



the peninsula Observer

newsletter of the Balmain Association

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We're Turning 60!



The BA in Action in the late '60's. BA President Bob Irving is seen co-holding a placard in the foreground.

2025 is the BA's sixtieth anniversary and promises to be an exciting period in the Association's history.

At the 2024 AGM I was re-elected president. I am not sure I like the term 'president' as it has been devalued by the re-elected President of the USA! I see the role more of team coach than megalomaniac.

Several of the BA's long serving committee members chose to retire. Ross Mackenzie after a year as president and several years as Vice-president chose not to continue on the committee and is to be thanked for his time in office. Ross will continue with the history group.

After many years looking after the maintenance and care of the Watch House, John Symonds has chosen to retire. Again, thanks are given for his efforts and advice over the last few years.

Michael Bounds also chose to leave

the committee due to family and work commitments.

To survive and be relevant all organisations need new ideas and enthusiasm, and we welcome Ben Cunningham and Agnieszka Kiera who were co-opted to the Committee.

We have also extended some responsibilities beyond, but reporting to, the Management Committee.

Kate Calabretta and Sue Hilton took over organising the bookings for the exhibitions after June Lunsman retired and have set up a comprehensive set of Booking Rules. 2024 was successful and 2025 is well booked.

The Arts and Culture Committee is chaired by Lisa Tatman and is working with IWC on the BA's Heritage week exhibitions and other events. We look forward to participation in IWC's proposed Balmain Festival.

The Heritage Committee of Ray

Stevens, Malcolm Garder and Agnieszka Kiera will look at matters requiring the BA's attention, many raised by community members.

These committees are intended to broaden the scope of the BA's activities in 2025 and beyond and are the opportunity for volunteers to participate without being on the Management Committee. Please consider joining them.

Finally, we are considering the future format of the Peninsula Observer. Postage costs increase annually, and many organisations have changed to emailing their newsletters. Many people, including myself prefer email. Please let me know by email whether you prefer printed or emailed newsletters.

Duncan MacAuslan

president@balmainassociation.org.au

The Balmain Association Human Library - 'Living History Books' Event Experience - Power Up Festival White Bay Power Station 2024

by Lisa Tatman

In the heart of the Balmain Peninsula, a transformative storytelling experience unfolded at the White Bay Power Station Power Up Festival last September, breathing new life into community connection and intergenerational understanding.

As a Creative Producer and the Chair of our Arts and Culture Committee, I created and lead the innovative event proposal to bring our Human Library of 'living history books' of the Balmain Association, centre stage at White Bay Power Station. A project was created to openly and authentically share the local stories of our long standing members, with new and younger audiences as an interactive event experience at the 3 day festival.

Craig Donarski Manager Arts, Culture and Creative Industries at White Bay Power Station noted, this was a stand out leading new concept submission from the Balmain Association community group. He said 'The Balmain Association brought the heart, heritage and history of the hood' to the flagship Placemaking NSW community festival, at White Bay Power Station. Our Member for Balmain Kobi Shetty MP also enthusiastically and significantly recognised the Balmain Association's community

group contribution, to the hugely successful Power Up Festival, in a community recognition statement

our 22 volunteers, creating hundreds of meaningful connections. The book stand became a hub of



Human Librarian Richard Waterfield with an enthralled young visitor

in Parliament this October. We had great impact over an extraordinary festival event weekend, with more than 17,000 visitors experiencing The Power Up Festival. The Balmain Association Human Library's 'living history books', with

cultural exchange, with a huge number of publications sold, each volume sharing our local history and also creating additional talking points for visitors.

Our success was due to carefully staged storytelling, technically innovative touch points, and genuine human connection. We created a new, fresh model of community engagement for the Balmain Association, in the exciting setting of the Turbine Hall in the brilliantly reinvented Power Station. A unique immersive experience was created that touched and resonated with a welcoming, curious and enthusiastic audience.

Two of our 'living history book' cast were seated in hourly intervals on stage and the festival visitors were welcomed to join each of them. These one on one conversations were broadcast with the larger audience 'listening in' through glowing head phones.

