

The Peninsula OBSERVER

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DEBBY NICHOLLS OAM

On January 26th it was announced that Debby Nicholls had been awarded a Medal of Order of Australia for service to the community.



The following information is based in part on Debby's OAM citation, with explanatory remarks by Debby about Balmain for Refugees and Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation, as well as information updated since the citation was first written.

Debby Nicholls was born in the United States, but lived with her family in Turkey from 1931-34 and again from 1946-47. Back in USA she took an Arts degree in Ohio (1947-51), majoring in political science as well as a secretarial course. Her working life began as a US federal public servant, first in the United States Information Service (USIS) and in Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines. It was these formative travel and career experiences that shaped her openness to others, empathy for individuals from diverse cultures and her lifelong interests in political and social justice issues.

While working in Iceland for USIS in 1955 Debby met her husband, a Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Navy. She completed a Diploma of Education at the University of Singapore and later taught at the Taipei American School in Taiwan. In 1969 the family moved to Australia, and Debby taught English and History at high in schools in the Australian Capital Territory. In 1980 Debby moved to Sydney. She joined the Balmain Association's management committee in 1984, and proceeded to serve occasionally as Secretary, then occasionally as Treasurer and Watch House Conservator (1986-89); and finally President (1990). As a further part of this involvement, she compiled the publication *Around Balmain* (1986) and, with Bonnie Davidson and Kathleen Hamey, co-authored

the book *Called to the Bar: 150 Years of Pubs in Balmain and Rozelle* (1991). She joined Balmain Probud the year after it was formed in 1995 and has served as its Treasurer and President.

Debby was involved with Community Aid Abroad (CAA, now Oxfam Australia) and took on several major voluntary roles. From 1992 to 2002 she co-ordinated On the Day Volunteers for the group's annual major fundraiser, first for the Walk Against Want held in the Sydney CBD attended by thousands of people, and then the Parramatta Walk. CAA had previously merged with Freedom From Hunger (FFH) and after that, Debby co-ordinated the FFH door-knock in Balmain and other areas until 2002 when the Appeal was discontinued. As well she did some general administration and reception work in the CAA office.

Debby has been a parishioner at the Balmain Uniting Church for many years, is currently a member of the Church Council and also does some lay preaching from time to time.

Debby has a long-standing interest in social justice which she manifests through her deep involvement with several groups and causes

However, Debby's contribution to assisting refugees has been the most significant. In 2002, Debby first visited the Villawood Detention Centre as part of the Balmain for Refugees Group (BFRG) which was founded after the Tampa Crisis in 2001 by the Balmain Uniting Church, but now has participation by individuals, including pro bono lawyers and medical/psychiatric practitioners in the broader community. In 2003, she also became a founding member of the board of Bridge for Asylum which provides financial assistance to asylum seekers who are in danger of their lives if they return to their home countries, and are living in the community without work rights or access to Medicare. Her particular area of expertise has been in assessment of individuals who have applied for assistance. As part of her refugee advocacy with BFR, Debby visited the Villawood Detention Centre at least once a week. During these visits she became aware of individuals who required assistance, especially by providing

a supporting presence at the Refugee Review Tribunal, or, if they had been refused by the RRT, finding pro bono legal assistance for appeals on grounds of judicial error to the Federal Magistrates Court. When such appeals were unsuccessful, and if Balmain for Refugees agreed that the individual's life or liberty was threatened in his or her own country, she would write submissions to the Minister asking for Ministerial intervention in the case, researching and assessing claims and, on some occasions, meeting with the Minister's staff.

After 10 years, during which she believes that she herself has been able to assist about 50 individuals in obtaining protection visas, she has decided that she can take no new cases, but still has one case pending, and continues to serve on BFR and BASF management committees, as well as doing advisory work when required.

