

## British Rowing Awards 2021 – Regional Winners

### Volunteer of the Year

**Nominees: Matthew Temple - CUBC; Gary O'Shea – Cantabrigian RC; Richard Maxey – Isle of Ely RC; Malcolm Hingle – Broxbourne RC**

**Winner – Alice Draper - Milton Keynes RC**

By leading the most successful Learn to Row courses ever at MKRC, Alice has played a key role in rebuilding membership post Covid. Uptake of Development membership following completion of a LTR course increased from around 20% to over 80%, which has more than compensated for the fall in members renewing.

This is the third year Alice has volunteered for the role of LTR Coordinator & Development Captain, with step improvements being made year on year. Her dedication and hard work has elevated the role, the quality of the LTR courses and the offering to Development members, to an exceptional level.

The LTR Coordinator role involves managing the LTR waiting list, responding to new enquiries, inviting people to participate, planning eight sessions including members to support, gathering feedback from both participants and helper's and using to further improve subsequent sessions. But Alice's contribution goes way beyond completing each of these tasks. She has a natural flair for teaching and dedicates a huge amount of time and energy to personally connecting with each of the participants to understand how they are finding the course and how she can enhance their experience. Alice fully appreciates that people have widely differing capabilities and motivations and works with each of them to build confidence and skills as appropriate.

Prior to Alice being in the role, LTR graduates would join as Development members and their rowing sessions were organised by the women's captain. Alice proposed and implemented the Development Captain role whereby she would continue to organise their rowing sessions using her knowledge of their abilities and goals, to best match with supporting senior members and boat types. There is no doubt that this smoother transition has improved retention rates.

Covid of course presented challenges to the usual course format but Alice was not to be deterred and ran two courses for just four participants, thereby requiring minimal contact with other members. In both cases all four participants took up membership. As soon as it was feasible, a further two courses were run, each for 16 people. From the first, 14 people joined the club and the second course is still ongoing.

At Milton Keynes we have restricted access to the water, meaning a significant number of members are required to sacrifice their own rowing time to support LTR courses and subsequently Development members. Alice has been successful in engaging members to provide the level of support needed and to provide written feedback on each outing.

This years LTR's have been a huge success thanks mainly to Alice! Below, just some of the feedback received:

"It was super organised and everyone made me feel welcome."

"Really friendly club with great teamwork all round."

"I must thank leaders and crew members for their patience. ... Rowing is exhilarating and relaxing. I feel I've started to achieve something."

"Really good experience, wish I had done it years ago!!"

### **Lifetime Achievement Award**

**Nominees: Rodney Atkinson – Isle of Ely RC; Steve Casey – Peterborough City RC**

**Winner: Tony Roper – Yare BC**

Tony Roper was elected Secretary of Yare Boat Club, Norwich at 21 and has served for 58 years. Now, at 80, he continues to play an active role in Club affairs and its future direction as President. Longevity alone justifies this nomination, but Tony has made an exceptional contribution to the sport of rowing, benefitting countless participants.

The Secretarial role may have connotations of being routine, but not Tony's version of it. As well as being the interface for British Rowing, local authorities, other clubs and insurance providers, licensing the boats and administering membership, he has skilfully repaired Club boats and attended to house and grounds maintenance-all quietly and efficiently. Moreover, he still does! There is hardly a tap, plug, bolt, widget or boat fixing that has not been serviced, maintained or rebuilt by Tony over the last 60 years. He has supervised competency assessments for single scullers, patiently coached newcomers and supported Club events, both competitive and social. YBC quite simply owes its survival to Tony and for his handling of the aftermath of two landmark events.

The first, in the 70's, saw a take over bid but, led by Tony, a few loyal members, wishing to remain on site, formed Yare Sculling Club, later YBC and retained enough boats to survive.

The second was in 1997. Arsonists destroyed the main boathouse and fleet. Tony, with others, worked tirelessly to secure a complete rebuild and source replacements boats. To celebrate this re-emergence, the Club initiated a new event under the auspices of British Rowing. Tony played a pivotal role in the complex organisation required, calling upon experience gained from his own extensive competitive involvement. The Yare Cup is now a permanent fixture in the racing calendar.

In the mid 2000's, Tony's commitment to YBC was further demonstrated by his willingness to contribute funds (alongside others) for the purchase of the Club site from the landowner. This safeguarded the facility from competing external threats and has ultimately enabled the Club to purchase ownership from the Trustees, thus enhancing its future viability.

Now, in 2021, Tony has presided over a momentous milestone in the local rowing scene—the incorporation of Broadland Boat Club. This has inevitably involved complex amendments to policies and organisation, and an expansion of fleet and membership with the emphasis on ensuring incomers feel valued and welcome. Again, Tony has been pivotal in steering the adjustments needed and is closely involved with the plans for expansion and modernisation of facilities. Seeing a need for improved, safe and confident use, he has already future-proofed river access by personally securing and supervising installation of new, state of the art launching pontoons, a practical and durable donation to the Club's facilities.

YBC has always been friendly and welcoming with an inclusive ethos, nurtured by Tony and reflective of his character and it owes him an enormous debt of gratitude. He is the embodiment of sustained, selfless voluntary service to our sport and is the bedrock of YBC.

