ST. HELEN'S HOSPITAL HAS PLAYED A LIVING ROLE


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Abstract: Showing the rise of the modern hospital evolving from its early beginnings and the connection of St. Helen's Hospital with the main stream of better known hospitals.

The nineteenth-century beginnings of St. Helen's its subsequent development and its future continuance as an influence in the hospital life of Queensland.

The "hospital" as we know it today, began over two thousand years ago. Its various forms and intentions which we now house under one roof were known to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Further east, rules had been drawn up under the Code of Hammurabi for the care and treatment of various ailments. Strict observance of these rules had to be followed, otherwise the operating surgeon could find eye for eye and tooth for tooth becoming the rule applied to him. The Greek Temples of Healing with an emphasis on body hygiene and fitness showed the need for cleanliness, and adequate light, air and space in healing places.

There are three famous long-standing hospitals still in active use today that stem from these early beginnings. Each has been a hospital for over a thousand years. One is mentioned briefly because of its unique position, the other two because apart from their age and place in hospital development they are related to St. Helen's Hospital, the principal centre for our consideration at this time. These three hospitals are the Hotel Dieu, Paris; Tiber Island Hospital, Rome; and St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London.

Each of these illustrates in its own way the struggles, growth and inspirational leadership of hospital evolution in our western world.

Mr. W. R. F. Love is Administrator of St. Helen's Methodist Hospital, Brisbane. His paper is timely, as the old hospital is to disappear to make way for the State Cultural Centre at South Brisbane and will be replaced by the new Wesley Hospital to be built on the "Moorlands" estate at Coronation Drive.
The Hotel Dieu, one of the most famous hospitals in the world, was founded in 651 A.D. by Bishop Landry of Paris. It is still respected as a hospital of note in 1975. But for this address, fascinating and educational though the history of Hotel Dieu may be, it does not hold the same relevance for St. Helen's Hospital as do the other two.

In Rome there is a small island in the Tiber River that is the site of the hospital, St. John Calybit. As a hospital site, Tiber Island dates from 291 B.C., when a temple of healing dedicated to Asclepeus was erected on the site, parts of which are still extant. The oldest bridge in Rome, built in 62 B.C., leads to Tiber Island, the Ponte Fabrico. The early history of the hospital is vague but it is known that in 997 A.D. Otto III built a church, St. Adelberto, on the island. Later, the remains of St. Bartholomew were transferred to this church and the church was renamed in his honour. The building date for the first Christian hospital on the site is uncertain, but some time around 1100 A.D. the hospital was being used for patients.

In the early 1100's Rahere, an English Court Jester, tiring of court life, had travelled to Rome as a penitent. Here he became ill and was taken into St. John Calybit Hospital. Rahere was cured. Inspired by a vision of St. Bartholomew, he vowed to build a hospital in London in gratitude. This he did, which was St. Bartholomew's Hospital, begun in 1123, a hospital with which St. Helen's Hospital has become associated.

However, that is moving ahead. In an ancient manuscript in the British Museum you can read part of this story of Rahere. Born in obscure circumstances, the talented and ambitious young man became a courtier. Tired of this life, he made the penitential pilgrimage to Rome, caught malaria on the way, and was healed at the Tiber Island Hospital. Eventually, he returned to London and abandoned his old court life for one of service to God and humanity.

The son of William the Conqueror, King Henry I, gave a grant of land to Rahere and on it he established a monastery and Church of the Augustinian Order, also a resthouse (i.e., hospital) for the sick and poor of London. The Order required the director of the hospital to be good-tempered, kind, compassionate and willing to gratify the needs of the suffering with affection and sympathy.

His duties also included consulting with the doctors and supervising the patients' diets. Our hospital administrator here had a hospital, St. Bartholomew's, that was designed to give shelter to anyone who knocked at the door asking for help; the homeless, the outcasts, the orphans, and the ill. The rules required all the sick to be tended until they were well. The
hospital today occupies the exact position in which Rahere placed it in 1123 A.D. The buildings are not the original ones, however. Brother John Cox of the Order wrote about the beloved hospital continuously from 1456 to 1468 and most historical information on the early period comes from his pen. A carpenter patient named Adwyn was admitted in 1150. Evidently a victim of "rheumatism" all his life, he was now too crippled to walk and his hands were too twisted to work. His treatment bears great similarity to that which we use in retraining handicapped people today.

