

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

# To the readers of *www.Rowperfect.co.uk*

This is the seventh installment on *www.Rowperfect.co.uk* of the latest draft of the beginning of my coming new book. Many thanks again to Rebecca Caroe for making this possible.

Details about me and my book project are available at *www.rowingevolution.com*. For seven years I have been researching and writing a four volume comprehensive history of the sport of rowing with particular emphasis on the evolution of technique. In these last months before publication, I am inviting all of you visitors to the British Rowperfect website to review the near-final

draft. Your comments, suggestions, corrections, agreements, disagreements, additional sources and illustrations, etc. will be an essential contribution to what has always been intended to be a joint project of the rowing community.

You can email me anytime at:  
*pmallory@rowingevolution.com*.

For a short time you can still access the first six installments, which have been updated thanks to feedback from readers like you. Additional chapters for your review will continue to appear at regular intervals on *www.Rowperfect.co.uk*.





# The Sport of Rowing

## A Comprehensive History

by  
**Peter Mallory**

### Volume I

# Genesis

draft manuscript January 2011



# **The Sport of Rowing**

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**Volume I**  
**Genesis**





**Part V**  
**British Rowing**  
**in the Olympics**

# THE SPORT OF ROWING

## 22. The Birth of the Modern Olympics

*Athens – Paris – St. Louis*



[www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org)

**Pierre de Coubertin**

During classical times, every four years the various city-states of Greece would set aside their differences and call truces in ongoing wars in order to meet in peace at Olympia for a festival of athletic competition.

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the idea of renewing this tradition in his own modern era was the brainchild of **Pierre Frédy, Baron de Coubertin** (1863-1937), a French aristocrat.

[www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org): “Coubertin was a very active sportsman and practiced the sports of boxing, fencing, horseback riding



[www.rudergott.de](http://www.rudergott.de)

**1896 Olympic Games, Athens**

and rowing. He was convinced that sport was the springboard for moral energy, and he defended his idea with rare tenacity. It was this conviction that led him to announce at the age of 31 that he wanted to revive the Olympic Games.

“He made this announcement in a meeting at the Union of French Societies of Athletic Sports, for which he was Secretary

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



[www.rowinghistory.net](http://www.rowinghistory.net)

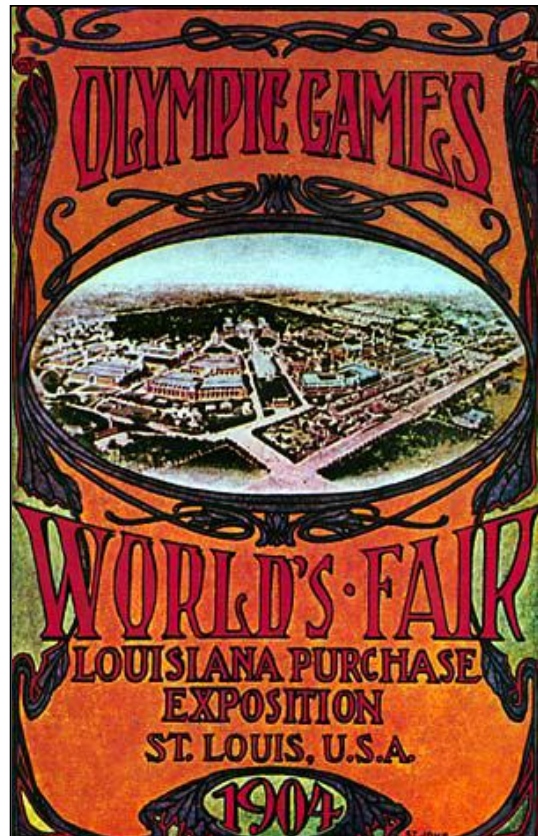
**Pierre de Coubertin** *en skiffe*

General. His statement was greeted with little enthusiasm.

“Coubertin, however, was not discouraged, and on 23 June, 1894 he founded the **International Olympic Committee** in a ceremony held at the University of Sorbonne in Paris. Demetrius Vikelas from Greece became the first president of the IOC.

“Two years later, in 1896, the first Olympic Games of the modern era were held in Athens.”<sup>934</sup>

Coubertin was an avowed Anglophile, and he planned to include that most British of sports, “the most complete sport that one could imagine,”<sup>935</sup> rowing, in the Athens Games. The rowers assembled, but rough water in Piraeus harbor forced the postponement and eventual cancellation of the regatta.<sup>936</sup> Therefore, rowing was not included until the second modern Games in Paris in **1900**, and as a consequence, French



[www.rudergott.de](http://www.rudergott.de)

**1904 Olympic Games, St. Louis**

<sup>934</sup> [www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org)

<sup>935</sup> Saint Sing, *The Wonder Crew*, p. 29

<sup>936</sup> Luckman, personal correspondence, 2010

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became the language of international rowing from that time forward until quite recently.

The Paris Olympics had four rowing events, and Vesper Boat Club of Philadelphia, representing the United States, won the eight in 6:09 over Belgium's 6:13 and Netherlands' 6:23. Britain, with an attitude that Henley was much more important than any newfangled international

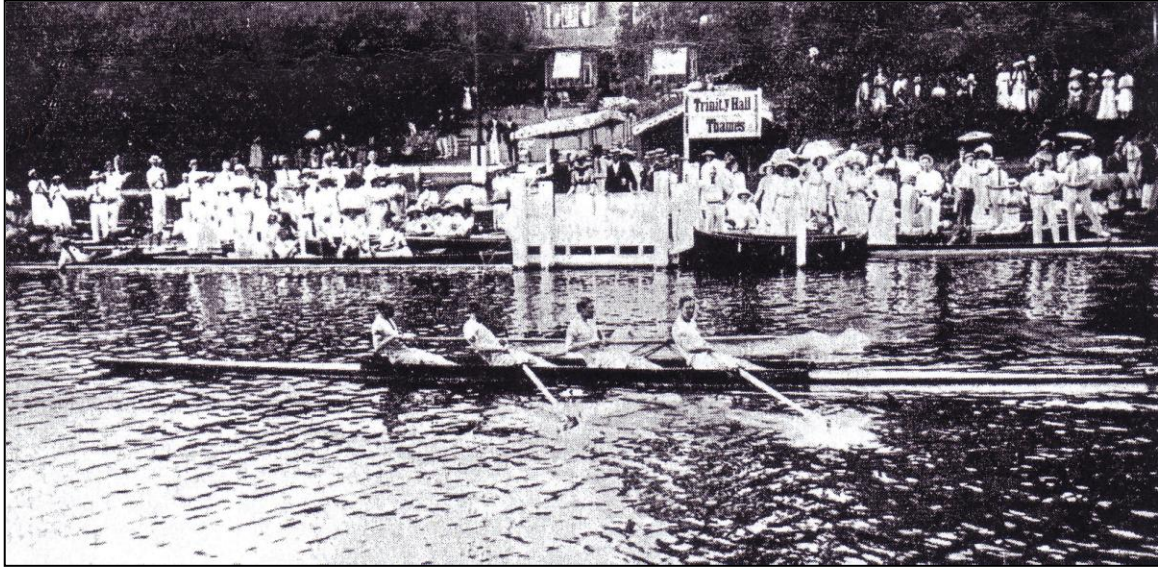
affair, were hardly represented in Paris, Saint-George Ashe's Bronze in the single being their only medal.

Rowing at the **1904** Olympics in St. Louis drew an eight from Canada, but the rest of the entries in the eight and in the smaller boats were all American. The U.S again won the eight in 7:50 over Canada.

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### 23. Jack Beresford the Elder

*1908 – 1912 – Fairbairn at Thames R.C.*



*Rowing, Isthmian Library*

#### **Thames R.C Coxless-Four**

1909, 1911 Stewards' Cup Champion

1912 Olympic Silver Medal (w. coxswain **Geoffrey Carr**)

Bow **Jack Beresford** 140 lb. 64 kg, 2 **Karl Vernon** 158 lb. 72 kg,  
3 **Charles Rought** 183 lb. 83 kg, Stroke **Bruce Logan** 176 lb. 80 kg

### **Julius Wiszniewski**

Today the most celebrated family name in British Olympic Rowing history remains Beresford.

It all started with **Julius Wiszniewski** (1868-1959), a slightly-built Polish-born furniture-maker who had changed his name to **Jack Beresford**<sup>937</sup> and was known to everyone as “Berry.”

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<sup>937</sup> Modern sources tend to refer to the elder Beresford as **Julius Beresford** in order to

After coming second in the Diamond Sculls in 1903 and winning the Holland Beker<sup>938</sup> and coming second in the Silver Goblets in 1904,<sup>939</sup> 37-year-old Berry left Kensington Rowing Club in Hammersmith to join Thames Rowing Club down the river in Putney in search of stronger teammates.

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distinguish him from his son and namesake, but he was known as Jack (or Berry) to his contemporaries.

<sup>938</sup> See Chapter 72.

<sup>939</sup> with pair partner Harry Blackstaffe

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Even though he and his new pair partner, **Karl Vernon**, whose nickname was “the Bean”<sup>940</sup> because he was a vegetarian, “enjoyed great success, they never seemed to impress the Thames coaches.”<sup>941</sup>

**Page:** “This was not altogether surprising since Berry was now in his fortieth year and very light, while Bean, never a stylist at the best of times, was still a comparative novice.”<sup>942</sup>

So in the fall of 1907, Beresford bought a coxless-four and formed his own crew consisting of himself, Vernon, **Charlie Rought** and **Bruce Logan**.

**Page:** “Bean said that Rought had been dropped from the second eight and was about to leave the Club, while Logan did not want to row in a Henley eight. Logan was put to stroke the four, and Berry coached from the bow-seat.”<sup>943</sup>

Berry used long slides, wider spread and shorter, lighter oars with a heavier load he had seen used by Ghent, Belgium’s dominating Club Nautique de Gand.<sup>944</sup>

Many years later, Beresford wrote of his approach to force application.

**Beresford:** “An upward stretch of the arms before gripping the water quickly as possible should make a clean catch of water, and by finishing as hard as possible with the outside hand will get a hard finish, being sure of making a true finish by the blade leaving the water square. A real hard finish makes a good beginning if forward sliding is controlled properly.”<sup>945</sup>

The last sentence means that a strong *Schubschlag* effort to the release will make the boat run, setting up the next entry.

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<sup>940</sup> Page, p. 10

<sup>941</sup> [www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk](http://www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk)

<sup>942</sup> Page, p. 44

<sup>943</sup> Ibid.

<sup>944</sup> See Chapter 72.

<sup>945</sup> J. Beresford, Senior, Elder Berries: The fruit of ripe experience, *Rowing*, First Autumn Number, 1950, pp. 257-8

### 1908

“In the spring [of 1908], his four competed at Amsterdam,<sup>946</sup> and to the surprise of the Thames establishment, they won, beating a Ghent four drawn from their 1906 and 1907 Grand winners.”<sup>947</sup>

At Henley, Logan and Rought were also included in the Thames R.C. entry in the Grand Challenge Cup, and this proved to be their four’s undoing in the Stewards’ Cup, the winner of which would represent Britain in the 1908 Olympics.

Logan and Rought had just raced in their eight when they had to climb into the Beresford four to face a fresh Magdalen College, Oxford crew. The race was very close all the way, and they pushed Magdalen to a new course record time before losing narrowly.

Magdalen won the final the next day in a much slower time. Later in the summer, they comfortably won the 1908 Olympic title.

Olympics of this era allowed countries to enter two boats in an event, but Berry’s four was not selected as the second British coxless-four. “This caused a great furor in the papers, and they were generally felt to have been shabbily treated.”<sup>948</sup>

In this way, Beresford, at age 39, missed the 1908 London Olympics with the rowing events held at Henley.

**Page:** “Bean and Berry believed to the end of their days that had they concentrated on the four alone, they would have won both the Stewards’ and the Olympic fours.”<sup>949</sup>

### 1909 - 1911

“In 1909, Beresford’s Thames R.C. four raced again in the Stewards’ Cup at Henley,

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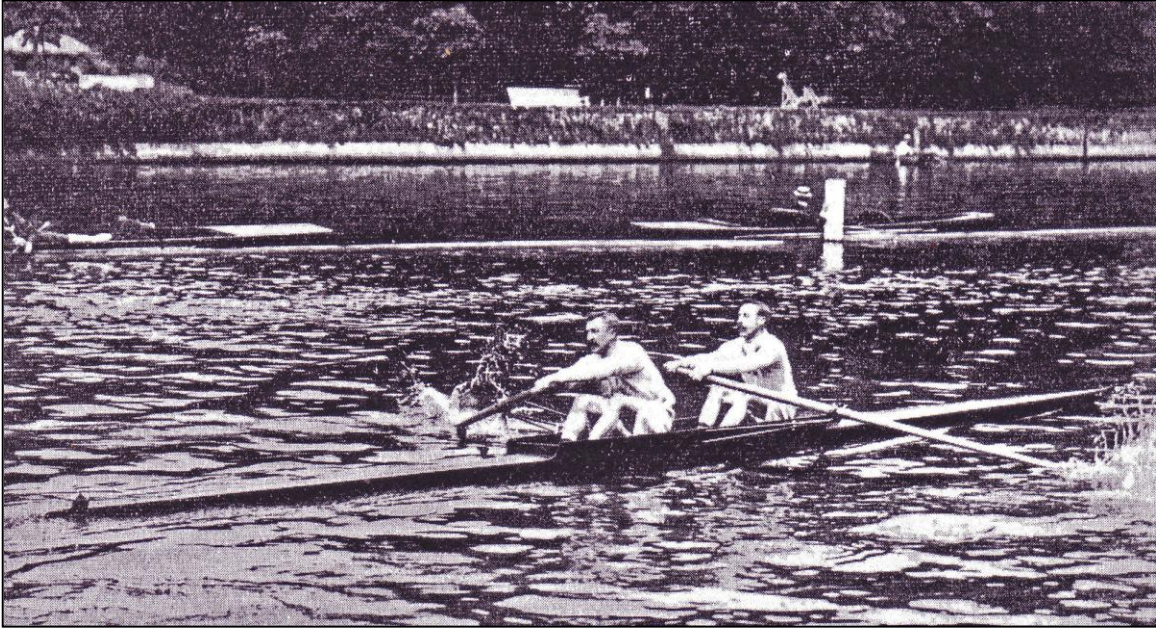
<sup>946</sup> the Holland Beker Regatta. See Chapter 72.

<sup>947</sup> Ibid.

<sup>948</sup> [www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk](http://www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk)

<sup>949</sup> Page, p. 45

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



Rowing, Isthmian Library

### Thames R.C. Coxless-Pair

1911 Silver Goblets & Nickalls Cup Champion

Stroke **A. Hamilton Cloutte** 174 lb. 79 kg, Bow **Jack Beresford** 143 lb. 65 kg

Note the concurrent legs and backs.

meeting the Olympic Champion Magdalen crew in the final and beating them by one and one-half lengths. It was a famous victory and Thames' first Stewards' win in fifteen years.<sup>950</sup>

Beresford was not a large man, even for his generation. In 1909, he weighed 140 lb. 64 kg to 158 lb. 72 kg for Vernon, 183 lb. 83 kg for Rought and 176 lb 80 kg for Logan.

