

= Michael Rush (rower) =

Michael Rush (3 January 1844 ? 17 December 1922) was an Irish Australian sculler noted for his one @-@ on @-@ one competitions against champion opponents , which drew vast crowds of spectators . He attempted to win the World Sculling Championship .

Rush arrived in Sydney in 1861 at the age of 16 , an assisted immigrant brought to augment Australia 's mostly agricultural workforce . Rush was a farm labourer , who knew nothing of boats or boating , but within ten years of his arrival in Australia , Rush was Champion Sculler of the Clarence River , as well as a selector , cattle @-@ raiser and butcher . His interest in the sport of rowing dominated Rush 's life , and hampered his prosperity . He repeatedly travelled from his Clarence River home to compete for large money prizes on Sydney 's Parramatta River , neglecting his business affairs . Rush became Champion Sculler of Australia in 1873 , and defended his championship several times , not always successfully . Rush succeeded on a few occasions in having the Championship venue moved from Sydney to the Clarence River , the first to shift the focus of sculling away from the capital city . From 1874 , there was talk of Rush travelling to England to compete for the World Sculling Championship , but this did not eventuate . Instead , Edward Trickett won the World Championship on the Thames in 1876 . Rush and Trickett in 1877 competed on the Parramatta River for the World Championship , but Rush lost this race .

Rush was unique in early Australian sculling in that he provided opportunities for others to compete and excel , by organising regattas and other rowing events , though financially he gained little . He raised and raced horses , organised athletic carnivals , and was a generous supporter of charities , churches , and schools . His background as the son of Irish tenant farmers , a class traditionally debarred by law from owning land and hence accumulating wealth , gave Rush little understanding of the management of money . Rush and his wife had fourteen children , and the Rush family lived in grand , if not extravagant style ; most Rush enterprises were financed by mortgages or promissory notes . When the Banks Crash of 1893 came , Rush was not only deeply in debt , he did not even own the house he lived in .

Though his finances remained shaky , and his attempts at various business enterprises were unsuccessful , Rush continued to the end of his life to be interested and involved in the sport of rowing and sculling , organising carnivals and umpiring important matches . Rush died on his small farm in Hurstville , in December 1922 .

= = Youth and early life = =

Rush was the second son of William and Margery Rush née McGrath . He was born and spent his early years on a tenant farm in the Townland of Dooish , County Tyrone , in the Province of Ulster , in what is now Northern Ireland . The Rushes were cattle @-@ raisers , but their 26 @-@ acre holding was too small to support their family of sons , of whom four have been identified ; there were reputedly ten Rush sons . Rush 's birth @-@ date is given as 3 January 1844 .

Seeking employment and better opportunities than their native land offered , Rush and his brother John emigrated in 1860 , arriving in Sydney in February 1861 per Hotspur , as assisted immigrants . The brothers at first worked in Camperdown for their uncle Michael McGrath , a retail (or ? cutting ?) butcher , who sponsored their immigration . McGrath 's brother , Thomas McGrath , was a former Champion Sculler of the Colony of New South Wales .

Rush then spent some months as a drover in southern New South Wales , while his brother John , taking advantage of the new Crown Lands Act took up a selection on the Lower Clarence River in 1863 . Rush soon joined his brother , at first working for other settlers as a stockman and slaughterman . In 1866 , he selected land at Ashby and began business in his own right as a butcher .

= = Early rowing matches = =

During its early days of settlement , the Lower Clarence district lacked roads ; virtually all

communication within the area and with the outside world depended upon water transport . Lower Clarence settlers were by necessity good oarsmen , and several of them became national and even world champion scullers . Rush , who in his prime was over six feet tall and weighed 13 stone , soon distinguished himself as a powerful ' puller ' . He rowed the heavy settlers ' boats , also known as ' butcher boats ' delivering meat to Clarence River customers . By 1866 , Rush was competing in various regattas regularly held among the riverside settlements of Ulmarra , Lawrence , Brushgrove and Rocky Mouth .

In 1869 , Rush won the title of Champion of the Clarence from Prospero Coulon . The two men then joined forces as a rowing team and competed at the Anniversary Day Regatta of 26 January 1870 held at Port Jackson . Rush and Coulon contested several events , notably winning the single @-@ scull and pair @-@ oar races , and while the prize money they received was modest , their performances were noted by Sydney rowers who quickly challenged them to private matches for large stakes . Rush and Coulon remained in Sydney for some months after the January regatta , and continued to win as a team .

