

Here's the book on our heroic doctors

Sentinel Times, 1/9/2009

DR BENNETT from Mirboo North, Dr John Flemming and Dr John Birrell of Foster, Leongatha's pioneering Dr Donohue and Dr Hugh Martin from Yarram; they will be among many Gippsland doctors and nurses to feature in a new book being written by Monash Gippsland academic, Dr Anne Dettrick.

Theirs is a rich history of heroics, innovation, hard work and fun and should make good reading when the book is out early next year.

Dr Dettrick was the entertaining guest speaker at the annual meeting of Prom Country Regional Tourism last Thursday night and after reports of a tough year for tourist operations, it was good to hear our others in Gippsland's history had triumphed over adversity.

"We have been researching 150 years of medicine in Gippsland and receiving great cooperation from the hospitals, nurses and medicos across the region," Dr Dettrick said.

"We have 100 people writing their stories about doctors and nurses and we've also been able to put together some fantastic photos.

"It's about creating a living history, written by doctors and nurses and people have fantastic memories of events and dates.

"We have a picture of the canvas hospital at Wonthaggi, the old Omeo hospital, nurses on bikes, doctors on horseback and many more which we have put together to form some banners on display at the Monash Gippsland Medical School."

Dr Dettrick gave a couple of insights into the heroic actions of some of the region's pioneering doctors like the Walhalla medico, Dr Hadden, who saved the town from contracting smallpox in 1869 after promptly isolating a family who had recently returned from Melbourne with the killer disease. He is credited with saving the lives of much of the town's population.

There's also the story of the brilliant surgeon from Morwell, Dr Julian Smith, one of the co-founders of St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne, who gave up a promising career in the city to move to Gippsland. This was fortunate for one of the area's pioneers who accidentally shot himself in the head. Dr Smith had earlier brought one of the first x-ray machines in Australia to the area which he used to locate the bullet before extracting it successfully from the man's brain.

Dr Dettrick apologised for not being able to relate more stories to the group due to time constraints, but urged all to look out for the book when it hit the shelves locally next year.