

## **‘Jolly Boating Weather...’ Wakefield Amateur Rowing Club, 1846 – c.1876**

Nowadays rowing is typically viewed as a socially elite sport: that of grammar schools, universities and gentlemen. Whilst this is true to a point, historically rowing has cut across boundaries of class as much as any other sport. During the nineteenth century most sports, including rowing, were divided into three broad classes – working or tradesmen who made their living on the water as watermen or boatman; middle class and gentlemen amateurs; and those who made their living from the sport, who came from the working or middle class. This last group, the professional sportsmen rowers, were the equivalent of today’s superstars from football or rugby; the Clasper family or James Renforth from Newcastle had a massive following as true working class heroes who made a living from their prize money and boat-making skills. Harry Clasper (1812 to 1870) and his brothers were some of the first superstar sportsmen of their day and also the earliest professional sportsmen – in other words they were able to live from their winnings and what we would now term sponsorship.

Rowing races and regattas were seen by the middle and gentry classes as a polite summer entertainment and also as the off-season equivalent of horse racing, with prizes and wagers commonly running into several hundreds of pounds. Regattas were established in London on the Thames before 1825 – the ‘Lambeth,’ ‘Blackfriars’ and ‘Tower’ regattas were held that summer with prizes being as high as £25.<sup>1</sup> Most towns with access to a good stretch of water established Rowing Clubs, generally as an ‘out door amusement’ but increasingly during the nineteenth century for the ‘improvement of the working classes’ and ‘bringing out the bone and muscle of our English youth... [and] assisting to maintain our national sports.’<sup>2</sup>

The earliest mention of a rowing as a sport rather than as an occupation in the Yorkshire region is from Hull in 1830 when ‘meeting of the proprietors’ of the Hull rowing boats 24 June that year resolved to hold the ‘Humber Regatta.’ A Public Meeting was held 1 July 1830 at 4pm to form a committee, organise subscription lists.<sup>3</sup> York Rowing Club was established in 1843, and informal regattas were first held on the Ouse in 1846, which was considered to be ‘admirably adapted for a boat race.’

### **‘Wakefield Rowing & Gig Club’**

At the same time as rowing was getting underway in York, ideas were mooted for the formation of an aquatic sports club in Wakefield. ‘Wakefield Rowing & Gig Club’ was formed in June 1848, for ‘rowing and aquatic aerobics;’ they held their first Regatta on the Calder in August 1848 with four-oar cutters and gigs. The *Wakefield Herald* (23 June 1848) called it a ‘delightful aquatic amusement’ and was very tongue in cheek about the whole affair. Indeed, the *Leeds Mercury* (5 October 1850) suggests that the idea of a Wakefield Rowing Club, let alone a regatta, was ‘considered by many all but impractical’ when the club was first established. The Chairman was Noel Louis Fernandez (1811-1890) and J. A. Julius was Secretary.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Morning Post* (1 September 1825).

<sup>2</sup> *Durham County Advertiser* (23 November 1860).

<sup>3</sup> *The Hull Packet and Humber Mercury* (29 June 1830).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Wakefield Grand Regatta’, *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (22 September 1850).

The Wakefield Rowing Club prospered sufficiently in the next two years to be able to hold its first large scale regatta, on a stretch of the Calder from Old Mills to Broadreach Locks.<sup>5</sup> The event not only attracted sportsmen but also members of the public who promenaded along the banks of the river and took advantage of the thirty or so tents and pavilions set up by local traders. The *Leeds Mercury* describes the scene as being:

... graced by a gay assemblage of ladies, with the hundreds of banners waving in all directions, the swell of martial music, and the swarms of boats upon the water decorated for the day.

Such was the prestige of the event that several of the more respectable shops in Wakefield were closed and the Parish Church bells were rung.<sup>6</sup>

### **Wakefield Grand Regatta**

Crews came from Wakefield, Leeds and Manchester and it was the latter who dominated the event and carried off the majority of the cups.<sup>7</sup> Wakefield was one of the few major rowing regattas outside London during this period.<sup>8</sup> It was estimated there was over a thousand spectators present.<sup>9</sup> The event was patronised by several local worthies, including the MP George Sanders esq, the Right Hon. Earl of Carlisle, Joseph Holdsworth esq. (Mayor of Wakefield), Benjamin Gaskell esq, T. H. Marshall esq and also Richard Cobden (MP for Manchester) and J. G. Smyth MP

The following boats and crews raced with the racing being divided between sculls (single and double) and coxed fours. It is interesting to see returning rowers, crew line-ups and 'celebrity' and champion rowers: Ault, Wood and MacCormick had previously rowed for Manchester's 'Shakespeare' Rowing Club at the York Regatta in 1848. Harry Ault of Salford was only 25 and already a local celebrity. When he retired aged 38 in 1863 he had had a career as a professional rower for 19 years<sup>10</sup> and was considered something of a local celebrity.<sup>11</sup> He won the Grand Prize at the Thames Regatta together with Samuel Wood, John Carroll and Matthew Taylor, had beaten the celebrated Clasper brothers of Newcastle (in 1852, 1857 and 1858<sup>12</sup>) and was an expert coach.<sup>13</sup> The combination of Ault, McCormick, Wood and Gorringe or Carroll appears to have been 'Shakespeare's' winning formula as that combination rowed successfully at the Manchester & Salford Regatta of 1846, 1847 and 1848 and also on the Thames in the latter year; in the same year,

---

<sup>5</sup> 'Wakefield Grand Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (5 October 1850).

<sup>6</sup> 'Wakefield Grand Regatta', *Wakefield Journal* (25 September 1850); 'Wakefield Grand Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (5 October 1850).

<sup>7</sup> 'An Amateur', *The Aquatic Oracle. Or: Record of Rowing from 1835 to 1851* (London: Simpkin Marshal & Co, 1852), p. 142.

<sup>8</sup> N. Wigglesworth, *The Social History of English Rowing* (London: Frank Cass & Company, 1992), p. 69.

<sup>9</sup> 'Wakefield Grand Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (5 October 1850).

<sup>10</sup> *The Era* (16 November 1863).

<sup>11</sup> *Manchester Times and Examiner* (9 June 1853)

<sup>12</sup> K. Hastie, *pers comm.*, email 16 February 2007.

<sup>13</sup> *The Era* (16 November 1863).

however, they were beaten by Eton.<sup>14</sup> Ault and Wood were racing for 'Shakespeare' into the late 1850s; at the Thames Regatta of 1857 the 'Shakespeare' crew comprised H. Ault, S. Wood, E. Winship, T. Bruce (stroke) and J. Driver (cox).

