

Kabes/pins/oarlocks

The oars pivot at the gunwale and the plans show the traditional Scandinavian/Shetland system which is a rectangular section thole pin called a kabe slotted into a plate called a routh fastened to the top of the gunwale. The flat front face of the oar bears against the kabe and is kept there by a rope lanyard called a humliband. This system was found unsatisfactory by all who tried it and now nobody uses it.

The rules require the use of wood only in this area so no metal or plastic components are allowed.

The systems now in use are:

Pin and Plate: A hardwood thole pin of 25 to 30mm diameter is set in a hole in the gunwale, either a parallel hole or a tapered hole 2.5 degrees on each side, with the pin tapered to match.

The oar has a timber or ply plate fastened under it, projecting forward of the oar. It has an oversize hole which fits over the thole pin, or in some versions three holes which allow three gears. This is simple and robust, fixing the oar in pitch and in/out.

Two Pins: This system has been tried but is no longer in use. If the oar is moved further than the pins permit, it levers the gunwale apart. A hardwood thole pin is fitted as above, and aft of it another pin of softwood which will break if the rower catches a crab. In order to move the oar fore and aft the pins must be further apart than the width of the oar, so each stroke begins and ends with a clunk as the extra space is taken up. The oar may be free to rotate and slide in/out, as with Cornish Pilot gigs, or may be restrained with some kind of stop to prevent in/out travel.

Pin and Swivel: A thole pin as above is fitted, and then a swivel or gate or rowlock made of ply or timber is fitted over it. The oar lies in the crutch of the swivel and does not rest on the gunwale. It rocks on the bottom bar of the swivel and the swivel rotates fore and aft on the pin. The swivel is basically a plywood copy of the moulded plastic gates used by sliding seat rowers. The oar may be restrained in/out by grooves on the underside of the oar wear plate or by a button glued to the oar.

Some variations of the above systems are to be found. The first two systems are simple but prone to wear, friction and slackness or play. They also need care to make the oar pitch (the recommended angle between vertical and the oar blade) to be 4 degrees towards the stern. The gunwale curves up and down, so the bottom of the oar needs to lie on a shaped wedge to get the pitch right.

With the Pin and Swivel, as long as the pin is vertical both fore and aft and also sideways, a standard swivel will keep 4 degrees of aft pitch (top of the blade nearer the stern than the bottom of the blade) throughout the stroke. The friction and wear are also less because

the weight of the oar rests on the top of the pin and not the routh or gunwale.

The plans show a distance of 306mm/12 inches from the aft edge of the seats to the aft face of the kabe/pin where the front face of the oar bears. Several clubs have increased this to 13 or 14 inches. A good idea is to sit in the boat and experiment with mock oars before drilling your gunwale for pins.