



AQUARIUS SAILING CLUB

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CLUB
1948 TO 2008**



The clock - at the heart of the bar.

The first licence was obtained in 1952, but not before a 7am call by the constabulary to ensure all was being run satisfactorily around the club. It was at that time little more than a makeshift cupboard in one corner of the clubhouse.

Introduction

IN 1998 the club celebrated its first 50 years. In 2008 it celebrates 60 years, and what better time than to print out this outline history. It has been mooted several times, and nice to get it down while reminiscencers remain.

Most come from memories – very happy ones. Some details are from the club archives. Many thanks to George and Joan, and Bob Sumner, who supplied information, particularly relating to the early years.

It is surprising how many changes can be seen by looking at old photographs, so quite a few have been incorporated.

We look forward to the 60th anniversary reception evening, on 15 March 2008.

John Botterill



George Bray, President of the club since 1984; and Joan, Secretary; from the club officers portrait gallery

The Start

The club was formed on 28 April 1948 by Lt Col E W Mackenzie, J K (Sandy) Sanderson, and R F (Mac) McCoy, who worked for the Water Board at that time. Their main offices were in Rosebery Avenue, just to the north east of central London, at the south end of the “New River” - an artificial watercourse which brought water for north and east London from reservoirs associated with the river Lea.

They had looked at several sites, including the Water Board land at Surbiton, before settling on the land at Hampton. They had a loan of £300, partly from the Board, and partly from members, which was paid off in 1954.

The name Aquarius belonged not just to the sailing club. The Water Board’s whole sports association was known as Aquarius, and the sailing was just of many sections. It is just about the only survivor. Sunnyside is the name of what was previously a reservoir, behind the clubhouse, and also of the pumping station building half way down the drive from the road.



Lt Col Mackenzie and his wife - presenting trophies at a National 12 open meeting, 1954



Mac (R McCoy) and his wife Mackie – taken on his retiring from the club, 1983

“Mac” , an Ulsterman, was very much the driving force, and for over 30 years as Bosun, Harbourmaster, Secretary, Commodore and President. He was an expert craftsman, and kept all the early boats afloat. His wife, always known as Mackie, also has a great love of sailing, and laid the foundations of our early social activities. They retired down to the

coast at Hampshire in 1983, and the photo was taken at their leaving “do” from the club. Mac died the following year, 1984.

The photo of Lt Col Mackenzie is at a National 12 open meeting at the club in 1954 . The



regatta trophy is being presented to Staines Sailing club. This was the “Aquarius Mains” trophy – a section of London water main in elm wood, dating from the 17th century (there were in fact three identical such trophies, one of which was returned to the club in 2007, but one remains lost to this day).

Sanderson was a good sailor, and gave great encouragement in that direction.

Early Days



The first hut



Clearing the undergrowth to allow moorings on the bank, 1949

Soon there was a very small 8 foot by 6 foot clubhouse hut, and a sail locker, on the river bank, roughly on the site of the present bosun’s store to the west of the present clubhouse. The members camped on the river bank at weekends.

Bob Sumner was sailing downstream one Sunday evening in a canoe that had an Ariel

mast and a couple of segments from a parachute. Seeing people sitting outside this “garden shed”, he asked if there was any chance of joining their club. Yes, but not with that canoe. But he had finished building a 15 ft “Sharpie” at home, and so was in.

Shortly afterward, George Bray, who at that time worked for the Water Board, was introduced to the club within the first year by a colleague named Grimsdale.

There has been a continuous tradition of club boats being available for members’ use, especially when they first join. The first two, in the first year 1948, were called Aquarius 1 and Aquarius 2. The former was a 12 foot clinker built dinghy but nobody seemed to be able to identify its class, purchased for £62.50 from a Miss Saunders of Kingston. The latter was a West Wight Scow with a single lug sail, catering for the single handers, purchased for £46. With a strongish following wind, it would however dip its bow and try to imitate a submarine.

Prior to the winter of 1950/51 there was no winter storage available, so boats were taken to the Board’s works at Hammersmith, either by river or road. Whilst going downstream to Hammersmith, Mac found two undecked prototype National 12’s at the Aerial Club in Kingston, for £50 the pair. These two were widely used for match racing.