The Balmain Association has provided valuable assistance to both BFR and BASF, providing them with space for two very successful exhibitions of Refugee art work and donating funds from other exhibitions to the organizations, most recently the Association's very successful Tea Exposition. In conclusion the citation states:

Debby Nicholls was herself born overseas and came to Australia in the middle years of her life. Here she has, in turn, assisted others seeking to migrate but whose journeys to this country have not been made in circumstances as safe or easy as her own. She has parlayed early experiences of travel and cross-cultural exposure into a concern for others – be they resident in faraway countries or recently arrived in our own – and, through her efforts, reminds us of both the importance of openness to the world and the enormous positive impact that migrants can have in their new homelands. I commend her to you as worthy of the recognition bestowed by an Order of Australia.

"I accept the award on behalf of all refugee advocates who work so hard for people who are often in dangerous, difficult circumstances," Debby said.

From the citation, with our thanks, to Michelle Imison BA (Hons) MIPH JP, PhD candidate (School of Public Health, University of Sydney) Board member, Oxfam Australia Convenor, Special Projects Committee, International Federation of University Women.

Constable George William Poole (1872–1964)

by Edward Duyker, Australian Catholic University/University of Sydney

George William Poole, who was stationed at the Balmain Watch House for nearly twenty years, was born in Wellington, New South Wales, on 11 May 1872. He was the son of John Poole (between 1890 and 1892, Mayor of Wellington)¹ and his wife Agnes. When he reached adulthood, George Poole was of solid build, just over 5 feet 10 inches (178 cm) tall, and ‘twelve stone’ (76 kilograms) in weight. His eyes were grey and he had dark brown hair and a ‘sallow’ complexion. He also had a slight hair-lip and at some stage sustained an injury to his nose.²

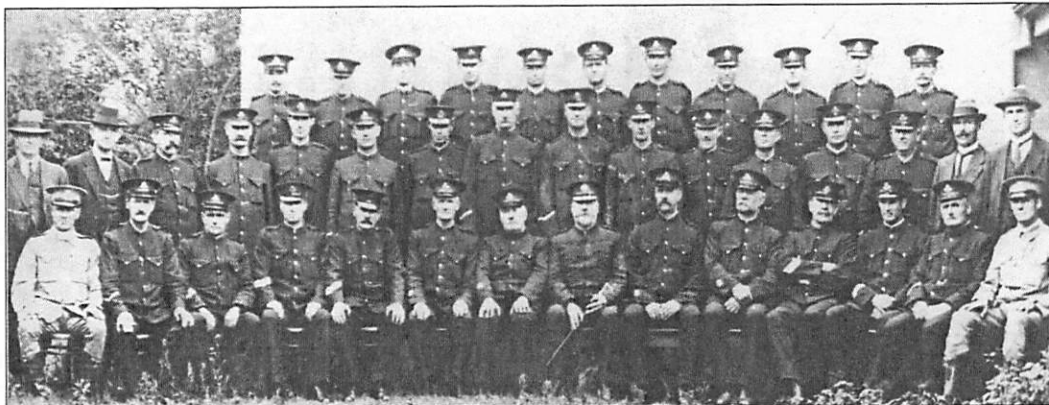
By 1890 George Poole appears to have moved to Sydney. There he married Elizabeth Trevillian in the suburb of Waterloo. In the same year his daughter Lilian was born in Redfern. Poole’s initial employment was as a road contractor, but after the Boer War began, he was part of the second contingent of the 1st New South Wales Mounted Rifles—men recruited because they were ‘good shots and good riders’—which sailed for Cape Town on the *Southern Cross* on 17 January 1900. A month later, Private George Poole (service number 95) arrived in South Africa, along with 20 officers, 385 other ranks and 404 horses divided into three squadrons. In March 1900 Poole’s regiment saw action in the Orange Free State, the Transvaal and the western Cape Colony as part of Le Gallais’ brigade. Poole appears to have taken part in the march to Bloemfontein and the advance on Kroonstadt and Pretoria. We are particularly fortunate to have one of his letters which offers important testimony on the conditions at Enslin. Poole wrote:

