

the balmain
association
incorporated
news sheet

The Peninsula OBSERVER

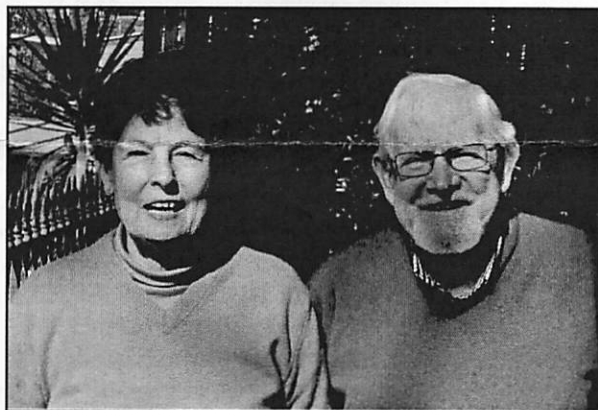
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LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The annual presentation of the Heritage Awards, a highlight of the 2011 National Trust Heritage Festival, was held at the Westin, Sydney on Monday 4th April.



Jocelyn and John Morris

The recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award was John Morris. John and wife Jocelyn are long time Balmain residents and members of the Balmain Association.

From 1965 to 1983, John Morris made a major contribution to the National Trust as an executive officer during a time of considerable change.

As Assistant Director of the Trust an initial task was administration of the Historic Buildings Committee, whose visits to regional NSW led to many new listings on the Trust register. In 1967, he was involved in the publication of the first Register of Classified places in the state. Establishment of the Urban Conservation, Industrial Archaeology and Cemetery Committees followed and the structure, membership and influence of the Trust expanded.

In 1974, John was appointed Executive Director of the Trust and when the NSW Heritage Council was established in 1978, he was the Trust's representative. John played a large part in the relocation of the Trust's headquarters to Observatory Hill and the setting up of the S H Ervin Gallery. He worked with Jack Munday to campaign for the protection of much of Sydney's

most significant heritage and continues his involvement with the Trust and in environmental issues today.

Congratulations John, from the Balmain Association.

While John was Assistant Director of the Trust the Balmain Association was formed in 1965 and the founding members were looking for a building in

Balmain to be the newly formed group's headquarters.

At 179 Darling Street, the former Watch House, local lock-up, had been closes for many years and was derelict. John found that the building was owned by the Police department and marked for demolition but with the enthusiasm of the members of the Balmain Association urged John to negotiate to have the building placed in their hands to restore and use as headquarters. The Police Department were reluctant to lease to a community group who may disband after a couple of years but eventually, the property was ceded to the Trust who then leased to the Balmain Association on condition that it be conserved and

IN THIS ISSUE

- P. 1. Lifetime Achievement Award
- P. 2. Fortified Shoe Shop and more...
- P. 3. Sylvia's story, A slice of EAT History
- P. 4. What's on at the Watch House
- Enclosure: Booking form for EAT History dinner.

maintained. This was achieved by much effort and continues today.

The first newsheet of the Balmain Association, April 1966, states: Although the building was not yet officially within the Association's control, some forty members descended upon the building at various times through-out the day of the 18th February and by team work and constant effort, they completely transformed the scene by nightfall. The rubbish was removed from the rooms and grounds literally by the truck loads.

The Watch House was opened by the then Minister for Lands, the Hon T E Lewis MLA on 12th April 1970.

Source:

- National Trust Magazine (NSW) May-June 2011.
- Leichhardt Historical Journal No 23, Peter Reynolds.

Fundraising was a major role for the Association in the early days. It still is today but with the building restored, it is a much sought after venue for artists and craftspeople who hire the building on weekends providing funds for its upkeep. Below is a fair held in early 1970s.



Fortified shoe shop and more

When Nancy Merlo, journalist with Ciao publication contacted the Balmain Association seeking information "about 'Sole Comfort' Shoe store in Rozelle, which was once home to Raiders Restaurant and Bar and an illegal casino, which was run above the restaurant and closed in 1987", emails began to fly.

There was some confusion because 'Sole Comfort' is currently the shoe shop at corner of Nelson and Darling Sts, 610 Darling St also with an interesting "shadey" past but not the casino (see later).

