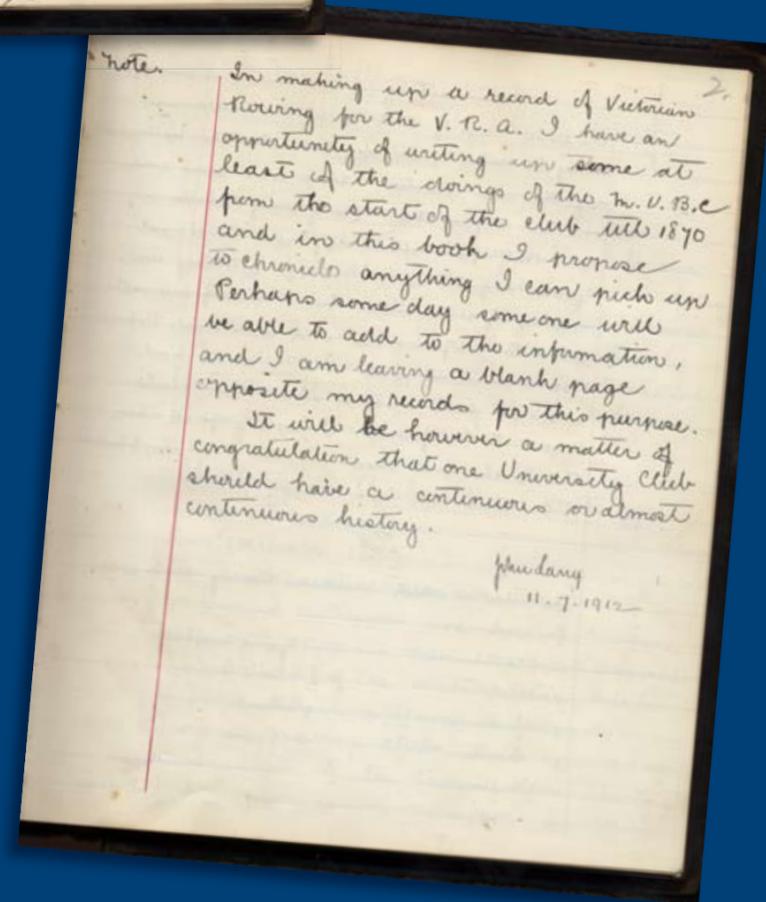


The front page and accompanying note to the reconstructed records of the Club 1859-70, completed by John Lang in July 1912



Well Rowed University

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY BOAT CLUB

THE FIRST 150 YEARS

Judith Buckrich

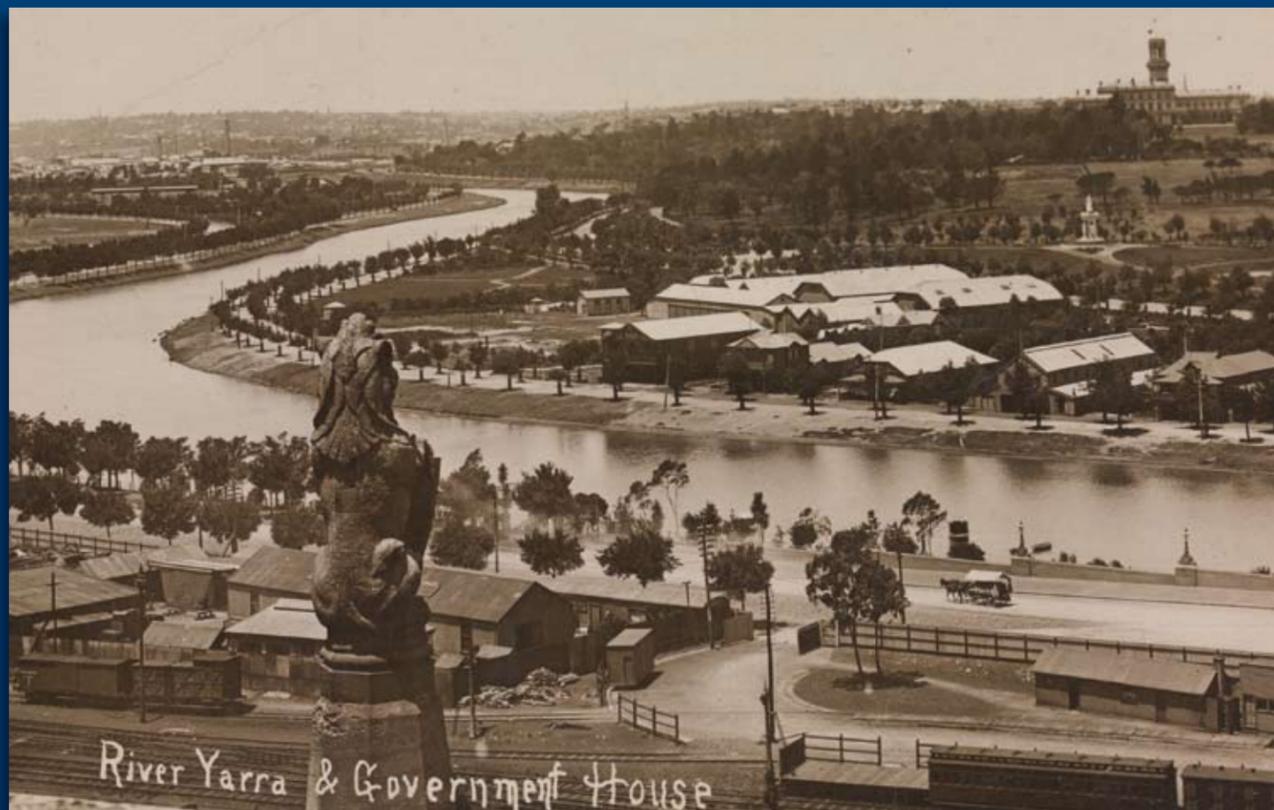


MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY BOAT CLUB INC.



CHAPTER THREE

The fabulous years until the First World War



'River Yarra and Government House' c.1909 Shirley Jones collection of Australian postcards.

The newly erected MUBC boatshed is the last boatshed on the left in the centre of the picture. The large buildings behind the MUBC boatshed are the government engineering works

State Library of Victoria picture collection

University elite become leaders of the Club

The committee bought a large blue and black diagonal striped flag, with MUBC in white lettering on it, and this was unfurled by the Lieutenant Governor, Sir John Madden, at the Club sheds on 30 March 1904. According to John Lang, this was the first flag of this design ever flown by a university club. The flag went missing and was thought (by John Lang) to have been stolen around Henley Regatta Day in 1910. Mysteriously, an unknown person left a brand new flag of exactly the same design at Lang's office on 12 August 1911.¹ In the Club's records Lang mused, 'Was it conscience or a generous but anonymous donor?'. To his great surprise, the old flag was discovered in 1911, having been inadvertently rolled up with other Henley paraphernalia. To his even greater surprise, he then discovered the anonymous donor was none other than his wife, who was 'induced to confess the gift owing to my telling her how the old flag had been found.'² Sadly, there is no trace of either flag today.

In 1904 the President of MUBC was Professor William Charles Kernot. Kernot was the first qualified engineer graduate of the University, having gained a Certificate of Civil Engineering in 1866. He was appointed Melbourne University's first Professor of Engineering in 1883 and was involved in many projects and concerns, in and out of the University. Kernot was first elected President in 1903 when the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Sir Henry Wrixon, declined to be re-elected. Presidency of the Club was prestigious and many MUBC Presidents and patrons were Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors of the University.

Vice-Presidents of the Club at this time were Professor David Orme Masson and ED Ulrich. Orme Masson was Melbourne University's Professor of Chemistry from 1886 to 1923 and instrumental in setting up the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, (later CSIRO). He would eventually have a Melbourne University street and a mountain range in Antarctica named after him. Captain for the season was EP Oldham and John Lang was Hon Secretary.

1904 was a busy year for John Lang. On 24 February, he suggested to MUBC that the Club attempt to secure a site on the banks of the Yarra for a proper clubhouse. The use of Fuller's Shed no longer served the purposes of the Club. Sydney Smith and Ogg were engaged to design a suitable shed.

At a meeting held on 16 November 1905, there was discussion of the design for the 'Honour Pocket'. The design of the figure of Victory was submitted. Members were 'not greatly impressed with the beauty of same but thought it would be a pity to abandon her'. It was therefore resolved to respectfully urge the Sports Union not to discard the present coat of arms in favour of a monogram on the pockets of the honour blazers.³

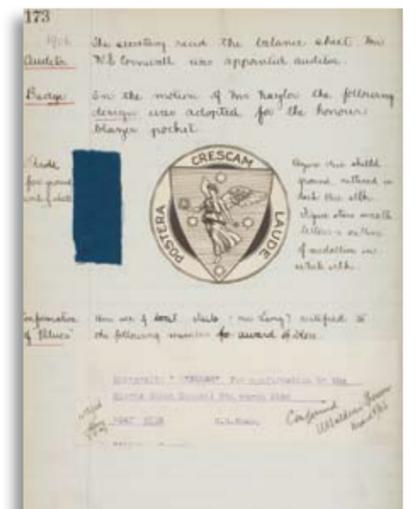
The ball held in conjunction with the cricket club was revived and made £120. This and Henley-on-Yarra were major events in Melbourne's social calendar.

Mixing it with the rest of Victoria

1905 showed a 'gratifying increased interest in regatta rowing among club members.'⁴ A MUBC maiden eight and four participated at Henley-on-Yarra, coming second to



1905 Medical crew, winners of the John Grice Shield by 2 feet from Engineers and Law: (standing left to right) HC Fulford (4), EL Elcoate (5), JW Dunhill (3), J Love (2) (seated left to right) SJ Campbell (6), EP Oldham (7), RNS Good (stroke), J Ward (cox) and JH Anderson (bow)



Design for the honour blazer pocket submitted by the Club to the Sports Union Council for confirmation in 1906
Sports Union Minute Book
University of Melbourne Archives

1905 MUBC intervarsity eight (Port Adelaide): (standing left to right) A Chamley (coach), HJ Whiting (stroke), (seated middle) DW McKellar (4), H Mayo (5), SJ Campbell (6), (seated bottom) KS Cross (cox), JW Dunhill (3), JAH Sherwin (bow), ET Guinness (2), WH Waters (7)



Mercantile in the eights. As well, MUBC had crews in the VRA Regatta, coming second in the maiden eight to Albert Park Rowing Club, and in the Nagambie, Ballarat and Barwon Regattas.⁵ There was an increased visibility and vitality in the Club that was reflected in the popularity of the Boat and Cricket Ball at the St Kilda Town Hall on 27 April 1906, bringing a profit of more than £55 to the Boat Club. One hundred and ninety college members, thirty-nine life members and twenty-five ordinary members attended the 1905 annual meeting,⁶ a considerable number considering the student population of the University was 785.

According to the 1905–6 annual report, the Club came third at the 10 June 1905 intervarsity at Port Adelaide in South Australia. The somewhat disgruntled explanation in the report was that the intervarsity race was ‘a disappointing one as the Melbourne crew, owing to bad advice from a Port Adelaide man, kept to the shallows where the water was dead and the incoming tide of little use to them’.

The Club v the Colleges

Following the uneasy truce in 1889, the annual meeting in 1890 passed amendments to the Club’s rules providing for the Club to be composed of four sections, namely Extra Collegiates, and Trinity, Ormond and Queen’s Colleges. Each section was entitled to appoint representatives to the Club’s committee. Things seemed to settle down for a while, and in the late nineties agreement was reached for payment of a lump sum to the Club by each college, entitling all college residents to enjoy Club privileges.

Quite suddenly, however, a bitter dispute erupted in 1905 over college men voting at the annual meeting, which was allegedly ‘stacked’ to ensure that one particular college’s candidate was nominated as Captain. A special meeting was requisitioned to overturn the Chairman’s original ruling, which had allowed the voting at the annual meeting to go ahead. Proposals were then put forward tying college representative’s votes to the amount of subscriptions paid by the colleges. This in turn provoked a spate of disagreements until a compromise was eventually reached at the 1906 annual meeting.

John Lang, very unusually for him, devoted over five pages in the Club’s records to a discussion of this affair and described it as ‘a dispute that threatened to split the Club up entirely over the question of college voting power at a meeting where a college split had occurred over nomination for the captaincy of the club.’⁷

Consolidation

The 1906 annual meeting was attended by 150 members. It was at this meeting that one of the Club’s best and most successful coaches, Charles Donald, was formally appointed.⁸ Donald rowed for Victoria in intercolonial and (post Federation) interstate championships from 1894 to 1908 and coached the same in 1909 and 1910. He and T Crosthwaite coached the winning MUBC crew at the 1904 intervarsity race on the Lower Yarra.

