

Commodore's Report to Members 2021 AGM

I'm sure you will know by now that I will not be re-standing for GYC Council. Given my oft-stated favour for the customary yacht club model (offering potential management continuity of up to ten years) of succession from *Vice Commodore to Commodore to Rear Commodore*, one could say my decision is dereliction of duty. It does trouble me, but this has been an exceptionally challenging year and I now have a duty to my family and my work that would continue to be compromised were I to remain an Officer of the club.

It has been troubling, with very demanding consequences, that we have lost several members of GYC Council this year. We even started it with no Harbourmaster or Hon. Treasurer, and during the course of the last twelve months we have faced the resignations of the Hon. Secretary, Vice Commodore, Chair of House and Social Secretary – largely, because they needed to concentrate on aspects of their lives (not least of them work) that prevented them from attending to even the most basic remits of their club roles. Many vital tasks have needed covering, particularly as we came toward the end of the calendar year. A Vice Commodore would normally deal with preparing trophies and awards for presentation; a Social Secretary would organise the Annual Dinner; an Hon. Secretary would deal with preparation and running of our AGM. Trying to cover these vacant roles alongside increasing obligations at home and at work has been mightily stressful, and I hope members will forgive me for retiring from Council to re-prioritise my life.

Over the last few years it has been somewhat trying ensuring adherence to agreed procedures and protocols. We have been too often slack in our administration, but we must remember that we are all volunteers acting in our spare time. I am convinced the burden on many members of Council would be eased by better use of sub-committees, such that specific contained ongoing tasks are covered by specific members. We were most fortunate in being able to co-opt Paul Honeyman to Council to cover the most crucial volunteer role of all – Treasurer; while Susan Rush continued to offer the most diligent support to, and oversight of, GYC's financial affairs throughout the past year. We have benefitted significantly from pandemic-related Government grants for which Susan applied. The elision into the elected role of Hon. Treasurer will reach its conclusion at this AGM, and I thank Paul profoundly for taking on this most challenging and responsible role. I should pay tribute here to Brenda Miskin who beavers away diligently and quietly, supporting the admin of our club by helping to keep our database up-to-date and keeping track of our increasing number of applicants' progress through the system.

Susan Rush's extreme fiscal responsibility has transformed our finances since I was elected Commodore. Sue has put in an amazing amount of time attending to anomalous financial infelicities that had affected our income. Our subsequent concentration on ensuring adherence to risk-averse protocols has given us confidence that our future is more secure.

I do think the club has been missing opportunities presented by various grant funds. Applying for grants is a time-consuming process but we really do need a member to step forward and take on the role of fund-raiser pursuing the numerous opportunities out there to fund our various activities. There may be someone in our membership with experience in this area. Would you like to step forward?

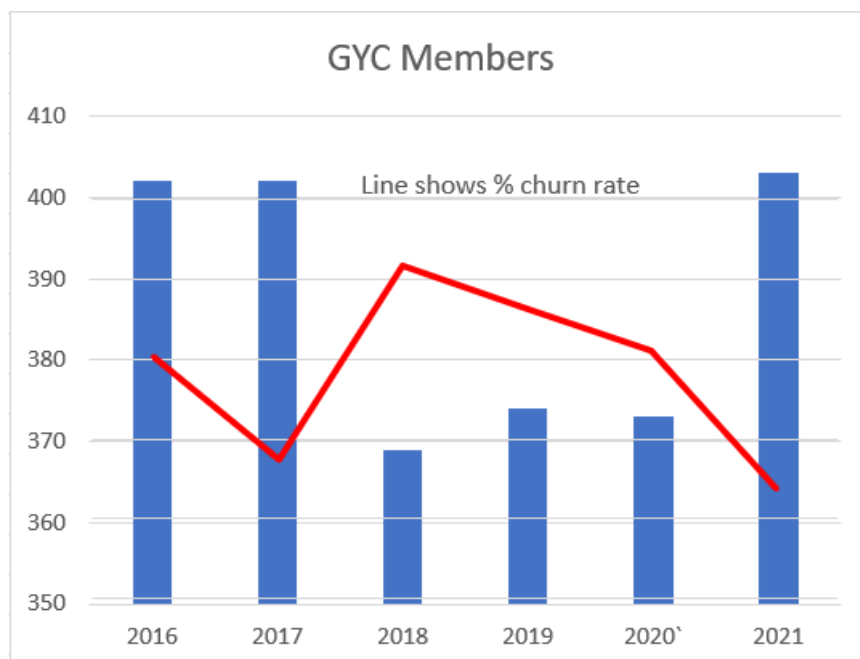
You can imagine how challenging things were during the various stages of lockdown, with the very responsible charge to decide on Special Operating Procedures that addressed the risks. I was most uncomfortable having to police all our temporary rules and protocols, but we had – and, indeed, continue to have – a duty of care to our members that we could not shirk.

