



JULY 1986

# NEWS SHEET

# 152

PO BOX 57 BALMAIN 2041

the balmain association

FOUNDED 1965

## NOTICE OF AGM

THE 1986 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BALMAIN ASSOCIATION

WILL BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13TH AUGUST

IN THE WATCH HOUSE

179 DARLING STREET

TIME: 7:30 P.M.

Nomination form for office bearers - Page 4

## GLADSTONE PARK The Pigeon Ground

### BALMAIN PLACES 3

A new pamphlet by Peter Reynolds has just been published and is now available at the Watch House. Number three in a series on Balmain Places, it describes in detail the history of Gladstone Park, which in early days was known as the Pigeon Ground. The story makes fascinating reading for anyone interested in local history and it could also be an education for those who think that resident action groups are something new. In 1881 a public meeting was called to organise a campaign to have the Pigeon Ground declared open space, as there was "not one major recreation ground of any kind." Speakers claimed the park "could be used by over 1000 children from schools nearby" and they resolved that a deputation take the matter to the government. Sound familiar? The following quote from the pamphlet relating to another time in Gladstone Park's history may strike a chord with present day residents:

"In December 1949, the Board wrote again reminding Council of the original agreement to maintain the bandstand and to say that no action had been taken on its 1944 letter"

There is a reservoir beneath the park and the pamphlet outlines the reasons why this was built and the complex engineering involved. Price is 60 cents. Other publications which may be purchased at the Watch House include:

|                                                   |                                      |        |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------|
| AROUND BALMAIN                                    | - pictorial history of Balmain       | \$9.95 |
| HALF A THOUSAND ACRES                             | - history of the original land grant | \$5.00 |
| BALMAIN WALKS                                     |                                      | \$0.60 |
| THE BALMAIN WATCH HOUSE                           |                                      | \$0.60 |
| BALMAIN PLACES 1. MORT'S DOCK                     |                                      | \$0.60 |
| BALMAIN PLACES 2. THE COAL MINE UNDER THE HARBOUR |                                      | \$0.60 |
| LEICHHARDT HISTORICAL JOURNAL NO. 14              |                                      | \$8.00 |

NEXT MEETINGS ARE ON WEDNESDAY 2ND JULY & WEDNESDAY 6TH AUGUST 1986  
AT 7:30 P.M. AT THE WATCH HOUSE, 179 DARLING ST. BALMAIN

## BALMAIN MEMORIES - BY BARON NEWLYN

### "Bill and the Fireman"

It was the policy of Elliot Brothers that all apprentices had to serve the first two years of their time with the most senior and experienced tradesman according to their craft. As a result I spent my initial training period under the very firm hand of Bill.

Bill was in his early seventies when I first met him, still going strong although he walked with a rolling limping gait, the result of an earlier industrial accident. English by birth he had learnt thoroughly the skills of his trade in the "Old Dart" before seeing lengthy active service in France during World War One. Shortly after the war he was brought out under contract by Elliot Brothers to impart his peerless skills in the field of chemical manufacturing maintenance.

Bill was short and round, almost entirely bald and wore spectacles behind which twinkled two very alert and cunning blue eyes. Probably the most salient feature of Bill's face was a slack wet lower lip which jutted out and hung down usually accomodating a tailor made cigarette which he could never smoke more than half-way through because of the saliva which would course down the fag, extinguishing the glowing tip. Another aspect of Bill was a rather charming stutter with certain syllables, and this coupled with a totally guileless smile lent him the appearance of a disarmingly fatherly old gentleman.

However, behind that benign guise lurked a passion for jokes which Bill was forever engineering and inflicting upon anyone who was unwary enough to be caught. To be fair, I was a more than willing accomplice in many of these schemes he devised to keep those around him on their toes. One of his more harmless pranks involved the Fire Brigade.

Opposite the "lead table" where we worked - a mostly open compound and workshop used by the chemical plumbers - lay the sulphur plant. This building was ramshackle and quite old, constructed of grey weather-scarred timber interspersed with raps and holes through which one could see into its gloomy, dust-laden interior. The purpose of the plant and its three operators was to grind rock sulphur into powder which was then bagged for commercial use.

