

SALTFORD REGATTA

The following pages reproduce the history of Saltford Regatta written by W G Martin of Ariel Rowing Club in 1961.

Among particular points to note are:-

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The Regatta before the First World War - entertainments for spectators, umpiring arrangements

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Previous communication methods, and their problems

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Some unusual side events

SALTFORD REGATTA

There is no doubt that competitive rowing is as old as boats themselves. Rowing regattas were held on the Bristol Harbour over 100 years ago and the programme for 1861 shows events for money prizes and Gentlemen's races for silver cups and goblets. Regattas were also held about this time on the Saltford stretch of the Avon by the Bath Amateur Regatta Committee. These were not profitable or well supported and towards the end of the nineteenth century there was a danger of competitive rowing disappearing from the Bristol Avon.

The Bath Amateur Regatta Committee, who more than once had asked the Ariel Rowing Club to join in the promotion of the Regatta at Saltford but received little support beyond donations to their funds and entry fees for competitors, decided to abandon it after the heavy loss on the 1888 fixture; this Committee owned the Bath City Challenge Vase and a one-fifth share in the West of England Trophy.

In the absence of other evidence, it seems that the Ariel Committee took the first steps towards ensuring that the Saltford Trophies should not leave the neighbourhood by instructing the Captain, in 1889, to open negotiations with the Bath Avon Rowing Club for the joint purchase of the "Bath City" and the share in the "West".

Early in 1890 an Ariel sub-committee was appointed to meet the Bath Regatta Committee with reference to a regatta at Saltford, and at the end of January a meeting was held at the Rummer Hotel with Bath Avon R.C. (who had apparently taken over the property of the original committee). The outcome of this meeting was that each Club paid £24.10.0d. for the "Bath City" and £1. for their share in the "West" and an agreement was drawn up sharing the responsibility of running the Regatta.

The principles enunciated in this Agreement were acted upon, with occasional minor change, until 1906, when growing differences of outlook between the two Clubs forced the abandonment of the Regatta for that year.

Some account of the events which led to this state of affairs may help to make clear the difficulties that beset the promoters of the Regatta.

The Ariel members of the Joint Committee had for some years urged that considerable reductions in certain items of expenditure could be made without imperilling the future of the Regatta as a rowing and social function. The Avon men, on the other hand, were strongly opposed to anything which would detract from the Henley scale on which things had been done in the past.

The cuts in expenditure which Ariel stood out for were to be on printing and advertising, and on the value of the presentation prizes. In this connection it should be remarked that in those days Regatta Committees vied with each other in advertising the money value of the prizes, a practice which was ended by the Provincial Council of the Amateur Rowing Association some years later. In 1903 and the next two years, Saltford Regatta prizes accounted for over one third of the total expenditure, and cost more than twice the amount of the receipts from entry fees.

The joint Committee resolved their differences and held Saltford Regatta in 1907 and 1908, much on the same lines as it had been run before 1906, with some reduction in the costs of advertising and prizes, nevertheless the gross loss in 1908 came to the large sum of £204.8.7d.

Then, in 1909, Avon Rowing Club could not see their way to join Ariel as joint promoters of the Regatta. Nothing dismayed, Ariel decided that the function must and would be held. Crews which went to Evesham, Llandaff, Cardiff and other Regattas induced a number of provincial Clubs who had never seen Saltford to send entries, and by vigorous action success was assured.

The old Agreement had come to an end with the 1908 Regatta: one Club had risked much by undertaking the management in 1909 and, having shown courage and achieved success, it was not difficult to persuade Clifton Rowing Club to come in, for in 1910, with a new Agreement this Club purchased a third share in

the two Challenge Vases and for five years the promotion of Saltford Regatta was the joint responsibility of Avon R.C., Bristol Ariel R.C. and Clifton R.C. - the A.B.C. Committee as it was known.

The outbreak of War in 1914, ten days after the Regatta, caused the suspension of racing at Saltford until 1919 when the Jamaica Cup Regatta was revived and, for the next two years, took the place of Saltford Regatta. Then, in 1922, the "Henley of the West", shorn of much of its former glory and display, started again, now with the Redcliff Rowing Club as the fourth promoting Club, an arrangement which still continues.

The Ariel R.W. was always essentially a Bristol Club. Founded in 1870 its headquarters were originally a barge on the Harbour. In the early nineteen hundreds they built a boathouse at Conham, St. Annes, and are still there.

