

## COBRA Olympians present new boat to CGSRC in honour of Bobbie



Since our last major purchase in 2012, COBRA have been working hard to purchase a new Janousek 4-/4x for CGSRC and on Saturday 1st October 2016, we proudly presented the new boat to the club with the help of two of our Olympians, Richard Archibald and Alan Campbell.

### Thanks to our members

The funds for the £14,000 boat came from a variety of sources – annual

membership donations, larger donations specifically towards this purchase and also funds raised by COBRA members who took part in a gruelling challenge last year when they cycled the length of Ireland, 'Mizen to Malin', in 3 days. The common factor is the generosity of our membership, who are always keen to give something back to the club that gave them such great experiences. So from the COBRA

Directors, thank you to all of you who have made this purchase possible. Thanks also to the school who generously purchased the 4 sweep and 4 sets of sculling oars to be used with the new boat.

### The 'Bobbie Platt MBE'

When Bobbie passed away in 2015 we were in no doubt that we wanted to name the new boat in memory of him and the 40+ years he spent coaching



at the club. Our Olympians both spoke emotionally about Bobbie and how he passed on his passion for this sport to them, crediting their time at the club for setting them on their Olympic journeys. We were honoured that Bobbie's son and grandson joined us at the presentation. Such was his impact on the club and its rowers this is the second boat at the club to be named after the great man! 'The Bobbie' was purchased by the club in 1996 and is still in regular use today.

**The 'Richard Archibald'**

At the presentation there was an unexpected surprise for former COBRA director Richard Archibald when a boat was named after him. The Stampfli 8 which was bought in



he was one of the 8 COBRA members who took part in the big fundraising effort run in 2011 to fund the purchase of this boat by following the River Bann from 'Source to Sea' in a day - running alongside the source of the river in the Mourne Mountains, following it by bike through mid-Ulster and then rowing

was attended by over 150 parents, pupils, staff, old boys and special guests including Olympic medallists, Richard Archibald, Alan Campbell and GB Rowing World Champion from Fermanagh, Holly Nixon.

The current rowers in attendance couldn't fail to be inspired by the after dinner speeches from the three special guests, and it was fantastic to witness the sense of community which is building at CGSRC under the guidance of coach Jeremy. The evening raised over £1,300 for the boat club and a good evening was enjoyed by all.



2012 and hasn't been named since arriving at the club. It is the top 8 in the club, only used by the top crews at the biggest races.

from Kilrea right to the Barmouth where the river empties into the Atlantic Ocean.

*Philip Hamill*

Richard rowed at the school until 1997, went on to row at Queen's University and then represented Ireland over the course of 10 years, winning multiple World Championship medals and competing at the Athens and Beijing Olympic Games. He was one of the founding members of COBRA in 2002 and has been a strong, dedicated and passionate advocate of the school club since then. Fittingly,

**CGSRC Boat Club Dinner**

Later in the evening, CGSRC hosted its inaugural Boat Club Dinner at the Royal Court Hotel, which





# Rio 2016

As has been custom for the last few the repechage Olympiads, we had significant and go straight representation in the rowing to the semi-competition at Rio 2016 by Coleraine final, sitting in Old Boys. After winning a silver medal lane four next to in London 2012 with brother Peter in the Irish the Lightweight Four, Richard O'Donovan Chambers switched to the lightweight brothers. double with new partner Will Fletcher Unfortunately in whilst Alan Campbell was aiming to a race that was defend or better his Bronze medal in significantly the Single Scull. faster than the

Richard had won a number of other semi-final International medals throughout the the required 3rd place by the Olympiad, notably a Silver at both the became the first Northern Irish athlete the 2015 European and World in any sport to compete in four Championships in Poland and France, they finishing 7th overall in the a tremendous they finishing 7th overall in the achievement. however the season running up to the standings.