The Club also won the 1906 intervarsity race in Sydney. The Melbourne crew ‘had the privilege of staying at the Sydney Rowing Club Branch Shed at Abbotsford, a very comfortable place indeed ...’⁹



1906 winning MUBC intervarsity eight (Parramatta River): JW Dunhill (bow), VR Bradbury (2), SJ Campbell (3), CG Shaw (4), WH Waters (5), M Hurry (6), RJ Lewis (7), HJ Whiting (stroke), J Ward (cox), inset, Charles Donald (coach) and the Oxford and Cambridge Cup

The race had a false start because Melbourne's stroke, HJ Whiting, broke his oar at the start of the race. The Sydney Mail reported the race on 16 June 1906 (the newspaper report being quoted as follows in the Club's records):

... just 10 minutes late the race began. Sydney getting away cleverly but it was seen the Melbourne stroke had put his hand up and a second look sufficed to inform us that his oar was broken. (Whiting as a matter of fact was watching for the smoke of the judge's pistol and he got his weight on as soon as he saw this. He was therefore a fraction ahead of his crew who waited for the pistol crack, so all the weight of the stationary boat came on Whiting's oar and his strength combined snapped it at the button.) [This note was inserted by Lang parenthetically in the extract of the newspaper report cited in the Club's records.] The rules provide for a restart should an oar be broken in the first minutes rowing & so on a signal from the umpire the crews stopped rowing. There was no spare oar near the place and the launch had to go down river some 2½ miles to get another. This caused a delay which was trying to the crews and visitors but there was no help for it. A second start was made at 4.55pm just as the sun was disappearing behind the hills. Sydney again got the benefit of the start and dashed in a few fast and vigorous strokes in really good style. Melbourne was also well off the mark and Adelaide fairly so but they were soon half a length behind. The pace was very fast for a ¼ mile and here Melbourne had gone to the front but was only a few feet ahead of Sydney and Adelaide well up. The stroke now was about 34 a minute and with a very even and fine driving style Melbourne gained steadily while it was difficult to tell whether Adelaide or Sydney were second. At a half a mile Melbourne was clear of Sydney and Adelaide was losing pace. At the old mile post (¾ mile) Melbourne was a length and a half in front of Sydney and another length away from Adelaide, the time being 4mins 6secs ... Melbourne was rowing hard but in excellent style and perfect time. Sydney was good as to time but the swing was far too short and the recovery not so steady as in the earlier part of the race. Putney (1¼ mile) was reached on 7mins 4secs and here there was a gap of 2 lengths between each boat, the positions being otherwise unaltered. The tide was now against the crews but all three boats held a course down stream. Sydney following in the wash of Melbourne but hanging on well and putting in occasional spurts in good style.

The race was now practically over for Melbourne was strong and in first rate form ... At Gladesville (2¼ miles) Melbourne were 3 lengths ahead of Sydney. the time being 13mins 10secs ... Nearing home Melbourne and Sydney spurred but there was little if any change in their positions and Melbourne passed between the judge and One Man Wharf with a lead of 3 lengths, the time being 15mins 15secs. Sydney passed just 10 seconds later and Adelaide was 45secs from the leader.¹⁰

This victory was followed with success at Henley-on-Yarra on 27 October 1906 when a maiden eight stroked by Simon Fraser—of whom we shall hear much more later—beat old foes, Barwon Rowing Club, in the first heat and the illustrious Mercantile Rowing Club in the second. They were beaten in the final by Civil Service, one of Melbourne's early boat clubs, founded in 1866 and later amalgamated into the Melbourne Rowing Club. MUBC kept a houseboat for friends and special visitors throughout the Regatta.¹¹



1906 Engineers crew, winners of the John Grice Shield by a third of a length from Law and Medicals: (standing left to right) HL Penfold (2), A Benbow (3), JA Laing (4), C Bage (bow) (seated left to right) J Linden (6), Simon Fraser (stroke), EC Dyason (7), R S Anderson (5) (front) J Dow (cox)

Including everyone

As the number of men not living in colleges at the University increased, the committee decided it was important to encourage them to join the Club. A subcommittee of non-college men was formed to persuade them, and to arrange training and coaching. This was a good plan and by 1911 there were more than forty—a big leap from twelve in 1907.¹² Three extra-collegiate men (or 'Extras' as they were called) were in the 1911 intervarsity crew: SP Lyttle (2), JS Doubleday (6) and CS Steele (stroke): 'a most gratifying result to those concerned'.¹³

Thinking of the world

Following Melbourne's success in the 1892 intervarsity race, the Club turned its mind for the first time to the possibility of competing internationally. It did this by opening communications with Sydney and Adelaide, 'with a view of evolving some practical scheme whereby the winning crew might be sent home [i.e. to England] in 1893'.¹⁴ These efforts, however, appear to have come to nought—unfortunately for MUBC, which won the 1893 intervarsity race by three lengths.

The 1907 intervarsity race was held in Melbourne. It was followed by a conference of university boat club delegates on 10 June.¹⁵ Among the topics they discussed was the idea of sending a combined Australian Universities crew to row a challenge race against Oxford and Cambridge and then to compete in the 1908 Olympic Games Regatta in London.¹⁶ A letter was drafted to the 'Home Universities' asking if a challenge race could be arranged. The 'Home Universities' declined the challenge with regret because 'the Olympic Regatta competitions would fully occupy their attentions.' The Australian Universities clearly had different priorities and abandoned the project 'as the main object of the trip [i.e. the challenge race against Oxford and Cambridge] could not be attained'.¹⁷

A 'red letter' season

Though MUBC did not win the intervarsity race in 1907, being beaten by a Sydney crew 'rowing brilliantly',¹⁸ it did well in club regattas with its maiden eight at Henley-on-Yarra, winning against Richmond City and Albert Park in their heat, Footscray City in the semi-final and Mercantile in the final. According to Lang, it was the first regatta win the Club had had since 1892, when Harold Irving's crew won junior and maiden fours at Colac.¹⁹ This was followed with a victory at the Victorian Rowing Association Regatta on 12 December for a maiden four crew stroked by Simon Fraser, who was to become one of the Club's leading oarsmen and, together with Harry Ross-Soden, one of its first international representatives. The season was described by Lang as 'a red letter one in the annals of the Club', and was the foundation of increasing success in later years.²⁰

The new boatshed

As mentioned in chapter one, Professor Irving had originally applied for and the Club had been granted permission to occupy land near the old Botanical Gardens Bridge,



1907 MUBC intervarsity eight (Lower Yarra): (crew named as seated in the boat) JW Dunhill (bow), LJC Mitchell (2), I R Macfarlan (3), FE Dossetor (4), SJ Campbell (5), M Hurry (6), CWB Littlejohn (7), AG Greenham (stroke), JSR Rowan (cox).



1907 MUBC winning maiden four: John Lang, coach (in cox's seat), Simon Fraser (stroke), EC Dyason (3), CG Shaw (2), RS Anderson (bow), inset JSR Rowan (cox)

Simon Fraser

Simon commenced rowing at Melbourne Grammar School. He entered Melbourne University and was a student at Trinity College, where he stroked the College and the University crews in 1908 and 1909. The MUBC crew finished second in both 1908 and 1909 to the SUBC crew, which included his fellow 1912 Olympic crew member Waley on both occasions and Ward in 1909. He stroked the winning Henley-on-Yarra Grand Challenge Cup crew in 1910 for MUBC. With fellow 1912 Olympic crew member Ross-Soden, he won a Victorian Championship Men's Pair. He did not row after the 1912 tour as he had to return to manage his father's estate at Nyang, Victoria. He enlisted in May 1918 and died at the age of thirty-three years as a result of the influenza epidemic of 1919. A Club fund for purchasing boats was established in his name.²¹



'Henley on Yarra, Melbourne' c. 1908 postcard
State Library of Victoria picture collection

as early as October 1859. However, there does not appear to be any record of this grant having been acted upon and for most, if not all of the Club's first forty-five years, crews boated from Fuller's Shed, where space was leased from Fuller.

It was not until 1904 that the Club finally acquired land for its own boatshed. The matter had first been discussed at the annual meeting of 14 March 1890, when the Club resolved to secure land from the Lands Department on the Yarra Bank. Though steps were taken, the matter was not then followed up as Mr Fuller, whose own boatbuilding and storage sheds were being rented by the Club on a non-exclusive basis, offered to build the Club its own boatshed on condition the Club paid him a £200 advance.²² His offer was accepted on 24 June 1890 and a shed (100 feet by 25 feet) was built for the sole use of the Club. The shed was leased back to the Club for five years at £50 a year.²³

Despite several renewals of the lease, it proved a temporary solution. By 1904 Lang, who was then the Club's Secretary, had begun the process of securing a site for MUBC. Among the possible options which Lang was requested by the committee to investigate were: to obtain a licence to occupy a site on the Yarra Bank 'as near the Banks Rowing Club as possible'; 'establish the cost of erecting the South Melbourne Rowing Club shed on a Yarra Bank site'; find out 'if Greenland will sell his shed or what rent he will take';²⁴ and 'write to the Melbourne Amateur Athletic Club asking for their official views on a private communication re housing the Club.'²⁵ Eventually Lang identified the current site occupied by the Club as being the last available one in the precinct, and an application for licence was lodged and approved, subject to payment of the licence fee.

In September 1904 Lang suddenly realised that the site applied for was at risk of being lost because of the danger of it being included in the park to be created by the Alexandra Drive Bill, then before Parliament. With alacrity, the indefatigable Lang went to Treasury on 22 September, paid the necessary licence fee, and:

had [then] seen a clerk in control of boatshed licences and had got the Alexandra Drive Bill (read the first time the previous day) amended on the second reading (which happened to be that afternoon). The name of the Boat Club was therefore added to the names in the schedule and the club site excluded from the park which the Bill created.²⁶

The licence to occupy thirty-seven perches of land was granted in October 1904. However, the annual report for 1904–5 stated that at any time 'radical changes' might be made in the area and 'it is necessary the Building Fund be steadily augmented.' Further exhortations to augment the Building Fund were made in the 1905–6 and 1906–7 annual reports. The report for 1907–8 notes that:

... the matter has become all the more urgent owing to the envious eyes cast upon this site for our new shed by certain non-rowing bodies of the baser sort. Consequently your committee made an earnest appeal to past and present members to win undying fame by becoming life members and thereby provide funds for a new shed.²⁷

The response, though not up to expectations, was fairly good. Just over £92 was collected in addition to the amount in hand for building at the beginning of the season.

Fundraising continued with the Captain, EC Dyason, asking '... certain men to join as life members if 50 others did so.'²⁸ Though they did not reach this number in July 1908 John Lang, who had become Treasurer at this crucial time, reported that he had received £169 towards the building fund in a week. There was now £285 on hand, and another £137 promised. Lang loaned the Club the remaining £100 at 2½ per cent interest, and donated an additional amount in excess of £31, making up the total of £520 needed to go ahead with building. On 29 July, Lang, Simon Fraser, Professor Ernest Skeats and FL Apperly formed a subcommittee to prepare plans for the new boatshed. They inspected other boatsheds and:

... decided to adopt a plan quite different to ... any other (excepting Melbourne Grammar School shed which it resembled in some ways). The plan was to have a two storied boatshed with the boat rack in four rows on each side of uprights placed quite clear of the walls at the sides and a stair-case was to go up in a small tower built outside the main building.

It was proposed to have the upstairs part extend back only halfway and submitted to the architect of the Public Works for approval. At the last moment this gentleman withheld his consent and insisted that the top story should run the whole length and that some more ornamentation should be added to the building.²⁹

It appears that even in those days, the authorities responsible for granting planning and building permits could sometimes act capriciously.

Nonetheless a new architect, AS Eggleston, prepared fresh plans and only charged half fees of £21 15s. Public Works approved and tenders were called. That of RT James of Oakleigh at £707 for a boatshed and fifty feet of staging was accepted. The contractor started building on 22 September and the boatshed was officially opened on 12 December 1908.

The Club's building subcommittee reported that the total cost of the building and staging was £838 0s 8d and the major donors from the time the project was commenced were Prof Kernot, Mrs Ross-Soden, Senator Simon Fraser, The Sports Union, Sir John Madden, WE Cornwall, WH Melville, T Crosthwaite, Prof Masson, Sir Henry Wrixon, Miss Ethel Bage and John Lang. The subcommittee stated in its report: 'We hope members will like the new boathouse. We trust they will take a pride in it and will dress in more decently clean and more uniform rowing togs than formerly.'³⁰

Official opening

The VRA Regatta Day was also on 12 December 1908. Professor Orme Masson opened the proceedings by referring to Professor Irving as the founder of the Club, and the fact that the Club 'was celebrating its Fiftieth Year by this Jubilee Day opening of the long desired and much wanted new boathouse.'³¹ Professor Kernot declared the building open and Mrs Lang cut the ribbon across the door. The ceremony was performed with a pair of silver scissors. The key was presented to the Captain, TJ Campbell. HL Purves of Sydney University Boat Club and Darnley Naylor of Adelaide University Boat Club were present. A report in the *Herald* described the building: 'It is constructed of jarrah weatherboard



'Boat Sheds, River Yarra, Melbourne' c. 1908 postcard
State Library of Victoria picture collection

The Club's boatshed

The Melbourne University Boat Club shed is a two-storey weatherboard building situated with other boatsheds on the south bank of the Yarra River east of Princes Bridge.

The 1909 shed was able to house 9 eights, 5 fours, 4 pairs and a sculling boat. It was constructed of oregon studs and jarrah weatherboards. A small hipped-roof belvedere stood on the northeast corner, overlooking the river. The ground floor was used for the storage of boats and equipment and the first floor as clubrooms, showers and toilets. There were recessed verandahs at both ends. The verandahs were composed of three bays with a very simple triple arched valance with plain lattice pattern balusters on the first floor. The southern verandah had stilted segmental arches on the ground floor. The roof of the small lookout tower on the northeast corner has similar detailing. The south verandah has been partially enclosed. A concrete block addition was built to the west facade in 1978.

The shed was updated using a design by Club members, Peter Martin and Peter Sandow of FMSA Architects in 2001–2002. Further additions and renovations, required as a result of booming membership demand and the need to accommodate a much larger number of boats and an upgrade of the facilities are planned as at the time of publication.

