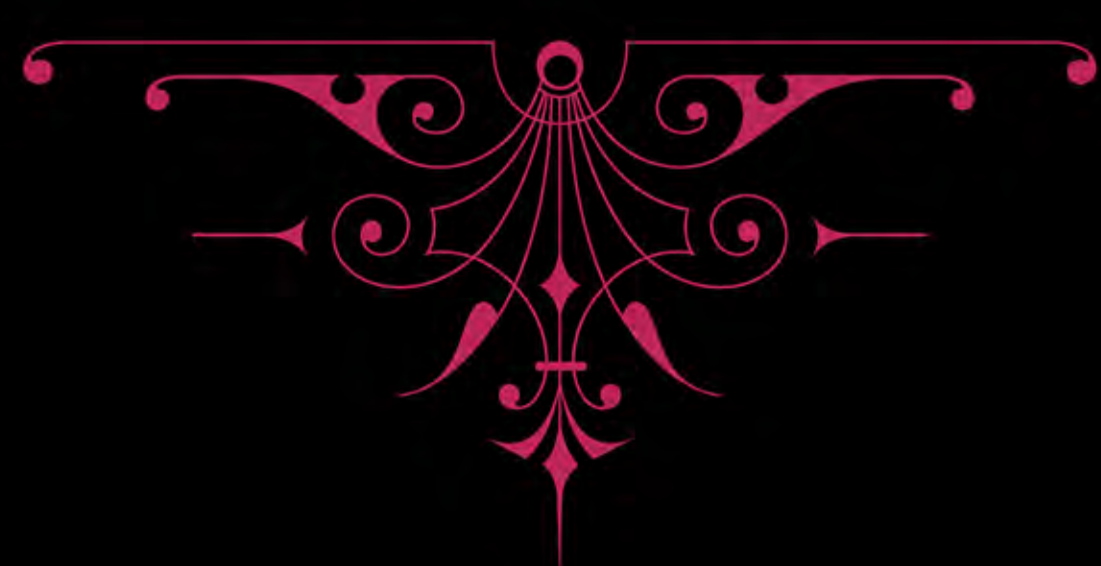
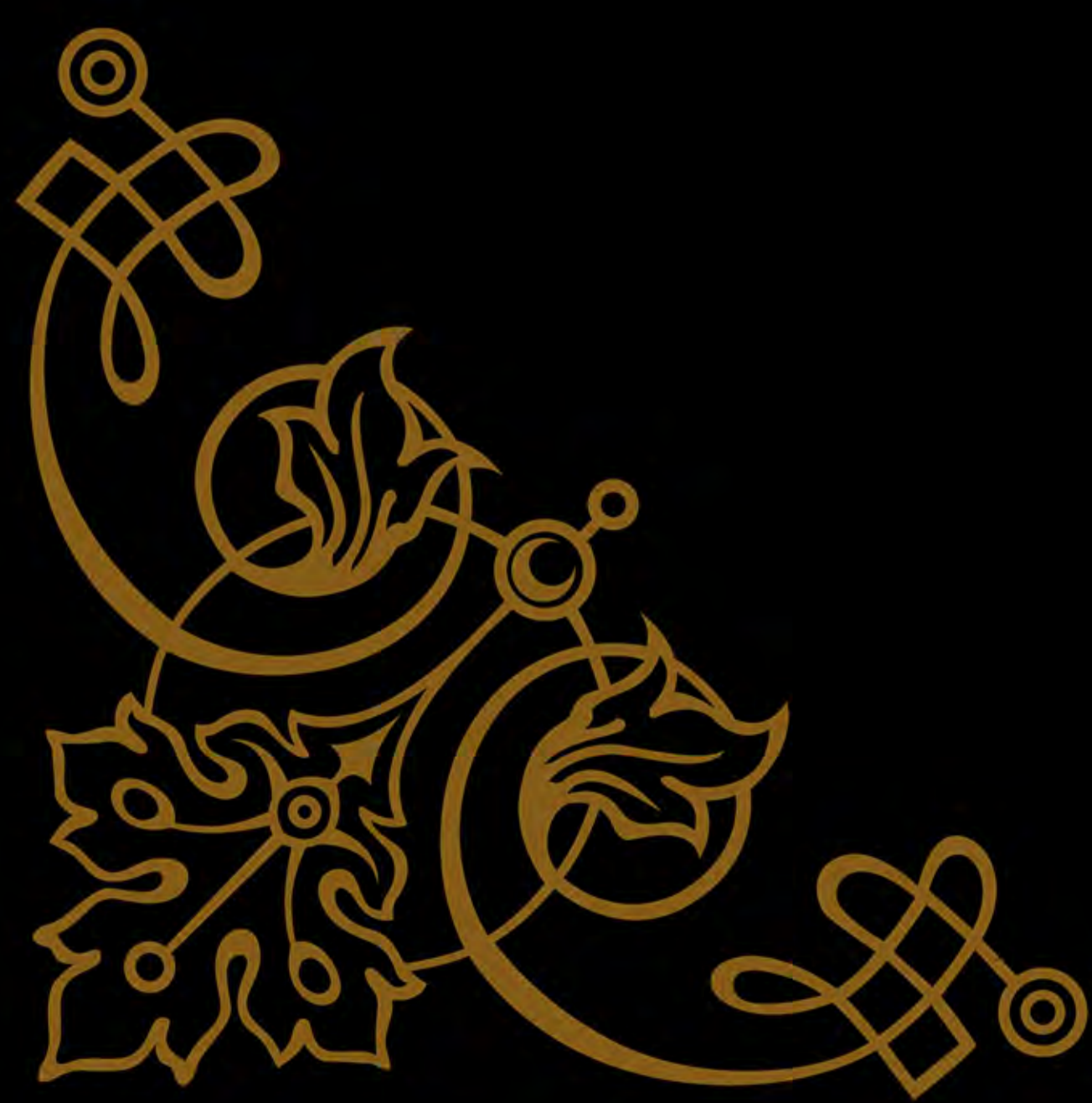
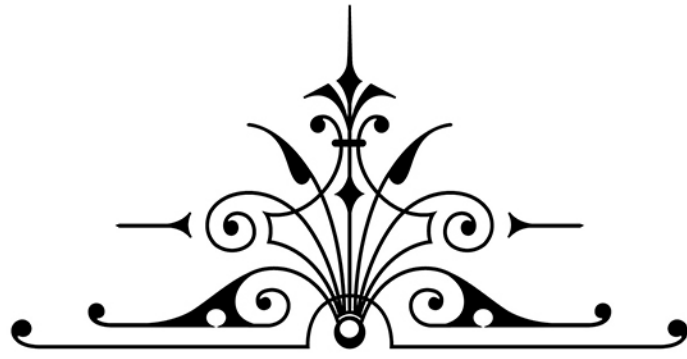




