



BRITISHROWING

Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

July 2024

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Rewards and Recognition for Rowers

At its meeting in July, the Royal Humane Society (RHS) conferred awards on the following rowers:

- Izzy Stevenson (Windsor Girls School) - Testimonial on Vellum
- John Dodsworth, (Christchurch RC) - Testimonial on Parchment
- Stephen Aldridge (Christchurch RC) - Certificate of Commendation
- James Erwin, (Christchurch RC) - Certificate of Commendation

These awards are described on the RHS website ([Awards and Certificates - Royal Humane Society](#))

The Testimonial on Vellum is awarded “where someone has put themselves in considerable danger to save, or attempt to save, someone else”. This award is exceptional. This is the highest RHS award that a rower has yet achieved, and Izzy, at 14, is the youngest person that we have nominated. This is a summary of the incident.

"Izzy Stevenson was rowing at bow in a coxed quadruple sculling boat and her colleague, also 14, was coxing. The girl's coxing position was almost prone in a compartment at the bow of the boat. As they were approaching the race finish line the boat suddenly capsized. Izzy and the other three rowers managed to get out and surface quite quickly, but the cox did not emerge. Izzy quickly dived under water to rescue the girl from within the inverted boat. Her first attempt was unsuccessful but her second try worked, and she was able to pull the girl free from her seat. Both girls surfaced and all five rowers then hung on to the upturned boat awaiting to be rescued. The safety launch was deployed and came and rescued the rowers."

The Testimonial on Parchment is awarded where someone “has put themselves in danger to save, or attempt to save, someone else”. The Certificate of Commendation is awarded where someone “has made a significant contribution to the saving or attempted saving of a life, though their own life was not necessarily at risk”. This is a summary of the incident.

Two rowing club coaches, Stephen Aldridge and John Dodsworth, were each in separate launches supervising a training session for a group of junior scullers. They became aware of a woman in deep flowing water holding on to a mooring buoy and in distress. John approached the woman and cut the engine. Stephen remained close-by in his launch monitoring the attempted rescue. He made contact via radio with a third coach, James Erwin, who was some distance away in the club's safety launch.

The woman in the water was very cold, almost submerged, quite passive, and her breathing was erratic. John tried to lift her out onto the launch, but she was too heavy, weighed down by her saturated clothing. John almost managed to lift her up and onboard but he slipped and fell overboard into the river. He then swam around the stern and supported the woman whilst keeping hold of the launch for flotation.

The riverbank at this point was steep and it was not possible to land the woman there. The tide was ebbing, so John decided to remain in the water as the launch was drifting towards shallow water and a beach about 250 metres downstream. Stephen stayed close and physically guided the drifting launch towards the beach. James in the club safety launch arrived and helped recover the woman to the beach, putting a thermal cloak on her and keeping her talking. Stephen had contacted the emergency services, and the ambulance was waiting further upstream at a public slipway.

The beach where the three coaches and the woman had landed was not accessible to vehicles, so they decided to take her about a kilometre upstream to the public slipway to meet the ambulance and hand her over to paramedics. She was conscious and communicating by the time she reached the ambulance. John, who fell in, was quite cold and had a few minor aches and pains but soon recovered."

In 2023 Royal Humane Society awards were presented to seven rowers for the probable saving of three lives. The presentations are described on the British Rowing website here,

- [Rowers recognised for lifesaving reactions after competitor collapses - British Rowing](#),
- [18-year old Dominic Jones awarded Royal Humane Society Resuscitation Certificate - British Rowing](#), and
- [Rowers receive Royal Humane Society awards - British Rowing](#)

These latest awards will be presented, in person, and there will be similar announcements on the website.

In addition, British Rowing Certificates of Commendation have been awarded to Paignton Amateur Rowing Club and Torquay Rowing Club whose “members worked together to rescue of a man from the sea in Torbay on 22nd April 2024. There is more information [here](#).

