

the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

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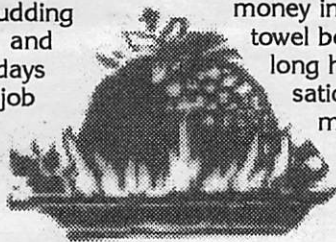
Christmas in Balmain

By Beryl Wensley nee Lyne

Christmas is coming
The ducks are getting fat
Please put a penny in the old man's hat
If you haven't got a penny
A halfpenny will do
And if you haven't got a halfpenny
God bless you.

This is the song my mother taught me. Owing to the 1930s depression, Christmas was a special time in our life. There was no Christmas tree or decorations in our old kitchen at 25 Ennis Street, where we spent most of our time on cold days huddled around the old fuel stove.

Do you see mothers of today boiling their Christmas pudding wrapped in heavy calico and cooked in the fuel copper days before the big day. Dad's job was to chop off the head of the fowl hanging it from the yard's tap to drain the life from the poor animal, so that we could have our special Christmas dinner. A big old galvanised bath was in the yard with boiling water to allow the feathers to be plucked



from the chook, then to be cleaned and roasted in the fuel oven. Brown crispy baked potatoes, spinach from our garden and some good old-fashioned green mushy boiled peas and topped with the rich brown gravy (yum).

Our Mother, God bless her, would serve us in turn, our plates heaped. No lovely white tablecloths donned our table, only oilcloth with only a dish of salt in the middle. We sat on two long benches. Mother would not sit as she would be poking the stove, getting ready to give us her plum pudding with flowing yellow custard for it to swim in.

Bloated as we were, we all had our pudding, hoping to find the 'trays' (three-penny pieces) to be used as entry into the swimming pool.

We would bolt from the table with the money in our hands and with one towel between us, set out on the long hike with the burning sensation of the melting asphalt making us jump into the gutter to cool our shoeless feet. When we arrived to pay our fare at the turnstile at the Elkington Park Pool, we would check the height of the tide. After our swim on the way home we would raid a few peach and lemon trees.

Christmas tea consisted of bread and left-overs from lunch and pudding, in the big old kitchen, still with the lovely lingering smell of the Christmas lunch.

At night, down under the street light to play cocky laura or statues, with Christmas beetles buzzing around our ears and mosquitoes playing havoc with our skin. Then the old familiar cry from the dark, 'home now you kids and off to bed'. No showers or hot baths for us only the old baby's bath to wash our face, hands and feet. No pretty night-dress or pajamas, only a singlet and bloomers.

Next morning, up early and with an empty jam tin in each hand, then down to the Bald Rock Wharf, to catch the ferry to Erskine Street, City, for our pub-to-pub singing day. Here we hoped to collect coppers (half-pennies or pennies), 'trays' (three-pence), 'zacks' (six-pence), or maybe 'deeners' (shillings).

What joy we felt when we would pool our takings and go straight to Mrs Souther's shop for a big bag of lovely lollies and we would also buy for Mother a shillings worth of leg ham from Mrs Howell's shop at 71 Mullens Street.

My heart fills with happiness, when my mind travels back to the old Balmain of by-gone years.

Anti-development Campaign

Hundreds of residents packed Leichhardt Town Hall on 17 November to hear reports from the Council on policies to combat over development. There were displays detailing developments that had been approved by the Land & Environment Court on appeal against Council decisions.

Leichhardt Council has been trying for nearly a year to persuade the Minister for Planning to approve the draft Town Plan that has been formulated over the previous five years. It wants the decision before the end of the year. The Dept of Urban Affairs & Planning has objected to the reduced floor space ratios and heritage conservation in the plan be-

cause they want to increase residential density. Apparently their concept of Urban Deign Significant Areas has been successfully repelled. As there are no major sites remaining the Council and residents are adamant that the municipality has achieved the objects of the Government's urban consolidation policy.

The concern is that developers have now targeted small single dwellings. Speakers complained of the number of individual sites that, following demolition, two dwellings have replaced the previous cottage. Some advocated a floor space ratio of 0.5:1 throughout the municipality but considering the reluctance of the Minister on the draft this demand would only delay approval of the Town Plan that sets floor space ratios of 0.7:1 for Balmain, Rozelle and Glebe.

Only in Leichhardt would 0.5:1 be allowed.

The Blackwattle Bay studio project has highlighted the need for the approval of the Town Plan. The Council approved the proposal against residents' objections because they believed that the Land & Environment Court would allow more intense development.

The Mayor, Cr Maire Sheehan, asked residents to write to the Minister to inform him of their concern about over-development and the necessity to gazette the Town Plan to strengthen the regulations and controls. You are urged to write or fax the Minister, Dr Andrew Refshauge. His fax number is 9957 2145.

