



MCBC 2024/25: A Brief Handbook



Who we are

Welcome to Mansfield College Boat Club! We are a group of undergrads and postgrads, run by a student committee, who row against other colleges in Oxford. We train pretty often and race at least once a term. Almost all of our members haven't rowed before starting at MCBC and we welcome novices of all sporting abilities with open arms. Within one term of rowing, everyone has the opportunity to race against the other colleges in the yearly novice regatta held at the end of the first term. Our main goal is to make rowing an accessible sport to everyone and anyone who wants to try it.

We have a boathouse called Longbridges on the river Isis (can be found on Google maps). It's about a 10 minute cycle or 30 minute walk from college. This is where all our boats are kept and there is also an erg (rowing machine) room upstairs. The code for the gate to the right of the boathouse is 6384 and for the erg room 8463.

Follow our instagram @biglegsmansfield for more updates!

Committee 2024/25

President: James Bennett
Captain of Coxes: Sam Hudspith
Women's Captain: Lucy Lansdown
Men's Captain: Mikey Matthews
Women's Vice Captain: Isabella Rulten
Men's Vice Captain: Matthew Burrow
Treasurer: Lowis Sanders
Secretary: Grace Hind
Alumni Officer: Isabel Valovin
Safety and Equipment Officer: Lucy Lockyear
Social sec: Hes Edwards

We vote for committee members at the end of each Trinity term and anyone who is a member of Mansfield can run for a position by making a short speech and then answering some questions from the rest of the club.

Feel free to contact any of us about anything on email, Facebook messenger or just around college. If you have any welfare concerns within the club, these can be raised through the college's main welfare systems and will be passed on and dealt with as appropriate.

What is Rowing and Coxing?

Almost all our rowing involves 8 rowers and one cox. The cox sits at the back of the boat looking forwards and the 8 rowers sit in a line facing backwards with one blade (oar) each. The rowing motion is very similar to rowing on an erg (rowing machine) but there is much more technique to learn! The cox has a microphone to speak to the crew, sometimes a walkie talkie to speak to the coach on the bank, and some handles connected to a rudder to steer. The cox is in charge of steering and instructing the rowers what to do. They will also be motivation during racing and can help with coaching tips. If learning to cox sounds like something which interests you, you can start as a complete beginner - see the coxing section.

Here are some videos of good rowing:

A video of the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race 2021 (race starts at 1:05:48 - keep an eye out for OUWBC's 5 seat Martha, who learnt to row at Mansfield!)

- [▶ The Boat Race 2021](#)

A video of summer Vllls bumps races which happens every year against other colleges:

- [▶ Oxford Summer Eights : Final day 16:45](#)

A coach-approved introductory video on the rowing stroke:

- [▶ The Official 2024 Rowing Form Checklist \(PERFECT STROKE!\)](#)

What our training looks like

On average our first boats aim to have 3-4 water sessions, and around 1-2 erg sessions a week when coming up to races - though this will vary a lot depending on the decisions of the crew and the captains. If you are motivated by success and training hard to achieve a goal, being part of the first boat is a really rewarding experience, and a great bonding experience as a crew of 9 people. Lower boats have less training, typically 1-2 sessions a week, and can be as relaxed or competitive as people want, depending on discussions amongst the crew. Almost all the sessions on water will be supervised by a qualified coach.

In the first two terms iver outings are mostly in the mornings at 6:30am before lectures, or at weekends. In the summer term they are often in the evenings in the sun! Mornings are always finished in time for people to get to 9am commitments. On the weekends, outings are throughout the day depending on the captains' preference.

Rowing is the ultimate team sport - everyone in the boat must be perfectly in tune with each other .The important thing about outings is that everyone shows up or else no-one is able to go out as the boat must be full!

In the first term, senior/returning rowers will mostly train separately as they can't row in the novice-only regatta. Novice outings for beginners will be run totally separately and you will be able to race in the regatta at the end of the first term!

We organise our training on Facebook messenger/whatsapp chats and on infamous spreadsheets. Captains and coaches usually put your name down for an outing/erg and you will be asked to 'green' or 'red' your name if you can make it or not. This is just changing the box your name is in to green or red.

Taster Day

The Saturday of Fresher's week is the MCBC taster day. There will be a big BBQ down at the boathouse and drinks in the clubroom, and everyone has the opportunity to try out rowing for the first time!

Technical stuff

This section is only for if you want to find out more about some technicalities of rowing - everything you need to know will be taught by the coach!

In a boat of 8 people, each person has only one oar, which sticks out to one side. If this is the right, it is called strokeside, if it is to the left it is bowside. Each person is also given a number from 1-8. Seat 8 is called strokeseat, and this is the front of the rowers - this person sets the rhythm for everyone else to follow. Seat 1 is called bowseat and is the back of the rowers, though is the front of the boat as it moves, as everyone faces backwards. It makes more sense when you see the boat.

