

FROM THE ARCHIVES

DIGEST FROM OUR ARCHIVES



Beaufort Street looking north - photo from MLS Archive

Unfortunately, we don't have photos of 693 Beaufort Street from 1920s and 1930s, so if any of our members have any, we would love to see them.

THE PRACTICE

Mount Lawley's
medical women

A passage from
Mount Lawley
Newsletter 1992

'THE PRACTICE', as it was known of at the time, was a medical practice at 693 Beaufort Street Mt Lawley, (circa 1929 / 1931). THE PRACTICE was unique not only as it has been in existence since at least 1929, but apart from the presence of some very welcome male locums, THE PRACTICE has always been run by women.

The earliest of the medical women at THE PRACTICE (and probably a very early woman graduate) was Dr "Winnie" Windmill, but unfortunately details about her are scarce. She was in THE PRACTICE from 1929-1939.

Next was Dr Aileen Murphy who came to THE PRACTICE in 1939 and remained until her death in 1974. Dr Murphy was born and bred in Tasmania. She left school after matriculation at sixteen years of age and then wished to embark on a medical career. This was in an era when very few women entered the Faculty of Medicine, and she was persuaded instead to enrol in the Faculty of Arts. She bowed to pressure and proceeded to obtain a Bachelor of Arts degree. However, "Spuddie" as she was generally called remained determined to enter the medical course and subsequently became accepted as a student in the Faculty of Medicine at Melbourne University and in due course obtained her degree. Sometime later, following the death of her father, she and her mother elected to come to Perth.



At this time the number of medical women in the community was also very small

693 Beaufort Street,
Mount Lawley
as it is today.

Photo courtesy of
Google Maps.

Arrangements were made for her to join the staff at Princess Margaret Hospital, where she remained for some years and she may have been Medical Superintendent for part of this time. Eventually she left the hospital and in 1939 took over THE PRACTICE from Dr Windmill, who had become ill and passed away.

In 1939, World War II had commenced, at which time Dr Murphy also became involved with the Army, in a non-combatant medical capacity and with the rank of Captain. Also at this time the number of medical women in the community was also very small and the numbers of medical men in the general community was greatly reduced as the need for suitably trained personnel in the Armed Forces was considered paramount. Consequently, those doctors in the general community led a very busy life with plenty of disturbed nights and a minimum of leisure time.

In 1957, Dr Nora Burke, a cousin of Dr Murphy and a graduate of Sydney University joined THE PRACTICE. She had been in Europe and called in at Perth to see her sister Mary (Burke) Petersen, who was living in Perth and who was also a medical graduate (Adelaide University). The partnership of Dr Aileen Murphy and Dr Nora Burke was very harmonious but THE PRACTICE enlarged considerably. In the 1960s they were grateful to be joined by Dr Shirley Shevell, a graduate of Sydney University and the wife of the, then, newly appointed Dean of Perth, the Reverend John Hazelwood. Later again they were joined temporarily by Dr Cathy O'Donovan, a delightful lady.

A few months later, when Dean Hazelwood was appointed Bishop of Ballarat, Dr Shevell arranged her departure to join him there. In the meantime also, Dr O'Donovan had become aware of extra family commitments requiring her to cease her work at THE PRACTICE.

THE PRACTICE then continued in the hands of Dr Nora Burke, and remained so until its demise on 1 July 1991.