



the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

The Peninsula OBSERVER

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Heritage Revisited

The Godden Mackay Logan heritage review, on exhibition at the Balmain Library, proposes welcome changes to the Residential DCP to strengthen its guide lines on contributory buildings in conservation areas. "The local government area of Leichhardt today is of heritage significance because it collectively demonstrates that first great surge of suburban growth on the edge of the city which sprang from the consolidation of wealth brought by the gold rush."

The Leichhardt Historical Journal No 15 in 1986 carried an item by local architect Robert Irving on the rationale for conserving old buildings. It is interesting that the review basically favours this rationale.

Continuity is good psychology: we have inherited our environment and are custodians of it for our children. Old buildings are not just links with the past but are symbols of community stability: society's memory. The loss of this stability and memory breaks 'the perpetual partnership that makes for orderly growth in society.'

Old buildings are educational: because they are unassumingly truthful historical records, buildings are wonderful educational tools. Buildings can express economic highs and lows, dignity or frivolity, regulations and by-laws and civic pride. A whole way of life may be understood by studying the buildings of a precinct or settlement. Buildings are history's stage, giving depth and reality to the past and perspective to the present.'

Caring signifies good economics: keeping a building can demonstrate a community's self-esteem. Historic environments generate tourist dollars. In generally soulless contemporary environments, historic

places have an appeal attested to by those visitors willing to spend to experience them.

Re-use makes economic sense, too: built and natural resources are not bottomless. It is foolish to go on depleting built resources by applying throw-away consumer principles to building. A building can be given a new life by adapting it to suit a new function. People are prepared to pay for things that old buildings

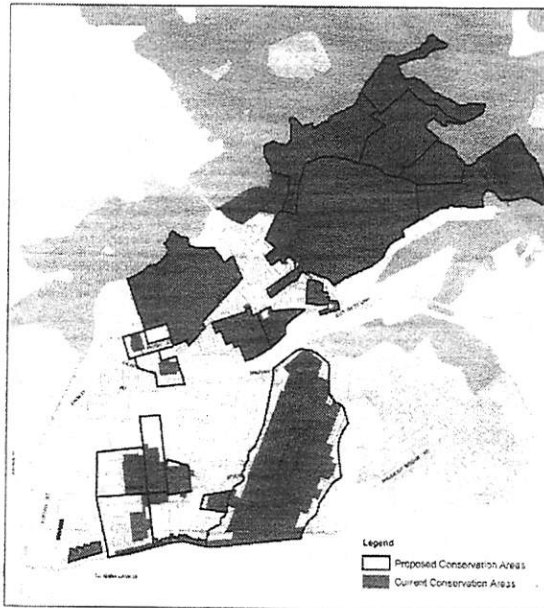
admiration, irrespective of size or function. A building can be worthy of keeping even if it has no intrinsic beauty, so long as it contributes something to the quality of a place – even just by being there.

Conservation deepens history: a building is more than a piece of real estate; it is a link in the chain of the National Estate, a primary source historical item. The site on which it stands, the materials of which it is made, the techniques of its construction, its financial envelope, the people who have built and have occupied it – all are solid history. Australian architecture is a three-dimensional account of Australian history.

The Balmain Association, for many years, has objected to the disregard of conservation controls. Planning staff and councillors have used the diversity of buildings to justify the demolition of quite serviceable residences and the replacement by buildings that do not fit in the existing fabric. Owners of 17/19 Cove Street approached the planner with plans to modify the brick semi-detached residence with additions to the rear only to meet with disapproval. They have now requested the demolition and replacement

by a modern structure. A site inspection will be held shortly.

It is proposed to divide the conservation areas into more manageable areas for better scrutiny and control. Submissions can be made to the council before 30 June.



Heritage Review: Proposed Changes to Conservation Areas

have which are not provided in modern structures – high ceilings, large windows, ornamental and decorative work. Renovation can take less time than a new building and can be staged so that one part may be used before the whole is finished. Rehabilitation imposes fewer public and social costs than new development by saving on the costs of services. Re-using conserves energy: thick walls are better insulators: windows can be opened, high ceilings and roof spaces provide greater air reservoirs. There are so many in good condition still standing that more deserve to be kept.