THE  
INFLUENZA  
PANDEMIC  
OF 1918



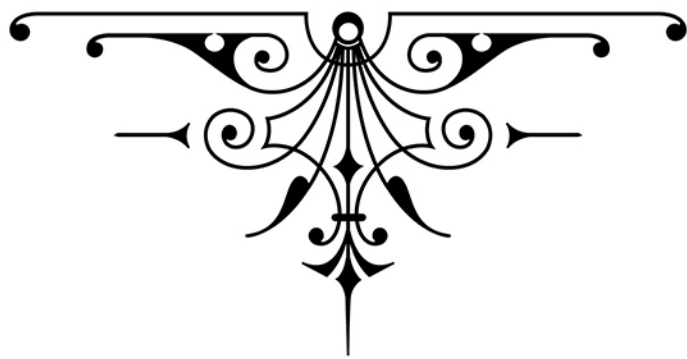


# **IN 1918**

**the nature of viruses was not understood. There were no vaccines, no antiviral drugs, and no antibiotics to treat secondary bacterial infections like pneumonia.**

**Prevention in 1918 consisted of isolation of those who were ill and temporary closure of public places such as theatres and bars.**

**Treatment was limited to supportive care and unproven remedies. Public inhalation chambers were set up. A popular standard influenza remedy was a strong cough mixture laced with alcohol. Alcohol and strychnine were used as stimulants. Aspirin was available to treat fever.**



# A STRICKEN CITY AT WAR'S END



Ambulances in Wellington during the 1918 flu epidemic.  
Ref: PAColl-7489-69, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/2251121

New Zealand's worst disease outbreak was the influenza pandemic that struck between October and December 1918. The timing couldn't have been worse, coming at the end of a devastating war. No event has killed so many New Zealanders in such a short time. The death toll reached 9000—around half the number of New Zealanders who had died in the First World War. Maori suffered heavily, with about 2500 deaths.

*Some people wore muslin masks or bags of camphor around their necks to ward off the flu. Some people took up smoking as a preventative.*

**INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC.**  
**IMPORTANT NOTICE!**  
**CITIZENS' VIGILANCE COMMITTEE**  
IN THE INTERESTS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH.  
THE NEAREST SOURCE OF HELP!  
HEADQUARTERS OF DISTRICTS AND SUBDIVISIONS:

HEADQUARTERS—Town Hall. Telephone 5281.  
1. BROOKLYN—H. E. Holland, Esq., M.P. Headquarters, Brooklyn State School. Telephone 3162.  
2. WELLINGTON CENTRAL ELECTORAL DISTRICT—F. Fraser, Esq., M.P. St. John's Schoolroom. Telephone 4121.  
3. WELLINGTON EAST—Wm. Foster, Esq. Clyde-quay School. Telephone (day and night) 494A, and between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m., 704A.  
4. ROSEBATH—J. J. McGrath, Esq. Rosebath School. Telephone 992A.  
5. HAYATAI—H. H. Toke, Esq. Bowling Pavilion. Telephone 617.  
6. KILBIRNIE—J. J. Clark, Esq. Kilbirnie School. Telephone 2623.  
7. LYALL BAY—A. A. Gellatly, Esq. Lyall Bay School. Telephone 2604.  
8. MIRAMAR—Miramar District. T. O. Fox, Esq. Council Chambers. Telephone 3783 (two rings).  
9. SEATOUN—A. P. Smith, Esq. Seatoun School. Telephone 3707 (one long one short).  
10. ISLAND BAY—C. O. Odlin, Esq. Island Bay Bowling Club Pavilion. Telephone 4311.  
11. NEWTOWN—H. A. Parkinson, Esq. Newtown School. Telephone 3556.  
12. NORTHLAND—D. M. Polson, Esq. Northland Public School. Telephone 1307.  
13. KARORI—A. M'Kenzie, Esq. Karori School. Telephone 3701 (one short and one long).  
14. KELBURN—F. Gray, Esq. Infants' School, Kelburn. Telephone 2754.  
15. WELLINGTON NORTH—Rev. Robertson Orr. St. Andrew's Schoolroom. Telephone 4613.  
16. WADDESTOWN AND GOLDIE'S BRAE—A. R. Atkinson, Esq. Anglican Churchroom. Telephone 786; House, 472.  
17. NGAIRO—Telephone 6581.  
18. KHANDALLAH—Telephone 3748 (three rings).  
19. KAIWARRA—Telephone 1976.

