



Eric & Gill Gagg

December 25, 1935 - January 5, 2025

Eric Gagg was born in Worcester on Christmas Day 1935, the son of Frank and Vera Gagg and brother to Jonathan. From an early age, he showed a love of the outdoors, sport, and teamwork – qualities that would remain central throughout his life.

In the early 1950s, canoeing in Britain was still in its infancy, with enthusiasts experimenting with designs and materials. Eric, alongside his great friend and paddling partner Brian Cubberley, helped pioneer innovation in the sport by building one of the very first fibreglass canoes in the shed behind Frank's supermarket (Burtons in St John's – later Fine Fare, and one of the first self-service supermarkets in the country). At a time when most boats were still built from wood and canvas, their work represented both creativity and courage.

His enthusiasm for paddling led him to become one of the founding members of **Worcester Canoe Club in 1953**. Based on the River Severn in the heart of the city, the club grew out of the energy and dedication of people like Eric who wanted to share their passion for the river. He poured vision, energy, and countless hours into the club, helping it grow from a small gathering of friends into one of the most active and respected canoe clubs in the country. For Eric, the river was never just water – it was freedom, friendship, and a community he helped to create.

Gill was born in Worcester on 23rd December 1940, to Gladys and James Roberts. Growing up on a smallholding, she learnt resilience, care, and quiet strength – qualities that shaped the rest of her life. She became Eric's greatest supporter, always by his side on the riverbank, encouraging paddlers and standing proudly behind the club's growth. Known for her warmth and kindness, Gill gave generously of her time and spirit, touching many lives both within the canoe club and beyond.

Together, Eric and Gill shared not only a deep love for each other, their daughter Helen, son-in-law Robert, and grandchildren Jade and Ryan, but also for the river and the community around it. With Gill's support, Eric's drive, and a fantastic committee, Worcester Canoe Club became a hub for paddlers of all ages – from youngsters taking their first strokes on the water to elite athletes competing at national, international level and the club boasts 4 Olympians. The ethos that Eric and his fellow founders instilled – friendship, innovation, and a love of the river – still runs strongly through the club today, strengthened by Gill's steady encouragement and care.

Eric was remembered for his determination, skill, and generosity of spirit; Gill for her kindness, loyalty, and quiet strength. Together, their legacy endures not only in the club they helped to build, but also in every paddle dipped into the Severn, every friendship forged on its waters, and every act of kindness that reflects the values they lived by.

Eric served as Chairman, with Gill by his side, from 1967 to 1984 – the longest-serving Chairman in the history of Worcester Canoe Club, a remarkable 17 years.

We hope these pictures help tell the story and give an insight into the history and evolution of Worcester Canoe Club. We have tried to be as accurate as possible with dates. They reflect the dedication, hard work, and vision of so many who together formed a formidable team, driving the club forward from its beginnings in 1953 through to the present day. May it continue to go from strength to strength.

We start with Eric's own words on how it all began...



Picture 1

60th Anniversary Dinner

23rd November 2013

The Early Years

Of

Worcester Canoe Club

By

Eric F Gagg

Founder Member

1953 to 1979

Founder

Members

Brian E Cubberley

Eric F Gagg

Neville Hinton

Bernie Knight

John Luxton

Robin Powell

Tony O'Connell

Dave Rea

How it all began.....

Canoeing on the River Severn at Worcester was my favorite pastime. Having built a PBK canvas double canoe in 1952 and whilst spending many hours on the river, I met others doing the same. We formed a group that used to meet up and chat about how it would be good to have a place where we could meet and somewhere to store our boats.

Presidents

Mr Roger Bengier

Mr Roy McKee

Dr W D Steele

We made contact with the Sea Scouts run by Mr Challenor who suggested that we could use the other half of the old City Council River Swimming Barge buildings in Grandstand Road.

These were all concrete and in a very dilapidated state. Mr Challenor advised us to apply to the City Council for permission to take over this part of the building. To enable us to do this, we had to form an official group which we called Worcester Canoe Club in 1953.

Picture 2

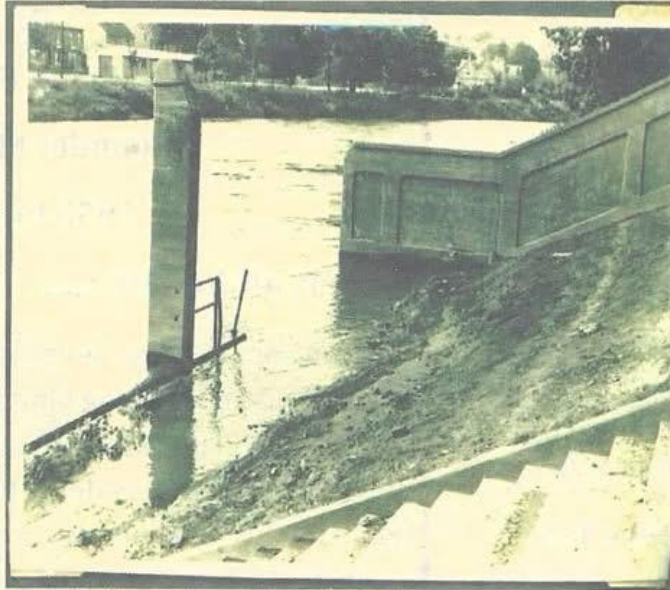


Eventually, one half of the building was turned into a boat store in which the first committee meeting was held.

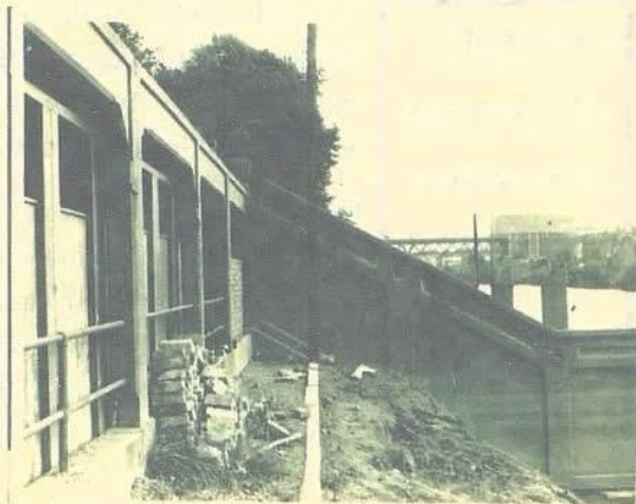
Money was raised by membership fees, donations and scrounging, at which we all became pretty good!

