

The Peninsula OBSERVER

the news sheet of the Balmain Association • PO Box 57• Balmain • 2041

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT - JANE WARD

The year 2010 – 2011 has been a period of continuing activities and projects for the Balmain Association in the new context of a change of Government in New South Wales.

Like the wider population, we are keen to see promised reforms and projects implemented by the Liberal Government, particularly those that safeguard heritage and give real power to local communities in urban planning and protection of amenity. It is early days yet.

A major test will be the future of the Bays Precincts. The Balmain Association joined with other participants in the community consultations to re-iterate to the new government our long-standing desire for a masterplan and integrated planning to achieve public foreshore access and community facilities, not profit-driven over-development.

We are still waiting.

Reforms to the Balmain Association Constitution and changes to membership subscription were implemented smoothly. Particular thanks go to John Symonds, Di Garder and June Lunsman. We are pleased that Ross Mackenzie is taking on the role of managing the membership list. We also welcome Leo White's increasing contribution to maintenance tasks.

Our admiration and gratitude are extended to good-humoured Fergus Fricke for his persistence in engaging the support of Telstra and Leichhardt Council in his heroic battle to relieve the community of the visual blight of the much-loathed Balmain Telephone Exchange. Bravo Ferg!

Exhibition highlights included the National Trust Heritage Festival display, *Amazing Stories* and the Tea Exposition, a delightful occasion which raised \$3000 for local group, Bridge for Asylum Seekers. Guest speaker, Liz Gemmell, a talented local artist and exhibitor, moved the audience deeply with her reflections on her own family's



President Jane Ward, Secretary Helen Carter, Kathleen Hamer, Ross MacKenzie, Carolyn Allen, Vice President Diana Garder, Ann Bastock, Rita Ellis, Treasurer John Symonds
Absent: Leo White, Christina Ritchie, June Lunsman
A special welcome to Helen who has taken on the role of secretary, the position has been vacant for the past year.

refugee experience. Special thanks go to Di and Robert Osmond and June Lunsman for the success of that event.

Kathleen, Di and Rita ran a successful stall at Christmas in July and I officiated at Back to Balmain Day in windy, but dry weather, unlike the previous year! I am constantly amazed at how many people have family connections with Balmain and its history. We strongly encourage people to make permanent records of their stories and to offer memorabilia for archiving.

Our most recent function, Eat History was a roaring success, starting with drinks and nibbles at the Watch House and moving on to a delicious dinner at Finola's. The company was great and there was much conversation and hilarity. My favourite memory is of June dressed in black and white as a 1960's Rock and Roller. Totally cute.

Another happy and welcome occasion was the official unveiling by Gabrielle Kibble of the memorial plaque at Mort Bay, commemorating the listing of the whole site on the State Heritage Register, the culmination of years of lobbying by residents. We thank Marine Archeologist Sarah Ward, for the nomination and we all thought how happy Issy Wyner and Nick Origlass would have been with this landmark event in safeguarding their and our maritime heritage.

The Balmain Association participated in the community's successful opposition to Leichhardt

Council's attempted re-classification of Weston Street, East Balmain from Community Land to Operational, and recently we endorsed the Birchgrove Precinct's call for an 'all precincts' review of traffic calming measures, their appropriateness and effectiveness. Another busy year lies ahead.

I thank, as always, the wonderful work of the Committee, Office Bearers, the newsletter team, Bulletin contributors and website managers. Special thanks to our new auditor, Colin Bloomfield, and best wishes to his predecessor, Tim Potter.

Thank you all.

Vale Val Moss

Val Moss passed away on Sunday, 13 November 2011 after an illness over the past two months. She was a long time member of the Balmain Association and was involved in many issues related to the suburb particularly through the precincts. Val will be missed by all in our local community.

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BALMAIN TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - OPPORTUNITY FOR A NEW CIVIC SQUARE?

In the March 2011 edition of The Peninsula Observer there was a report on the most recent efforts to change the front of the Balmain Telephone Exchange. Information was given on the history of the site but there was little progress to report on concrete proposals. The situation has developed and although there is no imminent risk/satisfaction of demolition work at the exchange there have been developments. Before describing these a little more history may be of interest.

The first telephone exchange at the Sydney GPO started operating in 1884 with 10 subscribers. Among the early users was Mort's Dock, which at the time, was the Sydney exchange's most long-distance customer. Although the first automatic telephone exchange in NSW was demonstrated at the GPO in 1910 the first operating one was at Balmain. The gabled roofed two-storey exchange was built at a cost of £1150 and was opened on 14 July 1914. What is perhaps more interesting historically is that the first automatic exchange was in Balmain, the industrial and union heartland of Australia and the cradle of the ALP. There do not appear to have been any protests about the displacement of telephonists but then they were women and were replaced by technicians to maintain the exchange. By the time the existing exchange was built in 1957 there were about 15 technicians based at the Balmain exchange. There are now none based there and what telephone equipment remains takes up far less space than the "crossbar" equipment that the building was originally designed to house.

