

*60 years of*

# Mansfield College Boat Club

1965 – 2025

*Memories from the last 10 years*



*Dedicated to all who have supported  
rowing at Mansfield.*



# Note from the editor

Having the highest proportion of UK state sector students of any Oxford college, almost no-one has rowed before coming to Mansfield. This presents unique challenges; it has been the norm for the last few years for captains of the club to have only started rowing themselves nine months previously, or in some cases less! In my second year I was teaching novices to row while only having a (questionable) grasp of the stroke myself. Nevertheless, I think this is what builds the team spirit of the club further. The key foundation on which the club has stood over the years is being welcoming to anyone and everyone who wants to be part of the team and get to know this amazing sport. Knowing your squad has got your back is one of the best feelings, both on the water and off.

I was inspired to compile this booklet by a similar piece from the Club's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, documenting memories from the

previous 50 years. What follows is my attempt to continue the record; a collection of memories, stories and photos in chronological order, submitted by members from the past 10 years. I'm sorry if I missed you! It has been lovely to read people's memories and hear what a profound impact the club has had over the last decade, in so many ways.

**James Bennett (M. 2021)**

**President 2024/2025**



O1 celebrating a row on every day in Summer VIIIs 2024

# Memories

I joined Mansfield College Boat Club in October 2017 with the aim of trying out an Oxford sport. My grandad had religiously watched the Boat Race and supported Oxford despite never having rowed or been to university himself so I thought I should give it a go when I arrived at Mansfield. Within a week of starting I got involved in coxing in the usual way – being bundled into an OURCs coxing briefing at the slightest expression of interest! I quickly decided I was much better at coxing than rowing and carried on coxing Mansfield throughout my time at the university.

The 2017-18 rowing year was a challenging one competitively for MCBC. The club was placed high in the division 2 charts due to some amazing results in past years. However, many of the rowers who had contributed to these successes had left in 2017, leaving the club to regroup and build up its strength. Tariq, Henry and Andy rallied the open side, while Becca and Kara led the women's side, with the help of a generous donation from Rhys Hedges – the 'Mel Hedges' remains our women's 1st VIII shell. Rowers from this year will also remember Torpids happened during the adverse conditions of the 'Beast from the East' snowstorm, which halted two days of racing.

2018-19 saw a push up into division 2 on the women's side led by captains Jeanne and Erin, with 3 overbumps in Torpids and an exciting bump on Lincoln on the first day of Summer Eights. The women's 2nd VIII were agonisingly close to winning blades at Torpids and qualified with the 2nd fastest time at Summer Eights. The open side also saw a reversal in fortunes at Eights, with Dan, Henry and Josch leading the efforts to hold off an extremely strong Merton VIII on the first day and bumping Worcester on the last day.

We cannot go past the 2018-19 year without mentioning Martha Birtles, who is already one of Mansfield's most successful rowers ever. Martha learned to row in 2018, was picked in the OUWBC blue boat in 2020, 2021 and won the Island Challenge Cup and Remenham Challenge Cup at Henley with Oxford Brookes in 2023 and 2024 respectively. At the time of writing, Martha has been selected to row in the Great Britain women's VIII at the European Rowing Championships in Plovdiv.

Perhaps the less said about the weather in the 2019-20 year, the better. While not near the levels of flooding seen in 2024, the winter of 2019-20 saw persistent rain that held the river on red flag for the vast majority of time between October and February. Following the cancellation of Torpids, the UK was plunged into a national lockdown by the government of the time to stop the spread of COVID-19, calling a halt to rowing in Oxford.

This was a huge shame for Mansfield who would have had 3 blues rowers representing OUBC at the boat races and returning for Summer Eights. Martha was rowing for OUWBC and Caspar Jopling and Dan Holod were set to represent OUBC that year. Joel, George, Izzy and Sara deserve great credit for holding the club together at this difficult time. 2020-21 saw the shoots of recovery following COVID, though lockdowns caused significant disruption to rowing (and headaches for the author who was OURCs Captain of Coxes and had to work out how to train and brief Oxford College coxes in a screens-only world). While the novice regatta and Hilary Term Torpids were cancelled, OURCs managed to run a summer edition of Torpids in Trinity Term. The open side 1st VIII, led by Jamie and Bailey, picked up 3 bumps and the women's 1st VIII, led by Emily and Luci, managed to row over for 3 days, holding their position.

