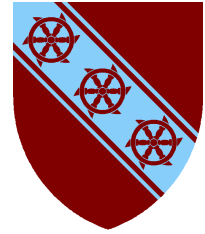




St Catherine's College Rowing Society
St Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ



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

29th March, 2026

In this issue . . .

Torpids was indeed cancelled, to no-one's great surprise. However, with falling river levels, OURCs decided to offer head race on the Saturday instead: 'TorpHeads'. It was basically the IWL format but with the added twist that racing would be in divisions based on the Torpids start order, but *definitely* no bumping allowed, is that clear!?! (difficult anyway since crews were set off approx 30 seconds apart but a couple did manage to overtake). The captains provide their reports on this and other activities during the term, and we take a closer look at the TorpHeads results for some idle speculation as to what might have happened if Torpids had run.

The Boat Races are now just a week away and I'll try to summarise what we know so far about the crews, make some poorly-informed predictions, and hope that I'm only half-right. One thing for certain is that for the second year running there will not be any Catz students participating. Not current students anyway.

Shortly after the last newsletter I received an email from Douglas Adams (who, I notice, also featured as a 'Legacy Luminary' in the latest edition of *Catz Eye*). I had presumed that the Dean got his way in naming a new shell in 1954, but Mr Adams points out that he most definitely did not, and the boat was duly named *Winnie the Pooh*. And so began the tradition, a full 5 years before *All Rabbits Friends and Relations*.

Results

TorpHeads, 7th March

69 crews raced

1st	4:23.0	Oriel M1	1st/35 M8
20th	5:03.0	St Catherine's M1	20th/35 M8
28th	5:14.0	Pembroke W1	1st/34 W8
43rd	5:42.0	St Catherine's W1	9th/34 W8

Men's Boat Club

Laurentius Heukamp, Men's Co-Captain

On the men's side, we reflect on a term marked by significant disruption yet considerable adaptation and progress.

With river restrictions on the Isis forcing us off the water for the entirety of Hilary, we quickly explored alternatives for water-training elsewhere. We were very lucky to be able to leverage our coach, Nigel Smith's, connections from his time at Reading. This meant we were able to train at Burghfield Sailing Club. The training proved invaluable as the Thames became unrowable throughout term both up- and downstream of Oxford. Burghfield was simple to reach for athletes and coaches via train, and provided a simpler and more cost-effective option compared to the likes of Gloucester, Dorney or Swindon. We trained there for a total of five weekends, conducting multiple sessions per trip.



Avoiding the floods, and home comforts. Women's and Men's VIII at Burghfield, west of Reading.



The men's 1st VIII landing after TorpHeads

This helped us further train our Novices who are developing into competent rowers under Orlando Williams' coaching. We were also conscious that a lack of water training has made Novice retention difficult in prior years, which made our commitment to training in Burghfield particularly important. Despite the lack of water training in Oxford, the Novices demonstrated resilience and commitment throughout the term, staying on the ball.

2026 St Catherine's Torpids

Men's 1st Torpid

B Phillip Siller
 2 Hugo Cooper
 3 Timothy Bage
 4 Finlay Thomas
 5 Robert Lennon
 6 Lucas Samson
 7 Benjamin Scholten
 S Laurentius Heukamp
 C Katie Maybin

Men's 2nd Torpid

B Julian Tilney
 2 Milo Halton
 3 Hyunmin Koo
 4 Lewis Holmes
 5 Albee Wilson
 6 William Molloy
 7 Nick Clarke
 S Samuel Harvey
 C Laurentius Heukamp

Men's Coach
 Nigel Smith
 Orlando Williams

Women's 1st Torpid

B Teresa Wood
 2 Jane Platt
 3 Julia Gartold
 4 Isabel Rafalin
 5 Sophia Waterson
 6 Ava Peralta
 7 Emma O'Donnell
 S Lucia Pyne
 C Rowan Nicholls

Women's 2nd Torpid

B Lara Botha*
 2 Alice Mangin-Griffiths
 3 Ella Nijkamp
 4 Edith Leedham
 5 Mary Oehler
 6 Sophie Simpson
 7 Edith Darin
 S Rosemary Ellis
 C [unnamed]

* also Lea Natanek

Women's Coach
 Rowan Nicholls

Given the amount of time and effort we put into training off the Isis, Sam and I were particularly saddened at the decision made by OURCs to cancel Torpids. Instead, 'TorpHeads', a time trial race on the Isis, was held. Although our performance here was not phenomenal, it was competitive and solid.