First, he was taught to make small objects such as weights and distaffs for spinning wheels. Later he was given tasks that used larger muscles, hewing wood with adze and axe. After months he regained his ability as a carpenter, "blessing God who keeps His eye upon them who hope in His mercy".

Paying patients were admitted to the hospital even in the earliest days. Tournaments were held in front of the hospital with English nobles contesting, and the King, Queen and court in attendance. Probably these tournaments helped to provide hospital patients as well. Records of about 1650 list an average annual roster of about 700 patients with an average death rate of about 10 per cent. A low rate indeed for 1650 and no antibiotics in post civil war England.

Bed capacity ranged from about 50 in pre-Reformation time to about 750 just after World War I. In the grounds of the hospital there were separate houses for attending physicians. One of these at one time was Sir Thomas Bodley, founder of the Bodleian Library at Oxford. It is also on record that Dick Whittington, thrice Lord Mayor of London, gave money to repair St. Bartholomew's some time round about 1400 A.D.

In the Tudor period St. Bartholomew's was one of the five Royal hospitals in London. There are no early records of the medical training periods at St. Bartholomew's Hospital. The Medical School appears to have evolved quite gradually out of a system of apprenticeship.

From 1540 to 1745, the Barber-Surgeon Company had a monopoly on licensing surgeons. An accredited surgeon required seven years' apprenticeship and then a final examination. In 1787 John Abernathy, an assistant surgeon, began the medical school of which he is regarded as the founder. The Medical School of the hospital was a private enterprise matter until it was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1921 in St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Today it is a college of the University of London.
FOUNDING OF ST. HELEN'S

Medical students in the 1870's and 1880's, however, regarded themselves as part of St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Now we come to St. Bartholomew's and St. Helen's. In the Brisbane Courier of Thursday, 10 November 1885, the following advertisement appeared in the Professional Notices column:

“Dr. Charles Kebbell, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., L.S.A., London, formerly of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, late House Surgeon of Sussex County Hospital, England, has commenced practice in partnership with his brother, Dr. Kebbell, in Stanley Street, South Brisbane. (Attends also at Farrants Chemist, Melbourne Street, from 9.30 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. and 7.30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. daily.)”

It was Dr. Kebbell who in 1896 came to part of the property known as St. Helen's and began a private hospital in the building there. The earliest part of St. Helen's was built in 1885 on a block of land obtained by John Harris under deed of grant on the 11 May 1854. John and George Harris owned considerable land in South Brisbane and had a store also in Stanley Street. The Brisbane Courier in its issue of Thursday, 23 November 1885 has this entry:—

Board and Residence — St. Helen’s
Sitting Room and Bed Room vacant.
Mrs. Scott, St. Helen’s, South Brisbane.

Mrs. Scott, previously the proprietress of “Evingston”, another early boarding house in South Brisbane, appears to have begun St. Helen's in November 1885. It is noteworthy that by 22 December 1885 the Board and Residence advertisement in the Brisbane Courier reads:—

Vacancies. Suite of Rooms.
Mrs. Scott, St. Helen’s, South Brisbane.
Telephone Number 326.

The telephone appears to have been connected in the week prior to this advertisement. The classified “ad.” entries for 20 and 21 December do not state the telephone number, but are the same as the entry of 23 November 1885.

The Brisbane telephone entries for 1886 also show St. Helen's listed for the first time. It is interesting to note, that comparison with the other telephone subscribers of 1886 does not indicate any of them still being on their same site today. It would appear, therefore, that St. Helen's Hospital can claim to be the oldest continuing telephone subscriber in the same building in Brisbane. As the centenary of the invention of the
telephone will be celebrated in 1976, the 91-year subscribing period of St. Helen’s is noteworthy. The year 1880 is credited as being the year when a telephone service was initiated in Brisbane. In June 1881, there were 36 instruments in circuit with the exchange. (Aust. Encycl. 2 Vol. A&R 1926 Sydney, p.319) Telephone Number 326 of 1885 went to St. Helen’s.

