



STOUR SAILING CLUB



Rowing On

1st May 2020 – 30 April 2021

(well that was plan A before the pandemic intervened)

This is Plan B – what we did instead

January 2020 – April 2021



Stour Sailing Club: Rowing On

1st May 2020 – 30 April 2021

In January 2020 Stour Sailing Club was delighted to be awarded £10k of lottery funding from the Sport England Small Grants fund to enable us to purchase a second Harker's Yard Gig for our 'Rowing On' project to increase participation opportunities and get more people active on the water through coastal rowing.

Our Project Description:

"We established Club Coastal Rowing in June 2016 and purchased our single Harker's Yard Gig in October 2016 with the help of the Sports England Small Grants Fund. Rowing has proved popular, with a strong core of regular rowers, and steady interest from potential new rowers. Our current capacity is very limited with a single Gig and a short tidal window. To retain existing rowers and enable new rowers to get involved we need to purchase a second Gig to increase capacity, enable us to expand low cost access to coastal rowing and get more people active on the water."

Our Targets:

- Hold at least three free 'have a go' sessions - one of which will be run exclusively by women rowers and coxes with the aim of encouraging participation by other women who may be more confident in an all female environment.
- Provide a 'learn to row' pathway with land and water based sessions
- Hold a range of different types of rows including social rows, more technical sessions and race training sessions
- Medium term aim to develop A & B teams and race two Gigs in the winter 20-21 series
- Hold a rowing event at Manningtree open to both home and away boats and crews of all types – open entry handicapped
- Develop volunteer base with more people confident and able to organise and take rows
 - provide opportunities to gain coxing confidence and experience
 - support members to develop and demonstrate competence in launching, handling and retrieving Gigs to increase the number of rows available
 - encourage volunteers to take appropriate British Rowing qualifications
- Base line 39 individuals rowing at the Club in previous 12 months to November 2019
 - Target 90 over the project period
 - 10% aged 14-25 90% 25+
 - 47% male 53% female
 - 10% disability/long term illness
- By the project end the aim is to have at least 50 regular rowers, to have engaged 40 new individuals rowing at least once and a pool of 25 individuals training and racing.

12 Month Round Up – April 2021

Looking back on the project, we started with great enthusiasm and managed to get our second Harker's Yard Gig 'Hunter' purchased by the end of March ready to begin the project in earnest from the 1st May. We also equipped the Gig and had new oars made for her in time for the project start.

With impeccable timing we picked up our new Gig on Friday 20th March, and on Monday 23rd March the country went into the first national lockdown for Covid 19, and rowing, along with just about everything else, was prohibited.

We hoped that the lockdown would be short lived, and that we would soon be back on the water. However, this was obviously not the case! We were finally able to return to rowing briefly at the end of August, then were locked down again at the beginning of November, rowed again in December and then were off the water again until 29 March. In all we were only permitted to row for 19 weeks of the 52 week project timescale (and were prohibited from rowing for 33 of the 52 weeks) , and when we could cautiously return to rowing it was with Covid 19 protocols in place and small 'bubbles' of rowers to limit social contacts. In addition the weeks that we could row were over the autumn and winter when short days and our short window on the tide mean that even in good weather rowing opportunities are limited. Not exactly the best conditions for running a participation project!

Rowing has only returned to anything approximating 'normal' in the month since we were able to return to rowing from 29 March 2021, and that has coincided with the coldest April for many years and strong northerly winds which make rowing at Manningtree difficult.

The demographic of our existing rowers is older (many are in their 60's and 70's) and many have been more cautious during the pandemic and are waiting until later in the summer to return to rowing, inevitably a few will probably not return as that ship has sailed and they have moved on. On the plus side our older demographic meant that by the time we returned to rowing at the end of March many of our rowers had had at least one dose of the vaccine.

However, even when we could not row we have tried to keep the sense of rowing community going with zoom quizzes, and more recently with a two month long return to fitness challenge – our February Fun/March Hare Challenge to virtually 'row' the Atlantic. And remarkably we have had twenty existing rowers out on the water over the nineteen weeks of the twelve months that we could potentially row, and have also managed to get twenty four new rowers out on the water, eighteen of them in April 2021 alone, and we still have a list of potential rowers waiting for a first row.

In summary, although we obviously did not meet our targets we end the twelve months still rowing, with a pool of existing rowers and some new rowers out on the water, of whom some will become regular rowers. Because of Covid restrictions we have not advertised rowing opportunities widely but even without significant publicity there is a constant trickle of people wanting to try rowing, often through personal contacts or through seeing the Gigs on the water.

We are positive, and keeping our fingers crossed that the worst of the pandemic is over and that we will be able to continue "rowing on" in 2021 and beyond.

Our Targets – we said that we would:

- *Hold at least three free 'have a go' sessions - one of which will be run exclusively by women rowers and coxes with the aim of encouraging participation by other women who may be more confident in an all female environment.*

We were unable to hold 'have a go' sessions due to Covid restrictions until we came back to rowing from March 29 2021. Even then we have had to limit numbers and have operated on a pre-booked rather than turn up and row basis. In April 2021 we organised four sessions for new rowers on each Saturday of the month. We had to cancel one due to gale force winds but three took place successfully. We had 18 new rowers out for a first row and some came along for all three rows. We have not yet held a session run exclusively by women, but women have been in the majority of existing rowers/coxes for the sessions, and the majority of the new rowers have been women.

- *Provide a 'learn to row' pathway with land and water based sessions*

We are now developing this, starting with the new rowers who have been through the new rowers' sessions in April. Until the social distancing requirements and restrictions on meeting indoors are eased we are limited in what we can provide in terms of land based sessions.

- *Hold a range of different types of rows including social rows, more technical sessions and race training sessions*

Since returning to row at the end of March we are beginning to differentiate sessions into beginner/improver/race crew sessions. However full race training is still not permitted under British Rowing guidelines, and the weather is still not good enough for more social rowing!

- *Medium term aim to develop A & B teams and race two Gigs in the winter 20-21 series*

The winter 20-21 series was cancelled along with all competition, and there has been no racing since the end of January 2020, and even when we have been able to row race pace training has been discouraged. Now that we are back on the water we are beginning to plan for the next Harker's Yard Gig Association (HYGA) Winter Series which is due to start in October 2021 with our home leg as the first event (Covid permitting).

- *Hold a rowing event at Manningtree open to both home and away boats and crews of all types – open entry handicapped*

This one went the way of all activity during lockdown. With the HYGA we are organising and participating in 'home challenge races' during May, June and July 2021 – with courses of a specified length and crew type logged by GPS, rowed on home water, and the results submitted and analysed to produce a 'winner'.

