

# Camden Red Cross Heroes

By Julie Wrigley

*In 2014 the Camden Red Cross Branch will be commemorating 100 years of service. In 1984 Agnes Roberts wrote the booklet "70 Years of Red Cross in Camden". This is an extract from the booklet.*

On 14 August 1914, in the week following the outbreak of World War I, at a meeting convened by the Mayoress, Mrs Young. Camden branch of the Australian Red Cross Society was formed – the first Branch in NSW outside Sydney.

A great wave of patriotism swept the county, and Camden district women (and men) came "with whole-hearted support beyond all expectations" to send everything possible to "the old country" and to our soldiers on overseas battlegrounds. Clothing of all kinds, tobacco, eggs (for London's food shortages) rolled in, even feathers for pillows ("Will those having poultry for Christmas please remember to save the feathers") appeared in the minutes of the time. Sewing meetings, every Tuesday afternoon, were held in the School of Arts [now the Camden Library], with as many as one hundred gathering to make up pyjamas, shirts, hankies, etc; Mrs Street alone, it is recorded, cutting out 1000 shirts. In October 1915, the "billies", costing five-and-a-half pence each, filled with Christmas cheer for our men at Gallipoli, were dispatched.



Red Cross ladies organising a street stall in Argyle Street, Camden, about 1917

For Camden's first year of Red Cross, 4000 garments were sent, and the sum of £2,145 raised – a huge total for those days when three pence was regarded as a worthy donation. A familiar sight outside "Whiteman's" was the weekly produce stall to which Camden folk generously donated for 56 years.

Many hours of hospital work, mainly at "Waley's" (Mowbray Park) and Camden were undertaken by the newly formed Voluntary

Aids, under the leadership of Miss Mary McIntosh. During the war years Camden Red Cross membership averaged 125 with an annual average of 3363 articles dispatched. An extract from the Sydney Morning Herald of 1916 reads, "The work of the Camden Branch of the Red Cross is a record of fine achievement, and perhaps nowhere else in the State, when population is considered, has there been greater enthusiasm, or better results."

The booklet also included a Red Cross Camden Branch Honour Roll:

**Miss Sibella Macarthur Onslow.** Foundation Honorary Secretary 1914-1927. President 1927 to her death in 1943. Vice President NSW Division. Awarded Jubilee Medal in 1935 and honoured by King George V as Companion of the British Empire for her services to country and community.

**Mrs G F Furner.** President 1915-1926. Vice President to her death in 1932.

**Mrs W H Faithfull Anderson.** Foundation member. Patron 1945-1948.

**Miss Clarice Faithfull Anderson.** Foundation member. Long Service Medal in 1951. Patron 1948 to her death in 1979.

**Mrs E A Davies.** Foundation member. Treasurer 1924-1955 for a record term of 31 years. Made Life Member in 1955.

**Mrs R E Jefferis.** President 1943-1954. Made Life Member 1955.

**Mrs O Powe.** Foundation member. Awarded Laurel Wreath and Gilt Rosette for 60 Years of Active Service in 1975.

The first three Camden Branch Presidents who were the most influential at a local level up to 1945 were:

**Mrs R E Young** 1914-1915, **Mrs G F Furner** 1915-1926, and **Miss Sibella Macarthur Onslow** 1927-1943.

Two other local residents who were very active supporters of the Red Cross were:

**Enid Macarthur Onslow** (1868-1952) undertook a high level of involvement in the Red Cross at a state level throughout her life. She served on state division Committees of the Red Cross in the period from 1914 to 1939. She was active in the Junior Red Cross Movement and was a member of the NSW Executive Committee of the JRC from 1924 to 1938. Before she attended the British Empire Red Cross Conference in London in May 1930 as the NSW delegate, she was farewelled at the Sydney Town Hall by over 200 Red Cross members.

**Miss Llewella Davies** (1901-2000) was a tireless volunteer. She was part of the Camden Voluntary Aid Detachment in World War II and was Red Cross Treasurer for many years from 1961, taking over the role from her mother. Davies was a stalwart of numerous Camden organisations over the many decades of her life, and was awarded her Medal in the Order of Australia in 1981. In 1992 the council presented her with the keys to the town, conferring on her the Freedom of the Town.

At the Camden Museum there is an interesting new exhibition telling “the Story of the Camden District Red Cross in War and Peace”. The exhibition has been supported through funding from the Australian Government’s *Your Community Heritage Program*. A book by Dr Ian Willis is in publication and will be available from the Museum in 2014. The colourful exhibition includes many photos, a spinning wheel from World War I and Red Cross recruitment posters from World War II. The Museum is open from Thursdays to Sundays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.