

# Balmain Hospital 130th Anniversary

1885–2015



Health  
Sydney  
Local Health District





## Message from Dr Genevieve Wallace, General Manager, Balmain Hospital

Welcome to celebrations for the 130th birthday of Balmain Hospital. It is a privilege and an honour to be at the helm of a hospital steeped in such history and staffed by incredible people, passionate to deliver the very best in health care.

Balmain Hospital has changed many times since opening its doors in 1885. When it was first established, the suburb of Balmain was deeply working class. Its tiny lanes and docks were a vibrant centre for shipbuilding, metal works, engineering, boilermaking and coal mining. Thousands of lowly-paid workers rented small cottages across the peninsula, and overcrowding became an issue.

Balmain Hospital's first purpose was to "provide for the frequent accidents and the popular treatment of serious illness that occurs in such thickly populated areas".

But, as times changed, and reliance on the wharves and heavy industry reduced, the demographics of the suburb also changed – and we changed along with it.

This book contains a wonderful timeline which covers the history of this hospital – and I encourage you to take the time to view how far we've come – but one thing that has never changed here is the people. The ones for whom this hospital holds special meaning; the ones who always go that extra mile; the ones who are proud to call this hospital their home away from home.

This book pays homage to those people – the very lifeblood of this hospital. We are not a bustling metropolis, but we are a community of clinicians and staff with huge hearts; people who come to work each and every day to make a difference in the lives of those within our walls. And I am proud to say it is something we do very well.

May I take this opportunity to thank you all for your loyalty; your diligence; and your empathy. This hospital has an absorbing past and a very bright future.

### Dr Genevieve Wallace

General Manager  
Balmain Hospital

*We are  
a community of  
clinicians and staff  
with huge hearts*

## Who we are

**278** staff

**92** beds

**13,079**  
annual GPC  
presentations

**\$42**  
million budget

**1082**  
annual admissions

### What services we provide

#### Ambulatory Care –

services for patients requiring intravenous or other specialised therapies to treat a skin infection, pneumonia or blood clotting disorder.

#### Transitional Care Unit –

provides up to 12 weeks inpatient support for older people who are medically stable but need to complete their recovery and organise living arrangements.

#### Aged Care –

assessment and treatment of medical conditions in the elderly.

#### General Practice Casualty –

services treating minor illnesses and injuries.

#### Outpatients –

services such as acupuncture, podiatry and physiotherapy.

#### Rehabilitation –

provides patients with various types of therapy to improve physical abilities and regain independence before leaving hospital.

## How we have evolved

We have evolved over the years to better suit the needs of the community and the Local Health District. We offer a unique general practice casualty service which provides the local community with medical assistance for low acuity problems. We also have a Hospital in The Home service which treats patients at home or in our outpatient clinic for issues which once would have required admission to hospital.

We recently opened a rehabilitation garden which allows patients to practise everyday activities such as negotiating steps, putting out the bin or getting in and out of a car, before they are discharged home.

# The colourful man who sold Balmain for five shillings



*He extracted a spear from Governor Arthur Phillip's shoulder after a run in with "hostile natives".*

William Balmain, pictured, probably won't go down in history as a real estate visionary, but he certainly led one very colourful life.

The namesake of one of Sydney's most expensive suburbs handed over 550 acres of choice waterfront land for a mere five shillings in 1801 (or about \$24 in today's terms) soon after it was granted by the NSW Governor for "services rendered".

Apparently, Balmain, a Scottish doctor who had travelled to Australia on the First Fleet, owed money and thought the land – and the shillings – a fair exchange to clear the debt. Little did he know just how valuable it would become.

Credited with delivering the First Fleet's first baby, he engaged in a pistol duel

with his boss after a disagreement and challenged merino king and lifelong adversary John Macarthur to the same. He extracted a spear from Governor Arthur Phillip's shoulder after a run in with "hostile natives" and was involved in covert rum deals with India under the Governor's nose.

But for all his connections and contributions to the fledgling colony, Balmain was buried in an unmarked grave in Britain after his death from liver disease at 41.

