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Their triumph, our motivation

#SASuffrage125



NEWSLETTER 3 of 3

## MARION'S SUFFRAGISTS

Welcome to the *final* Marion's Suffragists newsletter.

We hope you have enjoyed reading the newsletters about the exceptional women who contributed to changing lives through challenging stereotypes and creating better social outcomes for women and the wider community.

Over 100 people enjoyed the Muriel Matters screening with guest speaker Frances Bedford held at the Marion Cultural Centre on Saturday 16 November. For more information about Muriel Matters, please visit the Muriel Matters Society <https://murielmatterssociety.com.au/>

The Marion Heritage Research Centre (MHRC) Coordinator has been busy archiving material and images to finalise the research component of this project. This material will be available for public access in February 2020. We would like to thank the project volunteers for their time and interest in being involved in this project, and for the valuable information sourced for present and future generations about settlement, growth and societal changes for women associated with Marion's history.

## TWO WOMEN WHO MADE NEWSPAPER HEADLINES.



Mary Elizabeth Holden migrated to Australia in 1850 from London. She was the First Matron at the Girls' Reformatory, established by the government in Edwardstown in 1891 and housed 19 girls, aged between 12 to 18.

While committed to the Reformatory, girls carried out all the work required to keep the institution running. This included wood chopping, gardening, milking cows, laundry work and sewing for themselves, the reformatory and for other government institutions. The Annual Report of the State Children's Council for the first year at Edwardstown noted that the girls were 'unsettled' on first moving to their new premises and that 'one or two of the worst girls absconded, but were returned'. During those first 12 years there were forty escapes, a suicide attempt and a fire which destroyed the laundry building.

In 1897-1898, due to the continuing large number of escapes, girls were removed from the Edwardstown Reformatory and separated into two groups, according to their religious denomination. The Catholic girls were sent to the Catholic Girls' Reformatory at Kapunda in June 1897. In January 1898 the first 30 Protestant girls were transferred from Edwardstown to Redruth along with the resident matron, Mary Elizabeth Holden. She remained there until her retirement in 1909. The Girls' Reformatory at Edwardstown closed in 1898.

A permanent historical display at the now heritage listed building reports that her time was 'one of the most lively periods of the reformatory.'

Mary was the widow of Alexander Holden who was the businessman who founded the South Australian company which eventually produced the Holden automobile. They had six children. Mary was declared insolvent in 1895 roughly a year after her husband died. She died in 1914, age 76 at the Nursing Home Kensington. Her son Mr J. H. Holden was the current Mayor of Norwood. Her death notice in the newspaper included 'she was an intellectual and energetic woman, and took great interest in work of a philanthropic nature. Her husband and she were foundation members of the Flinders Street Baptist Church.'

Sources State Records South Australia

<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/guide/sa/SE00065#tab1>

First published by the Find & Connect Web Resource Project for the Commonwealth of Australia, 2011

Express and Telegraph (Adelaide, SA : 1867 - 1922), Wednesday 9 October 1895, page 2

This project is funded by the Office for Women, Department of Human Services

**FLORANCE TURNER**

Florence was placed in the Girls Reformatory by her parents in 1891 at age 14 as she “runs the streets” and they were unable to control her. Florence was boarded-out twice and both times returned to the Reformatory due to ‘misconduct’. On her return in 1895 she was punished by Matron Mary Holden, and Florence and her father sued Mrs Holden for assault and unlawful imprisonment after having her hair cut off. The case was thrown out of the Local Court but appeared in the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court found that the Matron returned her to the Reformatory without consent and that cutting Florence’s hair to ‘quieten her’ was assault.

Florence was released from state care when she turned 18 and married the following year, later having three daughters. She and her mother worked together as midwifery nurse and licensed midwife, appearing in the press in 1911 giving evidence in a neglected child case.

The defence of Florence Turner promoted a number of changes to the regulations governing the reformatories, including barring girls hair being cropped as a punishment.

The case of Florence Turner versus Matron Mary Holden made headlines in the newspapers, with several articles and letters supporting Mary Holden’s character. There was a ‘Meeting of Sympathizers with the Matron’ held at the YMCA where attendees rallied to support Mary and to lobby Government on her behalf.

Ultimately, the altercations between Mary Holden and Florence Turner resulted in progress to law reforms to benefit women in society.

Sources: State Library of South Australia Evening Journal (Adelaide, SA : 1869 - 1912), Friday 9 August 1895, page 2

Burra Record (SA : 1878 - 1954), Wednesday 22 April 1914, page 2 (2)

**SUFFRAGISTS AND THE WOMEN WORKERS' UNIONS**

Mrs. Strongmind : “If women would only stand shoulder to shoulder they would soon win the suffrage.”  
Dr. Guffy : “But, Madam, that is something they can’t do, with the present styles in sleeves !”



Figure 3.—Boating Dress.

You could be forgiven for thinking that the right to vote ended women’s political problems. You would, however, be dead wrong. The right to vote in South Australia opened a minefield of questions about a woman’s rights. One of the most prominent post-vote suffragist movements was the Women Workers’ Unions. These campaigned for the rights of women as employees to safe working conditions and equal pay.

