

St Catherine's College Rowing Society
St Catherine's College
Oxford OX1 3UJ

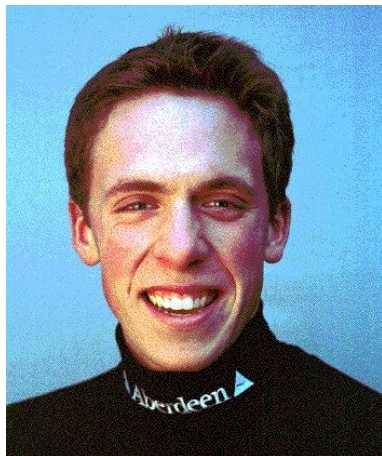
13th May, 2000

Dear Alumnus,

Unusually, this year the Men's Boat Races took place the day before the Women's and Lightweight Races — normally they are the following Saturday. For the Catz quartet of University rowers, this meant that Ed Foster would be first off, in the Isis-Goldie race. This was Ed's 3rd year in Isis. In his first year, when everyone thought Isis would lose, they won. In his second year, when Isis were expected to win, they lost. So this year, with all the pundits tipping Goldie, things were looking hopeful. Indeed, Isis duly won by 5 lengths.

I'm sure you all know that, after a hard-fought race in brutal conditions, Oxford also won the Boat Race (by 3 lengths), so over to our man in the boat, Matt Smith:

'Rowing in the Oxford Blue Boat has always seemed an unreachable dream, so when I was selected I felt not only privileged but an immense sense of achievement. However the realization soon dawned that rowing in the Boat Race only gave us the chance to achieve something great, the appointment itself was not anything to be immensely proud of.



Matthew Smith

'Four weeks before the Race we adequately disposed of a Molesey crew but concluded that we were still, however, slower than Cambridge. We threw ourselves back into training to prepare for our race a fortnight later against the best oarsmen in the world, in the form of Redgrave, Pinsent and friends. We rowed well in one piece against them and beat them round the inside of a bend, however we lost out by substantial margins in the other two. We would have to row to our full potential to beat Cambridge.

'The last two weeks' rowing went well, we were building in confidence and speed. By the time we reached the day of the race we were confident of victory. The day itself was nothing special in many ways as we had been through the routine many times before. We were just racing another crew with a few people watching. We were our normal rowdy selves in the race, yelling abuse at the other crew etc. The victory was especially sweet because of the way we did it. I will definitely go back next year to do it again.'

At 18 years and 8 months, Matt also became the youngest person ever to win a Boat Race (and I reckon he must have been just 10 when Oxford last won).

Upriver, at Henley, the rivalry resumed the following afternoon. A new curtain-raiser this year: a race between the men's lightweight reserve crews, in which Granta (Cambridge) beat Nephthys. Blondie also beat Osiris in the women's reserves race, but the increasingly reliable Oxford women's lightweights put paid to any rising Light Blue hopes of a clean sweep to avenge the previous day. The scene was now set for the women's Blue Boats. Cambridge had won the Women's Boat Race 8 years in succession, but there were rumours that this year's Oxford crew was a bit special. Emily Woodeson takes up the story:

'On race day, we had a short paddle in the morning which went really well and got rid of a lot of nerves. We had our pre race chat away from Upper Thames and it was relaxed but focused. We all knew what we had to do, and we all felt we were going to do it. Walking back to the club we



Sponsors of
 St Catherine's College
 Boat Club

President: Tony Hancox
 Vice Presidents: Joanne Gough
 Rupert Obholzer
 Matthew Pinsent MBE

watched Osiris go by and seeing them lose was really difficult, but it stiffened our resolve to go out there and nail Cambridge.

‘Our warm up was good, and it was reassuring to see the lighties win. We did our last start right in front of all the Oxford support and it was a really good one.

‘Sitting on the stake boat I felt a bit tense, but I tried to relax as we were taking our kit off. It seemed like ages before the Umpire said go, and the first stroke of our start wasn’t the best we had ever done! However we pulled it back straight away and started to move through them. We had decided that our cox wasn’t going to tell us where they were until we were at the 500m mark and when he called it he was sitting on their bow canvas and was asking us for clear water — that was a fantastic feeling. Going past Remenham and Upper Thames the crowd was amazing, it was so loud and sounded so excited. We were able to settle into our cruise pace, and as the race went on it got better and better. Crossing the finish line 2 lengths up, I was absolutely knackered but at the same time I wanted to jump into the air. It was a very special moment which made all the blood, sweat and tears of the previous 6 months very worth it!’



Emily Woodeson

Unfortunately, Catz rowers didn’t quite make it 4 wins out of 4: in the last race of the weekend Richard Law, rowing with the men’s lightweights, went down by 2 lengths to an exceptional Cambridge crew. Yep, been there, done that, got the zephyr (although it has long since disintegrated).

Men’s 1st Eight		Women’s 1st Eight	
<i>bow</i>	James Johnston*	<i>bow</i>	Carla Crifo
2	Paul Hearn*	2	Natalie Weber
3	Matt Denmark*	3	Laura Goodsir*
4	Greg Halton*	4	Clarissa Edwards*
5	Ralph Schapiro*	5	Kathryn Whyte
6	Richard Law*	6	Sarah Boddy*
7	Simon Evans*	7	Lauren Groff*
<i>str</i>	Matt Smith	<i>str</i>	Florence Williams*
<i>cox</i>	James Darbyshire*	<i>cox</i>	Jen Rees*

*denotes previous 1st VIII experience

Rowing in Oxford this term got off to slightly delayed start, thanks to the wettest April in Oxford since records began (1767). Newcomers in the Women’s 1st Eight are Jen, Carla and Natalie, all promoted from last term’s 2nd Torpid (Jen’s a former 1st VIII rower herself, opting for an easier life no doubt); Kathryn rowed as an undergraduate at Lincoln. Surprisingly, the only newcomer to the men’s 1st Eight seems to have been put in the stroke seat — I can only

assume it’s because his timing is a bit suspect. Henry Hirsch (Brasenose) is coaching the men, Emily Woodeson and Richard Law are coaching the women.

Summer Eights will be from 31st May–3rd June, with racing from noon–7pm (Wed–Fri), 11–6pm (Saturday). On the Saturday, refreshments (and, I hope, copies of the History) will be on sale at the Boathouse, followed by the usual buffet supper in College Hall. I’ll be providing news on each day’s racing for everyone on the Rowing Society’s e-mail list.

And finally, thanks to Ian Bowles (M.61) for clearing up one of the great Boat Club mysteries of our time: the clinker scull is called ‘*Skimbleshanks*’. It was bought in 1963 and the name, from *Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats* by T. S. Eliot, was part of a short-lived rebellion against the prevalent A. A. Milne tendency. Which begs the question: *why* are Catz boats named on the A. A. Milne theme? I hope someone will provide me with a convincing theory by the next newsletter.

Anu Dudhia (email: dudhia@atm.ox.ac.uk)

Rowing Society: <http://www.atm.ox.ac.uk/rowing/rs.html>