

THE SPORT OF ROWING

To the readers of ***www.Rowperfect.co.uk***

This is the fifth installment on ***www.Rowperfect.co.uk*** of the latest draft of the beginning of my coming new book. Many thanks again to Rebecca Caroe for making this possible.

Details about me and my book project are available at ***www.rowingevolution.com***. For seven years I have been researching and writing a four volume comprehensive history of the sport of rowing with particular emphasis on the evolution of technique. In these last months before publication, I am inviting all of you visitors to the British Rowperfect website to review the near-final draft. Your comments, suggestions, corrections, agreements, disagreements, additional

sources and illustrations, etc. will be an essential contribution to what has always been intended to be a joint project of the rowing community.

All my contact info is at my website. I will also be at the FISA Coaches' Conference in London in January. Or you can email me anytime at:

pmallory@rowingevolution.com.

For a short time you can still access the first four installments, which have been updated thanks to feedback from readers like you. Additional chapters for your review will continue to appear at regular intervals on ***www.Rowperfect.co.uk***.



The Sport of Rowing

A Comprehensive History

by
Peter Mallory

Volume I

Genesis

draft manuscript January 2011

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Volume I
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Part IV

**English Orthodoxy
Meets Classical Technique**

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14. Steve Fairbairn

Rowing Career – Influences – Biomechanical Principles



Thomas E. Weil Collection

Steve Fairbairn's 1883 Oar

Jesus College, Head of the River

Bow **J.E. Hayne** 10st. 3lb. 65 kg, 2 **E.T.H. Brandon** 10st. 10lb. 68 kg,
3 **H. Armitage** 10st. 8lb. 67 kg, 4 **H.B.S. Fowler** 11st. 11lb. 75 kg,
5 **F. Straker** 11st. 11lb. 165 kg, 6 **A.M. Hutchinson** 12st. 2lb. 77 kg,
7 **Steve Fairbairn** 13st. 1lb. 83 kg, Stroke **P.W. Atkin** 12st 0lb. 76 kg,
Coxswain **C.E. Biscoe** 8st. 2lb. 52 kg

Throughout history, it has been traditional for members of championship boats to retain as trophies their oars, embellished with names, weights, dates, coats of arms, etc.

Fortunately, some have been handed down to the present day.

Since the early 19th Century, it has been common practice for English regatta officials to record athletes' weights (in stone) but not heights. In this book, I have tried to include both weights and heights in English and metric units whenever possible so that the reader may judge how the sizes of athletes have increased over the years.

Throughout history, human organizations such as governments or religions or political parties or bureaucracies or industries or individual commercial businesses have found themselves following increasingly rigid ideologies as time passes. Concepts that begin as revolutionary eventually become entrenched dogma, the established orthodoxy, and their adherents become increasingly intolerant of viewpoints that do not follow the now "officially" recognized norms. During the half century after Egan and Shadwell, this is

what was happening to English Orthodox Rowing Technique.

The English University rowing establishment soon became resistant to change to such an extraordinary extent that it seems that only individuals from the lower classes of English society or from the furthest reaches of the British Empire were capable of seeing past the "conservatism which was inbred in the comfortably-off upper and middle classes of the mother country's indigenous population,"⁶⁴⁸ and so

⁶⁴⁸ Dodd, *World Rowing*, p. 158

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I believe that it was no coincidence that **Ned Hanlan**, the man who first perfected **Classical Technique**, came from Canada.

History will teach us that all the greats who have fundamentally altered future rowing have had one thing in common: an open mind, unfettered by tradition, prejudice or preconception.

Steve Fairbairn

When Ned Hanlan won the World Professional Championship in 1880, there was already change in the air in Great Britain. Whether the English Orthodox establishment liked it or not, sliding seats had the inherent capacity to transform rowing, and it was only a matter of time before the cork came out of the bottle.

The Tidewater clubs, principally Thames and London, sharing their waters with professional scullers and coaches and never in the thrall of Oxbridge Orthodoxy, were already changing in the 1870s in response to sliding seats, placing more emphasis on initial leg drive,⁶⁴⁹ and we shall see that one man in particular, **Joe Sadler** (1839-1889), the World Professional Sculling Champion from 1874 to 1876, was even coaching one of the colleges at Cambridge with great success.

The man who would bring Classical Technique right to the heart of English University rowing was, like Hanlan, another far-flung colonist. Born into a well-to-do Australian farming family of Scottish descent, **Stephen Fairbairn** (1862-1938) would come to Britain to attend Cambridge University and would actually have the opportunity to see Hanlan row shortly after his arrival.

A descendent of generations of exceptional athletes, Fairbairn spent his



Fairbairn on Rowing

Concurrent Classical Technique in Fairbairn's day



FISA 2004 DVD

Concurrent Classical Technique in the 2004 U.S. Olympic Eight

In both cases, legs and backs were caught in the middle of their motions, and while arms and shoulders were straining, outside elbows had yet to begin to break.

secondary school years at **Geelong Grammar School**, near Melbourne in the Australian State of Victoria, , and to say that he excelled in cricket, rugby football, track, swimming, gymnastics and rowing would be a pitiful understatement.⁶⁵⁰

He was a large man with inexhaustible energy. At the age of 14, he walked across

⁶⁴⁹ Bourne, *Memories*, pp. 95, 105

⁶⁵⁰ *Fairbairn of Jesus*, p. 41

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jcbc.jesus.cam.ac.uk

Jesus College Boat Club

The College Arms consist of the shield of Bishop John Alcock (1430-1500), consisting of three cock's heads and his golden mitre surrounded by a red border bearing the red crowns of the See of Ely, of which he was bishop when he founded Jesus College, Cambridge in 1496.

In Fairbairn's day, JCBC rowed with black blades with a band at the tip made up of diagonal swaths of black and red, as shown with the oar at the beginning of this chapter. Today Jesus rows with black blades with two narrow red stripes near the tip, as shown above.

Tasmania with his brother and a cousin, making 90 miles in their first 36 hours. That set the tone for the rest of his extraordinary life.

On top of other athletic endeavors, he thought nothing of walking 40 miles a day for many days in a row. He once walked from London to Inverness, Scotland. On holiday when he first got to England, before breakfast he would run up the tourist trail by himself to the top of Mt. Skiddaw, 3,000 feet (900m) of vertical climbing, and then take on more challenging hikes with his companions during the rest of the day. On a bet, he once canoed from Putney to Henley, 62 miles or 100km including a detour, through locks, against the current and into a

headwind, in 23 hours. Unfortunately, he never collected on the wager.⁶⁵¹

When Steve was still 15, his older brother George came home from Cambridge University where he had won the Ladies' Plate in 1876 rowing for **Jesus College**.

Steve's son, **Ian Fairbairn**: "The young Steve was greatly impressed by the ensuing controversy between his brother and the local rowing talent, in which controversy the self-taught methods of rowing prevailed, and George Fairbairn was converted from the traditionalism which he had imbibed at Cambridge.

⁶⁵¹ *Fairbairn of Jesus*, p. 44 ff

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“Two years later, in 1879, Steve’s second brother, Charles, returned in like circumstances, having rowed 6 in the winning Cambridge crew of that year and 4 in the Jesus crew which won the Grand.”⁶⁵²

When Charles, too, was converted, Steve never forgot. When he later followed in the footsteps of his brothers to England, he was predisposed to be skeptical of the English Orthodox rowing he would find there.

Fairbairn: “In my last year at [Geelong], I coached the school boat from stroke, and we won the Public Schools of Victoria Boatrace. This is a big event.”⁶⁵³

In the fall of 1881, he became the fifth of six brothers to enroll at Jesus College.⁶⁵⁴

Steve in Britain

Here was the state of English rowing as Steve Fairbairn arrived:

Sliding seats had been introduced into the Boat Race only eight years earlier. They were still quite short, and they were not well understood or appreciated at the Universities.

Thames Rowing Club⁶⁵⁵ and **London Rowing Club** had adapted quickly to longer slides and a more natural, less rigid approach to technique. At Henley, the Metropolitan crews were dominating the more conservative crews from Oxford and Cambridge.

In London on November 15, 1880, Canadian **Ned Hanlan** had wrested the World Professional Singles Championship from Australian **Edward Trickett**.⁶⁵⁶

World Rowing Magazine: “Professional racing [in Australia] flourished to

the extent that it became a matter of national pride. When Trickett lost to Hanlan in 1880, the result was considered to be a national calamity, such was the importance of the sport.”⁶⁵⁷

Hanlan then defended his title against another Australian, **Elias Laycock**, in London on February 14, 1881. Metropolitan amateur and professional rowers were carefully watching Hanlan as he rowed his revolutionary Classical Technique on the longest slides yet seen.

Steve Fairbairn did not arrive in time to see either of these matches, nor is it likely that he was present when Hanlan defeated Englishman **Robert Boyd** in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne in the north of England on April 3, 1882, just two days after Steve’s first appearance in the Boat Race, but it seems reasonable to speculate that Steve, an enthusiastic 19-year-old Australian rower transplanted to Cambridge, might have made the effort to get to London to join the massive throngs watching his fellow Australian Trickett try to regain the World title from Hanlan less than a month later on Monday, May 1, 1882. The date was a week before the start of the May Bumps.

The Times of London: “No doubt the cause of the enormous attendance was the desire to see the perfection of sculling as exhibited by Hanlan, who is without doubt the most accomplished sculler of this or any other age.”⁶⁵⁸

Sporting Life, London: “Hanlan’s sculling was worth travelling a hundred miles to see.”⁶⁵⁹

In his writings, Fairbairn never once mentioned Ned Hanlan, the man who had won the World Professional Championship

⁶⁵² *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 19

⁶⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 236

⁶⁵⁴ Mendenhall, Ch. XVI, p. 1

⁶⁵⁵ They row with black blades with a single stripe of red and white dashes near the tip.

⁶⁵⁶ See Chapter 11.

⁶⁵⁷ Melissa S. Bray, *Racing for cash – the era of professional scullers*, *World Rowing Magazine*, April, 2009, p. 4

⁶⁵⁸ *The Sculling Championship*, *The Times* of London, May 2, 1882, p. 12

⁶⁵⁹ Qtd. by Harding, p. 25

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away from Trickett, the hero of his homeland of Australia, except to relate how surprised Hanlan was in 1884 when he eventually lost his championship to Australian Bill Beach^{660, 661} but the slide length that Fairbairn adopted at Jesus came right from Hanlan, and the mid-1880s technique that would become associated with Fairbairn's name was strikingly similar to that of the Canadian.

Influences on Steve Fairbairn

In Steve's first year in England, he started out by winning the Cambridge freshman championship at hammer and shot-put.

Geoffrey Page, respected *Daily and Sunday Telegraph* rowing correspondent, artist, and author of the superb *Hear the Boat Sing, The History of the Thames Rowing Club*: "He rowed for Cambridge [in the Boat Race] as a freshman and said that the crew was the worst that he had ever rowed in."⁶⁶²

Steve Fairbairn: "I came to England prepared to find the varsity style not to perfection. I found London and Thames winning most of the races at Henley and rowing differently from the varsity style, much the same as the Melbourne crews, also Jesus College, Cambridge."⁶⁶³

Page: "**Joe Sadler** had coached the Jesus crews in the 1870s on *blade-work and not on body form*. These crews were outstandingly successful on the Cam and at Henley. [my emphasis]"⁶⁶⁴

Steve: "When I went to Cambridge in the year 1881, the Jesus men told me that they had got Joe Sadler, the Champion professional sculler, to coach them, and he

taught them to concentrate on working the oar to move the boat."⁶⁶⁵

"Under this coaching, which was a great departure from the Orthodox teaching, the Jesus crews were very successful. They won the Ladies' Plate five times. They won the Grand and Stewards' in 1879. The Jesus men told me that **W.B. Woodgate**,⁶⁶⁶ a very great judge of rowing, wrote that the Jesus crews would have won the Boatrace for the last ten years if they had not been hampered by oarsmen from the other colleges."⁶⁶⁷

"I do not claim to have come to England and taught the English rowing, but finding the Jesus men were rowing differently from the other colleges, I carried on their ideas of leg-work and blade-work, a style started by Joe Sadler . . . so I started with my two maxims: 'Get the crew to concentrate on working the oars [and not the body]' and 'Mileage makes champions.'"⁶⁶⁸

After the Boat Race, in the middle of his very first rowing practice in the Jesus College Mays Boat of 1882, Steve told the man on shore who had been appointed by the Captain, **Arthur Hutchinson**, to coach them, "Do you mind not talking to the crew; your talking is upsetting their rowing."⁶⁶⁹

Fairbairn: "I had tubbed the crew to work their blades, and he was talking body form. That is the difference between the old teaching and *my* method of coaching. [my emphasis]"⁶⁷⁰

No matter its origin, on the first day Steve Fairbairn had already taken personal ownership of this revolutionary alternative to English Orthodox Technique, and from that time forward, he coached all of his Jesus crews from within the boat.

⁶⁶⁰ See Chapter 11.

⁶⁶¹ *Fairbairn of Jesus*, p. 72

⁶⁶² Page, p. 28

⁶⁶³ Qtd. by Page, p. 28

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 29

⁶⁶⁵ *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 487

⁶⁶⁶ See Chapter 12.

⁶⁶⁷ *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 488

⁶⁶⁸ Qtd. by Page, p. 28

⁶⁶⁹ *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 350

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 350

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Page: “Steve lengthened the slides in the Jesus boat from eight inches to fourteen. There was the usual outcry that accompanies all departures from the traditional, which Steve found surprising since London and Thames were successful at Henley [with the longer slides].”⁶⁷¹

Joe Sadler alone could not have been the originator of the technique that Fairbairn began to teach at Jesus. Steve’s brothers had been coached by Sadler in the 1870s, and yet they had to be converted to the more natural technique being rowed in Melbourne when they returned home, and Steve had to replace Sadler’s slides in the Jesus boats with longer Hanlanesque slides. No, Sadler laid the foundation at Jesus by making the initial break from Orthodoxy, and even though Steve continually gave him credit, it was Fairbairn who then formulated an approach that drew from what he had seen and experienced all around him.

