



Honorary Rowing Safety Adviser Monthly Report

July 2025

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TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Awards for Rowers

At its meeting on 23 July 2025 the Awards Committee of the [Royal Humane Society](#) (RHS) decided to confer the following awards: -

- David McNeill - Certificate of Commendation
- Sven Friedemann – Testimonial on Parchment and Resuscitation Certificate (These two certificates are now combined as one joint certificate.)
- Mary Lack and Duncan Strachan - Testimonials on Parchment

A **Testimonial on Parchment** is awarded where someone has put themselves in danger to save, or attempt to save, someone else. Although the Society has kept the historical name of the award, these days it is no longer made of parchment but of good quality card.

A **Certificate of Commendation** is awarded where someone has made a significant contribution to the saving or attempted saving of a life, though their own life was not necessarily at risk.

A **Resuscitation Certificate** is awarded to people who have undertaken a successful resuscitation of someone, who was at one stage 'seemingly dead', through mouth-to-mouth resuscitation (MMR) and/or heart-and-lung massage (CPR). A successful resuscitation is measured by the resuscitated person being alive when they are taken from the location. If they subsequently die, this will not nullify the award of the resuscitation certificate.

There is further information of RHS Awards here [Awards and Certificates - Royal Humane Society](#).

David McNeill was awarded a Certificate of Commendation for his PRAISEWORTHY action when saving the life of an unknown woman on 12th March at York City Rowing Club. The Incident was described in my [March Monthly Report](#). David is a British Rowing Satellite Coach, as far as I know this is the first time a member of British Rowing staff has received a RHS award. The official Case Summary contains the following: -

While opening the boat house before a session McNEILL saw some ripples on the water below the embankment, and assumed a boat was coming into land. He walked to the edge of the embankment to see who it was. He saw a woman in the water about 5m off the landing steps. She was fully clothed and struggling to stay afloat. A backpack and coat had been left on the steps. McNEILL rushed to the water's edge and shouted to her encouraging her to swim back towards him. He extended his arm but could not reach her and so he descended a couple of wooden steps into the water (knee deep, not swimming) to reach her and he was able to pull her in. By this stage she was sinking but still conscious and so he pulled her to the side and onto the bank. She was emotionally distressed and immediately said she had tried to take her own life. McNEILL provided reassurance, tried to warm her up and called the emergency services. She was assessed but had not inhaled any water and she was admitted for further psychiatric help.

This incident was the genesis for the [Safety-Alert-Small-Talk-Saves-Lives.pdf](#)

Mary Lack and Duncan Strachan were each awarded a Testimonial on Parchment for BRAVERY when saving the life of an unknown man on 11th April at Warwick. The incident was described in my [April Monthly Report](#). The official Case Summary contains the following: -

A man jumped off the bridge into the river, and it was apparent he was inebriated and could not swim. LACK and STRACHAN were in a double sculling boat on the river close to where the man was in the water. They avoided a collision with him and then realised that he was struggling and so stopped to assist. The drowning man was unable to grab onto their boat, and he sank below the water. LACK jumped into the river but was unable to find him as he was below the surface. STRACHAN then also jumped into the river, and he was able to find the unconscious man and pull him to the surface. STRACHAN then swam with the man to the bank where there was a landing stage while LACK swam in with the boat. STRACHAN ensured the man was breathing and in a safe location while people called an ambulance. The man regained consciousness before the emergency services arrived and was kept away from the water by bystanders for his own safety (he displayed aggression and lack of control of his movements). LACK and STRACHAN remained nearby but did not interact with him any further. The emergency services arrived quickly and took him away to safety. LACK and STRACHAN re-entered their boat and rowed back to their club.

Sven Friedemann was awarded a Combined Testimonial on Parchment and Resuscitation Certificate for BRAVERY & RESUSCITATION when attempting to save a life on 12th April on the Feeder Canal in Bristol. The incident was also described in my [April Monthly Report](#). The official Case Summary contains the following: -