‘We get one loaf of bread a day, a one-pound loaf, hard, tough and nearly black, one pint of coffee or tea for breakfast; one pint of soup for dinner, with a bit of meat in it; and for tea the same as for breakfast. Occasionally we get two tins of jam for 11 men—there are 11 of us in a tent. The water is a bit scarce, one well for about 1,500 men to draw from, and it is hard to get a decent wash. About once a week we get a bath. There are three or four round holes dug in the ground. A great waterproof sheet is spread over them. About six or seven men get into them, and some of the men carry water and throw it over the bathers. I forgot to mention that sometimes (about half time) we are on bully beef and biscuit rations, that is one

pound of tinned meat and one pound of biscuits a day. If you soak them all day the biscuits won’t get soft’.³

The 1st New South Wales Mounted Rifles suffered 10 killed or died of wounds as a result of engagements with the Boer forces; 13 others died from disease. Although the regiment served in the Boer War until the end of March 1901, Private Poole was one of numerous

built the first aluminium-bodied trucks, the first wheat augres and the first pad-mounted transformers exported from Australia. All his life, William Glenn Wade remembered the crucial inspiration of Poole’s informal Balmain youth club meetings in the Watch House.⁶ George Poole retired from the New South Wales Police on 31 July 1931. He died in Waterloo on 26 March 1964.⁷



The 41 members of Balmain Police Station in 1922 including motor cyclists on the extreme left and right. George Poole is most likely included but not identified.

sick cases who were invalided home early, arriving in Australia on 15 December 1900.⁴

Poole had left Australia when it comprised separate British colonies. He returned in time to witness Federation. Five months later, on 23 May 1901, with his health recovered, he became a probationary New South Wales police constable. Perhaps he had had enough of mounted service, for he served on foot in the metropolitan district. On 1 June 1902 he was promoted to ordinary constable and in 1906 he was sent to the Balmain Watch House. On New Year’s Day 1910 Poole was promoted to constable 1st class. His police career was marred by very minor blemishes. In November 1902 he was fined half a day’s pay for being 35 minutes late when reporting off duty at 3.00 am. In January 1906 he was reprimanded and cautioned for not attending to a case at the Lunacy Court!⁵

George Poole was a popular figure in Balmain and is remembered for organising activities for boys in the disused cells of the Balmain Watch House. These included teaching them how to construct crystal radio sets. One of these boys was William Glenn Wade (1911–1983) who later became an electrician, wired ships for the Royal Australian Navy during World War II and eventually became managing director of Peters Brothers Wade and Allison Pty Ltd (later Australian Power and Distribution Industries Inc.), which

¹ Gass, C. & Hiatt, J., *Pictorial history of Wellington N.S.W.*, Wellington Historical Society, 2003, p. 148.

² George William Poole, Police Service Card, State Records Authority, New South Wales, AK 724.

³ Quoted by Wallace, R. L., *The Australians at the Boer War*, The Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, p. 81.

⁴ Australian War Memorial, Boer War Nominal Roll/ Murray, P. L., *Official records of the Australian contingents to the war in South Africa 1899–1902*, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1911.

⁵ George William Poole, Police Service Card, loc. cit.

⁶ Duyker, E., ‘William Glenn Wade (1911–1983): A Biographical Memoir’, *Sutherland Shire Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 10, May 1995, pp. 209–213.

⁷ George William Poole, Police Service Card, loc. cit.

Memories. . . .

Seeking information and memories of my family: Norm (often known as Normie) WHEWAY, his siblings (Beverley, Lorraine, Douglas and Robyn), my grandparents Percy (often known as Gus) WHEWAY and Susan WHEWAY (nee BRAGG) or any other family connections to assist me with a Diploma in Family History Research with the Society of Australian Genealogists. Maybe you would be prepared to be interviewed for my thesis. Kerry Waight (nee Wheway)
whatecanihave@hotmail.com
0411 965 123 or 02 4385 7580.