It didn't help though, that we had to remove, in some places 8ft of mud to find the lower deck and that every time the river flooded we had to spend hours cleaning all the silt out of the building and off the steps.

Soon others heard about us and what we were doing and either joined the club or supported us in our fund raising activities.



Our only water supply



Picture 9

Picture 3

As well as working on the Canoe Club premises and canoeing on the river, we also began to have a social life too. However, all too soon some of us had to join the forces, just meeting up when we were on leave, but those two years soon passed and we were all grateful to those who continued to hold it all together while we, at different times, had those two years of enforced absence.



Just before Brian Cubberley and I went into the forces, we built the first fiberglass canoe in England called 'CG1'. We were fortunate enough to be able to use an old building at the rear of a supermarket where we built three racing kayaks. It was a big learning curve but one which we both enjoyed. We would have loved to have gone into boat building when we came out of the forces but in those two years, others had jumped on the band wagon and we didn't have the finance to compete with the now well established businesses. We did however design and build a two-seater canvas racing canoe which we called 'CG2' in 1959.



Eric and Brian built 3 of the first fiberglass boats in England (CG1)

Many other club members built their own boats too in both fiberglass and canvas.

Picture 4



How to carry a double canoe on a convertible car which was called the 'Blue Streak Missile'!



Eric Gagg and Brian Cubberley in 'CG2'

We got involved with Long Distance Racing, having been encouraged by Geoff Blackford who had recently joined the club. We travelled all over the country each weekend. There used to be quite a group of us with supporting parents and girlfriends who used to follow the race by car, cheer us on at portages and meet us at the other end.



WCC at Chester Canoe Club race

Bryan Harrison introduced us to Slalom, which was a rough water race where your body, canoe or paddles could NOT go under or touch the gate poles. What a difference to today!

Paul Lampitt

Bryan Harrison



Eric Gagg



Picture 5

Soon the name of Worcester Canoe Club was a force to be reckoned with, so much so, that in 1961 and 1962 we won the much prized Hasler Trophy, the accolade of Long Distance Racing.

The Club felt very honoured and extremely proud and were soon coming to the attention of the press and the City Council.

With growing membership, encouraged with the great team of canoeing coaches we had, we needed more space for boat storage, changing facilities, together with a large room with a bar, for both socialising and to enable us to raise much needed funds. Our premises were rapidly getting far too small for us.



Hasler Trophy (centre) together with many other trophies won by Club Members 1961

This was at the time the Council decided that the Racecourse should be re-vamped with the demolition of the Grandstand Hotel and our Canoe Club and in its place build what is now the Grandstand area.

We approached the City Council, and after a long struggle, but with a lot of help from many of them and several benefactors - to whom we shall be eternally grateful, we obtained permission to build a temporary club house. They gave us the use of the site in Hylton Road for 4 years, which we were able to stretch considerably. But we succeeded and built a wonderful clubhouse, in **6 months**, with boat storage, large social room, lounge and bar. The building team, led by Paul (Lil) Lampitt, resulted in many happy times and to the growth of the club and was a great stepping stone to the present club.



Peter Walker MP presenting Paul Lampitt with a surprise gift for his work in planning the construction of the club house at the opening ceremony

Picture 6

All the while, increasing our membership with coaching, we also kept up our true sport: Canoeing.

In 1971 we were privileged to organize the National Long Distance Canoe Championships, which turned out to be a very an international event and was opened by Peter Walker MP.

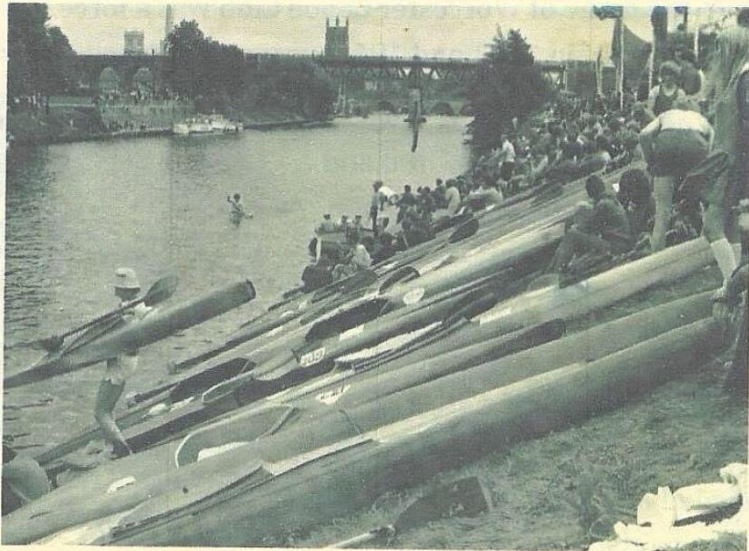
Teams came from all over Europe, USA, and in 1972 South Africa, then officially banned but unknown to us, entered under a different name and country, as apartheid was still prevalent in South Africa at that time.

This was the start of an annual national event which we have had the honour to run many times since.

Other members too achieved top honours in their own classes, which include Long Distance, Slalom and Sprint Racing. The latter was introduced to the club by Frank Wagner, a member of the Hungarian Olympic team.

Club Members who have competed in the Olympics were Alan Edwards 1964 and 1968, Glenn Palmer 1964 and Don Smith 1972.

We are very proud of them. Well done everyone!



Canoes waiting to be launched for the start of the Nationals



Peter Walker MP presenting the prizes at the Nationals

Picture 7

The time eventually came when the City Council informed us that our time at Hylton Road was up as they wished to improve the river bank. We were then faced with the move to the allotted space on the Grandstand Road side of the River within the River Sports Centre and build new premises there. This meant raising sums of money in excess of £50,000, a lot of money in those days.