A kayaker was paddling upstream when he capsized. A passenger motorboat was moving downstream at slow speed and some way off and so its wake had not caused the overturn. FRIEDEMANN was on a coaching launch stationary, with engine failure, and attempting to re-start the engine. He saw the incident and knew the kayaker to be competent and so did not react. The man had capsized 2 metres from the bank and was struggling to get out of the boat but had his head above water and then got partially on top of the kayak which was floating well. FRIEDEMANN continued his efforts to restart his engine and when he checked again seconds later the man was no longer on top of the kayak but floating with his face under the water. By now the motorboat was only about three metres away and the crew did not appear to have noticed the kayaker. FRIEDEMANN, who was about 20 metres away, quickly took off his shoes, trousers, shirt and checked his life jacket before jumping in and swimming over to the man. He found he was unconscious and so he pulled the paddler towards the bank keeping his head above water. He managed to get the kayaker onto the bank where the man remained unconscious. FRIEDEMANN started giving rescue breaths and was joined seconds later by a passenger from the motorboat who happened to be an unknown off-duty doctor. She started CPR and was joined by another unknown man who helped with compressions. FRIEDEMANN, the doctor and the other passenger delivered CPR in relays until the ambulance arrived and took over. The kayaker remained unconscious, and he was taken away by ambulance. At this point his heart was beating but the ambulance crew were concerned that it would stop again. Sadly, the man died later that day in hospital.

Incidents reported in July

Rowers support people who are injured

Club members were having tea and cake in the clubhouse after unloading the trailer. They were aware of around 15 local youths playing in the river and alongside it. Two or three youths were on the nearby bridge that has a 200ft span directly across the river. Two splashes were heard and then a lot of shouting from the youths. One had landed on their knees and was injured. The teenagers were shouting that they could see bone.

Three trained club members administered emergency first aid to the injured youth on the riverside. A club member had to take over talking to the ambulance as the other youths were too panicked to communicate effectively. Club members also spoke to the youth's parents, by phone. Club members continued to support the youth until the paramedics arrived and took the youth to the ambulance. Club members also talked to the other youths about the dangers and to calm them down. One appeared to have vomited and was pale and they were checked too.

The incident has been reported to the police who have said they will liaise with the council about safety measures for the bridge. The police have also said they will run a campaign on safety. This sits alongside the fire and rescue safety session the club are hosting on National prevention of drowning day where club members and the local community have been invited for throw line training and safety advice. The same group of local youths had already been invited and showed interest.

The youth was taken to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

Take extra care if the water is shallow

After a prolonged period of little rain, perhaps as a consequence of global climate change, it is not surprising that water levels can be low and this produces additional hazards for rowers, as illustrated by the following incidents: -

- A 4- collided with a completely submerged log in a position that was the normally safely navigated by boats.
- A 4x on a lake grounded briefly on a normally well submerged underwater feature (a stone wall).
- A coach stepped up from a launch to the dock lost balance and fell in the water because the water level was low.

Please take extra care when water levels are low.

Take care to pay attention when afloat

A rower in the bow seat of a 2x reported that they had set their line according to their knowledge of the area, but they didn't notice a 4x coming in the opposite direction. This rower did not pay attention to the 4x and a blade collision occurred causing damage to blades.

It was explained that it is everyone's responsibility to keep a good lookout and, in particular, to know what is ahead. It is not safe to rely on others being where they should be and being in the correct place yourself. Wearing Hi-vis clothing helps but it only helps when people keep a good lookout.

Take care when selecting a person to steer

A 4- approached a stationary 2- on the water. The two coaches on the bank and the two rowers in the 2- shouted continuously at a good volume at the four but they did not stop until the last moment. The four responded angrily to having to stop and said that no warnings had been heard. The crew of the 4- said that the bowman was unable to look round due to his age.

Later in the outing the 2- was again stationary and tucked into the side, waiting to turn, and the 4- was approaching from behind. The crew of the 2- shouted loudly for the 4- to take a look to ensure that they were seen. The crew in the 4- took this badly; they were reported to be very rude and aggressive.

Please take care to ensure that anyone afloat who is expected to steer is capable of doing so safely.

The Route to the Start

The following incidents involved crews rowing to the start at competitions colliding with crews racing: -

- During a race, an 8+ in a race collided with the blades of a 4x+ on its way to the start. The 4x+ was rowing up to the start and not tucked into the bank as instructed by the umpire. As a result, the competition organisers are looking to make changes to the course so that there is a clear demarcation of the water for crews rowing to the start and crews racing.
- A 4x- did not keep to the racing line and collided with a 2x making its way upriver in the boating lane. The collision resulted in damage to the breakwater on the bowside of the boat and the bow's strokeside rigger. The junior athlete in the bow seat suffered bruising and soft tissue abrasion. The junior competitors were subsequently seen by the medical team. The Regatta review meeting will review and consider any measures that can be improved.

Please do whatever you need to do to ensure that incidents like this do not occur at your regatta or to your crews.

