

GRAPEVINE CUTTINGS (April 2003)

By Rob Upson

LISTER HOUSE

Bendigo's first hospital was built in 1853 on a two-acre site at the top of Short St. between McKenzie and Rowan Streets. The area around it was known as 'Belgravia' and, being a lofty location, it was where merchants and mining magnates built their large houses and mansions. It was so named after the upper class suburb of Belgravia in the west end of London. The name in Bendigo did not survive the 1860s.

In April 1854 there was a land sale in the area of Belgravia and Lachlan Maclachlan, the Police Magistrate, purchased several allotments between Wattle and Forest Streets and facing Rowan St. Three years later he sold these lots to his clerk of courts, John Thomas Sanders, for £350. In the 1860s Sanders built a two story brick residence on Rowan St. that was to be later known as Lister House.

When Sanders died in 1875 the house was left to his teenage daughter, Maria Alice, the sole surviving member of his family. She occupied the home until her early death in 1881 when the property passed on to William Milne. In mid 1884 Milne sold it to a young Irish widow named Marian Aherne. She and her assistant, Alice Hill, were both schoolmistresses and on 23rd April 1884 they had opened a school in a terrace house in Barkly Place. The school, to be called Girton College, needed expansion and in August 1884 it relocated to the newly acquired property in Rowan Street. Girton College was to remain there for the next 27 years.

Marian Aherne died of pneumonia in 1897 bequeathing the school to her co-principal, now Alice Millward, who continued it until her death in 1911. The Anglican Church then acquired the school until 1916 when the Millward Estate disposed of the property to James Andrew Neptune Scott.¹ After practicing as a surgeon in Victorian country towns, Scott decided to settle in Bendigo and open a private hospital. The long classroom of Girton College was turned into a hospital ward and other renovations and extensions included an operating theatre.

He named his hospital 'Lister House' after Joseph Lister² (1827-1912) the English surgeon who pioneered antiseptic surgery. When Scott died in 1944, aged 76, Lister House ceased to be a hospital and in 1949 it was purchased by the Hospital and Charities Commission. It then became the Northern District School of Nursing, the first independent school of nursing in Australia, opening in March 1950 with 39 students. (The only other school of nursing was in Melbourne until its closure about 1963.) Properties to be used as student hostels included 'Euralla' at 247 View St. and 'Edgbaston' at 99 Wattle St.

The Northern District School of Nursing continued until 1989 when the tertiary education systems took over the role of nurse training with clinical experience to be acquired at an approved training hospital. Lister House, today, is now occupied by the Loddon Mallee Region Department of Human Services.

*References: Lister House, The Story of the Northern District School of Nursing by Frank Cusack
The Bendigo Historical Society
Dictionary of World Biography by Barry Jones*

¹ James Andrew Neptune Scott, MB, MD, LRCP, FRCS (Eng) was a graduate of Oxford and Glasgow Universities, connoisseur, art collector and linguist with some nine or ten languages. He was also a benefactor of the Bendigo Art Gallery, bequeathing his valuable art collection.

² Joseph Lister, MD, FRCS, FRS studied medicine at the London University. The major problem in surgery at the time was the high rate of deaths from post-operative sepsis. He used carbolic acid (phenol) as a spray on surgical and other wounds to kill germs. This dramatically reduced the post-operative mortality rate. He also introduced catgut as ligatures instead of silk or hemp. He was made a baronet in 1883 and awarded a peerage in 1902. The Lister Institute of Preventive Medicine preserves his name.