From Australian and Tideway amateur rowing, Steve appropriated a more natural and less rigid approach to technique. From Joe Sadler, he adopted the concept of focusing on blade-work and not body-work. He then added the longer slides originated by Ned Hanlan and the “Mileage makes champions” motto derived from the examples among Australian and British professionals⁶⁷² and from his own active life.

1882

With Sadler coaching, Jesus had been Mays Head of the River every year since 1875. In 1882, with Fairbairn and four other freshmen aboard⁶⁷³ and only Hutchinson left over from the previous Mays winner,⁶⁷⁴

Jesus retained their title under Fairbairn’s coaching.

With Steve and Hutch, they would remain Head of the River until 1886, when Steve had taken seriously ill with jaundice.⁶⁷⁵

At Henley in 1882, Hutch and Steve rowed 2 and 3 in the winning Wyfold Four for Jesus and in addition rowed in the Grand Challenge Cup for **Kingston R.C.**,⁶⁷⁶ one of the older Metropolitan amateur clubs. Also in the Kingston eight was G.C. “Beja” Bourne,⁶⁷⁷ who would become a great rowing coach and writer and also a friend of Steve’s for life.⁶⁷⁸

1883

Steve rowed in his second Blue Boat in 1883 and found the coaching even more disagreeable than the previous year. He then took the Jesus Mays Head of the River boat with himself in 7⁶⁷⁹ and entered the Grand at Henley. After being level at half distance, they were put out in the first round by London Rowing Club. Then in the Stewards’ Cup heats, London also put out the Jesus ‘82 Wyfold-winning four with himself in 3.

1884

Having learned his lesson, Fairbairn refused the invitation to represent Cambridge for a third time in the Boat Race in 1884.

After Jesus again went Head of the River, Steve represented Thames Rowing Club at Henley.

⁶⁷¹ Page, pp. 28-9

⁶⁷² See Chapter 131.

⁶⁷³ Durack et al, *The Bumps*, database

⁶⁷⁴ Page, p. 28

⁶⁷⁵ Durack et al, op cit.

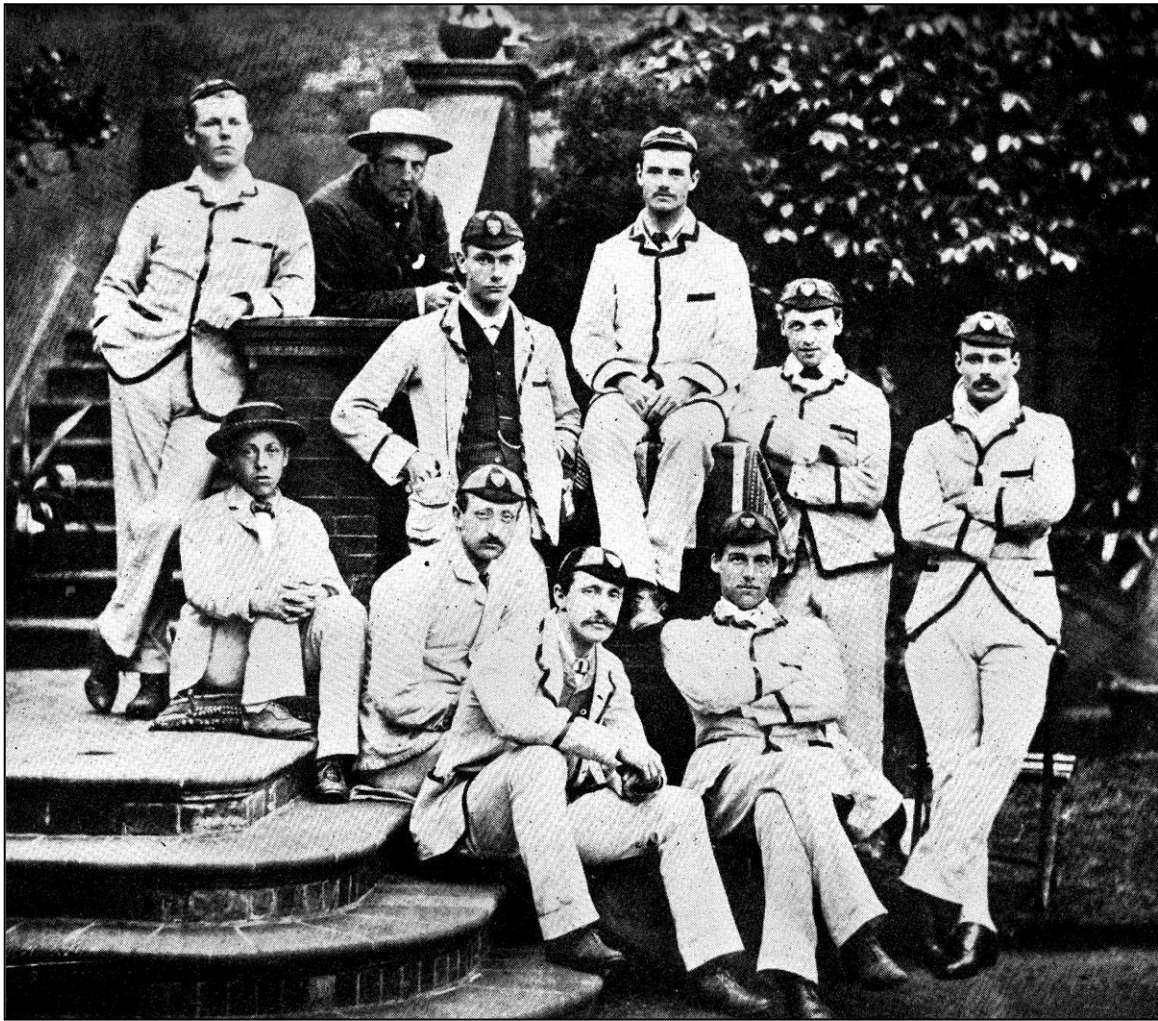
⁶⁷⁶ They row with red blades.

⁶⁷⁷ Paige, p. 17

⁶⁷⁸ See Chapter 16.

⁶⁷⁹ His 1883 oar is illustrated at the beginning of this chapter.

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Brittain, *The Jesus College Boat Club*

1885 Jesus College First May Boat

Head of the River, Grand Challenge Cup Winners

Top: 4 **E.P. Alexander** 12st. 11lb. 77 kg, Coach **T.E. Hockin**, 3 **H.A. Armytage** 10st. 7lb. 67kg,
2 **L.P. Bevan** 10st. 5lb. 66kg, Bow **H.S.J.A. Sanford** 10st. 4lb. 65 kg,

7 **Steve Fairbairn** 12st. 13lb. 82 kg,

Bottom: Coxswain **C.E. Tyndale-Biscoe** 8st. 9lb. 55 kg, 6 **A.M. Hutchinson** 11st. 7lb. 73 kg,
Stroke **C.H. Bicknell** 10st. 3lb. 65 kg, 5 **J.W. Dickson** 11st. 2lb. 71 kg

Paige: “[Steve] learnt something in turn from Thames men, not least **Jimmie Hastie**, whom he quotes frequently in his writings.”⁶⁸⁰

“Hastie won over two hundred races on the river, and his Henley tally was the

Goblets three times, Grand, Stewards’ and Thames twice each, and Wyfold once.

“In *A Textbook of Oarsmanship*, **G.C. Bourne** paid his tribute to Hastie: ‘When I attempt to conjure up out of my memory an ideal oarsman . . . I think of the late Mr. J. Hastie of the Thames Rowing Club, whose vigorous and perfectly balanced action, free

⁶⁸⁰ Page, p. 29

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from all affectation of unnecessary ornament, has rarely been equaled and never been surpassed.’

“He is one of the Thames immortals.”⁶⁸¹

In 1884 with Steve aboard, Thames lost in the heats for the Grand by half a length to the eventual winners from London R.C., but Steve’s Thames four with himself at 3 and Hutchinson stroking won the Wyfold Fours by three lengths in its final over Marlow and London Rowing Clubs.

1885

In 1885, Steve again passed up the Boat Race and focused on Jesus College. After going Head of the River for the fourth consecutive year under his leadership, he took them to the Grand at Henley. In the final they drew the Berks station and met London R.C. (Bucks) and Twickenham R.C. (centre).

The Times of London: “Twickenham and London came away at a very fast stroke, and the former rowed so fast that below Remenham they led Jesus by half a length. At the Farm, Jesus reduced Twickenham’s lead materially, while London were three-quarters of a length astern. At Fawley Court, a tremendous race ensued between Jesus and Twickenham, but the latter were strong enough to keep in front, and half-way over the course led by half a length. Passing the little bridge, Twickenham improved their position slightly, but the slack water told in favor of Jesus and prevented Twickenham getting away.

“At the Horse-barrier, Twickenham led by half a length. Below Poplar Point, Jesus went up to the leaders fast, and at the Point itself they were nearly level. In the stretch reach home to the finish, Jesus under the towpath went back ahead fast and won a well-rowed race by a length and three-

⁶⁸¹ Ibid, p. 24

quarters, London the same distance behind Twickenham. Time 7min. 22sec.”⁶⁸²

According to Page, at less than 156 lb. or 70 kg average, this Jesus boat was the lightest boat ever to win the Grand Challenge Cup, before or since, “but what was more important to Steve was that the Leander crew who lost [to Twickenham] in a heat, contained the six best men from that year’s Cambridge crew, and his methods were being proved on a tough battlefield.”⁶⁸³

For the rest of his life, Steve would point back to this boat with great pride.

Fairbairn: “I won the Grand in 1885 with the College May boat, the only time that has been done. All other winning College crews have had old hands to strengthen them.”⁶⁸⁴

Not a single member of this boat had been chosen by Cambridge for the Boat Race in 1885.

1886

In 1886, when Fairbairn agreed to return to the Cambridge Blue Boat after a two year absence, he had the credibility to bring long slides with him after Jesus had won the Grand Challenge Cup using them.

The 1886 Boat Race was a great win for Cambridge and will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 15.

Page: “Steve did not confine his coaching to Jesus, and the extent of his influence can be judged by the remarkable results at Henley in 1886 and 1887. Steve claimed⁶⁸⁵ that, in these two years, the winners of every race at Henley, with the sole exception of the London eight that won the Thames Cup in 1886, had been through

⁶⁸² Henley Royal Regatta, *The Times* of London, July 4, 1885

⁶⁸³ Page, p. 28

⁶⁸⁴ *Fairbairn of Jesus*, p. 64

⁶⁸⁵ *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 352

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Richard Curry

Jesus College / Thames R.C. Coxless-Pair

Stroke **Steve Fairbairn** 189 lb. 86 kg, Bow **Arthur Hutchinson** 170 lb. 77 kg

They represented Thames in the Goblets in 1887, but this photo is from 1898 representing Jesus.

“An old JCBC oarsman sat in on one of my lectures and produced this picture, which he had found amongst some ‘junk’ while he was in Cambridge. I think it is unique.” – **Mike Spracklen**

his hands and were all rowing on the principles he taught.”⁶⁸⁶

For 1886, that included his and Hutch’s winning Thames R.C. four in the Stewards’ Cup, the second Thames four in winning the Wyfold Fours, his Cambridge Blue Boat teammates F.I. Pitman in the Diamond Sculls and F.E. Churchill and S.D. Muttelbury⁶⁸⁷ in the Silver Goblets, Pembroke College, Cambridge⁶⁸⁸ in the Ladies’ Plate, First Trinity, Cambridge in

the Visitors’ Cup and Trinity Hall, Cambridge⁶⁸⁹ in the Grand Challenge Cup.

Steve: “I coached the Hall in ‘86 before the May races and laid the foundation of leg-work and blade-work taught me by Jesus men, a style started by Joe Sadler.”⁶⁹⁰

On September 18, 1886, Australian World Champion professional sculler **Bill Beach**, who had won his title from Ned Hanlan in 1884, defended it against Jake Gaudaur on the Thames championship

⁶⁸⁶ Page, p. 29

⁶⁸⁷ See Chapter 15.

⁶⁸⁸ Their blades are Cambridge blue with a band near the tip made up of diagonal swaths of navy and Cambridge blue.

⁶⁸⁹ not to be confused with Trinity College, Cambridge. Trinity Hall rows with black blades with a white band at the neck.

⁶⁹⁰ Qtd. by Page, p. 29

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course in London. Fairbairn was watching from an eight rowing just ahead of the two scullers during the match, rooting for and betting on his countryman.

Fairbairn: “The best race I ever saw rowed was a sculling race between Bill Beach and Jake Gaudaur (or Jack Goodall, as the tongue-tied Putney watermen called him).”⁶⁹¹

Later he called Beach “the finest sculler I ever saw.”⁶⁹²

1887

In 1887, after another win in the Boat Race, Steve’s three personal Thames R.C. entries at Henley were each eliminated by opponents that he had coached.

Charles Luckman: “The Trinity Hall 1st and 2nd eights won five of the eight events at Henley in 1887, due in no small measure to the influence of Steve Fairbairn emanating from the Jesus boathouse next door.

“In THBC circles, 1887 is still referred to as the *annus mirabilis*.”⁶⁹³

On the first day of the regatta, Trinity Hall won over Thames in a close race in their Stewards’ heats, and then Third Trinity’s coxless-pair of Barclay and Muttelbury from Steve’s 1886 and 1887 Cambridge Blue Boats disposed of Fairbairn and Hutchinson in their Goblets heat after they had kept it close for more than a mile.

Fairbairn: “We were beaten after one of the most enjoyable and best races I ever rowed, by a very good pair, rowing for the Goblets alone whilst we were rowing for the Grand and Stewards’ as well.”⁶⁹⁴

“We got away beautifully, but they led us. ‘No pair can live at this pace,’ I thought,

but they kept just ahead. We rowed every stroke perfectly true and very well together, and I confidently expected the other pair to come back, but they hung on just half a length ahead. We were rowed to a standstill and stopped about one hundred yards from home.

