

Grace Wilson Estate, Brisbane

IN HONOUR OF A LOVED AND RESPECTED LEADER...



Defence Housing
AUSTRALIA

26 JUNE 2007

In honour of Grace Margaret Wilson, 1879–1957

Defence Housing Australia (DHA) is proud of its role in providing quality housing solutions for members of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and their families.

Today marks the opening of the Grace Wilson Estate, a DHA housing development providing 50 new, high-quality homes to ADF members and their families in the McDowall area.

This development is dedicated to Grace Margaret Wilson — a loved and respected leader.

Grace Wilson served in the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) in both World War 1 and World War 2. She was a self-disciplined leader described by many as having a rare quality that inspired deep and lasting loyalty. Grace Wilson had a sympathetic ear for her nurses and a determination to improve their conditions and training. She regarded it as a privilege to help the 'bright and brave' wounded soldiers and, with her great gift for living, was an inspiration to nurses and soldiers alike.

The AANS played a vital role in both wars, and DHA is pleased that through developments such as Grace Wilson Estate, it is able to commemorate the vital contribution of the ADF to defending Australia and securing our way of life.

Australians are very proud of the work being done by our Army, Navy and Air Force personnel. Naming DHA housing developments after war heroes is one way in which we can honour and remember those whose courage and sacrifice is an inspiration to us all.

Early Days

Grace Margaret Wilson was born in 1879 in South Brisbane and educated at Brisbane Girls Grammar School. She undertook general nurse training at the Brisbane General Hospital, where she was the first nurse to receive the hospital's Gold Medal Prize. She then went to England for six years, obtaining her midwifery certificate at Queen Charlotte's Hospital and working as a Sister at the Albany Memorial Hospital in London. On her return to Australia, she became Matron of the Brisbane General Hospital where she was working when the First World War began.



Landscaped parks include playgrounds and barbeque facilities



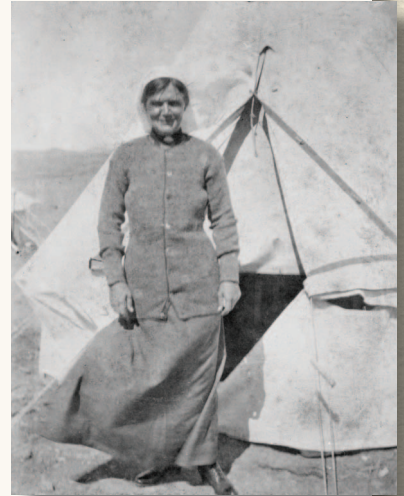
The different house designs reflect the character of the local region

World War I

Joining the Australian Army Nursing Service in 1914, Grace Wilson headed to England as principal matron of the 3rd Australian General Hospital the following year, hoping to 'make some difference' to the care of war wounded.

In August 1915, the 3rd Australian General Hospital was transferred to Lemnos Island near Gallipoli to treat Anzac casualties. However, they spent several frustrating days waiting off-shore for the signal to start work, as Grace Wilson explained in a letter home:

'Things are just too awful for words. It is dreadful to think we have done nothing yet... This is about 40 miles from the firing line. We are the first women to come so far, except for the Sisters on the hospital ships. This waiting exhausts our spirits and roughing it will be beyond description. If you can imagine at present a bare piece of ground, covered with stones, from the size of pebbles to boulders—the men in their clothes lying on it—waiting—and we Sisters imprisoned on a ship opposite, also waiting and doing nothing...'



*Portrait of Matron Grace Margaret Wilson outside her 'office' at the 3rd Australian General Hospital, Lemnos, 1915
(donated by C Weedon)*

Lemnos Island

When Grace Wilson and her staff finally set foot on the exposed rocky slopes of Lemnos, their equipment and supplies were delayed, the 'hospital' consisted of just a few tents and mattresses, there were no beds and only spirit lamps for cooking and sterilising. She described the scene in her diary:

'...dust and heat appalling. Found 150 patients, lying on the ground —no equipment whatever—did best we could—have tents ourselves but no beds or mattresses. Had no water to drink or wash.'



