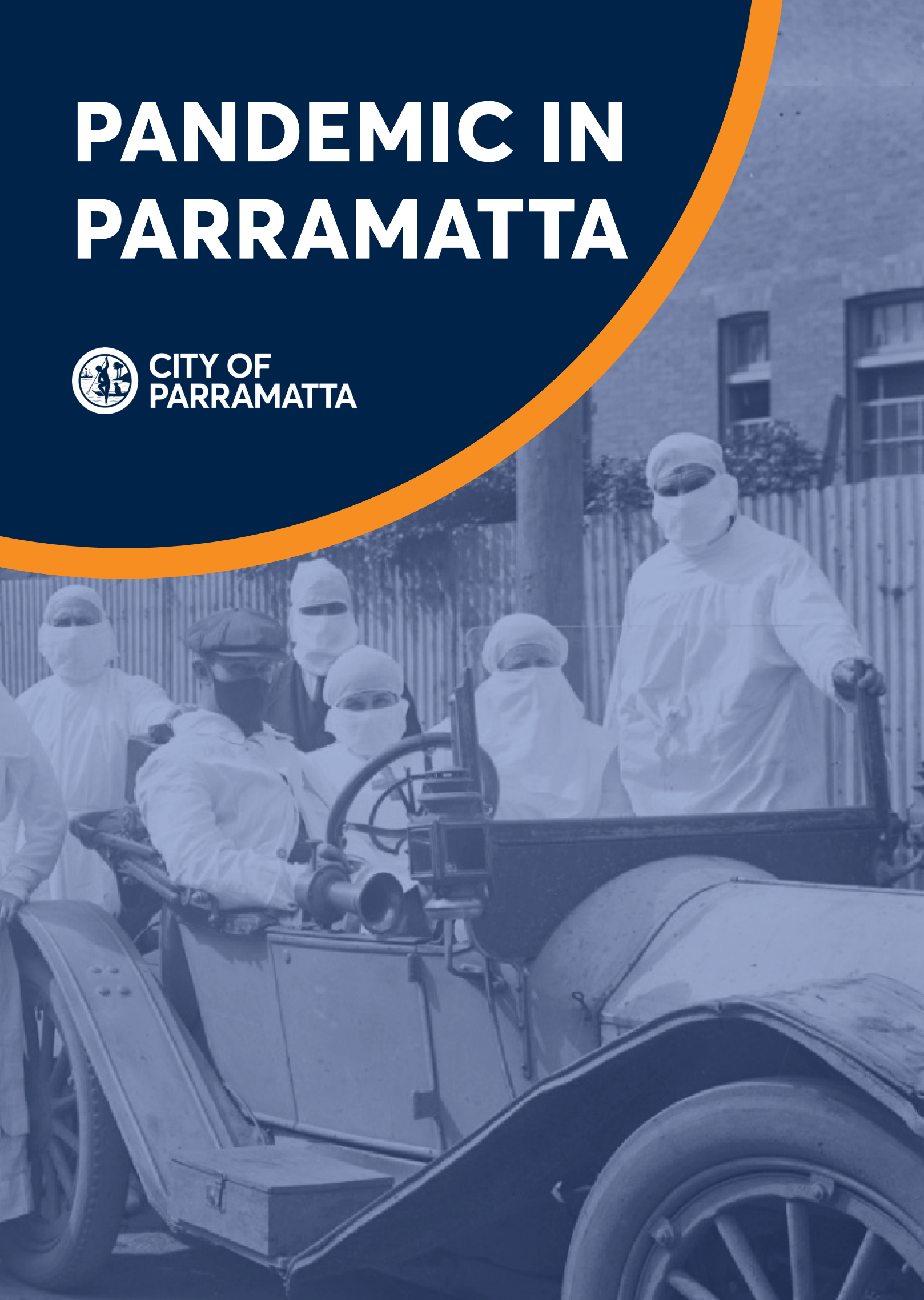


PANDEMIC IN PARRAMATTA



CITY OF
PARRAMATTA



Front cover image: *Influenza epidemic 1919, medical staff and workers from Riley Street Depot, Surry Hills NSW*
(Source: courtesy of NSW State Archives and Records, Ref. NRS4481_ST6679)

COMPILED BY:

Michelle Goodman, Council Archivist

Research & Collection Services

Parramatta Heritage Visitor & Information Centre

346A Church Street, Parramatta NSW 2155



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We would also like to acknowledge the NSW Lancers Memorial Museum for sharing their knowledge and collections items.

Images appearing in this publication were sourced mostly from the archives and locals studies collections of the City of Parramatta. Where images have been sourced otherwise the appropriate repository has been referenced.

The City of Parramatta acknowledges the Darug people as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live and work, and recognises the First Nations peoples of Australia experienced mortality rates significantly higher than non-indigenous communities during the 1919 pneumonic influenza pandemic.

Introduction

Part One of this publication draws from content developed for an event presented by Parramatta Heritage Centre in partnership with Westmead Hospital in August 2019, as part of the Sydney Science Festival for National Science Week.

The event, a talk titled *Pandemic in Parramatta*, marked the 100th anniversary of the devastating 1919 pneumonic influenza pandemic, which swept the world at end of the First World War.

The guest speaker at *Pandemic in Parramatta*, medical virologist Professor Dominic Dwyer, shared fascinating information relating to the medical aspects of viral pandemics. The Council Archivist from the City of Parramatta then explored the Civic responses to the 1919 pandemic by Municipal Councils in the Parramatta area, drawing from the historic collections held by the City of Parramatta Council Archives.

Who could have imagined that within six months of the *Pandemic in Parramatta* event held in 2019 the health professionals, Civic leaders, workers and communities in the Parramatta area would again face the significant challenges of a world-wide viral pandemic.

Part Two of this publication draws from an online exhibition, *Pandemic in Parramatta: Historical reflections*, prepared in August 2020 for National Science Week. The exhibition, drawn from the historic collections of the City of Parramatta Council, reflected on the eerily similar Civic responses in Parramatta to the two pandemics, one hundred years apart.

In 1919, the elected representatives and employees of the Municipal Councils in the Parramatta area worked ceaselessly, often at great personal risk, to deliver a co-ordinated and compassionate response to the challenges of the pneumonic influenza pandemic. Local health professionals and the people of Parramatta's communities responded with extraordinary courage and forbearance.

As we find ourselves again rising to the demands of a worldwide viral pandemic, the people of the Parramatta area can draw knowledge, strength and inspiration from the documented local experiences of the 1919 pandemic, and derive from them invaluable insights into how to navigate our challenging present.

Michelle Goodman

PART ONE

Pandemic in Parramatta, 1919

From *Pandemic in Parramatta* presented by the Parramatta Heritage and Visitor Information Centre in partnership with Westmead Hospital in August 2019, as part of National Science Week. Special guest speaker medical virologist Professor Dominic Dwyer.

A global pandemic reaches Australia

Michelle Goodman

In November 1918, as peace was declared and the guns of the First World War fell silent, people across the world began to succumb in great numbers to a deadly disease. Caused by a particularly virulent strain of pneumonic influenza, the illness was notable for taking the lives of an unusually high number of otherwise young and healthy people.

Commonly known as the Spanish 'flu', the disease is now thought to have originated in Kansas, USA, and been transported by American troops heading to the European theatres of war.[1] The uncensored press in Spain, neutral in the war, was merely the first to report large-scale fatalities.[2] During 1918/19 it is estimated approximately one third of the world's population became infected with the virus. An astonishing 50 to 100 million lives are now thought to have been lost during the pandemic – well in excess of the 17 million lives lost to the First World War.[3]



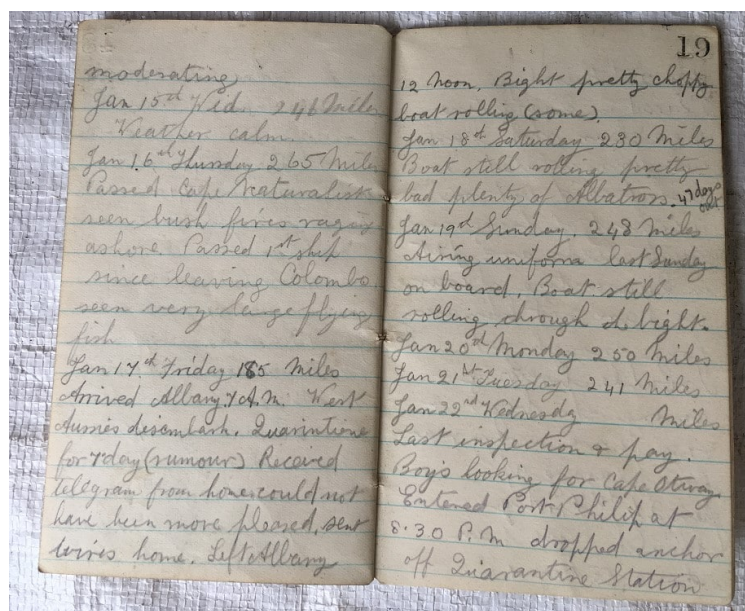
Soldiers during the first wave of the "Spanish 'flu" at Camp Funston, Kansas, 1918.
(Image: US National Archives, Otis Archives)

The pandemic reached Australia in early 1919, and became one of the greatest public health disasters in the history of our country.

Parramatta was not immune to the deadly spread of the disease.[4] Buried within the cultural collections and historic archives held across the Parramatta area is unique material that identifies when the disease reached our neighbourhoods and tells us how our communities prepared for, experienced and recovered from the pandemic.

One fascinating archive record is the diary held by the Royal NSW Lancers Memorial Museum of the young 'Parramatta Lancer', Trooper William Barracluff. In the diary, Barracluff expresses frustration and anger when, after diligently counting down the weeks and miles travelling home on the *SS Port Hacking*, he learns on docking in Melbourne that he will be transferred immediately to quarantine. Trooper Barracluff writes:

Jan 19th Sunday: 248 miles. Airing uniform – last Sunday on board. Jan 20th Monday: 250 miles. Jan 21st Tuesday 241 miles. Jan 22nd Wednesday: Last inspection and pay. Entered Port Phillip at 8.30pm, dropped anchor off Quarantine Station. Jan 23rd Thursday: Placed in Quarantine. Are clean ship, have been inoculated and disinfected... but put in Quarantine, of course we have not been away long enough yet. Trouble brewing among the boys and they have every reason for playing up. Jan 24th Friday: Should have been home today.[5]



Diary of Trooper Barracluff, Parramatta Lancer, quarantined on return to Australia from serving during World War 1, January 1919.

