



# PPCA Newsletter October 2023

## Introduction

Welcome to October's Newsletter. This month we have a return of that occasional Newsletter tradition, the Bumper Holiday Edition, albeit at a time when relatively few are on holiday. This month, we have some important bits from Mount Batten, Helga is attacked by a buoy and Kevin talks about two mythical giants whose origins are lost in the mists of time. Coincidentally, both Clive and Terry also have pieces in this issue.

## Editorial

The wheel of the seasons has turned again. The evening sessions are over and the white water season has begun. This can only mean one thing - it's time for the AGM (details below). This is your once a year chance to try to avoid making eye contact with the chair when they are desperately searching for new ~~victims~~ volunteers for the Committee. Be there or be square.

Ivor Jones

Newsletter Editor



# AGM update



**At Plymstock Albion Oaks  
Rugby Club PL9 ODF**

**Friday 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

**1900**

**Update... Join us afterwards for  
drinks at the bar and nibbles**



### Winter Opening Hours

As of Monday 2nd October, we will be opening at 9am and closing at 6pm. There are a couple of weekends in October where we have accommodation booked so the centre will be open 08.00-22.00. Times out of these hours affiliate clubs with keys to the yard or know the code to the metal gate at the back entrance of the yard can still enter the yard. People with access cards can use the changing rooms and the pontoon. If you are unsure of your card, please come to the centre where we can check this for you.

Please can we remind everyone that access from the changing room corridor into the main part of the building is not permitted out of hours. When the Centre is closed and intruder alarm is active and will go off if the building is entered. As always, the glass bolt will be on the door so access can be made in the event of an emergency.

Please can we also ask everyone to be conscious of lights being turned off, doors being locked to sheds and if you are the last group/club around please ensure both wooden and metal access gates to the yard are locked and secure, including the smaller wooden access walk through gate.

Car parking out of hours, please either collect a registration sheet from reception before closing hours or e-mail a list into [enquiries@mount-batten-centre.com](mailto:enquiries@mount-batten-centre.com) so we can enter them the day after. We only get a couple of days extra to do this so please send them as soon as you can.

### Changing Room Policy

The Mount Batten Centre is a multi-user site; therefore, groups of children or young people should be supervised at all times and as far as practically possible. Groups of adults classified as 'Adults at risk' are to have the same levels of supervision.

As far as is reasonably practicable adults should not use the changing rooms whilst children / young people / adults at risk are using these facilities. Adults may be asked to wait or offered an alternative single user facility if available.

Protocol for changing room use:

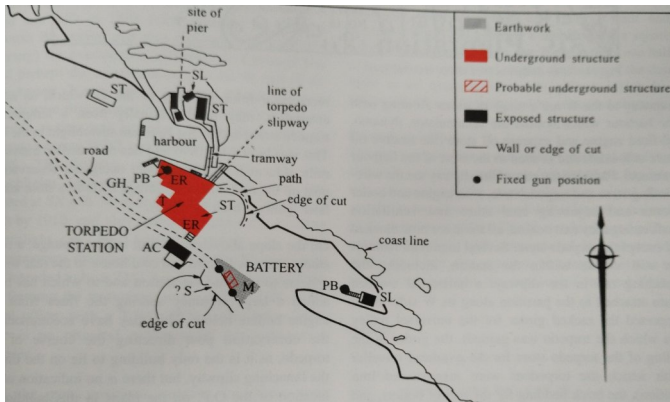
- If a group of children, young people or adults at risk needs to use the changing rooms then the group leader/responsible individual will check the changing rooms to ensure no adults are present. If adults are present, then wait until they have vacated the changing room before entering.
- The first door from the corridor leading into the changing rooms are to be pinned back. This allows the group leader/responsible individual monitoring the changing rooms to hear if there are any behavioural issues.
- The group leader/responsible individual must remain in the corridor until all the party have finished in the changing rooms.
- The group leader/responsible individual is to ask any adults wanting to use the changing rooms to wait until their group have finished changing or offer them the use of the single user facility, the classroom changing facility or accommodation changing facilities (keys are available from reception).
- Before adults enter the changing rooms, please check all children/ young people /adults at risk have left. When checking changing rooms two members of staff should be present, they should knock loudly on the door to announce themselves.
- A duty manager will be available for any support.

