

CAMPERDOWNHISTORY.ORG.AU
PAST MATTERS

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HELLO TO ALL OUR MEMBERS

I'm sitting at my kitchen table answering emails, before heading out for another day's gardening, as I've done each day for the last few weeks. Social isolation isn't difficult here in the Stony Rises, it's part of everyday life, as it is for many people on farms in rural areas. I've only left home twice in the last four weeks, my partner Sue doing the shopping every few days. ~ Article by Rob Wuchatsch

The Camperdown Heritage Centre, like all cultural heritage places in Victoria, has now been closed for over a month. Who knows when we will reopen? But Australia seems to be winning the COVID-19 battle. In the spirit of turning a negative into a positive, the closure of the heritage centre will provide our committee and volunteers with a well-earned break, after years of sustained hard work. Hopefully, long delayed jobs around the home will get done and we will all eventually return, safe and well and eager to get on with the job of collecting, recording and promoting our area's incredibly rich history. How lucky we are to live in one of the safest and blessed parts of the world.

To remind us epidemics and pandemics are not new, **Gillian Senior's article on page 2-3, about Camperdown's Infectious Diseases Hospital (1915-51), makes excellent reading.** Mick O'Beirne's memories of his three months' hospital stay provide a very interesting child's view of the 1938 diphtheria epidemic.

In February, before the lockdown, over 30 members and friends gathered at the heritage centre to hear **Graham Arkinstall tell us about the restoration work carried out at Mt Leura over the past 29 years by the Mount Leura and Mount Sugarloaf**

Management Committee and the Friends of Mount Leura and Mount Sugarloaf.

The work done by Graham and his fellow volunteers is an inspirational case study in what can be achieved when people look for innovative solutions rather than just see problems.

Maree has advised us that **Laff's, the Camperdown clothing and manchester store, will be supporting our society in May by donating \$1 of every sale item sold.** *Please support Laff's and our other local businesses as they trade through the current difficult economic conditions.*

This crisis has clearly shown us what is important in life. **We owe an enormous debt to our health workers and the producers, transport, distribution and retail staff** who have kept us safe and supplied so far.

To all our members, please stay safe and well over the next few months.

Although research places such as the State Library and Public Record Office Victoria are closed, **now is a good time to do online family and local history research.** We all know how enjoyable and time-consuming that can be.

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Tuesdays 10am-3pm
& 1st Sunday of month
(Market Day) 10am-3pm
or by appointment.

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CAMPERDOWN'S INFECTIOUS DISEASES HOSPITAL 1915-1951

A phone call to the Heritage Centre some time ago was able to tell us from first-hand experience just what it was like to be in Camperdown's Infectious Diseases Hospital for three and a half months during one of Victoria's Diphtheria Epidemics back in 1938.

Michael (Mick) O'Beirne was around ten years old at the time and he told us some very interesting stories about his time there.

The family had a shoe shop on the corner of Manifold and Gibson streets and Mick was born on 1st April, 1929. He grew up in Camperdown and went to school at St Patrick's where, he says, the nuns were wonderful and dedicated teachers. He played football with Camperdown Football Club and was a member of the 1951 Premiership team. He is now the only living member of that illustrious team and is in the photo on the right, first on the left in the front row.

MICK'S MEMORIES...

Mick has many other memories and stories about early Camperdown which we are hoping to document for our historical records and which we may be able to share with our members in a later newsletter. Meanwhile, here are some memories of his stay in the Infectious Diseases Hospital:

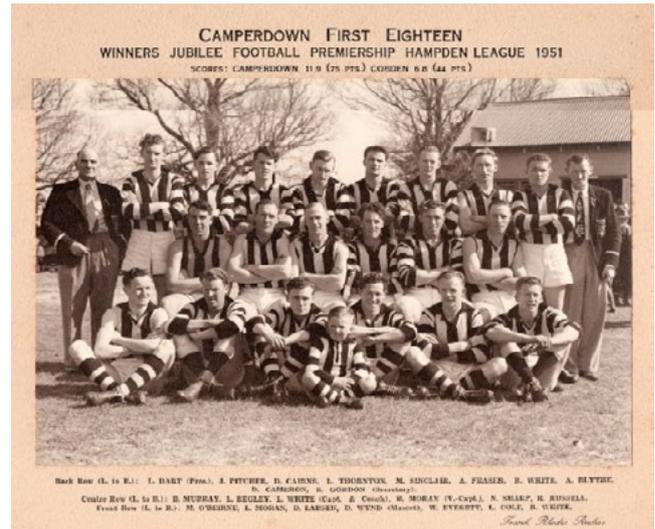
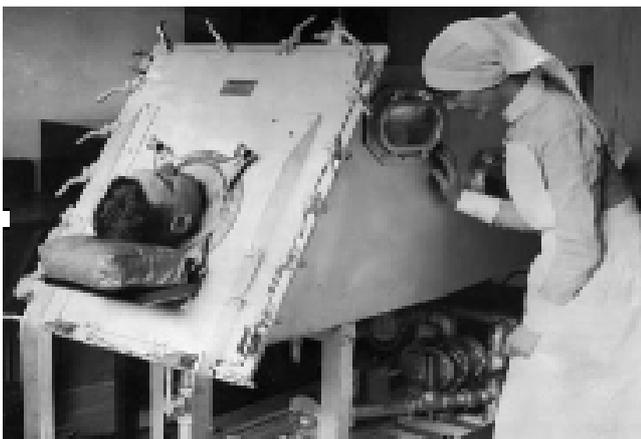
LIVING IN THE HOSPITAL

During the diphtheria epidemic in 1938, the Local Health Inspector would come to the schools and take throat swabs from the children. The swabs were sent to Melbourne for testing and, as a result of one of these visits, Mick, his brother Kevin and one other boy, Pat Breen, were declared 'carriers' and sent to the Infectious Diseases Hospital to be kept in isolation.

The Doctors he remembers, were Dr Varley, Dr Morlet and Dr McInnes and the nurses were the Matron, whom he knew only as Sister Anderson and Sister Sally Morris. Both the nurses lived at the hospital.

The boys were only allowed to have visits from their mother and were tested by swabs being taken from the back of their nose each week. While the tests came back positive, the boys had to stay isolated.

THE POLIO EPIDEMIC



There was another patient in the hospital at the time, a man Mick remembers as Storky Adams from Derrinallum. He was in the next ward and was a victim of the quite recent polio epidemic.

He was in what was called an "Iron Lung" which was a respirator invented to help polio victims breathe if their chest muscles had been affected by paralysis. The whole body of the patient was enclosed in an airtight metal box and the artificial respirator pulled air in and out of the lungs. Often patients only had to stay in the respirator until their muscles recovered but there were some who spent many years of their lives encased in the machine.

Mick says he and the other boys used to go and visit Storky and talk to him.

UNEXPECTED OPERATIONS

One day, the three doctors arrived at the hospital and carried off brother Kevin to the operating theatre – with no explanation to either of them. Soon Kevin was returned to the ward – having had his tonsils out.

Then it was Mick's turn. Into the operating theatre he went, a chloroform mask was put over his face and he was told to count to 28. When he woke, his tonsils also were gone.

It wasn't so bad though, he said, they had custard and lamingtons, ice cream and jelly to eat for the next two weeks. They were also given regular doses of Hypol every day.

A few weeks later, the doctors' three cars drew up outside the hospital again. What was going to happen this time, they wondered.

This time it was their mate, Pat Breen's turn. He was taken away into the operating theatre, again with no explanation. The two brothers crept after him and peeped through a crack in the door. There they saw the doctors all clustered around Pat's lower region.

“They’re cutting his dickie bird off!” they thought in horror.

