

The Campaign Will Continue

In unveiling their City West Urban Strategy the State Government proclaimed a 30 year redevelopment of Central, Pyrmont, Glebe Island and White Bay. The intention is to "identify the broad nature, intensity and form of the development, emphasising the regional policies and defining the direction of fine-tuning".

Then why are they not allowing a similar procedure for the redevelopment of the redundant industrial sites of Balmain? An ad hoc approach to the Peninsula ignores the local character and puts our amenities under pressure. White Bay Terminal and Unilever are part of the City West Urban Strategy so why not all of the Balmain sites?

To allow market forces to wholly determine the type of residential accommodation is not a responsible direction. "Pressures on rental levels and property values are already occurring in inner areas causing difficulty for low-income groups. It is likely that redevelopment will accelerate this process." (City West Urban Strategy, p9). The document attempts to advance solutions most of which are currently opposed by the present government. Why does the Government ignore the advice of their planning departments?

In the period of the exhibition of the Town Planner's draft Local Environmental Plans for the 5 sites, members of the Balmain United Residents Strategic Task Force have attended all of the Administrator's 'workshops' with experts, where they have forcibly expounded reasons for a total environmental plan for Balmain. The Administrator, Mr O'Toole, expressed his appreciation of the

manner in which the BURST representatives conducted their appeal.

As expected the discussions on traffic attracted the largest attendance with experts representing the Road Traffic Authority, Council and some Developers as well as BURST. There was a concerted effort by the bureaucracy to convince the residents that traffic should not be the

"White Bay Terminal and Unilever are part of the City West Urban Strategy so why not all of the Balmain sites?"

determinant for rezoning as the problems could be managed by careful design. Mr J Wesley, RTA, was confident that a network of local roads envisioned in the City West Strategy would overcome the Balmain traffic snarl in peak periods (in the next century). Even if this network really existed we would be suitably amazed if a local road could be constructed on the White Bay Container Terminal bypassing the Darling Street shopping area. Such a road would need to climb the cliff that the MSB had created in its vandalising of

Cameron's Cove — and it would still need to intersect with Roberts Street and pass through narrow streets to link with Darling Street.

Leichhardt Council's planners are convinced that Balmain residents are privileged because living on a peninsula means that we are not subjected to through traffic. However, the morning peak hour traffic generation from new development will increase by 32%. Seventy percent of this will be from the 5 sites. Additional costs to motorists will amount to \$10 million per year according to the traffic consultant's data. The delay at Darling St/Victoria Rd is calculated to increase by nearly 7 times in the morning peak and almost 12 times in the evening. There is no solution to the parking problem unless there is a large capital outlay.

The 5 sites will be worth at least 10 times more when rezoned for residential use. Residents expect some contribution from the developers to improve the amenities of the Peninsula. In the campaign for the Coffs Harbour by-election Wal Murray promised to transfer to public use foreshore land worth \$30 million previously earmarked for a tourist development. Surely it is not too much to

expect the State Government to buy Ballast Point as an addition to the Sydney Harbour National Park by reinvesting funds from the sale of the Balmain Power Station site.

Playing fields are needed urgently on the Peninsula to avoid travel to other suburbs.

Residents of Balmain expect the rezoning decisions of Mr O'Toole to be faithful to his assurances that he has not been given any instructions from the State Government.



Representatives of BURST, Council and Leda inspect the Copra shed on the Unilever site

