

Mary Rawson (1883 – 1953)

Mary Rawson worked as volunteer nurse in privately funded hospitals in London and near the Western Front in France. After the war, she worked at Mt St Evin's Private Hospital and was actively involved in the St Vincent's Past Nurses' Association.

Mary was the second in a family of nine children and was born in Kyneton. Her father, Hugh, was a Member of the Victorian Legislative Assembly from 1891 to 1900. Mary was educated at the Convent of Mercy in Kyneton.

In 1914, when war was declared, Mary was working as a private nurse in England.

Rather than join the Australian Army Nursing Service, Mary served as a volunteer in a number of privately funded hospitals in England and France run by various benefactors.

Mary initially worked at the Harold Fink Private Hospital in Mayfair in London. This hospital had been established by Douglas Shields, formerly a senior surgeon at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne.

In November 1914, Mary moved with Dr Shields to the Australian Voluntary Hospital firstly in Paris, and then in Wimereux near the western front in France. Established as an independent field hospital to care for French, Russian, Serbian and Portuguese soldiers, as well as soldiers from Commonwealth nations, The Australian War Memorial described it as "the United Nations of emergency healthcare".

After a short break back in Australia in 1916, Mary returned to overseas service joining the staff of the Coulter Hospital in London's Grosvenor Square. Mary wrote home describing it as: "*A splendidly equipped hospital of 100 beds, and every comfort for the Tommies.*"

Two of Mary's brothers served in the war in France. Hugh, twelve years younger than Mary, survived. Her older brother by one year, Gerald, was killed in action at Villers-Bretonneux.

After the war, Mary worked at Mt St Evin's Private Hospital, precursor of St Vincent's Private Hospital. In 1933, contributing to fundraising efforts, Mary was described as "the president of the Mt St Evin's Private Hospital nursing staff". She was also actively involved in the St Vincent's Past Nurses' Association.

In 1945, Mary married Gerald McKenna, also from Kyneton. They settled in Kyneton where Gerald was a grazier.



Service summary: Harold Fink Private Hospital (London, England); Australian Voluntary Hospital (Paris and Wimereux, France); Coulter Hospital (London, England).

Graduation St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne: 1913
Enlistment: N.A.
Final rank: Sister

Image: Wimereux, France, 1915. Four of the nursing sisters of the Australian Voluntary Hospital, at the entrance to the mess tent. Family sources have identified Sister Rawson as being the nurse at left.
Image source: Australian War Memorial, P01064.008.

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