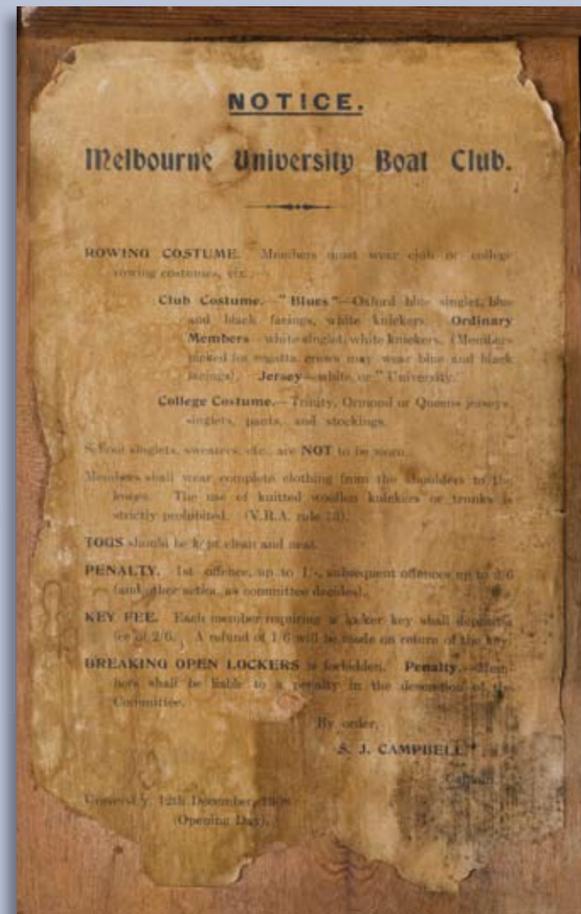
The Conservation Management Plan prepared by FMSA described the building as a typically Edwardian structure with graceful timber arches and simple timber details. It is regarded as having statewide significance in heritage terms and it was recorded on the register of Heritage Victoria in 1988. It is now the only original timber boatshed on the Yarra at Princes Bridge.



TOP: The New Boat Sheds 1908 (Melbourne University Magazine, August 1909) *University of Melbourne Archives*

CENTRE: Plaques affixed to the front verandah of the MUBC boatshed

BOTTOM RIGHT: Notices inside the original locker doors on Opening Day, 12 December 1908 (and still *in situ*) *Robert Zahara collection*



THE FABULOUS YEARS UNTIL THE FIRST WORLD WAR

on oregon frames. The ground floor measures 70 feet by 35 feet.³² The Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Councillor Burston, Mrs Burston and the President of the VRA, H Gyles Turner all attended the opening ceremony.

The visitor's book signed on that day had the following names, including the dates on which they joined the Club:

George Upward 1891, T a'Beckett 1889, John CF Ulbrich 1874, Thomas Colles 1867, Thos C Hope 1866, Wolfe Fink 1870, Donald McKellar 1905, AG Greenham 1907, PM Bennie 1869, Bennett Langton 1881, R Russell Lewis 1888, Ernest W Skeats 1907, Felix Meyer, W Beattie Smith, TP McInerney, HRF Chomley 1889, JW Springthorpe 1874, John E Hogan 1894, RH Gregory 1897, C Gordon Shaw 1902, JS Elkington, Honorary Secretary of the Club from 1863 to 1866, John Smyth 1908, WH Waters 1898, FP Derham 1904, Andrew Lang, born 9 June 1907 joined 1908, S Dutton Green 1897, John Lang 1893.

All the boats and material were removed from Jerram's boatshed on 19 December 1908 and put into the new clubhouse. The members who took part in this heavy work were Captain SJ Campbell, O'Dell, Crowther, Balcombe, Quick, RW Creswell, CS Honman and John Lang; on 13 January 1909 the contractor handed over the clubhouse completely finished.

John Lang and the missing Club records

For years the devoted John Lang tried to trace the whereabouts of some missing Club records. The search seemed fruitless as he had corresponded all over Australia without success. In the beginning of 1909 Mr HH Harper, who was articed to Messrs Davies & Campbell solicitors Melbourne, discovered two old books in the office. One of them turned out to be the Club Minute Book from 1870 to 1888 and the other the Club Record



ABOVE: Historic Buildings Council certificate

BELOW: The lost Club Minute Book and Record Book for the period commencing 1870, found and returned to John Lang in 1909



Book written up from 1870–1885. Messrs Davies & Campbell handed the books over to the Club. Lang noted that ‘It was intensely satisfying to get these records and they were most interesting reading’.³³ In 1911 Lang also noted that he had searched for the prior records for the period from 1859–70 without success. He therefore set to work to reconstruct them, based on the results of his research into the history of Victorian rowing, and created the first record book of the Club for that period.

1908–10 intervarsity races

The years 1908 and 1909 saw the Club lose the intervarsity race to Sydney on the Port River and Parramatta River respectively—the 1909 Sydney eight being a ‘particularly brilliant crew’.³⁴ In 1910 MUBC was beaten into third place by Adelaide and Sydney respectively on the Yarra. This race was rowed on the Lower Yarra from the western end of Coode’s Canal to the Steam Ferry at Spencer Street (a little less than three miles). In this year, the loss was due to the misfortune of SP Lyttle (the crew’s 4 man) catching a crab in the rough water, and so damaging his rigger as to render it useless.

The accident was entirely excusable—it might have happened under the circumstances to the best rower in any race. A little while after no. 4 unshipped the oar and let it overboard. He swung in time with the rest, but when our crew passed the steamer near the Victoria dock entrance it was only too apparent we had no chance to pick up the 4 lengths we had lost in the foul and shortly after this point the crew stopped rowing and the steamers passed them.³⁵

Adelaide ‘rowing splendidly’ went on to win easily by four lengths in 17mins 33secs.

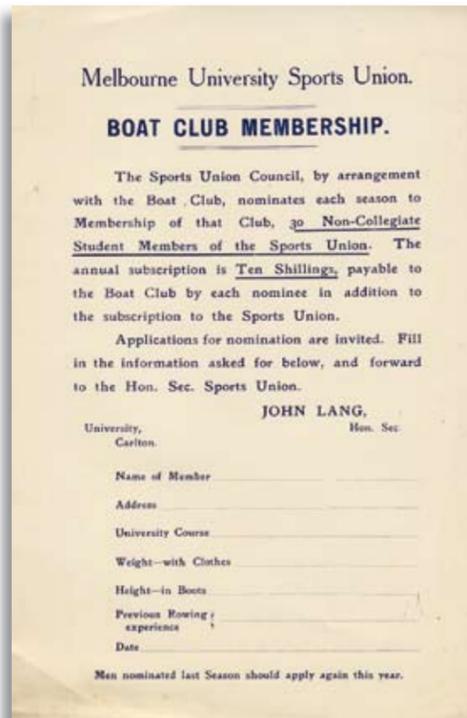
The 1910 Australian Universities Dinner at the Vienna Café

The Vienna was a popular venue for celebratory dinners. It was located on ‘the Block’ in Collins Street, where the Australia Hotel would later be built. On this occasion, Mr Justice Higgins (a member of the High Court and a life member) toasted the donors of the Challenge Cup. There were several ‘old strokes’ present including HJ Whiting who stroked the 1901–1906 crews, Simon Fraser (1908), T Crosthwaite (1891), and FAH Boynton (1909 and 1910). The Sydney University ‘old strokes’ present were TS Dixon (1908–9) and RP Hickson (bow in 1895 and 1897 and stroke in 1898).

The Club held regular dinners at the University but venues such as the Vienna Café, Oriental Hotel and Scott’s Hotel were often used. Meetings too were mostly held at the University, various members’ offices and the shed, but Young and Jackson’s on the corner of Swanston and Flinders Streets was also frequently used.

Results also improve at a Club level

The Club continued to improve at Henley entering two maiden eights and a maiden four in 1909. The maiden four crew came second to Banks. Unfortunately both of University’s maiden eights were drawn to meet in the first round. University beat Banks in the semi-final and Civil Service in the final.



Boat Club membership nomination form c.1909



1909 MUBC maiden eight:
S Dobson (bow), KG Aberdeen (2),
GG Anderson (3), I Black (4),
P Apperly (5), J Lindon (6), H Ross-
Soden (7), S Campbell (stroke),
P Gill (cox)

In the 1909 season University also won the maiden pair at the Seymour Regatta. The crew was C Halkyard (bow) and Simon Fraser (stroke), the latter continuing his rise to rowing prominence, with CJ Wilson (cox). The same crew won the junior pair race at the Ballarat Regatta on 19 February 1910.

According to Lang, ‘in 1909 the M.U.B.C. members began to come into their own—to force the pace and to look on themselves as responsible for the Club’s performances in regattas and in Victorian rowing generally.’³⁶

First women rowers

Although there would be no formal women’s rowing at Melbourne University for another sixty years, it is of significance that the first rowing club for women, Melbourne’s Albert Park Ladies Rowing Club, was established in 1907. An Interstate Challenge race for women was held in 1912 when Brisbane Ladies’ Rowing Club four, representing Queensland, defeated Albert Park Ladies in Melbourne.³⁷ The first mention of women rowing within the sphere of MUBC is recorded in the 1909 minutes of meetings. At a committee meeting at the boatshed on 1 November, it was decided to allow women students to row on Saturday mornings using the Club’s boats with detachable fixed seats at an annual subscription of 5s.³⁸

College and extra-college men

In 1908 the race between the Melbourne University colleges, which continued to be one of the most popular events of the Melbourne social calendar, was won by Queen’s for the first time. In 1909, the race, again won by Queen’s, was rowed over a new shorter course on the Upper Yarra from Cremorne Corner to the Henley finish. This provided much better viewing. Cremorne was a recreation area in Richmond with picnic spots and a permanent rotunda and statues.³⁹ The course was 1¼ miles or a little over, compared to the two-mile Lower Yarra course previously used, ‘... with a view to make the preparation for the race less exacting so as to allow a shorter training for the college race and a consequent longer interval between that race and the varsity race.’⁴⁰ It was thought this would improve the Club’s chances in the intervarsity race. Indeed MUBC won that event from 1911 to 1914, and again in 1919, when rowing began again after the First World War, which seems to suggest that this decision was a success.

The 1909 Queen’s crew was coached by Charles Donald and included FL Apperly who played a crucial part in setting up, in the following year, the annual race between an eight composed of non-college men and a crew from the ‘Head of the River’ (i.e. winning) college of the previous year. The first of these races was rowed on 25 April 1910 over a mile course ending at the Henley finish.⁴¹ Queen’s beat the extra-collegiates, but only by a length; a great effort on the part of Extras considering their 5 man caught a crab early in the race.⁴² MUBC Hon Secretary Apperly was appreciated for his ‘tact and patience of high order in his negotiations to arrange this race.’⁴³

Apperly also played a strategic role in persuading the Sports Union to allow the Boat Club to admit up to thirty non-college members at a subscription of 10s, rather than the normal fee of one guinea. The Sports Union was to pay a fee of 25s a year each on such members. According to Lang, Apperly’s success in securing a reduction in subscriptions



Henley Mile Course (superimposed over the Old Channel and adjacent lagoons of the River Yarra). Compare with the maps on p. 18
The Victorian Oarsman, p.4

for extra-collegiate members, coupled with his role in establishing the race with Extras, 'did more than anything else to bring on general university rowing.'⁴⁴

The best win in fifty-two years

The 1910 Henley Grand Challenge Cup provided the Club with more laurels. On Saturday, 22 October, a strong crew with Simon Fraser as stroke and CC Halkyard, S Dobson, H Rabling, SP Lyttle, AH Dunstan, SJ Campbell, H Ross-Soden and the coxswain, Edmonson, beat Mercantile by just two feet in the first heat, the two crews rowing neck and neck all the way. The final was between MUBC and 1909 winners, Albert Park. The crowds were treated to some unexpected drama in this race as University's boat ran into a large rowing boat that was obstructing the course. The crash completely wrecked the bow of University's *Wm C Kernot*, the Club's best eight. The race had to be re-rowed by mutual consent on the afternoon of Monday, 24 October, when the University used a 'sister ship' to the *Kernot* on loan to the Club by the Footscray Rowing Club. It was another close race:

After shooting the Monier Bridge [now called Morell Bridge at Anderson Street] our boat was about a canvas ahead. This position was maintained rounding New Cut corner. Between there and Branders with both crews racing their hardest our men crept on a little until the bow of the Park boat was opposite no. 2 in the University crew. A little after Brander's Ferry Fraser called on his men and gradually drew ahead and won by a length.⁴⁵

Another Vienna Café celebration followed, this time at the invitation of Simon Fraser's father, Senator Fraser, a life member. Also present were Professor Allen, Professor Skeats, Messrs EI Robson, CC Halkyard, H Ross-Soden, SJ Campbell, T Crosthwaite, Simon Fraser, SP Lyttle, AH Dunstan, S Dobson and John Lang. In his toast to Crosthwaite (the coach), John Lang remarked that it was the best win the Club had had in its fifty-two-year history.⁴⁶ He also commented on the Club's success in 1910, that 'it only required the weight of a first-rate Hon Secretary in S Dobson to rouse the Club to a full sense of its own strength.'⁴⁷

Magnificent men in their flying machine

There is an entry in the Club's records which indicates that the bow man of the victorious Henley eight almost came to grief before race day: 'Bow of the Grand Challenge was laid aside for some time owing to an accident with an aeroplane belonging to Clarke [Clarke was the stroke of the MUBC maiden four which also competed at that year's Henley]. Bow (Halkyard) recovered from the results of his experiments with the flying machine and was well enough to go on training.'⁴⁸

Growing confidence on the water

After the 1910 Henley, the Club competed in many regattas successfully. Simon Fraser and the intrepid airman CC Halkyard had become a formidable senior pair winning at



the Seymour Regatta on 12 November 1910. The Club stood out at the Victorian Rowing Association Regatta on 3 December with senior four, maiden eight and maiden four crews. Simon Fraser was stroke of the four, with other members H Rabling, ALT Dobson, H Ross-Soden and cox, N Edmonson. They won their heat against Mercantile and Yarra Rowing Clubs. In the final University were beaten by Albert Park in a closely fought race. MUBC coach Crosthwaite encouraged them all the way, and the crowd yelled with excitement throughout. Interestingly, the Albert Park crew included Charles Donald. All Albert Park oarsmen were veterans of many interstate races compared to the relative inexperience of the MUBC men.⁴⁹ University came third in the maiden eight and maiden four.