(Source: Royal NSW Lancers Memorial Museum, 2014-001)

The end of the First World War saw the mobilisation of people across the world on a scale never before experienced. Trooper Barracluff was only one of many who, returning to Australia from the battlefields of Europe and North Africa, were held first in the close confines of military camps and then on transport ships "looking forward to a triumphal return home and grand reunion with family and friends they had not seen for years", only to be "bitterly disappointed".[6]



Machine Gun Section, 1st Australian Light Horse Regiment, New South Wales, including Trooper W Barracluff – quarantined on return to Sydney in 1919.
(Image: *Australian War Memorial*, ref. P01208.019)

The understandable disappointment of the troops in quarantine was counter-balanced by the real need to protect the civilian Australian population from the pandemic. Many Australian troops had certainly contracted the disease abroad, some perishing even before their journey home began. Once such tragic case was Driver Richard Moxham, from a well-known family in Granville, who lost his battle with pneumonic influenza in France on 11 November 1918, Armistice Day, at the age of 20.



DRIVER RICH. (Dick) R. MOXHAM,

son of Mr. and Mrs. R. R. Moxham, of "Kia-Ora," New York-street, Clyde, died in France of illness (broncho-pneumonia) on 11th November, the day on which the armistice with Germany was signed. His age was 20 years and three months. He left for the war with the 31st Reinforcements (Army Service) on 31st October, 1917. Prior to enlisting he was for three months a member of the 13th Battalion Band stationed at Kiama, and had previously been a member of the Granville Municipal Band. He worked at the Clyde Engineering Works, as an apprentice in the blacksmith's shop, where he was well liked among his shopmates. He leaves, besides the members of his own family, a wife and little daughter, who at present reside with the former's mother at Fairfield. As a lad he attended the William-street public school and his name appears on honor roll erected there.

Driver Moxham lost his battle with pneumonic influenza on Armistice Day.
(Source: *Cumberland and Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*, 7 December 1918, p.10)

Australia's strict maritime quarantine rules were successful in protecting the country's population from the first two deadly waves of the disease that swept the world. However, it was only a matter of time before the pandemic breached the country's coastal defences.[7]

In early January 1919, cases of pneumonic influenza were diagnosed in Melbourne, and then in Sydney.[8] Despite the implementation of containment strategies across the state, cases were shortly afterwards diagnosed at other sites in New South Wales.[9]



A makeshift hospital at the Royal Exhibition building in Melbourne for pneumonic influenza patients, 1919.

(Image: Heritage Council of Victoria)

With the pandemic now confirmed as having reached Australia, the New South Wales State Government issued a series of proclamations in January 1919, restricting public movement. The proclamations directed the closure of all “libraries, schools, churches, theatres, public halls, and places of indoor resort for public entertainment”.[10] Use of public transport was discouraged, and it became compulsory to wear masks in public.

Official containment policies affected not only city dwellers but, as the disease spread through the state, also regional and rural populations. Aboriginal communities were particularly affected. Notification of an infected individual resulted in entire communities being transferred into regional ‘quarantine camps’, where their movements were rigorously patrolled by police under the instruction of the Department of Health.[11]

The enforced containment had a toxic outcome and in some Indigenous communities, pneumonic influenza mortality rates approached fifty percent (by comparison, non-indigenous death rates were three deaths per thousand).[12]

THE ABORIGINAL CAMPS.

SYDNEY, Friday.—Seven more cases of pneumonic influenza are reported from among the crew of the steamer Age. The Minister for Health has requested the Inspector-General of Police to provide for the strict isolation of aboriginal camps throughout the State. A special train with stranded Sydney people will leave Adelaide on Saturday. Mr. Holman advises that four days' detention at Albury is absolutely necessary. Over 30 persons, including a number of women, were fined at the police courts to-day for failing to wear masks. The State Commandant, referring to complaints about the soldiers' camps at the quarantine station, declared that if there was any foundation for the grievances drastic action be taken. He asked for a report on the statement that the utensils were dirty and greasy.

Aboriginal communities in NSW were often transferred to isolation camps during the pneumonic influenza outbreak.

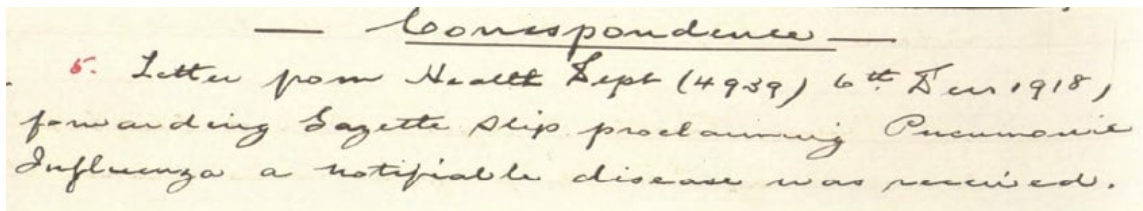
(Source: *Northern Star (Lismore)*, 1 March 1919. p.4)

Despite best efforts to contain the disease locally, not long after pneumonic influenza had arrived in Sydney, the deadly virus crept into the neighbourhoods of Parramatta.

Parramatta prepares, and the pandemic arrives

Michelle Goodman

Formal notification of the pandemic had first reached Parramatta in December 1918 by receipt of a letter from the Health Department of New South Wales proclaiming pneumonic influenza as a 'notifiable disease'. Local governments were instructed to report immediately any suspected cases within their districts.[1]

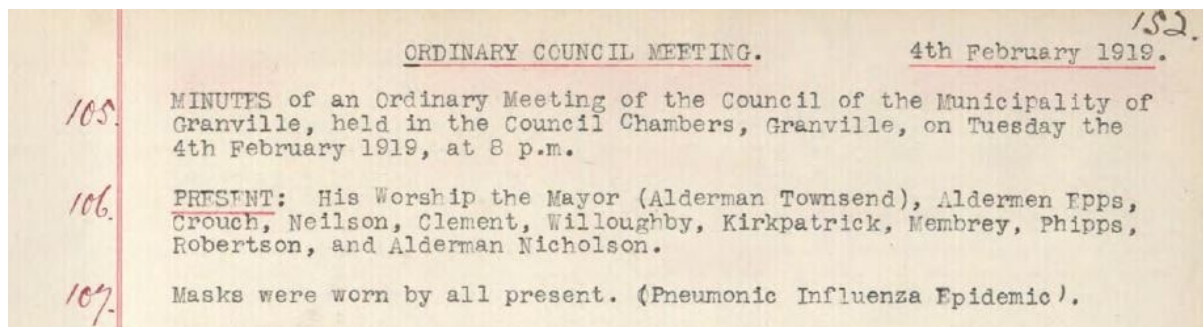


Pneumonic influenza identified as a notifiable disease.

(Source: Minutes of the Meeting of Parramatta Municipal Council, 13 January 1919)

By early 1919 Civic leaders in the Municipality of Parramatta, and the neighbouring Councils of Granville, Dundas and Ermington & Rydalmere had mobilised into action to prepare for the pandemic. The Councils established Influenza Committees, and appointed Influenza Administrators to co-ordinate local responses to containment, treatment and relief.[2].

Despite potential health risks to Aldermen, Council Meetings continued to be convened, with masks worn during proceedings.[3] Councils gave measured consideration to the potential social disruption that may be caused by a severe influenza outbreak. In Parramatta, the official Patrolman wrote to Council asking for guidance "should pneumonic plague break out in the District", leading to panic and disorder.[4]



Masks were worn by Council Aldermen at meetings during the pandemic.
 (Source: *Minutes of the Meeting of Granville Municipal Council, 4 February 1919*)

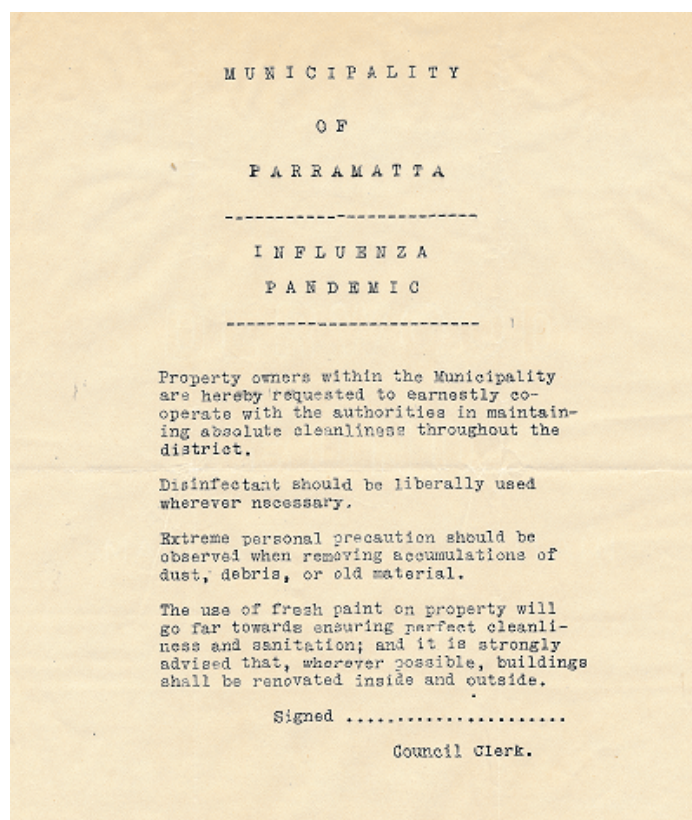
Strict restrictions on personal movement were introduced by the Councils with local businesses, schools, hotels, cinemas, dance halls and churches closed down. On 10 February 1919, Parramatta Municipal Council passed a resolution:

That in order to help combat the dreadful disease which has been devastating most of the countries throughout the world and to assist the State Government in its endeavor to check the possibilities of contagion by preventing as far as possible the contagion of too many persons in a small area, instructions be issued forthwith for the closing of the Centennial Baths until such time as all danger therein is passed and matters are from the country's health point of view, again normal. [5]



