

From the Archives

"Every scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out from his storeroom things both new and old."

Matt. 13.52

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Editorial Dear Sisters, In March I spent five days as a patient in old dear old "Mena House", now known as Cliveden Hill Private Hospital. Thanks be to God, a brilliant surgeon and excellent nursing care I have made a complete and speedy recovery. Whilst in "Mena" I discovered that the spirit of our Sisters walks the corridors and resides in the rooms of our first hospital in Australia. Former staff of "Mena", like Sister Lim and Sr. Gunthera's offside, Alexandra, still working there, keep the memory of the Sisters alive and management readily acknowledges the enduring influence of the Sisters as this edition of *From the Archives* will show. *Pat*

Rosary Beads in a Glass Case In the Foyer of Cliveden Hill Private Hospital for incoming patients to see there is a little glass case in which a pair of Rosary Beads are enshrined with a placard which reads:

Sacred Heart Sisters' Rosary Bead Story
In the year 1930 Cliveden Hill Private Hospital
(formerly known as Mena House) was sold to the
German Sisters of the Sacred Heart.
During the years 1930-1986 the Sacred Heart Sisters
cared for the sick and prayed for them to enable
their recovery. During these years, the building
was updated and changed in keeping with the times.
In 1996 during an extensive renovation at Cliveden
Hill Private Hospital these Rosary Beads were found
inside a wall cavity and it can only be presumed they
were placed there many years before by one of the Sisters
to keep holy watch over all who enter its doors.

During my stay at Cliveden Hill Private Hospital, practically every person who entered my room, which by the way was Sr. Friedegund's old sewing room, said: "Have you seen the Rosary Beads? Do you know the story?" The staff, who are all permanent, even the casuals are on a permanent nursing bank, really believe that those Rosary Beads are "keeping holy watch over all who enter its doors". The Rosary Beads are symbolic of all the MSC Sisters who lived, worked, laughed, shed tears, suffered or died at "Mena House" and still hover over it. I could feel their presence.

What is the story behind the Rosary Beads hidden behind the wall?

If you have any clues I would appreciate any information you have to offer. I recently told Sr. Joan Fisher about the Rosary Beads and she told me that placing beads behind the wall to invoke Our Lady's special protection would be the sort of thing that Sr. Sebastian would do. Joan's very first appointment after the Novitiate was to Mena House and Sr. Sebastian was the Superior at that time. Another clue came from a conversation I had last week with Bernice Braletich, formerly our Sister Bernard. Sr. Bernard was on night duty at Mena House on the night in question, together with another lay nurse. Sr. Sebastian was the Superior and other members of the community were, Sr. Farilda, Sr. Gunthera, and Sr Carmel. There may have been others but Bernice could not recall their names. This is the story of:

A Fire at Mena House Hospital Circa 1960

About a year before this incident I had experienced a short circuit followed by a fire in an electrical switch box. If you have ever smelt burning electrical wires you know that the smell is unforgettable. One night in Winter I was on night duty with another nurse. I could smell the unmistakable smell of burning electrical wires. We set about investigating but could not track down the source. On that particular night one of our patients was sleeping on the back veranda. This was not a regular ward but, because the lady had a particular bowel complaint she requested to be placed on the veranda where she would not give offence to other patients. This lady came to the nurses' station to report that sparks were coming from the switch board on the veranda. Sparks had already burnt holes in the blanket on her bed. We ran to the scene to find smoke pouring from the switch box, followed by a loud explosion. I immediately phoned the Eastern Hill Fire Brigade. The only other patients on the ground floor that night were a mother, who had had a hysterectomy and a little boy who was due to have a tonsillectomy the next day. They were moved to the front parlour for safety. From the front window the little lad witnessed all the action. He saw the fire brigade arrive with clanging bells and flashing lights. He watched the firemen don their uniforms and enter the hospital with hose reel and torches. They very quickly had the situation under control and the hospital was restored to quiet and calm. The next morning I informed Sr. Sebastian of the drama. I did not want to disturb her sleep during the night. Later the Eastern Hill Fire Brigade sent a stern report on the state of the hospital's water pipes which had been the cause of the short circuit and fire. Because the fire was in the wall, the calamity could have been much worse and patients' lives could have been at risk.

Reported by Bernice Braletich almost 50 years after the event.

It is plausible to suggest that the Rosary Beads were placed inside the wall cavity after this event. And that they were placed there by the Superior because sisters only had one pair of beads and they couldn't dispose of them without permission. It would be a very German thing to do – think of the many Marian Shrines in Europe where pilgrims go to thank Our Lady for averting calamity or to implore protection in the future. Our own shrine in the grounds of the Mother House in Hilstrup and the shrine that Mother Damascena had built at Mary's Mount after the deliverance of passengers and crew from the burning Skaubryn are examples. Another possibility could be that the Rosary Beads were placed behind the wall during the renovations that Mr. Hunt did in the late 1960s when Sr. Alma was Superior. *What do you think?*