Although Clifton R.C. had a boathouse at Saltford for many years before they joined in the management of the Regatta, their members confined themselves entirely to pleasure boating and in the nineties and later would have nothing to do with the racing - some in fact disliked the Regatta and deplored the interference that it caused to their exclusive use of the river. The Regatta Committee was allowed to occupy their upstream lawn and the Judges' Enclosure (very much on sufferance), the rest of the property being retained for the use of their members on Regatta days. However, in 1903, the Clifton colours appeared in a race for the first time for twenty-one years - the Club had rowed a generation earlier - a new and soon to be formidable rival and valuable ally came into the Saltford picture and remains there.

Redcliff R.C. remained on the Floating Harbour with a boathouse at Bristol Bridge until enemy action destroyed it in 1940 but, like Clifton R.C., a new generation wanted something better than the Floating Harbour and the Feeder Canal, and established a training centre at Saltford, as Avon R.C. had already done, so that of the four Clubs who, since 1922, have shared the responsibility of running the Regatta at Saltford, Ariel alone has no permanent accommodation there.

Some description of the arrangements which were customary from 1890 until the last pre-War Regatta in 1914 may be of interest. On the Saltford side were the reserved and Judges' Enclosures, moored under the willows were houseboats and decorated barges but these fell into disuse early in the present century. The layout on the Kelston side was very extensive and, even for those days, costly.

Canvas fencing completely enclosed the fields from a point more or less opposite to the present bungalows on the Saltford side of the river to a point near the White Gate, running back to and along the railway embankment.

Payboxes were set up at each end of the enclosure, temporary seats were placed along the towpath near to the edge of the river. Rafts, Boat and Competitors' tents were erected below the finishing post, whilst at suitable places were the usual adjuncts of a Regatta - refreshment tents, prize tent, Secretary's tent, the band-stand, a large telegraph board, cokenut shies, and all the fun of the fair.

Police patrolled the enclosures with powers to conduct from one paybox to another persons who might claim right of way along the towpath (one individual did this year after year as a matter of principle).

Ferries connected the two banks, stake boats were often used, Umpires rode on horseback (the account for 1890 gives an item "Boy to hold Umpire's horse, 2/-").

This then, with minor changes of detail from time to time, was the layout of the pre-War Regatta at Saltford.

As indicated in the Agreement, each Club was credited with the tickets issued by its members and collected at the gates; to minimise the loss to Ariel funds it was customary to organise a Guarantee Fund, the income from this being set off against a half share in the actual loss on the Regatta (in 1912 Ariel had their own enclosure on the Kelston side)

Rowing events were all then, as they still are, under Amateur Rowing Association rules, except races between Police, Fire Brigades and so on, which occasionally figured in the programmes and were confined entirely to members of these bodies. Double Sculls, whether mixed or not, were outside A.R.A. jurisdiction. Swimming races were under the rules of the Amateur Swimming Association

The courses for Maidens and races of higher status were the same as they are now.

In those years when the West of England Challenge Vase was the first Senior Race, the Bath City Challenge because the second one and the Saltford Plate (the second to the "City") fell out for that year. Over the years the Saltford Plate has mysteriously disappeared and the Ambrose Challenge Vase became the second senior trophy. More recently the second Senior Four race has been omitted and Junior/Senior Fours introduced, using the Ambrose for its trophy. Also the Jamaica Cup, from the extinct Regatta of that name, is now used for a Senior Eight event.

After World War I, as members returned to their Rowing Clubs, the Captains of the four Clubs - Ariel, Avon, Clifton and Redcliff - got together and decided to organise the Regatta at Saltford again, but due to the conditions pertaining decided it must be on a modest scale and confined the entry to local Clubs on the lines of the Jamaica Cup Regatta. In 1920 the programme was increased to five events, three being thrown open to all Clubs rowing under A.R.A. rules and the next year all but one event was open.

Then, in 1922, Saltford Regatta was formally revived, but with no enclosure on the Kelston side of the river.

Except for the interruption of the Second World War, the Regatta has been run on these lines since 1922 - entries have increased far beyond those which were customary in the early days of the present century. Loudspeakers and telephones have replaced the old telegraph boards (as far back as 1900 a telephone on very primitive lines connected the Judges' Box on the Saltford side and the Committee Tent on the other bank - it didn't work and in an attempt to make it do so a very distinguished official fell into the river, not for the last time).