Parramatta Cinema, c. 1919.
 (Image: *City of Parramatta Local Studies Photograph Collection, LSP0856*)

As the weeks went by, with fear of the pandemic growing within the barricaded Parramatta communities and the streets and public spaces becoming increasingly and eerily deserted, Civic and community leaders continued to meet and plan behind closed doors. Municipal campaigns for infection containment and sanitation were launched, with property owners issued formal directives from Council to "maintain absolute cleanliness" and use disinfectant "liberally and wherever necessary".[6]

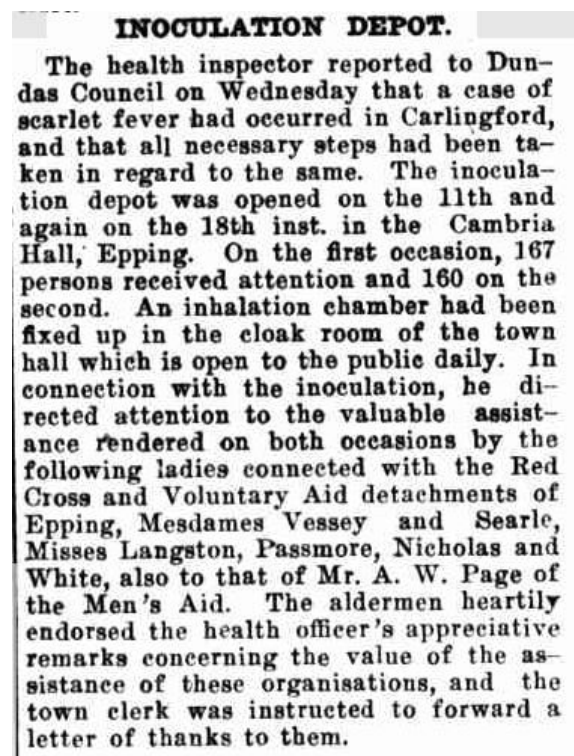


An Influenza Pandemic directive from Council to property owners.
(Source: Parramatta Municipal Council correspondence files, 22 February 1919)

Ultimately, concerted Civic efforts were not able to prevent the inexorable march of pneumonic influenza into Parramatta, and by March 1919 the local area was in the grip of a full-scale outbreak. As the pandemic took hold, the Mayor of Parramatta approved 100 pounds of Municipal funding, an enormous sum at the time, for the undertaking of containment and relief.[7] At the same meeting, the Mayor also put his official car at the disposal of those "working for the public interest" in fighting the spread of the illness.[8]

On 16 April, Dundas Municipal Council approved the installation of a telephone, a new technology in the district, at Dundas Town Hall, to co-ordinate the provision of influenza services.[9]

Beyond remaining indoors and observing hygiene and infection control recommendations, the residents of Parramatta had few other means of avoiding infection. Experimental influenza vaccines started to be distributed by the Australian Commonwealth Serum Laboratories. However, at this time the exact nature of viruses was unknown, and effective influenza vaccines would not become available until the 1940s. An inoculation depot for the Parramatta area was set up at the Cambria Hall in Epping, where long queues formed for the vaccines.



An Inoculation Depot at Cambria Hall in Epping administered vaccines during the pneumonic influenza outbreak.

(Source: *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate*, 22 Feb 1919, p. 8)

Inhalation chambers, thought to 'steam clean' the lungs and therefore reduce the risk of pneumonic influenza infection, were installed in the cloakrooms of the Granville, Dundas and Parramatta Town Halls and "open to the public daily".[12]

Privately operated "inhalatoriums" were also installed by local businesses, including in the furniture show room of the landmark Murray Bros department store on Church Street, Parramatta.[13] Local pharmaceutical dispensaries also offered for sale a variety of supposedly miraculous influenza "wonder cures".



Murray Brothers department store in Parramatta, where an 'inhalatorium' was installed during the 1919 influenza pandemic.

(Image: *City of Parramatta Council Local Studies Photograph Collection*, LSP00269)

Retrospectively, the effectiveness of the inhalation chambers and over-the-counter remedies came to be dismissed as of little benefit beyond a potential 'psychological boost'.^[14] The effectiveness of the vaccines is contested, although it is believed they did provide some protection from the deadly secondary bacterial infections associated with the virus.^[15]

As 1919 progressed, people across Parramatta continued to succumb to pneumonic influenza. Higher rates of infection and death were experienced in Parramatta's poorer communities. A Parliamentary Paper prepared after the outbreak, in 1920, identified:

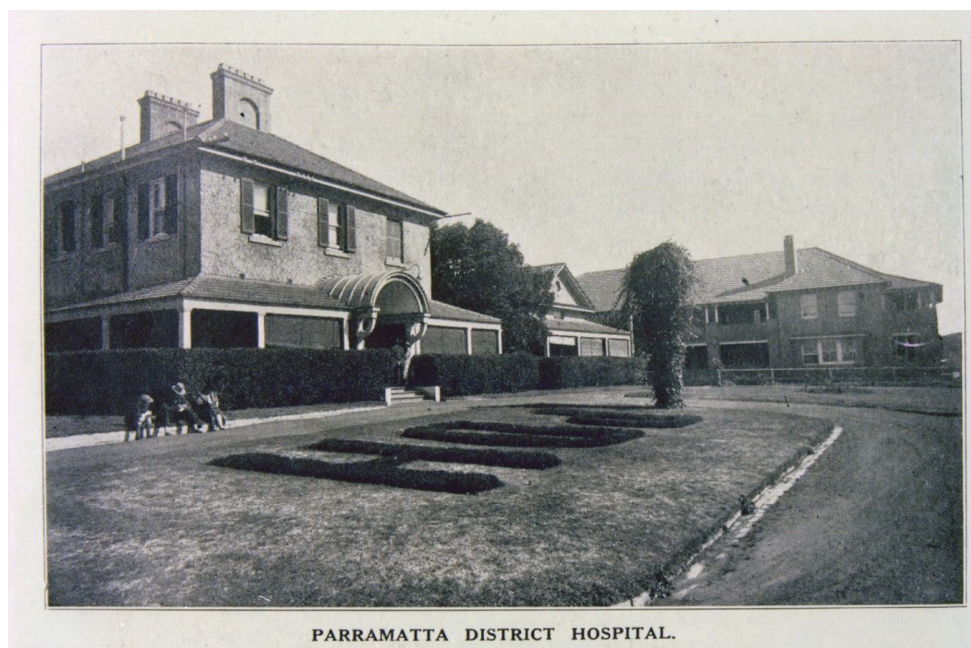
Poor nourishment, and poor living standards contributed directly to the spread of pneumonic influenza... while the rich could pay for private nurses to care for sick family members, parents and children in poor families were frequently sleeping together in shared beds, with inadequate blankets, and were often left penniless once the household breadwinner became ill.^[16]

As the pandemic ravaged the community, few people ventured into public spaces, and everyday life in Parramatta ground to a halt. The impact on commercial and business activities across the area was profound. In turn, with the breadwinner of many families lost to the disease, seriously ill, or unemployed, the Relief Depots established across the Parramatta area struggled to support the large and increasing number of residents suffered financial hardship.^[17]

Loss and recovery in Parramatta

Michelle Goodman

As the pneumonic influenza pandemic took hold in Parramatta during the first few months of 1919, the small Parramatta District Hospital, with only four dedicated infectious patient beds, was only able to admit a handful of influenza patients. Those falling ill with the disease began to be directed to Lidcombe State Hospital, or the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Camperdown.[1]



Parramatta District Hospital could only admit a small number of patients during the 1919 pneumonic influenza pandemic.

(Image: City of Parramatta Council Community Archives, ACC002/106/027)

It is estimated there were approximately 2,000 hospital beds in New South Wales at the onset of the outbreak of the 1919 pandemic, with more than 25,000 people requiring hospitalisation across the state between January and September of that year.[2]

As the acute hospital beds close to Parramatta began to fill, patients were admitted to nearby convalescent hospitals including Thomas Walker Hospital in Concord, and the 'Denistone' Hospital in Eastwood.[3] At the peak of the pandemic 'emergency hospitals' were also set up in public sites such as schools and community halls. A large number of those infected were cared for by relatives at home, often spreading the disease through generations of families.

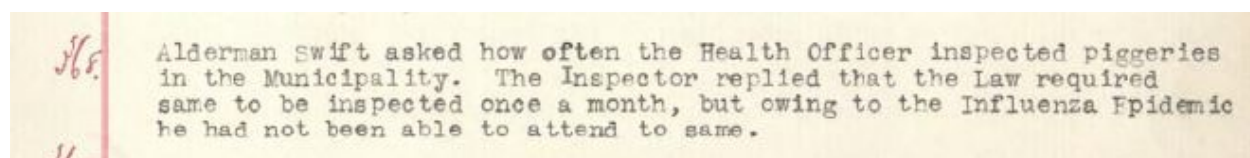
Across the Parramatta area, people were losing their battle with the illness. Tragically, many families recovering from the loss of beloved sons during the First World War watched as further young family members slipped away, often within days of displaying their first symptoms.

