

Oar of NZ's first official Olympic medallist returned to Auckland rowing club

Stuff, Aug 09 2021

Mina Kerr-Lazenby

A rowing oar that belonged to the first Olympic medallist for New Zealand in the early 1900s has been returned to its rightful home – a rowing club in West Auckland.

Kiwi rower Darcy Hadfield was a member of Waitematā Rowing Club, located in Auckland's Te Atatū Peninsula, when he won a bronze medal at the 1920 Olympics.

He was the country's eighth Olympian but its first official winner, with all New Zealand winners having previously represented Australasia.



CHRIS MCKEEN/STUFF

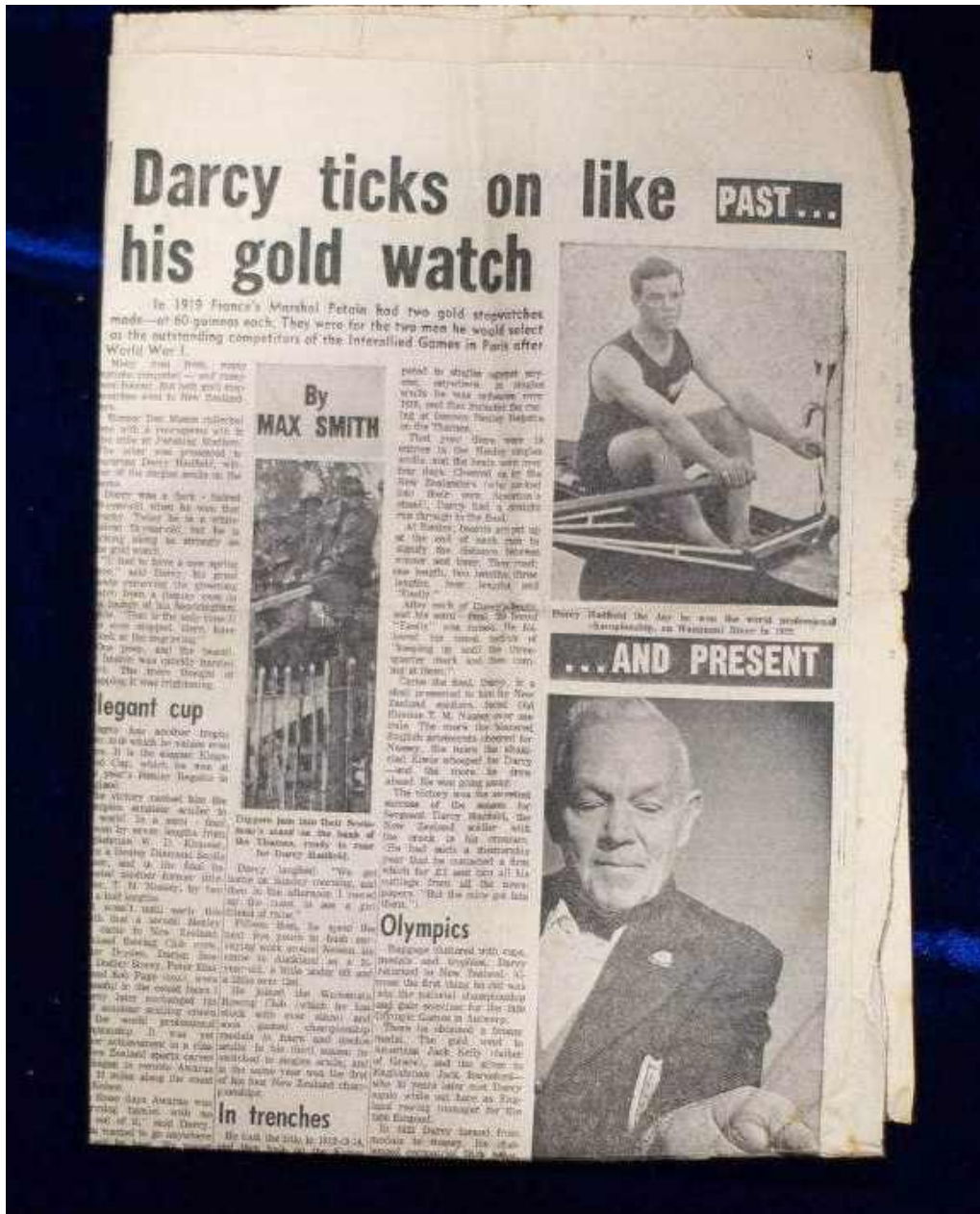
Brian Hawthorne, one of the coaches of the Waitematā Rowing Club, holds the oar that belonged to the first Olympic medallist for NZ, Darcy Hadfield.

