

## PNEUMONIC INFLUENZA - 1919

### SYNOPSIS

The 1919 pneumonic influenza epidemic in Australia has received little attention from historians although Australia suffered heavy loss of life. The time was not one of glory. The Authorities had plenty of warning as Australia was one of the last places in the world to be struck by the pandemic and they believed that adequate preparation had been made. With the outbreak of disease, the arrangements fell into immediate disarray and the fragility of Australian Federation was shown in the hostile reaction of the States to each other and to the Commonwealth. The measures adopted were subject to constant change and bungling, sometimes amounting almost to farce. The public, frightened and unsure, became hostile and suspicious. The epidemic had a very divisive effect on society and the tendency was for everyone to look after their own interests. It proved to be a sorry and somewhat sordid episode in Australian history.

A number of my family and friends provided me with a rich source of information for this study. They were selected for interview solely on the basis that they had been alive in 1919. It was a privilege and quite remarkable to hear them recount their experiences, so clearly remembered yet rarely, if ever, mentioned since. The focus of this essay is Victoria, and Melbourne in particular, where the interviewees all reside now. The record of these interviews is attached.

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In 1919, the Australian population numbered just over 5,000,000 and close to 12,500 of them, including 3561 Victorians, died that year from pneumonic influenza, commonly known as Spanish Flu. All sections of the population were affected though mostly young adults, many of whom died and, in addition to deaths, countless numbers were left with impaired health which frequently led to premature death. Worldwide it was estimated 50 million died - more than the number of deaths in World War 1.

The first recognised Australian case was in Melbourne in December 1918 and by January the disease was raging. Immediately precautions were instituted. The NSW/Victorian border was closed, meetings of more than twenty were forbidden, train travel was restricted, masks had to be worn and loitering under the "Clocks"

at Flinders Street station was forbidden. Carts filled with phenyl sprinkled the streets to ward off germs.

For this study, I interviewed twenty three people, all relatives, including my mother, and friends and neighbours. At the time their ages ranged from 70 to 91. They were all affected by the epidemic in different ways and degrees but each of them remembered their experiences well and the clarity and accuracy of their recollections was impressive. Seven of the twenty three became ill themselves and five others had close family members affected. Nine of them lost close friends or relatives, Marge losing five family members in one week. Those who lived through it did not forget and they remembered it as a time of fear and sorrow.

Compared with the rest of world, Australia was lightly affected, possibly because of warmer weather, a small and widespread population and geographical isolation. One measure that undoubtedly had some effect was the rigorous quarantine restrictions applied to all shipping. From October 1918, all incoming vessels were placed in seven days quarantine and between October and April 1919, 174 vessels were found to be infected and 149 were uninfected. This involved 81,510 people and 1,102 were diagnosed with the flu. Forty of these ships were troop transports bringing men back from the war and the restriction on returning soldiers, particularly when some missed Christmas at home, caused great hostility in sections of the community who scoffed at the idea that heroes could cause of infection. Others approved the measures and were angered when some returned soldiers, who had been put into further quarantine at Broadmeadows, broke camp. Agnes, Emily and Hilda all remembered the anger about this at the time. It widened the existing division in the community about those who had gone to war and those who stayed home, which was also fomented by the bitterness of the Conscription campaigns of 1917.

After initial panic in January 1918, the authorities, particularly in Victoria, adopted an increasingly low-key approach with a policy of withholding or minimising information. The community was already frightened, hostile and suspicious and there was much squabbling between Municipal, State and Federal authorities. The NSW government chose to close its borders without consultation and this became a continual bone of contention. The Melbourne newspapers took every opportunity to pour scorn on their northern neighbours, calling Premier Holman "That panic stricken Statesman" and elaborating on the

“border barbarities and border atrocities” at Albury. Of course closing of border was a farce as Hilda described the situation at Wahgunya, with boats going back and forth just down from the bridge and free access after the inspectors had gone home.

