



**President's Report**

The most important item to bring to members' attention is the information about this year's International Nurses Day celebrations, which are to be held on Thursday the 12<sup>th</sup> May, at the Heritage Village Shearing Shed.

Afternoon and evening programs have been organised. The afternoon program is aimed at nurses in the work force, with attendance leading to points towards their annual registration requirements. ACHHA Members are welcome to attend, but there is a registration fee of \$50.

The evening program is free (donations appreciated), and would be of interest to all members of the health profession and others. The evening program will see a power point presentation of what was as to what is now, and following the success of the great debate last year there is to be another debate, the title being "Generalist nurses - who needs them?".

A light meal sponsored by Hillcrest Hospital will be available at the Hospital Museum from 4.45 pm prior to the evening session. For catering purposes advice as to intentions to attend would be appreciated. The Hospital Museum will also be open for tours. The evening program in the Shearing Shed commences at 6pm.

The IND planning committee has representatives from the Rockhampton Hospital, Qld Health, Hillcrest Hospital, Mater Hospital, CQUniversity and the TAFE College, with Yvonne and myself representing ACHHA, Yvonne as Secretary and myself as Chairman.

A copy of the program is enclosed with this newsletter. Be sure to read both sides of the sheet to see the details of both the afternoon

and the evening programs.

In 2010, ACHHA was successful in obtaining a grant from the National Library of Australia to allow for a significance assessment to be done on the Museum as a whole, and on identified specific collections such as the uniform collection which dates back to late eighteenth hundreds. Our archivist Yvonne has a significant part to play in preparing for the assessment which will be undertaken by the Central Queensland Museums Development Officer Bronwyn Roper. The assessment itself will commence in May.

A recent donation to the museum is in the form of a complete and new skeleton given in appreciation by a movie company for ACHHA assistance in loaning various items from our collection for the making of a documentary. While the newness of the skeleton does not meet our collection acceptance criteria, it will be an item of interest, and be a reference point for researchers. A suitable display area is yet to be identified.

The Hospital Museum is a popular stop for school children visiting the Village. Already two tours have taken place this year and one tour from Emerald school was aborted due to the wet weather. Since the new building opened almost 1000 students, teachers and parents have visited the building on organised tours which are led by our Members.

The Museum is manned on Market Days, and members have noted a steady increase in numbers visiting, and it is expected these numbers will continue to increase with more activity occurring in our area of the Village. Many compliments are received. The book we provide to

enable people to comment on the displays makes interesting reading and tells us that there are a significant number of international visitors.

The committee has identified ongoing needs in the form of a wish list, such as signage to identify the museum, filing cabinets to better care for archive material, employing someone to catalogue the library, and many more items, and with a view to the future research, a wireless broadband modem. Without successful grant applications the overall management of the Hospital Museum and its progress into being a significant research centre becomes delayed. Grant applications themselves are a time consuming exercise.

My continued appreciation goes to all Members of the committee for their dedication in achieving the ACHHA goals.

**Norma West**  
**President**

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#### **Comments on this Newsletter**

Since we have no social events to report on, I have decided to devote this Newsletter to reporting on several events, individuals and buildings which tell us something about country hospital life in Rockhampton over the 50 years 1895 to 1945. I hope that readers will find the "snippets" of information interesting for what they tell us about life in the city and its hospitals in this period. It is interesting that many matters which are regarded in great confidence these days were widely reported in the newspapers of the day with no attempt to disguise the names of individuals involved.

If anyone would like to read the story of the Children's Hospital in greater detail, there is a chapter by Dr Peter Roper in a book entitled *Characters and Caritas* which was published in 1992. The book (77 pp.) was edited by Dr Hilary Mercer, Ms Peggy Carter and Professor John Pearn and also includes chapters about the Mater Hospital by Deborah Friel, about Andy - a legendary theatre sister at Tannachy written by Rhylia Webb, and about the late Dr Charlie Whitchurch written by Daniel Manahan. The book is available in the Rockhampton Regional Library.

**Errol Payne**  
**Newsletter Editor**

#### **From the Archives**

##### ***Near Disaster at the Rockhampton Children's Hospital***

A storm in Rockhampton on 21st February 2011 in which one of the crosses on a Range Convent dormitory building was struck by lightning, blowing a hole in the lower roof area brings to mind a similar event which occurred at the Rockhampton Children's Hospital on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1897.

One of the books in our ACHHA library is "Scarlet Pillows" written by Mrs Arthur H. Garnsey in 1950. The use of her husband's name instead of her own is a practice which some will remember, but which has now well and truly disappeared from our culture. The author's "real name" is Ann Stafford Bird.

