

A personal view of the early and mid sixties

by Stevie Smith

1961- 1962

I have just read Dusty Anderson's account of the 1961/62 season and found it very interesting to compare his 'bird's eye view' with my 'worm's eye view'. At that stage Dusty was an experienced oarsman and respected coach who was able to take an objective overview of the club and especially of its upper echelons. On the other hand I was a complete novice at the very bottom of the club. Understandably, our perspectives were somewhat different and I shared Dusty's view that there was a great feeling of optimism in the club.

My introduction to Queen's rowing was purely accidental and came via Ken Morrow, who had been several years ahead of me at school, and whom I met coming out of the boat-house. I had been training on the Lagan towpath with the Queen's cross-country squad but within half an hour I was coxing a tub and had been bitten by the rowing bug. Of course I didn't realise at the time that Ken would do so much for Lagan rowing, both on and off the water, nor did I realise that I would still be coxing Ken in Belfast Rowing Club and Belfast Boat Club veteran crews thirty-five years later.

In 1961 I had no previous contact with rowing apart from a vague image of the University Boat Race and I was at a slight disadvantage because I joined towards the end of Christmas term. However, I remember being made very welcome by Dave Porteus, the Captain.

There was a strong Novice squad consisting of over twenty oarsmen and three coxes. In January 1962 we settled into two Novice VIII's plus a few spares. John Stitt, who had coxed from the start of the season, was an obvious choice for the A boat and I achieved my ambition to cox the Novice Bs. During the Easter term we rowed against each other regularly and the Bs occasionally beat the As which was good for both crews and resulted in some personnel changes. In common with many crews of that time we were coached by Ken Morrow, Sam and Dusty Anderson and Donal Murphy.

I can still remember our first win which was against Royal College of Surgeons on the Liffy as part of the Wylie Cup Regatta. As a B crew our race didn't count towards the Cup but both the Senior and Intermediate crews won their races so Queen's brought Wylie to the Lagan, where it stayed for several years. Both Novice crews remained intact throughout most of the regatta season before the inevitable pressure of exams, summer jobs and lack of cash reduced us to an eight and a four. We had a busy season, racing at Trinity, Belfast, Bann, Galway, Athlone and Blessington. The A crew won at Galway and had several very close races and the B four won at Belfast. Unfortunately both Novice VIII were beaten in the Novice Championships although the A crew pushed the winners, RBAI, hard in the final.

The Intermediate VIII won at Wylie, Carlow, Belfast and Coleraine and I remember being very pleased and proud that both the Senior VIII and the Intermediate VIII had won their respective Championships. However it was several years before I fully appreciated just

how string the Club was that year and how rare it was for a university club to achieve a 'double' success.

1962-63

When the Club resumed training again in the autumn of 1962 expectations were high for another successful season. Most of the crew had won the Novice Championships in 61 and the Intermediate Championships in '62 returned to form the core of the Senior VIII and their stroke, Jimmy Riddell, was elected Captain. The other Senior members were Jim Barry, Joe McMinn, Ron Bradley, Terry Morahan, Ian Duff, Eric Woods, Wilson McClelland and Paul Newman (cox). Enough people from the '62 Novice A and B crews also returned to form an Intermediate crew and provide the nucleus of a good Novice crew.

One of my strongest memories of '63 was that the River Lagan started to freeze beside the boat house in early January and it remained frozen for over three weeks. It eventually froze from bank to bank as far down as the Albert Bridge and training was severely disrupted at a time when crews should have been preparing for Head races. The Senior and Intermediate crews did some land-based training but this was unusual for oarsmen at that time and I don't remember the Novice crews doing anything collectively. During this period I realised how much time I had been devoting to the sport with its six outings a week and how little to my studies and I decided to change my priorities. I didn't want to let the Club down but there were two other novice coxes available and I thought it was best to make the break early in the season.

I continued to cox for the rest of the season, albeit less intensively, as a reserve for the Novice, Intermediate and occasionally Senior coxes when they were unavailable which kept me in touch with the club. I particularly remember coxing the Intermediate crew which beat our own Senior VIII to win what would now be called a mini-head involving about eight boats from Queen's, RBAI and Methody. This race, which was held in March, was the first one on the Lagan since 1956 and was rowed from Pollock Dock to Queens.

The Club entered three boats for Erne Head but had a disappointing day. Fortunately we were more successful in the Wylie Cup which was held on the Lagan and rowed over a distance of approximately 1500 metres, from the McConnell Weir to Queen's boat house. The Seniors lost in the final but both the Novice and Intermediate crews won their sections which meant that Queen's retained Wylie. Shortly after this the Club had a successful outing to Coleraine where we won all three sections at an Invitation Event.

When training resumed after Easter it was evident that the Seniors were not going well and two oarsmen dropped out, to be replaced by Roddy Clarke and Sid Gray, who had both been in the '62 Senior Crew. The Senior VIII then won at Coleraine and the Senior IV won at both Coleraine and the Belfast Lough Championships.

At Henley they were coached by Ronnie Teale, who took over this role from Felix Badcock who had helped Queen's crews for many years, and he decided to re-arrange the crew, moving Wilson McClelland to stroke and Jimmy Riddell to 2. He also tried to change them to a Lady Margaret style which was out of date even then and was not

successful. Unfortunately they met Cornell University in the first race and were well beaten.

