



THE NOVICE GUIDE TO ROWING AT ORIEL

OCBC *Handbook* 2026-27





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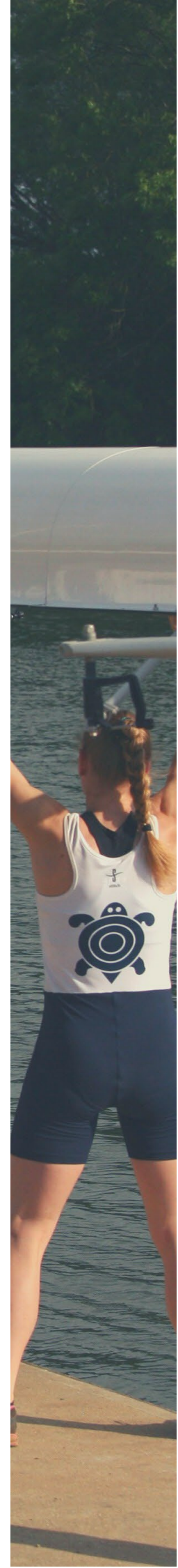
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GLOSSARY



The Committee

The boat club is organised and run by a committee of 2nd years and above, with the Vice-Captains responsible for novice rowing at Oriel. If you have any questions or would like to find out more, please get in touch with any of us - our contact details can be found on the Boat Club website: <https://www.orielrowing.org/>



Thomas Bisatt
Men's Captain



Emma Kate Price
Women's Captain



Kyle Ferguson
Men's Vice-Captain



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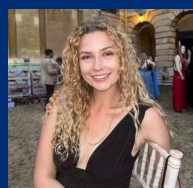
Ana Jones
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Olivia Elder
Senior Member



Ben Mackenzie
Men's Head Coach



Harry Selwyn-Smith
Women's Head Coach

The History of Rowing at Oriel



Bumps racing at Oxford is reckoned to have begun a few weeks before the Battle of Waterloo in the summer of 1815 when crews from Brasenose and Jesus colleges raced up the final leg of the Isis from Iffley Lock, with Brasenose emerging victorious as “Head of the Rivier”. Oriel likely first fielded crews in these races sometime in 1825 or 1826 (and certainly in 1828) and, consequently, has been participating in bumps racing now for some 200 years!

Oriel’s mighty contribution to both Summer VIIIs and Torpids began early on with the College claiming headship in Torpids in 1839 and in Summer VIIIs in 1842. Since then, Oriel has claimed a total of 37 headships in Summer VIIIs and 39 headships in Torpids – including double headships in 2006 and 2018, and an extraordinary period where the Oriel Men’s First VIII went undefeated in Torpids from 1972 until 1998!

Beyond its historical dominance in bumps racing, Oriel has also made a number of technological contributions to the college rowing at Oxford (including the first deployment of outriggers on its boats in 1844) and counts a number of British rowing champions and international Olympic medalists amongst its past members, including Chris Mahoney, Michael Wherley, Tom Mackintosh, Liam Corrigan and Nicholas Rusher.

This rich history of rowing at Oriel flows through to our club today and you will have the opportunity to make your own contribution by participating actively in the boat club!



How Can I Get Involved?

At Oriel there's rowing for everyone, whether you want to train seriously or just row socially and enjoy the events off the water. Most people learn to row while at Oriel so don't worry if you don't have any previous experience! There is also no fee to join OCBC so you can come give it a try at any point throughout the year.

Weekly Training Schedule

Generally, the top men's and women's boat will each train daily, with an off day each week. For example, a typical weekly schedule might look something like...



Monday -- Evening erg/weights

Tuesday -- Morning outing

Wednesday -- Evening erg/weights

Thursday -- Morning outing

Friday -- OFF

Saturday -- Outing

Sunday -- Outing

This is by no means a schedule that everyone who rows will follow! As explained further below, novices and lower boats will typically train 1-4 times per week, depending on the commitment level you want to choose.

