



the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

The Peninsula OBSERVER

Vol 41 No 1 Issue 298

Founded November 1965

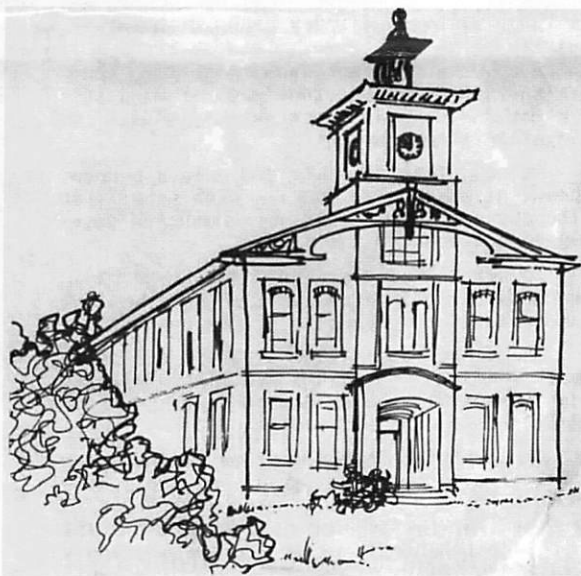
March 2006

FROM PAST NEWSLETTERS

Early Balmain Association Newsletters, especially those in the first ten years of the Association, contain a fascinating history of attitudes, foresights, persistence and campaigns. There have been some amazing achievements over the years and it is obvious that there are some reoccurring issues and some that that refuse to go away. Perhaps one of the most remarkable issues the BA has successfully pursued is the greenhouse next to the Balmain town hall (see the previous edition of the Observer). While the greenhouse has been restored it has taken over thirty years of action to achieve this.

What is abundantly clear from the Association's records is that most of the stances that the Balmain Association has taken, promoting or opposing issues, were, in the end, found to be the right. The Association successfully campaigned for a library in Balmain. The Association bitterly opposed the use of Mort's Dock as a container terminal. The battle was fought 40 years ago and lost. A container terminal was constructed at Mort Bay but it operated for less than ten years before it was closed down. The support for the retention of the Council's horses and carts may yet turn out to be correct also!

This and future editions will include items from earlier editions on campaigns and historical studies. In the adjacent column is an article that appeared in the June 1966 Observer which gives an account of a battle to save some of the industrial heritage of Balmain (buildings at Morts Dock) and prevent the site's use by Associated Steamships Pty Ltd.



Clocktower Building at Morts Dock just before demolition

Fare-Thee-Well Morts Dock

By the time this news sheet reaches Members the historically and architecturally interesting buildings on the Mort's Dock site will have fallen before the bulldozers.

Unfortunately the demolition of these fine buildings had been planned before any of the Balmain Association's members learned anything about it. The tragedy of this event of course is that the last remaining traces of Thomas Sutcliffe Mort, one of Australia's pioneer industrialists who was so closely identified with Balmain, will have disappeared from the area.

Some of our members were able to salvage a few relics from the office block, (Clocktower Building)- Bob Irving & Graham Bennett seized the opportunity to take a series of photographs both inside and out, showing details of interest.

Maritime Services Board has leased the site to Associated Steamships Pty.Ltd. for the handling of steel shipments.

This Association has protested against the use of Mort's Dock on a number of grounds, the principal ones being noise, traffic chaos and loss of residential amenities.

A Petition has been presented to Council, with approximately 800 signatures recorded. At a Council meeting 17th inst., Associated Steamships' application was objected to. We understand the Association will be notified in due course.



The latest piece of history: the Caltex grease and lubricating oil plant at Ballast Point is no more and is mourned by few.

Callan Park Update

Over the past few months there has been increasing community disquiet about the lack of mental health care in NSW and, in particular, the lack of beds in mental health facilities. The NSW Police Commissioner's concerns about police being forced to deal with violent behaviour of people with inadequately treated mental illness only to see them jailed, prematurely discharged, or kill themselves because there are no mental health beds available, has also helped highlight the lack of funding for mental health since the shift away from hospital care in the 1980's. The work of Jeff Kennett's 'Beyond Blue', John Brogden's attempted suicide and the resignation of the Western Australian premier, Geoff Gallop, because of ongoing depression should perhaps have raised more political concern about the crisis as clearly politicians, like the rest of us, are not immune from mental health problems.