The Senior VIII, and a second Senior VIII which had got together after the exams, rowed at Belfast Regatta but both crews then disbanded. A Senior IV went to Limerick and several other Regattas but was unsuccessful. The Intermediate VIII, which had won Wylie, also had a disappointing season although their IV won at the Belfast Lough Championships.

Fortunately the Novices had a great year and really carried the flag for Queen's in '63. In addition to Wylie they won at Belfast, Galway, Bann, Limerick and Cork as well as lifting the Novice Championships at New Ross. The Novice IV out of the VIII won at the Belfast Lough Championships, Galway and Limerick. I also remember a second Novice crew which contained Paddy Stevenson and Mike Ekin, both of whom had been successful athletes before taking up rowing. Paddy was a London schools sprint champion and Mike was an Athletics Blue. The success of the whole squad must have been very satisfying for their coach, Ken Morrow, who had worked very hard with Novice crews for several years, and for Donal Murphy, the chief coach.

Trevor Anderson, who spent many years as a doctor in South Africa, returned to Northern Ireland recently and is now a rowing veteran with Enniskillen Boat Club. I am very grateful to him for the following antidotes:

“Leading up to the Irish Championships that year, which were scheduled for New Ross, we were beaten by only one crew in Ireland; the Garda Maiden VIII. We had both competed in the Junior Championships and had finished first and second in the final thereof. I don't know how often two Maiden VIIIs achieved that feat. Thus we knew that the Garda crew would not be eligible to compete in the Maiden Championships as well, thus making us the favourites to lift the title. We had warned our cox, Trevor McCartney, that we would be throwing him into the river if we won the Championships. He protested that he could not swim, but we promised to rescue him! After duly winning the Final and taking our boat from the water we proceeded to carry our reluctant cox to the water's edge where a crowd of about two hundred spectators were encouraged by the commentator to “Come and see the Queen's crew throw their cox in the water”. On the count of three we launched him through the air into nine feet of water. We all jumped in after him to perform the promised rescue. To my horror, he was nowhere to be seen. As I had been through school with him and knew his parents well, I had a momentary vision of having to break the news to them that we had drowned their son! Eventually I saw his hand appear and we pulled him up to the surface. At this point someone on the bank threw a heavy cork life belt which hit our unfortunate cox on the head sending him under for the second time. Again we pulled him up, but, as there were eight of us in the water and we had eight different ways of getting him into the life belt, we managed to send him under again! Eventually we got him into the life belt and, deciding that our duty was complete, we swam off to enjoy ourselves leaving the people on the bank to pull him in to the shore using the attached rope. We didn't see how he managed to tip out of the life belt, but somehow he did, and went down under for an unprecedented fourth time! This time we “lifesaved” him in to the bank ourselves and. After he had coughed an enormous amount of river water out of his lungs, he gasped “What took you so long?”

Two other incidents stand in my memory that year, both involving the vagrancies of starts in the far south and west of Ireland. Having won the Maiden Championships we moved up to the Junior division and remained unbeaten there as we did not encounter our rivals from the Garda crew again. They had progressed on to compete in the Irish Senior Championships, held at Limerick and losing only very narrowly to a very experienced Old Collegians crew. In the same Regatta we progressed to the finals of the Junior section, winning both VIIIs and IVs. The incident that will always remain in my memory was at the start of the Junior IV Final. We were against Limerick Boat Club and, for some reason, there were no skate-boats being used. We rowed past the start line, turned and drifted down to the start. Limerick also turned and paddled to stay ahead of us. The umpire responded by shouting more and more furiously at both crews to stop paddling until he gave the order to start. We shouted back that we had no intention of stopping until we were level with Limerick. This continued as an “unofficial race” for about 150-200 metres with the umpire, by now screaming at Limerick: “Limerick! Stop! Limerick Stop!, if you don’t stop I’m going to disqualify you! Limerick. I warn you. I am going to disqualify you! Limerick. This is your last warning. All right then. GO!” And so we started the race, still half a length behind! We won anyway.

The other start that I will never forget occurred at Galway Regatta that year. We were due to have the Final IV event after the Final of the Senior Sculls. We sat level with the starting line to watch them go off. Again there was no stake-boats. The two scullers sat alongside each other waiting for a starter to appear. To our amazement, a little priest appeared on one bank and shouted across to them; “Are you a wee bit ready lads? Well, away you go then!” The two scullers looked at each other in equal amazement and set off!

I shall never forget the fun we had travelling around Ireland in those days, sleeping in a proper bed the night before races, and wherever we could lay our heads the night after! This often meant the floor of the Regatta Dance venue after the dance ended, or, on one occasion the luxury of a soft bunk when we “broke into” some riverboats moored along the bank. I shall never forget the sight of Paddy Stevenson (6’4”) being pummelled in the middle of the night by an irate, very drunk little Irish lady with her panties around her ankles, swinging her handbag at his head after he had mistakenly walked into the ladies loo and screaming at him; “My three brothers gave their lives for Ireland, and this dirty great Englishman assaults me in the toilet!”

