

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE5408

Dunlop, Mary Paule

(1893 - 1978)

Born 8 April, 1893, Tuggeranong, Queanbeyan New South Wales Australia

Died 6 May, 1978, SydneySydney New South Wales Australia

Occupation Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) worker, Volunteer, War Worker

Summary

In 1915 Mary Paule Cunningham travelled to England where she trained with the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) and thereafter worked in military hospitals in southern England.

Details

Mary Paule Cunningham was born on 8 April 1893 to Mary Emily Cunningham (née Twynam) and James Cunningham, pastoralist, at the family homestead 'Tuggeranong' near Queanbeyan, New South Wales. She shared a tutor with Kate Campbell of the Yarralumla homestead before attending Ascham School, a progressive independent girls' school then at Darling Point, Sydney .

At Ascham Mary Paule and her sister were keen cricketers, played polo, acted in dramatic productions and were prefects. Family photographs show that at home Mary Paule enjoyed fancy dress parties, family picnics beside the Murrumbidgee River where it ran through their property, and riding with Kate Campbell.

A Twynam cousin remembered Mary Paule and her sisters Tommy and Peggy as the 'golden girls', blessed with money, good looks and confidence (Horsfield, p. 103). But life was not always easy. In December 1910 their eldest sister, Jane Cynthia, died of appendicitis, casting a pall of grief over the family for some time.

By 1914 Mary Paule had left school and was enjoying the society of the district, including polo, tennis, horse riding and the young cadets from the recently opened Royal Military College (RMC) at Duntroon to whom her mother regularly extended hospitality.

Once war broke out, Mary Paule and her sister Tommy were inspired by male friends who joined the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), and by female friends and family who served overseas as nurses or joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment, in which women with no nursing experience provided assistance in military hospitals. In 1915 Mary Paule left home to travel to Britain to train for the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). She worked in hospitals in Colchester. On 23 December 1916 in London Mary Paule married William Archibald Shuldham 'Billy' Dunlop (1892-1966) who she had met when he was among the first intake in mid-1911 at the newly opened Royal Military College, Duntroon near the future site of Canberra. Billy Dunlop got a brief leave from the battlefield in order to marry. Mary Paule's maternal aunt, Phoebe Wesche, who was in London helping in the Soldiers Club for Australian troops in London wrote of the wedding to her sister Mary at Lanyon: 'Our dear little Mary Paule was married to William Archibald Dunlop at St Margaret's Westminster. Dear Ned [Mary Paule's maternal uncle who was serving with the Australian Light Horse] had special leave to attend, and helped make the wedding party a success. A wedding is the only festivity that takes place in London now' (Twynam papers cited in Horsfield, p. 116).

With her sister Tommy, Mary Paule had hoped to join the British Women's' Land Army which had been formed by the Board of Agriculture to ensure food production continued in the absence of three million men who were away fighting, but her maternal grandfather, Edward Twynam, had strictly forbidden it as unsuitable work for young ladies (Twynam family papers cited in Horsfield, p. 197) so she continued her VAD work in military hospitals.

Mary Paule and her husband returned to Australia in 1919 and in 1921 moved to Melbourne with their two children. Their marriage later ended. The Australian electoral rolls show Mary Paule living in Wentworth NSW from 1934 to 1936, and then from 1937 to 1954 she was back in the Eden Monaro area. From the late 1950s, apart from a brief time in the early 1960s in the New England area, she lived in Sydney where she died on 6 May 1978.

Published resources

Book

Mary Cunningham: An Australian Life, Horsfield, Jennifer, 2004

Site Exhibition

Canberra Women in World War I: Community at Home, Nurses Abroad, Clarke, Patricia and Francis, Niki, 2015, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cww1>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Papers of Cunningham family, 1834-1902 \[manuscript\]](#)

[Letters, 1910-1960 \[manuscript\]](#)

Author Details

Niki Francis

Created 26 August 2015

Last modified 22 October 2015