

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TAMAR & TAVY GIG CLUB

In the beginning

On 30 October 2002, a small working group was convened by Bob Turner in the local pub (The Plough) to take the first steps in setting up a Cornish Pilot Gig club on the Bere Peninsula. The initial motivation behind the Club was to provide an opportunity for youngsters to get out on the water and encourage them to participate in a healthy outdoor activity. The working group consisted of Bob Turner, Ann Jeffries, Adrian Mitchell, Robin Musgrave and John Pearce and these folks set about founding the Club. Plans were made for a publicity campaign and feasibility study, and advice sought from another local gig club, Cattewater. Over the following months, a constitution and business plan were drawn up, agreement was reached with Weir Quay Sailing Club to keep a boat (which we still didn't have) in their dinghy park, and the club gained official recognition by becoming a member of the CPGA in January 2003 (proposed by Caradon and seconded by Cattewater).

A small grant was obtained to conduct a feasibility study and a vigorous publicity campaign included roadshows to Tavistock, Gunnislake, Calstock, and Bere Alston with an ergo machine, in one case a gig (Miller's Daughter) loaned by Caradon, and lots of enthusiasm. As a result of all this hard work, the club held its inaugural meeting on 22 Feb 2003 with 35 folks present. Tamar & Tavy Gig Club was a reality- now the club had to work out how to get rowing!

What's in a name?

Early ideas for a name included Tamar Valley Gig Club (not specific enough); Bere Peninsula Gig Club (too geographically specific); Weir Quay Gig Club; Tamar/Tavy Gig Club.

As we now know, the final name settled upon was Tamar & Tavy Gig Club as these two rivers form the boundary of the Bere Peninsula where it all began!

With a name agreed, we needed a logo and everyone was asked for ideas. It was clear that the logo should reference oars and a boat in some way but many gig club logos use the same themes and it wasn't obvious how to differentiate our logo until Brian Nobbs suggested using the stern view of a gig, in the hope that "all the other clubs get used to it as hopefully that's all they will ever see of our boat". In this way our logo using the shape of the transom with crossed oars was conceived.



The first gig

Much time was spent investigating how to fund a new boat- early minutes record an estimate of £15-20000 for a new gig plus oars plus a trailer (it's gone up a bit since then)! This was clearly going to be a huge hurdle but fortune smiled upon the club. One of the feasibility leaflets was picked up by a young lady, Ginette Nobbs, while doing her Saturday job in Tavistock. Ginette passed this on to her father, Brian, a local craftsman who built kitchens for a living. Incredibly, Brian, who originally hailed from East London, was a trained shipwright who had developed a passion for pilot gigs since moving to Devon and had always wanted to build one. Seizing the moment, Brian contacted Bob Turner and made the generous offer to build a gig for free if the club could provide the materials and some general labour. After some initial bemused scepticism at this stroke of luck, and with the successful outcome to two funding bids, the club quickly accepted Brian's offer and in October 2003

commissioned him to build their first gig with the hope of launching her in time for the IOS World Pilot Gig Championships in May 2004.

The gig was built at Brian's farm near Lifton, with various club members lending a hand, and went right down to the wire! The oars were painted in Bob Turner's stable on 13 April, the gig was put in the water for the first time at Roadford Lake on 16 April (to make sure she floated!), and was then officially launched in a ceremony at Weir Quay on 17 April, and blessed by Rev Greg Stanton. Named "Ginette" after Brian's wife, the gig colours of blue and claret were in recognition of Brian's life-long support of West Ham Football Club (for the boat nerds the colours are Marlin Blue and Bounty). Amazingly, within two weeks of her launch Ginette was on the Scillonian heading to the Isles of Scilly to take part in the first of many World Championships. On 21 April 2004 the Club held its first ever AGM and was able to celebrate this great achievement as a fully-fledged gig club!



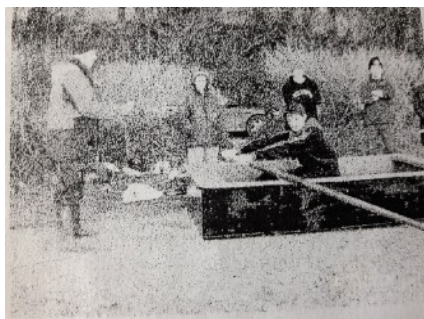
Ginette blessing



Ginette launch

How to start rowing?

