

NEWSLETTER

MUSWELLBROOK SHIRE LOCAL & FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC (Founded 11th June 1958)

Affiliated with Royal Australian Historical Society

ABN 34611778680

PO Box 450 Muswellbrook NSW 2333

Editor Lionel Ahearn

No. 2 April 2020

Future Arrangements.

Due to the restrictions placed on the movement of the public that requires us to stay home unless engaged in accessing essential services and the needs to practise self-distancing we had to close the activities of the Society for the immediate future. There will be no monthly meetings for April and May and the Society will not open on Saturday mornings for April and May.

At the end of May a decision will be made on what happens in June and beyond. We will keep you informed. Some research may be possible using information and facilities possessed by some members. If you think we may be able to help you please contact us as specified below. Email preferred.

A Brief History of Hospitals in Muswellbrook

With the rising number of infections from the Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid – 19) our hospitals once again are found to be indispensable. The need for a hospital in Muswellbrook led to the formation of the Muswellbrook Benevolent Society in 1849. The charter of the Society was “to relieve the sick and destitute and to assist them on their way to a hospital or benevolent society.” The Benevolent Society leased a house from Joseph Ashburn in Brook Street which became the first hospital. This is now the site of the Muswellbrook High School Farm.

In 1860 the NSW Government granted two acres on the corner of Hill and Sowerby Streets for a new hospital and work commenced in 1862. A new seven bed hospital opened there in 1864.

MSL&FHS Inc photo 998



In 1894 during a typhoid epidemic the hospital was forced to turn away patients and in 1897 it was decided not to admit patients suffering from tuberculosis because of the highly infectious nature of the disease. As the town expanded an additional wing was added on the western side and in 1908 a donation of £500 by Mrs H Campbell allowed the building of a further two wards, an operating theatre and a sterilizing room.



Private Residence MSL&FHS Inc photo 2797

In 1892 Dr Grigson built a new home on land bounded by Brentwood, Doyle and Bowman Streets costing around £7000. Dr Grigson offered his home ‘Brentwood’ to the Society for £3000 for a new hospital in 1913. His offer was accepted. The Sowerby Street Hospital was rented for a number of years before becoming a private residence.

DETAILS ABOUT THE SOCIETY

Objectives:

- To collect, preserve and promote the social, cultural and physical history of Muswellbrook Shire, its environs and its people for future generations.
- to promote public access to our collections and research facilities, and
- to provide information, advice and assistance to individuals, community groups, organizations and businesses.

Meetings

The Society meets on the third Tuesday of each month starting at 7.00 pm in the Society Room at the rear of the Muswellbrook Library. All members and visitors are welcome to attend the meeting and stay for a cuppa, biscuit & a chat after.

Premises

The Society maintains its records in a section of Muswellbrook Library. You will find us at the rear of the Library. The Research Centre is open every Saturday from 9.30am to 1.00pm. The Research Centre may be opened at other times by appointment. Bus & tour groups are most welcome.

Annual Fees

Single \$25 Double \$35 Pensioner Single \$15 Pensioner Double \$25

The Hon Secretary may be contacted via the post office box or email mei2@bigpond.com The Society also has a web presence thanks to Darrin Khan and Lionel Ahearn at <http://www.mbkhistorical.org> and a research site at <http://research.mbkhistorical.org>



Nurse Loader opened Orwell Private Hospital, primarily a Maternity Hospital, in the late eighteenth hundreds (c1897) on the corner of Brook and Carl Streets and continued working there for 27 years. It closed in 1958 with the opening of the new Maternity Wing at Muswellbrook District Hospital. Four patients were transferred from The Orwell Hospital to Brentwood Hospital.

Nurse Loader organised the first meeting of the C.W.A. on 10th November 1928 and was instrumental in opening the first C.W.A. rest rooms in one of her cottages in Bridge Street and founded the Baby Health Centre.

Nurse Loader MSL&FHS Inc photo 623

The previous Orwell Hospital shown here when converted to flats. MSL&FHS Inc photo from F038



Brentwood was another of John Horbury Hunt's beautiful crafted houses designed in his own version of the Shingle Style dominated by numerous gables and tall chimneys. It was built by local builder Charles Skinner. It had ground floor walling of brick supporting a timber framed upper story which like the roofs was originally shingled. It took two years to build.¹

MSL&FHS Inc photo D2954 shows a group photo of the workmen employed in the building of Brentwood in 1892.



MSL&FHS Inc photo D2161 (courtesy of Cousins family) shows Brentwood Hospital c1970. On the far right of the photo is the Isolation Ward.

¹ From Reynolds, P; Muir, L. & Hughes, J 2002. John Horbury Hunt Radical Architect 1838-1904. Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Sydney, pp145-146. See MSL&FHS Newsletter 2015/1 p2

Miss Ruth White in 1928 bought the house 'Birralee' and after it was refurnished and renovated presented it to the hospital as a nurses' home. The gift was a magnificent one and a tablet was provided by the people of Muswellbrook acknowledging the generous gift and was placed on the wall of the hall just inside the front door. It carried the following inscription: - 'This nurses' home "Birralee" is the gift of Miss Ruth White "Edinglassie" August 1928. The plate was subscribed by the people of Muswellbrook.'

