

Basic Detail Report



Tathra Canvas boat

Vessel number

HV000725

Description

The canvas craft is quite small, only 4 metres long and has just enough cockpit space for two people who would have to paddle the craft. It is currently on display at the Pig & Whistle Line Museum in Tathra. However, prior to

2016, it was on display at the Bega Museum. Betty Koellner, one of the older members of their staff recalls it was brought up to the Bega Museum over 20 years earlier from the Tathra Surf Club where it had been in storage. It has characteristics in its shape, construction and layout that are similar to surf craft of the period, however it is significantly smaller. It is a canvas skinned hull with a timber support structure and timber deck. It has a double ended hull shape with a raked stem and stern, a convex sheer line and a straight keel. It is a round bilged hull section. The raised ends give this craft the potential to handle rough water, and it has a small well cockpit, with the remainder of the hull forming a large buoyant volume. This configuration provides an appropriate shape and layout for use in the surf. Although there are claims it is Tathra's first surf boat, it is relatively small and would seem unsuitable to operate in any rescue capacity. However it may have been used in the surf. It could have been launched from the surf club area as this is located on the beach inside the headland and in a relatively protected zone in relation to the big breaking waves further down the beach. The canvas construction used on this craft was common in the early decades of the 1900s, it was an economical way of building a hull. Whilst it may have suited the limited resources available at the time, the entire hull was enclosed in the canvas rather than remaining open like a canoe, suggesting it was deliberately chosen to make a watertight hull that would float if swamped. The hull has a keel and outer keel that also form the stem and stern profile. There are 14 stringers, with 15 frames and four bulkheads. The frames are located on 125mm centres adjacent to the cockpit. The cockpit ends form a complete bulkhead, but there is an additional bulkhead fore and aft of these. A diagonal bulkhead runs fore or aft to sheer level from frames 1 and 17 at the keel. The gunwale is made of an inner and outer section that sandwiches the ends of the frames. The framed and planked cockpit is supported with a girder spacing from keel to the beams under the sole, and the deck is supported by beams and the bulkheads. It is difficult to identify the timbers used, but they remain in good condition in most places and suggest a quality hardwood was used. The canvas is only visible in remnants at the edges, but shows it was used over the entire hull to make it a fully watertight vessel. At the bow and stern on the centreline frame and also on the diagonal bulkheads the stringers are fastened with brass slot head screws. There are screws located in a few other places but not to any particular pattern. These are more recent than the remaining nail fastenings. It is possible these areas were refastened with the bigger diameter screws in place of nails to secure the structure for display at Bega Pioneer Museum, where it was undercover but out

in the open. There is damage to the stringers in a couple of places where they are broken and a small section is missing. Along with the loss of the canvas this suggests it spent some time stored ashore not in use before being located and taken to the museum. The canvas remnants show the material was quite thin and probably the last finish applied may have been a paint rather than an oil. There is no evidence on the boat to show that it was propelled by rowing with oars in the current layout. The open cockpit suggest a person or two people sat in the cockpit and paddled the craft like a canoe or kayak with a single or double blade paddle. There is also a question of whether this configuration with the small well cockpit was the original layout. The existence of both the diagonal bulkheads and the vertical bulkheads at the cockpit is unusual. It may have originally been a much more open hull with just the area fore and aft of the diagonal bulkheads decked and canvased to form a water tight tank at each end. The inside would have been framed as it is and may have had floor boards. It would have been a canoe or possibly rowed. Subsequent use in the surf may have shown that much more buoyancy was needed, in which case the new bulkheads replacing two frames at either end, the cockpit and decking could have been added and the entire boat then skinned in canvas to create a strong and buoyant craft. The Tathra Surf Lifesaving Club, (where the craft had been stored) was formed in 1910 and is one of the oldest surf lifesaving clubs in NSW. It has played a significant role in the state's surf lifesaving history and is closely associated with the George Bass Race from Batemans Bay to Eden. When it was on display at the nearby Bega Pioneer Museum it was outside but undercover. However after many years on display there it was moved in 2016 to the Pig and Whistle Line Museum which is located on the historic Tathra Wharf, built in 1862 and restored during 1970 to 1988 by the National Trust and Public Works Department. It is the only original wharf on the south coast of NSW. The wharf is close to the beach and surf club where the craft was used, keeping the craft in context with its region. The Pig and Whistle Line Museum takes its name from the colloquial term 'Pig and Whistle Line' which described how the steam vessels that came to Tathra often carried live pigs as cargo, and they would go into a frenzy whenever the steamer let of its whistle.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 3.95 m × 0.95 m (12.96 ft × 3.12 ft)