

Public Record Office Victoria, VA 5261 Bendigo Health, VPRS 18830 Bendigo & Northern District Base Hospital, Annual Report 1933-34

A DESTRUCTIVE DIAGNOSIS: THE BOMBING OF THE BENDIGO HOSPITAL

FEBRUARY 2026

includes references to medical conditions, racial language, and suicide

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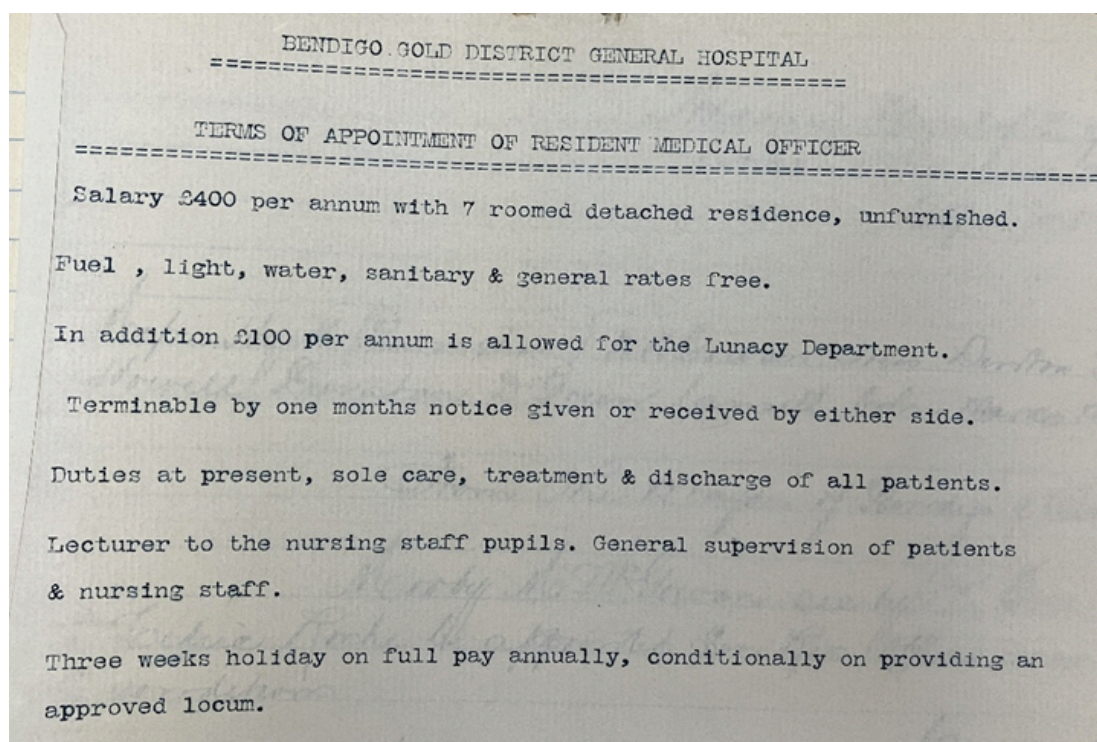
After the long years of the Great Depression, Victoria was on something of an upswing by the winter of 1934. In February, the world's first vehicle that combined the function of a truck and the comfort of a sedan – the Ford ute – rolled off the lines at Geelong. The MacRobertson Air Race from London to the Flemington racecourse was being heavily promoted by chocolate tycoon Macpherson Robertson. In Bendigo, the Mayor officially opened the renovated RSL Memorial Hall in Pall Mall, the occasion marked by a classical concert.

At the Annual General Meeting of the Bendigo & Northern District Base Hospital on Tuesday 10 July 1934, the secretary reported that memberships had almost doubled from the previous financial year but Bendigo City Health Officer, Dr Keith Gardner Kerr, reported the death rate for pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) in the district was 8.9 per 10,000 – much higher than the general rate of 4.5. Notified cases state-wide sat at more than a thousand, the third-highest communicable disease for the year behind diphtheria (6,500 patients) and scarlet fever (2,400). [1]

In the year to July, 27,000 patients had been admitted to the Hospital, first established in 1853 and then permanently on a sprawling ten-acre block bounded by Lucan, Arnold, Bayne and Stewart streets. A further 13,000 people were treated as outpatients by the 15 medical staff and 70 nurses. [2] The whole operation was overseen by an experienced board led by James Walshe, founder of the Institute of Hospital Secretaries and a Trades Hall Council president. The Honourary Indoor Surgeon had been with the Hospital since 1917, a Jewish doctor by the name of Morris Jacobs. Just two days after the board had met and Walshe appointed for another term as president, Dr Jacobs became the focus of an unprecedented event in Bendigo which – literally – shook the institution to its foundations...

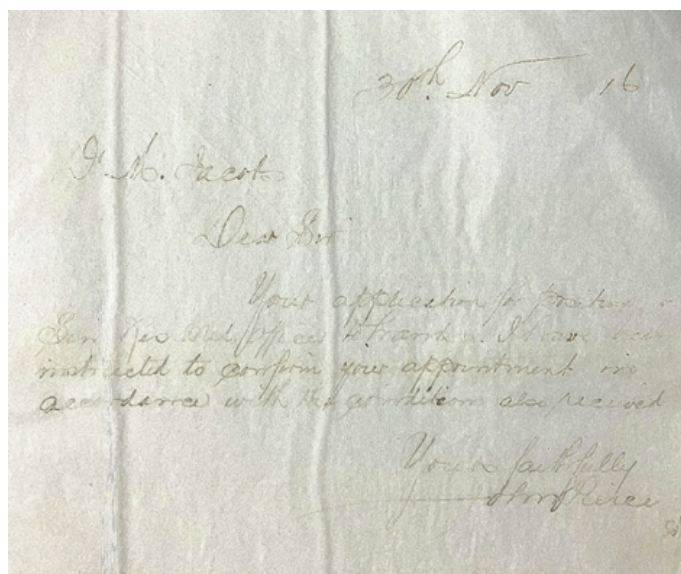
The Stationmaster's Son

At the age of eight, a quiet boy with brown eyes moved with his parents from Malven in Melbourne's eastern suburbs to the mid-Goldfields town of Taradale. Little Morris Jacobs was the son of stationmaster Simeon Jacobs, and his wife Hannah. The relocation would be his earliest experience with the area but certainly not his last. Simeon had undertaken courses with St John's Ambulance Service in his role as head of the railway station, and perhaps this sparked an interest in young Morris who went on to study medicine at Melbourne University. Life in country Victoria proved no obstacle – upon graduation he took up a junior residency at the hospital in Geelong, where he met his future wife Eva Fairbairn, before setting up private practice in the Riverina district of New South Wales (NSW), and in 1914, at Pyramid Hill, an hour north of Bendigo.



Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 18858/6 Bendigo Hospital Committee Minute Book, 1902-1922

In October 1916, the Bendigo Hospital Board of Management held a special meeting at the Shamrock Hotel to discuss applications received for the advertised position of Senior Resident Medical Officer. It was a role that commanded an annual salary of £400 (approximately \$50,000 in 2025 terms), in addition to a seven-roomed house with utilities, three weeks paid leave, and an additional £100 allowance for supervision of the Lunacy Department. [3]



30 November 1916
Mr M Jacobs

Dear Sir
Your application for position of Senior Resident Medical Officer to hand. I have been instructed to confirm your appointment in accordance with the conditions also received.

Yours faithfully ... for J Pierce

Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS
18869/5, Bendigo Hospital Letter Book

The position had been left vacant by Dr Robert Douglas, and four applicants were considered – Dr Kenneth Alexander, Dr Helen Kelsey, Dr Armstrong, and Dr Cedric Roche – with the latter two invited to call for an interview. The Board reconvened a week later and decided to offer the role to Dr Roche, and a residency as First Junior doctor to Dr Alexander. However by November 26, a further special meeting had been called at board president Barkly Hyett's legal offices to receive Dr Roche's resignation. They then considered a telegram sent from Pyramid Hill, an offer by Dr Jacobs to take up the Senior Resident Medical Officer role – as long as he be permitted three weeks to commence. In something of a reversal of usual process, Dr Green moved that a copy of the conditions be sent to Dr Jacobs with a request for him to return if approved, with an official application for the position.

By January, Hyett had formerly introduced Dr Jacobs to the Hospital Board and staff, and he officially commenced his role. Morris and Eva soon took an active part in the broader Bendigo community. Appointed to the inaugural committee of the Bendigo Trotting Club when it formed in 1923, a short time later Dr Jacobs joined the Bendigo Jockey Club board, and became a long-term member of the Zenith Freemasons' Lodge.



'Snapshots at the Bendigo Jockey Club', Table Talk, 21 Aug 1924, p30
(Dr Morris Jacobs)

Eva was particularly involved with the Hospital, serving as president of the Hospital Central Auxiliary for several decades. Jacob's service went well beyond the local district. He joined the ranks of Australians who brought their specialist skills to the war effort, first in the Great War with the 17th Light Horse and 2/24 Infantry Battalion.

In 1934, Dr Jacobs shared the role of Honourary Indoor Surgeon with Dr William Long at the Bendigo Hospital, and also ran his own practice from Roystead in McCrae Street (now 170 McCrae Street, opposite the St Killian's car park). It was there, on Tuesday July 10th at around half-past six in the evening, Dr Jacobs took a consult that would change the lives of people across Bendigo for years to come.

Just Another Quiet Thursday Night

The Rising Sun Hotel stands solidly on the corner of Arnold and Barnard Streets, and has done since the 1860s. To sit in the main bar during the day is to take in the expansive grounds of the former Hospital (demolished in 1989) beyond a high brick wall. Even today, the wall features remnants of broken glass shards added in 1882 to deter the young residents of the Asylum's Industrial School from making an escape.



Bendigo Regional Archive Centre collection

On the night of Thursday 12 July 1934, men like Joseph Cavagna, an agent from Quarry Hill, were arriving at the Hotel for a night out and weren't particularly interested in the view. Nonetheless, as Cavagna – who later claimed he was at the hotel to 'do business' – crossed the road at 9pm with his friend, he did notice a man, entering the side gate of the institution. [4]

The vista from the meeting room of the Bendigo Hospital instead captured the driveway to Lucan Street, and the forecourt with its grand fountain.

The occupants of the room could likely hear the steady cascade too, sending a mist of water to settle on a row of cars parked below the meeting room windows. These belonged to the ten doctors gathered at the Hospital that night for an impromptu conference of the British Medical Association (BMA). Honorary Surgeon, Dr Jacobs, however, was not among them. As they sat around the table, Dr Harrison noted a peculiar smell and thought perhaps one of his colleague's jackets had been ignited by an improperly tamped pipe. Matron Agnes Esler was in the sitting room of the new nurses' quarters while her trainee nurses saw to the usually quiet night shift.

In the Casualty Ward, Dr Turner was about to put a patient's broken arm into a splint when suddenly the two-foot thick walls shook, and all the windows in the room shattered, showering them with broken glass.

Patients woke in shock and fear, many beginning to seep blood from cuts on their hands and faces. Panes in the clocktower were shattered but the hands remained pointing to half-past nine. The explosion, it seemed, emanated from a basement storeroom formerly used as the butcher's cool store, and directly beneath the meeting room [highlighted below] where the gathered doctors had been thrown from their seats and hurled across the room, some bleeding heavily from head injuries.

In the old cool room, asbestos sheets had been ripped from the hot water pipe system and were hanging from the walls. Electrical wires were exposed, a door had been blown in. Large portions of solid cement wall around the basement window had been blown off. Boxes, cupboards, bricks and masonry were strewn about. Beyond the explosion site, furniture fell, fittings broke off, and wood splintered. Trolleys and wheelchairs tangled together. Every window pane at the front of the sprawling two-storey building, which included the casualty, outpatients and maternity wards, was smashed, glass strewn across beds, desks, passageway floors. Somehow, most of the light bulbs survived, and the utilities were all in order.



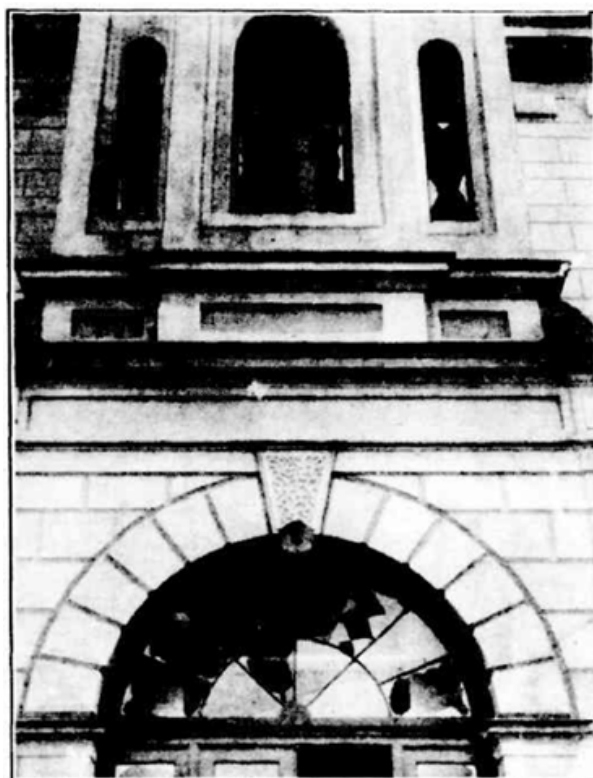
*Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS
18830, Annual Report Bendigo Hospital,
1938-39*



