

Women In Uniform

Nurses Who served in The Great War

1914-1919



Compiled for Darebin Heritage by Brian Membrey

Our cover illustration shows members of the Australian Army Nursing Service,
pictured on camels in front of the Sphinx and pyramids, circa 1915

Courtesy Australian War Memorial P00411.001

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Introduction

This document is a companion volume to the Honour Rolls compiled of those from the current-day City of Darebin.

The In Memoriam section of our Darebin Roll includes two women from the district that died as a result of war service (the second, Amy Alice Simpson in fact one of the last entries to be made).

Darebin's Great War : Of Matters Local, Part One of the Darebin research includes details of all of the local nurses that are known to have enlisted - this group has been extracted into this separate volume with those from the districts covered by Darebin Library's co-partners in the WikiNorthia project; the City of Moreland and Plenty Valley Regional Library.



The Australian Army Nursing Service

Almost without exception, the enlistment of local women into the Nursing Service drew no attention from any of the local newspapers - the identical Preston and Northcote Leader, the Brunswick and Coburg Leader, the Heidelberg Times or the Evelyn Observer (renamed as the Eltham and Whittlesea Advertiser from 1 January, 1917).

There was perhaps a reason for this as we will see - nurses before embarking for overseas duties were required to volunteer for Home Service as part of the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) and were thus technically already part of the A.I.F.; volunteering to embark for overseas was a secondary step with many more volunteers than those actually accepted.

According to the Australian War Memorial, Australian nurses as part of the Australian Army Medical Corps served in Egypt, Lemnos, England, France, Belgium, Palestine, Greece, Salonika, Mesopotamia and India as well as on hospital ships, initially in the Dardanelles and later between England and Australia.

(No Australian troops were involved at any of the four latter venues; the campaigns in Greece and Salonika were conducted primarily by British and French troops, later joined by Italian, Serbian and Russian units), Mesopotamia, (Iraq), British and French, and Indian service was a mixture of British troops and the native population).

In all, 2,139 served with the Australian Army Nursing Service, and 130 with the Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service.

The latter was the nursing arm of the British Army. There was such a backlog of registered nurses waiting to enlist in the Australian services that in the first twelve months of the War many paid their own passage to England where their experience was welcomed with open arms with the horrendous fighting on the Western Front.

The Queen Alexandra option provided somewhat controversial - the local authorities initially refused to recognise the time spent in England by the Australian nurses and until later in the War, those serving in the Queen Alexandra Service were forced to re-enlist and lost any seniority that they had earned overseas.

A further 423 nurses served in hospitals in Australia as part of the Australian Army Nursing Service

Definitions and Glossary

Perhaps a few definitions may be appropriate here.

(AANS) The Australian Army Nursing Service was formed in 1902 as a volunteer force of nurses who declared their willingness to be called up in times of national emergency - military threat, epidemics or natural disasters.

It was substantially different from the later compulsory Universal Military Training established for the men - the nurses to be accepted into the Service had to have had three years of training, and to have been suitable examined and certified - for the men, it was a system of basic training from scratch.

(AANC) The Australian Army Nursing Corps was established as the nursing arm of the Australian Imperial Force and allowed nurses registered with the AANS to enlist for overseas service - the same requirements as to experience and qualification applied, with the additional requirement that only single or widowed women between the ages of 20 and 45 were accepted. Resignation was mandatory if the nurse married while serving in the Nursing Corps - there were none from Darebin in this category, but two from other northern suburbs in the wider WikiNorthia version of the Roll.

(AGH) Australian General Hospital. These were the hospitals established for the immediate treatment of the wounded established in Egypt, England and eventually in France. There were also AGH's in most Australian cities, the two in Melbourne No. 5 in St. Kilda Road (later Prince Henry's) and No. 11 in Kooyong Road, Caulfield.

(AAH) Australian Auxiliary Hospitals were for treatment and ongoing recuperation of patients; they did not take in wounded directly, this was the role of a General Hospital.

(HMAHS) His Majesty's Australian Hospital Ship. There were two Australian vessels specifically equipped for transport of the wounded or ill - No. 1, *HMAHS Karoola* y and No. 2, *HMAHS Kanowna*. Many other vessels were used in the early part of the war, especially during the Gallipoli campaign where a number of hastily-converted British steamers transported wounded to Egypt or Crete.

(HMAT) His Majesty's Australian Transports were mostly British-owned liners requisitioned by the Australian Government, most of which were returned to their owners by 1917.

(RMS) There was obviously a shortage of suitable accommodation on troop transports - around a third of the group recorded here travelled to Sydney to embark, and there was a similar mix of those that travelled by modified troop transports and commercial shipping, typically Royal Mail Steamers (RMS). Even the latter must have caused some concerns over discipline - one RMS collected around 80 nurses in Sydney and Melbourne, to be joined by around 350 servicemen in Adelaide!

The Early Days

For the first eighteen months of the war, all of the nurses who served overseas were taken from the AANS volunteers, but as the requirement for nurses skyrocketed and the original AANS volunteers were taken up, those working in home-based military hospitals were given priority.

The AWM has no figures on the number of nurses that died, but other sources place the figure at 21 "on service or soon after repatriation". Given that many nurses served in hospitals or on ships during the influenza epidemic, the figure may well be higher if the likes of Amy Simpson, who never recovered from the impacts of disease before passing away some four years after the war ended, are taken into account.

The same, of course, is true of servicemen - one estimate suggests that as many servicemen that returned had passed away by 1930 as died during the official conflict.

While isolated from the ravages of the front line, conditions in hospitals were hardly ideal especially during the cholera outbreak in India (believed to have claimed two lives, our local Sister Vera O'Grady, and the Irish-born Sister Kathleen Power, plus two others after their return to Australia) and the influenza epidemic of late 1918 and 1919.

The nurses that enlisted were across the board significantly older than the servicemen because of the three year training requirement, and it seems the more mature nurses took precedence when considered for overseas service.

Probably half were over the age of 30 and the Darebin group was older still, the average age just a little over 36.5 years of age - the youngest 23, the eldest a little debatable, she was 46 when she enlisted in 1915 and 44 when she re-enlisted two years later after the upper age limit of 45 years was introduced.

(Although only a small sample, the Darebin group provides a remarkable statistic - the date of death is known of eight of the 13 that survived the war and reveals the average age at the time of their death as 81.25 years; given the shorter life expectancy of just on a hundred years ago, this was probably somewhere between 13 and 15 years longer than the general average. The ages on death ranged from 73 (probably five years beyond that of the general populous) to 89 years of age).

Because of their training, they were in fact substantially better paid than the average male Joe Private - the first nurses embarked overseas in mid-1915 at a base daily rate of 7/10d per day or more than half as much again as a humble Private on 5/- (although, unlike the nurse's rate, this was later increased and those in the ranks became the "six bob a day" servicemen).

For those with the more senior rank of Sister, the *per diem* rate was 10/4d, fractionally more than that of a Sergeant in the infantry.

What is perhaps surprising (or perhaps not given their relatively mature age), just one of the local group of fifteen whose post-war records run through to the 1930s is known to have ever married after returning to Australia and being discharged.

