

When and why was Balmain Town Hall decapitated?

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1 Introduction

Local lore has it that the cupola of the Balmain Town Hall was dismantled during World War II as a war time safety measure.¹⁻⁵ Indeed this is true of the clock tower of the General Post Office in Martin Place. As the tallest masonry structure in Sydney at the time, its clock tower was dismantled in 1942 and the building itself was sand-bagged.^{6,7}

Possibly the dismantling of the GPO tower was extrapolated to explain Balmain Town Hall's disfigurement. However, if that was the case then there is a nagging inconsistency in that the taller roof of the Balmain Post and Telegraph Office clock tower was not also dismantled. This can be verified via the aerial survey of Sydney done in May-June 1943.⁸ (Though it was removed later, when the telephone exchange was extended in 1957, and rebuilt anew in 1978.⁹⁻¹¹)

In fact, Balmain Town Hall's cupola, which crowned its stairwell tower, was consigned to oblivion well before the outbreak of WWII hostilities. It did not survive the architect, **Edward Harman Buchanan**¹² (1859-1943), who designed it, nor even celebrate the Town Hall's golden jubilee in 1938.

2 Building Balmain Town Hall

Following expressions of dissatisfaction by the Balmain Ratepayer's Association,¹³ Ald. E. H. Buchanan tabled a motion on 26 July 1887 that council should expend £4,000 on building a new Town Hall.^{14,15} Buchanan presented the council meeting with a rough sketch of his proposal, which included a first-floor hall for 700 patrons above ground-floor offices. His fellow aldermen, while mostly supportive, argued that a larger hall was needed, and so the plan crystallised.²¹ The council accepted a tender for £4,500 and construction by builder John Williams started on 15 November 1887 with the felling of a tree, the same day the contract was signed.¹⁶⁻²⁷

On 14 January 1888 the mayoress, wife of **William Moffitt Burns** (1846-1925), laid the foundation stone,²⁸⁻³⁰ and thirteen months to the day after he had tabled the motion, 29-year-old Buchanan, mayor since 16 February, addressed the 1,000 citizens who had assembled in the new and well-decorated centenary hall at 3 p.m. on Saturday, 25 August 1888 for the opening ceremony.³¹



Image 1 (3548×2816): Hand-tinted newspaper clipping of a drawing produced for the opening of the Balmain Town Hall on 25 August 1888.^{32,33} The cupola of the Victorian Free Classical building consisted of an octagonal dome supported by an arcaded storey and topped by a lantern.



Image 2 (1100×845): Opening of N°8 Division (Balmain) Police-Citizens Boys' Club on 15 January 1938. The roof of the Post Office clock tower peaks above the decapitated Town Hall. Photo: Sam Hood.³⁴

Image^a 1 depicts the new town hall in an illustration published by *The Australian Town and Country Journal* for

^aImages in this PDF document are included at full resolution and when read on a computer may be zoomed in to reveal far greater detail than in hardcopy. Image captions state the image pixel size.

the occasion.^{32,33} This print provides a faithful representation of the completed building. The line drawing published in *The Balmain Observer* for the laying of the foundation stone²⁹ depicted the building from exactly the same angle, but the architectural details, particularly of the dome, are based on a slightly earlier design.²¹ This older drawing was reproduced at better quality in a booklet produced by Balmain Council in 1910 to commemorate its golden jubilee.³⁵

In addition to his unpaid civic services, Buchanan had offered to provide the plans of the building gratis, and this certainly would have helped to constrain costs. Contra to some of his fellow aldermen, his philosophy was to expand upon the existing 1881 Council Chambers rather than demolish and start afresh. This put Balmain's Town Hall somewhat in the shade compared to neighbouring Leichhardt's more imposing edifice, whose foundation stone was laid only the week before Balmain's, but Balmain Post Office and Court House, which had opened in 1887, gave him a grander setting to work with.^{36–38}

With construction extras of £190 16s plus furniture and appurtenances, the total cost of the Town Hall would tip £5,000,³¹ about \$750,000 in today's money.³⁹ This was one quarter of the borough's annual revenue of £20,000 from all sources.⁴⁰ Already servicing a debt $3\frac{1}{2}$ times its annual revenue, growing rapidly and with much infrastructure yet to build, the council spent freely yet cautiously. This even stretched to the point that the eleven aldermen personally bore the substantial cost of the banquet laid on as part of the opening festivities – the grateful mayor having been spared this impost on account of his architectural contribution.⁴¹ Leichhardt Town Hall, which opened a month later on 26 September, cost £5,600.³⁷

3 The dome bites the dust

We now advance in time by fifty years to the opening of the Balmain Police-Citizens Boys' Club, which, as the second in NSW, was to be accommodated in the brick building next to the Town Hall. This Federation Warehouse style building by architect **James Nangle** (1868-1941)⁴² had been purpose-built in 1912-13 for the Balmain Technical College, aka Trades School.⁴³ **Samuel John Hood** (1872-1953),^{44,45} a press photographer, was on hand to record the opening of the PCBC on 15 January 1938.^{46,47}

All of Hood's photos of the event are currently displayed as framed prints in the foyer. Image 2 shows a particular one of them. The Balmain Town Hall is visible in the background, crowded out by the newer brick building – and with the roof of the Post Office clock tower peeking above where the Town Hall's cupola should be!

Clearly the cupola was removed well before WWII. So just when and why was the Balmain Town Hall decapitated?

Renowned aerial photographer, **Milton Charles Kent** (1888-1965),⁴⁸ was often commissioned to photograph Sydney's industrial sites. Nearby residential areas were inevitably included, and raking shots might capture a larger



Image 3 (1920×1280): Balmain's civic precinct with the Town Hall cupola intact in a crop of an aerial photograph taken by Milton Kent in the early 1930s.⁴⁹

portion of a suburb, thereby providing an invaluable historical record. However, as Balmain's industry was mostly clustered around the shoreline, the view in Kent's aerial photographs rarely extended to its civic precinct.

In one notable exception, in the early 1930s Kent captured much of Darling Street running through the heart of Balmain.⁴⁹ Balmain Town Hall, with cupola intact, sneaks into the corner of that plate, a small portion of which is shown in Image 3, narrowly escaping some strong shadowing.

A fuzzy date of 1930, together with the firm bookend of 15 January 1938, gives an interval of about eight years in which the cupola could have been removed. A search through Trove⁵⁰ provides some curious results.

Beginning on Sunday 5 July 1931, a cyclonic gale hit coastal New South Wales centred on Sydney. Sustained southerly winds of up to 68 m.p.h. (110 km/h) caused widespread destruction and loss of life over the next several days, with the event widely covered in national newspapers. In Sydney, *The Sun* reported:⁵¹

Balmain.—Bricks fell outwards when the front portion of Peter Theodore's residence in Llewellyn-street was struck by lightning; the occupants were unhurt. **The dome of the Balmain Town Hall, weighing several cwt., was blown off, and just missed a police car.** In Victoria-street, Rozelle, traffic was delayed when a high tension wire fell across the street. The roof of Mrs. Watson's house in Victoria-street, Rozelle, was blown off, also the roof of an adjoining house.

As would be expected for Australia's preeminent newspaper of record,⁵² *The Sydney Morning Herald* covered the events on its doorstep in depth, including many photographs. Yet curiously it made no mention of Balmain Town Hall.^{53–55} Likewise, *The Labor Daily*, which often covered Balmain news, and in which the Council advertised, reported the aftermath at length, also with many photos.^{56–58} Yet it also omitted mention of the Town Hall.

Perversely, the dome's fate is most widely recorded in Queensland regional newspapers. On the Wednesday fol-

lowing, nine papers, ranging from Toowoomba to Cairns, carried pretty much the same syndicated story, which appears to have originated from *The Sun*. The only other was *The Argus* in Melbourne. Perhaps it 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!

One cwt. (hundredweight) being 50.8 kg, it is clear that the “dome” in *The Sun*’s report refers solely to the dome and lantern of the cupola, and not to the arcaded storey supporting them. However, the masonry of the latter is likely to have suffered some damage in having the structure above it ripped off.

