



Lithgow Pioneer Press



INFLUENZA IN SYDNEY FOUR CASES IDENTIFIED STATE AUTHORITIES TAKE DRASTIC PRECAUTIONS

"Pneumonic influenza has appeared in Sydney, four cases have been definitely identified, and between 17 and 19 suspicious cases have been reported. They are all in the Randwick Military Hospital

The whole of the State's anti-epidemic organisation has been brought into operation, the federal authorities have declared the State an infected area."

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THE INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

The influenza pandemic, also known as the 'Spanish Flu', emerged at the end of the First World War, killing more than 50 million people worldwide. It was referred to as the 'Spanish Flu', not because it originated in Spain or that it was most deadly there, but due to the illness first being widely reported there. Spain was neutral in WWI and was not under the same wartime censorship as were other countries, including Australia.

While it caused fatalities, it still seemed relatively mild. It didn't last long, and complications were generally absent. By August 1918, the epidemic was over - or so it seemed.

Yet even before this wave ebbed, something changed. Many patients now developed pneumonia, their lungs filled with fluid; lack of oxygen caused their skin to turn blue and sometimes almost black. They died rapidly.

This second, deadlier wave - now a pandemic - exploded around the world. By October 1918, it had hit South Africa and New Zealand.

In the four months prior to 31 December 1918, there were 71 deaths in Lithgow. Of these 30 were attributed to influenza-pneumonia.

As the new strain of pneumonic influenza had not reached either New Zealand or Australia by then, and the first diagnosed cases were recorded in Sydney in late January 1919, these deaths in Lithgow were discounted by some of the medical fraternity in Sydney as being from pneumonic influenza.

The first 'official' case of pneumonic influenza was reported in Sydney on 27 January 1919. Two days before becoming ill, a soldier had travelled by train from Melbourne, and had shared the compartment with an unknown civilian, who had displayed influenza symptoms. Within a few days, other cases appeared in Sydney.

News of the first death in Sydney from pneumonic influenza reported in the *Lithgow Mercury* on 11 February 1919 was cause for concern for the people of Lithgow.

Parents anxiously waiting for their sons to return home after the Armistice were advised that many of the troop ships with cases of the pneumonic influenza on board would be placed in quarantine on arrival in Sydney.

Travel restrictions were put in place by Government Regulation and State borders were closed to prevent the spread of the disease.

The total number of deaths due to pneumonic influenza in the Lithgow district may never be known. The medical staff in Lithgow were unable to record all the cases of infection as they struggled to make home visits to diagnose those who were ill and make arrangements for their care.

Many of the deaths recorded in the *Lithgow Mercury* between 30th March and 30th April do not appear to have been entered in the Lithgow Infectious Diseases register.

This is totally understandable as on any one day there were no less than 1500 to 2,000 in town suffering with influenza during that period according to the report from the Lithgow Council's Health Inspector, David Owen.



Lithgow District Hospital staff 0138

ALDERMAN ALBERT WATSON was elected Mayor of Lithgow Council at a special meeting held on Monday 10 February 1919, the youngest occupant of the chair since Lithgow became incorporated.

Albert was President of the Trades Hall Society and took an active role in the affairs of the community and was chosen by the Labour caucus for the position of Mayor.

Born in Hartlepool in County Durham on 2 October 1888, Albert Watson commenced working at the Lithgow Small Arms Factory on 5 December 1916. His employment record shows that he worked in several roles – Leading Hand, Leading Operator, Section Hand and Section Hand Fitter.

James Finlay, Factory Union President, accompanied by Albert Watson, represented all the employees of the Factory at the Public Works Inquiry into the quality and quantity of housing available for factory workers in June 1918.

Mayor Watson's one-year term in office coincided with the arrival of the pneumonic influenza epidemic in the district.

It was the Mayor who was able to communicate with the NSW Health Board to seek funds to open a relief depot funded by that body, and an appeal by the Mayor secured the temporary transfer of extra doctors and nurses employed by the NSW Board of Health to Lithgow to assist the medical fraternity during the epidemic.

When the number of people dying in both hospitals or in their home increased to five and six and peaked at thirteen deaths per day, this brought about a crisis at the cemetery. Graves could not be prepared fast enough, and the Mayor was compelled to take the matter into his own hands and paid men out of his own pocket to dig graves. The Council later recompensed this expense.

The Council approved the re-naming of a section of Hassans Walls Road from Main Street west to the turnoff, as Watson Street as a tribute to the work of its Mayor during the epidemic emergency.

Alderman Watson's terms as Mayor finished on 31 January 1920.

