

## **BENDIGO: Déjà Vu in a Time of Disease**

Here we explore the BRAC collection by taking a look back at Bendigo's response to the outbreak of another infectious disease – smallpox – in 1872 and see no matter how much changes, some things stay the same...

**NOTE: This article contains sensitive themes that some readers may find upsetting**

At the time of writing, the City of Greater Bendigo is living through a declared pandemic; the growth of a previously unknown disease in humans, COVID-19, has led to a significant official response by governments trying to protect the community as well as varying responses in the community. In 1872, Bendigo (then known as Sandhurst) was similarly on the cusp of a substantial threat to public health when the dreaded smallpox was discovered in a household at Long Gully.

Smallpox (caused by the *variola* virus) was certified as officially eradicated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1980 but prior to that was a highly contagious disease, being spread by both direct contact and through the air, that carried a risk of death of around 30%. Outbreaks would spread rapidly through a community and caused a rash, fever, digestive issues and fatigue. Dr Edward Jenner's work in late 18<sup>th</sup> century led to the development of a reasonably effective vaccination which was first sourced for use in Australia in 1804<sup>i</sup>.

### **ON OUR SHORES**

While it is widely reported that a significant contributor toward COVID-19's introduction to Australia was the *Ruby Princess* cruise ship, in July 1872 the smallpox outbreak in Bendigo was traced to the steamer, *Hero*. Despite reports of smallpox having been discovered on board the *Nebraska* which carried passengers including Joseph Sutcliffe who subsequently died of the disease, to Auckland, transferring passengers on the *Hero* were permitted to disembark at Sydney and later in Melbourne without quarantine<sup>ii</sup>. A telegram seen by *Bendigo Advertiser* staff stated that a report had been made of an illness on board *Hero* but that 'the surgeon of the vessel declined to say the nature of the disease'<sup>iii</sup>. In Sydney on July 22, the surgeon himself was reported to have smallpox<sup>iv</sup>.

### **THE DISEASE REACHES BENDIGO**

On board both the *Nebraska* and then the *Hero*, was Cornish miner, John James, 33, who had tried his luck on the Californian goldfields and decided to make his way, with his wife Rebecca and six children, to Australia. The James family remained in Melbourne just a day after docking before making for Sandhurst in early July where they went straight to Long Gully, at the time 'one of the most thickly populated parts of the district'<sup>v</sup>. Here the family initially lodged with Thomas Sherlock and his family. Sherlock had also come to Sandhurst from California ten months earlier with his family and lived in a four-roomed house 'at the rear of the Manchester Arms' Hotel<sup>vi</sup>. With the addition of the Jameses, this placed six adults and eight children in the 20' x 20' 'miserable tenement'<sup>vii</sup>.

On Wednesday, Emanuel James, six months old, fell to the disease, and his sister, two-year-old Sarah, the following day. Both were buried at the White Hills cemetery that night. Grace, 13, Edward, 9, and Matilda James, 6, along with Sarah Sherlock, 3, had subsequently contracted the disease and on the Saturday, Matilda also died, her little body wrapped in a sheet soaked in disinfectant and buried with her siblings at White Hills. The *Bendigo Advertiser* reported that by Saturday 6 July, 'nearly all members of both families – with the exception of the mothers – were smitten and lay prostrate'<sup>viii</sup>.

DEATHS.						
Name.	Address.	AGE.			Cause of Death.	Remarks.
		Y.	M.	W.		
Not named Dungham	Little Iron Back	"	"	12	Debility	
Albert Edward Hague	Keir Street	7	"	"	Scarlatina	
Matilda James	Lower Gully	6	"	"	Varicella	
Alexander Crawford	Bendigo Hospital	42	"	"	Lumbar Abscess	Pneumonia
Andrew McEvoy	Hospital	50	"	"	Miner's Accident	
James Bartlett	Sheephead	37	"	"	Rupture of Aneurism of the descending Aorta	
Edward Wells	Golden Square	52	"	"	Congestion of Lungs	
James Moyle	Honeyuckle Street	59	"	"	Phthisis Pulmonalis	
Charles Kingbell	Greasy Flat	39	"	"	Consumption	

Excerpt from weekly return for district Health Officer for week ending 18 July 1872 showing death of Matilda James<sup>ix</sup>

Georgina Robertson, a neighbour with two daughters of her own, had been helping to nurse the sick children and soon contracted the disease herself. In just a week, a further two cases had been reported near Jobs Gully, a miner named Clemo was diagnosed at Eaglehawk, and symptoms had been detected in George Keys, who lodged at Bernal Street (now Chapel Street) with a man named Salamon, who of had worked on a miners' claim with John James.

Sandhurst's Health Officer at the time was Inverness-born Dr John Cruikshank MD, a 'genial', six-foot-tall honours graduate of Edinburgh University who had previously served as surgeon for the Scots' Greys regiment<sup>x</sup>. Cruikshank emigrated from Scotland in 1859 – it was reported that this was because of a bronchial condition, and that the family had been ruined by the British Government's emancipation of slaves in the West Indies where Cruikshank's father owned plantations. Possibly for both reasons, he arrived on the goldfields initially to oversee the health of men working on the railways but by 1861, had been appointed health officer at Sandhurst, a post would hold for 27 years.

It was not until Friday 5 July that Dr Cruikshank was alerted to the deaths of the James children by Dr Atkinson. Dr Hugh Boyd had been attending the patients and not thought their condition serious; during a short absence, Dr Atkinson saw the children in Boyd's stead and despite immediately directing that the Chief Medical Officer to be informed, the telegraph was not sent. This led to several days passing before the cases were appropriately acted on.

