



MEDICAL ADMINISTRATION

THREADS THROUGH TIME

DESCRIPTION OF INVESTIGATIONS AND FINDINGS RELATING TO THE WORLD WAR II AIR RAID SHELTERS AT REPATRIATION GENERAL HOSPITAL

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1. HISTORIC CONTEXT

From 1942 until 1947 the Repatriation General Hospital was under the control of the Australian Army. It was first known as the 105 Australian Hospital Springbank. The history is detailed in the book "The Repat" by Dr Peter Last.

Part of the hospital's history involved being prepared for invasion during the war. Apparently several air raid shelters were constructed on the Eastern side of the hospital to house patients & staff. The facilities are thought to include a fully set up operating theatre, recovery wards and general ward areas with triple bunk beds.

In 1947 the hospital was handed over to the Commonwealth and later in 1995 to the State. At some point the entrances to these shelters were covered over and their actual locations have been lost in time.

Many stories abound amongst staff and residents who remember the air raid shelters. The hospital took a decision in 1996 to research and document the locations of the installation in an effort to preserve this part of history. A collaborative project is being undertaken with the Flinders University Archeology Department. Oral histories have been accumulated revealing significant amounts of information and stories. There are tantalizing clues in old ariel photographs of the hospital on display in the Executive Officers corridor.

2. COLLABORATION

An agreement has been made for a collaborative research project to be undertaken between the Repatriation General Hospital and the Flinders University Archaeology Department, to enable the pooling of resources and expertise. The project has been organised as a community history project. It will involve archeology students completing surveys and field tasks . The major effort will be concentrated in a field school scheduled for September 2007

On 29 September 2006 Mr Chris Overland, past Chief Executive Officer provided delegated authority for Darren Renshaw and Ken Mayes to act as Executive Officers on behalf of the hospital, to facilitate the research project. Continuing support has been provided by Mr Geoff Tattersall, current Chief Executive Officer.

Principle leadership has been provided by the Flinders University through Dr Heather Bourke, Head Archeology Department and Dr Alice Gorman, Archeologist.

All work is governed under a University application to the Department of Environment and Heritage, who will provide a framework for the preservation of items of historic significance. All investigations will conform to a Code of Conduct and Risk Management Plan developed by the hospital in cooperation with the University.

A decision was taken to provide information to staff, patients and visitors during all phases as a community interest project. This provided avenues for further oral histories to be gathered.

3. THREADS TO FOLLOW

Finding the air raid shelters has been an extremely complex puzzle. There are lots of stories abounding. The shelters have been sealed and well hidden for 50 years. With the passage of time most remaining evidence has disappeared with landscaping and new building developments. A walking survey around the hospital shows various layered history – different styles of buildings, pathways, hatches, sewer covers, service points, storm water drainage etc.

Oral histories have pointed to various places of interest. We have decided to follow up every possible lead. The following stories define hospital investigations so far. It is hoped that one of them may lead to the uncovering of the air raid shelters in due course.

Research for the project was provided primarily by Elaine Hanneson. A significant collection of information and photographs have been gathered to support the Field School investigations. It has proved to be a very time consuming exercise, requiring intense analysis to join all the threads.

3.1 THE REPAT BOOK

THE THREAD...

Dr Peter Last published the book *The Repat* in April 1994. The book contains a wealth of information and early photographs of the site. There are several references to the air raid shelters. The book provided the key inspiration for this research project.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

Some of the photographs have been enlarged and framed in the Executive Corridor and also in the RGH Museum.

Dr Last presented a talk on Repat Hospitals on 19 July 2007. During question time we asked him about the air raid shelters – his reply was that everything he knows about the air raid shelters was in the book. He also stated that the air raid shelter story did not really hold his interest at the time.

FINDINGS...

Some photographs show evidence of the air raid shelter entrances. One photo of a group of patients on the lawn by Ward 3 clearly shows an entrance in the background. It is difficult to correlate the photos with the buildings in existence today. Copies of the book are available from the RGH Museum for \$10

3.2 EARLY RGH BUILDING PLANS

THE THREAD...

Dr Peter Last reprinted the only plan of the air raid shelter he could find (page 224). These plans were located in Assets Services.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

2 November 2006 permission obtained from Manager Asset Services to look for early plans. There are several plan storage areas distributed around the hospital.

There are two plan cabinets in the main Assets area. These contain fairly recent plans 1960's onwards.

