Miss Elizabeth L. Murray

Miss Elizabeth Lilla Murray (pictured) was born in Malta in 1852 and grew up in Perthshire with her aunt and uncle. She entered the Kings College School in 1880 as a paying Lady Probationer.

Unfortunately she was not able to complete her training course because she contracted Sepsis (blood poisoning). However in January 1882, Murray sailed to Australia aboard the Shannon and landed in Sydney to take up a position with the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA).

Miss Murray then married her cousin, a captain in the P&O Shipping Company. Though it was not the social norm for married women to work, in June 1882 she became the first Matron of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, much to the chagrin of the YWCA who did not want to lose her. In her 1906 speech to the Trained Nurses’ Reunion, she described her welcome to the newly built Prince Alfred Hospital (PAH): “it was not half finished; I think it was just opened in desperation…”

Her duties at PAH comprised maintaining cleanliness, systematising the wards and hiring, as well as training the few nurses who had applied. Indeed, she commented that “there were but a few applicants, we had to gather in the weeds and be thankful if we found a flower amongst them”.

Miss Murray was also responsible for arranging the vital linen supply by hiring women to sew pillowcases for the 160 beds of the new hospital. In the early days she was frequently called upon to perform duties similar to those of a housekeeper when she was required to help at the doctors’ establishment – managing their meals specifically – as well as hiring a baker, grocer and butcher.

She believed that a Matron served “with the kindest heart, the wisest head, and the most upright intention in the world”. Miss Murray resigned from the hospital in December 1886 after four years of service as Matron and travelled to England. Later, upon her return to Sydney with her husband, she moved to Brush Farm to take charge of the Boys’ Reformatory there. At the end of her life, she resided in Wentworth Falls where she died in 1916.
Miss Catherine C. Downs

Miss Catherine C. Downs (pictured) was one of the original five sisters to be employed at the Prince Alfred Hospital.

She is remembered as one of those “ladies of culture and training who laid the foundations of the nursing prestige of the hospital”. Miss Downs began training as a nurse at the Alfred Hospital, Melbourne, in 1875, before moving to the PAH to work under Matron Elizabeth L. Murray in 1882.

When Miss Murray resigned from the hospital in 1886, Miss Downs was chosen to be her successor and became the PA’s second Matron. The foundation stone for the first purpose-built nurses’ home was laid during her time as Matron there. It opened a year after she left.

The expansion of the hospital, the constantly increasing number of staff as well as the creation of a nursing school, tested Downs’s abilities as a supervisor in an administrative capacity and she reportedly considered her role to be “almost beyond her experience and capacity”. She officially stepped down from her position on the thirtieth of September 1891 and died in 1926 in her home aged 86.
Miss Susan Bell McGahey

Miss Susan Bell McGahey (pictured) was born in 1862 in Ireland and qualified with a general certificate in September 1887. She also received a certificate from the London Obstetrical Society.

In 1889, Miss McGahey travelled to Australia to join a friend in Manly who had resigned from her position in England to marry David Thomas, a surgeon. Soon after her arrival, Miss McGahey accepted a position at the Carrington Centennial Hospital for Convalescents in Camden in 1890.

In 1891, after the resignation of Miss Downs, McGahey applied for the position of Matron at PAH. She was unanimously selected for the role from twelve applicants and began on 5 October 1891. As the third matron, she accomplished much in the way of organising and running the hospital, education of nurses and founding several hospital funds. During her time as Matron, Miss McGahey also had her title extended to Superintendent of Nursing.

“Nursing Rules” were officially approved and implemented in July 1902 modelled after similar rules used in major nurse training institutions overseas. These Rules permitted her to grade nurses according to first, second or third years. This enabled her to further organise them more effectively based upon their levels of skill. As a new initiative, she proposed graduate nurses complete a fourth year of training and pressed for a nurses’ training school to be established. This idea was opposed by Professor Anderson Stuart, chairman of the Board of Directors.

