

## My life in rowing Bill Carey

Well, here I am, around 14 years of age, skinny with a light body frame, and attending CBC where sport was compulsory. Aussie rules football was the winter sport; I played in the Thirds (lowest level possible). I did not like it at all because, being of light build, I'd get hammered nearly every week by boys much larger than me.

Summer sports were cricket and tennis. I couldn't stand cricket and in one inter-school match, I was bowled out by an under-arm ball. I didn't mind tennis, and played socially for many years in later life, but I wasn't good enough to be really competitive.

Rowing started at CBC way back in 1909 (not with me!) with the help of Mercantile (disbanded in 1954) and Torrens Rowing Clubs. Due to school staff transfers, CBC ceased rowing activities in 1928. It was revived in 1948, again with help from Torrens Rowing Club, but fell off the radar yet again, until it was re-introduced as a school sport in 1958.



So, anything to get out of cricket, I put my hand up for a row.

Torrens Rowing Club (TRC) hosted CBC yet again. We initially used TRC equipment and were supported by their coaches. In the book recounting the history of CBC rowing, there are multiple references and thanks to TRC and their coaches. My first coach was Peter Morelli, a TRC legend and King's Cup oarsman.

I started as a coxswain for CBC (I keep saying I was of light build), but in 1959 got to row in the 2 seat of the under 16 tub fours. These clinker-built boats were really, really(!) heavy.

But it turned out that I was quite good at this sport. That year, I won the school rowing cup (I still have it).

In 1960, I graduated to stroke the School Open Four. I can't recall winning anything in these early days.

In 1961 and 1962, I stroked the CBC First Eight, coached by Peter Morelli and later, Ron 'Slim' Lawrence. Probably, my first race win was in 1961, when CBC won the First VIII eight race at a Snowden's Beach regatta. In that last year, I was Captain of Boats for CBC.

1962 was the first year that CBC was permitted to enter an eight into the prestigious Head of the River. The regatta was held on the Torrens Lake, with heats either 2 or 3 crews across, depending on the draw. It was also a time when the banks of the Torrens were crammed with spectators. I stroked the First Eight (photo) at that regatta, but in our first heat against Scotch College we were beaten by a good length.



A quote from the CBC Rowing Story is pertinent here. In the Principal's report of 1962, it is recorded, "*Rowing has become firmly established and is proving most beneficial, providing an excellent activity for the boys who have no special talent for other summer sports.*"

Yep, that says it all ... but I was beginning to like this sport of rowing.

After school, University beckoned and I enrolled in a science degree. I coached the CBC First Four for a year; however, it was natural for me to continue competitive rowing with Torrens.

I remember traveling with TRC to Dimboola for sprint races over their 750-metre course. Accommodation was first class - sleeping on the grass/dirt under the rowing club.

At about this time TRC was becoming strong in lightweight (LW) rowing, so that suited me perfectly. We were fortunate to have champion LW rowers in the club, Vaughn Bollen, Bob Cooper, Alfie Bowen, Lui Lippis, as well as David Neall, Nick Lippis, Peter Cooper, George Boboly and Michael Eastaughffe (who subsequently officiated for Australia at many national and international rowing events), amongst others.

The photo is of the TRC LW8 crew that were State Champions over multiple seasons.

I can't remember exactly how many State LW 8 championship races I won - probably 6 (because in my shed I still have 6 silver beer tankards that were the championship

TORRENS ROWING CLUB  
S.A.R.A. - CHAMPIONSHIP LIGHTWEIGHT EIGHTS  
WON BY TORRENS ROWING CLUB - 1968 - 1969 - 1970



DAVID NEALL, (BOW) BILL CAREY, (TWO) MICHAEL EASTAUGHFFE, (THREE) PETER COOPER, (FOUR) ALFIE BOWEN, (FIVE) VAUGHN BOLLEN, (SIX) ROBERT COOPER, (SEVEN) LUIGI LIPPIS, (STROKE) GEOFFREY WORTH, (COX)

trophies). TRC also won the State LW premiership for the season multiple times during the 1960s and 70s.

