



the peninsula Observer

newsletter of the Balmain Association

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Balmain Post Office

by John R Newland



Pic. courtesy of John R Newland

I was once resident in the Balmain Post Office during the mid-1950s.

The post and telegraph office building was a grand Victorian era structure with a clock tower and a bell which sounded each hour, day and night.

The Post Office was situated at 368 Darling Street, Balmain, near the corner of Montague Street. It has since become a heritage-listed building along with the adjoining Balmain Court House.

Balmain during those times was

quite a busy place with several industries and factories still functioning. The chief industry was the Morts Dock and Engineering Company but its closure was becoming imminent.

The Balmain colliery next to the Birchgrove Primary School was also evident but that had closed during the 1930s.

Some of the colliery structures had been removed when I was there. The colliery chimney was demolished during the early 1960s. It was supposed to fall

when dynamited onto the colliery property but instead, the chimney took a sideways lean and fell into nearby Water Street, leaving bricks scattered on the roadway. This event was later broadcasted by ABC Channel 2 evening news with views of the chimney falling on the roadway.

The electric trams ran frequently along Darling Street to the East Balmain ferry wharf and also down Rowntree Street to Birchgrove Park.

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Friends of Callan Park Historical walking tours

Hear stories of the park's curious and complex history, the conditions for patients and recollections of people who worked and lived here – and contemporary plans. Bookings are essential:

Sunday, June 19

11am to 1pm

Registration:

www.trybooking.com/BZDTY

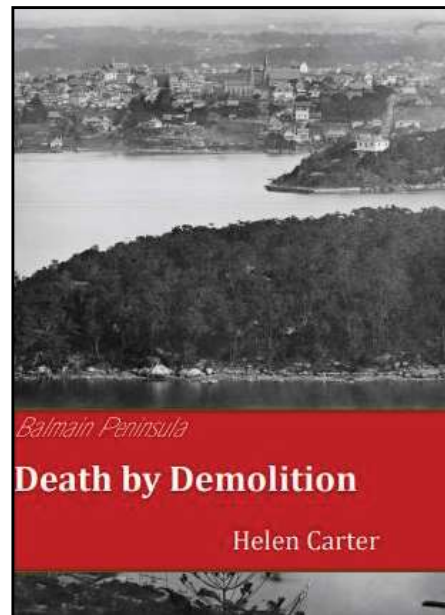
Sunday, July 10

11am to 1pm

Registration:

www.trybooking.com/BZDUC

Balmain Association Inc.



This remarkable 140 page book traces the history of demolished houses in the Balmain area (Balmain, Birchgrove and Rozelle) from its earliest house built circa 1815 to an inter-war bungalow recently demolished in November 2021.

The 49 examples, accompanied by a small history of who lived in these houses until their demise, range from a marine villa to a humble iron house. Copies of *Death by Demolition* can be pre-ordered via the Balmain Association website at:

www.balmainassociation.org.au/publications/

Cost: \$49.95.



Balmain from the air

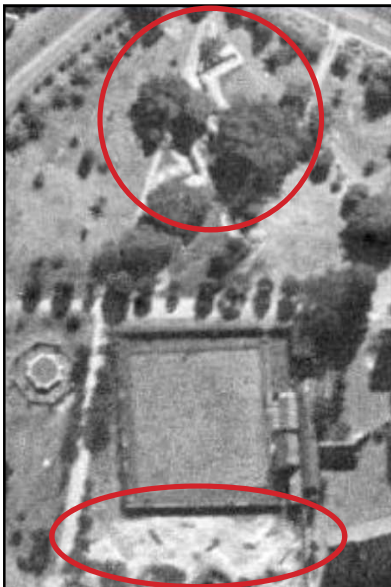
by Malcolm Garder



Pic. 1



Pic. 2



Pic. 3

Looking back over old aerial photos of Balmain there are some interesting changes to note in the landscape particularly the 1943 photos. These show the wartime waterfront industries producing fighting ships for the navy and the bomb trenches in the parks.

There are very few parked car or trees.

Photo one shows slit trenches in Ann Cashman Reserve on the Elliott Street and Beattie Street intersection. This treeless land was being held as a future public school site.

