



the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

The Peninsula OBSERVER

Vol 37 No 3 Issue 277

Founded November 1965

June 2002



www.pictureaustralia.org

The National Library of Australia provides a single access point to over a half million images held by agencies around Australia and overseas. At present, Picture Australia brings together the online image collection of 15 participating agencies including: Australian War Memorial, Museum Victoria, National Library of Australia and New Zealand, State Library of New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria.

The service is a valuable free resource for research in family history, genealogy, cultural heritage and heraldry. Picture Australia allows you to find pictures of your home town, major events in Australia's history and many other topics. The service is great for home research as images may be reproduced for personal use after checking the copyright provisions.

After some three hours 'on the web', the search for 'Balmain' gave 888 references. I was delighted with the many photographs of industrial Balmain, such as, the Coal Loader at Glebe Island, Lever Bros. Poole and Steele, Colgate Palmolive, Mort's Dock and the Empire Timber at Iron Cove. Football personalities, swimming and rowing clubs at Elkington Park and much much more so get connected to www.pictureaustralia.au.

Kathleen Hamey

Town Hall DCP

The Leichhardt Council is in the early stages of compiling a Development Control Plan for the Balmain Town Hall Precinct. The DCP is to include all of the Council's land adjacent to the Town Hall including the existing depot.

A community meeting was held at the Town Hall in December 2001 and as part of the consultation for this project, a second meeting was on 2nd May, 2002. At the meeting a video was shown of a project by architecture students from the Sydney University; undertaken some two years ago for the redevelopment of the Balmain Town Hall Precinct.

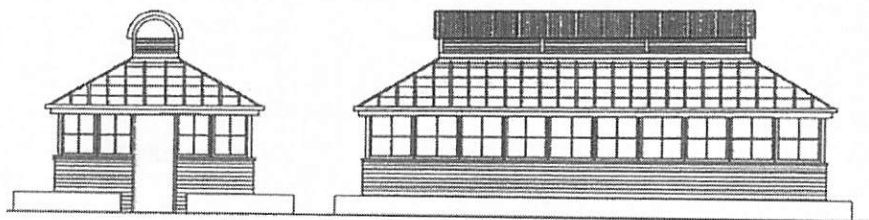
Godden Mackay Logan, Consultant, as well as Matthew Viney, Leichhardt Council Manager Property Services, were in attendance to answer the concerns of residents as to the redevelopment of the site. Contact for M Viney 9367 9222. The pre-school has been designated to be removed to a new building at Mort Bay.

A plea was made for the retention and reuse of the onsite green/glasshouse for the propagation of local native plants for enhancing the Council's parks. The

structure has been neglected and unused for some years and has been accessed by local Architect, Ray Stevens and Heritage Consultant, Paul Davies. On 16th May, 2002 at the monthly meeting of the Balmain Town Hall Committee, an approval for \$10,000 was allotted for the repair of the green glasshouse. Community assistance is sought for fund raising and materials. Contact: Kath Hacking 9818 2504 or Kathleen Hamey 9818 4954.

The process for preparing the DCP is likely to take several months with other opportunities for community input.

Talk about history repeating its self! The Balmain Association's newssheet November 1977 includes a long article on 'establishing a native garden to attract birds to Balmain' also a heading 'save the glass house'. The 1946 building was marked for demolition to allow access to the 'new' Balmain Town Hall branch library. However, strong local opposition, led by the Balmain Association and intervention by the then Minister of Planning and Environment, Paul Lander, stopped the proposal. The green/glasshouse was used for another ten years for a holding area for plants, before replanting in the local parks.



Drawing of the Glass House from Paul Davies

Boundaries On Hold

Justice Talbot in the Land & Environment Court on May 14, ruled that a report recommending massive changes to South Sydney's boundaries was invalid because it was written without consultation with the community.

"The Court holds grave doubts that the authors applied themselves to the task of examination and report with suf-

ficient diligence to justify a finding that the document reflects a proper fulfillment of the statutory obligation assigned to the Boundaries Commission under the Local Government Act," Justice Talbot said.

He noted that a poll or public survey of affected residents had not occurred and the Commission had failed to accord procedural fairness to the applicant, South Sydney Council. The judgement was welcomed by

Leichhardt Mayor, Moire Sheehan. "Council believed that the report was so flawed it could not be legally implemented." The Minister for Local Government, Harry Woods, was disappointed with the decision and may appeal although he has not moved to such action yet. He said there were implications for other boundary changes.

It is likely that any action will be on hold until after the State election next year.

