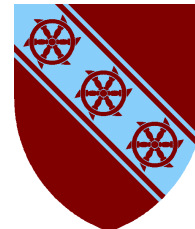




St Catherine's College Rowing Society
St Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ

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



3rd November, 2024

In this issue ...

The announcement of the end of British Summer Time last weekend will have raised eyebrows from those still waiting for the summer to actually start. September was the wettest month — any month — in Oxford since 1774, and the river remained on Red Flag for most of October while that all washed through.

Any freshers coming up to Oxford inspired by GB's rowing success at the Paris Olympics and hoping to jump straight into a boat will instead have found themselves sat on an ergometer, made to undertake a swim test and, at best, giving the water of the Iffley Rd rowing tank a vigorous stirring with an oar blade full of holes.



Acknowledging the lack of experience of most coxes following a year of almost continual flooding, OURCs now offers some very literal guidance at the start of IWL races.



RQ (yep, still going strong) getting racing underway in today's IWL.

On the other hand, now that novices are finally allowed on the water, the delay may have been beneficial in weeding out those who just wanted a selfie in a boat for their Instagram (I'm pretending I know what some of these words mean). Novice rowers, that is. Anyone wanting to try coxing will have to wait until the river drops further.

We're now at the end of 3rd week and today was the first of the intercollege events, IWL-A. However, with barely a week of water time there weren't many entries, and none from Catz, so no results to report.

Instead we take a historical diversion and look at the events of 100 years ago. While St Catherine's could not compete with Balliol in terms of hereditary celebrity, two of our oarsmen went on to distinguish themselves through their own efforts.

And finally the annual review. Last year, presenting the 2022/23 review, I think I might have implied 'things could only get better'. Well, about that ...

100 Years Ago

The UK started 1924 under its first ever Labour government, led by Ramsay MacDonald. However, possibly aided by the Zinoviev letter hoax, the Conservatives were back in power by November. King George V had been on the throne for 14 years (with another 12 to go).

St Catherine's Magazine, MT1924

We were obliged to abandon the idea of coming up a fortnight early, but we got in a week if training before term. Subsequently we scrapped the old ship and got into a streamlined craft, the identical boat that had won the Ladies' Plate [at Henley] last year. We achieved nothing but in a year remarkable for its man shortages we have checked the downward precipitation.

St Catherine's Magazine, HT1925

When Virgil 'came up' in the Michaelmas term, presumably in the year of the Great Frost, he was so struck by the spirit of abandon with which Oxford throws itself into the chief business of the first term of the year that he wrote:

*Natos ad flumina primum
deferimus, sævoque gelu duramus et undis*¹

We still keep up this tradition. As three out of five 'Eights' men were suffering from Schools we could not hold the sliding seat pair races which are occasional. So we gave those newly born to Oxford life our undivided attention. Two old Togger [Torpids] men were happily available to help us. At first the freshers were rather disappointing. Those who did not fail to turn up seemed oversensitive about disturbing the water. This was aggravated by our inadvertently dropping two men in the river and so completely upsetting their 'aqua'-librium.

The Daily Telegraph, Thu 19 Feb 1925

The Torpid races commence at Oxford to-day, the Third Division starting at half-past two [...]. The Crown Prince of Norway is rowing in the Balliol II crew, and the Emir Zeid [future head of the Royal House of Iraq] in their third.

The Times, Fri 20 Feb 1925

The Oxford University Torpid Races were begun yesterday between Ifley and Salter's Barge. Considering the unfavourable weather, there was quite a good attendance of spectators. The boats competing number 36 and the races are rowed in three divisions. The river is almost bank high and the current, against

which the crews had to contend the entire distance, was very strong. There was some exciting racing and in the three divisions ten bumps were made.

In Torpids St Catherine's gained 4 places (in 6 days' racing), finishing 27th. In Summer Eights they again made 4 bumps, finishing 25th, top of Div III.

The Times, Mon 25 May 1925

Some mention should be made of the St. Catherine's crew, who are quite easily the best in the Third Division, and are likely to reach the Second Division, a position which they have not occupied for very many years, if at all [actually 1923]. They bumped a good Brasenose II crew, containing three school eights men, and are rowing in a manner in which one rarely sees displayed so low on the river.

St Catherine's Magazine, MT1925

Our first eight was an experiment. Two of its component parts had never rowed on slides previously. However, the experiment succeeded and gave rise to others. During the following two weeks we tried no fewer than nine combinations.

