



the peninsula Observer

newsletter of the Balmain Association

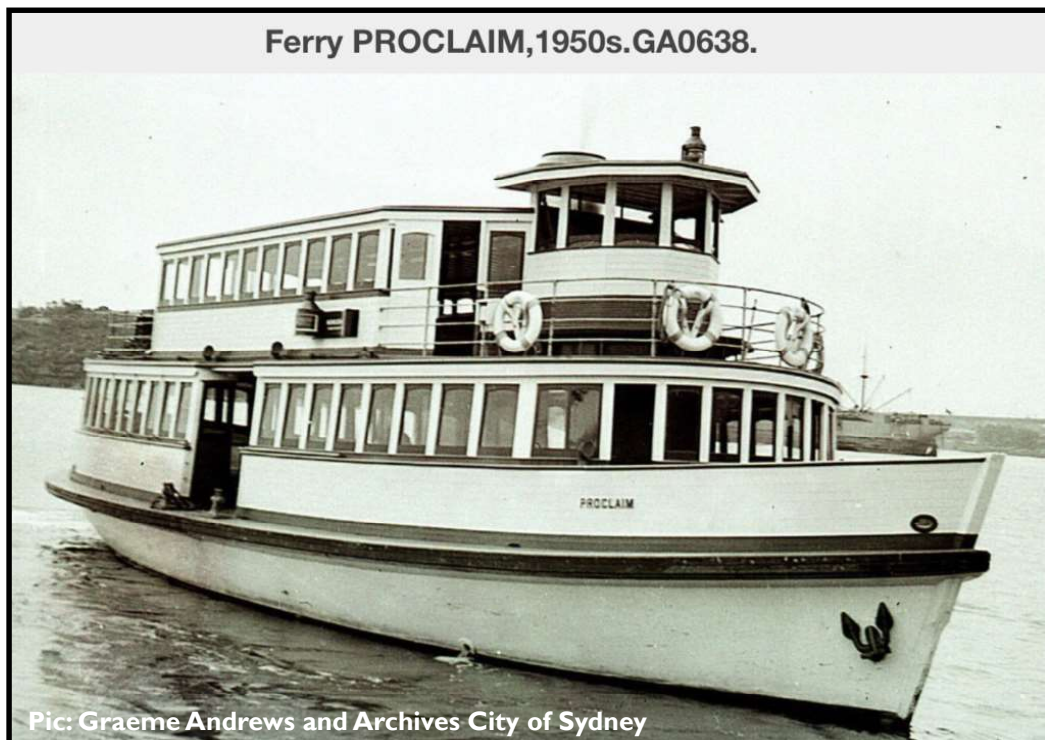
Vol. 58 No. 1 Issue 365

Founded November 1965

March 2023

In the fog, there was a siren

by Phillip Jeffs



Ferry PROCLAIM, 1950s. GA0638.

Pic: Graeme Andrews and Archives City of Sydney

In the 1950s and 1960s I used to catch the 7.30am ‘start work’ ferry to Cockatoo Island Dockyard from Gladesville, before the new bridge was built. It travelled to Ferry Street Hunters Hill, then to Wolseley Street Drummoyne and then off to the island.

The ferry was not a NSW government ferry but was instead a Nicholson Brothers ferry named “Proclaim”.

Built in Balmain at Morrison &

Sinclair in 1939, the boat is a lovely piece of history that is still afloat and in service today.

Some wind-still, bitterly cold mornings, dense fogs lay low on the waters of the Parramatta River. Fogs so thick and heavy you couldn’t make out the blokes waiting at the end of the wharf for the ferry to arrive to pick up their shivering fellow workers.

There were many of us employed at Cockatoo in those days and

mornings would see a rush onto Proclaim as workers claimed their usual seats, rubbed their hands together, snuggled in, lit up a cigarette and got their conversations going.

Us apprentice boys either stood out the in the stern area in the open deck, not seated as the seats were wet with dew.