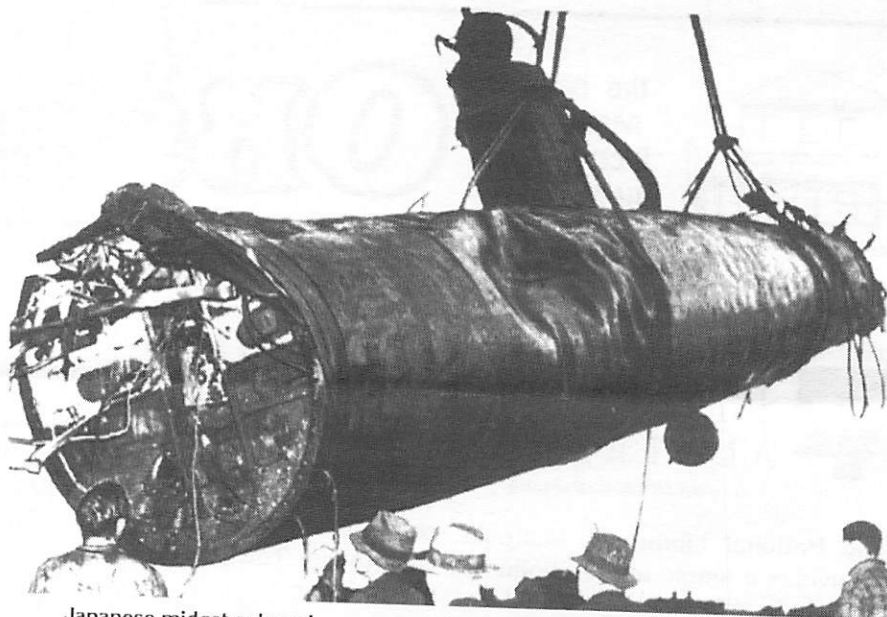
Sydney Harbour 31st May 1942

The Japanese aircraft attack in February and March 1942, on Darwin, Broome and Wyndham caused widespread panic in Northern Australia, where many believed they were a prelude to invasion. But news of the air raids were heavily censored, a full account was not made available for ten months and for most people in south-eastern Australia the war still seemed far away.

The evening of Sunday 31 May 1942 was dark and overcast at Sydney. The moon was full but until the middle watch (midnight to 4 am) its light was obscured by heavy cloud. There were frequent movements of merchant ships along the coast near Sydney and these vessels had their lights on. The main leads to the harbour entrance alignments lights were out but there was no blackout ashore. Barrenjoey Head lighthouse was on as was the powerful reflectors of the Macquarie light, maintaining their measured sweep of the horizon, sending a beam of light well out to sea and providing an ideal navigational fix.

Floodlights were on at the graving dock site at Garden Island, where work was in progress. Several destroyers were alongside the wharves on the western side of the island. There was also one US battleship, one large US cruiser and one large transport ship, moored close by. Cockatoo Island had two light cruisers and a destroyer inside the dock. The harbour was open to traffic which was proceeding normally. Ferries were running and ships departing and arriving.

In the evening of 31 May 1942, three Japanese midget submarines began the attack in Sydney Harbour. One followed a well-lit Manly ferry on its way to Sydney, through the eastern boom net but became entangled in the steel mesh of the anti-torpedo boom. The other two



Japanese midget submarine recovered from harbour (Photo John Fairfax Ltd)

submarines proceeded up-harbour in the wake of a Manly ferry and continued towards the warships lying at anchor. Searchlights began to sweep across the water, residents gathered around the harbour in their dressing gowns, watched as the guns swung into action. Although two submarines were simultaneously under attack in different parts of the harbour, the ferries continued to run. One torpedo caused the deaths of 21 naval ratings. The ferry *Kuttabul* built in 1922 for the Sydney Ferries Ltd, for the run between Milsons Point and Circular Quay. The vessel was requisitioned by the RAN to provide overflow accommodation for crews of ships undergoing refit at Garden Island.

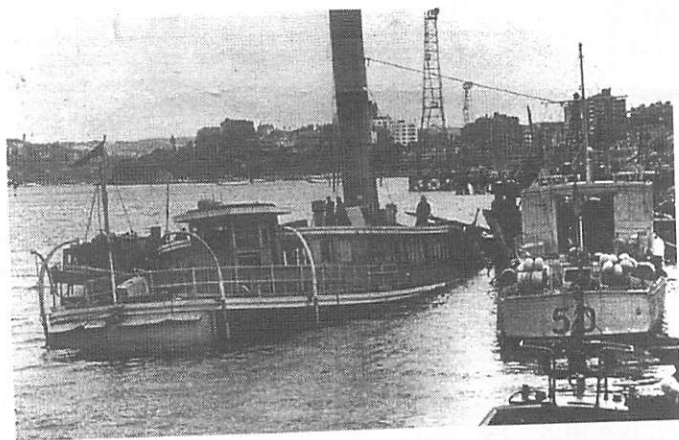
Of the three midget submarines to reach Sydney Harbour, the Japanese submariners of the craft ensnarled in the boom fired a demolition charge which ripped open the steel plating and killed them. The second was so badly damaged by depth charges that the commander and his petty officer chose to commit suicide and the third apparently escaped the harbour to sea but failed to rendezvous with the mother submarine.