Unlike in modern races, the same boats were used in the different races but with a different crew, and the situation is further confused because contemporary newspapers didn't or couldn't differentiate between boat or club name, and in general listed boat name rather than club.<sup>15</sup> The *Wakefield Journal* lists crews from Leeds, Manchester and Wakefield.<sup>16</sup> Members of the club were young men who would become the 'great and good' of Wakefield. George William Alder, for example, would later be a prominent corn factor, was enrolled as the first Captain in the Wakefield Rifle Volunteers (1859) and live in the fashionable South Parade; Philip George Skipworth would become a successful Solicitor, also lived in South Parade, and was Captain in the West Yorkshire Yeomanry.

'Jolly Boat Race' (Mens' coxed four) Sweepstake £5/-, £1/- added each mile rowed over

*Atlanta*: Monchair, Mackie, Gotthardt, H. Gray (stroke), F. Wild (cox)

*Sea Serpent*: J. H. Julius, R. J. Harrison, C. Berners, W. Clarkson (stroke), E. W. Shaw (cox).

Men's Double Sculls, regatta course. The prize was a pair of Sculls. There was a 10s entrance fee.

*Unity*: Harry Ault, Thomas MacCormack

*Shakespeare*: John Carroll, Samuel Wood

*Arethusa*: D. Craggs, J. Collinson

The *Arethusa* was withdrawn by the Umpire resulting in a race between two Mancunian crews.<sup>17</sup> Both of the boats from Manchester, *Unity* and *Shakespeare*, used outriggers. It is interesting to see the change in boat technology through this period. The first outriggers are mentioned in 1828 and iron ones were used in 1830; Harry Clasper of Newcastle was making keel-less boats with iron outriggers by 1844.

Outriggers – now part of the standard fit of any racing boat – were a peculiarly northern technology which was only adopted nationally following the Thames National Regatta in 1846 after many years of demonstrable success by northern crews.<sup>18</sup> In the 1850s there appears to have been a preference for riggers on single and double sculls but with coxed fours keeping the traditional rigging. By the 1860s we see a use of coxed fours with either outriggers or 'in-ward rig';<sup>19</sup> Coxed fours with outriggers appear to have been made from the mid 1840s; an advertisement for a boat yard in Preston of 1848 has a 46 foot long 27 inches wide mahogany coxed four with iron outriggers for sale.<sup>20</sup> The Leeds Regatta rules in 1866 stated that sculling boats (single and double) were to be out-rigged, with coxed fours in-rigged.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> 'Amateur', *The Aquatic Oracle*, p. 49, 102, 107, 109, 114, 137, 142.

<sup>15</sup> K. Hastie, *pers comm.*, email 16 February 2007.

<sup>16</sup> *Wakefield Journal* (25 September 1850). See also *Leeds Mercury* (5 October 1850).

<sup>17</sup> 'Wakefield Grand Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (5 October 1850).

<sup>18</sup> Wigglesworth, *Social History*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>19</sup> 'Leeds Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (7 November 1866).

<sup>20</sup> 'Classified Advertisements', *Preston Guardian* (27 May 1848).

<sup>21</sup> 'Leeds Regatta Club', *Leeds Mercury* (6 July 1866).

'Ladies' Cup' (Men's single scull). This was rowed in two heats; the first race was between Harry Ault and R. Winter, the second between J. Collinson and J. H. Julius and won by Carrol from Shakespeare RC, Manchester.<sup>22</sup>

'The Member's Cup' (Men's coxed fours). Boats to be 25 feet 6 inches in length, rowed over a regatta course the entrance fee being 25 shillings. The prize was £10, the winning crew to pay £1/- to the losing crew. The race was rowed in heats, with the winner from the first and second heats rowing against each other; 'Shakespeare' 'won easily'.

First Heat:

*Water Witch*: R. Winter, W. Clarkson, R. Goldthorp. F. Wild (stroke), A. Goldthorp (cox).

*Corsair*: Marsden, Crawshaw, Lunsdale, Monchier (stroke), Speight (cox).

Second Heat:

*Shakespeare*: W. Hamilton, J. Carrol, H. Ault. S. Wood (stroke), C. Langshaw (cox).

*Nemesis*: Gnr H. Hodge, Gnr P. Whatsmough, Gnr J. Davidson, Bombardier King (stroke), E. Birch (cox).

'The Mayor's Cup' (Men's single scull). Silver cup valued at £5/-

*Confidence*: Henry Ault

*Vesta*: 'an amateur'

*Unity*: Thomas MacCormack

This race was:

... won easily by Ault; MacCormack fouled at the viaduct and gave up the race. The amateur finding he had no chance, turned back in time to reach home before Ault, but as he had not been able to complete the whole distance, of course Ault carried off the cup.<sup>23</sup>

The 'Calder Cup' (Men's coxed fours). Boats under 25 feet in length (for the Wakefield Crew only) and of 'the lighter type.' Prize £10, the winning boat to give the second £1/-. To be rowed in heats on a regatta course.

First Heat:

*Lance*: R. Tranmer, G. Ryding, W. Tranmer. J. W. Rhodes (stroke), Alfred Rhodes (cox).

*Leugher*: C. Bennet, Edward Young, F. Wild (stroke), George W. Alder (cox).

*Arethusia*: G. Hodges, J. Eddies, D. Craggs, J. Collinson (stroke), J. H. Dawson (cox).

Second Heat:

*Caroline*: C. Berners, E. Julius, R. J. Harrison, H. A. Julius (stroke), Philip G. Skipworth (cox).

*Corsair*: Leech, Boston, Balmforth, Corbett (stroke), J. H. Dawson (cox).

*Lance* won the first heat and *Corsair* the second. *Corsair* then won the deciding heat by several

---

<sup>22</sup> 'Wakefield Grand Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (5 October 1850); 'An Amateur', *The Aquatic Oracle*, p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> 'Wakefield Grand Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (5 October 1850).

lengths, despite having broken an oar whilst rowing up to the start. *Arethusa* also broke an oar during their heat whilst ahead several lengths thus losing the race.

The 'Steward's Cup' (Men's coxed fours). For Amateur or scratch crews, prize of £10/-. The boats to have outriggers.

*Shakespeare*: W. Hamilton, J. Carroll, H. Ault, S. Wood (stroke), C. Langshaw (cox).

*Nemesis*: Gnr H Hodge, Gnr P Whatmough, Gnr J Davidson, Bomb. King (stroke), E Birch (cox).

The *Shakespeare* beat the Royal Artillery crew, winning both the cup and cash prize.

