



the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

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Thames Street Ferry Shelter

Thames Street Ferry Wharf and Shelter on the shore of Mort Bay, Balmain is described in the Register of the National Estate as a functionally designed late Victorian building.

The original ferry wharf that was used to transport workers and their families was built out from the large dock which runs from the north east side of Thames Street to College Street, opposite Mort Street. It was known as the Dock Ferry and when the new ferry wharf was built at Thames Street, it too was known as the Dock Ferry until Mort's Dock closed in 1959. In the Sands Directory it was still called Mort Street Ferry in 1910.

The Balmain Council leased public wharves to ferry companies and operated stalls and tearooms at the terminals. It was responsible for the repairs to wharves and cleaning of waiting rooms. The Council attended to complaints about ferry companies and tried to ensure the residents were given good service.

The matter of building a wharf at Thames Street, first came up at Council meetings in June, 1896. A plan for closing of College Street and diversions to Mort and Yeend Streets and the erection of a wharf at Mort's Bay had been submitted by Mr J P Franki, on behalf of Mort's Dock Company. In August, some of the Council visited the site after which Council rescinded its permission for the work to go ahead and asked that new plans be submitted.

After some more correspondence, Council requested that the Dock Company should carry out and pay for all the proposed alterations to streets, wharves and waiting room. In June, 1897, Franki refused this offer and the matter disappears from the records until 1901.

A reason for the delay at this time may have been the change in administration of Sydney Harbour. The Marine Board which had operated from 1871,

was taken over by the Sydney Harbour Trust in 1901, to try and contain the bubonic plague. The Trust took over all private wharfage to clean up insanitary conditions.

In June, 1901, the Sydney Harbour Trust wrote to Balmain Council to say that a license to erect a ferry wharf at the foot of Thames Street, would be granted, provided the council pay a rental of 15 pounds a year. In July, they called for the extension of the 'present' wharf and floating pontoon and in October, 1902, the Council agreed to pay an additional 25 pounds towards the cost.

The last reference to any negotiations or building at the site was a request from Mort's Dock in May, 1904, for permission to fence the land at corner of Mort and Thames Streets. The Council estimates for year 1907-1908, from the Thames Street stall was £18. From the above negotiations, it is possible that the ferry shelter may have been built before June 1902, when the request for extension to the 'present' wharf was made.

The Balmain New Ferry Co. Was formed in response to passengers complaints about the 3d fare charged by the Balmain Steam Ferry Co. Charging only 1d, it forced the older company out of business. To compete with trams, the older screw and paddle vessels were replaced by steam ferries.

In 1918, the Sydney Ferries bought out the Balmain New Ferry Co and serv-

iced the area until 1939. Competition from trams and later buses, caused them to turn over the business to a smaller local company - Nicholson Brothers. The closure of Mort's Dock in 1959 and the removal of the city terminus from Erskine Street to Circular Quay, forced Nicholson Brothers to abandon the run. The Public Transport Commission took over, but only serviced Darling Street and Cockatoo Dockyard.

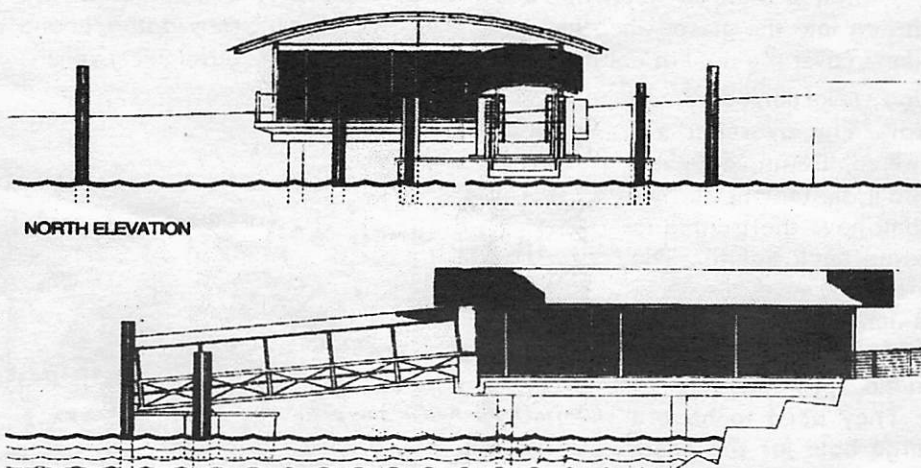
In 1975 the Balmain Association did a study of the area, to try to get a ferry service for the residents around Mort Bay. They found that 3,500 people lived within walking distance of Thames Street.