**PROMPT ASSISTANCE NEEDED.**  
The Officers in Charge of each District are holding MEETINGS at their respective districts to set up the necessary organization for thoroughly patrolling their Districts, arranging for Nursing, Attendance, Medical Consults, and other such Help as can be given.  
ALL EFFICIENT PUBLIC-SPRITED CITIZENS who can afford the time are EARNESTLY REQUESTED to Assist the Officers in Charge to their utmost ability.  
BOY SCOUTS are in attendance to report to different Groups.

**REPORT AT ONCE!**  
IMPORTANT—The Public are requested to REPORT ANY CASES TO HEADQUARTERS IN THE RESPECTIVE DISTRICTS, and the best attention possible will be given.

**INHALATION ROOMS FOR CHILDREN!**  
CHILDREN MUST ATTEND AT CLYDE QUAY SCHOOL AT NEWTOWN SCHOOL, AND AT DISTRICT HEALTH OFFICE, AITKEN-ST. (Thorndon) for Inhalation.

CITIZENS WHO ARE WILLING TO HELP BUT WHO HAVE NOT YET REPORTED AT DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS, ARE REQUESTED TO DO SO AT ONCE.  
J. P. LUKK, Mayor.

Page 2 Advertisements, Column 5, Evening Post,  
Volume XCVI, Issue 120, 16 November 1918

The disease manifested itself in Auckland in October. By early November it had reached Wellington and by the time of Armistice celebrations, the epidemic had taken hold in the city.

Wellington had the highest death rate of the cities with over 750 deaths. Medical services in the capital were unable to cope with the scale of the outbreak. The Mayor, John Pearce Luke, established the Wellington Citizens' Vigilance Committee to organise and manage relief. The city was divided into districts each with its own committee. In Island Bay the Committee operated from the bowling club.

The committees arranged for volunteers to visit households to check on the health of the occupants. The seriously ill were referred to hospital.

# ISLAND BAY BERHAMPORE AND TE ARO



Emergency Motorcycle Corps, during the 1918 influenza epidemic, Christchurch  
Ref: 1/1-008543-G, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/22676277

Amongst the volunteers in the southern and eastern suburbs were sisters from the Home of Compassion. The sisters visited homes using vehicles provided by the Island Bay committee. Sister Clotilde was assigned a motorcyclist with side-car.

“The sisters were not known to Island Bay residents, although the Home of Compassion had been in their midst for eleven years. When the sisters paid their first calls they were shown into the front room as though they had merely come for a social call; Sister Claver had to ask: ‘Where is the patient?’ and then persuade the people that she and her sisters had come to nurse, not to talk.”

From *Reminiscences of Mother Mary Joseph Aubert Foundress of the Sisters of Compassion*, written by Sister Angela Möller 1945

## ISLAND BAY

Most valuable work is being done in Island Bay district by sisters from Mother Mary Aubert's Home of Compassion. The staff of that institution has been much depleted by the releasing of sisters for voluntary work among the sufferers from influenza, and those sisters remaining are having a busy time. In attending the sick the Sisters of Compassion are able to relieve the doctors of much of their work, their skilled attention having been the means of saving lives and lessening suffering. The cars of the Island Bay organisation call for them at the Home at 8 a.m., eight sisters going on duty at a time and remaining till 10 p.m., when they are relieved by others.

"Island Bay", *Evening Post*, Volume XCVI, Issue 123,  
20 November 1918

*“As soon as the Island Bay residents heard the sisters were ill, they simply poured dainties upon them. At first the sisters thought they were meant for distribution to the patients they visited... [The sisters] were told that they were to lack nothing for their own sick.”*

SISTER ANGELA MÖLLER: REMINISCENCES

The flu moved quickly through the population. As the epidemic eased in Island Bay several sisters contracted influenza. They were fed by sisters from the Sacred Heart Convent and the people of Island Bay.

Sisters from the Whanganui River travelled to Wellington to help when the disease took hold in Berhampore.

The sisters were the only volunteers prepared to check on the residents of the boarding house district around Tory and Haining streets. The disease was rife here because of the poor housing.