Thank you for your co-operation – if you have any queries please refer to: Mount Batten Centre Safeguarding Officer Emma Denham (Centre and Operations Manager) [emma.denham@mount-batten-centre.com](mailto:emma.denham@mount-batten-centre.com) 01752 404567

## Features

### Plymouth Sound Snippets #20, Millbay - Brennon Torpedo Station - Pier Cellars by Terry Calcott

Many club paddlers will be familiar with Pier Cellars over in Cawsand Bay. I will write an article about its history in the future, but this snippet is about a little known feature at the southern end of Pier Cellars. The remains of a Brennan Torpedo station, designed to protect the west entrance to the Sound and the Breakwater. A unique feature as very few survive today.



Torpedo Station Layout Late 1880s

The Brennan torpedo was patented by Irish-born Australian inventor Louis Brennan in 1877. It was the very first wire guided torpedo. Brennan and his partner negotiated with the Government a fee of £100,000. The War Office agreed to this but said they would have to pay it over three years. Brennan accepted this. Every year he would drive to the bank of England in a horse and cart and collect the equivalent of his fee in gold bars. The Brennan torpedo was adopted in 1887 and became standard harbour defence throughout the British Empire and was in use for more than fifteen years.



Most of the Brennan Torpedo Station is hidden from view, built into the hillside



Brennan Torpedo

Operational stations were established in the UK at Cliffe Fort, Fort Albert on the Isle of Wight and Plymouth. Other stations included Fort Camden in Cork Harbour, Ireland, Lei Yue Mun Fort in Hong Kong and Forts Ricasoli and Tigne in Malta.

Pier Cellars was requisitioned by the government in 1889 to house the newly developed Brennan torpedo.

The Brennan Torpedo was designed to run at a depth of twelve feet and had an indicator mast sticking up from the torpedo until it just broke the surface. At night this mast had a small light fitted which was only visible from the rear. In the body of the torpedo, two steel drums were mounted, each carrying several miles of high tensile steel wire. The drums were connected through a differential gear to the twin in line propellers arranged to rotate in opposite directions. The twin wires from the drums passed out through the tail shaft. The other ends of the wires were connected to winding engines at Pier Cellars. The torpedo was launched and guided by Army personnel at Pier Cellars. They would have been in an elevated position using powerful binoculars to control the torpedo to its target.



Torpedo Slipway



Torpedo Slipway

In 1905 the Government recommended the removal of all Brennan torpedoes from fixed defences due to their comparatively short range and the difficulty of launching them at night. The installation at Pier Cellars still exists today although it was later modified for midget submarines trials and then use by the Royal Navy as a training area. Next time you are paddling between Penlee Point and Cawsand take some time to stop and have a look at the Brennan Torpedo slipway.

## Attack of the Big Red Buoy by Helga Pinn

It was a somewhat breezy Saturday and the info on the FB read like this:

'The weather forecast is for winds about 15mph if you feel happy paddling in this type of wind then come to the rec paddle. Check the wind on your preferred app. Brim'

I was feeling super positive after a glass of wine on Friday evening. Checked a kayaking app...it told me that fishing was best left to experienced kayakers. I reckoned that I'd be ok minus a fishing line – so up I rocked bright and early Saturday morning.

There was a small and select band of paddlers which slightly disconcerted me. Perhaps they hadn't checked the forecast on a random US kayaking / fishing site.

Anyway, off we went....heading straight for the outer breakwater. Joy did try to talk to me. Monosyllabic replies. So she took a photo of the others paddling ahead.



I was questioning my decision. Brim stopped, waited patiently and asked if I was having a lovely time. He then abandoned Plan A and took us over to Drake's Island Plan B and to the deceptive calm.

Then the Proper Adventure began. My nerves had calmed just like the water at that moment of time. Brim pointed me in the direction of a white marker and told me to head towards that. I was paddling like the duracell bunny, marker firmly fixed ahead. Suddenly to my horror, I glimpsed this huge red apparition in the corner of my eye and it was racing towards me at about 60mph or the knot equivalent. It was terrifying. The buoy depicted in this article is an inferior model and apart from the colour and certainly does not resemble the conditions of the day.



This ginormous red buoy appearing from nowhere was heading straight to me as if I was a magnet. Just before the inevitable collision, Brim appeared and gently nudged me to the side, murmuring things like 'You were never going to win that battle'. Thanks Brim, I owe you. I think!

