



NEWS SHEET

128

the balmain association

FOUNDED 1965

PO BOX 57 BALMAIN 2041

NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY 5 APRIL



Uncovering Our Past

No one living today would have seen the little building in our title block. That picture shows the original Watch House when Blacket built it in 1854.

During the 1880s the top storey and the cells at the back were added to make the Watch House that we know today.

The present-day Watch House has many dear memories for Jessie McMahon because as Jessie Gray first arrived there, a child of eight, in her father's arms. It was raining so hard on 2 May 1930 that her Dad carried her inside.

He was the last policeman to live at the Watch House. Ira Clarence Gray was born at Grafton on 7 June 1889, and joined the Police Force on 17 May 1911. His career in the force took him to Canowindra NSW where he met and married Eliza Brotherton. We are fortunate to hold a tinted portrait of Eliza shortly before her wedding on 20 January 1917.

Later Ira and Eliza moved to 16 Cook Street, Glebe, and when the time came to move to the Watch House they had been blessed with eight children.

Ira Gray had been promoted to Constable First Class in 1920 and to Sergeant Third Class in 1928. After the 1920s the Watch House had become a Police Residence only. When a vacancy occurred at Balmain Police Station, Ira Gray was chosen for the job with the Watch House thrown in as a place to live.

But it became more than "just a place to live". To Jessie, her seven brothers and sisters and Mum and Dad, it was "home". In descending order, the children were Allan, Douglas, Jean, Jessie, Nola, Merle, Marie and Dorothy.

Five more children were born upstairs and the last one in hospital. They were Sylvia, Ronald (d 1933), Edna, Margaret, Bruce and Eric (d 1942).

How could the parents and 12 children live in such small spaces? Jessie's answer is, "Comfortably!". By good management and consideration for others, each member of the family knew his or her place.

What we know as the Charge Room was the Lounge Room with a small lounge and table, sideboard, wireless, gramophone and piano.

The right hand cell was a bedroom for two boys and three girls shared the left hand cell. Just by removing the cell doors, more space and air was

gained. A curtain gave privacy when needed.

Through the Exercise Yard, with its cold shower for hot days, were the two rear cells which were not used as bedrooms. The left hand cell was the Play Room, or more accurately the Work Room, for homework had to be done somewhere. The adjoining cell was strung with clothes lines for the nappies, essential on wet days.

Upstairs, the remaining girls and boys were safe and sound in our Office and History Room. All these children bedded down in single and double beds - bunks were not known to the family.

Our Meeting Room was divided in two - the smaller area for two more children. The main bedroom took the remaining space and even with the double bed, two wardrobes, wash stand and dressing table, there was still room for the baby's cot.

It's hard to realise that wardrobes were not a problem because possessions were few and you wore one set of clothes while the other was in the wash. The wash was done out the back. A big copper set in stones received the clothes to soak overnight, and in the morning Dad lit the fire about 6.00 before he went to work. The wash was ready for Mum when she got up.

On the back of the laundry was the bath room with a chip heater. There was just enough room between the bath and the door to get dry and dressed.

Feeding everybody was a masterstroke of simplicity.

At first, the corner fuel stove provided meals but later an upright gas stove made things a lot easier. This stood next to the fuel stove on the long wall in our Foyer.

A long narrow table with a row of chairs along the wall was the dining table. When not in use the table was pushed back against the wall. More chairs were placed against the opposite wall allowing an uninterrupted passage through.

The overflow diners sat at a little table in our Kitchen where there was also a cupboard for the many household utensils.

In the Stairwell was a small linen cupboard and an ironing board.

Although needs were small and possessions few, the children were spick and span when the occasion demanded as were Mum and Dad. Mum kept the home neat and clean and worked hard making all the clothes. All the girls had a new dress for every Sunday School Anniversary and Mum would sit up till all hours to get the job done.

Dad's uniform was always spruce. He was a wonderful man but could be stern when necessary. The punishment for swearing was to be locked in the drying cell for only a few minutes. It was long time before you were caught swearing again!

(CONTINUED NEXT PAGE)



NICHOLSON STREET
PUBLIC SCHOOL

NICHOLSON STREET BALMAIN EAST 2041
TELEPHONE 82 2863

"NICHOLLY HIGH" IS 100 YEARS OLD!
Join in the Centenary celebrations
at these events:

SUNDAY	3 April	10-4pm	THE GREAT ONE-DAY CRICKET MATCH AT BIRCHGROVE OVAL
SATURDAY	23 April	10 00am	MEET AT THE SCHOOL
		11 30am	OFFICIAL CEREMONY
		12 30pm	LUNCH (small charge)
		2 00pm	ENTERTAINMENT AND CENTENARY DISPLAY
	8-12mid	-night	OLD TIME DANCE AND SUPPER AT BALMAIN TOWN HALL

SUNDAY	24 April	MORNING SERVICE AT ST MARY'S ANGLICAN CHURCH
	11 30am	PICNIC AT PEACOCK PT.
	onwards	BALMAIN EAST BYO EVERYTHING

***** During the afternoon there will be boat trips to Goat Island to see the Museum (small charge to cover costs).

DETAILS OF THE OCTOBER PROGRAMME
TO BE ANNOUNCED LATER. *****

Time passed and things changed. War broke out in September 1939 and Allan and Douglas joined the AIF. Balmain was declared a danger zone and the four young ones, Dorothy, Edna, Margaret and Bruce were sent to Bombala with Jean. They stayed at the grandparents home there until it was safe to return.

