

Southampton's Solent and Coalporters clubs work together to share resources and expertise, says **Ian Mckechnie**, making them a force to be reckoned with at competitions, and an inspiration to clubs around the country.

Southampton Solent & Coalporters RCs



Coalporters Amateur RC was founded in 1875 and as such is the oldest rowing club within the city of Southampton. The Club has been successfully competing every year since its foundation.

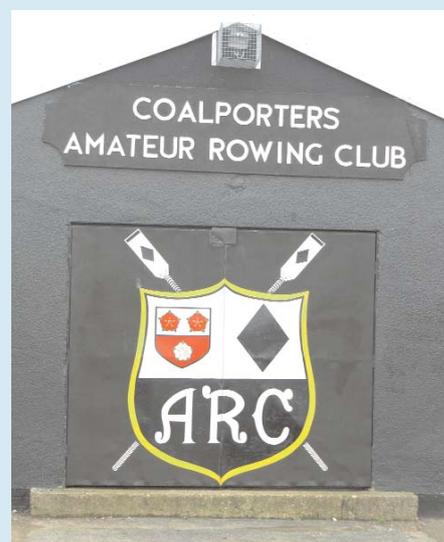
against anyone else who would race them.

In 1884, the Club scratched together a crew of 18 to race and beat a previously undefeated racing crew of 14 from the visiting American Navy. The race was set over a five-mile course

Coalporters takes its name from the rowers who transported coal to visiting ships. Workers used their skills in competition against anyone else willing to race them...

Coalporters itself takes its name from the rowers who transported coal to visiting ships. These workers formed the Club in which they could participate using their skills in competition

for stakes of £60. The crew imbalance was more than compensated for by the fact that the Americans could race their own specially designed racing boat, whilst Coalporters had to



club spotlight



race in a disused service cutter from the condemned stores in Portsmouth Dockyard. The Americans asked for a rematch for higher stakes and Coalporters took them up on the offer, again going on to win.

Soon after, Coalporters were challenged by the 'Portsmouth Shovelers', which laid down the foundations for the more conventional river and coastal rowing competitions of today. The Club has progressively grown in stature over the years to become a renowned and respected club throughout the rowing circuit, both locally and nationally, and has been on its present site beside Northam Bridge for over 40 years.

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In the last few years, though, it has been the Coalporters women that have been issuing the dares. The senior women have been Hants & Dorset Champions going back to 2004 and were also South Coast Champions in 2005. Claiming the FISA Open Championship in 2006 followed. Held in Guernsey, the Coalporters crew raised a number of eyebrows by using a coastal boat which many thought would sink in the sea, but they proved everyone wrong by emerging victorious as Open Champions.

Closer to home, the Club has worked closely with the ARA to develop its facilities and recruitment. In 2005, the Club benefited from years of hard work and received a grant from Sport England to expand its facilities.

Prior to the grant, the Club also operated as one of the ARA's Project Oarsome clubs,

fostering a number of young talents who are now starting to show real potential. The main two schools connected have been Bellemoor and Bitterne Park and a number of those in the current junior membership have been to both schools, although juniors do hail from across the county. One especially talented young person claimed medals at the World Championship 'Adopt a Nation' competition and a Gold at the British Indoor Rowing Championships in 2006.

Playing a key role in this development has been the community club coach who also shares duties with a number of other Wessex region clubs. Various CDOs over the years have also

been responsible for helping the Club to organise its various funding streams.

But it hasn't always been easy. The Club, like many others, has had to fight in the past to retain its facilities. Members have visited court to hold onto the land the Club is based upon and, most recently, to fight the building of a pontoon. The Club has hopes to build further boat storage under the Northam Bridge – a facility would potentially be available for other clubs, but also would help the local police to better manage what has sadly become something of a crime hotspot.

Coalporters have also been responsible for the birth of another club in the form of Southampton Solent University Boat Club. When Solent University was still Southampton Institute, Coalporters presented the students



with an opportunity to start its own club. Initially, when it first started in 1995, the University Club had no equipment so Coalporters provided them with equipment to get started. Solent University's first ever boat – the *McNamara* – is still in service today.

The facilities at Coalporters provided Solent University with the base to name one of its latest additions in a poignant naming ceremony. The Club named a boat *Lisa the Daddy*, after the e-mail address of a former and much loved student who died whilst travelling in Australia in 2002. In addition, the Club has been involved in fundraising for a scholarship in her memory, which has included a row around the Isle of Wight.

Solent University has managed to repay the favour to Coalporters with the addition of four more ergos through a community grant in 2004/05 as well as a Virus scull. Most recently, they have helped run the Southampton Schools Indoor competitions for the past three years at Project Oarsome school Bellemoor in Southampton. The transient nature of the student population, of course, means that the relationship is continually renewed and redeveloped.

'Coalies', as it is colloquially known, has provided a training base for those who have gone on to represent Great Britain on senior, student and adaptive rowing stages. With the Club now turning its focus to the 2007 South Coast Championships at Dorney Lake, no doubt the future will hold the same range of challenges and opportunities. ■

Find out more...

Coalporters RC: www.coalporters.co.uk
Southampton Solent: www.solentboatclub.co.uk
The Lisa Wilson Scholarship Fund:
www.lisathedaddy.com