

## JOHANNA 'HANNE' TONGE (1867-1937)

### Founder of nursing home in Yarra Glen

Johanna Nink, or "Hanne" as she was called, was born during the gold rush on the Caledonia Diggings. The popular mining spot is now the suburb of St Andrews in Melbourne's north east. Hanne's father Frederick, or Friedrich in his native German, was searching for gold.

Hanne married James Alexander Tonge in 1888 at the age of 21. His skills as a bootmaker meant he found work easily and they moved around Melbourne and Gippsland for a short time until they decided to return to the Yarra Valley to be closer to her family. It seems her widowed mother had fallen ill at the time and she died soon after Hanne had her third child at Yarra Glen.

Hanne and James had eight children and the last five were born at Yarra Glen. All the children attended the Yarra Glen state school. James died in December 1915 when the youngest child, Elsie, was just seven years old. James had been ill for some time as his death notice, placed by Hanne, read "a patient sufferer at rest".

Hanne's nursing skills had been put to good use years earlier when she opened a nursing home at Yarra Glen in 1913 for mothers about to give birth. This allowed her to work from home to provide an income while looking after her sick husband and her young family. There was no hospital in Yarra Glen at this time so local mothers appreciated being able to remain close to their families after giving birth. Many local children were born at 'Nurse Tonge's Nursing Home' over the years.

These years were worrying times for Hanne. Two of her sons, James and Charles had gone to fight in WW1. James returned relatively unscathed in 1919 but Charles was not so lucky. He suffered severe dysentery in Malta, and was wounded and endured gas poisoning in France. He returned in 1919, one month before his brother, but suffered from the effects all his life.

By 1921, Hanne had moved her business over to Healesville, perhaps to reach a wider population than Yarra Glen could provide. When she died in 1937 she was brought back to Yarra Glen to lie beside her husband James at Yarra Glen Cemetery.



#### Find out more

ANMF, *100 Years of Maternal and Child Health Nursing, 1917-2017*, (2017)

Campbell, C. & Proctor, H. *A History of Australian Schooling*, (2014)

Fothergill, D. *Dorothy Fothergill's Memories of Yarra Glen*, (2001)



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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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