Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0634

Glowrey, Mary

(1887 - 1957)

Born	18870623, Birregurra Victoria Australia
Died	19570505, Bangalore India
Occupation	Doctor, Religious Sister

Summary

On 29 November 1924 a ceremony of the Perpetual Profession of Dr Mary Glowrey, now Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart took place in the Church of St Agnes at Guntur (India). Mary Glowrey, who completed her medical training at the University of Melbourne, (MBBS 1910, MD 1919), was the first president of the Catholic Women’s Social Guild (now Catholic Women’s League). After receiving assurance from the Pope that she would be allowed to continue in her profession, Glowrey left Melbourne for India in 1920. At this time nuns were still prevented from practising medicine, She entered the Society of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, a Dutch order of nuns and spent the next 37 years involved with medical work in Guntur, India. Glowrey House, the Catholic Women’s League headquarters in Nicholson Street, Fitzroy, is named in her honour.

Details

Mary Glowrey, the third of nine children, spent most of her childhood in the Mallee at Watchem in country Victoria. Her mother provided the children with domestic and religious education, but she received the major part of her primary education at the local state school when it was established. She was confirmed in the Catholic Church at the age of nine. Her parents encouraged their children to continue their education and Glowrey trained as a pupil teacher at the local primary school before winning a state secondary scholarship to attend the South Melbourne College. She boarded at the Good Shepherd Convent, Rosary Place, South Melbourne. She won a University Exhibition and proceeded to the University of Melbourne to complete a BA degree, but was persuaded to transfer to medicine, graduating MBBS in 1910.

Her first medical appointment was to the Christchurch Hospital New Zealand in 1911 as resident doctor. She was the first medical woman to be granted an appointment in New Zealand. On her return to Australia the following year, she took up a position at the Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital. She later set up in private practice in Collins Street, Melbourne, but continued to assist at the Eye and Ear Hospital and also became Physician to out-patients at St Vincent's Hospital, the Catholic public hospital in Melbourne.

In 1915 she was inspired by the work of Dr Agnes McLaren, an English pioneer medical woman who had become a Catholic at age 61 and went to India at age 72 to establish a Catholic hospital for the care of Indian women. Glowrey decided that God had called her to go to India to improve the health of Indian women, but had to wait until the end of World War One to achieve her goal.

During the period from 1916-1919, she became founding president of the Catholic Women's Social Guild and, at the same time, to prepare herself for her work in India, continued her medical studies in the fields of gynaecology, obstetrics and ophthalmology.

She left Melbourne on the ship 'Orsova' for India on 21 January 1920, arrived in Madras on 11 February 1920 and reached Guntur the following day. She was received into the Order of the Sisters of the Society of Jesus, Mary and Joseph on 28 November 1920 and became the first nun-doctor missionary. She had to gain special permission from Pope Pius XI to perform her medical mission work, for nuns had not been permitted to practice as doctors. She took on the name of Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart.

She worked for the next 37 years in India to establish a Catholic Medical College, but did not live to see the St Johns's Medical College Bangalore open in 1963.

Mary Glowrey died in Bangalore on 5 May 1957.

Events

2019 - 2019
Glowrey Catholic Primary School opened in Wollert, Victoria, named in honour of Mary Glowrey

2015 - 2015
Inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women

Published resources

Journal Article
Tributes to a Medical Missionary Pioneer: Dr Mary Glowrey (Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart) - First C.W.S.G. President, Brennan, Anna T, 1957

Book
Horizon in retrospect, 1916-1986, 1985

Australian medical nun in India: Mary Glowrey, M. D. Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart, Society of Jesus, Mary Joseph, Clinton, Ursula, 1967

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition
The Encyclopedia of Women and Leadership in Twentieth-Century Australia, Smart, Judith and Swain, Shurlee (eds.), 2014,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders

Archival resources

Mary Glowrey House
Mary Glowrey papers

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