Q1: This is an oral history interview with Len Saunders and Len Saunders, Celia Holman on the 16th of July 2018. Also present is Walter Rothon. And the interview is taking place at Cadogan Pier in Chelsea. Please could you state your full name.

MS1: Leonard Saunders.

Q1: And what is your date of birth?

MS1: 19th of the sixth, '49.

Q1: And whereabouts were you born, Leonard?

MS1: I was born in Barking, Essex.

Q1: And what were your parents’ full names?

MS1: Alfred Leonard Saunders, father, and Doreen Olga Saunders, mother.

Q1: And what did they do for a living?

MS1: Mother just kept house once married and father was, yeah, lighterman, waterman, on the Thames all this time. During the war years in his younger days, he joined up to the navy and he was a minesweeper along the east coast from [Blythe 00:01:38] right down to Yarmouth. But his main occupation was a Thames waterman and lighterman.
Q1: And he did that for all of his life?

MS1: All his life.

Q1: First and Second World War?

MS1: Yeah, right the way through till he retired, yeah.

Q1: And where did you go to school, Len?

MS1: I went to school in Laindon in Essex, so 'cause Mum and Dad moved--, well, we went to Australia for three years, like you do [laughs]. So, yes, so when I was a young lad, preschool, we went to Australia. But Dad, he couldn't get a job on the tugs and things out there at that time, so we returned after three years. So we went out on the £10 fare that it was in them days and we sailed from Tilbury landing stage. And then we went for three years and then come back and then Dad got his job back on the Thames with the company that he'd left when we went to Aussie. And then I'd become school age, I went--, to my two schools, were in Laindon in Essex.

Q1: And what age were you when your sort of formal education, if you like, ended?

MS1: I was apprenticed and about two months before, I left school at 15, so a lit--, but that's how things were then, because you, the July apprenticeship was when I was--, that I had to sign for me papers and everything. So you could say I done sort of a little bit at a time when I was still at school [laughs]. [A couple of months 00:03:24].

Q1: And at what age were you when you kind of knew that you were going to have a working life afloat?

MS1: That is easy answered, 'cause my careers [laughs] I can still see his face to this day, erm, they offered us a day out around Ford's factory as a, well, as they call them nowadays, job experience. So I went to the Ford's factory with the school as job experience and come out. And then they asked me, “Well, do you see yourself working in Ford's, Len?” And then the answer was, “Never. Never. I know where I’m going. It's an outside job for me.” And that
was it. So I never had no more careers work [laughs] experience from school, so that was it, so I come out and then once I’d explained that to me father and then it become, yeah, apprenticeship to the Thames and that was how it all started.

Q1: And we will pick up on your apprenticeship in a moment. I’m going to turn to your son, who is also Len. Do we call you Len as well?

MS2: Yeah.

Q1: Okay. So could you please state your full name?

MS2: Leonard Saunders.

Q1: And what is your date of birth?

MS2: 30th of the tenth ’74.

Q1: And where were you born?

MS2: Melton, Woodbridge.

Q1: And what are your parents’ full names?

MS2: Len Saunders and Margaret Saunders.

Q1: And well, we know what your father’s profession is but I’m going to ask you formally to state it for the record. What were your parents’ professions? What do they do for a living?

MS2: Dad works on the water and Mum was in catering.

Q1: And where did you go to school, Len?
MS2: Worcester.

Q1: And how old were you when your sort of formal education, if you like, ended?

MS2: After my GCSEs, so it would have been 17.

Q1: And at that point did you have any idea of perhaps what you wanted to do?

MS2: Well, I've always built things and made things, so I pretty much really from when I left school, have just been in the building trade, so, you know. My dad tried to get me on when I finished on the water, on the tugs at Felixstowe but yeah, there wasn't any job--, anything going at that time. So yeah, I just sort of got into building. That's where I've been for like two or three years now, so...

Q1: I'm going to ask you just to say that again 'cause that was quite loud overhead. So Len, you didn't go on water when you left school.

MS2: No.

Q1: You went into the building trade.

MS2: Yeah, well, I applied, you know, to go 'cause I used to go on the tugs and that with Dad when I was little, so, you know, I've been around, sort of introduced to it quite young, did go for an interview but like I say, it wasn't any positions, was there?

MS1: That's right.

MS2: So, yeah. Yeah, and then I just got in with a building company and worked with them for so long and then yeah, set up my own business and yeah, sort of went from there, really, so...

Q1: So you were obviously, Len, you have competed in Doggett's.

MS2: Yeah.
Q1: And in order to do that, you need to be apprenticed to the lighterman and waterman company. Can you tell me a little bit about your journey as an apprentice, bearing in mind that you're working in the building trade?

MS1: Do you want me to answer a little bit there for you?

MS2: Er, I don't really know, to be honest. I don't really know how to answer it 'cause I mean it was sort of we all, 'cause it was a family thing, wasn't it? We all, we used--, we'd come up here with you and...

MS1: Yeah, I think we just--, can I just, can I come in?

Q1: Of course you can.

MS1: Yeah. I think because of the building money, it made life a bit easier for Len, because of the distance to travel. So what we used to do is have days up here, so we would come up and perhaps we'd have a pleasure boat ride and we'd do things like that. But it was always sort of general conversation of what the river does for you, how if families always earn a living out of it. So I think, being fair to Len, that the life in that house was always a little bit of conversation somewhere, so that's how it was. But for his actual apprenticeship, because he was --, it was a patrimony and I being his master and I was able then to help him, guide him through all the things that was needed, really, for Doggett's and the race and that, so--, and so the finished product is he becomes a freeman of a Watermen's Company but it didn't actually allow him to work on the river itself, to be in charge of anything, boats and stuff. But it allowed him to carry out the end product, which was to row for Doggett's.

Q1: So can you explain to me a little bit about how patrimony works? For example, how many generations does, you know, as a general point, because we have Len who is a waterman, lighterman by patrimony. Would then Len's, any of Len's children also be able to do patrimony? Or does it stop at a certain point? How far can you take patrimony?

MS1: I'm not 100 percent sure how far it goes on but I do believe that once because of the family setup originally, I understand, that is, yeah, so Len would then become first generation under a patrimony. I think the generation feels that they're all [the same 00:09:35]. And then and the same would be for his sister, so that would be allow her to then--, so yeah, so if they had
any family, sons, daughters, they could do the same thing if--., in the same way. So I believe that the patrimony thing is in the same category as going in and taking an apprenticeship and so it is passed on.

Q1: And your experiences of rowing, Len, early on, because we were talking about this patrimony, with one of the goals in mind being to kind of rowing Doggett’s, to be--, to qualify, if you like, to rowing Doggett’s. Can you talk to us a little bit about your early experiences of rowing, perhaps?

MS2: Erm, it seems it was a long time, now. But yeah, it--, well, we started at home, didn't we? We got a sculling boat and it was on the River Orwell in the marina where we sort of got the basics going. Then we started and then through the company we started to [inaudible 00:10:43].