While much progress was being made in setting up the infrastructure of the club, and in building the first gig, ways still had to be found to get people rowing. Luckily, John Pearce persuaded an old rowing friend, George Firk, to take on the initial coaching of club rowers. George lived on a boat at Weir Quay boatyard and while he had no experience of gigs, he had previously coached gold medal winning sculling crews at a public school. Initially, training had to be mainly land-based: George set up circuit training sessions at Bere Alston Community Hall and had a "bank tub" built (by Peter Sillcock)- this is a mock-up of a boat which sits on dry land and has a seat and thole pins which allow novice rowers to practice the stroke using an oar.



The bank tub



Blade with holes for static practice

The club was also able to borrow two flash boats from Calstock Rowing Club. Flash boats are smaller than gigs, with four rowers, and are somewhat less stable, but provided the first opportunity for rowers to get on the water! In addition, Brian Nobbs arranged for us to borrow a boat from Padstow

on Sundays to get some practice through the 2003/04 winter. In these early days, winter training had to be creative and also included sessions in a salmon boat (single rower, two oars) and there is a great Youtube video where Mr Peter Clarke can be seen demonstrating the art, accompanied by a singularly apt soundtrack.



Pete Clarke in the salmon boat

The first IOS Championships 2004

The club sent one ladies crew to row Ginette in our first IOS Championships. That first crew consisted of Helen Dickenson, Kate Morlock, Sam Adlam, Helen Smith, Carrie Lawson and Carolyn Dawe.



Ladies' crew at first ever Scillies



Ladies' crew on the finish line

Through one club member, Jane Cole, who was a native Scillonian then living in Walkhampton, and island contacts of Brian Nobbs, an arrangement was made with the St Martin's gig crew that their coach, Keith Lowe, would cox our ladies crew in the races if we loaned Ginette to their men's crew. Keith also agreed to do some training with our men's crew (Robin Musgrave, George Hilson, Rob Dawe, Joel Smith, Chris Dill and Holgar Stoecker), who were too inexperienced to enter the race but who nevertheless went out to the Scillies to support the ladies and to get valuable experience. Everybody stayed together on St Martin's and although the ladies were really thrown in at the deep end, as river rowers from a new club facing their first sea races, they came away with a respectable 69th of 76 boats.

A promising beginning on which the Club has steadily built, going on to attend every Championship from 2004 to the present day. It may also have helped our profile as a new Club that the St Martin's men's crew, including four brothers from the Morton family who went on to buy Brian's second boat build, Iron Maid, came 20th in Ginette!



Ladies' crew with St Martin's cox, Keith Lowe



Men's crew training (note the overhand grip and lean out)

The first summer 2004

Throughout the summer of 2004, rowing continued to grow and develop. The ladies squad was led by Carolyn Dawe while her husband Rob, along with Tim Hamlyn, built up the men's squad including an influx of rugged farmers. Ann Jeffries set up a veterans rowing section, while John Hilson and Anne Turner initiated a junior rowing section; and Helen Lloyd started the Monday morning recreational rowing sessions which continue to this day.

The club started attending regattas around the coast and the early emphasis on land-based training (due to the initial lack of a boat!) was carried through into winter training. This set the tone for the future and winter circuits and ergos are still an important part of our training, although these days we get to row through the snow and ice of winter too! Given that our crews had very little rowing experience and were mostly novices, with only one member (Ali Trotter) with previous gig experience, our first summer saw some great results, although at this stage it probably was more about gaining experience. In their first Newquay Champs, the Ladies managed a superb 21 of 63.

A huge effort was put into publicity to raise the profile of the club, help attract funding and increase the membership, with articles regularly featured in local press such as the Tavistock Times and Western Morning News, perhaps peaking with a mention in the July 2004 edition of Country Life.



