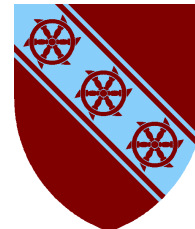




St Catherine's College Rowing Society
St Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ

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



27th December, 2024

In this issue ...

Apologies for this newsletter being a couple of week late. I mentioned in the last edition (beginning of 4th week) that the river had finally opened for the first time since the record-breaking deluge of 23rd September, and OURCs had just run the first of the Isis Winter League races, but without any Catz entries.

There were no Catz crews in Autumn Fours the following weekend either, but at least the novices got to enjoy some water time. I say 'enjoy' although that did involve some early morning rowing in the snow — a bit of a novelty these days. It produced some viral footage of foxes playing around in Magdalen quad, but was rather less appealing for those who had to get themselves down to the boathouse before sunrise.

Then, at the end of 6th week, came Storm Bert which (who?) pushed the Isis back up to Red Flag and the resulting cancellation of the Tamesis (formerly Christ Church) Novice Regatta and IWL-B. Thus a term passes without a single Catz oar being pulled in anger. The Captains provide their reports.



The fog lifts to reveal the Isis encroaching on Christ Church Meadow.

It's been a wet couple of years in Oxford. Rainfall for the 12 months up to the end of November was 988 mm, 50% above the annual average.

You'll have seen that the Oxford alumni (possibly including you) have elected ourselves a new Chancellor — not the Catz candidate but Mr Mandelson seems to have rapidly found alternative employment as the UK ambassador in Washington. You'll probably also be aware that the College has a new Master, Jude Kelly CBE, who will take over in April next year. Less well known is that her daughter, the poet Caroline Bird, studied at Catz from 2007–2011 (although she never rowed as far as I can tell). What I *failed* to notice was a former Catz student, very much into rowing, featuring in the King's Birthday Honours over the summer. Also, I recently received an email from an alumnus starting 'We don't know each other ...', as if someone would forget the person who first introduced them rowing.



Anyway, even if the floods hadn't got you on this particular morning (28 Nov) the fog would have.



How we like to portray early morning outings ... [Photo: Ben Beggs]

Men's Boat Club

Ben Beggs, Men's Co-Captain

It's been a great term for Catz men, as we've had a successful recruitment drive which has helped us expand our squad significantly, which has been lacking in senior numbers. We've had over twenty new starters, who've been committed throughout the term despite the weather. The enthusiasm and improvements in skill from all of the novices has been great to watch and is a credit to our new coaching team of Sydney Rose and James Duckitt.

Whilst the weather has been far from ideal, we started the term with a lot of tank sessions, and managed to complete learn-to-row water sessions for all of the novices by the time the conditions worsened again in November. Once getting some erg practice under our belts, we had a great evening doing 1 k tests with the whole squad, which was a great learning and team bonding experience. Coxing has been a particular challenge for us this term (the challenge being: we don't have any!) but James has been great for this, and we've started the training of some new keen coxes.

The cancellation of the Novice Regatta and IWL was disappointing at the end of term, as we had some really promising Novice and Senior/Novice crews prepared for these.

In spite of this, [co-captain] Hugo Cooper, Sydney, James and I are all confident that we're off to a great start, and that when term resumes after Christmas we can keep building on this and will have some strong crews for Torpids and Summer Eights.



Ben Beggs, Men's Co-Captain



...and maybe we'll downplay the risk of mornings like this [Photo: Valentina Antonaccio]

This was done in two waves. For the first wave of taster sessions, we carried out tank sessions, while for the second wave the weather allowed us to have a water session. We only have 5 returning seniors, given that many of last year's squad graduated.

Right now, we have around 20 rowers which allowed us to sign up one boat for the Novices' Regatta and two boats for IWL. We were very disappointed when these got cancelled due to bad weather conditions, as everyone had been really committed to water sessions and erg sessions throughout the term. However, as Ben says, coxing is still an issue, and [coach] Rowan has taken up much of that load while we train two new ones. But the weather conditions have jeopardised our plans on this end. However, we are happy with the progress everyone has made, and managed also to get novices to complete all learn-to-row water sessions. We are very excited to go back to training next term to start working towards Torpids.

Women's Boat Club

Valentina Antonaccio, Women's Captain

It has also been a great term for Catz Women, with a successful recruitment drive, which has helped expand the squad.



Valentina Antonaccio
Women's Captain



Fun times upstairs in the boathouse [Photo: Ben Beggs]

University Crews

The high winds associated with Storm Bert also forced the cancellation of the Tideway Fours Head on November 24th (for the second year running — last year it was high stream). That also meant no chance to compare the strengths of the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race squads. However, I note that there were 12 Oxford boats entered (5 men + 7 women) compared to Cambridge's 4 (2+2). Also, while 6 of the Oxford boats were in the 'Championship' (i.e., top) category (3+3), none of the Cambridge boats were. Unfortunately I think all we can read into that is that the top end of the CUBC squad had other plans for that weekend, so even if the Fours Head had been run it would not have yielded much information.

Also noticeable was the complete absence of any Oxford or Cambridge college crews. This I suspect is a result of the new entry criteria which favour higher quality crews and limit the number per institution, rather than those who can press the 'submit' button fastest as soon as entries open.

I'm not aware of any Catz participants in Oxford (or Cambridge!) squads this year, or at least none that shows up on the OUBC squad web-pages.

Alumni News

Jon Wilmhurst (M.76, Geology)

Jon was the Captain of Boats when I arrived. He'd disappeared off our radar after going down but last month I received an email from him out of the blue. I've been living in Minnesota USA with my family for over thirty years and am still active in the mining industry. Ironically, I'm basically a professional coach for youngsters at this point in my career having been in management for decades.

Helen Barnes (M.96 Mod Hist. & Lang.)

Helen coxed the men's 1st VIII, rowed in the women's 1st VIII and later for the women's lightweights.

From the UK official Gazette, 15 June 2024:

Deputy Development Director Ukraine, British Embassy Kyiv Awarded an O.B.E. for services to International Development.

From eecpoland.eu, Feb 2024:

Helen leads the team responsible for the UK's development and stabilisation programming in Ukraine. She has worked for the UK government since 2012, primarily as a governance and accountability specialist on programming ranging from support to grass-roots paralegal volunteers to criminal justice sector reform. Prior to joining government she worked for International NGOs for over a decade, focusing her

efforts on democracy, human rights and civil society resilience. Helen has spent extended periods living with her family in countries as diverse as South Africa, Tanzania, Pakistan and now Warsaw. She has a BA in History and Spanish, and an MPhil in Latin American Studies, both from the University of Oxford.

Coming Up ...

In the next issue there will be a preview of Torpids, maybe even results from Catz' first race of the season (if IWL-C goes ahead on 26 Jan), updates on the University crews and a look back at the Boat Club of 1949/50, 75 years on. Also a decision as to whether or not we'll be able to resume the Rowing Society Dinners (last year's was cancelled due to the RAAC issues with the Dining Hall).

Diary

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



A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our readers. [Photo: Valentina Antonaccio]