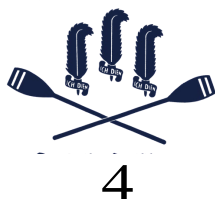
MYTH: You have to be tall to row

...at the Olympics, maybe, but at the college level there are successful rowers of all sizes. Coxing is another way to get involved, too, as coxswains are often small!

MYTH: You have to wake up at 5AM every day

The top boats do have a couple early morning outings per week, but other crews train at other times so how many early mornings you want to do is entirely up to you.

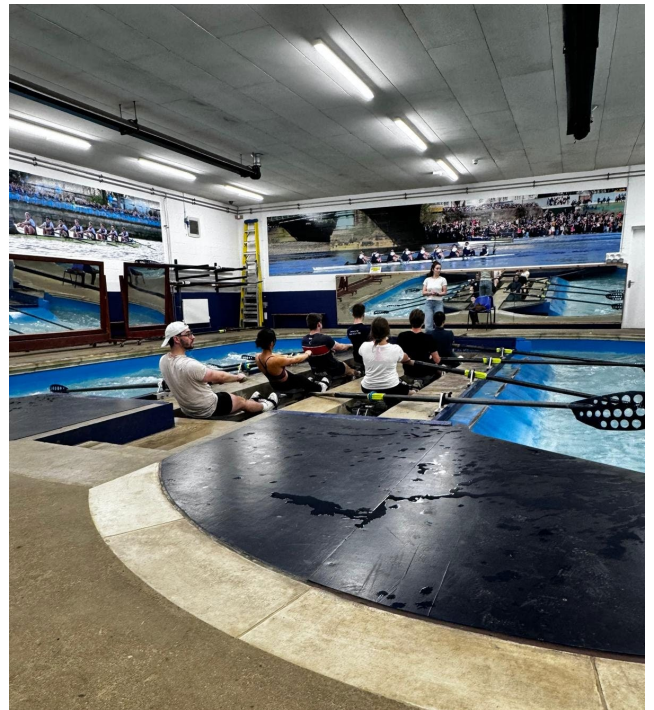
To get involved at any point during the year, contact the captains or vice-captains!



Novice Training

Starting your rowing journey at Oriel presents you with terrific opportunities to learn to row alongside your peers and form firm friendships as a member of one of Oxford's most storied sporting clubs. The training schedule for lower boats (M2, W2, M3, and W3) is generally somewhat lighter than the top boats, with 2-4 land sessions on the erg and another 2-3 sessions on the water or in the tank each week.

At the outset, you will need to attend a swim test as soon as practicable in order to participate in water sessions on the Isis. A number of early sessions as a novice rower will be held in the specially-designed indoor rowing facility known as 'the tank'. Both your swim test and tank sessions are held at the Iffley Road Sports Centre.



Once you have completed this orientation, you will be able to participate in regular outings on the river and train to join crews in the novice regatta towards the end of Michaelmas Term!

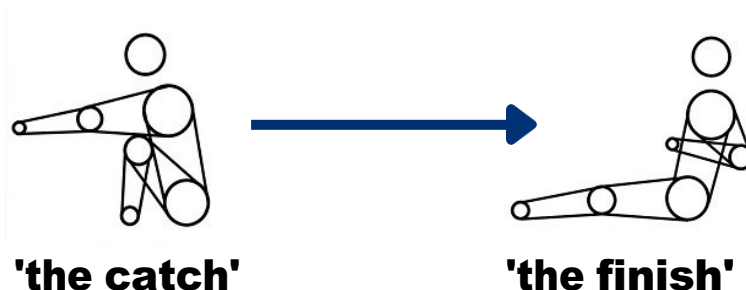


Basics of Rowing

The Boat & Crew



The Rowing Stroke



There is a 3 step sequence to get from the catch position to the finish position--this is called **the drive**:

1. straighten your legs while keeping the same angle with your upper body
2. tilt your body back from an 11AM clock position to a 1PM clock position
3. pull your arms into your chest

Reverse this process to get from the finish back to the catch--this is called **the recovery**