Until the first case appeared, the authorities believed that Australia was well prepared, “in the unlikely event of an onslaught”. In November 1918, State and Federal Health Departments and representatives of the British Medical Association set up Medical Committees, established precautionary measures and set up the machinery for concerted action by the States. At the same time, there were suggestions that nerves, “frayed by years of war, led some to lose their sense of proportion” and the Medical Association warned against “heeding grossly exaggerated reports from overseas”.

These well-laid plans, previously confirmed by unanimous consent, broke down from the outset. The first known case in Melbourne in December was not reported for some days and despite 256 cases in city hospitals by 26 January, the Victorian Government delayed confirming the outbreak. When two cases were detected in NSW, both traceable to contacts in Melbourne, the NSW government immediately proclaimed itself “an infected state” and closed the border without any consultation. That was the end of any pretence of uniformity of action. NSW continued to bitterly attack and blame Victoria and the Medical Journal deplored the fact that “Australians, after fighting side by side in the war, failed in this matter of communal interest, to grasp the significance of Australian nationhood and acted as members of detached and hostile states”. Australian nationhood was still relatively new, having been achieved only on January 1901 and the States continued to be jealous of each other and resented any usurpation of their authority by the central government.

The daily press had a field day. Numbers of cases and deaths were listed, as they had been for the dead and wounded in the war, and the spread by suburb and town was highlighted. Doug recalled how people turned to the papers for information with a “sort of morbid interest” and he described this as the continuation of a wartime habit. When the papers reported some sensational stories, the Press was accused by the Medical Association of “pandering to public taste and fanning the flames of panic, which was sure to upset the whole social machine and permanently damage the community.” The Press and the public

were advised to “continue their duties calmly and leave matters in the hands of experts”.

In Victoria, the epidemic was prolonged and for the eight months from January to August the death rate was above thirty a week. The highest morbidity was among children and adolescents but 80% of all cases were mild with few complications. Of the other 20%, half died and 72% of these were in the twenty to forty age bracket.

After a peak in February there was a marked decrease in Press attention as a result of pressure from the authorities and the medical profession. It could have been that the public no longer wanted to know. The Age declared that there was little public interest and reports became increasingly optimistic. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, The Age announced that there had been “needless panic” and anticipated the early lifting of “absurd and irksome” regulations.

However, in NSW, Premier Holman issued what could be described as a “Call to Arms”. He spoke of a danger greater than the war. He called the people to watch the daily progress in the Press and to work together to win the fight. It was quite different in Victoria where, after a period of indecision, regulation after regulation was issued and these were subject to constant change which aroused widespread controversy. What had appeared practical under academic discussion or controlled conditions proved impractical and unenforceable in the wider community. The population was not as docile as anticipated, and the manpower did not exist to carry out such measures as house to house inspections, in addition, it was shown subsequently that the regulations were not backed by law. When a NSW publican challenged his ten pound fine, the High Court ruled that the NSW government had acted illegally in restricting the freedom of persons under the Quarantine Act of 1892 as this applied only to vessels or those in contact with vessels. This caused further trouble as some who had been found to have breached the regulations were fined while others went scot-free. By the middle of March, most of the restrictions had been lifted in Victoria.

Government schools did not open at the end of January after the Christmas vacation but private schools could make their own arrangements, albeit under defined conditions. In Victoria, the State Schools opened by mid-March, to the relief of those who had heard “disquieting reports of the activities of schoolgirls

on prolonged vacation". Hospital visiting was also permitted after 16 March.... Florence described visits by family and friends to her sister dying in the Homeopathic Hospital (later Prince Henry's) which had been entirely given over to influenza cases.

The wearing of masks left vivid memories and it was mentioned by every one of the interviewees. The practice persisted long after other regulations had been relaxed. Apart from the official type of mask, people were creative and masks of many varieties appeared almost as fashion items. Seamstresses, such as Florence, made masks to their own design and the Age reported that a girl had been seen in a salmon pink mask with floral borders. Foy and Gibson advertised harem veils as an attractive substitute for the unpleasing official gauze variety and, in the country, May recalled that people just used handkerchiefs, or in Corowa, according to Hilda, most people didn't bother.