Since March there have been ongoing discussions with Telstra's South Western Metropolitan Area Manager. A report was prepared by Telstra on the feasibility of two demolition options; a 7 metre and a 12 metre demolition of the building from the present facade. These were both found to be feasible but at a cost, approximately \$1.5 and \$3 million respectively. Fortunately, thanks to local residents, Martin Waters (Arben Management), Geoff Bonus (Bonus Architects Pty Ltd), David Liddle (photographer) Michael Ewing (planner), Ruth Downes (designer) and Kathleen Hamey and Ross MacKenzie (Balmain Association) who have freely given of their time, a cost estimate of about one third of Telstra's estimate seems to be closer to reality. However this is still a lot of money for a small but very significant space.

Telstra has stated that it wishes maintain ownership of the land but is prepared to lease the open space created

by the demolition to Leichhardt Council. The lease would be for 20 years and be at a peppercorn rental, but there is a big "but". At this stage Telstra is saying that they would not bare any of the cost of the demolition and the creation of a public plaza, despite an \$18.5 billion profit last financial year and have negotiated an \$11 billion deal with the Commonwealth Government for the purchase of the obsolete copper network for the NBN. While Telstra has a responsibility to its shareholders they also have employee and societal responsibilities. We are offering Telstra the chance to help their shareholders and employees by creating such a good impression with their social conscience in removing a Balmain eyesore that people may also flock to open accounts with Telstra as well as help Telstra dispose of some of their profits. We also think it would be a cheaper business promotion than the millions of dollars spent each year on sporting facilities and club sponsorships.

A presentation on the BTE was made to Leichhardt Council's Heritage Advisory Committee and the concept was enthusiastically supported. The

mayor, Rochelle Porteous, organized a meeting of interested parties and council staff on October 19th where some of the issues were discussed and a plan of action suggested. It was agreed that a firmer demolition and design options should be prepared in time for the matter to be considered by Council in February 2012.

I leave the final comment to Bruce Petty who manages to say it all so well and so succinctly.

Fergus Fricke



PLANNING MATTERS – Christina Ritchie

•The Mort Bay Park Community garden proposal has been on public exhibition and received general support at a public meeting in October. The proposed Community Garden will be constructed as an organic produce garden in raised beds within the site at the rear of the Child Care centre and will be open to the public at all times. Seating is expected to be provided and nearby schools have expressed interest in the educational aspects of the garden. It is hoped the garden will be successful and become an attractive asset for our area.

•Sydney Ports Corporation, in defiance of recommendations by the Barangaroo Review Panel set up by the O'Farrell Government, intends to proceed with the construction of a Cruise Ship Terminal and Corporate Events Centre on the Balmain Peninsula at White Bay. The proposed Terminal would render the Bays Precinct Taskforce planning process irrelevant. It would effectively wipe out any chance of public open space or public amenity on the White Bay foreshore and create major traffic and noise problems for the

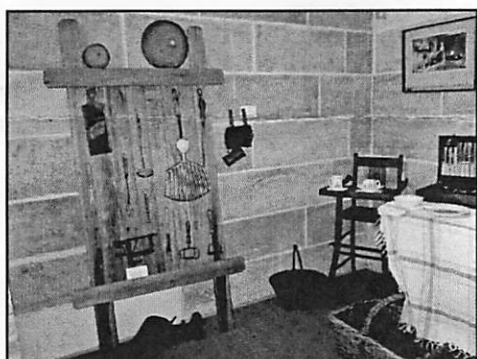
area. A large public meeting in October overwhelmingly objected to the Terminal at White Bay. If the O'Farrell Government does nothing to stop this proposal it is effectively rubber-stamping a Part 3A approval by the previous government that the current Premier and Planning Minister publicly opposed.

•The proposal for redevelopment of the Nutrimerics site in Elliott St has been on exhibition through November. The proposal includes residential and commercial office and retail buildings, up to 5 storeys. With the Anka and 'Rozelle Village P/L' developments looming, the area may see its amenity and roads stretched beyond reasonable limits. Protection of our treasured 'Village' ambience, attractive historical streetscape and valuable Heritage needs consideration at this time.

•The much-despised Telstra building on the corner of Montague and Darling Sts, Balmain was discussed at the recent Heritage committee meeting. See above.

