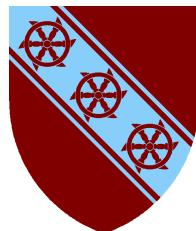


St Catherine's College Rowing Society
St Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ



President: Colin Smith

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

15th November, 2025

In this issue ...

Had I produced this newsletter, as intended, a couple of weeks ago (sorry — busy, busy, busy), I would have painted you an idyllic scene of happy novices frolicking on an almost still, leaf-flecked river against a background of rich autumnal colours.

Yesterday, however, storm Claudia arrived and dumped half-a-month's rainfall in 12 hours, so we've jumped straight to Amber Flag (amber and red being the traditional autumnal flag colours as well) and the river is an empty, grey torrent just trying to get to London as soon as possible. I'm hoping that's just a temporary blip and we'll resume Green Flag (and ongoing local hosepipe ban) early next week.

But so far we've had the first round of the IWL races (only Catz women came out to play) and an Autumn Fours regatta that attracted so many entries (67, though none from Catz) that the finals had to be raced in near darkness. Oriel's top crews don't normally condescend to race on the Isis in anything except the bumps, but they entered, and won, both men's and women's VIIIs in the IWL and also the men's Autumn Fours. Wolfson — whose men's VIII usually dominates the IWL races, were strangely absent. I mention in passing that Wolfson men currently hold the headship in both Torpids and Eights while Oriel are second in both.

St Catherine's Boat Club first appeared on the river in 1876 so we're now starting our sesquicentennial (yes, that is the proper word) anniversary. To give you an idea of the world into which we emerged to take our first strokes, I'll be including a series of short articles throughout the year tracking the events of 150 years ago. Further plans will be announced in due course but the first item of business (and this is from the current Boat Club rather than the Rowing Society) seems to have been to commission a 150th anniversary tie.

Although, before we get too carried away with the celebrations, perhaps a moment of quiet reflection as we review the events of the past year, and mourn all those places that were sadly taken from us.

Results

Isis Winter League A, 2nd November

92 crews raced

| | | | |
|------|--------|--------------------------|------------|
| 1st | 4:12.0 | Oriel MA | 1st/25 M8 |
| 22nd | 4:56.0 | Oriel WA | 1st/22 W8 |
| 62nd | 5:39.5 | St Catherine's WA | 16th/22 W8 |



Suits you sir? If you're interested in ordering a 150th anniversary tie see the link sent along with the newsletter.



The women's VIII racing in IWL-A

150 Years Ago

In 1868 the first 18 students had been admitted to the University under the auspices of a 'Delegacy' rather than attached to any college. By 1874 they had self-organised into 'St Catharine's Club' taking, the name from their meeting place, St Catherine's Hall (now part of Hertford College), and from this emerged a Music Society, the Dean Kitchin Society and a Boat Club.

In August 1875, Matthew Webb had become the first man to swim the English Channel, in September Joseph Bazalgette finally completed the construction of the London sewer system, and in November *The Times* revealed that Disraeli had negotiated the purchase of Egypt's share of the Suez Canal, but had omitted to mention this to Parliament.

In sporting news, football clubs had recently been established at Birmingham and Blackburn, bringing the number of present day English football league clubs up to 11. Oxford had won the Boat Race by 10 lengths, ending Cambridge's run of six successive victories.

Overseas, the first shots in the Perak War (Malaysia) had been fired in November when the locals objected to British Imperialist expansion and abolitionist tendencies. Elsewhere, our American cousins under President Ulysses S Grant were pre-occupied with the Indian Wars. Recently the Sioux had refused to sell the land on which gold had recently been discovered, so Lt Col Custer and the 7th Cavalry were soon to be dispatched to press the US Government's case more forcefully.

Such was world into which the first oarsmen calling themselves St Catherine's Boat Club pushed off their raft. To be continued

2024–25 Review

The academic year started with the river in flood (September 23rd 2024 was the wettest day ever recorded in Oxford, in records going back 250 years) and the river remained closed until 3rd week. There was a brief interpluvium, but storm Bert arrived at the end of 6th week, wiping out the Novice Regatta for the second successive year. Although a sparsely attended IWL race was run at the start of 8th week, the entire term passed without a single Catz blade being pulled in any competition. More significantly, it meant that Catz were now running very low on experienced rowers.