Public Record Office Victoria, VA 5261 Bendigo Health, VPRS 18830 Bendigo & Northern District Base Hospital, Annual Report 1933-34



'Hospital explosion was deliberately caused', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 13 July 1934, p7



'Glass was smashed wholesale', *Sun News-Pictorial*, 14 July 1934, p1

PATIENTS AND DOCTORS HURT BY FLYING GLASS

Windows Shattered and Motor Cars in Front of Building Damaged

BUILDINGS IN CITY ARE SHAKEN

'Mysterious night explosion partly wrecks Bendigo Base Hospital', *Sun News-Pictorial*, 13 July 1934, p3

The doctors' vehicles bore the brunt of the explosion, parked as they were adjacent to the blast site. The twisted mudguard of Dr William Long's single-seat coupe was found in the casualty operating theatre.

Dr Eugene Sandner's 'modern, streamlined' vehicle was practically 'blown to bits', with air vents and a rear-view mirror found up to 100m away. [5] It was only that he'd agreed to stay on for a consult that he hadn't been climbing into his car at the time. Many smaller fittings were never found.

The Rising Sun rocked with the force of the explosion, heard and felt as far afield as Goornong, 30km north-east of the city. The man Cavagna saw leaving the grounds was heard to say, 'Don't take any notice of that. It's an earthquake. We get them every morning for breakfast in New Zealand.' [6] Undeterred, drinkers rushed into the street to see a column of smoke rising from the vicinity of the Hospital. Those households adjacent to the Hospital had their windows blown out too. Rumours soon circulated as the city's police and firemen made their way to the site. A substance in a storeroom had ignited. Two nurses were dead. Several patients had been killed. A boiler had burst and set light to a gas line. Those living further away thought a sudden storm had struck.

Authorities were soon summoned. Captain James Marwick and a large group of his fireman arrived quickly but to everyone's great relief, no fire had broken out as a result of the impact. A team of plain-clothes and regular constables began an immediate inspection of the area. The curious and the ghoulish arrived on the scene, along with those who had relatives in the Hospital, and Sergeant William Gill had the difficult task of ushering them off the grounds. Hospital Superintendent Thomson stationed a guard at the gates to keep them there. More than half a century after its installation, the broken bottles atop the boundary wall had come in rather useful in deterring fence-jumpers. The crowd continued to build on Lucan Street, and had to be disbursed again as an ambulance arrived carrying three young men injured in a car accident on White Hills Road.

The head Sister instructed her nurses to knock out any glass still clinging to the window frames so the wind wouldn't blow further shards onto patients. With brooms and shovels, they began gathering the mess of glass, mortar and plaster. Others started to right equipment in the theatres and furniture in the wards. Along with electricians and hospital authorities, civic architect Godfrey Eathorne made a rudimentary inspection to rule out any serious structural damage that would require the evacuation of patients, and handed the site to Bendigo police who instructed all debris be left undisturbed until daylight.

Dawn Breaks

'How we got off so lightly,' pondered Dr Albert Thorne, 'is beyond me.' [7]

Authorities agreed. Eathorne's daylight inspection found some concussion – cracks in the walls, plaster shaken from the superintendent's office, the collapse of some sandstone in an old foundation supporting the floor – but otherwise the building was sound. He began drawing up a list of repairs for approval by the Board of Management who met the next morning.

Roof sheets to be secured.

170 panes of glass replaced.

Window frames and sashes in the Nurse's Home and clinic to be replaced.

Repair to floors, foundation and structure of the main building.

Repair of cracks and bulges to internal walls.

Reconstruction of the front wall where the blast had taken place.

The repairs began immediately, with Eathorne's team chancing upon fine midwinter weather for their weekend work to repair the ward windows. In total, the reconstruction cost more than £2,000 to carry out including more than £300 for glazing alone. Eathorne & Garvin, the chief architect's firm, offered to organise and supervise the work without charge. A reply was made to the Charities Board who offered to bear some of the cost of repairs, requesting that, in light of the Hospital's financial position, the Board fund the entire cost of repair.

Interestingly, the final cost to the Hospital for these works is difficult to pinpoint in the 1934-1935 Annual Report (VPRS 18830). Indeed, there is not a single mention of the incident or subsequent actions in the document. An amount of £666 is noted against 'Extraordinary payments (other)', a further £506 for 'Repairs to buildings', £161 for 'Repairs to plant & equipment', and an 'Intermediary maintenance' cost of £2,540. [8] Also confusing the true picture of the damage cost was the erection in the same financial year of the Kumala Private Hospital.

Further, the official Visiting Committee, charged with inspecting hospital operations and providing recommendations to the Board, made no notes in their report regarding the incident (VPRS 18832). In fact, rather unbelievably, they write just a few days later, 'inspected the wards, dispensary, kitchen and boiler and found all in a satisfactory condition'. [9]

July 17/34
 Messrs BR Rogers & J. Stanistreet visited
 the Hospital and inspected the Wards, dispensary,
 Kitchen & Boiler and found all in a satis-
 -factory condition. A recommendation was made for
 Gravel to be placed in front of the Boiler House.
 Visitors gate £7.12.6
 Outpatients £4.3.0
 £11.15.6
 BR Rogers
 J. Stanistreet

Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 18832, Minutes Weekly Meetings of Bendigo Hospital Visitors Committee, 1933-1952

July 17, 1934

Messrs BR Rogers and J Stanistreet visited the Hospital and inspected the wards, dispensary, kitchen and boiler and found all in a satisfactory condition. A recommendation was made for gravel to be placed in front of the Boiler House.

Visitors gate £7.12.6

Outpatients £4.3.0 (£11.15.6)

As well as approving the commencement of immediate repair works, the Board issued appreciation for the quick response of the Bendigo Fire Brigade, and sent a letter of commendation to Acting-Chief Commissioner of Police, William Mooney, for the actions of the local force and particularly of Constable George Hogben. The young nurses who immediately set out to calm bed-ridden patients were praised for their coolness throughout the emergency.