Continued on page 2

In the fog, there was a siren **Continued from Page 2**

If there was a fog we would head straight out on the bow to try and spy landmarks to yell to the Captain who could not see much either.

In the slowly idling travel, barely moving forward and the background silence of the waters, we would hear the wail of a siren in the distance. At first far away and then slightly louder as we drew nearer, we would hear the noise blasting away at intervals.

It was the Cockatoo Dockyard siren located at the Parramatta Wharf to guide our ferries to where they were headed — Cockatoo Island.

I often thought about the people sleeping in or shift workers living in the suburbs of Balmain, Greenwich and Hunters Hill who would be disturbed by the noise.

At the time Government ferries were not permitted to travel in fog but sometimes the fog would close in on their travels and those ferries that made it to a wharf would tie up for safety reasons. They also tied up at Parramatta Wharf, Cockatoo Island not wishing to depart, until

the fog dissipated.

But not Proclaim! She was always there for us and onto the plank we would board her and off we would go. She always showed up, rain, hail, shine and yes... fog.

I recall, after leaving Wolseley Street Wharf, Drummoyne one foggy morning, not heading for Cockatoo but instead heading for the rocks at Pulpit Point Hunters Hill, where the Vacuum Mobil Oil Storage Fuel Tanks were located. A big yell from us sharp eyed boys on the bow prompted the Captain to do a quick reverse, no problems at all, and we were on our way again.

The Vacuum Mobil Oil site burnt down in 1964; an event I witnessed from Cockatoo.

I also remember being tangled up in the Ammunition Barges at Spectacle Island one morning and wondering what sort of explosives were inside the cement hulls of the barges with red flags flying. Cool as a cucumber, however, out we manoeuvred and knew we only had to head east now and we would bump into Cockatoo Island, so to speak.

Some of us always gave a clap, a wave and a cheer to the Captain

of Proclaim for a job well done, as we left the ferry at the Parramatta Wharf on Cockatoo Island and went to our Muster Stations to pick up our 'Sign On Chit Medallions' and get on with the job in hand. Just another day on the island. Or getting to it I should say.

Footnote

Proclaim would pick up our office staff, with a later sign on and our shipyard latecomers around 8.30am at Birkenhead Point when Dunlop-Perdriau occupied the site. Birkenhead Point became a shopping complex in 1979.

The ferry would then travel and pickup at Elliot and Cove Streets Balmain, then off to Cockatoo.

I met my future wife on this trip from Birkenhead to Codock on Proclaim in 1961.

I was 19, she was 17, I am now 80, she is 78. Time flies.

The Balmain Association Inc. representing Balmain, Birchgrove and Rozelle

Since 1965 we aimed to:

- Improve the living, working and recreational amenities of our area
- maintain all features having natural, architectural and or historical value of the area and keep a permanent collection of historical interest
- seek the cooperation of everyone concerned in the realisation of the above.

Members are welcome to attend the Balmain Association meetings at 6pm on the first Wednesday of each month at the Watch House, 179 Darling Street Balmain.

The History Room at the Watch House is open every Saturday from 11:30am to 3pm and every Tuesday from 11am to 1pm.

Website: www.balmainassociation.org.au

Postal: PO Box 57 Balmain 2041

Material from this newsletter is not to be reproduced without acknowledgement.

The power of beauty



Elizabeth Farrelly gave an interesting and thought-provoking talk about beauty in architecture and the world around us at a venue in Rozelle co-hosted by the Balmain Association and the Balmain Institute.

Cities are continually changing and often not for the better with overdevelopment, urban sprawl, misappropriation of public land, selling off of public assets and more.

Elizabeth spoke of how beauty has been left out of architecture, town planning and in the lives of ordinary people as they go about their business.

Unplanned environments – like Balmain, and much of the inner city suburbs, have a liveability about them that we love! We can walk to the shops, restaurants in the evening, to the parks with the children or the dog!