According to the *Leeds Mercury* the 1852 Regatta was a complete wash out due to cold, wet weather leading to a lack of attendance – of both crews and spectators.<sup>24</sup> Wakefield challenged Leeds to a 'Four-oared race' in August 1853. The crew of *Five Brothers* challenged the crew of the *Magnet* 'on condition that it shall be a turn race, viz. one mile and a half each way' with stakes from £15 to £25 a side. *Five Brothers* had been built in 1843 by Harry Clasper and was the first widely-raced keelless racing boat (nowadays termed a 'shell hull') and fitted with iron outriggers. She took her name from the fact it was rowed by all five Clasper brothers at the 1843 Durham Regatta and at the Thames Regatta (22 June 1844). Clasper subsequently sold *Five Brothers* and built a new boat (*Lord Ravensworth*) for the 1845 Thames Regatta.<sup>25</sup> The crew of *Five Brothers* also challenged the crew of the *Royal York* (another Wakefield boat) on 'any distance they like to name, the same amount.' Particulars could be had from Sander's Hotel, Kirkgate, Wakefield.<sup>26</sup> Leeds subsequently issued a challenge of their own; the crew of the *Magnet* challenged the 'York Hotel' crew or the 'Lander's Hotel [sic, Sander's]' crew<sup>27</sup> to a three or four mile 'right-away match' either on the Ouse at York or the Aire at Castleford 'the Monday after Christmas day.' The stakes were £15 to £25 a side and particulars were available from 'Seven Stars', Dock Street, Leeds.<sup>28</sup>

Wakefield sent crews to the 1854 Leeds Regatta.<sup>29</sup> The following men's coxed fours competed for the 'Airedale Plate' (valued at £5):

*Magnet*, Leeds (winner)

*Irwell*, Manchester (second place)

*Five Brothers*, Wakefield (third)

*Royal York*, Wakefield (fourth)

*Maid of Leeds*, Leeds (fifth)

The 'Subscription Plate,' for men's coxed fours, was won by *Maid of Leeds*, which was rowed by the Manchester crew; the *Magnet* came second rowed by Leeds, and *Royal York* was last. The

---

<sup>24</sup> 'The Leeds Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (16 October 1855).

<sup>25</sup> Wigglesworth, *Social History*, pp. 198-200. See also, E. D. Brickwood, *The Arts of Rowing and Training* (London: Horace Cox, 1866), p. 6ff.

<sup>26</sup> 'Challenge from Wakefield', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (21 August 1853).

<sup>27</sup> It is possible the *Royal York* was sponsored by the York Hotel whilst the *Five Brothers* was sponsored by Sander's Hotel.

<sup>28</sup> 'Challenge from Leeds', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (6 November 1853).

<sup>29</sup> 'The Leeds Regatta', *Preston Guardian* (17 June 1854).

double scull race was won by Leeds, with Manchester coming second and Wakefield third.<sup>30</sup> The Leeds Regatta became so large and popular that by the following year it was being advertised in the Sporting Notes pages of London Newspapers, alongside Oxford, Cambridge and London regattas and races.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Leeds Regatta**

Despite its promising start in 1854, the Leeds Regatta floundered after only around ten years. This was due, reported the *Leeds Mercury*, to the dirtiness of the water and also the attitude of the Aire & Calder Navigation Company.<sup>32</sup> It had originally been hoped to stage the regatta on the Aire below Leeds Bridge. The Aire & Calder Co., however, informed the organising committee that they would not allow their water to be used below the bridge because:

... that portion of its course was a public highway, subject to the provisions of an Act of Parliament, and would be liable to damage from the assembling of so a large number of persons as the regatta would probably bring together.<sup>33</sup>

The Aire & Calder Co. therefore took out an injunction to prevent the regatta from being held ‘on any part of the river under their jurisdiction.’<sup>34</sup> The organising committee believed this was ‘factious and ungentlemanly’ on the part of the Aire & Calder Company. The *Leeds Mercury* indicated, however, that ‘no communication was made’ between the Directors of the Aire & Calder Co. and the rowing club concerning the regatta, and that had there been, it would have been immediately pointed out to the rowing club that the regatta could not be held on what was a public highway.<sup>35</sup> The Regatta was thus ‘deferred until further notice’ in August 1864<sup>36</sup> but was finally held in September when it was described as the ‘First Annual Regatta’ – despite the regatta tradition beginning ten years earlier.<sup>37</sup> The new course was along a straight stretch of the Aire, from Abbey Bridge to a buoy opposite Kirkstall Forge. This in itself presented several problems, not least in arranging transport for boats!<sup>38</sup>

The revived club had teething troubles and the 1864 and 1865 regattas were hampered by poor weather, and therefore turnout, which led to the loss of several members of the committee. A new committee was established to organise the annual regatta in 1866.<sup>39</sup> The 1866 Regatta managed to

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Aquatics’, *The Era* (8 April 1855); ‘Aquatics’, *The Era* (22 April 1855).

<sup>32</sup> ‘The Leeds Regatta’ *Leeds Mercury* (27 August 1864).

<sup>33</sup> ‘Leeds Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (6 September 1864).

<sup>34</sup> ‘The Leeds Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (27 August 1864).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> ‘The Leeds Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (30 August 1864).

<sup>37</sup> ‘Leeds Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (10 September 1864).

<sup>38</sup> ‘Leeds Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (6 September 1864).

<sup>39</sup> ‘The Leeds Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (16 July 1866).

attract around 7,000 spectators and also celebrity oarsmen such as the Claspers from Newcastle.<sup>40</sup>

The 1866 Regatta was held over two days (10-11 July) and in addition to the rowing boasted 'Swimming; Shooting Galleries, Stalls, Stereoscopic Views, Weighing Machines &c. &c.'<sup>41</sup> It attracted crews from Newcastle, York, Horbury Bridge and Mirfield.<sup>42</sup> The 1867 Leeds Regatta drew competitors from South Stockton, Middlesborough, Hull, Mirfield and 'the crack crews from the Tyne and Irwell' (i.e. Newcastle and Manchester). Also present were Leeds St George's RC – 'A club which has done so much to promote a love of aquatics in and around Leeds.'<sup>43</sup> The *Leeds Mercury* concluded that the 1867 Regatta was 'the most successful since the club commenced' and expected 'great things' in the near future.<sup>44</sup> With the establishment of Leeds Athletic RC in 1874 the regatta moved to Roundhay Park under the management of Leeds Athletic Club.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately the new venue proved unsatisfactory:

The course is unusually circumscribed in limit ... The Lake ... is about three-quarters of a mile in length, but, owing to weeds and shallows, not more than half a mile was available for racing, which necessitated several turns in the longer races, and consequently, besides other disadvantages ... competitors making mistakes ... putting themselves *hors de combat*... or subjecting themselves to disqualification.<sup>46</sup>

Due to a dispute with the Park Authorities the Regatta fell through in 1878 and it was hoped to re-start the event either on another lake or the river Aire.<sup>47</sup> Following the winding-up of the Leeds Regatta, the ownership and custody of the expensive silverware became an issue. In May 1879 Mr T. Humphrey-Naylor, the first secretary to the Leeds Regatta Committee in 1874 when the regatta moved to Roundhay Park, wrote to the *Leeds Mercury* regarding the whereabouts of the 'Leeds Regatta Challenge Cups.' The cup - valued at £100 - had been presented to the club by the late Alderman Henry Rowland Marsden (Mayor of Leeds 1873-1875), who intended the crew winning on the third consecutive occasion should retain it. However, no crew having done so, 'presentation cups' were given instead. A second 'Challenge Cup' (worth £50) had been presented by Mr. Brayshay of the Park Hotel, Roundhay, 'to be competed for under similar conditions.' 'Owing to the regatta having fallen through,' however, the 'valuable and attractive prizes' would be lost to the club. It was proposed that members of the old regatta committee attempt to claim possession of the cups or organise a new regatta; if that were not possible then it was requested that the Lord Mayor should take possession of them.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> 'The Leeds Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (11 July 1866); 'The Leeds Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (14 July 1866); 'The Leeds Regatta', *Newcastle Courant* (13 July 1866).

