

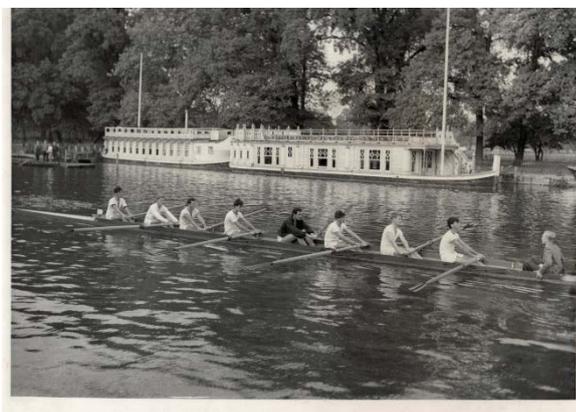
BRIAN SNELSON



On 3 October 2015, Brian Snelson, YCRC Club Treasurer, received the British Rowing Medal of Merit. Here's why.

Brian was a cross country runner at school and had no intention of taking up rowing, but the Captain of Boats for St Peter's College cycled up the hill where the young fresher was living and persuaded him to give rowing a try. Brian never looked back.

He took to rowing like the proverbial duck to water, rowing with his College for three years, two of which were in the College First Eight and where one of his fellow crew members was Fred Evans, father of the current Club Captain Pat.



Oxford University trial 8, with Brian at 2.

Brian moved to York in 1960 and straight away joined the rowing club. He continued to row until 1965; like others at the time, his rowing career was relatively short as there was no such thing as Masters rowing and leisure rowing unthinkable.



Winners of the Harrison Trophy (Senior Eights) York Spring Regatta 1962
Beat St Peter's School BC & Durham University BC
Brian Snelson, Geoff Dack, Ken Woodruff, Barry Dack, Ted Portlock (Captain), Charles McNeil, Patrick Howat, Tony Lane, Baz Turner

Photo by Yorkshire Evening Press and Gazette & Herald May 1962

But despite giving up active rowing, he never really left the Club. In 1963 the vice Chairman resigned and Brian was asked to take over, which he did. Then the Captain left for Australia and the Secretary for Newcastle, leaving the unelected Brian as Captain, Vice Captain and Secretary. That's real multi-tasking.

Brian says his main role was to get people to take on the various roles which he did, although he remained Club Secretary until being elected Club Captain for 1976/77, after which he became Regatta Secretary and held this role for 13 years. Brian has also been a Trustee and Treasurer of the Club for many years, being appointed Treasurer in 2002

Brian had always been involved in the York Regattas in one way or another, which led to him being approached by Wilf Mellor and asked to take on a broader role. Until the late 1960s, regattas had always just appointed their own umpires, but the Amateur Rowing Association (now British Rowing) realised that if rowing was to become a respected sport, regattas needed to be run under their jurisdiction, umpires needed to know the rules of racing and be trained. Brian was given the unenviable task of training and licensing all of the umpires for York – nothing too taxing, just making sure they knew the rules.

Maybe he did that rather too well, as he soon received a call from the Chairman of the National Regatta Committee, asking him to be on a newly formed National Umpires Commission and to take charge of all umpiring at regattas in the North of England, from Berwick to Nottingham. And there was trouble. Sheffield had just organised a regatta without telling them and Brian was sent to sort them out. He oversaw the training and qualification of all umpires in the three Divisions, a task that was relatively trouble free with one exception. Durham. The Regatta was a two day holiday for the City, the umpires were Council Officers who knew little about rowing but did like sitting in the sun. Did he get them whipped into line? More or less, with the help of his deputy in division 1.

After 3 years of sorting out umpires for one third of England, he pointed out that the area was simply too big. Brian suggested that each division, which later became the regions, had its own umpires commissioner. This suggestion was adopted but not the suggestion that regions elect their commissioner rather than being appointed by the national commission. Ian Wilson took over as umpiring commissioner for this division and Brian went back to training umpires, and has trained most of the current commission!

When I asked Brian what his most memorable times had been, he grinned.

“The Henley wins, our first Men’s and Women’s Henley wins, I was Treasurer at the time”, he replied. “I like to feel that by helping to run the club well, keeping the finances in order, I have helped those crews achieve their outstanding results. And other wins and crews as well. We hadn’t won the Londesborough Trophy (Mens 4+ race at York Regatta) since 1932, but there was a crew that came second the year I was Club Captain and then went on to win the next year. When I was Club Chairman in 1973, a ladies crew won the first women’s national championship medal. Jack Wood was Lord Mayor at the time, a long standing club member and the club was given a civic reception in recognition of that win.”

“I also like to think that I have helped individual club members. When Alan Whitwell joined the national squad his employers moved him to the London office – no Lottery funding in those days – and Alan went on to win a silver at the Moscow Olympics.”

“I enjoyed my rowing here in York, obviously, perhaps the highlight of that was winning Senior status in the 8+ in 1962. I’ve fallen in a few times, but that happens to the best of us.”

“Rowing has been an integral part of my life for 60 years now. Life without rowing is unthinkable, really, so maybe I still have a few years left”

Brian, we all hope so, the Club will not be the same without you.

“I don’t think it is an exaggeration to say that Brian is something of an institution” said Pat Evans, YCRC Club Captain. “It was an extraordinary coincidence and a rather touching moment when I found out that he had rowed with my father. He has been a member of the club as an athlete and as a club official for over 50 years. He has fulfilled a range of roles; whatever the Club has needed, he has turned his hand to. He has seen the Club go through great times and troubled times, he has always been a steady hand on the tiller. His contribution to the Club has been immeasurable and we owe him an immense debt of gratitude. But to me, this shows the extent to which we rely on volunteers to run our Club. We don’t have paid officers or roles, everything is done by volunteers. Not everyone can put in the work that Brian has over the years, he is an outstanding example, but I hope he will inspire everyone to contribute in some way, however small, to the running and success of our great club.

*Liz Porte
April 2016*