The Medical Association decided that there was little that could be done to stop the disease, though the restrictions that were instituted "may delay the rapidity of its spread". There was really no treatment except nursing measures to relieve some of the more distressing symptoms. The Inhalation Chambers, a type of tent which accommodated up to 50 people and into which several types of vapour were fed, were deemed useless and possibly dangerous. Vaccination was popular early in the epidemic but it was experimental and found to be ineffective because the bacillus had not been isolated. The Health Departments decided that to abandon control measures and rely on a build-up of natural immunity and a natural diminution of the virulence of the infecting bacillus. The Medical Association emphasised the prime importance of allaying public fear and insisted that constant reminders of danger were counterproductive. It advised that it was "safer for the public to carry on as usual than to give way to fright and panic".

Nowhere were mistakes more evident than in the provision of hospital accommodation. Errors on a huge scale were made. Despite assurances that adequate provision had been made, the day before Victoria was proclaimed to be infected the Argus announced that hospitals were already filled to capacity. From then on, it was a saga of confusion and acrimonious exchanges of accusations. Public buildings had previously been selected as suitable for housing the sick, but no provision had been made for staffing and equipment. Urgent

appeals were issued for equipment and all women were asked to volunteer. Town Halls, schools, drill halls, Wirth's Circus and the Showgrounds were some of the places set up in a very makeshift fashion. There was no co-ordination or planning and the result was wasteful and inefficient duplication of facilities.

The Exhibition Building was taken over by the Health Department and opened to patients on 5<sup>th</sup> February. The Exhibition achieved an unenviable degree of notoriety, which was well remembered by many of the interviewees, especially Grace, who, as a former inmate had horrible memories unsoftened by time. The Age declared that "the Exhibition was a disgrace". Patients reported that the place was "not fit for beasts" and a deputation from the Trades Hall demanded an investigation into "the unsatisfactory and unhygienic conditions". Some patients refused to be taken there and Grace, Emily and Margaret all spoke of the fear the place aroused. The Exhibition moved from drama to drama with the resignation of the Matron, the Medical Superintendent and other ancillary staff.

The Exhibition also became the focus of a sectarian wrangle. When Mr Bowser, the Minister of Health announced that he had accepted the offer of the gratuitous services of 150 nuns and a number of Christian Brothers to staff the Exhibition under the management of nearby St Vincent's Hospital, a furore broke out. A petition of protest was sent to the Minister and the Rev. H. Worrall declared that it was "an insult to the incumbent staff" and that he "feared the ecclesiastic uses to which the hospital might be put". In his opinion, "the sick in their weakened state, should not have alien views and alien customs forced upon them."

The Minister responded to the protest by offering the religious the Melbourne High School as an alternative. The offer was spurned indignantly by Archbishop Mannix on the grounds that, as the Exhibition was only partially filled, further accommodation was "a wasteful extravagance". Volunteers nuns did work in a number of other areas such as the Richmond Municipal Hospital and many convents set themselves up as convalescent homes. This ministerial volte face rankled long after as staffing problems at the exhibition remained acute. "Where is Mr Worrall and his army of nurse assistants" demanded a letter to the Age.

The only treatment for pneumonic influenza was palliative and nurses were the essential ingredient in the fight. They proved very hard to come by. The

over-crowded and under-staffed conditions took a heavy toll and few hospital workers escaped infection. Continual appeals for volunteers brought little response although the pay offered was considerably higher than the nurses' normal salary. Agnes and Kath could not remember any other volunteers at the Geelong Hospital and many interviewees remembered the reluctance to volunteer in the community. A source of resentment among nurses was that the Health Department had placed the organisation of the nursing force in the hands of a lay woman, but when the Royal Victorian Trained Nurses Association was eventually given control, the situation improved. Home nursing was a preferred alternative and the Nurses Association set up a comprehensive scheme of home visiting, with nurses being driven by members of the Women's Auto Club. Nurses also gave demonstration of nursing techniques to women in public halls.