When I got home, I was tired but elated that I was able to go out in the company of the PPCA and try things that are sometimes not within my comfort zone. Dai asked me what I had learnt from this experience and produced a book on kayaking with tides and winds. Over the years, many have tried to educate me on this. I thank you for your time. For some reason, that part of my brain is inactive.

What did I learn? Do not borrow a red PPCA cag in 15mph winds. It attracts rogue red buoys.

Thanks to Joy and Pete for the before and after photos.





## Breakwater Swim 2023 by Clive Ashford

People can be amazingly creative when it comes to dreaming up hair-brained challenges, especially when those challenges involve other people's discomfort. One such hair-brained challenge is the annual Breakwater Swimming Race that is organised by the City of Plymouth Amateur Swimming Association. The race involves swimmers entering the water adjacent to the Breakwater and swimming to Tinside Beach on the Hoe. The swim organisers like each swimmer to be accompanied by a safety kayaker and by tradition the PPCA have provided this safety cover. The really creative bit about this particular hair-brained challenge is that while the swimmers are battling such things as currents and jellyfish, and the kayaker are battling such things as wind and rain, the organisers and race officials are bobbing around the Sound nice and snug on board a boat with tea making facilities. Also, this year the boats carrying the race officials etc were visited by dolphins as they passed Drakes Island. Good organisation and top marks to them.

Some time ago Leader Colin put out a plea for someone to take on the task of organising the safety kayakers for this year's event. I woke up to find that my name had mysteriously been allocated to the task, I suspect hypnosis and/or witchcraft. In less enlightened times people would have been burned for less. (Apparently there are e-mails.) Presumably I have not been the only victim of hypnosis/witchcraft because very shortly after putting out a request for volunteers I had a list of 10 people willing, nay eager, to help, thus proving that hypnosis/witchcraft has its good points.



Paddling Out to Meet the Swimmers (Photo by Nigel)

The organiser of this year's Breakwater Swim was a chap called Diego Walker. We met. We shook hands. I can inform you gentle readers that Diego has what could be described as a firm handshake, but having experienced it first hand (as it were) I would describe it as vice like. Plunging my hand into a bowl of iced water seemed to reduce the resulting swelling! Paddler Nigel points out the irony of someone being called Walker organising the Breakwater swim, but as Diego spent the day studiously avoiding getting wet, perhaps we're talking more Freudian than ironic?

There were some last-minute changes in personal but on the day (16 September) 10 paddlers took to the water at Mount Batten to look after 9 swimmers. The day was dull with a few spots of rain and as we paddled out to the Breakwater the wind seemed to pick up, causing a bit of a chop as we crossed the sound. Not quite the hot balmy conditions that we had been experiencing earlier in the month, but they could have been a lot worse and at least it kept the Sound clear of recreational traffic.

By a most marvellous piece of choreography the paddlers met the boats carrying the swimmers and race officials at the Breakwater dead on time. I was going to offer my choreographic skills to Strictly Come Dancing but realise that they couldn't possibly cope with such a high degree of professionalism! We were given a briefing and the swimmers got into the water. There was some flag waving and whistle blowing and then we were off. The astute among you will have done some maths and realised that with 9 swimmers and 10 paddlers there would be a spare paddler. I was that spare paddler and I kept a beady eye on things from a position very near the back of the race.

Here are two little snippets for you. 1) The swimmers were swimming in what is described as skins. That is, they weren't wearing wet suits. 2) The wind had all but died away so the chop we had experienced paddling out to the Breakwater disappeared.

If you measure the straight-line distance from the Breakwater to Tinside on a map you will come up with a distance of just over two miles, but that doesn't take into account any deviations caused by currents etc. Our swimmers used various methods of navigating. Some had done their homework, allowed for the tidal flows and arrived at Tinside in a most efficient manner. Others had a far more relaxed approach and subsequently swam a bit further and took a bit longer. Had we been using tracking devices there would have been some very squiggly lines. At the end of the event there was quite a current going east – west across the Hoe, a current that must have been quite frustrating to tired swimmers.

While this event is officially a race, that wouldn't have been apparent had you paddled near the back with the last two swimmers. They obviously didn't like swimming in crowds because they left plenty of room all around themselves. They also left plenty of room between themselves and the group of swimmers in front of them, presumably in case of an emergency stop.



