

The Old Pharmacy

A RICH HISTORY

In 1894, Thomas Gaydon (born in Drayton near Toowoomba) moved to Childers to start his own business, Gaydon's Pharmacy, after having completed an apprenticeship at Thomas Brothers Chemist in Brisbane.

Mr Gaydon was welcomed by the small but fast-growing community of Childers where he became chemist, dentist, optician, veterinarian and anaesthetist at the local hospital (and even the town photographer!). He was a public-spirited man being Shire Chairman for many years and serving on the first management committee for the new Childers Hospital, built in 1901. He was also the driving force behind the building of the Methodist Church in Childers.

As the only chemist over such a large geographic footprint, Mr Gaydon travelled to outlying areas on a regular basis and would stay overnight in Biggenden once or twice a month.

Thomas Gaydon married Miss Mary Hood whose father was a newsagent and tobacconist in town. The Gaydons had two boys, Thomas Geoffrey Gaydon and Stanley Noel Gaydon, both of whom were encouraged to follow in their father's footsteps.

Geoffrey completed a degree in dental surgery from the University of Melbourne while Noel finished his pharmacy degree at the Queensland College of Pharmacy in 1925. After Thomas Gaydon died in 1935, Noel took over operation of the pharmacy from his father.

Gaydon's Pharmacy was a thriving business and often hosted young apprentice chemists. The late Mr Herb Kingston, founder of Kingston's Pharmacies in Maryborough, and Mr Ken Cullen of Gin Gin Pharmacy were two professionals who learnt the trade from the master.

Frank Mycock came to Childers to work at the pharmacy but was called up for duty on the medical ship "The Centaur" which tragically sank off the Queensland coast in May 1943, killing 268 people on board.



Mervyn Graham Hooper came to join the staff as dispensing chemist in 1938 and married local lass, Isbell Todd. Graham Hooper and Noel Gaydon became partners in 1956 and following Noel's death in 1966, Mr Hooper owned the business outright.

Amazingly, all leather-bound prescription books, labels, ground glass bottles, scales, etc from the turn of the century were intact and Graham and Isa Hooper kept it that way.

Graham Hooper died suddenly in 1982 and Mrs Hooper ran the business as a gift shop until her retirement in 1987 when she announced the business was for sale.

RESTORING THE COLLECTION

On 5 December 1986 the Isis Shire Council discovered the fixtures, fittings and contents of Gaydon's Pharmacy were to be sold to a southern buyer and moved out of Childers.

After inspection of the Pharmacy, the Council launched a rescue bid to return the magnificent old pharmacy to its original state and place in Childers and so preserve this important history.

It was discovered that all the early records such as leather-bound prescription books, cash books and many other documents, stored in an old wooden shed at the rear of the building, were still in excellent condition. Approximately 350 ground glass bottles with gold leaf lettering, most of which contain their original contents, lined the mirror backed red cedar shelving.

A contract was signed with Mrs Hooper for the purchase of all fixtures, fittings and contents, and the Isis Council took possession on 1 April 1987. In May 1987, restoration work commenced with the removal of modern-day proprietary lines for sorting and storage for future reference – history in the making.

Cataloguing, coding and cleaning of the magnificent collection of pharmaceutical items took five months of hard work and much love after which everything was carefully packed and stored before the carpenters, electricians and painters moved in.

The building was completely rewired and painted followed by many hours of restoration work on the beautiful mirror backed red cedar shelving and

display cabinets. Many of the red cedar drawers with crystal knobs still contain their original contents and prices, including 'Creta Prep' (prepared chalk), 1 shilling per pound, 1/7/1917.

Above this marvellous set of drawers stands the National Cash Register purchased by Mr Gaydon in 1906 for the princely sum of sixty pounds. The first deposit receipt for one pound and final payment receipt and amongst our valuable records.

After much laborious scrubbing through the grime of many years of shuffling feet, a magnificent mosaic floor was discovered.

It was decided to return the dispensary area to its original layout (taken from early photographs found in the shop). The fascinating use of wooden packing cases as drawers for the storage of medicine bottles is a very interesting feature which remains.

Among the optical equipment discovered in the dispensary were several gold rimmed spectacle frames, pince-nez, hundreds of tiny screws and minute instruments along with reference books such as The Ophthalmoscope by James Thorington AM MD, 1906.

Soon afterwards, restoration work began on the dental surgery above and two of the original portable dentist chairs and a foot pedal drill along with pliers, pincers and a denture press were recovered and put on display in The Old Pharmacy (these items send a shiver up the spine of many visitors!).

On 21 August 1987 the Museum was officially opened by Sir Frank Moore, then Chairman of the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation. The Museum won the inaugural Tourism Ministers Award that year and in 1989, won the National Trust John Herbert Award for excellence in Heritage Conservation Works.

The Isis Shire council along with the Bundaberg City Council, Burnett Shire Council and Kolan Shire Council were amalgamated in 2008 to form the Bundaberg Regional Council. The Childers Pharmaceutical Museum was then renamed as The Old Pharmacy and opened its doors in 2010.

NOT JUST A PHARMACY

During refurbishment of The Old Pharmacy, a large wooden box was found to contain glass photographic plates and hundreds of negatives dating back to 1906. Many are family portraits of early pioneers of the region and early town photographs. With the help of a portable backdrop, the back-exterior wall of the dispensary became the 'studio' and several old cameras and equipment are now on display along with early photographs.



For more things to see around Childers, visit the Childers Historical Village opposite St. Joseph's School in Taylor Street and visit the friendly team at **CHILDERS VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE, 72 CHURCHILL STREET CHILDERS**