

the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

The Peninsula OBSERVER

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The Battle For Balmain: New Stage

Leachardt Council's flag flew proudly from the ferry mast and the Municipal Band played Advance Australia Fair for nearly 400 residents on a cruise around the five waterfront industrial sites still under threat from the Minister for Planning, Mr Webster. A further 150 residents waved from Thames Street Wharf and waited for their return for the protest rally and sausage sizzle. Mayor Larry Hand spoke of those "maniacs on Macquarie St" and their "recipe for disaster". He urged the throng to attend the Land & Environment Court when Council challenges the REP that Mr Webster plans to impose.

Opposition Leader, Bob Carr, drew applause when he called on the State Government to impose its urban

consolidation on the "leafy North Shore" and their under-performing councils instead of forcing it on densely populated inner city areas.

During the cruise, cheers greeted the announcement of the dismissal in the Court of McMahon Holdings' appeal against Council's rejection of the development on the Howard Smith site. Justice Talbot denied consent because the landscaping was unacceptable. Amended plans had been presented to the Court in which the buildings along Birchgrove Road were lowered by 800 mm and the level of the roof ridges were reduced. The developers also agreed to lower the buildings which impinge on views from Gow St. However, the Court did not accept

residents' objections to loss of views as grounds for refusing development.

The Maritime Services Board has released a review of their requirements of Sydney ports. The Board had previously endorsed a report by Kinhill Engineers recommending the retention of Glebe Island commercial shipping activities in the long term and White Bay in the short or medium term. Their requirements will affect the preparation of City West Planning Committee's REP for the Bays Precinct which is scheduled to be completed this year. Leichhardt Council has declared its policy of retention of Rozelle and Blackwattle Bays for rowing craft and foreshore parks. The MSB plans to open the bays for recreational craft.

Open Local Government

Local Government in NSW is in the forefront of participatory democracy and precinct committees are the instruments that will extend this concept. Their democratic, "grass roots" character works well in open government, where there are no closed meetings nor secret files. Compromise can replace confrontation. Precincts offer hope in dealing with authoritarian decisions. They have been formed in eight municipalities in NSW.

We attended an all day conference organised by the Total Environment Centre on 25 July to discuss the philosophy and practice of open local government. The reports from several councils showed the variety of ways in which precinct committees work.

In a keynote speech, Ted Mack, MHR, said that it was the role of aldermen to carry decisions of precinct committees to councils. Such decisions made at a local level might concern traffic problems, development applications or any other matters of interest to that committee. Reports of each committee's decisions would be given by one spokesperson instead of a large "lobby" group and these would be brief. It is essential for the committees to broadly reflect the community and attempts by the political parties to stack them should be resisted. Mr Mack also called for the recording of each

alderperson's vote as a means of making them accountable. The best way to diffuse criticism is to open files and information to the public. He suggested that if "bureaucrats" are called public servants it may remind them of their duties to serve the public interest.

The Conference discussed other topics, including the involvement of the community in strategic planning; resolution of conflict in the community and environmental politics. Above all, public trust in the need to make to make precinct committees' vital links with councils was made clear.

Barry O'Keefe, QC, gave an alarming report on the draft NSW Local Government Act which proposes the subordination of the Mayor to the council and establishment of a General Manager with power over council on management procedures and answerable only to the Minister on matters of ordinance. There have been over 11,000 submissions mainly objecting to the introduction of first-past-the-post voting. The Minister, Mr Peacock, has since proposed that the voting system be decided by referenda in each municipality. This has already met with displeasure.

Stacy Miers, Leichhardt Council Precinct Coordinator, will announce the 14 proposed precincts for the Municipality. The report will be publically exhibited for 21 days for resident's submissions.

Frances Heathfield & Val Hamey

Siege of Balmain Hospital

There is no doubt that our District Hospital is under siege by the State Government and the Department of Health as well as influential members of the staff of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital.

Many of the hospitals in our area have been summarily closed or their services severely curtailed. Supporters of our Hospital are determined to preserve, at least, the basic emergency services required by our community, especially to those people with limited resources as well as those unable to travel to the next nearest hospital at RPAH. The "Guardians of Balmain Hospital" intend to bring pressure on the Department of Health, and make the community aware of the threat to their hospital.

Of course, the Hospital must adapt to change. Problems in providing services to our patients are constantly being analysed and solutions being found. We accept that restrictions in staffing, maintenance, equipment and some services are necessary, but we must survive. The administration of the Hospital has been responsible and has restricted expenditure without compromising standards of care.