Sister Claver

Sister Clotilde

# ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE EMERGENCY HOSPITAL



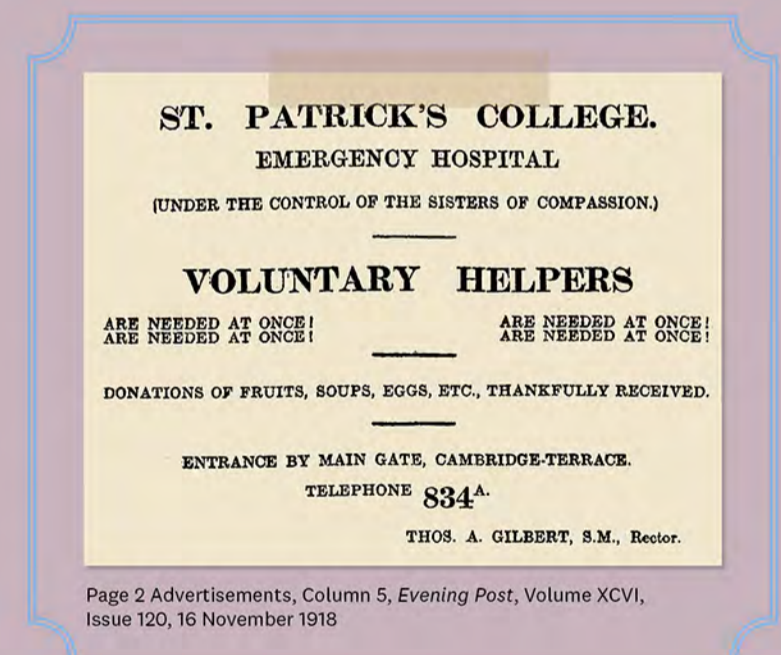
St Patrick's College exterior, circa. 1927  
St Patrick's College archives

The sisters also served at the temporary hospital at St Patrick's College, which at that time was located in Buckle Street. The Rector, Father Gilbert, acting on the advice of Doctor McEvedy, closed the college and sent the boarders home. On 14 November Father Gilbert offered two College dormitories to the Minister of Health as an emergency hospital under the direction of the Sisters of Compassion. The Sisters were well known at St Patrick's as nurses to the boarders. The only condition Father Gilbert placed was that the dormitories be disinfected and painted. At the end of the pandemic fumigation and painting were carried out and new bedding was installed.



At St Patrick's, Sister Genevieve led a volunteer nursing staff of eighteen. Sister Clotilde took charge when Sister Genevieve caught the infection. The hospital was described as a model of good management and good nursing, in contrast to the chaos at other temporary hospitals.

The hospital was in operation for one month with the first patient admitted on 16 November. It closed on 16 December. There were 48 beds, and the sisters and volunteers nursed men of every denomination. Ninety-one men were admitted of which 54 survived and 37 died.



Page 2 Advertisements, Column 5, Evening Post, Volume XCVI,  
Issue 120, 16 November 1918

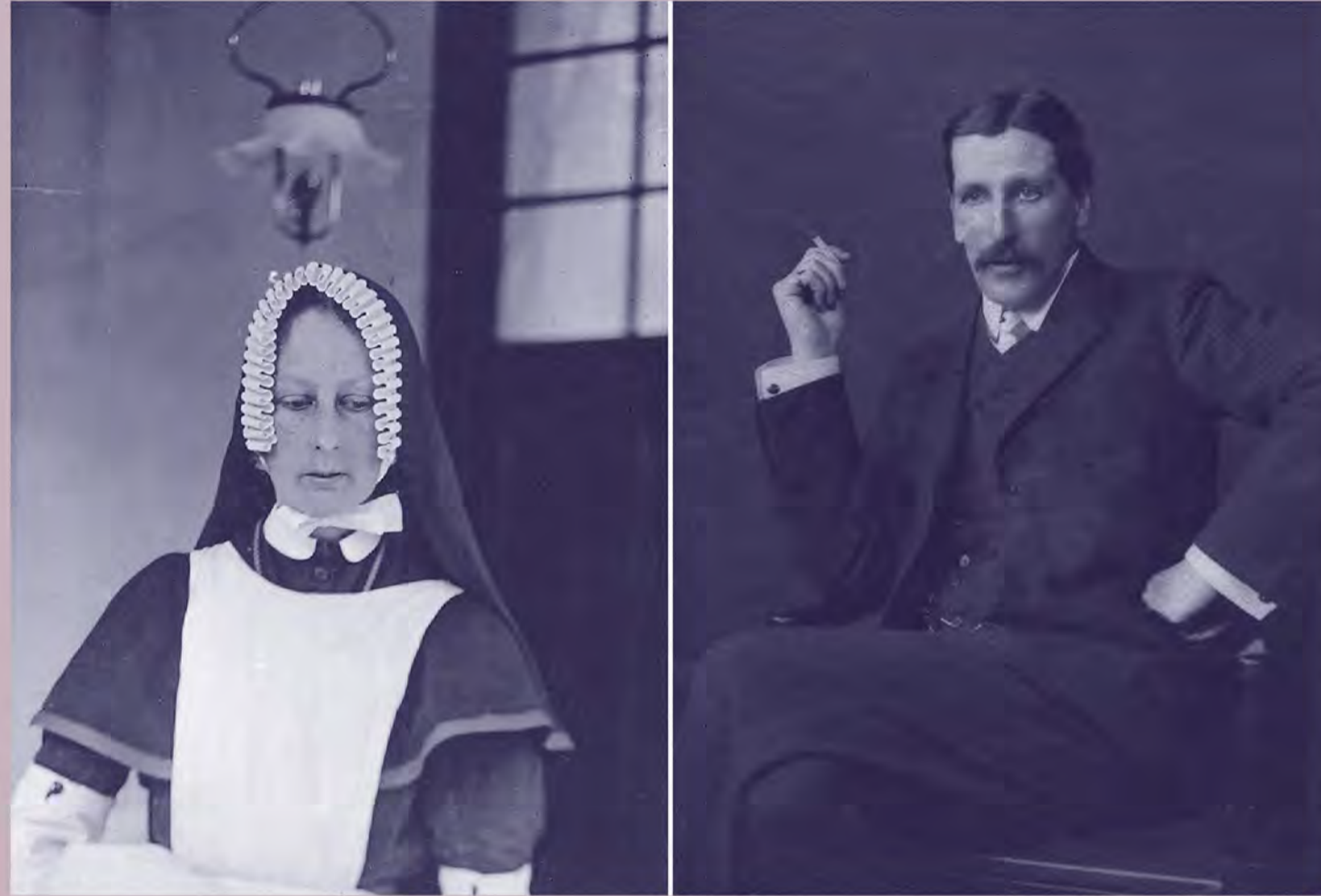
Name	Age	Religion	Address
James Jgo	52	R.C.	23 Bachelors
J. J. Gillon	54	R.C.	17 Spring St
William George	36	R.C.	15 Parkville
Edward Robert	23	C & E	222 Clarendon St
Richard J. J. J.	45	Protestant	118 1/2 Lynton Rd
James J. J.	57	Protestant	125 Colingwood Ave

