⁰ The absence of alcohol was conflated with the absence of a sense of occasion: 'one can scarcely imagine Henley's finals at a time when it would be impossible to celebrate victory, in the approved manner'.⁴¹ The centrality of male experience is clear, as is the primacy of Henley Royal Regatta: the touchstone for – and pinnacle of – domestic rowing competition at the time. The success of the event, then, can be characterised as partial. It allowed more British female athletes to gain international experience, although the extent to which the WARA was able to capitalise on this was limited, and it generated some media exposure for the women's sport, particularly for

³⁷ A.C. Gentry, 'The Championships and the Future', *The Oarswoman*, no. 23, April 1961, 2; 'Women's European Rowing Championships', *Rowing*, September 1960, 161–2.

³⁸ Rayner, oral history interview.

³⁹ 'Women's European Rowing Championships', 162.

⁴⁰ Ibid. On the interactions between the provision and consumption of alcohol and sport, see T. Collins and W. Vamplew, *Mud, Sweat and Beers: A Cultural History of Sport and Alcohol* (Oxford: Berg, 2002).

⁴¹ 'Women's European Rowing Championships', *Rowing*, September 1960, 161–2. Henley Royal Regatta would not offer any women's events until the 1980s.

Penny at the start of her promising athletic career. Perhaps most importantly, collaboration with the ARA, on a project that served male and female rowing communities alike, helped to lay important groundwork for future co-operation and integration.

Collaboration between these two organisations, with markedly different profiles, expertise and resources, would not be straightforward. The cultural differences between the ARA – the product of elite Victorian masculinity, anchored in exclusive educational and sporting institutions – and the WARA were significant.⁴² One of the most enduring images of the Championships at Willesden for Penny involved Amy Gentry and her contribution to official ceremonial duties. Penny described how she had been

very short, and – quite wide, by that time – and was renowned always for being seen in a yellow – the old fashioned yellow waterproof stuff that fishermen wore, Sou'Wester yellow hat, and gumboots. And I can't remember if it was the opening or closing ceremony but that's how she was dressed [...] So, I mean she made a good speech or whatever she said, but it was – quite embarrassing what she was dressed in, I seem to remember. But maybe that was just because [laughing] I was seventeen years old at the time and I just couldn't believe it!⁴³

Penny's teenage embarrassment notwithstanding, her anecdote raises an important point regarding the image and reputation of the WARA, problematising

⁴² See C. Dodd, *The Story of World Rowing* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1992), 219–36 on the formation and institutional underpinning of the ARA, and Taylor, 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963' on the different characteristics of the WARA.

⁴³ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

the easy collaboration of the committee reported after the event.⁴⁴ Gentry's public image and conduct may have introduced some limits to the 'mutual esteem' of the committees described in a report; it is noteworthy that Gentry, ordinarily a thorough chronicler of the social and sporting details of international events, does not mention a formal reception held in central London that the ARA highlighted as another 'outstanding success of the Championships'.⁴⁵

1961–1963: administrative anxieties and amalgamation

With funding depleted after hosting the 1960 Championships, the ability to support attendance at the 1961 Championships was beyond the WARA. Three crews 'indicated' to the WARA that they 'wish to compete and are prepared to go at their own expense', as long as they were deemed of a high enough standard by selectors.⁴⁶ The WARA expressed 'grateful appreciation' for this: a telling insight into the limited resources of the organisation and the dynamics of power between it and the athletes under its purview.⁴⁷ The absence of administrative involvement meant that athletes, and any accompanying supporters, assumed full responsibility for the logistics of international competition. Penny's assessment was unequivocal: 'we had to basically be our own doctors, our own Team Managers, our own travel agents, had to – we had to do everything ourselves'.⁴⁸ In order to make the journey to Prague, the group had hired and customised a bus to accommodate their equipment and luggage – 'nothing to do

⁴⁴ 'Annual Report', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1961, 45.

⁴⁵ 'Women's Rowing', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1961, 24.

⁴⁶ These crews were Penny Chuter in the single scull, and a United Universities' coxed four and double scull. A.C. Gentry, 'Prague – 1961', *The Oarswoman*, no. 23, April 1961, 5.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

with the ARA, we organised and paid for all this, completely by ourselves'⁴⁹ – resulting in a lengthy delay at the border. 'They had the whole coach apart. [...] We were there, oh I don't know, six hours, or five hours, and there was absolutely nothing you could do.'⁵⁰

Penny recounted this experience in good humour, remembering other members of the team playing board games on the side of the road, and she told a number of stories about difficult border crossings and encounters with foreign police in the course of her career. She accepted, and indeed enjoyed, the unpredictability of her international endeavours, although she did suggest that as an athlete 'that really diverted you'.⁵¹ She highlighted that later,

in my day as a coach, whilst we did have to ask for financial commitments, I tried to ensure in my time that everything was done. That they [the athletes] didn't have to get involved in any of those – you know, things that would distract you.⁵²

Her criticism of having had to bear this administrative burden as an athlete was that it would compromise her performance, not impinge on her enjoyment. She understood her role as a coach was to facilitate performance, not only by developing fitness and technique on the water, but also, importantly, by addressing peripheral issues and distractions. Her behaviour in this role pre-

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

empted a key concern of high performance sport in the twenty-first century: the pursuit of marginal gains.⁵³

Access to private funds was an important facilitator of participation in international competition throughout this period. This was most clearly demonstrated by athletes in the United Universities' group that Margaret described, who were consistently able to cover the costs it entailed. When asked if she remembered the process of being selected for international competition, she was definitive: 'we virtually weren't selected, we were us. We wanted to go, so we went.'⁵⁴ She repeatedly emphasised the degree of autonomy she and her crews experienced: 'we were a little group of people who got on well together, we knew what we wanted to do, we were all teachers, so we were used to getting things organised, and we just organised ourselves'.⁵⁵ Margaret's sense of agency and ownership of the process was striking, and implicitly suggested that opportunities for women to compete at this level were dependent on their energy, visibility to selectors, and their own financial resources. For her, it was simple:

if you hadn't got the money you couldn't do it. You know, if – we had to – save up, and, and – and people put money in when we had to buy boats, because we'd all got reasonable salaries. So we just paid for

⁵³ For contemporaneous comment on marginal gains in British Cycling at the 2012 Olympic Games, see Matt Slater, 'Olympics [sic] Cycling: Marginal Gains Underpin Team GB Dominance', August 8, 2012 (available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/olympics/19174302>; last accessed February 27, 2020). The notion of an 'aggregation of marginal gains' (AMG) arising from sporting practice is also used in other professional communities, notably the medical.

⁵⁴ M. McKendrick, oral history interview by the author, August 28, 2018, Otford, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

them, and that was it. But if you really couldn't, well that was it. You – had to keep with the old boat. That was the limitation, was whether you could afford to pay for these things. And I mean, travel to regattas and entries to regattas, we paid ourselves.⁵⁶

Margaret and the United Universities' group were able to capitalise on the opportunity to row internationally because they had the financial resources to fund their attendance. The WARA would have valued the optics of sending a bigger team to foreign competition; certainly, this had been an important factor in building and funding teams for the early internationals a few years previously.⁵⁷ Their financial resources and organisational skills, coupled with the lack of administrative resources, empowered them to make their own choices about international racing. The power dynamic between athletes and the administration was somewhat inverted.⁵⁸

Christine, who also rowed with United Universities', suggested that her family 'weren't in a position to support any of my – any, any of the things I did', yet having started to attend university she was able to fund her participation, including the purchase of a boat.⁵⁹ Penny was fortunate in having parental support at the start

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See for example A.C. Gentry, 'First Women's European Rowing Championships', *The Oarswoman* no. 10, October 1954, 5–11.

⁵⁸ This pattern was visible in men's rowing over the next four decades in tensions between established, relatively well-resourced clubs such as Leander Rowing Club, and the ARA and the development of a centralised national squad.

⁵⁹ C. Davies, oral history interview by the author, July 20, 2017, Henley-on-Thames, UK. Notes in possession of the author. Unlike Margaret, Christine clearly identified her access to university as a route to a different kind of life her parents and siblings led, aligning it with a sense of social mobility. On the impact of broader access to higher education for women, and links to social mobility, see J.L. Thompson, *Women, Class and Education* (London: Routledge, 2000); B. Skeggs, *Formations of Class & Gender* (London: Sage, 1997).

of her career, but once she had left school, she was able to be more self-sufficient. Her salary and the foreign funding she was able to secure for competitions overseas – as an independent athlete, not as part of the British national team – enabled her to pursue competitive rowing as her primary ambition. She highlighted that her employers at that time, the Bank of England, were actively supportive of her athletic career and ‘paid a contribution to me, towards what I was being asked to pay [...] they were – pretty helpful in that respect’.⁶⁰ Margaret’s experience was more equivocal, illustrating the positive and negative impacts of such individualised support in the workplace.

On one occasion the Championships was in term time, and I had to ask my boss for time off. Well he didn’t like women on his staff anyway, so he was very reluctant. And he said yes, you can have time off, but you’re going to have to ask the County Council [...] I wrote to them, and [...] I was most amused afterwards, cos it turned out that one – I was to have time off without pay. It turned out that one of the committee was a, was a rowing Blue. And I got a letter from the chairman [laughing] of the County Council saying you know, what an honour it is to be chosen, there is no, no *possible* way that you would get time off without pay, you will be paid as normal.⁶¹

Unsurprisingly in this climate, the provision of kit at this time relied on the athletes, who would procure basic items that could be customised to represent the national team. Penny was particularly scathing about this scant support, but less about

⁶⁰ Chuter, oral history interview.

⁶¹ McKendrick, oral history interview.

the expectation of needlework than the quality of the letters provided: ‘the G for Great looked like a C for Crate, and so on and so forth’.⁶² She did however concede that she ‘was lucky my mother sewed on my “Crate Britain” red lettering, and sewed on my vest’.⁶³ Laughing, she recalled watching ‘other members of the team, like the girls from the United Universities’, all trying to persuade each other to sew on each other’s badges’ – athletes like Christine, who remembered how we sat on the boat, crossing over from Harwich to Hook, sewing white Great Britain letters on the back of our navy blue tracksuits, that we had gone and bought at Lillywhites in Piccadilly Circus!⁶⁴

Customising the kit was part of the fabric and the ritual of sporting competition, and while some athletes framed it as a quaint and comedic characteristic of their experiences, Penny attributed greater importance to its symbolic meaning. She was the only one among the athletes racing over this period to connect the physical symbol of the badge with a sense of pride in representing the country, suggesting that

along with all this business of having to pay for your own tracksuits, pay for your own vest, the discussions about why couldn’t we have more than one vest because it was a bit unhygienic [...] underlying all that it was really great, to, you know – put on a, put on a vest that had a Great Britain Union Jack on it.⁶⁵

⁶² Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid; Davies, oral history interview. Such stories recurred, from the 1950s well into the 1970s and 1980s.

⁶⁵ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

She was also the only one of these athletes to win an international medal. The way in which Penny experienced wearing the Union Jack on her vest – that is, as a privilege – echoes the point made by Rita and Valerie in 1954, albeit to different effect. All understood that material support and paraphernalia carried significance, and that kit and uniform dress offered a powerful outward indication of the commitment, preparation and self-esteem of the athlete within it. Elsewhere in the interview, Penny was critical of the impact limited provision had on athlete experience and aspirations – primarily those of the athletes under her care in her later role as a National Coach, rather than her own – suggesting that limited material support would have had a negative impact on their engagement with, and performance in, elite competition.

The lack of material support for the national team was felt the more keenly as British athletes gained more exposure to foreign practices, notably within Eastern Europe. The 1961 Championships in Prague were the first that the British women attended outside of Western Europe, offering athletes a glimpse into a markedly different sporting culture.⁶⁶ A report written by two of the athletes observed the ‘very close co-operation’ between sports authorities and the medical profession, reflecting with amusement on the British team’s visit to a sporting ‘Institute’.⁶⁷ Here, they

endured examinations incomparably more thorough than any we had ever undergone at home [...] we were left with the impression that in

⁶⁶ No British women competed at Bucharest in 1955 or Poznań (Poland) in 1958.

⁶⁷ A. Sayer and P. Reynolds, ‘The Women’s European Championships, Prague, August 18th–20th, 1961’, *The Oarswoman*, no. 24, October 1961, 16.

Czechoslovakia, most of us would have been quietly redirected to some less demanding sport, or even advised against sport at all!⁶⁸

Acknowledging the care and attention of the Czech authorities, they nonetheless felt that we preferred choosing our sports for ourselves, even if we were puny by Czech standards, and we would rather do what we wanted, however physically unsuited, than be pushed into a sport to which we had no leanings.⁶⁹

The British entry of eight athletes in three crews was reported as being 'by far the largest' of the Western European countries.⁷⁰ Athletes and administrators at this time frequently drew on the idea of a collective Western European sporting identity, suggesting it was only competition within this group that took place on an equal basis. In Prague, having placed last in the final, the eight and their opposition

did a lap of honour, and the people in front of us went round in silence. And when we got in front of the stands, they all stand up and cheered. And we said, what's that for? And they said – because you came. Because we were the only Western European country in the Championships. [Pause.] And I mean that was it. We were the only Western country that used to go to things.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ A.C. Gentry, 'European Championships 1961', *The Oarswoman*, no. 24, October 1961, 1–2. Apart from Great Britain, only Holland and Belgium entered.

⁷¹ McKendrick, oral history interview.

A report by the WARA commended the ‘determination to get there at all’ and the ‘encouraging results which they achieved’.⁷² Its optimism that ‘if they persevere there is no reason why they should not break the East European monopoly of Championship medals’ was rewarded the following year when Penny won the first European medal for Britain since the first Championships in 1954: a silver, in the single scull.⁷³

Penny’s success was celebrated in three different parts of the 1963 *Almanack*, a document that ordinarily made no reference to the women’s sport outside of the small section composed by the WARA. The report within the women’s section celebrated this ‘magnificent result’, while Freddie Page reported that ‘all were delighted to see Miss Chuter’s determination rewarded by a silver medal, the first ever gained by Great Britain in these Championships’, optimistically adding that ‘a gold now seems well within her reach’.⁷⁴ Penny herself was aware of the impact of the result on the international community of athletes around her, framing her silver as

the first Western medal, in a single, for a very long time [...] the fact was I had – all the Western nations that were there, particularly the Dutch and the French [...] jumping up and down with joy and celebrating.⁷⁵

⁷² ‘Review of 1961: Women’s Rowing’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1961, 16. The ‘encouraging results’ noted most likely refer to Chuter, who placed fourth in a field of nine. The coxed four placed fifth of six, and the double sixth of six.

⁷³ ‘Review of 1961: Women’s Rowing’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1961, 16.

⁷⁴ ‘Review of 1962’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1963, 18; ‘Women’s Amateur Rowing Council: 1963 Report’, *ibid*, 161; J.H. Page, ‘Women’s European Championships’, *ibid*, 165.

⁷⁵ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

Surprisingly, the response among her teammates was more tempered: when asked if Penny's win had had any effect on the rest of the British team, Margaret claimed 'no, no it didn't actually. I mean it was all so, so, so different, in those days.'⁷⁶ She suggested that the meaning of international representation and success had shifted, and that it had been less significant at the time than it might appear now. This runs contrary to archival reports, and indeed to Penny herself: while her immediate response had been framed negatively ('me being me I was – I was disappointed I didn't get the gold medal'), reflecting on it some fifty-five years later, she claimed that 'when I rationalise it actually, I was over the moon about it'.⁷⁷

Hosting the European Championships at Willesden in 1960, and Penny's silver medal in 1962, both represented significant steps on Page's 'cautious path of progression', and the timing of the amalgamation of the WARA and the ARA the following year is suggestive.⁷⁸ Early in 1962, *Rowing* magazine reported the prospect in optimistic, if patriarchal, terms: 'it is understood that very properly the proposal came from the men', and that since 'oarswomen appear likely to benefit from the merger, it is hoped that this is a take-over bid which will succeed'.⁷⁹ The same article referred to women's rowing as a 'Cinderella sport', the language of the report setting the tone of the amalgamation as chivalrous rescue rather than hostile takeover. The amalgamation was eventually agreed at an Extraordinary General Meeting of the ARA in October 1962, to take effect from January 1, 1963,

⁷⁶ McKendrick, oral history interview.

⁷⁷ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

⁷⁸ See Taylor, 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963'.

⁷⁹ 'Nothing to Lose', *Rowing*, March 1962, 10–1.

and unanimously accepted by the WARA since 'it was felt that this step would be of benefit to women's rowing'.⁸⁰

Day-to-day running of the women's sport remained separate from the men's, as the responsibility of the Women's Amateur Rowing Council (WARC). This committee comprised all of the previous year's WARA committee in the same roles,⁸¹ and the only shift in constitutional aims was the addition of a clause stating the WARC would 'consider all questions and disputes which may arise from time to time and if necessary to refer these to the Amateur Rowing Association'.⁸² The WARC intended to continue to run its own regattas, as the WARA had done, and 'to look after the domestic affairs of women's rowing in this country'.⁸³ Although some men's clubs began to offer women's events at their regattas – a move welcomed by the ARA – these opportunities remained limited.⁸⁴ That such 'lack of competition' represented an important handicap on the development of the women's sport was publicly highlighted in *Rowing* magazine in 1965, in a report that further emphasised more opportunities to race at mixed regattas 'would encourage women's rowing in a way few other actions

⁸⁰ 'Women's Amateur Rowing Council: 1963 Report', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1963, 161.

⁸¹ This continuity is identified using details published in the *Almanacks* from 1962 to 1964 inclusive. In 1963, full committee details were not included, but in 1964 the roles and role-holders were identical, including the President and Vice Presidents. From 1965, no Vice Presidents were named.

⁸² 'Women's Amateur Rowing Council: Constitution', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1963, 162.

⁸³ 'Women's Amateur Rowing Council: 1963 Report', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1963, 161.

⁸⁴ In the 1964 *Almanack* it was recorded that 'since the merger that brought the women's clubs into the ARA organisation several regattas have included events for women in their programmes, and we welcome this development'. J.H. Page, 'ARA Report: Women's Rowing', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1964, 244.

could'.⁸⁵ (It is noteworthy that opportunities in the south east of England, with a greater concentration of athletes and male-only clubs, were more limited in this respect than for women elsewhere.)⁸⁶ Penny was acutely aware of the slow pace of progress in this respect: 'really, all this business of mixed regattas, or mixed anything, didn't improve at all between 1964, and I retired [from competition] at the end of that year, and when I became a National Coach in 1973'.⁸⁷

Although amalgamation offered a powerful symbol of change within the rowing community, and a show of support for greater integration and collaboration between men and women, there were few outward signs of progress. The ARA itself emphasised continuity, reporting in the *Almanack* that some new terminology was 'the only apparent sign of change' – apart from the WARA reforming as the WARC,

an immediate effect of the amalgamation was the disappearance of 'Maiden' and 'Vest' from our rowing vocabulary. Our beginners are maidens no more [...] and the A.R.A. replaced the forbidden words with 'Novice' and 'Singlet'.⁸⁸

In 1980, a retrospective suggested that 'in 1969, women's rowing had only just become fully integrated into the ARA', highlighting that it was not until 1968 that

⁸⁵ 'Oarsman Looks at Women's Rowing', *Rowing*, December 1965/January 1966, 31. Walton Rowing Club is noted an exception, having offered women's Vllls in 1964 and 1965; this club is on the same stretch of water as WLARC, the club founded and led by Amy Gentry.

⁸⁶ 'A number of Women's A.R.C. events could usefully be incorporated in the programme at men's regattas on the Thames [...] elsewhere quite a few regattas have always offered races for women's fours, and sometimes in eights'. 'Review of 1963', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1964, 41.

⁸⁷ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

⁸⁸ 'Review of 1963', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1964, 39.

the Women's Rowing Council became the Women's Rowing Committee; instead of remaining separate, all affiliations and subscriptions from women's clubs or on account of women members of mixed-sex clubs now went into ARA funds and the WRC submitted estimates for expenditure and received an annual budget just like any other standing committee of the ARA.⁸⁹

It further noted that at this point, the number of nominally integrated clubs was misleading.

The 1969 *British Rowing Almanack* lists 41 mixed clubs [...] however, when the Women's Rowing Committee Regattas Secretary sought information about the activities of the women members of mixed clubs, it appeared that in many cases there were only one or two who were simply tea makers and were prohibited from actually going out in boats. Furthermore, those that did have actively rowing women members were in the Midlands, North and West.⁹⁰

The relative merits, for women, of the separate and combined administration of men's and women's sport are contested. Some scholars of women's sport argue that in merging with male administration, women's sport loses agency, control and identity. On more overtly feminist grounds, they also argue that the promise

⁸⁹ P. Churcher, 'Development of Women's Rowing 1969–1979', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1980, 161. This change, the author suggested, 'was particularly important from the point of view of international competition'. Pauline Churcher represented Britain from 1960 to 1965, and was extensively involved in domestic rowing administration. See 'Pauline Churcher (née Baillie Reynolds)', *Rowing Story*, available at: <https://rowingstory.com/people/pauline-churcher/>, last accessed January 28, 2020).

⁹⁰ Churcher, 'Development of Women's Rowing 1969–1979', 159.

of equality within mixed administrations is illusory, being a privilege conditionally extended by men, to women, on their terms.⁹¹ In rowing, while the ARA was careful to clarify that ‘women’s clubs have the same voting rights and pay the same rates of subscriptions as Mens’ [sic] clubs’, and that it would ‘allocate all revenue from womens’ [sic] clubs exclusively to women’s rowing’, it was a small concession.⁹² In comparison with the ARA, the WARA had few administrators or members, and little revenue. Its share of power would, correspondingly, be very small, and the extent to which the women’s sport could develop within such a structure would be determined primarily by the volition of men.

In a retrospective written in 1970, Gentry allowed for a more nostalgic acknowledgement of what was lost by the women’s sport, as well as what it gained: it

brought us into line with the rest of Europe and is a source of great satisfaction to me. I feel it is how it should be, although I was very proud of our achievements while we were a separate body.⁹³

While supportive of the change, she perceived it as a necessary rather than a desirable step – especially in an increasingly international environment.⁹⁴ Yet such control does not appear to have been exerted in any meaningful way. The amalgamation was a decision taken by men, and accepted by women from a

⁹¹ See for example Nicholson, “‘Like a Man Trying to Knit’?”, particularly 267–79; J. Williams, ‘The Fastest Growing Sport? Women’s Football in England’, *Soccer & Society* 4, no. 2–3 (2003): 112–27; J. Halpin, “‘Will You Walk into Our Parlour?’: The Rise of Leagues and their Impact on the Governance of Women’s Hockey in England 1895–1939’, (PhD thesis, University of Wolverhampton, 2019).

⁹² ‘Review of 1962’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1963, 18.

⁹³ A.C. Gentry, ‘50 years in Women’s Rowing’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1970, 220.

⁹⁴ ‘Review of 1969’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1970, 46.

position of relative weakness, but there is no evidence of hostility. The men's rowing community continued, largely, to ignore the women's sport, and the ARA made little overt attempt to regulate it; if attempts to control the sport were lacking, so too were attempts to support and develop it.⁹⁵ Page's path of progression was cautious indeed, and the inclusion of women's sport and female administrators in ARA decision-making and structures would be extended only slowly over the following forty years.⁹⁶

1963–1964: 'competing out of their class'

Alongside the administrative changes within the women's sport, the early 1960s constituted a period of reflection and change for the male rowing community, notably around training and performance. In 1963 the ARA had taken the 'radical step' of appointing a National Trainer, Jim Railton, who would be 'primarily concerned with physical fitness', marking 'a complete change of attitude from pre-war'.⁹⁷ This was coupled with an understanding of the 'urgent' need to 'improve the knowledge of coaching methods for club coaches', delivered directly through clubs and a successful Coaching Conference held in conjunction with the CCPR in the autumn of 1963.⁹⁸ Distinct from questions around the practice of the sport, the formation of a 'Public Relations Sub-Committee' in 1964 aimed to tackle the

⁹⁵ Even in 1972, a male advocate for the women's sport argued that 'girls on the river are largely ignored; most men's crews seem to wish that they just weren't there', and highlighted how beneficial they would find some engagement and support from their male peers. J. Langfield, 'Women's Rowing', *Rowing*, June 1972, 19.

⁹⁶ This discussion is revisited in Chapter 5.

⁹⁷ 'Review of 1963', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1964, 38.

⁹⁸ 'ARA Report: Coaching Courses', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1964, 244.

relative lack of publicity pertaining to rowing: a problem that was seen as a threat to athlete recruitment, as well as to profile more generally.⁹⁹

Although the ARA and the WARA had amalgamated by this point, there is little evidence that changes proposed and implemented by the ARA impacted upon the women's sport (or indeed, vice versa). The women's rowing landscape remained relatively unchanged, with limited international participation and little evidence of change in domestic structures and training.¹⁰⁰ For the 1963 Championships in Moscow, arrangements were, again, made and financed privately; the suggestion that the ARA could offer support to the struggling women's sport was not borne out by its actions at this point. The team comprised only three people, Penny in the single scull and a United Universities' double scull, so the transport required was simply 'a trailer towed by a private car'.¹⁰¹ The costs of travelling to Moscow were seen to be prohibitive for larger crews, whose equipment was far more difficult to transport: Margaret, who coxed fours and eights for United Universities', claimed that 'we were funding ourselves, and we couldn't afford that [...] we could have got ourselves to Moscow, but we couldn't afford to take a boat'.¹⁰² Asked about the impact of amalgamation, Margaret claimed that

⁹⁹ A.G. Lane, 'Rowing Publicity', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1965, 191.

¹⁰⁰ 'With few exceptions, the pattern in 1964 was much the same as that of previous years; entries enabled most events to take place, but they were well below the level which existed some years ago'. G.K. Wilkinson, 'Women's Rowing: 1964 Regatta Review', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1965, 162–3.

¹⁰¹ J.H. Page, 'Women's European Championships', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1964, 158.

¹⁰² McKendrick, oral history interview.

MM: It made no difference to us except that the last – er, Championship we went to, they paid our fares. That was that was the only thing. [Pause.]

LT: But that's quite a big difference isn't it?

MM: Well, yes. Went to Duisburg in Germany [1965]. But I mean that was – technically that was the only thing that we noticed, the only difference it made, otherwise everything went on as usual.¹⁰³

Supporting crews to travel to competition nearer Britain, and not to more distant venues, was a continuation of the WARA's practice from the early 1950s, and this funding may, therefore, have been unremarkable to Margaret as a consequence of the amalgamation. Yet the lack of importance she attached to this funding is reflective of a degree of financial freedom. She enjoyed a relatively high level of disposable income – even if Moscow had been out of her reach.

Such financial freedom was not unique to Margaret, but characteristic of the community of university sportswomen she engaged with, and, consequently, of the British women's rowing team at this time. Albeit without reference to financial privilege, Page noted that for the 1965 Championships,

with the exception of Miss Chuter, all came from the United Universities' Club, the supremacy of which is unquestioned, but at the same time not an altogether healthy sign of the state of women's rowing in the country.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Page, 'Women's European Championships', 165.

He also considered that amalgamation 'may give the fresh impetus that is needed'.¹⁰⁵ The entry for 1964 comprised the relatively experienced United Universities' eight and Penny in the single, as well as a young, coxed four from the University of London. Christine, who rowed in the crew, claimed 'we were by far the best four around' on the domestic circuit, but also that her crewmate Margaret Gladden had expedited their selection by contacting Page, since he understood that 'we can't just [...] have, you know, United Universities' representing the country, we've got to sort of move on from there'.¹⁰⁶ Page himself claimed that although 'the four were competing out of their class [...] the need to introduce new blood into our international teams justified their entry'.¹⁰⁷

The difference between the experienced United Universities' athletes and the rookie excitement of the University of London four was clear in Christine's account. She recalled how on making the team, 'Margaret [Gladden] and I couldn't really sleep cos we were just so excited about all this'.¹⁰⁸ Once on the trip, she described 'a lovely atmosphere, all, you know travelling together, and there'd be, um, the Russian ones singing Midnight in Moscow, and all the rest of it'.¹⁰⁹ Yet she also remembered how the Team Manager

came and had a word with us, cos we were – we were having a lovely time [...] you know, we were young, and, and – I mean, we were training hard, you know, but – young people, it's nice if they're happy [...] we never stopped smiling, really, we were having a lovely time.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Davies, oral history interview.

¹⁰⁷ Page, 'Women's European Championships', 166.

¹⁰⁸ Davies, oral history interview.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

We used to sing with people on the coaches, and apparently some of the UU eight thought we weren't taking it seriously enough!
[Laughs.]¹¹⁰

Her anecdote is important in illustrating the range of views (and personalities) that could co-exist within a team, encompassing different opinions on the purpose of international competition, and the correct approach to it. The irony that Margaret, who was in this United Universities' crew, focused heavily on the social opportunities of attending internationals, over and above the sporting, is indicative of a more fundamental issue: that she and her crew understood the performance of sporting sociability in a different way to their junior teammates.

Although Page suggested 'all credit is due to our little team for leading the Western European countries', he was explicit that 'the results fell short of our expectations'.¹¹¹ He expressed a feeling of 'sad disillusionment' regarding the eight's performance, in which they finished last, 'some six or seven lengths behind the winners,' and observed that Penny 'seemed to have lost some of her zest', despite some technical improvements in her sculling.¹¹² Page assessed the results against the absolute criteria of results, which he found to be lacking; by contrast, a report on behalf of the WARC described the standard of competition as 'almost terrifyingly high', positioning the standard of the other teams as the decisive factor in the British team's results.¹¹³ The results of international competition are necessarily relational: both ARA and WARC interpretations could

¹¹⁰ Ibid. The Team Manager was former international and United Universities' athlete, Frances Bigg.

¹¹¹ Page, 'Women's European Championships', 166.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Wilkinson, 'Women's Rowing', 162.

simultaneously be valid. The difference in how they allocated responsibility for the result, however, is significant.

Exposure to international competition, and foreign sporting cultures, was an important feature in developing athletes' ability to perform. The lack of collective knowledge regarding internationals, and its limited transmission between teams from year to year, and even between individual crews, is evident in archival reports as well as oral histories. In 1964, among the experienced athletes travelling to Amsterdam on the team were Ann Sayer and Pauline Baillie Reynolds, who even in 1961 had reported that

British crews are simply not used to the 3-day event type of race, where the first day's results mean nothing at all, and the crews that don't immediately lead just give up and paddle.¹¹⁴

This was a cultural critique as well as a physical one: crews were physically unprepared for the rigours of consecutive days of racing, and psychologically unprepared to compete aggressively. The more experienced athletes racing in the United Universities' crews constituted a valuable resource for learning the expectations, procedural and otherwise, of international racing. Christine recalled her inexperience and naivety with amused curiosity:

one of the things they were saying is look, in the run up to this, sort of the Championships, make sure that you have adjacent days' training. Because otherwise when you actually get there, and you're going out every day, it knocks you out! [Laughs.] Isn't it different?¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Sayer and Reynolds, 'The Women's European Championships', 16–7.

¹¹⁵ Davies, oral history interview.

In similar good humour, she also recalled learning about starts by word of mouth within the team:

In those days they started in French, yes? So it was: êtes-vous prêtes?... PARTEZ! Yes? And, um, UUs had to more or less tell us [...] you, go on the P of partez, yes? [Laughs.] You don't [...] wait for the end, the end of the word.¹¹⁶

Importantly though, these were lessons Christine learned in advance of being on the start line – albeit arguably too late for meaningful training and preparation. Margaret, by contrast, suggested that in her early days of international competition there had been little experience for them to draw on ahead of racing. She recalled that at her first international race, at Willesden in 1960, she struggled with a new skill: manoeuvring her eight onto a stake boat start.¹¹⁷

By the time I got onto the stake boat I was crying so hard I couldn't see where we were going [...] You don't think about things – well no- – *that's*, that's the trouble of not having proper coaches, you see, nobody tells you that sort of thing. That you're going to have to back an eight onto a stake boat. We did it, we got there eventually but... [Pause.]

Nearly got disqualified, but not quite. [Swallows hard.]¹¹⁸

Margaret was willing to take some responsibility for their lack of awareness, but she highlights that experience (in the form of 'proper coaches') was essential; she

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Stake boats are placed on rowing regatta starts to ensure all crews start level. Boats are required to pass these and then reverse ('back') on to the stake boat in order to attach. To do so without practice would be challenging, especially in an eight: a boat that is over eighteen metres long.

¹¹⁸ McKendrick, oral history interview.

and her crew could not intentionally prepare for something they did not know was a requirement. The lack of continuity and structure in women's coaching and competition led to important gaps in knowledge. The crews assembled for any given Championship event had too much to learn, at the point of racing, to perform their best.

While valid, such arguments should not distract from the limitations of the British team's physical training, especially in comparison with their opposition. Penny – who was described as 'noticeably more powerful' at Amsterdam – as an exception to this, her claim that 'I did more training than any of the other British crews at that time' borne out in oral histories.¹¹⁹ In order to increase her time on the water, including 'rowing four times at weekends, which was more or less unheard of', she had to make independent arrangements.

There was no training at all at the skiff and punting club after twelve o'clock on a Sunday. So to get two sessions in on a Sunday I just had to do my first session from the club, Sunday morning, leave my sculling boat on my parents' front lawn, do the second outing from there because the club wouldn't allow me to train on the Sunday afternoon, and then bring my sculling boat back Monday or Tuesday or whatever.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Page, 'Women's European Championships', 166; Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

¹²⁰ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017. Throughout her athletic career, Penny retained her affiliation to Laleham Skiff & Punting Club. On Sunday sport, see N. Baker, 'A More Even Playing Field? Sport During and After the War', in N. Hayes and J. Hill eds., *'Millions Like Us'?: British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 150–2.

That Penny's home could function as a temporary boathouse was an unusual privilege. Yet throughout her accounts, she described multiple instances of mobilising the support she needed rather than accepting that existing provision was lacking. At the point of wanting to develop her weight training, for example,

I started training in Edward Sturges' gym [...] He saw some sob story about me in the paper saying we'd got nowhere to train and I needed more than circuit training I needed to do strength training. And so he just contacted the ARA and got hold of my address and phoned me up and said, well, you can come and train in my gym.¹²¹

Penny specifically commented on the fact that 'there weren't that many crews – women, doing heavy weight lifting', although some may have been doing circuit training.¹²² She suggested that having seen

bits written about at the River Lea, at Stuart Ladies' being one of the early ones in the '50s that were doing heavy weights [...] maybe at that time the River Lea happened to have somebody who was into strength training and took them down that route [...] I only started it [later], I can't remember if it was my second year of sculling, or my third year.¹²³

Land training was by no means universal, even among international athletes, into the late 1960s: Christine was clear that 'once you started the rowing season you stopped your gym stuff, completely [...] you stopped everything, it was just, it was just stuff in the boat'.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid, October 31, 2017.

¹²⁴ Davies, oral history interview. Alongside the cultural limitations may have been practical ones: the Wolfenden report explicitly noted the difficulty and expense of sourcing indoor training space, and the barrier to access this created within some sports. Central Council of Physical Recreation, *Sport & the Community*, 61–2.

In addition to differences in athletic training practices, unlike their continental counterparts, British clubs prioritised sweep-oar rowing over sculling. Penny observed that while in Britain ‘all the clubs just had eights and fours’,

nearly all women’s rowing, in Europe, in my day, was sculling. They did have eights and fours at the international level but at club level, it was absolutely all sculling. And there was quads, quads everywhere.¹²⁵

The lack of suitable boats was a significant reason for the limited practice of crew sculling, Penny claiming that ‘we didn’t have a tradition in doubles and quads’.¹²⁶ Margaret similarly emphasised that ‘literally there were no boats in those days’, although she speculated that ‘I expect the men had a few, but not for the women’.¹²⁷ Despite such absolute lack, there was some appetite to provide opportunities for sculling, particularly for women. Even in 1955, an article in the *Almanack* had offered ‘a note on Productivity as applied to rowing’: observing the popularity of quadruple sculling in international women’s rowing, it commented on ‘how much quicker [...] and how much more enjoyable’ the discipline might be.¹²⁸ In 1965, Page similarly lamented

what a pity it is that we do not develop the attractive and exciting art of quadruple-sculling, of which the Continental girls are such graceful exponents. There is probably no more suitable form of boatracing [sic]

¹²⁵ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ McKendrick, oral history interview.

¹²⁸ ‘Review of the Year’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1955, 9. ‘Britain, motherland of modern rowing, was a classic example of a country where everything was handed down, whether it was orthodoxy, Fairbairnism, or the stirrings of the modern international style’. Dodd, *World Rowing*, 129.

for women than this and double-sculling, and how work in these boats would improve the rowing in eights and fours!¹²⁹

In neither case were arguments about using sculling to improve boatmanship in eights and fours applied to the men's sport. The purpose and practice of sculling and sweep oar rowing remained distinctly gendered, an observation echoed by Penny in oral history: 'there was if you like more quad sculling, um, in the women than the men'.¹³⁰ Aside from suggesting that 'the optimum height, for a sweep rower, is taller than a sculler', she claimed that

the catch is just as quick, but it's not so brutal in a sculling boat, even in a quad [...] there's still that element of less brutality and more quickness and deftness. And perhaps all those little things you could argue they're not more feminine, but they're just, if you just link the word brutal, with masculine or feminine, then maybe you know, you're going to say... [Pause.]¹³¹

Separating understandings of the physiological capacity and cultural expectations of the female body had been fundamental in achieving greater legitimacy for women's sport in the nineteenth century. Penny's conflation of technical demand and gender norms here is telling: a strong, and problematic, indication of the enduring implications of historic sexual prejudice.

¹²⁹ Page, 'Women's European Championships', 167.

¹³⁰ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017. See also L. Taylor, 'From Pleasure Rows and Plashing Sculls to Amateur Oarswomanship: The Evolution of Women's Amateur Rowing in Britain', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35, no. 14 (2018), 1498–500.

¹³¹ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

1965–1972: indecision and insufficiency

After building some momentum in the early part of the 1960s, from 1965 onwards, international women's rowing became increasingly sporadic, with some fractures forming within the community. Increasing criticism was directed towards the dominance of the United Universities' group in the international team, amplifying the concerns voiced in 1964 about the lack of upcoming talent. A scathing report by one female athlete in the *Almanack* characterised the British entry of a coxed four and a single scull as 'even more amateur in its outlook than usual'.¹³² Lamenting that 'the demands of training college have removed Penny Chuter from the scene (a great loss to international entertainment value as well as to sculling)', she reported that the inexperienced single sculler replacing her had been 'unable to cope with the conditions, and was eliminated'.¹³³ Her tone, especially with regard to the United Universities' contingent of which she was a part, is heavily sardonic: '(inevitably?) U UWBC provided a IV', a crew she described as 'a resurrection' of the 1961 entry.¹³⁴ Parenthetical frustration aside, she claimed that the four did not begin training until very late in the season, 'possibly working on the theory that since they had trained extremely hard in the eight in 1964 and got nowhere, they could hardly do worse this time'; ultimately, the crew finished last of six.¹³⁵ 'One would normally conclude by saying that the lessons to be learned were obvious', she reported, but the four 'certainly did no worse than ever before, on the minimum of training'.¹³⁶ Noting that 'this is

¹³² M.P.B.R., 'Women's European Championships', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1966, 129.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

presumably not a desirable gospel to preach, while international success still eludes us', she concluded that 'the reader may draw his own conclusions'.¹³⁷ Her frustration with the system is palpable; yet as an active participant, under the umbrella of an organisation that exerted little influence on international preparation and training, her role – or rather her agency – with regard to their performance is left unscrutinised. It is unclear whether external or administrative issues had proved insurmountable earlier in the season, or she and the rest of her crew were simply unable or unwilling to train.

A year later, in 1966, engagement and involvement with the women's sport remained limited on domestic and international fronts. Domestically, membership of the WARC was 'generally [...] rather low', resulting in 'correspondingly light' racing entries, signalling the absence of a new competitive generation moving up through the sport.¹³⁸ This appears to have been mirrored internationally: the venue for the European Championships was confirmed very late, apparently owing to international 'indecision', and the reception of the eventual decision being met with a declaration of 'the gratitude of oarswomen and scullers everywhere' most likely reflects a lack of volition or resource to host.¹³⁹ The British entry at this event comprised an eight from St George's Ladies' and Margaret Gladden of the University of London in the single scull, and despite close racing

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ 'Women's Amateur Rowing Council: Annual Report, 1966', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1967, 136.

¹³⁹ H.B.F., 'Women's European Championships, 1966', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1967, 141. 'H.B.F.' is presumed to be Hazel Bertha Freestone, who served as Honorary Secretary of the WARA from 1943 to 1960.

between other teams, 'of the British team's performance, perhaps it would be best to say that it did not exceed expectations, and leave it at that'.¹⁴⁰

From 1967 until 1972, British women's participation in international rowing was very limited. No team was fielded in 1967 and 1968, and entries remained small for the next four years: only six British crews, comprising different combinations of the same four women, competed over this period.¹⁴¹ The United Universities' group that had featured so prominently began to disintegrate. Penny attributed their gradual disappearance to life course: 'as usual, those that got married, as soon as they started having children, they, they stopped'.¹⁴² By contrast, she viewed a teaching career as something that enabled many of the women she competed with, and later coached, to participate more easily – and more extensively.¹⁴³ Margaret similarly suggested that at the point of having children they 'gradually' drifted out of the sport, although she later corrected herself:

actually it wasn't until after they'd decided to stop that they actually married [...] they lasted out until after our international days were over, and occasionally rowed after just for fun.¹⁴⁴

The decision was not triggered by being married, but by the prospect of it. Their performance of conformity to conservative gender norms – here, recusing themselves from rowing – was a preparation for marriage, rather than a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ The entries were a single scull for the 1969 Championships in Klagenfurt (Austria); a single and a double scull in 1970 and 1972; and a double scull in 1971. The four athletes were Margaret Gladden, Christine Davies, Christine Peer (née Dennis) and Diana Preston (later Bishop).

¹⁴² Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

¹⁴³ This issue is explored further in Chapter 3.

¹⁴⁴ McKendrick, oral history interview.

consequence of it.¹⁴⁵ Such behaviour suggests a high degree of hegemonic conformity to traditional marital roles and relations within this group, a willingness to reassess their priorities and retrain their focus accordingly.

The lack of entries for domestic racing in 1966 had somewhat improved by 1968. Increases were, however, concentrated in eights and fours, largely driven 'by the Universities, who do not seem to be short of new members'.¹⁴⁶ The lack of senior scullers, meanwhile, was reported as being 'very disappointing'.¹⁴⁷ 'Senior' status here refers to racing experience, not to age group, and as such, this trend aligns with the stability of demand in the universities, and a predictable pattern of athletes leaving the sport on leaving university. Many university crews would initially row in novice categories; that these novices did not proceed to senior status suggests that for the majority, participation in rowing was seen as a student hobby rather than a long-term pursuit. While the WARC expressed the desire to develop the standard of women's rowing, it struggled to promote long-term change. An 'experimental training weekend' for aspiring international scullers and rowers held at Reading University in 1968, for example, offered competitive training sessions, coaching, video analysis and lectures, delivered by former internationals, WARC Committee members and National Coach Bob

¹⁴⁵ Getting married and having children were conflated by narrators; combined, they represented women's lives after sport. Yet the distinction between the two may be an important one in determining women's access to leisure; see for example, C. Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); Doustaly, 'Women and Leisure in Britain', 192-3.

¹⁴⁶ G.K. Wilkinson, 'Women's Rowing: Review of 1967', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1968, 149.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Janousek.¹⁴⁸ In 1968, however, it was observed that ‘the spread of wins over several clubs is encouraging, but there is still a shortage of oarswomen coming up into the Senior status’.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore,

in many cases, the current Seniors have been around for quite a long while and, even if the spirit is willing, the flesh gradually gets weaker and the standard lower. New blood is needed among the Seniors if we are to have any hope of again reaching the European standard which, at the time of writing, seems remote.¹⁵⁰

Gendered constructions of women’s rowing: continuity and change

During the 1960s, male advocates for women’s participation in rowing increasingly voiced their support publicly, often using examples of other sports to emphasise the need for rowing to change. In 1964, for example, an article in *Rowing* magazine asked

why should the movements in rowing be any less fitting for Women [sic] than any of the other sports at which they excel? Do the back and stomach muscles take a bigger strain than in tennis? Or does it call for greater fitness than running or swimming? No, of course it does not, and the days are long past when these sports were considered unladylike.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ ‘Women’s Rowing: WARC Training Weekend’, *Rowing*, June 1970, 27–8.

¹⁴⁹ M.P.B.R., ‘Women’s Rowing: More Winners, but New Blood Needed’, *Rowing*, August/September 1968, 16.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ ‘Oarsman Looks at Women’s Rowing’, 30.

Although defending rowing for women, the writer implicitly accepts the need for women's sport to be 'fitting'; another correspondent to the magazine argued, similarly, that

many people consider women's rowing on the same par as women playing football or even wrestling – what a horrible thought – and it's not true at all. Women have a much finer sense of timing and balance than most men and even if they haven't got the brute strength of men, they can row within their own limits and do it gracefully.¹⁵²

The argument leaves the physical superiority of male rowers unquestioned, but posits that it should not preclude female participation. Capable of delivering competent and aesthetic technique, women's practice of the sport could be entirely appropriate to their specific – and limited – physical abilities.

The majority of printed coverage and correspondence in the *Almanack* and *Rowing* magazine is actively supportive of women's rowing, or if not, neutral or silent on the topic. A tirade printed in 1967, however, is a notable exception. In response to the call for more men to get involved in coaching women, one male correspondent suggested that coaching as 'a serious function relating to great possibilities and effects' was 'perverted to silly and trifling ends' in being offered to women: it was, he argued, 'revolting'.¹⁵³ In part, he objected to the possibility that boys and men might lose out in favour of women, perceiving coaching to be a finite resource that should not be extended into the women's sport. He also

¹⁵² T. Osborne, 'Women in Boats', *Rowing*, July 1964, 32.

¹⁵³ P. Barnsby, 'Leave the Girls Alone', *Rowing*, February 1967, 37.

argued that 'whereas man takes up sport for the love of strength and action, woman takes it up to get noticed'.¹⁵⁴

Arguably more telling than this anti-feminist commentary is the response it provoked. The Captain of United Universities', for example, strongly defended women's sporting practice, in physical and ideological terms.

The point of physical exercise, apart from the health aspect is that it is, at its lowest, a way of letting off superfluous energy and, at its highest, it provides the enormous pleasure that comes from perfect timing, physical strength and co-ordination, and the co-operative effort of team games. Why should women not be as capable of this as men?¹⁵⁵

Male advocates too focused on the suggestion that women were not capable of authentic and legitimate motivation in amateur sport.

The dedication shown in international athletics, swimming, etc., should show that they are capable of fine sports(man?)ship. This could just as easily apply to rowing. The fact that their physical construction does not allow them to equal our standard is irrelevant. It is the technique of getting the best from one's limitation that counts; if this is not so why do so many of us bother to row in second-rate clubs (I mention no names)?¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. Barnsby's views were swiftly rejected by the Captain of Furnivall Sculling Club, who found it 'imperative to disassociate Furnival [sic] Sculling Club from the jaundiced views expressed' – not least because of the club's history as a women's club, and the active involvement of Dr Furnivall in coaching women (J. Robbins, *Rowing*, March 1967, 28).

¹⁵⁵ P.B. Reynolds, *Rowing*, March 1967, 28.

¹⁵⁶ T. Mason, *Rowing*, April 1967, 36.

Others mobilised more pragmatic, if sexist, arguments, expressing enthusiasm at the greater integration of the men's and women's sports at club level:

the girls are easy to coach, very competitive, and smell better than the men. For club rowing they are the best fundraisers that ever existed.

They are fun to have around and add life to our club.¹⁵⁷

Fragrant and fun, these 'girls' posed no threat to traditional gender norms, or to a sexual hierarchy that prioritised men. The emphasis on women's attitude to training – coachable, competitive, lively – avoided issues around athletic practice. Penny meanwhile suggested that the women's involvement in sport provoked more anxiety than training of the female body at this time:

I don't think we were talking so much about muscular as not being feminine [...] And sport was still perceived not to be feminine. And it seemed to be more the feminine bit than specifically picking out what used to be called a male trait of being muscular.¹⁵⁸

By this time, she claimed, physiological objections were less prevalent than cultural ones.¹⁵⁹

Penny did not explicitly recall encountering any negative commentary about women's rowing while she was an athlete, at least 'not personally', although, without prompting, she rationalised this through the specifics of her upbringing, her local community, and indeed, of single sculling:

¹⁵⁷ E.E. Liskin, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Such analysis necessarily pertains to the British context: the physical appearance of women competing for Eastern European teams provoked scathing criticism that called not only their gender – their 'femininity' – but their sex itself into question. Domestically, in the absence of remarkably muscular female athletes, such anxieties could lie relatively undisturbed.

I think I was lucky, because I was in a mixed environment in my punting and my skiffing, and therefore I was sort of known when I got into a single sculling boat. And sculling was the more acceptable side of it rather than the rowing, in terms of feminine versus not feminine and all that. And I was a single sculler, so it was me, they weren't having to cope with four women or eight women or whatever, it was just me. And I – expect I could be a handful even in those days [laughs], but most of the people that I used to train against on the Burway reach were my friends socially and whatever. You know so they all – I'd grown up with them, so – that sort of wasn't a big issue.¹⁶⁰

Being embedded in a local community had facilitated her acceptance as an athlete. Margaret alluded to this with regard to rowing outside of London, suggesting that different regions may have viewed the issue differently because of the scale of the sport there.

I suspect that outside London, there was a little more association between the men and the women. [Pause.] Because the clubs weren't so big. I mean the clubs in London were big rowing clubs, and they didn't want to know about women because they were quite happy – with their own little world. But I think outside London there was a lot more association between the men and the women.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

¹⁶¹ McKendrick, oral history interview.

Margaret acknowledged more, and more negative, gendered discourses around rowing than Penny, but she was dismissive of the idea that they had much effect on her and her group.

LT: Was there a lot of negative commentary around women rowing at that point? [Pause.] That you were aware of?

MM: Well, we could usually stand up for ourselves.¹⁶²

Probed further, she suggested that this ability to ‘stand up for ourselves’ had insulated them from some criticism – thus acknowledging that it did exist, at least in some quarters – but also emphasised that as a group they had personal connections within male amateur rowing.

We did *know*, we did know quite a lot of people in the – Zona Howard, I mean her brother was the Captain of Oxford. So we knew people in that area.¹⁶³

Yet while her group enjoyed social connections to the men’s amateur sport, she was clear that such connections did not translate to sporting equality, and could not exist at an organisational level.

There was no possible chance in those days, I mean the women didn’t talk to the men, so that was it. Or the men didn’t talk to the women, probably that way round. [Pause.] I mean we *did*, but I mean – officially. No.¹⁶⁴

Penny was exceptional in the level of success she achieved, and while she was modest about the extent to which her athletic talent may have facilitated her

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

acceptance into male rowing communities, she did identify it as a legitimating factor in some contexts. On travelling to a regatta with the Oxford University men's eight, she recalled that on the way there

they wouldn't recognise me as being anybody. We flew to Paris and then got the train all the way down to Mâcon, and they were in the same carriage but ignored me. And then at the regatta I actually won [laughs], won, and they didn't! So on the way back, we actually got quite chatty.¹⁶⁵

It follows that her performance level may have facilitated access to exceptional opportunities – such as being allowed to train out of one of the most conservative bastions of amateur (men's) rowing in Britain.

I did actually boat from Leander, in the '60s would you believe, and I was allowed to keep my sculling boat in the garden, just overnight – and I was allowed to get changed in, they didn't have a shower room for women, so I used the ladies' powder room! [Laughs.] So that was way back then.¹⁶⁶

She attributed this privileged access to Stuart MacKenzie, a fellow international sculler with whom she had regularly travelled to competition abroad, but also to the particulars of her training:

they probably thought, oh just – we'll keep him quiet, and yes, she's only one. And she's only gonna be putting a – putting her single in the garden or whatever.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, October 31, 2017.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Personal networks and characteristics, then, could supersede administrative or institutional barriers.

International mobility and sociability in women's sport

Travel was becoming more available to more of the British population by the early 1960s, but remained a privilege.¹⁶⁸ Penny was unique among the women interviewed in the extent of her travel as an athlete at this time, and in her use of international competition and exposure to develop her sporting performance.¹⁶⁹ She enjoyed a relatively high degree of independence. She was in her early twenties, single, and employed in a job that allowed her to develop her athletic career. Competing in the single scull, she did not need to co-ordinate with teammates or make special arrangements for her equipment.

I'd go off to, say, Whitsun weekend to Ostend Regatta or wherever and then drive back [...] having driven up, caught the night ferry, driven – gone into a Greasy Pete's in Dover, driven up to the city, parked my car, with my sculling boat on the top of it, in the Bank of England car park, and just walked in, 'oh morning, had a good weekend?', as if nothing had happened! And so, that's how it was.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Figures cited by Hennessy suggest that by 1961, 3.5 million British people went abroad for their holidays – twice the number that had done so in 1950. P. Hennessy, *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 539. Despite this increase, it remains a relatively small proportion of a population of 52.8 million (Office for National Statistics, available at www.ons.gov.uk; last accessed June 16, 2019).

¹⁶⁹ The lack of domestic competition was repeatedly identified as an important reason for British failings over this period. Other athletes observed that Chuter had 'obviously benefitted' from her substantial experience in regattas overseas, and that the rest of the team were 'ludicrously raw by continental standards.' Sayer and Reynolds, 'The Women's European Championships', 16–7.