Advertisements for room and suites at St. Helen’s appear in various issues of the Brisbane Courier from this time forward. In 1893, at the time of the flood, St. Helen’s, still a place of board and lodging, was inundated almost to the first floor. Evidence of where the 1893 flood had deposited silt came to light in the renovations of 1964.

The original St. Helen’s building, as shown by photographs and sketches of the early period, was that part of the building in Peel Street nearest to the Brisbane River. The next addition to the building structure was between 1892 and 1893 when the Peel Street - Stanley Street corner section was added.

This portion was an addition to the original building, but a blank wall between the two prevented internal access from one to the other. It was not possible to walk into one building from the other without leaving by an outside door. The new structure was different in design and appears to have been built with a purpose in view; from its layout it looks as though it was planned to be a hotel. A corner entrance with a separate side doorway, a cellar, space suitable for counters, rooms for accommodation and dining, all can be traced in the structure. Indeed, though no evidence has been found of a licence application or refusal for one, the building is listed in the 1893 Queensland Post Office Directory as St. Helen’s Hotel, E. J. Dowding, proprietor, situated alongside St. Helen’s Boarding House being conducted by Mrs. Caroline Scott. In

![St. Helen’s: The frontage to Peel Street.](image-url)
this same year Dr. Charles Kebbell was living at Carlton House on the opposite side of Stanley Street, between Peel Street and Soda Water Lane next to the South Brisbane Laundry.

The 1893 flood, occurring at this time, may have influenced Mr. Dowding, for we hear no more of him. For 1894 - 95 Mrs. Scott is still recorded as the resident of St. Helen’s Boarding House. The 1896-97 records show Mrs. Sarah Hayden for St. Helen’s Hotel on the corner of Peel and Stanley Streets. The Directory of 1897 shows Dr. Charles Kebbell, M.R.C.S., having a Private Hospital in the previous St. Helen’s Boarding House building. It would appear, therefore, that St. Helen’s became a hospital some time in 1896 with Dr. Charles Kebbell as the doctor, and Mrs. Marshall as matron.

DR. E. S. JACKSON’S INTEREST

In the years 1896-97 we could note also that the Medical Superintendent of the Brisbane Hospital was Dr. E. Sandford Jackson. The records from 1896 to 1900 still show St. Helen’s Private Hospital in its own building. By 1901 the St. Helen’s Hotel building had become the private residence of Mr. Carl Zoeller who renamed the building “Tabbelkoome”. Mr. Carl Zoeller was a well-known medical instrument maker of the period. He was interned in World War I and subsequently went overseas. Descendants of Mr. Zoeller are still resident in Queensland.

At the turn of the century Dr. E. Sandford Jackson appears to have left the Brisbane General Hospital and set up in private practice at 109 Wickham Terrace, Brisbane, having his residence in Windermere Road, Hamilton.

Queensland Directory entries for 1902, however, show Dr. Jackson as being at Evadnia Street, Taringa, and St. Helen’s Hospital, South Brisbane. Also in 1902, Dr. Francis Hare is recorded as being with him at the hospital — Dr. Hare was the Medical Superintendent of the Diamantina Hospital for Chronic Diseases, the hospital address being given as Cornwall Street, South Brisbane. This is the only mention of Dr. Hare’s association with St. Helen’s Hospital.

In 1902, Mr. Carl Zoeller still occupied “Tabbelkoome” on the corner of Peel and Stanley Streets, but disposed of his interest there to Dr. Jackson shortly after this date and the two buildings then became St. Helen’s Private Hospital. The A.M.P. Society held the deed of the property until 1910 when it came into the possession of Dr. Jackson.

In 1913 Dr. Jackson purchased the two adjoining Stanley Street allotments from Mr. Charles Albert Robertson Lawson, who had previously obtained them in 1881 from Mr. William
Wootton Blow. Dr. Charles Kebbell actually began St. Helen's Hospital and must be given due recognition for this. However, the medical practitioner who developed St. Helen's most in its early years was Dr. E. Sandford Jackson.

