

Tales of the Riverman



The magazine “the Lifeboat” will be returning to your screens soon, but we are also going to send you going to send you “Tales of the Riverman” which we hope you enjoy

Sculling boat Razor

The following extract is from the Glasgow Humane Society Historical details of boats, written around 1990

“Razor”

21ft sculling boat (10 inches wide) built by George Simms Putney around 1921 and used by Benjamin Parsonage for recreation on the River Clyde it is the only boat of this type in the world

It is a cross between the old professional 32ft x 9” boats and the 18ft x 24/32” boats used by professional rowers in the 1800’s

The boat is V sectioned and extremely difficult to sit

The boat is owned by George Parsonage and is wanted by several museums

The Razor seldom goes on the water now and is really just a museum piece

There were three main types of sculling boat used by the world professional scullers They had 31/32 foot boats for races around 3 1/2 or 4 1/2 miles which were rowed on rivers like the Parramatta, Thames, Nepean and Tyne. These boats were only about 9-10 inches wide and in many cases (as with the sculling boat “Cassamajor” which hangs from the roof of London Rowing Club) were V sectioned.

The second sculling boats were about 27 foot in length and about 10-12 inches wide and were usually round in section. This is the type of sculling boat favoured nowadays and was for middle distances like 1 mile or 2000 metres

The third type of boat was about 18-21ft long and 24/32 inches wide (to compensate for the length) and was used for sprinting.

A Scottish Boatbuilder decided to have a boat built 21ft long in the V section of the 32 foot boat. The result was a boat that rocked as the sculler moved between bow and stern. The boat dived so much in the bows that it was known to dive right down into the water and stand on end going down into the water like the Titanic.

The scull at first was 1 1/2 inches lower at the bow and stern, but due to being too low in the water the bow and stern canvassed sections were raised.

Built of single skin (not ply) the sculling boat was susceptible to damage. Several repairs were carried out to this sculling boat in the 1920's. The repairs were as follows. The varnish was scrapped off the area to be repaired. Shellac was brushed onto this area. A piece of Irish Linen soaked in shellac was placed onto the area to be patched and brushed hard to the surface (much as a fiberglass patch today).

These repairs/patches are still on the Razor today and still keep the water out.

The original shoes and seat are in the collection of the Glasgow Humane Society and are lighter than their modern equivalent.

This sculling boat was very unsteady and would even turn upside down if sat in the water with no one in it. It was used first in Scotland by Glasgow University but as no students could stay afloat in her (for more than a few minutes), it ended up in the hands of Ben Parsonage.

At 5ft 1inches in height and weighing 10 stone, Ben Parsonage was not exactly what people expect of a fast sculler (although many of the World Professional Scullers in the 19th Century and early 20th Century were "lightweight")

Ben Parsonage as a young man had won a couple of races as a member of the Clydesdale Rowing Club including the prestigious "Fleming Shield" the Club Sculling Championship, but had been made a Professional when in 1928 he became the Officer of the Glasgow Humane Society.

Ben Parsonage looked after the hiring boats for George Geddes in the 1920's and in those days they hired boats during Regattas on the River. Ben could be seen out in the Razor in his dungarees, with tools still in his pockets, money in his pockets, a whistle in his mouth sculling downriver ahead of four oared boat races clearing the course of the hiring boats

The speed of Ben Parsonage was truly remarkable especially as he was sculling a "joke" boat that was known to be extremely difficult to scull and extremely slow.

It was the only boat that Ben Parsonage had and in his "professional" hands it flew. Ben Parsonage could cover 110yds in an average (upstream and downstream) of 17.5 seconds.

The "Razor" hung on a pulley in the boathouse and only had an occasional outing especially when George Parsonage would try to achieve his father's times over the 110yds, but could only achieve 19.5 one way with the stream. Once George did take the Razor on his roof rack to Runcorn where he was senior coach at a Sculling coaching weekend and demonstrating technique in a boat like the Razor showed adequately that it is not always the boat that makes you go fast, but the sculler.

It had not seen water for around 20yrs when last week George decided to lower it down, dust the inches of dust from it, wash it down and give his son Ben and Ben's

friend Jamie Park (who have been sculling and double sculling for nearly 2yrs together) the chance to say “they sculled the Razor”



The scull had not even had a varnish in all those years, but still did not take any water. Everyone found the rigging extremely low compared to modern sculling boats.

It was amazing to see this craft still being used.

And of course the sculling boat could not be seen on the water without George having a seat in it.



The Razor will soon end its days either in a Glasgow Museum or more likely in the River and Rowing Museum