"Scarlet Pillows" tells the story of her life as a nurse in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

We learn from the book that Ann was a daughter of the Hon. B.S. Bird, C.M.G., M.H.A., who held several ministerial portfolios in Tasmania. Her family moved from Hobart to Flight's Bay on the Huon River in the 1880's and was involved in the early development of the apple and pear industry there and on Bruny Island where she and her sister managed the property for a time after the death of their father. The pair then travelled to the mainland.

She tells the story of leaving Tasmania for Sydney on a small ship the "Tambo" on 17 October 1893. She attributes her departure and the departure of many others from Tasmania to the collapse of a number of banks, notably the Bank of Van Diemen's Land which collapsed on 03 August 1891. The trip to Sydney was a difficult one. They ran into a very bad storm during which the ship's propeller shaft broke and the propeller went to the bottom of the ocean. Fortunately, they were spotted by chance by another small boat which was passing and they were towed to Eden.

She then came to Rockhampton where she trained as a nurse at the Children's Hospital. One chapter in her book which she has called "Steamy Rockhampton" tells of her experiences among the humidity, the insects, the snakes and other wildlife including the prolific koala population around the Children's Hospital which was located on the western side of

Agnes Street over from the Girls' Grammar School. Ann speaks of being a "new chum" from Tasmania when she came to Rockhampton around 1894. In another chapter of the book, she writes about visiting Longreach and Dingo by train in 1896. She certainly must have been an adventurous young person. At the end of "Steamy Rockhampton" she says that she decided to go to the Western Australian Goldfields. From her stories about this part of her life we ascertain that she was in Coolgardie by January 1898.

Before proceeding with the story of the lightning strike and subsequent fire, we present two images from our archives. The first is a sketch made in 1888 of the planned first building on the new Children's Hospital site. The second shows the site in 1922. In 1897, development would have been at a relatively early stage. The hospital was closed and the buildings relocated or demolished in 1929 (see later story).



This is the text of Ann Stafford Bird's first-hand account of the lightning strike on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1897 and the aftermath.

**Important notices**

**International Nurses' Day**  
**Thursday 12 May 2011**  
**Professional Development Workshop**  
**12:30 pm to 16:30 pm**  
**Evening program—The Great Debate**  
**16:30 pm to 20:45 pm**

**Forthcoming 2011 Rockhampton Heritage Village Events**

- Sunday 08 May 2011**  
Mothers' Day Markets
- Sunday 05 June 2011**  
Multicultural Day
- Sunday 10 July 2011**  
Markets
- Sunday 11 September 2011**  
Markets
- Sunday 27 November 2011**  
Christmas Markets

**Association Membership**

The Association welcomes your support for our activities. The Association operates on a normal financial year, so that subscriptions are now due for the 2009/2010 year..

If you wish to join the Association, please contact the secretary, Errol Payne, by phone on 4922 3314, by email at:

[secretary@achha.org.au](mailto:secretary@achha.org.au) or post payments to ACHHA Inc, Box 4035, Rockhampton Qld 4700. Of course any member of our management committee outlined on the final page will be pleased to assist you to join.

**Membership Fees**

Annual	Individual	\$20.00
	Couple	\$30.00
Life	Individual	\$200.00
	Couple	\$300.00

Please make cheques payable to: Australian Country Hospital Heritage Association Inc.

**Newsletter**

If you have ideas for the newsletter, please contact me by phone or mail at the address above or by email to [secretary@achha.org.au](mailto:secretary@achha.org.au).

*"The position of the hospitals right up on the range meant that the water pressure was very poor. The Children's Hospital, which was a weatherboard building on twelve feet high piles, depended largely on its rainwater tanks. So when, one hot night about midnight, in a wild tropical thunderstorm, our front hall was struck and burst into flames, we had a most alarming time and great difficulty in putting it out. The lightning blew out the telephone and cut through the leaden gaspipe which was near it, so we had first to rush and turn off the blazing gas at the meter. Then we had no light to work by, but only the flames and the lightning flashes. The hall was as dry as match-wood, and in a minute was all ablaze.*

*When the alarm was sounded in the nurses' quarters, the matron and nurses came flying along almost as they were - some had one slipper and carried the other, and I remember the matron just had one stocking half-way on. It would have been a funny sight if it had not been so alarming. We rushed about in the darkness, bumping into each other as we ran to get stepladders and buckets of water. The tallest of us stood on the ladders, while others handed up dippers of water, which we threw wildly in all directions. Some of this fell back on us, scalding hot, and the flames just licked up the rest. At times it seemed hopeless.*