A page from St Patrick's College Emergency Hospital admissions  
Supplied by St Patrick's College archives



# THE TERRIBLE EPIDEMIC AT HOME AND ABROAD

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Sister Angela Möller

Doctor Fyffe



*“The terrible epidemic which has pretty well spread all over Europe is also against my departure now.”*

When Suzanne Aubert wrote this to Sister Chanel on 3 November she was in Rome and influenza was just striking the shores of New Zealand. Sister Claver was in charge of the Sisters of Compassion in New Zealand.

**The following is a letter from Sister Angela to Mother Aubert on 16 November, 1918:**

**Dearest Mother,**

Things are in full swing to fight the epidemic. Fr. Gilbert, the Rector, offered two dormitories of St. Pat's to the Health Department for a hospital for men. Sister Genevieve is Matron, with Sisters Prisca, Salome and Louise, Mrs O'Leary, Defence Orderlies and men and women volunteer nurses, for staff.

Every nationality and denomination is received. Priests going about the wards, gathering harvest of repentant sinners, picked up dying on the streets. Deo Gratias!

Buckle St. and Island Bay sisters nursing folk in their own homes. Our Sisters are working under an excellent committee, with Mr. Odlin and Col. Hughes at its head. Three motor cars are at their service.

Sister Clotilde is chief Nurse, and Dr. Fyffe, who is working like a Trojan, is arranging for the Bay Town Hall to be turned into a temporary Hospital. Meantime he has given Sister Clotilde his signature to admit cases into hospital at her own discretion, and has instructed her to use strychnine injections also at her own discretion, and finally is telling his patients to do everything the Sisters tell them! So like him!

The Sisters are standing the strain well so far. We have Sister Stanislaus the permanent night nurse, and the work simplified as far as possible with the children's help.

The Sacred Heart nuns have sent us every day this week, meat and potatoes for 24 Sisters' dinners. God reward them. Everyone is kind, and the only patient who died under our care was a relapsed convert, who thank God, received the Last Rites and died a beautiful death.

Dr. Verdon of Dunedin is at the Redemptorist Monastery ill, and this afternoon the Rector wanted two Sisters to go to nurse him there. We want him to come to St. Pat's.

Dr. Holmes died the night before last, R.I.P. It was his month at the Home. Perhaps he will help us from Heaven.

“Yours truly” is doing little, owing to weakness, but hopes to help more if others yield under strain.

Jerusalem knew nothing until they telephoned this morning—they wondered why there were no boats!

**Sr. M. Angela**

# THE INCOMPARABLE SISTERS



Nursing staff, Home of Compassion, 1908

*“Fifteen nuns [sic] from the Home of Compassion in Island Bay worked magnificently in the southern and eastern suburbs, earning the highest praise of all who came in touch with them.”*

GEOFFREY RICE, *BLACK NOVEMBER: THE 1918 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC IN NEW ZEALAND*, 2nd ed. 2008

The Sisters’ contribution was particularly important because Wellington struggled to find enough volunteers and many medical staff were ill with the flu.

