

With very great sadness BBRC has learned that its oldest member John Northridge died last week at the age of 82. John had been ill for some time, then following a fall he was admitted to hospital, where he subsequently died.

John Pitchford and Mike Gleeson have kindly prepared the following obituary:



John was one of the founder members of the club, and rowed regularly at Bewl until well into his seventies. He was a modest and unassuming man who never boasted about his rowing career. But those who knew what he had done in his youth appreciated that his high standards were solidly grounded. An outing in a crew containing John was always a disciplined affair - and if you made a mistake you would hear about it, often in salty language. He demanded the best, as much from himself as from his crewmates. One might add that he took no nonsense from other lake users either - and his altercations with sailors and anglers have given the club some of its best anecdotes while reminding us that a good outing demands respect for the rules - on both sides. In spite of his sometimes crusty exterior he had a good sense of humour and liked nothing more than the gentle ribbing over tea in the clubhouse that used to follow these "full and frank discussions".

He started rowing at St Pauls School in London, and rowed in the school first eight coached by the redoubtable Freddy Page - also an influential Oxford coach. After his return from National Service he joined London Rowing Club and in the 1950s he rowed in the Grand three years at Henley - once as stroke. He was in the ARA group who were under consideration for the 1956 Olympic eight, and narrowly missed selection. That was an eight that never really reached international standard, and although John never said as much one can't help feeling it would have benefited from his fiercely competitive nature and his insistence on the highest standards.

But John made his mark on the international scene by campaigning a pair with an old friend from LRC Maurice Rayner. They won their age group in the coxless pair event at FISA Masters regatta no less than 4 times, a superb result and clear confirmation that his style and attitude to racing had real value. After the sad death of Maurice he was at a loose end for a while until investing in a double scull with John Pitchford with a view to racing when possible in veteran events. Although both have said it was the most enjoyable boating they had ever done, it never reached the standard of his pair with Maurice. But he used to enjoy the boast that they "beat the Japanese" by coming in 3rd ... just ahead of the Jap double in the Masters at Hazewinkel. Later in a restaurant near the regatta the two Johns stood up and loudly toasted their "success" only to find the Japanese pair eating at the next table, blissfully unaware that they were the objects of our good humour - having not a word of English between them. They were immediately given drinks and toasted in their turn - but even today they are probably still puzzled as to how they achieved such amazing popularity - so quickly.

John was also the moving spirit behind the veteran D coxed four which he stroked and selected in 1989. Together with Hugh Spivey, Andrew Prideaux, and John Pitchford, and with Andrew's daughter Louisa coxing, with very little practice (all were still working, and time was limited) they won the event at Staines and at Bedford regattas. The participants

agreed it was John's influence which gave the crew their winning attitude, and the two cups will always be treasured possessions.

But these were in a way "highlights". John was a club oarsman of the best kind. He would appear on a Sunday morning with the intention of sculling, but always willing to change his plans and slot in to a crew if called upon to do so, and always doing his best to impart some of his own expertise to less experienced rowers. Younger members used to say that once you got accustomed to his brusque "tell it like it is" manner you found a first rate coach whose sometimes forbidding exterior concealed a kind nature and a willingness to help in any way possible. He was always sincere about wanting others to enjoy a sport that had so captivated him and given him a lifetime of pleasure. Bewl Bridge Rowing Club has lost a star, as well as a genuine character whose foibles and eccentricities will live long in the memory of all who had the privilege of knowing him.



*John Northridge*