“I looked around, and Hutchinson was in a glorious state of exhaustion. I gave a yell, ‘Up!’ and we had a last go, and a very fine spurt we made, but we were beaten by half a length.”⁶⁹⁵

In the Grand on the final day, Trinity Hall and Thames R.C. battled to the finish line with the Hall winning in 6:56.

Fairbairn: “Hutchinson and I rowed in over a hundred races at 7 and 6 in Eights and 3 and 2 in Fours. We were only beaten once when rowing 7 and 6, and that was in ‘87 in the final of the Grand, which we lost by eighteen inches. This was only because the Hall’s crew’s oars struck the water just before the finish and we struck just after.”⁶⁹⁶ Our boat floated out ahead of the Hall boat.

“We were beaten five times in Eights and Fours out of over a hundred races, and we did not have the pick of men with us, like Leander.”⁶⁹⁷

Steve and Hutch were to be lifelong friends, dying within months of each other in 1938.

Freddie Brittain, speaking after Steve’s passing: “Each of the two friends was the complement to the other. Hutch’s slim figure a strong contrast to Steve’s massive frame [in later years], and he was a taciturn as Steve was loquacious. When the two were together, Hutch seldom spoke unless Steve addressed him first, and then he answered in the fewest possible words. Steve, for his part, seldom ventured on an

⁶⁹¹ *Fairbairn of Jesus*, p. 71

⁶⁹² *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 278.

⁶⁹³ Luckman, personal correspondence, 2010

⁶⁹⁴ *Fairbairn of Jesus*, p. 63

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 69-70

⁶⁹⁶ This represents a common misconception. The boat actually goes fastest after the release and slowest after the oars enter the water. See Chapter 102.

⁶⁹⁷ *Fairbairn of Jesus*, p. 69

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assertion without afterwards appealing to Hutch for his opinion before he considered the matter closed.”⁶⁹⁸

Having completed his studies in 1887, Steve then returned to his homeland. Rowing for Jesus, he had rowed twenty-five times Head of the River at Cambridge,⁶⁹⁹ each time with Arthur Hutchinson.

Afterwards

Page: “Even after he had left for Australia, so missing the [Thames R.C.] Grand wins in 1888-9, his influence persisted, the captains of both these crews writing to him to say that it was all because of his work with Thames from 1884 to 1887 that these wins had come about.”⁷⁰⁰

Steve Fairbairn had come along at a propitious moment in rowing history. Ned Hanlan had turned professional rowing on its ear, and amateur rowers in Melbourne, Australia knew better than the best at Oxford and Cambridge. Slides were virtually doubling in length along the Tideway, and since there are only so many ways they can be used effectively, it was only a matter of time before several people would figure them out. By the time Fairbairn arrived in England, there was already great rowing being done at the Metropolitan amateur clubs, and Joe Sadler had already left his mark on Jesus College.

But that does not in any way minimize what Steve himself accomplished. Until Steve Fairbairn, English Orthodox rowing had continued on undaunted in the Boat Race crews and in many of the college boathouses. Regardless of where Steve got his various inspirations, he fanned a fire

which we will eventually discover is still burning brightly today.

Concurrency

In the more than a decade from the introduction of sliding seats around 1870 to Jesus winning the Grand Challenge Cup in 1885, virtually all rowers who thought about it except Ned Hanlan had used legs and backs sequentially, backs first in English Orthodox Technique, legs first for most Thames Professionals. Along came Hanlan using concurrent legs and backs.

Sequential versus concurrent motion was and still is no trivial distinction. Hanlan dominated the world with it, and now Steve Fairbairn also came to understand it, and he began teaching it to his teammates at Jesus.

In retrospect, this was another true eureka moment in the history of rowing, as important as Egan’s long-reach innovation of 1836, because concurrent use of legs and backs had been a key innovation which Ned Hanlan used to achieve his long, smooth *Schubschlag* stroke, and now it was about to proliferate in the hands of Steve Fairbairn.

Here is a summary of what Fairbairn came to believe about rowing technique in his own, somewhat stilted, words: “The oarsman should realize that to synchronize his movements, he must pull as hard as he can at the oar [= arms] as he springs off [= back] and pushes at the stretcher [= legs]. . . The hands have got to pull at once – that is, directly the body starts to spring off the stretcher.”⁷⁰¹

A prolific writer, Fairbairn would describe his ideal stroke many times, often more comprehensibly than that last quote. For instance: “Draw freely and as hard as possible, and the **arms** will begin to bend almost at once. . . I believe that the best way to apply one’s weight right through the stroke is by letting the shoulders and arms

⁶⁹⁸ Qtd. by Page, p. 93

⁶⁹⁹ (including multiple sessions in a single year’s regatta) *Fairbairn of Jesus*, p. 63

⁷⁰⁰ Page, p. 29

⁷⁰¹ *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 398

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play as feels most natural. . . One should keep the **legs** and **back** at work right through the stroke and end it with a final whip to the oar. That gives pace to the boat. [my emphasis]”⁷⁰²

(Though Fairbairn included concurrent arms in the above quotes from later in his coaching career, there is an indication that he believed only in concurrent legs and backs during the 1880s. See Chapter 19.)

Conflicting Scientific Principles

But doesn’t concurrent use of legs and backs (and arms) directly contradict the biomechanical principle of **Summation of Segment Velocities**?⁷⁰³

Yes, it does, and you might wonder how could science possibly be wrong? Biomechanics Professor **Andrew Carter**, Head Coach at the University of Miami in Florida, provides the following perspective:

“There are many sports that require large forces, and many that require high velocities. There are only a few that require both.

“In rowing, both force applied and velocity of the oar handle (and in turn, the blade) are important, and this makes rowing a bit of an odd sport, and *two* biomechanical principles need to be applied.

“The first is indeed the principle of **Summation of Segment Velocities**, which states that the production of maximum *velocity* (in the case of rowing, maximum velocity of the hands) requires the use of joints in order, from largest to smallest: legs, then back, then arms.

“But second is the principle of **Summation of Joint Forces**, which states that the production of maximal *force* requires the simultaneous use of all joints

that can be employed. This clearly will incorporate more muscle.

“In skills calling mainly for maximum force, biomechanics holds that the athlete should perform the slower, controlled movements at high intensity. In these skills, all body segments usually move at the same time, especially if the object is heavy or if both hands are used at once.

“Now this is where I think we get into the communication problem in rowing. This can easily be misunderstood, and in turn miscommunicated to others.

“What the principle of **Summation of Segment Velocities** is actually saying is that in skills like rowing which require maximum velocity, joint *movements* should be timed sequentially - but body segments should **not** be *triggered* sequentially.

“What actually happens is that the larger, slower joints start the movement, and the smaller, faster joints each add in when the preceding joint reaches maximum velocity.

“As the principle’s name suggests, the goal is to add together angular velocities about joints in order to achieve the highest velocity at the end of the combined movement.”⁷⁰⁴

So concurrent *effort* would be the most effective strategy, even if the resulting motion appears sequential. With Hanlan and with Fairbairn, the effort *and* the motion, at least of the legs and back, were both concurrent.

Survival of the Fittest

Now evolutionary theory would lead us to expect that if there are two ways to row, **concurrent** motion and **sequential** motion, and if the distinction between the two indeed makes a significant difference, then they should compete for dominance, and at some point the competition should drive one or

⁷⁰² Ibid, p. 164

⁷⁰³ See Chapter 7.

⁷⁰⁴ Carter, personal correspondence, 2005

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the other to extinction. The genetic principle of **selection**⁷⁰⁵ would come into play. Survival of the fittest.

But in one hundred twenty-five years, it hasn't happened, and we shall soon see that the reason is that the difference between concurrent and sequential rowers is illusory, more attitude than fact, and in any case it is a means to an end. The real issue that divides rowers is **force application**: *Schubschlag* versus *Kernschlag*.

Today rowers whose joints visibly *move* more-or-less concurrently are certainly in the overwhelming majority in world rowing, and in numbers they completely dominate international sculling,⁷⁰⁶ but sequential motion in rowing remains alive and well, the late 20th Century Italians and early 21st Century Australians perhaps being its most successful adherents.

Most notably, perhaps eighty percent of North American crews, junior, senior and masters, in the first decade of the 21st Century purposefully attempt to row with sequential motion *and effort!*

The reason that neither approach has driven the other to extinction is that in order for there to be true ideological competition between two philosophical branches of rowing, coaches and rowers have to perceive that there indeed exist two viable alternatives, that they make a meaningful difference, and that one must actually choose between them.

Astonishingly, even after more than a century, neither side in the illusory concurrent-versus-sequential debate, and indeed neither side in any of the three issues that actually *are* fundamental to boat moving and which continue to divide rowing today, neither side lends any credence at all to the other side's position. Neither camp can even *imagine* abandoning its core beliefs, and so the various evolutionary branches continue side-by-side in parallel but separate universes.

That's history for you. You couldn't make it up if you tried.

⁷⁰⁵ See the Introduction.

⁷⁰⁶ although as I write this the four-time defending World Men's Singles Champion, **Mahe Drysdale** of New Zealand, is a sequential rower. See Chapter 168.

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15. The Golden Age of British Rowing

Fairbairn – Muttiebury – Rowe & Pitman – Migration

Before Fairbairn arrived, Jesus College had been using conventional (for the time) sixteen-inch tracks, which allowed slide movement of only nine inches and which terminated five inches to the bow of the “work.”⁷⁰⁷ When he left, tracks had been lengthened to twenty-three inches, nearly doubling seat travel to sixteen inches and reaching the pin.⁷⁰⁸

But Steve also left a trail of bruised egos. In a display of hubris, in 1885 Fairbairn won the University coxless-pairs title with **C.E. Tyndale-Biscoe**, his Jesus *coxswain*, in the bow-seat,⁷⁰⁹ beating, among others, all the other members of his own Jesus Mays boat.

Fairbairn: “I was dissatisfied with the day’s row in our eight, and as we were changing in the dressing-room, the others were all speculating as to who would win the Pairs.

“‘You fellows win pairs? I wish you’d do some work in the eight. I am pulling you



Rowing, Isthmian Library

Entry Position with twenty-three inch tracks

along, and the coxswain has the rudder against me.’

“That gave me an idea.

“‘You fellows win pairs? The cox and I will win them.’

“As I was talking to the Eight who rowed head of the river and won the Grand at Henley, it was a big order to talk of beating them with a cox in a pair, for I was fourteen stone [89 kg] and the cox eight stone [51 kg].”⁷¹⁰

He later called their improbable win the most remarkable race in which he had ever rowed.

⁷⁰⁷ Lehmann, *Complete*, p. 22; Lehmann *Isthmian*, p. 43

⁷⁰⁸ Lehmann, *Complete*, p. 23; Lehmann *Isthmian*, p. 43

⁷⁰⁹ *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 237, Brittain & Playford, p. 82

⁷¹⁰ *Fairbairn of Jesus*, pp. 67-8

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Historian **Chris Dodd**: “A picture of him holding the coxswain in his arms hung in the Jesus boathouse until it burned down in 1932.”⁷¹¹

Perhaps partially explaining his prickly personality, on his second day out sculling at Cambridge in 1881, the same day that he won the freshman hammer throw and shot-put, “he had a head-on collision with another sculler, the other boat striking him within an inch of his spine. Two feet of its bow broke off and were left sticking into Steve, and he reckoned that he had a blood cyst for thirty-five years after this as a result of the doctor not getting all the bits of wood out of his back. It caused him a lot of pain and nervous dyspepsia, to which he was a self-confessed martyr ever onwards.”⁷¹²

In Steve’s last two years rowing for Cambridge, they won the Boat Race both times, in 1886 taking the rating up to 40 for the last three minutes and coming back from three lengths down to a legendary win by two-thirds of a length at the line.

In both years, Steve rowed in the 5-seat.⁷¹³

In 1890, **J.A. Watson-Taylor**, Eton and Magdalene, Captain of C.U.B.C. in 1881, described the Cambridge technique during the Fairbairn era: “If I were to compare the Cambridge and Oxford crews, I would say that the main difference, in Cambridge’s favor, is that Cambridge men sit the boat better and use their legs better. A Cambridge crew looks more a part of the shell than an Oxford crew, and at the finish of the stroke you will see the knees of the Oxford men show up, while the Cambridge men finish with their legs straight and thus get a stronger finish. . . . Cambridge has a longer [body] swing, also, and she gets a

grip on the water at full reach, keeping an even power right through the stroke [*Schubschlag*]; while Oxford is inclined to mark the beginning of the stroke emphatically, which tends to a letting up in the middle [two-part segmented *Kernschlag*].

“Some men say, ‘Mark the beginning of the stroke!’ but I cannot concur in this, and there are few now who believe in it. What a man wants to do is to cover his blade at once (wasting no time) by raising his hands quickly, then put all his weight on the oar, and grind it through with his legs. He should lift the whole weight of his body on to the oar, off the stretcher. The shoulders do the work more rapidly than the legs, and really begin work first, but when the legs begin their exertion, it is a question of driving the oar through evenly and with all the force possible.

“As the arms are coming to the body at the end of the stroke, there is a certain amount of muscular exertion on their part, but not much. If a man tries to use his arms much in a four-mile race, he will find they will give out, and then he is of little use. The last kick of the legs is given as the arms are being drawn in toward the body, but there is nothing marked about it.”^{714, 715}

Fairbairn’s innovative approach to technique brought about a sea change to rowing in the Boat Race, but it by no means drove English Orthodoxy to extinction. It must be remembered that at no time were the majority of British rowers even aware of the existence of Classical Technique or of Steve Fairbairn. If Steve coached at Jesus,

⁷¹¹ Dodd, *Henley*, p. 132

⁷¹² Ibid

⁷¹³ Rowe & Pitman, pp. 308-9

⁷¹⁴ We shall discover that even though this paragraph concerning arm usage may or may not be an accurate description of the 1880s Cambridge technique, it does not conform to Fairbairn’s later coaching, thinking or writing. See Chapter 19.