The current wharf has recently had an upgrade and is serviced by Sydney Ferries to Circular Quay via Darling Harbour and limited service from Hunter's Hill to Circular Quay.

The NSW Department of Transport is to replace the wharf and shelter and is expected that construction will be undertaken in 1998. The design proposed will locate the new structure between the existing facility and the concrete wharf, include a disable access ramp on the floating pontoon and a covered access and waiting area.

The old waiting shelter will not be incorporated into the new structure and awaits it's fate!

Source : Historical Archaeology 11. Thames Street Ferry Wharf and Shelter. Helen Beckett,



Joseph Smith

Joseph Smith arrived in Sydney on the 2nd Fleet in 1790, transported at the age of 14 years. Joseph was hard working and thrifty and in 1845 at the age of sixty-nine and having been in the Colony almost since its establishment, he was a wealthy landowner, with several hundred acres of land, provided for his two sons, his daughters are not mentioned and had 'a thousand pounds of ready cash'. He thought little of paying 40 pounds 'for a chest of tea'.

Joseph agreed to a record being taken of his early days of servitude. His 'Voluntary Letter from as Old Settler' addressed from 'Macdonald River, County of Hunter, 3rd October, 1845'.

'I arrived in the Colony fifty-five years since; it was Governor Phillip's time, and I was fourteen years old, there were only eight houses in the colony then. I know that myself and eighteen others laid in a hollow tree for seventeen weeks, and cooked out of a kettle with a wooden bottom; we used to stick it in a hole in the ground, and make a fire round it. I was seven years in bondage, and then started working for a living wherever I could get it.

There was plenty of hardship then: I have often taken grass, pounded it and made soup from a native dog. I would eat anything then. For seventeen weeks I had only five ounces of flour a day. We never got a full ration except when the ship was in harbour. The motto was 'kill them or work them, their provision will be in store'. Many times have I been yoked like a bullock with twenty or thirty others to drag along timber. About eight hundred died in six months at a place called Toongabbie. This was the site of the Government Farm, where hundreds of convicts were engaged in tree-felling and clearing the land.

I knew a man so weak, he was thrown into the grave, when he said 'don't cover me up. I'm not dead; for

God's sake don't cover me up!'. The overseer answered, 'Damn your eyes, you'll die tonight and we shall have the trouble to come back again!'. The man recovered; his name is James Glasshouse and he is now alive at Richmond.

They used to have a large hole for the dead;

once a day men were sent down to collect the corpses of the prisoners and throw them in without any ceremony or service. The native dogs used to come down at night and fight and howl in packs, gnawing the poor dead bodies.

The governor would order the lash at the rate of five hundred, six hundred or eight hundred; and if the men could have stood it they would have had more. I knew a man hung then and there for stealing a few biscuits and another for stealing a duck frock. A man was condemned-no time- take him to the tree and hang him. The overseers were allowed to flog in the fields. Often have men been taken from the Gang, had fifty and sent back to work.

Any man would have committed murder for a month's provisions: I would have committed three murders for a week's provisions! I was chained seven weeks on my back for being out getting greens, wild herbs. The Rev Marsden used to come it tightly to force some confession. The Rev Samuel Marsden was known as 'the flogging parson' for the severity of his sentences as a magistrate. Men were obliged to tell lies to prevent their bowels from being cut out by the lash. The laws were bad then. If an officer wanted a man's wife, he would send the husband to Norfolk Island.

Old Jones a convict overseer, killed three men in a fortnight at the saw, by over-work. We used to be taken in large parties to raise a tree; when the body of the tree was raised, Old Jones would call some men away- then more; the men were bent double- they could not bear it- they fell- the tree on one or two killed on the spot. 'Take him away; put him in the ground!'. There was no more about it.

