

# THE HISTORY OF HOMŒOPATHY IN AUSTRALIA \*

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Homœopathic dispensaries and clinics were set up in Sydney and in other parts of Australia chiefly to aid the treatment of the poor and sick, as well as to advance the knowledge and success of Homœopathy as a form of treatment superior to other treatments in use at that time.

The *Sydney Homœopathic Dispensary* was born out of a

... meeting of a few of the influential friends of Homœopathy held on the 13th of July, 1858 when it was determined to establish a dispensary and arrangements were made with Messrs. Bell and Huntley, to occupy a portion of their Pharmacy, George Street. Dr. Bellamy and Dr. Meyott, then the only Homœopathic practitioners, gave their services gratuitously, ...<sup>1</sup>

The aims of the dispensary were to enable the poor and the working class in Sydney and its neighbourhood to obtain the benefits of Homœopathy. The extent of its running is unknown as reports are only available up until 1861, at which time the dispensary seemed to be running successfully, with many subscribing donations. However, in this last Annual Report of 1861, the Chairman, *Michael Metcalfe* outlined the urgency for more donations. It is also interesting to note that the dispensary operated out of the Pharmacy of *Bell & Huntley*. According to the Sands' N.S.W. Directory, the John Bell (Homœopathic) Pharmacy was listed between the years 1863 and 1870. If 1870 was the last year of the Pharmacy's trade, then this may have had some bearing on the ongoing functioning of the *Sydney Homœopathic Pharmacy*.

The 1st Annual report <sup>2</sup> of the *Melbourne Homœopathic Dispensary*, dated 1870, gives us a brief insight into the original setting up of the dispensary, which later became the *Melbourne Homœopathic Hospital*, and later still, *Prince Henry's Hospital Melbourne*:

On the 30th October, 1869, in response to a circular, 16 gentlemen met to consult together as to the advisability of establishing a dispensary for the treatment of the poor on the principles of Homœopathy.

Among those present at the meeting were the Chief Justice, Sir William Stawell, the Bishop of Melbourne and the Dean. After the appointment of a provisional committee to draw up rules, initiate the charity and select suitable premises, the premises were secured and the dispensary opened on the 22nd November, 1869, at 153 Collins Street East, Melbourne.

The 1st Honorary Medical Officers were Dr. Robert Ray, LRCP, MRCS, LM; Dr. J.P. Teaque, MD and Dr. J.W. Günst, MD (the latter will be discussed later as his role in Homœopathy was significant). The Patron of the *Melbourne Homœopathic Dispensary* was the Lord Bishop of Melbourne and the President was the Chief Justice, Sir William Stawell.

In Melbourne, during the late 1860's the city was just starting to get over the convulsions it experienced due to the large increase in its population over the gold rush period. However, overcrowding, shanty towns and uncontrolled slums were still problems and centres for disease. Water-borne sewerage was not introduced until the late 1890's, and therefore sanitation was almost non-existent in many areas. Although, unlike Sydney, the city was well laid out with wide, gas lit, paved streets, it was still in general sprawling and filthy in appearance.

In 1858, there were 52 practitioners in practice in Melbourne and the Suburbs, this included Chinese Herbalists and Homœopaths: In 1870 the number had risen to 156 and in 1882 to 178.<sup>3</sup>

At this time, therefore, not only was the need for medical attention growing, along with the population increase, but the number of medical practitioners inside and outside of orthodox practice was also growing. Hence the birth of the *Melbourne Homœopathic Dispensary*, whose chief aim as outlined in the 1st Annual Report was

... to afford gratuitous medical relief to the poor.<sup>4</sup>

The dispensary operated with great success and each available report outlines the variety of conditions treated, acute and chronic. The dispensary opened Monday, Wednesday and Friday between 9-10 a.m. During its first eleven months, 741 patients were treated.

Of these: 302 were discharged cured; 217 still remained under treatment; 72 were relieved; 135 did not present after treatment; 4 were discharged unrelieved and 11 died. Overall, in the first eleven months, the dispensary saw 40.6% cured of the whole presenting. This figure would have been substantially higher if all those who had been under treatment had reported themselves. During its first year of operation, the Government recognised the claims of the dispensary and granted 150 pounds to be placed at the disposal of the committee. This institution as well as all homœopathic institutions set up at any time in Australia relied heavily on charity and those dedicated to the cause of Homœopathy. The annual reports are full of 'Lists of Subscribers' and the benefits awarded through donations of substantial sums.

