

COBRA

COLERAINE OLD BOYS ROWING ASSOCIATION

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Triple success for COBRA in 2012



Richard Chambers
Olympic Silver

Alan Campbell
Olympic Bronze



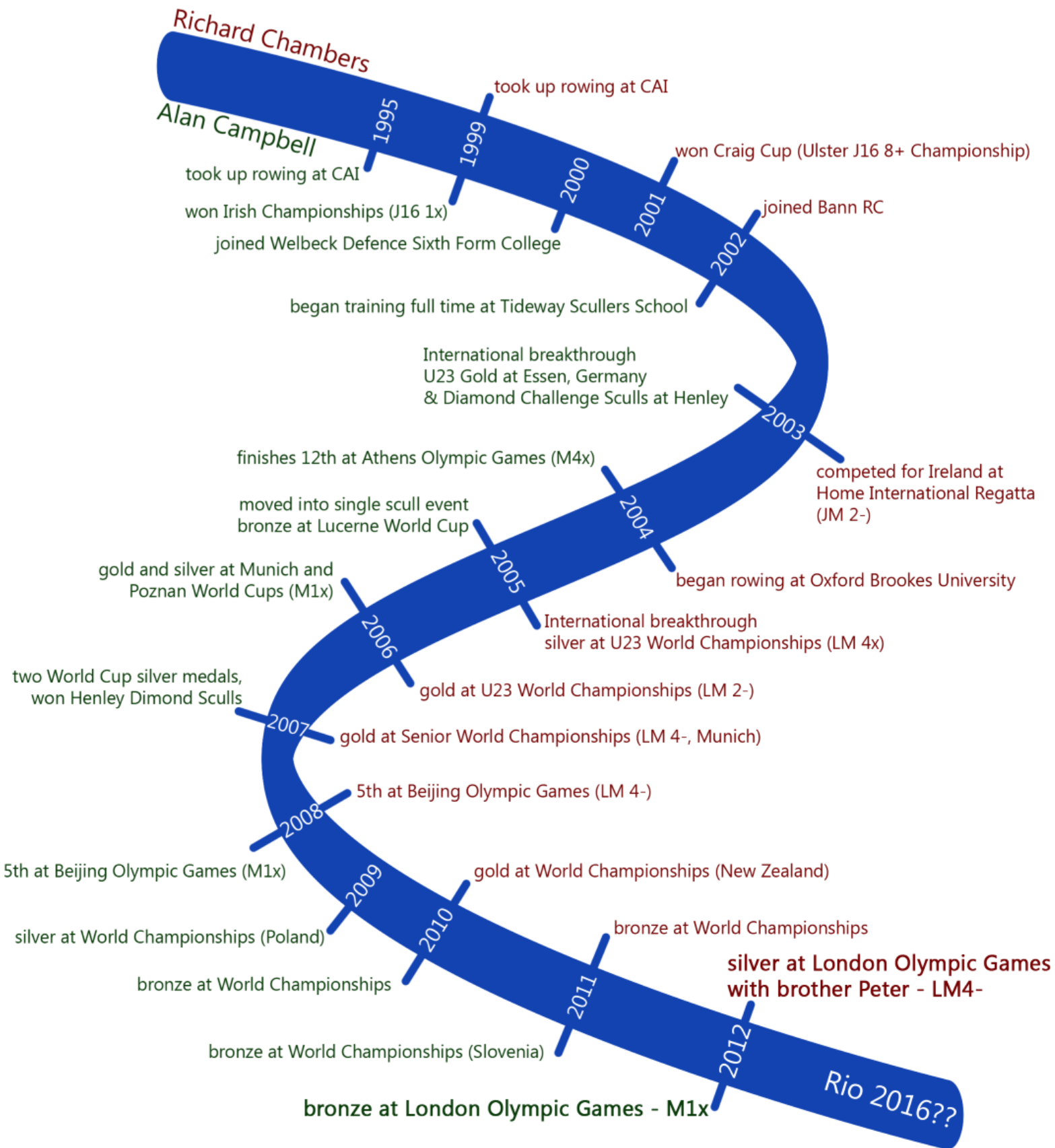
New VIII for CAI

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The Path to London 2012

Alan Campbell and Richard Chambers with his brother Peter made history in 2012 by bringing Bronze and Silver Olympic medals back to Coleraine, but they were not won overnight. In fact it took over a decade of intensive physical and mental training to get to the standard required to stand on the podium at an Olympic games.



