

# BECCLES ROWING CLUB

Words: Phil Marler

Beccles RC has attracted a whole host of new members by improving its facilities, welcoming all sections of the community and running an annual competition for complete novices to the sport. None of this would be possible, though, without the dedication of its diligent committee, existing members and their fundraising efforts.



**W**hen trying to think of rowing centres in East Anglia you'll probably think immediately of Bedford, Cambridge, Norwich, amongst others, but how many of you would consider Beccles?

Beccles is a small, historic market town nestled in the heart of the Norfolk Broads, situated on the Norfolk / Suffolk border. Perfect for rowing, the River Waveney meanders for mile after mile, allowing club members to row to Norwich (should they choose to) – a distance of some 36 miles by river.

For almost 20 years now, there has been a rowing club in Beccles. However, at its inception in 1989, the founding home of the Club was woefully inadequate. The construction of the Club's 'boatshed' consisted of fence panels for walls, wooden pallets for flooring and a roof of corrugated

tin. All of this was squeezed onto a plot no more than two metres wide, meaning the boats had to be rigged and then de-rigged before use, losing club members valuable time on the water. This whole situation was compounded by the fact that the level of the site meant that at almost every high tide the wooden floor would be floating around – a huge health and safety concern.

Club membership stood at around 20 and was operating at full capacity at the

regular club sessions. The committee knew that something needed to be done and set about identifying potential new sites for relocation or else it would be limited in its growth in the future.

Through committee connections to a local charitable trust, the Club was able to locate an appropriate riverside plot which the trust acquired and rented back to the Club on a 50-year lease. The site was prepared for a longer term future – with

## BECCLES ROWING CLUB



**FOUNDED:** 1989  
**COLOURS:** Red and black  
**MEMBERS:** 35  
**FLEET:** 12 (a mixture of singles, doubles and two coxed fours) plus coaching launch  
**WEBSITE:** [www.becclesrowingclub.co.uk](http://www.becclesrowingclub.co.uk)

## FUNDRAISING TIPS FROM BECCLES RC

- Ensure it can be demonstrated that the club supports junior development – there is far more grant aid available for the development of youth activity.
- Provide a clear, concise business case when applying for the money. Cost the project or item being applied for carefully – it shows the recipient that you are serious.
- Include photographs with your application, where appropriate, as it helps to sell your story.
- Provide evidence of how the money was spent (again, photos can be useful) along with a thank-you.
- Engage the club membership – in terms of creative input and also working parties – to cut labour costs where possible.
- Don't give up, despite the decline letters. There are many organisations that will consider supporting projects in the community – some will be large organisations and others will be smaller local traders. Also, keep your eyes open for 'funding fairs' which can provide great ideas for places to apply to.
- Be mindful of any conditions put on you by the fund themselves – they may add to your costs or, at worst, be too onerous for your club to abide by.

new quay-heading and a raising of the site to above previous recorded flood levels. The levelling of the site was completed by club members themselves shifting ton upon ton of rubble to finally get the site ready for construction to begin.

Behind the scenes, though, the club committee were going about finding sources of funding that kept moving them towards the cost of constructing a boatshed. During this time the membership was also on the increase with more and more new recruits arriving. In addition, successful bids to Awards for All allowed Beccles to acquire a new LOLA Aylings coxed four and a coaching launch.

The real breakthrough arrived when the Foundation for Sports and Arts agreed to part fund the construction project – significantly decreasing the amount that the Club needed to raise themselves. Through social events, a sponsored row at the 2006 Boston Marathon which raised £2,000 (half of the proceeds of which were shared with another local charity) and various other fundraising initiatives, the gap was closed.

Construction began in earnest when a grant funding panel – which supports development of sport for youth projects in the Waveney Valley area – agreed to provide sufficient funds not only to complete the boatshed project but also to acquire a number of boats fit for juniors, including a new training scull. What made this bid appealing to the panel was that some of the Beccles junior members were heavily involved in the preparation of the bid for funding.



and their skills improve!" The event is still only in its fourth year but has already swelled the number of members in the Club as the competitors get a taste for rowing. The crews come together early in the new year and have the day of the Oxbridge Boat Race to hone their skills. To deal with those crews and development of the existing crews, the Club has four ARA coaches – one having recently completed the Level 2 coaching qualification.

So what now for Beccles? Well, there are still many more things that need to be done to finish the boatshed project – the



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Now the Club has its new boatshed and is already filling the newfound space. Membership is on the up – a try-out day recently brought a dozen new junior members to the Club which is now able to support them more adequately than could ever have been dreamt of in the past.

