

Hexham Rowing Club



Weir Safety

Enjoy rowing – keep safe.

Rowing is generally a very safe sport. However, you should always respect the water. Get to know your river and how it changes with more or less water and with different wind conditions. One particular hazard at Hexham is the weir and how close our landing stages are to the hazard. This means that you must be vigilant at all times when boating or landing or turning to go back up the river.

What is the purpose of the Weir?

A weir is a large wall that holds back river water so that it can be released slowly downstream and regulate the flow of water.

Why are Weirs dangerous?

Water flows over the weir and creates a 'washing machine' effect at the bottom.

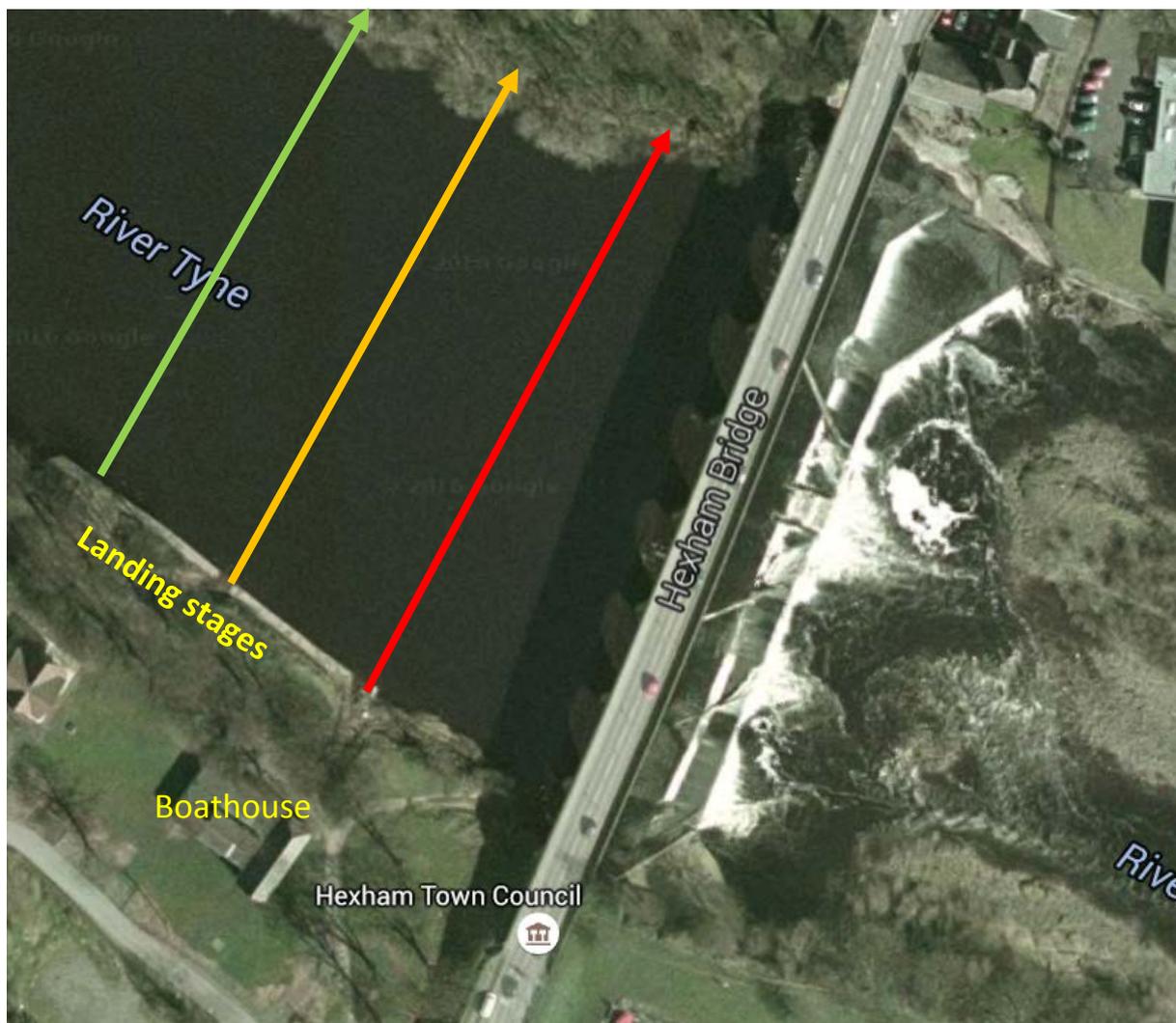


People going into this part of the water are held under by the current making self-rescue or assisted rescue almost impossible. It doesn't matter how good a swimmer you are, swimming skills have little to do with survival. Many people fail to realise that the faster the water is flowing, the shallower it needs to be to sweep you over.