LERNA, 1 BALLAST POINT ROAD, SNAILS BAY - HELEN CARTER

Recently I have been watching a series on ABC television "Who's been sleeping in my house". The houses chosen are historic rather than modern and the presenter uses photographs and other historical records to give an insight into the original family and their lifestyle from the period.

I think an ideal house for such a program would be Lerna, at 1 Ballast Point Road, Birchgrove. The grounds are presently undergoing extensive changes and the house is to be restored. As my terrace originally bordered the property in 1889 I have included an interesting amateur photograph circa 1930s looking over Wharf Road from Lerna.

In 1796 a land grant of 30 acres was made to soldier George Whitfield. This was on sold to Lieutenant John Birch who constructed Birch Grove House in about 1812 which was demolished in 1967. This area was known as Birchgrove. From the early 1970s the name Birchgrove spread to encompass a much larger area of the suburb of Balmain which was part of the grant of 550 acres made in 1800 to William Balmain the assistant surgeon on the First Fleet. The peninsula bears his name today. The Wharf Road and Ballast Point area was originally part of that grant and was later divided into 5 sections when sold from the Gilchrist estate in 1853 and portion 32 or 33, where Lerna sits today, does not reveal a dwelling. A further check of the subdivision maps of 1868 and 1880 also fails to indicate any further information..

Whilst there has been some speculation that the house may have been built in 1853 in the Village Voice article "Farewell to a house with a heart of gold" there appears to be no evidence to support that date. A visit to the State Library of New South Wales to view photographs in the Mitchell Library's small pictures file and the Holtermann photographs of August 1875 failed to reveal a house where Lerna stands.

Other information I have unearthed from the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage which has assessed the property against the State Heritage Register is found in its Statement of Significance:

"Association with Camerons of Ewinton. The surviving Camerons of Ewinton moved here in 1890. John Waught (sic) who owned this house and built it was Cameron's son-in-law. Built in 1881"

Valuable information which complements this statement can be found in the Sand's Directories. The earliest mention of Lerna in the directories was in 1880 which recorded the

resident as a Mr John Waugh, Manager, Bank of NSW in Sussex Street, Sydney and that Lerna received its house number in 1890. Prior to that year it was known as 'Lerna'. Rate books are an ideal source to find out the owners of the property but unfortunately Balmain's records held at the Library commence in 1908.

Next an on-line visit to the National Library and to their digitized newspapers – Trove – which unearthed a few more interesting facts about life at Lerna.

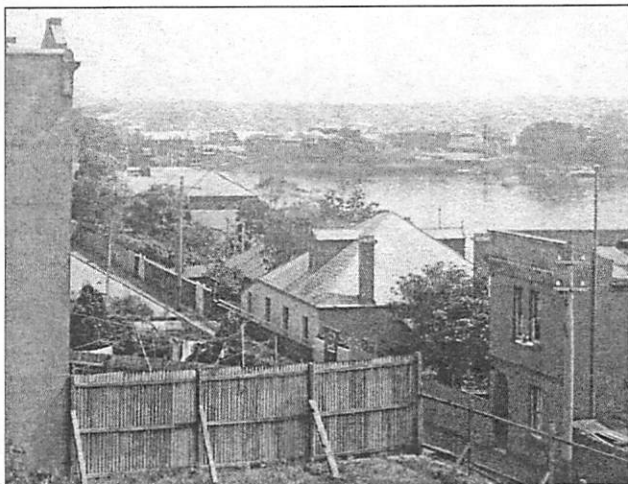
On 15 July 1882 another advertisement in the Herald adds to the picture of life at Lerna: **WANTED**, a General Servant; also Nurse-Girl. Mrs Waugh, Lerna, Snail's Bay.

On 29 January 1891 the Sydney Morning Herald (Herald) in its *Abstract of sales by auction this Day* - lists furniture, pianoforte, books, glass, china &c to be auctioned by Harris and Ackman at Lerna.

A funeral notice in the Herald of 9 September 1901 mentions the death of Elizabeth Turner wife of Samuel Briggs and mother of JHE Berry (aged 60 years).

