Nurses & midwives in Australian history: a guide to historical sources

by Noeline Kyle, R Lynette Russell and Jennifer Blundell

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Nursing and midwifery have been the occupations of women for centuries and almost every one of us will find an ancestor who engaged in these traditional feminine pursuits.

This book, written by experts in nursing history, women’s history and family history, provides practical advice on how to research the lives of nurses and midwives, the hospitals they trained and worked in, and is a guide to the many public and private repositories where sources are found in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Nurses and midwives worked in hospitals, refuges, asylums, prisons, charitable institutions and were pioneers of bush nursing, established maternity hospitals and were often important health providers in small communities in past decades. The records of their lives are found in a wide range of places, and as well as online and digitised records, this book also points the researcher toward the myriad of documentary and private records which are useful for writing their lives.

The authors:

Dr Noeline Kyle’s books include We should’ve listened to Grandma: women and family history, (1988), Memories & dreams: a biography of Nurse Mary Kirkpatrick, (2001); Writing family history made very easy (2007) and How to write & publish your family story in ten easy steps (2011). Recent books with Unlock the Past are Finding Florence, Maude, Matilda, Rose: researching and writing about women in family history (2013) and Citing historical sources: a manual for family historians (2013). Since retirement from university teaching in 2001 Noeline continues to support the profession of history and family historians through her writing and her website www.writingfamilyhistory.com.au.

Dr R Lynette Russell AO, FACN, is a registered nurse and certified midwife and holds a Diploma of Nursing Education (NSWCN). Her books include From Nightingale to now: nurse education in Australia (1990) and (with Judith A Cornell) A vision for the bush; the NSW Bush Nursing Association 1911–1974 (2012). Lynette has extensive experience as a clinical nurse, nurse educator and academic historian within the health care and higher education sector. Dr Russell’s research expertise centres on the history of nursing and the health care sector, particularly in Australia. Lynette is an Emeritus Professor, The University of Sydney, and Director of the Nursing History Research Unit (NHRU) and former Foundation Dean, Faculty of Nursing (and Midwifery) at that University.

Dr Jennifer Blundell is a registered nurse with a background in neuroscience nursing and a lifelong interest in history. She has an interest in the development of nursing practice and research and has published and presented in relation to the effects of scientific development on neuroscience nursing and patient care. Jennifer is the archivist for the Australasian Neuroscience Nurses Association and has an interest in family history and nursing history research. She is currently engaged in further study and research in historical research methods and writing.