Lough Neagh Challenge

What were we thinking? The next time Ian Harvey rings me I must just let the phone ring off. When he called in February 2012 with the idea of rowing around Lough Neagh in a day for charity I, being slightly mad, thought it was a great idea. The charity was Fields for Life and Ian was hoping to raise funds to drill drinking water wells in Northern Uganda – ‘A thirst for life challenge’. Then he told me his ideal crew: Alan Campbell, Richard Chambers, Richard Archibald and himself - three Coleraine Inst. Rowing Olympians and Ian. I had no problem saying yes, figuring that the others, with London preying on their minds would have too much on their plate to agree. Sadly they are obviously more able to multi-task that I ever was, or perhaps it is more that we are as mad as each other, but they jumped at the chance. Seven months to go....I better start training!

The months ticked by, Richard and Alan performed well in the early season World Cup regattas, knowing that their big season target lay ahead, and before that they would also have the Olympic Games!! Ian kept in contact and informed me that his training was progressing well down in Ballynahinch. Mine on the other hand wasn't, as I found it much easier to put off until tomorrow every training session I planned, that was until the Olympic hype struck and I found myself running in my lunchtimes. It was a start.

By early September two of the team were Olympic medallists on the GB & NI team; Alan with bronze in the single scull and Richard Chambers with silver in the close four boat finish of the lightweight coxless fours, with his younger brother Peter in the crew. This meant that there was likely to be a little more pressure on us to succeed, but equally it meant all attention would be on the good rowers, so Ian and I had every chance to hide



any lack of pace. That was until the fateful call came from Ian to say that whilst in Donegal he had sprained his ankle and was in no position to train or drive, never mind compete in the challenge. For a second I thought that my lack of training might have been intuitive genius, but of course Ian had a plan to find another man to fill his shoes. That poor guy was Jonathan Mitchell, a student finishing his studies with Queen's University Belfast, but more importantly a member of Irish Rowing's national under-23 team. His inclusion meant I was in no doubt who would be dragging the crew backwards; I had only to look in a mirror.

Ian has tackled endurance challenges the world over; rowing Lake Victoria in Africa before taking on the mighty Lake Superior on the US/Canadian border. His preparations were meticulous and extensive and he brought those skills to our hunt for a suitable boat and the best course for us to take. The major difference was the extra bodies and their availability. We couldn't get together as a crew until the day of the race, so we found ourselves gathering at Ian's house outside Saintfield late one Thursday night. We had only the following day, Friday 14th September, to carry out the challenge due to other commitments, and the weather forecast did not bode well. Not a problem for us, the bigger the waves the more

fun it would be!!!

Pulling into the small car-park at the rear of the Antrim Forum and looking at the North Sea....sorry Lough Neagh, the scale of the challenge became clear. The wind blew from the west straight towards us and by the time the waves crashed into the east shore they had risen to quite a height. Put off....Coleraine men....not a chance (insane to the last)! The boat was unloaded, oars unpacked and our rowing kit was donned. Ian was now taking the role of coxswain and we had the assistance of two other support boats containing supporters from Fields of Life, the Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster and Cairndhu Rowing Club (who had been our advisers around which boat to use and where to source it, as the low-sided boats raced from the CAI River Pavilion would quickly be swamped in the waves on the Lough). I will remember the comments from the support boats as they looked on at our last minute preparations. In other circumstances they said that they would not have ventured out, and they had an engine on their boat. What were we doing?

The Plan had always been to row a circuit within Lough Neagh, broadly 80km/50 miles. What we saw that morning put into question whether we would be able to launch our boat

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at all, never mind complete the challenge. We certainly didn't cry away from the challenge, launched the boat in the small Six Mile Water and awaited the go. Our first few strokes were more stable and easy than any of us expected. Unfortunately that didn't last long. As soon as the boat left the shelter of the small river and the full-force of the wind and waves hit us we knew all about it, particularly by the feeling of a wave crashing above your head.

