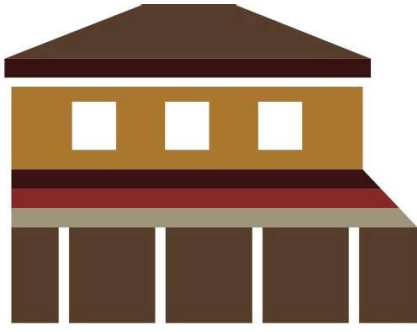




the peninsula Observer

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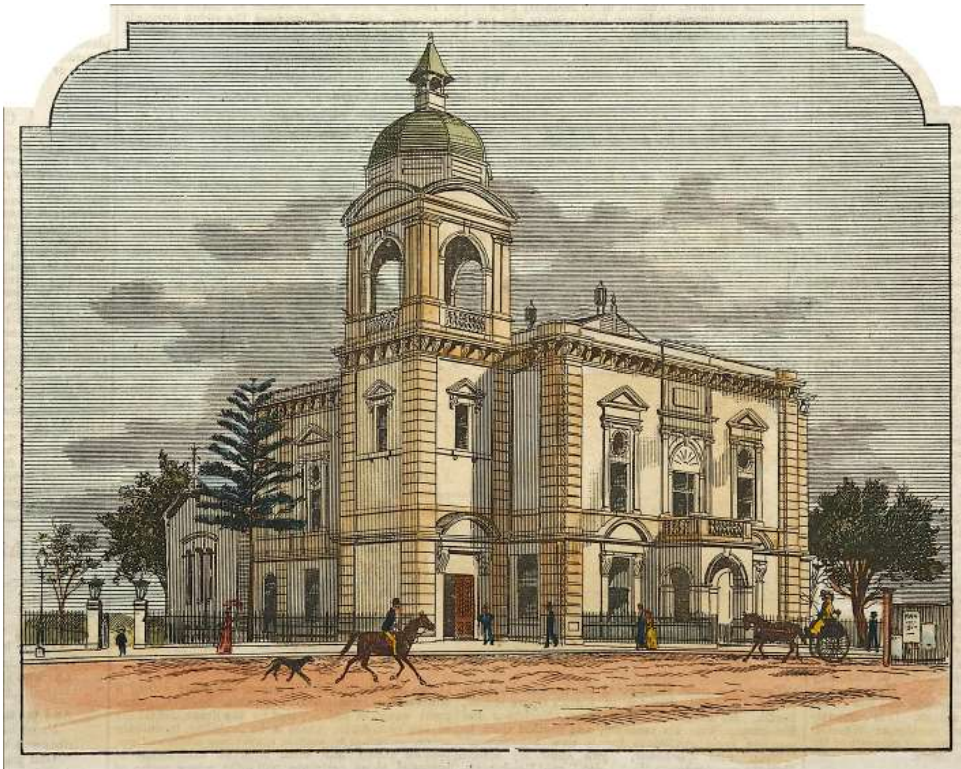
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Off with its head!

by Mark Calabretta



Local lore has it that Balmain Town Hall's cupola was dismantled during WWII as a war time safety measure. Indeed, this is true of the clock tower of the GPO in Martin Place, and possibly that was extrapolated to explain Balmain Town Hall's disfigurement. However, if so, then there is a nagging inconsistency in that the taller roof of the Balmain Post Office tower was not also dismantled.

In fact, Balmain Town Hall's cupola, seen in the image above. (A hand-tinted newspaper clipping of a drawing produced for the

opening of the Balmain Town Hall on August 25, 1888. The cupola of the Victorian Free Classical building consisted of an octagonal dome supported by an arcaded storey and topped by a lantern crowning its stairwell tower, was consigned to oblivion well before the outbreak of WWII hostilities.)

It did not survive the architect, Edward Harman Buchanan (1859 to 1943), who designed it, nor even celebrate the Town Hall's golden jubilee in 1938.

The image on page six provides the evidence that triggered this study. So just when and why was

Balmain Town Hall decapitated?

The tale begins on Sunday, July 5 1931 when the tail of a cyclone hit coastal New South Wales.

It caused widespread destruction over the next several days and was covered by newspapers across the country.