Once again fund raising came to the fore in strength, we promoted the club at shows and using our lovely large social room we held monthly discos, tramp's suppers, jumble sales etc. We were also fortunate enough to receive some Grant Funding. However, if it wasn't also for the group of people who fought tooth and nail with the City Council to grant us an extension, we would have been on the verge of evection from our 'temporary' premises.

Credit must be given to those who fought so long and hard , not only to extend our stay at Hylton Road but to have the type of future club house we wanted. Also to those few on the council, our ex President Mr Roger Benger and the next President Mr Roy McKee, who believed in us and gave us their enduring support, we wouldn't have a Canoe Club now. Although acknowledged at the time, most people will never really realize just how many very hardworking people dedicated all their time and effort into making the club a wonderful sporting and social place to be. One to mention is Brian Cubberley our dedicated Treasurer and I believe he became the longest serving committee member.

Moving to the River Sports Centre was the future for the Club and needed a tremendous amount of work and organization to achieve such a venture. This is where we have to thank Alan Edwards and his fantastic team, for their dedication to the sport and the building of the present Club premises. Unfortunately there are too many names to mention here.

At this stage of the development, due to my new job and work commitments, I had to retire as Chairman. I have very fond memories of my days at Worcester Canoe Club and have retained a lot of friends. I hope that all the members, present and new, enjoy their time there too.



Model of Canoe made by Robin Powell, presented to Mr F A Benger on his retirement as President. Left to right Steve Jenkinson, Sec. Eric Gagg Chairman, Roger Benger, President. Brian Cubberley, Treasurer

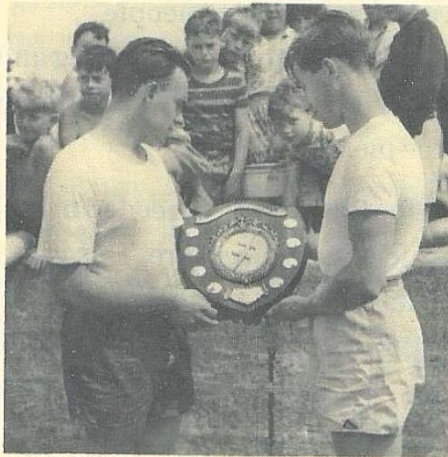


Picture 8



One of the many displays we held to promote Worcester Canoe Club

This is just a small synopsis of my memories. When we meet tonight I am sure that many more memories will come flooding back. They were very happy days, we had lots of fun and laughter in between the hard work, training and sporting events. We were always proud of our fellow members in their sporting achievements as well as our own. I can only wish Worcester Canoe Club success and good luck for the future and to keep up the good work that has always seen them succeed.



Eric and Brian winners of the
Weston to Barry Race



Other uses were found for canoe paddles
Gill and Eric's wedding day 9th June 1962

Disclaimer

Due to age, memory and complete confusion after conversations with others (also suffering the same) I sincerely apologise for any incorrect or missing information!! 60 Years is a long time ago! Sincerest thanks and congratulations to everyone who has made Worcester Canoe Club what it is today—a healthy and thriving club. Well done everyone! Eric Gagg

The Canoe Club's very first "club rooms" – the other half of the old City Council River Swimming Barge buildings in Grandstand Road. A modest place to gather, hold lectures and meetings. It was cold and damp, and only had one tap! Soon the search began for something better to encourage new membership.



9th June 1962 – Eric and Gill were married at St John in Bedwardine Church, St Johns, Worcester, surrounded by their canoeing friends – another use for paddles! They celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on 10th June 2022.



As the club grew, so did the need for larger premises and better communication with members. A new club magazine was launched in May/June 1968.



EDITOR'S CORNER

Page 1.

Picture 11

May/June 1968

Dear Reader,

Your magazine has now taken on a new face and we hope that it will be like a telephone making a two-way link between members and the Committee. We hope that you will use this opportunity to express your points of view in the 'Post Box' column.

Many new features have been incorporated, including colour and photographs as you will see as you read further on. These should make very interesting additions.

We have lost many members who have left the district and then the Club, because they have not been able to "go down to club" to find out what is going on and this magazine is a way of holding their interest in the Club. During canoeing activities many things happen, eg: "Joe Bloggs capsized at Bevere twice on Sunday and failed to roll". or "We did the Usk river on Sunday A. N. Other ripped his pants on a barbed wire fence!"

