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Happy 90th Birthday, Epworth!

On Saturday 27 February Victoria's largest provider of private not-for-profit healthcare services, Epworth celebrates 90 years of providing hospital services in Richmond.

Opening its doors in a converted mansion in 1920 with just 25 beds and a staff of five, the original benefactor Sir Alfred Danks could only have dreamed that Epworth HealthCare's yearly admissions would exceed 100,000 patients nine decades later.

A donation of £6000 from the Danks family in 1919 allowed the Methodist Church to buy the 1½ acre property Yalcowinna on Richmond Hill. The Annual Methodist Conference had earlier committed the church to build an intermediate hospital for people who were unable to meet the charges of private hospitals, but who might not be eligible to use the facilities provided at public hospitals. Renovations to convert the mansion into a hospital cost £3,324, part of which was donated by Dr. Georgina Sweet and her father in memory of Dr. Margaret Sweet who "gave her life during the 1919 influenza epidemic".

Epworth is the birthplace of the founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley and was chosen by the church elders as an appropriate name for a hospital, wherein the Wesley tradition of "practical assistance to the sick" could be carried out.

There proved to be such a need for the hospital that within five months, patients were being turned away and the nurses were being housed in tents while renovations were undertaken to increase the number of beds.

In 1923, another benefactor, Fred Cato laid the Foundation stone - located in the Cato Wing.

1932 The best single room charged at 4 pounds 4 shillings per week!

1953 The heating of the boilers is switched, for reasons of economy, from the use of black coal to brown. Black coal is in short supply.

1955 More economical and readily available, oil fuel replaces coal for the heating of the boiler system.

1962 The Epworth chapel is opened on Sunday 6 May and dedicated by the Reverend S.I.Weeks.

1963 A large stained glass window is installed in the chapel in memory of Ethel Gray, the first matron of Epworth Hospital

1978 An underground car park is built on the site of the Bosisto eucalyptus factory. When construction begins, a strong perfume of eucalyptus fills the air.

1981 The Jubilee Development is opened by the Governor-General, His Excellency the Right Honourable Sir Zelman Cowen.

Specialist units for cardiovascular disease and coronary care are opened. Epworth becomes the first private hospital in Victoria to have a fully equipped intensive care unit with 24 hour medical cover.

Epworth performs the first open heart surgery in a private hospital in Victoria.

The total bed capacity is now 320 plus eight operating theatres.

1982 The world renowned In Vitro Fertilisation program, led by Professor Carl Wood CBE, moves to Epworth in January.

1984 First Bionic Ear operation takes place at Epworth. Epworth-Monash Fertility Clinic creates first baby from a frozen embryo.

1987 Epworth blesses its own Flag and buries a time capsule in the front driveway Erin Street. The time capsule is to be opened in 2020.

2003 Epworth Rehabilitation expands to include a campus at Brighton.

2004 Epworth brings the first surgical robot technology to Australia

2005 Epworth Eastern opens in Box Hill – with state of the art equipment in a fully wireless environment.

The new Acquired Brain Injury Unit (ABI) opens in Richmond.

Epworth acquires Epworth Freemasons – one of Melbourne's premier maternity hospitals.

2006 Epworth purchases Cedar Court Rehabilitation Hospital to become Epworth Rehabilitation Camberwell, further expanding its rehabilitation services.

2007 Federal Treasurer Peter Costello acknowledges Mia Templeton born 29 June at Epworth Freemasons as the 21 millionth Australian.

2009 Epworth goes global and signs a formal affiliation agreement with the prestigious Cleveland Clinic and a program of international training of registrars and surgical fellows begins.

During the 2008/09 year, from across its five locations, Epworth HealthCare performed over 66,000 operations and recorded 3550 births.