MS1: There is--, yeah, sorry, I'll come in here because there is a little story to this, to the start of rowing, because when they was apprenticed in the Watermen’s Company, we was in there that day. And I was talking away to different freemen in there, while they was doing all their paperwork and signing [up to it 00:11:05]. And I was talking to a chap and I--, his names gone at the moment but he was from Gravesend Rowing Club and I said, yeah, yeah, so I said, we're going to start out and now we got to start off right from fresh. So I says, so I'm looking, I said, for a cheap sculling boat to start training in. So they said, oh, we might be able to help you out with an old boat from Gravesend Rowing Club, which we did. So I paid £60 for a wooden sculling boat on the day and it had a little bit of damage but that didn't matter because--., so the only place that then we had to do our training was at a placed called Levington Marina, which is not far, five, ten minutes from [our 00:11:50]. So we--, that was our first boat, wasn’t it?

MS2: Hmm-hmm.

MS1: That wooden one.

MS2: Yeah.

MS1: And that was built at--., and the boat I know was built at Canterbury. So that was it. So we took them down the slipway in Levington Marina and we just sat--., and the boat that they'd termed a sculler was a fine boat for racing, which is completely against all that criteria’s of how you ship learn. So you normally learn in a wider boat, which they call a rub tub and that--., so
you progress. But they got straight into a very narrow fine single sculling boat and I mean I just let them row off to the--, off the--, you can remember doing all that, can you?

MS2: Yeah, I remember.

MS1: Then we rode off, off the slipway, tied a line around me and they used to just row off there and just row against me and then once where they got their balance, so I went in tied around them and that's how we trained them and that was in a fine sculling boat. And then we moved on. So we jumped the boat training, if you like. But that boat was bought on the same day that they was apprenticed in the Watermen’s Company, so yeah.

Q1: And where you were talking about they, you're talking about your son and your...?

MS1: Daughter, Kate, yeah, sorry. Yeah, so yeah, so the two of them was training in the same boat. And yeah, I think--, and we used it for quite a bit, didn't we?

MS2: Yeah. Most of the time, yeah.

Q1: And so you start this training in this rather fine--, and I know how difficult it is to be in a narrow, single scull, so I’m kind of feeling for you, Len, [laughs] if that was your kind of first experience. That was quite intense. When did you start kind of maybe going to regattas or competing or things like that? Have you any recollection of when your father pushed you out in that boat to go racing?

MS2: Well, it was when we started doing the Cambridge weekends.

MS1: Yeah. So our club is another thing, 'cause we're a distance people [laughs]. So London-Felixstowe is a travel but our nearest club from Felixstowe was Lowestoft Rowing Club, so we're another 40 mile away, so we used to go to Lowestoft Rowing Club. And we then rowed under Lowestoft colours all the time he rowed, didn't you?

MS2: Yeah.
MS1: And then we--, so we rowed away from the [SOs 00:14:30] there. Then their training then was the Norfolk Broads, so inland, still waters. Still open waters, still lots of mileage, could be got. But it was open waters. I would think it’s fair to say, isn’t it, Len?

MS2: Yeah, yeah.

MS1: [Laughs] Yeah.

Q1: So what was--, if that was Len’s journey into the story of your kind of apprenticeship into [skiff rowing 00:14:59] and your own experiences of rowing, I’m going to turn to Len Senior and ask you about your apprenticeship, which I am sensing was a more traditional approach?

MS1: It was, yeah. It was a more-- it was a work approach I had. So yeah, so when I sort of as soon as I went and left school at 15 then yes, I was straight into a company called Gaselee and Son 00:15:27, which was seeking toward work on the Thames at that time. And I used to travel from Laindon to West India Dock here. I picked the tug up here. So yeah, so my first 18 months of my apprenticeship was as a tug boy/deckhand. Yeah, so straight into work, straight into learning, learning the river. And I was quite fortunate because the company that I worked for covered the full distance of the river, really, from Teddington right the way down to the River Medway, so my early years was fast, the full length of the river, so I was quite lucky.

Q1: And I’m, from what you were saying about Len’s early experiences of rowing, a lot of which were on the Norfolk Broads, you would have experience of what the flow of the river is in London.

MS1: Yeah.

Q1: And how that can, knowledge of that, prepares you for Doggett’s, in many respects.

MS1: Yeah.

Q1: Would you talk a little bit about that to us?
MS1: Yeah. It did, because as I moved on with my apprenticeship and you come to your second year of apprentice, as long as you've passed the question criteria in the satisfaction of the masters that was asking the questions. And so in your second year then you become--, you could become in charge of a vessel. So then you could step up and instead of being a deckhand you could take a mate's job. So then I was fortunate enough I could take a mate's job, so which on a tug which run up to Brentford, so then I was learning my Doggett's while I was at work. So with steering the tug up with a barge behind you, you learn exactly where the tides were, how it was on the bridges. So the knowledge that, you know, you were able to glean off of your work, to go into your end goal of rowing for Doggett's, was really great. It was knowing, you know, it was an easy ride for me when it come to it.

Q1: So when did you, at what age were you when you, what stage in your apprenticeship were you when you identified Doggett's as a goal that you had in mind?

MS1: I think just about starting my second year, because the first year I was-- the work I was doing at the tug company that I was working for, it was a long, long hours, so I would go in at six, a morning start, and maybe I wouldn't get home till the next day. So you then have a day's rest at home and then you'd be over till the following morning, you'd be away again for six o'clock. So it was a pretty intensive work criteria, if you like, in them days. So the first year it was work, work and knowledge, knowledge, if you like. And then it was probably into my second year that I joined the Poplar and Blackwall Rowing Club and then that's when everything started to just sort of take place, really, yeah.

Q1: Poplar and Blackwall Rowing Club is a very prestigious rowing club.

MS1: It is.

Q1: On the river.

MS1: Yeah.

Q1: Did you choose to join that club rather than other clubs because you felt that, you know, they had a good track record, they'd be able to support you in your goal? Or was there any reasoning for joining that particular club?
MS1: Well, I suppose yes because the guys that I was probably going to row against were at that club as well, [laughs] so you could say you was keeping an eye on them [laughs]. No, no. But Poplar and Blackwall was a good club and it was easy for me to travel to from home, so--, but it did have a good track record. A very good track record. They put out some very classy rowers. So yeah, it was really I suppose, in this modern world, a no-brainer to go anywhere else but there.

Q1: So I'm going to ask you some questions about your training routine, if you like, leading up to Doggett's, because you said in your first year of your apprenticeship, you were working all hours, there wasn't much time. And then you joined your rowing club, you had a little bit more time with work. Can you sort of describe to us the sort of things you started doing to gear yourself up for the race?

MS1: I went back to doing what I used to do at school. I did a lot of running. So I used to--, when I used to come home from work then I would go out and I would perhaps run maybe 20 minutes, half hour. I never used to be able to do it because I, you know, you would just say you did that. So running of an evening time was more to the--, for the fitness side of that. And then my rowing, or boat skill, if you like, was then either a Saturday or a Sunday away from Poplar and Blackwall. So that's how we used to do it. Very rarely did I get a midweek row or anything like that, so it all had to be--., fitness levels had to be from running. So me rowing took--, was weekends when I wasn't really perhaps working, you know, so...

Q1: And did you have a mentor, if you like, someone who was specifically training you, or...?