*Holding a parasol and notebook, Matron (Margaret) Grace Wilson 'does a round', Lemnos 1915
(donated by C Weedon)*

Grace Wilson Estate, Brisbane

Within days, she wrote in her diary of hundreds more patients arriving:

'Very many badly shattered, nearly all stretcher cases...Tents were erected over them as quickly as possible...All we can do is feed them and dress their wounds. They beg to be washed, but we have no water...They are all so bright and brave.'

Typhoid and dysentery added complications for patients and hospital staff. Winter brought howling winds, rain and mud. Many soldiers and some nurses suffered frostbite. Despite all the difficulties, the hospital's mortality rate was only two per cent.

Under Grace Wilson's leadership, the nurses emerged from Lemnos with great honour. They managed to deal with the primitive conditions, creating order out of chaos and proving their worth time and time again. They worked extremely long hours, learnt new techniques developed to help cope with the wounded and at times handled minor surgery. They improvised when necessary, sometimes using up their own provisions for their patients. They existed on meagre rations and kept themselves warm in winter with a motley combination of uniforms, gum boots, riding breeches, men's woollen socks, sheepskin coats and assorted hats. Always, they placed patient care first regardless of the cost to themselves.

Leading by example under the extreme conditions, Grace Wilson inspired great admiration and respect from her nurses, as Sister Selwyn Smith explained:

'At times I think we could not have carried on without her. She was not only a capable Matron, but what is more, a woman of understanding. She saw and understood many things without having to be told—and she was very human too.'

In a report on the work of Grace Wilson and the nurses of Lemnos, the Director-General, Australian Army Medical Corps said:

'She was the best of all our Matrons, was Miss G Wilson...I believe the hospital would have collapsed but for the Nurses. They all worked like Demons ... Every one of these nurses deserves the greatest credit. They were the first women on Lemnos by a long way—lived in tents, lived on tinned meat and biscuits, no baths, no conveniences and when it rained, mud up to their knees. But they never grumbled.'

*A group portrait of the Matron and Sisters
of the 3rd Australian General Hospital,
with Grace Wilson in the dark uniform,
June 1918*



'Miss Wilson had that rare quality which inspired deep and lasting loyalty and drew forth from very many of those who worked with her their finest efforts. She provided opportunity for, and helped in the development of, a broad and tolerant philosophy and an intense interest in the well-being of patients, and of the nursing profession in general.'

Miss GN Burbidge, OBE, Matron, Fairfield Hospital, Fairfield
UNA Nursing Journal, January 1957

After Lemnos

After Lemnos, Grace Wilson went with her unit to Egypt, England, and finally, France until September 1917 when she was posted to London as temporary Matron in Chief. While enjoying the administrative experience, she missed her 'family' at the 3rd Australian General Hospital and was glad to return there in April 1918. Her judgement, tact and ability always ensured a high standard of conduct.

Armistice

On 11 November 1918, Grace Wilson reflected in her diary on the signing of the Armistice:

'The Armistice was signed today. It is good to know the fighting is over and that the end is as it is. The four years have not gone for nothing and the price paid by the boys has gained this...they gave us all they had and they know now—not in vain. I hope none of us will ever allow ourselves to forget.'



Group portrait of three medical officers and nursing sisters of the 3rd Australian General Hospital grouped in a courtyard at the hospital, with Grace Wilson front row centre (donated by J A Dick)

'As a member of the nursing profession, her greatest love was the Army Nursing Service, the service she did so much to establish and of which was the leader for nearly 20 years—a leader loved and respected by men and women alike and who by her fine example, self-discipline and kindly understanding, set a standard second to no other service of its kind. A great women, a grand soldier, one we were privileged to love and proud to serve...'

Miss AM Sage, CBE, RRC, former Matron in Chief,
Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps

UNA Nursing Journal January 1957

Grace Wilson Estate, Brisbane

After her hospital was dismantled in May 1919, Grace Wilson was posted to the 3rd Australian Auxiliary Hospital at Dartford, Kent, before returning home to Queensland. For her efforts during the war, Grace Wilson was mentioned in several dispatches, awarded the Royal Red Cross and made Commander of the British Empire in 1919.