The four's technique did not meet the English Orthodox standards of Thames Rowing Club.

**Karl Vernon:** "At that time, men were selected for Thames R.C. crews on body-form, and it is illuminating to note that by that criterion, only the stroke of this four [Logan] was considered worthy of a place in an eight, and that the second eight."<sup>951</sup>

Combining Beresford's words with individual photos included in this chapter, one can infer that the Beresford four rowed a legs/back concurrent *Schubschlag* pull-through with a body swing from +35° to -30°, i.e. **Classical Technique!**

"Berry's four stayed together for the next three years, and won the Stewards' again in 1911."<sup>952</sup>

In 1907, 1908 and 1909, the coxless-pair of Beresford and Vernon had placed second in the Silver Goblets to three different opponents.

**Page:** "Berry and Bean won thirty out of the thirty-six races in which they started, but though they were [three] times finalists at Henley, the Goblets eluded them."<sup>953</sup>

<sup>950</sup> [www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk](http://www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk)

<sup>951</sup> Vernon, qtd. by *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 60

<sup>952</sup> [www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk](http://www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk)

<sup>953</sup> Page, p. 48

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In 1911, Jack paired instead with **Hamilton Cloutte**, an old friend and “London sculler who had competed many times, unsuccessfully, in the Diamonds and Wingfields,”<sup>954</sup> and in the semi-finals of the Goblets, they met the stern pair of the Beresford four, Logan and Rought.

“The *Rowing Almanack* records that ‘A very fine race ended in a dead heat in record time 8m 8s. Afterwards, Cloutte and Rought tossed to settle the result of the dead heat, Beresford and Cloutte being the winners.’”<sup>955</sup>

That course record they set was not broken for another forty-one years!

The two crews didn’t rerow the dead heat because everyone but Cloutte still had to jump into their coxless-four for a Stewards’ Cup heat.

Beresford/Cloutte won the Goblets final the next day in an anticlimax, though they still equaled the former course record of 8:15, set in 1887 by C.T. Barclay and S.D. Muttlebury.

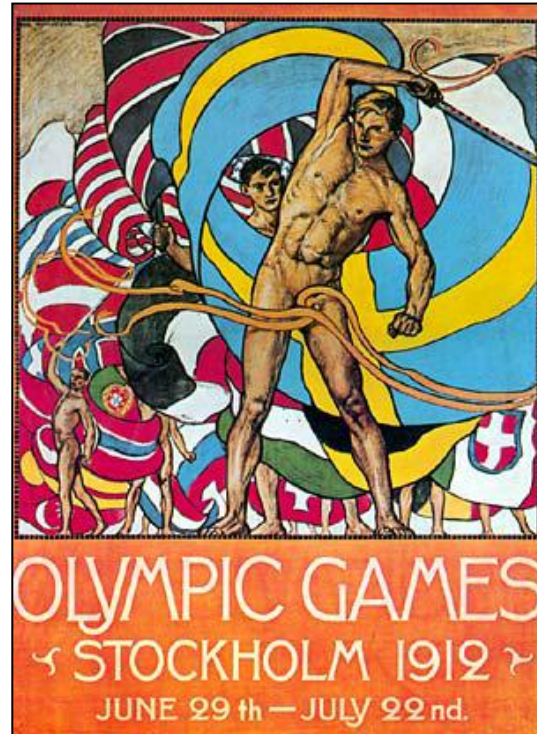
The Beresford four also won the Stewards’ Cup.

**Page:** “Berry, at 43 the oldest man competing in the regatta, was also the only man to win two finals.”<sup>956</sup>

The next year, Logan and Rought returned the favor, putting out Beresford and Cloutte on their way to the 1912 Goblets title.<sup>957</sup>

### The 1912 Olympics

At the 1912 Stockholm Olympics there were three rowing events scheduled, the eight, single and the coxed-four, so Beresford, Vernon, Rought and Logan added coxswain **Geoffrey Carr** and won the



[www.rudergott.de](http://www.rudergott.de)

### 1912 Olympic Games, Stockholm

right to represent Great Britain in a twenty-year-old shell.<sup>958</sup>

In Stockholm against eleven crews from nine nations over a two-lane course, their Thames R.C. coxed-four made it through to the final against Ruderverein Ludwigshafen of Germany.

**Page:** “The Bean was suffering from a boil, and Bruce Logan had been stung by a wasp. The Germans had a slight lead at 500 metres and then gradually drew away to win by 2½ lengths. Surprisingly, this was to be the only medal won by Britain in the Olympic coxed-fours until an outstanding composite crew won the Gold in 1984.”<sup>959,960</sup>

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<sup>954</sup> Page, p. 49

<sup>955</sup> [www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk](http://www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk)

<sup>956</sup> Page, p. 51

<sup>957</sup> Dodd, *Henley*, p. 117

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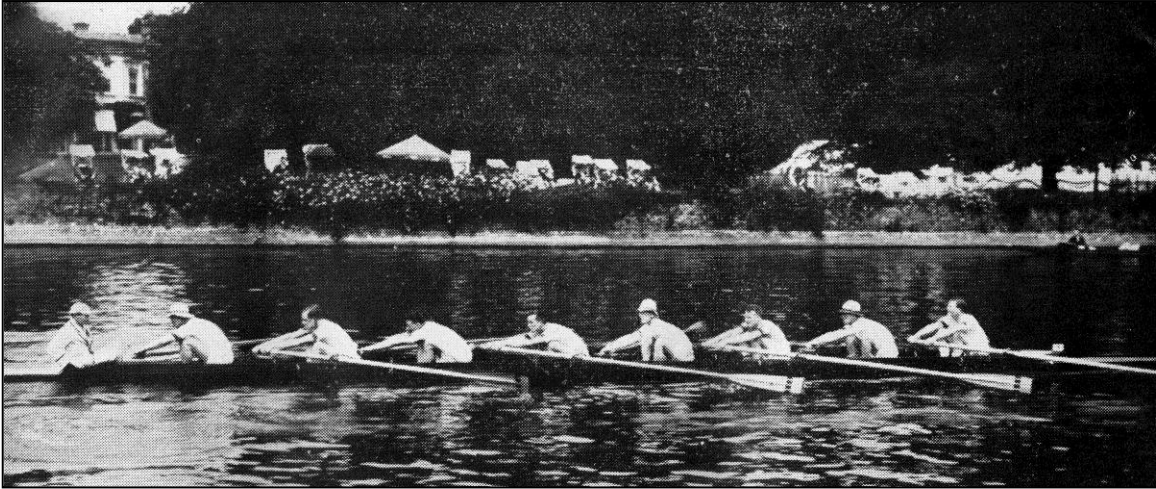
<sup>958</sup> Page, p. 51

<sup>959</sup> See Chapter 130.

<sup>960</sup> Page, p. 52



## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



*Fairbairn On Rowing*

### 1923 Thames Rowing Club Eight

Grand Challenge Cup Champions

Coxswain **J. Godwin**,

Stroke **Ian Fairbairn** 170 lb. 77 kg, 7 **H.L. Holman** 137 lb. 62 kg,

6 **K.C. Wilson** 166 lb. 75 kg, 5 **Bones Long** 161 lb. 73 kg,

4 **Charles Rew** 158 lb. 72 kg, 3 **Jack Beresford, Jr.** 160 lb. 73 kg,

2 **R.G. Bare** 160 lb. 73 kg, Bow **Cherub Chandler** 154 lb. 70 kg

The closest race of the Stockholm rowing competition involved not the British four but the British eight. Previously at Henley, Australia's **Sydney Rowing Club** had won the Grand Challenge Cup final by three-quarters of a length over Britain's **Leander Club** and were the favorites to win Olympic Gold.

[www.rowinghistory-aus.info](http://www.rowinghistory-aus.info): "Success at Henley against the Leander crew lifted the expectation of a good Olympic regatta. The Australian eight was one of the strongest crews of the Games, and with better luck might have won the event.

"The official *Report of the Games* recorded their efforts in the following manner: 'In the semi-final, Australia met the champion British number one eight from Leander. Australia led by one and a half lengths at the 1,000 metre mark, but the British crew managed to catch them 100 metres from the finish. Regrettably, the Australian crew had a sharp curve to

negotiate at this point in the race, which was a significant disadvantage.'

"With Australia eliminated by three metres, the British crew went on to win the Gold. The race received due reference in the *Official Report*: 'Those who had the pleasure of seeing this race will probably never forget it.'

"Britain's time of 6 minutes 10 seconds was the fastest over the course. The race is noted in other publications as the highlight of the regatta."<sup>961</sup>

Today, rowing in the 1912 Olympics is remembered most for the Thames R.C. coxed-four and **Jack Beresford's** Silver Medal, and Jack is best remembered as being the father of Jack Beresford, Jr.

The elder Beresford was forty-three years old in Stockholm, and his son would follow him onto the Olympic stage only eight years later.

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<sup>961</sup> [www.rowinghistory-aus.info](http://www.rowinghistory-aus.info)

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### Fairbairn at Thames R.C.

**Karl Vernon:** “After the 1914-1918 war, Thames R.C. elected **Steve [Fairbairn]** as their Captain. In 1919, Steve formed a crew composed of six veterans and two youngsters, with ‘Berry’ [Jack, Sr.] at stroke. Berry was over 51.

“Steve kept his veterans together for two more years, and although they did not win at Henley, they were successful at other regattas. During this time, he brought on the younger men using the veterans as pacemakers, and Thames R.C. won the Thames Cup and Wyfold in 1920.

“Steve’s efforts were crowned with success in 1923, for the younger crew won the Grand Challenge Cup after a lapse of thirty-three years.”<sup>962</sup>

“That crew included [Steve’s son] **Ian Fairbairn** at stroke and a twenty-four-year-old 155-pounder [70 kg] with a winning smile and a winning pedigree, **Jack Beresford, Jr.**, at 3.

“Fairbairn built this crew up from scratch in 1920, and it was a great vindication when Thames held on after a titanic struggle with Pembroke<sup>963</sup> to win by a third of a length. It was the first Thames Grand win since 1889. The crew averaged only 11st. 3lb. [157 lb. 71 kg], and the only lighter crew to have won the Grand, before

<sup>962</sup> Vernon, qtd. by *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 60

<sup>963</sup> another of the colleges of Oxford University. They row with white blades with a purple stripe at the tip.



[www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk](http://www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk)

**1923 Grand Challenge Cup Final**  
**1 Thames R.C., 2 Pembroke College**  
6min. 45sec., 1/3 length

or since, were Steve’s own Jesus crew in 1885.<sup>964,965</sup>

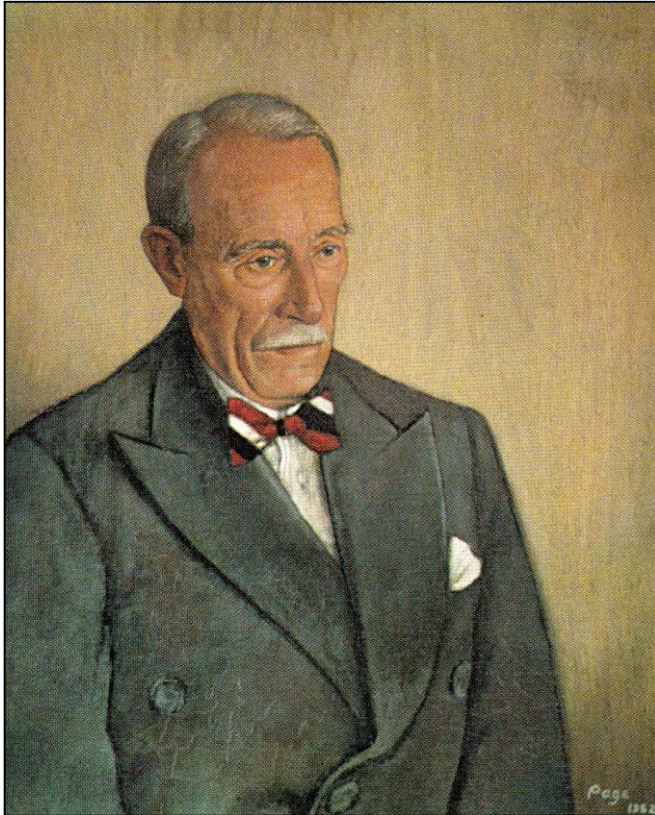
### Technique

**John Badcock** was a member of the 1923 Thames squad the produced the Grand Challenge Cup winner. He described the style Steve was teaching. “It is interesting

<sup>964</sup> See Chapter 14.

<sup>965</sup> [www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk](http://www.thamesrc.demon.co.uk)

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



Geoffrey Page

**Jack Beresford, Sr.** in 1952

to note that during the latter part of his coaching at Thames, he was rather emphasizing a long swing and hard finish, possibly because the 'leg drive' was already there."<sup>966</sup>

Newsreel footage<sup>967</sup> discloses that young Jack's body mechanics were based on concurrent legs and back from entry to release, generating a fluid pullthrough to a strong send at the finish. This was the Classical Technique of Steve Fairbairn.

Steve had skillfully combined pre-war rowing veterans with a new generation in a drive to make Thames R.C. the premier club in Britain.

<sup>966</sup> Badcock, qtd. by *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 67

<sup>967</sup> See Chapter 25.

In the fall of 1925 after a contested election for team captain, Steve left Thames to join London Rowing Club.

**Page:** "Considerable ill-feeling existed at that time between Berry and Steve, mostly on Berry's side, the result of some row of epic proportions probably emanating from the 1923 'mutiny' by the second eight,<sup>968</sup> which Berry had coached. What it was all about has long been forgotten, but even in my rowing days in the 1950s and 1960s it was still referred to as 'The Row.' Whatever the cause, Berry never made his peace with Steve."<sup>969</sup>

Steve coached a couple more years at London before declining health forced him to retire from active coaching and turn his full attention to writing, but by 1928, Steve's work at Thames and London had revitalized Metropolitan rowing.

### Thames After Steve

After Steve left Thames R.C., coaching duties fell to **the elder Jack Beresford** with the younger Beresford in the boat.

**Karl Vernon**, one of the pre-war Thames rowers who continued under Fairbairn: "It was the juniors of 1923 and 1924 who came under Steve's spell that made up the great crews of two or three years later."<sup>970</sup>

**John Badcock**, 1928 Olympic 3-seat: "[After 1926] it was a pity for his own sake that Steve took no part in the coaching of Thames during the next two years, for in

<sup>968</sup> One of the second eight was unavailable for Henley. As club captain, Steve arranged for a replacement, but the eight procured someone else. Steve was furious and resigned. Per Page, pp. 85-6.

<sup>969</sup> Page, P. 72

<sup>970</sup> Vernon, qtd. by *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 67.