<sup>41</sup> 'Classified Advertisements. Leeds Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (16 June 1866).

<sup>42</sup> 'The Leeds Annual Regatta', *York Herald* (14 July 1866).

<sup>43</sup> 'Leeds Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (11 July 1867).

<sup>44</sup> 'Leeds Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (12 July 1867).

<sup>45</sup> 'Leeds Regatta', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (22 May 1874).

<sup>46</sup> 'Leeds Regatta', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (18 July 1874).

<sup>47</sup> 'The Leeds Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (26 May 1879).

<sup>48</sup> 'The Leeds Regatta Challenge Cups', *Leeds Mercury* (26 May 1879).

Leeds Wellington ARC held its own replacement regatta at Cardigan Fields,<sup>49</sup> and a rather half-hearted affair ‘which can scarcely be dignified by the name regatta’ was held during Whitsun at Kirkstall Abbey over a mile course between Leeds Bridge and Kirkstall Forge.<sup>50</sup> Leeds Wellington’s regatta on Saturday 21 June combined both rowing and ‘athletic sports.’ Unfortunately ‘the weather was bad, and the sports were worse.’<sup>51</sup> The regatta opened with a pair-oared race between members of Leeds Wellington ARC and the ‘principal event of the day’ was the ‘four-oared race’ which attracted crews from Mirfield, the 4<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards (barracked in York) and York but the latter were disqualified. The boats provided by Wellington ARC proved to be of ‘such primitive construction and quality that they shipped a lot of water’ and it was with ‘considerable hesitation’ that the Dragoons took part! In the first heat, a Leeds crew under William Towler (stroke), ‘rowed over’; in the second heat, the Dragoons ‘caught a crab’ and lost to the Leeds crew (stroke T. R. Wood). The final heat saw the two Leeds crews compete (Towler vs. Wood): Towler set off to a good start, getting a one-length lead until the turn, when Wood ‘put on a spurt’, leading by two lengths. At the second turn, however, disaster struck and ‘immediately after turning the boat got full of water and sank.’ So too did that of Towler! It was thought that because the boats had been kept in the open air for the six years since they were purchased they had rotted and the seams had opened up.<sup>52</sup>

Two of the most famous rowers of their day Ned Hanlon (Champion sculler from Toronto) and William Elliot, whom he had beaten to win the ‘English Sculling Championships’, were advertised to appear, but the *Leeds Mercury* reported both failed to attend.<sup>53</sup> John S. Shaw, Honorary Secretary to Leeds Wellington ARC published an open letter in the *Leeds Mercury* apologising for the farcical regatta and tried to offer an explanation for its failure: he had written to 34 clubs in the north of England inviting them to take part but none had responded and the non-appearance of the booked ‘celebrities’ had not been explained to him.<sup>54</sup>

The Leeds Regatta was re-established on Waterloo Lake, Roundhay Park during 1882, promoted by Messrs. Blackshaw & Co., of Leeds. The ‘Second Annual’ Regatta of 1883 included swimming, canoeing and rowing. Two coxed fours were entered from Dewsbury and York; York were considered the favourites but in a race-to-the-finish, Dewsbury won by ‘about a yard.’<sup>55</sup>

### **Yorkshire Regattas**

Other northern regattas advertised in London included the Yorkshire Regatta (established 1864) and the prestigious ‘Manchester & Salford Grand Regatta’, held over two, later three days around 20 August. This was described as being:

Besides London, the only one at which three days’ rowing can be seen and that is

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Kirkstall Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (3 June 1879).

<sup>51</sup> ‘Regatta and Athletic Sports in Leeds’, *Leeds Mercury* (23 June 1879).

<sup>52</sup> ‘Boat Races and Other Sports at Leeds’, *York Herald* (23 June 1879).

<sup>53</sup> ‘Regatta and Athletic Sports in Leeds’, *Leeds Mercury* (23 June 1879).

<sup>54</sup> ‘Leeds Regatta – An Explanation’, *Leeds Mercury* (24 June 1879).

<sup>55</sup> ‘Leeds Regatta’, *York Herald* (8 August 1883).



proof the rowing is pretty good, Manchester having sent the Champion Crew to the Thames National last year.<sup>56</sup>

By the 1860s, both the Leeds and York Regattas had grown to two days of rowing, with special trains being provided by the *Midland Railway* from Derby, Belper and Sheffield;<sup>57</sup> by the *North Eastern Railway* from Newcastle and York to Leeds<sup>58</sup> and additional trains were run from Hull, Cottingham and Beverly.<sup>59</sup> The Yorkshire Regatta attracted crews nationally: from South Stockton, Middlesborough, Hull, Lancaster, the University of Cambridge and of course York (York Amateur RC, Ouse Amateur RC, and the White Rose Boat Club (est. 1868)). Despite the wet weather at the 1866 regatta, ‘the best racing’ of the day was the coxed fours between Lancaster, Middlesborough and the University of Cambridge, the Lancaster crew winning ‘by about a length.’<sup>60</sup>

The Mirfield Regatta was begun in 1859; the ‘Fifth Annual’ was held 23 July 1864 ‘in the presence of 20,000 people’ who ‘thronged the river side, filled the Grand Stand and scores of barges.’ Special trains had been provided from Leeds, Bradford, Halifax and Huddersfield: ‘The day was beautifully fine and the people seemed to enjoy themselves most heartily.’ Crews were present from Manchester, Leeds, Wakefield and the organisers drew special attention to the presence of Harry Ault from Salford.<sup>61</sup>

Wakefield, Leeds and Mirfield sent coxed fours to the 1867 Dewsbury Regatta, and ‘the programme also contained the names of some celebrated rowing men’ including the ubiquitous Clasper brothers, Robert Chambers, James Taylor and J. Percy ‘all from Newcastle’ who competed in the out-rigged single sculls for the ‘Dewsbury Plate’, the first prize of which was £12.<sup>62</sup> The Leeds Regatta of 1868 had crews from Newcastle, Stockton, Mirfield, Horbury Bridge and Manchester,<sup>63</sup> and in the same year Wakefield sent a coxed four to the Goole Regatta, but ‘owing to some accident’ to their boat were unable to compete.<sup>64</sup> They were disqualified from the 1869 Goole Regatta ‘on the ground the crew were not amateurs’ i.e. they were professional watermen.<sup>65</sup>

### **‘Wakefield Amateur Rowing Club’**

Wakefield Amateur Rowing Club was established at a meeting at the Jolly Sailor, Thornes, on Tuesday evening, 13 October 1868.<sup>66</sup> The meeting was ‘attended by a comparatively large number

---

<sup>56</sup> ‘Sporting Notes: Rowing’, *The Era* (11 May 1855).

