

J. B. SHARP MEMORIAL REGATTA SERIES 1924 - 2017.



Of all regattas and races in which "Bay Club" rowers have competed perhaps the best loved and most enjoyed are the J. B. Sharp Cup winter series. In order to give an outline of the history of the Sharp Cup Regattas since their inception in 1924, it is necessary to look back along the history of rowing on "our" cove for a considerable period before that date. Rowing has been an established sport on the Iron Cove for over a century. The first club erected (and still standing) was the Balmain Rowing Club built at White Horse Point in 1882. Leichhardt Rowing Club followed in 1886. With the advent of this club began a series of unofficial challenge races held on week-ends during the winter months. Enterprise Rowing Club (sited on White Horse Point) featured in these races until that Club was devastated by the gale of September, 1917.

Although no definite history is available it appears that winter rowing continued to thrive by reason of these inter club challenge races until after the first great war. With the establishment of Drummoyne in 1919 (formed by Enterprise members) and Haberfield Clubs, unofficial racing assumed much greater proportions and warranted organisation. The late J. B. Sharp presented the "Bay Clubs" with a magnificent perpetual trophy which was first raced for and won by Balmain Rowing Club in 1924.

The original conditions of the racing were designed to measure the all round rowing strength of the clubs. No premium was placed on senior rowing nor on the comparative numerical strength of each club. So well have these original conditions served throughout the entire history of the regattas that there has been no material alteration in the format since the Regatta's inception. One change of importance was the introduction in later years of Novice Tub Pair (now raced for the Novice Sculls) race at each regatta. Excellent trophies each year were donated Mr. J. B. Sharp (and since his passing in succession by son Sid Sharp; his son Jack and his son John) and since the winter is essentially the beginners' period, this innovation during World War II has met with remarkable success.

A Sydney newspaper under the headlines, "House Full, Sign made History", showed J. B. Sharp's rowing interest. This story began when John Bennett Sharp was crowded out of a Saturday theatre matinee by the house full sign in Melbourne in 1920. He was "killing" the last few hours of a business trip, before catching the train back to Sydney. He was not a turf man so he decided to have a look at the Australian Henley Regatta on Melbourne's Yarra River.

That afternoon converted Sharp into Australia's number one rowing fan. Amongst the crews he noticed the black and gold colours he had often seen in his home suburb of Balmain. The programme showed to his surprise that they were from his own town. He introduced himself to the oarsmen and travelled back to Sydney with them. Within a week he joined Balmain Club, was elected President the following year. He held that office for 19 years.

Founder of a prosperous furniture manufacturing and retailing firm, he was a visionary and was able to help rowing in a practical way. An advertisement in the Balmain, Glebe and Drummoyne Rowing Clubs' Annual Combined Regatta on 16th March, 1935 (6 races) reads "The secret of economically furnishing the home is by no means the buying of cheaply-made furniture. But buying quality home furnishings. Direct from the maker at factory prices. Visit our up-to-the-minute showroom. You'll not be pressed to buy! J. B. Sharp Ltd. Loyalty Square, Balmain. Makers of guaranteed furniture and furnishings. Phones W 1226, W 1229."

His name always headed the appeals list for funds to send crews interstate. For many years he travelled from State to State to watch the King's Cup. He was enthusiastic over crew racing, but loved sculling. In 1928 he went to Holland to see Bobby Pearce win the Olympic Sculling Title for Australia. He helped to buy the shell which started Pearce's cousin Cecil, 1936 Olympic sculling representative on his big race career.

From 1924 onwards he donated an annual J. B. Sharp Cup for Balmain, Leichhardt, Drummoyne and Haberfield Clubs. Following World War II, Glebe Rowing Club was invited to join the series and has competed annually.

It was a sad day and a great loss for all when Mr. Sharp, aged 74, passed away on 1st April 1944. The following year oarsmen young and old, who had competed in the Sharp Cup races met and opened a special fund. The money raised was used to survey a central rowing course on Iron Cove. The course, a measured 2,000 metres with permanent aligning posts, was known as the "J. B. Sharp Memorial Course" and was used for about ten years after World War II.

"Committed to growing rowing"

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After J. B. Sharp's death his son J. Sid Sharp, a champion oarsman in his own right, maintained the family rowing interest and continued to donate the fifteen trophies for the Tub Pair event and the five trophies for the Walker and Hall Cup (handicap sculls) races. Sid served Balmain Rowing Club well and was President for sixteen years. Having seen the horrors of the trenches of France in the Great War, Sid was very involved in community welfare, truly a man devoted to the wellbeing of others.

On the 15th July, 1974 a celebration dinner to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Series was held at Haberfield Rowing Club at which Sid was presented with a silver tray. By reversion this tray was to become the "Sid Sharp Trophy" for the Novice & Under 16 men's point score in the real spirit of the Series. Vale Sid Sharp 1896 to 1976.



Sid's son Jack took over the support of the Series until his passing in April 1996 with grandson John (who rowed at Kings) continuing the family's patronage of the Series. In recognition of their contribution to the sport, the Sharp family was presented with a Rusty Robertson MBE Award by the NSW Rowing Association in 1994.

In the year 1999 the Series was expanded to permit all clubs and all schools to participate, however following tradition only clubs are permitted to score points for the seven trophies. Individual scullers score points for the Walker & Hall Chalice for the handicap scull which is open to both genders. The John Sharp Trophy for the Women's Novice and Under 16 Scull point score was introduced in 2004.

The Balmain Rowing Club Trophy for the Men's & Women's Open Eight Point Score was introduced in 2017. This trophy was re-birthed form the Balmain Regatta of 1887 and features a bullock horn and rower statuette.

On the 12th May, 2010 LEA Insurance Brokers became the first sponsor of the series adding the LEA Insurance Brokers Trophy for the women's novice scull point score. This sponsorship increased the number of race trophies award at the regattas over the series from 26 to 66 by adding the men's and women's novice quad scull. LEA's support added a new dimension to the series providing equipment and garments for the officials and trainees and was welcomed by all members of the rowing fraternity.

We were delighted when BMG took over with BMG General sponsoring the 2012 series followed by BMG Aviation in 2013, 2014, 15, 16 & 17. We look forward to continuing our mutually rewarding relationship as we progress toward the Centenary.

We are forever indebted to the Sharp family for their ongoing contribution to the welfare of the "Bay Clubs" and the sport of rowing in NSW.

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