

the balmain
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news sheet

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Edmund Thomas Blacket in Balmain

Edmund Blacket (1817-1883), whose work is so familiar to residents of Balmain, was, according to Joan Kerr in "Our Great Victorian Architect", probably one of the most prolific and versatile architects Australia has ever known. His work included hundreds of churches and domestic buildings, but also extended into virtually every Victorian building type from abattoirs and asylums to warehouses and woodstores.

Blacket was born on 25 August 1817 in Southwark, England, the seventh child of James Blacket, a prosperous cloth merchant, and his wife Margaret. He was educated at the Millhill School, a Congregational College near Barnet in Hertfordshire and then worked in his father's office in London and at a linen mill in Stokesley, Yorkshire. While living there he designed and built the town clock and the Wesleyan church organ.

Blacket married Sarah Mease in 1842, shortly before the two left England forever on the SS Eden. On arrival in Sydney he wrote in his diary that he thought he had never seen "such exquisite a scene" although he also described it as "like the artificial grottoes and mountains which we see [in] County country houses, but on a large scale." The first man-made object he noticed

was St James's Church spire and then the Governor's Mansion. If he had ever intended going on to New Zealand, plans apparently were abandoned. Bishop Broughton was so impressed with Blacket's letters of recommendation that he almost immediately appointed him Inspector of Schools for the Church of England in the Colony, which was fortunate for Blacket (and New South Wales!). In 1845 he was the architect for St Mary's School in Adolphus Street.

By 1847 Blacket was Diocesan Architect and also enjoyed a flourishing private practice. Even before that he wrote his brother that "I have already succeeded marvellously and altho' I do not officially bear the title, yet I hear I am pretty well known as the Church Architect." Certainly he was responsible for St Mary's Church, Balmain, which was built in 1846. [The church was much enlarged in 1859 by William Weaver and William Kemp, but the original Blacket chancel was retained.] He was appointed the Colonial Architect in 1849 and designed the Balmain Watch House lower part five years later.

During this period Blacket and his growing family (he and Sarah produced eight children) lived in Glebe. He had purchased the land at 393 Darling Street, where the Manor House now stands, in September 1860 but did not move to Balmain until after Sarah's death in

1869. The first indication of any residence in Darling Street is a listing for Edmund T. Blacket in Sand's Directory of 1871 (which indicates actual residence in 1870.) It is unclear why he only resided there for less than five years; it is obvious he still owned the house, which he definitely designed and built himself, as he left it to his two younger daughters, who were unmarried at the time he made his will in 1881.

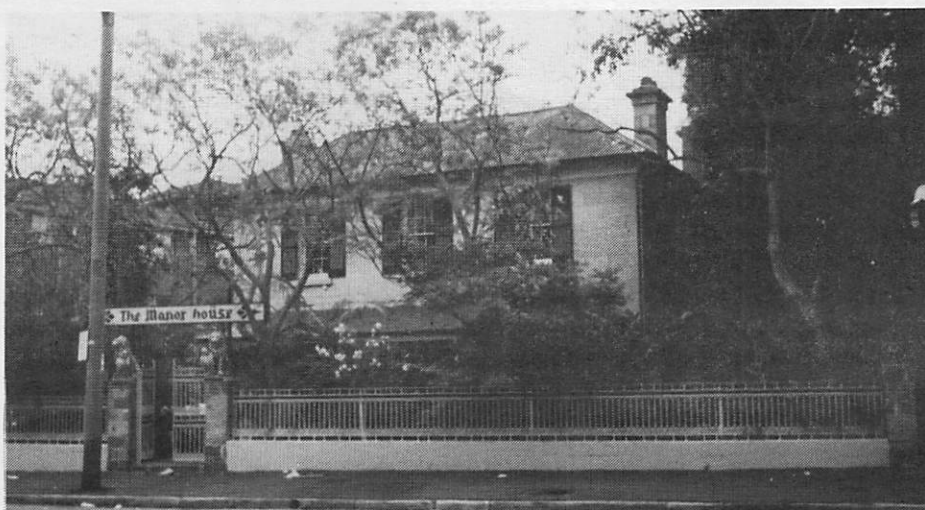
Whatever the reasons, Blacket is next listed in Booth Street in Sands Directory of 1875. From 1876 to 1882 he was listed by Sands in Darvall Street. For many years it was thought that he resided at *Alderley* which he had designed and built in Booth Street and which is now the core of the Balmain Hospital. However, further research now indicates decisively that this is not so. [See article on next page.] Before he died on 9 February 1883, Blacket had moved once more to *Roland Villa* in Croydon Street, Petersham.