One of these races is burned into my brain. Over the entire 2000 metres, we were neck and neck with Railways (now Riverside). I had no idea, even from the 2 seat who won. Exhausted, I slumped over my oar. I then heard the announcement – “Torrens by a bow ball.” That very quickly makes you feel a whole lot better.

University tried to ‘poach’ me around this time, using the argument... well you’re attending Adelaide Uni, you should row with us. I actually visited that club – but only for a few times. I had too many great friends at Torrens and our club seemed more relaxed. Red and white was in my blood – and still is today. I can’t imagine rowing in any other colours.

I remember another championship 8 race on the Port River. We won, but I was on my knees in the water’s edge, resting on the side of the boat, trying not to vomit. My legs wouldn’t work. My good friend and then pair partner, Nick Lippis, tapped me on the shoulder and informed me that we had to be up at the start for our pair race – now! My response is not printable - but we made it to the start. Nick and I won a few pair races for Torrens – some surprisingly easily, even though we were both real lightweights. We had a tough coach (Lui Lippis, Nick’s brother) and a quick start.

I owe so much to the coaches of this time. Slim Lawrence looked after us for many years. I was stroking an eight (can’t remember which one) training on the Torrens and the conversation with Slim went something like...

Slim – “Bill, get out of the stroke seat and row 7”

Bill – “I can’t row bow side”

Slim – “Get into the 7 seat”

I did ... We rowed to the weir and back.

Slim – “Bill, get back in the stroke seat”

That is my one and only row on bow side – ever.

Before one State LW8 championship, we were having trouble making the weight requirements, due to certain unnamed “fat” people in the back end of the boat. My contribution to solving this dilemma was to be told that I had to lose weight and get under 10 stone (63.5kg). Easily done, being a proper lightweight - I rowed the race at 9 stone 13 (63kg).

Ian Russell was another of my coaches. It was about the time when training sessions were changing from after work/Uni to early morning. He claims(!) that I complained the loudest and longest about the early morning rows. I did dodge one early row. Ian had us down on the Port River at sunrise for a 2000m trial in preparation for an upcoming championship. Our coxswain (can’t remember who) unfortunately hit one of the massive shipping buoys and took off the bow rigger – end of session.

We had a significant race at Murray Bridge (which may have been another championship) and Ian phoned the Murray Bridge RC to let us know that his car had broken down and he couldn’t make it for his pre-race briefing. I remember that, on

the start line, we were all saying... "Let's do this for Ian." I'm sure the boat took off the fastest it had ever done in training and we won by lengths. That's what an inspiring coach can do.

As well as LW rowing, I competed in, and won state championships in other classes in various years - Maiden eights and Junior eights. I was too light to ever make it into a Senior eight. I still have the Advertiser clipping of a Maiden 8+ championship that we won at Snowden's, just beating Saints by half a length, after our stroke, Bill Dankbaar, gave the crew a hurry up shout ("do you want to be beaten by schoolboys?") near the finish. The crew was (bow) N Lippis, W Carey, D Neall, P Cooper, M Eastaughffe, L Lippis, N Shields and W Dankbaar (stroke), coxed by Bob Potter.

1968 must have been a good year in my rowing career. The 1968-1969 TRC Annual Report records that I topped the individual club performance list with 11 wins from 18 starts for the season.

Around 1968, we were having selection trials for the LW 4 to represent South Australia in the interstate Penrith Cup. I was just on the edge of the short list for state selection. We had 2 fours that sometimes trained together. One of these sessions was on the Murray, with the coaches (maybe Bob Russell and/or Slim Lawrence – not sure) trailing us in a tinnie. We started at the Murray Bridge Rowing club and headed off towards Tailem Bend, doing multiple, power pieces on the way. I'm not sure if we actually made to the Bend, but we rowed plenty of miles, much of the distance at pressure. On the way back, we were told to stop at the 2000 metre mark of the rowing course. My first thought was... at last they're giving us a bit of a rest. Then came the instructions – 2000 metres at competitive race pace. That was another time of total exhaustion. My crew was beaten, most likely ensuring that I missed the chance of making the State crew. My contribution that year was to help Bob Cooper tow the boats to the Nepean River at Penrith for the national regatta – that's a long drive with a big trailer.

