



Boat Club Newsletter

Merton College Boat Club Newsletter | Hilary Term 2020



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Words from the river

by Henrik Hannemann

Sometimes it seems the river gods try to balance the scales. Looking back at three sets of blades in the last academic year, the most prominent tool in the past two terms will not have been the oar but the erg. Nonetheless, the Club and most crucially our novice rowers are to be congratulated to persevere through such a water-logged time.

The heartiest congratulations to our Women's First Eight on winning their blades last Eights Week. The first crew to do so since 1999 – a very fitting anniversary. While many other crews had relaxed their training regime after Eights Week, the senior men continued right on since they had their eyes set on a special prize – Henley Royal Regatta. Unfortunately the Stewards had a different interpretation about eligibility and a slightly modified crew line up tried their oars at qualifying for the Temple.

Having noted already the dreadful weather at the beginning of the academic year, the news now showcase a near entire collapse of the rowing season across the board due to the pandemic shut downs. While this will rob finalists of their chance of a last hurrah, more crucially as a Club this means yet further time without bumping other colleges. I for one deem this only a mere pause and have strong hopes for Merton to continue the rise of previous years.

As the annual gathering at the riverside and the dinner will unfortunately have to be postponed as well, I would like to thank all alumni who have reached out from far afield to the crews as they were chasing that elusive final bump for their blades during Torpids and Eights, as well as previous Henley crews. It is amazing to receive such notes across the years and continents!

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Photo credits (cover page): Henrik Hannemann

Merton Ergatta 2019

by Paul Zimmer-Harwood

With Oxford almost being flushed away after record-breaking downpours in October and November, it quickly became apparent that the much-awaited Christ Church Regatta would fail to deliver the first race for our novices. Many seniors also had looked forward to this jolly spectacle - especially as many of our newcomers still had no experience on the water whatsoever. However, no time was wasted on being disappointed, a Merton Ergatta was quickly organised to fill the gap that now had emerged in everyone's calendars.

In teams of four which were mixed through all levels of experience, this socially driven event gave everyone a chance to show off their, by now much polished, erg technique. The tournament, with races of 2 km in 4 x 500m relays guaranteed a lot of action and atmosphere while team members cheered on their current contestants so they would give it all they have got. And all gave all they had.

Crunching teeth, groaning, and with deforming facial

muscle compositions they ventilated the spirit of a rowing club that knows how to have some healthy competition in a light-hearted package. Glycogen storages could be restored immediately thanks to everyone bringing some food to share and assembling a small buffet. Special prizes for the best erg-face or best-dressed team were handed out in addition to the prizes for our overall winners and the performers of the best split times. Finally, as a gift from their rookies, the novice captains received surprise t-shirts sporting the image of the much beloved Concept2 rowing machine and the letters Merton College - Erg Club Captain as memory and sign of gratitude for their dedication in a special time were the gods of the river were just not tameable. After this heart-warming scene and a compulsory photo session, a lot of exhausted but happy faces ventured home or to the hall to continue eating, now surrounded by the sweet scent of achievement. And sweat. Mostly sweat.

Senior women at the Fairbairn

by Constanta Burlacu

After a term of real thirst for water time on the Isis, Merton's senior women's crew decided to check out the River Cam and see whether 'The Other Place' could bring us some relief. On Friday, 6th December, two cars left Oxford at the early hour of 6am to head towards what ended up being a memorable day for our Boat Club. Our faithful and always colourful shell, Joe Virden, was waiting for us in Cambridge already. Upon our arrival it was enough to quickly rig the boat, spend some time on the ergs, and be promptly ready to go for a paddle on the Cam. Our sister college in Cambridge, Peterhouse, has been extremely kind and patient in hosting not only Merton's women, but also Somerville's senior squad. They ended up having a full house, busy with rowing chatter and constant erg noise. To our surprise, even though Merton can claim its primacy in terms of College foundation, it appears like Peterhouse possesses far older rowing machines than Merton does!

