



OUABC

Alumni Newsletter

Michaelmas
2021

Welcome to the Michaelmas 2021 edition

I hope this edition of the newsletter finds you all in good health and even better spirits. I'm delighted that, as well as reflecting on the past, I've been able to focus on the present and look ahead to the next Varsity Match. After such a long period of reduced activity, OUABC President Max Jenkins, reports on developments at the club this term and shares his optimism about the coming year.

Shane Hervey, 1971-1973, shares his memories of Bob Nairac. You will all know about the pivotal role Bob played in keeping OUABC going through difficult times and his tragic death - a memorial lunch for Bob was the last occasion that brought alumni members together prior to the pandemic - but it is great to hear about him from a team mate and good friend.

Terry Adams is another figure whose achievements and personality have influenced generations of OUABC boxers. In what I hope will become a regular newsletter feature, I've included a "Q&A" with Terry.

There's also some news of Olympic success...

If there are any stories or pieces of news you would like to share with the Alumni Association, please do get in touch.

Mark Linehan

The OUABC Committee 2021-2022

President: Max Jenkins, Corpus Christi

Vice-President: Jody Bragger, Hertford

Secretary: Joshua Lavorini, Pembroke

Treasurer: Josh Williams, Oriel

Men's Captain: Ryan Fincham, Pembroke

Women's Captain: Annina Lieberherr, Lincoln

Men's Vice-Captain: George Carver, Magdalen

Women's Vice-Captain: Eleanor Kerfoot, Balliol

The Committee is supported by the following:

Social Secretaries: Benjamin Allwright, Queen Mary, University of London and Gabriela Oseguera Serra, Worcester

Welfare Officer: Niall Kelly, Wadham

IT Officer: Jasmin Patel, St Hilda's

Stash Officer: Abhishek Manikanda, Trinity

OUABC PRESIDENT'S REPORT - OCTOBER 2021

The club has been growing in number steadily since the end of summer last year with around 30 people attending pre-season training in September. Last week we had Fresher's Fair where we had over 250 people express an interest in boxing and are now signed up to the mailing list. We have split our usual two-hour sessions into two one-hour sessions this week to give newcomers a taster session in the first hour followed by a proper session for those who have been with the club for a while in the second hour. We are getting around 50 newcomers followed by around the same number of boxers in the second session.



Pre-season training

The squads are starting to take shape, we have around 20 carded boxers on the Men's side and around 6-10 carded boxers on the Women's. We will start sparring hopefully from next week. There are some experienced boxers coming through which should make for some very exciting and high-quality bouts for Town vs Gown and Varsity next term. I'm very optimistic about the Varsity match this year.

Depending on how the Women's squad develops this term we would like to host the Women's Boxing Show again before Christmas and we will look to get some boys out for bouts before Christmas on local shows.

Max Jenkins



Training at the Gallie-Lewis-Dean gym

Max also has a couple of dates for your diary - Town vs Gown on 21st January at the Oxford Union and the Varsity Match on 5th March at Oxford Town Hall. Make sure you save the dates and give the boxers your support!

Finally, Max wanted to express his thanks to Karim-Pasha Ladbon, who made a very generous donation to the club this term.

BOB NAIRAC GC

Shane Hervey won his first Blue in 1971 and captaining the team in 1972. Now living in South Africa, where he's been since 1981, Shane was a close friend of Bob Nairac from his school days and I am very grateful to him for sharing his personal memories of one of the club's larger than life characters.

"I have been reluctant, for many reasons, to put finger to keyboard to share my memories of a truly remarkable man, Robert (Bob) Nairac GC. It is now, amazingly enough, 44 years since his death in 1977. I thought it would be a shame not to share these memories with the OUABC members past and present.