During the 3rd Annual Report <sup>5</sup> of 1872, the committee reported that 1116 cases had been treated during that year. The workload, therefore, of the medical officers had been increased to such an extent that the committee was called on to supply an assistant, at a small salary, to act as their clinical clerk. We read:

Some idea may be formed of the labour of your Honorary Medical Officers, from the fact that often times as many as 90 patients attend for treatment at a time, and that upwards of 7200 prescriptions have been dispensed during the year.

Government opinion and recognition of the scientific importance of Homœopathy, was evidenced at this time by the selection of one of the honorary medical officers of the dispensary as a member of a Royal Commission. This commission was set up to investigate the causes, nature and best means of treating disease which up until this day had baffled the skill and knowledge of the medical world. This appointment received great recognition from the committee and was included with great pride in the 3rd Annual MHD Report of 1872.

The 4th Annual Report <sup>6</sup> of 1873 shows a decrease in the number of patients (to 903) during the year. This was not due to a decrease in popularity, on the contrary, this was increasing yearly. However, due to a lack of funds the committee instructed the medical officers to treat only urgent cases. In addition to this increase in popularity and consequent increase in demand, came an increase in subscriptions which set the dispensary's financial difficulties at ease. In this report we read:

About the middle of the year, a requisition, signed by 242 subscribers to the Melbourne Hospital was presented to the Committee of that Institution, asking that a ward might be set apart for the reception of such patients who desired to be treated homœopathically. Whilst signatures to the Memorial were obviously restricted to the subscribers to that Institution, it was noticeable that many who were not professed Homœopaths joined in the request and amongst the memorialists, were some of the leading Merchants and Businessmen of the city.

At first the requisition was not well received by the Hospital Committee. Their argument being that the introduction of Homœopathy would interfere with the hospital as a school of medicine, especially "in the estimation of persons from a distance".<sup>7</sup> The dispensary argued, rightly, that the Melbourne Hospital was established for the cure of the sick and poor and not as a school of medicine. They also advised that the school of medicine be continued after the introduction of Homœopathy, and in this way the students should be able to judge the merits and demerits of both systems.

In 1877 the dispensary was legally incorporated as the Melbourne Homœopathic Hospital. The Government granted land in St. Kilda Road to the hospital and on July 25th, 1882, the foundation stone of the enlarged hospital was laid by the Governor. The cost of the new building was 8041 pounds. The success of the MHD/Hospital inspired others to follow in the footsteps of the Melbournians in hastening the success and progress of Homœopathy in Australia, by the establishment of other such institutions.

On the 20th June, 1902, a meeting was held at 56 Vickery's Chambers, 76 Pitt Street, Sydney at 3.30pm. Present in the Chair: Mr. Robert Curtis (Practising Homœopath 1890-1900), Mr. J.P. Walker, Mr. E. Denham, Dr. J. Field Deck (Practising Homœopath 1852-1904), Mr. Donald Cormack. These five men discussed a proposal to establish a Homœopathic Hospital in Sydney, and Dr. Field Deck gave information as to the rapid advancement Homœopathy was making, especially in the USA. From the minutes of this meeting we read:<sup>8</sup>

Where no city of the size and importance of Sydney can be found without benefit of one or more Homœopathic Hospitals, and where something like \$400,000,000 or 80,000,000 Pounds Sterling were represented in the names of petitioners in a recent petition in favour of Homœopathy, showing that some of the wealthiest as well as some of the most intellectual in the country are included amongst its supporters. There has been a Homœopathic Hospital in Melbourne for 25 years, during which period almost 100,000 cases have been treated within its walls, whilst at Hobart and Launceston, Homœopathic Hospitals have been recently established and in Geelong a Homœopathic Dispensary has been flourishing for many years.

This proposal was enthusiastically entertained and it was decided to call a general meeting of all sympathizers to be held at the Board Room, Vickery's Chambers, 82 Pitt Street, Wednesday 2nd July at 3pm.