British Rowing Certificates of Commendation have been awarded to Ben Jackson and Laura Meridew of Hartpury University and College Boat Club “for their contribution to the successful rescue of a woman from the Gloucester and Sharpness Canal on 12th June 2024. There is more information in the June Monthly Report.

Incidents in July

Rowers to the rescue again

A woman, not connected with rowing was walking her dog on the tow path. The dog fell into the canal, which has steep sides, and could not get out. The woman jumped in after the dog and was then herself unable to get out of the water. Rowers spotted the women and notified a coach in a launch. The coach helped the dog and the woman out of the water and returned them to the bank. Had the rowers and their coach not been present then it would have been difficult for anyone else to perform this rescue as there as there was no throw line or life buoy on the bank in the vicinity.

Lesson Learned

Following a low-speed collision, one of the rowers involved reflected on the incident and concluded that the “*key learning for myself as a steers to be a reinforcement about the importance of keeping a good lookout, to beware of potential blind spots when steering and to beware of crews doing stationary exercises*”. A good lesson well learned.

In another incident two 4-s were racing side by side, got too close and clashed blades resulting in a crab and injury to a rower. This was discussed and it was agreed that side by side is only permissible when it is safe. Crews must not to be on the wrong side of the river at any time.

Antisocial behaviour

A rower in a 1x was heard the revving of an outboard and, before he could react, a man drove a dark grey plastic launch out from between some boats and turned around running over the bow of the 1x causing crush damage. The man drove straight off without stopping. The report states that *“it is unclear whether the ramming of the single was deliberate or done under the influence of drink and drugs”*.

In another incident, experienced rowers were afloat when a group of teenagers threw several rocks hitting both the boat and the rowers in the boat. A Police incident report has been filed. There were no injuries.

A member of the public appeared to use a motorboat as a weapon to attack a crew during racing. The driver was repeatedly asked to keep clear. The Police have been made aware.



In another incident a pleasure boat with three persons on board was reported to be deliberately interfering with a regatta. The boat was driven onto the course (subject to a river closure) and then moved upstream towards the crews marshalling at the start, travelling at speed and washing down crews in the navigation channel. A 1x was completely swamped and required assistance. The launch also washed down other crews and almost collided with a 4- and an umpire's launch. There was considerable verbal abuse from the driver throughout of the incident. This incident was reported to the Navigation Authority and the Police. It is understood that they spoke to the launch driver and will determine whether to prosecute. The incident was recorded on video. (The name of the boat and the face of the driver are visible in the original photo but have been obscured or omitted from this version.)



In yet another incident a motor cruiser ignored requests to stop and continued along the course whilst a race was in progress. This resulted in a collision with a 4x and a near miss with a 2x in the following race. There were no injuries. This regatta is licensed by the Canal and Rivers Trust. The river is not closed to other traffic, but measures are in place at both ends of the course to stop and make arrangements with cruiser traffic who wish to traverse the course or to moor up within it.

In a further incident a group of three youths set two unmanned barges loose and pushed them out into the stream. A barge swung out into the flow and narrowly missed a 2x. – fortunately, it was caught by a neighbouring barge owner and pulled back to the bank. The other barge was pushed out into the flow and travelled 100-200m downstream, narrowly missing a 4x travelling upstream, before hitting the opposite bank and becoming fast between the bank and a moored barge. The Police were informed.

In another incident two single sculls heading upstream through a bridge, and something was thrown at them. One rower was brushed by something like a ball. This just missed their face and hit the water. The other 1x was hit quite hard on the canvas by a similar object, which left a pink residue. This was thought to be pink and the size of a dog ball. The objects appeared to have come from directly overhead.

In another incident a water balloon was dropped on me from a bridge on to a 1x. It hit the canvas just in front of the rower and landed with a loud bang. The rower was shocked, and splashed by the water.

In a further incident, a barge came through a lock/tunnel and hit a 1x. The boat capsized the barge and continued without stopping to help or assist. The rower was left stranded holding on to side of the lock with nowhere to get out of the water.