The BA at Powerup 2024 (continued)

Our eldest cast member was 91 years of age and our youngest visitor was just 3 years old. New friends

were made, old friendships and connections reunited. The experience was described by both our BA cast and our visitors, as delightful, authentic and genuinely moving.

The BA 'Human Library' stories captured in our intergenerational film series, featuring local high school students Scarlet and Emily, was also screened in our activation. Scarlet and Emily explore our stories of community activism- the saving Ballast Point, Dawn Fraser Baths, the Watch House and many other local landmarks that make Balmain what it is today.

The live event experience, the film series, the photographs collected; ensure these unique, memorable stories continue to resonate and inspire long after the event experience. The Human Library at Power Up Festival 2024, stands as a shining example of how local stories can illuminate our collective journey,

bridging past and present. The Balmain Association Human Library 'living history book' experi-

understanding, and connecting. It's a reminder that every story matters, every voice has significance, and

our community's strength lies in its ability to create spaces where these stories can be heard and celebrated.

We are now reaching new audiences by opening our doors wider to our local community, continuing to build on our great legacy, whilst actively planning for the future growth and direction of the Balmain Association.

Special thanks goes to our core team- Lisa Tatman, Duncan MacAuslan and Di Garder.

Thanks to our invaluable Human Library cast volunteers in alphabetical order- Agnieszka Kiera, Carolyn Allen, Cathy Bray, Christl Blacket, David Porter, David Somerfield, Di Gardner, Duncan MacAuslan, Errol Pickard, Helen Carter, Jan Wood, Jocelyn Morris, Ken Oates, Larry Hand, Lesley Hume, Mal Garder, Narelle Hooper, Ray Stevens, Richard Waterfield, Robyn Longhurst, Roger Parkes and Rose Pickard. Thanks to Our Films Series Team - Scarlet Stewart and Emily Barratt, Lisa Tatman and Kate Barratt.

BA Film Series Cast- Carolyn Allen, Di Garder, Jocelyn Morris, Larry Hand and Roger Parkes and Special Guest- Award Winning Local Musician Josh Pyke.