<sup>57</sup> *Derby Mercury* (20 September 1865).

<sup>58</sup> *Leeds Mercury* (20 September 1865).

<sup>59</sup> *Hull Packet & East Riding Times* (20 September 1865).

<sup>60</sup> ‘The Yorkshire Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (5 September 1866); ‘The Yorkshire Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (11 September 1866).

<sup>61</sup> ‘Mirfield Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (26 July 1864).

<sup>62</sup> ‘Regatta and Athletic Sports at Dewsbury’, *Leeds Mercury* (19 August 1867).

<sup>63</sup> ‘Leeds Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (13 July 1868); ‘Leeds Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (14 July 1868).

<sup>64</sup> ‘Goole Sailing and Rowing Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (17 July 1868).

<sup>65</sup> ‘Goole Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (20 July 1869).

<sup>66</sup> ‘The Wakefield Rowing Club’, *Wakefield Journal & Examiner* (23 October 1868), p. 2.

of persons' notwithstanding the frenetic activity associated with the Elections. New members were enrolled and the rules of the club were established.<sup>67</sup> The club rowed on the River Calder opposite Lupset Hall and enjoyed the patronage of Daniel Gaskell.<sup>68</sup> A meeting was held a week later, again at the 'Jolly Sailor', chaired by Mr Beaumont; the *Wakefield Journal* felt it 'may now congratulate the Town upon the Rowing Club being an established fact.'<sup>69</sup> The 'First Annual Meeting' was proposed to be held on the evening of 3 November 1868 at 8.30pm at the 'Jolly Sailor', 'for the purposes of electing officers for the ensuing year.'<sup>70</sup> The meeting, however, had to be deferred due to the election when Mr Alfred Ash esq. was elected unanimously as President and an inaugural dinner was planned to be held at the George Hotel on 15 December. The *Journal* thought 'The Committee have commenced work in earnest, and are energetically preparing for next year's labour.' Mr Alfred Ash was President; Mr William Armstrong Vice President and Benjamin Gibson Hon. Secretary.<sup>71</sup> At the annual dinner subscriptions of one guinea had been received from Mr Somerset Beaumont, G. W. Westerman, L. R. Starkey and Alfred Ash; Samuel Gurney Leatham subscribed £1 and John Totty 10s 6d. Amongst the members was Alderman Benjamin Watson (St. John's Ward); the chemist John Unthank; Samuel Laycock (hosier and shirtmaker).<sup>72</sup> Over 50 persons sat down to a dinner that 'was a very recherché affair.'<sup>73</sup> Mr Gibson had received 'voluminous correspondence' regarding the 'impure state of the Calder'; the *Wakefield Express* in reporting the 1875 Regatta noted 'the stench which usually arises from the Calder was all but imperceptible, the recent freshes having cleansed it of some of its impurities.'

The late 1860s 1870s were a decade when rowing was becoming increasingly popular as a sport and hobby, which was beginning to get a large following with lavish regattas, and races became media events. At the same time, the sport was growing at professional and international levels also. Leeds boasted no fewer than four rowing clubs, and clubs like Leeds ARC were able to attract 'some of the best known men in the country' to their events.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, it is no surprise that the 'great and good' of Wakefield wanted to host their own regattas.

Wakefield ARC held their first regatta 7 August 1869 in the Lupset Park, which had been 'placed at the disposal of the committee by Mr. D. Gaskell of Lupset Hall.'<sup>75</sup> Rather as happened in Leeds, there was a dispute between the Aire & Calder Co. and the Rowing Club over the use of 'Company water' for a regatta. The *Wakefield Journal* reported that:

Rumour has been very busy about the obstruction the Aire & Calder Navigation Company intended throwing in the way, but we have the pleasure of authoritively

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> K. Taylor, *pers comm.*, email 28 December 2007.

<sup>69</sup> 'Wakefield Amateur Rowing Club', *Wakefield Journal & Examiner* (30 October 1868), p. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> 'The Wakefield Rowing Club', *Wakefield Journal & Examiner* (4 December 1868), p. 3; 'Wakefield Rowing Club', *Wakefield Journal & Examiner* (18 December 1868).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Wigglesworth, *Social History*, p. 77.

<sup>75</sup> 'Wakefield Regatta and Athletics Festival', *York Herald* (11 July 1874).

announcing that the Undertakers have me the Regatta Committee in the most honourable and liberal manner. The only stipulation they have made is that the hawling path should be kept clear, and that undertaken they have promised to stop the traffic as much as in their power.<sup>76</sup>

Special trains were provided by the *Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Company* from Kirkgate Station to Horbury Bridge where omnibuses had been chartered for the onward progress of spectators.<sup>77</sup>

The Regatta did not get off to an auspicious start: not least due to the wet weather but also the long gap (upwards of an hour) between races – due to one of the crews entered having to borrow a boat - and that crews were not necessarily wearing their correct colours.<sup>78</sup> Rowing crews were present from Leeds, Airedale RC, Mirfield, Horbury Brigde, York (Ouse ARC) and Wakefield. Sadly, due to a lack of entrants the ‘Town Plate’, which comprised four silver cups and a silver plate worth £25 meant that it was not competed for.<sup>79</sup> Considerable controversy arose of the ‘Town Plate.’ The only which showed was that of the *Duffer* of ‘John of Gaunt’ Rowing Club from Lancaster, who had arrived in Wakefield the day before. They were ‘at the post ready to contest the race’ when they were informed by the Umpires that as no other crew ‘appeared against them’ the race was cancelled, but they were allowed to row the course, ‘thus showing their capabilities.’ The Wakefield Regatta rules stated that there was to be a minimum of three entrants per race. The Lancaster crew were therefore ‘sorely disappointed’ especially as it had been reported that both York and Hull had promised to send a crew and Leander ‘actually entered a crew.’<sup>80</sup> *The Lancaster Gazette* believed ‘the Wakefield Regatta Committee is certainly open to censure’ for ‘not informing the John O’Gaunt club there were not the requisite number of entries to constitute a race’ which the Wakefield Committee could have ‘done easily by Telegraph’ and saved the club ‘considerable expense’ transporting the crew and their boat. The Wakefield Committee ‘attempted by an offer of money’ to correct the mistake, but it was refused by the Lancaster men because they had been ‘specially invited to go to the regatta’ and felt hard done by, especially as Wakefield claimed they could not enter their own crew into the race but yet ‘they sent crews to York and Goole,’ and believed Wakefield ‘spoil a race because they knew they could not win it.’ Wakefield had acted both against the public spirit, and the ‘regatta spirit.’<sup>81</sup>

Wakefield won the ‘Tradesman’s Plate’ against Airedale RC; Horbury Bridge won the ‘Innkeepers’ Plate’ against Ouse ARC. Crews were entered for this ‘four-oared race’ from Ouse ARC, Horbury Bridge, Mirfield (who sent two), Thornhill Lees and Shipley Bridge. The *York Herald* expected it to be the ‘closest contest of the meeting’ but the final heat was ‘spoil’ by Horbury Bridge ‘breaking an oar soon after the start.’<sup>82</sup> The *Wakefield Journal* described Horbury Bridge and Mirfield as old rivals and ‘it was a race almost for life and death between them.’ In the first heat, Ouse ARC went

---

<sup>76</sup> ‘The Regatta’, *Wakefield Journal & Examiner* (6 August 1869).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> ‘The Wakefield Regatta’, *Wakefield Journal & Examiner* (13 August 1869).

