
Adieu Hickman House.

by Carol Herben.

"Hickman House", to all of the residents in the Illawarra region you have served us well.

At one time or another we have been inpatients, outpatients or visitors to loved ones whether on joyous or sad occasions. I personally can recall my early days as a child in the childrens ward, and in 1977 the loss of my dear mother in the Coronary Care Unit. At any time we can remember the quieter, more private times when the rooms held no more than two beds. With the addition in the 1970's the feeling in the wards were similar to being stabled in a barn, losing the homely effect of hospitalisation. Let us turn back the clock when the expansion program began at Wollongong Hospital eventually leading to the construction of the new Hickman House opened in 1951.

A large expansion program of the Wollongong Hospital site commenced in 1937. The development program commenced with the construction of the nurses quarters in 1937, with Dr John Kerr and Mr Harold Cox laying the foundation stone. The overall cost of this program was £22,000 and was partly funded by the state Government for £11,000. The Hospital Women's Auxilliary raised £600 to cover the cost of the furnishings.

In 1940-41 a new laundry and boilerhouse were built. By 1943 it was decided to build a new two storey hospital estimated at a cost of £30,000, to be named in honour of Mr F C Hickman whose service on hospital committees commenced in 1929, and had chaired the Wollongong Hospital Board since 1930. The board, headed by Mr Hickman, met with Alderman J. J. Kelly, Mayor of Wollongong in 1945. Subsequently a public meeting was called. This meeting raised the sum of £17,000. In the meantime the Department of Defence became interested in the Wollongong Hospital and they agreed to donate £11,000 to the building fund on a condition that the soldiers and female staff from the Balgownie Camp were treated at Wollongong Hospital. This offer eventually fell through as the Army lost

interest. In the meantime the Department of Public Works decided to construct a four storey hospital. In 1947 work commenced on the foundations. Altogether the Public Works Department had had three or four different plans drawn up between 1943 and 1947. One plan in 1947 called for a 10 storey hospital. Members of the Hospital Board were "pleasurably shocked". So Hickman House was begun.

The new 'Hickman House' of 10 storeys, rose to a height of 120 feet, overlooking the surrounding areas for a distance of 10 miles. The building was designed by Mr Cobden Parkes, Architect for the Public Works Department under the direction of the Hospitals Commission and built by F.C.W. Powell and Son of St. Peters. At the time it was classified amongst the best hospitals in the world with its ultra modern equipment.

"Hickman House" had a capacity of 201 beds, three operating theatres with gleaming blue tiles on the floor and telephones installed in the automatic lifts.

The overall cost of the construction of the building came to £400,000, the furnishings totalled £36,000 and the surgical equipment £4,000.

A lot of thought and consideration was put into the interior of the building such as:

The foyer was lined with Queensland maple panels, whilst the floor was covered with colourful rubber carpeting. The floors of the workrooms serveries and bathrooms were covered with either 2" squares or Moravian tiles, whilst the ward floors were covered with a tallow wood parquetry. The patients' rooms had venetian blinds and floral patterned drapes to match the colour schemes.

Most effective was the penthouse roof between the sixth and seventh floors which was surrounded by a parapet. It provided sweeping views of the surrounding area. Though not accessible to the public it gave a wonderful view of the mountains, sea and the industrial areas, and was considered the ultimate for viewing Wollongong and its surroundings.

The ground floor housed the children's wards with a total of 30 beds including a nursery for children who were recuperating.

A 24 bed maternity wing for public patients was situated on the first floor whilst the second floor catered for 27 private and intermediate beds. General patients were catered for on the third, fourth and fifth floors which had a total capacity of 120 beds.

On the sixth floor were the three operating theatres, labour and delivery wards and the recovery room.

The resident medical officers were also catered for on the seventh floor, with the inclusion of 5 bedrooms, a sitting room, pantry and a small kitchen.

Levels eight and nine were set aside for the emergency lighting, air-conditioning, lift motor housings, battery plant, as well as a 10,000 gallon capacity concrete water tank which supplied this building with water.

The new hospital had a covered walkway installed connecting it to the old building as both hospital buildings will be in operation soon after the official opening.

"Hickman House" was officially opened by the Minister for Health Mr M O'Sullivan on 10 September 1951. No less than 100 sisters and nurses formed a guard of honour at the entrance of the new hospital. Entertainment was supplied by Wollongong City Band and the Steelworks Band who played "Advance Australia Fair". The hospital secretary Mr D. S. McInnes sang "Bless this House".

Amongst the speakers of that day was the Minister for Housing Mr C A Kelly, who paid a glowing tribute to Mr Hickman after whom the new hospital was named.

Mr Rex Connor M.L.A. said, amongst other things, "While we view with pride this splendid edifice, we must remember that no hospital is better

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than its nurses". He also said he would do all he could to have the Nurses' Home completed as soon as possible.

After the official proceedings were over the doors of the hospital were opened to allow hundreds of people to walk the corridors and inspect the new building for themselves.

Now, 50 years later, Hickman House has served its purpose well and is about to come down to make way for another building more suited to modern medicine.

I hope that the name of Mr F C Hickman can somehow be preserved in the new building. The name Hickman has been associated with Wollongong Hospital since early 1929.