The community response was far from altruistic and unselfish. Those interviewed remembered it as a time of fear and suspicion and no anecdotes of 'neighbourly' behaviour were supplied. No doubt there were some examples of this but the absence of reports in the papers, coupled with the constant appeals for help tend to confirm that such incidents were isolated. Local authorities provided some aid with childcare when parents were ill and the Red Cross was active in distributing 'invalid food' to the poor. The Red Cross made continual appeals for helpers and for donations, but little was forthcoming. Even publicity given to Her Excellency, Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, the wife of the Governor General, working in mask and apron, failed to make the epidemic a fashionable cause. Some financial aid was provided by municipalities and a race meeting at Wren's Richmond Course, to provided for Collingwood families, was well supported.

It was a time of financial hardship, not only because individuals lost hours of workthrough illness but also because of the compulsory closing of places of entertainment which put 2,200 out of work in one day. Some factories were forced to close temporarily, an embargo was placed on commercial travellers and some businesses, such as hairdressers and restaurants were hit hard. Gladys recalled that people would shop only for essentials and this was confirmed by the fact the deparment stores put their staff on short hours and advertised widely to attract custom. Myers advised that all staff had been inoculated and that they wore masks. In addition "every safeguard that health and hygiene demanded was being observed. In addition, a trained nurse had been employed to watch over the health of the staff." Chemists did brisk business with patent medicines and tonics

from Bonox to Heenzo and from Bosisto's Eucalyptus to Gooch's Tonic Wine. Those engaged in essential services did not escape infection and the Fire Brigade, the Railways, the Postal Department and the Police Force all suffered losses but, in accordance with the official policy of allaying public fear, no disruption of services was reported.

The epidemic highlighted the inadequacy of the Public Health System and the inexperience in dealing with a major domestic catastrophe. It demonstrated that national feeling was a shallow concept and that all pretence of national unity was secondary to local interests. Despite the official policy of underplaying the danger, people were not fooled and they did not forget the sense of immediate personal threat. They did not forget its sudden onset, the vulnerability of the young nor the rapidity of death, made more horrible by the characteristic "heliotrope cyanosis" in which the skin took on a deep purple hue due to lack of oxygen, thus inviting comparison to the legendary 14<sup>th</sup> century "Black Death".

Scant attention has been paid by historians to the Spanish Flu epidemic. It may be partly explained by the fact that social history was not in vogue and it was a social phenomenon, marked by personal bereavement, disrupted family life and individual financial hardship. It seems staggering that the loss of thousands of young lives, within months, in a country not used to epidemic diseases has merited so little attention. It was a quite inglorious episode in which no heroes nor heroines were proclaimed and with created no sense of pride nor achievement. Its timing was also a major factor in its lack of historical prominence. It lost out to the excitement of end of the war, the glamour of the 1920s, followed by the Great Depression of the 1930s and the drama of the Second World War.

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Below are the edited stories of 23 people - all relatives, including my mother, and friends and neighbours. Their ages ranged from 70 to 91 when I interviewed them about their memories of 1919/1920 Spanish Flu Pandemic. All were under 30 at that time and every one of them remembered their experiences clearly.

AGNES - I was a boarder at the Geelong Convent and during the holidays the authorities advertised for volunteers. As a bit of an adventure, a friend and I decided to volunteer. We didn't ask permission, we just went along. We were frightened they wouldn't take us because we were too young so we pushed our



schoolgirl plaits up under our hats but we didnt have any hairpins. When the doctor came to give us a medical, we refused to take our hats off in case the plaits fell down and gave us away. We needn't have bothered. They were so desperately short, they would take anybody.

One section of the Geelong Hospital was set aside for women and children and the men were taken to the Drill Hall. Kath and I were the only volunteers at the hospital. We worked there for a couple of months and it was really hard work. When we left to go back to school we were given a letter of thanks and an inscribed gold watch.

