

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST HOMŒOPATH

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(First published in *Similia* 18:1, December 2005 (Journal of the Australian Homœopathic Association.)

Abstract:

There has been much debate regarding who can claim the right to be called Australia's first homœopath. This article provides a brief biography of the person who is most eligible to receive that title, both in terms of date of arrival in Australia, and his homœopathic qualifications.

There has been much debate regarding who can claim the right to be called Australia's first homœopath. Contenders cited in various sources included:

- Thienette de Bérigny, often credited as the first to introduce homœopathy in Victoria, who had settled in Victoria by 1855.
- John Bell Hickson who is reported to have been in practice in Victoria's Melbourne suburbs in 1850 (prior to de Bérigny).
- Dom Rosendo Salvado, a Benedictine monk who first arrived in Western Australia in 1846. He subsequently returned to Europe, and after an extended stay in Rome and Perth beginning in 1848, he returned to New Norcia in 1857, bringing homœopathic texts with him on his return.

There is another contender, at least for the Victorian title, who has not been mentioned as such in other publications because he was a lay person who quietly and without fuss provided homœopathic treatment to his friends in the community, rather than setting up an official practice. Mr William Ruse, from the Suffolk village of Stradbroke, had practical knowledge and experience with treating the sick, including a knowledge of homœopathy. He arrived in Melbourne on New Year's Day 1852 and eventually settled in Cheltenham (then Beaumaris). He acted as a lay practitioner in homœopathic medicine in the district. His grand-daughter writes that he "brought with him from England a large book on Homœopathy and a case of Homœopathic medicines. He was not a doctor in the modern sense but whenever a settler was ill, William Ruse was sent for and out came his little bottles of aconite, belladonna and bryonia, etcetera. In almost all cases his treatment was successful" Mr Ruse was among the founder members of the Church of Christ in Cheltenham and donated part of his land to the Church. He was present at the laying of the foundation for the Melbourne Homœopathic Hospital in 1885.

In several publications, including the international website "Homeopathe International", Dr Johannes Günt is incorrectly credited with having introduced homœopathy to Australia. Dr Günt arrived in Australia in 1852, initially practising as an allopath in Sydney, NSW. It was not until some time in the mid 1860s, after his move to Melbourne, that he devoted himself to the study of homœopathy.

Whilst not wishing to detract from the efforts and contributions of the above pioneers, the person who should be given the title of Australia's first homœopath, both in terms of date of arrival and homœopathic qualifications, is Dr Stephen Simpson.

Born at Lichfield, Staffordshire in England ^(*See below) and baptised 29 July 1793 at Wolston, in Warwickshire near Coventry, as an adult Simpson joined the 14th Light Dragoons. However he left

the army in order to study medicine. After obtaining his qualifications in Edinburgh, he became the personal physician and medical adviser to a Russian noble family and as a result, travelled widely in Europe.

Interestingly, Simpson is also recorded as having studied Homœopathy under Dr Hahnemann. Dr Simpson was one of the early London homœopathic practitioners and the author of “*A practical view of Homœopathy: Being an address to British practitioners on the general applicability and superior efficacy of the homœopathic method in the treatment of disease*” (1836). This was possibly the first work in English on the subject of homœopathy. See note below

However it is not an easy path for those who lead the way in any pursuit. The title of his publication, with its implied criticism of other British practitioners and of the inferiority of the treatment methods used by them, would not have endeared him to his colleagues. Regular doctors commenced their attack by deriding homœopathy and then turned to social and political ostracism. There was strong criticism of Simpson’s work, which appears to have upset him greatly. In April 1856 a writer in the British Journal of Homœopathy wrote:

“Dr Simpson’s was a timely work. The writer should have remained at his post; but he was discouraged, and took to a sheep run in Australia. Whether he is yet alive or dead this deponent knoweth not.”

In fact, motivated partly by the unpopularity of his work with the medical profession in England, Dr Simpson had decided to migrate to New South Wales. He and his recently married wife Sophia Anne, to whom he had been engaged for twenty years, arrived at Port Jackson on 26th January 1840. Very sadly Sophia died within a few days of landing.

About six months later Simpson, with a friend of his, W.H. Wiseman who had travelled on the same ship to Australia, moved to Moreton Bay in Queensland. Wiseman had also studied medicine and shared Simpson’s views on homœopathy. At that time Moreton Bay was part of NSW and he and Wiseman were two of the earliest free settlers there. They received permission to occupy a vacant cottage at the abandoned Female Convict Establishment at Eagle Farm, convict transportation having ceased to New South Wales on 1st August 1839.