Flag Days during Full Term 2022–25

| Flag | MT23 | HT24 | TT24 | MT24 | HT25 | TT25 |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Red | 25 | 44 | 0 | 28 | 15 | 0 |
| ≥ Amber | 30 | 48 | 1 | 32 | 21 | 0 |
| ≥ Blue | 35 | 50 | 10 | 38 | 26 | 0 |
| ≥ L.Blue | 45 | 56 | 14 | 42 | 42 | 0 |
| Green | 11 | 0 | 42 | 14 | 14 | 56 |
| Total | 56 | 56 | 56 | 56 | 56 | 56 |

Hilary Term 2025 also had its interruptions but allowed some much-needed water time. Eventually, exactly half way through the academic year, Catz crews finally got in their first race, in an IWL time-trial. For the men, almost a minute and a half slower than the fastest crew, it also became clear that they were a long way off the pace required to maintain their position in Div I.

A week before Torpids we were at Green Flag and Rowing On races were held, with the women's 2nd

Torpid qualifying comfortably and set to make their first appearance since 2023. However we were back to Red Flag for the start of Torpids and it was decided to race only the top crews in half-divisions, which meant just our 1st Torpids.

The men's 1st Torpid dropped 8 places in the first three days of racing but were saved by a swan-induced klaxon on the last day, although not before S.E.H. had run across their stern.

The more experienced women's 1st Torpid, rowing in their new shell *Hunting for a Woozle* fared better, gaining three bumps — their first since 2022 — although a crab on the Friday meant they also got bumped twice.

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 |
| <i>2024–25</i> | | | | | |
| 9th Feb | IWL-D | 24th | +85.5 s | 14th | +47.5 s |
| 4th May | ISL-A | 21st | +50.5 s | 3rd | +7.0 s |

‘Time’ is difference from winning time

Best performance 2022–25 shown in bold

As soon as term had finished, some members of the Boat Club headed off to Slovenia for a photogenic training camp on Lake Bled, and a chance to warm up and dry out.

In the Boat Races Cambridge handed Oxford another thrashing, winning all 6 races. None of the Oxford men's crews finished within 4 L of their opposition, a harsh introduction for their new coach. At least no Catz students were harmed in the process.

It stopped raining immediately after Torpids and we ended up with the driest March on record, and the warm sunny weather was to continue.

As commonly happens when racing opportunities have been limited, OURCs ran a one-off ‘Isis Spring League’ time-trial at the end of 3rd week of Trinity Term. The men's 1st Eight were still a long way off the pace but the women finished 3rd, their best result since 2021.

Both men's crews got spoons in Eights but, following their ISL result, it was particularly disappointing that the women's 1st Eight also got bumped every

day. It was left to the women's 2nd Eight to provide our only success, bumping on three days, but a steering error on the Thursday led to them getting over-bumped, so they finished level. Catz finished Eights with a net loss of 12 places, the worst result of all 35 colleges.

Catz Crews: Current Positions (& highest–lowest positions, 2016–2025)

| | Men | | Women | |
|------------|------|---------|-------|---------|
| | 2025 | Range | 2025 | Range |
| 1st Torpid | 19th | (3–19) | 28th | (8–29) |
| 2nd Torpid | 41st | (33–47) | 58th | (48–64) |
| 1st Eight | 20th | (9–20) | 26th | (14–26) |
| 2nd Eight | 52nd | (42–52) | 64th | (55–74) |

In summary, another disappointing year. The men's 1st VIII are at their lowest position since the 1980s and the women 1st VIII at their lowest position ever in Eights, and just one place above that in Torpids.



A numerically-depleted Men's 1st Torpid returning to the boathouse following their klaxonized race on the Saturday.

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).

The Torpids scores take account of the positions of all the crews from the lower divisions which did not actually race.

Osler House didn't race in 2025 but have residual positions in the finishing order from last year.