*“It is impossible to speak too highly of the work done not only by your Sisters but by their lay helpers. I can truthfully say that they have saved many lives that, but for their devotion to duty would have been lost.”*

Letter from Doctor Kingston-Fyffe to Rector Gilbert, St Patrick’s College, 17 December 1918

November 23  
The epidemic of influenza has claimed as victims quite a number of our Catholic people. St. Patrick’s College has accommodated a large number of patients, and good work was done at that institution by Father Gilbert, S.M., M.A., Rector, and the Sisters of Compassion. St. Anne’s Hall was offered as a convalescent Home by the Ven. Archdeacon Devoy, and was gladly accepted by the authorities. This institution is under the charge of Sister M. Aloysius, of the Sisters of Mercy, Newtown. His Grace Archbishop O’Shea has also offered that fine institution, the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Island Bay, to the authorities, and also the services of the devoted nuns of that convent. The Sisters of Compassion have been, and are, doing wonderful work. Not only are they nursing at St. Patrick’s College temporary hospital, but they are visiting the homes of the stricken, nursing, comforting, and consoling the afflicted. This is all in addition to the care of the inmates of the Home for Incurables and the Home of Compassion: and as a result of the exertion of the devoted women a number of them have contracted the illness, and are at present laid aside awaiting recovery to again take up their work of charity. The Sisters of Mercy, Newtown, have also been busy visiting the sick and doing everything possible to assist those in distress.

New Zealand Times, 5 December 1918



At the opening of Our Lady’s Home of Compassion, 28 April 1907

**Discover more about these sisters in the Sisters of Compassion exhibition room.**

The Sisters saw their work as voluntary and did not seek any monetary compensation or publicity for their efforts.

Sisters who helped nurse:

- Sister Claver**
- Sister Chanel**
- Sister Clotilde**
- Sister Veronica**
- Sister Anthony**
- Sister Francis**
- Sister Paula**
- Sister Lawrence**
- Sister Delphina**
- Sister Hedwige**
- Sister Emmanuel**
- Sister Monica**
- Sister Ignatius**
- Sister Marcelle**
- Sister Genevieve**
- Sister Prisca**
- Sister Louise**
- Sister Salome**
- Sister Stanislaus**

The Sisters were assisted by many volunteers including Mrs O’Leary and Miss Veitch at St Patrick’s College.

# SISTER NATALIE O'MEARA

## 1885-1918



Sister Mary Natalie, Sisters Of Our Lady Of Compassion, Wellington  
Photo of Margaret O'Meara (right) supplied by the Cole family

One of the sisters succumbed to the illness.

Sister Mary Natalie was born Margaret Teresa O'Meara at Totara Flat, near Reefton on the West Coast of the South Island in 1885. She was the fourth of ten children and the oldest daughter. Sister Natalie entered the Sisters of Compassion in 1910. At this time two of her brothers, Will and John, were resident in Wellington. Will signed up for military service in 1916, returning home for medical reasons in March 1918.

Sister Natalie was the fifth of the Sisters of Compassion to be buried in the sisters' multiple plot at Karori Cemetery.

Sister Mary Natalie, of the Sisters of Compassion, passed away on Friday, Dec. 13, from complications supervening on a severe attack of influenza. All through the epidemic she, with the other members of the Order, had been doing heroic work on behalf of the sufferers, and the overstrained system was unable to stand the effects of the disease when she in turn became affected. Though quite a young woman, Sister Natalie had been a member of the community for ten years, and her cheerful disposition and loving kindness to those in any way afflicted had made her name a household word among a large section of the community on whose behalf she labored. She was a daughter of Mr. M. O'Meara, of Totara Flat, Reefton, and the sister of Mr. W. O'Meara, well-known in Wellington athletic circles. Solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated at the Home of Compassion on Saturday morning, December 14, by the Very Rev. Dean Holly, S.M. (Provincial), assisted by Father Buckley, S.M., as deacon, Father J. Cullen, S.M., subdeacon, and Father Hurley, S.M., Adm., master of ceremonies. The interment took place at Karori.—R.I.P.

New Zealand Tablet, 19 December, 1918

“Although Sister Natalie was a nurse she did not attend the victims of the epidemic, as she and her novices were in charge of the Nursery.”

SISTER ANGELA MÖLLER: *REMINISCENCES*

On 6 November 1918 Sister Natalie became Novice Mistress. She was in charge of the nursery and, although children in the nursery were also infected, it is thought she caught the flu after visiting her brother Will who was sick.

Sister Natalie received Holy Viaticum at 11.30pm on 12 December. She had previously taken her perpetual vows and been anointed. The community of sisters were with her until her death on 13 December.

“The evening before Sister Natalie died Father Cullen had consecrated the Home of Compassion to the Sacred Heart. Whether owing to the Consecration or to Sister Natalie’s intercession, the epidemic abated at the Island Bay Home almost from the moment sister died.”

