

# Tortoise Club Newsletter: Michaelmas 2024

Dates for the diary:  
Torpids Dinner: 1st March  
Eights Dinner: 31st May  
HRR Picnic: 5th July

## The President

The Tortoise Club's constitutional duty is to recognise and celebrate outstanding Oriel oarsmanship and support the OCBC. We celebrate through racing, winning the after party, and spreading the word. We give support in the form of war stories, singing, and donations. I ask you all to [support the boat club](#) however you can. It is thanks to alumni generosity that OCBC is one of the few college clubs which is still free to students, a principle that I will never surrender.

Wyndhams was short and sweet, Ellie Jukes and I went with as young a pair of crews as possible to keep us lean and scrawny, hoping this would make for some fair racing. The 4-0 combined result suggests that we should change tack and next year a 1970s reunion crew Wyndhams is in order. There was talk of putting together some reunions for the next Tortoise Dinner, please do so. If you get in touch with me early, then I can make sure to reserve places and to talk to the venue about a larger total headcount.

This year's was a fantastic Tortoise Dinner, with thanks to Aysha Strachan for her work organising despite serious surgery keeping her away on the night itself. I reiterate my call at the AGM for people to get involved with the Tortoise Council, I have had three people reach out to me since, but please do keep coming, especially members of women's crews interested in being decade representatives. I think it is in the best interests of the Club to have new blood at the helm, so despite loving serving the Club in this capacity and being concerned about the need to develop a personality when I no longer President, I do not plan to stand for a term renewal. This means that I will hand over in two Tortoise Dinners' time (November 2027).

Much else was said and done at the dinner including an M1 vs. Alumni Boat Race taking the term's tally to 5-0. The fieriest Women's Captain's speech I have yet witnessed was given, and some very tall claims were made by a Captain Schwabach. My advice for the future is to back up such claims in your own racing shell rather than borrowing faulty equipment from Tabs and growing the tally to 6-0, the price of forgiveness is Headship.

That takes us to Fairbairn's where we had far too much fun. In a crew that just clicked, despite or because of a last-minute replacement of Alex Able for an injured Tom Lister we came 5th overall and 2nd in our category. With thanks to Angus Forbes for organising, Coach Bevan for an early morning crash course, and to Henry Hawkins for helping to row the boat back so that Stevan could catch a plane to Sweden and compete in something called a Hyrox. Fairbairns is the perfect end of year event, no need for British Rowing membership, plenty of boats to be hired at reasonable rates, and a ready supply of Tabs to Shoe. Anyone who would like to put together a reunion crew or a bunch of mates please put your hand up and I would be happy to help.

At the end of this newsletter we have the first - in what I hope will be a series - of guest contributors to tell you of the Tortoise Club's foray into the world of Skeleton. There are also some future trips planned to the Engadin Skimarathon 9th March; and the Tallinn Ironman 23rd August. All Tortoise expeditions are encouraged and welcomed to be included in future newsletters.



Floreat Oriel!  
Robert Boswall (2016)  
Tortoise President

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

# Women's Captain's Report

The women have had a very successful start to the season, hitting the ground running after our summer training plan and eager to get that warm mileage in whilst the early October sun was still out. Alas, our plans were soon foiled, for we were ambushed by heavy rain barely a week into term and had to return to our darling beloved– the erg. And yet, we persevered. Our dedication to the early morning steady was eventually rewarded by a return to the once again rowable Wallingford, where our increased land speed soon began to translate, with the help of some slick bladework and a chunky rhythm coached by the wonderful Harry Selwyn-Smith, into the watts we desired. We rowed strongly and steadily as the flow fell and our set improved, and for a few blissful sessions, we felt like the tortoises we were destined to be, gliding through the water in the dappling autumn light. That is, until we got off the water one day to the discovery of a mysteriously bent fin on the Blessed Mary.