College Standings and Points

| | | 2024 | 2025 |
|----|-----------------------|------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Christ Church | 385 | Wolfson |
| 2 | Wolfson | 380 | Pembroke |
| 3 | Oriel | 366 | University |
| 4 | University | 357 | Oriel |
| 5 | Pembroke | 344 | Christ Church |
| 6 | Keble | 300 | Keble |
| 7 | Wadham | 275 | Wadham |
| 8 | Magdalen | 245 | New College |
| 9 | Balliol | 244 | Balliol |
| 10 | S.E.H. | 241 | Magdalen |
| 11 | New College | 236 | Hertford |
| 12 | Lincoln | 190 | S.E.H. |
| 13 | Jesus | 189 | Lincoln |
| 14 | Hertford | 170 | Jesus |
| 15 | Trinity | 165 | Merton |
| 16 | L.M.H. | 164 | Exeter |
| 17 | St Catherine's | 157 | Trinity |
| 18 | Merton | 152 | G.T.C. |
| 19 | G.T.C. | 148 | Worcester |
| 20 | Exeter | 140 | L.M.H. |
| 21 | St John's | 137 | Brasenose |
| 22 | Brasenose | 131 | St Hugh's |
| 23 | St Hugh's | 125 | St John's |
| 24 | Linacre | 124 | St Catherine's |
| 25 | Worcester | 122 | St Peter's |
| 26 | St Peter's | 115 | Linacre |
| 27 | Mansfield | 112 | Somerville |
| 28 | Queen's | 105 | Queen's |
| 29 | Somerville | 94 | Mansfield |
| 30 | St Anne's | 90 | St Hilda's |
| 31 | St Antony's | 72 | St Anne's |
| 32 | Corpus Christi | 69 | St Antony's |
| 33 | St Hilda's | 65 | Corpus Christi |
| 34 | Osler House | 28 | Reuben |
| 35 | Regent's Park | 23 | Regent's Park |
| 36 | Reuben | 17 | Osler House |

St Catherine's drop from 17th down to 24th, continuing a steady decline since the heady heights of 9th in 2022. We are now just behind St John's and ahead of St Peter's. Our men's 1st VIII are not near crews from either college, but next year the Women's 1st Torpid will start immediately ahead of St John's and the 1st Eight immediately behind St Peter's.

Wolfson replace Christ Church at the top, having taken the men's headship in both Torpids and Eights this year, while Christ Church lost both the Men's Torpids and Women's Eights Headships. Pembroke also had a good year, taking the women's double Headship while their men's 1st boat lie 3rd in both Torpids and Eights.

News of Alumni

I don't normally hear much from students who continue to row after graduation (mainly because no one tells me anything) but someone drew my attention to the efforts of **Jamie Woodford** (2018–22), who's been rowing for Thames since he went down, and this summer was in the bow seat of the coxed four which won the Britannia Cup at Henley.

Isabel Berwick (1985–88), working for the Financial Times, popped up on the radio over the summer and I note she's recently given a Catz webinar on 'How To Get Ahead At Work (Without Burning Out)'. Change 'work' to 'rowing' and I think that's pretty much everyone's race plan.

A couple more rowing alumnae are scheduled for the 'Catz in Conversation' series of talks; **Cynthia Grover** (1978–81) on 'Teaching English: Creating Accents' (3rd Dec) and **Linda Geaves** (2011–15) on the impact of technology on the evolution of human cognition (11th Dec).

Finally, and aware that career-wise the focus is very much on alumnae rather than alumni, earlier this week I heard **Jana Bakunina** (2000–02) on Radio 4 discussing her new book, *The Good Russian*.

Coming up ...

River permitting, in the remaining weeks of term we have the Lion & Chough Regatta (replacing Nephthys), Tamesis Regatta (replacing Christ Church) and IWL-B so hopefully the Captains' reports will actually contain some competitive element.

There will be a round-up of news of the Boat Race crews, including an analysis of today's Tideway Fours Head results, and whether any Catz trialists were involved.

I'll bring stone-cold-off-the-press news of events at the end of 1875 (spoiler alert: the Wimbledon All England Croquet Club is about to embrace a new sport, but no it isn't going to be football), and any further details on how we plan to mark our 150th Anniversary.

Diary

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| 21–22 Nov 2025 | Lion & Chough Regatta |
| 26–29 Nov 2025 | Tamesis (Novice) Regatta |
| 30 Nov 2025 | IWL-B |
| 4–7 Mar 2026 | Torpids |
| 7 Mar 2026 | RS AGM & Dinner [tbc] |
| 4 Apr 2026 | The Boat Races |
| 27–30 May 2026 | Eights |

Anu Dudhia