Racing

College rowing is centred around two main racing events: **Torpids**, which takes place during 7th week of Hilary Term and **Summer Vills**, which takes place during the 5th week of Trinity Term. Both events are hugely popular for both rowers and non-rowers alike, with hundreds of spectators gathering by the boathouses to watch the races and enjoy a BBQ and drinks. There are four days of racing for each (Wed-Sat) and on the final day rowers are invited to a tradition-filled dinner in Hall to celebrate the week's



Head of the River celebrations



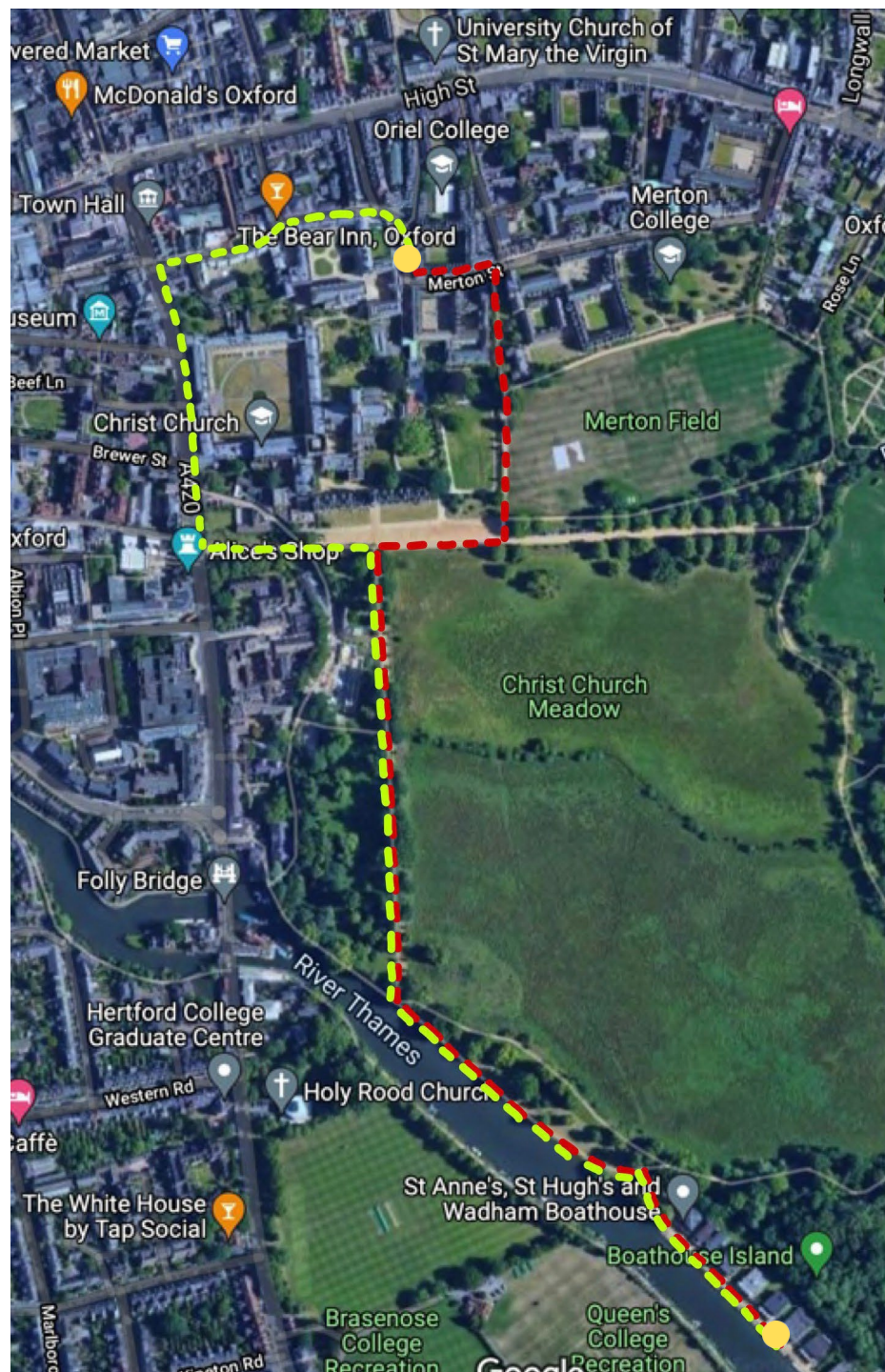
Bumps

Torpids and Summer Eights are both bumps style races, meaning that boats race in a single file line as opposed to side by side. Crews line up along the river with 1.5 boat-lengths of water in between each boat and a cannon firing signals the start of the race. The aim is to catch up to, or physically 'bump' the boat in front of you without getting caught by the boat behind. The crew that ends up first in Division I by the end of the four days of racing wins 'headship' and earns the title 'Head of the River' (a feat which Oriel has managed a number of times in recent years)!



Map to the Boathouse

The boathouse is about a 15 minute walk away from the main college site. There will be people around to help walk you down for your first few outings so you don't get lost, but these are the directions for reference.



If Christchurch Meadow Gates are open (RED LINE):

1. Turn left out of the lodge, then left onto Merton street
2. Turn right onto Merton Grove and pass through the gate into Christchurch Meadow