**Thomas Surridge (M. 2017)**

**Captain of Coxes 2018-20**



I tried rowing on something like day three of freshers week - I was hungover, tired from trying to make new friends, and missing home. We had what felt like a ridiculously long walk to the boathouse on a drizzly, cold day. Getting the titan beast of a shell out of the narrow bay and getting it into the water without dropping it or concussing anyone was a stressful start, and I seem to remember a lot of shouting from what in retrospect were probably only slightly more experienced rowers and cox. It proceeded to pour down.

I don't remember much about the session itself anymore, but I do remember - when we went up to the crew room for a soggy welcome tea of Soreen malt loaf and juice - the words of encouragement from Becca Sinnot and Jeanne Lerasle in particular, cornerstones of the club at that time. (The latter would eventually force a shy 19 year old me to sign up for OUWBC testing, potentially a key moment in my rowing career when I might just as easily have quit altogether.)

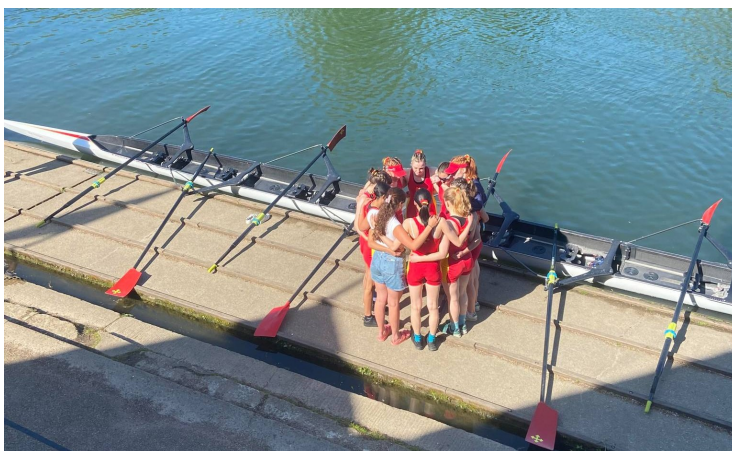
That feeling of being valued as a part of something bigger than yourself was addictive, and I believe is the secret ingredient at MCBC. My happiest memories are truly from the other side, when I returned to the club in 2021/22 to coach the women's team and got to witness that magic of buying into the team unfold. Coaching the first Blades winning crew in five years was an amazing moment, and to have my name on the walls of

Mansfield college at all is such a special feeling - one that makes me emotional to think of when I first inspected those strange chalky shapes wondering if I'd ever make one.

Seeing two of that crew - Imogen Boxall and Ruby Mullin - go on to represent the university in Boat Races was also an immensely rewarding part of the process. MCBC is seriously passionate about getting people involved and keeping people involved, and I think that's incredible.

I'm excited to imagine new students walking onto the quad for the rest of time and seeing those chalk drawings, hearing long yarns about our glory days, and hopefully making glory days of their own.

### **Martha Birtles (M. 2018)**



Martha Coaching the W1 – Summer VIIIs 2023

Being part of MCBC was a defining part of my university experience. The sense of community within the club is truly something special. Regardless of the result on race day, we always celebrated the effort and dedication that went into every outing. MCBC gave my university life structure, and a deep appreciation for early mornings. I'm deeply grateful to the donors whose support keeps the club afloat. From new unisuits to entire boats, their generosity was vital.

**Charlotte Withyman (M. 2018)**

**President 2021/22**





Rowing is a sport I imagine none of us thought we'd spent our prime university years taking part in and yet, here we ended up. If it was that fated taster day as a fresher or being faced with ATIK (rip) and bridge as the only big nights out in Oxford, MCBC and rowing took up more space in my brain than my degree in my time here. In my first year, summer 8s was a slaughtering. We got bumped before Donny bridge everyday... Spoons. FANTASTIC.