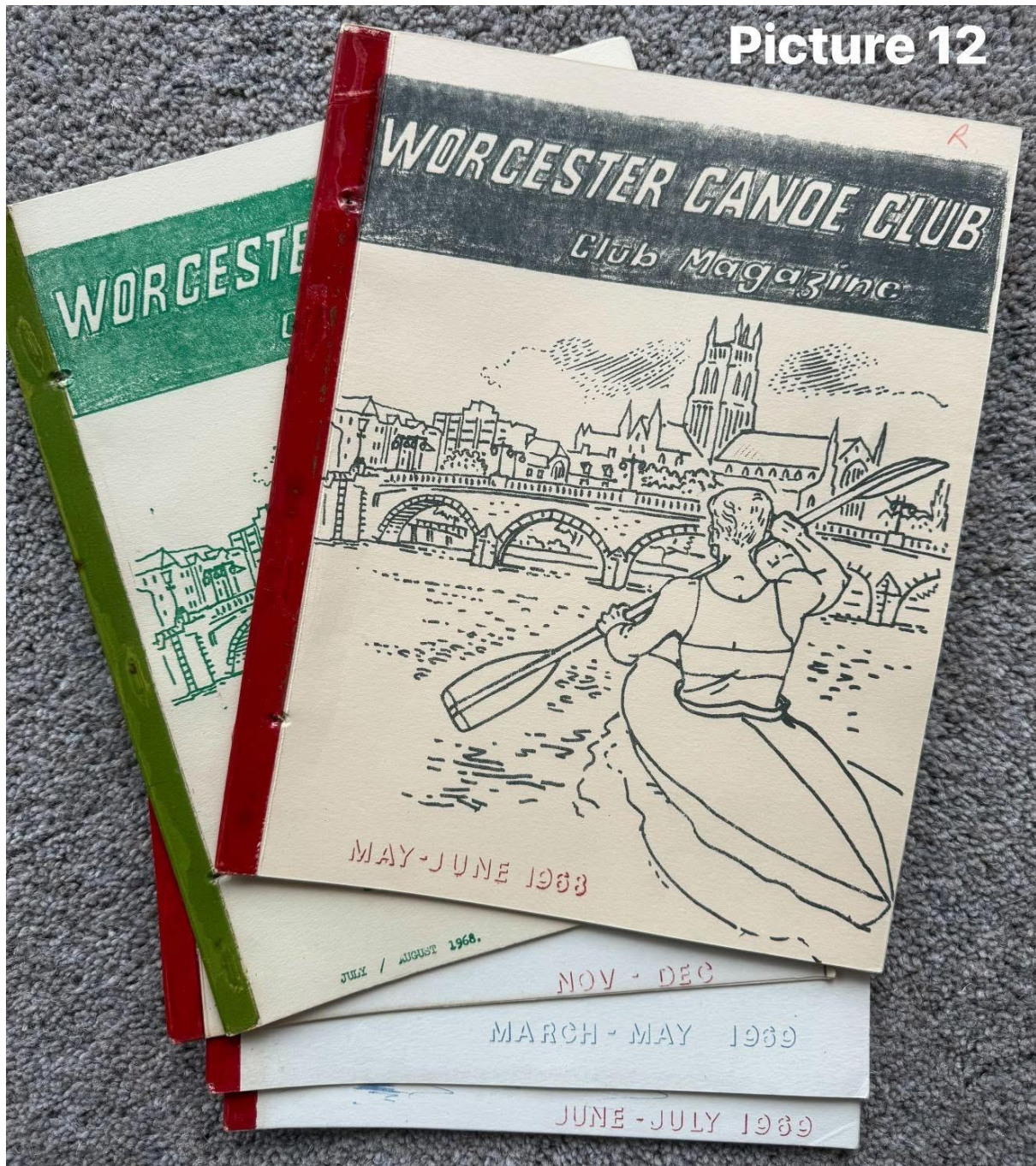
These pieces of information plus a cartoon, can make funny and interesting reading; have a go and send them to me. There are also many other ways in which you can help: read the poem below and we hope this will give you a few ideas.

W R I T E I D E A S .

This magazine we bring to you,
Is now different, bright and new.
But only with your help can we
Keep it so - now let us see.
Here are just a few suggestions,
To help you with all your questions.
We want articles on Cruising,
Something funny and amusing,
Slalom, Sprint, L.D. and Coaching.
'Do it yourself', Camping, Farming.
Recipes, Wine Making and 'Items for Sale',
'Post Box' where we'll print all your mail.
We'll print the results of all our crews.
And even keep up with other Clubs' news.
New members and Changes of Address.
So please help us make it a success.
And then we hope this 'Mag' will be,
Something YOU will want to see.

The “new style” magazine, produced using a Gestetner with wax stencil, was published every two to three months. High tech for the time, it was even entered into a Gestetner competition for the best home-produced magazine!

Picture 12



By June/July 1969, hopes were rising that permission would be granted for a new club building on Hylton Road – fingers crossed!

At last the chance of a Clubroom seems to be more than a pipe-dream. As most of you know, we have outline planning permission to modernize the two demountable buildings in Hylton Road, which will give us all mod.cons. but at the time of going to print we still have a few obstacles to overcome. During the final stages of detailing the necessary drawings to obtain final approval, we have been informed that we have to raise the floors approximately 5 feet from its present level. We also have to provide a temporary car-park. Maybe you are wondering if it is worthwhile going to all the trouble to do all this work; your Committee is certain that it is, and is striving to get the necessary permissions to enable us to construct the shell before the Winter is upon us and maybe finish in time for Christmas 1969. We are hoping to keep the cost to a limit of £500 and we are certain that this will be money well spent. which will enable us to bring the social activities down to the river, also it will give you somewhere to go during the Winter that will be warm and cosy and you can still do your canoeing, and raise funds for the club.

Picture 13

Page 1.



EDITOR'S
CORNER

Aug/Sept 1970

Editor.

CLUB FORUM

AT

THE BELL INN

ST JOHNS WORCESTER

ON

TUESDAY 15 JULY

START 3.00 P.M.

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT MEETING - IT IS ESSENTIAL YOU ATTEND

In September/October 1970, good news arrived – permission had been granted. The club now looked ahead to its ambitious five-year plan: to build on Hylton Road and eventually move to a new river sports complex on Grandstand Road. The reality, however, was that it took much longer to achieve!

Picture 14

Page 1.

May/June 1969

At last the magic words: PLANNING
PERMISSION GRANTED.

Now we can start on our five year plan, and the first part is the hardest: building the Club Room. To control this project a sub-committee has been formed consisting of Messrs. B. Cumberley; P. Lampitt; A. Edwards; E. F. Gagg., The main problem as far as I can see; and one that can easily be overcome if all members do their share of the work, is that we obtain maximum effort throughout the time the project takes to complete. No doubt many of you feel that a job of this magnitude requires skilled labour, this is so, and we have the skilled men who have agreed to take control of the part of the building programme in which they are specialised, but there will be many jobs requiring various standards of skills and no doubt there will be one for you. The main thing I ask is, if you are given a job to do, stick at it until it is finished and if it takes more time than anticipated and you HAVE to leave it unfinished, next time you come down, check to see that it HAS been completed. if not, carry on until it is finished or you are instructed otherwise.

This project could be great fun if every member put his or her back into it and does not start meaning every time they are asked to do something - just do it. We all like to get out on the water and canoe so I do not expect you to spend all your spare time on this project: mind you, it would be wonderful if you did. Training must go on if the club members are to succeed at International or National events, but please, do not use training as an excuse to dodge work. See if you can use the work on the Club house as part of your training programme.

I must ask all members to leave the weekends free from spontaneous canoeing meetings that take the whole day or weekend unless it is a National Slalom, L.D.R. or White Water race and only go to these if you are competing yourself. Remember; the more members we have working each week, the quicker you will be able to enjoy the fruits of your labour.