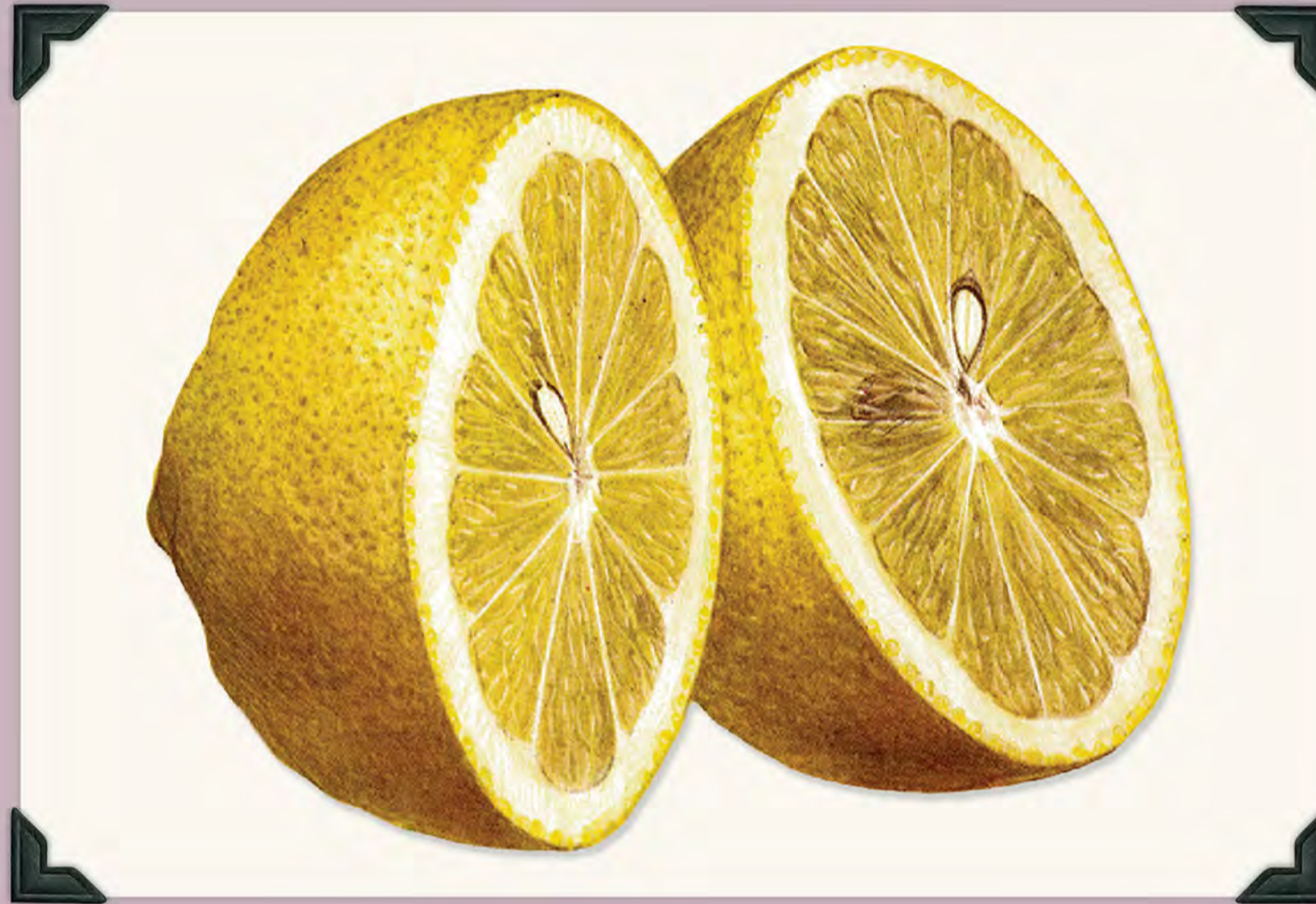
Sister Angela Möller: *Reminiscences*





# UNOBTAINABLE LEMONS

## IN SHORT SUPPLY



*“The Sisters are met with enquiries on every side for lemons, which so far have been unobtainable.”*

NOTE FROM SISTER CLAVER, SISTERS OF COMPASSION ARCHIVES

Lemons, along with oranges, were in demand during the pandemic, to make drinks for the sick. Some took advantage of the situation and hiked prices. In response, the Government placed an Order-in-Council on 15 November to fix the maximum price for good quality lemons at threepence each. The police could be called in and fruit requisitioned from those breaching the order.

### LEMONS REQUIRED.

The Mayor yesterday received an urgent telegram from Mr Baldwin, Chairman of the Wellington Hospital Board, at the instance of Colonel Deck (Superintendent of Military Hospitals) stating that lemons were urgently required at the military hospitals. Mr Snodgrass will be pleased to receive lemons for this purpose, either as gifts, or at a fair market rate.

The Anchor Company have offered to carry the lemons free and to make arrangements for the cases to be delivered in Wellington. Mr J.B. Sadd, of Takaka, has promised to collect lemons in his district.

The Mayor received a number of gifts of lemons yesterday evening, from Miss Blick, Mrs O'Brien, Mrs Smith, and others. These lemons will go to Wellington today by the Nikau. It is hoped that a large additional quantity will be forthcoming, as the need is very great.

Colonist, Volume LXI, Issue 14920, 16 November 1918

### COOLING DRINK FOR PATIENTS

A Masterton resident informs us that, during the present scarcity of oranges and lemons, a good cooling drink for patients can be made by boiling rhubarb.

Wairarapa Daily Times, Volume 44, Issue 13693, 19 November 1918

### PROFITEERING IN ORANGES AND LEMONS.

#### CHECKED BY ORDER IN COUNCIL

Wellington, Nov. 15

The most unscrupulous profiteering has been indulged in over oranges and lemons. Yesterday the former were up to 5s a dozen and the latter sixpence each. To-day lemons were to be a shilling apiece, but an Order in Council commandeers the whole supply of these fruits and fixes the maximum price at 3d each for best qualities.