As details emerged it was confirmed that the casino was above Hylands shoes at the corner of Victoria Rd (680 Darling St). It seems it was one of the extensive network of criminal activities that included robbery, theft and extortion rackets, illegal gambling, sly grog shops, prostitution and drug dealing run by Sydney's "Mr Big" Lennie McPherson. It was a simple doorway leading upstairs to rather elaborate mirror walled gambling rooms. Wikipedia.

With all the current hooaha about gambling, in particular poker machines, it's interesting to try and understand gambling in the past. Apart from SP bookmakers and actually attending the races, dogs or whatever, illegal casinos flourished, many catering to the needs of "gentlemen gamblers".

Before the age of legal gambling at glitzy Star City type casinos, this place was big business and rumoured to house tables individually owned by high-profile politicians and barristers. One such owner and frequent visitor to the casino was thought to be the late Sir Robert Askin, former Premier, Treasurer and Police Minister who had quite a reputation as a notorious gambler.

John Williams, who lived in Rozelle from 1949 to 1981, says he remembers the casino, that was frequently raided by the police, but with secret exits built in, high profile clients were rarely, if ever, caught red-handed at the casino. The casino escape route was via rear stairs and passage way that led into Hancock Street allowing all the important clients to casually make a back exit while police stormed in the front. excerpts from Nancy Merlo's article in Ciao.

Ian Scandrett, owner of Sole Comfort, says, "The Casino was not only the upstairs of the Hylands Building (the most fortified shoe shop in the world!) but also the one next door on 682 Darling St. This was the main entrance, and was set up as "Raiders", supposedly named after Police Chief Merv Beck, whose illegal gambling squad was known as Beck's Raiders. Beck had dined there one night not knowing!

"I purchased it in 1988 and the Casino

was gone. However there were lots of red curtains and tizzy decor still there plus concealed rooms, doors – the lot. It took me a month to clean it all out as I then redecorated and looked for Dancing/Arts tenants. You might recall we had Brent Street there for many years – Nikki Webster who flew across the 2000 Olympics was one of theirs.

"There were many colourful characters passing through the place in the years prior – I would hear all these stories as a shoe shop proprietor – people would come in and mention the casino and their experiences there. And yes, many good looking women also visited the Casino!"

Ian decided in 2006 to close Hylands Shoe City, which he had moved further down Victoria Rd and open the specialist store Sole Comfort, an innovative, totally cashless one stop comfort shoe shop, only to find he had chosen another infamous site. This time a building that had once housed a brothel run by criminal madam, Tilly 'Queen of the Night' Devine.

Tilly's Art Supplies was previously in this shop and it is rumoured that the art supply business was so named after Tilly Devine. Even if this were not the case it would seem to be a good name: "as I suppose it all relates to each other as Prostitution and Gambling are both a form of ART. There was however a large brothel above us when we were at 654 Darling St. Who owned it, I'm not sure maybe it was a relative of hers." Tillys Art Supplies.

Planning Matters – Christina Ritchie

- Leichhardt Council has adopted a Voluntary Planning Agreement (VPA) for the proposed Anka Development in Terry St for which the Balmain Association made representations. This VPA will now be sent to the Planning Minister to commence the Gateway process.
- Rozelle Village P/L is preparing a response to the Director General's Requirements for the development of the former Tigers site. The proposal has not been returned to Leichhardt Council for assessment but will still be assessed under the 'old' unpopular Part 3A process.
- Balmain Association members may wish to consider and express their preferred options for the proposed redevelopment of the Nutrimerics site in Elliot St, Balmain.
- The Balmain Association has written



Darling St and Victoria Rd c. 1954 Courtesy Tram Museum, Loftus.

June Lunsmann remembers entering the casino via the door on Victoria Rd in the early 70s when pubs closed at 10pm and smoking was still acceptable if not fashionable. Together with a friend, desperate for cigarettes around 3am, they could only think of the casino. Somehow they managed to bamboozle the cockatoo on the doorway in Victoria Rd and made their way upstairs where they were very politely sat down in a fairly flash reception area and asked what they wanted. In retrospect, it would have been to the relief of the casino operator that they only wanted some cigarettes. These were very quickly supplied (B and H if I remember correctly) free of charge and we happily went on our way without even getting a glimpse of what was inside.

