

# Tortoise Club Newsletter Hilary 2022

## Women's Captain's Report

The year started off with some excellent novice recruitment and enthusiasm that led to us having nearly five boats of keen women, including three boats of novices! This was especially exciting after several consecutive years of limited rowing due to flooding and Covid. The senior squad improved quickly under the guidance of new coach Rob Hines from Wallingford Rowing Club and W1 began to find its rhythm together. In a tale as old as time, the women's side struggled with a lack of minibus drivers, relying on odd favours and the ever-trusty public bus.

The return of Wyndhams was a highlight for many with a strong turnout from both alumni and students, and some great (and not so great) racing as is traditional. Throughout the term, W1 had several opportunities to do some racing, both hosting Lady Margaret Boat Club (Cambridge) for an afternoon of pieces at Wallingford and racing at Fairbairn's at the end of term. Although our Fairbairn's result was respectable, we weren't satisfied with the rowing and it left everyone with good motivation to train hard over the vacation.

The squad returned in Hilary with about as much enthusiasm as Omicron cases. We managed several strong weeks of training before Covid swept through the boat club, taking out some of W2 and W3, all but three of W1, and the majority of the coxswains. Although we are very grateful that didn't happen a few weeks later during Torpids instead, it still caused a challenging interruption to training.

A combination of transportation difficulties, Covid cases, and high wind gave all the women the opportunity to become very well acquainted with the ergs during Hilary. Fortunately, by 5th and 6th week, this has subsided slightly and W1 and W2 began taking the 5am public bus to Wallingford every possible day to squeeze in as many sessions as possible and make up for lost time. W2 benefitted hugely from training at Wallingford, making massive improvements in those two weeks, and W1 began to get its fitness and confidence back after Covid. This term reminded us how very grateful we are to have access to the Wallingford stretch and to be able to train at times even when the Isis is stuck on red flag.

Unfortunately, a bout of injuries and illnesses killed our hope last minute of entering both a W3 and W4 for rowing on. The scratch W3 we were able to pull together wasn't able to have any sessions together before racing due to flag levels and sadly didn't qualify, but they put down a strong row nonetheless and are very much looking forward to Summer Eights.

Key Dates:

Summer Eights: 25<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> May

Saturday of HRR: 2<sup>nd</sup> July



W1 preparing to boat



W2 celebrating their Blades winning Bump

Torpids was, overall, extremely successful for the boat club as a whole. The highlight on the women's side was W2 putting down 5 spectacular rows, bumping before the gut on every day, earning Blades, and bumping into Division III. They are poised to have just as successful of a Summer Eights' campaign and can't wait for more racing. W1 had a mixed bag result, unfortunately being bumped on two days by very quick and more experienced crews. However, on the other two days, the crew showed some incredibly gutsy rowing, with thrilling escapes from Christchurch after overlap in the gut on both days. We are looking forward to Eights, where our placement on the river is much more favourable for doing some bumping.

Floreat Oriel!  
Cassidy Hoeft ([womens-captain@orielrowing.org](mailto:womens-captain@orielrowing.org))

## Men's Captain's Report

It has been a very strong two Terms for the OCBC men's side. From the beginning of Michaelmas Term we have had a very large squad, with a lot of dedicated rowers competing for seats.

Our first successes of the season came at Wallingford Head, Oriel M1 were by far the fastest college crew entered and the M2 were the second fastest, beating the M1's of University, Wadham and Lincoln colleges' M1's. On the same day our M3 raced in Oxford amongst other college crews, being by far the fastest third eight and beating all but three M2's and even a couple of first eights. A week later we went on to race at the Fairbairns Cup in Cambridge. Our M1 were the second fastest college crew by a very small margin. The M2 were the second fastest second boat, but were once again unbeaten by any other Oxford crews, closing out a very successful Michaelmas Term.

We also had a large turnout of novices. One of the main difficulties that we have had this year has been not having enough days in the week to run sessions for all our crews and running out of coxing equipment when we've had crews at Wallingford and on the Isis. We entered two men's eights, one of which was mixed with the women's side, into Christchurch Regatta. Unfortunately our crews came up against strong opposition and got knocked out fairly quickly, but with each race their rowing improved massively and the event was enjoyed by all.