The girls did their bit for the War Effort - Nola joined the WAAPS, Jean went nursing and Jessie joined the WANS doing voluntary work.

During the War, and after, the children were in and out of the Watch House. The furniture in the rooms was swapped around as required and without fuss.

A big day came for the Grays on 5 December 1942 when Jessie was married. Dad gave her away at her wedding and Mum and the girls laid on the reception at the Watch House. In those days the end of the verandah was closed-in with timber louvres. A match-stick blind gave privacy to the Lounge Room door and a canvas blind protected the street end of the verandah, so all in all there was plenty of room for the wedding guests.

Jessie's son Eric, was born on 5 November 1944 and as he was the first grandchild, Ira was pleased and proud.

Eight days later, Ira Gray was dead. In those days trams stopped right outside the Watch House and Jessie stood at the gate holding the new baby to wave goodbye to her father on his way to work at Regent Police Station.

He had been promoted Sergeant Second Class in 1937 and to Sergeant First Class in 1940, taking up duties at Regent Street on 27 March 1944. He was being fitted for his inspector's uniform and his prospects were bright.

Without warning Sergeant Gray collapsed at work and news was brought home to the family. He was only 55.

Ira Gray was given one of Balmain's largest funerals. The Mounted Police led the way followed by the Police Band, then the Police and office-bearers of the MUOOF in full regalia.

On 12 May 1947, after 17 years at the Watch House, Mum and the five remaining children moved to the Herne Bay (now Riverwood) housing settlement. A year later they moved to Toongabbie.

Mum was killed in a car accident on 30 August 1956.

After 35 years absence, Jessie McMahon visited the Watch House and was happy to see the changes we had made to her old home. We are very happy to receive these memories of life in the Watch House in those days of Depression and War.

PETER REYNOLDS

Details of Sergeant Gray's service appear in News Sheet 108. (The final entry should read "until his death" and not "until his retirement").

For a full discussion and illustration of the original Watch House see Leichhardt Historical Journal No 3 1972.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

7 MARCH

T Begbie, G Chanter, R Linklater, S Lynch, P Reynolds and P Ryan, members of the Clontarf Park Action Group and R McDonald (Leichhardt Council Welfare Officer) met at the Watch House at 7 30 pm on 7 March. Apology received from R Norman.

CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED:

- 1 Mrs J McMahon, Gray family photographs for display.
- 2 Sydney County Council re access for meter reader.
- 3 Clontarf Park Action Group re new development.
- 4 R D Mack re Half a Thousand Acres and his being a great-great-grandson of Dr William Balmain.
- 5 Mr and Mrs G Downey appln to join, encl cheque.
- 6 P Goldby re Treeve family history.
- 7 P Ireland re Ireland family history.
- 8 J Cullan re Knight family history.



WATCH THESE DATES

1983 MEETINGS DIARY*****
To simplify arrangements for Management Meetings, General Meetings and History Meetings, one meeting combining all these functions will be held on the first Monday of each month - except public holidays.

Monday	1 August	Monday	1 August
Monday	5 September	Monday	5 September
Tuesday	4 October	Tuesday	4 October
Monday	7 November	Monday	7 November
Monday	5 December	Monday	5 December

Remember - first Monday in each month at the Watch House at 7 30 pm. ALL WELCOME*****

JOIN the balmain association

meaning BALMAIN BIRCHGROVE ROZELLE

OUR AIMS ARE TO:

- * improve the living working and recreational amenity of our area
- * maintain all features having natural architectural and/or historical value
- * compile and record the history of the area/keep a permanent collection of items of historical interest
- * seek the co-operation of everyone concerned in the realization of the above

For further information please contact:

PETER REYNOLDS

827 3560



the balmain association

AMENDED SUBSCRIPTION RATES

MEMBERSHIP FORM

(OPEN/RENEW)

PO BOX 57 BALMAIN 20

NAME:

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE: (HOME)

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION (including News Sheet delivery in Balmain Birchgrove Rozelle)

Single	\$ 4.00
Family or Household	\$ 6.00
Pensioner or Student	\$ 1.00
Organization	\$12.00

DELIVERED FREE IN OUR AREA

Add \$3.00 to above rates to have News Sheet posted.

Cheques made payable to "The Balmain Association" 15-3-83

CORRESPONDENCE SENT:

9 Nil.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

- 10 Clontarf Development.
- 11 Additional sub J McMahon for postage of News Sheets.
- 12 New granddaughter named Tara for Mr H N Cavill.
- 13 Sub from G A and M E Downey, new members.