There is another rack of plans and cardboard boxes in the storage shed behind the Repat Shop. These are older pre 1960 building and plant plans in no particular order.

There is a wooden cupboard containing about 100 Commonwealth tender files in the old Boiler House. These files date from about 1980s and show some building extensions.

The most recent plans are kept in the hospital's Property Management office.

FINDINGS...

We found early hand drawn plan mounted on cotton fabric dating from 1944 which seems to be the one that Dr Last used. The plans are very fragile and now in safe storage with the Veteran & Community Advisor Office for eventual conservation. These plans will be given to the RGH Museum. Also found some other paper plans that show the 'cut out' entrances 1 & 2.

It is has become apparent that many early files/plans/records of the RGH Military Hospital are missing. It is likely that these may have been archived with the Commonwealth Government.

3.3 LEATHER SATCHEL OF PLANS

THE THREAD...

One of the oral histories described a set of plans in an old leather case, that was given to the Repat Museum in the 1960s

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

The Repat Museum curators are not aware of these plans. Very littler material is available in the museum relating to this project.

15 November 2006 spoke to Marilyn Toop at Keswick Army Base. All old plans, photos and items from the early hospital days may have been archived in the National Archives in Angus Street Adelaide. Database is searchable.

Visited the Keswick Army Base Museum and asked the Museum Manager if he had heard this story. The museum does not hold anything from the hospital.

FINDINGS...

Evidence of these plans appears to be lost.

3.4 ENTRANCE NUMBER 1 & 2

THE THREAD...

Dr Last's book shows a small diagram of air raid shelter trenches.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

Located a very early set of plans paper on linen dated 1944 showing the shelter entrances. Printed aerial photo of hospital from Google Earth and overlaid plans on transparency to scale revealing location of entrances. Unfortunately the trenches seem to be directly under a private house.

Interviewed the house owner who knew about the trenches and confirmed that her brother had filled them in before the house was built.

The University conducted a specific dig at the site of entrance 1 in 2004. A cement pathway was found leading down to a gravel base (see pamphlet photos).

Another hole was dug near entrance 2 but only gravel base found.

FINDINGS...

It is impossible to access the full extent of the trenches because they are situated under the house and cement driveway.

3.5 ENTRANCE NUMBER 3

THE THREAD...

One of the oral histories indicated a third entrance was located near Carpark 5 and was always padlocked.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

The location of this entrance was lost when Carpark 5 was graded and bitumised. Located a construction plan of the Carpark in the Commonwealth tender files held in the Boilerhouse. No indication of any air raid shelter features.

FINDINGS...

The entrance is under car park 5 and requires further investigation with radar technology. On 28 October 2006 a detailed survey was conducted by the Archeology Department. Mapping exercise was completed. Many technical difficulties meant that the ground penetrating radar did not run properly.

3.6 CAR PARK 5

THE THREAD...

During the construction of Carpark 5 there was a story published in the RGH Staff Newsletter that an underground feature had caused a collapse and had to be backfilled with tons of rubble.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

This story appears to relate to 'the well' or was an air vent that was backfilled.

FINDINGS...

Magnetometer survey located some anomalies in southern end of carpark 5, however the data was very unreliable due to magnetic interference of the hospital infrastructure.

3.7 THE WELL

THE THREAD...

When Car Park 5 was being built the grader wheel collapsed down a hole in the ground.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

We traced one of the workmen involved in this incident who confirmed the story. Location marked with x on the bitumen on the western side opposite Day Surgery. When the grader was pulled back it revealed a shaft about 5 metres deep which was brick lined. The feature was considered to be a well and a decision taken to backfill. A five ton truck of rubble was dumped in the well and work continued.

FINDINGS...

Hospital not keen to dig up bitumen at this stage. The question remains whether it was a well or an air vent?

3.8 AIR VENTS

THE THREAD...

One of the early residents of the houses near Vascular Hut related that air vents used to stick up from the ground near the end of Francis Street.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

Searched for photo evidence.

FINDINGS...

Old photo in Executive Corridor shows possible vents in the paddock. The location would be near the Vascular Hut and since covered with garden landscaping.

3.9 LIBRARY TUNNEL - MAIN ADMIN BLOCK END

THE THREAD...

Ms Leslie Jeffers described a story that a tunnel runs between the Medical Library and the main administration block. It is supposed to link with the old Medical Superintendent's office, which was within the original building. The tunnel supposed to extend under Daws Road and come out in the Pasadena High School grounds, which was previously an army camp.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

The main administration building was extended in the 1960's. Additions and roofline changes are obvious when looking at the building from the front lawn area. The central part of the building existed in the early days and would be the logical place for a tunnel entrance.