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, perhaps the best surviving source of information is the Balmain Municipal Council records, preserved by NSW State Archives and Records.⁵⁹ However, the minutes of Council meetings only briefly summarise the matters dealt with, motions passed, etc., and usually provide only a faint echo of what was discussed – any documents referred to, such as reports, plans, attachments, etc., having been lost. Likewise, financial Ledgers, Journals, Cash Books, etc. only catch a glimpse of Council’s financial dealings.

As it happened, Balmain Council, under **Ernest Lyle Brisbane Swan** (1895-1949), mayor for this and the two preceding years, met for its regular fortnightly meeting on 7 July 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.*⁶⁰

Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing what was in the report. The dome is next mentioned in the minutes of the Works Committee meeting on 17 November 1931 with a terse statement

5. *Town Hall Dome Reinstatement.*
*Consideration to stand over generally.*⁶¹

So while the wheels appear to have been turning behind the scenes, they were only turning slowly.

Nine months later, on 15 August 1932, the new mayor, **Reginald Thornton** (1875-1962), alderman since 1911 and five times mayor in the 1920s, presented alternate designs for a replacement dome, the implication being that Buchanan’s original plans had been lost by this time. The designs were prepared by local architect **Charles Norman Hirst** (1901-1947), who estimated a cost of £370 (\$38k³⁹) and £250 (\$25k) for the two options. The council moved to accept the more expensive option,

*and that the Mayor and Engineer confer with the architect and be given authority to invite tenders for the work.*⁶²

Six tenders were presented and discussed at an ordinary Council meeting on 26 September 1932,⁶³ where it is evident that Hirst underestimated the cost of reconstruction. Five of the tenders were reasonably close, and, neglecting the one outlier, the average price was £525 (\$54k)

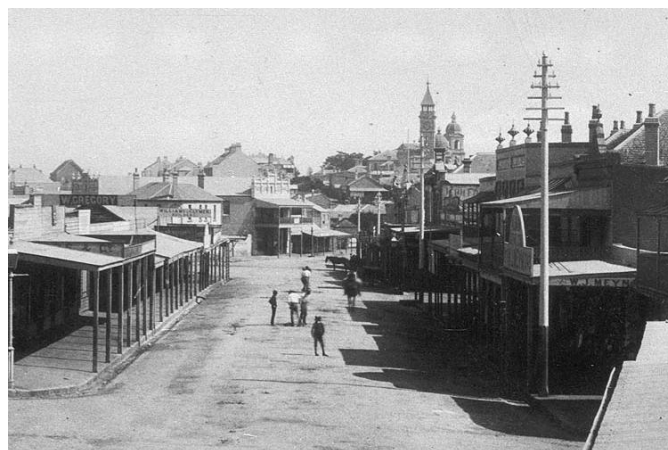


Image 4 (750×500): As seen in 1890 from the verandah of James Mills’ shoe store at 225-227 Darling Street,⁶⁴ opposite Gladstone Park, the Town Hall’s cupola was a significant element of the Balmain skyline, complementing the Post Office clock tower. Photo: James Mills.⁶⁵



Image 5 (504×361): Looking west from atop the Post Office clock tower, February 1909. This view reveals the close alignment of the three landmarks – they were also close to being equi-spaced. This geometric regularity contrasts with the varied style of the roofs and domes: the Post Office tower recalls St. Mark’s Campanile in Venice, while the exaggerated vertical ovoid of the Court House dome echoes the dome of the Old Bailey in London. Buchanan’s “squared-circle” Town Hall cupola contrasts with them, and is unusual in western architecture where octagonal domes normally rest on octagonal bases, and circular domes on drums (though it did actually have a squat octagonal spacer). Photo: Kerry Studios.⁶⁶

and £470 (\$48k). Moreover, the builder who provided the cheapest tender, £454, for the cheaper option

*Mr. McIntyre was prepared to decrease his tender by £70 7s if certain specified adornments were eliminated.*⁶³

As detailed in the lengthy minute, the Council split between deferring action until 1933 or accepting McIntyre’s reduced quote.

Deferment won. It is impossible to know the reasoning

behind the decision. Perhaps those arguing for delay were unwilling to compromise and hoped to achieve something better later. Perhaps those willing to accept the cheaper option thought that something needed to be done as soon as possible, to “put a lid on it”. Cashman, Gould, Hunter, McIntosh, Stapleton, and Swan voted to defer. Abrahams, Storey, Thornton, and Ward opposed. Burns and Robinson were absent as delegates to a Local Government meeting in Armidale, and an amendment to defer the vote until they returned was defeated.

Whatever their rationale, this decision effectively sounded the death knell for the Town Hall cupola.

4 Hard times in Balmain

With the Great Depression in full swing, many of Balmain’s workers had been employed in industries that had slowed or closed.^{67–69} Although they do not dwell on specifics, Council records attest to the plight of the hard-hit in Balmain, with a steady stream of letters requesting deferment of rates or payment by installments; regular reports from the Health Inspector of abodes deemed unfit for human habitation; council unemployment relief works; charities requesting fee-free use of the Town Hall for fundraisers; council donations to charity, including to Sydney City Mission, which ran a soup kitchen from its building in Beattie street; and free entry to Elkington Park Baths for the unemployed. In response to an auditor’s report that questioned the practice, which hitherto had been illegal, on 4 August 1931 Council moved

*That the Council approves the action of the Town Clerk in not charging interest on overdue rates when satisfied of the ratepayer’s inability to pay owing to unemployment, the closing of the Government Saving Bank or any other cause for which a perfectly valid reason is given.*⁷⁰

There is scarcely a page in the General Council minute book for the early 1930s that does not hint at the privations endured by the local population.

Still, in the budget estimates for 1932,⁷¹ long-serving Town Clerk, **Alexander William Sommerville** (1869–1943) had allowed £750 (\$77k) for “*Town Hall Dome & Alterations*”. However, the alterations referred to here have nothing to do with the dome. The Chief Secretary⁷² had required modifications to the main Hall, which was deemed to be a fire trap, and without them its licensed capacity would have to be reduced from 1000 to 300 patrons – ironically, today’s limit! But this was only a relatively minor one of the Council’s financial concerns.

Sommerville concluded his preamble to the budget estimates for 1932 with this uncharacteristically (for him) forthright observation:

The actual loss occasioned by the Amendment to Section 132 of the Local Government Act (based on a 6d rate) [is] £6,497.0.0 and is quite a calamity to Balmain Council, coming as it does concurrently with the great reduction in land values. I certainly think that this and other Councils similarly affected



Image 6 (814×937): A. W. Sommerville, Balmain Town Clerk 1918–40 (today he would be called the General Manager). He started with the Council as a junior clerk in 1886. Photo: Balmain Council Chambers, via Solling & Reynolds (1997).⁷³

*are entitled to some material assistance from the Government. The loss sustained by the large majority of Councils is a mere bagatelle compared with that suffered by the few which are called on to bear the heavy burden.*⁷¹

He was referring to a provision of the *Rating (Exemption) Act, 1931*⁷⁴ that amended Section 132 of the *Local Government Act, 1919*. From 1 January 1932, Council rates could no longer be levied on certain classes of Crown Land. The “6d rate” referred to was a rate of 6d (sixpence)^b in the £ (i.e. 2.5%) of the unimproved capital value (U.C.V.) of ratable land.

To understand the effect of the Section 132 amendment, consider that Sommerville estimated the revenue from all ratable land to be £42,588 (@6d/£). This implies a decrease of 13% in rate revenue due to the newly unratable Crown land. It is amazing to think that there was so much unratable Crown land in Balmain (which included Rozelle and a smidgen of Lilyfield) at this time, especially considering that land vested in the Railway Commissioners and Sydney Harbour Trust were *not* classed as unratable, nor was any Crown land upon which industry was operating.

