

## PRINCIPLES OF COXING.

This document highlights the basic fundamentals of being a coxswain of a Cornish Pilot Gig. It does not cover any coaching techniques, but is solely concerned with the safe handling of the gig, from launch to recovery. Safety MUST be the primary concern of the cox, and anyone wishing to cox must first be aware that they are LEGALLY RESPONSIBLE for the boat and rowers they take charge of.

### ROLE OF THE COX:

The first duty of the cox is the safety of the crew and the equipment, and the safety of all other water users.

The cox has complete charge of the boat, but should consider him/herself one of the crew, and be regarded as such by the other crew members.

Whilst on the water the cox should ensure that everything is made as easy as possible for the crew, and should adjust each session to suit that particular crew.

### ATTRIBUTES OF A COX:

*Common sense:* Must be alert to changes in the environment. Must have a cool head and the self-confidence to act effectively in a fast changing environment. Must be willing and able to learn from mistakes and experiences.

*Innate abilities:* Must be observant, and be a good judge of speed and distance.

*Boatmanship:* This is essential if the cox is going to have a full understanding of what the craft can and cannot do.

## COXING.

### 1. DECIDING TO PUT TO SEA

The decision to put to sea lies with the cox, although if any of the crew express concerns about launching then the cox must respect this and act accordingly. The cox must consider the following before launching:

Weather

Tides

Limitation of the vessel and crew

Navigational hazards

Route plan

a) WEATHER

## BEAUFORT WIND SCALE

WIND FORCE	KNOTS	KPH (approx)	WIND DESCRIPTION	SEA STATE (Representative)
0	Less than 1	Less than 1.8	Calm	Calm (glassy)
1	1 - 3	1.8 - 6	Light Air	Rippled
2	4 - 6	7 - 11	Light Breeze	Wavelets
3	7 - 10	12 - 19	Gentle Breeze	Moderate Wavelets
4	11 - 16	20 - 30	Moderate Wind	Slight Waves
5	17 - 21	31 - 39	Fresh Wind	Moderate Waves
6	22 - 27	40 - 50	Strong Wind	Rough Waves
7	28 - 33	51 - 61	Near Gale	Very Rough Waves
8	34 - 40	62 - 74	Gale	High Waves

This is a useful guide to wind and sea conditions, but be aware that winds can gust much higher than forecast, and will also be affected by valleys, hills, headlands etc. The wind direction must also be taken into account.

A useful resource is the weather station located by the Harbourmasters office. To access real time data from this station go to: [www.lymeregis.org/webcams/live-weather-station](http://www.lymeregis.org/webcams/live-weather-station).

### **NEVER DECIDE TO PUT TO SEA IN FOG.**

#### b) TIDES.

As tides rise and fall the direction of the tidal stream changes and this can affect progress in a rowing boat. It is important to know what the tide is doing, especially if the tidal stream direction is against the wind direction, as this will increase the sea state. The highest tidal flow occurs mid tide (approx. 3 hours after high tide).

#### c) CREW.

The strength and experience of the crew must be considered when conditions are marginal, and you must always row to your weakest rower. You must also ensure that the crew has suitable clothing for going to sea, as conditions can change very quickly.

#### d) NAVIGATIONAL HAZARDS.

Be aware of any local hazards to navigation, to include reefs/ rocks exposed at low tide, buoys in the water, especially metal mooring buoys, and pot and net buoys that could snag the rudder.

#### e) ROUTE PLAN.

The decision as to which route to take at sea should be governed by wind and tide primarily. ALWAYS row INTO the prevailing conditions first, where possible, so that when the crew is tiring they will have the conditions helping them.

Never feel pressured into taking a boat out, and once out if the conditions are worse than you thought, have no hesitation in returning to harbour and cancelling subsequent boats.

## 2. GETTING THE BOATS READY

Once you are happy to put to sea it is time to equip the boats and get them on the launch trollies.

Equipment should include:

Bung, in place and secure.

Charged VHF radio

Buoyancy aids

First aid kit

Space blanket

Bailer

Compass

Flares

Whistle

Throw line

Sharp Knife

Plenty of spare Thole pins

Fenders

The gigs are heavy so always ensure there are enough people to lift onto the trollies. Make sure people are lifting at the end of the boat and not closer to the centre. Lift with backs straight and knees bent. ALWAYS wait until ALL the lifters have a good grip and are ready – there is no need to rush.

When the gig is well positioned on the trollies start moving the boat SLOWLY, with an even distribution of people on both sides making sure they are pushing and not just holding on, and keeping the gig level. The person on the front trolley should NOT pull as the trolley could slide out. When on a down slope make sure the weight is held back. When coming to a stop ensure at least one person on each side remains holding the boat.

## 3. LAUNCHING.

Make sure the boat is fully prepared before launching, e.g. stretchers in the right position, pins located, etc. Consider how the wind will affect the gig when she is afloat and try to keep the bow into the wind. Slowly walk the gig down the slipway and into the water. Lift one end off at a time when there is enough water to float her, NEVER let the gig ground out.

Once afloat get the crew in as quickly as possible, one at a time, and if you need to fend her off the shore do so with the handle of an oar. Get the crew ready to row quickly if conditions are tricky or if it is busy, and prepare to exit the harbour.