It used to be said, before World War I, and since, that it always rained on the day of Saltford Regatta but, like most generalisations, this is untrue. For the twenty-one Regattas held between 1890 and 1914, on only ten was the weather wet, but with the single exception of 1909 when Ariel ran the Regatta alone, a financial loss was suffered.

The local Clubs have always done well competitively at Saltford Regatta and up to 1923 never failed to win at least one event. In the first Regatta of 1890 the major prize was won by Worcester, but the second Senior Trophy was won by Redcliff, who at that time was not a constituent member of the Committee. Ariel won the Pairs and Avon won the Senior and Junior Sculls. The Avon Club appears to be the most successful in the Senior events, winning twelve first or second Senior Trophies up to 1923. Ariel had more success sculling, winning fifteen sculling events in that period. The first Clifton success was the Maiden Sculls in 1907 by Alfie Gardiner, and the following year they won the Maiden Fours.

The foregoing paragraphs cover the early history of the Regatta in a general sense and to follow is a chronological survey with some of the highlights of interest and special features of the period.

1890 First Saltford Regatta. Run by Avon and Ariel.
Local successes: Redcliff - Saltford Plate, 2nd Senior Fours.
Ariel - Ariel Plate, Pairs.
Avon - Lansdown Cup, Senior Sculls and Redland Cup,
Junior Sculls.

Also in the programme - the De Colmars aerial bicycle tricks.
Weather - heavy rain in the morning, threatening all day.

1891 As the Bath & West Show was to be held at Bath, both Clubs agreed that it would be inadvisable to hold the Regatta.

- 1892 No explanation of why the Regattawas not held can be found.
- 1893 West of England Challenge won by Royal Chester.
Local successes: Avon - Maiden Fours and Senior Sculls.
Ariel - Junior Sculls.
Also in the programme - Half-mile Amateur Swimming Championship of England (won by J.H. Tyors in 13 mins. 41 secs) and a water-polo match.
Weather - perfect all day.
- 1894 Local successes: Redcliff - Maiden Fours.
Also in the programme - a race in Washing Tubs. 100 yards Handicap and 220 yards Swimming Races.
Weather - very hot.
- 1895 No explanation of why the Regatta was not held can be found.
- 1896 Local successes: Avon - Salford Plate.
Bradford-on-Avon - Junior Fours.
Ariel - Maiden Fours.
Also in the programme - an Aquatic Competition, Rod and Line v Swimmer.
- 1897 Local successes: Avon - Bath City Challenge Vase, Maiden Fours.
Redcliff - Junior Fours.
Also in the programme - Double Sculls (Lady & Gentleman, Lady Steerer) and a race for Canadian Canoes (two paddles).
Under A.R.A. Rule No.20 then in force, a Junior Sculler could compete year after year in restricted boats, hence C.H.C. Farn (Worcester) was able to do so and win in 1894, 1896 and 1897. To stop this pot hunting the Regatta Committee reduced the Redland Cup to an event for Maiden Scullers from 1898 onwards.
The list of officials had grown considerably since 1890 and comprised 3 Starters and Umpires. 5 Judges. 7 Competitors Stewards. 3 Telegraph Stewards. 2 Press Stewards. 9 Officials (undefined).
- 1898 West of England Challenge Vase won by Stourport.
Local successes: Avon - Bath City.
Redcliff - Junior Fours, Maiden Fours.
Ariel - Maiden Sculls.
Caius College, Cambridge, entered the same Four for the Avon and Salford Plates; two of that Four went for the Redland Cup, the cox was beaten in his heat for the Lansdown Cup and Double Sculls - sad to say, the only heat won by a Caius man was in the Redland Cup, and he was not a member of the Four.
Also in the programme - Double Sculls (now called the Clifton Plate) and a competition for decorated boats.
Weather - dull, wet and windy.
- 1899 Local successes: Avon - Bath City, Junior Fours.
Ariel - Salford Plate, Maiden Sculls.
Also in the programme - the Clifton Plate and a procession of Decorated Boats.
- 1900 Local successes: Avon - Junior Fours (rowed over).
Ariel - Maiden Fours, Senior Sculls, Maiden Sculls.
Also in the programme - Four-oared race between the Bristol and Bath Police, Bristol won. Four-oared race between Bath and Bristol Fire Brigades, Bath won.
- 1901 Local successes: Avon - Salford Plate.
Ariel - Junior and Maiden Sculls.
Also in the programme - Four-oared race between Bath Fire Brigade (who won) and Bath Police, and a Tug-of-War in boats which Ariel won.
The name H.W. MORTIMER appears this year as "bow" in the Avon R.C. Maiden Four, and figured in every Salford programme up to 1952, as a competitor or official.

