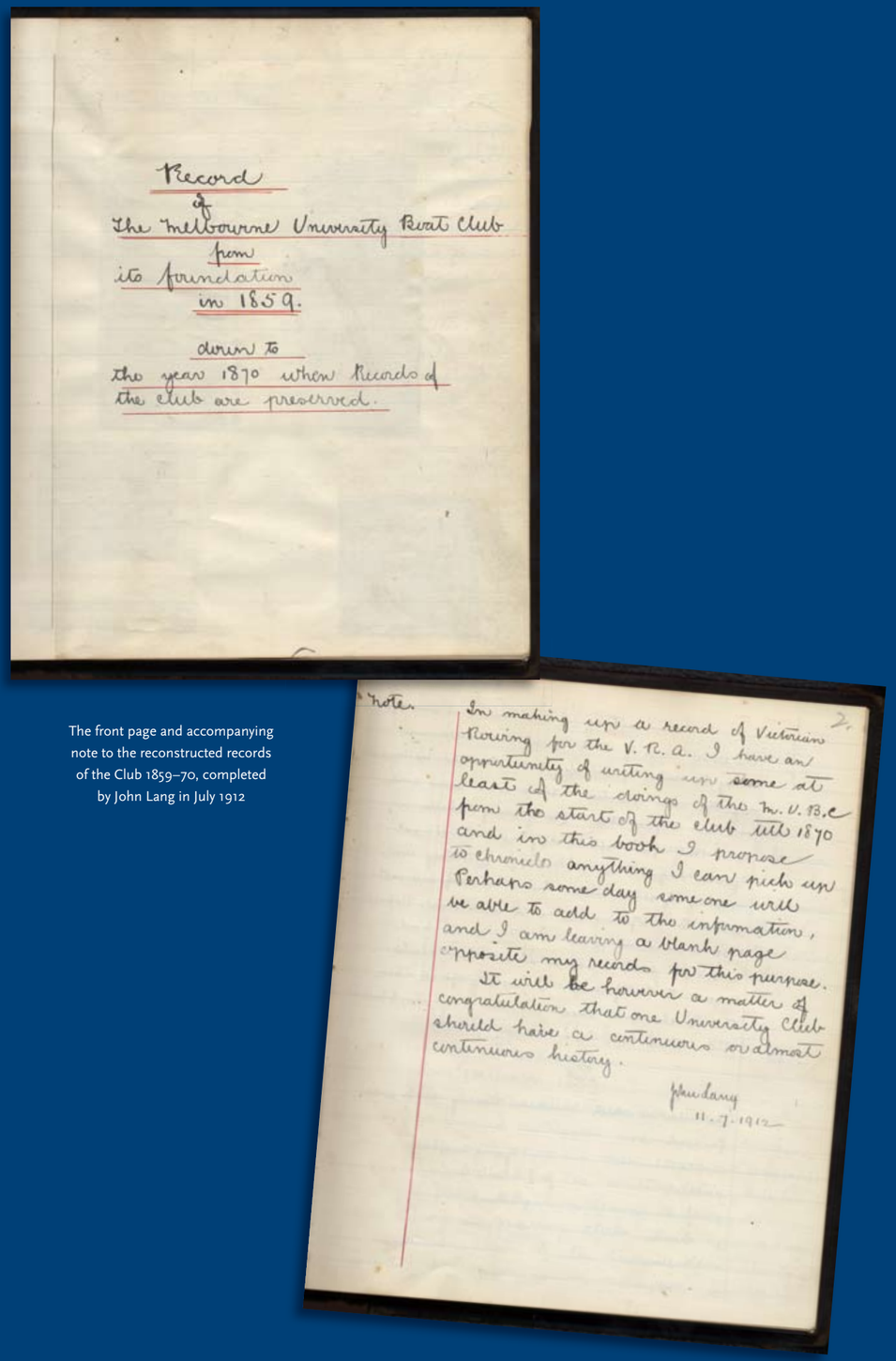


Record
of
The Melbourne University Boat Club
from
its foundation
in 1859.

down to
the year 1870 when Records of
the club are preserved.

Note. In making up a record of Victorian Rowing for the V. R. A. I have an opportunity of writing up some at least of the doings of the M. U. B. C from the start of the club till 1870 and in this book I propose to chronicle anything I can pick up. Perhaps some day some one will be able to add to the information, and I am leaving a blank page opposite my records for this purpose.

It will be however a matter of congratulation that one University Club should have a continuous or almost continuous history.

Thursday
11.7.1912

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

M·U·B·C· Melbourne University Boat Club Inc.

CHAPTER FOUR

Between the Wars



1938 MUBC intervarsity crew in training *James Guest collection*

The Club was soon enjoying the pleasures of peacetime rowing. In 1919 it celebrated its diamond jubilee year. A subcommittee was established to investigate extensions for the boatshed and funds were sought. Plans got underway to revive the intervarsity and intercollegiate races, the latter now including Newman College. To facilitate four crews racing in the intercollegiate race (Trinity, Ormond, Queen's, Newman) it was necessary to have two heats with the winners racing off in a final. For the 1919 college boat race, heats were rowed on 9 May with the final taking place the next day. In addition to being the first intercollegiate race in which Newman would participate, this race would be the first where the newly instituted Mervyn Bournes Higgins Trophy was competed for. Ormond College beat Queen's while Newman was too good for Trinity. In the final, Ormond won the Mervyn Bournes Higgins trophy for the first time by defeating Newman by two lengths in a spirited race.[1]

The first postwar intervarsity race was held on the Parramatta River on Saturday, 31 August 1919. Adelaide and Queensland Universities found it impossible to send crews so soon after the War, so only Sydney and Melbourne competed: 'The weather was spring like with a slight breeze from the S. E.; tide on the ebb except in sheltered places where the water was calm.' MUBC's crew was well prepared and 'showing admirable blade work' while the Sydney crew were sluggish. Melbourne won the race by three lengths and 'the victors and their coach were heartily cheered at the winning post.' [2] Melbourne's crew included A Spowers (stroke) as well as KF Abernethy and CS Wood—men who had been in the 1914 crew.

In 1920 the race returned to its former glory. Held in Melbourne on 29 May, crews from Sydney, Adelaide, Queensland and Melbourne Universities participated. It was the first time Queensland University had competed in the race. Everyone thought that the race would be between Melbourne and Sydney because neither Queensland nor Adelaide showed much form in practise. However Clive Disher, back from England, took over the Queensland coaching and they improved considerably. In fact during the race Queensland held the lead for the first half mile, after which Adelaide assumed the lead and kept it. Melbourne then overtook Queensland and Sydney finished last.

The Club had never focused on sculling—an event in which many New South Welshmen competed on a world championship basis. But in 1919 MUBC member, A Ashkenassy, enjoyed some success at various sculling events in the VRA Regatta in December. He won the maiden sculls and came second in the junior sculls. He also came second in the junior sculls events in the Upper Yarra and Albert Park Regattas. Lack of support from the Club led him to complain at the 1920 annual meeting, but the Hon Secretary, KH Hallam, said there were difficulties in organising events at the end and beginning of the year when the VRA regattas tended to be held. This was a perennial problem for the Club because of the constraints of the university year. Also there was no money to buy boats. Members of the colleges did not participate much in sculling, and the colleges were still the main source of boats for MUBC.





TOP: Mervyn Bournes Higgins Trophy
The Victorian Oarsman, p.103

BOTTOM: 1919 winning MUBC intervarsity eight (Parramatta River): KH Hadley (bow), FH Gamble (2), FR Gale (3), HS Thomas (4), KF Abernethy (5), CS Wood (6), FC Ross (7), A Spowers (stroke), T Harris (cox)

Changes at the University, but not at the Boat Club

OPPOSITE TOP: Programme from the 1921 intervarsity race

OPPOSITE MIDDLE: Commemorative oar from the 1921 intervarsity race

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: 1921 winning MUBC intervarsity eight (Brisbane River): CJV McKeown (bow), RH Keon-Cohen (2), RJ Holyman (3), DA White (4), LF Edmonds (5), J Lanfranchi (6), CGB Parker (7), JM Buchanan (stroke), TAB Harris (cox), inset, Dr HC Disher (coach). Lanfranchi was the first Newman College man to row intervarsity for MUBC

The University itself was changing. Immediately after the War, as with other Australian universities, it negotiated with the Repatriation Department to pay half the fees of returned soldiers, and agreed to waive the other half for students needing financial assistance.

Melbourne University was a fast growing institution; there had been 1200 students in 1917 and 2500 in 1921, increasing to nearly 3000 by the end of the 1920s. A trickle of students from the new secondary schools had made their way to the University. There were about 140 non-fee-paying places, for which there were always many more applicants than could be accommodated. But most Melbourne University undergraduates were still from private schools. From 1917 to 1944 certain private schools could prepare their pupils for university entrance, bypassing external examinations, further facilitating the smooth transition between playing sport at school and university.[3] From this time MUBC records show crew members' schools, and either the names of their college, or whether they are extra-collegiate.

Elsewhere in the University, MUBC Patron and University Vice-Chancellor, Sir John Grice, cancelled a meeting of the Public Question Society that was to have been addressed by a labour politician on the subject of 'One Big Union'. There were protests from some students against such restrictions but these seemed to bring even more. For example, on 16 September 1919 a ruling was brought that anyone who was not a student, teacher or graduate of the University could not address the University, without first seeking permission from the University Council.

It was not until 1925 that the University Council allowed the formation of Labour and Liberal Clubs and the University paper *Farrago* was first published.

A University Bill introduced to Parliament in 1919 was not passed as an Act until 1923 and then with many amendments. It provided an endowment of £45,000 with an additional £8500 to set up a commerce faculty and for scientific research. The Act changed the make-up of the University Council, but many thought the change was not beneficial to students or the general public. According to some historians, to many it seemed that an authoritarian and exclusive group had taken control of the university.[4]

The 1920s and 1930s were a time of both social progress and upheaval in Australia. Many students saw themselves as the stalwarts of loyalty to the empire and those struggling for societal change as disloyal.



1920 Engineers crew, winners of the John Grice Shield: (standing left to right) FJC Rennie (coach), SC Moore, HF Stokes, RF Ritchie, (seated left to right) J Young, AE Fleetwood (7), DA White (stroke), DH Eakins (6), A B Smith (4) (front) J James (cox)

Sport builds again at University

The colleges now had second eights and they held a race on 19 April 1920. 'It was the first of its kind and although very informal, attracted a large crowd.'[5] Not all of them prepared well for the race, but the winning crew Ormond and runners-up Newman were serious about the event.

The intercollegiate race for the Mervyn Bournes Higgins Trophy followed on 20 and 21 April. Coaches for these crews were Harry Ross-Soden for Trinity, JRS Cochrane for Ormond, Charles Donald for Queen's and WJ Jerram for Newman. Queen's won the race by about one and a half lengths from Ormond.

The interfaculty race for the John Grice Shield also attracted a lot of interest. Engineering, Dental, Medical, Arts and Law faculties all competed, with the engineers

winning. The 1920 race between Extras and the 1919 winning college resulted in a win for Extras, coached by Clive Disher, against Ormond by a quarter of a length.

At this time, there were nine eights regularly out every evening from the Club's sheds.

