

NEWS SHEET

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PO BOX 57 BALMAIN 2041

the balmain association

FOUNDED 1965

ASSOCIATION ACTIVITIES

"Please, Minister"

In the last News Sheet we mentioned the decision by Leichhardt Municipal Council to create a one-ward municipality. Since then, the Association has written to the Minister for Local Government expressing concern at the decision and the definitely un-democratic manner in which it was made.

Archives Dusted Off

Several busy ladies in the Balmain Association have recently put in more than a few hours sorting through the archives in The Watch House. The archives include numerous photographs and documents and are now in somewhat better order following this burst of activity.

As a reward for their diligence, three Association members are being sent to an all expenses paid series of meetings to learn even more about the preservation and care of old archives. That's incentivisation in action.

The archives include copies of "The Link", a Balmain newspaper of the seventies. While we do not, due to bitter experience, normally lend material to anybody, you may be interested to re-live the past by reading "The Link" at the Watch House.

Heritage Week Exhibition

The Association will display a collection of some of the above-mentioned photographs as our 1987 Heritage Week Activity. Full details are elsewhere in this News Sheet under "Exhibitions at the Watch House".

Balmain Association Takes Over R.A.S. Showground!

Well, not exactly, but we will be there to take part in a Royal Easter Show stand run by groups such as the Balmain Association. The reason for our participation is to sell lots of copies of "Around Balmain" and so raise much-needed funds for the preservation and restoration of the Watch House.

If you would like to assist in this activity, please contact Debby Nicholls (Secretary) on 810 7391.

Watch House Refrigerator

It is a long story. Twelve months ago, the Association was offered, free of charge, an old refrigerator by one of our supporters in the community. After that original offer proved impossible to take advantage of, we had another two or three "false starts" and still no refrigerator. In February after a series of phone calls and one or two strained backs, a "fridge" was finally located in Glebe and taken to the Watch House. Thanks must go to David Ramsay, whose persistence won through and achieved the impossible.

We anticipate that our new acquisition will be put to much use during future art exhibitions and Association social functions.

IS ANYBODY OUT THERE?

The Committee of the Balmain Association would like to see more of the "other members". In particular, it would be really good to see a lot more members visiting the exhibitions that we have at the Watch House. Since December last year there have been three very successful exhibitions, all of which have been publicised in this News Sheet. Although about three hundred visitors altogether have been to them, the absence of "locals" is a disappointment. Please come to the Watch House in April when there is another art exhibition and also our own Heritage Week Display.

The Balmain Association meets at the Watch House, 179 Darling Street, Balmain on the first Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. The Watch House is also open on Saturdays from 1-3 pm and at additional times during exhibitions.

Postal Address: P.O. Box 57, Balmain, 2041.

President: Norman Bull 810 1611 A.H.

Secretary: Debby Nicholls 810 7391 A.H.

P.S. Even if you don't like art, why not come along and enjoy the wine and food which cost you nothing!

GOING, GOING...

It has been decided, due to poor attendance to discontinue the Friday evening social nights, which began in January last year. The last get-together will be on Friday, April 24th. We are hoping that by doing this, more time and effort can be given to organising the art shows. We trust this decision will prove to be more beneficial to the association as a whole.

EXHIBITIONS AT THE WATCH HOUSE

"53 Artists"

The exhibition of fifty three artists - all part-time students at the East Sydney Technical College, was held from January 17th to February 1st.

Being part-time students, they do not have the opportunity to stage an exhibition at their College and the chance to display work at the Balmain Watch House was enthusiastically taken advantage of.

