

# Nurses brought seasonal cheer to pitiful Home for Incurables

These evocative photos taken at the Home For The Incurables in Ryde show patients celebrating Christmas in the early 1920s. **MELISSA DAVEY** reports.

**T**HE hospital now known as the Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney has long been occupied by patients struggling to overcome devastating genetic disability, disease and injury.

Many of them have no one able to care for them.

These photos from the Ryde Historical Society archives show how, in the 1920s, the nurses at what was then known as the Home for the Incurables tried their best to make the Christmas period brighter for their patients.

They set up Christmas trees, hung coloured lights, bunting and banners. They arranged for Santa to visit and presents were handed out.

However, when hard times arrived in 1930 it was feared that the Christmas party at the home would have to be cancelled, due to a lack of money.

Nurses fought against the decision to cut back on festive activities.

Thanks to their objections, a Christmas party went ahead on December 23, with the celebrations made possible by donations from the community and the efforts of the staff.

Two Christmas trees were set up for the 66 patients in the Weemala building, with one placed in the entrance hall and another in a large fireplace in one of the wards.

Matrons put decorations up including flags and flowers.

Gifts were distributed by a man named Mr Atkinson, dressed as Father Christmas.

The nurses also organised entertainment, carols and supper, as well as a second Christmas party the following night for the cancer patients living in the nearby Moorong building.

The courtyard was filled with electric lights and a Christmas tree, allowing the 20 patients to experience some Christmas cheer.

By 1954 most of the patients were those confined to a wheelchair or who were bed-ridden.

It was then that the Home for Incurables, long dependant on a significant amount of financial support from the state and federal governments, changed its name to the less socially confronting Royal Ryde Homes, which by 1969 had grown to 176 beds.

It was not until 1990, that it became the Royal Rehabilitation Centre Sydney, and its focus shifted strongly to rehabilitation of its occupants.

The spirit of Christmas continues at Royal Rehab today, and this year patients will be treated to a morning tea and Christmas carols sung by children from Putney Pre-school on Tuesday, December 8.

On Thursday, December 10, the patients from the Weemala building will be entertained by an Elvis impersonator.

Individual wards will also be holding their own Christmas parties.

