

**‘Works of many hands’:
Nurses’ Autograph Books and Military Hospital Culture in and
after The First World War**

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Dedicated to my Mum

Abstract

This thesis makes a case for the importance of the albums nurses compiled during the First World War for our understanding of the medical, emotional, and cultural history of the period. Military nurses and VADs working in hospitals from 1914-18 recorded personal thoughts and experiences in personal documents of diaries and letters. They also collated autograph albums in collaboration with their patients. While the diaries and letters have received sustained scholarly attention, only limited work has been done on the albums. Offering valuable, intriguing insights into soldier-patients-nurses interactions, emotional dynamics of care, and containing a variety of contributions of personal messages, poems, and artworks, these albums provide new perspectives on a significant period of great societal change.

The thesis charts the position of nurses' albums within the history of album-making with established conventions, developed over centuries. The war-time context drives a significant shift in the selection of contributors with albums becoming indicative of hospital communities, reflecting the transitory soldier-patient-nurse relationship and attesting to the hero status of the ordinary soldier. Traditional recurring themes of friendship and remembrance at significant moments of parting are explored in the context of wartime nursing. I examine the nurses' presence in the albums and how they share their wartime nursing inspirations and aspirations with their soldier-patients.

I use albums in conjunction with other creative works produced in the hospitals, particularly hospital magazines, to explore aspects of care as perceived by both nurse and patient. I consider the album's use as a tool for extending rehabilitative therapy within a consideration of wider therapeutic practices in military hospitals. An important historical source previously only used to support wider research into First World War nursing, this thesis seeks to enhance our understanding of the soldier-patient-nurse relationship through the prism of the albums.

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Glossary

AMS	Army Medical Services
ANS	Army Nursing Service
ARRC	Associate of The Royal Red Cross
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CasEvac	Casualty Evacuation Chain
CCS	Casualty Clearing Station
GH	General Hospital
LGH	London General Hospital
MM	Military Medal
NHS	National Health Service
QAIMNS	Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service
QAIMNSI	Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve
QARANC	Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RRC	Royal Red Cross
SH	Stationary Hospital
TFNS	Territorial Force Nursing Service
TNA	The National Archives
VAD	Voluntary Aid Detachment
WO	War Office

Introduction

‘Works of many hands’: Nurses’ autograph books and military hospital culture in and after the First World War

I have always had a keen interest in the First World War and in the lives of the men and women who lived and fought through it. I have pursued this interest extensively by reading books such as B.H. Liddell-Hart's *History of the First World War* and Lyn MacDonald's works on the First World War, in addition to numerous documentaries that have endeavoured to analyse this industrial conflict, often referred to as The Great War and the War to End All Wars.¹ In my thirties, I made a career change, training first as a civilian Registered General Nurse (RGN) then specialising in peri-operative nursing at Guys and St Thomas' Hospital in London in the early 1990s.² During that time, I worked alongside military reservists who had deployed as part of the first Iraq war and the Bosnian and Kosovan conflicts and became interested in military nursing as a career. In 2000 I joined Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps (QARANC) as a Nursing Officer, deploying to Kosovo in 2003 and serving until 2016. My research approach is driven by my personal perspective, which has been shaped by my experiences as both a military and civilian nurse. This research is informed by both academic inquiry and an interest in the fields of military and civilian nursing. Its primary objective is to examine the experiences and perspectives of Queen Alexandra's Imperial

¹ B. H. Liddell-Hart, *A History of the First World War* (Pan Books, 2014); Lyn MacDonald, *The Roses of No Man's Land: Nurses on the Western Front* (Penguin, 2013).

² St Thomas' Hospital London was the fifth London General Hospital in the First World War.

Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) and Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses during the First World War, whose contributions significantly shaped the development of modern military nursing. I am mindful of balancing the benefit of personal insight with care that I do not judge or apply my own standards. I hope, rather, to enhance rigorous research by applying my experience and knowledge of military nursing in order to understand what the nurses and their patients went through and the difficulties of nursing during warfare on such an industrial scale. Michael Angrosino suggests that the researcher should be aware of their own perceptions and prejudices in the way the data is collected and interpreted to avoid researcher bias.³ Robert Newell and Philip Burnard also suggest that ‘the researcher who is from the culture under observation may take things for granted’ but equally ‘the researcher who is from outside the culture [...] may not [...] understand the meanings behind the behaviours being observed’.⁴ With my background in military nursing, it was important to ensure that modern meanings were not projected onto the historical record. However, familiarity with the culture can be seen as a strength, as there can be a greater understanding, which can contribute to an informed reading of the material.

This thesis is an in-depth exploration and analysis of the autograph albums of QAIMNS, Territorial Force Nursing Service nurses (TFNS), their Reserves, and VAD nurses of the First World War. It sets out to explore and analyse the soldier-patient contributions in these albums collected during their convalescence in the hospitals, both at home and abroad. The scope of this thesis is confined to QAIMNS, TFNS nurses and VAD nurses only and, although these nurses worked in hospitals in both the Western and Eastern spheres of the war, it mainly focuses on the albums collated in the Western sphere with most of the albums

³ Michael Angrosino, *Doing Ethnographic and Observational Research*, Qualitative Research Kit (Sage Publications, 2007), doi:10.4135/9781849208932.

⁴ Robert Newell and Philip Burnard, *Research for Evidence-Based Practice in Healthcare*, Vital Notes, 2nd ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 84.

centered in the United Kingdom (UK) convalescent hospitals. Although nurses served in Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service (QARNNS) and First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) during the First World War, this thesis focuses on the Army and the Voluntary Aid Detachment nursing only.⁵

Autograph Albums

Chambers's Journal of 1873 contains the following commentary on autograph albums in the late nineteenth century:

Those who can look back for half a century will remember the rage there was in their youthful days for albums [...] legion was not a name multitudinous enough for them; literary men crouched under their tyranny; young maidens wielded them as rods of iron [...] Splendid books they were in their day, bound in rich Morocco and gold, and often containing contributions from Scott, Moore, Montgomery, and Praed; whilst Prout's beautiful sketches adorned their pages side by side with other artists [...] Taking up one of the old albums, it is rather a melancholy task to look through it: here is the writing of a friend who is no longer in existence; there the name of one who has long ago ceased to be numbered among your acquaintance [...] Madame de Stael, [on being asked to contribute to an album] threw the book on the sofa exclaiming: "I do not like these mortuary tables."⁶

The description of the albums in rich Morocco and gold applies equally well to many of the albums of the First World War nurses although no longer containing the names of well-known people rather the names of the common soldier, a different kind of hero and celebrity. The second part of this quote is apt when reading the nurses' albums where their soldier-patients have been memorialised and are no longer in existence.

The autograph albums compiled by nurses in the First World War are part of the rich and complex tradition of the multitudinous making of multi-media, collaborative books. Often less splendid in their material properties and lacking celebrity contributions of the rich and famous, autograph albums are the humbler relation of these earlier collaborative books. In this thesis, I trace the way in which First World War nurses used their autograph albums in part as a professional document of the relatively new profession of military nursing in the

⁵ A uniformed Naval Nursing Service was introduced in 1884 and renamed Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service in 1902. The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) was founded by Edward Baker in 1907.

⁶ *Chambers's Journal* (1865 Nachgewiesen, 1861), p. 559.

context of battles for women's emancipation and the professional accreditation of nursing. Using existing scholarship on wider practices of collaborative bookmaking, I will explore a long history of autograph albums as a record of relationships, particularly at times of major life change and precariousness. I consider the development of celebrity, and how popular late-nineteenth-century practices of autograph hunting influenced collections of contributions and signatures in military hospitals, positioning the soldiers and medical staff who were asked to write in the album as celebrities. Throughout, I examine the autograph album and its status as a relational document. I consider how established conventions of autograph album writing governed what could and could not be included in entries, and how the relationship between nurse-owner and contributor shaped the content.

Ancient Obsessions

The autograph album, as it is recognised today, traces its origins back to the ancient Greeks. Steven Raab examines these origins, beginning with the Greek fascination with literary manuscripts of the great writers of the day. There was much value placed on autographed manuscripts which were avidly collected in great libraries like the one at Alexandria founded in the fourth Century by Ptolemy I. Raab charts this growing obsession through Ptolemy in Egypt in three hundred BCE who sought to collect manuscripts of renowned Greek Scholars in order to 'educate people and start universal synthesis of knowledge'.⁷ These collections of Greek and Roman scholars' manuscripts then became popular with Romans and fervent collectors such as Cicero. The earliest known mention of autographs in a publication is probably in Suetonius' 'Lives of The Twelve Caesars'.⁸

During the second Jewish Revolt against the Romans, (132 to 135 CE) Simon Bar Kochba wrote several letters, and these are possibly the earliest notable surviving

⁷ Steven Raab, 'The Raab Collection, A History of Autographs: The Lure of Collecting', 2020 <<https://www.raabcollection.com/learning/history-autograph-collecting>>.

⁸ Raab, 'The Raab Collection, A History of Autographs: The Lure of Collecting'.

autographed letters.⁹ From 488 to 575 CE Cassiodorus set up a library in Vivarium to preserve and copy ancient autograph manuscripts. The manuscripts in the library were, however, later dispersed and, with the loss of this library, collections of autograph manuscripts ended in the west for over 700 years.

Album Amicorum

It was not until the sixteenth century that the practice of collecting autographs in a form that is recognisable today began. In 1507 a Bohemian squire compiled a collection of autographs from family and friends, an album amicorum, now considered a predecessor of the modern autograph album. Dissimilar to the ‘ancient obsession’ for collecting letters and manuscripts in the hand of scholars and literary persons, the album amicorum or book of friends was also made up of contributions from members of the owner’s personal circle.¹⁰

Thought to have gained renewed popularity in Germany among students in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these early albums were often small oblong leather-bound books with the owner’s name inscribed on the cover. They could be custom-made either by combining a collection of loose leaves together to form an album bound by a local printer or by interspersing loose leaves into a published book.¹¹ The practice was widespread, but not exclusive to Europe, and Japanese pilgrims compiled similar albums with pages collected on visits to temples throughout Japan.¹²

The album amicorum became a record of the journeys young intellectuals made through Europe, academic or otherwise, sometimes acting as a reference source for employment. The album of Thomas Seget, is a good example of how the album is used to

⁹ Simon Bar Kochba was a Jewish military leader in Judea who led a revolt against the Roman Empire.