The Rhodes scholars for 1919 and 1920 were WA Merrylees, who rowed for Queen's in 1919 and CEG Beveridge, stroke of the 1919 Trinity crew, and first emergency for the 1919 intervarsity crew. Merrylees, who went on to read philosophy at Oriel College Oxford, would become an educational innovator and lecturer in philosophy at the University of Melbourne.[6] Beveridge became a doctor for the Sudan Government Medical Service in 1925, and from 1929 he held various appointments in several provinces, until finally he rose to the position of Assistant Director, Sudan Medical Service, retiring in 1946.[7]

1921 saw the Club at a peak, with interest in rowing at an all-time high. The intervarsity race was held in Brisbane on 31 May 1921 on the Hamilton Reach of the Brisbane River. Charles Donald coached the crew till they went to Brisbane when Clive Disher took over; this was difficult as no speed launch was available for the coach. Nonetheless Melbourne 'stroked magnificently [by Buchanan] and forcing Melbourne into the lead won by a length from Queensland, followed by Adelaide and Sydney in that order.'[8] One of the Club's great personalities of the future, Russell H Keon-Cohen, rowed in the 2 seat. He then surprised everyone by representing Melbourne University two days later in the 880 yards race at the athletic meeting that was also taking place in Brisbane. He won that 'in fast time' despite not training for the event![9]





Henley-on-Yarra 1920
State Library of Victoria picture collection



Back in Melbourne the Club held combination eights races for metropolitan clubs and received nineteen entries. The course was from midway along Flinders Street Station to in front of the clubhouse. Clive Disher was starter. The winning crew included rowers from Xavier College, Wesley College, Ormond College, Albert Park Rowing Club, Yarra Yarra Rowing Club and MUBC.[10]

Overall, it was a very happy year for the Club, marred only by the sad news that John Lang, who had left Melbourne in 1920, had died in London the following year. The reason for Lang's return is unknown. The reason for Lang's return was to educate his children in English schools and perhaps to get treatment for an illness from which he first suffered in 1917. A letter to Clive Disher dated 28 July 1921 from Charles Morrell explained that he had seen Lang on the morning of his death, just five days before, at the Walton-on-Thames Regatta. Lang had been with his family in their punt. Shortly after Morrell had left to row in the Regatta, Lang became ill and lost consciousness, dying a few hours later.[11]

The Club noted his death with great regret and his extraordinary efforts on behalf of the Club were remembered. He had also been instrumental in setting up the Sports Union and indirectly, the Student Union. In 1923, old Blues of the Club presented a cup in Lang's memory. The John Lang Cup was to be given annually to the winners of the race between the extra-collegiate crew and the crew representing the previous year's winners of the intercollegiate race. The Cup was given for the first time on 17 April 1923 to Queen's College by Professor Skeats.[12] In May 1925 a new best racing boat was named the *John Lang* and christened on 22 May. The boat was made by Jerram & Son and £50 towards the purchase of the boat was donated by Sir John Grice.[13]

A matter of loyalty

No doubt Lang would have been pleased at the turn-up for the 1922 annual meeting held on 12 April. Sir John Grice was Patron, Dr Clive Disher was President and 110 members were present. Professor Skeats was a loyal supporter and remained a Vice-President of the Club, as did Dr Apperley, Charles Donald, Allan Spowers, Rev Parker and HJ Whiting.

The meeting appears to have been somewhat dominated by Russell Keon-Cohen, who wanted to prevent men who were members of outside clubs from rowing in the intervarsity crew. His motion was lost. Keon-Cohen was very devoted to MUBC and he expected other men to be too. He also had a very practical point. Two of the men chosen to row in the intervarsity crew of 1922, HC Maling and J (Jim) M Buchanan, were not available for training until after 11 May. This was because they had been called upon to occupy the bow and stroke seats respectively for the Victorian crew at the interstate race in Sydney.[14] This really prevented the intervarsity crew from settling properly, considering that their race was in Adelaide on the first weekend in June. Maling's college affinity is unknown; however Buchanan had certainly stroked the 1921 Ormond crew, but he was unable to do so in 1922 because of his interstate commitments.





TOP: 1922 MUBC junior eight: JF Williams (bow), HS Thomas (2), JW Cook (3), J Lanfranchi (4), RD Holyman (5), C Abernethy (6), OI Fitzpatrick (7), KH Hadley (stroke), J James (cox)

BOTTOM: 1922 MUBC maiden eight: JF Williams (bow), GBG Maitland (2), JW Cook (3), HS Thomas (4), J Lanfranchi (5), LC Abernethy (6), OI Fitzpatrick (7), KH Hadley (stroke), J James (cox)



1923 MUBC winning junior eight and junior-senior eight New Norfolk Regatta, Tasmania: BT Keon-Cohen (bow), LCL Murray (2), RR Webb (3), RR Garran (4), HML Murray (5), JC Garran (6), EW Turner (7),RH Keon-Cohen (stroke), RH Cunningham (cox). This crew is unique for the reason that it appears to contain three sets of brothers



1924 MUBC senior eight, winners Grand Challenge Cup and Morell Cup: EW Gault (bow), KH Hadley (2), OA Yuncken (3), LCL Murray (4), HML Murray (5), JC Garran (6), EW Turner (7), RH Keon-Cohen (stroke), RH Cunningham (cox)

The 1922 season

The 1922 season began with the college race in April, won by Queen's. Selection for intervarsity took place immediately afterwards. The selectors were Charles Donald, Clive Disher and Jim Buchanan. The race was held in Adelaide with Sydney, Adelaide, Queensland and Melbourne Universities represented. Queensland won a hard fought race. It was just their third time in the event. Melbourne came second.[15]

In September the combination eights event attracted 130 entries with sixteen crews competing. The short course went from opposite Flinders Street Railway Station to the boatshed. The race attracted a big crowd.

The Club entered three crews in the Henley Regatta in October, a maiden four and two maiden eight crews. Seventeen crews competed in the maiden eights race and MUBC's No. 1 crew came first in the finals. It was the first maiden eight victory for MUBC since 1912. The Australasian newspaper of 4 November 1922 noted '... Pride of place ... must be given to the winners of the maiden eights, the Melbourne University No. 1 crew. The crew had been coached by Mr C Douglas (to perform in) the splendid manner in which it finished in the three heats of this race ...'[16]

This success was followed by an even more important one at the VRA Regatta in December 1922, when the Club won the junior eights event for the first time ever.[17]

The Club was now competing in regattas throughout the summer including the champion eights of Victoria, Nagambie Regatta, Warnambool Regatta, Colac Regatta, Upper Yarra Regatta, Albert Park Regatta and Ballarat Regatta.

The 1923 season began with an annual meeting on 18 April, at which the committee recommended a change of date for the annual meeting to October, to fall in line with the other university sports clubs. Thus another annual meeting was held on 18 October 1923.

The New Norfolk Regatta

The Club sent a crew to the New Norfolk Regatta in Tasmania for a Boxing Day event at New Norfolk. The group was composed entirely of members of Trinity College. The expedition which left Melbourne on 17 December 1923 was organised by Russell Keon-Cohen and used the Sandy Bay Rowing Club sheds for training. They competed in the junior and junior-senior eight events, both of which they won. It was the first time that a Victorian club crew had competed in Tasmania outside of the interstate race.[18]

Tasmania joins intervarsity

The following year the University of Tasmania participated for the first time in the Australian Universities Boat Race in May. The race was rowed on the Lower Yarra starting in the Coode Canal and finishing at the site of the old steam crane, on the South Wharf, 200 yards below Queen's Bridge. A record crowd was present on the wharves. A steamer, *Miner*, full of spectators, followed the race and the Harbor Trust launch, *Commissioner*, carried officials and guests including his Excellency the Governor, Lord Stradbroke. Crews from Adelaide, Queensland, Sydney, Tasmania and Melbourne Universities participated. Melbourne University fought out a close race with Queensland:

> At the last bend at Spencer Street [Spencer Street Bridge was not built until 1930] Brisbane in the sheltered position kept well in towards the wharf but Melbourne were steered very wide and lost a lot of "ground", both crews were rowing 34 per minute. A fine race to the winning post ensured the rate in both boats being raised to 36 and at the end, 38. Melbourne won by half a length in 16mins 14secs.[19]

Adelaide was three lengths behind Queensland followed by Tasmania with Sydney coming last. Melbourne's crew was coached by Charles Donald and stroked by Russell Keon-Cohen. NJ Abernethy was in the 2 seat and HML Murray was 5. Another name that was to have a long association with the Club appeared in the crew list for the first time; this was OA Yuncken.

On the evening of the race the crews were entertained with a dinner at the Scott's Hotel. Intervarsity events provided university students with the opportunity to meet their peers in other states, enabling them to form networks that would serve them throughout their lives, as well as providing unforgettable revelries.

Melbourne changes

The city of Melbourne in the 1920s was in a period of particular growth and reconstruction. Having finally recovered from the 1890s Depression (which had hit Melbourne harder than any other Australian city) and the First World War, the city was finding a new identity. Because of its location as the temporary capital of Australia until the completion of the construction of Canberra in 1927, much of the country's economic power was held in Melbourne. As well, factories were springing up, beginning a trend that would eventually make Victoria Australia's most industrialised state. A great energy pervaded the city. Melbourne was also Australia's most radical city, with strong unions and many new organisations working for greater equality.

The place of women was also changing—albeit slowly. The establishment and instant success of the Lyceum Club for educated women, many of whom had attended Melbourne University, was an important sign of this change. Women's rowing had also officially begun with the 1920 Interstate Women's Four Championship. It would however be another fifty years before women would row for the University of Melbourne.

At the Club, the change was perhaps most felt in the growing numbers of extra-collegiate rowers and racy parties held after rowing events.

Putting the Club first

The growth in membership led to problems in the leadership structure. At the October 1923 annual meeting a motion was put by Hugh ML Murray (Treasurer) and seconded by Russell Keon-Cohen to add a clause to MUBC Rule 17 so that: 'No active member of another rowing club could be Captain, Vice-Captain, Secretary, Treasurer, Collegiate Representative or Extra-collegiate representative of MUBC.'[20] Murray stated that the 'Club needed active and conscientious committee members and that an active member of any other club would not be able to discharge his duties in an efficient manner'. Keon-Cohen was more passionate and said that the Club was 'not content with conditional or

half-hearted fealty. On Mr Maling asking for an explanation, the meaning of the last word was explained to him.'[21]

The topic continued to preoccupy the committee. TR Lyle had asked for permission to row with Albert Park and been refused because he had already rowed with them on several occasions without asking for permission. There was further discussion about this on 7 April when two members, Casey and Maling, who had been in the intervarsity crew, spoke on behalf of men who had rowed elsewhere and asked if the committee would reconsider its decision. They felt that such a ruling amounted to men being disqualified from the Club.

Maling referred to Rule 40, and in particular, the last sentence: 'This rule shall not apply to any past or present member of the Club who has at any time rowed for any other Club within such radius, and who wishes to continue rowing for such Club at such regattas.'

He was informed that this only applied to members at the date of confirmation of the rules, namely, 30 March 1906. Maling still wanted the committee to reconsider. They then withdrew, Keon-Cohen moved, and Breen seconded a motion to ask the Secretary to prepare a list of members ineligible to row for the intervarsity crew and post them in a conspicuous place. Allan Spowers said he agreed with the principle but not the method of carrying it out. The motion was carried.[22]

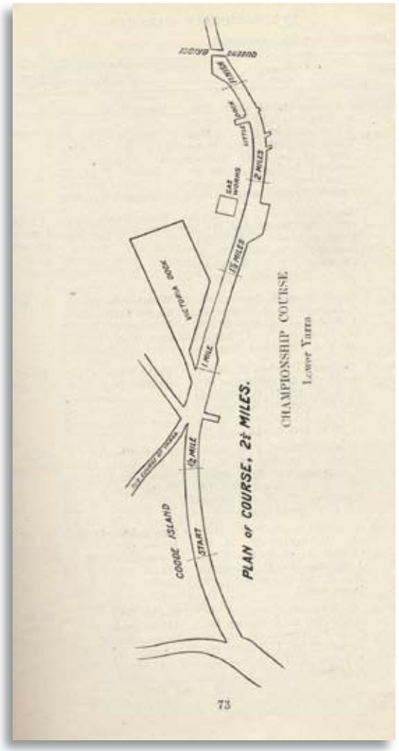
There is little surprise at Russell Keon-Cohen's prominence at meetings considering his rowing performance at the time. He successfully participated in many regattas in 1924 including both a maiden and junior pair which he stroked at the Melbourne Regatta. He also stroked junior and junior-senior eights at the New Norfolk Regatta in Tasmania, where MUBC won the 'IXL Cup' and the 'LM Shoobridge Shield'. Russell's younger brother Bryan had joined him at Trinity and was bow in these races. The crews also included Hugh Murray and his brother, and another pair of brothers, JC and RR Garran (sons of Sir Robert Randolph Garran, a leader of the Federation Movement who would become the first Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department, and parliamentary draftsman).

With the Keon-Cohen, Garran and Murray brothers all at the same college, it was hardly surprising that Trinity won the 1924 intercollegiate race, and broke the stranglehold that Queen's seemed to have had on the trophy at the time.

Uncle Russell's ultimatum

The Club bought a new racing eight in 1924, built by Jarram and mostly funded by a donation from Sir John Grice, but many other donations totalling £110 came to the Club in this year. However, the election of office-bearers at the annual meeting of 14 October 1924 had led to a crisis at the Club. Dr C Gordon Shaw was elected President, AH Buchanan, Secretary and DT Oxer, Treasurer; RH Hadley was elected Captain and EW Gault, Vice-Captain.

