Q1: This is an oral history interview with Chris Spencer and Roger Spencer on the 14th of June. Also present are Eva Tausig from the Thames Festival Trust and Nicola Beauchamp, volunteer. The interview is taking place at The Poplar Blackwell and District Rowing Club. Could you please state your full name?

RS: Roger Spencer.

Q1: And what is your date of birth?

RS: 11th of May 1964.

Q1: And where were you born?

RS: In Dagenham.

Q1: And what are your parents’ names?

RS: Barbara Spencer and Bernard Spencer.

Q1: And what do they do for a living?

RS: Mum was a housewife and dad was a waterman and lighterman on the Thames.

Q1: And whereabouts did you go to school, Roger?
RS: In Rainham in Essex.

Q1: And what were you interested in at school?

RS: Normal things, normal sport and we was always involved in rowing. Our father rowed and we was down there as three or four year old coxswains sitting in boats with his brother being shouted at and learning the hard way.

Q1: And when did you--, when did your formal education, if you like, end?

RS: At 16.

Q1: And what did you do after that?

RS: I become an apprentice electrician. I was apprenticed onto the river, taken to the union by our father 'cause if you was going to get a job you had to be a member of the union. The TGW at Limehouse. But there wasn't a lot of livery work at the time and it was to go on the pleasure boats, and we was doing quite well rowing, and me dad more or less said, "Well, if you go on the pleasure boats you're not going to really push a lot with the rowing now the [livery's] not there." So I become an apprentice electrician.

Q1: Okay, so it seems to me from a very early age rowing was something that was very important to you.

RS: Oh, very important, yes. Very important. It was the main part of your life, your dad went rowing weekends and you just went with him.

Q1: And at that early age, when you were in those boats and age three and four and obviously rowing throughout your time at school, did you have your eyes on the Doggett's prize at that age?

RS: It was always--, because every year someone in the club would do Doggett's and at seven or eight years of age someone would be talking about Doggett's and you'd be a coxswain and someone in that crew would do Doggett's. So it was just always known if you was apprenticed
you would be doing Doggett's at 21, and our father had done Doggett's, and unfortunately after leading the race there was a problem on the river and he came second, and it affected him. In them days, to lose Doggett's when it was such a massive thing on the river, and it was just the thing that with us, it was always going to be you will do Doggett's when you're apprenticed.

Q1: And you say your father took part in Doggett's. Had previous generations of your family taken part?

RS: He was the first one in our family to have done Doggett's. His father worked on the river, but they never did Doggett's in them days, and in 1970 our cousin did Doggett's, and he won in 1970.

Q1: So there was a win in the family, and you were looking to repeat that.

RS: Carry on from there, yes.

Q1: Okay. I'm going to turn to your brother, Chris. Could you please state your full name?

CS: My name is Christopher Spencer.

Q1: And what is your date of birth?


Q1: And where were you born?

CS: Dagenham.

Q1: And I'm going to ask you your parents’ names just for the record.

CS: Okay, Bernard Spencer and Barbara Spencer.
Q1: And their professions?

CS: My father was a waterman and lighter and my mother was a housewife.

Q1: And whereabouts did you go to school?

CS: In Rainham.

Q1: And what did you enjoy at school?

CS: Sports and girls.

Q1: And at what age did your formal education end?

CS: 21.

Q1: So you stayed school to do A-levels or--can you walk me through to 21?

CS: Okay, we were members of the rowing club from an early age and then we would travel here on a row and every night after school, Monday to Thursday, row, weekends and then at 18 I won the National Junior Sculling Championships and I was awarded a scholarship for America, so I went to America for two--for education and to row, returning on my 21st birthday or the year that I raced Doggett's.

Q1: And whereabouts were you rowing in the United States?

CS: Pennsylvania.

Q1: I beg your pardon?

CS: Pennsylvania.
Q1: And at the time that you won that scholarship, was that an unusual thing or...

CS: Oh, it was a first, yes, it's extremely unusual and, you know, but it's, you know, a great experience and yes, and so obviously when I returned to England I was super fit.

Q1: And did you do a degree while you were at Pennsylvania?

CS: Yes I did, yes.

Q1: And what did you study?

RS: Law, but I've never used it.

Q1: And when you came back to the UK in--, age 21, what did you do?

CS: I had a... dream of rowing bigtime and so I took a part-time job in a sports centre to enable my rowing, you know, and--, but I would say I never really reached my potential, you know, and now I work in the leisure industry.

Q1: Okay, thank you. Right then. You--, I think we touched upon--, I'm going to go back to Roger. I think we touched upon the fact that your father was a waterman and lighterman, can you explain to us in a little bit more detail your family's connections to the river?

RS: Our family go back, is it 400 years?

CS: 400 years, yes.

RS: You know more about--, you know the history of this, don't you?

CS: Yes.

Q1: Shall I throw this question at--,
RS: Ask Chris [inaudible 0:07:00] yes, 'cause Chris has--,

Q1: Chris, the same question to you.

RS: Done a lot more research.