At the end of the season Colours were awarded to the following squads:

Novice VIII	Novice IV	Intermediate VIII	Senior VIII
R Donaldson	J Frazer	D Graham	J Barry
R Roberts	P Stevenson	T Craig	J Riddell
P Harris	R Ardis	I McLernon	S Grey
R Stratton	M Ekue	D Boyd	J McMinn
L White	K McWhinney	D Stewart	R Bradley
B Tate	B McComish (cox)	R James	R Clarke
D Tomkinson		D McCandless	T Morahan
T Anderson		R Pagan	I Duff
T McCartney (cox)		J Stitt (cox)	E Woods
			W McClelland
			P Newman (cox)

Lady Victoria Boat Club had produced a regular supply of coaches for Queen's crews for many years but during the 1962/63 season relationships between the two clubs became somewhat strained and several of the coached decided to leave. I must confess that until then I had taken our coaches somewhat for granted. From our usual viewpoint on the water on winter nights they were shadowy figures outlined by the street lamps and we had no idea of their previous rowing or coaching experience. They were also seen as elderly gentlemen (i.e. twenty-five plus) who were barely able to keep up with us on their bicycles and seemed to enjoy sending us out on 'double runs' when it was wet and windy. I realised in later years that coaches are a dedicated band who find the winter nights even less rewarding than the oarsmen and whose commitment to the sport goes largely unrecognised.

Belfast Commercial B C was going through one of those 'lean spells' which afflict all clubs from time to time and the 'Lady Vic' men decided to move down river to Balfour Avenue and put a Senior IV on the water. Despite my resolve to reduce my involvement with the sport I ended the season coxing this crew which consisted of Red Skelton (bow), Des Browne (2), Ken Morrow (3) and Sean Doherty (stroke) and provided me with great experience.

I coxed Belfast Commercial BC again in 1964 and also in the late sixties which meant that I had regular contact with Queen's rowing throughout most of that time. However many of the details of those years, as recorded below, are the result of some very pleasant reminiscing with Nigel Kerr, John Martin, Ian (Alex) Hull, Ian James and Ricky Caruth whose help was invaluable.

1963/64

Aubrey Kerr was elected Captain in 1963/64 and was joined in the Senior crew by Dave Porteus, the 1961/62 Captain. Jim Barry was the only member of the 1962/63 Senior crew to return but Ian McLernon and John Stitt, the cox, moved up from the Intermediates. Nigel Kerr, who had stroked the Methody First VIII, and John Young, who had rowed at Coleraine Inst, were useful additions to the Club and went straight onto Seniors. The crew was completed by Brian Tate and Leslie White, two big men from the previous year's Novices. The Novices also provided the core of the Intermediate VIII, stroked by Trevor Anderson, and there was a good squad of enthusiastic beginners.

Coaching was provided mainly by Sam Anderson, Harvey Jackson and Ken Morrow who placed great emphasis on building up miles during training, with charts in the boat house and note-books being filled by coxes. Despite the fact that most coaches were known to enjoy a few 'jars' there was a strict rule that oarsmen should not drink spirits and have no more than one pint per day during the rowing season. Today's rower will find it hard to believe that this rule was adhered to and that, apart from an occasional beer after training on a Sunday, the crews in which I was involved rarely had a drink together.

I was actively involved in the usual training progression from 'bank' tubs to fours and eights during the early part of the season. I also helped Tommy, the boatman, to carry out minor repairs which led to a life-long interest in the design and construction of boats. The Sixties were very interesting in this respect because there were more changes during the decade than in most others. I recall in the early Sixties it was only the Senior crew which rowed in 'fine' or 'shell' eights of plywood construction and the much heavier 'clinker'

boats were used by the rest of the crews. The eights in use in '63/64' were the Slieve Bloom, Slieve Bignian, (both fine), Slieve Donard, Slieve Bearnagh and, the oldest, the Sir Milne Barbour. The Slieve Beagh, which was a relatively broad-beamed eight, was purchased in '63 but wasn't available until '64. For some unknown reason the fours were not named until '65 when John Martin, then a Geography student, produced a list of all the mountains with the Slieve prefix at the request of Roddy Clarke, the Captain.

A 'compromise' boat which was a fine shell with a small keel, was produced around the time but the idea didn't last long and within a few years fine boats were being used by Intermediate and School crews. Before the end of the decade 'man-made' materials such as fibreglass and plastic were being used more widely although they were expensive and only used by the top crews. The design of the stretchers and riggers also changed considerably, becoming lighter, stronger and easier to adjust. The slides became longer and seats were developed which ran on grooves rather than on ridges and were less prone to sticking, especially in 'starts'. During the same period the blades changed from being 'feather' shaped, through 'spades' to 'compacts'.

As a cox I remember that the rudder was large by today's standards and mounted on the stern with about half of it above the water line. The bow and stern sections were covered in clear plastic although some of the older boats still had the traditional canvas, which gave its name to a narrow winning margin, and coxes were instructed to pierce the stern canvas to prevent damage to the boat if it is sinking. Of course there were no 'cox boxes' or other aids to communicate between cox and crew and some coxes could be heard for miles.

Small boat rowing on the Lagan had virtually disappeared although there was one pair-oar slung from the rafters of the boathouse and taken occasionally by the members of Lady Victoria. During the summer of '62 the club purchased two training sculls which were imitation clinkers made of fibreglass and quite heavy. They were also relatively stable, or so I thought until I fell in the first time I took one out. I swallowed several pints of the Lagan but suffered no ill effects until I went to a lab class a few days later and discovered that the staff used the river at the clubhouse as a rich source of microbiological specimens.

