

Max Solling, *The Boatshed on Blackwattle Bay. Glebe Rowing Club 1879-1993*. Glebe Rowing Club, Glebe, 1993. Bibliog., illus., index. pp. 244. \$30 from Glebe Rowing Club, Ferry Rd., Glebe NSW 2037.

Australian rowing and sculling have had few historians. Thankfully, Solling has offered more than just a club history, for he has considered Glebe's development in the contexts of New South Wales and Australian rowing. The author offers a lively account of the sport's formative years, including the influence of English traditions, the development of clubs and regattas, and the organisation of professional sculling. Of particular note is Solling's discussion of changing definitions of amateur status during the late nineteenth century. Some historians have mistakenly assumed that 'gentlemen' amateurs never rowed for a money prize. But as late as 1873, although clubs in New South Wales and Tasmania excluded manual labourers from competition, they nevertheless allowed their amateur members to row for prize money (p. 22). The principal objections to working class rowers were social. As John Blackman, the *Sydney Mail's* rowing correspondent, argued in 1893: 'The ideal amateur is a person of education, refinement, leisure and means' (p. 26). Increasingly, as their English counterparts had done, Australian gentlemen demonstrated their social status by rowing for pleasure and trophies, not monetary reward. They also refused to row against manual labour amateurs, for they argued that men who worked with their hands had an unfair advantage over white collar workers and professionals. But some clubs on the outskirts of Sydney, such as Leichhardt and Balmain, welcomed working class rowers, although the manual labour amateur could not compete for New South Wales until several clubs managed to win support for the proposal within the NSWRA in 1903. One of these clubs was Glebe (p. 28).

On this basis, Solling's description of Glebe as 'a bastion for the manual labour cause' in the late nineteenth century, seems appropriate. But there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. In 1878 club membership was restricted to non-manual occupations, and only 'a handful of manual

workers survived the black ball test and gained admission to the Glebe club between 1879 and 1900' (p.63). Solling also admits that the cost of equipment, as well as annual subscriptions and entrance fees, took rowing out of the reach of many working people (pp. 13, 37,39,72). Solling is on firmer ground when discussing religious divides among Glebe members. For much of the nineteenth century the club was dominated by Protestants, and Catholics were not made welcome. But after the turn of the century several Catholics of 'social standing' survived the black ball test, and this paved the way for others to join (pp. 85-6). But religious divisions again surfaced during the conscription crisis of World War I, and again in 1928, when Catholics staged a mass walkout from the club. Solling might have added that a probable cause of the October 1928 crisis was sectarian conflict over the staging of Sydney's International Eucharistic Congress the month before. But after World War II Glebe again accepted Catholic members, and the intensity of religious rivalries waned and compromises were reached. A light hearted example of this was at a club meeting on a Friday evening, where 'fish and meat pieces were served for supper. Protestant members made a point of devouring all the fish; the Catholics, not to be outdone, put the clock forward (after midnight) so they could eat the meat' (p. 152).

While Solling provides biographical insights into many of Glebe's most notable rowers and administrators, these are often too lengthy, and they detract from the author's main purpose. Similarly, Solling spends a lot of time detailing Glebe's rowing performances - surely a lot of this could have been summarised in an appendix. This might have left space to deal more fully with other areas of the club, such as women rowers, who were awarded only five pages of their own. Neither the disappearance of the Glebe Ladies Rowing Club by 1918, or the appearance of female members at Glebe from 1983, are adequately explained (pp. 71, 192-95). Also, on some occasions Solling's points need further development. For example, he notes that in the 1920s the black ball test for membership was

abandoned, but he does not suggest why (p. 124). We are also informed that the club colours were changed from red, white and blue to maroon jersey and cap in 1888, but again there is no explanation (p. 46). Finally, and this is not meant to be pedantic, Solling's repeated references to the Victorian and Edwardian periods don't seem appropriate to a study of *Australian* sports history.

Aside from these complaints, this is a welcome study. The author has not only demonstrated a solid grasp of rowing, he is well versed in the history of the suburb of Glebe, and these talents combine to give an engaging insight into a sporting community. The book is handsomely put together, with many fine photographs and illustrations. We need more of these kinds of club histories.

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