

Digging the depths at Dorney

Hammer Smith reports from the Pink Palace's tent, 1818 metres gone, Dorney Lake

Yesterday was definitely a bad move. I have arrived in a pub with no beer — the Pink Palace, situated at the 1818-metre mark on the rowing course at Dorney. The bitter blow is that on Sunday night the beer barrel was nicked, much to the chagrin of the clientele.

Thus the organiser of last Saturday's opening ceremony and myself had to commiserate with each other on our ill-luck (eschewing the filthy Pimms on offer in lieu) instead of drowning our sorrows. He was lamenting that fact that his ceremony had contained no fat ladies in leotards.

A former guards officer himself, his troubles began when the band of the Welsh Guards (below) said they wouldn't play if it rained. Just as they vacated their grandstand seats and drew up to march, some hapless jobsworth forecast on the radio links that an electric storm was due, and all the boats in the parade must be got off the lake in record time.

By the time it was established that this was a false rumour, the bandsmen were fighting for their seats, now occupied by the good citizens of Slough. The rain held off, the boats paraded on the lake, the band marched up and down playing Men of Harlech etc, and then just as they did one of those lovely reversing movements, it was cats and dogs, right down the tubas. The PA system

didn't work, Denis Oswald, a big cheese in the IOC, spoke for hours in three indistinguishable languages, preceded by Sir Steve Redgrave in his own indistinguishable language.

By all accounts, a jolly good time was had by all.

Later, Sarah Winckless, that tower of the women's quad, led me to thinking about Dorney lake when she remarked that "we've been here since the man started digging." The man in question was Roddy Whats-On, the former bursar of Eton, who devised the cunning plan of digging up Eton's gravely water meadows and flogging the gravel to terminal 5.

My, what a dig he did. As a hack remarked in the Telegraph the other day, thank god the Wembley contractors weren't on the job. Dorney would be farmers' fields if it weren't for him. Too bad they wouldn't give him accreditation last week.

Then my old mate Carl Douglas, boatbuilder extraordinaire and eccentric man of mild opinions, wandered in. His solution for ensuring fair lanes is to plant trees between each pair instead of on the bank. I fear his solution will not be effected in time for the finals, even if Roddy starts digging right now.

PS Thames Rowing Club has sent a furious letter to the Telegraph admonishing James Cracknell for alleging that the last British sculler to win Olympic gold was in 1912. Oh no it wasn't. It was Thames member Jack Beresford (aged 106) in 1924.



The Band of the Welsh Guards scarpering for shelter during the opening ceremony on Saturday

Barrel of laughs at pinkos' tent

Leander Club's wheeze of having a bar at the championships hasn't gone exactly to plan. One of the highlights of this facility for the early

arriving connoisseurs was the chance to have a tippie of Lodden's best bitter direct from the barrel. However, when the staff turned up for Monday's racing, guess what, no barrel! It's just going to have to be pink gin from here on.

TODAY

Brits to look out for

Alan Campbell at 10.48 — has the fastest Brit sculler since Jack Beresford recovered from his cold?
Smith and James at 11.24 — is Tom James back to full fitness in the pairs?
Plus

9.48 Antonia van Deventer in the lightweight single scull
11.06 Baz Moffat and Jess Eddie, the racing spares giving the pairs a go

Today's timetable

Repechages from 9.30 to 12.20
W4- Women's fours
LW1x Lightweight women's singles
LM1x Lightweight men's singles
W1x Women's single sculls
M1x Men's single sculls
W2- Women's pairs
M2- Men's pairs
W2x Women's double sculls
M2x Men's double sculls
M4- Men's fours

Plus demonstration races for coxed pairs and lightweight eights

15.00 Umpires' practical exam
15.00 FISA v Organising Committee race
17.30 A pissup in a brewery for the press*

Reception at Windsor Castle*
**note for blaggers: by invitation only*

*Hammer
Smith*

Quote of the day

"Sorry about the washing getting mixed up the other day" — *internationally renowned rowing correspondent C Dodd (5ft 8ins on his short leg) to his lodger, GB M8+ oarsman T Solesbury (8ft 5ins on a cold day).*