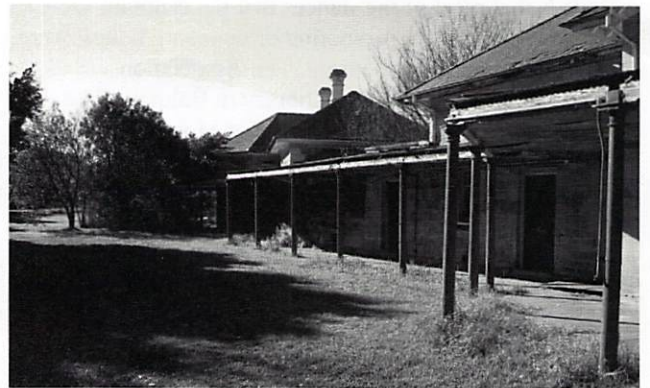
Despite these concerns, and Premier Iemma's claims that his government is increasing services, NSW Health continues to plan the closure of Rozelle Hospital at Callan Park and the building of a smaller facility at Concord Hospital to 'replace' it. This position is also contrary to that stated by Kim Beasley when interviewed by Alan Jones (31/1/06). The leader of the Federal Opposition stated that community based mental health care was a failed policy and that closing psychiatric hospitals had contributed to the terrible state of mental health and the Prime Minister, "opened the batting with mental health", at the Council of Australian Government meeting on 10 February. The Friends of Callan Park (FOCP) are pushing for the retention and upgrading of Rozelle Hospital in addition to the Concord facility, to make up for some of the service cuts of the last ten years rather than the improved community care that the NSW premier is advocating (Sydney Morning Herald 2/2/06). Opening beds rather than opening bats is what is required.

FOCP are also pressing for a Master Plan to be produced for Callan Park, and the setting up of the Callan Park Trust to manage the whole site as required under the Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002. So far the State Government is continuing to resist both the continued operation of Rozelle Hospital and the preparation of a Master Plan. It appears that they are trying to force amendments to the Callan Park Act by encouraging groups such as WHOS, JEFF, Lucan Care and sporting groups to press for the use of Callan Park facilities, and then to grant them use of facilities on an ad hoc basis. 'Master planning by deceit', or 'deceitful avoidance of the limitations placed on the government by the Callan Park Act', would perhaps be reasonable descriptions of this activity. It seems clear that a result of this action is to put pressure on the community to allow amendments to the Callan Park Act to suit the government's hidden agenda.

In January Premier Iemma went on 2GB, taking questions from the public. This was a very commendable thing to do. However his response to questions about mental health services and Callan Park seemed to show that he's getting all his information from spin-doctors rather than medical doctors. He failed to mention that NSW's total mental health bed numbers have been cut by half from 4,000 to 2,000 over the last 15 or so years and the total at Callan Park and Concord is being reduced from

the 300 that existed five years ago to 174 at best, once the 'move' to Concord takes place. He gave as an excuse for any reduction in bed numbers that might have occurred, the dying off of the long-term war veteran patients. This does indeed justify the reduction of about 100 beds at Callan Park, but only from the 600 that existed until the mid-eighties to the 500 that existed when the big cuts started in the nineties.

The Premier also mentioned the 'transfer' of the two longer-term psychogeriatric wards to the Western Suburbs Hospital site at Croydon but failed to mention that the hospital there no longer exists and the wards are in effect now just part of an ordinary nursing-home. He also failed to explain why it is desirable to have such services in Croydon, miles from the nearest general hospital, when psychogeriatric patients have the highest need for general medical as well as psychiatric services, whereas he claims it is unsatisfactory to continue to have a psychiatric hospital at Callan Park rather than in the grounds of a general hospital. Nor did he mention the plans to build a psychiatric hospital beside Long Bay Gaol with no general hospital for miles either.



THE CALLAN PARK CONVALESCENT COTTAGES

It is not just the mental health services that need some attention: the buildings need some rehabilitation also.



Friends of Callan Park meetings are held in the Meeting Room of Balmain Town Hall at 7pm on the first Monday of each month. Their mailing address is 17 North Ave, Leichhardt NSW 2040 and their website is www.callanpark.com

Bonnie Davidson

The following article about Bonnie Davidson, written by Debby Nicholls and Ann Bastock, is in recognition of Bonnie's extraordinary contribution to the Balmain Association: Bonnie deserves both notice and praise.