Sam Lake, the Winning Swimmer (Photo by Nigel)

The event was won by a lady called Sam Lake in 44mins and 45 secs. (Tavistock Times) The last swimmer came in approx. 20 mins later. I've noticed in the past that the biggest cheer of the day is reserved for the last swimmer and quite rightly this year was no exception. I have nothing but admiration for all the competitors but the last one deserves all the praise they get.

All 9 swimmers completed the event so congratulations are due (in strictly alphabetical order) to Ami, Deborah, Fiona, Jason, Lesley, Samantha, Steve, Tim and Yvonne.

My thanks go to our paddlers, without whom the event couldn't have taken place. We hear such phrases as "Giving something back" but that doesn't take away from the fact that our paddlers happily gave up four hours of their time on a Saturday afternoon to help realise someone else's hair-brained challenge, so thanks (again in strictly alphabetical order) to Bekky, Brian, Brim, Jane, Jonathan, Julie, Nigel, Rita and Sarah.

Footnote. Diego refutes the claim that there were tea making facilities on board the race officials boats, but says that this oversight may well be rectified in the future.



Olympic swimmer Sharron Davies presents her brother, Tony, 14, with an award for winning the junior under-16 race in the canoe marathon.

**GOLDEN** girl Sharron Davies presented the winners of the Plymouth Sound canoe marathon with their awards after a gruelling race around the Breakwater yesterday.

More than 40 canoeists from as far as Honiton, Braunton and St. Austell took part in the competition around the Breakwater and back. The marathon was revived three years ago by the organisers the Port of Plymouth Canoeing Association and yesterday's event was the most successful so far.

Race secretary Colin Ryall said: "The sport of canoeing is growing because it's such a cheap sport. Now we have got sponsorship from Strand Glass Fibre who have paid for all the trophies which has helped us a lot."

## Sharron presents canoe prizes

The race was tough because of choppy waters. Although the senior canoeists were allowed to go around the Breakwater, juniors, kept inside.

"We had five capsizes but they were speedily collected by one of our five rescue boats," he said.

One winner was an Olympic medalist — Sharron's 14-year-old brother Tony — who came first in the Junior Slalom. Winning the Youth K2 class were two disabled

canoeists from Trengweath, Evans and Tucker.

**Winners:** Mens senior slalom — S. Amos (Exeter); K1 — D. Flynn (RNKA); K2 — Carpenter/Worth (Exeter). Youth, Slalom — R. Humber (PPCA); K2 — Evans/Tucker (Trengweath). Junior Slalom — A. Davies (Strand Glass). Wild Water, Senior — G. Rowell (RNKA); Junior — S. Marley (Plymouth College).

**Womens Slalom** — S. Skinner (Strand Glass); K2 — O'Toole/Lambert.



Figure 1 The Figures of Gogmagog and Corineus on the glacis in front of the Citadel in 2021.

When you paddle across from Mount Batten to Fisherman's Nose and then along in front of the old Corinthian Yacht Club (now various drinking gaffs), you may remember the chalk figures that graced the slope in front of the Citadel walls in 2021. The chalk outlined figures represented the battle between native giant Gogmagog and a Trojan warrior, Corineus. The council funded this project and artist Charles Newington and a raft of volunteers and Argyle groundsmen laid out the figures in whitewash. They have since disappeared. However the myth behind the two figures is intriguing.

Records held in the city archives show that two figures were cut (possibly renewed) into the turf on this hill in the 15th century but were destroyed when the Citadel was built by Charles II in the late 1660s. Who was Gogmagog? This giant is part of the mythic folklore of old Albion and is related to the ancient figures cut into the chalk escarpments in Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and also to figures in Cambridgeshire and the City of London. The original image (which we know very little about) would have been cut through turf to expose the hard light grey Devonian Limestone and then stained red. But to the origins of the myth we need to go back to the historiographer Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100 – 54) and his 'History of the Kings of Britain'. In this (according to the bold Geoffrey), the original inhabitants of Albion were giants. These aboriginals were displaced by an invasion of Trojans(!) who landed in the South Hams. They were said to be invaders led by the Trojan Brutus, banished from Trojan Italy for the murder of his father. He went first to Greece and on winning a battle there was given a fleet of over 300 well stocked and manned ships and the advice of an oracle to travel to an island in the Western Seas inhabited by giants. (The Greeks were at least aware of Cornwall and traded for tin to make bronze). Brutus is said to have landed in Dartmouth and if you take the myth further stood on the 'Brutus Stone' in Totnes Fore Street (inscribed 'Here I am and Here I rest, And this town shall be called Totnes.') and pronounced that this was now his land. Brutus' invasion was led by his captain Corineus. The leader of the resident giants was Göemagot – from which we get Gogmagog – who yielded a cudgel the size of an oak tree. Part of the myth has Corineus and Göemagot engaging in manly combat in Totnes and another part has this ruck taking place on the Hoe. Corineus, having received a stretch of broken ribs seized Gogmagog and hurled him into the sea, his bulk turning into an island.