While the carpenters were repairing doors that Sunday, a public thanksgiving service was conducted by the Anglican Church's Dean Edward Schwieger. An invite was issued to 'medical, nursing, pharmaceutical and other kindred professions and those within the danger zone' to attend a service by the Lord Bishop of Bendigo at the All Saints Cathedral. The nurses sat together right at the front, headed by Matron Esler who took annual leave shortly afterward. Doctors Edwin Turner and Sandner read lessons after the special prayers were given.

'It is horrifying to think how Bendigo might have been bereft of its most eminent medical men... and how the matron, nurses, staff, officers and patients of that great institution were also in dire peril of their lives had not God willed otherwise,' said the Dean. [10]

After clearing the area of onlookers and making sure patients and staff were no longer at risk, police began to inspect the scene to determine the cause. A ten-inch length of burnt fuse was found, as well as a golden syrup tin lined with compressed brown paper, and other pieces of scorched wadding. It appeared that someone, 'with a maniacal purposefulness', had intentionally attempted to blow up the hospital with a home-made bomb. [11]



Detective William Sloan, reproduced with permission from the collection of the Victoria Police Museum

The Hunt Begins

The community was outraged. Local newspapers went into hyperbolic overdrive. Detailed reports, suppositions, editorials, all alongside photographs of the damage and various officials undertaking their investigations were spread across pages and pages of each edition. Detectives from the Criminal Investigative Branch (CIB) were sought, and arrived in Bendigo the following morning. Senior Detectives William Sloan and Harry Carey were joined by Detective Fred Hobley, a police photographer, and Keith Straw, an expert from the Government Explosives

Something of a re-enactment took place and it was soon determined that a person could have easily gained access to the window sill and left without being observed. There was no gatekeeper on the entrance, which was left open at all times, and the main building was nearly 200m from the street. A large stand of trees interfered with the view of the southern wing, as did the row of doctors' cars. Building works on Arnold Street also provided cover in the form of huge piles of excavated earth, bricks and building materials. Even if this were not the case, Hospital staff indicated that with over 100 patients on site, even at that late hour, it wouldn't have aroused suspicion to see a someone moving about the grounds.

All a criminal need do was walk through the gates on Lucan Street, lay his parcel on the sill, and leave as if a legitimate visitor.

Straw's examination suggested up to 14 plugs of gelignite had been used (around 2.3kg) but a local mining manager judged it to be closer to 39 plugs (6.6kg), based on the strength of the sound that reached his house half a mile away. The material was not difficult to come across in Bendigo, with all the major mines using it in their operations, and local suppliers not required to keep any records of sales.

The unknown bomb maker had been very liberal with the amount of explosive used but not particularly strategic with its placement. The way it had been settled on the window sill directed the blast outward, but had the device been correctly set, doctors meeting in the room above would likely have been killed or far more seriously injured. It appeared that the perpetrator had been unable to get the basement window open – had the bomb been placed inside the store room, experts predicted the whole main building would have been reduced to rubble. 'Even the worst type of Communist would not be expected to cause such an outrage to a hospital,' wrote the *Bendigo Advertiser*. [12] The police agreed. The placement below the administrative offices, immediately suggested to detectives that a grudge was the motive behind the action.

A theory that the target was the BMA was quickly discounted given the meeting was not one of the six general sessions held across the year but rather of an ad hoc nature, with the doctors themselves being unaware of it until they'd been convened by telephone only hours before. It was likely this attack then, was personal. As a consequence, medical superintendent Dr Thorne was instructed to stay out of town for a few days. Being victim of an explosion was not a new experience for Dr Thorne. He was nearby a Masonic Lodge meeting in Ouyen a decade earlier when a vapour lamp exploded in the Shire Hall and blew out one of the walls.

Sergeants set about inspecting the Patient Admission & Discharge Registers (VPRS 18854), checking on patients who'd recently been released. Two in particular stood out. One inmate of the Receiving Ward, where psychiatric assessments were undertaken, had made general threats against staff, but it was soon discovered he was being securely held at the Sunbury Asylum. Another, though not obviously discontent with the institution, had unexpectedly discharged himself Thursday evening and so was brought in for questioning. The Registers suggest that this man was Cliff Fraser, a labourer with an infected finger who'd been released into his wife's care that night.

Constable Gleeson said he'd seen many people inside the grounds after the incident but did not speak to any of them. What few witnesses there were found themselves being questioned. Nurses Jean McDonald and Jean Crawford didn't see anyone they thought suspicious. Behind the bar of the Rising Sun Hotel, new landlady Kathleen Raymond also noticed the man Cavagna had clocked crossing the road earlier. She saw him enter the pub just on half-nine and watched as her husband 'interrogated' him at the door. Later she saw the man back in the bar, gossiping that a nurse had been killed.

Beyond these leads, police had very little to work with. One unnamed suspect came in for particular attention and plain-clothes detectives drove to an 'unrevealed' destination 160km away to interview a suspect, but to no avail. Bendigo's Member of Parliament, Arthur Cook, stated it was 'evident that some mad-brained individual intended to do something that shocked Parliament'. [13] 'The best brains of the Criminal Investigation Branch,' he continued, 'have failed to obtain a clue which might lead to the arrest of the perpetrator of the outrage.'

A fortnight later, on instruction from the Chief Secretary of Victoria, Stuart McFarlane, the Victorian Cabinet agreed to offer a reward of £500 (around \$60,000) for information leading to an arrest, given it was 'beyond doubt that the explosion was deliberate'. [14] He described the case as more serious than one of isolated murder due to the number of patients and nurses placed at risk, and the 'public disquiet and apprehension' created in the community. At the same time, a £200 reward was approved for information into one such isolated murder case, that of 21-year-old Jean McKenzie, found battered to death in St Kilda a month before the bombing.

Time Passes

The repair works complete, Hospital life soon returned to its usual state of controlled chaos. The events certainly weren't forgotten but priorities changed. More than 18 months had passed when in March 1936, word spread an arrest had been made in connection with the bombing. Local Constable Hogben with Senior Detective Sloan were escorting a man back to Bendigo, charged with, by use of gunpowder or other explosive substance, unlawfully and maliciously damaging the Base Hospital, whereby the lives of certain persons were endangered. The officers had travelled to Katoomba in the Blue Mountains to interrogate a man known as Jack White but many Bendigonians recognised him by a different name.