CS: Okay, our family have been traced back with connections on the Thames to 400 years ago. They owned the first steam ship, steam pedal boat on the Thames¹, that was my father's grandfather, all Spencers, and my father's father, he was a foreman lighterman in []. My father worked for a number of companies as a lighterman and our father is Roger's master. My master is my cousin, Martin Spencer.

Q1: Can you-- you've mentioned this word master, can you explain to us a little bit of what that relationship is?

RS: The master-- your master is a person that apprentices you at waterman's hall, and it's-- he's supposed to find you work. Either he get into--, he's got contacts and that they will give you work or apprenticeships and that's what the master is supposed to do.

Q1: So you were both apprenticed to these masters, but it doesn't seem to me that you actually worked on the river per se. Can you explain a little about how that worked, you being apprenticed to a master but not actually working on the river?

RS: Well a lot of people did get apprenticed by their fathers but never worked on a river. They may have worked for six months and then they went and got other jobs as messengers or brokers in the city, there's quite a few people that did. Which that would have just been our course, we'd have said we got apprenticed and that was it, but because to be able to do Doggett's, if you was apprenticed by your father then you could do Doggett's. You still went through the same ceremony at the end of the five years but you hadn't gone there before they'll ask questions. Part of this in the beginning was because numbers in Doggett's were

¹ The boat was the first stem powered pleasure boat on the Thames and it was called the Greenwich Belle
dwindling and it was the way of keeping people entering the race, and that's really--, so there wasn't enough work for us. We didn't really want to go on the pleasure boats. We'd loved to have been lightermen, and it's just how it ended up. That was just our path at that time.

If we'd have been apprenticed now, with Cory's and the amount of civil engineering now, you could go back there and become watermen and lightermen which I would say if we was apprenticed in the last five years, we would have gone on the river. Definitely with the work, it's a different thing.

CS: Our apprenticeship was in the early 1980s and Tilbury Docks had opened and the lighterman's companies all broke up really and that because all the... cargos and that was... coming into Tilbury, not London.

Q1: Right, now you took a slightly different apprentice route. You were apprenticed by your uncle was that?

CS: Cousin.

Q1: Your cousin.

CS: Yes.

Q1: Does that mean that you still qualified to row Doggett's?

CS: Yes it did. There's a rule in Doggett's that if your father is a journeyman, freeman, working lighterman, the sons and daughters can row.

Q1: Right it doesn't matter who--; it's not a question of who your master is, it's a question of who your father is.

RS: No, Chris' master was Martin, and our dad Bernard apprenticed Martin in probably about 1963, and Martin never had children, and he asked me dad could he apprentice Chris.
Q1: Right, now you touched upon--, I think it was Roger. You mentioned that you were down here aged three and four in the boats. Can you tell us a little bit more about your early experiences on the water?

RS: Well as always, rowing clubs are short of coxswains, and it's still the same case now. So if you was down there at three or four, five or six years of age a group of men would just take you out, put a life jacket on you, now we can't do it. We've got a rule in the club, they've got to be 12 now haven't they?

CS: Yes.

RS: In them days nothing ever happened to anyone. They could just be put in a coxswain's seat and you'd learn to pull the hands one way or the other, you'd get shouted at the guys quite a lot but at the end they bought you in the bar and bought you a coke and a Mars bar and they'd become your friends and that was the earliest memories of it. Our dad and his brother, Sam, we had some big tub pairs down there which people would learn to row in, and they would put the pair of us in the coxswain seat and go off in the pair and have a row with two of us steering them. And it was just--, you just learned and then someone would say [the current's under 0:12:11] six or seven, someone would say "I'll take you out sculling," or your dad might, and you'd go out, you'd fall out the first few times and they'd keep you along the front of the club and by the time you was eight or nine, wasn't that fast 'cause of your strength but you was competent. You knew where to go in the river, you knew the dangerous points, you was quite streetwise with it.

Q1: And how often at that age would you be rowing?

RS: Going out sculling? You might go out once a month, every--, couple of times a week in the summer. Once you got to the summer nights when the river wasn't that busy in them days, you'd be coming down from junior school and going out sculling with people 6, 7 o'clock at night. But you become friends, this... people come through... and it was a strange thing and so this is how the rowing club builds up. We had our father's funeral in February. He was--, he'd have been 89 last week. There was 200, 300 people at the funeral, all linked basically to the rowing club over the years, so there was people there in their mid-seventies that would have been ten years old when he was 25 that they used to get taken out steering and then people 20 years older than us took us out and we took their sons out so there's big groups of people who are best friends, standing at the bar and laughing, and if you didn't see their faces you would think everyone was the same age.
The humour's the same, the banter's the same but someone could be 88 standing there and someone could be 22, and this is what happens when you--, it's such a nice thing at these early ages.

Q1: So it sounds to me that the--, you know, you enjoyed sport at school, but it was as much the kind of--, the tradition and the social aspect of the club that kind of fed into your rowing.

RS: Well, it was your mates.

