

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: IMP0069

Bidmead, Martha Sarah

(1862 - 1940)

Nationality Australian

Born 5 December, 1862, Guernsey Channel Islands England

Died 23 July, 1940, Payneham South Australia Australia

Occupation Nurse

Summary

Martha Sarah Bidmead was the first South Australian and one of three Australian nurses who were awarded the Royal Red Cross (RRC) medal for service during the Boer War. After her war service she continued her nursing career in South Australia and assumed the position of superintendent of the District Trained Nursing Society of South Australia from 1912 until her retirement in 1926.

Details

Martha Bidmead was the daughter of Thomas Benjamin Bidmead, tobacconist, and Anne, née Mason. She lived in the Channel Islands, until the age of 22, when she and her four sisters migrated to South Australia after the death of both parents. They arrived on 30 April 1885 on the ship the *John Elder*. She embarked upon her nursing career at the Adelaide Children's Hospital in July 1886 and became a charge nurse there from 1887-1889. After nursing privately for eight years, she took up the position of staff nurse at the Burra Burra District Hospital.

Martha Bidmead volunteered for war service when the South Australian Government decided to send a detachment of nurses to the Boer War in 1899. She was in charge of six nurses who sailed from Melbourne on the *Australasian* on 21 February 1900. They worked under the authority of the British Army while in South Africa, but had to report regularly to the South Australian Chief Secretary. The South Australian Government paid their fares and a salary of fifteen shillings a week. Their first attachment was to the Second General Hospital at Winburg, near Cape Town, until June, and then they transferred to the Tenth General Hospital at Bloemfontein, the base of the New South Wales Ambulance Corps. In addition to treating the wounded, they nursed cases of enteric fever and dysentery.

Martha Bidmead related her war experiences through a series of letters she wrote to members of the Nurses' Fund Committee, which were published in the *Adelaide Observer*. She succumbed to illness in March 1901 and after her recovery she worked on light duties at Fifth Stationary Hospital, Bloemfontein, then later took charge of Tenth General Hospital. She was Mentioned in Dispatches twice and awarded the Royal Red Cross medal on 10 December 1901. At the end of 1901 she accompanied wounded servicemen on the hospital ship back to London. She received her medal, with her colleague, Elizabeth Nixon, at St James' Palace, London, 12 March 1902.

After her war service, she resumed her private nursing career in South Australia until she was appointed superintendent of the District Trained Nursing Society of South Australia, which provided home nursing care for the poor. She retired in 1926. Her retirement interests included playing bridge and gardening.

Martha Bidmead died at her home, Guernsey Cottage, which she shared with her sisters, of a neurological disorder on 23 July 1940.

Published resources

Book

Guns and brooches : Australian Army Nursing from the Boer War to the Gulf War, Bassett, Jan, 1992

The Diggers : makers of the Australian military tradition, Coulthard-Clark, Chris, 1993

Resource Section

Bidmead, Martha Sarah (1862-1940), Clark, Rex, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070291b.htm>

Martha Sarah Bidmead,
<http://www.awm.gov.au/database/honours.asp>

Site Exhibition

Faith, Hope and Charity Australian Women and Imperial Honours: 1901-1989, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2003,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/honours/honours.html>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Author Details

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