His old foe John Macarthur, whom he had labelled a 'base rascal and an atrocious liar and villain', showed up for the funeral – possibly just to confirm for himself his pistol-wielding enemy would give him no more trouble.

## Our People:

### MICHAEL BERBARI

Head of Department, Occupational Therapy



*We live in a very multicultural District and when we visit our patients at home, we are welcomed in like friends.*

I've been at Balmain for 10 years this year. We've just installed our rehabilitation garden at the front of the hospital – thanks to funds we won through the District's innovation competition, The Pitch. The idea for the garden has been in the making for a long time, but when The Pitch came up, it was a great opportunity to put the proposal forward.

We do a lot of a work with people in their home environments, but the new garden also gives us the opportunity to simulate those environments for people who are still in hospital.

I'm very pleased to see it come to fruition – and so are all the therapists involved.

The other aspect that gives me pride is that we continue to meet the growing demand for aged care services and we continue to deliver great care. It's a great feeling to see a frail, elderly patient in hospital in their

night gown and then you see them at home, taking control in their own environment and wanting to share their culture with you.

We live in a very multicultural District and when we visit our patients at home, we are welcomed in like friends. They are always very keen to share their cultures with us – we get a lot of meals and biscuits and coffee.

When I look back over my 10 years here, I would say one of my highlights was working with a patient who was a former OT herself. She had very clear ideas about wanting to stay living at home as long as possible and I worked with her to achieve that. Only recently, I heard she has gone into care.

Together, we achieved four or five more years of independent living and that's a fantastic outcome.

## Our People:

# DEBRA DONNELLY

Nurse



*As I walk through  
the wards now,  
I can still see, hear  
and remember  
all of the ghosts  
of my mentors  
and good times past.*

I was born in Balmain Hospital in 1960. My mother, Margaret Saunders (above left), was working there at the time. She'd started her general training at Balmain in 1955. I used to walk to school at St Augustine's with my two sisters every morning via Balmain Hospital so mum could plait our hair. She became charge nurse of Wakefield and Mort's Dock wards so I guess it was only natural that I would become a nurse.

I was initially accepted by St Vincent's but then realised it was run by nuns, so I switched to Balmain. I did do six months in the Central Sterilising Department first, though, because mum thought I should work. I thought I should be laying by the pool until my general training started, but she won.

Nicole Kidman's mother was one of our nursing tutors and her photo still hangs in the office of the Director of Nursing.

I worked in orthopaedics as an RN after graduation and I even worked in the emergency department for a while with mum. There was a sign in the tea room which said "Clean up after yourself. Your mother doesn't work here!". Clearly, that didn't apply to me.

I was there in 1993 to "turn the lights off" when Balmain District Hospital changed its role to aged care and rehab. And I've never really strayed too far away. I'm now the District's clinical manager for Aged Care, Rehabilitation, Chronic and Ambulatory Care, Endocrinology, General Medicine, General Practice and Andrology, so I still spend time at Balmain.

Balmain Hospital has been in my life forever, really. It has always been a great place to work over the years with many passionate and dedicated staff caring for patients for 130 years. It has always had a great community feel. I have made many friends from my training days and beyond and the place will always remain close to my heart.



## Our People:

# SUMAN KARKI

Hospital assistant



*I really like chatting with the patients who all tell me their stories.*

I came to Australia from Nepal about seven years ago to study and have been at Balmain Hospital for about three and a half years. I work in Environmental Services but I also fill in for my manager when he's on leave. Everyone is friendly and cooperative, and I really like chatting with the patients who all tell me their stories.

When the recent earthquake hit Kathmandu, it was very scary. Luckily, my parents had arrived here about two weeks before it happened and no-one in my family was hurt. Even so, I was still checking the news online every day and calling relatives back in Nepal when I could.

My mum and dad are staying in Australia until October and then we'll be going back with them for a two-month holiday. I'm looking forward to that. I miss Kathmandu. But it has been so helpful having them here. My wife and I both work and study, plus we have a three-year-old, so we're very busy.

I'm doing a Master of Health Service Management and my wife is a nursing assistant studying to become a registered nurse. I'm in my second semester and when I graduate, I'll be looking for a job in management.



