

The First AAGPS Head of the River in Sydney

The Head of the River is a race held in many parts of the world but here in Sydney it means a schoolboy race that has been held 119 times in Sydney!

The Athletic Association of the Great Public Schools of New South Wales (AAGPS) is a sporting association of boys' schools that contest sporting events among themselves. The AAGPS was formed on 30 March 1892, and has nine members - eight Sydney schools and one northern NSW country school.



These days, eight of the nine members of the AAGPS send their best rowers to row the 2km Olympic course at SIRC in Penrith.

Although Sydney schools had already been competing against each other for some years, the AAGPS rowing championship first began in Sydney on May 13, 1893. It was an event that preceded the seventeenth Intercolonial Eight-oar Race between NSW, Queensland and Victoria. The schoolboys at the time faced each other in a four-oared race for the school-rowing premiership. Only two crews started, the Sydney Church of England Grammar School (now known as Shore) and the Sydney Grammar School (Grammar).

There was some controversy even before the race started because this race was set for a date two weeks before the St. Ignatius' regatta, a regatta that featured its valuable Gold Cup for the first time. As they were not happy about the race being set down so soon before their regatta, the St Ignatius Four were absent from the GPS championship race and so interest was shorn.

The course was from One Man Wharf near the Ryde Bridge to Blaxland's Point, a distance of 1 mile 500 yards [2km], rowing with the tide and the race started at 3:24pm. Mr. D Walker, of the Sydney Rowing Club, officiated as starter, Mr.

Quarton L Deloitte was the umpire aboard the *Thetis* steamer, Mr. J D Delaney, of the King's School, the judge and the convener was Mr. Reginald Herbert Bode, of Sydney Grammar School.



Spectators watching rowing races on the Parramatta River

Trams ran almost non-stop from the Enfield depot taking crowds to Cabarita Point to watch the finish of the race. Supporters chartered ferries, the *Admiral*, *Birkenhead* and *Pheasant* and other launches, decorated them with their team's colours and made the spectacular trip along the river to the finishing point.

The weather was beautiful in the morning, though it became rather cloudy towards the afternoon, and a light southerly breeze sprang up which was thought to favour the Grammar crew since their crew was about 33kg less in total weight than their Shore opponents and should, in consequence, have been able to row a fast stroke rate.

The two crews were made up of the following schoolboys:

Sydney Church of England Grammar School - J Rundle (bow, 68.9kg), H Kendall (2, 68.9kg), NS Deane (3, 69.4kg), N Trevor-Jones (stroke, 67.1kg), R Fitzhardinge (cox, 39.5kg), Messrs. Robson & Bogan Barton (coaches), and

Sydney Grammar School - R Smail (bow, 57.2kg), G Fairfax (2, 63.5kg), F White (3, 65.3kg), L Callaghan (stroke, 57.2kg), M Teece (cox, 37.2kg), Sydney Mack (coach).

The Shore Four went ahead from the start, and passing Gladesville had a lead of a clear length. Here Fairfax in the Grammar boat caught a crab, which was caused by his slide catching half through the stroke, making him foul his knees. However, before Fairfax could recover his oar, the Shore crew had got about a dozen lengths away.

As if the fates had not been hard enough on the Grammar crew, stroke's slide left the rails shortly after, and for three-quarters of the course Smail had to row on a fixed seat. The racing boat was on loan from North Shore Rowing Club.

After this, all interest in the race dropped, and Shore won by 12 lengths "as they pleased". The time taken was 8 minutes 13 seconds.

A report on the race provided some comments on the rowing skills of the Shore crew:

CHARACTERS OF THE CREW.

W. J. S. RUNDLE (*Bow*). New man this year, and very promising oarsman. Rows hard every stroke. Bad time-keeper and apt at times to miss the first part. Rowed really well in the race.

H. W. KENDALL (2). A little slow with his hands and not enough drive at finish. Gets good work on with body and legs. Inclined to rush when excited. Rowed a good race.

N. Y. DEANE (3). Another new man very strong but wants neatness. Apt to clip finish owing to too much arm work early in stroke. Has a good

deal to learn about the use of the slide. Rowed better in the race than he ever did before. Hardest worker in the boat.

N. TREVOR-JONES (*Stroke*). (*Captain*). The best oar in the crew. Good catch and length, gets his hand away quickly and marks both beginning and finish well. Apt to row a little short forward and to hurry his slide up. As captain, keeps his men in good order in the boat.

R. FITZHARDINGE (*Cox*). Keeps his crew going well and does not bother them with too much rudder. Has good judgment and knows how to steer a straight line.

It is interesting to note that the official opening of the Sydney Church of England Grammar School took place on Saturday, 4 May 1889. So in a very short period of time, Shore was able to develop a winning crew.

Also, the cox of the winning Shore crew, Roger Berkeley Fitzhardinge, was to later stroke Australia's first Eight in 1912 at the Stockholm Olympics.

The GPS championship was again held on the same course in May 5 1894, and as it was such a success it was proposed to make the affair an annual one, and to that end it is understood that Major Zenas Crane Rennie, who was present, promised a 20-guinea perpetual trophy for the Schools' Championship Four-oared race. The Major Rennie Trophy has been awarded to the winning senior crew from 1910 onwards. Major Rennie was the general manager for Australia of

the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York and was an American Civil War veteran.



Major Rennie Trophy

It was not until 1910 that the race changed to Eights, Victoria having changed the featured Head of the River on the Yarra from Fours to Eights in 1901.

Also, on referring to the rowing history of the various schools, St. Ignatius' College won an Interstate four-oared race as far back as 1888, five years earlier so it would have been interesting if they had raced in this regatta.

For 2017, the 120th race will have lining up from Lane 1: Newington, St Ignatius, Shore, St Josephs, Scots, Kings, Grammar, and Sydney Boys High.

As always, this will be a highly contested and watched race.

Louis Petrin
Drummoyne Rowing Club
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