I am so grateful to our most loyal membership that very little fuss was made about what had to be, at times, some quite draconian measures. The thought of ever having to return to compulsory mask-wearing, one-way systems and social distancing, brings me out in shivers.

I have fond memories of our yard taverna once we could serve in the open air. It went to show how the awful times we went through could produce something positive to offset the misery of it all.

One of the things I most wanted to focus on, during my time as Commodore, was the friendliness and family-feeling of our club, putting emphasis on encouraging our new members, and making guests feel welcome in our clubhouse. Another aspect of this imperative was looking beyond our “gated community” to the world outside our railings. The result has been an increase in membership – especially in the younger age range. We are indebted to Jennie Hawley, our Membership Secretary, for nursing so many people through the joining process.

It is most gratifying that our numbers, after taking a serious hit from 2017-2018 have actually remained pretty well constant as we lurched into covid. You can see from the graph below that our membership is now showing a really encouraging increase that, I believe, reflects a great feeling of friendliness and togetherness in our club.



Our last *Push the Boat Out* Event and the *Open House* events were tremendous successes; the enthusiastic involvement of so many members in their organisation and implementation was wonderful evidence of the love and loyalty that our members feel for GYC.

Our mandatory work parties have been most effective this year; Nancy Thomson has done a splendid job administrating them. We still need to find an effective way to record participations in a way that makes the long-threatened financial penalty a watertight policy.

One of my final acts as Commodore was attending the 2021 RYA Regional Conference in November. It was rather encouraging to discover how well we are doing by certain criteria – particularly in the field of volunteering. We were introduced to the re-vamped RYA web site, which is looking like a really valuable resource for all; as an affiliated club we get access to the Club Zone – which I highly commend.



Pictured left are some Work Party volunteers going the extra mile, building some new picnic benches for the yard. On the right, Frank, Colin and Mickey prepare to replace some deacying buoys on our trots ready for Storm Arwen. The kind of vounteering that makes our club what it is.

The general positive vibe in the club on Tuesday nights is evident from the increasing number of meals that Santos, our terrific chef, is preparing. The Willo Project, our responsive catering partner, have even taken on extra staff to meet the demand.

I have long been convinced that regular and effective communication is key to the success of our ventures on and off the water, and to the general level of happiness in our membership. I am so glad that *Trident*, with Annie McCombe at the helm, has been maintained at the highest standard. My own weekly emailed announcements, while time-consuming to compile, have proved popular and effective. I'm confident they have contributed to the all-important sense of inclusiveness that members feel as our nation staggers toward the seemingly distant eradication of the covid threat.

Richard Phillips has given our web site a major overhaul at minimal expense. I'm sure he will welcome suggestions as to how it can be further improved. Ian Palmer laboured for many years on our behalf covering for the reluctance on Council to get to grips with content management. I thank him profoundly for his diligence and responsiveness. I do hope that, now our web presence has a fresh look, future Council members will grasp the importance of keeping our pages relevant, fresh and up-to-date.