To put into context the first leg from Antrim to Ballyronan, the ten mile distance would take a rowing four that we were all more used to about an hour to cover. THREE AND A HALF HOURS LATER we glided into the small harbour in Ballyronan. At no time after our start did our boat stop moving. At times, when one of two of us rested briefly the boat was barely moving forward, but we refused to cover the same piece of water more than once. The strangest thing about that stretch was that throughout there was high spirits, good banter and relatively solid row-

ing. Bananas, water and energy gels kept us going through this stint and were duly supplied by the ever present support boats.

In Ballyronan, those with far greater knowledge of the lough than Richard, Alan, Jonathan or myself stood and discussed the options. The winds were not due to die down for some time and whilst we would be able to skirt down the west coast of the lough, making any crossing from west to east was going to be treacherous and highly inadvisable. Couple this with the inability to travel up the east coast due to the strong cross winds, and our options were limited. As we spent an hour drying out in Ballyronan, refuelling and rehydrating, the decision was made to carry on south to 'The Battery'. It would be a paddle of approximately 10km, but would present the last safe harbour that we knew we could access. The conditions had beaten us on this occasion and whilst we searched for anyway to even make to Antrim, we eventually realised that nature was calling the shots and our only choice was to go with it.

The contrast between this row and our earlier crossing was quite stark. Ian steered us close to the shore and the stable boat moved much more as we were used in – forwards, rather than up and down waves. Within about 50 minutes we had reached the harbour and steered to boat to rest along the harbour wall. At 26km we had covered about a third of the intended route, but we had the blisters and sore backs to demonstrate that it had been an effort.

Whilst we were all disappointed that the feat we attempted had not been possible on that day it had been an exhilarating journey for all and something new for all the rowers. Will we attempt it again? Ian has assured us that it was still a great accomplishment, but I sense it is in our DNA that once a challenge has been set we won't rest until we try, try and try again. So I suspect that the boat will be launched again and hope that the conditions are more favourable next time.....and perhaps a training session together first might be worth considering.

Richard Archibald

Old Boys in Action

This year's Tideway Head of the River race saw COBRA represented with a good turnout of members competing. Milo Stynes and Gareth Clarke having just left CAIBC took on the 7.5km race for the first time, competing for Bristol University and Manchester University respectively. Connor Campbell was racing under Tyne United rowing club and Iain Giffin with the Royal Navy & Royal Marines in a very stealthy camouflaged vessel. In the Scottish contingent Michael McNaul was racing with Glasgow Rowing Club, while Elliot Clarke after some successful trialling raced in a Scottish Lightweight 8.

With the first battle of the season between the Clarke brothers, Manchester University came in at 143rd

while the Lightweights finished 105th (after their stroke man caught a boat stopping crab). Bristol University finished just behind Manchester in 153rd. Glasgow Rowing club finished 41st, Tyne United 212th and The Navy 251st. After all parties had recovered from the gruelling race, we all enjoyed a very civilised catch up.

The next big race on the University rowing calendar was BUCS regatta in Nottingham. With the traditional bad weather and waves it provided very challenging racing conditions. Racing under Glasgow University, Elliot Clarke achieved 6th place in the Champ Lwt pairs. Gareth Clarke narrowly lost out in the rep of the Intermediate 8s. Again the Clarke brothers competed against each other in

the coxed 4s event. Unfortunately they both got knocked out in the time trials.

At the Scottish Championships at Strathclyde Park, Elliot managed to improve on his Lwt pair result from BUCS and won the category. Michael with Glasgow rowing club was successful in winning the Open 4+ event.

After reaching the final in the senior coxed 4s at Met and Marlow regattas, the Glasgow crew was preselected for Henley Royal Regatta. However they were unsuccessful in progressing from the first round, getting beaten by a very strong Henley crew.

Michael McNaul

The School 2011/12

The rowing club's resurgence continued this year with the new river pavilion providing a fantastic training base for the club's aspiring oarsmen. The rower's intensive training regime brought about encouraging results in the early Head of the River races with the Junior 15 squad taking impressive wins at Bann Head of the River and Lagan Head of the River.

