



UNIVERSITY BOAT RACE

By

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BOAT RACE - SUMMARY

The Boat Race is an annual rowing race between the Cambridge University Boat Club and the Oxford University Boat Club, rowed between men's and women's open-weight eights on the River Thames in London, England. It is also known as the University Boat Race and the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race.

The men's race was first held in 1829 and has been held annually since 1856, except during the First and Second World Wars and the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. The first women's event was in 1927 and the race has been held annually since 1964. Since 2015, the women's race has taken place on the same day and course, and since 2018 the combined event of the two races has been referred to as "The Boat Race". In the 2019 race, which took place on Sunday 7 April 2019, Cambridge won the men's and women's races as well as both reserve races.

The course covers a 4.2-mile (6.8 km) stretch of the Thames in West London, from Putney to Mortlake. Members of both teams are traditionally known as *blues* and each boat as a "Blue Boat", with Cambridge in light blue and Oxford in dark blue. As of 2019, Cambridge has won the men's race 84 times and Oxford 80 times, with one dead heat. Cambridge has led Oxford in cumulative wins since 1930. In the women's race, Cambridge have won the race 44 times and Oxford 30 times. Cambridge has led Oxford in cumulative wins since 1966. A reserve boat race has been held since 1965 for the men and 1966 for the women.

Over 250,000 people watch the race from the banks of the river each year. In 2009, a record 270,000 people watched the race live. A further 15 million or more watch it on television.

The Men's Boat Race

THE
BOAT RACE
OXFORD X CAMBRIDGE

Contested by



CUBC



OUBC

First boat race	10 June 1829
Annual event since	1856
Current champion	Cambridge
Course record	Cambridge, 1998 (16 min 19 sec) ^[1]
Course	The Championship Course River Thames, London
Course length	4.2 miles (6.8 km)
Sponsor	BNY Mellon (since 2013) ^[2]
Official charity	Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) ^[3]
Trophy	The Boat Race Trophy

Number of wins	
Cambridge	Oxford
84	80
There has been one dead heat , recorded in 1877	
Official website	
theboatrace.org	

The Women's Boat Race

THE
BOAT RACE
OXFORD X CAMBRIDGE

Contested by



CUWBC



OUWBC

First boat race	15 March 1927 ^[4]
First side-by-side race	1936 ^[5]
Annual event since	1964 ^[6]
Current champion	Cambridge
Course record	Cambridge, 2017 (18 min 33 sec) ^[7]
Course	The Championship Course River Thames, London (2015 onwards) ^[8]
Course length	4.2 miles (6.8 km) ^[8]
Sponsor	Newton Investment Management (since 2011) ^{[9][2]}
Official charity	Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) ^[3]
Trophy	The Women's Boat Race Trophy (since 2014) ^[10]
Previous courses	Henley (1977 to 2014 except 2001 & 2013 on Dorney Lake); ^{[11][12]} The Isis, Oxford and River Cam, Cambridge (1927 to 1976 with several gaps); ^[13] River Thames, London (1929, 1935) ^{[13][14][15]}

Number of wins ^[6]	
Cambridge	Oxford
44	30
Official website	
www.theboatrace.org	

BOAT RACE - ORIGIN



The Boat Race trophy as seen in 2014.

The tradition was started in 1829 by Charles Merivale, a student at St John's College, Cambridge, and his Old Harrovian school friend Charles Wordsworth who was studying at Christ Church, Oxford. The University of Cambridge challenged the University of Oxford to a race at Henley-on-Thames but lost easily. Oxford raced in dark blue because five members of the crew, including the stroke, were from Christ Church, then Head of the River, whose colours were dark blue. There is a dispute as to the source of the colour chosen by Cambridge.

The second race was in 1836, with the venue moved to a course from Westminster to Putney. Over the next two years, there was disagreement over where the race should be held, with Oxford preferring Henley and Cambridge preferring London. Following the official formation of the Oxford University Boat Club, racing between the two universities resumed in 1839 on the Tideway and the tradition continues to the present day, with the loser challenging the winner to a rematch annually.