Glossy photo from Country Life

In this first summer, there was no usable slipway for launching the boats and we initially used a home-made wooden ramp to launch from the "beach". We had no home of our own and Ginette was initially stored on her trailer on the hard, but soon we were able to strike an agreement with the

Sailing Club to share their clubhouse, giving us access to a large room which was used for early committee meetings, toilet facilities (complete with resident bats), and storage for oars and kit.



Launch ramp

The next stage

By May 2005, the Club had progressed sufficiently to send a ladies', men's and vets' crew to compete at our second IOS Championships. As we only had a mixed vets crew, they had to compete in the men's vets race! Ladies came 47th of 81 boats, men 57th of 92.

In Sep 2005 we sent our first crew to participate in the Great River Race, then known as the Trafalgar Great River Race. John Pearce, our first Rowing Captain, happened to be a member of the Company of Watermen and Lightermen of the River Thames, organisers of the GRR (the John Pearce Cup is awarded to the champion U16 crew), and so our participation in this event was conceived. In those days, the race was downstream from Ham to Greenwich and John was able to borrow an ex-PLA police launch to follow the race, accompanied by Brian Nobbs, and tow the boat back at the end. Amazingly, our mixed crew won the Bulgin Pilot Gig Trophy beating 27 other gigs (Sam Adlam, Julie Williams, Sean Lock, Lynn Hosking, Ian Page, Rob Dawe, Carolyn Dawe, Kate Reeves).



First GRR crew training at Morwellham



First GRR

The Club faced the usual growing pains as different ways to organise squads and manage the rowing were debated, but our crews continued to compete in regattas up and down the region with increasing success, and we continued to grow. Through the course of 2005, we attended 18 regattas/ events! Our Men won their first trophy at Port Isaac regatta; a Mixed crew won the 5 mile Boscastle sea race; our Ladies came 17 of 56 boats at Newquay. We were improving all the time, although it has to be said that we found it easier to field competitive Ladies or Mixed crews, but often struggled with insufficient numbers in the Men's squad.

By 2006, the Club felt confident enough to host our own race and the Great Tamar Gig Race was born. Starting at Cotehele, twelve gigs from nine clubs raced down river in torrential rain to finish under Brunel's Royal Albert Bridge. Caradon A won the men's race in 68 mins, Dartmouth the mixed in 77 mins and Salcombe the ladies race in 82 minutes, beating T&T ladies in Ginette by 7 seconds! This cemented our presence as an established gig club and our own regatta became a popular fixture, albeit with a changing format over the years. At some stage, we switched to the Brunel race format, and some while later Cotehele Quay Gig Club adopted the Saltash to Cotehele format as the Tamar Challenge.

IOS results for 2006 continued to show rapid improvement, with the Ladies coming 17 of 85 boats and the Men 38 of 91 boats. It is impossible to compare such results with the current gig racing field, where almost double the number of boats take part and some top crews train like semi-professional athletes, but there is absolutely no doubt that these results from such a young club were an outstanding achievement.

By 2007 we had grown to between 70 and 90 members. Continued success saw the Ladies win the 2007 Vets Championship and it soon became clear that the Club needed a second boat so fundraising began in earnest. Luckily, Brian Nobbs had continued to be closely involved with the Club and as regional CPGA Rep he attended the Club Committee for some 10 years. Brian kindly offered to loan Iron Maid to the Club for the season, and was commissioned to build our second gig over the winter of 2007. "Tamar" was launched in March 2008 at Bere Ferrers Quay, blessed by Rev Nick Law and with the auspicious omen of club member, Tamar Howard-Pearce, naming the boat.



Tamar launch with Brian Nobbs & Tamar Howard-Pearce

At this stage, we became temporarily homeless. Following some issues with the Sailing Club lease of the barn clubhouse, we had to move out in July 2007 and during this period Ginette and Iron Maid were stored in the riverside field. Oars and kit were stored in the boats, with spare kit kept at Bob's barn. The owners of the boatyard kindly allowed us to use their facilities, but it wasn't ideal and negotiations continued throughout 2008. By March 2009, agreement was finally reached for us to licence the ground floor and yard of the barn clubhouse from the Cleave Estate and we had a home again. It wasn't to last- the Estate decided to develop the barn for residential use, and in August 2013 we moved along the lane into the Clarke's much smaller outbuilding, keeping one boat just outside and one in the old yard.