After seven years I got my liberty and then started working about for a living where I could get it. I stowed myself away on board the *Barrington*, bound for Norfolk Island, with eighteen others;

it was not a penal settlement then. Governor King was there. I had food plenty. I was overseer of the governor's garden. Afterwards I went to live with old D'Arcy Wentworth and a better master never lived in the world. Little Billy Wentworth, the great lawyer has often been carried in my arms. (The present W C Wentworth, formerly MHR for Mackellar NSW is the Great-grandson of Little Billy).

Old Darcy wanted me to take charge of his Home-Bush property but I took to the river, worked up and down the Hawkesbury till I saved money to buy old Brown's farm at Pitt Town. No man worked harder than I have done. I have me one thousand pounds cash. I have also got 80 acres, 50, 75- besides my house and some fine cattle.

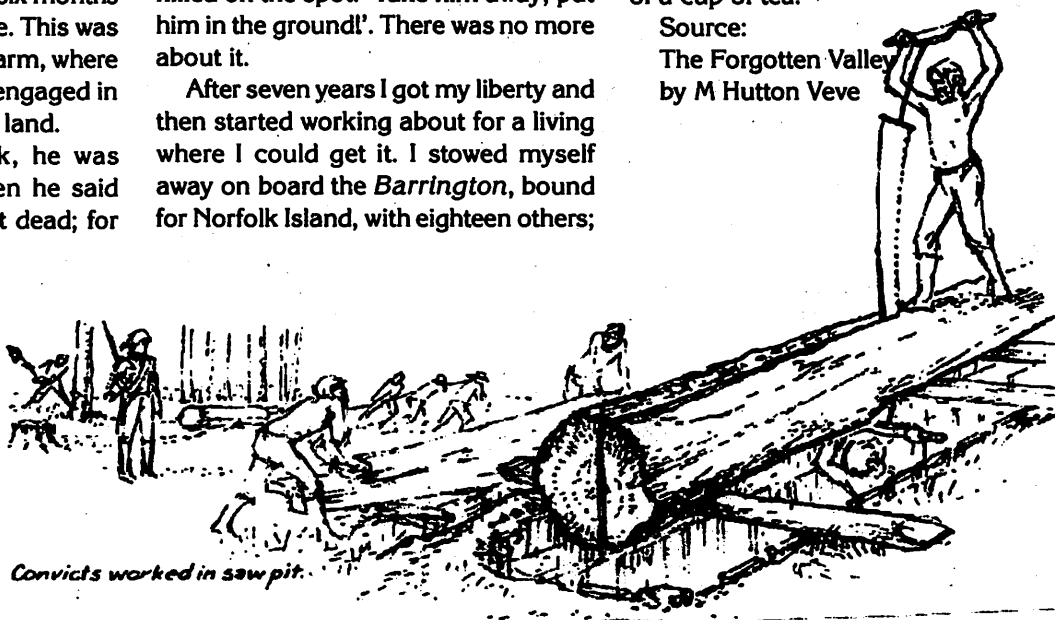
We are never without a chest of tea in the house; we use two in the year. I have paid 40 pounds for a chest of tea in the colony. Tea is a great comfort."

This dramatic description of convicts servitude under loathed and sadistic convict overseers, written by an ex-convict, portrays the worst side of convict life: but all were not so ill-treated as Joseph Smith and his workmates. For a boy of fourteen to spend the seven years of his formative adulthood amongst such horrors and survive to become a successful and respected farmer is indicative of the inborn character of some of the emancipists. When chained convicts gangs were building the Great North Road towards Wollombi in the 1820s and occasionally escaped, they were hidden, fed and helped when possible by the Macdonald Valley emancipists.

Joseph Smith deserved his comfort of a cup of tea.

Source:

The Forgotten Valley
by M Hutton Veve



Convicts worked in saw pit.

Reginald Thornton

In response to the article 'a Walk up Darling Street', in the April and June Observer, member Reg Mitchell's letter to the editor follows:

In answer to the editor's question 'What comments would Messrs Thornton and Bogle make of Darling Street, to-day March, 1997'.

My grandfather, Reginald Thornton, became a member of Balmain Council in 1910 and remained an Alderman until 1941. He was Mayor between 1920 and 1932 for 6 terms. He was born in 1875 in the family home on the corner of Darling and Thornton Streets, house now demolished, and died in his home 'Braeside, 96 Elliott Street, Balmain, in 1961. He lived in Balmain all his life.