He unsuccessfully sought re-election in February 1920 as an independent, having broken his connection with the ALP. Of the 29 names on the ballot papers, 12 candidates were from the recently formed Lithgow Ratepayers and Tenants' Association. Ten of these candidates were elected and only two of the most favoured ALP candidates (George Chivers and Robert Pillans) secured re-election.

The new council rescinded the naming of the section of Hassans Walls Road to Watson Street soon after its election.

Albert Watson ceased his employment at the Lithgow Small Arms Factory on 5 October 1921 and sailed to England to visit his elderly father in Hartlepool. He commented in a letter to a friend that he longed for a 'pocketful of Australian sunshine' after a couple of days in London.

Albert Watson returned to Australia in 1922 and leased 245 acres of land at Bundanoon, ideal dairying country. In this venture he was assisted by his nephew who had recently arrived from Canada.

DAVID OWEN was appointed Sanitary Inspector of Lithgow Municipality on 23 September 1907. His previous appointment was Chief Sanitary Inspector of Waratah Municipality in the Newcastle area. As Health Inspector he was responsible for the inspection of about two thirds of the meat consumed in Newcastle and was one of the few men in that district who possessed a certificate from the London Sanitary Institute, which was the highest credential an inspector could possess.

He held the position of Mayor of the Municipality of Carrington between November 1891 and February 1892 and again between February and November 1895.

As Lithgow Council's Municipal Health Officer during the pneumonic influenza epidemic David Owen produced a report to the Council dated 31 May 1919 after the abatement of what was later referred to as the "Easter Epidemic".

The report detailed the steps taken by Council and the doctors to address the many issues involved and suggestions as to some of the reasons why the epidemic was so devastating in this district. Attached to the original report was a summary of the Government restrictions extended to the municipality on 19 April 1919, a list of names of those 'scores of noble men and women who gave their services unstintingly to the work of relief and distress' and two hand drawn mortality charts.

This report was published by the Lithgow & District Historical Society as Occasional Paper

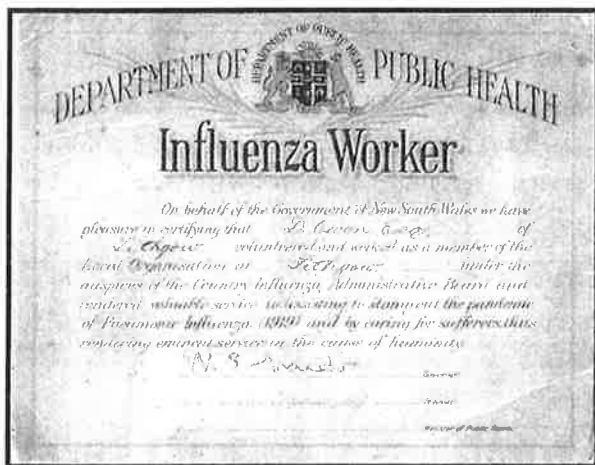
#48 and copies are available from Lithgow & District Family History Society.

Unfortunately the list of names and the summary of Government restrictions were not included in the Occasional Papers.

The list of names and a corrigenda were published in the Lithgow Mercury.



David Owen - Mayor of the Municipality of Carrington November 1891 to February 1892 and February 1895 to November 1895.



Certificate of David Owen
Influenza Worker Lithgow

Leslie John Duncan a motorcycle mechanic known as "Major Duncan" to his mates, purchased the Speedwell Bicycle and Motor Agency in Bridge Street, next to the Oddfellows Hall in 1911. 26-year-old Leslie was one of a group of young men from Lithgow who enlisted soon after war was declared in August 1914.

#914 Private Leslie John Duncan was with the 3rd Battalion during the landings at Anzac Cove on 25 April 1915.

It was not long before the Lithgow Mercury was publishing copies of the interesting letters "Major Duncan" wrote to his family and friends back home.

"Major Duncan" received a shotgun wound to his right eye in August 1915 while fighting in the trenches on Gallipoli. He was recommended for a medical discharge and arrived home to a hero's welcome on 1 July 1916.

Leslie married Leila Murray in 1918 in Mudgee and the couple were living in 83 Calero Street, Lithgow when he contracted pneumonic influenza. He died on 16 April and was buried in Lithgow Cemetery. The impressive gravestone erected by his widow is topped by a broken column, which usually signifies a life cut short by tragedy.

Leslie's brother, Sid Duncan, took over his brother's business, engaging the services of a skilled mechanic. In 1920, Leila Duncan married her brother-in-law, Sid Duncan.



PTE. L. J. DUNCAN,
Familiarly known in Lithgow as "Major," severely wounded in action. Famous for his genial and golden smile, Pte. Duncan had been in the trenches for many months, and doubtless did good service. He is one of the best-known local lads now with the colors. He responded to the call early, and has consistently written to the "Mercury" since his departure.