Nurses that had served in Home Service with the Australian Army Nursing service had to formally enlist to serve overseas.

The process appears to have been much the same as for servicemen; an Attestation as to the person's willingness to serve overseas, but there were some subtle differences.

Only a few of the nurses appear to have a medical examination, and their physical measurements were only rarely shown (perhaps in Amy Simpson's case, somewhat discreetly, a medical report had her standing 5'3 but weighing 13 stone).

Given the nurses were highly trained and experienced in the care of patients, the nurses also embarked for overseas much sooner than their male counterparts.

Embarkation

With a long list of volunteers, the women typically embarked within a fortnight of enlisting, hence the *Leader* perhaps not identifying their departure (in fact, many of the Attestations suggest that the date of enlistment was the same as that of embarkation - these "enlistment" dates seem to have been contrived after the nurses had actually sailed

There is some circumstantial evidence to suggest that either the recruiting office was thrown open when it was known transport would be available, or alternatively, women who had previously volunteered were advised that they had suddenly been accepted. Some of the embarkations noted in the Nominal Roll have 20 or 30 nurses listed with identical enlistment dates.

Probably around half of the servicemen by contrast had some form of military training under the Defence Act of 1909 which came into force on 1 January, 1911 or with the earlier volunteer forces, but in contrast with the "hands on" experience of the nurses, their training (in some cases, little more than marching drills and fundamental advice as to which end of the rifle was the one to stand behind) had little relevance to the realities of war.

Most men were stationed in camp for at least six weeks before embarking and with the prospect of another two months training in Egypt or England before they went into action.

The other difference was that the standard for servicemen on Attestation was to agree to serve "for the duration of the war plus four months" - the four months does not seem to have applied to nurses, although in practice all of them remained in England until at least March, 1919.

(Nurses serving in India and Egypt following the cessation of hostilities were awarded a month's leave and transportation to England and most served briefly in English hospitals awaiting embarkation back to Australia). None of our local nurses serving in the Middle East or on the sub-continent returned directly home).

Our list of nurses that served is taken from the embarkation roll "Nurses (July 1915 - Nov 1918)" where there is an obvious link to the Darebin district via the residential address of the nurse or next of kin.

Some nurses shipped with the First Reinforcements for the 1 Australian General Hospital (AGH) initially stationed at Heliopolis, Cairo, and the 2 AGH in Alexandria, but none from the district were in their ranks.

In the case of the latter, 40 nurses embarked and all were from South Australia or Tasmania, the A.I.F. adopting the same early policy as it did with servicemen, i.e. to keep volunteers from neighbouring residential areas together.

Wounded and Their Care

The chances of a serviceman at the front lasting much more than twelve months without being wounded, accidentally injured or suffering from an illness given the horrendous conditions in the front lines were low.

Without in any way denigrating the essential services provided by nursing staff, they operated at the tail end of a hierarchy of medical resources in place to tend the wounded, although given the chaotic conditions of warfare, there were certainly no hard and fast rules as to how a serviceman would be cared for.

Field Ambulance Brigades were perhaps the unsung heroes of the war - the stretcher bearers risked life and limb to collect the wounded from the field of battle, often under heavy enemy fire - yet S.B's as they were known were ruled ineligible for the Victoria Cross.

Many regular servicemen also acted as stretcher bearers when wounded comrades needed assistance and there are a handful of instances in our Roll of men being killed while performing this extra duty. The Brigades also included ambulance drivers, usually motorised, but given the horrendous conditions in wet months of the Western Front, horses and mules were also used to draw ambulances.

After being collected from the field, a casualty's first stop was possibly a Regimental Aid Station, a post in, or close behind the line where a surgeon or medical officer and aides attached to the serviceman's unit were based.

A Dressing Station was a medical centre behind the lines to which wounded were sent from regimental aid posts to have wounds dressed before being carried to a Casualty Clearing Station (CCS).

These were hospitals (generally located near a rail-head) charged with clearing the wounded to a base hospital.

The admission to a CCS appears to be the differentiation used by the Army between a serviceman being classified as Killed In Action or Died Of Wounds.

There are no examples on our archives of a death attributed as having Died of Wounds before being admitted to a CCS - perhaps not surprising as posts at, or close to the lines would be rather more concerned with emergency treatment than recording details of the men they were trying to keep alive.

From a CCS (where a high percentage of the badly wounded are attributed as dying), a wounded man could be possibly sent to a Stationary Hospital - well behind the lines and the first level of care that we would consider as of "hospital" quality today.

At this point, a decision was made depending of the seriousness of the wounds as to whether the serviceman should be repatriated to a General Hospital.

These were initially in England, although they were later established at Rouen and Abbeville in France.

Major capital cities in Australia also had hospitals of this nature to treat volunteers that contracted diseases while in camp (there were 256 volunteers that died of meningitis in Australia in the year to 30 June, 1916) and servicemen that required treatment after returning to Australia.

In England, there was an additional category - the No 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield Park did not accept casualties directly from the fighting, but was charged with treating on an on-going basis those released from General Hospitals that still required bed-side care.

Most servicemen considered to be have suffered wounds that warranted transfer back to Egypt and later England underwent a Medical Board Assessment as to their fitness to continue in service.

The official position was that if the wounds were considered sufficiently serious as to render the patient incapable of returning to active service within six months, then he should be returned to Australia for "rest" or possibly discharge depending on a local Medical Board examination.

Those considered likely to recover to a state where would be fit for active service within six months remained in Egypt and England, generally serving as part of their recovery on a variety of light duties at training camps, stores depots, or in military disciplinary or administrative roles before returning to their units.

Like most of the war, "the official position" was somewhat different from the reality - some after returning to England were considered as only fit for light local duties for anything up to eighteen months; others returned home were declared fit and re-embarked within two or three weeks after they arrived back in Australia.

Those less fortunate were repatriated back to Australia, usually via one of the two hospital ships and depending on the nature of their wounds or illness were classified as "Bed", "Bunk" or "Hammock" patients for the voyage. The ships also had Isolation Wards for those with contagious diseases, especially influenza in the latter months of the war.

After invalids had reached Australia, and had received any treatment in Base Hospitals, a military medical board determined whether they were to be returned to duty or discharged as unfit for further military service. In the latter case, each soldier was instructed to apply to the Deputy Commissioner for Pensions in his State for consideration of his entitlement to a pension.



Ward 1, 5 Australian General Hospital, St Kilda Road

Local Care

5 Australian General Hospital (St. Kilda Road)

The major centre locally was the No. 5 Australian General Hospital in St. Kilda Road established in March, 1915 in buildings originally the Homeopathic Hospital, but intended at the time for a police hospital and stable. (The St. Kilda Road police station was between the hospital site and Victoria Barracks).

On opening, there was a single medical officer, 8 nurses and 40 beds; by the end of the war, the staff included 17 full-time officers and 63 nurses serving 620 beds (later after redevelopment, Prince Henry's).

