

## Newsletter September 2020

Spasm HealthCare Museum Building 6 Victoria Rd Gladesville  
No 1 gate house at the Crown Street bus stop on Victoria Road Gladesville



We hope you can join us on our first Zoom AGM September 28 at 1pm. Please notify us if you would like to take part. Information has been sent to all members by email.

During this closure period changes are being made. Gary has been reorganizing the anaesthetic display area in building 1. The main task at hand is identifying and cataloging the large number of items not on the database. Later we hope to re-organise the volunteer work area and improve the flow of viewing the exhibits. Sadly vandals threw rocks in windows at the Gladesville site last month! Our 5 windows affected were in the tea room and in Building 6. Thanks again to facilities for replacing them.

On a cabinet, in the main corridor of the museum, our previous curator, Bevan Stone, told the story of the use of the Australian Eucalyptus tree & oil. The trees were planted in Egypt, to help drain swamplands to prevent mosquitoes breeding which cause the spread of malaria. Another use of the tree was the Eucalyptus oil, which was used in the inhalation devices. Some of those are on display in the museum. Many of us, who volunteer at the museum, remember, being taught how to give this form of treatment with those porcelain inhalers. One of which was called "Doctor Nelson Inhaler" "Invented in 1865.... By following directions printed on the vessel the patient, suffering from ailments, such as bronchitis, asthma or congestion may have been able to find relief by inhalation of steam sometimes mixed with medicinal elements" (such as Eucalyptus or Tinc. Benz Co).

Perhaps you, like many of us, were looking for something to do during the early Covid period... You will remember... when we were in lockdown in our houses, not visiting, wondering where the next shipment of toilet paper would arrive at our local supermarket. A time when the elderly were allowed to shop an hour earlier than others, so they didn't have to be subjected to the hurly burly of the shopping frenzy as Australians decided they must have extra supplies of toilet paper, pasta and flour. In the first months of that Covid period the decision was made to embroider the empty squares on the SPASM tablecloth for our new tea room. That tablecloth began life as a Calico drop sheet, on which embroidered flowers covered paint splashes. It was decided to embroider images of the flowers that belonged to medicinal plants, used through the ages. As we are a group of mainly anaesthetists and operating room nurses, there is no prize to guess what plant was thought of first to represent on the tablecloth. Of course it was the Opium poppy, next came the Curare vine, then Deadly Night shade for atropine. Five of the plant stories are over the page, all the stories of medicinal plants depicted on the tablecloth can be found in a folder at the museum. Or look at the reference, over the page, for more information about this topic.

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Do you remember SOLYPTOL? Part of the display in the main corridor of the museum showing use of eucalyptus trees.



Dr Nelson Inhaler as shown on the SPASM ehive web site

No prizes to guess what was chosen to represent medicinal plants. The Opium Poppy



Deadly Nightshade or "Belladonna", the plant from which Atropine was derived.

## Visiting the HealthCare Museum in real time or online.

Opening hours for the Museum is normally 11 am – 3pm on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday and 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of each month - February to November. **The museum will be closed to the public until further notice. Members are welcome to attend on specific days as organised with individual volunteer Guides.**

**Executive Members :** President Sandra Solarz  
**Curator** Gary Klopfer  
**Secretary /Treasurer** Ros Berryman  
**Volunteer Guides:** Val Corcoran, Kate Paton, Margaret Warby & Peter Hartigan

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SPASM web sites at [www.spasmmuseum.org.au](http://www.spasmmuseum.org.au)

Facebook page "Discover HuntersHill"

Like us on Facebook: [Society for the Preservation of Artefacts of surgery and medicine SPASM](#)

# Entry to the Museum takes you to another era:

## BUILDING 6

Room 1 takes us to a 1911 Consulting room: "**The consulting room of Dr. John Sand Smyth**" who practiced in Warwick Queensland. Items from the Five Dock GP Dr. Menzies collection are also in the large display case.

Room 2. The surgical "pick room" contains instrument cupboards with a large display of surgical instruments, blood collecting apparatus and interesting items. We will be adding a selection of orthopaedic instruments and prostheses.

Room 3. The St Thomas Hospital Operating Theatre Room In Feb 2020 had a new ceiling installed, and a new display is being set up in this area. The early operating table, as well as early anaesthetic equipment will be on show again we plan to add early surgical equipment to this display.

Room 4. The haemostasis room is home to: an impressive collection of diathermy machines as well as other methods used to provide haemostasis, such as tourniquets, clamps, suturing, bone wax and other medical means.

The corridor to the exit will take you past a display of hearing trumpets, tracheostomy tubes a display of early syringes and other historical equipment. We plan to add the portable operating table, and world war instruments to this area. The small formaldehyde cupboards and dental equipment will be on display as well as the small sterilizing water baths, one of which was used during Mawson's Antarctic Expedition.

