

# The Early Superintendents & Matrons of Tarban Creek /Gladesville Hospital:

Joseph Thomas Digby & Susannah Digby (Matron 1838-1847)

Francis Campbell & Jane Manson (Matron 1851 – 1873)

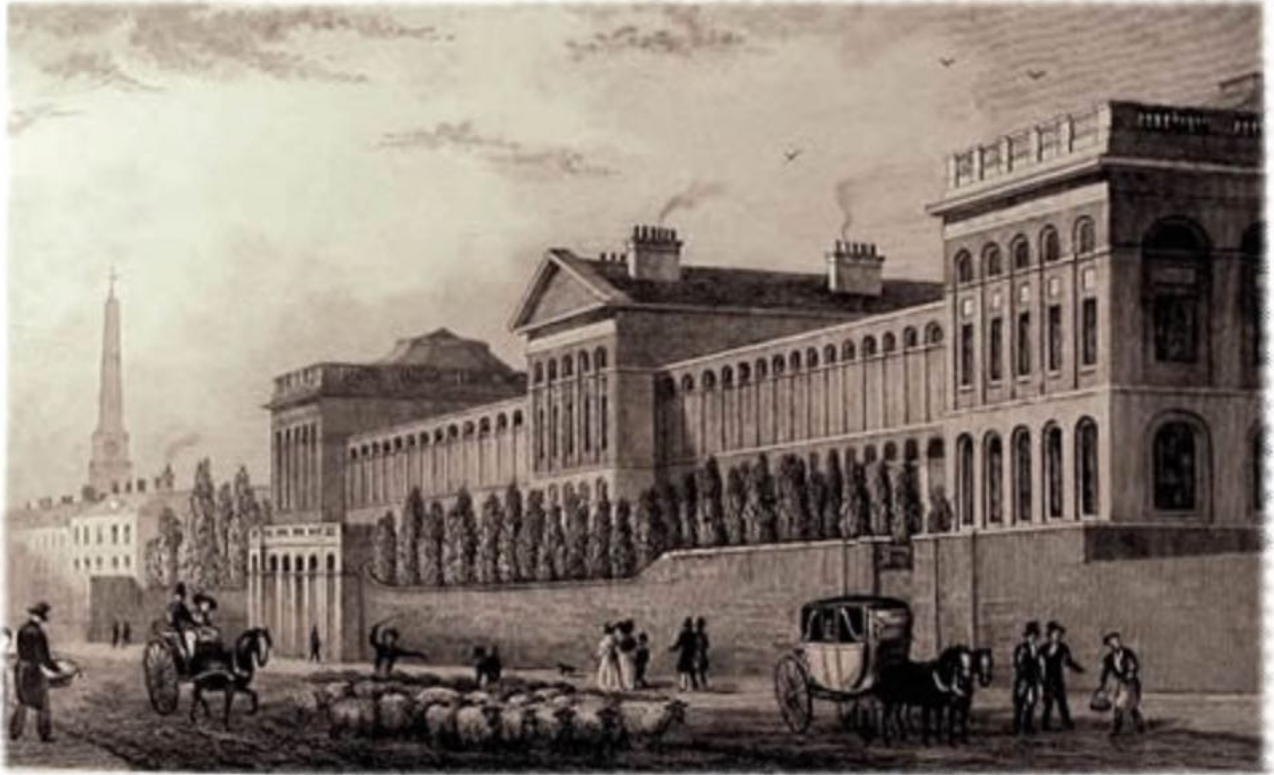
Sister Mary Bland (Matron 1873-1881)

Sister Bessie Simpson (Nee Chant)<sup>i</sup> (Matron 1881-1908)

By the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in Europe and England there were a number of institutions established, to care for those who were mentally ill. When Australia was first colonised in 1787 Governor Phillip had detailed instructions for setting up a colony including the care and custody of “lunatics’ and ideots”<sup>ii</sup> Those instruction were fortuitous, because when landing at Sydney Cove, Lieutenant George Maxwell of the *Sirius* was reported to be suffering a form of “*general insanity*”. Phillip directed 3 doctors to examine the hapless man and they found “*a total incapacity of every mental faculty*” he was given into the care of a surgeon and people from the ship attended to him.<sup>iii</sup> Thirty years later in 1805 Governor King called for a 12-man jury to examine Charles Bishop and determine if he was a lunatic. Five years later in 1810 a 12 man jury must have been considered a too laborious procedure as Governor Lachlan Macquarie directed that Alex Brodie, Master of the ship *Frederick* was to be examined by only 3 doctors (Carter, Wentworth and Martin). Brodie was said to be “*labouring under serious mental derangement.*” Trustees were appointed to care for him and his property until he was no longer indisposed. In Sydney town, Parramatta Gaol was the first place where those mentally ill, particularly the dangerous ones, were confined. By 1811 the first asylum at Castle Hill was developed, under the order of Governor Lachlan Macquarie, in a former convicts barracks,<sup>iv</sup> as there was considered to be a number of individuals who were a nuisance to the community.<sup>v</sup> When it was closed in 1825 another asylum was opened in barracks at Liverpool. Transportation of convicts continued until 1839, but there were increasing numbers of free settlers coming to the colony. Some of those were to become affected by mental health problems and needed management. By the 1830’s construction of the first purpose built asylum, known as *Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum* began at Gladesville on the banks of Parramatta River. It was designed by Colonial architect Mortimer Lewis and completed by 1838. Patients were transferred there from the Liverpool Asylum and the female factory at Parramatta.<sup>vi</sup>

At the SPASM Medical/Surgical museum on the site of the former Gladesville Hospital, there is one small room dedicated to artefacts from the Tarban Creek Asylum that once existed on this site. In another room hang portraits of Medical Superintendents associated with the hospital. There was unfortunately no mention of the nursing staff, Matrons or attendants who also lived and worked at Tarban Creek Asylum - later called Gladesville Psychiatric Hospital. Nor was there a portrait of the first non-medical superintendent or his wife who worked tirelessly for the Asylum for the first 10 years. This paper discusses five of these important, visually unrecognisable people: Joseph Thomas Digby, Susannah Digby, Matron Jane Manson, Matron Mary Bland, & Matron Bessie Simpson. No formal photographs or paintings of any of them have been discovered to display at the museum. It is hoped that these words instead, shed some light on these fascinating people’s lives. When visitors tour the museum, our volunteers can retell some of their personal experiences, hopefully their importance to the asylum and hospital’s history can be recognised in this way.

It is well recorded that the first superintendent of the Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum was a man named **Joseph Thomas Digby**, born on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1812 in Shoreditch London. However little is recorded of his wife Susannah. Digby and his wife Susannah were especially recruited from England, and were highly recommended by Dr Sutherland from St Luke's Psychiatric Hospital in London, where they both worked. St Luke's had been founded in 1751 to treat the poor who suffered from mental illnesses. In 1786 it moved to new purpose built buildings with an impressive 150 metre street frontage.



### **St Luke's Hospital for lunatics Old street London.**

This palatial building contained 300 individual cells for patients - male wards on one side and female on the other. St Luke's hospital emphasised Dr William Battie's methods of treatment for insanity. This became known as "Moral management or treatment". It described treatments of insanity caused by: grief; fright; disappointment; conjugal infidelity; pride; jealousy and fanatical excitement. Emphasis for treatment relied on encouraging patient's self-awareness and self-restraint, encouraging patients to do meaningful tasks, which increased self worth. Physical /mechanical restraint was regarded as a necessary evil. Straps, straight waistcoats and seclusion were used only as a last resort to decrease the risk of harm to self or others.<sup>vii</sup> But they were still used and Digby bought samples of them with him to Australia. The Digby's moved from this magnificent building to take charge of the first purpose built Lunatic Asylum in Australia originally designed to house up to only 60 patients.

