



the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

The Peninsula OBSERVER

Vol 29 No 6 Issue 232

Founded 1965

December/January 1994

One Man Remembers

For almost fifty years the Balmain Ten Footers could be seen skimming and skudding across the harbour on Sunday afternoons from September to April. I am not sure when the club began but I hold the Tom Keddie Memorial Shield which was first contested in 1907. My own memories date from 1938 when Balmain was, like many river and harbour suburbs, a centre of sailing. But only Balmain had a 10 foot Dinghy Sailing Club.

As their name suggests, these boats were 10 feet in length and 7 feet to 7 feet 6 inches on the beam with a depth of 21 inches. They had lee and bow cloths and carried an enormous sail area. The mainsail was 24 feet on the boom and 26 feet on the mast with an 8 feet long bumpkin that carried a jib 19 feet on the hoist and 10 feet on the foot.

Because these boats carried so much sail they were tricky to sail and only skilled skippers were successful as the design of the boat and the huge sail area

made them tend to nose dive. Life was very fast crewing in a 10 footer and on more than one occasion I recall, with spinnaker in hand, I was directed to sit "on the rudder" as we ran up the harbour before a good breeze.

The crew of a 10 footer consisted of the skipper, sheet hand, for'ard hand and two well hands, one to bail out the well water while the other had to hang out on the gunwale to keep the boat on a right even keel. Some of the skippers who sailed these boats to notable success are Tony Russell, Horrie Balkwell (later to sail the successful and champion 18 footer "Tek"), E Ellis, Ken Morrow, Charlie Miller and Stan King (also a successful 18 foot skiff skipper and owner) to mention only a few of the keen participants in the sport.

As the son of a long experienced Sydney Flying Squadron 18 foot skiff skipper, my interest in skiff sailing was well established at a very early age. In 1938, aged 16 years, I joined the 10 footers and sailed regularly with them until I joined the RAAF in 1942. During

the 1940/41 season I crewed in *Wallaby* with owner-skipper Stan King when we had a wonderful year, winning 8 races and being equal point scorers with the *Jean* owned by Gus Hunt and skippered by Charlie Miller. The popular saying in the club was "If you can finish in front of *Jean* you win the race". The *Wallaby* was the only boat that season to win all three excessively heavy weather races.

One race I vividly recall was blowing out the start in bare spars - no sails hoisted - then hoisting mainsail and jib to run down the harbour before the wind. We lowered the mainsail and took the gaff out just letting the peak hang down. By this time we were level with the heads and on our way to Tasmania. We came about heading up the harbour where we were declared the winner as no other boat was afloat.

The *Wallaby* was housed in a Double Bay boatshed but naturally most of the boats sailed out of Balmain. The course we sailed began at Clarke Island down the harbour to George's Head Light, back to Shark Island then to Clarke Island and across to Taylor's Bay, back around Shark Island to finish at Clarke Island. The race covered approximately 9 miles and commenced at 3pm and, depending on wind velocity, concluded between 4pm and 4.45pm.

My father, Frank Burrows Snr, was a very experienced 18 foot skiff man and as a result became starter and judge for the Balmain Dinghy 10 foot Sailing Club until it ceased to operate in the second half of the 1940s. As there was no club house, the weekly meetings were held in the Institute in Darling Street. It is now a shopping arcade.

After World War II the club ceased racing and so ended a great era of sailing on Sydney Harbour and for Balmain in particular. I hope this will bring back a few happy memories of those great days. The Balmain Tens Club was the training ground for many successful 12 foot, 16 foot and 18 foot crews of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s.

Frank Burrows



'Wallaby'

Kid Sister

Two years ago Barbara Whitley, a former resident of Durham House (demolished 1954) in Nicholson Street, sent us the chapters of the manuscript of her autobiography which dealt with her memories of growing up in Balmain in the years between 1918 and 1931. We were unfortunately unable to give her assistance in finding a publisher, but she has kindly agreed with our request that we use extracts from the manuscript for publication in the Observer. The first of these edited by Debbie Nicholls begins with this issue.

All the people living in Nicholson Street must have been agog with curiosity that day when our family moved into Number Eight. There were so many of us! Nine children, aged from eighteen down to two. (There was another one as well, but he was a grown man of nineteen, away at the war.) Such a huge house, with such a big garden! It was the only one of its kind left in that street, remaining there from the early days of Sydney, when East Balmain was a suburb where wealthy men built grand and spacious homes. It was a beautiful and convenient place to live on a narrow peninsula poking out into Sydney Harbour, with water close on three sides, and just a short ferry ride across to the city.

By the time we went there, in October 1918, several big shipping companies had built wharves and docks where the streets ran down to the water, giving work and livelihood to most of the men of the district. The houses generally were small and pokey, either weatherboard cottages or narrow double-storey terrace houses (some of these with elegant iron lace decoration) and the gardens were minuscule.