Miss McGahey founded the Prince Alfred Hospital Trained Nurses’ Reunion (a meeting for the ‘Old Girls’ of the hospital). She encouraged them to reflect on their experiences with the younger nurses - and assisted in the development of the first nurses’ journal, The Australasian Trained Nurses’ Association Journal, and became one of its first Joint Honorary Secretaries.

In 1901, Queen Victoria’s death prompted Professor Anderson Stuart and Dr James Graham, the director, to establish the Queen Victoria Memorial Fund as recognition of her patronage of the hospital. The money was used to build two more pavilion wards thereby increasing the number of patients who could be treated (now known as A and Vic Blocks). Miss McGahey played an important role in advising the board on how the new building should be planned and was recognised for her efforts by the Committee. The Hospital gained the title “Royal” in 1902.

In December 1903, Miss McGahey resigned from the hospital claiming illness. On leaving she remarked that she had “raised the status of the Hospital and its nursing staff”. She later opened the small hospital “Charlemount” at Potts Point, specifically for the training of nurses. She died of cancer in 1922.
Miss Mabel Newill

Mabel Newill (pictured) trained at King’s College Hospital, London, and then pursued further training at the Manchester Maternity Hospital and the London Obstetrical Society, completing in 1897. She then travelled to North America for four weeks where she learnt the methods used by leading hospitals there.

In July 1904, she took up the position of Matron at RPAH, a role which tested her organisational and leadership abilities as the Hospital dealt with a Typhoid epidemic. Approximately 228 patients were admitted per day, with about 37% affected by typhoid fever. Others were forced to wait for a vacant bed. Frequently, only couches and ‘shakedowns’ (makeshift beds made of straw or blankets) were available for the critically ill.

The shortage of beds finally reached a crisis point. A fundraising event was planned: the Grand Fancy Dress Ball. However, while its generous proceeds funded more beds, over the next two years the money dwindled away as the number of patients steadily increased. Again the situation became critical, with patients being fitted into unsuitable areas of the hospital such as the basement or isolation cottages outside – originally intended for just infectious cases.

As the outbreak of typhoid fever worsened and with no wards to quarantine these infected patients, Miss Newill devised measures to ensure the disease was contained as much as possible and not spread by the nurses from patient to patient. A conference was organised called “Regarding typhoid in the hospital.” Miss Newill recommended that a separate trolley (specifically for the typhoid patients) be used in each ward, and that foot-taps be implemented in the wards to prevent the spread of germs by hand. She reported that most of the nurses were vaccinated—a measure designed to further prevent the disease from spreading.

During her time as Matron, Miss Newill advocated for her nurses. The number of surgeries had greatly increased during her time there and nurses worked long and taxing hours. When the second Nurses’ Home was constructed beside the first, a quadrangle was built as a space for nurses to relax when they were off duty. Miss Newill went to great lengths to ensure it was “as pleasant and attractive as possible”.

In 1917, despite the hospital urging her to stay on and train other nurses for war work, Miss Newill applied for a 12-month leave of absence. She joined the Australian Army Nursing Service and helped with the war effort. Badly affected by her experiences, Miss Newill remained in England after being discharged [from the AANS] as “medically unfit to continue her service”. After her 12 months leave lapsed, Miss Newill wrote to RPAH and formally resigned from her position as Matron. She was succeeded by Phyllis M. Boissier. Miss Newell died in 1959 in England.
Miss Phyllis M. Boissier MBE RRC JP

Phyllis M. Boissier (pictured in her WWI uniform) was born in Goulburn and began her nursing training at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in 1905.

Elected Matron of Manly Cottage Hospital in 1912, Boissier then joined the World War I effort. She signed up with the Australian Army Nursing Service and travelled to Egypt in 1914. She was awarded the Royal Red Cross for her war service at Gezirah, where she tended to the wounded soldiers from Gallipoli. She became Matron of the hospital at Dieppe, France in 1917 but was later allowed to return to Australia to care for her sick mother. In 1918 she accepted the role of Matron at the RPAH.