Holding on enhances aesthetics: many examples of architecture are works of art, evoking pleasure, or

**All members and their friends are invited to a get together at 6.30 pm on the first Wednesday of the month beginning 2 June at the Riverview Hotel. Come and hear about local issues and socialise with your neighbours.
Contact Roger, 9810 8978.**

The Paper Queen

A short film by Julie Nebauer.

Every city in the world has it's street identities who make their impact on society. They become part of the urban landscape, taken for granted until one day they are no longer there.

Beatrice Bush sold newspapers for 25 years on one of our city's busiest intersections at Victoria Road. Amidst the daily peak hour traffic this 70 year old women was seen by millions wearing the distinctive Tiger Football Club Socks, yet few knew who she was. This partially dramatised documentary explores the unconventional life that set her apart. The documentary was telecast on ABC TV last February and will be screened again on Wednesday 9th June, 2004 at the Balmain Library, 6pm for 6.30. Meet Mrs Nebauer who will discuss her research and the making of the doco. Leichhardt Local History Group. Cost \$12. Bookings 9810 6885.

Heritage Walking Tours.

During the April Heritage Festival enquiries were made from visitors and residents of other guided walks available. The History Committee is happy to announce that on the last Saturday of the month a two hour will depart the Watch House at 2pm. Bookings essential. Contact 9818 4954. Each tour will conclude at a local hotel. Cost \$10. Refreshment not included.

June 26th, Old Balmain, Balmain East, 31st July, Bay to Bay, Mort Bay to Snail's Bay, 28th August, White Bay Wanderings, 25th September, Heritage Pub Tour.

Visitors to Balmain

On the 19th April, Committee members assembled at the Watch House to greet visitors from Hooks, Texas, USA. These special guests had come to claim the City of Balmain as they were long distant relatives of William Balmain. Some ten years ago a previous claim was made by close relatives of this group.

Preston and Carolyn Balmain, daughter Tani Balmain-Smith, Michael Smith and Michael's mother Beverly were visiting Sydney and were looking forward to their tour of the sights in Balmain. After a lovely morning tea the visitors were driven around the Peninsula with stops to enjoy some Harbour views.

This Balmain line is from William Balmain's father Alexander's first marriage to Katherine Alison. William Balmain's heirs, John and Jane Henderson, took the surname of their mother, Margaret, a convict partner of Balmain.

Below: Us visitors visit the Watch House.



Cockatoo Island

Friends of Cockatoo Island were proud to receive the inaugural Community Award for Sydney Harbour Week in February for having made the best contribution to the harbour by its efforts to save the island from sale and development.

The Federation Harbour Trust has completed the management plan for the island and will go on public exhibition shortly. Interested parties will be consulted as the plans emerge.

Work has begun in earnest on the island with the high voltage ring main around the island, now installed, southern apron works under way and the camber wharf to be reinstalled to provide facilities for the boating industry. Part of the former Administration building has been

established as a teaching facility for senior school students.

On the 22nd May during Writer's Festival, three historians gave an insight to their recent publications to 90 visitors, seated in the convict jail courtyard. The visitors then joined a guided tour of the island. Oral history of former workers at the island is another ongoing activity by the Trust.

The Friens representative on the Trust Community Advisory Committee continue to have input into the planning process. The Trust has called for volunteers with interviewing skills to assist in the recording of the history and memories of formwer Cockatoo Dock workers and others involved with the island.

Contact for tours: 8969 2100, Friends of Cockatoo Island: 9487 2854

Vale Joyce Landau

Joyce formerly of Wharf Road, Birchgrove, was a Committee Member of the Association for many years giving her time to greet the visitors to the Watch House on Saturday, during the Heritage Festival and on the Back to Balmain Days. Joyce supported local issues and at the BBQ held at the gates of Balmain Point to celebrate the long battle for the site to become a Park, Joyce assisted with this happy event. We missed her companionship over the last couple of years since going into aged care. Committee members attended her funeral on 2nd April, 2004.