> Mr. Keon-Cohen then made a very forcible speech in which he deplored the fact that inexperienced and raw members had been elected to the executive positions. He further stated that at the end of this year he intended to sever his connection with the Boat Club and row elsewhere. He however stressed the point that he would not row against the University in any outside races. Dr Hadley (a Vice-President of the Club)



ABOVE: Championship Course on the Lower Yarra (2½ miles)
The Victorian Oarsman, p.73

BELOW: Commemorative oar from the 1924 intervarsity race

however corrected Mr Keon-Cohen and stated that Mr R Hadley and Mr Gault were equal in seniority. Mr LCL Murray moved a vote of thanks to Mr Keon-Cohen for all the work and energy he had put into the Club. It was seconded by Mr Hadley and carried with acclamation.[23]

The matter did not end there. An emergency meeting was called the next day at which Russell Keon-Cohen moved and OA Yuncken seconded that the order of business be discontinued in order to discuss business of vital importance to the Club:

> Mr Keon-Cohen stated that owing to the disgraceful way in which senior oarsmen of the Club had been treated at the general meeting, he & a number of other prominent oars who would graduate this year proposed to leave the MUBC and join another club unless the committee were willing to guarantee him two things:
>
> 1. That the committee would do all in its power and so make an amendment to the constitution that packing general meetings by non-active members would be impossible, and
> 2. Either a) the Secretary and Treasurer resign at once and a special general meeting be held at which only first and second eights and John Grice Eights should vote, or b) Mr Keon-Cohen be elected delegate to the VRA and Mr HML Murray delegate to MUSU, with power to vote for and propose motions.
>
> Professor Skeats pointed out to Mr Cohen that the first of the motions was agreed as correct by all. It was put as a motion, seconded by Mr Yuncken and passed unanimously.
>
> Continuing, Professor Skeats said that the first condition of the second was impossible constitutionally and that the second should be left in the hands of the committee to do as they should deem fit. After considerable discussion Mr Cohen agreed to this.[24]

Keon-Cohen then moved and Yuncken seconded a motion that a subcommittee be appointed to inquire into the conduct of general meetings and to present proposals to the committee concerning it.[25]

At the next meeting the subcommittee presented two proposals by which the stacking of general meetings might be checked. Lists of one-third of college members were to be prepared by the college clubs, and only such members had the right to vote at general meetings of the Club, or to hold office in the Club.

The complications of membership of MUBC were evident in the next proposal to alter the agreement with the colleges whereby with payment of a small sum, all members of student clubs could be admitted as associate members of MUBC. Associate members





were to have the same status as junior members, that is, they would be entitled to all the privileges of MUBC membership, except the right to vote at general meetings. Associate members could become full members upon payment of the difference between the per capita rate paid by their college club and the full subscription due by each such member, as defined in Rule 11. Any associate members who had rowed in his college's first or second eight, or in the intervarsity race, or in the John Grice eights, or in an MUBC crew in any regatta under the control of any recognised rowing association in Australia, would automatically, without further payment, become a full member, with privileges as such: 'The Secretary shall not less than three days before a general meeting, post, on the club noticeboard, a list of all such members.'[26]

ABOVE: 1924 winning MUBC intervarsity eight (Lower Yarra), Chas Donald (coach): EW Gault (bow), NJ Abernethy (2), WJ Pannell (3), RH Hadley (4), HML Murray (5), OA Yuncken (6), EW Turner (7), RH Keon-Cohen (stroke), EWB Kyle (cox)

BELOW: Newspaper cartoon of Russell Keon-Cohen



After a long discussion the motion was put and carried. A new bye-law was also created by which:

> The Secretary shall, at every general meeting, issue to each full member one (1) ballot paper, which shall be signed for by the said full member. The Secretary may demand from any person, before issuing him a ballot paper, proof of his full membership of the Club. Any person who, in the opinion of the committee, after due inquiry, is guilty of fraud or imposition, or attempted fraud or imposition, shall be suspended or otherwise dealt with as the committee may think fit. No ballot papers shall under any circumstances be issued in any manner other than that provided by this rule.

This seems to have satisfied Russell Keon-Cohen. He and Allan Spowers, Lee Murray and Russell's younger brother Bryan were all still on the committee in 1926.



Commemorative bronze tablet for John Lang
Courtesy Phillip Susman

The Battle commences for Sunday Rowing

'A letter was read from Newman College expressing a hope that the matter of Sunday rowing could be looked into, and that some arrangement be made, by which the caretaker could be brought into agreement with those gentlemen who wished to row on the Sabbath. Some discussion ensued, and it was pointed out that while a personal matter like the caretaker's views should not be allowed to carry too much weight, that the Sports Union might have its own views on the matter of Sunday activities.'
From the Club's minutes, 17 April 1928

'The Secretary reported that the Sports Union had no desire to control the Club with regard to Sunday rowing, and consequently the matter was referred back to the committee. Discussion showed that there was no desire to deprive Newman College of their Sunday rowing, but that it would be very serious if Gilligan proved obstinate. Finally it was moved by Mr Taylor and seconded by Mr Mackay, that Dr Disher and Mr Yuncken be deputed to approach Gilligan and endeavour to render him amenable.'
From the Club's minutes, 13 June 1928

'Discussion took place on the subject of Sunday rowing, about which Gilligan had proved adamant, despite the persuasive measures adopted by the committee's delegates. The Newman delegates decided to abide their time and make further attempts in due season.'
From the Club's minutes, 22 June 1928

In April 1926 the John Lang Memorial, a handsome bronze tablet with inscription 'Erected in Memory of John Lang. Died July 23rd 1921. A generous benefactor of this Club', was placed in the boatshed. According to Club records, the delay in erecting the memorial was due to the tardiness of the colleges in raising their portion of the necessary funds.[27] The tablet is still in the Club's possession and will be reaffixed to the boatshed after the proposed current alterations are completed.

Interference with training by the normal demands of university life was apparently a sore point during this period. The Club's minutes of 11 March 1926 stated:

> Lectures after 5pm were emphatically condemned. The delegates to the Sports Union were instructed to bring the matter up and the Hon Sec was instructed to write in very strong terms to the SRC expressing the opinion of the meeting on the matter.[28]

The intervarsity race was held in Tasmania on the Franklin course of the Huon River on 5 June 1926. The hosts, University of Tasmania, had won the race held in Brisbane the previous year; a great effort considering they had only entered the race for the first time the year before. The Melbourne crew of 1926 was stroked by Bryan Keon-Cohen and Hugh Murray's younger brother Lee was in the 2 seat. The brothers HL and OA Yuncken were at 6 and 7 respectively. ECH Taylor of Melbourne Grammar coached and trained the crew. The report of the race gives an idea of the excitement the event evoked:

> Franklin is 25 miles by road from Hobart and the leader of the prosperous apple district in Tasmania. Nearly 1000 cars filled with spectators went to Franklin on the afternoon of the race, which had created extraordinary interest in Hobart and the Huon. The race itself was quite worthy of the occasion and was one of the finest in the history of the contest. Leading from the start Sydney were pressed hard by your (MUBC) representatives over the whole three miles, the two crews being actually on even terms shortly before the two-mile mark. Sydney however was a trifle too solid and won the grand race by a little over half a length. Tasmania was third, some ten or twelve lengths away, with Adelaide a long way further back still. Your crew's dashing finish was one of the features of the race. We congratulate Sydney on breaking their long run of non-success and console ourselves that our crew went under to a really first-class combination, and though beaten, were far from disgraced.[29]

During the period 1924–8, OA (Otto) and HL (Lindsay) Yuncken rowed in intervarsity crews for the Club. Their younger brother Rene also rowed in the 1934 intervarsity crew. Rene's eldest son Tom rowed intervarsity for Melbourne University in 1968 and later rowed in the Cambridge boat in the Boat Race. Another of Rene's sons, Jim, rowed for the Club and then Monash University in the men's pair in 1973. Otto Yuncken and John and Tom Freeman established the famous architecture firm of Yuncken Freeman in 1933, and Rene and Lindsay established the legal firm Yuncken & Yuncken.

In June 1926, the Army Rowing Association Regatta was held for the first time since 1914. The Association was revived by Clive Disher (known by his then rank of Major HC Disher). The race was rowed over the Henley half mile and was won by Air Force, from 4th Artillery Brigade, Melbourne University Rifles and Army Service Corps, in that order.[30]



1926 MUBC intervarsity eight (Huon River):
MR Norton (bow), LCL Murray (2), JW Barnaby (3), LK Corteen (4), RC McKay (5), HL Yuncken (6), OA Yuncken (7), BT Keon-Cohen (stroke), JSN Harris (cox)

The 1926–7 season began with the annual meeting on 21 October 1926. The Patron remained Sir John Grice, the President was JRS Cochrane; Vice-Presidents were Russell Keon-Cohen, Dr Hadley, Allan Spowers, Dr Gordon Shaw, Hugh Murray and ECH Taylor. The Captain was Bryan Keon-Cohen with Vice-Captain, H Lindsay Yuncken. F Konrad Hirschfeld was Hon Secretary until he resigned to leave for Oxford as the Queensland Rhodes Scholar (he had begun his medical degree at the University of Queensland); he was replaced by JR Harris. The Victorian Rhodes Scholar for this year, NG Bayliss, was also a member of MUBC.[31]

The Club had a full season during 1926–7 beginning with the Henley Regatta of 23 October 1926. MUBC entered four crews in the maiden eights. There were a total of twenty crews entered in the race. The MUBC no. 2 crew made it through to the final which Mildura Rowing Club won by three lengths.[32] The Club also entered crews in the maiden four, junior eight, senior four, and senior scull races, but with less success. In the following week the club's maiden four, maiden eight, junior pair, junior eight, junior sculls and senior four crews competed in the Melbourne VRA Regatta. This was a very competitive regatta, with crews from all over Victoria and New Zealand participating. MUBC no.1 crew won the maiden eight (this time beating Mildura). They were coached by Russell Keon-Cohen and his brother Bryan coached the no. 2 crew. The Footscray Regatta of November 27 was the next-to-last competition in which MUBC competed that year. A maiden four and junior four crew were at the Nagambie Regatta of 27 December 1926 and the New Year's Day Regatta at Rutherglen. Russell Keon-Cohen coached both of these crews. CL Rosenfield competed in both senior and junior sculls races throughout the season with several second placings in the junior sculls.

Smoke Night

'On the subject of the proposed Smoke Social the subcommittee reported that in spite of their economic inspirations, a function held at the Palais would be a financial risk, and such being the case, they did not feel inclined to go ahead without the sanction of the committee.

After considerable thought and discussion, it was suggested that the function be held at the University Clubhouse. The matter of whether or not the University Union authorities would allow the distribution of beer was brought up, but it was felt that even if they did not, the probable frigidity of the evening would abate the thirst of the guests, and that coffee would probably be a more suitable drink.

The subcommittee was instructed to finalise matters if it considered the event worthy of success.' *From the Club's minutes, 22 June 1928*

The Keon-Cohens

Russell Hallel Keon-Cohen (1901–1969), affectionately known as 'Uncle Russell', attended Trinity College and studied Law and Arts. On one occasion, Russell stroked a victorious University senior eight in the Grand Challenge Cup at the Henley-on-Yarra Regatta, to a clear win over Mercantile. As the crew passed the Governor's barge tied at the Henley staging (some 150 metres from the finish line), Russell doffed his cap to the Governor, while continuing to row with one hand, put his cap back on and rowed to the finish line. This action was never forgotten by members of the Mercantile crew. Forty years on, when Russell's nephew Chester introduced himself at the Mercantile boatshed, he was ordered to leave—some elderly Mercantile members saying: 'No Keon-Cohen will ever set foot in this Club'.

Although Russell enrolled at the Victorian Bar, he initially earned a living playing bridge and eventually became a teacher. During the Second World War, Russell was with the Australian intelligence services and served with General Douglas Macarthur in Brisbane.

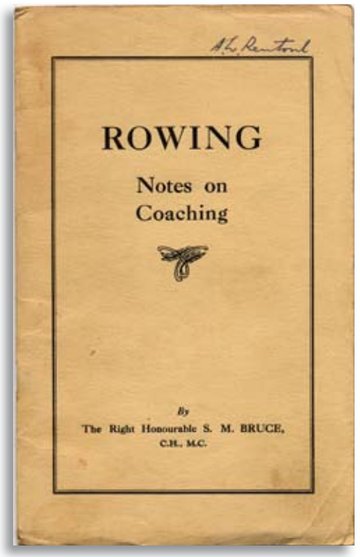
Russell's younger brother, Bryan Tobyn Keon-Cohen (1903–1974), studied medicine and rowed for Trinity in intercollegiate and MUBC in intervarsity crews during the 1920s. With the outbreak of War, he enlisted in the medical corps and saw active service overseas. He was elected President of MUBC for the period 1947–50. Bryan became one of the leading orthopaedic surgeons in Australia.