Simon Fraser and CC Halkyard rowed through the summer at the Upper Yarra and Albert Park Lake Regattas of 28 and 30 January 1911 respectively. They came second in both races losing to Civil Service and Footscray Rowing Clubs. The Moran brothers of Footscray Rowing Club were the long-time champions of the Footscray Regatta.⁵⁰

Off the river, 1910 ended on a disappointing note from the viewpoint of fundraising because Lang's circular seeking assistance in paying off the building debt met with little success, initially only three guineas being raised from 1000 addressees: 'It is really rather discouraging when the general body of old members show as little interest in the Club—there are of course some exceptions whose generosity and continued kindness only make the apathy of others more marked.'⁵¹

MUBC winning Grand Challenge eight 1910: CC Halkyard (bow), S Dobson (2), H Rabling (3), SP Lyttle (4), AH Dunstan (5), SJ Campbell (6), H Ross-Soden (7), Simon Fraser (stroke), Edmonston (cox)

The Club comes of age, 1911

At the MUBC annual general meeting held on 3 April 1911, John Grice and John Lang were elected honorary life members in recognition of special services to the Club.⁵²

The 1911–12 season unfolded with the first race being held on 8 April 1911 between the winners of the 1910 intercollegiate race, Queen's, and a crew of extra-collegiate men. The Extras crew, consisting of Gordon Storey (bow), FH Moran, JD Blair, SP Lyttle, Fraser, JS Doubleday, GA Birnie, CS Steele (stroke) with Gardiner (cox) won; this being the first win for Extras in only the second year of the event.

The annual college race rowed from Cremorne Corner to the Henley finish, which followed on 13 April, was a thriller. The three crews were level as far as the Monier Bridge, after which Queen's and Trinity drew away and were racing neck and neck, until 'Queen's got in the stroke just on the line and got the verdict of Dr Springthorpe, the judge, by 6 inches.'⁵³

Twelve crews participated in Club Fours on 16 May. The trophies were half-pint pewter pots. These and pint pewter pots were the most common of trophies for boat races around this time and right up to more modern times, hence the term 'pot hunting' or 'pot hunter' used for rowers who won multiple events at any regatta.

Two days later on 18 May, the Boat Club celebrated the launching of two new eights. A practice eight had been presented by John Grice along with a practice pair. The other boat was a best eight to replace the *Wm C Kernot*. All the boats were built by Jerram & Son. Tea was laid on in the dressing room of the boatshed which had been cleaned and decorated. Many of the Club's glitterati were there including John Grice, his son JN Grice, George Higgins, T Crosthwaite, George Shaw, AI Eggleston, Professor Skeats, RJ Lewis and HW Allen. The Club's President, EI Robson, thanked John Grice. The party moved down to the ground floor, where two crews rested the eights on trestles, and Mrs Lang christened the racing eight *John Grice*. The Club's Captain, Harry Ross-Soden, helped Mrs Lang pour 'a fizzing liquid' on to the bow canvas, and wished the boat and her crews success in all her races. John Grice's daughter then performed a similar ceremony with the practice eight and called her the *Coolullah*. The crew for the Universities race launched the new racing boat and 'rowed away from the staging as if they had sat her for weeks'. Another crew rowed away the *Coolullah* with much cheering from the launching party.⁵⁴

The year continued with a novel race between various Victorian military regiments that was rowed on Saturday, 10 June 1911. For the first time, Melbourne University Rifles participated. The other crews were eights from Garrison Artillery, Field Artillery, the Victorian Scottish Regiment and the Fifth Australian Infantry Regiment. Melbourne University Rifles won the final.

The 1911 Australian Universities Boat Race was set to be rowed on the same day on the Port River in Adelaide over a three-mile course. However, for the first time in the history of the race, the weather was so bad that it had to be postponed to Monday, 12 June. Ross-Soden, Captain of MUBC, later reported that the waves on the river were so high that they would have swamped any racing boat. The boats did nonetheless try to start on the Saturday; the crews on board launches with the boats being towed behind to the start line. But it was impossible to begin the race.

When the race did take place the Adelaide *Register* reported it fully. In contrast to

the Saturday, conditions on the Monday could not have been better. The launch *Leveret* was crowded with spectators. The *Register* noted that 'The issue was never in doubt.' Melbourne was, throughout the race, a relaxed confident crew compared to Sydney and Adelaide who 'were plugging and making hard work of it'. And though there were times that Sydney almost drew even, there was never any doubt about the result. Another Adelaide paper, *The Advertiser*, praised Melbourne's stroke, Harry Ross-Soden, who '... was the best oar in the three boats, his blade work being powerful and finished'.⁵⁵

Charles Donald coached the crew. It was the first time the race was rowed under the new rule by which only undergraduates could participate in intervarsity events. Because of the postponement, there was no official dinner on the Saturday although the three crews dined together. On the Monday, both Sydney and Melbourne crews caught the express to Melbourne after the race.

Henley-on-Yarra which took place on 28 October 1911 turned into an unfortunate event for University, despite dead-heating with Albert Park Rowing Club in the first heat.

Soon after the start University got a slight lead. Nearing new cut corner our coxswain closed in (University was south station, Banks centre, Park north), Banks being about a length astern. University thus took the Banks water. Park caught our crew up after Branders and they were leading a few yards from the post but Fraser put in an extra spurt and the boats were level crossing the line. The umpire then disqualified MUBC for crossing in front of Banks. According to the Club's records, many people felt that MUBC could have won if they had been allowed to row in the final.⁵⁶

There were several other University crews at Henley this year including two junior eights, a junior four and a maiden eight. The maiden eight crew included two younger brothers of senior eight members—AC Fraser and J Ross-Soden—and reached the semi-finals in which they came third, while the junior eights finished second and third respectively in their heats.

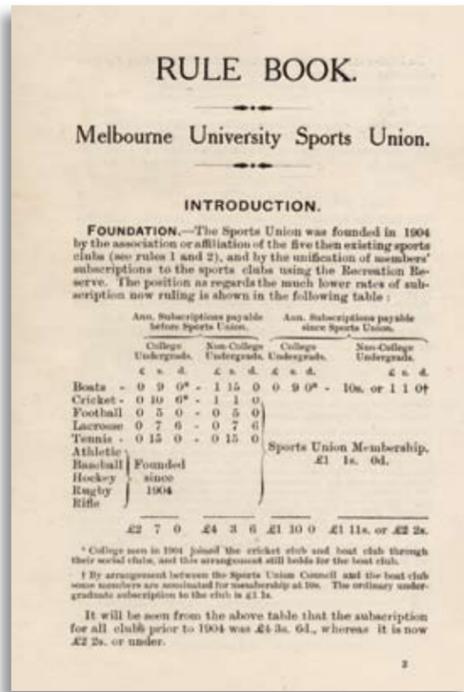
As Lang remarked in the records, 'Henley was a huge success in every way (excepting for the very regrettable disqualifications). There were about 120,000 people present. Some £3000 was taken at the gates of the reserve.'⁵⁷

The year finished on a high with the Club's maiden eight winning their heat and semi-final in the VRA Regatta on 2 December, and coming second by barely a quarter length to Civil Service Rowing Club's no. 1 crew in the final.

A remarkable row

Lang noted a 'remarkable row' by Ormond College men who were training on 26 June 1911. They found the water in the Yarra so calm that they decided to row through the river mouth into Hobson's Bay and around *HMS Cerberus*, moored off Williamstown, and back to the river.⁵⁸

This was an even more adventuresome row than the unusual course used for the 1907 intervarsity race that was rowed downstream from the Footscray wharf and finished beyond the mouth of the Yarra, between the retaining walls.⁵⁹



TOP: 1910 Melbourne University Sports Union Rule Book

BOTTOM: 1911 winning MUBC intervarsity eight (Port Adelaide): (standing left to right) FH Moran (4), SP Lyttle (2), FL Gill (cox), CC Halkyard (bow) AFS Dobson (3), (seated left to right) JL Doubleday (6), CS Steele (stroke), H Ross-Soden (7), H Rabling (5)

MUBC men at Oxford and Cambridge

MUBC members who continued their studies at Oxford or Cambridge often continued their rowing pursuits as well. One of these was Mervyn Bournes Higgins, the son of High Court Judge, Henry Bournes Higgins. A small note in the records for 1910–1911 mentions that Higgins, then of Balliol College, rowed bow in the winning 1910 Oxford crew that competed in the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race.

Steve Fairbairn was probably the most famous of these MUBC expats, but there were many others and in 1911 several achieved good results at Henley-on-Thames in July. RG Casey, 11st 13lbs (subsequently Lord Casey, Australian Minister for External Affairs and an Australian Governor-General) rowed in the 3 seat of the First Trinity Cambridge crew which won the final of the Thames Cup; Mervyn Bournes Higgins, 11st 3lbs, stroked the London Rowing Club crew which was beaten by Ottawa Rowing Club in the Stewards Challenge; C Baillieu, 12st 3lbs, was 2 in the Magdalen Oxford crew which beat New College Oxford, Ottawa Rowing Club, and finally, Jesus Cambridge, thus winning the Grand Challenge. Also participating in this event was CWB Littlejohn, 12st 9lbs, who rowed in the 7 seat of the New College Oxford crew, as did Mervyn Bourne Higgins in the London Rowing Club boat. All but Baillieu and the bow of the Magdalen crew, the members of which averaged 12st 10lbs and 6ft 1½ins, were Blues at Oxford. Littlejohn also rowed in the 7 seat in the Oxford crew which beat Cambridge in the 1911 race. C Baillieu also rowed in the winning Oxford crew in the 1913 Boat Race.⁶⁰

Success breeds success

Simon Fraser and CC Halkyard continued their 1911 winning streak as a pair at the VRA Champion Pairs race of 12 January 1912 with S Jerram (cox). They beat Albert Park and Essendon Rowing Clubs. They also won the final of the senior pair event at the Upper Yarra Regatta on 27 January 'on the post by about two feet' and the final of the Albert Park Regatta on 29 January 'by a few inches'. John Lang noted that 'no members of the Club have ever put up three such wins. Not even Colles and Hope in the seventies did as well, though they did splendidly'.⁶¹

The 1912 Australian Universities Boat Race went ahead on 1 June on the Parramatta River in weather that was beautifully fine, '... a slight breeze blew behind the crews and the tide was fairly slack, just about on the turn as the race was started shortly after 3.30pm.'⁶² Melbourne started favourites. Although Sydney got away at the start Melbourne spurted



ABOVE: 1912 MUBC intervarsity eight (Parramatta River) (crew listed as seated in the boat): S Humphreys (bow), FP Halkyard (2), HC Disher (3), CS Steele (4), JD Blair (5), JL Doubleday (6), H Rabling (7), FH Moran (stroke), JHS Jackson (cox), Charles Donald (coach)

BELOW: Commemorative oar from 1912 intervarsity race



at the half mile, caught up and remained ahead despite many attempts by Sydney to get ahead. By the one and a half mile mark Sydney's strength had given out and Melbourne won by three lengths, with Adelaide four lengths behind Sydney. It was only the second time that Sydney had been beaten on its own water. Charles Donald coached the crew again, which included HC Disher in the 3 seat. It was the first time that Disher was mentioned in MUBC records, as he had only just started in the Ormond crew of 1912. Stroke for this race was FH Moran.

At the dinner that evening the President of Sydney University Boat Club, Mr F Coen, proposed 'ascertaining if the Queensland University would join in the race and that he would communicate with other Universities concerned. He would also ask Hobart to send a crew if the Universities of Melbourne and Adelaide approved.'⁶³

Henley-on-Thames and the Stockholm Olympic Games

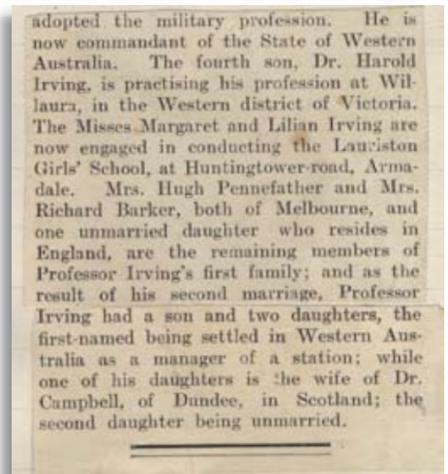
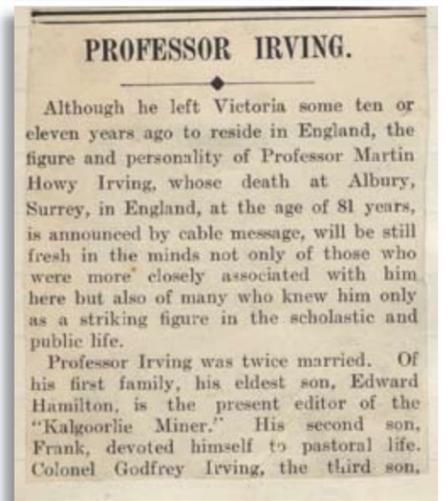
MUBC champions Simon Fraser and Harry Ross-Soden were soon to leap onto the world stage and take MUBC to international participation in rowing. In winter 1911, the New South Wales Rowing Association decided to send a crew to the upcoming Olympic Games planned for Stockholm in 1912. Victoria and Tasmania would have liked to join the scheme, but the NSWRA kept control of the arrangements ostensibly because 'they thought it better for one state to make up the crew owing mainly to the difficulty in getting the crew together for practice on the same water if it was composed of men from more than one state.'⁶⁴ The VRA committee 'in a magnanimous and sportsmanlike spirit resolved to assist NSW in every way.'⁶⁵ This in itself was a turn of events that could only have been brought about by the opportunity to participate on the international sporting stage; until this time relations between the Victorian and New South Wales Rowing Associations had emphasised their rivalry, rather than a willingness to work together.