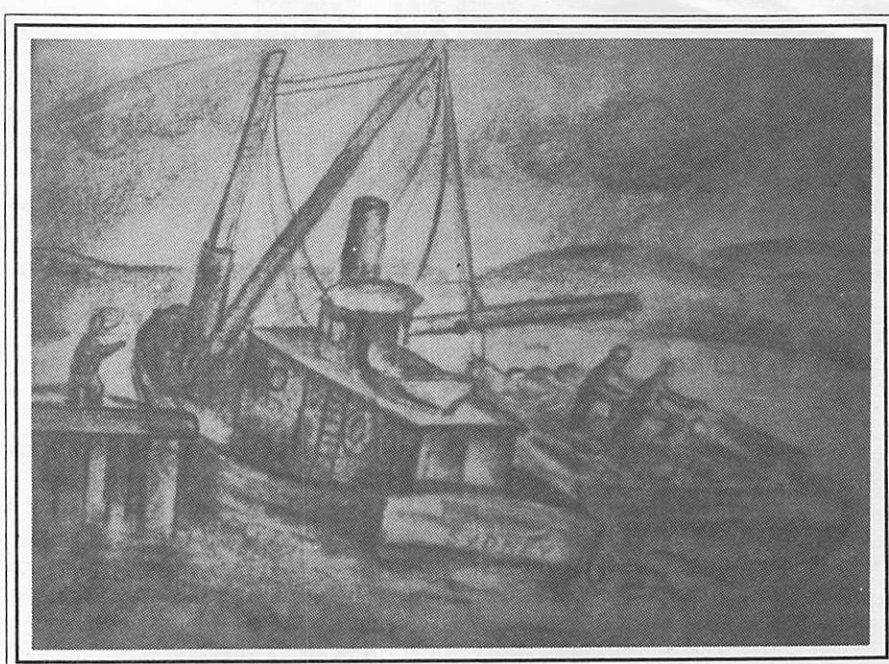
GOURLIE'S CORNER

Timber Yards

There were many timber yards in Balmain. Brongers (George Street), Cush (Mullens Street), Whitelum & Catts (picture frame & moulding maker, Reynolds Street), Cant (case maker, corner Mullens and Ennis Streets), Acme Box Co (case maker, 29 Palmer Street, later at Cooper Street), Driscoll (Buchanan Street) and Bell & Fraser (Elliott Street).

Both Driscoll and Bell & Fraser had bay access and they cut-up logs that were towed from overseas ships into their bay by tugs. The logs lay in the salt water for many months to drive out the sap. When the logs were unloaded in Snails Bay steel, eyelet pegs were driven into them and a steel cable threaded for towing. The bark was sawn off the logs and given away free after the workmen had finished their day's work and this was used in the fuel coppers and stoves that prevailed in those days.

The most well known of the timber yards was that of John Booth on the shore of Johnston's Bay. Booth came to Balmain in 1855 and soon after started his sawmill. He commenced his timber getting in the Hawkesbury district and later expanded northwards to the Manning River. His



Unloading timber in Snails Bay—drawing by Nancy Borlase. Courtesy Woolloomooloo Gallery

own ships brought logs to his steam-powered sawmill where he had circular saws and other machinery from America and Europe.

Booth was a tough boss who knew how to work hard and expected his men to do the same. He was nicknamed *Yonny Boots* by his migrant workmen. He lived next door to the sawmill in his house, *Surbiton*,

at the foot of Booth Street, and was always the first at the works at 6 am to ring the bell. In those days working hours were 6 am until 6 pm with a half hour for breakfast at 8 am and three-quarters of an hour for lunch at noon.

More of John Booth's life story can be found in the Balmain Personality column.

Birchgrove Oval

The Friends of Birchgrove Park would like to welcome the arrival of Ken and Maryanne Noakes and their daughter Hayley to the Caretaker's Cottage in Birchgrove Oval. While the cottage was being restored there was concern about vandalism and inconsiderate use of the Oval. The Friends of Birchgrove Oval have undertaken to provide Ken with any support he may need.