But the other part of the double-whammy Sommerville referred to was the huge decrease, 20%, in the valuation of ratable land between 1931 and 1932, from £2,129,195 down to £1,703,552, with a corresponding reduction in

^bThere were 12 pennies or pence (d) in the shilling, and 20 shillings (s) in the pound (£). 1d = one penny (d = Latin denarius).

this major source of Municipal revenue. Including other minor sources – rents, fees, licenses, etc. – he estimated the total revenue for 1932 would be £47,653 (\$4.9M³⁹).

As council had just negotiated a loan for £65,000 (\$6.7M) for permanent improvements, the timing of this 33% crash in rate revenue was particularly unfortunate. The top twelve items of expenditure, described as “*actual commitments*” accounted for £35,304, or 74% of revenue. This included £1,400 for “*Town Hall, including new dome, etc.*”. However, other recurrent and unavoidable expenses would

*absorb ... £9,286. 0. 0 leaving only £3,063. 0. 0 for works, which is not even sufficient to provide essential services such as street and gutter cleaning, repairs to wharves, gutter crossings, horse troughs, repairs to road and footpath cuts, etc.*⁷¹

for which he estimated £6,150 would be needed. Sommerville wrote:

*The most careful consideration has been given to every item of expenditure with a view to keeping at the minimum whilst no expectant revenue has been omitted.*⁷¹

Thus, there is little doubt that, at this stage early in 1932, the Council was committed to replacing the dome. However, it was clear that it could not avoid blowing its budget.

Thus when the tenders for the replacement dome were presented on 26 September 1932, it is not surprising that some aldermen might have balked at the cost. The following month, in reply to a letter from the Chief Secretary requesting completion of suggested alterations to the Banquet room, Council resolved on 24 October to

*inform the writer that the Council has no money available at the present time for further alterations to the Town Hall.*⁷⁵

In fact, by March 1932 the Council Engineer had completed a long list of alterations to the Town Hall to satisfy safety requirements, thus safeguarding its license.^{76,77} That there was no money for “*further alterations*” suggests that the £750 set aside in the budget estimates for “*Town Hall Dome & Alterations*” had been soaked up by this work, leaving nothing for the dome.

Consequent on a further slight decline in land values, but also partly due to Council’s decision to decrease rates to $5\frac{7}{8}$ d / £, Sommerville’s budget estimates for 1933 forecast a total revenue of £45,802, down by 4% on the previous year.⁷⁸ One bright point was that he had successfully renegotiated the £65,000 loan at $5\frac{7}{8}$ % payable over 15 years to £66,500 at 5% p.a.^{78–80} However, the loan was for set purposes, namely remaking Balmain’s main thoroughfares,⁸¹ and did not include the Town Hall dome, which disappeared altogether from the forecast expenses for 1933.

Sadly, there is no further mention of Balmain Town Hall’s lost dome in the General Council or Works Committee minutes. R.I.P.

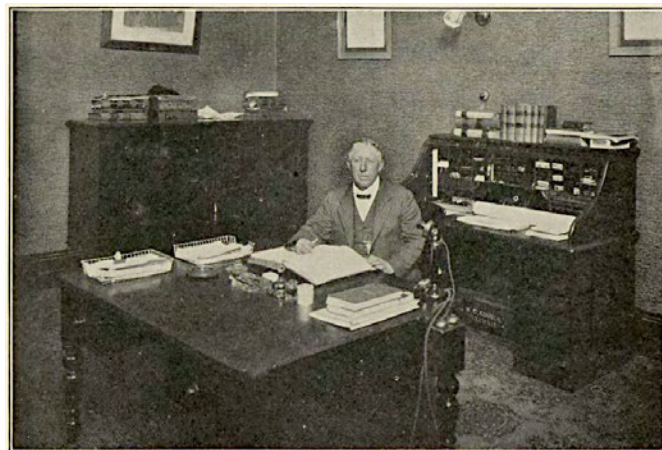


Image 7 (908×616): Balmain Town Clerk, A. W. Sommerville, in his office, perhaps writing the minutes. Several minute books and/or financial ledgers can be seen on top of the cabinet at left. Photo from the 75th Anniversary booklet.⁸¹ (Don’t forget to zoom in!)

5 Case of the disappearing cupola

So far in this story the Balmain Town Hall has lost its dome in a violent storm, and our valiant Council has been thwarted in replacing it by the dastardly Great Depression. But what about the rest of the cupola?

Structurally, the Town Hall cupola consisted of an arcaded storey, which looks and surely must have been in masonry, topped by an octagonal dome and lantern, which, since it only weighed “several cwt.”, must have been copper-cladding on a relatively light-weight timber or iron framework. The question to be answered now is, what happened to the much more substantial arcaded storey, which was left intact after the July 1931 storm, although possibly with some damage?

Sommerville’s budget estimates for 1934 continue the tale of financial woe.⁸² Land values had declined further, this time by an estimated 6%. The projected total revenue was £52,401 – much higher than the previous year, which sounds hopeful, until it is realised that a whopping £10,563 of this accounted for unpaid rates for the previous year. In other words, about a quarter of Balmain ratepayers could not pay their rates in 1933. Sommerville again pointed the finger at the decline in ratable land value, and the Section 132 amendment. There is no mention of replacing the Town Hall dome, or for that matter any other alterations. Moreover, in deference to the hardship suffered by ratepayers, the Council had again voted to decrease the rates, now to $5\frac{3}{4}$ d/£.

From here the records become very sketchy indeed. The first clue as to the cupola’s fate appears on 29 May 1934 with a brief report in *The Labor Daily* of the re-elected mayor, **Gilbert Storey** (1874-1939), brother of former Balmain M.L.A. and esteemed NSW Premier **John Storey** (1869-1921), 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.⁸³

The Council meeting of 28 May, reported in *The Labor Daily*, resolved to refer the matter to the Works Committee.⁸⁴ That met on 11 June where

*the Engineer produced a plan explaining what was intended.*⁸⁵

The mayor then moved

*That sufficient money be borrowed... to cover the cost of painting and renovating the Town Hall...*⁸⁵

with an amendment to authorise the mayor

*to engage the services of an architect to advise on a scheme for improving the Town Hall.*⁸⁵

The Council meeting that followed immediately afterwards adopted the Works Committee's recommendations, though replacing the phrase "painting and renovating" with "painting and remodelling".

In the next development, at the Council meeting of 12 November 1934 the Mayor submitted

*plans by Mr. C. Hirst, architect, for proposed alterations to the Town Hall,*⁸⁶

Hirst being the same architect who had submitted plans for the replacement dome in 1932. These were referred to the Works Committee, which, on 26 November, resolved

*That the question of reconstructing the Town Hall be referred to the incoming Council with a recommendation to proceed with the proposed alterations and that the architect be instructed to so amend the plans to conform to the Council's requirements.*⁸⁷

In the meantime, the plans had been sent to the Chief Secretary's Office for approval.

The principle difficulty here is that, with none of the plans extant, it is necessary to read between the lines of the minutes. However, with engineers and architects being consulted, loans being raised, approval sought from the Chief Secretary, and the use of words like *remodelling*, *alterations*, and *reconstruction*, it is clear that the council contemplated changes that involved the fabric of the building itself, not just interior redecoration. In any case, in 1935 the problem was now in the lap of Labor alderman, **Cecil Stapleton** (1891-1943),⁸⁸⁻⁹⁰ who was elected mayor on 6 December 1934.

Sommerville's budget estimates for 1935 were considered at a special meeting of Council on 17 December 1934. They were as bleak as ever. Land values, and therefore rates had dropped by a further 1%, but worse, Council was now carrying an overdraft of £13,400. Council voted to set rates back to the maximum of 6d/£, but even so the deficit was projected to be £12,368. As the second item of the same meeting, Stapleton proceeded post haste with the recommended Town Hall alterations

*After due consideration of the plans of the proposed alterations to the Town Hall premises prepared by Mr. C. Hirst, architect. Alderman Angelini moved: A. "That tenders be invited for reconstruction of the Town Hall according to plans submitted to and approved by Council including suggested alterations to the Banquet room and any adjustments made necessary by requirements of the Chief Secretary's Dept."*⁹¹



Image 8 (614×906): Alderman Cecil Stapleton, mayor, in 1935. Photo from the 75th Anniversary booklet.⁸¹



The Council of the Municipality of Balmain, 1935.
Left to right—Aldermen J. WAITE, J.P., H. V. ANGELINI, J.P., M. D. CASHMAN, J. TRAINOR, R. W. ROBINSON, J.P., K. THORNTON, J.P., F. J. BAMFIELD, M.Inst. M. and Cy.E., A.M.I.E. (Aust.) (Engineer), O. A. GOLDING (Deputy Town Clerk), Aldermen CECIL STAPLETON, J.P. (Mayor), A. W. SOMMERVILLE, J.P., F.L.C.A. (Town Clerk), H. GOSWELL (Caretaker), Aldermen S. H. P. BURNS, J.P., S. HUNTER, J.P., H. R. G. TATHAM, J.P., R. M. BROWNLEE, J.P., and W. M. ROSS, J.P.