An Australian, born on 18 July 1860, he became sole surgeon in charge of the Brisbane Hospital in Bowen Bridge Road in 1883, at the age of 23 years. Brisbane Hospital had developed out of the convict hospital at North Quay, the last building of which came down only a few years ago. A summary of the career of Dr. E. Sandford Jackson and his progressive reforms at the Brisbane Hospital will be found in the *Royal Historical Society Journal* for 1973-74. Dr. Jackson is recorded as having ceased to be Superintendent at the Brisbane Hospital in 1898, but continuing as an appointed Honorary Surgeon. The same vision that had lifted the standard of Brisbane Hospital in surgical sepsis and patient care brought this outlook to St. Helen's. Dr. Jackson began the first definite School of Nursing in Australia at Brisbane Hospital. It is perhaps fitting that the Nursing School he began at St. Helen's was probably also the first such school in a private hospital in Queensland if not in Australia.

**HIGH NURSING TRADITION**

St. Helen's nurses have continued in the traditions established by Dr. Jackson in those early days. During his
period as Medical Superintendent the buildings on site developed and increased. The upstairs interior wall between St. Helen's Boarding House and St. Helen's Hospital was pierced and the present dog-leg passage was opened, the whole area being given over to patient care.

A new building facing to Stanley Street paralleling the existing structure, appears to have been built in the period before the 1914-18 war, and was used to house hospital service areas—kitchen and laundry being on the ground floor, with nursing staff on the two upper floors. The only extant Nursing School record shows one nurse enrolled for 1913, Miss Lilian Douglas, who completed her training by passing the Nurses Registration Board Examination in 1918. This register also shows that the next student was not enrolled until 1915, while Dr. Jackson was still overseas in Egypt with the A.I.F.

It is reported that once, in Egypt, he was taken ill with pneumonia and was a very sick man, later having to be operated upon. He demanded "my nurses shall attend me" and two St. Helen's girls were brought from other military hospitals to take care of him.

The first recorded hospital matron was Mrs. Marshall, who had been matron for Dr. Kebbell. Her capabilities were known to Dr. Jackson. She remained on at St. Helen's Hospital as matron with him until she retired in 1913, being succeeded by Miss Nina Holmes. Miss Holmes was matron from 1913 until 1917 and was followed by Miss Dadswell who after a few years left to be married. It is on record that Miss Ida Axelsen, a returned sister of World War I, occupied the position temporarily until she took charge of the then new Sanatorium at Westwood, near Rockhampton, for the treatment of tubercular patients.

Miss Linda Bell followed Miss Axelsen as matron pending Miss Teresa Dunne's taking up the position. Miss Bell was a sister-in-law of Dr. Hare, previously mentioned in association with St. Helen's. Miss Teresa Dunne was a St. Helen's Hospital trained nursing sister who left for overseas service in the first hospital ship to leave Australia in 1914. Dr. Jackson, it is reported, was the medical officer-in-charge.

In 1916 Matron Dunne was appointed to a 1,500-bed hospital on the Deccan in India. She also received the Royal Red Cross from the hands of King George V at Buckingham Palace. Miss Dunne in 1921 began teaching and training the nurses and carrying out Dr. Jackson's principles. She held the position of matron until 1931 when she died following an operation. Miss Caldwell was then appointed matron.
During the Second World War Miss Caldwell was granted two-and-a-half years' leave of absence to become principal Matron of Northern Command. Miss Elsie Sully was Acting Matron during Miss Caldwell's war service, and in 1954 became matron after Miss Caldwell’s retirement.

Miss Sully served as matron until 1966, when she retired, handing over to Miss Heather Junner. Miss Junner resigned early in 1971 on the eve of her marriage to Mr. Roy Elliott. Miss M. Crawford, Deputy Matron, a registered nurse who had trained at St. Helen's, became Acting Matron until Miss Helen Banff was appointed matron in October of the same year. Miss Banff, a former matron of Royal Children's Hospital, is the present matron of St. Helen's.

**ACQUIRED BY METHODIST CHURCH**

Dr. E. Sandford Jackson retired as Medical Superintendent of St. Helen's in 1934 and went to live at Victoria Point. When he died, his estate continued the hospital until it was sold in 1949 to the Methodist Church, which changed its title to St. Helen's Methodist Hospital.