To fund the Penrith Cup crew, we had to do some fund raising. So, we arranged a get together at Alfie Bowen's place in the Adelaide Hills. We also had (shhhh...) a poker machine that could collect money to be put towards travel expenses. Poker machines were illegal in SA at the time, so it was all very hush hush. The entire rowing community was invited. During the night, one guest got a bit stropky, so was asked(!) to leave. He immediately dobbed us into the police, who raided the place and took the poker machine and its proceeds. We eventually got the funds back.

At another fund raiser for TRC, we had invited a dancing lady of dubious reputation to entertain the boys (it was still a male only club). Ian Russell and I watched for a short time, then went to the back corner of the clubrooms and played on the Pub Pong table – some may remember this as one of the first video games.

All of this rowing was taking up huge amounts of my time. My studies at Uni had continued and by now, I was doing research for my PhD in Biochemistry. At one stage in my final year, when I still had an enormous amount of work to complete for my thesis, my supervisor called me into his office and said, simply... "Bill you have a

choice. You can row ... or graduate.” I got the message and so my rowing career came to an abrupt end in 1971.

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Sometime around the late 1980s, I got an unexpected phone call from Lui Lippis. He informed me that Veterans rowing (as it was then called) was taking off and that Adelaide would host the 'Masters' Games in 1989. Would I like to participate? An emphatic yes would see my reincarnation into the world of rowing.

*As an aside, it was only early in 1993 that FISA struck the word 'Veterans' from its Statutes, to be replaced by 'Masters', and endorsed mixed Masters events.*

Of course, I didn't win anything at that 1989 regatta. But we (our master's group) had great fun in that era. The Union of Old Oarsmen had a number of local and country Veteran's regattas in the 1990s. As a TRC group, rowers, wives and girlfriends, we would take a bus (with our own TRC driver) to various country veterans' regattas – Berri, Renmark, Wentworth and Mildura – sometimes staying overnight. I still have trophies for the P and R Morelli Open 8 for 1991, 1992 and 1993, the Chas Bowman over 50s four (1994) and the Jim Lord over 50s eight (1994).

During this era, I started rowing with the TOMs (Torrens Old Members) in an eight on Sunday mornings, followed by a few(!) beers and pasties around the 'long table'. If it was your birthday, you had to provide half a dozen 'long necks' for the group.

Over the ensuing years, the TOMs rowed (nearly) every Wednesday morning and this has been a major part of my life. Thanks must go to Grant Baldwin for his work in ensuring we had a crew each morning. While I was working, I found this early morning row so useful; the requirement to concentrate on technique and balance distracted me from the pressures of the upcoming day (*mens sana*).

TRC hosted the WEA Learn to Row courses from around 1989. I was a coach for a few years in the early 1990s, leading these courses, on and off-water.

In 1991, our age matched masters group travelled to Lake Wivenhoe in Queensland for the Australian Masters Games (AMG). With a mixed club crew (1 from ARC and 1 from PARC), I rowed a C-grade men's eight for a silver medal.

My only international rowing experience was a social row in a quad with Grant and his son-in-law, Wade Hall-Craggs and Paul Stanley, from Durham University Boat Club on the River Wear in Durham (2006). We had a great paddle, although it was hard to concentrate, as the scenery is spectacular.

Wade was able to get me 2 hard to get (and expensive) tickets into the Stewards Enclosure at Henley Royal Regatta. This is an amazing event and well worth a look – some great rowing, so many rules about dress code (male and female), personal appearance, behaviour and of course, you can only drink Pims!

I also rowed regularly on the Torrens in a coxless four with members from the TOMs group – Lui Lippis, Ian Russell, Kevin Keogh and John Tonkin. Lui was a tough taskmaster – 500-metre pieces at race pace, racing start – square blades!