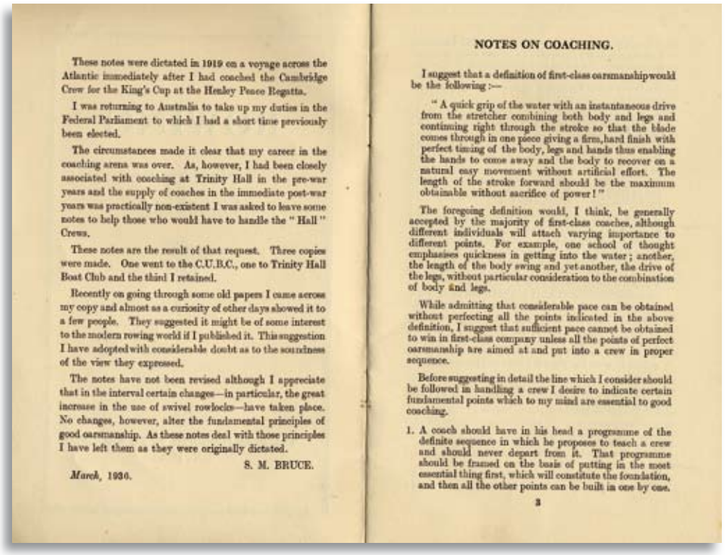
Bryan's elder son Chester was at Melbourne University from 1960 to 1965 and later, he became a barrister before being appointed a county court judge. He rowed for Trinity and MUBC crews. He was Captain of MUBC in 1963, when Jim Gobbo was President, and was elected President for the 1970–1 season. In 1963, he stroked the victorious MUBC intervarsity eight to one of the greatest winning margins in intervarsity history, in a boat named *Keon-Cohen*.

Chester's younger brother, Bryan Andrew Keon-Cohen, commenced rowing for MUBC in 1966. After graduation and a stint in academia, he enrolled at the Victorian Bar, became a Queen's Counsel, and was one of the applicant's counsel in the famous Mabo case. In 1967 Bryan stroked the winning MUBC intervarsity eight. Earlier in the same year, he stroked the Trinity eight that won the intercollegiate event, coached by Chester. This achievement—elder brother coaching younger brother, stroking a winning Trinity crew in the intercollegiate boat race—replicated exactly the position forty-one years earlier in 1926 (with Russell as coach and his younger brother Bryan as stroke), and is unique in the annals of MUBC history.



Keon-Cohen family oarsmen c.1967 Left to right: Bryan Andrew Keon-Cohen, Chester Keon-Cohen, Russell Keon-Cohen and Bryan Tobyn Keon-Cohen *Keon-Cohen family collection*





These notes were dictated in 1919 on a voyage across the Atlantic immediately after I had coached the Cambridge Crew for the King's Cup at the Henley Peace Regatta.

I was returning to Australia to take up my duties in the Federal Parliament to which I had a short time previously been elected.

The circumstances made it clear that my career in the coaching arena was over. As, however, I had been closely associated with coaching at Trinity Hall in the pre-war years and the supply of coaches in the immediate post-war years was practically non-existent I was asked to leave some notes to help those who would have to handle the "Hall" Crews.

These notes are the result of that request. Three copies were made. One went to the C.U.B.C., one to Trinity Hall Boat Club and the third I retained.

Recently on going through some old papers I came across my copy and almost as a curiosity of other days showed it to a few people. They suggested it might be of some interest to the modern rowing world if I published it. This suggestion I have adopted with considerable doubt as to the soundness of the view they expressed.

The notes have not been revised although I appreciate that in the interval certain changes—in particular, the great increase in the use of swivel rowlocks—have taken place. No changes, however, alter the fundamental principles of good oarsmanship. As these notes deal with those principles I have left them as they were originally dictated.

S. M. BRUCE.

March, 1930.

NOTES ON COACHING.

I suggest that a definition of first-class oarsmanship would be the following :—

"A quick grip of the water with an instantaneous drive from the stretcher combining both body and legs and continuing right through the stroke so that the blade comes through in one piece giving a firm, hard finish with perfect timing of the body, legs and hands thus enabling the hands to come away and the body to recover on a natural easy movement without artificial effort. The length of the stroke forward should be the maximum obtainable without sacrifice of power!"

The foregoing definition would, I think, be generally accepted by the majority of first-class coaches, although different individuals will attach varying importance to different points. For example, one school of thought emphasises quickness in getting into the water; another, the length of the body swing and yet another, the drive of the legs, without particular consideration to the combination of body and legs.

While admitting that considerable pace can be obtained without perfecting all the points indicated in the above definition, I suggest that sufficient pace cannot be obtained to win in first-class company unless all the points of perfect oarsmanship are aimed at and put into a crew in proper sequence.

Before suggesting in detail the line which I consider should be followed in handling a crew I desire to indicate certain fundamental points which to my mind are essential to good coaching.

1. A coach should have in his head a programme of the definite sequence in which he proposes to teach a crew and should never depart from it. That programme should be framed on the basis of putting in the most essential thing first, which will constitute the foundation, and then all the other points can be built in one by one.

3

TOP: *Rowing: Notes on Coaching* by Stanley Melbourne Bruce, Australian Prime Minister and later Viscount Bruce of Melbourne. Bruce had a life-long love of rowing and, as Australia's High Commissioner in England at the time, was instrumental in Lex Rentoul's appointment as coach of the RAAF crews which rowed at the 1945 Henley Royal Regatta (see pages 144–47)

BOTTOM: 1927 intervarsity single sculls representatives SR Bell (Melbourne) right and K Flavelle (Sydney) left

The 1927 intervarsity race was scheduled for the Nepean River near Penrith in New South Wales on 4 June. University of Western Australia, who were competing for the first time, won the race and were presented with the Oxford and Cambridge Cup by the Prime Minister, Mr SM Bruce.

> The course, from Glenbrook Creek to Victoria Bridge—three miles—was ideal, the water being always calm and the banks affording a natural grandstand from which the race could be viewed from start to finish. For the first time in the history of the race all six states were represented, it being the first time that the West Australian University had competed.
>
> The Melbourne crew arrived in Penrith on Sunday, May 21st, thus leaving a full twelve days for training on the Nepean, but unfortunately the John Lang did not arrive till the Tuesday. Lack of stamina over the full course was evident from the beginning, and long gruelling rows were done for the first week to rectify this failing, which seems to have been due to the fact that in Melbourne the crew seldom got out before dark, and thus could not do justice to itself or the coach. Thanks given to citizens of Penrith, course described as probably the best three mile course in Australia.'

Melbourne did manage to come second, followed by Tasmania, Adelaide, Sydney and Queensland. Melbourne's crew included Rhodes Scholar, Konrad Hirschfeld, in the 7 seat.

The first intervarsity sculling championship was held as well 'where thirty years ago George Towns and other champions fought for world sculling titles.'[33] SR Bell (Melbourne) and K Flavelle (Sydney) were the only contenders. Raced over a shortened course of two miles, it was won by Flavelle.[34]

1927 was another active year for MUBC crews competing in interclub regattas. Russell Keon-Cohen was delighted and said that that it was the first year that the Club had been represented at every regatta, and the number of Club entries for Henley was the largest individual entry for any Club at any regatta.[35] Results however remained patchy.

At the 1927 annual meeting, Russell and his brother Bryan, Dr Clive Disher, O Yuncken, JW Barnaby and ECH Taylor were all elected Vice-Presidents; the Captain was HL Yuncken.

Despite all this, Russell Keon-Cohen suddenly resigned at the next meeting. There is no evidence of what offended him, if anything, but the committee was still discussing his resignation in December. He was made an honorary life member at the following annual meeting and was active again in the 1930s.[36]

1927 was a significant year for another reason; it was the first year that Lex Rentoul, fine oarsman and later a legendary coach, appeared in the Club's record books. Having previously represented Ormond unsuccessfully in 1924, 1925 and 1926, he stroked the winning 1927 College crew at the 45th Annual Intercollegiate Boat Race on 19 and 20 April. He subsequently rowed in the 2 seat of MUBC crew at the 1928 intervarsity race held on 3 June at Mannum, South Australia. The race was won by Western Australia, with Melbourne coming second by two lengths.[37]

The Great Depression years

The Club did better at the annual intervarsity race in the following year, when it won the 1929 event held on the Lower Yarra. Charles Donald coached the crew. The six universities were present with Adelaide coming second, three and a half lengths behind Melbourne, and Queensland third. It was the 38th occasion that the race had been held. Melbourne had won sixteen times, Sydney fourteen and Adelaide four times. The other universities joined much later and Queensland had won twice, Tasmania once and Western Australia twice.[38]

The crews were given a dinner at the Oriental Hotel on the night of the race (1 June) and Club Patron, Sir John Grice, entertained them at Macedon the next day.

There were stirrings of discontent from the committee when the intervarsity eight did not compete for the Grand Challenge Cup at the Henley Regatta. The President of the Club, JRS Cochrane

> ... deplore(d) [the] lack of interest by members ... especially with regard to Henley this year and other Regatta rowing ... The Intervarsity crew was to have rowed as a senior VIII at Henley but unfortunately this had to be abandoned. The senior men should support the Club even at a little sacrifice to themselves. The rest of the year has been very satisfactory and he was very proud of the intervarsity eight winning this year.[39]

The date of the Henley Regatta, 29 November 1929, was after the end of the academic year and many of the intervarsity crew had left their colleges by that time, not being willing to stay the extra days in order to compete. An old Blues senior eight, a maiden eight and a maiden four did participate in their respective Henley events.

It was in this year that Ron Jelbart competed in the Victorian Champion Sculls and later represented Victoria. This was the first of many events in which members of the Jelbart family would compete with great success on behalf of the Club.[40]





TOP: MUBC sculler Syd Bell c.1927, later one of the Club's most effective Treasurers

BOTTOM: 1928 MUBC junior eight, winner Founders' Challenge Cup, Henley: AA Lee (bow), AL Rentoul (2), RGC de Crespigny (3), RGD Turnbull (4), R Officer (5), HL Yuncken (6), WB Griffiths (7), ARM Johnson (stroke), JSN Harris (cox)



1929 winning MUBC intervarsity eight (Lower Yarra): (standing left to right) LR Sharp (4), ARM Johnson (2), GK Duane (cox), RGC de Crespigny (3), AA Lee (bow), (seated left to right) R Officer (6), W Sherlock (stroke), WB Griffiths (7), RC McKay (5), inset Charles Donald (coach). This was Charles Donald's last winning intervarsity crew

With the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929, much bigger problems were soon facing the Club than participation in regattas and summer rowing.

The first sign of the decline was the decision not to hold the Boat Club Ball in 1930.[41] Soon financial problems arose, and the difficulty of relying heavily on the colleges and not being properly integrated with the Sports Union was evident when:

> Mr Johnson (of Queen's College) advised that at the last meeting of Queen's Social Club it was decided that unless the Boat Club made some definite move to get the Sports Union to take financial responsibility for the Boat Club that they would sever all connection with the Club & remove their property from its shed.
>
> The matter was discussed very fully by the committee. Queen's felt that they were suffering an injustice to have to pay a subscription for all members of their college whether they rowed or not.
>
> It was pointed out that the £40 approx being paid by Queen's was not a high rental for the privileges they enjoyed and in view of the fact that the whole business had been taken up a number of times with the Sports Union & unsuccessfully & also that without raising Student Union fees, the S.U. could not allow any more money to the Boat Club—the possibilities of a change in the present arrangements was not likely.
>
> Mr McCutcheon then moved seconded by Mr Johnson "That the Club strongly recommend to the Sports Union that the sports fee be raised to one and a half guineas & that half the increase be given to the Boat Club."[42]

BELOW: Commemorative megaphone presented to the 1929 winning intervarsity coach Charles Donald



BELOW RIGHT: Commemorative oar from the 1929 intervarsity race donated to the Club in 2008 by the niece of Ron MacKay who rowed in the 5 seat of the MUBC crew





TOP: MUBC Office Bearers 1929–30: (standing left to right) J R Adam, LCL Murray, PL Connelly, GM Oxer (Hon Auditor), WB Griffiths (Vice-Capt.), JW Barnaby, HL Yuncken, R Officer, Dr RGC de Crespigny, LLO Bevan, (seated left to right) Dr BT Keon-Cohen, ARM Johnson (Capt.), Dr HC Disher (President), Sir John Grice (Patron), SR Bell (Hon Sec.), OKO McCutcheon (Hon Treas.)

