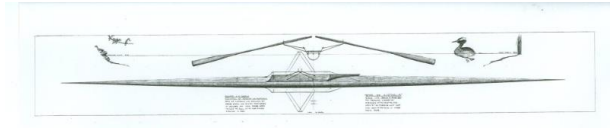


Basic Detail Report



Star of Australia

Vessel number

HV000058

Date

1863

Primary Maker

George Green

Description

Update August 2023: STAR OF AUSTRALIA is a rowing scull built in 1862 at Milsons Point, Sydney by HT Green. It is a very early rowing scull with direct connections to the first challenge by an Australian rower for the title of World Champion in 1863, RAW Green. It had a tubular hull shape which was unique for the period and the craft remained intact for over 160 years. It remains in excellent condition in the bar of the Marlow Rowing Club in England. The elegant tapered, circular hull section hull form was designed by George Green (1830-1906) and built by Henry (HT) Green (1834-1909) in 1863 at his Milsons Point boatyard for Richard (Augustus Willoughby) Green (1836-1921). All three were brothers; their father George (1810-1872) was a boatbuilder (but resident in New Zealand at the time), and is known to have built yachts and other vessels during his lifetime. The son George had begun as a boatbuilder as well, working for his father, but was lured to the goldfields, then returned to become a publican in Sydney in 1858. At the same time he also went back to design and boatbuilding. Richard and Henry were champion scullers in Sydney, and by the early 1860s Richard had proven himself to be up to international standard with wins over prominent English scullers who had emigrated to Sydney. They were competing in wager races where significant sums of money were put up by the backers of the rowers involved as the prize for the race. Green's supporters felt his abilities were good enough for a wager race against the best in England, and they set up a challenge for a race to be held in Sydney. No one came forth and accepted, and Green's backers were reluctant to send him to England to race in an event they could not witness. As noted in 'Early Sporting Diplomacy: The case for R A W Green' by R. Fotheringham (University of Queensland 1989) this came at a time in history when the colonies in Australia and New Zealand first began to look upon themselves as a separate identity to their English rulers, and sport was a means of expressing this. The first tour by an English cricket team had just taken place in 1861 - 1862, and other avenues of comparison such as rifle shooting and race horses were being used to test Australian colonials against the mother country. Sculling was another sport with international significance, and the sculling champion of the Thames was considered unofficially the champion of the world. Against this backdrop Richard Green, supported by both his and his wife's family, decided he would represent the colony of New South Wales at this sporting event and thus became the first person from Australia to take part in an event outside of it. As Fotheringham points out in his detailed account, Green was probably Australia's first international sportsman. Henry Green had built his brother's previous craft GUIDING STAR, a success in

Australia, and for this challenge he built Richard an especially light craft to the unique design by George Green. The circular hull shape tapers to a very fine point at either end; it is almost a double-ended cone shape. The inspiration may have come from ideas developed by American railway engineer Ross Winans. He designed and built a tubular vessel in 1858 and this craft had been widely publicised, including articles in Australian media. It was never subjected to sea trials, and neither were a small number of similar designs he later built in England and Russia. The design was possibly an inspiration elsewhere, shaping Capt Nemo's submarine in Jules Verne's '20,000 Leagues under the Sea' Stephen Gard, writing in his book 'Port Jackson Pullers' has uncovered much of STAR OF AUSTRALIA'S early history. A prototype of the tubular boat was built in March 1862, and rowed by Richard Green against his brother Henry in GUIDING STAR. It is reported that the new craft was far superior, and given the failure of Winans to trial his designs, this may well have been the first practical test of the tubular concept. In October 1862 a second tubular scull was demonstrated in Farm Cove, and this became STAR OF AUSTRALIA. One observer felt it was not a success, noting it was unstable and the rower spent more effort on keeping it upright rather than moving ahead. It was also said the upper surface caught the wind and created drag. George Green responded to this report with a strong defence of his design, and noted that it was to be sent to England. Another report from England gave its dimensions as 36 feet 6 inches, 10 inches wide at the seat, weighing 32 lbs. As measured in 2007, the craft is 10.26 m (33 ft) long. The cockpit sits in the tubular midships section. It features a rudimentary sliding seat, which is an early example of the use of this invention which was originally from America. The wooden construction uses Australian red cedar for the planking on the hull and deck which is copper fastened to the internal structure and appears to be only 2.5mm thick. There are at least three longitudinals, one at the keel and then one on either side, and a series of circular frames with vertical posts, set at an unknown spacing. Some or all of the framing is understood to be made of banksia integrifolia. The last 350mm at either end is shaped from solid timber with a copper tip, and the cockpit is built of cedar planking. It had metal outriggers and included Green's patented swivel rowlocks. The name was embroidered on to the seat cushion by Richard Green's wife Frances. Green used sculls (oars) made in Sydney by John H Dawson, who was also a boat builder. STAR OF AUSTRALIA arrived in England in January 1863, and Green registered a patent for the tubular design before revealing the boat to the public. However the patent may not have been properly registered, and was certainly ineffective, because the English boat builder James Messenger was offering a tubular design by February 1863 and claiming the concept had been introduced the previous season. Another report indicates John Tiger rowed a tubular boat from Messenger in May 1863. The Field June 20 1863 carried a report on Green and included this reference to the scull. 'Great talk was made about his boat, which was to arrive from Australia, and in which only (so it was asserted), he could row. She was a tube, somewhat after the fashion of the American Monitors, the top which is usually of canvas, being made of the same wood as the rest of the boat. He used her for some time, and on more than one occasion we ourselves have seen him start from Putney-bridge in her as rapidly as, if not more rapidly than, any previous sculler. After awhile, however, he discarded her, though not without having set all our boat builders by the ears.' The construction appears to have been quite light, and this is given in other reports as a reason why Richard Green eventually changed to a conventional boat built by Biffen and called ROSE OF DENMARK. The STAR OF AUSTRALIA may also have been quite awkward and unstable due to its circular shape and the height of the seating position. It could have suffered from an excess of wetted surface which is known to be a very significant form of resistance

