After war was declared in 1914, most Australian women were caught up in the same patriotic sentiments as their men-folk. While some women quickly became engaged making and packing comforts on the home-front for distribution to soldiers, others sought work that was more ‘hands-on’ close to the war, or equal to their professional skills and training. Yet hundreds of nurses and female doctors were prevented from serving with the Australian army or its medical service. Because of various restrictions here, they took their own journey to war, enlisting with an allied nation. It wasn’t only these professionally trained women who sought work outside Australia however. Possibly hundreds of others served with the Voluntary Aid Detachments and in civilian occupations in England, Europe, and Egypt. Others joined a paramilitary corps such as the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, while others joined the French, American or Italian Red Cross, or the YMCA.

In this PhD pre-submission seminar I will discuss how the major themes of gender and war and gender and travel intersect throughout the thesis. This approach will broaden our understanding of the contribution and role of Australian women who served in a range of wartime situations and contexts during World War One.

Selena Williams is a PhD Candidate in the School of History at the ANU. She has recently retired from State Records of NSW where she worked as an archivist for 16 years.