EAT HISTORY IN BALMAIN - SEPTEMBER 2011

EAT History was the theme for the NSW Hhistory Council celebration in September. The Balmain Association's exhibition "A slice of Eat History in Balmain", included photographs from our archives, menus, cook books, bottles, crockery display on a kitchen cabinet and an afternoon tea setting featuring a hand embroidered cloth and serviettes. The large cell at back of the Watch House was set up as a nineteenth century kitchen including an iron urn with tap that would sit on a fuel stove for constant hot water. Many items



A corner in the kitchen with its array of old utensils

delighted the visitors and had them guessing to their use in the kitchen. One of the smaller cells held an inmate who slept on his straw pallet for the duration of the exhibition.

Twenty visitors squeezed seated in the Charge room for the Pease Porridge Hot Talk by Elizabeth Roberts on Saturday 17th September. Elizabeth spoke of the Convicts & Military Rations and Colonial produce of the 1820 – 1830s. We were given a taste of the Pease Porridge made from yellow split peas, a staple diet for convicts.

The highlight of Eat History was the dinner held on Saturday 10th September: Hors d'oeuvres of the 1970s, devils on horseback, smoked oysters, and delectable's of cheese, pineapple and pickled onion on tooth picks set in an orange, etc at Watch House, dinner of rabbit terrine and lamb stew at Finola's Restaurant where the recipe place-mats



BA members admire the hors d'oeuvres before tucking in

were quickly souvenired. Then back to the Watch House for an array of desserts 'to die for'.

Many members of the Balmain Association and the committee were generous with their assistance with articles for the exhibition and the fun food for the dinner. Thank You All. A special thanks to Janine and Ken Oates who lent many of their kitchen utensil collection.

THE CHRISTMAS TRADITION

As part of the history of EATING, Dave Pollard wrote about his experiences during the 1940s and as Christmas is approaching here is his experience of Christmas Day back then.

Chickens, or "chooks" as they were then generally known, were a bit of a luxury back in the forties, and usually reserved for such special occasions as Christmas dinners (though paradoxically, pound for pound, chicken is probably one of the cheapest forms of animal protein available here today). Like the roast "dinners" served on a Sunday, Christmas dinner was always actually served at lunchtime on Christmas Day. And, as with the Sunday roast lamb, these chooks, which were usually filled with seasoned "stuffing", were always roasted together with potatoes and pumpkin, and served with hot gravy and boiled peas - regardless of the prevailing temperature conditions, which often reached well over 100 degrees Fahrenheit (or more than 40 degrees Celsius on the new-fangled scale) in Sydney at that time of the year. And this hot main Christmas dinner chicken course was also sometimes accompanied by some hot baked ham.

Christmas "pudding" was always a

real pudding, in the form of a home-made dried fruit or "plum" pudding, and was also always served piping hot, in fact usually carried to the table flaming with brandy, where it was eaten together with our Mum's traditional "hard" brandy sauce and boiled custard. The Christmas pudding always contained a number of silver coins embedded within it, including threepenny bits (then known colloquially as "trays"), sixpences ("zacs") and shillings ("deeners"), and these were of course greatly appreciated by us kids if we were lucky enough to find one in our serve. "Afters" would usually comprise home-made mince pies and rich Christmas fruit cake, accompanied by some candied fruits, raisins and nuts.

On Christmas Day the parents might also have a beer or two (maybe a bottle of Resch's Dinner Ale, or "DA" as it was known) and a sherry or two before dinner, and then a port or a brandy (-all being Australian made) after; and the kids would have lemonade or home-made ginger beer. And all having respectfully listened to the King's message on the radio in the morning before lunch, at this - well lubricated after the heavy

midday meal - afternoon stage of the proceedings, our Dad, although a committed heathen, would always present us with his Christmas speech about the real meaning of the Jesus message, etc. - an honourable tradition that we also persevere with to this day. And soon after that, all of us would fall asleep around the house in the late afternoon due to excessive overeating, and often also acute heat exhaustion.

In retrospect, apart from substituting a turkey for the chicken, this basic English style Christmas dinner has not changed much at all in our family up to this day, even though the temperature conditions at this time of year often still remain much the same.

David Pollard



Christmas Day in the bush c. early 1930s



What's on at the Watch House

www.balmainassociation.org.au

FEBRUARY

Saturday 4 and Sunday 5, 10am to 4pm

Sacred Geoms

"Sacred Geoms" is a collaboration between Oya Demirbilek and Phillippa Carnemolla. These two Industrial Designers have explored the universal influence of geometry on generations of philosophical thought and religious culture and present a unique selection of both hand crafted and computer generated jewellery and sculpture. Oya's work has been inspired by the geometric patterns of Iznik and 13th-century Seljuk glazed ceramic mosaics - her pieces lovingly crafted with glass bugle beads, silver beads, glass marbles and crystals. Phillippa works with etched copper, silver and gold to developing a selection of sculpture, amulets and earrings inspired by the Sacred Geometry of the Universe - the essence of Nature, the Bees, and the precision and harmonics of our Plant Life.