In another incident two youths, aged about 12 - 14 years entered a restricted part of the quayside and threw stones at a 2x. A stone landed one metre from the stern of the boat. A few minutes later another stone was thrown at the coaching launch, but this stone landed several metres short. The launch had already passed the youths, so they were not captured on the dashcam. The area accessed by the youths is not covered by the Environment Agency security cameras. The incident was reported to the police and a crime number obtained. A portable camera is now carried in the launch in addition to the mounted dashcam. The continued uncertainty whether members will face stone-throwing youths each time they go on the river has introduced a level of anxiety in the sport not experienced before.

At this time of year, during the school holidays and when the weather is hot, there is often an increase in antisocial behaviour. We have drafted a draft Antisocial Risk Management Plans for inclusion in RowSafe in the April 2025 revision. This is presented in a document that accompanies this report. Please send comments to safety@britishrowing.org.

Broken Blades

There have been several instances recently where blades have broken. In one case a spoon parted from the loom. It was reported that this was not checked prior to the outing. However, defects that could cause this to happen may not be visible on the surface of the scull.

In another incident involving a collision between a 1x and a 4x, one of the sculls in the 1x snapped at the loom.

In yet another incident, a collision between two 2xs resulted in a sculling blade being broken.

In another incident a collision between a 1x and a 4x resulted in a broken blade.

One club has examined its blades to identify those that are more likely to break. Visible surface damage, especially on the leading edge, is likely to introduce stress concentrations and make fracture more likely.

I have discussed this problem with friends who have expertise in materials science, and we concluded that the fracture mechanism is likely to be by fatigue. Micro-cracks in the structure can be detected by standard laboratory non-destructive testing techniques.

However, this is not available to most clubs and, as a pragmatic alternative, it may be possible to detect inherent weakness by comparing the stiffness of otherwise identical sculls. This can be achieved by supporting the sculls at the ends, so that they are horizontal, and hanging a small weight from the centre and then measuring the deflection. If you have a better idea, then please write to me at safety@britishrowing.org.



Contaminated water

There were two further incidents of rowers becoming ill following exposure to contaminated water, as follows: -

Rowers suspected that they had some river water in their water bottle or their hands during an outing. Within 48 hours, rowers still unwell and unable to train for regatta that weekend. They suffered severe sickness, diarrhoea, and a high temperature. They needed a course of antibiotics. River testing showed very high levels of E. coli.

In the other incident, a rower suffered the following symptoms after a capsized: -

- Diarrhoea
- Stomach pains and cramps
- Loss of appetite
- Body aches and
- Fever and cold chills.

Incident Reports and admission of guilt

Someone wrote to ask about the legal status of Incident Reports and whether I was aware of any instances when an incident report has been used as an effective admission of guilt in a claim by a third-party seeking damages? Do I think this is a valid reason for not submitting a report? The people who are concerned have British Rowing RACE membership and assume that they are covered for public liability and personal injury claims.

The response was that I have never known of a claim being made against a rower for damages resulting from an incident, so I do not think anyone has anything to fear from making a report. These reports should be all about learning and not about fault or blame. We actively try to deter anyone from making comments about blame.

Membership of British Rowing confers insurance benefits. These are included for all members, not just those with RACE membership. There is more information here [Insurance - British Rowing](#).

If you read the preamble to the Incident Reporting system you will find: -

"Reports can be submitted anonymously.

Reports are confidential and comply with GDPR and the Data Protection Act (2018).

In certain circumstances, British Rowing will also send a copy onto British Rowing's insurance providers."

Incident Reports are not made under oath but if there ever is litigation between rowers (and there has been none yet) then they could become "discoverable documents".

An early admission of liability can be very helpful as otherwise the legal costs can quickly become huge and far exceed the compensation paid.

Support for the KNRB

The Royal Dutch Rowing Federation ([KNRB](#)) is considering the introduction of an Incident Reporting system. They feel that British Rowing clubs are well disciplined in reporting incidents. They asked whether we have some system or approach in place to maintain the level of reporting. They are concerned about how they can motivate clubs to report.