The 26-year-old Digby and his 22-year-old wife, Susannah nee Shaw arrived in Sydney on 1st July 1838 aboard the 473 t Barque "*John*" under Master Smith. They had embarked on 11<sup>th</sup> February and left London on the 13<sup>th</sup> February, sailed via the Cape of Good Hope on 23<sup>rd</sup> May. The ship was carrying "*merchandise*" and at least 26 other passengers. The Digby's were in "good company" on their long voyage to their new life. Those passengers included Reverend W Smith and "Primitive Methodist Minister" the Reverend William Sparling and his wife. Reverend Sparling <sup>viii</sup> was later to be stationed at Goulburn then he returned to St Peters in Sydney. He died in Sydney in 1894 of Typhoid fever.<sup>ix</sup> Charles Thomas Weaver was also a notable passenger<sup>x</sup>; he was a police Magistrate who went on to be a member for New England and Member of the NSW

Legislative Assembly. He, poor man, could have used the services of Joseph Digby, as years later in 1874 in a cemetery in Armadale he took his own life while "*labouring under a fit of temporary insanity.*"<sup>xi</sup>

Susannah Shaw was 21 when she married Joseph on 14<sup>th</sup> Feb 1837 at St Luke Chelsea Middlesex London.<sup>xii</sup> Susannah was to be the first Matron of the Tarban Creek Asylum and was paid a very good salary of £100 per annum. The Digby's faced a number of obstacles, frustrations and opposition in their employment at Tarban Creek. The New Governor George Gibbs<sup>xiii</sup> faced a severe economic depression in the colony soon after they arrived and he was well known for his frugality.<sup>xiv</sup> The couple were to be paid from when they left England, £200 for Joseph and £100 for Susannah. Gibbs quibbled about that, refusing to pay until they took up residence and commenced work. He also refused to pay for furniture in their apartments at the Asylum when it was finally ready to be moved into. The buildings were not completed when they first arrived in Sydney.<sup>xv</sup>



**The inner main quadrangle of Tarban Creek Asylum photographed in 1895.**

Suitability of staff was a particular trial to the Digby's. In the beginning patients and staff were mostly convicts however there were increasing numbers of free patients, whose care it was believed, should not be entrusted to convicts. Digby sought the appointment of free men to oversee the work of the convicts. The Asylum was understaffed and had too many patients for the available facilities. The buildings were inadequate, with insufficient ventilation and drainage. The availability of water was insufficient. But the most significant obstacle the couple faced was that members of the Medical fraternity, in particular Dr Francis Campbell, believed that the management of the establishment should be under the control on the Medical profession, and a number of articles in the newspapers were written to undermine Digby's authority. However Digby did have the support of a few people, including Dr Lee the Medical officer for the Asylum and Reverend Turner the local Anglican minister who was also a Tarban Creek Official Visitor. The role of the official visitor at the asylum was to act as an independent inspector and advocate for the patients. They were responsible for monitoring conditions, inquiring into patient

treatment and reporting the findings to the government. This is a role that is still in use in Mental Health facilities today.<sup>xvi</sup>

Digby advocated for salaried staff with internal training; he developed procedures for the admission of voluntary patients; procedures were also developed for admission and transfer of patients, the establishment of visiting days<sup>xvii</sup> and for official inspections.

In an effort to ensure that his expectations were made clear, in 1842 Digby issued a set of rules for the Day to day activities for the keepers. These rules demonstrate his strong dedication to the welfare of his patients - they were:

1. *[The Keepers were] under no circumstances to strike the patients, to use exciting expressions to them, or in any way to ill-use them, but to treat them as afflicted beings, and in a quiet but firm manner, and not to suffer themselves to be irritated by any offensive remarks the patients make towards them, but always to bear in mind that, being insane, they have not the same control over their actions as they themselves have.*
2. *In every case of illness, a report to be made immediately to the Surgeon and likewise to the Superintendent.*
3. *All Medicines to be duly and regularly administered, and particular attention to be paid to all orders from the Surgeon respecting the Medical Treatment of the Patients, to report the state of the bowels, or any sudden change that may take place in their health, and that the slightest appearance of any sore to be reported to the Surgeon and the Superintendent.*
4. *No confinements to be put upon any of the Patients without acquainting the Superintendent, before or immediately afterwards, and no confinements to be taken off without first obtaining his authority.*
5. *All patients confined in the chairs to be exercised at least 3 times during the day, and all fatuous and helpless patients to be exercised daily and the calls of nature strictly attended to.*
6. *The whole of the Mess Rooms, Sleeping Rooms and Galleries, to be cleaned and in order by 8 o'clock every morning; the Patients to be supplied with plenty of water, soap and clean towels; and all of them to be washed before Breakfast, their hair combed and their heads cleaned.*
7. *Breakfast to be served out, at 8 o'clock in the summertime and ½ past 8 in the winter. The Keepers to be present at every meal, to remain there till each meal is finished; and on no account to hurry them over it. The Keepers, male and female, to dine at 1 o'clock and the patients at 2 o'clock. Tea at 6 in the summer and 5 in the winter precisely. All the Patients are to sit at the tables in proper order at their meals.*
8. *The Patients are to be put to bed, not before 7 o'clock in the summer, nor before 6 o'clock in the winter. All Clothes, Handkerchiefs and Ligatures of every kind to be put outside the door of each Patient's sleeping room; and all the doors to be fastened securely. The Chamber Utensils to be scoured every Friday.*
9. *Any noise, during the night or day, to be attended to instantly, and the slightest accident to be reported to the Superintendent.*
10. *Every Patient to be shaved, on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays; and no Patient whatever, under any circumstances, to be allowed to shave himself or any other Patient.*
11. *The Airing grounds, Verandahs and Privies to be cleaned every day and the walls to be lime-washed weekly. Each Mess Room to be scrubbed every morning, the Sleeping Rooms on Tuesdays and Fridays and the Galleries and passages, etc. once a week.*
12. *In cold weather, good fires must be constantly kept in the Patient's Mess Rooms. The windows to be cleaned the first Tuesday in every month.*

Colonial Secretary's Office,  
Sydney, 20th September, 1841.

**LUNATIC ASYLUM.**

**I**T having been represented that much inconvenience is experienced through the repeated calls of Individuals to see their Friends or Relatives, at the Lunatic Asylum, Tarban Creek; His Excellency the GOVERNOR directs it to be notified, that Monday and Tuesday, in every week, have been fixed as the days on which Patients in that Establishment may be visited, but that it must be clearly understood, that no Patient can at any time be seen, if in the opinion of the Resident Surgeon, the state of Mind of the Individual would thereby be injuriously affected or his ultimate recovery protracted.

*By His Excellency's Command,*  
**E. DEAS THOMSON.**

13. Each Patient to be washed in a bath every Saturday afternoon, in Summer, and once a fortnight, in Winter, and in dirty and debilitated cases as often as required; and their finger and toe nails to be kept in order.

14. The dirty and wet straw in the cribs to be changed every morning in the Palliasses (a straw mattress) when necessary in case of illness, and the inside of the cribs to be washed every morning.

15. All torn clothes to be taken to the Matron in order to have them repaired, and the Patients must be kept clean and tidy at all times – to have clean linen every Sunday morning and clean sheets once a fortnight.

16. All tin plates, cups and spoons are to be scoured and kept clean and all articles of clothing, furniture, etc. Given into charge of the Keepers shall be mustered the first day of every month and, if destroyed through neglect or want of proper precaution, the value of each Article shall be deducted from their pay.

17. All Patients on admission to be immediately washed in the Bath from head to foot and have their hair cut short; their bodies to be examined and if there is any appearance of wounds or sores, to report it immediately to the Surgeon and the Superintendent.

18. No Keepers to shew [sic] the Patients to any person whatsoever without being so ordered by the Superintendent or Surgeon of this Establishment.