Photo two shows similar trenches opposite 'Fertility Row' (a name coined in the late 1960s and early 1970s due to the number of new Balmain residents buying into the terrace and producing children) in Grove Street, Birchgrove. The row of stone terraces had a shop on the corner and was called Gladstone Terrace.

Photo three shows Gladstone Park with trenches towards Darling Street and Balmain Public School with trenches behind the bowling club.

Photos four and five show Callan Park hospital grounds where there are still many old purpose built brick bomb shelters, constructed with solid brick walls and reinforced concrete roofs. This design was typical of the shelters built by the government in school playgrounds. The shelters were not designed to protect from a direct hit but could save lives from shrapnel strikes and falling building material. Some of these buildings have now been adapted for other uses.

Pics. one to three, courtesy of SIX Maps

Pics. four and five, courtesy of Malcolm Garder



Pic. 4



Pic. 5

Callan Park Estate Entrance Restoration

by Carolyn Allen

The NSW Government through the Greater Sydney Parklands and the Minister's Stoneworks Program has now completed external repairs and conservation of the guard house and the gates at the entry to Callan Park.

The purpose of the project was to restore the gates and repair the damaged and deteriorated guard house building to match the original. The only additional work has been the installation of (removable) bollards to prevent vehicles parking in front of the gates. This re-establishes the original views of the entrance from Balmain Road.

The first buildings on the Callan Park Estate were built in 1839 and 1842, and the most splendid Kirkbride Block was completed in 1885 as a psychiatric hospital.

The Balmain Road gates, built in 1878, provided the original entranceway for carriages and pedestrians to the Callan Park Hospital for the Insane.

The gates were originally located further east, adjacent to the original gatehouse (now a childcare centre) as shown in the photo below.

When Balmain Road was widened for trams in 1912, the gates were moved, and the boundary wall

was realigned and replaced in brick. Otherwise, the gates are predominantly intact and have been identified as being exceptionally significant.

The yellow colour of the gates was determined by paint scrape, photo analysis and the original pairing with the gate lodge. The conserved lanterns have been reinstated and look magnificent.

The construction date of the guard house is unclear. The 2011 Conservation Management Plan describes the guard house as of 'moderate' significance. The State Heritage Register for the Callan



Pic. courtesy of Department of Regional NSW for and behalf of the State of NSW,
Dept of Public Works, Stonework Program



Pic. courtesy of Carolyn Allen

Park Estate does not list the guard house as an individual item.

The heritage report prepared for this project shows plans by the Government Architect for *Boundary Wall, Gates and Alterations to Existing Entrance to Callan Park Hospital for the Insane* in 1912.

The 1903 photo to the left shows a small timber building to the left of the gates but the gates were moved in 1912 and although the plan has an annotation 'Inquiry box re-set' that may refer to this building, its footprint does not align with the current building.

The 1990s plaque on the south east elevation identifies this building as the 'Balmain Beat Police Rozelle Hospital Gate House'.

The guard house that was painted for many years has been restored to its original condition with exposed brickwork.

The Friends of Callan Park,

Leichhardt Council (now Inner West Council) and the community have worked for around 30 years for the restoration of the many significant heritage buildings within Callan Park.

Until now, few have been restored. The publicised cost for this project is \$600,000 illustrating the

enormity of the task ahead but it is significant that the entrance to the Callan Park Estate has been restored to its former glory.

Friends of Callan Park are celebrating the gate restoration with a community opening on May 28 at 11am. All are welcome.

HOMES FOR THE PEOPLE.

A RESIDENCE CLOSE TO YOUR BUSINESS.

Among the manifold opportunities of acquiring land on EASY TERMS hitherto presented to the public, none have approached the system of HANCOCK & CROSS for simplicity and liberality of terms.

Grand Freehold Allotments,

in the choicest parts of Balmain and Leichhardt, may now be selected by payment of a SMALL CASH DEPOSIT of £5 and upwards, and 21 quarterly payments of £2 10s. each and upwards, being

Five and a Quarter Years' Credit with Immediate Possession.

The allotments are of good size, fronting wide streets, and steamers and buses ply to and from the city every quarter of an hour, from sunrise to midnight.