Besides building our friendship with Cambridge's Peterhouse and Oxford's Somerville, our crew saw the involvement of two rowers from Worcester and one from Christ Church. All in all, our women's 8+ rowed the course of River Cam one minute faster compared to last year, achieved a target they have been aiming for during Michaelmas Term, quenched their thirst for rowing on the water, and set a new challenge for the year to come.

Crew:

T Rallens (Cox), P Jagers (S), C Burlacu, R Williamson, A Hearn, A Schmidtman (ChCh), E Pope, N Smith (Worcester), I Woodward (B, Worcester)

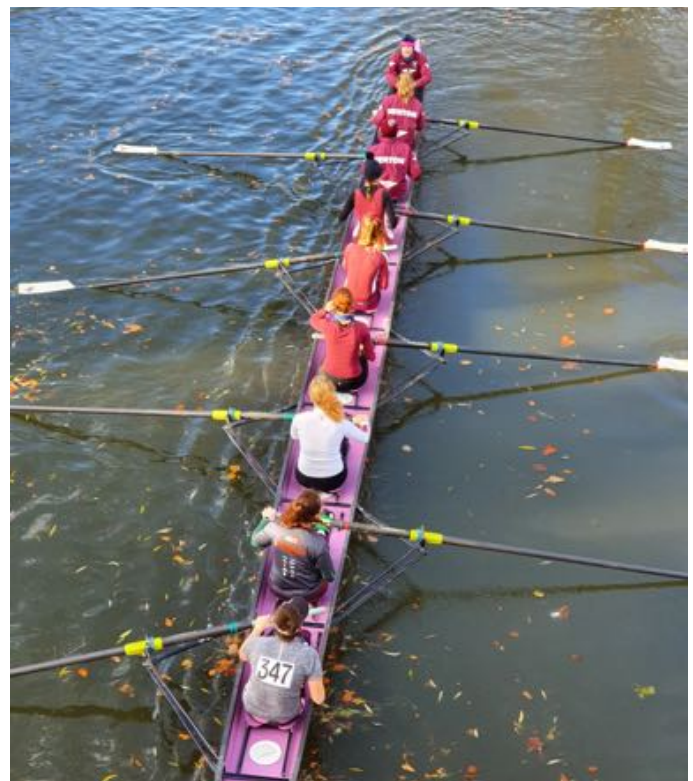


Photo credit: Paul Zimmer-Harwood

Once more for blades - Eights Week 2019

by Charlotte Kilpatrick

Merton entered Summer Eights excitedly after the success of the Torpids campaign. Six competing crews ensured that keen and casual rowers were able to participate together; it is a testament to the efforts of the captains that so many were able to enjoy a thrilling week of racing with excellent results.

Lower Boats:

The men's side was represented by four crews; M4 comprised a number of enthusiastic alumni who tore down the stretch with passion, to the alarm of their competition as well as their cox!

Wigs were not the defining feature of their performance but certainly a tasteful addition to the crew. M3 also displayed a remarkable level of determination, with novices and more casual rowers united under the guidance of men's Vice-Captain and their cox, Mantas Abazorius. His battle cries and rhythm calls live on through the cox-cam footage on YouTube, regularly revisited by rowers and coxes alike. With an impressively high stroke rate they put up a good



Merton W1 on their way to the bunglines on Saturday.

fight throughout the week. The women also managed to form a W2 within the club, an encouraging development from the composite crew of Torpids. It was wonderful to see senior members swelling the ranks, and their presence was felt by all!

Men's Eights:

M2 looked strong going into the week and their tenacity was immediately tested by a row-over on day one. They remained keen but a number of external factors challenged their hopes of success: most notably a wardrobe malfunction (n.b. we wear unisuits for a reason: shorts are not suited to a smooth recovery up the slide), stroke coming unseated, and a poorly timed klaxon.

M1 also looked impressive going into the week, and their sharp warm up showed the competition they meant business. Their attempt to chase down Mansfield on the first day was prolonged due to an unfortunate crab but they closed in on them on the approach to Boathouse Island. A heart-breaking klaxon delayed the bump until the second day, but ensured they went into the rest of the week determined to move up the chart, with three remarkably swift bumps, to 5th in MDiv2.