Never to be deterred, our crew faced adversity with a smile and stayed focused through the wobble, using this as an opportunity to work on their core strength and solidify their understanding of what makes or breaks a boat's set. Thus, we rowed on, day by day, until after several weeks of liaising with interim boatmen that culminated in some arduous hammering with a block at 6am on a fin that simply would not budge, our fin was trapped no longer, and finally repaired. Although we were very excited to test it out again, we woke up on the morning of our next water session to the shock that Wallingford had gone to BLACK BOARDS, which it would remain for the rest of term. Given that the river then burst its banks and flooded some boathouses on the Wallingford straight, it was no surprise –although a great disappointment– that we were not able to try our shiny new fin before the winter.

Nevertheless, the squad has flourished, piecing and paddling through sun and snow (once!) and building an incredible community full of encouragement, determination and drive. The W1's performance at Fairbairns was strong, especially given that two last-minute subs meant we had never rowed together as a full crew. Our novices motivation and eagerness to learn was reflected in their strong performances at Wyndhams, where they raced valiantly against each other without any disasters despite it only being their second or third water session ever. Our novice women have integrated wonderfully into the squad, subbing into W2 Wallingford outings and regularly showing up to senior land training, and this dedication bodes well for both our lower boats' upcoming Torpids campaigns.

Wallingford may have been flooded for 60% of Michaelmas, but our rowers only grew stronger and stronger, cementing our bonds both within our crews and across the squad. We went on group runs, did circuits, sang karaoke on the erg, and saw 5km PBs across the entire squad! (Although this last statistic may or may not be attributed to the fact that it was everyone's first, it does not detract from the stellar performances that our rowers gave, all of which evidenced a significant fitness increase and would likely have resulted in many PBs anyway).

We look forward to seeing you on Boathouse Island for Torpids and Torpids Dinner. The commitment to OCBC shown from every part of the women's side has placed us in a strong position for the racing season and means we are beginning Hilary training with our sights set high for Torpids. With our W1 currently 3rd on the River and our W2 and W3 looking to clamber up from some lower than usual placing, we are eager to get out on the water and bring glory to Oriel.



Floreat Oriel!

Carolina Cortes Vilaplana and Emma Gee Olmedilla  
Women's Captains of Boats

# Men's Captain's Report

Michaelmas term began smoothly, with the Fresher's Fair drawing a strong turnout for our taster sessions, which, though held on land due to river conditions, kept enthusiasm high for later erg and tank training. The Fresher's Barbeque also saw encouraging attendance. Novice training, led by our vice-captains Naomi and Ben, progressed steadily and moved onto the Isis in November. Though the Novice Regatta was sadly cancelled, our novices showed determination and progress, promising a strong Hilary training camp and term. Wyndhams, revived this year thanks to our social secs Tom and Sienna, became the term's highlight, featuring barbecuing and head-to-head races. It gave novices a taste of racing and showed them what makes OCBC special. Seniors faced tough competition from alumni crews, setting a clear target to strive for.



Moving on to the senior squad. To begin with, we met with the aggravation of a red-boarded Wallingford River. However, we faced this adversity righteously, by exercising our frustrations out on the ergs to great effect. Despite our diminished water time, not a moment was wasted in terms of land training, such that during the weekends, when there was enough light for us to safely boat, we had the strength to back up our anticipation. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the guidance of our Men's coach, Benjamin Mackenzie. With his help, our technique and speed as a crew steadily improved across the term both on and off the water.

Given that we had been working so hard over the course of the term, it was also critical that we play hard, bringing us to Tortoise Dinner. It was such a brilliant chance for our newest senior members to immerse themselves in the beating heart of the OCBC, that being the Tortoise Club. We had a wonderful time, and for that we give our deepest thanks to Robbie and the rest of the Council. We must also express our thanks and appreciation for the Tortoise Club as a whole for their continued support.