Bonnie Davidson is a familiar sight at the Balmain Watch House, where she takes part in the Saturday roster of Committee members who are present to answer questions from visitors who come in - either for the specific purpose of seeing the Watch House, or to look at one of the art exhibitions. She can also be found there many week-days, putting up and taking down pictures, and working on the Association archives.

Bonnie became involved in the Balmain Association in the early 1980's. At first she played the part of Watch House Guide, provider of information from a Long Term Balmain Resident, keeper of the garden and Watch House tidier and organiser, as well as staunch member of the Management Committee. But it did not take long for Bonnie the Historian to emerge. Possibly the breakthrough came when she discovered Sands Directory. Then Peter Reynolds became aware of her information gathering skills and asked for her help for his Leichhardt Historical Journals. She and Kathleen Hamey were soon answering at least half a dozen letters a month from people asking for help in finding family



history and other information and Bonnie was conducting regular telephone conversations with Peter about his forthcoming publications.

About the same time, the publication of, "Called to the Bar", was begun. Visitors to the Watch House frequently had questions about buildings that they believed were old pubs. Then Tikwis Begbie became aware of a source of photographs of Balmain pubs, which had been taken at a time when Toothy Brewery was "modernising" the old buildings, and these photographs provided many of the answers. The authors - Bonnie,

Kathleen Hamey and Debby Nicholls - found the history of every past and existing pub on the Balmain/Rozelle Peninsula, and Bonnie undertook the astonishing effort of finding the names of all the publicans. They also investigated the part that pubs played in the social fabric of the peninsula - and learned a lot about the history of the temperance movement. The resulting book became Bray's Books best-seller for the year it was published.

In addition to this, Bonnie took on the task of providing a regular column of gardening advice, which some members say was the first item they read in each issue. The Watch House garden flourished too.

Recently Bonnie organised and hung up the photographs for part of the exhibition at the Watch House in December 2005 and January 2006. Many people visited and commented on these pictures and the story they told of Architects and their Balmain buildings. She is a gifted woman who was born and has lived in Balmain all her life. In 2004 a booklet was published called "Movers and Shakers". Written by Davidia Peters and Jan Wood it was about women in the Leichhardt municipality who had contributed so much down through the years because of their devotion and hard work. Bonnie Davidson's achievements were written of in this booklet.

<<<<<<>>>>>>

Nature in Balmain

We are experiencing a hot, humid summer. This weather brings powdery mildew, black spot and rust to attack roses, other flowering plants and many vegies. The snails have returned with a vengeance, and green algae are spreading in shady areas. Here are some tips on tackling these problems without poisoning the environment. I am taking the liberty of passing on an abbreviated version of Jerry Coleby-Williams' organic recipes from his *Gardening Australia* article.

- Milk fungicide for preventing various types of mildew on plants such as melon, cucumber, choko, roses, zucchinis, tomatoes and grapes. Recommended solution: one part milk and nine parts water. Use full cream unhomogenised or organic milk. Spray on to infected areas during the cool of the morning.
- Bicarb fungicide for preventing powdery mildew, black spot and rust on roses. This mix was developed at Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens. It doesn't harm predatory wasps and ladybirds that control aphids. Mix one litre of water with two teaspoons of bicarbonate of soda, one drop of vegetable oil

and a drop of biodegradable washing-up liquid. Shake well to dissolve the bicarb. Apply as for milk fungicide.

- Coffee snail killer is safe to use but is lethal to slugs and snails. Dilute one part espresso coffee with ten parts water. Use caffeine-rich espresso. Instant and decaf or reused grounds are too weak to be effective. (I have used spent coffee grounds from my local Deli to spread around my cordylines with great success; also beneficial to hibiscus, gardenias and camellias).
- Vinegar solution for green algae on walls, paths and paintwork. Dilute one part white vinegar with three parts water. Spray affected surfaces until it drips off. If any gets on your plants, just wash off. This is safer than using bleach which kills beneficial micro-organisms.

(For more details please see Gardening Australia on the ABC website)

Ballast Point demolition is progressing well, and a landscaping plan has been completed. We must apply pressure to ensure the inclusion of thickets and water features to encourage the settlements of small birds, such as blue wrens.