The Coke fallacy, again

There was an incident in which the crew of a 2x that capsized in water that was thought to be contaminated was given a can of Coke to drink. It was suggested that this would comfort the rowers, aid hydration, flush the digestive system and that Coke containing phosphoric acid would help to kill off bacteria.

I explained that if all you want is to keep hydrated then drinking water would probably be better. I checked the idea about the benefits of the acidic nature of coke with our medical advisers years ago, this is a myth, stomach acid is far, far more concentrated (lower pH) than any drink you are likely to encounter. I do not like the idea of giving someone a drink that they think will protect them when, in reality, it will do nothing at all. Expecting people to be comforted by coke is a bit like asking them to believe in black magic.

Antisocial behaviour

The last few months' reports have contained information about incidents of Antisocial Behaviour as it is that time of year when this becomes more common. This month there have been more incidents and of a more serious nature. Please take care.

The following incidents occurred this month: -

- There was a group of youths on the side of the bridge jumping into the water as rowers were putting boats onto the water. The rowers kept away from them but two youths in the water swam towards them and threatened to flip a 1x but it sped away and the youths called abusive names. They then held onto the stroke blades of the double and tried to flip the boat over. The coach told the crews not to go under the bridge that the youths were jumping off. The coach called the Police.
- There has been repeated anti-social behaviour from the children of travellers camping close to a Rowing Club. This includes entering the boat house and clubhouse; swearing and kicking glass doors, leaving rubbish and defecating in the grounds and offensive graffiti on the storage containers in the grounds. The racist and offensive graffiti will be removed.
- A person driving a large motorboat shouted and swore at the rowers in a 2-.
- A group of youths on the dock side became abusive and one threw a glass bottle that hit a launch, narrowly missing the coach.

Please remember the 3Rs: -

Don't REACT
REMOVE yourself from the situation
REPORT to the Navigation Authority, Police etc.

Take care to check the vent on your Fuel Tank

A coach took a launch from the Boathouse, about five minutes into the outing there was a loud bang, followed by a strong smell of petrol and about three litres of fuel pooling inside the launch.

The coach noticed that the fuel tank's cap was missing, having been blown off and lost into the river. The coach then moved the boat to the riverbank, dropped anchor, and vacated the launch.

The Boathouse Manager was contacted, and they deployed a reserve launch to recover the stranded launch and transport the coach to safety. There were no injuries were, and the fuel was contained within the launch, with no environmental contamination of the river.

This incident was probably caused by failure to open the fuel tank vent, combined with high temperatures, leading to pressure buildup and expulsion of fuel cap.

Please take care to check fuel tank vents.

Remember your lifejacket

A report contained the following: -

"I was about to get in a launch. My driver reminded me that I didn't have a lifejacket on."

Please ensure that people in launches take care of their own safety.

Please take care to check your own boats

There were several reports following boat inspections at competitions.

At one competition, 18 boats were checked, and the following faults were found: -

- The heel restraints on a 1x were too long.
- Another 1x had no Boat ID, and
- Also, six lifejackets were checked, and all were found to be in good order.

At another competition 20 boats were checked, and the following faults were found: -

- A heel restraint was broken on two 4+s, and
- A 1x had a damaged/missing Bow Ball.

At another competition, many defective heel restraints were identified.

Please take care to check that your own boats are safe, not just at competitions but before every outing.

Which side is which?

Towards the end of the race an umpire instructed a 4- to move to starboard but the rowers thought that he had instructed them to move to stroke side. The crew eventually realised that he meant starboard but by that time it was too late; the crew was too close to the other crew in the race and was disqualified. The umpire was not using a flag. The chief umpire subsequently advised the crew that they should know terms starboard and port.

The Rules of Racing are quite clear. They contain the following, in addition to the use of flags:-

The commands 'move to starboard' or 'port' should be used first. If this fails, the umpire may try 'bowside' or 'strokeside'; or any other words to achieve the desired effect."

From a safety point of view, particularly when coaching, it would be better to standardise on port and starboard because they are clearly defined and, unlike right and left, are the same for rowers and coxes. With some boats stroked from bowside the terms can be confusing and bowside and strokeside have no inherent meaning for scullers.

The terms "port" and "starboard" also sound different, one has one syllable and the other has two. This is intentional and longstanding, "larboard" was changed to "port" by Admiralty order in 1844 for that reason.

Please consider teaching your rowers and scullers using port and starboard.

