



*Michaelmas 2013*

### Cuppers

The decision was taken by the committee this year to have only two selection races for Varsity. The first of these was our old favourite, Michaelmas Cuppers. However this year we decided to ring some changes, holding the event at South Parks for the first time. The advantage over the traditional course on Port Meadow were the multiple ascents and descents, putting the course much more on a par with both Varsity matches. The day was a great success. The new course worked well and, despite amateur signage, was almost perfectly navigated! Victory on the women's side went to newcomer Claire McIlvennie, while OUCCC veterans Sophia Saller and Joanna Klaptocz took 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. For the men, Tom Frith put in a stunning performance, winning the race by nearly 40 seconds. He was followed by fresher Will Christophi and second year Adam Speake.

### RAF match/ Chiltern League

Eager to keep our strong relationship with the RAF going, OUCCC opted to make this race the second selection fixture. Conveniently, there was also a Chiltern League fixture taking place at Horspath/Shotover and thanks to some enquiries from race-organiser James Taylor, the Chiltern League kindly allowed OUCCC and RAF athletes to compete as non-scorers in the race.

The high standard of the league meant it was a good test at this stage of the season for the stronger runners. First up with the women and for a few, it was the first time facing British mud! Claire McIlvennie once again was the first Oxford runner home and finished in an impressive 2<sup>nd</sup> place overall. She was followed



shortly after by Sophia Saller (5<sup>th</sup>), Emma Hodson (8<sup>th</sup>), Sarah McCuaig (14<sup>th</sup>) and Simone Paulson (15<sup>th</sup>). These strong performances led to a comfortable victory over the RAF. The men's race was particularly competitive for a league fixture with national standard athletes up the front. RAF's Ben Livesey won the race overall but strong runs from Tom Frith, Will Christofi, Adam Speake and Sean

Ledger (coming in 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> respectively) were all encouraging in the run up to Varsity - and ensured a convincing victory over a strong RAF side in the 4-to-score format. There were excellent debut runs in an OUCCC vest from Thomas Quirk (14<sup>th</sup>) Alex Howard (28<sup>th</sup>), Will Durkin (38<sup>th</sup>), Phil McCorquodale (40<sup>th</sup>) and Aidan Smith (50<sup>th</sup>). Impressively, 20 women and more than 30 men turned out on the day for OUCCC showing real depth in the club.



### **IInds-IVths Varsity**

A reasonably mild and sunny day greeted the Dark and Light Blues on Saturday of 7<sup>th</sup> week for the Seconds to Fourths Varsity. A dry spell in the weeks leading up to the race meant that Shotover was surprisingly firm underfoot compared to the much muddier affair 3 weekends before at the Chiltern League / RAF Fixture.

Women's 2nds: A very new Dark Blue team lined up on the start line, with 4 out of the 6 never having competing in a cross-country Varsity match before. The girls faced the challenge well and were confident on the start line. From about 5 min in Simone Paulson took the lead and held first position for the rest of the race leading to a comfortable victory. With less than a mile to go, Sarah McCuaig was next Oxford in 4<sup>th</sup>, but fought hard up the final hill, catching the Tabs ahead and finishing in 2<sup>nd</sup>. Unfortunately, despite the 1-2, four strong Light Blues took the next four spots, meaning Oxford didn't quite have the edge. However, gutsy runs from freshers Fern Brereton (7<sup>th</sup>) and Imogen Kempton (10<sup>th</sup>) meant only a very narrow loss of 18-20. All the girls on the team will be back next year and will be ready to reclaim the victory they deserve!

Women's 3rds: The Women's Mob Match however, was a different story. Having not won the race since 2007 Captain, Naomi Webber, and Vice-Captain, Rosemary Hurford, were determined not to let the Tabs get away with another victory. Superb recruiting on the part of Rosemary meant Oxford fielded its largest team for a number of years. Coupled with the commitment to training from so many throughout the term meant we couldn't have been better prepared. Superb packing meant that from positions 4 to 30, there was barely a Light Blue vest to be seen and the team produced a stunning victory of 294-388.



**Men's 2nds:** Both sides were extremely strong with the usual range of disciplines represented from middle-distance specialists to marathon runners. The race went out at a sedate rhythm but then Cambridge started to push it on after the first kilometre. At the halfway stage, the race was finely poised: Cambridge's O'Donnghaile was clear at the front, but Oxford were packing well. Unfortunately for the Dark Blues, in a race would could have gone either way, they were just edged out 37-41. A Cambridge 1-2 did the damage and on the whole, the Tabs edged the scraps down the long finishing straight at Shotover. There were, however, solid individual performances from men's captain Alex Muir returning from injury to take 3<sup>rd</sup>, as well as from new recruits Alastair Graves, Phil McCorquodale and Aidan Smith who acquitted themselves well to come in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> respectively.