During her years as Matron, Miss Boissier contended with overcrowding in the wards, the same serious issue that kept her predecessors busy. She also dealt with complications related to a new onsite building project which caused increased expenditures exacerbated by the Great Depression, and new requirements for nursing education. Of course she still had the regular duties of Matron.

In particular, an outbreak of pneumonic flu challenged Miss Boissier, as almost one hundred nurses became sick and were unfit to work. From 1927-1929 a lack of funds meant the closure of 200 beds. After all these problems settled down, Miss Boissier had to take on an influx of junior staff, which she commented had “not been an easy time”.

As Matron, Miss Boissier was well-liked. She was described as “the local Nightingale” representing “the best tradition of unselfish and dedicated service of the nursing profession”. She was notably awarded a Member of the British Empire for her “outstanding and devoted services” to the hospital, and a King’s Jubilee Medal in 1935 for her service to the hospital connected with the returning soldiers. She also became the first female Justice of the Peace in New South Wales.

Miss Boissier resigned in 1935 and retired to a ‘cottage by the sea’. Members of the hospital were disappointed by her decision. The Chairman of the Board of Directors, Hebert H. Schlink wrote to her: “Your place will be difficult to fill, and your Hospital will miss you greatly”. He also commended her for her work stating that her “methods have been so thorough and the training of [her] staff so well done, that we may look with confidence to the future”. As a parting gift, and a demonstration of their love for her, the nursing staff of the hospital put on a play entitled ‘A Pageant of Nursing’ at her farewell party. She passed away in July, 1976.
Miss Beatrice J. Dun MBE

Beatrice Jean Dun (pictured) was born in New South Wales and began her nurse training at RPAH in 1918, where she later became the sixth Matron.

In 1922, upon completion of her training, Miss Dun stayed on at RPAH for another four years before moving to Europe for further training and experience. She returned in 1932 to take over the Intermediate (private) Wards.

In 1935, Miss Dun succeeded Phyllis M. Boissier as Matron. Despite her senior position as Matron she was nicknamed ‘Birdie’ by her staff. She is oft remembered for “rolling up her sleeves and helping on a particularly hectic day.” In November 1937 Miss Dun was awarded the Member of the British Empire medal, presented to her by the Governor-General of Australia.

Issues with the Hospital's medical administration as related to the training of nurses, lead to Miss Dun’s resignation in December 1940, further prompting the resignation of twenty other nurses as a display of support. The resignations were disputed by some saying that the nurses really resigned to join the AIF and only pretended to support Miss Dun. Regardless, the RPA nurses collectively signed a petition for her immediate reinstatement which they presented to the Hospital’s Board of Directors. This became an issue for government intervention and investigation into the disagreements between hospital officials and the nursing body. It was never publicly resolved and Miss Dun did not return to the hospital as her staff had hoped.

In 1941 she became Matron of the Sydney District Nursing Association (SDNA) but only stayed for a year. One year later, after having joined the Australian Army Nursing Services, she was called up to service at the 113th Concord Military Hospital.

Miss Dun returned to Australia in 1946 and resumed her role as Matron of SDNA where she was met with a huge influx of patients in the post-war period. As Matron there, Miss Dun worked tirelessly to expand the organisation until 3 September 1955 when she was forced to resign because of failing health. On 22 September, 1955, she died in her home.
Miss Helen B. Hetherington

Helen Budd Hetherington (pictured) was born in Sydney and began her training at the RPAH in 1916. In 1920 upon completion, she was awarded the Alfred Roberts Medal for Proficiency (seen in the photo). This came as a surprise but Miss Hetherington did recall her training years as “the happiest in my life.”

After three years of service at RPAH, Miss Hetherington moved to England where she studied obstetrics at the Queen Charlotte Hospital. She returned in 1936 to take a supervisory role in the newly built Gloucester House.

Five years later, Miss Hetherington became Matron and Superintendent of Nursing after Beatrice J. Dun resigned at the end of 1940. Miss Hetherington’s experience in obstetrics allowed her to oversee and advise on the construction of the Obstetric and Gynaecological hospital, the King George V Memorial Hospital for Mothers and Babies, which opened in May 1941.

