

= The Boat Race 1897 =

The 54th Boat Race took place on 3 April 1897 . The Boat Race is an annual side @-@ by @-@ side rowing race between crews from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge along the River Thames . Oxford went into the race as reigning champions , having won the previous year 's race . The crews were almost evenly matched weight @-@ wise , Oxford marginally the heavier , whose crew consisted almost entirely of veterans of the event . In a race umpired by former rower Frank Willan , Oxford won by two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half lengths in a time of 19 minutes 12 seconds , the victory taking the overall record to 31 ? 22 in their favour . It was Oxford 's eighth consecutive victory and the third fastest winning time in the history of the event .

= = Background = =

The Boat Race is a side @-@ by @-@ side rowing competition between the boat clubs of University of Oxford (sometimes referred to as the " Dark Blues ") and the University of Cambridge (sometimes referred to as the " Light Blues ") . The race was first held in 1829 , and since 1845 has taken place on the 4 @.@ 2 @-@ mile (6 @.@ 8 km) Championship Course on the River Thames in southwest London . The rivalry is a major point of honour between the two universities , as of 2014 it is followed throughout the United Kingdom and broadcast worldwide . Oxford went into the race as reigning champions , having beaten Cambridge by two @-@ fifths of a length in the previous year 's race , and held the overall lead , with 30 victories to Cambridge 's 22 .

Oxford were coached by G. C. Bourne who had rowed for Oxford in the 1882 and 1883 races , William Fletcher , who rowed for Oxford in the 1890 , 1891 , 1892 and 1893 races and Douglas McLean (an Oxford Blue five times between 1883 and 1887) . There is no record of who coached the Cambridge crew . Oxford were very quick , and set a full course record (on the ebb tide) of 18 minutes and 27 seconds two weeks before the race . Conversely , according to author and former rower George Drinkwater , Cambridge " never fulfilled its early promise ... always slow into the water . " The umpire for the race for the ninth year in a row was Frank Willan who won the event four consecutive times , rowing for Oxford in the 1866 , 1867 , 1868 and 1869 races .

= = Crews = =

The Oxford crew weighed an average of 12 st 6 @.@ 25 lb (78 @.@ 8 kg) , 0 @.@ 875 pounds (0 @.@ 4 kg) per rower more than their opponents . The Cambridge boat included four former Blues in their number five William Augustus Bieber who was participating in his third Boat Race . Five of the Light Blues were studying at Trinity Hall . Their number four , American rower Benjamin Hunting Howell , was the only participant in the race registered as non @-@ British , hailing from the New York . All but one of Oxford 's crew had rowed in the event prior to 1897 , only G. O. C. Edwards was new to the race . Eight of the nine members of the Dark Blue crew were educated at Eton College ; four of their crew were studying at New College . George Drinkwater , former Oxford rower and author stated " this year saw the finest Oxford crew that has ever rowed " .

= = Race = =

As a result of their impressive performances during the build up to the race , Oxford were clear favourites to win . Cambridge won the toss and elected to start from the Middlesex station , handing the Surrey side of the river to Oxford . The race was started at 2 : 24 p.m. in a light breeze from the east on a favourable tide . The Light Blues made the quicker start , with stroke William James Fernie taking his crew off at 41 strokes per minute . Within a quarter of a mile , Cambridge held a half @-@ length lead but the Dark Blues began to draw back into contention and took the lead just before Craven Cottage .

A spurt at the Mile Post from the Light Blues kept them in touch but Oxford rowed away from them , taking a clear water advantage by Hammersmith Bridge , effectively ending the contest . Oxford

extended their lead " as they liked " and passed the finishing post two and a half lengths clear of Cambridge , in a winning time of 19 minutes 12 seconds . It was Oxford 's eighth consecutive victory and was , at the time , the third fastest winning time in the history of the event . It took the overall record to 31 ? 22 in Oxford 's favour .