

Colebrook Avenue, Moorooka

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Colebrook Avenue, Moorooka runs between Beaudesert Road and Ipswich Road south of Stimpson Park. It is only one block long so why is it called an Avenue? According to the Brisbane City Council's definition of road types circa 1970 an Avenue is so defined "Each case to be considered on its merits but only for roads of sufficient importance." What is important about Colebrook Avenue? Well, there is no record at the Brisbane City Council Archives. I have always pictured an Avenue as a wide road with trees planted down each side. Nothing could be further from this than Colebrook Avenue, so I am afraid for now it remains a mystery.



The only place I can find called Colebrook is in Tasmania. However I have found a wonderful story of a man called Leonard Colebrook born in Guildford, Surrey in 1883. He did his medical training at St Mary's Hospital, London. After graduating he worked on vaccine therapy, tuberculosis and pneumonia. He joined the Royal Army Medical Corps during World War 1 when he worked on wound infection. Following the war, he returned to St Mary's and worked with Sir Almoth Wright who developed a vaccine against typhoid in 1929. In 1926 Colebrook became interested in the incidence of puerperal fever in post-natal women. He found that a drug called Prontosil (an early sulphide drug) cured the sepsis. This is recorded as the first clinical trial of antibiotics.

He campaigned for the use of gloves, masks and gowns before touching patients and that chloroxynol, first made in 1927, was an effective disinfectant and superior to soap and water for hand washing. Today it is called *Detto*. During World War 2 he developed an interest in burns and skin grafts. He established the practice of placing the burns patient in a near sterile environment. Following his retirement he and his wife promoted the use of guards on all portable electric heaters to prevent clothing catching alight. Their campaign led to legislation requiring these guards to be mandatory and increased interest in flame proof clothing. So, I believe a street that contained an Ambulance Centre was well named.

Colebrook Avenue wasn't part of the War Service Estate on land purchased on 19 March 1920 from George and Annie Mackay for £100. George had a chemist shop in Queen Street with a partner called Watkins. The block of land was 10 acres bordered by what was to become Helles and Gaba Tepe Streets. Where Colebrook Avenue is was the southern end of a water reserve – now Stimpson Park.

My first memories of Colebrook Avenue are from the 1940's. On the corner of Colebrook and Beaudesert Road was Bullock's store. Prior to supermarkets all groceries were purchased from the local corner store. Sugar and flour were carefully weighed and taken home using your ration coupon in paper bags. Most stores house delivered at no cost – well before women drove around in 4-wheel drives. The corner store was also the place where you heard all the local gossip – pre telephones in every home. The Bullocks had a daughter Sandra who went on to work for Clem Jones, married and managed the Bowls Club at Beenleigh. Fishers had a bakery and had a deal with the tram drivers and conductors. On the way to Moorooka or Salisbury they would ring the bell on the tram twice if they wanted two pies on the way back. The Fishers would meet the returning tram and deliver the pies.

The butcher shop was also located near Colebrook Avenue. The son of the butcher married one of the Weidman daughters. I am sure you ladies remember the Weidman's store in Queen Street. They made my wedding frock. The Weidmans lived in Beaudesert Road between tram stops 32 and 33.

There is a heritage listed substation on the corner of Beaudesert Road. The first building on this site, Substation No. 13 was constructed by contractor Albert Mason in 1929 and designed by City Architect Alfred Foster. As demand for electricity grew a second building No. 213 designed by Frank Costello was constructed in 1942 and reconstructed following damage in 1988. The establishment of the Rocklea Munitions Works in Evans Road, Salisbury, along with the construction of a temporary military camp at Moorooka led to even greater demand for electricity.

Land purchases and selections in this area around the substation had commenced in the 1860's but with the opening of the South Coast Railway in July 1885 little residential development occurred. Even after the sale of allotments in estates near the Moorooka Railway Station, development was slow, affected by the oversupply of available sites and by the depression of the 1890's. By 1900 the number of households in Moorooka had reached 41 and by the mid 1920's this number had only increased to 217.

