Silent Anzacs: Red Cross convalescent homes in NSW, 1914-1916

Summary of Abstract
The story of soldier repatriation and the efforts of the Red Cross in NSW to provide convalescent facilities are an often overlooked part of the war at home, 1914-1916.

Abstract
The country was ill-prepared for soldier convalescent patients who returned from the front during the First World War. From the expeditionary force to New Guinea in 1914 to casualties from the Gallipoli campaign in 1915 military and medical authorities failed to come to grips with the issue for months. Into the void stepped the Red Cross as it did in similar circumstances in England and other countries across the globe from the late 19th century.

In New South Wales the groundbreaking efforts of Red Cross workers copied the example of the British Red Cross. Led by the individual efforts of Red Cross volunteers homestays were provided in the early months of the war, which then expanded to a number of dedicated facilities including a number of convalescent homes. Initially with a seaside cottage at Cronulla, then homes at Darlinghurst and the harbourside suburb of Woolwich, with more across country New South Wales. By June 1916 the Red Cross in New South Wales was managing 14 convalescent homes which increased to 19 by 1918, including a tuberculosis sanatorium. All up treating over 10,000 soldiers in facilities staffed primarily by voluntary aids who qualified in first aid and home nursing.

Funding for these efforts was provided by an extensive statewide Red Cross branch network and fundraising campaigns organised from New South Wales Red Cross headquarters in Sydney. All up the Red Cross provided a level of care and soldier welfare activities never seen before in Australia.

Bio
Dr Ian Willis is an honorary fellow at the University of Wollongong, NSW, a member of the the Australian Historical Association, Professional Historians Association (NSW & ACT), and the
Independent Scholars Association of Australia. He has a special interest in local studies, place and the Red Cross in Australia.