Our first Weir's Bridge [timed piece to a towpath bridge, close to the present Donnington Bridge] took alarmingly long. But this stimulated the old Togger feeling. In one day we reduced our time by $5\frac{1}{2}$ seconds. We also rowed the course in 6 min 56 seconds, the first recorded time that St Cath's have done it under 7 mins, 0 seconds. The actual races were similar to Togggers. We made four bumps and should have made more.

I have found further information on two members of the 1925 St Catherine's Eight

George Peel Gilmour (1900–1963) (no.3 in the 1925 Torpid and Eight). He studied at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, followed by post-graduate work at Yale and Oxford. Returning to McMaster as a history professor, he served as Chancellor from 1941–49 and then President until 1961. He was named Citizen of the Year by the City of Hamilton in 1950, and collected a further 8 honorary degrees.

Joseph T Weingold (1904–1987) (no.4 in the 1925 Eight, and no.3 the following year). 'Jerry' was born in New York City and received a Bachelor's degree in literature from Oxford followed by a law degree from Columbia. He practised law from 1929–1950. As the father of a son with Down's syndrome, he became President of the NYC chapter of the Association for the Help of Retarded Children (nowadays just 'AHRC') and remained a strong advocate for the rights of those with intellectual disabilities, eventually forcing a change in US legislation.

¹'We send our children to the river, and temper them with ice and waves' (Virgil, *Aeneid*, ix.603).

2023–24 Review

Rain was a bit of a theme during 2023/24, with persistent river restrictions leaving few opportunities for on-the-water training, especially for novices. A novice cox in particular — only allowed under ‘Green Flag’ conditions — would have had a maximum of only two days on the Isis between the end of 2nd week of Michaelmas and the 3rd week of Trinity.

Flag Days during Full Term 22/24

Flag	MT22	HT23	TT23	MT23	HT24	TT24
Red	4	10	0	25	44	0
≥ Amber	7	12	0	30	48	1
≥ Blue	10	14	3	35	50	10
≥ L.Blue	15	19	6	45	56	14
Green	41	37	50	11	0	42
Total	56	56	56	56	56	56

Michaelmas Term had started normally enough. Our senior rowers competed in the first IWL race of the season, which demonstrated how much training would be required if they were to become competitive in bumps. Then it started raining, leading to the cancellation of Autumn Fours, Nephthys and the Michaelmas Novice Regattas. The flow eased-off just enough for one more IWL to be held at the start of 8th week, but this attracted few entries (and none from Catz).

The new year brought flooding to the attention of the wider Oxford public when the river spilled across the Abingdon Rd, for the first time in 10 years. The Boat Club joined with several others for a day-trip to Dorney Lake but then it was back to land-training. There was a brief respite at the start of February during which IWL-D was scheduled. Catz women managed to get a crew together although the results showed that, if anything, they had lost ground to the other crews.

Fastest Catz VIIIs in IWL Races

Date	Event	Men		Women	
		Pos	Time	Pos	Time
<i>2022–23</i>					
5th Feb	IWL-D	9th	+33.0 s	5th	+19.5 s
30th Apr	ISL-A	3rd	+16.5 s	8th	+21.5 s
<i>2023–24</i>					
20th Oct	IWL-A	15th	+64.0 s	9th	+25.0 s
4th Feb	IWL-D			18th	+37.0 s
28th Apr	ISL-A	11th	+56.5 s	12th	+49.5 s

‘Time’ is difference from winning time

Best performance 2022–24 shown in bold

Then the rain returned, enough to make it the wettest Oxford February on record and inevitably, also to some relief in certain quarters, Torpids was cancelled a full week before it was due to start.

It wasn’t just Oxford affected by the rain — there was enough stream to render even the Tideway unsafe, with Fours Head (Nov’23) cancelled and the Women’s Eights Head (March’24) run with a heavily pruned field.

There were two Catz students in the December Trial VIIIs races, one heavyweight and one lightweight (plus an alumna in the Cambridge races). One was selected for Isis and the other for the lightweight crew, but both lost their races against Cambridge. Oxford had been favourites for the heavyweight races but ended up only winning the Osiris-Blondie race (although that was an improvement considering Cambridge’s clean sweep the previous year). The flooding took some of the blame; for restricting Oxford’s training and a suggestion that illness within the OUBC squad may have been due to the resulting poor water quality.

Moving onto Trinity Term, the stream was still high, but rowable and a scratch Men’s/alumni VIII entered City Bumps at the start of term, even registering a couple of bumps. The regular 1st Eights entered ISL a week later, although those results were less reassuring.

