In the early summer of 2003 Lesley Chamberlin and I came down to Dittons to introduce our respective children, Alastair and Charlotte, to the Juniors following their achievements at Sunbury Junior Regatta the previous year. The appeal of the river and the club enticed us to join ourselves and, twelve years later, we are now privileged to be Captain and Vice-Captain of the finest Skiffing and Punting Club, on one of the most beautiful stretches along the Thames.

I feel very honoured to be entrusted with the role of Captain; I accept that it won’t always be an easy ‘outing’ but I will endeavour to carry forward and hopefully enhance the spirit, character and traditions on which Dittons was founded back in 1923.

The outstanding facilities, both sporting and recreational, that we all enjoy at Dittons are testimony to the passion and hard work of many members, past and present, and we all have a duty to care for and maintain them for future generations. As a club we are so fortunate in having a beautiful fleet of boats and a good supply of blades, providing the opportunity to maximise our enjoyment of the river and to achieve our own personal potential within the sport.

None of this would be available to us without those members who give up their precious time to undertake the maintenance, upkeep and, sadly, all-too-frequent repairs to our skiffs and blades. This harnessing and utilising of in-house skills has saved the club a lot of money over many years, and should never be taken for granted.

If we are to secure the future of our skiffing and punting tradition we need more support - particularly from experienced members - in order to train new members of all ages so that they pass on their skills and educate us all in how to care for our fleet of boats and blades.

Traditions, both on and off the water, play a major role in the Club’s history and some remain fundamental to the identity of Dittons. A key example is the Tiny Knight Memorial. This event was initiated in 1953 to commemorate A. A. (Tiny) Knight, who was Captain 1933-1945, and his invaluable commitment to DSPC. The initiative came from one B.A.M. Clarke, a member of The Skiff Club, signifying heartfelt recognition for Tiny’s commitment to individuals, the club and to the sport as a whole.
In 1988 Ladies racing was included in the event with the presentation of a trophy, the Nancy Knight, along with a winner’s record book by Ray and Pat Pembery. This tribute was made in honour of Mrs Annie Clara (Nancy) Knight, the wife of ‘Tiny’ Knight, and mother of Pat, for her commitment to the club.

Whilst compiling this article, I have referred to “A History of Dittons Skiff and Punting Club” compiled by Ray Pembery and his wife Pat until her death in 2010. Within this publication it states that at the inaugural meeting of Dittons Skiff and Punting Club on the 24th October 1923 ‘a good deal of time was spent discussing dances and other functions’. I would like to think that those present at that meeting would be proud of the way we have upheld this tradition, evident in the number of successful social events that are organised and supported by members.

A combination of well supported sporting events and entertaining social occasions are the life of any club and therefore are the substance and material for the Second Edition of the History of Dittons Skiff and Punting Club.

And who doesn’t want their name or sporting prowess to go down in History!

Anne Newman

We’ve been asked to explain the various roles on the committee so I am going first. The role of Vice Captain can be huge, potentially. However, I am really fortunate to be supported by others: Malcolm Knight, who takes overall responsibility for maintenance of the boats, liaising with the boat builders and transporting the skiffs for repair; Rebecca, who manages regatta entries; and John Atwood and Tony Perot who work tirelessly at their bench in the club house doing the smaller in-house repairs.

So, what do I do?

When I took on this role I considered my own personal objectives:

- Nurture new members.
- Ensure there is a good transition for members who had attended new members’ night the previous year, and to improve integration with more established members on all club nights.

Lesley Chamberlin - Vice Captain Role
• Encourage members to enter regattas and to have fun racing.
• Improve our coxing situation at Dittons.

Working alongside the other committee members, we have got off to a very busy start. We have listened to your suggestions and comments and I am currently working to achieve some of my objectives.

We aim to improve Thursday night (new members’ night), in particular, and we will start to have a scratch-crew system. So, there is no need to worry about organising a crew, or worry about turning up on your own as we will be organising crews on the night – a bit like Bridge 2 Bridge.

Also, on a Tuesday evening, we hope to have a co-ordinator, again with the purpose of ensuring all members get outings.

Obviously, a large part of my role is focussed around the regatta season. I ensure that boats get to the regattas, assist with finding crew partners so as many people as possible can race, and also assist with finding coxes. Obviously, if you wish to race, you should endeavour to find your own Cox, and you must also be prepared to help by skiffing boats to and from regattas - it is a useful way to get extra practice in.

Bridge 2 Bridge has been going well, but it would be lovely to see some new faces turning up. Please, have a chat with me if you would like to find out more about it. It currently runs on a Saturday afternoon (names on the board by 1.45 p.m.), but as the river gets busier this will change to mornings.