Upon the eventual communication to Cruikshank, the Health Officer reported the matter verbally to Mayor Duguld Macdougall, who accompanied him on an inspection of the houses. Victoria's Chief Medical Officer, Dr McCrea, was finally telegraphed. Macdougall instructed the town clerk, George

Fletcher, to arrange workmen and materials for the construction of 'an iron sanatorium or temporary hospital on the ranges at the head of Long Gully'<sup>xi</sup>.

The advice of the medical men was that both families were to be removed to the new sanatorium, with the healthy members to tend to the sick ones, and only doctors and approved medical staff allowed to enter the securely-fenced compound.

Dr William McCrea had been appointed to the role of Victorian Chief Medical Officer in 1853, and had previously overseen the successful suppression of smallpox outbreaks in Melbourne. He telegraphed Fletcher to confirm he would arrive at Sandhurst on the first available train.

E. T. NO. 1  
500,000-13 | 7E.

Telegram of Ten Words can be sent to any Station in Victoria for One Shilling.

**BY ELECTRIC TELEGRAPH.**

No. Words 17 NO FEES TO BE PAID UNLESS STAMPED HEREON.

Check OK Dated Melbourne 5.7.1852

The following despatch has been received for delivery, subject to the Regulations and Conditions under which Telegraphic Messages are authorized to be transmitted in Victoria.

Telegram for The Town Clerk Sandhurst

Dr	1	McCrea	2	will	3	go	4
to	5	Sandhurst	6	by	7	first	8
train	9	tomorrow	10	have	11	a	12
car	13	ready	14	to	15	meet	16
him	17		18		19		20
	21		22		23		24
	25		26		27		28
	29		30		31		32

(Signature) W Wilson  
Board of Health

\* For Regulations and Conditions see other side.

Telegram sent by Dr McCrea to City of Sandhurst Town Clerk<sup>xii</sup>

The Borough of Eaglehawk had recently appointed Dr John Thom, another Scotsman, to the post of Health Officer; he had arrived from Michigan USA where he had served the army during the civil war and resided as a bachelor with his brother, Robert and sister, Agnes. On McCrea's initial arrival to

Sandhurst, Thom and a deputation from the Borough also met with him, arranging an inspection of the infected cases that had since appeared in that area.

While Dr Cruikshank was 'unremitting' in his attendance at the sanatorium, in order to continue his duties as district Health Officer, Gaol Surgeon and GP, he indicated that he'd be unable to go on overseeing the sanatorium as it would require him to adhere to strict quarantine; he was also having trouble finding a cab to take him to the facility. While this move was explained in full by Cruikshank, and viewed as 'proper and prudent' by the *Bendigo Advertiser*, several councilors took exception and there was some debate later in the year about whether he had effectively resigned from all his municipal duties, and whether he should be paid<sup>xiii</sup>.

As a result of Cruikshank's move, Dr McCrea appointed Dr James Murray – who had previously put his hand up for the job but at that point was not required – as surgeon to the Sandhurst smallpox sanatorium. Murray was a Scottish doctor who had authored the pamphlet *Smallpox, Chickenpox & Vaccination* following the Melbourne outbreak in the late 1860s<sup>xiv</sup>, and overseen the Melbourne Sanatorium for some time. Before he left Sandhurst, he gave directions to Cruikshank for the vaccination of every resident in the vicinity of the Sherlock house, fumigation and carbolic wash for the interior and exterior of affected houses, and the procurement of a specific vehicle for patient transport<sup>xv</sup>.

## **COMMUNITY RESPONSE – MEDIA, MUNICIPALITY & THE MASSES**

### *THE MUNICIPALITY*

Recently China's efforts in building a purpose-built COVID-19 hospital in just ten days was widely reported<sup>xvi</sup>, but in Bendigo in the 1870s, the threat of a smallpox saw the erection of an infectious disease sanatorium in under two days on order of the City of Sandhurst.

The site was picketed by angry Long Gully locals and Council contractor, Daley, sent word that the site could not be completed at all if police protection were not arranged. When Sergeant Drought with four constables arrived, they found '100-150 men assembled'; the men claimed if permitted they could move the materials to a site in Jackass Flat and if they were not allowed, they would remove it by force<sup>xvii</sup>. Further officers arrived and the group dispersed, promising to send a monster petition to the council. No such petition survives in BRAC's City of Sandhurst Inward Correspondence collection, though it may have been submitted to another body.

The building was described as being divided in two compartments, one for the attendants which included two nurses and the cook & handyman (a man from the West Indies who had been immune to a previous bout of smallpox in his native home), and the other for the patients. Later a tent was erected on the grounds for staff, stoves added to the main building, and a corrugated iron fence eight-foot high was completed around the whole complex.



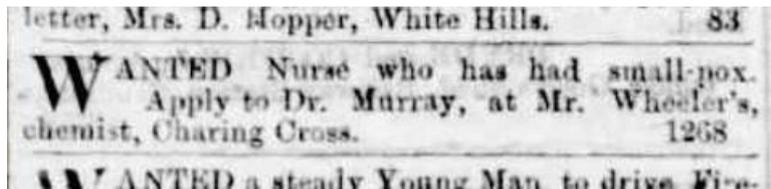
Sanatorium reserve at New Street, California Gully marked on the Parish Plan<sup>xviii</sup>

Dr Cruikshank oversaw the build, and reported to council on Sunday 7 July that three single beds with blankets were available, with two double beds and two single beds with bedding on order, along with a kerosene lamp with wick and oil for between the two rooms, plates, cups and saucers, knives and forks, towels, two basins and ewers, candles, soap, water, and a tank<sup>xix</sup>. Locals refused to allow water to be taken from their wells through fear of infection, so a new water tank had to be installed for the facility.

