

TWO EARLY HOMŒOPATHIC PHARMACIES IN MELBOURNE

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(With several updates incorporated regarding the early days of Kidner's practice in Melbourne, and the Kidner and Gould pharmacy, following the results of more recent research.)

Abstract

This article provides information about two of Melbourne's earliest homœopathic pharmacies, both of which were located in the same area of that city's medical precinct, Collins Street East. Emphasis is placed on their physical appearance in the streetscape of the city, and the survival of those buildings into the 21st century.

Introduction

Following the establishment of Kidner and Gould's Homœopathic Pharmacy in Melbourne in 1860, many other such specialised pharmacies were established in order to meet the demand for homœopathic medicines and books. In the 1884 edition of the Sands & McDougall Melbourne & Suburban Directory, for example, eight homœopathic chemists were listed.⁸

H. Seelenmeyer & Forbes in Swanston Street, Melbourne
Benjamin Poulton at 84 Collins Street East, Melbourne
Robert Joseph Poulton in Bourke Street East, Melbourne
Martin & Pleasance (a later name for Kidner & Gould) at 85 Collins Street East, Melbourne
George Pleasance in Prahran and also in St Kilda
Thomas Osmond in St Kilda
Edward Doney in Carlton.^{Note 1}

It can be seen that there were four homœopathic chemists in the Melbourne central business district, two of them being almost directly opposite each other in Collins Street.

Over time, much of Melbourne's early streetscape has been destroyed. Small cottages and buildings, which had served as both businesses and residences, have been replaced by large business establishments. In the lead-up to the 1956 Olympics, there was also a great rush to remove older buildings and replace them with glass-covered "sky-scrapers", in the hope that Melbourne would be perceived as a "modern" city, rather than a city that still looked like it was from the era of Queen Victoria.

Have any of buildings used by Melbourne's original homœopathic pharmacies survived?

This article describes the fate of the two homœopathic pharmacies in Collins Street:

- Benjamin Poulton's, which became Poulton & Owen's, and then Owen's;
- Kidner & Gould's, which underwent several changes in name to become Gould & Martin, Martin & Co., and then Martin & Pleasance, the name by which this company is still known today.

Collins Street in the 1850s

Described as being the first pharmacy of its kind in Melbourne, the Kidner and Gould Homœopathic Pharmacy was established at 90 Collins Street East (opposite the Baptist Chapel) in 1860.¹ Previously, in 1854, this location had been used by a furniture dealer, and by 1857 it was used by Bramston & Marshall, a firm of undertakers.

To the right that building, with its upper storey windows lower than the others next-door, was number 84 Collins Street East, the building which was used eventually by Poulton's Homœopathic Pharmacy. Prior to Poulton's becoming established during the mid-1860s, the building was used by painters and house decorators, followed by Julia Benjamin's "labour mart".

Collins Street in the mid-1860s

Although Mr Kidner established his pharmacy in 1860, later in the same year he left the firm and moved to Adelaide, leaving the business to be run by Edward G. Gould.¹ (Note that this is not the same person as Henry Gould, who established Gould's Homœopathic Pharmacy in Hobart, Tasmania during the 1880s.) In October 1863, Edward Gould also established a homœopathic pharmacy in Geelong, and was the dispenser for the newly-formed Geelong Homœopathic Dispensary.

At first, the Kidner & Gould pharmacy was confined to a room 12 feet square, but as time went on, additions were made to the building.⁴

Benjamin Poulton was born in Norfolk, England, around 1819. In 1851 he appeared in the Geelong Commercial Directory and Almanac as being an importer of drugs and druggists' sundries, a wholesale and retail druggist on the west side of Market Square, in Moorabool Street. His advertisements during this early period made no mention of homœopathic medicines. Soon after 1865, he moved to Melbourne and established a homœopathic pharmacy just a few doors down the road from Mr Gould in Collins Street.

