

A HISTORY OF MT EDEN MEDICAL CENTRE

The following history was written from the recollections of Dr Tom Marshall, a partner in the practice between 1966 and 2011.

Mount Eden was settled early in Auckland's history, as farmland. Wheat was grown and the Bycroft Mill was built in Windmill Road in 1843. One Hastings Atkins Esq. acquired the land on which the Medical Centre stands between July and September 1845, as part of a purchase of some 60 hectares. Prophetically, perhaps, he sold 30 hectares in October 1845 for the sum of £80, to Henry Weekes, a surgeon!

The house, in which the general practice has operated since 1931, was built some time prior to 1882. No other general practice in New Zealand has functioned for so long in the same premises. A photograph taken from the slopes of Mount Eden between 1910 and 1920 shows the house clearly, with its distinctive three chimneys.

The medical influence that was created by Mr Weekes' purchase of the land lay dormant until the general practice, now known as the Mount Eden Medical Centre, was established in June 1931. Dr Edward Roche, who had graduated from Guy's Hospital, London, in 1914 and his wife Barbara, also a doctor (she was an anaesthetist), decided they had found in it a gracious family home and an ideal place to start a general practice.

Dr Roche started practice in the midst of the great depression and he later recounted,

"It was right in the middle of the slump and things were very tough then. No social security and lots of salesmen wanting to sell cars, etc. In our first month, we took £16. We stuck it out and eventually it was a big practice. In the first year, we made more money from playing cards, than we did from fees!"

Dr Renton Grigor joined Dr Roche as an assistant in 1936. In 1940, he moved to establish his own practice further along Mount Eden Road, where he remained until his retirement, almost 50 years later.

Dr Victor McGeorge had enlisted in the Army soon after the outbreak of war but was "invalided out" following a severe attack of asthma, prior to departure for overseas. He was then able, on Dr Grigor's departure, to join Dr Roche, similarly as an assistant.

Cardiology was Dr Roche's first love and it is probable that he carried out New Zealand's earliest electro-cardiograms, at 457 Mount Eden Road. In 1942, he left general practice, selling the practice and his home to Dr McGeorge, to establish his own specialist cardiology practice.

Dr McGeorge conducted this practice single-handed from that time until 1946. During those war years, he added a flourishing maternity practice.

In 1946, his great friend and former flatmate from student days in Dunedin, Dr Albert (Butt) Adams joined him after serving five years with the Second New Zealand Echelon in Africa and Greece, followed by a year as a Medical Registrar at Waikato Hospital.

A further Dunedin flat-mate, Dr Noel Wilson, joined the practice in 1949, having also been overseas with the New Zealand Army for five years and subsequently at New Plymouth Hospital. Dr Wilson left the practice for a year's postgraduate study in Melbourne, in the early 1950s.

In the 1950s, they formalised their arrangements and coined the name Mount Eden Medical Centre, for the house at 457 Mt Eden Rd. Thus was established the first group practice in Auckland and the only one to have survived for so long.

Dr Daphne Adams, Dr Butt Adams wife, worked part-time in the practice in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The trio continued together until the death of Dr McGeorge in September 1982, after he suffered a heart attack while at work. He had seemed to be recovering well in Green Lane Hospital but then collapsed and died suddenly six days after the initial attack. Dr Wilson was diagnosed with advanced cancer in December 1982, dying in February 1983. He continued working until two weeks before his death.

Dr Tom Marshall had joined the established practice in September 1966. When he and his family took sabbatical leave in 1975, Dr Herman Develter, an Irish graduate who had owned his own practice in Derby, England, acted as his locum tenens. On the return of the Marshalls in early 1976, Dr Develter remained with the practice as a partner.

In 1976, major alterations of the premises took place. An addition was built at the rear of the building and the house at 459 Mt Eden Road, which had been purchased in 1970, was joined to 457. All this was done without altering the essential character of 457, either inside or out. The heart of the building remains as it was in 1931. No other general practice in New Zealand has functioned for so long in the same premises.

Dr Tony Hay joined the practice in 1982 after post-graduate study in the United Kingdom and New Zealand experience in general practice.

Following the deaths of Drs McGeorge and Wilson, Dr Andrew Chong, who had been in practice in Papakura since 1968, joined the practice.

Dr Butt Adams retired in March 1984 and Dr Jan White, who had returned from post-graduate work in Boston, USA, took over his practice. This established a group of doctors that was to continue unchanged for the next twenty years.

More recently, Dr Julie Taylor, already an established GP in Mount Eden, moved her practice to the Mount Eden Medical Centre in 2002. In 2004, Dr Herman Develter retired and Dr Anthony Tam joined the team and in 2007, following the retirement of Dr Andrew Chong, Dr Michele Cooper joined the practice.

At the end of 2011, Dr Tom Marshall retired after a long and illustrious career in medical politics and General Practice. Dr Elizabeth Catherwood took over his practice. [Read an article from Central Leader about his retirement here.](#)

From the single-handed days of Dr McGeorge and until after the arrival of Drs Adams and Wilson, Sister Mabel Ashby was the first practice nurse. She was a former maternity hospital owner and the aunt of our pharmacist colleague, Mr John Ashby. Mr Ashby's father had established his pharmacy in Balmoral in 1938 and supplied pharmaceuticals to Drs Roche and McGeorge. John succeeded his father as proprietor of the pharmacy and continued this arrangement until recent times.

A notable and much-loved figure in the practice following Sister Ashby, was another practice nurse, Sister Denise Fleming. She joined the team in the early 1960s and remained until the effects of terminal cancer forced her to stop work in 1989.

Following these pioneer practice nurses, the team was ably led by Mary Edgar for a number of years, followed by Kimberly Phillips.