¹⁰ Liber amicorum or book of friends, sometimes called album amicorum. www.oxfordreference.com

¹¹ June Schlueter, ‘Michael van Meer’s Album Amicorum, with Illustrations of London, 1614-15’, *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 69.2 (2006), pp. 301–14, doi:10.1525/hlq.2006.69.2.301.1.

¹² These two album pages are from a group of three from a larger number. Possibly owned by a Resident of Edo (Tokyo). *Page of a Pilgrim’s Visiting Album*, Asian Art: The Metropolitan Museum, New York <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/57363>> [accessed 19 October 2023].

chart the owner's travels and the famous people they encountered.¹³ Seget's album was notable for the entries of famous scholars and academics such as Galileo and Pinelli and now resides in the Vatican library.¹⁴ Scholarship on early albums rarely considers what the content can tell us about the culture of the time or conducts a close reading of the meaning that might be elucidated from the contributions.

These albums served as a documentation of the friendships forged, similar to the albums that nurses carried during the First World War. These earlier albums often contained illustrations of regional dress and were a 'fashionable and effective means of demonstrating that [the album's owner] was a well-educated and widely-travelled man of the world'.¹⁵ Albums could also be used to parade their owners' social connections, both as a means of introduction and as a validation of their status and learning. This resulted in a utilitarian use of albums as a means of establishing credentials, a practice that nurses continued in the nineteenth and early-twentieth century in the absence of formal accreditation of their skills.

Charles I was known to have kept an album that later came into the possession of George III as a valued object. A desire to parade social connections is also found in the visitor books of the great houses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which performed a similar function to the album amicorum. Some albums were merely lists of names, but by the seventeenth century, the term had evolved to refer to visitor books at large houses. These books often included entries by famous people, and guests were invited to contribute their thoughts about their stay.¹⁶ These books enabled the owner to boast of the illustrious connections provided by the comments left by distinguished guests.

¹³ Thomas Seget, Scottish poet (1569-1627).

¹⁴ Stefano Gattei, 'The Wandering Scot Thomas Seget's Album Amicorum', *Nuncius*, 28.2 (2013), pp. 345-463, doi:10.1163/18253911-02802026. Gian Vincenzo Pinelli, Italian humourist (1535-1601); Galileo di Vincenzo Bonaiuti de' Galilei (1564-1642).

¹⁵ Schlueter, 'Michael Van Meer's Album Amicorum', p. 302.

¹⁶ Schlueter, 'Michael Van Meer's Album Amicorum', p. 304.

Many early albums contained inscriptions not only from friends and colleagues but from prominent academics, similar to the celebrity autographs of today. Also popular was the practice of commissioned illustrations that reflected the style of illuminators from earlier centuries.¹⁷ Contributors were selected by the album's owner as having some quality that he wished to remember when perusing the album at a later time. In the nurses' albums of the First World War illustrations of regimental emblems abound similarly demonstrating the album owner's interaction with the many and varied regiments that participated in action at the front and can be compared to the earlier practice in the album amicorum of collecting illustrations of regional dress of the various countries they passed through.

The choice of contributor to an album amicorum also provided information about the album's owner. It reflected his own academic success and validated his own worth by the quality of his circle of friends and acquaintances. The contribution was often written in Latin, another signifier of elite education, and in the form of a motto or some moral advice. Two notable surviving sixteenth- and seventeenth-century album amicorum are those of Abraham Ortelius and Michael Van Meer. In his work on *Abraham Ortelius' Album Amicorum*, James Freeman describes the album as a 'booklet [which] had 247 pages of contributions on 124 sheets of paper' commenting that such albums are still used today where collections of their works are presented to them to mark their careers in a particular field.¹⁸ Contributions in Ortelius' album contain miniature paintings and inscriptions and some of the famous names include John Dee and William Camden.

Schlueter, in her work on Michael Van Meer's album, discussed below, points out that these contributions were written with a view to being read by a wide audience, not just

¹⁷ Schlueter, 'Michael Van Meer's Album Amicorum', p. 301.

¹⁸ James Freeman, 'The "Album Amicorum" of Abraham Ortelius', 2017 <<https://specialcollections-blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/?p=14031>>. The Album Amoricum of Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598) is part of the Cambridge Digital Library. John Dee (1527-1609) was Court astronomer to Elizabeth I; William Camden (1551-1623) topographer, historian and antiquarian.

the album's owner. She quotes from a letter by Nicolaus Fabri Vilvordiensis: 'This little [album], which contains the names of your friends, shows how much you favour the arts and those who cultivate them'.¹⁹ Schlueter notes that van Meer's album was collated over a period of more than thirty-five years and is 'a rich compendium of autographs, coats of arms, mottoes, verses, dedications, and watercolour illustrations'.²⁰ The similarity of the content of van Meer's album and the albums created by the military nurses in the First World War is striking, with regimental badges replacing coats of arms.²¹ Van Meer's album is of particular interest owing to the number of signatures from European nobility, including various princes and princesses of the House of Orange and, among other English nobility, Thomas Howard (1561-1626).²² Friendship albums such as van Meer's spanning many decades continued as a practice into the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century.

Schlueter's work on van Meer is similar to Waterhouse and Poetica's discussion of the two autograph albums of Sir Charles Giesecke (1761-1833), which had been left to the National Museum of Dublin.²³ Giesecke's labelling of his albums suggests there were more books. Waterhouse and Poetica, however, consider that only one other album probably did exist covering a period of travel in his life where 'we might expect to find [in the album], firstly, a record of his career as actor, librettist, and novelist, together with the autographs of such colleagues as Mozart and Schikaneder, and of other celebrities'.²⁴ Only two of

¹⁹ Schlueter, 'Michael Van Meer's Album Amicorum', p. 304.

²⁰ Schlueter, 'Michael Van Meer's Album Amicorum', p. 301.

²¹ Autograph Book Archive, Museum of Military Medicine, Keogh Barracks Aldershot. Regimental badges are common contributions to the albums, often very intricate in design they would have occupied a convalescing soldier for some time and for some, aided in improving their fine motor skills. For the nurses the different badges would have represented the soldiers from across the regiments of British and Commonwealth countries.

²² 1st Earl of Suffolk.

²³ The Giesecke books are labelled No. 3 and No. 5 suggesting that No. 1, 2 and 4 are missing. Waterhouse and Poetica suggest No. 4 probably did exist. G. Waterhouse and Horatius D. A. Poetica, 'Sir Charles Giesecke's Autograph Albums', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, 43 (1935), pp. 291–306.

²⁴ Waterhouse and Poetica, 'Sir Charles Giesecke's Autograph Albums'. John Joseph Schickeneder, also known as Emmanuel (1751-1812) German impresario, actor and composer he also wrote the libretto for the Magic Flute by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) p294.

Giesecke's autograph albums survive but, as with diaries such as Lilian Robinson's (discussed in chapter four), further volumes do emerge at auction suggesting the collector continued the hobby as a lifelong passion.

A Passion for Collecting: The Re-emergence of the Album within the Feminine Sphere

Up until the early 1800s, albums were mainly the preserve of male academics. But in the nineteenth century activities such as music, reading, painting, embroidery, and collecting were seen as socially acceptable pursuits for women. Charles Darwin's literal voyage of exploratory collection helped to popularise the hobby of collecting, and butterflies, stamps, books, shells, flowers, and even human bones were all collected and categorised.²⁵ Today, many people are still familiar with the *Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady* (written in 1906 and first published in 1977).²⁶ Diarist Edith Holden gathered poems, sketches of wildlife, and observations of the seasons, and it was her hobby of collecting flowers that ultimately led to her death when she fell into a river and drowned in pursuit of flora.

The gathering of material in albums was shaped by this wider collecting culture. John Brewer explores the burgeoning of literary and artistic expression in the eighteenth century, arguing that 'taste in the arts was considered a sign of refinement and politeness'.²⁷ He suggests that eighteenth-century British culture was as popular in the provinces as it was in the capital, reaching more people and often more varied. Brewer considers, among others, the work of Anna Seward who collected correspondence which was posthumously published as an example of the growing importance of cultural pursuits in English society in the eighteenth century.²⁸

²⁵ Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²⁶ Edith Holden, *Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady* (Holt & Company Inc, 1977).

²⁷ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Routledge, 2013), p. i, doi:10.4324/9780203551660.

²⁸ Anna Seward, English Romantic Poet known as The Swan of Lichfield (1742-1809) in Brewer p397.

Patrizia Di Bello explores the culture of photography and album-making by Victorian women. The term ‘album’, she states, was derived from the Latin ‘albus’ meaning white and referring to the blank pages or empty containers in which various items were collected.²⁹ She observes that these albums had no order or value assigned to their content, and it is possible to find many similarities between Victorian albums and the autograph albums of the First World War, particularly the haphazard way in which contributions in the nurses’ autograph albums are entered. In the First World War autograph album, just as in Mrs Birkbeck’s album (discussed below), verses sit side by side with pen and ink sketches and watercolour pictures. There is humour about the war as well as poignant verses of remembrance. These parallels help to inform an understanding of how the nurses’ albums are read.

Mrs Anna Birkbeck’s album is a rare early-nineteenth-century album known to have survived intact. It provides, as Di Bello argues, ‘a fascinating insight into the life and activities of the literary, artistic and diplomatic circles of Regency London and beyond’.³⁰ Mrs Birkbeck was the wife of a fashionable London doctor and among the entries in her album, is an unpublished poem by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley.³¹

Di Bello’s research considers wider aspects of these albums noting the size, covers, and, in Anna Birkbeck’s case, the importance and value of the album to its owner and of its continued use over many decades. It contained ‘sentimental verses and [with] its delicate paintings of birds and flowers, is a pleasant period piece’.³² She argues that until recently, research into the practice of album-making has been overlooked suggesting that the focus has been on the individual genres within the albums, that is, watercolours, poetry, and sketches, rather than on the feminine culture of album-making that took hold in America and Europe

²⁹ Patrizia Di Bello, ‘Nineteenth-Century Album Culture’, in *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 29–52.

³⁰ Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p.29.

³¹ Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 30.

³² Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 29.

during the Victorian era. Although this thesis will attempt to consider the practice of album-making in the hospital environment rather than the refined environment of a lady's drawing room it will consider the application of the same conventions and etiquette.

