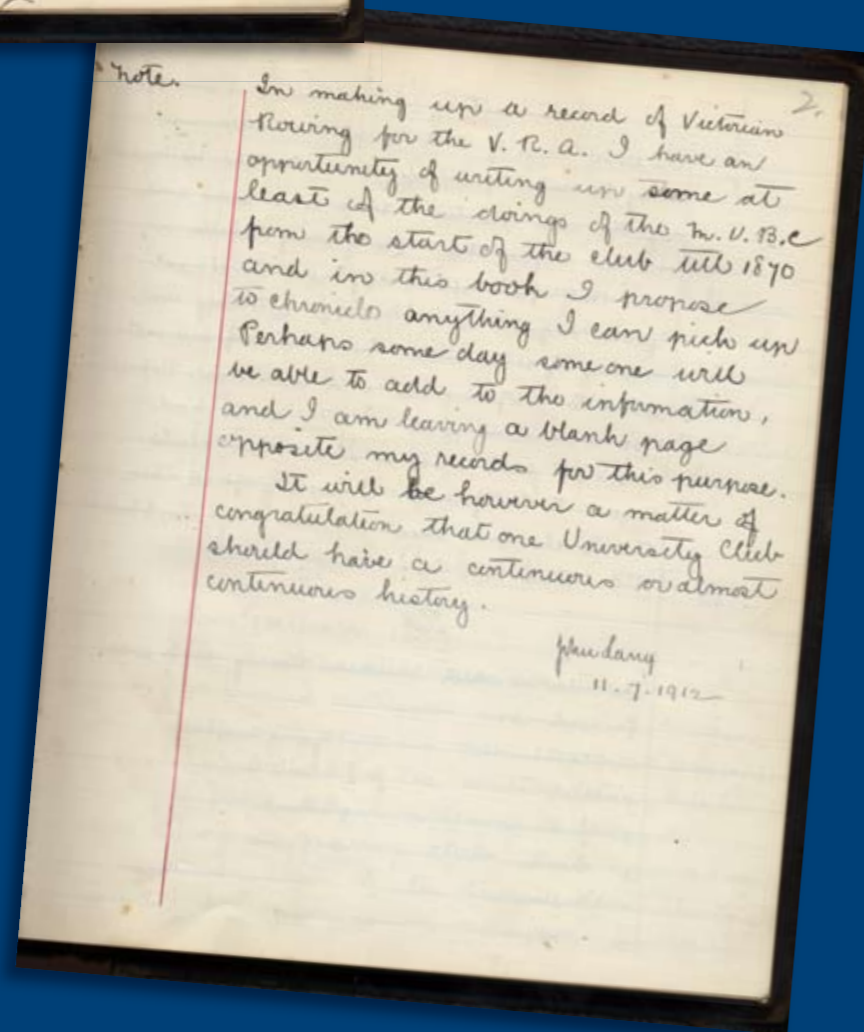


The front page and accompanying note to the reconstructed records of the Club 1859-70, completed by John Lang in July 1912



Well Rowed University

MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY BOAT CLUB

THE FIRST 150 YEARS

Judith Buckrich



MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY BOAT CLUB INC.

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Melbourne University Boat Club
Boathouse Drive Melbourne Victoria Australia 3004
Phone: 61 3 9650 1902
Fax: 61 3 9639 3551
Website: www.mubc.asn.au

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CONVERSION TABLE

1 MILE	1760 YARDS	1.6093 KILOMETRES
1 CHAIN	22 YARDS	20.1168 METRES
1 YARD	3 FEET	0.9144 METRES
1 FOOT	12 INCHES	30.48 CENTIMETRES
1 INCH	2.54 CENTIMETRES	

1 STONE (ST)	14 POUNDS (LB)	6.3504 KILOGRAMS
1 POUND	16 OUNCES (OZ)	0.45359 KG

OLD CURRENCY

£1	20 SHILLINGS (S)	240 PENCE (D)
1S	12 PENCE	
1 GUINEA	£1 1S	

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James Gobbo, preparing for the annual boat race between Oxford University and Cambridge University, March 1955, in which he rowed for the winning crew, Oxford University. James (later Sir James) Gobbo was President of both Melbourne University Boat Club and Oxford University Boat Club and, after an illustrious legal career and greatly respected community service, served as Governor of Victoria 1997–2000

Italian Historical Society Collection State Library of Victoria

Foreword

It is a pleasure to write a foreword to this handsome and comprehensive book celebrating the 150th anniversary of Melbourne University Boat Club, one of Australia's oldest sporting clubs and one of its most successful rowing clubs. It is a story of surmounting recurrent funding crises—not uncommon in sporting organisations—of its achieving great success at university, club and international level and of the individuals and families who led the Club.