⁷¹⁵ Qtd. by Rowing at Universities, *The New York Times*, March 2, 1890

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and at a smattering of other Cambridge colleges, and on the Tideway, and if he impacted the Cambridge Blue Boat, there were still all the other colleges at Cambridge and at Oxford with coaches carrying on with English Orthodox Technique just as before.

It turns out that the two approaches were like oil and water. Even when you mixed them, eventually they separated again of their own accord, and so without constant reinforcement, isolated islands of Classical Technique quickly succumbed to the onslaughts of the English Orthodox establishment. Nevertheless, early in the 20th Century, twenty-two years after Steve's last row for Cambridge, Fairbairnism would begin to become a formidable movement in world rowing.

Haig-Thomas & Nicholson

Peter Haig-Thomas was an Etonian, four-time Cambridge Blue (1902-5) and three-time Boat Race winner. He won the Grand three times, the Stewards' three times and the Goblets once. As a coach he won the Grand three more times and was mainly responsible for thirteen Cambridge Boat Race victories between the two world wars.⁷¹⁶

Matthew Archibald Nicholson was another Etonian, the 1947 Cambridge President who stood down and never got his Blue, and then won the Boat Race as coach in 1949 and 50 for Cambridge and 1951 for Oxford.

In 1958, when the two of them wrote an influential book, *The English Style of Rowing*, the two great branches of rowing, English Orthodox and Fairbairn, had divided the British rowing community into two camps which by then had been engaged in a bitter war for half a century.

Haig-Thomas and Nicholson were decidedly anti-Fairbairn in their loyalties:

⁷¹⁶ Haig-Thomas & Nicholson, p. 14

“‘So-called Orthodoxy’ has acquired a bad name for some reason or other and is synonymous with a style in which the crew is stiff, lacking in leg drive and, on putting its oars in the water, backs the boat down.”⁷¹⁷

They mentioned no individual by name in describing the change initiated by Fairbairn at Cambridge: “By 1886 or a year or two earlier, Cambridge had learnt the proper combination of [body] swing and slide, in which both are driven back together on the entry until the slide reaches the back stop at the same moment as the hands reach the body [concurrency].”⁷¹⁸

The 1886 stroke-oar who had rallied the Cambridge Blue Boat to win from behind spectacularly was **Frederick I. “Freddie” Pitman** (1863-1942), one of eight brothers from the family of the famous “Rowe & Pitman” stock-brokers.⁷¹⁹ They all went to Eton, and they all rowed.⁷²⁰ Freddie went on to win the Diamond Sculls three months after stroking his 1886 victorious Blue Boat.⁷²¹

Twelve years later, Pitman's younger brother, **Charles Murray “Cherry” Pitman** (1872-1948), himself Captain of the Boats at Eton and winner of the School Pulling and Sculling, a member of New College, Oxford⁷²³ and four-time winner of the Boat Race,⁷²⁴ would write in collaboration with his 1892 Oxford Blue Boat teammate, **Reginald Percy Pfeiffer**

⁷¹⁷ Ibid, p. 13

⁷¹⁸ Ibid, p. 34

⁷¹⁹ Diana Cook, personal correspondence, 2005

⁷²⁰ By 1932, fourteen Pitmans had rowed for Eton College.

⁷²¹ Rowe & Pitman, p. 324

⁷²² G.O. Nickalls, *Rainbows*, p. 94

⁷²³ Burnell, R., *Oxford/Cambridge*, p. 40. They row with purple blades with two thin yellow stripes near the tip.

⁷²⁴ 1892-5

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“Reggie”⁷²⁵ Rowe (1868-1945), the peerless book *Rowing*, the second volume of the *Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes* devoted to rowing after the previously-mentioned Woodgate volume, *Boating*, of 1888.⁷²⁶ The new work, their era’s definitive rowing bible, was inevitably referred to familiarly as “**Rowe & Pitman**.”

Back in 1886, the man rowing in the winning Cambridge Blue Boat 6-seat, directly in front of Steve Fairbairn in 5, had been stroke-seat F.I. Pitman’s enormous Eton and Third Trinity⁷²⁷ teammate, **Stanley Duff Muttlebury** (1866-1933). Fairbairn had recruited Muttlebury to help him install his preferred longer slides in their Cambridge shell. The two of them “set to work on the boat with screwdrivers.”⁷²⁸

That come-from-behind Cambridge win in 1886 was additionally memorable, being only their second victory of that decade, and it began a Cambridge dynasty.

After the elder Pitman completed his studies in 1886, Muttlebury rowed four more years in the Cambridge boat, rowing again right in front of Fairbairn in 1887, and going on to win the Boat Race for a total of four years in a row,⁷²⁹ the only Cantabridgian to do so in Boat Race history until the 1970s.⁷³⁰



Vanity Fair, March 26, 1895

“Cherry” Pitman 12 st. 68 kg

Sir Leslie Ward, aka “**Spy**,” an Etonian, is perhaps the best remembered of the weekly *Vanity Fair* caricaturists. He contributed 1,325 portraits, more than half the magazine’s total output between 1873 and 1911. *Vanity Fair* published sixty portraits of current or former rowers. Forty-one were by “Spy.”

After completing his studies in 1887, Fairbairn returned to Australia.

With the perspective of nearly three decades, Muttlebury’s 1888 crew was described by historian **Gilbert C. Bourne** as “without a doubt one of the finest crews ever sent by either University to Putney. The

⁷²⁵ V. Nickalls, p. 35

⁷²⁶ See Chapter 12.

⁷²⁷ **Third Trinity Boat Club** is a rowing club of Trinity College, Cambridge University. It was founded in 1833. First Trinity was founded in 1825, and Second Trinity, no longer in existence, in 1831. Membership in Third Trinity was originally confined to Old Etonians and Old Westminsters. The two remaining clubs merged to form **First and Third Trinity Boat Club** in 1946. They row with blue blades with a yellow band at the neck.

⁷²⁸ Dodd, *Henley*, p. 132

⁷²⁹ Rowe & Pitman, pp. 308-10

⁷³⁰ Dodd, *Oxford/Cambridge*, p. 118. History’s only other Cambridge four-time winner has been **Chris Baillieu**. See Chapter 130.

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Vanity Fair, March 22, 1890

Stanley Duff Muttelbury 13st. 10lb. 87 kg

boat travelled so smoothly and the oarsmen seemed to be exerting themselves so little, that it was difficult to believe that it was going as fast or the oarsmen were working as hard as they actually did.”⁷³¹

But who got the credit for having brought concurrent legs and backs and *Schubschlag* effort on long slides to University rowing? Both Pitmans gave it to Freddie’s classmate Muttelbury with *no mention at all* of Fairbairn!

Freddie Pitman: “At that time, the full length of the slide had just come into use, at any rate at the Universities. Coaches had very limited knowledge of how it could be used to the best advantage. Muttelbury showed them how it could be done; no one ever excelled him.”⁷³²

Cherry Pitman: “He swung right down forward, and, lifting his body straight off the stretcher, used his great weight in combination with leg-drive with immense effect.”⁷³³

Muttelbury must have been quite a memorable character. Fellow Etonian **Vivian Nickalls**⁷³⁴ (1871-1947) related an amusing anecdote that occurred at the Marlow Regatta towards the end of the 1880s: “Thames [R.C.] had the reputation of being able to beat the starter, and Leander, for whom Muttelbury was rowing, thought they had been beaten at the start at Henley [the week before] by Thames getting off before the word, and so gaining the quarter of a length by which they eventually won.

⁷³¹ Bourne, *Textbook*, p. 8

⁷³² Obituary, Mr. S.D. Muttelbury, *The Times* of London, May 6, 1933

⁷³³ Rowe & Pitman, p. 77

⁷³⁴ See Chapter 24.

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Author

Cherry Pitman's 1890 School Pulling and 1st VIII Oar Now displayed in the Eton Eight Room

Bow **J.L. Wood** 10st. 13 lb. 69 kg, 2 **E.H.C. Bald** 10st. 12lb. 69 kg,
3 **C.M. Pitman** 11st. 4lb. 72 kg, 4 **T.G. Matheson** 12st. 2lb. 77 kg,
5 **Vivian Nickalls** 12st. 0lb. 76 kg, 6 **P.C. Shelbrooke** 11st. 3lb. 71 kg,
7 **T.G.E. Lewis** 10st. 13lb. 69 kg, Stroke **E.L. Lee** 11st. 6lb. 73 kg,
Coxswain **M. Barne** 7st. 0lb. 44 kg

Vivian Nickalls will be discussed further in Chapter 24.

"At Marlow, Muttelbury said, 'What'll you do, Mr. Starter, if Thames get off before the word?'"

"'Call them back!' was the reply.

"The starter, with his eyes glued on Thames, asked 'Are you ready?' – and away went Muttelbury and beat the starter himself and also Thames, and so turned the tables."⁷³⁵

What's in a Name?

English Orthodox Technique had firmly established itself over the half century since Egan and Shadwell. Then came Fairbairn, inspired by the examples of Melbourne rowing and/or Ned Hanlan and/or Jimmie Hastie and/or Joe Sadler, and the new era ushered in by Cambridge's 1886 Boat Race victory became English rowing's **Golden Age**.

Haig-Thomas & Nicholson recognized that a sea change had occurred beginning with the 1886 Light Blue Boat. They called

the new approach "**The English Style**," and they contrasted it with English Orthodoxy of their era and also with the teachings of 20th Century followers of Steve Fairbairn.

Haig-Thomas & Nicholson: "Nearly all crews from the early eighties till 1914 tried to row the English Style, which was very like the way the best American crews row today [1958] and not in the least like what passes for 'Orthodoxy' in most present-day crews which adopt this term to describe themselves."⁷³⁶

History will show that this new approach to rowing technique transcends any one man, Sadler or Muttelbury, even Hanlan or Fairbairn, and Haig-Thomas & Nicholson noted that it strongly resembled the 20th Century Conibear Stroke that had evolved in the United States,⁷³⁷ so it also transcends any one country, even mother England. With due respect to Haig-Thomas & Nicholson and with the advantage of

⁷³⁵ V. Nickalls, p. 42

⁷³⁶ Haig-Thomas & Nicholson, p. 35

⁷³⁷ See Chapter 36 ff.

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Vanity Fair, April 8, 1897

D.H. "Ducker" McLean

13st. 83 kg

Two-time Boat Race winner,
six times more as Oxford coach.

hindsight, the name "Classical Technique" captures its universality far better than "The English Style."

Migration

The advance in technique that Fairbairn had introduced to the Tideway and to the Boat Race did not stay long exclusively at Cambridge or at Thames Rowing Club. In 1888, indeed it *was* Muttelbury who spread by example Hanlan's revolutionary innovations to Coach **Rudie Lehmann's**

team at Leander Club,⁷³⁸ where the ideas were immediately embraced.

Lehmann wrote a poem about his famous Cambridge recruit:

Muttel at 6 is stylish,
So at least the *Field* reports;
No man has ever worn, I trow,
So short a pair of shorts.
His blade sweeps through the water,
As he swings his 13.10⁷³⁹
And pulls it all, and more than all,
That brawny king of men.⁷⁴⁰

Two of the men rowing behind Muttelbury at Leander Club that summer of 1888 were former Eton teammates of his, **Guy Nickalls**⁷⁴¹ (1866-1935) and **Claude "Tooley" Holland**,⁷⁴² who had rowed 6 and bow respectively in the losing Oxford boat three months earlier.

Nine months later, when these two moved down to stern pair for the Dark Blues in the 1889 Boat Race, they brought with them to Oxford the new Classical Technique they had learned from Muttelbury at Leander.

Fairbairn: "The two most powerful Etonian oarsmen I ever saw, Muttelbury and Guy Nickalls, rowed with exactly the same movements as my crews come to."⁷⁴³

In 1890, after Muttelbury had taken his leave of Cambridge, Oxford began an eight-race winning streak.⁷⁴⁴ The Oxford coaches were **Douglas Hamilton "Ducker" McLean**, Etonian and teammate to Nickalls and Holland in the 1887 Oxford Blue Boat that Fairbairn and Muttelbury had beaten, and then **William Alfred Littledale "Flea" Fletcher**, member of the first four Oxford

⁷³⁸ Dodd, *Oxford/Cambridge*, p. 126

⁷³⁹ 192 lbs. 87 kg

⁷⁴⁰ Qtd. by Dodd, *Henley*, p. 132

⁷⁴¹ See Chapter 24.

⁷⁴² Dodd, *Oxford/Cambridge*, p. 126

⁷⁴³ *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 485

⁷⁴⁴ another example of evolutionary migration between the two British Universities.

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winners from 1890 to 1893 and coach periodically thereafter.

Haig-Thomas & Nicholson: “D.H. McLean, who coached most, if not all, of the winning Oxford crews of the nineties, had previously claimed that the spring back of the body should start first and the slide should instantly follow it, but after seeing the Cambridge crews of 1888-9, he adopted their methods.”⁷⁴⁵

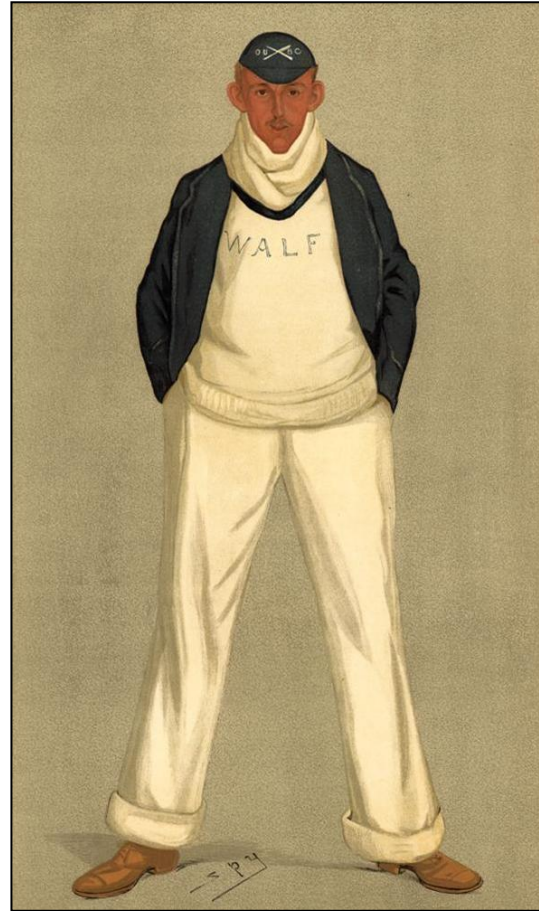
McLean was quoted as saying, “We did not understand rowing till **Steve Fairbairn** came over and taught us.”⁷⁴⁶

Haig-Thomas & Nicholson: “The passage of this ‘amateur’ style to and fro between the Universities can be traced, and it is impossible to escape the conclusion that success followed it and only ceased when the principles behind it were neglected by one University and adopted by the other.”⁷⁴⁷

When Flea Fletcher switched from coaching Oxford to Cambridge in 1898, the Light Blues had already forgotten the principles of Classical Technique that Fairbairn had taught their predecessors just a decade earlier. Fletcher brought them back. Cambridge won in 1900 by twenty lengths, tying the course record.