Di Bello's interpretation places women's album-making as operating similarly to the album amicorum, which reflected the academic education of a student in Europe working his way through various universities and functioning as a passport to new societies. She suggests that the Victorian lady's album would enable the reader to discern between 'truly cultivated taste and recently acquired, superficial mannerisms: between spiritually valuable displays and the merely ostentatious'.³³ The First World War nurses albums provide an opportunity to focus on similar individual genres in the context of the male-dominated hospital wards and whilst Di Bello reads the album as a reflection of a lady's cultivated taste and education, we can attempt to read the nurses' albums as a reflection of the rawness of injury and recovery. Di Bello contends that the value of Anna Birkbeck's album lies in its ability to 'construct a rich network of social and cultural contacts'.³⁴ Similarly, this thesis contends that the nurses' albums can also be viewed as a network of contacts between the nurses and their patients and between the soldier-patients' regimental community.

Birkbeck's album demonstrates her social standing and participation in what Di Bello describes as a 'world of culture'.³⁵ Di Bello suggests the album shows Birkbeck's personal participation as a woman in the male-dominated world of science, politics, and education. The participation of women of a subsequent generation working as nurses within the predominantly male environment of the First World War, can be examined in the contributions of wounded and recovering soldiers they cared for. The contributors to both Birkbeck's album and the nurses albums were aware that they had been singled out

³³ Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p.39.

³⁴ Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 30.

³⁵ Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 41.

especially, and therefore their friendship was of value. Di Bello, however, highlights that this imposed an obligation on the individual to contribute something that would be unique and worthy of remembrance. Often, these albums were left in the care of the contributors for many months, and it was a matter of trust that the albums were eventually returned. We know that Birkbeck was concerned about the return of her album through a letter to a third party asking for it to be retrieved. This also demonstrates the value that she placed on it and its content.³⁶

Di Bello considers how the contributor's rank and social standing were a factor in their selection. Although the vast majority of contributors at this time were female, some men were prevailed upon to contribute. Anya Jabour, in her work on nineteenth-century American albums, suggests, though, that:

signatures of male friends or beaux were extremely rare before the Civil War [...] Women's autograph albums in the pre-war years, thus, appear to be the literary equivalent of the female academy, a space inhabited primarily by women, in which men appear only infrequently.³⁷

In the UK a short newspaper item titled 'The Autograph Album' from 1895 suggests that men considered it an embarrassment for their male peers to find that they had contributed to a young lady's autograph album.³⁸ It considers the problem of being asked to contribute and the difficulty of finding something original to write: 'No greater social nuisance than the autograph album can exist for the man who has none of the larger troubles of life'.³⁹ It also highlights the pressure this task brings, of knowing that the 'writing, signing and delivering to perpetuity the crude efforts of a moment' by which the writer will be remembered and judged

³⁶ Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p.29

³⁷ Anya Jabour, 'Albums of Affection: Female Friendship and Coming of Age in Antebellum Virginia', *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 107.2 (1999), pp. 125–58.

³⁸ 'The Autograph Album', *The Sketch* (British Newspaper Archive, 8 May 1895), p. 106, British Newspaper Archive <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL0000271/19631021/048/0003>>.

³⁹ 'The Autograph Album', p. 106.

by those who come after him.⁴⁰ According to this article, the male perspective is that the autograph album has become the domain of the female autograph-hunter.

This embarrassment of contributing to a lady's autograph album can still be seen in the First World War albums. Often brief signatures and a few words of thanks are provided. Others include phrases, such as 'wounded at', which suggest an element of shying away from anything more creative.

While autograph albums traditionally indicated a community of social prestige, the First World War autograph albums no longer reflect the shared social position of owner and contributor. The nurses who collected the entries were often of a higher social standing than the wounded soldiers, and any social networking or endorsement of the owner's education or circle of friends would no longer apply. The endorsement is a more abstract one in that it reflects the experiences that were shared and the care the nurses gave. The soldier-patients came from a wide social circle, the handwriting of some entries carefully crafted by someone not comfortable with the skill, contrasting with entries made in a fluent hand. Many of the entries in the albums come from other ranks rather than officers who, after their care in the military hospitals on the Eastern and Western Fronts, returned to convalesce in private homes; two-thirds of officers' beds were in these homes.⁴¹ Many of the autograph albums of this archive were compiled in Military or Auxiliary Red Cross Hospitals, which might explain the high ratio of soldier to officer entries found in them.

Later, with the widespread availability of the camera, photograph albums became a popular way to capture memories and gather visual images of friends and places. Hand-inscribed books, such as celebrity autograph albums continued, suggesting that new technologies encourage a proliferation of new forms of autograph albums and album making.

⁴⁰ 'The Autograph Album', p. 106.

⁴¹ Jeffrey S. Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain during the Great War* (Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 55.

Di Bello argues that ‘feminine visual culture in the nineteenth century was under pressure from forces of modernity, such as illustrated magazines and photography’.⁴²

Anne Higonnet writes that the ‘least known [form of feminine self-expression] may be their albums and amateur painting’.⁴³ She argues that nineteenth-century women’s painting, albums and other work have not routinely entered the public domain, suggesting that ‘this neglect can be partially attributed to the images’ own seclusion in the private worlds of women’s lives’.⁴⁴ Similarly, autograph albums were often regarded as personal, semi-private documents in the same way as informal sketchbooks. After the First World War, many soldiers and nurses decided to publish their memoirs and diaries, and yet chose to keep their albums private.

Higonnet states that rudimentary drawing and watercolour were a typical feminine accomplishment at this time. Edith Marshall kept two sketch albums through the pre- and post-war periods together with a sketchbook appropriated as an autograph album during the war.⁴⁵ One sketch album contains, for the most part, pen and ink drawings of castles and churches and the location and dates of summer 1914 suggest a sketching holiday.⁴⁶ The second postwar sketchbook has a mix of architectural sketches and portrait sketches. Edith’s work as a VAD may have influenced her to widen her work to include studies of people too.

Higonnet argues that these feminine albums embraced different skills, collated either by the individual or as a collective effort. The First World War albums in the archive reflect a transition from the visual albums of painting, sketches and journaling of the nineteenth century to the capturing of memories via the new medium of the camera. Higonnet argues

⁴² Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 23.

⁴³ Anne Higonnet, ‘Secluded Vision: Images of Feminine Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe’, in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 1992), p. 171.

⁴⁴ Higonnet, ‘Secluded Vision: Images of Feminine Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe’, p. 171.

⁴⁵ Anne Higonnet, ‘Secluded Vision: Images of Feminine Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe’, *Radical History Review*, 16-36, 38 (1987), p. 18.

⁴⁶ ‘Autograph Album Edith G Marshall VAD’ (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection.

that work on the feminine language of the album and its tradition of ‘feminine visual culture’ ‘did not survive outside the home [...] it succumbed to the force of commodity marketing’.⁴⁷

Di Bello, however, argues that this ushered in a revival of album-making as a method of capturing memories.⁴⁸ Nurse James’ autograph album is a good example of this changing trend.⁴⁹ The first part of the album contains traditional entries, mainly verses, mottos, and statements of thanks, but later a series of twenty-four sepia photographs are rudely cut and pasted into the book. They have been separated from the first section by several unused pages as if to mark a new purpose for the book. Unfortunately, unlike the traditional entries, there is no way to identify the location, date, or individuals accurately as Nurse James has not annotated these photographs.⁵⁰

Di Bello argues that Mrs. Birkbeck’s album was a small portable item that could be easily taken with her on visits and displayed in the drawing rooms of her friends as it ‘displayed her taste and showcased her husband’s reputation’.⁵¹ She also goes on to conclude that albums, unlike diaries that women also kept, were not secret but to be shared with friends, acquaintances, and strangers.

Albums passed through many hands and previous entries would be scrutinised, not only for content and ideas but also, perhaps especially, for the handwriting. Blouin argues that handwriting was seen as a ‘nineteenth-century litmus test of culture and character’.⁵²

Erica R. Armstrong’s *A Mental and Moral Feast: Reading, Writing, and Sentimentality in*

⁴⁷ Higonnet, ‘Secluded Vision: Images of Feminine Experience in Nineteenth-Century Europe’, p. 180.

⁴⁸ Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ ‘Autograph Album Elsie Maud James TFNS’ (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/63/JAME.

⁵⁰ Elsie Maud James was a Territorial Force Nursing Sister serving at the 3rd Western General Hospital in Cardiff. Her records contain only letters regarding her resignation from the TFNS in November 1915 due to a family bereavement. The dated entries in her album are mainly from October to December 1915. ‘Service Records Elsie Maud James TFNS TNA WO399/12349’, The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War.

⁵¹ Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 38.

⁵² Jennifer Blouin, ‘Eternal Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Friendship Albums’, *The Hilltop Review*, 9.1 (2016), pp. 63–76 (p. 4).

Black Philadelphia considers the albums as expressions of female friendship, arguing their popularity with both black and white females. Armstrong goes on to suggest that the ‘albums demonstrate common cultural assumptions about piety and virtue [...] serv[ing] as a badge of respectability’ for black women’s public image.⁵³

Autograph albums present a range of insights not only into writing, indicating literacy levels, but also showing concerns about contributing as a demanding creative practice. In their work on Ozark albums, Vance Randolph and May Kennedy McCord argue that the many contributions written in the same handwriting suggest either poor or non-existent writing skills, as amongst pioneering communities, ‘ninety per cent of the people [...] would be classed as wholly illiterate.’⁵⁴ They suggest these entries were, in all probability, made by proxy as the contributor sought help from a more learned member of the community, arguing that even the literate often found difficulty in knowing what to write, ‘many a poor chap [...] stewed and sweated over it for hours’.⁵⁵ Although some contributions in the nurses’ albums seem to be written by inexperienced hands, the effects of injury and shell-shock maybe the cause of shaky handwriting rather than a reflection of their literary skill. However, the chance to write in a nurse’s album and showcase their writing abilities should not be overlooked either.

The shared nature of albums meant that the entries were read by many people, and the obligation to provide something that was thoughtful and unique could place the contributor under pressure. The widespread perusal of existing entries, however, also provided a source of prose, verse, and ideas to contribute to other albums. Because contributors were also readers of albums, conventions governing the genre and content of album entries were

⁵³ Erica R. Armstrong, ‘A Mental and Moral Feast: Reading, Writing, and Sentimentality in Black Philadelphia’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 16.1 (2004), pp. 78–102 (p. 81).

⁵⁴ Vance Randolph and May Kennedy McCord, ‘Autograph Albums in the Ozarks’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 61.240 (1948), pp. 182–93 (p. 182), doi:10.2307/536127.

⁵⁵ Randolph and McCord, ‘Autograph Albums in the Ozarks’, p. 182.

quickly established and disseminated. My thesis aims to demonstrate the ongoing tradition of sharing through albums found in the nurses' albums. Randolph and McCord's argument that contributors struggled to know what to write in the 1870s remains evident in the nurses' albums from 1914-1918. Within the intimate settings of the wards, soldier-patients could browse the albums and draw inspiration, support, and a sense of community from the content. I will discuss the value of this content as a form of therapy for both the soldier-patients and the nurses.