¹⁷⁰ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

Penny and other narrators recalled their exploits abroad with fondness and good humour, and invariably described issues and problems as comic episodes rather than anything more sinister.¹⁷¹ They did, however, provoke some anxiety at home: while Penny suggested that her parents were relatively open-minded, asked directly if they had expressed any concerns, she said they had, 'absolutely. Absolutely. [...] You know, every time I went behind the Iron Curtain, my mother was just – you know.'¹⁷²

Penny's athletic career was characterised by significant amounts of time spent abroad, competing independently as well as part of the British team. She suggested that in Eastern Europe, because she had been 'good enough to represent competition', she had enjoyed full financial support from the hosts.

Whenever I went to Prague or Grünau or wherever, they paid for me to go. It didn't cost me a brass farthing, my air fares, and everything. Whereas if I went to, as I did a lot as well, Amsterdam, Duisburg, Mâcon, Dunkirk, Ostend, Belgium, and all those nearer countries, I was – usually driving my, my mother's mini with my single sculling boat on the top.¹⁷³

Unlike her British teammates, her athletic ability opened opportunities to compete abroad without personal cost. For the majority of British athletes, with only limited financial support from the WARA and later the WARC through the early 1960s, international travel required personal financial investment. The extent to which

¹⁷¹ This is plausibly a function of the time elapsed since they took place, the retrospective security of knowing no serious consequences had arisen, or a different set of expectations around foreign security.

¹⁷² Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

¹⁷³ Ibid, October 30, 2017.

these individuals were able to take advantage of their time abroad was uneven, and again, it was the United Universities' group that were able to exploit the opportunity to its fullest. Margaret recalled that

we used to wander off after the Championships, [...] we wandered all round East Germany, all round er – um – Czechoslovakia. And um, I was a, one of the managers in Copenhagen, and in Hungary, and we did the same there, we just wandered round.¹⁷⁴

This 'wandering' was sociable, and she spoke of the opportunity in a casual manner. As with the sport itself, travel offered a context in which to spend time with friends. She had taken a great deal of pleasure in it, although she also highlighted the impact of seeing countries still struggling to reconstruct after the Second World War.

In 1960, '61 and '62, there was a lot still on the continent that – you know. We saw Dresden absolutely flattened, they hadn't done anything to Dresden after the war [...] we saw a lot of things that that – [coughs] disturbed us a bit shall we say. [Swallows.]¹⁷⁵

Christine, who had 'never travelled at all' before her international athletic career, expressed a greater sense of privilege around the opportunity to go abroad.¹⁷⁶ Yet she also articulated some equivocation about her own access to such opportunity. Following the 1964 Championships, for example, 'some of them were going on a canal boat trip around Holland [...] I turned it down because I, I

¹⁷⁴ McKendrick, oral history interview.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Davies, oral history interview.

wasn't quite sure how my family would take it'.¹⁷⁷ She expressed an acute awareness that she was 'getting so much, all these things that were happening to *me*', a more stark imbalance since

the same year as I was being selected to row for the country – my elder sister, had been diagnosed with tuberculosis, TB. And was hospitalised for nine months. So there was – yeah? That family situation. And there was me... [Pause.] [...] I had to go to the European Championships, because I, you know, but I didn't have to have a canal holiday.¹⁷⁸

Christine described a growing sense of distance between herself and her family, her adult self and her childhood identity. Her education was changing the course of her life, professionally and socially. For the most part, she fully embraced these changes, but here, opportunity presented as self-indulgence, and she rejected it. While she advocated for balance in terms of training, she perceived of national representation as a responsibility – and a more legitimate form of privilege than a canal holiday.

The impulse towards sociability was, however, an important one, which extended beyond the immediate social groups of the athletes' crews and the rest of the women's team. International events offered a platform to meet and engage with foreign athletes and, in some cases, administrators. While in earlier reports social occasions had been depicted as ad hoc and low key – fireside singsongs rather than ceremonial dinners or receptions – Margaret alluded to a more formalised

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

opportunities to socialise at international rowing competitions. She also recalled far more, and more enjoyable, interactions with foreign teams than other athletes who competed at this time, facilitated by the higher language skills within her group. Their education had practical, social advantages in this respect, allowing them to find common ground with others even if they did not share a first language: 'the Romanians spoke – school French, and we spoke school French. So we always conversed in fractured French. So we, we could talk to each other.'¹⁷⁹ She described how she and her crew 'got very friendly with all the – all the others, and – the other countries [...] we had a marvellous time actually, great friends, we had'.¹⁸⁰ Beyond the community of female athletes she was a part of, she suggested that her group had a social relationship with the international administration through Thomas Keller, then Chairman of FISA:

We did very well abroad, actually, because the Chairman of – FISA was a Swiss, Swiss millionaire, ever such a nice bloke. And he liked English fruitcake. Well Frances' mother always used to make us a big fruitcake to take with us, and he very quickly discovered that we had a fruitcake. So we always used to have a visit from the Chairman of, er, of FISA. Which was very useful.¹⁸¹

It was unclear how Keller had 'discovered' the fruitcake; but the anecdote was illustrative of a very different pattern of sociability than was evident in other interviews.

¹⁷⁹ McKendrick, oral history interview.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

‘The day of the amateur is passing’: shifts in sporting ideology and practice

Margaret and Christine both presented narratives about the sport that aligned with the conservative tenets of British amateurism that had underpinned the ARA, along with a number of other amateur organisations, for decades. Yet sporting culture was changing. The appointments of Railton and Janousek to the ARA during the 1960s offered a clear indication that a process of reconfiguring men’s amateur rowing was underway, formally moving training away from amateur advice towards professional specialism.¹⁸² In such context, their easy appropriation and articulation of traditional amateur values – values that were becoming anachronistic in the men’s sport – is suggestive.¹⁸³ In 1963, R.D. Burnell, an Olympic gold medallist in 1948, had posited that

the days when we argued about the desirability of international sport are past. It is no longer an argument, but a fact. Perhaps it is a physiological [sic] necessity, a safety valve for national aspirations. And it is no longer the prerogative of the few in rowing. Its base will become even wider, and those who participate will become ever more insistent that we create the conditions in which they can do so successfully.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² While amateur athletes had regularly used professional trainers from the nineteenth century, these appointments were notable for their visibility, and for being within a governing body. See for example D. Day, ‘Massaging the Amateur Ethos: British Professional Trainers at the 1912 Olympic Games’, *Sport in History* 32, no. 2 (2012): 157–82.

¹⁸³ This issue was explored in more detail by the author in ‘Revival, Recalibration, Radicalism?: Reflecting on Women’s Amateur Rowing in the Long 1960s’, presentation and seminar at the Institute for Historical Research, London, June 10, 2019. Recording available at: <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/sport-and-leisure-history-lisa-taylor/id868133959?i=1000456204997>; last accessed March 4, 2020.

¹⁸⁴ R.D. Burnell, ‘Whither the Rowing Calendar?’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1963, 22.

Burnell articulated three key ways in which the expectations of amateur rowing were shifting: the appeal of international competition, the accessibility of the sport to a broader section of the population, and the importance of winning. By 1970, this strand of discourse had developed into a more fundamental separation of the historic meanings attached to the amateur, and the contemporaneous practice of sport. A letter from John Langfield in *Rowing* magazine claimed that ‘the day of the amateur is passing [...] we do not argue that there is no place for the amateur; only that if he wants to win, he will have to develop a professional approach’.¹⁸⁵ He continued:

we have played at being enthusiastic amateurs for quite long enough.
[...] Many of the old guard will say that all the enjoyment goes out of rowing if it is carried to these extremes; to which at least some will reply that if one can’t win, then the enjoyment has gone out of it anyway.¹⁸⁶

This critique neatly expressed a paradox facing British rowing: it needed either to move away from the amateur model it had enshrined and promoted since its formation, or to recalibrate its understanding of what amateur sport might mean and how it might be practised. The conflation of social and sporting superiority underpinning amateur ideology was becoming more problematic, and uncomfortable compromises would need to be made. Employing Railton and Janousek, the ARA’s first forays into professionalising training and coaching in British rowing, was a progressive move. Yet these appointments also illustrated

¹⁸⁵ J. Langfield, ‘Fewer & Larger Clubs’, *Rowing*, April 1970, 15.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 16.

the anxieties of the ARA around placing amateur bodies in professional hands. With their chances of success uncertain, and their status in a hitherto steadfastly amateur sport unclear, the roles were given to individuals from outside the core of the community.¹⁸⁷

The introduction of an ARA coaching qualification in 1971 was connected to the ARA's strategic goal of achieving greater success in international performance by building better technical and physiological foundations in clubs.¹⁸⁸ Yet the principle of teaching and assessing coaching in a standardised way – as well as the specific methods employed by the ARA – were criticised by some factions of the amateur community. The use of objective criteria upon which to judge the skill of the coach and the performance of the athlete challenged historic constructions of amateur sport. Ideological shifts in understandings of athletic motivation and performance, as well as of coaching as craft to coaching as science, were fundamental.¹⁸⁹

British anxieties were exacerbated by comparisons with programmes implemented in Eastern Europe. The success of these programmes, measured by international results, was clear:

¹⁸⁷ See L. Taylor, ““What an Absurdity”: Penny Chuter and the Polemics of Progress in British Rowing During the Early 1970s’, *Sport in History* 40, no. 1 (2019): 56–77.

¹⁸⁸ Scoping work carried out in 1971 indicated that ‘there were very few coaches in the country, and of these few were up to the necessary standard’ (‘Annual Report of the A.R.A. 1971’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1972, 200). W. R. Clarke, ‘A.R.A. Annual Report – 1975’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1976, 204 offers some detail on the coaching awards over the previous years.

¹⁸⁹ On coaching as craft, see D. Day, ‘Craft Coaching and the “Discerning Eye” of the Coach’, *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching* 6, no. 1 (2011): 179–95.

no one in the West could win any coloured medal, except maybe in the single, in the early sixties, just because often as a single you weren't the product of any system. But all the Eastern Bloc countries had a system. [...] So the better your system was, like the East Germans and the Soviet Union et cetera, the more likely you were to get medals.¹⁹⁰

Penny made the important observation, however, that the system itself was quite progressive with regard to gender. Unlike Britain, where debates around 'appropriate' training for women endured, she described how 'they just took the view in the East, you know, that you can train the women and you're fit for what you train for'.¹⁹¹ Yet she also acknowledged the limitations of training and racing within such systems, suggesting that the Eastern European athletes

had a different sort of mentality, apart – over and above the communist regime and all that side of it. [...] We always used to joke about the Bulgarians and say really they're just cabbages. Because they've got nothing else to divert their attention.¹⁹²

She argued that in such sporting cultures, a winning mentality was more akin to sleepwalking: a stark contrast with domestic amateur rhetoric around the pleasure of sport and the spontaneous delight of winning as the outcome of a game well played.

Penny's experiences and ambitions as an athlete, and her subsequent coaching and administrative positions, made her acutely aware of the differences in sporting and athletic cultures across Europe. She identified fundamental, decisive

¹⁹⁰ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, October 30, 2017.

¹⁹² Ibid, October 31, 2017.

differences between East and West, and while she did not frame these as unfair, she allowed that they may have limited aspiration among British athletes.

It was hard enough for the men to break through and get any medal of any colour. But it was even harder for the women, because the number of women actually rowing were so small, relatively speaking.¹⁹³

By the early 1970s, a report suggested that more of Western Europe had been able to approach the success of these programmes; thus,

the general impression was that the standard at the top was approximately the same, but many more countries were approaching this standard [...] there were no easy victories as there had been in the past.¹⁹⁴

A lengthy critique of women's international rowing written by Langfield in 1972 claimed 'we are further behind in women's rowing than ever we were on the men's side', criticising the WARC for showing

little imagination or initiative. As with the ARA, no one doubts that they are a good body of people who try sincerely to do what they feel is best; but like the rest of us, they should be judged not on their intentions, but on their achievements.¹⁹⁵

A strong defence of the WARC and its selectors came from a group of 'U. U. Veterans', who argued the motivation for this tirade was personal slight – Langfield's crew had not been selected to compete at the 1972 European

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ B. Phillipson, 'Women's European Championships: Lake Tata, 20th to 23rd August, 1970', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1971, 108.

¹⁹⁵ J. Langfield, 'Women's Rowing', *Rowing*, June 1972, 21.

Championships – rather than objective observation. (At least two of the selectors were themselves former representatives of United Universities’, however; commentary on these issues, regardless of position, is difficult to separate from personal loyalties, priorities and experience.) They defended the selectors’ need ‘to decide whether a sub-standard crew or sculler will benefit from such competition, or merely be so disheartened that they do not try again, after a very expensive lesson in European standards’.¹⁹⁶ Their argument centred on the need to use funds to improve domestic standards before supporting international competition:

as with the men, the WARC has a limited budget and a responsibility towards all its members, not just those with international ambitions. International competition may be the incentive for a few; the majority of rowers, male or female, compete because they want to and have no higher ambitions. You can dangle a carrot before some people, but you shouldn’t beat everyone else over the head with it.¹⁹⁷

These veteran rowers rejected Langfield’s views, but accepted that the delivery of the women’s sport required some reconsideration. Despite the amalgamation of the ARA and the WARA, the men’s and women’s sports remained under separate governance and leadership, and the priorities of each were different. Articulating the need to concentrate on domestic improvement in order to improve competitive standards, the need for the WARC to serve its less ambitious members, and to support and develop a wider base of rowers with ‘no higher

¹⁹⁶ U.U. Veterans, ‘Women’s Rowing – Some Corrections’, *Rowing*, July 1972, 32.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

ambitions', was voiced much more strongly in the women's sport than in the men's. With a greater number of participants and resources, and a historic pipeline of athletes from public schools through to universities and clubs, the ARA could rely on a steady flow of men entering the sport, even if accelerating their development would require specific intervention.

Oral histories and written accounts suggest that coaching for women (and indeed, the vast majority of men) was delivered on an informal basis, with coaches secured through personal connections. Although Christine initially suggested that there had been 'no coaching, ok?', probed a little further, she clarified that while she had not been coached consistently, later in the 1960s she had been able to source 'coaching and various things in my single because there were people who were keen to develop women's sculling'.¹⁹⁸ The coaching she had received was largely outside of formal structures and, like Penny, her flexibility as a single sculler enabled her to pursue opportunities independently. She recalled approaching individual coaches for suggestions of training programmes and ad hoc support, and identified Bob Janousek, who was then coaching male international athletes, as a particularly positive influence on her understanding and practice of the sport. She felt their approaches were aligned:

I went to see him, went up to see him in London, to talk about training – and he was the most – lovely, lovely chap, most, most sensible person I've ever come across coaching because you – you go to people for training and whatever else, and they start telling you what you've got to do. Yeah? What did he say, he said, how much time have

¹⁹⁸ Davies, oral history interview.

you got? And what facilities have you got? [...] You know, it's common sense! [...] I got on very well with his kind of training schedules.¹⁹⁹

In light of the methods Janousek brought to the British men's squad, this account of such a 'sensible' and adaptable approach is perhaps surprising.²⁰⁰ Yet it clearly illustrates Christine's approach to her development as an athlete. For her, successful coaching required pragmatism and flexibility rather than the single-minded pursuit of a set programme.

Christine was ambivalent about the emerging discourses around training and coaching at this time. Her athletic career spanned the 1960s and the early 1970s, when structural changes were made to the training and management of the national team; her perspective reflects her exposure to two quite distinct models and philosophies of sporting practice. She explicitly linked the enjoyment of training with her own motivation:

you just enjoy putting in the miles of sculling, and I used to go running in Windsor Great Park. [...] I fitted it, this in very nicely. [...] And you can enjoy it, yes?²⁰¹

She was also felt strongly that time away from training was a necessary part of a training schedule: 'keeping going twelve months of the year, you can't do it – and it's lovely relaxation if you've been training at the top to go back'.²⁰² Her

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ On Janousek and his methods, see C. Dodd, *Pieces of Eight: Bob Janousek and His Olympians: A Memoir* (Henley-on-Thames: River & Rowing Museum, 2012). This may have reflected gendered concerns, or simply the difference between giving an athlete informal advice compared to coaching within a formal programme.

²⁰¹ Davies, oral history interview.

²⁰² Ibid.

expectations of sport and international competition were that they should form part of a wider set of interests and pursuits, including her education and career, rather than constitute one, sole point of focus.

Christine perceived her timing to have been fortuitous, suggesting that she could not have derived enjoyment or satisfaction from the sport in the form that it had started to assume by the end of her athletic career. Reflecting that 'I had the privilege of being able to compete internationally in a way that was comfortable for me', she felt sure that

I wouldn't have got involved nowadays, I wouldn't have had those experiences [...] if they'd started saying early on, well I must say I'm afraid that your rowing's got to take precedence over your academic studies, I would have said get lost.²⁰³

In a similar vein, Margaret suggested that she 'wouldn't have done it now [...] I don't think any of us would've, would've liked being organised by somebody else.'²⁰⁴ She suggested that her crew trained relatively hard by British standards, but emphasised enjoyment, satisfaction and a sense of control as being key characteristics of her experience. Such characteristics, she felt, were less important to the athletes that followed her. Within the environment she competed in during the 1960s,

you'll go on and do it [...] as long as you want to do it. And then you stop. Um... And I don't think it's quite like that now. We liked rowing. I

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ McKendrick, oral history interview.

think now they perhaps see a, an Olympic medal, somewhere, glowing.²⁰⁵

For Margaret, rowing was a social rather than an athletic pursuit, and she suggested that this seam of sociability was a key factor in there having been any British representation over this period. Given the differences in support and in approaches to training, and the consequent likelihood of competitive failure,

we were the only fools who went on losing all the time. Because we – we liked going to the regattas, and we liked going abroad [...] I don't think anybody would have done it – because they wanted to, to *row*, you know, and think they might win something.²⁰⁶

The elements of a rowing career that reflected traditional amateur norms and values, then – love of the sport and training in moderation for Christine, and sociability and life experience for both her and Margaret – were the most significant factors in their involvement. Penny expressed an authentic love of the sport for its own sake, but was, by contrast, wholly committed to it for the duration of her career as an athlete. She trained with exceptional dedication and resourcefulness. Her professional work facilitated her athletic career, and her decision to stop competing was in part driven by her desire for a professional career that she could not, at the time, secure in the sport of rowing. Her critique of the mentality of Eastern European athletes was distinct from her respect for their athletic prowess. She admired (and learned from) their training practices, and benefitted substantially from the financial support to travel and compete.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

Meanwhile, pursuing the sport as a British amateur contributed to making her life as an international athlete rich, varied, and challenging.

Conclusion

Despite evidence of some volition for change in women's rowing administration, the resources required to enact it – whether human, financial or in the form of skills – were lacking. Administrative amalgamation itself did not lead to greater interaction between men's and women's national teams, or in domestic club rowing at this time: the distance between legislative and cultural change was clearly evident in rowing. Treading the path of progression with caution reflected a perceived need to accommodate and appease male opposition in attempts to further opportunities for women. Alongside questions of sexual equality were those pertaining to amateurism. Margaret and Christine in particular described changes in the sport that would come to compromise their engagement with it; to them, discussion of the meanings attached to amateur sport was not abstract musing but a reflection on tangible elements of their sporting lives. The sense of loss they evoked as the sport changed is an instructive reminder that scale and robust administrative structures are not the only metrics of sporting progress.

Narrators centred individual choices and circumstances as key determinants of their athletic careers. This was in part contingent on age and life stage, but also on the specific group of athletes they trained, raced and socialised with. Although this chapter has not engaged with life course in depth, it has emphasised independence and resourcefulness as important, even necessary, characteristics in women pursuing rowing at this level. It has also suggested that the athletes

involved valued these characteristics highly, taking pride in their application and ingenuity, and their desire to seek new life experiences. They embodied the 'indifference' to negative public opinion that Kay identified in committed athletes at this time, and appeared to find professional work largely accommodating of their sporting commitments and ambitions.²⁰⁷ Unlike domestic responsibility, the negotiation of professional commitments alongside sport has largely been neglected in considering the lives of female athletes: an important omission, and one that merits greater exposure and analysis.

²⁰⁷ Kay, 'A Window of Opportunity?', 213–4.

Chapter 3

1972–1980: 'the first rung on the ladder'

The introduction of women's events at the World Championships and the Olympic Games, in 1974 and 1976 respectively, prompted significant changes to domestic rowing structures and provision for women. Most important was the recruitment of Penny Chuter as a National Coach, tasked with establishing and coaching a women's national squad: a development that started a difficult and radical process of cultural recalibration within the sport. The demands of rowing internationally were becoming more extensive. Coupled with increasing amounts of sponsorship and funding, a more transactional relationship between athletes, their sport, and the sporting administration was emerging. Male influence on the international sport would also become more prominent, with responsibility for coaching and oversight of selection in the women's national team increasingly assumed by men. For athletes competing domestically, more male-only clubs began to offer club memberships and regatta events for women – although the extent to which they were welcomed and provided for in these clubs was uneven. Written reports and oral testimonies both offer substantial evidence – and awareness – of the structural inequalities between men and women. Narrators within this cohort were vocal about their desires and frustrations, and the extent of the prejudice and discrimination they encountered. They illuminated the range of emotions and attitudes attached to practice of the sport, and offered subtle insights into how they navigated power, gender and legitimacy in this nascent squad community. This chapter explores how women negotiated the multiple demands of their sport, their work, and their personal lives, and their

understanding and experience of fundamental changes to sporting practice and values.

Chris, Christine, Gill, Jean, Lin, Penny and Rosie feature in this chapter as oral history narrators.

Social and sporting landscape

Economic downturn dominates histories of the 1970s. With Britain in recession from 1973, economic anxieties could be seen manifested in high-profile, disruptive strikes, governmental interventions such as the three-day working week and restrictions on power supplies.¹ Yet Pemberton, for example, has advocated for a more positive historicisation of the decade, proposing a more complex narrative of political and economic change, over a simplistic one of deprivation and limitation.² Bruley and Forster meanwhile identify a ‘great burst of feminist energy—mass activism, theoretical texts and literature’ which were distinctive to the long 1970s,³ and the emergence and activities of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) are key characteristics of the social history of this

¹ See A. Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009); D. Howarth, ‘A History of British Regional Policy in the 1970s’, *Yale Law & Policy Review* 2, no. 2 (1984): 215–55.

² H. Pemberton, ‘Strange Days Indeed: British Politics in the 1970s’, *Contemporary British History* 23, no. 4 (2009): 583–95 surveys literature that supports this position, notably including H. Sounes, *Seventies: The Sights, Sounds and Ideas of a Brilliant Decade* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2006). See also L. Black, H. Pemberton and P. Thane eds., *Reassessing 1970s Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); L. Black and H. Pemberton, ‘Introduction: The Benighted Decade? Reassessing the 1970s’, 1–24 offers a summary of this corrective.

³ S. Bruley and L. Forster, ‘Historicising the Women’s Liberation Movement’, *Women’s History Review* 25, no. 5 (2016): 697–700.

period.⁴ In terms of legislation, the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 would tackle 'broader processes of discrimination other than pay', and the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act in 1978, equality in the workplace.⁵ While important interventions, they highlighted the failures of the Equal Pay Act of 1970 to solve the structural inequalities faced by women in the workplace. Observing that the marriage rate in Britain 'peaked during the early 1970s' Lewis offers further evidence of conflicting feminist agendas and uneven change for women in Britain.⁶ Her analysis does not, however, contradict Thane's cautious conclusion that 'from the perspective of women's opportunities and gender relations, it is hard to be seriously negative about the seventies'.⁷ Acknowledging that the radical changes envisaged by some feminists were not realised, she suggested change was 'closer to the expectations of more moderate feminists: continued steady, slow but somewhat accelerating, progress towards equal opportunities in work and education, equal pay and, to a lesser degree, in the home'.⁸

⁴ See M. Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain Since 1914* 3rd ed. (London: Palgrave, 2015); J. Rees, "'Are You a Lesbian?' Challenges in Recording and Analysing the Women's Liberation Movement in England', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 69 (2010): 177–87; G. Stevenson, 'The Women's Movement and "Class Struggle": Gender, Class Formation and Political Identity in Women's Strikes, 1968–78', *Women's History Review* 25, no. 5 (2016): 741–55; and N. Owen, 'Men and the 1970s British Women's Liberation Movement', *The Historical Journal* 56 no. 3 (2013): 801–26 on male involvement with feminist activities and agendas.

⁵ H. McCarthy, 'Gender Equality' in Pat Thane ed. *Unequal Britain: Equalities in Britain Since 1945* (London: Continuum, 2010), 113.

⁶ J. Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 43–4. A. Cole, 'Twenty Years On: Feminism's "Three Body Problem"', *Women's History Review* 22, no. 4 (2013): 559–75 highlights the lack of intersectional sensitivity to feminist activity within this period, and subsequent analysis of it.

⁷ P. Thane, 'Women and the 1970s: Towards Liberation?', in Black et al. eds., *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, 183.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Politically, sport was located within broader debates around the welfare state and increasing partnerships between voluntary and professional (and public and private) organisations at this time,⁹ and from the early 1970s, governmental intervention in sport would steadily increase.¹⁰ Reflecting back from 1982 in *Sport in the Community: The Next Ten Years*, Dick Jeeps as Chairman of the Sports Council identified multiple areas for improvement and further investment, but positioned developments in the 1970s as having successfully laid down important foundations. His assessment was that ‘thanks to the initiatives of the 1970s, Britain entered the 1980s with a much stronger basis of facilities and institutions, greater popular interest in playing sport, enjoying it, and fulfilling sporting talents’.¹¹ The report itself claimed that a core objective for the 1970s had been to ‘ensure establishing national training or competition facilities for every sport’, and whilst ‘only modest success’ was identified in this area, rowing was one of the fourteen sports to benefit.¹² The National Water Sports Centre at Nottingham (NWSC) was a shared facility with canoeing which would function as a training centre for athletes across a range of abilities, from grassroots to the national teams, and could be used as an international-standard, multi-lane regatta course.¹³

⁹ B. Houlihan and A. White, *The Politics of Sports Development: Development of Sport or Development through Sport?* (London: Routledge, 2002), 11–4. They highlight the variance between different sports: their conditions, priorities and pressures were, necessarily, specific.

¹⁰ B. Houlihan, *The Government and Politics of Sport* (London: Routledge, 2015), 97.

¹¹ D. Jeeps, ‘Foreword’ to Sports Council, *Sport in the Community: The Next Ten Years*, 1982, 7.

¹² Sports Council, *Sport in the Community*, 41.

¹³ The NWSC is informally referred to as Holme Pierrepont in some oral histories. The lack of such a course had been lamented by the men’s rowing community for decades. An ‘upsurge’ in various forms of ‘water recreation’ in Britain was identified by a parliamentary Select Committee in 1973. One of its

During the 1970s, debates around the performance of international teams and trends in participation in rowing at club level become increasingly complex, and increasingly intertwined. Such issues were not limited to women's rowing, or indeed to Great Britain: at the Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Aviron (FISA) Congress in 1973, Thomas Keller observed that 'the structure of rowing today is like an obelisk with a high point and a narrow base' and that 'it is our duty to see to it that it again becomes a pyramid'.¹⁴ For British women specifically, the introduction of rowing events at the Olympic Games in 1976 was the catalyst for substantial change. World Championship events were introduced in 1974, as a necessary precursor, and in 1973 the ARA recruited Penny as a National Coach, responsible for building a women's squad to compete at these events: 'they desperately wanted to send two or three crews to that first World Championships'.¹⁵ While these changes were of primary importance to those with international aspirations, the introduction of National Coach for women also had significant implications for development opportunities for female athletes, and the women's rowing community more widely.

recommendations was that 'subject to the requirements of conservation, much more water space must be found for recreation'. Select Committee of the House of Lords on Sport and Leisure, *Second Report* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1973), lix, cxxiv.

¹⁴ Cited in C. Dodd, *The Story of World Rowing* (London: Stanley Paul, 1992), 391.

¹⁵ P. Chuter, oral history interview by the author, October 30, 2017, Mylor, UK. Notes in possession of the author. A series of interviews with this narrator were conducted on October 30, October 31 and November 1, 2017; the specific date for each is cited as required in this chapter.

1972–1974: laying the foundations for a women’s national squad

The ARA’s recruitment of a third National Coach, Penny, in 1973 represented a fundamental shift in how women’s rowing was delivered and practised in Britain.¹⁶ It coincided with a further step towards integrating male and female rowing administrations: Eleanor Lester was the first Chair of the Women’s Rowing Council (WRC; formerly Women’s Amateur Rowing Council, WARC) to occupy a place on the ARA Executive *ex officio*. Previously, a representative of the women’s administration had been invited to join ‘when matters concerning women’s rowing were under discussion’.¹⁷ Lester’s wry suggestion that, since Gentry as her predecessor had never received such an invitation, ‘one must assume that nothing of interest to women’s rowing was ever discussed’ is illustrative of the extent to which women’s rowing was considered an entirely separate branch of the sport, and to which any advocacy for it was under male control.¹⁸ Granting the WRC Chair a right to attend all meetings, apparently at Lester’s request, was a noteworthy concession of power on the part of the ARA.¹⁹ Its previous actions suggest either a complete absence of interest in the women’s sport, or a reticence to involve Gentry, personally, in their decision-making.

¹⁶ See L. Taylor, “‘What an Absurdity’”: Penny Chuter and the Polemics of Progress in British Rowing During the Early 1970s’, *Sport in History* 40, no. 1 (2019): 56–77.

¹⁷ E. Lester, ‘Women’s Rowing Committee’, *Rowing May* 1975, 35. Eleanor Lester was elected to the ARA Council, in her role as Chair of the Women’s Amateur Rowing Committee. A women’s committee or commission within the ARA would remain until 2003.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Lester reported that on attending a meeting of the Executive, ‘hearing a number of subjects discussed which I found of value to us, I asked for permission to attend all meetings and this was agreed. I believe that this was the beginning of a better understanding between us and I hope the gain has not been all on our side.’ *Ibid.*

Both of these developments indicate an openness to change – and indeed, to greater financial and political support for the women’s sport – within the ARA. Penny’s appointment was undoubtedly the more visible: as a National Coach, she was responsible for establishing and coaching a national women’s squad system and team, and for delivering coach education and best practice to clubs (men’s, women’s, and mixed) across the country. Her role was noteworthy for being occupied by a woman, especially within a sporting administration that did not solely cater for women.²⁰ Penny herself made no suggestion that she was unwilling to enter what she herself defined as ‘a male-dominated sport’, and claimed ‘not [to] think that being a woman will make any difference [...] they want national coaches regardless of sex’.²¹ She was unperturbed that, on being interviewed for the role, she was asked whether she could ‘handle men’ – drawing on her experience of teaching PE to boys, she claimed that the ‘bottom line is that I can handle schoolboys and men are just [laughs] grown up schoolboys’.²² As a strategy, her deflection by humour appears to have been successful: ‘there were a couple of wry smiles’.²³

²⁰ Day and Carpenter argue that “coaching” has always been socially and politically constructed and defined’, and therefore ‘a highly gendered activity’. They follow Hargreaves in understanding the role of the coach as defined by characteristics historically ascribed to men such as competitiveness, assertiveness and leadership. D. Day and T. Carpenter, *A History of Sports Coaching in Britain: Overcoming Amateurism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 3; J. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women’s Sports* (London: Routledge, 1993), 43.

²¹ ‘Feminine Touch for British Rowing’, *Birmingham Post*, April 19, 1973, 18.

²² Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

²³ *Ibid.*

Initially, Penny's approach was simple: she would 'grab whoever there is out there and start, and see where we go'.²⁴ Chris was philosophical about the 'very experimental' training in the squad: 'we were just the guinea pigs, and that's fine, I don't mind that [laughs]'.²⁵ Yet for Lin, who continued rowing internationally until the late 1980s, there was a more critical observation to be made: 'I think that men weren't being experimented on the same. [Pause.] You know, we – I think we were fodder in some ways.'²⁶ Penny appeared able to perform her role without significant male intervention or backlash; as Chris saw it,

I think the men were quite happy to let Penny get on and do it her way [...] we had very little contact with anyone in the men's side, so – I think they were just happy to let the women get on and do their own thing [...] I never felt any ripples of any ill-feeling or anything.²⁷

The lack of male involvement had some benefits in this sense, but was perceived as a lack of interest rather than a feminist victory. For Lin it was simple: the women's sport was left to develop independently 'because we didn't matter as much. Nobody wanted us?'²⁸

In marked contrast to the localised, individual and sporadic provision for the women's sport in previous years, and indeed, to traditional amateur discourses around training, Penny's approach was clear, incremental and

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ C. Aistrop, oral history interview by the author, October 16, 2017, Weybridge, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

²⁶ L. Clark, oral history interview by the author, November 11, 2017, near Stourhead, UK. Notes in possession of the author. A series of interviews with this narrator were conducted on November 11, 12 and 13, 2017 near Stourhead; the specific date for each is cited as required in this chapter.

²⁷ Aistrop, oral history interview.

²⁸ Clark, oral history interview, November 11, 2017.

uncompromising.²⁹ Acknowledging that she was starting from almost nothing – ‘there wasn’t the physique, the physiology, the training background [...] you can’t train until you learn how to train, and they were literally in that, at that sort of stage’ – she saw wholehearted commitment from athletes as the only way to improve.³⁰ Addressing the WARC AGM, her ambitious plans were received with trepidation; a report claimed

it would be wrong to say that most of those present, and the room was full, were not quite shaken when confronted with the practicalities of expansion of women’s rowing on the scale Penny hopes for.³¹

Arguably the most significant shift in training was the inclusion of four land training sessions a week, two as a squad and two sessions set to be done at athletes’ home clubs: a clear assertion that success in rowing could no longer be generated by time on the water alone.³² *Rowing* magazine shared a sense of disbelief at Penny’s proposed training schedule, reporting that ‘having had the chance to glance at the document in question over the shoulders of our favourite local blonde we refrain from comment except to say that our glance rather frightened us to death’.³³ Characterising her proposal as an erroneous ‘blob’ – the tone of the critique is more condescending than collegial – the article

²⁹ Janousek’s appointment in 1969 had been an important intervention in addressing these issues in the men’s sport.

³⁰ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

³¹ L. Chapman, ‘The Reform of Women’s Rowing: Penny Chuter Addresses the W.A.R.C. A.G.M.’, *Rowing* January/February 1974, 5.

³² ‘I had to train, four nights a week, I think we did Monday Wednesdays in the gym at Paddington School, where the whole squad trained, and then there was stuff we had to do Tuesday and Thursday which I could do at the Lea’. G. Parker, oral history interview by the author, June 20, 2018, Clapton, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

³³ ‘Comment’, *Rowing*, November/December 1973, 4.

expresses a paternalistic duty to correct her, as well as to protect the athletes under her care. This was partly rationalised through the potential impact on recruitment: such an intimidating training volume, it suggested, was not 'likely to attract girls to the rowing ranks which we should have thought was the main priority in any sphere of rowing'.³⁴ Yet in response, a former international highlighted that the schedule in question was intended for aspiring internationals, and that expectations around training volume would necessarily differ according to athlete experience and ambition. Indeed, she claimed, 'if the average oarsman looked over a male squad member's shoulder and read his training schedule, I expect his reaction would be very similar'.³⁵ She emphasised that women's rowing had been 'terribly neglected', and criticised the negative response when 'at last we have someone who goes to the trouble of thinking about training from our side of the sport'.³⁶

For years a very small number of us, mainly scullers, have badgered and pleaded for information to help us to become fit technically as well as physically, to race against foreign competition, and to try in our own small ways to prevent women's rowing from completely sinking into the abyss of the entertainment section of those rare regattas which permit us amongst the men.³⁷

The demand for rowing to take a more prominent place in athletes' lives represented an important, yet controversial, move towards a more

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ C. Peer, 'Penny's First Blob', *Rowing*, March 1974, 37.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

professionalised ideology of training, even if there remained no question of athletes being paid. Chris described how, having enjoyed club rowing,

it was – errr more difficult in the squad. Because I had already found boys, and a good job, and netball, and riding horses, and a social life – and all of that had to be given up.³⁸

She felt her entry to rowing was ‘quite late, I think I was twenty-seven’, and that for her younger teammates, it was ‘more of a continuation of their lifestyle, whereas for me I had to give so much up to actually do it’.³⁹ Thus, she explained, ‘I was very glad I got to the World Championships but it wasn’t enough for me to give up what was a very good life, and a very good job’.⁴⁰ Her comments resonate with Christine’s reflections on the 1960s, the sense of freedom she had enjoyed to pursue international rowing alongside her education and career without needing to give it absolute priority. Christine herself had initially hoped to join the squad, although in retrospect, she could see that this ‘was a silly move, really’.⁴¹ The tenor of the international sport had fundamentally changed, and she disliked the increasingly mechanical and aggressive training environment she found herself in. She described how

you were supposed to sort of take your pulse after everything, and you know it all became – do you know what I mean? It, it, it’s – it’s training cogs in a wheel, rather than me enjoying what I was good at.⁴²

³⁸ Aistrop, oral history interview.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ C. Davies, oral history interview by the author, July 20, 2017, Henley-on-Thames, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁴² Ibid.

She noted, with sadness, that in professionalising training and competition, ‘they take all the joy out of it’.⁴³

Penny accepted that her approach might have been difficult to implement ‘because it was quite revolutionary really’.⁴⁴ It was no exaggeration: her recruitment was a pivotal moment in the sport, and the choices she made in the role had decisive consequences. The decision to run a squad system had practical implications for clubs, as well as demanding a shift in training volume and mentality. Coaches and athletes alike would need to conform to a more defined vision of the sport. Even the rowing stroke itself was problematic in this respect: as Penny recalled,

there was no – national technique. And that came in with the coaching education programme, we were promoting a sort of technique [...] obviously at squad level, all the coaches should be singing from the same song sheet. There will be subtle differences, ok, fair enough, but the fundamental stuff needs to be the same.⁴⁵

Relatedly, she saw using small boats – single and double sculls, and sweep-oar pairs – as ‘the only way to sort out the wood from the trees, in terms of moving boats’.⁴⁶ These would make the particularities of each athlete’s technique, and the limitations of their fitness, far more visible. Most clubs did not have this sort

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

⁴⁵ Ibid, October 31, 2017. Her comment reflects the localised development of the sport, and the substantial differences in equipment that characterised the sport in previous decades. See E. Halladay, *Rowing in England: A Social History: The Amateur Debate* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 5 on the localised provision and development of rowing.

⁴⁶ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

of equipment, both a cause and an effect of established amateur practices, the idealised sublimation of the individual into a crew, and limited financial resources.⁴⁷ Small boats required a different skill set, and few were the athletes, male or female, who had the opportunity to develop those skills: as Penny explained, ‘in the early days, neither men or women could steer coxless pairs because there was very few in the country’.⁴⁸ This issue was not limited to Britain:

I can remember in the early days, women’s coxless pair, FISA umpires, tossing a coin as to who’s gonna umpire the women’s coxless pair. Who’s expecting to have to do the most work.⁴⁹

As a result of the cultural and practical legacies of the sport, Penny’s intention to base national selection around performances in small boats was controversial: ‘there was a hue and outcry!’⁵⁰ Having spent her athletic career in the single scull, she was highly competent in these skills, and considered good watermanship as a question of practice, and some inherent ability.

Some people know absolutely where they are in space, or on the water. They know exactly where they’re going, they can be blindfold [...] they will steer well and I don’t care whether they’re male or female. And there are those, male or female, who have got absolutely no idea and never will.⁵¹

⁴⁷ T.S. Egan famously expressed the idealised notion of ‘that entire uniformity and machine-like regularity of performance for which the eye looks at once in a University crew, and which is the glory and delight of the oarsman’ in R.C. Lehmann, *The Complete Oarsman* (London: Methuen & Co., 1908), 15.

⁴⁸ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, October 31, 2017.

⁵¹ Ibid, October 30, 2017.

Given the opportunity to learn the required skills, however, some athletes thrived on the additional challenge. Describing herself as 'young' and 'naïve', Gill remembered that prior to joining the squad, 'I'd never been in pairs but I thought it was *great* fun, and I quite liked having a steering foot as well, cos I thought that was great fun as well'.⁵² Rosie meanwhile 'loved it, absolutely loved it' for more strategic reasons: 'you could get such a big advantage on the Tideway if you could steer a pair and be close in and, and or get in the right bit of the tide'.⁵³ It was a skill that would give her, as a relatively small athlete, important competitive advantage.

Aside from introducing new approaches to training, the squad system brought a number of previously distinct rowing communities into more direct contact with one another. As Gill, who had started rowing on the Lea in East London, explained, 'we didn't know all the other girls that were on the Tideway sort of competing against each other, we was in our own little pocket down here'.⁵⁴ She observed significant differences in sporting and social cultures:

it was very, very working class down here. [...] So, when we went across to West London, and rowed there, and met – met people who'd

⁵² Parker, oral history interview. The topic of steering intersects with heavily gendered public discourse around skill in Britain at the time. Lewis highlights that 'studies of skill during the 1970s and early 1980s have shown how the strategies of both trade unionists and employers combined to define women as unskilled or semi-skilled'. J. Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 84.

⁵³ R. Mayglothling, oral history interview by the author, January 18, 2018, Bedford, UK. Notes in possession of the author. In this chapter, all quotes are taken from this interview; a separate interview with this narrator was conducted on June 8, 2018 in Henley-on-Thames, UK.

⁵⁴ Parker, oral history interview.

been to university, and things like that [...] it was a different sort of world really? Socially? You know?⁵⁵

She suggested that although she was able to laugh it off, class prejudice was rife:

I did get called that horrible girl from the Lea a few times, from a certain person [laughs]. And that was quite funny. [Adopts high-pitched voice.]

Ooh, that horrible girl from the Lea!⁵⁶

Her delivery highlighted an obvious contemporary snobbery around accent, allied to class prejudice, but there was also a specifically sporting dimension. She suspected that she and her club mates – physically competitive, mentally tough, and, socially unknown – represented a threat. ‘We were competitive. And er, I suppose we were quite fresh, we weren’t in that little – section of people that all knew each other.’⁵⁷

1974–1975: the advent of the Women’s World Rowing Championships

With the advent of World Championship events for women, Penny understood 1974 to be ‘the best year to start the long climb back into world class rowing’.⁵⁸

The ARA’s investment in recruiting her for this long climb was significant, but further provision was very limited. Chris claimed that her crew, the coxed four, were ‘very very lucky’ to have had a boat built for them’, but this boat would need to serve as both a sweep-oar four for her crew and a quadruple scull for another.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ P. Chuter, ‘1st Women’s World Championships’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1975, 122. This was rationalised as 1974 was the first opportunity; the 1975 Championships would be held in Britain; and 1976 was the Olympics and some additional financial support would be available in the form of Olympic training grants.

⁵⁹ Aistrop, oral history interview.

It would therefore need to be rigged differently by each crew every time they used it.⁶⁰ While careful to clarify that she was ‘not crabbing about it!’, from accommodation to equipment and training, she emphasised both the absolute and the relative lack of provision: ‘it was hard on all of us, truly, when you think the blokes all had Empachers and Stampflis and we were just, you know, scratching around trying to get money’.⁶¹ She suggested that this relative lack left the athletes ‘not resentful but wishing we had the same thing [...] we didn’t want them not to have it, but we wanted the same sort of thing’.⁶² This latter point speaks to contemporaneous anxiety about the impact that providing more for the women might have on the men, an anxiety that Penny felt acutely. She recalled that ‘we couldn’t expand too fast, mainly because I think – in the very early days – anything that the women had, seemed to in some way be taking away from the men’s squad’:

somehow or other, it was perceived all the time – and maybe it was fact, I don’t know, but anything that seemed to be going to help the women seemed to be being taken away from the men. So it’s understandable the men wouldn’t be too keen on any of that, and they were the majority. By far.⁶³

⁶⁰ Changing riggers on boats is not an arduous process, although for crews training regularly, this arrangement would add significant amounts of time. Rigging a boat properly, for high level competition, however, is a time-consuming process, requiring multiple, accurate, measurements and adjustments.

⁶¹ Aistrop, oral history interview. Empacher and Stampfli were – and remain – well-respected boat brands.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

Gill connected the limited provision for the women's team to the idea that 'we were seen as a bit of a joke, in the early days', a sentiment echoed by Jean who felt 'we were se-, second-class citizens weren't we'.⁶⁴ At Hammersmith, Gill explained,

we didn't have a changing room? We had the rigger cupboard. And we were actually told that, well if you need a shower afterwards, you can go and use the men's after they're gone.⁶⁵

Yet despite the lack of equipment and facilities, Penny was able to introduce both a higher training load and a more systematic approach to race preparation. Attendance at international regattas such as Mannheim, Ratzeburg and Nottingham became an integral part of preparing for Championship events. Penny and athletes alike understood the importance of having experience on the start line of top-tier competition. It offered specific preparation for the World Championships and the Olympics, but would also mould the expectations, aspirations and practices of the athletes in her squad as they trained. Success at these events, by turn, was not only a confidence boost for the athletes but also a demonstration of their potential to British onlookers. As Gill explained,

we won in Mannheim that first year, and – it made people sit up. And think actually these girls aren't, aren't just playing at it, they're actually training hard and trying to win.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Parker, oral history interview; J. Genchi, oral history interview by the author, September 28, 2018, Abingdon, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁶⁵ Parker, oral history interview. Gill acknowledged that many rowing clubs, male or female, lacked showering facilities but was keenly aware of the gendered hierarchy of their use in this nominally shared space.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Narrators observed important differences between the experience of racing at the World Championships for women and for men. Lin was particularly critical of the sexual hierarchy she saw as being embedded in the structure of the event, describing the women as an 'attachment, you know, also-rans, at the end of the day, or at the beginning of the day'.⁶⁷ Beyond the timetabling, provision on the water was lacking: 'I don't even know if they had enough people to say bloody go, there was just so – such disinterest in women's rowing'.⁶⁸ Echoing Lin, one of Jean's most prominent memories of racing the following year was that

you were lucky if you, if they started you straight. Because we were women it didn't matter, they just wanted – they had a time issue, and you know, so the women's eights are gonna go off at that time, no matter what, if they're facing that way or that way.⁶⁹

Asked if she thought that was specific to the women, she was definitive: 'oh most definitely, oh, the men – they wouldn't do that to the men'.⁷⁰

Lin's perspective was influenced by the fact that her husband was on the men's team at this time, a position that gave her greater insight into the male sport, and highlighted to her the extent of the sexual inequality in rowing at the time. (It also facilitated communication between the teams: Gill for example suggested that, in later years while she was on the team, while 'for a lot of the men, we really didn't exist [...] Lin Clark's husband Jim Clark was rowing in the men's team, so – he

⁶⁷ Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Genchi, oral history interview.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

kind of kept an eye out for us I think'.)⁷¹ Lin described how the Team Manager in 1974, driving her and her pairs partner to the course to race,

said I've got one thing to say to you, to me. And I thought he's gonna say good luck or something, and – you know, this is the first time women had, British women had ever been at Lucerne [...] and he said, you make sure you, you do whatever it takes to keep your husband happy, cos he's a really important man. [...] So *you*, that – your duty whilst you're here, is to keep your man happy. [Laughs.] So – Liz Monti said, oh, you know, under her breath, fuck that. And I just said I'll do my best Bob, after I've raced! [Laughs.] And I look back now and I think what a bloody cheek! You know, I was there. In my own right.⁷²

Retrospective outrage aside, she made the more subtle observation that, whilst she was committed to her own athletic career, she was also deeply invested in his. She was thrilled

to watch Jim row, and I loved him because he won a medal and – it – it was brilliant, and – I felt really proud to be his wife, and, and to see him excel, it, it was, it really was stunning.⁷³

She did not perceive that her success needed to be at the expense of his, nor his at hers; they could strive and thrive alongside one another.

⁷¹ Parker, oral history interview.

⁷² Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017. 'Bob' here is understood to refer to W. R. 'Bill' Clarke, the 'Team Manager: Chef de Mission' (the full administrative team, and all male athletes, are named in W. R. Clarke, 'World Championships 1974: Lucerne' *British Rowing Almanack*, 1975, 114); earlier in the same section of the interview she referred to being in the minibus with 'the manager who was called Bill'. Bill Clarke was, of course, no relation of Lin Clark.

⁷³ Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

Following the Championships, in which the pair came third in the small final, the coxed four came last in a field of eleven, and the single scull and coxed quad both unplaced in fields of fifteen and sixteen respectively, Penny accepted that the team 'represented inexperience in every sense of the word'.⁷⁴ Importantly, though, she had 'no doubt in my mind that the decision to send them was entirely valid' despite their inexperience:

at least now we are on the first rung of the ladder. You cannot accept a challenge until you know what you are up against, and now we know.⁷⁵

Penny's clarity on the need for long-term planning and provision marked a significant change from previous years. Yet the extent of the climb required was daunting, and athletes and administrators struggled to negotiate the distance between ambition and reality. Thus, while a summary report in *Almanack* reported that 'the fruits of a year's work [...] were the establishment of a small nucleus to build on for 1975', reflecting Penny's emphasis on the need for long-term, incremental development, the WRC was more cutting, suggesting that the team's performance 'did not enhance the reputation of British rowing'.⁷⁶ A different report in the same publication written by the Team Manager offered a gentle critique of Penny's lack of experience, but presented it as 'the sort of mistake which can readily be corrected' rather than a serious challenge to Penny's ability or performance as a coach.⁷⁷ Indeed, Penny herself fully accepted that

⁷⁴ P. Chuter, '1st Women's World Championships', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1975, 127.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷⁶ 'Review of the Season', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1975, 31; G. Williams, 'Women's World Championships', *Rowing*, September 1974, 17.

⁷⁷ W.R. Clarke, 'World Championships 1974: Lucerne', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1975, 109.

I was learning on my feet if you like, in terms of high performance. That didn't matter really because you could argue that when I started the squad, they weren't really high performance athletes. Cos I started with whoever there was out there.⁷⁸

The characterisation of the results as 'disappointing despite the fact that every crew in the team achieved times which were their personal best performances' reflected that expectations of the team may have been unrealistic.⁷⁹ Penny suggested that 'they all expected to do better than they did', and recalled 'trying to say we've got to start somewhere and you've just got to put this down to experience'.⁸⁰ This may not have been felt universally; Chris, for example, suggested that 'all I personally wanted to do was to have a bloody good row, and I think we did [...] we all did our best'.⁸¹ Lin meanwhile, disappointed in the results, described her 'huge sadness' that a more long-term view had escaped her at the time:

I didn't actually look at – and say actually, for Penny starting the squad, we've rowed internationally [...]. That in itself was a step in a journey which I should have been proud of. But all I saw was – and that was the culture – British women don't win, they shouldn't really be here.⁸²

Hosting the 1975 World Championships at the NWSC in Nottingham was an important strategic move for British rowing administration, premised on similar

⁷⁸ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

⁷⁹ Clarke, 'World Championships 1974', 109.

⁸⁰ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

⁸¹ Aistrop, oral history interview.

⁸² Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

logic to the hosting of the Women's European Championships at Willesden in 1960. It also enjoyed vocal support from FISA President Thomas Keller, who understood England to be 'the motherland of modern rowing' and saw the construction of the course at Nottingham as 'an important influence in bringing English rowing back to the position in which, by tradition [...] it belongs'.⁸³ It was facilitated by a change to FISA rules that reduced the financial pressure on the hosts, although

the last few weeks of 1973 and early 1974 could not possibly have been a worse economic climate for our mission [...] good-will, there was in plenty for the project, but no cash. Strikes, shortages, inflation, the 3-day week, political uncertainty and a crash in the Stock Market made the task a nightmare.⁸⁴

In the lead-up to the 1975 Championships, the WARC acknowledged that 'we have made many mistakes during this early period of the squad and we hope we have learned something', but provision for the athletes remained very limited: any lessons learned may have been difficult to implement.⁸⁵ For the women's team, again there was a sense that 'we are virtually starting all over again, with no one left from entrants of earlier years'.⁸⁶ The pool of female athletes remained small – Rosie, laughing, remembered 'a statistic, sort of, in the 1970s there were only a thousand women rowing [...] there weren't an awful lot of people to choose from

⁸³ T. Keller, 'Foreword: The Nottingham Course', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1971, 9.

⁸⁴ J. Garton, '1975 World Rowing Championships – The Background', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1975, 22.

⁸⁵ 'Women's Rowing Committee', *Rowing*, May 1975, 35–6.

⁸⁶ G. Williams, 'Women's World Championships', *Rowing*, September 1974, 17.

really' – and equipment was scarce.⁸⁷ Writing at the time, Penny declared it 'a sad state of affairs that a National team should have to beg from small clubs who themselves are more than hard up for boats and equipment'.⁸⁸ Her humorous comment that 'even the best of us find it hard to row without some type of craft in which to sit!!!' belied the seriousness of such an absolute lack of equipment and resources.⁸⁹ The expectation that she could run a women's squad of eighteen athletes 'on a A.R.A. budget of £85, which the Sports Council doubles', with almost no existing equipment, was absurd.⁹⁰ Penny suggested that she had seen the substantial logistical limits facing her as almost irrelevant, and certainly surmountable, at the time, but in retrospect, that she had been 'trying to run a programme for which we just didn't have the money or the boats or the facilities or whatever'.⁹¹ Her lack of compromise reflected her ambition for the women's sport, and her conviction that raising expectations would, in time, drive standards up. Her approach required investment and patience, both of which were lacking at the time. Her ambition placed considerable strain on her as an individual.

Despite administrators' enthusiasm for hosting a home Championship, it was not universally popular. Just like Penny some fifteen years earlier, despite her excitement at being selected, Gill remembered that 'the down – thing of it was, it was in Nottingham. Ha! Really wanted to go abroad somewhere.'⁹² This was not

⁸⁷ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

⁸⁸ P. Chuter, 'Letters: From the Women's National Squad to Some Great Clubs!', *Rowing*, April 1975, 44.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ 'Girls Prepare', *Rowing*, May 1975, 26. This article noted that 'the first crew are using a fifteen year old eight built for 13 st. men with hard gearing, their average weight being 9 ½ stone'.

