



the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

The Peninsula OBSERVER

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Thirtieth Anniversary Issue

Some recollections

by Bob Irving

It is not easy to recall accurately what happened thirty years ago, in those early days of the Association, but inevitably certain things stand out. I clearly remember, for instance, being invited by two recent graduates in architecture, former students of mine, to attend a meeting of concerned Balmainiacs to consider the formation of a residents' group. (Not long afterwards the *Balmain Observer* published the headline 'New Association formed to "restore" Balmain'). The two young architects were Brian McDonald and Errol Pickard, and the concept for which they were spokespersons was enfolded mainly by Sibyl Masterman, Toni Furness and John Power, but others including Alan Harding, Thea Banks, Tom Flower, Richard Waterfield, Joan and Terry Chapman and Graham Stevenson had a hand. The meeting which established the Association took place in November 1965 and elected the first Management Committee, of which I was a member. This committee first met at Toni Furness' house in Wharf Road on 2 December. Dr John Power was elected as president and Toni as secretary. On the following Saturday, a barbecue was held at Sibyl Masterman's in Numa Street. From then on regular general meetings were held in the old council chamber of the Balmain Town Hall. The membership subscription was one dollar.

The Balmain Association was the second residents' action group to be formed in NSW after the Paddington Society was established to oppose the mooted development that threatened comprehensive and vastly detrimental changes to the historic nature of that area. Their Society grew rapidly and, mainly because Paddington was in a marginal State electorate, its voice was

soon heard in high places. Eventually Paddington was declared an area of heritage importance and its traditional character was protected.

Mindful of the success of the Paddington Society and recognising that we had similar aims, but wishing to express its own distinctiveness, the management committee decided to call the new group the *Balmain Association* and quickly established a rapport with the Paddington group. We also supported the formation of other groups such as the Annandale Association.

The aims of the Association were, in the beginning, rather more modest than those of the Paddington Society. Graham Stevenson, spokesperson for the Publicity Sub-committee, summarised them in a letter to the *Balmain Observer* published on 19 January 1966 as "... to maintain all the features of Balmain having beauty and/or historic value; to preserve and enlarge the area's open spaces; to encourage high architectural standards in new or altered buildings; to prevent the disfigurement of the suburb by ugly signs, advertisements, notices, pole and other unseemly structures; to protect residents from air pollution, noise and other nuisances; to ensure the safety of pedestrians and drivers using the streets; to encourage cultural activities, especially a library and crafts centre; to compile and record the area's history and to establish a permanent collection of historic relics; and to seek the co-operation of residents, existing industry and others to help us achieve these objectives."

Warmly remembered among the early members, in addition to those already mentioned, are Bob and Bettina Chambers, John and Audrey Rogers, Geraldine and Dick McGillicuddy, Leigh Roussos, Norman and Jocelyn McLeod, David and Jenny Porter, Mrs K Rudlow, Jeanette Stevenson, Lorraine Power,

Barbara Flower, Neil and Helen Oates, Margaret Dobson, Jim Cunningham, Rose Pickard, Pat Irving, and Jack Zuber. Bettina Chambers produced the first News Sheet in April 1966. Most of us of course were newcomers, although the Mastermans had been in Balmain for twenty years. But we also encouraged long-time residents to join and many of them did, supporting our desire to keep the existing mixed character of the place. Rita and Hal Wise, Pat and George Macaulay and Ethel May were just five. But we liked to think of the Association as helping to cement relationships too, as when Toni Furness, secretary, married John McKenzie, treasurer.

A great many other new residents joined as soon as they came to live on the Balmain peninsula, among them Bill and Jess Haesler, Peter Reynolds, Bob Beverley, Gladys Chanter, John and Jocelyn Morris, Chris and Jean Bell, John and Helen Engle, Keith and Julie Campbell, Rick Gruen, Reg Window, Nick Winter, Bruce Stannard, Alicia Lee, Philip Bray, Louis Lodge, Richard Wright and Len Barton.