Ian says, "There was an SP operation and a call girl booking business run out of the attic rooms (entered from another part of the building 132 Victoria Road) and I suggest that perhaps the free cigarettes were a good outcome."

June Lunsmann.

If you have a story about a building, not necessarily as nefarious as this, that we could publish, please let us know.

Sylvia's Visit to the Watch House

A very special visitor came to the Watch House on Friday 15th July. On the eve of her 80th Birthday, Sylvia Boothby nee Gray accompanied by daughter Karen and son-in-law Paul Hedley came to visit her birth place. Sylvia is one of the five children born



Peering through the hatch in one of the cell doors, brought back many childhood memories for Sylvia.

at the Watch House to Ira Clarence and Eliza Gray when the building became a police residence from 1930 to 1947.

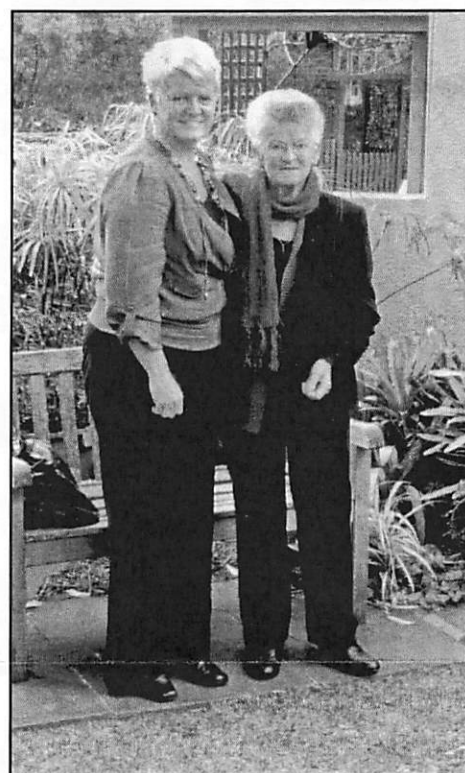
An extract from a letter from Sylvia: *As we walked into the entrance and saw the photos on the wall of my Mother and Father, I felt a great feeling of belonging and being home.*

My parents would have been proud to see how well the restoration was carried out, especially the gardens. There are still 9 children living out of the 12. I have lots of memories of events that occurred at the Watch House and Balmain.

Keep up the good work and we hope to come again to visit.

Kathleen Hamey.

During the same week another contact from the Gray family was Tania Gray whose grandfather is Douglas Gray.



Sylvia with her daughter, Karen, in Watch House garden on the day of their visit.

A slice of early Eat History on the Balmain Peninsula - Kathleen Hamey

The early history of eating on the Balmain peninsula really depended on what could be cultivated and or captured.

The Eora Aboriginal people and the Cadigal clan seem to have populated the area. The rocky shoreline provided cockles and mussels in abundance and there is evidence of the Aboriginal presence as there are many shell middens around Sydney Harbour, some on private property and on public waterfront land such as Callan Point. The thick scrub would have many edible fruits in season and the narrowest part of the peninsula near Birchgrove, was used a catchment area for small animals to be driven there by beating the ground.

A common practice in the early years of the Colony was for the military personal to receive a grant of land or a small plot of land to grow vegetables.

Lieutenant Robert Ross, Gov of the Colony and Commandant of the Marines arrived with the First Fleet. An extract from William Bradley's journal, A Voyage to NSW 1762-1792, 'Some canoes landed at Major Ross's garden up the Harbour, they stole a jacket and several other things'. The area suggests on research to be today's Balmain East.

Another reference to growing food was from an advertisement for the lease of Birch Grove House in 1827. The area today is around 67 Louisa Road.

George Whitfield, a private in the NSW Corps, received a 30 acre grant in 1796, the area changes hands a few time and was in turn purchased in 1810 by Lieutenant John Birch, paymaster of the 73rd regiment who built a storey-house called Birch Grove House. Birch sold to Rowland Walpole Loane, merchant of Sydney in 1814.

After a description of the house 'a garden near three acres in extent, secured by a strong fence, well cropped with vegetables and about five hundred fruit trees of the finest kind.' One would say an exaggeration to the extent of the fruit trees as to the poor quality of the sands soil, but proof of early food grown for the inhabitants of Birch Grove House.