The VRA's expression of goodwill may have been a key factor in the NSWRA's decision to allow the VRA to nominate two Victorian rowers to replace members of the NSW crew who were unavailable. The VRA chose Harry Ross-Soden and Simon Fraser, both members of Melbourne University Boat Club, and they were officially selected on Monday, 22 January 1912. Poignantly, Lang recorded that:

This achievement was followed all too close by the death of one who would have taken great pleasure in the matter. Professor Irving (founder of the Club) died in England on Wednesday 24 January 1912 aged 81 ... Allowing for the difference in time between here and England probably the announcement of his death and the selection of the crew (if cabled) would appear in the same issue of the press.⁶⁶

Ross-Soden and Fraser went to Sydney in February 1912 to row with the crew. Although Fraser stroked often in training, in the end, a NSW man, Roger Fitzhardinge, who had rowed for NSW in several interstate championships, was chosen as stroke for the Olympic Regatta. Fraser rowed at 2 while Harry Ross-Soden was in the 7 seat.

Two thousand pounds had to be raised to get the crew to Europe—they were to compete at both the Henley-on-Thames and the Olympics. The VRA was expected to raise £600 towards this sum. The Melbourne Amateur Regatta Association (which organised



The death of Professor Irving
From the MUBC Record Book, vol. 1 p.1



the Henley-on-Yarra) contributed £500 and VRA President, Henry Gyles Turner, also contributed, as did the Athenaeum Club (one of Melbourne's better-known gentlemen's clubs); in the end the Victorian contribution totalled £713.

The Australian crew left Melbourne in the *Osterley* on 17 April 1912 for London and the Grand Challenge at Henley in June. It was the first Henley to be attended by a reigning sovereign. King George V and Queen Mary arrived on the Royal Train, were greeted by the Mayor of Henley, and escorted to the Royal Barge which took them to the Royal Enclosure.

For the race, they rowed as a Sydney Rowing Club crew and beat the Canadian Argonaut Club in their first heat and New College, Oxford in the next round. They met one of England's strongest club crews, Leander, in the final and beat them relatively easily by three quarters of a length. Their rowing was smooth and long and was subject to very favourable comment considering that they were a 'colonial' combination. They were presented with the Grand Challenge Cup by the Queen.⁶⁷ 'Thus first shot did Australia win the Grand Challenge at Henley-on-Thames. And the M.U.B.C. had two of its active members in the crew.'⁶⁸ As an aside, the Royal Standard from the Royal Barge somehow found its way back to Australia, and is a prized possession to this day at Sydney Rowing Club.

The Stockholm Olympic Regatta was held on a twisted one and a quarter mile course on 17 and 18 July. The Australian crew beat Sweden in the first heat and rowed against Leander in the semi-final. They drew the outside station which put them at a distinct disadvantage. Nonetheless at the halfway mark, they led Leander by half a length. A great struggle followed and in the last 300 yards Leander stroked ahead and won by two-thirds of a length. As Lang put it: 'The tail of the Australian kangaroo was rather limp for a bit after this defeat—but anyway, we won the Grand!'⁶⁹

No Australian rowing team would travel to the Olympics again for some time. The First World War would decimate a generation of young men. The next moment of glory would have to wait until after hostilities had ceased in 1918, when the AIF No. 1 crew won the King's Cup at the Henley Peace Regatta of 1919.

As an historical footnote, five members of the Royal Henley and Stockholm Olympic team were decorated for bravery in the First World War and one was killed.

OPPOSITE TOP: Australian oarsmen train for the 1912 Henley Royal Regatta and Stockholm Olympics aboard ship *Harry Ross-Soden* family collection, reproduced courtesy www.rowinghistory-aus.info

OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT: 1912 Australian Team *Harry Ross-Soden* family collection, reproduced courtesy www.rowinghistory-aus.info

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT: The Australian crew winning the Grand Challenge at the 1912 Henley Royal Regatta *The Victorian Oarsman*, p.118



1913 winning MUBC intersarsity eight: (standing left to right) FP Halkyard (bow), JRS Cochrane (3), Mr Chas Donald (coach), R Mc C Abernathy (4), A Spowers (2), (seated left to right) CS Steele (6), HC Disher (stroke), EI Littlejohn (7), JL Doubleday (5), (sitting) JHS Jackson (cox) *Disher* collection at University of Melbourne Archives

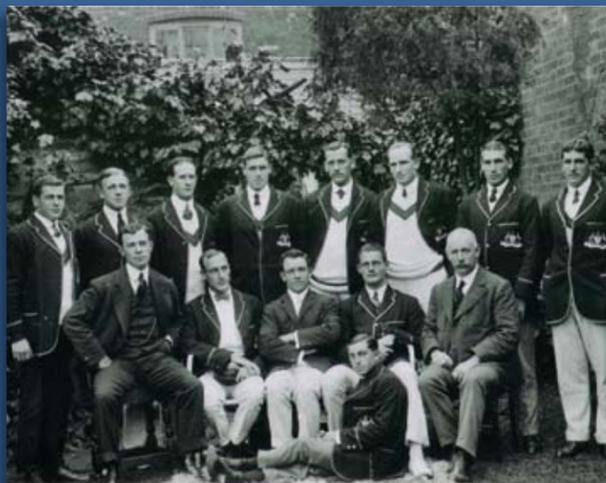
The final moments of peace

The halcyon days of the Club in the immediate prewar years were literally the calm before the storm. The Club's records capture the mood of the times in recounting the genteel entertainment immediately following the competition for the John Grice eights in August 1912:

Mr EI Robson (President) entertained members of the club and friends to afternoon tea at Branders Ferry Tea Gardens. Last year the President gave an afternoon tea at the boathouse which everyone thoroughly enjoyed but the innovation of the open air *al fresco* repast at "Branders" was a delightful surprise to everybody and the weather being balmy and mild, the numerous guests thoroughly enjoyed the outing.⁷⁰



1913 winning MUBC maiden pair: EI Littlejohn (bow), HC Disher (stroke), FY Wallis (cox)



HENLEY ROYAL REGATTA, ENGLAND, 1912. (RE-PRODUCED FROM STUDIO)
Finish of the Final Heat of the Grand Challenge Cup, Australia winning from Leander R.C.

Lang recorded, disapprovingly, the nature of the welcoming reception given at the end of October 1912 to the returning Olympians, Simon Fraser and Harry Ross-Soden, who were met at Spencer Street Station by 'four or five members of the Club. The welcome accorded these two men might well have been of a warmer kind.'⁷¹

MUBC had little success at Henley that year but fared somewhat better at the VRA Regatta in December 1912. Notably Clive Disher stroked the winning maiden eight.

Clive Disher followed up his success at the end of the previous year by stroking the winning MUBC eight in the Australian Universities Boat Race rowed on 7 June 1913. The location was Melbourne's Lower Yarra and the course was from a point 'down Coode Canal to near the Big Crane at Spencer Street', a distance of two and a half miles.⁷² Inter-club competition was very strong and rowing remained a popular sport (see the list of active Victorian clubs as at 1 July 1914 in Appendix II).

Only official steamers, the *Commissioner*, and the naval picket boat were allowed to follow the race; the Harbour Trust Commissioners having decided that the wash caused by any bigger boats would damage the wharves. Charles Donald was again the coach, Sydney's crew were trained by the 1912 Henley-on-Thames and Olympic Games stroke, Roger Fitzhardinge. Sydney did lead at the beginning but Melbourne soon caught and passed them. Melbourne won easily by six lengths. It was MUBC's third win in succession at the Australian Universities Boat Race.

The celebratory dinner for all the crews followed at the Oriental Hotel. A couple of months later, on 8 August, John Grice, now a patron of the Club, gave a dinner party for the Melbourne crew at his house 'Coolullah' in Hawksburn. The Club's President, John Lang, spoke about the achievements of the Club noting the first amateur Melbourne Regatta organised by Martin Irving in 1860, and the first intercolonial race, in which Irving had been a member of the Victorian crew. Lang mentioned the first school's race between Scotch and Melbourne Grammar held in 1868 and '... ascribed to the work of two members of our Club, who were masters at the schools.'⁷³ He mentioned that John Grice had moved that an intercolonial gig race be rowed in 1872 and that Grice had rowed bow in the crew.⁷⁴

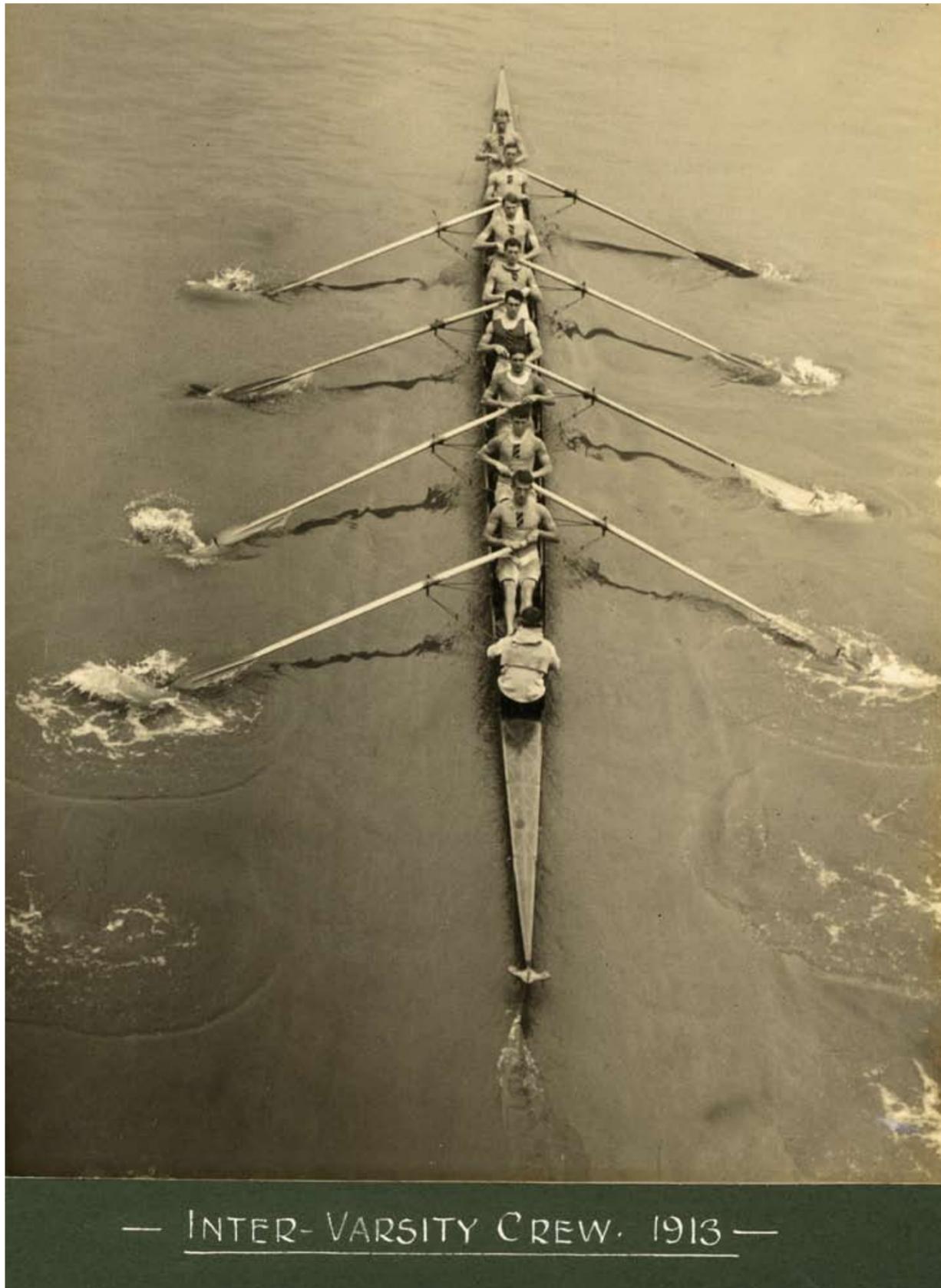
The rest of 1913 went by with many good races, but no victories at the Henley-on-Yarra Regatta or other events. At the VRA Regatta of 6 December 1913 however Clive Disher and EI Littlejohn got together to participate in the maiden pair event with great success. Their cox was FG Wallis.