(continued on next page)

Balmain Association 30th Anniversary Cocktail Party

at the Watch House
179 Darling Street
Saturday 28 October 1995
6 pm to 8 pm



Donation \$10

RSPV 14 Oct Tel 810 5185

Some recollections continued

The first project was of course the Watch House which, as a result of the Association's lobbying, was eventually acquired by the Lands Department and handed over to the National Trust, on condition that the Association nominated trustees and undertook its conservation and public accessibility. The leader and most enthusiastic in these endeavours was Alan Harding, who not only organised the working parties (even well before the building was acquired) but was also instrumental in getting its first authentic furniture from the government stores branch. A few times the 'restorers' worked through the night and afterwards, on at least one occasion, we had morning beers at 6 o'clock at the Pacific Hotel in Stephen Street (the 'Opera House') with the wharfies who had just finished their night shift. Wine bottlings, with our Watch House label, are among my happy memories of those days. Specifications for major work at the building were drawn up by the architectural sub-committee. The grand opening was held in 1970. By the Bill Haesler was the third president and it was he who took the lead in saving from development the triangular piece of land beside the Watch House as open space.

The other sub-committees also began their activities early. I was responsible for co-ordinating the Historical Sub-committee and, with people such as Bill Ottley, Arthur Ellis, Graham Bennett and several others, began to spread the word about Balmain's absorbing heritage. The great impetus for historical investigation came with Peter Reynolds, who also established the *Leichhardt Historical Journal* in 1971 and produced his *Balmain Walks* publications. (The latest issue of the *Journal* [1995] has a splendid editorial by Peter that is a kind of potted history of the Association). We did the Balmain

chapter in the second volume of the National Trust's *Historic Places*, wrote the text for John Wong's *Houses of Balmain*, published *Balmain in Time* and gave innumerable lectures, talks and interviews.

When John Power stood down as president, I succeeded him for a year. Then followed Bill Haesler (three years), Bob Beverley, David Porter (three years) and Margaret Dobson.

Almost from the beginning we attended the Labor dominated Leichhardt Council meetings and on many occasions the public gallery was filled with observers, largely Association members. On one occasion we made so much noise demonstrating against some motion or other (I can't remember which one) that the mayor, Ald Annie Cashman, demanded we leave if we couldn't be quiet. In those days before 'open' council there was usually only one copy of the business papers available for perusal by the public at the beginning of the meeting so organised contribution was very difficult. Issy Wyner and Nick Origlass were our aldermen and they were generally sympathetic with the ideals of the Association.

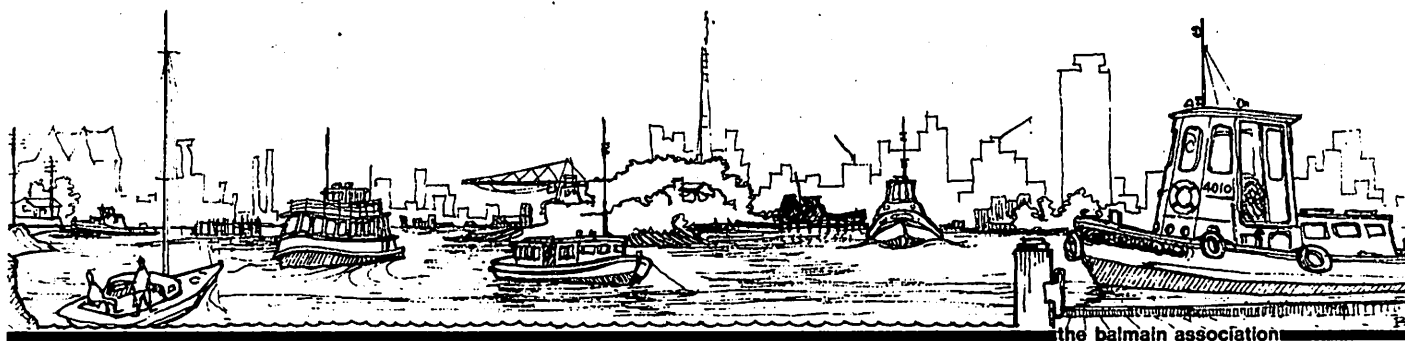
The Council began to consider the 'Libraries for Leichhardt' proposal at the end of 1966. The Association was a vocal supporter but the Council resolutely opposed the project for some time. The Association initiated a Children's Library in one of the cells of the Watch House and this was an important step in the Council's change of mind. There was also a reaction when a hefty rates increase was proposed in 1967. The huge public protest meeting in the Town Hall, orchestrated by the Association, made the Council listen.

An early lost battle was the effort to save Birch Grove House (1810), the first building known to have been built in our area and one of the earliest surviving houses in Australia. Early on Friday morning, 1 December 1967, the

wreckers moved in. I stole the original back door during the demolition. A year or so later the present block of units appeared on the site, ironically named after the old house.