- *Develop volunteer base with more people confident and able to organise and take rows*
 - *provide opportunities to gain coxing confidence and experience*

- *support members to develop and demonstrate competence in launching, handling and retrieving Gigs to increase the number of rows available*
- *encourage volunteers to take appropriate British Rowing qualifications*

We now have an expectation that unless there is a good reason to the contrary everyone who rows should also Cox even if only in clear water (with no moored boats or obstacles and not having to Cox in or out of shore) to begin with. Despite the lack of rowing during the year rowers are becoming more confident in Coxing, and crews regularly share the Coxing between them on outings. The same applies to launching and retrieving the Gigs, with most of our rowers now in possession of waders and able to lend a hand to get the Gigs in and out. We have also invested in new launch trolleys which are much lower than our previous road trailer, and which make it much easier to launch and retrieve the Gigs in our tricky conditions. As an added bonus the trolleys mean that we can launch half an hour earlier on the tide, and come back half an hour later than we could with the road trailers – giving us up to an hour's more rowing on each tide.

- *Base line 39 individuals rowing at the Club in previous 12 months to November 2019*
 - *Target 90 over the project period*
 - *10% aged 14-25 90% 25+*
 - *47% male 53% female*
 - *10% disability/long term illness*

Under the circumstances it has not been possible to meet the participation targets, but we have done well in the short period of time when we were able to row with Covid restrictions in place. 44 people have rowed over the twelve months, 4.5% were aged 14-25, and 95.5% were aged 25+. 34% were male, and 66% were female, 4% had a disability/long term illness.

- *By the project end the aim is to have at least 50 regular rowers, to have engaged 40 new individuals rowing at least once and a pool of 25 individuals training and racing.*

The participation targets remain a work in progress, but as long as we are able to continue rowing, and with the prospect of better weather over the coming months, and racing potentially returning in the autumn we are confident that the number of regular rowers will continue to increase, and there will be more rowers wanting to train to race as well as rowing socially.

This project log is intended as a record of our project in unprecedented times and also an opportunity to show the activity and fun behind the facts and figures!

January 4 2020

Our first row of 2020, in William Rose at Brightlingsea on a windy day.



January 5 2020

The very next day we were racing in the fifth event in the Harker's Yard Winter Race series at Burnham on Crouch.



10 January 2020

A lovely training row at Brightlingsea - thanks to Russell to taking us to the farthest reaches of the creek that we have not visited before. It was a high tide with the first full moon of the year (a wolf moon apparently). Thanks also to Maria for making us practice our starts, hard tens and keeping 'eyes in the boat'.





12 January 2020

We were back again racing in the sixth event of the Harker's Yard Winter Race Series – this time at Wivenhoe. It was a blustery, windy day and we enjoyed the racing (in retrospect, once we were safely back in the club house after the event!) The races were held time trial style with two Gigs facing off against each other in each of the three events (men's, women's and mixed)

January 13 2020

We were thrilled to receive the news from Sport England that our application had been successful. With a project start date of 1st May this early decision was brilliant as it meant that we could begin to plan with certainty. Over the next two weeks we completed the formalities with Sport England and began to explore timescales with the Pioneer Sailing Trust (for the Gig) and Oars suppliers.

As neither Gigs nor oars are 'off the shelf' purchases and have to be made to order we were uncertain what the timescales would be.

It seemed that with both we had hit a window of opportunity. The Pioneer Sailing Trust team were just finishing one Gig and were awaiting a confirmed buyer before beginning on fitting out the next which could potentially be ready in two to three months. Similarly a manufacturer of Gig oars was making a batch and had just one set looking for home, so we could potentially have a set of oars at the same time as the Gig.

The Club moved quickly and paid the deposits by the 18 January so that we could secure our orders – only five days after we got the good news about the award (and before the award was paid – fingers crossed!)

There were still lots of details to be worked out and other equipment that would be needed – but getting the Gig and Oars in place was the project critical element.

18 January 2020

A lovely sunny afternoon row at Brightlingsea with two crews out - we only have a photo of the 'girls' so apologies to the mixed crew! Thanks to Keith for coxing. Next Saturday - (25th Jan) if the weather is ok we are planning a longer session from 10am with more time on the tide and chance for lots of rowers (and new rowers) to join in!



24 January 2020

We had a really good (if a bit mizzly) morning row at Brightlingsea with the 'girl's' crew. We had job to persuade the Gig to leave the trailer (she was rather reluctant - perhaps the water was too cold!) but we got there in the end. Angela then took us through a bit of a race piece to warm up. We then worked on the catch and not rowing in: 'plop together then push' - plopping and not rowing, plopping and rowing a quarter stroke, then a half then a whole stroke. Tricky but useful - and the Garmin track is hilarious! We were so busy there is no photo - must try harder!

24 January 2020

Another day, another row in Brightlingsea. We had two crews out today, the first with Hannah out her second Gig row, and Grant out on his first both doing well in some quite lumpy conditions before we decided to head for the creek. Angela also got back on a gig oar for the first time post hip replacement - in between coxing.

For our second row we took advantage of the big tide and took William Rose up the creek to St Osyth boatyard - the first time for the boat and the crew. It was a much easier row coming back than going!



26 January 2020

We were racing in the seventh event of the Harker's Yard Winter Series at Stone. It was an interesting day in lots of ways. The 'girls' had a great race - overtaking three boats on the tough second leg of the race and coming home in sixth place.

The men's crew set off for their race - headed towards the start line and then came in to shore with a broken oar and not even a clash of oars to blame! Two crews broke oars on the day but the other crew did so in an argument with a moored boat. We managed to borrow a spare oar from a crew that were not in the race and the men set off again - coming home eighth across the line and were promoted to seventh after a disqualification.

Then it was the mixed race - no spare oar was available as all of the Gigs were in the race - only an aluminium canoe paddle could be found. We had a choice of not racing and accepting the 20 points penalty, or trying to get round the tough course with three oars and a paddle and coming last which would get us only 16 points.

Well of course we had a go! We got round the course and even left one Gig behind us - it was a bit daft, and tough going but we did it!