Dr. J. Field Deck had also gathered information from the 1901 Inspector of Charities report on the Melbourne Homœopathic Hospital (MHH) to illustrate the need for and the efficacy of such an establishment in a major city like

Sydney. The report compared the running and expenses of the Melbourne hospital, Alfred Hospital and Melbourne Homœopathic Hospital.

From the report it can be seen how well MHH had been patronised and that the expenses of maintenance and the average stay of patients are both less than the other hospitals shown in the report. In his report<sup>9</sup> "Proposal for the Establishment of a Homœopathic Hospital in Sydney", Dr.Field outlines the role of the hospital:

This Institution will act as a centre for the propagation of the knowledge of Homœopathy and will link together all those who sympathize with its views and are anxious for its advance. Patients will be seen 5 days a week. It has been proposed to make a small charge for medicines supplied to the patients, which will make the Institution to a certain extent self supporting.

The original site selected was at 301 Cleveland Street, Redfern. This site, being close to two tram lines, would hopefully prove to be easily accessible to a large population. The first matron of the hospital was a Mrs. Rutherford, employed in August 1902. The first medical superintendent was Dr.Field Deck, who worked in this capacity up until his death in 1929. Subsequent medical officers were Doctors G.H.Baring Deck and J.Northcote Deck, both sons of Dr.John Field Deck.

Patients were attended every weekday afternoon between the hours of 3.30 to 5 p.m. The inpatients were under the care of an experienced matron and nursing staff and the medical officers whenever required. The first available Annual Report was the 5th, 1906, from which can be learned of the success and increasing popularity of the hospital. The total outpatients treated in 1906 were 4,227 whilst 1905 saw 3,221 treated. The number of inpatients had increased from 1,062 in 1905 to 1,274 in 1906. This put an increasing demand on the four honorary medical officers attending the hospital, i.e. all mentioned above plus a Dr.N.Sisca, newly appointed to help cope with the increasing demand for homœopathic treatment. The bulk of the financial burden on these institutions depended upon subscriptions, fund raising and gifts to the hospital, as was also the case with the Melbourne Homœopathic Dispensary and Hospital. The Ladies Aid Association, an ever present support for the hospital spent much of its time fund raising and organising gifts to the hospital of food, linen, crockery, magazines, flowers, etc. It was not until 1906 that the Government finally recognised the hospital's claim for government subsidy and agreed to give, pound for pound, the amount raised by private subscriptions. An estimate of 400 Pounds was granted to be used for this purpose.

Included in each annual report were instructions as to how to insert in ones will a form of bequest, which would enable a person to leave a donation to the charity known as the "Sydney Homœopathic Hospital." This was the case with the will of Dr.William Moore, Homœopathic practitioner, who subscribed to the Hospital during its earlier years of running. Dr.Moore died on the 18th May 1911 and the terms of his will were as follows:

I direct my trustees to divide the same in 3 equal parts as near as may be as follows that is to say they shall pay over to the Sydney Homœopathic Hospital 1/3 of the residue aforesaid and in case there shall be no such hospital established in Sydney or its suburbs at such time I direct my trustees to pay the same to a committee which shall be appointed and approved by the said Committee of the said Union" (i.e.Congregational Union of NSW) "to be applied to the founding or maintenance of such a Hospital ...<sup>10</sup>

This direction did not take effect until some time in the fifties. The provisions of the will were twice interpreted by the High Court of Australia. After the second of these cases, (the Sydney Homœopathic Hospital v. Turner 1958-9) the hospital went to the Equity Court in 1960 and obtained an order which determined that:

...very substantial funds have been and are being received by the hospital pursuant to the provisions of the will.<sup>11</sup>

To return to the earlier history of the hospital, the 13th Annual Report records increased success of the hospital and a change of premises to "Ben Ledi" Glebe Point Road, Glebe, which was to be deemed ready for hospital function on the 28th January 1915. The surgical cases having increased from the previous year from 30 to 52 were "uniformly successful".