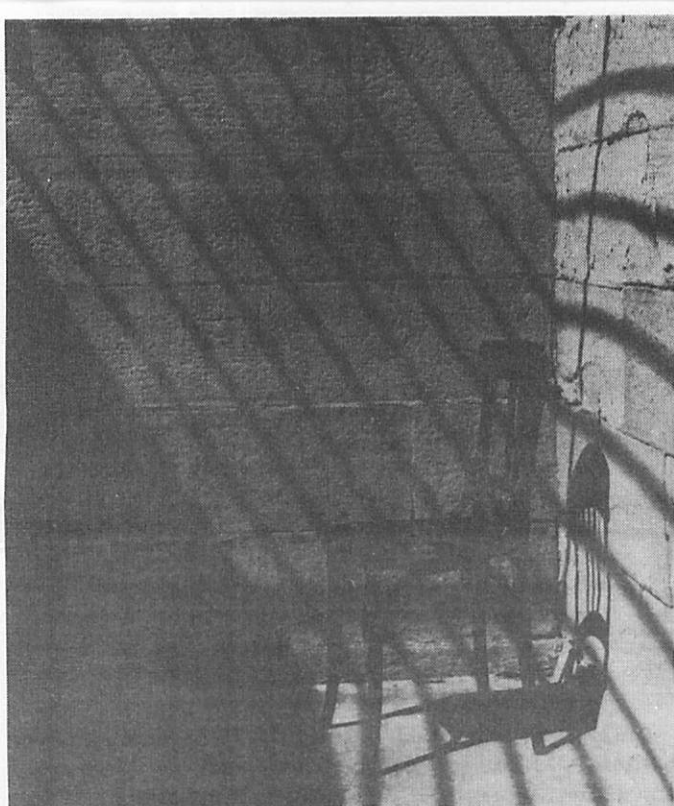
As the exhibition was held over three consecutive weekends, with the work of different artists being shown each week, "53 Artists" was really like having three exhibitions in one. The variety of the works on display was only surpassed by their quality and the prices of the items for sale were low by normal commercial standards.

The "exercise yard" proved to be a brilliant location for several stone sculptures. The afternoon sun casts shadows from the overhead iron bars at a striking angle across this space, creating an unusual combination of sandstone textures and hard lines of shadow which enhanced the strength of the sculpture.

The exhibition was also helped by the informal Watch House atmosphere and the fact that the tables were groaning under the weight of food and drink provided by organiser Peter Hovagimian.



Photographer Fiona-Lynne Schofield
Year 12, James Ruse Agricultural High School



EXHIBITION OF FIVE YOUNG ARTISTS

Sandra Guy, Mark Drew, Linda Swinfield, Thomas Filder and Jane Harly all study at the City Art Institute and this is their first exhibition together as a group.

ADMISSION FREE

APRIL 17th - MAY 1st

Open Weekdays 4:00pm - 8:00pm

Saturday & Sunday 1:00pm - 7:00pm

There will be two "opening parties" on Saturday, April 18th and Saturday, April 25th. Wine, cheese etc. provided.

Proceeds from Watch House rental and sale of works go towards restoration of the Watch House.

Heritage Week - Display of Photographs

An exhibit of old photographs of Balmain will be shown at the Watch House as part of Sydney's Heritage Week celebrations.

The photographs will include many in the Watch House collection which have not previously been displayed, as well as others which are being contributed by members. If you have any old views of Balmain or pictures of former Balmain residents which you would be willing to loan for the occasion, we would be very grateful. You can get in touch with Steve South on 810 1411 A.H. or Normal Bull on 810 1611 A.H.

In addition to these old photographs, we will also have on display photographs by Fiona-Lynne Schofield and her father Phil.

Fiona-Lynne is a Year 12 student at James Ruse Agricultural High School of her HSC subjects.

Phil Schofield has to his credit 2 cartoon books, exhibitions of jewellery and is an Associate Professor at the University of N.S.W.

ADMISSION \$1.00 (good value!)

FRIDAY, APRIL 10th 6:00 - 9:00 pm

SATURDAY, APRIL 11th 11:00 am - 5:00 pm

Wine and cheese provided.

HISTORICAL QUESTIONS, ANSWERS & NOTES

Can You Help?

Mrs. Black of Belmont is researching the Longfields and Sideys who lived in Balmain possibly between 1850s-1860s. Her grandmother Patience Longfield married her grandfather Robert Kay Sidey at St. Mary's Church Balmain in 1859. Patience's father John Longfield came originally from County Cork in Ireland, date of arrival in Balmain unknown. Mrs. Black is anxious to find out the actual address of her grandparents.

At last! The discovery of the Gas Works.

After much diligent searching the old Balmain Gasworks has been located. While hinted at in the Hyde Park Barracks "Know Your Suburb" exhibit, the Museum made reply to our enquiries for more information. All was revealed when our treasurer produced an old town plan showing the precise location. We were then able to complete a title search of the property.