Children can ride their bikes or scooters to school or to visit friends nearby. We enjoy the comfort of walking our local streets. The question is how can this be developed in new towns and suburbs?

Elizabeth is standing as an Independent candidate for the Legislative Council at the forth coming New South Wales state election.

by **Diana Garder**

Grant time

On November 30, 2022, Mayor of the Inner West Council, Darcy Byrne announced the successful recipients of the Council's grant program for 2023 at Balmain Town Hall.

The Balmain Association's application under the History Grant section was successful for the production by Helen Carter of *Industrial Vandalism - the rise and fall of the Balmain Peninsula's industries*.

Pictured left to right are the Balmain Association's Helen Carter, Paul Brennan who was the recipient of a grant for inner west cinema history and Mayor Darcy Byrne.



100 years of ideas

by Bill Ryall

For 100 years, various NSW State governments had plans to construct crossings of Sydney Harbour.

Of the four proposals produced to date, the 1922 proposal for the design of the first harbour crossing was rejected by the government of the day and the proposals of 1982 and 2002 were roundly rejected by the community.

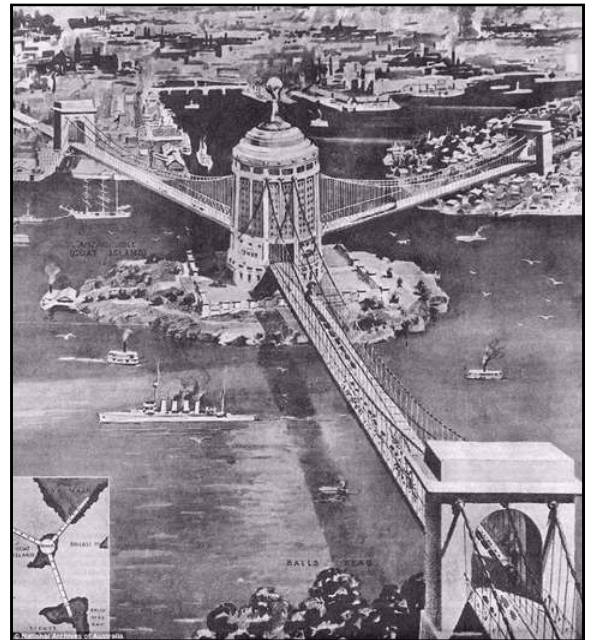
Finally, the 2022 proposal of the NSW Government for a crossing of western Sydney Harbour was accepted by the community albeit with some reservations.

1922

The first harbour crossing – an unacceptable proposal

One of the submissions for the first harbour crossing submitted by architect and engineer Francis Ernest Stowe in 1922 had a component connecting Balmain with the city of Sydney and Balls Head.

This proposal comprised a three-part bridge that linked Balls Head, Miller's Point and Balmain, meeting in the middle with a central 500 feet (150 metres) tower on Goat Island, which was designed to double as a war memorial, as shown below. This submission was rejected in favour of the design by engineer John Bradfield's design for the Sydney Harbour Bridge as we know it today.



Pic: National Archives of Australia

1982

The Yurulbin Point - Manns Point Bridge – another unacceptable proposal

A Balmain Association newsletter from November 1982, listed 'a few of the horrifying conclusions promoted by the DMR (Department of Main Roads) after one year's study', and summarised the DMR's glowing report of the project, as follows:

- The bridge would be at a high level and at 630 metres in length be the 'longest of its type in the world' and 'the design has already been developed'.
- 'Elegant towers to support the bridge would be constructed at Long Nose Point [now known as Yurulbin Point], Birchgrove, and at Manns Point [Greenwich]'.
- At the south end of the bridge, the tunnel mouth was considered to '...gobble up the hillside from Birchgrove Oval to the junction of Rowntree and Cameron Streets' and the 'Rozelle mouth will gobble up the area from the junction of Reynolds and Mullins Streets to Victoria Road'.

Tunnels (at each end of the proposed bridge) were considered as '...not difficult to excavate and not all that expensive to complete'.