At the Olympic regatta, he and He convincingly won his heat against Fletcher came second in their heat in a Stanislaw of Belarus and finished a quick time, meaning they could miss second to eventual Silver medallist



After the high in London, Alan had an Richard's brother, Peter Chambers up and down few years but was hitting won the B final of the Lightweight form again in 2016, picking up a Four, also placing him 7th overall, and more than this to stop them getting to bronze at the last world cup before we expect to see more of him in the Rio. international scene in years to come.

He convincingly won his heat against Whilst he didn't make the Olympic Stanislaw of Belarus and finished team, 2015 World Champion Joel second to eventual Silver medallist Cassells did compete in both the

Damir of Croatia in the European and World Championships quarter final to set up an in the Lightweight Pair taking home important semi-final Gold and Bronze respectively, and at against among others, only 22 we think there will be many 2012 champion and more medal opportunities in the friend Mahe Drysdale. future.

With 3rd place enough Since Rio, both Peter and Alan have to make the Olympic announced their competitive final, Alan could only retirement. Richard has since joined make an agonising 4th Cambridge University as a coach and place, missing out on a Alan has moved into the banking place in the A final. Alan, sector in London. We wish them well. however, leaves the sport with his held high

Fellow London Silver medallist and Richard's brother, Peter Chambers won the B final of the Lightweight Four, also placing him 7th overall, and we expect to see more of him in the international scene in years to come.

Whilst he didn't make the Olympic team, 2015 World Champion Joel Cassells did compete in both the European and World Championships in the Lightweight Pair taking home Gold and Bronze respectively, and at only 22 we think there will be many more medal opportunities in the future.

Since Rio, both Peter and Alan have announced their competitive retirement. Richard has since joined Cambridge University as a coach and Alan has moved into the banking sector in London. We wish them well.

*Alex Humphrey*



# Interview with Alan Campbell

**You are the first Northern Irishman to compete at four Olympics in any sport. Which was the most memorable?**

London 2012 without a doubt, I won a medal! It was also a home Olympics, so I had over 95% of the support and seeing so many of the COBRA members and friends I had rowed with throughout the years was really special.

**How did Rio 2016 compare to London 2012?**



The Olympics are always great, for the two weeks of the Games the host city is at the centre of the world. A swimmer takes a pee behind a petrol station and it makes front page news, but seriously you feel like you are at the centre of where everything is happening and that you are a part of that news. Rio is a beautiful city and the people are amazing, however it couldn't touch London for the fact that there were bigger more partisan crowds.

**Can you describe what it's like to row in an Olympic final?**

It's exciting, you've done all the training you're going to do and now you're going to do the one thing you've been training for. You're up for it in a way you can't ever be up for any other race and you know you're competing alongside the best in the world.

**Did you get to know any athletes from other sports in the athlete's village?**

Eating in the athletes dining marquee which can cater for up to 3000 athletes at a time you get a variable smorgasbord of not just food but also humans ranging from the very petit, gymnastics to the beasts, heavyweight lifters using 2 chairs, one for each buttock to sit. Then you have the Usain Bolts tucking into McDonalds, the triathletes drinking smoothied meals and the lightweight rowers weighing out their portions then concealing it in a little doggie bag to have after weigh in. However as different the shapes sizes and eating habits of athletes you all share one thing in common and that is a passion for sport. It's a great environment. I met lots of athletes from around the world including some closer to home including Lutalo Muhammed and Northern Irelands very own Patrick Huston.

**What's your proudest rowing achievement?**

The obvious would be London 2012, but beyond that winning the diamond sculls at Henley Royal Regatta in 2003. the whole week leading up to the event and racing it I felt so capable and that I was destined to scull.

**Who has inspired you to achieve what you have?**

There are many people that have been inspiring characters but the probably the most inspiring to me are my parents, William and Jennifer. The values and skills that they instilled in me have seen me through my rowing career and have had the greatest influence on me.

**What's the toughest training session you've had to do?**

I can't remember, they were all hard!