When we came off duty we had carbolic baths and washed our hair in carbolic. We were on our honour not to go into any houses or shops. We used to go down to the beach and Vin Moloney, an altar boy at the Convent, was the only one who would come near us. He'd buy us pies and lemonade and put them down somewhere for us to pick up. Then we'd walk along talking, with him keeping his distance.

There was strict barrier nursing at the hospital and we went through gallons of carbolic. There wasn't much that could be done for the patients, just sponging and fluids and poultices while you waited for the crisis. There were some deaths but we were a bit protected from that. We were a pair of innocents and the nurses looked after us though we were shocked at their free and easy behaviour and the language we heard. One woman told Kath she was pregnant. "Dont worry" said Kath, "so am I." Later we pondered what she meant and decided it was something to do with standing firm. We had been taught that Gibraltar was impregnable.

The epidemic came as a terrible anticlimax after the peace and it had a very divisive effect on the community. People were really suspicious and ready to blame one another. A lot of the soldiers had it and they were blamed for bringing it back and it was said that soldiers going AWOL for camp were the main reaon for its spread. A returned soldier called Ricketts was the first person to get it at the Woollen Mills and he was blamed for the outbreak there. There were scares for a long time afterwards that it would recur.

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DAINTREE - I was on holiday in Young, N.S.W. when flu broke out and I couldnt get

back home because no interstate travel was allowed. I was staying with a doctor and his wife and I helped look after the children. The flu was very bad in Young and they were worked off their feet but no one in the family got it.

One of my cousins from Frankston died. She was twenty five and the illness made her turn black before she died. Her sister was also very ill but she recovered.

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HILDA - I was 22 and we lived in Corowa, with Wahgunya just across the river. The state border was closed and some were really annoyed but most young people thought it was a joke. If you had a good reason, you could get a permit, but it meant you had to have a medical certificate. We used to stand on the bridge and talk to our friends and the boys used to swim backwards and forwards. There were always boats going across a bit downstream and the inspectors weren't there at night. A lot got through, especially soldiers coming home from the war. There was a law that you had to wear a mask but, up there, most didn't bother.

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DOUG - I was 12 but I remember it well. We lived in West Hawthorn and my mother had a bad dose. She was allowed to stay home because she could be isolated. My father was a health fanatic and we had an open-air bungalow. My mother was put to bed there and the only one who went near her was my father. Everything she used was soaked in cauldrons of carbolic in the backyard. We children had to exercise and take special health foods. My mother was in her early forties and she never fully recovered. She died several years later.

It started during the summer and we did not go back to school for months. It got pretty boring because we were not allowed to see our friends or go out. The papers published statistics of cases and deaths according to districts and everyone took a sort of morbid interest, as they did with casualties in the war.

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EILEEN - I was a schoolgirl in Bendigo and we were all vaccinated when the epidemic started. My older brother and sister still got flu and both were dangerously ill. It was called the Black Death because once you went black in the face, you were done for. They both recovered but it was a long, slow process. One thing I do recall is that we had Mass outside.

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ELAINE - They died like flies from the flu, although the only one I actually knew was the boyfriend of a girl in my office. It was very sudden. She was talking to him on the phone on Friday and by Monday he was dead. We lived in Malvern and I went by tram to work in a solicitor's office in the city. I remember everyone on the tram wearing masks.

Everyone was worried and it was a very gloomy time after all the excitement of the end of the war and the boys coming home. It seemed to go on for a long time, about 12 months, I think, but we just carried on as usual.

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EMILY - I was teaching at St Catherine's Orphanage, Geelong. The Orphanage and the Convent were in the same grounds and both institutions were completely closed to the outside. No one got it but there was a terrible scare. We were all lined up and vaccinated ... the same needle for everybody, and a large dose! Geelong was not as badly affected as Melbourne, especially the inner suburbs. People just did not go out unless they had to and when they did they wore a cheesecloth mask tied with tapes.