At RPAH Miss Hetherington was responsible for a hospital that now had nearly 1,000 beds. This included the newly opened private beds in Gloucester House and the private and public patients in King George V. Unfortunately, many trained sisters had enlisted in 1939 and 1940 to help with the war effort; newly trained nurses left as soon as they could to serve overseas. Miss Hetherington was left with only student nurses to tend to returning and wounded soldiers. As a result, she organised for personnel from St. Johns Ambulance, students from the Rachel Forster and the Royal Alexandra Hospitals to come to the wards and lend a hand. Miss Hetherington herself was not able to enlist because, as she recalled, she was “too young for the First [World War] and too old for the Second”.

During her tenure she served as President of the Institute of Hospital Matrons and was briefly the President of the NSW Nurses’ Association as well as the Australasian Trained Nurses Association. Miss Hetherington demonstrated her modesty in her memoirs where she recalled:

“I know there was a great deal I was not able to accomplish and which was probably thought I should have done … I was devoted to the Hospital … but again I felt that a period was approaching when it needed an up to date and progressive Authority on nursing education to keep it in the forefront as the largest teaching hospital in the Southern Hemisphere”.

Miss Hetherington retired in 1947 to look after her parents. She died in 1982.
Initially, Margaret Frances Looker (pictured) studied medicine at the University of Sydney. However, she did not complete the degree and instead commenced training as a nurse at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in 1933, later completing her training with a certificate in Obstetrics. In 1940 she enlisted with the Australian Army Nursing Service where she rose to the rank of Captain.

After her war service, she spent time in the UK and the USA studying nurse education and administration. She was recognised as the Florence Nightingale Scholar for NSW in 1946-47.

Upon returning to Australia, she was appointed Matron of the RPAH in 1947 – the youngest Matron in Australia at the time. She commented to *The Sun* in 1948 that Australia had fallen behind in its training of nurses because of its outdated methods. She also stressed the importance of Matrons remaining abreast of new and more efficient modes of training. To improve training she looked at efficiency, job analysis and an outline of what constitutes ‘basic training’. She wanted to ensure homogenous levels of knowledge amongst the nursing staff and, finally, a push towards specialisation after completion of ‘basic training’. Values she believed a nurse should possess were “stability, even-temper, and a good sense of humour”. In addition, she believed nursing provided women with “greater emotional satisfaction”.

In 1949, she became one of four founders of the NSW College of Nursing and in 1954, Miss Looker resigned from RPAH in order to marry, as was common at the time. She then received Rotary and Fulbright Travel Grants to travel overseas for more study, and was the first woman to win a Churchill Fellowship.

Miss Looker, subsequently known as Mrs Guy, moved to the Canberra Hospital and became Matron there in 1956. In this role Mrs Guy continued to advocate for nurses and their rights. She, along with approximately 500 nurses at the hospital, took two week’s leave to protest against nurses’ pay. Mrs Guy claimed nurses were “expected to work 160 hours a week, be terribly competent, always sympathetic and never lose their temper but never get paid for all these things”. Mrs Guy also heavily criticised the abilities of doctors when she stated that “The doctor understands little about administration”.

For her impressive work at the Canberra Hospital, Mrs Guy became an Officer of The Order of the British Empire (OBE), in June 1961. She resigned from Canberra Hospital in 1972 due to poor health and died in 1988.
Miss Evelyn J. Lawrie R.R.C

In 1919, Miss Lawrie (pictured) began her training at RPAH as a nurse. After completing with distinction in 1923 she worked at the Braeside Hospital, Stanmore. In 1939 she went overseas and was in England when the Second World War began.

She enlisted in the War and worked for eight months with the Queen Alexandra’s Royal Naval Nursing Service – which was unusual as male nurses and orderlies were generally the only people employed to work aboard naval ships. Later she was sent to Portland Hospital which became a station for casualties. Despite the frequent bombings in the area, she stayed on at the hospital where she remained the only woman. For her work there she received the Royal Red Cross medal for “zeal, patience, courage, and devotion to duty”.

