

Basic Detail Report



Wilson Paisley Dinghy

Vessel number

HV000772

Date

1872

Primary Maker

Walter Paisley

Description

The 11' 10" (3.6mt) clinker planked dinghy has two thwarts and stern bench. The Museum Conservator's report identifies that, while the dinghy had been built by an accomplished craftsman, several of the planks are fitted in several short lengths, rather than full planks as would normally be the case for such a boat. The inference from this is that if Paisley did build the dinghy then he was carefully supervised by John Wilson and that much of the material may have come from off-cuts found around the worksite or yard. The hull shell, transom and upper part of the stem are identified as to likely be original, while much of the rest of the dinghy and fittings have been repaired or replaced over the boat's long working life. At the time of the dinghy being built, Walter Paisley was aged about 52 and was well known locally as an old lag, an ex-convict. He had arrived in Van Diemen's Land in 1833, aged 14, sentenced to seven years' transportation for burglary. He was part of the first intake at Point Puer, the juvenile establishment at Port Arthur. He gained a Certificate of Freedom in 1839, but returned to Port Arthur later that year on a ten-year sentence of transportation, again for burglary, finally receiving a Conditional Pardon in 1847. There is no evidence in the available history that Paisley had previously acquired any boatbuilding skills, although he may have worked in the boatyard at Port Arthur as a juvenile, although his conduct record was so bad that this seems unlikely. John Wilson was encouraged to become a boat builder by his maternal grandfather, William Nichols, an early, if not the first, European settler at Port Cygnet, Southern Tasmania. John established himself as a shipbuilder of note and his descendants continued to build commercial and recreational vessels until 2016. John Wilson presented the dinghy to his wife, Dinah, after their marriage in 1871. The historical record on how Wilson and Paisley met is quiet, but the wedding gift story is a strong one within the Wilson family. As such, the dinghy is one of very few objects that can be linked to a named Point Puer inmate. Dinah Wilson, John's wife, is reported to have used the boat almost daily throughout her life, in the early days of marriage rowing the 10kms from home at Port Cygnet to her husband's worksite at Esperance with supplies at least twice a week. She was photographed for The Mercury newspaper in 1937 rowing the dinghy at aged 88. Thus the dinghy tells a strong story of the boat skills acquired by Dinah and the role she played supporting the family business while raising nine children (four of which also became boat builders,) as well as the importance of small craft as the principle means of communication along the waterways of southern Tasmania in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 3.6 m × 3.3 m × 0.2 m (11.81 ft × 10.83 ft × 0.66 ft)