Since 1856, the race has been held every year, except for years 1915–1919, 1940–1945 and 2020.

BOAT RACE - DEAD HEAT

The race in 1877 was declared a dead heat. Both crews finished in a time of 24 minutes and 8 seconds in bad weather. The verdict of the race judge, John Phelps, is considered suspect because he was reportedly over 70 and blind in one eye. Rowing historian Tim Koch, writing in the official 2014 Boat Race Programme, notes that there is "a very big and very entrenched lie" about the race, including the claim that Phelps had announced "Dead heat ... to Oxford by six feet" (the distance supposedly mentioned by Phelps varies according to the telling).

Phelps's nickname "Honest John" was not an ironic one, and he was not (as is sometimes claimed) drunk under a bush at the time of the finish. He did have to judge who had won without the assistance of finish posts (which were installed in time for the next year's race). Some newspapers had believed Oxford won a narrow victory but their viewpoint was from downstream; Phelps considered that the boats were essentially level with each surging forward during the stroke cycle. With no clear way to determine who had surged forward at the exact finish line, Phelps could only pronounce it a dead heat. Koch believes that the press and Oxford supporters made up the stories about Phelps later, which Phelps had no chance to refute

Oxford, partially disabled, were making effort after effort to hold their rapidly waning lead, while Cambridge, who, curiously enough, had settled together again, and were rowing almost as one man, were putting on a magnificent spurt at 40 strokes to the minute, with a view of catching their opponents before reaching the winning-post. Thus struggling over the remaining portion of the course, the two eights raced past the flag alongside one another, and the gun fired amid a scene of excitement rarely equalled and never exceeded. Cheers for one crew were succeeded by counter-cheers for the other, and it was impossible to tell what the result was until the Press boat backed down to the Judge and inquired the issue. John Phelps, the waterman, who officiated, replied that the noses of the boats passed the post strictly level, and that the result was a dead heat.

— *The Times*

BOAT RACE - OXFORD MUTINIES 1959 & 1987

1959 Oxford Mutiny

In 1959, some of the existing Oxford blues attempted to oust president Ronnie Howard and coach Jumbo Edwards. However, their attempt failed when Cambridge supported the president. Three of the dissidents returned and Oxford went on to win by six lengths.

1987 Oxford Mutiny

Following defeat in the previous year's race, Oxford's first in eleven years, American Chris Clark was determined to gain revenge: "Next year we're gonna kick ass ... Cambridge's ass. Even if I have to go home and bring the whole US squad with me." He recruited another four American post-graduates: three international-class rowers (Dan Lyons, Chris Huntington and Chris Penny) and a cox (Jonathan Fish), in an attempt to put together the fastest Boat Race crew in the history of the contest.

Disagreements over the training regime of Dan Topolski, the Oxford coach ("He wanted us to spend more time training on land than water!", lamented Lyons), led to the crew walking out on at least one occasion, and resulted in the coach revising his approach. A fitness test between Clark and club president Donald Macdonald (in which Clark triumphed) resulted in a call for Macdonald's removal; it was accompanied with a threat that the Americans would refuse to row should Macdonald remain in the crew. As boat club president, Macdonald "had absolute power over selection", and when he announced that Clark would row on starboard, his weaker side, Macdonald would row on the port side and Tony Ward was to be dropped from the crew entirely, the American contingent mutinied. After considerable negotiation and debate, much of it conducted in the public eye, Clark, Penny, Huntington, Lyons and Fish were dropped and replaced by members of Oxford's reserve crew, Isis. The race was won by Oxford by four lengths, despite Cambridge being favourites.