The response was that this is far from simple. We have established a culture where many, I hope most, clubs understand that by reporting an incident they are making a positive contribution to rowing safety.

It takes time and care to develop this culture. We always thank the person submitting the report when we comment on them. Nobody ever gets into trouble because of a report. We give prizes to the clubs that submit the most reports each year. At the end of the year, I write to the handful of large clubs (100+ members) who have not submitted reports and remind them of their opportunity to support the rowing community in this way. Most respond positively.

The information in reports does not disappear into a "Black Hole". We share the learning that reports provide in my Monthly Report and in the annual analysis of reports. We take care to do this anonymously so that nobody is embarrassed.

We did not complete the 2023 analysis because we have been having problems with the software supporting the Incident Reporting system. Despite this, our members persist in writing their reports. (Thank you all.)

Within most clubs and many rowers we have a culture of openness and willingness to share. They are confident that we will treat their information with respect. We typically have 2,500 reports per year.

Anyone can report anything, it is not the responsibility of designated individuals. Reporting is a game that anyone can play.

The first thing you should do is to ask yourself why you want clubs to report incidents. What are you going to do with the information you collect? How are you going to use it to guide your actions or to improve the safety advice that you deliver? It is important to have a clear vision before asking anyone to do anything. Remember, people do things because they see the benefit of doing them; they do not do things just because someone has asked them to.

The simple advice is to: -

- give clubs time to understand the importance of reporting, you may need to explain this several times.
- make it easy for clubs to report, keep it simple and efficient
- encourage reporting by explaining the contribution that each report makes to all clubs
- respect the information and do not embarrass anyone
- provide feedback, share what you have learned from the reports

Young People Rowing with Adults

The Safeguarding Team was asked by a Club Welfare Officer (CWO) whether it would be safe for a young rower who has just turned 18 to row without coaches but with others. The rower is very competent. This was referred to me.

The simple answer is that the rower is 18 and therefore an adult and can row with whoever they wish. There is no need for them to be coached but many crews are.

The more nuanced answer is that if this person rows with the Junior squad, perhaps in a J18 crew, then they should stick to that squad and not row, unescorted, with adults. It would be a little difficult for fellow members of the junior squad to see a colleague doing something that they are not allowed to do.

In real life people do not make an instantaneous transformation on their 18th birthday. A little care would go a long way. We should treat people as individuals and recognise that they each develop in their own way. If the CWO thinks that this rower is ready to row with adults, then they could do so. If not, then more time in the Junior squad may be appropriate.

Tideway Code updated

The Port of London Authority (PLA) has worked with the Thames Regional Rowing Council to produce an updated edition of the Tideway Code. This is available on the PLA website at [Tideway_Code.pdf \(pla.co.uk\)](#). They have also issued a Safety Bulletin, highlighting key changes, this is available here: [Tideway Code 2024 - Publication | Port of London Authority \(pla.co.uk\)](#).

Speed Limits for Launches on the Tidal Thames

Someone wrote to say that they had heard that there was a new policy that launch drivers need to stick to 8 knots on the Tideway, is that correct?

The response was that I think that this came from the 2024 revision to the Tideway code ([Tideway_Code.pdf \(pla.co.uk\)](#)). This contains the following on page 44: -

" **Speed limits**

*Rowing coaching launches have a special dispensation from the PLA to exceed the speed limit **but only when directly coaching a crew**. At all other times coaching launches are limited to 8 knots and should navigate to the starboard side of the channel. The speed limit applies if a coach becomes separated from their crew and they must not exceed 8 knots when attempting to catch-up with a crew.*

Similarly, coaches must proceed with extreme caution and within the speed limit behind aits. “

Keep your footing

A coach slipped from the side decking of a catamaran launch when moving forward to attach it to the winch hook. Various options were discussed, including the use of handrails and a boathook but the option that found most favour was to use self-adhesive 150mm wide non-slip anti-skid decking strips. There is more information [here](#).

