Midwifery Training at Warrnambool Base Hospital

1931 to 1940

A partial recount by Amy Wilton

A collection of information from Annual Reports and a recount from trainee nurse Amy Wilton

The 1929 Annual Report stated that it was hoped that the Maternity Ward would soon be registered as a Training School for Midwives. By 1931 Sister Hance was appointed Sister in Charge of the Midwifery Ward and in the following year Nurses N.V. Harris, A.I. Osmond, F. McDonald and B.W. McGregor passed their Midwifery examinations.

The Annual Report of 1933 indicated that Nurses D. Bennett, P.B. Westwood, M.V. Matthews and A. Fisher had gained their certificate.
By 1934 births per year reached 195. Seven midwives were successful with their examinations, namely Nurses F. McDonald, J.L. Watt, M.P. McPhee, N.M. Pilley, M.V. Ratcliffe, L.J. McLaren and M.E. Howard.

Miss Griffiths, the Matron who had much influence on the progress of the Midwifery Training School resigned and her position was filled by Miss J.M. Little. This was 1935 and students who passed were Nurses J. Hudson, A. Dixon, L. Langdon, A.E. Wilton, and M. Hare.

Amy Wilton (now Mrs R. Wade) writing of her Midwifery Training period stated *"I finished my General Training on the 6th April 1934, and went straight into Midwifery. It was a nine month course and the School at Warrnambool had not been functioning very long then. Dr Buzzard was responsible for its beginning with Matron Griffiths and Thelma Hance. Gwen Brooks, a Ballarat trainee, was night sister in charge of General Wards and I think become sister of the Midwifery School when I trained. She was a dear person who was very deaf and resigned just before I finished and a Sister Faneco from Ararat was appointed.*
We had to work very hard, in fact it was almost slavery!! We washed all the babies' napkins, and even the patient's pads. I can remember being on night duty when we had 32 Mothers and babes!! This was

something of a record, and the average number would be sixteen to twenty. I think we had four day and two night duty trainees and I am nearly certain we were not paid any money. General trainees from other hospitals had to pay a premium for the privilege of doing their training (that is at W.B.H.). We had to deliver forty babies during the training period".

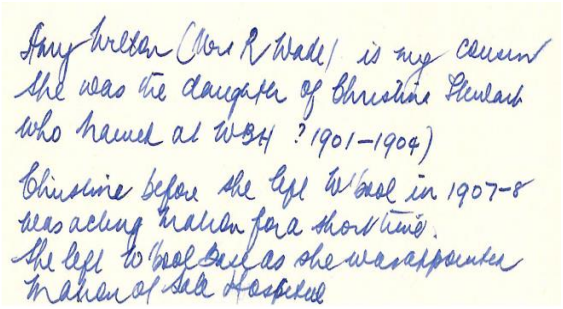
Amy's comments, relating to the number of patients in the Maternity Ward are related to the number of babies born in 1935-1936, no less than 221. (N.B. The number of babies born 50 years later was 425). Those who passed their examination in 1936 were Nurses M. Wright, T. Vollprecht, P. Chatles, L. McKellar, L. Paton, P. Greenwood, M. Cheshire, and B. Brown.

Those who passed in 1938 were Nurses E. Podger (thought to be the first married student), M. Curran, E. Treloar, and H. Bayley.

The 1939 report listed the name of the last students to complete their Midwifery Training namely Nurses M.A. Bayley, M. Wilton, A. Brown, H.M.V. Patterson, B.M. Wines and D.S. Rurade. This report records the opening of the Marcus Saltau Block.

It would appear that with the outbreak of World War II, Midwifery Training ceased. 1940 sae the appointment of Miss Thelma Proctor-Brown as Matron, Miss Little had resigned to accept a similar position at the Ballarat Base Hospital.

Note from donor of original copy (Amy Wilton's cousin)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