In 1989 Topolski and author Patrick Robinson's book about the events, *True Blue: The Oxford Boat Race Mutiny*, was published. Seven years later, a film based on the book was released. Alison Gill, the then-president of the Oxford University Women's Boat Club, wrote *The Yanks at Oxford*, in which she defended the Americans and claimed Topolski wrote *True Blue* in order to justify his own actions. River and Rowing Museum founder Chris Dodd described *True Blue* as "particularly offensive" yet also wrote "[Oxford] lacked the power, the finesse—basically everything the pre-mutiny line-up had going for it.

BOAT RACE - 2012 DISRUPTION

In the 2012 race, after almost three-quarters of the course had been rowed, the race was halted for over 30 minutes when a lone protester, Australian Trenton Oldfield, entered the water from Chiswick Eyot and deliberately swam between the boats near Chiswick Pier with the intention of protesting against spending cuts, and what he saw as the erosion of civil liberties and a growing culture of elitism within British society. Once he was spotted by assistant umpire Sir Matthew Pinsent, both boats were required to stop for safety reasons.

The umpire, John Garrett, decided to restart the race from the eastern end of Chiswick Eyot. Shortly after the restart the boats clashed and the oar of Oxford crewman Hanno Wienhausen was broken. Garrett judged the clash to be Oxford's fault and allowed the race to continue. Cambridge quickly took the lead and went on to win the race. The Oxford crew entered a final appeal to the umpire which was quickly rejected; and Cambridge were confirmed as winners by $4\frac{1}{4}$ lengths. It was the first time since 1849 that a crew had won the boat race without an official recorded winning time. After the end of the race Oxford's bow man, Alex Woods, received emergency treatment after collapsing in the boat from exhaustion. Because of the circumstances, the post-race celebrations by the winning Cambridge crew were unusually muted and the planned award ceremony was cancelled.

Oldfield was convicted in October 2012 of causing a public nuisance, fined £750 and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. In June 2013 he was refused leave to remain in the UK; he successfully appealed, with the appeal judge stating that there was "a public interest in providing a platform for protest at both common law and the European Convention on Human Rights".

BOAT RACE - SINKINGS

In the 1912 race, run in extremely poor weather and high winds, both crews sank. Oxford rowed into a significant early lead, but began taking on water, and made for the bank shortly after passing Hammersmith Bridge to empty the boat out: although they attempted to restart, the race was abandoned at this point because Cambridge had also sunk, while passing the Harrods Depository.

Cambridge also sank in 1859 and in 1978, while Oxford did so in 1925, and again in 1951; the 1951 race was re-rowed on the following Monday. In 1984 the Cambridge boat sank after colliding with a barge before the start of the race, which was then rescheduled for the next day. In 2016, at Barnes Bridge, Cambridge women began to sink and received advice from the umpire to pull to the side. The Cambridge cox indicated that she wanted to continue to complete the course and was allowed to do so.

