

Tortoise Club Newsletter: Trinity 2026

Tortoise President

Dates for the diary:
Blazer orders close: 31 July
OCBC Endowment Dinner: 3 October
Tortoise Dinner: November [20th TBC]

Gabriel Wright died in June of 2026. Gabriel rowed for Oriel from 1995 to 2001; he and his father Michael (1966) were a rare father-and-son Headship pairing. I had the honour of talking to Gabriel shortly before he died and have been in touch with Michael and Gabriel's wife Victoria. Our thoughts are with them. If you knew Gabriel or the family and would like to send a memory or photograph, please write to tortoise-president@orielrowing.org; I can pass them on or if you wish put them on his [Crewbook profile](#). Any gift given in his memory can be given to the family's chosen charities [here](#).



This will be my last full newsletter as Tortoise President, I will handover in November to my successor as chosen through the constitutional election process. It has been a great honour to lead this club for the last five years. Over that time we have further professionalised and grown the Blades Scheme, carried out major donor-led improvements such as the Boat House refurbishment, grown both the Tortoise Dinner and Henley picnic substantially with inspiring growth in Women's crews, had a full turnover of the Tortoise Council to a new generation, got the Tortoise Club out on the water including a successful qualification for the Thames at Henley and an unsuccessful attempt in the Britannia Challenge Cup, raced on the Tideway, on the Cam, at Dorney, and elsewhere; but this last year has been the best of the lot, the 700th and 40th anniversaries, the channel crossings, the Summer Eights Rowpasts, the Henley Rowpast, and most importantly the OCBC Endowment.

When Adam Frost and Tom Barry first came to me with the mad plan to row the channel I don't think they expected me to counter with the even madder plan to use it as a platform to raise £1,000,000 for a permanent fund to secure Oriel College Boat Club for the next 700 years. As I write we have raised between £500,000 and £600,000 (the public tracker shows around £350,000, as many gifts have come through other routes), with gifts still arriving and the final Gift Aid to be confirmed. The Provost tells me this is the first alumni-driven mass mobilisation of its kind toward a college endowment that he has seen. Every single person who gave, rowed, sent a photograph, or simply passed the appeal on to someone else is part of it, and I am more grateful than I can easily say.

The fund is being formally established for the boat club year that begins on 1st October, the goal is to restructure the Boat Club finances in the following way. The first is the Endowment Fund itself: permanent, the principal never to be touched, growing alongside the College's own endowment and paying out around 3.3% a year to the Boat Club in perpetuity. The second is a Capital Account, liquid and College-overseen, which is where Blades donations flow and where we will save toward renewing an ageing fleet (our most recent boat is already eight years old). The third is the club's own Current Account, the students' self-raised money and College stipend, which the captains continue to control as they always have. The principal of the endowment can never be spent, and the College has committed in writing that its existing core funding will be maintained.

Most student rowers meet the sport for the first time at university. Oriel prides itself on being open to all, with no cost to row, and on putting out more crews per head than any other college. The difference between a novice who tries it for a term and one who stays with it for three years and beyond is good, reliable coaching. Tenacity, enthusiasm and drive are what get someone into an Oriel boat, and with this Endowment that will still be true in another 700 years. Giving is still open, I ask that anyone with any connection to Oriel give, and anyone who knows such a person to please pass this on. Donate [here](#), or for a larger gift please contact Tom Barry (tom@willitmaketheboatgofaster.com).



The OCBC Endowment Dinner

On Saturday 3rd October, the day before term starts, we are holding the OCBC Endowment Dinner in Oriel Hall: a full evening to celebrate the endowment, the crossings, the Henley rowpast, the Crew Book, and the two anniversaries, to thank everyone who made them happen, and fundraise further for the Endowment. The College is supporting the evening, with the Provost, Lord Mendoza, attending and speaking. We are planning for a full Hall of 137, every age and both sides of the club represented, from Olympians and University oarsmen and women through to the rugby-eight veterans. Before dinner there will be drinks and a set of short, rotating talks by Oriel rowers on different corners of the sport, and the current captains will show off what rowing at Oriel looks like today. Over dinner, the Provost will present the endowment's first payout to the current Captain of Boats, the first fruit of everything you have built, and there will be an auction or raffle on the night to add to the Endowment. Please do get in touch with items you would like to donate to the auction or raffle.



