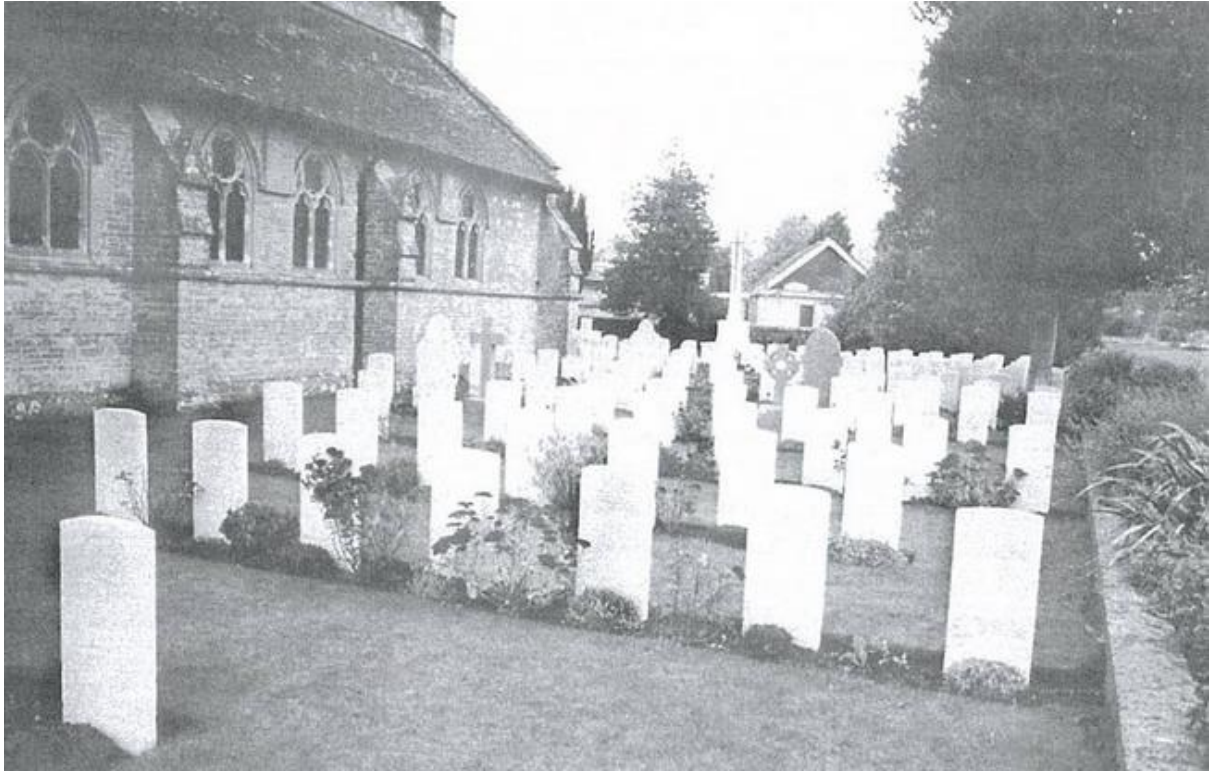


History Lives

EPIDEMIC KILLED MORE THAN WAR

Spanish Influenza / Pneumonic Influenza



War Graves in Church Yard at Sutton Veny

Before the Armistice was signed to end World War I, a new epidemic spread across the world that killed more people than were lost in the war.

Some researchers put the figure as high as 50 million, making it a greater killer than the Plague or Black Death in Europe.

This epidemic was popularly known as Spanish Influenza because the Spanish king was amongst its earliest victims.

In Australia, the disease was called pneumonic influenza.

Australian troops in Britain suffered a 10 per cent infection rate, of which 209 were fatal.

Soldiers in AIF depots in Britain were inoculated and made to gargle Condy's crystals in salt water twice a day.

It is interesting to note that of the 60,000 troops in Britain, the 25 per cent who were inoculated suffered only a third of the rate of infection, a ninth of the rate of pulmonary complications and a twentieth of the death rate of the 45,000 who were not inoculated.

Returning troop ships were often badly hit. If a ship arrived with an infected person, everybody on board was immediately inoculated and forced to wear face masks for the period of quarantine.

In Australia, there was widespread support for inoculation.

Melbourne's socialites reputedly arranged "inoculation parties" where the guests "got the needle" in turn to slow music and a prize was awarded to "the shapeliest arm".

Australia remained relatively free of infection, but by the end of 1919, all Australian states shared a death toll of 12,000.

No one knew the cause of the epidemic nor how to cure it.

The states argued, with New South Wales accusing Victoria of spreading the infection, and borders were closed.

Patent medicines such as Dr Morse's Indian Root Pills claimed to be effective against this influenza. The makers did advise people to see their doctor, but this was often disregarded as doctors were in short supply, five per cent being still on overseas service, and were likely to detect venereal disease or recommend Bovril instead.

Bendigo was affected by the epidemic when Victorian authorities requested space at the hospital.

With the hospital overflowing and not able to accept any more patients, further accommodation had to be sought and, according to its Annual Report, the Benevolent Asylum (Anne Caudle Centre) was appealed to for help since it possessed the only buildings in the town that could provide the required facilities.

The committee gave approval for the two upper floors of the main building, with the proviso that the city council undertake to completely isolate the inmates of the asylum and bear the cost of this move.

The Argus newspaper reported several deaths at Bendigo Hospital from influenza in 1919.

(Bendigo Advertiser, Victoria, Australia, 2 February, 2015)