

# LUCY EMMELINE POWER

This talk was first presented by Rosie Hunt, from Bridgetown Historical Society, on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2026 in Memorial Park, Bridgetown. Rosie was dressed in a Staff Nurse's WWI uniform and tells the story in the first person.



## Introduction

In **WWI** more than 3,000 Australian civilian nurses volunteered, with many from Western Australia serving in British nursing services like the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve (QAIMNSR).

I am but one of many to take up the challenge and volunteer my service to assist my countrymen. My name is Lucy Emmeline Power, and I served more than 3 years in the military in WWI as a Staff Nurse posted to Britain, France and the Middle East.

## Birth / Childhood / Immigration

I was born in Rochestown, County Cork, Ireland, on 5 August 1882, to my father John Thomas Power (a baker / grocer) and my mother, Isabella Power (nee Nelson). I was the second-born child of their seven children. I was blessed with six siblings – five sisters and a brother: Elizabeth, Frances, Henry, Isabel, Myra and Wilhelmina. Sadly, Myra passed away aged ten years. Two of my sisters, Elizabeth and Frances also trained as nurses and practised in England.

## Nursing Career

I began my nursing career shortly after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1900 at the North Infirmary General Hospital, Country Cork, completing my qualification in 1903. My education at this time was through

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the Metropolitan Technical School for Nurses. During my training the hospital was run, since 1867, by nuns from the Daughters of Charity and was well-equipped with a modern operating theatre, spacious wards and a highly trained nursing staff. It was founded in 1720; it originally held 24 beds to serve the city's poor and served as a fever hospital in the Great Famine of 1847 as well as housing wounded Irish soldiers in WWI. It became a major healthcare facility but despite extensive public protests and a protest march by 5,000 staff, the hospital was closed on 26 November 1987, by the Irish government. The building was redeveloped into the Maldron Hotel, which opened in 2008, featuring the original staircase and maintaining a high level of historical interest.

It was at this hospital that my interest in midwifery began because of the high mortality rate of infants and mothers during delivery. Statutory regulations for midwifery practice were introduced in Britain in 1902 and extended to midwives trained in Ireland.

## **Immigration**

In 1909 I left with my brother Henry to settle in Australia. I was employed at the newly-opened Bunbury Government Hospital in WA and worked there until late 1913, registering with the Australasian Trained Nurses Association (ATNA). By 1914 I was residing in Hampton Street, Bridgetown and had set up a private nursing home at Spencer Street. I had excellent credentials and was keen to attend patients in their own homes.

## **War Service**

On 18 September 1915, I offered my services to the Australian Army Nursing Service Reserve (AANSR) and was accepted within a reserve force of 150 Australian Nurses that, at this time, were experiencing delays in posting to war service duties. The QAIMNSR eventually contacted the AANS to seek additional nurses to be sent to Britain. I was accepted into the QAIMNSR on 24 November 1915 and was one of only seven Western Australian nurses who embarked from Fremantle WA aboard SS *Ajana* on 23 December 1915, to serve with the British Army Medical Corps. A total of 120 Australian Nurses served in the QAIMNSR in WWI.

I disembarked in England on 10 February 1916 and was posted to the Birmingham War Hospital known as the 1<sup>st</sup> Southern General Hospital. At this time the hospital housed over two thousand beds. Wounded soldiers were conveyed to admission by train. I spent eight weeks in Birmingham before being posted to the 14<sup>th</sup> British General Hospital in Wimereux, France, on 14 April 1916. I was to spend six months at this hospital which was made up of a collection of huts and buildings. During this posting I was also expected to work reliefs at 35<sup>th</sup> British General Hospital at Calais, 35 kms from Wimereux.