Image 9 (900×746): The Council of the Municipality of Balmain, 1935, at a meeting in the Council Chambers. Photo from the 75th Anniversary booklet.⁸¹

So the Chief Secretary would finally be appeased – presumably he would not have approved any other alterations to the Town Hall without his requirements first being satisfied. The motion was carried, and tender advertisements duly appeared in *The Sydney Morning Herald* early in January of the new year, 1935.^{92,93}

This work on the Town Hall was to be funded by a "Brightening-up" loan at 3% p.a. under a scheme run by the State Government's Building Relief Committee, which

was intended to stimulate the depressed economy.^{94,95} Stapleton was hampered in this by his insistence on solely employing local labour, so that by 22 January 1935 only one tender had been received. As three were required, it was not possible to proceed.

Undeterred, on 5 February Stapleton tabled a mayoral minute in which he proposed to borrow £13,000 (\$1.3M³⁹) commercially, of which £10,400 (\$1.04M) was earmarked for stormwater drainage, £1,600 (\$160k) for Town Hall alterations, and £1,000 (\$100k) for constructing dressing sheds in Easton Park.^{96,97}

Work on the stormwater system was urgently needed. A great storm on 20 November 1932 had caused much flood damage to houses in the South-west Ward.⁹⁸ The Council denied liability but the Engineer later reported on serious deficiencies in the system. In fact, Stapleton, who represented the South-west Ward, had crossed swords in 1933 with ex-mayor Storey on the matter.^{99,100} Besides, fixing the drains would require a mix of skilled and unskilled labour, and Stapleton was adamant that jobs funded by the £13,000 loan would go to the unemployed of his municipality.⁹⁷

Under the Local Government Act, 1919, Council was obliged to advertise its intention to raise the loan, which was to be repaid via a special levy on Council rates, either $\frac{1}{4}$ d in the £ of the unimproved capital value of all ratable land, or $\frac{1}{8}$ d on the improved capital value.^{101,102} A petition by at least 25% of ratepayers would force it to take a poll to choose one way or the other.

Indeed a petition of 2095 ratepayers was raised and it rejected the proposal outright – as we have seen, times were hard for land owners as well! At that the Council conceded.¹⁰³ Putting on a brave face, Stapleton vowed to push ahead anyway with the stormwater upgrade using normal Council funding.^{104,105} This despite having tabled a minute at a Council meeting on 5 February stating

*It was quite obvious that drainage schemes estimated to cost £10,000 and other necessary works could not be undertaken and paid for out of ordinary revenue.*⁹⁶

Unfortunately, the General Council minute book for the period 5 March 1935 to 17 January 1939 is missing from the State Archives, and newspaper reports of Council proceedings in this period are sketchy. Although the Works Committee minutes do survive, they record little of interest regarding the Town Hall cupola in the period to the opening of the PCBC on 15 January 1938.

As it happens, 1935 was a significant year in Balmain's history, being the 75th anniversary of the Borough's incorporation in 1860. "Back to Balmain" celebrations were organized for the first week in December, and a commemorative booklet was produced.⁸¹ It features the photo of the Town Hall shown in Image 10. Unfortunately no conclusions can be drawn from this photo as close inspection reveals that it predates Hood's c1928 photo of Image 11: the latter shows the addition of a flagpole on the parapet, air vent on the roof, four newly installed air vents on either side of the first floor windows, a cable support on the quoin on the left frontage, and a fresh coat of paint. The



Image 10 (2100×1414): Photo of the Town Hall in the 75th anniversary booklet produced by Balmain Council in 1935.⁸¹ The two cars appear to be 1920s vintage. In any case, it certainly predates the photo of Image 11.



Image 11 (2800×3600): Balmain Town Hall, c1928? One of a series of postcards of Balmain produced by Sam Hood.¹⁰⁶ Mentally erase the cupola (and its shadow on the Court House) to arrive at today's diminished streetscape.

wall vents and cable support survive to this day.

Regarding Balmain's public buildings, Sommerville wrote in the 75th anniversary booklet:

Public Buildings: Residents of Balmain are justly proud of their Public Buildings. The block on Darling Street comprising the Town Hall, Court House and Post Office makes an imposing show. The

tower of the Post Office forms one of the most prominent landmarks of Sydney, especially when viewed from the harbour side.

The venerable Buchanan himself, in his 77th year, was a guest at a reunion dinner at the Town Hall¹⁰⁷ and it might be thought a bit insensitive to present him with his finest public building beheaded, rather than just scalped!

Consequently, it seems most likely that the cupola was removed sometime in 1936 under the mayorship of **John William Victor Waite** (1891-1960) or in 1937 under **Michael Daniel Cashman** (1894-1959). However, no direct evidence has yet been found as to precisely when or why.

Recalling Storey's initial statement of 28 May 1934, "*Something desperate will have to be done, and done in the near future*", given the difficulty of obtaining funds for the necessary repair work and the constraints imposed by the depression, it is safe to conclude that the cupola fell victim to hard times, rather than war time.

For the record, close inspection of Images 2 and 11 reveals other changes that were made besides removing the cupola: with the cupola gone, the flagpole on the parapet was moved across to the top of the tower; an air vent with horizontal slats on the gable end of the roof was closed in; and the finial above it removed.

Also for the record, a report on the effects of a destructive gale in *The Truth* on 11 December 1938 – "BALMAIN TOWN HALL TOWER DAMAGED AND COLLAPSE THREATENED"¹⁰⁸ – actually refers to the Post Office clock tower, the top of which was swaying, with the wind even strong enough to blow the minute hand backwards!¹⁰⁹

6 Afterword

Other machinations of Balmain Council in the 1930s are worth noting in the context of the Town Hall and civic precinct.

1. Originally the Post Office, Court House, and Town Hall were surrounded by a **cast iron picket fence** on a sandstone base with substantial sandstone pillars at regular intervals for support, as can be seen in Images 1, 2, 10, 11, and 13. On 8 April 1930 the Works Committee dealt with correspondence from the

*Rozelle-Balmain Chamber of Commerce suggesting the removal of iron railings from front of the Town Hall. Ald. Wheeler moved and Ald. Shiel seconded "That the Council accede to the request." Ald. Robinson moved an amendment which was seconded by Ald. Waite: "That the Council cooperate with the Chamber with a view to accomplishing its object to have the railings removed from the front of the public buildings." The motion was declared carried. Aldermen Robinson, Waite and Brownlee desiring their names recorded in the negative.*¹¹⁰

It's not clear what the Chamber of Commerce expected to gain from their removal, but in any case the Council only owned the railings in front of the Town Hall – those

