



the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

The Peninsula OBSERVER

Vol 40 No3 Issue 295

Founded November 1965

June 2005

Balmain Harbourside Villa - NSW Heritage

On Friday, 27th May, Hampton Villa, a two-storey Georgian style house on the Balmain Peninsula, officially became part of the NSW heritage. Assistant Planning Minister, Dianne Beamer, announced that the former residence of Sir Henry Parkes had been listed on the NSW Heritage Register.

"Hampton Villa is of heritage value not only because of its architectural significance but also due to the prominence of its owners and tenants," Ms Beamer said.

Sir Henry Parkes lived in the house for four years from 1888 and used it as a venue for at least one Cabinet meeting during the Constitution debates of the 1890s. Ms Beamer took time out to visit Hampton Villa with the Member for Port Jackson, Sandra Nori, on a very significant day – the 190th anniversary of the birth of Sir Henry. "The villa's original owner was successful Sydney cabinet maker,

Edward Hunt, who built the house between 1847 and 1849", Ms Nori said, "He was a founding member of the first Sydney City Council and member of the NSW Legislative Council."

Hampton Villa was leased to businessman, etcher and gallery director, Eliezer Montefori, in 1872. He was one of the founders of the Art Gallery of NSW. During its first 100 years, the house had only three owners. A knitting factory operated there in the early 20th century and was later converted into flats. Conservation work in the 1970s returned the house into a private home.

Hampton Villa is one of the last remaining gentlemen's marine villa from Sydney's Victorian era. It joins distinguished harbourside residences such as Boomerang in Elizabeth Bay, and

Vaucluse House in being heritage listed. Listing on the State Heritage Register means that the Heritage Council, together with the Leichhardt Council is the consent authority for changes to the property that affect its heritage significance.

Below, Mr and Mrs John Priest welcome Dianne Beamer, centre, flanked by Cr Damien Copley-Finch and Sandra Nori, at the heritage listing announcement at Hampton Villa.



Message from the New Editors

Ann Bastock has thanked Kathleen and Val Hamey for their extraordinary editorial contribution to the Balmain Association over the last seventeen years. We wish to add our thanks and express our admiration for the work they have done. As Ann has also indicated, there are likely to be changes in the content of "The Observer" because of our different expertise and interests. As fledgling editors, we are not sure exactly how "The Observer" will evolve. We invite you, the readers, to give us feedback and suggestions.

One of the changes we wish to introduce is a "letters" section. In this issue there is a letter from Frances Heathfield that also raises another possible type of contribution: obituaries. Obituaries are of historical

interest and we would be interested in reprinting obituaries of the famous, infamous, and not so famous former citizens of Balmain.

Following articles on development issues in the last two editions of "The Observer" there is also a letter from Georg Straesser on development titled, "The Other Side of the Development Fence". Development and heritage issues have never been more important for Leichhardt Council and the community. We will continue to cover these topics.

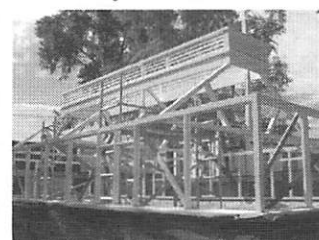
The main article reports on an interview with Issy Wyner. It is anticipated that more articles of this type will be published in future editions. If you have suggestions about who should be interviewed or if you would like to submit an article about someone in Balmain or a former resident of Balmain please let us know

Another possible inclusion in future issues could be a "Question and Answer" column. If readers have any questions about Balmain historical matters we will try to find someone to answer them.

Please get in touch by phone or email if you would like to submit a contribution or offer some criticism. And some letters please!