19. All Patients employed inside and outside the walls of the Asylum shall be strictly watched by the Keepers in charge of them and on no pretence to leave them a moment without first putting them under the charge of a responsible person and before returning to their wards their persons to be strictly examined in order that nothing of an injurious nature may be conveyed therein.<sup>xviii</sup>

Susannah must have had a difficult time as Matron of this new asylum and as a new wife. In 1840 staff at the asylum consisted of Joseph (Steward) Susannah (Matron) Daniel McLean (assistant Surgeon May 1839-1840) Thomas Lee (Assistant Surgeon appointed 9 Sept 1840-) two male keepers, two female keepers one clerk two nurses 'two assistant keepers and one laundress.<sup>xix</sup> On 8<sup>th</sup> August 1840 she gave birth to a son "which survived only 2 hours"<sup>xx</sup>. In 1843 two of the male convict keepers were accused by Susannah to be sexually abusing the female patients, who were under Susanna's charge. Digby verified this and the keepers were sent as prisoners to Cockatoo Island. Then in 1844 Susannah fell from a horse and sustained a head injury, causing her, at times, to appear uncoordinated.<sup>xxi</sup> It was frequently insinuated, by some, that her symptoms were due to alcohol consumption. This was vigorously denied and the reason for Susannah's apparent medical condition was supported by her husband, the Tarban Creek medical officer Dr Lee, as well the staff who worked with her. In 1846 her husband Joseph was assaulted by an Irish Convict Keeper who punched and kicked him in the head,<sup>xxii</sup> so bad were his injuries that it was reported in the press (incorrectly) that he died.<sup>xxiii</sup> Then in September 1846 Capt. Joseph Long Innes, visiting magistrate to the Lunatic Asylum was sent by Governor Gibbs to investigate the continuing reports of problems at the Asylum. Innes vouched for both Susannah's and her husband's high character in a letter to Gibbs written from Sydney on 12 September 1846<sup>xxiv</sup>. One year later, on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1847 in a poignant letter to Governor Gibbs, Joseph wrote on Susannah's behalf, to finally resign from her position as Matron he stated:

*"Lunatic Asylum 4<sup>th</sup> September 1847*

*Sir*

*I have the honor to state that in consequence for a long and anxious service in this colony of nine years in a most trying and difficult course of duty Mrs Digby's health has been so much injured that I am reluctantly compelled to tender to His Excellency the Governor her resignation of the office of Matron in this establishment.*

*I have the honor to be Sir your most obedient servant  
Joseph Thomas Digby Superintendent"*

It appeared that Susannah was unable to cope with her own physical and mental state and the stress of the procedures being waged regarding her husbands' management of the Asylum. **Mrs Price** was appointed a head Nurse in her stead.

The Select Committee Review of the conditions at Tarban Creek dragged out in the Newspapers over a protracted period of time during 1847. The main concerns reported were:

<b>LUNATIC ASYLUM.</b>	
<b>The COLONIAL TREASURER moved</b>	
the following estimate :—	
Superintendent	400 0 0
Steward	200 0 0
Visiting Justice	100 0 0
Clerk, at 3s. per diem	54 15 0
Head nurse	50 0 0
Eight male attendants—three at 40l. and five at 35l. each, per annum	295 0 0
Eight female attendants—three at 30l. and five at 25l. each per annum	215 0 0
Cook, 35l.—Surgery attendant, 37l.	70 0 0
Gardener, 40l.—Carter, 30l.	70 0 0
Porter and gate-keeper	25 0 0
Two laundry women, at 25l. and 20l. respectively	45 0 0
Allowance to the superintendent, in lieu of provisions, fuel, and light	45 12 6
Allowance to the steward, in lieu of provisions, fuel, and light, of 2s. 3d. per diem	45 12 6
Provisions and medical comforts	1662 0 0
Clothing and bedding	891 0 0
Fuel and light	91 0 0
Forage	31 18 9
Stores and utensils	134 0 0
Stationery, 14l — Books, periodicals, and newspapers, 25l.	39 0 0
Binding books for the Library	10 0 0
Furniture	20 0 0
Coffins and burial expenses	17 0 0
Conveyances	20 0 0
Repairs and incidental expenses	170 0 0

£4701 18 9

In answer to several questions, the COLONIAL SECRETARY said that although the salary of the visiting justice was not named in the estimate last year, it was included in the amount voted. He expressly stated that the principal medical officer was willing to devote a portion of his time to the inspection of the institution, but that it was necessary there should be a paid visitor. He would take this opportunity of stating that the principal medical officer had been of the greatest assistance to the government in the management of the institution, not only by his inspection and superintendence, but also in framing rules and regulations for its management. With respect to the salary of the steward, it was larger than he would consider necessary if a new appointment were to be made, but the present steward came out from England with an engagement that he should receive £200 a year.

Mr. WENTWORTH said, that if there was an engagement to pay £200 a year there was no engagement to pay extra allowances, and he should move that the vote be reduced by £45 12s. 6d., being the amount allowed to the steward for rations and lights.

The vote was then passed with the proposed reductions.

1) A complaint by a private patient regarding her treatment and restraint at night, of "barbarous cruelty" during her stay at the asylum.

2) A report by Captain JL Innes, a Visiting Justice of the Asylum that proper records were not kept by neither Mr Digby nor Doctor Lee the Medical officer,

3) Dr Eckford Colonial Surgeon at Liverpool hospital believed a medical man could treat patients better than a non medical man, and that three or four men who had been at Tarban Creek and were restrained did not now need those restraints at Liverpool.

4) Report by Dr Dawson Deputy Inspector-General of Hospitals, that while the patients are treated kindly he has no way of judging the treatment they received as there was no records kept.

5) Joseph Digby's own admission that he did not consider strangers visiting the establishment did good and that he believed his was the final authority in the general moral management of the establishment. <sup>xxv</sup>

All this resulted in the demotion of Thomas Digby just three months after Susannah's resignation and the Appointment on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1848 of Dr. Francis Campbell as Medical Superintendent. The Asylum was now under Medical Control, and Digby was demoted to "A steward". Dr Lee the previous medical officer was paid off with £183 for compensation as late medical officer of the asylum.

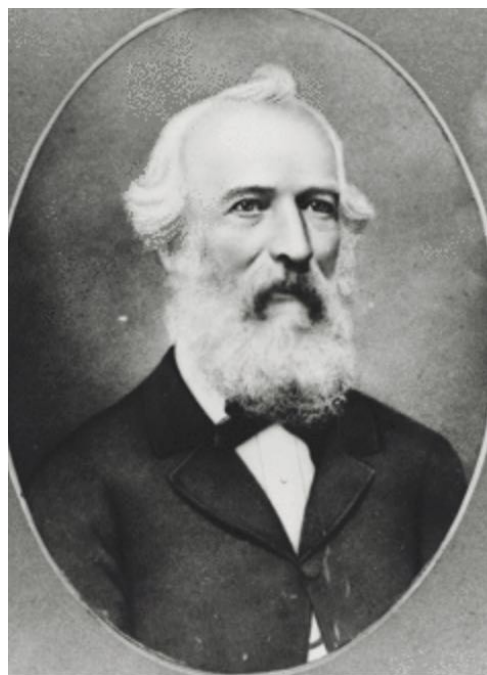
The Estimation for the running of the Lunatic Asylum was published, on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1848 In the Sydney Morning Herald, showing the cost of running tarban Creek. <sup>xxvi</sup> The Medical Superintendent (Campbell) was paid £400. The Steward (Digby) £200. The Head Nurse (Mrs Price) £50 (a saving of £50 as Susannah's wage had previously agreed in England been £100) The £200 cost of the Steward was questioned and the amount paid to him as an allowance in lieu of provisions fuel and light of 2s& 5p per day the total of

£43.12.6 was deducted from his wages, keeping to the promised £200 according to his engagement from England 10 years previously! £91.10s was postponed for a supply of water to the Asylum. Dr Campbell was also not allowed an additional £45.15s he requested to provide refreshment to public visitors. <sup>xxvii</sup> On a more promising note a garden for the use of the inmates of the asylum was stumped and cleared in the middle of the year 1848 and The Macarthur's of Camden sent a hundred fruit trees and ornamental shrubs to be planted in it - according to a report published in the Sydney Morning Herald August 1848.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Digby stayed for 2 more years in this inferior position, but he was eventually dismissed in Nov 1850 following a Medical Board of Inquiry, which investigated the deaths of two patients. His eventual dismissal was not because of cruelty to patients, mismanagement or any other crime but rather that he would not be overborne by Campbell. It was felt his continued presence was disruptive to the new medical management of the asylum. He had to go. In Nov 1850 **John Haybourne** was appointed as steward to replace Digby and paid £120 per annum and his wife **Sarah Ann** (nee McMullen) was installed as head nurse at £50 per annum.