Blacket was buried in Balmain Cemetery beside his wife Sarah, but their remains were cremated and the ashes moved to St Andrew's Cathedral when the cemetery became Pioneer Park in 1941. The ashes were placed behind the choir stall, which is the memorial to Bishop Broughton who was so closely connected with the inception of Blacket's career and who continued to take an interest in it throughout his life.

In addition to the buildings already noted, Blacket's legacy in Balmain includes Captain Pearson's House, later called *Eastcliff* by Major Jaques, in Pearson Street (c.1844); *Woodleigh* in Stack Street (c.1870); St Thomas' Church, Rozelle, (then Balmain West, 1874) and Rectory (1882); and the Convent of the Immaculate Conception in Jane Street 1876 (now altered).

Sources: "My Name is Blacket", Nicholas Vine Hall, "Our Great Victorian Architect, Edmund Thomas Blacket" Joan Kerry, "Blacket in Balmain", National Trust 1981.

Bonnie Davidson



Blacket's house now the Manor House

Land Management

The variety of experience that the community currently enjoys is achieved through a diversity of built form. Fundamentally, a variety of land uses will encourage diversity of building types, which in turn, will be used by a variety of people. These forms of diversity are already part of the Peninsula environment.

Achieving a diversity of land use in the built environment is partly dependent on ensuring a wide range of building types are available, at affordable rates. Greater levels of affordability will help to ensure a wider range of uses.

Economic pressures can work against achieving diverse urban environments. From a developer's perspective, a building that operates as a single use is often easier to manage and finance, than a development comprising a number of different uses. This issue can affect diversity, from the individual building through to the area.

A greater diversity in the urban environment can be achieved by the retention and reuse of older buildings for new uses. Often, older building stock will have little, or no money tied up in it. This stock attracts limited demand from pro-

sperous tenants, as the buildings often lack modern facilities. This combination of factors keeps rents low and enables occupation by a variety of tenants.

Today's high construction costs for comprehensive redevelopment result in increased rents and a reduction in the variety of built environment. This could be argued as a reason for allowing little or no development to occur. This would be far from ideal, as many buildings will eventually become obsolete. New building stock is often necessary to enliven an environment.

A balance of building stock, providing a range of ages and conditions, will help generate a broader spectrum of rents. Planning has no direct control over the rents charged, but can indirectly influence through Council's policies for mixed use areas should ensure the economic sustainability of existing uses, but enable them to be recycled or replaced when appropriate. Change in the urban environment is inevitable and desirable and planning should be concerned about managing that change affectively. (above from Leichhardt Council Planning Interface draft).

Many newcomers to the Peninsula, attracted by the ambience and convenience of the closeness of the city,

buy a small terrace or workingmans cottage. Soon after, they modernise or add extra rooms, unaware that they may contribute to the destruction of the very environment that enticed them originally. Many of the small one bedroom dwellings are within the finances of young couples or single persons. If they are extended or replaced, the stock of affordable housing is depleted.