By the following day, Dr Murray had been appointed and submitted a report to Council summarising the situation at the sanatorium – ‘a very good man, suitable in every way’ had been appointed as cook and ‘general useful man’ at 30/- per week; the Sherlock house had been sanitized; a cabman had been found; and Mrs James and Mr Sherlock had been vaccinated<sup>xx</sup>.

Securing services and staff for the facility was challenging, from cabmen to cleaners, and much as occurred in recent times, not all of them complied with the rigorous standards required to stop the spread of the illness. One nurse visited the township from the sanatorium to purchase meat, Dr Murray himself was reported attending the telegraph office directly from the sanatorium, and the patrolling constable was directed to ‘look sharply’ on the cook who had expressed a wish to ‘go down the hill to buy something’<sup>xxi</sup>.

Murray in his report to Council on 14 July noted that “the cook is not giving perfect satisfaction but fear to change lest we should get a worse one”<sup>xxii</sup>. When one nurse was discharged in late July, Dr McCrea had to send a nurse from Melbourne as no suitably qualified nurses could be found near to Sandhurst. In this instance, suitably qualified also meant having had or vaccinated against smallpox:

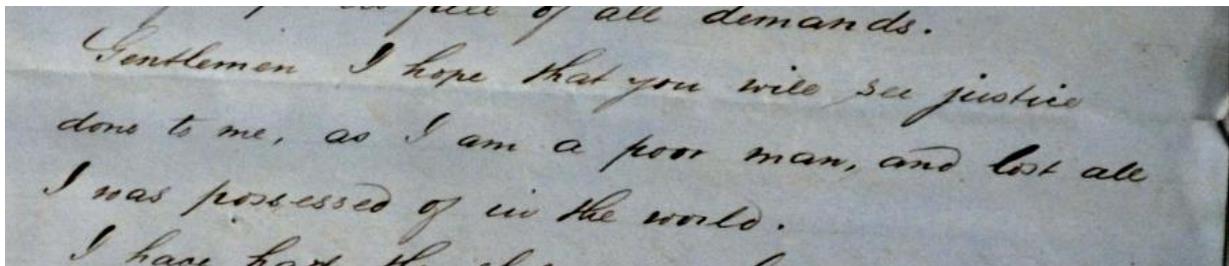


Wanted ad from the Bendigo Advertiser<sup>xxiii</sup>

The challenge of finding reliable transport was overcome by the Council purchasing a cart, at a cost of £25, specifically to convey patients to the Sanatorium. Dr McCrea directed that the cart be treated with carbolic wash and the cabman's clothes fumigated to stop the spread of infection.

The City of Sandhurst was obligated to take direction from the Chief Medical Officer, and several steps were taken in Long Gully in addition to the erection of the sanatorium. Reports had been received that the clothing of the patients had simply been hanging out on clothes lines and the houses had not been disinfected according to the directions given. As a result, on 12 July the Sherlock and Robinson houses were razed and along with their contents and water closets, were razed. Items recorded by Murray that were in need of replacement included a meat safe and cupboard, carpet and blinds, suits of clothes, a hat and more<sup>xxiv</sup>.

The Finance Committee approved reimbursement of £70 to Sherlock and Robertson for the loss of their houses. Gilbert Robertson subsequently wrote to the council, explaining that he would be out of pocket at least £115 which he could prove was not excessive given all his family had lost, and signing off with a plea to the Councillors:



Excerpt from letter sent to City of Sandhurst Council by Gilbert Robertson 5 August 1872<sup>xxv</sup>

They did not; a meeting of the Finance Committee on 9 August did 'not entertain additional remuneration'<sup>xxvi</sup>. By 1875, Robertson and his family had moved from Sandhurst.

Precautions were also taken with suspected cases or breaches of the guidelines – a girl from Short Street visited to the sanatorium and although she did not have smallpox, her house was thoroughly fumigated, drawing quite a crowd of concerned locals.

## THE MEDIA

Undoubtedly the media in modern times has much greater variety and reach; certainly the reporting of COVID-19 was significantly different between different publications – some were cynical of the likelihood of a pandemic being declared, blame was allocated to different agents, editorials have blamed governments for doing too little – or too much, and many have varied their position multiple times over the course of the pandemic.

In 1872, the *Bendigo Advertiser* had initially shown skepticism in regard to an outbreak in its midst - 'the rumour seemed to be such a strange, extraordinary and unlikely one that we did not give currency to the statement, being reluctant to raise false alarm'<sup>xxvii</sup>. Once the case was confirmed, several reports appeared each day in its pages, with headlines such as 'An Alarming Visitation', and judgments passed on the residents of Long Gully - 'a very salubrious neighbourhood, and one in which the spread of a pestilence is likely to be rapid'<sup>xxviii</sup>.

The publication was also critical of the authorities who had allowed the *Hero* to land - an 'appalling fact that a terrible pestilence brought to our shores... through neglect or oversight'<sup>xxix</sup>, and stated 'Surely someone is to blame... quarantine regulations... must be very lax and unsatisfactory'<sup>xxx</sup>. The *Advertiser* were also critical of the reporting process - "It is a matter of fact that his disease has been raging in Long Gully in the heart and centre of Bendigo for about one week without the community being made aware of the fact"<sup>xxxi</sup>.