Digby stayed in the Colony until 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1852. Fortune smiled on him at last. He returned to England a rich man. The New South Wales Gold rush began in Bathurst May 1851. And spread to Braidwood. Digby tried his luck on the Braidwood gold fields. Because of the amount of gold he returned to England with, it was deduced that he made his fortune not finding gold but selling salted beef on the gold fields. Those who sold food and equipment on the gold fields made the most money. An apparatus for salting beef was found in the possessions he sold before leaving Australia. <sup>xxix</sup> He returned, with his wife Susannah, to England a very rich man. Susannah died in England in 1860 and was buried 12 March 1860 at Islington London. The 1861 Census gives Joseph T Digby as a widower, living at St Pancras Somers Town. The records describe him as a landowner, age 48, born at Shoreditch. However he married again in 1866 and he and his new 26-year-old wife Caroline Susan Digby (nee Brierley) had 2 daughters - Louisa Mary in 1867, Alice Caroline in 1870 then a son Thomas J Digby in 1871.

Twenty-eight years later Joseph Thomas Digby died on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1899 aged 87 years leaving £602 to his wife Caroline. She went to live with their son Thomas, who was an electrical engineer, and his wife Helena. <sup>xxx</sup>



Meanwhile back in the Colony, on the 25<sup>th</sup> October **1847 Mrs Price** had been appointed in Susannah Digby's place as Head Nurse, with a salary of 50 pounds per annum, as well as rations of provisions. Mrs Price was described by Dr Lee in the Colonial Inquiry of 1848 as one who "*seems very attentive to the patients, with no severity about her, she sometimes makes a little noise and shouts to the patients*"

In 1848 **Superintendent Dr Francis Rawdon Campbell** wrote his Regulations for the attendants, which contrast greatly with those written six years earlier by Digby. *Regulations for the Guidance of attendants:*

- 1. They are to be at all times in the Asylum, and each at the post or duty assigned to him.*
- 2. None shall leave the Asylum without the written permission of the Superintendent or steward, which written permission shall, on the return of each attendant from leave, be deposited with the steward or the clerk, who shall write on it the hour at which it was given to him.*
- 3. The attendants shall call the patients, and shall assist them to rise, and dress, and wash themselves.*

4. *One attendant in each division shall, at the appointed hours, go to the kitchen for the breakfast, dinner, and supper of the patients*
5. *At least one attendant shall be present at every meal hour to divide and distribute the food, and watch over the conduct of the patients during their meals.*
6. *Such proportion of the attendants as the Superintendent thinks fit shall remain in the Asylum to clean the day-rooms and the mess utensils belonging to their several divisions, and to perform any other necessary duty. The remainder of the attendants shall accompany the patients to the airing or working grounds.*
7. *Every attendant especially those under whose immediate care for the time the patients are, shall keep a watchful eye over them. It is their duty to prevent violence, and to soothe the temper of such as are likely to be roused. Remembering always that the insane are without reason, the attendant should conduct himself kindly to them, speak mildly, and never in an angry tone; and if he has occasion to interfere, his manner should be gentle and calm, but determined, without hurry.*
8. *The attendants must never, for any purpose, threaten, swear at, or strike a patient, or of themselves apply restraint of any kind. If it be necessary to overcome a violent refractory patient, the attendant should not attempt it alone, but should ask for assistance; or if the case of emergency should arise, rendering it necessary for the safety of the patient or others to apply restraint, it must be immediately reported to the Superintendent or the steward.*
9. *The attendants of each division must observe the patients carefully, so as to report daily to the Superintendent, the state of the appetite, the nature of the excretions, the habits of each patient and any mark they may detect in the person.*
10. *All patients employed inside and outside the walls of the Asylum must be strictly watched by the attendants in charge of them, and they are on no account to leave them a moment without first putting them under the charge of a responsible person; and before returning to their wards their persons strictly examined, in order that nothing of an injurious nature may be conveyed therein.*
11. *No attendant or other servant to shew [sic] the patients to any person whatever, without being so ordered by the Superintendent or steward; and no attendant, while on duty in the airing yard of the refractory ward, must leave it, even to go into the mess-room, except in case of emergency.*
12. *If any patients should escape from the attendants in charge, they will have deducted from their pay not exceeding £1 for the first offence; £2 for the second; and they will be discharged for the third offence. Females 15s. for the first offence; 30s. for the second; and for the third to be discharged.*
13. *All plates, cups, spoons, &c. to be scoured and kept clean; and all articles of clothing, furniture, &c. given into the charge of the attendants, and shall be mustered on the first day of each month; and if destroyed through negligence, or want of proper precaution, the value of each article shall be deducted from their pay.*
14. *Each attendant to bring to the steward for inspection, all worn-out articles of clothing and other stores every Saturday forenoon, in order that they may be replaced.*
15. *The attendants are to be clean and neat in their persons and conduct themselves with regularity and decorum and civility to each other, and in respect to the officers of the Asylum.*
16. *These instructions are only for the general guidance of the attendants, and not to supersede or prevent their obeying implicitly, and without hesitation, whatever orders or instructions they may receive from the Superintendent and the steward; and though they will be more immediately under the direction and control of the steward, they are to remember that he is carrying into effect the orders and wishes of the Superintendent.*

It would seem that the attendants now faced as many restrictions and tribulations as the patients might. These were strict rules that governed the attendant's time on duty and off duty. Financial penalties were to be imposed for damage to property, escape of patients and perceived dereliction of duties. Campbell was ensuring that he was to be seen to be in complete control of the establishment. This position he had coveted for a number of years. Campbell's management of the hospital and his approach to problems were considered by John Bostock author of *The Dawn of Australian Psychiatry* to be "academic, ornate and obsequious."<sup>xxxix</sup>

In was in October **1848 Jane Manson nee Gray**, first came to work at the asylum. Mrs Margaret Price was the head Nurse at the time and husband George Price was also a keeper. Two years later Mrs Price died in November 1850 just one month after her Husband Mr George Price. Both were buried at St Anne's Ryde and they both were recorded as "*Keepers*" at the Asylum by Reverend Turner from St Anne's. Jane Manson came from Morpeth in the Hunter Valley where Dr. Campbell had originally moved to take up a land grant before he later opened a medical practice in Maitland in 1842. Perhaps the Rev Blaine or his wife from Hinton manse recommended her to Frances Campbell. Jane had temporarily resided at the manse following the untimely death of her husband. Or perhaps Jane knew Campbell, as a doctor to herself or her husband. Maitland was close to Morpeth, and they may have been part of the same community.

Or perhaps Jane, now a widow, needing occupation simply answered an advertisement placed by the Steward in the Sydney Morning Herald in March 1848 or September 1848. Joseph Digby would have ratified her first appointment to Tarban Creek as he was still in charge of applications according to notices placed in the Herald in March 1848 and in September 1848. Which called for "*a respectable, strong and healthy woman, of even temper and kind disposition*" in March 1848 and then in September the need increased to "*Three female attendants, salary 25 pounds per annum, with good rations, They must be strong and active, of humane disposition, and temperate habits. Unexceptional references required.*"<sup>xxxii</sup>

Jane Manson certainly fulfilled both the advertisements requirements. On her arrival at the Asylum in 1848, she was 41 years old, a strong, and temperate woman. She remained at the Asylum for 25 years before her retirement in 1874. Jane was born in 1807, the second daughter of two convicts Elizabeth and John Gray. Her father was in charge of the Markets at Parramatta. After his death her mother continued the business and later was in charge of the markets in Sydney and held a liquor licence. Jane resided for ten years, from 1818-1828 with Mrs Mary Lord, wife of Simeon Lord. The Lord's were one of the richest couples in the Colony.<sup>xxxiii</sup> On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1830 Jane married Alexander Sinclair Manson, previously a Sargent in the Band of the 38<sup>th</sup> Regiment. At the time of his marriage he was a clerk in the Colonial Secretaries office. They lived in Surry Hills, but in 1846 Alexander decided to become a farmer and they moved to Morpeth on the Hunter River. By September 1847 Alexander died leaving Jane with debts and mortgages. She sought refuge in the Hinton Manse, near Morpeth with The Rector Robert Blain and his wife, with whom she kept in contact after her appointment at Tarban Creek. She also kept in contact with her siblings and her Mother who she visited and who corresponded with her and her family. Jane was especially close to her brother, Richard Gray, she and her husband were witnesses to his marriage. Richard Gray named his first son, born in 1844, *Alexander Sinclair Manson Gray*, after Jane's husband. The young boy was sent by his father from Melbourne to live with Jane when she was widowed.