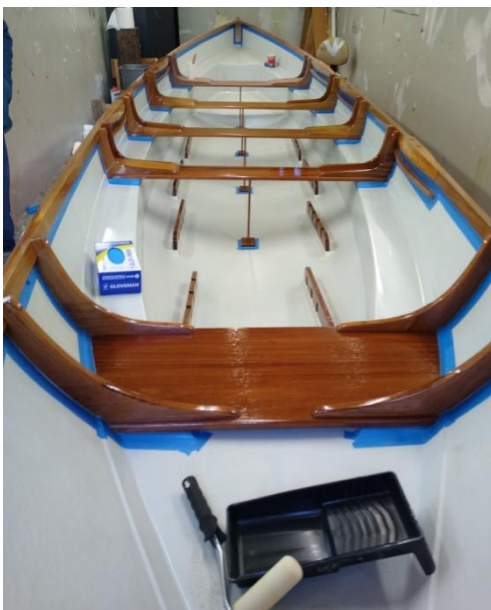
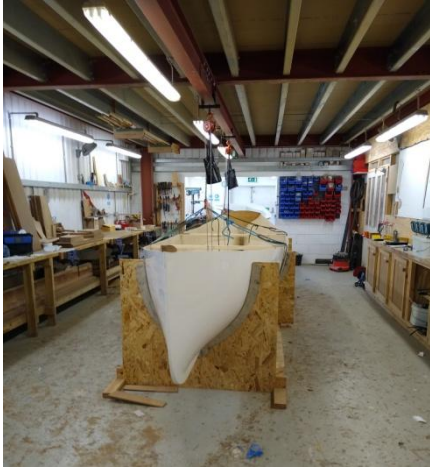
Honours for the day: the "doesn't know his own strength" award went to Neil, and the "never give up" award went to the Mixed Crew!



January 29 2020

A trip to Brightlingsea to row our existing Gig William Rose provided the chance to visit the Pioneer Trust and have a first look at Harker's Yard Gig number 22 - in build to become Stour Sailing Club's second Gig.

To be honest she didn't look like much of a beauty at the time, with the hull and the plug waiting to be joined together before the rest of the fitting out could commence – but exciting none the less.



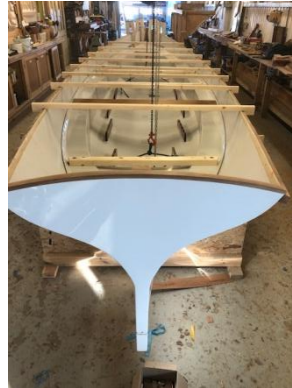
However we also took a sneaky peak at Harker's Yard Gig number 21 which was almost ready to go to her new owner Rowhedge Coastal Rowing Club. This is more like 'our' Gig would look when completed.

Number 21 is the first 'plastic' Gig made for sale, and our Gig, number 22 would be the second.

Varuna (number 20) – the first 'plastic Gig' was built for the Pioneer Trust and is used for proof of concept and demonstration purposes.

February 5 2020

Photographs arrived today of the build in progress – looking much more Gig like already.



February turned out to be a miserable month for rowing with storm Ciara followed by storm Dennis leading to un-rowable conditions due to gale force winds and tidal surges (without even mentioning the rain!) However, we took comfort in thinking about the spring and visiting our new Gig on 18th February just to keep an eye on how the build was going! Roll on spring!

Storms Again

Sadly the weather then deteriorated, and the last three events in the Harker's Yard Winter Series, scheduled for the 9 February, 23 February and 02 March all had to be cancelled due to storms, along with all of our scheduled rows. Our facebook post on 7 March says:

"The final results are in for the winter series - a real shame that the last three events were cancelled due to the storms. We were confident of picking up some good points after some setbacks along the way this year including an extremely harsh disqualification for the girls (which cost at least two places overall in the series), and breaking an oar in the last men's race at Burnham so that the mixed crew had to race with a teaspoon.

On the plus side the men's crew had their best series so far - 8th overall - improving by 2 places on last year and 3 over 2017-18.

So - onwards and upwards and we start preparing for next year's season now - with two Gigs to race!"

Perhaps it is just as well that we didn't know what was coming next...



Alongside our on the water rowing we also started holding regular once a week evening 'Erg' sessions to work on fitness, strength and technique. This one is from 12 February.

The sessions were held in our Club house 'Parlour' using ergs owned by Club members and brought in and set up each time.

Our Clubhouse is tiny and it is a very tight fit!



06 March 2020

A Brightlingsea row in William Rose

08 March 2020

The forecast for Brightlingsea this morning was for strong SE winds with 28mph gusts - so we switched to Manningtree and took Claydon Skiff Lt Washington (owned by our Rowing Secretary) out for a row instead. It was still gusty but WSW and so a bit more sheltered here than at Brightlingsea and it was lovely to get on the water.





11 March 2020

A row on an almost spring like day, although a bit blustery. We went for a lunch time row on one of the highest tides ever with Lt. Washington almost sitting on top of the quay as we set off for our row. The salt marsh and Hogmarsh island were completely under water and the water was so high we thought better of trying to go under the bridges. We made do with rowing inside the posts at the end of the East Hard instead.

It was lovely to be out on the water and good to see two rowers back after a bit of a winter's break. Good to see other people also out on the water getting boats ready for lift in.

This was the day that the World Health Organisation declared the Covid 19 Pandemic.

14, 17, 20 March

William Rose went out for what turned out to be final pre-lockdown rows at Brightlingsea – unfortunately no one remembered to take photographs for the log.

Pandemic – Covid 19

In early January 2020 we first saw reports of an outbreak of Corona Virus in Wuhan (China) after the first case was identified at the end of December 2019. Although it raised alarm bells, it was a geographically distant and hopes were that it would not spread widely. During February and early March it was clear that those hopes were misplaced and that our world was more interconnected than ever before. On 11th March 2020 the World Health Organisation declared the Corona Virus (now officially titled Covid 19) as a pandemic.

By the 17th March the British Government responded with guidance on limiting social contact and self-isolating for vulnerable people, and by 20th March all schools were closed. Sport across the world began to close down including rowing, with the British Rowing and the Cornish Pilot Gig Association recommending cessation of all rowing activity.

It was not the best preparation for a rowing participation project starting on the 1st May. On the plus side rowing is an outdoor sport with plenty of ventilation and only the Cox facing the crew and potentially in sneezing distance of the stroke. On the minus side the seats are less than two metres apart (the official distance for limiting social contact).

Faced with a unprecedented global health, social and economic crisis where there were no answers we decided to carry on as planned to get all of the elements for our 'Rowing-on' project in place as best we could. Whether we could actually 'row-on' in the next few months or not was unknown.

We had faith that if we lost months (or more) on the project we would not be alone and that Sport England would be looking at creative ways of building in flexibility to respond to the crisis.

Our beautiful new Gig was completed on Friday 20th March and we travelled to Harker's Yard in Brightlingsea to collect her! At the same time our first Gig William Rose was out on the water at Brightlingsea for what turned out to be the last row for rather a long time.