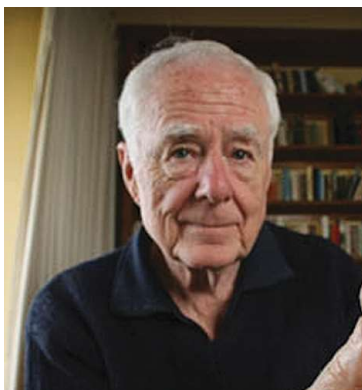
In Sydney, *The Sun* reported that 'The dome of the Balmain Town Hall, weighing several cwt., was blown off, and just missed a police car'. Curiously, it was the only Sydney newspaper to carry the story.

Continued on page 6

Vale

Dr John Power

Dr John Power was the first president of the Balmain Association that was formed in 1965. The first informal meeting was held in Sybil Masterman's house at 2 Numa Street where a number of local residents, concerned about the loss of heritage in the area met.



A formal meeting was held in November at the Balmain Town Hall and John Power was elected president.

John Power gained his first degree in Political Science at the University of Melbourne and then received a scholarship to Harvard University to study political science. With his wife, Lorraine, John lived in Harvard before accepting a position at the University of Sydney as a senior lecturer in government.

John and Lorraine came to live in Balmain in 1963, in a waterfront house in Louisa Road. They became very involved with the local residents that culminated in their participation at the very beginning of the Balmain Association.

John was the President from 1965 to 1968 and Vice President to Bob Irving in 1968. On his return to Balmain from a year long stint in England in 1972, John was offered a position in Canberra and then on to the Chair in Melbourne.

Throughout his life John always maintained interest in the Balmain Association and was keen to know that it was progressing well.

by **Diana Garder**

Apology

The last issue of *The Peninsula Observer* (September 2022) stated that Kathleen Hamey spent time in a nursing home before her death in May this year.

This was incorrect and the editor extends apologies to Glenda and Narelle Hamey and family.

BA Annual General Meeting and Christmas Party 2022

Members are invited to our 2022 Annual General Meeting
to be held at the Balmain Watch House
179 Darling Street, Balmain
on Sunday, December 11 from 2pm.

Please join us afterwards for drinks and
light refreshments at our 2022 Christmas Party.



Achievements and actions 2022

by Malcolm Garder

Telstra Park

The Association's long campaign to have the Post Office's 1960 red brick telephone exchange removed was finally completed this year with paving, seats, the erection of public art work and the repair to the façade of the original Post Office.

We must give thanks to Balmain Association member Fergus Fricke who started the campaign, also to Telstra for the land and Council for the works.

I believe this campaign deserves a nomination for the IWC Council's Heritage Awards.

Judging IWC Council's Heritage Awards

The Association submitted the nomination of a suitably qualified Association member to IWC to judge this year's prestigious IWC Council's Heritage Awards 2022. The award has been awarded annually since 1995 by Marrickville Council. The nominated member, Malcolm Garder, was selected and served on the judging panel with the Council's Heritage Planner, Niall Macken and Architect and Lecturer, Matt Devine.

Rozelle Cruise Terminal

Supporting the Balmain East residents fight to control the diesel fumes emitted from the Rozelle Cruise Terminal. The environmental impact of the burning of third world quality oil in port where the ship's funnel level is at ground level is appalling. Sydney Ports is to provide on shore power in the near future and fuel quality appears to have improved.

Heritage timber picket fence

Inner West Council proposed to replace the timber picket fence around Birchgrove Oval with a metal fence. Historic Birchgrove Oval was the first place in Australia where Rugby League was played in April 1908.

The fence was last replaced in 1980 when Association member Geoff Stevens was a Alderman, he remembers voting for the timber fence then. This time around Council ignored their own heritage advice and opted for the metal fence.

After a long battle and with photographic evidence from one of your committee members, John Symonds, and support from Independent Councillor, John Stamolis, a timber fence has been erected.



Birchgrove Oval

Illegal demolition of a heritage shop front

Balmain Darling Street has a wonderful heritage main street with many original shop fronts that are generally protected by Council.

It was brought to our attention that the shop front and use of the shop, which adjoins the popular Bertoni's, has recently changed. On a quick search of the Council's DA register there appears to be no DA for change of use or alterations to the building at 285 Darling Street.

The building prior to the recent work had a traditional shop front and entry doors to the street. The shop now opens directly to the street and is secured by a boundary-to-boundary roller door.

The prior use was children's clothing. The present use is children's sweets and lollies, cigarettes, tobacco products also possibly including vaping products.

Council is at present investigating this matter.

