

Ebenezer Vickery and The War Memorial Hospital "Edina"



*War Memorial Hospital
Carrington Road & Birrell Street, Waverley
1985*

The discovery of gold in 1851 at Ophir, near Bathurst, and the ensuing gold rush, ignited the long boom that lasted until the 1890s and changed the Sydney forever. It was during this period that Ebenezer Vickery, son of a boot and shoe manufacturer, gradually built up a vast empire of manufacturing, mining, shipping and property. Ebenezer Vickery served on various boards and committees and was a leading and active member of the Sydney Methodist Church.

Vickery was born in 1827 in London and came to Australia with his family in 1833. Leaving school at the age of 16 to work for an ironmonger, his achievements were remarkable given his humble beginnings. According to the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 'self made and self contained, Vickery cared little about society and culture: his business, his family, his church and his philanthropic work were his absorbing interests.' He married his first wife, Jane Begg, in 1851. They had six children, three girls and three boys.

Edina

Ebenezer Vickery acquired the Edina property, about 6-7 acres in size in the recently created suburb of Waverley in 1866-1867 and built his first house *Edina*. This was later demolished and in about 1884 a second *Edina* was built. *Edina* was a Victorian Italianate mansion set in extensive gardens. This imposing, two-storey, colonnaded residence was the style of building that appealed to the new moneyed classes – the picturesque relationship of the building and landscape, the enclosed gardens surrounded by tall trees and hedges with wrought iron fences and handsome entrance gates.



Ebenezer Vickery and family 1901

The two-storey mansion has beautifully decorated ceilings, cedar doors and staircases, cast iron balustrades, etched glass door panels and behind the main staircase magnificent stained glass windows. Vickery also travelled abroad, going to Italy with his architect during the building of *Edina* to purchase marble fireplaces, over mantles, hearth tiles and Venetian chandeliers for his new home. The tiles which still grace the verandahs and main hall of *Edina* came from the ancient ruins of Pompeii – something which is considered quite shocking today.



The tiles in Edina came from the ancient ruins at Pompeii

One of *Edina*'s most distinctive features, still visible today, is a central balustrade tower, a device intended to give the building a landmark quality and which allowed district views in all directions.

Edina's garden

The Victorian garden has been described as evolving from the picturesque to the gardenesque. *Edina* displays a typically Victorian solution to the dilemma of reconciling the straight, classical, symmetrical, architectural and continental gardenesque with the more picturesque, self-consciously irregular and "natural" style prescribed by 18th century gardening philosophy.

There was room for the wild, however, in the Victorian garden, and in the grounds of *Edina* this part of the garden appears to have been called 'wildwood' by the family. In a family album, held by descendant Mrs. Alfreda Henry, several photographs of the garden have captions referring to 'wildwood' and on one page the following verse is handwritten:

*How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood
When fond recollections presents them to view!
The lawns and the ponds, backyards and wildwood,
And all the loved spots that my infancy knew.*

Vickery and the Methodist Church

In 1887 Ebenezer Vickery was appointed to the Legislative Council of NSW from which forum he defended capitalism, attacked "union leaders and socialistic agitators" and opposed the eight-hour clause and the proposed minimum age of 14 for boys in mines.

He was a staunch Methodist with a strong evangelical dedication to his church. Amongst his generous donations to the church was his funding of the Tent Missions of 1902–1904. These consisted of missions to eighty towns in NSW from fully equipped tents complete with teams of evangelists. Vickery was also responsible for the purchase and gift to the church of the Lyceum Theatre in Pitt Street – an interesting purchase for someone to whom pleasure was derived not from the popular arts, but from church activities.

Vickery's main interest was evangelical work and he was strongly involved in the Wesley Methodist Church Sustentation and Extension Society. This society was set up to promote 'the spread of holiness through the land...to provide assistance to maintain ministers among scattered or neglected populations and to aid in the erection of new churches, parsonages, and schoolrooms and the liquidation of old debts.' In its first half century, Vickery and a wealthy minister, Rev. W. Schofield, donated more than half the total income of £300,000 to the Society.

Vickery, described as the Central Methodist Mission's most prominent early supporter also paid the shortfall from advertising revenue for the publication of the Mission's periodical *Our Weekly Greeting*. In fact, Vickery supported – often financially - every aspect of the church's work.

He may even have been involved in the attempt to set up an Aboriginal Mission Station.

There is a photograph in a Vickery family album showing Vickery amongst Aboriginal children captioned '1904 at the Aborigines Mission Station, Cairns'.

Vickery's later life

In 1904 Jane Vickery died after over 50 years of marriage to Ebenezer. The following year, at 78 years old, Vickery married a teacher, Deborah Louise Ellis. They visited the USA and England to study modern evangelistic methods. In the USA he survived the great Californian earthquake, but died after an operation at Leeds, UK, in 1906. He is buried in Waverley Cemetery. His estate was sworn for probate at £483,354, of which £11,000 was mainly left to Methodist charities.

Apart from his many public deeds, including the building of 'The Glenrock Terrace' in High Street to accommodate his tannery workers, Vickery left the legacy of his magnificent home and grounds, which were donated by his family to the Methodist Church in 1919 for use as a hospital. This property is now the War Memorial Hospital at 125 Birrell Street, Waverley.

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