



Name: Samantha Aarvold

Degree: Mathematics

College: Keble

Years of Study: 1987-1990



“A truly diverse and inclusive club such as OUCCC enables all to bring out the best in themselves, whether that is breaking world records or just having a sense of belonging and enjoying being part of something much greater than oneself. As a celebration of the 50th anniversary of female participation in the Varsity Match, I have a sense of imposter syndrome being in these profiles. It should come as no surprise that as a 2nd team runner I didn't go to the Blues Varsity Match on Wimbledon Common. Turtles raced at Shotover Woods. Cold, wet and muddy - just like a cross country race should be. However, as a celebration of extending diversity, I welcome the opportunity to be a voice for the non-blues runners (I had to look to OUAC for my half blue as the 4th runner in the 400m relay Varsity team).”

About Me:

“I'm white, British and the daughter of a school teacher, pretty much squarely in a mainstream background of a university undergraduate. But go back a couple of generations and I'm the great granddaughter of economic migrants from Norway, Finland and Ireland, another important part of the Great British story of population movement. Out of this background of family stories of migration, I have always felt a strong sense of the importance and relevance of diversity and inclusion in all its forms. Several of the men in my family (brother, father, second cousin, great uncle) studied at Emmanuel College, Cambridge but there were no stories of women in tertiary education, despite them being strong minded, strong willed, independent and (in my mother's case) strongly feminist. And so it was my aim to apply to Oxford, to right some of the gender imbalance narrative I'd constructed in my head. My real interest was Geography but I was advised by school that 'there aren't so many female mathematicians and we need more women in STEM subjects' and so I applied to study Maths. I chose Keble because it actively promoted itself as a college that welcomed applications from comprehensive schools”.

Early Years

Samantha found a love for running through large-scale open races that allowed for mass participation and thus, lots of fun! With a running journey that was inspired by such inclusive events, one can see the foreshadowing of Samantha's great OUCCC initiatives through her early running years.

'I ran throughout secondary school informally and unattached to any clubs, in a pair of Dunlop green flash trainers from Woolworths! I really enjoyed the massed atmosphere of the Sunday Times Fun Run annually in Hyde Park and the London Boroughs' mini marathon (about 3km) preceding the start of the London Marathon. Spurred on by these events, I got my first pair of 'proper' trainers (Reeboks) in my late teens and instantly felt like a 'proper' runner! I started doing my own form of training (jogging round my local streets a few times a week) and in sixth form I made it into the county team as the slowest member, to represent Middlesex in the Weymouth and Preston English Schools Cross Country Championships. I know for most OUCCC runners these races would have been about placing in the top rankings but just being there was enough of a triumph for me'.

OUCCC Life

When Samantha joined Oxford University, she was in search of a group with which she could share her love for running, whilst improving her own ability in a more structured setting.

"I joined OUCCC as a fresher because I enjoyed running and wanted to do some more formalised training, in company, with people who knew what they were doing".

Whilst in many running clubs across the country it can be intimidating to join a group of well-established runners, Samantha found herself welcomed into a group of that was able to include all abilities of running.

"I particularly remember lunchtime 3 minute runs in University Parks. It was really easy to get to as a Keble undergraduate living in college! More seriously, it was a perfect example of how I felt the club held in balance its championing of elite achievement with the egalitarian encompassing of broader participation. As we all trained together in this session, across gender and speeds divides, this gave the club its strong social cohesion and was a big part of my sense of 'grounding' and belonging during my undergraduate years".

OUCCC training was not just a week-day affair, with Saturdays often being filled with races in the Reebok South England League. Here, members would travel to other Universities for some friendly rivalry (Exeter, Bath, Southampton): *"Travel, running and pie, chips and beans: what's not to like about that?"*

"Like many students I used college as a base, in which I was able to try out lots of sports for fun; pool and darts, ballroom dancing, soccer and squash all spring to mind as ones for which I clearly had lots of enthusiasm and little to no skill. The great thing about running is that the basics of putting one foot in front of the other was something I'd had years of practice with and I loved its simplicity. With OUCCC I felt like I was with like-minded people, albeit that it was also a diverse group in terms of training experience and speed. As for anecdotes and memories... 'what happens in club dinners, stays in club dinners'. Suffice to say my chocolate éclair speed eating skills are as suboptimal as my running!"

With the running community playing an increasing part of Samantha's social life, she formed close-knit friendships amongst her OUCCC peers. We were delighted to welcome back Samantha and her peers at this year's Annual Dinner, a true testament of the longstanding friendships she made!

“It would be impossible to name all the friendships from this time without it ending up as a dry role call but I have been to two cross country weddings of OUCCC members (Vicki Vaughan, Corpus Christi 1986/Mike Webb, Lincoln 1986 and Davina Manship, Keble 1988) and I am blessed to have Emma Westlake (St Catz 1988) as a Buddhist ‘godparent’ to my eldest daughter (who has just started her university journey this year, doing Geography at Manchester, so I finally get to live my Geography field trip dreams vicariously through her)”.

OUCCC Committee and the Teddy Hall Relays Legacy:

As a key member of OUCCC, it wasn't long before Samantha would take on organisational responsibilities on the OUCCC committee: first as treasurer, then going on to become the first female club secretary of OUCCC.