12 October 2006 checked the plant room on the northern side of the building. Gated stairwell leads to a large plant room under the main administration building. Visual inspection of floor and walls shows no evidence of any tunnel access. There is a sump with automatic pumping system. There is a pipe coming out of the side wall which has a reasonable breeze blowing around it (which could just come from underfloor ventilation). No signs of hollow wall spaces or bricked in doorways.

Checked services hatches in the wooden/tiled floor of the main entrance. These are quite small and lead to pipes running through a shallow crawl space. The hatch near the Gents toilet shows deeper plumbing excavations under the eastern side of the building, but impossible to get into it.

Checked room doorway under RMO Lounge stairwell. Room contains electrical switchboard and no evidence of any other access.

Found an inspection hatch under the carpet in Medical Administration. Leads to shallow crawl space about 600mm deep containing wires and pipes. The underfloor foundations consist of brick walls with small window air spaces. Looked up and down under the wooden floor of the full length corridor - nothing of interest apart from some old beer bottles at the western end. Could not see into the southern side offices due to the foundation walls.

FINDINGS...

Located an early plan of A Block which confirms that the Medical Superintendent's office was now The Director of Medical Administration Office. Quentin Ward entered the underfloor space and confirmed there is no visible evidence of any tunnel.

3.10 LIBRARY TUNNEL – GUARD HOUSE END

THE THREAD...

It is rumored that under the Library is some cells and an armory. The cells were called “vagrant cells”. Lesley Jeffers recalls when she was a child her father was a guard in guard house. He showed her down a staircase. She has a sense of it being through a wooden hatch in a wooden floor. Lesley recalls seeing a tunnel leading off into the distance. It was said that the tunnel also went under Daws Road and came up in the army camp.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

In the 1960’s the Guard House was remodeled. It was originally two buildings under one common roof as per early aerial photographs. The buildings were joined and extended to become the Medical Library. The building was originally half its size, thus explaining the join in the floor slabs and the different ages of the roof tiles.

Met with Dianne Edwards, Librarian who confirmed that she had heard the stories. There is a bump in the carpet near the guard house end which had always intrigued her.

The first thing that is obvious is that the floor is no longer wooden. Perhaps a cement floor was put in to hold the weight of book shelves. We tapped the whole floor and lifted the carpet in many places. Found some hollow sounds in the middle of the floor opposite the main door. There is vinyl under the carpet. Any hatch may be under the vinyl or cement. The bump under the carpet is a cement filling patch in the shape of a small square walled area.

Visually inspected outside of library but no evidence of skylights or vents.

FINDINGS...

Need to find any old plans to accurately pinpoint trapdoor. Drilled the centre of the floor but unable to verify air space due to thickness of the slab. If a slab has been poured across the whole floor, then no access would be available, so further action has been curtailed.

3.11 DAWS ROAD TUNNEL

THE THREAD...

The tunnel from the Library is supposed to go under Daws Road and come up in the old army camp which was situated on the school oval

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

Old photo shows army camp across the road.

4 December 2006 Met Site Foreman for the new housing development and discussed possibility of finding old foundations. Permission sought to survey whole area. Surveyed with metal detector but only found nails, wire, bolts and washers. Graders have unearthed some old cement foundations but nothing appeared of significance. The site is slightly off-line with guard house.

On 23 March 2007 the E&WS dug a huge hole in Daws Road directly opposite the Guard House. They had to cut in deep draining from the new housing development into the main storm water pipe that runs parallel down the centre of Daws Road. The workman informed us that nothing unusual was seen under the road down to a depth of at least 4m.

FINDINGS...

Survey revealed evidence of occupation across the site, but nothing to indicate a tunnel entrance. A new housing development now covers the whole site.

3.12 GOODWOOD ROAD TUNNEL

THE THREAD...

One of the hand drawn mud maps in the oral history shows a tunnel going under Goodwood Road. A photo in Dr Last's book also shows what appears to be a path/mound leading from the shelter entrances across the paddock towards the old house behind Peter Vans.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

Walked the park, church and school. No evidence of any old cement hatches.

18 December 2006 we doorknocked the old house behind Peter Vans and interviewed Mrs Rasheed regarding any connections with tunnels under Goodwood Road. She has lived in the house for 50 years and does not recall any tunnels. There are no cellars under the old house.