In those days the Mort's Dock complex still existed, though it was no longer a working installation. The decision to demolish the old buildings and redevelop the site had been made before the Association was formed, but we campaigned — in the event unsuccessfully — to have some of the components and their contents kept. The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 20 May 1966 reported on some of our activities under the headline "Balmain link with past is destroyed". I remember watching the office building's majestic cedar staircase being destroyed and I rescued one of the sets of aluminium hands from the four-sided clock tower as it was knocked over. In later years the use of Mort Bay for roll-on-roll-off cargo handling produced its own detrimental effects in the area. The Bay area is now very different from what it was 25 years ago.

Sydney was changing very rapidly and (as Peter Reynolds later wrote) there was always a threat to Balmain looming. In the Association's very earliest years it became evident that, instead of just advocating rubbish bins in the main streets, protesting about the Council's intention to paint public seats in vari-coloured strips and preparing to plant trees, the Association must react positively and vociferously to the massive and serious developments that began to overshadow Balmain. The most frightening of these was ship containerisation, the effects of which were soon to alter the White Bay area. It was later made known that this desecration was planned as an interim measure pending the setting up of Port Botany. But despite much opposition Balmain was changed and we still endure the shortsightedness of the planners.



Treasurer's Report

Financial year to 30 June 1995

Income

Subscriptions	3341.00
Donations	388.05
Watch House Hire	8752.59
Leaflets	954.20
Around Balmain	1278.40
Called to the Bar	1398.31
L Hist Journal	881.50
Half Thousand Acres	242.00
Christian Brothers	95.00
Gourlies Corner	433.00
History	1511.00
Streets Book	3350.95
Miscellaneous	49.00
Interest	<u>514.77</u>
	23190.07

Expenditure

Subscriptions	343.34
Refunds	575.00
W/H operating	1669.37
W/H capital	6102.72
News Sheet	1778.02
Publications	1435.00
History	1896.84
Streets Book	2861.87
Miscellaneous	1269.30*
Govt Charges	<u>72.45</u>
	18003.91

* Miscellaneous includes \$1000 donation to Leichhardt Historical Journal
Brought forward June 1994

Cheque Account	2713.80
Savings Account	14570.70
History Account	<u>393.67</u>
Total	17678.33

Plus Income	23190.07
Less Expenditure	<u>18003.91</u>
Total	22864.33

Cheque Account	7651.51
Less outstanding cheques	<u>145.00</u>
	7506.51

Savings Account	11968.46
History Account	<u>3389.36</u>
On hand 30/6/95	22864.33

President's Report

In the past year, most of the aims of the Balmain Association have been addressed. Our aims to improve the living, working and recreational amenities of our area have been assisted by the Precinct Committees and particularly by the removal of the NSW Government's restrictions on the Leichhardt Council to control the proposed developments on our foreshores by speculative builders.

Our aim to maintain features having natural, architectural and historical value has been expressed in the repair of the Rowntree Monument; the support for a park on Ballast Point (we have members on this committee) and, in particular, the extensive work of restoration of the Watch House and its gardens. The greatest compliments have come from two of our original members - Peter Reynolds and Alan Harding. Alan said "congratulations on

the work on the Watch House and its use. It is all we set out to achieve".

Our aim to compile and record the history of the area has involved the History Committee in limitless labours of love and the publication of *Streets, Lanes and Places* - the latest of a series of successful Balmain oriented booklets. Furthermore, the opening of the Watch House to visitors is a communication exchange in that we receive, as well as give, historical information. In the future more of our collected material may be displayed.

Much of our previous work was action as an umbrella organisation for many diverse groups (or gripes). Such is now the responsibility of the Precinct Committees in which our members are active. The focus of the Balmain Association is now on history and the upkeep of the Watch House which is a desirable exhibition venue.

Lastly I wish the new committee every encouragement for the following

Management Committee 1995

President	Debby Nicholls
Vice President	Ann Bastok
Minutes Sec	Jeremy Arnott
Treasurer	Val Harney
Assist Treas	Bonnie Davidson
Public Officer	Frances Heathfield
History Convenor	Kath Harney
Watch House Hire	Steve South
Committee Members	
	Kay Trippe
	Joyce Landau

Balmain Association First Officers 1965

President	John Power
Vice President	Alan Harding
Secretary	Toni Furness
Treasurer	Richard Waterfield
Presidents since inception	
1965/7	John Power
1968	Robert Irving
1969/71	Bill Haesler
1972	Bob Everley
1973/5	David Porter
1976	Margaret Dobson
1977/8	Brian Brady
1979	Peter McEwen
1980/2	Peter Reynolds
1983/4	Frances Heathfield
1987/91	Jane Ward
1992/4	Frances Heathfield
1995	Debby Nicholls

year. I am resigning as president, having held this position on and off since 1983 when we had lost our president, news sheet publisher and distribution organiser, our secretary and treasurer. A completely new committee with fresh ideas took up the challenge of management and brought the languishing Association back to life.