*Meanwhile some of the nurses were carrying near-by patients into safety, and one nurse had braved the storm to run down the hill to "break" the fire alarm. She found it already broken - it would not work - so she rushed to a neighbour's house and begged the man who opened the door just a crack to come and help us. But he said he couldn't leave his wife, who was very frightened by the lightning. She was under the bed and would not come out. The nurse then tried a second house with much the same result, so came running back, boiling with scorn for men who thought more of their wives' nerves than of a blazing children's hospital. However, at last, our efforts, helped by the terrifically heavy downpour, succeeded, and we put out the fire.*

*Now we had time to breathe, and found some candles, and groped round settling the patients, who, naturally, were very upset. At last we were able to get coats to cover our own flimsy, soaking attire. The hot night saved us from getting bad chills. Hot coffee and bed for those not on duty was the next order. The matron praised us greatly. She said we had really been tried by fire, and had proved that we had the sterling qualities which nurses should have - self-control and tranquillity in danger. We must have been hiding our feelings pretty well, for we were all decidedly unstrung and longing for daylight. We have often since laughed merrily at the remembrance of all that happened that night.*

*"Wild" is a mild term for these storms, which are really terrifying. At first one is warned by the dull thunder in the distance. Nearer and nearer it comes, and louder and louder are those agonising groans of the heavens. Then sparks begin to fly, and lightning flashes and thunder crashes in all directions. The air is so charged with electricity that one quivers at every flash, as though touched by an electric battery. And, of course, after every flash come the most awful, roaring, clapping bangs of thunder, and through all this the deluge - not rain, but sheets of water. One cannot describe all this in writing. It has to be felt, to be lived through, to know what it is really like."*

As you might expect, such an alarming event was reported in *The Morning Bulletin* the next day (and more briefly in *The Courier Mail*). This is the way the newspaper saw the story which was part of a longer report on how uncomfortable the weather had been.

*"The Rockhampton Children's Hospital had a narrow escape from destruction while the storm was at its height on Monday evening. The lightning evidently struck the telephone wire that connects the institution with the residence of the medical officer (Dr. Brown); and, running along the wire, the fluid came in contact with the gas piping and melted it. The inmates of the institution, like the inmates almost of every house in the town, were startled by the storm; but it was not*

*until they smelt fire that they suspected anything was amiss. Then a search was made, and it was discovered the ceiling of the hall immediately opposite the main entrance was ablaze.*

*The matron very promptly turned off the supply of gas, and though that left the building and its twenty-two sick little children in darkness for the time being, it proved the one thing that saved the institution. The gas piping had melted, and the gas was escaping and igniting, and the piping would have continued to melt and the gas to escape and take fire. A call for help was made on Mr. Kent, the caretaker of the Rockhampton Girls' Grammar School; and Mr. Kent, with the help of the nurses and the matron - all of whom worked with right good will - succeeded eventually in extinguishing the blaze.*

*Some idea of the difficulty of the task may be gathered from the fact that the Hospital is not connected with the town water service ; that every drop of water which was used had to be carried in buckets from the tanks outside ; and that the ceiling was so high that they were not able to throw the water on, but were compelled to mop it on with long-handled brooms. Indeed, it was quite an hour and a-half from the time the fire was discovered until it was quenched.*

*The damage done to the building was, fortunately, very trifling and confined mainly to the ceiling, in which a hole about a yard square was burnt. The matron, the nurses, and Mr. Kent are deserving of the greatest praise for their very prompt and energetic action. What might have happened if the fire had not been discovered very early after its outbreak or had been permitted to make headway is too horrible to think of. There were twenty-two young children, all ill of one malady or another, in the institution half on one side of the burning hall and half on the opposite side."*

It appears that Mr Kent made a stronger impression on the reporters after the event than on the nurses during it!

Reports of the Children's Hospital Committee which met monthly make a number of positive

references to the contribution being made by the Matron, Miss Grace Bourn, who was appointed from a Sydney Hospital in mid-1896. However, after a time the relationship with the Hospital Committee must have deteriorated because the report for the 1889-1900 financial year recorded in the Morning Bulletin includes the following statement: *"In July, 1899, the Committee deemed it desirable to make a change of Matron"*. The new Matron was Mrs Balfour. Another statement in the report which makes a link between Rockhampton of 1900 and 2011 is this sentence: *"The legal expenses incurred at that time entailed no loss to the funds of the Hospital owing to the handsome donation received from the firm of Messrs. Rees R. and Sydney Jones."*

One of the challenges for nurses in this period was working in the tropics with the required uniforms. Ann reports that the "going out" uniform was a navy blue dress and long cloak, high Eton collar, and a bonnet with a long veil at the back, and white strings tied under the chin. The Matron's response to complaints was "It's no good wearing what you like; like what you wear". Ann's comment on Matron Bourn was that she was a strict disciplinarian and sometimes considered too severe. Nurses were not allowed to scrub on Sundays no matter how strong the imperative.

