

Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 41

MARY LIVINGSTONE 1882 - 1974



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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.

Cover Illustration:

At Choubra, Egypt. 1916. Sister Mary Livingstone, Australian Army Nursing Service, in the grounds of the infectious diseases hospital, formerly a civil hospital. This was taken over for military use in August 1915. (Donor JA Bate)

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
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Sister Mary Livingstone

Mary Livingstone was born in 1882 in Cumberland, New South Wales, daughter of Neil Livingstone and Agnes (née Gardiner). One of her sisters was Mrs Flora Merrington, wife of the Minister of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brisbane, Rev Dr Ernest Merrington.¹ Mary's family called her 'Mollie'.

Soon after the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914, Rev Merrington received his appointment as Chaplain to the First Expeditionary Force. In the midst of his preparations for departure, Dr and Mrs Merrington's youngest child only three years old, became very ill. Mrs Merrington's sister came to nurse him. Dr Merrington recalled, "A great trial came to us in the illness of our little son, Harvard, who contracted broncho-pneumonia just at this juncture. Flora's sister, Mollie Livingstone came to nurse him and was a comfort and ministering angel."² It was not till the end of October when his ship was about to depart for Egypt from Albany in Western Australia that Chaplain Merrington learnt by telephone that Harvard was out of danger.

At the age of 30 years, Mary Livingstone herself enlisted in the Australian Army Nursing Service on 3 November 1915 in Brisbane. She named as next-of-kin, another of her sisters, Mrs Agnes Edwards who lived at Rose Bay. Attached to the First Australian General Hospital Unit, Staff Nurse Livingstone embarked for service overseas on His Majesty's Australian Troopship *Orsova* from Sydney.

¹ See *Rev Dr Ernest Merrington*, Booklet number 2 in this series 'Stories from the Honour Boards'.

² EN Merrington, *Memoirs*, page 77

In Egypt in 1916, Staff Nurse Livingstone worked at Choubra Hospital for infectious diseases and at the 14th Auxiliary General Hospital at Abassia.

She transferred from Alexandria, Egypt to England at the beginning of 1917 per Hospital Ship *Essequibo*, thence to France where as Sister Mary Livingstone, she was stationed for the rest of the war at Australian General Hospital locations at Rouen, Wimereux and Boulogne. Mary's brother-in-law, Chaplain Ernest Merrington was stationed at Le Havre in 1918 and was able to arrange for leave to visit his sister-in-law. He wrote of a happy meeting with her near Boulogne. "I found Mollie at the Nurses' Quarters. I went for a drive with her in a cab and it was a very happy time that we spent together sitting in the cab and talking about Flo, the children and our mutual friends. She is looking very well. We both agreed to cable unitedly to Flo, as her birthday is near at hand. I made some purchases for Mollie on the following day and we had lunch together at the Folkstone Hotel. In the afternoon we took a trip to Pont de Briques, then dinner again at the same hotel. ... It was a great joy to meet Mollie and have time to get to know some of her companions."¹

Sister Livingstone returned to Australia per *Devanaha* from England. Her brother-in-law had his sailing altered to allow him to proceed with her on the same ship. It so happened that Chaplain Merrington had gone to Anzac Cove on HMAS *Devanaha* in 1915. On this much happier occasion the band played as they departed from Devonport on 8 May 1919. "Mollie was a great favourite on board," he wrote. "She used to spend much of her time below deck pressing the men's uniforms, although the temperature was almost overpowering."

¹ EN Merrington, *Memoirs*, page 114

“An election was held for a Mock Parliament and Mollie was elected for the Boat Deck constituency at the top of the poll. In the parliament she was appointed to the ministry as Attorney General... We arrived at Port Jackson on 26 June and had a grand welcome from our relatives, whom we soon visited in their own homes.”¹ Mary Livingstone remained in her Sydney home while Ernest Merrington continued via Toowoomba, back to Brisbane and the work of Saint Andrew’s Presbyterian Church.

Sister Livingstone was discharged from the AANS on 18 August 1919 in Sydney. Mollie Livingstone stayed a few weeks with the Merrington family in Brisbane in the latter part of 1919, again to help care for Harvard then 8 years old, who had pneumonia.

In 1926, Mollie was visiting the Merringtons again, this time when Rev Dr Merrington was Minister of the First Church of Otago, New Zealand. “At the beginning of September, Flora’s sister Mollie came from Sydney to stay with us, and we soon took her for some of the favourite drives on Otago Peninsula, to Whare Flat, and a hurried trip to Queenstown, from which we returned ahead of a blizzard that covered Walter and Cecil Peaks with snow to the shore of the lake. Mollie left for Sydney at the end of the month after a very enjoyable visit.”² Family ties were strong. According to Dr Merrington’s diary, Mary Livingstone was visiting the Merringtons again in Wellington in 1934.

Mary Livingstone continued her nursing career in Sydney. She did not marry. Her war service medals were returned to military authorities in August 1960 – the Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal. She died on 14 May 1974, aged 92 years.

¹ EN Merrington, *Memoirs*, page 123

² EN Merrington, *Memoirs*, page 141

Select Bibliography

National Archives of Australia, war records

Ernest N Merrington, *Memoirs*, not published, c 1948

Australian War Memorial, AANS records on line

Compiled by Noel E Adsett, February 2015



Lest we forget