- 1902 West of England Challenge Vase won by Notts. Brit.
Local successes: Avon - Bath City.
Ariel - Junior Sculls.
- 1903 Local successes: Avon - Bath City.
Ariel - Maiden Fours, Maiden Sculls.
Clifton Rowing Club colours made their first appearance in the Saltford programme since Ariel and Avon began to run the Regatta in 1890:
P.T. Rowe, who had been a member of Ariel and stroked its winning Maiden crew in the 1900 Regatta, rowed for Clifton in the Maiden Sculls.
- 1904 Local successes: Avon - Bath City, Maiden Fours.
Ariel - Junior Fours, Open Pairs, Redland Cup for Maiden Sculls.
Mr. A.F. Freeman, a former Captain of Avon R.C., presented the Challenge Vase which bears his name, for a competition for Maiden Fours at Saltford Regatta.
Also in the programme - a swimming race for the Championship of the River Avon, won by P. Radmilovic.
- 1905 Local successes: Avon - Bath City, Open Pairs.
Ariel - Junior Fours, Junior Sculls.
Clifton R.C., putting on two crews, made its first appearance in four-oared rowing at Saltford Regatta since it was re-started in 1890.
- 1906 No Regatta.
- 1907 West of England Challenge Vase won by Burton Leander.
Local successes: Avon - Bath City.
Ariel - Junior Fours, Maiden Fours, Open Pairs.
Clifton - Maiden Sculls.
It was the same Ariel crew that won both the Maiden and Junior Fours, this has never been repeated.
The Regatta was held on a Wednesday, but was not a success financially - the total loss being much the same as in past years.
- 1908 Local successes: Redcliff - Junior Fours.
Clifton - Maiden Fours.
Ariel - Maiden Sculls.
Weather - stormy and a lot of rain (poor attendance).
Loss - £103.9.7d.
- 1909 For reasons previously stated, Bristol Ariel R.C. alone undertook the management of the Regatta this year. The list of officials included members of Avon, Bath, Clifton, Redcliff and Bradford-on-Avon.
Local successes: Ariel - Bath City.
Avon - Saltford Plate, Junior Fours.
Clifton - Maiden Fours, Junior Sculls, Maiden Sculls.
For the first time, Junior Fours were rowed in Glinker Boats provided by the Committee. Twenty-six races, all six Clubs which then rowed on the Avon took part and seven "foreign" ones.
Bath Rowing Club did not survive the War which was soon to come.
- 1910 West of England Challenge Vase won by Ariel.
Other local successes: Ariel - Open Pairs.
Avon - Junior Sculls.
The Ariel Senior Four which won the Bath City the year before, now brought back the "West" to Bristol for the first time since 1884 and made local rowing history by using swivel riggers.
In the spring of 1910, the City Surveyor of Bath advertised widely that the construction of a new sewage works would make it necessary to lower the water in the Saltford reach at frequent intervals during the summer. The threat, which might have caused the cancellation of the Regatta, was withdrawn only after strong protests had been made to the Bath Council by the Committee of Avon R.W.
Weather - wet in the morning, fine but dull later.
Loss - £133.9.9d. shared by three Clubs.