A few practical notes:

- Because 3 October is the day before term starts, there are likely no college rooms free for hire, so the evening will start earlier than usual, from around 6pm to about 9pm, so that guests can travel home the same night, or stay elsewhere in Oxford.
- Places are limited to 137, so please register early when the email is sent out; we will ask your matriculation year and who you would like to sit with, so we can seat the room well.
- Priority will be given to Channel rowers and endowment supporters; this is a fundraising dinner in aid of the endowment.

Blazers

Many alumni sadly do not currently have blazers, in particular the women who came up in the early years. Bea Frediani is running a group order to put that right, in good time for the dinner. If you would like one, please contact Bea at kit@orielrowing.org by 31 July, which is the deadline for the blazers to be made and delivered before 3 October.

Henley Royal Regatta

Then to Henley. On the afternoon of Friday 3 July, an Oriel crew rowed the Henley course in a ceremonial rowpast, marking 700 years of Oriel College and 40 years of women at Oriel. The crew was a medley across the decades, Blues and internationals from the 1970s through to rowers who came up in 2021, and it was, we believe, the first time Oriel has fielded a mixed crew at Henley. We rowed in a boat generously lent by Upper Thames Rowing Club, Thamesis, in memory of Tim Senior, and I am grateful to them for it. The alumni who rowed came off the water saying they wanted to be more involved in the Tortoise Club and in Oriel rowing again, which has been the byline of this year and shows the momentum we now have. The Tortoise picnic ran on Saturday, with an incredible turnout. My thanks go to Jack Delaney, who ran the entire thing with aplomb, the first time in my Presidency that I have not had an early start to drive everything in and set it all up. I look forward to many more.



The Crossings

In the spring we were still in the middle of it. All seven crews are now across. Sixty-one Oriellenses rowed, men and women, students and alumni, matriculating from 1968 right through to the current undergraduates, either crossing the Channel from Ramsgate to Dunkirk in fixed-seat Cornish gigs, around eight to ten hours of rowing over 35 nautical miles, or taking on the parallel Solent Marathon. The whole thing grew out of nothing more than a conversation between Tom and Adam about staying fit and rowing together, and turned into the largest single act of alumni goodwill this club has ever seen. My thanks go to every one of the sixty-one.

A few things are worth recording for the history:

- At 76, Martin Richmond-Coggan (1968) is believed to be the oldest person ever to row the Channel.
- The crews carried a married couple, an Olympic gold medallist, Americans who flew over for it, and Richard and Christopher Hull, a rare father-and-son headship pair.
- The final crew, the all-women crossing, rowed into Dunkirk on Eights Saturday and is, we believe, the first all-women crew ever to make the Ramsgate-to-Dunkirk row.

The Crewbook

Off the river, the Oriel Crewbook (theorielcrewbook.com) continues to grow, and now holds 3,092 rowers across 1,035 crews, with photographs going back to a group portrait from 1929. This has been an extraordinary term for it. Tim Harris unlocked whole 1980s lineups; Clifford Thring and Phil Hawkins between them supplied a deep 1972 archive, including three of the old Oxford-to-London row logs and the Bishop of Buckingham's coaching letters; and Joe Clift restored the 1981 "beer boat", among a great many others. If you rowed for Oriel you should be in there. If you spot a gap, a misspelling, or have a photograph tucked away, please send it in through the Submit page. I am still particularly hoping for more on the women's Torpids crews of 2006 and earlier.

Tortoise Council

A warm welcome on the Tortoise Council to Adam Frost, who joins us this term. Adam is one of the two who first brought me the channel crossing, rowed one of the Channel crews himself, and has been at the centre of the Endowment effort from the beginning; it is a real pleasure to have him formally on the Council. I stand down as President in November, so I will say again that anyone interested in joining the Council in any capacity should please reach out. We have open positions and a genuine appetite for experience so please do get in touch.

Floreat Oriel!

Robert Boswall (2016)

Tortoise President

tortoise-president@orielrowing.org

P.S. If you or others are not currently receiving invitations and newsletters, please fill in this [form](#).