The 16th Annual Report of 1917 records great difficulties with funding and short staffing due to the war. However during this time the hospital was registered as a training school for nurses from the 1st January, 1917, the period of training was to be 4« years during the duration of the war. Lectures were given by Dr.Baring Deck and the matron of the hospital. At this time there were 20 beds available at the Hospital. The last available annual report is that of the 25th, dated 31st December, 1926. This mainly called for the expertise of other homœopathic medical officers to help with the patient demand. Each annual medical report up to and including this, the last available, was given by Dr.John Field Deck, who three years before his death in 1929, at the age of 91, was still (along with his sons) an honorary medical officer of this institution, and still reporting on its success and progress. Credit must be given to this man who had such dedication and tenacity.

In 1945, the last homœopathic doctor, Dr. Leigh Deck worked at the hospital. At this time, many of the new medicines were coming to the fore, e.g. antibiotics, then steroids, etc. Practitioners became interested in this and it is said that this contributed to the downfall of Homœopathy to a certain extent. On the whole, there were very few doctors left who were interested in practising Homœopathy.

In 1985-86, a group of doctors, the Australian Medical Faculty of Homœopathy (AMFH), became aware of William Moore's will and decided to make a challenge for a clinic to be opened in the Sydney Homœopathic Hospital which at this time was not practising as such. The Board of the SHH, who were operative at the time, realised that legally they had to allow a homœopathic clinic to be opened. Having saved and invested a lot of money over the years from monies left in William Moore's will, they included a homœopathic clinic within the plans of extension to the hospital which were then submitted to Leichhardt Council (the local council). The Government at this time decided that no changes should be made to any of the hospitals in the local area because, in their opinion, the smaller hospitals had to be reassessed in terms of their function. The assessment took two years, after which time, the Area Health Board chose to close down the Sydney Homœopathic Hospital. The Area Health Board realized also that to do this, they must be able to justify to the courts that the money left by William Moore was being spent in line with the terms of the will. They then approached the AMHFH, who simultaneously approached them, and offered the AMFH to set up a clinic at the Balmain Hospital which would be funded by the money from Moore's estate. The ongoing income from the estate is \$100,000 per year which is now being used to fund the Balmain Homœopathic Clinic. The court hearing to date has not yet been heard, but the Health Board feel that now they will be able to prove that they have abided by the terms of the will, which leaves them to deal with the hospital at Glebe as they see fit.

The advancement of Homeopathy in this country would have been impossible without the dedication of interested, caring people who believed in what they were doing and in the principles of Homœopathy. I am sure there are many whose names go unmentioned in the recorded biographies of important Australians. I have however been able to find some whose contributions to Homœopathy in Australia have been briefly noted.

One such man was a medical parson, Reverend Benjamin Gilmore Wilson, 1823-1878. Born at Moy, County Tyrone, Ireland on March 16th 1823. The son of a Quaker farmer, he grew up in Ireland during desperate, famine stricken times. In the 1830's he moved to England. Ever since boyhood he had been filled with a zeal for missionary work. In Bradford, England he helped to found the YMCA and was appointed City Missionary. During this time he began the study of medicine with Dr. John Le Gay Brereton, homœopathic practitioner of medicine, who conducted a large practice in Bradford and who later came out to Sydney to practice here. (The first recorded listing for Dr. Le Gay Brereton was in the Medical Directory in Sydney 1861, where he practised in Hunter Street. It was also around this time that he worked as one of the medical officers for the newly established Sydney Homœopathic Dispensary). Reverend Wilson travelled widely on the Continent and married in Yorkshire in 1854. Soon after this he returned to perfect his medical practice under Dr. Le Gay Brereton. This was before the passing of the 1858 Medical Act, when the apprenticeship system was still widely used. His intent was to well equip himself as a medical missionary.

In 1858 he saw a letter in the London 'Freeman' requesting a clergyman to take charge of a Baptist Church in Queensland. He decided to take up the position, giving up a lucrative practice in Bradford of 1200 Pounds per year. He sailed from Liverpool in 1858 for Melbourne and on to Queensland for a salary of 200 Pounds per year. The Reverend kept a diary of the 12 week voyage. Each day recorded as to the pleasures and difficulties encountered. During the voyage he was called upon to treat many conditions. Influenza, scarlatina, the ill effects of a miscarriage, bad blows and bruising, etc. He recorded the homœopathic remedies he used and proved how effective his treatments were as a lay homœopath in 1858. His treatments, by record, succeeded those of the ship's doctor over the 12 weeks, who accepted his success without animosity. The ship arrived in Melbourne on Friday 21st August 1858. and on the 12th September, he landed in Brisbane. Here he preached to an evergrowing congregation and visited the sick not only as a minister but as a physician of homœopathic medicine. In addition to treating those seeking his medical advice, he also had occasion to act as 'locum tenens' for other Brisbane doctors. The Reverend Wilson died in January 1878, after 20 years service to the people of Brisbane. A unique character, the first, in fact the one and only parson-physician known in early Brisbane life.

