

Discovering Greta

An inquiry into the life of Greta Norman Towner



*Sister Greta Norman Towner – date and location unknown.
(Image shared by Pamela Francies, a relative of Greta Towner)*

Discovering Greta

Discovering Sister Greta Norman Towner through Historical Inquiry.

During research into Blackall born and past student of Blackall State School, Major Edgar Towner VC MC FRGSA, Blackall State School's Bayley Williams came across an article describing the return of Lieutenant Edgar Towner and his sister, Nurse Greta Towner to their home town of Blackall in 1919.

Edgar Thomas Towner is remembered in Blackall through the statue Towner's Call. Ronan Robinson, from Blackall State School wrote a letter to the local paper, *The Barcoo Independent* in 2008. His letter saw nephews John and Geoffrey Towner and the Blackall community galvanise to see the statue erected in 2009. Edgar Towner VC MC, twice mentioned in dispatches is also well documented in the public domain.



Towner's Call – statue to commemorate Greta's brother – Edgar Thomas Towner VC MC FRGSA

But... Who was Sister Greta Norman Towner? What did she do during the First World War? What was her life like after the war? The students knew about Edgar but what about Greta?

Initial research into Greta Towner online revealed her war record and a grainy image with a few words from an article that appeared in 1919 in the Sydney paper, *The Sunday Times*. These were the starting point to *Discovering Greta* through historical enquiry.

Blackall State School students with support from Head of Department, Avril Fazel, and Christine Campbell from the Blackall Historical Society began the process of researching and enquiring.

Research to date has established Sister Greta Norman Towner as being born at Glencoe station, Blackall in 1891, educated at Blackall State School and in Rockhampton. Greta Towner trained as nurse at the Rockhampton Children's Hospital, registering as a nurse in August 1914, enlisting in July 1915.



Glencoe and the Towner Family (date unknown) Photo courtesy of Pamela Francies, Towner relative

Sister Towner served with the AANS (Australian Army Nursing Service) in Egypt (Heliopolis, Cairo), Lemnos Island from September 1915 during the Gallipoli Campaign and on Sea Transport ships. January 1917 she arrives in London serving No2 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Southall which specialised amputations and artificial limbs. In March 1917, she arrives in France with the 8th Stationary Hospital, Rouen. On 27 September 1917, she is posted to No 1 Australian General Hospital, Rouen. Officially discharged on 4th July 1919.

Upon her return to Australia, Sister Towner took on pharmacy study at the University of Sydney, emigrating to the United States of America where she married twice and held various positions as nurse in veteran hospitals. Sister Greta passed away in the US in 1961 and shares a headstone with her second husband, Harry Maloney.

During the inquiry process, six students were able to view Sister Towner's uniform and medal set making connections with Greta Towner through this historically significant object. Similarly, through sharing their research, Towner relatives offered images and insights into Sister Greta's life to the students to further their research and connections.

Through the State Library of Queensland's History Pin project as part of their Q ANZAC 100 – Memories for a New Generation project, students are making their own documentary on Sister Towner's life and their connection to her story and the process of *Discovering Greta*. The video will be published on the Blackall to Battle and Back History Pin as part the SLQ Q ANZAC 100 project. They hope their research will see more objects relevant to this ANZAC shared – so more people will come to know her story. The University of Sydney has already shown interest in recording Greta's association with the university through their remembering of the First World War and it is hoped this research will see students of Blackall State School remember Sister Greta Norman Towner in the generations to come.

You can view The University of Sydney's entry on Greta here: <http://beyond1914.sydney.edu.au/profile/39473/greta-norman-towner>

Year 9 student, Samantha Bly has worked on Sister Towner's profile on Discovering Anzacs: you can view the entry here: <http://www.discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/>

By Avril Fazel



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in

*Edgar Thomas Towner – Greta's Father
(date and location unknown – image
shared by Shirley Watts, Towner
relative)*



*Greta Towner (nee Herley) – Sister Towner's
mother (date and location unknown – image
shared by Shirley Watts, Towner relative)*