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those years, in my opinion, Fairbairnism reached its peak in Thames. In 1927 at Henley we won the Grand, Stewards', Thames Cup and Wyfolds, and in 1928 the Grand, Stewards', Thames Cup and Goblets, thus disproving the fallacy that 'the style might get an eight along but was quite useless in a coxswainless boat.'

"In this latter year, Thames also had the honor of representing Great Britain in the Olympic Games in Amsterdam."<sup>971</sup>

At that time, 1928, as will be described in Chapter 25, Jack Beresford, Sr. would compete in his third Olympics, this time as a coach.

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<sup>971</sup> Badcock, qtd. by *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 68

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS

### 24. Guy, Vivian and Gully Nickalls

#### *The Old Crocks – Three Olympic Medals*

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, British rowing had been a family tradition for as many as four generations, passing from father to son, in public school, mostly Eton, at Oxford and Cambridge and in the clubs in London, Henley and throughout the countryside.

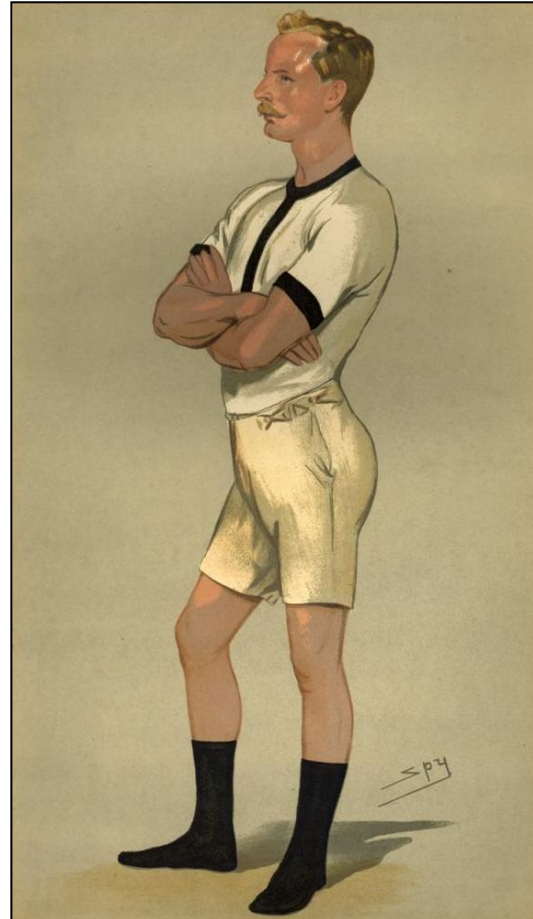
Among the first truly great British rowing families was the Nickalls clan, winners of three Olympic medals.

#### **Guy Nickalls**

Historian **Mendenhall**: “**Guy Nickalls** [1866-1936] was born the third son and fifth child of a well-to-do Victorian family of [eleven] children. His father was a venturesome stockbroker whose gambling instinct eventually depleted Guy’s inheritance. Equally ardent as a sportsman, the father insisted on a vigorous outdoor life for his sons.”<sup>972</sup>

**Nickalls**: “Although my father was a rowing man and an original member of the London Rowing Club, which was founded in 1856, he never mentioned the fact and sincerely hoped that we should all become cricketers. ‘Cricket, my boy, will take you round the world, and rowing up and down the Thames.’”<sup>973</sup>

**Mendenhall**: “‘A duffer at his lessons’ by his own admission, Guy reveled in the fiercely competitive athletics at Eton. Hours on the river in singles, pairs and fours



*Vanity Fair*, July 20, 1889

**Guy Nickalls**

helped him to work his way up that complex hierarchy of races that awaits the Eton ‘wet bob.’”<sup>974</sup>

<sup>972</sup> Mendenhall, *Harvard-Yale*, p. 282

<sup>973</sup> G. Nickalls, *Life*, pp. 37-8

<sup>974</sup> Mendenhall, *Harvard-Yale*, p. 282

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**Guy Nickalls:** “The proudest moment of my life was an the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 1885, setting out to drive to Henley in light blue blazer, white cap and flannels amidst the plaudits of the whole school.

“We were a very good crew indeed. We won the Ladies’ Plate in better time than the Jesus crew won the Grand. This is the Jesus crew often alluded to by Steve Fairbairn,<sup>975</sup> and it was Jesus’ second and [last until 1947] win in the Grand Challenge Cup.”<sup>976</sup>

Guy Nickalls and his Eton classmate **Claude Holland** were responsible for transferring the Fairbairn innovations from Cambridge to Oxford after they had learned them while rowing at Leander with Fairbairn’s teammate, S.D. Muttelbury.<sup>977</sup>

### Classical Technique

**Nickalls:** “Old **Edmond Warre** never liked my rowing – I think merely because I understood the uses of the slide as he did not. He considered I abused the slide [drove the legs], but it was this abusing of it which enabled me, an old man, to compete with younger men in their prime.”<sup>978</sup>

“Warre was nothing if not a stickler for form, the arched back (inwards) and the slide [leg drive] held until the [back] swing was almost completed, alone appealed to him.”<sup>979</sup>

According to **Mendenhall**, “sculling taught Guy the proper function of legs and slide, ‘keeping the loins firm and never driving the slide away.’ This emancipated him from the straight back and even the

shoulder catch, which still obsessed many of his contemporaries.”<sup>980</sup>

The result was a reaffirmation of Classical Technique as opposed to English Orthodoxy. The Fairbairn innovations passed by Muttelbury to Guy Nickalls *himself* at Leander in 1888 were already second nature to him!

In his book, *Rowing*, **Gully Nickalls**, Guy’s son, described his father’s ideal technique through the photos on the following page.

**Photo 1** “demonstrates the forward position. There is no sign of strain anywhere. The shoulders are not over-reaching, and the head is looking up. The body is in a position where great power can be exercised, and in which the legs will be able to drive the weight straight back from the stretcher.

“**[Photo 2]** shows] the beginning of the recoil. The oarsman is making a superlative lift with his back muscles and driving his feet down into the stretchers as hard as he can. The force exerted by the muscles at the top of the thigh is obvious, and the little bulge at the base of the back indicates the power that is being used. The erectness of the head and the tautness of the arms demonstrate the force that is being applied by the big muscles of the legs and back.

“As the swing of the body dies out **[Photos 3-5]**, there is still some slide left to finish on, and the [arms and] shoulders come in to play to aid the thrust of the legs so that maximum pull is maintained on the fingers and acceleration maintained on the boat. It is a leg thrust and a shoulder draw, and maximum power is being exerted right up to the time that the hands drop at the finish.”<sup>981</sup>

The photos demonstrate that back and legs were completely concurrent, with the back perhaps barely leading early. Arms

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<sup>975</sup> See Chapter 14.

<sup>976</sup> G. Nickalls, *Life*, p. 54

<sup>977</sup> See Chapter 15.

<sup>978</sup> G. Nickalls, *Life*, p. 192

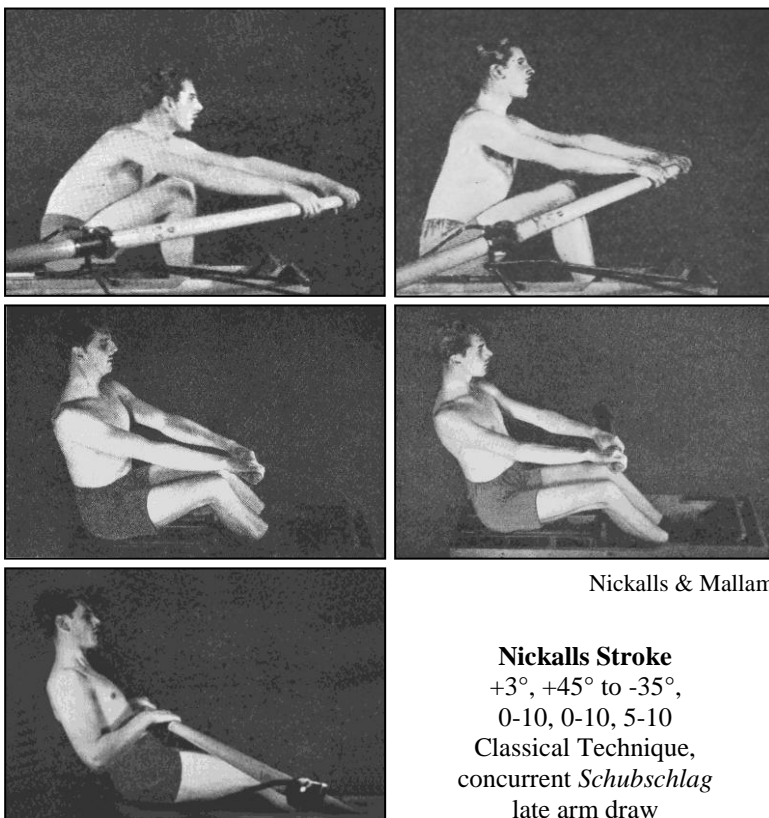
<sup>979</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51

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<sup>980</sup> Mendenhall, *Harvard-Yale*, p. 282

<sup>981</sup> Nickalls & Mallam, pp. 12-15

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



Nickalls & Mallam

**Nickalls Stroke**  
 +3°, +45° to -35°,  
 0-10, 0-10, 5-10  
 Classical Technique,  
 concurrent *Schubschlag*  
 late arm draw

It didn't happen. By the time Nickalls had finished his studies at Oxford in 1891, he had rowed in the Boat Race five times, winning in his last two, and ending Cambridge's domination during the Fairbairn/Muttlebury era. He had already won the Grand Challenge Cup once, the Wingfield Sculls twice, beating, among others, Steve Fairbairn in 1886, and the Silver Goblets and Diamond Sculls three times each! Guy Nickalls was the greatest oarsman of his era.

Taking up the trade of stockbroker,<sup>985</sup> Guy continued to row for six more years at Leander Club, Magdalen College and London Rowing Club. The result was two more wins in the Grand Challenge Cup, two more in the Diamond Sculls and four each in the Silver Goblets for

pairs and Stewards' Challenge Cup for fours.

He finally retired . . . for the first time . . . upon his marriage in 1898.

### Out of Retirement

In **1905**, at the age of 38 and after seven years away from boats, Guy was asked to sub temporarily for a member of the Leander eight. It felt good, and so he kept on. The result that year was another win in the Grand and one in the Stewards' Cup.

He won the Stewards' again in **1906** for Leander in a memorable race against Third Trinity, Cambridge.

were held straight until well into the second half of the pullthrough, and back, legs and arms finished simultaneously.

Force application was *Schubschlag*. Guy Nickalls is well remembered for chanting, "A hard catch makes a boat light, and a hard finish gives it run."<sup>982</sup>

In 1889, upon his being honored with a portrait by "Spy,"<sup>983</sup> *Vanity Fair* described him as follows: "He is the best of friends, and a man with whom, for other reasons, no one would care to quarrel. But he is not fond of rowing, and is likely soon to retire upon his laurels."<sup>984</sup>

<sup>982</sup> Qtd. by Mendenhall, *Harvard-Yale*, p. 290

<sup>983</sup> See Chapter 15.

<sup>984</sup> *Vanity Fair*, July 20, 1889

<sup>985</sup> Mendenhall, *Harvard-Yale*, p. 280

## THE SPORT OF ROWING



Guy Nickalls

### 1906 Stewards' Challenge Cup

1. **Leander Club** (near side), 2. **Third Trinity**, Cambridge, verdict: two feet

**Leander:** Bow **Archie Graham** 157½ lb. 71 kg, 2 **F.S. Kelly** 168 lb. 76 kg,  
3 **R.B. Etherington-Smith** 179 lb. 81 kg, Stroke **Guy Nickalls** 173 lb. 78 kg

**Third Trinity:** Bow **G.D. Cochrane** 148½ lb. 67 kg, 2 **B.C. Johnstone** 177 lb. 80 kg,  
3 **E.W. Powell** 160 lb. 73 kg, Stroke **R.V. Powell** 174½ lb. 79 kg

Three men from these two boats would end up in the 1908 Olympic Champion Eight.

**Guy Nickalls:** “We got away together, we rowing 40 to Third’s 36, and losing a little ground at every stroke. At the top of the Island their rudder was level with my left shoulder, and at the quarter-mile they had nearly half a length in hand, rowing 34 to our 37. Then they dropped their stroke to 32 and held us easily, leading at Fawley still by half a length, with our crew plugging along at 36.

“For the first and last time in my life, I felt like throwing up the sponge. I was burst

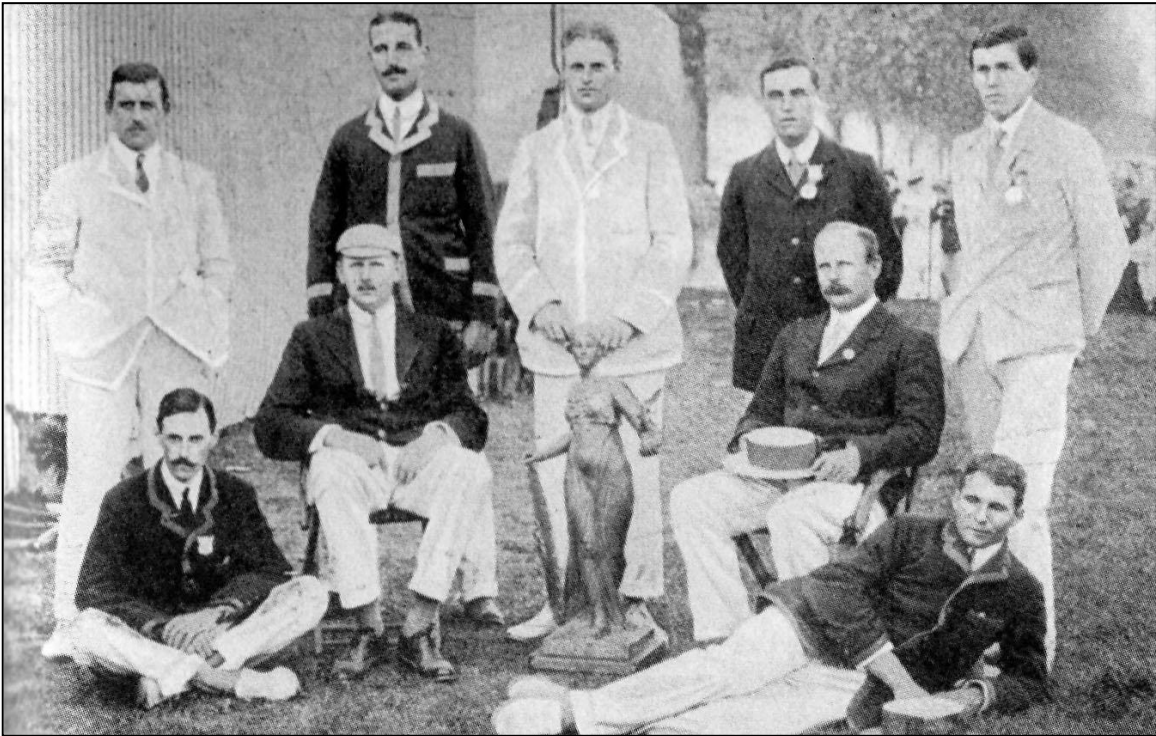
wide open, dark grey in the face and slobbering at the mouth. My only chance was to try a great bluff, so I hung on grimly at a four-a-minute quicker rate than they.