Ruth MacLeod Ph 9810 8030, email rmacleod@mail.usyd.edu.au

Fergus Fricke Ph 9810 1179, email ferg@arch.usyd.edu.au



Glasshouse Reconstruction

A Special Time, A Special Place, A Special Person

A Glimpse of Issy Wyner's Early Life

Balmain has produced more than its fair share of famous and influential political figures. Issy Wyner is one of Balmain's most respected "elder statesmen". Born in 1916, Issy has spent practically his whole life in Balmain. He grew up in the times when the suburb was an industrial power-house. Ship-building and repair work employed thousands, especially at Cockatoo Island and Mort's Dock. Issy was a young adult all through the depression years. It was a time of great political ferment, and Balmain was an established centre of activism. Issy joined the Ship Painter's and Dockers Union in 1939, and had a distinguished career as a Union official which spanned some forty four years. He served for some twenty-four years as an alderman/councilor on Leichhardt Council between 1960 and 1991.

Much has been written about Issy's achievements in the public sphere. In an interview for the *Balmain Observer*, in April 2005, Issy talked about how growing up in Balmain influenced the development of his interests in social and political reform, and his determination to improve the conditions of life and the opportunities for ordinary people.

Issy graduated from Phoenix Kindergarten School to Rozelle Public, then to the then Intermediate Boys School at Drummoyne, where he did well enough academically to get into Fort Street Boys. But after a year or so, Issy dropped out, and so lost the chance to go on to University. Here is how it happened:

"...when I was going to Fort Street, it was in the Depression period. My parents were on the dole, and there was no income coming in, nothing, and I couldn't afford to buy all the things that were required. Maroon coat and a straw boater hat, special pants and all that. And you must have a tennis racquet or a cricket bat and all these things. And all the fancy boys...I had nothing, just torn pants and lucky to have a pair of shoes...We were kids in those days, and I finished up having fights all the time because



Jack Munday greets Issy at Cockatoo Island

they were all the time giggging me...Really bad time there for anybody like me. I was just a no-hoper as far as they were concerned, and they'd gig you about your torn trousers or "What are you doing? Why don't you get some books?" Getting books to study! The teacher would say "Get this or that book to study". The most I could rely on, was to go to a second-hand book store and hope I could find a copy of something there. And even then, sometimes I couldn't afford to pay for it. So that it always seemed to be thrown up at me. Maybe it's wrong to say, "thrown at me" because I wasn't the only one, there were a few others, very few though. There weren't too many that ever got to Fort Street."

While still at Fort Street Issy was meeting people around Balmain who gave him ideas and material to read, about communism, socialism, revolution. Although Issy's father did not talk politics at home much, and did not take Issy to the meetings, he had himself joined the Communist Party. The Communist Party may have had its first nucleus in Balmain, when Issy was a small child. Issy did see something of his father's involvement with the Unemployed Workers Movement. This was a very practical organization, to help families with no income, who might be evicted for not paying rent. The UWM negotiated an agreement with the breweries when the Volunteer Hotel wasn't doing well, to take it over and run it as hostel for unemployed men. It

operated as a Cooperative for some years. So, at fifteen or so, Issy saw the hardship people had to contend with, and was exposed to left-wing ideas. His own parents had been born in Latvia and Estonia, and it is possible that they connected readily with the momentous tides of international politics. Things came to a head for Issy at school:

"The teacher was giving us a lecture on Economics, by some of the English economists – Mills was it? Well, one or two others. Anyhow, he finished talking, asked if there were any questions. I got up and said "Yes, Sir, can you tell me why you teach us about this and that, but we never hear you talking about Karl Marx?" Boy oh boy, did he give me hell for that! "Get out of my class!" That sort of attitude. "You don't talk about that rubbish here". I can still remember that. Why the hell I should get up and ask such a silly question I don't know! Anyway that was it, he told me "You don't belong here"...so that was all a build-up to my saying in the finish "Oh, the hell with the lot of them! Give it all away".

So at sixteen or so, Issy found himself kicking around Balmain, getting into mischief with other lads such as "scaling the trams" which was jumping on the footboards and catching a ride without paying a fare. Also he was listening to older men talk and act political change. He was helping Jack Sylvester produce a weekly stenciled pamphlet called *The Tocsin*. Paid work was hard to come

Letters to the Editor

The Other Side of the Development Fence

Nothing brings out the worst in our good-natured selves than the council notice that a neighbour wants to add to and alter their house. Our comfortable secure little world is attacked ... even though it was never quite perfect. ... it's like being told we have chronic disease. We realise we are not in control of our world.