In 2005, we travelled to Rockhampton and Queensland's Fitzroy River for our first real competition at the Australian Masters Championships (as opposed to the Masters Games). In our eight, fours and quad races (various grades), most often within 20 strokes, we had lost touch with all the other crews. I think our single best result was second last. It was a real wakeup call and we didn't like it; we all knew we had to get better. The way to do that is pretty simple – more miles in the boat, more gym work and some coaching.

Anna Tree came to our rescue and coached us with our gym fitness and rowing technique. She would video us at West Lakes and emphatically point out how short we all were rowing.

I also remember Anna running a single scull session for all age groups in TRC up around the start pontoon at West Lakes. After some preliminary stationary exercises, Anna told us to stand up in the scull. I said... "I can't." Anna just repeated, louder, "Stand up!" I eventually stood up, holding the oars flat on the water. Anna's next instruction was to do some "rigger dips," while still standing. We had to raise and lower alternate hands, so the rigger and gate went under water, first on stroke side, then bow side. I really didn't think that would be possible – but it is. I stayed dry and it shows that it's actually quite hard to tip a scull over if you keep control of the oars.

Our masters group still warmly remember Anna's coaching. Even after she left, you would hear the question... "Why are we doing this exercise like this?" The answer was always ... "because Anna said."

I thought I'd have a go at racing a single scull, so I entered in the SA Masters state championships. No one finished behind me – that's one way of saying I came last. The weather was lousy – that's my excuse.

However, our group was starting to get a bit competitive at local and country regattas, winning those Veteran's races at various Riverland events.

At the 2007 Australian Masters Games (AMG) in Adelaide, I picked up 6 medals – 1 gold, 1 silver and 4 bronze.

But the Australian Master's Championships are a different level to the Games. I participated in the 2007 (Sydney), 2008 (Nagambie) and the 2009 World Masters Regatta (Sydney) without any medals – other than a 'club' medal.

However, we had a lot of fun. At the 2009 World Masters, we used our competitor's lanyards laced through caramel donuts and pretended they were gold medals.

This regatta had a scary moment. Lui Lippis and I were heading down to the start for our H-grade double race, when the wind suddenly came up. I mean wind... and UP – typhoon like. Many small boats were swamped, or just blew over and sank – even a couple of quads tipped over. Being almost at the end of the warm-up lake heading to



the start, we had the longest row back to safety. Lui isn't a strong swimmer (if at all) and was quite apprehensive, especially as waves were breaking over the side of the boat.

Accompanied by the Umpires' boat, we were the last crew back to the launching pontoons and got a round of applause for making it back without sinking.



But (confession time), Lui and I did capsize our double on a couple of other occasions. The best display was at a Murray Bridge regatta, in front of all the regatta spectators. We pushed off to head down to the start of our event, but we both failed to control our oars on the stroke side and over we went. We hurriedly had to get back on the bank, lift the boat and empty out the water. When we arrived at the start, the aligner called (very loudly, for everyone to hear) ... "would the **very wet** Torrens crew please come up to the line."

Oh ... OK, while on confessions, Kevin and I tipped out of a double at West Lakes (technical error), and I've tipped out of a single (my own fault, as I hadn't checked the rigger was securely installed).

2011 AMG Adelaide – 7 medals, 1 gold, 3 silver and 3 bronze

Ian Russell and I rowed an MH2- pair at the 2013 Australian Masters Championships in Canberra. It was a memorable race, neck and neck with St George (NSW) over the entire 1000 metres. The race commentator called Torrens as the winners, so there were great celebrations. But the timekeepers had a different result; we came second by 0.52 seconds. I also stroked a G-grade 4- to a bronze medal at that regatta, so we were on the improve.

We rowed the pair again at the World Rowing Championships in Ballarat in 2014 (photo). This time, we were successful and had a world gold medal for the H-grade pair.

A memorable race, rowing away from the opposition at the finish.