**What do you miss now you've stopped full time training? And not miss?**

I miss the cool bright winter mornings when the water is pancake flat and making the boat fly over the top of the

water, it is the greatest feeling. I will not miss the blisters on my ass from long training camps spent on the ergo - it's not so bad when the first blister goes, it's the next session having to sit on the open blister and then the next blisters develops. I'm not lying!

### **What advice would you give to the boys and girls of Coleraine who want to follow in your footsteps?**

I never knew when I was taking my first strokes at school that I was going to make a career out of rowing. I think if I had of made this my sole aim that I wouldn't have developed as well as I did. I did lots of other activities and sports. During my A-level years I did Rugby, Orienteering, Fencing, Cross-Country Running, Beagling (it's an actual sport) and the odd session in a boat. I also got stuck in to school life and was active in The Boy's Brigade and later Army Cadet force as I had planned a future in the Army. It wasn't until my second year of University and having developed a great support network and used the skills of various sports that I was self-assured enough to know that I could actually make a life out this sport. It is also hard work, the easy day was always yesterday, but this is also true of all careers. My best advice, get your education and if you want to do it then commit straight out of University.

### **What are you doing now and what's it like to have a 'normal' job?**

I have been working in the banking sector for the last five weeks on an internship which I'm hoping will turn in to a full-time position. I'm up at 5 to make the commute from Henley-On-Thames to be at my desk for 7am in Canary Wharf, then it's non-stop through to between 19:00 and 21:00 depending on how busy the markets have been. Breakfast and lunch are eaten at the desk. It is hard work but compared to rowing I'm actually finding it relatively stress-free due to having weekends which is a complete novelty having spent all my weekends rowing or sleeping. The years spent rowing have given me a desire to want to be full on whatever I do.

## Domestic Rowing 2016

2016 was another busy year for having claimed COBRA members who have continued victory in the rowing after their time at CAIBC. Novice Fours at Corey McDowell was Men's Captain Shrewsbury last season at Reading University Boat Regatta.

Club, and had a successful head season with wins at Upper Thames Head, Bristol Uni Head and 2 silvers at BUCS head (Inter 4x, Lightweight 4x). This form continued into regatta season, and having had a productive training camp in Banyoles, Spain, Corey placed 5th in lightweight 4x at BUCS regatta and got knocked out in the semis in the light 2x (although he felt he could have made the A final... watch this space for next year!)

Jordan Gregg had a successful first year at Harper Adams University, and raised a few eyebrows as he competed in the "Beginner" Eights at BUCS Regatta. This being said, Jordan did lose his novice status in England

Finally, Calum McBurney took a sabbatical from rowing to focus on coaching for the year (and even brought the junior squad from Belfast Rowing Club to join CGS for a training day). The highlight of the year was his protégé Lucy Taylor secured a place in the Irish Junior Womens Quad and brought home a bronze medal from the Coupe de la Jeunesse in Poznan - being the first athlete from BRC to represent Ireland at this level in over 40 years.



Rumour has it that more COBRA members have dusted off the lycra in recent months, and are taking giant strides in both fitness and speed as they have big goals in sight for the summer of 2017. If you see Phil Hamill and Alex Humphrey on the water, feel free to give them some friendly advice!

*Calum McBurney*

# Coleraine Grammar '16

Rowing at CGS started in turmoil in September 2015 as no formal rowing coach was in position and the number of oarsmen were low. COBRA Old boys, teachers and parents all stepped up to fill the void and keep boats on the river and compete at the local Bann Head of the River in November.

COBRA day held during the Christmas break demonstrated the spirit of the club was alive and well with three eights taking to the water, the Old Boys eventually beating the boys' crew who held them to the new bridge before a bit of Olympic fire power allowed the old boys to pull clear. A great win in difficult rowing conditions.

The start of January 2016 brought a seismic change to CAI rowing, a change of Club name to Coleraine Grammar School Rowing Club (CGSRC), of colours from maroon to green with a red band and the influx of large numbers of girls attending the boat house for the first time. To add to the state of flux Jeremy Johnston formerly a Bann Rowing Club coach was appointed as head rowing coach.