However, tracing the original spread of the Fairbairn innovation was still getting confused as late as 1925 by historian **Gilbert C. Bourne**: “The most effective and therefore the most correct way of using a long slide was introduced in this country by the Canadian **Ned Hanlan**. After his arrival in 1879, he astonished everybody by the ease with which he romped away from much more powerful opponents in a succession of contests for the Championship of England and the Championship of the World.

“The tideway amateur clubs [including Thames and London Rowing Clubs], then in



Vanity Fair, March 18, 1893

W.A.L. “Flea” Fletcher
6’3” 191 cm 190 lb. 86 kg
Four-time Boat Race winner,
five times more as coach.

the heyday of their power, were not slow to profit by his example. Some years later the Universities, Cambridge under the influence of **Mr. Muttlebury**, followed suit.”⁷⁴⁸

Bourne’s Chronology was:

1879 Hanlan
1880 Tideway clubs
1886 Cambridge Blue Boat via Muttlebury

The correct chronology was:

1870s Tideway clubs

⁷⁴⁵ Haig-Thomas & Nicholson, p. 34

⁷⁴⁶ *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 115

⁷⁴⁷ Haig-Thomas & Nicholson, pp. 29-30

⁷⁴⁸ Bourne, Textbook, p. 136

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1879 Hanlan
1882 Jesus via Fairbairn
1884 Thames via Fairbairn
1886 Cambridge Blue Boat via Fairbairn
1888 Leander via Muttiebury
1889 Oxford via Nickalls, Holland
1898 Back to Cambridge via Fletcher

It was only decades after Steve Fairbairn had returned from Australia to England in 1904 to become coach of Jesus College that he began to receive *some* of the credit he deserved for the University long-slide revolution he had started in 1882, but until 1991 when **Geoffrey Page** wrote *Hear the Boat Sing, The History of the Thames Rowing Club*, the significance of his role early on had not been fully recognized.

By attacking the status quo, Steve was to become famous . . . and infamous . . . for the impact that he would eventually have on British rowing, but all too few have fully realized that it was Steve Fairbairn who actually ushered in the Golden Age of English rowing in the first place.

S.D. Muttiebury, a truly extraordinary oarsman, a celebrity in his day, later a stockbroker and Honorable Treasurer of the Islington War Pensions, has become an asterisk in rowing history in comparison to Steve Fairbairn.

But Muttie may have achieved immortality in another way. There is a family legend that he once met **Mark Twain** on one of the author's trips to Great Britain and that the author was quite taken

by Muttiebury's unusual last name. It is also said that they rowed together and, on his departure, Twain told him he would soon write a book about him.

And so the story goes that Muttiebury became **Huckleberry**, and his oar became **Finn**.⁷⁴⁹

Eton Rules!

Interestingly, every single amateur oarsman, coach and historian mentioned in this chapter was an Etonian with the sole exceptions of W.B. Woodgate, Rudie Lehmann, Australian Steve Fairbairn, R.P.P. Rowe, a Clifton old boy, and Geoffrey Page of St. Paul's.

No single institution in the history of rowing, perhaps in the history of sport, has ever had a more dominating influence than Eton College.

"**Sir William Gladstone**, former President, Christ Church Boat Club: "The school provided 312 of 848 Oxford and Cambridge Blues between 1863 and 1920."⁷⁵⁰

Richard Burnell:⁷⁵¹ "It is incontrovertible that for some forty years Eton had a very near monopoly in the Ladies' Plate at Henley, and consequently, so far as the Universities were concerned, it was really the Eton material that counted in the Boat Race.

"As an Etonian, I make no apology for my pride in her record on the river."⁷⁵²

⁷⁴⁹ <http://www.online-literature.com/twain/>

⁷⁵⁰ Qtd. by Parkhouse, supplement

⁷⁵¹ See Chapter 17.

⁷⁵² Burnell, *Swing*, p. 27

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16. The “Custodians” of English Orthodoxy

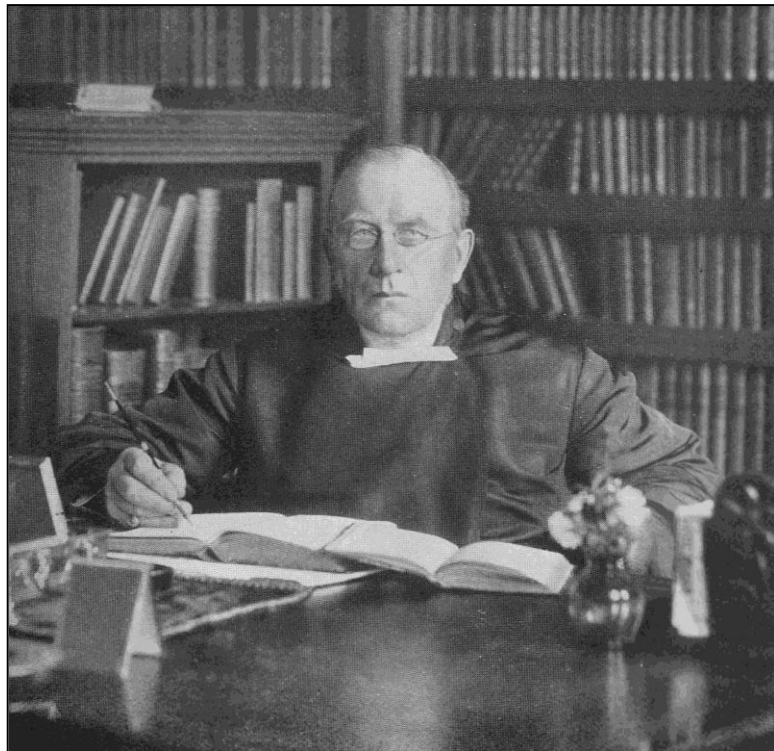
Warre – de Havilland – Bourne – Lehmann

Edmond Warre

It is fitting that **Edmond Warre** M.A., D.D., D.C.L., C.B., C.V.O. (1837-1920), known as the great custodian of English Orthodox rowing, should have been first and last an Etonian, forever identified with the birthplace of sport rowing.

According to Eton rowing historians **L.S.R. Byrne**⁷⁵³ and **E.L. Churchill**,⁷⁵⁴ “By the end of his five years at Eton, he had won the Newcastle scholarship and School Pulling, and he went to Oxford as a Scholar of Balliol. There he rowed twice against Cambridge,⁷⁵⁵ and was President of the O.U.B.C. in his last year.

“Fair-haired, blue-eyed, with fresh complexion and a



Fletcher, *Warre*

Mr. Edmond Warre in his study, 1897

⁷⁵³ **L.S.R. Byrne** was a member of the Oxford Blue Boat that Fairbairn, Muttelbury and F.I. Pitman beat in the 1886 Boat Race. He had been a teammate of Pitman's while at Eton, and returned as a House Master in the era of R.S. de Havilland.

⁷⁵⁴ “**Jelly**” **Churchill** was Eton Captain of the Boats in 1889 and a teammate of Vivian Nickalls (See Chapter 24.) while at Eton. He also returned to Eton as a House Master.

⁷⁵⁵ Rowing 6-seat and winning in 1857, rowing 7-seat and losing in 1858.

voice like a trumpet, he was a fine figure of a man, weighing in rowing trim over 13 stone⁷⁵⁶.”⁷⁵⁷

Gilbert Bourne: “It was he who had introduced and perfected the modern style of rowing suited to keelless boats in 1857.”⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁶ He was the largest member of both his Oxford crews and weighed 184 lb. 83 kg in his last year.

⁷⁵⁷ Byrne & Churchill, p. 179

⁷⁵⁸ Bourne, *Textbook*, p. 14

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NOTES ON COACHING.

ἐπισταμένους δ' ἑμὴν γράφει ὅτι ὀλίγοι τῶν ναυτῶν οἱ ἐξορμῶντές τε
αὐτοὶ καὶ ξυγχέουσι τὴν εἰρησίαν.—THUCY. vii.

In teaching a Crew you have to deal with—

- A. Crew Collectively ;
- B. Crew Individually.

A. COLLECTIVE—

- 1. Time
 - α. Oars in and out together—buttons up.
 - β. Feather, same height—keep it down.
 - γ. Stroke, same depth—cover the blades, but not above the blue.
- 2. Swing—α. Bodies forward and back together.
 - β. Sliders together.
 - γ. Eyes in the Boat.
- 3. Work—α. Beginning,—together, sharp—hard.
 - β. Turns of the wrist—on and off of the feather, sharp, but not too soon.
 - γ. Rise of the hands—sharp, just before stroke begins.
 - δ. Drop of the hands—sharp, just after it ends.

GENERAL EXHORTATIONS.—Time—Beginning—Smite—Keep it long, and the like, to be given at the right moment, not used as mere parrot cries.

B. INDIVIDUAL—1. Faults of Position. 2. Faults of Movement.

N.B.—These concern Body—Hands—Arms—Legs, and sometimes Head and Neck.

- 1. Point out when you easy, or when you come in, or, best of all, in a gig. *Shew* as well as *say* what is wrong and what is right.

N.B.—Mind you *are* right. “Decipit exemplar vitiis imitabile.”

- 2. To be pointed out during the row and corrected. Apply the principles taught in “E. W.’s” paper on the stroke, beginning with bow and working to stroke, interspersing Exhortations (A) at the proper time.

N.B.—Never *hammer* at any one individual. If one or two admonitions don’t bring him right, wait a bit, and then try him again.

For Coaching purposes, not too fast a stroke and not too slow.

Before you start, see that your men have got their stretchers right and are sitting straight to their work.

HE TEACHES BEST WHO, WHILE HE IS TEACHING, REMEMBERS THAT HE
TOO HAS MUCH TO LEARN

E. W.

ETON, March, 1st, 1875. [2nd Ed., May, 1880.]
[3rd Ed., Jan., 1898.]
[4th Ed., March 1947.]

Alex Henshilwood

THE SPORT OF ROWING

Indeed, it was Warre's 1857 Oxford Blue Boat which had won the Boat Race in their new Matt Taylor keelless boat and that had practiced with Taylor himself in the stroke seat.⁷⁵⁹ The experience had a profound effect on him.⁷⁶⁰

In 1860, Warre returned to Eton College as a master and began coaching the crew at the request of the student Captain of the Boats.

Woodgate: "Mr. Warre, with the greatest kindness and with unremitting zeal and energy, first coached the eight for the

order to preserve their energies for the Ladies.'

"Warre developed generations of the very best oarsmen in Great Britain.

"Of [the 1866 Henley] Regatta, *The Field* says: 'Out of the twenty-eight medals given to oarsmen for winning the eight- and four-oared races, twenty-seven were won by Etonians. These twenty-seven medals were won by nineteen men, of whom seventeen had been pupils of Mr. Edmond Warre of Eton.'"⁷⁶²

All the great Eton oarsmen of the second



Author

Oar from Mr. Austin Leigh's 1896 House Four

Now displayed in the Eton Eight Room

Three of Reverend Warre's sons rowed in this School Champion House Four.

The Eton Boating Book lists ten Warres who rowed for Eton by 1932.

Westminster races and then continued coaching for the Henley Regatta evening after evening during their training every year for twenty-four years until he was appointed headmaster [in 1884]."⁷⁶¹

In 1861 at the end of Warre's first year back as a master, Eton entered the Henley Royal Regatta for the first time. They won the Ladies' Plate for the first time in 1864.

In 1866, Eton defeated a strong crew from First Trinity, Cambridge by three lengths in the finals of the Ladies' Plate. "First Trinity were Head of the River at Cambridge and had reached the final of the Grand and then scratched, presumably in

half of the 19th Century had affectionate stories to tell about Mr. Warre.

Vivian Nickalls,⁷⁶³ who arrived at Eton in 1885 and was Captain of the Boats in 1890: "He used to 'boom' into a room, overawing the occupants with his commanding presence. When I was in the Eight he always used to ask myself and one or two others to dinner twice every half and used to ply us with 'Old Shoo' – as he called his port – and talk of style and rowing throughout the meal.

"His was the old fixed seat style with a tremendous body catch, but the instructions he had printed and issued to the boys who

⁷⁵⁹ See Chapter 4.

⁷⁶⁰ Byrne & Churchill, p. 215

⁷⁶¹ Woodgate, p. 209

⁷⁶² Byrne & Churchill, p. 181

⁷⁶³ See Chapter 24.

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coached⁷⁶⁴ the various crews were based on sound fundamentals.”⁷⁶⁵

In his memoir of his own days as a wet-bob, **Gilbert C. Bourne** described Warre’s routine for coaching the first eight each year: “For the first week or ten days of practice the crew went out in a heavy clinker-built boat, Dr. Warre standing up in the stern to coach.”⁷⁶⁶ During this time, great attention was paid to detail, especially to the action of the hands and wrists, squareness of the body and shoulders, sitting up to the work, etc.