Gig no 22 Hunter – ready to leave



The Team of Apprentices that built her (plus Gig Manager)

Our new Gig was given the name Hunter in memory of Ian Hunter Edmond the father of one of our rowers, the family also donated funds to the project which enabled us to equip the Gig beyond the minimum that we were able to do with the Sport England Grant and commitment of additional funding from Stour Sailing Club.

By Monday 23rd March it was clear that a full lock down would be in place before long, and we travelled back to Brightlingsea where our first Gig William Rose had been over wintering (to increase access to the water) and bring her back to Manningtree. Later that evening the Prime Minister made the announcement of the unprecedented national lock down which put paid to our hopes of rowing again for the foreseeable future.



We tucked both Gigs up, safely under cover to wait for the time when we would be able to get back on the water to row again and start our Rowing On project.

It was to be a rather longer wait than we could have predicted in March.

All water based activity was suspended and the estuary was closed by the Harbour Authority until 13 May. At that point the Sailing Club started to come back to life as members were able to begin work on their cruisers ready for lift-in which was rescheduled from April and took place during the first week of June. Sailing could begin again for members with their own boats, sailing singlehanded or with members of their own households. Sadly, we were still a long way away from being able to row Gigs again – social distancing is not possible in a rowing Gig.

The lockdown was further eased from the 4 July – but Gig rowing was clearly still not possible. However, we did not waste the time. We ordered equipment for our new Gig, and once the lockdown was eased to permit socially distanced outside 'visits' to other households there was a chance to do some much needed maintenance on our first Gig William Rose. William Rose joined the Club in September 2016 and has been in constant use since, including four challenging winter race series and summer racing as well as club rows, and was looking a little the worse for wear. We also re-leathered and varnished oars and replaced one that had been broken in racing!



Alas Poor Oar



Lots of 'dings' – soon to be gone

Nationally British Rowing was working with the Government to agree a phased strategy for returning to rowing with appropriate Covid 19 mitigations in place. From a complete lockdown rowing was first permitted in single person boats, then from 1 August in coxless doubles. Clearly this was of no use to us with our Coxed four rower Gigs, but at least there were signs that we might be able to get back on the water at some point.



It did mean that we could get our donated single scull Sarka on to the water, although only in fairly flat, calm conditions.

Then British Rowing announced that from 15 August rowing could restart in coxed doubles and pairs and coxed fours. It looked like we were back in business, albeit in a rather cautious and limited fashion.

The British Rowing strategy did not permit boats of more than five people to row until the 29th August, meaning that the Cornish Pilot Gigs could not restart until then. The newly formed Harker's Yard Gig Association also took a slightly more cautious approach, suggesting that the Harker's Yard Gigs should be rowed with two rowers and a Cox from from the 15 to the 29 August to allow all Clubs to carry out their Covid 19 risk assessments and put procedures in place ready for a return to rowing full crew from 29th August.

As a Sailing Club we already had our overall risk assessments and Covid 19 mitigations in place. However we carried out our Team Rowing specific risk assessment, prepared our return to rowing plan.

Our Covid mitigations included hand and equipment sanitising, face coverings, social distancing on land, and the development of rowing bubbles around the two Gigs to minimise the number of social contacts between rowers. Coxswains would wear face coverings and a visor when coxing and all rowers would be able (but not compelled) to wear face coverings when rowing.

We communicated our plans to our rowers and asked them to make their own risk assessment and let us know whether they were happy to return to rowing from the end of August.



August 19 2020

Then it was time to wake our Gigs up from their long hibernation and get them back to the Club ready for preparation to row.

August 23 2020

Time to take all of the equipment down to be reunited with the Gigs, clean them and try out our new launch trolleys which we were able to purchase thanks to donations from rowers.



At long last we were able to get our lovely new Gig Hunter on to the water for the first time.

Pre-Covid we had plans for a formal grand launch along with a celebration and a 'have a go' session. All of that would have to wait – but we could not let the occasion go un-marked. Hunter was duly launched with a splash of champagne and a few words. Hunter is named in memory of Ian Hunter Edmond, and his family donated funds to allow us to equip her in style. His daughter Sue is one of our rowers and did the honours with the champagne.

Then we took her for her first row – Covid 19 style with two rowers instead of four and face coverings in place.

We had the rudder painted in the same style as William Rose to provide continuity between the Club Gigs and also to distinguish Hunter from the other white hulled Gigs when racing (when we are able to do that again!)





Sunday 30 August

Back on the water and back rowing with full crew. William Rose went out on a blustery day with a mixed crew for a little 9.5km row. Possibly a little ambitious for a first row after such a long break and they had the blisters to prove it – but they enjoyed being back on the water.

Monday 31 August

The next day conditions were much better for our first full crew row in Hunter.

Not to be outdone the Hunter crew put in 10.4 Km in an hour and 41 minutes on the water.



Wednesday 2 September

A real landmark day for the Club as we got both Gigs out on the water together for the first time. Conditions were amazing with warm sunshine and light winds and it was luxury to be on the estuary. William Rose with an experienced mixed crew disappeared into the distance for a 9.5km row. Hunter with some less experienced rowers on board had a rather more cautious row. A good time was had by all.



Saturday 5 September

Another breezy Saturday with a gusty South Westerly that made for a quick trip down the estuary followed by a hard slog back – and then a trip up to the 'bridges' and the Suffolk/Essex border before coming in.





Thursday 10 September

One of the last of the late summer evenings with enough light for a row in Hunter for this year at least.

Sunday 13 September

It was a beautiful sunny morning for a row this morning with both Club Gigs: William Rose, and Hunter out on the water. It was not a big tide and we shared it with kayakers, swimmers, a sail or two and our own roving paddle board photographer - always good to get pictures from outside the boats.

It was a brisk blow down towards Harwich and a hard slog back. The 'girls' in William Rose made it down to the Beacon just to check that it was still there, and then back home with just enough water left to retrieve the Gig. Hunter took a more circular route just enjoying being out on the water - luxury!



Wednesday 16 September

A slightly soggy Wednesday morning row in Hunter today. Once again the tide came in very slowly although in the end there was loads of water - both to row on and coming down from the sky as we rowed out. The rain didn't last too long though and it was at least warm. A couple of sails drifting round in the lighter than expected wind - and Muscle on the beach being fettled for the micro worlds.

We have discovered that wind screen wipers would be helpful for Coxing in a face shield in the rain...

Friday 18 September

We had two crews ready to row on a big lunchtime tide – unfortunately the wind also decided to go big with ENE winds even stronger than the forecast 18 gusting 29 mph, meaning that even though we could possibly have rowed once we were on the water launching and retrieving safely was not possible as the Gigs would have been swept against our concrete quay and hard.