The profound effect on the community of the many rapid and untimely deaths is evident in the lengthy columns of obituaries in local newspapers and the "Motions of Condolence" carried in silence at the beginning of Council Meetings.[4]



Headstone in Rookwood Necropolis for siblings Henry and Harriet Ottoway: Lost in 1917 serving in the First World War, and during the 1919 influenza pandemic respectively.
(Image: University of Sydney)

While illness and death enveloped Parramatta's domestic spaces, aspects of day-to-day Civic life also experienced severe disruption. Council personnel and resources were increasingly directed to fighting the pandemic, so routine functions such as health inspections were put on hold, and significant initiatives, such as house numbering projects, were delayed. Even large-scale community Peace celebrations were postponed.[5]

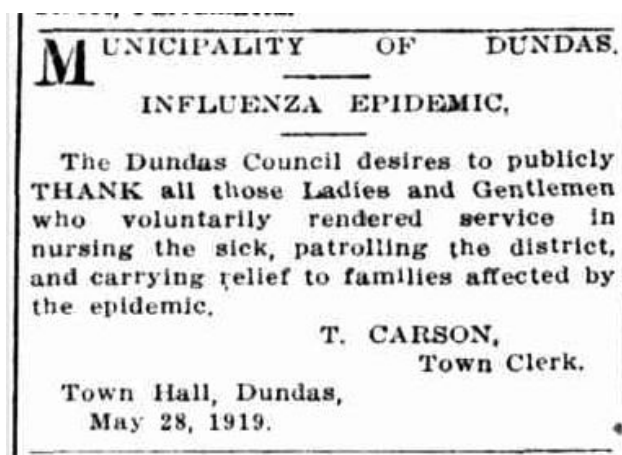


The pneumonic influenza pandemic disrupted everyday life during 1919.
(Source: Minutes of the Meeting of Granville Municipal Council, 1 April 1919)

Pneumonic influenza infection levels in Parramatta peaked during the month of April 1919 and by the end of May, newly diagnosed cases in the area had fallen away. Indeed, by this time the situation began to improve markedly across the whole state, although some regions continued to be at the mercy of the pandemic until September 1919.[6]

As the pandemic in Parramatta began to wane, the local Municipal Councils publicly thanked the many officials and volunteers who had assisted during the crisis, often at great personal risk to their own health.

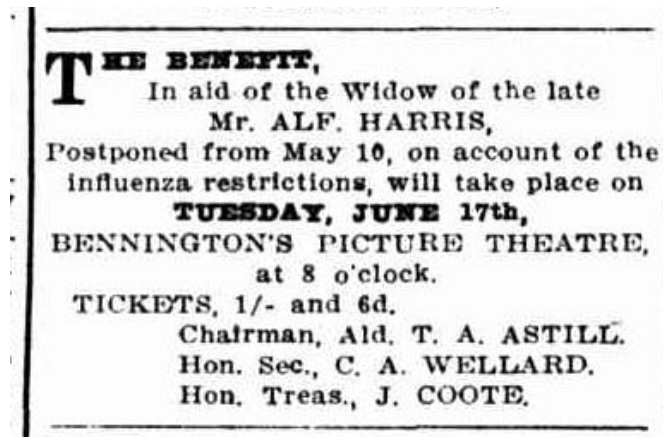
The contributions by Parramatta's Civic and neighbourhood leaders, medical personnel, and community volunteers had been remarkable, and undoubtedly resulted in fewer deaths and less financial deprivation than would have otherwise been experienced.



Local Councils thanked those who volunteered assistance during the pneumonic
(Source: *The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate*, 31 May 1919, p. 14)

By June 1919 businesses, schools and places of entertainment had reopened, the Relief Depots across the district had been closed, and the Influenza Committees disbanded.[7]

Slowly, life across Parramatta began to recover and return to normal. Peace celebrations and widows' benefit functions, postponed during the height of the pandemic, were rescheduled. With the horrors and deprivations of the First World War, and the devastation of the pandemic behind them, local communities began to rebuild their social fabric.



Peace celebrations and benefits were rescheduled as the pandemic *subsided*
(Source: *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*, 31 May 1919, p.14)

The pneumonic influenza pandemic that swept through Australia during 1919 caused a greater restriction of personal liberty and loss of life than any single event in our nation before or since. It is estimated that two million people in Australia were infected with pneumonic influenza during 1919, with deaths in excess of 15,000.[8]

However, the pandemic seems often now only to be remembered as a 'footnote' to the history of the First World War. It was therefore fitting in 2019, during the centenary anniversary year, to remember and reflect upon the contributions, sacrifices and losses across the Parramatta area, and indeed communities around the world, during the devastating pneumonic influenza pandemic of 1919.

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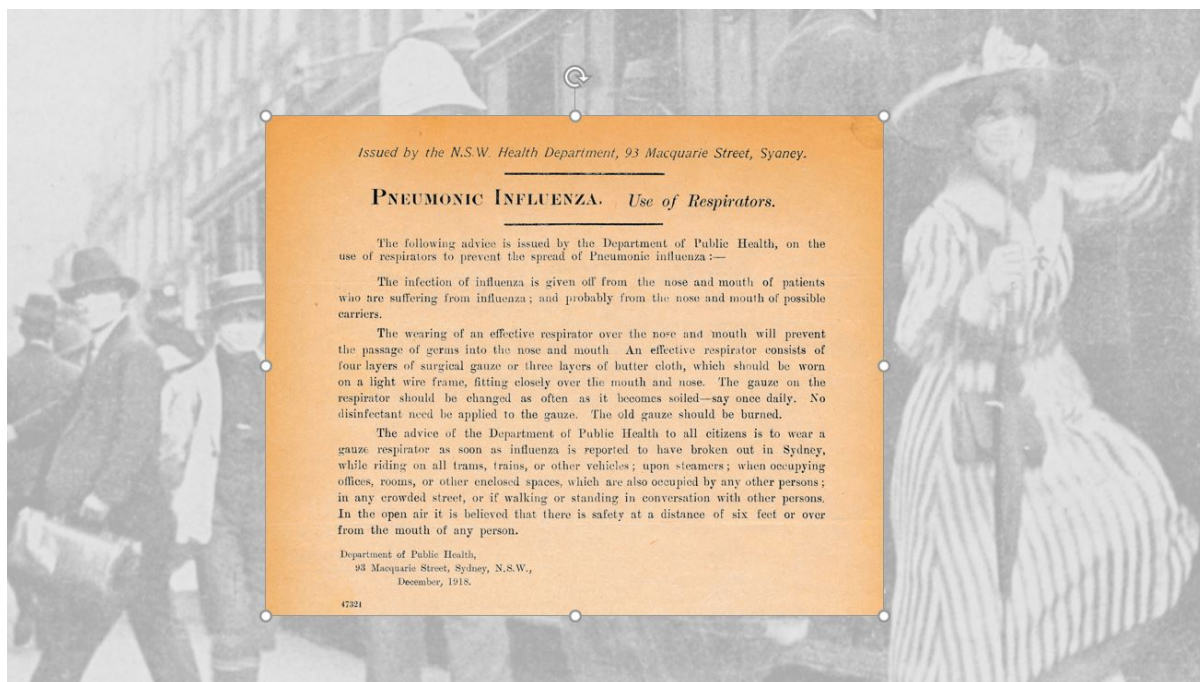
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PART TWO

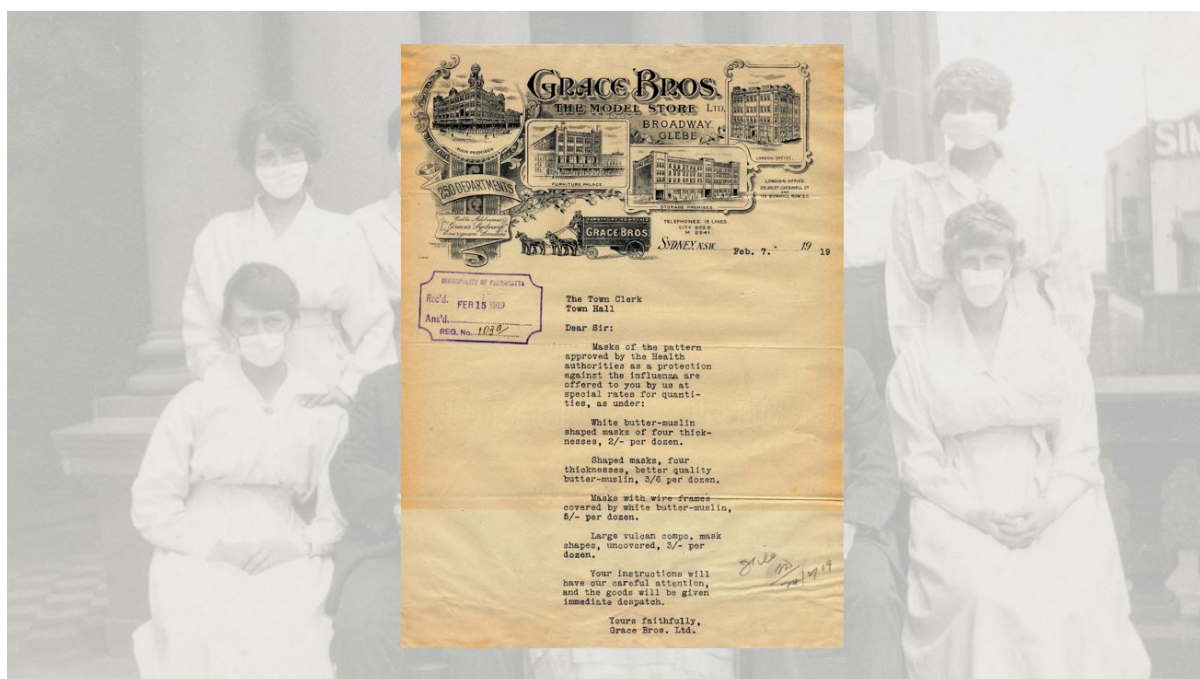
Pandemic in Parramatta: Historical reflections

From *Pandemic in Parramatta: Historical reflections* online exhibition presented by the Parramatta Heritage and Visitor Information Centre in August 2020, as part of National Science Week.