My journey with Bob started in 1964 when I started at Ampleforth College in Yorkshire, aged 12. The College is situated in the most picturesque valley on the Yorkshire moors 20 miles from York. On one side of the valley is the prep school for the College, Gilling Castle. At 10 years old boys would then move across the valley to Junior House thence to Senior House at the age of 13. This is the route that Bob followed. Alternately one could join the College, aged 12/13, from an outside Prep School. He was 2 years ahead of me. He was in St Edwards House and I was in St Thomas'.

Although he was only in his 3rd year he had already been made captain of boxing and was also playing rugby for the U16 team. My first real encounter with him was when all of us newbies had to go to the gym and be lined up by Bob who asked us all to throw a shadow punch. Most of us had never formally boxed but, of course, had some experience from scraps. I'm not sure how, but Bob singled some of us out for further development under his guidance. We were all then put into a "knock out" tournament and I found myself in the final. I was up against a well-known Irish toughie, Morris, from Junior House who must have been boxing when he was born. I decided I needed a bit of outside help so I went, all alone, into our huge Abbey to pray for a miracle. Realising my underdog status, Bob put himself in my corner as my trainer for the 3 rounds. I got the points verdict and won the best boxer cup, all thanks to Bob.

Even in these early days one could see that Bob was a unique character. He lived on a large plot in Gloucester where his father was a well-known eye surgeon. Even at the age of 15 Bob had already written books on shooting, fly fishing and hunting with birds of prey. St Edwards was an outhouse which gave Bob some space to fly his kestrel. I often used to go behind the house to fly the bird with him. He famously trained the kestrel which featured in the film "Kes".

Bob wrote the entrance exam for Oxford duly passed and went up to Lincoln College. I took over as boxing Captain. The following year I then wrote the entrance exam, passed and left Ampleforth in December 1969 going up in September 1970. I spent the 9 months in South Africa in the certain knowledge that my boxing days were over.

When Bob went up he was horrified to find out that the boxing team had folded. He discovered that the trainer's name was Alf Gallie and he went around to see him in his house down the Cowley Road. There he met Alf and Lina with whom he was to form a close bond. Bob and I would subsequently have many Sunday morning breakfasts at Alf's house. Bob asked Alf if he would train the side if he could put a team together. Alf, who had been Henry Cooper's trainer in the 1952 Olympics, was keen to take up Bob's offer. One by one Bob put a team together which included a good friend, Julian Malins, who was also a Rugby Blue. The Blues match went ahead that year and OUABC never looked back.

I arrived in Turl Street in September 1970 with my parents and the usual first term luggage. As I got out of the car at Lincoln College who would be there but Bob to welcome me. I had not seen him for a year. As he helped me with my trunk he said "you will of course box for us". I replied "Bob I've just spent the last 9 months in South Africa and the last thing I want to do now is box". But he was a difficult man to refuse.

In 2 months' time Oxford were due to fight Sandhurst. Bob tells me that the Sandhurst light-middleweight is undefeated and the new hero of the College but "don't worry you can beat him". I am then told that he is a southpaw so Alf set about teaching me how to circle the other way away from the famous Smith left hook. The day dawned and off the team went in a coach to Sandhurst. Boxing against Oxford was a big occasion and the whole College was there in their Mess Blues. When my turn came the crowd went ballistic as their hero, Smith, came into the ring. After the first round the crowd started to get quieter. After the second round there was an eerie silence. With 20 seconds to go I started to get cocky forgot about moving away from the left hand which crashed through and knocked me out. I woke up next morning in the Sandhurst hospital and guess who had stayed behind to be with me? That was the mark of the man.

Bob was still the Oxford Captain and I duly won my first Blue when we beat Cambridge at the Corn Exchange 6-3. Bob and I both won our bouts with knock outs. In the meantime Bob and I had been involved in several bouts up and down the country representing the University. It was normally just the two of us fighting in working men's clubs. These clubs were normally low ceilinged, smoky places enriched with shouts of "strike him Don" as the crowd took the piss out of us. Fortunately we won most of our fights arranged in those days by Bill Wheal, but always with Alf in our corner. After our bouts we would often find money in our boots accompanied with the offer to turn pro as these two University lads were a bit of a novelty. Later the two of us were to box against the Channel Islands now representing Oxfordshire.