The land on which Substation 13 was built at the edge of Stimpson Park was 10 perches close to an area known locally as Four Mile Swamp. This wetland was part of Moolabin Creek. Initially the locals petitioned against part of the park being used as a substation, but they were advised that the building, on account of its design would add beauty to the park.

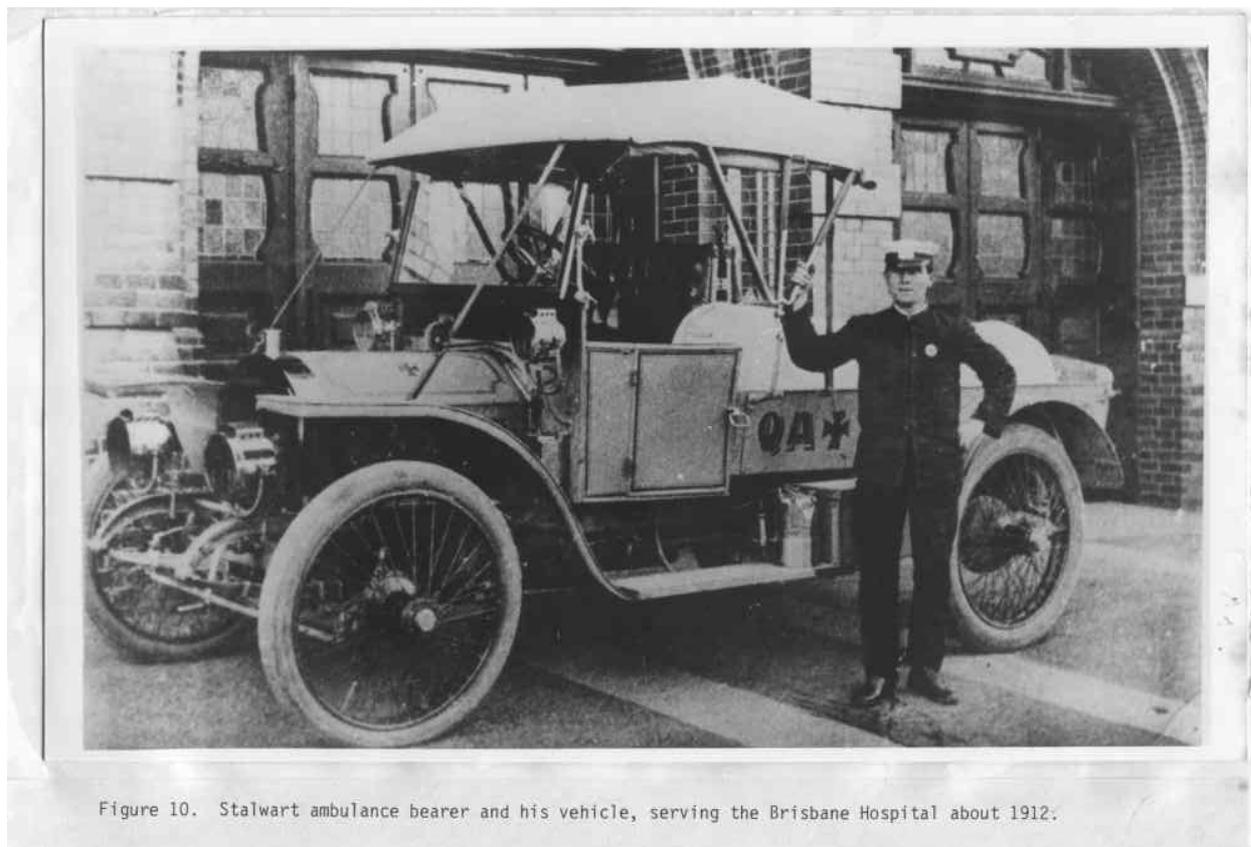
In a statement of significance, the substation is considered a place of importance demonstrating the evolution of the city and the local area's history and of its aesthetic significance. It has been described as "of an elegant simplicity that is both modern and civic in appearance".

Oh, that this could describe today's architecture.