Colonist, Volume LXI, Issue 14920, 16 November 1918



# THE NURSERY

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“... every precaution was made to keep the children isolated from the rest of the house for fear of any infection reaching the babies. Infection did reach the nursery, through the admission of an infant who had brought the germ with her, and all the toddlers caught it severely, entailing grave anxiety and much work.”

*From Reminiscences of Mother Mary Joseph Aubert Foundress of the Sisters of Compassion, written by Sister Angela Möller 1945*



"Te Whare,"

Esplanade,

Island Bay,

Wellington.

Dear Sister Claver,  
The Epidemic  
committee herewith enclose  
the sum of £5.0.0 for those  
sisters & children who  
suffered with Influenza  
- Please spend this by  
purchasing Xmas  
Comforts.

Yrs Sincerely

C.C. Odlin  
Chairman

We trust you and the  
children are all on  
the road to recovery  
and wish all the  
Complements of the season



**Water Jug and Basin**

*During the influenza epidemic the sick were confined to bed. To contribute to their comfort and wellbeing they were given a daily bed bath.*

**Inhaler**

*The inhaler was used to help relieve nasal and upper chest congestion. The jar was filled with very hot water to which was added Friar's Balsam. The patient, with their head completely covered, leant over the jar to inhale the steam coming from the inhaler.*

**Syringes**

*Syringes were used to administer injections. Injection is a technique used for administering drugs intramuscularly where the drug is quickly absorbed by blood vessels, rather than administering the drug through the digestive tract.*

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# INFLUENZA

## INSTRUCTIONS to Volunteer NURSES or Family ATTENDANTS.

**Patient to be Isolated in Bright Well-ventilated Room.  
Be sure Windows Open Fully.**

**No one except the Nurse or Attendant to Enter Room.**

### MILD CASES.

1. Keep chest covered with flannel, if patient has slight cough and pain in chest. **Don't over cover.**
2. Keep patient in bed for about a week, with open windows but no draughts.
3. Give "standard influenza medicine" if feverish, and follow directions on bottle. (Medicine can be obtained from your local Depot.)
4. Gargle thrice daily with salt and borax (1 teaspoonful of salt,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoonful of borax to 1 cupful of warm water).
5. Opening medicine, one or two pills at night, and, if necessary, salts before breakfast.
6. Diet: If feverish, fluids only, every two hours.
7. If temperature over 102, sponge with warm soapy water under blanket.
8. If faint, give sal volatile (half teaspoonful in water every four hours).
9. **Don't get up too soon.**
10. Nurse to wear mask, and use disinfectants freely.
11. Pieces of rag to be used for sputum, and then burnt.
12. No patient to get out of doors for seven days, nor to appear in public for 14 days from date of onset.

### SERIOUS CASES.

1. Prop patient up in bed, if breathing is bad.
2. Note color of patient's face; if any blueness, report at once.
3. Keep chest and back well covered with cotton wool or flannel, right up to the neck.
4. If pain in back or side, poultice with linseed, or preferably with **antiphlogistine** (carefully following directions on tin). On removing poultice, cover parts with wool.
5. Give plenty of light drinks, such as barley water, lime juice, thin soups, beef tea, and milk and soda water.
6. Stimulant every four hours; either one tablespoonful of brandy or whisky in equal quantities of water.
7. Hot sponge twice a day, **under blanket. Don't expose patient.**
8. Opening medicine nightly.
9. **If urine not passed in 12 hours, report.**
10. Fresh air essential, but screen patient from draughts.
11. Keep note of patient's condition for doctor.
12. No patient to go out of doors for seven days, nor to appear in public for 14 days from date of onset.

### EXTREME.

**Haemorrhage (or bleeding from the mouth).**

1. Send for Doctor at once.
2. Prop patient up high; then raise head of bed by means of blocks or two strong boxes.
3. Place a bolster under patient's knees, and tie each end of bolster to head of bed, to prevent patient slipping down.
4. Give ice to suck if obtainable. (Ice can be had in town from the local Freezing Works).
5. Hot water bottle to feet (bottle well covered).
6. **No stimulants.**
7. If bleeding from nose also, apply cloth wrung out in cold water to nape of neck and to nose, change every five minutes.

### DELIRIUM.

1. Hot sponge patient under blanket.
2. Apply hot water bottle (well covered) to feet; then cold packs to head and back of neck.

### FOOD FOR CONVALESCENTS.

**Eggs: Poached or lightly boiled.**  
Bread and butter.  
Fish.  
Toast.  
Custard.  
Blanc manges and milk foods.

### MEDICINES.

**IN CASES WITH BRONCHITIS, COLDS, etc., order NO. 2 MIXTURE from your Chemist.**

**IN EVERY CASE at the outset order NO. 1 MIXTURE from your Chemist.**

**IN ALL CASES order NO. 3 (PILLS) APERIENT. If pills not available use salts or other opening medicine.**

### FOODS.

3. At the outset there is little desire for food, but the patient should drink freely of water, milk, milk and water, soda water, and Imperial drink. The latter is made by adding one teaspoonful of cream of tartar to one pint of water. A slice of lemon may be added. Later, soups and broth, egg flips and custards may be added. Orange juice is permissible from the start.

Copies of the above may be obtained free of charge at the local depots, or on application to the Public Health Office, Egmont Street, New Plymouth.