Mysterious Bones

Builders renovating a cottage in Cove Street, 'Birchgrove' discovered some bones after removing a large slab of sandstone in the fireplace in the living room. The Glebe police were called to investigate as it was thought that the remains could have been of a child. The forensic pathologist at the Glebe mortuary reported 'the bones are non-human'. The initial report in the local Glebe newspaper sparked community interest into a possible murder committed when the 1870s building was erected.

A report in the Sydney Morning Herald 29th April, 2004 carried a report on evidence of secret rituals and ancient builders' superstitions having been unearthed in Australian historical buildings. The practice of bricking a dead cat in a building appears to have been transported to Australia from Britain, where the habit may date back as far as the 12th century. The cat was 'posed' in cavities under the floor chasing dead rats: 'catching spiritual vermin'. 'You have to put aside your 21st-century logic and think of a time when people constantly lived in fear of death from the plague or appendicitis.

Ian Evans, a researcher who studies old Australian buildings suspects that many such objects were probably included in other construction projects as part of a ritual by building workers and their inclusion may have been kept a tight secret. There have been some cases recorded in the last couple of years but Mr Evans fears that record of their existence are lost when buildings are demolished or renovated.

The River

Gregory Blaxell has published a history of the Parramatta River as a journey using clearly defined 'signposts' to point the way from Sydney to Parramatta. Mr Blaxell will discuss his book (with over 200 maps and photographs) at the Balmain Library on Wednesday 7th July 2004, 6pm for 6.30pm. Leichhardt Local History Group. Cost \$12 Bookings 9810 6885.

Balmain Greek Club

As mentioned before in the newsheet, the History Committee receive many requests for local information. Some months ago such a request was received from a resident as to the faded sign (picture right) on the side of the two-storey building at 404/406 Darling Street, Balmain. Did we have any information on the Greek Club?

Long time resident John Williams response to this enquiry resulted in a fascinating detailed report of the 1950s and the following is an abridged copy of his article.

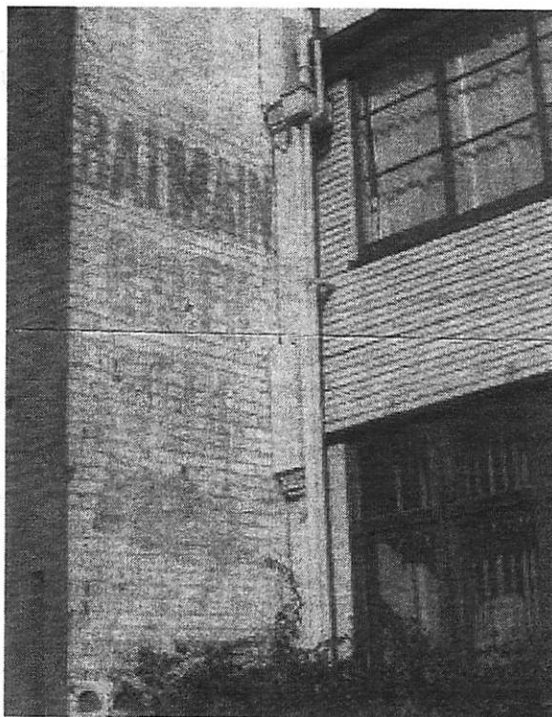
The Greek Club operated in the terrace house at 408 Darling Street. The entrance was through a doorway into the glassed-in timber porch created on the ground level veranda of this house. The sign GREEK CLUB was nailed in individual reflective red lettering over the door. The sign in question was painted on the wall of 406 Darling Street also pointed to the club's location and the entrance. The outside of the building was painted green.

The club began about the late 1950s and continued operating for about 10 years. There may have been two other Greek clubs near the junction of Victoria Road and Darling Street, Rozelle. Such clubs were certainly male-only bastions but it is unlikely that there was sly grog traded apart from some under-the-counter sales of beer, ouzo and Metaxas brandy. Certainly there was some illicit gambling practised as one of the clubs on 'the Lilyfield side of Rozelle' as the club was declared a disorderly house and closed. One of these clubs had street illuminated signage 'Hellenikon Kaphenion' in Greek uncial lettering.