<sup>79</sup> ‘Wakefield Regatta’, *The Bradford Observer* (9 August 1869).

<sup>80</sup> ‘The Wakefield Regatta’, *The Lancaster Gazette* (14 August 1869).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> ‘York Rowers at Wakefield’, *York Herald* (14 August 1869).

round the marker buoy the wrong way – and should have been disqualified – but the Committee ruled in the favour of Ouse, to the chagrin of Horbury Bridge. The second heat between Mirfield and Shipley Bridge was ‘perhaps the tightest and most exciting, scarcely half a boat’s length separating them at the finish. The third heat – Horbury Bridge v Mirfield – was an ‘arduous struggle’ for Horbury Bridge but ‘succeeded in wiping off their late defeat’ to Mirfield ‘much to the elation of their friends.’ Sadly, in the final heat, Horbury Bridge broke an oar soon after starting, which ‘put an end to their chances.’ The Ouse ARC crew, however ‘gave them a ringing cheer, but still they kept way, and were declared the victors.’<sup>83</sup>

The remaining contests were for Wakefield men only: the ‘[coxless] pair-oared race for Gentlemen of Wakefield, who never won a race’ saw B. Kilner and S. Hurst lose to J. W. Widdop and J. E. Grace. The ‘Ladies’ Plate’ was also a pairs race, but only open to members of Wakefield ARC, and won by C. Clapham and J. Marriot who raced against M. H. Bennet and G. Gibson.<sup>84</sup>

### Local Rivalries

Following the regatta, the Horbury Bridge Club issued several challenges: The first were against Mirfield and York: ‘The Horbury Bridge crew, hearing that the Mirfield four are not satisfied with their defeat’ reported *Bell’s London Life*, ‘will be happy to make a match with them for any stake from £10 to £50 a side.’ The deposits for the matches were to be sent to the *Bell’s* office in London and particulars were available from the Horbury Bridge secretary, Frederick Lister.<sup>85</sup> Ouse Amateur Rowing Club was also challenged to a two-mile race on Lupset Pond and a ‘right away’ race on the Ouse at York for £25 a-side. The race at Lupset was to use ‘in-rigged boats’, but owing to the York team lacking in-rigged boats two were provided by Wakefield, the *Water Lilly* and *Annie*; the race at York was to use ‘best outrigged wayer boats.’ The Horbury Bridge coxed-four were ‘the best crew in the West Riding’ and the *York Herald* thought the ‘strong’ York crew would be ‘dangerous opponents’.<sup>86</sup>

The Horbury Bridge club similarly challenged the Mirfield crews who had raced at Wakefield over a two-mile course on Lupset Pond ‘in the best in-rigged boats they can find’ for no less than £25 (open for £100) a side. The two boats were the *Magnet*<sup>87</sup> and *Nil Desperandum* and particulars could be had from G. C. Lister, secretary, at the ‘Horse and Jockey,’ Horbury Bridge.<sup>88</sup> The crew line-ups were the same as at Wakefield: Horbury Bridge crew comprised W. Asquith, J. Martin, F. Oates, J. Bowers (stroke), G. Halliwell (cox) and Mirfield R. Oates, J. Ellis, W. Mallinson, J. Mallinson (stroke), W. Mallinson (cox). The Horbury Bridge crew owed their success to being trained by ‘the celebrated J. H. Clasper’ of London.<sup>89</sup>

The rivalry between Horbury Bridge and Mirfield led to a further rowing match 4 December 1869, on the Broad Dam, Ravensthorpe, near Wakefield. The race was ‘a mile out and home’ between

---

<sup>83</sup> ‘The Wakefield Regatta’, *Wakefield Journal & Examiner* (13 August 1869), p. 3.

<sup>84</sup> ‘Wakefield Regatta’, *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (14 August 1869).

<sup>85</sup> ‘The Late Wakefield Regatta’, *Bell’s in London and Sporting Chronicle* (21 August 1869).

<sup>86</sup> ‘Aquatics’, *York Herald* (23 October 1869).

<sup>87</sup> Is this the same boat used by Leeds Rowing Club during the 1850s?

<sup>88</sup> ‘The Horbury Bridge Crew’, *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (2 October 1869).

<sup>89</sup> ‘Aquatics’, *Wakefield Journal & Examiner* (5 November 1869), p. 3.

coxed pairs: Fred Oates and Francis Oates (cox G. Halliwell) of Horbury Bridge against J. Mallinson and W. Mallinson (cox M. Mallinson) of Mirfield<sup>90</sup> A '[coxless] pair-oared race' was held between Horbury Bridge and Mirfield on Lupset Pond 17 June 1871 in the presence of around 5,000 spectators. W. Mallinson and J. Ellis represented Mirfield and J. Martin and F. Oates Horbury Bridge. Mirfield was awarded a length head-start and won by a comfortable five lengths.<sup>91</sup>

### **Wakefield Regatta**

Wakefield Rowing Club entered its second year in a buoyant mood. At the General Meeting in October 1869 Alfred Ash was re-elected President and Mr T. Grice as Vice President; Benjamin Gibson continued as Secretary and Mr J. Wilson, treasurer. The Captain was Mr M. Bennet. The Committee consisted of Messrs. Marriott, Hunt, Bennet, Whitehead, Robinson and Terry.<sup>92</sup> At the Annual Dinner in December 1869 Mr Gibson was able to report that the club owned four boats: all were coxed fours but two were in-rigged whilst the other pair had outriggers. It was hoped the club would be able to purchase skiffs and pairs in the near future. The club was financially solvent, having made £91 17s over the last year with expenses amounting to £91-2-6. The club had also purchased its first piece of silverware - from Mr Lovejoy the jeweller - from the 'remainder' of the money subscribed for the Regatta. It was a 'graceful Grecian vase', christened the 'Wakefield Challenge Cup' and to be competed for annually.<sup>93</sup>