In much the same way as modern media - both traditional and social - has allowed the publication of unsubstantiated opinions in connection with COVID-19, from 5G conspiracies, doubts on mask efficacy and pedaling of unproven treatments like bleach and hydroxychloroquine, the letters column of the *Bendigo Advertiser* provided a similar outlet in 1872. An excerpt below, from 8 July:

*"Sir - Will you allow me to suggest through your columns to the authorities the advisability of using Sullivan's disinfectant in the infected district at Long Gully. It has been used by the Government in foot and mouth disease with effect. Mr Curr, Chief Scab Inspector, has expressed a high opinion of it and most of the leading chemists of Melbourne strongly recommend it in all cases in which there is danger of infection. The experiment at a time like this at any rate is worth trying. Yours, Disinfectant."<sup>xxxii</sup>*

Overwhelmingly though, the local papers were a vehicle for the dissemination of important information. The *Bendigo Independent* editor was a believer in 'pure air' as a sworn foe to epidemic disease, and stated in their columns that 'vaccination is a very powerful aid against infection, and an operation which has been proved to be thoroughly harmless to adults'<sup>xxxiii</sup>. The *Advertiser* also published letters from medical men, including one signing simply 'Medicus', noting that revaccination had been effective in the last major outbreak<sup>xxxiv</sup>. It also published a piece explaining that the contagion was primarily through contact with 'a person diseased or their clothes' and that the view that smallpox could be spread over long distances by the wind could be 'rejected as being wholly erroneous'<sup>xxxv</sup>.

## THE MASSES

In much the same way people have responded in different ways to news of COVID-19, as did the residents of Bendigo in 1872. After the James family and their desperately ill children had been removed to the Sanatorium, a 'considerable amount of stupid ill feeling' existed in the community, resulting in a 13-year-old boy being accidentally shot by his father<sup>xxxvi</sup>. Friends of John James, who believed Ferguson had given information to the authorities that led to their detention, chose to take revenge by harassing the Fergusons, including stoning their house. When on July 26 at three in the morning a volley of stones landed on their roof, the son took up a tomahawk and ran out the front door, while separately his father took a gun loaded with shot and exited the back of the house. When

he called at a figure and got no response, he fired before realizing he had struck his son; aside from a wound to the cheek, the boy was unharmed.

The Victorian Government soon after added a clause to the Bill put to assembly requiring revaccination of those not successfully treated in the last decade which made it a penal offence to conceal a case of smallpox.

As noted in an episode of the ABC Radio National's *Rear Vision* podcast, [The Anti-vaccination Movement](#), when public health authorities take an approach of 'coercion rather than persuasion', push back from certain areas in the community is quite high<sup>xxxvii</sup>. Anti-vaccination movements coincided with mandatory programs, and since 1853, Victoria had had in place an Act – though patchily enforced – requiring compulsory vaccination of children against smallpox<sup>xxxviii</sup>. The Chief Medical Officer directed that 'all persons within a radius of a quarter-mile' of the Sherlock and Robinson households be vaccinated<sup>xxxix</sup>. Broader moves by the Victorian government were strongly protested by a 19<sup>th</sup> century Bendigo 'anti-vaxxer' and libertarian, William Dixon Denovan.

His letter published in the *Bendigo Advertiser* on July 10 stated his utter opposition to the intention of Parliament to pass measures to vaccination compulsory for adults and children alike, and reads similar in its sentiment to Facebook posts of the modern day. "The remedy I fear will prove worse than the disease, and will only serve to infect the population of the colony with diseases at present confined to certain classes of individuals," he wrote, "I am altogether opposed to vaccination as a remedy for smallpox. I believe it is a mere sham... it is found of no avail in either stopping or preventing the disease... besides being of a filthy, loathsome nature, repugnant to nature itself, causing needless pain... and oftentimes ending in premature death." Denovan provides no evidence for his claims, but encourages the 'medical men of this city' to prevent 'a vile custom being established among us'<sup>xl</sup>.

The general population of Bendigo, however, appeared to be happy to comply – Dr Boyd and Dr Atkinson commenced vaccinations a week after the first cases were apparent and at least 92 people attended and Dr Boyd having to telegraph for further doses<sup>xli</sup>. By the end of the second week of the outbreak, the two doctors had vaccinated an estimated 1,000 residents<sup>xlii</sup>.

Stock shortages for products like sanitizer, masks and toilet paper have been the focus of many headlines throughout COVID-19 and similarly, empty shelves were reported in 1872 when chemists were unable to keep up the demand for disinfectants like carbolic acid and sulphur, sending regularly to Melbourne for fresh supplies after selling out.

Those outside of the district felt great pity for Sandhurst and particularly her affected residents. James Horsfall of South Yarra, having 'a lively recollection of the benefit and luxury I found from their use many years ago suffering a similar case', had two separate cases of oranges sent up to the Sanatorium, which were shared with the children of the Industrial School<sup>xliii</sup>.

Much like today, new proclamations under the *Health Act* were subject to interpretation and challenge from various quarters. In 1872, a charge brought about against Constable O'Brien for permitting clothing to be taken from the Sanatorium was dismissed after it was found there was no specific offence disclosed on the summons<sup>xliv</sup>.

There was none of the contemporary debates about schools continuing to operate in 1872 – Mr Rae’s school at Ironbark closed immediately<sup>xlv</sup>, as did several others in the Eaglehawk district following Clemo’s diagnosis in that area<sup>xlvi</sup>. Whether it could be compared to the modern ‘pox party’ – a gathering designed to intentionally expose attendees to an infected individual with the aim of gaining immunity – or simply the sense of invincibility possessed by the young it’s hard to say but a curious incident was reported at the residence of Clemo. The *Bendigo Advertiser* reported:

*“With a strange infatuation which almost approached insanity, several women living in the neighbourhood visited the house of the sufferer during the day and remained there talking for a considerable time, displaying an interest in the case which was something marvelous, considering the imperative necessity of everybody keeping a safe distance from those afflicted. The police arrived and did their best to prevent the women having [social] intercourse with the inmates of the house, although their task was a very difficult one.”<sup>xlvii</sup>*

The site of the sanatorium was very contentious with locals across most of its life time. James Gardner of California Gully asked, “why not Jackass Flat?”, believing the choice of his locale for the hospital was a ‘great injustice’<sup>xlviii</sup>. There was a belief that the smallpox could be borne on the wind for considerable distances and not only did locals picket the building site as the sanatorium was being erected, they refused access to their wells to supply water for the inmates.

