



# 2016/17 Season Review



## President's introduction



Since joining Robinson in 2014, I have seen this club's fortunes rise and rise. From last year's extraordinary double-blading women's crew to the return of M1 to the first division, and always it has been underlined by the hard-work and unity of all our members past and present. But 2016-2017 saw contrasting seasons for the men's and women's crews of RCBC, with the men building from last year with a strong returning squad bolstered by talented freshers, while the women saw their numbers diminished as the brilliant crew of 2015-2016 mostly graduated, leaving keen but inexperienced rowers to take up the challenge. Particular highlights include:

- M1 maintaining their joint highest ever position of 9<sup>th</sup> in Lent's, and climbing three to 13<sup>th</sup> in May's, the highest they've been for 10 years.
- M2 earning blades in Lent's including an amazing overbump on Magdalene M2, and climbing up two in May's
- The return of several alumni to help coach the club: Mark Sydenham, Joe Griffiths, Ewan McGregor, and the legendary John Pritchard who was able to put his Olympic experience to good use in coaching both our 1<sup>st</sup> VIIIs.

RCBC still maintains six VIIIs: two women's and four men's, and a single shared IV+. The women's 1<sup>st</sup> VIII was most recently refurbished, and in the coming year we look to refurbish Laura, the men's novice VIII, so she can continue to provide new rowers a strong platform to develop. Through the combined funding of college and the Pegasus Boat Club we are able to maintain our fleet to a good standard, and we still are saving up for a new 1<sup>st</sup> VIII for the women, though the fulfilment of that is set for a few years yet.

RCBC remains Robinson's largest and most vibrant club, with members spread across all years, and an ever flourishing intake of novices from year to year. We continue to strive for excellence on and off the river, and our newest committee members are even now beginning to take up the mantle of leadership to great effect. The men's side of the club has been very fortunate with the intake of numerous keen freshers in 2016, including three schoolboy rowers: Alfred, Harris, and Sam from St. Paul's, Monmouth, and Portora respectively. Their inclusion in the club has proven a real boost to the first boat.

The Pegasus Boat Club is instrumental in the continued success of RCBC. The provision of coaching and the sage knowledge of all Robinson's veterans serve to guide our current crews to future success and the financing provides a platform for ensuring competitive equipment for all crews. The Alumni were out in force this year, especially in May term. As was already highlighted, many alumni returned to coach the college's top boats, and even more returned to celebrate our successes past and present at May's BCD, and again at the PBC dinner in September in London's West End.

We hope this Collaboration continues for the next year. As such we would invite anyone interested in helping however they can to email [robinsonboatclub@gmail.com](mailto:robinsonboatclub@gmail.com), whether it is coaching a crew or simply a donation. We would also like to invite you all to celebrate again at next May's Boat Club Dinner on Saturday the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, especially the crew of the women's May boat 1998, who celebrate 20 years since they earned their blades. If you were a member of that crew, please get in contact, it would be excellent to see you all return! Details of the event will be circulated in the near future, but please don't hesitate to contact us if interested!

It has been a great pleasure to row at Robinson, and become a member of this amazing group of people whose kindness and enthusiasm never cease to astound me. I look forward to hearing from you all, and even more so to the coming year of competition and growth for the Mighty 'Binson!

Oliver Tesh, RCBC President 2017-2018

## M1 season review



The start of the academic year dawned more promisingly than Michaelmas 2015, with a boatload of returners and some new faces arriving with experience rowing at school. Training started immediately, with a focus on placing highly in the Fairbairn Cup. Cold winter mornings and long land training sessions saw a nascent crew bond and begin to row well together. However, it became clear that not only were RCBC's standards higher, but that it was a good year on the river over all the colleges. Rising to the challenge and redoubling our efforts, M1 trained hard and laid down a time to be proud of on the Cup course. Placed 19th, members of the first VIII found themselves within touching distance of Oxford lightweights, and firmly beating many of the traditional heavy-hitting colleges.

Encouraged, M1 kicked off Lent term training quickly, with rowing week and a tough selection period. Established seniors found themselves under pressure for seats from both lower boats, and from talented novices, one of whom won themselves a coveted place in M1 with both already-passable technique, and blistering times on the ergometer. Once the dust settled, training began in earnest, aiming to improve overall fitness to augment sprint capabilities, and ensuring new members of RCBC knew what to do with all the challenges that the bumps could throw at them. The boat picked up speed, then really began to fly, with regular water sessions and dedicated coaches helping the crew reach their full potential. Sadly RCBC were pipped to the post at Newnham Short Course by a huge Clare crew, bringing to an end a reign of several years, but given the rest of the field the crew were extremely pleased with the result heading into Lent Bumps. When the day arrived, disaster struck as a slow-to-clear Queens' crew gave the cox no quarter and forced a severe clash of oars. Recovering quickly, M1 disentangled themselves from the wreckage, but were now too far behind and were snapped up by a merciless Christ's. Day 2 proved no better, as Christ's caught the hapless Queens too quickly and Robinson were forced to row over. Day 3 saw some optimism among the crew as Queens were now lined up for the taking, and indeed it was to be, bumping out quickly and bringing Robinson back to their equal-highest-ever position on the river. A bumps-hardened crew took their best shot at FaT and the highest place ever, but it was not to be and they finished the Lent campaign with a respectable row-over. Perhaps next year...