During this year I was fighting at lightmiddle and Bob was middle. I often used to battle to make the 11 stone 2 lbs limit but no problem for Bob. Into the sauna he would put me with a sweat suit on doing press ups until I made the weight.

Bob was due to go down in 1971 but he then had some misfortune. He used to drive a battered mini-van 2 seater with an open back. He would transport his history files in the open back and one day they were stolen we suspected by skinheads who were the lads of the moment. Anyway as a result Bob got an extra year to complete his degree. This was great for me because I had now been made Captain of the team and would have Bob as my middleweight.

One famous night Bob and I had come from training and we were about to go down the narrow passage by Lincoln to have a beer. At the bottom of the passage were about 6 skinheads advancing towards us and we knew they recognised us. There were 2 dustbins close at hand and Bob grabbed one lid giving me the other. We charged down the passage just wide enough for the 2 lids and the skinheads turned tail and fled.

We would train at least twice a week as well as staying fit and running. In training we would often spar together under Alf's eye. We would basically knock seven bells out of each other. Alf would always say how he never understood how two such good friends could behave like that and then go and have a beer together.

In my Captain's year, three quite interesting things happened. Firstly, 1972 saw the arrival at Oxford of Steve Michaud, an American Golden Gloves lightweight champion. Bill Wheal immediately picked up with him and got him some really top class opponents. He was a really good boxer in a different class. I used to spar with him and he would run circles round me. Bob also had a few problems with him.

Secondly, Alf roped in Percy Lewis who sadly passed away very recently. He was Commonwealth lightweight champion. When I met him he had put on a bit of weight but was still incredibly good. I was sparring with him once and caught him with a genuinely good punch which knocked him backwards. I thought I had him and came in to finish the job only to be met by a serious right hook which knocked me to the ground. He taught me never to do that again.

Thirdly, I decided to change the format of the Cambridge match to a dinner show. We booked the Randolph Hotel which we filled to capacity on the night. The hotel was a Trust House Forte Hotel so I invited Sir Charles Forte to attend and present the prizes. He generously donated a case of champagne for the winning Captain which I duly accepted. We had a really good team that year and won 6-3. Bob made it memorable. He had now joined the Grenadier Guards and a few of his Vincent's friends put a couple of tables together and, when Bob came on to box, they went into full voice singing "The British Grenadiers" and the whole room took up the resounding song. Bob duly won with the referee stopping the bout.

Bob was a regular visitor to Vincent's, the Blues club just off the High Street, and made a habit of writing regularly in the members' book with some interesting observations. To anyone who is interested I am sure that the members book for the period 1969-1972 is available. A few years after both Bob and I left Oxford and he was on his path to go undercover in Southern Ireland, we were invited back for a Vincent's reunion dinner. As we left he told me that he would not be seeing me for a while as he was going to work on London building sites to learn some of the Irish rebel songs.

And now we come to the saddest part of my story. In 1977 I was articled in London to Peat, Marwick, Mitchell, as it then was. I lived in Tunbridge Wells and, on that day, as I arrived at Canon Street all the newsstands were ablaze with the headline "Nairac missing in South Ireland". Of course this came as a great shock and the headlines continued for many days as the search for him continued. If you had known Bob as well I did you will understand that I just could not accept the possibility of his death. He was indestructible and I was sure he would soon be found. That was never to be and you will probably all know how he was captured in a pub close to the border masquerading as Danny and singing a well-known rebel song. He was taken across the border, tortured, did not reveal any information, read the last rites at his request and killed by the IRA.

Although these memories go back more than 40 years, there is hardly a day that goes by without my thoughts of Bob's life. He was a unique character who was always destined to become famous as a hero."