Strangely the photograph fails to capture the extent of the wind or the chop – will take a wind sock next time!





Sunday 20 September

It was a lovely sunny Sunday for an early afternoon row on a huge tide. The winds, although still strong and from the North East had calmed down enough since Friday for us to go out.

We had a choppy row against the wind out to the Pink House and then surfed back, taking a trip under the bridges and then home. All in all, an hour and a quarter's row and getting on for 8k covered.

We had two relatively inexperienced rowers in the Gig who both coped really well in the conditions (and did not complain about the blisters until we got back to shore!).

Wednesday 23 September

Our Club row was at 3.30 this afternoon in Hunter. At 2.30 it was raining, by 3 it had stopped. Then it started again and it was still raining at 3.25. However, the weather forecast confirmed by the satellite track said that we should get away with it - and we did! Just after 3.30 the rain stopped, and although it wasn't exactly sunny we got out there and rowed. The skies were threatening, but we managed to get out and back and put Hunter away before the rain (and when it rained it came down in torrents) While we were out we even tried a few 'hard tens' - least said soonest mended - it had been a while!



Thursday 24 September

Time for an afternoon row for a mixed crew in William Rose. Continuing the wet and soggy theme the Cox was too busy getting rained on to remember to take a photograph.

Sunday 27 September

We row in the rain, the hail, sunshine and snow – but we cannot row in a gale. Among other delights 2020 has been a windy year with so many Atlantic storms that by September the World Meteorological Organisation was only one storm short of running out of names for hurricanes for the first time ever. On a smaller scale we had a very windy February and March with more rows and races cancelled than ever before. We had hoped that things would get better – but today was another one of those un-rowable days in a gale struck weekend with gusts up to 45 mph or more. Needless to say we could not get on the water!

Monday 28 September

What a difference a day makes with a morning row for a mixed crew in William Rose with a definite autumnal feel and winds less than a third of the force of the day before.





Tuesday 29 September – Wednesday 7 October

We had rows booked in for the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th of October – but the weather had other ideas as storm Alex swept in with torrential rain and gales. Then just as the weather improved a little our rows for the 6th and 7th of October also had to be cancelled as work to improve the drainage in our compound meant that the Gigs were stranded temporarily on the shore side of the sea gate – with a trench in between!

Thursday 8 October

Finally – we got a Gig back on the water with a mixed crew taking advantage of a short gap in the rain and wind to get out.



Friday 9 October

Another day, another row, this time with the 'girls' (Keith rowing rather than coxing and Judy coxing rather than rowing) out for a slightly soggy late afternoon row.

Saturday 10 October

Yet another soggy and blustery day for a late afternoon row dodging the rain. Both William Rose and Hunter were out this afternoon – the Hunter crew got back in time to lay up the Gig before the worst of the rain hit. The William Rose crew got rather wetter.

Not quite sure what happened but there appear to be no photographs!

William Rose went out on Tuesday 13 October and Hunter went out on Thursday 15 October – both crews neglected their photography – words have been had!



Friday 16 October

The 'girls' out for another rather soggy row down to the Beacon and back.

Friday 16 October Mid-Night

In the background the 'second wave' of Covid 19 had begun with concerns over rising numbers of cases. The numbers in our local area, although increasing, remained low compared with most parts of the country. However Essex County Council asked the Government to place the ECC area in to Tier 2 from mid-night on 16 October. This meant that in addition to existing restrictions we were unable to meet people from other households indoors, or stay overnight, and were discouraged from going out. The Clubhouse locked down again. But as an organised outdoors sport, we were able to continue rowing. At least for now.

Sunday 18 October

Two boats out today. Hunter went out with a full and a brand new rower having a go for a first time as a rowing passenger – while she was in the passenger seat she managed to take some great video – but there is no photograph of the crew.

William Rose went out with an experienced mixed crew.

Wednesday 21 October

We were due to go out on a Club Row, but the weather was dreadful with yellow rain warnings and strong winds. So we rearranged for the following day.



Thursday 22 October

Today it was still breezy, but it was warm and even sunny at times as we had two gigs out for a row.

William Rose with a mixed crew set off for the beacon and even hazarded a sprint on the way home.

Hunter, out for Club row took a trip a little less far afield and had a lovely luxurious row. Great to have a returning rower out for a row for the first time in a long while and doing well.

Friday 23 October

Another Trip for the 'girls' in William Rose – another photo missed!

Winter Rowing

As the nights draw in, our limited rowing window on the tide really makes itself felt. For Saturday 24 October the tide would have meant rowing at 5.30 when it was already dark. With a wide estuary and little ambient light from shoreside that is not a feasible proposition. Then on Sunday 25 October British Summer Time ended so the sunset moved an hour earlier, although the mornings would be lighter for a while.



Tuesday 27 October

An early morning row catching a lovely sunrise and a 10k round trip to Stutton Point and back for some of more experienced rowers in William Rose.

Thursday 29 October

Another soggy day for a row – this time with another new rower – doing well and hardly missing a stroke.



Friday 30 October

A slightly less soggy Friday row!

Saturday 31 October/Sunday 1 November

A stormy weekend in more ways than one! We had rows planned for both Saturday and Sunday but both had to be cancelled due yet again to storm force winds.

Then on Saturday evening the Prime Minister announced the second national lock down – starting on Thursday 5 November and due to last for at least four weeks until 2 December. With one of the lowest Covid 19 rates in the country it all felt a little surreal, going from tier one to tier two and then back to lock down within three weeks.



Tuesday 3 November

It was frankly not a great day weather wise, windy and wet. However, we knew that it would be our penultimate chance to get out on the water for at least a month. So we got out there and rowed!

Wednesday 4 November

It was a lovely calm sunny day for our last row before being beached for national lockdown#2.

We had a new rower on board who did so well that we made a round trip to say au revoir to the Pink House. A shame that we finally got some lovely rowing weather just as we had to lay up again!

Back on land we tucked the Gigs up again, hoping that we might get back on the water in December.



Reflections from Lockdown #2

It seemed that we had hardly got going when we were off the water again. The two months that we were back went really well despite the limitations.

We learnt that it is possible to row in a face covering (although not comfortable!), and that visors are ok for coxing unless it is raining, or windy, or cold or all three!

We also learnt that coxing is a challenge when the crew at the bow of the Gig several metres away can't hear you because you must not shout, your voice is muffled due to a face covering, and rowers cannot see what you are saying.

Necessity is the mother of invention – so we give you the Coxing face covering!



Evolving Coxing mitigations.

If we were ever worried about wearing face coverings – that time had passed.