On the **1<sup>st</sup> of August 1851 Jane Manson was appointed Matron at Tarban Creek.** Ford's Australian Almanac published that year in 1851 informs us that on 31/12/1849 there were 91 patients at Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum 49 males and 45 females. 91 patients were claimed to be curable and 56 incurable. These numbers could be compared to the Parramatta

**WANTED, for the Lunatic Asylum,**  
**Tarban Creek, a respectable, strong,**  
**and healthy Woman, of even temper and kind**  
**disposition, as attendant on the insane females.**  
**Salary £25 per annum, with rations, &c.**  
**Apply personally to the Steward of the Asy-**  
**lum. 5639**

**WANTED, at the Lunatic Asylum,**  
**Tarban Creek, the undermentioned**  
**persons to attend on the insane patients, viz.**  
**Three Female Attendants, salary £25 per an-**  
**num; with good rations.**  
**They must be strong and active, of humane**  
**disposition, and temperate habits. Unexcep-**  
**tionable references required. Personal applica-**  
**tion to be made at the Asylum, to**  
**Mr. J. T. DIGBY,**  
**4291 Steward.**

lunatic asylum for convict lunatics, where, of the 276 inmates, 240 were males and only 36 females. Of these inmates, only 32 were claimed to be curable and 244 were said to be incurable. At Tarban Creek in 1852 Steward John Haybourne died following an alcoholic seizure. In 1852 Haybourne's replacement was James R Firth until November then Robert Larkin was appointed as Steward. It must have been a difficult time for Jane after the dismissal of Joseph Digby. She had to deal with at least two difficult stewards, one an alcoholic, the other an illiterate womaniser who was eventually dismissed. Matron Jane Mason testified against Larkin, claimed that he sexually harassed female attendants, was illiterate, and that even she had trouble obtaining candles for her own use from the stores controlled by Larkin. However she always had the support of Dr. Francis Campbell. She also had the support of the Parsonage at St Anne's Church Ryde, which played a large part in the burial practices at Tarban Creek. From 1849 Rev George Turner from St Anne's officiated at the Non catholic funerals and kept excellent records of those whom he buried either at St Anne's or at the Asylum itself in the consecrated ground on the Gladesville site from 1847-1893

July 1854 Dr Campbell took sick leave for 6 months leaving 13 members of his family living at Tarban Creek; he had recommended that Dr Walker the dispenser take his place. But Dr James McNish the Assistant Medical Officer was appointed to the position. Campbell remained as Superintendent of the Asylum until the appointment of D. Norton Manning in 1867. It was reported that: *"Campbell's fame rests upon his reputation as a clinician. He introduced concepts of non-restraint, adequate diet, planned recreation and clinical regimes. He failed as an administrator and was personally criticised to Henry Parkes by Surgeon George Walker as ineffectual."* <sup>xxxiv</sup>

In 1854 Sep 10 while Campbell was absent on sick leave, Selina, Dr Francis Campbell's wife, wrote to Jane Manson, a letter addressed from the Lunatic Asylum. This appears to be a letter of apology from the tone of the text. Jane appears to have taken exception to some comment or deed by Selina and the letter says what a good job she is doing and the she the undersigned had no intention of interfering in the running of the Asylum.



**Jane Manson in latter years.**

Jane Manson's position appears secure in 1857 when she attends to an officer on an official visit she is described as a lady of considerable experience, who concentrates all her energy in discharging her onerous duties. She is described as *"having a high order of mind, and a rare goodness of heart"*. Her kind heart was in evidence when her husband died in 1848 and she had sent money to his mother in Thurso, Scotland. She had also sent expensive clothing to Thomas the baby son of The Rector and his wife in Hinton Manse in 1852. Perhaps further proof is provided in 1861 at Tarban Creek when letters of gratitude for Jane Manson's care of the insane patients is sent - *"along with a purse of 20 guinees,"* Signed by Jane Hume, E & J Macpherson.

The 1860's were just as eventful as the previous decade. In 1863 Jane was to again go before an enquiry, this time regarding a Clerk by the name of Edward Corner, he was accused and convicted of embezzlement. A female nurses and a male attendant's pay had been taken and cashed by Corner. James R Firth was appointed the replacement Clerk.

Dr Campbell resigned in July 1867 and bore testimony to Jane's services by writing of her as "one of the most faithful, constant and useful officers that ever served a Government." In 1869 Her mother wrote to another family member that "she does not know what would become of me if it were not for Jane" – who visited her at Newtown where she lived. By 1873 Jane was earning £120 per annum, plus provisions.

In 1874 after Jane retired, Dr Manning the Superintendent wrote "at the close of the year Mrs Jane Manson, to my exceeding regret, resigned the office of matron, which she had held for a period of twenty-five years. During all this long period no suicide, and no fatal accident had taken place in the division of the hospital under her supervision. A fact, I believe, almost unparalleled in the history of an institution of this character". My predecessor bore previous testimony to her services. His testimony I most cordially endorse. When her mother died in October 1875 Jane paid the two pounds for an exclusive right of burial for her and again in December 1875 she paid for her mother to be removed to an adjoining empty plot in preparation for her own demise. She was paid a pension of 48 pounds per annum from 1/11/1874 and died on 17/11/1880 at the age of 74.

The NSW Government Gazette reported from Sydney on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1873 "The executive council was pleased to appoint **Mrs Mary Bland** to be Matron of the Hospital for the Insane Gladesville in the room of Mrs Jane Manson resigned". How pleased Henry Parkes must have been that here was a Sydney Hospital nurse, trained by Lucy Osburn, nurse leader of the group of nurses whom he had asked Florence Nightingale to provide to NSW. Mary Bland was the first Sister Probationer to train as a nurse at Sydney Hospital. In a letter to Florence Nightingale dated 19<sup>th</sup> May 1869 Lucy Osburn described Sister Bland with being "somewhat of a check upon evil tendencies" among the other nurses.<sup>xxxv</sup> Mary Bland (nee Anderson) was born on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1832 in Surry England. A number of her siblings and cousins had emigrated to Australia. William Anderson, a cousin, was a member of the Legislative Assembly in the Colony of Victoria. Mary settled in Port Fairy area and in 1864 married John Bland, brother in law to her sister. He was a widower who had three young daughters under the age of 12. He died 10 months later leaving Mary a widow at the age of 33. She travelled to NSW and was employed as a nursery governess and housekeeper for Mrs Tucker in Double Bay. On 15<sup>th</sup> October 1867 Mrs Tucker had a son - Viles, at her residence "Ban Ban" in Double Bay.