In a pattern somewhat similar to contemporary objections to and flouting of rules for self-isolation on social media, in 1872 a letter was published by a traveler from the *Hero*, who by July 19, had been placed in quarantine and was quite indignant about the matter:

*“We dispersed ourselves in Sydney and suburbs, and amused ourselves until Monday morning when we were visited by detectives and police, and told to go on board the Government steamer Thetis, otherwise we should be carried there. It seems that the day after we left Newcastle a supposed case of smallpox occurred on board the *Hero*. We asked to be shown a warrant for our arrest in the public streets of Sydney and were told they had none but that we would be taken down by two policemen, one on each side.”<sup>xlix</sup>*

Much like today, new proclamations under the *Health Act* were subject to interpretation and challenge; a charge brought about against Constable O’Brien for permitting clothing to be taken from the Sanatorium was dismissed after it was found there was no specific offence was disclosed on the summons<sup>l</sup>.

## **THE DISGRACED DOCTOR**

Dr Murray’s tenure as sanatorium doctor was cut short due to his need to appear as Queen’s evidence in a trial in Sydney. He wrote to the Council on August 2, as ‘Acting Health Officer’ explaining that ‘a duty of an urgent nature requires my presence in Sydney the moment Dr McCrea thinks it is safe to dispense with my services’<sup>li</sup>; such notice was provided on August 5. As a result, Murray departed Sandhurst but submitted a letter asking for clarification as to if his ‘temporary appointment’ as health officer would be made permanent, and if so, could a leave of absence be granted to him<sup>lii</sup>.

It was discovered through the trial that Murray was the owner of a brig, the *Carl*, and sailed with the vessel as she undertook ‘trading’ in the South Seas. Murray, with four others, first established a

plantation at Epi (Vanuatu), but was soon trading in men in a number of Melanesian nations. On the *Carl's* first cruise in the Buka Straits (Papua New Guinea) in 1871, the local men paddled out to the ship expecting trade, but the crew dropped iron to sink their canoes. Eighty men were kidnapped in this fashion and stowed in *Carl's* hull. The prisoners plotted to escape and used timber bats made from their bunks to try and fight their way out of the hold. In response, Murray gave alcohol and firearms to the crew, and joined them in firing upon the captives, for several hours.

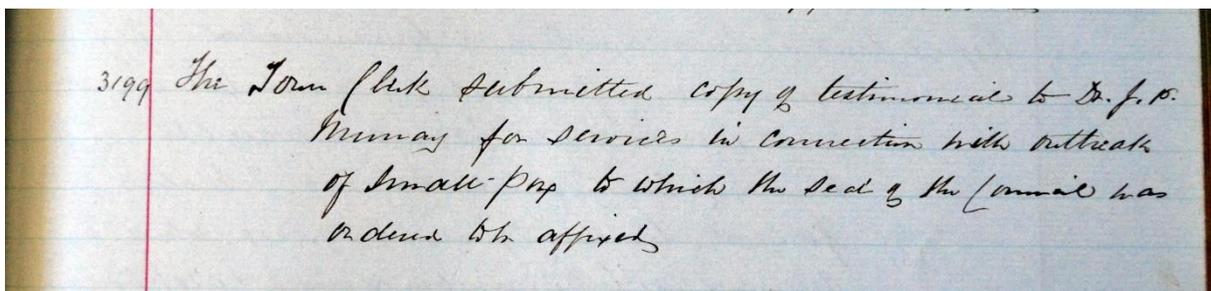
While the men were being fired upon, crew testified that Murray had sung "Marching Through Georgia", and then read prayers over breakfast before retrieving any wounded who may recover and still fetch money as a slave and taking part in throwing the dead and seriously wounded overboard<sup>liii</sup>. In all, five men were unharmed, nine wounded, and the remaining kidnapped men dead or severely wounded. Despite Melbourne being regarded as far less involved in the 'black-birding' trade as it was colloquially known, the *Carl* case stood as a particularly brutal and ruthless example. As a result, the British Navy started patrols in the region in an attempt to suppress the slavery trade<sup>liv</sup>.

As a consequence of turning Queen's evidence for the prosecution of his fellow sailors, despite his significant and leading role in the atrocity, Murray faced no penalty. This pained many across the community and indeed, Mr Justice Faucett summarized, "It is a stain upon the community that Murray, the ringleader of all these atrocities, the chief mover and instigator, should be allowed to escape punishment"<sup>lv</sup>.

Dr McCrae claimed to have no knowledge of Murray's connection with the *Carl* when asked to explain how it came that such a man was appointed to the charge of an infectious disease hospital, and that he had the appropriate qualifications and was willing to undertake quarantine.

Some were surprised, and a few councilors disgruntled, to see a letter tabled at Council from Dr Murray in late September, asking for additional payments and a reference! In some ways, the response to this request mirrored some of the ways people engage with the modern issue of commemorative statues – in the light of disgraceful actions, should and indeed can an individual's good deeds be appropriately recognised?