With our Novices now gaining even more water time in Bled, Sam and I are confident that they will be competing with the seniors on M1 seats. This will provide both the Seniors and Novices with the necessary motivation to maintain rigorous training standards, giving

us a positive outlook for Summer Eights.

Women's Boat Club

Lucia Pyne, Women's Co-Captain

My Michaelmas report naïvely read 'with the stream and weather on our side, Catz women made the most of the river time'. This term, with not a single day of rowable river conditions, the Isis geese have lived a largely undisturbed term on the river empty of college crews. However, I don't like to be negative, and although Catz women may not have been able to make the most of the river time, we did make the most of our new home, Burghfield Sailing Club, where for 5 Saturdays in a row, our crews raced up and down preparing for what we believed to be an exciting Torpids week. We worked hard doing double outings on each trip, speedrunning through technique drills and pieces in the surprisingly choppy lake (should we become a coastal rowing crew?). When we weren't taking early trains across Reading we were making the most of the gym and the ergs, novices and seniors alike saying things like 'at least we aren't out in that rain', knowing full well if it meant we could row we would love to be 'out in that rain'. I am extremely proud of the commitment shown by our rowers this term, keeping up with the lovely, supportive and determined atmosphere despite the non-lovely amount of 6:30 am ergs.

Then came Torpids week. Our 2 women's crews were eager to race, however, river conditions meant we could only race our W1 in a one-day Heads race replacement 'TorpHeads'. Ecstatic to be on the river for the first time, our W1's hard work paid off as we battled to 1st place in our division, overall placing 9/34, beating many crews in the divisions above us. We spent our final week of term trying out some new



Crews assembling before the start of Women's Div D of TorpHeads

sports, going for sunny runs and trying out Olympic weightlifting, giving us a good fitness base for our training camp and the eagerly anticipated Summer Eights next term!

TorpHeads

The TorpHeads time trial, while not quite matching bumps racing for levels of excitement, did at least settle some arguments.

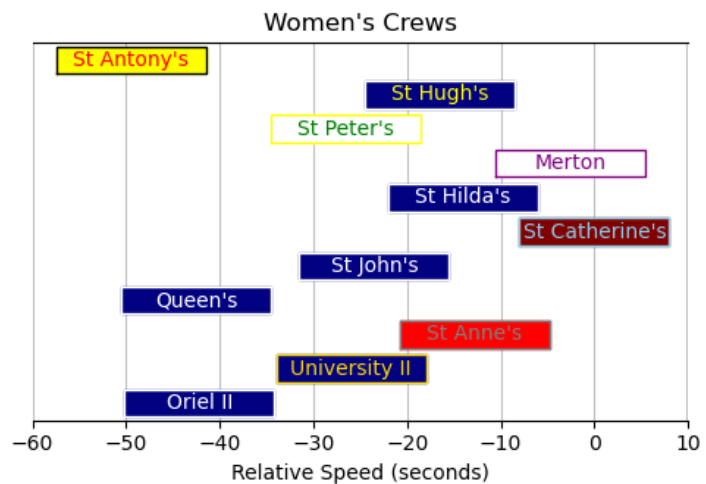
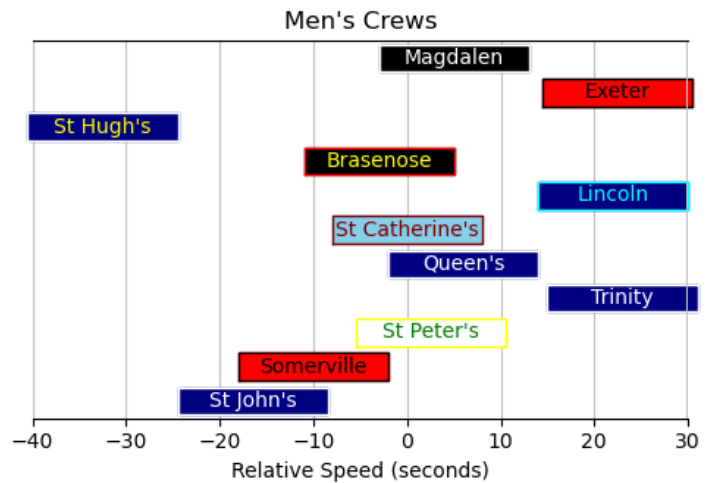
Oriel men were the fastest crew on the day, but they only beat Wolfson by 1.5s, not enough to regain the Headship. Hertford were 3rd fastest and can only dream of the happy times they would have had working their way up from the bottom of Div I.