Rush then engaged in a series of one @-@ on @-@ one matches with the scullers William Hickey , the Australian champion , and his brother Richard Hickey . Rush , being unfamiliar with rowing outrigger wagger boats , on that occasion failed to win the championship from Hickey , but returned to the Lower Clarence with prize money totalling over £ 700 .

= = Business ventures = =

Rush set up as a store @-@ keeper in the town of Rocky Mouth (Maclean) . He operated a ' floating store ' which was anchored at Chatsworth Island during the sugar @-@ cane harvesting season when hundreds of itinerant labourers moved into the district . His steam launch Jinnie Rush was used as a mobile general store , delivering goods to farmers and villagers along the river . Rush also bought several racing boats , importing ' riggers ' from England , as well as ordering them custom @-@ made from local boat @-@ builders .

Rush divided his energies between his business ventures and his sculling contests , organising as well as competing in regattas and ' aquatic carnivals ' , so much so , that he never achieved the solid prosperity of other Clarence River commercial pioneers . He added the Criterion Hotel and a string of race @-@ horses to his business ' empire ' at Rocky Mouth . As a former farm @-@ boy from impoverished Ireland , where he might never have owned even a house plot , Rush now purchased many acres of Clarence River land , much of it having little value . Rush 's Irish background of tenant farming gave little understanding of managing capital , property , or conducting a business career . Rush fits an Irish immigrant model offered by historian Patrick O 'Farrell :

Too often [Irish immigrants] bought extensive tracts of marginal land , just because it was land , and cheap , and their pride was built on quantity ... To the dangers of inexperience and chancy judgement , they added an ingredient which made a recipe for disaster ' prodigal generosity . They gave loans at no interest , gave money to unreliable friends and relations , were free and imprudent with credit they could not afford , pursued paths of extravagance when thrift was needed and were careless when caution was called for . [T] hey were men with big ideas seeing in the colonies their chance to cut a fine figure and break away from mean Irish lives .

= = Major sculling matches = =

Rush set his sights on the Australian Sculling Championship , and in February 1873 , won it from William Hickey in a controversial match : many claimed that Hickey ' sold ' the race . Rush insisted that the championship be contested on his home waters of the Clarence River . To make this condition was his right as the holder of a current championship . Rush 's enterprise in arranging for sponsors to provide substantial sums of prizes encouraged Australia 's best scullers to compete . These events drew large crowds of spectators and gamblers to the Clarence River , especially the town of Grafton . Rush helped to organise , and took part in , aquatic contests held Grafton in 1874 , and 1875 Two of these were held in conjunction with Grafton 's celebration of the Queen 's Birthday

. Rush also organised an Intercolonial Regatta , held at Grafton 7 October 1874 at which he successfully defended his championship . However , at the Queen 's Birthday regatta of 1875 , Rush , who was ill , lost the race to Elias C. Laycock .

= = = World Sculling Championship = = =

Edward ' Ned ' Trickett sought to win the Australian Championship from Rush . Trickett was outclassed by Rush at the 1874 and 1875 events , but afterwards competed at numerous regattas and in private matches , and his form was consistently improving . Trickett and his backers demanded that Rush contest the title on the Parramatta River where he won it from Hickey . Rush declined to row anywhere but on the Clarence River , and demanded that the stakes be not less than £ 500 . By 1875 , Rush had a wife and five children to support , as well as many business commitments , and could not afford to undertake a sporting endeavour involving a major investment in time and money , unless there was a chance of an adequate financial return . Dozens of letters and articles in the Australian press debated the issue for nearly two years , as Trickett and his supporters became increasingly incensed at Rush 's stalling . Finally , former champion sculler and now a prosperous publican and backer of sculling events , offered to finance an attempt by an Australian sculler to topple the current holder of the World Sculling Championship , Englishman Joseph Sadler . Rush declined to travel to London . Trickett agreed to the journey , went to the Thames , beat Sadler , and brought home the World Championship to Australia . Rush challenged Trickett for the World title . Trickett demanded that the race be rowed on the Parramatta River , and the match came off on the afternoon of 30 June 1877 .

The Rush vs. Trickett match attracted the largest number of spectators ever before gathered at a Sydney sporting event , and the event is part of Australian sporting history . Estimates of the size of the crowd range from 30 @, @ 000 to 70 @, @ 000 . Shops and government offices closed for the event , special trains brought people into the city . Steam @-@ ships carrying spectators accompanied the competing champions , and hundreds of smaller , private vessels crowded the river . Special Regulations were published by the Marine Board of the NSW Government to deal with the problems of regulating maritime traffic during the event .