“Ronny Powell [the Third Trinity stroke], I knew, was playing with me. Sailing along at 30-31 he might have had three lengths whenever he chose to take it, but he preferred to sit and watch me.

“He should have known better. I was an old bird, and he considered I had shot my bolt years ago. I tried a short spurt and



## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



2005 British Rowing Almanack

### Great Britain Eight

Leander Club "Old Crocks"

1908 Olympic Champions, Henley

Rear: 3 **B.C. Johnstone** 177 lb. 80 kg, 6 **R.H. Sanderson** 181 lb. 82 kg,

7 **R.B. Etherington-Smith** 179 lb. 81 kg, 2 **F.S. Kelly** 168 lb. 76 kg, Bow **A.C. Gladstone** 160½ lb. 73 kg

Seated: 5 **C.D. Burnell** 196 lb. 89 kg, 4 **Guy Nickalls** 173 lb. 78 kg

Front: **G.S. Maclagan** 117 lb. 53 kg, **H.C. Bucknall** 162 lb. 73 kg

made up a quarter of a length, passing the three-quarter mile mark still a good half-length to the bad. Just before the mile I made a final and grand attack, from 35 I rushed up to 38 as quickly and suddenly as I could. Magnificently backed up by Ethel [3-seat R.B. Etherington-Smith] and the crew and gaining new confidence as we drew up on them, we went suddenly 'berserk' and led them by six feet at the mile, and half a length at the Isthmian.

"We were still spurting at top speed, but our strength was all spent, and without attempting any sensational spurt at all or raising his stroke much above 32, Ronny began to come up again. Of course he was

playing with us. He was ahead of us at the crew's enclosure and led us a foot or two at the bottom of the stand, raising his rating comparatively little for the row in.

"I got up to 40 and wobbled over the line only two feet ahead. The race was won on pure bluff."<sup>986</sup>

In 1907, Guy won the Stewards' again, this time for Magdalen College, this time by three lengths.

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<sup>986</sup> G. Nickalls, *Pudding*, pp. 188-9

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

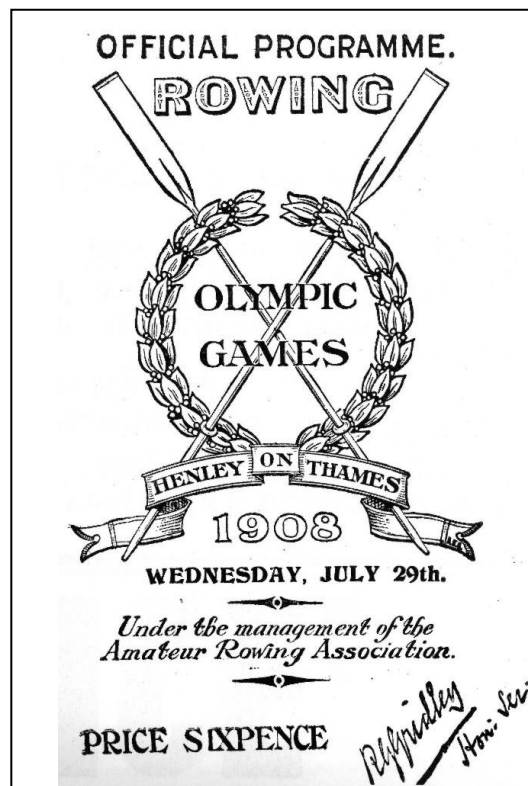
### The Old Crocks

At nearly forty-one years old, Nickalls understandably decided to retire for good after Henley in 1907 . . . but then he received a letter from the British Olympic Committee inviting him to try out for the **1908** London Olympics to be held at Henley. “His last race was in 1908 with ‘**the Old Crocks,**’ the cream of twenty years of Orthodoxy,<sup>987</sup> who were called out to represent their country and win the Olympic eights at Henley.”<sup>988</sup>

**Page:** “The Olympic Games were still in an embryonic stage, and only eight nations took part in the rowing events, partly because the ARA insisted on applying their strict amateur definition, so that absentees included the United States, France, Holland and Switzerland, and Italy entered only a sculler.”<sup>989</sup>

Even without the presence of Jack Beresford, Sr.,<sup>990</sup> the 1908 Olympics was turning out to be a bit of a geriatric event for British rowers. Forty-year-old **Harry Blackstaffe** (1868-1951), 150 lb. 68 kg, was entered in the single.

Historian **Göran Buckhorn:** “Harry ‘Blackie’ Blackstaffe (1868-1951) began to row for Vesta R.C. in Putney in 1891 when he was 23 years old. In the beginning, he had a problem being recognized as an amateur as he was working in the meat trade, but he competed ten times in the Wingfields – the first time in 1897 – becoming English champion on five of those occasions. At the end of the 1890s, Blackie raced with success at international regattas



Wikipedia

### 1908 Olympic Games, London

abroad, [winning the Holland Beker<sup>991</sup>] in 1899.

“In 1897, Blackie reached the final in the Diamond Challenge Sculls for the first of three occasions [losing to the American Ned Ten Eyck<sup>992</sup>] before finally winning in 1906. Two years later, Blackie beat Alexander McCulloch of Leander Club to win Olympic Gold.”<sup>993</sup> He was three days past his fortieth birthday.

The Leander Club entry in the eights was one of two British entries. They were a group of eight outstanding but decidedly

<sup>987</sup> actually post-Fairbairn Golden Age Classical Technique.

<sup>988</sup> Mendenhall, *Harvard-Yale*, p. 282

<sup>989</sup> Page, p. 47

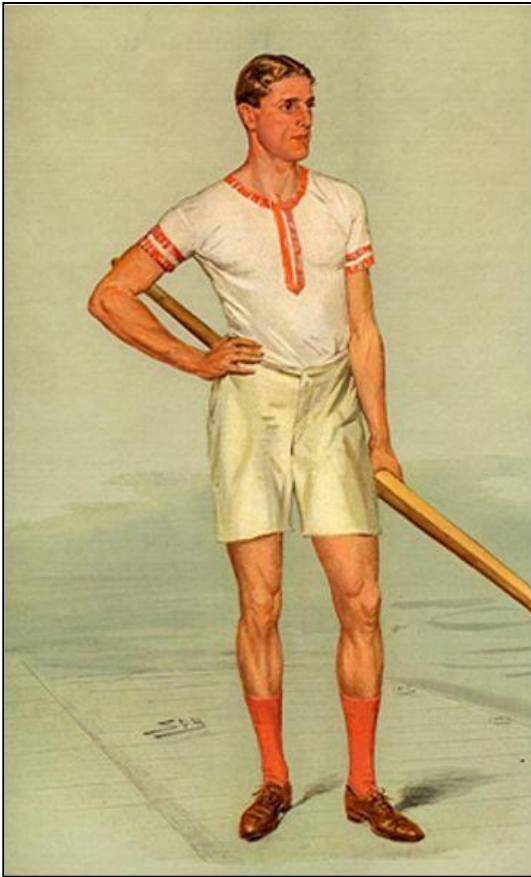
<sup>990</sup> See Chapter 23.

<sup>991</sup> See Chapter 72.

<sup>992</sup> See Chapter 41.

<sup>993</sup> Göran R. Buckhorn, *Three Men in a Boat, Rowing & Regatta*, August/September 2009, p. 54

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



*Vanity Fair*, August 5, 1908

**R.B. "Ethel" Etherington-Smith**  
Captain of the Old Cocks

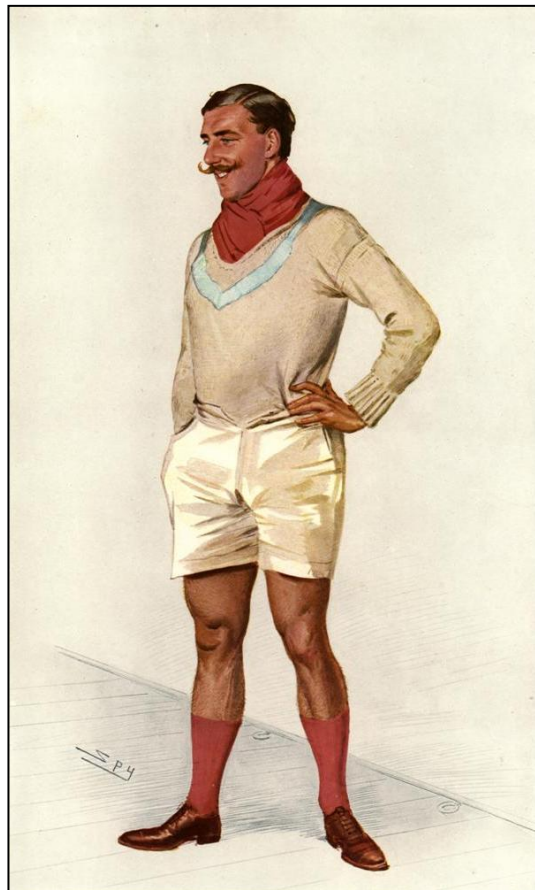
"elderly" Oxbridgians with a total of twenty-nine Boat Race appearances between them:

Bow <b>A.C. Gladstone</b>	Oxford 1906-9
2 <b>F.S. Kelly</b>	Oxford 1903
3 <b>B.C. Johnstone</b>	Cambridge 1904-7
4 <b>Guy Nickalls</b>	Oxford 1887-91
5 <b>C.D. Burnell</b>	Oxford 1895-98
6 <b>R.H. Sanderson</b>	Cambridge 1899-1900
7 <b>R.B. Etherington-Smith</b>	Cambridge 1898-1900
Stroke <b>H.C. Bucknall</b>	Oxford 1905-7
Coxswain <b>G.S. Maclagan</b>	Oxford 1899-1902

Incidentally, only Sanderson from Harrow, a non-rowing school, and Etherington-Smith from Repton were *not* Old Etonians!

The two oldest members of the crew, **C.D. Burnell** (1876-1969), Oxford '98,<sup>994</sup> in his 30s, and **Guy Nickalls** (1866-1935), Oxford '91, almost 42 and still to this day the oldest ever British Olympic Gold Medalist,<sup>995</sup> were given chairs to sit on during the team picture.<sup>996</sup>

Guy's son, **Gully Nickalls**: "To give some idea of the variation in age, my father, who was then in his forty-[second] year, had rowed his first race at Henley before the



*Vanity Fair*, July 3, 1907

**B.C. "Bush" Johnstone**  
3-seat on the Old Cocks

<sup>994</sup> See Chapter 17.

<sup>995</sup> [www.bosonmedia.co.uk](http://www.bosonmedia.co.uk)

<sup>996</sup> Both men would have sons medal for Great Britain in the Olympics. For the story of the younger Burnell, see Chapters 17 and 77.

## THE SPORT OF ROWING



Geo. Bushell & Son, Henley-on-Thames

### 1908 Olympic Eights Final

Henley

1 Leander Club 7:52, 2 Société Royale de Sport Nautique de Gand

stroke of his crew – one **‘Togo’ Bucknall**<sup>997</sup> – was born.<sup>998</sup>

“They practiced for some months of hard work on the river, and were able to show the younger generation of oarsmen how an eight-oar should be rowed. The crew became a magnificent combination and, in spite of their weight and long stroke, could start at 42 a minute and average 36 to 38 over the course.”<sup>999</sup>

**Colin Porter**, British rower and coach during the 1950s,<sup>1000</sup> admired the strenuous

training the crew put in. He quoted Guy Nickalls from his autobiography: “We paddled in one piece from Putney to Kew Bridge [5.6 mi. 9 km], and rowed and paddled alternatively all the way home in one piece, no matter which way or how fast the tide was running or what was the state of the tide.’

“They did this every night for five days a week, and the distance involved is exactly eleven miles.”<sup>1001</sup>

Coached by **Rudie Lehmann**, Leander’s main competition would come from 1906 and 1907 Grand Challenge Cup

<sup>997</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>998</sup> G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbow*, p. 142

<sup>999</sup> Keith Osbourne, *The Pathway of Progress, 2005 British Rowing Almanack and ARA Yearbook*, ARA, London, 2005, p. 254

<sup>1000</sup> See Chapter 78.

<sup>1001</sup> Porter, *Rowing to Win*, pp. 151-2

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS

winner **Société Royale de Sport Nautique de Gand** from Ghent, Belgium.<sup>1002</sup>

**Nickalls:** “We drew Hungary in the first heat and paddled after the top of the Island. In the next heat, Canada made a better show. They started at 43 and never got much below 40 at any point of the course. We started at 41, and continuing at a level 36 we were from a length to a length and three-quarters ahead all the way up the course. After the Henley Regatta three-quarter mark, we let the stroke down to 34 and paddled in firmly, easy winners.

“In the final, we met the redoubtable Belgian crew, the terror of the then modern English oarsman, the crew who had beaten the famous Cambridge crowd [the second of the two 1908 British Olympic Eights entries] more easily than even we veterans had expected.

“We were known to one and all as ‘**the Old Crocks.**’ I may say our style was admitted to be of the best, but would-be wiseacres shook their heads knowingly.

“‘Wait ‘til the Belgians press them.’

“Well, I had never been beaten by either a colonial or a foreigner, and I certainly wasn’t going to be in my old age, and this my absolutely last race.

“The start was beautifully level; they did 43 and we a long, crisp 42. I had never felt the like of it, and never in my life had I felt like galloping at full tilt the whole distance.

“We had a quarter of a length lead at the end of a minute, and letting the stroke drop to 38, led by half a length at the end of two minutes. At the second signal box, we led by three-quarters of a length, rowing 37. Cockie [coxswain G.S. Maclagan] had warned us that unless absolutely necessary, he was not going to ask for more than one 10, and that we were to let ourselves go and give it good and strong.

“The psychological moment had arrived. Cockie’s clear voice rang out immediately

after the Belgians’ great spurt at Remenham Farm had subsided.

“‘Now then, Leander, we’ll have our ten strokes and let them know it! One – ‘

“The boat fairly leapt out of the water, up to 38 again. We fairly sang along, cleared them at once and began sailing away. [Stroke-seat Togo] Bucknall dropped to 36 again. The race was over. We had them beat. I was all for rowing in at 40, but Cockie looked back.

“‘Take it easy and keep together, Leander,’ shouted he, and we swung over the line easy winners by more than two lengths in record time.”<sup>1003</sup>

**Gully Nickalls**, nine years old when he watched the race from shore: “There was the nervous tension prior to the start, the sickening anxiety during the race as my mother, through her field glasses, scanned the signal boxes bordering the course which indicated the relative positions of the crews. The glimmerings of hope when we learnt that Leander had taken the lead, and the glorious, almost hysterical relief when they rowed in comparatively easy winners.”<sup>1004</sup>

### The Impact of the Old Crocks

By 1908, English Orthodoxy had been in decline for more than a decade, and the recruitment and success of the Old Crocks was sufficient evidence that contemporary British rowers were merely a shadow of their predecessors. The results of the 1908 Olympics prompted a thorough re-evaluation of the direction of British rowing.