When I first took up rowing in 1947, there were still current a number of mythologies—one of these being that rowing was bad for the heart and shortened one's life, and another being that it took too much time and so adversely affected academic performance. This book buries both these now amusing mythologies. As to the first, we read with pleasure how the Club was guided in its history by outstanding long-lived former rowers, such as Martin Irving, John Lang and John Grice and later, the inimitable Harvey Nicholson. One such outstanding leader who often visited us in the 1950s and 1960s was Dr Clive Disher. His story is told in fascinating detail. After a distinguished career in the First World War, he stroked the A.I.F. crew which won the Victory Regatta at Henley-on-Thames and so won a gold trophy presented by King George V, a cup which ultimately became the King's Cup, the premier trophy in Australian rowing.

As to the second myth, one only has to note the academic success and outstanding careers of many of the Melbourne University Boat Club members referred to in the book. Rowing, for example, figured more than any other sport in the list of Victorian Rhodes Scholars in the immediate postwar years.

For those seeking a wider survey of achievement, the list of male and female Blues in the history of MUBC is replete with names of successful doctors and lawyers, leaders of commerce and industry, senior office-bearers in politics and the public service. Indeed, the cox who steered to victory the two intervarsity crews in which I rowed was John Button, a senior Federal Cabinet Minister. In that context, the author records that Edmund Barton, who was a member of the Sydney University crew which raced Melbourne University in the first intervarsity boat race in 1870, went on to become Australia's first Prime Minister.

This splendidly written and researched book records that in 1893, the Old Blues of Oxford and Cambridge presented the perpetual trophy for the Australian Universities Boat Race, to become known as the Oxford and Cambridge Cup. It is a handsome piece of silver craftsmanship, which has with good fortune survived many Varsity Dinners and interstate peregrinations. A surprisingly large number of Melbourne University Boat Club members have rowed for Oxford or Cambridge—possibly second only to Harvard and Yale universities.

Melbourne University Boat Club is described as very progressive and innovative in its policies and training methods. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in its early adoption of women's rowing, in intercollegiate, intervarsity and club regattas. Women's rowing became active in Melbourne before it did so in leading overseas university clubs, such as Oxford, and MUBC women were highly successful at the 1978 intervarsity regatta.

It was no surprise that some of these rowers were the first women rowing for Australia at the Olympics in Moscow in 1980. At the risk of flaunting my Venetian origins, I feel bound to note, however, that there are records of Venetian women rowers engaged in regattas as early as 1610 on the Grand Canal, as is illustrated in Alvise Zorzi's book, *Venice 697–1797*.

Melbourne University Boat Club has always been a lean and frugal organisation. For most of its life it managed without boatmen or motor launches. Its rowers were expected to be very hands-on in such matters as de-rigging and transporting boats—a vivid contrast to the elegant facilities of Oxford and Cambridge. Their candidates receive handwritten invitations to selection trials in contrast to last-minute phone calls which characterised selection trials here.

Yet, there was no doubting the pace and fitness of Melbourne University Boat Club crews—both male and female. Moreover, unlike many other Australian and overseas university boat clubs, Melbourne University's members continued to row after graduation and so helped the Club achieve success in national and international championships and special Challenge Races, such as those in Japan and Taiwan.

Rowing is very much associated with the life of Melbourne because of the location of its boat clubs. Rowing is a defining symbol of the city in the same way as is true of sailing and Sydney. Over the years, the convenience of having boat houses a mere ten minutes walk from the city centre is a boon of which few other large cities can boast. MUBC Boat House, built in 1908, is the only surviving timber boatshed beside the Yarra at Princes Bridge—a heritage building which is a unique and much loved landmark.

One of the chapters of the book is entitled, 'Australia's most successful Sporting Club'. This is not mere hyperbole for it reflects the sustained record of success in a major sport at all levels—club regattas, intervarsity, national and international championships. Olympic participation—with Gold Medals—has been significant, especially in recent years.

The more successful the Club has become at the national and international level, usually described as the elite level, the greater the tension between two separate goals—first, elite rowing success and second, affording the opportunity for as many as possible to take up rowing at the University. Melbourne has always had a strong tradition of rowing at private schools, which provided readymade rowers to MUBC. But there was no obvious attempt to teach rowing to students at the University—a task left to the University colleges. The author identifies this tension well, without being able to record that the tension has been satisfactorily resolved. In this context, it is encouraging that in recent years, thanks to the assistance of Rowing Victoria, there has been greater participation in rowing at high schools and a high school regatta.

Dr Judith Buckrich has written an absorbing account of a great sporting institution. It is a happy combination of interesting historical detail and the humanity of Club members. The book is redolent with the infectious enthusiasm of the many individuals who teamed together for experiences that were to be a major satisfaction in their lives—experiences which were often carried on through generations of families.

Congratulations are due to the current President, Peter Antonie, and all those who came together to bring about this splendid publication. *Well rowed*, indeed, MUBC.

James Gobbo
Melbourne, March 2009



MUBC's 1908 boatshed photographed from the rear looking towards Melbourne's central business district
Courtesy Dr Edward Hodgson

About the author

DR JUDITH RAPHAEL BUCKRICH was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1950 and emigrated to Australia with her parents in 1958. She has returned to Hungary several times and was working for the English language *Daily News* during the 1989 velvet revolution. She is an Honorary Research Fellow of Melbourne University's School of Historical Studies and a Consulting Fellow of the World Innovation Foundation. She is Chair of the International PEN Women Writers' Committee and Vice-President of the Melbourne PEN Centre.