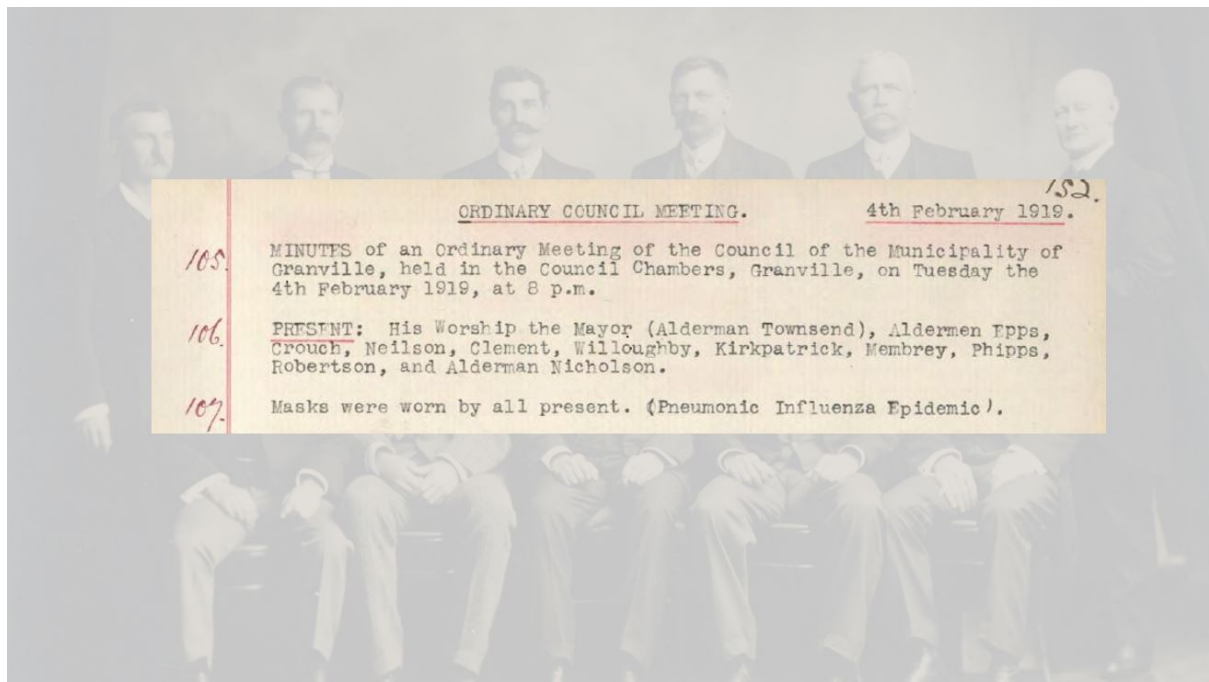
"The wearing of an effective respirator over the nose and mouth will prevent the passage of germs..."

(NSW Dept. of Health Directive, Parramatta Municipal Council Correspondence File, 1919)



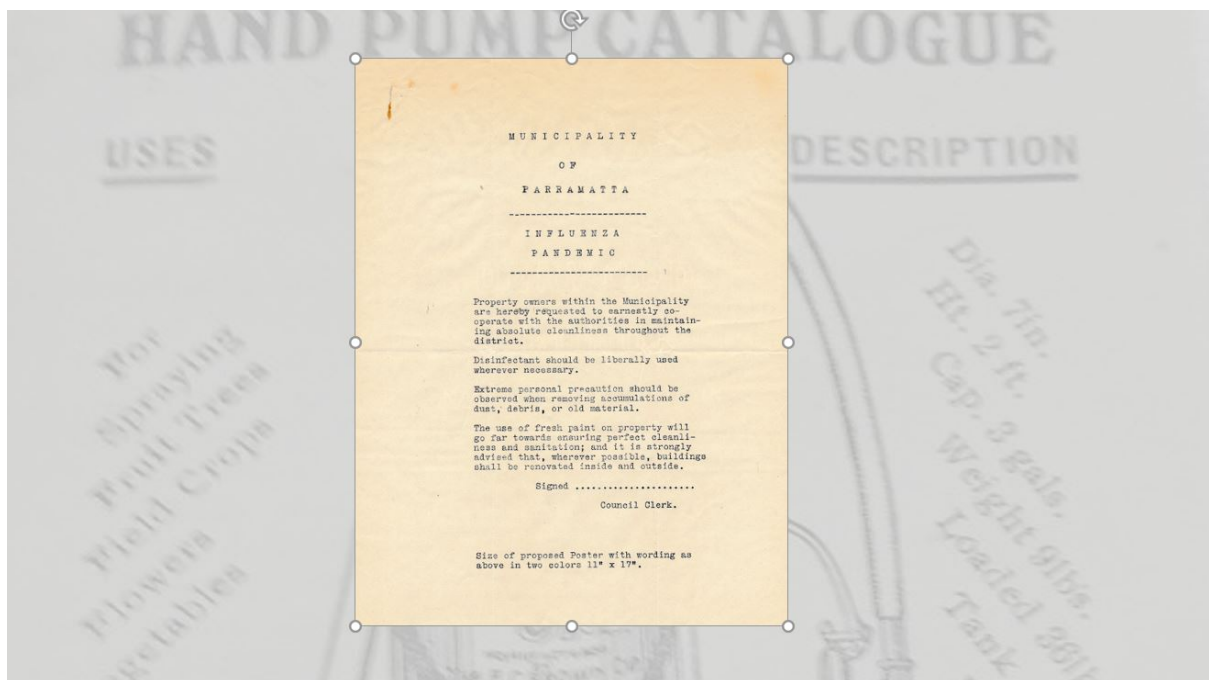
"Masks of the pattern approved by the Health Authorities...are offered to you by us"

(Correspondence, Grace Bros Pty Ltd, Parramatta Municipal Council Correspondence files, 1919)



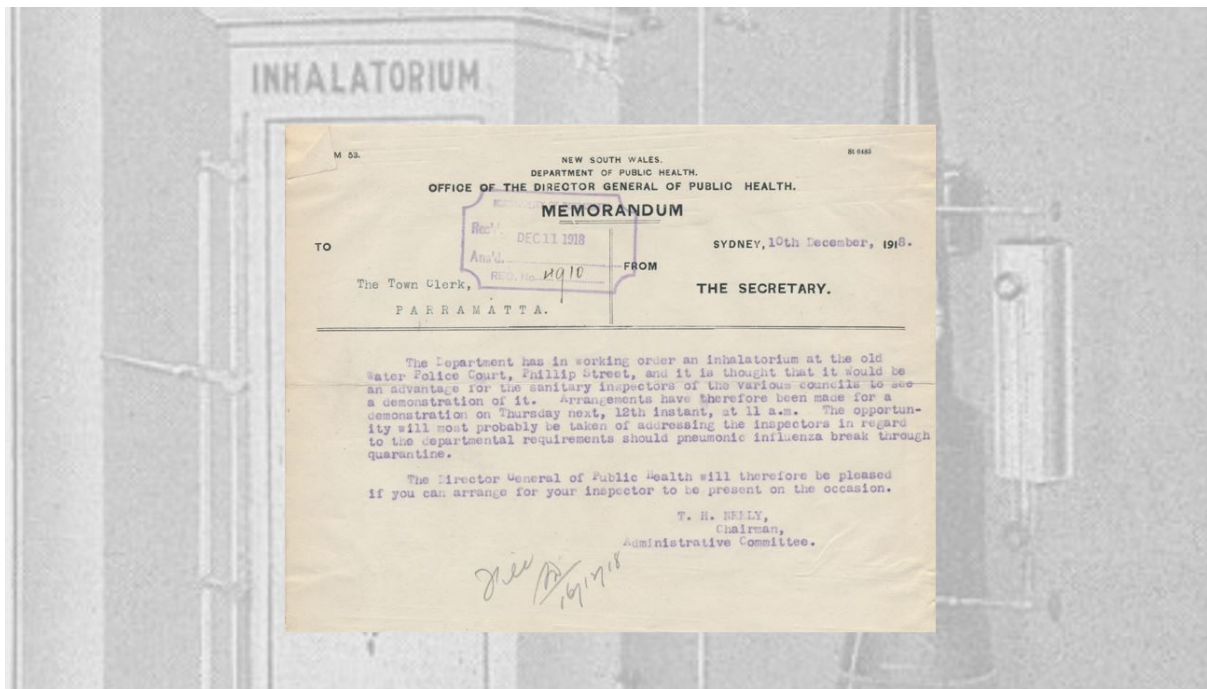
"Masks were worn by all present. (Pneumonic Influenza Epidemic)."

(Minutes of the Meeting of Granville Municipal Council, 4 February 1919)

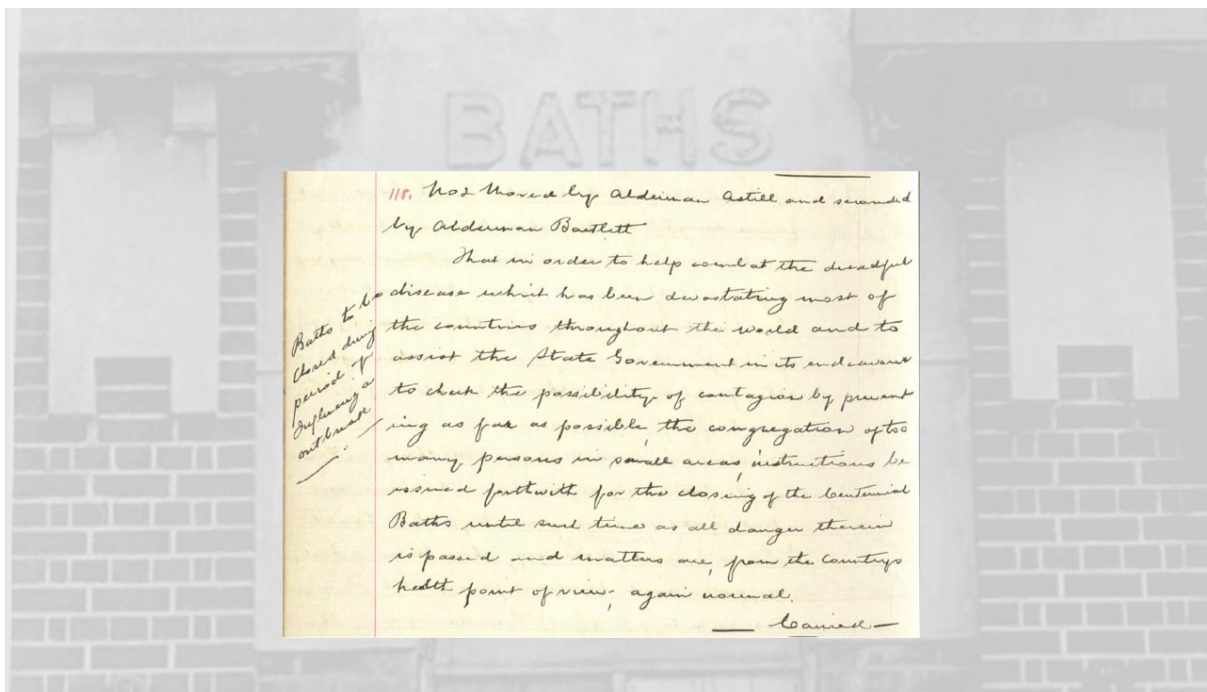


"Disinfectant should be liberally used wherever necessary."