On the day after the Olympic final, *The Times* of London published a lengthy and quite knowledgeable article: “The special importance and interest of yesterday’s racing lay in the battle of styles presented in the chief event of the day – the final of the

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<sup>1002</sup> See Chapter 72.

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<sup>1003</sup> Nickalls & Mallam, pp. 203-4

<sup>1004</sup> G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbow*, p. 143

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

Eights between the Belgians and Leander. If the Belgians had proved successful, it would have revolutionized our ideas of rowing, and a new style – a short stroke style<sup>1005</sup> – would have had to be taught throughout the country.

“Fortunately, Leander saved the situation, and their decisive victory should put an end once and for all to the doubts as to the effectiveness of the English methods, which have been widely circulated since the second Belgian victory in the ‘Grand’ last year.”<sup>1006</sup>

Club Nautique de Gand’s wins in the Grand in 1906 and 1907 had come a decade after the American invasion of Henley by Cornell, Yale and Pennsylvania,<sup>1007</sup> but this time a foreign crew had actually won. What set all these foreign crews apart? Long slides, lack of long English Orthodox body swing and a heavier load.

*The Times* of London published a long commentary putting the race into historical perspective: “It must be remembered that the English style has not been a thing of a few years’ growth; it has been handed down for three-quarters of a century. It is true that the invention of the sliding seat thirty odd years back caused some development of ancient principles; but the old principles were still adhered to, and were only amplified to fit new conditions.

“Some of our earliest rowing records tell of the time when the advantage of the long over the short stroke was definitely proved and finally admitted [the era of **Egan and Shadwell**]; and yet, curiously enough, the foreign crews that have come over to England from time to time have invariably been exponents of what is, according to our

notions, a short stroke style. [The Belgian technique featured shorter body angle forward and shorter layback on longer slides. They rowed higher ratings than their English Orthodox contemporaries but were *not* shorter in the water, a nuance unappreciated by British critics. See below.] This is probably due to the fact that all foreign oarsmanship had its beginnings in the days subsequent to the invention of the sliding seat. The shortness of stroke of these foreign crews is almost always due to a lack of swing, whereas long swing is regarded as the first essential of good English rowing, an article of faith handed down to us from the time of the fixed seat.

“Over the long course, such as that between Putney and Mortlake, it is hardly credible that a crew which did not swing would have a chance of victory; but the recent Belgian successes have raised some doubt as to the effectiveness over a short course. This doubt, it is now to be hoped, has been put finally to rest; for Leander’s race in yesterday’s race did not win merely through superior staying power, but had the pace of their opponents from the very first stroke.

“Although very short in the water [Not true.], the Belgians not only raced pluckily, but showed in some respects good form.”<sup>1008</sup> Their wrist work at the finish is very smart and effective, the movement of the bodies forward very steady, and the stroke in the water, for all its shortness, is driven through tremendously hard and clean. These merits account for their undoubted pace; for it must be remembered that it took a very good crew to beat them, a crew that not only shared in a great degree these characteristics, but added to them the advantage of a long swing.

“There is no question that this Leander eight is one of the finest – many think the finest – that ever rowed. It was composed of veteran oarsmen who have taken the greatest

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<sup>1005</sup> See Chapter 72.

<sup>1006</sup> The Olympic Regatta, Victory of Leander,  
*The Times* of London, August 1, 1908, p. 13

<sup>1007</sup> See Chapters 32, 34 and 37.

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<sup>1008</sup> See Chapter 72.

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



G.O. Nickalls

### 1895 Stewards' Challenge Cup Winners

London Rowing Club

3 **Vivian Nickalls** 176 lb. 80 kg, 2 **H.W. Stout** 158 lb. 72 kg,  
Bow **Stuart Little** 151 lb. 69 kg, Stroke **Guy Nickalls** 172 lb. 78 kg

pains for months past to get themselves into condition for this regatta. Their action has not only saved the credit of the country, but has very possibly saved English oarsmanship from the degeneracy that threatened it. It is to be hoped that many of the young generation of Oxford and Cambridge rowing men have watched this Leander eight, and will profit by the

example that has been given them of good oarsmanship.

“Unless they have done so, our rowing supremacy is still in danger. It can be barely doubted that neither Oxford nor Cambridge, nor perhaps the two Universities combined, could produce a crew today able to beat the Belgian eight; for present-day oarsmen are certainly inferior to the generations which

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

preceded them, and the fact that until now they have never seen really good rowing has probably helped to prevent their improvement. Until this improvement takes place, we shall still have to depend on our old oarsmen to defeat a good foreign crew, and men even of the finest physique cannot go on rowing forever.”<sup>1009</sup>

This is an extraordinarily long and passionate editorial from London’s flagship newspaper. British Rowing was serious business at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

It is interesting to note that the writer noted that the then-current generation of English Orthodox rowers could not compare with the previous generation, many of whom actually rowed the post-Fairbairn Golden Age Classical Technique!

### Vivian Nickalls

Of the three great rowers in the Nickalls clan, **Vivian Nickalls** (1871-1947), who never rowed in the Olympics, is now too often overlooked. Guy Nickalls had been 2<sup>nd</sup> Captain of the Boats at Eton in 1886. His younger brother, Vivian, was Captain of the Boats in 1890, and when he followed Guy to Magdalen College, Oxford the following year, he got to row right behind him in the winning 1891 Oxford Blue Boat. Vivian won the Diamond Sculls as well that year. He won the Wingfield Sculls in ‘92, ‘94 and ‘95.

**Guy Nickalls** described his brother as follows: “Vivian Nickalls, for a long man, was a fine sculler, handicapped by an awkward finish and handicapped also by the fact that he never entirely gave his time up to sculling only – his chief characteristic being a fine, healthy, long body swing.”<sup>1010</sup>



U. of P. I. A.

**Vivian Nickalls**, 1913, University of Pennsylvania Coach

Rowing for Leander, Magdalen and later London Rowing Club, Vivian shared victories with his brother in the Grand Challenge Cup in 1891, the Steward’s Cup in ‘92, ‘95 and ‘96, and the Silver Goblets in

<sup>1009</sup> The Olympic Regatta, Victory of Leander, *The Times* of London, August 1, 1908, p. 13

<sup>1010</sup> *Isthmian Rowing*, p. 174



## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS

'94, '95 and '96. In '92 and '93, he also won the Goblets with former Eton and Oxford teammate **W.A.L. Fletcher**.

Had Vivian Nickalls not stayed retired after 1896, he might have joined his brother in the Old Cocks.

During the 1908 Olympics, Vivian was coaching in the United States. He spent five years at Detroit Boat Club and two more at the University of Pennsylvania before returning to defend his country in 1914. Guy would also coach briefly at Yale University just prior to World War I.<sup>1011</sup>

Both brothers later wrote amusing memoirs, Vivian in 1932, Guy's published posthumously in 1939 by his son, Gully, who would write his own autobiography in 1974.

### Gully Nickalls

Rowing at Eton has always been a family affair. Altogether, six members of the Nickalls clan rowed for Eton. Three went on to win the Boat Race, with Guy's son Gully joining his father and uncle as Oxford Blues.

In his memoir, **Guy Oliver "Gully" Nickalls, Jr.** (1899-1974) wrote that he was hooked on rowing while watching from the Umpire's launch as his father competed in the 1905 Silver Goblets.<sup>1012</sup>

**Gully:** "At the age of five or six I knew how to handle an oar, but I had to wait for a year or so to experience the thrill of propelling a light boat. Up to that time my rowing had been done in a gig, a dinghy or one of those monstrous old craft known as a 'randan.'

"It was then that I had my first experience of sculling in a whiff. In a few strokes I had found my balance, and for the first time I took a stroke with all my power.

It was a glorious sensation. The boat responded and sped on its way. Sheer ecstasy.

"I knew from that moment in so far as it was possible, I was determined to excel."<sup>1013</sup>

At Eton, as a resident of Mr. De Havilland's<sup>1014</sup> House, Gully began as coxswain of his House Four in 1913. With Gully still coxing, they placed third the following year. With an oar in his hand, he also placed second in Lower Boy Pulling.

He moved to bow in Mr. de Havilland's Junior House Four in 1915. By 1916, he was 3 in the winning House Four, the Dark Blue Trial Eight and the Eton second eight which defeated Beaumont.

**Gully:** "I failed to make the [first] eight, and although I was included in the second eight I was bitterly disappointed. Life became a bleak wasteland in spite of my being in the winning House Four, which gained a two-foot victory over a crew which included three members of the first eight."<sup>1015</sup>

In 1917, Gully was Captain of the *Prince of Wales* in the June 4<sup>th</sup> Procession of Boats, stroked the winning House Four and won the School Pulling. His pair partner beat him to second in School Sculling, but he rowed 7 in the First VIII that beat Shrewsbury. After that, the Great War intervened, and Gully spent time in the trenches in Salonika, Greece.

When Gully returned to rowing after the war in 1920, he and **Richard Saville Clement Lucas** won the university pairs at Oxford and the Goblets at Henley. Back in 1914, Lucas had rowed 3 in the de Havilland House Four which Gully had coxed.

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<sup>1011</sup> See Chapter 42.

<sup>1012</sup> G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbow*, p. 9

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<sup>1013</sup> G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbow*, pp. 144-5

<sup>1014</sup> See Chapter 16.

<sup>1015</sup> G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbow*, p. 146

## THE SPORT OF ROWING



G.O. Nickalls

### Magdalen College, Oxford

1920, 1922 Silver Goblets and Nickalls Cup Winners

Bow **Gully Nickalls**, 167 lb. 76 kg, Stroke **R.S.C. Lucas**, 188 lb. 86 kg

The full name of the Goblets trophy is actually the **Silver Goblets & Nickalls' Challenge Cup**.

**Gully Nickalls:** "By the way, to those who wonder why the trophy for the Henley pair-oared event bears my name, I should explain that there was no Challenge Cup for the event until my grandfather presented one in 1896 to commemorate the fact that his sons Guy and Vivian had, either with another partner or together, won the event for the previous six years. Altogether, my surname appears on the silver plaques on the basis of this Challenge Cup no less than thirteen times."<sup>1016</sup>

"[Beginning in 1920,] I had more than my fair share of success. In the next nine years, in addition to minor victories, I was President of the Oxford crew when it won in 1923. While at Henley, I created a record

by being in the winning Grand Challenge Cup crew on no less than seven occasions. With R.S.C. Lucas, I had two Goblet victories, and in 1928 rowing for the Thames Rowing Club I was successful in the Stewards' Fours – my last race at Henley, in which we got home by the narrow margin of one foot. In the twenty-four eight-oared races I rowed over the Henley course, the crew in which I was rowing were beaten on only two occasions."<sup>1017</sup>

### 1920

Turning to Gully's international exploits, during the Olympic year of 1920, his Magdalen College eight went Head of the River and won the Grand Challenge Cup, beating Leander Club in a walk by two

<sup>1016</sup> G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbow*, p. 140

<sup>1017</sup> G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbow*, p. 147

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS

lengths in the final. With Nickalls at 7, Magdalen was stroked by **Ewart “Dink” Horsfall** (1892-1974), 1912 Olympic Gold Medalist returning to the sport after winning the Distinguished Flying Cross as a fighter pilot in World War I.<sup>1018</sup> The Magdalen eight seemed to be a natural selection to represent Great Britain in that summer’s Olympics.

**Gully**: “At the time there was what amounted to a tacit understanding that, when it came to international representation, a Leander crew should be picked. What guided the authorities in this particular piece of folly I have never been able to understand, except perhaps that a Leander crew had been successful in the eight-oared Olympic events of 1908 and 1912.

“On this occasion, they took five men from the Magdalen crew and called upon three Leander men to, in their opinion, ‘strengthen’ us.”<sup>1019</sup>

*The Times*, describing the original Magdalen lineup at Henley: “There were six good oarsmen in the boat, and the two bow oars [H.C. Irvine 10st. 12lb. 69 kg and B.L. Bathurst 10st. 11lb. 68 kg] will improve with experience.”<sup>1020</sup>

In fact, both men were far lighter than their eventual Leander replacements, **S.E. Swann** and **Ralph Shove**, and neither would ever win their Blues.

**Gully**: “Not content with this, the selectors made the captain of Leander the captain of the newly formed crew.<sup>1021</sup> This was a piece of unforgivable stupidity bound to lead to friction, as indeed it did.”<sup>1022</sup>

(As an historic aside, the choice between selecting intact crews or composite crews will continue to bedevil Olympic efforts on



*Vanity Fair*, April 3, 1912

### S.E. “Cygnet” Swann

Leander bow-seat, 1920 British Eight

The artist, known only as “WH.,” painted three portraits for *Vanity Fair*, all in 1912.

both sides of the Atlantic for at least another half century.)

Interestingly, the selectors also changed the coach from **C.D. Burnell**,<sup>1023</sup> <sup>1024</sup> who prepared the Magdalen eight for Henley, to **C.M. Pitman**,<sup>1025</sup> <sup>1026</sup> who took over the composite eight for the final weeks before the Olympic regatta. On this change, Gully

<sup>1018</sup> Saint Sing, *The Wonder Crew*, p. 156

<sup>1019</sup> G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbow*, pp. 82-3

<sup>1020</sup> A Wet Henley – Five Oxford Victories – Fine Oarsmen from Magdalen, *The Times* of London, July 5, 1920

<sup>1021</sup> **Ralph Shove** in the 2-seat.

<sup>1022</sup> G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbow*, pp. 82-3

<sup>1023</sup> See Chapter 17.

<sup>1024</sup> A Wet Henley – Five Oxford Victories – Fine Oarsmen from Magdalen, *The Times* of London, July 5, 1920

<sup>1025</sup> See Chapter 15.

<sup>1026</sup> The Leander Crew at Henley, *The Times* of London, August 16, 1920

## THE SPORT OF ROWING



Tommy Jacomini

**1920 Magdalen/Leander Men's Eight**  
Olympic Silver Medal, Willebroek Canal  
1 USA 6:02.6, GBR 6:05.8

Bow "Cygnet" Swann 11st. 7lb. 73 kg, 2 Ralph Shove 12st. 5lb. 78 kg,  
3 Sebastian Earl 12st. 6lb. 79 kg, 4 John Campbell 13st. 5lb. 85 kg,  
5 Walter James 13st. 7lb. 86 kg, 6 Richard Lucas 13st. 6lb. 85 kg,  
7 Gully Nickalls 11st. 13lb. 76 kg, Stroke Ewart "Dink" Horsfall 11st. 13lb. 76 kg,  
Coxswain Robin Johnstone

Stroke, 7, 6, 5, and 3 were from **Magdalen College**, the 1920 **Grand Challenge Cup** winners.