The following are two typical scenarios

1 We have been notified of a proposed application for the house next door. We go to council and complain, then object in writing having found something to complain about and perhaps even canvas our neighbours to do the same even though they may live several houses down the street and are not really affected. The more objections the more weight it will have in intimidating already battle worn planners and insecure councillors.

Some of us may talk to the offending neighbour to resolve things but most of us don't know how to do this anymore as we have lost the art of face-to-face negotiations. It is easier to write and get the council to do the unpleasant work, well, that's what rates are for.

We bought the house because it is close to the city and Balmain is 'trendy' with restaurants etc but the house is really too small and only has one small bath room. ... but, we can change this as we have the 'right': its our life, our individuality, our fulfilment. How dare our neighbours try to stop us? Why does council have these stupid rules and, after all, they approved the same up the street why can't we do the same?

These are two perspectives of the same issue that repeats itself time after time to varying degrees of ferocity in every such situation. Some of us are more flexible than others and resolve issues with the aid of planning officers. Others

see only their side and threaten to take it to the courts for 'justice'. Yes we all know clichés about this one. If the issue is not resolved by the planners and council and the application is rejected the court will surely fix it and will see our sensible point of view. The shock comes when we realize the 'judge' is usually an ex-council planner and thinks like the rest of them. Most cases are a compromise, so why not compromise at council level.

The real issue is one of CHANGE: change of social aspirations and expectations, and to a lesser degree technology. Some if not most residents like the old environment for whatever reasons: nostalgia, comfortable human scale etc but at the same time we want current standards of middle class living. Often we hear the sigh that the 2 bedroom house with only one bathroom is far too small, yet, when the place was built it housed a working class family with 4 kids and a dog and of course, no car.

It is all about urban renewal. In the 60's and 70's we decided to stop all these old houses from being demolished to make way for home units built by developers. Unfortunately we scored a few large home unit blocks before we got active enough to stop them. Now have the alternative, and it works, in a fumbling sort of way; additions and alterations.

"Ads and alts" are democratic and politically correct, funded and controlled by the individual house holders, not by developers for developers' profits but by home owners for home owners. This is the process of shaping our own personal environment and being involved in it. It is a real triumph for community action and involvement.

The process is troublesome and there are no definitive rules for every case. Well, so is life. Some of us think there are too many rules already. Some

rules are stupid; some are outright dishonest giving councillors power to make subjective decisions for which they are not qualified. Others think the opposite. But we fumble through; we argue, get angry, sometimes very angry and, compromise. In the end the result is tolerable and sometimes even pleasant. Just like life.

Yet, there are people out there knocking this system labelling all homeowners as developers making the applicant the 'baddy' and the neighbours the innocent 'goodies'. There is no similarity between the professional developer's attitude and motivations and that of a home-owner seeking approval to renovate her house but this counter productive and ignorant view has been responsible for much of the agony and excessive cost associated with home owners obtaining development approvals.

We hope councillors will represent their constituents' interest and aspirations and develop some positive development processes. What is so difficult in providing productive help and advice for home-owners? How many publications are there for instance explaining to the residents 'in their language' the intent of the development controls such as why keep the old buildings, sunshine rights, privacy, cars etc. What about information seminars?

What is the planners' attitude to these budding developers when they seek advice on upgrading their house? It seems to be, pay an upfront fee and we will tell you the rules, but, we can't give you any more information unless you pay a bit more and we may give you a clue but nothing definitive.

Georg Straesser

One who has seen it from both sides. . . for 30 years.



**Another Titan Achievement.
The Balmain Association Celebrates its 40th Anniversary**

The Balmain Association celebrates its 40th anniversary over 16, 17 & 18 September 2005. There will be a Family Concert in the Balmain Town Hall, a Garden Tour, a Children's Art Exhibition on "What Do You Like About Balmain", and a Reunion Dinner.

If you are a past or present member and have archival photographs of previous functions and activities we wish to have copies for a display in the Watch House.