Whilst the structure of the albums remained relatively unchanged for over one hundred years, I will argue that the significant change was the contributors. Ricker, Jabour, and Blouin show that albums were passed among young female friends.⁵⁶ Earlier albums were passed around a group of women with a similar connection, all were from a similar background, and often had the bond of starting out in adult life together. During the First World War, the nurses now passed the albums among the young, wounded soldier-patients. The relationships between the contributors and nurses in these albums were very different, these young men were not friends in the traditional sense of album contributors. There was a power relationship underpinning the connection as the nurse was in charge of the patient, and the bond was constrained by both rank and the reverse of gender roles. This thesis shows that these friendships can be seen as transitory. The albums were a connection with a war hero who had been willing to die for his country. In this regard, the albums of the First World War are closer in resemblance to the celebrity autograph albums of today.

Historical studies of First World War nursing care have often used autograph album content, together with postcards and hospital magazines, as supporting evidence about the

⁵⁶ Lisa Reid Ricker, '(De)Constructing the Praxis of Memory-Keeping: Late Nineteenth-Century Autograph Albums as Sites of Rhetorical Invention', *Rhetoric Review*, 29.3 (2010), pp. 239–56, doi:10.1080/07350198.2010.485961; Jabour, 'Albums of Affection: Female Friendship and Coming of Age in Antebellum Virginia'; Blouin, 'Eternal Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Friendship Albums'.

treatment of wounded in the war. This has usually taken the form of the various sketches that appear in the albums portraying the ward environment as well as stylised sketches, sometimes critical or comedic, of the nurses in their uniforms, mainly the VADs. This thesis looks at the albums collectively and considers the significance of entries within the context of a single album, within the conventions of hospital albums, and within wider cultures informing nurse/patient interactions and their representation.

The Context for the Autograph Collections in the First World War

The background to the First World War continues to be debated and analysed.⁵⁷ In his book *The Ascendancy of Europe 1815-1914*, M. S. Anderson considers the changes that various European countries underwent during the nineteenth century, following on from the upheavals of revolution and war in the eighteenth century, which continued to unsettle emerging new European states. He argues that this age of ‘revolutionary populism of the nineteenth century was to breed many of the forces which devastated Europe for a generation after 1914’.⁵⁸ Arno Mayer writes in his chapter on ‘The Persistence of the Old Regime’ in *Total War and Historical Change: Europe 1914-1955*, that the First World War was the result of countries trying to hold on to the traditional or old order of governments rather than as the ‘explosive rise of capital industrialism’.⁵⁹ Europe had not truly been at peace during the nineteenth century; since the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, countries increasingly vied for supremacy throughout the century. Britain had been gradually building its Empire, and other European Countries such as Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Hapsburg Empire sought to increase their strength by modernising their military might. Alliances were formed, broken

⁵⁷ Key works that discuss the origins of the First World War include: Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2014). J. M. Roberts, *Europe 1880-1945*, 3rd edition (Pearson Education Ltd, 2001). Liddell-Hart, *A History of the First World War. Total War and Historical Change: Europe, 1914 -1955*, ed. by Arthur Marwick Clive Emsley, Wendy Simpson (Open University Press, 2009).

⁵⁸ M.S. Anderson, *The Ascendancy of Europe 1815-1914*, 3rd edn (Pearson Longman, 2003), p. 199.

⁵⁹ Arno J Mayer, ‘The Persistence of the Old Regime’, in *Total War and Historical Change: Europe 1914-1955* (Open University Press, 2009), pp. 42–55 (p. 42).

and reformed between the major players to maintain and gain control of industrial resources to meet the need to support their growing Empires.

In the later part of the Victorian era, into the early 1900s, Britain shifted towards a greater philanthropic focus on the welfare and betterment of the people. Women's right to vote in parliamentary elections had been restrictive. Before the Great Reform Act of 1832, only a few propertied women were able to vote in parliamentary elections.⁶⁰ The Act defined the voter explicitly as male therefore denying women suffrage in 1832. The Municipal Franchise Act of 1869 saw the right to vote extended to unmarried women ratepayers.⁶¹ Earlier that decade, there had been calls from prominent voices, like that of John Stuart Mill, for full female suffrage.⁶² The demand for equal voting rights gained momentum throughout the later nineteenth century. The Local Government Act of 1894 saw married women eligible to vote in local elections alongside single women and widows which led to an increase in female voting in the local government elections in the 1890's.⁶³ The call for women's rights to vote at national level, however, remained. The suffrage movement saw the founding of both local and national political groups. In *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign 1866-1928*, Harold L. Smith provides an account of some of the more prominent local societies such as the London National Society for Women's Suffrage, which had links to Manchester and Edinburgh. Members of many of these local groups were affiliated with the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS).⁶⁴ Despite its significance in furthering the

⁶⁰ The Representation of the People Act 1832 also known as The Great Reform Act introduced changes to the electoral system in England and Wales. It was the first time that voters were defined as male and has been seen as a source of the women's suffrage movement.

⁶¹ The Municipal Franchise Act 1869 extended the vote in local elections to women who were ratepayers. It also enabled women to become Poor Law Guardians.

⁶² John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was an influential politician, economist and civil servant. Along with Henry Hunt (1773-1835) he called for women's suffrage.

⁶³ The Local Government Act 1894 established elected councils at both district and parish levels. This resulted in the significant enhancing of local democracy. 'Local Government Act 1894'

<<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/56-57/73/contents>> [accessed 25 August 2025].

⁶⁴ The NUWSS was formed in 1897 following a joint meeting with the Central National Society for Women's Suffrage presided over by Millicent Garrett Fawcett in 1896. (Harold L. Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign, 1866-1928* (Longman, 1998), p.13).

developments of the suffrage movement, however, it was later overshadowed by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) led by Mrs Pankhurst and her daughters.⁶⁵

Further philanthropic reforms of the Victorian era saw development in two main influential areas of particular significance for this thesis: education and hospitals. The Education Act of 1870 saw the introduction of compulsory elementary education in England.⁶⁶ This reform meant that girls could now receive free education, and school was no longer the preserve of boys for families who could not afford to pay. Leaving school with the ability to read and write opened up avenues of a life other than one in service, marriage, or poverty. Some of the handwriting in the albums bears witness to the often very basic level of this education. One aspect of the education system was to encourage rote memorisation especially of poems which, according to Catherine Robson, was a 'device in the extended period during which rudimentary education in English was understood primarily as a necessary tool to unlock the Bible and Christian scriptures'.⁶⁷ This popularisation of memorised poetry and short verse can be seen as a dominant factor that shaped the contributions made to the albums.

Similarly, advancements in medicine and care of the sick and elderly saw public health legislation emerge in Victorian Britain.⁶⁸ Of the reforms that had a lasting impact on the twentieth century, it was nursing that provided a professional pathway for many young women particularly those from middle- to upper-class families.⁶⁹ It provided a certain

⁶⁵ Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was founded in 1903. Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928); Christabel Pankhurst (1880-1958); Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1960)

⁶⁶ The Education Act of 1870 was introduced by W.E Forster. It was in response to a call for mass education deemed important in maintaining England and Wales's position in manufacturing.

⁶⁷ Catherine Robson, *Heart Beats Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem* (Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 40.

⁶⁸ The Public Health Act of 1848 was a response to poor living conditions and recurrent epidemics such as cholera. This, together with the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, began to ensure better care and improvement for living conditions in Victorian England for the destitute.

⁶⁹ Brian Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession* (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1960), p. 19. As Abel-Smith summarises, 'The nursing reform movement was part of the wider struggle for the emancipation of women'. Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession*, p. 36.

freedom from the control of families where the only independence was the limited one found in marriage.

A substantial medical and social historiography of First World War nursing exists which provides crucial contextualization of the albums and the conditions in which they were produced. Whilst Brian Abel-Smith's *History of Nursing* focuses mainly on civilian nursing, he does discuss military nursing as well as the VAD nurses, within the context of the development and history of nursing.⁷⁰ He contends that the demand for recognition of nursing as a profession is part of the wider picture of Women's suffrage. The campaign for a register of trained nurses is often seen as running parallel to the suffrage movement and Linda Martz's study outlines the parallels between the nurses' fight for registration and the suffrage movement's call for women's right to vote.⁷¹ Registration for nurses eventually followed in 1919 with the Nurses Registration Act and the establishment of the General Nursing Council in 1920.⁷²

Abel-Smith's focus was on the everyday experiences of nurses looking at their work in hospital in particular, but what marked it out was his use of primary sources such as official records and local sources to delve into the development of nursing.⁷³ Christopher Maggs took up this bottom-up approach arguing that for a better understanding of nursing history we should 'explore a new historiography, [and] examine our sources for historical inquiry'.⁷⁴ He goes on to state that 'the interest in oral and local history is producing more

⁷⁰ Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession*.

⁷¹ Linda Martz, "'That Splendid Body of Women': Nursing, Professional Registration, and Suffragette Militancy", *Women's History Review*, 29.6 (2020), pp. 1000–15, doi:10.1080/09612025.2020.1745404.

⁷² Nurses Registration Act 1919 Ch 94 p 440, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/Projects/Controllers-Library/item_651859 (King's Printer of Acts of Parliament) <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/43-44/23/contents/enacted>> [accessed 30 April 2025]. General Nursing Council was replaced by the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing Midwifery and Health Visiting in 1983. With the introduction of placing nursing in the higher education field with Project 2000 and Diploma and Degree level teaching of nurse training, the Nursing and Midwifery Council was established in 2002.

⁷³ Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession*.

⁷⁴ Christopher Maggs, 'A History of Nursing: A History of Caring?', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, no. 23.3 (1996), pp. 630–35 (p. 634), doi:<https://doi-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1996.tb00028.x>.

accounts from the rank and file', rather than from the perspective of nurse reformers and biographies of the profession's elite.⁷⁵ This approach supports the value of researching documents such as the autograph albums, which provide a grassroots perspective of nursing care in the First World War.

Previously, historiography was in a more conventional form with a broad-brush approach that focused on biographies of prominent individuals. Particular attention had focused on reformers such as Elizabeth Fry and Florence Nightingale, who brought about consistency in nurse training and improvements in hospital organization and administration.