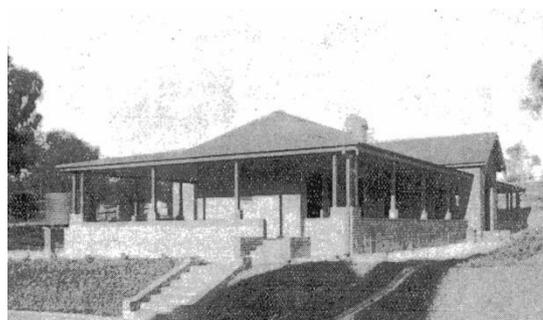


MSL&FHS Inc photo D3127 Birralee

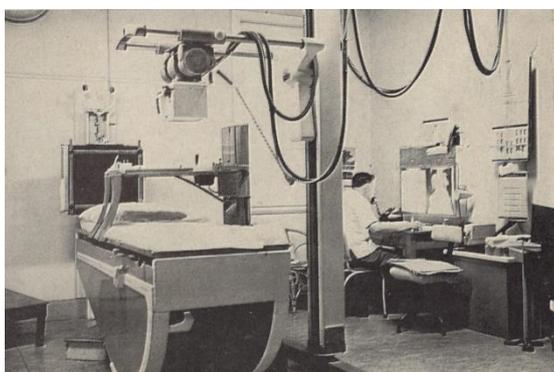


Ruth White was an outstandingly generous and gracious woman. Recipients of her generosity included: the White Memorial Baths, the Red Cross, the Girl Guides' Association, St. Alban's Anglican Church, the Muswellbrook Ambulance Station, Muswellbrook C.W.A., the Muswellbrook Senior Citizens' Association and Brentwood Hospital to which she donated a children's ward and the nurses' home "Birralee". Her charity extended to national organizations including the Royal Flying Doctors' Service and the Spastic Centre of New South Wales.²

At the ceremony conducted to unveil the tablet the Hon. Dr Richard Arthur, MLA, Minister for Public Health, was made aware that the matter of an Isolation Block had been engaging the attention of the Hospital Committee for some time.³



MSL&FHS Inc photo D3150 Isolation Block Brentwood Hospital



In 1930 an Xray Building complete with a modern Xray plant was provided for the hospital by Mr E Hunter Bowman.

Photo of modern Xray room and machine taken from the Brentwood Hospital Muswellbrook Annual Report 1967/68

Up until 1958 there had been no maternity ward attached to the hospital. When Orwell Hospital closed down Brentwood Hospital accepted the responsibility for maternity patients. Mr E Jefferson, Chairman of Brentwood Hospital, gained approval for the conversion of the Isolation Ward (which was hardly ever used) to an up to date maternity ward. In 1964 the Maternity Block with two delivery rooms came into use.⁴



Maternity Wing Photo courtesy of Lionel Ahearn

² Personalities of the Past p60

³ Muswellbrook Chronicle December 1928. See Newsletter 2014/2 p4.

⁴ Jessica Benson, The Muswellbrook Hospital. Scone Historical Society, Bishop Essay Competition 2008

Also in 1964 a new Nurses' Home was built in the Muswellbrook Hospital grounds. 'The new nurses' home is one of the most modern in the state with central heating, single rooms, interior courtyard and all the latest amenities.'⁵



Nurses' home and courtyard photos cropped from Annual Report 1966/7

The building of a new hospital began in 1968 behind the old Brentwood Hospital and was completed in 1971. The hospital was occupied in June and after the demolition of Brentwood Hospital it was officially opened in October 1971. The name was changed to The Muswellbrook District Hospital.

MSL&FHS Inc photo D0022



Tenders were called for the construction of an assessment and retraining unit and community health centre in the grounds of the Muswellbrook District Hospital with a completion date in early 1980. Mr W J R Curtis, chairman of the hospital board said the new unit would also be the headquarters for the Community Health Service in the Upper Hunter.



The new building was to be known as the 'Weidmann Wing' in recognition of the wonderful act of generosity on the part of the Weidmann Family. A bequest of \$150,000 from the estate of the late Mr Les Weidmann and a further \$100,000 from Mrs I M Harvey (nee Weidmann) Made the construction possible. Further funds from the Hospital Board and the State and Commonwealth Departments of Health were provided.⁶

Mrs I M Harvey presents a cheque on behalf of the Weidmann Family

The Weidmann Wing right and the above photo are scanned from the souvenir program used at the official opening on Saturday, 1st November 1980

The Weidmann Wing can also be seen in the above photo of the hospital D0022.



Since then the Hospital has been upgraded and improved. Stage 1 was the development of a new Emergency Department costing \$21.5 million.

Stage 2, costing \$21.5 million, was built to the west of the original building and contains a number of units. One of these is an expanded chemotherapy unit.

Photo courtesy of Bill Spicer



⁵ Brentwood Hospital Muswellbrook Annual Report 1966/67

⁶ Muswellbrook Chronicle, Tuesday, May 29, 1979