



## Merewether Historical Society

*"A society aimed at recording memories of the past for the benefit of the next generation."*

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# The Chronicle

October 2021

**Meetings:** Next meeting is **November 9**, 10 15 for morning tea. 10.40 Annual General Meeting with the General Meeting to follow. Social distancing will be in place, as well as the wearing of masks. Venue is the Merewether Bowling Club and unfortunately, we shall be unable to have lunch as the chef has an alternate appointment. An option is to lunch at South Leagues Club instead. **In line with Covid Regulations all attendees must be double vaccinated.**

**Fees** for 2021/22 are now due. Cost is \$20 single and \$30 for family. Thank you to those members who have already paid. **If you no longer wish to remain a member of the Society could you please advise Sue Kenny so the Register can be updated.** Thank you.

**Guest Speaker:** Terry Collins will relate the tragic tales of the Dunbar and Caworra shipwrecks in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Bus Trips:** A flyer with planned bus trips for 2022 will be available at the meeting but please keep the following dates free: 15 March, 17 May, 19 July and 18 October.



**Christmas Lunch:** A change of venue has had to be arranged for our lunch, which will now be held at the Merewether Bowling Club on **December 14**. Cost, as per previous 2 years, is **\$55**. Given our isolation for so much of 2021 this will be a wonderful occasion to get together again. More details at our November meeting.

**November Birthday Greetings** to Jan Welsman, Denise and Geoff Wright

**Hillcrest Mothers Hospital** run by the Salvation Army from 1933 to 1977 had accommodation for 16 married and 23 unmarried mothers. Accommodation for the mothers to be was in a different part of the hospital. Unmarried mothers generally spent some months at Hillcrest prior to

the birth of their babies and in some cases, the hospital arranged for the babies to be adopted.



**Point to Ponder:** You're only here for a short visit, don't hurry, don't worry – and be sure to smell the flowers along the way. (W.C. Hagen)

**MHS Library Update:** Please see Dennis Hinchliffe if you are interested in borrowing any of the material in our extensive library. He has developed a catalogue of what is available.

**Now we at** last appear to be returning to a more 'normal' normal the following article (edited) by Dr Edward Bridle Project Archivist, University of Newcastle published in the Newcastle Herald 18/3/20 may be of interest: "Spanish Flu and Newcastle 1919: What can we learn today?" The Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918-1920 arrived Hunter between March and September, 1919 and claimed 494 lives in the area. Planning to respond to the epidemic began prior to its arrival and the Newcastle and Northumberland Benevolent Society's Hospital at Waratah (later the Western Suburbs Hospital) was requisitioned as an 188-bed Isolation Hospital. This was done at the beginning of February; consequently, when the first Newcastle cases of the influenza appeared, the premises were already available to receive them.

Newcastle Hospital agreed that its Dr Banks-Smith should become the Medical Superintendent of the new Influenza Hospital. The Deputy Matron at the Newcastle Hospital, Sister Skelton, was appointed as Matron. The whole of the Newcastle Hospital nursing staff volunteered to nurse influenza patients; most were sent to the Isolation Hospital as they could be spared, and, although several contracted the disease, all who did so recovered.

The Health Department set up an inoculation station at St Philip's Hall in Watt Street; in one day, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, 1,774 inoculations were given there. Other stations operated at Newcastle South Public School (for children) and Wickham Council Chambers. From the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, all travellers by train were required to wear masks, and masks were distributed to all railway staff; however, the Newcastle Herald reported on the 4<sup>th</sup> that "While every member of the staff at the Newcastle railway station yesterday was wearing a mask, numbers of the passengers were not masked." From that evening, however, passengers without masks were refused tickets.

The first influenza case in Newcastle was a young sailor, who arrived from Melbourne on the steamship "Ooma" (*shades of The Ruby Princess*) on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February. He was taken, already ill, to Newcastle Hospital, in the belief that he had typhoid, and died on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March, at which time it was confirmed that his illness was the influenza. Unfortunately, he had infected five nurses, two wardsmen and one other patient during his short time at the Hospital. These became the first eight patients at the Isolation Hospital, where they were admitted on the 4<sup>th</sup>. One of the doctors was diagnosed shortly afterwards and within a week, thirty-five patients had been sent to the hospital at Waratah.

According to the final report of the Board of Health Medical Officer for the Hunter, Dr Robert Dick:

"The disease showed itself in two waves, the crest of the first being felt during the period 6<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> April, and the second more pronounced wave extended over the period May 25<sup>th</sup> to June 28<sup>th</sup>. After this there was a very rapid decline and disappearance of the disease. of the populations of these towns was attacked." (Newcastle Herald, 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1919)

The second wave was particularly challenging for the establishment at Waratah. During June, Dr Banks-Smith, his assistant Dr Taylor, and Matron Skelton all contracted the infection, as did several other members of the staff (Newcastle Herald, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1919). On the fifteenth of that month, 17 new patients were admitted, 15 discharged, and three died, leaving a total of 166 cases under care. Two days later, twenty cases were admitted; on the same day, over thirty members of the Newcastle Post Office staff were reported to be absent through sickness

During the course of the epidemic in Newcastle, 1,442 patients were admitted to the Isolation Hospital, of whom 157 died. A further 256 were

taken by Wallsend Hospital, 23 of whom died there. Other deaths occurred at Maitland, Cessnock and Kurri Kurri Hospitals. Of the 494 lives claimed by the epidemic in the Hunter, 290 died in hospitals, and 204 at home."

At the time it was considered that in spite of all measures taken the disease could not be prevented from taking hold: "maritime quarantine, preventive inoculation of the population, masking, closure of theatres, picture shows, and all other similar places where crowds congregate, the control of train and other traffic. No one will deny that it is very unwise to frequent crowded places during the prevalence of any infectious diseases, but to compulsorily prohibit any and every form of meeting and to restrict travel unnecessarily is a different matter."

Dr Dick's final sentence from 2019 perhaps describes what those people protesting about the Government restrictions one hundred and two years later believe.



#### **COMMITTEE FOR 2020/2021**

President:	Geoff Wright
Vice President:	Dennis Hinchliffe
Secretary:	Sue Kenny
Asst Secretary:	Denise Wright
Treasurer:	Greg Struck
Asst Treasurer:	Monica Jordon
Committee	Alison Chapman Laurie Graham Iain Kelso Jan Welsman

Hon. Solicitor: Nicholas Dan

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