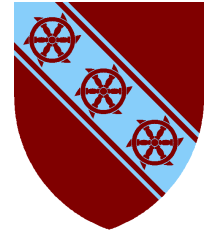




St Catherine's College Rowing Society
St Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ



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

10th December, 2023

In this issue . . .

The Red Flag was up throughout November, forcing the cancellation of Autumn Fours and the Michaelmas Novice (formerly Christ Church) Regatta. The river was partially open in 8th week, allowing a second IWL event to be held under fast stream conditions, but with most crews not having been on the water for a month, there weren't many takers (and none from Catz). The Captains report on the mostly off-water activities.

While filling in historical details, it struck me as a bit odd that R W Bonham, the no. 2 in our 1928 Eight, was listed as coming from The Worcester College for the Blind. Although he won a blade that year, having also trialled for OUBC, it turns out that rowing wasn't even his main diversion from academic work.

The Oxford Trial VIII's races take place next Friday. Crew lists aren't yet published but we have two OUBC triallists this year who may or may not feature.

Finally, as we wish a wet and not particularly fond farewell to 2023, there's news of someone who'll be spending the New Year in sunshine and warmth. Yet I, for one, shall remain eternally grateful not to have been persuaded to join in that particular project.



The men's squad training in the Iffley Rd Rowing tank

Results

Isis Winter League A, 29th October

56 crews raced

1st	4:42.0	Wolfson A	1st/18 M8
15th	5:41.5	Mansfield A	1st/19 W8
17th	5:46.0	St Catherine's A	15th/18 M8
30th	6:06.5	St Catherine's A	9th/19 W8

Men's Boat Club

James Farmborough, Men's Co-Captain

With only a handful of seniors returning to the boat club this Michaelmas, and after a great recruitment push from the committee, we were excited to end week 1 with an influx of enthusiastic novices.



James Farmborough

We managed to get one more week of water training in before the persistent rain caught up with us, and the flag turned red at the end of week 2. Unfortunately, the river remained closed for the best part of the following 5 weeks, with only a brief hiatus for us to race in IWL A before it swiftly closed again.

We kept training, despite the river closure, making full use of the tank, erg room and Catz gym.

Our hard work was finally rewarded with an eighth week river re-opening, and one final water session to send us into the winter vacation — which we will spend wishing the rain away from next term!



The women's VIII racing in IWL-A earlier this term

Women's Boat Club

Emma Halliday, Women's Co-Captain

The Women's squad were happy to welcome some new seniors this year which helped us have a strong block of training to start off the season.

Leading up to our first race, we had seen some good improvements

and had gained confidence as a crew, producing a competitive IWL A time. However, our productive training on the water was halted due to a long period of heavy rain. So, for the second half of term our training consisted of many strength and erg sessions, including a tough 5 k test for the seniors.

Our novice women have showed eagerness despite their limited time on water and are looking forward to putting their tank sessions to use on the water next term.



Emma Halliday

Finally, Longbridges Ergatta was a welcome opportunity to race at the end of term, where the novice women did well to reach the semi-finals against some strong crews. We are excited for Hilary and are hoping for a little less bad weather!



The women's novice team at the Longbridges Ergatta. Rachel Craig-McFeeley (M.16), centre, is helping out with the novice coaching this term.

This year Catz women continue to be coached by Rowan Nicholls and the men by former paralympic oarsman Laurence Whiteley, MBE.



The 1926 St Catherine's Torpid. Back row, left to right: W. Kristianson (2), C. L. Goss (4), **R. W. Bonham** (3), W. J. Pienaar (bow); Middle: B. P. Foss (6), D. B. Durand (str), [unknown coach], C. L. Blom (7), R. I. Redfern (5); Seated front: S. G. Timms (cox)

R W Bonham MBE (1906–1984)

Reginald Walter Bonham, known as 'Bon', was born in St Neots, 1906 to a family of butchers. Like others in his family, he was born visually impaired and, at the age of 16, was sent to Worcester College for the Blind (now New College Worcester). There, with the encouragement of the Headmaster, G C Brown, he developed a talent for both chess and rowing.

He came up to Oxford in 1926 to read mathematics as a member of the St Catherine's Society, the association for students without a college affiliation.

He rowed in the St Catherine's 1st VIII from 1926–1928, winning blades in 1928, and also trialed for OUBC in Michaelmas 1927. Rowing apart, he was a regular member of the Oxford University Chess Club, becoming the University champion in 1929.

After Oxford he returned to Worcester College as a teacher of mathematics and braille, coached the rowing and developed further interests in amateur dramatics and bridge. But chess was his real passion and, under his leadership, Worcester College had four teams in the local and county leagues, while he himself won the county championships twenty times and was four times Midland champion.

In 1951 he founded the first correspondence chess championship for the blind as well as the International Braille Chess Association.

In 1956 became the first winner of the English Blind Chess Championship, and in 1958 the Blind World Chess Champion. He was also the Correspondence Blind World Champion numerous times from 1957–66.

