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## Blessed are They - The story of Bowral & District Hospital, Bowral NSW

By Win Smith.

BOWRAL and District Hospital is an essential entity in the Southern Highlands and had an auspicious beginning on Monday, July 27, 1885 when Dr Bernard J Newmarch and Mr Copland Bennett called the first public meeting to discuss the establishment of a hospital in the district. Twenty-two men representing Berrima, Bowral, Mittagong and Moss Vale attended the meeting, which was held at the Bowral School of Arts.

Chairman of the meeting, Mr W McCourt M.L.A told the meeting that the government would give £1000 towards the £1000 raised towards setting up a hospital.

It was stated that five beds would probably be adequate for the present with the estimated annual cost of each bed being £52 pounds.

It was suggested the

erection of the hospital would cost approximately 500 pounds, the land would cost 400 pounds and annual expenses would be 400 pounds.

Opinions appear to have been divided about the wisdom of establishing a hospital, for soon after land was chosen, Dr Newmarch wrote in a letter to the Bowral Free Press:

"It is useless to deny that the residents of Bowral, in not a few instances, raise objections to the foundation of a district hospital, as it is to be built in their own town. The reason is that the hospital will be used for infectious cases and that it will drive visitors away and ruin the district. For my own part, I consider that every town should have the means of providing such accommodation as the necessity arises."

"We can never be positive that typhoid may not arise or be

imported into our homes by the very people that afford so many people here a means of support. We must remember that it is even more than probable that such may happen; but we have no visible means of preventing it spreading, or from destroying the reputation of this and every other town in the district.

No one can blame us, not even the most short-sighted of those who object to the establishment of the hospital, if we have the means at hand ready to cope with the only foe likely to militate against their welfare."

At a committee meeting on August 11, 1886 it was decided that the intention of building a district hospital be relinquished with the view of establishing a District Cottage Hospital on a smaller scale.

In addition it was agreed that the hospital

should not be for the admission of infectious cases.

In September 1888 a sketch plan by the architect was submitted and unanimously approved and Government approval was also received.

In the design the accommodation shown is for six patients, four males and two females. The male and female wards are each overlooked by an inspection window from the matrons bedroom and are well separated, their verandahs having an outlook in different directions. The plan also shows man's room, linen room, kitchen, wash house, fuel room etc...

The Foundation stone of the Berrima District Cottage Hospital was laid at 4pm on Saturday, February 9, 1889 by the 16th Governor of the Colony - his Excellency, the Governor Lord

Carrington. The opening of the hospital took place on September 4, 1889. The opening of the hospital and laying of the foundation stone was attended by more than 600 people on a bright and clear day with the town being liberally decorated with bunting.

The hospital was opened by the hospital's first president, the Hon. John Lackey MLC and included athletic sports, school children singing the national anthem and a sale of work (The Ladies' Working Association). This was a great occasion for the residents of the area so it was clear that a sense of anticipation was in the air on this day.

It was later advised this day had been declared a public holiday in the district.

Berrima District Hospital 1919-1968: Standing on the grounds are two life-



Photo supplied.

sized metal statues, fondly nicknamed 'the girls' by staff. They are copies of two marble antiquities in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities of the Louvre Museum, Paris.

The smaller figure represents Euterpe, Muse of Lyric Poetry and the larger is of Artemis, the Huntress and Goddess of Light.

The statues were cast in metal from the guns used in the Crimean War. They were exhibited in the National Exhibition of the Louvre

in 1884 and were thought to have been purchased by a member of the Harris family at that exhibition.

One New Year's Eve, vandals poured sump oil over the statues. In cleaning off the oil, the patina was removed and it was after this that the figures were first painted. On the death of Arthur Harris, the statues were given to the Bowral Municipal Council.

In May 1948 the Council presented them to the Berrima District Hospital.

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# Celebrations

By Eliza Winkler

THIS year Bowral and District Hospital will celebrate a major milestone as it reaches 125 years serving the Highlands community.