We are fortunate to have Sandra Nori and John Murray representing the Balmain Hospital district in State Parliament and expressing our concerns about the future.

Dr Leslie F Glen

Prisons Part 2

Berrima gaol was built by convicts out of sandstone between 1834 and 1840. At that time it had three radial wings with 34 cells to contain 66 prisoners. In 1866, in order to implement the new "separate" system of prison reform discussed in a previous article, the walls of the gaol were raised by five feet and eight new cells were added to each wing, giving it a capacity of 110 prisoners. The notable facade with which visitors to Berrima today are familiar was built at that time from the original entrance gate.

The smallest of the cells was 4'1" wide with a length on one side of 5'11" and on the other side 5'5". The floors were stone flagging while the furniture consisted of a small board fixed in the corner to serve as a table and a cane stool. The bedding was removed each morning and returned at night. In each of the angles formed by the wings were six exercise yards divided by partitions of galvanised iron. The warders were stationed in a clear space in the centre of the building where the wings joined.

As noted in the Berrima District Historical Society publication on the subject, the essential feature of the Philadelphia Separate System was the provision of one separate cell for each prisoner, a cell in which he was confined for the whole of the time which prevented his having communication with any other prisoner or any other person except his warder and the chaplain.

As part of the separate system, all prisoners in NSW were classified into six groups according to the severity of offence. First class prisoners were further divided into A, B and C divisions. All first class prisoners passed through separate treatment - i.e. were separated and isolated from other prisoners - and separate treatment was also used as a punishment for other classes of prisoner who broke prison rules. The adoption of this system was supposed to destroy the prisoner's habits of crime and deter other criminals from causing trouble. It was also supposed to eliminate the gross moral corruption which had been rife when prisoners of all types, including the most debased, were herded indiscriminately together. But the separate confinement of prisoners, while preventing one sort of evil, certainly created new forms of suffering and despair.

All prisoners on arrival at Berrima were washed and inspected by the surgeon. All were provided with a Bible and the Gaol Regulations were hung on the wall of every cell for the enlightenment, presumably, of those who could read. The cell was kept "in the highest state of cleanliness" and each prisoner washed his feet twice weekly in summer and once in winter. Baths were taken weekly. Night pails were to be kept clean and their contents disposed of every

morning. During the day the built-in toilets at the end of each cell wing could be used. The first bell to be rung was at 5.45 a.m. Breakfast was from 8 - 8.45 a.m., dinner from 12-1 and supper from 4 - 4.30 p.m.

Conditions for prisoners in separate treatment were intended to be simultaneously reformatory and severe. They were not permitted to communicate with anyone except the prison officer and a chaplain - either Anglican or Catholic. Reading aloud was considered communication. They couldn't send or receive letters and had to perform prison work from their cells. Even the rations were restricted during the first month of separation. In the first six months of separation, the prisoner exercised for only one hour per day; in the next three months it was increased to two hours daily, depending on the opinion of the surgeon. Silence was rigorously enforced and prisoners in separate treatment even had to wear felt shoes to muffle noise. Exercise consisted of walking briskly and never loitering, and a prisoner was punished not only for talking, singing, whistling or dancing in either exercise yard or cell, but also for trying to scratch a message. Punishment for prisoners in separate treatment could include being placed in irons for not more than 48 hours, being put on half rations or in close confinement for up to seven days, or with a gag to compel them to cease from shouting or making use of offensive language.

The success of Berrima in achieving treatment which was "tough but fair" was examined on a number of occasions. In 1870 the Sheriff, Harold Maclean, wrote, "I have reason to believe that the complete seclusion attained in Berrima Gaol has had a most wholesome effect on the criminal class outside and those verging upon that class." Statistics appeared to support this

success: the number of prisoners in separate treatment had reduced from 109 in 1867 to 23 in 1874.

