

Mary O'Shea (1874 – 1932)

Mary O'Shea's family had strong connections with St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne and founding Rectress, Mother Berchmans Daly. Mary served in London during the highly virulent influenza epidemic at the end of the war.

Mary O'Shea was the eldest of eight children. Her father was a teacher and, at the time of Mary's birth, was posted at Rutherglen. Mary's childhood was spent in other towns in Victoria, in which her father taught, including Eddington and Inglewood, both near Bendigo. His final posting was as Head Teacher at Sunbury State School.

The O'Sheas were devout Catholics and supporters of St Vincent's Hospital. Mary's father taught Sunday school when posted in remote parishes where priests were few. Mother Berchmans Daly, founding Rectress of St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, stayed with the O'Shea family at Sunbury during her fundraising drives through regional Victoria for a new wing of the hospital.

Mother Berchmans Daly clearly had a strong impact on the O'Shea children. Mary decided to train as a nurse at St Vincent's Hospital and two of her sisters, Nellie and Nora, joined the Order of the Sisters of Charity.

In May 1915, Mary joined the staff at the Base Hospital, No. 5 Australian General Hospital in St Kilda Road. The hospital provided treatment to Australian based service personnel and invalids returned from overseas fronts.

In March 1917 Mary enlisted for overseas war service and sailed for England. As a result of her nursing experience, she was recruited at the rank of Sister.

Her first posting was to the Croydon War Hospital in Surrey which received wounded and sick servicemen from the campaigns on the Western Front.

Mary was then transferred to the No. 1 Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Harefield then near London. At that time, the hospital and its staff were under great strain as a result of the outbreak of influenza.

Mary was repatriated back to Australia and was placed in charge of invalids on the voyage.

On her return from service Mary returned to work for a time at the Base Hospital in St Kilda Road. Later she worked at the Eye and Ear Hospital in East Melbourne.

Mary was a member of the Melbourne Returned Army Nurses Club and assisted with fundraising to support returned Army Nurses who were invalided or in need.



Service summary: No. 5 AGH (St Kilda Road, Melbourne); Croydon War Hospital (Surrey, England); No. 1 AAH (Harefield, England).

Graduation St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne: 1902

Enlistment: 1917

Final rank: Sister

Medals: British War Medal

Image: Sister O'Shea, detail of image of Nurses and Sisters at the Base Hospital.

Image source: *Punch*, 17 February 1916, p. 17.

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