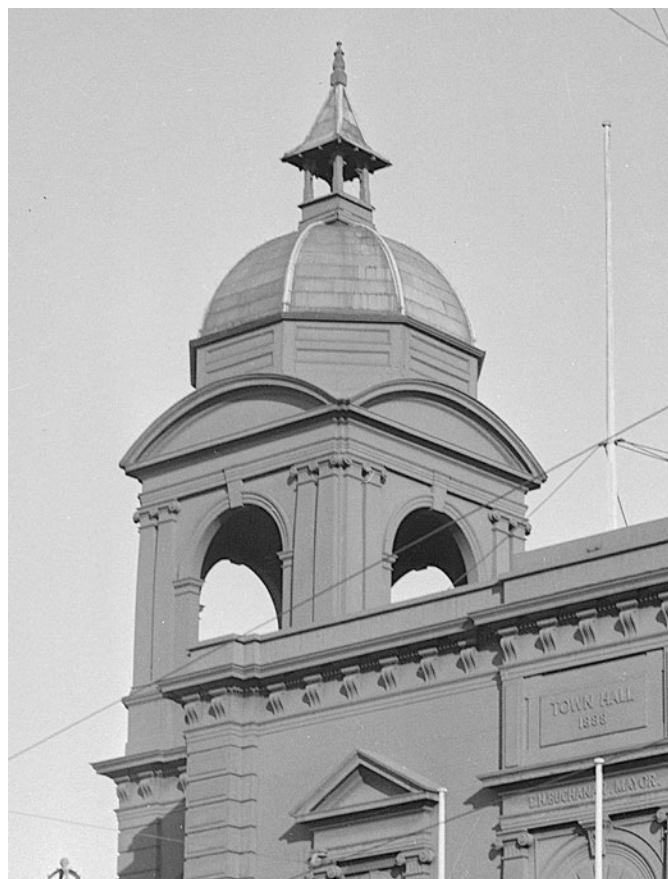


Image 12 (1300×1700): Close up of the cupola in Image 11.



Image 13 (1014×786): The Balmain civic precinct c1907.¹¹¹ Note that the roof of the Post Office tower was clipped in the original photo and has been "photo-shopped" back in without its finial in this image-processed copy. Some overhead tram lines were also erased.

fronting the Post Office and Court House would have been under the purview of the Federal and State governments. It is also unclear whether Robinson, Waite, and Brownlee opposed removal, or were instead pushing to have the whole lot removed, which is what ended up happening.

The railing in front of the c1914 Telephone Exchange on the Montague Street corner was spared, but only until

the Exchange was extended in 1957. A pair of pillars, painted, with cast iron pickets and an original gate remains at one of the secondary entrances; one pillar remains in original, though weathered condition near the entrance to the Police Station; and two painted pillars, supporting the original gate and railing on the path leading to the Town Clerk's residence survive on the western side of the Town Hall.

2. The subject of erecting the **Elkington Park bandstand** was first raised on 30 January 1933.⁹⁹ The bandstand, dedicated to A. W. Sommerville's 50 years of service, was opened in 1936. Fig Tree Point was also renamed Sommerville Point in his honour, as was Sommerville Road on Glebe Island.

3. On 22 May 1933, the Works Committee, which comprised the whole Council, presented a report with eight recommendations, the first of which was

*That the **furniture in the Council Chamber be remodelled** at an estimated cost of £129, such alterations to include: (1) Horse shoe table, (2) eleven aldermanic chairs, (3) Mayoral chair, (4) Two Officers chairs (5) panelling at rear of Mayor's dais.*¹¹²

Burns moved an amendment, which was defeated, that this item be deferred for six months. For the motion: Cashman, Gould, Hunter, McIntosh, Stapleton, Ward; against: Abrahams, Burns, Swan; absent: Robinson, Thornton. So by and large, those who had recently voted to defer replacement of the Town Hall dome endorsed this discretionary expenditure, the fruits of which can be seen in Image 9.

4. At the special meeting of Council on 17 December 1934 called to discuss the Town Hall alterations, which followed immediately after Sommerville's bleak budget estimates for 1935, the Council moved

*B. That the opinion of the architect be obtained re the construction of a **small hall over the Council Chambers**,*⁹¹

referring to McDonald's 1881 chambers at the rear of the main building. Fortunately, this did not eventuate.

5. The Works Committee voted on 15 September 1936 for *Erection of **Glass House in Town Hall Grounds** for propagation of plants (Mayor's minute 1st Sept /36). Resolved on motion of Ald. Brownlee seconded by Ald. Tatham "a sum not exceeding £100 be voted for the purpose in accordance with plan submitted.*¹¹³

Recall that the minutes of General Council are not available for this period. The historical plaque affixed to the glasshouse in 2005 states that it was erected in 1946. However, that cannot be correct as it is visible in the May-June 1943 aerial survey of Sydney.⁸ Interestingly, this survey also shows the tiled roof of a small, square building immediately behind it.

Certainly there are grander Victorian Free Classical style buildings in Sydney than the Balmain Town Hall. Notable examples are the General Post Office in Martin Place (1861-91); the Department of Lands building in Bridge



Image 14 (1140×760): The Balmain skyline seen from Ball's Head, c1905. Snails Bay is in the foreground, with Wharf Road behind. Birchgrove Oval can be seen at the water's edge at right.¹¹⁴ (Don't forget to zoom in!)



Image 15 (2202×1468): Looking past Cockatoo Island from Hunters Hill to the Balmain skyline, bathed in bright sunshine, c1922.¹¹⁵ The bell tower of St. Augustine's church can also be seen on the skyline at left.

St. (1876-92); North Sydney Post Office (1889); Paddington Town Hall (1890-91); and St. George's Hall, Newtown (1887); all of which still retain their cupolas.¹¹⁶ However, amongst these iconic heritage buildings, almost uniquely in NSW, the Balmain civic precinct is significant for the setting of its three public buildings.¹

As others have noted,^{1,2} it is sad that Balmain Town Hall was disfigured, and that this situation has persisted for so many years. Efforts ought to be made to rectify it, especially now that the telephone exchange has been dealt with, and the Post Office clock tower newly repaired and repainted. If Buchanan's original plans are not available, Sam Hood's postcard photo, an enlargement of which is seen in Image 12, should be sufficiently detailed to reconstruct the architectural elements of the cupola faithfully.

There is also the issue of inappropriate vegetation in the civic precinct that detracts from the architecture. (a) Mercifully, the Pencil pines that used to conceal the frontage of the Court House are long gone, and so too the palm tree that replaced them (Images 16 and 17), but the Cotoneast-



Image 16 (736×552): Balmain Post Office tower without its roof, and the Court House with Pencil pines before they grew to the full height of the building, 5 October 1962.¹¹⁷



Image 17 (640×427): Balmain Post Office and Court House (behind the foliage), 8 October 2012.¹¹⁸

ers there now have grown straggly and do not grace the building. Compact, low-growing shrubs would suit better. (b) The tree planted (or self-sown?) hard against the Court House portico should be removed. It is simply in the wrong place, visually interrupting the line of the civic buildings (Image 17). (c) The four enormous Hill's Weeping Fig trees (*Ficus microcarpa hillii*) growing between the Town Hall and the Police Citizens Boys' Club are totally inappropriate for that location, they endanger the very fabric of the building. The CMP drew attention to them 20 years ago.⁴ A Camphor Laurel has also recently self-sown there for good measure. At least the particular fig tree that, year-by-year, leans ever further across to obscure the frontage of the Town Hall should be removed. The medium-sized deciduous tree newly planted in Telstra Square should be the model for future plantings.

The saga of GPO clock tower, related in the introduction, did at least have a happy ending. It was rebuilt in 1964 at a cost of £90,000¹¹⁹ (\$2.7M³⁹) by A. W. Edwards,¹²⁰ who are clearly proud of their efforts. The original stone and other materials had been stored by the Post Master General at various locations around Sydney.

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Image 18 (1600×1600): The “Common Seal” of Balmain Municipal Council. Unlike wax seals of older times, this Seal was a rubber stamp, kept under lock and key, and used only with Council’s authorisation. Normally impressed in red ink, it was printed on the cover of the 75th Anniversary booklet. This impression is from a typed minute dated 12 December 1934 (the budget estimates for 1935) attached to the General Council minute book.¹²¹

A Selected minutes of Balmain Council meetings, 1931-36

NSW State Archives and Records preserves the following minute books of Balmain Council: General Council meetings (ordinary and special), Work Committee meetings, and Finance Committee meetings. The minutes were mostly hand-written. This appendix collates excerpts of these minutes that relate to alterations to the Town Hall from the following books in the period 1 May 1934 to 15 January 1935 (where possible):

- Minute books of General Council, Municipality of Balmain, 9 June 1931 to 5 March 1935, NSW State Archives and Records, NRS-15810-1-18-MUN 22 (Item 23).

