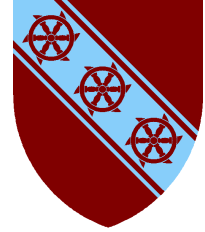




*St Catherine's College Rowing Society*  
*St Catherine's College, Oxford OX1 3UJ*



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

5th May, 2024

**In this issue . . .**

The river level has been dropping since the last newsletter although so far this term we've been oscillating between light and dark blue (the former 'blue flag' nowadays being subdivided).

The Boat Races, on the other hand, stubbornly refuse to oscillate and once again the light blues dominated, although Oxford did pick up one win this year (albeit, from a Catz perspective, probably the one we least wanted). We have to rely on our alumni in the veterans' boat race to remind us of how things used to be.

There has already been some early racing on the Isis. A scratch Catz men's VIII, including some recent alumni, entered City Bumps — like Torpids but with 4 days' racing compressed into one — and near approximations to both our 1st Eights racing last weekend in an impromptu Isis Summer League.

The ISL results in particular also provide some insight as we peer into the murky waters in which our 1st Eights hope to be able to swim come Summer Eights (22–25 May).

Listening to the radio, I overheard a familiar name in connection with sand dunes and, sure enough, it was indeed the same Catz oarsman I remember from a millennium ago. The recent *St Catherine's Year*, however, provided less welcome news of three of his near contemporaries.



Catz men's 1st VIII happy to reach the Head of the River . . . pub, in the marshalling area after completing the ISL.

**Results**

**The Boat Races, 29/30th March**

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<i>Women's Lightweight</i>				
Cambridge	bt	Oxford	5 L	23:04
<i>Men's Lightweight</i>				
Cambridge	bt	Oxford <sup>1</sup>	5 1/2 L	20:15
<i>Women's Reserves</i>				
Osiris	bt	Blondie <sup>2</sup>	5 L	ntt
<i>Men's Reserves</i>				
Goldie	bt	Isis <sup>3</sup>	4 L	ntt
<i>Women's Boat Race</i>				
Cambridge	bt	Oxford	7 L	21:01
<i>Men's Boat Race</i>				
Cambridge	bt	Oxford	3 1/2 L	18:56

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<sup>1</sup> Luca Nadig at 6

<sup>2</sup> Helen Nielsen-Scott (M.20) at 3

<sup>3</sup> Freddy Orpin at 4

**Veterans' Boat Races, 29th March**

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<i>Men's Veterans</i>				
Oxford*	bt	Cambridge	2.5 s	
<i>Women's Veterans</i>				
Oxford	=	Cambridge	dead heat	

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\* Colin Smith (M.03) at 2  
 Ante Kusurin (M.06) at Str.

**City Bumps, 21st April**

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<i>21 Men's Vllls raced in 2 divisions</i>				
R1	1st Div II	bpd by Worcester	-1	
R2	2nd Div II	bpd Univ B	+1	
	11th Div I	rowed over	=	
R3	1st Div II	rowed over	=	
	11th Div I	bpd Wallingford	+1	
R4	10th Div I	rowed over	=	

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**Isis Summer League, 28th April**

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<i>68 crews raced</i>				
1st	4:17.5	Wolfson A	1st/31	M8
11th	5:14.0	St Catz A	11th/31	M8
22nd	5:36.5	Mansfield A	1st/23	W8
47th	6:26.0	St Catz A	12th/23	W8

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The Oxford Men's Veteran crew. Photo from BigBlade.

## The Boat Races

I think the headmaster character played by John Cleese in the 1986 film *Clockwise* sums it up best:

‘It’s not the despair ... I can take the despair. It’s the hope that I can’t stand.’

The Oxford crews had been flooded out of their Wallingford base for much of the year and had to travel to Caversham or the Tideway to get water time. Cambridge had no such problems, having had the foresight to bring over a bunch of Dutch engineers back in the 17th century to sort out their drainage. Yet, in spite of this, Oxford went into both the men’s and women’s Boat Races as favourites.