On 29 June 1894 a Death Notice has the following information Ewen Mort Cameron, second son of the late Ewen Wallace Cameron dies at Lerna, Snail's Bay.

Later, *The Obituary of Mr John Henry Berry*, in the Herald of 6 September 1930 connects another family to Lerna. It also mentions that Mr Berry was a consulting engineer and surveyor died aged 71 on 4 September 1930. He received his training



Photograph ca 1930s looking over Wharf Road from Lerna courtesy Ian Bignall once a long time resident and advocate for Ballast Point

with John Booth whose timber yard and ship building was next to the area where Lever Bros was established. He was foreman engineer for 13 years at Mort Bay before moving to CSR and then later establishing his own business.

The notice also mentions that Mrs Berry, a Mrs S Bignell and Mrs H Mogford both of Snail's Bay survive Mr Berry.

Obviously there are numerous other pieces of information that can be added to my vignette of Lerna between then and 1963 when the MacGillycuddy family moved in. They lived there until 2009 when the current owners purchased Lerna and undoubtedly its history will continue to evolve as these new owners settle in.

If you would like to contribute to our Newsletter with the history you have researched on your house in Balmain and whose been sleeping there, please send to:

Kathleen Hamey, History Committee
Balmain Association
Email: khamey@tpg.com.au

National Trust Heritage Festival 2012, 14 – 29 April

The theme for this year is Amazing Stories & Innovation & Invention and The Balmain Association will be holding a photographic exhibition at the Watch House, through out April.

Where in Balmain was used as an open garbage dump that led to the innovative use of garbage destruction and power plant on the peninsula?

What sail and flag manufacturing firm invented the Aussie water bag that was attached to the front of cars to keep the contents cool?

Who had the vision of refrigeration and financed the research but did not live to see the success of this invention?

And more Amazing Stories will be on display at the Watch House each Saturday during April. As well as display to

celebrate the 150th anniversary of the NSW Police Force which occurs on the 1st March this year. There will be information and photos of past policemen stationed at the watch House.

Open Saturdays 7, 14, 21, 28 April

11.30 to 4pm. Entry FREE although donations to the Watch House restoration would be welcome.

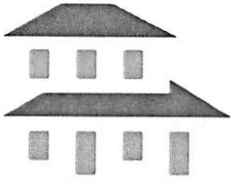
Contact: June 9810 6885. Kathleen 9818 4954.

IN THIS ISSUE

- P. 1. Debby Nicholls OAM
- P. 2. Constable George poole
- P. 3. Lerna, 1 Ballast Pt Rd

National Trust Heritage Festival
P. 4. What's on at the Watch House
Planning Matters

Insert: Proposed coach trip to Blue Mountains.



What's on at the Watch House

www.balmainassociation.org.au

MARCH

Friday 23, 12 – 7pm, Saturday 24, 11 - 4 and Sunday 25 12 – 4pm

Wish You Were Here

A selection of works of art from the artist's stockroom contribute to the exhibition, which consist of oil on Belgian Linen and canvas, as well as works on archival paper framed and floating behind glass.

Annemarie Murland is an internationally exhibiting artist and educator whose art practice explores notions of place and identity through abstract visual motifs. The experience of migration has shaped Murland's creative practice and offered a curious entry point in the development of a personal painting methodology. Weaving paint to find form is the technique she employs to create visual monologues that translate a medley of cultural experiences from both here and there, Scotland and Australia.

Drinks Saturday 24, 2-4pm All welcome

Friday 30, Saturday 31 and Sunday 1

April 10am to 6pm

Emerge

An exhibition of curated 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 Contact Gabrielle Jones www.gabriellejones.com.au/workshops or ph: 0410622264

APRIL

National Trust Heritage Festival 14 – 29

Balmain Association exhibition see p.3

MAY

Saturday 5 and Sunday 6, 10am to 5pm

Ebru "Floating Reflections on Water"

An exhibition by Marbling Artist Serpil Gurkan displaying Ebru, the old Turkish art of Paper Marbling.