MS1: Not just, er, there was a guy called Ronnie Watkins and he worked for the company, the second company I went to work for and he used to put a guiding eye over me, so when he was out training and the like. But they did a lot of, erm, and I still do now, Len, didn't they, of squad training, where the lots of boats would go out on a Saturday, Sunday, so you'd all be in, you know, perhaps a ten-boat squad and away you go. And you'd all be monitoring one another, so--., and there'd be a coach there and he'd keep an eye on you. So--., but the guy called Ronnie Watkins, he used to keep an eye on me and things like that. And then he would come out and put us in a boat that they never--., that Len and Kate never got into was a rub tug and he was cox in that and then giving me a bit of guiding about using me blades more for efficient and things like that. So that's how I got--., but he wasn't a coach that has stuck with me all of the time. He was just some very nice guy that I could call on and say, "Look, have a look at me. I need polishing." [Laughs] And that was it. But he was a good guy from--., Ronnie Watkins, yeah.
Q1: And were you competing in other regattas and races?

MS1: I did one or two. I did [Poplar used to hold 00:22:51] regattas with Curlew and Globe [inaudible 00:22:54] rowing clubs, which was on the south side of Greenwich and then I went to St Neots with him a couple of times, [rowing a four 00:23:02] and everything like that. But 'cause I couldn't guarantee my time, it was pretty restrictive for me. So it was everything I used to do, really, was the single scull. I could go down and get the boat out, go and have a row and do everything meself, so yeah, it was a self-motivated, er, that--, which all scullers have to do. You're in the boat on your own and I think Len, now he can back me up on that, that it's you, you'll sit, you know, and it's your mind that's in charge of that boat, in charge of you, and away you go. And you do what, you know, you do what you've got to do. You put yourself through the pain barrier yourself and that's it. But it makes you very single-minded, a single sculling boat. Very sing--, yeah. And strong in mind as well. I think you've got to be. And I think that's fair, isn't it? Isn't it?

MS2: Yeah.

MS1: Yeah.

MS2: Yeah, definitely.

MS1: Yeah. You've got to...

Q1: I think that, you know, from talking to other people who have competed in Doggett's, there is something about the personality of the people who take part. They're very kind of single-minded, very self-motivated, all the things that you have just described now. When you were talking earlier, Len, you talked about how now you do a lot of running, not so much rowing but a lot of running and the sort of single-minded quality that you bring to that, that the people you're competing against kind of know that you're going to be the guy who's going for the finishing line.

MS2: Yeah.

Q1: Can you tell us a little bit about your training for Doggett's, which I'm imagining featured your father. Or I might be wrong.
Erm, well, it--, a lot of it, yeah, we spent a lot of time on the water when it was the boat work but it was also the same again, it was, you know, out running, I was doing a lot of cycling, backing it up, fitness. Er, a lot of gym work as well. I was, yeah, so it was--, it wasn't really in a week. We didn't have much time off, so yeah, I sort of might have just gone a little bit over the top with what I was doing because it was just one goal, I wanted to do my best. So yeah, there wasn't much room for any rest or--, yeah, or any other things 'cause I had a timer, as lots of my mates would be going on holidays and had holidays and doing what they do at that age. And yeah, I, yeah, I was more concentrated in what I wanted to do and that was to row well and compete, so that was, yeah. And I am still that way now. I'm still training five, six times a week, running, gym, cycling, so even though it was 20 years, yeah, now that, you know, when I done Doggett's, I still, yeah, it's still set me up for how I am now. And that's with my business as well, so it's sort of, yeah, you sort of got that, a drive. And with people in me running club, they know my background a little bit and yeah, I don't, still even now, I don't want to give up, even though I'm getting a bit older. But still, still competing. Still, you know, still loving it, so, yeah.

And that, we hear that a lot from, you know, men who have competed in Doggett's. It seems to be the character of the people who compete, is what we're coming across in these various interviews. So that rather intense process that you have just described there, Len, leading up to Doggett's, was that like six months or a year or...?

Well, it was, yeah, it was pretty much, well, the first year I did it I came second, so I stopped going out, stopped drinking, just literally just trained. And then I was a little bit more relaxed in the second year but it was still pretty much, yeah, it was--, it, yeah, for the entire three years it was just--, I just, yeah, it was just that was just my main goal. And I got three seconds and I, you know, I'm happy with that. I would have liked to have won it but the, you know, when I look back I couldn't have done any more 'cause it wasn't enough hours in the day with what we were doing. So yeah, it was, yeah, it was pretty intense, so there wasn't any let up. And if anything, we were doing more regattas, more racing and winter work, so yeah, it was--,

It was a lot. I think our period of--, for rowing, really, was over a six-year period, so--,

'cause we had a six-year apprenticeship for Kate and a five-year one for Len. So to give me a little chance of one of them rowing Doggett's on their own, if things went in a certain direction, which they did, so it give me four years [laughs] of Doggett's as a coach, if you like. But I think Len is probably doing himself down a little bit because he was far, far fitter than ever I was when I rowed Doggett's. Yeah, far, far fitter, so he, you know, he really put his heart and soul into it. Kate as well. So they done it. But also we had to fill the gap between, well, once we
knew that he got to row a second time then you also got to keep that year going. So his fitness levels, Len kept up all the way through the year, so--, and then it was over. He was over there to compete. And we competed from Kent, if you like, all the way through the Thames races, scullers, heads, all them he's done and come out of them pretty good. Pretty good results. We've travelled to Nottingham multi lane course, so they've all rowed there. So they're--, it wasn't just Doggett's as one thing. It also become part of life, racing, in between. So it was, yeah, I've--, they had a pretty good time but also an intensive time. And six years competing at that level and trying to stay at that level is pretty hard, yeah.

Q1: Right. I was going to say, to have that consistency over three years is quite intense. That's quite an achievement to--,

MS1: Yes, yeah, exactly. Yeah, sorry. Yeah, exactly right. And we look back at it now, Len and Kate look back at it now, the three years that Len rowed, the competition was really, really high. Really high. There was no getting out. So when he looks back now, you know, he rowed against the best. And whoever beat him, they were. They just were, because we all know on the day that Doggett's can be--, it doesn't matter how fit you are or how good you are, there's always something in that river that's going to catch you, you know. You might just be in the wrong place, you might just get a--, catch a crab from round one of the bridge buttmens, anything. So it's, you know, it's a pretty tricky course. It's not just down to total fitness but you also got to have that, er, so yeah. So Len, for my part, kept his self in peak condition for three years and to be able to come out of that and say, well, I, you know, yeah, a bit disappointed but three seconds, it takes a bit of doing. Even said [laughs].

Q1: Do you think when you had your Doggett’s race, Len Senior, predated your son’s race by how many years? Or, you know, the period when Len Junior was rowing was when...

MS1: So I rowed the 1970, so then, so he--, your first race was seven--,

Q1: In the '90s?

MS2: '90s.

MS1: Yeah, '90s.

MS2: '90--,
Q1: Okay.

MS2: ’99?

MS1: ’99.

Q1: All right, so sort of 30 years or so later.

MS1: Yeah.

Q1: How had the kind of boats in which you competed changed over that period? Because you talked about, you know, getting this wooden boat. When you raced, can you describe the kind of scull that you were using?

MS1: Yeah, they kept up until I think the present day boats, they tried to keep the boat criteria weight similar. So the boat I rowed in was a Chadwych Healey and that was a wooden boat with a canvas decking type. And yeah, and they was slightly wider at the end than a fast boat, so yeah, they was a quite chunky boat, so a little bit of weight, stable for the lower reaches of London. So, yeah, they was good. So when Len and Kate come to row for the first, yeah, all your years were the same, so they rowed in a similar boat to me. Yeah.