Membership is now up above 30 for the first time and the Club is looking to grow numbers even further. This is boosted by the annual 'Beccles vs Bungay Boat Race' – a race between the two neighbouring market towns. "It's intended to be a fun event for four volunteers from each town who are completely new to the sport," said Jon-Benest Bartram, club captain. "But you can see how the individuals start to take it more seriously as the race day approaches

bits and pieces around the edges – so the fundraising continues. Alongside this there is the development of the Club's new junior squad. The addition of land-based training facilities in the shape of ergos is planned for the near future and is seen as an essential element of preparing the Club for the next regatta season.

Another recent development is the launch of a website which it is hoped will help to engage the Club further with the local communities. Developed using in-house skills and connections, the addition of a website is a new development designed to generate interest in the Club from new members and create an opportunity for local organisations to contribute. Beccles are hoping that forging →

### CLUB PERSONALITY:

#### ROBIN DE VERE GREEN

Although from his modest persona you wouldn't know it, Robin De Vere Green – the Club's chairman for the last four years – is in fact Beccles' closest thing to a full racing 'Blue' as he rowed for Isis in the final of the Grand at Henley and then raced in Japan for Oxford. One of his favourite events was the double sculls, winning the ARA Championship in 1956.

Although not an active competitor nowadays, Robin's contribution will last for many years to come through his project management of the boathouse building project. In fact, the Club has recently named its new coxed four as a tribute to his dedication to improving rowing facilities in the town.

"Robin has tirelessly sought new fundraising sources, begged for and borrowed materials and negotiated terms on the construction which have all combined to contribute thousands of pounds for the Club," said Jon Benest-Bartram, the club captain. "Without his efforts we wouldn't have progressed to where we are today."

Robin's latest competitive rowing has seen him compete in reunion races with old Blues and he recently competed in Japan as part of a rematch against his rivals from 1959. Happily, the Oxford crew returned with the trophy. On another occasion, whilst competing for Oxford in India, Robin (in a single scull) took off down the course and was so engrossed in his racing that he completely forgot where the finish was, stopping only when the local crowd started shouting warnings at him that he was approaching the end of the river!

## CLUB SPOTLIGHT



### CLUB PERSONALITY:

#### MARK BANHAM

Anyone who has ever met Mark will know that he is a determined, enthusiastic and successful individual. He has had great academic success and enjoys many sports. In fact, Mark is like many 19-year-olds, except that Mark is completely blind.

Mark lost his sight at a very early age but has never let this get in his way. Taught to scull whilst away at school, Mark turned up at Beccles RC upon his return to South Norfolk when he was 13 with a view to developing his skills further. Since 2002, Mark has been a strong contributor to club activities and is always around for club sessions. Originally, Mark paired up into a double scull and latterly stepped into a coxed four.

Although a strong and competitive swimmer, Mark fell in love with rowing because it's a sport that he can perform to an equal standard as his sighted clubmates. "For me, because I can't see what's going on, it's all about feeling and hearing the movement of the boat," he said. "Rowing presented me with a real challenge but as everyone relies on the cox to steer and keep us all together I really don't have much of a disadvantage as long as there's good boat discipline."

Mark is now pursuing his rowing career whilst away at Hatfield College in Durham but returns to his 'home' club when out of term. "It's such a great place to come back to" says Mark, "and with all the development in facilities I never know quite what I'll find when I get back!"

these links with local business will raise the profile of the Club and create more visibility locally and further afield.

As for competition, Beccles RC regularly travels to compete. The Club is frequently represented at regattas and heads around the Eastern region and occasionally further afield such as this year's Pairs Head of the River. Frequently reaching regatta finals has proved that Beccles is up to speed, but victories have been harder to come by with just a handful of wins to their name for the 2007 regatta season. Beccles are aspiring to taste success, however, with a stronger emphasis on development and readiness for racing for the 2008 season.

Club chairman, Robin De Vere Green said that the growth of the Club is very much a result of the dedication of the committee members and its wider membership all pulling together. "One of the strengths of our club is its inclusive environment – there's a great team spirit," he said. "No-one is ever turned away, and all are encouraged to get the most out of their rowing as they can. We recently brought through our ranks a novice rower who is blind and he is now rowing for his university rowing club. We have also instructed a novice cox who has gone on to be heavily involved in her university club too – something we feel very proud of." ■