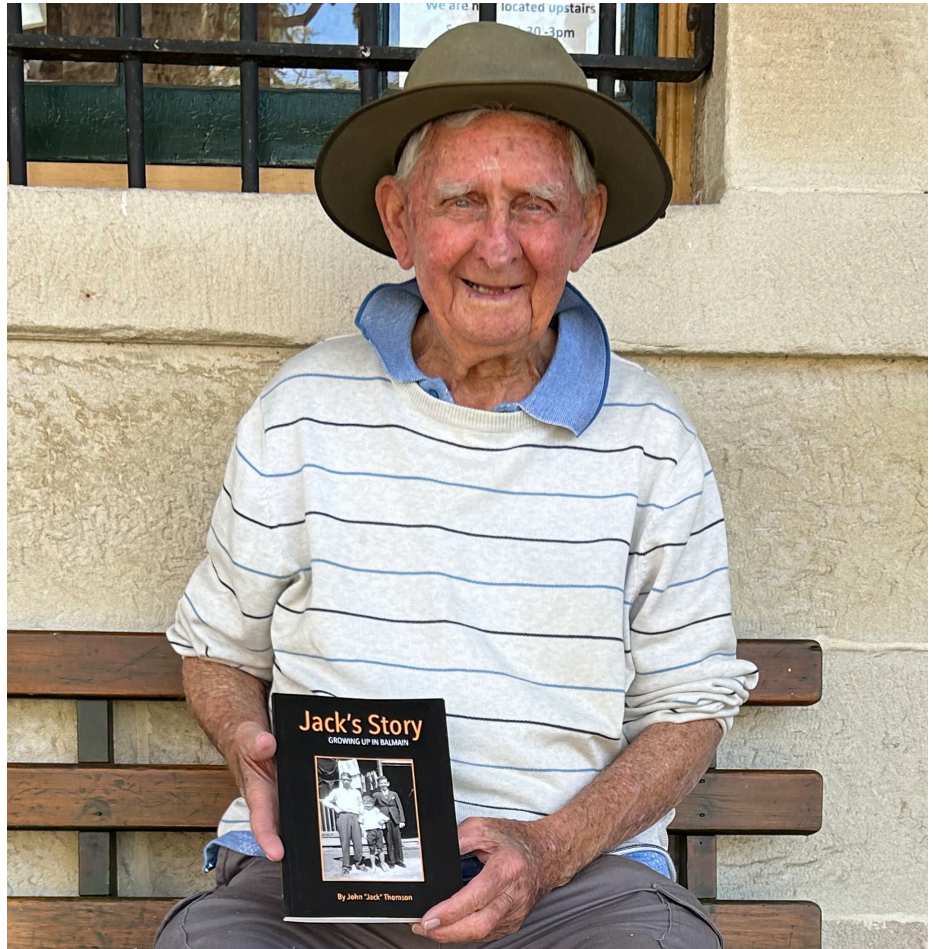


Human Librarian Richard Waterfield with an older visitor Errol Pickard

ence wasn't just an event; it was a celebration of community memory, a deliberate act of preserving the stories that define us. By transforming personal histories into shared experiences, the Balmain Association's Human Library project demonstrated the profound power of listening,

Jack's (and Your?) Stories

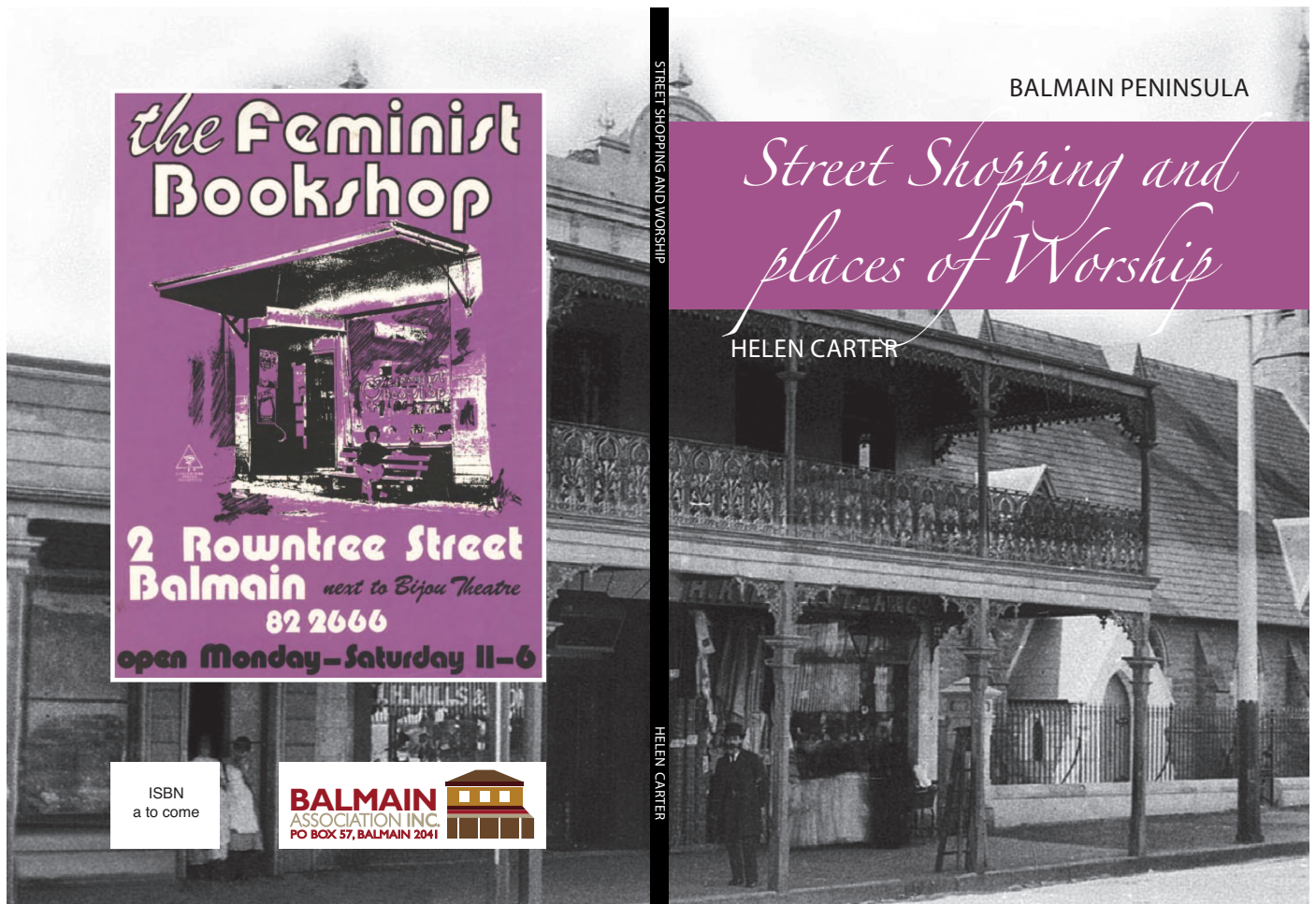
John "Jack" Thomson is a proud Balmainian having lived on the peninsula for all of his 98 years. Jack has previously self-published his memoirs in "Jack's Story" in 2016 and in late 2024 we had the privilege of sitting down to chat with him and to record his fascinating insights into life in times gone by. Jack's new story now forms part of the Association's Oral History Collection which contains the stories of local residents dating back to the early 20th century. These chronicle quintessential Balmain stories through periods of great upheaval and change; the Great Depression and World Wars. The collection has been digitised from the original analogue recordings and some have previously formed the basis of an exhibition at the Watch House. Jack was born in 1927 as Australia was about to enter the Great economic depression. Jack recalls this period when hungry children would receive "specs", pieces of spoiled fruit, put aside by generous green grocers. To compound his unfortunate arrival in life, when he was 5 Jack's father was diagnosed with schizophrenia and thereafter spent his life in Callan Park. Shortly after this, when aged 9, his mother unfortunately contracted tuberculosis from which she subsequently died. Just as his life seemed at its bleakest, Jack's life took a happier turn when he was taken in by the neighbouring Philips family. Jack recounts this warm and generous "old Balmain" family with great fondness. What makes his story so compelling is Jack's detailed recollections of faces and places of the area, the games played by the children and how people lived and made ends meet. Unlike children of today who have television and the internet which are taken for granted, Jack's generation kept themselves (in and) out of trouble around the boat sheds and waterfronts of the peninsula, sailing, fishing, swimming and just about anything imaginable. Rugby League was first played