MS2: Yeah, it was.

MS1: A wooden boat but a fibreglass hull. But the weight ratio was similar to what I rowed in, where the modern day boat they got now is totally all fibreglass, so they are a bit lighter. But the mould shape, it’s stayed roughly the same all the way through. It’s just--, I just believe that the boats they’re using now are slightly lighter, yeah.

Q1: And you don’t compete in Doggett’s bringing your own boat?

MS1: No. No, that’s, er, so the Watermen’s Company supply the rower [laughs]. Yeah, I think it’s, er, so you, so when you’ve come out of your apprenticeship as a lighterman, waterman then you’re eligible to row. And then so the Watermen’s Company give the fishmonger’s company
the rowers and then they, you have six on the day of completing the race but if it’s more than that then they row heats at Hammersmith to get the numbers to the six. So the fishmonger’s supply the boats, which is very good, and the Watermen’s Company supply the engine room, if you like [laughs] but that’s the rowers. So that’s, so between the two of them they work it really well, so may it stay that way, yeah.

Q1: And on the day, are the boats rigged individually for you, or do you just arrive and you get in a boat, or--, how does it work? Len, Len Junior, you seem to have some thoughts.

MS2: Yeah, I mean you pick your boat up, don’t you?

MS1: Yeah.

MS2: Way before, well, when it’s convenient and you can get it. And then you set your boat up to, you know, what you’re used to rowing in, depending on your weight, height, and then you just get comfortable, you know. And yeah, you just then start training. We used to train in that all week and then we used to go off to the regattas and race in the lighter boat, which was good, so that gives you a, you know, you’re all week, you know, pulling the heavier boat along and yeah, and then swap boats, so--, but yeah, you just, you know, I can’t remember how long you, when you had it, when you could pick it up. But yeah, once we got it--,

MS1: We used to pick them up about six months beforehand.

MS2: Yeah.

MS1: But it was pretty good to us because we used to say, well, we live a little way away but they was, the fishmongers were pretty good to us, so we used to get our boats quite early. But--,

MS2: Yeah, everything was all set up, so what we were used to and, yeah, you just, yeah, it was good.

Q1: Now your father, Len, has described the fact that because he worked on the river, he was very familiar with the waters of the course, you know, how the Thames runs between bridges and so forth. Did you have much opportunity to kind of row the course, if you like, before the actual race?
MS2: Yeah, we did it a lot. We used to come up, we had a, down at Woods’ we had our boat down there, didn’t we? A little safety boat. And we used to then come up some mornings really early so we could get the same tide. So, yeah, so we, as much as, you know, we could with the distance, we did, we went over it as much as we could. Yeah, and with all the other races and regattas up the Thames as well, I, you know, I had one, Hammersmith, wasn’t it?

MS1: Yeah.

MS2: That was my first ever race I won and got a pot.

MS1: Yeah.

MS2: So, er, and the sculler’s head. So it wasn’t like we weren’t aware of the tides and the, you know, how strong it can be through the bridges and stuff, so—, and yeah, not the same knowledge as the people that work on there, but enough to be able to, yeah, to respect it, so, yeah, a massive thing. So, er, ‘cause it’s not the same as we—, it is on the Orwell, which is what we trained on a lot, so yeah, it was—, yeah.

Q1: Your father was, er, when he was doing his sort of build-up to Doggett’s, if you like, he was at Poplar and Blackwall and District Rowing Club and I think he said he was kind of aware of other people who were competing.

MS2: Yeah.

Q1: Were you aware of who your competitors were?

MS2: Oh, yeah. Yeah, because we’d all be either Cambridge weekends, you know, when you all go out and, you know, row on, erm, and do various bits during the day and there’d be a race held and so everyone knew what they were up to, you know. And even through the winter when regattas are longer, you bump into various people and, oh, yeah, I’m not doing much training or, you know, injuries. So yeah, you know, you pick up on that and you know everyone around you. And everyone’s keeping an eye on each other’s time. It wasn’t in, that wasn’t as big then, you know, with mobile phones, so you couldn’t—, it was all paper-based. And so you’d get rumours through the, you know, various people are doing really well, or they done
such-and-such and the sculler's head, so yeah, it was good. And that's what drove and pushed you to, you know, either beat them next time round or, yeah, make them be a bit wary and a bit, you know, so yeah, it was good. I like that. That's what I like, you know, just sort of, yeah, if it wasn't hard work it's not fun. So it definitely was.

MS1: Yeah. The camaraderie between the apprentices was--,

MS2: Oh, yeah.

MS1: Unbelievable, yeah.

MS2: And even though I wasn't with, you know, apprenticed in the water up here and they all, you know, a good bunch of lads that I was rowing with, they were like, you know, mates and I'm still friends with them today, you know, even though it's distance, you know, it was good. It was really good, so yeah.

Q1: So I'm going to take this a little bit through sort of the race itself. I mean obviously you competed on three occasions but perhaps we can kind of bring ourselves to the first race, if you can recall it. Maybe, let's go to race day. How did you feel on race day, Len?

MS2: Erm, yeah, pretty nervous. Yeah, still, er, yeah, yeah, I didn't sleep very much and, you know, you're going over every single scenario, what the weather will be like, you know, what arch, what bridge, you know, where you--., what position to be at, what point you're in, you know, first or second. And, you know, all these things, even though we wasn't on ten, you know, working, we still were going through all the, you know, the scenarios and, you know, the course. And still, still can picture all--., everything. So even to now, you know, so yeah, and it was just, yeah, massively nervous. I still remember now, even like the only thing I could eat was bananas [laughs] so I was literally just a bunch of bananas. That's all I could hold down and just literally, yeah, it was, er, I just wanted to get, yeah, out on the water, in the boat and just, yeah, I just wanted to be there, just at the start, right, and just, you know, get down to business, really. So it was, yeah. And it didn't help, having to drive. It was driving here, wasn't it? And it was--,

MS1: Yeah, we--., 'cause it was two and a half hours--,

MS2: Just sitting there.
MS1: Drive. Everything we done in to come and train up here, it was, yeah, two hours in the car. And we was very lucky because, erm, which is, er, to walk in, allowed us to-, 'cause we, I also built a little dory that we used to keep up here for training. So Alan Woods used to allow us to keep that inside his pier, so that's why Len and Kate could do the course as much as they did. So there was lots of times we didn't row it but we would come up and then go over it, just in a boat and it was a dory so it was low-level with the water. So we'd try and keep the criteria as close to the real thing, if you like, so we'd say to him, well, he used to take charge of the boat and the engine and say to him, well, you do your Doggett's course, you know. And then we used to try and get him to turn around as well, so-, 'cause when you're in a boat, steering, you're looking the way you're going. So we used to-, so we used to try and sit him round in the boat so he was looking behind him all the time and still doing the course up the river. So you had--, so he was steering backwards, if you like. So we used to do all them sort of things so the picture, 'cause when you're rowing the picture is behind you, it's not in front of you. So, you know...

MS2: [Laughs] But even on the day, even like now still looking at it, you don't take any of that on board.

MS1: You think you don't [laughs].