Bob Nairac (left) and Shane Hervey (second-left) in 1971

Q&A WITH TERRY ADDAMS

In what will become a new feature in the newsletter, I will be doing a “Q&A” with former OUABC boxers whose achievements and influence on the club have helped to make it what it is today, and paved the way for boxers who followed in their footsteps. I could think of no better person with whom to kick this off than Terry Adams. When I joined OUABC in my first year in 1983, there were a number of names that were spoken with a degree of reverence and one that assumed near legendary status was that of Terry Adams.

A light-middleweight, Terry won his first Blue in 1955, captained the team in 1956, and won another two Blues in 1957 and 1958. Alf Gallie and Percy Lewis described him as one of the best boxers to lace on a pair of gloves for the club. Coronavirus notwithstanding, Terry still goes down to the club to watch the boxers training, despite living nearly 60 miles away in Camberley!

Anyway, Terry kindly took some time out whilst visiting family in France to answer my questions.

What was your boxing experience before going up to Oxford?

I came from a boxing family - my uncle was a Western India champion and I competed from the age of 6 in India, continuing when I came back to England to Dulwich College at 11. At Dulwich we boxed frequently against other schools, including a Quadrangular tournament between Bedford, Dulwich, Eton and Haileybury. I boxed for the school and eventually was captain of boxing and enjoyed both boxing and coaching. Also won a junior Western India title while on holiday back in India...

How did you get involved with OUABC?

I was recommended to the Captain of Boxing at Oxford by the master in charge of boxing at Dulwich, who was also a former boxer at Oxford! Boxing was my first interest at Oxford and Alf Gallie was happy to take me in hand.

Do you remember your first bout for OUABC?

I think my first bout was away to Guy's Hospital: we had between 4 to 5 bouts each term before the Varsity match.

What did you enjoy most about being part of OUABC?

The fellowship of the club (smaller at between 20-25 men, mostly in their 20's after National Service, all with some experience of boxing); the daily training; boxing at the Town Hall before a home crowd who followed the club closely; the coaching of Alf Gallie and his care for his boxers was also a permanent boon, together with the sparring with Percy Lewis; captaining a winning team in the Varsity match; winning two UAU (Combined British Universities) championship titles..!

What did you enjoy least about being part of OUABC?

Difficult to say! It was a lovely period and I enjoyed every moment of it EXCEPT my defeat in my last (fourth) bout in the Varsity match!

Which was your toughest bout?

That last loss against Cambridge! I think it was the only bout I lost.

Who was your most difficult sparring partner?

My Hon Sec and next Captain, David Mitchell - a couple of weights above with a fantastic reach who had me ducking and weaving throughout!

Apart from the above, what is your abiding memory of boxing at Oxford?

The fellowship of the basement training gym and the tutelage from Alf Gallie and Percy Lewis.

Did you box at all after you left Oxford?

Yes. I won the Army Divisional championship in the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) boxing after some bouts against German clubs, but lost in the BAOR semi-finals with a damaged eye from an accidental butt. I couldn't box after that but enjoyed coaching, especially at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst after retiring from the Army and taking up a lectureship.

What are you doing these days?

Surviving! In remission from a serious throat cancer and diminished by the consequences of the treatment; enjoying continuing contact with OUABC; keeping in contact with the French family, the extensive relations of my sadly deceased but ever wonderful French wife, who married me in Oxford in my last (4th) year.

If you could give one piece of advice to boxers at OUABC today, what would it be?

Maximise fitness and sparring.

Who is your favourite boxer of any era?

Used to be Jack Dempsey alone, but then Ali joined him alongside!

Any other thoughts?

Cherish the university years - maximise your commitment!