Bow, 2 and coxswain were from **Leander Club**, 4 from **Cambridge University**.

Nickalls and Lucas also won the **Silver Goblets and Nickalls Challenge Cup** in 1920.

Earl, James and Horsfall also won the 1920 **Stewards' Challenge Cup**.

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS

was silent, but coaching from several consecutive coaches was by then already the norm with Boat Race crews and throughout British rowing, the presumption being that no one gentleman could volunteer for more than a few weeks at a time.

**Haig-Thomas & Nicholson:** “Therefore, since a crew will normally have three or even four different coaches during its training period, the need for uniformity of approach and method is greater.”<sup>1027</sup>

**Pitman:** “English amateur rowing has always been a form of sport which can be indulged in without unduly interfering with a man’s ordinary school, university or business career. The Leander crew consisted of six University men, a barrister and a clergyman, who devoted five weeks of their holiday to training. In form and in pace, they were as fine a crew as ever sat in a boat.”<sup>1028</sup>

**Gully:** “[The Magdalen eight] was the fastest crew in which I ever had the privilege of performing. My best chance of ever winning a Gold Medal. Had we been allowed to remain as a college crew we might easily have done it.”<sup>1029</sup>

The 1920 Magdalen/Leander composite British eight lined up in the Olympic final against a crew from the United States Naval Academy.

**Pitman:** “The Americans, with their exaggerated swing back, looked as if they had to take more out of themselves in paddling to produce the same pace as was produced by **Leander**.<sup>1030</sup> The latter, in their long, steady swing, sharp beginning and well held out finish, were perfectly together and looked the picture of what an English crew should be.”<sup>1031</sup>

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<sup>1027</sup> Haig-Thomas & Nicholson, p. 82

<sup>1028</sup> Qtd. by Page, p. 59, 60

<sup>1029</sup> G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbow*, pp. 82-3

<sup>1030</sup> Note that Pitman referred to the composite eight as “Leander.”

<sup>1031</sup> Qtd. by Page, p. 59, 60

The Americans won, coming from behind in the last 100 meters, as will be discussed at length in Chapter 51.

Gully Nickalls earned an Olympic Silver Medal to go with his father’s Gold.

### 1928

In 1927, the strongest squad in England had been Thames Rowing Club under the command of the elder **Jack Beresford**. Having missed the 1908 Olympics and then having won a Silver Medal in the 1912 Games, Jack was a strong supporter of Olympic competition. As we shall discover in Chapter 25, the younger Jack Beresford had already gained a Silver in the Olympic Singles in 1920 and a Gold in 1924. For 1928 he switched to sweep rowing, and Beresford *père* wanted to be sure that the 1928 Thames eight was as strong as possible for Beresford *filis*.

**Chris Baillieu**, English international of the 1970s:<sup>1032</sup> “There was a story my father always told. When he was in his heyday, there was this big, great thing about English traditional style. **Gully Nickalls** was a model Eton/Oxford/Magdalen traditional oar, and Steve Fairbairn wanted him in his 1928 Thames crew, so he wrote to him and said, ‘I’d like you to row in my crew because you row the way I coach.’

“Gully was the archetypal traditionalist, so ultimately what Fairbairn wanted was people who rowed with length and got onto it fast, and whether you started with a beautifully timed blade and then you learned to get quicker or whether you started with a fast blade and learned to get long, you came down to the same thing.”<sup>1033</sup>

Baillieu’s father had confused Fairbairn with the elder Beresford, but it was absolutely true that Fairbairn’s recent

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<sup>1032</sup> See Chapter 130.

<sup>1033</sup> Baillieu, personal conversation, 2008

## THE SPORT OF ROWING



Cal Boathouse

**1928 Thames Rowing Club Men's Eight**  
Olympic Silver Medal, Sloten Canal, Amsterdam  
1 USA 6:03.2, GBR 6:05.6

**Britain:** Bow **Harold West** 155 lb. 70 kg, 2 **Jack Beresford, Jr.** 5'10" 178 cm 158 lb. 72 kg,  
3 **Gordon Killick** 184 lb 83 kg, 4 **Harold Lane** 182 lb. 83 kg,  
5 **Donald Gollan** 200 lb. 91 kg, 6 **John Badcock** 173 lb. 78 kg,  
7 **Gully Nickalls** 180 lb 82 kg, Stroke **Hamish Hamilton** 146 lb. 66 kg,  
Coxswain **Arthur Sulley**

influence still remained strong at Thames R.C. in 1928.<sup>1034</sup>

In his history of Thames Rowing Club, **Freddie Page** added some details of how Gully made the switch from Leander to Thames, and they involved "**Hamish**" **Hamilton**, stroke of the 1927 Thames Grand eight which beat London by three-quarters of a length in the final at Henley.

**Page:** "After they had been beaten by Thames in 1927, Leander had asked Hamilton to stroke them in 1928, but he remained faithful to Thames and turned the tables on Leander by making it a condition of rowing for Thames that the Club got Gully Nickalls to row 7 for them. Gully agreed to this, but he was practically expelled from Leander for the move. Apparently it was all right for Leander to poach men from Thames but unforgiveable for the reverse to happen! Gully, however,

<sup>1034</sup> See Chapter 23.

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



Nickalls, *Life's a Pudding*

**Guy Nickalls**

was always quick to see where his best chance lay, and he did not regret his decision. He was soon forgiven by Leander and became their President from 1962 to 1966.”<sup>1035</sup>

There must have been another factor that recommended Gully Nickalls to Berry. Olympic medals were in the Nickalls family genealogy, just as they were for young Jack.

Thames R.C. won the 1928 Grand and qualified for the Olympics. The Olympic final in Amsterdam was a furious one, with the American crew from the **University of California** slowly driving to a length lead at the half-way point before the Thames eight began clawing back. Their stretch drive brought them back to within half a length, but that's where it ended.<sup>1036</sup>

### Rowing Family

Guy, Vivian and Gully. An improbable Olympic Gold Medal with the Old Crocks. Gully's two hard-fought Olympic Silver Medals. Ten Oxford Blues. Innumerable victories at the Henley Royal Regatta. A cup at Henley named after them. Surely the most impressive set of rowing family accomplishments in British history . . . at least up to that time.

### R.I.P.

With twenty-three wins in his long career, Guy Nickalls was the most successful oarsman in Henley history. After witnessing Ruderclub Zürich win the Grand and the Stewards in 1936, Guy Nickalls was heard to remark, “I have now seen perfect rowing and can die in peace.”

He was killed in a car crash on the way home from the 1936 regatta.<sup>1037</sup>

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<sup>1036</sup> See Chapter 25 for a detailed account of the progression of the 1928 races. See Chapter 54 for a detailed account from the point of view of the American crew from the University of California.

<sup>1037</sup> Edwards, p. 185

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<sup>1035</sup> Page, p. 77

# THE SPORT OF ROWING

## 25. Young Jack Beresford

1920 – 1924 – 1928 – 1932 – 1936 – 1939

*R.I.P. Steve Fairbairn*

**Young Jack Beresford** (1899-1977), “was torn at Bedford School between his father’s beloved rowing (he stroked the VIII) and rugby (he captained the first XV).”<sup>1038</sup> When he entered the armed forces during World War I, “he was a prospective England Rugby International,”<sup>1039</sup> “but a leg wound ruled out rugby. Dinghy rowing off the Cornish coast during his rehabilitation did wonders for his strength.”<sup>1040</sup>

After the war, “Beresford followed his father’s example and joined Thames Rowing Club in 1919.”<sup>1041</sup>

Young Jack’s arrival at Thames coincided with that of **Steve Fairbairn** and his son, Ian.<sup>1042</sup>

### 1920: A Second Beresford Olympic Silver Medal

“From the outset, [the younger Jack Beresford] displayed the brilliance of a winner. He won the Wingfield Sculls, the Amateur sculling championship of Great Britain, from 1920 to 1926,”<sup>1043</sup> this despite

the fact that he was not large man, 5’10” 1.78m, 154 lb. 70kg.<sup>1044</sup>

“In 1920, at the age of only 21, he won the first of his Diamond Sculls and was selected for the Antwerp Olympics. In the final, he met America’s **Jack Kelly**,<sup>1045</sup> who won by a second, still [as of 2000] the tightest margin in the event’s history,<sup>1046</sup> in a battle that left both men too exhausted to shake hands.”<sup>1047</sup>

Journalist and historian **Geoffrey Page**: “Beresford had a slight lead at the end of one minute and held it until the last 100 meters. Neither man cracked, but the 6 foot 5 inch American, weighing over 14 stone against Beresford’s 11 st 4 lb,<sup>1048</sup> and at 30 years of age Beresford’s senior by ten years, proved to have that vital bit of extra strength and won by 1 second.”<sup>1049</sup>

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<sup>1038</sup> Nick Mason, *At His Fifth Olympics, Jack was the Master*, Sept. 22, 2000, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

<sup>1039</sup> Keith Osbourne, *The Pathway of Progress, 2005 British Rowing Almanack and ARA Yearbook*, ARA, London, 2005, p. 255

<sup>1040</sup> Nick Mason, op cit.

<sup>1041</sup> [www.english-heritage.org](http://www.english-heritage.org)

<sup>1042</sup> See Chapter 23.

<sup>1043</sup> [www.english-heritage.org](http://www.english-heritage.org)

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<sup>1044</sup> *Hero of the Past: Jack Beresford*, *World Rowing Magazine*, autumn-winter 2006, p. 6 lists his weight as 154 lb. The 1920 Henley program listed him as 158 lb. 72 kg.

<sup>1045</sup> See Chapter 55.

<sup>1046</sup> Since 2000, Olaf Tufte of Norway won the Gold in 2008 by 0.44 seconds over Ondrej Synek of Czech Republic. On the women’s side, Yekaterina Karsten-Khodotovich of Belarus won in 2000 by 0.01 seconds over Romyana Neykova of Bulgaria. Nekova won in 2008 by 0.44 seconds over Michelle Guerette of the USA.

<sup>1047</sup> Nick Mason, op cit.

<sup>1048</sup> Kelly was actually 6’2” 190 cm 13 st 8 lb 86 kg.

<sup>1049</sup> Page, p. 60



## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS

“‘[Beresford] was very vicious in the boat,’ said Eric Phelps, his coach for the [1936] Berlin Olympics. ‘He would give a sickly smile to the man next to him. He never knew what it was to pack up.’”

But he also epitomized the ethos of an amateur prevalent at that time.”<sup>1050</sup> Back in **1921**, “Beresford stopped in the Diamonds to wait for his opponent, the Dutchman F.E. Eyken, who had hit the booms. Eyken eventually won by a length and a half.”<sup>1051</sup>

**Geoffrey Page:** “Jack had put the word ‘gentleman’ back with ‘amateur.’”<sup>1052</sup>

In **1922**, Jack again lost in the final of the Diamonds, this time to **Walter M. Hoover** of the United States,<sup>1053</sup> who just four weeks earlier had won the **Philadelphia Challenge Cup**,<sup>1054</sup> symbolic of the world amateur sculling championship.

### 1924: The First Gold

By **1924**, Jack, Jr. had been the top rower in England for five years. That year he won his fifth consecutive Wingfield Sculls crown and his second Diamond Sculls, qualifying him to represent Great Britain in the Olympics for a second time.

The site of the rowing at the 1924 Paris Olympics was **Argenteuil**, downstream on the Seine and just northwest of Paris, best known today through several impressionist painting masterpieces by **Claude Monet**.



Musée d'Orsay, Paris

*Basin at Argenteuil*, Claude Monet, 1872

During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the infrastructure of Paris had expanded to envelope the area, but when Monet painted during the 1870s, it was way out in the countryside. By 1924, it was still rural, but also the site of several factories.

**Benjamin Spock**, 7-seat in the U.S. eight from Yale University: “The actual place for the race was some miles away from where we practiced. It was a very hot spell of weather in Paris that year, and the sewers emptied out where the race was rowed.

“It was unpleasant.”<sup>1055</sup>

In 1924, Jack Kelly chose not to defend his 1920 Olympic singles title, focusing instead on repeating in the double, so Beresford’s main competition came from the American **W. Garret Gilmore** (1895-1969)<sup>1056</sup> from Bachelors Barge Club in Philadelphia. Gilmore was a formidable opponent, the new holder of the Philadelphia

<sup>1050</sup> Hero of the Past: Jack Beresford, op cit.

<sup>1051</sup> Dodd, *Henley*, p. 129

<sup>1052</sup> Page, p. 61

<sup>1053</sup> See Chapter 55.

<sup>1054</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1055</sup> Spock, pp. 6-7

<sup>1056</sup> See Chapter 56.

## THE SPORT OF ROWING



www.topphoto.co.uk

### 1924 Olympic Singles Final

Argenteuil

1 **Jack Beresford, Jr.** GBR 7:49.2, 2 **Garret Gilmore** USA 7:54.0, 3 SUI 8:01.0, 4 AUS DNF

Challenge Cup, which he had won the year before from Walter Hoover. Gilmore was coached by Frank Muller,<sup>1057</sup> who was also Kelly's coach.

In their preliminary heat, Gilmore beat



Gaumont Pathé Newsreel PR 1924 32 2

#### **W. Garrett Gilmore**

1924 Olympic Single Sculls Silver Medalist

<sup>1057</sup> Ibid.

Beresford soundly, but young Jack won his repêchage, and the two met again in the final.

*Associated Press*: "Gilmore started poorly, trailing Beresford as well as [Josef] Schneider of Switzerland and [Ted] Bull of Australia.

"The American spurred to second place behind the Britisher at the half-way post. This effort, however, seemed to sap his strength, for he was unable to match Beresford's steady, powerful stroke over the last 500 meters and finished badly tired, with the English star pulling away."<sup>1058</sup>

"Jack Beresford led all the way into a headwind to win his first Gold Medal in single sculls in a time which was only two seconds slower than the winning double sculls."<sup>1059</sup>

"Jack won through the heady scents wafting from a perfume factory on the banks of the Seine."<sup>1060</sup>

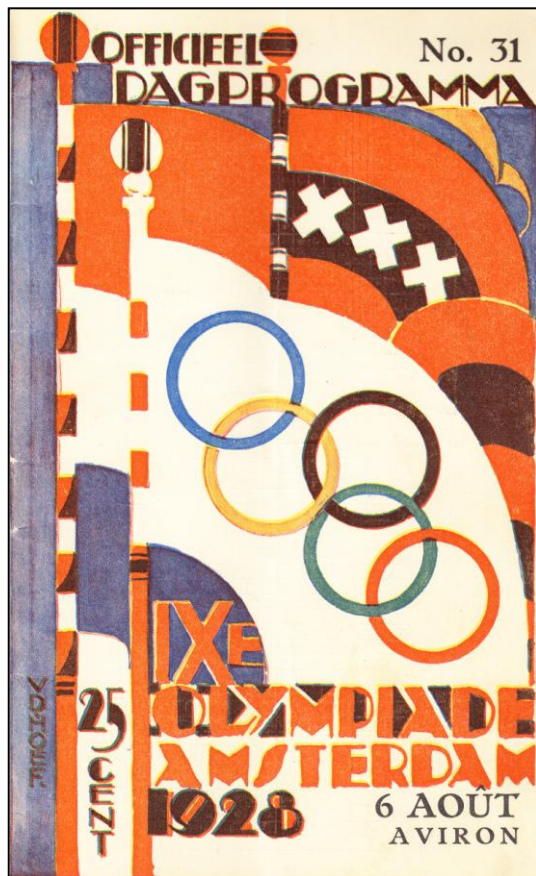
In defeating Philadelphia Challenge Cup holder Gilmore and winning the Olympic

<sup>1058</sup> *Associated Press*, July 17, 1924

<sup>1059</sup> Keith Osbourne, op cit, p. 255

<sup>1060</sup> Nick Mason, op cit.