Dr. Stephen Simpson was another early settler to bring Homœopathy into early Australian life. One of the first free settlers in the Moreton Bay district, he was described by Stevens as an excellent doctor of medicine and held many important positions in the new found colony. He was born (exact date unknown) around the year 1800 at Lichfield, Warwickshire, England. After receiving his medical degree he became the personal physician to one of the continental nobility, and as a result travelled widely in Europe. He became interested in Homœopathy and published a book on this in London in 1836. It was said that his book was the first to be written on Homœopathy in English. He received strong criticism from this publication and decided to migrate to NSW. Bringing his knowledge of Homœopathy with him, Dr. Simpson held many important positions during his stay in Australia. The first Commissioner of Crown Lands, Justice of the Peace, Police Magistrate, Member of the Legislative Council. Simpson died on the 11th March 1869 at Brayston Street, Portland Square, London. His obituary states that "he was regarded as one of the cleverest men of his day in medicine and one of the ablest and most impartial men in the Commission of the Peace". It is to Simpson we must owe our gratitude for the early introduction of Homœopathy into Australia.

Henry Thomas Gould (1855-1928), a pharmacist of "Hillside", Murray Street, Hobart, was born on the Isle of White in 1855, educated at Portland House, Newport and Westminster College, London. H.T. Gould arrived in Hobart in 1881 and, in

association with Dr.H.Benjafield, a homœopathic physician, built the first homœopathic pharmacy in Tasmania, which was carried out under the style of H.T.Gould and Co., by Mr.Gould in partnership with a Mr.Mason. Upon the death of Mr.Mason in 1920, Mr.Gould's son, J.H.Gould, became his partner and the business was moved to Liverpool Street. H.T.Gould was one of the founders of the Homœopathic Hospital in Tasmania and acted as Trustee and Chairman of the finance committee of the hospital. During his life he held many, many public positions and was prominently associated with the public life of Hobart. His obituary describes him as "one of the most estimable and useful citizens whom the state can ill afford to lose".<sup>12</sup>

Henry Benjafield (partner to H.T.Gould) 1845-1917, was a Medical practitioner of Homœopathy in Hobart. Born in Wiltshire, England in 1845, he arrived in Tasmania in 1873 at Somerset. He bought a homœopathic practice and fought for the recognition of Homœopathy. He bought land extensively and also ran a vaccination clinic. He died in Hobart on June 13th, 1917.

Johan Werner Gunst (1825-1894) was a medical practitioner in Melbourne. Born in Amsterdam, Holland on the 31st May 1825. Gunst was educated in Leyden. He first arrived in Sydney in May 1852 and then travelled the globe extensively where he once again found himself in Australia, this time in Melbourne in the late 1860's. In Melbourne he practised Homœopathy and worked untiringly as one of the honorary medical officers for the Melbourne Homœopathic Dispensary. Of this institution he was also a Life Governor. Gunst edited a monthly journal called "Australian Homœopathic Progress" which first came out in 1870. The journal was aimed at the public, both lay and professional. It aimed to clarify Homœopathy and educated people as to the principles of Homœopathy and included such subjects as anatomy, physiology, materia medica, hydropathic and veterinary practices. It was also designed to help those readers who lived in remote parts away from medical aid. J.W.Gunst died on in Sydney on April 19th, 1894.

Dr.Augustus Harold Nash (1843-1914), medical practitioner of Sydney, practised as a homœopath for many years in Sydney's Phillip Street and was a member of the board of management for the Sydney Homœopathic Hospital for many years. Dr.Nash gave great support to the profession and its growth.

