

**Old Wellington District Hospital and Surrounds, 135 Maxwell St, Wellington, NSW**

**List: Register of the National Estate**

**Class: Historic**

**Legal Status: Registered (27/03/2001)**

**Place ID: 100331**

**Place File No: 1/03/210/0023**

**Description:**

The Old Wellington District Hospital garden and early buildings including the main ward, old kitchen block, operating theatre, old nurses home, and isolation ward comprise a group of pre 1910 structures which clearly demonstrate how a Federation period hospital was planned and operated. The major early buildings are excellent examples of Federation architecture applied to an institutional use in what was a small country location. The main ward building designed by a local builder, exhibits fine Federation proportion and detailing. The 1910 to 1938 structures on the site demonstrate building styles promoted state wide by the NSW Government Architects Branch at this time.

The Old District Hospital buildings and their former uses demonstrate the changes to health practices, standards and hospital design which have occurred over the twentieth century culminating in the cessation of hospital functions in 1989. The range of buildings highlights the variety of solutions implemented largely to meet community needs and aspirations and the availability or lack of funding. Alterations and additions to the buildings on the site demonstrate the necessity to adapt the structures for increased bed needs, as a result of the growth of population in the town and surrounding region, with limited funds being available.

The scale and design of the early hospital buildings and garden, being one of the most substantial civic building complexes in the town when constructed, illustrate the confidence of the town of Wellington in its future development.

(Criterion A.4) (Australian Historic Themes: 3.26 Providing health services: providing hospital services)

The Old Wellington District Hospital makes a major contribution to the townscape of Wellington. The early buildings are aesthetically significant, being architecturally imposing, and located on a prominent position overlooking the town (Criterion E.1).

The Old Wellington District Hospital is significant to the community of Wellington having served as the local hospital for around 85 years (Criterion G.1).

The Old Wellington District Hospital is significant for its association with a number of significant local families and individuals who contributed to the hospital and to the town of Wellington. The hospital was associated in particular with the Barton, Glasson, Rygate, and Walker families who are remembered through the naming and The Main Ward building, 1903/4, of the old district hospital is a large and impressive

building sited on a hill overlooking the town and valley. Its main entrance faces the town. Built by Kennard Bros of Wellington of local red bricks from the Wellington Kiln, the main block of the hospital is designed in the Federation Queen Ann/Filigree style. Queen Ann elements can be seen in the varied roof shapes, Marseilles patterned roof tiles, terracotta ridge ornamentation, tower, gable facing street, timbered effect in gable, and Filigree elements evident in the substantial iron filigree to the verandah. The Main Ward has a pitched roof tiled with Marseilles pattern terracotta tiles, with decorative roof capping and finials and six roof ventilators adorning the ridge. The roof over the rear verandah is corrugated iron. Two gables with detailed timber elements are positioned over the front entrance, one on the main roof, the other on the verandah. The date 1903 is written under the gable on the roof. The centre of the roof was originally topped by an impressive high belvedere tower and spire, removed during World War Two. It was constructed of bricks with iron supporting columns and decorative iron frieze.

At both north and south ends of the building are faceted bays with corresponding roof detail above. Large casement windows are symmetrically placed, opening from the wards onto the verandah.

The building is surrounded by a deep verandah on all four sides. The verandah is supported by paired slender iron columns with decorative iron brackets and frieze, the verandah railings and balustrade are decorative wrought iron. The large front door has plain glass panels, brass handles, and is surrounded by decorative coloured leadlight. All original existing joinery is painted cedar. The high ceilings are pressed metal with ornate ceiling roses, the walls plastered and painted, the floors are timber. Fibrous cement infills have been added to all verandahs and areas.

A basement runs the length of the main building. It opens under the hospital verandah through ten arched entrances symmetrically placed along the northern and eastern sides. These entrances lead to a walkway around a walled off secure storage area. Doors and lattice infills are built into the arched entrances.

The Operating Theatre, 1908, is of red brick construction with a pitched corrugated iron roof and a concrete floor. The feature of the theatre is a large south facing window, the bottom half etched to light the operating area. The X-ray room, 1938 is built of brick with a terra cotta roof. Infills provide access from the main building to the operating theatre and X-ray room.

