

A History of Medicine in Hunters Hill

Medicine in the Colony: 1788-1860.

In 1788, when the First Fleet arrived, medical science was barely embryonic. The British doctors at the time believed diseases were due to *miasmas*, mysterious odours from decaying material or diseased patients, or to sedentary habits, emotional upsets, or environmental conditions especially being cold or wet. The only drug they had that worked for infectious diseases was quinine for Malaria and perhaps mercurial salts for Syphilis. By contrast, Indigenous Australians had a large pharmacopoeia of drugs of herbal and animal origin. They saw disease as a disturbance of a patient's spirit and sought to rectify that disturbance. Both British doctors and Indigenous medical men could set broken bones and treat wounds.

The First Fleet consisted of 11 ships transporting over 1400 people, 24,000 kilometres in 251 days. Forty eight people died. On board were ten doctors, including surgeons Arthur Bowes Smyth (no relation to Andrew Bowes) and William Balmain. The doctors were members of the navy, employed by the British Government. The Second Fleet (1790) came to a colony that was starving. Unfortunately, one of the desperately needed supply ships was lost and over 250 of the 1000 convicts died on the journey. Five hundred arrived ill; many died. The shipping company was paid per person joining the ship, not per person leaving it. A military hospital was set up in tents on Observatory Hill. The Colonial Medical Service provided most of the medical care to the convicts and free settlers from 1788. It was not until after 1850 as the population and wealth grew that private medical practices became established.

High mortality in the early settlement was due to yet to be recognised communicable diseases, mainly dysentery, typhus and typhoid, abetted by malnutrition and scurvy. Childhood illnesses including whooping cough and measles occurred in seasonal epidemics from the 1830s. Influenza epidemics were connected to pandemics and local, seasonal endemics. Tuberculosis was a common cause of death. Maternal mortality from puerperal infections remained high (6.4 deaths per 1000 live births 1871-1880).

From 1880 the mortality rate from communicable diseases began to fall, as bacteria were identified and transmission of germs understood. It was not until the late 19th century that hospitals, laboratories and universities came together to produce modern scientific medicine.

Transportation of Doctors from Britain to the Colony

It was difficult to attract doctors to the penal colony: some were naval doctors. Another solution was to allow medical practitioners who had fallen foul of the law to work in the colony. For example, Dr D'Arcy Wentworth came on the Second Fleet after being found "not guilty of highway robbery" in England, but he was advised to leave. After four years on Norfolk Island, Governor Lachlan Macquarie made him Chief of Police and Treasurer of the Police Fund and eventually Principal Surgeon. Wentworth was given the contract to build Sydney Hospital and the sole rights to import rum to the colony. Consequently, the hospital was called the Rum Hospital. His son, WC Wentworth, was the explorer and wrote the early colonial laws.

In 1801, William Redfern (1774-1833) was a surgeon's apprentice under his older brother and passed the examinations of the London Company of Surgeons in 1797. He became a surgeon's mate in the navy, but was sentenced to death for mutiny. This was commuted to life imprisonment. He was transported in 1801, served four years in jail, worked for two years as an assistant surgeon on Norfolk Island, and received a full pardon in 1803. He was appointed to Sydney Hospital in 1809, developed a large private practice, and was a founding member of the Bank of NSW with Dr D'Arcy Wentworth. The suburb Redfern is named after him.

In 1814, Dr William Bland, (1789-1868), a naval surgeon, was sentenced to seven years transportation for the murder of a ship's purser in a duel in Bombay. He was released early from Castle Hill Lunatic Asylum and worked at the Sydney Dispensary in Hunter Street (operated by John Tawell another ex-convict). Dr Bland became Sydney's first full-time private practitioner in 1815. He invented instruments to remove cataracts and bladder stones and even removed a peripheral aneurysm in 1827. This was 20 years before anaesthesia by ether or chloroform was used in the colony. Governor Macquarie charged Dr Bland with libel and he served a year in prison. He then lived in Hunters Hill and worked as a surgeon at Gladesville

Psychiatric Hospital, at Bedlam Point. He bought 30 acres of land nearby, an area then known as Blandville, now Henley. Blandville Court, opposite the hospital, is named in his honour.

