

Basic Detail Report



Britannia

Vessel number

HV000003

Date

1919

Primary Maker

Wee George Robinson

Description

BRITANNIA is gaff rigged with a small topsail, and exemplifies the enormous spread of sail carried by the 18-foot skiff class, very few of which remain extant. The hull is only 18 feet (5.49 m) long, but with its full rig set the craft is almost 70 feet (over 20 m) long. It is seam batten built in red cedar, with hard wood frames and other structure. It has three thwarts, a tabernacle for the mast, a foredeck, sidedecks and centrecase. BRITANNIA was first raced on 8th November 1919. It then raced on Sydney Harbour from that season through until the late 1940s. In that time it won numerous races and championships and became one of the few 18s to race for over two decades. It underwent gradual rig changes, increasing the amount of sail it could carry, and it is thought to have carried one of the largest mainsail and headsail areas of any 18 foot skiff during the late 1930s. Wee Georgie Robinson was one of the most well-known and respected skippers. He raced and sailed hard regardless of the conditions, and knew the Harbour well. Some of his Balmain crew also played for the famous Balmain Tigers rugby league club over winter, and they wore the striped black and gold Balmain rugby league jerseys when sailing on BRITANNIA. After World War II the hull was converted into a motor launch by Robinson and used as a starter's boat by the Sydney Flying Squadron for many seasons. It had a small petrol motor and a mast for starting flags and signals. As it neared the end of its use it was left in Robinson's boatshed at Balmain. It was taken from there and restored by the Australian National Maritime Museum in the late 1980s in an extensive project that was a blue-print for restorations of this type. The original side decks, thwarts and foredeck were still in place on the hull, only the cabin and engine mounts needed to be removed. Plans were drawn of the biggest rig it may have carried based on quoted measurements, and where required new parts were made to replicate as best possible what would have been there at the time. Missing timber and other damage was replaced as well, but a considerable amount of the original structure remained in place despite its age. In October 2019 it went on display in the Wharf 7 Heritage Complex foyer to mark its centenary. An exact replica of BRITANNIA was built by Ian Smith in Sydney in 2001. It was constructed faithfully from the plans drawn during the restoration project, using traditional methods and materials that were recorded in the documentation and conservation management plans that were prepared. The replica BRITANNIA now sails regularly with the fleet of new 'historic' skiffs based at the Sydney Flying Squadron.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 5.49 m x 10.65 m x 5.49 m x 2.58 m x 1.97 m, 71.8 square metres (18 ft x 35 ft x 18 ft x 8.45 ft. x 6.5 ft., 772.93 square feet)