By this time, Gould had been joined by Mr Martin, to create the firm Gould & Martin. It can be imagined that there may have been some considerable annoyance that Mr Poulton decided to set up his competing business in such close proximity to Gould's pharmacy, especially as they both had the same specialty business, providing homœopathic medicines to the public and to homœopathic practitioners. Perhaps there had been some previous antagonism regarding Gould's entry into Poulton's home territory in Geelong. To-date I have found no evidence that any overt antagonism existed between the two firms, however, apart from a much later incident in 1895. At that time, the later version of Gould's pharmacy, Martin & Pleasance, issued a writ against the later owner of Poulton's, Mr EG Owen, for an alleged infringement of their trade mark "Santonia" and "Phosferrine", which Martin & Pleasance claimed as proprietary words.⁵ Yet in the same year Martin & Pleasance and EG Owen joined forces to publish a pamphlet titled A Study of Homœopathy by Dr Edmund Alleyne Cook.

Collins Street in the 1870s / 1880s

In 1873 there was considerable public discussion about the homœopathic treatment of disease. As a result, Dr J. Emery Gould, previously Senior House Surgeon of the Liverpool Homœopathic Dispensary and by 1873 one of the physicians to the Melbourne Homœopathic Dispensary, produced a small publication called "Homœopathy and its Professors".⁶ This provided a brief resume of the principles, practice, and results of homœopathic treatment.

Advertisements for the pharmacies of both Benjamin Poulton and Gould & Martin were included in the pamphlet. Gould & Martin's advertisement was very short, merely stating their location opposite the Baptist Church, plus the date of their establishment in 1860. Poulton's advertisement stated that they provided "a good assortment of" homœopathic works and periodicals, medicine chests adapted to any of the homœopathic works, and veterinary medicines and cases. They advertised a homœopathic tincture of camphor, suitable for, amongst other things, the "early stage of Colonial Diarrhœa". An assistant was in attendance on Sundays, but "out of Church hours". The advertisement also assured readers that Poulton's prescriptions were "accurately dispensed".⁶

It is interesting that the accurate dispensing of medicines was considered to be an important issue to mention in pharmacy advertisements (whether homœopathic or "druggist") at that time. In 1874 the specific issue of homœopathic manufacturing and dispensing was raised in *The Argus*. An anonymous writer, calling himself "X.Y.Z.", stated that he knew of someone, "now resident in this colony", who had witnessed consignments of bottled pilules "prepared for Melbourne general use" being filled from the one large bottle and indiscriminately labeled with whichever remedy name came to hand.⁹ (It is unclear from the letter whether the consignments were being prepared overseas for Melbourne use, or were being prepared within Australia.)

Mr R.J.H. Martin, on behalf of his homœopathic pharmacy, replied to this accusation, stating

I can honestly aver that during the past 11 years no imported medicated pilules or globules have been sold from this pharmacy, but only those prepared on the premises.

I cannot help remarking that, with a full knowledge of the imputed dishonesty, it is rather to be deplored that the "unimpeachable witness" did not disclose it at the time, as, if such dishonourable members of the profession existed, they should be held up to the scorn, not of those who never really endeavour to comprehend the thing they scoff at, but of those who would be only too sorry to witness the defection of one amongst their number.

I have no remembrance of such a disclosure, which would certainly not be over-looked by the editors of the homœopathic journals.⁷

After a while, the original premises of Gould's pharmacy could no longer meet the demands which were placed upon it. The 1878 edition of Melbourne's post office directory shows that the firm, now called Martin & Co. (having been purchased by Richard JH Martin), had moved across the road to the two-storey building at 85 Collins Street East. It was a building to the left of the Baptist Chapel, but it is now demolished. This large establishment was a long-standing building in the Melbourne streetscape. In 1857 Fawcett & Co., dentists, occupied some rooms, and in the mid-1860s a firm of chemists was there and had their name painted on the side of the building. In fact, the building housed several businesses.

It is interesting to note that in 1877 there was a listing in the Sydney post office directory for Martin & Co at 143 Pitt Street, part of the Union Chambers building, but it appears that this venture was unsuccessful, as there was no listing for the company in the following year.

Charles Pleasance studied chemistry and was articled to Gould and Martin before becoming one of the owners. He became a partner with Mr Martin in 1878, although the business continued to be listed in the directories as Martin & Co until 1883, at which time the entries in the directories were changed to Martin & Pleasance. In 1886 the partnership between Mr Martin and Mr Pleasance was dissolved.² It appears that Mr Richard J. Martin (or a son with the same name) eventually moved to Western Australia and ran the homœopathic pharmacy in Perth called Martin & Co.