At the return of the good weather, the Lent crew (combined with some returning experience), rallied to take the Easter term by force. Coxing had been a problem in the preceding terms, with our few dedicated cox spread thinly among many boats. As if in answer, Mays saw the return of an extremely-experienced cox, Amy Henfrey. She was able to dedicate her time exclusively to M1; acting frequently as both cox and coach, and this was a huge boon to the boat. The crew moved on in leaps and bounds, ironing out technical problems and picking up speed all the while, culminating in a couple of weeks of the best rowing as a crew I've ever experienced. Bumps came all too quickly, especially with the spectre of exams and other summertime distractions. But the crew were not to be denied. M1 did not go into their first day with good odds. A speedy Catz crew were chasing an inexperienced Churchill ahead, and behind Christ's' and Girton were both hungry for revenge. But the crew showed their class from the outset, displaying an ability to maintain speed out of a powerful start, and hunting down St. Catharine's in a three-boat sandwich, catching them coming out of the gut. Suddenly, Robinson's prospects had improved drastically. The Churchill boat, now directly ahead, was dispatched with ease by a buoyant crew on the first straight, to make the record +2 for 2 days. Things got much more serious on the third day. King's were no easy crew, and they were chasing a Selwyn crew which had already been bumped twice. Another sandwich emerged quickly, with Robinson powering through the incredibly choppy water down Plough Reach. Coming around the corner, everything got very close very quickly. Kings flagged fractionally in their pursuit, and the crew were ruthless in claiming a victory from the jaws of a painful row-over. The final day dawned nervous, but disciplined, with the prospect of a clean sweep in reach. The eight knew from the previous

day that they were quicker than Selwyn, but Queens up ahead had sunk rapidly through the bumps charts and were now potential prey for Selwyn to catch. And so it was to be. M1 launched from the start and began to reel Selwyn in, but before even the first corner, Queens were out of time and Selwyn pounced. Robinson rowed over the whole course powerfully, gliding home to +3 and 13th overall. A fine finish.

Thanks especially to Amy Henfrey for her expertise, John Pritchard for his sage advice, and to Bill Nolan, for all the pep talks, coaching, and the best motivation I've ever heard mid-race.

Michael Rawson, Men's Captain 2016-2017.



## M2 season review



M2 formed in earnest at the start of Lent term, with the graduation of novices to the senior squad. A mixture of talented novices and experienced seniors came together in an extraordinary manner. A tough training programme yielded excellent results. The first day of bumps saw M2 at the back of a four boat sandwich with Churchill M2, FaT M3, and Clare Hall M1 all closing together. FaT were able to gain the bump around Grassy, forcing both chasing crews to stop. M2 however were judged to have earned their bump as well, gaining a technical bump! Day 2 proved more straightforward. From 10<sup>th</sup> station they took down a weak Clare Hall before first post corner. Day 3 was by far the most rewarding day. The boys chased hard on FaT M3, but they in turn gained quickly on Lady Margaret M3, and took them at first post corner. Facing no threats from behind, M2 dug in deep and rowed strongly and professionally, knowing they could only go up. By Ditton, they were 4 lengths from Magdalene M2, and it came steadily down to a length before the railway bridge, where M2 launched their final charge and decimated Magdalene, taking the full length in 200m and bumping in front of the marshalled women's boats to enormous cheers. They didn't let it go to their heads though. The final day and the opportunity in front of them spurred them on. A blistering start leading into a firm bump on St. Catherine's M2 around Grassy, earning the boys a well-deserved set of blades! +6

Selection for May's M2 was extremely competitive, and even some of the most experienced rowers missed the cut thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the returning M2. Training for May's was overseen by former captain Ewan McGregor and the college chaplain (and former army rower) Simon Perry. The crew's mentality and enthusiasm throughout the term was intense, and they entered bumps filled with hope. The first day provided a dramatic conclusion. Chasing their old rivals from Lent's, Magdalene M2, they lost distance off the start and saw Magdalene charge away. But the depth of stamina and quality of rowing proved ultimately too great, as they reeled them in to gain the bump within the final 100m of the course. The second day saw fortunes reverse. Magdalene knew they had a strong start, and put it to good effect as they stormed forward from the start. The speed of their start set panic in our M2, and they quickly succumbed. But this was not the end of the rivalry, as day three saw our boys once again real Magdalene in with superior fitness, only this time a whole kilometre sooner! The final day promised more excitement. Magdalene once again surged from the start to half a length, but this time Robinson kept their cool and pushed them away again, determined to finish up. And so it would prove, as they closed swiftly on Trinity Hall M2 and with a tight line around Ditton, bumped them just as Trinity Hall came to overlap with Emmanuel M2. A fine performance all term saw M2 finish +2.



## Women's side (W1/2)



Despite some initial difficulties with recruitment, by the end of Michaelmas we had a strong novice women's boat. They gained valuable racing experience in Fairbairns, finishing 12<sup>th</sup> with the help of a couple of seniors. Those who returned for rowing week made quick progress and three novices were able to join W1 for Lents.

On the first day of Lent bumps we closed on Emma II, but frustratingly carnage ahead meant we were awarded a technical row over. A speedy Sidney Sussex bumped us on the second day, and we succumbed to Darwin on the third. We set out on the fourth day determined to take revenge on Darwin. Unfortunately, crews ahead and behind bumped out early, forcing us into a long row home.

Recruitment was ongoing through the year, but, unfortunately, we did not have the numbers to enter a W2 for bumps. However, we did have women going out regularly in the four and joining W1 for some land training sessions. Very short on rowers in Easter term, we recruited an athletic novice who learnt astonishingly quickly, just in time for Mays.

W1 went into May bumps with some strong crews behind us. We were bumped by Darwin and Lucy Cav/Hughes Hall on the first two days, and eventually succumbed to Pembroke II on the third. Sensing spoons on the horizon, we gave it our all on the final day. Unfortunately, Wolfson, on for blades, were too strong and we ended the week down four.

Overall, 16/17 was a challenging year for the women's side. Several novices picked up rowing very quickly and raced for W1, which will hopefully lay the foundations for better results next year.

Lottie Plaschkes