There follows a gap to 17 January 1939.

- Minute books of the Finance Committee, Municipality of Balmain, 9 June 1925 to 21 July 1936, NSW State Archives and Records, NRS-15831-1-1-MUN 22 (Item 25).

There follows a gap to 18 January 1938.

- Minute books of Works Committee, Municipality of Balmain, 9 June 1925 to 21 July 1936, NSW State Archives and Records, NRS-15832-1-1-MUN 22 (Item 27).

- Minute books of Works Committee, Municipality of Balmain, 4 August 1936 to 21 December 1948, NSW State Archives and Records, NRS-15832-1-2-MUN 22 (Item 28).

Throughout this period, the Works and Finance Committees consisted of the full complement of Council, i.e. the mayor and eleven aldermen.

1929-31 Council: Following municipal elections on Saturday 1 December 1928, the council comprised:

- North ward:
 - Thornton, Reginald
 - Burns, Samuel Herbert Priestly
 - Robinson, Robert Wilton
- North-east ward:
 - Brownlee, Robert Morris
 - Hunter, Samuel
 - Scott, Henry
- South-east ward:
 - Swan, Ernest Lyle Brisbane
 - McIntosh, Francis Benedict
 - Waite, John William
- South-west ward:
 - Wheeler, Bertie
 - Shiel, John
 - Thompson, William Henry

1931 Council: On Wednesday 10 December 1930, the aldermen elected **Lyle Swan** as mayor for 1931 for the third successive year.

Ordinary Council meeting, Tue 7 July 1931, p11:

The Engineer presented a special report on the condition of [the] Dome of [the] Town Hall which was adopted.

Works Committee meeting, Tue 17 November 1931, p313:

*5. Town Hall Dome Reinstatement
Consideration to stand over generally.*

1932-34 Council: Following municipal elections on Saturday 2 January 1932, the council comprised:

- North Ward:
 - Thornton, Reginald* (Reform)
 - Burns, Samuel Herbert Priestly* (Reform)
 - Robinson, Robert Wilton* (Reform)
- North-east Ward:
 - Hunter, Samuel* (Reform)
 - Ward, Roger Therry (Reform)
 - Abrahams, Barry Abraham (Reform)
- South-east Ward:
 - McIntosh, Francis Benedict* (Reform)
 - Storey, Gilbert (Reform)
 - Swan, Ernest Lyle Brisbane* (Reform)
- South-west Ward:
 - Cashman, Michael Daniel (Lang)
 - Stapleton, Cecil (Lang)
 - Gould, Francis Baptiste (Lang)

Those marked with an asterisk were re-elected from the previous council. "Lang" refers to Jack Lang's breakaway Lang Labor faction of the Australian Labor Party. The Reform Party was essentially an anti-A.L.P. party.

1932 Council: On Wednesday 6 January, the aldermen elected **Reginald Thornton** as mayor for 1932.

Ordinary Council meeting, Mon 15 August 1932, p153:

1. Town Hall Dome

The Mayor presented alternate designs for a new dome for the tower of the Town Hall to replace the structure demolished by storm. Mr. C. Hirst of Tilba Avenue being the architect.

No. 1 Design would cost £370

No. 2 " " " £250

Ald. Swan moved and Ald. Robinson seconded "That No. 1 design be adopted and that the Mayor and Engineer confer with the architect and be given authority to invite tenders for the work". Carried.

Ordinary Council meeting, Mon 26 September 1932, p167:

Mayors minute

The Mayor submitted suggesting that the tenders for the erection of the Town Hall Dome be considered at later period of the meeting in committee of the whole Council. The Minute was adopted.

Ordinary Council meeting, Mon 26 September 1932, pp170,171:

Orders of the day

1. Dome for Town Hall.

At this stage the Council resolved itself into a committee of the whole to consider tenders received for the construction of a Dome for the tower of the Town Hall. The following tenders were received

<i>James McIntyre</i>	<i>£454</i>	<i>£526</i>
<i>Fred. Lemcke</i>	<i>459</i>	<i>513</i>
<i>James Leckie</i>	<i>464.10.0</i>	<i>539.6.0</i>
<i>Charles Gray</i>	<i>477</i>	<i>509</i>
<i>Robert Wall</i>	<i>490</i>	<i>530</i>
<i>A. E. Kelshaw</i>	<i>621</i>	<i>621</i>

Mr McIntyre was prepared to reduce his tender by £70.7.0 if certain specified adornments were eliminated.

After a general discussion Ald. McIntosh moved, and Ald. Hunter seconded:

"That further consideration of the matter be deferred until next year".

The Mayor moved an amendment which was seconded by Ald. Storey:

"That the tender of James McIntyre at the reduced price of £383.13.0 be accepted".

The amendment was lost.

Ald. Abrahams moved a further amendment which was seconded by Ald. Ward:

"That the matter stand in abeyance for a fortnight to allow of a full Council being present".

The further amendment was also lost and the motion carried on the following division:

For the motion

Ald. Stapleton, McIntosh, Hunter, Cashman, Swan and Gould. "6"

Against the motion

Ald. Abrahams, Ward, Storey and the Mayor. "4"

The Council resumed business and progress was reported and the report adopted.

1933 Council: on Thursday 1 December 1932, the aldermen elected **Gilbert Storey** as mayor for 1933, with deputy mayor Robert Robinson.

1934 Council: on Wednesday 6 December 1933, the aldermen re-elected **Gilbert Storey** as mayor for 1934, with deputy mayor Francis McIntosh.

Ordinary Council meeting, Mon 28 May 1934, p370:

Mayor's Minute

The Mayor presented a minute dealing with the condition of the Town Hall building. The minute was received and it was decided that the matter be referred to the Works Committee and that visits of inspection be made on Wednesday 30th May at 2.30 p.m. and Saturday 2nd June at 10 a.m. and that the ordinary meeting of the Committee be at 7 p.m. on Monday 11th June instead of 7.30 usual time.

Works Committee meeting, Mon 11 June 1934, p422:

1. Mayor's Minute suggesting alterations and renovations to the Town Hall buildings. The Engineer produced a plan explaining what was intended and after a general discussion, the Mayor moved and Alderman McIntosh seconded:

"That sufficient money be borrowed from the Government's 3% Loan Scheme to cover the cost of painting and renovating the Town Hall building in accordance with the plan considered at this meeting of the Works Committee.

Alderman Thornton moved an amendment which was seconded by Ald. Swan:

"That further consideration of the matter be deferred for a month and in the meantime the Mayor be authorised to engage the services of an Architect to advise on a scheme for improving the Town Hall."

On the question being put the motion was declared carried. Aldermen Thornton, Swan, Robinson and Hunter voted for the amendment.

Ordinary Council meeting, Mon 11 June 1934 (immediately following the Works Committee meeting), p375:

Reports from Committees

1. The Works Committee Report containing the following recommendations was adopted, viz.

A. That sufficient money be borrowed from the Government's 3% Loaning Scheme to cover the cost of painting and remodelling the Town Hall in accordance with the plan considered at this meeting of

the Council.

Note that Works Committee's phrase "painting and renovating" was replaced with "painting and remodelling".

Ordinary Council meeting, Tue 7 August 1934, p388:

Mayor's Minute, Town Hall alterations

The Mayor submitted a minute recommending removal of proscenium and existing stage at the expense of the General Fund and erect new platform, leaving the work of repainting, etc. to be carried out from the Building Relief Loan.

The Mayor moved and Ald. McIntosh seconded: "That the Minute and recommendation be adopted".

The Motion was lost.

Removal of the proscenium and stage was not in dispute, only the funding.

Ordinary council meeting, Mon 12 November 1934, p420:

Mayor's Minute

The Mayor presented a Mayoral Minute Submitting plans by Mr. C. Hirst, Architect, for proposed Alterations to the Town Hall. The Matter was referred to Works Committee.