Adventure rows

The next few years saw continued growth, with membership topping 100 by 2008. In this year we managed to field more crews at IOS with respectable results (MA 71/109 MB 92/109 LA 71) and performed well at Newquay (Men 33/50 Ladies 37/50).

However, this was also the era when we started to consolidate our reputation for taking part in adventurous rows for their own sake, as opposed to simply racing. Some bright spark decided to enter the Club in the 2008 **Eddystone Challenge** run by the Mayflower Offshore Rowing Club, a 28-mile open sea row out to the lighthouse and back. A force 8 gale meant the organisers had to opt for the inshore course but our men's and ladies' veteran crews both completed the race and determined to come back for another try.



Men's vets Eddystone crew 2008

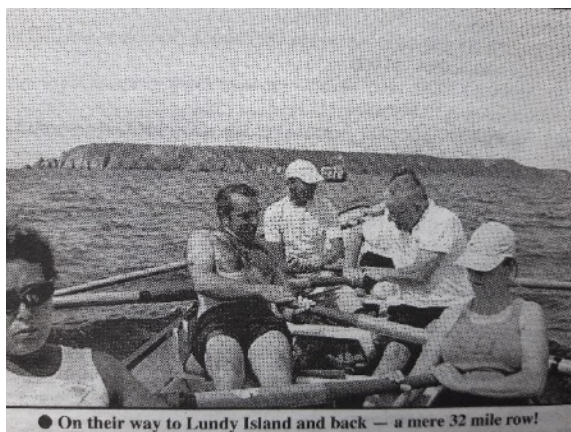


Ladies' vets Eddystone crew 2008

The 2008 Eddystone crews were Men's Vets: John Rogers, Martin Painter, Rae Bullough, Rob Dawe, Jon Young, Mike Barnes, Alan Perrott, Jon Overnell and Ladies' Vets: Ruth Walker, Nicky Sellers, Jo Cameron, Debby Vojkovic, Carrie Lawson, Tricia Stewart, Bill Stacey-Norris (cox).

Over the next three years, we continued to enter the Eddystone Challenge, having to turn back before reaching the lighthouse once, but successfully completing the challenge twice.

In a similar spirit, 2009 saw a mixed crew take on the **Lundy** row, 32 miles of sea rowing from Clovelly to Lundy Island and back, with an overnight camp in between. A great achievement for Andy Morton, Jo Cameron, Jane Morton, Simon Brownley, John Rogers, Ruth Walker and Mike Vosper.



The 2009 Lundy crew



2009 Eddystone Challenge crews

In the regular 2009 racing season, Ladies' A crew had a disaster at IOS managing to get disqualified for being over the start line in the long race! Meanwhile, at the Feb 2009 AGM the Club named Bob Turner as our first ever Honorary President. Having been a leading light in founding the Club, Bob had served as Chairman until 2008 and was instrumental in the further growth and development of the Club. To mark the occasion, Bob was present with a scale model of a Cornish pilot gig crafted by Brian Nobbs.



Bob and Ann Turner, with Brian Nobbs and Vice-Chair Robin Musgrave

Lundy was so much fun we sent two crews on this row in 2010.



The boats on Lundy beach 2010



Leaving Lundy on the long row back to Clovelly 2010

Continuing the spirit of adventure rows, we participated in the **Ramsey Island** row in July 2012, and again in 2016. This is hosted by Tom Sutton and his family at Porthgain Gig Club in West Wales. In 2016, the weather was too bad to circumnavigate the island but we had a great sea row along the Pembrokeshire coast.

Venturing even further afield, in Aug 2015 we mounted an expedition to take on the **Caledonian Canal**, a 66-mile row along the Great Glen from Fort William to Inverness. This epic row took in stunning scenery, including Ben Nevis, and involved tackling 29 canal locks, 5 lochs and 1 Firth.

The crew consisted of Lynn Renton, Helen S-H, Helen Lloyd, Tricia Stewart, Sue Douglass, Simon Howes, Mike Vosper, John Rogers and Chris Dill with a support crew of Rob & Carolyn Dawe, Sam & Charlie Lloyd, Andy Stewart, and Brian & Ginette Nobbs.



