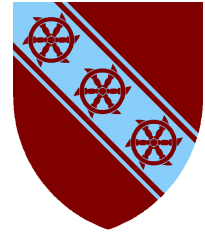




St Catherine's College Rowing Society
St Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ



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

12th February, 2024

In this issue . . .

To misquote, and mistranslate, the late, great Galileo Galilei: *eppur si piove!* ('and still it rains!').

Early in January the river reached levels last seen in 2014, and led to a temporary closure of the Abingdon Rd. We've now had 114 consecutive days — nearly a third of a year — with rowing restrictions in some form or other.

Untroubled by such parochial matters, Oxford and Cambridge held their Trial VIII's races in mid-December. While the Oxford boats could focus on their opponents, the Cambridge crews main contest was with the river itself. Apart from the two current Catz students one of our alumnae decided to try on a lighter shade of blue.

Torpedis is (still) scheduled to start on 28th February but obviously there's a fair amount of uncertainty about whether it will actually happen. The RS AGM and Dinner also has a fixed date (2nd March) but elusive actuality (for reasons of RAAC rather than rain).

While the locals may be feeling deprived of water time, spare a thought for our boatman whose extended outing has now entered its third month.



Looking south along the Abingdon Rd at the junction with Donnington Bridge Rd on 5th January this year, shortly before the road was closed.

Results

Trial VIII's Races

Cambridge races, 13th December

Women's B race

*Nala*¹ bt *Simba* 5 L

Oxford races, 13th December

Men's A race

*Noise*² bt *Panic* 2¹/₄ L

Men's B race

Quiet bt *Peace*³ 1¹/₂ L

¹Helen Nielsen-Scott (M.20) at no.5

²Freddy Orpin at no.4

³Luca Nadig at stroke

University Crews

Oxford and Cambridge held their Trial VIII's races over the Boat Race course just two days apart but in very different conditions. All squads used the same format: an 'A race' consisting of 'probables' for Blue boat and reserve crews, and a 'B race' for a mix of lightweights and 'possibles'.

Cambridge's day was the 13th December, and their women were up first. The combination of wind and tide led to horrendous conditions at the start, along the Putney embankment. Horrendous for the crews, that is, although I daresay the publicists were delighted with the dramatic photos and video footage (don't worry if you missed it, I'm sure you'll see it again in the Boat Race previews).

Helen Nielsen-Scott, former Catz women's captain and Osiris rower, is now studying and rowing in Cambridge. She was in the winning crew in their B race, held shortly afterwards.

The Cambridge men's B race was abandoned when one crew swamped, upon which the coaches decided maybe moving up the start into flatter water might be a good plan. Thus the crews in the men's A race had only to weather the scorn of the rest of the Light Blue squad.



Having fun yet? One of the Cambridge women's Trial VIIIs shortly after the start. Photo by Benedict Tufnell (Row360).

When the Oxford crews turned up for their races two days later the wind had dropped, the skies had cleared and conditions were near perfect.

In the men's B race Luca Nadig, our as-yet semi-mythical Swiss lightweight, stroked *Peace*, up against *Quiet*. It's difficult to find any information on this race — the Live Stream understandably concentrating on the A races — but the result was that *Quiet* won by a length and a half, which will have pleased whoever had the task of producing matched crews.

The men's A crews both had late reshuffles due to illness, *Panic* more so than *Noise*. However they produced an excellent race with *Panic*, on Middlesex, taking the early lead but they were gradually wound in, and then overtaken, by *Noise* who went on to win by just over 2 lengths. Catz Blue, Freddy Orpin rowed no.4 in the winning crew and the cox, William Dene-gri, briefly coached Catz women a few years ago while a student at Oxford Brookes.

Intriguingly, the OUBC President, Louis Corrigan, wasn't even in the A race; he coxed the losing *Peace* crew in the B race.

Perhaps to make up for missing out on all the 'character-forming' experience, the Oxford crews held their New Year's training camps on a wet and windy Tideway, while Cambridge jetted off to Italy and Portugal. Or maybe that's more to do with the current financial positions of the two clubs.