It was announced that from 1st January 1887, the business would be carried on solely by Mr Charles Pleasance, but still under the name of the late firm, Martin and Pleasance.² In 1890, it was reported that the business of the firm extended over all the colonies, and included between 500 and 600 agencies.⁴

The post office directories for 1876 to 1880 show that Poulton's pharmacy was run by "Poulton & Sons". During 1879 and 1880 the firm also had a shop at 83 Gertrude Street in Fitzroy, managed by Benjamin's son, George. The Collins Street business returned to being listed as "Benjamin Poulton, homœopathic chemist" in 1881, when Robert Joseph Poulton established his own homœopathic pharmacy in Bourke Street East. The directory for 1885 showed that Benjamin Poulton's pharmacy was now listed under the title of Poulton & Owen, Mr Edward Owen having joined the business.

Collins Street in the 1890s

By 1889 the numbering system for Melbourne's streets had become a mess, largely because of the building boom which had been taking place, with the removal of many of the small residential establishments, and the amalgamation of some smaller sites into larger buildings taking up several adjacent sites. As a result, some buildings had no numbers, others shared the same number, one business operated from number 81½, while others were labelled by the number followed by an alphabetic suffix. The street numbers of Melbourne, therefore, were altered and re-assigned, and the division of some streets into 'East' and 'West' sections was abandoned.

The address for Martin & Pleasance changed from 85 Collins Street East to 180 Collins Street. The address for Poulton & Owen's pharmacy changed from 84 Collins Street East to 189 Collins Street. When Benjamin Poulton retired his son, George J. Poulton, took over his part of the business.

In 1889 work commenced on a new building at the location of Martin & Pleasance, the whole building to be totally owned by Mr Pleasance. The architectural firm was FM White & Son, and Mr David Mitchell (father of Dame Nellie Melba) provided the successful lowest tender to build the premises, with an amount which was a few pounds under £14,000.³ The final total cost was estimated to exceed £15,000, and the land alone was valued at over £40,000.⁴ This was obviously a very large sum at that time.

The new building, five storeys high, was completed by 1890. It was built in what is termed a highly ornamented "Renaissance Revival" style. In pharmaceutical circles it was considered to be a modern wonder of its time, and the Australasian Journal of Pharmacy devoted a five-page article to describe and display its magnificent features.^{Note 2} The author of the article was impressed that the building was specially adapted for producing and displaying the medicines in an "efficacious and attractive manner". This was favourably compared with the standard pharmacy of yesteryear, which usually shrouded itself in darkness, gloom and mystery. "Enterprise and taste have been happily combined in the production of an additional marvel of 'Marvellous Melbourne'." "Everything is substantial, and nothing has been omitted calculated to promote the comfort and convenience of occupants." In the hundreds of little details "there is abundant evidence of enterprise, liberality, and cultured taste". The "magnificent" building was evidence that Charles Pleasance was now a man of substance, one who "has come to stay".⁴

In fact, Mr Pleasance was elected the third Lord Mayor of Melbourne (1904 – 1905). In October 1905 he laid the foundation stone of the Queen Victoria Memorial Statue which is in the Queen Victoria Gardens, part of the Domain Parklands, a short walk from Melbourne's CBD and Arts precinct.

When the building was first built, Martin & Pleasance occupied the eastern portion (right-hand side) of the ground floor, plus the spacious basements. The western portion was leased to the Union Building Society. Visitors to the other floors went through the wide, “handsome” hall and then up the staircase, or used the elevator. The first floor was divided into five suites of consulting rooms designed for medical practitioners. The Naval and Military Club occupied the next level, with the offices of the Rifle Association above that. The picture gallery and workshops of Mr Isaac Whitehead were on the topmost flat, as well as the apartments reserved for Martin & Pleasance’s assistants, two of whom slept on the premises. Over time, the occupants of the building altered. In 1892 there was a dentist, masseur, artist, gilder and print seller, accountants, and university tutors.