MS2: I still, it was, er, I can remember when I got out of the boat at the end and then seeing all the pleasure boats and I didn't--, he didn't even see like a wall of just boats. And it was--, it only hit home after like some photos was given to me, and you see how many are out on the water, how many people are actually looking over the bridges. But you don't see that, you're just down, looking at your hands, just who's around and where. But it was--, yeah, it was, yeah, so we didn't--. [laughs] even though we did all that, still in my mind it just seems like a--, yeah, just a tornado and you go--., when you go through it.

MS1: Yeah.

MS2: Yeah.

Q1: Now, you're describing, Len, you know, this kind of build-up to the race and how you felt and the fact you could only eat a couple of bananas and whatever.
Q1: How does that compare to how you felt before other races, for example?

MS2: Erm, I don't know. I was, even still now when I race or run, I still get nervous but nothing compared to the Doggett's 'cause it's just--., it means m--., because of the, er, now when I train it's--, I still want to compete, I still want to be up there but it is sort of, you can say enjoyment. But then it was because I wanted--, it was to prove something. One, that someone from outside can equally, you know, give them a run for their money up here. But it was, yeah, it was, you know, the tradition as well. And I, yeah, it was just, yeah, I don't think you can compare. Nothing to date compares to how I felt for all three of them. I was the same for the other two after than what I was with my first, because it was a different year that the same people around you were [moving 00:44:52] down but then you've got them newer people, wasn't it?

MS1: Yeah. There's always an unknown couple.

MS2: So and the same again, because you're rowing against the people that you know, you know what they've been up to on, you know, regattas, who was coaching them, so you had to [clicks fingers] yeah, you had to, yeah, sort of step up as well, didn't you?

MS1: Yeah.

MS2: So you couldn't relax and, you know, so all that what you've done throughout the whole year, it's all that, it's the nerves and, yeah. And it's not just the start of the race, it's then when you've finished. It was like weeks after, still analysing was it the correct, you know, had I done enough training? And when I look back even still now, I still now sometimes think, you know, I see a regatta or, you know, in Olympics and rowing, still question. But I couldn't have done any more. So, you know, it's--,

MS1: Yeah, that's right. That's right, yeah.

MS2: That's right.
Q1: I mean what's really nice about this, Len, is that you're describing this really intense experience but you're kind of smiling a lot through it. It seems to have been a very positive experience for you.

MS2: Yeah. I mean it sort of--, it set me up with who I am now, if I look back, how I work, you know, running my own business, how I run my business is through being out on the boat and it's the pushing, being on your own. I still work on my own, so it's--, and the drive--, and with my business, it was--, it's the same drive as what I had when I was training, because it was--, I worked with a building company for four and a half years. I finished with them, I said I was going to set up on me own, it was a bit of a joke and a laugh 'cause they didn't think, er, but it's the drive that you pick up from wanting to beat, you know, rowing. And it's the same, same attitude is what I put into my business. And that's, you know, still now.

MS1: Yeah, yeah.

MS2: So it, you know, so there's something [laughs] about rowers, [I don't know what it could be] is in--, there's something there that makes us tick, that's it's--, yeah, it's--, just pushes you and it's the drive, so, yeah.

MS1: It makes you--, I believe it makes you--, sculling, it makes you a strong person because you've got no help around it. You are that person in that boat.

MS2: [Laughs] And even now, when I'm running I still--, and running is easier compared to what it was in rowing. I just find, you know, what we were doing then, if I put that into running now, I'd be, you know, I'd do, yeah, I'd be flying. But that's why I, yeah, it's just a breeze with what I'm doing at the moment, 'cause it was pretty tense, wasn't it?

MS1: Yeah, it was. It was and it takes time. And, you know, I've got you know both. As a father, I've got to be grateful for that, for Len and Kate, you know, because once you--., once I’d given them the offer of apprenticeship, apprentice rowing, then, you know, and then they took it up. It wasn’t for me. They’re the ones that I’ve done right by. I could be--., it was down to them. And they put, you know, they put their heart and soul into it and I think they gained, you know, a lot out of it. But I still--., they probably keep closer to the people they rowed with than what I do from my day, you know, because, er...

MS2: Yeah, but that's 'cause we got in and that.
MS1:  Yeah, so [laughs] so, you know, they even probably know 'cause I was working with them but I don't keep in touch [inaudible 00:48:26]. So even today Len's had a call from [inaudible 00:48:30] guy that rowed with him on the day. So, you know, there's still that closeness 20 years on for them, so it's been a good connection. But it's been a good connect all the way, all the way through for them, in light of it.

Q1:  Can we go back and talk about your race day, Len Senior? Can you remember, did you manage to eat some bananas in the morning?

MS1:  I didn't. I just carried on as normal [laughs] to be honest with you. Yeah, there is, even for me, I mean there was a certain amount of nerve, which is, you know, which we’d expect. But in them days you was-- they used to give you your boat and you would train on it at night and then they would take your boat off you pre to Doggett’s and they would then put it on the beach in front of the Traitors’ Gate at the Tower. You’d then come down and you’d get your own boat and you’d get it afloat there and then you'd go afloat and you'd start the race and that. And that was how it was done on my year. So, you know, where we was. For Len and Kate, everyone was given their boats and we used to-- we got afloat on the day and everything like that. But on my day they used to take the boat away from you and so you'd get back [laughs] so it would, you know, for me I used to get back and I’d have a look and see if it was set up. But then we spoke about it earlier on, about Len having his boat set up. Now, going back when I rowed it, I, probably my boat was comfortable for me so whoever’s got it before me set it up reasonable, so I just got in it and rowed it. It was lovely. But with Len, he was quite finicky on [laughs] on the heights of these gates in the water and everything on it and we would work within two mil to get his balance that he needed for his boats to be set up. But for meself on the day, I just got it in it and we just rowed it. But that's how it was back then. So yeah, so once I got me boat afloat from off the beach at front of the Tower, then just row up to the London Bridge, get yourself in your position where you're starting and I believe and I was number two. It’s from the right. Yeah, number two. Yeah, 'cause there was four of us, only four that year, so yeah, so that was it. And then yeah, you just set your weight for the bargemaster, for the fishmongers’ company to down his flag and away you go. And yeah, then put your-- because there was-- in them days there would have been a few more buoys and barge rows about than what there is now. You know, there was a bit more thought, if you like, a bit more care they needed. But, you know, even today’s [moorings always tuck inside a Festival Pier, the buoys there, you know, you've got to still got to be careful. Be careful what you do. You still got to be careful how close you row to the buttments 'cause there's still a little movement in the tide and you've only got to have only one blade in slack water and the other in there and there'd be water and you're as close to the swimmer as you need to be. So you--, so what you--, you know what you've learnt over your period for me as an apprentice and up and down. And then another thing what I showed Len and Kate, we used to go over the
course and doing the same thing, don't get too close to this, don't get too close to that. And that's what you did, so --, but it was, yeah, so my --, so I still got the same as Len, so I still got the little early tweet, if you like, of starting a race and away we went. And I raced, er, yeah, I was set, number two, [timer two 00:52:59] north shore, so they run through it. It went quite well. I did have a little problem at Westminster Bridge but I did have an arm lock up, so I had to stop rowing. So I stopped a couple of strokes and then clicked, you know, my arm and then away I went again. But in them days there was no mercy for you as well because if you'd dropped too far back the pleasure boats went through you and then you was rowing in rough water all the way. So if the first two got away and then got some distance between you then the pleasure boats were following the lead boat and they went in and I think that nowadays there's a health and safety criteria, crept in and that no longer happens. So yeah, so I got passed by a pleasure boat when I was in Westminster Arch and it was not very pleasant. But, you know, and you then had to row, you're rowing rough water all the way to the finish, so it becomes a hard race then. But it was still enjoyable. Yeah, and I probably got a third, so yeah, it was, for me that was quite an achievement, so I was happy with that as well. But yeah, and then we, you know, ended up at Cadogan Pier. That's --, it creeps up on you very quick, yeah. So all the years', all the years' training you put in, you know, start to finish, is gone. Yeah, yeah.