Patients from the Base Depot Hospital as 5 AGH. was generally known were transferred to Caulfield and Mont Park in September, 1918, the St. Kilda Road facility then used for special cases requiring isolation, out-patients, and, because of its central location, as an emergency ward.

11 Australian General Hospital (Kooyong Road, Caulfield)

This was supplemented by No. 11 AGH. in Kooyong Road, Caulfield which appears to have catered for longer term patients.

The facility was established early in the war years, the former Caulfield mansion *Glen Eira* converted into a General Military Hospital (although usually known as Caulfield Military Hospital). There was a proposal post-war to convert its usage to that of an infectious diseases hospital, but it remained as a repatriation facility and permanent home for many disabled soldiers through to the end of the Second World War when it reverted to the civilian Caulfield General Medical Centre.

16 Australian General Hospital (Mont Park)

Our northern districts also came into play.

The Mont Park Hospital was established in 1910 as a mental facility, and late in 1914, an agreement was made with the Defence Department for the hospital to construct a new central block (sometimes referred to as "the Chronic Ward" for use as a military hospital, eventually known as the 16th Australian General Hospital.

The military section operated from 1916 with one wing set aside as a recovery centre from early in 1918 for what were rather unkindly called "bomb happy" cases, those suffering from shell shock and other traumas from which many never recovered.

This section of Mont Park was the first of the military hospitals to revert back to purely civilian use, the Defence Department relinquishing control from 1 August, 1921.

A further ward was constructed in 1919 to accommodate another 80 patients suffering from psychiatric conditions resulting from their war service. This continue to operate until 1933 when the remaining patients were transferred to Commonwealth facilities.

The hospital had a close association with the Preston branch of the Red Cross with many local women serving as volunteers at the hospital and a number of special efforts to raise both cash and other small luxuries of life for the patient were regularly noted in the *Leader*, including one campaign after those wounded at Gallipoli arrived home in the second half on 1915 to purchase a gramophone and records for the entertainment of those confined to the hospital.

1 Australian Military Sanatorium (Macleod)

As part of the same complex, the Macleod Sanatorium (1 Australian Military Sanatorium) was constructed in 1915 for the treatment of tuberculosis patients. Again, this remained until 1933 when the Commonwealth Repatriation Department took over control of the remaining inmates.



Mont Park Hospital, 1917

An Avenue of Honour of sugar gums was planted by inmates of Mont Park in 1919 to commemorate those that had died there; like many of its kind, the unmarked trees lost their significance until 1993 when the Macleod Progress Association uncovered the history of the Avenue and preserved it from a proposed sale and development of the land.

12 Ward, Austin Hospital (Heidelberg)

1917 saw the establishment of a Military Ward (later No. 12 Ward) at the Austin Hospital (originally designated as the "Austin Hospital For Incurables", admission restricted to those considered terminally ill) where several of the casualties listed in our Honour Roll died from injuries or illnesses. Deaths recorded in Family Notices during 1917 and 1918 appear to relate primarily to those as a result of tuberculosis and gas poisoning rather than wounds, the symptoms much the same.

This Ward provided post-war care of servicemen hailing from the northern parts of Melbourne - a similar Ward operated at the No. 11 AGH in Caulfield for the southern suburbs.

Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital

Although it was never classified as a Military Hospital, the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital was also used by the A.I.F. during the latter years of the war.

What is not clear is when the A.I.F. started to use the hospital and just what its official status was - with one exception (and that where the cause of death is somewhat clouded), all of the six men that passes away at the hospital in 1918 were suffering from cerebro-spinal meningitis after the hospital Board agreed to accept a small number of cases of those suffering from the disease.

The hospital in all army records is shown simply as the Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital without any indication of it being under A.I.F. control, but official statements from medical officers in the archives suggest that it was properly known as the Queen's Memorial Infectious Diseases Hospital. Some histories of the site suggest that Queen Victoria asked that funds raised during the Jubilee celebrations of her 60th year on the throne in 1897 to be to help the sick.

Some £16,000 was raised by municipal levies in that year and the Victorian colonial Government granted 15 acres of land at Yarra Bend for the hospital, considered an ideal site isolated by the Yarra to the east and south and Merri Creek to the west. A Lunatic Asylum had existed nearby since the 1860s, the location selected for much the same reasons.

The hospital opened in 1904 with the funds for operations drawn from the Melbourne, Fitzroy, Brunswick Coburg, Richmond and St. Kilda councils. Each of these councils contributed to the upkeep of the hospital and had representatives on the Hospital Board, with ratepayers from their district entitled to be treated free of charge. Other councils were required to pay for any of their residents who needed the use of the hospital. (Admission procedures required a written order from the Town Clerk of the municipality where the patient resided).

This arrangement caused something of a public outcry as one of the first six patients was a boy living in Northcote within a mile of the hospital who had contracted diphtheria and whose admission was delayed, some critics claiming that the Town Clerk of Northcote refused to agree to his admission as it was not clear who was to pay for the boy's hospital fees.

An order for the boy's admission was subsequently issued with the Town Clerk demanding an indemnity form be signed by his parents and doctor to reimburse the Council from any expenses and the boy was immediately removed to the hospital after a delay of five hours and operated on, but to no avail, the lad dying at 10 o'clock the same night.

(Northcote Council vainly tried to defend the actions of the Town Clerk, claiming that although the hospital had opened, the necessary forms for admission had not been received until after its previous meeting and that he had no power to act, two councillors in fact suggesting the matter was a ruse to force the Council to become a contributor to the financing of the facility).



Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital (date unknown)

Further public disquiet about the running of the hospital resulted in an inquiry being held in 1912 and an Act of Parliament was introduced in 1914 to establish a Board of Management and to have all councils contribute to the running of the hospital as well as providing funding from the State Government.

The Board was expanded in 1915 to include Northcote and Preston and minutes of Council meetings suggest Northcote share of the upkeep was £33 per quarter; Preston's are noted alternatively as £12 or £15 while plans were also announced for a £25,000 upgrade of the facility (ultimately over £75,000 was spent).

In October of that year, the Board opposed suggestions that the hospital should accommodate cases of cerebro-spinal meningitis that had reached alarming proportions; it was noted that the Government and some 30 councils then comprised the Board. This was later overturned with the Government allowing special cases to be admitted with the proviso that patients could only be transported to in the hospital's own ambulances.

Oddly enough, all the deaths, both of servicemen and civilians noted at the hospital are recorded in Victorian Births, Deaths and Marriages under Clifton Hill rather than Fairfield.

Falling Between The Cracks

Our list of nurses that served is taken from the embarkation roll "Nurses (July 1915 - Nov 1918)" where there is an obvious link to the Darebin district via the residential address of the nurse or next of kin.

While this roll includes all the nurses that embarked, the list may not be complete as in many cases - probably due to the short time between enlisting and embarking - the residential address shows simply as "Melbourne", although the address of next-of-kin is usually shown in full.

This means that there is an odd chance that a nurse may have been living locally, but classified as "Melbourne", thus if the next of kin was not in the district, it is impossible to link the two.

