

# SPASM MUSEUM

Newsletter June 2022



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



Our previously postponed 2021 AGM LUNCH was held on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May, and what a lovely lunch it was. Thank you so much to all those who attended and brought such delicious food. Thank you also to those who kindly sent their apologies. The tea room was a cosy and convenient place to hold the meeting. The minutes of the very short meeting will be circulated separately. **Our 2022 AGM will be held in the Building 5 tea room on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> August.** So if you missed out on lunch last month perhaps you might like to come in August?



A special welcome to our latest member **John Murphy**. John previously worked at Liverpool hospital as the Orthopaedic Perioperative NUM. A very welcome addition to our SPASM Family! He got into "cleaning duty" with Kerry to prevent slipping on the walkway behind building 1. We were very grateful for his help.

The terrible weather caused the cancellation of the **Group Visit by the Castle Hill Photography Club** to the museum in May. However last week some individual members called in and Kerry kindly showed them around. Kerry was at the museum taking delivery of an **anaesthetic machine, a mayo table, a rapid infuser and a fiberoptic bronchoscope - all donated through the wonderful efforts of Jenny Cubitt at Canterbury hospital.** Thank you so much Jenny.

This month a **visit by a group of Perioperative nurses from Newcastle** was a welcome occasion. Organised by Jenny McGavin this was a special outing for the group who went on to have lunch at Hunters Hill. Jenny wrote : "We had a wonderful time. So much work has gone into the displays. We really appreciated Menna, Kerry and Ros taking the time for the tours. We loved reminiscing and learning some new things too"

June 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.



In June we welcomed a group of periop nurses from Newcastle.



Items kindly donated by Canterbury Hospital organised by Jenny Cubitt.

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

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

**Executive Members :**

- President: Sandra Solarz
- Curator : Gary Klopfer
- Secretary /Treasurer: Ros Berryman
- Volunteer Guides:** Menna Davies, Kate Paton, Kerry Moroney, Marion O'Farrell, & Peter Hartigan

Contact SPASM by- Phone 0414 993 138

Email : info@spasmmuseum.org.au

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

- Like us on Facebook:
- <https://www.facebook.com/SPASM1>
- We also feature on the Hunters hill web page:
- <https://www.facebook.com/discoverhh>
- And the Museum and galleries of NSW website:
- <https://mgnsww.org.au/organisations/spasm/>

# Entry to the Museum takes you to another era:

## The Quest for Nurse Murphy Part 1 of 2



A great deal of interest has been shown to our photograph in the World War exhibition area. Ros was asked to submit a short paper to *"The Digger"* Magazine. Part one of that paper is reproduced here on page two of this newsletter: *The quest for more information about "Sister Murphy"*.

In the former male attendant's cottage at Gladesville Hospital, at the end of the corridor is a small wood lined room that holds an ancient washbasin. In previous times it was probably the "bathroom," however since 1979, when the SPASM Healthcare Museum has been utilizing the cottage, this room has been used as a crowded storeroom and hand washing area for visitors and volunteers. It was decided to use this room as a new display room. The wooden lining of this room reminded me of a photograph taken during WW1 that I had seen.

Memorabilia and artifacts from the World Wars have been displayed in various areas, throughout the museum. A number of larger items such as a portable operating table had formed part of the Melbourne Exhibition "Love and Sorrow" so they were absent from the museum for three years. Their return prompted re-consideration of their display.

Like so many of our displays the instruments in our collections were once owned and utilized by medical staff. The labels attached to the items rightfully tell the story of the surgeons and anaesthetists who donated them. There was little at the museum, which drew attention to the important role nurses play in the operating theatres. So throughout the museum we have chosen photographs to show the presence of operating room nurses.

The photograph I had in mind (which reminded me of our washroom) was taken from the Australian War Memorial website<sup>1</sup>, titled *"Lieutenant Colonel Fay McClure, AAMC performing surgery"* Those present were also named: Sergeant Haswell; Sister Murphy & Major Featonby. The date was 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1917, in Europe France, Nord Pas Calais Outtersteene at the 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Casualty Clearing Station. This photograph has been used in several publications about the WW1<sup>2</sup>

To me it is a most beautiful photograph, with the nurse in the center of the composition framed by the overhead light. I was keen to acquire a high-resolution image to enable it to be enlarged to hang in our museum as an example of the teamwork and the importance of the nurses' role in the operating theatre. This photograph shows a surgical team standing in what appears to be a small wooden hut they are: the anaesthetist, nurse, surgeon and one other. The type of operating table, enamel bucket and equipment are similar to items we have in our museum. The wood lined hut reminded me of our wood lined washroom. This scenario depicts the essential team required for surgery in a CCS during WW1. All four are intent on their duty. They appear serious but calm in what appears to be a relatively minor procedure, judging from the size of the retractors laid out on the patient's torso.