⁹¹ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

⁹² Parker, oral history interview.

the only echo of the 1960 Championships evident in oral histories. Rosie observed that ‘because it was a home event they sent more people’, but that ‘I don’t think it was a big deal really [...] there were people that came to watch but I don’t remember it being absolutely heaving’.⁹³ She expressed a retrospective awareness of her own inexperience going into the event:

I was completely naïve, I assumed that when we got to the World Championships we would have perfect technique, everything would be absolutely fine, um – you know there wouldn’t be any, anybody dipping their blade, or doing you know doing anything else, we would row perfectly. Which of course we didn’t [laughs].⁹⁴

The point she makes is subtle, and reflexive: the fact of going to the World Championships, she had believed, would make her and her crew perform at World Championship level. Whilst characterising this as ‘naïve’, her analysis echoes the repeated sense of disappointment in reports of British international performances, and indeed, the feeling Valerie and Rita described as they disembarked their plane in Amsterdam for the European Championships in 1954. Despite a more centralised squad and larger community of female rowers, a lack of continuity and shared knowledge exerted a substantial influence on the women’s sport.

⁹³ Mayglothling, oral history interview. It was not a full team; thirteen athletes and two coxes competed in an eight, a coxed four and single scull.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Montréal 1976: 'Wow! Olympics was the Olympics!'

The introduction of women's rowing at the Olympics, announced in 1972 and realised in 1976,⁹⁵ was an important milestone in international women's rowing – despite a more limited programme, and a shorter course, than for men's rowing.⁹⁶ It was, however, introduced with relatively little fanfare. An article in the *Guardian* announced that 'women make their first appearance in Olympic Games rowing events', but the remainder of the short column focused on the idea that 'as with the men, the East European nations are expected to dominate', while a two-page spread in *Country Life* dedicated only two sentences to 'the British girls' results'.⁹⁷ Even in the programme sold at the Games, in thirty-two pages of rowing-specific content, only two sentences addressed this development:

women are competing in the rowing at the Montréal Games for the first time in Olympic history. They appear in six events: four with coxswain,

⁹⁵ On the unique appeal and extended influence of the modern Olympic Games, see K.B. Wamsley, 'The Global Sport Monopoly: A Synopsis of 20th Century Olympic Politics', *International Journal* 57, no. 3 (2002): 395–410. Women's basketball and handball tournaments were also added to the programme in 1976, but with six new events, rowing represented a substantial number of additional athletes: twenty-four women per team, if they entered every event. For details of the various changes to the Olympic programme for women, see 'The Olympic Programme: Women's Progression', *Olympic Review* no. 195–6, 1984, 27. Part of the collection held at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, UK.

⁹⁶ Women would race in six boat classes, men in eight. The 2020 Olympic Games will be the first to offer an equal amount of men's and women's rowing events. The course in 1976 was one thousand metres, compared to the two thousand metres raced by men, as was the case in FISA Championships. See A.N. Schweinbenz, 'Selling Femininity: The Introduction of Women's Rowing at the 1976 Olympic Games', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 5 (2009): 654–72.

⁹⁷ 'Women Put Their Oar In', *Guardian*, July 16, 1976, 22; D. Hill, 'British Rowing Prestige Restored: Two Silver Medals at Montreal' [sic], *Country Life* 160, no. 4126, July 29, 1976, 292–3. All four images illustrated were of men's crews.

double sculls, pair without coxswain, single sculls, quadruple sculls with coxswain and eight.⁹⁸

The British strategy for 1976 was ‘a much smaller squad than previously, based on a nucleus of just eight girls’,⁹⁹ and Gill’s description of entering the squad in the autumn of 1975 was one of excitement and intensity.

There were some new faces and there was the old faces, so we all had to kind of gel in and sort everybody out. And it was very, very exciting. [...] But also there was lots of *internal* politics. And things to um – fight for and against.¹⁰⁰

Gill’s Olympic aspirations were a major driver of her rowing career. She claimed that after the 1972 Games, when she learned women’s rowing would be introduced in 1976, ‘I just stated then that I was gonna go to that. And people just gave me a funny look, and I said no, I’m going to that. And obviously I did.’¹⁰¹ Unsurprisingly perhaps, Gill also showed a high degree of emotional investment in the idea of the Olympics. Asked if they felt fundamentally different from other international events, she was definitive: ‘*Wow!* Olympics was the Olympics! Oh my god!’¹⁰² As well as the opportunity to perform on the Olympic stage, she was thrilled by the prospect of staying in the Olympic Village.

For someone like me who watched sport, non-stop, er, if I could, then you see the likes of – the top runners, *walking* around the Olympic

⁹⁸ *Games of the XXI Olympiad Montréal 1976: Rowing*, AV9. Document held in the archive of Parc Jean-Drapeau, Montréal, Canada.

⁹⁹ L. Lorrimer, ‘Womens [sic] National Squad News’, *Rowing*, November 1975, 13.

¹⁰⁰ Parker, oral history interview.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Village, and there they are. [...] I would follow them around, I would go oh there they are, and I'd go and people would have to say Gill come back! Come back! [Laughs.] Cos it was just like my heroes, you know and I'd be off! It was just incredible.¹⁰³

Despite the apparent lack of attention in the British press, 'it did feel important, it really did. Er, it was very exciting. [Pause.] Mm. Big buzz around, amongst all the women.'¹⁰⁴

Competing at the Olympics introduced a further novelty to the British team: 'femininity control'.¹⁰⁵ Lin said she had been 'horrified' at the prospect, 'cos oh my god, they're gonna take, get us to take our clothes off. But they didn't, they just gave us a scrape in the mouth?'¹⁰⁶ Although the process was less invasive than she had feared, in light of her concerns around the extent to which she presented as feminine – related to the 'big muscles' and visible six pack she had developed in training – she felt a joke at her expense within the team had been unnecessarily cruel.

Penny, thought it was funny? Which it really, really wasn't? That when – we, she came back with our cards, and we'd been certified women, she gave everybody else these cards, in the flat, and said I'm really pleased to say you've all been – I bet she doesn't remember this. Um,

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ A.N. Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current: A History of Women's Competitive International Rowing between 1954 and 2003' (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2007), 173–6 discusses the cultural and administrative issues raised around this issue. It is referred to variously as 'sex testing', 'gender verification' and 'femininity control'.

¹⁰⁶ Clark, oral history interview, November 11, 2017.

you've all been certified a woman. And of course I hadn't got my card. And I said where's my card, Penny? She said ooh. [Pause.] Oh, haven't you got one? Oh I think – you must have failed your test. Now you could have said that to any other female, but deep down in my heart, I'd read this article that twenty-three women who'd, who'd actually, um, competed at the Olympics had since become men [...] I thought oh my god.¹⁰⁷

Lin told the story in good humour, but the anecdote suggested that for her, reconciling the physical and psychological traits she was outwardly proud of – 'muscles, determination, focus, I can reverse a car' – with accepted constructs of femininity had been problematic.¹⁰⁸

Seven athletes competed at Montréal, in two crews: the coxed four, which placed tenth in a field of eleven, and the pair, which came last in a field of eight. Despite low placings, however, the results were reported in relatively favourable terms. In the *Almanack*, the ARA report claimed that 'considering their lack of weight [...] they were a credit to British oarswomen', Penny having 'extracted their best performance by concentration on good technique to overcome their lack to weight'.¹⁰⁹ The WRC similarly highlighted that 'the squad worked like Trojans throughout the year, ably coached by Penny Chuter [...] though no medals were won they acquitted themselves well'.¹¹⁰ Gill's recollection of the racing, however, was more equivocal, and she struggled to reconcile herself with the fact that her

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ D. Lunn-Rockliffe, 'A.R.A. Annual Report', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1977, 27.

¹¹⁰ J. Sagar, 'Women's Rowing Review of 1976', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1976, 29.

crew had not delivered a peak performance at an event that carried so much meaning for her. She suggested that the pressure on Penny to generate results had, ironically, compromised them:

when we went to the Olympics, that year, she – I don't know, outside influences, the fact that we needed to do well, I think she really pushed us too hard. [...] She needed to let the pedal off a bit earlier.¹¹¹

She explicitly defended Penny's decisions by considering the sexist environment she was working in, and speculated

I think it was about her being in control, and you know, being a *woman*, coach, in a world full of male coaches, was very different then. I mean it's not – that different now, I will say, as a woman coach, coaching mainly men, but I think for Penny it was quite difficult. So she was always out to prove that she was good enough.¹¹²

She recalled with bittersweet pleasure the 'ding-dong match all the way down the course' that her crew had with Canada in the repechage, since it was then that

we finally peaked. So it was a bit gutting. That we were fast enough to *be* there, and we were *fast* enough to *be* in the final, but we just – didn't get it right.¹¹³

Gill's analysis echoes that of athletes before her who, at various degrees of remove from competition, became aware of the lack of collective knowledge surrounding them. Yet Gill in particular engaged more heavily with the strategy of racing and technicalities of physical preparation. She and her crew had

¹¹¹ Parker, oral history interview.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

experience at international regattas and the World Championships; their base level of knowledge was undoubtedly higher, but so were their expectations. Talking more than forty years on from the race, she was philosophical, 'but you know, you look back, it was what it was, it was naivety'.¹¹⁴ Such 'naivety' was not limited to the physical preparation for racing. She described how the team had

specially light blades made, that were reinforced with carbon fibre [...] and that was great, cos they didn't weigh like tree trunks. But they painted them black, and when we was out in Canada, on training camp, in the hot sun they warped. So we had to get some sent out from England, quickly, so we could row with them.¹¹⁵

The night before their first race, in an echo of earlier years, their kit, too, presented problems.

We got our new vests, that had been printed up in Canada. And they had the GB flag, and it had Olympics, Montréal 1976, *fabulous*. And we all put them on. And we thought they were wonderful. And then we looked. And, where they were red, white and blue on the front, they were blue white and red on the back? So we couldn't wear them. Cos there was Eng- GB on the front, but France on the back. [Laughs.]

The resulting scene was familiar: 'we had to sit and sew Olympic badges on our tattered, old, squad vests. We sat there and sewed them on.'¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

1975–1978: shifting momentum in club rowing

The increasing interdependence of participation and performance had begun to heighten demands on the sport's administration. A report from the WRC in the 1975 *Almanack* described how 'a large part of our energy, time and resources were devoted to the production and preparation of the team which represented Great Britain [...] at the same time and with an eye to the future several successful general training weekends were held at Nottingham'.¹¹⁷ The need for better development opportunities for female athletes was clear, yet the following year it was observed that 'most clubs have failed to answer the challenge of the National Squad with the necessary increase in membership and updating of training programmes'.¹¹⁸ Whether for reasons of resource or of inclination, there was a disconnect between official direction and activities within the clubs themselves. A report following the Annual General Meeting of the WARC expressed a sense of 'feeling rather frustrated and disappointed with the shortage of productive argument', highlighting the circularity of administrative disputes: 'such a varied and knowledgeable collection of bodies from the women's rowing world should have generated more inspiring debate'.¹¹⁹

Such concerns were exacerbated by the limited financial means at the disposal of the women's sport. Despite an unprecedented and extensive sponsorship deal secured by the ARA with Leisure Sport, significant financial concerns within the

¹¹⁷ J. Filkins, 'Women's Rowing Committee Report', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1975, 223. Filkins was the Honorary Secretary of the WRC. A report written for the 1978 *Almanack* reflected on the evolution of these training weekends from 1969. I. Sanders, 'Women's Rowing Training Weekends at Nottingham', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1978, 178–80.

¹¹⁸ L. Glennie, 'Women's Rowing', *Rowing*, November 1975, 13.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

women's sport remained.¹²⁰ Summaries of sponsorships supporting the women's squad in 1975 and 1976 describe small, in-kind arrangements with businesses providing items such as track suits and running shoes 'at their production cost', as well as the continued offer of meat vouchers.¹²¹ The WRC identified their 'strong need for large financial sponsorship', although it was suggested this was something 'which perhaps the A.R.A. sponsorship committee might be more likely to be able to find'; and while appreciating the difficulty of the financial climate, 'nevertheless we shall continue trying and hope that *somewhere* there exists a "Leisure Sport" for women'.¹²²

Competitive opportunities for women rowing in clubs were increasing over this time, largely through the extension of existing men's events to female athletes. This matched the increase in formerly male-only clubs opening their doors to women, a trend that was initially most visible 'in the provinces' – that is, areas outside of London and the south east of England.¹²³ A report in the 1975

¹²⁰ The sponsorship was announced as comprising funding for boats for 1974; £6,000 in cash each year until 1976; a fifteen-seater minibus and the construction of a five-lane, fifteen-hundred metre course and a boathouse for 'the ARA fleet' at Thorpe Park in Surrey. The ARA reported that 'it is difficult to put a figure on this series of ventures but it must surely be in excess of half a million pounds!' M.C. Stamford, 'A.R.A. Annual Report', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1976, 185.

¹²¹ C. Aistrop, 'Women's Rowing Committee – Sponsorship', *Rowing*, July 1975, 14; A. Morrell, 'Supporters of the National Women's Squad 1976', *Rowing*, July 1976, 27. Gill suggested that the 'five steaks a week' were a tangible contribution she could make to her family home, where she lived.

¹²² Aistrop, 'Women's Rowing Committee', 14. In 1974, the WARC had expressed the feeling that they 'were an additional headache for the ARA Sponsorship Committee', making the gendered division of labour, and gendered hierarchy, in this nominally amalgamated organisation clear. See L. Chapman, 'The Reform of Women's Rowing: Penny Chuter Addresses the W.A.R.C. A.G.M.', *Rowing* January/February 1974, 5.

¹²³ G.K. Wilkinson, 'Women's Rowing Committee Report: Regattas', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1975, 224; 'Women's Rowing Review of 1975', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1976, 209.

Almanack, however, noted the ‘innovation’ of including women’s eights at Kingston Head of the River, ‘on the full men’s course’, and of ‘the WARC Fours Head becoming the final division of the Fours Head of the River’: events in the Thames Valley and on the Tideway respectively.¹²⁴ The latter of these developments importantly preceded the full integration of women’s crews into the Fours Head of the River in 1978. From this point, faster women’s crews would be started ahead of slower men’s crews: all crews would be judged equally on absolute speed.¹²⁵ This had been a vital part of Penny’s strategy in claiming legitimacy for female rowers:

I said to the girls, look, the only way to get accepted is to beat men. And, eventually, the best women will be able to beat about two-thirds of all average club men. And that will take some time.¹²⁶

She felt this strategy was a success:

people started observing that the times of the winning women, you know, were beating at least a third of the men. And gradually that crept up and that crept up. And slowly but surely there was an acceptance that yes, women could row.¹²⁷

As trialling and competing for Great Britain became a longer and more formalised process, tensions between the expectations of the national squad and club allegiances began to emerge. While Chris was adamant that her club had no

¹²⁴ Wilkinson, ‘Women’s Rowing Committee Report: Regattas’, 224.

¹²⁵ ‘Women’s Rowing’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1979, 36. The WARC claimed to be ‘happy to amalgamate one of our events with a larger one in such circumstances’.

¹²⁶ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

issue 'whatsoever' with her joining the national squad, she did acknowledge that 'there was definitely an element of clubs who didn't want to be part of the national squad, certainly, yes in the early days that was definitely true'.¹²⁸ Beyond relationships with individual athletes, 'the existence of the Squad has had an adverse effect on entries for regattas, particularly in the South East [...] it is unrealistic to expect clubs to enter crews in the almost certain knowledge that they will be beaten'.¹²⁹ Conversely, it was claimed that 'the image of women's rowing (outside Nottingham) has suffered greatly at regatta level because second rate club crews are entering first-class regattas'.¹³⁰ The difficulty of developing international athletes and crews in a sporting community that lacked competitive critical mass was significant.

In 1976, the conclusion of the Olympic cycle and the ARA's appointment of a new Executive Secretary, David Lunn-Rockliffe, marked a change of pace and direction in British rowing. Within the women's sport specifically, individuals who had been entrenched in its administration for decades were lost: Amy Gentry and Hazel Freestone, involved since the 1920s and 1940s respectively, died; Maud Cann retired after twenty-five years as Treasurer, and Eleanor Lester stepped down as WRC Chair, although she would spend another year on the committee.¹³¹ Lunn-Rockliffe concluded his first report in post with a lengthy call to action to the rowing community, but while sympathetic to the issues in women's rowing, he offered no active intervention or support. He identified 'the lack of

¹²⁸ Aistrop, oral history interview.

¹²⁹ 'Women's Rowing Review of 1975', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1976, 209.

¹³⁰ Glennie, 'Women's Rowing', 13.

¹³¹ Sagar, 'Women's Rowing Review of 1976', 29.

active oarswomen' as 'the deep-seated problem [...] both domestically and on the international scene', attributing this not to any 'lack of interest by women generally but more due to a lack of facilities, of money, and of boats'.¹³² Penny was redeployed to coach the junior men – a move which was understood by her and those around her as a promotion – but not replaced, and the women's team found it 'difficult to obtain the services of amateur coaches because those who had time to coach were also being sought by the Men's Selection Board'.¹³³ The squad system would 'continue, although there is now no National Coach with special responsibility or coaching women's crews'; the sense in which the system would continue, and under whose guidance, was left unclear.¹³⁴

The hiatus in coaching provision for women between 1976 and 1978 is the more noteworthy because by the end of 1977, the women's sport had acquired its 'first major sponsor': British Home Stores (BHS), which had committed to providing £33,000 over three years.¹³⁵ Where Leisure Sport's sponsorship deal with the ARA was explicitly intended to support international rowing, the arrangement with BHS reflected the desire within the women's sport to develop domestic and international standards in tandem.¹³⁶ Thus, while 'no doubt the International representatives making up women's team will surely benefit', BHS was explicitly 'hoping to embark upon support for a programme to encourage interest from girls

¹³² Lunn-Rockliffe, 'A.R.A. Annual Report', 27–8.

¹³³ P. Chuter, informal communication with the author, October 30, 2017; Lunn-Rockliffe, 'A.R.A. Annual Report', 27. This exposes the limited appeal of coaching female athletes at this point.

¹³⁴ I. Sanders, 'Women's Rowing: National Squad', *Rowing*, December/January 1977, 9.

¹³⁵ 'Comment', *Rowing*, January/February 1978, 3.

¹³⁶ By 1977, this support had been significantly reduced. 'Seen & Heard: Thorpe Facilities Withdrawn', *Rowing*, July 1977, 4.

and young women uncommitted to the sport'.¹³⁷ With this remit, the sponsorship would 'make it possible to implement the recruitment and training schemes which are so badly needed'.¹³⁸ Prudent caution was expressed around the extent to which it would result in international success: 'there will be a time lag before we get any return for this expenditure, and it is to be hoped the sponsors will not be disappointed if there is no immediate success at international level'.¹³⁹

Regardless, the appointment of Penny as a coach for the women's squad had been of huge significance, and her loss was therefore substantial. Athletes competing in this period were keenly aware of the value of having a designated coach, and indeed, of Penny personally within the role. Jean felt the impact directly as an athlete but also viewed it as an indication of the relative importance of the women's sport:

it's a shame Penny didn't continue, cos actually if you ask all the women, they always respect Penny. And what she tried to do for women's rowing. But, she had her hands tied [...] she couldn't coach, coach the women any more. So, again, women are not important.¹⁴⁰

She was resigned to the lack of long-term provision:

this is women's rowing at World Championships, it's been like that all along. Because um – [sighs] because [sighs] there's no structure. There's no consistency.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ 'Comment, *Rowing*, January/February 1978, 3.

¹³⁸ 'Women's Rowing', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1979, 35.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Genchi, oral history interview.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Lin shared some of Jean's response to the loss of Penny as a coach, but mobilised more provocative language to describe a sense of disappointment but also of personal slight: she 'dumped the women, and forgot us and went with the men'.¹⁴² In a context where 'the kudos was with men', however, her analysis was more critical, but also more understanding: 'she had her journey too. She aspired to be the best.'¹⁴³

Reflecting on this period a year later, Penny claimed to be 'well aware of the fact that since my involvement with the Women's Squad was terminated [...] the standard of our top women's crews has not developed any further', something she attributed directly to 'the lack of a coach to take full responsibility for the women'.¹⁴⁴ Her language clearly emphasised that the decision was not hers, no doubt in part to deflect critiques like Lin's. In her absence, some coaches did take on responsibilities with aspiring women, but while Jean allowed that 'I suppose it's, it's good that people would volunteer, like to go out with a women's crew', she felt that 'they weren't the best people'.¹⁴⁵ Aside from the lack of skilled technical assistance, she felt a more fundamental consequence of this lack of direction: 'we used to go out and do all this training and think, what – what, you know, why are we doing this? [...] We couldn't see where we were going.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

¹⁴³ Ibid, November 11, 2017, November 12, 2017.

¹⁴⁴ L. Glennie, 'Interview: Penny Chuter the ARA Senior National Coach', *Rowing* January/February 1979, 21. Her choice of language ('terminated') is powerful, and suggests it was important to Penny to communicate that her move was imposed upon her rather than being her own choice.

¹⁴⁵ Genchi, oral history interview.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Such uncertainty in the women's sport was matched with the increasing acceptance that existing amateur sporting models were no longer fit for purpose. In June 1977, *Rowing* magazine lamented that 'unfortunately, to be competitive at World or Olympic levels the training and preparation of self respecting [sic] participants has to be of a professional nature even whilst observing the strictest amateur code'.¹⁴⁷ A shift in the understanding of the amateur – including the acceptance of payment for broken time – would be necessary, and the prospect of allowing greater financial support for athletes introduced knottier questions around how such support would be allocated ('on proven ability? on potential?').¹⁴⁸ The editorial suggested that 'all possible aid should be given to deserving competitors who have denied themselves virtually any other prevailing thoughts', praising 'their individual and collective efforts to perpetuate pride of performance and pride for their country'.¹⁴⁹ This heady mix of nationalistic pride, and an increasingly transactional view of high performance sport and financial assistance, implicitly raised the question of what an athletic performance was worth, and to whom: a contested question with gendered connotations, and gendered responses.

Despite the lack of structure in the women's sport, four crews were selected for the 1977 World Championships in Amsterdam: the coxed four, coxed quad, double scull and the pair. This team of fourteen women was relatively experienced, nine having raced at previous World Championships, and included

¹⁴⁷ 'Comment', *Rowing*, June 1977, 3.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Payment for 'broken time' covered the cost of wages lost by athletes taking unpaid leave to train and compete without compromising their amateur status.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Astrid Ayling (née Höhl) and Pauline Hart (née Bird) in the double sculls: the first women's crew to reach a final at this level. Reported as 'the shining exceptions' in an otherwise disappointing set of results, their circumstances as well as their performances were exceptional:¹⁵⁰ they had secured a place in a prominent, previously male-only, club; they had a dedicated coach for multiple sessions a week; and both were married to rowers on the men's team.¹⁵¹ Ayling had also 'rowed for West Germany before her change of country, bringing a boatload of experience to British women's rowing'.¹⁵² Their ability to mobilise the support they needed may have been driven by their own athletic talent and ambition, but was bolstered by their extensive links with high-profile men in the sport.

Ayling and Hart were the only crew to compete at the World Championships in 1978, held in New Zealand in November, although they were unable to replicate or exceed their 1977 performance (they won the small final, placing seventh of ten). This event being so late in the year, however, enabled them to attempt a more radical domestic feat: to race at Henley Royal Regatta, then an exclusively male event. With the permission of their (male) club captain, they entered under their maiden names, and intended

to get into our boat where it was quiet at a nearby lock and then appear suddenly at the official start. We were going to dress like men and that meant depressing our figures and wearing hats.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ C. Dodd, 'British Women Scullers Make History', *Guardian*, August 26, 1977, 16.

¹⁵¹ R. Jennings, 'The Early Birds', *Observer*, September 17, 1978, 26.

¹⁵² C. Dodd, 'Women of Determination', *Guardian*, June 8, 1977, 25.

¹⁵³ A. Ayling, cited in C. Dodd, 'Henley Stewards Scupper Female Plot', *Guardian* June 17, 1978, 1.

Their subterfuge was identified ahead of time, so they were unable to compete, or indeed, to reach the official start, where their act of resistance would have been more public. Neither athlete claimed a strong political impulse in their actions, Ayling claiming that ‘we thought this would be a good giggle’.¹⁵⁴ Yet Hart felt ‘it would have been fun to see the reactions of the stewards [sic] if we had got to the starting line’, not least because of the common conception that ‘a woman’s place at Henley is to wear a pretty hat and clap with the men’, something she felt ‘doesn’t agree with social conditions today’.¹⁵⁵ Their actions were deemed a ‘frivolous venture’ by the Chair of the Regatta Committee, but their club incurred far stronger critique than they did as individuals: a reflection of the enduring notion that female athletes required moral management, by men.¹⁵⁶

1978–1980: coming of age?

For the men’s and women’s sports alike, the more extensive financial resources that had been put into the sport – ARA turnover was reported to have increased from £16,000 in 1973 to approximately £300,000 in 1978 – had not resolved all the problems in the sport as some had hoped.¹⁵⁷ A disillusioned report in *Rowing* magazine suggested that ‘what we were always led to believe was that the result [...] was to be a great advance and attraction for recruitment into the sport’, but that ‘unfortunately there seems little evidence that this is truly the case’.¹⁵⁸ Initially asking, with the remarkable influx of money,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ P. Hart, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ P. Coni, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ ‘Comment’, *Rowing*, March 1978, 3.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

are we not seeing all our dreams come true? The answer obviously depends on what our dreams are [...] despite the rapidly growing sums to be administered at headquarters just how much are rowing clubs, the backbone of the sport, benefitting?¹⁵⁹

While these issues applied to men's and women's rowing, it is perhaps telling that in the same publication as the figure of £300,000 was cited, a representative of the WRC sadly reported that

the Jumble Sale last year raised a very disappointing figure due to lack of helpers and lack of Jumble. Since it is the money from this sort of event that enables us to subsidise training weekends, it is in the interests of active oarswomen to give us help. Please don't forget.¹⁶⁰

Such an extreme difference in resources illustrate the extent to which the men's and women's sports were operating on markedly different scales. The budgets belie their nominal integration.

A dedicated women's coach was appointed at the end of 1978, when Penny was promoted to the role of Senior National Coach, and charged with coaching of the senior men's national squad. This promotion was, itself, remarkable, and while the *Almanack* was careful to state that it was 'no publicity "gimmick"', it noted with no small pleasure that it 'must surely have brushed aside for ever [sic] the image favoured for so long by cartoonists that rowing is ruled by a bunch of 'blimpish old heavies'.¹⁶¹ Meanwhile, Dan Topolski, a medallist at the 1975 and 1977 World Championships, was brought in 'to reconstitute a properly run national women's

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ 'AGM of the Women's Rowing Council', *Rowing*, March 1978, 29.

¹⁶¹ K. Osborne, 'Preface', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1979, 13.

squad', joined by Don Somner – who had been coaching Ayling and Hart in the double scull – as Chairman of Women's Selectors.¹⁶² The coaching and selection of women by men from the late 1970s was a conspicuous change in the sport compared to previous years, and, Penny suggested, a deliberate one. Somner's appointment, at least,

was something I pushed for very hard, cos I thought again, selectors had to be arguing the case for the women and promoting the women's side and to have a man doing it – at that time I felt was actually gonna get more for the women.¹⁶³

Acknowledging the inherent discrepancy in power between men and women, Penny argued that men could advocate for women within the ARA more successfully than women themselves could. She did not view the increasing involvement of men as a hostile takeover, but as a positive, pragmatic choice.¹⁶⁴

Although largely positive about Topolski's coaching, narrators suggested that his arrival marked a significant shift in their practice of the sport. They had gradually moved away from highly structured, centralised training programmes, and the change was therefore more marked than it might have been had they been training under Penny immediately beforehand. Yet there were also important differences in their respective approaches to the women's squad. A newspaper article reported that Topolski had said 'bluntly at the beginning of the year that he

¹⁶² 'Major Changes for British International Rowing', *Rowing*, December 1978, 5.

¹⁶³ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

¹⁶⁴ This was not a position she had adopted retrospectively; in an interview published in 1979, she explained that 'in clubs I believe that the development of women's rowing can only be brought about through the leadership of male administrators and coaches'. She argued it would drive an improvement in standards, and that 'no one can argue with results'. Glennie, 'Interview', 22.

proposed to bludgeon the women as hard in training as the men's squad is pushed'.¹⁶⁵ While largely positive about his coaching, Rosie identified this aggressive approach as 'his coaching style [...] he loves the battle sort of mentality that you create', and suggested that it had not, initially at least, been successful:

he arrived at a point where we'd got a bit of a flu epidemic going through the group [laughs], and so lots of people were off ill, at various points. And I think he just thought oh these women are just absolutely hopeless, they're not very competitive.¹⁶⁶

She felt that he fundamentally misread the squad, and athletes' responses to being 'bludgeoned' in training, at the outset. He underestimated their capability and tenacity; 'because he'd never worked with us, I think he just thought, oh, this group, any little excuse and they're not here'.¹⁶⁷

Others exposed a more problematic power dynamic. Jean defended Topolski as being 'very fair, lots of things went against him but that was one of his good points'.¹⁶⁸ Invited to elaborate on this comment, she was definitive: 'he was a womaniser, there's no, there's no getting away from that'.¹⁶⁹ While Jean seemed to accept that he could both be 'fair' and 'a womaniser' in charge of a women's squad, other athletes were more critical. Lin framed it in insidious terms, criticising what she perceived as complicity on the part of the female administrators:

¹⁶⁵ C. Dodd, 'If You Can't Stand the Heat Get Out of the Galley', *Guardian*, February 20, 1979, 25.

¹⁶⁶ Mayglotling, oral history interview.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Genchi, oral history interview.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

There was – huge, sexual, inappropriate behaviour. [...] And – the women selectors knew they had put people coaching women, who were manipulating and exploiting women sexually, and the women selectors knew that. I would stake my life on it.¹⁷⁰

Given how easily this topic was raised, spontaneously, by a number of narrators, Topolski's reputation appears to have been no secret; in such a small community, it is unlikely that administrators, male or female, were unaware. There was no suggestion that any sexual behaviour was non-consensual, although the ethics of such relationships are, by modern standards, deeply problematic.¹⁷¹ Even without viewing the situation through such a retrospective moral lens, it constitutes some challenge to the integrity of the selection system. Penny did not address this issue directly, but was disparaging of the influence of personal relationships on selection practices within both the men's and women's sports.

We had all that sort of stuff, uncles, aunts, boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands, wives, selecting and – whatever. Just completely incestuous. And – it's very, very difficult for people not to be biased.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Clark, oral history interview, November 11, 2017.

¹⁷¹ Although scarce before the early 2000s, this topic has increasingly been addressed through sociological and coaching lenses; historical perspectives however remain lacking. A. Tomlinson and I. Yorganci offer an early, UK-based exploration of the issue in 'Male Coach/Female Athlete Relations: Gender and Power Relations in Competitive Sport', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 21, no. 2 (1997): 134–55. C. Brackenridge, *Spoilsports: Understanding and Preventing Sexual Exploitation in Sport* (London: Routledge, 2002), lays out the polemic and addresses the individual and systemic imbalance of power in coach-athlete relationships. More recent work has explored the more complex intersection of such power imbalance with emotional connection; see for example S. Johansson, G. Kenttä, and M.B. Andersen, 'Desires and Taboos: Sexual Relationships between Coaches and Athletes', *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching* 11, no. 4 (2016): 589–98.

¹⁷² Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

The move towards an exclusively centralised squad and selection system announced in 1979 was harshly criticised by *Rowing* magazine, which argued that

in a section of the sport where obvious talent is so sparse this terse dismissal of anyone and everyone outside the sacred inner circle is ludicrous. It indicates a rapid loss of sympathy by those who not so long ago, were actually pushing their backsides up and down sliding seats but whose move to the static committee chair seems to have affected their outlook from when they were actual participants.¹⁷³

Somner, as Chair of Selectors subsequently qualified and defended his policy, arguing that some flexibility around the centralised system did exist.¹⁷⁴ He was, however, definitive about the benefits of the squad, claiming that ‘few single clubs can provide the experience, finance and facilities needed to produce international women’s crews and get them to regattas in Europe and the World Championships’.¹⁷⁵ He also argued that, contrary to the early 1970s when there had been little continuity year on year, by the end of the decade the squad system was retaining more athletes.

We have [...] not only more girls trying for international selection but also girls of much higher quality of performance. This does not simply mean an influx of new talent, which in itself would be very welcome, but many of the girls have raced internationally before.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ ‘Comment’, *Rowing*, January/February 1979, 3. The statement stipulated that ‘selection of all crews will be closed to those training with the National Squad’.

¹⁷⁴ D. Somner, ‘Focus: Don Somner – Chairman of the Womens [sic] Selection Board Clarifies on the 1979 Womens [sic] Policy Statement’, *Rowing*, March 1979, 18.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

In 1979, although the 'larger sized women's squad proved somewhat disappointing [sic]', Topolski was commended 'for taking a brave decision with the eight, and for re-establishing a professional attitude to women's competition'.¹⁷⁷

By the end of the decade, despite substantial domestic issues, and repeated expressions of disappointment in international competition, the *Almanack* reported that 'we appear to be at the start of a period of rapid growth in the number of women who participate at club level, as well as at national level'.¹⁷⁸

The increase of formerly male-only rowing clubs with a women's section, the popularity of the Fours Head on the Tideway which 'produced an entry of 50 women's crews' in 1979, and the attendance of 78 women at an ARA assessment weekend, were reported in *Rowing* magazine as significant markers of progress.¹⁷⁹ Echoing the observation of an 'enormous increase in the number of clubs admitting women', the Chair of the WRC highlighted that this was 'not only in the provinces' where such integration had been more evident in 1969, 'but also along the Thames and Tideway'.¹⁸⁰ She placed these developments in the context of broader changes in the delivery of sport and the expectations of athletes with the argument that

in sport nowadays, there is far less segregation between the sexes
(even before the activities of the Equal Opportunities Commission).

¹⁷⁷ M. Sweeney and M. Thompson, 'British Crews Abroad: World Championships 1979 – Bled, Yugoslavia', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1980, 111. The team comprised seventeen athletes in four crews. The eight placed last of nine; the coxed four, tenth of thirteen; the double, seventh of fifteen; and the single, thirteenth of eighteen.

¹⁷⁸ 'A.R.A. Annual Report', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1980, 27.

¹⁷⁹ 'Comment', *Rowing*, November 1979, 3.

¹⁸⁰ P. Churcher, 'Development of Women's Rowing 1969–1979', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1980, 159.

Boys and girls are used to mixing at school and would expect to do so if they joined a sports club.¹⁸¹

The increasing numbers of women participating, and the increasing structural integration of men's and women's rowing, were irrefutable: 'gentlemen, have you looked around at the rowing scene lately? Significantly and undeniably the ladies have arrived.'¹⁸²

The WRC Chairman's assertion in 1980 that 'constitutionally, domestically, internationally, women's rowing in Great Britain has come fully of age in the last 10 years' is perhaps an overstatement.¹⁸³ Women's rowing remained vastly under-resourced, and the more subtle processes of cultural integration of men's and women's rowing were slower than the administrative. Furthermore, as Penny explained, despite the 'mass explosion, women's sections, women's rowing clubs, opening up everywhere' in the late 1970s, 'you've probably got time lag [...] – the performance end of it, producing medallist quality, at the top end – is going to lag eight years behind, at least'.¹⁸⁴ Yet the decade had undoubtedly seen unprecedented change within the sport, more than justifying Churcher's claim that 'the status of women's rowing in 1979 was light years away from 1969'.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 159–60. The Equal Opportunities Commission was formed in 1975 as a corollary of the Sex Discrimination Act, also of 1975.

¹⁸² 'Comment', *Rowing*, November 1979, 3.

¹⁸³ Churcher, 'Development of Women's Rowing' 162.

¹⁸⁴ Churcher, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

¹⁸⁵ Churcher, 'Development of Women's Rowing', 162.

Coaching and selection

Penny's unbending conviction and sense of purpose in her coaching – especially given the sexual biases attached to coaching, and the historic conservatism of the ARA – was remarkable. Although she claimed 'I was obviously aware that I was up against it, I was even aware from the day I went for the interview',¹⁸⁶ she was not dissuaded from making difficult choices. This was, she suggested, a natural consequence of her personality and leadership style: 'I get completely carried away. I'm extremely enthusiastic and I've got tunnel vision for this is what we're gonna do.'¹⁸⁷ Athletes coached by Penny expressed respect for her technical ability, and for her resilience in the role. Gill's reflections on her crew's preparations for the 1976 Olympics notwithstanding, she was definitive:

Penny was incredible. And I don't think – enough people give her credit. Er, cos she – fought battles. Er, to get where she was. And to sort of, maintain her standing amongst all the male coaches.¹⁸⁸

Lin expressed a similar admiration for Penny's professional ambition and achievements, and alluded to an underlying sense of solidarity with her. She was aware that her performance as an athlete was a reflection on her coach, and, as such, had to power to bolster or to rebuff sexist criticism:

I wanted to do well for Penny? I could see how – how some of the men were treating her and disrespecting her, how disrespectful they were to her as a woman, and I thought that's not bloody right! She can annoy *me* but you're not bloody saying she's annoying you, you're a man.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Parker, oral history interview. An experienced coach of male athletes, Gill was keenly aware of gendered dynamics of power on the bank.

¹⁸⁹ Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

Lin's analysis separated personal annoyance from professional legitimacy. She positioned the coaching role as a professional one, rather than a personal relationship or a voluntary engagement: an important indication of the ways in which coaching practices, and the meanings attached to coaching, were changing. The increasing commitment required of athletes and coaches, and more vocal disputes over fairness in selection, were connected. Despite some attempts to make selection more transparent, athletes, including those who became selectors, like Chris and Christine, largely felt that 'it wasn't done properly'.¹⁹⁰ Although she was never a selector, Gill, now an experienced club coach, observed that the necessary sport science and technology was lacking at the time she was an athlete: 'things are far more transparent now, cos of – computers, and – lots of testing, you know. It was, it was different then.'¹⁹¹ The appetite for using objective measures depended on fair implementation, which was lacking; she suggested that, as a result,

it was – quite hard to convince people that we were good enough, we was always up against trying to convince people. [...] And that was hard for Penny managing it as well.¹⁹²

Chris highlighted that the use of 'standard times' whereby crews could be selected by completing a race within a pre-determined time, meant 'all we selectors did was say yes you did make that time or no you didn't make that time', something that required no skill or judgment: 'frankly, anyone could have done

¹⁹⁰ Aistrop, oral history interview.

¹⁹¹ Parker, oral history interview.

¹⁹² Ibid.

that'.¹⁹³ On the other hand, attempts 'to judge them, how they got on against other international crews, was not terribly productive because we really weren't very good'.¹⁹⁴ She understood the limitations of each method, of either empowering selectors to make judgment calls or asking them to implement objective metrics. Contrary to athletes' feelings that selectors were in control, she expressed a feeling of powerlessness in her position:

I had no – power of veto, except [...] we had to say to a crew, you didn't make the standard time therefore you cannot go to an event. Which some of them didn't take terribly well to [...] some of them were really quite – quite difficult about it.¹⁹⁵

Fundamentally, she was sympathetic: 'why wouldn't they be [difficult], because they've trained their socks off'.¹⁹⁶

The selection process, and the haphazard decision-making, took a heavy toll on athletes. Gill, for example, recalled that the combination of the level of work required coupled with mistrust of the selection system, was emotionally exhausting.

People said well how did you feel when you – got the word that you was in the team. And we would blatantly say [adopts robotic monotone] we-were-o-ver-joyed. [Reverts.] Because actually it was – a relief [...] we'd worked so damn hard, it was a relief to actually, people to say actually you're good enough. [...] It was a long process.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Aistrop, oral history interview.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Parker, oral history interview.

Her analysis suggests that the sport had assumed some transactional qualities, but that she lacked confidence in the mechanisms behind it. Her commitment and investment were absolute, but what she could expect in return was a matter of chance. Under such conditions, successful selection was no cause for celebration, only for relief. Like Chris, she felt powerless.

Penny was aware of the issues with selection at this time, and argued that, in a squad system,

selection becomes in my view, right from day one, the role of the coaches. You can't have the coaches writing the training programme, organising regattas, running all the training programmes, trying people out in different combinations, in different boats, over a period of time, maybe running a few trials as well – and then at the end of it all this selection board comes along and decides – and they don't know one individual athlete from another!¹⁹⁸

She understood the coach to have the most complete knowledge of a squad, and, therefore, to be the most equipped to judge athletes' performances. To her, the only rational decision was to empower coaches to take on selection. In an interesting parallel to the broader questions of participation and high performance in the sport, Chris suggested that selectors, as distinct from coaches, 'should have been out scouting for talent and trying to bring people into the squad':¹⁹⁹ that they could more usefully be deployed to recruit athletes into the squad than to select crews for the team. She said she

¹⁹⁸ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

¹⁹⁹ Aistrop, oral history interview.

would have like to have been charged – if I'd have had the time, which I didn't because I was working full time and I had a life – but I think a selector should have gone to the clubs round the country and looked at who was aspiring, who was showing promise, who was obviously a good person in a small club. That's what I think we should have done, but we didn't do any of that.²⁰⁰

A balancing act: professional, sporting and domestic commitments

The need to find a balance between professional and sporting commitments emerged as a more prominent concern among the women rowing in this period than negotiating domestic responsibilities. None of the women interviewed had children while they were in the squad, although some were married; all, however, had worked for at least part of their international careers.²⁰¹ The individualised support from employers that had been a characteristic of the sport in the 1950s and 1960s continued to be important in the 1970s. For Chris, this came largely from her peers, rather than through management:

I was very well looked-after by my colleagues, who would, if anything happened to me at five o'clock, and I had to be out by five to be on the river at six o'clock, [...] they would all take over from me and do it. And I can't expect them to do that for me indefinitely. So I knew that I couldn't do that job if I wanted to continue rowing internationally. And I liked my job.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ It is notable that all these marriages were to men who were also involved in rowing in some capacity.

²⁰² Aistrop, oral history interview.

Rosie was able to renegotiate the terms of her employment with the Tax Office as I got better at rowing and was going away to Championships I cut down my hours, so I was able to do part time? Which meant that I could do the training in the morning and the evening, which is what we were doing at the time.²⁰³

For those working in education, like Lin and, later, Gill, full-time work was more compatible with the heavy training load. Penny observed that within the squad system, the common transition from being university students to becoming teachers had important benefits: ‘they had the summer, the longer summer break and they had – other breaks [...] so I think they got around it’.²⁰⁴ The holiday periods embedded in the teaching year were not, however, sufficient for the pursuit of international rowing at this time, and the negotiation of additional time off was dependent on individual athletes and their managers. The extension of this privilege was uneven. Lin, for example, described how she and her rowing partner Beryl needed a week of leave in addition to the summer holidays to compete at the Olympic Games, and to attend the training camp that preceded it.

I applied for a week, to go to the Olympics. To represent Great Britain. And Beryl did too. Now she was in – Merton? And I was in Westminster. Her letter came back saying we’re pleased and proud to say you can have the week off. My letter came back and said not only I couldn’t have that week off but they wouldn’t pay me for my six week summer holiday cos I wasn’t there at the end of term.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

²⁰⁴ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

²⁰⁵ Clark, oral history interview, November 13, 2017.

Ultimately, 'the reason I got that week, is because my friend Frances wrote to the Westminster and played hell [...] I thought I might get the bloody sack'.²⁰⁶ Lin suggested it was the different treatment that she and Beryl received from different authorities that was decisive, because it constituted

discrimination between the two of us. [...] In the end Westminster wrote me another letter, which I've got somewhere, saying in retrospect, we've thought again, you can have your week off. Dear god, how nice is that.²⁰⁷

Competing in international rowing competitions required an increasing, but seemingly manageable, investment of time and money from the athletes involved. Gill explained that

I was working so I had money. And I lived at home, so I didn't have any overheads really. But um... You know, all your money went into rowing, whatever you had, and – the thing is when you're eighteen, nineteen, twenty, you don't really need a lot of money. You're not, you haven't got a mortgage, or a house, I didn't have to pay rent, um... I-i- it you know, I could manage it.²⁰⁸

The financial imperatives of competing were manageable for Jean, in part because of the support given to athletes, and in part due to her own character and discipline.

Once you were selected, to row for Great Britain, I think they gave you travelling expenses, which helped. [...] I was always quite frugal with

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Parker, oral history interview.

my money, so um, I must have been able to do it. But it was difficult, yeah. Probably took all my money. [Laughs.]²⁰⁹

Asked if rowing had demanded any sacrifices, Jean was definitive: ‘oh absolutely, that’s what rowing does, doesn’t it [...] it sort of grips you’.²¹⁰ It may not have been easy, but ‘you did it cos you loved it’: a less idealistic reformulation of familiar amateur sporting ideology.²¹¹

Such reflections suggest these women enjoyed greater earning power, greater control over how their earnings were spent, or a greater willingness to commit more of their earnings to the sport. For Gill and Jean, like Lin, rowing was the focus of their energies and their social lives. Their need or desire for discretionary spend elsewhere was minimal. These women also built social networks within the sport that, at different points in their careers, formed the basis of their marriages; their male partners could understand and relate to their sporting aspirations and what was required to achieve them. Jean spoke fondly of how her partner, later her husband, ‘was always in the background, sort of supporting me’, but highlighted the limits of her own capacity to be a good partner and a good athlete at the same time. At a point where she felt she needed to focus single-mindedly on rowing, she had put the relationship on hold, and while she knew he was ‘upset’, ‘he understood that I had to concentrate on the training and everything, and the travelling, it was – it was – used to take everything out of me’.²¹² When they later married, Jean reflected that ‘it’s silly but um, I thought I should devote

²⁰⁹ Genchi, oral history interview.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

myself to my husband, cos I – obviously, it'd been devotion to rowing'.²¹³ Initially perceiving a conflict between her sense of self as an athlete and as a wife, after a year of 'normal life', away from rowing, she felt they could be reconciled. She returned to the sport, secure in her marriage, with a husband who 'always supported me'.²¹⁴

Towards a mixed-sex rowing community

From the start of her coaching career, Penny was committed to integrating domestic provision for men's and women's rowing: 'there was absolutely no doubt that starting a women's national squad – there was no doubt in my mind that we had to have mixed clubs'.²¹⁵ Penny felt acutely that mixed events would be 'much more beneficial for the women than the men because it was dragging the standards up much quicker', in part because 'the expectations of standards of doing everything, from running the regatta or whatever, were higher'.²¹⁶ Penny's athletic career had been characterised by significant amounts of contact with male rowers and coaches, and she had honed her training – markedly more demanding than that of her contemporaries – in light of what she observed and learned from them. The female athletes she was coaching in the 1970s also identified the competitive edge to be gained from training alongside men: as Gill recalled, 'the women's training schedules weren't hard enough. So the only way I could get the – the sort of – the training that I needed was to join in with the men.'²¹⁷ She described training with the men's squad as 'horrendous': 'I would

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Parker, oral history interview.

join in with them and they would try and invent things that I couldn't do, just to get rid of me. And they never did, ok?'²¹⁸ Penny identified a similar impulse to challenge her credibility, on the grounds of her sex, when lecturing male-dominated groups on coaching courses.

The men were definitely asking questions that were quite specifically designed to catch me out. And I don't think I ever couldn't answer a question. Because they were still pretty basic, actually.²¹⁹

Gill described the mixed-sex environment as more of a battleground than Penny did, but both positioned themselves as able to navigate the sexism they encountered.

Athletes racing in the 1970s expressed surprise and frustration that sexual inequality was so persistent. By then, they suggested, such inequality should no longer have been an issue; athletic success should have earned them the respect of their fellow athletes. Observing no discernible change in how male club athletes behaved towards her and Gill once they had been selected to row for Great Britain, Jean was confused:

because we used to train with the men, I don't know why, why they were like that. I don- I couldn't s- actually say they were jealous, do you think they could have been jealous? [Pause.] Possibly. I don't know.²²⁰

In contrast to Penny, who suggested that growing up with the men in her local sporting community and shared social life had enabled them to accept and

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

²²⁰ Genchi, oral history interview.

respect her as an athlete, Jean's experience was one of disconnect. They were part of a shared sporting and social community – why then, she questioned, did they not treat her more equitably? She presented a very simple logical underpinning:

I think probably it still boils down to that the men were a priority, and women were second thought really. Yeah. So even, you know, all – everything that Gill and I had done up to that point, it still didn't – they didn't, didn't respect us.²²¹

Jean highlighted an institutional problem in club rowing, connected to the priority taken by men: that success for men took a form that was inaccessible to women.

Our ambition, as a [women's] club, was always the Nationals. Whereas the men was Henley. It was always Henley [...] apparently, Henley is very important. Um, but being a woman and not, not being part of that Henley thing, um, I couldn't understand it.²²²

Henley Royal Regatta, long the pinnacle of the (male) amateur rowing calendar, continues to exert considerable influence on club rowing to the present day, and its absolute exclusion of women until the early 1980s represented a significant barrier to women's pursuit of equality in the sport. Women's access to the World Championships and the Olympics had started to bridge this divide internationally; domestically, however, it was still a significant problem.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Genchi, oral history interview.

Rosie positioned the greater integration of men's and women's rowing during the 1980s as 'probably a sign of the times'.²²³ Yet her observation that 'slowly but surely, you know those things just changed' was coupled with an awareness of the financial issues at play: 'economically I suspect that they [men's clubs] needed the women'.²²⁴ Penny echoed this analysis, offering the example of Thames Rowing Club, which she recalled was 'going through a fairly bad phase' and, as a result, 'basically absorbed United Universities' Women's Boat Club, along with its boats'.²²⁵ Aside from athletes and boats, this integration brought additional value in the form of social or honorary memberships – Penny herself was

still paying a, you know, just a nominal amount each year to be a member of UU, as we called it. And that sort of transferred to Thames.²²⁶

Although by the end of the decade it was acknowledged that 'financial pressures forced some clubs to increase their membership by admitting women',²²⁷ a shift in female aspiration and agency was also increasingly evident. In the early 1970s, a defence of Penny and the early women's squad training programme had critically noted that women had been 'making tea, sandwiches, and cleaning clubhouses for men whilst they row' for some time.²²⁸ A 1980 retrospective, meanwhile, explicitly connected the growth of women's rowing to the idea that

²²³ Mayglothing, oral history interview.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Churcher, 'Development of Women's Rowing', 159.

²²⁸ Peer, 'Penny's First Blob', 37.

'women grew tired of making tea and cutting sandwiches and pressed to become fully active members of their clubs'.²²⁹ Both highlighted the hypocrisy of allowing women to further the sport and sporting sociability enjoyed by their male partners while denying them the opportunity to pursue their own. Women had also long been involved in mixed social activities within men's clubs, but not on equal footing: they were guests, accorded privileges rather than rights. As Penny recalled,

in my skiff-shoving days in the '60s [...] all the skiff and punting clubs were mixed. Um, and Molesey Boat Club had a jazz band, I think it was every two weeks or once a month throughout the winter, on a Sunday night. And whilst no woman could set foot across the threshold, to row or whatever, we were all up there, on the Sunday night for the jazz band and dancing and jiving and – you know, all the rest of it.²³⁰

Twenty years later, while many clubs had built more integrated social and sporting communities, some were still staunchly opposed, with a handful of clubs remaining exclusively male until the late 1990s.

The boundaries set by men for women within some clubs could be unapologetically rigid. In 1979, for example, a female correspondent wrote to *Rowing* magazine having been turned away from a rowing club bar on a 'men only night', a point of discrimination she found arbitrary and absurd: 'I've promised my crew that next time we go to Putney on a Wednesday I'll wear my false beard

²²⁹ Churcher, 'Development of Women's Rowing', 160.

²³⁰ Chuter, oral history interview, October 31, 2017.

and specs'.²³¹ In response, the club President suggested that it had already moved towards greater acceptance of women, since 'for the better part of 100 of our 109 years no women were allowed in our bar at any time' but were 'now welcomed at any time save Wednesday evenings, which remain sacrosanct to our members'.²³² The extension of the club's social space to women, who had no formal standing in the club, was presented as an 'enlightened' act of generosity from an organisation 'wishing to move with the times', but one that must remain explicitly on their terms. With no apparent sense of irony, the club President answered criticisms with the statement that 'we make no apology for adhering to this rule; indeed, we are rather proud of the small stand we have been able to make in support of men's liberation'.²³³

Men's clubs, then, had long depended on women for social and logistical support, but had been able to do so on their own terms: a dynamic that was beginning to change. Uncertainty around introducing women to male-only clubs was by no means unique to rowing, and neither was the precedent of women holding important but, previously, liminal positions in men's clubs, supporting husbands, partners or children with catering and other assistance of a domestic character.²³⁴

The financial advantages to men's clubs of introducing female members introduced a more immediate imperative for change than the will of women, but

²³¹ J. Smith, 'Letters: Male Chauvinism is Alive and Well in Putney.....', *Rowing* April 1979, 7.