Watch House

It has been a big year caring for the Watch House that we lease from the National Trust.

The front verandah metal roofing has been replaced with Fielders barrel rolled corrugated iron.

The kitchen has been re-roofed and has been refurbished with new cupboards, bench top and repainted.

The eastern side retaining wall has been rebuilt. The eastern fence at the front has been renewed and the garden has been redesigned and planted out.

Val Wensor Hamey

February 17, 1923 to November 5, 2022 by June Lunsmann

Val Hamey passed away on

November 5, 2022, aged 99 - just short of his 100th birthday.

For 68 years he was husband to Kathleen, who died in May this year. He is survived by his daughters Glenda and Narelle, four grandsons and a recent great granddaughter.

He was a much valued member of our community having moved to Birchgrove in 1985.

After retiring from the EMAIL Industrial Group where he worked as an industrial engineer, he took on many volunteer roles. Most significant was his involvement with the Balmain Association being treasurer for 14 years, as well as using his desktop publishing skill to edit the *Peninsula Observer* for 17 years and assisting in the numerous publications produced by the Association.

In 1990 he instigated the incorporation of the Balmain Association to provide an incorporated body to assist the activists who were challenging the NSW State Government over its handling of the 'Five Sites' developments. This challenge resulted in saving Ballast Point that is now a widely acclaimed park. The other four sites were developed but with modification.

Val was awarded Life Membership of the Balmain Association in 2014. He and Kathleen received a State Heritage Volunteer Award in recognition of their conservation of the Balmain Watch House and its historical records.

Val was an extremely keen skier, not giving up until he was 92 and

regularly played golf.

He enjoyed music particularly jazz and loved playing the clarinet.



In retirement Val and Kathleen travelled the world but continued their volunteer activities when at home. He

volunteered once a week at the Powerhouse Museum and he and Kathleen acted as drivers for the Sydney Olympics.

In later years, Val displayed his amazing driving skill as he zipped around the suburb on his mobility scooter.

A sad loss to our community. There will be more about the huge community contribution made by Kathleen and Val early next year.

Memories

When I bought my first house at Grove Street, Birchgrove in 1965, my grandfather, Norman King, told me that he had lived in Wharf Road when he was in his teens. His father, Walter King, had rented *Trebatha*, 7 Wharf Road and the family lived there for a few years.

My grandfather told me he used to sail a small boat on Snails Bay. He had seven sisters and two of his sisters were married from that house.

He had a younger brother, Carlton, who went to England as an adult and lived there for his entire adult life with his wife, Charlotte (Lottie). After I had moved to Wharf Road in 1980, Lottie came out from England to meet some of the family and was keen to see where Carlton grew up. Fortunately I knew the owners of *Trebatha* at that time and so Lottie

was able to visit the house and get a sense of where the King family had lived.

Recently, on doing a clean-up, I came across a letter addressed to my mother from her Auntie Dee, one of my grandfather's sisters who had lived at *Trebatha*.

I thought I would share some of it with you.

"Thank you for sending the photos of... *Trebatha*, I often wished I could have had the front part of *Trebatha* taken, it was all so nice with the lovely garden on the first tier and



by Diana Garder

then down the steps to the lawn where we used to have the bars we swung on and other things and then down the steps to the lower ground where we had the baths and the part where we ran the boats up and we sure had fun down there. We used to call it down on the bottom and oh, such a lovely view, so a picture of the front would have been lovely. Of course all the homes that faced the water

entered from the back."

In answer to a question from Mum, Auntie Dee said "No I went to Nicholson Street School, we used to go in the boat".

Inner West Council Built Environment Awards

by Malcolm Garder

The Balmain Association, in an endeavour to raise its architectural and heritage role in the community, submitted my name to the Inner West Council as a possible member of the jury selection panel for the annual Marrickville Medal for the Built Environmental Awards 2022. The award has been held annually since 1995.

The award 'celebrates built conservation works that contribute to the understanding and preservation of the Inner West Council's rich cultural and architectural heritage'.

Once I was invited to be a jury member, I was given the judging criteria and a list of 14 properties with photos and descriptions of work undertaken.

The list was to be reduced to a shortlist for inspection. Two weeks later, however, an additional seven properties were added increasing the list to twenty one.

Three properties from the Balmain peninsular were included on the now expanded 12 property shortlist. These were 8 Broderick Street, Balmain; 'Ravenscourt' at 39 Wharf Road, Birchgrove and 3 James Lane, Balmain East.

