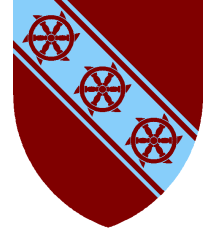




St Catherine's College Rowing Society
St Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ



President: Colin Smith
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31st January, 2021

In this issue . . .

Welcome to the first newsletter of Hilary Term 2021, or, in more practical terms, of Lockdown#3. We're back to last Trinity Term (Lockdown#1) protocols with the vast majority of students at home with lectures, tutorials, practicals (yes, really) and what passes for a social life, all on-line. Needless to say, Torpids has been cancelled, along with the Rowing Society dinner, although we'll probably hold our AGM via Zoom. We can at least regard the recent heavy rainfall, and the resultant red flag conditions, with equanimity rather than the usual frustration.

The brief lifting of restrictions at the end of last term came too late to be of any benefit to college rowing, but was well-timed for the University crews to hold their trials races over in Ely. There were two Catz participants on the day, with another four still involved in the various squads. At the time of writing the Boat Races are still scheduled for 4th April, although I doubt anyone really believes that. Talking *of* the other place, is it just me, or have our Fenland counterparts been surprisingly quiet on the whole Covid research front?

Even if students return for summer, there will have been a gap of nearly two years since the last full term of rowing, and even longer since the last cohort of novices were trained up for Christ Church Regatta (2018). OURCs are currently floating the idea of moving Summer Eights from 5th to 7th week, although it seems to me that the proximity to exams is likely to deter that badly-needed last group of college-trained rowers. How about the University extending Trinity Term so that students have an extra month before the start of term proper in which to catch up on their academic and, er, less academic studies? Surely no one would begrudge them that?

In the meantime, we'll take another look at 1919, when rowing resumed after a 5 year break, not to mention a serious flu epidemic (No, I mean that there was literally *no mention* of the flu epidemic). We covered it in a newsletter a couple of years back (100 years on) but this time, I suspect, we'll all be taking notes.

As for the ongoing countdown of Catz boat club members who've made the most starts in Torpids and Eights, we now reach places 32–36.

And finally a question for you: what three-word mantra comes to mind when you hear the first word 'Hands . . .' ? I'll refer you to my closing remarks at the end of this newsletter.



View of Oxford from South Parks during last weekend's (brief) snowfall. (Photo from Matt Smith)



No chance of unnecessary distractions as the OUBC Trial VIIIs race unfolds along the largely featureless Great Ouse. Augustin Wambersie, of Catz, is stroke of the *Track* crew, nearest the camera. (Photo from the OUBC Facebook page)

University Crews

As mentioned in the last newsletter, this year's Boat Races have been relocated to Ely, the home waters of Cambridge's university crews. More specifically to a 5km stretch of the Great Ouse from the Queen Adelaide bridge a couple of km outside Ely itself, northwards/downstream towards Littleport. There's a railway line along the west bank, a towpath and a minor road along the east bank, and ... absolutely nothing else. This is to discourage spectators who would normally be thronging the banks (and bars) of the Thames, but also to avoid passing under Hammersmith Bridge, now judged to be in a precarious state.

An Oxford-Cambridge boat race was held on this stretch in 1944, in the opposite direction, although this doesn't seem to form part of the official canon. Oxford definitely won, though (you can find it on YouTube, complete with horse-riding umpires).

So, at the end of last term, barely a week after rowing was resumed, the leading candidates for this year's Oxford crews decamped to a recently emptied and cleaned Cambridge University boathouse to hold their Trial VIIIs races over the new course. Oxford had sole use of the facilities for the weekend of 19/20 December, Cambridge having held their races a couple of days earlier. Notably, Oxford chose Covid-themed names for their crews (hello Cambridge!): *Track* and *Trace* for OUBC and *AstraZeneca* and *Pfizer* for OUWBC; the light blues looking elsewhere for their inspiration.

