

Farewell to Rozelle Hospital

Snip in Time – History Archives

Callan Park was opened with much pomp and ceremony in 1884. This group of splendid sandstone buildings set in park-like river view grounds in Rozelle was considered – in 1901 – to be one of the finest institutions in the Commonwealth. The inclusion of Broughton Hall Estate into the Callan Park complex and a further six repatriation wards for victims of ‘shell shock’ [took place] after the First World War.

PRA The Story, 2005. (Eds) Chesterson J, Maller S & Turner B p15; www.pra.org.au

Services for people with a mental illness have been provided on the Rozelle Hospital site since 1876. Rozelle Hospital was formed in 1976 from the amalgamation of Callan Park Hospital and the Broughton Hall Psychiatric Clinic. The History of Rozelle Hospital is in tandem with the historical, social and political context of the mentally ill of a new colony and the progressive maturity of a nation. The progressive changes between 1870 and the present day evidence this maturity as social attitudes gradually changed towards the care and treatment of the mentally ill.

The ‘Kirkbride Block’ was named after the eminent American, Dr William Kirkbride who was renowned for his pioneering work on progressive mental health care.

Rozelle Hospital has continued its services through the intervening years up to the present day in these historic buildings. Rozelle with its long and rich history has provided a milieu of progressive learning in treatment and care of the mentally ill with which it can be justly proud.

<http://www.cs.nsw.gov.au/rozdev/history.htm>

In 1873, due to severe overcrowding at the Hospital for the Insane at Gladesville, the Parkes Government purchased the “Callan Estates” (then a rural setting) of just over 100 acres for £12,500; with the express purpose of building a large lunatic asylum. There was some opposition by local residents but this was rejected by the Government and in 1884 the new asylum for the insane at Callan Park was officially opened. Dr. Frederick Norton Manning and the Colonial Architect, Mr. James Barnet were instrumental in pushing the government to establish Callan Park.

<http://www.cs.nsw.gov.au/mhealth/rozelle/rozhistory.html>

In April 2008, all Rozelle Hospital services and patients were transferred to Concord Hospital. The Callan Park (Special Provisions) Act 2002 restricts future uses to health and education, but the New South Wales Government has not revealed its intentions for the site.

Famous inmates – Australian suffragist Louisa Lawson, her sons Charles and Peter, and The Bulletin publisher and editor J. F. Archibald (who famously published much writing

by Louisa's son Henry Lawson), were inmates, but Henry Lawson was not. [See also PRA the Story, cited above].

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Callan_Park_Lunatic_Asylum_for_the_Mentally_and_Criminally_Insane

The Rozelle Hospital site in Sydney's inner west is 61 hectares of exceptionally beautiful, undulating waterfront parkland, preserved by historical accident, but still under threat despite the Callan Park Act being put in place late 2002. Its legal owner is the NSW Department of Health. The site incorporates many layers of archaeological, Aboriginal, historical, cultural, aesthetic, and environmental heritage. It contains many heritage buildings, including the original houses (1839 and 1842) of the two estates on which it is based; and the magnificent Kirkbride Block, completed in 1885 for the Callan Park psychiatric hospital (now the campus of Sydney College of the Arts).

The only known Aboriginal sites within Leichhardt, eight altogether, are located in two areas: at Callan Point within the grounds of Rozelle Hospital, and at Yurulbin Point's parts of the municipality's natural shoreline that have remained largely undisturbed. Evidence of whatever other sites existed has been destroyed by extensive reclamation of the shoreline and development. The five sites identified at Callan Point are shell middens in sheltered areas close to the water's edge where groups camped or stopped for a meal. These middens which, like other sites in Port Jackson, contain rock oysters, cockles, mussels and *Terrebralia* shells, have been dated at about 4,500 years old. The three other sites have been identified on private land at Yurulbin Point. Two are midden sites located under rock overhangs, and the other is an art site with hand stencils and a charcoal outline of a shark.

Built of sandstone mainly quarried on site, the buildings have slate roofs, timber floors, and copper down pipes. Spacious rooms lead to verandahs linking several courtyards. The verandahs are supported by hundreds of cast iron columns acting as down pipes for water which is fed into an underground reservoir. Dominating the complex is a venetian clock tower with a ball which rises and falls according to the water level of the reservoir. Essential to testament was the calming influence of natural beauty and pleasant parklands, designed by Director of the Botanic Gardens, Charles Moore. Further landscaping in the 1890's included the planting of palms and and rainforest trees, and the conversion of an informal pond to the curious sunken garden, which although waterless, survives.

<http://www.sydneyarchitecture.com/INW/INW19.htm>

Friends of Callan Park www.callanpark.com

Further Reading

Alan Rosen, Leonie Manns (2003) Who owns Callan Park? A cautionary tale
Australasian Psychiatry 11 (4) , 446–451 doi:10.1046/j.1440-1665.2003.02034.x

Ironic theft: great loss to hospital's history would be small beer in sale by Sean Nicholls,
August 22, 2003 - <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/08/21/1061434988794.html?from=storyrhs>

Snip in Time – In Honour of Rozelle

My first encounter with Australia, apart from the magnificent aerial view of Sydney Harbour on the 10th January 1988 from a QANTAS Jumbo Jet, was being greeted at the airport by a member of staff, Sue Blair from the Rozelle Hospital. Within 30 minutes of retrieving our baggage and belongings from UK via Bangkok, my family and I were introduced to our new home and place of work for the next 2 years – The Rozelle Hospital. Well that's partly how it happened missing one or two minor details. We arrived one day earlier on the 9th and due to a huge electrical storm in Sydney were diverted to Canberra, to be greeted by hundreds of onlookers and journalists on the tarmac – No Jumbo had ever landed in Canberra on a direct international flight and there was speculation about whether the runway would be long enough. The fuel tanks were almost empty, we had a full passenger load with international baggage allowances, and it is only looking back now, I am able to make sense of the cabin crew's hesitant and incongruous smiles. Only then, to repeat the trick outgoing the following day to an even larger crowd. Ha ha walls, which I was to learn about later, took on a whole new meaning.

Just over two weeks later on the 26th January, I accompanied a group of patients and a university student from ward 26 in acute admissions on a sightseeing ferry trip, mid-morning from Darling Street Wharf to Circular Quay, in full view of the First Fleet reenactment and tall ships arriving. A spectacle and location that beat the beautiful grounds of Rozelle, the hundreds of thousands lining the shore and the burgeoning passengers at Circular Quay waiting to embark and take our place – Could we have been in a better place that day? It was then announced over the loudspeaker, everyone aboard must disembark – We would have to find the end of the queue half way up George Street. I had to go plead with the Captain to allow us to stay on board and return to Darling Street Wharf. It was then that I realised that my tenure at the Rozelle Hospital might not even survive the first month if I returned to the ward alone, with those I had been entrusted, lost in the crowds that day. We laugh now, actually some (not all) laughed then too before I got to the Captain, I wonder what they were thinking?

Historically and according to true lives, many memories at Rozelle will be both distressing and sad ones. There have been tragic times – times we should not be proud of – times when some did their best to make a change – times when someone else's melancholic burden or disassembled thoughts were briefly lifted or forgotten, bringing home a familiar smile. These thoughts should be treasured nonetheless at the same time as we celebrate the healing and uplifting moments, as we celebrate the closing of the doors, the empty corridors, the walls and windows that contain the shadows of some of us, and the lives of many others.

Jon C
Chair, NSW Branch
Australian College of Mental Health Nurses