“My fresher’s enthusiasm for eclair eating was probably what brought me to the attention of the 2nd year committee members. I hadn’t much thought about standing for election until Colin Phillips and Mike Webb dropped into Keble one evening to tell me they thought I should stand for the treasurer role.

1989-1990 S.M Aarvold (Keble)
1995-1990 M.F Clark (Balliol)
2003-2004 J.R. Leitch (St Edmund Hall)
2018-2019 E.R. Brown (Brasenose)
2019-2020 N.A. Woods (New)
2020-2021 B.R Dow (Pembroke)
2021-2022 L.E Thompson (Somerville)
2024-2025 E.M Hall (St Anne’s)
2025-2026 J Ridley (Lady Margaret Hall)

OUCCC’s Female Secretaries

Taking over from Colin meant I had a really great structure already set out for me. I loved being part of the planning heart of the club and particularly enjoyed the pre-smartphone era of newsletters, printed on paper and distributed by committee members on bicycle to college pigeon holes. Being a postie is an excellent way to see the other colleges and get in some cross training. I wonder - has the pigeon hole become obsolete with the advent of email and WhatsApp group messages?

The treasurer tasks played to my strengths (as a Maths student I could at least add up and my parents always joked that my middle name was ‘organised’). And then there was the Teddy Hall Relays - this was organisation on a whole different level. Teddy Hall Relays had grown from a college organised race into something much larger, not only university wide but with appeal to external teams as well.



Crowds at Teddy Hall Relays

So in 1988 it was agreed between the college and the club that OUCCC would share race organisation with an organiser from St Edmund Hall (driven in that first year by a long standing friendship between Colin Phillips and Martin Borrett from SEH (also OUAC President 1989/90)) but the heritage of the event would remain in its name, leading to a great opportunity for aspiring graphic designers to create some cute/dubious teddy bear race T shirts. And for the record, yes, I think bright red and yellow make a great colour combination.

Given that my recollections are over 35 years in the rear view mirror, here are a small selection of stand out moments:

- *Putting out invitations to Cambridge colleges was great to keep up the old rivalries;*
- *Putting out invitations to other universities gave the race a space in the national events calendar but obviously increased runner volumes on the road and so onto key point 3:*
- *Get the Thames Valley Police invited to submit a team.*

Its always good to have the police enthusiastic about your event when you are also looking to them for the necessary road race permissions.



Samantha preparing race numbers

So invitations sent out, my key memories are then around two other essentials to any student race: food and results. Making sandwiches for hundreds of hungry runners requires military planning and the willing hands of many volunteers. The morning of the race was a production line of bread and margarine and jam (very sophisticated grub!). I recall this as a fun, energised time because of the team spirit of all involved.



Left: Shopping carts in preparation for the Teddy Hall Relays Tea. Right: Tea in action.

Onto the results, it was easy enough to announce the top places at the tea but getting a complete list of all the teams, input into the college's one computer and then printed out and photocopied to send out to all the teams the following day was a later night than any 'essay crisis'. I recall grappling with pretty clunky technology in a windowless cupboard/ computer room at about 2 in the morning. I'd like to think this element is a lot slicker these days.

Life after Oxford:

Samantha's post-university days continued to be as impressive and exciting as her activities during university! Taking on opportunities around the world, her running experiences range from Kenya's National Parks to the London Marathon.

"After university I spent 8 months backpacking around the world on my own - but of course you are never alone with the Lonely Planet books as your guide and every other backpacker following the same plans.

After qualifying as a chartered accountant, I swapped the London corporate life for a few years as a volunteer field accountant for Concern Worldwide's Ethiopia development programme. And here, at altitude in the home of distance running, I continued my slow running - this time as a member of the excellent Hash House Harriers group in Addis Ababa. With this mixed team of diplomats, business people, NGO (aka charity) workers and local Ethiopian runners, we took a few teams over to Kenya and it was truly a highlight of my running 'career' to participate in the Nairobi to Naivasha Relay. Meeting some young Masai resting in the shade of an acacia tree during their coming of age walkabout/rite of passage, whilst running through one of Kenya's many National Parks, I'm not sure which of us was more surprised by the other.

Since returning to the UK, running and supporting charities have remained intertwined. I've pursued a career in charity finance working for Oxfam, Guide Dogs for the Blind and now the veteran's mental health charity, Combat Stress. When I have chosen to do races (Great North Run, Brighton Marathon and London Marathon) it has always been with a dual goal of completing the distance in an iconic event alongside using the event to raise funds for a charitable cause.

I was delighted at the OUCCC/OUAC garden party in Merton College last summer to have the opportunity to talk to Richard Nerurkar about his setting up of the Great Ethiopian Run, which started about 4 years after I had finished my time in Addis Ababa. We even discovered we shared a mutual connection, with a dear friend who I am still in contact with 26 years after leaving the country. And this connection brings me back full circle to the start of my journey with running and with OUCCC. My good friend in Addis, Nadia, also ran in the Reebok league cross country races, for Exeter university!

So good luck OUCCC for the future development of the club and support of all students who seek a place of belonging with you. Celebrate elite performance but keep it grounded in egalitarian principles of being accessible to all those who share the same aspiration: to be the best versions of themselves".

Written by Anika Schwarze-Chintapatla
OUCCC Club Captain 2024-2025
OUCCC Alumni Rep 2025-2026