The Gas Works was established in 1873 on land purchased from a Donald Brown, engineer and Alex Brown, shipwright. The company paid £250 for a site of two roods thirty six perches. The gas company continued to operate until the street lighting contract was terminated on the 31st of December 1911.

The location? Sydney College of the Arts, Mansfield Street, Rozelle.

Contributions Welcome

Articles of historical interest are always welcome for this section of the News Sheet.

For example, do you have any interesting anecdotes of your main life or your family history?

We may also be able to assist in family searches by publishing historical enquiries for you too.

Glimpses of Sydney 1840-1845

My great grandfather, in Edinburgh, was thought to have kept almost every letter he ever received, and on his death in 1888, his executors faithfully beavered their way through that paper mountain.

In it were some letters from his brother Robert who had come to Sydney in 1840. It was thought that these letters might be of some interest to relatives then residing in South Australia, and were duly posted out to them (no family in New South Wales at that time). Those letters sat in a drawer in the sideboard during my early life and I frequently re-read them as he wrote interestingly of events around him.

Robert resided in a rented house at 4 Phillip Street, Sydney, and thought he was very fortunate to get employment as New South Wales was in a very depressed state, and jobs for free men were extremely scarce, with plentiful convict labour being available free for employers.

There was little opportunity in his own trade of engraver in illustrating books, but he had other skills, being good in machinery repair and maintenance, and had ability in working with wood and carving. He obtained work with Joseph Sly, a furniture maker, whose productions are still going the rounds of the antique trade in Sydney.

In one of the first letters, dated 1840, he wrote that the Free Men had held a big meeting "at a place called Hyde Park" to demand the cessation of convict transportation. In this, they were fairly successful despite the opposition of the Governor, backed by an ex-Governor, and other business men. Some shiploads of convicts still arrived occasionally for a few more years. With so many convicts still doing their time, it was years before opportunities improved for free men. He mentioned that food was scarce and expensive, with bread at sixpence a loaf, and the average wage was ten pounds a year. There was much "living-in" of employees, with factory workers being allowed to sleep under work benches, thus also providing a "watch-dog" service.

In another letter it was stated that when one went visiting, food was always taken, to avoid being a burden on the host.

Though times were bad, some were successful. An ex-convict named Billy Hutchinson had recently died, and left the then fabulous fortune of one hundred thousand pounds! There were no hints of how Billy had amassed that amount, whether by fair means or foul.



Most convicts were not so fortunate and often tried running away. Some simple fellows thought by keeping walking west they would get to China, having no knowledge of the terrible deserts in Australia between here and China. Apparently the authorities, who were the army, didn't go after them much, as they still had plenty more left, and probably thought that the Australian Bush which had never been hospitable, could be left to deal with them. When the escapees were caught, it was usually by accident, or they were forced back by hunger, and then they were mostly sent to Norfolk Island where conditions were said to be much worse.

One letter stated Sydney was a very rough place and advised that other members of the family were not to think of coming out, especially dentist brother John, as there were "too many dentists here already". One didn't know the neighbours and also one had to be very aware and careful out in the streets, as there were "many strange characters abroad, and footpads rife". Doesn't that sound modern!

Robert mentioned he had met Dr. Leichhardt, a silent gloomy man. Perhaps Ludwig had language difficulties or maybe a premonition of his final disastrous expedition in which his entire outfit were to disappear forever, without trace.

After living and working in Sydney for five years Robert collapsed one day in the street, and died a few hours after in Sydney Hospital, aged 35. Cause of death was stated to be apoplexy which was the term given to all cerebral vascular happenings in those days.

There was a final letter in very neat copperplate handwriting from his wife Margaret, detailing events; she wrote of her late husband as "Mister Watson" in the formal style of that time, not using his first name even to his family. She wrote, that with her baby daughter she had obtained "a live-in domestic situation". With that, she disappeared from our ken, doubtless to a life of hardship in competition with the convict women.

There were no more letters.

JESSICA MURRAY

BALMAIN GARDEN CLUB

The Balmain Garden Club meets at the Watch House, 179 Darling Street, Balmain on the third Saturday of each month (except December and January), at 1:15pm.

All interested welcome to attend!

"Bally-What?"

In December 1986 a new magazine called "Bally-Who?" arrived on the Balmain scene. It is available free, but only if you pick it up yourself at shops in the Balmain/Rozelle area.

