



STAR CLUB – A HISTORY 1960 TO 2016

BACKGROUND, FOUNDATION AND DEVELOPMENT

RAF CARDINGTON ROWING

In the early 1950's RAF Cardington servicemen interested in rowing were few in number and followed their involvement by boating from Bedford Rowing Club ('BRC'), which at that time was located in the centre section of the Harpur Trust Schools' Boathouse at Longholme.

The RAF rarely had enough members to form a full crew and so Ray Baron, a BRC member, often rowed with them. This experience caused Ray to cut short his apprenticeship and register for National Service with the RAF earlier than necessary so that he could row with at Cardington.

COACHING & TED POYNTER

Group Captain Lousada was the Commanding Officer at Cardington and together with another officer, Harry Clark, worked to develop the rowing activity at the base. At this time Ted Poynter, who had until recently been Captain of BRC, was asked to coach crews from the RAF but initially refused. Ray Baron became involved and after a further meeting to discuss possibilities and prospects, Ted agreed to take on the RAF coaching role.

BOATHOUSE

Around 1955 an old boathouse in the Cattle Market at Batts Ford became the first RAF Cardington rowing base and Bedford Ladies Rowing Club, who had themselves only recently been formed in 1955, were given boating space for the first time. There were no changing facilities and crews had to pass through a hedge to get to the water. In 1956 the RAF obtained a lease from the North Bedfordshire Borough Council on an old timber-seasoning shed at Batts Ford, which then became St Paul's Boathouse. Bedford Ladies RC moved there with the RAF and Viking Kayak Club was also invited to use the Boathouse at that time.

EQUIPMENT

The RAF used its PSI (Station Sports Funds) funds to purchase a set of oars and the Banham built 1951 Cambridge University rowing eight, named "Little by Little". Funds were also provided to buy new boats in the form of a tub pair, a clinker scull from Banhams and a Coxless Four from Sims, but the urgent need was for a new Eight. Shortage of funds meant that in 1956 Ted Poynter ordered

and paid for a new Sims Eight named "Ted" before being reimbursed by the RAF subsequently.

NATIONAL SERVICE ROWING RECRUITS

The oarsmen who were involved with the rowing activity were almost totally National Servicemen and as they reported to Cardington, the national centre for Kitting Out, any oarsmen among them were directed to a rowing contact who then advised them on the chances of being posted back to Cardington to continue their rowing while in the RAF. All were told to apply for clerical jobs in the RAF, which meant that they could be posted to any RAF Station, especially Cardington!

Membership of RAF Cardington Rowing Club thus grew in numbers along with the quality of rowing, so that crews were competitive at top level rowing events such as the Head of River Race and Henley Royal Regatta. Crews competed in these events from 1955 onwards; at Henley in Thames Cup Eights and Wyfold Fours. The first Cardington Eight to race in the Head of the River Race finished 50th as a new entry and won its first round at Henley in the Thames Cup. All training was carried out on a part time basis and normal daily work in their RAF jobs still had to be done.

ROWING DEVELOPMENT AND INTRODUCTION OF STAR CLUB

During 1956 and 1957 crews improved to finish 26th and 27th in the Head of the River Race and 20th in 1958. The RAF Cardington Thames Cup Eight had produced such outstanding performances at Henley and other top class regattas that it was invited to the trials for selection of the English Eight for the 1958 Empire Games at Lyn Padarn in North Wales. That crew was, Jock Lynn, Mike Brandon, Roy Woolston, Keith Symons, Les Streets, Peter Kennedy, Harry Clark and Cox A T Collins.

The RAF maintained the quality of their crews until late 1959 when National Service was ending and the supply of experienced oarsmen from all over Britain diminished. At the core of the rowing members was a dedicated group of people who considered that having reached such a high standard it was important to continue rowing with that group as long as possible. Consequently a number elected to remain in the Bedford area to row after demobilisation from the RAF, having to find themselves new employment and homes.

This situation meant that eventually civilians would have to be part of the RAF crews for the first time. In preparation for this, a decision was made to form a new rowing club to be called Star Club and to negotiate with the RAF and the Council to take over the boathouse and equipment from RAF Cardington as the numbers of National Servicemen rowing members dried up. The end of 1959 left only a few oarsmen at RAF Cardington, so the transfer to Star Club was gradually accomplished by mid 1960.