## **Rising Star of the Year**

### **Winner: Chris Radbone – Cantabrigian RC**

Chris has coached the senior women's squad at Cantabs for a few years now, but has really developed as a coach over the last 18 months. As a volunteer, his commitment to the squad is unparalleled, and he is so giving of his time. Chris makes it his mission to ensure that people improve both on and off the water. He genuinely cares about every single individual in the squad and spends every session helping them achieve their best. He has a very holistic view to his coaching, which for someone so young is really very impressive.

Over the past year he has been instrumental to the success of the squad, in which every athlete entered qualified for Henley Women's Regatta. Alongside coaching the senior women, Chris also coached the Hills Road girls crew which also raced at HWR.

Even when furloughed over lockdown, Chris spent time undertaking a nutrition qualification, ultimately helping to drive the squad on. He is our resident S&C expert too, and has inspired a lot of the squad to better themselves in the gym.

Despite his young age, Chris is exceptionally well respected at the club.

## **Coach of the Year – Club Development**

### **Winner: Rob Mayes – Broxbourne RC**

The nomination is for the coach Rob Mayes for developing a successful Development programme, Development team and Development squad at the club. This has been a new initiative, which has successfully met demand to row, and drawn in many from the local community.

Rob initially ran extremely popular on-line fitness sessions, using his personal training knowledge for the club. Feedback from many was that this was what kept them going in lockdown, when they could not row. As we had no water sessions Rob also added some additional weekly sessions at different times of the day and with different content, to help reach as many members as possible. He also made each session fun if good exercise, made it clear how people could make sure it supported them at their fitness level. There was lots of variety in the sessions to help keep members motivated and inspired to continue to train

When crew rowing was not permitted, Rob continued with the on-line sessions, but also supported many members to gain skills and confidence in single sculling.

Once back on the water, he helped reconfigure the club learn to row system, drawing in a specific 17-30 cohort. This also led to a new squad - the Development squad. This is historically a group with poor retention, but there have already been 3 courses and the retention is close to 100% This squad has already grown to well over 20, and with a focus on fitness and technique in land sessions, followed up by a team approach on the water, the squad has already entered some races, and within 6 months achieved their first win.

Rob is very aware of keeping people motivated, and has taken the group on a night out in London, to keep the group bonded and sociable.

The development squad has met a local need, is thriving and successful, and motivated under the coaching of Rob Mayes

### **Coach of the Year – Club Performance**

**Nominee: Jo Burch – Rob Roy BC**

**Winner: Tom Kisby – Peterborough City RC**

Tom is a member of Peterborough City Rowing Club and was previously an active and successful junior.

Approximately five years ago Tom put himself forward to join the junior coaching team and within a very short period made a very significant and positive impact.

Tom's influence and positive impact really came to the forefront when the Covid Pandemic began to take hold and affect the Country and the Club with Lockdowns.

During this period Tom took it upon himself to stay engaged with all the juniors and set up twice weekly Virtual Circuits via Zoom.

Tom led the circuits by example, not only ensuring the juniors remained active but that they had fun. A couple of examples are that approaching Christmas he organised a virtual challenge to get to Lap Land from Peterborough by recording distance travelled by Rowing Ergo, cycling, running or walking. This challenge came to the attention Peterborough Rowing Club in Canada and in the Spring this led to another challenge to virtually get from Peterborough in the UK to Peterborough in Canada. These challenges not only engaged the Juniors but encouraged the Senior members to also join in. In addition to running these circuits Tom "touched based" with those juniors who were not joining the circuits, for whatever reason, ensuring they were "ok" and sought ways in which he and the Club may be able to help them.

But it was not just running the physical activities that made Tom stand out, he also ran "get together and chat" sessions via Zoom and it became evident early on that some juniors were struggling with the Lockdown but having the opportunity to get with other juniors in the Club, albeit virtually, enabled them to talk and be themselves again – the improvement in their mental wellbeing was clear to be seen.

In the early stages of the Lockdowns being "relaxed" the numbers permitted to return to the Club were restricted at any given time. Tom ensured that a plan was in place which gave every junior athlete in the Club, 60+, the opportunity to have a row and an ergo session whilst continuing with the virtual circuits.

As more "relaxation" was permitted Tom developed a system which brought back regular weekly training sessions and enabled crews to be formed in preparation for National events.

It is testament to Tom's effort and commitment over the very difficult Pandemic period that he was instrumental in preparing and entering seven crews from Peterborough at the Junior

Championships. What is even more significant is that this is the highest entry for many years that Peterborough has entered for this event.

Tom's plans continue with a vision for the coming 2022 season and starting this, he has planned for four Junior Quads to be entered for the Fours Head, again the highest entry the Club has made for this event from the Junior section.

But it has not been an easy time over the past eighteen months for Tom; during this time he changed jobs which meant that for a period he was commuting from Peterborough to Northampton, he also moved house - but none of this affected his commitment and dedication to the Juniors. The Club has recognised his sterling commitment and enthusiasm by appointing him as Junior Coordinator and he has already, once again, shown his commitment to this position and the Juniors by organising and running a Group meeting with the athletes and parents setting out the plans for the coming season finishing off with a “fun-afternoon” of mixed playboat races which also involved the parents and BBQ party.

There is no doubt in the eyes of the Trustees of Peterborough City Rowing Club that Tom ticks all, and more, of the boxes for Coach of the Year and is a deserving candidate.