

## Matron Gertrude Riding OBE, S.R.N., S.C.M. (1891-1975)

Gertrude Riding was born on 25 June 1891 in Gateacre, a village (now a suburb) to the south east of Liverpool. She was the eldest daughter of William Riding, a railway shunter, and his wife Mary. The family subsequently moved to Halewood, a nearby village, and lived in "Railway Cottages" owned by the Cheshire Lines Railway.

In 1910 Gertrude began her nurse training at the Mill Road Poor Law Infirmary (Liverpool), run by the West Derby Board of Guardians. She achieved her nursing certificate in 1913, and went on to also qualify in midwifery. A founder member of the Royal College of Nursing, she was listed as a State Registered Nurse in 1917. In 1921 she became Assistant Matron at Mill Road. According to a later press report (*Evening Express* 30th April 1943), she occupied every position in the hospital, where she remained until 1941, by which time she was Matron. By then she had been closely involved with the training of hundreds of nurses.



During the May Blitz in Liverpool, the Nurses' Home at the hospital was badly damaged, and on 3rd May, at the height of the bombing, Mill Road Infirmary took a direct hit, resulting in the deaths of 97 people, both staff and patients, including a number of babies. Matron Gertrude was on duty at the time and suffered a serious head injury which almost blinded her. Nevertheless she set about rescuing the injured, and saved the lives of an Auxiliary Nurse and the Hospital Chaplain, who were buried beneath the rubble. Miss Riding subsequently lost an eye.

For her courage that day, Matron Riding was awarded the Order of the British Empire, which she received from King George VI at a Buckingham Palace investiture in October 1941.

After the bombing of Mill Road, Miss Riding was transferred to Alder Hey Emergency Hospital as its matron, where she served until she retired. During her time there, a young patient's pneumonia was cured when penicillin was tested on a child for the first time. In addition, during and since the war she was a member of Liverpool's Emergency Committee.

In 1943 Gertrude Riding was appointed President of Soroptimist International of Liverpool, stating that she hoped her year of office would be "a year of peace". She directed much of her energy that year to wartime housing problems and the impact of war on young people.

Gertrude never married, and died at her old family home in Halewood on 13th January 1975 at the age of 84.