

Middelburg Hospital History



Figure 1: Middelburg Moerdyk Hospital

Summary

Hospital history in Middelburg originated with the establishment of a hospital to provide care during the war against Sekhukkune in 1878. During the preparation for the Anglo Boer War a make-shift hospital was created in the Beer hall (Bierhal) with the bar counter serving as the operating table. The British later opted to deploy No 17 Stationary Hospital in the centre of the town for wounded or ill soldiers, for the duration of the war. During this time the Middelburg Cottage Hospital was also established for civilian care.

After the Boer war, a British Garrison was stationed in Middelburg equipped with a Military Hospital until the Garrison was withdrawn in the build-up to the First World War.

Following the Great Flu of 1918 the need for a permanent hospital was re-emphasised. In 1921 the first permanent hospital opened with six beds. In 1937 Gerhard Moerdyk, the architect of the Voortrekker Monument, was tasked to design a purpose-built hospital for Middelburg. This building was opened in 1939. The complex was then expanded over the next 80 years

Middelburg has a long and proud history as the centre for hospital care in the region.

In 1878, during the build-up to the war against the Pedi of Sekhukkune, Middelburg was acknowledged as the logistical and support hub to the war effort. The Magistrate John Scoble rented a house on stand 73, in SADC street just west of Walter Sisulu street. This served as a hospital for the wounded burgers from Sekhukkune-land, until the end of the war (Dr Lyle, 1878).

In the run-up to the Anglo Boer War the need for a hospital was again identified. Dr van Gorkum, the Railway Doctor in Middelburg and Nurse Jeanette Petronella van't Staaf converted the beer hall in Walter Sisulu street into a 30-bed hospital. The hospital was then operated by Dr Wilhelm Boeck Bidenkamp. The bar counter served as the theatre table. Several wounded or sick Boers must have been treated in this facility, especially after the fall of Pretoria. Records indicate that patients were evacuated by ambulance train to Waterval-Boven on 25 July 1900 as British forces approached Middelburg (De Villiers, 2008).

After the British occupied Middelburg on 27 July 1900, No 17 Stationary Hospital for ill or wounded soldiers was deployed in the centre of town. The exact location is unknown but it was most likely deployed around the Reformed Church, where the Middelburg Laerskool (Primary school) was later built. Several complaints were received from the town folk upon the deployment of a hospital in the centre of town, probably due to a fear of the transmission of diseases (Colonial Secretary, 1902). It is known that several wounded Boers were also treated in this hospital. (Mostert, 1935) The hospital functioned from 17 August 1900 to 31 May 1902 (AngloBoerWar.com, n.d.).

Simultaneously a civilian facility, the Middelburg Cottage Hospital, was established by the occupying British authorities in the house of Mr W van Waal, on stand 543 (12 Weeber st). This was soon thereafter expanded to include the house next door. Sr Maclay from Australia and nurse practitioners Florence and Bimms from the Concentration Camp, nursed 42 patients over a period of 8 months, of which 3 died.

After peace was declared on 31 May 1902 a British Garrison was established in Middelburg, utilising the terrain around the current Provincial Hospital as their camp site. A spacious hospital was built on the site which functioned until (likely) 1908 (Grimbeek, 2010). It seems that some beds were made available for civilians before the Cottage Hospital was closed down.



Figure 2: Middelburg Garrison Hospital (Photo: Wilma Bezuidenhout)

Following the Great Flu pandemic of 1918, the need for a hospital in Middelburg was realised, as no hospital was functioning at the time. The buildings of the Military Hospital were already removed at this time. The corrugated iron house of the General Officer Commanding of the Garrison was still standing and was bought by a committee, with support from the Provincial Government, and converted to the first permanent civilian hospital in Middelburg with six (6) beds and two nurses. It was officially opened on the 10 March 1921 by the Administrator. The building was expanded over time to accommodate 28 beds by 1937, but with an occupancy of 34/day! (Grundlingh, 1952). (This building stood on the site of the current swimming pool of the hospital)

In 1935 the architect Gerhard Moerdyk (Architect of the Voortrekker Monument) was tasked to design a new hospital for Middelburg. He designed this building in the typical local approach to the Art Deco style. Although the design, especially of the main entrance, was scaled down to save costs, it remains a fantastic example of his local approach to Art Deco with the use of local baked bricks and earthy colours. The building originally consisted of 72-beds, two theatres, an x-ray department, children's ward and a maternity section. An isolation section was included on the left ground floor. This building was officially opened on 25 January 1939, meaning the building is 80 years old!