Q1: And when did you really start focusing on rowing, or did you really start focusing on rowing, or…

RS: I didn't do a lot of competitive steering. I like--, I was playing football, not very well most of the time but I thought I was good. And then at about 14 it just wasn't happening, and it was playing a good team but not very good and me dad said "Look, why don't you start coming rowing more?" We might come down here three or four times a week but then all of a sudden it became your main sport where--, and then 15, 16 you started racing and traveling round the country and going to the national championships and 17 you go into Great Britain squad trials and it just takes on and you're training with men who are fast and popular at that period up toward the mid-eighties we was probably--, say up to about 1982 we was one of the best clubs in the country, below Leander and your top three or four. And we supplied so many people for the national squad over this 20-year period, so as you were 16 you was training with, I said Martin, Bobby Prentice who was top five or six people in the Sculler's Head and they'd give you a start but you was racing some of the fastest people in your country so you just become fast naturally anyway.

And then it just got into it and then you realised if you was going to miss a weekend, you wouldn't be as good the next week, and it just self-motivates.

Q1: At what point did competing in Doggett's start to figure in all this rowing that you were doing?

RS: It's always there, it's always had.

Q1: So you knew from what sort of age?

RS: Ten, 11?
Q1: That you were always going to compete in Doggett's?

RS: You was always--, you was going to get apprenticed and people would say to you, "Have you been apprenticed yet?" you might only be 14, you got another two years, and it was already done.

Q1: And for you, Chris, what Roger's described there you had a slightly different…

CS: Yes, I was coxswain at the age of ten, going away with men for weekends away and I grew up fast, obviously and I'm a ten-year-old and I was in the National Watersports Centre once racing, coxing, and they told me there's a time difference between there and London, and I believed him. [Laughs] So I rang my mother up and said "Mum, what time is it London?" and everyone was laughing and I couldn't work out why, but I grew up.

Q1: And was--, so you started travelling around the country, simply.

CS: Yes. At the age of ten, mum would pack me a picnic and everyone would steal it off me and they'd mistreat me which we can't do nowadays, and they'd lock me in cupboards and do terrible things and that but I grew up.

Q1: And can you tell me a little bit about your sort of professional--, I say professional, your racing career, because obviously you went to the--, you were, you know, you received a scholarship age 18 you must have been doing things that made people think that you were a good person to give a scholarship to.

CS: Well my rowing career very much mirrored Roger's, you know, we both were [inaudible 0:17:49] at J16, I rowed for the south of England when I was 15 in France, I rowed for England when I was 16. Roger and I both rowed for Great Britain under-23s, we were both national champions at Junior 18 in single sculls. I actually held British junior record for 500 meters and 1000 meters, so by the time I was 21 I knew that I was the fastest in the country and they found it very hard to actually get people to compete against me and that. So they bought a young kid up called Alec Argent who was 16 at the time, you know, just to make a race of it, you know and that, but even so the pressure was on from the family and, you know, 'cause like father would say, "You're going to win this but look out for driftwood, look around all the
“time” and despite Roger and I being quite fast, dad, he made us practice the first half-mile of that course how many times would you say, 20, 30 times?

RS: Loads of times, yes.

CS: Yes, and that…

Q1: Are you talking about the Doggett's course now?

CS: Doggett's course, yes. Yes, right, so that we knew, you know, we had a plan for every eventuality. You know, with the wing-tied boats and that and, you know, and we prepared for it and that because it meant so much.

Q1: I'm just going to ask you just to not tap the--, I think the microphone might be picking it up, I don't know. So it seems to me that Doggett's, right from an early age you both knew that you were going to race it and your father had a plan. So what you've just described now, doing the first half-mile of the race repeatedly to get a good start, what other things was your father Roger doing with you to ensure the family--, this was brought home for the family?

RS: Well… we worked on the course a lot so--., and 'cause you--., we weren't--, our boat speeds were pretty similar. So people would say "You go down the middle on that bit", and some people would say "You go inside at Blackfriars, that's faster." Me dad's philosophy was at Blackfriars it's faster inside at the time of tide I was racing. So he said to Chrissy one day, "Right, we're going to do a piece from Blackfriars to Waterloo," maybe two or three minutes. We'd start level, I'd go inside, Chris would go outside and I'd win by about four lengths. So then we'd swap it round, Chrissy won by four lengths, so in your head you knew it was faster inside. And what we did is--., and Doggett's is--., although you might--., I think when I raced there was five people. You can have up to six, but it's still a race to get in front. Whatever anyone says, it's still a race of watermanship, and if you get in front you can pick the course you want and that's your--., you are in command and then other people have got to chase you. It's not like a six-lane course, 2000 meters, it's tactics, you come off hard, you settle, you have a push at 1000, you push at 1250. In Doggett's, you're in front and it's easier to be in front than it is be behind. So once we drew the stations we just knew as we dropped through at Fishmongers', it was something like--., I think it was 15 strokes to the first bridge. We count 12 strokes through the bridge without looking over, pull hard left and you could shoot to [inaudible 0:21:43] to get back. I started on the north shore, and we just did it so many times, every time
the tide was in that direction we’d scull up and we would do probably 20 starts. 20 two-minute pieces across until you just knew where you was.