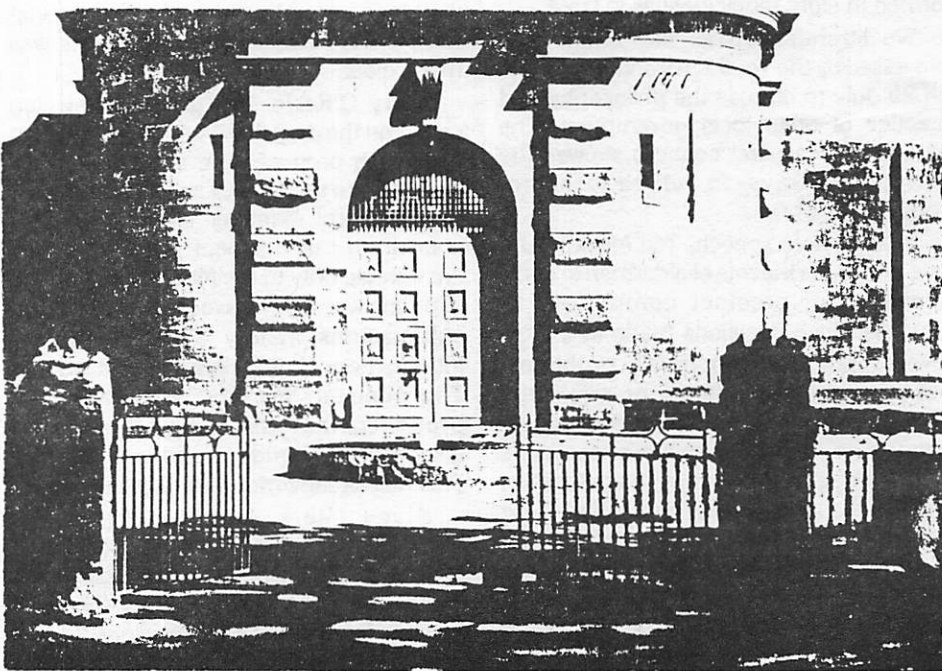
In 1878, however, Berrima Model Gaol was likened by the Member for Windsor to a "Hell upon Earth". It was stated in Parliament that Berrima was a "horrible place of torture [where] men were gagged for eight to ten hours at a time besides being spread-eagled, a punishment whereby a prisoner was suspended by his wrists from ring bolts fastened to the walls, with his feet not quite touching the ground. A Royal Commission was appointed which claimed that the system of separate treatment was in theory "an excellent one, largely conducive to the great ends of punishment - the deterring from crime and the reformation of the criminal". It also, however, acknowledged that the gag and spread-eagling were barbarous, that dark cells were ineffective and that the Gaoler, Mr Small, had on occasion been unduly rough, arbitrary and harsh. The Commission finally questioned separate treatment as a mode of discipline because its "successes numbered not one in a hundred."

Following the report of the Commission, references to the gaol in newspapers, and novels and by travellers continued to reflect the view that what had been a model of humane reform had become a shocking example of barbarity and inhumanity. Berrima gaol was closed in 1909 and did not reopen for 40 years.

A second experiment in prison reform - Trial Bay - will be examined in a subsequent article.

Debby Nicholls

The picture of the Berrima Gaol entrance courtesy of the Berrima Gaol. The copy of the engraving of Darlinghurst Gaol in last issue came from the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.



Lavinia Vernon

On 22 August it will be the 30th anniversary of the death of Lavinia Florence de Loitte Vernon, Comtesse de Vilme Hautemont, entertainer, writer and broadcaster. Lavinia was born in Balmain in 1881. Her parents were William Henry Deloitte, accountant and Florence Lavinia Hubert of *Simla*, 33 Wharf Road Birchgrove. Quentin L. Deloitte of *Wyoming*, 25 Wharf Road, was her uncle.

Lavinia was a pretty woman and musically talented. When she decided to sing professionally in the Australian Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Company, her family objected to her vocation on the stage. For some time Lavinia was an understudy in the company at the old *Her Majesty's Theatre*. Alexia Bassian was playing Josephine in "Pinafore" when she strained her vocal chords in the first act and Lavinia had only 20 minutes to take over the role.

One of the greatest exponents of Gilbertian characters on the Australian stage during the 1890s was Australian born Howard Vernon. Lavinia and Howard appeared together for a considerable period until Howard's death after World War I. She had married him while touring Tasmania in 1906. Lavinia performed overseas until 1927 when she settled once more at 33 Wharf Road with her widowed mother.

Mrs D J Wakefield of Wharf Road remembers Mrs Vernon in the 1930s presenting concerts at the Balmain Town Hall. Vinia's friend accompanied her on the piano with the audience joining in the singing. At interval, a small booklet about the Gilbert & Sullivan Company, written by Vinia was sold and all proceeds went to charity. A copy is held at the Mitchell Library as well as some of her piano scores.



"Patience" Miss Vinia de Loitte.