This was too much for them. They escaped from the hospital and ran away as fast as they could, along the railway track towards Colac. Police were called to assist in the search for the boys and railway staff were alerted. It wasn’t long before a train driver saw them and reported them to the police. Soon they were back in the hospital, relieved to find that Pat’s ‘dickie bird’ was still in place!

Mick remembers their stay in the hospital coming to an end when Nurse Morris took their swab with cotton wool which smelt strongly of kerosene. As kerosene was used as a disinfectant to kill all germs both on the patients and in the hospital, this swab came back negative and the boys were released back into the community. Mick says she was getting married the next day and might have been a bit distracted.

WHERE WAS IT?

The Infectious diseases Hospital had been built by the Shire in 1915 on land donated by the Manifold brothers, two of whom, Edward and J.C, were at the time serving as Chairman and member of the Hampden Shire Council. The land donated was situated just off the Camperdown-Lismore Rd in Green Street, next to the railway line, and the building, to be built of timber and corrugated iron, was designed by local architect, Michael McCabe.

At the time, there was no pressing need for such a hospital, but the councillors felt it was a wise investment for the future. It was agreed that the hospital would be maintained by the Shire and would be staffed by the doctors and nurses from the local Camperdown Hospital. As it turned out, it was used only spasmodically and spent much of its time closed, being opened only for specific patients.

SPANISH FLU

It was used quite extensively from around 1919 during the “Spanish Flu” epidemic after WW1 and was opened at various times to deal with epidemics of measles, scarlet fever, diphtheria, tuberculosis, meningitis and infantile paralysis (Polio).

In April, 1935 the Council decided to improve the hospital and had plans drawn up to provide a better water supply, a sewerage system, erection of two extra bedrooms for the staff and a room for giving patients massage and other after-care treatment. The new structure was to be of wood and iron and would be detached from the existing building. The use of massage as a treatment was for polio patients who had experienced paralysis and was pioneered by Sister Kenny of Queensland. A Melbourne authority on the subject, Dr Jean McNamara, had spent some time in Camperdown researching the treatment of polio patients and teaching the newest techniques of massage and splinting to local hospital staff.

On 4th May, the Council received news that the Melbourne Health Department had approved the plans and would fund half the cost. The additions now were quoted

as: two new wards for three beds, two staff bedrooms, storeroom, clothes store, sleep-out, wood shed, sewerage water supply and a veranda.

The hospital continued to give isolation accommodation whenever it was needed and was staffed by the nurses and doctors from the Camperdown Hospital.

STAFFING DISCUSSIONS

In July of 1939, the Camperdown District Hospital Committee requested that the committee be relieved of the responsibility of conducting the Infectious Diseases Hospital. There was only a limited number of nursing staff at the Camperdown Hospital and it was increasingly difficult to free staff if the Infectious Diseases Hospital had to be opened. There was also the problem of staff returning from working with infectious diseases and, with the possible increase of maternity cases, this was becoming more and more of a problem. The Council agreed to the request and from that time, the Infectious Diseases Hospital was rarely, if ever, put to use. Finally, in 1951, the main building was destroyed by fire.

Camperdown Chronicle, Tuesday 20 March 1951.

FIRE DESTROYS INFECTIOUS DISEASES HOSPITAL

A fire which broke out shortly after 8 o’clock on Saturday night completely destroyed the main and original section of Camperdown Infectious Diseases Hospital. The urban fire brigade fought well to save the wing added some years ago.

The flames spread rapidly soon after the fire was detected and although the brigade was quickly in attendance the main building was burning so fiercely that the brigade was unable to bring it under control. The cause of the fire is unknown. Using water from a main more than 100 yards from the hospital the brigade was able to isolate the fire and prevent it reaching the wing. All furnishings and equipment in the main building were totally destroyed. Built about 1914 the hospital was used at various times for the isolation of those suffering: from infectious disease. This main building contained two wards, nurses’ quarters, kitchen and sanitary block. To provide additional accommodation a wing was added to the hospital about 14 years ago. This wing is separated at one end from the main building by a narrow passage. The hospital was last used, in 1938 when infantile paralysis broke out in Camperdown district. The institution was fully equipped to meet emergencies and could have been reopened at a few days notice.