Q1: When you raced, Len Senior, if I may call you that, were you the first person in your family to row Doggett's? Had there been a tradition of rowing Doggett's?

MS1: No, I was the first. I was the first one to actually row it. So my father never rowed it 'cause it would have been the war years for him. And he had a --, he changed during the period. He changed to the navy, which a lot of the River Thames workforce did. So he went to the Royal Navy and he was minesweeping all the way down the east coast during the war period. So yeah, but I don't think me dad was a rowing person, so --, but whether he'd --, it'd have been changed for him if he'd been given the option, I don't know. But he was a sporty person. He run. He used to be a runner, so maybe. But I think he was just at that period of life, at that time in life, really, that, you know, he didn't do it. And me grandfather, he didn't row neither. But my grandfather was born in Jersey, so in the First World War his mother and father sent him from Jersey to his uncle in Barking and he finished off his schooling there and lived with them and then he was his uncle that apprenticed my grandfather to the river. So that's how the Saunders family done it. That's how it started, really. So grandfather, my father, meself, then Len and Kate, so depending on how you want to split them two up, [laughs] there's five. And so, yeah, so I'm pretty proud of that.

Q1: And when you competed, being the sort of first person in your family, if you like, to compete at Doggett's. Was there a boat, were your family on the flotilla, or...?
MS1: Yeah, 'cause, erm, and I think it still runs--, I think they still do it today, just about, in the Watermen's Company, in the Blue Union, which was a trade union, which is now part of Unite, so back in them days when I've come afloat, I also had to join a union. So that was part of my apprenticeship. So Blue Union I think used to have their pleasure boat that followed and the Watermen's Company had their pleasure boat as well. And then lots and lots of companies used to, you know, hire their pleasure boats out, so that's why you got a good, good following in them days. So yeah, my father, me mother, my two sisters, they would have been boarding, you know, Watermen's Company pleasure boat for the day, yeah, [might just 00:57:43], so yeah. So, all involved, really.

Q1: And do you have memories of watching your son and your daughter compete with you on a boat yourself, or...?

MS1: I was on a boat for the first year. When Len rowed the first year I was on the boat. But then I found it too stressful [laughs] so then that was why we built him a little dory, as I was saying, so--, 'cause I knew then I'd got to do--, going to do more of it. So that's when--, so I bought a--, built the dory, brought the dory to London. And the next three years I followed the race through at the same level as them. And it did seem [laughs] less stressful to be honest with you. Yeah, a bit. And I could see that they was, you know, how they was carrying out, how they were running, yeah. And they both steered good courses so we could never complain, really, about the course steering that they done and how they handled their self over the course. So, yeah. Very good.

Q1: So it's been some, what, how long was it ago, Len? Was it some sort of like not-quite 20 years? You can't-- , you don't look that old.

MS2: Yeah, it will be, 'cause--,

Q1: Will it really?

MS2: Yeah, 'cause I set-- , I, the second year in, it was the second year in, I then set up my own business, so I've been trading now 23 years, so yeah, it would be, so yeah, it flies by.

Q1: So, mmm, you're 20 years down the line, gentlemen. Do you still follow Doggett's? Do you go and watch the race? What's your relationship, Len Junior?
MS2: Ah, well, after we did it we, you know, we still spent a lot of time and even on the Cambridge weekends, we were still going to all those, weren’t we?

MS1: Yeah.

MS2: And helping out. Yeah, come up and watch. But the same, it’s this like business took over for me, so, you know, the-- , it was hard for them to sort of maintain how it was. And you come up a lot, don’t you?

MS1: Yeah, that’s right. But I believe for Len and Kate, it’s-- , they don’t necessarily have to be here to watch the race and this is the modern world we’re in, because somebody will send a message to them and say, so-and-so has won today, so-and-so is rowing today. And they, Len and Kate get their messages, where I don’t. So, yeah.

MS2: Yeah, and then how it’s moved on, like now, you know, you’ve got Facebook, you know, the Doggett’s all comes up on that, you know, so it’s like, you know, it’s, yeah, technology’s amazing now. But it’s, yeah, so you pretty much will get, you know, news. But yeah, but it’s like I’m still friends with, you know, people, even know, you know, we all got in a room together, even though it could be 20 years or ten years that I’ve seen, it’d just be like it was last week, so-- , and that’s what’s amazing about it. So, erm...

MS1: Yeah, so-- , but I’ve, you know, going back to your question, yeah, you know, I’ve-- , I’ll come up at odd times. I think I’ve been over in the last three years I’ve been maybe twice to this one, so-- , but yeah, I try to get up and have a look at the race ’cause it-- , yeah, it’s still I would say an interest, you know, in the family, if you like. So yeah, so where I don’t follow on the modern day [laughs] version where my son and daughter will, where I’ll come up, you know. And then all of a sudden somebody will say, “Oh, we’ve got a small boat going up. Do you want to come up on the inflatable?” So, you know, I’ve done them sort of things and so yeah, we do pay interest to what’s going on and who’s rowing and things like that, so yeah. And I suppose since I’ve been retired, I’ve probably a lost a little bit of connection. But when I was with, you know, finishing my years off in Cory’s, Cory Lighterage you know, you’ve got young lads there that are coming down in apprenticeship and, you know, you say to them, “Are you are you doing Doggett’s?” “Oh, yeah, I’m doing Doggett’s” and-- , so you would keep an eye on them, you know, you’d find out, you know, how they were going, where they was rowing from, you know. Some was rowing out of Medway Rowing Club, some of out of Gravesend, those sort of things. And we’d put-- , we’d have an-- , ergo put on the tug, yeah, so they’d, you
know, they'd be on the tug and we're doing their training on the tug collecting the waste. So it was--; so the connection was still there even, you know, with the lads now, it was still good and it still gives you a buzz, you know, it's a people buzz, which is good.

Q1: Which brings me rather neatly to kind of pretty much my final question, I guess, which is do you have any thoughts for Doggett's kind of going forward? I mean Len Junior, you've talked about how, you know, people are on kind of Facebook, kind of social, talking about it, so it's still, you know, very much something that's in the air for you, as someone who's competed. Do you think there's a wider audience for Doggett's or do you think there's a way which it could be brought to a bigger audience? Or have you any thoughts about Doggett's going forward?