Interviewed Manager of Peter Vans – he has no knowledge of tunnels or cellars.

FINDINGS...

Developments and landscaping appears to have covered any possible opening.

3.13 PASADENA HIGH SCHOOL TUNNEL

THE THREAD...

There supposed to be a tunnel from the old guard house leading under Daws Road and coming up in the old army camp (Pasadena High School).

Following a talk back radio segment in 2006, a student from Pasadena High School contacted us and advised that there was a tunnel leading down from the boys toilet block in the school.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

15 December 2006 Met Dean Low Principal and sought permission to survey the school. Discussed the story of tunnels leading from toilet block. Dean showed us the block which had a small locked door in the wall behind the ablutions. The door was opened and shows the pipework leading down into service tunnels. The way was blocked by building rubble so there was no access that way. Dean showed us the location of other hatches in a classroom which led to the service tunnels.

Entered the hatch and found an extensive complex of service tunnels under the main building. Tunnels run for hundreds of metres in an underground maze, but they are all 1960's variety cast cementwork.

The tunnels are about 2m deep and contain pipework and wiring. One section comes up under the boys toilets (see photos) and the small door can be seen. The area is dry and contains evidence of many mummified cats and rats.

FINDINGS...

No apparent connections with the hospital tunnels.

3.14 KITCHEN TUNNEL

THE THREAD...

The museum staff advise there are 'tunnels' under the main kitchen. 13 November 2006 Security Guard Mike showed us the access hatch where Fire Brigade went to investigate an underfloor alarm. The hatch is on the eastern side of the building behind a fenced area and next to an air conditioning unit.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

There is a crawl space under the whole kitchen about 600mm. Very difficult to move around with lots of service pipes.

A very unpleasant smell and dead animal carcasses. Noted that there was a lot of old fat running down the walls, from every spillage over the years. This means there are cockroaches that eat the fat. There are also lots of R A T S that eat the cockroaches. Over the years the ground staff have thrown rat baits under the kitchen. The result is a tomb of mummified rats peering out of every corner with lifeless eyes!!

FINDINGS...

No need to look further there.

3.15 MATRONS TUNNEL

THE THREAD...

The story goes that the Matron lived in a flat over near Hospice. It was said that she would often would disappear (down a tunnel) and reappear in the hospital, particularly on cold wet nights. The Matron supposed to have said that she could walk from the Hospice to Ward 17 underground.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

17 November 2006 Visually inspected the Matron Flat (called the Cottage) and grounds around Hospice. The Cottage was built in the 1960s. Appears to be no evidence of a tunnel entrance in or around the cottage.

Brioni, Security Guard advised us that she knew of a cellar under the Nurses Station in Hospice. Located air vent grill that opens into the atrium. Nurse Bev advised that there was a secret hatch and staircase under the carpet squares in the walk in cupboard. Permission obtained from Kate Swetenham, Unit Head to investigate the cellar.

The hatch was located and a reasonable wooden staircase exposed. This leads down to a very small cellar approx 3m x 2m. The walls are bagged freestone with some brickwork vents and cement floor. The atrium floorslab can be seen through the original external wall window casing.

2 August 2007 Quentin Ward, Property Manager advised that the atrium extension may have covered over the tunnel and the external wall in the cellar may be false. A second exploration was therefore arranged and we removed some of the stones from the cellar wall. Unfortunately only red clay was found and no void.

FINDINGS...

There does not appear to be any evidence of a tunnel leading off from this small cellar. There may be other cellars under the building.

The story is further validated by a nurse whos mother was also a nurse in Hospice. When she was a child she can remember going down a tunnel which was dark and scary.

Lesley Jeffers thinks that there was an old washhouse at the back of the hospice which may have been a more likely location, but this is now gone and new buildings built over the site. A visitor during the field school indicated that a hatch used to exist in the tearoom which is now under the floor of the equipment storage room.

3.16 HOSPICE HEDGE ENTRANCE

THE THREAD...

One of the oral histories indicated that there was an entrance near the hedge surrounding Hospice.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

The hedge is visible on the old aerial photographs. Conducted visual inspection but the hedge is long gone and unable to locate any evidence of entrance.

FINDINGS...

Evidence of hedge entrance appears lost under landscaping.

3.17 MORTUARY TUNNEL

THE THREAD...

30 October 2006 Lesley Jeffers advised that she was shown a cellar under the mortuary which had several doors leading off.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

Surveyed all rooms. No evidence of cellar. The vinyl flooring is quite new and may cover a hatch. Several large compactus have also been placed there and may be covering access. A service tunnel is said to exist between the Mortuary and the Boilerhouse.