FINALLY

This history of the Infectious Diseases Hospital is necessarily very brief. There is a wealth of information about Camperdown’s hospitals, the various epidemics and the work of doctors and nurses. In fact, there is enough to write a book, but for the purpose of this newsletter, we hope this small sample is of interest to our members.

Article by Gillian Senior
Newsletter & Communications
See related photos page 4...

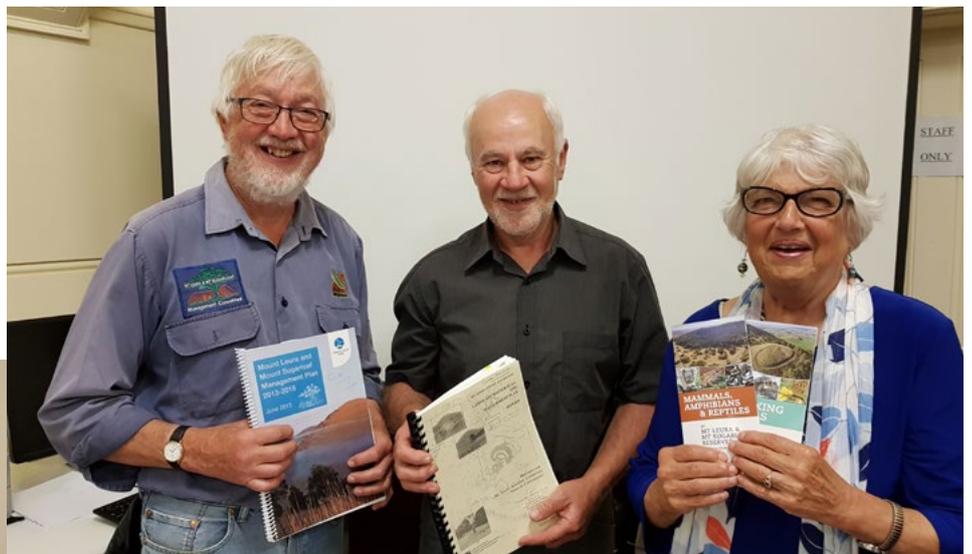
PHOTOS: CAMPERDOWN'S INFECTIOUS DISEASES HOSPITAL 1915-1951



NURSES BODDINGTON & MCNAUGHTON 1916



SPECIAL THANKS TO GRAHAM ARKINSTALL FOR BEING OUR GUEST SPEAKER IN FEBRUARY - PICTURED BELOW WITH BOB LAMBELL & GAIL WATSON



LAFFS MAY PROMOTION SUPPORTING OUR HERITAGE CENTRE

Camperdown Clothing and Manchester store, Laffs, are great supporters of many local organisations and clubs. Donations from various in store promotions are made to local sporting clubs, arts and environment organisations, aged care facilities, churches and schools throughout each year.

During May this year \$1 of every sale item sold will be donated to the Historical Society. Laffs will continue to operate, within the Covid-19 guidelines, as long as is possible.

Phone enquiries and orders are welcome, with local delivery available.

Our members who now live out of the district may have shopped at this Lafferty family store, previously 'Saunders', and originally 'Eckts'. The business has been located on the 'Morrison's' site, east of the Leura Hotel since the early 1980's.

'Supporting Laffs is supporting Camperdown'



You can also check out their specials online:

<https://www.laffs.com.au/>

<https://www.facebook.com/laffsptyltd/>

Article by Maree Belyea, Secretary

Please note that The Camperdown Robert Burns Festival 2020 has been cancelled due to the impact of COVID-19.



Members may have read about an invasion of mountain goats in the Welsh village of Llandudno recently.