The hospital will be running a year-long calendar of events as part of the celebrations, which kicked off in April.

The hospital officially opened on September 4, 1889 as the Berrima District Cottage, which was later changed to Bowral and District Hospital in 1919.

Over the years the hospital has transformed from a humble cottage to a large facility offering a range of general and specialised services.

Construction of the hospital was first discussed at a public meeting in 1885 of people from Berrima, Bowral, Mittagong and Moss Vale.

Opinions were divided on the hospital and there were some objections, including a letter in the Bowral Free Press voicing local concern about infec-

tious patients "driving visitors away and ruining the district".

However, support for a hospital in the district increased and the Berrima District Cottage Hospital was officially opened in 1889, which was declared a public holiday.

The original design had accommodation for six patients, four male and two female beds.

The male and female wards were each overlooked by an inspection window from the matron's bedroom and were separated.

Bowral and District Hospital general manager Alison Derrett said she felt very fortunate in her position during such an important time in its history.

"Like the Wingecarribee community, the hospital has grown and changed over the past 125 years," Ms Derrett said.

"10 years after it opened the hospital was treating 115 patients, including 14 accident patients and 35 operations.

"Today our staff deliver

around 450 babies each year, treat more than 17,500 patients in the emergency department and undertake more than 2700 operations.

"Throughout its 125 years the hospital has received strong community support and continues to enjoy this support today from groups like the Hospital Auxiliaries, the BDCU Children's Foundation, the strong volunteer community, and the University of Wollongong."

The Hospital kicked off celebration events in April with a lecture by former hospital matron Nancy Reynolds and a presentation by Dr Simon Grant.

Dr Grant is a senior staff specialist and shared his interest in plants, specifically rare and exotic maple trees and medicinal plants including the opium poppy and camellia.

Other celebrations include a restored quilt display, refurbishment of the hospital gardens, staff awards night and an art competition for local schools.



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# Bowral & District Hospital celebrates 125 years



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## A new direction for operations

IT WAS not until 1896 that discussion began regarding the construction of an operating theater for the Berrima District Hospital.

The building adjacent to the female ward was completed in November 1898.

Until an operating table could be purchased the table from the nurses' dining room was carried in when an operation was to be performed.

Ten years later the total number of patients treated at the hospital amounted to 115 in 1906. Included in this number were 14 accident patients

with 35 operations performed. The average stay of each patient had been reduced to 16.13 days.

Until the 1920s the Matron wore an ankle-length apron, stiffly starched collar, belt and cuffs, black stockings and boots or laced-up shoes and all topped with a natty little white 'hat' with two long flowing tails at the back. Over the years the headgear gradually changed, but the rest of the uniform remained.

Prior to 1901 there was no legal requirement for any matron in NSW to be a trained nurse. However, right from the beginning

the committee of the Berrima District Cottage Hospital insisted that each and every one of the early matrons had trained in a recognised training school for nurses.

The early matrons were totally responsible for patient care seven days a week, 24 hours a day. They were responsible for the day-to-day management of the Hospital, the inventory of stores and equipment and in the absence of a general servant, for

the cooking, washing, scrubbing and cleaning. They could not leave the Hospital without permis-

sion and certainly not be away overnight.

In 1889, Miss Annie Dyne Morgan was appointed the first Matron of the Berrima District Cottage Hospital at a salary of 52 pounds per annum. She was a first cousin of "Banjo" Patterson and a niece of Dr Allen B. Morgan of Bowral.

In 1913 the Hospital was granted recognition and registration as a Training School for Nurses by the Australasian Trained Nurses Association, with a training period of five years.

## Demand for hospital on the increase

On May 13, 1919, the Committee adopted new Rules and Regulations for the management of the Berrima District Cottage Hospital and it was decreed that the Hospital shall be called the Berrima District Hospital.