After the War she returned to RPAH and became Assistant Matron in 1946, then Deputy Matron in 1947, whilst Matron Looker was away on leave. In 1954, she officially became the ninth Matron of RPAH. The Hospital continued to grow during her service, specifically with the opening of the Page Chest Pavilion (demolished 2010), the Queen Mary Home for Nurses and the West Cancer Detection Clinic for Women.

Miss Lawrie retired in 1960 and died in December 1977.
Margaret C. Nelson (pictured) began her training at RPAH in 1945 and then received midwifery training at the Broken Hill Hospital. Miss Nelson returned to RPAH in 1950 and was appointed Assistant Matron of Gloucester House, but also worked in other parts of the Hospital. In 1951 she went abroad for further study to “keep pace with the times”.

In 1960 at 40 years of age, she became RPAH’s tenth (and youngest ever) Matron and Superintendent of Nursing. In Miss Nelson’s training days, the role of nurse had always been presented as ‘handmaiden’ but she intended to change that view while she was Matron. She discarded the formal title ‘Matron’ preferring to be called ‘Miss Nelson’ instead. She also changed the uniform by removing the aprons and veils which had always been mandatory.

She was well-liked by her staff and worked tirelessly alongside them, abolishing the policy of no marriage during training and restrictions on social activities.

In a November 1969 article written by Miss Nelson and published in the *Daily Telegraph*, she stated that a “nurse is a person in her own right and an integral part of the health team”. Changes the nursing profession underwent during her time as Matron were considerable, especially in the area of training. In the post-war years, women had more opportunity to attend university and the number of girls selecting nursing declined. Miss Nelson took advantage of this by marketing nursing as a possible post-graduate career. Girls could now also work as nursing aides. To fill shortages Miss Nelson recruited many women from Britain to work at RPAH. Men were admitted to the nurse training programme for the first time in the 1960s. The nursing curriculum gradually became geared towards developing a greater understanding of the practice of nursing, physiology, anatomy, infection control procedures, knowledge of nutrition and the rehabilitation of patients. Just before her retirement she was pleased that the “implementation of a full-time student Nursing Programme” had been introduced.

Miss Nelson officially changed her position title from Matron to Director of Nursing (DON) in 1968, and retired in 1978 after 18 years of service. She is RPAH’s longest serving Matron/DON.
Mrs Yvonne Winter

Yvonne Margaret Winter (pictured) trained as a nurse at the Rachel Forster Hospital in 1962 and became a certified midwife at the King George V Hospital in 1965. Miss Winter spent a few years in New Zealand, where she completed a post-basic course in neonatal intensive care at the National Women’s Hospital, Auckland. She also gained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Victoria University, Wellington.

In 1975 she returned to RPAH as Deputy Principal Nurse Educator. She is a member of the New South Wales College of Nursing and an Associate member of the Australian Institute of Management. Miss Winter became Deputy Director of Nursing in 1976 and Director of Nursing in 1978. In 1985, her title changed to Principal Director of Nursing. During her time she “was at all times committed to improving the education of all nurses”. Indeed, she helped establish a Nursing Research Scholarship for those nurses seeking to pursue additional education.

Miss Winter was well-liked and described by Lynette Ramsey as “an excellent role model and most supportive of all her staff”. In 1988, the same year she stepped down from her position at RPAH, she was awarded the Australian Medal for her Services to Nursing. She was later appointed Area Director of Nursing for the Central Sydney Health Service.
**Miss Lynette Ramsey**

Lynette Ramsey began training as a nurse at RPAH in 1964. She then worked in the Page Chest Building before moving on to the Greenlane Hospital in Auckland. She joined the RAAF Nursing Service in 1967.