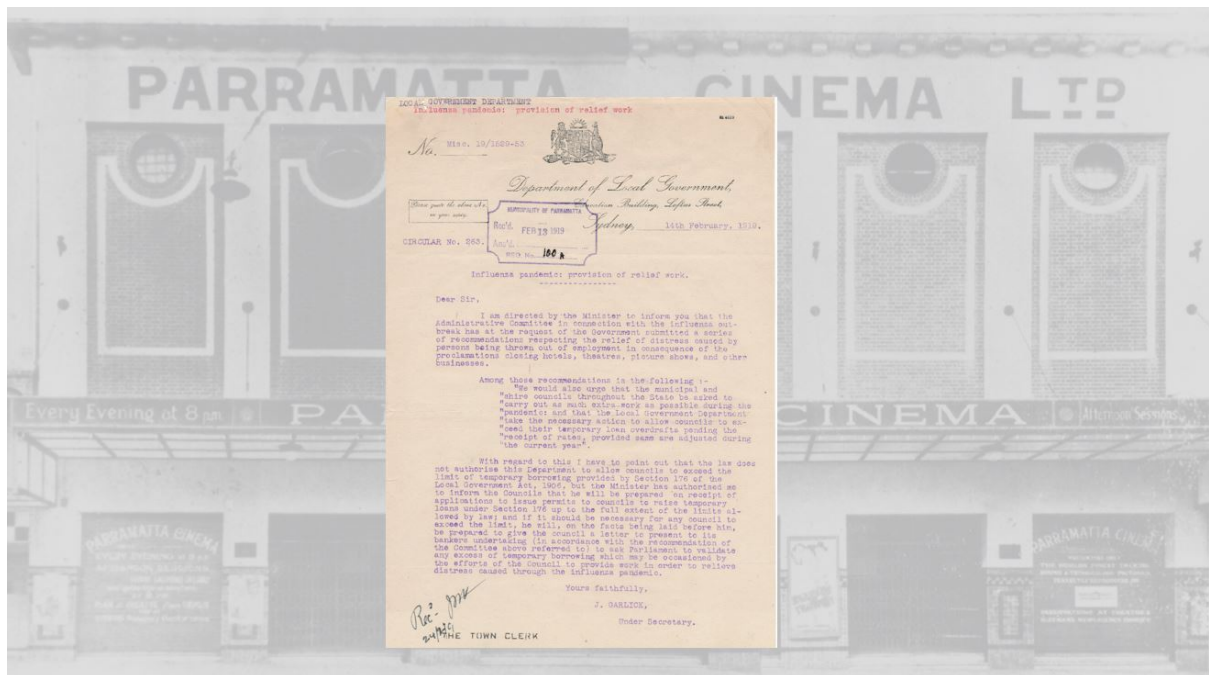
(Health Directive, Parramatta Municipal Council Correspondence File, 1919)



"The Department has in working order an inhalatorium at... Phillip Street..."
(Memorandum, Parramatta Municipal Council Correspondence File, 1919)

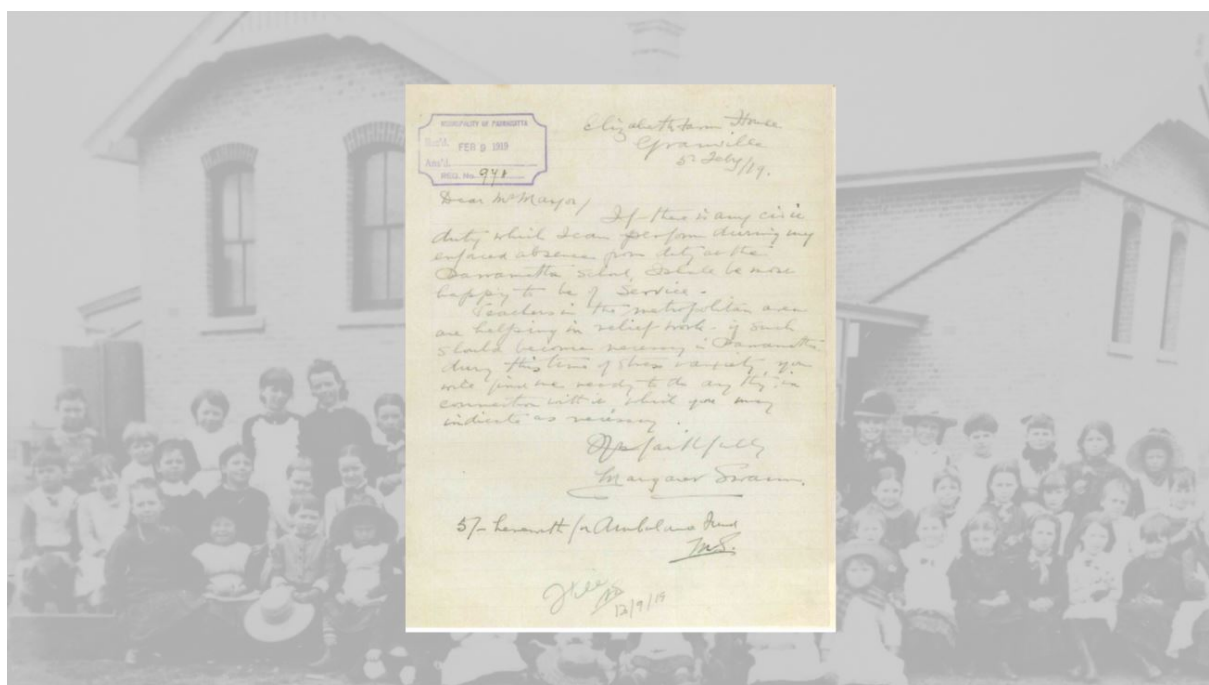


"...closing of the Baths until ... all danger is passed and matters are normal."
(Minutes of the Meeting of Parramatta Municipal Council, 10 February 1919)



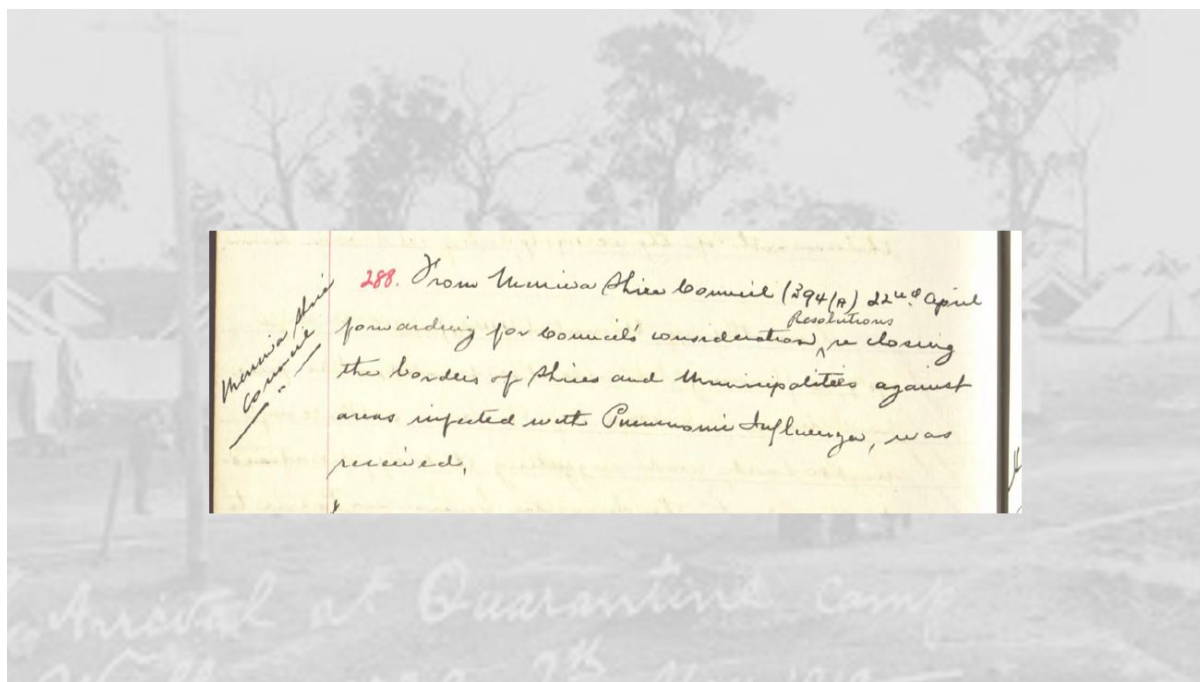
"...recommendations regarding the relief of stress caused to persons being thrown out of employment in consequence of the closure of hotels, theatres, picture shows and other businesses."