TOP: 1914 MUBC intervarsity eight racing

MIDDLE: 1914 winning MUBC intervarsity eight (Port Adelaide): (standing left to right) WI Hayes (bow), A Spowers (4), Chas Donald (coach), EI Littlejohn (3), CS Wood (2), (seated left to right) RM Abernethy (6), HC Disher (stroke), JL Doubleday (7), JRS Cochrane (5), JHS Jackson (cox) (absent)
Disher collection at University of Melbourne Archives

BOTTOM: Commemorative oar from the 1914 intervarsity race



1913 winning MUBC intervarsity eight (Lower Yarra) in training: FP Hallyard (bow), A Spowers (2), JRS Cochrane (3), RM Abernathy (4), JL Doubleday (5), CS Steele (6), EI Littlejohn (7), HC Disher (stroke), JHS Jackson (cox)
Disher collection at University of Melbourne Archives



HENLEY ON YARRA · 1914
2nd Heat, Grand Challenge Race
Melb. University winning from Leichardt (N.S.W.) & Wendouree (Vic)

Henley-on-Yarra 1914 with the MUBC senior eight winning its heat
Disher collection at University of Melbourne Archives

During that last summer of peace on 14 January 1914, AFS Dobson won the final of the maiden scull at the Upper Yarra Regatta, and followed this with another victory at the Albert Park Regatta of 26 January.⁷⁵ Dobson was a graduate.

On Saturday 6 June 1914, MUBC won the intervarsity race for a record fourth time in succession. The race was again on the Port River and the weather was fine and calm. Charles Donald was coaching the crew who were favoured to win (again). Clive Disher was stroke once more, but he was also picked to row in the 6 seat of the Victorian crew at the interstate regatta as well. The Adelaide crew was truly at a disadvantage having had their boat broken a fortnight before. Sydney had not been able to bring a coach with them. Melbourne won again with Adelaide a close second. It was the fourth win for the 7 man JL Doubleday and the third time for their cox JHL Jackson, giving him a



C.S. Wood (r) W.L. Hayes (row) G.P. McIntyre (cox) J. Spowers (q) F.L. Littlejohn (s)
R.N. Cahernelly (6) J.L. Doubleday (7) Mr Charles Donald (coach) H.C. Disher (stroke) J.R.S. Goehring (5)
M.U.B.C. SENIOR EIGHT
won Grand Challenge Cup
Henley on Yarra · 1914

1914 MUBC senior eight,
winners of Grand Challenge Cup
Disher collection at University of
Melbourne Archives

record for steering. This concluded an amazing few days for Jackson, who had showed his versatility when three days earlier he: 'ran well for the Melbourne Athletic Team' during the intervarsity athletics events in Adelaide on Wednesday, 3 June 1914.⁷⁶

As well as an athletics championship, won by Adelaide, a rifle match between the universities also took place. Sydney won the rifle match.⁷⁷

Two months later War was declared on 4 August 1914.

The President's 'Smoke Night' of 4 September saw 160 members attending to salute the Club's winning intervarsity crew. It was held at Scott's Hotel and was the first such occasion at which women attended—there were four of them including Mrs Ross-Soden, Mrs Synott, Miss Synott and Mrs Lang. John Grice presented the Grice Shield to Clive Disher who had also stroked the winning Medical School Crew in the interfaculty race which had taken place that day.

A good programme of music was rendered by the Zingari Amateur Orchestra, Mr Weston Pitt, Mr Horace Stevens & Mr Neil McInnes. Mr LW Roberts (Ormond College) gave a fine exhibition of conjuring. A table of old blues was well filled. T a'Beckett, CS Galbraith, J Hogan, NA Miller, H Ross-Soden, S Dobson, CC Halkyard, JS Rowan, Dr SJ Campbell and some others were present. Professor Skeats (senior Vice-President) and Mr E Kenny (Hon. Secretary of the VRA) wished God Speed to the members of the Club going to the War in the Australian Expeditionary Force—JS Jackson (cox) being one of the number.⁷⁸

Charles Donald was made an honorary life member at a special general meeting immediately preceding the commencement of the Smoke Night, 'in view of his distinguished service in coaching and for his long and invaluable interest in rowing matters connected with the Club.'⁷⁹

The Henley Regatta of 24 October 1914 saw all the crews depleted by men joining the expeditionary forces and who 'were in training at Broadmeadows or else on the sea in troop-ships.'⁸⁰ Charles Donald coached the senior crew and Dr Mitchell coached the junior eight till military duty called him to Queenscliff, when S Dobson took over. Cyril Halkyard coached the maiden eight and Harry Ross-Soden took over when Halkyard went to Tasmania.

The day was hot—a record thirty-seven degrees for October to that date. The Grand Challenge Cup crew included Clive Disher, J.L. Doubleday, E.I. Littlejohn and Alan Spowers. MUBC met a much heavier Footscray Rowing Club in the final and won a fine race. The junior eight and maiden eight crews were not so lucky.

The last VRA Regatta until after the War took place on 5 December 1914. With so many men enlisting, it was hard for the Club to assemble a crew, but other clubs were in the same situation. MUBC's maiden eight came second, beaten only by Albert Park Rowing Club by three quarters of a length.⁸¹

From 1915 to 1918 MUBC, like the rest of the world, was more concerned with the War than rowing, although an effort was made to retain normality as much as possible by competing in the sparse and infrequent competitions held from time to time. A list of MUBC members enlisted by April 1915 totalled seventy-three. More than half were active members of the Club. Eventually 343 MUBC members would enlist; forty-eight were killed and sixty received gallantry medals. The Roll of Honor is in Appendix III.

The War enabled Club members and other athletes to show loyalty to the Empire and display the leadership qualities that university life groomed in them. It was expected that their education and social status would make them leaders in the armed forces and set an example. They were, after all, to be the next generation of rulers. The University publication *Alma Mater* had stated the sentiment clearly at the time of Australia's first military engagement on behalf of the Empire, the Boer War:

After all, learning is not the only thing one may expect to gain from University training, for it is of the feeling of fellowship which is bred by a public school and University education that is born of the noblest of feelings—the readiness *pro patria mori*.⁸²

Men who played sport together were encouraged by the *Melbourne University Magazine* of November 1914 to: 'Join Together Train Together Embark Together Fight Together.'⁸³ The Sports Union publicly advocated that sportsmen enlist.

John Lang and his wife left for England early in 1915, Lang serving for a short time in the Australian Imperial Force. They were farewelled at the annual meeting of 31 March, where Dr H Irving (Martin Irving's son) became patron of the Club and Professor Skeats remained President. The Captain (until he finished his degree and enlisted) was Clive Disher.

The 35th intercollegiate boat race (the last official race held until 1919) went ahead on 23 April 1915. Ormond won, making it their sixteenth win. Trinity had won thirteen times and Queen's five times. A scratch eights regatta was held on 11 May. Private schools were



Clive Disher (seated on right) with unknown colleague in an Ormond College study
Disher collection at University of Melbourne Archives

EUROPEAN WAR.

With the outbreak of war, we lost, along with other clubs, a great number of members, who left us to answer their country's call. More have left us since then, and much as we shall miss them we are proud to think that we are so well represented, and we can only hope that when the war is over they will return to us safe and sound. They may rest assured that we will watch their movements, so far as we are able, with the greatest interest and good wishes. As for the rest of us who have not gone to the front as yet, we can best serve our country by keeping hard at our courses until the time comes when the way is made clear for us to join those who have already gone.

Several of our office-bearers have enlisted, namely, Dr. C. G. Shaw (Vice-President), Messrs. E. I. Littlejohn and A. Spowers (Hon. Secretaries), Dr. S. J. Campbell (Hon. Treas.). We wish to thank those gentlemen who have acted in their stead—Messrs. A. Spowers and G. O. Robertson (Hon. Secs. and H. C. Disher (Hon. Treas.).

At the President's Smoke Night Professor Skeats, on behalf of the Club, and Mr. E. Kenny, on behalf of the Victorian Rowing Association, bade farewell to those members who were going to the war in the Australian Expeditionary Force. Beneath will be found a list of members on active service. The Committee would be grateful for the receipt of any corrections and additions to this list, and apologise if any names have been omitted.

Ordinary Members on Active Service:

*Adams F.	*Jackson, C.	Penroe, L.
*Armstrong, W. L.	*Jackson, J. H. S.	*Pearce, W. B.
*Birmie, N. E. S.	Keast, W. R.	Richardson, —
*Brent, L. P.	*Knight, R. G.	*Rogers, J. E.
*Brownell, Dr. H. P.	Knight, W. R.	*Ross, H. C.
Carne, A.	Laughlin, A.	Rowntree, E.
Cooke, R.	Leekie, W. A.	Seymour, D.
*Davies, G. V.	*Littlejohn, E. I.	*Sproule, J. St. G.
Donaldson, W.	*MacNeil, N. H.	*Stretch, T.
*Faulkner, N.	*Marks, L. B.	Sweetnam, R.
*Flockart, J. T.	*Mathews, R.	*Wanklyn, E.
*Gillespie, E.	*McCallum, F.	*Wharton, J.
*Grimwade, G. R.	*McLeod, L. H.	*Whitteron, E. R.
*Hamilton, P. M.	*McKay, J. S.	Williams, A.
*Harton, H. C.	*McKenna, C. T.	Woods, E. W. B.
*Hill, E.	*Morrison, G. N. I.	Wright-Smith, S.
Hinman, W. F.	Meule, H. O.	Wynne, T. G.
Hurley, L.	Norris, F.	

* Signifies Active Members. All above are paid up members for 1914.
List of Life Members on Active Service will be found on page 12.

Life Members on Active Service

Bage, R.	Erce, J.M.	Kamsay, R.A.
Barrett, D.J.W.	Higgins, Merwyn B.	Shaw, Dr C.G.
Black, Dr J.J.	Lang, Stewart.	Sherwin, Dr J.A.H.
Campbell, Dr S.J.	Mackay, Dr C.V.	Spowers, A.
Crewick, H.F.	Maudsley, Dr H.C.	Watson, Dr R.F.
Fowler, Dr R.	Officer, F. Keith	Whiting, St.J.

invited to participate but Melbourne Grammar, Geelong Grammar and Geelong College could not take part, and Xavier College did not reply to the invitation. Wesley College sent twelve entries and Scotch College, eight. Despite so few schools turning up, the Club felt that regattas involving the schools were a good way of introducing boys to the Club.

This was the sum total of those rowing in 1915. The annual meeting held on 27 March 1916 elected as office-bearers Mr LA Adamson as patron, Professor Skeats as President and Charles Donald, Harry Ross-Soden, John Lang (who had by then returned to Australia), JL Doubleday, Dr LJC Mitchell, T Crosthwaite and Dr Clive Disher as Vice-Presidents. Disher was initially Captain, but he was replaced by Carl S Wood, and EI Littlejohn, who had returned from Gallipoli, was Vice-Captain. The Secretary was another Gallipoli survivor, the cox and athlete JHS Jackson. The President, Professor Skeats, in the following poignant extract from the minutes, summed up the patriotic mood prevailing at the time:

Our number of members on Active Service has now reached 160, the greatest number for any Rowing Club in Australasia—a record certainly to be proud of. Your Committee hopes to shortly publish a complete list to date of these men. We congratulate Lt NH McNeil on being granted the Military Cross. We regret to record the deaths on Active Service of the following members. Capt SJ Campbell, Lt NL Campbell, Pte HC Harton, Lt WA Leckie, Pte HO Moule, Capt R Bage, Pt GR Grimwade & Cpl ER Whitteron.

On a happier note, he continued:

We have much pleasure in welcoming back those members who have returned from active service and especially do we welcome back Mr John Lang, whose work for and interest in the Club in the past needs no mention here.⁸⁴

Disher resigned as Captain in October when he received his medical degree. He immediately volunteered for active service, and was replaced by P Carew-Smyth, an old member of the Club. Dr EI Littlejohn and Dr GO Robertson resigned at the same time and John Lang took over as Treasurer.

The only rowing activity was scratch eights held on 15 July 1916. Six crews competed including some Scotch and Xavier College boys. The final heat between Wood's and Disher's crews was won by Wood's crew; Professor Skeats acted as judge and trophies were distributed to the winning crew: 'As usual, the arrangements under the management of that first-rate Captain Dr Disher left nothing to be desired.'⁸⁵

The 1917–8 season saw the introduction of VRA scratch eight races held on 31 March 1917. Schoolboy rowers were included. These sorts of events took the place of the formal prewar regattas and on this occasion attracted nineteen eights as well as some fours. All Melbourne clubs participated. The final race was won by a crew stroked by J Thompson of Banks which included P McCabe of MUBC.

In October, at the opening of the VRA 1917–8 season, eighteen crews competed in the 'Civil Service Combination Eights' races. McCabe again rowed in the winning crew and H Cantor of MUBC rowed bow of the crew that came second. The *Argus* reported that

144 oarsmen competed in this event and 'this number was practically the whole number of rowing men now remaining in the metropolis.'⁸⁶

Trouble with the University grounds committee reared its head. The Sports Union insisted that a £50 payment for the year was a donation, not an annual contribution.⁸⁷ Fortunately the Club was financially healthy with subscriptions of £69. The total of receipts was £136. Expenses were £53 11s 1d on the clubhouse and boat and oar repairs £18 18s 6d. Affiliation fees were £3 13s 6d. With a bank balance of £48 17s 8d and petty cash of £2 9s 8d, Lang reported it was 'the very best balance the Club has ever had' and the Hon Treasurer was to be complimented.

The 1918–9 season and MUBC's annual meeting of March 1918 saw the beginning of a return to normality at the Club, although peace was not declared until November 1918. The patron of the Club was Canon Girdlestone and its President (despite being abroad with the AIF) was HW Allen. The Vice-Presidents were Professor Skeats, LA Adamson, T Crosthwaite, Charles Donald, JRS Cochrane and JL Doubleday. Doubleday died at sea on service and HJ Whiting was elected in his place in November 1918. The Captain was Carl Wood with Vice-Captain, Keith Abernethy. The Hon Secretary was JHS Jackson and the Hon Treasurer was again John Lang, who had been forced to resign from the position in April 1917 due to ill health.