On a wet Saturday morning, on September 3, we inspected the 12 properties.

The entrants were very varied from government works, commercial interiors, small cottages and a grand residence. From low budget renovations to million dollar renovations.

The award ceremony was held at Camperdown Common on Saturday, October 15.

About 60 guests attended including a number of councillors and the three judges.

The judges were Matt Devine heritage architect and University of Sydney lecturer; Niall Mackin Inner West Council team leader of heritage and urban design and myself, representing the residents and the Balmain Association.

My wife, Diana Garder, Balmain Association, Secretary and Duncan MacAuslan, Balmain Association, President also attended.

The award went to 29 Kingston Street, Haberfield.

The works included alterations and additions to a circa 1911 Haberfield cottage including construction of a brick pavilion to the rear with a glazed link and small

garden connecting to the house and reconstruction of the front fence based on historic photographs.

Three other properties received commendations. The Callan Park Gates, Balmain Road, Lilyfield were commended for conservation of sandstone gate piers, lanterns and gates to Balmain Road and guard house circa 1878.

A property at 94 Illawarra Road, Marrickville (opposite the historic former Marrickville Town Hall) was commended for the conservation and adaptive reuse of a two storey circa 1900 cornerstore. The building is now used as an architect's office.

The circa 1923 Blacket-designed former St Columb's Church at 35 to 37 Dickson Street, Newtown now a community hall used as an arts and activity centre by a non-profit community group also received a commendation for its restoration. It's great to see our council continuing its support for our local heritage.

The winner and commended properties are shown on the Inner West Council Built Environmental Awards web page.



29 Kingston Street, Haberfield

Off with its head!

Continued from page 1

Perhaps the loss would have been more widely reported, and in a less cursory manner, if the dome had been blown another few feet and crushed the police car!

No subsequent newspaper reports that mention the Town Hall cupola explicitly have been found, let alone a photo showing the cupola without its dome. To find what happened next we must consult the Balmain Municipal Council records, preserved by NSW State Archives and Records. However, these only catch a glimpse of Council dealings. Any documents referred to, such as reports, plans, attachments, etc., are long lost.

As it happened, Balmain Council met for its regular fortnightly meeting on July 7, 1931 as the gale was subsiding. By this time the dome must already have been down as the minutes succinctly record: 'The Engineer presented a special report on the condition of Dome of Town Hall which was adopted'. Invisible wheels ground slowly until August 15, 1932 when Council met to consider alternate designs for a replacement dome prepared by local architect Charles Norman Hirst (1901 to 1947). It deliberated and resolved to accept the more expensive option and to call for tenders.

Six tenders were presented and discussed on September 26, 1932, where it was revealed that Hirst had significantly underestimated the cost of reconstruction. The average price was £525 (\$54k) and £470 (\$48k). However, the builder who provided the cheapest tender, £454, for the cheaper option was prepared to reduce his tender by £70 if certain specified adornments were eliminated. The Council split between deferring action until 1933 or accepting the reduced quote.



Opening of No. 8 Division (Balmain) Police-Citizens Boys' Club on January 15, 1938. The roof of the Post Office clock tower peaks above the decapitated Town Hall. Photo: Sam Hood

Deferment won. Whatever their rationale, this decision effectively sounded the death knell for the Town Hall cupola. Its fate was sealed by the exigencies of the Great Depression.

As a heavily industrialised suburb, Balmain was particularly hard-hit by the economic downturn. Although they do not dwell on specifics, Council records attest to the plight of the workers of Balmain.

Still, in the budget estimates for 1932, long-serving Town Clerk, Alexander William Sommerville (1869 to 1943) had allowed £750 (\$77k) for 'Town Hall Dome & Alterations'. These 'Alterations' were required by the Colonial Secretary, who had deemed the main Hall to be a fire trap. Without them its license to operate was in jeopardy.

Balmain Council's real problem, though, stemmed from two sources. New State Government legislation meant that from January 1, 1932 certain classes of Crown Land were no longer rateable. For Balmain, which amongst Municipal Councils was unequally

and perhaps unfairly affected, this equated to a 13 per cent reduction in revenue. Additionally, a 20 per cent decrease in land values meant a corresponding decrease in rates.

As Council had just negotiated a loan for £65,000 (\$6.7M) for remaking its main thoroughfares, the timing of this 33 per cent crash in rate revenue was particularly unfortunate.