Clive Abbott: *Gardener and Bird lover*

Balmain and the British Raj

John Williams, who has lived in Balmain since early childhood, is a frequent visitor to India and has an academic interest in the social and economic history of the Indian sub-continent. Below he outlines three historical connections to the British Raj and comments on the origin of the name, "Rozelle". These comments were first published in the Indus Age after John read an article on Balmain in the May 2005 of the Indus Age.

John Hay Gilchrist: In 1800, the then Governor of the colony of New South Wales, Captain John Hunter RN, granted to Dr William Balmain, colonial surgeon and civil magistrate, the 550 acres where the adjoining suburbs of Balmain, Birchgrove and Rozelle are located. Immediately after receiving the land grant, Dr Balmain transferred the ownership to his friend in Calcutta (now Kolkotta), John Hay (Later Borthwick) Gilchrist, who was in service to the East India Company as Head of Fort William College. Gilchrist claimed that knowledge of the vernacular language of North India, Hindustan, or Hindi, was more important than that of Urdu, official Persian, or classical Sanscrit. He became the leading scholar of Hindi of his day and published several Hindi grammars and dictionaries over the period 1787 and 1800. What is now known as the Balmain peninsula was called 'Gilchrist's Place' from the time of his acquisition of the property until the mid-19th century.

Nautical Training Ship *Sobraon*: In 1890, the colonial government of New South Wales acquired a clipper (sailing) ship that was used for training 'neglected youth' of the colony in basic skills of seamanship. This ship had been named after *Sobraon*, the site of the last decisive battle of the Anglo-Sikh War fought in 1845. The village of *Sobraon*

(now a substantial township) is located in Punjab on the banks of the Sutlej River, just to the north of Firozpur. The *Sobraon* was moored off Balmain, close by Cockatoo Island and the ship's boys attended weekly church parade at St Johns in Balmain. The *Sobraon* was sold to the new Royal Australian Navy in 1911, renamed HMAS *Tingara*, and sold to private interests in 1927. The ship was eventually broken-up for scrap during World War II but even after 70 years, its Indian teak decking was still found to be in almost perfect condition.



The blessing of the *Madras* before launching

Indian Navy: During the period of World War II, HMIS *Madras* was one of the two mine-sweepers (the other was HMIS *Bengal*) built for the Royal Indian Navy at the Cockatoo Island Dockyard off Balmain. Allocated ship number 155, the *Madras* was laid down on 4 August 1941, launched on 17 February 1942 and completed on 22 May 1942. The officiating chaplain for the blessing of the *Madras* was Father Arthur Dix, Rector of St John's Anglican Church. After independence in 1947, the *Madras* continued service in the Indian Navy and was retired (likely sold – perhaps for scrap) in 1961.

Rozelle: I was once intrigued by a number of ladies' fashion shops in the posher parts of New Delhi called 'Rozelle Fashions' or 'Rozelle Sarees' or similar signage name that included 'Rozelle'.



The *Madras*

I was convinced that there had to be some link between India and the name of the suburb, Rozelle, which was previously called Balmain West and formed part of the Balmain land grant. According to the Hobson-Johnson dictionary of Anglo-Indian usage, Rozelle derives from the French for Red Sorell, 'Rose Saille', that was frequently cultivated and used as an ingredient for making jam in colonial India. My theory is that Red Sorell was likely cultivated on the Annandale shores of what came to be called Rozelle Bay. Like his numerous military contemporaries, the owner of the Annandale estate, Major George Johnson, had seen service in India before reaching New South Wales. Members of other branches of the Johnson family, originally from Annandale in Scotland, were among the first inhabitants of Shimla, formerly the Summer Capital of the Raj and now capital of Himachal Pradesh. One conventional theory is that Rozelle was named after the nearby Rozelle Bay. This is said to be named after 'Rose Hiller' or 'Rosella' parrots which nested on the shores. Another theory is that Rozelle Bay (and eventually Rozelle) was named after a ship that once berthed there. Others would disagree, but for me, the Red Sorrel theory is the most plausible.



VALE ROGER McKEOWN

30 Jan 1955 to 3 Dec 2005

Below is a shortened version of the eulogy given at the funeral of Roger McKeown by his wife, Judy Kelly (Judy was profiled in the previous issue of the Newsletter.).

Roger was a member of the Balmain Association. He died suddenly while out walking with Judy on the morning of Saturday 3 December 2005, aged 50.

Roger's funeral was a truly moving celebration of a life well lived. Judy's eulogy gives not only an insight into Roger's life but also the feeling of that remarkable occasion; Roger's funeral.