In 1964 the University Championships stayed at Queen's for another year and the Club also had a good day at Erne head. The crews were selected fairly early in the year and remained as follows:

	Novice	Intermediate	Senior
Bow	P Berry	R Corbett	J Barry
2	T Hewitt	K McWhinney	J Young
3	P Barnecutt	P Harris	I McLernon
4	C Carruthers	A Stratton	N Kerr
5	S McFerran	G Dawson	A Kerr
6	J Connolly	R Roberts	D Porteus
7	J Cunningham	D Moody	L White
Stroke	R Hall	T Anderson	B Tate
Cox	M O'Connor	B McComish	J Stitt

The Senior VIII was very good and had some close races, especially with Trinity College, Dublin but Garda Siochana had two strong VIII's and won most of the major events that

year. The Seniors entered the Thames Cup at Henley and were drawn against University College, Dublin in the first heat. They went off very fast and led for the first mile but were unable to hold on and were beaten by a length.

Queen's also had a very fast Senior IV which comprise Jim Barry. Leslie White. Aubrey Kerr, Brian Tate and John Stitt. They won several races at the main Regattas and were widely tipped to win the 'Blue Ribband' but were beaten by an Old Collegians crew on the day. Their quality was recognised later in the season when they were selected to represent Ireland in the Home Internationals and acquitted themselves well.

1964/1965

The Club started the 1964/65 season with a strong squad of experienced oarsmen and a promising squad of novices. Roddy Clarke, the Captain, had an excellent reputation as an oarsman having represented Ulster while still at Coleraine Inst and stroked the '62 crew to victory in the Irish Senior Championships as a 'fresher'. He had also gained Blues for boxing and athletics and was a very enthusiastic Captain with an organised and methodical approach. At the start of the year we had enough oarsmen for two Senior VIII's, an Intermediate VIII and a good Novice squad.

I was somewhat surprised but obviously very pleased to be selected for the Senior A VIII which had several experienced oarsmen. Ian McLernon and Niger Kerr had both rowed at Methody and were in their second Senior year at Queen's. Cedric Davis, George Dawson and John Martin had all rowed at RBAI and George had been promoted from the '64 Intermediate crew. Both Paddy Stevenson and George Carruthers, who rowed at 5 and 6 respectively, had moved up from previous Novice boats and, like myself, were on a fast learning curve. Roddy was an excellent stroke who literally 'led from the front'.

Training for all crews during the winter months consisted mainly of 'double runs' to the McConnell Weir and back six days per week. When the tide was well in we occasionally went as far as the Railway Bridge but longer runs were prevented by the construction of the Queen Elizabeth Bridge which was not opened until 4th July 1966. Head of the River races on the Lagan were not possible for the same reason. With so much discussion today about water quality it is hard to believe that in the Sixties Belfast Abattoir used to release floor washings into the Lagan and we used to row through several hundred yards of pale burgundy coloured water when we went below the weir.

The Senior squad also carried out a personal fitness programme involving circuit training which was developed specifically for oarsmen by Alistair McDonald of QUB PE Centre and considered to be very innovative at the time. Another training idea, which was initially unpopular with some oarsmen although I always enjoyed it, was a series of fitness exercises and a run to the QUB gym, than at Sans Souci, before each outing. We developed a system of handicaps which enabled even the slowest runners to win occasionally and resulted in a keen competitive spirit in the crew.

On the water the coaches included Donal Murphy, Rev. Gordon Gray and, later in the season, Arthur Lees.

The first event of the year was the Wylie Cup which Queen's had won for the past three years therefore we were under pressure to do well. It was held on the Lagan and the

format of the time involved only Senior, Intermediate and Novice boats, with ‘no second’ boats, fours or sculls allowed. The Senior A and Novice crews won their sections with the result that we retained Wylie for the fourth successive year.

A week later Queen’s entered two fine eights and two clinkers for Erne Head, as follows:

	Novice	Intermediate	Senior B	Senior A
Bow	I James	J Parnell-Smith	D Boyd	G Dawson
2	A McKay	T Craig	R Twenlow	C Davis
3	R Skelton	T Gibson	R Donaldson	I McLernon
4	B Madill	R Pearson	R James	N Kerr
5	P Barnecutt	R Galway	R Burch	P Stevenson
6	L Clarke	I Hull	R Pagan	C Carruthers
7	R Caruth	A McKibbin	P Harris	J Martin
Stroke	F Allen	R Hall	T Anderson	R Clarke
Cox	M Dodds	J Arjomandi	T McCartney	S Smith

The race took place in atrocious weather conditions including torrential rain and a strong flow but the Senior A VIII broke the course record and won the Open section for the first time since 1960.

Despite the old saying about not changing a winning combination, the crew was reorganized on the eve of the Bann Head and was beaten by a very strong Coleraine Inst crew. We reverted to the ‘Erne Head’ crew for Putney HOR and our training included a week on the tideway. We boated from the Westminster Bank boat house and were coached by Ronnie Teale, who organised several outings with other crews, including the Isis boat with Dan Topolski in it. They were preparing for the University Boat Race and won the Thames Cup later in the year so we were very encouraged when we held them over a 2-mile section of the tideway.

As a cox I found the river Thames very interesting but difficult to ‘read’ compared to the rivers of Ireland which are so narrow in comparison. The coxes meeting in Putney Town Hall was my first taste of the scale of the race which comprised over three hundred boats. I was very impressed with the organisation required even to get us to the start in echelons. We started out at No. 62 and by Hammersmith Bridge we had passed several boats. However, near the mile-post we came up behind a row of boats which were strung across the river and I tried unsuccessfully to get through a gap. Two of the crews which did not give way were disqualified later but that was no consolation to us. We didn’t settle again as a crew with the result that we finished a disappointing 88th.