Newman College

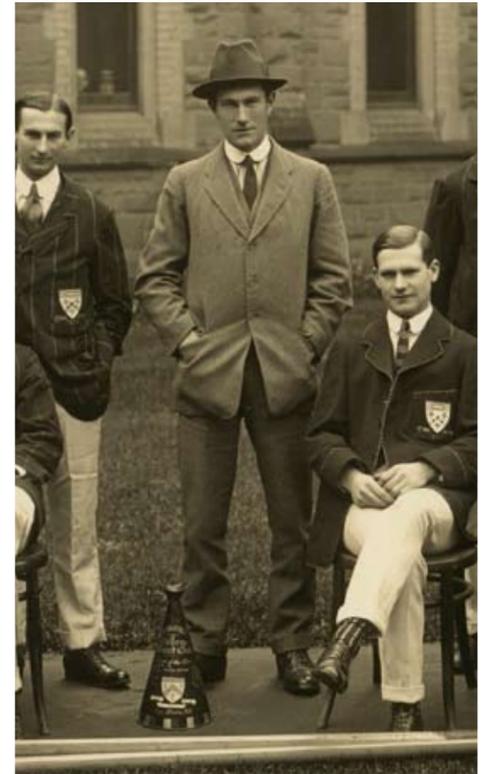
The committee meeting, at which the recently founded Newman College's application to join MUBC was accepted, was held at Wesley College on 25 April 1918. The chair of this meeting was Lawrence Arthur Adamson, headmaster of Wesley. He had once been resident tutor at Trinity. Adamson was a strong supporter of sport.⁸⁸ He was one of the best known and well-regarded headmasters in Melbourne. The College Agreement was to be revised to include Newman. A meeting on 13 May saw representatives of the colleges and MUBC agree on the subscription being maintained at three shillings a term. The allocation of two votes to non-college men was scrapped.⁸⁹

An informal college boat race was held two days after the agreement on 15 May over a short course between crews from Trinity, Queen's and Newman Colleges. Trinity won, with Queen's second and Newman third.

Mervyn Bournes Higgins Trophy

At a meeting in March 1917, Mr Crosthwaite reported that Mr Justice Higgins had asked him to approach the MUBC committee in regard to His Honour and Mrs Higgins founding a trophy for the Intercollegiate Boat Race to commemorate the memory of their son, Captain Mervyn Bournes Higgins MC, who had been killed on active duty with the 8th Light Horse in the AIF just before Christmas in the previous year. He had survived Gallipoli, only to be killed at El Magdhaba in Egypt. Crosthwaite and delegates from the colleges were to draw up a scheme and submit it to Mr Justice Higgins.

After various drafting sessions and discussions, a Trust Deed was signed on 10 May 1918 pursuant to which Mr Justice Higgins gifted £500. The trustees included the



Mervyn Bournes Higgins pictured as coach of the 1912 winning Ormond College crew
Disher collection at University of Melbourne Archives

Mr Justice Higgins, father of Captain MB Higgins MC

In 1907, as President of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration (now known as the Australian Industrial Relations Commission), Mr Justice Higgins handed down what became known as the Harvester Judgement, which established the first wage fixing system in Australia. The judgement set a minimum wage for unskilled labourers of £2 2s per week, based on the cost of living—the amount an average worker paid for food, shelter and clothing.

Masters of Ormond and Queen's and the Warden of Trinity. The objects of the trust were the benefiting of the affiliated colleges and the encouragement of intercollegiate rowing and to perpetuate the memory of the late Mervyn Bourne Higgins. There was to be a permanent trophy known as the Mervyn Bourne Higgins Trophy and a suitable book on parchment to contain a complete record of all intercollegiate boat races. The gift was acknowledged in the Club minutes of 26 March 1919:

This exceedingly generous gift from His Honour is greatly valued not only because of the sentiment and prestige added to the race but because there is perpetually also associated with it the name of a fine stalwart oarsman and gallant Australian soldier.

Royal Henley Peace Regatta

The greatest news for the Club in 1919, that grim postwar year when the world was blighted by the Spanish Flu, was the triumph at the Royal Henley Peace Regatta on the Thames by the Australian Imperial Force No. 1 crew, stroked by Clive Disher. The race was between crews representing countries of the allied forces plus Oxford and Cambridge Universities and some club crews. The prize was a gold cup to be presented by the King.

Planning for the event began with the Sports Control Board of the Imperial Forces decision to revive rowing. There had been little competitive rowing of first-class order in the United Kingdom since before the War. The end of hostilities presented a golden opportunity for a race to be open to members of the allied forces, if it could be organised before the men returned home. It did not take long to discover that many experienced oarsmen could be found to participate.

A meeting was convened in London on January 22nd by the Leander Rowing Club, England's premier rowing body, and attended by officials and members of rowing clubs affiliated with the Amateur Rowing Association and honorary secretaries of regattas. ... At this meeting a proposal, subsequently adopted, was made that a Henley Peace Regatta should be held in July, and that races should be included in the programme for amateur oarsmen of the Allied Armies.⁹⁰

Competitions for the usual Henley trophies such as the Grand Challenge Cup for eights and Diamond Sculls were suspended. The whole AIF was canvassed and men fit and willing to row were brought to London. The work was supervised from the London Rowing Club's shed at Putney. The subcommittee of experienced oarsmen to take charge of rowing included MUBC 1912 Olympian, Lieutenant Harry Ross-Soden, who had experience of winning at Henley in 1912. The others were Major EW Tulloch, MC, a Victorian interstate representative and Lieutenant OJ Wood, Hon Secretary of the New South Wales Rowing Association.

Finding suitable coaches was difficult. It would have been easy to find a man used to any of the recognised English orthodox rowing styles, but an Australian style had been evolved, perfected, and brought to Royal Henley with great success in 1912; and this was considered the style that the AIF should adopt. Fortunately, the legendary Steve Fairbairn offered his services as coach. The work of selecting an eight from a quality

group of twenty hopefuls proceeded at a fast pace. Captain HC Disher, AAMC, was well in contention as stroke and he, together with the rowing subcommittee, and lieutenant H Hauenstein, MM, a New South Wales interstate oarsman and Olympian from 1912, acted as a selection committee. A house was secured close to the boatsheds, and made comfortable by the Commissioners of the Australian Comforts Fund and the YMCA, and the group resided there. The crews rowed from the London Rowing Club, along with the Canadians, while the New Zealanders were training from the Thames Rowing Club.

Two months before the race, Fairbairn, who was not in particularly good health, had to step down from coaching the crew. Major Middleton took over the coaching at short notice and went to the river from his office each morning for a month, until lieutenant colonel Norman Marshall, DSO, MC, was made available, having been released by the AIF authorities in France. Lieutenant Harry Ross-Soden took over the coaching of the No. 1 crew during the week preceding the regatta.

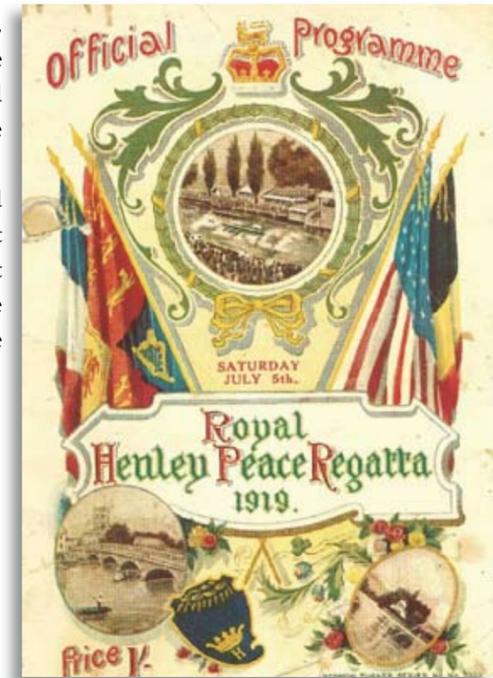
Arrangements were made with the Thames Club for the hire of the Australian boat *QL Deloitte*, which had been used by the successful 1912 Australian crew at Henley. A second eight was hired from Jesus College, Cambridge. Practice oars were bought from Norris, of Putney, and racing oars from Ayling. Rowing on the tidal waters of the Thames at Putney was not always pleasant and was certainly unfamiliar to the majority of the Australian rowers. The 23ft drop of tide means a fast-running stream and, more often than not, rough water. ... the crew welcomed the suggestion of an early move to the more sheltered reaches of Henley. Arrangements were made for the hire of a fine residence on the riverside, Wharfe House, near the finishing mark of the Henley Course. ...⁹¹

Two Australian crews were subsequently selected and this was very useful for both training and competition. Over the next few months the crews competed in various races with mixed results, but always improved.⁹²

Throughout training Disher wrote many letters home to the Club, all addressed 'Dear all' on the progress of the crew from March to June of 1919. His feelings of longing for home and the slow acclimatisation to peace are evident. At the beginning he wanted more than anything to be working in a hospital, rather than living at Putney, and there was some resentment about being separated from his duties. On 5 April he wrote:

At present I am living down at Putney with the Rowing Section and rowing in a 4 every day but I think I will go into town on Monday and find out if there is a decent job going in a hospital anywhere and if so I will take it but good jobs are pretty scarce these days. I am not taking much interest in the rowing. The thing is not being run too well at present and it rather bores me. I expect as time goes on it would improve...⁹³

The Regatta was held from 2 to 5 July. Sadly, the first heat to be drawn out of the hat saw the two Australian crews competing against each other. This was a pity because both crews had shown a good turn of speed and it was felt that both were in many instances superior to the other combinations—the No. 1 AIF crew won by a bare length over their



12.30		THE KING'S CUP.		Final	
FOR ALLIED' HEROES.					
Presented by HIS MAJESTY THE KING.					
No. 1 Berks.					
AUSTRALIAN ARMY CREW, No. 1.					
at lbs					
Sgt. A. R. Robb, bow	11 10	6 Maj. S. A. Middleton	at lbs		
2 Lt. F. A. Hesse	11 12	O.S.O.	15 3		
3 Lt. T. McGill	12 10	7 Cms. G. W. Mettam	11 12		
4 Cms. A. V. Scott	13 0	Capt. H. C. Disher, str	11 1		
5 Lt. H. Hauenstein, M.M.	13 9	Sgt. A. E. Stoddley, Cox	8 1		
Subs: Cms. J. A. Begg, Sgt. G. M. Penny, Lt. H. B. Newall, Lt. L. S. Davis, Lt. O. J. Wood, (cox).					
Colour: Light Blue.					
No. 2 Bucks.					
OXFORD UNIVERSITY SERVICE CREW.					
at lbs					
Lt. S. A. Hissik, bow	11 8	6 Major E. H. Hoofall	at lbs		
2 Lt. N. H. MacNeil, M.C.	11 8	M.C.	11 13		
3 Pte. S. East	11 11	7 Lt. W. E. C. Janes	13 4		
4 Lt. H. S. C. Lucas	13 4	Lt.-Col. E. A. Berriaford			
5 Pte. A. T. M. Durand	12 11	stroke, M.C.	11 0		
Subs: Capt. H. W. B. Cairns, Lt. A. S. MacIver, M.C., Capt. J. B. Kindersley, D.S.O., M.C., Lt. L. C. Robson, M.C., Pte. M. G. Fleming (cox).					
Colour: Dark Blue.					

No. 1 by a length
7-7

Programme from the final day of the 1919 Royal Henley Peace Regatta
Disher collection at University of Melbourne Archives

comrades. The other heats in the King's Cup were between Canada and Oxford University, New Zealand and Cambridge University, France and America.

The draw for the second round resulted in Australia No. 1 crew being opposed by Cambridge University, and Oxford University by America. Those who anticipated great races were not disappointed. ... Rowing at slightly slower rate, the Australian crew began to pull out from Cambridge as soon as they settled down after the burst off the mark. When half a mile had been covered the Australian boat was half a length in front, and the coxswain, in his anxiety to lose as little as possible by having the outside position, came in too close to the other crew. In fact, the bow oars of the Australian boat washed the stroke oars of Cambridge, and there was imminent risk of fouling. Captain Disher, the stroke, ordered the cox to pull out, and he did so—much too far.

Soon afterwards Australia again went into Cambridge water, washing them a second time. The order by the stroke was repeated, with the same result. The crew was eventually straightened up in a position on the course well clear of their opponents, and the race developed into a titanic struggle.

At the mile, Cambridge quickened their stroke, in [sic] essayed the task of overhauling the Australians, who had established a lead of nearly a length. It was a magnificently fought-out finish, the Australian crew winning by three-quarters of a length. The time was 7mins 24secs.

In the other heat of the semi-final the Oxford crew defeated the Americans ...

No. 1 crew was the finalists in this historic race, and the chances were widely discussed. The race was set down for decision at 12.30 pm on the final day, Saturday, July 5th. Races at Henley, it might be mentioned, are rowed against the stream, which flows at the rate of about half-a-mile an hour. ...The race was followed in the umpire's launch *Princess Arthur of Connaught*. And Australian soldiers turned out in force to view the event. ...