- It only takes ankle deep water to knock you off your feet.
- It only takes 60 seconds to drown

Many weirs (and we know this is the case at Hexham) have debris at the bottom. These are called strainers. Natural strainers force people under water and make self-rescue or assisted rescue very difficult and the debris can cause serious injuries.

STAY AWAY FROM THE WEIR!



Where is it safe to turn?

This is an Aerial view of the boathouse, landing stages and weir. You can see how close the bottom landing stage is to the weir. If you are a beginner, even in a coxed boat, you should turn by the **green line** – at Top landing stage even if the water is at a normal height and flow. You must not go out onto the water if the water is over the top landing stage.

Accidents have happened in the past. Emergency services have been called out twice in 2010 and 2016. The rowers involved can attest to how terrifying the experience is. In 2014, 3 kayakers were killed in at the Riding Mill weir.



2010 – Hexham Rowers were rescued by Emergency Services. On this occasion the rowers didn't have to get out of the boat but were still required treatment for Hypothermia.

Did you know?

- The majority of drowning deaths in the UK occur within only 3m of a safe point
- 2/3 of those who die in flood-related accidents are considered to be good swimmers.
- After 20 minutes in water at 12C the temperature of the deep muscle of your forearm would drop from 37 °C to 27°C, leading to a 30% reduction in muscle strength.
- In water 1m deep (waist high), flows of 1m/s become challenging and by 1.8m/s (4mph) everyone will be washed off their feet.
- If the speed of the flood water doubles the force it exerts on you.
- Just 15cm (6 inches) of fast flowing water can knock you off your feet and be enough for you to be unable to regain your footing.
- 60cm (2 ft.) of standing water will float your car.
- Just 30cm (1ft) of flowing water could be enough to move the average family car

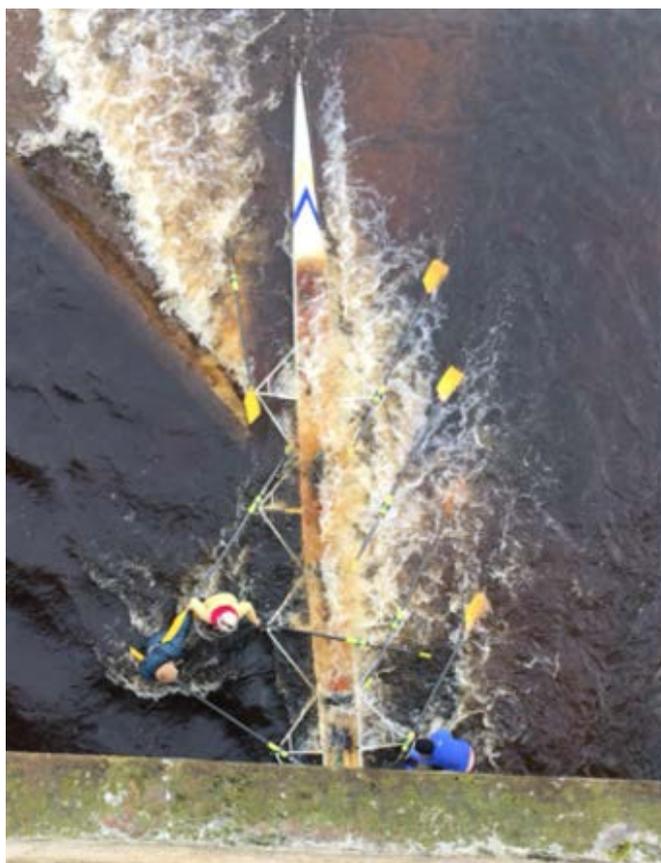
Practice the skills you need

Practice, practice, practice...

- stopping your boat
- bow side and stroke side spins
- backing down
- in an emergency – keep calm, listen to your cox and work as a team

Know you River

Heavy rain in the west of the county or at Hexham can cause river levels to rise during the course of one outing. If it's raining keep checking the landing stages when you are turning to see if the water is rising – if it is go back in! High winds will also affect your ability to row well and to turn safely, so if the conditions change – go back to the boathouse.



In 2016 Hexham rowers got blown onto the weir when a strong gust of wind hit them after a struggle to turn in fast flowing water. The river level was fast and high and would have swept the boat over the weir so the cox instructed the rowers to get out of the boat. They were in the water for 45 minutes. 2 of the crew were totally submerged when they slipped during rescue. All were treated for Hypothermia and one member was taken to hospital.

Coxes

If the conditions change whilst you are out and you are worried about whether your crew will get too close to the weir consider turning above the landing stages and letting the stream take you in or backing down if necessary. You are then in a position to row on and away from the weir if it's not working.

Keep safe – enjoy rowing!