The author of the 1890s article was overwhelmed by the lofty and large proportions of the facilities provided by the Martin & Pleasance business itself. The “public room”, or shop, was at the front of the building, with the dispensaries at the back, to a total depth of 90 feet.

Generally, and in details, it is to be said that the appointments of the public room are of a luxurious character, and, indeed, everything bespeaks expenditure lavish and tasteful; and here is found, stocked in elegant glassware, a perfect assortment of homœopathic medicines, chests, books, and the et cetera of a well-appointed pharmacy.⁴

The floor was inlaid with glazed tiles “of very elegant design”, and the plaster of paris cornices of the ceiling were considered to be “unusually massive”. The walls of the shop were covered to a height of 10 feet with “wall cases” and book cases. All the internal fixtures were made of solid American walnut in all the fronts, with the internal parts being made of well-seasoned clear pine (meaning that the pine was perfect, with no knots). The shelves which held the “shop bottles” were all fitted with spring roller blinds to enclose them at night. On the right hand side of the shop there was a two-tier perfumery case, behind which was the private office, fitted with writing table and book-shelves, and closed with a sliding door. The firm’s monogram featured throughout the shop.

The dispensary was reached by passing from the public room through large arches. Connected with this room, also approached through ornamental arches, was another dispensary and laboratory.

The western basement was reached via an ornamental iron stairway which connected it to the dispensaries. It was divided into two rooms. The smaller one was devoted to the cleaning, filling, and labelling of bottles, while the other, larger basement was used for tincture making and the storage of dry drugs.

The eastern basement was wholly used as storerooms for goods, and the thousands of bottles, boxes, etc, used by the business.

Both basements are lighted from back and front by patent prismatic lights, which, by a most ingenious arrangement of mirror reflectors, not merely obviate the necessity of providing artificial light, but appear to place persons within the rooms upon a level with the street.⁴

By this means, an ample flood of daylight was borne to the centre of the basement from either end, so that the use of gas was made unnecessary. This arrangement was the invention of Mr White, the architect, and at that time was only adapted to one other building in the city.⁴

A hydraulic lift made it easy to convey goods between the basement and the laboratories. All the departments were connected by speaking tubes and electric bells. The firm was able to remain in contact with “leading homœopathic medicals” in the city and suburbs via “telephonic communication” (Telephone No. 1659), so that “the many necessities and convenience of modern city life are to be found throughout the building”.⁴

Collins Street today

Owen's Homœopathic Pharmacy continued to operate at 189 Collins Street until 1922, when it moved further up Collins Street, closer to the medical consulting rooms. The original building is now a café with a false, modern (grey) façade, to the left of the Regent Theatre. (See photo on this website.) It is one of the oldest surviving shops in Melbourne.

The “new” five-storey building of Martin & Pleasance survives, including the name of the firm and the first date of its establishment, 1860, still featured at the top. (See photos on this website.) It was originally called “Pleasant House”, until a change in the fortunes of Charles Pleasance following a financial crash in Victoria, when he was forced to give up part of the accommodation he had used previously. For many decades the name “Martin & Pleasance Homœopathic Pharmacy” was still boldly painted on the side of the brick wall facing the Baptist Chapel. As a result, it was a major feature of all photographs looking down Collins Street towards the Town Hall. It is no longer used by Martin & Pleasance.

After utilising other locations around Melbourne for a number of years, once again Martin and Pleasance (although no longer run by a member of the Pleasance family) has moved into a modern, purpose-built establishment, thus keeping alive Kidner & Gould's homœopathic heritage for more generations into the future.