Shops and businesses were closed and industry was badly affected. It struck so suddenly that organisation of emergency workers was chaotic. The main place that everyone talked about was the Exhibition Building. Grace was there and when anyone talked of bad times she always said nothing compared with the Exhibition. They were crowded in on canvas stretchers with grey army blankets.

The troops brought it back after the war. They were quarantined but a lot of them broke out. We were so glad to have them back that I don't think anyone blamed them. There was all that grief during the war, and then this burst upon us. No one believed such a terrible thing could happen to us. It was a sort of a corollary to the war... a sort of recompense thing.

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FLORENCE - We lived in Deepdene and I was 22 years old. I worked as a seamstress in Flinders Lane. None of the thirty employees got sick and it was work as usual for us. We made our own masks but we only wore them on the tram. You could travel freely but there were restrictions on public gatherings. concerts and

things like that. There was terrible fear in the community but a lot of young people didn't take it all that seriously. Most people just carried on and just took the risk. The inner suburbs were worst affected but Deepdene wasn't too closely settled in those days. We certainly kept away from houses where there were sick people.

All the hospitals took in cases and the Exhibition Building was opened up. The nuns from St Vincent's offered to run it with volunteer nuns from convents all round Melbourne, but the Government wouldn't allow it. There was still a lot of antagonism against Catholics resulting from the part they had played in the Anti-Conscription campaigns. I think some of the nuns did work there and they certainly worked in other temporary hospitals. The Red Cross did a lot but people generally didn't do much to help one another.

When my sister fell ill suddenly, she called out to a neighbour, but she wouldn't come - she was too afraid. My sister and her husband, both in their late twenties, died in the Homeopathic Hospital (later Prince Henry's) within 3 weeks of each other. He died very quickly but she lasted for some weeks and we used to visit her. We were a bit frightened but we took courage from one another. I don't think there were any restrictions on visitors because lots of the family and friends visited too. The hospital was terribly crowded with beds jammed into the wards and the balconies. We would walk through with people dying all around. After she died we were not allowed to view the body, the coffin had to be sealed at once for fear of infection and the funeral held as soon as possible.

My sister had a 4 year old son and he came to live with us so we always had him as a living reminder. The epidemic meant more to me personally than the war. We knew a few boys who went away, but there was no one close to us and we were not really involved.

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GLADYS - I was 27 and we lived at Moonee Ponds. My husband worked on the railways and they were all vaccinated, but I wasn't. There was a lot of panic and anxiety and the government issued all sorts of regulations. Masks were given out and you were forced to wear them and schools and picture theatres were closed. Everyone stayed home as much as they could and shops and businesses were hit hard. We would only buy essentials and they were delivered.

The main thing about the flu was that a lot of young people got it and they died very quickly. The husband of one of my best friends died at the Exhibition Building, leaving a 6 weeks old baby. Everyone feared being taken to the Exhibition. So many died there, but they did not have the choice. The Showgrounds was also used for the sick.

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GRACE - Having the flu was the worst experience of my life. I was one of the lucky ones who survived the Exhibition Hospital. I was 29 and we lived in Carlton. Bob was a baby. I dreaded being taken away, but I had no choice and I'll never forget the horror of it. We were packed in, in our thousands, with scarcely room to walk between the beds. People were dying on either side and every hour someone was carted off on an iron stretcher. There were no proper facilities and the only treatment was sips of brandy.

I was there for weeks and I didn't know or care what was happening outside. It came so suddenly, out of the blue, especially for the poor in the inner suburbs. In the war, soldiers expect to die, but this attacked everyone, women and children too. They were well one minute and dead the next, and before they died they turned black in the face.

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HORACE - I was 19 and I worked on the family farm at Korrumburra. The government did all it could to deal with the epidemic. The Health Department put out posters, display advertisements and circulars outlining precautions, and, for the most part, people took heed. I remember, however, the derision that accompanied attempts to have the wearing of face masks made compulsory. Australians generally had access to a plentiful supply of fresh food, so they were better able to fight off the disease than those suffering from war privations in Europe. One result of the epidemic was to stimulate research into viral diseases and the development of vaccines.