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



Thomas E. Weil Collection

### 1928 Olympic Rowing Program

title, Beresford became the next holder of the Cup.

He retained it in **1925** on the Thames in London,<sup>1061</sup> avenging himself on Walter Hoover, who had beaten him in the final of the 1922 Diamond Sculls.

### 1928: Sweep Silver

During the next Olympic cycle, young Jack continued to win both the Wingfield Sculls and the Diamond Sculls in **1925** and **1926** before voluntarily surrendering the Philadelphia Challenge Cup and turning his attention to sweep rowing in **1927**. This was

<sup>1061</sup> [www.english-heritage.org](http://www.english-heritage.org)

the year that Steve Fairbairn had left Thames R.C. for London R.C. and was replaced by Jack Beresford, Sr.

During the Olympic year of **1928**, young Jack equaled his father's 1911 achievement by winning the Silver Goblets at Henley with **Gordon Killick** (1899-1962). He also rowed 2-seat in the Thames R.C. eight which won the Grand Challenge Cup for a second consecutive year, and in near-record time. Their win qualified them to represent Britain at the Olympics in Amsterdam.

In the boat was **Gully Nickalls**, like Jack the son of an Olympic medalist and also looking to add to his Olympic medal count after being a member of the Leander/Magdalen composite eight that came second to the U.S. Naval Academy in 1920.<sup>1062</sup>

### Technique

In 1938, Jack, Sr. had printed a description of the technique he taught in a pamphlet entitled *Metropolitan Rowing*. It traveled as far as Vancouver, British Columbia where it was distributed by their coach during the 1950s, **Frank Read**.<sup>1063</sup>

An excerpt:

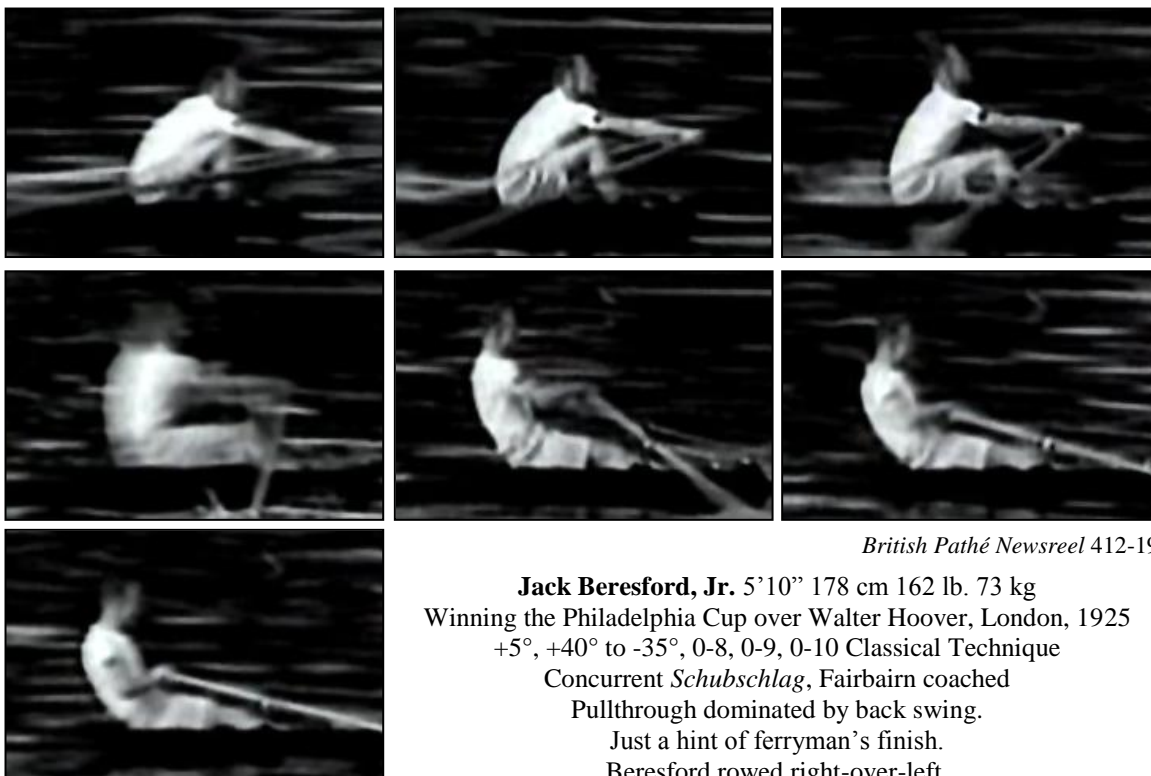
At the instantaneous beginning, the legs and back take the strain to convey the drive from the stretcher to the water . . . A slow-motion picture would show that every good oarsman does this, whatever may be his creed as to the style which he follows.

Snick the blade squarely and cleanly into the water at the instant when the power comes on. The blade must be moving against the water at the moment it goes in. Anybody knows that. Yes. But can you do it? Can you get the blade to cut in cleanly, like a hot knife cutting butter? And can you get that solid hump of water in front of the blade at the very beginning of the stroke? There is no need to turn your head to see.

<sup>1062</sup> See Chapter 51.

<sup>1063</sup> See Chapter 65.

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*British Pathé Newsreel 412-19*

**Jack Beresford, Jr.** 5'10" 178 cm 162 lb. 73 kg  
 Winning the Philadelphia Cup over Walter Hoover, London, 1925  
 +5°, +40° to -35°, 0-8, 0-9, 0-10 Classical Technique  
 Concurrent *Schubschlag*, Fairbairn coached  
 Pullthrough dominated by back swing.  
 Just a hint of ferryman's finish.  
 Beresford rowed right-over-left.

[An obvious jab at Fairbairn's teaching. See Chapter 19.] You can feel it and hear it, knowing where it should be so that it can hook on, well behind the rigger.<sup>1064</sup>

**Page:** "Like Steve, he made his oarsmen 'hear the boat sing.' Words like 'snick,' 'chump,' 'swirl,' 'feel it,' 'hook up' and 'cleanly' were the basis of his coaching."<sup>1065</sup>

### The Olympic Progression

A two-lane course and an eleven-boat field led to an interesting progression on the Sloten Canal in Amsterdam. In the first round of six heats, Great Britain beat Italy by half a length in a time of 6:22.

**Page:** "As reigning European Champions,<sup>1066</sup> the Italians could have been expected to be fast, but British oarsmen were still assessing the international standards by those of Henley, and Thames underestimated the Italians' pace. When the latter went off to mark at 52 and rowed the rest of the course at 44, Thames fully expected them to 'blow up,' but they did not, and, finishing at 50, they made Thames go flat out to beat them."<sup>1067</sup>

The U.S. beat Belgium by ten lengths in 6:21.2. The other heat winners were Canada, Poland and Germany in its first allowed appearance after World War I. Argentina had a row over.

<sup>1064</sup> Qtd. by Page, p. 122

<sup>1065</sup> Ibid, p. 122

<sup>1066</sup> Vittorino da Feltre, Società Canottieri a.s.d. from Piacenza. Their teammates would win Bronze in the coxless-four event.

<sup>1067</sup> Page, p. 78

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS

The following day there were repêchages for the five heat losers. Holland eliminated Belgium, and Italy did the same to France. Denmark drew a row over and advanced. The field was reduced from eleven to nine.

In the second round, Britain beat Poland by six lengths in 6:30.6 while the U.S. dispatched Denmark by two lengths in an unofficial 6:30. Again, the U.S. had rowed the course in a time marginally faster than the Thames R.C. entry.

The other winners were Italy, Canada and Germany. Denmark and Holland suffered their second defeats of the competition and were eliminated. The two crews with only one defeat so far raced off the following day, with Poland sending Argentina out of the regatta by two lengths. There were six crews left alive.

In the third round, Canada eliminated Poland, and the U.S. eliminated Italy by three lengths in 6:32.8. This was the same crew that Britain had beaten by only half a length days earlier.

The British lined up against Germany in the third round.

*The Times* of London: "The Thames men rowed with beautiful style and judgment. The Germans, who stroked 22 in the first half-minute to the British 21, got away with a slight lead which they maintained to half-way. Thames then spurted strongly and drew level at the 1,200 metres mark. By the 1,750 metres mark they had gained a lead of half a length, which they increased gradually till the winning post. They were by no means rowed out at the finish."<sup>1068</sup>

The winning time was 6:34.2. For the third time, the Thames eight came home slower than the Americans.

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<sup>1068</sup> The Olympic Games: Rowing, *The Times* of London, August 8, 1928

And then there were three.

In the semifinal, America beat Canada by half a length in 6:02, the fastest time of the regatta, while Britain rowed over the course in 6:23. The two finalists had been set, and the race would be a good one.

**Coach Jack Beresford, Sr.** described the final: "The English crew, though led by a length after the 750-metres signal, hung on with great tenacity and repeatedly spurted and lessened the American lead. All their efforts were answered, however."<sup>1069</sup>

**1928 British Rowing Almanack**: "From the 1,000 metre mark the Americans spurted no less than four times. Four times their coxswain rattled imperatively with the side-plates against the hull, for the last ounce to be put in; but in spite of all the efforts his men put forth, Thames came up on them."<sup>1070</sup>

**Beresford**: "At 1,500 metres the difference was three-quarters of a length. It was at this point that the English crew started their final desperate spurt. They rowed 40 all the way in, and were able to reduce the American lead to half a length.

"It is, perhaps, not known how good was the American crew that beat us in the final. Suffice it to say that their average weight was 13st.<sup>1071</sup> a man to our 12st. 2lb.<sup>1072</sup>; that they had broken the record of every course on which they had rowed in America, long and short distances alike; that they had rowed together since last January."<sup>1073</sup>

"After Henley, the Thames crew was described as one of the fastest that this country has ever produced. Since their defeat in the Olympic Games, there has been

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<sup>1069</sup> Jack Beresford, Sr., in a letter published in *The Times* of London, August 16, 1928

<sup>1070</sup> Qtd. by Page, p. 79

<sup>1071</sup> 83 kg

<sup>1072</sup> 77 kg

<sup>1073</sup> See Chapter 54 for a detailed account of the American crew from the University of California.

## THE SPORT OF ROWING



*Acme Photo, Thomas E. Weil Collection*

### 1932 Olympic Men's Coxless-Four Final

Alamitos Bay, Long Beach

1 **GBR** 6:58.2, 2 **GER** 7:03.0, 3 **ITA** 7:04.0, 4 **USA** 7:14.2

Bow **Rowland George** 178 lb 81 kg, 2 **Jack Beresford** 5'10" 178 cm 161 lb. 73 kg,

3 **Jumbo Edwards** 189 lb 86 kg, 4 **Felix Badcock** 174 lb. 79 kg

a tendency to qualify this statement. But anyone who saw their win against Germany must admit their racing powers; while the race against the Americans was an exhibition of great pluck, and incidentally, the hardest race the Americans have had, as they themselves said later."<sup>1074</sup>

Jack's third Olympic Medal was his second Silver to go with his Gold and his father's own Silver from 1912. The

Beresford family had exceeded the Nickalls family Olympic medal count,<sup>1075</sup> and they were not yet finished.

### 1932: A Second Gold

By 1932, it was no longer Jack Beresford, Jr. To the world he had become simply "Jack Beresford." He and three Thames R.C. teammates qualified to represent their country in the coxless-four at

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<sup>1074</sup> Jack Beresford, Sr., op cit.

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<sup>1075</sup> See Chapter 24.

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS

the Olympics by winning the Stewards' Cup at Henley, defeating **Berliner Ruder-Club e.V.** in the final by two lengths. The lineup was **Beresford** in bow, **Tig Tyler** in 2, **Rowland George** in 3 and fellow 1928 Eights Silver Medalist **Felix Badcock** at stroke.

Incidentally, after losing to the Thames crew at Henley, that Berliner coxless-four switched events and later that summer won Olympic Gold in the coxed-four.

The 1932 Olympic Regatta, the first ever to be held outside Europe, took place in Long Beach, California against a backdrop of oil derricks. "The racing took place with a strong cross-headwind blowing in constantly from the Pacific Ocean. This taxed the ability of crews to the utmost, but the Thames crew benefited from their Tideway experience."<sup>1076</sup>

"Bad luck hit the Thames four when the unfortunate **Tig Tyler** [168 lb. 76 kg] fell ill with influenza and could not row.

"It's a hell of a long way to go to catch flu,' commented the unhappy Tig to **Dick Phelps** who, in his first year with Thames, had been chosen as boatman for the Olympic team.

"[Hugh Robert Arthur] **Jumbo Edwards** [(1906-1972) 189 lb. 86 kg] from the pair was brought into the coxless-four at 3 to replace Tyler, George moving to bow, and Jack to 2. There is little doubt, however, that this combination was faster than the original crew."<sup>1077</sup>

"The British four gained an easy victory over the USA entry [from the Penn A.C.] in the first heat. In the final, Germany [**Mannheimer RV Amiticia**] put up a hard fight, but the British four had clear water at the end of the race, thanks to the keen determination with which J.C. Badcock stroked his crew."<sup>1078</sup>

"Tig Tyler wept unashamedly in the grandstand.

"For Thames, and especially for Jumbo, the 1932 Olympics were a triumph. The coxless-pair [Christ Church, Oxford, Bow **Jumbo Edwards** 189 lb. 86 kg, Stroke **Lewis Clive** 185 lb. 84 kg] won their event, and the four scored a resounding two and one-half length victory in their final over Germany, Italy and the USA, giving Jumbo his second Gold Medal in one day.

"It was also a personal triumph for Jack Beresford, bringing him a second Olympic Gold to add to his two Silvers."<sup>1079</sup>

But it was also a triumph for **Steve Fairbairn**. Stroke **Felix Badcock**: "In 1932, Thames were again selected to row in the Olympics held at Los Angeles, this time in the light fours,<sup>1080</sup> and with three Steve-trained men, they won the event fairly handily."<sup>1081</sup>

One of those three was Jumbo Edwards, who had been rowing for Fairbairn at London Rowing Club since 1927, as will be discussed in Chapter 78.