RIGHT: Ron Jelbart, winner 1930 Victorian Championship Sculls











TOP LEFT: 1930 MUBC intervarsity eight (Swan River): LLO Bevan (bow), ARM Johnson (2), TRB Courtney (3), JR Glenn (4), WB Griffiths (5), R Officer (6), LR Sharp (7), JR Adam (stroke) GK Duane (cox)
Tony Oakley collection

TOP RIGHT: Charles Donald (stroke) and Gus Oakley (bow) with Gerry Duane (cox) in Perth 1930. Donald, the coach of the 1930 intervarsity eight, suggested to Oakley, the emergency, that they have a commemorative photo of their own
Tony Oakley collection

MIDDLE: 1930 MUBC maiden four (centre station) winning at Henley from Eaglehawk No. 1 (north station) and Mildura (south station). Of special interest in this photograph are the man-powered floating billboards in the foreground
Tony Oakley collection

BOTTOM RIGHT: Portrait of the winning crew: LLO Bevan (bow), RP Yuncken (2), TRB Courtney (3), AW Oakley (stroke) and G K Duane (cox)
Andrew Yuncken collection

The Sports Union would not agree to this and the issue was again on the agenda in October. The Club could not see a way to lower college subscriptions. The sport's fees were controlled by the Grounds Committee and spent on maintenance of sports grounds and clubs, and expenses of varsity teams. With the Great Depression at its height, the Sports Union could not raise the fee. But in any case some Club members like Bryan Keon-Cohen also thought many of the college clubs would be upset if the Sports Union took over control of the boats.[43] Queen's did quit the Club. In any case, the Sports Union directed the Boat Club to sort the matter out. The problem continued unresolved.

Patron, Sir John Grice, visited the Club at its 1930 annual meeting. It was sixty years since he had rowed in the first intervarsity race.

Despite the economic downturn, the Club decided to extend the boatshed and build an extra room for the caretaker. The firm of Griffiths & Yuncken were appointed to carry out the alterations for an excellent fee. Yuncken remained a member of MUBC. An account of £70 was passed for this purpose. The Club also decided to buy a new best boat from Jerram & Son, if the cost did not exceed £130.[44]

There were complaints again from various members because so few men were rowing in the Henley Regatta and other regattas. MUBC Blue, J Harris, pointedly said:

> ... One reason MUBC did not have the success it deserves is that the members would not train unless they were assured of a seat in a regatta crew. The men should learn to row properly first before racing & then the coaches would not have to spend years getting them out of the faults they have developed.[45]

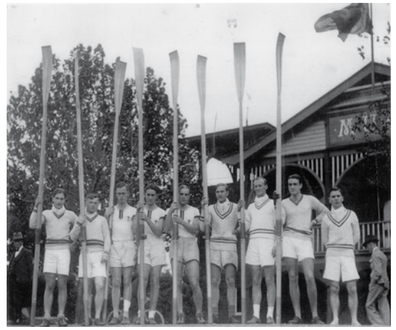
Bryan Keon-Cohen expressed his disapproval of the lack of interest taken by the Club in regatta rowing. Mr Bevan supported his remarks and expressed the opinion that the Club had too many 'stars' and not enough keen oarsmen.[46]

Bryan and Russell Keon-Cohen remained stalwart and active members throughout the 1930s and gave generously of their time and opinions. They were sticklers for hard work, but far from conservative regarding styles of coaching, rowing and the way the Club was run. Despite being college men themselves they were opposed to any push by the colleges for more power and less expense. When it was suggested that college men should get more votes at meetings, Keon-Cohen thought that only those who were really interested in the Club should have a vote; as it was, the colleges had four times the number of votes as extra-collegiate members (there were four colleges and each college was allowed twenty votes). The degree to which MUBC relied on colleges for the use of boats was well illustrated by the complaints of extra-collegiate members who could often not get a boat for practise, being entirely reliant on MUBC boats.[47]

There was again much discussion of the Club's affiliation with the Sports Union. Life members Professors Skeats and Allen opposed affiliation with the Sports Union. Finally they decided that each college would pay one guinea for each rowing member, with a minimum of twenty members.[48]

Bryan Keon-Cohen was outspoken on the matter of coaching again in 1934. Melbourne University had not won the Australian Universities Boat Race since 1929. At a special

Visit by Sir John Grice
'Just after the closing of the Meeting we were favoured with a visit from our Patron Sir John Grice whom we were very pleased to welcome. Sir John related to us some of his rowing experiences and told us about the first Intervarsity race in 1870, in which race he was in the Melbourne winning crew. We were very glad to have such a distinguished member of the Club at the meeting and hope that we will see him at the meeting again next year.'
From the minutes of the Club's Annual General Meeting, 23 October 1930





TOP: 1930 Trinity College crew in fashionable rowing attire
Courtesy John Newton (JE Newton)

BOTTOM: The Yarra in flood around the Judges' Box in 1934
Courtesy www.rowinghistory-aus.info

meeting held in February 1934, specifically to select the coach for the intervarsity crew, Jim Donald, a brother of Charles, was nominated. Keon-Cohen

> objected to the lamentable lack of vision on choosing an old man ... for many years the Club had been dominated by the Donald element and now that providence had thought fit to release us from it the Club was recklessly and thoughtlessly asking another Donald to come and coach our crews.[49]

Several members defended Donald but Keon-Cohen insisted that Charles Donald '... would not give any discussion on rowing, he merely dictated what he wanted done.'[50] Finally ECH Taylor was selected to coach the crew that went to Mannum in South Australia on 2 June. MUBC came third in a year when only four universities participated: Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne and Western Australia.[51]

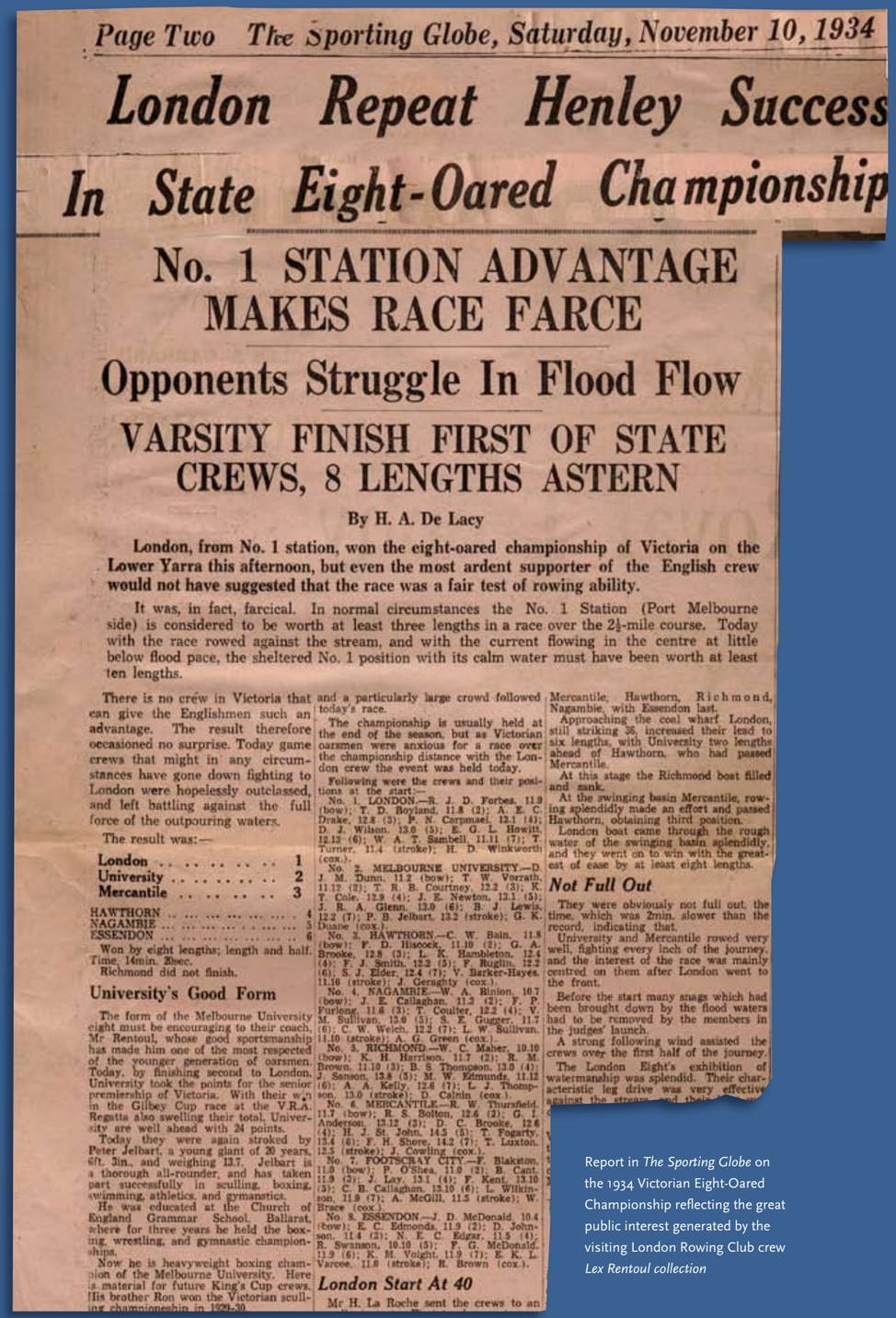
At the 75th annual meeting of the Club held on 11 October 1934, Sir John Grice finally retired as Patron and Dr Disher was elected as his replacement. The Club's President Mr Bell said:

> We all regretted that Sir John Grice was not able to continue to honour us by being our Patron but he [Sir John] felt that through failing health he was not able to take as active an interest in the Club as he wished and so asked that a younger man be asked to occupy his position in his stead. Mr Bell said that Sir John had for a long while been a generous benefactor and loyal supporter of the Club.'[52]

The following year was a turning point for the Club, with the elevation of Lex Rentoul to coach. He had offered his services after the intervarsity race of 1934, saying he would



1934 MUBC Champion Victorian Senior Eight: DJM Dunn (bow). TW Vorrath (2), TRB Courtney (3), KF Cole (4), JB Newton (5), JRA Glenn (6), BJ Lewis (7), PB Jelbart (stroke), GK Duane (cox), and, on staging, A Rentoul (coach)



Page Two The Sporting Globe, Saturday, November 10, 1934

London Repeat Henley Success In State Eight-Oared Championship

No. 1 STATION ADVANTAGE MAKES RACE FARCE

Opponents Struggle In Flood Flow

VARSITY FINISH FIRST OF STATE CREWS, 8 LENGTHS ASTERN

By H. A. De Lacy

London, from No. 1 station, won the eight-oared championship of Victoria on the Lower Yarra this afternoon, but even the most ardent supporter of the English crew would not have suggested that the race was a fair test of rowing ability.

It was, in fact, farcical. In normal circumstances the No. 1 Station (Port Melbourne side) is considered to be worth at least three lengths in a race over the 2½-mile course. Today with the race rowed against the stream, and with the current flowing in the centre at little below flood pace, the sheltered No. 1 position with its calm water must have been worth at least ten lengths.

There is no crew in Victoria that can give the Englishmen such an advantage. The result therefore occasioned no surprise. Today game crews that might in any circumstances have gone down fighting to London were hopelessly outclassed, and left battling against the full force of the outpouring waters.

The result was:—

London	**1**
University	**2**
Mercantile	**3**
HAWTHORN	4
NAGAMBIE	5
ESSENDON	6

Won by eight lengths; length and half. Time, 14min. 20sec.
Richmond did not finish.

University's Good Form

The form of the Melbourne University eight must be encouraging to their coach, Mr Rentoul, whose good sportsmanship has made him one of the most respected of the younger generation of oarsmen. Today, by finishing second to London, University took the points for the senior premiership of Victoria. With their win in the Gilbey Cup race at the V.R.A. Regatta also swelling their total, University are well ahead with 24 points.

Today they were again stroked by Peter Jelbart, a young giant of 20 years, 6ft. 3in., and weighing 13.7. Jelbart is a thorough all-rounder, and has taken part successfully in sculling, boxing, swimming, athletics, and gymnastics.