There was one case in our district that I remember when a man and his wife were overcome suddenly and were found dead in their milking shed. They had several children, one of whom became a member of Parliament and was knighted - Sir Edgar Tanner.

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JOHN - We lived in Northcote and I was 8. My mother, father and I had the flu but my two brothers did not. My aunt and uncle who lived nearby also had it and two of my mother's cousins who had been wounded in the war. We had been vaccinated by our doctor and when we became ill we were looked after at home, with a visiting nurse coming in once a day. I remember my father burning sulphur to fumigate the place.

People took a pretty fatalistic view and it was seen as just one more calamity, There were feeble attempts at isolation and face masks were used widely. Inhalatoria, remnants of the Middle Ages, were set up involving the use of some aromatic substance. All sorts of idiot nostrums were used. I was told that student doctors were called in for medical duties. Our doctor, A.E.V. Hartkopf, who later became a Test cricketer, was a hero.

I have a vivid memory of Mass with a masked priest with masked acolytes preaching to a masked congregation and masked people lifting the corner of their mask to receive Communion.

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LUCY - I was 10 and I remember vividly having to wear a mask to church. Being me, of course I took it off and I remember the aunts using this as yet another example of my incorrigible behaviour. Geelong over-catered for the epidemic and the Town Hall was fitted out as a hospital, but never used. The Council sold off the excess equipment and my parents bought an iron bed, made by Impey Bros of Geelong, and I still sleep in it today.

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MARGARET - I was a student teacher and we lived in Abbotsford. We were terrified and we were all vaccinated and wore masks. The injection was terrible and my mother got an infected arm that was swollen and sore for weeks.

If anyone in the family was sick, the authorities had to be notified and other family members had to stay home. There was an awful lot of talk about it in the papers and the fear was made worse because it was described as the "Black Death". You had to get permission to travel from an infected area into what was called a "clean" area. One of the worst problems was getting buried. Huge

numbers died and we heard about hearses pouring away from the Exhibition Building. Funerals were to be held as soon as possible after death because of infection, but there were often long delays.

All my husband's family had it. They had a licensed grocery in Richmond and they lived above the shop. Alice, the eldest, looked after the rest until she got ill herself. The mother died and Tom got out of bed to go to her funeral. When he came home he had a relapse and developed pneumonia, but recovered. Another brother who was married died at the Exhibition Building. He had one child and his wife was pregnant. When the baby was born, everyone looked at him and said "Poor little Chappie". He has been known as Chappie to this day.

During the epidemic, all places of entertainment were closed. There were no dances or pictures and people weren't too keen on visitors. When we went out it was for walks or to the gardens. The idea was to keep in the fresh air.

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MARGE - I was in my final year as a boarder at Star of the Sea Convent , Gardenvale, and we lived in Middle Park. The school was closed to the outside for months. A mild sort of flu went through the school but only one girl was bad and she was taken away to hospital. One of the nuns, Sr Magdalen, died and that sheeted it home to us. She was not more than forty, a small, vivacious woman who was running around looking after us all and putting drops up our noses. The next day she was dead. It scared the hell out of us.

My relations lived in Murtoa, which, like a lot of the Wimmera, was badly affected. My aunt and uncle and their daughter-in-law all died within 24 hours of each other, the latter leaving a 2 weeks old baby. My half-brother also lost two children within a week, one was 2 and the other 10 months. Incidentally, my uncle was the local doctor.

People were really terrified and there was a lot of talk comparing it to the Black Death. It seemed to fall out of the sky and no one knew where it would strike next. It was hit and kill and there was a great sense of personal danger. There was a lot of panic and scare and people were very suspicious. Everyone kept to themselves and didn't worry about what happened to the rest. It was ugly. Those who were not affected thanked their lucky stars

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MARY - The papers were full of news about the flu and there was a real scare. I lived in Kew and worked in town and we carried on but, at the same time, did everything we could to avoid contact with people. No one close to me had it but a young mother, who was a neighbour, died leaving a family of young children.