Timber &c., for building, will be supplied to the purchasers requiring same, payable by Ten Shillings weekly. Every inch of this land will be trebled in value long before payment in full by the fortunate selectors. Balmain and Leichhardt will presently be equivalent to the city, and cannot fail to enrich those whose frugality and foresight have secured lots while the opportunity lasted.

Title Guaranteed.

HANCOCK & CROSS,

Merton Estate & General Agency Offices, Beattie & Elliott streets, Balmain.

Continued from page 1

gradient. The trams in Sydney and suburbs ceased running in 1961 and were replaced by Government buses.

My father was the Divisional Engineer in the Dubbo Division of the Post Masters' General (PMG) Department since late 1947 until 1954.

The PMG Department at those times also administered both the postal and telephonic services until they were separated into separate entities in 1974 to Australia Post and Telecom Australia, respectively. Telecom Australia was later renamed Telstra and telegraphic or telegram services were also abandoned.

In 1954, my father was transferred to Sydney but accommodation in Sydney was very hard to get. Eventually, he was offered the Balmain Post Master's vacant residence, so my family moved there in 1955. I had been boarding in Sydney since 1952 to attend the School of Civil Engineering at the Sydney Technical College at Ultimo as after obtaining my Leaving Certificate at Dubbo High School in 1951 and also Dux of the school, there were no tertiary institutions available in country locations during those times to further my career. At last, I was able to come 'home' to be with my parents and siblings.

The postmaster's residence was rather spaciouly set out: the kitchen, laundry and breakfast room were on the ground floor and three large bedrooms and dining room were on the first floor. There was another room within the clock tower that had a ladder for access to the clock mechanism and bell. I often climbed up to the bell level and I once took a Kodachrome slide of Balmain and distant Birchgrove. It was not possible to get closer the edge of the tower for

a better view of Balmain as there were several large holes in the floor so I had to stand on my toes some distance away for the photo.

The steeple atop of the tower was a double pyramid shape. The main structural members were of the finest straight-grained iron bark timber (*Eucalyptus Creba*) I had ever seen that were held with by iron spikes. However, the spikes were rusted and the holes in the timber members were worn and loose. It was determined in the early 1960s that the steeple was unsafe and was therefore removed. A new pre-fabricated steeple but shortened in height was erected during the mid-1970s or early 1980s.

I rather enjoyed my stay in Balmain. It was much closer to my place of work and for my night time courses at the Sydney Technical College. My mother also enjoyed living in Balmain. She often walked down Darling Street and would chat to passers by. People were very friendly in those days.

There was a small park right on the corner of Montague and Darling Streets next to the post office building that had a concrete table and seats. The table top had a chess board cast into it and a few of the elderly gentlemen of Balmain would gather there to play draughts.

But our stay in Balmain was not to last. My fiancée and I were married in October 1956 as we had obtained a house for £3,000 in North Lakemba, later renamed to Greenacre. It was the then custom to move to the outer suburbs. My father decided that the only permanent accommodation was to build a house at Beecroft. That was the end of my association with Balmain for the next 17 years when my wife passed away with leukaemia.

Later I sold that house and came to live in Birchgrove where I have since been for almost 50 years.

It was during the mid to late 1960s that the PMG Department instituted a program of building more automatic telephone exchanges to cater for the greater public demand for home and office telephones. I was passing along the desk of an architect friend where I saw plans of the Balmain Post Office. "Hey", I said, "I used to live there", whereupon we had a chat. The new Balmain Telephone Exchange was eventually erected on the corner site which also occupied that small park.

Some people did not like the telephone exchange building but my architect friend later received a commendation from the Royal Australian Institute of Architects for the blending of the new with the old. The exchange served the public for the next several years.

Telephone services in Sydney during the 1950s were automatic but most country services were still manually operated, later to become automatic.

The early Sydney phone numbers were preceded with two alphabetical letters followed by four numerical digits. The letters for most Balmain phone numbers was WA. With the growth of automatic services, the WA was substituted by 82. With further growth, this became 810 and with still further growth, this became 9810.

People can now dial directly to other towns and cities in Australia with Subscriber Trunk Dialling and also internationally with Subscriber International Dialling.

What's on at the Watch House

Please check the Balmain Association website www.balmainassociation.org.au for up-to-date information on art exhibitions.