Q1: Do you think, Roger, you were the only person doing that the year of your race or did you ever go up there and you’d see one of your competitors or…

RS: Year of my race I think I was the only one doing it. A lot of people--, they were good athletes but they weren't… at the level of sculling it was where you would-- , so you would think. At any level of racing you did, you-- , if you… if you was racing someone in say the national championship that you knew was faster, you would try and rattle them and come off-- , do the fastest 1000 meters you could ever do in the hope that it could rattle them and if it was a bit choppy they might panic a bit. So it's just a racing mentality you had at a young age. It had been ingrained in you since probably 12. At the Poplar we used to-- , which is one thing why Poplar had so many good scullers. We used to have what was called club races once a month. This went on from the 1940s, there was betting on them and pleasure boats following. So from the age of 12 you was doing club races, and I know it sounds silly, but it's like an old prize fighter that might have done 20,000 rounds before their first fight, and this goes for everyone.

Martin Spencer, Charlie Dearsley, Frankie Walker, Kenny Dwan, Johnny Dwan, Bobby Prentice, Paul Prentice, everyone came through this thing from the age of 11 or 12 rowing, sculling in club races. Once a month you'd have a race and the race was-- , although it was from Millwall Dock or the blue bridge which is about 2000 meters each way, everyone would just go off like an absolute lunatic, hang on as long as they could and you just learned how to race. And so it's ingrained in you, so when you start racing as 14, 15 year olds, you just know it's as hard as you can.

Q1: Now you-- , I'm going to turn over to Chris now because Roger has described, you know, going to different parts of the, you know, river and getting to know the river. What about your actual analysis of technique or anything like that? Is there a-- , what's the technique that a Doggett's rower use? Because, you know, sometimes people, you know, they film people and sort of say "oh, you need to be sitting like this" or whatever.

CS: Well in the early 1980s our dad would photograph us from the bridges to make sure that we was in the right position and then we would study the course and we would-- , you know, in the evenings my father would get the photographs out and he'd say, "You've got to be a little bit further left here." So the technique, we just knew we had to go off extremely hard as though you're racing 500 meters, get the lead and then you dictate.
Q1: So we've talked a lot about your—, the support that your father gave you in the sort of lead up to Doggett's. I assume, Roger, you were working at this time. Did you have to take time off from work or what—, did you get any other support or sponsorship or…

RS: Didn't get a sponsorship, but my electrical apprenticeship was for a local authority, so they weren't long hours really. [Laughs]

Q1: And what about you?

RS: Not in them days.

Q1: And what about you Chris?

CS: No, I was supported in work and that, they gave me time off to train and, you know, which I'm grateful for.

Q1: Right, we're going to move to the—, we're going to move closer to the race itself. Can you tell me, Roger, how you felt as race day got closer?

RS: I think… physically Doggett's was probably one of the easiest race I'd had, but I think it was probably the most nervous I'd ever been for a race, and that is even compares with—, I'd done Diamond Sculls at 18, I've been to the Junior World Championships, I'd raced at Henley at 17. But the morning of Doggett's…

Q1: Why were you so nervous?

RS: I think it's 'cause—, well you're worried of losing. And you know, I remember me dad saying look, if I said to you, 'Go out and race these blokes today', you'd think well I'll go and have a beer the night before, this would be easy. But Doggett's, on that day, so many things can go wrong. Your gate might snap or you might catch a bit of driftwood, break a blade. And you just got it in your head, you've got this one chance. It's not another race you can say "oh, okay, next year I'll race it and it'll be better", you just wanted to do it that time.

Q1: And what about you Chris?
CS: Well it's normal that the family charter a pleasure boat and they invite all friends and family along, okay, so there's pressure, okay? And… we knew it was our race to lose. Okay, and yes, but 'cause there's 100 friends and family there and you are expected to win, it is massive pressure and it's family pride as well.

Q1: And obviously your competitors, you would have known all of your competitors.

CS: Yes. It's funny, on the day I was much better than them and they was all laughing and joking before the race, but I wouldn't acknowledge them

Q1: And what about you, Roger? You know, you knew all of your fellow competitors. Did you avoid each other in training, did you...

RS: I'm trying to think. Three of the people weren't from this club, so you knew them, because you'd all been apprenticed at the same time and you'd go on the weekends at Cambridge and you'd meet people and you'd be out on the boats and you'd see them. One guy, the guy who'd come second, David Everest, who was actually quite fast, his father at the time was the barge master at Fishmongers', Kenny Everest, and he had won Doggett's. But he--, David got apprenticed but he didn't start rowing until about three years before Doggett's which--., and I think he only went over the course once or twice. He'd done it the year before then he really trained, but we was in part of the same group of training. There's pictures on the wall, we all did the [inaudible, 0:29:49] the same in the same crew so you can't really avoid them. But what did happen, I'd had 18 months out of a boat before Doggett's 'cause I damaged me back, so it was coming back slowly. But then about four months before it started getting--., I started getting a lot fitter and I just made sure every time I went out, I wasn't going to avoid them but every time I went out I was in a race.