We went there from Woollahra where our house seemed to be shrinking as our family kept on growing. Our mother wanted a home big enough for us all, and this was the one she found. It was an enchanting house, at least to me. It had thick sandstone walls, lots of big rooms with tall windows and high ceilings, a wide hall going down the middle with passage ways leading off it to other rooms, and a fascinating staircase - a small spiral with two turns in it. There was a balcony where seven of us had our beds, three girls on one side of the door and four boys on the other; and even a cellar quite bit and airy enough for us to play in.

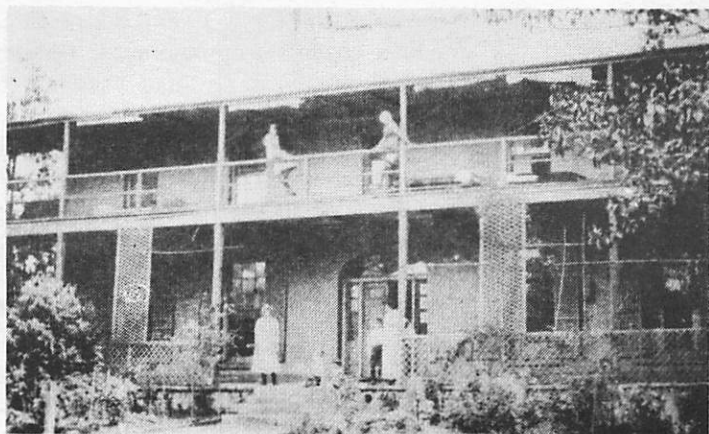
The house stood in about the middle of an acre of ground. There was a bed full of roses on one side of the front steps, and one with camellias on the other. Beyond the driveway was the tennis court, and beyond that again another patch of ground with trees - an oak in the corner, camphor laurels, and an almond tree that was the first thing to flower in spring. In the middle of this strip was a huge Moreton Bay fig tree that was almost impossible to climb - it had no foothold or handhold for at least twice my height and five trunks, separate but close together. On the edge of this "bit of pleasure" was a hedge and then a corrugated iron fence. That hedge! A mixture of plumbago and red tecoma, there was enough space between it and the fence for a smallish person to creep along, or to hide.

All in all, the house was nearly big enough to cover our heads, but Mother was a bit of a snob in those days and she had her doubts about Balmain being what she called a "lower-class" district. She would have liked just such a house in a seemingly suburb where we could have met "suitable" friends; but there wasn't

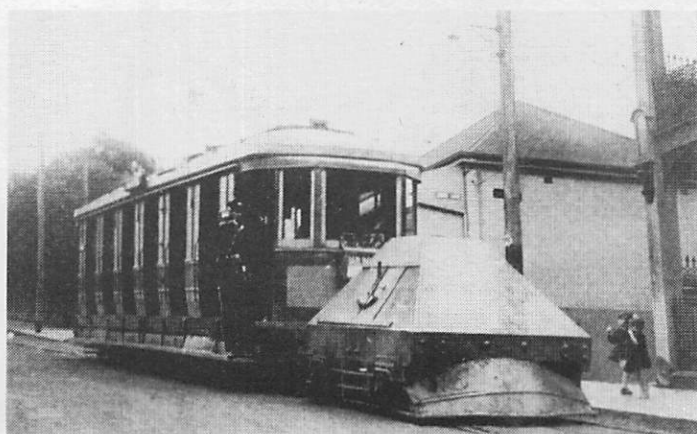
enough money. But we young ones loved that place - house, garden, being so close to the Harbour, everything.

This was our family, the Halls:- Dad, a surveyor who worked at that time in a city office; Mother, who had a busy life looking after us all; Pev, away in the Royal Flying Corps; Nan, 18, (now 94) and Mollie, 17, at home helping Mother; Les and Winsome, 15 and 13, at high school; George, 12, at Tech; Sep, 10 and myself, Slippy, 7, at primary school; and Bobaneenie (Bob & Ernie, Ed.), 4 and 2, who were really two boys but nearly always spoken of as one, still playing at home. Later on, when they were in that wicked period this side and that of ten years they'd sneak into the gap in the hedge and smoke cigarettes made out of newspaper, gum leaves - I hate to think what! A strictly masculine pastime.