In the women’s race, Oxford took an early lead and had stretched this out to almost a length by Hammersmith Bridge, to no great surprise. But then it seemed the weight of institutional disappointment began to take its toll and Cambridge, on the inside of the Surrey band, started to pull back and just rowed through Oxford. One should not read too much into the 7 length verdict, most of that must surely represent the state-of-mind of the Oxford women once they realised that, in spite of everything, it still wasn’t going to be their year.

In the men’s race, Oxford lacked the spark shown in their match races and, having struggled to stay in contention for the first few minutes, eventually had to let Cambridge slip away.

In the post-race interviews it emerged that several of the Oxford men’s crew had been ill, with polluted river water the likely suspect. That, and the fact that the winning crews had been warned against throwing their coxes into the river after the races has at least served to highlight the state of the Thames. The winter flooding led to regular sewage overflows and

British Rowing is one of several water-sports governing bodies now pushing for action on this.

Isis and both lightweight crews also lost (Freddy Orpin was in Isis, Luca Nadig in the men’s lightweights). The one glimmer of hope came from the women’s reserve boat, Osiris, registering their first win over Blondie since 2015 and, indeed, the only win by any Oxford women’s boat in the last 5 years. Unfortunately, from Catz’ viewpoint,

that also meant our alumna Helen Nielsen-Scott, in the Blondie crew, lost out to her older sister, stroking Osiris.

A couple of Catz alumni also took part in the Veterans’ Boat Race held, for obvious reasons, over a shorter course. Ante Kusurin (M.06) was at stroke and Colin Smith (M.03) at 2, according to the Boat Race web-site (although I’d have to say that’s not how it looks in the photo). The Oxford men, with an average age of 43, beat Cambridge (av. 47) by 2.5 s while the women’s race was declared a dead heat. However, since the average age of the Oxford women was 48 against 46 for Cambridge, I would interpret that as ‘a dead heat to Oxford, by 2 years’. The women’s vets race has only been going for a few years, but Catz alumnae are yet to take part (the Oxford women’s ages varied from 40–56, and I know there are 5 ex-OUWBC/Osiris/Lightweight Catz alumnae who fit into that age bracket).

After the dust (silt?) had settled, Sean Bowden, the OUBC coach for the past 27 years, announced that he is stepping down and moves are now afoot to find a replacement (The OUWBC head coach, Allan French, is generally well-regarded but has only been in post for a year). The OUBC management has also been undergoing something of a reorganisation. I note the new Treasurer is Catz alumnus, ex-OUBC cox (and rapid Parkrunner) Nick Brodie (M.04).

With the merger, the floods and coaching changes at the top it’s been a turbulent year for OUBC, but not without encouraging signs. They were favourites for this year’s Boat Races with good reason. Next year’s races will probably be determined mostly just by who gets the best post-Olympic athletes, so it may be 2026 before we can really see how the new Oxford structure is panning out.



Catz in close (but unsuccessful) pursuit of Worcester in the last round of City Bumps.

### Trinity Term 2024

The Boat Club didn't run their usual Easter training camp this year so most Catz rowers have started the term with just a handful of outings since last October. The same will be true for many other colleges, although for Catz the problem is exacerbated by having very few returners from the previous year as well.

#### Eights 2024

Starting positions of Catz 1st Eights and last year's changes in position

Men's Div I		Women's Div II	
7 S.E.H.	+1	1 St John's	+3
8 Magdalen	+2	2 New College	-4
9 University	+2	3 G.T.C.	+2
10 Wadham	-4	4 Hertford	-4
11 L.M.H.	+3	5 Lincoln	+2
12 <b>St Catherine's</b>	-3	6 Trinity	+4
Men's Div II		7 <b>St Catherine's</b>	
1 Jesus	=	8 Exeter	+5
2 New College	+1	9 Linacre	-3
3 Hertford	+3	10 Mansfield	+2
4 Trinity	-4	11 L.M.H.	-2
5 Lincoln	+2	12 Somerville	-4

The men's 1st Eight start at the foot of Division I, meaning that they will be chased by the sandwich boat which, given that Jesus men don't appear to have raced in an VIII all year, will probably be New College. I also expect Hertford to be quick since they've managed to keep 2 men's VIIIs training, and

racing, throughout the year. Starting ahead of Catz are L.M.H. who, like Jesus, also seem not to have raced this year. Ahead of L.M.H. are Wadham, who competed in City Bumps. That's them ahead of Worcester in the photo (Worcester went on to bump them). Wadham had also entered Bedford Regatta next weekend, but have now scratched.