²³² J.H.M., 'President of the Club Concerned', 'Letters: Male Chauvinism Unrepentant', *Rowing* August 1979, 6.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Kay cites the case of tennis, where questions such as 'should the ladies make the cakes for Saturday tea or should the club buy them' were still being debated in the 1980s. J. Kay, 'Grass Roots: The Development of Tennis in Britain, 1918–1978', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 18 (2012), 2544.

the ‘social ingredient’ underlying sport and recreation identified in a parliamentary report in 1973 would impact positively on both.²³⁵ As more rowing environments became more mixed, a greater appreciation of the benefits to both men and women began to emerge. As Lin suggested,

the women – in the end we brought I think a different dynamic. And some of the blokes, what I call proper athletes, who weren’t intimidated or prejudiced, actually we had a much better laugh with the blokes.²³⁶

Conclusion

The extension of greater competitive opportunities and access to clubs and events for female rowers in the 1970s was substantial. Against a backdrop of more vocal claims for sexual equality in society, and for a move away from traditional amateur models and ideology in men’s and women’s rowing, the women’s sport was changing rapidly. Issues of athletic performance, regional and class difference, and sexual equality were colliding in rowing; as Lin explained,

there was a lot going on, and I don’t – it was all happening at such a speed [...] it was just like a great big bubbling pot. Wherever you were, I don’t think it was – easy, it wasn’t just gender.²³⁷

Driven by the changes in the international landscape for female rowers – notably, their inclusion in the Olympic Games from 1976 – the introduction of a national squad represented a paradigm shift in the experience of rowing on the British

²³⁵ ‘One characteristic of recreation, which must be mentioned here because of its effect on levels of participation, is the social ingredient [...] activities which allow people of all ages and both sexes to join in together are more popular than those which do not.’ Select Committee of the House of Lords on Sport and Leisure, *Second Report* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1973), xviii.

²³⁶ Clark, oral history interview, November 11, 2017.

²³⁷ Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

national team. Penny's appointment as a National Coach for women in 1973 was remarkable; her acceleration to coaching the men's senior team at this time, extraordinary. Her conviction that a squad system and a mixed-sex environment were essential to developing the women's sport mark her out as having both vision and mettle; as she herself reflected, 'when I look back on it now it wasn't gonna be easy for anybody, never mind a female'.²³⁸ The systems she introduced laid the foundations for a more competitive national team, asking athletes for a much greater commitment of time and energy. Despite access to more financial support to compete, for many, like Chris, the commitment required was a price they were not willing to pay.

Importantly, the increasing interaction between the men's and women's sports over this period, and an increasingly mixed-sex environment, did not equate to a more equitable one. Absolute provision for women's rowing was less than for men's, and opportunities to change this were limited by the lack of interest accorded to women's sport in British society and the media. Securing commercial resources would require greater respect from both. Women involved in the sport were actively engaging with how best to negotiate their own ambitions and desires, and their relationships with men – whether fellow athletes, administrators or partners. They were acutely aware of operating in a sexist environment, but their accounts point to a shift in expectations, and less tolerance of sexual discrimination. With the temporal remove granted by oral history, narrators repeatedly reflected on their experiences using explicit language of

²³⁸ Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017.

discrimination, prejudice and injustice.²³⁹ They also showed increasing motivation to challenge discrimination, physically, in the gym, professionally, in the lecture room, and socially, in the rowing club bar.

²³⁹ See A. Thomson, 'Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia' in R. Perks and A. Thomson eds., *The Oral History Reader* 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 343–53 on the critical opportunities, and challenges, presented by this temporal remove.

Chapter 4

1980–1988: building momentum

By 1980, women in rowing had gained access to more clubs and to greater provision for aspiring international athletes. Internationally, the establishment of World Championship and Olympic events in the 1970s had provided women with access to the top tier of international competition. During the 1980s, the extension of the racing distance for women to two thousand metres, and the creation of international events for lightweight women, were important steps towards equalising the men's and women's sports. Domestically, the expectations of coaching, financial and logistical support for aspiring female athletes were higher. Attendance at international regattas and Championship events had become integral parts of an annual cycle of competition rather than contested opportunities. Domestic and international objectives were becoming increasingly interdependent, and greater attention was paid to the ways in which domestic structures could facilitate – or retard – success on the international stage. These characteristics are reflected in the structure and content of this chapter. It focuses less on specific events and results, and more on the interaction of domestic and international sporting provision and goals. It also highlights that, despite increasing opportunity for female athletes, decision-making remained, largely, in male hands. Much of the access women had gained was extended, conditionally, as a privilege rather than a right. This chapter suggests that, in such an environment, feminist objections to male power appear were less strident than in the decade before or after. Many women were able to enjoy the sport with less overt opposition, while some proved able to climb the ladder of sporting

administration: historically and contemporaneously a male-dominated and – distinctly – a masculine domain.

Chris, Jean, Lin, Penny, Rosie and Sue all feature as oral history narrators in this chapter.

Social and sporting landscape

Prefaced by the swell of second wave feminism during the 1970s and preceding the third wave of the 1990s, the 1980s was a period of substantial social and political change in Britain.¹ Yet under the Thatcher government, ‘genuine advances for women oscillated between snail-like and imperceptible’.² Thatcher herself offered a powerful – and equivocal – symbol of female aspiration and opportunity in British society.³ Rejecting feminism as ‘poison’, and showing little political interest in issues disproportionately affecting women, the absence of feminist (and female) support behind her was conspicuous, if unsurprising.⁴ One

¹ L. Kalayji, ‘Collective Relationships and the Emotion Culture of Radical Feminism in Britain, 1983–1991’ (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2018), 17–21. F. Mackay, ‘reclaiming revolutionary feminism’, *Feminist Review*, no. 106 (2014): 95–103 identifies the emergence of ‘revolutionary feminism’ during the 1980s, allowing for greater collaboration with men than radical feminism (typography Mackay’s). See also J. Purvis, ‘“A Glass Half Full”? Women’s History in the UK’, *Women’s History Review* 27, no. 1 (2018): 88–108 on liberal feminism in the 1980s.

² E.J. Evans, *Thatcher and Thatcherism* 4th ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 28.

³ Thatcher was notably absent from oral history narratives spanning this period. This may reflect a lack of political interest or awareness among the narrators, in the stories they were telling, or that her influence was less dominant than the historiography suggests. On the need to decentre Thatcher from historical analysis of the decade, see S. Brooke, ‘Living in “New Times”: Historicizing 1980s Britain’, *History Compass* 12, no. 1 (2014): 20–32, and M. Hilton, C. Moores, and F. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, ‘New Times Revisited: Britain in the 1980s’, *Contemporary British History* 31, no. 2 (2017): 145–65.

⁴ See J. Purvis, ‘What Was Margaret Thatcher’s Legacy for Women?’, *Women’s History Review* 22, no. 6 (2013): 1014–8; G. Stewart, *Bang!: A History of Britain in the 1980s* (London: Atlantic Books, 2013), 29–48.

explanation for the slow pace of change – and Thatcher’s apparent lack of interest – was that the results of legislative changes introduced during the 1960s and 1970s, to the benefit of many women, were increasingly visible. The birth rate was stabilising after two decades of steep decline, although there was a steady increase in the number of women over the age of 30 who were having children; marriage rates showed a gentle decline; and a greater proportion of women were in employment.⁵ Yet, as Lewis has suggested, there remained an important gap between women’s expectations – and opportunities in the abstract – and the realities they faced. The changes to their roles in the public sphere, including increased earning power, generated some domestic conflict around how time and money should be spent. The politics of the family, she argues, were ‘particularly fraught’ in the 1980s since assumptions around gendered domestic roles were ‘increasingly out of step with reality’ – even if ‘as late as the 1980s, a large majority of women reported that they saw marriage and motherhood as their main career’.⁶ The theory and the practice of female leisure, correspondingly, remained far more contested than the male.

Jefferys argues that sport was not a priority under the Thatcher government, highlighting that ministers and senior civil servants questioned the volume and

⁵ The birth rate in England and Wales remained relatively stable during the 1980s at around 1.8. Sixty-one per cent of women aged 16–64 were employed in 1988 compared to 57 per cent in 1980, and 53 per cent in 1971 (Office for National Statistics; datasets available at: www.ons.gov.uk, last accessed October 7, 2019). A graphic representation of unemployment figures, split by gender, using Labour Force Survey data is presented in M.J. Oliver, ‘The Retreat of the State in the 1980s and 1990s’ in F. Carnevali and J.M. Strange eds., *20th Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change* 3rd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 262–78.

⁶ J. Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945: Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-War Years* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 39, 59.

calibre of staff on the Sports Council, as well as its structure, priorities and strategic vision.⁷ Yet even if the bureaucracy of the Council invited scepticism and frustration – and even if ‘for all its earlier accomplishments the Sports Council of the 1980s found its future existence under threat as never before’ – it had already overseen significant increases in participation in sports, and stimulated greater political and social accountability in the sector.⁸ The conditions attached to grants had the potential to address inequalities in sport: a core concern of the Council’s wide-ranging 1982 publication, *Sport in the Community: The Next Ten Years*, which explicitly tasked itself with increasing participation among under-represented groups.⁹ With almost eight million more women participating in sport in 1990 compared to 1982, the extent of the demand for sport amongst women at this time – and the impact of addressing particular barriers to their participation – was clear.¹⁰ Acknowledging that the economic climate would be more challenging, the report suggested that ‘manpower, rather than land or money, will become the most available resource in the later 1980s’, and that stakeholders in sport should prepare to mobilise public, private and voluntary support to achieve their objectives.¹¹

⁷ K. Jefferys, ‘The Thatcher Governments and the British Sports Council, 1979–1990’, *Sport in History* 36, no. 1 (2016): 73–97.

⁸ Ibid, 84; Sports Council, *Sport in the Community: The Next Ten Years*, 1982, 17–30. See also K. Roberts, ‘Social Class and Leisure during Recent Recessions in Britain’, *Leisure Studies* 34, no. 2 (2015): 131–49.

⁹ Sports Council, *Sport in the Community*, 31–2. The key groups identified were women, ethnic minorities, young people aged between thirteen and twenty-four, and middle-aged and older men.

¹⁰ R. Nicholson, “‘Like a Man Trying to Knit’?: Women’s Cricket in Britain, 1945–2000’ (PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2015), 185–6. Nicholson claims that in 1990, more than thirteen million women were recorded as participating in sport. The provision of crèche services and schedules offering female-only sessions were two initiatives addressing such barriers.

¹¹ Sports Council, *Sport in the Community*, 31.

In rowing, women had gained access to more clubs and events in Britain and to major world rowing events, including the Olympics – albeit racing half the distance that men did, and in fewer boat classes and categories.¹² The provision and structures underlying the women’s national rowing squad had been established, and a consistent series of international training camps, regattas, and Championships formed the underlying pattern of each competitive season. Reports on the number of ‘active oarsmen in England and Wales’ suggested exponential growth from the end of the 1970s, and while this active population remained small – some 2,600 women in 1980 – the pace of change had been remarkable.¹³ The expansion of rowing may not only have been quantitative: the ARA’s Director of Coaching, Penny Chuter, accepted the sport had ‘long been tarnished with the brush of upper class orientation’, but suggested by 1983 this was ‘quite inaccurate’, describing rowing as ‘a very cosmopolitan sport’.¹⁴

Playing politics: the 1980 Moscow Olympics

International and domestic political pressure to boycott the Olympic Games in 1980, due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, was significant, and the final few months prior to the Games characterised by uncertainty. For athletes aspiring to

¹² The Olympic programme comprised six women’s events and eight men’s. Although two lightweight men’s events had been introduced to the World Championships in 1974, neither the World Championships nor the Olympics included women’s lightweight events at this time. One lightweight women’s event and two lightweight men’s events were introduced to the Olympic programme in 1996 in place of existing heavyweight events.

¹³ ‘The total number of active oarswomen in England and Wales was fairly static between 1974/77 at between 980 to 1,041 [sic]. By mid-1979, the number had increased by 75 per cent to 1,883. Today, the number is estimated to be around 2,600.’ ‘A.R.A. Annual Report’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1981, 30.

¹⁴ P. Chuter, ‘Rowing – A Sport for Women’, March 24, 1983, 1. Document held at British Rowing Headquarters, Hammersmith, UK.

compete internationally, their selection was a perennial concern, yet in 1980, the question of whether the selected team itself would be able to compete introduced additional anxiety. British public support for athletes to attend appears to have been robust, as was that of the majority of sporting administrations. Yet consensus was lacking, and the ARA was just one example of a governing body that (initially at least) decreed that its athletes would not attend.¹⁵ The views of administrators and of MPs, evidenced in a Parliamentary vote, differed sufficiently to dissuade the British Olympic Association from imposing a blanket ban, leaving individual sports to assume their own positions.¹⁶ In rowing, athletes themselves forced the ARA to reconsider: by the end of March 1980, it was reported that ‘player power brought a striking about-turn in rowing’ as the ARA voted ‘by a substantial majority’ to petition the British Olympic Association (BOA) to permit their attendance.¹⁷ For Rosie, who was selected for the eight, her experience of the Games was tightly bound to this political, and politicised, environment.¹⁸ Having been bitterly disappointed not to be selected for the 1976 Games, her

¹⁵ For a detailed political analysis of the period leading up to the 1980 Olympics, and of how different stakeholders in sport responded, see P. Corthorn, ‘The Cold War and British Debates over the Boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics’, *Cold War History* 13, no. 1 (2013): 43–66.

¹⁶ In March 1980, Parliament voted by 315 votes in favour of a boycott to 147 against; hockey, equestrianism, yachting and shooting constituted the small minority of sports that upheld the boycott. See Corthorn, ‘The Cold War’.

¹⁷ ‘Rowing off to Moscow while Hockey Sticks’, *Guardian*, March 24, 1980, 23. In the same article, its earlier intention to postpone a decision until a parliamentary vote in May was reported as having ‘enraged’ the practising rowing community ‘particularly as they had not been consulted’.

¹⁸ See K. Jefferys, ‘Britain and the Boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics’, *Sport in History* 32, no. 2 (2012): 279–301 for analysis centred on Britain; and O. Chepurnaya, ‘The Moscow Olympics, 1980: Competing in the Context of Cold War and State Dirigisme’, in A. Bairner, J. Kelly and J.W. Lee eds., *Routledge Handbook of Sport and Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 550–61 for analysis of the context and political rationale for hosting the Games.

commitment to racing in 1980 was unwavering.¹⁹ It was an important motivator: in the period leading up to the Games, she remembered lobbying her MP on the subject of the boycott, and she recalled that ‘it was the first time I think I was even really aware that sport and politics – sometimes sport was used as a political tool’.²⁰ Her particular circumstances had made the political, personal.

Rosie’s memories of the 1980 Olympics offer a powerful, individual reflection on the broader collision of sporting and political interests. Her activism indicated a belief in her own agency, a trait that would serve her well in her future career as an administrator. Attending the Games in Moscow represented the achievement of a long-held sporting ambition, but also a marked shift in her understanding of what sport might represent, and the values it might reproduce. Lin’s memory of the Games, for example, was dominated by ‘the top – well the Russian woman, the heaviest Russian woman in the eight’, who

was heavier than the heaviest man in the men’s eight. And when she stood on the scales, they only went to a hundred kilos and she was heavier than a hundred kilos, so we don’t know how heavy she was. [...] I remember our coach saying you know what, look’em in the eye and show them you’re not frightened. And I was looking thinking, you know, get real, they don’t work, they’re full of drugs.²¹

¹⁹ Rosie recalled ‘talking to Penny in the car park and saying you know, you’ve made the wrong decision and I’ll be back, and I’ll *be* in the crews’. R. Mayglothling, oral history interview by the author, January 18, 2018, Bedford, UK. Notes in possession of the author. In this chapter, all quotes are taken from this interview; a separate interview with this narrator was conducted on June 8, 2018 in Henley-on-Thames, UK.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ L. Clark, oral history interview by the author, November 11, 2017, near Stourhead, UK. Notes in possession of the author. A series of interviews with this

Such commentary on Russian and Eastern European athletes was common among narrators, but Rosie was unique in suggesting that spending time in Russia had encouraged her to think more critically about her own position as a British athlete. She described how the feeling in the team was that the Russians and Eastern Europeans perceived them as ‘like these, ooh, these Western [laughs] decadent people [...], and we probably thought ooh these rather sinister, Russian people [laughs]’.²² She felt herself becoming aware that

you get a tale of what your country is like, um, and they’re getting a tale of what their country is like, and, and actually we’re all getting propaganda and we just don’t realise it.²³

The women’s team results in 1980 were deemed a ‘disappointment’, with Beryl Mitchell’s fifth place, among eleven entries in the single sculls, by far the strongest result.²⁴ Her performance, and her potential, prompted greater optimism going forwards, and this optimism was justified when, in 1981, she became the first British woman to win a medal at a World Championship.²⁵ Yet this represented a

narrator were conducted on November 11, 12 and 13, 2017 near Stourhead; the specific date for each is cited as required in this chapter.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ ‘Olympic Regatta: Women’s Events’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1981, 46–7. The single scull placed fifth in a field of eleven; the double scull and the coxed four placed last out of seven and six entries respectively; and the eight placed fifth out of six.

²⁵ Beryl Mitchell (née Martin, and subsequently Crockford) was a prominent figure in women’s rowing during the 1970s and 1980, an outstanding athletic talent on the British team since the inception of the squad. She featured in many of the oral history narrators’ accounts as an athletic peer, friend, and inspiration; they described her drive, relentless energy and cavalier sense of adventure with remarkable respect and admiration. The timing of the interviews – within two years of her being fatally injured in a cycling accident – is noteworthy in this respect. For further biographical details, see C. Dodd, ‘Beryl Crockford Obituary: World-Champion and Olympic Rower who Became an Inspirational Coach’,

taste of success in the women's sport rather than a fundamental shift in momentum, and in 1982, no crews reached grand finals except Mitchell in the single scull, who placed fourth.²⁶ A report in *Rowing* magazine positioned the men's sport as enjoying 'almost habitual success', but resurrected a familiar sense of hopelessness on behalf of 'the ladies' – especially 'those poor midgets in the British eight', asking: 'how do you set them up and expect them to give away over 500lbs. weight advantage to the Eastern block [sic] amazons?'²⁷

1981–1984: pushing the boundaries and seeking fairness

Domestically, two events in the amateur heartlands of British rowing highlighted enduring anxieties around women's presence in the sport: Henley Royal Regatta, and the men's Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race. In 1981, these long established and highly visible events both saw unprecedented participation by women. Susan Brown, who had coxed the women's eight in Moscow, would cox the Oxford men's Blue Boat in the 1981 Boat Race: the first time a woman would take part in the men's race.²⁸ A report in the *Almanack* emphasised 'this is not an Oxford gimmick – she was selected on merit',²⁹ a view at least partly compromised by the Oxford Captain later claiming she was

Guardian online, September 19, 2016 (available at <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/sep/19/beryl-crockford-obituary>; last accessed February 8, 2020); 'Beryl Crockford (Previously Beryl Mitchell)', *Rowing Story* (available at: <https://rowingstory.com/people/beryl-crockford/>; last accessed February 8, 2020).

²⁶ The double came ninth in a field of fourteen; the pair, tenth of twelve; and the eight, last of seven.

²⁷ P. Ayling, 'The West Strikes Back', *Rowing*, October 1982, 11–2.

²⁸ This is quite distinct from women's participation in the women's Oxford and Cambridge Boat Races, the first of which took place in 1927.

²⁹ J. Railton, 'The Lightest Dark Blue in the Boat Race', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1982, 48.

quite good at steering, but when I chose her [...] my decision was biased by the fact that she is a girl. I thought it would be good publicity.³⁰

Her selection did indeed generate publicity; as a media strategy, it was well-judged, and the media showed more evidence of interest and amusement than ideological objection.³¹ Subsequent to the race, however, she was denied a privilege historically accorded to university rowing Blues: an invitation to join the exclusive Leander Rowing Club in Henley-on-Thames.³² Later in 1981, more controversially, Henley Royal Regatta would offer the first women's events in its 140-year history, 'albeit to start with by an invitation only system' in two events.³³ The creation of competitive opportunities for women at this event, however restricted, represented a potentially radical shift in the British rowing landscape. It is noteworthy, however, that changes to the racing programme were made contiguously with changes to regulations in the Stewards' Enclosure, an exclusive, private area at the finish of the course: from 1980, 'ladies wearing trouser suits [would] no longer be admitted'.³⁴ Changes in fashion – and perhaps,

³⁰ E. Pridham, 'Women in Rowing', *Rowing*, March 1984, 23.

³¹ See for example B. McRain, 'Eight Good Men and Sue', *Glasgow Herald*, February 18, 1981, 23; D. Hunn, 'Steering against Sue: the Cambridge Man with Only an Underdog's Chance', *Observer*, March 22, 1981 and 'Here's Looking at Sue', *Observer*, April 5, 1981, 26.

³² This unprecedented scenario – a woman qualifying for a privilege within a club that did not admit women – forced a 'special general meeting' at the club, which concluded that it 'did not accept the admission of women as members' (Railton, 'The Lightest Dark Blue', 49).

³³ 'Autumn Changes for Royal Regatta', *Rowing*, August/September 1980, 4. These were the coxed four and the double scull; an invitational single sculling event was introduced in 1982.

³⁴ Although initially the style was 'refined' enough to be acceptable to the Stewards, 'ladies soon appreciated that trousers could be worn with an assortment of tops including bikinis' ('Comment', *Rowing*, April/May 1980, 3). Dress codes remain in force in the Stewards' Enclosure at the time of writing.

an increasing willingness among women to test the rules – required new legislation. A further regulation, denying access to the enclosure for children under ten years old, was explicitly directed at women, who were advised by the editor to ‘take due precautions to arrive without dear junior if he should not have reached the acceptable age’.³⁵ Concessions made to women on the water were matched with a clear reiteration of the social expectations of them on the bank.

Narrators’ feelings about racing at these invitational events diverged considerably. For Sue, invited to race in the coxed four, and still at the start of her international career,

it felt like you were – like – super special [...] I felt, you know like – oh my god, this is the first time they’ve invited women and I am one of those women. You know, not like – well they should have done this years ago, I didn’t think like that I just felt – special?³⁶

By contrast, Lin, a seasoned international, remembered ‘everyone saying this is an honour, this is an honour Lin, and I was – totally disinterested’.³⁷ She described the gap she perceived between what the event represented, the performance she would deliver:

I wanted all those hundreds of people to be proud of me and cheering. Not, here’s these token women going past and they haven’t got a hope in hell. It was my li- – worst nightmare. So I couldn’t wait to get out of

Details available at: <https://www.hrr.co.uk/stewards-enclosure>; last accessed February 8, 2020.

³⁵ ‘Comment’, *Rowing*, April/May 1980, 3.

³⁶ S. Hastings, oral history interview by the author, July 10, 2018, Whitton, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

³⁷ Clark, oral history interview, November 13, 2017.

the boat, I couldn't wait to put it away, and I couldn't wait to go home. And it's a great shame. Because that is another milestone for women.³⁸

She expressed a sense of shame and regret that her crew did not reflect the best of British women's rowing.

When finally the men have relinquished their stronghold on Henley, and for a women's crew to go past that isn't what I think of a viable option, was the pits for me [...] it wasn't a triumph that women, you know, they'd opened the doors.³⁹

Unlike changes to the dress code in the Stewards' Enclosure, these invitational events were not made permanent at this stage, and were discontinued after 1982. Rosie, who won her event in the double in 1982, recalled her participation there in purely factual terms, with the curt appraisal that 'Beryl won the single, and Astrid and I won the double. But after that they – stopped it.'⁴⁰ The decision to discontinue the events was publicly anchored in the rhetoric of practicality. The necessity of an 'intermediate start' to accommodate racing over one thousand metres was identified as a core concern, alongside an overloaded race timetable and overcrowded facilities.⁴¹ This rationale was deemed 'feeble' by *Rowing* magazine and 'nothing more than a fob-off on the women' by one of its correspondents, who further noted 'it took 150 years to decide to have womens

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Mayglothling, oral history interview. The neutrality of her account here contrasts the wider arc of this narrative section of the interview, in which she spontaneously raised her frustration at the lack of opportunities for women in this event.

⁴¹ P. Coni, 'Henley Today', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1984, 174.

[sic] trials and just over a year to re-consider'.⁴² Peter Coni, the Chair of the Regatta Committee, did, however, allow that 'if, as seems likely, FISA decides in 1985 that the women's international distance should be increased to two thousand metres, then no doubt the question of events for women will be reconsidered'.⁴³

Having represented Great Britain from 1975 to 1982, in 1983 Rosie was appointed as National Coach for the 1984 season. Tasked with co-ordinating the national women's squad and developing women's and junior women's rowing in clubs,⁴⁴ she had

decided that coaching was the direction to go. Um, in those days there were not many paid coaching roles. [...] So – if you were going to pursue that, you know, this job came up, it was – around women's coaching, or coaching of women so what better chance than to apply for the job?⁴⁵

As Penny had some ten years earlier, she emphasised the training she had undertaken in that direction:

I'd just finished a sports, um, sports degree [...] and while I'd been rowing as well I'd taken my bronze and my silver qualifications as well. [...] So um, I guess I was sort of uniquely qualified and – yeah, a little bit older as well.⁴⁶

⁴² 'Henley – Women Given their Marching Orders', *Rowing*, Winter 1982, 4; D. Roberts, 'Letters: Women and Henley', *Rowing*, March 1983, 9.

⁴³ Coni, 'Henley Today', 174. FISA: the Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Aviron.

⁴⁴ 'ARA Equipment Manager Appointed', *Rowing*, June 1983, 5.

⁴⁵ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

While she remembered feeling very ‘enthusiastic’ about the role, in retrospect Rosie suggested she had been ‘completely naïve [...] but then I seem to have been that all the way through my career, whatever I’ve done’.⁴⁷

Modestly framing her proactive, questioning approach as naivety, Rosie remembered entering rowing administration with a belief in her ability to change the sport – and indeed, a conviction that such change was necessary. It was clear to her from the outset that development of club rowing, and the pathways between clubs and high performance rowing, needed improvement. The geography of the sport was one important issue she saw the need to address: although the National Water Sports Centre (NWSC) was in Nottingham, the administrative base for rowing was in the south east of England, along with the majority of its participants. Rosie remembered trying to shift the geographical focus of ARA activity, for ideological and practical reasons:

I’m not saying they hadn’t been before but I was quite good about [going] where the need was rather than always trying to do everything centrally. [...] I think – it’s a bit easier now, you can get your information from so many different places, but I don’t think it was quite the same then, there weren’t there weren’t sort of so many places you could get your information from.⁴⁸

This was reflected in the aims of the Women’s Rowing Commission (WRC), which had replaced the Women’s Rowing Council in 1984 in line with ‘the restructuring

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

of the A.R.A. and the dawn of five-year plans'.⁴⁹ With 277 of the 480 clubs in Britain reported to have female members by 1984, the remit of the Commission was increasingly broad.⁵⁰ One of its key objectives was to improve communications and relations with the women's rowing community outside of London and the Thames Valley; Rosie's position as a dedicated women's National Coach 'complemented this policy perfectly'.⁵¹

The need for greater engagement with clubs and athletes, male and female, around the country was a positive strategic move for the ARA, yet it also reflected the growing insecurity within the sport about its future. The 1983 Women's World Championships were called into question due to the small number of entries, and FISA expressed fears that rowing for both men and women might be removed from the Olympic Games after 1984.⁵² Although this threat did not appear to have concerned athletes and coaches as the potential boycott in 1980 had done, it may have influenced the extent to which rowing administrators were willing or able to invest in long-term planning. It also continued to fuel long-running debates around the ARA's responsibilities to the broad base of club rowing and to the national team. The resources to meet these simultaneous demands, and to build a successful pathway between the two, were severely lacking.⁵³

⁴⁹ J. Shorey, 'The Development and Promotion of Women's Racing', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1987, 244.

⁵⁰ Pridham, 'Women in Rowing', 23.

⁵¹ Shorey, 'Development and Promotion', 244.

⁵² 'No rowing in the Olympics after 1984?', *Rowing* April 1983, 4. This insecurity was partly attributed to the difficulty in televising the sport, and to broader concerns around the commercialisation of sport.

⁵³ See M. Green, 'Changing Policy Priorities for Sport in England: The Emergence of Elite Sport Development as a Key Policy Concern', *Leisure Studies* 23, no. 4 (2004): 365–85, especially citing commentary from 1988 which highlighted that 'on the cusp between casual participation and the quest for improved

Within the squad system, transparency in selection was an increasing concern. Rosie identified the 'difficulty' of the selection policy and practice when she assumed her role, describing how there were

about nine selectors, who all had a say. Which is ridiculous [...] soon after that, or at some point, we moved away from having a Selection Board and making it the Performance Director's role to be the lead selector if you like.⁵⁴

Her position in this political matrix was complicated by 'having just been in it the year before' as an athlete.⁵⁵ Being at a greater remove from the team might have made the complex power dynamics involved in selection easier to navigate, but even 1984, at a slightly greater distance from the team, she felt that the selection process 'was a bit of a farce';

I'm not saying we didn't get the right people to the Olympic Games, I think we did, and in the right boats, but the process was quite – tricky. To – to manage.⁵⁶

1985: reshaping international rowing competition

Two international administrative decisions taken in 1985 had immediate consequences for the British women's team: the extension of the racing distance from one thousand to two thousand metres, and the introduction of women's lightweight events.⁵⁷ The ARA and athletes alike had long been in favour of these

performance [...] the efficiency of a nation's administrative structure for sport really matters'.

⁵⁴ Mayglotling, oral history interview.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ A.N. Schweinbenz explicates and analyses how closely connected these two issues were in 'Little Girls in Pretty Shells: The Introduction of Lightweight

changes, with the view that 'more success would be possible where there was a greater emphasis on technique and endurance and less on explosive power' widely expressed in archival records and in oral histories.⁵⁸ Although this optimism was not borne out in the performance of the heavyweight crews, it was vindicated in the success of the lightweight double: in winning the gold medal, Lin and Beryl Crockford became Britain's first female rowing World Champions. Mainstream media coverage commended their athletic performance, albeit equivocally. Awarding them 'Sporting Performance of the Month', the *Observer* defined them as having 'slimmed for success';⁵⁹ a different reporter later commended 'one of the most heroic performances in the history of British women's rowing' while also observing that the athletes 'with a combined age of 70, each had to lose 20lb to make the light weight [sic] class'.⁶⁰

For Lin, this gold medal was the reward for years of hard athletic graft. Attempting to describe the pride she had felt, she explained how the medals themselves were presented on

this blue ribbon and if you were anybody, you never showed your medal, you'd tuck it in your vest? So all you'd see is this blue ribbon.

And I just used to think this was the height of cool. And so I can

Women's Events in Competitive International Rowing', *Sport in History* 28, no. 4 (2008): 605–19.

⁵⁸ 'Just Alf', *Rowing*, January 1985, 9. Under the proposed plans, junior women would race over 1500 metres. Changes were reported as approved by FISA in March 1985, although a further proposal, to replace the coxed four with a coxless four, was rejected ('FISA – Make New Years [sic] Decisions', *Rowing*, March 1985, 4); J. Toch, 'Heavyweights Down – Lightweight Up', *Rowing*, October 1985, 14.

⁵⁹ J. Welch, 'Two Women Who Rocked the Boat', *Observer*, September 8, 1985. Part of Lin Clark's personal collection.

⁶⁰ D. Hunn, 'On Top of the World', *Observer*, January 5, 1986.

remember tucking my – tucking my medal in my shirt thinking oh my god, I wanna bring it out cos it's *gold*, it's nothing else but gold. But then I thought it'd be [laughing] uncool if I got my medal out and showed it was gold, that's not right.⁶¹

Alongside the pleasure she took in the result, it represented a tangible symbol, and a vindication, of her investment in the sport over such a long period of time. She recalled how as a teenager she had craved the respect of her athletics coach:

I remember thinking to myself, I want John to admire me, I want John to admire me, and I was never, ever good enough. And I didn't think any more about it, but won the World Championships, came back, and I got a telegram – John Oxtan, twenty something years on cos I'd, I was, you know, pre-seventeen when I stopped running for him, and I went to college? He'd sent a telegram to the ARA, and the ARA sent a telegram to me? That's how old it is, we had telegrams. And it said, I knew there was something you could do and not run. Congratulations, my World Champion. I just cried. It was just, so, wonderful. That he – remembered me, and he'd written that about me.⁶²

She described visiting him afterwards, still coaching junior athletes, and how he sat me down with all the girls [...] he just looked and he went, this is my little World Champion. And d'you know what, you could take the

⁶¹ Clark, oral history interview, November 11, 2017.

⁶² Ibid.

medal away from me but that was the, one of the most wonderful things in my life. That John, thought I was good.⁶³

Having pursued the result itself so single-mindedly, this seemed to surprise her.

It's funny when I look back, it's things like that that make your journey – OK. Not just being on the rostrum. Yes, it was lovely, and you know and my mum was proud, and the – flag wav- – but um, but it's little things around you like John Oxton being proud of me, that – that matter.⁶⁴

Lin's reflections suggest that she experienced sporting success differently from how she anticipated: in achieving it, its meaning shifted. She described the experience of the race itself 'almost lightly' in a press interview, and was quoted as claiming 'I've had harder races. It was our destiny.'⁶⁵ She echoed this sentiment in oral history, remembering the race as being 'one of the easiest races we've ever, *ever* raced', adding that Beryl had been

pretty annoyed about it, because she – thought it wasn't hard enough and she thought to win the World Championships and *be* a World Champion, it had to hurt? I was so grateful it didn't hurt. But that was Beryl. [...] Her words were, it didn't hurt enough, I feel cheated. My words were, they'll never be able to say British women can't win.⁶⁶

While a male gold medallist warned her that 'it's brilliant – but don't expect anything to change [...] they'll all rave about you one minute, he said, and then

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Welch, 'Two Women Who Rocked the Boat'.

⁶⁶ Clark, oral history interview, November 11, 2017.

you're just on your own the next',⁶⁷ she perceived an important gap between the men's and women's sports in terms of precedent and provision.

I remember saying to him you know what, I don't care how many accolades we do or don't get, they'll *never* be able to say British women don't deserve a boat. Or a hotel. Or a – taxi from the hotel back to the airport or whatever excuses they had about keeping us in second-class citizen mode. And I remember thinking to myself then, whatever happens, it was worth – not just for my medal, but that would be the start. If we could do it, anyone could do it. That women could – do it for this country. And I think – I think that's quite wonderful.⁶⁸

The female rowing body: racing distance and race weight

The decision to extend the racing distance for women from one thousand to two thousand metres from 1985 represented an important shift within the sport, equalising the athletic expectations of male and female rowers and removing the need to alter the racing course for men's and women's competitions. This decision was taken contiguously with the introduction of lightweight rowing; as Schweinbenz has argued, they were closely interrelated, the debates predicated on concerns around female physiological capability and the aesthetics of the female athletic body.⁶⁹ Support for extending the racing distance had been

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Schweinbenz offers detailed analysis of the introduction of lightweight rowing in 'Paddling Against the Current: A History of Women's Competitive International Rowing between 1954 and 2003' (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2007), 179–92; 'Little Girls in Pretty Shells: The Introduction of Lightweight Women's Events in Competitive International Rowing', *Sport in History* 28, no. 4 (2008): 605–19; and 'Conspicuously Absent: An Analysis of the Introduction of

consistent in Britain, but FISA records show a lack of consensus in discussions between different national federations.⁷⁰ It represented the collision of a range of anxieties and priorities, negotiated differently in different social and sporting contexts, rather than a singular, abstract issue.⁷¹ In oral histories, British athletes who had rowed before the extension of the racing distance did not identify the shorter course as, ideologically, problematic. Jean, who only ever raced over one thousand metres, 'always thought it was a bit strange', but expressed the view that 'it was just what we were used to, so – I don't suppose we thought about it that much'.⁷² Despite the agency Rosie showed in many areas of the sport, she similarly suggested that 'I don't think any of us agitated for it to go to two thousand'.⁷³ Challenging the parameters of their athletic competition appears to have been of less immediate importance than the competition itself. This position appears to have been commensurate that with that of rowing administrators, in Britain and within FISA, who advocated for extending the course for women on logistical and physiological grounds rather than a political or ideological commitment to sexual equality.⁷⁴ The greater integration of the men's and women's racing programmes was an important factor. As Penny explained,

Lightweight Women's Rowing into the 1996 Olympic Program', *Proceedings: International Symposium for Olympic Research*, 2006, 324–30.

⁷⁰ Minutes of FISA Congresses from the late 1970s to the early 1980s contain records of multiple debates on this topic. Ultimately, the motion to change the distance was passed with seventy-four votes in favour to fourteen votes against. 'Women Also Over 2000 Metres', *FISA Information* 1, February 15, 1985, 8.

⁷¹ In 1976, for example, it had been reported in Britain that FISA was consulting on the racing distance for women, and that this consultation had provoked a range of views. '2000 Metres for Women's Rowing', *Rowing*, December/January 1977, 9.

⁷² J. Genchi, oral history interview by the author, September 28, 2018, Abingdon, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁷³ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

⁷⁴ Schweinbenz offers oral history evidence of a more political, feminist approach to this issue in 'Paddling Against the Current: A History of Women's Competitive

as soon as you talked about mixing them there was all this time wasting problems, so good logistical reasons as well. So people from the Events Commission or whatever, who wouldn't be jumping up and down about whether it was feminine, less feminine or whatever, were just saying oh, logistically it would be so much easier.⁷⁵

Athletes strongly echoed this position. Explicitly asked if she framed the decision in terms of equality with the men, Sue, for example, was definitive: 'no. No, I didn't. Just I thought it would be easier for the organisers, that's all I was thinking [laughs].'⁷⁶

Alongside the logistical argument lay the physiological. Athletes, coaches and administrators alike understood the one thousand-metre course to prioritise explosive power over technique and endurance: an issue that, in archival materials and oral histories, was explicitly located in anxieties around the training practices and supposed doping regimes implemented in Eastern Europe. These anxieties had weighed heavily on British athletes and administrators from the inception of the European Championships in 1954, and clearly reflect the impulse to connect female physiology with the aesthetic and cultural suitability of sporting

International Rowing between 1954 and 2003' (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2007), 179. This need not be seen as a contradiction: oral history necessarily captures individual perspectives. The different cultural climates for women in sport in North America compared to the UK may also contribute to this difference – not least of which, the introduction of Title IX legislation in the USA in 1972.

⁷⁵ P. Chuter, oral history interview by the author, October 30, 2017, Mylor, UK. Notes in possession of the author. A series of interviews with this narrator were conducted on October 30, October 31 and November 1, 2017 in Mylor; the specific date for each is cited as required in this chapter.

⁷⁶ Hastings, oral history interview.

practice.⁷⁷ Penny's observation that 'if people were on anabolic steroids, then the benefits of them over two thousand metres were going to be much less than for the one thousand-metre distance' was justified, she felt, since after the distance was extended, 'you can see immediately the change in physique? The women got taller, they got slimmer.'⁷⁸ She approached the issue with characteristic pragmatism, explaining that the decision for women to race over one thousand metres had been predicated on the 'simple logic' that 'if two thousand metres is stressful, half of that distance must be half as stressful, and that's not how the physiology works at all'.⁷⁹ Highlighting the irony of the decision to race women over the shorter distance – 'the three to four minute period, of time, time of racing, is the most stressful on the human body!'⁸⁰ – she positioned changing the distance as the correct response to a logical fallacy, rather than a claim for sexual equality.

Despite some administrators' fears that a longer course would exaggerate discrepancies between the fastest and the slowest crews, Chris, who raced some twenty-five years earlier felt the opposite. She recalled being

half a course behind the Eastern Bloc, because they were built like –
fellas. And of course over a sprint course, a thousand metres, they just

⁷⁷ C.F. Sullivan cites Cole's claim that 'the suspicion of gender deviance in sport has been used to produce both nationalism and anticommunist sentiment' in 'Gender Verification and Gender Policies in Elite Sport: Eligibility and "Fair Play"', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 35, no. 4 (2011), 403. See also C.L. Cole, 'Resisting the Canon: Feminist Cultural Studies, Sport and Technologies of the Body', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 17, no. 2 (1993): 77–97.

⁷⁸ Chuter, oral history interview. See also Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current', 178.

⁷⁹ Chuter, oral history interview.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

whopped us. But over a distance course it might have been a different story.⁸¹

Embedded in her language is the understanding that a muscular – and, therefore, masculine – physique was an undesirable consequence of the one thousand-metre course. The ethical arguments about such practices neatly complemented the idea that a longer race would favour the British team. None of the narrators suggested they had felt any reservations about such change being implemented. On the contrary, as Sue explained, it was

spun to us in such a way that it felt as a, it was a positive. As opposed to – holy shit I've gotta race double the distance! You are kidding me! [Laughs.] So I didn't ever really think of it in a bad way, I was looking forward to it? Like thinking this is our chance, to start to shine.⁸²

Penny similarly perceived lightweight rowing to be firmly in British competitive interests: asked why she had advocated so strongly in favour, laughing, she claimed 'well – because most of my squad would be eligible for the lightweight women's events, when I was the women's coach!'⁸³ While it opened up new opportunities for British athletes, Sue – who only ever rowed as a heavyweight athlete – suggested that it was poorly managed at the level of the British team.

⁸¹ C. Aistrop, oral history interview by the author, October 16, 2017, Weybridge, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁸² Hastings, oral history interview. Schweinbenz, by contrast, presents evidence that some North American athletes were dissatisfied with the change, and the fact that it had been implemented with no consultation. 'Paddling Against the Current', 187–8.

⁸³ Chuter, oral history interview.

The way it was done, really bad. A lot of the heavyweights who weren't making it in the heavyweight team, decided to become lightweights [...] so the girls were just getting the weight [...] any way they could.⁸⁴

She further suggested that 'I think that's maybe why I didn't – have that respect for it, cos I just saw it as a way for heavyweights who couldn't get into the heavyweight squad, to get a race'.⁸⁵ Lin, who did transition into lightweight rowing, had been selected for the British team in heavyweight crews almost every year since 1974. She had, in Sue's terms, proved more than able to 'get a race', and was similarly critical of those who decided to trial as lightweights but lacked the physical or psychological capacity to make weight. Yet perceiving (and later proving) herself to be capable of the weight loss and of success as a lightweight athlete, Lin was unapologetic about making a strategic choice.

I was naturally nine and a half stone. Eating what I wanted as a heavyweight, and occasionally I nearly got up to ten. And I only needed to be eight and a half to be a lightweight. So, you know, f-, for me, I literally had to lose ten pounds of weight. That was the hardest ten pounds, of a body that was already ten per cent body fat, but I hadn't really thought about that. Oh it's only ten pounds, for goodness sake.⁸⁶

Lightweight rowing opened up a more realistic chance of her winning a medal:

I started to think gosh, I could maybe even – not enjoy racing cos I didn't, er, I was always feeling sick and nervous, but – I thought this,

⁸⁴ Hastings, oral history interview.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

actually the thrill of being strategic, um, within parameters of being able to do something and win.⁸⁷

Lin remained acutely aware of the negative commentary surrounding the existence of the lightweight category and did not simplistically refute the criticisms it provoked.⁸⁸ She recalled a fellow international athlete, years later, telling her

I'm really glad, she said, I'd have rather lost honourably as a heavyweight. Than to win as a lightweight. [...] There was this resentment from the heavyweights who couldn't make it, to see a girl, that was a heavyweight one minute, then go off and win and get the accolades. And I can understand that, what I can't understand is her sharing that with me. Cos I'd have kept that to myself.⁸⁹

Unlike sex, which administrators conceived of as a physical binary,⁹⁰ the lightweight category represented an arbitrary point on a continuum, and the fact that some athletes could transition between the two was problematic. Implicit in the decision to compete in the lightweight sport, as Lin did, was the acknowledgment that they could not reasonably expect to compete with the heaviest, strongest women. Aware of the irony, Sue admitted:

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid. See also Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current', 180–1.

⁸⁹ Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

⁹⁰ The simplistic binary division of men and women was critiqued by a number of doctors and medical professionals from the point of introducing women's rowing to the Olympic Games. Extensive records of these critiques are held in the archives of the Olympic Studies Centre in Lausanne, Switzerland (notably, folders JO-1976S-MEDIC, B-1004-MEDIC/035, JO-1980S-MEDIC and JO-1984S-MEDIC). They challenged the use and infallibility of particular metrics, whether visual assessments of genitalia or chromosomal testing. On the intersection of sex testing and fairness in sport. See C.F. Sullivan, 'Gender Verification and Gender Policies in Elite Sport: Eligibility and "Fair Play"', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 35, no. 4 (2011): 400–19.

this is really bad – my thoughts for the lightweights were probably what the men’s thoughts were on the women? Which is really bad isn’t it? [...] I suppose you think, oh lightweights, they’re only like little tiny girls. Not very strong. And they can’t beat me, so they’re not really good rowers. [Laughs.]⁹¹

While rowers should be strong, she also recalled feeling that the two thousand-metre course would be beneficial because it was ‘not gonna suit – people who are just – monsters, you need to be able to row, as well?’⁹² She implicitly defined an optimal physique for female rowers, located between ‘little tiny girls’ and ‘monsters’: an echo of the historic paradox that positioned women as physiologically too weak for sport, and that training to develop their physiological capacity would compromise their femininity. Such equivocation reflects the more general uncertainty regarding lightweight rowing within the sport. According to Penny, as an international rowing community ‘we never looked back’ following changes to racing distance. By contrast, at the time of writing, the future of lightweight rowing looks increasingly uncertain.⁹³

⁹¹ Hastings, oral history interview. Schweinbenz describes lightweight athletes as ‘doubly cursed; they were women, which made them inferior to men and they were lightweights, which made them inferior to heavyweight rowers’; she argues that prejudices around the athletic merit of their performance and around weight management rendered them ‘pariahs’. Schweinbenz, ‘Paddling Against the Current’, 171, 181.

⁹² Hastings, oral history interview. See Schweinbenz, ‘Little Girls in Pretty Shells’, 606.

⁹³ Chuter, oral history interview. See also Schweinbenz, ‘Little Girls in Pretty Shells’, 618. Lightweight rowing is explored further in Chapter 5.

1986–1988: administrative evolution

Some twenty-five years after the ARA recruited its first professional employee – Jim Railton, as National Trainer, in 1963 – its relationships with the amateur rowing community, and its own professional staff, were increasingly uncomfortable. The expectations of the ARA in terms of international success and greater domestic opportunity vastly outweighed its capacity to deliver them. As early as 1980, a report in *Rowing* magazine had highlighted the demands of the National Coach's role, and the limited remuneration and recognition attached to it; the idea that 'all that we can hope is that our national coaches continue to enjoy it' would become a more untenable position as both pressure and profile increased.⁹⁴ In 1986, the ARA introduced the role of Director of International Rowing (DIR), which was tasked exclusively with international performance, and not explicitly with coaching. As such, it clearly distinguished the remit of high performance sport from that of participation. In combining 'decisive direction [...] together with the authority to propose and implement the necessary strategy',⁹⁵ it was intended to reduce bureaucracy, streamline administrative processes and foster greater international success. It also separated the management of the sport from its delivery to athletes, giving coaches more autonomy to select according to their own observations and judgment: with 'much more knowledge about what's going on than a group who come from outside', coaches were now understood to be the best equipped to make such decisions.⁹⁶ The DIR would assume ultimate responsibility for selection, although a 'Court of Appeal' was established 'to provide a procedure for athletes who wished to appeal against any

⁹⁴ 'Just Alf', *Rowing*, February/March 1980, 8.

⁹⁵ P. Chuter, 'The Best Way Forward', *Rowing*, February 1986, 14.

⁹⁶ Mayglotling, oral history interview.

decision taken by them'.⁹⁷ In replacing the existing process – likened to 'treading on glass through a procession of know-alls, incompatibles, hard men, schemers, and chancers' – these new structures aimed to ensure that 'with no selectors to petition, everyone will know who's boss'.⁹⁸

The appointment of Penny to this role was highly controversial. The ARA press release detailing the role had announced she was 'to be offered the appointment', while *Rowing* magazine elaborated that the decision had been made while she was on leave: a political manoeuvre from the ARA that, as a *Guardian* report suggested, 'may solve a problem for them while creating one for Miss Chuter'.⁹⁹ The same article noted that it 'will not be universally welcomed in rowing circles', and, while, emphasising her extensive experience and qualifications, it claimed that the ARA 'would have been forced to advertise the position at a much larger salary than she is prepared to accept if they were to attract another world class coach'.¹⁰⁰ Athletes and commentators alike largely directed their critique at the opacity of the process rather than towards Penny herself.¹⁰¹ The editor of *Rowing* magazine, for example, acknowledged her 'fullest qualification' for the position, but suggested that 'even she would surely have been more satisfied had she

⁹⁷ P. Chuter, 'International Rowing in 1986', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1987, 196.

⁹⁸ C. Dodd, 'Rowing's All-Powerful Daughter Takes up the Oars', *Guardian*, February 13, 1986, 28.

⁹⁹ D. Lunn-Rockliffe. 'Press Release', printed in full in *Rowing*, February 1986, 4; R. Ayling, 'Comment: A Rowing Supremo', *Rowing*, February 1986, 3; Dodd, 'Rowing's All-Powerful Daughter', 28.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. The article claimed Chuter would be 'one of the most powerful women in British sport, all for a salary under £20,000'.

¹⁰¹ 1984 Olympic champion Martin Cross, for example, was reported to have appeared on a regional BBC programme 'for several minutes on the theme of what he saw as misguided and incompetent decisions at the top of our sports administration'. 'Cross Critical of ARA Executive Decisions over Supremo Appointment', *Rowing*, March 1986, 4.

been selected after a full advertising search'.¹⁰² Highly visible and uniquely culpable for any perceived failures, Penny was under immense pressure to deliver. Vindicated by the results of the 1986 season, she publicly claimed that 'the appointment of a D.I.R. with a brief giving total control is radical but enlightened' – and 'a long way ahead of any other national governing body of sport in Great Britain'.¹⁰³ Privately, it had taken a substantial personal and professional toll.¹⁰⁴

The structural changes within the ARA offer a clear indication of how coaching and sporting administration had changed over the previous two decades, and would continue to change into the 1990s. With limited resources, however, fundamental issues in the delivery of the sport remained, and administrators remained aware that

inevitably, the Sports Council look at Henley and the Boat Race and think that there must be untapped money in the sport. Perhaps there is at some levels, but surely not across the board in many small clubs.¹⁰⁵

Despite some efforts to engage more with rowing across the country, the sport's administration and the majority of its provision continued to default to the south east of England. A letter to *Rowing* magazine from Neil Wigglesworth argued that

¹⁰² Ayling, 'A Rowing Supremo', 3. At the next ARA Council meeting after the announcement, the view that 'for a position of such importance the correct procedures of advertising the post should have been observed. Even more so to support an eventual appointment of Miss Chuter' (P. Ayling, 'All Quiet at March Council Meeting', *Rowing*, March 1986, 4).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Chuter, oral history interviews, October 30, October 31, and November 1, 2017.

¹⁰⁵ 'Just Alf', *Rowing*, November 1986, 9.

the ARA's spending should be regionally devolved, and increasingly diverted away from the national squad. He did not explicitly engage with gender, perceiving the most pressing inequalities to pertain to geography and the priority given to the national squad over club sport across the country: issues, he argued, that were closely related.¹⁰⁶ A year later, Bill Mason, an experienced club and international women's coach, would address issues in the women's sport specifically. Arguing that 'the money that is at present being spent on a small number of girls to compete at the top internationals through out [sic] the season, could be better spent on developing a broader base of women's rowing in this country', he shared with Wigglesworth a sense that the organisation's limited resources should be distributed more widely.¹⁰⁷

Entries for one club rowing event, however, suggested a major increase in the number of women wanting to compete domestically: the Women's Head of the River Race (WEHoRR). This event was first raced in 1930, over the full four-and-a-quarter-mile course – a decision that was reconsidered on its revival after World War Two¹⁰⁸ – but entries had remained low until the 1970s, when they began to increase gradually. The growth from twenty-four crews entered in 1979 to more

¹⁰⁶ N. Wigglesworth, 'Letters: The Future for British Rowing and the ARA?', *Rowing* February 1986, 26. Wigglesworth proposed that the ARA should retain only a small number of 'office staff' and not invest in National Coaches: 'nothing against them but they spend a lot of time on squad business and the rest on sending out to the clubs information on which it is impossible to act'.

¹⁰⁷ B. Mason, cited in 'Interview – Bill Mason', *Rowing*, November 1987, 21.

¹⁰⁸ The history of the event published on the WEHoRR website acknowledges precedents from 1927, but identifies 1930 as the first year of its continuous history, since it was the first year the race was run as a processional time trial rather than side-by-side. A. Southey, 'Race History', available at <https://www.wehorr.org/history/>; last accessed February 8, 2020.

than 120 by 1988, however, was exponential.¹⁰⁹ In her capacity as National Coach over this period, Rosie had identified the potential of the event to form a focal point in the club season for women. Developing the event was both a priority and a metric: 'it was a big desire to right, come on, we can get more women to come down [...] for me that was a bit of a marker of where we'd got to?'¹¹⁰ Changes in international rowing also prompted questions about reinstating the full course, a change that was made in 1986, the year after the international racing distance was extended.¹¹¹ The substantial increase in participation justified her conviction that with the right competitive destination, and support for clubs to overcome specific barriers (such as needing to borrow boats if transportation was an issue), the competitive side of the women's sport could flourish. It was an astute move: the event served an important purpose for athletes, but collecting data on entries year on year also created a solid evidence base supporting the case for women's rowing within the ARA, and with external stakeholders such as the Sports Council.

¹⁰⁹ 'Women's Eights Head of the River Race 1987', report. Part of the collection held at British Rowing Headquarters, Hammersmith, UK. The report offered a breakdown of competing clubs. Forty-seven of 105 entries were based outside of the Thames Valley area, and the report noted that 'all regions [were] represented', suggesting it was an important target, or a significant achievement, for administrators. Fifty-five entries were from independent clubs and 43 from university clubs; other categories were schools (with two entries), coastal clubs (with three entries) and the national squad (with two entries).

¹¹⁰ Mayglotling, oral history interview.

¹¹¹ Club opinions were canvassed and clubs eventually voted on this change. G. Wilkinson, 'Women's Head to Go to Men's distance for 1986?', *Rowing*, May 1985, 5. Such discussions illustrate the extent of cultural influence and legacy on the women's sport compared to scientific data or absolute physiological parameters – even the short WEHoRR course was significantly longer than the international standard of two thousand metres.