Off the water, Mark McMullan travelled to Dublin to compete at the Irish Indoor Rowing championships and won a Silver medal in the Junior Lightweight category. Over the Christmas Holidays the rowers continued to train hard, and for the first time in the club's history the School Boys defeated the Old Boys in the annual Old Boys race to lift the very impressive Hamburg Trophy. This result was particularly pleasing considering the Old Boys crew contained several Scottish internationals and double Olympian Richard Chambers.

The main head of the river season demonstrated the tremendous progress the club has made over the year with the Junior 18 and Junior 16 crews consistently finishing in the top 3 of their categories and challenging for the top positions. The highlight of the Head season was the Schools' Head of the River in London, held on

the famous Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race course. Here the boys were lucky enough to compete against all of the top public schools in England. The 1st Eight made a massive improvement on their result last year and the quadruple scull put in an equally commendable performance in their event.

The regatta season saw the development continue and some excellent results were recorded. The Junior 16 Eight won Portadown Regatta and narrowly lost in the final of the Craig Cup after an outstanding performance in the heat. The Irish Championship Regatta is the culmination of the year's training and provides an opportunity to compete against the best clubs in the country at the National Rowing Centre in Cork. The club sent the largest group of athletes in many years and as the week progressed it was clear that significant gains had been made throughout the season. Despite some strong performances the crews were eventually overcome by stronger and more experienced crews. Callum Marshall was our most successful individual throughout the season, recording 11 wins and subsequently being rewarded by selection for a Rowing Ireland training camp for

rowers of international potential.

We were extremely privileged to welcome both our Olympic Old Boys, not to mention their medals, back to school. The visit of Richard Chambers will long be remembered by the senior oarsmen as he took time out of his busy schedule to take them through his typical day and allow them to sample the life of a top class Olympic oarsmen, as well as providing them with crucial information on drugs in sport and injury prevention.

The boat club is indebted to Coleraine Old Boys Rowing Association (COBRA) for their considerable coaching and fund raising input. Thanks largely to a very generous donation from them, and support from Coleraine Inst Friends Association the club took delivery of a top quality racing eight, a welcome addition to our boat fleet. The support of parents in rowing is crucial and we have been very lucky to have the input of both Charles McMullan and Robin Taggart who selflessly give their time and expertise to support the boys in a variety of ways.

George Hull

COBRA Buys New Boat

As you will have read in our last newsletter, COBRA undertook the challenge of a fundraising effort to add a boat to CAIBC's ageing fleet of 'eights' which includes the 27 year-old Ballysally and the 20 year-old Cranagh.

We are pleased to report in this year's newsletter that we have been successful with this attempt and CAIBC have now taken ownership of 'Herestrael', a 2 year-old Stampfli which was getting little to no use at its previous home.

Stampfli is the more elite sister to the Janousek line of boats which have served the club so well over the years. The weight and hull of this boat are ideally suited to the school boys and after discussions between the school, CAIBC and COBRA it was decided that this boat presented an opportunity that was too good to miss out on.

We would like to thank all the old boys who donated so generously and allowed this to happen. COBRA will officially present the boat to CAIBC



on the morning of the school boy/old boy race on 27th December at the new river pavilion.