Perhaps three or four times a year the plant would "go up" - a spark from the moving machinery would ignite the sulphur-laden atmosphere producing a booming explosion which literally rattled every window within a five hundred metre radius. The ancient wooden structure would visibly shake and tremble as from between the many gaps a dense yellow cloud would burst forth, completely shrouding the plant within seconds. Usually, following the blast, occurred a creeping fire that gnawed its bluish-green way through the building emitting a horrendous, eye-watering, breath-taking stench. Through the swirling noxious miasma three running, stumbling and weaving panic-stricken men could vaguely be seen effecting their escape to the comparative safety of the lead table. Half concussed, covered from head to foot in fine yellow powder and sweating and panting with their eyes running a banker they were usually greeted by a grinning Bill, who would survey them carefully in silence before speaking.

Bill would say something like "What's the matter boys, don't you feel like working today?" or "You blokes are easily scared, I remember back in France in 1915....." and then be bombarded with a barrage of verbal abuse from men who considered themselves only recently a hair's breadth from death.

Whenever the sulphur plant went up the Fire Brigade arrived at short notice. On one occasion the fire engine roared into the factory as usual, siren wailing as it slid to a halt between the lead table and the sulphur plant, the crew jumping nimbly down. Their chief sized up the situation then took up a position at the rear of the engine and began roaring instructions. Hoses were quickly unrolled and connected to nearby hydrants, ladders placed at strategic points under the loudly bellowed commands.

Midway through a stream of directives Bill casually limped over to the red-faced, gesticulating officer and looked earnestly up into his face.

"Excuse me Mister" he enquired, "would you like a cup of tea before you start?"

Momentarily distracted from his task and probably not believing his ears the officer paused mid-yell to look down on this gnome-like person wearing such an open and innocent visage.

"What's that - what did you say?" snapped the fireman as his eyes searched Bill's face closely.

"Well" replied Bill, his expression still deadpan, "its nearly tea-time and the kettle's boiling so I thought I'd ask you and your boys over there would you like a cuppa before you started work".

The officer shook his head, then looked wildly around as if to reassure himself that he really was at Elliot Brothers and not the mental asylum. His distinctly bulging eyeballs swung back to Bill traversing him from head to foot before he slowly replied in a resigned voice.

"No - I don't think so - not this time"

"Alright, just thought I'd ask" said Bill with a shrug, palms upraised, before turning and limping slowly back to the lead table leaving behind a bemused, staring fireman.

For a long time afterwards Bill recounted the incident with much glee, to everyone's amusement. However, Bill and the fireman met again under similar circumstances and Bill had the tables turned on him, but that's another story.

### "REQUIEM FOR BALMAIN" - BY DAVID RAMSAY

On television now is a series called "Land of Hope". It shows Balmain as the place where the hope of the working class was to earn enough to buy a piece of Australia for their children. Sadly, today it would seem that we could make the government happy by closing down the arbitration system, putting everybody on the dole and living in public housing.

Balmain is the oldest industrial suburb in Australia. If it were in parts of London or Europe there would be brass plates and tourists everywhere. When it is said that we have no cultural history maybe the truth is that it costs too much.

When Balmain first became a suburb seven-eighths of the people living here did not know what the word environment was. The other one-eighth - who owned it - did not care as long as they made a profit.

The truth of Balmain's history is in the narrow streets and small houses where ex-convicts who had won their freedom and seamen made their homes and began the struggle against the class system for the right to own their homes. Some won and some lost, but our cultural history is in this tremendous struggle on the land against the weather, and in the factories and mines. In other words - the right to make a better life through labour!

Perhaps the movie makers can see what the rest of us can't see - that the clock of time has come full circle and Balmain is again in the hands of the greedy and those who don't care. Balmain is again being buried under development. The moviemakers also picked up the truth when they made "The Killing of Angel Street". Here is proof of our struggle by which some of the fourteen million other Australians will see Balmain, the place where the last signs of the beginning of nationhood exist, being destroyed for ever.

There have been many good men and women born here and they had a rare pride, for they shared the suburbs poverty, for they had no real open space and only the streets to play on. Are things better today? Our children don't have the streets to play on.