Source: Battle Surface. Japan's Submarine War. Against Australia 1942-1944. David Jenkins.

Committee member Bonnie Davidson remembers: The night WWII really hit Sydney was very scary. All my family were in bed and suddenly all the

noise woke us up. Air raid sirens were going off and searchlights all over the sky. Dad and Mum said we should all get under the beds. I was 10 years old and we lived at 99 Mort Street and Dad said the air raid shelter near Thames Street Wharf would be full.

Other shelters were behind a brick fence on the corner of Cameron and Mort Streets on Mort's Dock land, Loyalty Square and the Balmain Police Station. There were other shelters throughout the peninsula. We later found out that it was not an air raid but midget Japanese submarines had followed a Manly ferry through the boom net placed across the harbour. The submarines were trying to sink American ships in Sydney Harbour but instead hit the *Kuttabul*, killing 21 men. My Uncle Fred was assigned to the ship but as he lived in Sydney, he had been given shore leave that night. Soon after my Nana Berdg came to visit us from her home at Hillview near Liverpool and persuaded my parents to allow me to leave Sydney to live with her because of possible future air raids. My parents could not leave their work. So for 10 long months I complained to Mum when she visited each week-end to let me return to Balmain from what I then thought was the country, Liverpool. Mum finally relented and so 50 odd years later, I am still in Balmain. Soon after we moved to 91 Mort Street to the former Star Hotel, where there was an air raid siren on the roof. This was tested every Wednesday and Saturday at lunch time. One night a Japanese reconnaissance plane flew over Sydney and Mum was attending a city theatre, but hurried home to find me fast asleep although the siren had been blasting away. 'Boy! How I wish I could sleep like that now'.



HMAS Kuttabul sunk by the midget sub (photo John Fairfax Ltd)

Soot Blackens Balmain (2)

An article in the February 2002 edition of the Balmain Observer reported that people in the White Bay area of Balmain were 'hopping mad' at the unpleasant but dissimilar pollution problems with which they have at times been affected. Readers may like to be reminded that in the 1920s the people of North Balmain were also 'hopping mad' at what they described as a 'nuisance' affecting their lives.

The cause of this particular trouble stemmed, not from ships, but from the fact that, unbelievable as it may seem, the government of New South Wales and the Balmain Council had allowed a coalmine to be established in Birchgrove Road, next to a school and in one of the most densely populated parts of Sydney.

The nuisance prompted the setting up of a pressure group called the North Balmain Nuisance Abatement Committee who called for action to ease the coal dust pollution, even taking the company to complain '...they are permitted to devastate a whole neighbourhood, to destroy houses, to depreciate property, drive out to other suburbs all who can get away, practically close the local church and seriously affected attendance at the school'.

The school was on land adjoining the mine and comments from various sources were that the children in certain rooms looked like so many blackfellows, that the teachers forbade the use of books because they would be destroyed and that pupils were required to bring rags to school to wipe the coal dust off their slates and desks.

According to the Sydney Morning Herald of 8 August 1927, the Abatement Committee invited a party of newspaper representatives to inspect the area so that they might see first hand the extent of the problem. Their first call was at the school where they saw a small open piece of ground adjoining the premises on which the pit ponies run when brought to the surface. Between 40 and 50 ponies were scampering about on this restricted area which was covered with fine dried manure 'that was disturbed with every movement of the restless hoofs, and when the wind was off the water this dust was carried into the school in large quantities to the inconvenience and danger to health of both teachers and pupils'.

It seems also that cinders from the chimney stack along with the ever-present clouds of fine coal dust consti-

tuted an even greater nuisance which made it necessary to keep all the windows closed even on the most trying days.

A visit was then paid to a number of residences in the locality where similar conditions were complained of. Even today many long-time residents still remember the increasing coal dust pollution which permeated the whole house so that nothing could ever be described as clean. Besides this a carpet of dust often some four or five inches deep was invariably found to have settled in the ceilings, the weight causing many of them to bulge and sag.

The nearby church St John the Evangelist also had its share of problems with the coal dust which they described as 'a blighting plague' and when the wind blew from the west it was said to bring with it 'the black blight'. The rector, the Rev. George F B Manning, complained that coal dust on various surfaces was so thick that it seriously inconvenienced the worshippers, who were obliged to provide themselves with dusters when they attended services. He added that, in desperation, he had written to the authorities recommending that the church building be abandoned.

