

ISABEL GRANT MARSH (1875-1944)

Isabel was born in northern England in 1875. She arrived in Australia prior to the turn of the 19th century and graduated as a nurse from the Alfred Hospital in 1901. In 1902, Isabel was appointed as the Sister-in-Charge of the Consumption Ward at Austin Hospital. Her skills must have been evident early in her career for her to receive such an appointment so shortly following her graduation.

In 1907, Isabel was appointed Matron of the hospital. She brought good bedside care and hygiene learnt during her training at the Alfred Hospital. She introduced methods for the 'prevention of bedsores, a constant look-out for complications and always a sympathetic approach to her patients, all important factors in the recovery of health.' As Matron she insisted on high standards of nursing throughout the hospital.

Up to 1927 the Matron was the dominant figure in the day-to-day supervision of the hospital with all nurses and non-medical staff under her control. In 1927, a Medical Superintendent was appointed and in 1928 a Secretary was appointed and his office was moved to the hospital where he controlled non-medical staff. Matron Marsh resigned soon after, perhaps resenting these alterations to her responsibilities.

While Isabel Grant Marsh brought in a new concept of the duties of a nurse it is interesting to note that as late as 1953 nurses were expected

to clean the lockers, dust the window ledges and tables and 'carbolicise' the beds as well as undertake general nursing duties and tending to their patients.

Isabel retired to her house in nearby Hawdon Street, Heidelberg and it was there that she died of a brain hemorrhage on 23 March 1944 aged 68. She will be remembered as steering and developing the nursing and allied health care staff into a modern service. The Isabel Grant Marsh medal was instituted by the hospital to recognise outstanding nursing services.



Find out more

Gault, E.W. & Lucas, A. *A Century of Compassion: A History of Austin Hospital*, (1982)

Russell, L. R. *From Nightingale to Now: Nurse Education in Australia*, (1990)

Schultz, B. *A Tapestry of Service: The Evolution of Nursing in Australia*, (1991)



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Jan is a professional historian who has worked across the fields of heritage, education and tourism. She has taught at several universities, including Monash University where she delivered the master of public history course. She is also a former Chair of the Heritage Council of Victoria. Jan was appointed to The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust in 2010.



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