Apart from wanting to know why this little street was called an Avenue, the reason I chose to talk about Colebrook Avenue was that my father worked there for over 25 years as an Ambulance Officer. He walked from our home in Longueval Street, Clifton Hill every day. The shifts were 8 to 4 or 2 to 10. I would run to meet him at 4 because often he would have popped into Bullock's Store, and I would search his pockets to find the treat he had bought for me. Sometimes if it was a rainy-day Dad would drive us to Yeronga School in the Ambulance. As we approached school, he would turn the siren on. We felt we were King of the Kids.

Ambulance services in Queensland first began in 1892. Military medic Seymour Warrian called for a public meeting in Brisbane at his home at Annerley with the goal of establishing the first Queensland ambulance service. He was spurred on after witnessing some well-intentioned but ill-advised bystanders go to the aid of a horse rider at the Brisbane Exhibition who had fallen off and sustained a simple fractured leg. They carried him across the road in such a way that the simple fracture became a compound fracture. This served as a sharp example of the need for properly trained medical attendants and transporters known today as paramedics. On September 12, 1892, the City Ambulance Transport Brigade (CATB) began operating out of the Brisbane Newspaper Building.

The first officers possessed a stretcher but no vehicle and so transported the patient on foot. Their first patient was transported from Taringa to a private hospital in New Farm. How long do you think it took for the officers to go from Wharf Street to Taringa to New Farm and back to Wharf Street on foot?



Slowly, local centres evolved, each administered by a committee in conjunction with the QATB State Council. It was funded jointly by the state government and the general public – people either paid a yearly subscription or a fee for using the service. Unfortunately, this method wasn't enough to fund running the Ambulance Service.

Every QATB centre in Queensland was expected to fund raise. The officers even stood on corners on their day off shaking the begging boxes. We spent our Christmas holidays manning the Casualty Room in places that had no QATB station. During the 40's and 50's it was Caloundra and Maroochydore. Both provided houses for bearers from other centres to spend their annual holiday providing they manned the casualty room twice a day. They mainly dealt with sunburn and blue-bottle stings. Dad allowed me to be his nurse.

We also holidayed at Wellington Point. The ambulance had an old railway carriage there so Mum and I slept there, and Dad and my brother slept in a tent. The reason we were there was to fund raise. We had a chocolate wheel and the men from Cleveland QATB collected prizes from local businesses and every Saturday night we spun the wheel and had a concert. During the Christmas holidays for those of you familiar with Wello, the Point has a circular road and people used to be allowed to pitch their tents for their holidays. So, we had quite a crowd every Saturday evening and helped to keep the Cleveland centre running.

In 1940 plans for a two-storey ambulance building in Colebrook Avenue were submitted to the Brisbane City Council. It was mainly to serve the munitions and other industrial workers of Rocklea as well as residents of Moorooka and surrounding suburbs. It was to be staffed by permanent officers and controlled by the parent centre in Ann Street. Direct telephones from the station to the munitions factory would be installed so bearers could respond immediately in case of an accident. Two-way radios were also used but they had a very limited reception.



Harry Russell outside Moorooka Ambulance 1940's

Most stations had no oxygen and no sterile dressings or treatment for burns. Wooden splints or newspaper immobilized fractures and no pain medication. CPR didn't come in until 1960 and before that resuscitation procedures were ineffective. The only piece of technical equipment used for resuscitation was a Sparkler resuscitator. It operated on the principle that a build up of carbon dioxide would stimulate respiration. Unfortunately, we know this was wrong.

The officers were poorly trained and were really only able to offer basic first aid. My father together with many others started as an Honorary Ambulance Officer. At this time in the 1940's he was working at the Brisbane Hospital so 2 or 3 days a week he would leave work, go to the QATB station and work the evenings as a volunteer.

