

## The Veterinary College

### Catherine Pugsley

The changes in its fortune of the distinctive building at 38 Brunswick Street, now part of the Metropole Hotel are an interesting illustration of the changes in the use of buildings in the south part of Brunswick Street generally.

#### **Kendall's veterinary hospital & University of Melbourne: 1886 to 1920**

The lower animals are not exempt from 'the ills that flesh is heir to' and their sufferings are often more acute than those of mankind, for the simple reason that they have not the power in many cases of indicating the seat of pain, whilst their attendants are not sufficiently observant to localise it without assistance.

These are the opening words of a lengthy article in the *Fitzroy City Press* on 19 June 1886, describing the opening of the building at 38 Brunswick Street as a private veterinary college built by William Tyson Kendall.

Kendall is considered to be the founder of veterinary practice in Victoria. He was born in 1851 in England and in 1880 arrived in Melbourne, where he was to found a veterinary association and several journals, and publish *The Diseases of Australian Horses* in 1884. He drafted the *Veterinary Surgeons Act* of 1887, which provided for the registration of qualified veterinary surgeons. His Melbourne Veterinary College, opened in 1886, offered a four year course, with examinations conducted by the Veterinary Board of Victoria, of which Kendall was President in the periods 1897-1906 and 1912-24.<sup>1</sup>

The *Fitzroy City Press* article went on to say that:

Mr Kendall, M.R.C.V.S., whose services to veterinary science in this colony have been many and great, struck with the vast amount of suffering which horses that are continually worked have to endure, determined to establish a veterinary hospital which should be complete in all its branches and capable of accommodating a good number of dumb patients. He met with considerable encouragement on his project, and this induced him to develop it even more extensively than at first contemplated .....

It was reported that around fifty gentlemen, 'amongst whom were some of the most prominently interested in horseflesh in Melbourne', were present at the opening of the hospital, and were taken on a tour of the premises, before sitting down to 'an excellent collation'. The Chairman, Dr Le Fevre, proposed "Success to the Veterinary Hospital and health to Mr Kendall," stating that:

The want of such an institute with the appliances which their host had now provided, had long been felt by all lovers of the horse, and he trusted that the public would manifest a hearty recognition of the value of the institute, and give it the support that it deserved.

In replying to the Chairman's toast, Kendall is reported to have said that:

He had been induced to establish the hospital from the fact that over 30,000 horses were in daily use in and around Melbourne, out of which, on the average, fully 1,500 required veterinary attention, whilst he was sorry to say not more than about 100 got it. The amateur doctoring of horses was often a very costly process to owners, for valuable animals had their lives shortened and frequently were ruined and incapacitated from work by unskilful treatment.

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<sup>1</sup> H E Albiston, 'William Tyson Kendall (1851–1936)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

The article then described the interior of the hospital. At the front was Kendall's consulting rooms, with an adjoining dispensary. Kendall employed a Mr Gun as dispenser and hospital surgeon, allowing Kendall himself to be 'at liberty to attend country cases, without detriment to the interests of the animals under his care'.

The detailed description of the facilities for treating horses is particularly interesting. At the rear of the building were nineteen stalls, described as follows:

The floor of each stall is of cement with a slight incline from the manger, and hollowed out. This hollow is filled with tan which absorbs all moisture, and as it is a powerful antiseptic completely prevents any trace of ammoniacal gas rising. In this respect the improvement over ordinary stables is most marked and most satisfactory. In several of the stalls foot baths are provided for the special treatment of animals suffering from any disease of, or injury to the foot. The mangers throughout are movable and of iron, so that they can be easily cleaned, where medicated or boiled feed is given.

Equipment included a sand bath and slings, by which horses could be raised or lowered to any convenient position for handling, and a 'trivis', or stocks, to which horses could be secured and strapped for operations.

There were also nine loose boxes, each measuring twelve feet [3.6 m] square, with the first being 'specially designed for obstreperous patients, mattresses being placed on all sides and eight or ten inches of shavings on the floor, so that even the most violent animal could scarcely injure itself'. On the opposite side of the main entrance was a forge, 'presided over by Mr Hugh Mount, whose four years' experience in Dicks' Veterinary College enable[d] him to save much needless pain and positive injury, so often the result of imperfect and ignorant farriery'.

Some of the cases dealt with by the hospital are also described:

Amongst the cases under treatment were - cancer of the eye, congestion of the liver, tumor in shoulder, poll-evil, surfeit, and a couple of accidents. In each instance satisfactory progress was being made, and in some the cure was complete. The animals seemed to thoroughly understand that they were being well treated, and one at least was very valuable - a mare that has secured several prizes at shows and now has had a tumor successfully taken from her shoulder.

