



the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

The Peninsula OBSERVER

Vol 35 No 5 Issue 268

Founded November 1965

December 2000

Christmas Music in Balmain.

What role has music played in the lives of Balmain people over the last century or so, especially at Christmas time?

The population of Balmain, one of Sydney's oldest suburbs, was only about 6000 in 1869, yet musical activities during Christmas and New Year were surprisingly diverse. The School of Arts building on corner Darling and Ewerton Streets, destroyed by fire in 1920s, was the venue for many musical evenings.

For instance, on 9th December 1869, an evening of Gymnastic, Drama and Musical Entertainment was staged there by members of the Nonpareil Gymnastic club, assisted by 'gentlemen amateurs', in aid of the NSW Deaf, Dumb & Blind Institution. The program included several musical items on the piano, songs, trapeze acts and a 'laughable farce'. A few weeks later on 29th December, there was held a 'Farewell Entertainment' featuring the William Tell Overture, songs and piano items.

One of Balmain's oldest residents, Bill 'Sagity' Hill, who died on 8th February 1992, remembered some of the antics he and his mates got up to some Christmases. On New Year's Eve 1898 when he was 10, he and a friend with blackened faces and dressed as Black Minstrels, went door-knocking along Louisa (Lousy) Road, asking householders if they'd like a song for a penny or so. The evening brought them 'nine bob each', (90 cents) a lot of money in those days'.

Another Balmain boy, Jim Davidson, born in 1902 in Church Street, recalled in his 1983 book, 'A Showman's Story', how, as youngsters, he and three of his pals 'went carolling around the east end of Balmain at Christmas. He played the cornet while his friends sang. Jim was interested in music from the age of nine years, when the famous Sousa's 60 man military brass band visited Sydney in 1911. He was soon playing the cornet in a local brass band 'In the little church on the corner of Darling and High Street, Rozelle, near the Amusu Picture House'. Davidson, who died in 1982, started his working life as an office boy for Lever Bros. He became a leading jazz musician in Sydney, worked for the BBC in London and finally returned to a top job in the ABC.

Christmas music in Balmain has often been associated with clubs. The Balmain Worker's Social Club, for example, organised a Children's Christmas Party on 22nd December 1944, in its club rooms, in which youngsters showed their talent 'singing, tap-dancing...and leading in community singing'.

Contemporary musical figure, Bill Haesler, a former president of the Association, jazz musician and historian, a regular commentator in music radio programs, recalls his band playing voluntarily, in the 1970s, for patients in the grounds of Callan Park Hospital at Christmas.

These snippets are from research about the social role music of music in Balmain. If you have information or photographs of interest on all areas of music-bands, choirs, school and

church music, pub music, pop, folk, jazz, rock and classical as well as biographies of individuals, please write to Susanne Ainger, Balmain Association, PO Box 57, Balmain. 2041.

Susanne Ainger

Local Government

The Minister for Local Government, Harry Woods, recently announced an inquiry into the current structures of eight inner city councils (Botany Bay, Leichhardt, Marrickville, Randwick, South Sydney, Waverley and Woollahra) and whether they are providing efficient services to meet community needs. Not only geographic boundaries will be studied but also historical and traditional values. Professor Kevin Sproats, Professor of Local and Regional Government at the University of Western Sydney, will conduct the inquiry.

Leichhardt Council supports an open inquiry that looks at ways of enhancing council services other than through forced amalgamation or boundary changes. It is already moving towards working closely with neighbouring councils on exploring joint services to gain economies of scale. Leichhardt has a real problem with loan debt. The extra revenue from all those new multi-unit complexes must have some impact on finances.

The experience from amalgamations in Victoria and South Australia has shown that savings are quickly eroded and quality does not improve. Larger councils will limit residents consultation rights made possible by open council. If democratic participation were limited larger empire-building councils could become out of touch with the community.

Public hearings will take place in February and the report will be presented by the end of March.

The inquiry's website is:

<http://lginquiry.cadre.com.au>.

Submissions can be emailed to

lginquiry@cadre.com.au or sent to

Locked Bag 1 Westmead NSW 2145.

The closing date is 18 December.



Balmain Personality, Charles Carruthers

At the recent Balmain Hospital Heritage Exhibition of photographs, memorabilia, reports and memories dating from 1885, there was to Dr Charles Ulic Carruthers, First Medical Officer, Trustee and Director, 1885-1929.