Frances Heathfield

Kid Sister

Over the last year we have published excerpts from Barbara Whitley's "Kid Sister". This delightful history of the Hall family of ten children living in Durham House in Nicholson Street has now been published and is available from her at 47 Farnsworth St Castlemaine, Vic 3450 for \$17.95.

Part of the grounds of Durham House is a children's playground which has been named Origlass Park to honour Nick's community service.

In Your Garden The Easy Way

Weekends spent lawn-mowing and edge trimming and weeding are not for everyone. If you spend much of your time doing these jobs it is time for a re-think.

Formal hedges demand regular clipping. Manicured lawns need feeding, aerating, edging and watering repeatedly. Replace a portion of lawn with paving or if you have a small yard like mine, pave most of it as I did. Hanging baskets and numerous small pots dry out rapidly. I have had a drip watering system with timer over my hanging baskets now for three years. Put small potted plants in a few large containers that will retain moisture much better than small ones. Cultivated beds of annuals need regular weeding, watering, fertilising and dead-heading to stay respectable. Remove all plants that are not thriving or that need regular spraying. Mulch all garden beds. Use vigorous ground-covers extensively in large mats to help suppress weeds. It really can cut down your weeding. If you

want roses grow only those varieties that are resistant to diseases like black spot. Feed and mulch your plants. Healthy plants have greater resistance



to pests and diseases. Make sure you take regular strolls around your plants. Close observation of each one's performance ensures your response to its needs. Position a seat in the most appealing area of your garden and use it regularly. Take it easy!

Bonnie Davidson

Big Garden Tour

Two Balmain residents have included their gardens in Sydney's Big Garden Tour to be held on the week-end of 13-15 October. More than eighty private gardens will be on show in the Sydney metropolitan area and extending to the Blue Mountains. This is a major fund raising event to benefit the Anglican Retirement Villages. One, two and three day passes will enable the public to visit as many gardens as they can manage between 10am and 4.30pm. The local gardens are at 2 Broadside Street and Ewenton, 1 Blake Street, off Ewenton Street. Tour tickets and a Tour Directory will be on sale from BBC Hardware other hardware outlets as well as selected Australia Post sites. The public will have the choice of pre-arranged bus tours or by private car. Group discounts are available. Check newspapers for sales venues or contact 634 0513.

On the same weekend the Arts Balmania has simultaneous exhibitions of artworks at fourteen galleries throughout the peninsula. Art lovers can follow the Gallery Walk or ride the

shuttle bus between the venues. The Watch House is participating. Contact Golden Canvas on 555 8277.

The Balmain-Rozelle Festival takes place on Sunday 15 October at Elkington Park. This includes the Balmain Regatta coordinated by the Wooden Boat Association of NSW. Contact 555 8988.

What's On

Watch House Exhibitions

- **Samantha Collyer, Sep23-Oct 2**
Painting, drawing & sculpture
- **Julie Chamberlin, Oct 21-22**
Photos & mixed media
- **Nado Milat Nov 4-11**
Ink on paper
- **Elaine Norling Nov 11-19**
- **Printmakers Nov 25 - Dec 3**
- **Chris McLean Dec 9-17**

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Back To Balmain

Following the success of the previous Back to Balmain days the seventh of the series will be held on Sunday 29 October 1995 in Elkington Park. The day will commence at 9am with reunions of Gladstone Park, Father Therry, Nicholson St, Rozelle and Birchgrove schools. An Ecumenical Service follows at 10am in St Andrews Church. Proceedings then move to the park for Picnic Day where the Leichhardt Band will perform at 2pm. A stall will have steak sandwiches, soft drinks and ice cream for sale. As in past years buses will bring old Tigers from the Central Coast. The day will be one of reminiscence of the pleasures of growing up in Balmain-Rozelle-Lilyfield

Mr Val Hamey has been selected by IMROC as a community representative on the Sydney South Regional Subcommittee of the Metropolitan Strategy Committee. He will participate in the updating of the metropolitan strategy in respect to land use and its affect on transport planning.

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.