The hospital was able to accommodate thirty-two horses, with provision for an extension to accommodate twice that number. In addition to the facilities for horses, there was a canine ward, where the *Fitzroy City Press* noted 'the faithful friend of man receives due attention'. The cost of treatment was from two to three guineas a week for 'medicine, attendance, feed, operations &c', and the *Fitzroy City Press* commented that 'as the animal is under constant supervision, no owner should risk the life of valuable stock for so moderate a charge.'

### **Subsequent use of the building**

In 1908 the college was absorbed into the University of Melbourne, and Kendall's name is still associated with the University's School of Veterinary Science. The building was used as the University of Melbourne veterinary clinic and hospital until 1920. During this period it was also used as a polling booth in the subdivision of Gertrude within the electorate of Batman, both for the 1916 referendum on compulsory military service and in the May 1917 federal election.

The 1886 article in the *Fitzroy City Press* had described the building as 'an imposing two-storey brick structure, a little above Gertrude street, having a frontage to Brunswick street of 44 ft. by a depth of 200 ft [13.2 x 60 m].'<sup>1</sup> After it ceased to be a veterinary clinic the building's large size, convenient location and easy vehicle access allowed it to be used for a wide variety of commercial purposes. An advertisement in 1935 for the sale of the building,<sup>2</sup> described it as 'Large Brick and Iron Buildings, Ideal for Conversion to Showrooms, Garage, Factory, Warehouse, or Carrier Depot', and highlighted as attractive features 'easy access, lighting and

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<sup>2</sup> *Argus*, 16 September 1935.

loading,' and the building's position on the electric tram route and less than a mile from General Post Office in Elizabeth Street"

In the early 1920s there were numerous advertisements in the *Argus* advertising car auctions by David W Bon, such as the advertisement on the following page from 14 August 1923. Twelve cars could be housed in the building for inspection and auction.

**David W. Bon Pty. Ltd.**  
SUB AGENTS:—  
**HUPMOBILE**  
The Comfort Car . . . . £515  
WE ALSO OFFER  
**CHEVROLET**  
"Superior" Model . . . £290  
Immediate Delivery All Models.  
Good Condition Used Cars Taken as Part Payment  
Terms Arranged From £100 Deposit.  
**Auction Sale Used Cars**  
Without Reserve.  
TO-DAY, at 1.30 p.m.  
COMPLETE LISTS ADVERTISED MOTOR COLUMNS.  
Large Stock Used Cars Always on Hand.  
Any Trial or Inspection and Easy Terms Arranged.  
**38-40 Brunswick Street, FITZROY.**  
PHONE J2585.  
Collins Street-North Fitzroy Tram passes door. Bourke Street-Clifton Hill  
Tram to Brunswick Street, within one minute of door.

David W Bon Ltd advertisement.  
*Argus*, 4 September 1923, p 8.

During the 1930s the building was occupied by T G Budgeon, shopfittings manufacturer; in the 1940s by the Lucullus Pty Ltd Garage, and from the 1950s to the early 1970s by the Davies Case Co, packing manufacturers.

A photograph believed to be taken in 1978, shows the building housing Nat's Buy & Sell, which advertises new and used office furniture, laminex and chipboard, paint and masonite, doors; and fibreglass. Note that at that stage the distinctive gold horse's head now above the door is missing, although the horseshoe that surrounds it is still visible.



38 Brunswick Street: photo of about 1978, courtesy of Fitzroy Local History Photograph Collection Photo in 1986; Miles Lewis.

By the 1980s the building was on sale and the signage had been removed, though 'parking at rear' was now advertised.

### **The building today – Metropole Hotel & Conference Centre**

The National Trust web site describes the interior of the building as 'substantially intact with its timber-framed basilican cross-section with clerestory lighting, the forges and farrier's equipment ... in place at the rear' but qualifies the description with 'when last accessible'. The building has in fact now become apartments and a conference centre, typical uses of large historic buildings in the inner suburbs of major Australian cities. Fortunately, this enables the public to have access to and appreciate the impressive interior of the structure, which is a local landmark in Brunswick Street.

**Catherine Pugsley first moved to Fitzroy as a student in the 1980s, and has lived in the suburb for most of her adult life. She has been a member of the Fitzroy History Society since 2005, and is currently its Secretary.**