The objectives of Star Club were *"to produce crews and scullers capable of competing at Henley Royal Regatta, or any other similar standard National or International rowing event worthy of consideration for National representation"*.

AFFILIATION TO THE AMATEUR ROWING ASSOCIATION

The time for registering and affiliating Star Club to the Amateur Rowing Association came in early 1960 when it became apparent that at least two civilians would have to row in the Thames Cup Eight at Henley Royal Regatta in July. The RAF would not allow the crew to continue rowing under the RAF Cardington RC name and so the first Star Club Eight was formed for Henley. The Henley Stewards accepted that Star Club had been formed in 1959 and so the Thames Cup entry was allowed.

Two of the civilians in that first Star Club Eight were Neville Andrews: ex Army National Service but then a teacher at Bedford School and an ex Goldie oarsman, and Angus Robertson a local oarsman and son of Bill Robertson, Star Club's first President. Most of the other crew members were ex RAF Cardington personnel. That crew was Ray Brown, Jock Lynn, Darryll Pitchford, Angus Robertson, Neville Andrews, Dave Key, Mike Edwards, John Fundrey and Cox Gully Nicholls. A photograph of their losing race at Henley against Kent School (USA) was reproduced on the back cover of "The Field" magazine of July 1962 in an advertisement for Double Diamond beer!

RAF POLITICS AND NEW BLOOD FROM RAF HENLOW

During August and September of 1960 five National Service oarsmen were posted to RAF Henlow from various RAF stations and joined Star Club to continue rowing. They were taken under the wing of Ted Poynter and adopted his unique rowing style through intensive tubbing throughout the winter and formed the nucleus of the first ever Star Club Eight to race in the Head of the River Race in March 1961. The crew started as a new entry in 266th place and finished 39th. That crew was, Andy Rowe (RAF), John Singfield (RAF), Peter Kennedy, Mike Mansfield (RAF), Derek Wassell, Alex Watson, John Fundrey, Lyn Parsons (RAF) and Cox Paul Rainbow, aged 16.

After the winter season thoughts turned to selection of crews for the 1961 Regatta season and the RAF Henlow oarsmen intended to continue to row with Star Club members in the Thames Cup at Henley in July. However, a senior RAF officer, who was a member of BRC, pulled rank on the National Servicemen and, in effect, ordered them to row with BRC. This was not acceptable to the RAF Henlow oarsmen and they decided that if they could not row for Star Club they would not row at all. The net result was that they elected to form their own RAF Henlow Rowing Club and row under RAF colours independently of any civilian club. This meant that four of the RAF Henlow oarsmen went into a Wyfold Four, aiming for competing at Henley. John Singfield, who made that decision as Captain of RAF Henlow Rowing Club, opted to row with Star Club in a hastily reformed Thames Cup Eight composed of, Nevill Andrews, Jock Lynn, Darryll Pitchford, Mike Edwards, Derek Wassell Alex Watson, Peter Kennedy and John Singfield and Cox Charles Barling. The RAF Wyfold Four of, Andy Rowe, Don McLeod, Mike Mansfield and Lyn Parsons, then acquired a coxless four boat called "Maid Marion" from RAF Medmenham. There followed a regatta season of development for both crews and at the end of the season, successes in eights and fours, formed from both crews, at Norwich, St Neots, St Ives and other local regattas.

With the success of RAF Henlow RC the rowing interest grew and RAF regular personnel took up the sport. An officer, Flight Lieutenant Pete Ewing, encouraged the continuation of the rowing activity such that eventually there were 15 oarsmen of varying ability, all using Star Club equipment as an affiliated club.

A BENEVOLENT BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

In 1961 the addition of a Public Convenience to the end of St Pauls Boathouse by Bedford Borough Council (BBC), enabled the Club to incorporate male and female changing rooms, showers and toilets, plus a clubroom. Showers up to then were simply a hosepipe with a perforated tin can on its end in an adjacent Cattle Market. There was a toilet in the same location but in deplorable condition and never used by the ladies! With the assistance of Truman, Hanbury and Buxton Brewery, a bar was fitted into the clubroom at about the same time and the Club had social and changing facilities at last.