He was educated at the Church of England Grammar School, Ballarat, where for three years he held the boxing, wrestling, and gymnastic championships.

Now he is heavyweight boxing champion of the Melbourne University. Here is material for future King's Cup crews. His brother Ron won the Victorian sculling championship in 1929-30.

and a particularly large crowd followed today's race.

The championship is usually held at the end of the season, but as Victorian oarsmen were anxious for a race over the championship distance with the London crew the event was held today.

Following were the crews and their positions at the start:—

No. 1, LONDON.—R. J. D. Forbes, 11.9 (bow); T. D. Boyland, 11.8 (2); A. E. C. Drake, 12.8 (3); P. N. Carpmael, 12.1 (4); D. J. Wilson, 13.0 (5); E. G. L. Howitt, 12.13 (6); W. A. T. Sambell, 11.11 (7); T. Turner, 11.4 (stroke); H. D. Winkworth (cox.).

No. 2, MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY.—D. J. M. Dunn, 11.2 (bow); T. W. Vorrath, 11.13 (2); T. R. B. Courtney, 12.2 (3); K. T. Cole, 12.9 (4); J. E. Newton, 13.1 (5); J. R. A. Glenn, 13.0 (6); B. J. Lewis, 12.2 (7); P. B. Jelbart, 13.2 (stroke); G. K. Duane (cox.).

No. 3, HAWTHORN.—C. W. Bain, 11.8 (bow); F. D. Hiscock, 11.10 (2); G. A. Brooke, 12.8 (3); L. K. Hambleton, 12.4 (4); F. J. Smith, 12.2 (5); F. Ruglin, 12.2 (6); S. J. Elder, 12.4 (7); V. Barker-Hayes, 11.10 (stroke); J. Geraghty (cox.).

No. 4, NAGAMBIE.—W. A. Rinlon, 10.7 (bow); J. E. Callaghan, 11.2 (2); F. P. Furlong, 11.6 (3); T. Coulter, 12.2 (4); V. M. Sullivan, 13.0 (5); S. E. Gugger, 11.7 (6); C. W. Welch, 12.2 (7); L. W. Sullivan, 11.10 (stroke); A. G. Green (cox.).

No. 5, RICHMOND.—W. C. Maher, 10.10 (bow); K. H. Harrison, 11.7 (2); R. M. Brown, 11.10 (3); B. S. Thompson, 13.0 (4); J. Sanson, 13.8 (5); M. W. Edmunds, 11.12 (6); A. A. Kelly, 12.6 (7); L. J. Thompson, 13.0 (stroke); D. Calnin (cox.).

No. 6, MERCANTILE.—R. W. Thursfield, 11.7 (bow); R. S. Bolton, 12.6 (2); G. I. Anderson, 13.12 (3); D. C. Brooke, 12.6 (4); H. J. St. John, 14.5 (5); T. Fogarty, 13.4 (6); F. H. Shore, 14.2 (7); T. Luxton, 12.5 (stroke); J. Cowling (cox.).

No. 7, FOOTSCRAY CITY.—F. Blakston, 11.0 (bow); P. O'Shea, 11.0 (2); B. Cant, 11.9 (3); J. Lay, 13.1 (4); F. Kent, 13.10 (5); C. B. Callaghan, 13.10 (6); L. Wilkinson, 11.9 (7); A. McGill, 11.5 (stroke); W. Brace (cox.).

No. 8, ESSENDON.—J. D. McDonald, 10.4 (bow); E. C. Edmonds, 11.9 (2); D. Johnson, 11.4 (3); N. E. C. Edgar, 11.5 (4); R. Swanson, 10.10 (5); F. G. McDonald, 11.9 (6); K. M. Voight, 11.9 (7); E. K. L. Varcoe, 11.0 (stroke); R. Brown (cox.).

London Start At 40

Mr H. La Roche sent the crews to an

Mercantile, Hawthorn, Richmond, Nagambie, with Essendon last.

Approaching the coal wharf London, still striking 38, increased their lead to six lengths, with University two lengths ahead of Hawthorn, who had passed Mercantile.

At this stage the Richmond boat filled and sank.

At the swinging basin Mercantile, rowing splendidly made an effort and passed Hawthorn, obtaining third position.

London boat came through the rough water of the swinging basin splendidly, and they went on to win with the greatest of ease by at least eight lengths.

Not Full Out

They were obviously not full out, the time, which was 2min. slower than the record, indicating that.

University and Mercantile rowed very well, fighting every inch of the journey, and the interest of the race was mainly centred on them after London went to the front.

Before the start many snags which had been brought down by the flood waters had to be removed by the members in the judges' launch.

A strong following wind assisted the crews over the first half of the journey.

The London Eight's exhibition of watermanship was splendid. Their characteristic leg drive was very effective against the stream and their

Report in *The Sporting Globe* on the 1934 Victorian Eight-Oared Championship reflecting the great public interest generated by the visiting London Rowing Club crew
Lex Rentoul collection

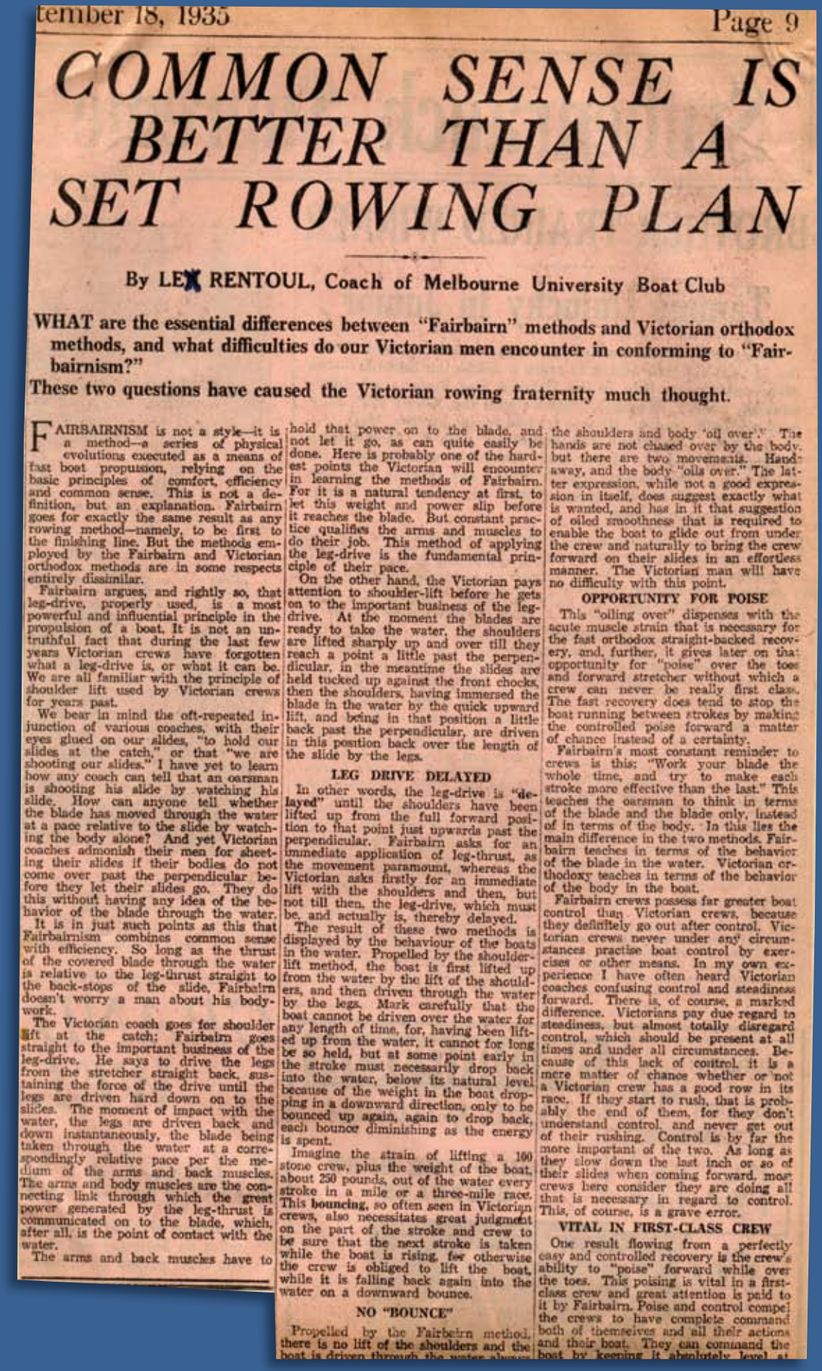


1934 Victorian Eight-Oared Championship Race rowed on the Lower Yarra course with the eventual winners London Rowing Club nearest the camera and MUBC (second placed but officially Victorian Champion crew) in the next station. The crews are shown half a mile from the start with two miles to row
Dr DJM Dunn collection

go down to the river every night for a month and coach anybody that wanted coaching. Rentoul would, over time, prove himself to be one of the best coaches in the history of the Club. He was an early convert to the Fairbairn style of rowing, and adopted it as his style of preference after the 1934 visit to Australia of the London Rowing Club eight to celebrate Victoria's Centenary.

The race that proved to be a turning point was the VRA's 43rd annual Championship Eight-Oared Race held on Saturday 10 November 1934 on the Lower Yarra Course. It had been preceded by the Melbourne Regatta (held on 27 October) and the Melbourne Amateur Regatta of 3 November (at which the Henley Grand Challenge Cup was won by the visiting London crew). The Melbourne University senior eight, stroked by Peter Jelbart, had won at the Melbourne Regatta and a great race was expected on 10 November. MUBC was the favourite with the other crews being Mercantile, Hawthorn, Nagambie, Richmond, Footscray City and Essendon.

London secured the no. 1 station which gave them a great advantage on a day when the Yarra was in flood flow. The newspapers declared that the idea this could have been a fair race was farcical considering that even in normal conditions the no. 1 station (Port Melbourne side) 'is considered to be worth at least three lengths in a race over the two and a half mile course.' On a day when the race was to be rowed against the stream, and with the current flowing at the centre at almost flood pace, the sheltered no. 1 position with its calm water 'must have been worth at least ten lengths.'[33] The MUBC crew was again stroked by Peter Jelbart 'a young giant of twenty years, 6ft 3in and weighing 13st 7lbs. Jelbart is a thorough all-rounder, and has taken part successfully in sculling, boxing, swimming, athletics and gymnastics.'[34] Jelbart was the heavyweight boxing champion of Melbourne University, having defeated 'Weary' Dunlop for the title. A huge crowd turned up for the race.



tember 18, 1935 Page 9

COMMON SENSE IS BETTER THAN A SET ROWING PLAN

By LEX RENTOUL, Coach of Melbourne University Boat Club

WHAT are the essential differences between "Fairbairn" methods and Victorian orthodox methods, and what difficulties do our Victorian men encounter in conforming to "Fairbairnism?"

These two questions have caused the Victorian rowing fraternity much thought.

FAIRBAIRNISM is not a style—it is a method—a series of physical evolutions executed as a means of fast boat propulsion, relying on the basic principles of comfort, efficiency and common sense. This is not a definition, but an explanation. Fairbairn goes for exactly the same result as any rowing method—namely, to be first to the finishing line. But the methods employed by the Fairbairn and Victorian orthodox methods are in some respects entirely dissimilar.

Fairbairn argues, and rightly so, that leg-drive, properly used, is a most powerful and influential principle in the propulsion of a boat. It is not an untruthful fact that during the last few years Victorian crews have forgotten what a leg-drive is, or what it can be. We are all familiar with the principle of shoulder lift used by Victorian crews for years past.

We bear in mind the oft-repeated injunction of various coaches, with their eyes glued on our slides, "to hold our slides at the catch," or that "we are shooting our slides." I have yet to learn how any coach can tell that an oarsman is shooting his slide by watching his slide. How can anyone tell whether the blade has moved through the water at a pace relative to the slide by watching the body alone? And yet Victorian coaches admonish their men for sheeting their slides if their bodies do not come over past the perpendicular before they let their slides go. They do this without having any idea of the behavior of the blade through the water.

It is in just such points as this that Fairbairnism combines common sense with efficiency. So long as the thrust of the covered blade through the water is relative to the leg-thrust straight to the back-stops of the slide, Fairbairn doesn't worry a man about his bodywork.

