

# SPASM MUSEUM

## Newsletter April 2022

Spasm HealthCare Museum, Building 6 Victoria Rd Gladesville  
Situating at the Crown Street bus stop on Victoria Road Gladesville



In Late March we had an interesting experience relating to an **old bottle of Ether** – read all about it over the page.

The **2021 Postponed AGM & Lunch is being held soon on Saturday May 14<sup>th</sup>**. Please RSVP to [info@spasmmuseum.org.au](mailto:info@spasmmuseum.org.au) if you are planning to attend so we can cater lunch accordingly. It will be held in or around the tearoom in Building 5 this year. The reports will be redistributed again.

The **monthly newsletters** were commenced as a way of keeping in touch with members who are not able to come to our monthly meetings, especially when we were closed during Covid periods. However as we now have members in Queensland, country NSW & Victoria there are good reasons to continue them.

**Last month was a celebration** of some of the special occasions over the last couple of years. A extra March newsletter features on the wall in our refurbished tearoom as a celebration of our community. We hope you enjoy reflecting on those past occasions as much as we enjoyed them while they were happening. Two of the photos are reproduced here.

### April 2022

Attendance at a Health Care Museum such as SPASM allows visitors to reflect on the past, to contrast with the present and contemplate the future.



Sept 2019. The lovely Train Travellers group.



June 2021. The Dundas Probus wrote "Thank you so much for a fantastic tour today. One of the best tours we have done with our group."



March 2022. Haberfield Probus Visit & photo in our refurbished tea room. Anne wrote: "What an interesting experience! I thought the SPASM team was terrific, so well informed. Sandra, who took my group, was a good storyteller."



The tea room when we first were given the area Sept 2019



The new tearoom set up in March 2022



The inner area of new tearoom in March 2022

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

### Executive Members :

**President:** Sandra Solarz

**Curator :** Gary Klopfer

**Secretary/Treasurer:** Ros Berryman

**Volunteer Guides:** this month:  
Val Corcoran, Kate Paton, Kerry Moroney, Peter Hartigan, Menna Davies, Jenny May, Judy Mutton, Sue Kelly & Marion O'Farrell.

**Opening hours** for the Museum are 11 am – 3pm on the **2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday** and the **4<sup>th</sup> Monday** of each month - **February to November**. Prior arrangements for Group visits may also be arranged on these days, or other days - depending on volunteer availability.

### Contact SPASM by-

**Phone** 0414 993 138

**Email :** [info@spasmmuseum.org.au](mailto:info@spasmmuseum.org.au)

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

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SPASM1>

We also feature on the Hunters hill web page:

<https://www.facebook.com/discoverhh>

And the museums and galleries of NSW:

<https://mgnsw.org.au/organisations/spasm/>

# Entry to the Museum takes you to another era:

NO BIG BANG AT SPASM

By Gary Klopfer

The anaesthetic properties of diethyl ether were first demonstrated in 1846 and its use for this purpose took off very quickly around the world, reflecting the pent-up demand for painless surgery and dentistry. Ether remained the most widely used anaesthetic agent world-wide for about 120 years despite the significant drawbacks to its use: post-operative nausea and vomiting, excessive salivation during administration and high flammability. Although many of the anaesthetic machines used to administer ether before about 1950 had electric insufflator pumps or heaters (including several on display in the SPASM museum), reports of fire or explosion, especially involving patients, were extremely rare, particularly in Australia. Nonetheless, by the mid-1960's ether had fallen into disfavour due to the increasing use of other electric devices in the theatre (e.g. diathermy) making its use more hazardous and indefensible, and due to the advent of the much better tolerated and easier to administer halothane.

Ether compounds, including diethyl ether (anaesthetic ether), belong to a large and varied class of chemicals known as "peroxide-forming" or "time-sensitive" chemicals. These compounds, mostly liquids, are used in chemical laboratories and some industries, for example as solvents. It has long been known that these compounds will degrade if stored for prolonged periods (months) to form peroxides, which are violently explosive crystals in the liquid or the container. The peroxide may explode if a container is bumped, shaken, or even opened. Peroxide formation is aided by exposure to oxygen, so open containers are more dangerous. Exposure to light or heat can hasten peroxide formation. Most laboratories have strict rules on the storage and handling of peroxide-forming chemicals. In the days of ether anaesthesia, hospitals controlled the supply, nature (dark glass) and storage of bottles of ether. The British Pharmacopoeia required manufacturers to add 0.002% w/v hydroquinone to anaesthetic ether as a stabiliser to prevent or delay the formation of peroxides.

During the upheaval of the Covid-19 pandemic, it came to our attention that there was an unopened bottle of Anaesthetic Ether B.P. at the back of the top shelf in a steel cupboard in the rear of the seldom-visited store room. The bottle was still in the original paper bag supplied by the manufacturer, Hoechst Laboratories (a predecessor of today's pharmaceutical giant Aventis/Sanofi). The product label was still attached and showed an expiry date of May 1982, meaning the ether was at least 30 years old. The bottle was left in situ while I did further research into peroxide formation in ether and made enquiries regarding safe disposal.

I spoke to the Hazmat officer at Fire and Rescue NSW. He reinforced the danger of explosion of the ether and advised safe removal of the bottle by the NSW Police bomb squad. Arrangements were made for this to take place at 1:00pm on 29 March 2022. At that time some 18 Fire and Rescue and Police bomb squad personnel arrived in 5 vehicles. They spent about an hour preparing the site, their equipment and themselves. They explained their planned procedures to me in detail, and told me they were using it as a training exercise.

I was joined by SPASM member Megan Hicks, a past Curator of the Health and Medicine Collection at the Powerhouse Museum and author of "Guidelines for Dealing with Hazardous Material in Medical Collections". When the fire and bomb teams were ready, we were instructed to stay in the back of building 6, putting at least two thick sandstone walls and some 30 metres distance between us and the potential "bomb". After about 20 minutes and no bang we were allowed out. We were told that the wrapping from the bottle had been removed (we have kept this), and the contents examined. Surprisingly, the bottle had been previously opened and was only 2/3 full, but there was no evidence of crystal or oil formation in the bottle to indicate the presence of peroxide. The original bottle, with the ether in it, was placed in a large, sealed, spill-proof, fire-proof, lined container for removal by a commercial waste disposal service.

**Editors note :** We have since checked all areas of the museum to ensure that no other potential hazards or chemicals are lurking in out of the way storerooms.



*Corporate Members of SPASM*  
NSW OTA.  
NSW Nurses Association  
Molnlycke

*Health Care Museum*  
**SPASM**

Founded by Professor Ross Holland AM 1928 - 2017