During his membership of the Council, Darling Street, except for the portion used for the tramrails, was paved in concrete. I believe that the paving is still in place. Mr Thornton would be very pleased.

He was a member of the Congregational Church (St Andrew's), all his life. He would be delighted that it has been sensitively and faithfully preserved and is still used as a Church. He would be gratified that the organ which accompanied his singing for more than 60 years, has been brilliantly restored.

As a former President of the Board of Balmain Hospital for many years, he

would be puzzled by the changes which have taken place, but happy that the work is continuing.

He would be sad at the demise of the businesses operated by his friends, including Fred Minifie, Harry West, Colin Flowerdew, George Clubb, the Derrins, even his old adversaries in the legal profession, Mervyn Finlay senior and Gilbert Murdoch. He would remember the hotels, although himself a life-long and tolerant teetotaler and the banks.

He would be glad to see the Town Hall building still standing as it has for so long, whilst deprecating still the fact that the center of Local Government for the suburb had been moved to Leichhardt.

He would be happy to see the development of the foreshore at the eastern end of Darling Street into a park, whilst wondering what had become of his friends the Fenwicks and would be quietly gratified that Thornton Park is still there on the other side.

Above all, he would be overjoyed that Balmain has revived, as he always said it would - that it is again the prosperous residential suburb he knew in his youth and that there are among the 'newcomers' people like members of the Balmain Association, who appreciate and understand the past, live in the present and plan and work for the future of the suburb which he loved.

Congratulations

Jack Clegg, a student at Sydney Boys' High School recently completed a Report on a Local Study. Jack chose his own area of Waterview Street, numbers 20 to 28 and industries in Mort Bay. Oral history was transcribed giving some fascinating information about the workers cottages. In one of the cottages the Unemployed Workers Movement held their meetings in the 1930s. Jack received top marks and excellent comments from Mr A Hannon, marker. The Study is on permanent loan to the Association and we congratulate Jack on his report.

Latest Edition of LHJ

Leichhardt Historical Journal No 21, completes a huge undertaking of research by Peter Reynolds of The Excelsior Subdivision, Leichhardt and A W Young's Subdivision :1847 from Adolphus Street to Gladstone Park, Balmain. Part 5,

The Excelsior Subdivision covers, Thornley, Roseby, Excelsior and Cary Streets. Part 5, Adolphus Street to Gladstone Park covers, Eaton, Darling, Adolphus and Gladstone Streets.

Two other items, How the Steam Tramway came to Leichhardt, by Lesley Muir and Robert David Fitzgerald, by Rosaleen Tidswell.

Cost \$22 includes postage. \$17 from Watch House.

Birchgrove Bicentenary + 1

This September, 201 years after the first land grant on the peninsula, two books will be purchased for schools in the area and the Bicentenary Trust Fund will present them - Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia to the Birchgrove Community School, Rose Street and as the Birchgrove Public School have the Encyclopedia, the librarian will recommend another Aboriginal publication.

On Sunday, 21 September, 1997, a guided walk of Birchgrove, will depart corner Cove and Grove Streets, at 11am. Sausage sizzle, 1pm. Watch the start of the Bicentenary Cup at 2pm, Balmain Sailing Club, River Street. Cost \$15. Bookings 98185780 and 98184954.

Bicentenary Commemorative mugs, pens, cards, t shirts available now.

Shop Fronts

Have you noticed the demise of many of the Darling Street business shop fronts, in Rozelle and Balmain? More of our heritage is disappearing. There has been a proliferation of timber bi-fold doors, replacing the entry of former businesses, changing the interesting streetscape. There are 13 to my count not including the fruit shops in the Balmain business

strip. Three in a row opposite the Post Office to recently renovated restaurants. There will be nothing to distinguish one business from another soon. But happily, look above the shop awning and the richly decorated 19th century facades remain, of course, with some regret as to aluminum window treatment. Two more verandahs over the walk way will help to give 'character' back to Darling Street.