St John's church council had also submitted a number of complaints to Balmain Council of the 'almost intolerable nuisance and damage to goods and depreciation of property caused by the dust arising from the mine', and requesting they take steps to minimize or obviate the trouble. In addition they sent a request to the coalmine authorities for a donation towards the cost of cleaning the organ which had become 'completely choked with coal dust'.

Besides all this the church interior was in a deplorable state. At that time the walls were of rough bricks painted over and as such were very much inclined to hold the dust, thus needing a regular washing. The thinking was that if they were plastered, the walls could simply be swept down each week. To this end various fund-raising events were organized in order to raise the £48 needed to do the job.

Needless to say feelings were running high in the wider locality. At a meeting between the colliery company, three aldermen and the Balmain North Vigilance Association Mr Farland, the Association's secretary, brought with him bags of coal dust from houses and from St John's church, protesting that the value of houses had deteriorated through the coal dust nuisance and that the company had done very little to remedy the trouble. In reply a colliery director explained that no colliery in the world had been able to overcome the prob-

lem. Everything possible had been done to deal with dust and noise, part of the difficulty being what to do with the dust after it had been caught. The company was not prepared to spend thirty to forty thousand pounds in an endeavour to eliminate it.

Because the nuisance was severe in the extreme, court actions were launched against the company which were likely to have effect of closing the mine unless the nuisance were abated. But the matter was more complicated than this. These were times of depression and the closure of the mine would add another 220 men to the already overcrowded ranks of the unemployed. Local storekeepers would suffer considerable losses and the income from the extensive shipping trade that visited Balmain would be severely affected.

Rozelle Chamber of Commerce regarded the probable closure of the Balmain mine following the court proceedings as disastrous, and by a large majority it resolved to ask the Council to rescind the prosecution.

In March 1932, after further fundraising, St John's was able to have the inside of the church roof cleaned and painted as well as having the inside walls plastered and painted – all for £48/10/-. But by this time the mine had in fact closed down and blissfully, the years of trouble and suffering had abated.

Nowadays the only sight of coal dust is when work needs to be done on the ceilings of some of the older houses in the locality and when newer residents decide to undertake this work, some may be in for quite a surprise.

Vernon Kemp



Leichhardt Photographs

Over the last six months a range of the archival photographs and slides covering all suburbs of Leichhardt Municipality held at the Leichhardt Library, have been digitised. The launch of the internet site was held during Heritage Week, at the library on Wednesday 24 April, 2002. Congratulations to Margaret Penson and staff for this exciting ongoing project. Some people and sites have not been identified so to assist in the detective work on names and places
logon:
www.siwvl.nsw.gov.au/leichhardt.html.

In Your Garden

It's Time to Plant Lillies

Though dozens of unrelated plants are called lillies, there is no mistaking true lillies, or lillium, to give them their official name.

These majestic plants produce some of the most beautiful and impressive flowers and given a climate that is not too hot they are not very difficult to grow.

The scaly bulbs are planted about now and you can get them at most nurseries. The choice will be limited to a few varieties but if you have not grown lillies before, they are the best ones to try.

A few ground rules to follow. Soil. All lillies demand extra well-groomed soil.

but whether it should be comparatively rich or poor depends on the species. Site. As a rule, grow them where their roots will be shaded but their upper parts will enjoy the full sun. The plants can grow to 2 metres high so shelter from strong winds is important.

Watering. Lillies, though they die back, are never completely dormant and must not be allowed to dry out.

Keep the soil always just moist. Feeding. It is hard to generalise as some species grow in poor soil while others need richer and more fertile conditions. Average, good garden soil will usually do and heavy feeding should not be necessary.

Bonny Davidson



What's On

Watch House Exhibitions

- Water Colours & Silks 1-2 June
- Passage: constructions through memory, time & place Anita Ekholm 7-16 June
- Traditional 22-23 June Sandra Elliott. Opened by Bill Donovan
- The Summer Set 28-30 June Oils & pastels - Noeline Dyer
- Etchings 6-14 July Jan Melville
- Paintings 18-23 July Rowan Fotheringham
- Student Art Group Paintings Annette Dorahy 27-28 July
- Ceramics - several potters Judy Paddison 3-4 August

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



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

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

SURFACE
MAIL

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

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: www.balmainassociation.homestead.com

Interested artists, potters, sculptors, etc who would like to organise an exhibition are urged to contact John Sullivan on 9555 1026 or fax 9810 6774.

Annual subscriptions:
Household \$20, Concession \$10
Organisations \$30.