

SYDNEY HOSPITAL.

In 1788 the Convicts and their Guards who survived the long voyage of the First Fleet from Portsmouth to Botany Bay were suffering from a number of diseases which included Typhoid, Scurvy, dysentery and Smallpox.

It was essential that Governor Phillip should have a suitable Hospital in the new Penal Colony.

The first Hospital was a couple of tents at the Rocks in George St. This would keep most of the weather off the worst cases but there was not much Surgical equipment and there were certainly no Nurses.

Most of the ships that would arrive after the First Fleet had many sick and diseased Convicts and Crews so the Hospital was always full.

When the Second Fleet arrived in 1790 it had a prefabricated Hospital made of wood and copper on board. This was erected on the site at the Rocks and today you will see *The Nurses Walk* which cuts across the site of this Hospital where Surgeon John White was in charge until 1794. There is a plaque there today to commemorate this.

In the Second Fleet we are introduced to Darcy Wentworth who arrived aboard *The Neptune*.

Darcy was from Northern Ireland and he had studied medicine in London. In December 1787 he had been charged with two counts of Highway Robbery and was found to be *Not Guilty*.

In 1789, he was arrested again and was charged with Highway Robbery. This time he was found to be *Guilty* but because he came from a wealthy, well connected family, he managed to escape the Death penalty. It was suggested by the Judge that he should depart Britain's shores and go far away to distant NSW. If he did not take this action then he may have to go in chains.

His wealthy family purchased a position as Assistant Surgeon on the good ship *Neptune* which was about to sail with the Second Fleet to NSW.

The Second Fleet was badly managed and 47 male and 11 female Convicts died on the long journey to NSW. Many of the Convicts who managed to stay alive were in a very sorry state and had to be carried off their ships in Sydney. The Sydney Hospital was unable to cope with the influx of very sick people, so 90 tents were erected. Each tent held four patients but there was only one blanket for each tent. The sick would suffer in the NSW winter.

On *The Neptune*, Darcy had tried to help the suffering Convicts but he and the crew also suffered and only just managed to survive the voyage.

The Convicts had been in chains, below the decks for the whole voyage and many had starved to death.

Once he had recovered from this ordeal, Darcy was sent to Norfolk Island as Assistant Surgeon. There he lived with a Convict woman, Catherine Williams, who had been convicted at Guildford and was serving a seven year sentence.

Lt. Governor Phillip Gidley King was impressed with the good work done by Darcy and wrote to Lord Fitzwilliam in London, who was a friend of the Wentworth family and arranged for Darcy to be appointed as *Superintendent of Convicts*.

Darcy was back in Sydney Town in 1796 and was appointed as , *Principal Surgeon in NSW* and was also made a *Magistrate and Superintendent of Convicts*. He also received several Land Grants and other benefits from the NSW Governor. He was then made *Principal Surgeon* at Sydney Hospital.

When Governor Macquarie arrived in 1810 the Hospital was a rough group of tents and slab-huts. He was not impressed and announced that a new Hospital must be built. He was a man of action and approved a new site on the Western side of *The Sydney Domain* and even created a new road to the area. It would be named *Macquarie Street*.

Macquarie then had plans drawn up for a new brick and stone building but the British Government refused to approve the funds to pay for it.

Governor Macquarie was determined to have his hospital so he entered into a contract with Garnham Blaxcell, Alexander Riley and Darcy Wentworth to erect the building. They were to receive Convict labour and Government supplies. He

gave them a licence to import 60,000 gallons of rum which they could sell to the settlers and Convicts. There would be a large amount of profit and this would pay for the Hospital.

It would become known as *The Rum Hospital*.

The contract was signed in November 1810 and the Architect appointed was John O'Hearen.

It was to be completed in 1816.

In 1815 Macquarie was unhappy with the work being done so he asked the Convict Architect, Francis Greenway to report on the quality of the work.

Greenway reported;

It is shoddy and should be pulled down.

Short-cuts had been taken by the builders and the brick work was crumbling. The foundations were badly built and in some cases, there were no foundations at all.

Most of the roof construction was about to fall down.

Greenway then set about having these faults repaired or totally replaced. A new roof was erected that would not fall down and he altered the design so that there was more open space in the wards and the kitchen.

The new hospital would have a large central building and two smaller wings. There was now space for new quarters for the Surgeons and the staff.

It was a grand building and it was not long before Lord Bathurst, in London, decided to use part of it for the new *Law Courts*.

Macquarie bent to the pressure from London and asked Greenway to alter one of the two wings to a *Law Court and Chambers* for Judge Jeffrey Bent.

The first Surgeon to take up residence was Darcy Wentworth.

Women would play only very small roles in the Sydney Hospital management until 1900. In 1816 James Bowman was appointed as Principal Surgeon. He came from the Royal Navy and brought order into the existing chaos. He

employed women to work in the women's wards and men to work in the men's wards.

The Head woman was to be known as The Matron and she and the nurses were responsible for the household duties. They were really only lowly paid servants and had no medical training. They were usually older women who had been domestic servants. They started work at 6 a.m. and finished at 9p.m. They cleaned the wards and cooked the meals.

There was only one night nurse who gave the medicines and called the Doctor if he was needed.

Hospitals, at this time, were not nice places to be in. The wards were filthy and dressings were thrown under the beds to be collected for washing once or twice a week. Rats and other vermin were ever present.

The kitchen was totally inadequate and also served as the Morgue.

It was not until 1868 that these conditions would change.

In 1868, in far away London, *Miss Florence Nightingale* would receive a nice letter from an admirer, Sir Henry Parkes and things would now change forever.

I will tell you all about this if you are interested. Please let me know.

I wish to thank U3A Member *Valerie Griffiths* for her wonderful book *Caps and Veils* which inspired me to write this story of *Sydney Hospital* and the *Nurses*.

(John Imrie 22/6/2020)