By 1920, the daily average number of patients had risen to 16.88 and the average length of stay in hospital had decreased to 15.30 days. There was little change in the mortality rate which stood at 6.7 per cent.

1922 was a memorable year for the Hospital and the staff as not only did open fires cease to be used (coke stoves were installed), in May the town water supply was connected. It was a day to remember in Bowral when electricity was switched on for the first time on January 31, 1925. By the end of the year the Hospital was connected to electrici-

ty. As demand on the hospital increased, it was decided that a new hospital had to be built. On April 24, 1943, the foundation stone of the new hospital was laid by the Minister for Public Works and Health, the Hon R.W.D Weaver M.L.A.

On February 23, 1935, the new Hospital was opened by Mr Mark Morton MLA in the presence of almost 1,000 people. During the formal proceedings, the Chairman, Mr W Terry said the new Hospital had cost 18,111 pounds of which the Board paid 9400 pounds.

The main ward block had two storeys and provided accommodation for 39 beds - 24 public, four intermediate, eight private and three children. The ground floor included the main entrance porch and hall, office, small outpatients department, dispensary, x-ray department,

rooms for dressings, a dining room for nurses and provision for a lift to be installed later.

In March 1961 a service of thanksgiving and dedication was held at the Parish Church of St Simon and St Jude in Bowral, to mark the opening of the Milton Park Wing - the hospital's surgical and obstetric block.

The Hospital Board decided to name the new block in recognition of the significant financial benefits the Hospital had gained from Mr and Mrs Anthony Hordern, who opened their beautiful garden Milton Park, to the public each year.

Following complaints from patients and visitors who had first travelled to Berrima trying to find the hospital, it was decided in 1968 to change the name to Bowral & District Hospital to better reflect its geographical location.

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# Bowral & District Hospital celebrates 125 years



Photo supplied.

## Ladies a gift to hospital

THE LADIES of the district took on the task of raising funds for the hospital.

Mrs Sarah Reed convened a meeting on June 17 1886 at the School of Arts and a Ladies Working com-

mittee was established in conjunction with the Berrima District Cottage Hospital.

In the first year of their work the group raised 231 pounds.

The ladies met every Friday afternoon and

worked each week to complete their gift to the hospital.

This included table and bed linen, blankets, quilts, towelling, blinds, garments for patients and other small items. A money box was sent to

each of the schools in the district for the reception of children's donations.

The boxes were cleared regularly and proceeds devoted to providing a children's cot at the hospital.

The Ladies Working committee continued in a myriad of ways to support the hospital and provide extras for patient comfort. They were the forerunner of the present hospital auxiliaries.

Money to maintain and extend the hospital came from many sources. Patient fees accounted for small amounts. Subscriptions from members of the public, companies and clubs raised varying amounts.

Concerts, race meetings, sports days, gymkhanas, bazaars, balls and special collections were held in a never-ending stream.

Donations also included fruit, vegetables, poultry, preserves, milk, cream, flowers, cakes and books.

During 1890 meat cost a little over 10/- per week, fruit 5/-, vegetables 3/- and bread 3/6. The hospital drugs, including brandy and whisky accounted for 17 pence per week.

In 1903, the hospital's finance sub-committee suggested the year be divided into three main fundraising activities:

1. The Friendly

Societies be asked to continue to hold their annual demonstration on or about the first weekend in October

2. The clergy of the district be invited to declare a Sunday in January, Hospital Sunday. One or the whole of the collections on that day to be devoted to the hospital.

3. A general collection be made throughout the whole district on a Saturday in May each year and that it be known as Hospital Saturday. - door knocking by the ladies.

In October 1915 an Egg Day at the District School resulted in 61 dozen eggs being delivered to the Hospital.

In May 1917 the first Linen Day was held for the Hospital.

The main items received were 91 bath towels, 54 sheets, 147 pillow slips and 15 tea towels which did much to replenish the linen supplies.