- 1911 Local successes: Avon - Maiden Fours.
Ariel - Junior/Senior Sculls, Maiden Sculls.
Four days before the Regatta the river was so low - there had been a long spell of dry weather - that the steamer "Comet" on which the Ariel scullers, pairs and oinker fours were brought from St. Anne's Park to Saltford for use as "provided boats", was aground in one of the reaches with no hope of refloating in time to get them there. No other Club at Bath or Saltford had suitable boats, crews were impatient to practise so, for want of other means of conveyance, they were towed down to the Feeder and there loaded on to horse-drawn furniture vans.
Weather - excellent.
Loss - £11.9.4d. to be shared by the three Clubs.
- 1912 West of England Challenge Vase won by Clifton.
Local successes: Clifton - Junior-Senior Sculls.
Avon - Maiden Sculls.
Alfie Gardiner who stroked the successful Clifton four in the "West", also won the Junior-Senior Sculls.
The Regatta was held a month earlier than usual in the hope that the June date would attract "foreign" entries and avoid a clash with other Regattas announced for 13th and 20th July.
Finance - the expenses came to £77.11.5d,
direct receipts (Entrance Fees, etc) £88.2.6d.,
leaving a deficit of £109.8.10d.
- 1913 Local successes: Avon - Junior-Senior Sculls and Maiden Sculls.
Monkton Combe School EC made its first appearance at Saltford Regatta. The date first fixed for 21st June, but the farmer who rented the field on the Felstone side refused to let it until after the hay harvest, and the 26th July was chosen.
The Suffragettes, who had been on the warpath all year, threatened to burn down the Boat Tents, interfere with the racing and generally to make a nuisance of themselves at the expense of the Regatta; they did no damage, in fact there is no evidence that they appeared on the scene at all, but their threats caused expenses for additional police and a night watchman.
- 1914 Local successes: Avon - Saltford Plate.
Redcliff - Junior Fours.
The Ariel Challenge Vase was presented to the Ariel Club by Sir Herbert Ashman, Bart., to mark his retirement at the end of 1913 after five years as their President. At the wish of the Ariel members this trophy was allotted to the event for Junior Fours by the Regatta Committee.
And so, ten days before the Declaration of War on the German Empire, Saltford Regatta was held for the last time under the conditions which, customary for twenty-four years, have never been repeated. On this, the last Regatta of the long series, Bath Rowing Club made its final appearance; many competitors rowed their last races.
- 1922 West of England Challenge Vase won by Hereford.
Local successes: Ariel - Maiden Fours, Maiden Sculls.
The winner of the Maiden Sculls was L. Fraser who is now the Ariel President. Also on this occasion, S.H. Horton, the present Secretary to the Regatta, stroked the Redcliff Maiden Four.
Weather - good after a threatening morning.
Loss - £30 shared by four Clubs.
- 1923 No entries for Senior Fours.
Local successes - None.
- 1924 No entries for Senior Fours, due to doubt to the clash with Tewkesbury Regatta.
Local successes: Redcliff - Junior Fours.
Clifton - Maiden Fours.

- 1925 Three entries for Senior Fours. Bath City won by Hereford.
Local successes: Clifton won the Maiden Fours and Jack Bronhead of Clifton won the Maiden Sculls.
Redoliff won a boys four-oared race on fixed seats.
The Gentlemen's Plate, the double sculling race, had now become an all Ladies affair.
W.H. Dotesis, now the Regatta printer, appeared in the Bradford-on-Avon Junior Four.
J.J. Lovegrove appeared for the University of Bristol in the Maiden Sculls.
There were five events not counting the boys race on fixed seats, 28 races in all. (There were 61 races last year - 1960).
There were no Pairs or Junior Sculls this year.
With such a small entry there was usually time for scratch Fours at the end of the Regatta.
- 1926 I have been unable to find any record of programme for Saltford Regatta in 1926, although the Jamaica Cup Regatta was held.
- 1927 Back to six events - the Bath City for Senior Fours.
No second Senior Four Event.
Open Pairs.
Junior & Maiden Fours.
Junior and Maiden Sculls.
Local successes: Avon - Junior Fours, Maiden Fours.
Monkton Combe School won the Bath City.
- 1928 Monkton Combe School retain the Bath City. They were beaten by Bristol University in the final who were disqualified. Monkton also won the Maiden Fours.
Also in the programme - a Hydroplane race, one of which capsized, the other passed the winning post at 29 m.p.h.
Local successes - None.

And so we reach a period when once more the Regatta settled down after the Great War. As there are many living contemporaries of that period I do not intend to go into detail of the Regatta's history for that time. There are others better qualified than I who may do that. Suffice to say that the Regatta generally improved within the restricted limits of its geographical location, particularly since the Second World War. Entries are now more than double those of between the Wars. A Junior Eight event was tried in 1934 but did not succeed. There are now twelve events in the Regatta including Open Eights, Senior Sculls, School Fours and Ladies Fours and Double Sculls. There are trophies for ten of these events.

With the running of a Regatta Dance the Committee of the present day Regattas usually make a small gross profit. The Four Clubs' commitment usually being to guarantee 125 entrance tickets (£15) as their only financial outlay.

Over the years certain of the Regatta Trophies have disappeared. The Avon Cup and the Clifton Plate were last competed for in 1914. The Rodland Cup in 1923 and the Gentlemen's Plate in 1925. The Saltford Plate for the Second Senior Four event last appeared in the programme just before the last War. The present Committee would be glad to learn of the whereabouts of these trophies.

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