Florence Nightingale continues to fascinate. Although regarded by many as the founder of modern nursing, with strong links to the introduction of female nurses in support and eventual integration into the military, it has been argued that her influence lies more in the development of hospital reform and public health improvements.⁷⁶ There has been a plethora of historiographical work on Nightingale and her reforms. In 1986, Anne Summers argued that this was the reason for the paucity of secondary literature on British military nursing before 1914.⁷⁷ In *Florence Nightingale: The Woman and Her Legend*, Mark Bostridge seeks to debunk the myths that have grown around her image in part due to the ongoing fascination with her.⁷⁸ Nightingale's strength of character enabled her to influence military care of the wounded during the Crimean war and led the way for nurses to be seen as an integral part of the British Army. The introduction of military nurses to support the casualty evacuation chain was brought about in part by Nightingale's role in the Crimea and their crucial role in the First World War.

⁷⁵ Maggs, 'A History of Nursing: A History of Caring?', p. 634. [Accessed 20 September 2024].

⁷⁶ Harold Ellis, 'Florence Nightingale: Creator of Modern Nursing and Public Health Pioneer. *Journal of Perioperative Practice* 2008-09 Vol 18 (9) Pp 404-406 .

⁷⁷ Anne Summers, 'Women as Voluntary and Professional Military Nurses in Great Britain, 1854-1914' (unpublished phd, The Open University, 1986) <<https://oro.open.ac.uk/56913/>>.

⁷⁸ Mark Bostridge, *Florence Nightingale: The Woman and Her Legend* (Penguin Books Limited, 2015).

Carol Helmstadter has written extensively on nursing during and after the Crimean War.⁷⁹ In *Beyond Nightingale* she explores the opposition to but eventual introduction of female nurses into the British Army in support of foreign wars. She argues that after Nightingale's arrival in Scutari on 04 November 1854, the medical officers opposed her mission, and at first, every single doctor refused to ask for any of her nurses. It was after the Battle of Inkerman that doctors' support for Nightingale gradually increased.⁸⁰ Summers argues that 'the early history of British female army nursing demonstrates the influence of civilian expectations upon military institutions'.⁸¹ She goes on to argue that:

the balance of military medical thinking was shifting from battlefield rescue to nursing care[...]and therefore, given the structure of the nineteenth and twentieth-century nursing profession, from male to female personnel.⁸²

Admittedly, the Crimean War had seen Florence Nightingale take a group of nurses in support of the British Army, but the overwhelming amount of nursing care had, up until that time, been carried out by the male orderlies of the British Army.

The second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) saw a small cohort of nurses accompany the British Army, working, as in the Crimean War, alongside male orderlies. The limited number of men available for nursing roles on the eve of the Boer War enabled military nursing to become feminized.⁸³ Charlotte Dale, Keiron Spires, and Christopher Schmitz have considered the impact and influence of the Anglo-Boer War nurses on military nursing.⁸⁴ Dale argues

⁷⁹ Carol Helmstadter, *Beyond Nightingale: Nursing on the Crimean War Battlefields*, Nursing History and Humanities (Manchester University Press, 2020), doi:10.7765/9781526140524.

⁸⁰ Helmstadter, *Beyond Nightingale*, p. 63.

⁸¹ Anne Summers, 'Women as Voluntary and Professional Military Nurses in Great Britain, 1854-1914' (unpublished phd, The Open University, 1986) <<https://oro.open.ac.uk/56913/>>.

⁸² Summers, 'Women as Voluntary and Professional Military Nurses in Great Britain, 1854-1914', p. 283.

⁸³ Anne Summers, *Angels and Citizens: British Women as Military Nurses 1854-1914*, Revised Edition (Threshold Press, 2000).

⁸⁴ Charlotte Dale, *Raising Professional Confidence: The Influence of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) on the Development and Recognition of Nursing as a Profession* (The University of Manchester, 2013). Lt Col (Retired) Keiron Andrew Spires, 'Nurses in the Boer War (1899-1902): What Was It about the Collective Body of Nurses Caring for the Sick and Wounded during the Boer War That Shaped the Future of Military Nursing?' (unpublished doctoral thesis, London South Bank University, 2013). Christopher Schmitz, "'We Too Were Soldiers: The Experiences of British Nurses in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902', in *A Soldier and A Woman* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), pp. 49-66.

that, despite continued opposition to nurses working in close proximity to the fighting, their ‘clinical proficiency had a significant impact on military effectiveness’.⁸⁵ The introduction of female nurses into the British Army, however, ran into opposition. Helmstadter argues that some of this opposition was due to the reputation of civilian nurses as callous and often drunk. Male orderlies were often preferred by the wounded or sick soldiers as they were found to be gentler in their handling of patients.⁸⁶ Society too, placed restraints on what was appropriate for middle- and upper-class women to do.

The years preceding the Boer War had seen the establishment of the Army Nursing Service (ANS) with the formation, in 1887, of Princess Christian’s Army Nursing Reserve (PCANR) in support of the ANS and the Indian Army Nursing Service (IANS) the following year in 1888. The PCANR was disbanded in 1907 and the QAIMNS reserve formed in 1908.⁸⁷ The merger in 1898 of the Medical Staff Corps and Army Medical Staff saw the formation of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), consisting of male orderlies and doctors and, in 1902, Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) was formed. These collective medical bodies of Orderlies, Nurses, and Doctors came under the umbrella of the Army Medical Services (AMS). The regular RAMC and QAIMNS nurses worked in the well-established military hospitals of Netley, Woolwich, the Cambridge Military Hospital (at Aldershot) and Queen Alexandra’s Military Hospital, Millbank in London.⁸⁸

Eric Gruber von Arni and Gary Searle state that the members of the newly formed QAIMNS were mainly selected on their social status and quickly became seen as an elite group of women:

⁸⁵ Dale, *Raising Professional Confidence: The Influence of the Anglo-Boer War (1899 - 1902) on the Development and Recognition of Nursing as a Profession*, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Carol Helmstadter, ‘Introduction’, in *Beyond Nightingale* (University Press, 2020), pp. 1–7, doi:10.7765/9781526140524.00010.

⁸⁷ ⁸⁷ Ian Hay, *One Hundred Years of Army Nursing: The Story of the British Army Nursing Services from the Time of Florence Nightingale to the Present Day* (Cassell and Company Ltd, 1953), pp. 57–58.

⁸⁸ Eric Gruber von Arni and Gary Searle, *Sub Cruce Candida A Celebration of One Hundred Years of Army Nursing, 1902-2002* (Qaranc Association, 2002).

Social status was a particularly important factor in the selection process as it had previously been agreed that preference should be given to those with ‘social’ as well as professional qualifications.[...] In the three years prior to the First World War the QAIMNS rapidly assumed an aura of exclusivity and were known colloquially as ‘the elite’.⁸⁹

A military staff nurse usually completed three years of training in a civilian hospital before enlistment and then two years in a military hospital before she could be considered for promotion.⁹⁰ Although all were considered Officer rank to ensure discipline was maintained by both soldier-patients and nurses themselves, their military records show the distinction of rank between Staff Nurse, Sister, and Matron. In 1914 the QAIMNS numbered 297 regular nurses. This cadre was augmented during the First World War with Reservists employed for the duration.

Ian Hay’s *One Hundred Years of Army Nursing* and Juliet Piggott’s *Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps* provide a broad background to the development of military nursing from its early inception onwards.⁹¹ Hay’s work incorporates First World War nursing as part of the wider history until 1958, utilising individual nurses’ testimony to recount their deployment at the start of the war. Piggott summarises the QAIMNS in the First World War fairly briefly (over approximately twenty pages) and focuses mainly on the Matrons in Chief, and in particular the renowned figures of Dame Ethel Becher and Dame Maud McCarthy and their influence and administration work during the war.⁹² Whilst these histories place nursing against the backdrop of War, other histories look more closely at the

⁸⁹ Eric Gruber von Arni and Gary Searle, ‘Chapter 2 The Early Years’, in *Sub Cruce Candida: A Celebration of One Hundred Years of Army Nursing* (The QARANC Association: The Bath Press, 2002), p. unpaginated.

⁹⁰ Summers, *Angels and Citizens*.

⁹¹ Ian Hay, *One Hundred Years of Army Nursing: The Story of the British Army Nursing Services from the Time of Florence Nightingale to the Present Day* (Cassell and Company Ltd, 1953). Juliet Piggott, *Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps (Famous Regiments Series)* (Leo Cooper Ltd, 1975).

⁹² Piggott, *Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps (Famous Regiments Series)*, pp. 46–56. Dame Ethel Becher (1867-1948), Matron-in-Chief to the War Office for the QAIMNS from 1910 -1919; Dame Maud McCarthy (1859-1949) Matron-in Chief to the British Expeditionary Forces in France and Flanders during the First World War .

practices of these wartime nurses, how nursing care was innovative due to the industrial wounds of industrial war, and how the nurse was represented.

Alison Fell in *Remembering First World War Nursing: Other Fronts, Other Spaces* argues that women's participation was 'highly mediatized from the outbreak of the conflict onwards'.⁹³ She argues that the nurse was seen as a heroic figure and a 'female version of service and sacrifice' which mirrored the volunteers and conscripted young men who went to the front in the cause of patriotism.⁹⁴ Fell links these images to the Virgin Mary and national patriotism citing popular images of nurses draped in the national flag and arguing that the image of the traditional maternal carer took on an elevated status as carers for the soldiers fighting for the country. Fell also considers the contrasting representation of anti-heroines, women who were seen as frivolous, selfish and who only 'played at caring for their patients'.⁹⁵ In this thesis I will consider how the nurses portrayed themselves to their patients in their autograph books and how such popular images and symbolism influenced their aspirations and patriotism. I will also explore the narrative in the autograph albums of how far the soldier-patients viewed their nurses as heroines and how their contributions to the nurses' albums acknowledged, or sometimes challenged, their maternal caring role.

The focus of this thesis aims to explore an underused source, that of the autograph albums. Margaret R. Higonnet argues that nurses' description of their work in First World War literature underscores the importance of exploiting every source of information'.⁹⁶ Higonnet argues for a broader focus on the perceptions of nursing care, which should also include that of the soldier-patient: 'The quest for truth in the shifting and chaotic conditions

⁹³ Alison S. Fell, 'Remembering First World War Nursing: Other Fronts, Other Spaces', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 11.4 (2018), pp. 269–72 (p. 269), doi:10.1080/17526272.2018.1523779.

⁹⁴ Alison S. Fell, 'Afterward: Remembering the First World War Nurse in Britain and France', in *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives*, ed. by Alison S. Fell and Christine E. Hallett, (Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2013), pp. 173–102 (p. 174).