After Easter Dick Hall, the stroke of the Intermediate VIII, replaced George Carruthers in Senior A boat and a new Senior IV was formed. This comprised John Cunningham (bow, Dick Stratton (2) Danny Stewart (3), Dick Roberts (stroke) and Brian (Bunny) McComish (cox). Danny was an interesting character who studied engineering for a few years, switched to first year medicine and then, and after graduating a Doctor, completed his engineering degree. It must have been hard work but he always said it was to give him more time for rowing!

The first Regatta was at Portadown where we had a successful day, winning both the Senior VIII's and IV's events. We set off for Trinity in good form but missed the Regatta because we had an accident in which the boat trailer parted company from the hired Land Rover outside Balbriggan. (We discovered afterwards that the ball-hitch on the Land rover was metric but the tow-bar was imperial!) Fortunately, no-one was injured but several boats were badly damaged, including our fine IV, and we had to borrow boats from other clubs for the rest of the season.

The tour to Marlow and Henley, which involved the Senior VIII, first Senior IV and intermediate VIII, was the trip of a lifetime for me, and I suspect, for most of the crew. Roddy, Nigel and Ian had rowed there before but for the rest of us everything was new, both on and off the river. The Senior VIII spent three weeks training or racing twice a day and gained valuable experience. We started at Maidenhead and rowed down river each day, leaving our boat at various boat houses overnight. The upper reaches of the Thames were very beautiful with overhanging willows along the bank and cattle grazing peacefully but there were plenty of other river craft and occasional locks to negotiate which kept me busy.

All three boats competed at Marlow over a 500m, 3 lane course. It was the biggest Regatta I had ever seen and included twenty-five Senior boats, seventeen Intermediate boats and forty-two Novice boats. Although we didn't collect any silverware we felt that we had had a competent row which gave us confidence for Henley the following week.

During the second week we trained twice a day over the regatta course and made good progress. We were entered for the Thames Challenge Cup, which was second only to the 'Grand', and according to the Regatta programme had been won by American crews seventeen times out of the previous nineteen. You can imagine our feelings when we realised we had drawn North-eastern Universities, USA, in the first round but we had a great row and were only beaten by a length.

The Senior IV entered the Wyfold Challenge Cup and got through the preliminary round but were beaten by a very strong Oxford College crew.

The opportunity of watching and occasionally mixing with the top crews in the world was a tremendous experience which culminated with the final of the Grand Challenge Cup. Ratzeburger Ruderclub of Germany beat Vesper Boat Club, USA but only by half a length and reversed the result of the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo. According to the official records, "both crews covered the course in a faster time than any previously achieved in the Regatta's 126 years of history."

In a 'novelty' event the entire crew which had won the Grand Challenge Cup in 1914 rowed over the course to tumultuous applause on the final day. The members were all in their early seventies and would now be classed as Veteran (H) but, of course, the thought of racing at that age was unheard of in the Sixties.

During my time at Henley I had the good fortune to meet two very famous people, Sir John (now Lord) Hunt and Princess Grace of Monaco. Sir John was a boyhood hero of many of the crew having led the British Everest Expedition of 1953 and I could hardly believe my luck when I realised that Sir John and Lady Hunt very generously hosted the Queen's crews which were competing at Henley each year. We were also very honoured

when Sir John showed us around his 'memorabilia' room which contained trophies and other artefacts which had been presented to him during a lifetime of distinguished service.

I was also asked by Harvard Rowing Club if I would substitute for their cox who had appendicitis and I was very pleased to accept. It was a great experience because off the water they were very casual but on it there was great discipline and controlled power. The crew was very fit and totally dedicated to rowing, having been granted a non-study year to compete at major European regattas. On a lighter note, although it didn't seem so at the time, we were rowing upstream of the regatta course and rapidly approaching the weir when I discovered that they couldn't understand my accent and I had some difficulty getting them to 'easy' because they used the command 'way enough'. As a result of my involvement with Harvard I was invited to a reception which Princess Grace of Monaco hosted for all the American crews plus one small honorary member from Queen's. She had a keen interest in rowing because her father and brother were both Olympic Gold Medallists but I must admit I was more impressed by her outstanding beauty.

We must have taken our rowing very seriously because I don't remember many parties (or maybe there was another reason). However I have a strong recollection of one incident in the early hours of the morning before we left Henley when our celebration included testing the 4-wheel drive properties of our Land Rover along the riverbank. Unfortunately we also proved that it wasn't amphibious and had to borrow a tractor to rescue it.

Nigel Kerr developed back problems while at Henley and was replaced by Sid Grey, who had travelled as cover for both crews, and he remained with the crew for the rest of the season. While we were in England the Intermediate VIII raced at Coleraine and got to the final of the Intermediate Championships, where they were beaten by an exceptionally strong Garda crew. They split up shortly after this but the Novices rowed at various Regattas including Cork, Blessington and Carrick-on-Shannon. The only competitive sculler in the Club, Tony Kernohan, also represented Queen's at several Regattas.

Unfortunately for Queen's, rowing in Ireland in the mid-Sixties was dominated by Garda Siochana. In 1965 they had two very strong Senior crews and an excellent Intermediate crew which made life very difficult in the top two divisions. Their Intermediate crew created history by turning Senior after winning the Intermediate Championships and, a few weeks later, beating their own first boat to win the Irish Senior Championships at Blessington.