MS1: Well, I'd very much it to stay in its amateur status that it is now. I think that has held it together all this time. And that way round it still means a lot to those that are racing it and those that are apprenticed to the water. And then it's--; and it brings you right back to its beginning, with Thomas Doggett's, because he was the guy, yeah, that got taken up and down the river by boat, so he knew what he was setting up. And I would very much like to see that hero still stay and keep out there. Saying that, but it's also now in the modern world but I think the exposure side that the electronics could give it would be probably beneficial to getting it out into the world, if you like, and people to understand it, what it is. But the general criteria of the race and what it's about, I think should be kept as close to the pattern it is now, because, you know, it gives a way forward for apprentices. I know that, you know, that we've got like a two-tier system now where it's you've got apprentices and you've got the patrimony and you've got your licensing committee and things like that. But they, you know, but they've got to get something out of all the years that they put in, you know, so some of the times now are narrowed down to two years and they need much more to get something. But I just feel that maybe a little bit old hat coming in here but the Doggett's itself should be down to who puts the apprenticeship time in for that race. And for me, it still should be the up to five year, six year knowledge based from the river that takes you in to that race, not necessarily somebody coming in to the Watermen's Company as a short cut, without being too rude. Yeah.

Q1: And that would be the short cut you're referring to is the fact that you can do a sort of two-year training programme to have your licence on the river?

MS1: Yeah.

Q1: Which is--; some see it as a substitute for doing the full apprenticeship.
MS1: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, so to me, it's, yeah, it still should be your criteria is Watermen's Company offer you five or six year and that's what you should build from. And that's what Thomas Doggett had when he was setting the whole thing up and that's, you know, that's my view. But also using the modern world technology to, you know, to advertise the race for people, because I was a Queen's waterman, so when the Diamond Jubilee and the river pageant was held, the amount of people on this river, on the banks, was phenomenal, yeah. So with electronic message sending, you're not going to get the same numbers for Doggett's but why can't people stand on bridges and have a look over and say what these guys are going through, these are apprentices. But that knowledge needs to--, that information needs to go out and I think that's what the modern world could do. Then you would get more people on the bridges, you'd get more people on the site, then you start to get the app for more information, so that's how I'd maybe think about things [laughs].

Q1: Thank you very much for that. Do you have anything you wish to add, Len Junior?

MS2: No, I just...

MS1: Yeah, I haven't taken over too much, have I? [Laughs].

Q1: No, no, au contraire.

MS2: Yeah, no, it's--, yeah, I'm pretty much, you know, how it was for me is, you know, it still is, you know, even though it was 20 years ago, it's still strong in me mind. No doubt tonight when I go home and go to sleep I'll be going over the course again [laughs] so, I most probably will.

MS1: Yeah, I've got to say, this is the longest we've ever spent on the finish line as well [laughs].

MS2: Yeah, it will, be, yeah. You just want to get--,

MS1: We never spent much too much time sitting here, did we?

MS2: No.
Q1: So is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you would like to tell me about, to do with anything to do with your kind of careers or rowing or your experience of the race or afterwards or anything?

MS1: No, I can't think of anything, no.

MS2: Yeah, I just--, yeah, it was all-- as much as I can say, anyway.

MS1: Yeah, yeah, all [inaudible 01:08:58] I think, yeah. I'm probably hoping that Kate has took you through some of the other things that we used to do, 'cause we used to do skiff rowing at Felixstowe. But Gravesend, they had a club there called the Shrimpers and it was a regatta day that they used to hold off of Gravesend and it was a--, and a long distance race. They used to row down to Southend and back and things like that, so--, but we, when I moved to Felixstowe with the tugging company, we managed to get a mould from the Shrimpers and we took it to Felixstowe and ended up, er, we had a bunch of other guys down here and we ended up building 11 skiffs off of this mould. And we--, then we got--, used to get everybody involved all round. Different-- [inaudible 01:10:00] port authorities, rowing, er, Porthaven, was with the yacht clubs and things like that. And they all-- and the Ipswich Rugby Club, and they brought one because they then instead of having no training during their summer months, they would do rowing. So we used to hold regattas all-round the river, round there, so we did a lot of that. And then the boats used to come in and compete on the river race as well, so we used to bring them up. So Len, I and Kate used to bring a motorboat around from Felixstowe round there and we used to come to the bottom of Blackwall Rowing Club and they would maybe if they would-- if we was lucky enough to get all the clubs, we'd have 11 boats which launched at Poplar Blackwall Rowing Club that night. And then the three of us would then tow them up to Richmond for the start of the river race down, so we would do that for the clubs, so their boats would get from A to B. Though, you know, we've stayed, yeah, you know, in a rowing world, if you like, for quite a long time, haven't we? We used to do--, you did a coxswain's job, didn't you, for the Great River Race.

MS2: Yeah.

MS1: So it's always been there in the background, if you like, so--, but the skiffs was quite a big period in my life in a way, getting all them boats up and running. And we used to do charity days for-- I think we put 400 people through these boats one day for hospital. So it was, yeah, lots of money made. So yeah, it was-- so we had a, yeah, quite a rowing [laughs] rowing busy time, a good few years of it anyway, you know. So, yeah, so yeah, fine.
MS2: If they, erm, if they're looking for ideas, if they maybe wanted to sort of think about bringing the old Doggett's veterans back into it and doing that as another race, I'd be well up for that [both laugh]. Yeah, yeah, I'd be first there. [Inaudible 01:12:15] that'd be pretty good, actually [laughs] but then, er...

MS1: This, er, yeah.

MS2: Yeah.

MS1: So modern technology could ask all the old veterans, couldn't it? [Laughs] Come forwards. But yeah, that--, but no, if, for meself as a, you know, as a father, with family, you know, I can't ask for more. Job done, yeah.

Q1: Well, that was very nice. Thank you so much for sharing all of that with us. I got a really kind of strong sense from your interview of how important rowing was to you but also how much enjoyment it's given you as individuals and as a family, which is lovely. I'm just going to turn to Walt and ask Walt if he's got any questions that he would like to ask.

Q2: Kate gave us a sense of what it was like for her as a female rower. What's your view of female rowing, and her becoming one of the, you know, joining the group?

MS1: I didn't have a problem with it at all. I--, it's a tall order, a very tall order for a girl to compete in Doggett's, because you're up against guys and they're big, strapping guys and there's no leeway given on the start. But I, because she was going into a man's world, which must've, you know, you have to be careful how you say things nowadays, but it is an--, it was, or is a man's world, when you run that race. But it's started to change, you know, you're getting girls, women now, in charge of boats on the river. So if that's all taking place then there's--, they've got to come into the race as well. But it--, we knew it was going to be a very, very tall order. And she took that on. She took that on. And I, you know, I thought it was a good thing because it just helped--, I know Kate wasn't the first but yeah, to have women rowing Doggett's, I just thought it was a help for women to progress into the river workings, if you like. So to come in, so I thought that was a--, I'd help that progression, so for me it was a good stage forward. And I'm proud.

Q2: And how about you, Len, racing against your sister? Not difficult?
MS2: No [both laugh]. Just the same as playing a board game, I still didn't want to beat her [both laugh]. I never gave her any slack, so, er, but yeah, I mean even when we were, you know, everyone treated her like one of the lads anyway. But, you know, they just saw her as an equal. I didn't think anyone saw her any different, you know, she, you know, yeah, it was...

MS1: Yeah, I think that's a fair comment. I think he's, that Len's pretty right there. Because of that river community, if you like, that she was more than accepted in to everything, you know.