Another notable boat was Col Mackenzie’s Puffin, a 15 foot Wivenhoe One Design, which always took in much water when first launched. Being large and heavy it had to be launched at the start of each season at Platts Eyot, and was towed down quickly before it sank in the shallows as a result of the water leaking in. Once the wood was wet, after about a week, it was pumped out and the boat was fine for the season.

There was always a strong emphasis on boat building at Aquarius. It was a hobby, more than it is today. In those days there wasn’t the money to go off buying “a new dinghy”. From 1950 the club was granted use of a derelict Reidler Engine house, and adjoining corrugated iron shed on the waterworks site. These had previously housed the locomotives of the light railway which served the Hampton and Kempton Works. An old oil drum and a 4 inch iron pipe made a first class steaming box for the chimes, and a 22 foot long trestle table was set up for making the wooden masts. In all they made between half a dozen and a dozen Moths, under the supervision of Mac and Sandy. They were allocated to members by lottery, at a cost of £35 each.

As noted above, Aquarius was the name given to all the sports sections of the Metropolitan Water Board Staff Association. Public relations and publicity were realised as being vital even in those days. The club contributed articles and photographs to the staff magazine on a regular basis. A special event was held in recognition of the Board’s 50th anniversary, at which we exhibited two boats and many photos. However the hall had to be cleared immediately afterwards for a dance, so the boats had to be carried head high out through a crowded bar which had already been set up. Here is a report of it in the sailing club section in the Golden Jubilee edition of the Association’s magazine in 1955. In the second photo left to right as we view are Mac, Mackie, ? , Ron Simmons (crouching), ? , Barbara Pierce, W Dobson (Dobby), Tony James, and George Bray :

AQUARIUS SAILING CLUB

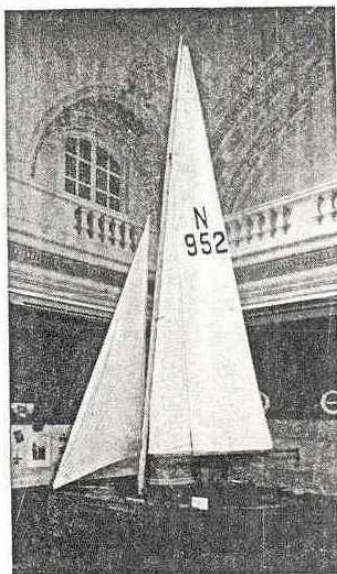
THE Sailing Club's stand in the Revenue Hall consisted of one 12-foot National Class dinghy and one British Moth Class hull.

The latter boat, made by hand in the Club's workshop at Hampton, by Mr. J. K. M. Sanderson, was a great attraction to all who were interested in small boat sailing, and proved how inexpensive this hobby can be. The numerous photographs taken by members of the Club were most interesting in capturing the happy moments of the sport and shows one of the many related activities of sailing. The science of the hobby was further illustrated by posters, models, and by the display of hand-made trophies.

The interest shown by the members of the staff attending was very gratifying to the officials of the Sailing Club. Many queries were answered, and many promises made to try out this very healthy, entertaining and useful sport. The afternoon proved the ability of the Club to put on a show in quantity and quality; and in view of the fact that this was on a reduced scale due to transportation difficulties, the effort was most satisfactory.

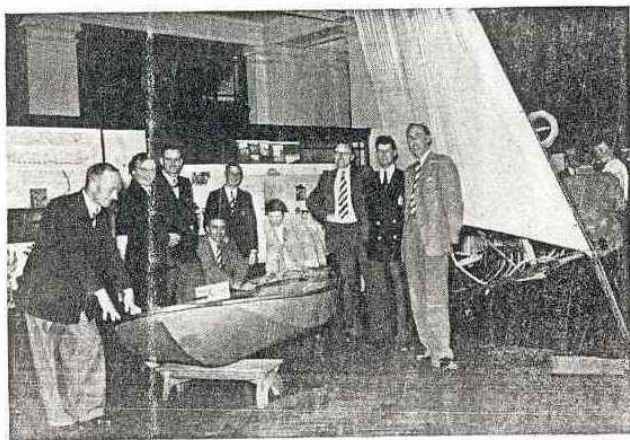
Not the least tribute was rendered by the Choral Society in "Songs for Sailors" and its Negro Spiritual invitation to "Sit on Board Little Chillun" was much appreciated as apt advertisements.

Much to the surprise of many enquirers the Club is part of the Staff Association and as such is open to all.