At that same World Championship regatta, I stroked a TRC G-grade eight to a gold medal in terrible windy conditions. The crew was Bill Carey (stroke), Ian Russell (7), Carmine Barone (6), John Tonkin (5), Loch Mitchell (4), Michael Magarey (3), Luigi Lippis (2), Kevin Keough (bow) and Vicky Knight (cox).

A great deal of that race's success goes to Vicky, our coxswain from Port Adelaide. The starter was getting quite frustrated (and loud) trying to line up

four eights in the crosswind. Vicky's comment was "Don't listen to him. Listen to me." She took control of aligning our boat – the starter even gave us a "well done, Torrens." She also surprised some of our Japanese opponents, telling them in their native language, not to row too hard!

That same regatta proved that you don't have to win the race to have a memorable and enjoyable competitive row. We entered a G-grade coxless quad and really didn't think we had much of a chance. The crew was Kevin Keough (bow), Bob Russell (2), Ian Russell (3) and Bill Carey (stroke). We had a great row and came second by a half-length. Unexpected and memorable.

At the 2015 Australian Championships in Penrith, Kevin Keough and I made it through heats into the H-grade double final. We were off the pace in the final.

At the 2015 AMG at West Lakes in Adelaide, the H-grade double race, again with Kevin, was instructive. In the final, we were probably close to a length down from a Canberra/Manning River crew nearing the red buoys at the finish. I remember saying... "Let's do this" – or something (!) like that. Our pace lifted and we passed the other crew for a gold medal. The lesson - you can win a race from behind – never give it away.



I also won a silver for an H-grade 4+ and another gold for the H-grade pair with Ian – although this was a row over as we had scared off any opposition!

Ian Russell and I rowed our pair again in the 2017 Masters Championships in Nagambie with a good chance of a medal. On the way to the start, we did a short piece as a warm up. Unfortunately, at full speed, we ran into the old steel starting platform. My rigger back arm broke and, worse, so did my oar. We "participated" in



the race, but I could not put on any weight as my oar and rigger just bent every stroke. I was terrified that something might break completely – managing a pair without an oar on both sides is inherently dangerous.

In 2018 Masters Championships Lake Barrington Tasmania, Ian and I won the gold for the I-grade pair. We also got a silver for the I-grade double. We stepped out of the double (event 115) into the waiting pair and immediately rowed back to the start for the M12- (event 117), ready to race again. Our opposition crew was in a similar situation, but scratched.

The 2019 Australian Masters Games in Adelaide were quite successful. I rowed in multiple crews - G-grade 8+ gold; H-grade 2x bronze; H-grade quad, silver; F-grade 4+ silver.

The medal story shows that if you put your mind to it, row the miles, do the work in the boat and get some coaching help, you can have quite some success at regattas of all levels. In writing this, I realise how far we came from the early competitions where our position was often last, to have some quite respectable results.

These days, my out of boat contribution to help with the management of TRC is to prepare and maintain the TRC websites – both for rowing and for our Function centre. I've done this on and off since around 2005 when Bianca Chapman created our first rowing website.

I continue to row with the TOMs on Wednesday mornings and, recently, we've expanded this to include a Friday crew.

And now, some of my proudest moments at TRC.

In 2011, TRC awarded me the ultimate club Honour of Life Membership. It's such a great feeling to be recognised in that very special list.

In 2018, I had the honour of having a boat carry my name. The Bill Carey – a lovely double/pair with RED riggers – how cool is that?

That completes my memories of my life at TRC to date – hopefully, I'll add more over the coming years. With a decade plus break while setting up my employment and life's work at the Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital Biochemistry labs, rowing for Torrens has been a major influence on my life. So many friends have been made and strong bonds still exist. So much fun and enjoyment – and you don't have to win every race to feel that.

To complete my narrative, here's two of my favourite 'sayings'. I have T-shirts with these maxims printed on them.

"Remigo ergo sum" – I row, therefore I am.

"Athletes row, others play games." This one gets a few 'comments'. Heh, heh!

Row fast and have fun.