⁹⁵ Fell, 'Remembering First World War Nursing', p. 269.

⁹⁶ Margaret R. Higonnet, 'Cubist Vision in Nursing Accounts', in *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2013), p. 156.

of war drives the ironic ambiguities of the “invisible visibility” in many of these nurses’ texts’.⁹⁷ She goes on to question how the ‘nurse’s examination [of their medical vision] intersect[s] with the patient’s own gaze.’⁹⁸ This can be found most obviously in the letters and diaries of nurses and their patients, but I argue that the autograph albums also provide perspectives on care and that many entries offer new insights into experiences of hospital care and environment.

Michael Roper uses diary entries and personal letters between the soldier and his family to explore the impact of war on the soldier and his work. Roper’s *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, demonstrates the importance of these personal documents in expanding our knowledge of the everyday impact of war in the UK.⁹⁹

MacDonald’s wide work on all aspects of the First World War draws significantly on the diaries, letters, and later interviews with First World War veterans. In particular, MacDonald’s *The Roses of No Man’s Land: Nurses on the Western Front* interweaves the work of the medical services, (military doctors, nurses, VADs, stretcher-bearers) with the major battles of the war providing both a top-down record of the war and drilling down into the intimate experiences of individuals to provide a unique perspective of war.¹⁰⁰

My project is inspired by a growing body of work, further detailed in what follows, that uses first-hand sources to attend to the intimate experiences of those involved in war work, recovering impressions of their emotions and relationships, while situating these within the historiography of nursing.

Angela K. Smith’s account of British nurses working in Serbia in *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* emphasizes the significance of the heroism and imperial

⁹⁷ Higonet, ‘Cubist Vision in Nursing Accounts’, p. 159.

⁹⁸ Higonet, ‘Cubist Vision in Nursing Accounts’, p. 159.

⁹⁹ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester University Press, 2009).

¹⁰⁰ MacDonald, *Roses of No Man’s Land*.

patriotism of nurses in the First World War set against the Serbian front.¹⁰¹ She argues that a sense of imperialism and associated patriotism was instilled from childhood and cultivated a desire in women to “do their bit”. Smith suggests that national identity was important to them, maintaining that how they were perceived from the outside was important.¹⁰² This can be seen reflected in the album contributions, where the soldier-patients presented their nurses as the physical embodiment of what they were fighting for.

First World War nursing history has mainly focused on the VAD nurses who served at the front and on the various large hospitals in the UK, such as the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth. The British Red Cross, together with the Order of St John of Jerusalem, as part of Sir Alfred Henry Keogh’s scheme for the organization of Voluntary Aid, founded the VAD system in 1909 and in 1914 joined forces to form the Joint War Committee.¹⁰³ The British Red Cross states there were over 90,000 VADs in the First World War.¹⁰⁴

Mary Burr outlines the origins of the VAD service from its inception in August 1909 by the Secretary of State for War, Mr Haldane, through its development by the British Red Cross and St John Ambulance Association.¹⁰⁵ In the pre-war years, both men and women completed training courses, attending lectures on as varied topics as suitable accommodation for the sick to the administration of medicines. Burr highlights that these courses were arranged by well-meaning people but with no trained nurse input.¹⁰⁶ In *Nurses of Passchendaele*, however, Christine Hallet asserts that professional nurses had skills that

¹⁰¹ Angela K. Smith, ‘Beacons of Britishness: British Nurses and Female Doctors as Prisoners of War’, in *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2013), pp. 35–50.

¹⁰² Smith, ‘Beacons of Britishness: British Nurses and Female Doctors as Prisoners of War’, p. 36.

¹⁰³ ‘Voluntary Aid Detachment - VAD Nurses WWI World War Two’ <<https://qaranc.co.uk/voluntary-aid-detachment.php>> [accessed 28 April 2025]. Sir Alfred Henry Keogh (1857-1936)

¹⁰⁴ ‘Nursing During the First World War - VAD Redcross’, *VAD Red Cross*, 2023 <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/medical-care-during-ww1/nursing-during-the-first-world-war>>.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Burr, ‘The English Voluntary Aid Detachments’, *The American Journal of Nursing*, 15.6 (2021), pp. 461–67 (p. 461).

¹⁰⁶ Burr, ‘The English Voluntary Aid Detachments’.

would be extremely useful when war began and that it was these professionals who ran classes for the newly formed VAD nurses from 1909 onwards in readiness for war.¹⁰⁷ As Hallett puts it, ‘no one could have anticipated the demanding and dangerous work they [the VADs] would eventually perform on many war fronts’.¹⁰⁸ In particular, nurses who had served during the Boer War gained valuable experience that could be taught and shared during the First World War. This sharing of knowledge can be seen reflected by one QAIMNS nurse who, as Hay quotes, records on her mobilisation at Chatham that she is ‘to instruct Territorial and Reserve Sisters in their duties in Military Hospitals, and also lecture on some of the Army forms and books used’.¹⁰⁹

Many historians writing about First World War nursing have looked at gender and class issues and how they intersect in debates about women’s professionalisation. Janet Watson considers the work of trained and untrained medical staff and whether the idea of patriotism or the concept of work itself was the driver for their war work. She contends that ‘work standards and professional identity could seem unpatriotic’ and considers the issues that conflict between trained and untrained staff could create.¹¹⁰ Watson argues that the VADs saw this opportunity as their chance to contribute to the war effort, viewing their work as ‘their contribution to the war effort’.¹¹¹ She makes a distinction between the volunteers and the trained nurses, maintaining that ‘for both trained and untrained female hospital personnel, the weight placed on these ideas competed (often unsuccessfully), with differing conceptions of the work itself’.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Christine E. Hallett, *Nurses of Passchendaele: Caring for the Wounded of the Ypres Campaigns 1914 -1918* (Pen and Sword History, 2017).

¹⁰⁸ Hallett, *Nurses of Passchendaele: Caring for the Wounded of the Ypres Campaigns 1914 -1918*, pp. 4–5.

¹⁰⁹ Hay, *One Hundred Years of Army Nursing*, p. 70.

¹¹⁰ Janet S. K. Watson, ‘Wars in the Wards: The Social Construction of Medical Work in First World War Britain’, *Journal of British Studies*, 41.4 (2002), pp. 484–510 (pp. 486–87), doi:10.1086/341439.

¹¹¹ Watson, ‘Wars in the Wards’, p. 486.

¹¹² Watson, ‘Wars in the Wards’, p. 485.

Whilst Watson suggests that the trained nurses saw the war as a means to demonstrate their abilities and be recognized as a profession, in contrast, Sharon Ouditt considers the success of the VAD institution in terms of middle-class educated women demonstrating their innate ability to nurse without the need for strict hospital training.¹¹³ Ouditt argues, though, that recruitment of educated women meant that ‘not only were women of lower social status excluded from the nursing services, but that they were also encased in an ideological construct that assumed their moral inferiority’.¹¹⁴ This was also true for civilian nurse training and for enlistment in the TFNS and QAIMNS.¹¹⁵

Trained nurses had to be able to cope with the trauma of medical care and, during wartime, the overexposure to the maiming, disfigurement, and death of young men. It was considered that they should be more mature, with the optimum age between twenty-five and thirty-five years. Yvonne McEwen states that it was the women in their thirties who carried out the hands-on care of patients in the Casualty Clearing Stations (CCS), base hospitals, barges, and trains.¹¹⁶ This is supported by Ana Carden-Coyne, who highlights the age difference between the military nurses and the VADs and points to references in hospital magazines to the professional or military nurses commonly being called ‘Old Aunt Polly’.¹¹⁷

Whereas military nurses had to be a minimum of twenty-five years of age to enlist, recruitment age for VADs was between twenty-three and thirty-eight years of age.¹¹⁸ The often young civilian women of the Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment (VADs) came from a wide background, with many volunteer nurses such as Vera Brittain coming from the

¹¹³ Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

¹¹⁴ Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*, p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*.

¹¹⁶ Yvonne McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

¹¹⁷ Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds: Military Patients and Medical Power in the First World War* (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 320.

¹¹⁸ Menna Lloyd Jones, ‘Voluntary Aid Detachments: Nursing Volunteer ‘VADs’ during World War One’, *British Journal of Healthcare Assistants* (London), 12.11 (2018), pp. 559–61, art. 11, doi:10.12968/bjha.2018.12.11.559.

middle and upper classes. The naivety of many of these young women is summed up by Brittain's description of her own inexperienced position on volunteering:

Throughout my two decades of life, I had never looked upon the nude body of an adult male [...] I had therefore expected, when I first started nursing, to be overcome with nervousness and embarrassment, but, to my infinite relief, I was conscious of neither.¹¹⁹

VADs carried out a variety of occupations from cooking, cleaning, ambulance driving to nursing whilst serving in auxiliary Red Cross Hospitals in the UK, the Western and Eastern Fronts. For many of these more privileged women, this would be their first taste of work. Summers quotes from *First Aid (August 1912)* that 'In order to gain the necessary experience, the members practice putting on bandages and splints, arresting hemorrhage and other matters they have learnt in their first aid classes' and that VADs would also undertake ward work in a hospital carrying out bedmaking, taking observations and 'putting on fomentations and simple dressings'.¹²⁰

Unlike professional military nurses, VADs tended to do such work only for the duration of the war before undertaking other occupations, marrying or, like Vera Brittain, returning to University. These VADs worked alongside the military nurses, with many serving abroad close to the front lines. They feature in the autograph archive both as collectors of albums and in frequent images, both pictorial and in textual descriptions from the soldiers. Their uniforms, emblazoned with the Red Cross on the breast of a starched white apron, together with a white, often elaborately tied veil, still stand out today as the iconic image of the First World War nurse.

Most volunteers came from that same group of mainly middle- and upper-class young women and girls, from financially comfortable homes, who were seeking a freer future and

¹¹⁹ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 6th Impression (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014), p. 136.