Twelve-foot National Class Dinghy.

—Photo by J. Holding.



The Sailing Club Stand in the Revenue Hall.

—Photo by Barratt's Photo Press Ltd.

To those who think we are only pretending to be sailors, come and see us in action at Sunnyside, Hampton.

It is interesting to note that the members of the Club were up early on the following Sunday morning to do battle with a Brightlingsea Sailing Club.

The members of the Sailing Club are indebted to the Staff Association for their continued interest and support since the inception of the Club in 1948. It is hoped that many more of the staff of the M.W.B. will be joining in this pleasant and healthy spare-time activity.

The club's own magazine, *Mainsheet*, was started in the early days, being published in covers supplied by the International Paints firm.

British Moth and National 12 seem to have been the predominant class of dinghy in the

first years. Open meetings for these were held from 1953 onwards.



National 12 open
meeting

The clubhouse develops

The clubhouse in its current position was started in 1952, being 20 feet in length, roughly as far as the dart board. It was extended by a further 10 feet in 1955, the walls having been fabricated in advance, during the previous winter. The front part of the changing rooms, and the sails corridor, a further 24 feet, were added in 1957, being at that time an open air verandah. This part is actually kinked, so as to follow the bend in the river, it is not in fact straight with the earlier parts.



The start of the clubhouse in its current
position, 1952



Extending in 1955



Further extension in 1957, at the topping out ceremony – note members standing on the roof !

The first extension to the rear, which today forms the entrance porch area, was originally the small kitchen.

This was followed by a continuation of the rear extension to form the bar in the 1960s, being fitted out by Bob Sumner and his father, and Mac.

Originally the narrow flight of steps down from the car park to the river's edge, was the only way down. The vehicular ramp was not built until the 1960's.

The extension to the west of the bar was undertaken in 1980, again by going back into the earth bank, which gave the lengthening of the kitchen, and the two toilet areas, and the shower area. But no plumbing to the toilets at first.



Nigel Knowles (the future commodore of the club in our current anniversary year) and Richard Hider, in 1980

Launching of lightweight dinghies has always been fairly easy, being fortunate with the convenience of our moorings right adjacent to the river, but in 1988 the upstream launching ramp was very much revamped, with a much gentler slope than previously. This has been improved more than once during the years since, particularly to deal with the problem of launching trolleys dropping off at its bottom end.



Rescue boats
have other
uses –
About to
transport one
half of the
new steel
ramp (1988)

Malcolm Edwards made quite an impression on the kitchen in the early 1990's, and erected the false ceiling in the main part of the clubhouse.

The new individual seating and low tables made a big improvement, and in particular proved to be more versatile. At about that time also, the start hut was moved from the top of the bank, to the patio adjacent to the river, because the sight lines had become so restricted back up at the top of the bank.

So the recent extension of the patio, by the modern team of “Bodgitt and Co”, is yet another in the long line of improvements that have been made over the decades.

Club life

Sunday has always been the day for competitive sailing, though many members, especially the retired ones, also sail during the week. In the last couple of years, Sunday lunches have further extended the club season through the winter.

Wednesday evening has been club night, around the bar, for many many years. Darts and bar billiards were quite popular at one time. In recent years there has been sailing tuition during the afternoon.

Saturday evening socials have always been popular, starting off with the traditional start of season party. We have been well looked after by a marvellous succession of social secretaries and their helpers.



A social in the clubhouse in 1985. This was prior to the installation of the false ceiling

The Jazz and Barbecue evening has long been very central to the club year. The secret when planning the club calendar was to ascertain the date of the Wimbledon fortnight, and be sure to avoid particularly the last weekend. The club regatta follows on the following day Sunday – making it a hard weekend for the social secretary and her helpers.



There has long been a Dinner and Dance at Christmas. In the early days they were held at the head office at New River Head. Later they were at venues such as the Richmond Hill hotel, and hands up who can remember seeking out the dark mansion, in the middle of a very dark Nonsuch Park. In more recent years the event has been held very successfully in our own clubhouse, with a catering firm coming in to look after us.

Membership numbers have generally been healthy over the years. A key element is the Open Day, nearly always a Saturday and Sunday, when we advertise for prospective members to come down and see us. The 1989 Open Day list for example shows 17 families leaving their details, and there was a certain Rodger Wheeler who said he lived near to Pat Halling over the river. The 1990 Open Day list shows 20 families, one of whom was a Malcolm Edwards who said he worked at Turks boatyard.