We came into Hilary Term ready for a strong bumps campaign. Despite the majority of M2 and a large proportion of the lower boats getting covid two weeks in, OCBC's momentum did not falter. Our first event of the term was Bedford Head. The M1 once again showed their dominance, being the second fastest crew of the day and by far the fastest Oxford crew. Jesus College M1 unfortunately showed that it was possible to beat an Oriel crew, but with some club members only coming out of isolation the evening before the race, it had nearly been three weeks since the M2 had been able to row as a crew. Our M3 entered two races in Oxford, in each being beaten only by M1's and New College M2 and M3.



M3 closing in for a Bump, with men's captain

Of course one of OCBC's biggest strengths is its social side and with covid restrictions lifting these were in full swing once again. We have been frequenting the fine establishment of Arzoos/Jamal's and it has been great to see both long standing and new members of OCBC being fully involved. As well as winning all our races OCBC also wins all our crewdates. We have seen the return of Wyndhams regatta, back in its old location for the first time since 2018, and it was great to see lots of alumni at the event.



M2 celebrating a Blades winning Bump

When it came to Torpids we entered four men's crews. Our M4 unfortunately did not qualify, but had been heavily disrupted by covid, not getting to row as a full crew until the day of the race. Despite having crew members missing on the day, with their seven-man having to switch sides to stroke the boat, M3 were the second fastest crew at rowing on, once again behind New M3.

It was brilliant to see Torpids happening again, unfettered by covid. The first day saw... well there wasn't much to see from the boathouse! Some say that the M3 bumped within twenty strokes. M2 navigated past three crews who had bumped out ahead of them,

at one point having to do a second racing start from a complete standstill due to boats blocking the river. They went on to bump the crew four ahead, all before reaching the gut. But the highlight of the day was hearing over the tannoy that Pembroke M1 had steered a tight line "into... into a tree!" and watching Oriel M1 row over at Head with at least ten lengths of clear water. This was despite the bungline being pulled from the cox's hand seconds before the start gun, such that the crew had been backing down trying to catch it again when the race started!

The second day brought disappointment for coxes as it was announced that due to worsening river conditions only X and S status coxes would be allowed to cox for the remaining day. Crews and coxes were disappointed that they wouldn't be able to race with all of their crew members but coxes Jack Delaney and (after a few hasty emails to OURCs the night before to arrange a status upgrade) myself were able to cover our M2 and M3. The next two days saw comparatively little excitement for our crews, with M2 and M3 bumping before Donny bridge each time and the M1 rowing over at head comfortably.

Come the final day we had three crews on for blades. M3 once again bumped before Donny bridge. Despite still being a length off, Wolfson M2 conceded to the might of the M2 going under Donny bridge. The M1 rowed over at Head. After scouring bumps charts, I believe that this is the first time ever that three Oriels have received blades in one Torpids campaign. As far as I can tell this is only the third time ever that an Oriels M3 has received blades.

It has been a disrupted few years, but in the first proper Torpids since 2019 we reminded everyone in Oxford who the best rowing college is. No other college got three sets of blades total and we had three on our men's side alone. The procession of the boat back to college was something to behold. The dinner was exceptional. The hall was full nearly to capacity. As well as more recent alumni, it was great to see the M1 crew from 1972 represented at the dinner. This is the crew that went to Head in 1972, fifty years on Oriels is still dominating Torpids.



M1 landing on Saturday to a heroes' welcome

Looking ahead, all crews are eager for Summer Eights. Each crew will be chasing and being chased by stronger opposition than in Torpids, but we are training hard and are determined to match our Torpids success. It has been a great honour to be Men's Captain during what has already been an exceptional year of rowing for Oriels and I cannot wait for Trinity Term.

Floreat Oriels!  
William Burrow ([mens-captain@orielsrowing.org](mailto:mens-captain@orielsrowing.org))

## President's Report

I am honoured to have taken on the Tortoise Presidency from Stevan Boljevic, the man who first showed me around Oriels on an open day and who has done such a great job over the last five years. His final great act was putting together a qualifying Tortoise Club crew for Henley Royal Regatta. I can speak from front row experience (having been dubiously given the keys) that it was incredibly good fun and very satisfying to line up with the Tortoises yet again, remember our training, and then send it down the tracks together. With an age range of 23 years, five ex-captains and a Senior Member the crew was a concentration of Love for The Oriels if ever I have seen one.