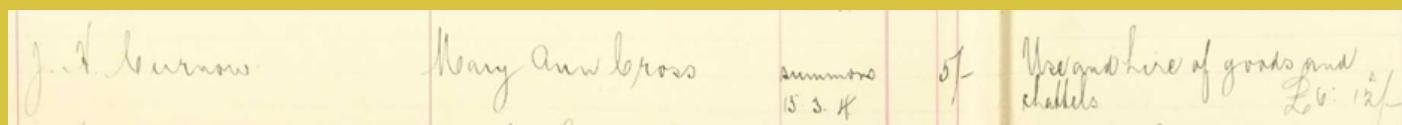
A 36 years of age, William John Leslie Cross' hairline was receding prematurely, and a scar traced across the bridge of his nose. He was below average height for 1936, with a labourer's hands – and a lengthy police record. Despite taking off for the Blue Mountains he was unable to remain under the police radar, recording convictions along the South Coast, then inland to Katoomba, for indecent language, drunk and disorderly behaviour, and begging. The first – in Parkes for theft – came just months after he'd allegedly set the bomb under the Bendigo Hospital.

SPECIAL INQUIRY.

VICTORIA.—Vide *Police Gazette*, 1934, page 328.—WILLIAM JOHN LESLIE CROSS, suspected of causing an explosion at the Bendigo Base Hospital, has been arrested at Katoomba for this offence and committed for trial.—(C.5943.)

South Australia,
Police Gazette,
No. 42, 15 Oct
1920

Cross had been born in Long Gully, one of Bendigo's less affluent areas, at the turn of the century but the family, headed by his miner father William and mother Mary, moved a number of times. There were only a few years between Cross and his brothers Charles and Bert, both born when the family resided in Vine Street and Mary was appearing regularly in the Petty Sessions Court for money owing to local traders. Nearly a decade separated these three brothers from eldest, George, and youngest, John, born in 1913. Relations between William and Mary deteriorated and by the time the boys were in their twenties, the couple were often living apart.



Public Record Office Victoria, Bendigo Courts, VPRS 7961 Petty Session Records, P1, 24 March 1904



Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 515, Central Register of Male Prisoners, 44084-44496, Volume 190, p166 CROSS

At this time, Cross dabbled with military service as a trainee but soon enough was brought up before the Donald court, charged with using obscene language. He later strung together a series of convictions across the goldfields – disorderly conduct, offensive behaviour, unlawful possession, wilful damage. This final charge followed an incident in 1929 where Cross had a drunken argument at the Law Courts Hotel (now the Courthouse Hotel on Pall Mall) with the landlady's husband. Once evicted, he punched out one of the windows, cutting his hand so badly he required hospitalisation. As he would do on many occasions, Cross pointed to illness and alcohol as the driving factors of his reckless behaviour.

The Hearing

A sticking point in the investigation from the start had been identifying a motive, though it turned out officers' initial instincts in reviewing the patient registers was on the money. Cross had been an inmate of the Bendigo Hospital almost as frequently as a prison cell. He'd been admitted on at least six occasions from 1929, and as an outpatient many more times, including at Dr Jacobs' consulting rooms in McCrae Street. One of these visits took place on the Tuesday before the explosion, on July 10, and this time, Cross was concerned he had a venereal disease. After an examination, the doctor wrote a note for his patient to pass to the hospital Superintendent, ordering further treatment for what he'd identified instead as a 'mental disease'. [15] Handing the sealed letter to Cross, he bid the man goodnight, expecting that he would make the journey up Nolan Street to the institution. 'As far as I recollect,' Dr Jacobs later said, 'There was nothing in the note that would annoy anybody. Nothing at all [I did not want him to see].' [16]

Much later that night, cab driver David Wilson was walking along Arnold Street when he was surprised by the sudden appearance of a man who had vaulted the hospital wall.

The figure asked him for a cigarette and as Wilson lit the gasper, he recognised Cross. 'They are trying to keep me there,' he allegedly told his acquaintance, gesturing toward the Hospital, 'I've got the jack, so I bolted.' [17] 'The Jack' was Australian slang for gonorrhoea, also known colloquially as 'the clap', and is contemporaneously referred to throughout both court and news reports as 'a certain disease'. At the time a particularly common sexually transmitted disease, the condition is caused by bacteria with painful symptoms that can cause infertility.

Wilson noted Cross seemed to be under the influence of alcohol, and told police as much a few days after the explosion. Others had stories to tell about Cross, though were not so forthcoming as Wilson, waiting until the suspect was safely under gaol cell lock and key almost two years later – and in a few cases, after the reward was announced – before telling constables what they knew. Sloan though was a canny copper who'd first been appointed constable in 1914 and had served in some of Melbourne's roughest neighbourhoods before joining the CIB in 1925. By his retirement in 1953, he would reach the rank of Superintendent at the busy Russell Street station. It took time to build a case and track down his suspect for the Bendigo Hospital bombing but he won out in the end, in spite of hesitant witnesses.

At a hearing on 30 April 1936, police magistrate Edwin Stafford heard Cross enter his 'not guilty' plea via law firm Cohen, Kirby & Co at the Bendigo City Court, and reserve his defence. What followed was a detailed retelling of the events leading to the crime and finally, a possible explanation for it.

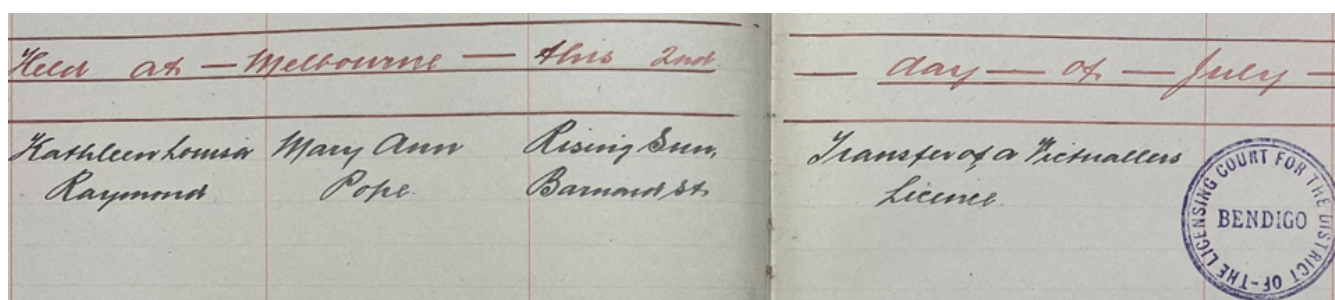
First Constable William Trewarne had visited the Cross household Tuesday night on Mary's request, having accused her son of calling her a 'foul' name, and found Cross sitting in front of the fire, his saturated grey coat hanging by the door. 'What have you been up to now?' he asked, and indicating his mother, Cross replied, 'It's not me, it's her. She picks on me every time.' [18] He claimed to have been trying to 'make peace' with his father, who was camped in a hut outside Bendigo and very sick, and this had evidently upset Mary. 'This is enough for a man to commit suicide,' he told the policeman. Later, Cross would claim the constable had threatened to 'vag' him, slang for being charged under the *Vagrancy Act 1852*, a charge regularly applied throughout the Depression.