To maintain consistency with the existing Darebin Honour Rolls, the district reflects the municipal boundaries of today, the significant difference being that Fairfield and Alphington were in 1914-18 part of the Shire of Heidelberg and not Northcote as from the 1950s.

A Letter From India

From what can be discerned nearly a hundred years later, just one letter from the district nurses appeared in a local newspaper, one from Nurse Elsie Deakin to "Mr. Worboys" and published in of the *Heidelberg News* published on 6 January, 1917 :

"Victoria War Hospital, Bombay, India, 16/11/16.

"Dear Mr. Worboys.-It seems quite a long time since I farewelled my home and the Fairfield people, though with seeing new sights and having new work the time has in many ways passed quickly, or I would have written before. Thanks for your kind letter to Adelaide; it came when I was feeling rather lonely and homesick and cheered me much. My writing-case has been most useful, and I wonder what I would have done without it. The inscription you sent is ever before me, so I am constantly reminded of the thoughts and loving wishes of my faithful friends.

"My thoughts are with you all in your service at Fairfield, which has so many happy associations for me, and I pray that your work for the Master maybe greatly blessed. We had rather a rough trip over, and a good many of the nurses were sick. I was rather miserable for a time, but cheered up and very much enjoyed the change and rest after our strenuous days before leaving Melbourne. We were glad to reach Colombo, and thought the harbor there beautiful, and it was all so strange to us.

"The natives are most interesting and amusing, and we enjoyed the rickshaw rides through the various beautiful gardens and drives. At the end of the third day we left really glad to go, for we were told of the great need of nurses in Bombay. Now we are really here and feel settled. The Indian Government are forming an Australian Hospital, so we are fortunate to be kept together. The building we are in is new and very handsome, and really belongs to the railway offices. We have 600 beds altogether, a good many medical as well as surgical cases, for owing to the climate and the hard conditions the men are living under, disease of many kinds is prevalent.

"I have charge of a surgical ward of 100 beds, and find it quite a responsibility. The work is very interesting, though often sad and depressing. The physical needs of the men we can do much for, but many of them have been two years away from home, and with the constant moving round the letters go astray, and they are so homesick and lonely, and it is these we feel so powerless to help. They are brave and seldom complain, but when they are ill they feel the need of their own people, and talk continually of home.

"One poor man upset me terribly last week. He had realised he could not live, and was very quiet and resigned while sensible, but he became delirious and only then we knew all his anxiety ; it was so hard to leave his children to strangers' care, for their mother had died after he left home. Poor fellow; his sufferings and longings are over, and we could not but be glad to know he is at rest, though the thought of those little children left so alone in the old country is often in my mind, and that is only one case of hundreds.

"I hope the people will to a certain extent realise and always remember the service these men have rendered. They need your prayers and so do nurses, that we may give patient, loving and skilful service. We feel it a privilege to help even in a small measure. Then there is always a bright side-many making marvellous recoveries, and every week some ready to be sent home. Then they all so appreciate our work. Will you accept and give to Mrs. Worboys and family and the church people my kindest regards and loving Xmas wishes. -Sincerely your friend, -ELSIE (Nurse) DEAKIN.

Elsie may not have known it, but at the time the letter was published, she was probably on board ship headed for a posting with No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield. Although this was the only one of her letters that appeared in a publication covering the Darebin area, there were several others written to her mother in Healesville that appeared in the *Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian* including one written composed in January, 1916 when she was aboard a hospital off Mudros immediately following the evacuation from Gallipoli that didn't find its way into the *Guardian* until May, 1918.

The addressee of the letter, "Mr. Worboys" was actually the Rev. James Worboys who had been pastor for three years of the Fairfield Baptist Church in Arthur Street to which Elsie Deakin belonged before he was transferred to Brunswick in April, 1918.

Honours and Awards

There were two awards exclusively available to women nurses during the First World War - the Royal Red Cross First Class and Second Class

Nurses could also qualify for honours and awards normally granted to servicemen, but the simple fact of being in non-combatant duties well behind the lines restricted such awards, although there are cases of nurses being awarded the Military Medal.

Somewhat more common was an official Mention In Despatches, one of which was award to Nurse Eliza Smith, the only instance of such a decoration to a nurse from the Darebin district.



Royal Red Cross (First Class)

The Royal Red Cross was inaugurated in the United Kingdom and British Commonwealth in April, 1883 by Queen Victoria for exceptional services in military nursing.

The award is for a fully trained nurse of an officially recognised nursing service who has either shown exceptional service over a period of time or who has performed some exceptional act of heroism at their post. The award was exclusively for females until 1976 when its scope was expanded to include male nurses.

The badge is in the shape of a golden Maltese cross approximately 3.5 centimetres high, enamelled red on the inner surface with a portrait of the reigning monarch and the word Faith, Hope and Charity on the upper three arms of the cross. Recipients are entitled to use the post-nominal letters R.R.C. (Royal Red Cross) after their name. There were 110 awards of the Royal Red Cross granted to Australian nurses during the conflict.

Royal Red Cross (Second Class)

The Second Class (sometimes known as the Associate Class) was inaugurated in 1917. The design is virtually identical to the First Class, but in silver rather than gold. Recipients are entitled to use the post-nominals A.R.R.C. (Associate Royal Red Cross).

There were 304 awards of the Second Class - there was no concept of a Bar to indicate a second award, many of those presented with the Second Class were later upgraded to First Class, although the latter could be made directly without the nurse previously being awarded the Second Class honour.

Note that despite the names, neither award has any connection to the International Red Cross, although many of the nurses decorated did, in fact, belong to that organization. The major award of the International Red Cross is the Florence Nightingale Medal introduced in 1912, one of those nurses included, Edith Cromwell amongst the first Australians to receive the award. It is a civilian award and as such is worn on the right side rather than the left as is the tradition for military decorations.

And, of course, the Uniform ...

... "the new military uniform for the nurses is very attractive. It is carried out in dark grey material, the bodice fastened down with oxidised buttons, the cuffs being of a chocolate colour. Embroidered on the sleeve is the Australian war badge, a little larger than a five shilling piece, in the centre of which is a red cross surmounted by a crown and surrounded with floral design picked out in fine silver wire, this replaced by silk in the case of the sisters. These will wear the decoration above the elbow, the matron displaying hers between elbow and wrist.

"All the staff will wear red military capes after the style of the English Army Nursing Sisters, but the Australian capes are a little longer, reaching almost to the waist, and are fastened at the throat with a silver brooch inscribed, "Australian Commonwealth Military Forces"".

"The costumes are completed with long grey cloaks and bonnets for outdoor wear. Beneath the grey brims of the bonnets, above an edging of white, is a narrow band of the chocolate material. This colour also appears on' the cuffs of the sisters' dresses, not solidly, as in the case of the matron, but in two hands of narrow dimensions. The ward dresses are of grey zephyr, with which are worn cuffs, collars, and aprons of white, with red capes, and army caps of handkerchief shape. Each also wears on the arm a wideband of white, upon which the red cross is woven. This costume would be a most attractive one in which to dress dolls for sale for Red Cross purposes. Workers might bear this in mind".
Preston Leader, 10 July, 1915

Honour Roll : The City of Darebin**Eileen Beagley**

Address : 2 Herbert Street, Northcote

Next of kin : father, Mr Richard Griffith Beagley, 2 Herbert Street, Northcote (mother Hannah "Annie", nee O'Connell)

Eileen Beagley was just 23 when she volunteered for overseas service on 19 April, 1917, by some years the youngest of the group included. Her three year qualification for her Nursing Certificate was completed at St. Vincent's Hospital.