Caledonian Canal crew



Making the lock look easy

Along the way, some of the support crew ran the route, some cycled, and some climbed Ben Nevis!



Caledonian canal mountains



Caledonian canal forest

Great River Race

Since our first GRR in 2005, the club has made this a regular fixture often sending two or even three boats- since 2009, we haven't missed a single race. This event has always been open to any Club member with the required fitness for an endurance row, and we have regularly sent both competitive crews keen to break their previous records and also more social crews content to enjoy the scenery and soak up the atmosphere of this unique event, which sees more than 350 traditional rowed or paddled craft rowing past iconic landmarks such as the Tower of London & the Houses of Parliament and passing under 28 Thames bridges. Despite the length of the race, we have twice sent junior crews (2011 & 2012) who both completed the course- a huge achievement.



The hard to miss Hot Flush crew of 2011



Exhausted 2015 crew just arrived at the pub



2017 Ladies that Launch

2013 Mixed crew

2012 Junior crew

The GRR always throws up something new, whether it's the thunder and lightning we rowed through in 2017 or the breaking of the yoke in 2016 requiring emergency repairs; and it is always a creative challenge coming up with new crew names each year: Hot Flush, Ladies That Launch, Tamar Belles.

Jubilee Regatta

On 3 June 2012, our gig Ginette was one of only ten Cornish Pilot Gigs chosen to participate in the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Pageant as part of a flotilla of 1000 boats processing along the Thames with the Royal Barge, Gloriana. Obviously many club members wanted to take part and the crew was chosen by random draw: Bill Stacey-Norris, Viv Barnes, Lynn Renton, Katie Turner, Harry Birt, Nick Bailey, David Auborne, with Brian Nobbs in pilot. Dressed for the occasion, Brian and Bill wore replica Elizabethan clothes on loan from Buckland Abbey. There is a marvellous photo of the flotilla in the archive file in the boat shed clearly showing Ginette in the front rank of boats not far behind Gloriana.



Brian and Bill dressing up for the Pageant



Getting into position



The Diamond Jubilee Flotilla

Social rowing

From the outset, the ethos of the Club was to be as inclusive as possible, welcoming folks from all walks of life and aiming to provide a variety of different rowing opportunities to suit a broad range of interests. This meant that we have always had a strong group of social rowers alongside our competitive squads. In our first year, Helen Lloyd initiated the Monday Morning Recreational rows to provide longer but more leisurely rows exploring the river, often with a picnic stop in the boat. In 2014, Helen was mentioned in Club despatches to celebrate an incredible ten years running MMR- these sessions are still going strong today under Mel Cotton. The Club has always organised periodic fun rows to such varied places as the Tamar Inn at Calstock, The Plough at Bere Ferrers (there's a theme developing here!); Morwellham Quay near the navigable head of the river; a beach picnic at Mount Edgcumbe (dodging the ferries); in 2009 we rowed around Looe Island; in June 2017 we had a Club row up to Cotehele to celebrate the 70th birthday of John R and the 80th birthdays of Alastair M, Peter C and Nelson B.



Juniors at T&T

One of the original reasons for setting up the Club was to provide opportunities for youngsters to get out on the water and the juniors have always been at the heart of the Club. Initially set up by Ann Turner and John Hilson in 2004, our junior squad has gone from strength to strength, encouraged by successive Junior Captains/Coxes. Our philosophy has always been that if the senior crews are going to a regatta, then why not take the juniors too, and it has to be said that the youngsters have sometimes brought back the best results! On top of that, we have consistently fielded crews at the dedicated junior-only events such as the Hayle U14 Championships, the Newquay U16 Championships and the Langstone Junior Sprints.



U14s win at Salcombe June 2009



U16s win at Salcombe 2014



U14s at Salcombe 2018

One of our early juniors, Sam Twine, went on to train with the senior GB Rowing Squad and in 2017 he came back to the club to give an inspirational talk to our current juniors. Over time, a number of juniors have transitioned into our senior crews and are now showing us how it's done (because sadly they all grow up, and get taller than us, at some point!).