It is probable that low-rise urban buildings will continue to dominate simply because high-rise housing is more costly. In research for AMCORD (Australian Model Code for Residential Development) it was revealed that a shift from a four-storey scheme with 63 dwellings to one with a nine-storey (with lifts) and 77 dwellings resulted in a substantial increase in the cost per dwelling. Even though the number of dwellings on the site increased from 63 to 77 and the land cost per dwelling fell, the effect of the additional construction cost per square metre (a rise from \$750 to \$1245) meant that the average cost of an identically sized two bedroom dwelling rose 17% (Scott Carver 1992).

Market conditions favouring high-rise development are likely to be confined to some inner areas, to sites converted from non-residential use.

Conserving Old Buildings

Old buildings are not just links with the past but are symbols of community stability. The loss of this stability breaks the perpetual partnership that makes for orderly growth in society.

Many examples of architecture are works of art, evoking pleasure, or admiration, or awe - irrespective of size or function. A building can be worthy of keeping even if it has no intrinsic beauty, so long as it contributes something to the quality of a place. It is false to think that if a building looks bad, then it is bad. A good rehabilitation can make a seemingly worthless old building sparkle with new life. Old buildings are educational because they are unassumingly truthful historical records, buildings are wonderful education tools. A whole way of life may be understood by studying the buildings of a precinct. Caring signifies good economics: keeping a fine building can demonstrate a community's self esteem. Built and natural resources are not bottomless. Re-using makes economic sense too. It

is foolish to go on depleting built resources by applying throwaway consumer principles to buildings. A building can be given a new life by adapting it to suit a new function. People are prepared to pay for the things that old buildings have that are not provided in modern structures - high ceilings, large windows, ornamental and decorative work. Renovation can take less time than new building and can be staged so that no one part may be used before the whole is finished. Rehabilitation imposes fewer public social costs than new development by saving on cost of services.

A building is more than a piece of real estate; it is a link in the chain of the National Estate, a primary source historical item. The site on which it stands, the materials from which it is made, the techniques of its construction, its financial envelope, the people who have built and have

occupied it - all are solid history, awaiting discovery, evaluation, interpretation. (Condensed from Robert Irving's rationale of conservation in Leichhardt Historical Journal No 15)



Verandah awnings are returning. Above in Darling St Balmain, National Bank proposed. Opposite page, shop in Darling St Rozelle.

Balmain Personality

Henry Earnshaw Tidswell was born in Manchester, England c1820, the son of Thomas Earnshaw Tidswell and Nancy, nee Kay. He married Elizabeth Roby in Yorkshire in 1850. Their first child, Henry Parker Tidswell was born in Chorlton in November 1851.

Shortly after the birth they sailed for Sydney in the ship F C Clarke. The ship's passenger list showed Mr and Mrs Tidswell and two daughters arriving in Sydney. At that time Henry would still have been in dresses, as was the custom of the day, and would have looked like a little girl. Their second child, Lilla Mary was born 1 August 1853, just before the ship arrived in Sydney.

The ship's records include Mr and Mrs Wilson and five children. Soon after arrival Henry Earnshaw Tidswell was a merchant in partnership with G H Wilson, who, it would seem, had arrived on the same ship.

On arrival the Tidswell family lived at Surry Hills where two more children were born. By 1858 they had moved to Balmain where they rented *Shannon Grove*, now No10 Ewenton Street.

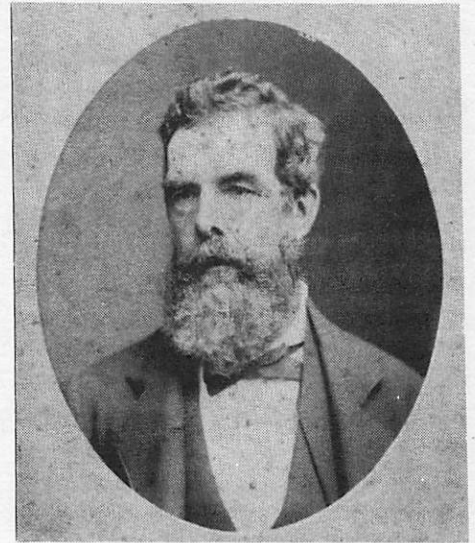
In February 1860 Henry purchased lot 4 of the subdivision of Gilchrist's original subdivision of lot 4 section 5 of the Balmain Estate from James Hugh Palmer. Later, in March, he purchased a portion of lots 5 and 6 of lot 4 sect 5 from James Hugh Palmer for £150. He purchased for £182, at public auction in June 1867, lot 3 of the original subdivision of lot 4 sect 5 from Frederick T Humphrey, the Official Assignee of the Estate of Nathaniel Caston. In July 1860 he raised a mortgage of £1387 on the first two parcels of land from the NSW Building Society. This amount was