in rowing shells, and may also have pitched excessively under the motion of the sliding seat. Whatever the case, at the time it was a very rare example of streamlining in hull design, and the design concept appears to have been documented as the 'Elliptic Tubular Principle' by the designer George Green. It would be enlightening to rediscover this paper to see what thoughts were behind the design of this hull form. The eventual challenge race was billed as 'The Championship of the World' in media reports and Green sculled against the reigning champion Richard Chambers of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Green started well but collapsed while in front, and finished four minutes behind in a time of 29 minutes. He attributed his collapse to illness during that week and spasms during the race. Shortly after Green took part in another regatta that had been declared 'Open to the World', and won two events against what were in fact only British competitors. However Chambers declined to race in the regatta and did not race against him again. Richard Green then returned home defeated by the reigning champion, but his challenge had stirred emotions at the time and was the stepping stone for a future winner Edward Trickett in 1876, who was coached by Green. It was the beginning of what became a long series of success by Australian scullers that continues to this day. STAR OF AUSTRALIA remained in London and was offered for sale, and an 1863 advertisement for the craft in the British 'Rowing Almanack' stated 'Her speed is unequalled by anything afloat'. There was a reference to a model of a 'Pilot Boat', which was another tubular design by George Green. This was for an oared pilot vessel or lifeboat that would be unsinkable, and was proposed in response to the loss of one of the Green family in an accident off Sydney Heads while attempting a rescue in an open boat. At least one other tubular scull was built by Green, it is understood to have been 40 feet long and built in 1863 for McGrath to row a 200 pound wager race against Ralph in Sydney, STAR OF AUSTRALIA was later rowed in 1865 and then also discarded by another champion oarsman CB Lawes while preparing for the Diamonds event in that year, which he won. At some unknown time STAR OF AUSTRALIA was eventually abandoned, and lay under a bridge in Marlow for some years before being rescued by the Marlow Rowing Club. The club has maintained the craft as a display in the bar room above the boatshed. After a fire damaged the club and the vessel, it was given to shipwright Ray Underwood who gradually restored the hull and riggers to excellent condition, and it went back on display in 2014. The STAR OF AUSTRALIA can still be recognised for its ingenuity and workmanship even though it was deemed a failure. The Greens have a long history of boatbuilding through a number of generations. George senior began as a boatbuilder in Sydney before his move to Dunedin. Henry left Sydney in 1862 to join him in Dunedin, and then returned in 1886 to set up again in Lavender Bay. Among the craft credited to them as builders and sometimes designers are a small number of vessels unusual for their period, suggesting a continued interest in experimentation. Richard remained close to the sport in Australia. His son Richard had twins, Augustus and Henry, and continued the family tradition by setting up as boatbuilders in 1926. In the late 1920s they built sculls for another champion Australian rower, dual Olympic gold medallist Bobby Pearce. A & H Green remained in business building sculls until taken over by Sargent and Burton, who then became one of the last wooden scull builders in Sydney. Meanwhile, another descendant from RAW Green's large family Laurie Fray, has been making canoes in Mt Isa for many years since the 1960s. References: Green family history notes and records, private collection Bells Life in Sydney, July 18 1863 Sydney Morning Herald, August 15 1863 Early Sporting Diplomacy: The case for R A W Green. R. Fotheringham University of Queensland 1989 Port Jackson Pullers: champion oarsmen of early Australia. Stephen Gard 2014

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 10.26 m (33.66 ft)