The Victorian coach goes for shoulder lift at the catch; Fairbairn goes straight to the important business of the leg-drive. He says to drive the legs from the stretcher straight back, sustaining the force of the drive until the legs are driven hard down on to the slides. The moment of impact with the water, the legs are driven back and down instantaneously, the blade being taken through the water at a corresponding relative pace per the medium of the arms and back muscles. The arms and body muscles are the connecting link through which the great power generated by the leg-thrust is communicated on to the blade, which, after all, is the point of contact with the water.

The arms and back muscles have to hold that power on to the blade, and not let it go, as can quite easily be done. Here is probably one of the hardest points the Victorian will encounter in learning the methods of Fairbairn. For it is a natural tendency at first, to let this weight and power slip before it reaches the blade. But constant practice qualifies the arms and muscles to do their job. This method of applying the leg-drive is the fundamental principle of their pace.

On the other hand, the Victorian pays attention to shoulder-lift before he gets on to the important business of the leg-drive. At the moment the blades are ready to take the water, the shoulders are lifted sharply up and over till they reach a point a little past the perpendicular, in the meantime the slides are held tucked up against the front chocks, then the shoulders, having immersed the blade in the water by the quick upward lift, and being in that position a little back past the perpendicular, are driven in this position back over the length of the slide by the legs.

LEG DRIVE DELAYED

In other words, the leg-drive is "delayed" until the shoulders have been lifted up from the full forward position to that point just upwards past the perpendicular. Fairbairn asks for an immediate application of leg-thrust, as the movement paramount, whereas the Victorian asks firstly for an immediate lift with the shoulders and then, but not till then, the leg-drive, which must be, and actually is, thereby delayed.

The result of these two methods is displayed by the behaviour of the boats in the water. Propelled by the shoulder-lift method, the boat is first lifted up from the water by the lift of the shoulders, and then driven through the water by the legs. Mark carefully that the boat cannot be driven over the water for any length of time, for, having been lifted up from the water, it cannot for long be so held, but at some point early in the stroke must necessarily drop back into the water, below its natural level, because of the weight in the boat dropping in a downward direction, only to be bounced up again, again to drop back, each bounce diminishing as the energy is spent.

Imagine the strain of lifting a 100 stone crew, plus the weight of the boat, about 250 pounds, out of the water every stroke in a mile or a three-mile race. This bouncing, so often seen in Victorian crews, also necessitates great judgment on the part of the stroke and crew to be sure that the next stroke is taken while the boat is rising, for otherwise the crew is obliged to lift the boat, while it is falling back again into the water on a downward bounce.

NO "BOUNCE"

Propelled by the Fairbairn method, there is no lift of the shoulders and the boat is driven through the water always

the shoulders and body 'oil over.' The hands are not chased over by the body, but there are two movements. Handsway, and the body "oils over." The latter expression, while not a good expression in itself, does suggest exactly what is wanted, and has in it that suggestion of oiled smoothness that is required to enable the boat to glide out from under the crew and naturally to bring the crew forward on their slides in an effortless manner. The Victorian man will have no difficulty with this point.

OPPORTUNITY FOR POISE

This "oiling over" dispenses with the acute muscle strain that is necessary for the fast orthodox straight-backed recovery, and, further, it gives later on that opportunity for "poise" over the toes and forward stretcher without which a crew can never be really first class. The fast recovery does tend to stop the boat running between strokes by making the controlled poise forward a matter of chance instead of a certainty.

Fairbairn's most constant reminder to crews is this: "Work your blade the whole time, and try to make each stroke more effective than the last." This teaches the oarsman to think in terms of the blade and the blade only, instead of in terms of the body. In this lies the main difference in the two methods. Fairbairn teaches in terms of the behavior of the blade in the water. Victorian orthodoxy teaches in terms of the behavior of the body in the boat.

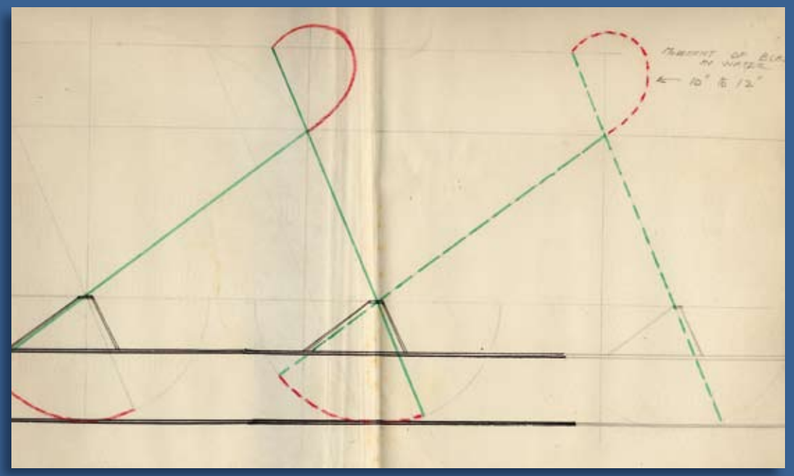
Fairbairn crews possess far greater boat control than Victorian crews, because they definitely go out after control. Victorian crews never under any circumstances practise boat control by exercises or other means. In my own experience I have often heard Victorian coaches confusing control and steadiness forward. There is, of course, a marked difference. Victorians pay due regard to steadiness, but almost totally disregard control, which should be present at all times and under all circumstances. Because of this lack of control, it is a mere matter of chance whether or not a Victorian crew has a good row in its race. If they start to rush, that is probably the end of them, for they don't understand control, and never get out of their rushing. Control is by far the more important of the two. As long as they slow down the last inch or so of their slides when coming forward, most crews here consider they are doing all that is necessary in regard to control. This, of course, is a grave error.

VITAL IN FIRST-CLASS CREW

One result flowing from a perfectly easy and controlled recovery is the crew's ability to "poise" forward while over the toes. This poising is vital in a first-class crew and great attention is paid to it by Fairbairn. Poise and control compel the crews to have complete command both of themselves and all their actions and their boat. They can command the boat by keeping it absolutely level at

Lex Rentoul's article on 'Fairbairnism' in *The Sporting Globe* of 18 September 1935
Lex Rentoul collection





ABOVE: Lex Rentoul coaching from the motor launch
Lex Rentoul collection

RIGHT: Lex Rentoul's diagrammatic illustration of blade movement through the water
Lex Rentoul collection

London took the lead position from the three-quarter-mile mark and kept it, despite valiant efforts by other crews. The Richmond boat actually filled with water and sank. University and Mercantile fought every inch of the way and came second and third respectively.[55]

London's style was praised: 'Their characteristic leg drive was very effective against the stream, and their boat was on an even keel at all times.'

Rentoul quickly adopted the 'Fairbairn' style used by the London Rowing Club and wrote about it in a long article in the *Sporting Globe* published on 18 September 1935. He noted that Fairbairnism was not a style, but a method of 'physical evolutions executed as a means of comfort, efficiency and common sense.' He explained the essential difference between the methods known as Victorian orthodox on the one hand and Fairbairnism on the other:

> The Victorian coach goes for shoulder lift at the catch; Fairbairn goes straight to the important business of the leg-drive … The arm and back muscles have to hold that power on to the blade, and not let it go, as can quite easily be done … The result of these two methods is displayed by the behaviour of the boats in the water. Propelled by the shoulder lift method the boat is first lifted up from the water … and then driven through the water by the legs [creating] bouncing … Propelled by the Fairbairn method, there is no lift of the shoulders and the boat is driven through the water always at the same level, for there is no bounce, as the energy and power is always directed in a level forward plane, never in an upward plane.'[56]

Rex's article makes for compelling reading more than seventy years after it was written, for those interested in rowing technique. Many of his ideas are as valid today as they were when he wrote about them. He was a student of the sport, as well as a coach.[57]

Notwithstanding his knowledge and enthusiasm, Rentoul found that despite offering to be available to coach every day, he could not get crews to row regularly or begin practise for intervarsity early enough in the year. He was soon also disillusioned with arrangements for the race.

An accident on the Yarra

Flooding on the Yarra in April 1935 caused a terrifying accident when a new clinker boat, the *Sydney R Bell*, was cut in half by the 'suction of the stream swilling under' the Williamstown Ferry during practise. It was a miracle that no-one was hurt.[58] Several papers testified that it was the calmness of the crew that saved them from a tragedy. All MUBC members had to be able to swim. The crew had rowed four miles down the Yarra and was resting about 200 yards upstream from the ferry, where floodwaters from the Maribyrnong entered the Yarra thus increasing the force of the current. The boat drifted fifty yards before the crew began to turn the boat back towards Princes Bridge. When the shell was broadside to the current it was caught in swirling water and carried towards the ferry. The crew could not hold the boat against the current. Dunn (in the 4 seat) was pulled under and caught in the chain but managed to free himself. He and the other men were able to hold onto the punt once it had stopped and all were rescued.[59] The boat was even able to be repaired. In a discussion of the incident in the Club's minutes of 2 May 1935, the President stated, somewhat enigmatically, that 'he was not in a position to blame anybody but he did not feel that the mishap could be put into the category of inevitable accident.'[60]



The famous Jelbart family four, winners of many senior four events during 1937–39 (left to right): Gerry Duane (cox), Norman, Lloyd, Peter and Ron Jelbart, being congratulated by George Jelbart (Ron and Peter's father) and, on the extreme right, Tom Jelbart (father of Norman and Lloyd). Peter and Ron also won the State Championship Pair in 1937
Kim Jelbart collection

In June 1935 the intervarsity race was held in Melbourne and initially training had to be carried out in the Club's best boat. The *Sydney R Bell* (still being repaired) and the best boat could not be used often because of 'railway sleepers, hen coops and tin jerries, and other floating and submerged rivals' still in the Yarra. A 'vast tub eight' was employed instead and this meant the loss of weeks of effective training. There were a few inconveniences as well, when a crew member dropped out, and a substitute had to be used until Peter Jelbart returned from duties with the Victorian state crew. With three weeks remaining, the crew got together for the first time and 'rapidly improved their leg drive'. During the last two weeks, the crew rowed twice a day and did a fast final trial on the Saturday before the race. Sydney beat Melbourne on the day, but by only two-thirds of a length. No doubt it would have been a different story if Lex Rentoul had had a decent boat and a complete crew to work with from the beginning.[61]

To be fair, the Sydney crew was not in its boat either, but they had been able to borrow the London Rowing Club boat, which they found to be very comfortable as soon as they began to use it. The London crew had brought their own boat with them when they came to Australia and sold it to the Victorian Rowing Association when they returned. From time to time the VRA made it available for use by visitors and other crews, as in most quarters it was regarded as a better boat than those available in Australia.



THE STAR, WEDNESDAY EVENING, APRIL 24, 1935.

RACING EIGHT CUT IN TWO BY FERRY

THE MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY CREW, whose racing eight was cut in two when it crashed against the Williamstown ferry during a practice run on the river last night. The members of the crew escaped injury.

The Star, Wednesday Evening, 24 April 1935
Dr DJM Dunn collection



Ferry Punt Cuts Racing Eight In Half

ROWING into a strong flood current from Maribyrnong River into the Yarra late yesterday afternoon, Melbourne University crew, training for the inter-University eight-oar race to be held on the Yarra on June 8, found its racing boat unmanageable. In a few minutes the boat crashed side on into the Short Road punt at Newport.

Surveying the ruins of the racing eight.

The racing boat, known as the Sydney R. Bell, was cut in half and the crew thrown into the water. The men managed to scramble on to the punt, while the coach (Mr. Rentoul) went after the boat and oars in his launch. Mr. Rentoul brought the shivering oarsmen back to the club shed at Princes Bridge.

The boat was only recently bought from Melbourne Grammar School and was valued at about £80.

The crew in the damaged racer was: T. Sherwood (Trinity), stroke; R. Jelbart (Trinity), No. 7; K. S. Cole (Trinity and Extra-Collegiate), No. 6; D. Wood (Ormond), No. 5; D. Duffy (Ormond), No. 4; J. Newton (Trinity and Ex. Coll.), No. 3; W. Vorrath (Ex. Coll.), No. 2; M. Dunn (Ormond), bow; C. Dyte (Ex. Coll.), cox.

The Sun News-Pictorial, Wednesday 24 April 1935
Dr DJM Dunn collection



Just after the finish of the 1935 intervarsity race held on the Lower Yarra course, with Melbourne closest to the camera, having been narrowly defeated by Sydney
Dr DJM Dunn collection

The *Sun News Pictorial* of Monday, 10 June reported the race with the headline: 'Two Fairbairn Crews Row Out Finish'. And declared that the 'race was a triumph for the Fairbairn methods they adopted.'[62]

Lex Rentoul used his contact with the London Rowing Club to good advantage in the preparation of the 1936 intervarsity crew to race on the Swan River on 6 June. Tim Turner who had been stroke of the 1934 visiting London Rowing Club crew became coach and introduced his club's methods to the crew but, unfortunately, he could not accompany them to Western Australia.

