



Patricia Chomley in AANS uniform, 1940

Patricia Downes Chomley OBE (1925)

Pioneering Nurse Educator and Administrator

It is not always the girls who shine brightest at school who make the biggest impact in the wider world. As far as we know, Patricia Chomley was awarded no prizes, played in no sports teams and held no positions of responsibility whilst a student at Lauriston during the 1920s. Yet this young woman was to become one of Australia's most highly qualified nurses, serving with distinction in WWII, and subsequently leading Australia's first College of post-graduate nursing education.

In recognition of her outstanding achievements she was awarded nursing's highest international honour: the Florence Nightingale Medal. She was also awarded the OBE, and in retirement, was made an Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Nursing, Australia, the highest honour awarded by that body.

Few would have predicted this career trajectory when Patricia completed her education at Lauriston in 1925, with the Intermediate Certificate under her belt. Indeed, it wasn't until 1931, when she started general nursing training at the Alfred Hospital, that Patricia embraced the vocation that was to become her life's work. General training was followed by qualifications in midwifery, and by the late 1930s, Patricia was working at the Alfred Hospital as a Sister Tutor.

After five years' service with the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) in the Middle East during WWII, Patricia was awarded a prestigious Florence Nightingale Scholarship, enabling her to study for the Sister Tutor Diploma at the University of London. It was from London, in 1949, where she was working as Assistant to the Director of the Royal College of Nursing, that Patricia was recruited to the position of Supervisor of the new College of Nursing, Australia. The College was the first of its kind in Australia to offer post-graduate nurse education, a radical departure from the existing model of hospital-based training. Taking up the role only three months before the College was to open, Patricia threw herself into the task of planning courses, equipping classrooms and offices, selecting staff and processing student applications.

During the 15 years of Miss Chomley's leadership of the College, some six hundred students undertook courses. Many of those nurses subsequently held senior nursing positions throughout Australia and were instrumental in important developments in the nursing profession and quality of patient care. Although the College of Nursing no longer exists - in 2012 it joined with the Royal College of Nursing, Australia, to form the Australian College of Nursing (ACN).

Miss Chomley's legacy has not been forgotten. To this day, her memory is perpetuated through the annual Patricia Chomley Memorial Oration.