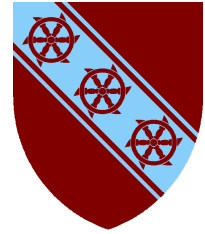




St Catherine's College Rowing Society

St Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ



President: Colin Smith
Vice-Presidents: Neil Chugani, Richard Peters,
Sir Matthew Pinsent CBE, Ben Sylvester,
Zoe de Toledo, Andrew Triggs Hodge OBE.

28th January, 2023

In this issue . . .

You used to know where you were with Oxford winters; either warm and wet or cold and dry. This one's struggling to make its mind up. Persistent rain from Christmas through to mid-January left the river unrowable for the first two weeks of term although, given the arctic temperatures, indoor training had its attractions.

At the end of last term, during the first sub-zero spell, five of our University Triallists raced over the Tideway course, one of those races also being umpired by a Catz alumnus.

Noting that there were just two Catz novice VIIIs last term, I've been through the records to see how this compares with previous years, and how many novices actually continue rowing.

We finally reach the top four in the list of those who've done the most starts in bumping races. Those of you who've been paying attention won't be surprised to learn who's top, and may hazard a decent guess as to who's second, but . . . I'll leave it there.

Torpids is a week earlier than usual (22–25th Feb), so most crews are going to be short of water time, and the cancellation of the last two IWL only adds to the general air of unpredictably. In that same spirit I'm afraid we've also left it rather late but we're still hoping to arrange the Rowing Society Dinner & AGM for the Saturday of Torpids, 25th February.



A disappointing view down the 2000m Dorney Lake course last weekend. Catz had hoped to escape the floods, only to find themselves thwarted by fog . . .



. . . which meant there was only one thing for it. Photos from Thomas Lim.

Results

Oxford Trial VIIIs Races

OULRC, 5th December		
<i>Atlanta</i>	bt <i>Paris</i> ¹	5½ L
OuwBC, 11th December		
<i>Athena</i>	bt <i>Artemis</i> ²	Easily
OUBC, 11th December		
<i>Beetle</i> ³	bt <i>Wedge</i>	~2–3 L

Participating St Catherine's students:

- ¹ Zac Abel (S), Tom Wagstaff (B)
- ² Helen Nielsen-Scott (5)
- ³ Freddy Orpin (3), Jonny Davidson (4)

University Trial VIIIs Races

All four Oxford squads ran their Trial VIIIs races over the Tideway course after the end of last term, the lightweights on 5th December and the heavies on 11th December. You can find the OUBC and OUWBC races, with live commentary, on YouTube.

Our two participants in the men's lightweight race, Zac Abel and Tom Wagstaff, were rowing at either end of the *Paris* crew. With limited practice time due to illness and injury, they made a good fight of it initially but, after a blade clash, *Atlanta* pulled away and established a commanding lead. Poignantly, the two crews were named not after mythological characters but after the cities of the first and last Olympic Games to hold lightweight rowing events.



Catz students Orpin and Davidson, at 3 and 4 on the right, fully engaged in the OUBC Trials race. Photo from OUBC Facebook.

A week later, in freezing but mercifully windless conditions, Helen Nielsen-Scott, in the OUWBC *Artemis* crew, lined up against *Athena*, stroked by her older sister. Once again Catz came out on the wrong end of a one-sided race.

Nowadays the designated Boat Race umpires introduce themselves to the crews by also umpiring the Trial VIII's races. For the Women's Boat Race that umpire is Matt Smith, a former Catz Blue. He was the OUBC stroke in the epic race of 2003 when they defeated Cambridge by just 1 foot. And, as it happened, the CUBC bow-man on that occasion was his own brother. I don't know if he had any advice to pass on to the N-S sisters.

So, later that afternoon, it fell to Freddy Orpin and Jonny Davidson, sitting in the 3 and 4 seats of the *Beetle* crew, to try and secure Catz first win. The OUBC race was a much tighter affair, with threatened and actual blade clashes all the way up the course until, approaching Barnes Bridge, a final clash resulted in *Wedge's* bowman getting an overhead crab, allowing *Beetle* to row away.

Cambridge did a better job of producing matched crews; their men's race was decided by a third of a length and their women's by a mere 6 inches.

Attention now switches to the various private fixtures and any indirect comparisons that may be made from the results. One thing already clear is that with both Oxford and Cambridge reduced to core 'student' crews, the likes of Oxford Brookes, Leander and UL are smacking their lips in anticipation. The feasting has already started; last weekend the Cambridge women, who've been nigh on invincible the past couple of years, were badly mauled by the women from Brookes.