Henry Stuart Russell’s book, *The Genesis of Queensland*, described Simpson’s situation as follows:

“About three miles away and down the river on the same side was a place called Eagle Farm. Here had been erected a kind of open palisade-enclosed space, in which female prisoners had at times been confined. It was now untenanted; but in a cottage hard by there still dwelt two gentlemen who, having been in former days associates in the old, found themselves again together in this brush-encircled nook in the new world. The elder was Stephen Simpson, who was afterwards appointed to be first Commissioner of Crown Lands – as soon as it was declared an open settlement – for the Moreton Bay district; the other William Henry Wiseman, years afterwards Police Magistrate at Rockhampton, where he died and was buried. The former had been attached to a crack cavalry corps in the old war [the Napoleonic Wars]; when peace was declared had retired from the army, become a disciple of Samuel Christian Friedrich Hahnemann, founder of Homœopathy, come to England, and by practise of the new doctrine, drawn upon himself so much invective and ridicule on the part of the Faculty, that pamphleteering and prejudice had embittered the old world to him, and after twenty years patient engagement had, in the first of his wedded life, been left to bear the burden of his disappointment alone as a widower.

So he, and his companion oft times in Germany, made interest to be admitted to this recess in voluntary exile; and here, with all manner of friendliness, which in some cases became durable friendship, the wayfarers from westward ho! were on all occasions called in, and tended. I say "entertained" because both were men of no mean powers of thought, enriched by no superficial study, and tempered by experiences beyond the role of everyday life. They were no modern sciolists.

The spring of this new era brought out these two recluses into the world again; they lived in it all long enough to make some few who remain feel that the old "arm-chairs" at Eagle Farm and Woogooroo can never be refilled by kinder hosts, or more chivalrous gentlemen."

It appears that the medical establishment in England had targeted their derision of homœopathy, and possibly of Simpson himself, via public "pamphleteering".

Interestingly, the heading to this page of the text is "Homœopathy of Life" and the quotation for the chapter is:

*In the reproof of chance
Lies the true proof of men.
- Shakespeare. (Troilus and Cressida.)*

At the time of Simpson's arrival at Moreton Bay, the government's medical officer (Assistant Surgeon) was Dr Ballow. On 6th May 1841 the Governor approved of payment for Dr Simpson for the time he attended duties during the absence of Dr Ballow. When he acted as medical officer, Simpson signed documents as Acting Colonial Surgeon.

In 1842 Governor Gipps appointed Dr Simpson as Commissioner for Crown Lands in Morton Bay (the Brisbane area), a position which he held until 1855.

Simpson acquired land at Woogaroo in early 1843 (in the area of Goodna and Wacol), where he established a horse stud and lived on the riverbank near the mouth of Woogaroo Creek. It was in early 1844 that Leichhardt, the famous explorer, stayed overnight at Woogaroo where Dr Simpson and his friend Mr Wiseman were living in a slab hut. They talked far into the night.

It would have been interesting to be able to listen in to their conversation, especially if it is true that, as some (but not all) people claim, Leichhardt had also been trained as a doctor, but in the allopathic mould.

Leichhardt's impressions of Simpson were recorded so that we in turn can gain knowledge of him from another contemporary source. According to one of Leichhardt's biographers, "Leichhardt thought him a thoroughgoing man of the world. As a medical man he adhered to Hahnemann's doctrine of homœopathy, but in moderation. Leichhardt thought him a considerate man of liberal outlook, especially on the future of the Colony; he was interested in landscape gardening and the naturalisation of exotic plants like the pineapple and tobacco." It is also recorded that "the better class of squatter held Simpson in high regard, even though most people wished the Crown lands commissioner to the devil."

He sounds like the sort of person whom any current-day homœopath would welcome as a dinner guest!

It is interesting that Simpson is recorded as being an atheist who "denied the existence of God, the soul, and immortality". This was both unusual for the time and for a homœopathic practitioner, as

most people of that time, and especially those who were adherents of homœopathic principles, were very strongly religious. Leichhardt concluded that the religious scepticism of Simpson and Wiseman was “based on ill-conceived grounds”.

Simpson was able to use his interest in landscape gardening at his new house at Woogaroo. In 1846 his property was described as “well developed, the gardens producing abundantly and showing evidence of the labour expended upon them”

In 1851-2 he purchased land on Wolston creek where he built Wolston House (named after the town where he was baptised), which is now a National Trust property. Mount Ommaney was named after his sister’s grandson, John Ommaney, whom he had hoped would inherit his lands. However the boy was killed after a fall from a horse on his property.

In the late 1840s Simpson was Acting Colonial Secretary and Acting Police Magistrate. In 1848 he was involved with the establishment of the Brisbane General Hospital and became one of its trustees. The first Legislative Council of Queensland was set up in 1860, and Simpson was appointed to it as a life member on 23rd May 1860. However in the same year he was given two years’ leave of absence to visit England and sailed from Sydney on 22nd December 1860. He did not return.

Dr Simpson died on 11th March 1869 in London.

Dr Stephen Simpson suffered greatly for his convictions. However he used his obvious talents to make his mark as a true pioneer in Australia. The quotation from Shakespeare appears apt. He should be remembered for his ultimate strength of character and his contributions to early Australian life. He should also be remembered by us all as Australia’s first homœopath.

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Author

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Later Notes:

- Lichfield is in Staffordshire, not Warwickshire, as previously published.
- I have since discovered that there were a few earlier works in English on the topic of homœopathy, but Simpson's book was still one of the earliest. Simpson's obituary incorrectly states that it was the first.