Val Hamey

John Colin Watson, Steam Boat Proprietor

John Colin Watson was born in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire in 1818, the son of William, labourer and mother Ann. The records at All Saints Parish Church, Gainsborough shows a baptism for John Watson on 5th June 1818 and a marriage between William Watson and Mary Susanna Russell. Anne is a shortened form of Susanne.

Watson was apprenticed to an engineer and later went to sea and experienced many exciting adventures on the high sea.

No record has been found of his arrival in Australia but before his marriage to Honorah Nugent at St Mary's Cathedral on 13th March 1853, he worked at Jimbour Station on the Darling Downs, Queensland.

Honorah Nugent was born in 1825 at Kingston, Dublin and arrived in Sydney in the *Palestine* on 7th March 1842, with her brother Michael.

John and Honorah had two children before their marriage, John born 1845 and William in 1848. They were to have five more children: Walter in 1854, Mary Ann 1856, Edward 1858, John 1858 and Ellen 1861. The family was living in Datchett Street when Ellen was born.

In the early days John Colin Watson was a waterman, rowing his passengers to the city. The Balmain Municipal Council Souvenir of Balmain 1860-1910 states: The late John Watson was manager for Mr Perdriau for some twenty years and then he purchased the Bald Rock branch which he worked up to the time of his death. The Balmain Steam Ferry Co finally bought out J Watson & Partners in 1887.

In 1865 John Watson returned to England to collect a large inheritance which no doubt enabled him to purchase this ferry service and also to build a very fine two storey house *Lincoln* at 49 Smith Street, Rozelle. (No 53 today.) The house had two carved models of ferries above the doors, in the front the *Me Mel* and at the rear the *Gem*. He later built two more houses in Smith Street for his family, *Gainsborough* at 42 and *Jimbour* at 47, and possibly *Grimsby* at 44.

Sydney Ferry Fleets written by A M Prescott lists the paddle steamer ferries owned by J Watson & Partners as *Alma*, *Courier*, *Atlanta*, *Violet*, *Nellie*, *Gem*, *Excelsior*, *Pysche/The New Era*, *Bald Rock*, *Me Mel* and *Lincoln*.

Watson died at *Jimbour*, on 7th October 1889, his wife Honorah survived him by only a few months, as she died on 17th December 1889. Both were buried at Waverley Cemetery.

An extract from Old Books, Old Friends, Old Sydney by James Tyrell, who was born in Darling Street in 1875 states: *Balmain was a great place for boys of the Tom Sayer persuasion in those days (1880-1887). We lived practically right alongside the water, only thirty yards or so from the jetty and linked to the romantic world of piracy and adventures on the high seas by ships and sailors constantly coming into the bay.*

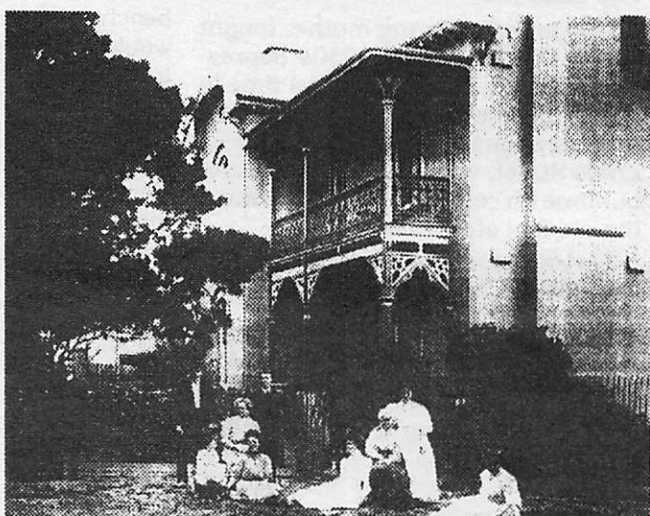
At times a ferry already ran from the jetty, a paddle wheeler, taking passen-

gers from Balmain to Erskine Street and the city. What may be called Sydney rush to get somewhere in a hurry is not altogether a latter day development, for even then there were always some either running to leap for the ferry as it moved off or ready to jump ashore before it tied up. Captain Watson who lived in a large house on top of the hill up ran the ferry. He was a man of ships and water, even to the extent of having a ship modelled on the side of the big house up on the hill. The barques and ships of sail have long gone from John-

son's Bay and the site of my boyhood home, is completely covered by the works of Lever Bros., the soap people.

Grimsby was demolished in 1890 for extensions to the Smith Street School and Lincoln in the 1980s.

The Watson family has links with the Rose, Marshall and Dickson families.