The second regatta was in August 1870 and was a much larger affair. Crews and scullers were entered from 'Phoenix' RC of Lincoln, Mirfield RC, Barnsley RC, York ARC, Derby School RC, and Leeds RC.<sup>94</sup> The first prize was the 'Wakefield Challenge Cup' a 'magnificent piece of plate worth 50 guineas, open to Gentlemen Amateurs of the United Kingdom'. Sadly, there was only one entry - York - who therefore 'rowed over.' The 'Maiden Plate' for 'Gentlemen of Wakefield who had never won a race' was easily won by H. W. Barber and R. Bradley against R. W. Connor and T. Whitehead; The 'Open four-oared race' was won by Mirfield, with Horbury Bridge being awarded second place. There were three entries for the 'Corporation Plate' (valued at £25): Ino Rowing Club (who later withdrew) leaving just Wakefield and Hull. The Wakefield four comprised J. W. Wilson, W. W. Hunt, B. Kilner, M. H. Bennet (stroke), J. Hall (cox). Wakefield also won the 'Ladies Plate' (for 'paired boats') won by M. H. Bennet and J. Wilson. Leeds won the 'Tradesmens' Plate' and Derby School the skiff race.<sup>95</sup>

Wakefield crews took part in the 1870 Yorkshire Regatta; their men's coxed four, comprising J. W. Wilson, W. W. Hunt, B. Kilner, H. Bennet (stroke) and J. Hall (cox), won the first heat of the 'White Rose Boating Club Challenge Cup' for junior coxed fours, against crews from London, Middlesborough, York Amateur Rowing Club and the White Rose BC. The *Leeds Mercury* describes them as having a 'slashing start' and 'pushing their boat barely a yard in front of that of

---

<sup>90</sup> 'New Pair-Oared Match', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (27 November 1869).

<sup>91</sup> 'Pair-Oared Match', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (24 June 1871).

<sup>92</sup> 'Wakefield Amateur Rowing Club', *Wakefield Journal & Examiner* (5 November 1869).

<sup>93</sup> 'The Wakefield Rowing Club', *Wakefield Journal & Examiner* (31 December 1869), p. 3.

<sup>94</sup> 'Wakefield Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (23 August 1870).

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

their opponents' at the finish line.<sup>96</sup> In the second heat, Wakefield rowed off against White Rose: 'The Wakefield Men soon showed their superiority' and 'passed the wining post a length and a half ahead.'<sup>97</sup> Wakefield rowed off in the final heat against the Ino Rowing Club, to whom they lost by half a length.<sup>98</sup>

Wakefield took part in the Yorkshire Regatta of 1871 but failed to win any competitions;<sup>99</sup> they entered again in 1872 but were thrashed by Ino Rowing Club for the 'White Rose Challenge Cup' due to being 'badly boated.' The Wakefield crew included J. W. Wilson, T. W. Binner, R. P. Bradley, W. W. Hunt (stroke) and J. Hall (cox).<sup>100</sup> They failed to appear at the 1873 Regatta – despite being entered for the 'White Rose Challenge Cup' – and were therefore disqualified.<sup>101</sup> A Wakefield Crew comprising R. A. Wood, T. A. Connor, R. P. Bradley, W. W. Hunt (stroke) and J. Hall (cox) entered the 'Goole Challenge Plate' at the Goole Regatta of 1873 where:

Great interest was taken in the match, as it was generally hoped that Wakefield would not be able to win the prize from Goole. So it proved... the Wakefield crew who are not used to this sort of water.<sup>102</sup>

At the 1873 Wakefield Regatta crews were entered from York, Leeds, Burton, Derby and Chester.<sup>103</sup> Wakefield entered the junior sculls and a coxed-four in the 'Wakefield Challenge Cup' where they were beaten by Chester – according to Bell's by a length and a half, the Leeds Mercury by two lengths and the Cheshire Observer by three! York came second and Manchester and Wakefield third.<sup>104</sup> Also in 1873 W. W. Hunt from Wakefield entered the junior sculling at the Royal Chester Regatta, where he lost to P. V. Churton of Chester,<sup>105</sup> and Hunt and Bradley entered the junior sculls at York in the same year.<sup>106</sup> The Regatta of 1874 was as usual held in Lupset Park where 'a large enclosure skirting the banks of the Calder was railed off' for spectators and Mr Richard Scowby of Westgate provided 'much appreciated' refreshments from a large marquee. The *York Herald* considered the 1874 event 'an improvement upon those of previous years.' The two Umpires were Messrs. Heaton Cadman (University of Oxford Boat Club) and Smelter Cadman of Cambridge University Boat Club; Mr Alfred Ash of Wakefield was the Judge and Mr W. H. Bennet was the starter.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> 'York Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (11 July 1870).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid; see also 'Aquatics: York Regatta', *Sporting Gazette* (13 August 1870).

<sup>99</sup> 'York Regatta, 1871. The First Day', *Leeds Mercury* (26 July 1871).

<sup>100</sup> 'York Regatta', *Bell's London Life and Sporting Chronicle* (July 27 1872).

<sup>101</sup> 'York Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (24 July 1873).

<sup>102</sup> 'Goole Regatta', *Leeds Mercury* (19 August 1873).

<sup>103</sup> 'Wakefield Regatta', *Derby Mercury* (23 July 1873).

<sup>104</sup> 'Wakefield Regatta and Athletic Festival', *Leeds Mercury* (18 July 1873); 'Wakefield Regatta', *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (10 August 1873); 'Wakefield Regatta', *Cheshire Observer* (19 July 1873).

<sup>105</sup> 'Chester Regatta', *Cheshire Observer* (5 July 1873).

<sup>106</sup> 'York Regatta, 1873', *York Herald* (26 July 1873).

<sup>107</sup> 'Wakefield Regatta and Athletics Festival', *York Herald* (11 July 1874).

The regatta, however, was hampered through lack of entries, and ‘for once the York oarsmen were entirely unrepresented’ despite the ‘liberal’ prizes offered. The *York Herald* noted that this had been due late arrivals of applications from various clubs, including Ino Rowing Club of London, Chillingworth Rowing Club of Twickenham and ‘two noted crews from Newcastle.’<sup>108</sup> Wakefield entered two coxed fours; other crews came from ‘Britannia RC’ of Nottingham; Derby School, ‘Derwent RC’ of Derby, and also Mirfield. ‘The principal event’ was the ‘Corporation Plate’ (coxed fours), which was won convincingly by Derby Schools against ‘Derwent.’ W. Bamford from Nottingham won the junior sculls, beating his only opponent W. W. Hunt of Wakefield ‘without much trouble’. Wakefield ‘walked over’ Mirfield during the ‘Open Four-Oared Race’ and it was two Wakefield crews who competed for the ‘Heath Plate’, which Connor’s crew ‘won by a length’:

Wakefield 1: T. Whitehead, Furnival, Stones, J. A. Connor (stroke), J. Hall (cox).