Editor.



EDITOR'S
CORNER

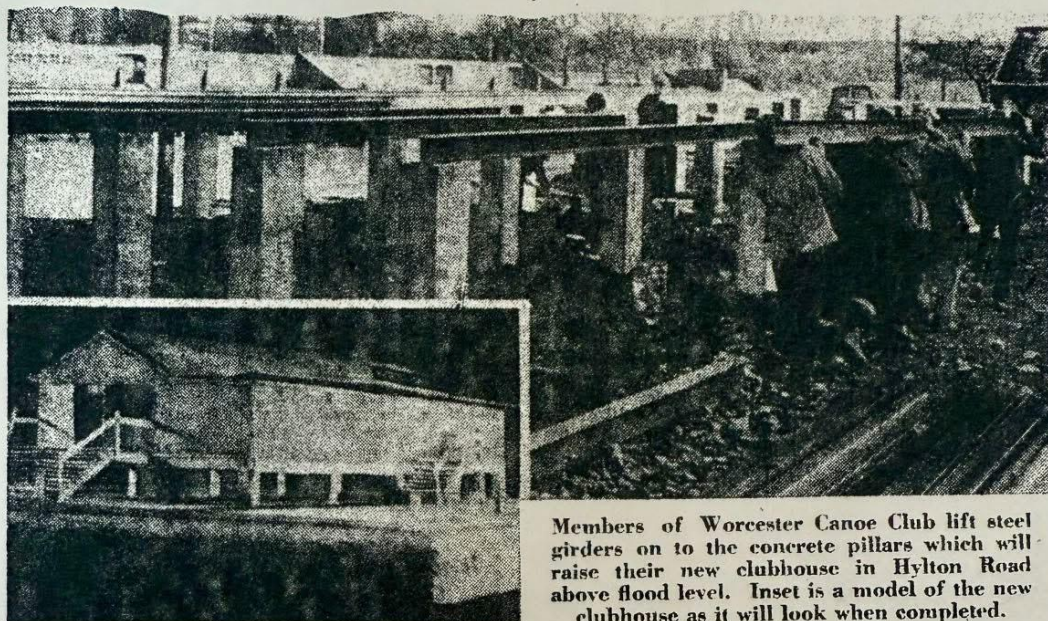
WE STILL NEED SOME HELP
CASHWISE CAN YOU HELP
BY SUPPLYING SOME

The club was excellent at fundraising and members did all they could: Tramps Suppers, jumble sales, wine and cheese evenings, discos. It truly took the efforts of everyone – if they weren't organising the event, it was important they attended to spend, spend, spend!

PLEASE SUPPORT

A

Picture 15



Members of Worcester Canoe Club lift steel girders on to the concrete pillars which will raise their new clubhouse in Hylton Road above flood level. Inset is a model of the new clubhouse as it will look when completed.

SELF-HELP EFFORT BY CANOE CLUB

MEMBERS of Worcester Canoe Club are taking no chances with their new premises on the west bank of the river in Hylton Road. The building is being constructed on concrete pillars which stand eighteen inches higher than the present flood level.

Not only have the 75 members undertaken to meet the entire cost themselves—it is estimated that they will need

between £700 and £900—they are also building the premises entirely on their own.

With professional builders and carpenters in their ranks, they are spending as much of their spare time as possible on the site, in good weather and bad, and are already a month ahead of schedule.

The new building, which replaces two older ones recently demolished, will be 80 feet long and 26 feet wide. It will house a club room and it is hoped a bar and a room

for the junior section, as well as providing cloakrooms for both men and women. More than half the space will be used for boat storage.

It is hoped to have the new premises opened in time for the club's long distance race in May. Once they are available it is planned to increase the club membership as although there is no official waiting list, there are many prospective members waiting an opportunity to join.

* * *

Planning for the new clubhouse continued in the background, while building at Hylton Road was in full swing. With many skilled members, volunteer help was vital. Those unable to give their time were asked instead for a £25 donation or loan to support costs. The building opened in May 1970.

Picture 16

Compromise plan for Pitchcroft

A COMPROMISE plan is sought by Worcester City Council to resolve the conflict over the £60,000 river sports centre proposed for Pitchcroft, but it is likely to be a year before the City Architect's Department can even start to consider the question.

The council's Planning Committee have been told that, because of pressure of work, the department will not have the staff available to deal with the problem for about 12 months.

Councillor James Croft, the committee's chairman, said the project was excellent as a plan and was something which ought to be encouraged.

His committee have been asked to seek a compromise between the council's Estates and Properties and Racing Management Committees who say that the project cannot be considered in its present form. The proposed site embraces the Grandstand Hotel and the surrounding complex of racecourse buildings, and they claim it would cost about £500,000 to replace them on the other side of Pitchcroft.

Goodwill

In a statement today Worcester River Sports Committee said: "There will be no lack of goodwill on our part to discuss with the council the question of a compromise arrangement. We appreciate only too well their responsibilities as custodians for the citizens of the land involved."

"We will be very interested to hear what compromise the council might have in mind, although we cannot help but feel that the delay of 12 months before they can get down to the question is a means to an end."

"We are particularly pleased that the river sports centre proposals, which have already been approved unanimously by the Worcester Area Sports Advisory Council and are being actively supported by the West Midlands Sports Council, have now been accepted as 'ideal' by both the Racing Management and the Estates and Properties Committees and that it merely remains a matter of resolving the precise siting of the centre in view of the conflict with horse-racing interests."

Prohibitive

"In our preliminary discussions with the corporation's representatives, they are on record as agreeing that the proposals for the resiting of the racecourse buildings on the east side of Pitchcroft are also ideal, but prohibitive in cost."

"This latter opinion derives from a figure of £500,000 which has been put about so far as we can discover without foundation, and has undoubtedly influenced many council members in their reluctance to consider seriously the project."

(Turn to back page)

CANOEISTS PRESS ON WITH SEARCH FOR CLUBHOUSE

WORCESTER Canoe Club, whose membership has shot up by about 40 per cent in the last three months, are continuing their urgent search for a clubhouse.

