

# COBRA

Coleraine Alumni Rowing Association



Issue 14—2021

## 20 Years and Counting

A brief history of COBRA



It may be surprising that COBRA is 20 years old this year, but the idea was around before then. Old boys had raced the schoolboys in the decades prior to 1994, but it was in this year that Niels Kee asked if I was going to join COBRA when I left school. When I asked what COBRA was he said they were the old boys rowing association, and although he was only joking the idea took root.

Roll on 6 years and I had finished uni in the summer of 2000 and my brother Andrew was rowing in the school J18 IV+. He asked me to come down to act as a megaphone for the legendary Bobby Platt as they couldn't hear him from the coaching launch. I agreed and Bobby seeing the chance of keeping me coaching for more than just a few weeks, supplied me with endless coffee & biscuits and

brought me down to the champs to help out. I was hooked and that was the start of 15 years coaching at the club. No wonder his nickname was Crafty.

On the 28th Dec 2000 I was chatting with Johnny Coulter & Brian Dickson about Bobby wanting to get old boys down to row, coach or just for a chat and they suggested that we set up an alumni club like they had in Glasgow Uni. And so

COBRA was born on that day. I can't remember much of what we talked about that evening, but I do remember an exceedingly long time being spent discussing rowing kit: type, colour, style, manufacturer, it went on and on. This turned out to be a common feature of more COBRA board meetings than I care to remember.

To begin with, we rounded up anyone who might be interested and started a Coleraine Inst Boat Club supporters emailing list. At Easter 2001 I met up with Geoff Macdiarmid & Neil Giffin and they decided that we were the perfect people to undemocratically appoint the COBRA committee. So I was told I would be chairman, Geoff was treasurer and Neil secretary. Johnny would be the social secretary, Brian the Captain, and as we'd heard reports that Richard Archibald was doing OK in the rowing world, we made him vice-captain. As committees are better with an odd number, my brother Andrew who was taking a gap year to coach at the school club at the time, would be appointed as the general dogsbody, to do most of the legwork for us.

Alison Millar from Macauley Wray solicitors (whose husband Alan & son John both had successful rowing careers at the school) got us registered as a Limited Company on the 8th January 2003 and recognised as a charity a few months later. We are incredibly thankful to Alison for all her work, especially when she joined Andy and me for a meeting with the school to get their blessing. It was with my old headmaster Stanley Forsythe and I found it rather awkward until Alison walked through the door and Stanley went from being the examiner to the examinee! He was very enthusiastic from that point on, even saying that Andy & I had saved the school club from closure (which was maybe exaggerating things slightly). It's odd to think that this was the 1st of 3 different headmasters that I had meetings with as chairman, for 2 different

schools, and 5 different Head Coaches, but only about the 1 rowing club.

Alison also lined up Irwin Donaghy (Stockman) to file our annual company accounts, and we're grateful to Roger Dallas and others for continuing to do this. As a limited company we also needed to have an AGM with the 1st one held in December 2003 and from that day I've had the privilege of being "status quoed" every year as the chairman. We had a very productive Fund Raising Committee under the chairmanship of Iain Giffin and then Philip Hamill and I'd like to thank them and everyone who helped run or attend our table quizzes, BBQs and even our Floral Art demonstration. The money raised was put to good use (although unfortunately not for a chairman's salary). We bought oars in 2005 & 2008, boats in 2007, 2012 & 2016 (1x, 1x, 2x, 4x+, 4x- & VIII+) and even ergs in 2011 (which was pretty hard to stomach as the one-time PR dept for the Anti-Erg Front!).

Over this time the Board had changed significantly, with Jason Taggart replacing Geoff as treasurer and then he himself being replaced by Philip Hamill. Neill was replaced by Steve Archibald who was replaced by Jamie Gibson. Johnny & Brian were next to be replaced, by Alex Humphrey and Calum McBurney who later took over the secretary role. Andrew & Richard were replaced in 2015 by Ross Cochrane and Mark McMullan.