No argument about the women's Headship, though. Pembroke, the head crew, were also the fastest in TorpHeads, 6.5s ahead of 3rd place Univ but 47s ahead of 2nd place Christ Church, who suffered the indignity of being overtaken (although definitely not *bumped*) by Univ.

We can also use the results for some informed speculation on how our own crews might have fared. Below are plots of the speeds of the crews that started around our 1st VIIIs (further to the right means faster). It should be noted that neither Worcester nor S.E.H., the two crews immediately behind the men's 1st Torpid, chose to race, and neither did Linacre or Wolfson II women, the crews 2 and 3 places behind the women's 1st Torpid.

This suggests that the men were very much in the middle of the local pack. Taking 5s difference as the minimum required for a bump, it seems that even if Catz men managed to evade Queen's over the week they would almost certainly have been caught by Trinity by the second day. If they kept their heads they might have limited their losses 1 or 2 places but with a chance of a bump on St Hugh's later in the week.

The women were the fastest boat in their locale and looked well set up for a successful week: probably bumping St Hilda's on the first day, St Peter's on the 2nd and St Antony's at some point (I've had to add 30 seconds to St Antony's speed just to keep them on the same plot). But let's not get ahead of ourselves; time trials are no substitute for actual bumps racing.





The women's 1st VIII after TorpHeads

University Crews

There's less than a week to go, so just time for one final round-up.

Cambridge women raced in the Women's Eights Head on 14th March. Their top boat finished 6th (they were 3rd last year), only just ahead of the Molesey 2nd VIII. On the other hand the Cambridge reserve crew, Blondie, comfortably beat a Molesey crew in their private fixture last weekend.

Cambridge men don't seem to have raced in any timed event this term but, according to their website (*so much more informative than Oxford's*) they beat Leander in a side-by-side fixture last week. Leander, not necessarily the same Leander, won yesterday's Head of the River Race. A Cambridge University crew finished 14th in the HORR but apparently this was just their development squad (!).

Oxford's only public outings against a stopwatch were a fortnight ago in the Netherlands at the Heineken Cup. It's a complicated format with racing over 250, 750, 2500 and 5000 m. Oxford women won the Elite event, beating Dutch crews. They beat Leander last weekend in a private fixture, Leander (with the usual caveats) having won the Women's Eights Head the previous weekend, 25 s ahead of Cambridge.

Oxford men came 2nd in the Heineken, beaten only by the Dutch national squad. They also beat Thames A by about 11 s over 5 km. Since Thames also raced in yesterday's HORR (finishing 5th), Oxford's time would have placed them 3rd, 15 s behind Leander and 6 s behind Brookes.

So putting all that together, I'm going to say: Cambridge men and Oxford women. And looking at the commercial betting sites . . . that also seems to be their professional opinion, although with Cambridge men rather more nailed-on for the win than I would have supposed.

Just to remind you: Cambridge have won the last 3 men's Boat Races by an average of 3¹/₂ lengths and the last 8 women's races by an average of 5¹/₂ lengths. With 6 (student) races each year, Oxford's only victory in the past three years was when Osiris beat Blondie in in 2024.

This year's races are being televised (in the UK) by Channel 4 instead of the BBC. A touch ironic since the newly-designated DG of the BBC is himself an ex-Cambridge Blue. Triple-Blue actually, although — checking the records — I note that he lost on all three occasions (those were the days) so maybe he's not so keen on the event after all. Given the understandable, but slightly toe-curling, efforts by the BBC to make the whole event more 'relatable' (is that the right word?) it is with some trepidation we await Channel 4's offering.

Coming up . . .

I seem to have run out of space to include an account of Catz first appearance in Torpids 1876. Something for the next newsletter then, along with details of the 150th Anniversary dinner that is being organised for next term. There will also be results of the Boat Races — I'm aware that my wish, expressed at the start of this newsletter, to be only 'half-right' in my predictions can be fulfilled in two, very distinct ways. I'm also hoping for at least a postcard's worth of reporting from the Boat Club training camp on Lake Bled, in Slovenia. A bit fancy, I know, but after a term of having to commute to Reading every Saturday to get any rowing done, they've earned it.

Diary

3 Apr 2026	Lwt & Vet Boat Races
4 Apr 2026	The Boat Races
26 Apr 2026	City Bumps
27–30 May 2026	Eights

Anu Dudhia