*Headstone of Leslie John Duncan
Lithgow Cemetery*

THE WILSON FAMILY Adjacent to the monument erected over the grave of Leslie Duncan are the unmarked graves of the Wilson family.

According to the Mudgee Guardian, the Wilson family in Lithgow were one of the worst cases arising from the epidemic in Australia. The entire family of ten contracted pneumonic influenza

Originally from Hartley Vale, William and Rose Wilson were living in Inch Street in 1919.

Rose Wilson nee McAviney was well known in Hartley Vale. Before the family moved to Lithgow, Rose worked in the community as an unpaid maternity nurse where she operated the doctor's surgery for Dr Hutley who visited weekly, travelling in a horse and sulky.

Rose contracted pneumonic influenza while nursing other patients in their homes.

William recovered from pneumonic influenza.

William's wife, Rose Wilson aged 53, died on 16 April 1919.

His seventeen-year-old daughter Ethel died the following day.

Eighteen-year-old son Charles died on 23 April 1919.

Six-year-old Carl Wilson died at the Emergency Hospital on 2 May 1919.

Four-year-old Rose Wilson died in Lithgow Hospital on 9 May 1919.

Carl's brother, ten-year-old James Keith Wilson was seriously ill in the temporary hospital. Jim Wilson recovered from pneumonic influenza and in an interview with Heather Menchin in 1988 he briefly spoke about that time.

Jim moved to Newcastle for a while, commencing work in the mines before he was twelve years of age. He returned to Lithgow in 1921 and helped to establish the Western District Mine Workers Medical Benefits Fund now known as Westfund.



Wilson family burial plot Lithgow Cemetery

LESLIE JOHN DOIG, pneumonic influenza was to claim the lives of both members of the family of another returned serviceman, #3831 Leslie John Doig.

Leslie, a miner from Zig Zag Colliery who played for the Gordon Football Club in Lithgow, was just 20 when he enlisted on 9 October 1915.

He suffered severe wounds to both legs and arms at Pozieres on 26 July 1916 and a gunshot wound to the right leg at the Battle of the Menin Road on 25 July 1917. The right leg was amputated, and Leslie was given a medical discharge.

22-year-old Leslie arrived back in his home town of Lithgow with little prospect of employment. It would be 11 months before he secured permanent work at the Lithgow Small Arms Factory as a polisher.

Soon after, Leslie married 18 year old Eileen Beatrice Ellen Denny in Mudgee. The couple were living in Roy Street, Lithgow and expecting their first child when Eileen contracted pneumonic influenza in April 1919.

Eileen gave birth to a son on 18 April 1919. Born prematurely, baby William Doig only lived for two hours and was buried the following day.

Eileen Doig died three days after the death of her son and was buried in the same grave.

Leslie's employment card stated that he ceased employment at the Lithgow Small Arms Factory on 15 May 1919 with the annotation 'influenza'.

Leslie John Doig re-married in 1938 and died in Sydney in 1959.



William Morgan with daughter Edna



Grave of Eileen Doig Lithgow Cemetery

WILLIAM HENRY MORGAN, son of William Cameron Morgan and Ann Elizabeth Barton was born 1888 in Lithgow and died 25 April 1919, at Old Clarence.

William married Kate Lough at St. Francis Xavier's Catholic Church Wollongong on 3 May 1911.

Kate, the daughter of Leonard Lough and Annie Wiley was born 14 March 1891 and died 16 November 1961 at Hartley.

Their children were Edna Mary born 20 November 1913 North Sydney, Ronald William born 4 September 1915 North Sydney and James Edward born 10 May 1917 Wollongong.

The pneumonic influenza epidemic highlighted the plight of those who lived between Clarence and Bell, and whose only access to Lithgow was by train or by horse along a bush track. For many years the residents of Clarence and Newnes had argued for the necessity of a road from Oakey Park to Bell. In the event of sickness patients were conveyed by tricycle or goods train.

Travel by road from Bell was via a road through Hartley Vale and over Brown's Gap, a distance of about 18 miles.

By January 1919 a proposal had been put to utilise the disused Zig Zag railway line, leaving only about 4 miles of road to be formed.

William Henry Morgan, his wife and three children were living at what was then known as Old Clarence when William contracted pneumonic influenza and died on 25 April 1919.

A letter to the Lithgow Mercury describes the Morgan family's plight: Arrangements were made with Lithgow's undertaker and a coffin was sent up to Clarence station the next day by the 3.30pm passenger train. The grief-stricken household were distressed that no-one from the undertaker's accompanied the coffin. William's home was about a mile from the station and 18 hours had elapsed since his death.