NATIONAL SERVICE ABOLISHED

By the end of 1961 virtually all National Service RAF personnel had been demobilised. Two from RAF Henlow, Andy Rowe from Hollingworth Lake RC and Lyn Parsons from LLandaff RC, elected to find work and remain in Bedford to continue rowing. Mike Mansfield of City of Cambridge RC returned to Cambridge to live but continued rowing in Bedford. Don McLeod from Staines RC and John Singfield of St Ives RC, were still in the RAF at Henlow finishing off their Service.

TRAGIC START TO THE 1961/62 SEASON

From 1962, therefore, Star Club became a fully civilian rowing club. Membership numbered about 30. Winter training started in October and the first outings of a First Eight were promising but, tragically, on the night of November 5th, Derek Wassell was killed and Don MacLeod and Mike Mansfield injured, in a car accident on the Embankment, caused by icy roads.

The crew continued to boat with two substitutes from the second Eight and a new cox for each outing, as Paul Rainbow, the 16 year old cox, was placed into the No 2 seat on a permanent basis as nobody else could make the 6 times a week outing schedule. Don MacLeod and Mike Mansfield, now recovered, rejoined the crew after Christmas. The crew developed into a very fast unit and finished 4th in the Nottingham Head, 1st at Bedford Head, 6th at Reading Head and won the Jackson Trophy, starting 39th and finishing 11th in the Head of the River Race, 1962

That crew won at Boston Regatta before competing at Thames Cup level at the main Thames Regattas. At Henley that year, racing as a Thames Cup Eight, that crew were the second fastest crew in the event but met the fastest and eventual winners, National Provincial Bank RC, in the first round, losing by 2 lengths in record times. That crew was, Andy Rowe, Don McLeod, Neville Andrews, Alex Watson, John Singfield, Mike Mansfield, Paul Rainbow, Lyn Parsons and Cox Brian Scott.

For the 1962/63 season, a number of the 1962 Eight had moved away and a less than full-time crew competed in the Heads and at Henley. Notably in the

run-up to Henley the eight won Thames Cup at Wallingford Regatta, beating the winners of the Grand event, Kingston, in the process. That crew was, Andy Rowe, Mike Mansfield, Darryll Pitchford, Alex Watson, Simon Foster, Mike Edwards, Paul Rainbow, Lyn Parsons and Cox Roy Ticehurst.

Star Club continued to compete in Head races and at Henley during the 1964, 1965 and 1966 seasons but it was difficult to maintain the high standard set by the experienced RAF oarsmen when replaced by relatively inexperienced or part-time members who could not devote the same amount of time to training.

In 1966 an aging Star Club eight won the Charter Year Eights at Bedford Regatta. The crew was, Ray Brown, Mike Mansfield, Colin Toates, Bob Howard, Mike Liggett, Mick Beaumont, Cyril Smith and Cox Maurice Stanbridge.

That effectively signalled the retirement from rowing of most of the elite level oarsmen who were then aged over 30, had married and were looking to develop their careers.

JUNIOR ROWING AND SILVER JUBILEE SCHOOL

By 1967 most ex RAF oarsmen had ceased serious rowing and the Club was at a crossroads. Active senior membership had fallen and when a schoolboy cox, Ian Darnell, with a view to introducing rowing to his school, approached the new Captain, Lyn Parsons, Silver Jubilee, he leapt at the opportunity to introduce junior rowing to the Club for the first time. Terry Chalk, Sports Master at Silver Jubilee School, was introduced to the Club and a very rewarding and successful relationship between the Club and the School began.

Membership grew as boys from other schools joined their friends and many of these new local youngsters developed into first class oarsmen. A number became Captains or officers on Club committees and from the mid 80's provided the backbone of the Veteran (now known as Masters) Squads.

CLUBHOUSE DEVELOPMENT AND EQUIPMENT UPDATE

In 1972, with the assistance of the Bedfordshire Playing Fields Association, a series of grants were obtained by Lyn Parsons which allowed substantial improvements to be made to the boathouse to provide a bar and clubroom with toilets on a new first floor, with a gymnasium in the old clubroom on the ground floor. The members carried out much of this work themselves. This enthusiasm encouraged further growth in activity and all the resources were put to improving and increasing the equipment available for training and rowing, with emphasis on the needs of young people.