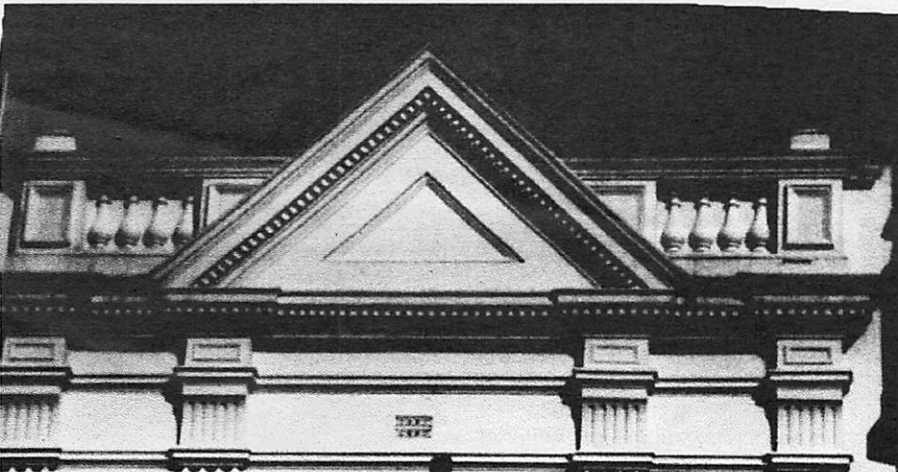
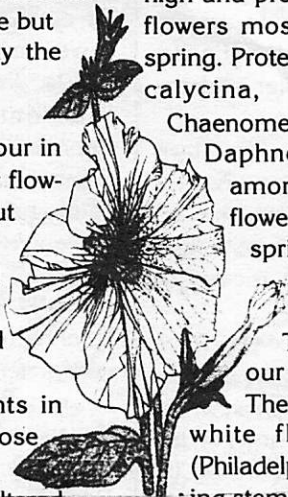


Photo at left by Dave Ramsey

In Your Garden

Small Flowering Shrubs

They are the framework of your garden. Sometimes it's hard to know where a shrub stops being a shrub and becomes a tree. Big shrubs can be tree-like and small trees shrub-like but no matter, for both are really the most useful plants in garden design. If you have been disappointed this winter for colour in your garden, think ahead for flowering shrubs for next year, but don't just plonk them anywhere. Imagine how they will look like when fully grown, their shape, size, density and flower colour. Now mentally arrange those mature plants in groups that will serve a purpose for you. A privacy screen, perhaps a windbreak or a sheltered nook.



Winter needn't be the dull flowerless time wisdom says it. Shrubs provide some of the season's brightest blooms. For example, *Erica canaliculata* produces masses of rosy-purple flowers during the late autumn and early winter. The hybrid tea-tree *Leptospermaum Lambeth* grows around 2 m high and produces both red and pink flowers most of winter and on into spring. *Protea mellifera*, *Thryptomene calycina*, *Magnolia stellata*, *Chaenomeles japonica* *Camellia* and *Daphne* are some of the best among a host of other winter flowering shrubs.

spring bloomers and for cool conditions and acid, leafy-rich soil. The very fragrant, These can be followed by our few can equal the azalea. These shrubs like cool moist white flowered mock orange (*Philadelphus mexicanus*) and arching stems of *Weigela* and *Maybush* (*Spiraea cantonienis*) are all

wonderful.

A good general rule with all shrubs is to prune to shape after flowering. *Poinsettias* need to be pruned back in September to keep them bushy after flowering. This applies to natives.

Bonnie Davidson

Watch House Exhibitions

- Trams of Balmain Aug 2-23
Photographic Exhibition
- Celebrating Life with Colour
Jean Buettel & Marie Lambert
Aug 30 - Sep 7
- Judy Brownlie Oct 11-19
- Tracey Marshlian Oct 25-Nov 2
- Nado Milat Nov 8-9
Sydney 1997. Oils, drawings
- Lilyfield Watercolour Grp Nov 15
- Anne Miller Nov 29-30
Jewelry, Weaving, Paintings

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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. Our editorial phone/fax is 9818 4954.

Interested artists, potters, sculptors, etc. who would like to organise an exhibition in the Watch House are urged to contact Steve South on 9810 1411.

Annual Subscriptions:

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