As a temporary solution, they are asking the City Council for permission to modernise and slightly extend the wooden buildings they own on the river bank in Hylton Road.

At the moment, these buildings are used for boat storage, but by spending £500, the club say they could provide modern changing rooms, toilets and a club room for which a bar licence would be sought.

One of the buildings would be demolished and the rest given a face-lift. The club point out, however, that the clubhouse would be only temporary, lasting until the proposed new river sports centre for Worcester is built in about five years' time.

DAMP AND COLD

The club, whose membership has increased to 64 in the last three months, emphasise that they desperately need new headquarters if they are to continue as "a leading club in Great Britain."

Mr. Eric Grgg, their chairman, explained: "We have required for years a room in which members can meet and have coaching lectures. Our present single-storey concrete building beside the Severn, near the Grandstand Hotel, is unsuitable, as it is damp, cold and too small."

"Some months ago we applied to the council for a site in Grandstand Road on which to erect a building for use as a club house, but needless to say, this was rejected as the area was required for a car park on race days."

"However, the Racing Management Committee suggested that we hire the old tote building, and negotiations have been taking place to see if this was feasible. Only one snag has arisen—on race days we would be required to remove all our bar stock and personal club items into a store room."

"This would mean an upheaval every race day and would not give us the independence we would like, though we may have to accept this if our Hylton Road scheme is rejected."

"We hope, however, that this project will be approved because it will help us progress towards a bright future by giving us the facilities we require and will also bring about a tidy-up of part of the riverside," said Mr. Grgg.

Canoe Club plan approved

WORCESTER Canoe Club's £500 scheme to provide themselves with a much-needed clubhouse has been approved by the City Council's Planning Committee.

By voluntary labour, the club are to completely modernise and improve the timber buildings they own at Acre Meadow, beside the Severn in Hylton Road.

One of the buildings is to be demolished and the other given a face-lift and slightly extended to provide modern changing rooms, toilets and a club room for which a bar licence will be sought.

In recent years the club have had nowhere of their own to meet socially or to hold coaching lectures as their single-storey concrete building near the Grandstand Hotel is "damp, cold and too small."

The need for a clubhouse has been described as "desperate."

The club point out, however, that the Acre Meadow clubhouse will only be temporary, lasting until the proposed £60,000 river sports centre is built—if all goes well in about five years' time.



Members of Worcester Canoe Club lift steel girders on to the concrete pillars which will raise their new clubhouse in Hylton Road above flood level. Inset is a model of the new clubhouse as it will look when completed.

SELF-HELP EFFORT BY CANOE CLUB

Canoeing partners Eric Gagg and Brian Cubberley completed many long-distance events together. This picture, taken in the 1960s, shows them in their CG2 (Cubberley-Gagg Canoe No. 2), a wooden canvas boat they built themselves, the picture is during the Weston to Barry race.

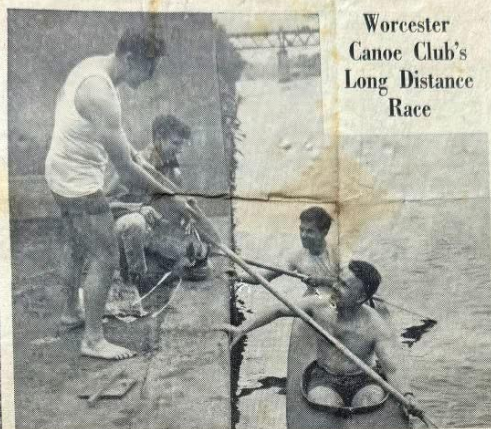


Brian Cubberley (left) and Eric Gagg (right) receiving a trophy for winning the Weston to Barry race.



Press cuttings, certificates, and badges from the long-distance races they completed. A promotional press photo shows Frank Wagner and Alan Edwards on the bank, with Eric and Brian in the canoe.

Picture 19



Four members of Worcester Canoe Club pictured after competing in the club's long distance race on the River Severn on Sunday—Frank Wagner, winner of the K1 Class, Alan Edwards and (in the canoe) Eric Gagg and Brian Cabblerley.

Worcester Canoe Club's Long Distance Race



BIRMINGHAM CANOE CLUB LONG DISTANCE RACE

This is to certify that B. CABBERLEY / M. GAGG.
completed the course of The Birmingham Canoe Club Long Distance Race, in a Class V Canoe, on 12/4/53 in 1 hours 46 minutes. 52 secs.

[Signature]
Chairman, Race Committee.

Forty-six canoeists set out on the River Severn from Upper Arley, near Kidderminster on Sunday, in the Worcester club's long distance race to the club HQ near Pichecroft.

Of the five classes competing, by far the largest entry was in the touring singles. These are general purpose craft and are usually home-made, costing from 40 to £20. There were six more classes, which were K1, professionally-built international craft; K2, internationally-built doubles, and N.C.K. (National Chinese Kayak), single seat, home-made craft. Also there were senior touring doubles, junior singles and junior doubles.

CHOPPY STREAM

The stream from Upper Arley to Bewdley was choppy and hazy, including one broken weir and two sets of rapids, was experienced. From Bewdley, the water was smooth and clear until Stourport, where the canoeists had to carry their craft round the weir. From Stourport it is Holt—the water was fairly calm and the canoeists had to carry their craft round Holt weir. At Bevery weir, the competitors had the choice of either shooting the weir or running round it; this was the last hazard of the trip and the water was calm to the finish.

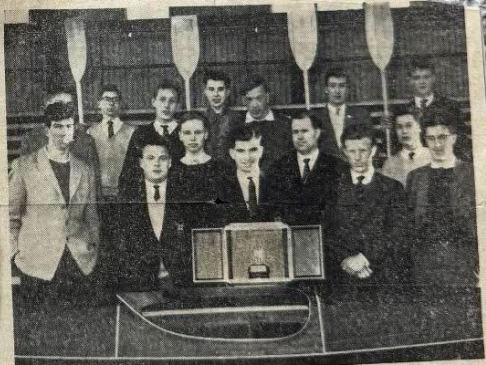
The junior singles class was won by G. Downing of Wolverhampton Canoe Club. The first home in the junior doubles were A. Hemming and C. Peace, of Camp Hill Canoe Club. The senior handicap doubles was won by J. Bicester and C. Summersby. A Worcester team, M. Powell and R. Powell, were third.