Steve had completed his coaching career at London R.C.<sup>1082</sup>

### R.I.P. Steve Fairbairn

Fairbairn had always been a strong believer in the benefits of distance training, saying often that "mileage makes champions." To encourage crews to train over longer distances, he developed the concept of the "head race," a long-distance race against the clock to mark the end of winter training. In 1926, he founded the **Head of the River Race** in London for men's eights, held annually on the reverse Boat Race Course from Mortlake to Putney.

<sup>1076</sup> Keith Osbourne, op cit, p. 256

<sup>1077</sup> [www.thamesrc.atics.co.uk/history](http://www.thamesrc.atics.co.uk/history)

<sup>1078</sup> British Olympic Association, p. 110

<sup>1079</sup> [www.thamesrc.atics.co.uk/history](http://www.thamesrc.atics.co.uk/history)

<sup>1080</sup> coxless-fours

<sup>1081</sup> Badcock, qtd. by *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 68

<sup>1082</sup> See Chapter 23.

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

He also donated a trophy for a head race to be held annually on the River Cam, and the **Fairbairn Cup** races are now held on the first Thursday and Friday after the end of the Michaelmas Term (typically early in December).

“By the proliferation of similar races, by his writings, and above all by his personal



wikipedia.org

Fairbairn Plaque on the  
the **Mile Post**. London

influence, he increased the popularity of rowing and has some claim to be called its greatest figure.”<sup>1083</sup>

Steve Fairbairn died in London on May 16, 1938. His ashes rest in the shadow of Jesus College Chapel in Cambridge.

“A memorial to Fairbairn is situated on the southern bank of the Thames between Putney and Hammersmith. This memorial, a

<sup>1083</sup> <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au>

stone obelisk popularly known as the **Mile Post**, is exactly one mile from the Putney end of the Championship Course. In the Boat Race and Wingfield Sculls, the Mile Post is a formal intermediate timing point, and it marks one mile from the finish of the Head of the River Race.”<sup>1084</sup>

### 1936: A Fifth Olympics

Young Jack Beresford was no longer young as he contemplated his fifth Olympics. He would be 37 by the time of the 1936 Games in Berlin.<sup>1085</sup> In **1935**, he decided to form a double with 29-year old Leslie Frank “**Dick**” **Southwood** (1906-1986), “a studious-looking London jeweler,”<sup>1086</sup> the 1932 British Olympic single sculler who had won the Wingfield Sculls in course record time in 1933.<sup>1087</sup>

*2005 British Rowing Almanack*: “With Southwood providing the horsepower at stroke and the experienced Beresford at bow, they trained for ten months and covered 2,000 miles. They raced only once before the Olympiad, but during Henley Royal Regatta in 1936 – where there was no double sculls event – they trained as hard as the crews competing and paced anyone seeking their help.

“In the last month before Berlin, they were coached by **Eric Phelps** [who was then working for a German club]. For the last three months of training, they ran a mile before breakfast, and in the final preparation ran to the top of Remenham Hill [above the rowing course at Henley]. Throughout the whole ten months, they also did thirty-five minutes ground exercises daily. Their one aim was the Gold Medal.”<sup>1088</sup>

<sup>1084</sup> Wikipedia

<sup>1085</sup> Of course, his father had been 43 when he won his own Silver Medal in the 1912 Olympics.

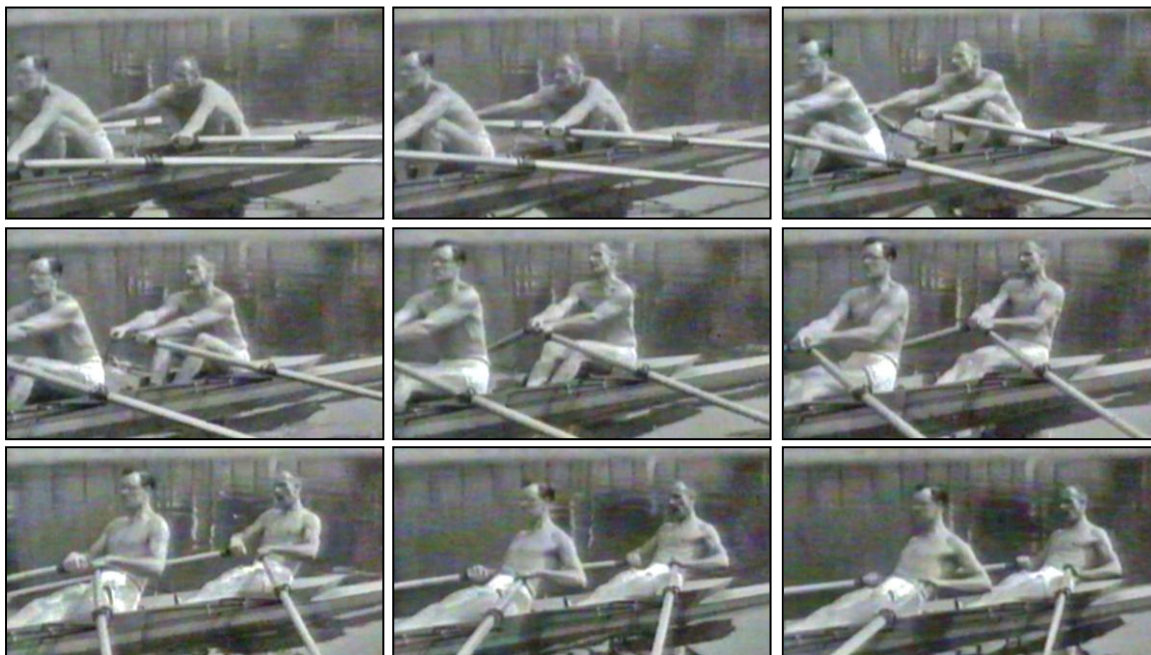
<sup>1086</sup> Nick Mason, op cit.

<sup>1087</sup> [www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes](http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes)

<sup>1088</sup> Keith Osbourne, op cit, pp. 256-7



## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



*Hooray Henley*, TSL Productions, BBC

**Thames Rowing Club Double**, in practice in 1939

1936 Olympic Champion, Berlin-Grünau

Stroke **L.F. Southwood** 188 lb, 85 kg, Bow **Jack Beresford** 163 lb, 74 kg

0°, +30° to -35°, 0-9, 0-10, 4-10 Classical Technique

Concurrent *Schubschlag*

Late arm draw, strong emphasis on back swing and send.

*The Guardian*: “In Berlin, they were too old, their boat was out of date, and the Germans were threatening to carry all before them.

“Beresford and Southwood had one trump card. Germany had relied heavily on English coaches, and one of these, **Eric Phelps**, warned the British that unless they found a lighter, more slender boat they would have no chance. Within a week, the boat was built. Within another it was tested, shipped off to Germany, and lost. A mere couple of days before the Games, it was traced to a railway siding between Hamburg and Berlin.”<sup>1089</sup>

**Geoffrey Page**: “They lost their heat to the German European Champions after

being washed by the Germans, the umpire being too far behind to do anything about it.”<sup>1090</sup>

*British Rowing Almanack*: “The next day in the repêchage the Britons raced flat out to lead Poland, France and Australia by over a length at 1,000 metres before paddling light to the finish, well ahead of their opponents.”<sup>1091</sup>

“On finals day, the German crowd, with the Führer present, were celebrating the fifth of five consecutive Gold Medals, and the home favourites, **Willy Kaidel** and **Joachim Pirsch**, showed every sign of making it six.”<sup>1092</sup>

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<sup>1090</sup> Page, p. 91

<sup>1091</sup> Keith Osbourne, op cit, pp. 256-7

<sup>1092</sup> Nick Mason, op cit.

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<sup>1089</sup> Nick Mason, op cit.

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“Both crews jumped the start, having observed that the starter, Victor de Bisschop, was using a megaphone so large that he could see nothing once he raised it to his lips.”<sup>1093</sup>

“[The Germans] rowed neck and neck with the British double for 500 metres, then eased steadily ahead to lead by a length.”<sup>1094</sup>

“Germany were one and a half lengths ahead halfway through before the Englishmen belted every stroke as hard as they could to get level.”<sup>1095</sup>

“At 1,500m, three-quarter distance, the British were pulling back. At 1,800m, the crews were level.”<sup>1096</sup>

“The Germans then wandered from their lane; Southwood shouted and Pirsch stopped rowing.”<sup>1097</sup>

*World Rowing Magazine*: “With 100m to go, Pirsch blew up and virtually stopped rowing, and Beresford and Southwood won by two lengths – ‘the sweetest race I ever rowed in,’ Beresford wrote later.”<sup>1098</sup>

**Page**: “The Olympic regattas in the 1920s had still been very much club affairs, crews competing with oars painted in club colours. With the Berlin Olympics in 1936 and the fanatical nationalism preached by Hitler, the stress of nationalism in sport suddenly increased. It was to change the face of international sport.”<sup>1099</sup>



[www.olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org)

### 1936 Thames Rowing Club Double

Olympic Champions, Langer See

Stroke **Dick Southwood**, Bow **Jack Beresford**

1 **GBR** 7:20.8, 2 **GER** 7:26.2, 3 **POL** 7:36.2, 4 **FRA**, 5 **USA**, 6 **AUS**

Adolph Hitler was watching the rowing finals from his reviewing stand at the finish line. The British double and the American eight were the only two crews to prevent a German sweep on that day on the Langer See in Berlin-Grünau.

### A Sixth Olympics?

But Jack Beresford was not finished. He and Southwood brought their double out of retirement in **1939** and in a special centenary regatta doubles event at Henley promptly dead-heated with the reigning European Champions from Canottieri Nettuno a Trieste in Italy, bow **Giorgio Scherli** and Stroke **Ettore Broschi**, who were younger and far, far heavier than the British double.<sup>1100</sup>

*The Times* of London: “Thames sculled 34½ and Italy 33 in the first minute, and the Thames pair led at once, gaining half a

<sup>1093</sup> *Hero of the Past: Jack Beresford*, op cit., p. 6

<sup>1094</sup> Nick Mason, op cit.

<sup>1095</sup> Keith Osbourne, op cit, pp. 256-7

<sup>1096</sup> Nick Mason, op cit.

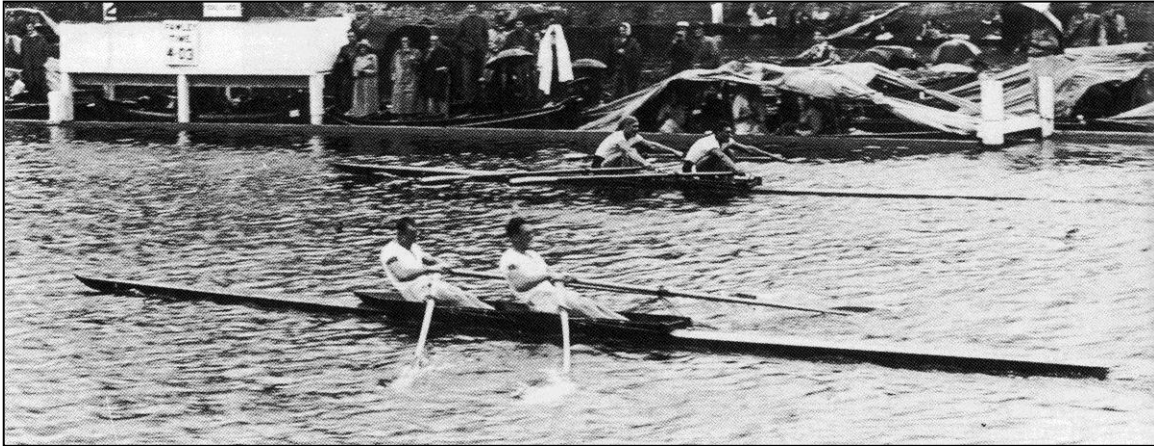
<sup>1097</sup> *Hero of the Past: Jack Beresford*, op cit., p. 6

<sup>1098</sup> Nick Mason, op cit.

<sup>1099</sup> Page, p. 89

<sup>1100</sup> [www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes](http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/athletes)

## BRITISH ROWING IN THE OLYMPICS



Burnell, *Henley Royal Regatta*

### 1939 Henley Centenary Double Sculls

Bucks: **Canottieri Nettuno a Trieste**

Bow **Giorgio Scherli**, 203 lb. 92 kg, and Stroke **Ettore Broschi**, 195 lb. 88 kg,

Berks: **Thames Rowing Club**

Bow **Jack Beresford** 163 lb. 74 kg, Stroke **L.F. Southwood** 188 lb, 85 kg,

The British spurt at the Progress Boards to catch the Italians.

Verdict: Dead Heat

length up the Island. The Italians came up fast and at the First Signal, Thames led by only a few feet. Thames were a half a length ahead at the Barrier, reached in 2min. 25sec., but the Italians spurted and took the lead at Fawley, reached in 4min. 3sec. The Italians were half a length ahead at the Mile Post and looked to be winners.”<sup>1101</sup>

**Page:** “At the last signal, it looked all over. However, Southwood worked the rate up and up, and stroke by stroke Thames closed up to catch the Italians on the line for a dead heat. The Italian bowman was very distressed, and it was decided not to re-row the race.”<sup>1102</sup>

Beresford and Southwood were preparing for the 1940 Olympics when World War II intervened.

A man who chose rowing over rugby due to an injury suffered in the First World War had his Olympic career cut short by the Second World War.

### The Beresford Legacy

Berry first rowed at Henley in 1896. He last rowed there twenty-seven years later in 1923.

Altogether, young Jack Beresford and his father participated in six Olympic Games, medaling each time, but it might have been eight had not Jack, Sr. barely missed out in 1908 and Jack, Jr. in 1940.

The rowing world changed profoundly during the years these two men rowed, but the fundamental values of athletic talent, hard work and solid technique that the father had passed on to the son were just as relevant as mid-century approached as they had been at the dawn of the century.

<sup>1101</sup> Henley Royal Regatta, *The Times* of London, July 10, 1939

<sup>1102</sup> Page, p. 94

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

*The Guardian*: “There are comparatively few pictures – still or moving – of Jack Beresford, the most accomplished oarsman in Olympic history before **Steve Redgrave** (1962- ),<sup>1103</sup> and most show him crouched over his oars winning, or having just won another race at an Olympic regatta or under the Henley sun. Few show the

stocky figure, the slightly dumpy legs supporting a broad and powerful upper body, the generous grin, high cheekbones and neatly parted blond hair.

“His racing weight was a little over 11 stone [154 lb. 70 kg].<sup>1104</sup> When Redgrave carried the British flag at Atlanta, his was a little over 16 stone [224 lb. 102 kg].”<sup>1105</sup>

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<sup>1103</sup> He won five Olympic Gold Medals in five consecutive Olympics between 1984 and 2000, an Olympic record for endurance sports. See Chapters 130 and 136.

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<sup>1104</sup> According to Henley officials, Beresford weighed in at 158 lb. 72 kg in 1920, 162 lb. 73 kg in 1925, 161 lb. 73 kg in 1932 and 163 lb. 74 kg in 1939.

<sup>1105</sup> Nick Mason, op cit.