Constable Trewarne saw Cross again on the night of the bombing as he patrolled the Law Courts precinct, and even said goodnight to the man, observing he was quite drunk – and carrying something in a new sugar bag.

His fellow officer, Constable John Gleeson, noted seeing Cross on the Hospital driveway shortly after the explosion. When Sloan asked him where he was that night, Cross claimed not to know anything, except that he'd been in a local pub with three other men.

'I did not do it. I was not there.' [19]

The detective pointed out that he was not in his 'local' pub, but in The Rising Sun, over 5km from his home. This seemed to prod Cross' memory. He admitted being in that pub because he was under the 'Blackfellows' Act' and the Sun was under new management. These details are true. In the Bendigo Courts Licencing Registers, we can indeed see a transfer of The Rising Sun victualler's licence from Mary Ann Pope to new landlady, Kathleen Raymond, just eight days earlier.



Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 1437 Bendigo Courts Licencing Registers, Unit 17 (1934)

To be under the 'Blackfellows' Act' was a colloquial term for being banned from the service of alcohol, or being under a prohibition order. The reference was to laws contained within various Liquor and Protection Acts which limited the rights of indigenous people in purchasing and accessing alcohol. Cross' hopes that he wouldn't be recognised by the new licensees and served a drink or three were realised with Kathleen Raymond.

Sloan testified that from his enquiries, he was of the opinion that Cross was 'mad with drink', having an imaginary grievance against Dr Jacobs and the hospital, something later witnesses would expand upon. In placing the explosive on the window sill, did not necessarily know what he was doing. Once the gravity of the situation occurred to him the following day, William Cross became Jack White – for the purposes of escape and collecting sustenance payments – and disappeared. Constable Hogben proceeded to give corroborating evidence for over an hour, entirely from memory – a feat for which he was praised by Stafford.

After two days, the experienced magistrate decided that Sergeant O'Keefe had prosecuted his case successfully and committed Cross for trial. The bail of a £200 surety – in modern terms, approximately \$24,000 – with two further payments of £100 was not met and the prisoner was returned to Bendigo Gaol on the hill.

The Trial

On June 23rd, the usual court staff filed into the court house on Pall Mall, along with a panel of jurymen ready to hear evidence from a wide array of witnesses before Mr Justice Charles Lowe.

George Allison, a local cook, said he'd camped with Cross some days before the explosion and heard him in a wild tirade against Dr Jacobs. After the event, Cross muttered, 'Something's going to happen to me today. I don't know where to break for.' Cross denied this, claiming to only have seen Allison at the Rosalind Park Hotel and gave the name of second man as an alibi. That witness had since died.

Frank Harles, saw-sharpener of Flora Hill, was at the Showgrounds sheep pens for work when Cross told him of his 'set' on a particular doctor. He'd discharged himself from hospital without being cured and said he was going to blow up the medical man, citing his knowledge of making Mills bombs (grenades) and ability to source ammunition from 'across Eaglehawk way'.

Echoing Allison's evidence, Harles said Cross declared he'd best roll up his swag and get on his way before the police came after him. In that swag, he claimed to have seen a three-foot length of fuse. While he knew of the Eaglehawk Magazine, Cross told the Court, he'd never seen it or stolen anything from it, nor did he know how to make a bomb or use explosives. Any prospecting he'd done had been undertaken only with a shovel and tin pan.

When asked why he hadn't made any moves to stop Cross absconding, Harles replied, 'Madmen are hard to deal with and I did not want to put my nose in it. I thought the police would know, and I went to Rochester soon after.' [20] Cross' counsel Geoffrey Wyatt was onto Harles immediately. 'You did not go to the police until there was a reward of £500, and then you rushed off as fast as you could go,' the defence lawyer levelled, though Harles in rebuttal claimed, 'I didn't rush', and that he would give £100 of any reward he was entitled to – 'the lot' in his words – to the Hospital.

It was suggested Cross was something of a 'romancer', using women across town for lodgings and access to alcohol. Boarding-house keeper, Ellen Lynch, was one of them. He took an excited fit in her kitchen after asking her to read the letter given to him at the surgery, when he then exclaimed, 'I wont forget Dr Jacobs!'

Annie Wetzler, a widow staying at the Rosalind Park Hotel, was another. When she'd seen him that night, he had two sugar bags with him, and told her he'd better take them, else 'somebody might be taking a look'.

Cross showed her the letter. 'Dr Jacobs gave me a letter to take the Hospital making out I had a bad disease,' he exclaimed, 'I will fire the doctor's house and burn him out and roast him and his wife.' Annie tried to soothe her friend but he only became more excited. 'If I don't burn him out, I'll blow him up,' he raged, 'You'll hear of a tragedy before the week is out.' Naturally Cross denied the claim, suggesting he might have used the words 'blow up' but as slang, as in 'to talk straight to him'. That Saturday, after the bombing, Annie claimed to have seen 'a terrible expression' on his face.

Further locals testified to hearing Cross make threats against Dr Jacobs, including to blow him up, and the hospital, or alternatively, to 'burn him up and roast him alive'. Cross labelled many witnesses as liars, merely attempting to 'frame him up'. When asked why his own story altered from his initial statement, he claimed to have been 'handled a bit rough' in the Katoomba interview room, enduring the 'third degree' and physical assault by Sloan and Hogben. Why, the Bench pursued, had he not raised this in the initial hearing? The prisoner's response was simply that he'd not been asked.

Mr Justice Lowe asked the Crown to call an additional witness, and called a further two himself. The jury retired just before 6pm and returned at 9pm to rehear some of the evidence submitted. An hour and a half later, they still couldn't agree on a verdict and were discharged with a second trial date set at the Court of General Sessions.

Judge.	Verdict.	Sentence, &c.
Lowe	Jury disagreed accused remanded for further trial at the Court of General Sessions at Bendigo on 7 th July 1936	

Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS
3524, Criminal Trial Brief Register II,
case 378

Starting All Over Again

On the morning of July 7th, Cross again stood before a jury and Judge Josiah Wasley to again enter a plea of 'not guilty'. Soon though, the men of the panel, including tailor William Ashman, orchardist Nicholas Cogley, and butcher Ron Nancarrow, were taken to the Bendigo Hospital for a tour of the site and shown important areas including the wall on Arnold Street.

