

# Lesley Archibald Elinor MacGowan 1882-1966

*Lesley MacGowan<sup>1</sup> became the lifelong companion of Elsie Bolam and the two of them spent over 50 years in Marysville. Lesley was the quiet one of the duo. Also see the Elsie Bolam document.*

Lesley Elinor MacGowan was born about 1882 possibly in South Australia. Her parents were Isabella nee Robertson and Archibald T. MacGowan who had married in South Australia according to her mother's death registration. Sadly, her mother died<sup>2</sup> from typhoid fever in August 1884 at her parents' house in South Melbourne with daughter, 2 and baby Archibald. Although Lesley's parents are named on her death certificate, details of her father have not been found.

There are many questions - Who looked after Lesley and her brother? and where she was for the first 30 years of her life ?

The first records found are of Lesley nursing around Melbourne<sup>3</sup> in 1912 & 1913 at 'Sunnyside' Burke Rd, Camberwell, nurse; in 1914 at St Augustine's Vicarage, Mentone, nurse and also listed in Walhalla, nurse. In 1916 she was in Castlemaine nursing at the Benevolent Asylum.

Lesley was first mentioned in Marysville in 1921 with her friend Elsie Bolam, helping her run Kerami. They lived together for the rest of their lives; until 1931 in Marysville, for a couple of years at the Black Spur Hotel, then in Melbourne until the late 1940s when they returned to Marysville to live in the cottage they named 'Little Kerami' in Kerami Crescent near the Marysville Chalet. Lesley was the quiet one of the duo, staying in the background most of the time supporting Elsie, while Elsie was in the public domain promoting the district and doing a lot of the nursing.

Lesley's life-long friend Elsie Bolam died in September 1965 and almost a year later Leslie E A MacGowan died on 18 June 1966 in Kew, from colon cancer. She was 83 years old. Her death - certificate says she was cremated. It is hoped that her ashes were returned to Marysville.

*The Argus 6 December 1955, page 14*

*Focussed on Elsie Bolam this article also gives information on Lesley McGowan.*

## **Came for year is still there**

SHE sat in a quiet room in a quiet house near Marysville's Crossroads – a small, vivid, laughing woman who, for many years, has been Marysville's Florence Nightingale.

On Friday the people of Marysville and its area will honor her when she, with Cr. Fred Barton will share the honor of bringing electricity to Marysville.

Sister Elsie Bolam is a legend.

A trained nursing sister, she has for 35 years (with a break during the war when she was co-opted to work in the city's emergency services) been Marysville's "honorary doctor". Marysville has not had a resident doctor.

## **Always ready**

"BUT in the tourist season, the population swells to 2,000; the many sawmills provide inevitable mishaps – and then Sister Bolam,

with her lifelong friend, Sister Lesley McGowan, are ready with advanced skill, advice, and round-the-clock availability. They work closely with the doctors in the district.

From their little surgery at the Crossroads, in their visits to homes, in their goings and their comings, they have won for themselves a place of honor in the life of the township.

"Now we have electricity," Sister Bolam says, "we may get a small hospital and perhaps a resident doctor, maybe one who has retired from the strain and the hurly-burly of city practice."

Until then, Sister Bolam and her co-worker will be the guardians of and the ministers to the health and well-being of the people.

Sister Bolam was one of the first presidents of Marysville's vigorous Tourist and Progress

Association<sup>4</sup>; she was its secretary for many years.

"We," she says, nodding at her smiling friend, Sister McGowan, "have never had a chance to retire".

Sister Bolam trained at Beechworth and Melbourne; held important administrative posts in major hospitals; came to Marysville to

"stand in" for 12 months in the conduct of Kerami guest house.

"I am Marysville's best advertisement," she says, "I came for a year and stayed for a generation."

So great is her vitality, and vivacity, that she (and Sister McGowan) look safe for another generation.

At least, Marysville hopes so.

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<sup>1</sup> Lesley is found in the Australian Electoral Rolls as Lesley Archibald MacGowan and later as Lesley Elinor MacGowan. She would have had to register personally, so this is her spelling. In newspaper reports she was often McGowan. Her death certificate records her as Lesley Elinor MacGowan, but in her Will she is Leslie McGowan.

<sup>2</sup> *The Leader*, 9 Aug 1884 McGOWAN - On the 2nd August, at her mother's residence, 42 Park-street west, South Melbourne, of typhoid fever Isabella Stella Jessie, eldest daughter of the late John Sinclair Robertson, C.E., Serpentine, and wife of Archibald T. McGowan, in the 27th year of her age.

<sup>3</sup> From Australian Electoral Rolls.

<sup>4</sup> Sister Elizabeth Glover had been involved with the Marysville Tourist & Progress Association which was founded back in 1907 and the owners of Kerami, starting with Sister Elizabeth Glover have all been very involved.