Lincoln 49 Smith Street

Contacts: Hazel A Marks nee Marshall 02 9144 4404, Dianne Marshall 249 761769.

Publications Christmas Sale

Gourlie's Corner. Growing up in Balmain & Rozelle in 1930s. \$7.

Streets, Lanes and Places.
Your street is included. \$7.

Around Balmain. Good value. \$7.

Leichhardt Historical Journal No 7.
Contains Up the Tiger's. Balmain Football Club's First 70 years. \$7.

New. Balmain Cemetery. Grave Concerns. The area now Pioneer Memorial Park, Norton Street, Leichhardt. \$10.
With 6 burial register micro fiche \$35.

Balmain. Half a Thousand Acres. A history of the land grant.
Limited Copies. \$25.

Please add \$2 pp for each book.

Balmain Hotels. A selection of line drawings of pubs. 17cm x13cm. Ready to frame \$12.

Called to the Bar. 150 years of Pubs in Balmain & Rozelle. \$10.

Membership Subscription Gift.
Household \$16. Concessions: Seniors and Students \$7.

Balmain Association. PO Box 57. Balmain. 2041.



**CHRISTMAS
GREETINGS TO
ALL FROM
THE BALMAIN
ASSOCIATION
MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE**

Mirrors of the Sea

Where lies the land to which the ship would go?

*Far, far ahead is all her seamen know
And where the land she travels from?*

Away,

Far, far behind is all that they can say

By Arthur Hugh Clough, Where lies the land.

From time to time questions are asked concerning a model ship, which may be seen on the south wall of the nave in St John's Anglican Church, Balmain. The ship's rigging is in full sail and is housed in a glass case.

Certainly the church has a long and close association with the sea and with the shipbuilding industry. Cockatoo is one of three islands included as part of the parish and is where the youth training ships *Sobraon* and *Vernon* were anchored for some years.

In England as well as in Scandinavia and other European countries it is the custom, especially in many coastal towns and villages, to have model ships in the church as votive offerings or, particularly in England, as a focus for meditation and prayer.

The ship motifs is sometimes extended to the weathervane on the church tower; to a wall hanging; a quilt; to the village sign; or to stained glass windows. Other nautical motifs may occasionally be found, for example, the boat-shaped pulpit in St Martin's Church, Suffield Park, Norfolk and also



in the small, modern church of St Peter-by-the-Lake at Paynesville in East Gippsland, Victoria.

From the many examples of models to be found in English churches, mention may be made of the *Alfred Corrie*, the first Southwold lifeboat, hanging in the St Edmund Church. It was made in 1913 and was placed in the church to give thanks for her preservation over 20 years of service of saving 47 lives.

In St Nicholas Church, Great Yarmouth is a splendid model of the herring lugger *John Benjamin*, used locally between 1760 to 1800. Marking the town's continuing connection with the sea, a model of the offshore gas rigs, tug-supply vessel, *Majestic Service*, is also on display. St Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors and the church is dedicated to him. It is said to be the largest parish church in England.

The London Church of All Hallows-by-the-Tower has a collection of ten model ships including one of Drake's, *Golden Hind*.

The August 1935 copy of St John's *Parish News* contained an appeal by the

Father Arthur George Rix, for new books of various sorts for the children's corner of the church. He then asked, *Has anyone a model of a full-rigged sailing ship to be suspended above the corner?* The name for the body of the church is the nave and comes from a latin word, *navis* - a ship. The ship has often been used as a symbol of the church. Father Rix was an honorary naval chaplain having been present for the launching of 61 ships at the Cockatoo dockyards.

Two months later, the *Parish News* reported that members of the church, Mr & Mrs G Robinson of 68 Birchgrove Road had donated a model ship made by their son George.

The ship is 61cm long, painted black with gold trim, fully rigged, i.e. a three-masted vessel with each mast consisting of a top mast and top-gallant-mast, square rigged with triangular staysails between the masts. The sails are painted white and a red ensign is flying but unfortunately, it is unnamed.

Perhaps the most impressive reminder of the links between St John's and Australia's Naval history is provided by the iron Chancel Gates made from material melted down from the first HMAS *Sydney*. The gates are a memorial to one of the foremen from Cockatoo Island dock, Mr Jack Payne and the gates were manufactured by his workmates.

(The Association thanks member Vernon Kemp for his excellent research on model ships in churches. The full text can be viewed at the Watch House.)

By Vernon Kemp

Sydney Harbour Federation Trust

The first meeting of the Sydney Harbour Interim Trust will take place at Hunters Hill Town Hall at 6pm on Wednesday 15 December 1999. The Trust will manage the transfer of Defence Dept lands for public use.