professionally in Australia in Jack's backyard at Birchgrove oval in 1908. The "spiritual home" of the "greatest game of all" was also the home ground of the Balmain DRLFC until 1932 and was where Jack and his friends could be found on wintery Saturday arvo's. Following his school years Jack worked at the CSR plant at Pyrmont and then went on to Sydney's trams and buses. In 1954 he bought a house in Cove Street in Birchgrove, which was to become home to he and his wife Marcia and their four children. A home in which Jack still lives to this day with his daughter Heather. Jack's is a wonderfully warm story of "back in the day" when people didn't have a great deal but they had each other and a community. Jack's personal retelling of his story for the Association has a greater depth than is possible to convey in the printed page and you become enthralled by the stories

of a character of great warmth and humility. Even without a family or personal connection the BA's oral histories are compelling listening, but with a family connection they're amaaaazing. Some time ago, Mr Robert Menzies (no, not that one) dropped in to the Watch House while researching his family history. Bob was a former Olympian (and all-round good bloke) who played water polo down at Dawnies and had family in the area. He was looking for any information we might have had on the Grafton family. As it turned out we did and we were able to send a happy Bob home with a copy of an interview with his uncle Jack, who's voice he hadn't heard for over 50 years! If you or your family know of a story about the people and places of the Balmain peninsula that you think we might be interested in preserving for future generations please don't be backward in coming forward. We'd love to hear from you.

Street Shopping and (Other) Places of Worship



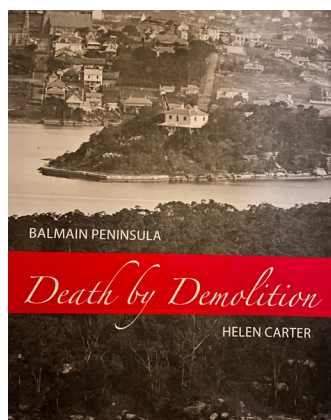
The BA's author in residence Helen Carter has begun research on the much anticipated third book in her Balmain Peninsula Series.