John Pash, president of the Waitematā Rowing Club, said it was “a real surprise” when he received a call notifying him the oar had been found during a house clear-out.

“It was right out of the blue. It's exciting, and everybody is really keen to see it,” he said.

“We've got pictures of him at the club, but this is the first time we'll have a piece of equipment he has actually used.”

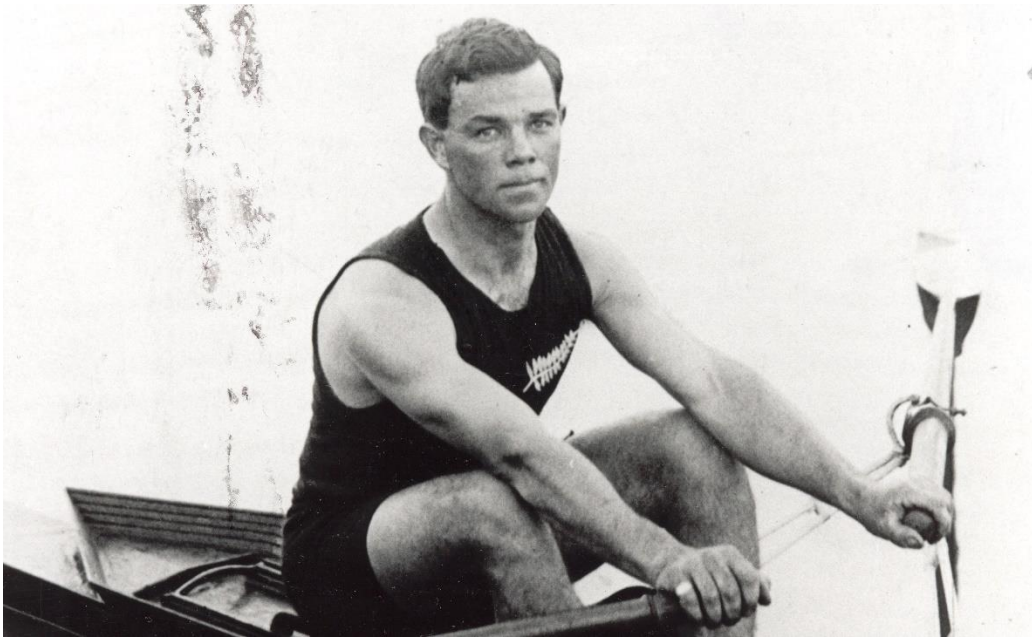
The boat paddle was found by the grandson of Hadfield's once next-door-neighbours, who had been clearing out his grandparents' Auckland home when he stumbled across it, alongside a number of old Waitematā Rowing Club documents. It had been there for decades.



CHRIS MCKEEN/STUFF/STUFF

Pash said he didn't believe it was the oar that had been used during Hadfield's win, but one that he had used in training for years prior.

Hadfield, born in 1889, was New Zealand's first-ever [rower at the Olympics](#) when he won [single sculls](#) bronze in Antwerp, Belgium, and became world champion.



UNKNOWN

Darcy Hadfield at Whanganui when he secured the World's Championship in 1922. (Auckland Star historical photo archive.)

He was born in the hamlet of Awaroa Inlet, near Nelson, but it wasn't until his move to Auckland in 1911 and his joining of the Waitemata Rowing Club, aged 21, that his career took off.

He won the national single sculls title for the club in his third season of [competitive rowing](#), before going on to win the championship for three consecutive years from 1913 – all of which would prepare him for his epoch-making win in 1920.



CHRIS MCKEEN/STUFF

The oar will join photos and newspaper clippings displayed at the Waitematā Rowing Club.