3. Continue straight on and then turn right, keeping Christchurch on your right
4. Turn left onto Poplar Walk
5. Turn left at the river, along Christchurch Meadow Walk
6. Turn right and go over the bridge onto Boathouse Island
7. Oriel Boathouse is the 6th boathouse, on the left

If Christchurch Meadow Gates are shut (GREEN LINE):

1. Head straight out of the lodge and along Bear Lane
2. Turn left onto St Aldate's, passing Tom Tower
3. Turn left into Christchurch Meadow via the St Aldate's gate
4. Turn right onto Poplar walk and follow from step 5 above



Calendar

Below is a rough guide to the main rowing and social events each term (some dates are subject to change).

Michaelmas Term (MT)

- 0th Week Freshers Week! Lookout for
- 1st/2nd Week freshers events Coxswain briefings
- 4th Week Wyndhams
- 7th Week Novice Regatta
- 8th Week Fairbairn Cup, Cambridge
(novices and seniors)

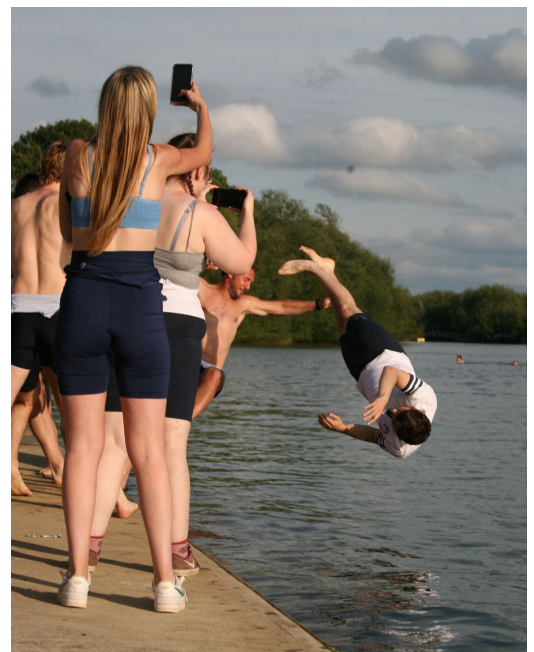


Hilary Term (HT)

- 1st Week Training Camp (for committed members)
- 4th Week Coxing and Marshalling briefings
- 7th Week **TORPIDS!!**

Trinity Term (TT)

- 3rd Week Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race (London)
- 1st Week Training Camp (for committed members)
Next Year's Captaincy Applications
- 5th Week **SUMMER EIGHTS!!**
Elis White Trophy awarded to the "Most Improved Novice"
- 6th Week Next Year's Committee Applications
- 7th Week **ORIEL REGATTA**
- 10th Week Henley Royal Regatta



External Racing

In addition to the novice regatta, Torpids, and Summer VIIIs, there are also a number of opportunities for intervarsity rowing throughout the year.