At the Berrima District Cottage Hospital 100 years ago, nursing and medical staff were faced with what would today be considered intolerable conditions.

There was no water

supply and no hot water.

Water was drawn from a well in the grounds and an underground tank near the building.

The only heating available was from wood fires in the wards.

There was no electricity, not even any gaslight.

There were no telephones.

When a doctor was needed at the hospital a message was sent by hand.

There was no sewerage, the night cart was called twice a week and emptied the pans.

The doctors visited the hospital on horseback or via horse-drawn vehicle. There was no ambulance service.

Patients were moved around the district by horse-drawn dray and those needing more intensive care than was available, were transported to Sydney on the railway.

During the first four months, 12 patients were admitted - nine male and three females.

Six were discharged, two were relieved and four died.

The average length of stay for each patient was 27 days.



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# Former matron reflects on a life of nursing

By Eliza Winkler

THEY say that being a nurse is more than just a job, but a way of life. As part of the Bowral and District Hospital's 125th celebrations, former matron Nancy Reynolds reflects on her nursing career in an industry that she has seen revolutionise first hand.

Working as a nurse and matron for the hospital for almost 40 years, Ms Reynolds said the hospital was a "special place, not just a building but with a heart of its own".

"I was 27-years-old when I became a

matron and started nursing when I was 23 in 1950," she said.

"The hospital has grown with the population, the significant increases in medication, the role of the general practitioner (GP) has changed and of course social changes.

"For every improvement you have to lose something and that is just life. The personal and family part has changed but you just have to keep up and adjust with the times.

"I'm in support of the new system and it has changed because society has changed."

Aside from advancements in medical technologies and the hospital developments, Ms Reynolds was the first nurse and woman to attend the Bowral hospital board meetings.

"I approached the chairman of the hospital board and asked if I could start attending the meetings," Ms Reynolds said.

"The men were making all the decisions, which directly affected the staff and the patients but they had little to do with the general runnings of the hospital."



Nancy Reynolds.

Photo by Eliza Winkler

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# Bowral & District Hospital celebrates 125 years

"Before that, nurse input was a letter that I wrote which was read out by the secretary during the meetings.

"Initially most of the board didn't see the need to have me there but I told the chairman that I would have felt the need to resign if they had said no.

"So they said I could attend, but only if I spoke when I was spoken to, but that didn't last long I couldn't keep my mouth shut."

"In a round about way it changed the role of the nurses and gave them more of a say."

Another big change during her time at the hospital was the shift in nurse training and education, which moved off site and into university environments.

"It was a very interesting time," she said.

"They ceased the nurse training onsite and moved it to the Illawarra School of Nursing at the University of Wollongong and I became the chairperson of that committee."

"It was the first program to be set up in the state and essentially the beginning of broader training and education

for nurses."

Bowral and District Hospital first opened in 1889 with a capacity of six patients and no resident GPs. Matrons and nurses lived in the adjoining nursing quarters and doctors were on-call for required emergency, surgery and general check-ups.

"If there was an accident and there was no doctor at the hospital we had to call them in and take care of the patient until they could get there," Ms Reynolds said.

"That helped to really grow a strong relationship between the staff and the doctors. It was like a family, because we were all carers of the district and we all worked as a team."

"But it wasn't just work, we really got to know one another. When a nurse clocked off duty we all helped finish up and all went off together.

"I really enjoyed it, I was happy and I still think of the hospital as a family and I still feel part of it."

Ms Reynolds retired as matron in 1990 but remained working on the Bowral Hospital Auxiliary, Hearts of the Highlands and as a

Fellow of the University of Wollongong

"If someone is in one position for a long period of time, they can become stagnant and I made sure that didn't happen with me," Ms Reynolds said.

"I've always stayed involved in the changes, the training and developments."

"I followed my career path, I love nursing and anyone who does it nowadays has a genuine love for the industry."

Nancy Reynolds gave a lecture on April 2 which was presented with a lecture by Dr Simon Grant.