Terry (front row centre) as captain of the winning 1956 team (photo courtesy of Gillman and Soame)

OLYMPIC SUCCESS

You might remember the OUABC outreach programme last reported in the Hilary 2019 newsletter. The programme has run since January 2015, with the support of alumni, Magdalen College and Radley College. Under this scheme the club has sponsored talented young boxers and taken them on the annual Tenerife training camp – six and a half days of elite level training including two high altitude runs on the Mount Teide mountain road.

One of the sponsored boxers was Ben Whittaker (of Firewalker ABC, Wolverhampton) who went on to secure his spot on Team GB. Ben was subsequently selected to represent GB at the Tokyo Olympics, where he went on to win the silver medal at light-heavyweight, losing the final on a split decision. Disappointed at not coming home with the gold, Ben has promised "I'll come back, trust me."

Everyone connected with OUABC should be proud of Ben's considerable achievement and we look forward to more success.

VINCENT'S DINNER

Late September saw the first Vincent's Dinner since before the pandemic, held in the magnificent Gladstone Library at The Royal Horseguards. Several alumni use the dinner as an excuse to get together (as might be expected, Terry Adams has never missed!) and this year was a particularly good turnout with thirty boxers present, even getting a mention in the speeches. Particularly pleasing was that several current boxers came along including the President, Max Jenkins, and Women's Captain Annina Lieberherr (with thanks to those alumni who generously sponsored their tickets). Chris Mack reports "Despite the fact Paul McGinley is clearly a much better golfer than speaker, a terrific evening was had by all."

You do not have to be a Vincent's member to attend, so do think about getting in touch with your contemporaries for the next one.



Some familiar faces for those of a certain age, including four members of the 1985 team

Help needed from alumni

Early in the New Year, usually around the 3rd or 4th of January, OUABC organises an intense pre-season training camp which has recently taken place in Tenerife. A typical day involves a 6am 7km run, followed by sprints on the beach. A session at a nearby gym (Club de Boxeo Povedano de Arona) takes place in the afternoon with a focus on bag work and circuits, with a return to the gym in the evening for sparring and work on technique. If this were not enough, there is a 12km run up Mount Teide twice during the week.

Boxers usually stay in a hotel by the gym that offers cheap accommodation and food. The training camp benefits the team by getting everyone back into training after the Christmas break, ensuring they are prepared for Town vs Gown and Varsity match later in the term. In previous years the training camp has provided an outreach opportunity with local boxers joining OUABC boxers, as well as future Olympians such as Ben Whittaker (see above).

However, this year - due to Covid-19 - the club has been advised to hold off from booking anything abroad. They also believe they should avoid flying where possible in a commitment to net zero targets. So, as an alternative, the club is looking to hold a training camp in the UK this in January. That could be in Oxford but, if alumni know of any venues that would provide similar facilities to those described above - or have contacts with other clubs and trainers who could help - then please do get in touch. In future, the club will be looking for European venues that are accessible by train.

If you can help with suggestions for this coming January or for future years, please do get in touch at the email address below and I will put you in touch with Max.

Remembered

Malcolm Faber (Merton) who boxed for OUABC in the 1960s sadly passed away peacefully on Saturday 18th September 2021.

Malcolm boxed at light-welterweight in 1960 and 1961, moving up to welterweight in 1962 when he was captain, and won all three of his bouts against Cambridge. Like a number of boxers, Malcolm was in digs with Alf and Lina Gallie in his third year. His younger brother Trevor told us “You may know that he had a fall over two years ago, fractured his spine, and was confined to a wheelchair thereafter. Obviously life was never the same again for him but he battled on with his usual fortitude and good humour. He leaves his wife Pat, daughters Anna and Stephanie, sons-in-law, four grandchildren, brother Roger and me and my wife, Trina. At the “wake” after his funeral last Thursday his daughters displayed lots of material from OUABC including team photos, blazer and sweater.”

OUABC and OUABCAA send their sympathies and best wishes to Malcom’s family.

If you have any feedback on the newsletter or suggestions for future editions, please drop me an email at marklinehan64@yahoo.com