BEDFORD LADIES ROWING CLUB AND REGATTAS

About this time Bedford Ladies Rowing Club experienced financial difficulties and merged with Star Club thus bringing women's rowing into the Club for the first time. The Ladies Rowing Club had organised a women's regatta for some years and, on joining Star Club, events for junior men were introduced. This regatta developed over the years to become an annual weekend of two regattas, open to all classes and continues to the present as the Star Club Regatta, offering as prizes its distinctive blue china pots made especially for Star Club by Rumney Pottery in Cardiff.

SENIOR AND JUNIOR ROWING SUCCESSES

From 1980, the quality of rowing and successes grew such that a number of the new young members won National Championships and were selected for GB representation, first at Junior and then Senior level. The Club's First Eight won the Jackson Trophy three years in succession from 1983 to 1985.

NEW BOATHOUSE, STAR CLUB BEDFORD LTD, FINANCIAL PROBLEMS AND INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

UNCERTAIN FUTURE

In 1984 plans on developing the old Cattle Market and the St Paul's boathouse site threatened the very existence of Star Club necessitating extensive and prolonged negotiations with Bedford Borough Council ('BBC') for support in maintaining the Club's presence in the town. Eventually, after considerable pressure from a Joint Working Party, led by Lyn Parsons, BBC agreed to provide a grant of £202,000 toward the cost of a new boathouse. Other smaller grants were obtained from the Harpur Trust and the Sports Council. This culminated in the construction of the new boathouse, 100 metres downriver, on land owned by BBC. That new boathouse was built by Star Club (Bedford) Limited, a company set up by Star Club simply for that purpose and to hold the Head Lease. The building was completed in August 1988 at a final cost of £334,332 and the premises sub-let to Star Club and Viking Kayak Club for 50 years, the first 3 years to be rent free.

Initially, in awarding the grant, BBC had proposed and designed an ideal boathouse after consulting Star Club on its needs, but, when put out to tender the cost was considered prohibitive. The Club was forced to revert to a previous design of a smaller boathouse designed by architects at Charles Wells Brewery. Eventually Star Club had to provide over £110,000 itself to complete the building and had to take out major loans to do this, including £30,000 from Charles Wells Ltd.

COMBINED CLUBS AND HENLEY ROYAL REGATTA SUCCESSES

In 1986, at senior level, with limited numbers of top level oarsmen at each club, BRC were invited to join with Star Club in forming elite level crews. This was at a time when neither club had sufficient members of elite standard to form their own crews. The crews rowed as Bedford Star Rowing Club, a club formed especially for this purpose and by renaming an existing Star Racing name, which was Rats Club. As a result of this combining of members, two Eights were formed for the Head season and raced in the positions held by the separate clubs in the Tideway Head of the River. As Bedford had finished higher than Star Club in 1985, Bedford Star 1 rowed as BRC and Bedford Star 2 rowed as Star Club. If the crews had rowed as Bedford Star they would have had to start last as new entries, competing in poor water. The crew racing as BRC, albeit with most members originating from Star Club won the Jackson Trophy.

At the National Championships a combined eight drawn from both crews, won the top Eights event to become British Champions.

The objective of the founder members of achieving success at Henley Royal Regatta was achieved in 1986, when a Star Club and BRC composite crew won

the Britannia Cup. The crew comprised, Jonathan Singfield, Richard White (BRC), Pete Mulkerrins, Kevan Armstrong and Cox Hayden Bass (BRC).

In 1987, BRC's new Captain, stated that they wished to recover their own rowing identity and elected to return to separate club operations.

However, there was more to come for Star Club when in 1990, rowing as a composite crew with Leander, the Club won the Stewards Cup at Henley, in a crew comprising Pete Mulkerrins, Tim Foster, Matthew Pinsent (Leander) and Martin Cross (Leander).

In the following year, 1991, again at Henley, as composite crews with Leander, Star Club won the Grand Challenge Cup (Jonathon Singfield and Tim Foster) and the Prince Phillip Cup (Peter Mulkerrins).