There were quite a few bitter-tasting times when I'd be told I couldn't join in some adventure because I was "only a sheilah". There was "jumping the dummy" for instance. A tram used to run down Darling Street to the ferry at the bottom of the peninsula. When it got to the corner of Nicholson Street it had to connect with the "dummy" waiting there on the tramlines. This was a remarkable contraption designed to stop a tram from careering too fast down the short steep hill and across the wharf into the water. It was a sort of box on four wheels, with sides sloping inwards to a flat top, and a heavy counter weight under the tramlines. It looked as though a tram would be pushing it down the hill, and pulling it back on the way up, to leave it standing there till the next tram came. I'm sure that Sep, and George too, used to risk their necks jumping on and off this tempting piece of dare-devilment, but they wouldn't even have told me - definitely not for "sheilahs" this one.



Durham House with members of the Hall family

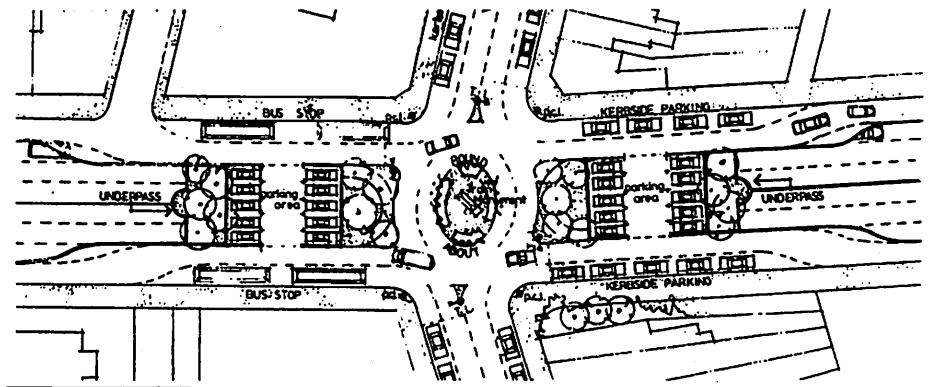


Tram and counterweight going down Darling Street

Victoria Road Tunnel

A plan for a tunnel under Darling Street to break the partition of Rozelle and allow easier access to Balmain is being promoted by architect, Mr Greg Vicas. He is a consultant on the Mainstreet study program for Darling Street in Rozelle and Balmain. His scheme is for a Victoria Road underpass from just past Evans Street to Wellington Street. Ramps would connect to Darling Street with a roundabout allowing continuous traffic movement. Car parking spaces would be provided above the tunnel. See diagram below.

The plan would improve the environment of residents and businesses in Rozelle and recreate the old Rozelle town



square. Mr Vicas claims that his project can be financed by sensitive development of the State-owned Balmain Power Station site and with contributions from developers of the large sites on the peninsula. He estimates that the cost would be \$15 million. The Leichhardt Council and RTA have expressed interest.

Combined with an elevation of Victoria Road to allow traffic to enter and exit at Roberts Street the access to Balmain would be facilitated and reduce delays on the main arterial. This would be cheaper and better than an extension of Mullens Street over the railyards which has the disadvantage of encouraging traffic through local streets.

Aircraft Noise

A rally of an estimated 15,000 angry people at Leichhardt Oval on 2 December gave the Federal Government an ultimatum to alleviate aircraft noise or face a blockade of Sydney Airport. Eleven surrounding councils organised the meeting which set a deadline of 10 December for the Government to agree to a charter requiring the restoration of the east-west runway and closure of the third runway until all runways can be used. Other demands are an expanded compensation package, assurances that the curfew be enshrined in legislation and the opening of Badgerys Creek as the principal airport in three years with Sydney airport used for domestic traffic only.

Residents under the flight path of the north-south runway have been subjected to sharply increased noise levels since the opening of the third runway mainly because of the prevalence of strong northerly winds. Despite CAA advice to the Minister for Transport, Mr Brereton, some experts claim that with proper management the E-W runway can be safely used in conjunction with the other

runways. On 26 November aircraft were landing from the west while other aircraft were taking off on the N-S runway.

The decision in 1989 to build the third runway rather than a new airport at Badgerys Creek has been vehemently disputed. Tom Uren, in his book "Straight Left", blamed Peter Walsh for threatening to resign from the Hawke Government unless the third runway was approved and the cabinet caved in breaking the election promise. Marrickville Mayor, Barry Cotter, said, "There is only one solution: reopen the east-west runway now".

In the draft EIS the consultants estimated that the number of people moderately affected by noise would be reduced from 170,100 to 82,000 and those seriously affected from 54,700 to 26,900. The number of residents north of the airport moderately affected would increase from 61,600 to 71,900 and those seriously affected would increase from 19,800 to 24,700. Even with these understated figures the backlash was foreseeable. The State Government is planning a residential development at South Creek on the Badgerys Creek flight path. Will they never learn?

Midi-buses. When?

Sydney Buses recently issued tenders for 30 midi-buses to operate on inner city routes. They have invited submissions for diesel or alternative fuel powered vehicles of low floor designs. After the normal evaluation process, the successful tenderer will be nominated at the end of this year.