Many community groups are dissatisfied with the draft and have made submissions to the Minister for the Environment, Senator Robert Hill. The terms are suspected of allowing private development of parts of the harbour lands.

Preceding the meeting there will be a presentation on the outcome of a heritage assessment of Cockatoo Island. The Friends of Cockatoo Island will be heard at the meeting. The public is invited to attend. Support the Friends. The Town Hall is at the cnr Alexander and D'Aram Streets.

Council Updates

Council approved LEP148 on 28 September which rezoned Mort Bay Site C as open space. A wellattended meeting discussed plans for community development.

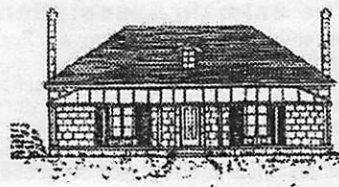
The first work of the Main Street Project has been approved by Council. It is expected to spend \$560 000 on creating Rozelle Square at the intersection of Darling and National Streets. The proposal opens the area in front of the Rozelle Public School. New parking off Waterloo and Merton Streets is being prepared. Also mentioned was the removal of the front portion of the Telstra building next to the Post Office. Investigation has determined that the building is vacant.

Thornton Park improvements have been delayed by the New Year celebrations. The project will be funded by the Dept of Urban Affairs in their Greenspace Program.

Street Party

**On Sunday 12 December 1999 at 4pm
a street party will be held at
Clontarf Cottage, 4 Wallace Street.**

**BYO food and drink and a plate, etc.
Enquiries 9810 2775 after 5pm**

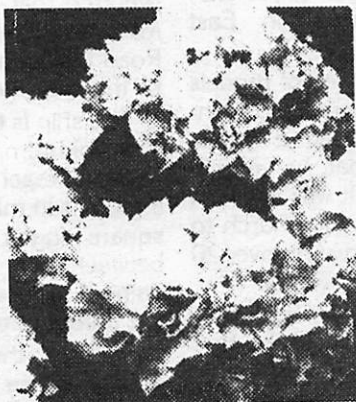


In Your Garden

The Long Hot Summer

Summer would not be summer without the magnificent heads of the hydrangea dominating the shady parts of our gardens with varying shades of pink and blue and occasional white blooms. The flowers reach their peak at Christmas but remain on the bushes into March and even April.

Hydrangeas colour in response to the soils they grow in. Pink blooms indicate limey soil, blue shows acid. If you want to be sure of blue blooms it is necessary to apply sulphate of ammonia (blueing tonic) in October and November. For pink or red blooms add lime now and again in mid-winter. The amount you add will depend on how limey the soil is. Start with a good hand-



Those indicators are helpful when you want to plant acid loving plants such as camellias and azaleas. The soil will suit these if the hydrangeas are blue but you will need to acidify it if the blooms are pink.

Unless you prepare for it gardening is difficult in the summer heat. Mulch everything as that insulates roots from the heat and conserves moisture as well as helping flora to multiply. In turn that helps plants to feed themselves. Next gradually get your plants used to less water, both to save water and to make your plants healthier. Soil dries out quickly and cracks under direct sunlight, so in un-mulched soils, frequent watering is needed to maintain plants.

On the other hand, mulching prevents drying-out and promotes better root systems capable of going deeper for moisture and the nutrients they need. The best care is to mulch and then give long, slow soakings a couple of times each week.

Bonnie Davidson

What's On

Watch House Exhibitions

- Warringah Printmakers 4-5 Dec
- Sue Wildman & Anthea Hay 11-19 Dec
- Photographs of Old Balmain from our archives 8-22 Jan open 12-3pm Saturdays
- Helga Kelly & John Merlione Balmain landscapes 29-30 Jan 2000
- Justine Rich - Still life acrylics 5-6 Feb
- Arty Ms - 11th Annual Show 11-27 Feb
- Jane Stafford 4-12 March
- Helen Ross - oils & watercolours 15-16 April

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A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR 2000

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 of the area and keep a permanent collection of historical interest; seek the cooperation of everyone concerned in the realisation of the above.

The Balmain Association meets on the first Wednesday of each month at 7.30pm in the Watch House 179 Darling Street Balmain. The Watch House is open every Saturday from 12 to 3pm. Our editorial phone/fax is 02 98184954. Email: valham@value.com.au. Our Web site: <http://member.rivernet.com.au/swsouth/watchhouse.htm>

Interested artists, potters, sculptors, etc who would like to organise an exhibition in the Watch House are urged to contact Steve South on 02 9810 1411 or on email swsouth@rivernet.com.au.

Annual subscriptions:
Household \$16, Concession \$7,
Organisations \$21.