

# "The Royallettes" – Case Study

It all started after last year's Paul Gilbert race. Five of us, all mums of junior girls, entered the fun race in an open Canadian canoe, dressed as cheerleaders 'The Royallettes'. We had also entered the race the previous year and one of us suggested (it wasn't me!) that, rather than make our sortie onto the river just an annual event, why don't we learn to paddle a K1 and go out every week? Someone even suggested racing!!!

## Learning the ropes

So, carried away with the idea that we could be racing at Nottingham next year, I asked my husband, Alan, if he wouldn't mind taking us out for a few sessions. And so, we had our first lesson on a dry, mild Saturday afternoon in September. We learnt how to get into the boat without falling straight out again and, holding our paddles correctly, we set off round the backwater, where I promptly fell in. After emptying my boat and getting back in, we all managed a few more times up and down the backwater without any dramas.



felt his work was done and it was up to us to go it alone. It's thanks to him that we ever got started and how he had the patience to stay with us while we were paddling at ludicrously slow speeds, I don't know.

## Out in all weather

We continued to go out every Saturday in rain, gales and all weathers, sometimes just around Trowlock Island if it was particularly nasty but mostly up to Kingston Bridge and back. It may not have been that pleasant much of the time but we were always glad we did it and it gave us valuable experience. When the river was on red alert and we couldn't go out we went to the gym and went on paddling machines. Come the spring we were able to also start going out on Wednesday evenings and we started paddling longer distances, making it to Ravens Ait and beyond and we started regularly paddling down to Richmond. All these places had seemed so far away when we started but now were reached with ease. The river had also shrunk, no longer the wide expanse of water it once was. The summer weather was glorious, which was lovely for paddling but also for river traffic and we were hit with washes from rowing launches, motor boats and pleasure boats but we survived them all, even the Merry Thames. They didn't seem to be so much of a problem anymore. One Sunday

afternoon we decided to treat ourselves and we went to Guildford to paddle on the River Wey. It was a beautiful hot sunny day and it was a joy to be on a small, calm river with no other river traffic apart from the odd narrow boat. We paddled for about 2 hours and vowed we would come back and do other parts of the river.



## Venturing further afield

Our next sessions with Alan saw us venture further afield to Teapot and then to Kingston Bridge and the Hogsmill, staying very close to the Surrey bank. Paddling out onto the main river was like paddling down the middle of the Amazon to us; it seemed so vast. Alan then took us over Teddington Lock and onto the tideway, which had always seemed to us like a boundary that we crossed at our peril. However, it proved to be a pleasant surprise, with still waters and no back washes, we made it safely to Eel Pie Island and back. All the time Alan was teaching us how to paddle properly and how to improve our technique. At this point Alan

## Tea and Cake

Now winter is upon us once again and we are still going out together. Other mums have joined us and there are two distinct groups, the fast (by our standards) and the not so fast. Miranda and Pearl raced at the Elmbridge marathon in October, in awful weather conditions, finishing a very creditable 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> respectively in Division 9. Some of us, however, know we'll never race because we'll never be that fast but it's just a pleasure to be out on the river with a group of friends, enjoying the wildlife and the scenery and (in some cases!) having a good natter. And when we finish it's always back to the club for a cup of tea and cake.