The Fairbairn Cup

The Fairbairn Cup is a head race organised by Jesus College Boat Club (Cambridge) and raced on the River Cam in the ninth week of Michaelmas term. The annual race honours the legacy of one of British rowing's most influential figures, Stephen Fairbairn.

The 2025 races will take place at the beginning of December, on two consecutive days with the first day for novices, followed by seniors on the second day.

Fairbairn was an Australian oarsman and coach who made his way to Cambridge University, had an enormous influence on college rowing through Jesus College, Cambridge (as both an oarsman and coach), and founded the Head of the River Race on the Thames in 1926. His enduring coaching maxim was "mileage makes champions", so sign up and put in some miles at Fairbairns on the path to champion glory!



Nanchang Regatta

In the summer months after Trinity Term, there is also the opportunity for selected rowers from the OCBC to travel to China to participate in the Nanchang Masters & Prestigious Universities Invitational Regatta.

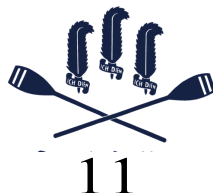
This is an outstanding opportunity to bask in the sunshine, race with an outstanding array of other rowers, and even get some sightseeing in!



OURCs Rules

In order to keep our rivers safe, the guiding committee of OURCs (Oxford University Rowing Clubs) have rules on when rowing is allowed and who is allowed to row - it will come in handy to know the following.

<i>Red Flag</i>	NO ROWING - The Isis is closed to all University and College rowers.
<i>Amber Flag</i>	The river is closed to all College crews except Senior crews (These are crews with a senior status cox and at least 4 experienced rowers)
<i>Blue Flag</i>	Experienced (crew with an Experienced Status cox) and Senior status crews
<i>Green Flag</i>	No additional restrictions in force. Ideal for Novices!
<i>Grey Flag</i>	No one is monitoring the river conditions, so rowers must make an assessment themselves!
<i>Capsize Drills</i>	Only those rowers who have taken an OURCs capsize drill, or can prove that they have taken a similar one elsewhere, may use singles, pairs or doubles (small boats) on the water.
<i>Swim Tests</i>	All rowers and coxes should be swim tested at the first available opportunity and must have had one by their sixth water session (these swim tests last six years).
<i>Which side?</i>	Row on the correct side of the river! (stick to the bank on your left when facing backwards in a rowing seat)
<i>Sunset/Sunrise</i>	Don't row in twilight hours! (1 hour before sunrise and 1 hour after sunset)
<i>Senior Status (S) Coxes</i>	A cox with 6 full terms coxing
<i>Experienced (X) Status Coxes</i>	A cox with 3 full terms coxing
<i>Novice Status Coxes</i>	A cox with minimal/no previous experience (very common)



Glossary

Rowing jargon can sometimes seem like its own foreign language – hopefully this list should cover most unfamiliar words!

<i>1.1 / 2.1</i>	<i>The locations of the men's / women's captain rooms respectively - steeped in history...</i>
<i>Backing down</i>	<i>Movement used to reverse the boat – blade it inserted into the water and pushed away from the rower</i>
<i>Backstops</i>	<i>The end of the slide furthest from your feet – when 'sitting at backstops' your legs are fully extended</i>
<i>Beer Boat</i>	<i>A crew who enters into Bumps races with little or no preparation just looking to have some fun. They are typically placed in the lowest division with all the other Beer Boats!</i>
<i>Blade</i>	<i>The paddle you row with</i>
<i>Blue Boat</i>	<i>The top university women's/men's crews</i>
<i>Boat Race</i>	<i>Famous annual race in late March/early April between Oxford and Cambridge on the River Thames in London. OCBC spectators gather in Fulham to support Oxford and any Oriel rowers in the Blue Boat!</i>
<i>Bow</i>	<i>The front of the boat OR the person sat closest to the front of the boat</i>
<i>Bowside</i>	<i>To the left (looking towards the rear of the boat)</i>
<i>Bumps Racing</i>	<i>The style of racing used in Torpids & Summer Eights - crews line up single file with 1.5 boat lengths between them and aim to catch the boat in front of them without getting caught by the boat behind.</i>