December and January were unprecedented wet months with huge flows on the River Bann making rowing for novice rowers unsafe. Jeremy transferred water based training from the River to the Swimming Pool; coaching



taking place pre-school and lunchtimes with rowing skills being taught in double and single sculls, this would stand the athletes in good stead once they faced the River Bann.

The number of both male and female students attending rowing swelled dramatically during February and March with approximately 80 young people attending every Saturday. To support the increased numbers the school commissioned all 18 rowing machines serviced and in full working order, this enabled training to take place on land and water. Another knock-on effect was the ability to run evening rowing machine fitness classes for teachers who in turn pass on their enthusiasm and supervise the children during training sessions.

After several meetings the decision was taken by the coaching team not to attend Head of the River races in the early months of the year and to focus on teaching as many athletes as possible basic rowing technique.

The Regatta Season kicked off in April and five of the more senior and experienced boys were entered in the National Schools Regatta held in Limerick, the standout result was a bronze medal in the under 23 men's pair. CGS Junior 16 sculler Hugh Moore was unlucky to meet the eventual winner of the event in his heat and the under 23 double finished a very creditable 16 out of 38 boats.

A week later the Club took forty two athletes to the Portadown Regatta. The Junior 14 squad of boys made a clean sweep, winning medals in all three categories of single scull, double scull and quadruple scull. The senior boys won the club quadruple scull. The girls competed in the Junior 14, 15 and 16 categories rowing in both eights and quadruple sculls. Despite some valiant efforts they all came up against more experienced opposition which was to be expected and on this occasion experience won the day!

In mid-May the senior boys attended Queen's Regatta held on Castlewelan lake. Single sculler Hugh Moore won the





Junior 16 sculls beating opposition from all over Ireland, a tremendous result. The boys competed in the intermediate coxed four finishing just out of the medal positions but had the satisfaction of defeating crews from Methody and Queens.

Towards the end of May the rowers attended Belfast Sprint Regatta. The junior fifteen ladies quadruple scull set the tone for the day by beating a Portadown crew who had dispatched them with ease a mere month previously. This emerging crew of talent fought valiantly to lose by a boat length to Bann Rowing Club in the final. It was the then turn of the boys to shine, winning the final of the junior sixteen quadruple sculls by a comfortable distance.

The good times continued when the CGS ladies Invitational Junior Eight came up against rivals from Portadown who had beaten them a month previously. In a race that went down to the wire CGS emerged victorious winning by a distance of one foot. The Coleraine Grammar School girls made their own little bit of history by being the first girls' crew to win a rowing event for the school. The junior



fourteen ladies quadruple scull followed suit to win the final over Portadown. The boys, not to be outdone then won the junior fourteen quadruple scull final over Methody, a title they were defending from Portadown regatta.

The most exciting race of the day followed in the Invitational Junior Men's Eight between CGS and Methodist College, Belfast. The lead changed over the course of the five hundred metres but as both boats surged for the finish line they could not be separated and the race was declared a draw. The CGS boys showed considerable resilience when the race was re-rowed and came out winners.



The final was CGS against a Portora development crew and CGS was delighted to come away winners. The ever dependable CGS J16 sculler won the final race of the day.

A squad of 12 girls attended Carlow Regatta at the beginning of June returning home with 13 medals between them. They won the junior 14 single scull, double scull and quadruple scull. They also won the junior 15 quadruple scull and were unlucky in the junior 15 eight when a clash of oars during the race against Carlow scuppered their chances.

Rowing Club hosted Portadown Boat Club for a fun days racing on the Bann. Parents stepped up and provided an excellent barbeque for the 50 visiting Portadown athletes of all ages and abilities. With the emphasis on the joys of rowing every single athlete who took part in a race from the twelve year old boys and girls through to teachers and parents received a well-deserved rowing medal (139) in total.