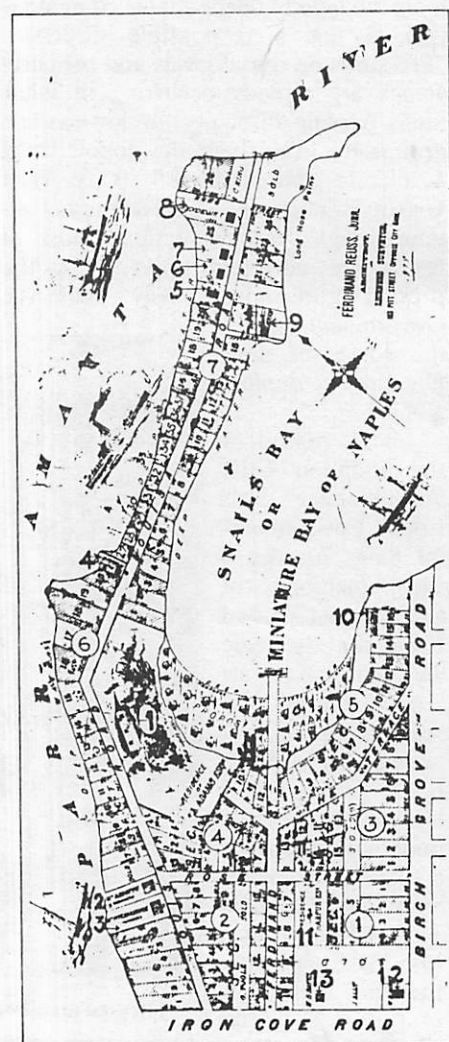
The Friends have commenced discussions with the Council's Planning staff and North Western Suburbs Tennis Association on landscaping around the Rose Street tennis courts. A consultant has advised works consistent with the heritage and style of Birchgrove Park and is in line with the National Trust which in 1989 recommended that additional planting should utilise plant species already existing in Birchgrove Park.

The park was established in 1882 when a trust was set up to begin reclaiming the bay. During the 1870s urban reformers and residents had urged the Government to "buy back land already alienated, to provide parks and recreation area". In 1880 Sir Henry Parkes' Government passed the *Land for Public Purposes Acquisition Act* and allocated £200,000 for land purchase. During this time 36 blocks were purchased for the Birch Grove

Recreation Ground. The land was nothing more than a wide expanse of mud at low tide. A government jetty and a park on the mud flats of Snails Bay was promised as a land sale attraction for a *Miniature Bay of Naples* (see map). It was proposed to use filling from the Sutherland Dock excavations on Cockatoo Island.

David Muir, sales clerk, of Balmain bought lot 9, The Terrace. In 1879 he built a 2 storey brick house and called it *Bay View House*. The house was later bought for the park's gardener and Edward Buchanan was commissioned to alter it in 1886. In 1887, Thomas J Rose, "a man with botanical experience", was in residence. Rose had two men to help him lay out the grounds.

A cricket wicket had been laid out in 1885 and a dyke-wall was commenced in 1887 but progress was halted by the depression of 1890. It was not until 1897 that filling was resumed and the line of reclamation was extended beyond the 1887 dyke-wall. By 1904 a tennis pavilion and a grandstand had been added. The new sea-wall had also been completed and it was possible to stroll from Louisa Road to Grove Street along the Deloitte Avenue walkway. Birchgrove Park continued to benefit from the efforts of Edward Buchanan until he died in 1943. Source: Leichhardt Historical Journal No15.



Balmain Personality

John Booth

John Booth ran away to sea, sailed the world and came to live in Balmain in 1854. Here he built ships on the shores of Johnston's Bay.

It was in 1822 that he was born in Bermondsey, England, where his father had come and started market gardening. Unable to get along with his step-mother, John, at the age of twelve, ran off and went to sail as a cabin boy. He was aboard the *Rajah*, an old barque that was almost unseaworthy when it put into Broken Bay for ballast and water—the year was 1839. The carpenter said to him, "This ship sails from here around the Horn, and she will never weather it, let alone being short of food. She'll go to pieces in the first storm—what about hopping it here?" John eagerly agreed.

More by good luck than knowledge they finally came to the little settlement of Kincumber, Brisbane Water. John immediately apprenticed himself to a Jonathan Piper, shipbuilder. After serving his time, John bought a ketch, the *Prosperous* of 15 tons, to get into the business of supplying the community of Kincumber. He mar-

ried Susie Weatherall on January 14th 1850.