¹²⁰ Summers, *Angels and Citizens*, p. 219. First Aid Manual no 1, a pocket-sized manual printed by the British Red Cross in 1912 written by Honorary Surgeon-Colonel James Cantlie.

better independence as promulgated by the suffrage movement.¹²¹ Ouditt argues that women saw this as an opportunity to break away from the restrictions of middle-class roles of women.¹²² Whilst Ouditt's work focuses mainly on VADs who worked in hospitals close to the Western and Eastern Fronts, Sue Hawkins' study on the VADs at Holmfirth offers a useful contrast. Hawkins' article typifies the interest in VAD nursing during the First World War, and in her article, 'First World War VAD stories from the British Red Cross Archives: The Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital', she uses the resources of the Red Cross VAD database to explore their stories.¹²³ She focuses on one hospital to reveal the diversity of these volunteers working at a distance from the front. Hawkins's study of the British Red Cross database highlights that over half the VADs listed were unmarried which, she argues, lends weight to the assumption that the work of the VAD offered an escape from societal constraints.¹²⁴

First-hand sources are invaluable to our understanding of both volunteer and professional nursing. Carol Acton, in 'Diverting the Gaze', argues that women in the First World War were authentic witnesses to the war; the diary entries, letters, and memoirs were valuable in understanding the experiences of men and women at the front.¹²⁵ Acton goes on to state that, despite this, scant attention has been paid to how they see the trauma of frontline nursing. In *Obsessed by the Obscenity of War: Emotional and Physical Wounds in Mary Borden's Poetry and Lesley Smith's Four Years out of Life*, Acton discusses how two nurses

¹²¹ Angela K. Smith, "'The Empowering of Individuals' Feminism, Art and War in The Egoist', in *Suffrage Discourse in Britain during the First World War* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 109–30, doi:10.4324/9781315242088.

¹²² Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*. Fell, 'Remembering First World War Nursing', p. 270.

¹²³ Sue Hawkins, 'First World War VAD Stories from the British Red Cross Archives: The Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital', *Journal of War & Cultural Studies*, 11.4 (2018), pp. 291–303. The diaries and letters of VADs and the British Red Cross society database of VADs has provided a wealth of data for the historian. In comparison, documents from military nurses are not as abundant. VADs such as Vera Brittain, Mary Borden and Irene Rathbone all published works on their experiences as VADs during the First World War and historians such as Hallett, MacDonald and Oudett all write extensively on VAD nursing. Christine E. Hallett, 'The British "VAD"', in *Nurse Writers of the Great War* (Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 187–210 <<http://www.jstor.org.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/stable/j.ctt1b3h94f.18>>; MacDonald, *Roses of No Man's Land*; Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*.

¹²⁴ Hawkins, 'First World War VAD Stories from the British Red Cross Archives: The Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital', p. 294.

¹²⁵ Carol Acton, *Diverting the Gaze: The Unseen Text in Women's War Writing* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), pp. 53–79.

expressed the trauma of war through metaphors in poetry and images.¹²⁶ Acton considers how Lesley Smith, in her memoir, uses images of injury and madness as metaphors to express the physical and emotional experience of nursing in a hospital on the Western Front much as the poetry written by both nurses and by the soldiers in the trenches, sought to express the trauma of their experiences.¹²⁷

In her chapter on ‘Negotiating injury and Masculinity’ in *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives*, Acton explores the complexities of the intimate relationship between the nurse and her wounded patient through their writing. She discusses the dilemmas both professional and VAD nurses encountered in these intimate relationships, setting it against the popular public images of the idealised nurse and the masculinity of the hero soldier and how these images are challenged by the destruction of the body through horrific wounds.¹²⁸

Carol Acton and Jane Potter in “*These frightful sights would work havoc with one’s brain*”: *Subjective Experience, Trauma, and Resilience in First World War Writings by Medical Personnel*” discuss shell-shock and the trauma of war on medical personnel. They contend that the scholarship on First World War trauma had mainly focused on the combatant experiences of war.¹²⁹ Drawing on the letters, diaries and autobiographical writing of doctors and nurses they explore the responses of the medical personnel in treating the badly injured and their own form of shell-shock in seeing the mutilated bodies of the soldiers. They examine how the psychological stress manifested itself in their language and writing but was simultaneously contained. They argue that these ‘works tend to focus on nursing process as well as the nurses’ role in “containing” combatant trauma and their own emotional

¹²⁶ Carol Acton, ‘Obsessed by the Obscenity of War’: Emotional and Physical Wounds in Mary Borden’s Poetry and Lesley Smith’s *Four Years Out of Life*, *Journal of War & Cultural Studies*, 11.4 (2018), pp. 335–47.

¹²⁷ Acton, ‘Obsessed by the Obscenity of War’, p. 336.

¹²⁸ Carol Acton, ‘Negotiating Injury and Masculinity in First World War Nurses’ Writing’, in *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2013), pp. 123–38.

¹²⁹ Carol Acton and Jane Potter, “‘These Frightful Sights Would Work Havoc with One’s Brain’: Subjective Experience, Trauma, and Resilience in First World War Writings by Medical Personnel”, *Literature and Medicine*, 30.1 (2012), pp. 61–85, doi:10.1353/lm.2012.0010.

responses'.¹³⁰ Acton and Potter suggest that contemporary reports on cases of nervous breakdown amongst the nursing staff were few, commenting that Yvonne McEwen's research had proved this not to be the case.¹³¹ Yvonne McEwen states that 'In the early days of the war, nursing journals boasted that cases of nervous breakdown among nurses on active service were 'remarkably few' but that 'the highest incidence of nervous breakdown and shell-shock among nurses was during 1917 and 1918'.¹³² Acton and Potter conclude by suggesting that the trauma experienced by the nurses and their resilience to it can be better understood in examining how they express themselves in the range of narratives within letters and diaries.¹³³ In my thesis I will consider how both nurse and patient trauma is manifested in the autograph albums and how the albums can act as a form of therapy for both the nurse and soldier-patient each trying through the medium of the album to offer support and understanding to each other.

Janet Watson's work on TFNS Sister Alice Slythe's diary considers the perspective of a wartime nurse through the medium of a diary.¹³⁴ Watson explores Sister Slythe's approach to nursing in France. Sister Slythe's diary charts her sense of adventure in the early part of the war. Her curiosity in getting as close to the frontline as possible contrasts with her initial lack of emotional connection with her patients. Watson suggests that as Slythe's work at the CCS goes on so she becomes more affected by the deaths of her patients and yet breaks off each time telling herself in her diary 'enough'.¹³⁵ This suggests that Slythe is protecting herself and at the same time ensuring she maintains her professional work ethic. Although diaries are often a space of privacy and intimacy where personal thoughts and feelings can be expressed,

¹³⁰ Acton and Potter, "These Frightful Sights Would Work Havoc with One's Brain", p. 64.

¹³¹ Acton and Potter, "These Frightful Sights Would Work Havoc with One's Brain", p. 64.

¹³² McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, pp. 173 and 175.

¹³³ Acton and Potter, "These Frightful Sights Would Work Havoc with One's Brain".

¹³⁴ Janet S.K. Watson, 'A Sister's War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe', in *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2015), pp. 103–20.

¹³⁵ Watson, 'A Sister's War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe', p. 114.

Slythe notes that she is writing her diary for her sister Maud and so it can be considered that Slythe exercises a certain amount of caution in her writing. Diaries provide further layers to the historian writing about nursing in the First World War and it can be argued that autograph albums too, are part of the archival strata still to be explored to gain fuller understanding of individuals' experiences of war.¹³⁶ Comparing a nurse's diary with her autograph album offers historians additional insight. While both were common among First World War nurses, analyzing an album and diary from one nurse for relevant information proved limited in the archives used for this thesis. This thesis will argue that the autograph albums enable us to explore this theme from a different perspective providing another dimension to our understanding of the nurse-soldier-patient relationship as the diaries and letters which have been extensively used in First World War research.

Christine E. Hallett's work considers the emotional and psychological aspects of nursing during the First World War in both *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* and *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*.¹³⁷ Hallett highlights the work of nurses in caring for psychologically as well as physically damaged men referencing the work of W. H. R. Rivers and the development of talking therapy, a treatment which is discussed as part of chapter three of this thesis.¹³⁸ The mental trauma of the soldier-patients who had endured life and injury at the front is an aspect that features throughout the albums in their verses and sketches which depict the nightmares these men suffered on the wards and the gratitude to the nurses who watched over them during this difficult period. Hallett considers the accounts of First World War military nurses and VADs to explore the phenomenon often

¹³⁶ Watson, 'A Sister's War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe', p. 118.

¹³⁷ Christine E. Hallett, "'Emotional Nursing': Involvement, Engagement, and Detachment in the Writings of First World War Nurses and VADs', in *First World War Nursing; New Perspectives* ed. by Alison S. Fell and Christine E Hallett (Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2013), pp. 87–102. *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, Cultural History of Modern War (Manchester University Press, 2009).

¹³⁸ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*; Christine E. Hallett, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

referred to as shell-shock. Hallett suggests that in *The Forbidden Zone*, Borden may have distanced herself from the more unsettling aspects of the war.¹³⁹ ‘For her, [Borden] pain was a ‘lascivious monster’ and death an “angel” who came to release men from their suffering’.¹⁴⁰ Hallett provides and examines many accounts of the nursing care given to traumatised patients arguing

The personal writings of First World War nurses suggest that, although they often used diaries and autobiographical accounts to give voice to their own feelings of emotional trauma, they were largely unaware of their importance in alleviating the trauma of their patients.¹⁴¹

In *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives*, the focus is on the nursing care provided by the Allied nations. It considers national and professional identities and the relationship between the nurse and patient.

One important element in nursing care is the power of touch. For many patients, this nonverbal communication is an integral part of human interaction. Although it can be soothing, reassuring, and comforting, nursing is also an intimate invasion of personal space. From birth to death, physical contact can provide many experiences for both the nurse and her patient, and it is still an indispensable part of nursing practice today.¹⁴² Santanu Das discusses the power of touch and considers the impact of pain and trauma during the First World War, arguing that ‘Trench poetry was a rare genre where the body in pain was fluently translated into a lyric voice’.¹⁴³ The autograph albums provide a space for the ordinary soldier to give voice to his feelings and it is my contention that many of these contributions should be regarded within this framework. Being asked to contribute to an album was also a tactile

¹³⁹ Mary Borden, *The Forbidden Zone: A Nurse’s Impressions of the First World War* (Hesperus Press, 2008).

¹⁴⁰ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 162.

¹⁴¹ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 166.

¹⁴² Madeline Gleeson and Fiona Timmins, ‘A Review of the Use and Clinical Effectiveness of Touch as a Nursing Intervention’, *Clinical Effectiveness in Nursing*, 9.1 (2005), pp. 69–77, doi:10.1016/j.cein.2004.12.002.

¹⁴³ Santanu Das, “‘The Impotence of Sympathy’: Touch and Trauma in the Memoirs of the First World War Nurses’, *Textual Practice*, 19.2, pp. 239–62 (p. 243).

experience in which a soldier was typically passed a book by hand, which had been touched by all the previous hands of those making their entries.