While Cr Aspinall moved that an additional £50 should be paid to the doctor (seconded by Cr Hattam and approved of by Cr Vahland and the Mayor), Cr Garsed thought that Murray had already been well paid for what he had done, and Cr Clark objected to the extra funds and to the testimonial given the circumstances. The Mayor further stated that he felt the Council must make a distinction between Dr Murray who 'rendered an important service in a season of emergency', and Dr Murray of the *Carl*, and grant testimony to his services as a medical man<sup>lvi</sup>.



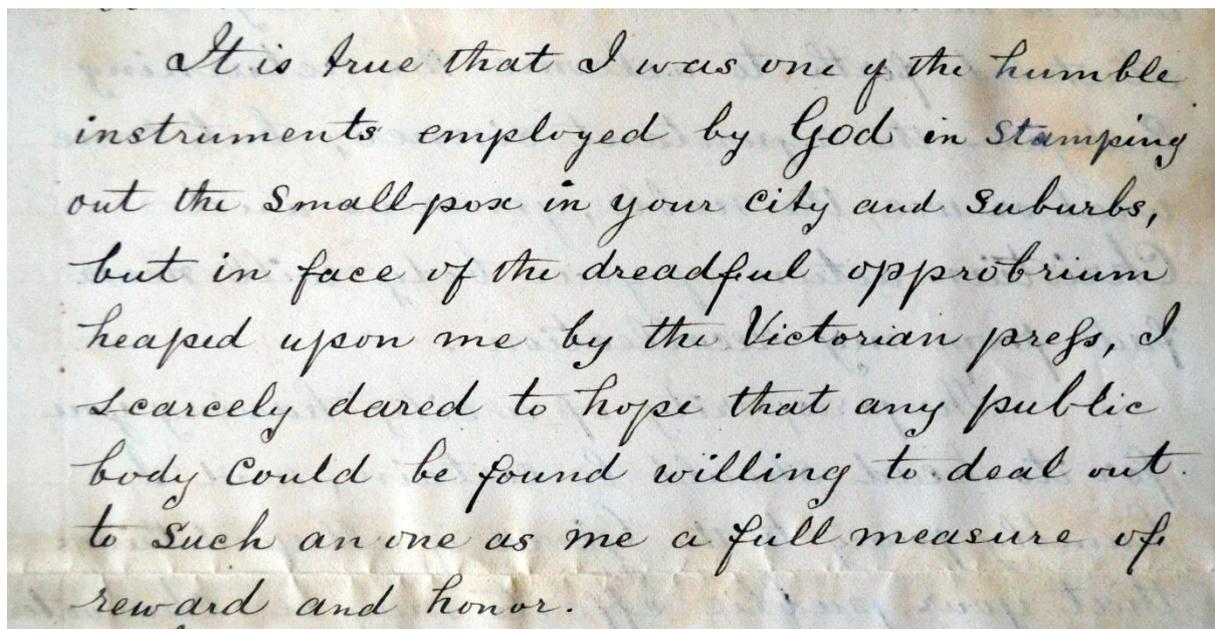
3199 The Town Clerk submitted copy of testimonials to Dr. J. P. Murray for services in connection with outbreak of small-pox to which the seal of the Council was ordered to be affixed

Notation in Council minutes from Town Clerk regarding submission of testimonial in 1872<sup>lvii</sup>

This occurring prior to the trial, it's unclear how much detail had been released at this time though strong rumours circulated; in contrast, Murray's own father had a letter published in a Melbourne newspaper stating that he had disowned his son – “a disgrace to creed, country and family... a cruel and unhappy being”<sup>lxviii</sup>, and believed he should be hanged<sup>lix</sup>.

Cr Aspinall and Hattam in particular were not inclined to extend similar respect to Dr Cruikshank, the tenured Health Officer who had overseen the outbreak initially; when discussing the matter of Murray's departure, Aspinall was quoted as describing Cruikshank as ‘not the man to stick to the Council at the time of danger’<sup>lx</sup>. Even by November, the issue had not been fully settled. Cr Hattam moved that applications for Health Officer be called for and when Mayor Macdougall indicated that the position was filled, since Cruikshank's resignation had not been accepted, simply his terms altered for the time of the outbreak, Hattam claimed it a ‘left-handed way of keeping Dr Cruikshank in his position’, a claim Macdougall labelled indecent<sup>lxi</sup>. The motion was ruled out of order, and Cruikshank maintained the role until his death in 1889.

Had Murray accepted the role at the smallpox sanatorium as an act of redemption, or was it a cynical attempt at shoring up his reputation before the trial? Simply been the right man at the right time? Certainly, the additional £50 granted by the City of Sandhurst would have helped his retreat back to England, leaving his wife Caroline and three children in Victoria<sup>lxii</sup>.



It is true that I was one of the humble instruments employed by God in stamping out the Small-pox in your City and Suburbs, but in face of the dreadful opprobrium heaped upon me by the Victorian press, I scarcely dared to hope that any public body could be found willing to deal out to such an one as me a full measure of reward and honor.

Excerpt from letter sent to City of Sandhurst Council by Dr James P Murray, 11 Oct 1872<sup>lxiii</sup>

Before departing however, he issued a final missive to the Council, humbly thanking them for their “handsome bonus and testimonials”<sup>lxiv</sup>, published by the *Bendigo Advertiser* and described by same: “a more sickening and disgusting tirade of hypocrisy has seldom if ever found its way into print”, and hoped that the last had been heard of Murray relating to his ‘brief employment by the authorities of Sandhurst’<sup>lxv</sup>.