Rush was soundly beaten , Trickett winning by several lengths . A combination of factors led to Rush 's defeat . Trickett had won a World Championship , at an international venue , and he brought home to Australia the polish and self @-@ confidence that arose from this experience . Trickett trained on the Thames , the home of championship sculling , by expert coaches including Harry Kelley . Rush , though trained by the ex @-@ champion Richard Green , remained in effect an amateur , largely self @-@ taught . Rush invented his own sculling technique , based on sheer strength and endurance ; his style was often deprecated . Trickett was three inches taller than Rush , and had a longer reach . Finally , Trickett learned on the Thames to use racing @-@ craft fitted with a sliding seat , which allowed a more efficient use of the sculler 's whole body when rowing . Before the race , Rush tried a sliding seat racing @-@ shell , but could not discover any advantage , and chose instead to row a fixed @-@ seat outrigger . Once the news of Rush 's decision became public , betting odds changed dramatically , favouring Trickett , and the result of the race was considered almost a foregone conclusion . Still , Rush was known as an honest sportsman and was expected to put up a mighty effort to beat Trickett . And so he did , but without success .

The celebrations following the match recalled Trickett 's return from his London victory in November 1876 . The commercial exploitation of the event had been considerable , and thousands of pounds changed hands in wagers , but Trickett and Rush were out of pocket afterwards , Trickett claiming to be considerably so . The stakes were only £ 200 , and expenses such as training , accommodation , advertising , new boats and incidentals made professional sculling an expensive business , as Rush argued beforehand . Trickett claimed a considerable shortfall in gate money from spectator ships , and a public benefit concert was held for him by actor George Darrell . Others spoke up for Rush as a major financial loser from his endeavour .

Most histories of professional Australian sculling commence with this event . By 1877 , Australia had a vigorous interest in sport , and a class of professional athletes was emerging . Far from

defeating him , the match of 30 June 1877 gave Rush new energy . After a year or two of retirement , he began to train and compete , mastering the sliding seat . He regained his Australian Championship in September 1881 .

== = Rush vs Laycock == =

Elias C. Laycock was his ' chief rival ' . Just a year younger than Rush , and like him , a large and powerful man , Laycock came to live on the Lower Clarence River around 1874 . The two scullers met first at the Queen 's Birthday regatta in Grafton in May 1874 . Laycock , untried at boat racing , was beaten , though undeterred . During the following years , Laycock challenged Rush and others to sculling matches , until in April 1879 , he beat World Champion Trickett at a State regatta . A series of matches followed to determine the current Australian sculling Champion , who would defend the World Title . Laycock beat Rush again and again , but Trickett eventually beat Laycock . Trickett once more went to the Thames to row against Ned Hanlan , but these preliminary contests in Sydney marked the end of Rush 's World Championship ambitions .

== = The Walker Whiskey Trophy == =

In April 1881 , Mason , Brothers offered a cash prize of £ 300 , to be known as the Walker Whiskey Trophy . The cash prizes attracted so many entrants that a series of preliminary heats was held during September 1881 . Rush took part , but was eliminated from the final race . Rush also rowed a number of private matches at this time , notably against J. J. Power , Harry Pearce , both of whom he beat , and Elias Laycock . The match against Laycock was for the Championship of Australia , which Laycock won with ease . Rush announced his retirement from sculling contests , not for the first or the last time .

== = The Francis Punch Trophy == =

Francis Punch was a younger brother of sculler , publican and promoter James ' Jem ' Punch . Following the death of James , Francis bought Punch 's Hotel . Punch sponsored a sculling prize and though this event did not attract any international entrants , Rush , Trickett and Laycock competed over the Championship course in early October 1882 . Rush won not only the Punch Trophy but regained the Australian Championship .

== = The Rush Trophy == =

Following his defeat in the Walker Whiskey Trophy events , a number of Rush 's admirers and backers held a banquet in his honour , at which they presented him with an illuminated testimonial along with a sterling silver tea set , salver , and claret jug , valued at £ 200 . These recognised his excellence as a sportsman , and his admirable qualities as a man . The salver was inscribed with a dedication , and each piece bore an inscribed caricature of Rush at the oars of an outrigger skiff . The silver items are now in the collection of the Clarence River Historical Society in Grafton , New South Wales .