Saturday 11, 10am to 6pm and Sunday 12, 10am to 4pm

The Humanisation of Sharle

Libby Knight

Opening Friday 10 at 6pm all welcome

Saturday 18, Sunday 19 and Saturday 25, Sunday 26 10am to 5pm

"LLOYD REES HATCHLINGS EXHIBITION"

Two architects and lifelong friends who learnt to paint and draw from Lloyd Rees and Roland Wakelin in their first year of architecture some 50 years ago are having a joint exhibition of their work.

Opening Friday 17 at 6.00 to 8pm.

MARCH

Saturday 3 and Sunday 4, 10am to 4pm

"Balmain and Beyond"

The Balmain Peninsula Park Painters are holding their 8th annual exhibition "Balmain and Beyond", which will feature well-known local scenes as well as a variety of other subjects. The artists paint regularly outdoors in the Balmain area, and members of the group also paint while travelling overseas and within Australia. They have been very successful in their annual public exhibitions. Opening Friday 2, 5.30 to 8pm. Please come and join us for nibbles and drinks on the opening night

Saturday 10, Sunday 11 10am to 4pm

Lysis

An exhibition of prints and mixed media works by Margaret Fitzgerald, Jenni May and Peri Tobias

Opening: Friday 9, 6 - 8pm All welcome

Saturday 17 and Sunday 18, 10am to 4.30pm

"OKAPI GROUP"

Okapi artists return to the Watch House to present their recent work including paintings, prints and sculpture. All works will be for sale.

Opening Friday 16, 6-8pm All Welcome

Saturday 24 and Sunday 25

Annemarie Murand

Friday 30, Saturday 31 and Sunday 1 April 10am to 6pm

Emerge

An exhibition of works from Students of Balmain Art Workshops with Gabrielle Jones Day and Evening painting students (Beginners to Advanced); classes at St John's Church, Birchgrove.

Opening Friday 30 6-8pm All welcome

Further details Gabrielle Jones www.gabriellejones.com.au/workshops or ph: 0410622264

STORIES IN STONE - Kathleen Hamey.

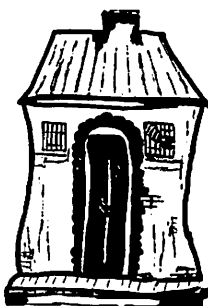
• BALMAIN CEMETERY REVISITED

Congratulations to June Dawson and Lorraine Greve, members of the Central Coast Family History Soc., for having completed a research over many years of the Balmain Cemetery burial register. Their dedicated work has been released on a DVD and consists of 1,900 pages that have the names of the 10,608 buried at the Balmain Cemetery between 1868 and the closure in 1912. The register of course was by month and year but now easy access by the names alphabetically. Each name has been checked for an obituary and included giving much more family history information.

Cost \$48 posted. Contact: orders@centralcoastfhs.org.au

• GRAVE CONCERNS

The Balmain Association's 1999 publication Balmain Cemetery/Grave Concerns contains the research into where some of the remaining memorials were relocated and photos of demolished memorials. The site of the Balmain Cemetery today is Pioneer Park, in Norton Street, Leichhardt where there is a plaque in the Rose garden. Pioneer Park still reveals its past from time to time with fragments of memorial stones that were used from the demolition to level the area for the park and recently a complete memorial for William Burton, who died at Darlinghurst in 1876, was uncovered and is now held in storage. \$12.50 posted. Micro fiche copies of the register \$12. PO Box 57, Balmain 2041.



FANCY AN INTIMATE WINE BAR IN AN UNUSUAL SETTING?

A DRINK IN A STONE CELL?

WALK IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DRUNKS OF LONG AGO?

Come and join us at the Balmain Watch House – the first Police Lockup in Balmain – where the walls could tell some stories!! and if you have a few too many you may be obliged to stay over night, in a cell of course.

**Cocktails at the Watch House
Friday 9 December from 6 pm**

Members \$10 Non-Members \$15

RSVP 5 December

June 9810 6885 Kathleen 9810 4954 Di 0402220993



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

STOP PRESS

The formal handover of the Callan Park Master Plan to the NSW Minister of Planning, Mr Brad Hazzard, took place in Parliament House on Friday 11 November before an enthusiastic gallery of about 40 residents. The Minister promised that the government would give serious consideration to the plan and work through its provisions with Leichhardt Council.