## **SMALLPOX DISAPPEARS, SANATORIUM LIVES ON – FOR A TIME**

In early August, it was determined with the last patient, George Keys (who had also taken on the role of cook), having been declared cured and all other patients discharged, that the Sanatorium be closed. Nurse McCabe was dismissed. Grace and Edward James, two elder children of John and Rebecca, had survived, as had their initial carer, Mrs Robertson. Dr Murray telegraphed Dr McCrae to confirm his last rounds of the smallpox hospital had been completed. The doors and gates were locked, and the keys handed to town clerk, George Fletcher who then arranged for it to be fumigated weekly and one of the neighbours to 'mind'<sup>lxvi</sup> the sanatorium during the summer for 10s a week<sup>lxvii</sup>.

The following year, the Bendigo Agricultural Society asked if they may use some of the good-quality galvanized iron from the Sanatorium to erect new buildings at their proposed showgrounds site behind the Gaol<sup>lxviii</sup>. This plan was not pursued however, and in 1873 Dr Cruikshank and the Wesleyan Church were granted use of the facility, along with  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre gazetted by the Government, for a women's refuge, known as the Sandhurst Home.

The Home operated for only a short time; despite helping six women return to relatives or go into domestic service (usually from prostitution) and having spent around £70 on refurbishment, it closed in 1875. Later that year, it was listed as the site for housing destitute people with scarlet fever in the district, as per the Central Board of Health regulations.

In 1878, the building and grounds were let annually to the Bendigo Safety Blasting Powder Company at £25 per year, with a caveat that it could be ordered to vacate with 24-hours' notice. The company left some time later and the site remained vacant, aside from caretaker Jacob Andrew. In 1893 the Health Officer directed that repairs were needed, and at the same time, the Borough of Eaglehawk made enquiries about possible joint use of the facility.

Moves were made to sell the site in 1903 and, in 1908, Dr Box indicated it would be unfit to receive scarlet fever patients<sup>lxix</sup>. Further discussions about the suitability of the structure were held in 1913, when Mayor Curnow said that in the event of a further smallpox epidemic, the building could be rebuilt. This was met with opposition from the California Gully Progress Association who pointed out that it was currently being used for – and was more suitable to – housing chickens, and declared that a rebuild would pose a public health threat to local residents and that One Tree Hill would be a better option<sup>lxx</sup>.

A further proposed sale by Cr Curnow – “not fit to be used as a dog kennel” – in 1916 was initially opposed by Health Officer, Dr Lyons, after recent typhoid and meningitis cases; even after a site visit, he declared it was still fit for isolation of patients, if not for their treatment<sup>lxxi</sup>. By now, the Borough of Eaglehawk owned a quarter of the facility and they objected to its disposal; Cr Curnow laughingly suggested that the City of Bendigo would simply knock down three-quarters of the building. Cr Trevean rebuked Cr Curnow for ridiculing their Health Officer after this episode by suggesting their share was only valued at 7/6, and if that was his belief, the Council should offer it to the Borough at that amount.

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30<sup>th</sup> March 1916 Town Clerk, Eaglehawk 28 Meek. Received, and Town Clerk instructed to suggest that the Eaglehawk Council should visit the building for themselves, also to point out that adequate provision for the isolation and treatment of infectious cases at the Infectious Diseases Hospital.

Correspondence received at City of Bendigo Council Meeting, March 1916<sup>lxxii</sup>

Eaglehawk jumped at the opportunity and soon managed the site outright. The suitability of the site was questioned again and by 1917- 45 years after its establishment – the Borough had tendered the sale of the building for £20 but offered the City Council half this amount, in addition to their share of the 900' of water service pipes retrieved.

In 2020, an Infectious Disease Clinic is contained within the Bendigo Health Barnard Street facility, with a dedicated infectious disease specialist, which deals with a range of cases including hepatitis. Bendigo Health also conducts the Infection Prevention & Control Unit, dealing with the monitoring, control, identification and investigation of infection hazards, including reporting vaccination data.

Bendigo's responses to very different health crises nearly 150 years apart are a good demonstration of both how society learns from the past but also how some things ostensibly change little. While our understanding of community transmission and the need for specific facilities has grown and developed from various outbreaks in the region over time, skepticism about vaccines and prevalence, empty shelves, protests from those asked to quarantine, border security and fear in the face of an unfamiliar threat suggest that some elements of the human condition may not alter much at all.

#### **BRAC's suggestions for areas of further research:**

Infectious diseases in the North-West region; the role of municipal Health Officers; the Sandhurst Home; the role of local media during a public health crisis; Dr James P Murray's interactions with Sandhurst; specialist health facilities in Bendigo & public responses to them; how global emancipation movements impacted emigration to Victorian goldfields; views on vaccination in regional areas; living conditions in 1870s Long Gully; responses of Shire Councillors to contentious issues in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**BRAC NOTE:** A significant collection of records from Bendigo Health and its various previous forms is in the process of being transferred to the Public Record Office Victoria, to be housed at BRAC. While public access to open documents is some time away, we will make an announcement when they are due to be released – be sure to [subscribe](#) to our quarterly newsletters and like our [Facebook Page](#) to keep up to date with collection updates.