**View of Double Bay in late 1800's by unknown artist** (Vintage Sydney Public group Kevin Davidson's post) <sup>xxxvi</sup>

In 1869 Mary Bland applied to train as a nurse under Lucy Osburn and was accepted. After completing her training and working at Sydney hospital she accepted the position of Matron at Gladesville, She was Lucy Osburn's first Australian lady probationer trainee, she was also the first trained general nurse in Australia to be appointed Matron of a hospital for the insane. Appointed on 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 1874 at Gladesville Mary worked under the direction of Dr Norton Manning. There is little written about Mary Bland or her work at the hospital. One very detailed article<sup>xxxvii</sup> published in the Freemans Journal Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June 1877 describes the condition in the asylum and in particular the women's section. Noting he was handed over to Mrs Cunnington, a very reserved nurse of No 1 ward as "*Mrs Bland, the matron was unfortunately absent*". He described one particular patient - a well-dressed young girl playing a variety of medleys on the piano. The workroom contained about 50 women employed in all branches of sewing, one very adept on a sewing machine. "*Many were young girls or children; they were generally weary and had vacant expressions and listless attitudes*". With hardly a word spoken. They mostly stitched in silence. Sewing a shroud or a shirt. He described the recreation ground of the men and women as "*replete with every convenience, which were laid out with great taste. Scores of tame birds, kangaroos &c, are provided to amuse the patients, while there are long sheds with commodious seats to shield them from the rays of the sun*". Another article in the Sydney Morning Herald dated 21<sup>st</sup> October 1879 describes an annual picnic at Chowder Bay for the Protestant Orphanage Parramatta - 250 Children left the institution wharf in the Steamer "Emu" at 8oclock, visitors were taken up at Ryde, Gladesville, Biloela and Circular Quay, until there were 300 on board. Among the guests were the Matron and a number of inmates of Gladesville Hospital. Apparently a great time was had by all - a volunteer band, a merry go round and other sports as well as a package of food for the day was provided. One can only hope the patients from the asylum enjoyed that day more than their usual occupation of sewing! Mary Bland resigned from Gladesville to take up a new position in Tasmania, as Lady Superintendent of the Hobart General Hospital in June 1881. She was appointed from a group of 17 applicants from various parts of the Colonies.<sup>xxxviii</sup> However sadly she resigned from that position two years later in October 1883 apparently feeling unsupported by the Hospital Board. She returned to mainland Australia to Victoria and then again returned to NSW. She died on 11th Feb 1909 having never remarried or had children.

We return to England now to an earlier time, to tell the story of **Bessie Simpson (nee Barthorpe/ Chant)**. She is the third and final Matron in this paper. In 1860 in Lincolnshire England James Thomas Chant's 20-year-old son, Edward Sharpe Chant married 21-year-old Bessie Anne Barthorpe. Both James and his son Edward were Chemists and Druggists. Edward's Chemist shop was at the Butter Market in Lincolnshire. The newly married couple went to live at 59 Horsemarket Row Caistor, with Edward's maternal grandmother - 75-year-old Elizabeth Sharpe (a cow keeper) and her daughter Hannah, a milliner and dressmaker.<sup>xxxix</sup> **Bessie Ann Barthorpe** had been born in 1839 in Willingham Lincolnshire in the parish of Caistor. She married Edward Sharpe Chant on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1860 in Senicoates, York, England. Only a short 4 years later on the 22<sup>nd</sup> August Edward died. In his will he left his widow effects worth less than 200 pounds.<sup>xl</sup>

Bessie Anne was listed on the 1861 census as a milliner and dressmaker, a skill that would surely prove useful when nursing. What caused **Bessie Chant nee Barthorpe** to begin training as a nurse? Perhaps she had had experience in her husband's and her father in law's Chemist shop? Bessie began training at St Thomas's Hospital London with an idea to work abroad. She finished her training on 4<sup>th</sup> January 1867. Mrs Wardroper considered her an attentive and obliging practical nurse. When she completed her training Bessie became a head nurse at the Derbyshire County Infirmary. <sup>xli</sup>



**Derbyshire General Infirmary 1810-1891 In 1890 a Typhoid outbreak swept through the hospital and the building design was blamed. The Hospital was entirely demolished.<sup>1</sup>**

Bessie later told a reporter that she had always wanted to travel and originally wanted to go to India, but a doctor advised her to go instead to Australia as it had a fine climate that would better suit her constitution. <sup>xlii</sup>

Bessie Chant immigrated to Australia as one of the 5 Nurses who accompanied **Lucy Osburn** to Sydney, sailing on the Dunbar Castle on December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1868. They landed in Sydney on March 5<sup>th</sup> 1869. She was recorded to be the only nurse to accompany Lucy Osburn that was “without a major personality flaw” or “peculiarities of temper” she was amiable, kind to her patients, and had given complete satisfaction in her posts. The medical staff considered her a clever nurse. <sup>xliii</sup> She nursed for 2 ½ years living at the Sydney Infirmary. Bessie “took surgical work” and remembered, “my first operation was taking off a poor fellows leg” She also stated that “Sister Mary (Barker) and I did the first ovarian operation in the colony with Sir Alfred Roberts”. She also worked with Sir Philip Sydney Jones. <sup>xliv</sup> It was Jones that was reported as performing the first successful Ovariectomy in 1870 <sup>xlv</sup>

Bessie left nursing at The Sydney Infirmary because she became pregnant to **Mr William Shaw Simpson** a patient in the accident ward. This indiscretion caused a great deal of consternation to Lucy Osburn. However Bessie and Mr Simpson married and Mr Simpson gained a job as the stationmaster of Homebush station. Lucy Osburn assisted him get this position. <sup>xlvi</sup> Sir Alfred Roberts also sent Bessie special cases to nurse privately. After the birth of her second child (named after Lucy Osburn) and the death of her husband, Lucy Osburn assisted Bessie again. This time obtaining a position for her as the Matron of the Gladesville Hospital for the Insane on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1881 after the previous Matron of The Gladesville Asylum, **Mrs Mary Bland**, left NSW to go to Tasmania.

In December 1881, in Bessie’s first 6 months of working at Gladesville, she and Dr Eric Sinclair were 2 of 67 witnesses being questioned in relation to a Royal commission investigating charges against the privately run Bay View Mental Asylum.

Bessie Simpson was fortunate to work when **Dr Norton Manning** was Medical Superintendent at Gladesville. He believed patients were to receive treatment for their illness. Gladesville was extended and modified. He was a staunch supporter of Nurses and their education, supporting the creation of the Australasian Trained Nurses Association in 1899-1902. He was its first President <sup>xlvii</sup>.



### **February 1895 The female ward at Gladesville Hospital when Bessie Simpson was Matron**

Bessie Simpson stated her years of service at Gladesville in two separate newspaper interviews – the first that she worked for 19 years and 11 months. In a later article (written when she was 78 years old) it was recorded that she worked at Gladesville for 26 years. According to the records Bessie Simpson was at Gladesville from 1881 until her retirement on Feb 20<sup>th</sup> 1908, a period of 26 years and 8 months. She was noted for her leadership kindness and care. Fond of animals it was reported that she kept a ringtail possum and a pet koala bear during her “hospital days”. (It is not clear if this was during her Sydney Hospital or her Gladesville Asylum days – most likely the latter) Later, when living at Petersham Road Marrickville (an inner suburb of Sydney) she had a Yorkshire terrier called “Ben Johnson”.<sup>xlviii</sup>

**Mrs Newton** the former Matron of the Newcastle Asylum was her successor.

Bessie had 2 children to William Shaw Simpson. George Barthorpe Simpson 1870 -1851 and Lucy Osbourne Simpson 1872-1945. Bessie’s son George left Australia and went to England and Scotland by 1891. He married in Scotland in 1895. His first daughter was born in Edinburgh in 1896, the second in 1897. In 1901 George his wife and two daughters were living in Yorkshire and he was a Surgeon and Physician. In 1922 he and his wife and children were all living in Birmingham Warwickshire. It is not known if Bessie was aware of her son’s whereabouts. He began his medical training in Edinburgh when he was 21 years old. It seems unlikely he supported his aging mother in a different country so far away, given the tone of the newspaper articles published in Sydney, which implied that her small pension from the government was inadequate for her needs and she needed financial help from friends.<sup>xlix</sup>

A second article in the same paper, written by Chas Helsham from Sydney Hospital stated that Mrs Elizabeth Simpson (Bessie) was in a destitute situation receiving the old age pension of 10s per week. She lived with her invalid daughter who received an invalid pension of 10s per week, Rent they pay was 10s per week. The 15-year-old granddaughter also lived in the house and cared for both women. A Benefit fund was organised to assist Mrs Simpson and her family.<sup>1</sup>

Bessie's Daughter Lucy Osborn Simpson (1872-1945) was married in 1897 to Herbert Roger Johns (1873-1921), who worked, at that time, as an attendant at Gladesville hospital. A family member believes that Lucy met and worked with Herbert Johns at Gladesville Psychiatric hospital and that she too was working at the hospital. They divorced in 1904. They had one daughter Lucie Hazel Barthorpe Johns born in 1898 - who later lived in Woollahra NSW and also worked as a mental nurse: from 1930-1936 and again in 1954.. In 1958 Lucie moved to Queensland and married a second time.