Vinia lived in the attic at *Simla* surrounded by her stage costumes (Mrs Wakefield said that nothing had been thrown out) and her two spoilt dogs, Olive and Gemina. A bed-sitting room downstairs was let. Mrs Wakefield remembers as a young girl being allowed to pick her camellias. Each day Vinia would catch the ferry to the city where she taught singing at Palings, 338 George Street or sang at the broadcasting studio.

The following is an extract from "Mother Stayed at Home, a mother's letters to a travelling daughter", by Gwen Badgery, published by Pan Books 1985.

"September 1954.

Sister Tim yesterday moved with my help to a lovely three-roomed flat, two guineas a week, at Snails Bay, Balmain. She heard of it from two girls at work - they said it was a terrible place, but it's glorious, even the lavatory pan is willow pattern.

It's one of the oldest places in all Sydney and is owned by a *real* countess, a French title which goes down with the women, on account of one of her ancestors killing a boar which was about to eat Louis Quince, believe it or not. This countess is a *pet*, who knows everybody, even my late Uncle Ned. She was an actress and singer, mostly Gilbert & Sullivan, and still teaches singing and all stagecraft and, as Vinia de Loitte, has sung in opera all over the world, especially Italy, so she and Tim will live happily on decrepit sofas covered with fringed silk from Damascus and will never use a broom.

The old stone house with attic windows on the waterfront is heaven and in the garden are wisteria and camellias and a huge magnolia and hollyhocks, and at the bottom is a flat terrace and seat and a tiny swimming pool. It looks over to Balls Head and is just lovely. The bathroom is fearful, but who cares, not Tim.

A ferry runs from the bottom of Erskine Street and the tram is the Birchgrove one, and it's a ten-minute walk to our cousins on Longnose Point. Even Aunt Lane was born in Balmain. The flat has been painted and is clean to start with. Tim is beside herself.

The other half of this old, long, low place is occupied by a Mrs. Lister, aged 90, relation of the artist Lister Lister. Gosh it's a fascinating place. A long flight of old steps leads to the back of it, and there is a stone courtyard with ferns, all very dilapidated but lovely. I longed to take the lav pan out and put it on the mantelpiece."



The Countess's House, Balmain.

"October 1954.

On Sunday met Val at Wynyard and we got the ferry over to Balmain to see Tim. We were asked in to have sherry with the Countess. I found myself balanced on a sofa spring which made a noise like a bullfrog whenever I moved, so I got cramp trying to sit still with a tiny glass a hundred years old in my hand, but every time I swallowed the spring let out a gurgle and if you had been there I would have roared.

The Countess was just adorable as usual. She used to have wonderful hair and we saw her gardening with it down, and she was in an ancient sheepskin coat and black stockings rolled down below the knee and sandshoes. But later the hair was up, and her skin was lovely, and her tiny feet and lovely legs in nylons could have belonged to a model of 20 years.

She sat at her grand piano and played her own compositions, then Tim asked her to show us the book she had published about Gilbert & Sullivan and their operas and actors, etc. in Australia. It's a little book, 4/-, and we all bought one. Good photos of her and all the others in it. Her husband, Howard Vernon, was thirty years older and very handsome. I lent mine to Stella's mother and she dotes on it, as she saw Vinia in all the operas and said she was fascinating beyond words.

She autographed all our copies and put a quotation from the G. & S. opera we each liked best. I chose *The Mikado* and a queer female, who lives in a boathouse next door and is alleged to be a journalist, said her favourite was *Madame Butterfly*! But the Countess pretended not to hear, her manners are *perfect*, and after a bit the female caught on and said, well, *Pinafore*!

One wall is covered with large photos of Queen Marie of Rumania, who was one of Vinia's mother's best pals. She knows Canada, of course, and was at one time a hostess for some travel agency and loved being at one of those huge hotels at Banff, where she organised a dirty Australian picnic for the rich tourists and they adored it, billytea and all.

Tons of driftwood were washed up at the bottom of the garden and the Countess said that once during the war she sat on the lower terrace for days waiting for a full bottle of the best gin to come up! She saw old Mrs. Lister next door throw it into the water - it had belonged to her old servant and Mrs. L. does not care for alcohol. You could listen to her for months."

Lavinia Vernon had no children and after her death at the Balmain Hospital on 22 August 1962 her body was sent to the Sydney University in accordance with her will.

Kath Hamey

Picture of Lavinia de Loitte courtesy of the Mitchell Library. Illustration of *Simla* from "Mother Stayed Home".