His weekends were the same. He learned by watching what the other officer who was mentoring him did. NO structured education at all. In 1948 two Honoraries who had served as medics in World War 2 recognized the lack of professionalism and determined to do something about it. Arthur DeBritz and Bob McDermott set about trying to convince the hierarchy at QATB to approve a structured training program. They approached Ken Watson an orthopedic surgeon who agreed and offered to help them. His comment was "You are all so far behind the times with patient care, you're little more than truck drivers." And this was in the late 50's – ten years after Arthur and Bob had started their quest for better training for every officer. Bob actually had worked with my father at Moorooka.

The Advanced Lecture Training Program began on 2 April 1959 with lectures held on two nights each week. Over 200 officers attended travelling from as far away as Toowoomba and the Dalby. Arthur and Bob asked senior officers who had a particular skill to help and received willing co-operation from medicos including Ken Watson (orthopedic) Ken Jamieson (neurosurgeon) Roger Bennett and Tess Brophy (anesthetists) Conrad Hirschfeld (surgeon) and Ralph Hocking (Senior Medical Officer at the Brisbane Hospital). For those doctors who gave up their precious off-duty time, it shows the vital need of the ambos. The result was better qualified men, better equipped ambulances, sterile dressings and better documentation. Apart from the lives that were simply saved.

When Bob started to work at Moorooka in 1948 the officer-in-charge manned the night shift. He, his wife and family lived upstairs in that rather ugly and totally impractical building made of fibro which still stands today in Colebrook Avenue. As Moorooka got busier a night roster was implemented.

A lot of the officer's time was taken up ferrying people to and from hospital appointments. My father sometimes shared the more humorous incidents including one when he and Bob were called to the Pensioner Reserve at Tarragindi. They entered the "house" made of corrugated iron and transferred the patient to hospital. On the way back to Moorooka Bob said "Are you scratchy, Harry?" They went on to the office and stripped. Flea bites! They put their clothes into the back of the ambulance and a flea bomb. Dad came home and lay in the bath in his undies until the fleas floated to the top. There were so many you could scarcely see the water. He sprayed the house which was already infested not to mention poor "Darkie" our dog. We eventually had to have the house professionally treated and it took weeks to eradicate them all.

They arranged to have the pensioner's house fumigated while he was in hospital and upon bringing him home, they told him about the effect of his flea infestation on the entire Moorooka Centre. He replied "If you think my place is bad you should see my neighbour's – it's riddled with them. He also told the story of the pensioner apparently living in poverty in one of the shanties. Following his death, the Police and Ambos searched his house and found thousands of pound notes hidden in a set of cannisters.

The Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) was founded in 1991 to replace the then outdated QATB. They have headquarters in Brisbane and employ about 5000 staff. They are part of Queensland Health and provide world-class pre-hospital emergency care. There are 15 local Ambulance Service Networks comprising 298 response locations and 7 Operations Centres across the state and dedicated Paramedics, Emergency Medical Despatchers and Patient Transport Officers. QAS is responsible for the delivery of pre-hospital ambulance response, co-ordination of aero-medical services, inter-facility transfers, planning and co-ordination for multi-casualty incidents and disaster and casualty room services. Their commitment to innovation and ongoing advancement in training and clinical practice position them as one of Australia's leading ambulance services despite the challenges of a geographically diverse state.

QAS is also a leader in the provision of quality First Aid training courses. To become a paramedic today one attends a three-year program to earn a Bachelor in Paramedicine. A far cry from my dad volunteering to help in the hope of becoming an Ambo in the 1940's. If any of you watch any of the TV shows on Ambos you will see what I mean. They are now able to make decisions that some medicos would ponder over. When the ambulance started in 1892 some of the medical profession were afraid that it would take over their job. But that hasn't happened. What has happened is that paramedics have become experts in their particular field – prehospital care. They are trained to treat patients outside a hospital; setting whereas doctors are not. When Arthur and Bob started the first training program in 1959 it was always envisioned that eventually the ambulance service would encompass advanced life support.

And now it's happened. Every time you walk down the street there are many people who are alive today due to the skills of the Ambos. So next time you drive by Colebrook Avenue think of this because one of the people they helped could have been a relative of yours. The building is still there in a state of disrepair, but Colebrook Avenue will be there forever.