The OUWBC trials race featured Catz oarswoman Oriane Grant in the 6 seat of *Pfizer*. Lest that conjure up the wrong image, I point out that Oriane was recently trialling for the lightweights. Despite losing the toss, and the (slightly) favoured western station *Pfizer* took the lead, indulged in enough opportunistic steering to attract the umpire's attention, and then rowed clear to win by 3 lengths.

In the men's race, the 2019 OUBC stroke and last year's President, Augustin Wambersie, was stroke of the *Track* crew. Their opponents took the early lead — see photo — but failed to break clear and several close encounters eventually resulted in a clash of blades, after which *Track* pulled ahead and went on to win by 2 lengths.

With a downstream course, there is a natural tendency for the coxes to want to grab the middle of the river, which leads to encroachment and possibly blade clashes. On a straight, non-tidal course you might have thought that's something that could easily be sorted out by laying a few buoys. Well, yes, you could, but where's the fun in that?

There is a glossy, detailed e-magazine on the boatraces.org web-site. And, by detailed, I mean 198 pages! But lots of nice pictures, though, and full-page profiles of *all* this year's squad members, not just those chosen for the Blue boats and reserve crews. From this, in addition to confirming the presence of three other Catz oarsmen in the OUBC squad (Johnny Davidson, Shane McCarthy and James Woodford), I also discover that St Catherine's have acquired a cox, Thomas Surridge, trialling for OUWBC. When college rowing restarts, experienced coxes are, of course, going to be worth their weight in gold/beer/name-your-price. However, I assume this is something of a graduate college-transfer technicality and that he'll opt to continue coxing for our boathouse neighbours, Mansfield, which is fair enough since they taught him his craft.

While *the* Boat Race press juggernaut lumbers on, there is a complete lack of any news on the lightweight boat races. I know they are training since one of our students, Kan Li, is trialling for the women's lightweights. But as to *when*, *where*, or even *if*? Not a clue.

Back in a Boat in 1919

At end of the First World War, students returned to Oxford to resume their studies bringing with them some collective memory of college rowing, which had been suspended since the outbreak of the war.

Some would also have brought the so-called ‘Spanish Flu’, which killed over 200,000 people in the UK but, having peaked at the end of 1918, it receded surprisingly quickly and doesn’t even rate a mention alongside the various other problems encountered in attempting to revive the Boat Club.

St Catharine’s Magazine, 1919

After a forced abeyance of five years owing to the war, rowing was again started in Michaelmas Term, 1918. Though a lot of tubbing was got through, the Club did not resume its normal activities until Hilary Term, 1919. This term brought back several old members of the Club, including Attale and Osmond. The continued occupation of the Delegacy Building by the Military caused much difficulty in finding suitable men, so that nearly a fortnight elapsed before the Captain (Parry) was able to start work.

The Daily Telegraph, Thu 30 Jan, 1919

Major Horsfall, R.A.F., of Magdalen College, president of the Oxford University Boat Club, presided at a meeting of captains of College Clubs held yesterday afternoon. An important discussion took place as to the future prospects of rowing at Oxford, and it was decided to approach the committee of the Cambridge University Boat Club with a view to arranging an inter-university race or races to take place at the end of the summer term.

The Daily Telegraph, Tue 11 March, 1919

Although it was not possible to arrange for the Torpid races this year, the Oxford University Boat Club arranged in their place a series of eight-oar and four-oar races. The course for the eights was from the Weir’s Bridge to Salter’s Post, and for the fours from Rough’s Boathouse to Salter’s Barge. Fortunately the weather was delightfully fine, but a strong wind and fast stream operated adversely to the higher crews. The competition is on the American tournament system, and with the conclusion of the three eliminating rounds [the winners of] both divisions will race on Thursday.

St Catherine’s were one of 9 crews racing in Division A of the fours, They won two out of their three races,

but Merton won all three so proceeded to the final, where they lost to Division B winners Lincoln.

The Daily Telegraph, Mon 17 March, 1919

The boat captains of Cambridge University met on Saturday to discuss the challenge issued by the Oxford University Boat Club to row two eight-oared races at the Henley Regatta of 1919, and it was decided to accept.