On 1 November 1916, I was selected for Sea Transport Duty aboard the Hospital Ship HMHS *Newhaven*. The ship accommodated 4 nurses and was fitted with capacity for approximately 163- 170 patients, comprising 6 officer patients, 19 enlisted men in cots, and 138 in berths. Serving from 7 May 1915 until mid-1917 as a hospital ship, she transported thousands of wounded from France to England sailing between the ports of Newhaven, England and Dieppe, France. I worked with the Sea Transport Section for almost 12 months and during port stopovers worked at local military hospitals.

On 10 December 1917, I was posted to duty at the 83<sup>rd</sup> General Hospital (Dublin) in Boulogne France where I was to remain for more than 12 months. The hospital was comprised of 12 wards set in temporary hut buildings that accommodated up to 30 patients each. The hospital had three specialised units: Maxilla-facial injuries, Eye Injuries, and a Rehabilitation Unit. The 83<sup>rd</sup> Dublin General Hospital in Wimereux, France, was a pivotal location during World War I where pioneering plastic surgery took shape. Under the supervision of Dr Harold Gillies (a NZ ENT Specialist), early creative facial

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reconstruction techniques — including skin and bone grafts — were experimented with by dental surgeon Charles Valadier to treat horrific trench injuries, often attributed as the birth of plastic surgery. Sir Auguste Charles Valadier was a Franco-American dental surgeon who pioneered new techniques and equipment for treating maxillofacial injuries of soldiers during World War I.

Matron in Chief DM Taylor (QAIMNS) was to write a glowing report of me:

*Staff Nurse Power has served under me for a period of 12 months. Her professional ability is up to the standard of her rank. Staff Nurse Power has acted as Sister in Charge of Wards satisfactorily. She is good tempered and works well with those under her: she is suitable for promotion to a higher rank. Staff Nurse Power is reliable, self-reliant and energetic. She has worked chiefly in Medical Wards and has also done holiday duty in Oral Wards (facial maxillary reconstructive surgery) in a very creditable manner, being prompt to act in cases of emergency.*

## **My commanding Officer RAMC wrote 13.01.1919**

*I consider Staff Nurse Power to be a very good Staff Nurse*

## **29.01.1919 – Conclusion “Recommended for promotion”**

*REPORT: health – very good, Conduct – Very Good, Character – practical and self-reliant, Capabilities – a capable nurse, very kind to her patients.*

My contract was terminated 28 January 1919. I was able to spend time with my family in Ireland before returning home to Australia. I embarked from England on 2 May 1919 aboard the SS *Roda* and disembarked in Fremantle on 7 June 1919 having served to the best of my ability. On 8 November 1919, a welcome home celebration was held in my honour in Bridgetown. I was to return to my first love of midwifery in Bridgetown, Greenbushes and the surrounding towns of Manjimup District.

I was honoured to have received the British War Medal and the Victory Medal for services rendered, as were Harry and Henry.

## **Marriage / Husband / Children**

On 5 April 1921 I married local farmer Harry Slingsby (born 11 August 1885 in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, England), who had enlisted for war service on 28 August 1915 from Bridgetown and served in the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion AIF. He was seriously wounded in the left leg at the Battle of Pozieres, France on 22 July 1916 and endured a lengthy period of hospitalisation and rehabilitation in England before being discharged as medically unfit for duty 28 December 1917.

We relocated to the farm property at Donnelly River previously owned by my brother Henry. Henry enlisted for service in the AIF on 8 September 1915, from Bridgetown. Sadly, my brother Henry was tragically killed in action at Pozieres France on 12 August 1916.

Harry and I were blessed to have two sons - Harry was born in 1922 and Albert in 1925. Sadly, I was not to see them grow to manhood. I died suddenly in Manjimup District Hospital on 5 April 1939 (my 18<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary) aged 56. My eldest son, Harry was 17 and Albert (Bert) 14. Both would later enlist to serve in WW2: Harry in the 110 Perth Military Hospital and Bert as a Leading Aircrafts man in RAAF.

My husband Harry sadly died on 8 April 1945, following an accident in Manjimup, six years after my own passing. We are now lie at rest, side by side in the Old Manjimup Cemetery.