1986–1988: Nottingham to Seoul

In 1986, ‘the invitation by F.I.S.A. to stage the World Championships’ at Nottingham was described as ‘a feather in the cap of British rowing administration, which again rose splendidly to the occasion’.¹¹² The *Almanack* characterised 1986 as ‘possibly the most outstanding season in its 147 years’ history’, highlighting the increasing frequency of medals being won by women as a key part of the sport’s achievements, and welcoming the ‘new era of representative rowing’ following Penny’s appointment as Director of International Rowing.¹¹³ Yet Penny herself foregrounded the ‘gross lack of funding and a dearth of sufficiently qualified and experienced international coaches’; with ‘extremely inadequate funding’, success had been achieved ‘with great expense to individual athletes’.¹¹⁴ Even on home waters, funding was insufficient for a pre-Championships training camp.¹¹⁵ Yet the following year, moving towards the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, Sue described how

the build-up was just amazing because – as a squad, before you’d been selected, so all the people who were in the squad were sort of given like little talks about [...] what the village was gonna be like, what the lake was like, what the training camp was gonna be like – so even though you weren’t in the squad you were being given this lovely big taster of what it was like, so you’re just sitting there going I wanna go, I wanna go, I wanna go, I *really* wanna go!¹¹⁶

¹¹² K. Osborne, ‘Preface’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1987, 15.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ P. Chuter, ‘International Rowing in 1986’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1987, 196.

¹¹⁵ B. Armstrong, ‘World Rowing Championships: Nottingham, 17–24 August, 1986’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1987, 201.

¹¹⁶ Hastings, oral history interview.

This attempt to prepare and inspire the athletes for the season appears to have been matched by a more robust selection policy than in previous Olympic cycles.

Sue described an arduous, but 'very fair' process of selection:

everybody was trialled, over and over again, so everybody knew where everybody's standing was? And you know all the ergo results, everyone, it was all transparent. Everyone saw everything. And you could work out, you know, your standing. Everyone knew where people were.¹¹⁷

Despite this sense of transparency, Sue still felt some apprehension about the announcement: 'there was no reason why we shouldn't be selected, but you never knew in those days what was gonna happen'.¹¹⁸ Having been selected, she was thrilled by the prospect of – and provision for – the Olympic Games. She recalled the training camp as

just brilliant, I've never had anything like it in my life. We were in this lovely little village, [...] and we had the whole hotel to ourselves. We had our own chef. We had our own – each crew had their own bodyguard.¹¹⁹

She also noted an athletic hierarchy within the accommodation.

The rooms were selected on – how – this is how pathetic they were, the rooms were, you were given your rooms depending on how close

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

you were to your selection time? So the furthest away from your selection time, you were on the top floors, the hotter rooms?¹²⁰

Although she laughingly describing this policy as 'pathetic', she saw this as part of a more holistic drive towards fairness and transparency. She added that since her crew had come very close to their selection time, they were 'on the ground floor, I think with the m- men's eight, or – and the pair and stuff [...] that was really nice'.¹²¹

The ARA had secured 'considerable sponsorship' in the lead-up to the Olympics, supporting the camp at Chuncheon 'which received accolades from everyone', 'the mostly smooth operation of the squad' and, suggestively, 'distinctly less personal rivalry between competitors and officials than is often the case'.¹²² With international sport increasingly framed in transactional terms, greater resources enabled athletes and administrators alike to feel that their efforts were valued. Adequate finance could facilitate more cordial and professional relations. It did not, however, generate impressive results, and 'from the blubbing emerged some old rivalries and a plethora of ideas about How To Do It Better'.¹²³ Satisfaction with the athletic 'transaction' was closely connected to results as well as to process.

Regardless of these issues, Sue spoke about the Games with tremendous passion and enthusiasm. She reflected on her excitement of being in the Olympic

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² C. Dodd, 'Olympic Regatta 19–25 September', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1989, 224.

¹²³ Dodd, 'Olympic Regatta', 224.

Village, surrounded by world-class athletes, as well as taking full advantage of the material benefits:

they had all sorts of – stuff. It was just – you know, you’re just walking into this thing going oh my god, is that for free? They go yeah! [Laughs.] You’re like, oh my god! [Laughs.]¹²⁴

Her crew did not win a medal, but she reflected on their performance as a strong one. Despite remembering a false start in their heat – ‘[laughing] oops!’ –

I remember the, for the, repechage, we were – you know sometimes the coach just gets it right, what they say to you? [...] It was just one of those races where you knew this is it, you know, do or die. [...] So yeah, getting into the final was fantastic, and I think – that’s it, we beat the Canadians to get into the final, and then in the final we were – pretty close with the Americans, but they – they took us at the er, line. So, it was good. It was really good.¹²⁵

Under Steve Gunn, a coach that Sue deeply respected and admired, her crew had been coached to set ambitious but realistic goals. Winning a medal was not a decisive factor in how they assessed their value as athletes; they were empowered to take pride in delivering a strong performance, and to see even top-level competition as a stage of their development rather than a final destination.

Women and Henley: contesting space and building pathways

Sue had followed a linear development pathway from junior rowing to the Olympics, yet for the majority of female club athletes, such a pathway was less

¹²⁴ Hastings, oral history interview.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

clear. Rosie clearly remembered that in the course of her work for the ARA, one core point on development for women made her 'extremely frustrated':

what you would see was that for the clubs, the culmination of their season was Henley Royal Regatta. [...] For the women there wasn't that focus at all.¹²⁶

As an ARA National Coach, in January 1987 she drafted a 'Proposal for Women's Events into Henley', and, acknowledging that there had been issues with the invitational events hosted in the early 1980s, she suggested that 'five years has now passed and women's rowing has moved on a great deal'.¹²⁷ Women now raced 'the full course'; there was evidence of international support; pressure on the schedule had been eased slightly by the introduction of a fifth day in 1985; and while in the past 'many people objected to seeing women in rowing boats', now she suggested 'it is far more acceptable for women to take part in hard physical activity'.¹²⁸ The only outstanding issues pertained to the programme, and to accommodating the athletes. Rosie acknowledged that 'with hindsight probably the wrong boat types and entry qualifications were imposed on the crews' for the invitational events, and advised that the decision around what to include 'should be carefully considered'.¹²⁹ On space, she suggested mitigating the 'serious strain' on changing and boating facilities by using a club just upriver, although she emphasised that this should be considered as a 'short term' arrangement

¹²⁶ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

¹²⁷ R. Mayglothling, 'A Proposal for Women's Events into Henley'. Part of the collection held at British Rowing Headquarters, Hammersmith, UK.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

which should not deny them ‘access to all the other facilities that the men already enjoy’.¹³⁰ Her proposal was unsuccessful, and she recalled

moaning to one of my [ARA] colleagues, [...] and saying, you know, why are we um, not – why haven’t we got some event for women, why can’t we get them into Henley? And he said well, if you feel so strongly about it why don’t you start your own? And that was how Women’s Henley came about.¹³¹

The river itself could, in theory, be used as the event organisers preferred. Athletes’ access to the water from the bank, and provision for spectators, however, were a different matter. Rosie recalled ‘it was made very clear from the outset that we weren’t going to be able to use any of the facilities of Henley Royal Regatta’, and in fact, ‘if there was any reason why they were way behind with the building of the course then we might not be able to hold our regatta at all’.¹³² Although it was still deemed to be a worthwhile endeavour, for an event aspiring to scale, permanence and prestige this was a major concession. To comply with the stipulations of Henley Royal Regatta, whilst retaining some of the original vision for Henley Women’s,

the first year they actually raced the normal course in the normal direction. Which meant absolutely finishing to nothing apart from a

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

¹³² Ibid. A five-page letter from Peter Coni, as Chairman of Henley Royal Regatta, to Laurie Bridgeman of the Sports Council, lays out the negotiation of space in detail. He emphasises his engagement in ongoing dialogue with Rosie and Pauline, not only in internal debate among the Stewards. P. Coni to L. Bridgeman, February 27, 1988. Part of the collection held at British Rowing Headquarters, Hammersmith, London.

man going [gestures the finish flag] *down* or whatever, you know, *finish*.¹³³

Despite such issues, at the end of the first regatta, *Regatta* magazine reported that ‘even the press heaped praise on an event that more than anything else needed to show that women can run efficient regattas’.¹³⁴ With similar enthusiasm, *Rowing* magazine reported that the first regatta was ‘voted a great success by both participants and spectators’, the racing being of a ‘high standard with some very close finishes of two and three feet being recorded’.¹³⁵ Its claim that the races were ‘warmly applauded [...] by the large crowd’ was somewhat belied – though, not contradicted – by a photo editorial in the same issue, which included an image of a coxed four passing the empty scaffold of one of the grandstands that was in place for Henley Royal Regatta.¹³⁶ It was a provocative choice of image, printed alongside the tentative enquiry:

would it not be possible to re-arrange the racing course? This year after cheers from hundreds, perhaps a thousand or two spectators, off Remenham Farm, the crews finished the last few hundred metres in virtual silence and isolation with zero atmosphere. Just think of the

¹³³ Mayclothling, oral history interview. She explained that the following year, in an attempt to mitigate this problem, ‘they turned the course round the other way’; while the finish line in this configuration was accessible, it was also in isolation. Alongside some more problematic anti-feminist commentary, one unsupportive correspondent to *Rowing* magazine asked the reasonable question: ‘who’s going to go down to the island to watch the finish anyhow?’ O.F. Duddy, ‘Letters: Womens Henley’ [sic], *Rowing*, August 1988, 4.

¹³⁴ ‘Chocs Away for Women’s Henley’, *Regatta*, August 1988, 6.

¹³⁵ D. Graham, ‘Women’s Henley Regatta: Off the Mark’, *Rowing*, August 1988, 18.

¹³⁶ Ibid; ‘Women’s Henley Photopage’, *Rowing*, August 1988, 19.

difference it would make if the finish could be opposite the crowds near Remenham Farm.¹³⁷

Female access to Henley Royal Regatta, and, distinctly, the creation of Henley Women's Regatta, functioned as a catalyst for discussion and a litmus test of progress within the rowing community. The conservatism of the former remains a point of pride, a manifestation and expression of its prestige. In 1984, as Chair of the Regatta Committee, Peter Coni argued that 'one of the great strengths of the Regatta is that it is run by an oligarchy, the Stewards, who are their own masters'.¹³⁸ While he acknowledged that its 'undemocratic' leadership was 'all a very unfashionable way to go on in the 1980s [...] because they are their own masters, the Stewards have been able to run Henley so as to provide the sort of event which they themselves would wish to enjoy'.¹³⁹ He was right to observe that 'happily the Stewards' ideal of a Regatta seemed to be very much shared by the rowing community'.¹⁴⁰ It was not only older, male members of this community that had reservations about radically reconfiguring female participation. Yet there was increasing pressure on the Regatta to consider its future regulations – not least with regard to women, whose expectations with regard to equal social and sporting opportunities had changed substantially.

Chairing the Regatta Committee from 1977 to 1992, Coni was a key figure in debates around the inclusion of women's events at Henley Royal Regatta. The

¹³⁷ 'Grasp the Nettle', *Rowing*, August 1988, 3.

¹³⁸ P. Coni, 'Henley Today', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1984, 171.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

extent to which the Regatta reflected his own agenda, distinct from that of the Stewards collectively, however, is difficult to ascertain. Penny defended Coni as being ‘much more forward looking, than previous Chairmen’, suggesting that his introduction of the invitational events in the early 1980s was evidence that ‘he’d already started thinking about – not separating the men and the women’.¹⁴¹ In a letter to a Sports Council representative, Coni himself claimed ‘to believe very strongly that it is in the Regatta’s long-term interests to include events for women’, but tempered this with the caveat that ‘some of the Stewards naturally and perfectly properly look to the Regatta first and the wider issues second’.¹⁴² This was an astute political position to take, located as he was between two important groups of stakeholders pursuing markedly different sporting and social agendas, but leaves the strength of his belief, or his willingness to advocate for it, unclear. Reflecting on the partial and conditional introduction of women’s events in 1998, Rosie remained sceptical, and questioned

the reasons for the inclusion of women’s rowing in the regatta both in the eighties and nineties. Is it a PR exercise or is it because women’s rowing is finally being treated with the respect it deserves both Internationally and Nationally? I suspect the former because the latter would require a full women’s programme.¹⁴³

In the context of the opaque, arguably obstructive, administration of Henley Royal Regatta, Rosie’s decision to establish an entirely separate event, under entirely

¹⁴¹ Chuter, oral history interview.

¹⁴² Coni to Bridgeman, February 27, 1988.

¹⁴³ R. Mayglothling, ‘Don’t Be Silly, Women Don’t Row’, *On the WIRe: The Newsletter of the WIRe* no. 4, July 1998. Part of the collection held at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, UK.

separate leadership, is unsurprising. The delivery of the two regattas would be markedly different, yet they would, inevitably, invite comparison: a source of some anxiety for Coni and the Stewards. Coni was acutely aware that crews – ‘especially the Americans’ – might

expect to find something at least on the lines of Henley Royal Regatta.

They won't [...] I would be profoundly unhappy if we found ourselves (or rather [the organisers] did) facing people with the same disillusionment that faces the family who go to Spain on a package tour only to find that the hotel of which there was a splendid photo in the holiday brochure is still in fact in the hands of the builders!!¹⁴⁴

The logic is sound, yet the irony of the argument – having chosen not to create space for women's events at Henley Royal Regatta, nor to accommodate Henley Women's Regatta more hospitably – appears to have been lost.¹⁴⁵ Chris was staunchly supportive of the latter, but suggested that a lot of conflict could easily have been avoided: 'I just think it's very sad that Peter Coni didn't, in the early days, allow women's rowing in to start off with'.¹⁴⁶

Aiming to appease readers on both sides of the debate, in March 1988 *Rowing* magazine reported that

it's happening isn't it? At last we have got women rowing at Henley!

As I hear the Stewards choking on their gin and tonics, I should

¹⁴⁴ Coni to Bridgeman, February 27, 1988.

¹⁴⁵ A column in *Rowing* magazine suggested that while Coni himself 'did not seem averse to the idea' of closer co-operation between Henley Women's Regatta and Henley Royal Regatta, 'a subsequent meeting of Stewards produced more doubts [...] and the new regatta had to decide whether it could go it alone'. 'Just Alf', *Rowing*, March 1988, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Aistrop, oral history interview.

perhaps mention that I mean Henley – the place, not Henley – the Royal Regatta.¹⁴⁷

The rhetoric is deft, simultaneously caricaturing and appeasing the conservatism of the Stewards and allowing for some celebration in more progressive quarters. By way of conclusion, the columnist commented:

exciting isn't it? At least some young ladies will now be able to answer

'Yes' to the oft posed question, 'Did you ever row at Henley?'¹⁴⁸

The notion of 'rowing at Henley' was steeped in male amateur privilege; it carried a set of gendered social and athletic meanings that were quite distinct from participation in any other area of the sport. This was part of the rationale for 'a prestigious women's regatta to be held on Henley water' expressed by Chris as the Chair of the Henley Women's Regatta committee. Sharing this historically male space was a fundamental part of the initiative,¹⁴⁹ and the criticism that 'the girls want to be able to say they "rowed at Henley" in some manner or another' held some truth.¹⁵⁰ The meanings attached to that space carried important cultural weight.

The prestige of the event was important as a stimulus for performance, and for the development of more robust competitive pathways and prospects for women.

As Rosie explained,

¹⁴⁷ 'Just Alf', *Rowing*, March 1988, 11.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ C. Aistrop to N. Thomas, March 14, 1988. Part of the collection held at British Rowing Headquarters, Hammersmith, UK. Neil Thomas was then the President of the ARA.

¹⁵⁰ O.F. Duddy, 'Letters: Womens Henley' [sic].

what Henley Royal did well, or does well, is that they have club events, so the clubs see it as a pinnacle. They have international events, so the internationals see it as a pinnacle. They have schools events so they see it as a pinnacle [...] that was what was – missing a little bit from some of the other events.¹⁵¹

Henley Women's Regatta was designed to serve a similar purpose in the women's rowing community. Although it provided an important competitive destination for aspiring female club rowers, however, it could not create the prestige or allure of an event steeped in history, tradition and privilege like Henley Royal Regatta out of nothing. Sue reluctantly acknowledged that with regard to

Henley Women's, I – I don't think that as a – as a special regatta [...] Maybe it's cos I'm still – you know I am older, I like the sort of – the traditions and the – even if it is a bit male chauvinistic. I – it – it's always been there, it's just a part of rowing. I qui- I quite like it. And will always see Henley as special. But I wouldn't go out of my way to go to Henley Women's?¹⁵²

Sue's reticence is indicative of a broader observation, that some narrators were uncomfortable, others apologetic, when expressing less than enthusiastic support for female access to this historically male space.¹⁵³ While many were more positive about the event than Sue, none suggested they were equivalent:

¹⁵¹ Mayglothing, oral history interview.

¹⁵² Hastings, oral history interview.

¹⁵³ The Oxford & Cambridge Women's Boat Race, which had achieved structural and financial parity with the men's race only two or three years prior to the interviews, was another which prompted a range of views amongst narrators. It was, however, a markedly less polemical issue than Henley Royal Regatta.

the place of Henley Royal Regatta in British rowing was, and remains, understood as entirely unique.¹⁵⁴ Its conservatism was an important part of its legacy and its image; sexism was a close (and, it would seem, largely a tolerable) corollary. In the wake of the first Henley Women's Regatta in 1988, it is unsurprising that anxieties around the mores and purpose of Henley Royal Regatta were once again trained around female appearance: a tongue-in-cheek report claimed that

the other very important matter on the first day was the length of ladies' skirts in the Stewards. [...] Mr Coni made it clear that he didn't want to see older thighs, which should have been covered for years, being revealed in the Enclosures. [...] He elaborated that if you relax things, people would be stripping off and the Stewards would 'look like Lord's or Wimbledon'. 'God forbid'. His words not mine.¹⁵⁵

Increasing social and sporting integration

With some notable exceptions, by the end of the 1980s, women's and men's rowing were increasingly integrated in clubs and events, while the national squads operated on more similar terms and in closer parallel to one another. Sue described a thriving social and sporting life at Tideway Scullers during the 1980s – it was a 'fun club' with lots of aspiring internationals, where 'every outing was like a race' – and enjoyed an increasingly mixed-sex environment while she was on the national team.¹⁵⁶ This stimulating mix of competition and comradery was echoed by Lin, for whom Thames Tradesmen's Rowing Club, also on the

¹⁵⁴ See E.L. McDonagh and L. Pappano, *Playing with the Boys: Why Separate Is Not Equal in Sports* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁵⁵ 'Just Alf', *Rowing*, August 1988, 9.

¹⁵⁶ Hastings, oral history interview.

Tideway, had offered an optimal balance of social and sporting opportunity.¹⁵⁷

Yet the critical mass of women in club rowing, and its effect on a maturing national squad, was not without issue. Sue described how, when she began to break into the senior squad,

they weren't welcoming new people and new blood [...] they were openly hostile to new people coming in because it meant that they might lose their place. And it's a different – it was a different sort of team ethos, then. Not – I wouldn't even call it a team [laughs]. Their little club. Their private club.¹⁵⁸

Unlike her experiences as a junior international, here 'there were people who'd try and knock you down [...] so that maybe you'd give up?'¹⁵⁹ In retrospect she could rationalise their behaviour:

they were hard women. They were *very* hard women. But, if you think – they – what they had been through, probably even worse than what I'd been through. [...] Yeah, there were some hard, *hard* women.¹⁶⁰

Lin was part of the established, toughened group of athletes that Sue suggested 'knew the ropes',¹⁶¹ and similarly perceived herself to have moved through a hostile environment. Explicitly reaching the same conclusion as Sue – that she had enjoyed more opportunities than her predecessors – she told of how a former international, subsequently an administrator, had retrospectively apologised to her, claiming

¹⁵⁷ L. Clark, informal communication with the author, November 12, 2017.

¹⁵⁸ Hastings, oral history interview.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

she thought that deep down – and this is a *hell* of an admission for one woman to another woman – that they'd had so much more stick than us, that she resented the fact that we'd got further. And I think that's hugely crucial. They hadn't been *allowed* to do what we'd done. And I suppose in her mind, she was really irritated, that we had stood on her shoulders. It's not 'til she got away from it all, and she realised that's part of that journey.¹⁶²

Lin understood this resentment as a consequence not only of the sporting opportunities her generation had enjoyed, but also of a social climate that allowed for greater self-expression and self-determination.

Along come Beryl and I, and have a good time with the men, and you know, wearing jewellery and being friv- – whatever we were, and it must have been hard. [...] Our generation have not just rowed, but are working in men's worlds, in their own right. And I think that's pretty significant.¹⁶³

Both Lin and Sue had 'stood on the shoulders' of their predecessors, but the changes they had experienced were of different orders. Lin had been part of the first group to have access to World Championships and the Olympic Games, and while coaching and administrative structures were constantly being appraised and revised through the 1980s, the fundamental concept of a national squad that Lin had joined in its infancy remained constant. Sue, meanwhile, had entered the sport as part of a generation that had grown up with the prospect of Olympic

¹⁶² Clark, oral history interview, November 11, 2017.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

rowing, and in a women's rowing community that was reaching critical mass. She had experienced the cultural changes emerging in the British sport: a lively, ambitious, mixed club scene, and the belief that she had the opportunity to progress as far as her talent and commitment could take her.

As rowing for men and women in clubs and on the international team became increasingly connected, relations between male and female rowers were also shifting. By 1988, most clubs and events catered for men and for women, leading to a more culturally, as well as administratively, mixed environment. On the water, men and women raced the same distance in international competition, and, increasingly, benefitted from more support as athletes when they travelled to compete. Penny suggested that 'whilst in the early days there was definitely this thing, keep the women away from the men, they'll distract them', by this point, 'really it didn't matter anymore'.¹⁶⁴ With an increasingly professional approach to competition, she explained that better resources could be provided if the team was considered more holistically.

Building all this up, there was this integration of the team that were mixed, men and women, the support team, and, all the squads had to logistically – money-saving – go to the same place and whatever. So gradually it all did become integrated.¹⁶⁵

As a result of this greater integration, Sue remembered a much more dynamic and enjoyable squad life than narrators in previous years. She recalled with

¹⁶⁴ Chuter, oral history interview.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

pleasure that ‘we used to have a really good time’, largely due to the shared training space at Hammersmith and Thorpe Park.¹⁶⁶ While the latter had ‘no facilities whatsoever’ – with no toilets, she recalled the women taking turns with the men to ‘squat by the M3’, which runs alongside the lake – she expressed a powerful sense of community.¹⁶⁷ Sue’s enjoyment of the sport was facilitated by the ‘good rapport between the two teams, even though [the men] made it quite clear they didn’t think you were gonna do anything’: a suggestive comment about the dynamics between male and female athletes.¹⁶⁸ She suggested that the sexual hierarchy in the sport was inevitable, but that it did not have a negative impact on the social life they now shared. In the next Olympic cycle, she suggested, she no longer felt the men ‘still thought the women were [...] just the pretty side of rowing’ as they had in the lead-up to Seoul in 1988.¹⁶⁹

Sue was married throughout her senior athletic career, and emphasised that her first husband – also a rower – had been ‘very helpful, with my training and he used to drive me places and you know, he’d take my boat everywhere for me, very supportive’.¹⁷⁰ Although ‘training-wise, it wasn’t expensive’, the demands of training and competition had financial implications, and while her household depended on her income as well as her husband’s, being married offered an important guarantee of financial security:

like for Seoul, I had three weeks unpaid leave and the regatta, so we’re talking five, that’s over a month’s pay, like, out of the window when

¹⁶⁶ Hastings, oral history interview.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

you've still got the mortgage to pay, and bills to pay. So he basically had to pay for everything.¹⁷¹

Her athletic career had not depended on his support, but she acknowledged that it had given her greater flexibility.

Lin mobilised more direct support from her husband, recruiting him as a coach for her 1986 crew. She convinced him that

there's not a man coach that wants to coach women, or *believes* in coaching women enough [...] we've got no-one, and without a decent coach there is no way we're going to win. [...] You're gonna have to coach us because – who else would I get that would want to coach women?¹⁷²

She suggested he had been reluctant to do so, not least because

there's a lot of men saying [drops voice] I wouldn't bloody have that mate. [Reverts.] But that's what I admire about Jim, both of us have been very utilitarian, this is what we need to do, we will do it.¹⁷³

She was not alone in recruiting support from a partner in this way; indeed, in 1986, Beryl Crockford, too, was coached by her husband Duncan.¹⁷⁴ In oral history interviews, however, Lin offered richer insight into the dynamics of her partnership with Jim. While he had been very clear that she had to deliver results

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ The four coaches for the World Championships named in the 1987 *Almanack* were J. Clark (Jim, married to Lin), D. Crockford (Duncan, married to Beryl), M. Genchi (Mike, married to Jean, who had retired as an athlete the previous year), and W. [Bill] Mason (B. Armstrong, 'World Rowing Championships: Nottingham, 17–24 August, 1986', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1987, 205).

– ‘if I’m coaching you there is no room for any error, ever [...] you need to be the best, by a considerable margin’ – she in turn was equally clear that ‘I cannot behave as your wife, and as your athlete’.¹⁷⁵ In practice, this meant that they would not, for example, share a room on training camp; but also that her crew instructed her

to keep it together just whatever he says, agree with him. Well I’d never done that in me [sic] life! [...] They just said without him we’re not gonna – you know, we’re not going to er, win. We know that, you know that. Agree with him. It’s probably the only time [laughing] in Jim’s life where I would agree with him! [Laughs.]¹⁷⁶

Agreements like those between Lin and Beryl and their husbands are indicative of the more general condition of the sport, reliant upon expertise it could not afford and therefore dependent on voluntary support: an important and striking continuity in British women’s rowing until the introduction of National Lottery funding in the late 1990s. Also striking is that, whether due to a greater depth of coaching experience among male athletes, the availability of male time for amateur coaching or the gendered connotations of coaching at this time, such voluntary support was provided almost exclusively by men.

The willingness of oral history narrators competing during the late 1970s and 1980s to approach the topic of sexuality and sexual relations – which was not evident among those before or after them – is suggestive. Lin clearly articulated

¹⁷⁵ Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

a sense of negotiation between men and women, and women and sexuality, during this period, claiming they were

at a stage where – women thought nothing, it wasn't necessarily a man exploiting a woman. Beryl's attitude towards sex was completely different from mine. I admired her, for thinking she had a body, she could use it how she wanted, when she wanted [...] I really admired that, it's just that I come from a background that didn't see it the same, so I couldn't behave like her. But I thought her behaving like that was great! So it was a – strange time to be in.¹⁷⁷

Where Lin and Gill had identified deeply problematic sexual relationships between coaches and athletes in earlier years, Sue was indifferent:

it was just part of the deal I think then, you know, some girls got on with the – coaches, or other coaches [laughing], things went on! But it was just – it wasn't like [adopts a formal tone] oh no, you can't be doing that, [reverts] it was just – alright, they – they get on, and, obviously, oh, them two are doing it now aren't they!¹⁷⁸

Her casual tone, and the suggestion that many of the squad shared this view, is quite distinct from narrators entering the squad in the 1970s. Whether reflective of greater female sexual agency, or simply of more objective, rigorous approaches to coaching and selection, it appeared to have become a less contentious issue. She was definitive that such relationships had no impact on crew selection or other decisions pertaining to the team: 'they were just – doing

¹⁷⁷ Clark, oral history interview, November 11, 2017.

¹⁷⁸ Hastings, oral history interview.

whatever they were doing'.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, if the range of views around sex and sexuality that Lin described had been current in previous decades, they did not surface in oral history interviews; narrators' willingness either to have discussed these topics with their contemporaries, or to broach them in the course of an interview, had shifted.

Women's rowing and the media

During the 1980s, rowing became increasingly preoccupied with the need to appeal to the media without compromising on what it perceived as the integrity of the sport. Despite wanting greater coverage, the ARA was reticent, unwilling to relinquish control over the messaging of the sport or to see it connected with 'human interest' or sensationalist storylines.¹⁸⁰ In the women's sport, however, one individual in particular rejected such qualms, and courted the media with aplomb: Beryl Crockford. As well as building profile within the rowing press, participating in the popular TV series *Superstars*, for example, enabled her to reach more mainstream audiences. Freed from reliance on the staid imagery of boats moving in procession down a course, she was able to leverage the athleticism and determination it required to build a more marketable media personality. The extensive coverage of her performance at the 1981 World Championships, however, offered striking evidence of how the public image of women's sport was mediated through and for the male gaze. On the first day of

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ In 1974, veteran *Guardian* rowing correspondent John Rodda explicitly suggested that the reason for rowing being reticent about working with the press was that better press access 'would of course produce stories rather than reports', a shift which was not seen as desirable. J. Rodda, 'The Public Image of Rowing', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1974, 20–1.

the competition, a *Guardian* report described how ‘this carefree, single-minded smiler’ was ‘poised at the stake boat this morning – head still, shoulders glistening, hands gripping oars’, standing ‘a very good chance of winning’ in the single scull.¹⁸¹ Reporting on her win, it focused on how Beryl’s ‘graceful, even, long stroke [...] thrilled the crowd’, and how ‘on the podium she blew kisses to the stands’;¹⁸² despite noting her ‘compelling’ combination of grace and power, the focus on her ability to charm onlookers is striking.¹⁸³ A report in the *Almanack* echoed this tone, remarking with paternalistic pride, how ‘afterwards, Miss Mitchell was as bubbly as the champagne with which she toasted her new silver medal’.¹⁸⁴ It further suggested that it carried ‘added significance, in that it represented the first tangible reward for all British Home Stores’ generous support of women’s rowing in this country over the years’.¹⁸⁵ The coverage, celebrating her athleticism by emphasising her performance of heterosexual femininity is commercially astute, if equivocal with regard to sexual equality and feminist ideology.

Later in the 1980s, Lin recalled one media interview with a female journalist that offered her a stark illustration of the ways in which media coverage pertaining women could be distorted and sexualised – and indeed, of the limits of mutual

¹⁸¹ F. Keating, ‘Beryl’s Golden Chance’, *Guardian*, August 27, 1981, 23.

¹⁸² C. Dodd, ‘Beryl Sweeps to Silver’, *Guardian*, August 31, 1981, 13.

¹⁸³ ‘The elegant power of her sculling is more compelling than the steamhammer [sic] style of the Romanian [Sanda Toma, who won the gold medal]’ (Dodd, ‘Beryl Sweeps to Silver’, 13).

¹⁸⁴ I. Simpson, ‘World Championships – Munich, West Germany’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1982, 68.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

understanding between women. She remembered the journalist expressing surprise that she and Beryl were not 'big bruising women', and thinking

I don't know why [laughs], why are you doing this, what it's got to do with – you know, looks or size, we've won the World Championships, you shouldn't even be talking about what I look like.¹⁸⁶

Lin expressed particular disappointment that it was a woman expressing such a view, and, indeed, appearing to encourage it:

she later allowed the photographer to ask us if we'd wet our tee shirts so our nipples, you know [...] and I thought oh my god. [...] I thought, what is it, when you get a woman, you finally get woman to woman, and they're not even like, consistent enough to keep on our side. So anyway I got the hump and walked off.¹⁸⁷

She was perhaps fortunate that her rowing partner was less easily offended:

Beryl finished the interview, and it was quite important because we were looking for sponsorship, and Beryl said whatever she needed to say. Good for her.¹⁸⁸

Lin's observations about Beryl highlight that women did not constitute a homogenous group, holding similar views about gender roles, sexuality and sexism. She suggested Beryl actively courted the media, using her sexuality and charisma to achieve particular objectives, including the necessary sponsorship for her and Lin to compete. Such an approach was no doubt helpful in securing some such sponsorship from the underwear manufacturer Playtex, and indeed,

¹⁸⁶ Clark, oral history interview, November 13, 2017.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

in approaching Tampax, which, at the time, was unable to support her since the advertising of sanitary products – unlike female underwear – was illegal.¹⁸⁹ While the ‘general creeping sexualisation of the media’ identified by Nicholson as, increasingly, ‘patronising and/or downright hostile’ to female athletes during the 1980s may have been in evidence, in rowing at least, it appeared possible for some women to exploit this trend for their own gain, rather than simply to be exploited by it.¹⁹⁰

Female leadership

One of the striking features of this period was the increasing presence and visibility of women in leadership positions within rowing.¹⁹¹ Men continued to hold the majority of such positions within the ARA, and the assessment in 1984 that ‘rowing was originally a public school sport so the sport is now ruled and organised by ex-public school boys’ held some truth.¹⁹² Yet it diverged from other sports that had, historically, been cast in a similar mould. The amalgamation of the WARA into the ARA in 1963 took place considerably earlier than comparable developments in many British sports, especially those with strong masculine,

¹⁸⁹ See S. Boseley, ‘Tampaxed’, *Guardian*, June 25, 1985, 8; and ‘Just Alf’, *Rowing*, November 1986, 9, which reports that a women’s crew had also approached condom manufacturer Durex for support.

¹⁹⁰ Nicholson, “‘Like a Man Trying to Knit’?”, 144–7. Nicholson suggests that sport was ‘one arena in which women made little progress towards equality in this period’, evidenced by media reporting’.

¹⁹¹ This visibility, at a relatively early stage compared to many other governing, makes rowing an important case study in historicising female leadership in sport. On the need for work in this area, and its associated challenges, see F. Castan-Vicente, C. Nicolas and G. Cervin, ‘Women in Sport Organizations: Historiographical and Epistemological Challenges’, in G. Cervin and C. Nicolas eds., *Histories of Women’s Work in Global Sport: A Man’s World?* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 17–48.

¹⁹² Pridham, ‘Women in Rowing’, 23.

amateur roots.¹⁹³ The organisations had merged at a time when sport was less influenced by commercial and political imperatives, and when sexual equality was a less prominent and contentious social concern. Women's position in the sport's administration had developed more organically, alongside the women's sport itself. (It is perhaps indicative that female participation at Henley Royal Regatta, an event under the control of the Stewards, a group composed entirely of men until 1997, has remained contested for so long.) Having been appointed in the early 1970s, Penny maintained high profile roles in high performance coaching, training and administration – albeit, controversially – throughout the 1980s. Rosie progressed into prominent coaching roles with 'very many glowing and appreciative accounts' of her work as 'a dedicated servant to our sport'.¹⁹⁴ The experience in events, team management and administrative diplomacy that Di Ellis was developing, meanwhile, would soon lead her to the highest levels of the sport's administration: she assumed the position of Chair of the ARA in 1989.¹⁹⁵ The ARA remained dominated, numerically, by men – yet it was on the brink of being led by a woman.

Understanding women's access to positions of power in the ARA demands an acknowledgment of the uncertainty around power and influence within an

¹⁹³ The Women's Amateur Athletics Association, formed in 1923, was formally integrated into the Amateur Athletics Association in 1991. 1998 marked the end of separate administration for men's and women's hockey and cricket: the All England Women's Hockey Association (formed in 1895) and the Hockey Association combined in a new body, the England Hockey Association. In cricket, the Women's Cricket Association (WCA) merged with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) in 1998. In women's rugby, where the governing body was only formed in 1983, amalgamation with the Rugby Football Union ultimately took place in 2012.

¹⁹⁴ 'Everything Coming up Rosie', *Rowing*, June 1988, 3.

¹⁹⁵ Further detail and analysis of Ellis' appointment is presented in Chapter 5.

amateur sporting organisation. The first professional appointments within the ARA, dealing with training and coaching, had been from outside the amateur stable,¹⁹⁶ and while much had changed by the 1980s, considerable uncertainty about what sport was for, and for whom, remained. Under such circumstances, a woman less constrained by amateur heritage, but cognisant of its weight, may have represented a politically astute solution to a difficult problem.¹⁹⁷

In taking on these opportunities, regardless of corresponding difficulties, women like Penny and Di Ellis were instrumental in setting precedents for other women. Rosie explicitly acknowledged the value of such precedent when she saw the opportunity to apply to be a National Coach.

Possibly if it had all been men, I'd have thought oh there's no point in me applying, I won't get the job. But you know, there were, she was in there as well, so that was – helpful I think. Not in terms of her – she would never – give a job, but just in terms of having a female in there, a role model.¹⁹⁸

Visible precedent had altered her belief in what was possible in this environment. Importantly though, she also suggested that she and Penny had approached their roles with markedly different leadership styles. Whether as consequence of their different managerial approaches or the specifics of the roles they held, both Rosie

¹⁹⁶ L. Taylor, “‘What an Absurdity’: Penny Chuter and the Polemics of Progress in British Rowing During the Early 1970s”, *Sport in History* 40, no. 1 (2019), 66.

¹⁹⁷ The term ‘glass cliff’ has been used to describe how ‘women are more likely to be selected for leadership positions in organizations that are declining or have experienced a crisis’. For its relevance to sporting organisations, see H. Grappendorf and L.J. Burton, ‘The Impact of Bias in Sport Leadership’, in Burton and Leberman eds., *Women in Sport Leadership*, 53. Such analysis could, equally, be applied to certain points of Penny’s career.

¹⁹⁸ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

and Di Ellis appeared to have largely avoided the extent of the vitriol directed at Penny. A 1987 article suggested that ‘Miss Chuter would be the first to admit that there have been times when the going has been tough since she first joined the A.R.A.’, and indeed that ‘few who have followed Penny’s long career would deny that this lady is a glutton for punishment’.¹⁹⁹ The article aligned the critiques of her work with male chauvinism and an antiquated view of sporting administration, but also with personal bias from some factions of the male rowing community.²⁰⁰

Women like Penny, Rosie and Di Ellis had identified ways to influence, improve and expand the sport as a whole and by the late 1980s, they had also, crucially, positioned themselves to implement change in a professional capacity.²⁰¹ In oral history interviews, Penny and Rosie articulated different perspectives on the women’s sport and different approaches to improving it. Yet both clearly advocated for equality of opportunity and the advancement of the sport of rowing. Their vision was not to improve the women’s sport in isolation, but to improve the sport such that enthusiastic women and men in clubs could, equally, thrive within it, and that male and female talent could, equally, accelerate towards international success.

¹⁹⁹ ‘If You Look After the Penny’s...’, *Rowing*, November 1987, 3.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. Citing her recent receipt of a ‘Coach of the Year’ award from the British Association of National Coaches, it was noted that ‘outside agencies approach such talent with more open and unbiased minds’.

²⁰¹ Leberman and Burton highlight that ‘women exercise leadership within sports organizations in ways that are not positional and therefore difficult to count and make visible’; they align this observation that ‘wholesale change in sport’ will also require fundamental shifts in the understanding and practice of leadership. S. Leberman and L.J. Burton, ‘Why This Book?: Framing the Conversation About Women in Sport Leadership’, in L.J. Burton and S. Leberman, S. eds., *Women in Sport Leadership: Research and Practice for Change* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 9. They do not, however, suggest that such ‘wholesale change’ has been accomplished, or, indeed, that it is imminent.

Investing in sport: personal sacrifice and sporting provision

The investment of time and energy that the sport demanded of athletes, coaches and administrators was increasing exponentially. The higher expectations of athletes' commitment and performance level was matched, however, in their own expectations of better sporting administration and event delivery and of emotional reward. Penny talked in depth about having campaigned for fairer racing conditions and rules, and, distinctly, selection processes throughout her career. This was a result of her commitment to the principles of amateur competition, but, also, by the 1980s, a keen awareness that 'the stakes were higher':

the demand from the athletes was there, we're giving up so much time, the National Coaches were saying it's costing, you know, the federations so much money – we can't then have this sort of – you know, pipsqueak organisation.²⁰²

Notwithstanding more professionalised structures within the sport, Sue, along with many women in the squad, still depended on paid employment to pursue her athletic career. Echoing earlier accounts, she suggested that her employers were relatively accommodating:

obviously, we worked, well, most people worked. I worked. So we'd have to, we'd still have to do the training like – in the morning, before work. And then I'd go to work, and then come back and – train. Um, except when I got selected for Seoul, my work actually let me do half days? Yayyy! [Laughs.] So I used to sort of leave at twelve, then we

²⁰² Ibid.

could have like a double session in the afternoon? Instead of getting up early.²⁰³

Additionally, she recalled being given ‘unpaid leave for – the training camp, which was – I’m sure that was a good three weeks’; she rationalised it as being good for them? You know, to be seen to be – helping me out. [...] I did tell them when they were thinking of taking me on permanently that I was trialling for the Olympics and I would be going to the Olympics and I would not be at work. And they were like [adopts serious tone] ‘no, no, that’s fine, we’ll support you all the way’. [Reverts.] And so they were quite happy to because they – they used me in a lot of their magazine things.²⁰⁴

The combined pressure of work and training was intense – ‘mentally it’s quite a strain’ – to the point where one morning on arriving at work,

I had a panic attack [...] it was the thought of having to do more and more trials, and just racing and racing and racing, I was just – I couldn’t work out why I was like in a [pants loudly, gestures] cos I thought I’m really fit, why is my heart going like that! I was like – I couldn’t understand it.²⁰⁵

Physically stretched by a demanding training programme, she was also acutely aware that there were no guarantees that she would be selected, and emphasised that ‘it was *hard* work up until the point you get into a crew’.²⁰⁶ Yet

²⁰³ Hastings, oral history interview.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

for the most part, upfront about her priorities and ambitions from the start, she was able to balance the needs of her athletic career with the necessity of professional work. Her workplace was actively supportive rather than simply tolerant: not only could she secure the time she needed for training, but ‘the boys in the energy centre used to buy me a bacon butty for when I came in, which was quite cute’.²⁰⁷

Sue had approached the sport with one clear ambition: to row at the Olympic Games.

That was my plan, that was what I wanted to do. That was – there was, that was always the aim? So, you know, going to the Junior Worlds, and going to the Under-23s, being in the Seniors, was all building up to going to the Olympics. So to go twice was *brilliant* [laughs].²⁰⁸

Gill had expressed similar ambitions as she came into the fledgling national squad in the early 1970s, but the route she took was less structured, and less visible from the outset. The greater provision and rigour of the international programme in the 1980s was matched with the likelihood of a longer period of training and competing at a high level before being selected for the national team. Sue was clearly able to articulate the stages of her development as an athlete that would enable her to reach her goal, and explained that the extent of her commitment, over such a long period of time, had made her achievements the more meaningful.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

I started rowing when I was twelve. I think in my head, that's what I was aiming for? And so then, to have actually [eyes well up] – got something that you've aimed for, I might cry! Like, it makes me all emotional [laughs].²⁰⁹

She acknowledged that it was her aspirations as well as her achievements that had made her experience of the sport, and her life after she retired as an athlete, as emotionally rich as it had been.

It's quite an amazing thing to do, to reach – to, to – have done something that you wanted to do. A lot of people don't get the chance to realise a dream? And I did! [Crying, laughing.] Twice!²¹⁰

Conclusion

Celebrating its centenary in 1982, Burnell remarked that 'in twenty-five years the A.R.A. has graduated from a small, autocratic body, which [...] had generally been content to stand as arbiters for the sport, exercising minimal administrative interference, into a true Governing Body, democratically elected, professionally staffed, and actively engaged in promoting and financing every aspect of a steadily expanding national sport'.²¹¹ He added that 'inevitably this has been a costly metamorphosis'.²¹² Women had played an important part in this expansion (as had junior rowing),²¹³ and they had begun to enjoy more international success than in previous decades. Their influence on the sport's administration, and the

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ R. Burnell, 'The Amateur Rowing Association – 1882–1982', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1982, 46.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ P. Chuter, 'Rowing – A Sport for Women', March 24, 1983, 2. Document held at British Rowing Headquarters, Hammersmith, UK.

sense of a critical mass of competitive women's rowing having been formed by the mid-1980s, also marked a significant change from previous decades – as did the extension of racing distance to two thousand metres, and the introduction of lightweight rowing. Yet Burnell's comments belie the extent to which the ARA, and the structures and ideologies perpetuated within more conservative amateur communities, continued to hinder the development of the sport. Returning from five years in the USA, one British club rower and coach felt able to 'take an objective view of English rowing for the first time', and was more critical about what he observed.²¹⁴ Whilst encouraging 'all you oarswomen who have been frustrated by antiquated prejudices and disappointments [to] take heart, there are many like me who respect the place that you are rightfully trying to take in the future of British rowing', he sharply criticised the sport's reluctance to modernise.²¹⁵

No longer can rowing clubs exist like Victorian Gentlemen's Clubs. [...] You can't get grants [sic] if you won't support 'minority' groups in your club. Tell a public company like one of our major sponsors that you don't endorse these groups and see how long their support lasts.²¹⁶

Neatly expressing the social, financial and political imperatives acting upon rowing, he highlighted that rowing as a sport could not sustain its amateur legacies and garner the financial support it required.

²¹⁴ D.J. Cowell, 'Professionalism and Women's Rowing', *Rowing*, January 1988, 24–5. Cowell's experience of coaching the USA was at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Training and competing in closer proximity to men offered both a spur to greater performance and, for many women, the succour of supportive relationships. This cohort of narrators was noteworthy for the extent to which their personal and athletic lives were intertwined, and while some expressed a strong sense of sexual inequality in the sport, others reflected on the freedom they had to enjoy the pursuit of their sporting ambitions in a stimulating and rewarding environment. Provision – like progress – was uneven. But with greater investment, both personal and institutional, female rowers were able to earn greater respect, and greater reward, for their efforts in this period than previously.

Chapter 5

1988–2000: ‘a decade of rags to riches’

The introduction of the National Lottery, and the exponential increase in funding it would make available to sporting organisations from 1996, represents a watershed in British sport. Rowing received substantial Lottery investment from the outset, and the injection of previously unimaginable sums of money would fundamentally reshape the sport. A generational divide between narrators who entered the sport after the introduction of Lottery funding, and those who had been in the sport previously, is clear. Those with longer experience in the sport were careful not to characterise change as immediate or comprehensive – even if they experienced it as ‘a decade of rags to riches’.¹ Their stories offer some challenge to familiar narratives of overnight transformation driven by Lottery funding, creating a more nuanced account of a sport cautiously, but ambitiously, investing in development for a new millennium.

The cohort of narrators in this chapter is skewed towards administrators, and their reflections on their lives as athletes, sexual politics, and the importance of female leadership in the sport are tightly interwoven. A core concern of this chapter is therefore to expose and to analyse the ways in which women continued to identify, experience, and address sexual inequality. They sought fair recognition in the structures of the sport, and by financial decision-makers – indeed, one of the most important analytical threads running through the chapter is the relationship between the availability of financial resources and the perceived

¹ M. Luke, informal communication with the author, June 13, 2017.

value of the women's sport. As well as the privileges of more extensive support, they highlighted the problematics of an increasingly professionalised approach to sport – not least of these being the emergence of more stark inequalities between women.

Annamarie, Brian, Debbie, Frances, Guin, Miriam, Rosie, Sue and Sir David Tanner feature as oral history narrators in this chapter.

Social and sporting landscape

By this late stage of the twentieth century, women had achieved significant material and cultural advances in their position in British society. Yet issues around sex and gender – their boundaries, the expectations and meanings attached to them, and their negotiation by the individual and by society – remained prominent and contentious. Turner argued that 'a substantial section of the country had reached some sort of compromise during the 1990s, in a spirit if not of liberation then at least of relaxation; responsibility had been abandoned in pursuit of simple pleasures and gratification'.² The observation resonates with some narrators' accounts of rowing at this time, and indeed, in the late 1980s. The blindness of his analysis to anti-feminist discourse, meanwhile, exemplifies the concern expressed by others: that women had, prematurely, stopped agitating for equality. For many feminist observers, the social positions and permissions that, it was claimed, women had achieved had come to obscure the increasing pull of dangerous, anti-feminist currents. Susan Faludi's *Backlash*, a

² A.W. Turner, *A Classless Society: Britain in the 1990s* (London: Aurum, 2013), 79.

prominent feminist text published in 1992, for example, highlighted the systematic unpicking of feminist progress by patriarchal forces. She powerfully argued that such forces had created a strongly anti-feminist climate by simultaneously undermining and overplaying its achievements.³

By the 1990s, there were more women than ever in employment,⁴ in higher education,⁵ and in more prominent public positions, but they were still underpaid,⁶ and still disproportionately bore the burden of domestic responsibility.⁷ The election of 101 female Labour MPs alongside Tony Blair in 1997 is one of the most obvious examples of women assuming more visible, and powerful, professional roles;⁸ the moniker of ‘Blair’s babes’ that was swiftly attached to

³ S. Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1992).

⁴ The Office of National Statistics (ONS) Labour Force Survey reports that 12.7 million women were employed between 1991 and 2000 compared to 11.7 million between 1981 and 1990. (Data available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/compendium/economicreview/april2019/longtermtrendsinukemployment1861to2018>, last accessed January 6, 2020).

⁵ In 1980, 42,831 men and 25,319 women (37.2% of the total) were awarded first degrees; in 1990, this was 43,297 men and 33,866 women (43.9%); and in 2000, 109,930 men and 133,316 women (54.9%). Figures ‘compiled from various sources and reproduced from House of Commons Library, *Education: Historical statistics, 2012*’, published in N. Hillman and N. Robinson, ‘Boys to Men: The Underachievement of Young Men in Higher Education – and How to Start Tackling It’, *Higher Education Policy Institute Report 84*, May 2016, 16.

⁶ The gender pay gap in 2000 was quantified at 26.7% (Office for National Statistics, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE); data available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/genderpaygapintheuk/2019>; last accessed January 6, 2020).

⁷ NatCen, ‘Gender Roles: An Incomplete Revolution?’, in *British Social Attitudes 30* (2013), 115–138 offers a number of metrics supporting this statement. (Available at: https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38457/bsa30_gender_roles_final.pdf; last accessed January 6, 2020.)

⁸ The total number of female MPs in 1997 was 120; in 1992, it had been sixty, while Blair’s Cabinets in 1997 and 1998 comprised five women and seventeen

them perhaps the most eloquent on the conflicting currents of ‘girl power’ and demeaning anti-feminist rhetoric of the time.⁹ The election of this number of women followed the introduction of all-women shortlists in 1993, a policy intervention within the Labour party that aimed to increase female representation both in Parliament and in the Cabinet.¹⁰ Outside of the professional sphere, ‘ladette’ culture, most memorably represented by TV personalities such as Zoe Ball and Denise van Outen, would help to normalise women drinking pints in the pub, openly enjoying sex, and speaking more crudely.¹¹ The idea ‘that women could or should adopt the most anti-social and pointless of “male” behaviour as a sign of empowerment’ was, to many feminists, baffling, and criticised by some as offering only ‘the most shallow model of gender equality’.¹² Importantly, though, it staked a claim for a kind of womanhood that did not depend on presenting in traditionally feminine ways.

Sport in Britain would be transformed from ‘a policy sub-sector which was underresourced [sic], lacking in strategic leadership and on the margin of the

men to his 1997 and 1998 cabinets; John Major’s 1992 Cabinet comprised two women and twenty men.

⁹ See I. Whelehan, *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* (London: The Women’s Press, 2000); S. Bashevkin, ‘From Tough Times to Better Times: Feminism, Public Policy, and New Labour Politics in Britain’, *International Political Science Review/Revue Internationale de Science Politique* 21, no. 4 (2000): 407–24.

¹⁰ The practice was stopped in 1995, being in breach of the Sexual Equality Act. See M. Stuart, ‘The Role of Parliament Under Blair’ in T. Casey ed., *The Blair Legacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 178–89.

¹¹ On ladettes, including their social problematics, and the connection to the media and to these personalities, see: C. Jackson and P. Tinkler, “Ladettes” and “Modern Girls”: “Troublesome” Young Femininities’, *The Sociological Review* 55, no. 2 (2007): 251–72; Whelehan, *Overloaded*, 8–10; ‘Lads’ in Turner, *A Classless Society*, 46–79.

¹² Whelehan, *Overloaded*, 9.

government's agenda' to a more central concern.¹³ Characterised by 'competing agencies, overlapping jurisdictions and role confusion', however, Houlihan and Lindsey argue that the domestic structures underlying this transition, like the sporting landscape itself, were fragmented; sporting administrations, being disparate and resource-poor, were excluded from policy debates and development, while policymakers in sport lacked governmental direction.¹⁴ As had been evident in the ARA, the appetite for change did not easily translate to its realisation. Yet some important policies were drafted, notably *Women and Sport: Policy and Frameworks for Action*, and *Sport: Raising the Game*.¹⁵ The latter laid out ambitious plans for sporting excellence, as well as placing renewed focus on school sports, while the former encouraged sports with separate governing bodies for men and women to align more closely, if not to amalgamate. It also recommended the implementation of a gender equity policy for the governing body and the sport.¹⁶ Both of these policy drives would have a

¹³ B. Houlihan and I. Lindsey, *Sport Policy in Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 2. Women occupied a visible part of this transition, Britain's hosting of the first World Conference on Women and Sport in 1994 offering a clear example. This event led to the *Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport*, which was updated and amended in 2014. The resulting 'Brighton Plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration on Women and Sport' is available at: <https://iwgwomenandsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Brighton-plus-Helsinki-2014-Declaration-on-Women-and-Sport.pdf>, last accessed: March 15, 2020. For in-depth consideration of the 1994 event, see J.J.K. Matthews, 'The Brighton Conference on Women and Sport', *Sport in History* (2020): 1–33 (online only at the time of writing).

¹⁴ Ibid. These included the ways in some areas of sport were devolved and others not (grassroots and high performance sport, for example, operated within separate governmental jurisdictions).

¹⁵ UK Sports Council, *Women and Sport: Policy and Frameworks for Action*, 1993; Department of National Heritage, *Sport: Raising the Game*, July 1995.

¹⁶ Only in 2016 would direct action be taken in policy to address the inequality visible in sports leadership. UK Sport and Sport England, *A Code for Sports Governance*, 2016 (available at <https://www.uk sport.gov.uk/resources/governance-code>; last accessed: January 7, 2020).

significant impact on the shape of rowing, for women in particular, during the 1990s.