A regular size low floor bus is currently undergoing trials to determine its efficiency and to gain feedback from various passenger groups.

Chemplex Heritage

The Rosgrove (Chemplex) site in Terry Street, Rozelle is subject to an application for the demolition of all of the buildings and structures, asbestos removal and remediation of the land. The applicant advises that they intend to do the work on a staged basis.

Leichhardt Council's Heritage Adviser, Mr Paul Davies, has reported on whether certain elements should be considered for retention. An inspection of the site revealed some potentially interesting items. These include a residence c1896 facing Terry Street, a building used for sulphuric acid production originally by Elliott Bros; stone retaining walls with important visual elements; tramway remains and road patterns which could improve the understanding of the sites history.

The developers, the Walker Group, held a meeting with residents on 16 November to explain their site remediation plans. The clean up will take place in stages on a 20 m² grid and each polluted area will be capped before proceeding to the next. 98 drums of polluted soil have been removed to a disposal area near Dubbo. Consultant, Ross MacFarlane, told the meeting that the work would take at least nine months but admitted that there may be more to learn about the site. There are hydrogen sulphide (rotten eggs gas) emissions from sandstone near the High School that have to be capped.

The adjacent site of the Balmain Power Station is also subject to a development proposal by Pacific Power to demolish all structures except the Switch House, Pumphouse and Administration Building. Both sites are subject to the appeal by the Leichhardt Council against the validity of the Greater Metropolitan Regional Environmental Plan No 1.

In Your Garden

There's a chrysanthemum for every taste. The exact origin of this delightful group of flowering plants is somewhat confused and it is hard to discover whether they were first cultivated in China or Japan. One thing is certain though and that is that the many different varieties can be grown with little effort by virtually all gardeners.



Chrysanthemums will adapt themselves to almost any conditions, growing in most types of soil and are fairly hardy. Flowers come in a large range of shapes and sizes. Because there are both early and late flowering forms, blooms can be had from spring to autumn and give a large supply of cut flowers over a very long period. They are not long-lived plants and in fact the best results are

achieved by starting new plants from cuttings each spring.

Colourful bottlebrushes are favourites with nectar-eating birds. Adaptable to varying soil and climatic conditions, bottlebrushes or callistemons are ideal for the garden. So showy and free-flowering, they cannot be ignored during their spring flowering season and again in autumn when they produce a few more blooms. When the heads of flowers are finished, remove them, cutting just behind the flower head to promote new growth and maintain a denser shapelier plant. Most varieties are quick growing and the large range available can

give you low bushes through to small trees. Although they are hardy plants most would prefer a moist well drained soil and lots of



sunshine for them to bloom well.

Bonnie Davidson

Ode to Australia Day

Oh! How I Love Her Still

Encircled by mighty oceans for nature a treasure store,
Hung with a necklace of coral, crowned with a pearl-studded shore,
This is but part of her makeup, luring the strong to their doom.
Cursed with her treacherous waters for her luggers become a tomb,
Draped in a mantle of desert, richly embossed with gold,
Taunting our sons to find it, making our young men old,
Moody, possessive and passionate, holding her wealth to her breast,
Breaking the men who seek it quickly subduing the rest,
Fringed with her mountains and forests, blessed with her rolling plain,
Blackened and scorched by bush fires, flooded and washed with rain,
Merciless, cruel, unrelenting, hungrily gorging her fill,
I've tried so hard to hate her, Oh! how I love her still.

Gordon Symonds.

Back to Balmain Day.

After the wild winds of the previous week, the weather for the 6th Annual Back to Balmain Day, Sunday 30th October, was warm and sunny. Crowds of former students visited the Balmain (Pidjy) School and Birchgrove (Birchy) School. The service held at St Andrews Church was well attended and finished with a resounding community singing of "Happy days are here again", "Pack up your troubles" and "Roll out the barrel".

Then to the picnic at Elkington Park. Two coach loads of ex-Balmainites came from the Central Coast to meet family and friends. A member from Perth, Tom McGuire, met his scattered family this year. Book sales were brisk and family history enquiries filled up pages of a notebook. The Leichhardt Municipal Council Band played on and it was a very happy and successful day.

Congratulations and thanks to the Committee. See you all next year on Sunday, 29th October, 1995. The Colgate Palmolive photographs will be on display in the History Room at the Watch House until Christmas.

Kath Hamey

We wish you a
Merry Christmas
and a happy
New Year



What's On

Watch House Exhibitions

- **Reiner Davies - Dec 10-18**
- **Elaine Norling - Feb 3-19**
- **Ann Sheridan - Feb 25-Mar 12**
Women's Art Collective
- **Samantha Collier - Mar 18-26**
Painting, drawing & sculpture

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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.