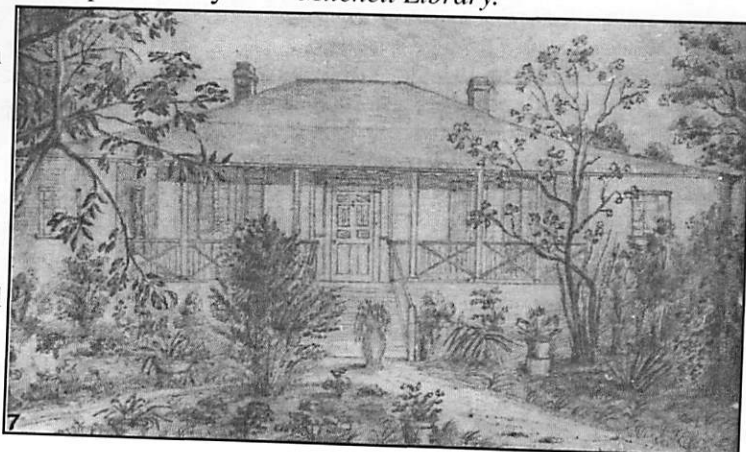
The first building on the Balmain grant was Waterview House 1835, and was built for land agent, Frederick Parbury, on the slope of the hill

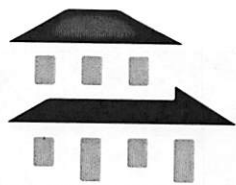
overlooking Waterview Bay, now Mort Bay. This area to day is Caroline Street. The one-storey, six-room house was set in 10 acres of ground, contained a stable, coach house and a fenced garden.

This house was built a year previous to the 1836 land sales that sold most of today's Balmain East, Mort Bay and Ballast Point.

Source:

- Half a Thousand Acres Peter Reynolds.
- Leichhardt Historical Journal No 15.
- Birchgrove. Pamela Jeffery. • Leichhardt, On the Margins on the City Max Solling and Peter Reynolds. Waterview House c. 1875. Pencil sketch by Mary Stephen, courtesy Mitchell Library.





What's on at the Watch House

www.balmainassociation.org.au

OCTOBER

Friday 30 Sep, 10 til 4; Saturday 1, 10 til 5; Sunday 2, 10 til 4; Monday 3 October, 10 til 4.

Designing with Fabric 2: Inspiration & Intensity
Elke Klein, Marena Von Behr, Aura Parker, Pepa Martin & Karen Davis

A diverse exhibition of original handcrafted artworks by four artists exploring the theme 'Inspiration & intensity'. The exhibition includes a range of unique and avant garde screen prints, shibori silk, textile design, digital prints and fabric collage. Celebrate the possibilities of 'Designing with fabric' and mingle with the artists on opening night.

Opening: Thurs 29 Oct. 6 til 9 - ALL WELCOME

Saturday 8, Sunday 9, 10am to 5pm

Separations

An exhibition of Prints and New Media Featuring the work of video artists John Bennett and John Laidler, and the prints and digital work of Janet Reinhardt and Bronwyn Rodden. The artists explore the issue of separations in terms of both our alienation from our own nature and origins as well as our increasing alienation from the natural world. The prints and digital work examine both the beauty of the natural environment and man's ephemeral and sometimes uncomfortable existence within this natural context.

Opening 6pm Friday 7 - All welcome

Fri 14, Sat 15, Sun 16, 10am to 5pm

Danielle and Friends

Danielle Gild is a young, emerging artist who has invited her artist friends and mentors to join her first exhibition. Both her early and current works explore abstract styles working with paper, canvas, acrylics and collage.

The exhibition includes a range of paintings, ceramics, sculptures and prints by her artist friends: Jody Rosen, Shannon Cranko, Judy Green, Louise Ryan, Michelline Abrahamson, Oscar Shub, Ruth Katz, Daphne Flax, Deborah Frank, Izette Felthun, Angela Slattery, and Cilla Davis.

Saturday 22, Sunday 23, 10am to 4pm

The Meditative Heart

Leon Lester and Merle Lester explore the meditative heart, from where there is both the flow and witness of creativity. It is a depiction of the joy of creation and dance of form. We are, as human beings a part of endless creation, occurring inside us and outside us, from the infinitely small to the infinitely large. Beauty is in us and all around us and we can be it and see it everywhere with the meditative heart.