I just thought I've got three months that have demoralised me [inaudible, 0:30:21] let me think don't--., you're not, you just can't get near it. It's just a different mentality. But otherwise me and him are really good friends.

Q1: Was there any kind of fallout post the race? Was there any sort of...

RS: Not with us there wasn't with people but a lot of other people really fell out badly.

Q1: And why do you think that is?
RS: They don't want to lose, and some people don't talk to other people if someone gets beaten for years.

Q1: And is it--,

RS: I'm not naming names, but [laughs]

Q1: Is it like that still now? The stakes are still that high?

RS: I think when--, if you had groups of serious people it would be. But I don't know it's so much--,
it's not so much like it now.

CS: I watched the race last year and all of the competitors were laughing and joking beforehand, and our father taught us not to do that and one of father's tactics was if you go out alongside someone who you might be racing, you make sure you beat them and then they always think you're faster than them.

Q1: So, the race itself, you obviously both won it. I'm not going to ask you too many details about your actual race itself but can you--. Chris can you tell us what happened immediately after you won the race? What…

CS: After the race we were taken aboard the pier and it was the biggest anti-climax of my life because, you know, we'd build up this great promised land, and we'd won, okay and that was it, you know? And then when we saw my mother and father, it's emotional.

Q1: I can imagine that, and Roger, for you?

RS: Much the same but we had a guy, when we juniors, who was helping us with publicity and trying to raise some help for us 'cause there was no money in rowing at that time. A bloke called Len Whaley, he worked for the Eastern London Advertiser and he had a lot of contact in--, on the TV. He was a boxing promoter--. a boxing commentator at one time, and he got--. I can't think what it used to be called. It would be like London, ITV, it's 6 O'clock News or something now but whatever it was called in '85, he got them down with film crews so as I finished, he got us over and we got interviewed on there and it got put out on the 6 o'clock
news so he did try and get the profile up but there just wasn't enough interest in them days to sustain it. But there used to be a lot of good newspaper articles on it and it used to get a lot of coverage, like we still got the cut in this room when Martin won in 1970, Martin has got a four-page in the Telegraph, ten or 12 photos.

CS: Jim Melton.

RS: Yes.

Q1: Yes. I wonder whether--, I mean we'll talk a little bit later about the future of Doggett's. So on the sort of--, at the end of the race you're reunited with your families and this, that and the other. What's the--., when's the first occasion you put on the, you know, the Doggett's coat? When does it go on?

RS: On your presentation night. You go for--, I think you used to go for four or five fittings. Ours was made at Clerkenwell Green, weren't they?

RC: That's right, yes.

RS: But you actually get it the night of the presentation.

Q1: And can you--, Chris, would you be able to talk us through what the night of the presentation looks like?

CS: Yes, we received the uniform beforehand and obviously we're 21 and we're much slimmer then and it was very hug-fitting, and so the parents are invited, and they watch the award and that from the [gods 0:34:52]. Nowadays they're invited in for a meal. Those--., then they would watch it from upstairs and the clerk or the fishmongers read a scroll of the race and then you walk out to the band and that's it really.

Q1: And this is all taking part in--, placed in Fishmongers' Hall.

RS: Fishmongers' Hall, yes.
Q1: Can you describe a little bit the room in which it takes place?

RS: It's in the main hall and it's whatever liverymen they had that night, whether it's A, B or C in Fishmongers. The Prime Warden of Fishmongers, you walk in behind the clerk to the Grenadier Guards--, the band--, the guards playing Hail the Conquering Hero, which is quite moving, and then the race is read out on a parchment by the clerk to the Prime Warden. The prime warden--, there's port, I think it's port or red wine in your cup that you win. Prime Warden [inaudible 0:36:06] took a sip, handed it to me, shook hands and then you walk back out to the Hail the Conquering Hero again. And then you hand the cup round to everyone and that is the night. It is--., that is a special night of it.

Q1: And so that's the first time that you sort of officially wear your Doggett's coat. Can you describe other occasions when you might be wearing a Doggett's coat?

RS: Well them--, in them days there used to be a lot of private functions. So the barge master of the Waterman's Company at that time was Bobby Prentice so he would--., say the Barracuda may have a function, they want it for a Doggett's [inaudible 0:36:43] and say can you do a Friday night, and then you'd go there, wear your uniform, see people on and then they sometimes might say, "Do you want to stay on?" It was nice but then--., or you would then--., the Lord Mayor's Show was always a good one to do where six Doggett's men are on three of the sheriff's carriages, four Doggett's men walk in front of Lord Mayor's carriage. That's every year.

Q1: And how are people selected to do that?

RS: Whoever's the barge master, he will always have the new winner. And then he picks whoever he wants.

Q1: And what other things have--., and what other occasions have you--., I mean do you still wear your Doggett's coat for certain things Chris?