BOAT RACE - COURSE



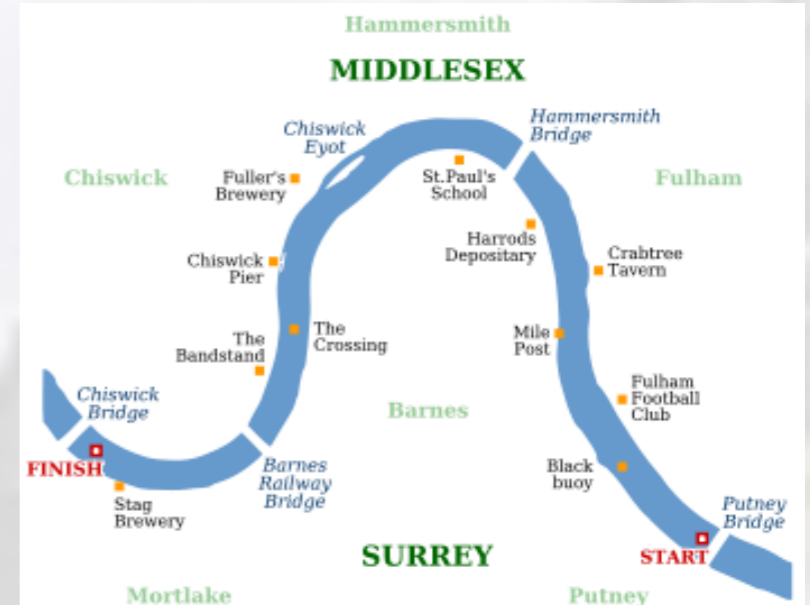
Competing for the fastest current

The course is 4 miles and 374 yards (6.779 km) from Putney to Mortlake, passing Hammersmith and Barnes; it is sometimes referred to as the Championship Course, and follows an S shape, east to west. The start and finish are marked by the University Boat Race Stones on the south bank.

The clubs' presidents toss a coin (the 1829 sovereign) before the race for the right to choose which side of the river (station) they will row on: their decision is based on the day's weather conditions and how the various bends in the course might favour their crew's pace. The north station ('Middlesex') has the advantage of the first and last bends, and the south ('Surrey') station the longer middle bend.

During the race the coxes compete for the fastest current, which lies at the deepest part of the river, frequently leading to clashes of blades and warnings from the umpire. A crew that gets a lead of more than a boat's length can cut in front of their opponent, making it extremely difficult for the trailing crew to gain the lead. For this reason the tactics of the race are generally to go fast early on, and few races have a change of the lead after halfway (though this happened in 2003, 2007 and 2010).

The race is rowed upstream, but is timed to start on the incoming flood tide so that the crews are rowing with the fastest possible current. If a strong wind is blowing from the west it will be against the tide in places along the course, causing the water to become very rough. The conditions are sometimes such that an international regatta would be cancelled, but the Boat Race has a tradition of proceeding even in potential sinking conditions (see Sinkings earlier slide).



Boat Race course ("Middlesex" and "Surrey" denote sides of the Thames Tideway corresponding to the traditional English counties)

BOAT RACE - PREVIOUS COURSES

Men's race

The course for the main part of the race's history has been from Putney to Mortlake, but there have been three other courses:

- 1829 – At Henley-on-Thames
- 1839 to 1842 – Westminster to Putney
- 1846, 1856, 1862, 1863 – Mortlake to Putney

In addition, there were four unofficial boat races held during the Second World War away from London. As none of those competing were awarded blues, these races are not included in the official list:

- 1940, 1945 – At Henley-on-Thames
- 1943 – Sandford-on-Thames
- 1944 – River Great Ouse, Ely, Littleport to Queen Adelaide

Women's race

During its early years (1927 to 1976 with several gaps) the Women's Boat Race alternated between The Isis in Oxford and the River Cam in Cambridge over a distance of about 1,000 yards. On two occasions, in 1929 and 1935, the race was held on the Tideway in London. Unlike the men's race, the official women's race continued in most years through the Second World War.

From 1977 to 2014, the women's boat race was held on a 2000-metre course as part of the Henley Boat Races. In 2013 the entire Henley Boat Races was moved to Dorney Lake due to rough water at Henley.

BOAT RACE - STATISTICS

Men's race

A selection of the more frequently cited statistics includes:

- Number of wins: Cambridge, 84; Oxford, 80 (1 dead heat)
- Most consecutive victories: Cambridge, 13 (1924–36)
- Course record: Cambridge, 1998 – 16 min 19 sec; average speed 24.9 kilometres per hour (15.5 mph)
- Narrowest winning margin, excluding the dead heat: 1 foot (Oxford, 2003)
- Largest winning margin: 35 lengths (Cambridge, 1839)
- Most races: Boris Rankov, 6 (Oxford, 1978–83)
- Heaviest rower: Thorsten Engelmann, Cambridge 2007, 17 st 6 lb 4 oz (110.8 kg; 244 lb)
- Lightest rower: Alfred Higgins, Oxford 1882, 9 st 6.5 lb (60.1 kg; 132.5 lb)
- Heaviest crew: Oxford 2009, 15 st 9 lb 13 oz (99.7 kg; 219.7 lb) average
- Tallest rower: James Letten, 6 ft 10 in (2.08 m)
- Tallest crew: Cambridge 1999, 6 ft 6.3 in (1.98 m) average
- Oldest rower: James Cracknell, Cambridge 2019, 46 years 348 days
- Oldest cox: Andy Probert, Cambridge 1992, 38 yrs 86 days
- Reserve wins: Cambridge (Goldie), 29; Oxford (Isis), 24
- Most successful station: Surrey 78; Middlesex 76 (as of 2018)