#### **Sources:**

1. Garnsey, Mrs Arthur H. 1950. "Scarlet Pillows – An Australian Nurse's Tale of Long Ago" McKellar Press (Melbourne).
2. Garnsey, Mrs Arthur H. 1984. "Scarlet Pillows – An Australian Nurse's Tale of Long Ago" Hesperian Press (Perth). (Facsimile edition with additions and introductory pages).
3. 1897 „THE WEATHER.“, Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton, Qld.: 1878-1954), 3 March, p.5, viewed 20 March 2011, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article52521508>
4. 1897 'ROCKHAMPTON CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld. : 1878-1954), 22 July, p. 5, viewed 21 March, 2011, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article52526353>
5. 1900 'ROCKHAMPTON CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld. : 1878-1954), 25 July, p. 5, viewed 23 March, 2011, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article52579554>

**Dr H. E. Brown and the Children's Hospital**

The Morning Bulletin article about the fire at the Children's Hospital refers to the fact that the telephone line between the hospital and the residence of the Medical Officer (Dr Brown) was struck by lightning. We should take this opportunity to find out more about Dr Henry Brown who was one of a small group of medical practitioners who were prominent citizens of the city in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. One of his physical legacies still standing today is "Shandon", the grand home which he had built for him in Alma Street in 1894-95. Today it serves as the office of Tucker and Nakivell Funeral Directors, a company which has operated in Rockhampton since 1863.

While we could show a present-day photograph of the building, this one from our archives shows it as the backdrop of a Rockhampton Hospital float participating in the ceremonies which marked the end of World War 2 in 1945.



The unidentified researchers who were responsible for the inclusion of "Shandon" in the Queensland Heritage Register tell us that Queensland Post Office records:

*"make the first mention of Dr Henry Brown residing and working in Rockhampton as part of the community's "Medical Profession" in the period 1885-86, though no place of address is evident until 1888. From 1888 through to 1893, Dr Brown who is variously listed as Medical Practitioner and Surgeon, resided at Campbell Street, Rockhampton. Records show that Dr Brown was then able to take up residence in his new purpose-built*

*town house, "Shandon", on Alma Street by 1894-95. During the period 1892 through to 1897-99, Dr Brown was engaged as the Visiting Surgeon to the 32-bed Children's Hospital in Rockhampton. Dr Brown also appears briefly on the Medical Staff of the 114-bed Port Curtis and Leichhardt Hospital (on Canning Street) approximately 1892-93."*

We know that Dr Brown actually had a very much longer association with the Children's hospital than this. It seems that in many ways it was his life's work. Newspapers of the day reported comprehensively on the work of the various hospitals and their committees and on the work done by doctors. We could report many examples but one will suffice. In the 1899-1900 report of the Children's Hospital Committee noted already in the article about the fire, the following is included:

*"In March last Dr. Brown asked that further room be provided for infectious cases, the difficulty of isolating different kinds of such disease, with the then existing accommodation, being too great. After consideration, three tents were obtained, and are now ready for emergency. In closing this short report, the Committee must record their obligation to Dr. Brown and the honorary staff".*

It is hard to imagine how the doctors coped with doing their rounds before the invention of the motor car. We see that Dr Brown lived in Alma Street, but his main work was done at the Children's Hospital in Agnes Street or at the Rockhampton Hospital in Canning Street. It is not surprising that doctors were among the first to embrace motor vehicles.

In his history of Rockhampton, Mr A. E. Hermann reported that:

*"The first owner of a horseless carriage in everyday work in Rockhampton was the late Dr. F. H. V. Voss and its introduction in 1902 aroused great interest, men leaving their work and children breaking away from school whenever the new wonder was seen. It was a steam vehicle known as the Locomobile, and was imported for the doctor by James Trackson of Brisbane. It was claimed to be the first horseless vehicle in the state."*

However, steam power was not particularly suited to motor vehicles and Dr Voss soon acquired a conventional petrol powered vehicle, an Oldsmobile. Hermann reports that Dr Brown's first vehicle was a 9 HP Rover and his next was a Renault.