Judith is the author of *Melbourne's Grand Boulevard: The Story of St Kilda Road* (1996); *The Montefiore Homes: 150 Years of Care* (1998); *George Turner: A Life* (1999); *The Long and Perilous Journey: A History of the Port of Melbourne* (2002); *Lighthouse on the Boulevard: A History of the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, 1866–2004* (2004); *Collins: Australia's Premier Street* (2005) and *Design for Living: a History of Prahran Tech* (2007). She has several entries in the *Encyclopedia of Melbourne* (2005), including those on Collins Street and St Kilda Road, and she was an image researcher for the project. In 2005 and 2008 she curated two exhibitions of the same name: 'History: Community: Identity: Showcasing Melbourne's Diversity' for the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. She was historian for the Melbourne Maritime Museum's Port of Melbourne permanent exhibit.

Judith has also written her own one-woman shows, short stories, feature articles and essays, and she has worked as an editor and translator. She has taught writing at Deakin University.

Preface

This history of Melbourne University Boat Club pays tribute to the founders of the Club, which came into existence in 1859, a mere twenty-four years after the birth of the City of Melbourne and four years after teaching commenced at the University of Melbourne. I hope that all past, present and future members of the Club will take great pride in the Club's achievements as recorded in this book.

The Club's committee hopes that this history will also be of more than passing benefit, not only to anyone who has an interest in the history of rowing in Australia and internationally, but also as a partial chronicle of the development of early Melbourne.

The committee sincerely thanks Dr Judith Buckrich for the comprehensive work she has produced, which she diligently and enthusiastically researched despite the difficulties caused as a result of the sometimes patchy records of the Club. The committee also expresses its gratitude to Sir James Gobbo for agreeing to write the foreword.

The Club itself is deeply appreciative of its intimate and excellent relationship with the institution from which it was spawned, the University of Melbourne, which has been unstinting in its support throughout the 150 years. We honour the City of Melbourne, on whose land our historic boatshed has stood since 1908, and with whom we have enjoyed a very cordial and cooperative association. We feel closer than ever to Rowing Victoria, having been a foundation member in 1876 of its predecessor, the Victorian Rowing Association. The support given not only to our own Club's members but to rowing throughout Australia by the national governing body, Rowing Australia, is also gratefully acknowledged.

Finally, to our neighbouring rowing clubs on the banks of the Yarra River, to all of the other university rowing clubs around Australia, and to all oarsmen and oarswomen wherever you may be, we acknowledge that without your participation in the sport and that of your own predecessors, none of the deeds and exploits in this book would have been possible.

Peter Antonie
President
Melbourne University Boat Club

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Thanks are due first to the 150th celebrations committee of Melbourne University Boat Club: Peter Antonie, Margot Foster, Adrian Maginn, Paul McSweeney, Field Rickards Jnr, Rob Stewart (Chairman) and Rob Zahara for their unstinting support, as well as their helpful comments and suggestions on various drafts of the manuscript.

This project has truly been a team effort. I especially wish to acknowledge the pioneering work of Arthur Adams, who together with the late Field Rickards Snr initiated the history project, researched and collected the Club's surviving documentary archives and contributed to the recording of the Club's early history. Adrian Maginn was a tireless source of facts and figures regarding the Club's crews and their results, as well as serving as the collector of images from members of the Club. The appendices of Dates, Facts and Figures, and Presidents of the Club are all his work. Thanks are also due to Paul McSweeney for researching and incorporating items of interest from the Club's minute and record books into the manuscript, assisting with redrafting where appropriate and liaising with the committee. Thank you also to Colin and Tim Smith who compiled Appendices IX and X and, with assistance from others, collated Appendix XI from the University's records.

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The staff of the University of Melbourne Archives and Special Collections provided support throughout the two years of work on the book. The University of Melbourne History of the University Unit provided a grant which enabled me to travel to Sydney for research into the Sydney University Boat Club. Judith Scurfield at the State Library of Victoria maps and the SLV picture collection staff offered invaluable assistance. Also my thanks to staff at the Prahran Mechanics Institute Victorian History Library, Melbourne Cricket Club Library, National Sports Museum, Royal Historical Society of Victoria, Australian War Memorial and to Marian Turnbull, archivist at Trinity College, the University of Melbourne. For initial research assistance, my thanks to Dr Andrew May at the University of Melbourne School of Historical Studies, Loreen Chambers and Tanja Golding. Robin Grow assisted with finding early newspaper cuttings dealing with rowing in Melbourne and Melissa Campbell, archivist, Geelong Grammar School was supportive. My thanks to Alf Lazer of Melbourne

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I acknowledge with thanks Diane Brown for copyediting the manuscript and Andrew Cunningham of Studio Pazzo for his excellent design and layout. And for their continued personal support, my mother Erika Buckrich, my daughter Laura Buckrich-Hegyesi, and my wonderful friends.

Judith Buckrich
Melbourne

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