THEIR LAST RACE

The senior N.C.K. class was won by P. Shankland, from Cardiff, and the K. class by a Hungarian refugee, Frank Wegner, whose last race this was. The senior K2 class was won by Hardy and Cann, who won the Devizes to Westminster race last year.

The touring singles was won by J. Richards, of Worcester.

Worcester Canoeists Triumph



Members of Worcester Canoe Club with their long distance race captain, Eric Gagg, holding the Hasler Trophy which the club won for their performances in long distance races last season. Worcester's 186 points was a record number for this national trophy, which was presented by Lloyd's underwriters to commemorate the raid up the Gironde River in December, 1942, by Royal Marines under Lt.-Col. H. G. Hasler in two men canoes to destroy enemy shipping.

Eric and Brian in their canoe, with Olympians Frank Wagner and Alan Edwards on the bank. This photograph was taken for a press release.



Picture 20

The committee worked hard to grow membership. Their original goal was 200 members in 2 years – a target they far exceeded! Keen to raise the club's profile, they created a large stand for the Worcester Festival, the perfect showcase right beside the river they loved.

Canoe championships will provide Worcester Festival thrills

Worcester Canoe Club, busily engaged in preparations for the 1971 Open National Canoe Championships to be held at Worcester as part of the Charter Festival, was formed less than 20 years ago by seven people who always seemed to meet on the river...

They took as their headquarters the old condemned swimming premises in Grandstand Road, Pitchcroft, still the club boat-house. In 1955 modifications started and by 1957 the first clubroom was ready. In the same year, club members affiliated to the British Canoe Union and began to compete in slalom and long distance canoe races all over the country.

In 1959 the club held the first of the now annual Worcester long distance canoe races. There were 30 competitors, a bit different to entries these days which run to over the 200 mark.

In 1961 the club held their first slalom at Bevere, with a total of 38 competitors. Last month's Bevere slalom attracted over 200 paddlers.

In 1961 and 1962 the club won the coveted National Long Distance Racing Club Championship. In 1964 two members, Alan Edwards and Glenn Culver, were chosen for the British canoe team at the Tokyo Olympics and Alan was again chosen for the Mexico Olympics in 1968.

In 1965 another member, Chris Skellern, joined the British slalom team and this year Chris was chosen as leader of the British downriver racing team.

In 1969 the club decided it had to expand from the old and inadequate concrete quarters and work was started on building the new £7,000 clubhouse. Made almost entirely by members, to a high specification, the building was finished in 1970, giving W.C.C. some of the best canoe facilities in the country.

To be asked to organise the annual national championships is one of the biggest honours that can befall any canoe club. It also calls for a high degree of organisation and preparation.

An estimated 400 canoeists, including teams from the U.S.A., Belgium, Spain, Denmark, Austria and Ireland, will be converging on the city during the last week-end in August. Possibly three times this number of spectators are also expected, as well as the country's Press and television.

The championships last for three days, from Saturday, August 28, to Monday, August 30.

Saturday's Race of the Day is the long distance single kayak event, starting at 3.30, after competitors have taken part in the carnival procession, while the long distance doubles take place on the Monday at 12.0. The 14-mile course runs, from Worcester to Bevere, back through Worcester past Diglis and up the Teme to Powick, and then back to Worcester.

There will probably be a few "casualties" at the mass start, as up to 400 paddles hit the water. The weirs will also be excellent places to see some action, as competitors negotiate the slippery concrete walls.

Car parks will be provided by the river bank at Worcester and at Bevere. Diglis and Powick and spectators should be able to keep up with the race by road if they wish. For those who prefer to relax, or spend some time at the carnival between the start and finish, a public address system is being installed along the river bank in Worcester.

In the race compound, by the club in Hylton Road, a trade stand, information centre and refreshments will also be available and a ferry will operate between Pitchcroft and the West bank for those who do not want to go the long way round.

On the Sunday there is a respite from the long distance race with an afternoon sprint regatta over a course running from the bridge to the canoe club. The public will have an uninterrupted view from the new riverside gardens and one unusual sight should be the four-seater kayakers... some paddlers call them floating windmills!