We have lots to look forward to. The racing season has started with the long distances races and Tiny and Nancy Knight race on Saturday 2nd May.

The forthcoming River relay pageant on 13th/14th June should be a great occasion.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information.

I look forward to seeing you on the river.

Lesley
Hi, my name is Sophia. I am twelve years old and I am a member of the junior section of the skiffing and punting club. I have been coming to the club for 4 years and I really enjoy it. The coaches (Malcom, Sue and Fiona) are really patient and welcoming and teach you the rowing.

The first time I went, I was really excited to go on a boat because I had never been on one before. The first boat that everyone starts on is a dinghy and it is really safe and easy to learn on because it is stable (and you have a cox in the boat)! I found this the easiest boat to row on because you can learn fast or slowly depending on what you like. The next boat you go on is a double skiff which is two people rowing with a cox (but you have to be twelve or over). I think this is the best one because it is so fun going from a dinghy to a skiff because you go faster in the skiff. The boat that I am learning to row on at the moment is a single skiff, which is just you in the boat. So far, I love going in a single because you control the boat yourself.

I like how the club is a friendly place to come every Sunday (and there is a tuck shop) and it is a nice place to meet friends and do exercise. Also every year there is a regatta which is when you do races, you can bring a picnic and you race with/against other clubs.

Sophia Ainsworth
A title they have picked for themselves. Tony Perot (ex President) and John Attwood explain.

John and I enjoy an outing on the river or a session on the ergo on a Tuesday and Thursday evening. We then retire to the bar where we have a glass of red wine and a chat to whoever likes to join us. Or we indulge in a little “grumpy old man discussion” i.e. we didn’t do it that way in my day. But mostly we enjoy the discussion with whoever joins us.

We also enjoy doing a few repairs when they are required on the boats. (This idea orginated with Ray Pembery a few years ago). By doing these smaller repairs we hope this avoids the club some expense. Of course, it also means that more boats are available for the use of the members. In order for us to be able to make these repairs, it is essential that if when using a boat you have or discover a problem you record it on the white board just inside the boathouse.

During the winter months John ensures that all the lights on the boats are working to keep everyone safe.

We would very much welcome some support, so if you have a little spare time and would like to learn how to make these minor repairs and carry out maintenance please get in touch.

We hope that this was of interest and that we have many more years at the Club.
Tony Perot and John Attwood

DO YOU KNOW YOUR SKIFFS?

Do you know which skiffs are which? Have you ever heard someone say...“let’s take out a Dennett” and thought “mmm, not sure which ones they are”. Well, to resolve this we’ve listed the various boats and nicknames, simply the builder and single or double. Skiffs display an SRA number in white.

In order to maintain matched boats for regattas we ask that novices only use boats listed as novice and that racing boats are not taken out coxless.

Please support us in taking pride in our skiff fleet. Take a responsible approach, do all possible to avoid damage and report any boat or blade damage on the white boards.
If there has been an accident causing damage to our boats, blades or an incident with another craft please make a note of who was involved and how the accident happened and email Lesley Chamberlin. This will support any possible insurance claim, may help us learn how to avoid accidents in the future, or address any claim from a third party.

SRA001-SRA003 Radley doubles (novice)
SRA004-SRA006 Dennett doubles (racing)
SRA007-SRA009 Stanley double (racing)
SRA010-SRA011 Eton doubles (novice)
SRA012-SRA014 (experienced)
SRA015-SRA017 Dennett singles (racing)
SRA018-SRA020 Stanley single (racing)
SRA021-SRA022 singles (novice)
SRA024 Messum’s IV sculler (Sandy) (experienced)

Christine Knight
Hi all,

You may be aware that this year it has been a bit harder to find volunteers to cook for Tuesday nights. We all enjoy our Tuesday night suppers after a hard training session, so read on for some tasty tips to get you all in the mood to cook for your fellow club members, and put your cooking skills into practice.

The first and most important one is KIS(S) - Keep It Simple. Chose a recipe you are familiar and confident with. No-one is expecting a gourmet meal filled with exotic ingredients. Think about your costs and keep things inexpensive where possible.

Secondly, plan your timing - cooking for 25 people does take a lot longer than cooking for 4 - especially when boiling large amounts of water!

Thirdly - Ask for someone to help you - either with the shopping or the preparation, or even just with serving everyone.

Fourth - One option is to prepare the food on a Monday night- either at home or at the club. This will take the strain off on Tuesday night and you should be able to get some training done that night. Also some recipes, for example, a curry, tastes nicer if it’s given an extra day to mature!