Archived South Australian newspapers tell a multitude of stories from South Australian women. Letters to the editor, information regarding Women’s Associations, articles about the mishandling of women’s rights and replies to anti-suffragists were among the many stories of the post-vote suffragists. These came from people of different backgrounds, including factory workers, domestic workers, hospital and asylum nurses, women in restaurants, women who worked in public transport and many more. The Women Workers’ Unions also provided suggestions and help for women emigrants to South Australia. The Women Workers’ Unions aimed to hold men, in positions of power, accountable for both the mistreatment of women and to bring attention to political, work and eventually social rights of women.

In the South Australian newspapers, women consistently provided rational arguments backed up by evidence, regarding the inequality of women workers. The Women Workers’ Unions supported women from different economic and social classes, claiming that, as women their plight was unified. Post-vote suffragists worked hard to challenge societal norms as well as to gain independence and equality for women in South Australia.

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## WOMEN WHO SERVED IN WORLD WARS

Women were involved and affected by war through various kinds of support both at home and overseas. They fundraised to provide comfort packages, stepped in to replace jobs traditionally performed by men including farming. They took care of families through a time of food and clothes rationing and served as nurses, telegraphists, drivers, aircraft ground staff, signals operators and clerical staff.

### MARY DWYER



Source Trove Newspaper

Mary was born in 1888, the second of four children to William and Mary Ann Dwyer. Her father was Manager of the Oaklands estate. Mary was educated in Marion where the population was largely English, Irish, Scottish and German heritage, amongst other early settlers. Mary trained to become a nurse and enlisted for duty at the front during World War I, at a time when young ladies' eyes were sheltered from grisly sights and experiences. Mary sailed overseas from Melbourne on board HMAT Nestor on 11 October 1915 and spent time working at hospitals in France. Near the end of the war she had periods of sick leave due to influenza. She returned to Adelaide in February 1920.

Mary received many service awards for her valuable nursing services and her courageous and strenuous work, including two Oak Leaves to pin with her medals, being Mentioned in Despatches, and the 1914-15 Bronze Star, the Victory Medal and the British War Medal.

## THE MARION DISTRICT



Source MHRC

Of the many women who lived in Marion, some made the headlines and some did not make the headlines at the time but played important roles in building the fabric of community life through being ahead of their time and acting as strong female role models. Some of these women and their roles are listed below.

Ruth Heathcock was a remote area nurse who worked with Aboriginal people in the NT and was named Pitjiri in 1936 by Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land, meaning 'a snake that floats on water and will not sink'. Ruth received an Order of the British Empire for bravery in 1951 and Marion Council Citizen of the Year in 1988.

## MIDWIVES AND WOMEN WHO WERE 'AS GOOD AS A DOCTOR'

Mrs Thredgold whose home became a maternity hospital, Mrs Keane, Mrs Pitman, Minnie Easterbrook and Mrs 'Nurse' Rodda.

Teachers at the early local and Sunday schools include Emma Lockwood, Rebecca McCloud, Jane Shepherd and Linda & Ruby Mason at Christ Church Day School, O'Halloran Hill, Wyn Western at the Methodist Sunday School, Jane Neilson at one of the earliest schools in Darlington). Miss Anne Gadd who would walk each week from Reynella to Hallett Cove to teach children at their home, Miss A S Grant who would visit the girls in the Edwardstown Girls Reformatory, Catherine Allert at St Marys school, Helen Lewin at Edwardstown, the Sisters of Saint Joseph who taught the local Catholic children, and Annie Doolan, who lived in Annie Doolan's cottage and supported the local community and maintained St Ann's church.

Source for women's workers text  
Melissa Peters,  
MHRC Volunteer & Researcher

Mary Dwyer source Elaine Beales,  
MHRC Project Volunteer

Source The History of Marion on the  
Sturt, book by Alison Dolling, Published  
1981

### POSTMISTRESSES AND SHOP-KEEPERS

Mrs Ellen Elsegood, Mrs Shearing, Ada Gosling, Elizabeth & Eliza Parker, Miss Olive Breuner and Miss Inglis. Mrs E M Johns 'who drove her cows across paddocks in her big boots and sun bonnet', in the 1920s.

### THE ART PROJECT

A tiled wall will commemorate the Marion's Suffragists project in 2020. For more information about this please contact Anne Minion, Team Leader Community Hubs on M 0466 507 836

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To find out more about the Marion's Suffragists project extensive research please contact the Marion Heritage Research Centre next to the Council Administration Office at 245 Sturt Road, Sturt.

Tel 7420 6455

Email [heritage@marion.sa.gov.au](mailto:heritage@marion.sa.gov.au)

Website <https://www.marion.sa.gov.au/venues-and-facilities/marion-heritage-research-centre>

If you have any information or photos you think relate to this project or Marion's history please contact us.



### CONTACT DETAILS

Please pick up a copy of the Marion's Suffragists newsletters to keep informed about the project from

- › Glandore Community Centre, Cooina, Mitchell Park and Trott Park Neighbourhood Centres
- › Park Holme and Marion Libraries, Cove Civic Centre, Living Kurna Cultural Centre, Marion Cultural Centre and Marion Heritage Research Centre.
- › CoM website: [www.marion.sa.gov.au/womenssuffrage](http://www.marion.sa.gov.au/womenssuffrage)

**Contact Elizabeth Sykora, Cultural Development Officer T 7420 6514 or email [elizabeth.sykora@marion.sa.gov.au](mailto:elizabeth.sykora@marion.sa.gov.au)**