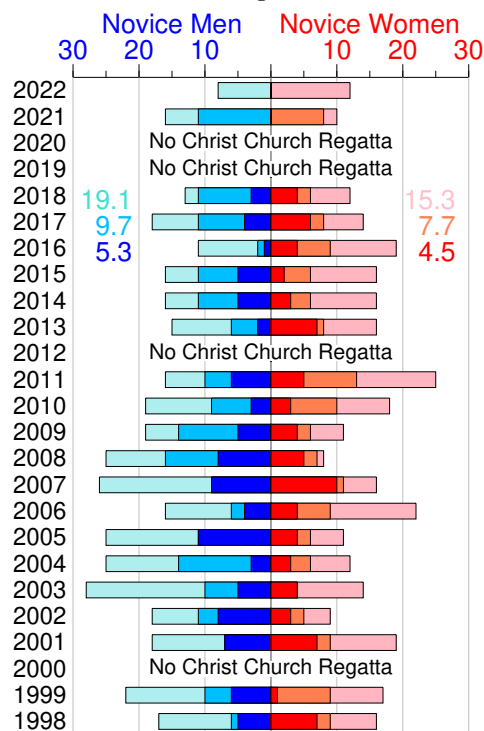
Where did all the Novices go?

College Boat Clubs have notoriously short-term collective memories — even without disruptions caused by global pandemics — and certainly within Catz Boat Club the system of recruitment and training of novices seems, from my admittedly distant viewpoint, to get completely re-invented every year or two rather than gradually evolving in the way it does for our senior crews.

I won't speculate on the reasons for this, or suggest any solutions, but I *do* have data. So, to try and put things into a longer-term perspective I've collected the statistics over the past 25

years on how many novices raced in Christ Church Regatta, and how many continued beyond that.

Number of Catz Novices racing in Christ Church Regatta each year, with inner bars showing the number who rowed in Torpids or Eights in the following two terms and, innermost bars, any subsequent year. Numbers refer to average values from 1998–2008.



The first notable feature is the reduction in numbers; we used to regularly have 5 or 6 novice VIII's. Some of this is undoubtedly due to the OURCs requirement, brought in around 2010 I think, that all rowers must complete a swim test before they are allowed to race.

But even so, the numbers in the past couple of years are well down on the period 2010–2018.

Until 2018, however many novices raced in Christ Church, the number continuing to row thereafter remained surprising stable: about an VIII's worth of men and women for the remainder of the academic year, and a IV's worth beyond that. This suggests that mere quantity of crews may not be a useful metric of how well the novice programme is working.

Obviously we don't yet have the data to see what happens to the novices of the last two years, but the small number of novice men racing last term could be a problem in the making.

Perhaps one last statistic. Over the past 5 Eights we've averaged 5 crews (3.2 men's VIIIs, 1.8 women's), which puts us 15th out of 36 college boat clubs. As one of the largest undergraduate colleges shouldn't we be a bit higher up?

Bumps Starts

I started this countdown as a diversion from the lack of rowing news during the Covid lockdown but, finally, it's time to reveal the top four:

	Pos	Starts	Name	Active
	1st	100	Mal Spencer	2006–2019
	2nd	64	Anu Dudhia	1978–1988
	3rd	55	James Wills	2015–
	4th	48	Keith Pritchard	1983–1989

Keith Pritchard was a chemist, who learnt to row in his first year as an undergraduate at Catz and continued to row through his doctorate. As captain of boats, he won blades in the '85 1st Torpid, taking the crew into the 1st Division in the process, all the while maintaining his skills at darts (hence his nickname 'Eric') and table football. After Oxford he went into management consultancy and these days is a Partner at Quorsus, no doubt having developed more lucrative skills along the way.

James Wills, currently pursuing a DPhil in physics, is still an active member of the Boat Club. He's mostly been coxing, winning blades with the 2017 Men's 1st and 2018 3rd Eights, but subsequently switched back to rowing, winning yet another set of blades rowing in the 2019 3rd Eight. But, unless he also fits in a bit of extra coxing on the side, I reckon my position is still safe for another year.