Most fish-and-chip shops, milk bars and hamburger shops along Darling Street were operated by people of Greek, Macedonian Greek, Greek Cypriot or Egyptian Greek origin. Dunlop Perdriau at Birkenhead Point, Drummoyne, was a large employer of unskilled migrant labour, particularly Greek, so too was Unilever at White Bay.

In the mid 1960s, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese sought to acquire a local existing church for the concentration of Rozelle Greeks. There were overtures made for the purchase of the former St Paul's Presbyterian Church in Darling Street, now the Rozelle Neighbourhood Centre. An after-school hours Greek language school for a relative large number of children from Greek families was conducted in the former Presbyterian Church hall.

Greek and Cypriot immigrants were rarely educated and many arrived with only the clothes they wore and a change in their suitcases. While some were able to purchase their own businesses, the lot for many was exploitative menial work. Most Greek families took in lodgers to the point of overcrowding: 10 people to one backyard loo was a commonplace arrangement. The enclosed top storey veranda



tenement arrangement in the former Methodist parsonage in Montague Street is possibly the last remaining vestige of this custom of housing.

Greek immigrants were huge purchasers of merchandise sold at street-stalls and jumble sale fund-raisers that local churches ran in the mid 1960s. They not only bought recycle clothing for themselves, they also bought it for impoverished families in the home countries.

There was no specialised intercultural skilling or language education provided to primary or for that matter, secondary teachers at those times. As most primary teachers of that period were but two-year trained, their stress levels in coping with multicultural multilingual classrooms were barely containable.

Dysfunctional Australian families living on the sooty peninsula were many, public amenities were underprovided, alcoholism was rife as the asphalt footpaths and industrial smells ubiquitous – sulphuric acid from Monsantos, copra from Unilever and coal dust from steam locomotives, two power stations, a coal loader and a half-dozen timber yard kilns – not exactly a 'City of God'. As most Greek immigrants were highly sensible, they worked earnestly, lived frugally and honestly, saved prodigiously, gave their children's education topmost priority and caressed as soon as they could afford to.

There could be now only four cafes along the Darling Street strip that are Greek family operated, one at Rozelle and three in Balmain though there are numerous commercial properties still in Greek ownership and many personal success stories.

According to the 2001 Census, Greek Orthodox was the third largest Christian population in the Leichhardt area.

John Williams's

In Your Garden

Sassy Beauties

Each season has its stars, but now around Australian gardens sasanqua camellias are stealing the limelight. The sasanquas are the first of the camellia tribe to make even an average garden full of flowers from now until early spring. As well as being the first to flower, they are also the easiest to grow and are very hardy. They can be grown as small shrubs or as small trees (5 - 7 m). Most have a long lasting show of at least six to eight weeks of colour.

About two handfuls of any plant food per square metre. Mark the spot to ensure you don't disturb them accidentally.

Although not native (they originated in Japan) the nectar filled flowers draw all sorts of native birds. The main bonus is that they rarely suffer any pest or disease problems



CAMELLIA SASANQUAS

and consequently don't require any regular spraying.

Sasanqua camellias are at their best in an open spot with sun for about half of the day. They will not do well in deep shade. If you are planting now dig in lots of peat moss or rotted manure, or compost before planting. Camellias flower best with ample water throughout summer.

In July, remember you should prune roses. Remove all the dead and diseased wood completely then shorten healthy branches to promote growth. Do not prune weeping roses as they are best pruned after their spring flush of flowers.

Bonnie Davidson

What's On

Watch House Exhibitions

- Carolyn Lapiss Art works 5-6 June
 - Art/sculpture 12-13 June Jennifer Lavender
 - D Runsford 19-20 June Art works
 - Annette Dorahy, Art 26-27 June
 - Photographs
- On each Saturday in July photographs featuring the industrial heritage and street-scapes compared to recent development in Balmain. 11.30am-3pm.**

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2005/12

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 5.00pm 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.

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Our Web site::

www.balmainassociation.homestead.com

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Household \$20, Concession \$10

Organisations \$30.