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BRO. WILLIAM BEACH (1850 - 1935)

William Beach was born on 6 September 1850 at Chertsey, Surrey, England. He came to Australia with his parents at the age of three and grew up on a dairy farm at Dapto on the south coast of New South Wales.

He learnt the trade of blacksmithing which, no doubt, strengthened his muscles for his future sporting career as a world champion sculler. He also spent some time as a fisherman.

He began competing in rowing regattas as a member of the Balmain Rowing Club in 1875 and started winning races by defeating Bro. Edward Trickett on the Parramatta River course on 27 August 1883. He won 150 pounds with which he built his home at Dapto. 1

An advertisement for a professional sculling race appeared in *The N.S.W. Freemason* issued on 30 November 1883 -

PROFESSIONAL SCULLING RACE

A professional Sculling Race between
Messrs. EDWARD TRICKETT
MICHAEL RUSH
DONALD MACDONALD, and
WILLIAM BEACH

Will take place over the
CHAMPIONSHIP COURSE, PARRAMATTA RIVER,
on DECEMBER 8.

First Prize, £150 (presented by Mr J. Hunt, Oxford Hotel);
second prize, £60; third prize, £20.

The winner to row Edward Hanlan on his arriving from America,
in the event of Elias Laycock not being ready. It is to be rowed on
Thursday, December 6, as follows:-

First Heat - Edward Trickett, Donald Macdonald. The latter to have the choice of
position.

Second Heat - Michael Rush, William Beach, the former to have the choice of
position.

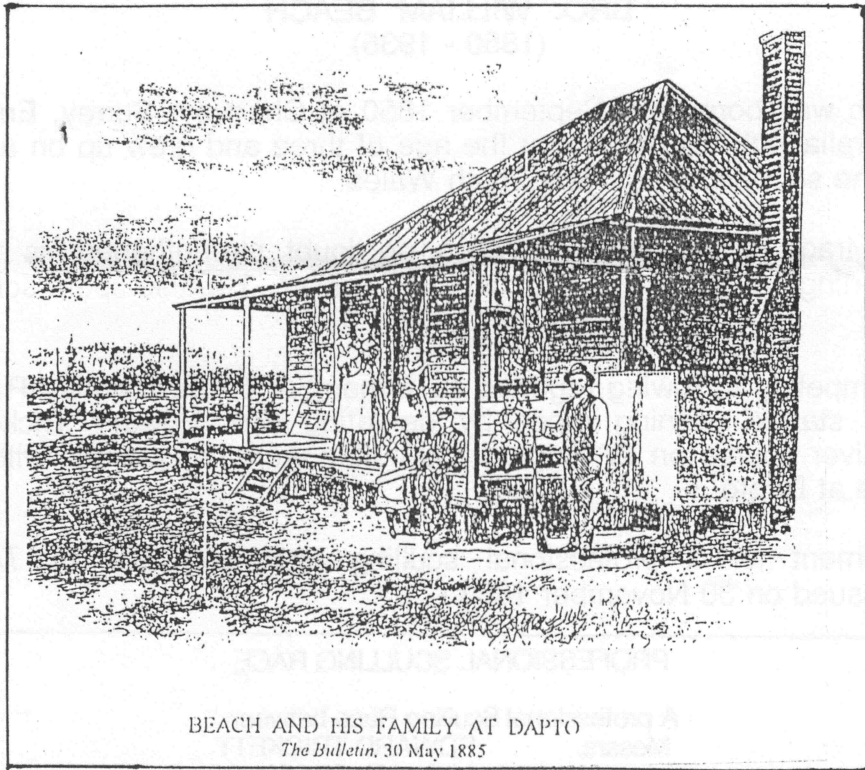
The Race will be rowed on December 8, by the winning man in each heat.

Umpire: Mr Garvan M.L.A.
Starter: Mr Myers
Judge: Mr Richards

Ample Steamer Accomodation will be provided.

The Race, for the James Henry Trophy, was won by Beach. The prize money of 150 pounds had been put up by Right Wor.Bro. James Hunt, Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of New South Wales and licensee of the Oxford Hotel. In 1888, he received the conferred rank of Past Grand Master.

Bill Beach was an amiable and lovable character and he became known as 'The People's William'. 2



On the first occasion that Bill was being taken to his new home, he ordered the driver to rein up, some five kilometres from the house and was reported to have said:

'I thought so; boy, she's at 'ome'.