The next year was one to set us up for a year of glory – Martha Birtles, Mansfield born, now turned GB finest, as the coach, and a boat load of vengeful returners, meant we went on to get blades in Torpids. My favourite memory by far has to be returning home to longbridges on that final day, the balcony packed with “M-C-B-C” ringing out.



I went on to row with the university, something I had dreamed of doing since watching the boat race as a kid but never thought was remotely possible. While we might have lost (no jokes) it was an incredible experience that I'll carry with me forever.

MCBC introduced me to the sport I love and taught me the unrivalled joy of being part of a team. Some of my best mates are those I rowed with and I look back on my time at the Club and Oxford with so much warmth because of it. Happy 60th!

**Ruby Mullin (M. 2021)**

**Women's Captain 2022/23**



W1 celebrate Blades! – Torpids 2023



I loved rowing at Mansfield from the get-go - maybe it was the impeccably decorated coaches (see Paul complete with bow in photo below...) I co-captained the Women's side in my second year and still don't think anything has topped the feeling of winning blades with the W1 that Hilary term. Something about the about the carnage and chaos of college bumps racing - magic!

**Olivia Ransome (M. 2021)**

**Women's Captain 2022/23**



Coach Paul with the W2 – Torpids 2022

My time with MCBC can only be described as profound. In a time of my life which I would describe as turbulent, it was with my team that I felt like I had truly found a home. While bumps racing was unforgettable, the moments that truly stood out for me were the ones in between. Dinner outings after long ergs. Pasta nights after a race. Laughing over memes in the chat. It was in these moments that I felt like I had found more than just a home; it felt like I had found a family.

**Albi Nani (M. 2022)**



O1 – Summer VIIIs 2023



I am currently writing this with a broken wrist. As a result, I will keep it short. However, you might be wondering why I would write this with such an injury. My time with MCBC was truly life-changing and I wanted to share my experience with the club. For a brief background, I came to Mansfield to complete a year abroad for my junior (third) year of college. My college in the U.S. had a longstanding program of sending students to Mansfield College, and so I asked some people who went before me, what I should do at Mansfield? Surprisingly, they told me not to row because rowing is very challenging, and the boathouse is far from campus. (Editor's note: how do we disrupt this propaganda?) However, I did not listen to their advice. I wanted a challenge. And so, with literally zero rowing experience, I joined the rowing team at Mansfield.

Luckily, joining MCBC was the best decision I made in Oxford. The first thing the team did was invite me to an erg session in order to get me accustomed to the rowing motion. I was so nervous because I was afraid that no one would help me, and as a foreign student, I did not really know anyone. However, that first day the team took me in, made jokes, taught me the motions, and I had a lovely session. After that session, I vowed to make it into the first boat and row with MCBC. Thus, I spent most of the first two terms in the erg room and taking advantage of every outing that I could go on. My hard work paid off when



O1 – Summer VIIIs 2024

in Hilary our coach told me that I would race in the first boat at Torpids. Unfortunately, Torpids was cancelled. I was really disappointed that I could not race, but it motivated me to work even harder. As a result, I got my shot in Trinity.

Summer VIIIs were not cancelled, and I was going to row in the first boat. Not only that, but my hard work in the erg room also translated into a 5-seat for bumps. Those four days in Trinity were some of the best days during my time in Oxford. My best friend came from the U.S. to watch me race. It was the perfect culmination to a great year. One final note, however, is that, as a foreign student, the rowing team was my way of making friends. Everyone was so accepting, took time to make me

better, and was forgiving when I made mistakes. My teammates in the first boat were some of my best friends in Oxford, and we all still text to this day. That relationship really made my time special, and I think our teamwork really showed when we won the Men's mixed VIIIs in the Oriel Regatta. I love MCBC because that team made my time at Oxford perfect!

**Alexander Walls (V. 2023)**