Well out in front though is Mal Spencer, who hung up his lycra after an extended career in which he reached 100 starts, mostly rowing but occasionally coxing the women's 2nd VIII. He's now back in Oxford, working as a librarian in the Bod, research op-

portunities in his specialist field — Russian history — being, understandably, somewhat limited at present. A hundred starts makes a nice round number but, when it comes, as it surely will, I wonder if he'll be able to resist 'the call'.



The 'Grimsby Express' banner unveiled during Eights 2015 marking Mal Spencer's 10 years and 80 starts. But he wasn't finished yet.

Torpids

Torpids, being a movable feast, will be in 6th week this year, to avoid clashing with the Women's Eights Head on the Saturday of 7th week. But with the first two weeks of term lost to the high stream, this compresses training time on the Isis to little more than a month. The first IWL of this term was also washed out so the final IWL, next Sunday, will be the first and last opportunity most crews get to race before Torpids. I expect it will be popular.

Torpids will be run from Wed 22nd until Sat 26th February. Last year it was decided that an extra women's division would be added this year, making 6 of each, and that racing would therefore start at 11:30 instead of noon (assuming that was all agreed with the Proctors!). I believe the pattern will be Men's Div 6 off first, then divisions every half-hour with the last race of the day being Women's Div 1 at 5pm.

Torpids 2023

Starting positions of our 1st Torpids
and last year's changes in position

Men's Div I		Women's Div II	
1 Oriel	=	1 L.M.H.	+4
2 Christ Church	+2	2 G.T.C.	-1
3 St Catherine's	=	3 Brasenose	+4
4 Wolfson	+2	4 St Anne's	-2
5 Balliol	+1	5 S.E.H.	+5
6 Wadham	+3	6 Lincoln	=
7 Pembroke	-5	7 Balliol	-7
8 S.E.H.	-3	8 St Catherine's	+1
9 University	+3	9 Wolfson II	+2
10 Keble	-2	10 Somerville	-6
11 Merton	+2	11 Mansfield	+1
12 Trinity	-2	12 Corpus Christi	+3

The men's 1st Torpid start 3rd on the river, the position they've finished for the past two years, having been promoted from 4th when Wadham failed to put out a crew for the first post-Covid Torpids. Last year Catz bumped Pembroke on the first day, giving them a couple of (long) shots at the Headship before Christ Church elbowed their way up past them.

We've not seen Oriel or Christ Church on the Isis but, with their resources, one assumes they've been getting in water time somewhere. Wolfson were 12 s quicker than Catz in the IWL-A at the start of last term, while Balliol were a further 17 s slower, but that was a long time ago, and there have been a number of changes in the Catz 1st VIII since then. They are being coached by Laurence Whiteley, MBE, a gold-medallist in the GBR mixed double scull in both the Rio and Tokyo Paralympics.

The senior women have been low on numbers so IWL-A was the only time this year that they've raced as an VIII (the new four's been getting a lot of use). However, then, they were 8 s quicker than Balliol and, although Wolfson beat Catz by 1 s, that was presumably their 1st boat (Wolfson women are currently Head of the River in Torpids, although I don't think even they expect to remain there). Somerville women were only racing in a four last term, but Mansfield looked good, winning IWL-A and getting to the final in Nephthys Regatta. The women continue to be coached by Rowan Nicholls, who's been with them since 2018.

The men's 2nd Torpid will be starting 9th in Div3 (2:30pm). They rose three places last year and now find themselves sandwiched between the 1st Torpids of Corpus (ahead) and Green-Templeton (behind). If there are any other Catz crews, they'll have to qualify in the Rowing On races on Friday 17th Feb.



The Women's 1st Torpid at Dorney last weekend photographed — I'm guessing, rather than 'photobombed' — by their coach Rowan who, I'm relieved to see, has not resumed his lockdown beard.

Coming up ...

With little rain and 'sensible' temperatures forecast for the next couple of weeks things are finally looking up, so I'm hoping we'll be able to report on a full Torpids in the next newsletter. There will also be updates on the Oxford University crews, and our own triallists who should all know their places by then.

I'll send out details of the RS AGM & Dinner as soon as things are finalised, but don't expect any departures from the usual pattern.

Anu Dudhia

Diary

22-25 Feb 2023	Torpids
25 Feb 2023	RS AGM & Dinner (tbc)
20 Mar 2023	Lightweight Boat Races
26 Mar 2023	The Boat Races
24-27 May 2023	Eights



The bows of the men's 1st VIII at Dorney (& Tom Aston). Remind me, which one of Winnie the Pooh's friends was *Goblin Cleaver*?