

It has been my privilege to be involved with the Regent's Park College Boat Club for the past 20 years – first as a sometime cox in my student days back in 2001, then as coach of the men's crews in 2005 and 2006, and again as coach from 2012 to 2017 with the women's crew and 2012 to the present with men. I have experienced the highs of eight blade winning crews and victories in Oriel and Christ Church Regattas, as well as some lows along the way, but regardless of results I have always been captured by the spirit with which Regent's students come together – year after year – to form dedicated crews determined to move up the bumps charts in Torpids and Summer Eights.

This year was to have been no ordinary Summer Eights. The Boat Club has now been going strong for 50 years – and this Eights would have been a celebration of that, a chance for alumni from throughout those 50 years to join together back at the river and cheer RPCBC in what we hoped would be another successful bumps campaign. Despite the pandemic leading to the first cancellation of Summer Eights since 1945, we are nonetheless excited to look back on our successes over the past 50 years – and will celebrate all the more in 2021.

Our Boat Club began in 1970; student Martyn Kelly had been rowing with Oriel College when he decided it was time Regent's had a boat club of our own competing in Summer Eights. So, after rounding up fellow students to join him in a crew, and borrowing a boat and blades from other colleges, RPCBC was formed.

The crew started 104th on the river in Division IX – these were days before a separate women's competition existed and all crews competed across these nine divisions – and the men's crew went on to win blades (the goal of all college rowers – awarded for catching the boat in front, or 'bumping', every day) in their first-ever competition.

The men's Eights crew climbed to the middle of Division VI by 1979, and a men's crew entered Torpids for the first time in 1978 – gaining 10 places in their first competition and reaching their highest-ever Torpids position of 39th on the river at the end of 1979.

The 1979 men's crew also undertook a Row-To-London Challenge, starting in Oxford and ending under Tower Bridge after more than 100 miles of rowing down the Thames.



*1970 crew coach Michael Ridgeon with the Principal, Rob Ellis, pictured in 2012 with the illuminated bow celebrating the club's first ever blades.*



*Our first-ever women's crew in 1985!*

Soon, our men's boat was joined by a women's crew as well. Regent's Women first competed in Summer Eights in 1985 - and Torpids in 1991 - winning Summer Eights blades in 1994, including a bump on St Antony's W1 ... a rare occasion for RPCBC to catch a college 1st VIII in bumps! The Women's crew reached their highest-ever positions on the river of 36th in Torpids in 1997 and 40th in Eights in 1998.

The mid-1990s also proved successful for the RPCBC Men's crew with Torpids blades in 1991, and Eights blades in 1993, 1994, and 1995. The Men's and Women's crews both winning blades in

Eights 1994 remains the only time both crews have won blades in the same competition.

The early 2000s brought more difficult times for RPCBC, with much of Michaelmas and Hilary Terms often washed out with flooding, leading to very limited training time. No RPCBC crews

competed in Torpids between 2000 and 2005, and in Eights - although 2000 started with men's blades - the men's and women's crews collectively dropped -18 places over these six years.

However, in 2005, two members of the women's crew and their cox took on a big challenge, teaming up with rowers from LMH to take part in the Oxford-Cambridge Channel Challenge, rowing a coastal 4+ from Dover to France over 21 miles across the English Channel, and setting a record time for their boat class.

In 2006, RPCBC produced arguably our fastest and most successful men's crew – they won blades in both Torpids and in Eights, won the Junior Eights and Senior Eights categories at Oriel Regatta, and set our



*The Channel Crossing Crew from 2005*



*The RPCBC men's crew racing in Summer Eights 2006 on their way to winning double blades.*

fastest-ever times over the Isis Winter League and 'Rowing On' course time trial races. This was only the second time a Regent's crew had won 'double blades' – a blade in Torpids and Eights in the same year – as well as the men's crew of 1978.

The women's crew of 2007 also won blades, and the men's crew set a RPCBC record of 35 consecutive bumps starts without being bumped from the last day of Eights 2005 to the first day of Eights 2010.

There has been considerable RPCBC success on the river in recent years, making the 2010s our most successful decade yet.

After the men won blades in Torpids 2012 and the women in Torpids 2013, our women's crew faced a rebuilding year in 2014 with a newly-recruited crew coming together at the start of Michaelmas Term. After a term of hard training, they achieved one of Regent's biggest sporting successes by winning the annual Christ Church Regatta for novice crews.

Despite being the smallest women's college boat club in Oxford, the RPCBC crew beat the novice 'A' crews from Pembroke, Christ Church, Keble, University, Wolfson, and Wadham - all colleges whose 1st VIIIs regularly compete at the top end of Division I in bumps - on their route to victory.

Building on their victory, from the first race of Torpids 2015 to the final race of Summer Eights 2016, our women's crew went on an incredible streak of 18 bumps in 18 races - winning 4 consecutive blades - and equalling the consecutive bumps record for a women's crew held jointly by University W1 and Osler House W1.

The 2015 women's crew also took part in our first overseas competition, travelling to race in the Trophée des Rois on the Grand Canal at the Palace of Versailles in France, and the 2016 women's crew competed for the first time in the Women's Eights Head of the River Race – the largest women's rowing event in the world – which takes place over the Championship Course that the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Races race each year.



*Christ Church Regatta Champions 2014*

Which brings us to the present ... the legacy of recent women's success has been built upon with the women's winning of blades in Eights 2019 and reaching their highest position on the river in Eights since 2000, whilst the men have currently raced another 28 consecutive bumps starts without being bumped since the first day of Eights 2016. This recent success has seen the men's crew rise to their highest position since 1982 in Torpids and their highest ever position in Eights.

As we look forward to the future, our women's and men's Torpids and Eights crews are all now placed in Division IV for the first time in the club's history.

Despite this year's flooding in Michaelmas and Hilary terms disrupting training, and the cancellation of Eights due to the pandemic, we were optimistic that we would have achieved similar successes again; all we can do right now is be determined to return even stronger in 2021 to start writing the next 50 years of RPCBC history.

*Pete Bond*

*RPC 2000-2003*



*Our most recent crews at Summer Eights 2019*