

## Bowen, T. Aubrey (1837 – 1893).

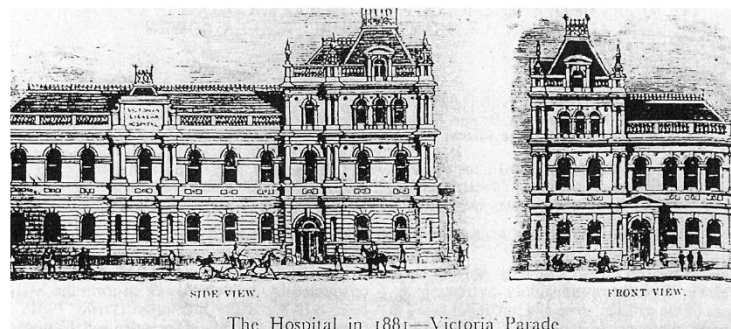
Thomas Aubrey Bowen, 1837-1893, was born in Cradley on the outskirts of Birmingham, England. He commenced his medical course at Birmingham General Hospital but, during his third year (1857), his family migrated to Australia for the health of Aubrey and his brother. His health improved, so he returned to Birmingham and completed his course in 1861. From June, 1862 to Oct., 1863, he was resident surgeon to the Birmingham and Midland Eye Hospital. In 1864, he returned to Melbourne as surgeon on an emigrant ship. From 1865-7 he was resident to the Melbourne Hospital, where he was greatly encouraged by J.T. Rudall. In 1869 with E.M. James he founded the charitable Ophthalmic and Orthopaedic Institution. The orthopaedic side soon ceased and, in 1870, he joined Gray in the Eye and Ear Institution. In 1872 he was appointed Honorary Consulting Oculist to the Children's Hospital, being the only specialist on the staff until 1897. Until the arrival of Gray and Bowen, the treatment of diseases of eye, ear, nose and throat was the province of general surgeons.

Bowen was President of the Medical Society of Victoria in 1875.

As the ophthalmoscope and refinements of instruments for eye surgery, and the small size of the operations required specialist training and application, the treatment of eye and ear diseases was to move to a new stage away from general surgeons to specialists. The separation of specialists was strongly opposed by the general surgeons who fought rearguard actions to prevent the appointment of specialists to the large general hospitals. (The Melbourne Hospital's appointment of an honorary ophthalmic surgeon was delayed until 1913). However, Gray and Bowen's Institution (Fig. 1) progressed and became The Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital (Fig. 2).



FIG. 1. The Melbourne Eye and Ear Institution, 1866.



The Hospital in 1881—Victoria Parade

This provided a firm base with its outpatient clinics and hospital beds to allow its specialists to flourish. Today it is a centre for excellence. In 1899, the Ophthalmological Society of Melbourne was founded, the first in Australia. Gray was the first president and Rudall the second.

Last updated 7 March 2025

Sources: Lowe, Ronald. F., "Founders of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology in Victoria, Australia", History, Heritage and Health conference, Norfolk Island, 1995;

Draft compiled by Allan Mawdsley

