

Marie Armstrong (1870 – 1953)

Marie Armstrong worked at the Base Hospital in St Kilda Road and served overseas in India. She was treated in India for breast cancer and was invalided home. A plaque for her grave in Melbourne was unveiled on Remembrance Day in 2021.

Marie Armstrong was the eldest of three children. She was born in Bendigo and attended Girton College.

Marie's father, James, had been a cattle drover and a gold miner. He made his fortune establishing the Bendigo Brewery and later constructed a reservoir and infrastructure to supply Bendigo with water.

Marie embarked on a nursing career later than most, completing her training when aged in her mid-forties. She joined the Australian Army Nursing Service around September 1916 and commenced work as a nurse at the Base Hospital, No. 5 Australian General Hospital in St Kilda Road. The Base Hospital treated servicemen and wounded and ill soldiers returned from the conflict in Europe.

Following a call in 1916 from the Australian Defence Department for trained nurses to enrol in overseas service to relieve British nurses working in overseas hospitals, Marie enlisted in January 1917.

She was posted to the No. 34 Welsh General Hospital in Deolali, a transit camp near Bombay, now Mumbai. The hospital patients included members of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force as well as captured Turks. The challenges included an enervating climate and ever-present risk of infectious disease. Marie's experience was quickly recognised and she was promoted to the rank of Sister.

In March 1918 Marie was herself admitted to the hospital, diagnosed with breast cancer. Following a successful operation, her medical report stated that she was much debilitated and that she was unsuited for residence in a tropical climate. Marie departed India in September 1918 and returned to Australia. She was discharged on account of being medically unfit for service.

Marie did not continue her nursing career after the war although there is evidence that she kept up with her former St Vincent's nursing colleagues.

A plaque commemorating Marie was installed and unveiled in the Boroondara General Cemetery on Remembrance Day in 2021, with the support of the St Vincent's Graduate Nurses' Association and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Foundation (Victorian Branch).



Service summary: 5 AGH (Melbourne, Australia); 34 WGH (Deolali, India).

Graduation St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne: 1915

Enlistment: 1917

Final rank: Sister

Medals: British War Medal

Image: Marie Armstrong as a young girl, circa 1880.

Image source: SVHM Archives Collection, copy of original photograph held by family.

Story: SVHM Archives, December 2024