Wakefield 2: A. Ginn, E. J. Spink, H. Armstrong, W. W. Hunt (stroke), J. Horridge (cox).<sup>109</sup>

The club committee in 1875 consisted of the following notable worthies:

Chair: J. W. Wilson

Secretary: B. Gibson

Committee: Rev. William Routh Tomlinson (Vicar of Wakefield), Mr. Counsellor Tattersall, Mr. Alfred Ash, Mr W. D. Carruthers, Mr W. W. Hunt, Mr G. F. Wild, Mr J. E. Wood, Mr W. Carr.

The 1875 event was larger and more popular than 1874. Sadly, the spectator’s enclosure proved too small – ladies and their bonnets were ‘crushed’ - and for want of room, ‘Large numbers... found their way to the opposite bank’ to get ‘an equally fine view of proceedings.’ Special trains had been organised by Captain Binstead of the *Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway* and ‘all trains stopped at Horbury Junction’ which was close to the regatta.<sup>110</sup>

The visiting crews were from Derwent RC of Derby, Barrow-in-Furness, Middlesborough ARC and York who won the main prize, the ‘Wakefield Challenge Cup’.<sup>111</sup> The Wakefield crew had been the contenders to win but suffered from ‘a change of man (no. 3)’ at the last minute. The ‘Heath Plate’ (presented by Edward Green of Heath Old Hall) for ‘Gentlemen amateurs residing within four miles of Wakefield, who never having won a race at any regatta’ saw two scratch crews compete:

Wakefield 1: J. T. Stead, J. M. Horridge, J. E. Langton, A. Mann (stroke), C. Allen (cox).

Wakefield 2: H. Green, G. H. Green, G. J. Lampen, R. P. Bradley (stroke).

According to *Bell’s* ‘Bradley led out, and kept in front for 200 yards’ when Mann drew level, ‘were on level terms at the enclosure, and won a well-finished race by half a length,’<sup>112</sup> whilst the

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> ‘Wakefield Regatta’, *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (11 July 1874).

<sup>110</sup> ‘Wakefield Regatta and Athletic Festival’, *York Herald* (12 July 1875).

<sup>111</sup> ‘Wakefield Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (12 July 1873).

<sup>112</sup> ‘Wakefield Regatta’, *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (17 July 1875).

Bradford Observer thought it ‘very exciting contest.’<sup>113</sup>

Also present was Captain Boynton who demonstrated his latest life saving equipment; he also displayed it at the Leeds Regatta of the same year. The 1875 Regatta was also accompanied by controversy; the waterman to Captain Boynton, one George Cox, was accused of stealing some 230 one shilling regatta tickets. Alfred Rogers, landlord of the ‘Shears Inn’, and Alfred Dixie (manager) were charged as being complicit in the theft and selling them feloniously for 9d and 6d.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, one William Thompson, boatman of the Aire & Calder Co., was charged with stealing timber, the property of Messrs. William Judge the contractors who had built the spectator’s enclosure. The timber had been used as a raft by Captain Boynton in his ‘experiments.’ The case was eventually dropped as the Rowing Club Committee ‘wished to offer no evidence’ and Thompson, who was ‘a very respectable man’, was discharged.<sup>115</sup>

Wakefield did not compete at the 1874 Leeds Roundhay Park regatta (which had rowers from as far afield as Newcastle, Gateshead, Bradford, Manchester and London<sup>116</sup>) but did send a men's coxed four to the 1875 Leeds Regatta at Roundhay Park, where they were severely thrashed by crews from Middlesborough Amateur RC and Leeds Wellington Foundry RC. The *Leeds Mercury* described their stroke as ‘somewhat erratic’ and ‘unsteady.’<sup>117</sup> Their fortunes were reversed in the following year (1876) when they beat both Leeds ARC and Leeds Wellington Foundry RC to win the ‘Four Oared Race’. The course was a one-mile straight sprint. The Wakefield crew comprised H. S. Witty, J. A. Connor, W. W. Hunt, R. Ward (stroke) and O. Allen (cox), but sadly, were defeated in the ‘Roundhay Park Challenge Cup’ by Middlesborough.<sup>118</sup>

After 1876 little can be traced of the activities of the Wakefield ARC. The victory at Leeds in 1876 may have been a last gasp against declining fortunes, perhaps brought on by loss of water on which to train, perhaps by other sporting activities – Wakefield Trinity rugby club being formed in 1873, for example – proving more popular, or perhaps an increase in disruptive behaviour at regattas. It is true that a major club sponsor, Daniel Gaskell, died in 1875; Gaskell was a Board member of the Aire & Calder Navigation Company, and may have secured a concession for the rowers to enable them to use ‘Company Water.’<sup>119</sup>

The ability to find suitable water to row on and host regattas was one that certainly affected rowing in Leeds – Waterloo lake being considered unsuitable from the beginning of the regattas there – and, following a dispute with the Park Authorities, led to the winding up the Regattas in Roundhay Park in 1878. The City of Leeds Rowing Club was founded in 2006. Rowing has yet to return to the Calder.

---

<sup>113</sup> ‘Wakefield Regatta and Athletic Festival’, *Bradford Observer* (10 July 1874).

<sup>114</sup> ‘On Monday at Wakefield’, *Liverpool Mercury* (28 July 1875).

<sup>115</sup> ‘Charge of Stealing Captain Boynton’s Raft’, *York Herald* (21 July 1875).

<sup>116</sup> ‘Leeds Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (13 July 1874).

<sup>117</sup> ‘Leeds Regatta’, *Leeds Mercury* (11 July 1874).

<sup>118</sup> ‘Leeds Regatta. The Second Day’, *Leeds Mercury* (12 July 1876); ‘Leeds Regatta’, *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (15 July 1876).

<sup>119</sup> K. Taylor, *pers comm.*, email 28 December 2007.



## Appendix: Wakefield ARC Coxed Four 1870-1876

<b>Date</b>	<b>Regatta</b>	<b>Bow</b>	<b>Two</b>	<b>Three</b>	<b>Stroke</b>	<b>Cox</b>
1870	Wakefield	J. W. Wilson	W. W. Hunt	B. Kilner	M. H. Bennet	J. Hall
1870	York	J. W. Wilson	W. W. Hunt	B. Kilner	M. H. Bennet	J. Hall
1871	York	J. W. Wilson	T. W. Binner	R. P. Bradley	W. W. Hunt	J. Hall
1872	York	J. W. Wilson	T. W. Binner	R. P. Bradley	W. W. Hunt	J. Hall
1873	Goole	R. A. Wood	T. A. Connor	R. P. Bradley	W. W. Hunt	J. Hall
	Wakefield	T. Jones	T. W. Binner	R. P. Bradley	W. W. Hunt	J. Hal
1874	Wakefield	T. Whitehead	Furnival	Stones	T. A. Connor	J. Hall
		A. Ginn	E. J. Spink	H. Armstrong	W. W. Hunt	J. Horridge
1875	Leeds	H. S. Witty	T. A. Connor	W. W. Hunt	R. Ward	O. Allen
1876	Leeds	H. S. Witty	T. A. Connor	W. W. Hunt	R. Ward	O. Allen