FINDINGS...

Need to find old plans to pinpoint any trapdoors.

3.18 SPF HALL TUNNEL

THE THREAD...

David Millar from Staff Development advised that there is a crawl space under the stage in SPF Hall.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

30 March 2007 found doorway in backstage area leading to a crawl space under the stage.

FINDINGS...

A hatch opens under the stage area. Low crawl space with no evidence of any tunnels.

3.19 STORMWATER DRAINS

THE THREAD...

There are literally hundreds of hatches and covers all over the hospital grounds. Most of these are for plant access or storm water. Some covers are quite large such as the large round cover in the garden by Ward 6.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

All larger covers have been lifted. The large round cover by Ward 6 turns out to be a very deep storm water pipe. Darren noted the floor was moving and when a light was shone down it revealed a mass of huge cockroaches! This is where they live in the sewer pipes!

FINDINGS...

Sewer plans identify particular types of inspection points to avoid. These are quite deep and dangerous

3.20 THE SPIDERS LAIR

THE THREAD...

Some of the hatches in the hospital grounds are quite old and may be part of the underground labarynth. There is one at the south end of B Block next to the steps opposite AARU

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

The hatch is a dead end drain. Ken entered and examined the hole and found that the rim is full of red back spiders. Killed many and survived to tell the story.

FINDINGS...

Older hatches need to be examined with caution!

3.21 THE OLD SERVICE STATION

THE THREAD...

In one of the oral histories is the story about finding the end of a wall when digging for the fuel tanks in the service station on the corner of Daws Road and Goodwood Road.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

Service station now de-commissioned and fenced off. Noted some excavations occurred in December 2007.

FINDINGS...

Spoke to Foreman who confirmed they were doing soil testing to see if there had been any fuel leakages. Several holes were dug 4 metres deep but no evidence of underground structures.

3.22 MORTLOCK OVAL

THE THREAD...

Mortlock Oval was also the site of an army camp. Was there any underground connection with the hospital?

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

Visual inspection of the oval grounds shows major landscaping over the years. No evidence of any remaining concrete structures.

FINDINGS...

Too far away from hospital to be significant.

3.23 IPU

THE THREAD...

A visitor to the Field School indicated that there was a cellar under the old IPU theatres where they stored patient belongings.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

Master keys obtained from Security to inspect the underfloor space of IPU. There are several external hatches leading into the foundation areas. Explored with Elaine Hanneson and found substantial service areas. .

FINDINGS...

No evidence of any cellar. Took the visitor inside IPU but the internal facilities have been remodeled over the years and memories were faded. Located one floor hatch under the carpet which led to the foundation void.

3.24 THE THEATRE REDEVELOPMENT TRENCH

THE THREAD...

An oral history related a story that a contractor was digging a trench to lay pipes for the theatre redevelopment and accidentally broke through into a hidden stairwell. Inside was a staircase leading down to a room that contained beds and equipment all covered with dust. The contractor bricked up the entrance the next day and completed the pipe laying task.

INVESTIGATIONS SO FAR...

The location of this trench is impossible to pinpoint but it may have run down the eastern roadway past theatres. An incident of this nature may have been discussed at project management level.

FINDINGS...

Enquiries are continuing to locate past members of that project team.

4. FIELD SCHOOL

A major field school was conducted by the University in September 2007 to investigate all the points of interest. Major excavations occurred using hand dug trenches, machine dug trenches and water drill probes. Significant resources were applied together with the necessary academic rigor.

Entrances 1 & 2 were excavated and revealed significant evidence of trenches leading under a private house.

Carpark 5 was re-surveyed and a deep pit dug in the centre. No evidence of underground structures located at this stage.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The stories of the air raid shelters are intriguing with overwhelming oral and photographic evidence of their existence. Unfortunately current investigations and technology have not quite located their exact position.

Further lost evidence may appear, or a void or staircase may be discovered one day by accident during normal service excavations. Investigations will continue during 2008, until all leads are fully resolved. There are plans to demolish Matron's Cottage to enable redevelopment of the site. Property Management have indicated that a deep trench will be dug under the foundations in an attempt to find Matrons Tunnel.

It is hoped that eventual location, discovery and exploration of the air raid shelters will verify and preserve a significant part of this State's war time history.

Ken Mayes
Manager Medical Administration

14 February 2008