Ed

Since last Saturday Amy and I have been enveloped by the love, friendship and support of our family, friends and of course our very precious Balmain community. We thank you. But as a biased observer I believe it is an indication of what a special person Roger was and how fortunate we were to have him in our lives.

Now Roger would have hated all this fuss, he would be saying I hope you're not going to cry. I told you just a party! But just this once I am not following orders Rog. There is a mutiny on your boat.

I have been such a lucky woman to have a husband who loved and respected me, empowered and challenged me. He was the source of my happiness. As family, friends and Balmain locals know we did everything together and when Amy came along we were a bit like the holy trinity – a very close and happy unit. We never worked out who was top dog, but we all think it was probably Suzie Schnauzer.

Many of you have memories of when you first met Roger – for me I was 23, teaching at Broken Hill and yearning to see water. So my then boyfriend arranged a sailing day with this great guy he had met at College of Law.

And so I met my Roger – he was so natural, friendly, not pretentious and he had a lot of hair.

On returning to Sydney Rog made his move on me and so began a beautiful six month romance that was simply dazzling and so stylish. Little did I know that Roger, ever strategic was being advised in the wings by his big sister Dee.

However I wasn't certain how our relationship would go as Rog was this intelligent, handsome lawyer from the North Shore, so I foolishly thought our values would be poles apart. But then one day on his boat as we sat reading his beloved Herald, with me waiting until he had read each section first, he started talking about politics and then I knew I had met my soul mate. He believed so strongly in the need for a just society based on equal access to public education, health and housing, he was a Labor voter – and proud of it. He was such a powerful and logical thinker, and he hated fakes – he wasn't impressed by people who coveted wealth and power and he hated Malcolm Fraser – you have to remember it was 1979 and we were children of the dismissal. And so we fell in love.

Now Roger states that he asked me to marry him because Dee's seduction plan was costing him too much money. He did observe that, "she is a big eater!" The proposal was so typically Roger – stylish – harbourside restaurant but no fuss – in the middle of conversation he simply said

"I think it would be a good idea if we got married. I have a copy of the marriage act that you can read so that you know the legal ramifications of marriage."

But I got him big time – I immediately said "YES" – this threw him a bit but I was still taken to the office to read the act.

Roger always said he was a man ahead of his time, he down sized or had a sea change before such terms became popular. As many of you know Roger and I lost our first baby boy and then a miscarriage before our beautiful Amy was born 13 weeks early. Once again Roger was there for me, ever sensitive and protective, putting my needs above his own. Roger and I knew what a gift we had received and he gave up his very promising and lucrative career as a corporate lawyer and company secretary to help care for Amy. His love for her knew no boundaries, a special bond always existed between them.

And so began Roger's new career as a TAFE teacher. In this role he assisted so many people. I was so proud of the way Roger showed dignity and respect for his students and his staff. I admired his compassion for people. He was leader who didn't need to do a leadership course!

His staff and students loved him,

and frequently he would show me their letters of thanks, and he loved the way they gave him a party for spending 20 years in building G! I don't think they had much choice in this though.

His last Friday in building G is an indication of his integrity. As he said to me on Friday night – well today I emailed TAFE management and Federation. It is so wrong, the temporary teachers positions must be increased in accordance with the agreement. So often I saw Roger fight for issues and people – no benefit for himself but he worried so much about those wonderful casual teachers who have become the backbone of TAFE education.

Roger loved life and his dog! Holidays were to be enjoyed, at least 3 activities per day – starting at dawn – swimming at Dawn Fraser Pool, sailing on the harbour, going out to dinner, walks, concerts, movies, times with friends, he gave his friendship cautiously.

My most precious memories of Roger are of him either sailing or walking in the National Park at Bundanoon. I still remember sailing down the harbour, swimming to shore at Nielsen Park and the sailing back at night, a full moon the breeze in our hair and Rog saying

"This is a true believers sail, take a mental picture it will get us through the week."

So Rog I have many mental pictures of our life together. I will always remember our last morning together, you opened the verandah doors and said, "It is a beautiful day but tell me Judy Ju what are your goals for this weekend."

"Dusting" I suggested – well he replied, I hope it is wet dusting because I vacuumed yesterday!

I never did do the dusting Rog but my goal is to always love and cherish you – I hope I never let you down because your approval always meant so much to me. Amy and I will keep fighting the good fight against John Howard's vision for Australia. You detested it.

