WELCOME TO GIG ROWING



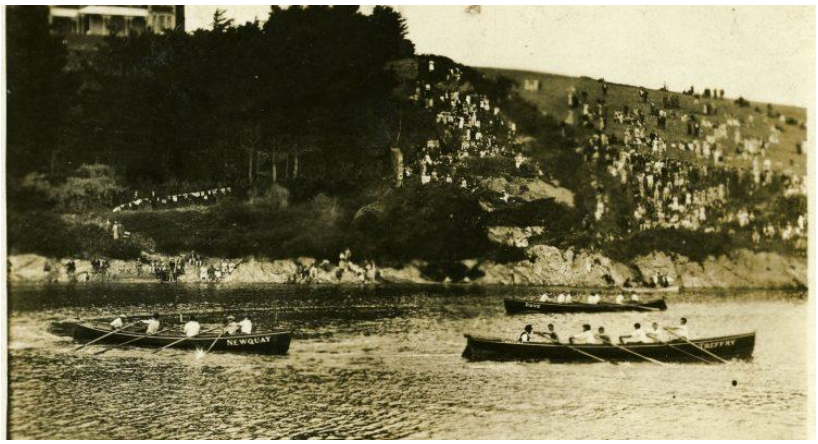
Island Gig Rowing Club
Island Harbour Marina
Isle of Wight

Welcome to Island Gig rowing club.

We are based at Island Harbour Marina in one of the most tranquil and beautiful sites along the River Medina. From leaving the only sea lock on the Island, we are fortunate to be able to row in safe waters up to Newport or can exercise our adventurous spirit and row out towards Cowes and into the Solent, and beyond.
The following information is to whet your appetite and give an idea of what you may already be contemplating. There is much more information available when you are ready.

History of Cornish Pilot Gigs

Gig rowing is as much about the history and heritage of these beautiful boats as it is about the adventure of rowing them. The Cornish Pilot Gig is a six-oared rowing boat, built from Cornish narrow-leaf elm. It is 9.8 metres long and 1.47 metres wide, with a crew of six rowers and a coxswain. The Cornish Pilot Gig has a long, industrious history. In the early 1800s, around 200 gigs, sometimes under sail, were used along the Cornish coastline. They helped larger vessels navigate safely, traded with ships, and rescued people in danger, whether stranded in remote or hazardous locations or escaping sinking vessels. They also transported goods and people between the Isles of Scilly and the mainland and were sometimes used to bring smuggled contraband ashore. These workhorses of the sea needed to move quickly, so racing naturally developed. The first gig to reach a ship could earn the rewards, whether a pilotage fee or goods to trade. As boatbuilding and maritime navigation advanced, the use of Cornish Pilot Gigs largely declined, and the few remaining boats fell into disrepair.
Today, Gig rowing is a fast-growing sport with many events in London, Scotland, Ireland and across the country, as well as Italy, Spain, France, Holland, and the ultimate World Championships in The Isle of Scillies. We are fortunate to own two traditional wooden Gigs with an ambition to purchase further training gigs in the future.



How do I start.

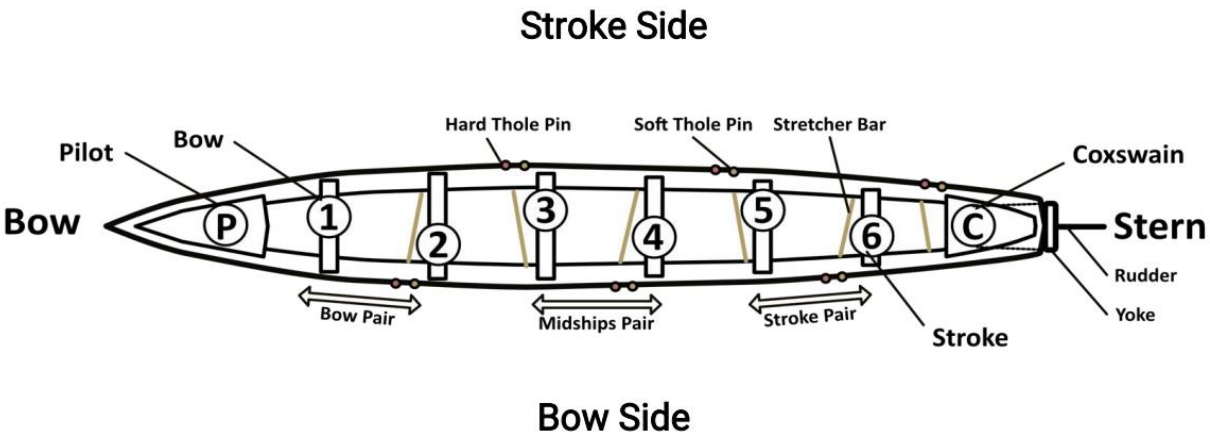
Register your interest at islandgigrowing@gmail.com and you will be invited to an introductory ‘Taster’ session where more will be explained. Following this, ‘Taster’ rowers will be taken on the water with experienced crew members and cox.

How do I prepare.

