

Basic Detail Report

Warrego

Vessel number

HV000861

Date

1952

Primary Maker

Uffa Fox

Description

Warrego is a 14ft RAN clinker dinghy that was built in 1952 at the Garden Island Dockyard in Sydney. It has a 5.6ft beam and 6 inch draught. It was modelled of a UK design developed by Charles Nicholson and Uffa Fox. From 1960 to 1980 it was used by the RAN Reserve Cadets. An abridged version of the design evolution of the dinghy and Warrego's history as told by owner Robert Gibson is as follows: In March 1935 the Admiralty of the Royal Navy in association with the Royal Naval Sailing Association officially adopted the "Island Class" 14' dinghy as a vessel for sail training and recreation. The dinghy had been fathered by the exceptionally active Portsmouth Harbour Racing and Sailing Association. The design allowed for the dinghy to be carried onboard Her Majesty's Ships so that adequate training in sail and racing was available wherever HM Ships were, whether in Port or in foreign waters. The Royal Air Force Yacht Club at Calshot, England also had a fleet of 14' Island Class dinghy's and sail racing was keenly contested between the Forces. The dinghy's were built at Portsmouth, Devonport, Chatham, Rosyth and Sheerness Naval Dockyards and were issued to the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force bases in Malta, Gibraltar, Bombay, West Indies, Singapore and the Dominions. The designer of the dinghy Mr Charles Nicholson and member of the Island Sailing Club, England conducted strenuous trials with special attention to the design of the keel, rudder and rig. The design was found to be fast, strongly built and had excellent seaworthy qualities. Uffa Fox, a most experienced dinghy racer on the Solant designed the rigging and sail plan. The dinghy's were built at the Portsmouth Naval Base by Royal Naval shipwright apprentice and were built on a production line except for those individually built by apprentices in their final year of studies as part of their final examination. Sometime after World War II the plans and specifications were forwarded to the Royal Australian Navy and production of the dinghy's commenced at Garden Island Naval Dock Yard, Sydney, much in the same manner as in England some 10-15 years prior and again with naval apprentice shipwrights building them. Gibson, who joined the Sea Cadets in 1963 was initially sailing whalers. Here he talks about his first time aboard Warrego: The day finally came, dinghy sailing was on the training program. I was on the crew list for Warrego, boat No.354. The dinghy had a coxswain and crew of 3, far less than the whalers, which had a coxswain and crew of 6. Although the unit had three 14' Island Dinghy's, Boat No 354 was my favourite from day one. There was just that "something" about her. Twelve months admiring boat No 354 and at last I was to go sailing in her. The coxswain was a SBLT Grimley and I should have known by the name what lay ahead - GRIM. Gibson became Coxswain for Warrego for two years

before resigning from the Sea Scouts in 1969. In 1972, the federal government disbanded all RAN, Army, and Air Force Cadet Units and all equipment stores and assets were disposed of. The Cadet Force was reestablished in 1978 and became known as the Naval Reserve Cadets. Gibson entered officer training in 1982, and during this period Navy Units had been supplied with Corsair Class fibreglass sailing boats. During the late 1980s Gibson progressed to becoming Lieutenant Commander Training Officer for NSW and ACT. Here he recalls encountering Warrego once more at a local museum near Coffs Harbour in 1992 whilst inspecting cadet units on the north coast of NSW: As I walked up towards the building I noticed that at the rear of the premises was an upturned timber boat in very poor condition. I was quite astonished to discover that it was a 14' Island Class dinghy and further inspection found that it had a patch of "plastibond" filling a hole in the bow starboard side that I had patched when I hit the bowsprit of a moored yacht some 15 years earlier. I couldn't believe it, it was "Warrego". She looked very sad, had some 30 holes punched through her with a steel fence post, was badly sagged from being upside down for many years and had most of her brass missing. I called my driver and we managed to turn "Warrego" over, she was a very sad sight. Gibson was able to acquire Warrego off the museum, along with its two piece mast, spars and sails. He brought it back to Sydney and had it restored in 2003 with the help of Pittwater based shipwright Mick Floydd. This process is detailed by Gibson: "...I was given a full set of drawings and construction specifications for the 14' Island Class Dinghy by the RAN archives. "Warrego" was re-ribbed and re-planked, the time upside down did its toll and along with the smashed planks made by the steel fence post made saving any timbers impossible. Planks and ribs were replaced with spotted gum ribs and Pacific Maple planks as called for in her specifications. "Warrego" was restored exactly as per her build as Boat No. 354 date stamped 1952. Following the restoration Gibson was gifted an original Admiralty Flax boat cover in mint condition along with a new tiller still with the Dept. of Defence part number attached to it. Warrego was displayed at two Classic Wooden Boat Festivals in Sydney in 2004 and 2006, and the Australian Wooden Boat Festival in Hobart in 2005. It won best dressed boat in 2006. In 2008 Gibson moved to New Zealand, and in 2009 Warrego was entered into the NZ Antique and Classic Wooden Boat Show at Lake Rotoiti, the first time it had been in water and under sail since 1969. In 2009 and 2010 Warrego received multiple awards for best restored boat at the Akorea Boat Show and NZ Antique and Classic Wooden Boat Show. In 2022 Gibson moved to Adelaide where Warrego resides today. It participated in the South Australian Wooden Boat Festival in Goolwa in 2023, and is set to participate in the Echunga All British Day in March 2024 and Saltwater Classic in Port Vincent in April 2024.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 4.27 m x 1.71 m x 0.18 m, , (14 ft x 5.6 ft x 0.6 ft, ,)