Of Miss Caldwell, on her retirement as matron, the late Dr. H. W. Noble—a former Queensland Minister for Health—said:

“She was and is a truly great nurse, devoted to her profession, willing at all times and at any sacrifice to comfort those whom she nursed. Her judgment in medical nursing was excellent and her work in the theatre, where she more often than not acted as assistant, was of great value to the operating theatre surgeon.”

And what a roll of surgeons and physicians could be called of those who attend and have attended patients at St. Helen's Hospital! To list the doctors who have made use of the hospital's facilities would be similar to preparing a list of who's who in Brisbane medical circles. But then, this could be said for all Brisbane hospitals. Currently, 200 medical practitioners are associated with patient care at St. Helen's each year.

The Medical Advisory Committee to the Hospital acts in the same capacity as would a medical superintendent. The first chairman of the Committee was Dr. Evan Thomson, who is the present Chairman of the Wesley Hospital Development Planning Committee. Dr. A. P. Crawford is the present Chairman of the Medical Advisory Committee, heading a list of distinguished colleagues.

Perhaps it is time now to consider the patients who have come to St. Helen's over the years. It would be presumptuous to say that a representative of every Brisbane family has at
some time been a patient of the hospital. Yet the total number of patients treated in the hospital could give rise to such speculation. In the past ten years alone, over 50,000 persons have been patients at the hospital, and the hospital has been in use for eighty years. Numbers, like dates, are the cold facts of history; but history is more than a collection of facts.

Being a private hospital, names of patients are never disclosed, but suffice be it to say that leading men of business, housewives and ordinary folk, have been guests at St. Helen’s as have been members of Parliament and the Cabinet along with all classes and creeds.

Strangers in a strange land, overseas visitors and sailors, all have been given tender loving care and hospital treatment. During the period 1950-1960, the hospital was constantly under review for improvement, and plans were being prepared for further building on the site.

In 1957 the foundation stone of the Nurses’ Home was laid by Mr. Joseph Packer (died 1968), the Methodist Hospitals Board’s foundation treasurer.

The Nurses’ Home was followed in 1963-64 by the building of a new wing along the riverfront, and a complete renovation of the existing buildings. The 1885 external stairway leading to the Stanley Street gates was removed at that time. The cellar was closed over, leaving only a manhole as the mode of entrance.

The Methodist Hospitals Board in 1961 decided to employ a Hospital Administrator to attend to all the non-nursing activities and Mr. W. R. F. Love was appointed to the position, which he still occupies. The growing health and hospital needs of Brisbane, in which St. Helen’s has played such a living role, caused the Hospital Board to consider a further building expansion programme. As this period in the sixties coincided with forward town planning for Brisbane, it was not possible to acquire further land next door as Dr. Jackson had done in 1913.

The proposed Riverside Drive prevented this from happening. Accordingly, expansion was seen as having to be on another site somewhere in Brisbane. The Hospital Administrator was set the task of bringing suitable sites to the notice of the Hospital Board for consideration.

MOVE TO “MOORLANDS” PLANNED

In December 1969, Mr. Love recommended that consideration be given to extending the hospital work of St. Helen’s on the “Moorlands” site in Coronation Drive. This was pursued
with attendant success. However, the State Health Department ruled that a hospital cannot be on two sites, so a new name had to be given to the extension.

The name, "The Wesley Hospital", was selected. The hospital activities of St. Helen's will be phased into those planned for the "Moorlands" site, and the hospital spirit, defined in today's management terms as the objective, will be a top priority. The feasibility study for the Wesley Hospital notes, *inter alia*, "Objectives and the operational policy of the new hospital will in general be a continuation of those in operation at St. Helen's."

What of the St. Helen's site? It, too, will continue to serve Brisbane as it always has done. Plans are being prepared for a new cultural and arts complex which will incorporate the site. Present indications are that the library section will be on the St. Helen's site. This will be a fitting way to continue spreading the hospital's "help thy neighbour policy".

Thanks must be expressed to all who have assisted in the compilation of information relating to this short generalised history. There are far too many to mention all by name, but tribute must be given to the Methodist Hospitals Board and its Chairman, the Rev. R. Howe, L.Th., C.F., the John Oxley Library, Royal Historical Society of Queensland, the National Trust, particularly Mr. Richard Stringer, and Mrs. Lyn Egan.

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