Carruthers was born in Kingston, County Dublin in 1853 and although related to the Marquis of Sligo, that money was a problem in his early life as his father, Charles William was a clerk. After passing the entrance exam for the College of Surgeons in Dublin, Carruthers worked in a mercantile office to help pay for his studies. He later worked for the Irish public service as a clerk. After graduating in 1876 he trained at an army medical school in Britain, then saw active duty as a subaltern under Lord Roberts in the Second Afghan War, 1878-1880. For six months Carruthers was the medical officer of a military outpost called Sibi and was awarded the Queen's Silver Medal for distinguished service in the Battle of Kandahar.

It is not known why Carruthers decided to emigrate to Australia but his arrival was Balmain's gain. On the 11th October 1882 at St Mary's Church, Balmain, Carruthers married Alice Laura, known as Laura, daughter of Dr Owen Spencer Evans. The bride did not have far to attend the ceremony as the Evans family lived at 85 Darling Street, adjacent to the church. By 1883 he had set up his medical practice at his new home *Glenora*, at 43 Montague Street. The house remains today with much change to accommodate apartments. Two sons were born there, Ernest born 1885 and Ulic Percy, known as Percy in 1883



Ernest married Winifred Burt in Sydney in 1921 at lived at Rose Bay. Percy later became an architect and after the death of his first wife, Mary, he married widow Caroline Moore at St Mary's in 1923 and lived at 34 Louisa Road from 1928.

Community life, particularly in Balmain, became Dr Carruthers's passion. A foundation member of the Balmain Cottage Hospital, Darling Street, he gave the first report on the 31st December 1885 of the treatment from 25th June 1885 when the two beds were provided and one for emergency. He remained a visiting medical officer and trustee for the rest of his working life. *Alderley House*, architect Edmund Blacket, an eleven room building in Booth Street, was acquired for £3000 in August 1886. The original building can be still seen

with two bay windows incorporated into the middle section on the Balmain Hospital.

Following in the footsteps of his father-in-law, Dr Carruthers became surgeon in 1889 to the nautical training ship *Vernon* and later the *Sobraon*, moored of Cockatoo Island. He visited the Cockatoo Island, Biloela Gaol prisoners, daily for twenty years. During these very busy years from 1887-1889 Carruthers was a Balmain Council Alderman.

An enthusiastic Freemason, even as a young man in Dublin, he became master of Balmain Lodge in 1888 and in 1913 he was elected the ninth Grand master of NSW.

He was a foundation member of the St John Ambulance Brigade in Sydney and was made an officer of the Order of St John in 1902.

Laura Carruthers died 13th July 1919 and was buried at South Head Cemetery.

Dr Carruthers retired in 1924 and died aged 84 years on 17th November 1937 at Louisa Road and his funeral service was held at St John's Church, Balmain where he had been a member of the congregation. His cremation was at Rookwood Cemetery.

Although Carruthers left much of his estate to the Balmain Lodge, due to complications of the will, it was not until 1962 that the lodge received the bequest. The Grand Lodge Library was renamed in his honour in 1982.

Source: Registry of D.B. & M. Balmain Hospital-Small Beginnings by Richard Devereaux. Inner Western Suburbs Courier 19/6/2000 Historical feature by Geoff Howe.

Bonnie Davidson & Kathleen Hamey.

Extra, Extra, read all about it.

Published in November 2000, *Leichhardt Historical Journal* No. 22 editor Peter Reynolds, contains Max Solling's article on the 'Labor Party in Inner Sydney'. Peter Reynolds begins a series of articles on Flood's Estate, Leichhardt, which will flow over several issues. The same is true of the Waterview Estate, Balmain, Precinct 7. 'From Cooper Street to Waterview Bay'. The article contains *Waterview House*, the first residence in Balmain. 129 pages, contains many maps and photographs. Cost \$22. inc. GST. \$27 posted.

Balmain Historical Monograph 4. Published April 2000, by Peter Reynolds, entitled 'John Balmain, Schoolteacher and Goldseeker in Balmain, California and Goondiwindi, 1811-1884'

Cr Chris Kruden launched the book at the Balmain Watch House. The launching in Heritage Week on 8 April 2000 celebrated the bicentenary of the land grant to Dr William Balmain on 26 April 1800. 116 pages. Cost \$17 inc. GST. \$20 posted.