Members of the former Children's Hospital Committee, the Mayor and other distinguished residents met at James Stewart and Company's Café on the morning of 18 June 1929 to celebrate Dr Brown's forty year contribution as Medical Officer to the Children's Hospital. The glowing testimonials to an obviously outstanding man were reported in The Morning Bulletin under the headline "*Dr H. E. Brown's Work Eulogised*". One is left with the impression of a man with great medical skill, outstanding compassion and the type of personality which can often make the difference between an organisation doing outstanding work and one which is dysfunctional.

A number of references were made to the sadness felt in the community at the Government's decision to close an institution such as the Children's Hospital and incorporate its services into the Rockhampton General Hospital. The Mayor presented Dr Brown with "*a handsome gold wristlet watch, suitably inscribed*" and Mrs Brown with "*a beautiful crystal electric reading lamp*".

Though many of those at the function expressed the hope that Dr and Mrs Brown would enjoy a long life, he died just over two years later on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> August 1931. As is often the case, his obituary, published in The Morning Bulletin on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1931, provides a comprehensive summary of his service to the city and its residents.

*"Dr. Henry E. Brown passed away at his residence "Shandon," Alma street, at an early hour on Saturday morning last, after an illness extending over several months.*

*Born in county Cork, Ireland, Dr. Brown was 73 years old. At a comparatively early age he secured his certificate as an engineer, but his love was for medicine and he studied at Trinity College, Dublin, where he obtained his M.D. degree.*

*In 1885 he commenced practice in Rock-*

*hampton, and specialised in diseases of children. He was the first medical officer of the Children's Hospital and held the post with great credit for over 40 years until the hospital was taken over in 1929 by the Rockhampton Hospitals Board under the hospital amalgamation scheme.*

*It was a great wrench to Dr. Brown when the Children's Hospital ceased to exist. It was his life's work and the conduct of the hospital was favourably commented upon throughout the State.*

*He devoted considerable time to the study of public health, and was medical officer of health for the City Council and the shires of Livingstone and Fitzroy. He occupied a unique position in this respect - medical officer for three local authorities.*

*During his term of office he insisted on the strict observance of sanitary regulations and this is reflected in the small number of infectious cases in Rockhampton and the adjoining shires.*

*Of late years he was not actively associated with the public life of Rockhampton, but in the past he was chairman of the old General Hospital Committee for a number of years, chairman of the now defunct Technical College Committee, and chairman of trustees of the Rockhampton School of Arts. He was a patron of the Rockhampton Rugby League for many years.*

*Dr. Brown was an omnivorous reader, and his comprehensive library bore witness to his culture. He was well versed in French, and works by noted French authors occupied a prominent place in his library. Bookbinding was his chief hobby, and the library shelves contain excellent specimens of his handicraft.*

*The city will regret the passing of a beloved doctor and noted citizen.*

*Dr. Brown left a widow and daughter and son (Mrs. W. G. Hutchins and Mr. Lal Brown). Mrs. T. C. Irving, Misses E. and F. Carr-Boyd, and Mr. W. Carr-Boyd are step children. The deepest sympathy is extended to the bereaved relatives.*

*The funeral yesterday afternoon was attended by representatives of Local Authorities, public bodies, members of the medical profession, and a large number of prominent citizens.*

*The pall bearers were the Mayor (Ald. T. J. Lee), Dr. D. P. O'Brien, Messrs. H. A. Kellow, W. F. Richardson, B. M. Lilley, and J. Barry.*

*The burial service at North Rockhampton was read by Canon Frost."*

While it is clear that the closure of the Children's Hospital was a major blow to Dr Brown, most of the buildings went on to have another life at the Canning Street site. The buildings were removed as quickly as possible so that the site could be sold to pay down the Hospital Board's debt. In particular, relocated buildings were used as quarters for the Matron, Sub-Matron and nurses. The photograph at right shows some of the buildings in their new position on the Rockhampton Hospital site with the original Rockhampton Hospital building and the lift building in the background. Unfortunately, the whole story does finally end in tears because the buildings in the photograph were burnt to the ground on 28 August 1945. The staff had to wait until 1954

for the opening of new, modern quarters in the building which was itself demolished in 2008.



#### Sources:

1. Hermann, A. E. 2002. "Development of Rockhampton and District", Central Queensland Family History Association inc., pp. 171 – 172.
2. 1929 'DR. H. E. BROWN.', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld. : 1878-1954), 19 June, p. 13, viewed 17 April, 2011, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article54655188>
3. 1931 'OBITUARY.', *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Qld. : 1878-1954), 17 August, p. 6, viewed 23 March, 2011, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article57616860>

#### Association contact details:

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**Patron: Dr Con Primmer OAM**

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**Treasurer:** Kay Smith

**Archivist:** Yvonne Kelley

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