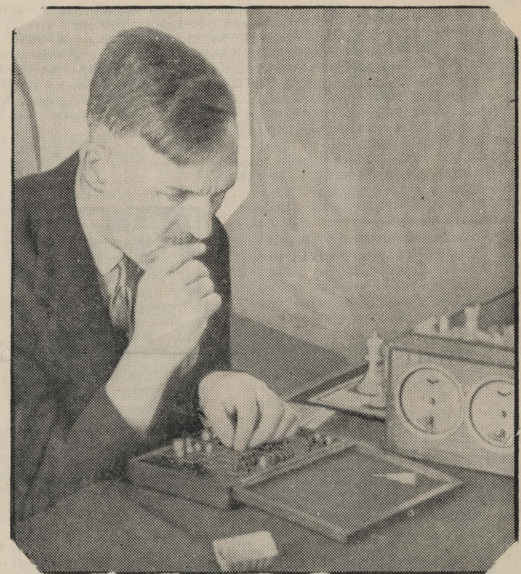
According to ancientpages.com, 'Bonham's memory was phenomenal. He had no difficulty taking on ten players at once blindfold, as it was, and he could keep the moves of a score of correspondence games in his head with recourse to a board and men'.

In 1975 the *Daily Telegraph* chess correspondent, B H Wood, wrote 'Of all the blind players, R. W. Bonham of Worcester was, to my mind, in his day, supreme. Merely poor-sighted in his youth, he slowly went blind during his twenties but had by then already become a strong player and, with security as a teacher, with a devoted wife and soon a family, unquestionably improved. For some twenty years he dominated Worcestershire chess, leading the county in

hundreds of matches and eventually becoming recognised as the best blindfold player in the world.'

He retired from teaching in 1970 and that year was also awarded an MBE for 'Services to the blind'. He died, aged 78, in Worcester on 16th March 1984.

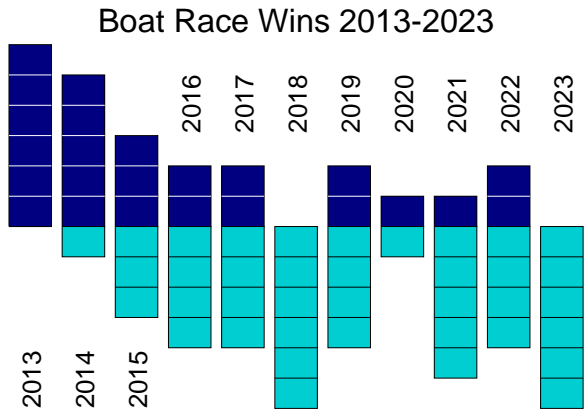
Midland Champion at Felixstowe



Blind competitor R. W. Bonham in play in the British Championship. He is using a Braille set.

[Photo by courtesy of "Birmingham Gazette"]

Photograph of R Bonham from the British Chess News web-site. The caption reads: Blind competitor R. W. Bonham in play in the British Championship. He is using a Braille set. (Photo by courtesy of "Birmingham Gazette").



Wins in the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Races over the past 11 years. In 2020 only the lightweights raced, just prior to the Covid lockdown.

University Crews

These are tough times for the Dark Blues. Cambridge have won 26 out of the last 32 (student) Boat Races and the only successful Oxford woman of the 2020's is Catz' own Cici Hong, who coxed the men's lightweights in 2021.

In the hope of turning things around, the four Oxford clubs have now followed the Cambridge model and merged into a single entity, although in practice the men's and women's squads still operate independently. With the lightweights now included, they've both been running four eights this term.

The Tideway Fours head, scheduled for 5th November, would usually have been an early opportunity to compare the strengths of the Oxford and Cambridge squads. Unfortunately it was cancelled, another casualty of a stream that was considered dangerously fast even by Tideway standards. However, I couldn't help notice that while Cambridge had entered 17 crews (10 men's, 7 women's), Oxford only entered 6 women's boats, the men choosing to focus on training in VIIs. Hmm.

The Oxford Trial VIIs races are scheduled for 15th December and can be followed live on-line via the Boat Race web-site. Just a men's race and a women's race, presumably the top halves of each squad and so probably excluding almost all the lightweights (the same for Cambridge, whose races are on the 13th).

There are two OUBC triallists from St Catherine's. Freddy Orpin, now in his 3rd year, was in last year's Blue Boat so barring illness or injury I'd expect him to feature in the Trial VIIs race on Friday. The other is Luca Nadig, newly-arrived on a Master's course. He used to be a lightweight in Switzerland but may well have a heavyweight appetite these days.



Jim Ronaldson (left) and Ian Davies.
Photo from worldstoughstrow.com

Atlantic Row

In last May's newsletter I mentioned that our long-standing boatman Jim Ronaldson had got this mad idea in his head to participate in the annual transatlantic rowing race. That's all suddenly got very real and his pair, *Never2Late*, will be part of a fleet of 38 boats, ranging from singles to a 'five', setting off from the Canaries next Wednesday 13th December. They're aiming to arrive in Antigua, 4800 km away, after ... well, maybe a couple of months? With an average age of 65 they'd also be the oldest pair to complete the race (and you were planning, what, golf?)

There's a livetracker on the web-site (worldstoughstrow.com) so you can follow their progress from the comfort of your own Christmas.

Coming up ...

In the next newsletter there will be a round up of the University crews and prospects for Torpids. With very little water time this term, the lower divisions could be spectacular (and not in a good way). Let's just hope our boatman is back from his adventures by then.

I wish you a drier, although not necessarily dry, January. And favourable trade winds for those that could use them.

Anu Dudhia

Diary

15 Dec 2023	Trial VIIs Races
28 Feb – 2 Mar 2024	Torpids
2 Mar 2024	RS AGM & Dinner [tbc]
30 Mar 2024	The Boat Races
22–25 May 2024	Eights