The Daily Telegraph, Thu 1 May, 1919

The Oxford Summer Eights will this year be confined to four days, and have been fixed to be rowed on May 26, 27, 28, and 29. These events will be open to anyone who is in bona-fide residence and who has rowed consecutively for ten days previous to the races. There will be two classes — best summer eights with sliding seats, and ‘Torpids’ with fixed seats. The result of these races will not affect the position of the boats when normal conditions return next year.

St Catharine’s Magazine, 1919

The OUBC decided to hold two series of races — Summer Eights as usual in the middle of term and Junior Eights for novices at the end. We could not hope to reach the standard of the former in time, and unfortunately we did not know about the latter races until too late.

The prospects for the future are distinctly good. We are to be back in our Delegacy Building once more, so that we shall be able to get in touch with one another. Furthermore our barge is being repaired, and is to be ready for our use at the beginning of term.

Henley Peace Regatta

Henley Royal Regatta was replaced in 1919 by a Peace Regatta, the highlight of which was to be the ‘King’s Cup’ for eights comprising servicemen from the Allied nations (an event repeated in 2019). Six overseas entries duly arrived but, embarrassingly, the expected British entry from Leander failed to materialise. Thereupon both Oxford and Cambridge agreed to step forward for King’s and country and enter their 1st Trial VIIIs, at the cost — it transpired — of their own planned race. The King’s Cup was won by the Australians, defeating Oxford in the final and Cambridge in the semis. Thus the only direct race between representative eights the two Universities in 1919 was the event for 2nd Trial VIIIs, which Cambridge won. Doesn’t count as a Boat Race, though.



The 1984 Men's 1st Torpid, with Graham Elliot at stroke and Kip Marks at 7. Two more members of this crew are still to appear in the top 50 starts list. Photo from Mark Tucker (5).

Bumps Starts

Pos	Starts	Name	Active
=32nd	34	John MacDonald	1936–41
=32nd	34	Crispin Marks	1980–88
=34th	33	Russell Bates	1982–85
=34th	33	Sarah Boddy	1999–2008
=34th	33	Graham Elliot	1981–84

Now for those occupying places 32–36 in the list of most bumps starts.

Graham Elliot arrived having rowed at school so was immediately inducted into the 1st VIII, where he remained for most of the 4 years of his Chemistry degree, assuming the Captaincy in his final year (no elections in those days). He went on to Bryanston school to teach, inevitably, chemistry and rowing, and remains there to this day.

Sarah Boddy, no.3 in the all-time women's list, arrived as a novice but still spent most of her career — undergraduate and postgraduate — in the 1st VIII, and was Captain in 2000. Dr Boddy is now a medical researcher at the University of Sheffield, specialising in Motor Neurone Disease.

Russell Bates was a novice who made his way up from the 3rd VIII to the 1st VIII, rowing in every Torpids and Eights for the four years of his Materials Science degree. He now works for HKA as a consultant in the construction industry.

Kip Marks was a mathematician and also President of the University Cycling Club, looking to introduce a little variety in his training. He went on to complete a DPhil in atmospheric physics (same lab as me, in fact) and was last seen cycling off into the sunset in New Zealand.

John MacDonald arrived in 1935 and, although our records are rather patchy, we believe he continued to row into the war years, presumably having completed his undergraduate degree. From the Boat Club minute book from 24th November 1939: 'It was proposed that Mr MacDonald be elected President of the Boat Club in order to ensure the continuation of the club as a corporate body during the duration of the war.' The Boat Club dinner, held in March 1940 was, understandably, '... the most sober boat club dinner ever — it developed into a theological discussion between MacDonald, Habgood and Knight.'

Coming up ...

No college rowing, although perhaps some Boat Race news, and we'll meet a group of 6 former oarsmen all on 35 starts. And, for UK readers, if your answer was 'Hands, Face, Space', let's look forwards to the time when the only words that come to mind are, once more, 'Hands, Body, Slide'.

Anu Dudhia