CS: Yes, for the Lord Mayor's Show, the Knollys Rose which is an ancient ceremony in the mansion house. We used to do events like the International Food and Drink Exhibition which was very exciting and good, and I emphasise the drink bit of it, and, yes, we used to--., probably we would put the livvy on probably eight times a year, years ago. Now I might wear it once or twice.
Q1: And that's just because there's been other people who've come through or are there fewer Doggett's jobs?

CS: No, it's too small for me.

RS: No there--, I think there are, yes. There are fewer Doggett's jobs, but you also get to a different stage in your life where you can't always get to all things. When you're younger, it's a lot easier. But we're--, I'm doing the Knollys Rose next Wednesday. We're wearing our uniforms at Henley for the presentation so that's a two. We did the Lord Mayor's Show.

Q1: So both of you did not--, were not working on the water when you won your Doggett's because other people we've spoken to have said it made a sort of--, they felt it made a difference to their career if you like, being a Doggett's winner. The fact that you had, you know, competed and won this prize, did it have any other ripple effects in your life?

RS: Well a lot of our life is involved with the river, like Chris is captain of the club or whatever you call it, chairman of the trustees is it?

RC: Yes.

RS: I'm vice-captain so our live is people coming in from the river, we're on the river, all our best friends work on the river so Doggett's is a big thing of it.

Q1: So it's given you status on the river?

RS: In certain ways I suppose, yes.

Q1: I mean, and was there anything--, do you think it had any knock-on effect on your professional career at all or…

CS: No, but the opportunity which it's given, we've met the royal family, most of them, you know, we're both swan uppers and that through Doggett's, and, you know, we visit the Vintners'
Company, we visit Fishmongers' Hall, we visit all the livery companies in the city and not many people can claim that can they?

Q1: So it's given you access to essentially the City of London, corporation and--,

RS: And that's really all through Doggett's. The start of it is all through Doggett's.

Q1: Very good, very interesting. Now one of the things--, we're sitting here in your own club and it was--, obviously it's been a hugely successful rowing club with success to Doggett's. But can you talk to us a little about the difference between the sort of professional rowing and the gentleman amateur, 'cause there was a kind of change over in the 1950s.

RS: Early '50s.

Q1: Can you first--, you know, because before it was they were sort of almost like two camps.

RS: Well you had the amateur rowing association, I think it was TAR. Was it Thames Amateur Rowing Association?²

C: Yes.

RS: And you had the professionals, and the professionals there's only one class that work with their hands, and that included builders, bricklayers, they would be classed as a professional, if they were rowing, they wouldn't be able to race the amateurs. There's professional scullers from the 1860s and 1870s right through until even in the '20s, late, mid-'30s it was still at its peak and they was racing for an awful lot of money. Astronomical amounts of money.

Q1: Where did that money come from?

RS: Gambling and wagers. There's pictures of Ernie Barry, who was a world champion in the 20s, I think it was.

² It was the Thames Tradesman’s Rowing Association

RS: They estimate there's 80,000 people on the tow path at Hammersmith walking behind. Me dad's got a picture, it is absolutely packed, and you see the pictures of the World Professional Sculling Championship which they would race over the boat race course, there could be—the [inaudible, 0:42:08]—, actually it's like watching—, there's more people on there than what there are on the Oxford and Cambridge boat race now and there's probably 50 boats following it. Astronomical money, and these people were really fast. Really fast, the amateurs couldn't have beaten them.

Q1: But these—, they couldn't compete in the Olympics or…

RS: No, nothing.

RC: Or Henley.

RS: They used to coach all the Olympic people. I think was it… Barry is it? Was it—, whatever one it was coached one of the Olympic doubles, told them what they got to do, how much faster they got to go, they was all professionals. But when you—, people like Bobby can remember stories, Bobby Prentice, Kenny Dwan, me dad remembers them all ‘cause he was—, at the tail end of that as he was starting, the professionals were still involved with coaching. And the Phelps and the Barrys, they weren't allowed cars, their families used to make them walk everywhere and they would just be put in—, they would be put in waterman skiffs at six or seven years of age to row people about. So they was just so strong. They weren't very big but they were so strong, and they've been really training since they were six or seven years old³.

Q1: So what was the change that came about and why did it come about that—,

³ Eric Phelps was employed by the Von Opal family in Germany and observed the 1936 German double scull. He subsequently told the British double that they would need to raise their rate of striking in order to beat them. His knowledge was so vast that they took his advice, and they beat the Germans for Gold
RS: I just think it was a changing world and professional sculling was changing. The amateurs were getting faster and then they've had it open up, and to be honest nowadays… if you was at the clubs, like if you're at Leander or Oxford or any of the universities you've got a bigger advantage over the normal people at clubs like this now than what the professionals had in them days. Because people have to work, if you're at uni for four years you can train three, four times a day, it's all scheduled in. All the public schools like Eton, it's scheduled in. They row at 7 in the morning, they have lessons at a certain time. If they're in the first eight their lessons get changed and that first eight can all train together. It is totally different now.