One of his friends asked how he knew. Bill replied:

'I hear her a-fryin. It ain't so decided when its mullet, but when its beef sausages ya can 'ear 'em singin' fur over as th' Woolloomooloo courthouse'. 3

Bill Beach, the blacksmith, was not noted for his oratory.

The Bulletin for 28 March 1885 noted:

When Beach beat Thomas Clifford it is worthy of chronicling that he didn't say it was one of the finest races he had rowed in his life, that the race was in peril during the first mile, and that Clifford was 'a magnificent oarsman'. He didn't say anything at all; and it is when he doesn't say anything, that Beach is the most eloquent.

At Ned Hanlan's presentation night, Beach was reported as saying:

'Orl I kin say, Mistur Hanlan, is as 'ow I 'opes you'll git 'ome safe, an' find th' missus an' th' young 'uns orl rite'. 4

Next day, *The Evening News* advised its readers:

'The Dapto demon made a speech thoroughly characteristic of the man'. 5

At the height of his success, it was suggested that Beach should stand for parliament.

The Bulletin wryly remarked:

However deserved a recognition this may be of the Champion's oar-a-torical powers, it really seems a pity to spoil a good blacksmith. 6

Bill Beach was a quiet unassuming man with great self confidence. Prior to one of his races, he was seen waltzing to music being played by the band. The expenditure of energy didn't worry him and he won the race. 7

On 12 April 1884 he beat Trickett for the Australian Championship, 200 pounds and the right to race against the Canadian, Bro. Edward Hanlan, who had been initiated into Freemasonry in King Solomon's Lodge No. 22, Toronto, Canada on 9 January 1879.

The township of Toronto, on the northern shore of Lake Macquarie was named to honour Ned Hanlan.

On 16 August 1884, Beach defeated Hanlan for the prize of 500 pounds and the World Championship.

Beach was so keen to carry as little weight as possible that he discarded his colours and rowed the race bare-backed. As he threw his singlet overboard, an over-confident Hanlan smiled and said: "Why take your shirt off? You may want it". Beach replied: "I'll make you take your shirt off, Hanlan, before I've done with you."

Twenty-one minutes later, Beach was the new World Champion, cheered home by 60.000 spectators. Hanlan, it was said, took his defeat with ill grace. 8

In 1980, The Canadian Post Office issued a stamp commemorating Ned Hanlan. 9

A second race between Beach and Hanlan, and umpired by Thomas Strange, was held on the Parramatta River course on Saturday 28 March 1885. Many thought that Hanlan was the better oarsman as Beach was said to:

'catch the water in faulty manner with slanting blade'.

There was, however, some doubt about Hanlan's staying power. 10

Beach again defeated Hanlan in one of the great races in the history of rowing.

Prior to the race, Ned Hanlan requested that only one steamer be permitted on the course since, if more were allowed they would compete for the best positions to the detriment of the oarsmen. 11

Spectator boats were not the only hazard. Jelly-fish were troublesome during the early part of the year. Beach nearly capsized after his blade caught one and Hanlan also complained.

The Bulletin in typical style commented:

As a rule, the blubber turns up after the race. 12

An estimated 100,000 people watched the great race.

Every pier, wharf and headland was covered with spectators and there was just room for the course proper between the boats and the steamer. Hanlan said he had never seen so many people except when he competed on the Thames in England. On that occasion Beach said: "I left betting to my supporters, but I did win a 'tenner'". 13

Beach's sponsor¹ was the hotelier J.G. Deeble who lost no time in using Beach's name. It is doubtful if Beach had any real knowledge of horse racing. 14

<p>"BEACH'S" CONSULTATION on ROSEHILL HANDICAP 500 Sovs 1000 subscribers, 10s. each Address:- "BEACH" Care of J.G. Deeble Hotel, King and Pitt Street, Sydney</p>

The Bulletin for 4 April 1885 described the great race:

A drizzling rain on Saturday morning last gave anything but a cheerful prospect for the sculling race between Edward Hanlan and William Beach, but as the day wore on the rain cleared off, and by the time the men drew up for the start, the champion course resembled the proverbial millpond, a light north-easter scarcely ruffling the surface of the water. The race was to start between three and half-past, but it was getting on to the latter time before the *Inflexible*, the only steamer allowed to follow the race, got through the bridge, owing to the swing having been closed a few seconds before she reached it. Arrived at Charity Point, no time was cut to waste, both men showing out almost immediately, and drawing up for a start. Beach looked the Hercules that he is, and his confident to his principal supporter in the bow of the *Inflexible* showed up in great contrast to the Canadian, who looked nervous and out of sorts. Almost at the first attempt the pair dashed off dead level, both putting in 40 strokes of every ounce they knew, and, when half a dozen strokes had been gone through, Hanlan appeared to us to have a shade the best of it, but it was momentary, as Beach commenced to draw out a decided lead, and, by the time Uhr's Point was passed, the Australian had an advantage of a clear length. Hanlan looked around at his man, and put a little extra 'devil' in the finish so peculiarly his own, but it was no go, as Beach rowed over and gave him his backwash half way to the mile point, both men striking an even 36 to the minute. It must have appeared to the Canadian that his chances of catching the tiger in front of him were a very limited nature indeed. Beach continued to draw away, and shot the mile point in 6 min. 15 sec., 9 sec. ahead of Hanlan. From this out, the contest was devoid of all interest, as Beach, all through, continued to increase his lead,

ultimately winning by some 10 lengths in 22 min. 53 sec.

Hanlan pulled a plucky stern chase, but was outpaced from start to finish. The Canadian has had a very fair lease of the Championship from 1879 to 1884, and it goes without saying it was merely a matter of time when he would meet his peer on the water, but we must say we did not think that peer would turn up in Beach, who has been such a comparatively short period in the game. It really seems like a fairy tale, and it scarcely appears years since we saw Beach take his first flutter in an outrigger, upon which occasion it was more by luck than management he did not take an involuntary bath in the anything but savoury waters of Johnston's Bay. In having for a mentor the accomplished waterman, Charley Messenger, may be attributed the wonderful improvement in form shown by Beach since his race with Hanlan in August last. Hanlon owned up to his defeat by a better sculler in manly style, saying to the crowd at Parramatta on Saturday night: "Well boys, I have been beaten by a man better than myself, which I must acknowledge. I am not one who boasts, but I speak my full confidential opinion that I have been beaten by a man such as the world has never seen outside Australia. I am sorry I am beaten, and I am pleased to see a better man than myself. I can say frankly, and will bet all the money I have in the world, that I will row any sculler but Beach, but Beach I can't beat".

Many ladies also took a keen interest in the race. The anonymous M.A.B. writing to 'Dearest Belle' in the social column of *The Bulletin* commented:

Poor Hanlan! We shall all have to acknowledge now, dear, that Beach is the better man - I mean oarsman of the two - shan't we? You should have seen the long faces as they returned from the race on Saturday evening - those who backed Hanlan I mean. Even the horses, whose heads were adorned with the Canadian's colours, looked sorrowful or tired, I am not certain which, but I prefer to think it was the former. 15

Nor was Mrs Hanlon forgotten. M.A.B. reported: 16

To begin with that inconsiderate Fanny must needs fix her dance for the very night of Hanlan's benefit, which I think was quite too mean. Of course she didn't know, when she sent out the invitations, that the benefit was to be on the same night, but it wasn't any the less provoking for all that. Mr Alcock, however, was kind enough to send the pretty things for me to look at, which were presented to the Canadian last Monday night. For Mrs Hanlan, there was a beautiful ring set with rubies and diamonds. The oval setting was so large that it would cover the whole first joint of the finger, which is now the fashionable size for ladies' rings. A brooch, which was banjo-shaped, had at the head a large sapphire, surrounded by brilliant diamonds - at the tail was a single ruby, also encircled by diamonds. If Mrs Hanlan isn't consoled for her spouse's loss of the Championship by these elegant presents, the wound must indeed be difficult to heal, don't you think so? But I was nearly forgetting to tell you that a silver salver, handsomely wrought, was presented to the ex champion, and I can quite understand his professed love for Sydney and its people, for he has been made little short of an idol during his stay with us. All the presents came from the establishment of Mr T.M. Alcock, Haymarket, so you may be sure they were as tasteful and elegant as could be procured anywhere.