This time, Cross was well versed in his evidence:

'I was living with my mother in Bendigo. I was not in the showgrounds as Harles said. I went to see Dr Jacobs on Tuesday because Constable Hogben had spoken to me and said he'd heard certain things and he was in a position to 'vag' me if I didn't get hold of myself and get cured. I went to Dr Jacobs to show I was making efforts to be cured. He wrote me a note and said, "You take this to the Hospital and it will be right."

He read the note to me and after seeing Dr Jacobs, I had a few drinks and went home a little after 7pm where I had tea and a lecture started again about drink. It ended in the Constable being sent for. I left home that night but was not in Arnold Street at any time. It was not true that Wilson saw me jump over the wall, I do not know him and have no recollection of speaking to him. I remember speaking to Allison at the showgrounds on Wednesday morning, and Harles may have been there. I didn't have a conversation or show him the contents of my swag, or tell him I had a piece of fuse.

I was about the town drinking on Wednesday but did not tell Harles I was going to the Hospital for treatment. I may have sent a note to Mrs Wetzler but did not tell her I'd roast Dr Jacobs. I said I would blow him up, not to Mrs Wetzler but to a man I sold my tent to for £5. When he asked what I wanted the money for, I told him "I want to buy some chemicals." He said as a Government doctor, Jacobs had to treat me and I said, "well next time I see him I will be justified in blowing him up." Mrs Wetzler is not telling the truth and she didn't read my letter.' [21]

He recanted this last statement, noting he wouldn't say she didn't since he couldn't actually remember. On the Friday night, he told the Court, he took dinner with his mother and left to see Miss Lynch. Upon returning home, there were sugar bags out with provisions for him, the note 'For Bill' pinned to the top one. These, he said, must be the bags various witnesses saw.

After drinking, he returned to the lodging house at around 11pm and left the next afternoon because 'I was sick of the place [Bendigo] and it was sick of me'. His brother lived in NSW and he decided given the threat of being 'vagged', he would go there to straighten himself out.

Judge Wasley addressed the jury. He directed them to look to motive, in this case, umbrage taken with the treatment recommended by Dr Jacobs, and consider the threats Cross had used publicly in discussing his grievances. They were told that the burden of proving the charge beyond reasonable doubt rested upon the Crown and they would need to consider both circumstantial and direct evidence carefully. There was no suggestion, he said, that the various witnesses were not telling the truth. They should consider that Cross told Detective Sloan in Katoomba he didn't remember where he was in order to buy time to construct a plausible story, and his claims about Crown witness statements helping his memory were false. The one witness to corroborate his version of events was deceased. Even in light of the evidence given by people at The Rising Sun Hotel, could Cross have placed the bomb, lighted the fuse and got to the bar before the bomb went off, he asked the jury? If they were not satisfied with any of these elements of the evidence, he claimed, they would need to acquit.

The second trial was just three days in length, and this time the jury took less than three hours to deliberate upon their verdict – guilty.

William John Leslie Cross	By the explosion of gunpowder or other explosive substance unlawfully & maliciously damaged or endangering whereby the lives of certain persons were endangered.	4th July	Not Guilty	Guilty	Sentenced to imprisonment for five years with hard labor.
					Duplicate Return of Prisoners committed sent. 9/7/1936

Public Record Office Victoria, Bendigo Courts, VPRS 17012 P1 2 Court of General Sessions Criminal Record Book

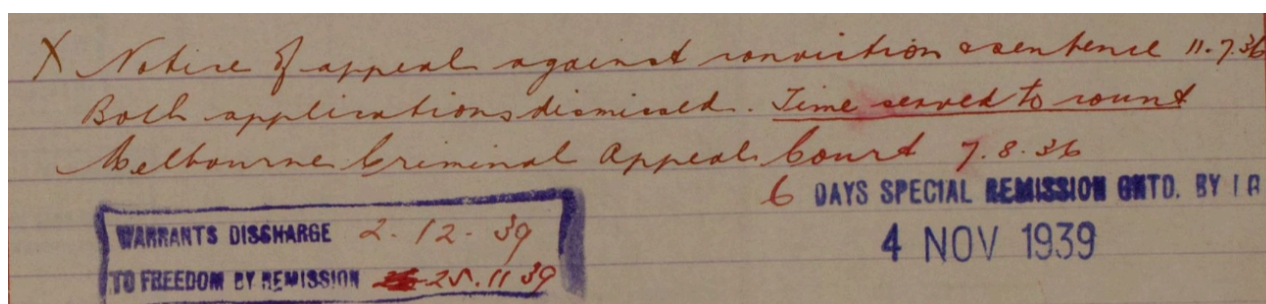
Upon the judge passing sentence of five years' imprisonment with hard labour, Cross sat down abruptly – or swooned, or staggered, depending on which newspaper is consulted – and had to be carried from the court. Mary Cross had a fit of hysterics outside the court room, crying, 'My poor boy, you are not guilty!' She made a move to approach Judge Wasley, asking to speak with him, but he declined. 'It is too late,' he said and added, somewhat cruelly, 'but a mother might have been called to give evidence for her son.' [22]

The maximum penalty was 15 years, and that, said Judge Wasley, would not be too much without the mitigating circumstances, like drinking and mental health. 'You have shown yourself to be a man of some intelligence,' he said, 'If your mind had not been warped by drink, I don't think you'd have committed this offence. But the crime is so serious, one cannot look at it with any degree of leniency – it is fortunate that you've not been charged with murder, that some people were not killed.' [23]

Interestingly, even after the appeal had been heard, the £500 reward was never collected. The following year however, a woman named Ellen Pascoe claimed in court, having accused Constable Evans of using insulting language, that she'd been recipient of that reward, or at least a portion of it, but had no idea why despite being involved 'behind the scenes' in the investigation. [24]

Final Throes

Cross' counsel, Wyatt, explained that despite his client's desire to appeal the verdict and sentence, it was difficult to lodge because his client insisted on his innocence. 'It does not impress anybody much to still say he is innocent,' the Judge explained, 'The whole trouble in this case was caused by drink. I think his mind, to a great extent, is gone. I don't think he realised what he was doing.' Wyatt emphasised Cross' mental strain, having been pursued for two years and spending three months in prison already. [25]



Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 515, Central Register of Male Prisoners, 44084-44496, Volume 190, p166

His Honour, Wyatt said, should not deal with him as a man who had committed a crime in full possession of his right mind. Instead, instructed by the public solicitor, William Fazio lodged a leave to appeal, relying upon ‘contradictory evidence of the main Crown witnesses’ and claiming the sentence was excessive in light of the circumstances. Crown Prosecutor, Maurice Cussen, argued the finding and sentence were sound and the application was ultimately dismissed. Cross was soon taken from Bendigo Gaol to Pentridge in Coburg where he would serve time until an early release in November 1939.