Looking at this photograph, with an anaesthetic focus, the eye is immediately drawn to the *shipway's* anaesthetic apparatus being used, which utilized warmed ether, which is a volatile anaesthetic agent. Coincidentally the means of warming the area, patient and staff - a stove with a naked flame would seem incompatible with the use of ether, but it was particularly cold in November that year!

The swabs on the floor, instead of in the bucket, and the surgeon operating in his bare hands, would be the only other items of concern to a pedantic observer. We can overlook the absence of facemasks and the short sleeves of the sisters' gown as a sign of the times. Information about the anaesthetist Major Henry Newark Featonby (1883-1964), and the surgeon Lt Col F McClure, has been previously published.<sup>3</sup> However Sister Murphy and Sergeant Haswell were to me the "unknowns". **So began my quest to search for Sister Murphy**

As luck would have it, we had received notification of a day seminar to be held at the Sydney War Memorial on 30/4/2022 organised by Paul Simadas, RFD Lieutenant Colonel, Chairman Australian branch Western Front Association. The seminar was to **launch the database of Australian Nurses of the Great War 1914-1918**. David Perkins, who had previously set up a database of other war personnel, has set up this database.<sup>4</sup>

The nurse's database that David provided has given us four possible Australian Nurses names to research. I also did a "Google" search, and a "Trove" search. Using "Ancestry.com" I located the service records of each of the four nurses to find out if any of them were allocated to the casualty Clearing station during the war. There was only one:

**Esther Murphy** was 25 when she enlisted. Her mother was then living at Wellington NSW. Esther was born at Barrington NSW in 1890, she enlisted as a staff nurse on 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 1915 for the AANS and was appointed to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian General Hospital. / 11<sup>th</sup> Nov 1915 Embarked "Orsova" / 9<sup>th</sup> Dec 1915 to 2<sup>nd</sup> AGH / 11<sup>th</sup> Mar 1916 to No 1 GH Heliopolis ex No 2 AGH / 17<sup>th</sup> June 1916 detached from 2<sup>nd</sup> AGH to **Rouen for Duty Marseilles.** / 5<sup>th</sup> July 1916 reported to 2<sup>nd</sup> AGH from **Rouen Wimereaux** / 10<sup>th</sup> Sep 1916 admitted to 14<sup>th</sup> British General Hospital with bronchitis / 9<sup>th</sup> October 1916 arrived in England and sent to Vincent's Square sick, boarded, given sick leave and furlough / 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1916 re-joined 2<sup>nd</sup> AGH **Wimereaux** for duty / 12<sup>th</sup> March 1917 proceed o'seas to France ex AANS Headquarters London / 24<sup>th</sup> Sept 1917 posted for duty No 2 ACCS / 6<sup>th</sup> Dec 1917 - 4<sup>th</sup> Jan 1918 Posted to 2nd AGH for duty No 1 ACCS. 16<sup>th</sup> Aug 1918 to 29<sup>th</sup> Aug 1918 retained in England for duty ex leave / 14<sup>th</sup> Sep 1918 appointment terminated in AANA in consequence of the marriage in London / 4<sup>th</sup> Dec 1918 Now Mrs J J Boyers RTA HT "Somerset" Free passage in return for service

So we are reasonably certain that our "Sister Murphy" is Esther Murphy, but more proof was needed! Comparing her experiences with the information I gleaned about 2<sup>nd</sup> AGH and the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> CCS in France it seems she is the most likely fit. The story of the Australian Army Medical Corps in France is well told on the website **"Following the Twenty-Second an Australian Infantry Battalion"**<sup>5</sup>

Part 2 of this story will be continued, next month.

1. <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E01304>
2. A Moncrieff, Expertise, Authority and Control. The Australian Army Medical Corps in the First World War Cambridge University Press, p8
3. Images of Australians and Anaesthesia from World War 1, M. G. Cooper and J. M. McDonald History Supplement Anaesth Intensive Care 2016. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0310057X1604401S01>
4. [https://ffaif.org.au/?page\\_id=14213](https://ffaif.org.au/?page_id=14213)
5. <https://anzac-22nd-battalion.com/hospitals-france/>

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