The most important thing about rowing is timing! As you can only see forward, it is really important to follow the body of the person in front of you. It is tempting to look out to the side at first but keeping your eyes forward as much as possible is best. This will help with the 'set' (the balance) of the boat and make it easier to row. The beauty of rowing comes from the synchrony which you begin to develop with your crew as you row together.

As well as 4 8+ boats (boats for 8 people and a cox), MCBC also owns a single (a boat for one person). To use this, you have to do a capsizing drill, as it is the only boat we have which has a reasonable chance of capsizing. Taking a single out is a great way to improve or enjoy rowing in the vacations if you want to take the sport further. We also own a 4+ which has only 4 rowers and a cox which we often use in vacations, or for smaller groups of people who want to train more.

There is an indoor 'tank' at Iffley gym which we use occasionally too. This is essentially a boat on land but with the blades in two tiny swimming pools. The blades have holes drilled in them to decrease resistance. These sessions are really useful for improving technique.

Coxing

Anyone can learn to cox at MCBC. At the beginning of every term there are two coxing registration meetings run by the university. This is an introductory session, at which you can register and get a licence - the meetings usually last around 2hrs. They will teach you everything you need to know to begin to confidently and safely lead a boat on your own. Our coaches include some world class coxes who will be able to give you further training and guidance as you learn.

In Oxford, there are three different statuses for coxes: Novice (N), Experienced (X) and Senior (S). Everyone starts out a novice, which means you will have a bankrider cycling alongside you at all times to help you. If you would like to progress, you can apply to upgrade your status and will be assessed on your experience. For more information about this, there is lots!! of information on the OURCS (Oxford university college rowing clubs) website. <https://ourcs.co.uk/coxing/>

When you first start coxing, you will usually practise with a fully experienced crew on your first couple of outings. Once trained-up you will then be paired with a more regular crew by the captains. As an active cox, you can also subscribe to the coxes' mailing list. Send a blank e-mail to coxing-subscribe@mailist.ox.ac.uk and follow the instructions. Potential coxes are also encouraged to sign up.

Rowing Jargon

Rowers like to use a lot of specific terms! Below are explanations of some of the main terms that you will come across in rowing. They may seem confusing at first, but after enough outings they'll soon become second nature.

The boat

- Shell: The physical boat without any equipment such as riggers added to it.
- Hull: This is the outside of the shell (the part of the boat that touches the water).
- Rigger: The metal bracket which is bolted on to the shell of the boat and holds the oars in place.
- Gate: the plastic bit at the end of the rigger which the oar sits into
- Slide: The two tracks under the rower's seat that allows them to slide back and forwards.
- Erg: a rowing machine

Stages of a stroke: the stroke is what we call the entire motion of rowing

- Catch: The first part of the stroke where the blade enters the water. Your legs are fully bent and your arms are outstretched forwards.

- Drive: This comes right after the catch and is where power is applied to move the blade through the water and the boat forward.
- Finish: This is the release of the stroke (when the blade exits the water). Your legs are flat, and your arms are into your chest.
- Recovery: This is where you move from the finish back up to the catch with the blade out of the water (after which you then take another stroke). This will be the slowest part of the stroke.

Common coxing calls

- 'Hold it up': This is used as a brake. This means stopping rowing and squaring blades in the water quickly to slow the boat down. Very important to stop crashes!
- 'Easy there': Called to end rowing so that the rowers know when to stop. It means let your blades lie flat on the water.
- 'Back stops': The position with legs straight at the end of the stroke and your arms into your chest. Basically the same as the finish mentioned earlier,

Usually the cox will give a command and then say "ready... go". In order to stay in time, wait for the ready go.

Other general terms

- Catching a Crab: This happens when the blade of an oar gets stuck in the water at the finish causing the rower to lose control of the oar. There's no actual crabs involved despite what people may try to tell you.
- Cox Box: an amplification device that the cox uses so that they can be heard by everyone in the boat (it also records time and reads stroke rates).
- Flag: The flag colour is set by OURCs based on weather, and restricts who can go out on the river - for example it isn't safe to row if the stream is too strong, if there is thunder and lightning or if the river is flooded. (e.g. a green flag means that there are no restrictions on who can row).
- Set: A boat is set when it is lying centred and balanced in the water allowing for maximum speed. A boat can be offset easily by many factors (e.g. not catching and finishing together, and by rowers having different handle heights).
- Stroke Rate: The number of strokes taken per minute.

Races

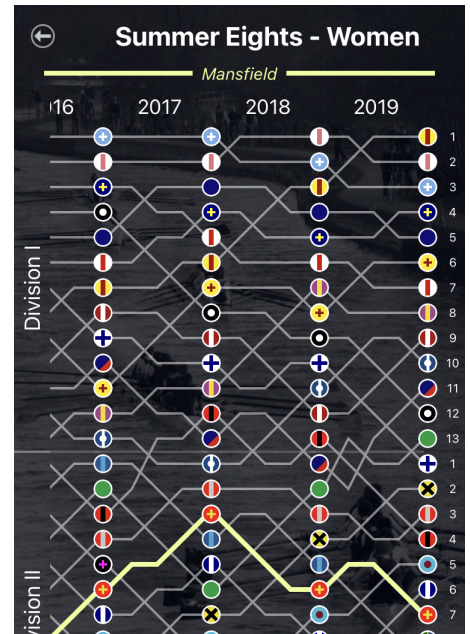
There is one main week of racing each term. Races tend to be on Tuesday to Saturday running in the afternoons. Talk to captains for the exact timings.