required to build his own new home in Booth Street. A Brownrigg & Langley survey map of 1861 has the name of Henry Tidswell on the Booth Street site where he lived until his death. This house, which Henry named *Alderley*, had eleven rooms and was built principally of sandstone. It was designed by Edmund Thomas Blacket and for many years was believed to have been Blacket's own home. Further research has now proved that it was a Blacket house but was never Blacket's home. Henry built *Alderley* c1860 and lived there until his death in 1882.

In 1886 Henry's executor, his eldest son Henry Parker Tidswell, sold the house and the three parcels of land to the Trustees of Balmain Hospital for approximately £3000. The name *Alderley* obviously held great significance for the Tidswell family as it was used by the youngest son, Frederick Charles, for his house at Bexley and by Henry Parker's son, Henry Francis, for his property at Marengo Flats.

After Edmund Blacket died in 1883 his sons continued to work as architects under the name Blacket Bros. They designed houses for two of Henry Tidswell's sons, Henry Parker at Bexley and George Earnshaw at Woolwich (Hunter's Hill). The plans for both these houses and for another for Mrs Tidswell of Bexley can be seen in the Mitchell Library in Sydney. Sadly no plans for *Alderley* at Balmain have survived.

During his life in Balmain, Henry Earnshaw Tidswell was a very community minded man. He served St Mary's Anglican Church, Balmain East as a churchwarden, sidesman and auditor. Six of Henry's children, born at Balmain, were baptised in St Mary's (two died in infancy). There is a memorial plaque for



Henry in St Mary's Church. Henry joined the Balmain Masonic Lodge in 1868 and was their Treasurer from 1870-73.

In 1867 he stood for and was elected Alderman of Balmain Council to fill an extraordinary vacancy in the South Ward, Mr Mossman having been disqualified from office due to insolvency. In June 1867 the Supreme Court cleared Mr Mossman so Henry resigned to allow Mr Mossman to be re-elected.

Henry again stood for Council in February 1877 and having been elected with a clear majority he was appointed Treasurer for the Borough. A special committee was appointed in 1878 to investigate the accounts of the Borough after a deficiency of £127/15/4. The Mayor then suspended the Council Clerk James Roby. The Assistant Council Clerk, Mr Glassop, was also threatened with dismissal. James Roby resigned on March 19th 1878 and Council voted to keep Glassop on. Henry Tidswell disagreed with this decision and in consequence resigned as Treasurer of the Borough on 2 April 1878. Henry did not stand for re-election when his term finished.

Henry Earnshaw Tidswell died on October 23rd 1882 and was buried in the old Balmain Cemetery (Now Pioneer's Park Leichhardt). His wife Elizabeth died shortly afterwards on April 16th 1883 was buried alongside her husband. After the cemetery was closed in 1912, Matilda, widow of Henry Parker Tidswell, removed Henry's and Elizabeth's headstone, but not their remains, to Woronora Cemetery.

Sources:- Land Titles Office, St Mary's Anglican Church Records, Brownrigg & Langley survey map, Mitchell Library.

