## **WOOD, Ellen Maud**

Ellen M. Wood was born in 1871 at Caulfield, Melbourne, Victoria, the daughter of Joseph Holden Wood (1841-1908) and Jane (Jean) (nee Forbes; 1834-1927) Wood.

1881 Census – Lee, London, Kent: Joseph Holden Wood, 40, Australian Merchant [in] Hardware, born Motteram, Cheshire; Jane Wood, 43, born Cushnie, Aberdeenshire, Scotland; children: Joseph Holden Wood, 14, scholar, born South Yarra, Vic.; Isabella, 12, born St. Kilda, Vic.; Ellen Maude, 9, born Caulfield, Vic.; Alexander G.[Grant], 8, born Clifton Hills, Vic.; James Patrick, 6, Caulfield, Vic.; Oliver, 4 months, born Lee, Kent. The household also consisted of a governess, a cook and a housemaid.**1**

Dr. Wood spent three years in the Medical School of Sydney University, and then proceeded to England where she studied at Edinburgh, London, and Dublin.

She obtained first class credentials in medicine, holding diplomas for L.R.C.P and S., Edinburgh, L.F.S. and P. Glasgow, and L.M. Dublin.**2**

**Ellen Wood 1898**



On application for the position of "resident medical" at Sydney Hospital (unsuccessful):

‘Dr. Ellen M. Wood is a native of Melbourne, but has been a resident of Sydney for several years. She was educated principally at the High School, whence she matriculated at Sydney; Dr. Affleck being one of her school-fellows. Miss Wood passed the first year's course of arts. The medical profession had its attraction; and forthwith she decided to embrace it. Miss Wood went to England to pursue her studies and qualify for her chosen calling. She entered the London School of Medicine, and afterwards spent some time at the Royal Free Hospital. Determined to make the most of her opportunities and acquire the fullest knowledge of her profession, she was next a student at St. John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin, Leicester Square, and then devoted some time to obstetrics. Going to Scotland, she attended courses in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and is a licentiate of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons at Glasgow. Dr. Wood's next sphere of professional work was in Ireland, she being appointed clinical assistant at the Coombe Hospital, Dublin, where she remained some months. While in the Irish capital Dr. Wood secured her L.M. diploma, and ultimately after well-nigh three years absence, returned to her native land by the R.M.S. Orizaba a couple of days before the lodging of her application for the position of "resident medical" ai Sydney Hospital. Dr. Wood resides at Neutral Bay with her parents.’

In June 1898, and Dr. Ellen Wood, and Dr. Harriet Biffin, graduate of Sydney University, were appointed resident medical officers at Adelaide Hospital, vice Dr. Kinmont. Each of these lady doctors receives £100 per year salary, and the engagement is for twelve months, with apartments and board.**3**

Returning from Adelaide, Dr. Ellen Wood, in partnership with Dr. Harriet Biffin, went into general practice in Elizabeth Street, Sydney. It was a battle for some time to make enough in fees to pay for the rent of the rooms.

[By 1904 Harriet Biffin became the first woman to practise medicine in Ku-ring-gai, establishing her own general practice from her home, *Stoneholm*, on the Pacific Highway at Lindfield, which she operated for 25 years. She assisted younger medical women wherever possible, and always insisted on a female anaesthetist for her surgical work. For many years she was honorary physician at the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, and during WWI undertook a large part of that hospital's medical work. She was one of the founders of the Rachel Forster Hospital for Women and Children, and served as its treasurer from 1922. She was awarded the MBE in 1937. Harriet died at Lindfield on 22 September 1939, unmarried, and is buried at Gore Hill Cemetery.]**4**

In March 1906, Ellen Wood, then engaged on the medical staff of the Dispensary Board, in Balmain, Sydney, was dismissed from her post. A petition was signed by over 300 members of the public to retain her post, as well as three testimonials from men, as to the competence of Miss Wood. A public meeting was held at the Balmain Town Hall for the purpose of retaining Dr. Ellen Wood's services in Balmain.

Miss Rose Scott, a women’s rights activist, spoke of the ability displayed by Dr. Ellen Wood and called for a resolution. It was moved by Miss Fletcher, and seconded by Mr. Longbottom, “That this meeting is of opinion that in the interests of the women and children of Balmain and district it is desirable that a lady doctor be resident in the borough.” — Carried.

Mr. Arch. Murdoch spoke, and stated that as a member of the Dispensary Board he could not understand why the women of Balmain desired to retain Dr. Ellen Wood's services when they failed to avail themselves of her services when she was attached to the Dispensary medical staff. In accouchement cases, for example, she had seldom been called upon, Dr. Kelly having three calls to her one. The experience of the Dispensary Board was that their members preferred male doctors. Miss Rose Scott said that many a man did not appreciate his wife until she was dead, and it was similar in the case of Dr. Ellen Wood, whose merit was justly appreciated when it was probable that they would lose her.