With no admission from the accused there was still no definitive explanation as to why Cross decided to set the bomb where and when he did, or why he thought his actions were an effective way to target Dr Jacobs. Perhaps alcohol played a role when it came time to set the bomb he’d otherwise so carefully constructed. While reporting of the case covered many column inches in the *Bendigo Advertiser*, no editorial on the matter was printed.

The Aftermath

As a result of the explosion, a Bill was prepared for the Victorian parliament which resolved to tighten laws relating to unauthorised possession of explosives, the law at that time being considered obsolete. However a perusal of the Government Gazettes and Hansard shows no such Bill being tabled or changes being made.

The financial fall out was also subject to much consideration. Despite the damage done to the Hospital building and the loss of equipment, the insurance company would not pay out on the policy. At a meeting of Country Hospitals Association (CHA) delegates, Hyett stated that in more than 70 years, the Hospital had paid out around £8,000 in premiums – including £146 in 1933 – and never had a single claim paid out.

This, he suggested, was reason enough to explore a scheme of internal or government insurance. ‘On figures,’ agreed chairman Dr Thompson, ‘it seems that hospital insurance is a profitable business. There seems no reason why we should not receive benefits from it ourselves given the risk taken by the insurers is small.’ [26]

They determined to ask the Executive to investigate the possibility of a self-controlled scheme, later specified as insurance against fire damage. By 1940, the CHA decided to abandon the idea because the Metropolitan Hospitals Association refused to support it.

Not until 1996 when the *Victorian Managed Insurance Authority Act* was introduced and a government insurer and risk advisor appointed, does it appear Barkly Hyett's advice was finally acted upon.

Central to the story but not materially impacted, Dr Jacobs continued on with the Bendigo Hospital, taking time out in 1940 to serve in WWII with the Assistant Director of Medical Services office.



'Bendigo's Centenary Cup meeting', The Australasian, 1 Dec 1934, p25 (John Lienhop and Dr Morris Jacobs)

Despite being in his fifties, his return to active service was passed on the basis that he was 'young enough for the performance under active service conditions of the duties of his appointment.' [27] In 1945, at the age of 61, he was discharged with the rank of Colonel. By now, Dr Jacobs had aged well into his annual role as Father Christmas for the hospital's roving pantomime for patients on the wards but 1952 would be his final time donning the costume. Returning home from the Bendigo Jockey Club's winter race meeting, Dr Jacobs collapsed behind the wheel of his car. When he was discovered, it was too late for revival. His 37 years with the Hospital was honoured by the Board of Management through a minute's silence at their next meeting. Following a large funeral at Fawkner, his practice was put on the market and eventually taken over by Dr William Straede.

And what of Cross?

Upon his release from Pentridge in November of 1939, the bomb maker became largely transient. One February afternoon in 1941, the diners in Mildura's Manhattan Café bore witness to a man enter and demand a steak lunch, kicking doors and windows, and punching waitress, Mrs Turner, before leaving. The rude man who appeared drunk was Cross, who returned soon after and threatened to cut the owner's ears off. While Cross begged for mercy due to his alcoholism, the police thought otherwise. 'This man deserves no leniency,' Detective Long told the court, 'He made a nuisance of himself and returned to create another disturbance.' [28] Kent JP wondered why men came to Mildura to work and then spent all their money on drink, before sentencing Cross to time in Ballarat prison.

The pattern continued through to December 1947 when Cross was released from Pentridge for the final time after being sentenced to spend time there seven times following his major stint for the bombing. Indecent assault, insulting words, drunk and disorderly, insufficient means, wilful damage – they all featured in Cross' record from Mildura to Numurkah, Horsham to Shepparton. It's unclear what brought about Cross' disappearance from the court lists by 1950 but we do know he was in Echuca upon his death in 1959. He remains there to this day, interred under the sobriquet of 'Jack Cross'.

103. 41	27-8-42 20-4-43	27-6-44	19-12-44	11-7-45 26-12-47
Unlaw. assault Indec. Long Threat words	Wil. Damage Damages Ins words	D. & R. is.	Offen. behav.	Ins Means Dr. Dis
Mildura D. S. Ch. of B.	Mooroopna P.S. Ch. of Bench Wangaratta	Horsham P.S.	Mooroopna	Numurkah Pelly. Pers Shepparton P.S.

Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 515, Central Register of Male Prisoners, 44084-44496, Volume 190, p166

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Conversions based on relative purchasing power and calculated using Thom Henry's calculator <https://www.thomblake.com.au/secondary/hisdata/query.php>

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- [3] Public Record Office Victoria, VA 5261 Bendigo Health, VPRS 18858/6 Bendigo Hospital Board of Management Minutes 1902-1922
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- [5] 'Hospital explosion was deliberately caused', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 13 Jul 1934, p7
- [6] 'Bombing of hospital: disagreement by jury', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 Apr 1936
- [7] 'Doctors' cars damaged', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 15 Jul 1934
- [8] Public Record Office Victoria, VA 5261 Bendigo Health, VPRS 18830 Bendigo & Northern District Base Hospital, Annual Report 1933-34
- [9] Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 18832, Minutes Weekly Meetings of Bendigo Hospital Visitors Committee, 1933-1952
- [10] 'Hospital explosion search for perpetrator', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 18 Jul 1934
- [11] 'Hospital explosion was deliberately caused', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 13 Jul 1934, p7
- [12] Ibid
- [13] Supplementary Estimates – Assembly, Hansard, p561
- [14] 'Explosion at hospital', *Border Morning Mail*, 3 July 1934, p1
- [15] 'Arrest after 21 months', *Daily News WA*, 30 Apr 1936, p2
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- [20] Ibid
- [21] 'Accused gives evidence', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 15 Jul 1936
- [22] 'Bombing of the Hospital: Cross found guilty', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 16 Jul 1936
- [23] Ibid
- [24] 'Constable charged', *The Age*, 5 Feb 1937, p7
- [25] 'Bombing of the Hospital: Cross found guilty', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 16 Jul 1936
- [26] *The Weekly Times*, 6 Oct 1934, p16
- [27] National Archives of Australia, B883, VX138508, Item 6698771
- [28] 'Was going to cut café proprietor's ears off', *Sunraysia Daily*, 5 Mar 1941, p1