It may not be safe to do "pieces" around bends

There are some times and some places where it may not be safe to do pieces, one of those is round bends. There was a collision when a 4+ was coming around the corner and had just finished a piece. It was in the middle of the river getting ready to move over to the right side. They took one more look thought it safe and then collided with a 4x.

Take Care around Swimmers

It is not unusual to find swimmers in the water in hot weather. Swimmers are vulnerable to impacts from boats and blades so please keep a good lookout and keep clear. The following incidents occurred: -

- A 4- was doing intervals up and down a straight reach. The crew was wearing high viz kit. As there was little traffic, they kept to the middle of the waterway. On their downstream pass, they stopped and found two swimmers three to four metres from the bank. Their oars passed within two meters of the swimmers, who seemed blissfully unaware of the risk.
- There were several people swimming in an area where swimming is not permitted. A 4- hit one underwater swimmer with the side of the hull. The crew was moving slowly and taking pauses due to the corner and poor visibility at the time.

Please take care around swimmers.

Take Care around Canoeists

There were several incidents involving rowers and canoeists: -

- A 4x collided with two kayakers waiting to start their race as part of a canoeing event. The 4x were aware of kayakers and held up their boat but still clashed oars with the kayakers. Crew came to a full stop to check the kayakers were OK and then moved on.
- There was a collision involving a 1x and a paddle boarder. The 1x was paddling behind some slow-moving paddle boarders, waiting for a gap to overtake. When the opportunity arose, the 1x went to move round them and collided gently with a paddle board.
- A kayaker finished a "piece" and was about to continue when they were rowed into without warning by a 2x. They reported being hit by riggers and oars and knocked into the water. When the kayaker surfaced, they were told that it was their own fault.
- A rower in a 1x finished a 1km timed piece downstream and let go of their blades and capsized due to frustration of kayakers obstructing them during the piece. The kayakers were on both sides of the river so the rower could not overtake.
- A coach was coaching an 8+ and saw a kayak ahead of the 8+. The coach believed that the cox had seen it. When the coach realised that the cox had not seen the kayak, they told the crew to all stop rowing but unfortunately was too late and the bow slowly hit the kayak causing it to capsize.

Share the water

Perhaps there was a time when rowing boats were the only boats on the water and rowers could do whatever they wished. If that ever was the case, then it is no more. We now share our waterways with others such as anglers, canoeists, paddle boarders, swimmers, dinghy sailors and motorboat users. We have no more right to use the waterway than they have. We will all have to learn to respect, and cooperate with, each other.

There are times and places when we can no longer use our waterways as racetracks and our coaches can no longer produce wash with impunity, not that they ever could.

The incidents described above illustrate the problem. If we cannot find a solution between ourselves then we may have one imposed upon us.

Work with PaddleUK

Copies of incident reports that refer to canoeists, kayakers and paddleboarders continue to be shared with a colleague at PaddleUK.

Some years ago, we worked with colleagues at British Canoeing (as it then was) to produce joint guidance for Rowers and Canoeists on Shared Water. It is still available here [Microsoft Word - Guidance for Rowers and Canoeists](#). This guidance is becoming dated and does not make reference to Stand Up Paddleboarders. We plan work with colleagues at Paddle UK to update the guidance.

The need for explanations to people learning to row

If you are providing a Learn2Row session or simply introducing rowing to a person who knows little about it, then please take time to explain to them what is going to happen and how they will be kept safe. In particular, please explain any terminology that may be used in the outing. Terms that you may feel are self-explanatory may be a complete mystery to a person new to rowing.

I received a complaint from a person who had taken part in an Introduction to Rowing session at a club. This person thought that the whole crew, including the cox, were facing backwards and that nobody was actively steering. I was assured by the Club Chair that this was not the case. It is not unreasonable for people to come to the wrong conclusion when there have been no or inadequate explanations.

Please take care to provide clear explanations to people new to rowing even if you think that the items that you are explaining are obvious.

News Item on Lifejackets

A colleague recently sent me a link to a news item on the BBC News website entitled “Lifejacket faults spark RNLI warning” This can be found [here](#) and contains the following: -

The life-saving charity said members checked 803 lifejackets in the south-west of England last year and found 523 of them had faults.

I recently checked an auto-inflation lifejacket only to find that the manual inflation toggle was packed inside the casing. The standard advice is that if you know that you are going to enter the water then inflate the lifejacket before doing so. This is not possible if you do not have access to the toggle.

The RNLI has published a video here [How to check and maintain your lifejacket video](#). There is also information here [Safety-Alert-check-your-lifejacket.pdf](#).

