

Basic Detail Report



Fairbairn paired scull

Vessel number

HV000788

Date

1898

Primary Maker

Brewer Swaddle & Co

Description

The Fairbairn Paired Scull is a wooden shell 33 feet long. It was built for Fairbairn by Putney boat builders, Brewer Swaddle and Co. to race in the UK when he was there, but brought back to Australia soon after when he returned. This boat was adapted as either a coxless pair or a double sculling boat, and is fitted so that either bow or stroke could steer. Stephen (Steve) Fairbairn was born in Melbourne, Victoria in 1862 and educated at the Geelong Grammar School between 1874 and 1880. Whilst at the school he was taught to row by J.L. Cuthbertson, a teacher at the school and by the Captain of Barwon Rowing Club, Edward Nicholls. The boys were offered free membership by Barwon from 1871 to 1874 when the school formed its own boat club. The school did not have a boathouse on the river until 1877 and so used Barwon Rowing club's shed and fleet. In 1879 Steve rowed stroke in the Barwon Rowing Club Senior Eight at the Colac Regatta. In 1881-84 he went to the UK and read law at Jesus College, Cambridge. He rowed in the Oxford/Cambridge boat Race in the Cambridge crews of 1882, 1883 (both defeated by Oxford), 1886 and 1887 (both victorious), in college crews at the Head of the Cam four times, and in crews which won the Grand Challenge Cup (the blue ribbon of amateur rowing in England), the Stewards', and the Whyfold at Henley Regatta. Now a celebrated rower, Fairbairn returned to Australia between 1884-85 but continued moving between England to Australia during 1887-1904, and maintaining his family's pastoral interests in Victoria and in western Queensland at Beaconsfield, originally one of the largest sheep stations in Australia. On a trip to England beginning in 1897 he competed at Henley-on-Thames Regatta and was captain of Thames Rowing Club. In 1898 he was runner up in the Silver Goblets (coxless pairs) at Henley Regatta in a boat built by Putney boat builders, Brewer Swaddle and Co. of Putney, England. In 1899 Fairbairn returned to Australia, arriving in Brisbane with his wife, two young sons and two maids. In October he travelled to Melbourne, taking the new Brewer Swaddle boat with him, where he took extensive exercise on the Yarra in his highly finished craft. In November Fairbairn was appointed coach of the Queensland crew for the Intercolonial Eights Championship. Before his return to western Queensland in the middle of 1900 he donated the boat to his old club, Barwon. The Club President in acknowledging his gift at the Annual General Meeting, spoke of the great interest that Fairbairn had always maintained in the club, and appointed him as the Club's first Honorary Life member. In 1904 Steve returned to Cambridge where he made his name as one of the most influential rowing coaches and introduced a new style of rowing, known as 'Fairbairnism', placing an emphasis on movement - "a perfect loose and easy elastic action" - above

strict restrictive conventions on body placement. He died in Cambridge in 1938. The wooden pair has been hanging in the Barwon Rowing Club's shed for as long as the oldest members could recall. Simply known as Fairbairn's boat, it survived onslaughts of paper planes from young coxswains and barrages of bread rolls from the rowdier rowers until the demolition of the old shed and the boat's refurbishment then transfer to pride of place in the new clubrooms. One hundred and eighteen years after it first arrived at the shed, three club members decided to inspect the hull hanging in the ceiling to confirm its origins, and photographed the builder's plate, providing the vital clue to confirm its provenance.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 10.06 m (33 ft)