In 2012, a Star Club crew comprising Will Eason, Leon Taylor, Dave Kempzell and Alex Miller, coxed by Chris Kingston, won the Britannia Cup after losing in the previous year in the final of the Thames Cup.

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

During this period the Club was experiencing growth in membership and consequential increased demands on equipment. Although BBC, The Harpur Trust and the Sports Council made grants towards the new boathouse, as previously mentioned Star Club had to raise over £110,000 itself to complete the building. Bank loans and overdrafts were necessary to do this and with the failure of the original licensees (who were expected to pay the overheads of the boathouse from bar and gymnasium operations), further costs were incurred. The net result of this situation was that from 1988 to 1992 all available funds had to be applied to servicing major loans with virtually no investment possible for new boats and equipment. The majority of the fleet of boats were soon outdated and uncompetitive, suitable only for basic training and coaching purposes. Although applications were made to local authorities and charitable trusts, no grants were forthcoming for urgently needed new equipment.

The effect of these problems was that when the 3 years rent free period from 1988 to 1991 ended, a further £6,000 per annum became payable and the situation was impossible to contain. BBC demanded that the outstanding amounts be paid in spite of the work done by the Club for the wider community. Negotiations commenced with the Council to find a workable solution. Finally it was decided that the Council should purchase Star Club's and Viking's interests in the Boathouse and the Council would take it over and manage it as a Water Sports Facility. A figure of £130,000 was offered and the two clubs had little choice but accept. Then began a long period of behind the scenes activity within the Council when it finally emerged that other parties were going to be included in the occupation of the Council run Boathouse and Star and Viking would be renting rack space in company with the Harpur Trust Schools.

RESCUE BY THE FOUNDATION FOR SPORT AND THE ARTS

However, during 1991 Lyn Parsons had foreseen the problem coming to a head and had applied for help to the Foundation for Sports and Arts (FFSAA)

providing full details of the situation and the stance taken by the Council, which was unsympathetic and threatened the very existence of Star and Viking.

In 1993, at a critical moment in time, just as the Boathouse was to be handed over to BBC, the grant application was approved by the FSAA. Star Club was thus able to pay off its debts and went some way to securing its independence with the generous grant assistance of £38,750. This enabled it to repay the crippling interest-bearing loans from Banks and the Brewery, which were all directly related to the original funding needed for the new boathouse. Although Star Club were prepared to discuss a partnership to develop the facility with BBC, it was clear that there were other ambitions for use of the Boathouse which had been thwarted by the award of that grant. All negotiations were abruptly halted.

THE POYNTER CHARITABLE TRUST AND PROFESSIONAL COACH

The Poynter Charitable Trust was set up in 1988 with a legacy from Ted Poynter who died that year. The Trust was established to develop and support junior rowing and was based at Star Club from 1990 when it was able to employ a full time Junior Coach. The Coach was permitted to use the Club facilities and equipment without charge during the daytime to allow children from a number of schools to participate in rowing and sculling without the need to take up membership of Star Club. Children from some 13 Bedfordshire schools were introduced to rowing in this way. These juniors achieved considerable success during 1992/93, winning over 30 events and even some medals at the National Championships.

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT

Senior rowing at club level suffered because of the lack of competitive equipment but at elite level Star Club had five members: Kevan Armstrong, Tim Foster, Peter Mulkerrins, Jon Singfield and Cox John Deakin, in the Great Britain Rowing Squad and won top events at Henley Royal Regatta with some of these oarsmen rowing in composite crews. Three had originally joined the Club as juniors. The 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona saw five members of Star Club competing for Great Britain, Pete Mulkerrins and John Deakin in the 4+ and Tim Foster, Jonathan Singfield and Rupert Obholzer in the Eight.

In 1993 membership stood at 252, which included social members; many of whom were parents of young members; and associate members who were, in effect, corresponding members or persons who have moved away but still wished to be connected to, and support, the Club.

Three members were still in the Great Britain national rowing squad, Jon Singfield, Tim Foster and cox John Deakin.