“When the crew took to its light boat, it was always accompanied by the scratch crew know as ‘Duffers,’ Dr. Warre taking the stroke oar of the latter.”⁷⁶⁷

Ralph D. Paine, *The Century Magazine*: “Old Etonians and masters who pulled lusty oars in their day make up the ‘duffers eight,’ a formidable combination which gives the ‘light blue’ the stiffest sort of practice during the last weeks of training for Henley.

“From time immemorial the English sovereign has graciously permitted the towing-path hard by Windsor Castle to be used by the crowds which watch the nightly practice of the eight on Datchet Reach [downstream of Eton, below Romney Lock].”⁷⁶⁸

Bourne: “[After some easy rowing,] the two eights paddled side by side, Dr. Warre coaching from the stroke seat of Duffers.”

Warre would also coach when the boats stopped for breathers. On the way back, “Duffers picked us up some 250 yards above Albert Bridge [2 mi. or 3 km from Romney Lock, against the current], taking a good



Vanity Fair, June 20, 1885

Eton Headmaster Edmond Warre

lead, and for some distance we could hear Dr. Warre growling at us as he drove Duffers along at nearly as fast a stroke as our own. As the trained crew drew up alongside, the race with Duffers began in earnest. As long as Warre was talking, we knew that we were making no impression, but when he was silent we knew that we were pressing him hard and could probably get first to the post. At the finish, after we had recovered our winds, we were often subjected to some severe criticisms, but if the crew had rowed well, Dr. Warre gave his due meed of approval.

“When a light day’s work was thought advisable, the afternoon was devoted to tub-

⁷⁶⁴ See a previous page.

⁷⁶⁵ V. Nickalls, p. 29

⁷⁶⁶ See Chapter 6.

⁷⁶⁷ Bourne, *Memories*, pp. 66-9

⁷⁶⁸ Paine, p. 499

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pair coaching. Every detail was gone into with scrupulous care, and he nearly always took an oar himself for part of the time and gave a practical illustration of how the stroke ought to be rowed.”⁷⁶⁹

The Eton VIII in Warre’s time were impressive athletically and fully competitive with the University colleges they met at Henley.

Vivian Nickalls, describing the Eton 1888 semi-finalists in the Ladies’ Plate at Henley: “All the Eight except stroke and bow were six feet in height [183 cm, quite tall by the standards of the day, especially for schoolboys], and on one occasion when we were putting our boat in the water, one riverside critic was heard to say to another:

“‘Say, Bill, who be those?’

“‘Those be Eton boys,’ said Bill.

“‘Boys!’ remarked No. 1, ‘‘airy-chested dock wallopers I calls ‘em!’”⁷⁷⁰

Classical Technique

After his years of coaching, Edmond Warre served as Eton headmaster from 1884 to 1905 and after that provost until 1918. Through all these decades, his was considered the last word on English Orthodox Technique.

He had experienced the introduction of sliding seats and the Fairbairn revolution. Later, his lectures *On the Grammar of Rowing*, peppered with quotes from Horace and Homer and published in 1909, codified his teachings and became the Holy Scripture of English Orthodoxy.

Byrne & Churchill: “His influence was refining, bracing, elevating, and he provided those who came in contact with him every day with the spectacle of a cultured intelligence devoting its entire energy to the task at hand. Not only Eton, but the whole

world of rowing owes to Warre a freedom from professionalism and a spirit of self-sacrifice which many of those interested in other sports would gladly attain if they knew how.”⁷⁷¹

In 1922, Warre biographer **C.R.L. Fletcher**, an Eton wet-bob during the 1870s, called Edmond Warre “the oracle and prophet of the Aquatic World.”⁷⁷²

In fact, the concurrent technique that Warre described in his 1909 lectures benefited fully from the innovations of Steve Fairbairn.

Warre: “The hands rise sharply so that the blade falls square into the water – and then instantaneously, without the loss of a thousandth part of a second, the stroke begins – the weight of the body going on to the handle of the oar and stretcher – the glutei and dorsal muscles lifting the body, so that the beginning is made by them and by the extensors of the legs *simultaneously* – and as the body rises, so the slide begins to go back harmoniously in *one homogeneous effort* – making the whole stroke one piece – one action – not two or three efforts pieced one on to the other – but *one continuous drive of the oar against the water from the beginning to the finish of each stroke*. [my emphasis]”⁷⁷³

Despite many English Orthodox details, Edmond Warre was essentially a Classical coach! From the perspective of **Haig-Thomas & Nicholson**,⁷⁷⁴ Warre was a proponent of the **English Style**, and the so-called Fairbairn and Orthodox crews the authors saw all around them in the 1950s had both diverged, albeit in different directions, from the ideal they shared with Warre.

⁷⁶⁹ Bourne, *Memories*, pp. 66-9

⁷⁷⁰ V. Nickalls, p. 34

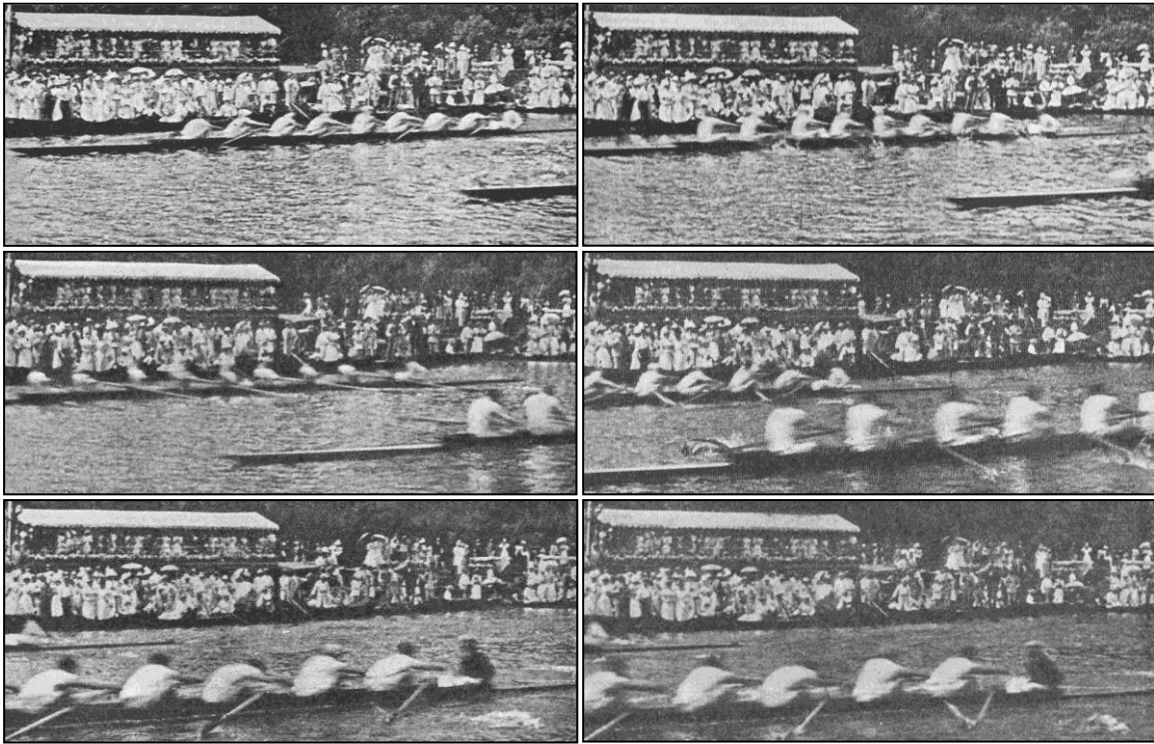
⁷⁷¹ Byrne & Churchill, p. 184

⁷⁷² Fletcher, p. 272

⁷⁷³ Warre, pp. 37-8

⁷⁷⁴ See Chapter 15.

ENGLISH ORTHODOX MEETS CLASSICAL TECHNIQUE



Rowe & Pitman

These stills were taken from a “cinematograph” of the last strokes of the final of the **1897 Grand Challenge Cup**, which was won by two feet by **New College**, far lane, over Rudi Lehmann’s **Leander Club**, near lane. Considered a model **English Orthodox** crew by Rowe & Pitman, New College was visibly a **Classical** concurrent *Schubschlag* crew. Per **Frame 6**, so was Leander.

Frame 1 shows the moment of entry for New College. Note the shoulder reach past the outside knee and the +30° body angle forward achieved even in the final spurt. With perhaps two strokes to go in the race, **C.K. Philips**, the 5-seat, was looking over at Leander. **Frame 2** came right after the first. Backsplash is evident throughout the New College boat. The crew had begun the stroke with backs, legs and arms. After looking out in the prior photo, Philips has missed water at the entry, so his back swing was far ahead of his mates. In **Frame 3**, time has passed, and New College has now swung to the finish, displaying elegant English Orthodox -45° layback. In **Frame 4**, the New College recovery has already taken place, and they are shown here backsplashing their next entry. Leander, in the near lane, shortly after their own backsplash entry, also displays coordinated, concurrent leg drive and back swing. In **Frame 5**, Leander was back at full reach for its next stroke. The boat was clearing its puddles. **Guy Nickalls**, the 6-seat, was late and had dropped his head. In **Frame 6**, the very next frame of the movie, the Leander backs and legs had begun to move.

Bourne: “[While tubbing,] often [Warre] took the oar and delivered, *secundum artem*,⁷⁷⁵ the ‘mighty and prolonged blow with instant force at the beginning of the stroke sustained through

the stroke with a force unwavering and uniform’ to show us how to do it.”⁷⁷⁶

“His maxim, oft repeated, was ‘work comes from the stretcher [i.e. the leg drive],’ and he clearly perceived that, if the *sharp catch* at the beginning of the stroke is truly taken from the stretcher, the slide must

⁷⁷⁵ literally “according to the art”

⁷⁷⁶ Bourne, qtd. by Fletcher, p. 276

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[simultaneously] move back to a certain extent. But he insisted on a sharp lift of the body contemporaneously with the movement of the slide [my emphasis].”⁷⁷⁷

But was all this *Schubschlag* or *Kernschlag*? Warre was most certainly aware of the distinction. In 1909, writing the passage on the word ‘boat’ for the Eleventh Edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, he included the following:

The tendency, with the long slide, and long type of boat, is to try to avoid ‘pinch’ by adapting the *scullers’ method* of easy beginning, and strong drive with the legs, and sharp finish to follow, but it remains to be seen whether superior pace is not to be obtained in a shorter boat by *sharp beginning* at a reasonable angle to the boat’s side, and a continuous drive right out to the finish of the stroke. [my emphasis]⁷⁷⁸

One might surmise that if the “scullers’ method” he described was *Schubschlag*, then the technique featuring the “sharp beginning” had to have been *Kernschlag*. “Sharp” was one of Warre’s favorite words.

Edmond Warre certainly believed in one continuous effort from entry to release, but he may indeed have believed in *Kernschlag* emphasis on the front end. History will reveal that many English Orthodox readers of Warre in later generations certainly interpreted his writings that way.

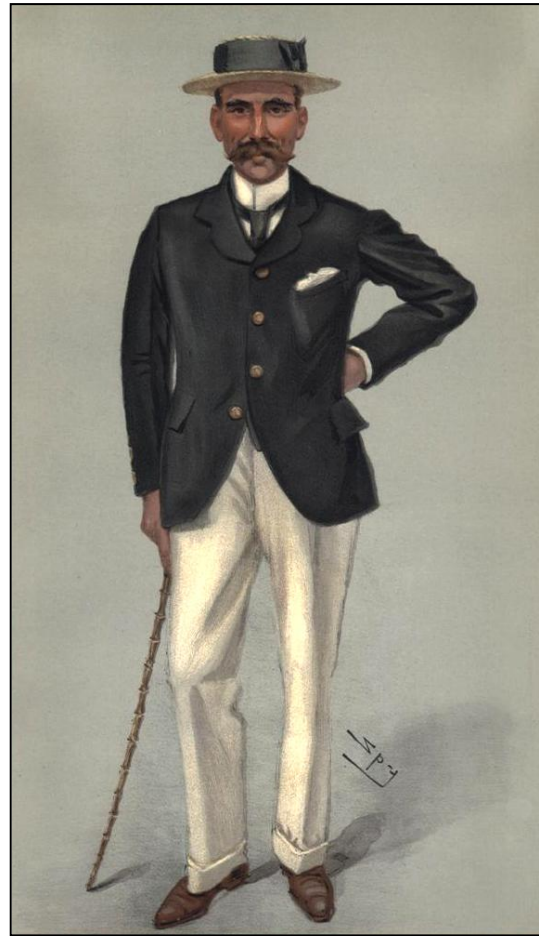
The irony is that generations of English Orthodox followers have worshipped at the feet of Edmond Warre, but his technique was *not* English Orthodox as it came to be known. It was Classical!

R.S. de Havilland

Reginald Saumarez de Havilland
(1861-1921), 2-seat in the Oxford Blue

⁷⁷⁷ Bourne, *Memories*, p. 105

⁷⁷⁸ *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, Volume IV, 1909



Vanity Fair, July 4, 1901

R.S. de Havilland

11st. 1lb. 70 kg

Boats which won the Boat Race in 1882 and 1883, and Eton coach from 1893 until 1914, has been called “the fountain-head of Orthodox English rowing.”⁷⁷⁹ His *Elements of Rowing* rivaled Warre’s *On the Grammar of Rowing* as the Bible of English Orthodoxy, but Steve Fairbairn embraced it as well. It was even reprinted in Ian Fairbairn’s compilation of his father’s writings.