Security

In those heady pre – privatisation days, the little hut in the car park had a man in it 24 hours a day. And besides, there were few instances of troublesome youths in those days. No need for padlocks on gates.

Then inevitably came gates, and the occasional “unwelcome person” necessitated the closure of at least one of them, even when members are down at the club. This has always been a difficulty, and various telephones have been installed along the fence running round to the clubhouse.

An innovation in the 1980’s was that of electronically opening gates, these were convenient in saving you having to even get out of your car, indeed they could be operated from about 100 yards up the road, so the gates were open by the time you got to them !

For years, BT did not allow people to have their own coin box telephones. So the telephone had no coin box, just an honesty box for you to put your 4 (old) pence in. Just about at the time of their privatisation in the late 1980’s , it became possible to purchase your own payphone, and Aquarius had one of the first, supplied and installed by the then commodore Nigel Richards, which in fact continued in use until very recently. It had to be told which exchanges were local calls in order to get the cost rate correct, and the repeated re-numbering of the London and indeed the nearby 0372 (Sunbury) etc numbers played havoc. The telephone answering machine was also quite an innovation at the time, and that too survived until quite recently.

Racing

The club has always welcomed all classes of dinghies. These days, lasers are still popular, but there are very many Signets, the class favoured by the Hawker club. Enterprises and Graduates still hold their own too. Each class has a time handicap according to what is

known as the Portsmouth Yardstick. Examples for the regular club boats in the 70's and 80's are (or were, the Yardstick numbers have changed a bit in recent years) :

Laser 114
Solo 122

Enterprise 118
Gull 142

GP 14 119
Mirror 146

In each case, the time taken is multiplied by 100, divided by the Yardstick number, to give the handicap time. Other classes at the club included Skipper, Topper, and Streaker. Signets were yet to come.



Sailing stalwarts - Pat Halling (with his other hat on), Graham Thompson, and Charles Dennis (with Joan Bray)

At the Easter weekend, Easter eggs are on offer, and this entices crews out at what is very much the beginning of the season.

The club regatta is held on the Sunday, the day after the jazz and barbecue evening.



There are numerous races, including traditionally a separate one for the ladies. There is a cup for novices. And then toward the end of the afternoon, an extra special tea, including hopefully strawberries. Always a particularly nice day, usually June sunshine, and hopefully a nice wind.

The rescue boat seems to have been replaced on a frequent basis by a newer

version. Whichever one, it is always there to hurry to make sure crew are safely reunited with their dinghy, and of course to

make recommendations for the Water Rat trophy, awarded at the end of the season for the most spectacular capsized.

At the beginning of the 1990's the concept of a personal handicap was added, at first only to some of the series – some years just the morning series, some years the afternoon series. There was some opposition to this at first, but it opened the way for faces other than the real experts to win the trophies. These days, all our races are based on both the dinghy class, and personal, handicaps. The personal handicap number is simply added to (or deducted from, if minus !) the Portsmouth Number.

Another concept has been to limit the number of races to count, so that members can afford to miss a few days, without losing their chance of winning a series trophy.



A colourful line up of dinghies at the start (1991)

Pursuit Races were quite popular at one time. Hard work for the OOD, as he or she had to start each class of boat at calculated times. Then at the elapsed time (once chosen this could not be varied) , he had to note the position order of every dinghy wherever they were up and down the reach.

Club boats these days include lasers, a topper, mini sail, pico, graduate, and bosun.

The introduction of microwaves enabled hot pies at lunchtime, and Janet's were exceptionally meaty. These days a more formal tea and cakes are arranged and served during the afternoon, to further fortify before the last race.

Club members regularly attend open meetings at other clubs, and Bewl Water in East Sussex has become a firm favourite.

Sunday Racing with Sou'west

In those days, Aquarius could not rely on a good number of racers on a Sunday. Sou'west were quite a strong club, who rented an area on the island, just downstream of Aquarius. But their sailing area was not good – they faced the main channel on the south side of the island which is relatively narrow. And the tall trees on the island masked the wind. So they used to come up and share the racing with Aquarius on a Sunday. It made good companionship for racing, but the social side never existed. A new landlord of the island put their rent up substantially, and their club ceased.



Dinghies sailing past the clubhouse in 1983 - several of them Sou'West ones.