The ambitions and objectives of *Sport: Raising the Game* were closely tied to the most decisive shift in the state funding of sport in Britain: the promise and introduction of the National Lottery. Licensed early in 1994, and launched later that year, the Lottery remains one of John Major's most important legacies in Britain, creating a new and substantial supply of public funds for sport and a number of other government priorities and sectors.¹⁷ In the wake of the collective failure of the 1996 British Olympic team – it won only one gold medal, in rowing – those involved in high performance British sport were hungry for this support. Importantly, though, it was not only the competitive elite that would benefit, but also those in grassroots sport. As public money, in both domains, stipulations attached to its spending would force sporting organisations to address inequalities. It would therefore be of particular benefit to under-represented groups, including women, those with physical disabilities, and ethnic minorities.

In 1997, high performance rowing was awarded £9.6 million to prepare for the Sydney Olympics; the only sport to receive more was athletics, with £10.6

¹⁷ See R. Holt and A. Tomlinson, 'Sport and Leisure' in D. Kavanagh and A. Seldon eds., *The Major Effect* (London: Macmillan, 1994), 444–58, and S. Creigh-Tyte, 'Building a National Lottery: Reviewing British Experience', *Journal of Gambling Studies* 13, no. 4 (1997): 321–41. The five beneficiaries, each holding a 5.6% stake of the income generated by the Lottery, were Arts Councils and Sports Councils (both separately administrated in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland); Charities; Heritage; and the Millennium Commission 'until the end of the century'.

million.¹⁸ Senior administrators in rowing believed the sport was ready to capitalise on this opportunity. David Tanner (later, Sir David Tanner), appointed in 1996 as Performance Director, suggested that the groundwork had been laid several years earlier, when Di Ellis (later, Dame Di Ellis) assumed the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) Chair in 1989.¹⁹ For Penny, there were also significant continuities between the structures and systems she had implemented and those underpinning the post-Lottery sport.²⁰ This was not the case for all sports – in swimming, for example, the injection of funds without the requisite planning led to waste, and substantial cultural conflict.²¹ Yet, thanks to organisational changes under Ellis’s leadership, Tanner suggested that by the mid-1990s, rowing ‘had the potential. If we had some money. To actually do something proper with it.’²²

¹⁸ The total budget for all sports in the Sydney cycle was £58.9 million. For a full summary of funding in each Olympic cycle from Sydney to Tokyo, see <https://www.uksport.gov.uk/our-work/investing-in-sport/historical-funding-figures> and <https://www.uksport.gov.uk/our-work/investing-in-sport/current-funding-figures> (both accessed December 8, 2019).

¹⁹ Sir D. Tanner, oral history interview by the author, August 20, 2018, Twickenham, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

²⁰ P. Chuter, oral history interview by the author, October 30, 2017, Mylor, UK. Notes in possession of the author. A series of interviews with this narrator were conducted on October 30, October 31 and November 1, 2017 in Mylor; the specific date for each is cited as required in this chapter. Penny felt that in the interim the system had ‘been improved and embellished and it’s been supported by virtually unlimited funding, but [...] the system had already been set up’.

²¹ ‘Almost immediately after the introduction of Lottery funding, science and testing were being “forced” into sports, and coaches, who had little time to consider how these methods would be incorporated into their training programmes, initially resented both the scientific methods and associated personnel’. D. Day and T. Carpenter, *A History of Sports Coaching in Britain: Overcoming Amateurism* (London; Routledge, 2015), 161.

²² Tanner, oral history interview.

1988–2000: club rowing and coaching

Following the exponential growth of women's rowing in the 1980s, between 1988 and 2000, the structure and the scale of the sport continued to increase. More women were participating, and oral histories suggest that the vibrant club environment described by athletes rowing in the 1980s was still thriving in the following decade. 1990 alone marked a series of milestones: 'a woman entered for Doggett's Coat & Badge for the first time, another woman became the first person to scull the 175 miles length of the Thames, a woman became the captain of Thames RC', and the fiftieth Women's Eights Head of the River Race (WEHoRR) took place with an entry of more than 150 crews.²³ Women were also increasingly visible in high-profile positions within the ARA. Di Ellis was elected as ARA Chairman in 1989, where she remained until 2013, while Penny Chuter continued to hold demanding, highly visible international coaching and administrative roles until 1990. (At this point, she was controversially redeployed to work on the ARA's domestic coaching programme, ultimately leaving the organisation in 1994.)²⁴ Increasing opportunities were also extended to women in Henley, one of the most historically conservative centres of the sport. In 1993, the first open event for women was introduced at Henley Royal Regatta. In 1997,

²³ 'Review of 1990', *British Rowing Almanack* 1991, 35. For more details on the Doggetts Coat & Badge Race – the 'oldest surviving race' in rowing – see E. Halladay, *Rowing in England: A Social History: The Amateur Debate* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 8; and on its increasing gentrification and connections to amateur rowing, N. Wigglesworth, *The Social History of English Rowing* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 176.

²⁴ Having been Director of International Rowing from 1986, in 1990, Penny was moved into the role of Principal National Coach, with the domestic remit of Coach Education. The move had been highly politicised, and in 1994, it was reported as the end of 'a tempestuous affair'; after '21 thorny years at Hammersmith' she moved first to Oxford University Boat Club to coach (men's) boat race crews, and later to Sport England. C. Dodd, 'Penny Wise and Pounding for Oxford', *Regatta* no. 74, December 1994/January 1995, 5.

the first female members were admitted to Leander Rowing Club, and the first female Steward of Henley Royal Regatta – Di Ellis – was appointed, and from 2000, Henley Royal Regatta would offer open women’s eights for the first time.²⁵ These changes had followed other initiatives, such as the foundation of the Stewards’ Charitable Trust in 1988, which were suggestive of an increasing sense of sporting and social responsibility – even if not of a straightforwardly egalitarian outlook.²⁶

While rowing activity and administration remained concentrated in the south east of England, more opportunities were being opened up elsewhere. Nottingham, a significant site of performance rowing since the 1970s due to the National Water Sports Centre (NWSC), became a more important hub for developing regional rowing in the 1990s. This development was in part due to the ARA’s creation of a full-time Regional Development Officer post there. Rosie held this role from 1993 to 1996, and described having three key objectives.

One was to increase the number of people coming to Holme Pierrepont [the NWSC] in the local area. The second one was to bring some national-type activities into Holme Pierrepont. And the third one was for activity around the region.²⁷

²⁵ K. Osborne (Hon. Editor), ‘Preface’, *British Rowing Almanack*, 1998, 12; M. Sweeney, ‘Stewards Give Women an Open Invitation’, *Regatta* no. 125, February 2000, 3.

²⁶ The Trust was formed following a substantial donation to ‘projects suggested [to the Stewards] by the ARA’ in 1987. See C. Dodd, *Henley Royal Regatta* (London: Stanley Paul & Co., 1989), 218.

²⁷ R. Mayglothling, oral history interview by the author, June 8, 2018, Henley-on-Thames, UK. Notes in possession of the author. In this chapter, all quotes are taken from this interview; a separate interview with this narrator was conducted on January 18, 2018 in Bedford, UK.

In addition to her formal remit, Rosie was involved in some high performance coaching, but largely on an ad hoc basis with athletes based elsewhere.²⁸ What she perceived as one of the most important elements of her role, however, was to support club coaches, in part because it was this that would drive more sustainable change.

For me, it's not only the athlete but it's also – the legacy for me is – you know, are there coaches out, there's loads of coaches out there and with a little bit of guidance, [...] they're like sponges, they, they want to get better at what they do.²⁹

Rosie's focus on coach education was reflected in ARA policy-making, which was at the time under Penny's direction. Penny had identified increasing moves towards more professionalised models in clubs as well as at the international level, and indeed, in British sport as a whole, not only in rowing. While athlete needs were increasingly 'impossible to meet solely by voluntary coaches', she was explicit that

this is not to say that the days of the voluntary coach are numbered. Far from it. The number of active rowers will always outnumber the available coaches, and as veteran rowing gathers pace the potential pool of voluntary coaches becomes even more shallow.³⁰

²⁸ An important exception was Guin, who Rosie started to support with regular coaching when she moved to the area to study at Loughborough.

²⁹ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

³⁰ P. Chuter, 'Coaching Matters', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1994, 267.

Penny located these observations alongside broader changes within the British sporting environment, and highlighted that the move away from amateur coaching also

raises the issues of competence and qualifications in coaching.

Potential employers require a minimum competence in respect of safety let alone technical 'know-how'.³¹

Taking stock in 1994, she praised the 1991 review *Coaching Matters*, requested by the Minister for Sport in 1989 as 'informed, enlightened and long overdue', as well as 'timely, in respect of the Government's current policy to improve the standards of vocational training across all trades and industries in the U.K.'.³² She was careful to specify that these were independent issues, but the comparison is telling. Coaching was increasingly aligned with learned skill and professional responsibility rather than amateur enthusiasm.

Rosie's role at Nottingham was not specific to the women's sport, but she led on several initiatives that addressed the gendered gap in provision and participation. Few clubs could offer talented, aspiring female athletes the coaching or performance environment they would need to be successful, especially outside the south east of England. One of these initiatives, therefore, was to 'put together a women's group in the region, for women who were rowing at a fairly high level', developing eights for WEHoRR as well as working with their coaches.³³ With promising athletes spread out – 'often there was sort of two in this club, one in that club' – opportunities to row in big boats like the eight would otherwise be

³¹ Ibid, 267–8.

³² Ibid, 268.

³³ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

lacking. More importantly, however, it offered these athletes a sense of sporting scale, and competitive collegiality.³⁴ In conjunction with Ron Needs, she modernised and reinstated women's training weekends. This model had existed, although not continuously, since the 1960s, and included

a mixture of water work, land work, um we had some talks around training, um, and various other things like that and er, that worked – quite well [...] there was a group of women who came through very successfully, sort of went on into the GB team.³⁵

The training weekends were an intervention aiming to 'create the right environment and conditions for female athletes to achieve their potential and prepare them for the national rowing squads'.³⁶ They were essential in addressing the 'gap between the top internationals and the top club rowers [...] especially in the provinces'.³⁷ In 1993, around sixty athletes were reported to have applied, and twenty-four were selected on the basis of their potential, having been 'tested on the ergo, weights, running and bench pulls'.³⁸ In addition to spending one weekend each month at Holme Pierrepont, the athletes were given a training plan to execute from their home clubs.³⁹ Annamarie felt that

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mayglothling, oral history interview. The format remained relatively constant over this time, although training techniques and equipment changed significantly. In 2020, designated women's training days in different regional centres are still offered to athletes in their late teenage years and early twenties.

³⁶ P. Halliday, 'Rosie's Rich Rewards on the Road to the Holy Grail', *Regatta* no. 69, June 1994, 14.

³⁷ P. Halliday, 'View from the Holme Office', *Regatta* no. 59 June 1993, 13.

³⁸ Halliday, 'Rosie's Rich Rewards', 14.

³⁹ Ibid.

there were a lot of people at that stage who – I think understood that, if we were to, to ever get our women’s national team up to the right sort of level, we needed to have a pipeline of, of women coming up. So those development weekends were [...] the beginning of a sort of a development pathway I suppose, for girls, and, and for women. And they were really successful.⁴⁰

These weekends also offered a platform for a further initiative, funded by the Sports Council: ‘an apprenticeship scheme for eight women coaches, who will be guided by experienced coaches’.⁴¹ These apprentices shadowed coaches at the weekends, ‘observing teaching in both sculling and rowing boats, from novices through to Senior 1 status’, and would benefit from continued guidance with ‘the mentor coaches acting as consultants’.⁴²

From early in 1995, the ARA was committed to promoting the opportunities that National Lottery funding could offer the domestic sport – opportunities that preceded investment in the international sport from after the 1996 Olympic Games. Substantial editorial space in *Regatta* magazine was dedicated to explaining what was available, and how best to apply successfully.⁴³ The need to modernise facilities was clear: as the ARA Development Manager, Alan Meegan,

⁴⁰ A. Phelps, oral history interview by the author, January 9, 2018, Hammersmith, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁴¹ N. Weare, ‘Women Coaches Serve Their Apprenticeships’, *Regatta* no 59, June 1993, 25.

⁴² *Ibid.* The report claimed that the Sports Council would use rowing as ‘an example of good practice for all governing bodies’.

⁴³ See for example, in a single issue, C. Searle, ‘Welcome to Camelot’, *Regatta* no. 75, February 1995, 20; R. Napp, ‘The Numbers Game’, *Regatta* no. 75, February 1995, 21; ‘10 Steps to a Lottery Grant’, ‘Schemes That Could Be Eligible’, ‘Selection Criteria’, ‘Lottery No-Go Schemes’, *Regatta* no. 75, February 1995, 20–1.

reported, 'many of our clubs were formed generations ago', and premises had either become unaffordable or 'inadequate'.⁴⁴ The latter, he suggested, was 'partly because rowing clubs now offer membership to a wider section of the community, which means that more accommodation and equipment is required'.⁴⁵ A prime example of this latter point was that 'most of our clubs were not built to include oarswomen, who are the fastest growth sector of our sport'.⁴⁶

While these tangible needs were readily identifiable, and relatively easy to address, encouraging clubs to modernise their thinking would require a more delicate approach. Describing sports clubs as 'places where sportsmen and sportswomen meet informally to partake in recreational activities and social gatherings', Meegan suggested that

the recreational environment, which is a necessary contrast to the workplace and home, can easily cause us to overlook the task of planning for the future. [...] Now is the time to map out your vision of the future in preparation for survival or expansion, by positioning your club, and the perception of it by others, both within and outside the sport, in such a manner that it will gain from any available benefits.⁴⁷

He also emphasised the benefits to clubs of engaging more with the ARA: 'funding partners are relying upon the governing bodies of each sport to give an honest appraisal and priority position of the applicants'.⁴⁸ Under pressure to show

⁴⁴ A. Meegan, 'Setting Club Targets', *Regatta* no. 75, February 1995, 21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* The ARA devolved much of the responsibility for these appraisals to regional administrations.

the value of its activities, the ARA needed to position itself as a fundamental link between clubs and these new sources of income.

Leander Rowing Club, the beneficiary of a substantial Lottery grant in 1997 to renovate its facilities, was a high-profile example of a club whose culture was reshaped by the imperatives of public money.⁴⁹ The £1.5 million grant, which was supplemented by a further £800,000 from other sources and the club's own fundraising efforts, was dependent upon a 'modernization of the constitution' and 'no discrimination against females'.⁵⁰ The stipulation that the grant should be used to develop 'facilities for rowers in particular' is further suggestive of fears that funds might, otherwise, be appropriated to serve the needs of the non-rowing membership of the club rather than those of current athletes.⁵¹ In 1997, then, Leander voted in favour of admitting women.⁵² This was unmistakable evidence of the fundamental transition the club was required to undergo at the end of the twentieth century: to morph from a club serving an amateur, social elite into one serving an athletic elite. Leander would meet the demands of the Sports Council by repositioning itself as a centre of sporting excellence, maintaining its highly selective reputation in a more contemporary and politically acceptable way.⁵³

⁴⁹ Lack of finance was a major driver of this change for many rowing clubs in the 1970s and 1980s. In more recent times, Muirfield Golf Club's high-profile decision to admit women in 2017 was prompted by losing its right to host the Open. The Marylebone Cricket Club did not admit women until 2018, some twenty years after a vote theoretically allowed them to join the waiting list. See E. Ammon, 'MCC wait over for women', *The Times*, February 10, 2018, 17.

⁵⁰ C. Dodd, 'Gender at the Top of Leander's Agenda', *Regatta* no. 95, February 1997, 3.

⁵¹ C. Dodd, 'All for the Sake of the Ladies', *Regatta* no. 95, February 1997, 18.

⁵² C. Dodd, 'Leander Votes for Women', *Regatta* no. 99, June 1997, 5.

⁵³ J. Randall, Leander Treasurer, is quoted at length in C. Dodd, 'Mayday at Pink Palace', *Regatta* no. 96, March 1997, 3, explaining the need to 're-establish superiority in rowing'. He further emphasised that the club's key stakeholders

Under similar political pressure, in 1998, Henley Royal Regatta was forced to drop its established 'amateur status' in favour of 'eligibility' by the international governing body: a change that, by this time, had little practical impact on who was able to enter, but was understood as an unnecessary and unwelcome concession to modernism by some more conservative onlookers.⁵⁴ While Mike Sweeney, as Chairman of the Regatta Committee, noted that 'the Stewards reflect on the passing of the amateur era with a sense of regret' he specified that this was only 'for historical and traditional reasons'.⁵⁵ He deftly acknowledged the heritage of the event while consigning some of its former prejudices and exclusions to history. Elsewhere, both these changes were seen to represent 'the advance and refinement of earlier rules, which, no doubt having decent spirits, can be regarded as relics of a former era'.⁵⁶ While noting the continued importance of upholding the 'finer ideals' of the sport such as 'fair play, honour, victory its own reward', it was clear that 'the less noble aspects of elitism must and will be disregarded'.⁵⁷

1988–1992: tasting success

By the end of the 1990s, the availability of funding through the National Lottery would enable British sports to take a more considered, long-term approach to developing world-class athletes. In 1988 however, following the Seoul Olympics, planning was dependent 'to a great extent on the availability of resources, both

were now able to see a level of performance in women's rowing that had not existed previously; the pursuit of excellence and the admission of women were no longer necessarily incompatible.

⁵⁴ C. Dodd, 'Henley Drops the Amateur Rule', *Regatta* no. 105, February 1998, 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ J. Felt, 'Beyond the Great Divide', *Regatta* no. 98, December 1997/January 1998, 15.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

financial and human'.⁵⁸ Since 'discussion with the ARA and the Sports Council and sponsors will inevitably take time', Penny, as Director of International Rowing, feared 'this could take up to six months'.⁵⁹ Despite such uncertainty, however, the women's team would start to reap more regular success. Two British women's crews won medals at the 1991 World Championships: the heavyweight women's pair, including Miriam, won a bronze, and the lightweight four, including Annamarie, a silver. Annamarie described the experience of winning the medal as 'amazing': 'we were completely, completely blown away by standing on the podium'.⁶⁰ Yet Miriam's memory of her result, and how it was received by others, was more equivocal. She had felt it had historic weight – 'I know Beryl had won with Lin Clark, but it was the first time in a sweep boat, in a World Championships, in an, in an Olympic event' – but suggested that her pride in it had not been shared more widely:

everyone else was like, oh, well if Miriam and Fiona, who are like – short-arsed, excuse me [laughs], um, you know, *girls* can do it then we can.⁶¹

In the lead-up to Barcelona, Miriam recalled that there were 'quite a lot of people that were trialling, and it was much more competitive', resulting in 'quite a big women's team, I think it was probably one of the biggest women's teams?'⁶² Sue, who had also raced in 1988, further suggested that relations between the men's

⁵⁸ 'Penny Looks to the Future', *Regatta* November 1988, 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Phelps, oral history interview.

⁶¹ Luke, oral history interview.

⁶² *Ibid.* With entries in the eight, coxed four, pair and double, the team comprised sixteen athletes and two coxes, as well as two reserves.

and women's team 'became more equal' over this cycle: 'they had as much respect for us as we'd, as we knew they would come up with the goods'.⁶³ She attributed this to a greater 'professionalism' within the women's squad. She felt it was

becoming more structured and it was more obvious that we were doing as much training and as much trialling as the men were doing, that they could see, that you were doing that? Whereas I think in the past it hadn't been *seen* as much as it has, as much as it was being done or being seen to be done.⁶⁴

Miriam was less positive about the level of both professionalism and integration, especially in recalling a training camp for which her coach 'wanted us to go to altitude but we weren't allowed to go with the men'.⁶⁵ She explained that 'no-one had ever *been* to altitude before' and, in this untested venue,

the water was *awful*, you couldn't row after eight o'clock in the morning, so although many of us were scratch crews, we couldn't actually row! So that was a bit of a nightmare.⁶⁶

An altitude camp had the appearance of a more professional setup, and of a superficial equality between the men's and women's teams, but for the women's team it was ill-conceived and badly delivered. The Games itself, with solid performances in small boats but no remarkable successes, were not remembered

⁶³ S. Hastings, oral history interview by the author, July 10, 2018, Whitton, UK. Notes in possession of the author. Following the recording, she identified this as an error of speech, and that the meaning was 'they knew we would come up with the goods' (informal communication with the author, January 13, 2020).

⁶⁴ Hastings, oral history interview.

⁶⁵ Luke, oral history interview.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

by either with any particular fondness.⁶⁷ For Sue, in part ‘because we were just a rowing village’ rather than in the central Olympic village, ‘it didn’t feel that different to a normal World Champs’.⁶⁸

In 1992, lightweight rowing was not an Olympic sport, so Annamarie and her lightweight teammates raced at the World Championships in Montreal rather than in Barcelona. Again, they won a silver medal, but after a poor race, the ‘feeling about that silver medal was so, so different, it was a real disappointment’, and Annamarie described having ‘a real moment of, do I really want to do this, and what am I doing it for [...] I almost gave up in ‘92’.⁶⁹ Her disillusionment was not only due to the specifics of the race. In an inversion of the process Lin described in the 1980s, when lighter heavyweight athletes were considering the transition into lightweight rowing, at this point some lightweight athletes expressed an interest in being considered for heavyweight crews. One of Annamarie’s lightweight crewmates from 1991, Katie Brownlow, transitioned into the heavyweight squad to race in the Olympic eight, which ‘made probably all of us, but particularly me think, well crikey, if Katie can do it, and I’ve been in a boat with her, I can do it’.⁷⁰ Following a regatta in 1992 where ‘we were allowed to go over and race heavyweight, and we drew our – heavyweight four in the heat, and we – absolutely smashed them’, her crew felt

⁶⁷ The pair and the double both placed fifth out of thirteen; the eight and the coxless four seventh of eight and eighth of nine respectively; and the single, ninth of fifteen.

⁶⁸ Hastings, oral history interview.

⁶⁹ Phelps, oral history interview.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

aggrieved that we weren't able to be considered for the Olympic four. [...] You know [pause], for me was sort of a, sort of slightly – what's the word – kind of a defining moment of deciding that I – was gonna try, at some point I'm going to try and go to the Olympic Games.⁷¹

In 1993, the opportunity to row in the Olympic Games as a lightweight was realised, with the announcement that three heavyweight events would be replaced by three lightweight events.⁷² A number of British athletes and administrators – including Annamarie, who was at the time a lightweight athlete with Olympic aspirations – were critical of these plans. The Olympic programme for lightweight athletes would be far more limited than the World Championships.⁷³ The fears Annamarie expressed around the implications for the future of the lightweight sport were prophetic:⁷⁴ at the time of writing, its status in future Olympic and World Championship events is highly uncertain.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² The men's heavyweight coxed pair and coxed four were replaced with a lightweight double and coxless four; the women's lightweight double was initially going to replace the heavyweight pair, but ultimately replaced the heavyweight coxed four. See A.N. Schweinbenz, 'Little Girls in Pretty Shells: The Introduction of Lightweight Women's Events in Competitive International Rowing', *Sport in History* 28, no. 4 (2008): 605–19; 'Conspicuously Absent: An Analysis of the Introduction of Lightweight Women's Rowing into the 1996 Olympic Program', *Proceedings: International Symposium for Olympic Research*, 2006, 324–30.

⁷³ C. Dodd, 'Open and Shut Case', *Regatta* no. 58, May 1993, 5 described FISA's decision to support the proposed programme as 'ham-fisted'. See A.N. Schweinbenz, 'Paddling Against the Current: A History of Women's Competitive International Rowing between 1954 and 2003' (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2007), 188–211.

⁷⁴ A. Dryden, 'Cox and Box: Women's Changes Make No Sense', *Regatta* no. 59 June 1993, 28.

1993–1996: towards Atlanta

Annamarie had enjoyed competitive success in the lightweight four, and, as a result, received fairly substantial financial support.⁷⁵ She described the £15,000 grant she received in 1993 as ‘a huge amount of money, it was the biggest grant that – well certainly that rowing had ever had and probably that the Sports Aid Foundation had ever given out’.⁷⁶ Statistics suggest this is comparable with an average wage for a woman of her age, but as she emphasised, this ‘was to pay for everything’, including Bill Mason and his costs as coach, and the extensive travel expected of the team for competition and training camps.⁷⁷

Every time we went to a regatta we had to pay for our flights. [...] The men would turn up and get their boarding pass given to them as we had to write a cheque before we were given our boarding pass. To go on the plane. So there was quite a stark difference between the funded and the unfunded and you know, in those days.⁷⁸

She was, however, able to exercise her own discretion over how to spend some of the funding, and along with two of her crewmates, spent two months

at the Hong Kong Institute of Sport, training alongside the Chinese athletes. And training three times a day, which was a big – was the first

⁷⁵ Annamarie, as part of a relatively consistent group of athletes in the lightweight women’s four, won four World Championship medals between 1991 and 1994. Over these four years, six women represented Britain in this event. She and Alison Brownless raced every year; Tonia Williams three times, Claire Davies and Jane Hall twice, and Katie Brownlow once.

⁷⁶ Phelps, oral history interview.

⁷⁷ Ibid. The average wage, for non-manual work, for a women aged 25–29 in 1993 was £271.40 per week, equating to £14,112.80 per year. New Earnings Survey (NES), published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/adhocs/006810newearningsurveynewsagesgroupgrossweeklyandhourlyexcludingovertime>); last accessed January 2, 2020).

⁷⁸ Phelps, oral history interview.

time any of us had trained full time and, um, and not worked. I, I took a break from work, we all took a break from work obviously. Um, er and I learnt to scull, out there, cos I hadn't sculled before, so we did a bit of sweep and a bit of sculling.⁷⁹

While the costs attached to international racing were substantial, and gendered discrepancies in provision were clearly visible, Annamarie was relatively fortunate. As Miriam explained, aptly mobilising Major's rhetoric, 'it was a very have-and-have-not kind of world'.⁸⁰

In 1993, in his first few months as the ARA's Head Coach, Jürgen Gröbler, highlighted the negative impacts of the inconsistent and inadequate provision for women. He argued that

you can achieve a lot by staying with the system. The British women's team was quite successful in 1991 [...] then they pulled more and more in to make a bigger team and changed everything around in 1992. [...] By changing the whole team [...] they learned nothing more. Now all the coaches have changed. [...] Everyone starts again and has to search for the target.⁸¹

As he continued, he openly acknowledged issues compromising the performance of the women's team – not least, the lack of a robust coaching structure.

⁷⁹ Ibid. Several female athletes took the opportunity to take training sabbaticals in Hong Kong, including Guin.

⁸⁰ Luke, oral history interview. John Major, in his final press conference as Prime Minister, expressed his 'belief in a classless society, where more of the have-nots are able to join the haves'. Cited in Turner, *A Classless Society*, 5.

⁸¹ J. Gröbler, 'Why Gröbler Swears by the System', *Regatta* no. 59 June 1993, 11.

It needs time to build up a coaching team, and you need a team of coaches. With the men, there is a system. The women play second fiddle to the men's team.⁸²

Having been recruited into the British system in 1991, following ten years at the helm of the East German women's rowing team, Gröbler was well-placed to comment.⁸³ His employment itself was a clear illustration of how the needs of the women's team were subordinated to the men's: shortly after his appointment to the ARA to lead the men's team, it was reported that 'endeavours made to ascertain funding for a full-time Chief Coach for Women have so far been unsuccessful'.⁸⁴ The role was later offered on a part-time basis, with a development group training out of Nottingham. Miriam clearly recalled the inequality of this provision:

I remember us being quite – obviously we knew, we, we knew about Jürgen being employed [...] and we went to talk to Brian Armstrong about, what are you doing for us? And it's like, well we have to prioritise the money we have, and put it where we think we're going to win medals, so, I'm afraid – um, there's no coach for you.⁸⁵

It was a stinging reminder of how easily their needs as athletes could be overlooked in favour of those of men. Drawing on his professional experience,

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Gröbler was initially employed to coach at Leander, and then for the British team from 1992. See C. Dodd, 'Grobler [sic] Leaves Pink Palace for Hot Seat', *Regatta* no. 53, November 1992, 8.

⁸⁴ 'ARA Annual Report – 1993', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1994, 323.

⁸⁵ Luke, oral history interview.

managing mixed teams of employees, Brian himself expressed the paradox faced specifically by female athletes in this climate:

I had no problem with women, it was just natural for me, we were equals. Ok, when it came to [laughing] dishing money out and you had a pot and er, you've got Redgrave and people like that producing the results and the women still aren't – I couldn't er, I couldn't er, not support the men. But, worked hard to get a sponsor for the women. A-ha.⁸⁶

In this uncertain environment, Miriam judged squad morale to be low, but when you're in that sort of situation you can sit there and go, oh it's rubbish – and a lot of the girls did all give up after '92. They all packed it in and said well there's no future here. Whereas a few of us really tried to carry on.⁸⁷

The need to see a 'future' in rowing, were they to carry on, is suggestive of a shift in women's understanding of their participation – and the nature of their opportunities – within the sport.⁸⁸ Miriam and Guin, who were willing to continue to make the sacrifices a rowing career required, would need to secure the coaching and personal support they needed directly. Miriam felt particularly

⁸⁶ B. Armstrong, oral history interview by the author, June 27, 2018, Henley-on-Thames, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁸⁷ Luke, oral history interview.

⁸⁸ Nicholson argues that the more professionalised models being introduced to international women's cricket in the 1990s required players to make substantial – indeed, unprecedented – investments of time and financial resources. R. Nicholson, "'Like a Man Trying to Knit'?: Women's Cricket in Britain, 1945–2000' (PhD thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2015), 237.

indebted to Pete Proudly, who had coached her at university and had been willing to make extraordinary efforts to support her at this stage of her athletic career:

ML: Pete was always there for me through that time [...] I mean he was driving up from Southampton twice a day to coach us on the Tideway.

GB: Twice a week.

ML: He – he – twice a *day*.

GB: Twice a day? Blimey.

ML: Yes. Um, you know, and he didn't get any money for anything [...] he did that all for nothing.⁸⁹

Guin, having worked with Gröbler as an exercise physiologist, used her contacts to different ends:

I used to basically ring up Leander and ask Tim Foster to take the men's training programme [...], put it in a fax machine and send it to me at work. And that would be what Miriam and I would then do, um, for some of our training through the winter. [...] The observation was the guys had got it together, so what was it that we could take from them.⁹⁰

In this context, it is unsurprising that the British entry for the heavyweight World Championships in 1994 was small, but Miriam highlighted a further absurdity: as one of three athletes competing, one of whom was her sister Guin, 'our parents had produced two-thirds of the women's heavyweight team that year'.⁹¹ Such a

⁸⁹ Luke and Batten, oral history interview.

⁹⁰ Batten, oral history interview.

⁹¹ Luke, oral history interview.

limited number of women competing at the top level of the sport was unsustainable, and the stipulation that a substantial injection of private funding was to be spent on building an eight, specifically, is therefore unsurprising. Miriam recalled that Mike Spracklen, a former British international athlete and coach who was then coaching the Canadian team,

had decided that what the British team needed for women's rowing was an eight. And therefore he persuaded his friend, Larry Tracey, who was an Irishman, um, to sponsor [...] a heavyweight eight.⁹²

Tracey's investment, supporting a group of twelve athletes over two years, was unprecedented. It created a squad that was financially supported to train full time, with a specific and non-negotiable goal: to race in the eight at the Olympics. Miriam remembered learning that

there was going to be funding, for a coach, for somewhere where we could train, [...] there was a very small grant, um, but there was going to be a focused programme. So that was quite exciting.⁹³

Annamarie recalled that 'we got four hundred pounds a month, um, to, er, live off, and he paid for our training camps and our kit and our everything', but that 'you weren't allowed to work or to do anything else, you had to be absolutely dedicated to the eight'.⁹⁴ This was a low wage to live on, especially in the south east of England;⁹⁵ yet in enabling athletes to train full time, 'largely free of worrying where

⁹² Phelps, oral history interview.

⁹³ Luke, oral history interview.

⁹⁴ Phelps, oral history interview.

⁹⁵ Based on 1995 data from the New Earnings Survey (NES) and the Labour Market Statistics Time Series (LMS), both published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsan>

the next meal and training camp is coming from' and with the 'luxury' of Bill Mason as a full-time coach, *Regatta* magazine suggested it brought with it a sense of 'liberation'.⁹⁶ Tellingly, the report added that 'they no longer feel like second-class citizens [...] even if they have not got everything that the men's squad have got'.⁹⁷

A stipulation of the funding was that the athletes would not work elsewhere, but Annamarie suggested that 'quite a lot of us snuck away and did stuff [...] we all recognised – and *Bill* definitely *always* recognised – that it was really important to have something else in your life'.⁹⁸ As well as offering 'something on a daily basis to take our minds off the training and just to keep us grounded', she saw the importance of work to her financial needs: at this point, 'this – career, in rowing, was not going to be a career in rowing, cos there was no money'.⁹⁹ Funding offered sufficient financial security to commit to the sport, but the ability (and sanction from her coach) to pursue a career was 'a good mixture': she was able to balance the demands of training at the highest level with her present and future needs off the water.¹⁰⁰

Annamarie's recollection that 'they asked Bill [...] would he coach the eight' was a more conservative estimation of his role and powers than a report in *Regatta*, which claimed that 'he is responsible for day-to-day management, training and

[dworkinghours/adhocs/006810newearningsurveynewsagegroupgrossweeklyandhourlyexcludingovertime](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/adhocs/006810newearningsurveynewsagegroupgrossweeklyandhourlyexcludingovertime) and <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/timeseries/ybuy/lms> respectively; last accessed 2 January 2020)..

⁹⁶ C. Dodd, 'A Mason's Dozen', *Regatta* no. 87 April 1996, 5.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Phelps, oral history interview.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

selection of both open and lightweight women for the British team – identical powers to those enjoyed by Gröbler on the men’s side’.¹⁰¹ The same report quoted Brian, as International Rowing Manager, claiming ‘it is only right that women’s rowing should benefit for a similar coaching structure as the men’.¹⁰² The conditions of this ‘generous support’ appear to be overlooked; while Mason was paid to coach, he was not accorded the kind of decision-making power that he might have wished for.¹⁰³ Annamarie recalled

Bill saying you know, this is not ideal you know I wouldn’t really, I would – if I, if I had the choice I’d be doing a couple of small boats, I wouldn’t be trying to do an eight, cos we’re never gonna – be able to go from nought to sixty in – two years, you know. From, from, from nothing to a medal, would be a massive step. So I think – I think Bill had reservations to start with, um, but – but you know [sighing], we were, we – it was the only choice, there was no funding, there was no funding for women at that point.¹⁰⁴

Guin, who, ‘was always in two minds to go into the eight’, did see another choice: to fund herself in the single scull.¹⁰⁵ In doing so, she knew the financial support would be ‘withdrawn’.¹⁰⁶ Yet throughout her career, she was cavalier her financial security, preferring to compromise on this than on her athletic goals. Ultimately, the decision was made

¹⁰¹ Ibid; ‘Two New National Coaches Start Work for BIRO: O’Neill Takes Up Sculling’, *Regatta* no. 74, December 1994/January 1995, 385.

¹⁰² ‘Two New National Coaches’.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Phelps, oral history interview.

¹⁰⁵ Batten, oral history interview.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

on training camp. And Bill Mason was – we used, I used to play table football with Bill Mason all the time? – and we were literally, last ball, you know, we had equal you know, four goals each, there was one ball. And I said Bill, if you score this goal I'll go into the eight and I'll never talk about it again. If I score it, I'll stay in the single. And I'll aim to go to the '96 Olympics in the single. I scored the, I scored the goal, and I never went into the eight.¹⁰⁷

Opting out of this conditional support, Guin committed to the independent pathway offered by the single scull. In 1996, she published an article which offered explicit detail of the financial hardship faced by athletes in the British system, for whom small grants and part-time work could not cover basic needs on top of the costs of training and racing. Presenting the breakdown of her income and expenditure, she described how rent had become her 'largest non-essential expense', and that she had therefore spent months 'living out of a bag in friends' houses'.¹⁰⁸ She exposed the extent of the barriers facing athlete at this level, and the extent to which the system relied upon the goodwill of others.

The financial hardship of top rowers is evident across the board, part of the life we have chosen. For every successful British rower there is

¹⁰⁷ Batten, oral history interview.

¹⁰⁸ G. Batten, 'Scrimping to Georgia', *Regatta* no. 87 April 1996, 7. She reported that 'this year I have an income of £3,500, roughly £75 a week from my part-time job as an exercise physiologist for the British Olympic Association. Living in the south of England, this would not even cover my rent, let alone my food! I have been fortunate that I have been granted awards from the Sports Aid Foundation, the Atlanta fund and the Foundation for Sports and the Arts. This comes to £5,500 grant aided. This does not cover the cost of my training camps and regattas, let alone maintaining a car or boat.'

a story like mine, of club members, friends and family who have silently helped out when the money has dried up.¹⁰⁹

Such silent support networks had long underpinned athletic careers. Narrators repeatedly described drawing on others for practical and financial assistance, as distinct from emotional support. From parental funding and coaching from friends and husbands, to concessions from captains in clubs and bosses in the workplace, none had achieved in isolation. While implicitly acknowledging the privilege of her own network, Guin highlighted the sacrifices she personally had made, over a period of years, to pursue the opportunity to race at the Olympics:

it was *anything* to allow me to go part time, to *do* the training programme, um, and to get that recovery. Because of trying to achieve.¹¹⁰

The need for Tracey's funding to be used to develop an Olympic eight addressed the problem of scale in the women's sport – a problem that was perpetuated by Sports Aid funding being contingent on previous results in a particular event. Annamarie was conscious that 'if you didn't have results in that boat class or whatever it was very hard to find funding';¹¹¹ for the ARA to secure public funding for a women's eight, it would require precedent. The scale of the task, in such a small timeframe, was immense: as Miriam reflected in oral history, 'you can imagine, trying to build an eight in two years, from quite a small pool of women,

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. A 1998 report suggested that one source of funding had been a £1,000 donation from the WEHoRR committee. R. Caroe, 'The Women's HERR', *On the WIRE: The Newsletter of the WIRE* no. 4, July 1998. Part of the collection held at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, UK

¹¹⁰ Batten, oral history interview.

¹¹¹ Phelps, oral history interview.

many of whom who hadn't competed on the world stage before'.¹¹² Such a task provoked new and disruptive approaches, including 'deliberately' separating more experienced athletes from each other 'to push others in the group up'.¹¹³ Sharpening competition between athletes within the squad might drive some performances, but would also compromise trust and mutual support: as Annamarie recalled,

there was always a slight feeling that the people who were at the top end didn't, you know, didn't respect the ones at the bottom end, and the ones at the bottom end felt they were fighting to be respected.¹¹⁴

In addition to this internal competition, efforts were also being made to bring new talent into the sport.

They put an advert in the *Daily Mail* asking people, in 1994, if they wanted to go and row at the 1996 Olympics. And out of that, they got, they, they did some testing of them, and they got a group of women, and I think it was around about twelve of them.¹¹⁵

Although the scale and visibility of this intervention was new, the desire to recruit women with potential from outside the sport was not. Even in 1973, Penny had actively tried to recruit women with athletic experience, or physical characteristics like height, to develop a pool of talent for the national squad, and increasingly sophisticated talent identification schemes would be implemented as the sport

¹¹² Luke, oral history interview.

¹¹³ B. Mason, cited in C. Dodd, 'With Georgia On Their Minds...', *Regatta* no. 79, June 1995, 7.

¹¹⁴ Phelps, oral history interview.

¹¹⁵ Batten, oral history interview.

moved into the twenty-first century.¹¹⁶ In the 1990s, however, the gap between experienced athletes and these new recruits was significantly larger than it had been in the 1970s, and the development model to support them less effective than what would follow. Thus, while Miriam claimed ‘they all tried to make it into the team but none – I don’t think any of them made it’.¹¹⁷

Guin’s initial response to the influx of these ‘*Daily Mail* girls’ was empathy for those within the system already: ‘can you imagine the implications that would have on the women that were on the verge of the national team, ok?’¹¹⁸ Yet she also observed an important side-effect:

I think it got the backs up of the women who were on the verge of coming in. And I think it was a really critical turning point for them to say actually, you know, we need to claim this territory.¹¹⁹

The initiative would bring raw talent into the system and provide important – if uncomfortable – competitive stimulus for experienced athletes, disrupting established hierarchies and challenging complacency. As Mason argued in an interview, ‘we can’t keep focussing on the good athletes [...] we can’t keep those people together to appear as gods to others’.¹²⁰

By the time of the Olympic qualification regatta, Annamarie remembered that ‘the boat was going fantastically well’, and a report quoted Mason ‘in the post

¹¹⁶ L. Taylor, ‘The Golden Girls: How Talent Identification Propelled the GB Rowing Women’s Team to Gold Medal Success at London 2012’ (unpublished MA Dissertation, London Metropolitan University, 2013).

¹¹⁷ Luke, oral history interview. Guin suggested that ‘one I think went as a spare’.

¹¹⁸ Batten, oral history interview.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Mason, cited in Dodd, ‘With Georgia on their Minds...’, 7.

qualification race euphoria' as saying 'jubilantly, "You've never seen a women's eight like that for GB, have you?" I don't think anyone ever had.'¹²¹ The tone of the press coverage leading up to Atlanta was, correspondingly, positive, with Guin also reported to have undergone 'a two-season rise to stardom' and the eight perceived to have 'a medal chance'.¹²² Following Redgrave and Pinsent's historic win (the only one of the Atlanta Games), one report described Guin's performance as offering further 'British jubilation': placing fifth in the world, it suggested, was 'surely an incentive to go for greater things'.¹²³ The eight, however, 'did not live up to expectations'.¹²⁴ Failing to qualify for the final through the repechage, Annamarie took little comfort in winning the small final, feeling that 'it wasn't much of a – an outcome really, considering – all the investment and all the time, and everything else that we'd, we'd all spent'.¹²⁵ The emotional and physical intensity of this period had taken a significant toll, and having 'been told there'd be no funding for the women, there was no coach, there was no base, there was no nothing' for the next Olympic cycle, she felt unable to reconcile her aspirations, and her love of the sport, with the realities of an international career.¹²⁶

I'd love to have – gone on and been able to race in that pair or [...] you know, actually do a smaller boat. And, and achieve something at, at

¹²¹ Phelps, oral history interview; M. Rosewell, 'Women's Eight: Pack on the Medal Hunt', *Regatta* no. 90 July 1996, 5.

¹²² C. Dodd, 'Guin's will to win', *Regatta* no. 84, December 1995/January 1996, 17; M. Rosewell, 'Women's Eight: Pack on the Medal Hunt', *Regatta* no. 90 July 1996, 5.

¹²³ M. Rosewell, 'Winners and Losers in the GB Squad', *Regatta* no. 92, September 1996, 8.

¹²⁴ B. Armstrong, quoted in Rosewell, 'Winners and Losers', 8.

¹²⁵ Phelps, oral history interview.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

heavyweight level. [...] By the time I got back from Atlanta, um, I, I kind of felt that I'd, my time was, there were other things in life I wanted to get on with.¹²⁷

1996–2000: privilege and pressure

In 1996, as ARA Chairman, Di Ellis expressed her ambitions for rowing over the following five years, including getting 'Britain's first Olympic medals for women in the bag', and a 'coaching programme underpinning the Amateur Rowing Association's regions at all levels and the national squad'.¹²⁸ To do so would require a major redress to the 'lack of direction in planning and funding of British sport [...] characteristic of the Olympiad that led to Atlanta'.¹²⁹ Despite the team's disappointing performance at the 1996 Games, 'distinction abroad' was reported as one of the 'principal features' of 1997, and 'pride of place belonged to the first women's crew to win an international gold medal in open women's rowing'.¹³⁰ As incoming Performance Director that season, Tanner recalled, laughing, that

we actually had a very successful time with women. But that was not sustainable. I mean, you can't just do it with the Batten sisters can you.¹³¹

Tanner had '[taken] over the "hot seat" from Armstrong' at the start of September 1996. He had identified that despite the 'more professional' structures Brian had introduced, the ARA 'still had no money to actually do – the basics at that time',

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ C. Dodd, 'The Future and Di', *Regatta* no. 93, November 1996, 5.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ K. Osborne, 'Preface', *British Rowing Almanack*, 1998, 12.

¹³¹ Tanner, oral history interview.

and understood that Lottery funding profoundly changed the nature of the role.¹³² He was also keenly aware of the discrepancy between the ARA's aspirations and the resources it, historically, had at its disposal: a discrepancy that had underpinned debates around how, and how best, to develop the sport over the previous four decades. It was for this reason that he 'wouldn't have taken it on without the money from the Lottery to – not, not for me particularly, although that was relevant [laughs], but actually to um, deliver the programme'.¹³³ He was clear on the importance of 'continuity of coaching' following on from Atlanta, but, echoing Penny's concerns from 1992, he identified 'availability of the right coaches, and the ability to pay for them [...] as a problem' – not least because he did not anticipate receiving the funds themselves until 1997.¹³⁴

Tanner recalled that his 'first objective was to get money, that was quite clear, and that included sponsorship as well as Lottery [...] to employ coaches, er, and some team support'.¹³⁵ The operation was, initially, very small:

I started with two and a half people working to me. One of those was Jürgen Gröbler, um... One of those was an administrator, and the half was Mark Banks, who was the junior – junior coach. Er, the first two were, were what we could afford, Mark Banks was paid for by Henley Stewards actually.¹³⁶

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid. Penny's experience would suggest that the two are not unrelated; she described having been 'absolutely burnt out and exhausted, because I was trying to run a programme for which we just didn't have the money or the boats or the facilities or whatever' (Chuter, oral history interview, October 30, 2017).

¹³⁴ Rosewell, 'Winners and Losers', 8.

¹³⁵ Tanner, oral history interview.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

When more funding became available, in early 1997, his 'first employment' was Mike Spracklen as lead women's coach.¹³⁷ He emphasised how important – and different – it was for the women's team to have 'a coach in for pretty much the whole Olympics': previously,

often they'd just, they'd be doing it as a volunteer and then they'd just bring somebody in for the last eighteen months or the last year of the Olympic cycle [...] and that's not long enough. [...] After '96, and they could then bring a coach in for the women, for the whole of the Olympic cycle, that made a huge difference.¹³⁸

He was also confident that Spracklen specifically would deliver the desired results.

Mike knew, what it took to win a medal. He was able to set those standards, and say well if you don't get to here you're not gonna win a medal sort of thing. So – that was a big step change as well.¹³⁹

Spracklen started a sculling group which catered for current internationals and aspiring talent.

What Mike did was he said right. [...] We're going to train from Longridge [Scout Camp]. This is where it's going to be based. I will be here at these times. If you want to come and train then you can. So it wasn't *forcing* people to, but he was not going to go anywhere else [...]

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

That was brilliant, to have that base. You knew there was a coach there, you knew that he would be going out.¹⁴⁰

The base he created, and his availability as coach, also gave athletes the option to seek additional support if they desired. Miriam, for example, decided to take a week off work in order to train, and

he literally said well when do you want to go out? And whenever I wanted to go out, he'd be there, in the launch, to coach me. It was amazing, we've never had that before.¹⁴¹

For athletes training here, the combination of a physical base, a permanent coach, and this sense of critical mass felt like the start of a new era. As Guin and Miriam explained,

GB: Everything we'd done was in a little bit here and little bit there and now you had this –

ML: Broader.

GB: *Broader*, er, and it's like, hang on – [...] we *can* do this? There was a sense of confidence through the system [...] there was a dawning, an awakening, that things were possible.¹⁴²

Despite the strength of her previous coaching allegiances, for Guin, 'there was only one place to be'.¹⁴³

Spracklen's 'open house' format was not selective at the outset, and proved increasingly popular: from 'three regulars' early in 1997, by 1998 this had grown

¹⁴⁰ Luke, oral history interview.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Batten and Luke, oral history interview.

¹⁴³ Batten, oral history interview.

to ‘18 women rowing and sculling [...] six days a week, with three more regulars at the weekends who train hard elsewhere during the week’.¹⁴⁴ The provision was basic, but fit for purpose. A report in *Regatta* described how ‘these full-timers have no boathouse, nowhere to lock their valuables, a shared kitchen which they can’t use when the camp is up and running, and minimum shower and changing facilities’, but, importantly, quoted Miriam claiming that they had ‘the three most important assets: “Good water, an excellent coach, and us”’.¹⁴⁵ Her pragmatism reflected an understanding that the programme prioritised athlete development over all other factors, and that coaching would be the decisive factor in Olympic success.

Marlow was Spracklen’s home base, but he rationalised the decision to base the group there as it was ‘the only stretch of the Thames not occupied by another club’.¹⁴⁶ Space on the water was crucial:

at this time of year we have twenty-four singles out and a coaching launch, sometimes three sessions a day. We couldn’t do that at, say, Henley. There would not be enough water for us, let alone other users.¹⁴⁷

He rejected ‘accusations from north of the border that the ARA has a policy for keeping GB international rowing in the Thames Valley’, but the advantage of being close to London’s thriving club rowing scene and with a greater, absolute number of club athletes within striking distance than anywhere else in the country,

¹⁴⁴ C. Dodd, ‘No Complaints from the Homeless’, *Regatta* no. 106, March 1998, 5.

¹⁴⁵ C. Dodd, ‘Holding Office’, *Regatta* no. 116, March 1999, 16–7.

¹⁴⁶ M. Spracklen, quoted in Dodd, ‘Holding Office’, 16–7.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

was significant.¹⁴⁸ Scale itself was important, and this location gave Spracklen the best chance of attracting the critical mass of athletes required for a challenging, competitive training environment.

ML: It was the first time that we'd ever had a whole group of women training together on a regular basis, with coaching every day, on decent water. Um, competitive, side by side?

GB: Twenty-two singles, I think.

ML: Yeah, and side by side because – for many years, you went out and if you were any good, you won by miles [...] this was the first time that it really did start to become competitive, a group of women pushing each other, regular coaching, hard training programme.¹⁴⁹

The team won three medals at the 1997 World Championships, an achievement that led to Spracklen being awarded Coach of the Year by the National Coaching Foundation.¹⁵⁰ By 1998, with Lottery funding making 'a substantial difference to the attendance',¹⁵¹ he could 'no longer offer open house. I have to discourage them now. [...] I can't coach a greater number of people.'¹⁵² While he claimed 'I never turn people away', the structure he implemented meant every athlete's place in the squad was contingent on their performance, day in, day out; it was, by his assessment, 'a very healthy scene'.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Dodd, 'Holding Office', 16–7.

¹⁴⁹ Luke and Batten, oral history interview.

¹⁵⁰ 'Spracklen is Voted Coach of the Year', *Regatta* no. 111, August/September 1998, 9.

¹⁵¹ Dodd, 'No Complaints from the Homeless', 5.

¹⁵² M. Spracklen, quoted in Dodd, 'No Complaints from the Homeless', 5.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Numbers may have been 'healthy', but competition was brutal: as Guin recalled, 'it was just, you know, murder out there [...] the pressure was enormous'.¹⁵⁴ Where athletes in previous years recalled struggling for domestic competition and being unprepared for the specifics of racing, under Spracklen's programme Miriam felt the opposite was true. She described 'competing so often [in training] that almost, it was almost a relief to get to a competition', a feeling echoed by Guin, albeit in a darker tone.

Yeah. Competition was easy. [...] I've never felt more prepared for a race after doing Spracklen's training than I ever have with any other training.¹⁵⁵

Under this pressure, Miriam suggested that athletes could easily 'burn out' or become injured, yet she and Guin were able to thrive. Indeed, she suggested that this 'higher intensity' was 'what we needed at the time, because we needed to be much stronger mentally? And it gave, you know, there was an element of sink or swim'.¹⁵⁶ Guin shared this view, but saw it as a more integral part of building the future of the sport: it was 'exactly what we needed to bring the next generation, or to make us harder'.¹⁵⁷

Their views may have anticipated the success that followed, or have been shaped by it; regardless, having won a silver medal at the World Championships in 1997, Miriam and her partner in the double scull Gillian Lindsay would 'join men on the gold standard' in 1998.¹⁵⁸ Sculling was, itself, an important strategic choice.

¹⁵⁴ Batten, oral history interview.

¹⁵⁵ Luke and Batten, oral history interview.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Batten, oral history interview.

¹⁵⁸ 'Women Join Men on the Gold Standard', *Regatta* no. 112, October 1998, 1.

Having been understood in earlier decades as the more appropriate discipline for women, it now represented their most significant opportunity for competitive success. While Miriam acknowledged that historically the team was 'not brilliant' in sculling events,¹⁵⁹ Guin recalled that Spracklen

always felt that the quad was a good, a good boat to win in? Noel Casey had identified the quad as the boat that we would probably win our first Olympic medal in, back in 1992. Um, so you know, people had been looking at that boat from a long time out.¹⁶⁰

In the year leading up to the Sydney Games, a small number of women chose to leave the group in favour of training at Leander, two of these feeling the limitations of their position as 'lone sweeps in a group of scullers'.¹⁶¹ While it was reported that 'emphatically they did not leave to make trouble, nor to face the management with awkward questions', one of the athletes was quoted as saying 'ultimately we'll be sitting on the line at Sydney and if we don't take responsibility for ourselves then no-one else will'.¹⁶² Unlike Guin taking herself out of contention for the 1996 eight, these athletes would 'still operate under the Lottery's world class performance programme' and receive 'full support from BIRO's professionals'.¹⁶³ While Spracklen claimed in an interview that 'they thought I hadn't done enough for them and wanted to do better', he also, importantly,

¹⁵⁹ Luke, oral history interview. 'There's Guin, but really otherwise there wasn't anyone in the squad that had done anything in sculling.'

¹⁶⁰ Batten, oral history interview.