This book will fill a gap in Helen's earlier works *Death by Demolition* (the demolished houses of the Peninsula) and *Industrial Vandalism* (the rise and fall of the Peninsula's early industries). *Street shopping and Places of Worship* examines some of the Peninsula's missing shops and their vital link to its early churches. Although retail and religion may seem like an unusu-

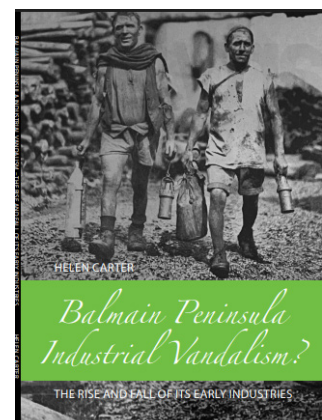
al mix her monologue sets out to demonstrate that there is a close connection between the shops and the churches.

The layout replicates Helen's other publications -and includes, East Balmain, Balmain, Birchgrove and Rozelle. Part 1 begins with a corner store in East Balmain, followed by the development of a hub, a stretch of shops at an intersection, and ends with the community's current obsession with Online shopping. Part 2 covers the area's churches, in chronological order.

The photographic images are a revelation – especially the old photographs of the street scenes that reveal the changing architecture of the shops, products for sale in their windows, perhaps a shopkeeper in his apron out front and the churches that were conspicuous when their bell towers dominated the streetscape and where a funeral procession travelled along Darling Street to the cemetery in Leichhardt.



Available at Ye Olde Goode Book Shoppes of Balmain and the Watch House





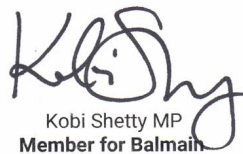
Community Recognition Statement

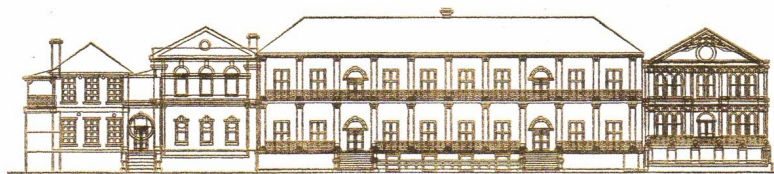
Wednesday 20th November 2024
Ballast Point Park Public Meeting

Today I bring to the attention of the House the co-organisers of the recent public meeting about the heritage listing of Ballast Point Park in Birchgrove.

I am contacted regularly by members of the Balmain electorate about how well-loved and valued Ballast Point Park is, so it was no surprise residents seized the opportunity to attend our recent public meeting about its proposed listing by the Heritage Council of NSW. The opportunity for residents to participate in decision-making about their local area is important to the democratic process, and I appreciated the opportunity to hear from a range of perspectives on the listing.

I want to extend my warmest thanks to Di Ryall AM, Malcolm Garder from the Balmain Association, and Stuart King from Save our Sydney Harbour for speaking, Wayne Neich and Lyn Fowler for their work helping pull together this trusted panel. Thanks also to Nina Pollock and Annie Tennant from Placemaking NSW for answering questions from attendees, and Principal Lucy Norrish and Carly Freel from Nicholson Street Public School for providing a great venue for the event.


Kobi Shetty MP
Member for Balmain



Malcolm Garder attended a meeting at Ballast Point Park with Kobi Shetty, the State Member for Balmain. The public meeting was called to discuss the proposed listing by the Heritage Council of NSW of this very important park and headland. There were a number of local residents who spoke and Malcolm was there both as a local resident, active in the heritage of the area, and as a representative of the Balmain Association.

It was very heartening to see Kobi's enthusiasm for the listing and thank her for giving us the opportunity to show the local support.

Vale Richard Waterfield

By Rose Pickard, founding and life member,
Balmain Association



Sadly we recently learnt of the death, just before his 92nd birthday, of Richard Waterfield, one of our foundation members. He was a

loving and charming man, and filled with enthusiasm for Balmain. He maintained his contact with the Association after he left. His later life was devoted to bush regeneration near his new home in Lane Cove, but he had many friends here and often returned.

Richard came to Australia as a "Ten Pound Pom" in the early 1960's, and bought a lovely old sandstone house with a large garden on the waterfront in William Street East Balmain.