So thanks to everyone who has served on the Board with me over the years, but I'd like to say a special thanks to Andy & Richard for their sterling work for COBRA. Andy did the vast majority of the donkey work for COBRA since day 1 and most COBRA endeavours would have stalled without his (what I'll diplomatically call) enthusiasm or persuasion. One year we had 7 people signed up for our annual dinner with less than a fortnight to go but come the day Andy had rounded up another 20 "willing" attendees. Richard has always been at the forefront of our interactions with the school and the wider

community and without his help and direction we would certainly have struggled to make such a positive impact. Our other Olympians also deserve a lot of credit for supporting us and the school club at every possible opportunity.

When Andy & Richard stood down in 2015, it left me as the only member of the original Board and I had at that point considered stepping down too. But as the schools merger was ongoing I thought it prudent to have at least one old face on the Board during the transition. However, when Alan Anderson stood up at our club dinner in 2018 and said that the thing he liked most about COBRA was that Board were all young people in the 30s, I realised that as an ancient 40 year old, my days were definitely numbered. I also decided that if I didn't get out soon, I may never do so and our 20 year anniversary seemed like a good opportunity.

It's also a good time to be stepping down as the school club is enjoying so much success, due in no small part to Jeremy Johnson who has overseen a remarkable turnaround at the club since he joined. I'd like to thank Jeremy for this and also thank his merry band of helpers, especially the COBRA ones Alan Anderson, Ross Cochrane, Jamie Gibson & Corey McDowell. And lets not forget Dr George who has been a great asset to both the school and the club. The one thing I'm not so keen on in the club at the minute is the lack of the colour maroon, but I will get over that, maybe. And as for the number of ergs....

But I'll finish now by thanking everyone who has been involved with COBRA, with CAIBC, and with CGSRC over the last 20 years. Especially the parents, as without their support there would be no rowing club. It's been a huge pleasure and privilege to be a part of the club, and I look forward to still being involved in a much less hands on capacity.

*William Wright – CAIBC 1992-1997.*



# The 2021 Season Highlights

## Junior World Championships

This summer two athletes from Coleraine Grammar School Rowing club were selected to row for Rowing Ireland in Bulgaria at the Junior World Rowing Championships. Rachel Bradley competed in the Woman's Double Scull with her crewmate from Lee Valley Rowing Club. The girls rowed an extremely strong regatta through heats, repechage, semi final and eventually bringing home a bronze medal in the final.

Fergus Bryce raced in the Men's Coxless Quadruple Sculls and again had great success at the regatta eventually finishing sixth in the world. Fantastic experiences to be rowing along with the very best in the world for both these athletes.



## Under 23 European Championships

Hugh Moore was selected to row for Rowing Ireland in the Lightweight Men's Single Scull at the Under 23 European Championships in the Czech Republic this summer. Hugh rowed through heats, to A/B semi finals and eventually through to the B final where he finished in a solid 4th place. This placed Hugh 10th overall at the regatta. Another fantastic result for Coleraine rowers at International level.





## National Schools Regatta

The first major event of the year for CGS was the National Schools Regatta at Eton Dorney. Coleraine GS Rowing Club entered in the Championship Girls Single Scull where Rachel Bradley rowed a brilliant race coming home in 2nd place.



## Irish Championships

Coleraine rowers had a successful championships across the board. Hugh Moore, rowing for Queens University Belfast, won the Men's Intermediate Double Sculls Championship of Ireland.

Coleraine Grammar School Rowing Club competed across six different categories bringing home medals for three of them. Rachel Bradley finished in 2nd place in the Woman's Junior Championship Single Scull, Rachel and Kirsty Dalzell then went on to finish in 2nd place in the Woman's Junior 19 Double Scull. This is the first crew boat from Coleraine to medal at the championships since the Junior Men's Coxless Quadruple Scull in 2010. Kirsty also finished in 2nd place in the Woman's Lightweight Single Scull.