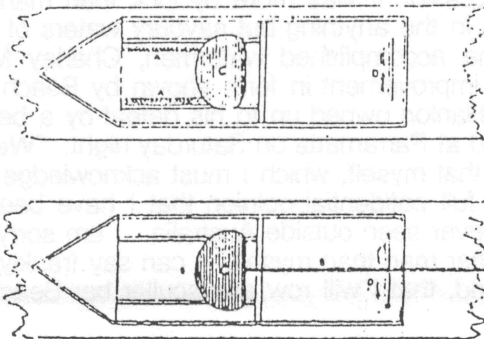
There was a good deal of speculation about what the newspapers described as 'Hanlan's Secret', until an article appeared in the 18 April issue of *The Bulletin*.

HANLAN'S SECRET

How Beach is said to have learned it, and won.

It was the first use of the sliding seat.

A GENTLEMAN, whose name we carefully noted and have lost now we come to want it, walked into our office this week and unfolded to us a curious yarn. He had, he affirmed, fathomed *Hanlan's Secret*, and to his discovery was due the easy victories by Beach over the famous phenomenon. The secret consisted in a mechanism applied to the sliding-seat, so simple in conception and construction as to present no difficulties in the way of secretly fitting it at the last moment before a race, and of keeping it secure from observation.



We give a couple of diagrams from the inventor's description and model. The principle claimed for the thing is just that it does all the work of the return of the striking attitude - drawing the sliding-seat to the required position after each stroke, and thus saving the sculler so much exertion. The inventor claims that to this mechanism must be attributed the continued motion of Hanlan's boat through the water in lieu of the jerky stops so noticeable in the case of all other scullers. But here comes the curious part of the business. The inventor asserts that he communicated his invention to Mr Deeble who agreed to purchase it for Beach's use prior to his first race with Hanlan, and he declares his conviction that Beach actually used a modification of the mechanism in both his races. He says that at the conclusion of the last race, he was close to where Beach sat in his boat, and distinctly observed that when the champion turned his head to acknowledge some of the greetings of his friends, the blade of his sculls lying on the surface of the water, he was suddenly slid forward, and lost his balance, the springs having worked while he was off his guard, so to speak.

On reference to the diagrams, the nature of the invention will be perceived. The diagrams show two ways of applying the idea. The top drawing C is the sliding-seat and D the stretcher. A A are two spiral springs behind the seat, so fixed that during the stroke the sculler, sliding, compresses the springs, which, on the completion of the stroke, return him, seat and all, to the first position, ready for another stroke. In the lower diagram, there is substituted for the springs an elastic rope BB of indiarubber, which performs the same function as the springs, and has the advantage of being hidden under the covering of the boat until drawn out and hooked on the seat, just before the start, and of flying out of sight into the run, when detached, the moment the race is over.

We interviewed Hanlan, with reference to his mechanism, and he laughed at it. He points out, what is sufficiently obvious, that to slide against such a spring during the stroke would require a far greater amount of exertion than would be saved by the mechanical recoil when the stroke was finished. He altogether scouts the idea that Beach used any device of the kind in his races.

It was common practice at the time to arrange public subscriptions for sporting identities. The aquatic testimonials raised 1800 pounds for Beach, 555 pounds for Hanlan and 410 pounds for Charles Messenger, who was a champion sculler, and who had given Beach great assistance.

He was the father of famous footballer, Bro. Dally Messenger. 17

Although many good judges believed that Beach should stick to the Parramatta River course, in March 1886 he left for London where he won 1,200 pounds in the International Sweepstakes and successfully defended his world title against Gauder on the Thames. During this exhausting race, each rower in turn stopped and slumped in his boat. 18

He returned to Sydney in December 1886 and was accorded a hero's welcome.

He was presented to the Governor of New South Wales, Bro. His Excellency, Lord Carrington and was accorded a grand picnic at Cabarita Park overlooking the Parramatta River course, by a Committee of the Grand Lodge of New South Wales headed by the Grand Master, Most Wor. Bro. Dr. Harman Tarrant, M.L.A. 19

Special trains ran from Sydney, Bathurst and Goulburn on 26 November, 1887 when, on the Nepean River, Bill Beach again defeated Hanlan. Beach successfully defended his title on seven occasions, finally retiring unbeaten in 1887 forfeiting to Peter Kemp.

Bro. Ned Trickett, defeated by Beach in 1883, described him as 'The greatest sculler the world has ever seen'.