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## Career Post war

Post-WWI, I returned to my Midwifery Practice and following my marriage to Harry I reregistered as a Midwife, practising in the Manjimup District until my death in 1939. During this time, I was blessed to deliver more than 600 babies between Bridgetown and Manjimup. I was able to offer my skills to mothers in a district where midwifery was much needed and much appreciated. To witness the beginning of life and not the end. Balancing family life with my dedication to nursing was not always easy, but both roles were deeply important to me. Each birth was a moment of hope and joy, and I felt honoured to support families at such an important time in their lives. My work was not just about delivering babies – it was about caring for mothers, supporting families and strengthening the community. In these rural communities, medical care was not always easy to access, so my role was vital. I travelled long distances, often in difficult conditions, to reach mothers in need.

## Conclusion

**Looking back on my life, I see a journey defined by service, first to my country during war, and then to my community in times of peace. Though the work was demanding, it was also deeply rewarding. I am proud to have played a small part in bringing life, comfort and care to those around me.**

**Lucy Emmeline Power**

## Lest we forget

## General Facts

During WWI, many nurses from the South West of Western Australia volunteered for active service, with some joining Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve (QAIMNSR) alongside the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS). These nurses operated in over 50 locations across eight nations, including England, France, and Egypt, often working in casualty clearing stations near the front line.

**Service Scope:** South West nurses worked on hospital ships, in ambulances, and in temporary, high-risk, and makeshift hospitals, with the average age at enlistment being 30.

The number of casualties during WWI was unprecedented. Firstly, there was the vast size of the armies – 10 million soldiers for the British Empire army alone – and secondly new types of weapons were causing mass, and horrific, injuries. The estimated wounding rate during WWI was 50% for the French, 20% for the British (including 40% for the Australians) and 40% for the Germans.

Some **estimates put the total number of wounded during WWI as 20 million!** Add to this sickness and illness brought on by the harsh conditions in the trenches, the influenza epidemic, psychological damage, then the number of men requiring medical treatment was huge. The medical facilities required to treat the sick and wounded during WWI therefore needed to be on a massive scale, and the process for treatment well-defined and executed. In 1902 the **Australian Army Medical Corps** was formed – only 12 years prior to the onset of WWI, which in turn established the Australian Army Nursing Service Reserve. Approximately **2,300 Australian nurses** served in WWI, most within the AANS with an additional 130 as part of the Queen Alexandria Imperial Military Nursing Service.

The 83rd (Dublin) General Hospital in Boulogne/Wimereux during WWI (formerly No. 13 Stationary Hospital) developed a specialized 50-bed unit for treating face and jaw injuries, led by Sir Auguste Charles Valadier. This unit, established around 1917, was a pioneer in early reconstructive plastic

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surgery and dental care, featuring specialized dental chairs, equipment for jaw splints, and irrigation devices.

**Role in Treatment:** The unit focused on treating severe facial shrapnel wounds and fractured jaws, essential for enabling soldiers to eat and aiding in early reconstruction.

**Location:** While named the 83rd Dublin General Hospital, the facial injury unit was located at Wimereux, near Boulogne on the northern coast of France.

**Staffing:** It was heavily involved in maxillofacial innovation, and the staff was augmented by volunteer staff from Irish hospitals.

**'Oral Wards':** These were essentially specialized, intensive care wards for jaw and facial reconstruction (plastic surgery) rather than standard dentistry.

Valadier, a pioneer in the field, worked to provide immediate surgical intervention in these specialized wards to improve functional and aesthetic outcomes, often conducting 'early' reconstruction that was ahead of its time.

WWI nurses described their work as exhausting, emotionally harrowing, yet deeply rewarding, detailing experiences of working in intense, often dangerous conditions, including bombed casualty clearing stations and under-resourced tents. Diaries and letters reveal deep compassion for wounded soldiers alongside personal terror of the war's violence.