Associated Groups

Over the years, several groups have joined the club under a group membership umbrella. There was the W S Atkins group in the 1970's, introduced by Mac's son, who worked at Atkins at that time. There was South Bank Polytechnic in the late 1970's. In the 1980's members of the Hawker club joined us on a very similar basis, their enquiry being very capably answered by Malcolm Edwards.

In all cases it is very noticeable how these 3 subsequently integrated fully into the club. And all three produced commodores (John Botterill, Nigel Richards, Mike Baker, and even today Nigel Knowles). Plus other dedicated officers such as Richard Cannon, our wonderful and longest serving sailing secretary.





Mac launching the new Atkins Group Enterprise dinghy Caps Eyes, in 1977. On the left is Lionel Reuben, commodore from 1982 to 1984.

The reservoir behind the clubhouse

The bank behind the clubhouse was previously higher, about 50% higher in fact. There was no fence. In those pre Health and Safety days you used your common sense and didn't go too near the edge over there. Then one of the managers over there Cliff Young, who was actually a member of Aquarius, had the bright idea of getting some sheep and goats in to graze the bank – around all 4 sides – and in fact this worked a treat.

George Williams , harbourmaster for many years, was always saying in winter “tie your boats down”. During the high winds of the storm in November 1987 however, many dinghies were flung far and wide, indeed some “sailed” up and over the bank into the reservoir behind. Metal ground anchors tend to do more harm than good to a dinghy, and it was Charles Dennis who introduced the good practice of half burying a rubber car tyre each side, and tying down to that.



The Pipeyard

This has always been part of the club's area, and the annual fireworks evening held there in November was a very popular event. Wood came from – well no one quite knew. It just came. Members and friends just stopped outside the gates and threw it over the fence,

and one or two members were involved in commercial exhibitions of various sorts, which resulted in large sheets of chipboard etc. In fact, there was invariably a surplus, so rather than just being “thrown on” the fire at the end of the evening, it was stacked tidily round the back, ready for the year when not enough wood turned up.

There have never been many spare moorings. So if you allowed your dinghy to fall into serious disrepair, or you didn't pay your subs, there was always the real threat of having your dinghy moved to the pipeyard. If you still didn't see to it, and if the dinghy was of wood rather than fibreglass, then it ended up on the November bonfire.



Bonfire night in the pipeyard, 1988

The setup included a tent (but it never in fact seemed to rain), lighting was from a portable generator (what did happen to it ?), bar stock was transported down from the clubhouse, and burgers were grilled. The fire was as warm as toast, and the fireworks let off at the top of the reservoir bank alongside were easily visible to all.

Electricity

The Water Board used to generate their own electricity. This was at 240 volts like other mains supplies, but because so much was used for pumps, they generated DC (direct current) electricity – which is more efficient for heavy duty motors – like south of London electric trains in fact. Now most things are happy with DC electricity – light bulbs, fires, oven, but not motors such as record players. The thing that makes them run at 45 or 33 rpm (revs per minute) is the 50 times a second reversing that constitutes AC (alternating current). So there was a thingy which did the opposite of a rectifier, it changed DC to AC. But woe betide if you put too much load onto it. At disco's, the music could be much slower than it should have been. And a cine projector really put it to the test, there was a very trying evening trying to show films.

In those days there were no fridges or freezers at the club. Indeed no microwaves nor beer chillers. At the end of the evening, all electricity could be, and was, was switched off when the last person left.

Toilets

It seems amazing now that the club managed without its own toilets for 40 years. Sunnyside pumping station, halfway down the drive, was completed in 1951, and members were then able to walk down to its toilets and washroom. Ladies however had to be aware that it was widely used by the numerous workmen from the filter beds. There was later a chemical toilet in the clubhouse that was supposed to be just for disabled people. The real problem was that the club was at such a low level that a pump was needed if we were to get the outlets up to the sewer level outside the pumping station in the drive. So after the Water Board eventually changed over to getting its supply from the National Grid in 1985, the excuse no longer held, and the club had to get busy, installing and plumbing in toilets into the rear parts of the clubhouse that had been built in 1980.

The hardest bit, the pipe to Sunnyside pumping station, was in fact very kindly laid by the Water Board. All the club had to do was to purchase and install a pump, which was lowered into, and remains happily to this day, in a storage tank that just happened to be under the clubhouse.