You will always be advised as to what to wear which we cover in your introduction, however being in the forever changeable weather elements, we recommend that light comfortable layers of breathable clothing, a lightweight waterproof jacket, trainers or water shoes, sun hat, sunglasses, sun cream, gloves and 1ltr water bottle be ready in your waterproof bag. It is not advisable to row in jeans or items of clothing which will impede your rowing.
Note: Each club have differing rules which is dependent on their location and the local rules, at **Island Harbour** buoyancy aids must always worn before stepping onto the pontoon and when you get in the boat. After this the Cox will advise when the buoyancy aid may be removed and tucked under or beside your seat when rowing. You may wear your buoyancy aid during the whole session if you feel more comfortable.
On returning to Island Harbour, you will don your buoyancy aid until you have docked and left the pontoon.
Buoyancy aids can be provided by IGRC if required.
Please remember this is voluntary team sport, and we must respect that the cox has given up their personal time to enable rowers to enjoy their day, please commit your time, and be on time.

The Boat and Kit

The boat has 6 rowing positions, numbered 1-6 from the bow, each position has a fixed wooden seat, and a comfortable cushion is provided to be fixed to the seat. By each position are holes for wooden thole pins to be inserted, a hard one at the rear to pull against, and a soft one in the front. At your feet are long foot stretchers which will need to be adjusted and set for the individual rower. Once set up you will be facing the stern towards the cox who commands the boat and steers with the rudder. Your seat position will be allocated by the cox, and you will alight one at a time as instructed, please remember that movement on the boat must be kept to a minimum to keep safe.
Once all seated, you will be handed your numbered oar, you will raise the oar aloft as an indication that you are ready to row, prior to setting out, you will be shown how to hold the oar.
We ask that this entire procedure is carried out with the minimum of "faff" to enable the valuable time to be spent on the water being guided or trained by your cox.
Boat terminology: Most Gig rowing clubs do not use Port & Starboard because the rower is facing backwards to the direction of travel hence can be confusing, so we use **Bow & Stroke.** Your cox will ensure you know which side you are rowing on.



The Cox and Commands

You are reminded that your cox has a responsibility to look after you, the boat, and be aware of all other water traffic. Whilst on the water you will hear commands that you will learn to understand, some of which are:

Oars aloft: meaning, your oars should be raised with the butt of the oar on the floor and the shaft secured between your knees with the blade leading away from any wind, one hand should be placed above the leather and one below to enable full control. Once rowers are ready the cox will direct the boat away from the pontoon or docked area

Come forward: meaning lean forward holding the oar correctly with your arms straight to the "front position" ready to row.

Row on: You drop the blade in the water, keep the arms straight and drive with the legs until you reach the "back stop" then pull the arms In, and repeat.

Hold water: meaning, let blade drop perpendicularly in the water and be prepared for the water pressure against the blade. This/ you are the brake, as you are the engine.

Back down: meaning, the boat has come to a full stop, you are now required to turn the boat either clockwise or anticlockwise by either Bow or Stroke side pushing the oar away together, as the other side continue to row forward.

Easy oars: meaning the cox will call the command (generally by count down) and you will gently but firmly push the butt of the oar downwards to take it out of the water. If you are stopping for a water break or longer than a few seconds you will place the butt of the oar under your knee to allow the use of both hands.

Once you have completed the session, you will don your buoyancy aid/ life jacket, your cox will again expect your full attention as you proceed through the lock and be guided back onto the pontoon. You will depopulate the boat in a specific order, and the boat will be secured with any on board items being secured.

Please note: your cox is always in charge of your safety, you have to be able to see, and hear them at all times and in all weather conditions, however, it is acceptable to ask them to speak up if you cannot hear them, if others are speaking then that may not be possible, In Gig rowing there is a saying of "one voice" on the boat, which is the COX.

Stack Team app

IGRC uses Stack Team app to share, the rowing schedules, Cox duties, events, news and all documentation relating to the club, it's rules, meetings etc. Once you have joined the club, you will be invited to join our app, which will then enable you to see what rows, events are coming up and then book onto those rows. A further explanation about the app and how to use it, will be given as part of your induction.

Summary

Island Harbour Gig Rowing Club offers so much more. We have a calendar of social land based get togethers for members and their families. Social rowing will also be a part of that with rows in other areas around the Island waters and even 'over there' on the mainland with events at the Hamble River Raid, The Great River Race in London, racing with other cubs in colourful boats down the River Ouse to name but a few and many other events……. The World is your oyster!

There is a lot more to cover and us to say. So… whether you are seeking casual rowing, making new friends, learning a new sport, wishing to race and be more adventurous, getting fitter, or all the afore mentioned. Come and visit us, we have many enthusiastic members who would be happy tell you their own experiences and learn something new in a safe environment.

Well done, you have taken the first steps to partaking and enjoying one of the fastest growing water sports. It is available for all, every age, and for all abilities. It is beneficial, not just for your general health and fitness, but for your mental health and general wellbeing. And we all like being outdoors, don't we? We hope you've enjoyed our introduction, please contact us if you would like to learn more.

Best wishes

Island Gig Rowing.
July 2026