Dr.John Field Deck (1835-1929) was perhaps one of the most influential men in the advancement of Homœopathy in Australia. A Medical practitioner of Sydney, he studied medicine at St.Thomas' Hospital in London and at the University of St.Andrews. He graduated in 1862 (MD) and in 1877 came to Sydney where he led a very full life, devoted to Homœopathy. Strangely enough his obituaries best describe his achievements:<sup>13</sup>

Dr.J.F.Deck, for just half a century, the head of the homœopathic "cult" in Sydney, died last week aged 94: he founded the Homœopathic Hospital at Ashfield 27 years ago, and continued without a break for 52 years, and that ought to besomewhere near an Australian record. There was a family of 11 young Decks, and homœopathy never had a better advertisement than in the fact that they are all still living - divided about equally between doctors and missionaries; the boys favoured medicine or dentistry and the girls foreign missions.

Dr.Deck was a council member for the China Inland Mission, Southsea Evangelical Mission and Egypt General Mission.

In the early days of his practice at Ashfield the late Dr. Deck and the late Dr. Richard Jones were the only doctors between Sydney and Parramatta. Dr.Deck was a remarkable man in many ways. Even in the Shadow of his great age, his mind retained the resilience of early life and as science broadened man's vision, he studied succeeding innovations with the enthusiasm for knowledge as keen as that of the younger generation. He had the warmest sympathy for foreign mission work and five of his children are and have been on the mission field.<sup>14</sup>

These few sentences give us a fairly good insight into the man, Dr.J.Field Deck and the dedication that he gave to Homœopathy in Australia and especially to Sydney at that time. His four medical sons, Doctors G.H.Baring Deck, J.Northcote Deck, E.F.Deck and H.Leigh Deck all feature strongly in the running and continuing support to the Sydney Homœopathic Hospital.

Hospitals, dispensaries and dedicated practitioners all did their part to introduce and educate the public to Homœopathy. Journals were another part of this education. "The Australian Homœopathic Progress", edited by J.W.Gunst, has already been discussed, but there were others in addition to this. The "Homœopathic Echo" 1855-56 was a journal published in Auckland, New Zealand at John Bell's Homœopathic Pharmacy, edited by Dr.C.F.Fischer MD. Like the "Australian Homœopathic Progress" it was aimed chiefly at the public to increase their knowledge of Homœopathic principles and treatments, offering information for lay and professional alike. It also contained a veterinary section for information allowing for the treatment of animals by farmers and settlers.

The "Australian Homœopathic Medical Gazette" was published quarterly. This was designed to be a record of the progress of Homœopathy all over Australia. This gazette was definitely aimed at the professional homœopath. It discussed various disease conditions and their appropriate homœopathic treatment and featured such things as key cases treated at the Melbourne Homœopathic Hospital, important medical seminars, Hahnemann and his contemporaries, materia medica,

homœopathic philosophy. This was the "newspaper" of the educated homœopath, who wanted to know about Homœopathy and its progress all around Australia. The Gazette was available through subscription to select homœopathic pharmacies - Martin and Pleasance in Melbourne; Mr.Coope in Bendigo; Gould & Company in Hobart; and Fisher & Company in Sydney - at a price of 2/6 per year.

In general the progress of Homœopathy in Australia was stunted by a few things. One of these was distance, pockets of strength would spring up here and there yet by virtue of the distance between states and areas within states, unity on a larger scale was virtually impossible. There is no doubt that Homœopathy enjoyed great success and acceptance by the populous. There is also no doubt that the remainder of the medical profession felt contempt for this success. The fact that institutions of homœopathic treatment had to rely solely on charity, receiving very little government subsidy was also a strong factor in its advancement. The running and progress of these institutions also relied on the undying dedication of educated men devoted to Homœopathy, and as in any growing cause, these people will be few and far between. As a result, instead of going from strength to strength, its prominence in the community fluctuated, according to the practitioners at the time. After the Second World War, the introduction of stronger drugs on to the market turned the heads of many medical practitioners. Those not truly understanding of or dedicated to Homœopathic principles no longer supported it, which took some support from Homœopathy in the community and left it weakened, much more so than before. Nowadays its genuine support is growing in strength and it may be only a matter of time before homœopathic clinics are running as successfully and are patronised as frequently as those in the mid to late 1800's.

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