Most DIY at the club has been done over the years by members, and the toilets, basins and shower were no exception. But the plumbing, both water supply, and the outlets to the tank under the clubhouse, was put in by a professional plumber. (Remember this was in the days before Bodgitt and Co). At the opening ceremony in 1989 – the ribbon for the ladies was cut by Linda Tillman, and the ribbon for the gents was cut by Bob Sumner :



50TH Anniversary in 1998

The club programme card had a special cover that year.



AQUARIUS SAILING CLUB



PROGRAMME 1998

Commodore: RODGER WHEELER
Hon. Secretary: JOAN BRAY

21 Manor Drive North
New Malden
Surrey KT3 5PB

Club Night: Wednesday 20.00hrs

Clubhouse: Telephone 0181 979 4720

SAILING PROGRAMME & SOCIAL EVENTS 1998

DATE	AM	PM
MARCH		
28	START OF SEASON PARTY	
29	Spring 1	Spa 1
APRIL		
5	Spring 2	Pursuit 1
12	EASTER EGG TROPHY (3 Races - best 2 to count)	Spa 2
19	Spring 3	
25	50th ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION	
26	Spring 4	Spa 3
MAY		
3	Spring 5	Pursuit 2
9 - 10	CLUB OPEN WEEKEND	
10	Training and Fun Day	
17	Spring 6	Spa 4
23 - 25	AWAY WEEKEND AT BEWL WATER S.C. KENT	
31	Spring 7	Pursuit 3
JUNE		
7	Spring 8	Summer 1
14	Spring 9	Summer 2
21	Spring 10	Summer 3
27 - 28	HAMPTON REGATTA	
JULY		
4	21st TWU ANNUAL INVITATIONAL PURSUIT RACE, DATCHET	
5	Spring 11	Pursuit 4
11	AQUARIUS 50th ANNIVERSARY REGATTA, JAZZ NIGHT & BARBECUE	
12	AQUARIUS REGATTA '98	
18	Molesay Regatta - No Sailing	
19	Informal Races or Cruise - National Go Boating	
Weekend		

And on 25 April a reception was held which included a special invitation to the Mayor of Richmond, and all the past commodores.



Mike Baker, Nigel Richards, George Bray, The Mayor Councillor Maureen Woodriff, John Moore, Rodger Wheeler, John Botterill, Malcolm Edwards



