

Tortoise Club Newsletter: Hilary 2025

The President

Dates for the diary:
Eights Dinner: 31st May
HRR Picnic: 5th July
1985 Celebration: 6th September

Hilary underlined again that bumps racing is a hard school. It was good to see Oriel crews testing themselves beyond the Isis, with external racing, a Lightweight fixture, and training at Dorney, with special mention to W1 for winning pewterware at Bedford Head. Torpids brought different challenges: W1 slipped one bungline but stayed within reach of Headship. Every position gained or lost matters, not just for this year, but for the future. It was a particular shame for W2, who narrowly missed racing altogether, caught by the half-division cuts under contingency rules. M1 fought hard against Wolfson but could not turn pressure into Headship. M2's overbump Blades showed that in bumps, it is not enough to be faster, you must be dominant.

Oriel will host a celebration day on Saturday 6 September 2025 to mark 40 years of women at the College. The Women's Captains' Room in Staircase 2 will be open throughout, featuring a display of photos from across the decades. If you have any photos of women's rowing from your time at Oriel, formal or informal, please send them to 1985@orielrowing.org. It is heartening to see how strong the rowing theme already is on the College's new Memories Page (www.oriel.ox.ac.uk/memories). While visiting the boathouse on the day itself will be logistically difficult, if you and your crew would like to organise a reunion row or visit during the weekend, do get in touch and we will make it happen.



I speak for the Tortoise Council when I say a heartfelt thank you to Helen Belgrano Operto and James Halsall, who have stepped down from their formal roles. Helen, our former Secretary and later Regalia Officer, was a constant driving force behind the scenes. James, as Treasurer, quietly but firmly kept our financial house in order as well as encouraging us to look to the future. I am delighted to say that both remain closely involved with the Tortoise Club, and their experience and wisdom will not be lost. We welcome new members of the Council in the form of Jack Delaney as our 2020s Decade Representative, Tom Lister as our new Regalia Officer, and Ben Gilmore as Treasurer. It is a pleasure to have them aboard.

Beyond the Isis, the 2025 Boat Races saw a strong Oriel contingent once again representing Oxford. Four Orielenes rowed in the Men's Blue Boat: Nick Rusher, Tom Mackintosh, James Doran, and William O'Connell. Isaac Throsby rowed for Isis, and Amelia Monaghan raced in the women's lightweight boat. The only logical diagnosis for the results is that there was insufficient Oriel.

In 2026, Oriel College celebrates its 700th Anniversary. There will be two alumni row-overs during Summer Eights: one marking the 40th Anniversary of Oriel Women's Rowing, the other celebrating 700 years of the College. Please do reach out if you would like to be involved in the row-overs, reunions for dinner, or both — fitness optional.

I look forward to seeing many of you at Summer Eights and at the Tortoise Picnic during Henley Royal Regatta. For HRR there are plans afoot for Oriel student and alumni entries. Off the river, Tortoises continue to distinguish themselves. Recent announcements include newborns, Ironman plans, adventures at the Engadin Skimarathon, and many more exploits in true Oriel spirit. James Doran's musical career also continues to flourish, he assures me the lyrics "can we feel so bad, in finding something fun, when others find it sad" are not a reference to rowing. If you would like to stay involved more regularly, the WhatsApp groups are the best place for coordinating racing crews, impromptu social events, and member-led regalia runs; including the sought-after Ironman trisuits. If you would like to join, please email me.

As we look ahead, the students are showing real resilience and innovation in the face of financial challenges, with rising costs and fixed incomes forcing hard choices. We need to help them with this, and I hope to work with the College Treasurer and the Development Office to use the 700th Anniversary as a platform from which to secure OCBC's finances well into the

future. I encourage all Tortoises to stay involved, to [sign up as a Blade](#) if you have not already, and to pass on the tradition they inherited. Your support deserves transparency in how this money is spent and the needs of OCBC. From now on Trinity newsletters will include a full annual financial report for both OCBC and the Tortoise Club, and Michaelmas newsletters a forward looking annual budget for both OCBC and the Tortoise Club.

Floreat Oriel!
Robert Boswall (2016)
Tortoise-President@orielrowing.org

P.S. If you or others are not currently receiving invitations and newsletters then please contact development.office@oriel.ox.ac.uk or tortoise-president@orielrowing.org.

P.P.S. The Captains gave me their newsletters in a very timely manner, I have been slow, hence their future tense references to the Boat Races.

Women's Captain's Report

The women's side began the new year with strength and commitment, our Hilary training camp filled with eager rowers itching to return to the glorious waters of Wallingford. Although a sudden downpour of rain (a common theme in the past months) halted our initial plans to get on the water, the squad responded with resilience, replacing outings with sunrise ergs at the Boathouse and many, many S&C sessions. Neither flood nor frost could keep the girls from throwing themselves into their training.

A brief dip to Amber Boards allowed the first water sessions of term to take place, and the 4:45 alarms began to ring once more; but river levels oscillated precariously, forcing our girls to build a strong bond with the ergs. Our determination was nevertheless evident during January testing, with significant PBs across the senior squad and our novices doing us proud on their first ever 2ks. But with February just around the corner and the river still rushing rapidly, we knew it was time to break free from the Red Boards at Wallingford. A misty drive at dawn for our top crews uncovered sunshine and clear skies at Dorney Lake, where W1 and W2 members practiced rowing on unfamiliar waters in preparation for the first races of term the following weekend.