I have been anxious to make it easier for members to order club clothing. We decided that it is uneconomic to keep stocks in various colours and sizes, so I devised a web form which sends orders direct to the supplier. That retailer currently has supply shortages that have meant long lead times, but the system is at least working for us. I also recreated the original, but lost, design for the GYC blazer badge and placed the minimum order of ten myself. That means I still have a couple for sale from my 'personal stock', if anyone is interested.

It is very gratifying that, by the end of my term, we have a working Trot Boat, a dramatically refitted Work Boat, and two Safety Boat RIBs (complete with ever-ready floating docks). We live in radically altered times where Health & Safety compliance governs so much that we do. We all know how dangerous our river can be, so I commend robust procedures to ensure usage of our boats is subject to the same controls that apply to our yard plant. It would be so good if users could fill in the boat logs in the Harbourmaster's office, when they return the boat keys. The new Wise Lift is determinedly proving its worth, gradually reducing the queue for recovery, while it really does look as if our crane is just too expensive and demanding for our club going forward. The Harbour and Yard team, comprising vital volunteers, has been really pro-active and you will note that we now actually have space in the yard!

After our boating activity has been so severely covid-compromised, it is pleasing to see our river activity now on the increase. As I write, our latest cruiser race had no fewer than nine entries. We have invested in some splendid Lasers and RS2000s, while our rowing ventures are attracting more and more members. Our intrepid Dinghy Captain - David Hayden-Case, and Cruiser Captain - Stefan Oloffs, have given much time and energy to the restoration of our boating programme after so many barren covid months. The one area of volunteering where we too often struggle – somewhat inexplicably – is in sailing support roles. There is too often an unfair burden on our sailing captains ensuring we have Race Officers, Safety

Boat crew and Trot Boat helms. Come on, loyal members, step up to the plate in the coming year and get trained up in these vital roles!

Our training programme is getting back on track, thanks to Christine Webster's hard work and our partnerships with Nomad Sailing and Thames Active have given us great strategic advantage.

The club's buildings and infrastructure are showing their age. We have undertaken significant repair and maintenance this year – not least in the total replacement of the landside deck, and with members stepping up to repair the walkway to the pontoon; but the decking around the clubhouse and the coatings all around the site are in quite urgent need of assessment and remedial action. A robust maintenance programme needs to be kick-started lest failure to act in a timely manner creates very expensive problems that will threaten our future. We need a robust House team that can create and maintain a maintenance program efficiently delegated amongst our willing membership.

Our moorings are a continuing challenge for us. The high tidal range and rate of flow here make it difficult for us to decide on optimal configuration. We have formed a sub-committee, under Sue Rush, to investigate and scrutinise possible solutions. That way may turn out to be expensive to implement, but our moorings are a vital asset and we owe it to members to have a set-up that minimises risk to them and their boats. I am convinced we must, in future, be very sure that we only allow boats that conform to reasonable and realistic limits of length and weight.

I have instigated some useful meetings with the officers of other clubs on the river, to which the PLA were invited, and I hope that initiative will be carried forward.

I do fear for our long-term survival when I consider the value of the land on which we sit, the development next door to us that insouciantly threatens the survival of the wetlands centre, our total failure to get any interest from the landowner in repairing our car park gate, and the exponential increase in commercial river traffic taking precedence over leisure sailing. The warning signs are all around us. You can see what has led to the consideration being given by Richard Phillips to reform of our governance; a re-think that he believes will encourage and enable longer-term strategic thinking in the way we manage and preserve this most precious thing: the wonderful club that belongs to us all.



My final Annual Dinner as Commodore was a splendid occasion. I regret that my wife had to pull out on grounds of health, but I'm sure you will agree that my daughter, Becky, made an excellent understudy. The menu was really well received, and the general bonhomie of the occasion was warmly gratifying. The turn-out was terrific and everyone looked wonderful. I'm so glad members – with due caution – came together to celebrate our friendship, fellowship and common purpose, in defiance of the pesky pestilence that has hitherto obliged us to cancel so much fun.

Nick Day