On Tuesday 21st June 2016 CGS rowers were delighted to accept an invitation to attend Methodist College Belfast for an invitation regatta. Forty athletes travelled twenty boys and twenty girls. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the day's racing and we look forward to repaying the kind invitation by Methody in the September term.

In a time of educational and financial constraints the school very generously purchased oars for the new boat at a cost of over £3,000. The Royal Air Force Recruiting Branch very generously sponsored five sets of rowing oars and local businessman Wilbur Mitchell used his expertise in the vehicle repair business to paint the new colours onto these oars. CGS Rowing Club is clearly on the up with 90 athletes attending regular training and looking forward to embracing the challenges that the racing season brings.

*Jeremy Johnston*

On Saturday 11th June CGS

# Adult Rowing Classes at CGS

Wednesday evenings present a new challenge to parents, teachers and COBRA members who are local to the club. Under the watchful eye of CGSRC coach Jeremy Johnston, erg classes have been taking place at the boathouse on a Wednesday evening since February 2016 with a healthy number of teachers, parents and alumni taking up the offer.

Initially Jeremy was able to introduce 30 parents and teachers to rowing at CGS, the majority of which had links to the club or children training regularly.

During the later part of the winter season the new arrivals got to grips with the basics of rowing technique on the erg and also started working on their fitness. Training started with 15-minute ergs and increased to 20-minute ergs as fitness improved. Scores were recorded each

week and the simple challenge was to keep beating your last score.

Once the longer evenings arrived water sessions were offered to those who wanted to venture onto the water and 28 members of the erg class rowed on the water for the first time. This was made easier by the use of a touring boat, which was borrowed from Rowing Ireland for a month in the summer term. Sessions on the water typically ventured downstream to an area nearby the Crannagh coffee shop!

The camaraderie of the group was such that a trip to the Ramore was organised near the end of the summer term to thank Jeremy for his work.

Now into the new school year the Wednesday night classes have returned and remain popular with a few new faces

attending. Unfortunately the dark evenings prevent any rowing on the water, however once the longer nights arrive, the club will be into its second year of offering Wednesday rowing to parents, teachers and alumni.

Ultimately the evening classes have led to a number of parents offering their support to Jeremy and they now assist with coaching at the club during the week and on Saturday mornings. This support is very much appreciated by CGSRC and COBRA, with the number of boys and girls regularly training at the club at an all time high.

Members who are interested in erg classes on a Wednesday should not hesitate get in contact with Jeremy and get stuck in!

*Ross Cochrane*

## About COBRA



In late 2000, a legal entity and charity "Coleraine Old Boys Rowing Association" was formed by recently left old boys of

Coleraine Academical Institution led by William Wright with the aim of providing a way for them and future leavers to give back to the boat club, though fundraising, advice and coaching assistance, but also to act as a means for friends to keep in

touch after leaving the school.

Over the past 16 years COBRA has continued these goals by supporting rowing at CAI, not least acting as a pressure group to ensure the boat club stayed open during recent dark times, but we have also purchased several boats and other pieces of equipment that have been donated for use by the school.

Recently with the amalgamation of CAI and Coleraine High School to form Coleraine Grammar School, we have changed our name to **Coleraine Alumni Rowing Association** to reflect the new

generation of boys *and* girls that will be learning to row at our old club and we are proud to be the first and only alumni organisation of either school to welcome members from all three schools.

But COBRA is more than just an alumni association. We are, and always have been, open to anyone, whether they are a past pupil, a parent or simply a friend of the club who would like to join us in helping the school.

We look forward to continuing to support Coleraine Rowing, past, present and future.

For more information on COBRA or rowing past or present at CAI & CGS, visit our website at

[COBRARowing.co.uk](http://COBRARowing.co.uk)

or

[facebook.com/COBRARowing](https://facebook.com/COBRARowing)

**Editor:** Alex Humphrey

If you have any comments or would like to contribute to the next newsletter, please get in touch at [alex.humphrey@gmail.com](mailto:alex.humphrey@gmail.com)