Other more prosaic problems soon arose:

> Between the Boat Club, the Melbourne University Sports Union, and the Australian University Sports Union a good deal of confusion existed in the early part of the year on the major question of the location of the race, and even as to whether the race would be held since there were only two visiting crews, whereas it had been agreed that unless three crews visited Perth, the race would not be held.[63]

The race was held in appalling conditions. Melbourne drew the north and most windy station. It was so rough that the waves were breaking over the crew's backs and the men were not experienced enough to be able to strike the form they had shown in the latter part of the training. Sydney won the race, Western Australia came second and Melbourne a disappointing third (and last).

Money troubles

Finances now became a problem for the Club mainly due to the fact that no depreciation had been allowed on the fleet, so when the need arose to buy a new boat no money was available for it. The Treasurer was asked from this time to make special provision for a depreciation amount to be allowed each year on the accounts.

The Club decided to appoint a permanent Hon Treasurer, SR Bell, as previous men in this post had been undergraduates and not able to cope with the task at hand. He remained in the post well into the 1950s.

In 1936 the committee refused the loan of a boat to the Ladies Rowing Association, despite Dr Murray personally interviewing Miss May Drewett. They declared that the hours of practise were too late for the loan to be possible. They also turned down an offer from the Student Union of Christchurch University College to participate in races with university crews in Melbourne because they would have had to return the visits.[64] In April Lex Rentoul resigned as coach, stating that he was too busy and too frustrated with the fact that he had asked for coaching to begin in March, and nothing had been done about it.

On 5 June 1937, the Club was again unsuccessful at intervarsity with Sydney taking out the race. The venue was the Brisbane River. Weather conditions were again unsuitable for good racing and Melbourne had again struck the worst station. A meeting of captains and secretaries was held after the race and agreed that there should be no dates fixed for the race and if the weather was unsuitable on the first day, the race should be rowed on the second. Also, the race should be held in rotation.[65]

Rentoul suggested a thorough investigation of the method of conducting intervarsity boat races. He pointed out how unsatisfactory arrangements had been in practically every state in the past, and went on to say that while the race was conducted in the present manner, it was a waste of time, effort and money on the part of the Club to send crews. He said that arrangements had been particularly bad in Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania. He proposed that a strong protest should be sent to the Australian Universities Sports Association giving the attitude of the Club and the reasons for it, set out in a report on the arrangements for the race in recent years. He moved that a subcommittee of three be appointed to go into the matter of conditions and arrangements in relation to the intervarsity race. He, Curtis and McKenzie were nominated and elected.[66]



Lex Rentoul playing cards
Lex Rentoul collection

Another War looms

By 1938 the world was heading toward another War. That this was apparent to members of the Club is evident in a comment made at a meeting held on 28 March 1938. The committee had been discussing the necessity of a launch for coaching, when one of them



1939 winning MUBC intervarsity eight (Nepean River): Lex Rentoul, coach and WH (Pinny) Pincott, assistant coach: Kingsley Rowan (bow), John Blanch (2), John Forbes (3), Lachlan Wilson (4), James Guest (5), Robert Lewis (6), Bob Ampt (7), Colin (CD) Smith (stroke), Stewart Moroney (cox)
James Guest collection



1939 MUBC eight at Penrith with coaches and supporters and the 1934 London Rowing Club eight used by the crew (left to right): Syd Bell, Lex Rentoul (coach), Kingsley Rowan, John Forbes (partly obscured), James Guest, Stewart Moroney (cox), Bob Ampt, John Blanch, Colin (CD) Smith, Robert Lewis, Lachlan Wilson, WH (Pinny) Pincott (assistant coach)
James Guest collection

remarked that 'a Motor Launch was as necessary as rearmament'.[67] The only available launch cost £9 which the Club could not afford, so apparently Lex Rentoul bought one himself. The crew did contribute towards it in a small way. Rentoul was appointed head coach for as long as he was able to do it, the assumption being that he would join the War effort. He was elected President in June 1938.

The 1938 intervarsity was again won by Sydney on the Huon in Tasmania. Sydney was better prepared having spent three weeks training on the course and much more time on three-mile training, as opposed to the shorter course covered by the Melbourne University intercollegiate crews, from which Melbourne's intervarsity crew was chosen. The 1938 crew was the first of five intervarsity crews to be stroked by Colin (CD) Smith, one of the Club's most successful and perennial oarsmen.

Rentoul did not let this 1938 defeat go, and in the following year, when the race was held in Penrith, the preparation was thorough and faultless.

For a start, he decided to borrow the boat the London Rowing Club had brought with them in 1934 and used so successfully. The Victorian Rowing Association charged £10 to hire it, but the Club decided it was worth the expense. A sum of £4 was donated by members of the crew and a further £2 by other officials of the Club.

The continued importance of the relationship between university, college and school rowing was evident in the information included on each member of the 1939 intervarsity crew published in the 1939 annual report. The crew as it raced was seated as follows:

Bow KS Rowan (Geelong Grammar and Trinity), 11st 4lbs
2 JA Blanch (Scotch and Extra-Collegiate), 13st 1lb
3 JA Forbes (Geelong College and Ormond), 12st 13lbs
4 LH Wilson (Launceston Grammar and Extra-Collegiate), 13st
5 JS Guest (Geelong Grammar and Trinity), 14st
6 RB Lewis (Geelong Grammar and Trinity), 12st 10lbs
7 CR Ampt (Scotch and Ormond), 12st
Stroke CD Smith (Geelong Grammar and Trinity), 11st 10lbs
Cox HS Moroney (Melbourne Grammar and Trinity), 9st 4lbs
The emergency oarsman was GH Gossip (Scotch and extra-collegiate), 11st 10lbs.

Under Rentoul's direction, good use was made of the six weeks spent on the Yarra before leaving for Penrith. Long rows were undertaken every weekend, and one night a week only was allowed for rest. The crew achieved considerable combination and pace before leaving Melbourne. Further help was obtained from the use of the speedboat for the three-mile trials, of which four were covered over a course beginning at the Church Street Bridge and finishing near the swinging basin below Spencer Street.

The crew was one of the heaviest ever boated for the race, averaging 12st 9lbs. The London boat proved to be of immense value, both in morale and in rowing form, and was unquestionably instrumental in the ensuing victory.

On 21 May the crew left for Penrith, which was reached on 22 May, where the Log Cabin provided accommodation for the duration of their stay. It was situated within short walking distance of the boatshed. Rentoul could not initially go with the crew, so for the first four days training was carried out without a coach on hand. Then Mr. Pincott, the Geelong Grammar coach, arrived and spent two very useful days smoothing out some roughness until Rentoul reached the scene.

> On the Monday of the final week a course was done in the time of 16mins 44secs. At ratings of 30–32, with a finishing burst of 37 and with a cover of not less than 4 feet, all the way to the last sprint. This row was very satisfactory. What had hitherto been a rough, heavy and fast crew was adding to those virtues good rowing form, and, above all, had developed a well-drawn-out finish. From this point to the race itself the coaches were polishing off what appeared to be Melbourne's best crew for some years.[68]

Melbourne prevailed, breaking Sydney's cycle of four wins in a row. The crew were given their oars, suitably painted, and money was raised to decorate and replace them.

The 1939 Boat Club dance was more of a success than in the previous year with the colleges showing some enthusiasm and a committee being formed to sell tickets.

The War's onset

The only mention at this stage in the Club's records of the Second World War which had broken out in September 1939 was in the 1940 annual report: 'In view of the increasing number of military camps it was decided to take the photo of the crew with the Oxford & Cambridge Cup at the earliest opportunity.'[70]

Alexander (Lex) Rentoul
Patron, President, Coach and Club Benefactor
Lex was born in Tamworth, New South Wales in 1905. He attended Ormond College for five years and studied law. He rowed in the Ormond and MUBC intervarsity eights. He coached Ormond, while still a student, and after graduation, for eleven years.

Upon graduation, Lex began practice as a solicitor in Melbourne. In addition, he started a nightclub, located near the Melbourne Town Hall. His club had a dance band, in which Bryan Keon-Cohen played piano. The place was patronised by university people and their friends. One of his first employees was Bob Dyer, of Pick-a-Box fame, the program where Russell Keon-Cohen subsequently won many prizes and became well known.

In 1933 Lex married Yvonne Keon-Cohen who was Bryan's sister. She too was an outstanding sportswoman, playing squash and tennis for Victoria before the War.

Lex took over the intervarsity eight in 1934. He was president 1938–40 and coached intervarsity for seven years with wins in 1939 and 1940. During the War, Lex enlisted in the RAAF. He was deemed too old to fly and was stationed at the Air Ministry in London. There, he was responsible for liaison between the RAAF and the RAF and in July 1945 organised and coached the RAAF crews, which competed with distinction at the first Royal Henley Regatta to be held since the beginning of the War.

After the War, Lex moved to Sydney where he managed the Australia Hotel and many restaurants for a number of years. Lex retained a lifelong interest in the Club and was a very generous donor to its appeals. He became one of the Club's two Patrons following the death of Clive Disher. His sister Jean, in a letter to Ormond College, said: 'Right to the last rowing was his great interest.'[69]

By early March of 1940 much discussion was underway regarding the intervarsity race of the same year. At a meeting held on 11 March MUBC decided it would compete, but only if two other crews participated. Sydney and Queensland also agreed. At the next meeting on 1 April they discussed it again.

The race was originally to be held at Mannum in South Australia but Adelaide forfeited. It was decided to hold the race at Penrith again because the Lower Yarra course could not be used 'in the circumstances.' The Port of Melbourne was heavily involved in the operations of War. When it came to the race, eventually held in May 1940, Queensland did not come. 'During the week before we left for Penrith, affairs overseas became suddenly very serious.'[71]

A member of the 1940 crew, Robert Lewis, wrote about the confusion leading up to the race:

> Incidentally ... the 1940 I-V was greatly confused and overlain by the war ... For many months it was "the phony war", and the Regatta was planned more or less in full. (And it being Melbourne's turn to select a venue, we solemnly chose to row again at Penrith—believing that there was no adequate three-mile course in Victoria!!)
>
> Then the war started hotting up ...
>
> [Each day from this time brought a new decision. The following are entries from Lewis' diary.]
>
> Tues May 21 "After row Lex considering whether we should go to Sydney ... Flanders is being left in retreat."
>
> Wed 22 "Medley [the Vice-Chancellor] says go to Sydney. Brisbane says they are going."
>
> Thurs 23 "Brisbane now not rowing. Medley not so sure now. At College, the boys and Lex were in the wireless room talking re this trip to row in Sydney. Rang John at Penrith and said we would come.
>
> Fri 24 "Out to Caulfield, filled in papers and did first medical exam ...
>
> Meeting in College re crew to Sydney, vote carried by about 5 to 4.
>
> Out to Caulfield for 2nd med. exam ... in at College, packed ... left for Sydney."
>
> N.B. Caulfield racecourse was the recruiting centre, where we signed up & submitted to medical check—and this entry indicates that I actually enlisted—and so did others too, I think on the same day that we left by train for Sydney. BUT I obtained "compassionate leave" for "personal reasons" for 2 weeks, so I was able to go with the crew! By 10 June I was back at Caulfield. On 11 June Italy entered the war, and on the 12 June I was at Puckapunyal! So you can see it was a pretty disturbed time ... I can't find much record in the way of newspaper reports ... all that I know is that we beat Sydney, the only other crew to take part, fairly easily. One of our main arguments for voting to go to Sydney was in order not to let them down, they having made the arrangements for the race.[72]

Within one month of the 1940 intervarsity race, all members of the Melbourne crew, including the coach, had enlisted in the armed forces. There would be no more intervarsity races until 1946.



1940 MUBC intervarsity crew members, with cox Stewart Moroney in the centre, pasted in Lex Rentoul's scrap book.
The 1940 crew members were Kingsley Rowan (bow), Ross Cameron (2), Peter Kirby (3), John Blanch (4), James Guest (5), Robert Lewis (6), John Forbes (7), Colin (CD) Smith (stroke), Stewart Moroney (cox), with Lex Rentoul (coach) and WH (Pinny) Pincott (assistant coach)
Lex Rentoul collection