Safari art

Salum and Jean Burke welcome you to take a safari through this exhibition. Salum has made his livelihood from art for a long time, selling paintings in his homeland on the streets of Tanzania.

Bold sunset and rasta-colours convey energy and warmth. Both Salum and Jean's artworks on canvas and paper evoke a sense of place and connection to East Africa, in stories of village life and wild animals of the savannah.

Jean's artwork showcases printmaking methods; lino and woodcuts, collagraphs, etchings and artist books, with a particular focus on trees. Each artist has exhibited locally and interstate, including in Parliament House, Canberra. Their art is available in a variety of prices, including unframed work and cards.

www.instagram.com/jeanburke76/

Opens Friday, June 17, 5pm to 8pm. All welcome.

Saturday, June 18 and Sunday, June 19, 10am to 4pm.



Brush with bay

Brush with bay is a collection of works painted in acrylic on canvas, by local artist Heather Hunt and David H. Herbert, the resident artist at Heather's Studio in Boudi National Park. Their artworks although very different in style are all inspired by their lifestyles living by the water in Balmain and NSW's Central Coast. The everchanging landscape, waters-ways, and flora and fauna they co exists and live alongside are all reflected in their artwork.

Opens Friday, June 24, 6pm to 9pm. All welcome.

Saturday, June 25 and Sunday, June 26, 10am to 5pm.

hART of Hearts

An exhibition of work from members of the hART stART art studio, 'hART of Hearts' is the 25th annual exhibition from Balmain hART stART art studio at the Watchhouse. Audiences will be treated with expressive artworks, rich in exploration of colour and texture. This exhibition is for people who enjoy paintings in modernist styles with strong emphasis on individual expression. Through modernist methods, all members work in a confident personal style in an atmosphere of warm friendly support.

Open Saturday, July 9, 12pm to 4pm.

Saturday, July 9, 10am to 4.30pm and Sunday, July 10, 10am to 4pm.



What's on at the Watch House

Over to you

You are invited to join Richard Sercombe some time over the weekend at the latest exhibition of his artwork. Richard Sercombe produces acrylic and mixed media artworks of landscapes and 'florally inspired works', in a variety of styles and sizes. Enjoy some refreshments as you view the new exhibition, and, possibly take advantage of the reduced prices on the popular ex-exhibition stock. Richard is now represented in private collections around the globe, in the United States, Europe and Asia, as well as throughout Australia. Opens Friday, July 22 at 7.30pm. Saturday, July 23 and Sunday, July 24, 10am to 6pm.



Roll over exhibition

Due to Covid restrictions this exhibition was postponed to 2022. Open Studio Printmakers is a lively group of artists who come together, to explore and expand the enduring practice of printmaking, resulting in distinctive and contemporary works on paper. Lino and wood cuts, screen prints, solar prints and etchings are some of the methods used to create this exciting exhibition. The group regards these exhibitions as an opportunity to showcase the time honoured medium of printmaking to the wider community. Open Saturday, August 8, 2pm to 4pm. All welcome. Saturday, August 6 and Sunday, August 7 and Saturday, August 13 and Sunday, August 14, 10am to 4.30 pm.



Land, sea and sky

A vibrant exhibition by local artist, Amelia Horvath, showing works created at her nearby Balmain studio. This collection includes a number of works completed during the lockdown period since early 2020 and explores landscapes and seascapes that were beyond reach during this time – combining the real, the imagined and the remembered.

Instagram: @ameliahorvath

Saturday, August 20 and Sunday, August 21, 11am to 3pm.

Magic of mosaic and art

Saturday, August 27 and Sunday, August 28, 10am to 4pm.

For further details refer to *The Peninsula Observer*, June 2021.

The Balmain Association Inc. representing Balmain, Birchgrove and Rozelle

Since 1965 we aimed to:

- Improve the living, working and recreational amenities of our area
- maintain all features having natural, architectural and or historical value of the area and keep a permanent collection of historical interest
- seek the cooperation of everyone concerned in the realisation of the above.

Members are welcome to attend the Balmain Association meetings at 6pm on the first Wednesday of each month at the Watch House, 179 Darling Street Balmain.

The History Room at the Watch House is open every Saturday from 11:30am to 3pm and every Tuesday from 11am to 1pm.

Website: www.balmainassociation.org.au