The Isolation Block (Glasson Private Ward), 1908, is built of locally quarried bluestone (other local buildings of the same era and material include the Baptist Church, St Paul's at Bodangora, Lechidale and Hillend at Maryvale), with random coursing, rendered quoins and parapets. The roof is a painted corrugated iron pitched roof with brick chimneys. The verandah had been extended and infilled with asbestos cement, retaining the original verandah structure internally. The verandah has been recently restored. Both the rooms and the verandah retain their pressed metal ceilings and much of the original joinery, although fireplaces have been removed. A lean-to store room is located at its eastern end. There is also a brick toilet block. The 1908 walkway from the original kitchen to the Glasson Ward was encased in asbestos cement sheeting with the original framework surviving. This walkway has recently been restored and the asbestos sheeting removed.

The Old Nurses' Quarter, 1908, is a federation brick building with a low pitched roof of corrugated iron. A north facing verandah is supported by slender posts with brackets, with timber lattice half screen infills. The verandahs were infilled with asbestos cement, this building has been recently restored and the asbestos sheeting removed and verandah restored. Some original joinery is retained, in particular some lattice balustrade panels and some of the original leadlight around the front door is intact.

The Kitchen Block, 1908, is constructed of brick on a stone base with a corrugated iron pitched roof. Original fireplaces and fittings had been removed and new external doors and a loading bay added. Verandahs were infilled with asbestos cement sheeting. The building has been recently restored and the asbestos sheeting removed, and the loading bay removed.

The Barton Ward, 1924, is sited at a south-westerly angle to the front of the main building and built in local bricks with a terra cotta tiled pitched roof. The surrounding flyscreen enclosed sleep out was altered to sliding glass windows in 1969, and the fibrous cement alterations and additions are in poor condition. A brass memorial plaque noting the dedication of the wing to Brian Templar Barton is located over the fireplace. A foundation stone is built into the northern wall of the wing. The original fireplace has been removed however the marble mantelpiece is in place. The building has retained the original joinery, locks and details but the ceiling appears to have been replaced.

Other Buildings on site:

The Old Morgue, 1923, is of face brick construction with a terracotta tiled roof. The Old Laundry, 1925 was converted to a workshop by extending the north end and adding a bathroom on the southern side with internal alterations. It is built of corrugated iron with a corrugated iron roof and asbestos wall additions.

The Nurses' Accommodation, 1932, is of brick construction with a terracotta pitched roof. Additions were made in 1934 with the interior being rearranged to provide living rooms. In 1974 the building became the Day Care Centre with additional toilets to the rear of the building, a porte cochere, enclosure of the verandah with fibrous cement and sliding windows.

The new laundry, 1972, is of fibrous cement on a brick base with a corrugated iron roof. The New Morgue, 1961 with internal additions in 1970 is built of brick with a concrete tiled roof. It has been extensively vandalised with doors torn off and all glass smashed. The Paint Shop, 1974 is timber with a corrugated iron roof. The Toilet Block, 1974 of asbestos cement sheeting with a corrugated iron roof.

Significant plantings on the site are mainly at the front of the main building with pepper trees along the southern boundary and a deciduous tree near the laundry. The front is dominated by a formal avenue of palm trees planted during the Federation period, outlining the early driveway and the approach to the building. Other plantings in this area comprise eucalypts, oleanders and some ornamental beds. Fencing on the western (front) side of the site and flanking the entrance comprises Federation

patterned wire supported on timber corner posts with a top pipe rails and decorative metal uprights.

### **History:**

The first European to discover Wellington Valley was John Oxley, Surveyor-General for the colony, on 19 August 1817, during his exploration of the Lachlan Valley. The party of explorers entered the valley through Glenfinlass (Curra Creek) finding and naming the Bell and Macquarie Rivers. Oxley called the valley "The Vale of Tempe". As the news of the Battle of Waterloo had reached the colony before Oxley left on his exploration he called the valley Wellington after the Duke of Wellington. In 1819 Oxley wrote of a depot established at Wellington to assist with further exploration to the west.

