

## Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race

The first Oxford and Cambridge boat race to be held on the Thames between Putney and Mortlake in 1845 was won by Cambridge in a time of 23 minutes 30 seconds. The current course record is 16 minutes 19 seconds which was set by Cambridge in 1998.

The race between the two universities began in 1829 when it was held at Henley and then at Westminster. By 1845, when Westminster had become too crowded, the race moved six miles upstream to the then country villages of Putney and Mortlake. In 1856 the race became an annual event (except for the war years).

The finishing line at Mortlake, just a few yards downstream from Chiswick Bridge, has always attracted huge numbers of spectators. The crowds along Thames Bank on race day are as densely packed as those near the start at Putney. The seven storey maltings building, built in 1903, has become a true landmark for race spectators, and when Watneys owned the brewery, they did not shy away from advertising their Red Barrel brand to all those who watched the race.

In the early 20th century, the Wigan family of Cromwell House, which stood opposite the finishing post in Mortlake, set up a telephone link with all the public houses along the route from the start of the race at Putney. They then declared the progress of the race through a loud hailer to spectators until it reached the finishing post in Mortlake – the first running commentary on the race! Later, in 1920, when Cromwell House was empty, anyone with 10/6d to spare could view the finish of the boat race from its upper floors. The BBC first broadcast a running commentary on the boat race in 1927, and in 1938 BBC television covered the race for the first time. From 2015 both men's and women's boat races were held on the Thames on the same day.

During the course of every year Mortlake is witness to many races and much activity on the river, but it is the excitement of the final few yards of the university boat race that really makes it a world famous attraction.



The Boat Race at Mortlake, 1868