# History of Balmain Hospital: 1885–2015



1880

1890

1900

1910

**1885:**

The Balmain Cottage Hospital officially opens on 10 August by Premier, Sir A. Stuart, K.C.M.G.

**1897:**

Evans Ward opens on 6 March.

**1901:**

New 'Victoria Ward' opens with women's and children's wards and an outpatient department in the basement on 14 September by the Premier, J. See.

**1912:**

Electricity is installed in the hospital.

**1907:**

Masseur service introduced, the beginning of current physiotherapy department.



1920

1930

1940

#### 1923:

A cottage in Booth Street is converted to a children's ward, known as "The Betts' Ward".

#### 1924:

24 hour casualty and pathology services introduced and John Goulston and David Easton wards commissioned.

**Telephone is installed throughout the hospital.**

#### 1927:

Thornton House (the present clinical building) is built.

#### 1928:

**Wireless is installed throughout the hospital.**

#### 1935:

Jane Patient Ward opens.

#### 1937:

Stacey House opens on 22 May and construction of a new boiler house, with two coal fired boilers supplied by the staff of Mort's Dock and Engineering Co. Ltd., begins.

#### 1942:

The Sarah Murden Pathological Block opens on 7 November.

Construction of a new four-storey Ward Block to provide accommodation for 96 patients begins, estimated to cost £45,000.

#### 1943:

Construction on "Thornton House" including Mort's Dock Ward, Lever Ward and John Beasley Ward is completed, bringing total beds to 260.

#### 1944:

Thornton House basement designated for orthopaedics and named the Harry Williams Ward.

#### 1946:

**Male nurses introduced.**

#### 1947:

**Paging system installed.**



1960

**1960:**  
Harold Simpson Wing adjoining Thornton House opens on 2 April by Minister for Health, W. Sheahan. The extension included four operating theatres, central sterilising department, Colgate ward, labour ward and nurseries.

**1966:**  
Marion Steward Training School for Nurses opens on 13 May.

1970

**1970:**  
Cardiac Care Unit (four beds) is established in the Lever Ward, the first patient admitted on 8 July 1971.

**1973:**  
Harry Williams and John Beasley wards close to allow for new casualty department and Wakefield Ward.

**1974:**  
Thornton House redevelopment is complete and new Casualty department opens on 12 December after renovation of over \$1 million.

Local ambulance service commences with a vehicle donated by Balmain Rotary Club.

1980

**1981:**  
Last baby born in the maternity unit.

**1985:**  
Balmain Hospital celebrates its centenary.

**1985-1988:**  
Mort's Dock Ward is refurbished into a Geriatric Assessment and Rehabilitation Unit.

**1989:**  
Mort's Dock reopens as first geriatric ward in the hospital.

1990

**1994-1995:**  
Major refurbishment exceeding \$1 million transforms Balmain Hospital to the new geriatric and rehabilitation facility for Central Sydney Area Health with a new physiotherapy department, Conference Centre, medical records department, morgue, and administration section.

Innovative new GP Casualty unit opens to service the needs of the general public.

**1996:**  
Balmain Hospital becomes the single distribution centre for the Area's Provision of Appliances for Disabled People.





1990

2000

2010

2015

#### 1998:

Refurbishments to the clinical support areas provide office space, meeting rooms and an upgraded library.

#### 1999:

Strength Training Rehabilitation and Outreach Needs in Geriatric (STRONG) Medicine clinic is established.

#### 2006:

Mort's Dock Unit is refurbished for the Centre for STRONG Medicine and a 14-bed Transitional Care Unit opens.

#### 2009:

Ambulatory Care begins in the General Practice Casualty.

#### 2011-2012:

Pathology and outpatient clinics are upgraded including a new triage room for the General Practice Casualty.

#### 2013:

Hospital in The Home service is established.

#### 2015:

Rehabilitation Garden opens in June.

#### 2015

August – Balmain Hospital celebrates 130 years.