Other members of the household were suffering

from influenza and could not care for themselves. William's brother, who was himself still recovering from pneumonic influenza carried the coffin from the station to the family home. Two volunteers from the Railway Department eventually assisted with placing William into the coffin.

When the coffin was returned to the station the family was told that the Railway Commissioners would not allow the coffin to be transported by any train – goods or passenger. The coffin was taken by cart over a passable stretch of rough road to the mountain top above Corneytown.

By this time William's brother was at his wit's end to know how to get the coffin down on to the flat country. A number of willing hands went to the relief of the lonely cortege on the top, and the remains were carried down the mountainside, as it was utterly impossible for the horse to proceed any further. By now night had fallen and the cortege proceeded cautiously down the mountainside with only pit lamps to light the way ahead. The writer of the letter describes it as a most unpleasant and hazardous undertaking.

William Henry Morgan was buried in the Catholic Portion of the Lithgow Cemetery.

The Lithgow Mercury continued the public reports of the difficulties of living in these isolated communities.

In September 1919, Dr Chapple accompanied by Capt. Chaplain Lee, walked three miles from the end of the road at Corney Town to the railway camp at Clarence to treat four men with pneumonic influenza. Despite representation by residents and other members of the community, it would be another 23 years before the road to Clarence was completed!

Extracts from Health Inspector's report 31 May 1919 relating to the Temporary Hospital, Lithgow:

A meeting was held on Sunday afternoon 30 March attended by Dr Hutley, Government

Medical Officer, Dr Malcolm, Dr Chapple, the Mayor (Alderman Albert Watson), Aldermen Chivers, Webster, Delahunty, Town Clerk (Mr T Evans), Mr David Owen (Health Inspector) & Mr C H Steward.

Dr Hutley in opening the meeting explained the reasons for calling that meeting, an outbreak of pneumonic influenza had occurred in the town, with five patients suffering from the disease removed to the District Hospital that afternoon, namely four from the Vale of Clwydd and one from Inch Street and that there was a possibility that many other cases would occur.

He therefore urged the Council to take immediate steps to secure the District School buildings and fit them up as an Emergency Hospital as the isolation ward at the hospital was now almost fully occupied.

A week later, following representations by the Town Clerk, permission was received to close the school and the building handed over to the Council for that purpose.

SOLDIERS SERVING OVERSEAS

Many of the soldiers on the Western Front, were to succumb to pneumonic influenza. Ten percent of Australian troops in Britain were infected, and 209 died.

GEORGE JOSEPH MARA one of the many hundreds of soldiers who died in France was #5055 Private George Joseph Mara who was serving with the 17th Battalion.

Born at Kirkconnell in 1896, George was the son of Edmund and Mary Ann Mara and served for 5 years with the Portland Cadets and Militia prior to his enlistment in the AIF on 5th February 1916.

He served with the 17th Battalion in France and was wounded twice. The first injury was a gunshot wound to the thigh and hip sustained in January 1917 and the second a gunshot wound to the scalp in May 1918.

Each injury required treatment in hospital for several months.

George returned to his unit after recovering from his second wound and fought with the 17th Battalion in the decisive battle of Villers-Bretonneux on 8th August 1918.

George's health was such that he was admitted to hospital in September suffering from debility (physical weakness due to illness) and eventually transferred to England on leave, returning to his battalion in mid October. George's letter to his sister Mary, dated 17th October commented that 'I think this war will soon be over'.

George had the pleasure of celebrating with his mates in the 17th Battalion, when the Armistice was signed, and the war had finally ended.

He was admitted to 41st Stationary Hospital in Amiens on 21st November, and his parents were duly advised he was 'dangerously ill'.

George Mara died from pneumonia on 26th November 1918.

He was buried in Drury Hospital Military Cemetery in Amiens but access to this cemetery was difficult and the French Government decided to move all soldiers buried there and his body was later re-interred in the Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery.



George Joseph Mara



Original grave of George Mara at Drury Military Cemetery Amiens

YJMA

YVONNE JENKINS MEMORIAL AWARD

The YJMA is an essay award held each year in memory of our Founding Member Yvonne Jenkins.

This years topic was
"My Favourite Rascal."

The winner will be announced on Saturday 17 August 2019 at the LDFHS Resource Centre commencing at 2pm.

Guest speaker will be Jan Saundercock who will speak on the topic of the "Influenza Pandemic"

This will be followed by the announcement of the winner of the YJMA 2019 and then afternoon tea will be served

RSVP for catering would be appreciated

Further details on website & **f**