The November Fours Head is usually the first opportunity to assess the relative strengths of the Oxford and Cambridge squads, but that was cancelled due to the fast stream.

So attention turns to Quintin Head (20th January), at which the women and lightweights often make their first competitive appearance in VIIIs. But no, not this year, nor for Henley Fours & Eights Head next weekend (now cancelled anyway). It's almost as if the word has out gone for Boat Race crews to avoid being seen (and, in particular, timed) racing in open competition.

Which just leaves the private side-by-side fixtures. The first round of these was on 28th January and a

second, this past weekend, with just the Cambridge crews. These are usually carefully choreographed so that Oxford and Cambridge don't both race the same opposition too close together. However, Oxford Brookes women raced both Oxford in the first round and Cambridge in the second so now (hah!) we have our first indirect comparison. While Brookes were faster than either, right now the Oxford women will be feeling happier than Cambridge. (HN-S, I notice, was listed as rowing in the 4-seat of the Cambridge B crew in both sets of races).

No sign as yet of the Oxford men's crews, whose first fixtures are still a couple of weeks away. The probable Blue Boat will be racing Leander on 25th February (this will be Live Streamed — details on the Boat Race web-site).



Two days later Oxford's women conclude their business in very different circumstances. Photo by Benedict Tufnell (Row360).



Catz women getting down to business, boating for the IWL last weekend

Torpids?

Torpids is scheduled for Wed–Sat, 28th February until 2nd March, which is 7th week of term.

The Red Flag was up until the start of 3rd week. Then followed 12 days during which rowing was permitted under gradually easing restrictions, but more heavy rainfall from 5–8 February took us firmly back into Red Flag territory, with no change expected before the end of 5th week.

The temporary abatement allowed an IWL event scheduled for the end of 3rd week to go ahead, after which it was pretty clear that some colleges are, somehow, well-prepared while others, perhaps most, are definitely not (and credit to those who went out and raced anyway).

OURCs have already pre-emptively banned any novice coxes from taking part in Torpids. Given that anyone who started coxing this academic year won't have been allowed on the water since 21st October (the last 'non-Flag' day) that seems fair enough when coupled with relaxing the usual restrictions to allow experienced coxes to double up and swap between colleges (often at a price — definitely the winners in the ensuing free-market environment).

It's a pretty safe bet that Rowing On (scheduled for 23rd Feb) will be cancelled, not that Torpids was likely to be oversubscribed anyway.

There are various options for running Torpids under high stream conditions but that assumes most crews have had the best part of two terms to train, which is obviously not the case this time. There will be a Captains meeting on Thursday, 15th Feb at which they may decide to waive the usual 6-place penalty and allow individual colleges to make their own decisions whether or not to enter, or they might just decide to cancel the whole event.

Anyway, indulging in a temporary suspension of disbelief, below is the current starting order around our 1st Torpids.

Last year did not go well for Catz; the Men's 2nd and Women's 1st Torpids both lost 9 places, the Men's 1st 6 places, while the women's 2nd Torpid gained Catz' only bump of the week but still ended up down 1 place overall.

This year's men's boat club has even less experience to call upon, their only race so far being a scratch crew entered in the first IWL back in October. Merton and Hertford have been racing more regularly and both look to be on

good form. Wadham's only appearance, like Catz, was in the first IWL when they went 20 seconds quicker. New College have not yet been seen.

The women seem to have a bit more experience to call upon, although it also helps that they're now down in Division III. In last weekend's IWL Catz were quicker than the two crews ahead but slower than the two crews behind. In fact all 5 crews finished in reverse order with St Hilda's fastest and St Hugh's slowest. The first day could be exciting.