Advantages of '...the tunnel/bridge/tunnel scheme offer an optimal combination of economic and environmental considerations'.

- 'Noise and vibration caused by the traffic in the tunnel will be only slight'.
- 'Ventilation shafts for tunnels are not a problem as they can be hidden in buildings'.
- '500 new jobs will be created by tunnel/bridge/tunnel scheme over the ten years it will take to build'.

The DMR highly recommended the tunnel/bridge/tunnel scheme, at a cost of M\$500.

The Balmain Association newsletter told of a 'Benefit Concert to Stop the Bridge' to be held at Birchgrove Oval on Sunday, November 21, 1982 offering 'jazz, singing and satire'.

In any event, the proposal for the tunnel/bridge tunnel was shelved by DMR, but the concept for the second western harbour crossing was certainly not forgotten.

2000

The immersed tube tunnel – yet another unacceptable proposal

The third proposal for a western harbour crossing, put forward in 2000 by Transport for NSW, comprised of the installation of an immersed tube tunnel in a massive trench excavated into the sediments and bedrock extending from Yurulbin Point to Waverton, which was stated to require:

- dredging of 142,500 cubic metres of contaminated sediments, with the contaminated sediments being transported by barge to a treatment plant at White Bay and subsequently disposed to landfill by trucks
- dredging of 610,000 cubic metres of uncontaminated sediments, with the sediments being transported by barge to an offshore dumping ground
- excavation of 44,000 cubic metres of sediment and rock for coffer dam construction
- excavation of 108,000 cubic metres of sandstone bedrock
- works extending over a period of possibly more than three years
- closure of the Birchgrove ferry wharf during the works.

The excavation of almost one million cubic metres of contaminated and uncontaminated sediment and rock is difficult to imagine, but if these materials were to be placed on Birchgrove Oval they would be almost 100 metres high

The immersed tube tunnel was strongly opposed by Balmain, Birchgrove and Waverton communities. The local State Member, Jamie Parker MP, provided strong support for the community's views by convening community meetings and making representations to government.

The opposition of the communities was based primarily on:

- loss of amenity 24/7, including the possibility of damage to houses, vibration and noise from shallow tunnelling beneath houses
- noise and odours from operation 24/7 of dredges and thousands of barge movements to White Bay and to the offshore dumping area.
- noise and odours from operation 24/7 of the contaminated sediment treatment works at White Bay
- noise from manufacture 24/7 of the immersed concrete tubes at Glebe Island
- lack of provision for public transport
- the high risk of serious pollution of the waters of Sydney Harbour and adverse impact to the marine ecosystem during excavation of sediment in the deep waters where strong tidal currents exist. There was concern that pollution may extend to the Dawn Fraser Pool in the west and beyond Goat Island in the east
- the loss of access to Yurulbin Point reserve and to ferries at this location for possibly more than three years.

The cost of the immersed tube tunnel was not made public by Transport for NSW.

2022

The deep bored tunnel

In December 2022, the Premier of NSW announced the proposal of the immersed tube tunnel would be abandoned to be replaced by a deep bored tunnel within sandstone bedrock.

This announcement was widely accepted by the community but the absence of provision for public transport and further uncertainty of the locations and effectiveness of exhaust stacks was lamented.

The bored tunnel is scheduled to commence in 2024 and its cost was stated by Transport for NSW to be \$4.24 billion.

Balmain Cemetary and

The Beatles

by Dr Sunil Badami

We've all heard the Beatles' classic concept album Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, and although it evokes the pomp of Edwardian music halls, Indian ashrams and Swinging Sixties London, it has a tantalisingly close connection to Balmain and Leichhardt.

Among the many classics on the album, one of the most intriguing is the evocative circus ditty 'Being for the Benefit of Mr Kite', which promises a "production second to none" on trampolines, with "somersets through hoops and garters and hogsheads of REAL FIRE" and dancing by a colourful cast of characters, including the talented Mr Kite, the Hendersons and Henry the waltzing horse.