She was one of the batch of Victorians that embarked from Sydney on 9 April, 1917 aboard *HMAT Ulysses* and like Elsie Fahey below, was assigned to the Croydon War Hospital until January, 1918 when she was transferred to the 1 AGH in France. The hospital unit appears to have returned to London just a few days later and served there until the end of the war. Details are not clear but she spent around three weeks in hospital prior to leaving England in March, 1919 and arriving home on 15 May. Her appointment was terminated on 29 June. Born North Carlton, Roman Catholic, died in St. Kilda, 1963 at 89 years of age



She had two brothers that enlisted 5032, William Charles Beagley who enlisted in October, 1914 and served as a Driver with 3 Light Horse Brigade Train and who was in England when the Armistice was declared awaiting his return to Australia for the six months Special Leave granted to men who had served four years; and 4658, Arthur John Beagley, Private, 23 Infantry who enlisted in February, 1916 and returned to Australia with a gunshot wound to the right leg in December, 1917.

Evelyn Davies

Address : Fairfield, Infectious Diseases Hospital

Next of Kin : mother, Mrs Alice Davies (nee Davies), "Fron", Healesville. Father George Meddins Davies (late)

Probably the longest continuously serving nurse from the district, her address on embarkation aboard *RMS Mooltan* with 3 Australian General Hospital on 15 May, 1915 was given simply as Fairfield where it was noted she had spent two years at the Infectious Diseases Hospital. Her three years of training to qualify for the Nursing Certificate were completed at Geelong Hospital and she was 31 on enlisting.

She served initially with 1 Australian General Hospital in Lemnos, but in July, 1916 was transferred to the British Indian Medical Service at the Station Hospital in Peshawar and later at the Victoria War Hospital in Bombay. In January, 1917, Evelyn Davies embarked for England where she served with the 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital before being sent to various units in France from January to December, 1918.

Then Sister Davies, she embarked for return to Australia on 20 May, 1919 after spending time in hospital with a sprained ankle and attending a training course at the Royal Sanitary Institute in London. She was discharged on 23 January, 1920 and when Service medals were being distributed in 1922, it was noted she was residing in Christchurch, New Zealand. Her promotion from Staff Nurse to came in March, 1917. Born Healesville, Church of England, died in New Zealand in 1965 at 79 years of age. Her mother's maiden name is confirmed as also being Davies by four other births under that name.

The *Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian* noted a Welcome Home for Sister Davies and around 30 returned servicemen on 19 June, 1919 with 500 local residents in attendance and a further presentation at the railway station on 12 July when she returned to her place of birth. Her service was honoured on the Board at the Memorial Hall (the only woman amongst 186 men) and at the Healesville State School.

Elsie Longmore Deakin

Address : 114 Station Street, Fairfield

Next of kin : mother, Mrs Janet Deakin (nee Longmore), 114 Station Street, Fairfield, father, Thomas Henry Deakin

Elsie Deakin enlisted at 35 years of age on 10 May, 1915 and served locally before volunteering for overseas duty on 9 August, 1916. Her three years of training were completed at the Melbourne General Hospital.

She embarked just over a week after volunteering on the 22nd with the same group as Gladys Sumner, but with the higher rank of Sister. On arrival in India, was appointed to the Victoria Hospital, Bombay until January of the following year when she was transferred to England and a Military Hospital at Bagfield. In August, 1917, Sister Deakin transferred to the 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital. In January, 1918, she was transferred to 25 AGH in France but returned a few weeks later to England and the 1 AAH after suffering a seriously strained left ankle. She returned to France post-war and served another four months before being returned to Australia in May, 1919. Her appointment was terminated as medically unfit on 9 June, 1919. Born Emerald Hill (South Melbourne), Baptist, died in Elsternwick in 1969 at 88 years of age.

Ernestine Mabel Edwards

Address : "Hopetoun", James Street, Northcote

Next of Kin, father Mr Ernest George Edwards, 67 Grey Street, East Melbourne, mother Marion, nee Mark.

32 years of age when she enlisted on 22 August, 1916, Staff Nurse "Nesta" Edwards boarded *SS Karoola* on 25 April 1917. After disembarking in England some two months later, she proceeded to join the 25 AGH in France, where she served more or less without incident until March, 1919 (the exception a spell in hospital in November, 1917 with severe asthma). She arrived back in Australia in mid-July, 1919, then as Sister Edwards after being promoted 1 June, discharged

A letter in her files from an Isobel Arnold in Camberwell (who appears to have been her employer when she enlisted) dated February, 1918 revealed that Edward's father had died some four months after she embarked, that her only brother was on active service and that she (Arnold) was then administering Nurse Edward's affairs locally. Birth record show a brother, Arthur Lionel Edwards, but there is no evidence that he enlisted.

This is all that is revealed by the AWM and National Archives, but she appears to have been awarded the 1914-15 Star for those who saw service in those years; her surviving Attestation suggests she had spent three months with the Australian Army Nursing Corps. She was noted as originally being educated at Westleigh College in Northcote with medical training at Melbourne Hospital and Queen's Hospital, Adelaide. In 1922, she was noted as being at Durban, South Africa where she remained until March, 1947 when she returned to Melbourne Born Snake Gully, Ballarat, Methodist, died Ivanhoe, 1959 aged 76.

Elsie Lena Fahey

Address : 32 Wood Street, Preston

Next of kin : father, Mr Stephen Andrew Fahey, at 32 Wood Street, Preston. mother Johanna, nee Fahey.

Staff Nurse Elsie Fahey was one of the younger women to enlist at 26 years of age. She had spent her three years in training at Maryborough Hospital, and like Ernestine Edwards appears to have spent some time with the Army Nursing Corps before officially volunteering for overseas service on 27 April, 1917.

The lack of suitable transport meant she had to travel to Sydney to embark on the regular troop carrier *HMAT Ulysses* - of around 30 nurses that embarked, more than half were from Victoria, and around 80 servicemen were also taken on board.

On arrival in England in July, she was attached to the Croydon War Hospital until February, 1918, when she transferred to the 2 AAH and proceeded to France a couple of months later. She served in England with 2 AAH until being repatriated home, arriving 1 August, 1919. Elsie worked at the Caulfield Military Hospital until at least 1921 when she applied for replacement for a lost medal.

Her history then takes a quantum leap in time with a letter in 1936 from her in New York thanking Base Depot for supplying her Victory Medal "... no doubt you think I'm rather late claiming it, but being so far away, one is apt to become careless about such things ...". This was followed two years later by a request for official records of her time in the Australian Medical Corps - her address then 647 Madison Avenue, New York; the details required as she was seeking work in the U.S. She is believed to have moved to the U.S. in 1930 and was naturalised there in 1935. Born Horsham, Roman Catholic, died in New York, 1965, 75 years of age.