Captains' Report

This year's long-awaited Trinity has come and gone in a flash. The year's rain and floods have washed away and Oriel rowers once again got the chance to enjoy uninterrupted and sunny water time. With both the men's and women's sides having achieved successful Topheads results, the pressure and expectation were on to deliver at Summer Eights.

Thankfully, due to good discipline throughout the squad, the first crews returned fit and rested after the winter's high mileage. Throughout the Easter vacation the women's side made up some of the missed water time in Hilary by running regular water sessions for the rowers in and around Oxford, mainly for the novice crews. This provided them with an edge over other colleges that materialised in four women's crews entered for Vllls and solid results across the crews. As has now become the norm at Oriel, the seniors returned to Oxford a week early to augment our preparations for Eights week and enjoy the calm waters of Wallingford for our Easter training camp.

A couple of practice races earlier on in the term (at Wallingford Regatta for the men and on the Isis for the women) meant that the crews got to practice their starts ahead of the big race in week 5. The weeks passed very quickly however and before we knew it, week five was upon us. Three fast women's boats were all on for blades as well as a Torpheads-winning men's side augmented by James Doran, Alex Sullivan and James Fetter (three returning Blues) and looking to right last year's wrong.

On the first day, a lightning-speed bump by the W3 provided a good first result for the squad. Unfortunately, tragic events meant that the first divisions couldn't race on the Wednesday. However, the M1 had been used to the feeling of delayed gratification after the cancellation of Torpids and were confident that we were merely waiting for the inevitable.

On Thursday, the M1 were provided with their first opportunity to bump Wolfson. A nerve-racking wait on bungline two was finally ended by the sound of the gun and we set off at blistering pace, striking 44 and at a pace of 1:17s/500m. It wasn't until the end of the gut that we heard the first whistle, but along greenbacks we heard a quick succession of whistles until our foes succumbed to us 100 metres before Univ boathouse. Despite Wolfson's valiant efforts, the natural order of Oxford rowing had been restored.

The W1 was next in the final division of the day. Although full of adrenaline due to a mix of nerves and excitement we rowed to our bungline feeling ready. We set off at a





1:30s/500m, and heard the first whistle within the first 20 strokes. With only a canvas going under Donny bridge, we held on while Lincoln gave a final push, but in the gut their cox inevitably conceded. The first W1 bump in 3 years was achieved!

Earlier that day, the W2 bumped and the W3 went +3 due to an impressive overbump on Mansfield W2, meaning both W1 and W3 were still on for blades. The M3 also provided a bump while the M2 unfortunately suffered the only bump of the week for the whole college.

Over the next days, the M1 cruised over at head easily despite a last-minute substitution for Friday due to illness. The M2 rowed over and the M3 bumped up. The W1 unfortunately missed out on blades, due to the 4 boats in front bumping out before the gut on Friday, and the W3 missed out on their bump on the final day. However, come Saturday, the W1 found an easy bump on Keble, being the only crew in Division 1 who bumped without having any Blues rowers, a testament to the quality of the OCBC programme. The M1 rowed over, maintaining a safe distance from Wolfson who themselves seemed a class above the other colleges. To celebrate the 700 years, 2 alumni crews rowed the bumps course in a celebratory row-over, connecting 7 decades of Oriel rowers across 2 boats.

Ultimately the results speak for themselves. The women's side went +9 overall, a remarkable reversal from last year that leaves them in a powerful position, while the men's side restored the rightful Oriel headship. With much to celebrate, the crews were met by alumni including some reunited 1966 headship crew members as well as the 1996 women's crew and the 1996 and 2016 men's headship crews all celebrating their decade anniversaries. As you can imagine, this provided for one of the many memorable dinners in the college's history.

After Vllls some of the crews enjoyed regatta season, with the W2 racing at Reading and the W1 racing Henley Women's in the 8+. Although missing out on qualifying, it was a good experience for all and a memorable way for half of the boat to bid farewell to OCBC. We handed over our captaincy to Thomas Bisatt and Emma Kate Price and we are excited to see them lead the boat club to new heights in the next academic year!

Floreat Oriel.

Freiderikos Vassos & Merle Beerens
Captains 2025-26