Torpids 2024

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

Men's Div I		Women's Div III	
1 Christ Church	+1	1 Wolfson II	−4
2 Wolfson	+2	2 Corpus Christi	−2
3 Oriol	−2	3 St Hugh's	+1
4 Pembroke	+3	4 Worcester	+3
5 University	+4	5 St Catherine's	−9
6 Keble	+4	6 St John's	−1
7 Balliol	−2	7 St Hilda's	+3
8 Merton	+3	8 Linacre	−7
9 St Catherine's	−6	9 Merton	−1
10 New College	+3	10 Queen's	+6
11 Wadham	−5	11 University II	+1
12 Hertford	+5	12 Worcester II	+7

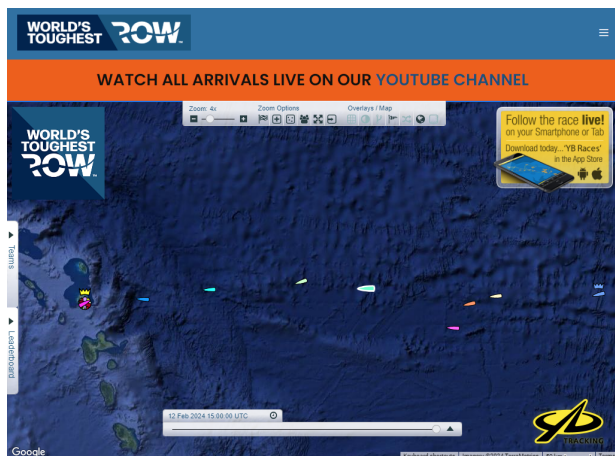
Christ Church, currently heading the men's divisions, haven't yet been seen while Wolfson have won all three IWLs. Oriol raced at Quintin Head but Pembroke were quicker.

The women's head crew, Univ, only had a IV in this term's IWL but 2nd place Pembroke and 3rd place Oriol have been racing more regularly, home and away, and will no doubt fancy their chances.

Atlantic Row

On 13th December a flotilla of 36 ocean-going rowing boats, varying from singles up to a five, set out from La Gomera in the Canaries to row 3000 miles across the Atlantic to Antigua.

Now, almost 2 months later, 29 boats have finished, one has abandoned, leaving 6 boats still to come in, including (currently in 33rd place) *Never2Late*, a double comprising our longstanding boatman, Jim Ronaldson, and Ian Davies.



(13th Feb) Current position of the remaining crews still in the Transatlantic Rowing Race. *Never2Late* is highlighted, fourth boat from home.

They had a bit of a shaky start, experiencing a 'knockdown' in the first week when the boat rolls past 90° before righting itself, during which the crew themselves take varying degrees of a battering. It took them about a week to recover from that and get moving again.

As the following posting from the event shows, that wasn't the end of their problems (remember all those times you've gone to Jim asking him to fix your rudder?)

Jan 11th

As previously posted Jim had a knee injury in the first phase of the race. This is now under control and limited to some occasional pain and fatigue, nothing to stop their journey. A few problems with their auto tiller caused some time on para anchor and if zoomed in on the YB map you will see them nicely scribing a figure of 8 during last night. Fortunately they manage to recalibrate the auto tiller and it's now working and continued progress away from La Gomera is now the case. The big sea and general conditions

might mean they will have to steer manually but let's see. The team has been advised to head south as much as possible to reduce the North and possible Westerly winds. they might end up catching up with Ian's daughter and son in law on board team *For Better Oar Worse!*

I gather a 'para anchor' is like an underwater parachute, which prevents the boat drifting when the wind is blowing in the wrong direction.

Since then, things seem to have gone more smoothly. They have indeed passed *For Better Oar Worse* and their estimated finish date (20th Feb) has remained constant to within \pm a day.

When he does make his way back to his workshop at Univ boathouse, I double he'll have much of a backlog by way of fixing damaged boats, but he's certainly going to notice something amiss.



Dear Jim,

When you get back from your holiday, could you please refloat the Univ pontoon. It seems to have beached itself during the floods and is currently sat across the towpath. Thanks.

Coming up ...

In the next newsletter there will be the Captains reports on the past term and a round-up of our University triallists.

Anu Dudhia

Diary

28 Feb – 2 Mar 2024	Torpids
2 Mar 2024	RS AGM & Dinner [tbc]
29 Mar 2024	Lwt & Vets Boat Races
30 Mar 2024	The Boat Races
22–25 May 2024	Eights