Works Committee meeting, Mon 26 November 1934, p441:

2. Consideration of plans of proposed alterations to Balmain Town Hall.

The Mayor moved and Ald. McIntosh seconded "That the question of reconstructing the Town Hall be referred to the incoming Council with a recommendation to proceed with the proposed alterations and that the architect be instructed to so amend the plans to conform to the Council's requirements. Carried.

Ordinary Council meeting, Mon 26 November 1934, p425:

Correspondence

5. Chief Secretary returning plans of proposed alterations to Town Hall buildings. Received.

and

Reports of Committees

The Works Committee's report containing the following recommendations was received and adopted, viz: 2. "That the question of reconstructing the Town Hall be referred to the incoming Council with a recommendation to proceed with the proposal, and the architect be instructed to amend plans in accordance with Council's suggestions."

1935-37 Council: Following municipal elections on Saturday 1 December 1934 the Council comprised:

- North ward:
 - Thornton Reginald* (Ind.)
 - Burns, Samuel Herbert Priestly* (Ind.)
 - Robinson, Robert Wilton* (Ind.)
- North-east ward:
 - Brownlee, Robert Morris (S.L.)

– Tatham, Herbert Roger Gill (S.L.)

– Hunter, Samuel* (Ind.)

• South-east ward:

– Waite, John (S.L.)

– Trainor, James (S.L.)

– Ross, William Macaskill (S.L.)

• South-west ward:

– Angelini, Herman Vincent (S.L.)

– Cashman, Michael Daniel* (S.L.)

– Stapleton, Cecil (S.L.)

Those marked with an asterisk were re-elected from the previous council. "S.L." means State Labor, which is effectively Lang Labor (see above). "Ind." means Independent.

1935 Council: On Thursday 6 December, the aldermen elected **Cecil Stapleton** as mayor for 1935, with deputy mayor John Waite.

Special Council meeting in part called to "Consider plans of proposed alterations to the Town Hall Buildings, Mon 17 December 1934, p438:

Plans of Town Hall alterations

After due consideration of the plans of the proposed alterations to the Town Hall premises prepared by Mr. C. Hirst, architect.

Alderman Angelini moved:

A. "That tenders be invited for reconstruction of the Town Hall according to plans submitted to and approved by Council including suggested alterations to the Banquet room and any adjustments made necessary by requirements of the Chief Secretary's Dept. B. "That the opinion of the Architect be obtained re the construction of a small hall over the Council Chambers"

Seconded by Ald. Thornton and Carried.

Ordinary council meeting, Tue 22 January 1935, p449:

Orders of the Day: 1. To open and examine tenders for alterations to Town Hall.

The Mayor explained that only one tender had been received and as three tenders at least had to be submitted before Council could borrow the necessary money to proceed with the work he suggested, the tender be not opened and he given authority to obtain quotes if possible from builders and deal with the matter at next Council meeting.

The Mayor's suggestion was adopted.

Ordinary council meeting, Tue 5 February 1935, p450:

Mayor's Minute

Proposed Loan £13,000

The Mayor submitted a minute (see inset) advising the borrowing of £13,000 for specified purposes

The Mayor moved and Ald. Waite seconded:

"That the minute be adopted and that steps be taken to obtain the Governor's approval to the loan and the Town Clerk make enquiries as to the lowest rate of interest the money can be obtained.

Alderman Thornton moved an amendment which

was seconded by Ald. Robinson:
“That the matter be referred to the Finance Committee for further consideration.
On the question being put, the amendment was defeated and the motion carried on the following division, viz:

For the motion.

Aldermen Trainer, Cashman, Angelini, Waite, Brownlee, Tatham, and the Mayor 7

Against the motion

Aldermen Thornton, Robinson, Hunter, & Burns 4

Alderman Ross was absent.

Orders of the Day

1. To open and examine tenders for alteration to the Town Hall.

The Mayor stated there was still only one tender which was before last Council meeting (unopened) and he had been unable to obtain quotations from other builders. Ald. Burns moved that the tender be returned to the tendered and that he be also informed of alteration in specification.

Seconded by Ald. Hunter and carried.

The Mayor’s typed minute was as follows:

MAYOR’S MINUTE PROPOSED LOAN OF £13,000

Since I have occupied the position of Mayor of this Municipality I have given much consideration to matters which engaged the attention of the last Council and which although so much desired for the progress of our suburb, it was found impossible to proceed with the scheme, the stumbling block being – lack of finance. It was quite obvious that drainage schemes estimated to cost £10,000 and other necessary works could not be undertaken and paid for out of ordinary revenue, and although much required they were passed over for the time being.

I have consulted with the Engineer in reference to the much needed drainage work and have after much thought, decided it would be best to raise a Special Loan of £13,000 for what is required, viz:

Drainage	£10,400
Town Hall alterations	1,600
Dressing Sheds –	
Easton Park	1,000
	£13,000

I would therefore recommend that the necessary steps be taken as required by Section 181 of the Local Government Act, 1919, to make application for the Governor’s Approval to borrow, and the Town Clerk be authorised to obtain information in respect to the lowest possible rate of interest at which the Loan can be obtained.

[Signed] Cecil Stapleton
M A Y O R

Ordinary council meeting, Tue 19 February 1935,
pp455,456:

Correspondence

3. H.E. Sheen protesting against proposed loan of £13,000. Received
7. Aust, T. & G. Assurance Coy
8. Commonwealth Bank
- 8A. Concreters Ltd
Quotations in respect to proposed loan of £13,000. Received and consideration deferred until after the preliminary notice as required by Section 181 of the Local Government Act has expired.

Finance Committee meeting, Tue 16 April 1935, p373:

166. Chas. N. Hirst Plan 45 0 0

1936 Council: On 17 December 1935 the aldermen elected **John Waite** as mayor for 1936, with deputy mayor John Trainor.

Works Committee meeting, Tue 15 September 1936, p4:

4. *Erection of Glass House in Town Hall Grounds for propagation of plants (Mayor’s minute 1st Sept./36). Resolved on motion of Ald. Brownlee seconded by Ald. Tatham “a sum not exceeding £100 to be voted for the purpose in accordance with plan submitted.*

B Acknowledgements

This history was produced in Portable Document Format (PDF) using the L^AT_EX document preparation system (Lamport, 1994). It is best read as an electronic document using a PDF reader, such as Adobe Acrobat Reader. Doing so provides the following benefits over hardcopy:

- As the images in this document are included at full resolution, zooming will provide much greater detail than appears on an A4 printed page. For example, try viewing Fig. 1 at 400% magnification.
- Text in blue provides an active link. Clicking on a Figure or Table number should take you to the relevant item. Clicking on a URL should open the relevant page in a web browser (on a well-configured computer system).

All images have been processed using GIMP, the GNU Image Manipulation Program.

Ray Stevens alerted the author to the existence of the Balmain Town Hall – Conservation Management Plan, 2003.

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MY KIND CO - BALMAIN TOWN HALL PROPOSAL: August 14 2022

COMMUNITY & COLLABORATION HUB

***Outline of My Kind Co's concepts and proposals for revitalisation of Balmain Civic Precinct**

As long term engaged local residents, employed in Balmain and with children attending the local schools, the team at My Kind Co, a Balmain collective, propose that any upgrades to the Balmain Library take into account the *bigger picture*, being the Town Hall/Courthouse/Depot as a civic precinct as a whole. We wish to highlight that any proposed reconfigurations to the floor plans of the civic buildings and any access points, must consider the great potential of the surrounding outdoor space, for a cohesive reimagining of a Civic Centre.

We currently see these important, historic and largely functional buildings are not only in need of restorative renovation, but an overall usage plan and management, and masterplan for the surrounding urban landscape. By doing so, Council will not only bring cohesion to the entire space, but understand where and when funds should be dedicated, to realise a holistic place-making approach and plan for the entire Balmain Town Hall Civic Precinct.

