

Lilian Cooper (1861-1947)



Portrait of Doctor Lilian Violet Cooper, 1861-1947. John Oxley Collection, State Library of Queensland neg No 185958

Lillian was the first female doctor in Brisbane. Born and raised in England Lillian was educated at home. As a teenager Lillian knew she wanted to be a doctor. Her parents opposed any idea of further study or the pursuit of a career encouraging her to stay home until she married.

Lillian was 29 years of age when she graduated from the London School of Medicine for Women in 1890. Lillian arrived in Brisbane the year after in 1891 setting up practice in the city. Her specialty was the *Diseases of Women and Children*.

Lillian travelled to patients doing home visits in a horse and cart. She became widely respected for her kindness especially during the great floods of 1893, and more importantly respected for her medical expertise including her surgical skills.

In 1896 Lillian was the first woman consultant in Australia when she was appointed an honorary medical officer at the Hospital for Sick Children. She was also a consultant at other hospitals including the Mater Hospital working there from 1906 until her retirement in 1945.

When World War 1 broke out Lillian offered her services to the Australian Army. She was told female doctors were not wanted at the front and she should stay home and knit for the soldiers. Angry that her offer to help was rejected, Lillian volunteered to help the Scottish Women's Hospital Service, helping people on the frontline in France and Serbia. Lillian was in charge of the ambulance division, with all female drivers. Lillian operated in tents very close to the fighting and received the Order of St Sava from the Serbian King for her wartime efforts.

On her return from war service Lillian returned to her busy medical practice and consultancy work. Her house and land at Kangaroo Point was donated to the Sisters of Charity to set up a hospice for the sick and dying. It is now St Vincent's Hospital (formerly Mt Olivet).