The story behind the song is even more curious.

On January 31 1967, John Lennon walked into an antique shop in Sevenoaks Kent where he saw a poster advertising a February 1843 benefit for Mr Kite — "celebrated somerset thrower, wire dancers, vaulter, rider, etc etc", pictured balancing on his head on a 12-foot-tall pole and playing a trumpet.

Lennon bought the poster, took it home, put it above his piano and adapted the poster's text into the song's lyrics.

The benefit for Mr Kite, in which the entire night's takings were gifted to the talented Mr K after he'd suffered a serious, potentially career-ending injury, was held by Pablo Fanque, the impresario of the Circus Royale. Fanque, born William Darby in Norwich sometime either in 1796 or 1810, was the proprietor of one of Northern England's biggest and most celebrated circuses, playing for months on end to audiences of up to 3000 a night.

After changing his name when he was apprenticed to a local circus, where he was a skilled juggler and adept acrobat, Fanque's other signature tricks included riding through towns

with up to 12 horses "in hand" (all on a single rein) and jumping a carriage on horseback with horses still in the traces in time to music.

He was lauded by the British Showmen's Guild for "his great popularity, consummate ability and great business perseverance... he was a genius, both in the training of humans and dumb beasts; many were the splendid equestrians he trained, and great was his power with horses and other animals."

What made his achievements even more extraordinary was that Pablo Fanque was the world's first black circus proprietor, and it's speculated that his father was actually a slave.

Pablo certainly did have perseverance. He not only lost his first wife in a tragic accident when a circus building collapsed on her during a show, but he endured numerous periods of illness, injury and bankruptcy. He'd often perform in other circuses while he got back on his feet, performing around Great Britain and the Continent.

But could Mr Kite's benefactor have ended up down under? In the 1850s and 1860s, there were breathless reports of a tightrope walker who'd made his spectacular debut in Melbourne's Fitzroy Gardens in 1857. His name? Pablo Fanque.

It's not clear who this Pablo Fanque was. As renowned circus historian Mark St Leon, who discovered this "other" Pablo while researching his own family's celebrated circus history in his seminal book *The Circus in Australia 1842-1921*, it was common for colonial circus performers to adopt the names of their better known overseas counterparts.

"Although, knowing what I do of circus genealogy, it's littered with adopted and illegitimate children, half-siblings, pseudonyms and alternative spellings. Or, as in Pablo's case, the use of one or both names as first

or surnames," St Leon wrote. It's an especially tantalising clue, as this Australian Pablo also went by the name William "Billy" Banham, and may have been either the English Pablo's nephew or even his son Billy, who was walking the tightrope at the moment the circus building collapsed and his mother was killed.

Although he was described as a "handsome, intelligent, vigorous man who never understood the word fear" Billy was a very different character to the "original" Pablo.

His time in Australia was full of run-ins with the law, bankruptcy and desertion of his family until he died in Balmain in 1869, with his children dispersed to children's homes and even gaols around New South Wales, although he left his father £4000. He was interred in a pauper's grave in the old Balmain Cemetery, which was closed in 1941 after it had fallen into disrepair, with reports of prostitution and even greyhound racing after dark forcing authorities to close the cemetery.

Relatives of the over 10,000 deceased buried there were notified to remove the bodies and their headstones. The families of only 12 responded, with the remaining bodies left where they lay, and the gravestones used to build a sandstone wall, arch and pave the subsequent park, which many of us now know as Pioneers' Memorial Park on Norton Street, Leichhardt. Although the original Pablo's funeral in 1871 drew thousands of mourners and he was immortalised in the Beatles' classic song, there was never any registered plan for the cemetery so it's impossible to know where Billy Banham/Pablo Fanque – or anyone else – was buried.

But if you listen closely, perhaps you'll hear the strains of a familiar song on the breeze...