Did you know that Camperdown has also had a goat invasion? Way back in December 1885, a long and fascinating letter to the Camperdown Chronicle states that:

"the township of Camperdown was overrun by herds of goats and the nuisance increased to such an extent that those residents having gardens bitterly complained of the Shire Council for tolerating them in the streets."

We published the whole letter on our Facebook page and you can now find it on our website under News and Events/Facebook Feed. It's well worth a read!

(No pics from 1885 so these goats are the ones from Llandudno.)

<https://www.facebook.com/camperdownhistory>
<https://camperdownhistory.org.au/latest-news/>

POLIO CHILDREN NOT FORGOTTEN

The worst thing that could happen to any young active teenager is to lose the use of their legs, but that is exactly what happened to Mrs Iris Atchison.

At 14 Mrs Atchison was diagnosed with polio and 62 years on she still carried a legacy of the disease with a limp punctuating every second step.

"I remember running around in the school sports on the Friday and then being sick in bed all weekend – it was as sudden as that," she said.

"I was bilious all weekend and when I tried to stand up my legs would just crumble under me."

Mrs Atchison said the doctor was called and polio was diagnosed straight away in what turned out to be an epidemic in the district.

"I was taken to Camperdown's version of an Infectious Diseases Hospital which was just a tin shed down by the railway – it was later used as a paper recycling depot, but is gone now.

There were about 15 of us there at the time, all of us with varying degrees of polio, which we had got in the space of two weeks.

I was put in splints which encased my feet with two bars going up the sides of my legs and strapped on around my waist. Then another two bars went up my bac and were strapped on under my arms.

I was lucky though, I didn't have to have my head in a support like some of the others."

Mrs Atchison said a bar between the splints kept her legs about 90 centimetres apart. "We were all like it and had to stay like it in our beds day and night."

It was four months before Mrs Atchison was allowed to leave the "tin shed" and in that time she was virtually in quarantine.

"Each of our bedheads was pushed up under a window. Whenever anybody came to visit us they had to talk to us through the window and because we were facing the other way we each had to use a mirror so

we could see who we were talking to."

Mrs Atchison said a masseur would come once a week and lift her onto a table and rub her legs but that there was not much else which could be done.

"After about four months I was allowed to go home but still had to spend all day in a bed. It had four bicycle wheels attached to it and once a month our neighbours used to wheel me down to the local dance."

It was two and a half years before Mrs Atchison could walk again and it was a long slow process.

"I eventually got a special pair of boots that gave support, but I was still only able to stand and couldn't take any steps.

Just being upright was strange for me and I used to faint, and having to eat from the dining table was awkward because I was used to sitting my plate on my chest and eating that way.

I was just starting to get moving again when I was about 18 but I still had to sleep in callipers at night."

From then it wasn't long before Mrs Atchison was walking again although the disease left its mark and affected her left hip and ankle.

"I walk with a little bit of a limp and drag my left leg but its nothing to complain about - I'm a lot better off than some who had polio."

Now in her 70's Mrs Atchison suffers from rheumatics in her right knee which she said could be a result of the polio.

"I had to rely on my right leg a lot more to take most of my weight and I think all the years of extra strain could be the reason for the rheumatics."

She said the knee sometimes felt like it might give way and often felt like the bones were grinding against one another in the joint.

"I can walk up the street alright, but there is no way I would be able to walk back again."

Mrs Atchison counts herself lucky but for many the effects of polio have been more crippling and now, later in life, many sufferers are experiencing problems thought to be related to the late effects of polio.

The Warrnambool Polio Support Group has been in existence for some years and is currently trying to extend its reach to help as many people as possible.

Group member, Ms Kate Logan said there were many in the community who could benefit by having support from other people who understood exactly what they may be going through.



Contracting polio as a teenager and living with a limp for the next 60 odd years hasn't held Mrs Iris Atchison back — she still considers herself lucky.