Miss Ramsey studied a post-basic cardiothoracic course at the Royal North Shore Hospital in 1975 and then obtained a Diploma of Nursing Administration at the University of Sydney Cumberland College. In 1979, Miss Ramsey came back to RPAH as an Administrative Assistant in Nursing. Two years later she became an Assistant Director of Nursing in Gloucester House and the Page Chest Pavilion. In 1982, she became the Director of Nursing at Baulkham Hills Private Hospital, before returning once more to the RPAH in 1985 to become the Director of Surgical Nursing. Three years later Miss Ramsey was appointed to the task of Principal Director of Nursing and Director of Surgical Nursing. Her title was changed to Director of Nursing in 1996. She is a member of both the New South Wales College of Nursing and also the Royal College of Nursing Australia. Miss Ramsey left the Hospital in 2005.

**Ms Katharine Szitniak**

Katharine Szitniak was the Director of Nursing and Midwifery services at RPAH between 2005 and 2011. She trained at and graduated from the Concord Repatriation General Hospital in 1983. Ms Szitniak also completed a post graduate qualification in nephrology in 1987 and specialised in nephrology and transplant nursing. For a short time, Ms Szitniak relocated to Melbourne but returned to Concord and became the Nursing Unit Manager of the Renal Ward until 1998. She was then appointed Nurse Coordinator of Cardiovascular Services for the Central Sydney Area Health Service. In 2000 she was promoted to the role of Operational Nurse Manager at RPAH. Since then she has completed a Masters degree in Health Administration. In 2005 she was appointed to the position of Director of Nursing and Midwifery, RPAH. She left this role in March 2011 to become Director of Nursing and Midwifery for the Sydney Local Health District.
Mrs Joanne Edwards
Joanne Edwards (pictured) was appointed to the role of Director of Nursing & Midwifery at RPAH in June 2011.

She completed her General Nurse Training at St George Hospital Kogarah in 1984 and then worked at Prince Henry Hospital, Little Bay for two years. During this time, she had the opportunity to work in the perioperative field of both Recovery and Theatres and developed a passion for this field of work.

In 1986, Mrs Edwards successfully applied for the Operating Theatre Course at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. On completion of this program she was employed in JL Operating Theatres focusing on orthopaedics and became a Clinical Nurse Specialist in 1987. She continued in this capacity in a full time and part time capacity while raising a young family until 2000.

From 2000 to 2004, Mrs Edwards was employed as a part time After Hours Nursing Unit Manager in JL Operating Theatres, a position she found challenging but simultaneously rewarding. During this time, she successfully completed a Masters of Nursing (Professional Studies) at the University of Technology Sydney, conferred in 2004. The following year she was appointed to the Nurse Manager Perioperative Services position and remained in this role until 2008.

In 2008, Mrs Edwards commenced at Bankstown Hospital as the Operational Nurse Manager and was subsequently seconded to the Director of Nursing of Nursing & Midwifery at Liverpool Hospital in 2009. She found both roles to be professionally fulfilling and benefited enormously from their diversity.

In June 2011, Mrs Edwards returned to RPAH as Director of Nursing & Midwifery.
Ms Claire Harris

Claire Harris was appointed as the current Director of Nursing & Midwifery Services at RPAH in October 2014.

Ms Harris trained at Royal North Shore Hospital graduating in 1987 in the second to last group of hospital-trained nurses at this facility. She holds post graduate qualifications, and was awarded a Masters in Health Service Management in 2014.

She has spent the majority of her career at RPAH, commencing as a newly graduated Registered Nurse in 1988 in the HIV Unit, climbing the ranks to Nursing Unit Manager, and then moving into a range of management positions at RPAH.

Following this she left to work for a period in the film industry. It was during this time that Ms Harris realised her passion for public health and returned to RPAH. She then moved to Canterbury Hospital as Operational Nurse Manager, then Director of Nursing and Midwifery Services for six years.

Ms Harris advises that returning to RPAH is the realisation of a long held dream, and she considers leadership of these nurses and midwives to be a great honour. She is best known for her innovation in all fields of nursing and midwifery services, and her personable attitude towards all staff.