The women's 1st Eight have the luxury of starting mid-division which, barring overbumps, should at least allow them to fix their timetables for the week. Unfortunately, most of the crews around Catz filled the top slots in the ISL, Mansfield being the quickest (5:37) (they've actually won all 3

IWL/ISL races that they've entered this year), followed by Linacre (5:48), Lincoln (5:50), Exeter (5:54) and Hertford (5:58). Catz only managed 6:26, so it's clear how much more speed they'll need to find in order to be competitive in Eights. The one crew missing from ISL were Trinity, starting immediately ahead of Catz. They've only raced as a IV in IWL-B last Michaelmas Term, but they've entered an VIII at Bedford next weekend so they must have got their act together.

Apart from the 1st Eights, there will probably be a Catz men's 2nd Eight consisting of novices (hopefully undertaking a crash-course in rowing at we speak) and possibly a women's 2nd Eight consisting of anyone who can be persuaded, so that may well depend on whether or not summer finally reaches Oxford in the next week or so.

Eights will be from Wednesday 22nd until Saturday 25th May. Racing will be from 12:15 until 6:45 Wed-Fri, and everything moved forwards an hour on the Saturday. In the spirit of equality, and rationality, these days there are seven men's divisions and seven women's divisions, racing every 30 minutes and alternating each year, so that this time it will be Women's Div VII racing first, and Men's Div I last. The standing rule that anyone can choose *not* to enter fixed-division crews for Eights, at the cost of a 4-place penalty in the finishing order, and I'm expecting a lot of captains to take that option. Last Eights (a 'normal' year), there were only 7 more entries than places available, so I'd be surprised if Rowing On this year serves any useful purpose other than proof of life.



Catz women racing in the Isis Summer League last weekend.

## Alumni News

**Geoff Duller** (M.84) who, during his time at Catz commonly went by the soubriquet ‘Death Sculler’, is nowadays Professor Duller of the Dept. of Geography and Earth Sciences at the University of Aberystwyth. He made the BBC news in early March for his work on establishing the age of large star dunes (specifically one in Morocco, 13000 years old), using his speciality technique of luminescence dating. Climbing these dunes is hard work, he’s quoted as saying: ‘As you climb, you go up two and slide back one.’ Or perhaps he was thinking back to his bumps racing days.

## Obituaries

When you reach a certain age you expect to see a few familiar names in the obituaries section of the *St Catherine’s Year*. That’s just how life works. This year’s issue, however, included three names well before their time:

**Simon Aspinall** 5th–1st VIII 1988–90.

**Jennifer Charles** 1st VIII 1986 and 1988.

**Andy Rushton** 2nd/3rd VIII 1993–96.

I coached all of them.

## Coming up ...

Jim the Boatman, and his dog, are back in his workshop; that beached pontoon outside the Univ boathouse has been refloated; and spring is working its magic with the vegetation soaking up the ground water. Even Farmoor Reservoir, which serves Oxford, is reported as being below its usual level for this time of year (although I think may be more to do with the magical thinking of privatised utilities than the natural cycle of the seasons).

Therefore I feel I can state, with a reasonable degree of confidence, that Eights *will* go ahead; furthermore, that the lower divisions will be a sight to behold, and that there will be klaxoning aplenty. In the next newsletter we’ll have photos, results and reports.

I hope to maintain the Racedesk Live web-page throughout Eights (examination duties permitting) and I’ll be sending out the usual evening reports to everyone on the RS email list.

Anu Dudhia

## Diary

19 May 2024 Rowing On  
22–25 May 2024 Eights