Women's First Eight:

The greatest victory for the club, however, was the comeback made by Merton W1; after 19 consecutive bumps days of sinking down the chart they went into the campaign with everything to prove. With coach Dan's meticulous regime they trained relentlessly at Godstow with the aim of turning the tables on the chart and moving up a division. After a close call on the first day they bumped St Anthony's in good time. The second day of racing presented them with the opportunity to bump up into WDiv2, which they comfortably achieved through bumps on Worcester and St Hugh's. The blade-winning bump on



Merton M1 pushing off for the final bump of Eights Week.

the last day was LMH, cleanly secured before the Gut, giving them space for an ecstatic row home! This success demonstrated the benefits of a competitive training programme and firm commitment, but it was particularly poignant as all of the crew had at some point been coached by Ian. We hope this last blade is a satisfying feather in his cap; it will certainly remind us what can happen when the girls get competitive!

Crews:

Men's Fourth Eight:

S Picard (Cox), T Bastianello (S), C Willmes, S Mahanta, H Hannemann, B Hartnell-Booth, W Whitehouse, K Kollnig, A Kenyon-Roberts (B)

Men's Third Eight:

M Abazorius (Cox), J Horrobin (S), L Fry, A Wohns, P Klimkowski, GP Milani, C Sheehan, A Jest, A Schellinx (B)

Men's Second Eight:

C Kilpatrick (Cox), D Testa (S), F Munro, S van Teutem, C Robertson, T Rallens, Yvan Nieuwerk, M Martinez, C Lippert (B)

Men's First Eight:

K Davies (Cox), L Koch (S), S Picard, M Abazorius, L Krone, M Drake, M Guerts, D Gutt, R Burke (B)



The blade-winning Merton WI crew with their coach Daniel Sadler.

Women's Second Eight:

G van den Berg (Cox), M Soares da Silva (S), I Carme, A Hearn, C Groenland, C Leopard, L McElwee, L Eck, S Bennett (B)

Women's First Eight:

T Rallens (Cox), S Bruce-Smith, G van den Berg, C Burlacu, B McCullagh, R Williamson, C Kilpatrick, L Buxton, R Herring (B)

Photo credits: Henrik Hannemann

Merton rowers complete their Thames row

by Lukas Krone

The unbroken waters in front of boathouse island glistened in the early morning light when a crew of six keen rowers was standing on Folly bridge waiting for the minibus to Lechlade. A year ago, four members of Merton's first men's team had undertaken an enduring 160km row through 32 locks from Oxford to London in support of the Pain Relief Foundation, reaching the Big Smoke after two days with blistered hands, hypothermic bodies but endorphin loaded brains. Now the team of Samuel Picard, Mantas Abazorius, Lukas Krone, and Lukas Koch set out to complete the remaining 50 kilometres and 13 locks of the Thames from Lechlade to Oxford joined by two keen rowers from the women's side, Constanta Burlacu and Iona Woodward (Worcester). Blue skies and a stunning sunrise during the drive to the first Thames lock foreboded that this year the temperature extreme would lie on the opposite end of the scale from the previous rowing adventure and would pose a new challenge to the vigour of the keen rowers. A lonely swan was the only resident of the picturesque village at the southern edge of the Cotswolds observing how Merton's Boatman Mark Seal helped with the assembly of the three doubles and the artistic boating from the walls

at the small Lechlade harbour.