That's the myth – and a cunning little concoction by Geoffrey of Monmouth which would link the inhabitants of Albion as descendants of noble Rome and Troy through Brutus (the Trojan, not the Caesarean conspirator) to Aeneas, founder of Rome, and back to Homeric Troy. What is outside of that?

Firstly, the Brutus Stone in Totnes. Its derivation is more likely to be the bruiters stone, where a medieval crier called the news, or bruit. Paul Newman in his 'Lost Gods of Albion' makes Lam Göemagot, the place where the ruck took place as Lambhay Hill. Yes dooooohhh! What IS known is that there was indeed a giant hill figure carved overlooking the Sound. Richard Carew (of Antony House) in 1602 notes two hill figures carved into the turf.

“Upon the Haw at Plymouth, there is cut in the ground the portraiture of two men, the one bigger, the one lesser, with clubbes in their hands (who they term Gogmagog) and (as I have learned) it is renewed by the order of the Townsmen which should infer the monument of some moment.”

And, as previously stated, the City Archives hold records back to 1486 of ‘Item paid to Cotewyll for ye renewing of ye picture of Gogmagog upon ye howe’. And further records add to the renewal and cleaning up of the monumental figure or figures right up to 1567. So the figure or figures existed! What they designated though is anybody’s guess. Geoffrey of Monmouth was a notorious fabricator. What we seem to have is a conflation of various parts of Celtic and Greek mythology. The tradition of giants fighting with clubs is very much a part of English folklore. In the South West, every notable island seems to be referred to as having been thrown into the sea by a giant, usually Gogmagog or even two giants, Gog and Magog (sometimes portrayed as man and wife) – I have heard it with respect to St Michael’s Mount and even to the Scilly Isles. The more you delve into this the curiozier it becomes. For me.... The date 1486 ties in nicely with the granting of mayoralty and privileges to Plymouth in 1437. The figures might have been cut soon after then as a status sign or mascot to vessels approaching Sutton Harbour through the Sound. Gogmagog is a collective Celtic term for giants. You can find similar circular myths around the famous Uffington Horse and the Cerne Abbas Giant.

To me, the sad thing is that unlike the Horse and the Giant, Gogmagog on Plymouth Hoe no longer exists, the chalk lines washed away in two storms and they just don’t cut the turf! What a bold statement it would make to arrivals into the Sound looking up to the slope in front of the Citadel.

(As an aside on the Citadel, ‘A Better Defence Estate’, published in November 2016, indicated that the Ministry of Defence would dispose of the Royal Citadel by 2024. This has now been extended to 2035. The Citadel contains Royal Chapel of St Katherine-upon-the-Hoe, originally built in 1371, but demolished and rebuilt in 1671 with the Citadel itself being built between 1665 – 1675)

Editor's Note:

Kevin has art work in two exhibitions coming up with the National group, 'The Arborealists' of which he is an elected member. They are all art work on Trees.

1. AT THE WATER'S EDGE, THE PIE FACTORY, MARGATE, KENT; 4 - 14 NOVEMBER 2023

2. TREE OF LIFE, ACE ARTS, SOMERTON, SOMERSET; 18 NOVEMBER - 23 DECEMBER 2023

## Exchange and Mart

## Discounts and Offers

A selection of discounts and offers are available on the PPCA website. [Click here](#) to see them.

## Next Committee Meeting

Please forward any items you would like considered at the next committee meeting to [secretary@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk](mailto:secretary@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk). They will go to the secretary.

## Next Edition

There is no specific deadline as such for contributions but please bear in mind my general sloth and indolence and let me have anything time-sensitive well in advance.

## Contributions

Please send any contributions to [newsletter@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@ppca-canoe-club.org.uk)

## Acknowledgements

As ever, I have plundered Facebook for the cover photos - my thanks to all concerned.

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