"So, have you found your thong yet?" — *T Garbett to T Solesbury a moment later.*

Have your say

Contact Hammer Smith and the Eton Mess:
E hammer@rowingservice.com
Text 07710-538114

The Eton Mess

Read this issue online at www.rowingservice.com/mess and print off as many copies as you want



Caption competition: come up with a line for this. Answers to hammer@rowingservice.com

Yesterday's runners and riders

"I think that one was one of the boys. I recognise the smell of maltloaf."
(Michael Cannon)

"Deny it if you like... but he who smelt it dealt it" (Mike Haggerty)

"If you could row, you might have been good enough for my sister"
(Robert Treharne Jones)



Syncopating Steve....

Hello

Well, did you go to the re-run of *Singing in the Rain*? You youngsters will probably not know what I am talking about, but it was a famous musical, featuring Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds, one of the first talking movies. One of the highlights was when the sound track got out of sync with the pictures.

So, I say again, did you go to the opening ceremony? I amused myself watching the faces of the heavies trying to understand what Denis Oswald and Sir Steve Redgrave said. It was no good watching their lips for a clue. Lady Redgrave said that it was the best speech she never heard Steve make.

Well, the wind blew on the Sunday and a Dutch radio commentator asked me which way was north. My answer was, "does it matter?"

Two Italian journalists embraced me and one French journalist shook my hand and said he was not happy with a declaration about how to behave in the boat-house that he had to sign.

All life is here. The funny thing is that, in spite of my age, I seem to get on with all of them, particularly my mates from Germany. One serious thought. How can there be so many problems in the world when you sit at a sporting event and watch everyone fraternising and getting on really well?

Cheers

ALF

A little something on the bank

Let's hear it for James Lindsay-Fynn of the Bank of America. A winner in the light double sculls yesterday with partner Mark Hunter, he is one of the few athletes in the British team who has an employer. Bank of America have given him 5 weeks off to row.

POSTBAG

Dear Editor,
I admire your courage. Hammer Smith & Alf in one daily News sheet. You must have generous sponsors if you can cover either of their bar tabs but to contemplate both....

I am surprised that after so many years I can still stumble from my stool and even more so last year when young Mr Hedgehog asked me to help him organise his regatta during the long vacation. He did mention there might be a few unfamiliar crews attending. Later he asked me to organise the tea tent for the volunteer workers. Much, much later I found out that there were over 600 of them, each expecting sandwiches every day. Most of them would be here for two weeks and they would acquire dozens of other hungry hangers-on including the secret arm of FISA. They are roaming stealthily around the site armed with boxes of what they claim are 'measuring tools'. They own up to be a 'rigging' team. I think they are the guerrilla arm of the fairness commission. Perhaps when the repechages start we shall begin to see the fruits of their sinister work?

It is fine to have a real ale bar, although without stools, that gives a good view of the racing but the racing seems to start at breakfast time and is finished by the time the sun is over the yardarm. I am beginning to think that there is a campaign afoot to break the link between rowing and alcohol. I must ask Mr Baldwin, who I think is helping Mr Hedgehog with the paperwork(?), to get Mr Oswald to put the racing on at acivilised time.

Do pop in for a wet if you are passing after racing - must return to the bread buttering - the Light Brigade is due in an hour!

Yours, *Towpath Tim*.

Bails struck

We have news from India, where the South Asian Games are taking place right now. A sculler from Pakistan was given a false start in the rowing event yesterday after a nasty outbreak of course-tampering.

Competitive jigsaw

Debbie Flood reveals that the GB women's and lightweight teams travel with an 18,000-piece jigsaw which they have been trying to complete since the Athens Olympics two years ago. Putting together this map of the ancient world is a competitive sport — individuals get a point per piece. The spoilsport men's team are accused of nicking three pieces, though. FISA's fairness commission is to be called in.

Commentaryballs

"Spectators are requested to refrain from going onto the field of play."

"The Italian crew is being urged on by their coach, as Italian coaches often do."