He came to the very first gathering of residents, held at the Masterman's house in Birchgrove in 1964, where the decision was made to call a public meeting in Balmain Town Hall to form the Balmain Association.

He was a member of the first management committee, and Treasurer

of the Association for many years. He took an active part in the restoration of the Watch House, where his delightful sense of humour and positive outlook on life were so appreciated. It was Richard who made the original quip of "fertility row" about the terrace of tiny houses in Grove St where several Balmain Association families were raising numerous babies during the 1960's.

Richard hosted many Association meetings in his home, and fund-raising events in his beautiful garden which was terraced down to the water, immediately opposite Wharf 13 Pyrmont. (The P and O and Orient ocean liners used to berth there and sail out dramatically at night ablaze with light).

Vale Richard.

John Symonds - Committee Member Extraordinaire

John has been a member of the Balmain Association for many years and was encouraged (he says coerced!) by me to join the Management Committee in 2008.

John took over the Treasurer's role from Val Hamey and brought all the records and the data base up to modern standards. With his expertise with the internet John set up the website for the Balmain Association and has kept it up to date making the workings of the Association accessible to everyone.

He took on the job of Maintenance Officer and dealt with the



National Trust over many years. Cleaning gutters, fixing lighting, working with contractors were all part of John's duties which he carried out extremely well. He also responded to enquiries about publications and on many an occasion he would mount his bike and ride to the Watch House to collect a book to send on to the enquirer!

John was a tireless worker and has earned his retirement – we wish him well!

Di Garder

What's on at the Watch House



Drawn to Nature

15-23 March 2025

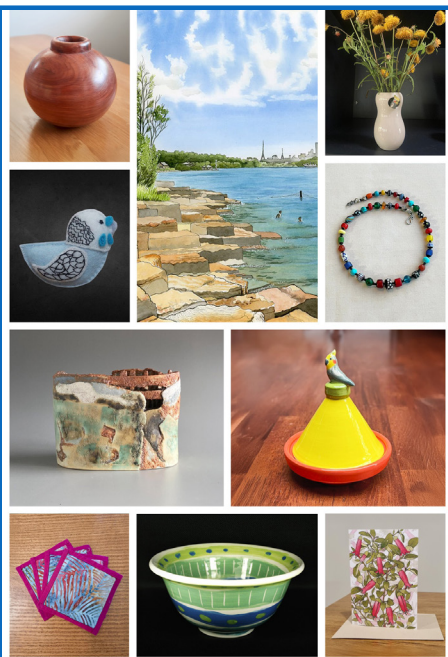
Trish Yates

Drawn to Nature – a solo exhibition by Trish Yates of original prints, drawings and artist's books. Themes from the natural environment have long been part of her art practice where, rather than replicate nature, she captures its essence. Her local Sydney bushland setting provides an ongoing resource for much of her imagery. She always interprets the textures, forms, and shapes in a personal and intuitive way, often abstracting nature as her memories, environmental values, feelings and imagination merge to create her images. Trish uses several relief, intaglio and monotype techniques, which she sometimes combines in her artwork. Multi plate monotypes enable her to create more painterly and spontaneous works. All these techniques allow her to reveal what draws her to nature

Hours:

2025 March 15-16 (Saturday and Sunday), 10am to 5pm, and
2025 March 22-23 (Saturday and Sunday), 10am to 5pm.

Drinks with the artist: Saturday March 15th, 2-4pm. All welcome.



Annandale Artisans in Autumn

11-13 April 2025

Meet the Annandale Artisans:

- 3 eclectic potters whose work features native birds, contemporary patterns and free-form pieces;
- 1 watercolourist producing still-lives and landscapes a jewellery maker using vintage buttons and beads;
- the turned and sculpted pieces from a woodworker;
- a paper crafter who also makes felted decor;
- a sewer/knitter of bright and practical household items

Hours:

2025 March 11 Opening (All welcome) 6.00pm to 8.30pm

2025 March 12-13 (Saturday and Sunday) 10.00am to 5.00pm

The Balmain Association Inc. representing Balmain, Birchgrove and Rozelle

Since 1965 we have 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, and
- 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