A novice men’s 2nd Eight was added bringing the Catz entry for Summer Eights up to three crews, but still our lowest entry since the single-sex days of 1973. Eights did not go well: both men’s boats were bumped every day and the women on 3 days. The men’s 1st Eight lost their place in the 1st Division, where they had been since 2017, and are now at their lowest position since 1998.

Catz Crews: Current Positions (& highest–lowest positions, 2015–2024)

	Men		Women	
	2024	Range	2024	Range
<i>Torpids positions carried over from 2023</i>				
1st Torpid	9th	(3–9)	29th	(8– 29)
2nd Torpid	42nd	(33–47)	64th	(48– 64)
3rd Torpid			—	(60–63)
1st Eight	16th	(9– 16)	22nd	(14–24)
2nd Eight	48th	(42–49)	66th	(51–74)
3rd Eight	—	(56–89)	—	(75–79)
4th Eight	—	(88–91)		

Overall, then, a year to forget. Although, hopefully, not before the causes of the poor performance have been identified and corrected.

College Standings

The table below shows the change in positions of the college boat clubs since last year based on assigning points for each crew according to their positions on the river in Eights and Torpids on an exponential scale (so more points are gained for moving up places in the top division than the bottom). As Torpids were not run in 2024, the only changes arise from the Eights results.

College Standings and Points					
2023			2024		
1	Christ Church	394	Christ Church	385	
2	Oriel	382	Wolfson	380	
3	Wolfson	380	Oriel	366	
4	University	346	University	357	
5	Pembroke	335	Pembroke	344	
6	Keble	305	Keble	300	
7	Wadham	266	Wadham	275	
8	S.E.H.	260	Magdalen	245	
9	Magdalen	250	Balliol	244	
10	Balliol	240	S.E.H.	241	
11	New College	224	New College	236	
12	Jesus	201	Lincoln	190	
13	Lincoln	193	Jesus	189	
14	St Catherine's	182	Hertford	170	
15	Hertford	179	Trinity	165	
16	L.M.H.	167	L.M.H.	164	
17	Trinity	165	St Catherine's	157	
18	G.T.C.	145	Merton	152	
19	Exeter	140	G.T.C.	148	
20	Merton	137	Exeter	140	
21	Brasenose	134	St John's	137	
22	St John's	125	Brasenose	131	
23	St Hugh's	123	St Hugh's	125	
24	Linacre	122	Linacre	124	
25	St Peter's	113	Worcester	122	
26	Worcester	111	St Peter's	115	
27	Queen's	110	Mansfield	112	
28	Mansfield	110	Queen's	105	
29	Somerville	99	Somerville	94	
30	St Anne's	96	St Anne's	90	
31	Corpus Christi	77	St Antony's	72	
32	St Antony's	75	Corpus Christi	69	
33	St Hilda's	58	St Hilda's	65	
34	Osler House	31	Osler House	28	
35	Regent's Park	27	Regent's Park	23	
36	St Benet's Hall	15	Reuben	17	

St Catherine's drop from 14th down to 17th, which is where we were in 2015 (that being a low point, having dropped from 11th the previous year). We're currently just below L.M.H. and ahead of Merton.

Our men's 1st VIII will be starting both Torpids and Eights next year chasing Merton, and the women's 1st Eight will be chasing L.M.H., but with Merton directly behind.

Christ Church remain top, with Headships in Men's Torpids and Women's Torpids, and 2nd on the river in Men's Eights. While Oriel held the men's Eights headship, their women's 1st Eight went down 4 so, as a college, Wolfson overtake them and move up to 2nd. A common feature of these top three colleges is the total number of crews in Torpids and Eights: Wolfson have 15, Oriel 12 and Christ Church 11. Catz by contrast have 7.

St Benet's Hall having now been wound up, their position on the river (along with some of their equipment and rowers) are taken by the new graduate college, Reuben.

Coming up ...

In the next issue we will have the Captains' reports on the term's rowing or, given recent form, rowing-related but land-based activities. There should also be results from the first match-up of the Oxford and Cambridge squads at the Fours Head, a chance to see how the new OUBC management structure is bedding down. If there's insufficient current activity to fill the space I'll review the events of 75 years ago (1949/50). Oxford University will also have announced our new Chancellor (did you register to vote?).



Crews at the finish of today's IWL.

Diary

27–30 Nov 2024	Tamesis (Novice) Regatta
26 Feb – 1 Mar 2025	Torpids
1 Mar 2025	RS AGM & Dinner [tbc]
13 Apr 2025	The Boat Races
28–31 May 2025	Eights

Anu Dudhia