After Tortoise Dinner, the river threatened to scupper us again, but we only redoubled our efforts on the land in preparation for our final event of the term. Now I must address the elephant in the room. At the Dinner, I made sure to assert that our defeat at Wyndhams at the hands of the alumni would not be repeated at Fairbairns. And when the day came, I was sure we could put our proverbial money where our mouth was. Fair to say, we were skint. Whether it was divine retribution or a well-placed pin in Pembroke's OCBC voodoo doll, only minutes into the race our rudder gave us the Irish goodbye, sending us into the bank at full speed. The damage was physically limited to a bow and a blade, but this is to say nothing of its true extent, which was to our pride.

There remains only one thing which can redeem us: Headship. Starting with the Hilary training camp, and continuing through Bedford Head and beyond, our campaign for Torpids victory is at its boiling point. The stakes remain the same as they were last year – Both first boats are 3rd on the river – and the hunger for success has never been greater. This will certainly be a Torpids to remember. You don't want to miss it.

Floreat Oriel!  
William Schwabach  
Men's Captain of Boats



## Tortoises on Ice

Over the New Year period self-appointed Snowsports Representative Leo von Malaisé (PPE, 2018) led a Tortoise Club winter training expedition to St. Moritz.

Setting the rhythm was myself, backed up by a presidential middle pair of Stevan Boljevic (PPE, 2014) and Robert Boswall (PPE, 2016). Honoured guest status was granted to bowman Cameron McInroy (Harvard, 2018) for the duration of the trip, his eligibility having been established by his participation in the 2021 edition of Oriel Regatta. Harry Gearty (PPE, 2018) took the cox's seat. Upon arriving in St. Moritz, we were dismayed to find challenging rowing conditions, it being 6000ft altitude and midwinter. Despite our best efforts, we were unable to find any opposition willing to face us, their meagre excuse being that the lake was 'frozen'.



Armed with only our blazers, we embarked on a comprehensive survey of the cross-training opportunities available in the town. A large data sample was collected at a number of strategic locations, including but not limited to Paradiso, Pavarotti Wine Bar, Zoo Bar, Stübli Bar, La Baracca, and Dracula's Ghost Riders Club.

Upon hearing of our plight, the friendly locals were quick to recommend that we ride the Cresta Run, a 1.2km natural ice tobogganing run with a 13% average gradient. I was the first to enter the course, as well the first to be leave it. Not, I would emphasise, at Finish, but rather into the welcoming pile of snow and straw that awaits overeager Cresta riders who approach the infamous Shuttlecock corner with too much enthusiasm.

Enamoured of his own experience of ejecting from the Run and never one to do things by halves, Mr Boljevic disdained to witness the sights of the picturesque hamlet of Celerina where the Cresta Run finishes and submitted a second application to the Shuttlecock Club on the first day of riding. Messers Gearty and McInroy eschewed this honour entirely on the first day and completed two runs without falling. Ever treading in the footsteps of his predecessor and clearly underwhelmed by Celerina, our noble President was successful on his second attempt to reach the Shuttlecock straw.

On New Year's Day we were invited to participate in the Bledisloe Cup. Assured in his line, no doubt owing to his experience at the helm of W1, Harry Gearty was the fastest Tortoise, posting a time from Junction of 62.11s. The Tortoise speed record, however, was claimed the following day by another challenger. Despite steering as erratic and unpredictable as his dance moves, the weight of his office accelerated President Boswall to a top speed of 57.80mph and earned him the title of fastest Tortoise in the Lowe Portago Challenge Cup.



Post-Cresta, SMTC members greeted us in the bar with immense warmth and conviviality. Their familiar manner was unfeigned - our PR activities on and off the slopes had not gone unnoticed, conducted as they were in true Oriel fashion, wearing blazers. An especially warm welcome came from the President of the SMTC, James Sunley (History, 1978). With sore heads and bruised extremities, we returned home having left our mark on the mecca of winter tourism.