[the] Australians were quicker to move, and took a lead. They went ahead earlier than was expected, and soon settled down to a slower rate of striking than their opponents. As they turned the slight bend in the course the Australians swung into a line straight down the centre of the river, and a great cheer arose from their supporters as the first indicator showed them to be half a length ahead of Oxford. Before reaching Fawley, which was passed in 3mins 25secs, the Australian crew had increased its lead to a full length, and thereafter the result was never in doubt. Despite repeated efforts by Oxford, the AIF crew won by a clear length in 7mins 7secs, which was the fastest time recorded for the full course during the Regatta. ... It was certainly the best row that no. 1 crew had done, their race against Cambridge on the previous day apparently having improved them. ... while rowing a slightly slower rate all the way, they were always the faster crew, and settled into that powerful racing swing and drive with length, which produces the maximum pace in the Australian style of rowing.⁹⁴

Thus 5 July 1919 was a great day for the thousands of Australians who found their way to Henley. The Sports Control Board had erected a stand for Australian soldiers and their friends on the riverbank, and this and a free afternoon tea provided by the YMCA were availed of by large crowds who 'went mad with delight.'⁹⁵ Another stand on the lawn



Silver-gilt medallion. Winner's medallion presented to each member of the AIF No. 1 crew
Australian War Memorial Negative
Number RELAWM16927.001



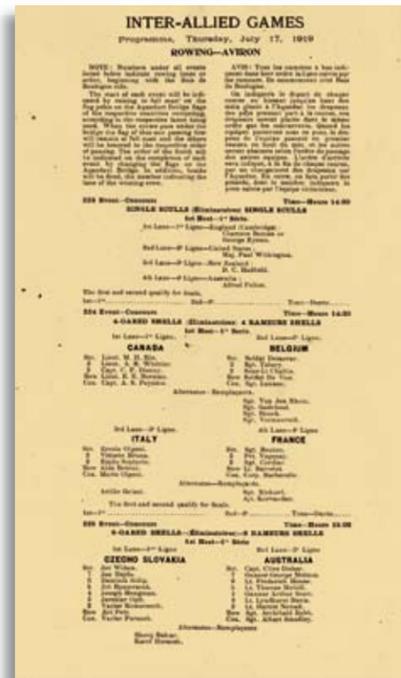
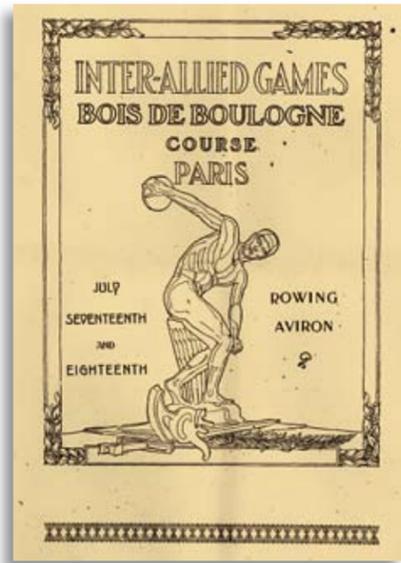
1919 AIF No. 1 crew, stroked by Clive Disher
From *Rowing in Victoria*, p. 6



TOP: Henley, England, 5 July 1919. The finish of the race for the King's Cup with the AIF No. 1 eight defeating Oxford University by 1 length
Australian War Memorial
Negative Number D00799

MIDDLE: Commemorative oar presented to Clive Disher after the 1919 Royal Henley Peace Regatta
Courtesy of the National Sports Museum

LEFT: Henley, England, May 1919. Group portrait of some members of the No. 1 and No. 2 AIF crews who competed at the Royal Henley Peace Regatta: (left to right, back row) Gunner (Gnr) JA Begg, Corporal JK Cogle, Lieutenant (Lt) HA White, Sergeant (Sgt) Eric John Harrison, Gnr GW Mettam, Sgt GM Penny, Lt H A Newall, Gnr AV Scott, (left to right middle row) Sgt AR Robb, Lt FA House, Lt T McGill, Major (Maj) WA Audsley DSO, Lt H Havenstein MM, Lt H Ross-Soden, Captain HC Disher, (left to right front row) Driver AS Cox, Lt OJ Wood, Sgt AE Smedley, Lt LS Davis
Australian War Memorial
Negative Number P02346.001



Programme from the 1919 Inter-Allied Games in Paris. Immediately after the Henley Peace Regatta, an Australian crew weakened by the withdrawal of some members of the winning Henley crew, competed at the Paris Regatta where it was defeated by Cambridge (who were coached by Steve Fairbairn)
Disher collection at University of Melbourne Archives

at the crew's headquarters which commanded a fine view of the finish was the scene of another wild demonstration when the Cup was won. Princess Arthur of Connaught presented the Cup to Captain HC Disher on behalf of the crew at the end of the day's racing, while each member of the crew, including the coxswain, received a medal.

Many distinguished soldiers paid visits to the crews' quarters, including General Sir William Birdwood, Lieutenant General Sir John Hobbs, Major General E Tivey, and Brigadier Generals T Griffiths and TA Blamey.

The final composition of the two AIF crews were:

No. 1 crew

- Sergt AR Robb (Derwent Rowing Club, Tasmania), 11st 10lbs (bow);
- Lieut FAI House (Derwent Rowing Club, Tasmania), 11st 12lbs (2);
- Lieut T McGill (Leichardt Rowing Club, NSW), 12st 10lbs (3);
- Gunner AV Scott (Murray Bridge Rowing Club, SA), 13st (4);
- Lieut H Hauenstein (M.M. Leichardt and Balmain Rowing Clubs, NSW), 13st 9lbs (5);
- Major SA Middleton DSO (Glebe and Sydney Rowing Clubs, NSW), 13st 6lbs (6);
- Gunner GW Mettam (West Australian Rowing Club, WA), 11st 12lbs (7);
- Capt HC Disher (Melbourne University Boat Club, Vic), 11st 1lb (stroke); and
- Sergt AE Smedley (Sydney Rowing Club, NSW), 8st 1lb (cox).

No. 2 crew

- Lieut J Howieson, 10st 11lbs (bow);
- Sergt GM Penny, 11st 9lbs (2);
- Sergt EJ Harrison, 12st 2lbs (3);
- Lieut HA White, 12st 5lbs (4);
- Major WA Audsley, DSO, 13st 3lbs (5);
- Corpl JK Cogle, 12st 3lbs (6);
- Gunner JA Begg, 13st 1lb (7);
- Lieut HR Newall, 11st 6lbs (stroke); and
- Lieut OJ Wood, 10st (cox).

The AIF crews were deserving of their place in history and were very representative of quality Australian oarsmanship at the time. They comprised members who had rowed for their states in the 1914 interstate championship, who had represented their country at the 1912 Olympics and who were more than accomplished at a club level.

The ultimate tribute to these men lies in the King's Cup which, one year after the regatta at Henley, was gifted by the King as the premier trophy for Australian rowing's blue riband event—the interstate championship for men's eight-oared crews.

So ended fifteen years of glory and tragedy for the Club. Thanks to a fine contribution from Clive Disher and his clubmate Harry Ross-Soden, the period ended in triumph, but the War ruined many lives and meant the loss of many oarsmen, as the roll call of enlistments and those killed on active service attests.

The King's Cup Trophy

There was an interesting postscript to the race which involved the King's Cup itself:

The famous trophy was left in the custody of the Australian Military Authorities, and was later handed over to the Australian War Memorial Council and placed in the Australian War Museum. On 14th May 1920, at a conference of delegates of the Australian Rowing Associations held in Brisbane, it was decided to ask the Australian War Memorial Council for the Cup as a perpetual trophy for the Australian Eight-Oared Championship. This request was refused, and on 12th October of the same year a further request was made by the Victorian Rowing Association for the Cup, with the suggestion that it be kept in the Australian War Museum of the state which won the race each year. This request was also refused. The second refusal precipitated further action by the Victorian Rowing Association, and a petition to the King dated 30th October 1920 prepared by the VRA was signed by Captain HC Disher and sent to his Majesty with the request that he make known his wishes with regard to the disposal of the trophy. A reply dated 13th May 1921 received from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr Winston Churchill, stated that, 'His Majesty commands me to inform you that it is his wish that the Cup should be used as a permanent trophy and be competed for annually in the Interstate Eight-oared Race of Australia'. The first Interstate Men's Eights Championship that raced for the King's Cup was in 1922. However, for the record, the sport and the trophy itself have recorded that crews raced for the Cup from 1920.⁹⁶



The petition referred to above is contained in Appendix V.

Half a century later in 1969, Clive Disher was a guest speaker at the Club's annual dinner. He had served as a doctor with the Australian Army Medical Corps during the Great War. In an emotional speech, during which it would have been possible to hear a pin drop among those present, he recounted how it was the thoughts of mateship that rowing engendered among crew members that kept him going through the darkest of times in the battlefields of France. Time and time again in the midst of the shelling and the horrors of the field hospital, he tried to switch his mind off by thinking of the happiness and sense of camaraderie he enjoyed while racing for MUBC on the Yarra. That speech made a great impression on the nineteen and twenty year olds present at that function.

Lang's work is done

In October 1919 John Lang finished writing up the Club's records. He had worked on the task for ten years. He also completed a history of rowing in Victoria: *The Victorian Oarsman with a Rowing Register 1857-1919—62 years*. The introduction and foreword were respectively written by Senator George Fairbairn and Henry Giles Turner. Turner was President of the Victorian Rowing Association at the time of publication. The entire cost of printing and publishing the book was paid by John Lang himself, who dedicated it



TOP: King's cup Courtesy Hebfotos
BOTTOM: Victorian Rowing Association memorial to oarsmen who lost their lives in the First World War (on the corner of Alexandra Avenue and Boathouse Drive, Melbourne) Courtesy Dr Edward Hodgson

John Lang

1874-1921

CHRONICLER OF THE CLUB

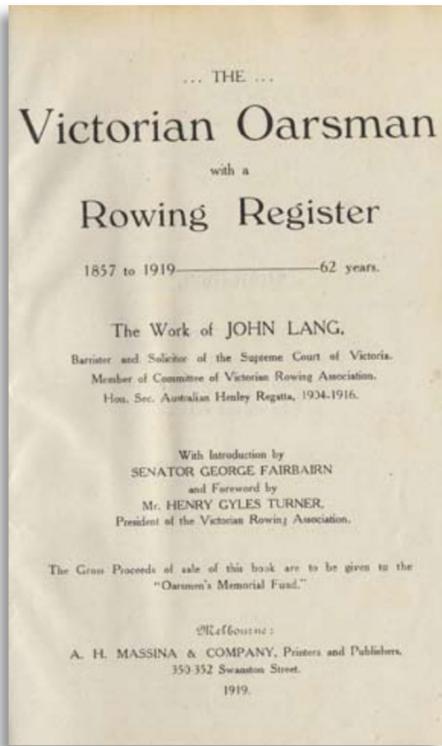
Long-time Hon Secretary of the Club, Lang was born in Scotland and educated at Toorak College and Geelong Grammar School. He matriculated in 1892 and passed the first year articled clerk's examination at Melbourne University in 1893. He was resident at both Trinity and Queen's Colleges and rowed and coxed for the Club. He was admitted to the Supreme Court of Victoria as a barrister and solicitor on 7 April 1899, after passing his final University examinations in 1898. He then practised at 128 William Street, Melbourne. At various times he held office as President, Vice-President and Treasurer. However his role as Secretary was of much greater significance to the Club and the University at large. Not only was he scrupulous about writing up minutes of meetings and keeping records of every race in which MUBC members participated, but he found the missing Club records for the period 1870-85. He researched and reconstructed the records from the Club's inception in 1859 until 1870.

Lang also played an important role in the establishment of the Melbourne University Sports Union; the setting up of University Blues; the foundation and holding of the Henley-on-Yarra Regatta; the securing of the site for and the construction of the Club's existing boatshed; the encouragement of extra-collegiate rowing; and the writing of the history of rowing in Victoria, *The Victorian Oarsman with a Rowing Register*.

He left Melbourne for England in 1920, intending to stay for a few years while his sons were educated there. He died in London the following year. On the occasion of the announcement of his death, the following testimonial was written in the Club's Record Book by Clive Disher:

... Mr Lang has at one time or another held practically every office in the Club. It is really due to him that we have the present sheds and his work for the Club was unceasing. Amidst many outside interests where he was always well to the fore in practical assistance of all kinds the M.U.B.C. always held pride of place. Many sporting and other bodies will miss him sorely and no words of mine can express how the M.U.B.C. will miss him ... His loss is irreplaceable and it behoves us to try and live up to the example he so ably set us ...





Title page of *The Victorian Oarsman* by John Lang

to 'our oarsmen who died On Service in The Great War' and stipulated that the proceeds of the book's sales were to be given to the 'Oarsmen's Memorial Fund'⁹⁷.

Lang left Melbourne for England forever in 1920. His contribution to Melbourne University Boat Club and rowing in general is inestimable. His final exhortation to the future in the records that had been his labour of love for so many years were:

Tomorrow I am passing this book of Records on to the committee of the club and to a new recorder. It is just a little over 10 years since I started to write the records. They are nearly complete, 1850 to 1870, then comes the club books kept up till 1885 and then I started and have written them up since that date except for 1915. It has given great pleasure to the writer and I hope that the hundreds of pages of MUBC records will always be carefully preserved. To my immediate successor and all recorders I say—never let your writing up get behind. Write at once, as soon as the event is over.

Good luck to the Melbourne University Boat Club, may you go on and prosper.

I intend going to Great Britain next year, perhaps an absence for some years. Some day perhaps I may again be an officer of the Boat Club which it has been a delightful recreation to work for.

The MUBC is the oldest Victorian Rowing Club and all my searches have failed to show any Australian Rowing Club as long established as it. Our old club can pride itself on being Australia's oldest rowing club—any clubs founded before ours have long disbanded years ago and have left the M.U.B.C. in undisputed possession.

'Overwells', John Lang, South Yarra, 12 October 1919.⁹⁸



MUBC intervarsity strokes 1870–1919.
The stroke in the middle of the bottom line is FH Moran, stroke in 1912