Coleraine Inst also had an excellent crew which caused some excitement when they rowed with seven men in the Senior VIIIs at Cork because one of their crew became ill. It was too late to find a replacement so, in order to satisfy the condition that the "boat be equipped with eight oars", they tied a blade across the seat and went on to beat several other crews. The fact that a schoolboy crew was rowing at Senior level was remarkable enough in itself but the way in which they acquitted themselves was outstanding.

The Queen's Senior squad had greater success in the IVs event where we were able to enter 3 boats, often racing each other in heats and several times in finals. These consisted of the 'Henley IV and two IVs out of the VIII. One of the latter comprising Ian McLernon, Dick Hall, John Martin, and Nigel Kerr beat the other two crews to win at Portadown.

The most successful crew consisted of George Dawson (bow), Cedric Davis (2), Paddy Stevenson(3), Roddy Clarke (Stroke) and myself (cox) and we had a great season, winning the Connor Cup and the First Senior fours events at Carlow (with Sam Hay coxing), Bann, Cork, Blessington and Carrick-on-Shannon Regattas.

As explained earlier, we missed Trinity because the Club trailer was involved in an accident in which our fine four was wrecked. One of the ironies of the season was we spent a lot of time adjusting the riggers on the eight to 'fine tune' them to various weather conditions whereas we recorded all our wins in the four in a selection of borrowed boats. We had used Carlow's best boat, the Padraig on several occasions and the crew will always be grateful to Carlow Boat Club and its Captain, Tony Dooley in particular, for the offer of this boat for the final of the 'Blue Ribband' at Blessington.

The race for the Metropolitan Grand Challenge Cup of 'Blue Ribband' involved eight boats including Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, who were an unknown quantity. Blessington Lake is notorious for its treacherous weather conditions and we decided we would aim for a second place in our heat on Friday in order to get lane 1, which was more sheltered, for Sunday's final. Several other crews had the same idea and we got slower as we jockeyed for position. At about 200 yards from the finish we sprinted for the line and achieved our objective but we didn't know until later that the small 'supporters' club' of parents, girlfriends and club members were worried that we were unable to go any faster!

We realised next day that we had taken an unnecessary risk because the conditions for the final were perfect and the lane didn't matter. We led from the start and won by a 'distance' which was our best result of the season. Blues were awarded to the 1st Senior IV, for the first time since 1962, but not to the VIII which was disappointing for those oarsmen who had been an essential part of the squad.

1965/66

Nigel Kerr took over the Captaincy in 1965/66, just one year after his brother had vacated the position. They were the second set of brothers to be Captains of the Club, the first being the Cunninghams in the 1930s. Unfortunately Nigel didn't get the support which this historic event deserved because many of the previous year's experienced oarsmen had either graduated or reached a critical stage in their courses. However he was a dedicated Captain off the water and was responsible for initiating the Queen's Regatta with the encouragement and assistance of Victor Warnock and others from Lady Victoria Boat Club.

According to Walter F Mitchell in his history of Belfast Rowing Club the Belfast Regatta was held on the Lagan up-stream from the McConnell Weir from 1938 to 1971, apart from a five-year break during the Second World War. It was organised by Belfast Commercial Boating Club and rowed downstream but was "abandoned because of the disturbances in the city and a resulting loss in support by visiting clubs."

It therefore seems surprising that Queen's decided to organise its first Regatta in 1966. However a foreword in the Regatta Programme, written by the Captain, indicates that "Queen's Regatta has been started with the aim of helping to raise the standard of Irish rowing by attracting crews from Britain. To further this aim at schools level, Queen's is the only Irish Regatta where crews competing for the 'Schools' Cup row in fine boats. It

is to be hoped that, with the continued support of other clubs, Queen's Regatta will be firmly established as a major Regatta in the Irish Rowing calendar." Although it took several years and a change of venue to Castlewellan Lake in 1974, Nigel's prediction was to prove correct and Queen's Regatta is now usually run in conjunction with University Championships each year. Much of the credit for this goes to Victor Warnock who was the University Representative on the IARU Executive and ran 'Wylie' for many years.

The crews at the first Queen's Regatta were:

	Novice	Intermediate	Senior
Bow	P Darragh	D Ellis	T Brown
2	H Turner	I Dunlop	T Anderson
3	J Farmer	G Wallace	S Grey
4	J Hurwitz	P Barnecutt	R Clarke
5	B Erskine	A McKibbib	J Cunningham
6	J Heggarty	R Skelton	C Davis
7	J Dallas	R Galway	J Martin
Stroke	J McRoberts	F Allen	N Kerr
Cox	J Collier	R Caruth	M Dodds

S F E (Ricky) Caruth, who had rowed Novice in 1965, coxed for most of the season because of back problems but returned to rowing the following year and Paul Darragh from the Novice boat alternated during the year from coxing to the bow seat. Marcus Dodds, whom I knew well from his Novice year and who tragically died as a young man, was an amazing character. He had a ferocious looking black beard, a theatrical 'presence' and a tremendous air of authority, all of which were very useful to him as a cox.

The perennial problem of a shortage of coaches became acute in 1965/66 as many of those who had been the mainstay of Queen's coaching were unable to assist. Harvey Jackson and Sam Anderson had retired while Dusty had moved to Coleraine where, not surprisingly he became actively involved with Bann. As a result most of the burdens fell on Paddy Kemp who had rowed in the Diamond Sculls at Henley and, fortunately for the Club, was a very experienced coach.