The Library Work area. Will hopefully soon be a pleasant space for volunteers to gather, research and collate the many items still to be cataloged. The reference books and curator's files will be all in one space - a flat space so we won't be congregated outside the toilet with our chairs sliding down to the exit door!

## BUILDING 1

The Anaesthetic Room which showcases the changes in anaesthetic apparatus used by surgeons, dentists and anaesthetists over the years displaying improvements in safety and monitoring of the anaesthetised patients over the years.

The pharmacy room shows beautiful jars, household remedies and also have some early dispensing records. A new optical collection will soon be added, as earlier pharmacists sold eye glasses according to our research.

The Corridor & Gladesville room gives a time line of the Tarban Creek Asylum - Gladesville Hospital. There are ECT machines, straight jackets, & mittens. There are photographs and stories from patients and attendants.

So it can be seen we have lots of plans and work to do Please consider assisting us we are there on various days these covid days so just contact Ros

September 1 is the first day of spring in Australia, so for this newsletter we consider 5 of the 12 plants depicted that have been used for medicine through the ages. Those are:



The **Opium Poppy (*Papaver somniferum*)** the Bread Seed Poppy is widely grown as an agricultural crop for its little black seeds. The legal harvest of poppy seeds is around 80,000 tonnes per year, with around two thirds of production taking place in the Czech Republic, Turkey, Spain, Hungary and France. The poppy's latex contains alkaloids, which have painkilling properties. From the latex, morphine, **codeine, thebaine, oripavine, papaverine and noscapine**, is obtained. Images of Opium Poppies have been found in ancient Sumerian artifacts C 4000 BC. The ancient Greeks called the sap "Opion". Laudanum, is opium dissolved in alcohol or alcohol and water.



**Foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*)** produce **digoxin**, a 'cardiac glycoside', which acts to increase the heart's output force and the amount of blood pumped on each beat. The entire plant (including the root and the seeds) is toxic. This toxicity is one of the plant's natural defences against animals, which would otherwise eat it. Foxglove extract was first described as a treatment for heart conditions in the late 1700s. It was difficult to determine the quantity of the active ingredient in plant extracts, and there is only a small difference between the amount which is medically effective and the amount which will cause poisoning.



**Madagascar Periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*)** Alkaloids tend to taste bitter, so alkaloid-filled leaves are avoided by grazing herbivores. Many also interfere with processes in animal cells, which makes them poisonous. The Madagascar Periwinkle produces over 120 alkaloids, including **vincristine** and **vinblastine**. It was used for centuries as a folk remedy for diabetes, and this led to studies investigating its use as a medicine. These studies showed little effectiveness in treating diabetes, but great potential in stopping the division of rapidly dividing cells, leading to its use in anti-cancer therapies, particularly for treating childhood leukaemia. The active ingredient vincristine is produced at a yield of only three grams per tonne of plant material and, for a while, farms were devoted to the growth of the plant. However, vincristine can now be synthesised in a laboratory.



**St John's Wort, (*Hypericum perforatum*)** flowers around the date of the Feast of St John (24 June), produces **hyperforin** and **hypericin**. This plant has a long history of being used in folk medicines. It was often used in 'theriac', a concoction of dozens of ingredients fermented and matured together, which would supposedly cure assorted ailments. Today, it has become the subject of intensive research, as it has been shown to have antidepressive, antitumour and antiviral activity. St John's Wort has an unusually high level of interaction with other drugs, and interferes with the effects of various anticoagulants, immunosuppressants and contraceptives.



**European Yew trees (*Taxus baccata*)** contain **taxenes** and **taxanes**, two classes of terpenes which are highly poisonous to many animals and thus deter herbivory. In the 1960s a natural products screening programme in the United States sampled bark from Pacific Yew (*Taxus brevifolia*) and found that at lower doses the active ingredient, taxol, reduced the growth rate of cancer cells. Pacific Yew bark only yields small quantities of taxol - it is estimated that three mature trees were required to treat one patient - and production required cutting down the trees. Further investigations found that the European Yew has high levels of taxol throughout the plant. This led to the development of methods to extract taxol from European Yew clippings, which could be harvested without killing the tree. Pruning's from Yew trees at the Botanic Garden have in the past contributed to making an anti-cancer drug, but it is now produced from cell cultures in laboratories. **If you would like to see the other plants in the next newsletter please let me know .**

SPASM

SPASM Founded by Professor Ross Holland AM  
1928 -2017

Reference: Information from the University of Cambridge  
Museums and Botanic gardens

<https://www.botanic.cam.ac.uk/education-learning/trails/medicines/>