Picture 21

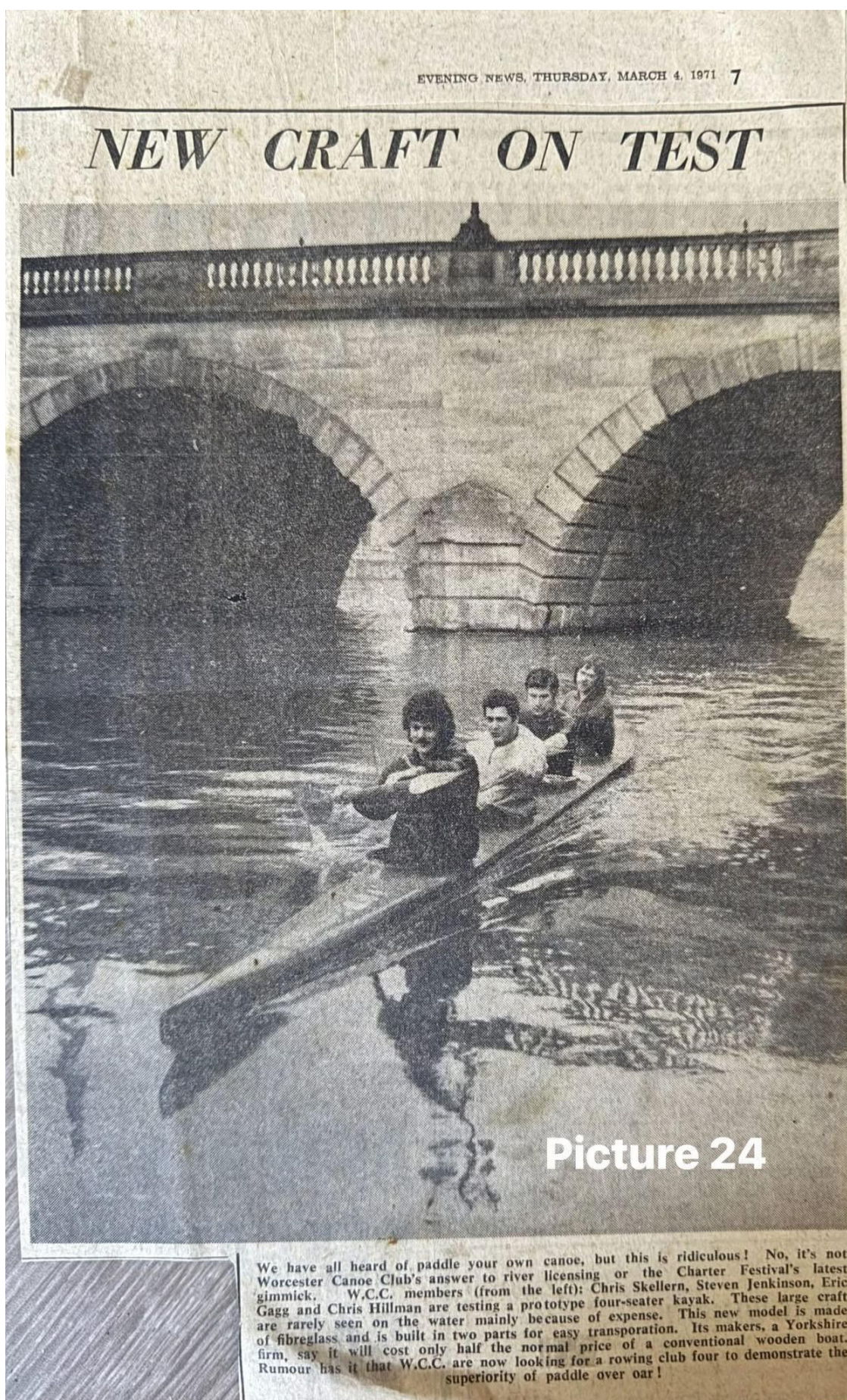
The Worcester Canoe Club stand – a proud display of the club’s achievements and ambitions.



Eric also enjoyed slalom. This photo was taken in 1970, upstream of Builth Wells at “The Rocks”, Wales.



Never afraid of innovation, members tested a prototype four-seater kayak. From left to right: Chris Skellern, Steven Jenkinson, Eric Gagg, and Chris Hillman. Fibreglass-built and designed in two parts for easier transport, such boats were rare on the water at the time due to cost.



Meanwhile, riverside development on Grandstand Road was still under discussion!



Finally – Grandstand Road was under construction!



The old and the new. The old Hylton Road building was dismantled by members as part of the planning conditions for the new build. This photo shows the start of deconstruction with the new clubhouse in the background.



Jumping forward, here we are today. Eric felt that his journey was complete when he retired as Chairman shortly after the new Canoe Club building opened in 1984, due to work commitments he was unable to give the club 100% and if Eric was going to do anything, it had to be 100% commitment!

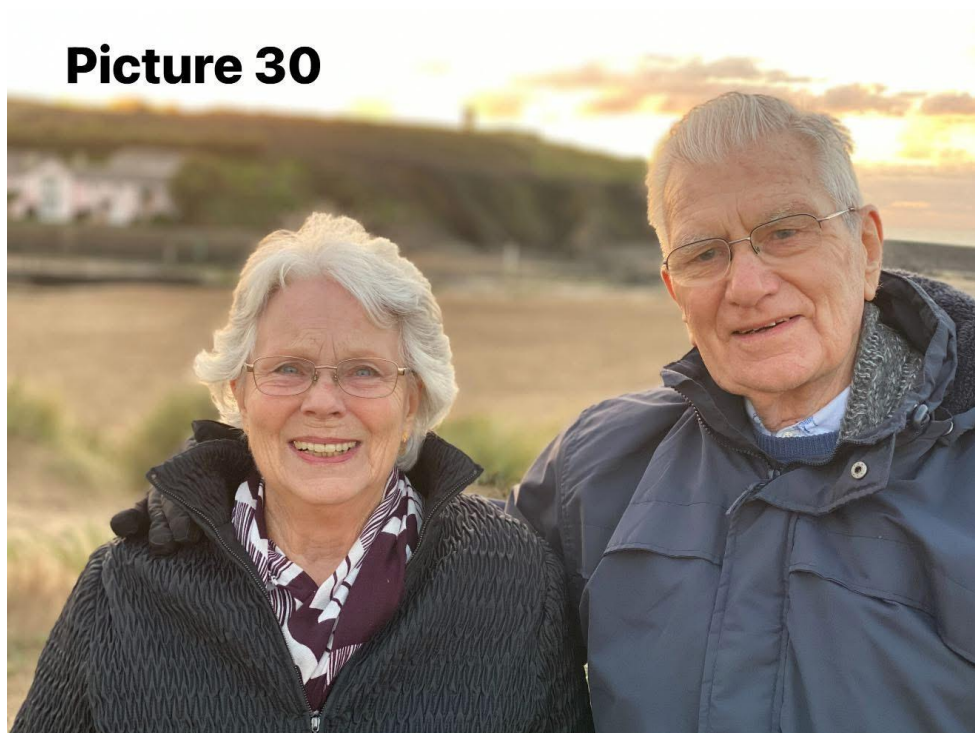


The last time Eric (aged 87) visited the Canoe Club. Sadly, Gill had passed away the previous month. In August 2022, Eric came to watch the Nationals – one of the first major events the club had organised under his chairmanship back in 1971. He was delighted to see so many founding members still active, some even out on the river. He was deeply touched by the warmth and kindness shown to him, proof that the ethos built in those early days – together with that drive and ambition – is still very much alive and thriving today.



And finally, a wonderful couple remembered by everyone.

They were the most amazing parents, grandparents, and parents-in-law. I have so many personal memories of the canoe club, as much of my childhood was spent there!



I hope these pictures bring back fond memories for others too, while showing the younger generation the grit and determination that built this club. I wish it every success for the future. Helen