Bessie Barthorpe /Chant /Simpson contracted dysentery in April 1920 and after a week of suffering died at home of “exhaustion” at Marrickville on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1920 at the age of 83 years. She was buried at Rookwood Cemetery Old Presbyterian section. 4A Row 4. <sup>li</sup> Her death was reported in the Sydney newspapers, country NSW papers and interstate. It was recorded that two children survived her.<sup>lii</sup> It was claimed in both these reports that she was “a personal friend” of Miss Florence Nightingale. <sup>liii</sup>

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The following is a quote from a newspaper report in 1885 about the Gladesville hospital at the time Bessie Simpson was the Matron. The years of Drs Norton Manning 1868-1897 and Eric Sinclair (1897-1925) as Directors of the Mental Hospital were, by comparison to the earlier times, good years.

*VIEWS OF GLADESVILLE ASYLUM FOR THE INSANE, PARRAMATTA RIVER. <sup>liv</sup>*

*If the whole of the environs of Sydney had been searched and re-searched for a site for an important public institution, a more beautiful and appropriate one could not have been found than that occupied by the Asylum for the Insane at Gladesville. Situated on eminences rising from the banks of the Parramatta River, the locality is at once a desirable one from a sanitary point of view, and beautiful from a picturesque standpoint, the views commanded from the building and grounds being of a most extensive and varied extensive and varied character. The asylum can claim to be the oldest of its kind in Australia, the first of the buildings having, been erected by the Royal Engineers in 1827 for an asylum for free lunatic patients, as distinguished from the insane convicts, who were sent to Liverpool; and they have from time to time been added to. The last addition having been the convalescent ward for women, a fine brick structure, which was only opened last year. The buildings, which vary from one to two storeys, are very numerous and are built chiefly of freestone. Most of the walls are covered with ivy or some other clinging plant, which gives them a pleasant appearance, refreshing to the eye, and takes off the gaol like look they would have if the walls were bare. The area of ground on which the asylum stands is about 200 acres. Of this a considerable-quantity is bush, and rocky country unfit for cultivation, but able to carry a certain amount of stock; but the remainder is good arable and pastureland, excellent for dairy farming. The stock consists of 50 cows, about 300 pigs hundreds of fowls, and the requisite number of horses for use on the farm and other parts of the institution.*

*The patients at Gladesville are recruited from the whole of the coastline and northern districts of New South Wales. In fact, lunatics from all quarters, except those from the west, who go to Parramatta, and those belonging to the metropolitan area who are treated at Callan Park, are received at Gladesville. The new asylum at Kenmore, when in order will, however, reduce the strain on Gladesville by taking in all the southern patients. Like most Government Asylums, Gladesville is*

full almost to its uttermost capacity, the number of patients at the time of writing being 535 males and 322 females. A fair average are discharged every year cured, or so greatly relieved as to be safely trusted amongst their friends in the outside world. The death rate is, on the-average, about 6 per cent for men, and 4 per cent, for women. This low rate of mortality may be accounted for in various ways. The healthy nature of the site may have much to do with it, while the fact that most of the patients are from the country, and physically healthy when admitted, may be partly the cause. Then the undoubtedly wise and scientific treatment, which lunatics in all great asylums undergo nowadays, must be a considerable factor in keeping down the death rate. The staff of attendants, including cooks, gatekeepers, domestic servants and artificers employed to look after the inmates is 111, of whom 76 are males, and 35 females. The asylum is under the control of Dr. Eric Sinclair, chief medical superintendent, who has for assistant's two medical officers, an assistant superintendent, a clerk, a chief attendant, and a matron. The system of treatment followed is much the same as in Parramatta and other asylums. The cost of administration is about £10,500 a year. Patients who show a disposition and aptitude for work, if it be ever so small, are provided with occupation on the farm, in the grounds, or the workshops, for the men; the sewing room and laundry for the women. The farm supplies all the milk for the establishment, and the numerous plots laid out as market gardens all the vegetables required, except potatoes; while from orchards and vineyard come abundance of fruit, from which jam enough is made for cooking purposes. The dietary scale is most liberal, and the allowance of extras for such of the patients, as need them unstinted. While the occupations of the patients are attended to, means of recreation are by no means neglected. The asylum cricket ground is well 'known by city and suburban players to be an excellent one, -while the lawn tennis, racket, and handball courts are as good as they can be. A large concert hall used as a church on Sundays, where the Rev. Mr Lumsdale (CE.) and the Rev. Father Murier hold services in the morning and afternoon respectively, forms a feature amongst the buildings. Four billiard tables are provided, and materials for draughts, cards, and other games, are plentifully distributed about the day and sitting rooms. Several pianos furnish means for the enjoyment of music, of which many of the inmates are very fond, and no mean executants. A steam yacht, which is used for conveying tho patients to the asylum when they are admitted, is also put into requisition for trips up the Parramatta River and down to Sydney Harbour. These excursions are held periodically, and are greatly enjoyed by the patients who are able to take part in them. A shark-proof bathing house and various fishing boats are also highly appreciated.

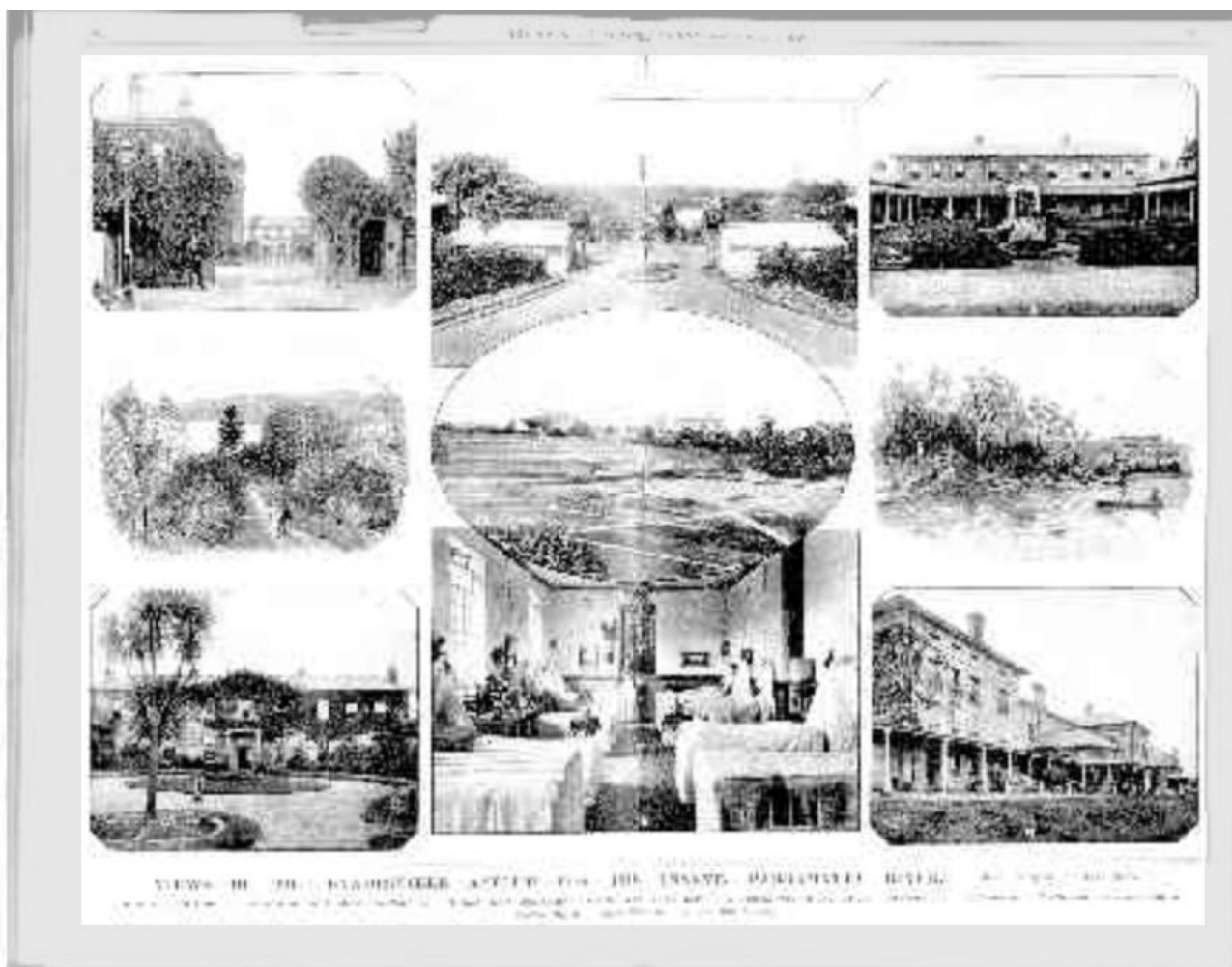
The buildings are in three clusters, the main division, the Hill branch, and the Priory. The main division contains the administrative buildings, of which, with its quadrangle, illustrations appear, the medical officers' and other private houses, the female wards, a portion of the men's Wards, and the hospital, a part of which is also illustrated. Hill branch is situated on an eminence about a quarter of a mile from tho main buildings further down the Parramatta River, and also forms the subject of a picture.