Paddling downstream through idyllic moorlands, the crews soon arrived at the first of many historic Thames locks, which are still operated manually. Not only the passage through the narrow locks but also the multitude of long-hanging branches, reeds, bushes along the narrow and



Picturesque summer rowing on the upper reaches of the Thames.

windy stretches of the upper Thames tested the steering skills of the crews. While the lighter doubles Picard/Koch and Burlacu/Woodward elegantly circumnavigated most of the obstacles, the heavyweight double Abazorius/Krone took the most direct route, proving their aptitude for high-resistance work and collecting plentiful foliage on the way. Having passed the Chimney Meadows Nature Reserve, the crews entered wider stretches of the river but the increasing number of swimmers, paddlers, and pleasure boats demanded continuous attention. When the summer heat peaked in the early afternoon, the locks along the way turned into desired oases providing refreshing fresh water fountains, shelter from the burning sun, and an opportunity to stretch the increasingly sore backs. A few hours later, the heat started to ease and the paddle on the familiar training stretch at Godstow and along Port

Meadow indicated the nearing arrival at the Merton boathouse. However, a final unexpected test was still waiting. A party boat suddenly challenged the crews to an unexpected race manoeuvring dangerously close to one of the boats. Luckily, the rowers had collected plentiful experience in avoiding bumps throughout their blade-winning season and successfully countered the approach for their stern. Shortly after this tense moment all rowers safely landed at the Merton boathouse, where cold drinks and snacks were awaiting the team.

When the sun set over the calm waters of the Isis on this beautiful summer evening, the friends were still sitting on the lawn at Merton boathouse celebrating the completion of the Thames and discussing new goals for the next season and rowing adventures for the next summer.

Photo credit: Lukas Krone

HRR - A challenge between the booms

by Mantas Abazorius

The last time a boat from Merton College Boat Club participated in a Henley Royal Regatta event was 1999. After performing well in Oxford races for the last few years and climbing up the bumps charts as well as getting a great result at the Head of the River Race in 2018, we started thinking about the 2019 HRR qualifiers more seriously. Our Club's secretary, Lukas Koch, got the process started in Michaelmas in 2018, so we knew all year long that our training would not stop with Eights.



Merton senior men during their HRR time trial

We did not have much of a break from training after Torpids because of HoRR, and with Henley coming up we did not take time off after Summer Eights either. Usually, the newly elected captains have to wait until Michaelmas before they realise how much work and stress comes with captaincy, however this year Matt and Max got a chance to experience that a lot earlier. It was their responsibility to organise training for HRR qualifiers and our coach, John Thicknes, was keen on keeping the intensity high. Thankfully Lukas had already started organising all the HRR admin early on, which the captains surely appreciated. The fact that Trinity Term was the exam season and people had to leave Oxford after the end of term made organising training a lot tougher than expected. Regardless, the captains did a great job and the circuits, the ergs, and the water sessions kept on going. Unfortunately, due to some unforeseen problems regarding the rules for college membership of Temple Cup crews, we had to make a last-minute crew change with only two weeks to go. Although we had a strong sub lined up, everyone in the crew felt disappointed that we could not

finish the season with the same crew that we started with.

On the day we left Oxford early in the morning, playing some 90s hip hop on the speakers in the car and getting pumped up, that was until the captains decided classical music is a better motivator. Once there we put the boat in the tent and tried to relax as much as one can when there are hundreds of other boats and thousands of people running around. Luckily for us, we did get to meet the YouTube rowing sensation and GB rower Cameron Buchan before the race, hoping that his handshake would transfer some of his power to us.

When the time came we boated, warmed up and lined up at the start line. We did bump the umpire boat while setting up, but fortunately that did not disqualify us (it was probably our stroke's smile and wave at the umpire that got us off the hook). Our coach John and Lukas were both on



The HRR 2019 crew.

their bikes on the towpath nearby and we were getting ready to see, for the first time for many of us, how good a 2 km race can feel. Due to the adrenaline the memories of the start are somewhat limited, other than seeing the bank get very close to our blades as Katie was fearlessly taking that perfect line. The starts were never the best part of our races, but we thought that one felt good. Once we got into our race pace the boat felt strong, we were rowing in sync, responding well to coxing calls and the weather was perfect as well. The enjoyment did not last too long as the lungs started burning, then the legs decided to do the same. However, our cox had a few great inspirational power 10s up her sleeve which allowed us to speed up whenever we started to lose it. Just like with any other rowing race with about 400m left you could feel everyone in the boat was

hurting and the whole race became a bit of a blur. Then as the cox called for the last 20, we all came back to life. Sadly it was more than 20 left, but we were already giving 110% every stroke and did not really have an excuse to back down. The finish was strong and even though our legs and lungs were on fire, we all felt quite proud of the way we raced.