Saturday 29, Sunday 30, 10am to 5pm

6+ again

"6+" is a group of local artists who have been exhibiting together for many years. These award winning artists will display their latest contemporary works which include paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints - a true celebration. The artists will be available to discuss their works on opening night - and would love to see you at the Watch House anytime. Opening Friday 28 October from 6pm to 9pm.

NOVEMBER

Saturday 5 and Sunday 6, 10 to 5

Students of Balmain Art School Exhibition

This annual event showcases the works of the students of the Balmain Art School, who are encouraged to follow their own path and explore their individual creativity, this results in an amazing diverse range of artworks. All works are for sale and are very keenly priced. Opening - Friday 4 November 6.30 - 8.30pm come and meet the artists.

Saturday 12, Sunday 13, 10am to 4.30pm
InkPaper, FabricThread

The exhibition showcases the works of textile designer Helen Richards and printmaker Dennis White. The works are strongly influenced by the natural world. Inspiration is derived from the forms, textures and colours of the Australian landscape through to ideas related to the evolution of species and the diversity of life. The exhibition includes a collection of prints, quilts and home-ware.

Opening: Fri. 11th August 6-8pm. All welcome.

Saturday 19 Sunday 20 available for hire

History Room open 11.30 - 4pm

Saturday 26, Sunday 27, 10am to 4pm
"FRESH"

A group exhibition of imaginative, contemporary, new works in a variety of media by Sydney artists Maggie Ho, Kerry Lonsdale, Jennifer Park, Shirley Peters, Judith Strachan and Lilian Wong. Opening Friday 25 November 6pm to 8 pm, where you will meet all the artists while enjoying great company and refreshments. All welcome.

Saturday 3, Sunday 4, 10am to 4pm

Art & The Heart

Helen Alker had her story told on Channel 9 through the RPA program. She was rushed to RPA Hospital with Tachycardia. Her journey was one of immense courage as she was informed that a pacemaker that was inside her body was keeping her alive. The programme showed more of Ms Alker as an artist than a patient in hospital. She donated a painting to the RPA, Camperdown, NSW, which proudly sits in the Chief Cardiac Surgeon's rooms. After the show Helen was commissioned by Australians from all over the nation for her work. Opening 2 December between 6pm - 9pm 'Sharp'. No late comers.

EAT History - History Week 3-24 September, 2011 EXHIBITION

A slice of EAT History in Balmain

If you have old pots and pans, other utensils, old recipes, cook books perhaps an apron or old tablecloth, photos or posters that we can exhibit, please let us know so we can plan our exhibition. Phone/email for an entry form.

Exhibition will open Sat 3 September and continue on Saturdays, 10, 17 & 24 September. 11.30am to 4pm.

6.30pm Saturday 10th September
BOOK NOW - "EAT History" dinner

Hors d'oeuvres and desserts at the Watch House, mains at the Balmain Bowling Club. Experience a selection of dishes from the colonial past, through the depression, 40s to today. Cost \$55.00 members. Refreshments at the bar at the Bowling Club, complimentary with hors d'oeuvres and dessert. Numbers limited, bookings essential.

Booking form included in this newsheet.

2pm Saturday 17th September

PEASE PORRIDGE HOT: Convict & Military Rations, Colonial Produce of the 1820-30s

Elizabeth Roberts will explore convict fare where it came from, and contrast it to the military rations and the food available to the general population.

Come along and taste convict food, see how it was prepared using typical tools from the 1820s and 30s.

Gold coin donation to Convict Trail Project Inc. Bookings (for catering) as below.

HELP WANTED

We need members to contribute a favourite beginner or a dessert from a specific era, labeled as such and perhaps with the recipe and its source. Costs for ingredients will be re-imbursed by the Association. If you can help contact one of below as soon as possible.

June 9810 6885 speal@zip.com.au; Diana digarder@bigpond.net.au, Kathleen 9818 4954, khomey@tpg.com.au

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 6:00pm in the Watch House, 179 Darling Street Balmain. MEMBERS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND. The History Room at the Watch House is open every Saturday from 11:30am -3pm Postal: PO Box 57 Balmain 2041 **Material from this newsletter is not to be reproduced without acknowledgement**