What's on at the Watch House

Wanderings

Artists, over time, wander through different techniques searching for ways to express a creative thought, exploring different genres and ideas while experimenting with mediums, colour and tone. This exhibition focuses on the work of eight local artists giving the viewer an insight into the way different artists see the world around them. From a moment at a window with a cup of tea nearby, a silent wandering through a forest, the smell of flowers picked from a garden or an abstract interpretation of the landscape, you will experience the diversity between artists as they search for individual creative expression.

Opens Friday March 24, 5pm to 7pm

Saturday March 25, Sunday March 26, 10am to 4pm

Saturday March 31, Sunday April 1, 10am to 4pm



The Flower Market

Mia Novati's first solo exhibition, The Flower Market showcases her love of nature and flowers. Mia's artworks are created by using a mix of oil and impasto medium. This technique, using only a palette knife, applies thick layers of paint to the canvas producing sumptuous and full blooms.

Follow Mia on Instagram @mianovatiart

Opens Friday May 12, 6pm to 8pm All welcome

Saturday May 13 and Sunday May 14, 2023, 10am to 4pm

Absorbed; Moments Captured

The exhibition explores nature and the ethereal qualities of light and colour. Both artists, Susan Cadby and Ann-Marie Bateman, work intuitively with various mediums and mark making techniques, emphasising the temporal qualities of light and colour in nature. Susan Cadby is an experienced artist with many years of professional practise in watercolour and acrylic painting. Time and moments captured are distilled in her compositions of land and seascapes submerging the viewer into veils of brushstrokes and colour. Ann-Marie Bateman's art practice seeks to explore the peripheries of sight and glimpses of unseen elements of our world particularly in nature. Over the last 20 years she has examined nature's wisdom, light, tone and colour, through macroscopic photography of flowers, grasses and various surfaces from day to day routines.

'Absorbed; Moments Captured' leads the viewer on a journey of creative viewpoints not often representational but experienced emotively with passion and zeal.

Opens Friday May 19. Official opening 5pm to 10pm

Saturday May 20, Sunday May 21, 10 to 4pm

Friday May 26, Saturday May 27, Sunday May 28, 10am to 4pm



What's on at the Watch House

Please check the Balmain Association website www.balmainassociation.org.au for up-to-date information on art exhibitions.

Heartwood

Escape into the enchanting world of sustainable woodcraft with Anha Field's exhibition Heartwood.

Heartwood is the 'dense inner part of the tree trunk, yielding the hardest wood.' The towering trees, jagged peaks and salted air of NSW South Coast are brightly portrayed on slices of fallen Jugiong trees.

Opens Saturday June 3, Sunday June 4, 10am to 4pm



Brushes with Nature

Chloe is a Balmain based artist who sells work locally and internationally.

Traditionally educated and trained, she has worked in a variety of mediums but finds herself drawn to working in watercolour due to its fluid and unpredictable nature.

Chloe is known for her beautifully whimsical loose watercolour creations based on her great love and respect for animals and our natural surroundings. She brings life and personality to her creations and invites her audience to perceive all creatures as individual and sentient beings.

Opens Friday June 9, 5pm to 8.30pm. All welcome

35 Years in the Making - Art | Milestones | Union

This exhibition marks an important milestone with the reunion of a group of friends 35 years after graduating from their Visual Arts degree at the now University of Western Sydney. It celebrates their friendship, art in all its forms, and the spirit of reunion.

It is a collective union of women artists connected by their enduring passion for the arts. Each artist has made an impact in their own community whether through graphic, visual, public or art education.

This exhibition celebrates their depth of talent, the diversity of their lived experiences and the skills and knowledge they have acquired over 35 years of their individual art practices.

Opens Friday June 30 (official opening by Graham Marchant) 6pm to 9pm

Saturday July 1, Sunday July 2, 10am to 6pm



| JOY MYERS-CREED | BARBARA NEWTON | TALIA IACONIS | DANIELA SHIELD |
| PATRICIA PROCIV | CONNIE MANDALAKOUDIS | ANN-MARIE BATEMAN |