In January 1823 Lieutenant Percy Simpson was commissioned by Governor Sir Thomas Brisbane to establish a settlement at Wellington Valley. Simpson left Bathurst on 14 February arriving on 24 February, 1823, with him was a party of thirty soldiers and fifty convicts. Governor Brisbane believed that the removal of ungovernable convicts to remote stations would facilitate the government's role in preparing the continent for private pastoral interests. The Wellington station was planned as the first in a large network of penal establishments spreading north-west along the Macquarie River and across the interior. However, these plans were never realised and soon after it was established, the Wellington settlement became neglected. The convict population at Wellington Valley was intended to be as many as 500 convicts but it only averaged about 70 and never exceeded 100. By 1829 Governor Darling had decided that the settlement was not economically viable and on 5 January 1831 advised the Secretary of State that the settlement had been abandoned.

The village of Wellington was not proclaimed until 1842 and lots were for sale in 1846. The town developed slowly with the erection of several churches in the 1850s a National school in 1861, the Bank of New South Wales in 1865, numerous hotels and in 1877 the opening of the railway.

As the town of Wellington began to grow and the district expand, it became obvious that a hospital was needed in the town, the closest hospital being at Orange. In 1861, a meeting was convened by the Police Magistrate, Mr J M Marsh, and it was decided to rent a cottage in Percy Street for six months to serve as a hospital. Dr Samuel Curtis was appointed as surgeon and he was succeeded by Dr Casterton. Mr J A Gardiner of Gobolion donated a block of land for the hospital but the government provided a site in Reid Street before the building was commenced, so Mr Gardiner sold the block and donated the proceeds to the new building.

Work commenced in 1862 with the design provided by D H Dunlop of Nanima: the cost was 600 pounds of which 300 pounds was provided by the government. The builders were a Bathurst firm and the building was opened on 1 January 1863. By 1890, it was clear that the hospital was inadequate to cope with the increasing population. Despite fundraising activities and special appeals for funds, by 1891 the hospital was also in financial trouble with a bank overdraft of 113 pounds, 8 shillings and 10 pence and unable to meet its creditors.

It was not until 1899 that serious moves were made to provide a new hospital. The Hospital Committee were negotiating for suitable land on which to build, and a Ladies' Committee was formed to begin money raising with bazaars, collections and theatricals. Two sites were considered as suitable: high ground at the eastern end of Maxwell Street, and an area on the Bell River near the Police Station in Maughan Street. At a meeting on 13 June 1900 it was decided to select the Maxwell Street site because of its healthy position on the hill and because the size of the block allowed for all buildings which may be required in the future. The site was picturesque with a very attractive view over the town and valley to the mountains.

The Committee then tried to sell the existing hospital to the Government for 1,000 pounds. This was accepted in January 1901 with the amount being reduced to 500 pounds and the 10acre Maxwell Street site was dedicated for the new hospital. The Maxwell Street land was taken from the Town Common (dedicated in 1867) and was outside the suburban boundary of the town: it was also located opposite the land set aside in 1890 for the town reservoir.

The site was surveyed and a grant of 1,000 pounds was promised by the government on the condition that the plans were approved by the Government Architect and the Chief Medical Officer. Mr F H Kennard (of Kennard Bros, notable local builders) was appointed Clerk of Works and specifications were prepared in 1901. Building commenced in February, 1903: the Governor, Sir Henry Rawson, laid the foundation stone on 24 April 1903 and the Main Ward Building was officially opened on 13 April 1904 by the local MLA, John Haynes. The total cost was 3,827 pounds with a further 304 pounds for fencing, furniture and beds. Of this, 1,188 pounds was from public subscription, 1,000 pounds was granted by the government, and 500 pounds was from the sale of the previous hospital site. The Hospital Committee had expected a further 1,000 pounds from the government but this did not eventuate.

The first stage of the construction was the Main Ward building which included two large wards, but no operating theatres or other facilities. At this time the new hospital was one of the most substantial buildings in the town. The operating theatre and infectious wards were added to the main block in 1907 and a nurses' block was built around 1908 to the east of the main block.

Five acres to the east of the site were granted in 1908 which allowed for the building of the Kitchen Block and the Isolation Ward (later known as the Glasson Ward after a prominent local doctor who built Bindawalla Private Hospital.) A lean-to store room was added to the Isolation Block's east in 1930. In 1938, a brick toilet block was added and by 1969, the verandah had been extended and infilled with asbestos cement, retaining the original verandah structure internally. The 1908 walkway from the original kitchen to the Glasson Ward was encased in asbestos cement with the original framework surviving.