Q1: So coming through your club though, you still--., it feels to me like you're still doing quite well at various sort of…

RS: We're a feeder club now, if we get anyone that's any good they're encouraged, they start and you just know that they're going to go. And they always come--., Mark Hunter was probably the last--., Mark and Ross was the last two, they had to go. Mark become an Olympic champion and Ross won four or five [inaudible, 0:44:43] medals. They're still classed as their club, if they ever need anything they come back. We do--., we've had club races at times saying "Do you want to come down?" and they come down. But it's just--., you've just got to realise you're a feeder club and the--., and we're not the only club like it but you're never ever going to have these purple patches that you had 25, 30, 40 years ago. Them days are gone.

Q1: So do you have--., Chris, do you have people who are racing Doggett's training via your club or do they go to these other clubs that Roger has mentioned?

CS: At the moment we've probably got five or six apprentices training here but they're not committed like we were, you know, they might attend one Sunday and then they miss two weeks. You know they might come back, you know, if they're not working, you know, and that's it now, you know, so.

RS: But the ones that are serious, sorry the ones that are serious like Jack who won last year, he'd been--., Timmy had got him sculling since he was about 11 or 12. He's only a little waif, but he trained really hard for 10 years and he had the mentality that people used to have. This was their career, they're going to do Doggett's and this is what they're training for.

Q1: And is--., does Jack work on the river?
RS: No.

Q1: Which kind of leads me to a question that I'd sort of like to wrap up the interview with, if you like. That the future of Doggett's, do you have any thoughts as to how it might change or how it might continue or…

CS: They could use our club as a hub, okay, and all the apprentices attend it at weekends

Q1: And how many people would that--., how many apprentices at any one point are kind of going through on that track where they'll gain their freedom the same year?

CS: About 15 to 20, yes, and like three heats and a final, you know, it's--., I think this year at the moment they've got two people entered for it.

RS: No it's only two have got their freedom at the moment.

CS: Oh, is it? Oh, okay then.

RS: Yes, they're all doing their--,

CS: Yes, are they?

RS: Yes.

CS: Okay.

Q1: They'll all qualify with their freedom by the 4th of September?

RS: Yes, they'll be tested, yes they're being tested so…

Q1: And when you say they're being tested what exactly is that?
RS: To get their freedom. To learn their laws, where the wolves are, where the time points are, stretches, there's two qualified so far and I think there's another four who are about to get it.

Q1: What are your thoughts, Roger, about Doggett's going forward?

RS: I think Doggett's as always had low points. In the '50s it was--, some people had rowovers. There were some rowovers in the '40s and '50s.

Q1: Could you explain what that means?

RS: A rowover, sorry, is when there's only one entry. I think when Kenny Everest won there was only two in the race. So these things have gone on and it's always dropped low and then they-- , this is why they had to bring people into the other row twice, which started in I think it was-- ,


RS: 1971, wasn't it?

CS: Colin Andrews.

RS: But when you speak to people who are older that didn't train for Doggett's, they all regret it. And a lot of the kids, they're earning quite good money on the river and it's nice, you do the party boats and I don't think they realise what avenues it can open up for them, and I really don't know how you can put that through to a 17 or 18-year-old boy that can go out here and earn good money and go to a party boat each night. Why's he want to get up at 6 o'clock in morning, train for two hours on the nice things you tell him that could happen and he's just not aware of them?

Q1: It feels to me that your motivation, a lot of your motivation was to do with doing it for the family pride. You came from a long line of, you know, generations that worked on the river and this was something that you were doing for your family. Is it to do with the fact that the apprentices who are coming to the trade now are not necessarily coming with lineage on the river?
RS: I'm not sure. Don't know. Well they're still working. Even if that is the thing, they're still working with people that have a got a history on the river that will talk to them and say "You should do it really," or they work with winners who will say--, and I know for a fact a lot of the winners do bring apprentices down here that are not related to them, and they'll do it for a little while and then they go missing and they have this panic three months before the race. And they are encouraged, they're given boats and they really are encouraged now. They give them boats, they give them good blades, they take them to good places, Simon sorts out this good training camp at upper Thames and the [inaudible 0:50:30] Leander. They really do get a lot of help now but they just seem--, I don't know. How can you tell a young person that's what they should do? It's--, 'cause we never done it in our day for what it could open up for you but it's when it starts happening, and everything you look back on, all the good--, a lot of the good things happen in your life really do go back to Doggett's.

It's... I'll be honest, my situation is a real [inaudible 0:51:02], I changed direction completely when I was about 25 and I started working in Billingsgate Fish Market and now I've got stalls and everything in there now, and that is linked to winning Doggett's, to doing the International Food Exhibition with a Billingsgate porter that we got to know. I used to go in there every morning, see him, get a bit of fish. I was going through a bad patch with this electrical work and he went, they want someone on my stand. But without Doggett's, I wouldn't have met him. So it opens up--, it just opens up avenues for young kids but...

Q1: I think there's also something, Chris, about the character of people who win Doggett's that make them perhaps people who go on to achieve or people who are--, you know, people are interested in a Doggett's win and not just because of the tradition but because of what their journey has been.