This portion is devoted to the treatment of male patients only, and contains two Wards, with about 80 inmates in each. The view from there is a splendid one, extending both up and down the river, and far into the adjoining country. Crossing the main Sydney road from the Hill branch, the Priory is reached. This consists of an extensive building (more like a -private gentleman's mansion than an asylum), in which are located about 50 male patients of a mild type. There are no stone walls, the men go in and out and around about at their own sweet will, and with beautiful surroundings pass away their time as happily as is possible under the melancholy circumstances in which they are placed. The buildings in which the patients reside are divided into 14 Wards, eight being for males, and six for females. A walk through these shows that amount of scrupulous cleanliness and good order, which is characteristic of most of our public institutions. The details are very similar to those at Parramatta Asylum.

The same snow-white bed linen, the same admirable culinary appliances, and the same excellent system carried out in the laundry and workshops. Of the latter there are several, including blacksmiths, carpenters, painters and glaziers, mattress-makers, and bookbinders' shops. The bookbinders' trade is carried on in connection with the asylum library, which is an extensive and

valuable one. But it is in the grounds and surroundings that Gladesville shines pre-eminently. The wide lawns stocked with flowers and shrubs of all possible varieties, fountains, conservatories, ferneries, and bush houses, combine to form a most beautiful whole. The view from the main entrance gates, the walk down from the main buildings to the stone jetty, and the prospect from the windows of the executive building, are charming enough to be suggestive of fairyland, and must be seen to be appreciated. Our illustrations will give the reader who has not visited the place some idea of their beauty, but it is impossible to reproduce the glowing colours of the parterres of flowers, and their harmonious blending with the verdant swards and the glistening waters of the river below. Nor is it all still life; small herds of deer can be seen peacefully grazing or lying under the shade of trees; tall emus stalk about the enclosures, and approach the visitor with curious gaze. Kangaroo and Wallaby of which there are a great number, hop playfully about in full confidence that neither dog nor man will harm them; while up in a corner sits an enormous land turtle, said to be of great age, and to weigh somewhere about five or six hundredweight. Such are some of the sights to be seen at the Gladesville Asylum. The view from the Parramatta River, which is one of those illustrated, is very fine, as is also that embracing the institution generally. Taken altogether, the asylum is in every way adapted to the purpose for which it is used. Roomy and well built, it contains ample accommodation for the patients, and with a site both beautiful and healthful, the inmates should have every chance of recovery from the dreadful malady with which they are afflicted. The thanks of the writer are due for the courtesy of Dr. Sinclair, and of the attendant who accompanied him through the wards and grounds. The illustrations, which appear in this issue, will speak for themselves. “

It is on this idyllic note that we conclude this story of the early days of Tarban Creek / Gladesville Hospital. The following years following the depression and WW2 were reported to be another time of financial stringency. <sup>lv</sup>



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- <sup>ii</sup> [https://www.nationhood.org.au/governor\\_phillips\\_instructions](https://www.nationhood.org.au/governor_phillips_instructions)
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- <sup>iv</sup> Parkinson JP. The Castle Hill lunatic asylum (1811-1826) and the origins of eclectic pragmatism in Australian psychiatry. *Aust. N. Z. Journal Psychiatry*. 1981
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- <sup>viii</sup> NSW Unassisted Immigrant Passenger lists 1826-1922
- <sup>ix</sup> TROVE : Goulburn Herald, Wed 14 March 1894 page 3
- <sup>x</sup> NSW Unassisted Immigrant Passenger lists 1826-1922
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/188979638>
- <sup>xii</sup> <http://www.ancestry.com.au/search/collections/1623/records/2187826>
- <sup>xiii</sup> <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/36854680>
- <sup>xiv</sup> Gipps, John (2016). *Every inch a governor: Sir George Gipps Governor of New South Wales, 1838-46*. Monash University. Book. <https://doi.org/10.4225/03/581fbc79f22ff>
- <sup>xv</sup> Letter from J T Digby to Colonial secretary dated July 10, 1838 transcript obtained from MH 12/2025
- <sup>xvi</sup> <https://officialvisitorsmh.nsw.gov.au/Pages/Who-Are-We.aspx#:~:text=Who%20are%20Official%20Visitors?,NSW%20Mental%20Health%20Act%202007.>
- <sup>xvii</sup> NSW Government Gazette Fri 24 Sept 1841 (issue no 79) page 1290 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/230395376?searchTerm=lunatic>
- <sup>xviii</sup> *Rules and Regulations issued by Mr Digby 1842. Cited in Bostock, J., The Dawn of Australian Psychiatry. A.M.A., Glebe, 1968, pp.67-68*
- <sup>xix</sup> New South Wales, Australia, Returns of the Colony, 1822-1857
- <sup>xx</sup> TROVE; Sydney Morning Herald, Friday 14 August, 1840 page 2 Family/Birth notice. (accessed TROVE 25/2/2026 )

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- xxi Terrence Gordon Smith, 2005. *With tact, intelligence and a special acquaintance with the Insane A history of the development of mental health care (nursing) in New South Wales, Australia, Colonisation to Federation 1700-1901* p158
- xxii TROVE; The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser Wed 21 Jan 1846 page 1 Sydney News (accessed Trove 25/2/2026)
- xxiii TROVE; News from the Interior. The murderous assault on Mr Digby at the Lunatic Asylum. Sydney Morning Herald Saturday 17 January 1846 page 2 (accessed TROVE 25/2/26)
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- xxv TROVE; Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council, The Sydney Morning Herald Thurs 17 June 1849 State of the Lunatic Asylum Tarban Creek, accessed trove April 5, 2017
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- xxvii TROVE: Sydney Morning Herald Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May 1848 page 2 Moved by the Colonial treasurer & Carried.
- xxviii TROVE; Sydney Morning Herald Monday 28<sup>th</sup> August 1848 page 3
- xxix [https://familypedia.fandom.com/wiki/Joseph\\_Thomas\\_Digby\\_\(1812-1899\)](https://familypedia.fandom.com/wiki/Joseph_Thomas_Digby_(1812-1899))
- xxx <https://www.ancestry.com.au/family-tree/person/tree/159080739/person/192083597153/facts#:~:text=1911%20England-,Census,-Select%20source>
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- xxxiv Cummins C J., A History of Medical Administration in NSW 1788-1973 (CJ Cummins Director-General of Public Health NSW 1959-1975)
- xxxv Cassin Vanessa. Bland Mary (1832-1909) in Descent – June/Winter 2024 pg58
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- xxxvii TROVE; Unorthodox Sydney By a Pilgrim No 6 The Gladesville Hospital for the insane Freeman's Journal' (Sydney NSW 1850-1932 Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June 1877 page 19 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/rendition/nla.news-article/115376264.txt>
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xl *England and Wales National Probate Calender 1858-1966*

xli TROVE: *The Sydney Morning Herald NSW Wed 25<sup>th</sup> Oct 1911 P5*

xlii TROVE *The Sun, Sydney NSW Sunday 22 Sept 1918*

xliii Judith Godden, Lucy Osburn, *a Lady Displaced: Florence Nightingale's Envoy to Australia*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 2006; p79-80

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