Apprentice Doctors in the Colony

Over time, and following the British tradition of medical training, from 1813 young men were apprenticed to qualified doctors as a way of addressing the shortage. In 1820, Henry Cowper, who arrived in Australia as an eight-year-old child, became the first apprentice doctor to travel to London and gain his Membership of the Royal College of Surgeons (MRCS). In 1823, William Sherwin became the first Australian-born medical student to gain his MRCS in London. He was an apprentice of Dr Bland, and there is a Sherwin Street in Henley (Blandville).

Important Medical Milestones in the Colonies

Below is a summary of some of the key medical developments:

- 1857: Sisters of Charity open St Vincent's Hospital
- **1860: First General Practice opens in Hunters Hill**
- 1862: Melbourne University Medical School established
- 1860 -1880: Large numbers of immigrant doctors arrive
- 1882: Prince Alfred Hospital opened
- 1883: Sydney University Medical School opens
- 1885: Adelaide University Medical School opens
- 1886: Radiology (x-rays) became available in Australia

Hunters Hill Doctors since 1860

Dr Jenner Plomley worked as the first doctor in Hunters Hill from 1860 until 1868. He was born in England in 1815 and trained at the University College London, graduating in 1837. Dr Plomley migrated to Australia, working as the ship's surgeon aboard the *William Stewart* in 1848. He lived in "The Warren" in Wandella Avenue at the end of Herberton Avenue in 1859. This sandstone cottage was destroyed during the construction of the Gladesville Bridge in 1960. Dr Plomley was a signatory on the petition to the Colonial government requesting permission for Hunters Hill to become a municipality. This was granted in 1861.

Following Dr Plomley, Dr FD Niblett lived and worked at 11 Alexandra Street from 1881. In 1887 the property was bought by William Clifton, Hunters Hill's first chemist. The house, 15 Alexandra Street, became the doctors' rooms in 1887, next door to the pharmacy, and was used as doctors' rooms at different periods up to 1979. Dr Niblett was an English-born and trained doctor who had worked in Clapton and Hackney in London until 1871.

Dr Sanderson Lloyd, one of Hunters Hill's most long serving doctors, practiced at 15 Alexandra Street from 1885 until his death in 1913. Dr Lloyd was the first example of a Hunters Hill doctor who was born in Australia (Adelaide), completed his schooling in Australia (St Peters College), and gained his medical degree in the UK (Edinburgh) prior to the opening of Sydney University's Medical School in 1883. When Dr Lloyd was on house calls on his horse-drawn buggy, it is reported that Mrs Lloyd would hang a white towel from an upstairs window if she needed to communicate with him. The telephone was established in Hunters Hill in 1884. Before the telephone, from the 1850s to the 1880s, communication also relied upon children running messages from their homes to wherever a doctor could be found. In 1909 Dr Lloyd became the first resident of Hunters Hill to own a motor vehicle, a De Dion-Bouton. He was a great fan of the words of Kipling, was beloved by the community, and Lloyd Avenue is named in his honour.

A number of doctors practiced out of rooms at 15 Alexandra Street. Dr William Denniston purchased 15 Alexandra Street in 1914 and is thought to have relocated to the eastern suburbs after the war. Sadly, he died in 1938 having fallen down the stairs of a double-decker bus. Dr Norman Robertson (1917-19): Scots College, University of Sydney and University of Edinburgh. In World War 1 he served in the Australian Medical Corps. In 1916 he was the Major in charge of the 1st Light Field Ambulance in Egypt. He was injured when a train he was travelling on was bombed. He met his wife, Neida, who had also been serving in Egypt on the ship on the way home. It was torpedoed en- route. He resumed practice at Hunters Hill in November 1917. Dr Charles Wassell bought the practice at 15 Alexandra Street including the waiting room furniture for the "princely sum of £1000" in 1919. Dr John Morgan, Australian-born, graduated from Sydney University in 1923. He served in the 6th Field Artillery Brigade in World War 1 delaying

his graduation as a doctor. He died of blood poisoning in 1931 aged 35. Dr Manning Hair practiced at 15 Alexandra Street throughout the 1930s.

