

Welsh Harp Women

In August 1960, while their male colleagues headed to Rome for the Olympic Games, Europe's women rowers came to a local reservoir for their own races.

**Headline from the "Willesden Chronicle",
19 August 1960.**

[Source: Brent Archives – local newspaper microfilms]

ROWING GIRLS MADE WELSH HARP HISTORY

DEEP Slavonic roars of encouragement echoed across the grey waters of the Welsh Harp as the strong-limbed ladies of Europe swept their fragile craft towards the finishing line.

This was part of the invigorating picture by the side of the North Circular Road on Friday and the week-end during the Women's European Rowing Championships.

The initial Women's European Rowing Championships were held at Amsterdam in 1954. 1960 was the first year that Britain had hosted the annual races, welcoming rowers from fourteen countries to the Welsh Harp Reservoir, where a four-lane 1000 metre course had been laid out. The countries represented were the Soviet Union (generally known as Russia), Hungary, Belgium, Rumania, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Germany, Greece, Great Britain, France, Holland and Norway. The championships took place between Friday 12th and Sunday 14th August 1960, and were sponsored and organised by the Borough of Willesden, which had been putting on its own popular Whitsun regatta for many years.

On 7th August the first of over 200 competitors and officials arrived at John Kelly School (now Crest Academy), where classrooms had been converted to dormitories for their week-long stay. Monday to Thursday were given over to training, before the heats on Friday and Saturday and finals on Sunday 14th. As all of the participants enjoyed a party in the school hall that Sunday evening, the president of International Rowing Federation thanked the Council for the excellent conditions in which the teams had lived while Willesden's guests.

Russian congratulations



Teams from Eastern Europe dominated the championships, with the Soviet Union (Russia) winning the eights, coxed fours and double sculls (it had won all five events in 1954). At the Welsh Harp, the German crew won the quadruple sculls while a Hungarian, Jenó Papp, won the single sculls for the third successive year. Because of the grey and blustery weather only 5,000 spectators came to watch the events, which were televised on the BBC and Eurovision.

**One of the photographs of the event from the
"Willesden Chronicle", 19 August 1960.**

[Source: Brent Archives – local newspaper microfilms]

One of the female scullers (possibly the Hungarian champion) receiving final instructions from her coach, from a negative which was not used at the time.

[Source: Brent Archives – negatives donated by the “Willesden Chronicle”]



British boats won through to two finals, finishing last in both. They were considered to have done very well to reach their finals, given the strength of the competition. The United Universities GB eight (below) included Marian Yates, a teacher at Brondesbury and Kilburn High School, who had been captain of the rowing club at King’s College when she was a student there. Britain’s other finalist was Penny Chuter in the single sculls, who went on to become a top rowing coach.



‘The British Eight coming ashore after their gallant fight’, from a “Hendon Times” cutting.

[Courtesy of Pauline Churcher]

Britain’s women rowers, with two fourth places, did better that summer than its men, who could only manage one fifth place in seven events at the Rome Olympics. Women’s rowing finally became an Olympic sport at Montreal in 1976. British crews have

moved on since those days on the Welsh Harp, and at the 2012 London Olympics they will be challenging for gold medals.

The United Universities GB eight, preparing for a race at the Championships.

[Source: Brent Archives – negatives donated by the “Willesden Chronicle”]



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