Display of trophies at the reception evening, 1998

The Future

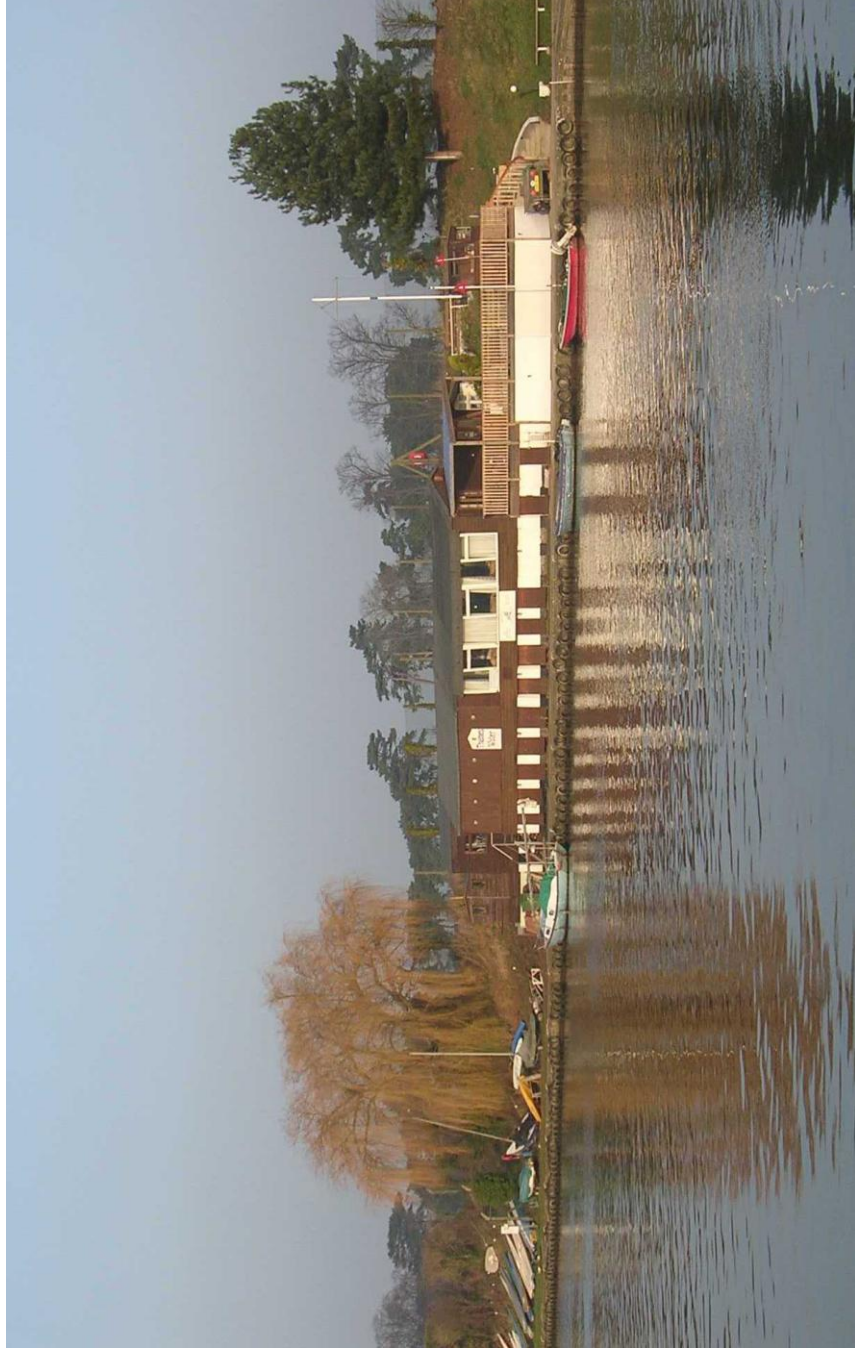
The club is in an even stronger position than it has been since its founding. On the membership side, numbers are very healthy, and we are pleased to have a good number of younger members. The website carries all our details, and indeed sailing results are invariably calculated and posted up by Sunday evening.

On the sailing side there are a good number and variety of dinghies out each Sunday, very much encouraged by our Sailing Secretary Richard Cannon. On the social side there is a good feel at all the social evenings, and the Sunday lunches now being regularly offered during the winter are very popular. On the premises side, Bodgitt and Co have excelled themselves.

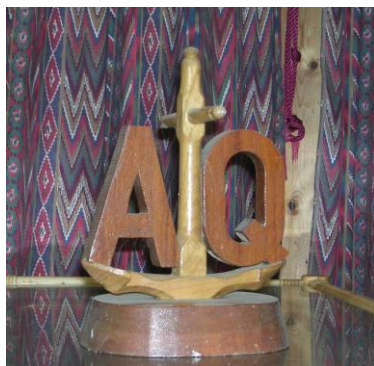
Aquarius retains its essential qualities – including being a club where you don't just be around as an individual – you soon get to know everyone by name, and relationships are wonderfully relaxed and informal.



The boat building tradition continues, and will likely continue, though we do not these days have the use of the engine shed workshop. Brian Clements here transforming into a sailing canoe, complete with mast, tilting centreboard, stabilisers, rudder, and on board storage spaces



The clubhouse today. Note Bodgitt and Co's recent work : the straightened up Bosun's store, the end store room, and the much extended patio



PRESIDENTS 1948 to 2008

1948	Col E F W MacKenzie
1954 to 72	Col E F W MacKenzie
1974 to 83	R F McCoy
1984 to present	G W Bray

COMMODORES 1948 to 2008

1948 to 53	Col E F W MacKenzie
1954 to 55	M R James
1956 to 62	L Rodger
1963 to 66	R F McCoy
1967 to 72	L Paul
1973 to 75	R A Simmons
1976 to 78	J Moore
1979 to 81	G W Bray
1982 to 84	L Reuben
1985 to 87	N Richards
1988 to 90	J Botterill
1991 to 94	M Edwards
1995 to 97	M Baker
1998 to 2002	R Wheeler
2003 to 06	M Baker
2007 to present	N Knowles

Other flag officers are as listed on the board in the clubhouse



Aquarius Sailing Club Lower Sunbury Road, Hampton 0208 979 4720

www.sailaquarius.org.uk