Copies of the Journal 1 to 22, are available at the Watch House. Nos. 1 to 13 Cost \$13. Nos 16 to 21 Cost \$17. No 22 Cost \$22. Postage add \$3.

Nos 14 & 15 are out of print, although a copy can be arranged.

Balmain Cemetery, Grave Concerns. By Bonnie Davidson and Kathleen Hamey. Since published in December, 1999, two more memorial stones from the old Balmain Cemetery have been located and included in the publication. The area today is Pioneer Memorial Park, Norton Street, Leichhardt. Cost \$10. \$13 posted.

Gourlie's Corner. Christmas Special. Published 1992. Growing Up In Balmain in the 1930s and 1940s. A5, 54 pages. Cost \$7. \$10 posted.

Contact 9818 4954. P O Box 57, Balmain. 2041.

Annual Subscriptions

The imposition of the GST has increased our costs especially for publication but we are unable to charge GST on our books. A small increase (the first for over ten years) in annual subscriptions will help to defray the cost of producing the Observer.

From January 2001 the subscriptions will be Household \$20 Concession/student \$10 Organisation \$30.

Please note the new email:
hamey@netpro.net.au

Consider the Lilies

Flowers in church are accepted as a normal part of Sunday worship just as they are for festivals and other special occasions. It is however, not entirely clear just how this practice came about. It is known that they were used by all civilisations throughout the ancient world including the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans as may be seen on Athenian red figure vases and on relics from the buried city of Pompeii.

It seemed natural, therefore, that the practice of using flowers should be continued in Christian places of worship. The sixth century Latin poet Venantius Fortunatus wrote: 'You gather them only for Christ....their scent is better than incense'.

In mediaeval times the tomb of a local saint would be decorated for his festival and it is of interest to note that early Australian white settlers noticed the Aborigines associated flowers only with the dead. In Europe flowers were strewn along procession routes besides being used inside the church as illustrated in the 1526 St Mary-at-Hill (London) records: 'paid for garlands and roses and lavender on Corpus Christi day 2s 5d.' County churches usually made do with wild flowers.

In these early times most people were illiterate. Flowers, therefore, acquired meanings, giving messages to the people; acacia—immortality of the soul, rose—pure love and sacrifice and so on. Edmund Spenser in his *Shepherd's Calendar* for May 1579 says of decorating the church:

and all the Kirke pillours eare daylight,
With hawthorn buds and sweet eglantine,
And giroinds of roses and sopps in wine,
Such merry maker holy Saints doth queme (please),
But wee here sitten as down'd in a dream.

The Puritan Reforms of the mid 17th century did not encourage the use of flowers or greenery, though exceptions were made for the new, approved celebrations. St Margaret's Westminster bought 'hearbes and lawrell' to be 'strewed in the church' on 24th October 1651, a thanksgiving day for victory in the second Battle of Worcester.

Throughout all this time there was never any mention of flowers being displayed on the altar itself. The custom was that nothing should stand on it except what was needed for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. However, there is a reference to altar flowers in the Roman *Caerimoniale Episcoporum* of

1606. Following this, the practice became general in the R C churches and in 1688 Jean Baptiste Thiers noted: 'Flowers either natural or artificial, are today the usual ornament of the majority of altars. They are decorated with them at all seasons.'

The Church of England eventually followed this custom, especially after an 1870 court case when it was decided that the placing of flowers on an altar was 'an innocuous and not unseemly decoration.' Soon after this, flower arranging came very much into vogue, both in church and the home. The lady of the house 'did the flowers' with varying degrees of taste and church decorations were often overdone, prompting Ernest Geldert to condemn the way in which a sanctuary may be 'perverted into a horticultural show.' It should, however, be added that amongst the good advice offered around this time that one was to be sure to obtain the consent of the churchwardens before decorating the church.

Following a decline in this enthusiasm, a more enlightened approach to the practice developed when Flower Arranging Clubs were formed and books on the subject appeared. Arranging was presented as an art, techniques were developed and skills were displayed at fund-raising flower festivals.

At St John's in Birchgrove Road, there has always been a tradition of beautifying the church with flowers. Frequent mention is made of this in parish newsletters, especially at harvest festivals and at Christmas one year the church was decorated 'most tastefully with a lavish profusion of whit and blue agapanthus, hydrangeas, Christmas bush and bells.'