Rowers wearing Earphones

There has been some concern expressed at the National Rowing Safety Committee meetings about rowers listening to music on earphones and similar devices when afloat. This can introduce an additional hazard because these rowers may not be able to hear shouted warnings or other sound signals. Please take great care to not use these devices when there is any chance of them introducing additional risks.

Launch Driver Qualification

I was asked whether there is an alternative qualification to RYA Level 2 Powerboat, the response was that RYA Level 2 Powerboat is the best on the market, but it has its limitations: -

- it does not cover the skills needed to rescue a rower from a boat
- it lasts a lifetime with no requirement for continual learning or competence checks
- different rowing venues require different skills; in some places, skills that are not needed are included and other places, skills that are needed are not included

I would rather clubs define the skills that are needed at their locations and teach and test those skills themselves. However, Navigation Authorities like to have something that they understand and like to specify L2 Powerboat.

Rowing Safety Training

Training in Safety Management and Safety Leadership was provided at a Rowing Club in London. This was well received. Further information and training prospectuses are available on request.

Work with the CPGA

The leaders of the Cornish Pilot Gig Association (CPGA) requested a meeting to discuss how best to manage various safety issues. This was a wide ranging and friendly discussion. Support was provided on many topics. In particular, it was explained that the success of Incident Reporting is based on developing a good safety culture.

Part of the discussion centred around Basic Life Support training as I had previously been informed that, following an incident where CPR was delivered, a large proportion of a small sample of Gig rowers were not trained to deliver CPR. The information provided was: -

Of the rowing members present on the day (approximately 27), only five members have completed any first aid training including CPR. We have a number of members throughout the whole club who have completed a first aid course, however after having spoken to many of the rowers present on the day in question, CPR and defibrillator training is lacking.

The procedure for getting a defibrillator was not straightforward. An app was used to locate but once located the casing was locked. It is not clear quite how it was opened; likely remotely following 999 calls. It is also not clear whether the call handler might have given instruction about the defibrillator.

In response I provided the following information by email: -

We expect British Rowing clubs to encourage their members to learn how to deliver CPR and how to use an Automated External Defibrillator (AED). We also encourage clubs to have their own AED. Alternatively, we expect them to know how to obtain a public access AED that is positioned close to their club. Over 90% of clubs comply with this expectation.

I am concerned that so few Gig rowers appear to know how to deliver Basic Life Support. This includes early detection of the need to deliver CPR and the ability to deliver good quality CPR, in relays if possible. Timeliness and Quality are important and have a big impact on the probability of survival and the subsequent quality of life.

I would encourage the CPGA to address this issue and arrange for Basic Life Support training to be delivered to its members. They will then be able to help people who may otherwise not survive. Basic Life Support is best delivered face-to-face by a qualified trainer. (I provided information about several local training organisations, including the Fire and Rescue Service.)

Logistics and cost sometimes make the use of face-to-face training difficult. The best alternative that I know of is to use the Resuscitation Council UK's Lifesaver Interactive on-line training App available here [Lifesaver learning | Resuscitation Council UK](#) (there are several formats, including Virtual Reality) and the a game-in-a-film is available more directly here [Lifesaver](#). Try it for yourselves and please let me know what you think.

We have guidance on cardiac arrest care here [Cardiac arrest care in rowing - British Rowing](#) and a Safety Alert here [Safety-Alert-Staying-Alive-FINAL.pdf](#) and here [Staying Alive - Safety Alert - British Rowing](#). If you would like to issue this with CPGA branding, then let me know and I will try to find a word version. This would help but is not an alternative to proper training or the use of the Lifesaver App.

There are charities that will help clubs to buy their own AED; there is more information here [British Rowing announces new safety partnership - British Rowing](#) and here [Home | www.ra-lphh.org](#)

I hope this helps, please let me know if you need anything further and please take action to help your rowers to save lives.

I was also asked about the law in Ireland that required the use of Personal Floatation Devices by almost everyone afloat. The response was: -

The law in Ireland requires the use of lifejackets but there is an exception for what we now refer to as "Classic Rowing".

There is more information here [Lifejackets and Personal Flotation Devices](#). The basic regulation is the [S.I. No. 921/2005 - Pleasure Craft \(Personal Flotation Devices and Operation\) \(Safety Regulations 2005\)](#). The 2012 amendment extends the regulations to cover "Personal Watercraft" and the 2018 amendment references CE marking.