Between the wars

After the war, she took on the role of Matron of the (then) Children's Hospital, Melbourne. She improved conditions for nurses, including winning trainees a nominal wage. Two years later she resigned and bought the Somerset House Private Hospital in East Melbourne.

In 1929, Grace Wilson was awarded the Florence Nightingale Medal for her service to nursing. In 1933 she was appointed Matron of the Alfred Hospital. Determined to improve the standard of nursing, she formed a training school committee, appointed two tutor sisters and introduced an orientation course for probationers. During her civilian career, Grace Wilson remained dedicated to the Australian Army Nursing Service reserves and was appointed Matron in Chief in 1925. Along with other returned nurses who held senior positions in training and other hospitals, she was a major influence on many of the young nurses who signed up as Australian Army Nursing Service reserves in the years between the wars.

World War 2

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Grace Wilson resigned from the Alfred Hospital to take up the appointment of Matron in Chief, Australian Imperial Force. She again travelled overseas—on active service with the Australian Forces in the Middle East from 1940 to 1941. Forced to return to Australia due to ill health, she became the executive officer of the Nursing Control Section of the Manpower Directorate for the remainder of the war years.

Retirement

Even in retirement, Grace Wilson continued to be actively involved in various returned nurses and RSL activities, as well as the Girl Guides, Red Cross and nursing associations. In 1953, she was the first woman to be made a life member of the RSL (then officially called the Returned Sailors' Soldiers' and Airmens Imperial League of Australia).

'It was at the 1953 Annual Conference of the RSL that the returned men's affection for her found expression. When she mounted the platform to receive the highest honour the RSL could bestow—the award of Life Membership by Conference—475 delegates from all parts of Victoria jumped to their feet and cheered until the Chairman had to sit them down to proceed with the award.'

Mr CH McKay, CBE State President, Victorian Branch
RSS and AILA

UNA Nursing Journal, January 1957

Grace Wilson Estate, Brisbane

Grace Wilson married Robert Campbell in London in 1954. She died in 1957 in Melbourne and was remembered at a service with full military honours.

Grace Wilson Estate

The \$17.5 million Grace Wilson Estate, completed in June 2007, provides 50 new homes for ADF members and their families at Rode Road, McDowall, Brisbane.

Bounded by Trouts, Keona and Rode Road in McDowall, Grace Wilson Estate adjoins an established residential area with easy access to community facilities, schools and parks, and is close to the Enoggera Army Base.

The modern homes are set in parkland with the overall design and landscaping creating a strong sense of community. Two landscaped parks include barbeque facilities and playgrounds.

Existing watercourses have been rehabilitated with local native species. Natural drainage paths support best practice water-sensitive urban design principles.

There are 40 conventional housing lot sizes and 10 smaller lots overlooking the parkland areas. Each lot has been carefully landscaped to provide privacy, shade and a setting for large outdoor living areas. Low maintenance plants have been chosen for their seasonal and water-sensitive qualities.



Sensitive landscaping provides privacy, shade and large outdoor living areas



Homes on Estate have been designed for the Brisbane climate

The estate features seven different house designs. The variety of house types and colour schemes reflects the regional character of South East Queensland. Each house has been designed specifically for the Brisbane climate, with features including four bedrooms, double garaging, ensuite, living areas and covered outdoor entertainment areas. Houses are sited and designed to conserve energy and non-renewable resources.

DHA has consulted with the local community and worked closely with the Brisbane City Council and other key stakeholders to design this unique development.

All properties in the Grace Wilson Estate have now been allocated to ADF families.



Grace Wilson Estate has been designed to create a strong sense of community

Produced by Defence Housing Australia to mark the official opening of Grace Wilson Estate in Brisbane on 26 June 2007.

Images of Grace Wilson reproduced with the permission of the Australian War Memorial.

Australian War Memorial negative numbers: 044618, A05331, A05332, E02578, J01654.

DHA appreciates the assistance of Grace Wilson's family and the Commemorations Branch, Department of Veterans' Affairs, in researching and preparing this text.