Michaelmas term has the novice regatta in 6th or 7th week. This is just for novices (those who haven't raced in regattas before). We will aim to enter at least 2 but hopefully 3 boats from each of the men's and women's sides. This regatta runs as side by side racing with two boats in each race, in a knockout style format. We get t-shirts made for everyone with all our names on which is a great way to remember your first racing event.

Hilary term has Torpids in 7th week and Trinity term has Summer Vllls in 5th week. These events both work as bumps racing, which is a long standing traditional racing format unique to Oxford and Cambridge college rowing. All the crews race once everyday. They all line up in several divisions with a length and a half between each crew and all start at the same time. The aim is to catch the boat in front of you (bump), without the crew behind you catching up with you (getting bumped). The races can get very exciting and especially on the Saturday of Summer Vllls thousands of spectators come to enjoy the atmosphere.

To get a bump, the boats can physically touch, or the cox of the boat being chased can concede by raising their arm. If you learn to cox you will learn the strategies and intricacies of coxing a bumps race to get the most out of your crew. Crews who successfully bump the boat in front of them (or 'bump up') exchange starting positions the following day. The aim in both competitions is to progress up divisions by 'bumping' as many boats ahead as possible. If a boat 'bumps' on all four days of Torpids or Summer Eights the team is awarded the prestigious accolade of 'blades'. Equally 'spoons' can be awarded for being bumped every day as a booby prize.

There are also other time-trial and side-by-side races throughout the year. Any crew can enter these and they tend to be on Sunday afternoons. They are a lot of fun and a little less serious than the regattas. There are also fun regattas where people often dress up and row in mixed crews for a bit of fun.



Events

Like most sports teams at Oxford, we have Crewdates which often take place in a restaurant and often involve lots of alcohol - though as always this is optional. These are lots of fun and have lots of silly rules and games, which everyone learns together. We usually have a few of these each term. Mansfield Crewdates are very friendly and are not in the spirit of some more hardcore Crewdates you may have heard about! If you want them, join a university sport team such as rugby...

Usually the day before a regatta, we will have a carb loading event somewhere in college. This is where everyone brings some food and we eat, watch funny videos from past years and get excited and relaxed ready for a week of races. It's a great social event to build excitement for the races ahead.

After Torpids and Summer Vllls, we have a formal dinner in college, which everyone is invited to. It is common to bring non-rowing friends and family along too, and there are usually speeches and prizes given out.

There are also many other events organised throughout term by our social sec!

Fees

Our club is heavily subsidised by College for coaching, equipment, boats etc, meaning we only charge £20 per term base fee. This gives you access to regular coached water sessions, use of the boats, use of the erg room, and is much cheaper than many other rowing clubs in an attempt to make rowing as accessible as possible. The fee is added to your battels from college at the end of each term. There are sometimes extra fees for entering races of around £3 per race though this can vary slightly. Access to boats over vacations comes at no extra cost.

If this is outside your budget, please don't hesitate to speak to the MCBC treasurer (or your captain) and they will be able to discuss financial assistance. We don't want financial reasons to stop anyone from joining our club.

Stash

In the first term, we order t-shirts for the novice regatta with everyone's names on. These are usually around £10.

We also have our own branded kit - each term there is usually one stash order for leggings, jumpers, unisuits, splash jackets, bucket hats and more. Ordering of stash is organised by the secretary and they will give you plenty of warning when it is happening if you want to buy anything! Everything is optional, but the stash is great to feel a sense of belonging to the club.

If you race in a first boat in Summer 8s, you have the opportunity to buy a tailored rowing blazer. These can be pretty expensive and very optional but can be a nice investment to wear to formal dinners, or if you take rowing further.

Swim Tests

In order to row or cox more than 5 outings (and race), all rowers and coxes have to do a swim test (usually £3) at Iffley Gym. This involves swimming two lengths in the pool (any

stroke, any speed), swimming 5m completely submerged and treading water for 2 minutes seconds, all while wearing shorts and a t-shirt. It is a pretty relaxed test, and if you can swim you will be totally fine.

Captains will organise this at the start of Michaelmas term, but they usually run throughout the year if you join later.

Social Media

We have a website (<https://www.mansfieldcollegeboatclub.co.uk>) which contains all the key information. The instagram account @biglegsmansfield is the best place to keep up to date with what is happening and see the club news.

<https://www.instagram.com/biglegsmansfield/>

The best rowing related facebook page you can join is OxRow which is an anonymous posting page for memes, river gossip and race photos!

<https://www.facebook.com/theoxrow>