Victorian Birth records confirm her mother's maiden name was also Fahey (on five registrations), her parents probably cousins. The Northcote and Preston Leaders in 1918 ran many advertisements placed by a Miss K Fahey (although shown as Catherine in Birth records) at the Wood Street address as a teacher of pianoforte and music, the notices revealing she had been educated at Trinity College in London as well as the Conservatorium of Music as the University of Melbourne.

Winifred Jeffreys

Address : Methodist Parsonage, Regent Street, Preston

Next of kin : father, Rev. John A. Jeffreys, Methodist Parsonage, Regent Street, Preston, mother Janette K. Jeffreys (maiden name unknown)

At 26 years of age, Winifred Jeffreys first enlisted on 30 October, 1916 after spending 16 months on local duty with 5 AGH in St. Kilda Road. She was assigned to *HMAHS Kanowna* and spent around eleven months travelling between Australia and England. She was struck off the ship's strength in October, 1917 and enlisted in the AAMC. On arrival in England in February, 1918, she was assigned to 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield where she remained until February of the following year when she returned home.

She had an elder brother, Leslie Gordon Jeffreys killed during the conflict. Leslie was a professional soldier based in Queensland when he enlisted. In one of the more bizarre cases, the Methodist Church had planned a service to honour eight of their congregation that had died in service with the Rev. Jeffreys to officiate, but he received notice of his son's death just a few hours before the service was to commence and understandably stood down.

Another brother, John enlisted and returned safely. There is no indication of Nurse Jeffreys movements after the war - the Rev. Jeffreys was transferred to Clunes via Creswick in April, 1918; receipts for her war medals distributed in 1921 have his signature as witness to their receipt. Her name is included on the Preston Cenotaph and she appears to have been the only woman other than Vera O'Grady acknowledged on a memorial in the Darebin district. Born Paddington, N.S.W. (birth records in N.S.W. do not show maiden names), Methodist, date of death unknown.



Minnie Knight

Address : "Brightlea", Murray Street, Thornbury

Next of kin : sister, Mrs Henry A. (Mark) Hall, Murray Street, Thornbury, father Edward, mother Maria E Knight (nee Bayliss).

The English-born Minnie Knight enlisted at 34 years of age on 26 April, 1917. She was another that noted Home Service with the Nursing Corp and like several others, travelled to Sydney to embark on *HMAT Ulysses* on 9 May. She had three years training at the Austin Hospital and after landing in England followed a well-trodden path in being assigned to the Croydon War Hospital and from January, 1918 to the 1 AAH. She was one of the last to return after being granted two months leave, possibly to visit relatives in England.

She embarked for return to Australia on 4 June, 1919 and her appointment was terminated on 31 October. She also returned with the rank of Sister, and was another that did not claim her medals for many years, in her case 1934, suggesting the reason she had not received them earlier was that she had been away when they were delivered. She was still at the Murray Street address at that time.

Born Birmingham, England, she migrated to Australia in 1890 at six years of age accompanied by her mother Maria, her grandmother, also Maria and two siblings, Charles and Mary, later Mrs Henry Hall. Her father was not shown in immigration records. Congregational, , died in Canterbury, 1969, aged 79 years. Her mother in Death records is shown as Gwendoline.

Florence May Laity

Address : Godfrey Terrace, Leabrook, South Australia

Next of Kin : mother, Mrs Susan Lamont Laity (nee Mackay), father John Henry Laity

Florence Laity is perhaps the odd-one out in our Roll. She enlisted at Keswick in South Australia with a residential address also in South Australia where her family appear to have been since about 1893, but she was born in Northcote on 20 May, 1888 when the family was in Barry Street (her father, John Henry was also listed in 1892 as a partner in the firm of Laity and Wheat, architects, in High Street, then unnumbered but mid-way between Westbourne Grove and Hawthorn Road).

Staff Nurse Laity enlisted at 28 years of age on 26 June, 1916 with her Nursing Certificate earned at the North Adelaide Children's Hospital. She appears to have served locally before embarking on *HMAT Themistocles* in Sydney on 19 December, 1916, arriving in England on 2 March, 1917 after a stopover in Egypt.

Her career differed somewhat from the norm as she was sent to France a week after disembarking without serving in a hospital in England beforehand. She was assigned to 23 General Hospital (location unknown) and served there except for a couple of brief admissions as a patient with bronchitis until March, 1919, being promoted to Sister on 1 October, 1918. After the month's Leave granted to all nurses, Sister Laity served briefly at No. 2 AAH until embarking for return to Australia on 20 June, arriving 6 August and being demobilised on 5 October. Born in Northcote, Church of England, died 17 June, 1947 at 59 years.

She had a younger brother, Henry Mackay Laity, just 20 years old who embarked as Company Quarter Master Sergeant with 4 Australian Army Service Corps, was awarded the Military Cross and returned in May, 1919 with the rank of Captain. He was shown as being born in North Adelaide in February, 1894, obviously just after the family moved from Northcote.

Thora McLennan

Address : care of Mrs Kenneth Jacobi, 91 Pender Street, Northcote (her sister, Amelia)

Next of kin : mother, Mrs Margaret McLennan (nee Rees), care of Mrs Kenneth Jacobi, 91 Pender Street, Northcote, father George Ross McLennan (late)

Perhaps the mystery woman of the local group, Thora McLennan was 32 years of age when she enlisted, She had completed her three years of training at Nhill Hospital and embarked for Egypt via *RMS Mooltan* on 26 June, 1917. After arrival in Cairo was transferred in August to Salonika where she served at the 60, 66 and 42 AGHs. Late in May, 1918, she was herself admitted into hospital suffering from malaria and she was repatriated back to Australia, arriving 1 September with a file note suggesting she would remain unfit for even light duties for at least three months, although she did not require hospitalisation.

From the point of her discharge, Flora McLennan appears to have virtually disappeared, or at least from the Victorian scene.

There is a brief note on the bottom of her Medical History sheet suggesting she returned to duty in Melbourne on 9 January, 1919, but no further details were forthcoming and there is no trace of her in Victorian Deaths or Marriages. She was not noted in Electoral Rolls for the seat of Bourke which included Northcote for any of the four elections between 1914 and 1920 and it seems that the contact she gave in Pender Street was purely a mailing address with her possibly residing at the hospital where she worked.

Her archives are the slimmest of any in the group and it appears that the British War and Victory Medals to which she was entitled were returned unclaimed to Base Depot in October, 1923. Confounding the issue further is that there is no record of her birth, although there are three siblings listed as born to George Ross and Margaret McLennan in Dimboola. Born Dimboola, Presbyterian, date of death unknown.