Byrne & Churchill: “[De Havilland] had not been born to easy circumstances. A

⁷⁷⁹ *Fairbairn On Rowing*, p. 25

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Author

R.S. de Havilland's winning Oxford "Dark Blue" Oar from the 1883 Boat Race
Now displayed in the Eton Eight Room

Bow **G.C. Bourne** 10st. 11½lb. 69 kg, 2 **R.S. de Havilland** 11st. 1lb. 70 kg,
3 **G.S. Fort** 12st. 2lb. 77kg, 4 **E.L. Puxley** 12st. 3lb. 78 kg,
5 **Ducker McLean** 13st. 2lb. 83 kg, 6 **A.R. Paterson** 13st. 5lb. 85 kg,
7 **C.Q. Roberts** 11st. 4lb. 72 kg, Stroke **L.R. West** 11st. 4lb. 72 kg,
Coxswain **E.H. Lyon** 8st. 1lb. 52 kg

Bow, 2, 4, 5 and 7 were Old Etonians, and three of them became famous coaches.

member of the large family of an officer in the Artillery – he said there had been thirteen of them – he depended from an early age on the rewards of his own work and intelligence. Like Warre, he had been President of the O.U.B.C. without ever rowing in the Eton Eight.⁷⁸⁰

Gilbert C. Bourne,⁷⁸¹ de Havilland's Eton and Oxford Teammate, remembers him as a "master of the art of boat propulsion.

"Mr. de Havilland [was] round-backed, rough and vigorous. [He] came forward easily and confidently and then, without any marked uplift of the hands or any marked display of energy in throwing back the body, in the twinkling of an eye the blade of the oar was covered to its full depth, and instantly a mass of green water was piled up against it.

"For the rest of the stroke this solid-looking mass of water was swept back with unfaltering precision [*Schubschlag*], and at the finish the blade of the oar left the water

as it had entered it, without flurry or splash, and the mass of water swirled away with scarcely a bubble round the edge of the vortex which the movement of the blade had set up."⁷⁸²

"His work depended on a tremendous thrust with the legs. In fact, his style had many points in common with that of the famous London oarsman, **F.S. Gulston**,⁷⁸³ [but despite this,] the London style was to Dr. Warre anathema."⁷⁸⁴ "He disliked the Metropolitan style because it involved too exclusive use of the legs."⁷⁸⁵

Byrne & Churchill: "Unlike Warre, [de Havilland] was spare of frame [148 lb. 67 kg at Eton in 1880 and only nine pounds more in 1883, his second year in the bow pair of the Oxford Blue Boat] and rapid of utterance. He had a clear high-pitched tenor voice, dark and glowing eyes which seemed to pierce to the bottom of every fault and to convict the wrongdoer almost without a

⁷⁸⁰ Byrne & Churchill, pp. 191-8

⁷⁸¹ See below.

⁷⁸² Bourne, *Textbook*, p. 7

⁷⁸³ See Chapter 8.

⁷⁸⁴ Bourne, *Memories*, p. 95

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 105

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Byrne

R.S. de Havilland

word. The character of his coaching, like that of all supreme teaching, is impossible to define.

"It must not for a moment be imagined that de Havilland reached his pinnacle of pre-eminence at once. During his first season [at Eton], grumbles were long and loud. **Long slides**, which he at once introduced, were unsuited to boys. The traditional Eton virtues of quickness and neatness were being sacrificed, rowing was a scramble, and so on. Even after his first successes, we were told that his methods were unsound and would end in disaster. How unwarranted these forebodings were, the history of the next quarter century would show.

"During his twenty-two years, Eton crews won the Ladies' twelve times, reached

the final five [more] times and the ante-final twice; entered three times for the Grand, and once reached the final, once the ante-final. Thrice their time in the Ladies' had been faster than that of the Grand.

"The style he taught was free and smooth, smoother than any since produced [as of 1935], even with swivel oarlocks. And he laid foundations for the future, for during this period, Etonian representatives at the University rose to nine a year, many of the winning crews containing from five to seven who had learnt their rowing from him.

"In the Olympic Regatta of 1908, there were seven Etonians in the winning Leander crew. In the Olympic Regatta of 1912, Leander with six Etonians won the eights against New College with four.⁷⁸⁶

"But the quality of his teaching is not shown by a mere list of successes. De Havilland inspired boys with a spirit of triumphant endeavor, of value to all who saw them and a precious possession to themselves, not only then, but in after-life.

"He was sometimes accused by purists of sacrificing form to mere pace, but this was because he laid stress on essentials, knowing that with time the rest would follow, and also because he knew that an eight is no machine, but is composed of living individuals who can give of their best only if they are not cramped."⁷⁸⁷

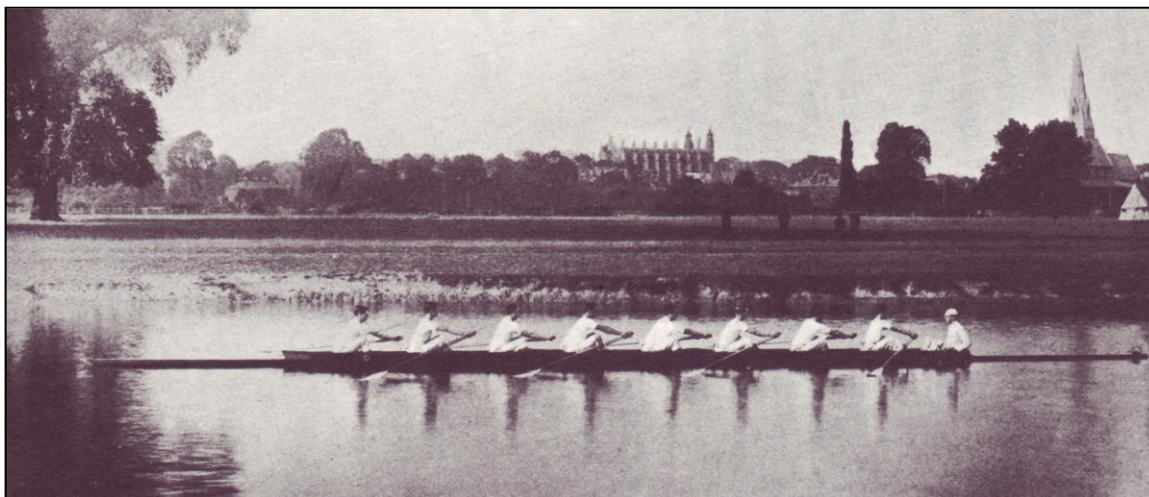
English Orthodox Attitude

Like Warre, De Havilland's 1913 description of rowing technique retained several pre-Fairbairn attitudes and phrases: the oarsman sitting "at attention," the body swinging forward "till the lowest ribs touch the thighs," the whole body springing back

⁷⁸⁶ Two entries per country were allowed in 1912.

⁷⁸⁷ Byrne & Churchill, pp. 191-8

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Byrne & Churchill

1881 Eton 1st VIII

Bow **W.K. Hardacre** 10st. 4lb. 65 kg, 2 **Freddie Pitman** 10st. 10lb. 68 kg,
3 **T.M. Babington** 11st. 3lb. 71 kg, 4 **Ducker McLean** 12st. 9lb. 80 kg,
5 **F.E. Churchill** 13st. 2lb. 83 kg, 6 **St.C.G. Donaldson** 11st. 3lb. 71 kg,
7 **G.C. Bourne** 10st. 7lb. 67 kg, Stroke **J. Baring** 9st. 7lb. 60 kg,
Coxswain **O.W. Rayner** 8st. 51 kg

at the entry, the slide as “merely an artifice for lengthening the stroke.”⁷⁸⁸

But if the language and **attitude** was English Orthodox, the fundamentals were not.

Haig-Thomas & Nicholson: “His emphasis on leg work and on natural action is in acute contrast to the ‘Orthodoxy’ attacked in Steve Fairbairn’s books.”⁷⁸⁹

De Havilland adopted Hanlanesque **long slides** with the increase in leg compression/decrease in body angle forward that went with them. For him, there was no going back to the old days.

De Havilland also totally rejected the English Orthodox principle of **sequentiality**, that backs only should work from the entry, with the legs joining in later in the stroke.

“[T]he slide should start as the oar enters the water and should stop when the oar leaves it. . . The body and legs must

ACT IN ONE PIECE, exactly together, but it cannot be insisted on too strongly that leg-work is the foundation and body-work the superstructure, and that, whereas leg-work by itself is only half the battle, effective body-work by itself is an impossibility.”⁷⁹⁰

De Havilland’s technique included orthodox tendencies, but almost as much as Warre, it was far more Classical than English Orthodox.

Gilbert C. Bourne

The third great text on Golden Age English rowing technique, *A Textbook of Oarsmanship*, was written in 1925 by **Gilbert Charles Bourne** (1861-1933) whose family roots went back to the “prehistoric period of rowing.” His grandfather had been a member of the Oxford boat of Westminster old boys which

⁷⁸⁸ Fairbairn *On Rowing*, pp. 521-5

⁷⁸⁹ Haig-Thomas & Nicholson, p. 39

⁷⁹⁰ Fairbairn *On Rowing*, pp. 525-6

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raced an Eton eight in 1819.⁷⁹¹ His father also rowed at Westminster as a member of their 1849 second eight.

Bourne was a major participant in and not just a chronicler of Britain's Golden Age. At Eton, he was the Captain of the Boats in 1880-1. He was coached by Edmond Warre and rowed competitively with future Oxford stroke and Diamond Sculls winner **Freddie Pitman**, and two-time Boat Race winner **Ducker McLean**, who as a coach would win the Boat Race six more times between 1892 and 1900.⁷⁹²

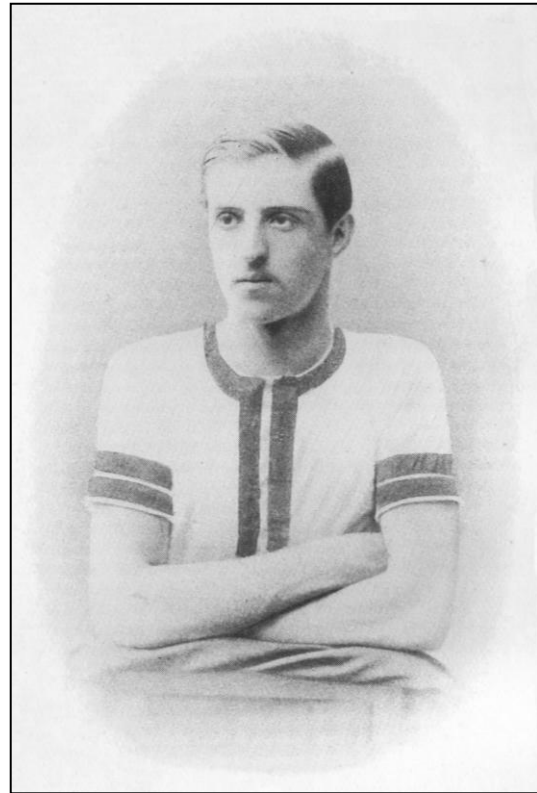
Bourne's years at Eton overlapped with those of future Eton rowing historians **C.R.L. Fletcher** and **L.S.R. Byrne** and with those of **S.D. Muttelbury**, who spread Classical Technique from Cambridge to Leander.⁷⁹³

At University, Bourne rowed bow pair with **R.S. de Havilland** in the 1882 and 1883 Oxford Blue Boats which won the Boat Race over Cambridge crews containing the still little-known **Steve Fairbairn**. He rowed with Steve in the 1882 Kingston R.C. entry in the Grand Challenge Cup.⁷⁹⁴ From then on they remained lifelong friends.

Bourne served as Secretary of O.U.B.C. in 1883 and 1884.

In the memoir of his years at Eton, *Memories of an Eton Wet-Bob of the Seventies*, Bourne described his own technique under the tutelage of Dr. Warre: "I had a firm hold of the beginning of the stroke, acquired during the long pulls that I had taken so frequently in my lower boy days.

"I acquired an instinctive knowledge of the feel and run of a boat and learned how to propel it with economy of effort, acquirements that only come by constant



Bourne, *Memories*

Gilbert C. Bourne
as a wet-bob

practice and are uncommunicable by any coach."⁷⁹⁵

Bourne's preferred technique can be gleaned from his admiring description of Mr. **T.C. Edwards-Moss**, 1879 Eton Captain of the Boats: "He rowed with a very natural carriage of body; his back neither round nor very straight, but with a very long swing forward from the thigh joints. He was conspicuous for the effective use he made of his legs, and he rowed in what would now [1933] be considered the correct manner, getting a very powerful lift from his feet at the beginning and combining his swing and

⁷⁹¹ Bourne, *Memories*, p. 8. Also see Chapter 3.

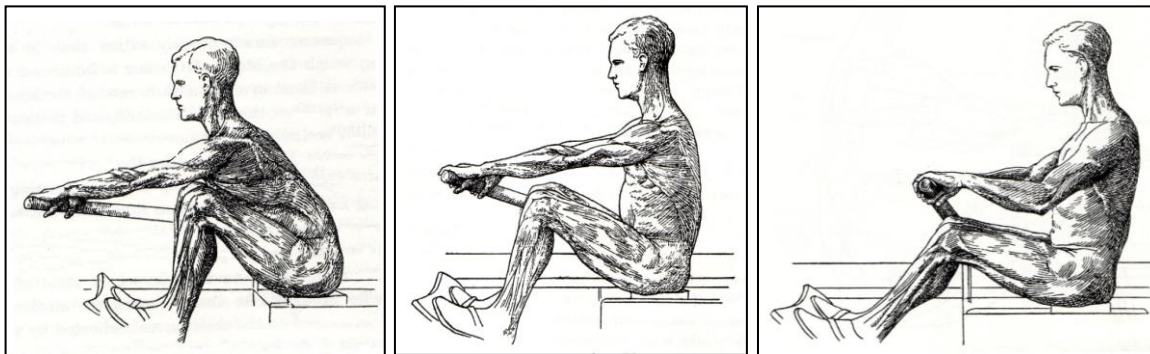
⁷⁹² See Chapter 15.

⁷⁹³ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁴ See Chapter 14.