<i>Catch</i>	<i>The front of the rowing stroke, when your legs are bent and you are leaning forwards (blade going into water)</i>
<i>Cox</i>	<i>The person sat at the rear of the boat, who steers and instructs the rowers</i>
<i>Crewdate</i>	<i>Social event between two college's boat clubs, involving games and rules, generally in a curry house</i>
<i>Easy there</i>	<i>Call made by a cox that means stop rowing and hold your blade out of the water</i>
<i>Ergometer (erg)</i>	<i>Indoor rowing machine</i>
<i>Feathered</i>	<i>The spoon of the blade is flat to the water</i>
<i>Finish</i>	<i>The back of the rowing stroke, when your legs are straight and arms are bent (blade coming out of water)</i>
<i>Frontstops</i>	<i>The end of the slide nearest your feet – when your seat is at front stops, legs are bent</i>
<i>Head of the River</i>	<i>The crew that is 1st in Division I at the end of the last day of Torpids or Summer Eights</i>
<i>Head race</i>	<i>Race where crews are timed over a given distance, and are set off at regular intervals</i>
<i>Hold it up</i>	<i>Call made by a cox to stop the boat immediately - place your blade into the water with the spoon perpendicular to the surface to act as a brake</i>
<i>ITL</i>	<i>Common abbreviation for "In The Lodge"</i>
<i>The Isis</i>	<i>The river used by colleges in Oxford, in Christ Church Meadows</i>



<i>M1/W1, M2/W2, etc</i>	<i>Men's/Women's 1st Boat, 2nd Boat, etc</i>
<i>Oriel Regatta</i>	<i>Oriel's own racing event held in 7th week of Trinity Term - Oriel rowers organize/run the event and other colleges enter crews to race</i>
<i>OURCs</i>	<i>Oxford University Rowing Clubs – confederation of college and university boat clubs, with authority over all college boat clubs and the organization of inter-collegiate competitions</i>
<i>Rigger</i>	<i>The metal bar/gate that holds your blade</i>
<i>Rigging/derigging</i>	<i>Removing and replacing/rearranging the riggers on the boat</i>
<i>Rowing On</i>	<i>The qualifying race for Torpids and Summer Vllls (held on the preceding Saturday)</i>
<i>Shell</i>	<i>The hull of the boat</i>
<i>Spoon</i>	<i>The part of the blade that enters the water</i>
<i>Squared</i>	<i>The spoon of the blade is perpendicular to the water</i>
<i>Stroke</i>	<i>The person sat closest to the rear of the boat (can only see the cox)</i>
<i>Strokeside</i>	<i>To the right (looking towards the rear of the boat)</i>
<i>Summer Eights</i>	<i>4 days of bumps racing in 5th week of Trinity term (Weds-Sat). Lookout for Shit Kit Day, Eights Dinner on Saturday and our Eights BBQ and Gin Stand throughout the week! You can even enter a Beer Boat!</i>
<i>Tank</i>	<i>Indoor rowing facility at Iffley Sports Centre, used for learning technique and simulating rowing off the river</i>



Tap down

Slight movement of the hands downwards at the finish to remove the spoon from the water

Torpids

4 days of bumps racing in 7th week of Hilary term (Weds-Sat). Lookout for Shit Kit Day, Torpids Dinner on Saturday and our Torpids BBQ and Gin Stand throughout the week! You can even enter a Beer Boat!

Trestles

Portable stands used to support the boat out of water for cleaning, rigging etc

Tortoise

A person is a Tortoise if they have ever raced in an Oriel 1st Eight for a bumps event

Wyndhams

Wyndhams is an interclub regatta at Oriel typically held in Michaelmas term to see how the novices are progressing with some racing against each other







@orielcrew



OCBC Page

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