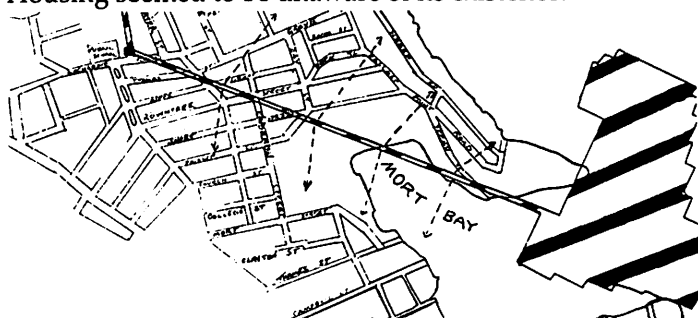
Thanks to "Bally-Who?" for all the publicity they gave the Association in their February edition!



**MORT BAY
ACTION GROUP**

A factor in the Mort Bay dispute that had been overlooked by both sides, until recently is the Balmain coal-mine.

Local geologist, Dr. Robin Jones, brought it to notice in early February, when she applied to the Land & Environment Court for an injunction to stop any further tenders being let until a full study has been done on the safety of building over the mine. Dr. Jones had previously supported development on the site, but became concerned that the mine question which she raised when the first development applications were before Leichhardt Council last July, was not investigated; and the Department of Housing seemed to be unaware of its existence.



As can be seen from the map, the main drive shaft of the mine runs directly under the Yeend St. side of the Mort Bay site, into the excavated area which extends from Ballast Point over to East Balmain. One reason its presence had been overlooked is that it is some 900 metres below the surface, but according to Dr Jones, & the report of an English expert brought out in the 1950s, its depth is irrelevant.

The potential problems are very significant. The mine is known to be full of methane gas. An explosion of this gas when it was being sealed off in 1948 claimed 3 lives. The gas is calculated to have the explosive power of 50 million litres of petrol, and Dr. Jones is concerned that disturbance to the system, caused by building the very heavy structures proposed for the site, could allow leakage of the gas along rock layers to the surface. Depending on how and where it leaked, there is the potential for toxic accumulations in the new buildings, or in other buildings, which would cause chronic health problems in exposed residents; the potential for explosions if concentration of the gas exceeds 5%; and the worst possible scenario of heavy leakage into the Caltex depot on Ballast Point, after which there would be very little left in the area for anyone to worry about.

The other major problem is subsidence. This can occur regardless of the depth of the mine or the mine tunnel, and it is clear from evidence collected by Dr. Jones that there have been a number of properties in the area affected by subsidence, and some have had to be demolished. It also seems that evidence of this subsidence has been suppressed, and people who should have been entitled to compensation haven't got it. Subsidence apparently is not necessarily confined to the area immediately over the mine, but can proceed along fault lines in the rock for considerable distances. The Land & Environment Court now has to decide whether, given all these possibilities, there is enough evidence to decide that it is safe to proceed to build without any further study; or whether a full geological study of all these safety aspects must be carried out.

The case is set down for hearing on 18-20th March. Balmain residents await the result with great interest - NSW taxpayers should too. The buildings most at risk of subsidence are in the Mort Bay development, which at the last count will cost over \$40 million!

COMMUNITY NOTICE BOARD

House Sitters

New Zealand grandparents need somewhere to stay while they visit their new grandson who lives in a tiny Balmain house with no spare room. If you are going away anytime between June & September, and need your home & garden meticulously cared for, & your pets totally spoiled, phone 810 2078. Excellent references available.

Weaving Loom

Available: 1 very old hand operated weaving loom. Needs restoring. Suit enthusiast/craftsperson. Contact Michelle South 810 1411.



the balmain association
representing
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 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.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Return to: Treasurer, P.O. Box 57, Balmain 2041

NAME:

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE: HOME:

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION (including News Sheet Delivery in Balmain-Birchgrove-Rozelle)

Please circle ... NEW MEMBER / RENEWAL

Single/Family/Household	\$ 8.00
Organisation	\$12.00
Pensioner or Student	\$ 1.00

Add \$5.00 to above rates to have News Sheet posted.

Cheques should be made payable to "The Balmain Association".