Thus, while there is no doubt that, early in 1932, the Council was committed to replacing the cupola's dome, it could not avoid blowing its budget. By the end of the year, the £750 allocated for 'Town Hall Dome & Alterations' appears to have been consumed totally by the Colonial Secretary's requirements. Thus when the tenders for the replacement dome were presented on September 26, 1932, it is not surprising that some of the aldermen might have balked at the cost and voted to defer.

Evidently the 'dome' in *The Sun's* report of July 1931 refers solely to the dome and lantern of the cupola, and not to the arcaded storey supporting them. The masonry of the latter may well

have suffered some damage when the structure above it was ripped off, but still it should mostly have survived intact. So what happened to it?

This is where the records become very sketchy. What is certain, though, is that the Council's financial woes went from bad to worse year by year as the Great Depression wore on. The first clue as to the cupola's fate appears on

architect Charles Hirst. However, as the Council's triennial term was ending, the project was inherited by Storey's successor, Cecil Stapleton (1891 to 1943), who was elected mayor on December 6, 1934. Stapleton pushed ahead vigorously with the plan in early 1935 but ultimately was defeated by a plebiscite that rejected the loan outright.

cupola in the period to the opening of the PCBC on January 15, 1938.

It seems that the base of the cupola must have been removed in 1936 under the mayorship of John William Victor Waite (1891 to 1960) or in 1937 under Michael Daniel Cashman (1894 to 1959). However, no direct evidence has yet been found as to precisely when or why.

Considering the significant hurdles, it faced, the cupola hardly stood a chance.

Despite Balmain Council's best intentions, the financial hardship imposed by the Great Depression made it too difficult to obtain funds for its restoration. Ultimately, the cupola fell victim to hard times, rather than war time.

The Depression ended with the outbreak of WWII and consequent rationing, with activity necessarily focussed on the war effort. Soon after victory, in 1948 Balmain Council was merged into Leichhardt Council, thus diluting Balmain Town Hall's civic importance.

The cupola slowly faded from memory as the aldermen who knew the full story faded from history. Today its fate has become an intriguing example of social amnesia.



Balmain Town Hall, circa 1928. Mentally erase the cupola (and its shadow on the Court House) to arrive at today's diminished streetscape.

Photo: Sam Hood

May 29, 1934 with a brief report in *The Labor Daily* of mayor, Gilbert Storey (1874 to 1939), lamenting 'Something desperate will have to be done, and done in the near future', as 'part of the tower, the stage and proscenium, and the main hall required reconditioning'.

Storey instigated a plan to borrow £13,000, which was to be used in part for Town Hall alterations, and again engaged the services of

It was the cupola's last gasp.

Unfortunately, just at this critical point, the General Council minute book for the period March 5, 1935 to January 17, 1939 is missing from the State Archives. Newspaper reports of Council proceedings in this period are also sketchy. Although the Works Committee and Finance Committee minutes do survive, they record little that is directly relatable to the Town Hall

This is an abridged version.

The full article may be downloaded from <https://balmainassociation.org.au/balmain-research>.

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.

Wet Paint – group exhibition

Ten local artists return to the historic Balmain Watch House to exhibit new work.

This exhibition is the fifth reiteration from a group of women artists. Each prior show has coincided with rain and navigated through the challenges of the inclement weather.

'Wet Paint', therefore, seems a fitting title.

As women juggling families and busy lives, while remaining flexible, optimistic and tenacious, the group offers a diverse collection of creative art making to the community, continually painting up a storm. And yes, the paint may still be wet!

Opening Friday, March 10, 6pm to 8pm.

Saturday, March 11 and Sunday, March 12, 9am to 5pm.



Salt

The Australian landscape is like no other; unforgiving and harsh, yet also magnetising with its breathtaking beauty.

'Salt' is an exploration by contemporary artist, Han Renshaw, of the landscapes and water systems that embody Australia.

Over the course of a few months, Han road-tripped along the eastern and western coastlines - diving, swimming, and exploring the waterways.

The variety of forms, colours and emotions experienced from this environmental immersion were further conceptualised through photographs and sketch studies.

The final result is evident in the series of dynamic abstract paintings of which 'Salt' comprises.

Opening Friday, March 17, 6pm to 8pm.

Saturday, March 18 and Sunday, March 19, 9am to 5pm.