MS2: And even when we were rowing in a double, you know, we had a different setup in the double. I definitely wouldn't ease up because of knowing, you know, she was me sister and she was female. You know, if anything, I pushed harder because it was-- we had that, you know, we just wanted to be known that we good, isn't it, and it just-- we were both, yeah, I suppose 'cause we were brother and sister we both, you know, wanted it equally the same as what you are when you're rowing on your own. But it was good. Yeah, it was...

MS1: Yeah, there was--,

MS2: Even still now, we still compete. You know, the other day we still had this, you know, oh, I did this and I did that, you know, or the rowing machine is doing that and I'm, you know, running, so it's still that like we're out on the water bickering, you know, sort of thing. So it was, yeah, it's--, yeah.

MS1: The competitive edge has always been there with them.

MS2: Yeah, that's normal. But with--, yeah, she was--, I, at the time when we were rowing, she wasn't treated anything differently, you know. There was a few people that, oh, yeah, you know, this is Kate, you know, that get, you know, a female rower. But amongst all the other rowers and everyone she was equal, and that definitely come over.

MS1: Yeah.

MS2: And it still does now.
MS1: Yeah. But it was quite good because you--, with sculling, it's not necessarily you had to be the strongest person to get that boat moving. If you're clean and smooth, the boat will travel. If you're rowing properly, the boat will travel. And you look at a lot of girls, their technique is very, very smooth. And Kate was one of them, although she's very slim, isn't she? But the boat, she was a very neat sculler, so everything was rowing, blades were through, everything was clean, wasn't it?

MS2: Hmm-mmm.

MS1: The boat used to travel really, really well. So, you know, that's why she could compete to a level, because she, you know, she never come home last, so that says it all. And then you're, you know, and you're rowing in. We talked about boat size and weight. She's rowing in a same boat as a man, so there was no leeway there neither. So it, for her to achieve what she was achieving, it was through technique and smoothness and yeah, and fitness as well, that must have been. But, erm...

MS2: And training alongside me as well.

MS1: Probably one of the things, and we probably didn't speak about it earlier but [Leslie 01:18:26] brought it up but one of the things that was a good thing for us, we brought a double scull, so they double sculled together. And as I say, Len, Kate used [to see him about 01:18:37] so she would steer and she would boss him around and say what to do.

MS2: I did switch off [laughs].

MS1: But it was the best thing that we ever done for winter training because it, you know, we could go out in all weathers where we were and we would train. But also then we started realising that people would, at the clubs would say, oh, you used to ring them up and say, “Do you do a mixed double race?” “No.” But then we'd find out about a few months later, they do a mixed double race. So we started and it started when--, so Len and Kate rowed against a Rebecca Romero who got a gold in the rowing in, oh, where was it? But anyway, she competed and she got gold in rowing. I think that was in a double. And then she then went into cycling and did the same in cycling. You probably remember. So that was the level that mixed sculling also brought them to, which was, yeah, and that was all on the upper reaches, Hammersmith, Mortlake, in that area. So yeah, so, you know, you know when you're rowing against clubs that they have, that you're in a good level, so that's why, so yeah. So the double was a real
good for us, yeah. They was pretty good, yeah. They was the only people that ever beat them anyway, wasn’t it?

MS2: Mmm.

MS1: Rebecca Romero and that. And I think it was Matt Wells, the guy from, I think he come from, er, Leander Club, so a big--, yeah, it was good, yeah.

Q1: Excellent. Okay, well, I think we’re going to wrap it up there. Thank you so much.

MS1: Okay, brilliant.

Q1: It was lovely to hear your stories of up and down river, and how it’s still with you. I live on the Eel Pie Island, so when you were talking about the Great River Race and mustering all the boats and everything, I, you know, I know Mark Montgomery Smith, who drags boats up and down and so forth and...

MS1: [Did you just row down from Ken’s Yard 01:20:53]?

Q1: I live--, my kitchen looks at Ken’s office, yeah.

MS1: Oh, right.

Q1: Have you been to visit Ken?

MS1: I, well, when I, ’cause I left London in 1972 and went to Felixstowe and then in 19, er, 15 years back now, I come back ’cause they changed the working practices in Felixstowe and I just went, I’m not going back 15 years, forget it. So when I come back, I didn’t come back straightaway, then I started getting one or two phone calls and they was, “Len, we heard you’re not working no more, Lenny.” [Laughs] I tried to retire early. Well, I should have done but it--, so I said, “Yeah, I know, yeah, yeah. Who told you this?” It was Ken, so he said it, yeah. He said, “I’ve got a skipper’s job on a pleasure boat,” and things like that, so I said, “Ken, I only want to come up three days a week at the max.” So I did, I come up and do a little bit for Ken, that's [away from land 01:22:04]. And then I went--, and then he said, “Can you
come to Eel Pie?” And I went--, and so I was coming through from Felixstowe [laughs] only three days a--,

Q1: That bloody sounds like [inaudible 01:22:15].

MS1: Yeah, I went [did I stay over 01:2 2:16]. I didn't drive over. I was training up and then [inaudible 01:22:19] like that, you know. So I was going up to him about three days a week, yeah. And it was lovely 'cause I was [inaudible 01:22:25] these boats and I would sort the tugs out and everything like that, so yeah, so I know roughly where you are [laughs]. I know where you are.

Q1: Well, yeah, you walk practically past my front door. How funny.

MS1: Yeah. So talking about that, the two boats that they had made for the Philip Henman Fund, for the Watermen's Company, were made by citizens just round the corner.

Q1: I was wondering, when you were talking about the wooden boats earlier, I was wondering whether those were--,

MS1: Yeah, so the first wooden boat was made at [Canterbury 01:22:57] and the second ones that they had I think when you'll see some of the pictures there, there was two boats that we normally take in the garden. But the Watermen's Company, the Philip Henman, I got two boats for them. And they was made it, Sims is on it, in one 01:23:11].

Q1: Wow, because of course Sims was a Putney, was at Hammersmith, they were kind of, well, George Sims was certainly the third generation and so forth.

MS1: Yeah, yeah, that's right.

Q1: He was known as the Stradivarius of the single scull.

MS1: Yes, he was, that's right. And they was lovely boats, weren't they?

Q1: Wow, wow. Do you still have those boats?
MS1: No, we don't. We moved, so because we was then coming--[, they was coming up to a
different level, that them boats then become slow, if you like, 'cause--,

Q1: Yeah, redundant for your purposes.

MS1: Yeah, so he went and brought a Sims Evolution from Sims at Nottingham.

Q1: Oh, right, okay.

MS1: Yeah. And then Kate went and bought a...

Q1: Did [inaudible 01:23:55].

MS1: Oh, er...

MS2: Stampfli

MS1: Stampfli

Q1: Okay.

MS1: So she bought a Stampfli, so that's where we were. And then the two Philip Henman boats,
they went back and they went to our apprentices that were coming along and felt that they
could go to regattas and do a little bit more. So that's--[, so they got--,

Q1: Well, good, keep them moving [keep them interested 01:24:24], absolutely.

MS1: Yeah, so they got these back, they're our apprentices. Yeah, so it was quite good, yeah.

Q1: Gosh, I'd better press the button here. Here we go.

[END OF RECORDING – 01:24:32]