# CLONTARF - THE END?

The "battle for Clontarf Park" - which some say is the beginning of the battle for Balmain itself - has reached critical stages over the past month or so.

In April the Clontarf Park Action Group gained media attention by having a shed moved from Clontarf to the front of Parliament House in Macquarie St. More recently, in June, the CPAG has been in the news again. Several have been arrested and a contractor's bulldozer has been sabotaged in spite of the security guards who had been hired by the Department of Housing.

On Sunday June 15 some of the residents held a picnic next to Minister Walker's home. This provoked the typical politician's response from Mr Walker in that he claimed the protesters were "trendies". On the same day the Sun-Herald published an article headed "Class War Breaks Out In Balmain", which reported recent events and quoted State MP Peter Crawford as saying that "...working class people have been pushed out by rising prices and mass evictions". At time of writing the construction work on Clontarf is still proceeding despite an investigation by the NSW Ombudsman into the procedures of Leichhardt Council. The CPAG is considering future strategies.

Is a fight over a small patch of land tucked away up an obscure back street really part of a "class war" or is it a justified act of rebellion by ordinary citizens against social engineering by a hamfisted government? Considering that the Clontarf site is about the size of a couple of tennis courts and will hold only 22 units - not many compared to other inner-city sites the Department of Housing could just as easily use - one could start to wonder if the issue is being used as a diversion to take our minds off something else, such as the ever-changing vision at Mort Bay. Another possibility is that the politicians are more concerned with preserving Labor votes than putting roofs over the heads of the poor. On the other hand the leaflet distributors and picnic attenders can be seen either as "trendies" or simply fair dinkum people trying their best for their children.

The simple facts are as follows:

\*Clontarf was zoned as public open space 18 years ago and was purchased in 1974 by Council for a park.

\*In 1981, the Council (now ALP controlled) decided to give the land away to the Housing Commission, now called Department of Housing.

\*The Clontarf Park Action Group took their case to the Land and Environment Court but before it could be heard the planning laws were changed to make the Court ineffective.

\*Various undertakings given by the Council have been broken, namely:

- the development will comply with Council's own building codes (it doesn't)
- the Balmain Association will be consulted regarding the design of the buildings (it wasn't)
- adequate parking will be provided (3 spaces for 22 units - adequate?)
- the units will definitely house Balmain aged pensioners (now they might)

\*The Department of Housing ordered work to commence in June, several days before the lease with Council was actually signed.

\*Work continues despite the Ombudsman's investigation into Council's handling of the affair.

We make our own environment but there are some, narrow-minded and high in their self importance, like the architects who put more people into our new crystal city across the water and forgot to build one new public toilet after closing all the pubs.

As we throw the last sod on Balmain the question must be asked how many humans to a hectare? Is it right to add more in this "New Land of No Hope"?

## EDITORIAL

On the recent Queen's Birthday long weekend two of the local residents' action groups held fireworks and bonfire nights. The two groups were the Mort Bay Action Group and the Clontarf Park Action Group and their gatherings were held on two of the most controversial pieces of real estate in Balmain.

If anyone ever needed a demonstration of the community spirit in Balmain then they surely would have found it that night at those two places. At Clontarf, for example, some two hundred people enjoyed each others company with the aid of a barbeque dinner, a jazz band and a bonfire complete with a two-faced "Guy Fawkes" said to represent somebody or other in politics. The Mort Bay function had a similar number of people present and the same togetherness feeling.

The point about such gatherings is that the most people who go are simply "Balmain Residents". The trendies, haters of

public housing and class war warriors so familiar to journalists and politicians are hard to find in a crowd of ordinary people.

One of the topics of conversation around the bonfires was that this was "the last cracker night". The same government that has taken away the right of the individual to let off fireworks has also taken it upon itself to decide the character of Balmain. Some people think this is responsible government and some think it is an example of Big Brother setting in the way again. But in either case there was one question often asked - where would the bonfires be put next year? The two sites used this time, for the enjoyment of hundreds of people, will not be available in 1987 if the government wins the "class war" it started.

## ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

One of our members asked recently why we don't include contact numbers in the newsletter... sorry for the omission! Norman Bull, President - 810.1611 a/h  
Frances Heathfield, Secretary - 818.2307 a/h

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You may have seen our ads in "The Glebe" recently to promote the Watch House as an exhibition centre. This is part of the committee's effort to make the Association more widely known in the community. Interested persons can enquire on either: 810.1611 a/h

or  
810.1411 a/h



### THE BALMAIN GARDEN CLUB

THE GARDEN CLUB meets on the first Saturday in each month (except December and January) at 1.15 at the Watch House. 179 Darling Street, Balmain. Good gardening library available for members. All interested welcome.

### CAMELLIAS

The flowering season of the Camellia Japonica, which is winter, is here again with their glorious display in gardens and shows demonstrating their value for the home shrubbery.

They are easy plants and grow best in filtered sunlight, although some will manage in full sun. They prefer soil on the acid side, although they are not as touchy about alkalinity as azaleas. However, do not plant where the rubble from the house renovations was thrown or where ashes from the house fires have been put for generations! Years ago people were madly liming soil every year, mostly this was quite unnecessary. If in doubt, where planting out, place fresh soil immediately near the plant then add 4 ounces of sulphate of iron and water well in. Be careful not to put the plant in any deeper than it was in the container.

Little or no pruning needed - just enough to keep them neat after flowering if required. Actually large overgrown neglected bushes are improved by removing all the lower branches right at the main trunk and so turning them into small trees. Avoid planting where morning sun will burn buds while the dew is on them.

Some varieties for growing in almost full shade are Margaret Davis; Cho Cho San; Lady Lock; Pukekura; White Nun and Debutante. As Balmain becomes more and more shaded with town houses going up next door, some of us will need to change from roses to camellias. There are town houses of three stories going up next to me! The Drummoynne Garden Club say their area is having the same problem.

Some camellias for growing in half shade are Drama Girl; Cartess Sunburst; Guilio Nuccio; Jean Lyne; Phillipa Ifould; Sawada's Dream; Lawrie Bray; Iwane and Bettv Sheffield Supreme.

Some varieties for growing in full sun (if mulched to keep roots cool) are Donation; Great Eastern; Margaret Waterhouse; Lady Gowrie; Galaxy and Grand Slam.

Some do well in tubs but begin with small containers. Keep pots and tubs on half bricks to ensure good drainage and discourage ants from entering. Varieties for pots include Elegans Supreme; White Nun; Iwane; Silver Chalice; Moshio; C.M. Wilson and Magnoliflora.

Before buying it is a good idea to see some Camellia shows. Epping Garden Club Show will be in the Church Hall in Pembroke St. on Sat. 12th and Sun. 13th July and Hunters Hill Garden Club Show will be on Sat 26th July in the Hunters Hill Town Hall in Alexandria St. Don't forget to take pen and paper to record names of plants that most appeal. The show stewards always have lots of knowledge if you are in doubt about anything. See you there!

JESSICA MURRAY

### FRIDAY NIGHT AT THE WATCH HOUSE

The Watch House is open EVERY Friday evening from 8:P.M. for a B.Y.O. social evening. This is an ideal opportunity to meet other Balmain residents - and enjoy the warmth of an open fire. All members and guests welcome.

### SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT THE WATCH HOUSE

The Watch House is also open on Saturdays from 1:P.M. to 3:P.M. Call in for a coffee and watch us clean out the fireplace.



### NOMINATION FORM BALMAIN ASSOCIATION 1986-1987 MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

NOMINATION FOR POSITION OF.....

PERSON NOMINATED.....

PROPOSED BY: (Name).....

(Signature).....

SECONDED BY: (Name).....

(Signature).....

I,.....  
(Name in Full)

.....  
(Occupation)

of.....  
(Address)

consent to this nomination.

SIGNATURE.....

DATE.....

Note: Proposer, Secondor and Nominee must be financial members of the Balmain Association.

This form may be lodged with the Hon. Secretary, P.O. Box 57, Balmain 2041 at any time before the elections at the Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 13th August, 1986.

## JOIN the balmain association

meaning DALMAIN 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



the balmain associati

MEMBERSHIP FORM (OPEN/RENEW) PO BOX 57 BALMAI

NAME: .....

ADDRESS: .....

TELEPHONE: ..... (HOME) .....

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

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