All sense of style had been well and truly lost along the way.

More Maintenance

As we could not row there was time to do more fine tuning to equipment. Our new Gig Hunter is GRP as opposed to the wooden construction of William Rose. This means that she has to have inbuilt bouancy, so the internal configuration is different. This changes the rowing position just enough to make a difference. On our last row before lock-down #2 we realised that we needed to move the leathers on Hunter's Oars by 3 inches to result in less oar inboard. This would increase the gearing and require more strength to row – but should result in a more comfortable and straighter rowing position and less risk of injury when we get back to rowing at race pace.

The existing leathers also had a tendency to slip and move up the oars (not what you need when rowing!) so this was also an opportunity to change the lacings and hopefully solve the problem. Oar leathering is an interesting activity – you put the leathers on wet and have to pull the lacings as tight as possible (using pliers). As the leather dries it shrinks and gets tighter so that it stays put (in theory at least) – but you never know whether it is tight enough until you row with the oar.

From Lockdown#2 to Tiers

The second lockdown ended on 2 December and was replaced by Tiers. Manningtree, part of Tendring District with one of the lowest Covid rates in the country at the time, none the less found itself in Tier 2 with ongoing restrictions due to higher rates in other parts of Essex. However, the go ahead was given for outdoor sports including rowing, to return. Our Rowing Sub-Committee met once again to consider the guidance and any further mitigations needed. We agreed to remind rowers about social distancing, face covering and sanitising and to continue with separate bubbles of rowers split between the two gigs to limit contacts. The splitting of rowers into different groups was not ideal, and takes away much of the 'Club' nature of rowing – however it is better than not being on the water at all.

Friday 4 December

Our return to rowing coincided with a cold front and we woke up to the first snow of the season.

Undaunted a 'girls' crew in the William Rose Bubble made it on to the water for a row.

It was apparently just as cold as it looks in the picture!



Saturday 5 December

Conditions could not have been more different. Hunter went out three up in flat calm conditions, with even the sun making an appearance!



Sunday 6 December

Another lovely winter day and another William Rose bubble crew out on a late afternoon tide for a longer row, just getting home before the light faded.

Anyone would think that it was nearly Christmas – other crews will have to catch up on the bling!



Monday 7 December – Thursday 10 December

The Stour estuary is a wonderful place to row, but only when the tide is in. When the tide is out all we have is acres and acres of mud, wonderful for wild life and visits from Countryfile, but useless for much else! During the winter months when the days are short it means that roughly every other week for days we do not have water and light at the same time, and so no rowing. This was one of them!

Friday 11 December

High water was at 7.30 so the girls from the William Rose bubble decided to get up in the dark and go rowing at 7am. There was just enough light to see what they were doing, and William Rose was fitted with a set of festive navigation lights for the occasion! It was a rainy day and although the rain stayed off while they were rowing they all got drenched whilst laying up.



Sunday 12 December

Both William Rose and Hunter were out this morning for a row with mixed crews from their respective bubbles on a cold December morning. Despite promise of bad weather to come there was virtually no wind and almost flat calm conditions. The Christmas bling competition ramped up a notch today with various silly hats – and a Christmas tree for Hunter.

Once again the rain held off for most of the row but came along in time to soak us when we got back to the compound and laid up.

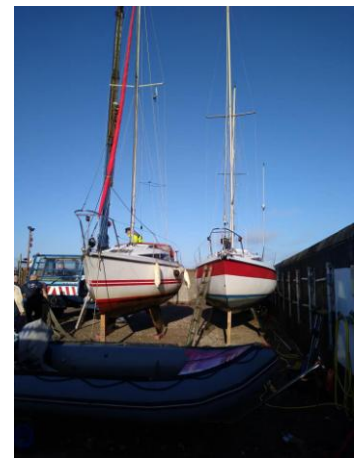




Monday 14 – Wednesday 16 December

The Club's long delayed lift out of cruisers for winter storage began the next day – with cruisers being lifted out of the water and over the sea wall in to the Club compound. In normal years this means that we are not able to get the Gigs on to the water at Manningtree between November and April and have to transport them by trailer to other locations to row, or row our privately owned Claydon skiff which is rather more robust and can sit on a mooring over winter. This year the Club was attempting to find space not only to store the Gigs – but also in a way that will allow them to be rowed over the winter.

We were all on tenterhooks. The Cruisers on the other hand were flying on on stops!



Wednesday 16 December

The weather for lift-in had been amazing with sunshine and light winds despite the forecast meaning that there were only three cruisers remaining to be lifted in on the last day. We even managed to get Hunter out for a Club row on the last day of lift-out.

There was more wind than forecast and the wind was more easterly than expected – but it was once again luxurious to be out on the water and quite warm in the winter sun at times.

The best news when we returned to land was that the mission had been accomplished and there was space in the compound for both Gigs, immediately opposite the sea gate – meaning that we would be able to row over the winter (just as long as the Covid situation allows it!) – keeping everything crossed for good weather, and an improving Covid position over the coming months....



Thursday 17 December

A milestone for us as the first time that we have ever been able to get a Gig on home water after lift-out – and what a beautiful day for with a row in William Rose down to Wrabness and back.



Sunday 19 December

The previous day the Prime Minister announced that large parts of the country would be moved into a new tier 4 with almost immediate effect due in large part to the identification of a new Covid mutation that was suspected of being more easily spread and behind a rapid increase in the number of cases. In addition the planned relaxations of restrictions over Christmas were cancelled in Tier 4 and restricted to a single day in Tier 2.

Of the Essex Districts only Colchester, Uttlesford and Tendring remained in Tier 2 with the remainder in Tier 4. British rowing soon confirmed that in tier 4 only rowing of single crew boats was permissible. Along with Clubs in Brightlingsea, Rowhedge and Wivenhoe (all Colchester Borough) we were able to continue rowing at Manningtree (Tendring) at least for now – although all of the other Harker's Yard Clubs were once again off the water.

Our last row before Christmas went out as planned on Sunday 20 December with both Gigs out on the water – sadly only a slightly distant photo of William Rose from Hunter, and one of the Hunter crew.

For Christmas week there was no water at Manningtree when there was light – we looked forward to spring and longer days. Unfortunately we were not to be back on the water for another three months!



Farewell 2020

2020 was an unprecedented year in so many ways.

We started the year with such great excitement on the 13 January 2020, hearing that our application for funding for our "Rowing on" project had been approved. Then Covid intervened and there followed months when we could not row at all with uncertainty about the future, followed by two months rowing, and a further month when we again could not row.