Today, with or without GST, flowers are becoming increasingly expensive. Some, however, are given as memori-

als, a scheme introduced in 1949, partly to soften the burden on those who arrange the high altar flowers each week and who often buy them with their own resource and partly as a means of helping people to remember their departed loved ones including war victims. The scheme continues and we try to ensure that flowers form part of the beautification of St John's in a restrained and tasteful manner.

By Vernon Kemp

35th Anniversary Celebration.

Any excuse, it is said, to hold a party. On the 7th October, a gathering of friends, members and some foundation members accepted an invitation to the Watch House, to celebrate 35 years of dedication of the committee and members of the Balmain Association over these years, to the restoration of the Watch House and involvement in local affairs to maintain the aims of the Association.

The Committee was pleased with the attendance of Leichhardt Mayor Cr Maira Sheehan and Cr Kris Kruden.

The President Anne Bastock welcomed the guests and foundation member David Porter made the first reply. Then many earlier members told the gathering how it was in Balmain 35 years ago. It must still be attractive to live here, as many remain Balmain residents. Clontarf Cottage Committee member Cathy McCabe spoke about the fight to save Clontarf Cottage, Wallace Street, and the continuing forces for more development in the area. Gail Abbott will have no trouble recording oral history of the earlier years of the Association.

Long time member Mrs Iris Ellicombe cut the cake. A grand time for all.



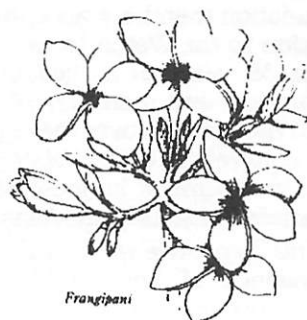
In Your Garden

Sunburnt Flowers

The merciless Australian sun creates real problems for garden plants. Believe it or not, plants actually do sunburn, some very badly and this can lead to sickness and the death of the plant.

The sun also causes rapid evaporation of moisture from the soil making life hard on the poor plant's roots as well. Fortunately there are many techniques that are useful for minimising these problems.

Water. It's been said before but I think it needs repeating, watering is the single



most difficult part of gardening. Don't stand outside each night with the hose — this is bad for the plants. Water once a week with a good quality sprinkler such as the Nylex Garden Rainwave. Your plants in pots will need to be watered everyday in hot weather and make sure you see water coming out of the bottom of the pot. It helps if you add some Wetta Soil to pot plants. See that your pots are in some shade during summer, particularly ferns, fuchsias, azaleas, maples, camelias and daphnes need the extra protection.

Do mulch all of your soil. Choose from mulches such as compost, leaf litter, woodchip, bark, mushroom compost or even straw or seaweed. Ideally the mulch should be about 75mm to 100mm thick. This will cut down on moisture loss and keep the soil far healthier.

Hibiscus, bouganvilleas, frangipanis and acalyphas are a few plants that love this time of the year. Fertilise hibiscus every couple of months with Nitrophoska or Citrus Food. A small amount will do—a heaped desert spoonful for a 2m tall plant. Don't forget to water at least once a week.

Bonnie Davidson

What's On

Watch House Exhibitions

- Focal Point 2-10 Dec
Rozelle Photo Workshop
- Realism 16-17 Dec
Natalie Barlow
- Balmain Photographs through January
- In the Spirit of Yesteryears
Chris Vella, Roger Janes & Ann Garbutt 10-11 Feb
- Arty Ms 2001 Odyssey 17-25 Feb
- Father & Daughter 3-11 Mar
Watercolours, collage & photos
- Unique Expressions. Glass, paintings & mixed media
Heather Wilkson 31 Mar-1 Apr
- Naive Art 17-26 Mar
Sandra Warner
- Windows on the World 5-6 May
Miki Watson

Printed by Snap Print, Balmain. ©Not to be reproduced without authorisation.



Registered Publication PP225832/00001

If undelivered return to:
The Balmain Association Inc
PO Box 57
Balmain 2041

**SURFACE
MAIL**

**Postage
Paid
Australia**

Dr Peter Reynolds
9 The Avenue
Balmain East NSW 2041
2000/12

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: hamey@netpro.net.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 \$20, Concession \$10,
Organisations \$30.