Please contact June Lunsmann on 9810 6885 or email
speal@zip.com.au

by, and pay and conditions of casual employment were bad. Issy had a go at all sorts of things, from sorting fish in the middle of the night when the catch came in at Pyrmont, to selling chocolate at the theatre. One hot day, Issy and a group of mates took action:

"We were cranky about the fact that we were all out of work, all in our sixteens and seventeens, and we couldn't get into the Baths (Elkington Park Baths) for a swim...We all got together outside the pool, must have been about a dozen of us, and the manager, quite rightly, said "No, you can't come in unless you pay. That's me job, to collect the money". We said "To hell with that! Let's go and put in a protest!" So we all marched up the road. We charged into the Town Clerk's office. We had our own Balmain Council in those days, and the Town Clerk had his office in a part of the front building where the library is now. And we all charged in there, pushed the door over and got in there, and we all started yelling at this bloke, "Why can't we go in and have a swim?" 'Course, the only answer he had was "Get out of my office or I'll call the police"! Actually, it wasn't his decision anyway. I don't know why the devil we picked on the Town Clerk, but we did. Anyway, the interesting thing about it all was, that about three or four weeks later, there was an announcement in the local paper that "Unemployed youth will be allowed to go into the Baths, three times a week without charge." I reckon that was my first victory!

Issy was asked whether his life would have taken the path it did if he had grown up in another suburb; whether his beliefs and commitments to the ideals of cooperation and helping others would have evolved in quite the same way. "I think back now, I imagine there would be no place like Balmain

in those days. Balmain had everything. Other suburbs had little associations and friends and activities, but no industry. Other places had industry and nothing else. In Balmain, we had everything. We had representatives of every political aspect you could think of, from ratbags upwards. They all had their little groups. We had every religion under the sun here... We had places like the Working Men's Institute, catering for people in different ways. We had three or four picture houses...They were all having meetings and gatherings. Together with the industry, so everybody knew everybody, not only within gatherings, but on the job as well. And I don't think that sort of composite set-up was the same in other suburbs. We seemed to have a little bit of everything here. It was remarkable.

And then of course the other tradition with Balmain was the first branch of the Labor Party, it was formed here. So there were all the highlights when Doc Evatt represented the area, who finished up being president of the UN...There's something about Balmain. I've been in other suburbs, just to visit them. They never seem to shine in the same way, to reflect so much of life in just the one community".

Although Issy feels that much has changed, and the local community is no longer as tightly interconnected as formerly, he conceded that some shadow of the unique identity of the area persists.

"But I do know that I've grown up in a place that is rife with tradition, there's tradition here everywhere, not only Labour tradition, but all sorts of things..." and Issy alluded to traditions of sporting and artistic life. "Balmain is still Balmain".

Ruth Macleod

respectful. My family censored part of my written obituary that was to be read at our mother's funeral.

In pursuit of family history, I asked my extensive kin to write brief autobiographies to include their aims; their values; and their experiences. I was interested to see how they lied by omission, or how they wished to be known. My view of myself is also contradicted by an old friend who writes nostalgic letters from Canada (I've been told that "nostalgia is not as good as it used to be").

Frances Heathfield

40th Anniversary

The Balmain Association celebrates its 40th anniversary over 16, 17 and 18 September 2005. A number of events have been suggested – a members reunion dinner, a family concert, a garden tour and children's art exhibition. If you are a past or present member or would like to join and wish to be involved in the planning for this celebration please contact June Lunsmann 9810 6885; email speal@zip.com.au. We also seek sponsors from local businesses.

From the President

We sincerely thank Val and Kathleen Hamey for their editing and publishing of the Balmain Association's news-sheet for the past 17 years. A great deal of paper work comes through to us all these days but the Peninsular Observer, which all members receive, is read and appreciated. This is true in my case and many other members tell me how they don't just put it on the coffee table and forget about it but read it there and then.

Ruth MacLeod and Fergus Fricke have volunteered to take on the editing of the Observer so a "thank you" is also in order for their offer to continue the newsletter. There will be some changes to the content and it was decided at the last committee meeting that the newsletter will become quarterly rather than bi-monthly from June onwards.

