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Brinsmead's Pharmacy 73 Glen Eira Road, Ripponlea



Brinsmead's Pharmacy, 2002

Brinsmead's is arguably the most intact Edwardian shop in Victoria, possibly Australia. It has always been a chemist. The chemist at 164 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy was built earlier, in 1888 for C.R.Blackett, Victorian Government Analytical Chemist and founder of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia. But there, all fittings have been removed from the building. Dow's Pharmacy at Chiltern (1863) still contains contents and fittings, but these are nineteenth century and quite plain and undecorated. The Family Butcher at 745 Nicholson Street, North Carlton is a comparably intact Victorian shop to Brinsmead's.

Very few interstate shops of the period are in the same league as Brinsmead's. Shott's Umbrella Shop in Launceston (1890s) and the Paragon Café, Katoomba (1925 & 1934-36) are the only known contenders. Two collections of the contents and fittings of nineteenth century pharmacies survive also: Oggs' Pharmacy was at 76 Collins Street, demolished

when Nauru House was built in 1977. Its vaulted cast-iron canopy, which extended to the kerb was saved and relocated to University House at the University of Melbourne by architect Robin Boyd and its collection said to be in storage at The Museum of Victoria. (The Ogg's business is now at 189 Toorak Road, South Yarra). The Department of Pharmacology at the University of Melbourne also contains the interior and contents of an historic pharmacy, accessible to the public.

There has never been a Brinsmead connected with Brinsmead's Pharmacy. The Brinsmead family had operated pharmacies in St Kilda and Caulfield at least from the 1880s. James Brinsmead opened a pharmacy, two doors from the Glen Eira railway gates in 1913. He closed it when the present building was completed. However, it reopened as Appel's Pharmacy, also extant, on the corner of Glen Eira Road and Hotham Streets. Frederick Damyon purchased the Brinsmead business (and presumably, its name) and built Brinsmead's, and its smaller neighbouring shop in 1918. Perhaps he decided to trade under the Brinsmead name because it was so well known and regarded. It is embossed on a bronze panel, part of the original design.

Next door was leased to Eileen Finch, pastry cook, but the year after, by Alice Giddy, confectioner. By 1928, Damyon owned other chemist shops in St Kilda and leased Brinsmead's to other pharmacists, firstly, to Joseph Lakeland and in the early 1930s to Samuel Park. By then, Damyon was comfortably ensconced, riding out the great Depression years at Mt Macedon. In 1938, he leased Brinsmead's to the newly graduated young pharmacist who had helped fund his university degree by working evenings at the shop as a delivery boy. His name was Campbell Fraser Johnson. With £50 saved from his 21st birthday and a loan from pharmaceutical wholesalers, Johnson began his business. He remembered those days when pills were made by hand and a chemist was on call over 24 hours. In the first night of his new business, he was called out five times between 9.00pm and 5.30 am. During World II he supplemented income from the shop, by operating a mobile dispensary around the Port of Melbourne's wharves. He lived in the residence upstairs.

A hand lotion first formulated in the 1920s was still manufactured at Brinsmead's 60 years later. Mr Johnson had still retained customers from 1938, 50 years later. Staff had been equally loyal. Helen Felder stayed for 25 years. One day she worked until 4.30pm and went off to have a baby at 8pm, Mr Campbell recalled. He was a national yachting judge for the Victorian Yachting Council and member of Brighton Road Primary School Council for 23 years.

In 1955-56, Mr Johnson purchased the property. By then next door was Alexander Reid, hairdresser. In April 1997, Sally Johnson, his daughter decided to sell the property, for only the second time in its 80 years.

The architect of this striking pair of Edwardian shops was Sydney Smith & Ogg. This firm is important as architect for the Victoria Brewery and for many hotels around Melbourne and also for State Savings Banks of Victoria, often in association with brilliant designer

Robert Haddon. Sydney Smith (Senior) is known to have designed 48 houses, commercial and municipal buildings between 1859-74. He died in 1886. His son of the same name (1868-1933) is known to have designed 35 buildings (1888-1934). Sydney Smith and Ogg designed 89 houses, banks and commercial buildings (1889-1908) and as Sydney Smith, Ogg and Serpell (1910-36), 12 more buildings are known. Their twentieth century work has most eclectic influences including the English Arts-and-Crafts movement, Art Nouveau and creative Classicism, with a particular interest in craftsmanship and new materials. Brinsmead's is a very fine and spectacular example.

Note the old Kodak painted hoarding sign on the external wall and others over the front first floor windows. Old signs are relatively rare survivals. The shop-fitters who created Brinsmead's shopfront and interior were Thomas Duff & Bros. Their nameplate survives on the window frame. There are bronze display cases, two brass lamps, and integral to the shopfront with magical leadlight domes over the symmetrical doors. The doors and interior joinery in oak are very fine and the concave fronted bank of druggist drawers is a *tour-de-force* of the joiner's art, with a further elliptical leadlight dome overhead. As virtuosic Edwardian shopfitting, Brinsmead's compares well with English examples of the period. The builders were Queever.

Messrs Thos Duff & Bros Shop Fitters, Show Case Makers, Shop Front Builders and Contractors operated from 225-227 Russell Street, Melbourne, with a factory behind in Heffernan Lane. Thomas Duff left C. Beecham & Co after 20 years with brothers John and Charles. Within a year they had purchased their former employer's business to become the largest in the industry in Victoria with twenty employees. They were known for the 'elegance of design and finish' with orders from all states and New Zealand. Thomas managed, John manufactured and Charles maintained the machines. Their virtuosity continues to grace Glen Eira Road.

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