Dr Grant is a senior staff specialist and shared his interest in plants, specifically rare and exotic maple trees and medicinal plants including the opium poppy and camellia.

Following the lecture there was a flag raising ceremony. Other celebration events included a restored quilt display, refurbishment of hospital gardens, staff award night and an art competition for local schools. For more info visit [www.swslhd.nsw.gov.au/bowral125](http://www.swslhd.nsw.gov.au/bowral125) and go to the "What's On" page for event details.



Photo supplied.

## Self-sufficient hospital

IN December of 1889 a man was employed once a week in summer and once a month in winter to give attention to the grounds. Succeeding committees were concerned about the perfect look of the grounds and maintenance of the property. Mention is frequently made of the purchase of trees and plants for the enhancement of the Hospital. Fifty pinus

insignis trees, donated by the Director General of Forests in 1897, were planted along the hospital's southern boundary. In 1892, 25 pounds was spent on ornamental trees for planting on either side of the carriage drive. In 1894, 750 plants were purchased to plant a hedge on the other boundaries and in 1895 a fence was erected round the veg-

etable garden. The public was invited to visit the hospital and the grounds.

For many years a large vegetable garden was maintained and the wardsman was responsible for milking the hospital cow. About a dozen fruit trees provided fresh fruit in season. The hospital's own fowls provided the kitchen with fresh eggs.

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With three children of his own, Michael is especially interested in the younger generation and making sure their eyes are looked after all the time.

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## Hospital takes trip down memory lane

If you were thinking of a career in medicine in the early days - here is a summary of the requirements that a good doctor needed when Berrima District Hospital was first established.

"The ability and desire to understand people; awareness of his lack of ability and shortcomings."

"In other words always learning; he must have a highly developed, inquiring and receptive mind which helps in diagnosis; he does not have to be a brilliant academic; he must be a humble person aware that he has been given a licence only so that he can help people and gain more knowledge; he must have a highly logical mind."

In the pioneering days, most of the doctors in the district lived in Berrima.

They travelled round the district either on horseback or in horse-

drawn vehicles in all kinds of weather, as they cared for the sick in their own homes.

As early as January 1890, reference was made to the desirability of having all medical gentlemen in the district associated with the hospital.

It was decided then that the hospital medical officers must be residents in Bowral and all other medical gentlemen of the district would be consulting honorary medical officers.

The workload at the Cottage Hospital in the early days was not great for the medical officers due to the small number of beds.

After 10 years, the daily average of patients was only 4.8.

In fact, at times there was no patients in the hospital, as occurred in April 1894 when there was no medical report

submitted to the committee meeting as there were no patients in the Hospital.

Until 1896 operations at the hospital, though not great in number, were performed in the wards, often in full view of the patients.

The light was poor and facilities non-existent.

In September 1896, Drs Fisher and Vallack decided to ask for the use of the room in which the committee met, to perform their operations.

The surgeons continued to work in this room until the first operating room was completed in November 1898.

George Newton Swinson, a lineal descendant of Sir Isaac Newton, was one of the first four medical officers appointed to the Cottage Hospital on 28 August 1889.



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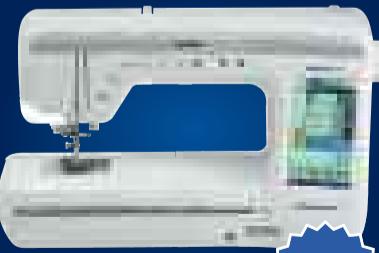
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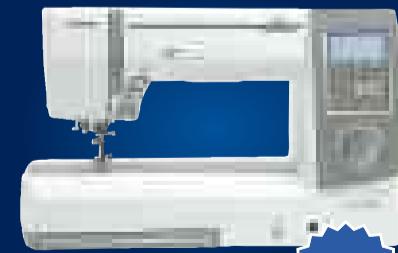
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