Amy Veda O'Grady

Address : North Carlton

Next of kin : brother, Rev. James O'Grady, Roman Catholic Presbytery, Clifton Grove, Preston. Parents Daniel and Ellen O'Grady (nee Egan)

Amy O'Grady was the first of two women connected to the district to die in the service of her country during the War, and the link appears to have been marginal at best. She enlisted on 10 August, 1915 at 38 years of age. Her attestation noted both parents were dead and next-of-kin was her brother, Father James Henry O'Grady of the Roman Catholic Presbytery in Clifton Grove, Preston where he was appointed from Brunswick in February, 1914. Her own address was listed simply as North Carlton.

Her application to join the Nursing Service reveals she had 13 years medical experience, her mandatory three years training at the Melbourne General Hospital with later qualifications from the Queen Charlotte Street Hospital in London. She was one of the first batch of 49 Australian nurses sent to India at the request of the Indian Colonial Government after an outbreak of cholera.

She died in the Sisters Isolation Hospital, Calaba, Bombay after contracting the disease, but no record remains of the period of confinement. Amy O'Grady was interred at the Sewree Cemetery, Bombay. One other Australian nurse, the Irish-born Sister Kathleen Power is known to have died in India the following day from the same disease; two others later after being returned to Australia. Her death is recorded on the Preston War Memorial. Born Castlemaine, Roman Catholic, date of death 12 August, 1916, aged 39 years.

Mary Elizabeth Jane Roberts

Address : 114 Westgarth Street, Fairfield

Next of kin : mother, Mrs Elizabeth Roberts (nee Couch), 114 Westgarth Street, Fairfield, father Thomas Frederick Roberts.

Mary Roberts enlisted 12 June, 1915 at age 42 and with some 15 years medical experience as a nurse, sister and theatre sister in both public and private hospitals after completing her three years of training between 1901 and 1903 at the Melbourne General Hospital. She embarked from Melbourne on board *RMS Morea*, 24 August, 1915 and served in Egypt until December, 1915 when she returned to Australia.

She was discharged from the A.I.F. on 17 January, 1916 and transferred to the Australian Military Force and subsequently served (briefly) at No. 5 AGH. in St. Kilda Road, and later 11 AGH in Caulfield. She transferred in September, 1916 to 14 AAH. at Sydney and appears to have served there until the end of the war, although correspondence in 1920 regarding war medals again shows No. 11 AGH. Born Molesworth, Church of England, date of death unknown.

Amy Alice Simpson (Mrs Robert Cordingley)

Address : care of Mrs Walker, Patterson Street, Preston

Next of kin : Sister in law, Mrs G. Simpson, Geelong Hospital. Parents Robert and Mary Lily Simpson (nee Sutton)

Amy Simpson was just the second woman and one of the last entries on our Darebin In Memoriam roll and for all practical purposes, a fluke discovery when another project to match up names on the South Preston State School Honour Roll with their military history revealed an "A. Simpson" on the Roll; this some years later identified as Amy and the only woman on the Roll.

On later investigation it was discovered that just the last page of 67 in her National Archive file gives a hint of her demise with notification that her husband, Mr Robert Cordingley was issued with a Memorial Scroll and Plaque.

She first enlisted on 15 August, 1915, giving her address as care of Mrs Walker, Patterson Street, Preston, although she seems to have been based in Geelong for some years. Amy was a sister of Lieutenant Colonel James William Simpson, one of the highest ranking officers from the district to have been killed in action (see Darebin Honour Roll).

The Simpson family were based in Garnet Street, Preston for many years, their father Robert a wheelwright in Plenty Road and a prominent worker in the local temperance movement.

Prior to enlisting, she had worked at Geelong Hospital for some years. A brief snippet in the *Geelong Advertiser* following the award of the Military Cross to her brother James suggested he was "a son of Mr. R. Simpson, formerly of Geelong ... he followed teaching pursuits in Geelong".

Her early history in the military nursing services is a little clouded. After enlisting in August 1915 and serving at the 5 Australian General Hospital in St. Kilda Road until April, 1916, and then at Caulfield Military Hospital from December, 1916. She re-enlisted on 21 February, 1917 in order to serve outside of Australia. Her military career was somewhat different than that of most the other local nurses that enlisted in that she appears to have exclusively served on the hospital ship *HMAHS Kanowna* from 21 March, 1917 and spent most of the next eighteen months serving on the hospital ship ferrying wounded servicemen back to Australia.

On what appears to have been her seventh trip back home, Simpson was disembarked at Gibraltar with influenza and pneumonia. She was repatriated back to England and discharged. After spending six weeks in hospital, she was considered fit to travel, embarking January, 1919 for her final return to Australia. She was confined to hospital in Melbourne until late in 1919, her condition described as "breathless on exertion, easily tired, unlikely to improve".

Then Mrs Robert George Cordingley, Amy died in a private hospital in Camperdown on 22 October, 1922. Although it was acknowledged that her demise was as a result of war service, her death came too late to be recorded on the AWM Honour Roll. Born Preston, Church of England, died Camperdown, 2 October, 1923 at 33 years.

(On voyages back to Australia, *HMAHS Kanowna* originally carried 12 medical officers and nine nurses; after re-fitting in August, 1917, the nursing configuration was changed to a matron, eight sisters and twelve nurses - the number of medical officers was not revealed).

The youngest sibling of the family embarked as 2893, Private Edgar Robert Simpson on 10 September, 1915 with 5 Infantry Battalion and returned March, 1918 suffering from a heart irregularity. The Mrs G. Simpson noted at Geelong Hospital as next of kin was James' wife Grace, also a nurse at the hospital.

Eliza Smith

Address : "Fallowfield", Perry Street, Alphington

Next of Kin : mother, Mrs Emma Jackson Smith, Birmingham, England

Eliza Smith enlisted on 3 August, 1917, giving her then-address as Bayswater. She served with the 19 Australian General Hospital in Egypt, but when on leave in England in January, 1918, she contracted bronchitis and was returned to Australia. Despite a medical examination in January, 1919 ruling she was only 75% capable of performing her normal nursing duties, she managed to re-enlist for duty on *HMAHS Karoola* giving her address as c/- Mrs Clough in Perry Street, Alphington.

She made one trip to England and while waiting return, suffered a relapse and applied for and granted permission to be discharged in England so she could return to her family in Birmingham. Born Birmingham, England, Church of England, date of death unknown.

Gladys Nettska Sumner

Address : 255 Clarke Street, Northcote

Next of kin : brother, Claude Sumner, 255 Clarke Street, Northcote. Parents Sydney Frederick (late) and Nettska Jean Sumner (nee McIntosh)

The London-born Gladys Nettska Sumner, aged 28, enlisted on 6 August, 1916 as a nurse with the Australian Medical Corps and was assigned to the British Indian Service following a request from the Indian Government for assistance in combating a cholera outbreak. Prior to embarking, she had served 12 months at the Base Hospital in St. Kilda Road. She embarked as a Staff Nurse aboard *RMS Mooltan* on 26 August, spending around 10 months in India, before transferring to Salonika, tending British troops sent to support the Greek government against an advance by Bulgarian forces. She returned to Melbourne in June, 1919, after, according to the *Leader* on 6 June, 1919, suffering 28 attacks of malaria.

