

Lois Sabine, editor, *Dr William Bell's "The Settlers' Guide" or Modern Domestic Medicine and Surgery Windsor NSW 1849*, Lois Sabine, Springwood NSW 2009 ISBN: 9780646520025 (pbk.) – available from the author at [lsabine@bigpond.com](mailto:lsabine@bigpond.com) for \$30 plus p&h

This book received a highly commended award at the 2010 Australian Society of Archivists Mander Jones Award and rightly so. It is a fascinating publication consisting of a previously unpublished manuscript coupled with the editor's background information to the work.

The book's structure consists of:

- Preface
- Biography
- Part 1
  - A-W: Abscess to Wry Neck
- Forms of Medicine for Part 1
- Plate illustrations for Part 1
- Part 2
- General Management of Newly Born Infants
- Management of Infants
- Diseases of Infancy and Childhood
- Eruptive and Skin Diseases
- Diseases of the Chest
- Choice of a Wet Nurse
- Management of Health during Pregnancy
- Diseases of Pregnant Women and Treatment
- Forms of Medicine for Part 2
- Table of the Doses of such medicines as are in Common Use and Generally Administered
- Index

With the exception of the Preface and Biography, the rest of the book was written in 1849 by Dr Bell which is a large part of the fascination as it clearly outlines the type of medical practices our ancestors would have used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the Preface we learn how the Editor became aware of the unpublished manuscript in the Mitchell Library, part of the State Library of New South Wales. Sabine transcribed the manuscript after purchasing enlarged photocopies from the Library to enable easier transcription. Even so, transcribing a handwritten work of a medical nature cannot have been an easy task.

In the Biography, Sabine outlines the life of Dr William Bell (1815-1871) and his various moves throughout New South Wales with endnotes giving citations and sources. I understand that Sabine will be starting a biography of Bell soon and it will include reference to his wife Margaret and their seven children including five daughters who all married very well.

My favourite section of this book is Part One where Dr Bell talks about the various illnesses and treatments for them. A selection of these include: abscess, apoplexy, asthma, bleedings and bloodletting, blistering, boils, bunions, burns (and scalding), carbuncles, chilblains, coughs and colds, colic, corns, delirium tremens, dislocations, dribbling of urine (today we refer to it as incontinence), difficulty of passing urine, drowning, dysentery, effects of cold, eyes and eye-lid diseases, ear diseases, fainting, falling sickness, feigning disease (or hypochondria today), fever and ague, fractures, gout, headache, heartburn, hiccups, hoarseness, indigestion, influenza, injuries from gunpowder, ingrown nails, jaundice, lockjaw, looseness of the bowels, piles, pleurisy, rheumatism,

sciatica, lumbago, sore throat, sprains, things in the windpipe and gullet, ulcers, warts, wounds and wry neck.

As you can see from that selection, there are lots of things that our ancestors may have suffered and the suggested treatments what they most likely did to help themselves get better or to at least relieve their symptoms. It is really fascinating reading and makes me truly grateful that we live today with the modern medical facilities that we have. It also makes me aware of how hard it was for doctors back then to diagnose and treat their patients and Dr Bell's clear and well written instructions brings this all to life in a highly readable way.

There are only a few illustrations, mostly for fractures and broken bones showing how best to strap the relevant body part. The lack of illustrations is probably for the best as some of Dr Bell's descriptions are quite graphic and I for one would not want to see them illustrated!

Part Two is all about women, pregnancy, babies, infants and children. All of us have maternal ancestors who had children and this is also fascinating and easily read. For example, in looking after new born babies it deals with washing, navel string (umbilical cord), clothing and feeding. He also looks at breast and artificial feeding, weaning, teething and diseases of childhood. I won't list them here but it is wide ranging and fascinating.

In the last section on Diseases of Pregnant Women and Treatment there is a subsection Diseases of Women and here you will find menstruation (suppression of, difficult, excessive, cessation), hysterical habit and ovarian dropsy. In the subsection on pregnancy he talks about before labour ('a cheerful female friend, may not only be desirable but necessary in the room'), during labour, after delivery and childbed madness (partly post natal depression today perhaps).

Dr Bell's own index allows you to find particular topics easily although it is laid out in the order of the book itself. This is a little unusual today but you need to remember that this transcribed manuscript was first written in 1849.

In summary, this publication is very unique and it provides us with a medical insight into the lives of our ancestors, and in particular our maternal line. It has given me a far greater appreciation of my own gg grandmothers especially those who had lots of children! Dr Bell's style of writing is clear, he gives numerous examples from his own practice and he is never boring. Lois Sabine has given us a terrific insight into our ancestors' lives and I encourage everyone to read this publication and discover how your ancestors handled their accidents and illnesses.

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