GREENE KING BREWERY AND BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL SUPPORT

In 1983 Lyn Parsons negotiated a sponsorship from Greene King Brewery to attract a grant from Sportsmatch. This allowed a start to be made on modernising the old fleet of boats and the introduction of recreational rowing. Bedford Borough Council contributed towards one boat, their grant being matched by donations from members and parents of junior members. Also in 1994, members constructed a room to allow installation of five new Ergometers.

In 1994, four members, Tim Foster, Jon Singfield and coxes John Deakin and Hayden Bass represented GB in the World Rowing Championships at Indianapolis winning gold and bronze medals in the process.

BEDFORD JUNIOR ROWING GROUP

The achievements of the juniors using the Club were largely due to the availability, during school hours, of the Junior Coach. For a time, continued success and development of junior rowing at Star Club depended to a large extent on the services provided by the town-wide Bedford Junior Rowing Group initiative which commenced in May 1995.

With the employment of the Bedford Junior Rowing Group Rowing Development Officer, access to daytime coaching for the top coaching resource was spread around three boathouses and so the lower level juniors had to rely on extra support by voluntary Star coaches.

FURTHER TOP LEVEL ACHIEVEMENT

Our members in the GB squad won silver medals in the World Championships and four members competed for places in the crews for the Atlanta Olympics in August 1996 with two members achieving selection, Tim Foster and Graham Smith.

Seven top-level juniors won gold, silver and bronze medals at National Schools and National Championships and five of these were invited to GB Junior Training camps after trials for twenty places.

LOTTERY SPORTS FUND GRANT

In 1996 Lyn Parsons made a successful application to the Lottery Sports Fund for modifications to the premises and upgrading the fleet of boats and other rowing equipment to the value of £96,646. Star Club funded the remaining £11,000 from its own resources.

The lottery grant enabled the purchase of all the boats oars and sculls in the Equipment Plan to the end of 1997 for a total cost of £78,449 and enabled upgrading of shower facilities and extraction equipment and improvements to the female shower room costing £10,719.

The lottery grant enabled upgrading of gym equipment and installation of moveable partitions creating two committee rooms and more versatile use of clubroom space for a total cost of £18,448.

JUNIOR COACHING SUPPORT AND FURTHER OLYMPIC RECOGNITION

The Bedford Junior Rowing Group provided funds to allow sufficient coaching and supervisory support during daytime hours for continuing the development of the younger new juniors.

In competition, eight juniors were selected for the GB Junior Squad during the summer and the newer juniors competed at National Schools Regatta and the National Championships.

Eight juniors represented GB or England during the season with medals being won at National Schools and National Championships.

A DECADE OF STEADY PROGRESS

SENIOR SQUAD SUCCESSES AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE JUNIOR SQUAD

In 1998 the Senior Squad began to move toward elite status and won events in the Tideway Fours Head for the first time. A number of crews were competitive at Henley.

In 1999, the Senior Squad first Eight won the Jackson Trophy and the second Eight won the Senior 3 Pennant at the Head of the River Race. Tim Foster, Graham Smith and Jon Singfield won Silver medals for Great Britain at the World Championships in Canada. Two women, Rachael Armstrong and Miriam Taylor, represented England in other International events.

The Junior Squad, rowing as Bedford Star Juniors, won over 100 events and medals of various colours in the National and Schools Championships.

In late 1999 the Bedford Junior Rowing Group became unable to continue the funding of the full-time Junior Rowing Officer but, after a period of uncertainty, managed to obtain the services of a part-time coach who was shared by means of financial contributions from Star Club Senior Squad.

In 2000, The Amateur Rowing Association awarded Star Club Accreditation for the National Junior Rowing Programme, recognising the quality of training programmes, coaching and facilities made available for schoolchildren. The junior Squad continued to flourish and won medals at both the National Schools Regatta and the National Championships.

During the 2000 season Tim Foster won the World Championships in the Great Britain Coxless Four and represented Great Britain at the Sydney Olympics, winning a Gold medal in the Coxless Four, rowing with Steve Redgrave, Matthew Pinsent and James Cracknell. Graham Smith won a World Championship Gold medal in the Great Britain Coxed Four and Miriam Taylor won World Championship Gold medals in Great Britain Women's Lightweight Squad. Rachel Armstrong represented England in the Home Nations Match.