The hard work paid off for both our crews, as we knew it would. The W1 put on a stellar performance at Bedford Head as the fastest Oxford College crew and came top of their Division, earning some lovely tankards (destined to dryly decorate our shelves until they could be christened after the Torpids drinking ban). Our W2 combined returning seniors and rising novices for a strong race down the Isis that instilled fear into the surrounding 2nd boats, and spirits were high as Bumps week approached.

A few days of brilliant blue skies dropped river levels down the week before racing was to begin, and the stage was set for glory... that is, until the weather-gods-that-be decided it was prime time for a new deluge. High-wind conditions prevented our W3 from racing Rowing On, and a vicious storm loomed up ahead, threatening our campaign. The heavens let loose two days before Wednesday of Torpids; with racing now set to occur on Red Flag, contingency measures restricted divisions, and our W2 was unlucky enough to be the first crew below the cut-off, narrowly missing out on a chance at reclaiming their place in Division III. Although a disappointing decision, the girls made their commitment to the club clear by showing up to cheer our crews every day and a powerful performance at a Keble erg relay on the Saturday, and they are looking to dominate their divisions come Summer Vllls.

The competition was fierce in Division I for our W1, resulting in a bump from Christ Church on the first day, but this only hardened our resolve to come back with a vengeance. Following Thursday's feather-filled klaxon under Donny Bridge when a swan sauntered into the racing line, the girls were eager to finally show their true grit. And show us they did with a thrilling row-over on Friday which left Wolfson snapping at the air behind them and also kept them at bay on the final day, finishing their campaign with two gutsy races which places us at a strong 4th on the river, ready to bump back up next Torpids.

With many of the squad remaining in Oxford to continue training and exciting opportunities ahead of us, including racing at an international regatta against the University of Porto and Clare College Cambridge in May, the girls are ready for victory this Trinity, and look forward to your support on Boathouse Island during Summer Vllls. In the meantime, we're excited to watch Amelia Monaghan do us proud in the 7-seat of the OUBC Lightweight Boat on Saturday 12th March.

Floreat Oriel!

Carolina Cortes Vilaplana and Emma Gee Olmedilla

Women's Captains of Boats

Men's Captain's Report



Hilary Term began with a successful training camp (as successful as a training camp can be when the river is largely unrowable). To make up for this fact, our coach put us through a variety of devious and clandestine sessions that tested not only our stamina and agility, but our ability to run cross-country in the icy cold having just downed a pint. It set the tone for the term as being one of out-of-the-box thinking and being prepared for the unpredictable.

In the M1, we knew the stakes were at an all-time high, and in the M2, the hunger for blades was stronger than ever. As the water improved, so did our technique and excitement. Before the bells tolled for Torpids, we had two races to prepare for: Bedford Head, and the fixture against the OUBC lightweights. In preparation for both, we sparred against the lightweights in the Wallingford arena, engaging in battle-paddling and shorter, more intense pieces. When Bedford Head finally arrived, we were ready for it. It was a short, sharp affair that placed us definitively ahead of not only all the Oxford colleges that competed, but all those of Cambridge as well. We came 5th overall, beaten out only by Bedford themselves, rowing on their home turf.

As the fixture against the Lightweights approached, the Torpids M1 solidified on Dorney Lake. It was an unusually beautiful day for February, and the crew stepped on nicely in the sunshine. Finally, the fixture arrived. I am proud, in a bittersweet way, to say that we held on as long and as hard as we could, but that we couldn't beat the speed of the Lightweights (to, I imagine, the deep relief of OUBC). Nonetheless, it was a wonderful experience, and we are grateful for the opportunity.

Finally, the main event, Torpids. How might those four days be described beyond twist after twist of fate? To begin with, a last-second burst of rain sent the Isis onto Red Flag, placing the extremely irritating restriction that only S-status coxes were allowed on the river. Luckily we found one, not only for the M1 but for the M2. Day one brought a clean overbump for the M2 in the morning. In the afternoon however, an unforeseen substitution was required due a very unfortunate injury only minutes before we were due to push off. Luckily, an extremely helpful Mr Ernst was in the vicinity, and hopped in for each day of racing. The race itself put us one step closer to headship, with a meteoric descent on the side of Christchurch, who

themselves must have been experiencing a cruel twist of fate. Now we had three days to catch Wolfson and claim the title, with Pembroke biting at our heels. It was a war. The M2 overbumped every day to achieve blades, while the M1 tried again and again to keep Wolfson in its grasp. Despite a wall of Oriel support (and perhaps a gratuitous number of bank-runners), on the Saturday, Wolfson slipped between our fingers for the last time, leaving us 2nd on the river. As disappointed as we were in the moment, in hindsight the campaign was a success overall, and we are now in an even better position to retake headship next year, not to mention the success of the M2!

Speaking of the future, we are looking forward to watching the Boat Race, and wish very good luck to all Oriel rowers involved. We further look forward to their contribution to the college scene in Summer Eights (28th-31st May). It's going to be a blast. See you there!

Floreat Oriel!

William Schwabach

Men's Captains of Boats