Hayle U14s 2013



Hayle U14s 2018

We take our junior rowing seriously but we also try to have fun, and after our races we often end up swimming in the sea or messing around on the beach, and so much the better if we can camp overnight too!



Langstone U16s in Blaez 2018



Newquay U16s 2014

Many of our juniors started rowing because their parents were members (we've had many mini dynasties over the years, and sometimes it even works the other way around when parents take up rowing after their kids), but we have also tried to foster links with local schools and community groups. Over the years, we have offered rowing sessions to Tavistock College, Mount Kelly School, and local youth groups including the Scouts.

In 2017, Jonny Overnell organised for the juniors to meet the inspirational Rowing Marine, Lee Spencer, as he was preparing to become the first physically disabled person to row the Atlantic- a feat he finally achieved in early 2019.

Other successes

In 2011 our Ladies won the Supervets trophy at Caradon Vets Championships: Jo Cameron, Ruth Walker, Julie Eastaugh, Lyn Renton, Viv Barnes, Julie Rendle, Carolyn Dawe.



Ladies Super Vets Champions 2011



Ladies win the Tamar Challenge 2014

And in 2014, our Ladies were again triumphant, winning the Tamar Challenge (Claire Luxton, Sandra Anstey, Katie Turner, Lynn Renton, Sarah Gall, Julie Rendle, cox Mark Turner).

We have continued to do well at the Scillies, with our Ladies A crew finishing 56th & 57th in 2017/18 respectively. At the Newquay County Championships 2018, Ladies A finished 19th of 108 boats.

Further additions to the fleet

Prior to the winter of 2010/11, rowing stopped from Oct to Feb while the wooden boats were out of the water for maintenance. The only way to keep rowing through the winter was to commission a GRP boat, and we were incredibly lucky to receive a generous grant from the Belinda O'Flynn Trust, set up with a bequest from local Bere Ferrers resident Belinda O' Flynn to benefit the local community with a specific emphasis on young people. Blessed by Nick Law and named by Belinda's friend Sarah Mugridge in a ceremony at Bere Ferrers on 20 November 2010, her maiden row was with the junior squad.

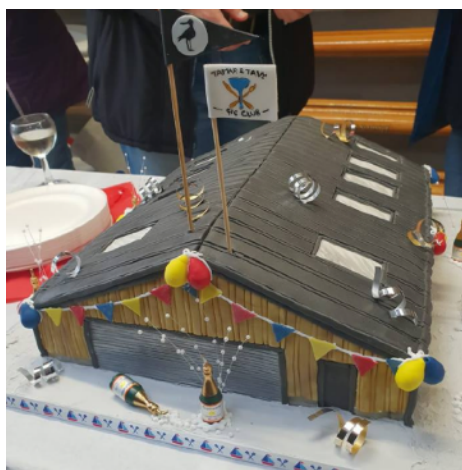
In the summer of 2018, we launched the latest addition to the fleet, our second GRP boat, Birlanda, and are now able to accommodate a full rowing programme throughout the winter.



Launch of Belinda O'Flynn

The next chapter

After some ten years of ups & downs and the hard work of many, many people from both clubs, the project to establish a permanent home for ourselves and the Sailing Club finally came to fruition when we moved into the new, purpose built boat shed on the new HubClub site on 16 August 2018, a month before the official opening on 22 Sep 2018.



Hopefully, we now have a permanent home with great facilities which will allow the club to keep growing and providing gig rowing fun on the river to the local community for many years to come.

With four boats and seven sets of oars, we have come a long way from those early days where all "rowing" training was land-based for lack of boats and equipment!

Long gone are the days of no winter rowing. Not only do we now row all winter, in Dec 2018 our club was instrumental in setting up the new Tamar Valley Winter League for ten local clubs. We hosted the inaugural regatta at Weir Quay and our Ladies A set the bar high with a win!

We continue to send multiple crews to the IOS World Championships each year, but we also continue the focus on all types of rowing. In 2019, we will again take part in the Ramsey Island row, the Great River Race, and various scenic club rows over the summer, and we plan to again tackle the Caledonian Canal in 2020.

From 2015 we have had our own Facebook page and from 2019 an Instagram account, and these continue the Club archive in the digital age, celebrating our successes and fun times on the river.