In 2001, in addition to the normal BBC "Try Rowing" course, an introductory rowing course was organised for the Bedfordshire Education Action Zone for Biddenham and John Bunyan Upper Schools. A further course was held for Bedfordshire and Luton Education Business Partnership ('BLEBP') Summer College and the first course for BLEBP's Children's University Initiative. A number of children involved in these courses subsequently joined Star Club to continue rowing. A feature of these courses was that most of the coaching was done by the older junior members under supervision of coaches and instructors. Juniors are encouraged to become qualified Instructors after the age of 16. The Bedford Junior Rowing Group was now defunct and Junior rowing was again controlled by the Club.

The Senior Men's Squad was being re-built for 2001 but was in the First Division of the National Rowing League and the Women's Senior Squad in the upper half of the Women's Premier Division. The Junior Squad now continued to flourish and won medals at both the National Schools Regatta and the National Championships.

Early in 2003 the Amateur Rowing Association accepted Star Club's application for involvement in Project Oarsome, which was aimed at linking schools with Star Club on a formal basis with provision of rowing equipment specifically built for children. Funding was also provided for coaching and rowing machines for use in the linked schools.

Also in March 2003 the Amateur Rowing Association appointed a Development Officer based at Star Club for the purpose of identifying children in the Eastern Region with potential for developing into top-level rowers. This programme was called "World Class Start" and a series of visits were made to schools to assess possible athletes.

The Club supported a local development, for a proposed Rowing Lake at Willington providing a 2000 metre training course for rowing as incorporated in a Strategic Framework of other local developments including a canal proposed from Milton Keynes to Bedford.

In 2004 the quality of Junior rowing was demonstrated by winning a Gold medal at the National Schools Regatta and Gold and Bronze medals at the National Schools Regatta in 2005.

The Club was awarded Community Amateur Sports Club status, which means that it is classified as a charity for grant and Rate Relief purposes.

In 2007, Juniors were finalists in the Fawley Cup at Henley Royal Regatta, combining with Peterborough and St Neots and won a Junior Bronze medal at the National Championships.

In 2008 the Senior Men's squad proved their fitness by taking the World Record for a 24-hour ergometer Marathon. A Bronze medal was won at the National Championships with Sudbury, Worcester and Trent.

In 2009 Senior men won Gold medals in the Coxless Four at the National Rowing Championships, becoming National Champions. They won Silver medals at the National Championships with Sudbury, Worcester and Trent. They were also Finalists in the Championship Eights. The Junior Squad won Gold, Silver and Bronze medals at the National Schools Regatta and the National Rowing Championships.

2009 – 2012 HENLEY ACHIEVEMENTS

During this period, the Senior Men's Squad achieved notable successes at Henley Royal Regatta. Semi finalists in the Wyfold Challenge Cup in 2009 and 2010, the squad went one better in 2011 and were beaten finalists in the Thames Challenge Cup, losing to Upper Yarra Boat Club from Melbourne,

Australia by 1 length. In 2012, the squad were victorious in the Britannia Challenge Cup, beating Taurus Boat Club in the final by half a length.

50th ANNIVERSARY, HENLEY PERFORMANCES AND GROWTH OF MASTERS ROWING

2010 – A LANDMARK YEAR

In 2010 The Men's Squad won the Bedford Head of the River in Eights and Fours and were the Fastest Four in the Bedford Small Boats Head. The Club won 13 events at that Head Race. The Junior Women won the Schools Pennant at the Women's Tideway Head of the River with Dame Alice Harpur School and St Neots RC. Tom Durrant won a Gold medal for Great Britain at the Coupe de la Jeunesse. Dianne MacDonald Smith won a Masters Silver medal at the European Indoor Rowing Championships. This followed a Masters' Gold medal at the UK Indoor Rowing Championships in the previous year.

The Club's 50th Anniversary was celebrated in 2010 by a series of events. Throughout the year, an exhibition in Bedford Museum depicted the Club's history. The Club was honoured to receive from Tim Foster his oar from the Gold medal winning Sydney Olympics Coxless Four, which today is displayed prominently above the bar. In June, Founder Members rowed in an Eight, with several disregarding doctors' orders to take part! Happily all returned safely to dry land. The year ended with a celebratory dinner at the Park Inn, Bedford, attended by over 350 members and guests. Guest speaker, international oarsman and former Oxford Blue, Capt. Robin Bourne Taylor QGM, paid tribute to the Club's achievements and presented a special award to Lyn and Lynette Parsons for their outstanding commitment to the Club since its formation.