¹⁶¹ C. Dodd, 'Dynamic B&B', *Regatta* no. 127, April 2000, 10. The isolation felt by these 'lone sweeps' in Spracklen's group offers an indication of the direction of the squad, but also of the increasing pressure – now necessity – even for sweep athletes to train and trial in single sculls.

¹⁶² Dodd, 'Dynamic B&B', 10.

¹⁶³ Dodd, 'Dynamic B&B', 10.

asserted that ‘they should have the freedom to be where they want and have the coach that they want. I welcome that situation.’¹⁶⁴

Sydney 2000: ‘The Athletes’ Games’

Alongside the new privileges of competing at the Games for the first time following the introduction of Lottery funding came new, and different, pressures on British athletes. These included a heightened awareness of the transactional expectations of a return on investment. Guin felt that

going into 2000, we knew that we needed to medal [...] we realised that the success, our success had a financial impact on the future of women’s rowing. [...] We had moved into an era where you knew that people’s careers, people’s jobs, people’s livelihoods were dependent upon the top boats winning medals.¹⁶⁵

The disappointment of Atlanta continued to weigh heavily on Miriam, and knowing that Sydney would be her last Olympics, the burden of hope was substantial: ‘for me, it was – we had this opportunity and, we don’t want to lose it because I’ve lost – I, I lost that opportunity in ‘96’.¹⁶⁶ Guin’s experience in Atlanta had been quite different, but despite the length of her international career, she was yet to win an international medal. She felt acutely that their performance needed to vindicate the years of commitment behind her: ‘we hadn’t, / hadn’t done all this, I hadn’t done all of this not to go in to a race and come out feeling the work – you know’.¹⁶⁷ Miriam framed the situation in more positive terms, although she, too,

¹⁶⁴ M. Rosewell, ‘Out of the Woods’, *Regatta* no. 126, March 2000, 14.

¹⁶⁵ Batten, oral history interview.

¹⁶⁶ Luke, oral history interview.

¹⁶⁷ Batten, oral history interview.

expressed an anxiety around letting success pass her by: 'it was about this, we have a fantastic opportunity, we have trained so hard, we have come so far, and we don't want to miss it'.¹⁶⁸ Confident in her crew's ability, but conscious of 'how easy it is at the Olympics to either blow it, or how crews can really raise their game', she approached the Olympics with a complex combination of hope and dread.¹⁶⁹ Feelings about her own performance were exacerbated by a sense of responsibility towards the women's sport as a whole.

Miriam suggested that the lead-up to Sydney was 'the first real time that I felt the men and the women's team started to help push each other?'¹⁷⁰ This was, in part, due to the changed funding landscape, but also a direct consequence of integrating the men's and women's teams for the Olympic training camp. The use of medal percentages on this camp – assessing crew performances against the gold medal-winning time in a particular boat class and discipline – offered comparability across the whole team: as a metric, it was gender-blind. Miriam suggested that

you could see that actually the team started to operate a bit more as a whole team? And a lot of that was Jürgen [Gröbler] bringing all of that together and trying to coordinate that.¹⁷¹

Miriam acknowledged that externally, 'the pressure was on Steve [Redgrave], and Steve's crew, they had all the pressure'.¹⁷² Guin agreed, but also felt that

¹⁶⁸ Luke, oral history interview.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid. The focus in rowing was trained heavily on the men's four, in which Steve Redgrave was in line for his fifth Olympic gold medal. Redgrave, along with Matthew Pinsent, had won Britain's only gold medal in Atlanta.

if we didn't come home with something, because all of the other women's crews hadn't delivered, that we, that might be – you know, that fantastic thing where there'd been twenty-five women singles, or twenty-two women's singles racing, the money to pay for that would go?¹⁷³

While she emphasised 'not that money was anything that was in the forefront of our minds', she had witnessed a transformation 'from 1994 with just three of us on the team', and felt that if they could deliver a medal, 'this would – and it became – the beginning of a new era'.¹⁷⁴ At the end of long athletic careers in which they had seen such substantial change, Guin's sensitivity to the historic position and impact of their performance was heightened.

I mean Great Britain had only ever come fifth at the Olympic Games up to that moment, I'd come fifth in my single, Miriam had come fifth in the pair, Ali and [...] Annabel had come fifth in the double, the eight had come fifth I think it was in, in, in Los Angeles [...] You stood on that start line and everybody looked at you and said there's Great Britain, they'll come fifth. You know, and how could we break that? And we broke it to silver that day. And you know, it was Katherine and the next generation, you know the pair, that took it to silver, er, took it to gold in 2012. But they were long journeys. Incredible amount of commitment from people that, you know, history will never remember.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Batten, oral history interview.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

In an interview after the Olympic final, Guin expressed ‘sheer delight’ that ‘we had done it, and we had done it together’, celebrating the result of an investment in the sport that comprised years of sacrifice, compromise, and physical slog.¹⁷⁶ Yet their success was not matched by other British women’s crews that year, many of whom had, also, invested heavily in their own athletic careers.¹⁷⁷ At the age of fifteen, Frances, for example, had made a ‘promise and a vow’ to do everything possible to reach the Sydney Games: a goal she achieved, racing in the double sculls. She was, however, disappointed in a selection process that she experienced as deeply flawed. The promise and vow that had defined her own actions could not define the outcome, and the decision not to include her in ‘the top boat’ – ultimately, the quad – ‘completely tore [her] apart’.¹⁷⁸

I absolutely, er, felt like I had earnt my place, to be in the top boat?
Whatever that had been. [...] I definitely felt like I could have contributed, and been a part [...] – I felt like I could have been in that boat and made it go as fast as other people in that boat.¹⁷⁹

It was not only a question of athletic ambition, but also a sense of history.

There would *never* be another Sydney, and I *knew* that there would be another – never another Sydney, and it was gonna be the Athletes’

¹⁷⁶ G. Batten, ‘Splitting a Second’, *Regatta* no. 132, October 2000, 8.

¹⁷⁷ The single scull placed tenth of nineteen entries; the pair and double both ninth of ten; and the eight, seventh of seven.

¹⁷⁸ F. Houghton, oral history interview by the author, October 23, 2018, Newquay, UK. Notes in possession of the author. Alison Mowbray, who from a much earlier stage was not considered in contention for a place in this crew, offers an account of how visceral and – she suggests – prejudicial the selection process prior to Sydney had been in *Gold Medal Flapjack, Silver Medal Life: The Autobiography of an Unlikely Olympian* (Leicester: Troubadour, 2013), 207–13.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Games, it was – you know, the *home* of sport [...] and you know, a really exciting time in women’s rowing, um, and sport in general.¹⁸⁰

Frances talked about the Sydney Games with huge enthusiasm and passion, and her feeling that it would ‘*never*’ be replicated was borne out. She competed at four more Games, but ‘never again did we stay in the Olympic Village’, and ‘never again did I get to go to the Opening Ceremony’, where she had ‘felt a part of the most amazing gathering of humanity’.¹⁸¹ There was only one point during the Games where she felt unable to put the compromise to her own athletic dreams to one side.

When the quad raced, I knew that it would affect me – forever? Um, and so I deliberately didn’t – I didn’t watch it. And I like, covered my ears so I couldn’t hear it cos I didn’t wanna have, like – I didn’t want to have the nightmares? Because I knew I’d dream about it. And I knew that I’d – like – that would be – images and voices and audios that I, that would be in my brain, and that I would never be able to get out. So I deliberately didn’t.¹⁸²

Debbie had been mindful of ‘a mixture of feelings within the other girls in the team’ (not least of whom, Frances), and highlighted the complexity of seeing one crew succeed in such a pressured environment: ‘it wasn’t like everyone was talking about it because everyone was, you know, having their own feelings about their

¹⁸⁰ Houghton, oral history interview.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

own performances'.¹⁸³ Explicitly engaging with the individual nature of the team experience, she highlighted how intertwined the feelings and the fates of individual athletes had become, and how their complex, emotional responses to the sport might limit a broader field of vision. At the time, she suggested, 'I didn't really realise what a difference that [result] was going to make', and only in retrospect, having seen the upward trajectory in the women's sport over multiple Olympic cycles, did she come to understand that 'it was really significant, very significant'.¹⁸⁴

Reflecting back in 2018, Guin and Miriam, like Debbie and other narrators, had made sense of their own experiences over a period where the British rowing team has enjoyed greater funding, support and success than was imaginable at the start of their careers. Tanner's caution against imposing a narrative of natural progress on the women's sport was instructive in this regard. He claimed that

it's been a huge step to actually um, get a women's result on the table.

I mean it looks – you look back now, you know, 'well of course it was all gonna happen', well – well it wasn't.¹⁸⁵

Guin and Miriam were explicit that their result had depended on the successes, failures, and hard work of their predecessors: those whom 'history will never remember'. Yet they staked a further, important claim alongside it. The fact of precedent alone did not provoke change, or drive success. It was the resourcefulness and commitment of individuals, from administrators and coaches

¹⁸³ Flood, oral history interview.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Tanner, oral history interview.

to the athletes themselves, over a period of years, that had driven change, and that would shape the future of the sport.

Reaching the top: sporting pathways

Annamarie suggested that the idea of a development ‘pathway’ for athletes at this point was, in a sense, anachronistic:

people didn’t really talk about pathways. Before the 2000s. You know, people had a journey that they did, to get into the team, but – but there wasn’t a sort of systematic pathway.¹⁸⁶

Rosie had clearly articulated the need for development routes through the sport – and indeed, had started to build them – in the 1980s.¹⁸⁷ Annamarie suggested, however, that it was the idea of the ‘journey’ that had resonated with athletes. Unlike a ‘systematic pathway’ it was a narrative they applied, retrospectively, to their experiences. To extend the metaphor, even if they had imagined a destination, the route was unplanned. When Guin and Lin talked about the ‘journey’ of a sporting career, it was bound to personal and emotional development as well as to athletic progress.¹⁸⁸ Pathways would be fundamental in creating a more sustainable flow of talent into the national team, but there were – and remain – limits to the structural support and guidance provided by the governing body. During the 1990s, provision for women’s rowing was uneven, dependent on club cultures, resources and locations. While this was also true for

¹⁸⁶ Phelps, oral history interview.

¹⁸⁷ See Chapter 4. The term appears frequently in this chapter as a result, but – tellingly – not in narrators’ accounts.

¹⁸⁸ Lin repeatedly drew on this metaphor, as did Guin – albeit in different registers.

men, it manifested differently, especially with regard to reaching the national team. In a report that Annamarie wrote for *Regatta* magazine, she claimed that in 1993, of the 46 men who competed at the World Championships, 43 rowed as schoolboys, and two-thirds of the open men's team had competed at Junior World Championship level. By contrast, all but one of the women's team that year had taken up rowing after leaving school.¹⁸⁹

For women, higher education had long represented an important opportunity to pursue sport, and in rowing, universities were a core part of the rowing landscape for male and female senior athletes. The priority given to improving connections between schools, universities and independent sports clubs in *Sport: Raising the Game*, however, highlights some of the problems perpetuated by university sport, as well as its positive contributions. University studies, for the vast majority, were undertaken for a finite, relatively short period of time, with university sport contested internally, or between universities, rather than with mainstream clubs. As a sporting community, it was necessarily transient, more susceptible to cultural change, and less visible to those outside of any given institution. Guin was unusual in gaining her first exposure to the sport by spending breaks from boarding school with her sister Miriam, who was then studying and rowing at Southampton:

aged sixteen I'm busy following my bigger sister [...] around Southampton on the back of a bike, thinking oh my god, I want to be

¹⁸⁹ A. Stapleton, 'Go Girls, Row...', *Regatta* no. 84, December 1995/January 1996, 19. The exception was Jane Hall.

part of *this*. [...] They were independent women, they just knew what they were doing, they were incredibly fast, I couldn't keep up with them on the bicycles – I was really athletic, so I was doing a *lot* of sport at school anyway, but um, and, so for me, this was pretty amazing.¹⁹⁰

University sport could also leave its participants blind to the wider sporting community. Annamarie described how in 1986, while trialling for Cambridge University Women's Boat Club (CUWBC),

we came down and did the Fours Head. Um... I – I was completely gobsmacked by the number of other women who – rowed. In clubs. People who were outside of university. [...] It was – a revelation to know that there were people who worked, and there were clubs where, where women rowed outside, outside of that.¹⁹¹

Annamarie had no particular intention of pursuing rowing beyond university, although she soon joined university friends at Thames Tradesmen's Rowing Club, 'a really thriving, exciting club' on the Tideway in London.¹⁹² She began to row 'very much on sort of a club basis, to start with, um, but having great fun',¹⁹³ and as she became more involved, suggested that she and her peers could train hard enough to pursue top-level athletic performance at national events like WEHoRR, and maintain a strong sense of sporting sociability as a club. She fondly described how

¹⁹⁰ Batten, oral history interview.

¹⁹¹ Phelps, oral history interview.

¹⁹² Miriam selected Thames in part because a number of her university teammates had joined there after graduating; similarly, Annamarie knew several female Cambridge graduates had joined Thames Tradesmen.

¹⁹³ Phelps, oral history interview.

in those days there used to be two lots of triple regattas over the bank holidays in the summer, [...] you'd, you'd take a tent and go and camp and so it was a real – and the whole club would go and, we had a great time.¹⁹⁴

Accessing club rowing in London led her to a far broader understanding of what rowing, and, distinctly, the experience of club sport, could be.

Miriam emphasised that her university coach, Pete Proudly, had been crucial in facilitating her own transition into the wider sport. She suggested that she had not considered rowing beyond university, and that

it was Pete who said to me, have you thought of continuing your rowing, have you thought of rowing perhaps even for the team? And I was, I'd no idea how to do that, there was nowhere to find out, and he rang up Rosie for me and she suggested I went and tried one of the London clubs.¹⁹⁵

She described him as proactive and, importantly, 'very inquisitive' as a coach, and suggested it was these traits that had accelerated her progress into an international rowing career. Several of her peers had done the same: 'about seven or eight of the people in the boat club at that time that then went on to represent Great Britain'.¹⁹⁶ Pete enabled them to see that such opportunities existed, and that they were of a level to pursue them. He also helped them to forge a route through a system that might otherwise have appeared inaccessible, or prohibitively intimidating. Her narrative offers an important reminder of how

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Luke, oral history interview.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

reliant athlete development was on individuals and on small communities. Actions taken personally by Pete on behalf of his athletes – the connections he was able to forge with Rosie and with clubs that could support them beyond graduation, his commitment to their long-term development – enabled Miriam to make more sound strategic decisions about her sporting ambitions, and how to achieve them. His resourcefulness and coaching talent created a bespoke route for her and her contemporaries to take, rather than the university club offering a pathway at a structural level.

Miriam and Guin were committed to pursuing the sport as far as their talent could take them from an early stage, and Thames Rowing Club in Putney was an important base for them both despite the different routes they took through the sport. The reputation and success of this club were reinforcing one another at this time; as Guin observed that ‘in that era [...] people were gravitating to Thames, um, at the beginning part of their career’.¹⁹⁷ The club was attracting high calibre athletes – and, importantly, athletes who would already have enough knowledge of the sport to be self-sufficient, and connections they could recruit for support. Miriam’s description of how ‘when we got there, there was – no coach, normal story, somebody’s husband wrote the programme, and we had to recruit a coach?’ is indicative of the conditions in a sport dependent on volunteers in clubs, and the continued difficulties faced by female athletes in finding appropriate coaching support.¹⁹⁸ The gravitational pull of clubs known to host talented

¹⁹⁷ Batten, oral history interview. See also Mowbray, *Gold Medal Flapjack*, 118.

¹⁹⁸ Luke, oral history interview.

athletes would be felt by coaches, as well as by aspiring athletes; thus Miriam and her peers

were able to persuade Noel Casey to come and coach us. And he – again, created a programme, so we'd have a programme we were following, er, and competitions that we were going to go to, regular coaching, crew selection, which we obviously hadn't had.¹⁹⁹

As time went on, the club built a strong coaching structure from novices through intermediate and advanced athletes, and when Guin later joined the group, she recalled

a really full-on approach, high level of commitment, high le- lot of weights, lot of training on the water, going out in the mornings and in the evenings, you know. A *significant* commitment.²⁰⁰

This commitment, coupled with strong domestic competition and opportunities to race overseas (in some cases against national teams), made her experiences as a club athlete hugely rewarding; and as Miriam suggested,

it created this pathway at Thames? It wasn't a group sitting at the top, stopping people? So there was this pathway, and Noel he was always growing, he was always picking the big girls and nurturing them and there was this pathway? Of people that were able to *really* move from novice, and within three years could be competing at elite level.²⁰¹

In this environment, athletes could access the expertise and the resources they would need to progress and succeed. Beyond their immediate needs, however,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Batten, oral history interview.

²⁰¹ Luke, oral history interview.

training there '[raised] people's belief and expectation in what they could do'.²⁰² In an aspiring group of athletes, Miriam suggested, 'it's almost like you fed off each other'; her peers 'were talking about what *they* wanted to do [...] – people started to have expectations about they, what they wanted, and they started to set goals about what they wanted to achieve in rowing'.²⁰³ For Guin, the sense of excitement, and scale, was palpable.

It was a really good time to be a, a female club athlete. [...] There was something about the – the atmosphere along the hard? In Putney? You know, there were a lot of very up-and-coming athletes on their way. [...] You know, we were all just without jobs, hanging out on the, hanging out, looking out over the um, you know over the river. And you know, I think being around that, being in *that* environment, was about how do we, we were *fascinated*, *totally* fascinated by the process of rowing, and rowing as a sport.²⁰⁴

On moving away from Thames to pursue postgraduate studies at Loughborough University, Guin 'managed to blag [her] way in' to one of the few clubs catering for women at this level at the time, the Nottinghamshire County Rowing Association (NCRA). Here, again, she was in an environment in which she could thrive: 'it was exciting, it was vibrant [...] it was basically a club for internationals

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Batten, oral history interview. 'The hard' can refer to any solid landing stage for rowing; here Guin refers to a particular stretch of Putney Embankment with a number of clubhouses in close proximity.

or people that were aspiring to be internationals'.²⁰⁵ Consequently, even for talented athletes,

it was very hard to get into. Um, Sean [Bowden] said you can come until Christmas and then if you're not very good we'll shove you out [...] I would get five minutes of coaching at the end of Sunday, second session on a Sunday.²⁰⁶

The NCRA was an important site of high performance rowing, especially for lightweight athletes, but it did not offer a pathway so much as a destination. Guin was unconcerned by the lack of coaching attention she could expect, or the need to source a boat to train in for herself ('I think we managed to find a – an insurance write-off in the back of the boat club at Thames').²⁰⁷ Training in that environment presented exciting opportunities to learn and develop. She would also, later, build a coaching relationship with Rosie, who was working at the same location. Her ability and motivation enabled her to capitalise on the intermittent coaching input she received. Rosie described her as 'a real sponge, she just soaked up – stuff', and 'completely, um, organised and dedicated to doing the training' – characteristics that enabled Rosie to offer meaningful coaching support, without '[having] to be there all the time'.²⁰⁸ Guin was an exceptional athlete, excelling as a junior in other sports and on the ergometer once she began to row, but her physiological advantages were only one factor in her progress. Her connections, motivation, and sense of agency were equally fundamental.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

With greater numbers of female athletes across the country, and almost all clubs being mixed, there were more opportunities for women to row competitively at a domestic level. Yet the transition into international rowing remained difficult. The distance between the majority of clubs, the small number of high-performing clubs like Thames or the NCRA, and the national team was becoming increasingly difficult to cross. At Henley Women's Regatta in 1995, Miriam, by then a decorated international, experienced the consequence of this growing distance herself:

there was one crew that refused to row, race us, and didn't actually turn up on the start to race us. They said, it's not fair, why do we have to race the national team, they shouldn't be entering here. [...] When we had to race the national team we were like [rubs hands together gleefully] great, let's see if we can beat 'em! Whereas this lot just gave up and didn't turn up.²⁰⁹

Her disappointment in this response stemmed from a sense that club athletes had lost their appetite for competition, their grit. Yet Annamarie's reflection that, in her time as an athlete 'we were much closer [...] nowadays, the dif- the distance between – er – a, a national team crew and – a club crew is just too great to make it, you know, a feasible race' allows for a slightly different interpretation: that competitive women's racing was approaching a tipping point.

Narrators that had been actively involved with the ARA and its development models emphasised that the sport needed specific initiatives and structures to find and develop the most talented athletes. Rosie in particular identified flaws

²⁰⁹ Luke, oral history interview.

with the 'pyramid model' of the sport, whereby a broader participation base is understood to push more talent to the top levels of the sport. While, undoubtedly, the scale of women's rowing in Britain was creating a more stimulating and competitive environment for club athletes, she argued, it could not of itself generate international champions.

You need to have a critical mass of people, um because – only a few of those will then be able to go on to the next level, [...] I would see it more like a church steeple. [...] It's not a pyramid as such because you're gonna have far more people who have just not got the capacity and never will have. To make it to that higher level. So you've gotta try and find those people that can make it to that higher level and then move them up as high as you can.²¹⁰

This attitude would increasingly lead the sport to use talent identification and development programmes: as Tanner argued, 'there's no point in sitting back and relying on our schools and unis and clubs to just provide the, the talent'.²¹¹

Making space for women's rowing

Whether through schools, universities or mainstream clubs, the women in this cohort entered the sport in mixed environments that had, previously, been male-only. The educational and sporting institutions that supported them had been founded by men, for men. Debbie and Frances, both born in 1980, experienced

²¹⁰ Mayglothling, oral history interview.

²¹¹ Tanner, oral history interview. There was precedent for recruiting female athletes on the basis of their height and strength from the beginnings of the national squad in 1972, but the methods used, and the support provided, became markedly more consistent and sophisticated in the post-Lottery era, first as 'World Class Start', and, subsequently, 'Start'.

the sexual divide as minimal, largely having enjoyed access to sporting opportunities and facilities without a strong sense of unequal provision. Yet Frances suggested that attending a heavily male-dominated prep school was 'so formative for me, because I've – until I finished rowing [...] I just never really perceived myself as a *woman*', and felt that 'being around boys and men, I feel very natural in that environment, and I think that helps [in high performance sporting environments]'.²¹² In her subsequent school, despite observing substantial differences between how boys and girls socialised, she found that her rowing friends, male and female, shared a mutual understanding and respect that did not depend on their sex. In sport, she felt she stood on more gender-neutral ground.

Underlying anxieties around women seeking superiority over men rather than equality, and 'encroaching, en masse, on formerly male-dominated space',²¹³ retained currency at this time. While many men viewed the inclusion of women in positive terms, the notion of 'inclusion' itself reiterates rather than challenges existing power structures: it constructs female participation in the sport as a privilege extended conditionally by men, rather than existing as of right. While the introduction to a special edition of the ARA's *Regatta* magazine – *The Women's Regatta*, published in 1993 – argued that 'by and large, women have achieved their acceptance as competitors and equal club partners largely by their own efforts', they had nonetheless depended on men and male institutions for acceptance.²¹⁴ Such acceptance was not universal; indeed, the claim that 'the

²¹² Houghton, oral history interview.

²¹³ Turner, *A Classless Society*, 55.

²¹⁴ 'Rowing, a Women's Sport', *Regatta* no. 59 June 1993, 3.

men-only ramparts have been breached almost everywhere' provoked one disgruntled reader to complain

Sir (or should it now be Madam) – It really is time for the Women to have their own magazine I suppose, but why oh why have you handed over this title to them? Call me old fashioned and a chauvinist to boot if you please, but let them publish their own and give us back the *Regatta!*²¹⁵

Annamarie, whose college at Cambridge University was only in its third year of accepting female students when she started her degree, could observe such a transition at close quarters. Yet she suggested that from the outset, the boat club had embraced the women's sport, and that even women who had joined the college prior to her

said in their first year they rocked up, and they went down to the boat club, and there was already a women's changing room, you know, there were women's boats, there were women's blades. So they didn't have to go in and – sort of fight their way to say oh we want to be part of this, there was, there was a big gap you know, saying – come on in, you're welcome.²¹⁶

Annamarie's account of her experience is in marked contrast to Wigglesworth's argument that 'the first women members of formerly male-only clubs were hardly made welcome'.²¹⁷ In this unusually affluent environment, conservative anxieties around gender, or the cost – financial or cultural – to the men's sport of supporting

²¹⁵ H. Jampton, 'Cox and Box', *Regatta* no. 61, August/September 1993, 19.

²¹⁶ Phelps, oral history interview.

²¹⁷ Wigglesworth, *The Social History of English Rowing*, 172–3.

the women's, appear to have been addressed successfully.²¹⁸ Her later reflection that 'we probably *didn't* have the same level of equipment and whatever else but we weren't treated any differently [...] we felt as important as the men, and we had as good coaches, we had our own boats' is telling: her needs being met, she did not engage in negative comparisons between the provision for men and women.²¹⁹

Miriam and Guin's accounts of the relative standing of men and women at Southampton University Boat Club were, similarly, positive; Miriam's initial assessment was that 'it wasn't a men and a women's boat club, it was a boat club'.²²⁰ On further reflection, however, she suggested that there were limits to this egalitarian culture.

I would say the, the women were equally perceived by the men until it came to shortage of boats. And then the men got priority, which we didn't like.²²¹

For Guin, who attended Southampton for a period but completed her undergraduate studies in Leeds, there was a stark contrast between the club cultures.²²² At Leeds, she suggested,

we really struggled, unlike Southampton where there was a real respect between the men and the women, [...] the men had preference

²¹⁸ The boat club that welcomed Annamarie was attached to St. John's College, one of the wealthiest of the Cambridge colleges; an example used by Wigglesworth, Bedford Star Rowing Club, is unlikely to have enjoyed the same degree of resource.

²¹⁹ Phelps, oral history interview.

²²⁰ Luke, oral history interview.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Guin was a student at Leeds Polytechnic (Carnegie), but rowed with the Leeds University Boat Club.

on all the gym, on all the timing, and we were expected to slide in behind them. And we could tag on, if we wanted to?²²³

She objected to a hierarchy of sporting merit that did not judge women fairly.

We were the women's first eight, we had to share our boat with the men's novices. We had two junior internationals in our eight, ok? [...] And there was a clash, because the York Head was the same weekend as the Women's Eights Head of the River Race, the men's novices took priority, over the women's eights.²²⁴

For the female athletes and the club alike, the relative importance of these two crews, and their competitive targets, was clear.

Guin was a highly resourceful athlete and leader, able to draw on a range of contacts and skills, including studies in human movement science, to overcome any obstacles placed in front of her and her team.²²⁵ With no recourse within her club to negotiate equipment for WEHoRR, for example, 'the assumption was that we wouldn't be able to go', an assumption she rejected:

I picked up the phone to Pauline Rayner [at Thames RC] and I said Pauline, can you find us a boat. And she, and we borrowed a boat, I think it was one of the men's boats, cos Thames only had two women's boats at the time [laughs] and they were being used.²²⁶

Aside from borrowing boats, in the gym,

²²³ Batten, oral history interview.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

I realised that what the men were doing just wasn't enough? And so I persuaded them that we could use the same gym space as them but we would do a different type of circuit. [...] So I started up the women's circuit in the same gym, at the same time, um, and after about two weeks all the men came across and started doing our circuit. So it was – it was a real interesting time.²²⁷

She met the lack of flexibility she encountered on the men's team with proactive agility, working around the constraints they imposed. The irony that, even within such constraints, she was able to formulate and deliver a better programme than her male peers was not lost on her.

The emphasis Guin placed on sporting standards addresses one of the key challenges faced by women in mixed rowing clubs: namely, how to assess and assert the value of their achievements and ambitions relative to those of men. A satirical cartoon feature, published in *Regatta* in 1994 engaged explicitly with this issue. Framed with the observation that 'ladies [sic] rowing is what it's all about. So how do you become one?', it offered extensive physical prescriptions (supplemented with a silhouette image of a woman in a swimsuit), and quipped that aspiring oarswomen should

expect to row the lightest and the best boats, no matter what standard you row. It is doubtful whether there is a club captain or coach that would dare argue with you.²²⁸

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ C. Pullan, 'The Alternative Rower: Ladies Rowing', *Regatta* no. 69, March 1994, 27. 'You should be slim, 5ft 8ish and of course, look stunning in one piece lycra (you're about the only rower it was designed to fit), but have about size 11 feet, since that is the only size shoes you will ever find in your club's boats'.

Embedded in the satire was a kernel of accepted wisdom: that the standard of women's rowing was not comparable with the men's, and the needs of female athletes should be seen as less worthwhile than those of male athletes – however loudly they might argue to the contrary.

Penny had argued that competing in the same head races as men, and delivering faster performances than a substantial proportion of male competitors, had been an important legitimating strategy for women's rowing in the 1970s. It was a metric biased in men's favour, but reflected her conviction that absolute speed offered the only incontrovertible evidence that female athletes were capable and deserving of serious competition. Yet the debates that Guin and some of her peers were engaged in during the 1990s were of a different order. They challenged the anti-feminist belief that performances in women's rowing – whether at events like WEHoRR, or achieving international caps – were not of comparable significance to those in the men's sport.²²⁹ Internationally, access to the Olympic Games and World Championships meant women had the opportunity to earn the same titles as men, even if these titles were not accorded equal cultural value. Domestically, this was not the case. The segregation of high-profile events like WEHoRR and HoRR, or Henley Women's Regatta and Henley Royal Regatta, would perpetuate sexual inequalities in terms of club priorities. These events were understood differently by clubs. They exerted tangible influence on female access to resources such as equipment, facilities and coaching.

²²⁹ Annmarie's commentary on the subordinate position of lightweight women is an important reminder of how the logic of absolute speed, power or size would continue to influence sporting practice and culture.

Guin and other narrators thus highlighted a direct and problematic correlation between historic male benchmarks and priorities and the allocation of resources, and the impact of such correlation on female opportunity. Their narratives also showed that the level of financial and cultural security felt by men in a particular environment was a key determinant of their willingness to pursue or support an equality agenda. This is a stark illustration of why addressing the gender balance in leadership positions, in sport and elsewhere, remains an urgent imperative. In systems overseen by men, and predicated on historic, male priorities, women cannot meaningfully seek, or achieve, equality – only privileges conditionally extended by men. As Valerie Amos has argued,

our legislation is framed so that it applies equally to women and men.

And that's fine as a principle but women and men don't start from the same place and all the data demonstrates that there is a differential impact on women of a whole range of social and economic policies [...] if you have legislation that starts off from a standpoint of equal treatment it is not going to be able to address structural inequality.²³⁰

She articulates a central paradox in the quest for equality: that, starting from a position of inequality, equal action may prove insufficient.²³¹

²³⁰ V. Amos, cited in S. Innes, *Making It Work: Women, Change and Challenge in the 1990s* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995), 330.

²³¹ Leberman and Burton address this paradox with a clear distinction between equality and equity, the latter of which argues for fundamental recalibration rather than the integration of women into existing structures. S. Leberman and L.J. Burton, 'Why This Book?: Framing the Conversation About Women in Sport Leadership', in L.J. Burton and S. Leberman, S. eds., *Women in Sport Leadership: Research and Practice for Change* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 3–5.

A seat at the table: female leadership and sports administration

Guin and Annamarie in particular advocated and agitated for women, mindful of the structural inequalities embedded in rowing, as in society. Where they perceived that provision was not equally available for women, they sought to redress the balance. Their approaches, however, were fundamentally different. As an athlete until 2000, Guin tended towards the pragmatic and immediate. She took political action outside of the administrative structures of the sport. By contrast, Annamarie entered these structures, seeking to generate change from within. Such political agitation by and for women in rowing was not a new phenomenon, and there were some reasons for optimism. From the amalgamation of the Women's Amateur Rowing Association (WARA) and the ARA in 1963, the administration of the sport had slowly, imperfectly, moved towards a more holistic structure and outlook. Penny Chuter and Di Ellis had carved precedents for women in its most senior coaching and administrative roles, while others had led on the creation and development of major rowing events. Henley Women's Regatta, first held in 1988, was driven by a female committee, as was the Women's Eights Head of the River Race (WEHoRR), an event which had taken place since 1930 and by the 1990s involved more than 1,500 athletes each year. The equivalent race for men – the Head of the River Race (HoRR), was also overseen by a woman, Pauline Churcher, for almost thirty years.²³² In 1998, the ARA was 'the first national governing body to attend a Sports Council equity workshop and participate in follow-up meetings'.²³³

²³² Churcher stepped down from this role following the 1997 race after twenty-five years. C. Dodd, 'Head Strong', *Regatta* no. 96, March 1997 offers an overview of the history of the race, and Churcher's contribution to it.

²³³ A. Phelps, 'Equity for Women Gets a Good Start', *Regatta* no. 109, June 1998, 21.

Yet women were, and remain, vastly under-represented in sports administration and leadership.²³⁴ In rowing, the retrospective assessment that ‘when elected chairman of the ARA in 1989, Mrs Ellis seemed an unlikely candidate for such a post’ is reasonable in the context of British sporting administration at the time.²³⁵ She was, however, well-qualified: she had international credentials as an athlete, having rowed for Great Britain in 1966, and as the British Team Manager in 1988, as well as being an accomplished cox, qualified umpire, and former Chairman of the WRC. She herself insisted on the title of Chairman, and ‘particularly disliked being referred to as ‘Chairwoman’: “I don’t support the gospel according to feminism,” she says. “But I won’t be called a chair because I’m not here to be sat on.”²³⁶

Apart from her direct influence on the direction and delivery of the sport, in this senior – though, still voluntary – position, Ellis was able to facilitate the entry of other talented women into positions of responsibility.²³⁷ Annamarie clearly

²³⁴ See Women in Sport, ‘Beyond 30%: Female Leadership in Sport’, 2017, for a thorough assessment of the state of play as at 2016, and a manifesto for future action (available at: <https://www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Women-in-Sport-Beyond-3025-1-1.pdf>, last accessed January 2, 2020.) For a still timely consideration of women in leadership roles in sport, see S. Shaw and T. Slack, “‘It’s Been Like That for Donkey’s Years’: The Construction of Gender Relations and the Cultures of Sports Organizations’, *Sport in Society* 5, no. 1 (2002): 86–106.

²³⁵ Dodd, ‘The Future and Di’, 5–6.

²³⁶ ‘Di Ellis; Stickler for Timekeeping who was Head of British Rowing for 25 Years, Culminating in the Triumph at the London Olympics’, *The Times*, June 1, 2017, 45; Dodd, ‘The Future and Di’, 5–6.

²³⁷ ‘By 1996, it was reported that ‘such is her workload and enthusiasm that she now works only three days a week [...] so that she can fit in her unpaid work for rowing’. Ibid, 6. The observation that ‘this would not have been possible without the support of her husband John, a former rower and retired banker’ notes her conformity to some more traditional gender roles, despite her unusual position in sports administration; it also offers an indication of the relative privilege required to pursue such a senior role.

identified Ellis's influence on her own pathway through sporting administration and leadership. In 1994, she was 'asked by Di – Ellis – if I would be the British Rowing rep on the Athlete Commission at the British Olympic Association', despite being 'probably the only non-Olympian on, on the BOA Athletes' Commission at the time', and in 1996, she was again 'asked' to chair the WRC.²³⁸

I immediately said no, of course I couldn't possibly do that [laughing], I couldn't – didn't know how to chair anything! And er, but she said well why don't you give it a go. [...] I agreed that I would go to a meeting and sit through it and make a decision. And I rocked up at this meeting and [...] Di Graham said, so I'm delighted to announce to everybody that Annamarie is going to take over, and in fact – I don't see any point in me hanging around any longer so here you are! And she handed me her file. There and then. And she walked out the door!²³⁹

She recalled her later decision to stand for election as Deputy Chairman of the ARA in 2002 was similarly prompted by Ellis, although her specific reservations about the role are telling:

I remember going – ooh, crikey, um – Deputy Chairman was a role that you know, old men did. [Laughs] Because, they, all the men that did that sort of role were *much* older than me. Um, and much more, sort of, I don't know, just different.²⁴⁰

Even with her experience in different areas of sport administration, her immediate response was that she was not the right person for 'that sort of role'. The anecdote illustrates the power of precedent, both in the form of a visible, relatable

²³⁸ Phelps, oral history interview.

²³⁹ Ibid. Di Graham was then WRC Chair.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

predecessor, and of the opportunities that a gendered organisational structure could offer. A separate administration for women's rowing was understood to be a limitation for the sport going forward, but it had served an important purpose in developing some women's ability and confidence to govern and lead the sport.

The history of rowing administration with regard to women is unusual in comparison with other British sports. The WARA, formed in 1923 and independent of the ARA until the amalgamation of the two in 1963, set a precedent for women administering the women's sport: all committee members, vice presidents and presidents were women, and indeed, after amalgamation, a separate council and, later, commission of women continued to represent the women's sport.²⁴¹ By the time Annamarie was involved with the WRC, some thirty-five years after its formation, it was clear to her that it was becoming anachronistic; she felt that 'unlike other ARA commissions, its ultimate aim should be to work towards its demise'.²⁴² Yet she perceived a continued need for dedicated female representation, borne out of fundamental misunderstandings around sexual equality between men and women. At the time, she reported regularly being asked 'why should the women have [sic] their own commission when the men don't have one [...] perhaps not surprisingly by men who may not see the inequalities inherent in a system set up by men for men'.²⁴³

²⁴¹ Writing in 1998, Annamarie described this as a body 'whose aims and objectives share those of the sport as a whole but with a specific remit to women'. A. Phelps, 'Equity For Women Gets a Good Start', *Regatta* no. 109, June 1998, 21. For further analysis of the WARA, including details of the committee, see L. Taylor, 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963: a Prosopographical Approach', *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (2018): 307–30.

²⁴² Phelps, 'Equity For Women Gets a Good Start'.

²⁴³ A. Stapleton, 'Power, Resource and Responsibility', *Regatta* no. 99, June 1997, 15–6.

Annamarie noted that there had been ‘some amazing people’ on the WRC ‘who were still sitting round and trying to help and support and influence’, positioning them firmly in ‘that whole generation of women [...] of the seventies’ that had engaged more overtly with feminist discourse and feminist agendas.²⁴⁴ By contrast, with

the women of the eighties – there was a big gap. There was no, there was very few women from the eighties, who were involved, the sort of Astrid Aylings, and the, the Beryl Crockfords and – we kind of knew of them and they were out doing different things and coaching but – somehow we missed that generation.²⁴⁵

She suggested that, having ‘been part of that first real sort of – militant’s a bit strong word but sort of bar – bra-burning kind of era of women’s rights in sport [...] I guess – the women of the eighties kind of had moved on from that’.²⁴⁶ She understood that some of the meanings attached to feminism had become problematic for women of this generation, but was, on balance, critical of their failure to continue ‘banging the table’, and their acceptance of unequal provision.

There wasn’t much conviction to – equality, most women in the clubs actually were very happy to have hand-me-down boats that were several sizes too big for them, er, and they were very happy that they were now included in most clubs. [...] there wasn’t a fight, certainly

²⁴⁴ Phelps, oral history interview.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

within rowing, for equality. Most women felt that they were happy with where they'd got to.²⁴⁷

Annamarie's surprise, and disappointment, that women were willing to accept this lot was clear. She suggested that even though

most women rowing in clubs, didn't have coaches, and they didn't have proper equipment, and they – you know, they were always sort of the lowest of the low [...] there wasn't, there wasn't – just wasn't interest in changing it. Really.²⁴⁸

She was mindful of the weight of responsibility attached to the pursuit of equality, and suggested that this needed to be shared by more of the women's rowing community. The visibility of female figures in the leadership of the sport did not, she argued, equate to success in terms of an equality agenda: writing publicly in 1997, she was explicit that 'the fact that the ARA's national manager and the chairman of its executive are female does not fairly reflect the involvement of women throughout the ARA'.²⁴⁹ Yet she had 'found it very difficult to raise enthusiasm amongst women to be proactively involved' at a more local level.²⁵⁰ This difficulty, she argued, had – and should have – negative consequences for the women's sport: 'women's rowing cannot expect a fair share of resource and power until it is prepared to take its fair share of responsibility'.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Stapleton, 'Power, Resource and Responsibility', 17.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, 16.

²⁵¹ Ibid, 17.

The decision to dissolve the WRC around 2003, taken discreetly between Di Ellis, Annamarie and the WRC itself, was predicated on the question of need, and of fitness for purpose: ‘was – was it really helping to – integrate women into rowing and rowing clubs, or was it ending up more divisive?’²⁵² Annamarie suggested that ‘women in rowing didn’t want to be separate any more’, and, in addition to the apathy she had observed among women in rowing, felt that

actually in order to improve it we needed to change the way we approached women’s rowing, and we needed to integrate, properly. [...] Getting rid of the Women’s Rowing Commission was a point of saying look guys, we’re here now, we’re here to stay and you can’t keep shelving women’s rowing you know, issues in the Women’s Rowing Commission. Um, because actually – we all need to deal with this.²⁵³

Most telling, perhaps, was the underlying principle: ‘to try and make sure that everyone had ownership of equality’.²⁵⁴

The cohort of narrators for this period was skewed towards administrators: Annamarie, Guin and Miriam all assumed (and maintain) high profile roles in rowing following their athletic careers, and Annamarie and Guin continue to work professionally in sport governance. In their public communications during the 1990s, and reflecting back in oral history, they all proved exceptions to Annamarie’s observation that political impetus towards sexual equality was

²⁵² Phelps, oral history interview. The 2004 *Almanack*, pertaining to 2003, is the last to record details of a Women’s Commission.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

lacking among female athletes. The sport may have lacked a groundswell of feminist activism, but they were part of a small number of women that made important contributions to the sport by assuming leadership roles. Regardless of their qualifications and motivations, in the historically conservative context of the ARA, their achievements are in some respects surprising. Yet, unlike other sports with weighty amateur legacies, rowing has remained heavily dependent on public funding. It continues to struggle to attract private sponsorship or lucrative media deals. It was, primarily, extensive public funding secured for high performance rowing through the Lottery that led the sport to address sexual inequality between athletes. The lack of private investment or commercial sponsorship, coupled with extensive public provision, appears to have facilitated good organisational practice. By way of contrast, in football – the most extreme example of a historically amateur sport that is now not only professionalised but highly commercialised – the sexual inequalities perpetuated on the pitch and in the boardroom remain prominent, and hotly contested.²⁵⁵

Conclusion

During the 1990s, the absolute number of athletes involved in international rowing increased significantly, as did the range of geographical and social backgrounds they represented. The athletes in this cohort represent only a small proportion of the total number of athletes involved, and the analysis presented here makes no claim to offer a comprehensive view of the sport or one, master narrative. Indeed, this research has consistently sought to highlight how individual and

²⁵⁵ See for example FIFA, 'Women's Football Survey, 2014 (available at: <https://resources.fifa.com/image/upload/fifa-women-s-football-survey-2522649.pdf?cloudid=emtqxvp0ibnebltvi3b>; last accessed January 16, 2020.)

individualised the experience of accessing and participating in the international sport has been. Within a sporting environment that had become far more centralised, and far more structures, their stories illustrate how contingent their achievements and disappointments had been on individual choices, some of which they could influence or control, and others which were out of reach.

Narrators' silence around the need to address fundamental social permissions around gender and sport in this period is indicative. Although some felt a strong political impulse to seek authentic, structural equality, more women were able to move through the decade unencumbered by the baggage of their sex than previously. Sometimes by accident, sometimes by design, athletes in this cohort positioned themselves in sporting communities that inspired them, communities with drive, energy and with real ambition. All identified particular individuals that facilitated their transition into the highest level of the sport; an aspiring community could function as a catalyst or as support, but they remained reliant upon the support, guidance and advocacy of others, not only to achieve, but to find fulfilment in their achievements.

Conclusion

The preceding chapters map one trajectory through fifty-five years of sporting and social change for women, focused on the British rowing community. Administrative and structural developments – notably, the introduction of women’s events at the European and World Championships and the Olympic Games, the establishment of a women’s national squad and the advent of National Lottery funding – shape and punctuate the narrative. Yet lived experience of international competition lies at its heart. Through oral history, narrators granted access to this experience in ways that the written word of the archive could not. From stale sandwiches and hasty needlework to the literal and figurative view over Putney Embankment, their reflections on practical and logistical aspects of the sport were inseparable from the emotional. What public report could do justice to the private joy of a medal tucked into a tee shirt?

Narrators highlighted that the evolution of the sport, and the ways it reflected broader processes of social and cultural change, had immediate, human consequences. Their stories are a reminder that individuals would experience and, distinctly, understand such consequences differently. What some identified as unwelcome controls and limits on the sport came to represent athletic opportunity to others. As such, they problematise linear narratives of progress, challenging the easy correlation of extensive funding and provision opportunity with an inherent sporting ‘good’. Robust, professional structures that could enable athletes to achieve might also constrain them in important ways. Narrators had all been able to identify spaces in and around the sport that enabled them to seek new experiences, and to engage emotionally with their fellow athletes in

meaningful ways. Yet they all, also, feared that such spaces were diminishing. The experiences of current athletes themselves are beyond the scope of this research, but narrators' fears about the elision of individual choice, responsibility and satisfaction are telling. They represent a conviction that sport should carry internal, emotional meaning for the individual, beyond any external indicators of success.

'The sport's grown up, the sport's moved on'

Following the British team's performance at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, Rosie observed a new readiness for change in rowing.

The big change – there was people recognising that other countries were becoming much more professional in their approach than we were. And therefore, I don't think there was so many barriers to us changing. I'm sure there were a few people who felt that it was a sort of bit of a loss of something. Um, but I, I think now its accepted that you actually have to go down that route.¹

She suggested there was a shared understanding that to professionalise the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) was to modernise and to stay competitive, rather than to reject its history and the legacy of its amateur ideals. The rebranding of the organisation as British Rowing in 2009 was a clear outward signal of long-term change and recalibration, both internally and in British sport

¹ R. Mayglothling, oral history interview by the author, June 8, 2018, Henley-on-Thames, UK. Notes in possession of the author. In this chapter, all quotes are taken from this interview; a separate interview with this narrator was conducted on January 18, 2018 in Bedford, UK.

as a whole.² It could no longer be assumed that the amateur label would be understood a mark of distinction. In the vernacular, amateurism had come to signify a lack of seriousness or of skill in sport, as in other pursuits, rather than the loftier ideals of the nineteenth-century gentleman. Even if understood as such, these lofty ideals and their historic connotations of segregation and prejudice had become increasingly difficult to defend.

Yet narrators' shared scepticism about contemporary international rowing was founded on some of the traditional tenets of amateur sport: enjoyment, sociability and personal development. Although Jean, who rowed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, admired the clarity of purpose and consistency of provision enjoyed by athletes rowing now – 'they know what they've got to do [...] and they've got everything on their side haven't they, science, and everything' – she described the pursuit of sport under these conditions as 'a bit mindless'.³

I don't know if I can see that lot joking about. Can you? [...] The coaches don't allow that, that's the impression I get. I think the enjoyment has been taken, sucked out of it. And that's the price you pay. For success, unfortunately.⁴

Lin, whose athletic career overlapped with Jean's, questioned the extent to which individuality might be eroded within the more modern system. She suggested that

² Rowing was not alone in removing the term 'amateur' from the name of its governing body in more recent years. The Amateur Boxing Association of England for example, rebranded as England Boxing in 2013, and the Amateur Swimming Association as 'Swim England' in 2017. The Amateur Athletic Association retains its original nomenclature, but is quite distinct from UK Athletics, which oversees the national team.

³ J. Genchi, oral history interview by the author, September 28, 2018, Abingdon, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁴ Ibid.

it 'would knock the hell out of my personality', and expressed doubts about 'how tenacious they [current squad athletes] would be, or what they would think up or whatever'.⁵ Guin, closer to the current system than either Jean or Lin, problematised ideas around the individual's ownership of her athletic career in this environment:

I would love to be a fly on the wall and talk to the girls in the sys- in the – because – they, we – in many ways, I feel we *created* the system. Whereas now the guys say they're *part* of the system. And I wonder what that feels like, as an athlete.⁶

She framed the increasingly professionalised approach to high performance rowing in terms of sporting maturity, but felt that individual motivation had been increasingly eclipsed by institutional ambition.

The sport's grown up, the sport's moved on, it's really serious now. I mean it was serious, but it was serious in a personal way, whereas now it's serious in a structured and system way. [...] You're not racing just for yourself now. Um, I think the era when we did what we did, [...] it was for us. And I, I think that – the system is really big now.⁷

⁵ L. Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017, near Stourhead, UK, by the author. Notes in possession of the author. A series of interviews with Lin Clark were conducted on November 11, 12 and 13, 2017 near Stourhead; the specific date for each is cited as required in this chapter.

⁶ G. Batten, oral history interview by the author, August 1, 2017, Henley-on-Thames, UK. Notes in possession of the author. This interview was conducted jointly with Miriam Luke.

⁷ Batten, oral history interview.

‘I was all about my own excellence’: individual success and mutual support

For Debbie, entering the international sport after the introduction of Lottery funding, it was simple: undistracted by financial need, individually or institutionally, ‘the environment around me has been set up so that I can just turn up and train hard’.⁸ She challenged the idea that training within this system was, necessarily, impersonal: her narrative consistently returned to individuals and communities that had supported, encouraged and inspired her.

I just really got, got so much support really when I first started. And encouragement, it wasn’t like, oh you have to do this, or there’s this expectation on you, it was just – well, you’re doing these things really well, let’s see if we can work on these other things. [...] It created that environment, environment for me to trust people as well? To be trusting, and just to train hard.⁹

She was, however, mindful of the need to invest, actively, in building and maintaining this kind of an environment. Later in her career, she recalled athletes joining the squad and ‘saying wow, ok, if I can get in a boat, we’re gonna medal, because that’s what we do here [laughs]’.¹⁰ The benefits of entering a such a successful system were clear – it ‘pulls you into that confidence and into that environment – but, what we had as a t- as a group was we had, we had to work out how to step up to that’.¹¹ She felt that

without having had the experience of having to learn how to work in a team, having to – take ownership and responsibility themselves to

⁸ Flood, oral history interview.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

make that happen [...] I think there'll be a period of time now, where they'll have to re-learn that almost? Because you know, all the oldies have gone [laughs].¹²

Narrators competing in earlier periods, for whom training was less centralised, often alluded to the lack of collective knowledge among athletes and teams, and many expressed regret that they had not been able to learn from one another more effectively. Debbie, by contrast, was keen to emphasise that, in a highly centralised system, this risk remained – albeit in a different form. With the logistics of training and competition drilled so carefully, athletes might not realise how much they could still contribute to one another. It was an astute observation, centring individual experience and learning even as the system was becoming 'really big', and an observation largely absent from accounts addressing the development and implementation of these systems. Community, mutual support and emotional engagement, she argued, were quite distinct from sharing facilities and pursuing an intensive training programme, but no less important. She recognised the need for athletes themselves to invest in their community rather than be satisfied with passively accepting formalised provision. Only in emotionally investing in each other, she argued, could they receive the emotional dividends the sport could bring.

Debbie was unique among narrators in expressing trust in the high performance rowing system. Such trust went beyond immediate questions of coaching, training and selection. She had faith that her journey through the sport had shape and

¹² Ibid.

purpose, and did not perceive any conflict between her personal ambitions as an athlete and the ambition she had for the team: they were two sides of the same coin. For Lin, some twenty years earlier, trust in the system, or indeed in the majority of her peers, was a luxury she felt unable to afford.

Once I joined rowing, I was about my own personal excellence and winning. And I wasn't into – and I'm ashamed to say this – I wasn't into the broader picture. [...] Because on a personal level, if doors closed for me, I found a way of opening them.¹³

While Debbie saw the value of individual athletes consistently investing in the progress of the squad as a whole, for Lin, this had only felt possible in the security of a selected crew. Once in that position, however, she described the pleasure and satisfaction she derived from the freedom to

look after each other's bodies, mentally, physically, spiritually. [...] That – that was fantastic, I loved it. It really played into my strengths where, I really committed to whoever I was rowing with a hundred and ten per cent, the rest of the world could go to hell, but we were going to stay cohesive as a unit.¹⁴

Only in retrospect had she realised 'how singular I was':

I've just rushed through fifteen years of rowing in my mind, and suddenly stepped back and looked and thought, there was other people out there. And it never occurred to me.¹⁵

¹³ Clark, oral history interview, November 13, 2017.

¹⁴ Ibid, November 12, 2017.

¹⁵ Ibid, November 11, 2017.

Lin's singular focus runs counter to historical narratives that emphasise the desirability of sisterhood among women, and the perceived need for women to support and advance one another as they, themselves, advance.¹⁶ Her narrative acts as an important reminder that, historically, sporting success might be the product not only of athletic talent and hard graft, but also of political nous and uncompromising, relentless ambition – for exceptional women, as well as exceptional men.¹⁷ She and Debbie both, differently, challenged the easy correlation of more professional, centralised sporting systems with cold self-interest. The shape assumed by sport at a particular time, from informal networks to structured systems, would predispose some individuals within it towards engagement and success, while limiting others. Such systems would not, however, define them as individuals.

'A time where my talents could out'

Each generation of athletes engaged in rowing under materially and ideologically different conditions. Finding ways to align their circumstances, outlooks and personalities with the demands and rewards of the sport was fundamental to their enjoyment and their success. This was not limited to athletes: while Tanner had been involved in high performance rowing as a coach and Team Manager over a

¹⁶ See S. Leberman and L.J. Burton, 'Why This Book?: Framing the Conversation About Women in Sport Leadership', in L.J. Burton and S. Leberman, S. eds. *Women in Sport Leadership: Research and Practice for Change* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 9–10.