There is no record of the fourteen or fifteen ships he built in Kincumber. There was not much hope for expansion in the tiny settlement so he decided to move to Sydney. There was already an office and timberyard at Market Wharf but John had bigger ideas.

The family first lived in a wooden cottage in Balmain at the end of what is now Booth Street. The next move was to *Wonga*, a wooden house further up the hill. Then came the final move to the big stone house next door, *Surbiton House*, where many of his children were born. This house had a street entrance from Donnelly Street to the back. The front of the house faced the waters of Johnston's Bay.

On coming to Balmain he constructed the first wooden steam ferry to be built in Balmain to the order of Henry Perdriau, of the Balmain Ferry Service. It was the *Alma*, of 11 tons seating 60 persons and costing £600. The squaring axe used in her construction was later presented to the Balmain Council by John Booth, Jnr. In all twenty vessels were built in Balmain.

John Booth first rented sawmills from George Coleson in 1856 that later became his sole property. The first log taken from

Coologalook, Cape Hawke was cut up and made into batons for the police. The first wood blocks for paving George Street, Sydney were made at Booth's Sawmill.

In 1887 John Booth & Co Ltd was a big concern. The works covered 9 acres with 1,500 ft frontage on Johnston's Bay and employed 300 men. A 500 hp steam engine drove the sawing, planing, boxing and moulding machines. The main driving wheel was cast at Mort's Works. The sawmills were capable of cutting 200,000 ft of timber per week.

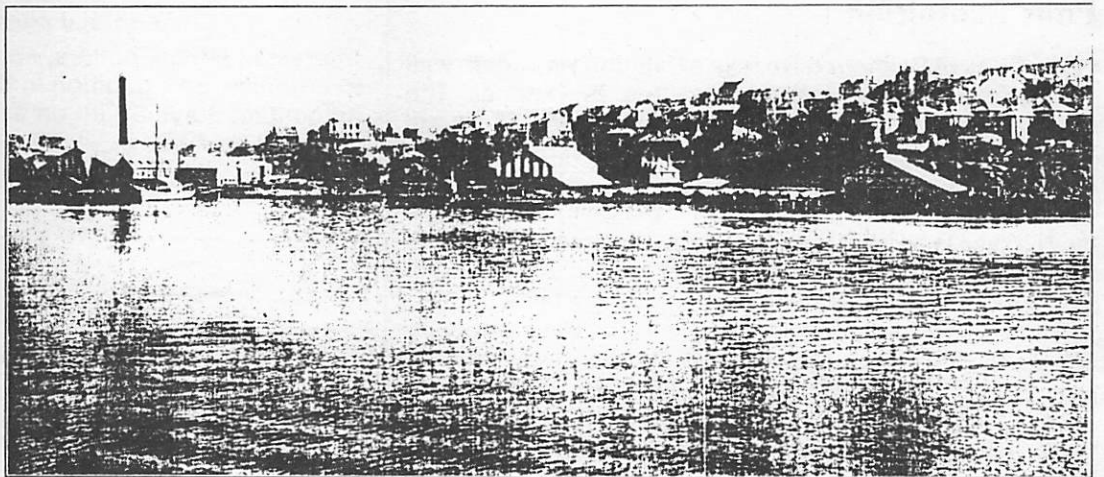
John Booth became the first Mayor of Balmain in 1867 and was member of Parliament for West Sydney from 1872 to 1875, jokingly referred to as the "Member for Lighthouses" because he was an authority on coastal matters. When an employee of the sawmill was badly injured and died on the way to Sydney Hospital, Booth was so distressed that he offered money and land for the Cottage Hospital built in 1884 on the site of the present Town Hall.

John Booth was Member for East Macquarie 1875/8. He died at Bundanoon on April 11th, 1898 at the age of 76.

Source: John Booth of Balmain, Reminiscences by his Family, by Rhoda & Norma Selfe.



John Booth



John Booth's Bay Sawmills in Johnston's Bay

Back to Balmain Day

The day commenced with an ecumenical church service at St Andrews Church conducted by Rev F Lambert-Carter who has served at the church for 30 years. After the service, the congregation sang some old-time songs to the accompaniment of violin and accordion.