⁷⁹⁵ Bourne, *Memories*, pp. 45-6

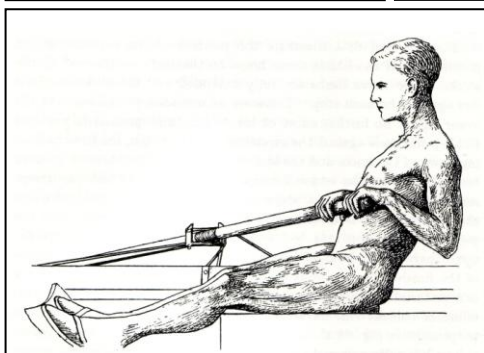
ENGLISH ORTHODOX MEETS CLASSICAL TECHNIQUE



Bourne, *A Textbook of Oarsmanship*

Golden Age English Classical Technique

Pullthrough began with +35° body angle forward. Arms were initially held “taut” by the strength of the legs and back, but the detail of the musculature (drawn by Bourne himself) strongly suggests that the arms and shoulders were to be engaged from the entry. Legs and back began their coordinated motion at the entry and continued with arm draw all the way to the release in order to “make the boat shoot forward.” Layback was -25°.



legwork throughout the stroke [concurrency].⁷⁹⁶

This is Classical Technique!

In his coaching, Bourne came to epitomize proper rowing to the most thoughtful of the next generation of British rowers. **Jumbo Edwards**, twice Olympic Champion in 1932,⁷⁹⁷ dedicated his book, *The Way of a Man With a Blade*, to **Steve Fairbairn** and to **Beja Bourne**.⁷⁹⁸

Bourne made a career of teaching comparative anatomy at Oxford, so it is no surprise that his own book, *A Textbook of Oarsmanship*, written near the end of his life, has a scientific and academic tone. It begins with a comprehensive review of the scientific literature on rowing and includes anatomical line-drawing illustrations by his own hand.

In this, his masterwork, Bourne affectionately described the glory of the post-Fairbairn Classical Technique of his younger days, reflecting the wisdom he gained over nearly half a century. Patience and moderation seemed to be the key. “Comfortably upright, not stiffened or strained in any way.”⁷⁹⁹ “Relax.”⁸⁰⁰ “One harmonious whole.”⁸⁰¹ “Natural sequence of bodily movements.”⁸⁰²

In summary, Bourne believed in Classical concurrent *Schubschlag*, the legs and back beginning their motions together at the entry while the arms were “pulled taut.”⁸⁰³ After arm motion began at mid-drive, the legs, back and arms continued their smooth, coordinated effort to accelerate the boat all the way to the release.

⁷⁹⁹ Bourne, *Textbook*, p. 90

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 104

⁸⁰¹ Ibid, p. 123

⁸⁰² Ibid, p. 130

⁸⁰³ Ibid, p. 144

⁷⁹⁶ Bourne, *Memories*, p. 90

⁷⁹⁷ See Chapter 78.

⁷⁹⁸ Edwards, p. v

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Bourne: “[The entry] must be caught in an instant and caught firmly, yet without hurry and without undue effort.”⁸⁰⁴

“A good oarsman will so couple up the action of the body and legs that they aid and reinforce one another at every part of the stroke. The leg-work and the body swing must be coupled together. But what do we mean by ‘coupling them together?’

“We mean that three powerful groups of muscles situated in the back, in the buttocks and in the thighs must be brought into action simultaneously at the beginning of the stroke, and must remain in action throughout the stroke, mutually aiding and reinforcing one another.”⁸⁰⁵

“During the first part of the stroke when legs, loins and back are doing all the work, the arms should be perfectly straight, but as the oar comes to lie at right angles to the boat and the wrists pass over the knees, the arms begin to bend home.”⁸⁰⁶

“If the first phases of the stroke have been executed properly, the oarsman will have four or five inches of slide left to push out with whilst his arms are bending and coming home to his body. Therefore, he should have an appreciable reserve of sliding and [body] swing to utilize in the last third of the stroke.”⁸⁰⁷

Schubschlag

Bourne’s description of *Schubschlag* force application is one of history’s best.

Bourne: “[By mid-stroke,] the pace of the boat has been accelerated by the work already done, but this acceleration is as yet far from having reached its maximum. To make the boat shoot forward as far as possible, the oarsman has to sustain the



The Way of a Man With a Blade

Beja Bourne

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 7

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 133

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 144-6

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid, pp. 146-7

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pressure of the blade in the water with undiminished energy.”⁸⁰⁸

“When teaching his crew to finish out, the coach should be explicit on this point, that the boat is moving faster than at the beginning of the stroke, and that the movements of body and limbs must increase their pace in proportion. The oarsman must go with his boat and never let it slip away past his control.”⁸⁰⁹

Forty years after the Jesus College eight won the Grand with Steve Fairbairn coaching and rowing in the 7-seat, Gilbert Bourne immortalized their Classical Technique. The decade or so that followed Fairbairn’s debut on the world stage were the Golden Age of British rowing. Bourne understood that and celebrated their rowing technique, but few of his readers noticed. Many of them had already returned to pre-Fairbairn English Orthodoxy.

Gilbert Bourne is the third supposed oracle of English Orthodoxy who was no such thing. He was a believer in Classical Technique and a teammate, follower and friend of Steve Fairbairn!

Rudie Lehmann

The man most responsible for leading rowing away from Fairbairn Classical Technique of the 1880s and back to the English Orthodox ideal was the son of a well-to-do London merchant whose home was frequented by artists and writers such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Robert Browning. **Rudolph Chambers Lehmann** (1856-1929) was a notable athlete at Cambridge, First Boat Captain of First Trinity and, at 148 lb 67 kg, the University middle-and heavyweight boxing champion. He raced many times at Henley and only just

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 145

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 146



Vanity Fair, January 17, 1895

Rudie Lehmann

missed his “Blue.”⁸¹⁰ He later coached both Oxford and Cambridge as well as Leander in London and Harvard in the United States.

He read law after coming down from Cambridge, stood for Parliament, and was writing enough prose and light verse to become an editor of *Punch*⁸¹¹ in 1890. Amid all these interests, rowing remained right at the top.^{812 813}

⁸¹⁰ which means he never represented Cambridge in the Boat Race.

⁸¹¹ the satirical London periodical first published in 1841.

⁸¹² Mendenhall, *Harvard-Yale*, p. 215

⁸¹³ *Vanity Fair*, January 17, 1895

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Lehmann is best remembered as the coach of Leander Club during the 1880s, 1890s and beyond. He was present when Muttletbury brought Classical Technique to Leander,⁸¹⁴ and so he participated in English Orthodoxy both before and after its first meeting with Fairbairn's innovations in the mid-1880s. He coached the 1908 and 1912 Olympic Champion eights.

Lehmann left for posterity two widely read and highly influential major texts, *The Complete Oarsman* in 1908, as well as 1897's *Rowing*, Volume 4 of the *Isthmian Library*⁸¹⁵ series of books about sports, on which he collaborated.

Despite being published in 1897, nearly a decade after Muttletbury had arrived at Leander Club, *Isthmian Rowing* still described the post-sliding-seat, *pre-Fairbairn* sequential English Orthodox Technique of the 1870s and early 1880s. To a large extent, Lehmann helped the English Orthodox Technique of the 1890s and into the 1900s rid itself of much of the attitude and viewpoint that formed the foundation of Classical Technique.

Conservatism reasserted itself through R.C. Lehmann.

Coordination of Backs and Legs

Lehmann, 1897: "The natural tendency of the tiro will be to drive his slide away before his shoulders have begun to move [Thames Waterman's Stroke]. This must at all costs be avoided. In order to secure the effectual combination of body swing and leg work, it is essential that the swing should start first.

⁸¹⁴ See Chapter 15.

⁸¹⁵ "a series of volumes dealing popularly with the whole range of field sports and athletics," initially edited by Bertram Fletcher Robinson and published by A.D. Innes & Co., London.

"It is equally reprehensible to swing the body full back before starting the slide [English Orthodoxy at its pre-1886 extreme]. You thus cut the stroke into two distinct parts, one composed of mere body swing, the other of mere leg work."⁸¹⁶

Despite what he could have learned from the example of Muttletbury at Leander Club in 1888, in 1897 Lehmann was still describing only *near*-concurrency of legs and back, basically a return to the English Orthodox *status quo*.

But Rudie Lehmann was a student of rowing history and well aware of the efficacy of Classical Technique. Ten years later in his second book, Lehmann looked back on the flaws of the pre-Fairbairn version of English Orthodoxy. "The fault of using nearly the whole of the body swing without the help of leg-power is never inculcated now, for there is a universal agreement in regard to the principles of the matter. It has, however, in times past had its advocates and exponents, chiefly, I think, at Oxford.

"[While the 1878 Oxford crew] used their bodies with immense gusto and dash, they used their legs scarcely at all. Some little time after this, as a result of four successive defeats at the hands of Cambridge [the Fairbairn/Muttletbury era], Oxford men recognized the true doctrine [the Nickalls/Holland era], and have ever since been its most brilliant exponents."⁸¹⁷

Nevertheless, Lehmann held on to his own belief in the sequential use of backs and legs.

Body Swing First

Lehmann, 1908: "We desire that the body impulse should precede very slightly the action of the slide.

⁸¹⁶ Lehmann, *Isthmian*, p. 48

⁸¹⁷ Lehmann, *Complete*, pp. 48-51

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“As the blade sinks swiftly into the water the whole body must, without waste of a fraction of a second, be hurled back so that its weight may be applied to propulsion with lightning celerity.

“The effect should be the swift uncoiling of a steel spring. With tremendous rapidity and impulse, the body moves in a solid column from the hips.”⁸¹⁸

“Immediately *after* the body has thus started on its backward journey, the slide must begin to move. The two movements of body and slide take place in so swift a succession, and occupy so small a fraction of time, that it is extremely difficult to disentangle them even on paper for the purpose of instruction. [my emphasis]

“The experienced oarsman is conscious of his body-beginning, but he is quite unconscious of the start of his slide.”⁸¹⁹

In 1905, historian **Samuel Crowther**⁸²⁰ described the English Stroke from an American perspective: “It is a grafting of the slide upon the old swing of the fixed seat. The oarsman swings up hard, throwing all his weight into the catch with his slide stationary and his toes well braced, the typical catch of the fixed seat. When the body has passed the perpendicular and the oar is coming into its most effective arc, the legs go out and the slide moves back and the oar is brought in.”⁸²¹

This represents a point of view that cuts up the pullthrough and then dictates how the parts should be assembled. By contrast, Classical Technique is all about organic integrity.

Arms

Lehmann: “The arms must initially remain perfectly straight, for their chief

function is to transmit the weight-power of the body to the oar.”⁸²²

Also here Lehmann disagreed with the Classical approach of Fairbairn, who eventually concluded that the arms should actively participate from the entry.⁸²³

Force Application

Lehmann: “The leg-power must not be spent on a sudden shoot, but must be distributed through the whole of the rest of the stroke.

“The pressure of the blade against the water must be continuous and unwavering, and all the oarsman’s movements must be so ordered as first to apply and then to maintain it throughout the stroke.”⁸²⁴

Crowther: “This stroke brings in nearly every muscle in the body; the power and swing of the fixed seat is retained, – for one must never forget that some of the old crews rowed very fast, – while the slide is brought in to give force at the most useful place, and also to put the body in the best position for a powerful finish. It is a reasonable stroke and seems to have more force-giving elements than our [American] stroke, which relies so much on the legs.”⁸²⁵

Lehmann: “As the slide moves, the leg-power applied must on no account diminish. If anything, it ought to increase, for the body is beginning to lose its impetus, and the main part of the resistance is transferred to the legs, the blade all the time moving at an even pace through the water.”⁸²⁶

“Simultaneously with the legs, the hands must bring the oar handle firmly

⁸²² Lehmann, op cit, pp. 48-51

⁸²³ See Chapter 19.

⁸²⁴ Lehmann, op cit , p. 51

⁸²⁵ Crowther, p. 216

⁸²⁶ Another example of confused physics. Lehmann intended to describe not even pace but even effort level, which generates even acceleration yielding *steadily increasing* pace through the water.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid

⁸²⁰ See Chapter 36.

⁸²¹ Crowther, p. 216

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home to the chest, sweeping it in and thus obtaining what is called a firm, hard finish.”⁸²⁷

This is the very same conclusion, the choice of *Schubschlag* over *Kernschlag*, which T.S. Egan had made in the 1830s, Hanlan had made in the 1870s and Fairbairn had made in the 1880s.

The Influence of Hanlan

In 1908, many years after Fairbairn had introduced Ned Hanlan’s long slides to the Universities, Lehmann wrote about the lessons that he, himself, had learned from watching Hanlan:

“His sculling was distinguished by extraordinary length and power, qualities which he secured, not merely by a remarkable suppleness, but by the *perfect combination of body and legs* for his work in the water [my emphasis].

“He seized his beginning decisively and instantly by the prompt application of body-weight. *His body moved first* [my emphasis]; his slide followed so quickly that the movements were blended into one – but the body always kept its advance [i.e. so that they could end simultaneously, the shoulders always moved faster than the legs since they had further to travel].

“His enormous leg-power, splendidly used, helped him out with his stroke and enabled him to maintain its great power to

the finish of it.

“I watched his sculling carefully more than twenty-five years ago, and have never forgotten the lessons I learnt from it.”⁸²⁸

Lehmann found justification for his own English Orthodox belief in sequentiality in his recollection a quarter century after the fact that Hanlan also rowed sequentially. This flies in the face of more contemporaneous descriptions of Hanlan’s technique, Woodgate’s in particular.⁸²⁹ If Lehmann was wrong, it would not be the last time that a respected member of the rowing community saw what he wanted to see in the rowing technique of another rather than what was actually there. History overflows with such events.

Summary

Of the four great so-called “custodians” of English Orthodoxy, Warre, de Havilland, Bourne and Lehmann, it was only Rudie Lehmann who remained true to the original English Orthodox core principles as Hanlan’s long slide revolution swept through Metropolitan and University rowing. It was only Lehmann who stayed true to English Orthodoxy at the dawn of the new century as he and his followers left the Fairbairn revolution in attitude and technique behind them.

⁸²⁷ Lehmann, *Isthmian*, p. 49

⁸²⁸ Lehmann, *Complete*, pp. 49-50

⁸²⁹ See Chapter 12.