It took a lot of time and effort for me to determine whether the original building used by Kidner and Gould still exists. I traced all the business and street numbers prior to the change in the numbering system, and compared these with all the businesses and street numbers after the changes. The destruction of smaller buildings, and the amalgamation of sites, made this a difficult and inconclusive exercise. I examined in minute detail all the old sketches and photos of the time, comparing roof lines and any other distinguishing features. I made several trips to Melbourne to compare the streetscape now, with what was shown in the photographs. When I was fairly sure of my “best guess” about the current location of the original Kidner & Gould pharmacy, I checked my findings with Melbourne's Heritage Council. Until I informed them, they knew nothing about the early history of the building, apart from the fact that in 1877 it had been owned by a firm called Martin & Co, who were chemists, thus confirming my research and observations were correct! Number 90 Collins Street East is now 179 Collins Street, a shop currently occupied by Bang and Olufsen. (See photo on this website.) The upper part of the building was “modernised” to an art-deco style in the 1930s. ^{Note 3}

The building originally occupied by the Kidner and Gould Homœopathic Pharmacy, therefore, is still a part of Melbourne's landscape, although it, and Poulton's, are now isolated and dwarfed by the sky-scrapers of 21st century Melbourne.

Notes:

Note 1 – For more information about these pharmacies, see this website.

Note 2 – For the full text of the 1890 article about “Martin and Pleasance's New Homœopathic Pharmacy and Buildings”, see this website.

Note 3 – Several years ago, I discovered that I had spent my early childhood in a “homœopathic house”, as the Oregon timber floor joists of the first floor bedroom in which I slept were originally part of the first floor north ward of the Melbourne Homœopathic Hospital. When the hospital was being torn down and replaced by the newer Prince Henry's Hospital, my father bought the joists at a

very cheap rate from the demolition company. But there was yet another surprising family connection with Melbourne's homœopathic history. During the writing of this article, I discussed some of the building design terminology with my father, Frederick Clarence (or 'Clarrie') Armstrong, an architect. When, for the first time, I showed him the final draft of the article plus the accompanying photos, imagine my surprise when he told me that he recognised the original site of the Kidner pharmacy extremely well. In about 1934, he had done the architectural design and drawings to create the "new" art deco frieze and general appearance of the front of the building, above the verandah. So, while I had been busy studying and photographing every aspect of this building, I had had no idea that I was in fact studying one of my father's very early works.

UPDATE: Results of recent research:

Since writing this article, I have discovered that Kidner first arrived in Melbourne around February 1858. At that time he advertised as a homœopathic chemist at 44 Elizabeth Street, a premises which he shared with Henry Biers and Co, an estate agent. He sold domestic medicine cases and books, and provided advice daily from 9am to 5pm. It appears that soon afterwards, however, he moved to St Kilda, where he set up practice as a homœopath and where he ran a homœopathic dispensary.

Recent research has also proved that Edward Gardiner Gould was one of the sons of the Edward Gould who established Edward Gould & Son in London. Dr James Emery Gould, who also came to Australia at a later date, was another son. The English Census records imply that the English pharmacy was established some time between 1851 (when Edward senior was listed as a porter) and 1861 (when Edward senior was listed as a homœopathic chemist). The London business went on to publish several books on homœopathy.

Soon after Edward G. Gould's arrival in Melbourne in May 1860, Kidner announced that he was going into partnership with him and establishing a homœopathic pharmacy in Collins Street East.

I have also discovered that, for about four months before moving to 90 Collins Street East, Kidner & Gould's business was located at 102 Collins Street East. Interestingly, at that time a William Gould, lithographer, was also located at 102 Collins Street. Perhaps he was a relative of Edward Gould.

In 1863 Edward Gardiner Gould also opened a homœopathic pharmacy in Geelong. In the 1870s Edward Gould returned to Europe, where he studied medicine in Ireland, and then practised medicine in several locations in England.

References:

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- (2) *Australasian Journal of Pharmacy*. Vol. II, No. 13. January 1887.
- (3) *Australasian Journal of Pharmacy*. Vol. IV, No. 43. July 1889.
- (4) *Australasian Journal of Pharmacy*. Vol. V, No. 49. January 1890.
- (5) *Australasian Journal of Pharmacy*. Vol. X, No. 118. October 1895.
- (6) Gould, J. Emery. *Homœopathy and Its Professors*. Melbourne: W.L. Ambler, 1873.

(7) Martin, R.J.H., The Argus. 3 February, 1874.

(8) Sands & McDougall's Melbourne and Suburban Directory. Melbourne : Sands & McDougall, 1884.

(9) X.Y.Z., The Argus. 31 January, 1874.