**Men's 3rds:** Setting off 5 minutes after the 2nds, this was another thrilling contest but this one went Oxford's way with a 37-43 victory. A sublime 1-2-3 from new boy Cameron Taylor, stellar team captain and recipient of 'OUCCC Performance of the Day' Oliver Starkey, and a speedy Matt Wood was pivotal to this success, but they were ably backed up by the rest of the squad to keep the Tabs at the bay.



**Men's 4ths:** This formed the day's climax and certainly did not disappoint. A stunning recruiting job from Mob Match captain and organiser of the day, Adam Speake, meant that Oxford had 31 runners toeing the line compared to Cambridge's 22 runners. Specialist triathlete Andy Dyson was a runaway winner of the race leading from start to finish. Cambridge's front-end in this race was very sharp: they filled 10 of the top 12 positions. Economics maestro Alex Betts was the other runner to break up this strong light blue showing, finishing 7<sup>th</sup>. Nevertheless, there was a good smattering of Dark

Blue in the front half of the positions as well, which added to the strength in depth on show, led to a victory, in the end by the smallest of margins: 504-513.

All in all, this was a superb day's racing and many of those who ran will be looking to ensure we're well represented in all races at BUCS in Stirling and in the relays next term.

### **Blues Varsity**

After some encouraging performances the week before at Shotover in the 2nds-4ths race, the term's most important fixture soon came round: Blues Varsity. Although it comes at the end of a busy first term, it is imprinted on the mind throughout the eight weeks of Michaelmas Term, and long before that as well...

After an exciting Old Gits race, with many ex-OUCCC athletes featuring prominently at the front, the women lined up. As with the Seconds, the Dark Blues fielded a very new team, with only two of the athletes having competed in the Blues match before, compared with several veterans on the Cambridge side. Still, strong performances in the previous weeks and a few unknowns on the other team meant the girls lined up with hope and determination. Unfortunately a combination of previous illness and some strong runs from the other side meant Oxford did not quite have the edge it needed. Special mention, however, must go to Sophia Saller, who put in a stunning performance finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> overall. As with the second team, these girls will be back, and with the experience of a Blues Varsity under their belts and the determination to regain the title they deserve there will be no stopping them next year!

On the men's side, this year had an added importance with it being the 123<sup>rd</sup> Varsity race and the scores tied at 61-61. Oxford fielded a relatively young but very talented side this year compared to a more experienced Cambridge one. Some excellent performances at the RAF/Chiltern League fixture and at Liverpool two weeks before suggested that the race could be a very competitive one indeed against a strong Cambridge side, even if they were slightly weakened by the absence of Alex Short who had been selected to run for GB U20s in the European Championships.

The team went in very well-prepared and adopted the tactics of taking the race by the scruff of the neck. Tom Frith had already opened up a sizeable gap by the water jump, coming only a couple of minutes into the race; and in the opening miles, Oxford featured prominently at the front of the race. As the race approached halfway, Frith and Lloyd of Cambridge were away and the Oxford athletes were exactly where they needed to be compared to the Light Blues – or very close and looking like they would soon establish contact with Cambridge athletes.

Unfortunately, some members of the team had been unlucky with injuries and illnesses in the lead up to the race. It was a combination of clinical running from Cambridge and these less than ideal elements which swung the race in the Light Blues' favour. In the end, Cambridge came out on top 30-53: every Dark Blue gave it as much as he could on the day; the Tabs were just too strong on this occasion. Nevertheless, there were some notable individual performances from: Tom Frith, running comfortably his finest Cross-Country Varsity to secure 2<sup>nd</sup>; Sean Ledger, who took the fight to a very strong Cambridge trio to place a highly respectable 6<sup>th</sup>; and Chris Phillips-Hart, who showed the

progress which can be made through consistency and attention to training over time, running the race of his life so far to come in 7<sup>th</sup>.

The team will come out fired up in the start of the New Year, looking to be a force up in Stirling at BUCS. Considerable improvement on the last couple of years' performances can be expected.

A special thanks goes to Thames Hare and Hounds for their excellent organisation of all aspects of the day.

Full Blues were awarded to –

Women: Sophia Saller

Men: Tom Frith, Sean Ledger, Chris Phillips-Hart and Will Christofi

Half Blues were awarded to –

Women: Claire McIlvennie, Emma Hodson, Joanna Klaptozc, Emily Moss and Simone Paulson

Men: Thomas Quirk, Glen Colopy, Adam Speake and Alex Howard



All in all, despite a narrow loss overall against Cambridge, it was a positive term. A huge influx of talent and potential has given the club the boost it needs and with a year's more experience behind us the tide will certainly turn. Time to show everyone what we're truly made of in Stirling, Hyde Park and our very own Oxford in the races to come!

Naomi Webber (Club Captain) and Alex Muir (Men's Captain)

January 2014