Ebru is the dance of floating colours on water and the artwork is a reflection of this moment in time, using the simplicity of water, festivity of colour, harmony of the atmosphere and the perfection of nature. Ebru never loses the mysticism from the first drop to the transfer onto paper. All works of ebru are unique, they may be similar but can never be exactly the same. All materials used are natural including pigments, brushes and medium, which are carefully and patiently prepared by the artist in advance using the techniques of centuries ago. Serpil Gurkan is also a member of Cintamani Art Group.

Saturday 12 and Sunday 13, 11am to 6pm

Balmain Seascapes- Peter Handran-Smith

Peter Handran-Smith is well known to Balmain residents by his paintings of the

Dawn Fraser pool painted in the 1980s.

There are many new paintings and lino cuts of the pool in this exhibition, plus other seascapes around Balmain.

Opening: Friday 11, 6 to 8.30pm – drinks with the artist

Saturday 19 and Sunday 20, 10am to 5pm

AGILE - Shauna Whyte

AGILE is a collection of works created by Shauna. These have been influenced by a love of 1950s surface and textile designs, abandoned industrial machinery that are the remnants of Balmain's past. And still life, everyday household objects primarily made of glass.

Opening Friday 18, 6.00 to 8pm, All welcome for nibbles and wine

Saturday 26 and Sunday 27, 10am to 5pm

Impressions from Balmain to Afar

Painter Barbara Hamilton, Sculptor Carlie Lopez and Photographer Peter Baldwin will be exhibiting with friends in this exhibition. The artists have exhibited on a regular basis with different collectives and are known for their locally inspired artworks as well as for a wide interpretation of subject matter, all at affordable prices.

Opening: Friday 25, 6 to 8 pm enjoy wine and cheese with the artists.

We look forward to seeing you there on this last weekend before Winter.

Planning Matters – Christina Ritchie

- The Mort Bay Community garden with associated amendments to the Mort Bay Park Plan of Management was approved by Leichhardt Council at its Nov 2011 meeting.
- Sydney Ports is in the process of demolishing part of the large shed at White Bay in preparation for construction of a Cruise Ship Terminal and Corporate Events Centre, using part of the existing structure. The Balmain Association, along with Leichhardt Council and other community groups continue to call for a Moratorium on development at White Bay pending the outcome of the Bays Precinct Taskforce planning process to determine the future of the Bays Precinct. While Sydney Ports agrees with the widely accepted view that Barangaroo is the preferred site for any Terminal west of the Harbour Bridge and sees the need for a large permanent Terminal east of the bridge it is pushing ahead with its plan for White Bay. The Sydney Ports plan, does not offer any benefit for the local area and noise, traffic and health impacts will be felt throughout the Balmain/Rozelle peninsula and beyond.
- Vic Road clearway – The Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) department has proposed a 24hr clearway for Victoria Rd through Rozelle. Details were presented to a public meeting at the Balmain Town Hall in early Feb 2012. There was strong opposition to the proposal from community attendees, the Balmain/Rozelle Chamber of Commerce and Leichhardt Council. The Mayor stressed that the traffic modelling data on which the proposal was based was flawed. The RMS will consider the feedback from the meeting and submissions and has agreed to extend the submission period.
- The Anka (Terry St) and Nutrimetics (Elliot St) development proposals are not yet on exhibition. Further information can be obtained from the Leichhardt Council website.
- The Balmain Association has objected to proposal by Mighty High Pty Ltd to construct and operate an 'aerial adventure park' on Cockatoo Island under a 20 year lease arrangement, on the grounds of the adverse impact on the heritage of the island both cultural and built and the inappropriate use which could be set anywhere.
- NSW Planning is conducting a Planning System Review and submissions have been invited in response to the "Issues Paper" produced in Nov 2011. Details can be found online at: www.planningreview.nsw.gov.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 11:30-3 Postal: PO Box 57 Balmain 2041 **Material from this newsletter is not to be reproduced without acknowledgement**