On Wednesday 23 December it was announced that we would be going in to Tier 4 on Boxing Day, with rowing along with all team sports not permitted. So we entered 2021 off the water again.

However, we achieved a lot despite the limitations. Although our plans to increase participation had to be put on hold, and there was no racing or social activity we had our new Gig and she was fully equipped.

We had rowed when we could, accepted when we couldn't, and ended the year with a core of regular rowers, and even some new rowers. We were making tentative plans to 'Row On' later in 2021 and hoping for a better year for everyone!

Greetings 2021!

We had hoped for better things from 2021 but it did not start well! Our row on December 20 turned out to be the last row for over three months as Covid cases continued to rise, and the country was placed in to a third lockdown from January 5 2021. All schools were shut, all non-essential retails was shut, and stay at home provisions were in place. Our District of Tendring went from being one of the least affected areas in the country to one of the worst affected.

Our Gigs were once again tucked up under cover, waiting for better days and our plans for rowing and competitive 'home water challenges' with other Harker's Yard Gig Clubs in the spring were put on hold.

On the positive side the vaccine roll out progressed well and as 'super vets' many of our rowers had received one dose by the beginning of March, leaving us to hope that we might be able to get some 'super vacs' crews out at some point.

The first review of the lockdown took place in February with a tentative roadmap published which envisaged restrictions of some sort staying in place until at least June.

On the positive side, if all went well, the roadmap envisaged organised, outdoor team sports would be allowed to restart from March 29.

We cautiously started dusting off our plans, putting rowing dates in the diary, moving our 'home challenge events' to April, May, and June and tentatively planning for a Winter Race series between October 2021 and March 2022.

Lockdown Three – Keeping Active - February Fun and March Hares

Unlike the first lockdown in March 2021 when everyone thought that it would be a short haul and then it would be done, the third lockdown seemed to hit everyone hard and there seemed to be little to look forward to. At the end of January we realised that we needed to do something to keep us all motivated, and active in the hope that we could all get a little fitter and more ready to row when the time came. Enter the February Fun Challenge (or more seriously – return to fitness!)

We decided that we would do a virtual 'row' of the English Channel starting in Penzance and ending up either at Dover or at Manningtree depending on how many kilometres we managed between us. We estimated the total distance at around 560k or 350 miles.

As only a few rowers have access to rowing machines we decided that we would be able to walk on water as well as rowing, with running, cycling, yoga, pilates, walking, HIT training all included as well as kayaking and paddleboarding which were allowed as individual exercise under lockdown conditions.



The results were amazing. During the week twenty five people took part, including rowers (and some waiting for a first row), friends and family. The joint total was 1,126 kilometres, more than double our target for the month.

We decided that we had accidentally left the Cox on dry land and without anyone in charge had turned right instead of left as we left Penzance and were heading out into the Atlantic with an easterly wind helping us on our way. With snow forecast for the following week we decided to aim for somewhere warmer, so headed down to the Canaries and then Antigua.



Week 2



Week 3

Week two saw heavy snow and icy conditions but twenty six people together covered a total of 1,009 Kilometres (2,158 Kilometres over weeks one and two). This put us level with Madeira and heading towards the Canaries.

In week three twenty seven people 'rowed' the equivalent of 1,409 kilometres. Our total distance of 3566k put us well on our way across the Atlantic with the trade winds behind us.

In week four we broke the previous record from week three by posting a fantastic 1,467 kilometres, putting us still on our way across the Atlantic with following trade winds. We celebrated with virtual champagne and chocolates on the 28th February to celebrate our journey so far!

Over the four weeks walking accounted for the most kilometres of any activity by quite a margin (there may be many fit dogs involved as well), followed by cycling (each mile counted as 1K), then rowing, then yoga and pilates (1 hr = 5k), with running, HIT (1hr=10k) and paddle boarding also making a showing.



Week 4

Over the four weeks rowers and friends jointly: Rowed 728k, Cycled 961k, Paddle Boarded 51k, walked 2,301k, Ran 168k, swum 1k, and carried out the equivalent of 491k in yoga/pilates and 282K in HIT/Joe Wicks.

At the end of the four weeks we decided that we would keep the challenge open during March for those who wanted to continue, and perhaps do some Island hopping March Hare style, until we could get back on the water for real.

During the next four weeks until the end of March we continued our 'row'.



Week 5

We were all obviously warming up with the weather as this week was yet another record with twenty three people 'rowing' the equivalent of 1571 kilometres.

It was also the first week that more kilometres were cycled than walked, and the first time that kayaking and paddle boarding both featured for the first time. In the five weeks so far we had collectively rowed 827k, cycled 1640k, kayaked 7k, paddle boarded 70k, walked 2818k, run 203k, swum 1k, with yoga and HIT making up 602k and 385k respectively. That was a grand total of 6553 kilometres in five weeks! On our virtual row that put us well over half way across the Atlantic (not bad when we were aiming to get to Dover!) – Our search for land continued!

Week 5

Week 6

Week six was a quieter week but we still managed 977 kilometres, meaning that we were in means that we are now in sight of Antigua. Once again the most popular activity was walking (514k), then cycling (152k) followed by HIT/Joe Wicks (129k), yoga/pilates, (70k) rowing 67k and running (45k). Over the six weeks we had collectively 'rowed' 7,531 kilometres which was amazing.



Week 6



Weeks 7 & 8

Weeks 7 and 8

Over the last two weeks of our March Hare challenge we collectively 'rowed' 1,739 kilometres and arrived at our destination including meeting up with one of our Rowers, Judy's family in Grenada for a beach BBQ (if only!) and then on to the British Virgin Islands.

The total distance that we rowed over the eight weeks was 9,397km which is great.

We then flew home first class ready to get rowing for real, a bit fitter than we would have been without the challenge.

Back on the Water at Last – 29th March 2021

Back on home waters the Government confirmed that the next steps in the roadmap would go ahead as planned and that organised, outdoors team sports including rowing could re-start from the 29th March. We double checked the British Rowing Return to Rowing Guidance, updated our Covid 19 protocols and readied our Gigs ready to get back on the water.



Tuesday 30th March 2021

A glorious spring day for our first row back on the water in more than three months. The sun shone, the winds were light and it was lovely on the water.

Thursday 1 April

This being a British Spring the good weather could not last! Our next row two days later saw cold and very windy conditions, with winds from the north meaning that there is little shelter to be found on our estuary.

The crew almost thought better of it, but managed to launch and row and enjoy a rather more blustery and less relaxed time on the water, with a photograph only rather blurrily from the shore!



Friday 2 April

Even stronger northerly winds stopped play today as we had to cancel our planned row.