One thing I remember was that it was hard to arrange funerals. So many died that the undertakers could barely cope and hearses were queued up at cemeteries.

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MAVIS - In 1919 I was a student at the Conservatorium. I travelled from Geelong each day by train. I remember that people were very anxious but not much else. I didn't know anyone who had it. The one thing I can remember vividly is everyone wearing masks.

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MAY - I was 24 and I worked in a private Midwifery Hospital in Armadale. The State School down the road was set up as a hospital for flu victims. Matron sent me there one day with one of our domestics who was sick. We didn't know she was pregnant but we heard later that she had miscarried. When I worked at the Women's Hospital later I found that a lot of women miscarried there at the time and a lot of young mothers died.

I got the flu, probably from that girl, and I went to my brother's house in Richmond to recover and I didn't have any complications. Afterwards I went home to Minyip to convalesce. There were no restrictions on travel and everything was normal there. They didn't have proper masks and people just used hankies.

There was quite a panic at the time and hospitals were set up all over the place but they didn't have the staff for them. Not many people were ready to volunteer; it seemed like putting your head in the noose. It was bad but but nothing like the constant anxiety for those who had boys away at the war.

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RACHEL - I went to P.L.C. from Camberwell each day by train and tram. I don't think the school closed but we may have gone back late after the Christmas holidays. Those who had been in contact had to stay home for seven days. We



were vaccinated by our doctor and I think I was more scared of the needle than I was of getting the flu.

A lot of people had the ordinary flu, not the pneumonic variety, and this made the epidemic seem worse. With pneumonic influenza there is a crisis with pulmonary and cardiac failure. Of course the epidemic was serious but we didn't feel great personal danger. A few years later I was working at Prahran Welfare Centre and I came across several families in which one or other of the parents had died of pneumonic influenza.

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RUTH - We lived in Korrumburra and I was 21. The flu is a bad memory but it is completely overshadowed by the war, in which I lost my two brothers and my fiancée. There were cases in Korrumburra, but it wasn't widespread, though the State school was used as a hospital. It was staffed from the local hospital supplemented by volunteers. There didn't seem much threat in the country but in the city it was a different matter.

A year or so later, while I was training at the Children's, I was seriously ill with flu. Though it was said that the epidemic lasted less than a year, there were cases for a few years afterwards.

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SHEILA -- I was teaching at Warrnambool Technical Schhol and I don't remember anyone there getting the flu. At the time, there was quite a scare and we were all vaccinated and had to wear horrible masks looped over our ears. In the country, it was more of a scare than a reality though we heard a lot of horror stories of what was going on in Melbourne.

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SIBYL - We lived in Camberwell and all the family got the flu - my mother, my three sisters and myself. My three brothers were still not back from the war. It came on very suddenyl and we were all very ill. My sister, Rachel, who was thirty two, died. We had a nurse in the house for weeks. Nurses seemed to be available to work in private homes, though they were in very short supply for emergency hospitals. No one seemed to bother about it at the time but, later, we received a lot of criticism because nurses were so much needed elsewhere.

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SUSAN - I was a trainee nurse at the Melbourne and there were wards set aside for flu victims. I got flu but, as a lot of the staff were sick with it too, there was no room for me so I was sent home. There I was completely isolated and none of the rest of the family got it. They hung carbolic sheets over the door and everything was passed to me through the window and everything I used was soaked in buckets of carbolic outside the window. The doctor saw me through the window and I had to put my hand out for him to take my pulse. I seemed to be in that rooms for months and I was really very ill. I was not allowed to do anything strenuous for a long time afterwards because of my heart.

No one would go near a house where there was flu and it was hard to get things delivered. They would leave things outside the gate and run. They said the troops brought it back after the war but I don't know if that was true. I think the papers didn't give the epidemic much publicity to keep down the panic.

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