25 years ago you said,

"We will have a good life together."

Thank you Rog – once again you were right – I just wish it had been longer.

My love for you will never die.

You were one of the good people.

What's on at the Watch House

EXHIBITIONS

MARCH

Saturday 4 (10am-5pm)

Sunday 5 (10am-4pm)

Affairs of the hART

Celebrating 10 years of the hARTstART Studio in Balmain

Official opening 12 – 2pm Saturday

hARTstART is an art course run in the evening in Balmain for information 9614 8008

Saturday 11 and Sunday 12 (10am to 4pm)

'Journeys'

by painting group POSIE, Malama Arapoglou, Fran Deady, Diana Fletcher, Maureen Laphorne, Harriet Loneragan, Sharon Tudor
A wide range of artwork in all media and subjects - something to tempt all art pallets.

Opening Friday 5pm to 8pm

Saturday 18, Sunday 19 and

Saturday 25 and Sunday 26

Janet Carter and Jan Moore Paintings in watercolour and mixed media and fine art prints relating to landscape

APRIL

Saturdays 1, 8, 15, 22 – Heritage Month

Industrial Heritage – our working lives

Exhibition of photographs and other items including working meccano model of the floating crane *The Titan*.

Saturday 29 and Sunday 30

a diverse connection

Five Blue Mountains artists celebrate their passion for art, their friendship and the diversity of their art-making practices: Christina Frost Clayton, Lisa van den Dolder, Fiona Steel, John Clayton and Steve Hazael. Mixed media, monotype prints, drawings, pastel, gouache, watercolour, inks and photography.

MAY

Saturday 6, Sunday 7

Saturday 13, Sunday 14

Intertwining 2006: RISK RISQUE Textiles taken to the edge

Saturday 20 and Sunday 21

'Hang it'

Featuring new works, ranging from contemporary print making to

experimental painting and sculpture by emerging artists from The Gallery School, Meadowbank - Diane O'Dwyer, Heather Kepski, Roma Devjak, Lynne Sung, Carlie Lopez, Josie Reid, Wendy Lowe and Michael O'Keeffe.

Saturday 27 and Sunday 28

Recent Journeys - Marilyn Dennes painted and sculptured pieces with emphases on found material, discoveries of being on the road and observations in the landscape

JUNE

Saturday 3 and Sunday 4

Krissie Oliver – Industrial photographs from the area

10, 11 June long weekend vacant

Saturday 17 and Sunday 18

Ludjov Seidl – ceramics and glass

Saturday 24 and Sunday 25

'Time + Tide'

Jane Hosking, Cate Macgowan and Julie Slavin. The exhibition will include mixed media painting, photography and sculpture, loosely working on themes of historical artifact and water and seashore imaging.

BALMAIN ASSOCIATION HISTORY ROOM

Open Saturdays 11.30am – 3pm

Contact Kathleen Hamey 9818 4954

The next issue of The Observer will feature:

- **What Bugs Balmain; how Balmain could be better.**
If you would like to contribute your views on what is needed to make Balmain a better place to live and work in, whether it be on community cooperation, social services, sporting or cultural facilities, development control, outdoor advertising, traffic or whatever, and how the Balmain Association could help, please contact Ruth Macleod on 9810 8030.
- **Protecting our heritage**

National Trust Heritage Festival April 2006

The 2006 Festival will be held from Saturday 1 April to Sunday 16 April with the theme 'Industrial Heritage – Our Working Lives'. The Balmain Association has participated in past years and this year a Photographic Exhibition in the Watch House will showcase many of the former industrial sites such as Mort's Dock, Colgate Palmolive, Elliott Chemical Works and the Balmain Coal Mine. An added attraction will be a free-standing meccano model of the famous Titan Crane of Cockatoo Island. Exhibition times: 11.30 am to 4 pm on April 1, 8, 15 and 22. Entry free. Contact: 9818 4954

The Balmain Association Inc Representing Balmain, Birchgrove and 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 realization 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 12:00 - 3:00pm.

Our editorial contacts:

phone/fax is 02 9810 1179

Email ferg@arch.usyd.edu.au

Our Web site:

<http://balmainassociation.org.au>

Annual subscriptions:

Household \$20

Concession \$10

Organizations \$30

Printed by Snap Printing, Balmain. Not to be reproduced without acknowledgement