¹⁷ See L. Abrams, 'Heroes of Their Own Life Stories: Narrating the Female Self in the Feminist Age', *Cultural and Social History* 16, no. 2 (2019): 1–20. On social role theory and role congruity, see A.H. Eagly, *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social-Role Interpretation* (Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1987); 'Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders', *Psychological Review* 109, no. 3 (2002): 573–98. The leadership behaviours analysed here resonate with Lin's narrative.

number of years, he was explicit that he had timed his entry into the sharp end of the sport – giving direction and taking responsibility for the team’s performance – to coincide with Lottery funding. Without such material support, he viewed the implementation of a structure and a process for generating success as impossible; he would compromise on his role in the sport before he would compromise on his vision. He was rewarded for his patience. With the advent of this funding, suddenly, his view of the sport aligned with conditions and opportunities in the British sporting landscape. His narrative is instructive in highlighting that sporting administrations, like teams, were comprised of individuals. Administrators, like athletes, brought personal skills and characteristics to the delivery of the sport; the priorities they voiced and pursued lay at the intersection of organisational policy and personal opinion.¹⁸

A sense of alignment between personal traits or ambitions and the sporting landscape was a consistent discursive thread that connected narrators over time. ‘I was the best person to do that job at that time’, Lin claimed; ‘I’m just glad that in a way I was born in a time where my talents could out’.¹⁹ Despite material limitations, most athletes, like Lin, reflected on what had been available to them with a sense of gratitude. They acknowledged the ways in which their opportunities, however imperfect, depended on women before them: as Guin suggested, with characteristic pragmatism, ‘you just build on the shoulders of the

¹⁸ See L. Taylor, ‘Mrs K.L. Summerton: The Forgotten Founder of the Women’s Amateur Rowing Association?’ in N. Piercey and S.J. Oldfield eds., *Sporting Cultures: Global Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019), 166–80, and ‘The Women’s Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963: A Prosopographical Approach’, *Sport in History* 38, no. 3 (2018): 307–30.

¹⁹ Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

poor bastards that are below you'.²⁰ Frances, meanwhile, recognised that the women's sport had also benefitted from the legacy of male administrative structures and profile through historic Olympic performances: 'the reason we have funding is so much based on the success of men before us'.²¹

Guin noted greater access to leadership roles in the sport an important corollary of the changes she and her peers had experienced as athletes.

I'm a Steward now, and I'm thinking – god, think of all the administrators, so you know, the previous chairs of Women's Henley, all the people, all the athletes like Beryl or Lin, or – you know – they never got an opportunity to be a Steward, they never got recognised. [...] I do feel, you know, that, perhaps we've got it much better than they had twenty years ago? Um, and I feel that, you know, I feel sad that probably they put in just as much hard work, but you know.²²

Annamarie similarly viewed her election as a Steward as being of a different order to her other administrative roles. In contrast to assuming the Chair of British Rowing – a role for which she had acquired substantial, relevant experience, with the support and guidance of peers and mentors – it was a privilege extended conditionally, and not determined by a transparent set of criteria. 'It was a real shock, actually, to be part of it.'²³ Their stories highlighted that different leadership roles carried different meanings as well as different forms of influence. Beyond

²⁰ Batten, oral history interview.

²¹ Houghton, oral history interview.

²² Batten, oral history interview.

²³ Phelps, oral history interview. In a similar vein, Guin described the 'absolute privilege' of the position, which enabled her to 'be part of the decisions'. Batten, oral history interview.

boardroom statistics, then, they suggest that any assessment of women's share of power in sport should involve careful examination of the characteristics and conditions within individual sports – that is, qualitative appraisal, as well as quantitative.

Narrators understood that with more rigorous application of sport science, and the increasing prominence of the strategic business case in training and selection, success would take a more predictable form. The value of creativity, lateral thinking and sheer grit – sporting traits Lin in particular had identified as some of her most important strengths as an athlete – would be diminished. She suggested that while 'holistically I think I'm a reasonable rower', it was her attention to detail – knowing which equipment was in the best condition, how to steer to advantage, how to handle a race – that distinguished her from the majority of her peers.

I would be thinking about every possible conceivable way of making sure I came up on top. And that must be quite refreshing to just go out and train and do it. But I found it very stimulating to – to be thinking on all those levels. It wasn't a problem for me. In fact I loved it.²⁴

Her individual attention to detail has been replaced by the institutional fixation on marginal gains that has come to characterise sports like rowing and cycling in Britain in the twenty-first century. Where Lin had used her own ingenuity to seek and secure personal advantage, coaches and administrators now do so on behalf of their teams.

²⁴ Clark, oral history interview, November 12, 2017.

This was to some extent a self-selecting sample: narrators were those who had been selected for the team, and as such, had navigated the demands it placed on them as athletes. Yet, as Lin and Debbie's narratives highlighted, not all athletes would adopt the same approach. For Frances, despite the longevity of her career, the meanings and values she attached to the sport did not align with those of the British high performance system as she experienced it. She felt a deep disappointment that as a system, it defined the value of the sport – and the athletes within it – on the basis of objective performance metrics, and chose not to engage with its human potential. She was able to chart an unusually independent course through her international career, and was unapologetic for leveraging her talent to access privileges denied to others, such as training independently for a large part of the season. She consistently advocated for her individual needs over the demands of the system, and such was her talent that she was successful. Her narrative shows that even the most outwardly unyielding of structures might be persuaded to bend.

Frances acted out of self-interest, but embedded in her narrative was a deep commitment to the collective. She perceived the field of vision within this centralised system to be dangerously limited and limiting; it did not represent the 'broader picture' that Lin retrospectively felt she had ignored. University rowing had shown Frances what sport should be: under pressure, it was invariably university rowing that she 'called upon and has like, totally risen any performance I've done, like, in a British all-in-one [...] that for me was the ultimate sporting experience'.²⁵ She felt a vicarious sense of loss that

²⁵ Houghton, oral history interview.

so many people are now coming through with a – without having that experience, um, and you know, a bit more a sterile view of sport? And sport for me is just like the most – it's a, like, it's a life-enriching thing, it's not, oh do this and get better at this and then you get to get a medal [snorts], like, if you're really good? – that's just not – that's just such a dry, sterile version of what sport can be²⁶

While she understood that 'when you're like, trying to forge forward for the first time, and you're like – fuck it I don't care, you know, I wanna get there, I wanna win a medal', it saddened her.²⁷ Long experience told her that

it takes so long to get through that to be like, you know what it doesn't matter whether I win or not, like *this* is what's important because *this* is what I wanna look back on.²⁸

Frances retired in 2016, having competed in for Great Britain for more than twenty years, and at five Olympic Games. Unlike Lin, she did not feel that her talents had been able to 'out'.

I believe that I had the capability, but I also know that it's not just about capability, it's about – so many *other* things, and your ability to, to form relationships, to *be* with people, you know, what you do under pressure, what you do in the months and weeks beforehand. And some of those things I wasn't Olympic Champion level at. It's such a

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

matrix of lots and lots of different things. I didn't have right amounts of the right things at the right moment.²⁹

The pressure to deliver success, in an environment that understood success in one way only, had been a heavy burden.

The gold medal was the millstone? Because that was like, the look in everyone's eyes, you know, the disappointment, all of that, um, and not – meeting *my* expectations or other people's expectations, and that frustration – that was the millstone.³⁰

Reflecting back, she had come to reconcile the difference between her expectations of her sporting career and the form it had ultimately taken. Her regret was that, having had access to 'so much opportunity', she and her peers had been conditioned to think about sport and sporting success in such limited ways.³¹

'It feels *right*': financial and cultural investment in equality

Frances and Debbie, who came of age as athletes in the late 1990s, and whose experience of senior international rowing followed the introduction of Lottery funding, made little mention of sexual discrimination. They enjoyed training and competing alongside men as part of an integrated team, and did not perceive their opportunities or experiences to have been limited by their sex. Their outlook was in stark contrast to Annamarie, Guin and Miriam, for whom sexual inequality

²⁹ Ibid. See also A. Mowbray, *Gold Medal Flapjack, Silver Medal Life: The Autobiography of an Unlikely Olympian* (Leicester: Troubadour, 2013), 146. 'You don't choose to go to the Olympics. You lay everything out and let the Olympics take it – no deals, no bargains, no questions asked, no hope of return. You accept that maybe it will be enough and that the Olympics will choose you... And maybe it won't.'

³⁰ Houghton, oral history interview.

³¹ Ibid.

remained one of their most pressing concerns. While it had become less overt, Guin suggested it was most clearly evident in tacit decisions around funding.

I always felt that, if you had the same result as the blokes, they'd get more. I always felt, there was always a subjective thing, you know, oh, there would sometimes be a little grant here or a little grant – there always seemed to be more little grants for men. You know? You could – you were physically seeing that, you could never put your finger on that discrimination but there was a clear... You know, you just have to be much *noisier*, much more successful to get your hands on those little grants.³²

They had encountered less hostility and less overt discrimination than their predecessors – but this was not, they argued, commensurate with equality. There had been no structural recalibration of power, influence or control. In their sport, as in their broader social environment, they observed that the provision or retraction of opportunity continued to lie, largely, in the hands of men.

The injection of extensive public funding was fundamental in making provision for the men's and women's international rowing teams more equitable. British rowing was the beneficiary of generous Lottery funding from the late 1990s, but it has never secured significant commercial support or profile.³³ There are no professional clubs or leagues; as Debbie suggested,

³² Batten, oral history interview.

³³ Details of the Lottery funding awarded to rowing, and how it relates to other sports, is provided in the Introduction. The Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race is an unusual exception, enjoying as it does high television audience figures (estimated at 4.8 million and 6.2 million for the women's and men's races respectively in 2015), and significant international recognition. Sean Ingle, *Guardian*, 'Boat race viewing figures delight BBC as 4.8m watch women's event',

it's not a fame and fortune sport so therefore you [laughs] have to enjoy it to actually do it. You know it's not like some sports that are, you know, there's big fame and fortune attached, rowing is certainly not that kind of sport.³⁴

Sports that have historically offered 'fame and fortune', like football and tennis, show a more marked gender gap, especially in terms of commercial value.³⁵ Yet especially in the early years of Lottery funding, Guin had continued to observe and to challenge the systemic discrimination that disadvantaged the women's team.

I remember repeatedly going to ask David Tanner [...] to see a breakdown of how the money from the National Lottery was spent on the men and women, and he clearly said we don't break it down like that, I can't show you that data. Yeah? But it's, you know – you know, there was never enough money, you looked at what the *men* were

April 15, 2015 (available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2015/apr/12/boat-race-viewing-figures>, last accessed February 28, 2020).

³⁴ D. Flood, oral history interview by the author, January 4, 2018, Henley-on-Thames, UK. Notes in possession of the author. This is not unique to rowing, but a number of domestic 'super leagues' launched in the last fifteen years such as the Netball Super League (NSL) was formed in 2005, the Football Association Women's Super League (WSL) in 2010, and the Rugby Football Union Premier 15s and Rugby Football League Super League both in 2017, illustrate how the sporting landscape for women is changing.

³⁵ In Grand Slam tennis, women still play shorter matches than men. The US Open awarded equal prize money to men and women from 1973, the Australian Open, French Open and Wimbledon following suit in 2001, 2006 and 2007 respectively. In football, the disparity between the financial value of the men's and women's sports is more extreme. See for example N. McCarthy, 'The Gender Pay Gap At The FIFA World Cup Is \$370 Million', *Forbes*, June 11, 2019 (available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2019/06/11/the-gender-pay-gap-at-the-fifa-world-cup-is-370-million-infographic/#72425c392751>; last accessed March 10, 2020).

getting financially, I mean it was way different to what we'd done four years before, but even then, you could see the difference.³⁶

Over time, Guin observed this changing, and she was confident that now, 'the absolute driver is medals – and medals don't have a sex'.³⁷ She was equally confident that this blindness to gender was particular to the high performance sport. The pressures and priorities imposed on sport by the commercial market, she argued, are fundamentally different from those imposed by public investment. While investment in athletic excellence was becoming more equitable, commercial interest and popular profile remained steadfastly prejudiced:

if that funding had come from the private sector we would *not*, you know – I open a newspaper every morning, and [...] women don't play sport. And in fact, men don't play minority sports either.³⁸

Issues of equality, investment and profile of the club sport, and rowing for recreation, are out of scope here. Yet Guin's argument reiterates a recurrent observation in this research, namely, the reluctance of the sport to change without external imperative. Under financial pressure, the sport has shown itself able to adapt, and to accommodate, support and champion the needs of a historically marginal group. Lacking such pressure, change has been far less visible, and far less comprehensive.

Beyond any public imperatives to demonstrate commitment to equality, in rowing there was also a strong 'business case' for investing in the women's

³⁶ Batten, oral history interview.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

programme.³⁹ Annamarie explained that such success, and the ease with which people were persuaded that it was a worthwhile endeavour, reflected that it 'wasn't about taking a risk, it was missed opportunity':

there were so fewer entries, and so fewer countries participating seriously in women's rowing that it was a massive opportunity, it was low-hanging fruit, you know? If a medal was a medal, in terms of UK Sport's eyes, why would we not invest money in this and actually try and achieve something that was gonna be relatively easy to do?⁴⁰

For Tanner, who 'wanted us to be the top Olympic nation within two Olympics', regardless of any ideological merit, it was simple: 'as a business plan, you'd do it anyway, wouldn't you'.⁴¹ There was no conflict, in high performance women's rowing, between the moral and strategic imperatives to invest: by either metric or motivation, it was the right thing to do.

In other areas of the sport – lacking such clear stipulations around financial investment and definitions of excellence, and more influenced by inherited assumptions, traditions and structures – inequality has remained more persistent. Indeed, for all the opportunity the Lottery has created for female rowers, reflecting on the current landscape, Guin highlighted that the pathways for aspiring women remained underdeveloped. She was 'really keen' to see the return of

a much more vibrant top end to the clubs. Very much how Miriam and I were able to experience, in, um, in, with Noel in Thames when we

³⁹ Sir D. Tanner, oral history interview by the author, August 20, 2018, Twickenham, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁴⁰ A. Phelps, oral history interview by the author, January 9, 2018, Hammersmith, UK. Notes in possession of the author.

⁴¹ Tanner, oral history interview.

came through. It's just not there for that top level of women. So the National Lottery has really affected the top club women more than the top club men, because the men have this, you know, Henley Royal et cetera, they've got an extra layer in that isn't in, that isn't Women's Henley, Henley Women's.⁴²

A target so narrow and clearly defined as winning Olympic medals may provoke ingenuity and excellence in some areas – talent identification, for example – but comes with a cost to development pathways that are embedded organically in the sport.⁴³

Guin's allusion to Henley Royal Regatta is a further reminder of its absolute primacy in British club rowing: a recurrent and powerful theme across sources and decades, for men and women, athletes, administrators and observers. Annamarie, herself a Steward of the Regatta, was careful to emphasise that such power was wielded with immense care, and that the privilege of self-determination was matched with a sense of responsibility. While she accepted that 'it makes its decisions, itself', she felt 'it's always reaching out to see what's going on [...] there is great debate about what those, you know, what those events should be, and – whatever'.⁴⁴ She did, however, acknowledge that 'the one thing that Henley doesn't do is change things very rapidly, and it doesn't like to fail at doing things. So it will always start small.'⁴⁵ Guin argued a different, and

⁴² Batten, oral history interview.

⁴³ L. Taylor, 'The Golden Girls: How Talent Identification Propelled the GB Rowing Women's Team to Gold Medal Success at London 2012' (unpublished MA Dissertation, London Metropolitan University, 2013).

⁴⁴ Phelps, oral history interview.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

suggestive, point: that under historically male leadership, the extent and the impact of sexual inequality had remained largely invisible to them. She felt this had started to change, claiming that

the absolute biggest driver at this you know, in some of these more traditional areas, is, men, who have daughters, who see their daughters not having access to the things that they cherished enormously in their rowing careers. And asking themselves, why can't, you know, my daughter do what I did. I think that is probably one of the most powerful ex- you know, persuasions that are out there, to allow, to break down the last, you know, biases that exist in our sport.⁴⁶

The women effecting ideological change in the most conservative stakeholders in the sport were not those sitting on committees, but in their own homes: only they could make the human dimension of prejudice and exclusion felt.

Tanner viewed the increasing inclusion of women in this closed community as one example of how the Regatta has shown itself able to adapt, if slowly, to the changes in amateur sport that have been under scrutiny in this research.

Henley has remained successful because it has evolved. Often with a bit of a push and shove, but it has evolved. Um, you know, there are – there are, now, female Stewards. [Snorts.] Gosh [laughs]. Right? And they need to make a racket. Not – for women but for good competition.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Batten, oral history interview.

⁴⁷ Tanner, oral history interview.

He thus argued that women's progress would rely on a holistic commitment to the sport, and that women will be more driven to prioritise and to agitate for athletic excellence – holistically, for men and for women – than men. With greater awareness and scepticism of the traditions that had historically constrained them, women would approach the sport with a stronger sense of what is right: a radical inversion of historic views on the moral guardianship of the sport.

Despite some caveats, Guin remained hopeful that the energy and momentum of the rowing communities she had inhabited, and the irresistible, magnetic pull of sporting excellence, could still exist. Such a pull would draw up with it a new generation of athletes: different athletes, undoubtedly, but with the same unbending focus on excellence, and the same love of the movement of boat, blades and body across the water. At the top of the sport, she argued, these athletes, like her, would no longer be constrained by their sex: an unaccustomed privilege, and an unmatched freedom.

What is really exciting to me, having lived in rowing, where we have an opportunity to go to a World Championships, and we're doing it with the men. You know, when we go on the Great Britain Team, we're not the women's Great Britain team I mean, Great Britain Team, we are the *Rowing*, Great Britain *Rowing* team. When you stand, when you get your medal, it's the same medals whether you're a man or a woman. It's, you know, we're not doing a different distance, we're not doing – you know, it – it feels *right*? If I was a footballer, I wouldn't get that. If I was a rugby player, I wouldn't get that, if I was a cricket player I wouldn't get that. There's something about rowing that has allowed

my experience as being a female athlete to have been as close as you can get to parity. And I hope it'll continue to go that way.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Batten, oral history interview.

Postscript

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.

'Ulysses', Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Neither research nor the researcher stands still. 'I am a part of all that I have met'; since the start of the project in 2016, the people, texts and ideas I have encountered have changed me. I am fortunate to have observed the field change, too, seeing a greater breadth and depth of scholarship on women's sport emerge, alongside more critical and creative engagement with oral history and the historical integrity and value of lived experience. Such change is both heartening and challenging. Along with inspiration for the future, it introduces doubt to the author of research that reclines in the comfort of chronological structure and, partly, in the perceived security of the archive. As the project draws to an end, inevitably, I question whether I could have done more, and what I could have done differently.¹ Yet with any decision comes a cost, and to have taken any other course would have left a noticeable void. In adopting a conventional structure, but attempting more reflexive analysis within it, this research makes an important contribution to the historiography of British women's sport. Beyond that, I hope it lays the foundation for more exploratory, more challenging, work.

¹ See R. Josselson, 'On Writing Other People's Lives: Self-Analytic Reflections of a Narrative Researcher', in R. Josselson ed., *Ethics and Process in the Narrative Study of Lives* (London: Sage, 1996), 60–71.

It is difficult, in the context of an academic study, to make space for the discussion of doubt and limitation. The narratives presented in this thesis are, necessarily, partial, and carry the biases of my sources as well as my own. Moore et al. argue that research should be considered not as influenced by the researcher, but as the impact on the researcher itself: a reflexive point based on archival research that clearly resonates with the practice of oral history.² As researchers, whether we acknowledge it or not, we write about what impacts on us, and how, and why. Our writing *is* our experience. It *is* our bias.

Such bias, of course, can change. The meanings and potentials I attach to oral history as a methodology, for example, have shifted in the course of this research. The absence of voices from across the regions of England, and from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was, and remains, justified by the scope and constraints of the research. It is however an absence I feel more keenly in retrospect. The decision to focus on the national team, similarly, remains valid, but reproduces a hierarchy of sporting merit: a hierarchy that, historically, prioritised the white, middle-class man, and those who have followed in his footsteps. Such a hierarchy necessarily excludes, or diminishes, multiple others. The final chapter in particular is dominated by voices of privilege, the voices of women who, by their own admission, were more actively engaged with the politics of sexual equality, and who have enjoyed more recognition, on and off the water, than many of their peers and predecessors. Initially, I understood their

² N. Moore, A. Salter, L. Stanley and M. Tamboukou, *The Archive Project: Archival Research in the Social Sciences* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 24–5.

professional credentials in sport to give them a more holistic and authoritative view of the sport; now, such externally-accorded credibility presents as another formative characteristic of their narratives, rather than a form of validity. They were uniquely qualified to talk about the sport from one perspective; necessarily, then, uniquely unqualified to reflect on it from others.³

The impulse towards hagiography in women's sport can also be hard to resist, especially in a historiography so heavily dominated by men, male priorities and masculine perspectives. But the default narratives of pioneers and trailblazers are insufficient. Part of redressing sexual imbalance in the historiography must be to engage with the complexity of womanhood and female lives: the limitations, jealousies, and unkindnesses of women, intentional or otherwise, as well as the networks, communities and relationships they built and thrived in. It is not easy to do, and indeed, in this research I, too, have shied away from some of the more controversial or prejudicial narrative threads that emerged from the archive, and from narrators' accounts. No doubt, 'I like them too much', but I also feel a responsibility to keep their legacies safe.⁴ It is a weighty task, the difficulty of which increases when their actions do not neatly fit a celebratory narrative arc.

³ 'There are enormous epistemological gains to be made by attending carefully to the perspectives of precisely those who have been marginalized by the dominant perspective. There is much to be learned about reality, for example, by learning what counts as reality for those who are in subordinate social positions – they view the world from an angle not fully accessible to the privileged.' J. Callahan, 'Symposium: A Roundtable on Feminism and Philosophy in the Mid-1990s: Taking Stock', *Metaphilosophy* 27, no. 1–2 (1996): 184–8.

⁴ V. Yow, "'Do I like Them Too Much?': Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa', *The Oral History Review* 24, no. 1 (1997): 55–79.

In the course of this research, it has been encounters with narrators that have changed me the most. I carry their stories with me, a part of my life as much as of my work. Some narrators challenged me to lose the interest in familiar tropes of women's history, including the influence of administrative decision-making in sport, and, more broadly, of husbands and children: the narratives, in short, of men. These challenges were instructive in showing the ease which I, as a researcher, might impose male influence and agency on the stories of women, even as I sought to do the opposite. No less importantly, other encounters had deep and lasting emotional impact. They changed how I heard their stories, and those of others; they changed how I felt, as well as what I thought. Embedded in the practice of oral history is the opportunity to learn about the experience of others: to learn intensely, profoundly, and personally. Such learning blurs the line between emotion and intellect; and such learning can never be complete.

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Pauline Rayner’s private collection is cited in the thesis. Photographs and memorabilia from other oral history narrators implicitly informed analysis, notably, those of Lin Clark, Annamarie Phelps, Rita Sheldrake and Valerie Tester.

Other archives consulted in course of this research

The contextual research for this project involved more extensive archival work than is cited in the thesis. As with some narrators' private collections, and the private collection of Lynda Glennie (née Chapman) and Weybridge Ladies' Amateur Rowing Club, some of these significantly informed analysis. These include:

- National Archives, Kew, UK. Papers pertaining to the National Amateur Rowing Association. File reference: ED113/69.
- Museum of English Rural Life, Reading, UK. Documents and photographs pertaining to rowing at the University of Reading (formerly, University College, Reading).
- Girton College, University of Cambridge, UK. Documents and photographs pertaining to rowing at the college.
- Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford, UK. Documents and photographs pertaining to rowing at the college.
- Newnham College, University of Cambridge, UK. Documents and photographs pertaining to rowing at the college.
- St Hilda's College, University of Oxford, UK. Documents and photographs pertaining to rowing at the college.

Mainstream newspapers, magazines and periodicals

Bedfordshire Times and Bedfordshire Standard; Birmingham Post; Britannia & Eve; Country Life; Coventry Evening Telegraph; Daily Herald; Daily Mail; Forbes; Glasgow Herald; Gloucestershire Echo; Guardian; Illustrated Sporting and

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Appendix 1

Rowing glossary and acronyms

- ARA: Amateur Rowing Association (now, British Rowing).
- British Rowing: Formerly the ARA, the overarching governing body for rowing in Britain. It is an umbrella organisation that covers the British international team, and grassroots sport in England.
- Coxswain (cox): The steersperson in coxed crew boats, and the only crew member to face the direction of travel. In modern boats the cox is equipped with a microphone, with speakers throughout the boat. Although it is not an athletic position, coxing is a skilled role carrying significant responsibility beyond steering.
- FISA: Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d’Aviron (now, World Rowing).
- GB Rowing: The international arm of British Rowing.
- Head race: A time trial racing format, usually offered during the autumn, winter and spring. Crews are set off at regular intervals rather than from a standing start, and the course is ordinarily longer than for a regatta.
- Heavyweight: There are two weight classes in rowing, heavyweight (or, ‘openweight’) and lightweight. The former is usually assumed as the default; as such, it is only used in this thesis when a specific distinction from lightweight rowing is being made. As the term suggests, there is no upper or lower weight limit for athletes in this class (although a lower limit applies to coxswains in all classes).

- HoRR: Head of the River Race, a high-profile annual race for men's eights between Mortlake and Putney.
- HRR: Henley Royal Regatta.
- HWR: Henley Women's Regatta.
- Lightweight: There are two weight classes in rowing: openweight and lightweight. At the time of writing, in lightweight women's rowing, no individual athlete may weigh more than fifty-nine kilograms, and in a crew, the average weight per athlete must be below fifty-seven kilograms.
- NARA: National Amateur Rowing Association; this organisation amalgamated with the ARA in 1956.
- NWSC: National Water Sports Centre, a facility in Nottingham which was the first international-standard two thousand-metre rowing course in the UK. It is also known as Holme Pierrepont, after the country park it is located in.
- Regatta: A side-by-side racing format usually used in the summer in knockout tournaments. At club level, crews will often race multiple rounds in a day. The course is ordinarily shorter than for head races.
- Sculling: In sculling, each athlete uses two 'sculls' simultaneously in a symmetrical motion. It is contested internationally in single, double, and quadruple sculls. The coxed quadruple scull has been raced at this level in the past, but at the time of writing there are no coxed sculling events.

Sweep-oar rowing: In sweep-oar rowing, each athlete in a crew uses one oar (or 'blade') to move the boat. The sweep-oar boats involved in international competition are the pair, four, and the eight. The eight has always included a coxswain (thus necessitating a crew of nine). Coxed pairs and fours have both been raced at the Olympics and the World Championships but at the time of writing, the eight is the only coxed boat class at this level. The Paralympics, by contrast, includes the coxed PR3 Mixed Four.

Tideway: The Tideway can refer to the whole of the sixteen-mile stretch of the Thames downstream of Teddington Lock, which is subject to tides. In rowing, it tends to refer to the stretch between Putney and Chiswick, approximating the course of the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race.

UUWBC: United Universities' Women's Boat Club (known as 'the UUs').

UWRA: University Women's Rowing Association.

WARA: Women's Amateur Rowing Association; this organisation amalgamated with the ARA in 1963.

WARC: Women's Amateur Rowing Committee, Women's Amateur Rowing Commission. This committee, later commission, within the ARA was created when the WARA amalgamated with the ARA.

WEHoRR: Women's Eights Head of the River Race, a high-profile annual race for women between Mortlake and Putney.

Appendix 2

Biographies of oral history narrators

Basic biographies of all oral history narrators are provided here as a point of reference, in alphabetical order of the names used to refer to them throughout the thesis.

Annamarie Phelps CBE, née Stapleton, also Dryden; born 1966 (Annamarie)

Annamarie was brought up in north-west London, and subsequently studied Geography at St John's College, Cambridge University. Domestically, she rowed for Lady Margaret Boat Club (attached to St. John's College), Cambridge University Women's Boat Club, Thames Tradesmen's Rowing Club, Queen's Tower Boat Club (a network of alumni and friends of Imperial College London), and Thames Rowing Club. Internationally, she competed as a lightweight at every World Championship from 1991 to 1995 inclusive, winning three silver medals and one gold medal. She was the Crash-B Indoor World Champion and world record holder in the lightweight category from 1992 to 1994. She was selected to row as a heavyweight at the Olympic Games in 1996, after which she retired from competition.

While she was an athlete, she worked as a specialist dealer, curator and researcher in Decorative Arts. She also engaged with sporting administration as the ARA Athlete Representative for lightweight women from 1992 to 1994, and for the whole women's team from 1994 to 1996; and as the British Olympic Association (BOA) Athlete Representative from 1994 to 1998. She subsequently assumed prominent professional roles in sports leadership, as Deputy Chair of British Rowing (formerly the Amateur Rowing Association) from 2002 to 2013, and Chair of the same organisation from 2013 to 2018. She was Vice Chair of the British Paralympic Association from

2013 to 2018; Commonwealth Liaison for the Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Aviron (FISA) from 2016 to 2018; and chaired the high-profile, independent review of British Cycling conducted between 2016 and 2017. She was awarded a CBE for Services to Rowing in 2016.

She is currently Vice Chair of the British Olympic Association (BOA) and of the European Rowing Board; Chair of the British Horseracing Authority; a member of the Legal and Ethics Committee within the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), and of the Olympic Education Commission within the International Olympic Committee (IOC); Associate Consultant to Safe Sport International; and Ambassador to UK Sporting Heritage and International Mixed Ability Sport (IMAS). She is an Honorary Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge; Doctor of the University of York; and Honorary Reader at the University of Swansea.

Brian Armstrong; born 1936 (Brian)

Brian grew up in Cumbria and, having been a keen cross-country runner, took up rowing at Talkin Tarn Rowing Club. He subsequently rowed at Newcastle University and at club level for a number of years before becoming involved in the coaching and administration of international rowing with the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA). This was initially in the men's sport, learning from Bob Janousek – formerly a rower on the Czech international team, and the ARA's first National Coach – in the early 1970s, going on to coach the lightweight men in the early 1980s. He assumed the role of Team Manager for the British team from 1988 to 1996, after which he retired from international rowing but was involved with coaching at Leander Rowing Club. Professionally, he worked as a chartered surveyor: a career he pursued alongside the

substantial demands of British rowing administration, which was almost entirely on a voluntary basis.

Christine Aistrop; born 1947 (Chris)

Chris was born in Isleworth and grew up in Teddington, in south-west London, and was a successful skiff racer for many years before taking up rowing in 1972, at Weybridge Ladies' Rowing Club. She worked as an oil trader for Shell before, during and after her athletic career: a demanding job in a performance-oriented and male-dominated environment, from which she derived much satisfaction. She was selected for the national team in 1974, and while this was the only year she raced internationally, she remained involved in the sport as a qualified club coach (Bronze level), and as an administrator for the international team. She was Team Manager for the 1975 women's team at the World Championships, and a selector from 1977 to 1980. Having been posted overseas in her professional career for four years, she returned to her role as a selector in 1984 for at least two years. She was Chair of the first Henley Women's Regatta, which was held in 1988.

Christine Davies, married name Dugdale; born 1944 (Christine)

Christine was born in Redcar, North Yorkshire, where, having passed her eleven-plus, she attended grammar school. She went on to study Mathematics at Queen Mary College (now part of Queen Mary University of London), and earned her PhD at the same institution. She subsequently spent the majority of her teaching career at Royal Holloway, University of London. She learned to row while at university, and competed for United Universities' Women's Boat Club and Jessamy Scullers. She was first selected for the national team in 1963, and again in 1970, 1971 and 1972 – all

European Championship events – and in the early 1980s, she was a selector for the women’s team. She was involved in coaching novice rowing at Royal Holloway, and once retired from competition, she continued to scull out of Reading Rowing Club, assisting at Reading Regatta for many years.

Deborah Flood, married name Bruwer; born 1980 (Debbie)

Debbie was born in Harrogate, and was a talented junior athlete, running for her county and competing for Great Britain in judo as a junior prior to taking up rowing. She was first selected for the British team to compete at the Junior World Championships in 1998, where she won a bronze medal. She won gold medals at the Under-23 World Championships in 1999 and 2000, in which year she was also selected as a spare for the Olympic team in 2000. From then, she competed at either the World Championships or Olympic Games in every year from then until 2012, except for 2009, studying at Reading University alongside the sport between 2000 and 2005. She won gold medals at the World Championships in 2006, 2007 and 2010, and silver medals at the 2004 and 2008 Olympic Games. Much of her career as a junior and senior rower was spent training and competing in crews with another narrator, Frances.

Debbie was elected captain of Leander Club in 2012: the first woman to have held this role in the club’s 200-year history. Debbie trained to be a prison officer in 2009, and over the course of seven years worked in this environment with adult men and older teenage boys. She is a committed Christian who is actively involved in her local church, and seeks to share Christ with others. She currently works for the charity ‘Christians in Sport’, working alongside elite athletes to support and encourage them in their sport and their faith. She got married in 2017, and has a young daughter.

Frances Houghton; born 1980 (Frances)

Frances was born in Oxford, where she attended the Dragon School. She learned to row there at the age of eleven, and continued to row at the King's School, Canterbury. She showed precocious talent as a junior athlete, and began her international career in 1995, racing at the Coupe de la Jeunesse. She studied Spanish at King's College London, during which time she rowed with the University of London Boat Club as well as the national team. She has also raced for Leander Rowing Club.

The longevity of Frances's career as an athlete, and her achievements within it, are remarkable. After her entry to international rowing in 1995, she raced at the Junior World Championships from 1996 to 1998 inclusive; the Under-23 and Senior World Championships in 1999; and competed at either the World Championships or Olympic Games in every year from then until 2016, except for 2009 and 2014. She won a bronze medal in the 1998 Junior World Championships and a gold medal in the Under-23 World Championships in 1999. In the same year, she also won a gold medal at the Junior Indoor Rowing World Championships. As a senior, she won three silver Olympic medals, four gold World Championship medals, one gold European Championship medal. She often trained and competed in crews with another narrator, Debbie.

Frances retired from competition following the 2016 Olympic Games, but continues to collaborate with elite athletes and sports governing bodies as a mentor to athletes, and to bring an athlete's perspective to developing mental health and sporting culture strategies. She is also a professionally-trained chef.

Gill Parker, née Webb; born 1956 (Gill)

Gill was born in Hackney and grew up in Stamford Hill. Having left school, she attended the College of All Saints (later, subsumed into Middlesex Polytechnic, now Middlesex University). She learned to row at Stuart Ladies' Rowing Club, one of a number of club that merged to form the Lea Rowing Club in 1980, and was first selected to represent Great Britain at the World Championships in 1975: the second year the opportunity to compete at this level had been extended to women. She subsequently raced at the 1976 Olympic Games – the first time women's events were included in the programme – and the World Championships in 1979. While competing, she trained as a PE teacher, and she spent thirty-six years in teaching, from 1979 until her retirement in 2015. She got married in 1981, and her children, Tim and James, were born in 1986 and 1989.

Gill is a qualified and committed rowing coach, primarily at club level although she coached the junior women's four that competed at the Junior World Championships in 1981. She continues to be deeply involved at Lea Rowing Club, where she is employed to run 'learn to row' courses, and coaches men's and junior girls' performance squads as a volunteer. She also teaches rowing for Highgate School.

Guin Batten; born 1967 (Guin)

Guin was born in Sussex and had an international upbringing, between West Africa, the Middle East, and boarding school in Wiltshire. She started undergraduate studies in Naval Architecture at the University of Southampton, but changed course, subsequently studying Exercise Physiology at Leeds Polytechnic (Carnegie) and, at Masters level, Loughborough University. She initially worked as an exercise

physiologist at the British Olympic Association (BOA) Medical Centre, for sports including rowing, canoeing and speed skating. More recently, she spent twelve years at the Youth Sport Trust, before moving to British Canoeing in 2017, where she is currently Head of Strategy and Development. She has also played a pioneering role in the development of sliding-seat rowing in the Maldives.

Guin learned to row at Southampton University Boat Club and has been affiliated to Leeds University Boat Club, Thames Rowing Club, Leander Rowing Club, and Upper Thames Rowing Club. She was first selected to row for Great Britain at the 1994 World Championships, and competed at the World Championships or the Olympic Games every year from then to 2001. She and her sister Miriam, another narrator, were part of the crew of four that won Britain's first Olympic medal in women's rowing – the silver, at the Sydney Games in 2000 – in the quadruple scull.

Guin was the winner of the Thames World Sculling Challenge in 2001, and remains one of a handful of athletes to have won the four top-level domestic Head of the River Races – Scullers', Pairs, Fours, and Eights – in a single year. She has won gold medals in two different crew events at the 2009 and 2010 World Rowing Coastal Championships. She was also the first person to row the English Channel in a fine boat – fine boats being those used in international rowing competition, as opposed to the more robust coastal boats. She holds the record for the fastest solo row of this stretch of water, by a man or a woman – three hours and fourteen minutes, a time she achieved in 2003 – and skippered the first British women's rowing crew to row the Atlantic, from New York to Falmouth, in 2016. She is a Steward of Henley Royal Regatta; Vice President of Thames Rowing Club; Chair of the Women's Eights Head

of the River Race (WEHoRR); and was the first woman on the committee of management for the (men's) Head of the River Race (HoRR). She is also a FISA Council member. She founded the British Athletes Commission, which represents the interests of elite British athletes, and is Chair of the Athletes Commission for the British Olympic Association.

Jean Genchi, née Guppy; born 1956 (Jean)

Jean started rowing at Stuart Ladies' Rowing Club on the River Lea (later, Lea Rowing Club) in Clapton, after her older brother joined neighbouring Crowland Rowing Club. She had a successful domestic career as a junior, including a win at the National Championships. She was first selected to row for Great Britain at the World Championships in 1975: the second year the opportunity to compete at this level had been extended to women. She subsequently rowed at the World Championships in 1979 and 1983, and ultimately the Los Angeles Olympic Games, in 1984. Her husband Mike was a successful domestic and international rowing coach.

Linda Clark, née Lacey; born 1949 (Lin)

Lin was born in Liverpool, and grew up in the Wirral. As a teenager, she was a county level runner, and when she left school she went on to train at Chester PE College (now the University of Chester), and later pursued a Masters at Brunel University. She spent her career in schools, as a PE teacher, Head of PE, Senior Teacher in charge of special needs, and Vice Principal.

Lin learned to row at the Civil Service Ladies' Rowing Club, and later rowed at Thames Tradesmen's Rowing Club and Sons of the Thames Rowing Club. Her first selection

for the British team coincided with the first World Championships that offered events for women, in 1974. She subsequently represented Britain as a heavyweight athlete at the World Championships in 1975, 1977, 1981 and 1982, and at the Olympic Games in 1976. She converted to lightweight rowing in 1985, racing at the 1985, 1986 and 1987 World Championships in this category. She won gold and silver medals at the 1985 and 1986 World Championships, and a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in 1986.

She married Jim Clark, a decorated international rower and later international-level rowing coach, in 1972. Their daughter, Jessica, was born in 1988.

Margaret McKendrick; born 1929 (Margaret)

Margaret grew up near Croydon. She went on to study horticulture at university, initially in the Horticulture Faculty at Wye College (then a school within the University of London), and subsequently King's College London, where she undertook a teaching diploma and started rowing. She taught at school level for a few years but spent most of her career teaching in higher education. She was a member of the United Universities' Women's Boat Club, and, later, of Thames Rowing Club.

Margaret coxed for Great Britain at five European Championships, from 1960 to 1962 and 1964 to 1965 inclusive. She later qualified as a coach and umpire, and was President of the University Women's Rowing Association and Press Officer to the Women's Amateur Rowing Commission.

Miriam Luke, née Batten; born 1964 (Miriam)

Miriam learned to row whilst a student at the University of Southampton, later joining Thames Rowing Club and Upper Thames Rowing Club. She was first selected to row for Great Britain at the World Championships in 1990, and competed at either the World Championships or the Olympic Games every year from then until 2000. She won a silver medal at the World Championships in 1997, and a gold medal in 1998. At the Sydney Games in 2000, along with her sister Guin (another narrator), she was part of the crew that won Britain's first Olympic medal in women's rowing: a silver in the quadruple sculls.

Miriam is a Steward of Henley Royal Regatta, Chair of Henley Women's Regatta, and Vice President of Thames Rowing Club. Her husband is also a former international rower.

Pauline Rayner, née Sanson, also Horan; born 1940 (Pauline)

Pauline grew up in West London, and started rowing at the Alpha Women's Rowing Club on the Tideway when she was thirteen. She attended grammar school until the age of sixteen, when she began work at CAV, a motor parts company in Acton. She got married for the first time in 1959, having three children between 1959 and 1962, and for the second time in 1981. Between 1966 and 1967 she attended Wall Hall Teacher Training College in Hertfordshire, and spent her later career in schools.

Pauline was selected to represent Great Britain at the European Women's Rowing Championships in 1960, in the double scull. This was the only time she was selected to row for Great Britain, but she has competed in the World Masters events since 1976,

and was crowned World Indoor Rowing Champion in her age category in 2001 and 2003. She joined Thames Rowing Club in 1983, and was captain from 1990 to 1993. She continues to row competitively, and to coach novice athletes at Thames.

Penelope Chuter OBE; born 1942 (Penny)

Penny was born in Scotland but grew up in Laleham, on the Middlesex bank of the Thames. She attended private schools in Staines and Weybridge followed by a year at Brooklands Technical College, also in Weybridge. She learned to skiff and punt at an early age, and was British champion in both these disciplines before learning to scull (and becoming British sculling champion). She represented Great Britain in the single scull at the European Championships every year from 1960 to 1964, winning a silver medal at the event in Berlin in 1962, and placing fourth in each other year. She competed extensively in domestic and overseas regattas during this time.

While competing, she worked at the Bank of England as a clerk and later, audio typist. When she retired as an athlete in 1964 she trained as a PE teacher at Bedford College, spending six years teaching before embarking upon a long career in rowing coaching and administration from 1973. First employed as an ARA National Coach for the women's sport and coach education, in 1978 she was promoted to Senior National Coach, with responsibility for the men's team, and in 1982 became Director of Coaching: a role with oversight of all teams, but no direct coaching responsibilities. She had coached crews at every World Championship and Olympic Games from 1974 to 1982 inclusive. In 1986, Penny was made Director of International Rowing, and from 1990 to 1994, she returned to domestic coach education, as Principal National Coach.

During the 1980s in particular, Penny sat on a number of committees and steering groups, including with the BOA (Coaches' Steering Group and Coaches' Advisory Group) and FISA (Competitive Rowing Commission and Women's Commission). Her contribution to rowing administration and in coaching remains substantial, the latter directly, as a successful coach, and indirectly through the creation of resources and development opportunities for coaches. In 1987, she was recognised as Coach of the Year by the British Association of National Coaches (BANC) in two categories – Outstanding Long Service to Coaching, and for Team Coaching by a Woman – and inducted into the Sports Coach UK Hall of Fame in 2003. She is still coaching competitive pilot gig rowing in Cornwall, her crews having won three World Pilot Gig Championships medals since 2016.

Penny was awarded an OBE in 1989 for services to rowing, and the FISA Distinguished Service Medal and the ARA Medal of Honour in 2006.

Rita Sheldrake, née Pope; born 1931 (Rita)

Rita grew up in Weybridge, Surrey, and took up rowing at Weybridge Ladies' Amateur Rowing Club (WLARC). Her father was a keen rower at the neighbouring Weybridge Rowing Club, and her younger sister Valerie, also a narrator here, followed her in joining WLARC in 1950. Rita left school at fourteen, at which point she started work at Vickers-Armstrong and trained as a comptometer operator, as well as starting to row. She was selected to cox the eight for the 1954 Women's European Rowing Championships: the first year this event was held, at the only time she raced internationally. She continued to be involved in the sport until around 1970, first at WLARC, then the Huyani Rowing Club in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), where she and

her husband lived for nine years, and, latterly, Bedford Star Rowing Club. She coxed her Bedford Star crew, which represented England, to a win in the 1969 Home Countries match.

Rita got married in 1953, having met her husband – a rower at Kensington Rowing Club, on the Tideway in London – in 1950. Their daughter was born in 1959.

Rosemary Mayglothling OBE, née Clugston; born 1954 (Rosie)

Rosie grew up in Staines. She started skiffing competitively at Wraysbury Skiff & Punting Club, before taking up rowing in fine boats at Weybridge Ladies' Amateur Rowing Club (WLARC) and the Civil Service Ladies' Rowing Club. She had also been a competitive hockey player. Rosie was first selected to row for Great Britain at the World Championships in 1975: the second year that women's events at this level had been available. She went on to compete at the World Championships in 1975, 1977, 1979 and 1982, and at the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow.

After she retired from competition, Rosie pursued a long career in rowing coaching and administration, in volunteer and professional capacities, initially as Team Manager and subsequently as a coach for the women's team. She was Technical Coordinator for the GB Rowing Team and, latterly, Director of Pathway Development for British Rowing: a role from which she retired in 2018. She was responsible for the foundation of Henley Women's Regatta, which first took place in 1987, and was a driving force behind developing the Women's Eights Head of the River Race (WEHoRR) into a large-scale, high-profile domestic event. She was appointed to the World Rowing

(formerly, FISA) Executive Committee in 2018, for which she remains Chair of the Competition Commission.

Rosie was awarded an OBE for her services to rowing and gender equality in sport in 2020.

Susan Hastings, née Clark, also Smith, Nicholl; born 1965 (Sue)

Sue was born in Norwich and grew up in Abingdon, where she began rowing at Abingdon Rowing Club. After secondary school, she attended the Oxford College of Further Education where she studied Animal Technology. She worked as a laboratory technician, first at Maltings in Abingdon and then Truman's, where she ultimately managed the brewing laboratory. She now works as a Biology Technician at the Lady Eleanor Holles School in Hampton, one of Britain's foremost girls' schools for rowing, where she also coaches junior athletes.

She competed for Great Britain in the Junior World Championships in 1981, 1982 and 1983, and the Under-23s in 1984 and 1986. She was selected for the senior World Championship teams in 1985, 1987, 1989 and 1991, and competed at two Olympic Games: Seoul in 1988, and Barcelona in 1992. Sue married for the first time in 1984, and, most recently, in 2019. She has a daughter, Abigail, who was born in 1997.

Sir David Tanner CBE; born 1947 (Tanner)

Sir David Tanner began rowing while attending Abingdon School. He attended the University of Bristol and later trained as a teacher, and while teaching, started coaching rowing. He was later a deputy Headmaster at Greenford High School, and a

Headmaster at Longford School in Feltham (now Rivers Academy West London) until he moved into full-time rowing administration. His involvement in international rowing began in coaching, with a schoolboy crew that eventually reached the World Championships and the 1980 Olympics, where they won a bronze medal. He was the Team Leader for the British team at the Olympic Games in 1992, and was appointed as a full-time, professional Performance Director following the introduction of National Lottery funding in 1996. He stood down from this role in 2018.

Having been awarded an OBE in 2003 and a CBE in 2009, in 2013 he was knighted for services to rowing.

Valerie Tester, née Pope; born 1935 (Valerie)

Valerie grew up in Weybridge, Surrey, and took up rowing at Weybridge Ladies' Amateur Rowing Club (WLARC) aged fifteen. Her sister Rita, also a narrator here, was already rowing at WLARC at this time, and their father was a keen rower at the neighbouring Weybridge Rowing Club. She left Secondary Modern School at the age of sixteen to pursue a year-long commercial course, which prepared her for employment at a number of businesses in London. She was working at the Chubb Lock & Safe Co., now Chubb Locks, when she was selected for the 1954 Women's European Rowing Championships: the first year this event was held, and the only time she raced internationally.

Valerie married her husband, who was also heavily involved in the local rowing and skiffing community in Weybridge, in 1956. They had three children, born in 1959 and in 1967.

Publications and presentations associated with this thesis

Journal articles

Taylor, L. 'From Pleasure Rows and Plashing Sculls to Amateur Oarswomanship: The Evolution of Women's Amateur Rowing in Britain.' *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 35, no. 14 (2018): 1490–1506.

Taylor, L. 'The Women's Amateur Rowing Association 1923–1963: A Prosopographical Approach', *Sport in History* 38 no. 3 (2018): 307–330.

Taylor, L. "“What an Absurdity”: Penny Chuter and the Polemics of Progress in British Rowing during the early 1970s', *Sport in History* 40, no. 1 (2019): 56–77.

Book chapters

Taylor, L. 'Mrs K.L. Summerton: The Forgotten Founder of the Women's Amateur Rowing Association.' In *Sporting Cultures: Global Perspectives*, edited by N. Piercey and S.J. Oldfield, 166–180. Manchester: Manchester Metropolitan University, 2019.

Oldfield, S.J., Taylor, L. and Day, D. 'Spreading the Word: British Sportswomen and the International Diffusion of Sport.' In *Yearbook of Women's History 38: Building Bodies: Transnational Historical Approaches to Sport, Gender and Ethnicities*, edited by M. Derks, 41–54. Hilversum: Verloren, 2019.

Academic presentations

Taylor, L. “Down the Lea”: Remembering Women’s Rowing in East London.’ Paper presented at the British Society of Sport History Annual Conference, Liverpool Hope University, September 6, 2019.

Taylor, L. ‘Home Advantage?: The 1960 European Rowing Championships at Willesden.’ Paper presented at the International Society for the History of Physical Education and Sport Annual Congress, Madrid, July 15, 2019.

Taylor, L. ‘Revival, Recalibration, Radicalism?: Reflecting on Women’s Amateur Rowing in the Long 1960s.’ Presentation and seminar at the Institute for Historical Research, London, June 10, 2019. Part of the Sport and Leisure History Seminar Series.

Taylor, L. ‘Testing the Waters: British Perspectives on International Women’s Rowing, 1951–1954.’ Paper presented at the North American Society of Sport History Annual Convention, Boise ID, May 25, 2019.

Taylor, L. ‘The Changing Room.’ Contribution to the ‘Oral History Jukebox’ session at the Oral History Association Conference, Concordia University, Montréal, October 12, 2018. The ‘jukebox’ format involved presenters playing short clips from their own interviews and engaging with the methodological issues they raised.

Taylor, L. “‘What an Absurdity’”: Penny Chuter and the Polemics of Progress in British Rowing During the Early 1970s.’ Paper presented at the British Society of Sport History Annual Conference, University of Westminster, September 8, 2018.

Taylor, L. ‘Mrs K.L. Summerton: The Forgotten Founder of the Women's Amateur Rowing Association?’ Paper presented at the Manchester Metropolitan University International Sport and Leisure History Colloquium, Crewe, March 3, 2018.

Taylor, L. ‘Hidden Histories: Competitive Women’s Rowing in Britain from 1945.’ Presentation and seminar at the International Seminar for Post-Graduate Students in Sport History, Université de Bordeaux, September 11, 2017.

Taylor, L. ‘Capital Gains? A Group Biography of the Women’s Amateur Rowing Association, 1923–1963.’ Paper presented at the British Society of Sport History Annual Conference, September 1, 2017.

Taylor, L. ‘Competitive Women’s Rowing in Britain from 1945.’ Presentation and seminar at the International Summer School for Young Researchers, Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée, Paris, June 30, 2017.

Taylor, L. ‘Against the Current: Competitive Women’s Rowing in Britain from 1945.’ PechaKucha (a compressed, time-sensitive format) presented at the Manchester Metropolitan University International Sport and Leisure History Colloquium, Crewe, March 3, 2017.

Public lectures

Taylor, L. 'A Woman in a Waterman's World?: Lucy Pocock Stillwell.' Public lecture to mark International Women's Day delivered at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, March 8, 2018. An abridged version of the text from this lecture is available at: <https://heartheboating.com/2018/03/16/lisa-taylor-lucy-pocock-stillwell-a-woman-in-a-watermans-world/>; last accessed March 4, 2020).

Day, D., Taylor, L. and Oldfield, S.J. 'Historical Perspectives on Female Contributions to Sports Leadership.' Public lecture delivered at Manchester Metropolitan University, Crewe, March 6, 2018.

Taylor, L. 'Women of the Welsh Harp: Willesden 1960 and Early International Women's Rowing.' Paper delivered at Backsplash: The Rowing History Conference at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, November 4, 2017.

Public engagement

A display installed at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames in 2019, 'The Evolution of British Women's Rowing: Sydney 2000 to Tokyo 2020', integrated oral histories conducted for this project, and bespoke analysis, by the author.

Collaboration with the lead curator of a rowing exhibition for the Thames Festival in 2018 led to the installation of panels relating to female involvement in working class rowing in Guildhall Yard and on the South Bank in London. The author was named as a contributor within these panels.

The research was featured on the Arts and Humanities Research Council blog in 2019. See L. Taylor, 'Reflecting on Women's Rowing: Oral Histories and Sporting Lives', April 5, 2019 (available at: <https://ahrc-blog.com/2019/04/05/reflecting-on-womens-rowing-oral-histories-and-sporting-lives/>; last accessed March 15, 2020).

A number of articles based on the research have been published on *Playing Pasts*, the online magazine for sport and leisure history. These include 'Competitive Women's Rowing in Britain Since 1945: The Shadow of the Nineteenth Century'; 'Liberté, Egalité, Sororité – or a Lot of Nonsense About Rowing Shorts?'; and "Seventeen Men and a Girl Chasing One Another Up the Thames": Sue Brown and the 1981 Boat Race'. *Hear the Boat Sing*, which focuses exclusively on rowing history, has also published features based on these articles and public presentations. These are available at <https://www.playingpasts.co.uk/> and <https://heartheboatsing.com/> respectively; last accessed March 15, 2020).

The author researched and presented a segment on women's rowing focused on Amy Gentry, alongside Anna Kessel MBE and Annamarie Phelps CBE, for a YouTube broadcast by Leena Norms in 2017. Entitled 'A London Tour of the Rebellion', this formed part of a public history drive to see greater representation of women in public monuments and Blue Plaques. Broadcast available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZbhZVAAks4&t=659s>; last accessed March 4, 2020. She also researched and presented a short historical treatment of the women's sport for an episode of the BB2 television show *Celebrity Antiques Road Trip*, broadcast in December 2017.