(Letter, Dept of Local Government, Parramatta Municipal Council Correspondence File, 1919)



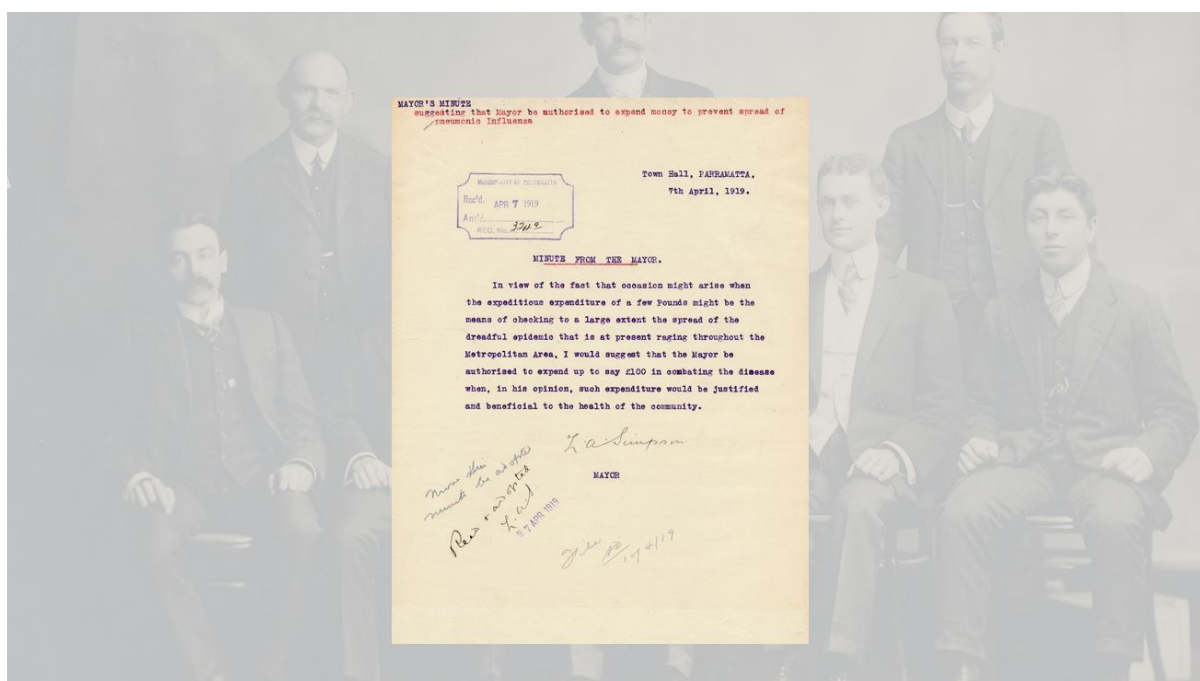
"If there is any civic duty which I can perform during my enforced absence from duty at the Parramatta School I shall be most happy to be of assistance."

(Letter from Margaret Swann, Parramatta Municipal Council Correspondence File, 1919)



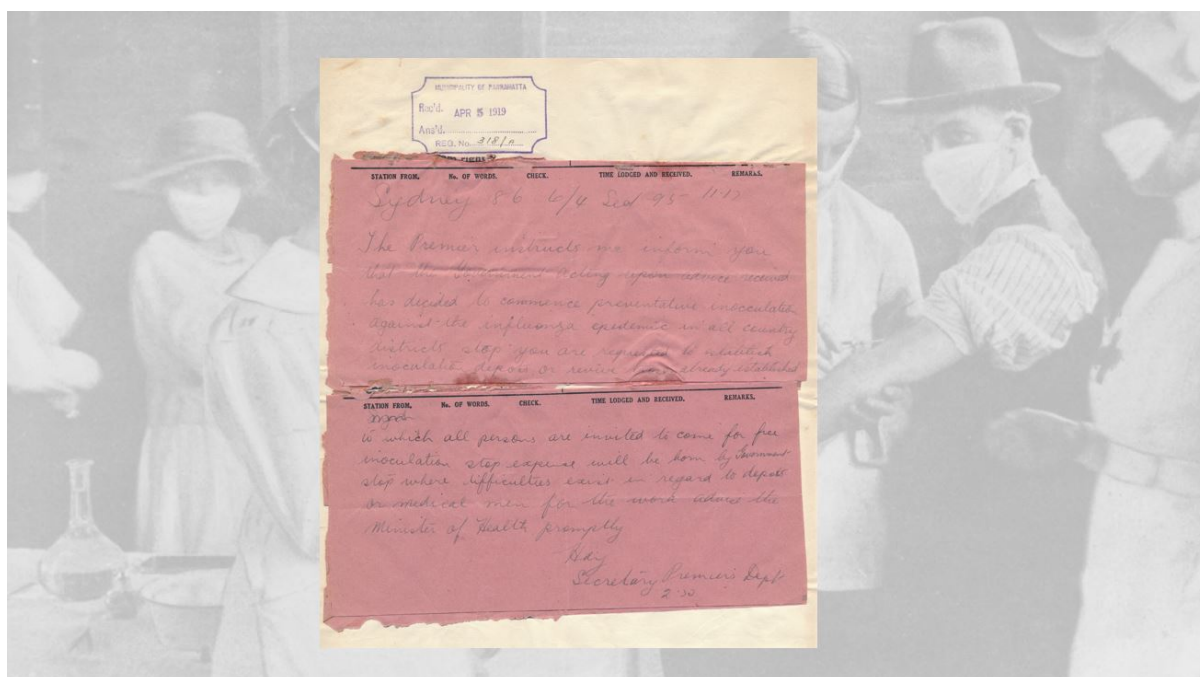
"...forwarding for Council's consideration in closing the borders of Shires and Municipalities against ours infected with Pneumonic Influenza..."

(Minutes of the Meeting of Parramatta Municipal Council, 5 May 1919)



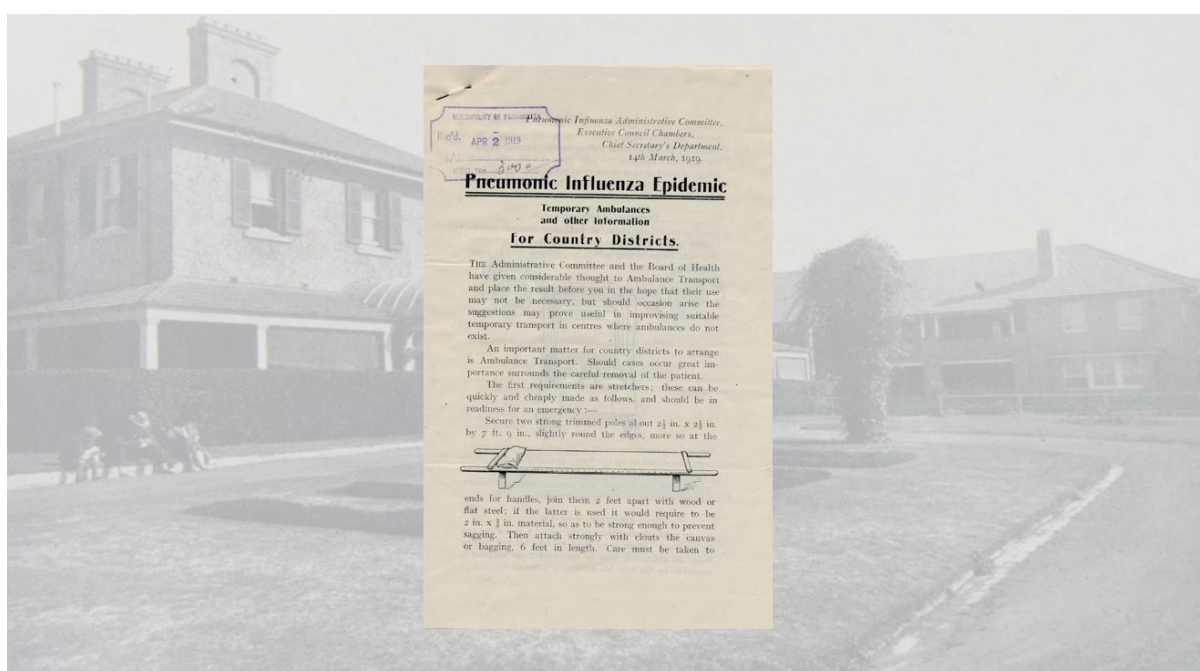
"...the Mayor be authorised to spend money to prevent the spread of... Influenza"

(Mayoral Minute, Parramatta Municipal Council Correspondence files, 1919)



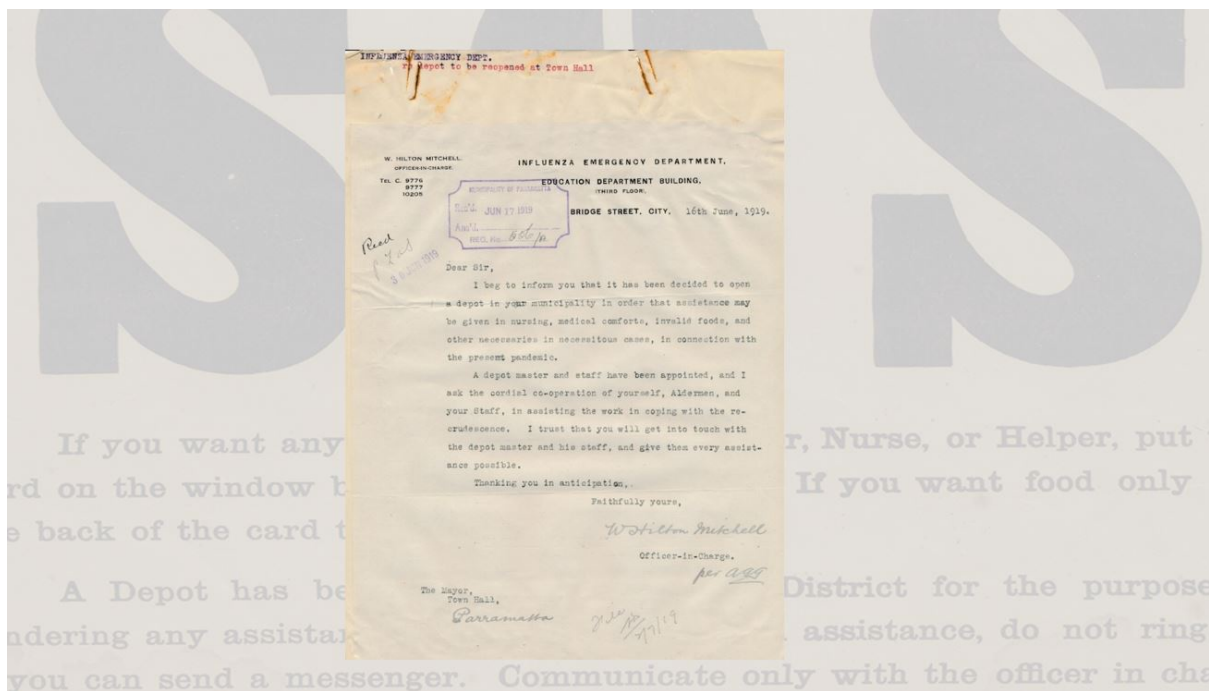
"...commence preventative inoculations against the influenza epidemic..."