== = His last row == =

Business and family commitments kept Rush busy for the next few years . He moved his home up @-@ river from Maclean to Grafton , the effective ' capital ' of the Clarence River district . Rush purchased a hotel and an adjacent store , and a riverside villa which he named ' Clarence House ' . Rush took an active part in a great many community and sporting organisations . He was a founder of the Grafton Rowing Club and was several times an office @-@ holder of the Clarence River Jockey Club . He continued to promote and take part in local regattas . One of these was the Clarence River Aquatic Carnival , held on 10 March 1883 . The Carnival attracted thousands of

spectators . The main event was Rush vs Laycock for a stake of £ 1000 and the Championship of Australia , which Laycock won convincingly . At a banquet later that week , Rush announced his retirement from professional sculling , but in December of that year , he rowed Trickett on the Parramatta River for a stake of £ 400 , and lost convincingly . The newspapers praised Rush for his valour , but hinted that it was high time he retired .

Rush organised an Aquatic Carnival at Grafton , held on 2 January 1888 , as part of the national celebrations marking the centenary of European settlement in Australia . The event attracted many up @-@ and @-@ coming scullers , including future World Champion Henry Searle , and even Ned Hanlan , who declined to compete due to illness , though he gave an exhibition of ' trick ' sculling . Rush rowed his last professional match on this occasion , as a member of a pair @-@ oar crew .

= = Later life and career = =

Rush remained interested and involved in the sport of sculling . He was in demand as a race official , for example , as a umpire or timekeeper , though he did little coaching .

In 1893 , Rush moved his family to Sydney . The Banks Crash reduced many Australian businessmen to ruin , Rush included . His business was built on credit alone : Rush did not even own the Grafton house where he and his family lived , having mortgaged it from the man who sold it to him . He borrowed from local banks , using his store @-@ keeping business as security . In Sydney , Rush took a lease on the York Hotel , at the corner of King and York Streets , which quickly became known as ' Mick Rush 's Hotel ' , a popular venue for meetings of sportsmen . During the next decade , Rush kept several hotels in the city of Sydney , and operated also as a hotel broker .

Rush organised two major Sydney sculling events , held on the Parramatta River . The first was in August 1906 which included a Veterans ' Race , and a Ladies ' Double Sculling Championship . The Veterans ' Race included many old sculling champions , with the exception of Trickett who had retired from sporting activity . In 1907 , Rush organised an even more ambitious event , ' Rush 's Rowing Carnival ' , held in February 1907 @.@ with a Veteran 's Event , and an ' All Comers ' Handicap ' offering a prize of £ 50 . Rush hoped to ' resuscitate an interest in rowing . ' The Carnival attracted several promising scullers , including future champions Richard Arnst and Peter Kemp , but spectator attendance was ' very small ' . Rush 's last recorded participation in a major sculling event was as umpire of the World Championship match between William Webb and Charles Towns held 3 August 1907 , over the Parramatta course .

= = Appearance and character = =

Rush was a tall , well @-@ built and powerful man . He was described many times in Australia 's colonial press , his ' form ' being of interest to sports fans . Journalists commented repeatedly on Rush 's open and honest manner ? ' the genial Mick Rush ' ? and his honourable conduct in the world of professional sculling , which earned a reputation for dishonesty . He possessed a strong social conscience , and was involved with many community and charitable projects . Some years after his death , a Grafton resident wrote , ? Mick Rush was the best @-@ hearted Irishman who ever broke bread , and helped many a poor beggar irrespective of colour or creed , and may his descendants follow in his footsteps . ?

= = Personal life = =

Rush married Anne Aby (known as Annie) Fitzpatrick on 18 September 1865 , at St Mary 's Cathedral , Sydney . Annie Fitzpatrick , born 1846 , was the daughter of Irish ex @-@ convicts . She bore Rush fourteen children , three of whom died in infancy and two in early adulthood . None of Rush 's children became professional sportsmen , though three of his sons competed successfully in various amateur sculling contests and one as a cyclist . His daughter Emily was a well @-@ known amateur singer during her youth . Two Rush sons fought in the Boer War , another went gold

@-@ prospecting on the Kalgoorlie gold @-@ fields , and died there . Rush retired around 1913 , to a cottage and ten acres of land in Hurstville , New South Wales . He died there on 22 December 1922 , after a brief illness . Rush is buried in Sydney 's Waverley Cemetery .

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