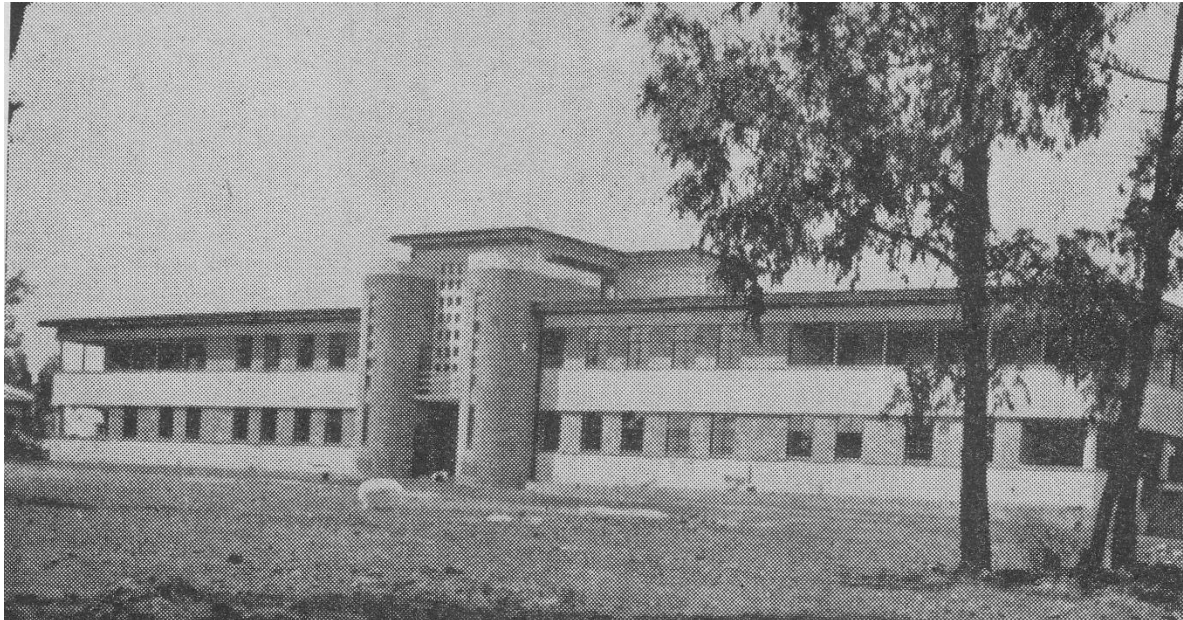


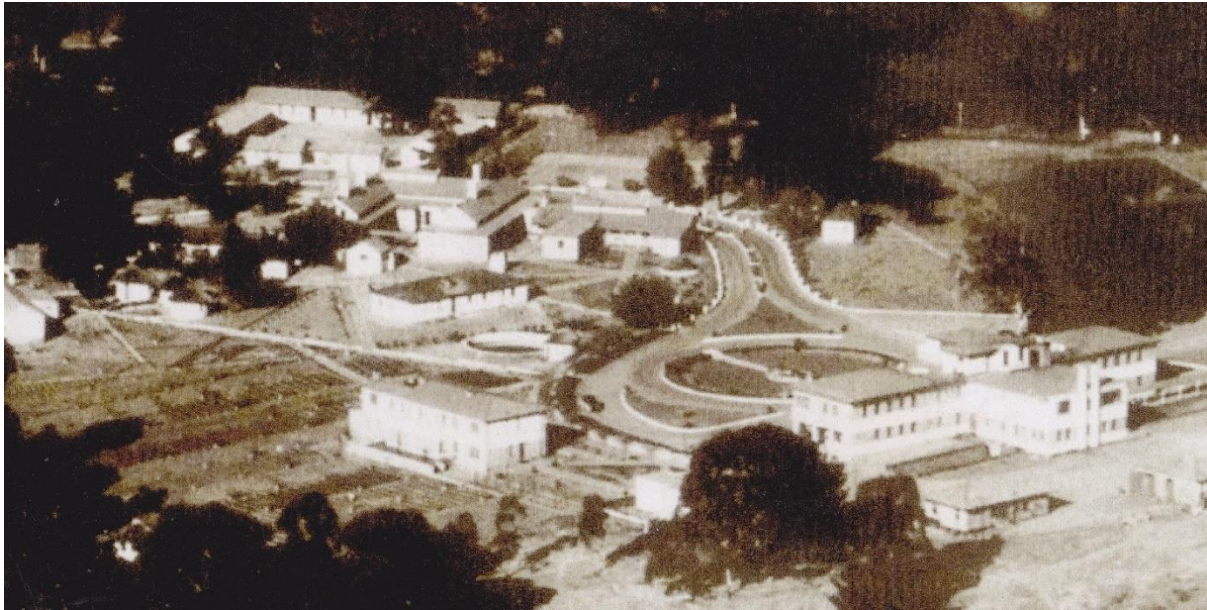
Figure 5: Middelburg Moerdyk Hospital Circa 1952 (Picture: Van Riebeeck Centenary Publication)

In 1938 a section for black patients was added to the hospital and in 1943 the MH Joosub section for Indians was opened.



Figure 6: Wards for Black patients Circa 1960 (Photo: Kobus Terblanche)

During the Second World War (1939-1944) the old Corrugated Iron hospital was re-opened as a Military Hospital and several additional buildings were added to accommodate the needs of the military during the war.



*Figure 7: Hospital from the west - note Corrugated Iron Hospital with chimneys and World War 2 buildings in top left
(Photo: Kobus Terblanche)*

The buildings were dramatically expanded in the 1960s and 70s with a total new complex for black patients, new wards for white patients, a central theatre complex and new maternity sections, resulting in the original Moerdyk building being used for office space.

Visitor Information

Unfortunately, none of the temporary or military hospital buildings are still standing. The buildings added to the corrugated iron building for the military during the Second World War is still standing to the east of the main entrance to the Provincial Hospital.

The Moerdyk Hospital is still standing, although the verandas have been closed-up over the years to create more space.

Position World War 2 hospital buildings: **25°46'27.4"S 29°27'10.9"E** (-25.774266, 29.453037)

Position Moerdyk Hospital: **25°46'31.3"S 29°27'03.9"E** (-25.775348, 29.451089)

The hospital can be visited by prior arrangement with the hospital authorities.

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