Saturday 3 April – New Rowers Session

Over the months that we had been off the water there had been a steady trickle of interest from people who wanted to come out and try rowing. With the prospect of returning to rowing we had contacted those on our 'rowers in waiting list' to see if they were still interested. We also put up a few posters in the Town which resulted in more interest.

Then we organised our first covid secure new rowers session of the year. The forecast was not great and we feared that we might not be able to get back on the water as it was cold with a gusty NE wind. But in the end thirteen new rowers aged between 17 and 68 came out for a first row, with two new rowers an experienced cox, two experienced rowers and an experienced rower in the bow to help with leaving and coming into shore, out for each row.



Sunday 4 April

Back to spring like conditions today with warm sunshine and both Gigs out on the water. True to form, the next day the weather treated us to cold, snow, hail and strong winds for Easter Monday!



Wednesday 7 April

A bright and early start for a 7.30am row and a trip to the Beacon and back before breakfast!





Thursday 8 April

Another chilly and overcast day with gusty winds – this time WSW – six up in the Gig this time and playing swapsies.



Friday 9 April

A women's crew out today for another little jaunt to the Beacon (in the background) about a five mile round trip.

Saturday 10 April

We had arranged our second new rowers session since getting back on the water. We had twelve people booked on to come out for a first or second row and lots of willing helpers again.

Unfortunately the weather had other plans and was much worse than forecast, cold and gret with strong and gusty ENE winds meaning that it was unsafe to row and we had to call the session off, always disappointing as so much time and effort goes in to organising such events.



Sunday 11 April

William Rose out for a row, even spotting some of the Club's micro-sailors out on a shake down sail.



Tuesday 13 April

Two Gigs and three crews out for a mid day row today. William Rose went on a long row to Holbrook (around 3 hours), whilst Hunter went out on two rows with two different crews. The Coxes on Hunter failed to take photographs but we were delighted to be emailed an aerial photo of the first crew taken by drone by a local photographer.



Friday 16 April

'Girls' crew out today in William Rose, with Keith out on our donated single scull Sarka.



Saturday 17 April

The third Saturday of our planned new rowers sessions for April. The forecast had been dreadful once again, and we had feared that we would have to cancel for a second time. But on the day the winds were less than feared (although still stonger than we would have liked), and we managed to get out again with four brand new rowers, and eight rowers returning for a second time.

Rowing coincided with the funeral of Prince Philip and we were able to stop at 3pm for an 'Up Oars' salute and a minute silence.



Sunday 18 April

Both Gigs out today for a row down to the Beacon and back: William Rose with a men's crew including some inexperienced rowers and and Hunter with a women's crew.

Wednesday 21 April

During the third lockdown five of our rowers signed up for one or more legs of the Roxy Lionheart Round Britain row, taking place over six, week long legs in June and July 2021. This will innvolve rowing two hours on, two hours off for twenty four hours over a week for each leg.

The row will take place in Roxy, a new Atlantic Rowing boat (currently actually rowing the Atlantic on her maiden voyage.

This calls for some serious stamina and strength training, and some more adventurous rows.



For our first 'long row' we set off early in the morning with both Gigs with a plan to row down to Harwich Harbour and then to take a right hand turn down to Walton Backwaters ending up at Titchmarsh Marina before rowing back, a trip of roughly thirty two miles.

Conditions were beautiful as we left Manningtree but deteriorated as we reached Harwich where strong winds from the North and rough water led to a change of plan and we took a felt turn, calling in at Shotley before heading up the Orwell past Felixstowe Dock and then on to Levington Marina. Conditions were very tough on the Orwell and it was a long, hard row and at twenty nine miles of rowing, the furthest that any of us had rowed for a very long time. But we made it, and plan a repeat attempt on Titchmarsh Marina at the beginning of May.



Congratulations, this activity is your longest rowing on Strava!

Distance	Avg Pace
46,479 m	4:42 /500m
Moving Time	
7:17:44	



Pit stop at Levington Marina

Friday 23 April

Some of the rowers from Wednesday’s epic row went for a rather more gentle early morning row to stretch the muscles.



Saturday 24 April

Another Saturday, another new and developing rowers session. Once again the wind was rather more than was wanted but we managed to get both Gigs out twice with eight rowers out for a second or third row and all making good progress.

There was great excitement also as after many years in planning the piles for what will become a floating pontoon were put in place during the week, and the piling rig was towed away during our session.





Sunday 25 April

Another cold and blustery day, but two Gigs went out despite the conditions. The experienced crew ventured a hard and windy row down to Shotley Point and then the beacon and then sufed back home with the wind behind them. The other crew stayed closer to home and tried to find some shelter!

Thursday 29 April

Another windy weektime row. This time the wind change round to a gusty north westerly with one of the highest tides of the year meaning that Hunter was almost sitting on top of the quayside when we came back in.

We really were not grumpy – it was just windy out there...

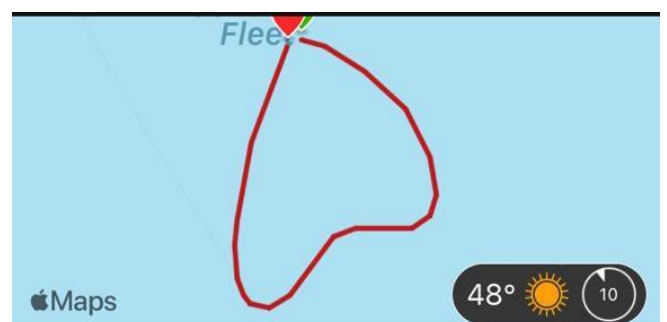
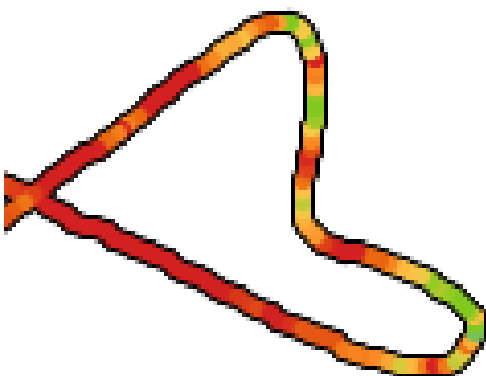


Friday 30th April

The final day of our planned 'Rowing On' project and another trip for the 'Girls' in William Rose – rather less grumpy looking than yesterdays' photos!

And Finally –

Our Harker's Yard Gig Association Challenge for April was to 'row a heart' with the track on GPS – a technical challenge for both Coxswains and Crews. The crews on both the 29 and 30 April gave it a go!



What can we say but that we love rowing and we will continue to 'Row On' in 2021 – thanks Sport England!