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- <sup>i</sup> Vaccine history timeline, Department of Health, <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation/immunisation-schedule-vaccine-eligibility-criteria/vaccine-history-timeline>, accessed September 2020
- <sup>ii</sup> An alarming visitation, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 6 Jul 1872
- <sup>iii</sup> The Hero, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 8 Jul 1872
- <sup>iv</sup> Sydney telegram, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 23 Jul 1872
- <sup>v</sup> Small pox in Long Gully, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 6 Jul 1872
- <sup>vi</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>vii</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>viii</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>ix</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 17-31 July 1872, Health Officer Return, 18 July 1872
- <sup>x</sup> The death of Dr J Cruikshank MD, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 12 Jan 1889, p5
- <sup>xi</sup> Small pox in Long Gully, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 6 Jul 1872
- <sup>xii</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 1-16 July 1872, Telegram from Victoria Chief Medical Officer 1872
- <sup>xiii</sup> Small pox, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 10 Jul 1872
- <sup>xiv</sup> News and notes, *Ballarat Star*, 9 Aug 1869
- <sup>xv</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 1-16 July 1872, Report from Dr Cruikshank 6 July 1872
- <sup>xvi</sup> China completes coronavirus hospital in Wuhan in ten days, *ABC News*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-03/china-completes-wuhan-makeshift-hospital-to-treat-coronavirus/11923000>, accessed August 2020
- <sup>xvii</sup> Smallpox at Bendigo, *Geelong Advertiser*, 9 Jul 1872
- <sup>xviii</sup> Public Record Office Victoria, VA 3972 Department of Natural Resources & the Environment, VPRS 16171/P001 Regional Land Office Parish & Township Plans Digitised Set, Item Parish & Town Plans S-Ti, Bendigo in the Parish of Sandhurst 05 Township Plan Imperial Measure 3473A
- <sup>xix</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 1-16 July 1872, Report from Dr Cruikshank 7 July 1872
- <sup>xx</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 1-16 July 1872, Report from Dr Murray 10 July 1872
- <sup>xxi</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 17-31 July 1872, Report from Dr Murray 17 July 1872
- <sup>xxii</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 1-16 July 1872, Report from Dr Murray 14 July 1872
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Classifieds, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 20 Jul 1872
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 17-31 July 1872, Report from Dr Murray 17 July 1872
- <sup>xxv</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 1-15 August 1872, Letter from Gilbert Robertson 5 Aug 1872
- <sup>xxvi</sup> City Council – Finance Committee, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 10 Aug 1872, p2
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Small pox in Long Gully, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 6 Jul 1872
- <sup>xxviii</sup> An alarming visitation, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 6 Jul 1872
- <sup>xxix</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>xxx</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Smallpox in Bendigo, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 6 Jul 1872
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Letters, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 8 Jul 1872
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> News and notes, *Ballarat Star*, 10 Jul 1872
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Letters, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 8 Jul 1872
- <sup>xxxv</sup> The smallpox outbreak, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 10 Jul 1872
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> *Ibid*
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Phillips, Keri – Rear Vision, The anti-vaccination movement, Australian Broadcast Corporation (ABC), 26 May 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/the-anti-vaccination-movement/11131060>
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> CURSON, Peter – *Deadly Encounters*, Arena Books, Australia, 2015
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Chief Medical Officer, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 9 Jul 1872

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- xi Letters, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 10 Jul 1872
- xii Smallpox outbreak, *Bendigo Independent*, 9 Jul 1872
- xiii The smallpox, *Ballarat Star*, 12 Jul 1872, p3
- xiii Smallpox outbreak, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 12 Jul 1872
- xiv Smallpox, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 23 Jul 1872
- xiv Smallpox at Bendigo, *Geelong Advertiser*, 9 Jul 1872
- xvi The smallpox outbreak, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 9 Jul 1872
- xvii *Ibid*
- xviii Letters, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 8 Jul 1872
- xlix Letter to a friend, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 19 Jul 1872
- <sup>l</sup> Smallpox, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 23 Jul 1872
- <sup>li</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 1-17 August 1872, Acting Health Officer 2 August 1872
- <sup>lii</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P/0001 Inward Correspondence Unit 7, 1-17 August 1872, Acting Health Officer 2 August 1872
- <sup>liii</sup> Buka's long agony must end, *Tribune*, 14 May 1962, p6
- <sup>liv</sup> South Sea hell ship, *Brisbane Telegraph*, 30 May 1953, p11
- <sup>lv</sup> Peeps into the past, *Truth*, 11 Dec 1909, p10
- <sup>lvi</sup> Dr Murray, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 28 Sep 1872
- <sup>lvii</sup> Public Records Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16269/P001 Council Minute Books, unit 3, Minutes 11 October 1871, p486
- <sup>lviii</sup> South Sea hell ship, *Brisbane Telegraph*, 30 May 1953, p11
- <sup>lix</sup> Australian almanac, *Australian Women's Weekly*, 12 Jul 1967, p41
- <sup>lx</sup> City Council – Finance Committee, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 10 Aug 1872, p2
- <sup>lxi</sup> Council meeting, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 2 Nov 1872, p2
- <sup>lxii</sup> Dr Judas of the brig Carl, *Brisbane Courier*, 14 Jan 1933, p18
- <sup>lxiii</sup> Public Record Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P001 Inward Correspondence, unit 9, 11-21 Oct 1872, Letter from Dr Murray
- <sup>lxiv</sup> Public Record Office Victoria, VA 4862 City of Sandhurst, VPRS 16936/P001 Inward Correspondence, unit 9, 11-21 Oct 1872, Letter from Dr Murray
- <sup>lxv</sup> Dr Murray again, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 16 Nov 1872, p2
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Council meeting, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 10 Aug 1872
- <sup>lxvii</sup> The Sandhurst Home, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 1 Jul 1873
- <sup>lxviii</sup> City Council, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 7 Sep 1872, p2
- <sup>lxix</sup> Scarlet fever accommodation, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 14 Jan 1908
- <sup>lxx</sup> Sanatorium, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 23 Jul 1913
- <sup>lxxi</sup> The Sanatorium, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 31 Mar 1916
- <sup>lxxii</sup> Public Record Office Victoria, VA 2389 City of Bendigo, VPRS 16269/P001 Council Minute Books, unit 9, Minutes 30 March 1916, p415