CS: Of course, yes. I'll give you a example, when we won someone wrote to us and said "Welcome to the most exclusive club in the world" and that sums it up.

Q1: Well I think that's a very nice place to leave our interview with the most exclusive club in the world. I'm going to just throw over here to the two people, Nicole do you have anything that's occurred to you that you'd like to ask?

Q3: I was just wondering about the nature of the club and girls and boys both rowing. Is it primarily...

RS: Fifty-fifty.
Q3: It's fifty-fifty there?

RS: Yes.

Q3: Right.

RS: And women were… allowed in the club in the mid-1970s okay, right, there was a general meeting and they voted to allow women in and then they gave them showers about ten years later.

Q3: [Laughs] Helpful.

RS: Yes, and now they've got their whole changing room [Laughs] Yes, we are very generous.

Q2: On that note, this is Eva. Obviously in order to---, very few women, only two women have rowed Doggett's. In order to row Doggett's you have to do the apprenticeship, so what do you think could encourage more women to do the apprenticeship and go through that?

CS: Well, more and more women are now being apprenticed and the people who had raced before, Claire and Kate, their fathers were watermen lightermen, and yes, so now people are being apprenticed whose parents are not watermen lightermen. Watermen sort of need to make sure they know about Doggett's, you know, which I'm sure they do.

Q2: And one final question, when we were talking to Johnny he mentioned that shortly after the division between amateur and professionals dissolved that there was an idea to get a team together that was a mixed team between this club and Leander and that that was then said that that was a bad idea and it'd be a sort of controversy. Can you remember that or can you talk more about that?

CS: Well that would have been in the 1950s. I'm not that old.

Q2: No, sorry.

Q3: [Laughs]
CS: No. There was Argosy wasn't there Rog?

RS: Well you had Nautilus.

CS: Yes, Nautilus and Argosy.

RS: In the early '60s which Nautilus was the start of the national squad and that was made up of mainly people who had done Doggett's or who had won Doggett's, and dockers, that was basically the start of the national squad that then got broke up and people from other clubs came in and that was the start of it, that sort of time.

CS: Yes, our father, he raced in 1951 which was the first year of amateur racing for Doggett's.

RS: But the first--, so in 1956, there's a picture on the wall is the first Poplar crew that raced at Henley in the Thames Cup, and that was made up of seven lightermen and one docker. A couple of Doggett's winners in it, and they got through to the semi-final of the Thames Cup and they just got beaten by the RAF. And that got--, we got newspaper cuttings on that, our dad was in the crew and that got national press coverage because it was the first working crew to ever row at Henley. And it's on--, we got--, 'cause we're clearing the house out we found some books, sports books, like proper sports annuals and under rowing there's pictures of the Dockers Eight, this Dockers Eight rowed at Henley for the first time.

CS: The Lighterman's Eight.

RS: The Lighterman's Eight they called it, and that was 1956, and that was the start of Poplar and these sort of crews, them racing at Henley all the time, and then within two years of this, Charlie Dearsley had won Sculler's Head, he'd won Wingfields a couple of years then Poplar are then three or four always in the top Scullers' Head. It was that sort of crew. Kenny Dwan comes along at 18, Jerry McCarthy and Martin, Bobby, they've all been at Henley, it's just--, then it went on. But round about 1980 this verbal patch had ended. It was--, I don't know why, it's just, I don't know. I think a lot of the people, with the [inaudible 0:56:50] although they worked shift patterns in them days they still got quite a lot of time where they could train and that was a big advantage. I know when Martin and Bobby were doing the double they'd work their shifts, they could go out, have a morning and have an evening or they'd run or
something. Nowadays, people can't train twice a day unless you're at one of the Leander clubs, Sideway Scullers, it's just totally different, these sort of jobs now. It's a shame, but...

Q1:  And it's also to do with where people can afford to live in relation to the location of their--,

CS:  Exactly, yes.

Q1: Club.

CS: The demographics of this area, you know, have changed immensely in the last 15 years and that, we used to be a lighterman's rowing club, you know, and a blue-collar rowing club. Now everyone works in the banking sector and in Canary Wharf, you know? And they work very long hours, you know. Some people train at 9pm at night, you know.

RS: They do, true.

CS: After work.

RS: But the club now is made up of solicitors, [laughs] barristers, brokers, we have our trustees, the trustees board has changed completely now, hasn't it?

CS: Yes.

RS: [Laughs] But they come down at 9 o'clock at night to train, that's just the hours they're working.

CS: At the club meal last year, I made a speech, I said, you know, for years and that we used to have 150 East End people eating posh food, now we've got 150 posh people eating East End food.

Q3: [Laughs]

CS: It's weird. Pie and mash.
Q1: Well I'd like to come to one of those suppers.

Q2: [Laughs]

RS: [Laughs]

Q1: Shall we end it there?

Q2: Let's do that.

Q1: Eva, would you like to press the button? I don't like to press the button in case I press delete.

RS: Delete it.

Q1: You know?