***Our submission here is to be viewed as an invitation for further consultation with My Kind Co, creative directors, strategists and landscape architects.**

IN BRIEF, OUR SUBMISSION ADDRESSES THE PRECINCT IN THREE ZONES

Overall, we propose a precinct to attract, capture & engage through a hub of community spaces. The spaces are to include cultural and historical recognition, innovation and the arts, community collaboration, social purpose activities and council initiatives. A variety of partnership opportunities for the precinct should be explored to maximise the precinct's potential.

ZONE 1: Outdoor Community Space

- Expand the Library and Town Hall Meeting Rooms into all surrounding and shared outdoor space
- Reassess, connect and upgrade all outdoor spaces surrounding the library maximising precinct usable footprint
- Relocate the carpark and library waste management, in exchange for a vibrant pedestrian shared zone and green space between the buildings capturing visitors
- Regenerate green spaces with dedicated native landscape design and first nations public art
- Storytelling and educational opportunities about historical figures and events, through public art and informative installations
- Extensive permanent lighting plan, for illumination of the historic facades of buildings and art installations, including way finding lighting creating a safe precinct for evening events and community gatherings

- Glasshouse to be a central flexible educational community green hub; generating connection, knowledge and native plants for the precinct

ZONE 2: Indoor Collaborative Space

- Current archives storage space (upstairs above the library) to be relocated and the space repurposed as an extension of the library footprint, as a quiet reading space with work stations, allowing for more 'active' social use of the library downstairs
- Storytelling and educational opportunities about historical figures and events, through public art and informative installations
- Regenerate and refurbish to increase the usability of the Glasshouse by creating an educational, sustainable, innovative, collaborative and programmed 'greenhouse' space
- Include in-residence Creative Industries tenure for Town Hall Meeting Room, regular programming and activation. Upgrade facilities to be flexible and reflect contemporary community use, including to house exhibitions and live events
- Refurbish and equip the Town Hall and Town Hall Meeting room with contemporary permanent audio visual facilities, lighting and acoustic treatment for events, live performance and rehearsals
- Renovate bathrooms to include change room facilities for performers
- Renovate kitchens for event catering standards

COURT HOUSE

- **Repurpose and reimagine Court House into Cultural, Creative and Performing Arts Centre.** Featuring flexible exhibition spaces, commercial and fine art creative studios and co-working, rehearsal studios, intimate scale theatre space, art house cinema, licensed cafe/wine bar.
- Retaining significant heritage features and 'legal' stories interwoven in a contemporary engaging place-making context
- Open house approach with community group engagement and programming to be encouraged and explored

ZONE 3: Community & Collaborative Space

- Council Depot as community leisure, creative in-residence program and hospitality hub
- Reimagine the Council Depot as a space for both community and collaboration through 'The Grounds' style local hospitality kiosks, 'green' food trucks, seating areas and community garden
- Repurpose dedicated area as a sustainability and recycling hub- demonstrating concept of the community 'circular economy' in action
- Re-home artist studios to the Depot having direct interaction with the public and building creative community
- Consider regular and periodic themed community activation of the space, with interactive facilities such as usable pizza ovens ([see Albury City Council](#)), food trucks and open-air cinema and regular community hire for appropriate celebratory events (example [Bridge Road School Forest venue hire](#)).

My Kind Co has proven records of achievement in activation and place-making of the precinct, through pilot activation events held in the Glasshouse and Town Hall Meeting room, namely Queen Bees of Balmain in March 2021. This included a clear focus to engage the local community, support and showcase local female artists, beautifying the historic space and demonstrate the greening of our Balmain Town Hall precinct environment.

We would welcome a meeting with Council to discuss the full extent of our ideation and proposal. Connecting with community with creativity, securing partnerships, sponsorships and funding, form a large part of our capacity. My Kind Co has an extensive creative network and we are a part of and have regular engagement with, Inner West and Balmain community groups. These include- the Balmain Association, Friends of the Balmain Library, The Glass House Community Group, My Kind Co Creative Collective - Online Community, Inner West Mums, Balmain and Rozelle Carers and Parents, local schools and their P&Cs, local residents and businesses at large.

We also have the support and interest of Mayor Darcy Byrne and Councillor Kobi Shetty, in our persistent and consistent efforts to activate and revitalise the Balmain Town Hall Precinct.

[PLEASE CONTACT US FOR MORE DETAILS](#)



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Balmain Town Hall precinct project

Hello [REDACTED]

Can I chip, in a suggestion as well.

The inclusion of the Balmain Courthouse I assume will form an important part of an overall strategy for the precinct. It would be fair to say that very few people have been inside the Court itself, let alone the labyrinth of back of house facilities that are part of it. Also I doubt anyone has ever been upstairs!!! At best some may have seen inside the courtroom, the foyer and the clerks office when trying to have a Stat Dec. signed.

Do you think the Department of Justice would be open to the suggestion of an Open Day for the building? I suspect it may be too late to include this year as part of heritage month (I don't recall seeing Justice Week on the calendar). Maybe it could be part of Open Sydney in November if Council was behind the idea and sponsored that part?

If the public are more informed as to what this treasure is they may be more enthusiastic about its inclusion. It is hard to dream about possibilities if you have not experienced it first.

I suspect Council officers and Councillors may not have been inside either?

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

O I K O S
A r c h i t e c t s

[REDACTED]

oikos - (An. Greek) meaning domestic house or household also *oikonomia* meaning domestic management and **economy** (*oikos* house + *nomia* to manage), see also **ecology**

Please Note:
If you have received this e-mail in error, our apologies.

14 August 2022

Inner West Council

PO Box 14

Petersham, NSW 2049

Attn: Mayor Darcy Byrne

Baludarri - Balmain Town Hall Vision - Public Private Partnership

Dear Mayor,

I am a local resident of Rozelle, active in property development in Balmain. As a passionate ambassador for the Balmain Peninsula, with its culturally rich and diverse community and deep rooted heritage, I request the opportunity to discuss a proposal to elevate the culture, economic and community experience of the Peninsula.

The Balmain Town Hall Precinct is the geographic heart of the Balmain Peninsula, ever present in the daily lives of residents. However, minimal activation within the precinct impacts the utility of the site as a cultural heritage or economic centre. In reality, the lack of activation around the site has resulted in investment centralising further east towards the Woolworths precinct, west at the Leagues Club precinct and more recently to the south with the State Government's proposal for The Bays West precinct

The opportunity for the Balmain Peninsula community and the Council is to leverage the recent proposal to upgrade the Balmain Town Hall Precinct to deliver a vibrant precinct where residents live, work and play all within a close radius of their home and an environment where density provides community activation at a scale sympathetic to its surrounds.

To deliver this vision, I propose consideration be given to engaging in a Public Private Partnership to redevelop not only the Council assets, but the entire Precinct in conjunction with the State Government.

In the 2022-2023 Budget, the Council allocated \$1.4m to the project in question. By partnering with the private sector, Council can recover the budget allocation and reinvest the allocated funds towards other Council ventures, such as operating long day care centres, family day care, preschool and outside school hours care; services and facilities that are critical to the ongoing livability of the Inner West.


Partnering with the private sector would enable Council to develop the asset, increase public amenity and return a greater outcome for the residents of the Balmain Peninsula. Examples of such partnerships are scattered across Sydney with the Kiora Lane Precinct in Double Bay providing a brand new public library and community spaces, a supermarket, public parking and active laneways.

Developing Council and State owned assets within the Balmain Town Hall Precinct poses the opportunity for an outcome to benefit residents now and in the future. By adding density to the rear depot site, providing relief to the heritage buildings and commercialising the streetscape, the Precinct could once again become the beating heart of The Peninsula.

With key stakeholders including Balmain Peninsula Residents, Local Businesses, The NSW State Government, Telstra, NSW Police and Inner West Council, it is not a direct and simple development proposal. The economic and social benefits of the development are at the heart of any proposal and would be driven by the inputs from all key stakeholders to ensure a precinct that residents love to live, work and play is delivered.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss potential partnership opportunities for the development to achieve the best social and economic outcome for the community; delivering housing, economic activity and social spaces for teaching, learning and gathering.

Regards,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the Director.A small black rectangular redaction box covering the name of the Director.

Director

A black rectangular redaction box covering the contact information of the Director.