Moved by Mr. Heggan, and seconded by Miss Reeks, and carried: “That this meeting is of opinion that a medical club or association should be formed with Dr. Ellen M. Wood as their medical officer and that those present enrol themselves as members. The subscription for medical attendance was fixed at 5s per quarter and 2s a quarter extra for medicine. A large number handed in their subscriptions and the meeting terminated after arrangements had been made for the committee to meet at an early date.’**5**

In October 1909 Ellen Wood commenced practice at Beecroft, having four horses and an up-to-date groom, having previously practised in Adelaide, Sydney and Blayney, N.S.W.

In May 1910 she left Beecroft and was succeeded by Dr. Elworthy.**6**

By July 1910 Ellen Wood had taken up practice at Cooroy, Queensland. Temporary accommodation for her practice was at the Cooroy hotel. That month she purchased an allotment for the building of her private hospital. While accepting Cooroy as her headquarters, Dr. Wood would equally give Eumundi, Pomona, Cooran, Traveston, Tewantin, and all the back country the benefit of her services by regular visits.**7**

In August 1910 she was having erected a large private hospital, containing 14 rooms. In October she took possession of her new premises and ‘was preparing to accommodate in the most up-to-date-fashion all and sundry. The new premises have been specially built, and consist of consulting room, operating theatre, emergency ward, and five other wards for patients, besides doctors and staff quarters. All is surrounded by a spacious verandah. There are already three patients in occupation, thus showing that the hospital will meet a present and growing need.’ In November several cases of measles were isolated in tents at Dr. Ellen Wood's private Hospital.**8**

In May 1913 Ellen Wood resigned her position at Cooroy, the practice being taken over by Doctor Ronald McLean Stokes. The premises were to receive a complete renovation complying with the terms required by the health authorities, in regard to private hospitals.**9**

She worked as medical office to Kilkivan Shire, at Murgon, Queensland, then resigned in January 1915. By March she was working at Nanango [Qld] hospital which had had a serious outbreak of diphtheria. In June she re-commenced practice at Murgon as Government medical officer.**10**

Ellen Wood practised medicine between Queensland & N.S.W. for some years. In June 1930 she went to England and in September 1931 returned to Australia.

In 1932 she was practising medicine at Clarence Town, N.S.W.

In August 1934 she commenced practice at Canungra [Qld] hospital, about 50 miles from Brisbane, having taken over from Dr. Ashton-Shorter.**11**

On the 18th February 1935 Ellen Wood, still in practice, died suddenly at Canungra, due to pneumonia. She ‘was one of the pioneer women doctors of N. S. W., and, along with the other pioneer women of her profession, had to struggle against prejudice and the "preconceived idea" that women could not measure up to the masculine standard of proficiency in the noble calling of medicine.’

‘With a roving strain in her nature and with a gradually growing attachment to the country and country people, she acquired and disposed of many practises in N. S.W. and in Queensland, pioneering in some rough places in the latter State, and showing herself equal to all emergencies.’

A special meeting of the committee of the Canungra District Hospital was held at the end of February to appoint a doctor to the hospital vice Dr. Wood, deceased. The Rev. Alexander G. Wood, brother of the late Dr. Ellen Wood, was also present by invitation.

Her remains were placed at Mount Thompson Memorial Gardens and Crematorium, Holland Park West, Brisbane City, Queensland.**12**

**Bibliography**

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4 North Western Courier (Narrabri, NSW), Thu 7 Mar 1935; [2019 Mar Newsletter.pdf (khs.org.au)](https://www.khs.org.au/pdfs/2019%20Mar%20Newsletter.pdf)

5 Balmain Observer and Western Suburbs Advertiser, Sat 24 Mar 1906; Balmain Observer and Western Suburbs Advertiser, Sat 31 Mar 1906

6 Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 2 Oct 1909; Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate, Sat 14 May 1910

7 Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser (Qld.), Sat 2 July 1910; Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser, Fri 8 Jul 1910; Gympie Times and Mary River Mining Gazette (Qld.), Sat 30 Jul 1910

8 Gympie Times and Mary River Mining Gazette (Qld.), Sat 6 Aug 1910; Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser (Qld.), Sat 8 Oct 1910; Gympie Times and Mary River Mining Gazette (Qld.), Sat 26 Nov 1910

9 Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld.), Fri 30 May 1913; Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser (Qld.), Fri 20 Jun 1913

10 Brisbane Courier (Qld.), Wed 31 Mar 1915; Gympie Times and Mary River Mining Gazette (Qld.), Sat 5 Jun 1915

11 Beaudesert Times (Qld.), Fri 24 Aug 1934; Beaudesert Times (Qld.), Fri 16 Nov 1934; Ancestry.com

12 Beaudesert Times (Qld.) Fri 1 Mar 1935; North-Western Courier (Narrabri, NSW), Thu 7 Mar 1935; North-Western Courier (Narrabri, NSW), Thu 8 Aug 1935; Ancestry.com