



COST TO NURSES' HEALTH

Many nurses became ill while on active service. Some recovered with a change of environment and scenery. Many others needed hospitalisation and convalescence near their unit or in England. The most severely affected nurses were declared medically unfit and repatriated back to Australia for months or permanently.

Nurses succumbed to the highly infectious and serious illnesses afflicting their patients such as dysentery, malaria, 'enteric' (typhoid), cholera, measles, pneumonia and influenza. Nurses were also diagnosed with relatively minor but debilitating problems, including conjunctivitis, chilblains, gastric ulcers and other digestive disorders.

There were numerous diagnoses along the lines of 'debility consequent on pressure of work'.

Many nurses made application to the Repatriation Department in the decades after the war for illnesses and other conditions related to their war service.

May Hall

Gave the Trained Nurses Home Winfield at 340 Albert Street, East Melbourne as her enlistment address

Served on Lemnos, nursing sick and wounded from the Gallipoli campaign in harsh and primitive conditions

Succumbed to illness on several occasions

Subsequently served in Egypt, on the Western Front and on hospital ships

Hall wrote to her mother from Lemnos in August 1915:

'We are very busy indeed... We have one luxury in sea bathing, though now that has been forbidden on account of refuse, etc from hospitals and boats. Despite that we risk it ...'

'19th August Couldn't finish this before, as I've been sick and off duty three days ... It was the usual complaint, caused by the food and flies and scarcity of water. You will see by the marks on this paper what the flies do to everything ...'



Nurses including May Hall bathed against orders in the polluted Mudros Harbour, Lemnos, August 1915, (AWM PO1480.002)



Nurses recovering from 'lemnitis' (dysentery), Lemnos, 1915, (AWM JO14565)

Estelle Lee-Archer

Nursed at Mena House and Crathie Hospitals in East Melbourne before the Great War

Enlisted in 1914, and served in Egypt and the Western Front

Awarded the Royal Red Cross (2nd Class) decoration for 'conspicuous services' in Egypt

Nursed at Caulfield Repatriation Hospital in the 1920s and 1930s

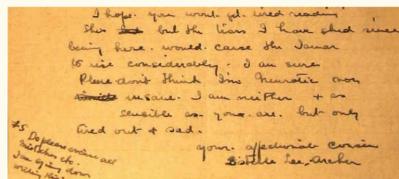
Injured at home on her last day of work in 1936; distraught and incapacitated, she failed to win compensation from the Repatriation Department despite enlisting the aid of the Returned Sailors Soldiers and Airmen's League and appealing to her cousin, Prime Minister Joseph Lyons.



Estelle Lee-Archer at Crathie Hospital, East Melbourne in 1914, (family collection)



Estelle Lee-Archer was decorated with the Royal Red Cross (2nd Class), (family collection)



Extract from Lee-Archer's letter to Prime Minister Joe Lyons pleading for help, 1937, (National Australian Archives)

Beryl Tucker

Gave East Melbourne as her enlistment address

Served in India and on hospital ships

Sent to Vladivostok, Russia in 1918 and 1919 to bring back wounded and sick troops from Czechoslovakia, Britain and Australia

Ran a hospital in the remote town of Sea Lake, Victoria in the 1920s and 1930s

Died in an isolated fishing hamlet in South Australia in 1941; the coroner's verdict was 'suicide by drowning'.



Beryl Tucker's grave, Mitcham Cemetery, South Australia, (private collection)

Gertrude Robertson

Gave Marinook Hospital, 375 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne as her address on enlistment in 1917

Served in India and on hospital ships between Bombay (Mumbai) and Mesopotamia (Iraq)

Became 'seriously ill' on a hospital ship in 1918; diagnosed with malaria, sandfly fever and neuritis

Bedridden in 11 Australian General Hospital, Caulfield in 1919-20, unable to sit up for months

Commended for her 'special courage' by Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, Governor General's wife

Recovered, moved permanently to England in 1928 with her twin sister; died in 1972 aged 87.



Gertrude Robertson in 1907, aged 24, (family collection)



'First sitting up': Gertrude Robertson as a patient in 11 AGH in 1920, (family collection)



Gertrude Robertson (left) and her twin sister Gwendoline in London, 1964, (family collection)