#### 4. GOING TO SEA.

It is vital that each cox has a working knowledge of the rules preventing collisions at sea.

- a) Navigation rules: Keep to the right as you leave harbour. Pass boats port side to port side.
- b) If overtaking at sea you must keep well clear of the craft you are passing.
- c) Power gives way to sail, a gig is a powered craft.
- d) A craft with limited manoeuvrability has right of way over all other craft, e.g. a towing vessel, survey boat, etc.

These are the basic rules but it is useful to read the full COLREGS.

When leaving the harbour the gig will be going slowly and the rudder will have a reduced effect. Therefore it is essential to understand the importance of using the oars to steer at low speeds.

When you have cleared the harbour approach you may stop the gig and let the crew put shoes on, etc. Whenever you stop try to make sure you are downwind of any hazards and you keep the bow facing into the waves – NEVER stop beam on to the conditions.

#### 5. AT SEA.

When at sea remain vigilant and alert for any other craft or hazards, and stay WELL clear. Remember to row INTO the prevailing conditions first. Try to never be beam on to the sea – if you have to navigate across the waves steer a zig zag course with the gig at 45 degrees to the waves. In bigger seas go into and then with the sea.

If you need to stop try to keep the bow of the boat INTO the waves. In rougher seas the oars can be placed flat on the water to act as stabilisers.

Do not enter inside the swim line and stay well clear of reefs as these can cause sudden breaking waves.

Be mindful of changing conditions and local squalls. Stay close to home if conditions are changeable.

#### 6. APPROACHING A PONTOON.

Stop well clear of the pontoon, taking into account drift, and ready the boat with fenders etc. Both bow and stern lines should be easily accessible, i.e. not covered with bags, etc. and not knotted.

Approach the pontoon SLOWLY and INTO wind whenever possible. Remember the rudder will have less steerage at low speeds so using the oars to steer is vital. Ensure the crew are quiet and alert to commands.

Try to approach as parallel as possible to the pontoon and slowly steer your bow close to the person waiting on the pontoon. If no one is waiting to receive you then

either the 1 or 2 rower will have to grab the pontoon. If this is the case then you MUST approach VERY slowly.

As soon as someone has the bowline, throw your stern line to another person on the pontoon. They can grab an oar and pull you in, but the rope is much better.

Make sure the boat is secured to the pontoon before the crew alights, one at a time.

## 7. LEAVING A PONTOON.

Leaving a pontoon can be difficult as you have no power or steerage in the gig. If the previous boat has approached into the wind then you should be able to drift off.

If you are on the end of one of the arms then those on the pontoon can walk you clear, or the rowers can grab the pontoon and 'walk' the gig up.

If you need to fend off the pontoon then get the three rowers sat closest to the pontoon to place the handle of their oars onto the pontoon and start pushing the gig sideways, using the full length of the oar. When clear ask the other rowers to get their oars in the water and start paddling gently to manoeuvre the bow away from the pontoon. When clear you can turn the gig on oars. Do NOT worry about bringing fenders in until you are well clear of the pontoon.

## 8. APPROACHING A BEACH.

If a crew change is taking place on a beach, the approach should still be nice and slow. The chances are the conditions will push you into the beach so stop well clear of the shore and have the rowers holding water so you approach slowly. Someone should be in the water to receive you and you want to ensure that you steer your bow to this person and make sure you have basically come to a stop before you reach them. The gig should NEVER touch the bottom.

If there is a slight swell onto the beach then turn your boat, before the breaking water, and approach stern first by backwatering. Do not ground the rudder.

Beach approaches should only be made in calm conditions with very little swell or surge.

## 9. COMING BACK INTO HARBOUR.

When coming back into harbour you must be extra vigilant. Look out for any sails that might be coming out or going in, fishing lines across the mouth, and all other boat users. Enter on the right and make sure the crew are quiet and alert to commands. Do not cut across the mouth of the harbour, but rather make a straight line approach from a few hundred metres out.

If there is no one to receive you try to stop the boat in shallow water so that the 1 rower can get out and hold the bow. Try to keep the gig into, or back to the wind so she doesn't drift. Use an oar handle to fend if necessary. Take the rudder out and ask the crew to alight one at a time. Two crew members to fetch the trollies whilst the rest hold the boat.

## 10. RECOVERY.

With enough people lift the bow onto the trolley and then the stern. Try to have the gig well afloat so you don't have to lift too much. When the gig is on the trollies push her out of the water and up the slipway slowly and making sure the stern trolley does not get stuck or stopped by rocks etc.

When back at the boathouse steer the gig slowly in and then lift her off the trollies, bow first then the stern. Slide her to the wall, making sure she is level and on the bow and stern marks painted on the floor – NOT JUST NEAR THEM! Place the trigs GENTLY under the bilge keel, carpet side up. Do NOT ram the trigs in. Place the chocks under the bow and stern and kick them well in. Make sure trollies are stored tidily, secured by chocks under the wheels and bungees/rope on the wall, AND ARE NOT IN CONTACT THE BLADES OF ANY OARS.

Clear the gig of all equipment:

- Turn VHF radio off and return to filing cabinet.
- Put oars in the rack.
- Hang up lifejacket/s.
- Pins back in the bucket, broken pins discarded.
- Make sure all bottles, clothing, etc, are taken away by the crew.