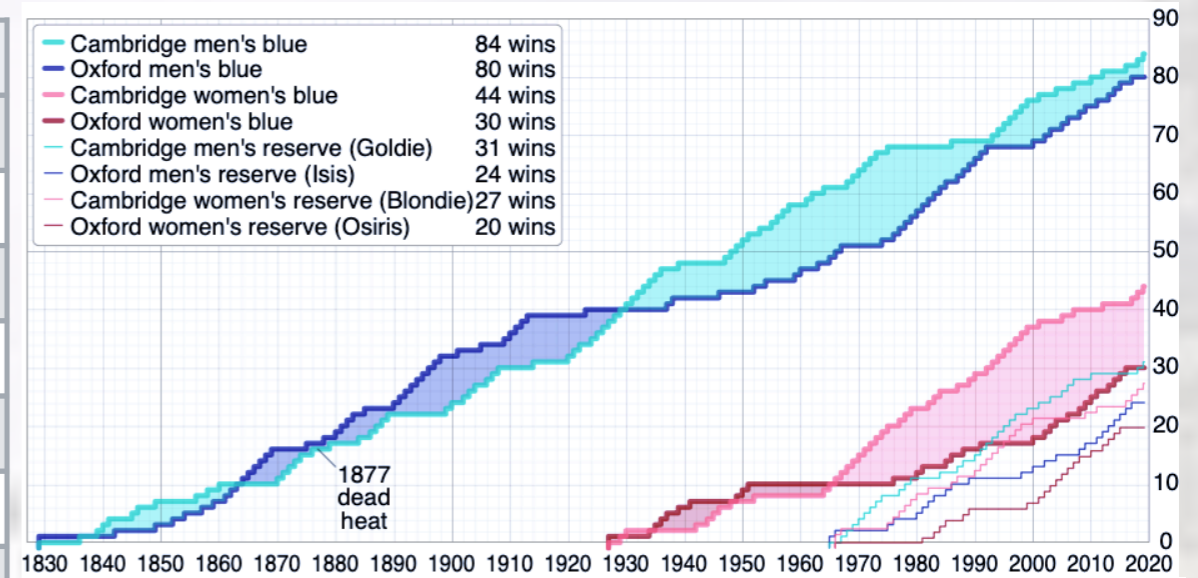
Women's race

- Course record: Cambridge, 2017 – 18 min 33 sec (faster, in different conditions, than the Cambridge men's Blue Boat in 2016 and the Oxford men's in 2014)

Men's race

BOAT RACE - RESULTS

Decade	Total races	Cambridge wins	Oxford wins	Notes
1820s	1	0	1	
1830s	2	2	0	
1840s	7	5	2	
1850s	6	2	4	
1860s	10	1	9	
1870s	10	7	2	1 dead heat
1880s	10	5	5	
1890s	10	1	9	
1900s	10	7	3	
1910s	5	1	4	
1920s	10	9	1	
1930s	10	8	2	
1940s	4	3	1	
1950s	10	7	3	
1960s	10	5	5	
1970s	10	5	5	
1980s	10	1	9	
1990s	10	7	3	
2000s	10	3	7	
2010s	10	5	5	
2020s	Cancelled for now			
Total	165	84	80	1 dead heat



Cumulative wins by Oxford and Cambridge men's and women's blue and reserve boats