Val Hamey, who is also our Treasurer, has volunteered to continue to do the layout until a volunteer to take over this task comes forth! So if you would like to do this job please let us know and Val will be happy to guide you till you get used to it.

The Balmain Association committee meets at 5pm on the 1st Wednesday of each month in the Watch-house and anyone is welcome to come along, especially if you have something of interest or concern to bring up for discussion.

Many thanks again to the Hameys who have produced and published 126 issues of our Observer!

Ann Bastock

Obituaries

That great historical resource, the Australian Dictionary of Biography, is filled with obituaries. The newspapers such as the SHM also provide captivating reading - usually of a character whom we would like to have known. There are some exceptions: i.e. Darcy Dugan,

On Friday 6th May, Tony Stephens of the 'Sydney Morning Herald' entertained the Friends of Balmain Library talking about Obituaries. There is no general policy for writing obituaries, but they must be



In Your Garden

Sassy Beauties

Each season has its stars, but now around Australian gardens sasanqua camellias are stealing the limelight. The saanquas are the first of the camellias 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 most easy going camellias. They are easy to grow and very hardy. They can be grown as small shrubs or as small trees, (5-7m) Most have a long lasting show of flowers giving at least six to eight weeks of colour.

Although not native to Australia (they actually originated in Japan) the nectar filled flowers draw all sorts of native birds. The main bonus is they



CAMELLIA SASANQUAS

rarely suffer any pest or disease problems and consequently they certainly don't require any regular spray program

Sasanqua camellias are at their best in an open sunny spot with sun for about half 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 floor best with ample water during summer.

Elizabeth Farm at Parramatta will have their yearly show of camellias that came to Australia originally with the MacArthurs.

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

Bonnie Davidson

Nature in Balmain

"Think Balmain, but act to enrich your environment"

Let's encourage the birds and bees to visit and live in our peninsula. This is the time of the year we think of preparing the garden for spring. I would like to recommend two small native trees that provide flowers, food and shelter for our native birds, and encourage bees to visit our gardens and balconies. These are two ideal native plants that are quick growing and easy to manage, and guaranteed to attract birds, bees and butterflies.

Ivory Curl tree – *Buckinghamia celsissima*:

An evergreen with dark leaves that are a shiny pale green on the underside; creamy flowers on long attractive stems; prefers warm sheltered spots; also prefers a moist well-drained loam in full sun or partial shade.

Lilly Pilly – *Acmena smithii*:

A medium sized tree, 2 to 10 meters, and easy to control; dense bushy crown, glossy green leaves, small white flowers and edible mauve fruit. Both these trees provide privacy in our close living community. They are

What's On

Watch House Exhibitions

- **Landscapes of Europe**
Peter Mottershead
June 4/5 & 11/12
- **Balmain Association**
June 18-18
- **Artworks - June 25-26**
Helen McCosker
- **Artworks Aug 6-7**
Ljubov Seidle & Robert Wood
- **Art Exhibition Aug 13-14**
Kyrsten Winkley
- **Artworks Aug 20-26**
Judy Brownlie
- **September**
Balmain Association
40th Anniversary
- **Inner West Photographic**
October 1, 2 & 3

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

excellent for screening, and the Lilly Pilly makes a great hedge. Both are also suitable for the Balmain streetscape. With regular tip pruning they can be kept to a desired size.

After planting, mulch with Botany Humus or Greenlife mulch and compost, to 100mm. This will encourage rapid growth. Either of these mulches should be applied to all your garden beds during winter and all your plants will be jumping. You will also encourage those all-important earthworms. An added bonus is you will save on precious water.

Clive Abbott Gardener and Bird Lover



the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

The Peninsula
OBSERVER

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

Miss Theresa L Hayward
61 Louisa Road
Birchgrove NSW 2041
2005/12

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 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 9810 8030.
Email rmacleod@usyd.edu.au.
Our Web site:
<http://balmainassociation.aussiehosts.com>

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