2011 – ANOTHER JACKSON TROPHY TRIUMPH

During 2011 the Men's Senior Squad maintained progress under coaches Pete Mulkerrins and Andy Smith, winning the Jackson Trophy once again. The crew were given a Civic Reception by the Mayor of Bedford to honour their achievement. Four members of the squad represented England in the Home International Regatta, winning Gold in the Coxless Fours.

Funding of Junior rowing received a boost by the granting of £30,000 by the Harpur Trust spread over three years to support the employment of the Club's Junior coach. This was extended in 2014 by the grant of similar amount, again to support the Club's Junior coach.

2012 – A DISRUPTIVE YEAR

The whole rowing calendar was disrupted by bad weather, which resulted in many Regattas and Heads being cancelled at very short notice. The Star Regatta was cancelled due to a change in school half terms caused by the Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

The Clubmark status was renewed for a further 3 years.

THE CLUB ADOPTS A PRINCIPAL SPONSOR

2012 saw the commencement of a significant relationship with Ceetak Ltd, who became the Club's principal sponsor. Significant donations by Ceetak have enabled the Club (with the additional aid of Sportsmatch) to purchase an enviable number of new boats for the benefit of all squads. This relationship continues.

2013 – 2019 EMERGENCE OF A STRONG MASTERS' SQUAD

During this period the Senior Men's and Women's squads entered a period of retrenchment. Highlights included winners of the Bedford Eight's and Four's Head and the Trent Head in 2013 and 2014 and reaching the semi finals of the Wyfold Challenge Cup in 2015. In 2016, Dave Kempzell set a new UK record for the Heavyweight Men's Marathon Ergo.

Throughout this time, the Masters Men's and Women's Squads developed strongly. The squad picked up three medals at the British Masters Championship in 2016 followed by two golds in a mixed quad and mixed double in 2017. Success continued to build in 2018 with wins in the coxed and coxless fours at the British Masters and a win for the E8 at Henley Masters and two wins at the Euro Masters in Munich. In 2019 the squad won the E and G coxed categories in the veteran fours and eights head and then went on to win the Victor Ludorum at the British Masters with seven wins. They also won three events at Henley Masters in the E8, G8 and H8 categories. In September 2019, the squad combined with the masters from Bedford Rowing club to row as Bedford Star for the World Masters in Budapest. With a total of 5 wins and numerous strong performances, Bedford Star finished second overall out of the 420 clubs competing from all over the world.

This period also saw the strengthening of a Recreational Squad that boated regularly on a twice-weekly basis. Members of the Masters' Squads attended Easter rowing camps at Banyoles in Spain in conjunction with the Junior Squad.

In 2014, Junior oarsman Will White competed for Great Britain in the Coupe de la Jeunesse. The ability of the Squad to thrive was due in part to generous sponsorship. In addition to the Harpur Trust, the Poynter Charitable Trust has loyally supported the squad for two decades and granted in excess of £400,000 over that time. More recently, the squad benefitted by sponsorship from Woodfines, Solicitors, The Gale Family Trust and Rands Print Motors.

WILLINGTON ROWING LAKE

By 2016, the development of the Willington Rowing Lake had progressed, albeit at a slower rate than the members of Star Club, who took a leading role in the development of the site, would have wished. Major planning decisions in late 2010 were favourable and it was expected that by late September 2012 all planning hurdles would have been overcome. Some work on constructing the first 1000 metres of the rowing course was begun, but by 2016, site development issues remained and work on the Lake stalled.

60th ANNIVERSARY AND COVID RELATED CURTAILMENT

The years 2020 and 2021 witnessed a severe curtailment in Club activities on and off the water. Careful financial husbandry has ensured that the Club has weathered the storm and in 2021, strong Men's and Women's Squads were formed. Also in that year, 60th Anniversary events took place, that had been postponed in 2020, due to the pandemic.