Dr Callaghan John McCarthy King (Cally King) worked at 34 Woolwich Road in the 1930s and 1940s. He performed surgery and delivered babies at Ryde Hospital and helped in the out-patients' clinics at Sydney Hospital. In World War 2, Dr King was involved in the Hunters Hill Branch of the National Emergency Service conducting drills preparing for any potential Japanese attack. For example, more than 80 men and the local fire brigade simulated a bombing of St Joseph's College. After the war Dr King went into partnership with Dr Marie Grainger of Wharf Road, Gladesville, and continued with the Anderson twins when they bought Dr Grainger's practice. This was a relief from being on call seven days a week.

Dr Jack Walker succeeded Dr Manning Hair in 1939 at 15 Alexandra Street and worked there for over 30 years. He graduated from the University of Sydney in 1926 and did his residency at Balmain Hospital where he met his wife, Claire. After country locums in Hillston and Narrandera he worked for seven years in Holbrook. At 15 Alexandra Street Dr Walker conducted morning and evening surgeries. In between he saw patients at professional rooms in Gladesville, did house calls and delivered babies. He formed an association with Dr Angelo Callose (home and surgery: 129 Victoria Road, Gladesville). They shared the after-hours on-call and assisted one another performing surgery at Ryde District Soldiers Memorial Hospital. During the war Dr Walker was a member of the local civil defence force. In addition to raising four children, Claire Walker supported Dr Walker "behind the scenes". This involved answering the phone after hours, making appointments, acting as nurse, washing surgery linen, and sterilising equipment. Claire Walker lived to over 99 years. Dr John Marshall bought the practice at 15 Alexandra Street and worked there throughout the 1970s.

Dr David Dalgliesh bought the practice in 1979 and relocated it to 11 Alexandra Street on the other side of Hunters Hill Pharmacy. Dr Margot Cunich became the first full time woman general practitioner in 1982. Dr Mary-Lou Shiel, another notable woman doctor in Hunters Hill, practiced out of her own home further down Alexandra Street for many years. Dr Andrew

Bowes joined the practice in 1984, Dr Tony Keane in 1987, Dr Gabrielle Wood in 1988, and Dr Janice Newton in 1994. In 1994, Dr Andrew Bowes became the first senior doctor in the medical practice not to live above the doctor's rooms since the practice commenced in 1860.

In 2009, with the assistance of the Practice Manager Judith Dalglish and partners Drs Wood and Keane, Dr Bowes moved Hunters Hill Medical Practice (HHMP) from the cottage rooms at 11 Alexandra Street to commercial rooms at 6 Ryde Road, Hunters Hill. Dr Charbel Badr and Dr Victoria Wilkinson joined HHMP when the new rooms opened. Dr Kath Turner joined soon after and these three doctors purchased HHMP from Dr Bowes in 2018, just before the Covid 19 pandemic. Dr Andrew Bowes retired from HHMP on 31 January 2024 on the 40-year anniversary of commencing at 11 Alexandra Street.

HHMP has now ten consulting rooms, 14 doctors and upstairs, specialist doctors, pathology services, physiotherapy, psychologists, speech pathology, a dietitian and an education room. It is a teaching practice for medical and nursing students and cares for patients at nine local aged care facilities. The changing demographic of medical graduates reflects multi-cultural Australia.

Dr Andrew Bowes

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Acknowledgment

Special thanks to my son, Dominic Bowes. For more details regarding the doctors who have worked in Hunters Hill, refer to "*A History of General Practice in Hunters Hill*". Dominic Bowes, 2012. Hunters Hill Historical Society archives.