Later in the year the Senior VIII was disrupted by injuries, one of the casualties being the Captain who had a recurring back problem, and it was replaced by a Senior IV. This was the first year for some time that Queen's did not row a Senior VIII at Putney or at the summer Regattas, which caused some comment at the time. With hindsight, it was probably a reflection of the fact that University crews were losing their supremacy of the Irish Rowing scene and it paved the way for the Queen's first boat to row in later years as either a Senior IV or an Intermediate VIII if this was considered appropriate. The four considered of Cedric Davis (bow), John Cunningham(2), John Martin(3), Trevor Anderson(stroke) and Marcus Dodds (cox) with Ian Wilson providing coaching.

When entries for Marlow were being submitted it was decided that a coxless IV would stand a better chance than a coxed IV and, much to Marcus Dodds disgust they put a bag of sand in the cox's seat of a normal four to keep it trimmed. Cedric Davis, who had experience of steering as a sculler, kept them between the banks from the 2 seat and despite the unorthodox approach they went quite quickly. They were beaten by a strong Garda IV at Marlow, using a borrowed boat, and went on to Henley in good form. However, when they had been trained there was almost a week they discovered that, due

to an amazing ‘oversight’, they had not been entered for the Regatta. They continued to train but were bitterly disappointed, especially Trevor Anderson who had coxed the course while at Methody and was keen to row it.

The crew also took a more active part in the social side of Henley than they had planned and will always be remembered for providing Queen’s with the official starting point which is still used each year at Castlewellan. The operation was planned with military precision and involved Cedric, who was a very strong swimmer, swimming under water with a shifting spanner and undoing the retaining nuts before the post was ‘collected’ by a passing punt containing the rest of the crew. Queen’s was being hosted by Dr. and Mrs Salmon who were very impressed by this feat and Mrs Salmon composed a song about it which was sung at an end-of Regatta Concert. Fortunately the Henley officials who were present seemed to see the funny side of it.

1966/67

Membership increased again in 1966/67 and this led to a more successful season under the Captaincy of John Martin, who was in his third Senior year. A large squad of experienced rowers and beginners trained on Wednesdays and Saturdays during the Christmas term and were able to go below the Queen Elizabeth Bridge occasionally at high tide because it had been opened during the previous summer.

Six Queen’s VIIIs took part in Erne Head and the Intermediate VIII won the clinker section for the first time for some years. Shortly after this the Senior and Novice VIII also won Wylie, thus extending Queen’s run to six successive University Championships.

Queen’s had lost its place in the Head of the River at Putney because no crew had been entered in 1966 so they decided to miss it again and concentrate on training for the Regatta season. The Seniors spent a very useful week at Coleraine Inst, training on their own each morning and with the school first VIII each afternoon. They were coached by Robert Northridge, who was a Post-graduate student at Queen’s and is now the well known Rowing Master at Portora. John Martin claims that in the evening the crew, whose degree courses covered a wide range of subjects, helped the senior boys with their ‘prep’ although they found their way into town a few times as well. He also remembers that the school allowed the crew to use the swimming pool, in which some of them swam naked because they had no ‘togs’, much to their embarrassment when a group of teachers’ wives arrived unexpectedly for a swim. The crews were re-arranged several times during the year but for most races they were as follows:

	Novice B	Novice A	Intermediate	Intermediate IV	Senior
Bow	S Heaney	R Bunn	J Farmer	R Caruth	J Kernohan
2	B Gray	J Gillan	P Darragh	I Hull	S McElhinney
3	D Frizelle	S Magill	D Ellis/I Hull	D Connolly	N Young
4	N McVicker	R Clarke	J Hurwitz	L Clarke	G Carruthers
5	D McMullan	T Higgins	R Donaldson	M Barlow (cox)	J martin
6	G Alcorn	P Bateson	I Dunlop		R Skelton
7	N Scott	N Murray	W McGowan		G Dawson
Stroke	B Craig	H Cassidy	J McRobert		R Hall
Cox	S Hawkins	P Blair	J Collier		I James

The Senior VIII went to Henley and beat Jesus College Cambridge, in the preliminary heats before going out to Poplar and Blackwell in the first heat. At the end of the same week some of the crew decided to emulate the '66 crew by bringing home a Henley starting post but the planning was not just as thorough and they nearly got caught when their 'get-away car' refused to start. Fortunately George Dawson, who was well known for his coolness, persuaded the Security Guard to help them push the car and they arrived home with the other post which is used each year at Castlewellan.

Trevor Anderson, the Vice-Captain, was not rowing that year because of medical exams, and he took over responsibility for the Novice squad. He probably spent more time at the boat club during the year than many of the active rowers and John Martin gives him full credit for the success of the Novice crews. His enthusiasm was repaid when the two Queen's Novice eights finished first and third in the final of the Novice Championships at Coleraine.

The Intermediate VIII and an Intermediate IV both won at Portadown and rowed at Coleraine, Belfast and several other Regattas. Paul Darragh was a good all-rounder who sculled at Intermediate level as well as rowing and coxing. About two weeks before the Intermediate Championships, which were held in Galway, Sam Anderson decided that drastic action was needed and he re-arranged the Intermediate VIII and IV's. The experiment almost worked but they were beaten in the final by Garda Siochana who had 'cleaned up' all season.