Wyndhams saw a strong turn out from students and alumni alike, with the women's and men's alumni crews taking a combined 4-0 clean sweep victory over W1 and M1. My thanks to OCBC for hosting us. We returned the favour at the annual Tortoise Dinner at London Rowing Club, which was the best that I have attended (and not just because of getting elected at it). There was a particularly large turnout, especially from women's



Wyndhams Alumni Crews enjoying their victories

crews which is very heartening to see. Much thanks must go to Helen Belgrano Operto the Tortoise Secretary, and Aysha Strachan, the Events Officer, for putting on such a great dinner; and to Eleanor Jukes for organising a cracking after party at Vesta Rowing Club next door.

Torpids was a real pleasure to attend. I was at the boat house on Wednesday and the strength of support for the crews from the whole Club and the rest of the College was a credit to the culture that still thrives at Oriel. Then on Saturday the turnout from the Alumni was excellent. Special mention must be made to two groups in particular: Pippa McGowan (Women's Captain 1991) and Jane Oliver, representing the days when Oriel Women were first making their mark on Oxford Bumps racing winning Blades year after year, I hope that the reception they were given by the Oriel Women's crews of today shows how much their efforts are still appreciated some 30 years later; and we were also joined by Philip Hawkins, Gareth Morris, Clifford Thring, and Tim Shephard-Walwyn (Andy Dawson and his wife Maria sadly unable to attend due to Covid) of the 1972 Torpids crew that bumped to Headship. Before that crew Oriel held only two Torpids Headships (1839, the first ever Torpids, and 1844) we now hold a combined 38 Torpids Headships. So, it was a real privilege to have representatives of two of the crews who were instrumental to building the legacy that Oriel now proudly bears.



My first tangible achievement as President was entering a crew into the Head of the River Race. We had crew members flying in from as far afield as Sri Lanka and Chicago just to participate in this storied event, with one landing at Heathrow only an hour before we boated. We placed 121<sup>st</sup> having started 142<sup>nd</sup>, satisfyingly beating all Oxford College crews as well as various acquaintances that had competed in training crews, giving some justification to the Hoods Oarsman refrain that “we don't like to practice, we don't like to train...”.

Late last year I received a very uplifting email from John Stenzel (matriculated 1979) telling me of his time rowing at Oriel (including memories of Bill Parry, Len Andrews and the Oriel roar); how he has taken up rowing again “in a setting about as different from the crowded Thames as is it possible to be”, Lake Tahoe; and how he now wishes to “put his wallet where his worldview is”, a phrase I will be duly adopting. He has since become a Blade and, with luck, I very much look forward to meeting him at Summer Eights 2022.

The Tortoise Club's aims are to celebrate and support Oriel College rowing. We achieve the first aim through our social events, getting out to row ourselves, and communiques such as newsletters. We give support in the form of advice, singing, and donations. I urge you all to take up these goals as your own, to attend events, to get back out in a boat again (even just for Wyndhams), to give generously, and to get other Tortoises involved. I am currently working to update our records and our mailing list; we have a Whatsapp group for organising men's alumni crews and are starting one for women's alumnae crews; I am also working with the College Development Office to streamline the Blades donation process.

If you know of anyone who has not been receiving emailed invitations to Torpids, Eights, Tortoise Dinner, or HRR; if you wish to race in a Tortoise Crew; if wish to become a Blade; please do not hesitate to contact me. A very helpful step would be to ask your fellow crew members whether they are receiving Tortoise invitations (which they should be three or four times a year) and if they are not, to contact me so that their details can be added to our invitation list. Our records are rather thin before 2000. I look forward to seeing many of you for Eights, HRR, and at the dinner next year. It is an exciting time to be a Tortoise.

Floreat Oriel!  
Robert Boswall ([tortoise-president@orielrowing.org](mailto:tortoise-president@orielrowing.org))

P.s. if anyone has any of the photos from the other cameras that we are clearly looking at please do send them my way.