After landing we found out the results: we had not qualified and were in the bottom half of the division. Although we were faster than New College, we were slower than a Pembroke and Teddy Hall composite crew. Most importantly though we were happy with the way most of the race had felt and the way we had approached it. Everyone in the boat knew that qualifying for Henley would be an incredible feat and we would really have to be at our best to even have a chance. Even though the result was disappointing we all found that, not only racing, but also

organising and training for the Henley qualifiers was a very exciting experience. Getting to see how much quicker the other university and school boats were was definitely humbling (never fun to be beaten by a crew that is almost 10 years younger than yours), but it also showed us how much faster we can get if we keep training hard together. After this great experience, hopefully entering HRR qualifiers will become a more regular occurrence for Merton.

Crew:

K Davies (Cox), S Picard (S), M Geurts, M Abazorius, L Krone, M Drake, R Burke, D Gutt, F Munro (B)

Photo credits: K Davies/Merton College Boat Club

A watered-down Michaelmas Term

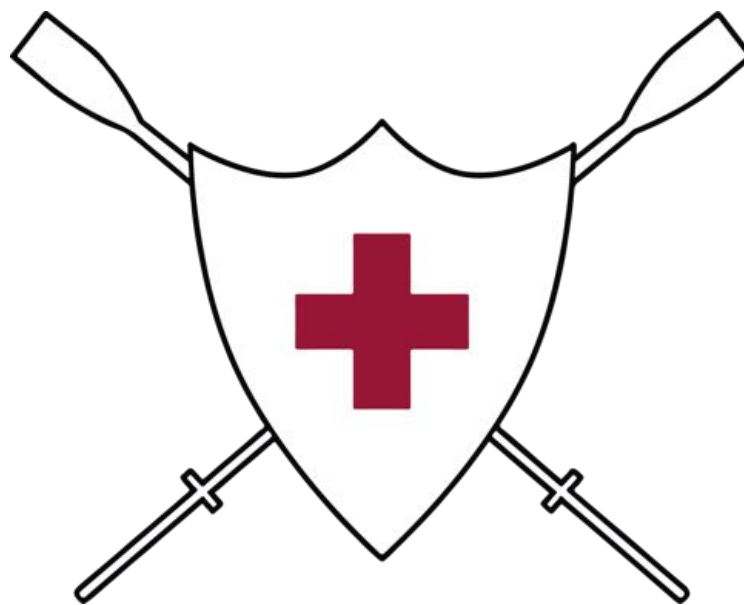
by Natasha Bradley & Lucas Didrik Haugeberg

After a series of red flags, the closest the novices got to the river was when it started to flood the grounds of the Sports Pavilion. Thanks to the dedication and adaptability of our novice coaches, Paris Jagers and Colin Robertson, our commitment was nevertheless kept as high as the river. Despite other colleges losing a lot of novices, Merton maintained its high numbers. Learning to row through a variety of ergs and tank sessions, our novices decided a better name for the team they had joined was the Merton College Erg Club. As the river remained high throughout the term, the Christ Church Regatta was cancelled and replaced by the Worcester Ergatta.

For many novices, the Ergatta was their first-time setting foot on Boathouse Island. We entered two women's teams

and one men's team, each consisting of four members for a relay sprint race. All three teams reached the semi-finals, with the Men's A team taking second place and the Women's A team taking first place. Our rowers pushed themselves to their physical limits. The success of our novices was testament to their excellent coaches and their numerous morning ergs.

As the river levels dropped during the Christmas Vacation, some lucky novices got out on the river. Their hope for Hilary Term was, however, dashed as the river returned to a red flag just as the hopeful rowers returned from their vacation. As the term continues, our novices are keen to progress from the Erg Club into the Boat Club.



Merton College Boat Club
c/o The Secretary of the Boat Club

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