To the best of my knowledge Queen's has only produced two FISA Umpires and coincidentally both came from the 1967 crew. John Martin officiated at numerous regattas in Ireland as well as the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, the 1986 Commonwealth Games at Strathclyde and the World Championships in 1997. Ian James, who is still umpiring, officiated at many Irish regattas including the National Championships as well as the Home Internationals at Nottingham and Hazewinkle Regatta in Belgium. Ian was also the Irish Intermediate Team Manager for the 1984 Home Internationals and had contributed to the administration of the sport as a member of the IARU Executive and Vice President of the Ulster branch.

1967/1968

John Martin and Niall Young returned in 1967 and Niall, a Scot, was elected Captain. The rest of the Senior crew was made up of men from previous Intermediate and Novice crews and, although they trained hard, the lack of experience was evident at times. For example at Erne Head the Senior crew came 5th whereas the Intermediate crew was a close 7th and the Novice crew was 11th.

In 1968 the University Championships were planned for Newry Canal because it was a more convenient venue for Southern clubs than Belfast. Unfortunately arrangements were well advanced when Ian Hull, the Regatta Secretary, was advised that the lock gates had been damaged by a cargo vessel and Wylie had to revert to the Lagan.

After Wylie, which Queen's lost, the Senior VIII was changed to a Senior VI and the Intermediate and Novice crews were strengthened, as follows:

	Novice B	Novice A	Intermediate	Senior IV
Bow	M Barlow	D Frizelle	W McGowan	R Caruth
2	B McKenna	J Gilliland	B Craig	N Young
3	M Higgins	R Greene	N Murray	J Martin
4	S McClenaghan	R Todd	I Hull	J Hurwitz
5	G Bleeks	R Fox	T Higgins	J Collier (cox)
6	G Rice	G Hamilton	J Heggarty	
7	A Law	W Ryding	N Scott	
Stroke	G Alcorn	B Grey	H Cassidy	
Cox	P Darragh	N Mercer-Smith	J Farmer	

The Senior IV rowed at the Western Regatta on the Clyde, to which Queen's had sent two crews in 1962, coxed by John Stitt and myself. They rowed at Henley where they were entered for the Henley Prize, the precursor of the Britannia Cup, but were beaten by Durham University.

The Intermediate VIII travelled over at the same time and rowed at Pangbourne and Whitchurch Regatta, also on the Thames. Unfortunately the trip had a very sad ending in which Hugh Turner lost his life after some of the squad had spent an evening at Henley and had taken a punt out on the Thames on the way home. Hugh was a very popular oarsman who is still fondly remembered by all the Club members, coaches and others who had the pleasure of knowing him.

The crews named above rowed at Trinity, Belfast, Coleraine, Carlow and Queen's Regattas with some close races especially in the Novice events. They also rowed on the tidal waters of the Boyne in the last Regatta to be held there.

This personal account of rowing at Queen's had concentrated on the competitive side of the sport which has played a significant part of my life. However there was also a social side and in my search for crew names and other details I found, among my cardboard box of regatta programmes and other memorabilia, several menu card for Annual Dinners and Formal Dinner Dances. These brought back memories of an important, and very enjoyable, aspect of the Boat Club in the Sixties when Coloured blazers were worn with pride and the ladies wore long dresses. They also reminded me of the less formal dances which were held after regattas and of the many friends I have made via rowing throughout Ireland.

The twenty-five years since I started coxing have led to an increase in the popularity of the sport and I can think of no other in which school's crews compete in the same event as 'senior citizens' and both sexes are timed against each other, as happens in Head of the River races.

The Queens University of Belfast Boat Club

1968-69 by Dusty Anderson

Apologies for appearing again as an Author! I was involved only intermittently in coaching that year and have always had very sympathetic memories of Henry Cassidy's very difficult year as Captain.

Basically, the problem for Henry and the coaches was that the Club had a skilful and enthusiastic but lightish Senior boat and a fairly but not very strong, Intermediate boat, made up mainly of the previous year's Novices. As the season progressed, it became clearer and clearer that neither crew was strong enough in its class. Henry eventually bit the bullet and sacrificed some of both crews, including himself, to concentrate on a strong Intermediate eight (half the Senior Crew were of Intermediate status). Perhaps that decision should have been made earlier in the season but it was a difficult one. In the event, the re-vamped Intermediate crew started closing on their main opposition (UCD) and after narrowing the gap to 3 feet at the last race before the Championships, felt they were on target. However, at the Championships, rowed in very rough weather at Waterford, they lost to St Michael's. They did have a good consolation at the end of the season at Marlow Regatta, beating Eton in the heat and Cheltenham in the final.

The Novice eight that year was described in the Secretary's report as being "grotesquely consistent", by which he meant that in the course of the year, they beat virtually every other Novice crew in Ireland in heats but always managed to lose the finals. Nevertheless, they were a very competitive crew in a very competitive division and had many fine and close races. They had the consolation of wins in Novice fours at Coleraine, Waterford, Belfast and Cork and in the under-age fours at Portadown. Novice scullers were also active in the summer regattas.

All in all, an anxious, disappointing and uneven year but as Henry Cassidy observed in the captain's report "I believe there is a new spirit in our Club and that possibly, in the near future, Queens will again attain its proper place".

In retrospect, however, Henry thinks that probably the most important event during his year and one with very far-reaching consequences, was the decision to allow Queens women students to use the club's boats. This paved the way for the foundation of QUBLBC; whose history is detailed in their own publication.