

Monday 13 January 2014

A boatload of emotion in the calm after the storm

A break in our recent stormy weather came at the perfect moment to bless a rather special boat at Appledore on Saturday. This was no ordinary boat, but a Cornish pilot gig whose story was already laden with emotional tales, hopes, dreams and fond memories before the paint which told that story was even dry.

The boat, *Margaret James*, was blessed in traditional style (but with wellies!) by the Reverend Steve Hunt from Kingsley School, on the slipway at Appledore. Proudly watching the blessing was a crowd of avid rowers with Appledore Pilot Gig Club, who have been doing all in their power to help raise the funds to buy *Margaret James* – from raffle ticket selling and sponsored walks, to belly dancing, leaflet distribution – and even an English Channel Challenge campaign. They will be using the gig to train new rowers entering the sport and more experienced 'giggers' for the forthcoming World Championships in May. Also in attendance was a band of local sponsors and local lady, Ann White, who named the craft in loving memory of her late parents, Margaret and James.

Mrs White is the title sponsor amidst this mammoth effort which has brought together literally hundreds of supporters keen to help the club raise funds. Seven of the Appledore Ladies A Crew spearheaded the Channel Challenge last summer, promising, in return, to row 23 miles across the English Channel, the world's busiest shipping lane. Rarely do things go to plan at sea – and this was no exception. As storm after storm battered our coast towards the end of 2013, the Channel Challenge was postponed time and time again. It will now take place in March – once the risk of frostbite has passed!

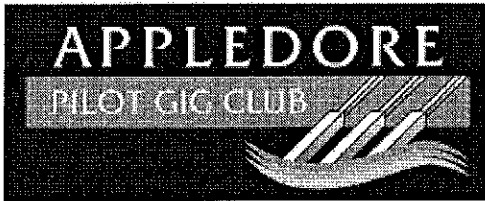
But in the meantime, the *Margaret James* arrived to delighted applause this weekend. Not only does she carry the names of Mrs White's much-loved parents on her side for perpetuity, but her oars and gunwales also tell many a tale – oar number three, for example, is named for the late Sally Barten, a much-loved nurse at North Devon District Hospital, by her daughter Jan (one of the Channel Crew), and her two sisters. Oar number two is named and sponsored for Pete Marley by his partner, crew member and Channel Challenge fundraising lead Naomi.

Naomi said: "I wanted to surprise Pete with a thank you by naming an oar after him for his support last year after a brain tumour rudely interrupted my training schedule. The girls in my crew were amazing. They encouraged me all the way and getting back in the boat was my one and only goal after surgery on 10 January at Frenchay last year. As a thank you for my successful treatment, we have also raised £1,000 for Brain Tumour Research. By a lovely coincidence, today is exactly a year since my first day post surgery!"

Ladies Captain and Club Chairman, Natasha Acres, said: "Gig rowing has seen a huge uptake in our region over the last few years and our membership just keeps growing; we're delighted to have raised £10,000 to buy another training boat so that we can get more people, especially juniors, out on the water. We are so grateful to Mrs White, to our many private supporters and to the corporate sponsors for making it possible. They include Kingsley School, Skern Lodge, Fatyak-Kayaks, Singer Instruments, Hocking's Ice Cream, The Boathouse at Instow and the Officers' Mess at Chivenor."

"Good luck to all at Appledore for the coming season. Here's to the *Margaret James* and all who row in her!"

www.appledoregigclub.com



EDITORS

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Visit www.appledoregigclub.com to find out more about learning to row at Appledore.

Images shown available from Andrew Hobbs, email: hobbs@hobbsphotography.com, tel. 07787 421483.
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