



GREAT WAR NURSES AND THEIR EAST MELBOURNE LINKS

About 60 women connected with East Melbourne served as army nurses in the Great War. Most enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service and a handful in the Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service or its Reserve.

Born in the 1870s and 1880s, most were children of British parents who had come to Victoria in the gold rush era. Many were raised in country Victoria, in large families in which education for girls was valued. Their mothers were enterprising by choice or necessity: some owned land or businesses, while some widowed with young children had to work to survive.

The nurses' links with East Melbourne generally came through family connections, employment and church membership.

Several grew up in East Melbourne. Others had close family members who lived in the mansions, houses and rooming establishments of the area.

Many worked in East Melbourne's numerous hospitals, such as Crathie, St Ives, and Mena House. There they came in contact with prominent matrons such as Jessie McHardie White (Crathie) and Elizabeth Glover (St Ives), both pioneers of army nursing in Victoria. Others were registered with trained nurses homes (employment agencies) such as Winfield and Elmore.



Matron Jessie McHardie White, owner and operator of Crathie Hospital in East Melbourne, was highly decorated in the Great War, (AWM 15254)

East Melbourne nurses were among the first to enlist on the outbreak of war in 1914. Others enlisted later: when they finished their training, after a brother was wounded in action or when family circumstances permitted.

Many were the first and sometimes the only members of their immediate family to enlist and serve overseas.

Like other members of the AIF, nurses enlisted for varied reasons. Patriotism and pay, professional advancement and a desire to travel, freedom from family responsibilities and a sense of independence were some of the factors that played a part in their decision to join up.

The East Melbourne nurses served in most theatres of war, in India and on transport ships. Some held senior positions as matrons of large Australian and British hospitals in England, the Western Front and Greece.

A number of East Melbourne nurses were recognised and decorated for their war service. Some were mentioned in despatches or awarded the Royal Red Cross for military nursing (1st and 2nd Class). A select few received decorations from Britain's allies.

Most continued nursing after the war ended. Despite illnesses during and after the war, many of East Melbourne's Great War nurses went on to live well into their 80s and beyond.

Reminders of East Melbourne's army nurses can still be seen. St Peter's Eastern Hill in Gisborne Street has honour boards identifying twenty-six nurses from the parish who served, including one who died. Holy Trinity Church in Hotham Street names one on its Great War commemorative plaque. Former hospitals where they worked can still be seen: Crathie at 118 Gipps Street, Mena House at 29 Simpson Street, and St Ives at 118 Vale Street. The building that housed Elmore Trained Nurses Home at 1101 Hoddle Street still stands. Winfield which was at 340 Albert Street has been demolished.

'Gone to War as Sister' can show only parts of the lives of some of East Melbourne's army nurses.

Go to the East Melbourne Historical Society website, emhs.org.au, to read in detail about these pioneering, brave, colourful, adventurous women.



Sister Edith Cameron's service is commemorated in the Great War Commemorative Plaque in Holy Trinity Church in East Melbourne, (EMHS)



Matron Elizabeth Glover, a pioneer of military nursing in Australia, owned St Ives Hospital in Vale Street, East Melbourne, (Epworth Cliveden Hospital)



Crathie at 118 Gipps Street, East Melbourne, Matron McHardie White's hospital, employed nurses who later enlisted, (East Melbourne Library)



Several AANS members worked at Mena House located at 29 Simpson Street, East Melbourne, (East Melbourne Library)



An honour board at St Peter's Eastern Hill commemorates nurses from the parish who served, (EMHS)



St Ives, Vale Street, East Melbourne was owned by pioneering military nurse Matron Glover and employed nurses who later enlisted, (EMHS)



Many nurses found work through Winfield Trained Nurses Home, an employment agency located at 340 Albert Street, East Melbourne, (EMHS)



Gone to War as Sister
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