## Henley Woman's Regatta

Coleraine Grammar School Rowing Club entered into two categories at the regatta. The Aspirational Lightweight Single Scull and Junior Coxless Quadruple Sculls.

Kirsty Dalzell competed the Aspirational Lightweight Single Sculler and qualified from her time trial to reach the last 16 of the event. Unfortunately she was drew against an extremely talented sculler from Surrey University Rowing Club who came 2nd at the British University and College Sports Rowing Championships only the week prior. Kirsty put up a brave fight and pushed the Surrey boat all the way to finish 4 boat lengths behind.

Our Junior Coxless Quadruple Scull unfortunately didn't manage to qualify their boat from the time trial. However they rowed brilliantly and being a year young for the event they will surely be back stronger next year.

## Henley Royal Regatta

COBRA members Graham Hunter and Hugh Moore competed at Henley Royal Regatta this summer. Graham competed in the Wyfold Challenge Cup for Coxless Four's with Vesta Rowing Club, while Hugh competed in the Prince of Wales Challenge Cup for Coxless Quadruple Sculls with Queens University Belfast Boat Club.



## National U23 Trials

Continuing her success in 2021, in November Rachel Bradley, as a new member of Newcastle University Boat Club, took part in the (British) National U23 trials at Boston, Lincolnshire. Still only 18, she came first at U21 level in the 5k Single Scull, 3rd at U23.



# Rowing Legends

At the start of November CGS Rowing Club were delighted to welcome to the boathouse two CAI old boys both of whom went onto become Rowing Olympians. Mr Iain Kennedy and Mr Noel Graham. Both gentlemen were accompanied by their wives and also the third Olympian from the boat Mr David Gray.

A gathering of over thirty guests including the Headmaster, Chairman of the Board of Governors and the Chairman of the Coleraine Alumni Rowing Association admired the billboard proudly displayed in the boathouse, which showed the schools



Olympic heroes. Following an inspection of the outstanding rowing facilities the guests adjourned to the Deerstalker Restaurant in the Golf links Hotel Portrush, where a room had kindly been set aside for our use. Guests enjoyed an excellent lunch and told stories and made speeches about days gone by.

## New Boat Trailer



Due to the increased numbers training and competing around the country at Heads and Regattas, an additional trailer was required to transport the boats to facilitate this, and in September the school took delivery of a new lightweight trailer to complement the existing one.

The fact that there are enough race-worthy boats to require two trailers is also a testament to fundraising work that Jeremy and the parents have put in, in the last few years. This has been helped in no small amount by COBRA, COBRA members and old pupils of the school.

The lighter weight trailer will also be more manageable for taking smaller number of high-performance athletes to Trials or specialist events.

For this we would like to thank *The Honourable The Irish Society, Ian Harvey MBE, Cappagh Cottage* and *Friends of Coleraine Grammar School* for their contributions.

# Anniversaries

## 25 years ago—1996

The 1st VIII+ travelled to Henley Royal Regatta, where they were defeated by the favourites and British schools champions Hampton, the first round.

Purchase of Aylings fleet including “The Old Boys” 4-

## 20 years ago—2001

The Colt VIII+ won the Craig Cup, the J16 Ulster Championships.

The 1st VIII+ competed at Henley Royal Regatta for the first time in five years, and became the first CAIBC crew to progress past the first round of the Princess Elizabeth Challenge Cup. They defeated Oundle School in the first round, before being defeated by the seeded Abingdon crew.

## 15 years ago—2006

First edition of the newsletter!

The Wray cup, for J18 4+ between Coleraine and Portora is raced for first time in 17 years, and won by CAI. It was first competed for in 1930.

## 10 years ago—2011

In December, the demolition of the old boathouse and pavilion began, clearing away for the new facilities we currently have.

Rowing Machines purchased by COBRA presented to CAI

## 5 years ago—2016

Current head coach Jeremy Johnston takes charge at CGS  
COBRA present the “Bobby Platt MBE” coxless four to the school, named in memory of the late head coach who passed away in 2015.







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)

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