In 1923 the Government Architects' Branch designed and built a new maternity block on the south of the main building consisting of a single ward with nurses' room and store, surrounded by a screened verandah with an ablution block to one side. The foundation stone was laid on 9 May 1924 by Mrs C H Barton, the wing is known as the Barton Ward in memory of her son, Brian Templar Barton, killed in World War One. Mrs Barton funded the complete construction of the wing.

By 1925, additional bedrooms were added to the nurses' quarters, a small morgue had been built at the rear of the site and a boiler house had been added. New nurses' accommodation was built in 1931/2 to the south of the site and a laundry added at the rear of the site. Around 1934, the nurses' wing was extended with the addition of bedrooms, matron's flat, laundry and verandah with a garage underneath. The old nurses' accommodation was converted into a kitchen, dining room and domestics accommodation with the Kitchen Block converted to the Wardsman's accommodation and a dining room.

In 1938, bathroom and toilet annexes were provided for the isolation ward and additions made to those in the main wards and an X-ray room was added to the main ward. In 1942 a lean-to shed was built on to the isolation ward and a sterilising room, shower and change room added to the operating theatre. It was also then that the imposing tower on the main building was removed as a wartime security measure and stored under the hospital main block (tower location now unknown).

By 1969, the verandah of the isolation ward (now Glasson Private Ward) had been extended and infilled with fibrous cement sheeting; the Barton Ward had become the male ward; the Wardsman's Block had become stores; the rear verandah of the main block was enclosed; the end verandah was enclosed for wards and treatment rooms; additions were made to the X-ray room, and the kitchen verandah was enclosed for staff areas.

Between 1972 and 1975 there were alterations to the old laundry building for a workshop: a paint shop was built: a new laundry: an added concrete deck to the Glasson Ward and an entrance porch: the covered way was infilled with fibrous cement: a cool room added: an additional room to the rear of the Barton Ward: a new morgue with the old one used as an inflammable liquids store: several additional sheds, and an extension to the road and path system on the site. In 1974 a day care centre was added to the 1931 nurses accommodation.

In 1977, an addition was added to the 1961 nurses accommodation and known as the Walker Wing (after a recent Chairman of the Hospital) it incorporated the nurses' block and was constructed with an enclosed verandah on the northern side. The Walker Wing was later converted to flats for use by staff.

Work commenced on the Bindawalla Community Hospital in 1948, planned to be operated as a private hospital. In 1952, the government took over the Bindawalla Hospital, Gisborne Street, and incorporated it as part of the Wellington District Hospital. Patients, facilities and expenditure were gradually moved from the Maxwell Street Hospital to Bindawalla which became the Wellington District Hospital. The old hospital on the hill became known as the Old Hospital. Nursing home patients were admitted to the old buildings in 1974 and remained until its closure in 1989 when it was declared redundant.

After the closure of the Old Hospital, the University of New South Wales, in anticipation of occupying the buildings, carried out some upgrading, especially of the toilet facilities and fire exits, in the Barton and main wards. These were mainly

removed when they vacated the site: at the same time, some of the internal fittings of the main block, including several original fireplaces, disappeared. For a period, flats (in the previous nurses' and matron's quarters) were occupied by tenants. The buildings were largely empty from 1989 until 1997 and deterioration occurred. In 1993 the Walker Wing was destroyed by fire. The hospital was under the control of the New South Wales Health Department's Asset Management Unit, who placed it on the market. In 1997 it was purchased by private owners who have restored the Barton Ward, Old Nurses' Quarters, Wardsmen's Block, Paint Shop, Glasson Ward, Old Morgue and New Morgue.

**Condition and Integrity:**

The Walker Ward was destroyed by fire in 1993.

Since 1997, a number of the buildings have been restored including the Barton Ward, Old Nurses' Quarters, Wardsmen's Block, Paint Shop, Glasson Ward, Old Morgue and New Morgue. The other buildings including the Main Ward require restoration and repair work although they are in good structural condition there are inappropriate additions and some original fabric mostly fireplaces, iron detailing and joinery have been stolen/vandalised (2000).

**Location:**

About 6.5ha at 135 Maxwell Street, Wellington, comprising the buildings, gardens and west boundary federation style fence.

**Bibliography:**

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