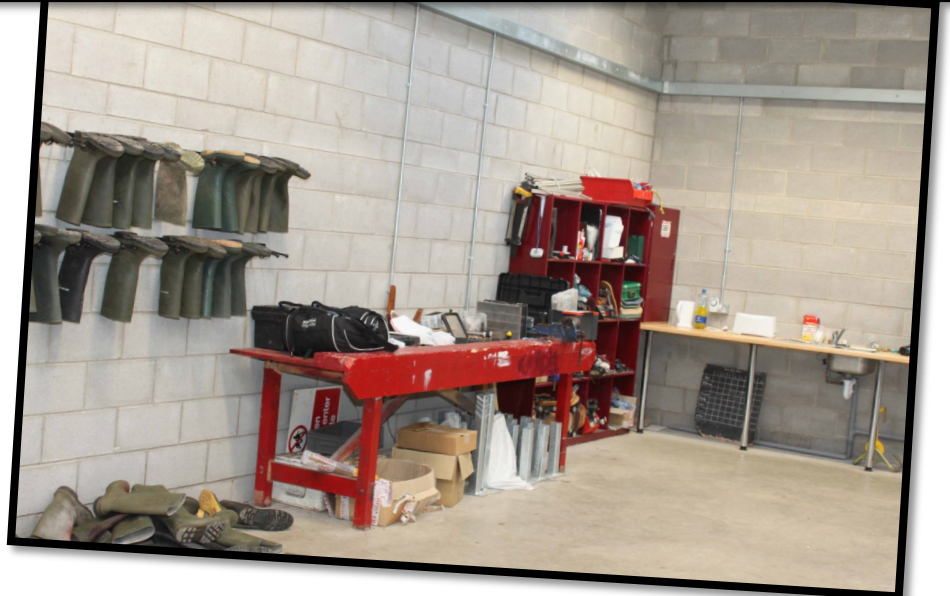
Philip Hamill

New Boathouse & Pavilion

From its beginnings in 1968 when the River Pavilion was opened by HRH the Duke and Duchess of Kent, the boathouse has been the home for hundreds of Coleraine Inst oarsmen as they progressed through the Boat Club. The boathouse was eyewitness to thousands of hours of training that lead to the development of many fine oarsmen, and even a few Olympic medallists. This all changed on the 13th December 2011 when the demolition crew moved in and erased 43 years of history in an afternoon. Once the old boathouse was flattened it revealed a new building behind it. This is the new River Pavilion which hosts a large new boathouse that will be a perfect home and training environment for the next 43+ years of oarsmen at Coleraine Inst.



n Day!



COBRA Day 2011

Tuesday 27th December 2011 was a momentous day for CAIBC. Conditions were nothing out of the ordinary, with a typical December grey sky, sporadic rain and a reasonably calm River Bann. The usual excitement that precedes the annual COBRA versus CAI Vllls race seemed to be heightened this year, maybe as a consequence of the fact that in 2010 it had had to be cancelled due to the Bann freezing over.

The schoolboy crew in the "William C Houston" and the old boy crew in the "Cranagh" did not know that they were about to make history as they walked the down the ramp from the new Boat Club and pushed off from the old wooden steps. The youngsters would soon become the first school VIII to beat an old boy VIII in COBRA's illustrious history.

The race, umpired by Chris Black, was held over the traditional course from the Cutts to the Bann stone steps. The start was hard fought, with the schoolboys eventually taking the lead. The old boys on the Londonderry station tried everything in their power to get back on even terms, but the school boys used the Antrim station to good effect and refused to let them past. Not even the presence of an Olympian in the stroke seat of the old boy crew was enough to claw back



the lead, with the eventual verdict being 1 ½ lengths to the School Boys.

Just what it meant to the schoolboys was clear as they lifted the Hamburg Trophy for the first time, with smiles abounding as their coach Chris Black handed it over. Their names will be recorded for posterity in the Hamburg Trophy Book.

The Crews were as follows –

Schoolboys – A Millar, C McDowell, R Pierce, P McCullough, S McKay, M McMullan, C Marshall, G Hunter, J Taggart (cox).

Old Boys – R Chambers, M McNaul, S Archibald, G Clarke, D Ewart, M Stynes, S

Henry, E Clarke, P Stynes (cox).

The day ended with the COBRA AGM and the annual dinner in Shenanigans, Portstewart. This is always an event to look forward to for members as it is often one of the only times they get to see each other from year to year. The highlight this year was undoubtedly the after dinner speech by Lieutenant Iain Giffin. He gave us a thoroughly informative and entertaining guide to the Royal Navy's role in the 21st Century and his own experiences serving in it, while teaching us one of the traditional Officers Mess games.

Andrew Wright

For more information on COBRA or rowing past or present at CAI, visit the website at

www.cobra rowing .co.uk

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If you have any comments or would like to contribute to the next newsletter, please get in touch.

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