Five - If you are not sure what to cook, but would like to give it a try, we have a few recipes which you can use. Please ask Siobhan.

Six - if you are cooking, put the dishwasher on as soon as you arrive as it takes at least one hour to heat up. And either share any left overs with people eating, or takeaways (ask for extra donations) or take it home yourself (remember to return any dishes). Try not to leave any food in the fridge as it tends to stay there until the next club cleaning day 😊

Thanks in advance and I look forward to enjoying your cooking!!

Siobhan
On Monday 13 April we resumed the Monday evening punting, after a long winter’s rest. You are welcome to join us from 6.30pm till dusk. For those members who are not sure what punting involves and would like to try it out, please come along on any Monday night from 6.30pm onwards and you will be well looked after by all the punters. This also goes for skiffers who have yet to dip their toes into the dark arts of punting but have been too afraid to ask! It may look tricky to stand up in a flat bottomed boat and wave a pole about but it is safer, faster, easier and more fun than you might first expect. All welcome, no experience needed!

I would suggest novices avoid any cold or windy evenings as the river is best enjoyed in a punt when the sun is shining and the ducklings are out. For the old hands there will be a pole making day when the new shoes are delivered from the foundry (our punt poles wear little aluminium "shoes" which wear out as they grate across the riverbed. We have new ones cast in a foundry in Molsey and it is a job each spring to refresh our poles with new Jimmy Choos before racing starts. Our work party is like the skiff repair Team but with more hacksaws, waterproof mastic and cake.)

We will also rely on current punters to help train our novices – please let me know if you would like to give punting a go – I’ll organise a session for you.

We are running another punting Meander from Cricklade to Wargrave from 23rd to 26th May with four 2ft punts and a jolly bank party. I have asked the Vicar to lay on better weather than last year so that I know who to blame when it rains again! Please let me know if you would like to be involved or take part if I have not already knobbled you. Even if the first time you see a punter in action is at the Hampton Court and Dittons Regatta, the summer is long, and punts are the coolest craft on the river - come along and try them out.

pip pip *Natalie*
Some Dittons Members enjoy the sporting and social sides of the club for years without ever needing to come into contact with the committee and so may ask “what does the Club committee ever do?” I would assure them the Club committee (which includes the Captain and other Officers) is in overall control of Dittons and is ultimately responsible for everything that happens at the Club, whether good or bad. In turn, the committee is under the control of Dittons members (by whom it is elected at the AGM). Copies of the committee meeting minutes are posted on the notice board so anyone who is interested can see what is discussed and what has been agreed on their behalf.

In reaction to a request in the “Dittons wants a minute of your time” email I’ve been asked to outline some of the key topics discussed, using the February 2015 minutes.

River Safety - the Thames was in flood for most of the winter of 2013-2014 and flowed high and too fast for anyone to skiff in safety. In February this year we knew that flooding could recur at any time, so the committee discussed whether we should establish a “Black Boards” river flow rate (based on the environment agency river flowmeter) when all club boating would be suspended. In the end we decided to leave it to the captain’s discretion, since flow rate is just part of the river conditions picture, which also includes river height and general weather conditions (freezing or mild temperatures, gale force or gentle winds).

Financial Report - cash flow is as important to a club as blood flow is to a person - so the committee thinks about club finances at every meeting and Heather (doing a wonderful job as Club Treasurer) keeps us firmly in line. At this meeting (bearing in mind our budget year ends in early April) we discussed how expenditure was going against the annual budget. We also discussed the level at which membership fees should be set for the coming year 2015-16. It was clear expenditure was generally in line with budgets and decided membership fees should increase by about 3% to maintain/improve membership income and ensure we can run the club without dipping too far into our capital reserves.

DBS Applications - Child safeguarding legislation is rightly becoming more extensive and detailed. An example of this is the change from CRB (Criminal Records Board) certificates to DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) certificates, which Club Welfare Officer, Sarah Duffy will now obtain via a commercial company for all adults regularly involved with our Junior club. All local Skiffing and rowing Clubs will have the same need for DBS certificates as we do, so we hoped to source ours at low cost through the SRA or British Rowing, but no agreement on this is yet reached.

Regatta Finish Line – illustrating the range of topics (major to minor), we also discussed the need to repaint the Club regatta finish line marker on the far bank of the river, as the original mark was obscured by tree pruning work.
I hope this helps explain what the committee does to manage club business, but please read the Minutes from time to time to better understand the full story.

John Roberts

Club Secretary