## Our People:

### JOHN SHEEHY

Nurse Unit Manager



*My grandfather was one of the Rats of Tobruk. One day here I met a patient who knew him. Now that's six degrees of separation.*

I came here as an enrolled nurse in 1996 as a typical snotty young thing in my 20s who thought I knew everything.

I actually met my wife here in the trainee enrolled nurse program but she wouldn't have a bar of me. I pursued her for 10 years but she kept saying no because she thought I needed to grow up.

And so, eventually, I did. In 2007 I decided to become a registered nurse – and an adult. And she agreed to marry me. We now have two young children and nothing is more important than my family.

Early on I fell in love with geriatric nursing. I love my history and I could bore you for hours with details about the Roman and Napoleonic wars. I think that crosses over into my work because I have a great

respect for the oldies. They've lived it all and I love hearing their stories.

My grandfather was one of the Rats of Tobruk. He died two weeks before I was born so we never met. But one day here I met a patient who knew him. Now that's six degrees of separation.

Since working here, I've also fallen in love with wounds. We have a lot of patients here with chronic wounds, and the more manky and festering they are, the more I like them. There's something cathartic about cleaning them. And before you think I'm weird, I'm not the only one with this passion. There are at least six other wound fanatics in Sydney.

Being a nurse can be difficult yet rewarding. You don't get thanked every day but on the days you do, you know why you're here.

## Our People:

### KYLIE DRAPER

Speech pathologist



*There's a great deal of rapport and support here.*

I've been here for two years and it's my cup of tea. I'm from a small country town, so working here means I get experience in acute care at a metropolitan hospital with a country atmosphere.

I love the casemix at Balmain because I get to work in acute and aged care.

I had one patient stay for 120 days because I was able to advocate for him and work with everyone in the multi-disciplinary team to achieve the best outcome. I don't know if that would have been possible at a larger hospital. There's a great deal of rapport and support here.

Speech pathology is my second degree. My first was in hearing and speech, but once we studied neurology, I knew I wanted to do this.

Everyone knows everyone here at Balmain. From Stan the maintenance man to the kitchen staff, we all get along and it takes me out of my speech pathology bubble and well beyond Allied Health.

When my mum and dad visited me from the country and came to work, Stan told them how much I'm valued and that they're all looking after me. It feels like home.

When I'm not at work, I run half marathons, play OzTag, go to the gym – and I bake. Whenever we have case conferences, I cook up something sweet and work my way around the place after the meeting sharing my food. I bake for the whole hospital.

And that's not something you can do at RPA.

## Our People:

# STAN WEDZONKA

Carpenter



*I fix everything here.  
I'm the A to Z man  
so I'm very good  
at knowing  
how to fix things.*

I came to Australia from Poland when I was 25. I was young and stupid and up for anything.

I knew communism wasn't for me so I first headed to Italy, and spent two years in the immigration camps before arriving in Australia. I think my mother expected I'd be back within a few years once everything settled down, but I knew I'd never return.

The people in Australia are so easy going; it's a wonderful culture.

*I've been at Balmain Hospital for 24 years and I'd say I know the names of about 95 per cent of the people here. Even all the nurses.*

Technically, I'm the supervisor of the tools but I'd prefer you just call me the carpenter. I was born to work with my hands, not sit

behind a desk in an office. It's not my style.

I fix everything here. Well, if I can't fix it, they call in a contractor but they haven't had to do that often. I'm the A to Z man. In my culture in Poland, we all had to know how to do two or three different jobs. Carpentry, mechanics, bricklaying, whatever, so I'm very good at knowing how to fix things.

When I'm not here, I fish. I fish as often as I can and wherever I can.

I won a trophy from NSW Fisheries for catching a 4.5 pound John Dory on a line in deep water. That was a fluke. But I just love catching and eating them. My wife and I share the cooking, but I have to do all the scaling and cleaning. She won't touch that.

I still call Poland a few times a week but I'm staying here. My heart and home are here.



## Our People:

### KERRY HYLAND and LES HILLIER

Administration Supervisor and Finance Manager



*Everyone is so approachable and caring.*

**Kerry:** We met in 1977 when I started here as a medical typist. Les had gone through a divorce and he kept asking me out. Every five minutes, to be honest. But I said no.