The weather was superb and the shade trees at Elkington Park were appreciated when the crowd gathered for the picnic. There were old Tigers from as far as New Zealand, Charters Towers, Wagga Wagga, a coachload from the Central Coast and

from all over Sydney mingling with locals to share recollections of earlier times. The park was packed with almost 4,000 attending. In the afternoon, the Leichhardt Municipal Band played in the rotunda for over 2 hours.

Sales of Association books and cards exceeded all expectations and required a number of journeys back to the Watch House to replenish our stocks. Many stories were told and orders were placed for reproductions of old photographs from our history files.

Congratulations to the organisers, led by Wal Gourlie, who have already started on the 1991 Back to Balmain Day.

Balmain Development Trust

A large crowd gathered at the Asheraton Wentworth Ballroom on November 5th to successfully launch the competition for a Town Plan for an Inner Sydney Village.

The dinner was attended by Balmain celebrities, including writers, actors and media personalities.

The Trust is offering \$10,000 in prize money to architects and planners who can create a visionary solution to urban consolidation on the Balmain Peninsula. The winning plan will be promoted as the basis for future development.



IN YOUR GARDEN

Maurandia Barclaiana

Commonly called creeping gloxinia, this unusual lightweight vine will climb up any support by twisting its leaves and flower stalks around almost anything and can grow as high as high as 4m.

Give this lovely fast-growing vine a go as it blooms for months on end with vivid blue-purple flowers in autumn and winter. Some will start blooming in late spring and continue until frost cuts them back. The leaves are quite attractive—a downy, silvery green and heart shaped.

Soil for Maurandia should contain plenty of compost and be very well drained. The plants also demand a sunny position. Once established they will usually seed themselves.

Garden tip—an annual mulch of rotted organic matter applied each spring keeps plants growing strongly. Take care not to build it up around the trunk.

Bonny Davidson



Maurandia barclaiana is a fast-growing summer vine with vivid blue-purple flowers.

Pubs Exhibition

The Pubs of Balmain & Rozelle exhibition was again well received when it was represented in October. The display, together with Klin Sullivan's paintings, will remain for viewing 12 - 3pm on Saturdays until November 17th in the Watch House.

Due to wide publicity on radio and in the Courier newspaper, the Heritage Pub Crawl was a huge success, attracting many new visitors who enjoyed the social history trail in Balmain. Our thanks to the members who assisted with the exhibition.

Those who have yet to experience the walk will get the opportunity when it is repeated on Australia Day, 1991. Alternatively, get a few friends together and book a day to suit yourselves.



Association President and past secretary Margaret Dobson at the 25th Anniversary

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WHAT'S ON

● Pubs Exhibition
with Klin Sullivan's Paintings
extended to
Sat, Nov 10th & 17th

● Pottery & Prints - Helen Engle
Sat, Nov 24th & Sun, Nov 25th

● Pottery - Trevor Heldt
Sat, Dec 1st & Sun, Dec 2nd

● Xmas Drinks - Sat Dec 22nd

OUR HOUSE WATCH

The Watch House is open every Saturday from
12 to 3pm ● Call in for coffee

**The Balmain Association meets on
the first Wednesday of each month
at 7.30pm in the Watch House, 179
Darling Street, Balmain.**

Send mail c/o PO Box 57, BALMAIN. 2041

Our editorial phone is 818 4954

Interested artists, potters, sculptors etc. who would like to organise an exhibition in the Watch House are urged to contact Steve South on 810 1411. The Watch House can also be made available as a meeting place for local organisations.



the balmain association inc
representing
Balmain-Birchgrove & Rozelle

Our Aims Are To:

- improve the living, working and recreational amenities 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 cooperation of everyone concerned in the realisation of the above

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Return to: Treasurer, PO Box 57, BALMAIN 2041

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ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION (incl News Sheet delivery in Balmain-Rozelle)

Please circle-... NEW MEMBER / RENEWAL

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