Bonnie Davidson & Ro Tidswell

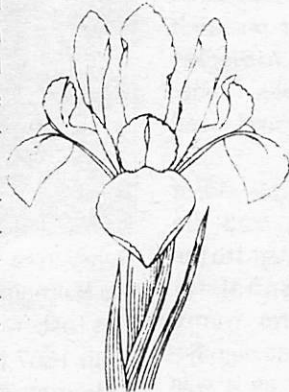


In Your Garden

Colours of Cannas

Add a glow to that sunny spot in your garden with colour during the hottest time of the year by including some cannas in your planting. Cannas come in all tints of red, pink, orange, and yellow as well as spotted and multi-coloured. Seldom attacked by pests and diseases and requiring little attention, cannas will brighten a sunny corner.

Cannas are most effective when grown as a complete bed planting, but they are also pretty and adaptable for spots or narrow areas. They also can be grown in large containers. As they like the sun, they can be kept on the north or north-west of the house. There are dwarf, medium and tall growing



varieties, so plant them accordingly. They can also be propagated from seed, which can be sown in autumn or spring.

Cannas like plenty of moisture but not bog conditions. Being quick-growing they can also absorb extra plant food. Plant in soil enriched with plenty of organic material, some animal manure and slow-release fertiliser. The best time to divide cannas is winter. Plants that won't be lifted can be topped with organic material from mid-summer until late autumn if grown in a full sunny position. When cannas have finished flowering, the tall and untidy stems can be cut down to near the ground.

Bonnie Davidson

Heritage Week Success

Heritage Week 17-21 April 1994 was a great success with many visitors at the Watch House to view the Murals in the History Cell and the new Watch House History display in the foyer. The old photographs displayed in the many shop windows along Darling Street created much interest for the shopkeeper as well as the public. Book sales were stimulated and the response to the Heritage Walks was gratifying. The lovely sunny weather helped.

The commitment to microfiche the church registers has now included the St Pauls Presbyterian Church in Rozelle (closed 1974) and the much depleted marriage register of the Campbell Street Presbyterian Church. In September 1969 items including a Baptismal Roll, Marriage Certificates and Register and several cartons of church papers were stolen from a car owned by the Rev Jim McDonald, then Minister of Campbell Street Church. The car was parked outside the Balmain Primary School while the Rev McDonald was giving scripture lessons. An appeal produced no response. A great loss for family historians.

Kath Hamey

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120th Anniversary

St Thomas Anglican Church, Rozelle, celebrated their 120th year with a special service on 22 May. Archbishop R M Goodlen presented the lesson with Rector John Lousada in attendance. The parish registers of St Thomas are at St Andrews Cathedral, Sydney archives, but the parish would be grateful to copy anything relating to the Church and parish. Contact 810 1072.

The Annual General Meeting of the Balmain Association Inc will be held on Wednesday 3 August 1994 at 7.30pm in the Watch House.

What's On

Exhibitions at the Watch House

- Nado Milat - June 4-5
Ink on Paper
- The Endangered Species
June 10-12
- Julie Chamberlin - July 30 to Aug 7
- Susan Kerville - Historic Papers
Sep 3-11
- Anita Johnston - Sep 17-25
Paper Makers of NSW
- Sue Cowden - Oct 1-2

Apology

Acknowledgment for the source of the two paragraph introduction to the Leichhardt Town Plan in the April issue was not credited to Peter Reynolds from the Leichhardt Historical Journal No 18, page 76.

Leichhardt Historical Journal

The LHJ 1-18 are now available at the Watch House. Cost 1-12 \$10. 13-18 \$15. Full set \$175.

Each journal includes Book Reviews, but space here precludes their inclusion in this index list.

Contents

LHJ No 1 1971 Reprinted 1994

Foundation of this journal; A Roberts. Remains of Birchgrove House; R Irving. William and Annie Miller; D Kerohan. Robert J Stuart-Robertson; R Stuart-Robertson

Responses of the Balmain people to the Depression; N Wheatley
Bishopgate Estate, M Solling
Lot 48 Darling St. Balmain; J Engle, P Reynolds & R Wise
Book reviews; A Roberts

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

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/fax 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.