Claude was also English-born, two years younger than Gladys, and a younger brother born in Australia, Roy Gordon Sumner enlisted and died of gas poisoning at the 53rd General Hospital, France on 26 March, 1918.

Immigration records suggest the family arrived in November, 1890 when Claude was six and Gladys four. Their father was shown as Frederick and 29 years of age, and his father in turn, Joseph as 56. In response to the usual query from Base Depot as to whether she was "the nearest blood relative" following Roy's demise, Mrs Sumner suggested "his father is many years dead" - she is shown in some registrations as Gladys Jean, but Nettska on arrival in Melbourne. Archives do not reveal where Gladys Sumner completed her training. Born London, Presbyterian, died at Dromana, 1970 aged 83 years.

Ruby Emily Olive Wilson

Address : Kerrisdale, Victoria

Next of kin : mother, Mrs Catherine Wilson (nee King), 102 Rossmoyne Street, Northcote (Father Thomas)

Ruby Wilson's address was given as Kerrisdale (on the Goulburn Valley Highway) when she enlisted on 31 October, 1917, with her mother as next of kin in Northcote. She was 31 and had completed her three years at the Melbourne General Hospital.

She enlisted on 31 October, 1916 and joined *HMAHS Kanowna* in Sydney on 8 November. She appears to have completed two round trips as a Staff Nurse on the ship before re-embarking for England on 22 December, 1917 on *HMAT Ulysses*. Her time in the military was almost identical to that of Winifred Jeffreys - after serving around 12 months on hospital ships, they embarked at the same time, both were assigned to No. 1 AAH at Harefield in England, both returned via *SS Lancashire* in February, 1919, and, sadly, both lost a brother during the war. Born Whittlesea, Church of England.

The only variation was that Ruby served at the Mont Park Hospital before enlisting. She had a brother Norman Claude who served with the 8th Light Horse in Palestine, but after being wounded at Gallipoli, he spent most of the next two years in hospital with a variety of illnesses; diarrhea, dysentery, conjunctivitis, eczema and blepharitis (severe inflammation of the eyelids). His final admission was to the French Hospital in Damascus on 13 October, 1918 (despite the name, the hospital was briefly under Australian administration when Wilson was admitted). He died five days later, the rather unusual cause given as "malignant malaria". Born Whittlesea, Church of England, died in Camberwell in 1963, aged 73 years

To date, we have listed nurses in alphabetical order, but it is perhaps fitting that we leave possibly the most outstanding individual from the district to last.

Edith Cornwell, (R.R.C)

Address : "Cleadon", 81 Westgarth Street, Northcote

Next of kin : brother, Alexander Cornwell, "Cleadon", Westgarth Street, Northcote. Parents Henry (late, 1915) and Isabella Cornwell, nee Winter.

As Matron Edith Cornwell and at 47 years of age (possibly 48 when she joined a second time), she was the most senior of the women from the district to enlist, both in terms of rank and age. Her initial training was at the Alfred and Women's Hospitals and when she first enlisted in January, 1915, she was Matron of the Osborne House Hospital in Geelong.

She embarked as Matron with the 1 Australian Medical Corps on *HMAT Kyarra* and on arrival in Egypt was appointed sub-matron of No. 1 AAH (Australian Auxiliary Hospital) in Heliopolis and later as Matron of No.2 AAH at Atelier. Her next of kin was then given as a sister, Mrs H. (Isabella) Norman in Waverley Road, East Malvern, also shown as her own address.

Ms Cornwell returned in February, 1916 and on 27 April, 1917, she re-enlisted (perhaps a little coy about her age, she claimed to be 44 years), with her brother Alexander in Westgarth Street as next of kin and as her own address.

This Attestation confirmed her three years mandatory training at the Alfred Hospital, but an alternative form specifically requiring details of earlier medical experience reveals she had held positions of Sister and Matron for 14 years, had been superintendent of the Royal Women's Hospital and in charge of other private and public hospitals where no surgeon was resident.

She was embarked as a Matron with Mo. 1 Australian General Hospital reinforcements in Sydney on *HMAT Ulysses*, and like several others in the group was first assigned to the Croydon War Hospital and then 1 AAH, although the latter transfer was delayed until February as she spent in Southwell Hospital with an unknown illness.

In 23 February, 1917, she became the only woman from the district to receive an official award, the Royal Red Cross (Second Class) for her services in Egypt. She continued as Matron of the 1 AAH until April, 1919 when she embarked to return to Australia. By this time, she had been awarded another Royal Red Cross, this time First Class (one of only 46 awarded to Australian women) gazetted in London on 1 January, 1919, in Australia 23 May.



Her contribution to the nursing profession continued for many years - post-war she became Matron of the Caulfield Military Hospital and later of Returned Soldier's Sanatorium at Wentworth Falls in New South Wales before serving ten years as the Matron of the Child Welfare Depot in Royal Park (formerly the Neglected Children's Home).

It was during the former assignment that she suffered the rather tragic loss of her two Red Cross awards - they were lost in a robbery where trunks containing war bonds to the value of £195 and deposit slips for other investments held in various banks in Melbourne, but it was the loss of the Badges that appears to have caused her the most distress.

Matron Cornwell was awarded the Florence Nightingale Medal by the International Red Cross in Geneva. The Medal was awarded in June, 1933 for outstanding services to nursing in both war and peace time and was presented with the award in September by Lady Isaacs, wife of the Australian Governor General, Sir Isaac Isaacs. At the time, Edith Cornwell's was just the 57th awarded and just the third to an Australian.

She is noted in a letter in 1936 requesting replacement of a stolen Returned Serviceman's Badge on the stationery of the Edith Cavell Trust Fund and reveals that as well as being the incumbent secretary of that fund, she had previously been the founding President of the Returned Australian Nurses Club.

Matron Cornwell died on 26 May, 1955 at Heidelberg House, Heidelberg and was cremated at Springvale Crematorium, a letter from the Imperial War Graves Commission requesting details of her service before her ashes were inserted into a memorial wall.

She was survived by three sisters, Mrs Isabella Norman, Mrs Alice Cochrane and Mrs. Bessie Stone, while five other siblings pre-deceased her - Mrs Annie Adams and brothers Edmund, Harry, Frank and Alexander. Victorian registrations place her as being born in Melbourne in 1868.

Her father Henry was noted as passing away on 27 May, 1915 at the Westgarth Street address. The Northcote Leader suggested he was "an old pioneer of the state and a useful, energetic and esteemed citizen of Northcote for many years ... the existence of the rockeries which beautified the entrance to the town was due in greater measure to no man than to the late Mr. Cornwell".

An earlier edition noted that one section of the rockeries was named after him, the other notables so honoured Messrs. Bastings, Candy, Clausen, Dennis and Mitchell.

In Voter's Rolls for the first Federal Election in 1903, Henry was shown at 49 Westgarth Street with his occupation listed as "independent means", but he is known to have been a builder who appears to have retired when he brought his family to Northcote from Bennett Street, North Fitzroy around 1898. He was still at 49 Westgarth Street when he passed away, Alexander at number 81.