In Your Garden

In the Shade

Bringing your garden out of the shadows. There is no reason why shady areas around the home and garden can't be brightened with some attractive plants. Houses, sheds, fences and established trees and shrubs all create shade for part of the day, but there are lots of plants that will look nice under shady, semi-shaded or filtered sun conditions.

During late autumn or spring, shady areas can be planted with natives or other evergreen plants. Shady areas under eaves tend to be dry most of the time because rain does not fall there and are overlooked when watering. A few hardy plants to grow under eaves with regular watering are palms, tree ferns, tree



begonias, euonymus, jacobina, buxus, murraya, hydrangea, azalea, camellia (filtered sun) and the invaluable impatiens (pictured), which give marvellous colour. Some perennials are foxglove, hellebore, snowdrop, lily of the valley, clivia, November lily. For ground cover use helexine, ivy, lamium, native violet or vinca. Climbers are cissus and trachelospermum.

Whatever the soil type, it can be improved by adding plenty of compost or other rotted organic material. A garden bed on the east side of the home which receives morning sun and afternoon shade or enjoys filtered sun throughout the day, provides an area to grow quite a lot of plants. Fuchsias are delightful with a tremendous range to choose from. If given too much shade they do not bloom as well. Try white impatiens (Busy Lizzie) here.

Bonnie Davidson

The Exhibitions

A few years ago, Norman Bull, a past president, thought that we should make more use of the Watch House. He suggested hiring the building for Art Exhibitions. Great idea, Norm! We have not looked back since. This coming spring and summer there will be something to see each weekend from August to December. Do drop in.

It has become one of the main sources of income for the Association, taking in \$10946.60 this year. The most successful exhibition this year paid a \$1000.00 in commission. As a venue the unique atmosphere is always commented upon at opening nights. The variety of rooms allows for exhibitions of vastly different mediums and or groups. Each exhibit can have a separate area removing visual conflicts or allowing each artist their own space. It is particularly suitable for smaller paintings and prints which are very popular with the public.

The range of art exhibited also varies. A pricing policy was designed to attract the student as well as the experienced independent artist. The Watch House has been patronised by painters, printers, sculptors and potters.

This success is due in part to the spread of the venue's reputation by successful Artists. You can help in the success by letting people know the Watch House is available for exhibitions not just Art but any proposal will be considered. Enquires can be made to me on 8101411 (H).

Stephen W. South

Watch House Hire Co-Ordinator.

Art Balmania

We have Back to Balmain, The Rozelle Festival and now Art Balmania. The Peninsula galleries have come together to celebrate Art in Balmain. Fifteen of the Best Galleries have combined to create Balmain's First Art Festival.

On 12 September you can take a stroll around all these Galleries. They will be open from 2pm to 7pm. You could start at the Watch House with Imma Thiel and her friends, maybe have Claudia do a wrapping for you, then catch the Free Shuttle bus Leichhardt Council will supply to tour the route all afternoon.

This promises to be an exciting event with a great variety of Art to see. So keep the date open and watch out for the insert in your Observer.

Stephen W. South

What's On

- Exhibition at the Watch House
Lee Hyunmi - Art works
Aug 8-9 (Sydney Art College)
- Leonard Matkevich - Paintings
Aug 22-30
- Louise Broue - Paintings
Sep 19-27
- Gallery Festival - Sep 19
- Back to Balmain Day
Sunday 25 October

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Police Blotter

27 September 1876

Stock Branch, Department of Lands.
Sydney 22 September. Removal of Pound Yards, Balmain.

It is hereby notified for public information that in conformity with the "Impounding Act of 1865", the Public Pound at Balmain has, on the recommendation of the Municipal Council, been removed to the south-west corner of the Town Hall Ground fronting Llewellyn Street.

Obituary

Members will be saddened to hear of the death of Klara Rudlow, a long time member of the Association. She came from Vienna in 1938 and could speak three languages. Klara was admitted to the Bar in 1953 and relinquished her practice as a solicitor recently after over a half century's association with Balmain. She was an enthusiastic supporter of the local theatre group and had stood, although unsuccessfully, for local government. She maintained her sane, modern attitude to people and was never pretentious and always amusing. Klara's sharp wit, clever turn of phrase and modest humour will be missed.

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

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.

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.

Annual Subscriptions:

Household \$16, Pensioners &
Students \$7, Organisation \$21.