Capsize Training “Requirements”

I was asked to confirm our requirements for capsize training as it was thought that the length one must be able to swim has been reduced. It was also thought that climbing onto the boat and paddling puts a lot of strain on the boats and could cause some damage.

The response was that there are several issues here. Firstly, we do not have requirements we simply provide advice and guidance. It is up to clubs to define their own needs based on their risk assessment and on their knowledge of the venue where they row.

The guidance on swimming ability changed a few years ago and we no longer advise that rowers must be able to swim. The guidance is in section 3.6 of RowSafe ([RowSafe - British Rowing](#)); this contains the following: -

3.6. Competence in the Water

It is important that rowers who find themselves in the water do not panic and are able to respond so that they can keep themselves safe. In effect, this means that they should be able to swim or float. Floating, rather than swimming, is recommended by the RNLI, RLSS and NWSF because it tends to conserve heat and energy when in cold water.

All participants in rowing should be competent and confident in the water. Each club is expected to use its Risk Assessment to determine the capability that it requires its members to have.

It should be recognised that the ability to swim in a pool does not guarantee the ability to swim in cold, exposed waters. This is explained further in the online learning module on Cold Water and Hypothermia and the Safety Alert - Cold Water Kills.

Everyone taking part in rowing should be able to:

- Float unaided for at least five minutes*

And ideally:

- Swim at least 50 metres in light clothing (rowing kit).*
- Tread water for at least two minutes.*
- Swim under water for at least five metres.*

Those rowers who can only float or swim when wearing a buoyancy aid should also wear such an aid, or a lifejacket if coxing, whenever they are afloat.

Capsize training courses are in RowHow here [Course: Capsize Drill | Home \(rowhow.org\)](#). There are two courses, one for rowers and a slightly longer one for coaches. There is more information in Section 3.7 of RowSafe.

If you use boats that will support the weight of the people using them then they are less likely to be damaged.

Competence Requirements for Individuals

I was asked to provide guidance on the part of section 3.2 of [RowSafe](#), "Specification of the competence requirements for individuals". The club also would like to know whether if it was to rely on internal assessors, such as Captains or Coaches, to identify when club members have reached a specific competence milestone then would they be exposing those individuals to any liability should some incident subsequently occur?

The response was that the statement in RowSafe is: -

Safety Plans should include.

- Specification of the competence requirements for individuals (including competence in the water, steering, launch driving, coaching etc).

Rowing Clubs operate in a variety of venues with different risk profiles. It is important that they use their risk assessments to determine the safety rules that they need at their venue. This includes the competence requirements for individuals. This is the basis for best practice. There isn't a "one size fits all" solution.

The Rower Development Guide here [Rower Development Guide - British Rowing](#) contains extensive material on the developing the competence of rowers. This may help.

Assessment decisions can be less subjective if there are specified criteria to judge against, however, it is not always easy to define and agree these criteria. These should relate to the conditions and risks at the club's venue.

Providing decisions made by club officers, or anyone else, are "reasonable", i.e. seen by a reasonable person to be reasonable, then there should be no problems with liability.

Defibrillators in wet conditions

A club has been offered a portable defibrillator and one of its committee members, who is also a GP, and is concerned about the use of a defibrillator in a wet environment. I was asked to confirm British Rowing's position.

The response was that I usually take advice on matters relating to resuscitation, and other medical matters, from Dr David Zideman, our Honorary Medical Adviser. David is a Consultant in Anaesthesia & Pre-Hospital Emergency Medicine and a Member, IOC Medical & Scientific Commission Games Group. I expect that he is currently a little busy.

Based on previous discussions with David, I can assure you that, providing the areas of the skin where the pads fit are sufficiently dry for the pads to stick to the skin, then further skin wetness will not have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the defibrillator. The pads are positioned such that the shock is transmitted directly across the heart. The defibrillator will be effective even if the casualty is lying on a wet surface or in a little water. The defibrillator will be effective and there will be no risk to the person using it.