(Health Department telegram, 6 April 1919, Parramatta Municipal Council Correspondence File)



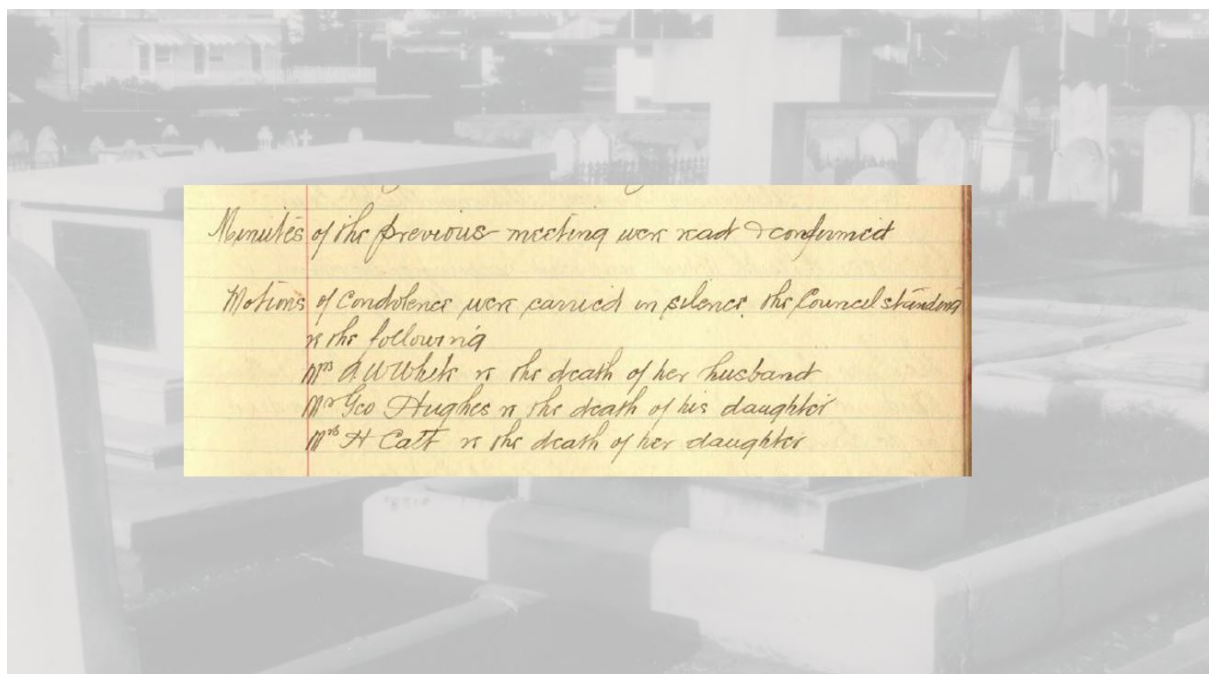
"...improving suitable temporary transport in centres where ambulances do not exist."

(Pamphlet, Pneumonic Influenza Administration Committee, Parramatta Municipal Council Correspondence File, 1919)



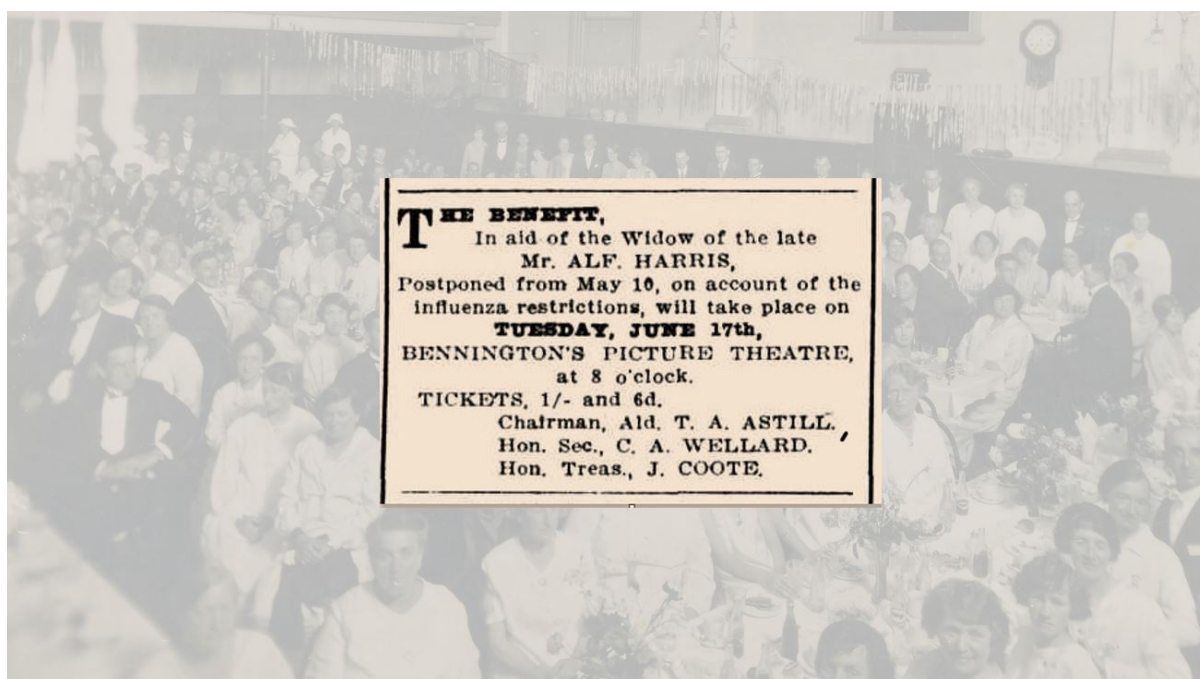
"...it has been decided to open a depot... in order that assistance may be given in nursing, medical comforts, invalid foods and other necessities..."

(Letter, Influenza Emergency Dept, Parramatta Municipal Council Correspondence File, 1919)



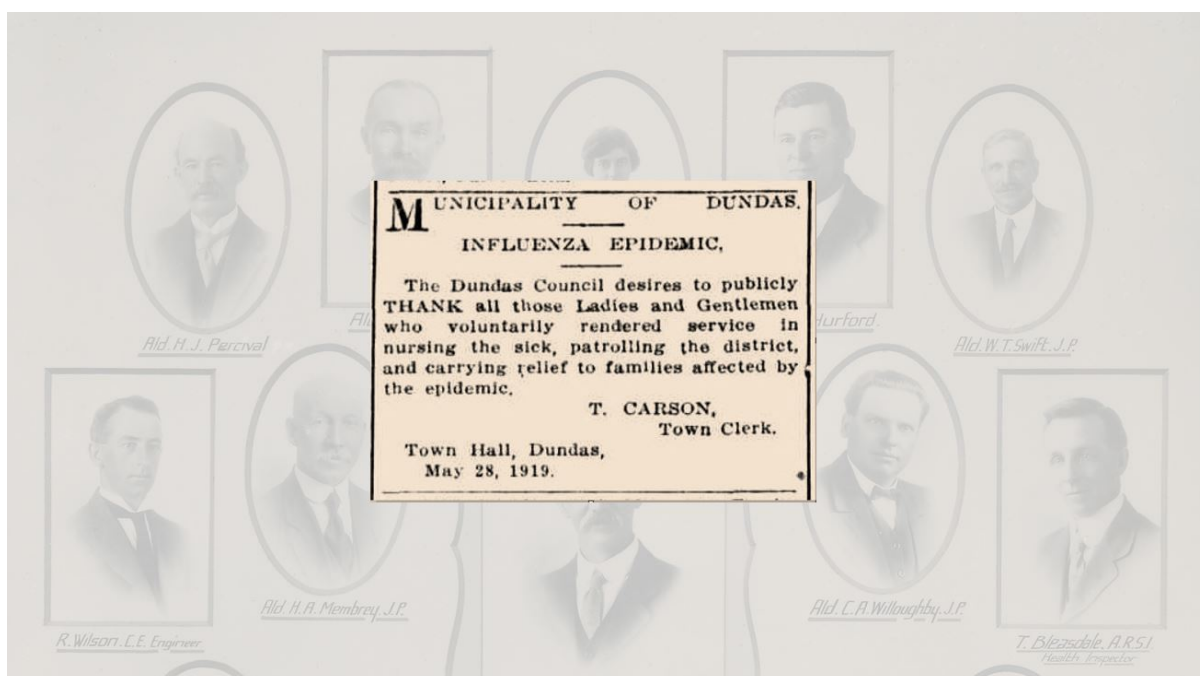
"Motions of Condolence were carried in silence, the Council standing..."

(Minutes of the Meeting of Dundas Municipal Council, 16 April 1919)



"The Benefit... postponed from May 10, on account of the influenza restrictions, will take place..."

(Public Notice, Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate, June 1919)



"...desires to publicly thank all those Ladies and Gentlemen who voluntarily rendered service in nursing the sick, patrolling the district and carrying relief to families..."

(Public Notice, Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate, 28 May 1919)

Part Two - image credits

Medical depot staff, 1919 (NSW State Archives and Records);

Commuters in Sydney wearing masks, 1919 (*The Australian*);

Portrait of seated people wearing masks, 1919 (*The Australian*)

Aldermen portrait, c.1919 (City of Parramatta Council Archives);

Disinfectant Pump Advertisement, 1919 (City of Parramatta Council Archives);

Parramatta Centennial Baths, unknown (City of Parramatta Local Studies Photograph Collection);

Parramatta Cinema, c.1919, (City of Parramatta Local Studies Photograph Collection);

Parramatta School (City of Parramatta Local Studies Photograph Collection);

Quarantine camp, 1919 (National Museum of Australia);

Aldermen portrait, 1911 (Parramatta City Council Archives);

Influenza inoculations in Hyde Park, Sydney, 1919 (Sydney Morning Herald);

Parramatta District Hospital, c.1920 (City of Parramatta Local Studies Photograph Collections);

SOS Card, 1919 (*Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*);

Social Gathering in Parramatta Town Hall, c.1919 (City of Parramatta Community Archives);

St John's Cemetery, Parramatta, c.1920 (City of Parramatta Community Archives);

Social gathering, c.1919 (City of Parramatta Community Archives);

Aldermen portraits, 1920 (City of Parramatta Council Archives).

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Back cover image: *Influenza epidemic 1919, medical staff and workers from Riley Street Depot, Surry Hills NSW*
(Source: courtesy of NSW State Archives and Records, Ref. NRS4481_ST6679.)