Bill Beach retired to his farm at Dapto and *The Bulletin* of 23 November 1895 said that he was "one of the very few successful athletes who has prudently handled his earnings".

One of his sons, Arnold, became a sculler, but could not attain the greatness of his father.

Rowing was also in the Hanlan family. His younger sister was a champion sculler who, it was said, could beat any oarsman, let alone oarswoman, in Canada. She frequently raced her brother Edward and was considered a good match for him. 20

William Beach was initiated in Lodge Tarboltan, No. 377, Scottish Constitution, in Sydney on 21 April 1885. This was just after he had beaten Bro. Edward Hanlan for the second time. It was considered a red-letter day in Scottish Freemasonry and the special invitation card read:

"Banquet at the Masonic Great Hall York Street, April 21st 1885, on the occasion of the initiation into Freemasonry of William Beach, the champion oarsman of the world."

The Military Headquarters Volunteer Band was engaged and there was a large and representative gathering of brethren.

At the conclusion of the festivities Bro. McMahon was awarded a special vote of thanks for his composition, the "Beach Schottische." 21

He affiliated with Lodge Illawarra No. 59, United Grand Lodge of New South Wales in 1895 and he was foundation treasurer of Lodge King Edward No. 234 on its formation at Dapto on 12 August 1903.

He remained a member and frequent attender until his death on 28 January 1935.

The N.S.W. Freemason, in its issue for March 1935, published an obituary:

THE LATE BROTHER WILLIAM BEACH

The late Brother Beach was initiated into Masonry in Lodge Sydney Tarboltan, No. 377, Scottish Constitution, (now No. 11) on 21 April 1885. He had just beaten the previously unbeaten sculler Hanlan, and was indeed the idol of the day, and his admission was regarded as quite a red-letter day in the history of Scottish Freemasonry in the colony, as it was then called.

The invitation card notified that there would be a "Banquet at the Masonic Great Hall, York Street, April 21st, 1885, on the occasion of the initiation into Freemasonry of William Beach, the champion oarsman of the world.

The Headquarters Band was engaged, and there was a large and representative gathering of brethren.

Brother William Beach became a Trustee of Dapto Showground, President of the Regatta Club, and Alderman of the Central Illawarra Council and Patron of the Boy Scouts.

Monuments to his memory were erected in Cabarita Park in Sydney in 1938 and in Bill Beach Park, Mullet Creek, Dapto. Beach Street in the Parramatta River-side suburb of Tennyson and William Beach Road, Dapto also remember a great masonic sportsman and citizen. 22

NOTES

1. Douglas Pike (General Editor) *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne University Press. Vol. 3. 1851 - 1890. 1969, p. 122.
2. *The Bulletin*. 18 May 1895, p. 17.
3. *Loc. cit.* 9 May 1885, p. 14.
4. *Loc. cit.* 2 May 1885, p. 14.
5. *The Evening News*. 20 April 1885.
6. *The Bulletin*. 13 June 1885, p.5.
7. *Loc. cit.*, 11 April 1885, p.17.
8. M.C.I. Levy. *Wallumetta*. W.E. Smith Ltd., Sydney, 1947, p. 226.
9. *Whence Come We, the Mason in the Community*. Grand Lodge of A.F. and A.M. of Canada covering Freemasonry in Ontario, 1764 - 1980. p.262. (Also T.J. Fray. *Masonic Philately*. Harry Hayes Philatelic Study No. 46, 1985, Part 2., p. 85.
10. *The Bulletin*, 28 March 1885, p. 14.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Loc. cit.* 13 June 1885, p. 14.
13. M.C.I. Levy, *op.cit.*, p. 227.
14. *The Bulletin*. 11 April 1885, p. 17.
15. *Loc. cit.* 4 April 1885, p. 16.
16. *Loc. cit.* 25 April 1885, p. 17.
17. *Loc. cit.* 9 May 1885, p. 14,
18. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. *Loc. cit.*, p. 122.
19. *The Freemason*. 14 December 1886.
20. *The Bulletin*. 6 June 1885, p. 14.
21. J.R. Sutcliffe, *History of Lodge Sydney Tarbolton*, privately published, 1957, p. 26.
22. *The Australian Encyclopedia*, The Grolier Society of Australia, Vol. 1, 4th Ed., 1983, p. 292.