Then one day he invited me to his daughter's birthday party. I thought well, it's just a birthday party. And if I don't take the chance, I'll never know so I went along and realised what a nice guy he was.

We've been married since 1979 and have had no problems working together. He does his thing, and I do mine. And we never take our work home.

I was born in this hospital and I gave birth to my daughter here. I also went to Balmain Public School, so I haven't ventured far. But we've seen some huge changes. I remember when we got our first computer

in 1980 – and it was only one. We had to do all the accounts, the banking, everything on that one computer.

**Les:** I've been working in health since 1963 when I started at Auburn Hospital. Since then, I've worked at Marrickville, Tresillian and the former Rachel Forster and Western Suburbs hospitals.

*I then went to RPA for a while before coming back here to Balmain. We all know each other here, and everyone is so approachable and caring.*

People probably think we have cushy jobs here at Balmain because it's so small, but we need to be multi-skilled and willing to do everything.

This morning I was on the switchboard and Kerry was watering the plants.

## Our People:

# BETTY IRELAND

Former nurse



*Nursing has changed so much but one thing that has never changed is the companionship; the mateship.*

I started at Balmain Hospital in 1947. I'd wanted to be a teacher and had applied for a scholarship – which I won – but my father wanted me to do nursing. I thought he was wrong and we exchanged some angry words over it, but years later I realised he was right. I've never regretted becoming a nurse. And every nurse is a teacher because you are always mentoring younger staff or educating patients.

Nursing has changed so much but one thing that has never changed is the companionship; the mateship. When I was training in theatres, I worked with a senior nurse called Joyce. We became very firm friends because she was always getting me out of strife. We had a head nurse who was a bit difficult, shall I say, but Joyce was always there to save the day for me. We stayed friends for 62 years and when she died a few years ago, my heart broke.

I'd say getting an OAM for services to nursing in 2014 was definitely a highlight for me. But there was another highlight I will

always remember. We were due to receive our exam results one day and I was working. When I was told I had passed, there was a woman in the office standing behind me who made a special point of telling me how happy she was for me. I was thrilled that I had passed but I suddenly remembered that she had just lost her 13-year-old child to kidney failure. She had so much sadness, yet she still took the time to say how pleased she was for me. I'll never forget that moment. That's the thing with nursing – it teaches you so much about your thinking and appreciating others.

I gave more than 40 years' service to Balmain Hospital and was the president of the women's auxiliary for many years, but now I spend my days volunteering with Legacy and Probus. And I make daily visits to the park to see my many friends – some of whom have four legs. For those ones, I take a bumbag full of treats. It's known as Betty's Tuckshop. If your dog has wandered off, everyone knows it will be at Betty's Tuckshop.

## Our People:

# KAREN McDONALD

Clinical Support Officer



*Interacting  
with people  
and helping them  
feel better  
about themselves  
is important to me.*

I've been working at Balmain Hospital for about six years after leaving my former career as a partner in a real estate valuing firm with my husband. The decision to become, first a ward clerk, and then a clinical support officer here was a lifestyle choice. Real estate might be big money but it's also high pressure and long hours.

*I love it here. It's a small hospital, we all know each other and we all help each other. Make no mistake – it can be hectic, stressful and chaotic but it's always fun – and I love that.*

I teach aerobics at a gym in Five Dock one or two days a week. I used to teach five days a week. I've cut that back, but I still train every day. I also used to be a personal trainer and it's interesting how they're linked.

I often walk around the hospital and watch the physiotherapists and the occupational

therapists working with patients and I think to myself 'I've been doing that all my life.'

I love getting to know all the patients on my ward. Interacting with people and helping them feel better about themselves is important to me.

I remember one woman having a tough time with her body. She'd just had a baby and her self-image was low so I encouraged her to try aerobics. I said you'll start at the back of the class in your baggy t-shirt and you'll move through to the front in your tights. And she did.

That's the best part of my job – seeing people improve themselves and grow in confidence.

I have no plans to leave this place. It's right for me. I expect I'll be here until they take me out in a box.





Balmain Hospital



th Anniversary