Das uses nurses' writings to explore the connection between the physical trauma of the wounded and the anguish this caused nurses. In chapter six I will explore how the albums reflect both the trauma and anguish of the patient and the nurse. Just as Acton describes the nurse as a witness to the destruction of the war on the human body, so too Das speaks of the helplessness of the nurse translated into the haplessness of the witness.¹⁴⁴ He goes on to consider how the minds of the nurses dealt with the pain of the soldiers, often treated without anaesthetic. When shell-shock was attributed to the percussive effects of constant bombardment of the industrial high explosives, Das argues that nurses were unable to share 'the experience of the soldiers, and yet the juddering of the senses by serving the wounded body so intimately leads to a crisis of experience'.¹⁴⁵

Notable historians such as Ben Shephard, Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely have all written extensively on shell-shock and Post Traumatic Shock Syndrome.¹⁴⁶ Focusing on the gradual understanding of the effects of war on the minds of soldiers, Shephard draws on relevant official documents and literature of the time to demonstrate the complex relationship between the young RAMC and its role in the British Army. He considers the conflict between the British Army's requirement for manpower to complete its aim in fighting the war and to engage the enemy in equal battle with the RAMC's requirement to provide a fit fighting force. Shephard considers the work of Harold Wiltshire, who wrote the first authoritative study on shell-shock in British troops in France in June 1916. Shephard argues that Wiltshire suggested that, rather than the effects of close proximity to explosions, that it was the

¹⁴⁴ Das, 'The Impotence of Sympathy', p. 243.

¹⁴⁵ Das, 'The Impotence of Sympathy', p. 244.

¹⁴⁶ Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists, 1914-1994*, Pimlico, 502 (Pimlico, 2002). Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War* (Psychology Press, 2005).

prolonged strain of trench warfare that wore down their resistance and that ‘it was a sudden “psychic shock” especially “horrible sights” that administered the *coup de grace*’.¹⁴⁷ There was a conflict between the understanding of the effects of war on the mind and the care of a damaged mind with a need to provide fit fighting men. These authors do not, however, discuss the effects these same ‘horrible sights’ had on the nurses who treated the badly wounded men. When the soldiers were wounded there was (and still is) a casualty evacuation chain (casevac). Immediate first aid was given in the form of dressings that the soldier carried with him, and then he was taken by RAMC stretcher bearers or, if he was able, by walking to the Regimental Aid Post (RAP) situated close to the front lines. From there, he would be taken to a Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) for more immediate treatment and then to a larger base or stationary hospital before onward evacuation to a hospital in the UK.¹⁴⁸ The casualty evacuation chain from point of wounding to a base hospital in Great Britain was often a long and painful one. Mark Harrison, Jessica Meyer, Emily Mayhew, and Lt Col, MCM Bricknell write about different aspects of this journey.¹⁴⁹ Meyer, in *An Equal Burden* charts the casualty evacuation chain focusing on the technical advances in wound care in the immediate space after wounding and details the evolution of the first field dressing and the advances made in response to the increased infection risks of the trenches.¹⁵⁰ Meyer takes an intimate look at three stages of the casualty evacuation chain, from the stretcher-bearers/ambulance retrieval to the CCS before onward movement to either a base hospital at the coast or onto a hospital in Great Britain for definitive treatment and convalescence. MCM Bricknell in his study on *The*

¹⁴⁷ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, pp. 30–31.

¹⁴⁸ ‘RAMC: Royal Army Medical Corps WW1’ <https://ramc-ww1.com/chain_of_evacuation.php> [accessed 11 April 2024].

¹⁴⁹ Mark Harrison, ‘Building the Medical Machine: The Western Front, 1914-June 1916’, in *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 16–64; Jessica Meyer, *An Equal Burden: The Men of the Royal Army Medical Corps in the First World War* (Oxford Scholarship online); Emily Mayhew, *Wounded: The Long Journey Home from The Great War* (Vintage Books, 2013); MCM Bricknell, ‘The Evolution Of Casualty Evacuation In The British Army 20th Century (Part 1) - Boer War To 1918’, *J R Army Medical Corps*, 148.2 (2002), pp. 200–07, doi:10.1136/jramc-148-02-17.

¹⁵⁰ Meyer, *An Equal Burden: The Men of the Royal Army Medical Corps in the First World War*, p. 128.

Evolution of Casualty Evacuation in the British Army 20th Century (Part 1) – Boer war to 1918 discusses the development of the CCS, detailing the lessons learnt from the Boer war that provided new direction for care of the wounded in the First World War.¹⁵¹

Similarly, Harrison combines these developments and advances in care and transport lines with the political arguments around the treatment and retrieval of the wounded.¹⁵² He also draws comparisons with the German and French medical provision. He considers the influence of military leaders such as Sir Henry Wilson, who determined it was good for the morale of the soldiers to be treated as close to their homes as possible.¹⁵³ Shepherd, on the other hand, in his exploration of the treatment of shell-shock, argues that the view was that such men should be treated as near to the front as possible to keep in contact with the regiment.¹⁵⁴ Carden-Coyne also highlights the benefits of wounded men remaining in communities within the hospitals in Britain to maintain regimental and unit cohesion and to bolster morale.¹⁵⁵

Emily Mayhew charts the journeys of the wounded by ‘interweaving the testimonies of injured soldiers and stretcher-bearers, doctors and surgeons, nurses and chaplains, orderlies and hospital train staff and volunteers in train stations in France and Britain’.¹⁵⁶ Transport to ‘Blighty’ could involve barges and trains with ships to transport the wounded across the channel accompanied by nurses and finally to one of many hospitals in the UK such as The Territorial Force London General Hospitals and The First Southern General Hospital at Birmingham University, as well as the auxiliary Red Cross hospitals sometimes situated in private houses such as Willoughby House and Pilton House (Shepton Mallett).

¹⁵¹ Bricknell, ‘The Evolution Of Casualty Evacuation In The British Army 20th Century (Part 1) - Boer War To 1918’.

¹⁵² Harrison, ‘Building the Medical Machine: The Western Front, 1914-June 1916’.

¹⁵³ Sir Henry Hughes Wilson (1864-1922) Director of Military Operations in the First World War.

¹⁵⁴ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 54.

¹⁵⁵ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 218.

¹⁵⁶ Mayhew, *Wounded: The Long Journey Home from The Great War*, p. 2.

Jeffrey S. Reznick, Carden-Coyne and Joanna Bourke have all explored the culture and environment of caregiving in the First World War and discuss the control of the soldier's body within these environments.¹⁵⁷ Reznick examines the development of two military hospitals in the UK in response to the demands of the number of casualties utilising selected cartoons from albums to illustrate the soldier-patients' perspective of treatment and the underlying control of their bodies by the military doctors.¹⁵⁸ These are often humorous appearing to take the sting out of the painful situation or lightheartedly criticising the care they received. Bourke's work *Dismembering the Male* examines the image of the male before the First World War, drawing comparisons between how disabled civilians were cared for and subsequent treatment of the disabled war veteran, considering the changes that the magnitude of disabled soldiers had on the established care environments.¹⁵⁹

Anna Maguire's *Contact Zones of the First World War* looks at the different places colonial soldiers encounter each other during the war.¹⁶⁰ She maps the contact zones from the soldiers' origins across the Empire through their journeys and training to the front. She studies the leave locations that provided them opportunities to visit places such as the Egyptian Sphinx, interact with civilians, and their experiences in the hospitals and wards with medical staff. Alongside Bourke, she highlights the significance of physical contact between soldiers and medical personnel, singling out the importance of nursing in the hospitals for colonial troops. By considering the range of perspectives offered across nurses' albums, I add to this body of work on the hospital environments and the patient experience. The albums also contain numerous verses which can illuminate a different perspective of care; they can be seen as a means of therapy as well as a contact zone where numerous people come

¹⁵⁷ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*; Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*; Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Reaktion Books, 1996) .

¹⁵⁸ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, pp. 31–76.

¹⁶⁰ Anna Maguire, *Contact Zones of the First World War: Cultural Encounters across the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 1–15.

together with a shared commonality. They also provide insight into the gender and power relationships at play on the ward.

This thesis allows an examination of how, in their contributions to the autograph albums in the form of verse and sketches recounting their nightmares, their soldier-patients endeavoured to give a form to their trauma. In particular, the emotional effect of working in this difficult time upon the nurse herself and her connection with the wounded is explored. In summary, the thesis builds on and adds to a rich body of work on the social and medical history of the First World War. It contributes new perspectives on the emotional and psychological experience of nurses and their soldier patients, expanding work on shell-shock and enriching the growing field attending to the significance of touch and intimacy in wartime.

Methodology

My reading of the album archive is necessarily interdisciplinary. As Higonnet suggests, First World War nursing texts may well cross three disciplines: medical history, historical testimony and literary artistry.¹⁶¹ The autograph albums certainly cross these three disciplines and will be researched accordingly. This study has been guided by ideas that are related to interpretive hermeneutics. Robin Usher argues that in order to make sense of and explain the world we live in we need to understand the meaning behind our actions.¹⁶² The albums were collated during the soldier-patients recovery period in the hospital environment where their experiences of interactions with the nurses often informed and influenced the content of the album contributions reflected on through the medium of the albums. This recovery environment, together with the nursing care and medical care, is reflected in the albums, which provide testimony of a moment in the war between the soldier-patient and his nurse.

¹⁶¹ Higonnet, 'Cubist Vision in Nursing Accounts', p. 157.

¹⁶² Robin Usher, 'A Critique of the Neglected Epistemological Assumptions of Educational Research', in *Understanding Educational Research* (Routledge, 1996), pp. 9–32.

Amongst the traditional verses found in autograph albums there are contributions that are unique to the First World War and these sit firmly in the literary artistic framework.

Michael R. Hill argues that the task of researching archival collections is to ‘frame or make sense of these uninterpreted materials with a view to writing a sociohistorical account’.¹⁶³ It is important though, not to allow the perspective of the present to influence the interpretation of the materials.

The fragmented dialogue between the nurse and the contributors gains significance when considered with other period documents, records, and artefacts. Considering the collection as a whole, helps to shape the narrative of the interaction between nurse and patient, providing a different perspective of their relationship.

Carolyn Steedman in *Dust* maintains that there is much overlooked material within archives that is considered of little or no value to modern historians, and she endeavours to correct that balance in her book.¹⁶⁴ She suggests that archives provide ‘a form of writing which celebrates the constraints on it, constraints which [...] are made by the documents themselves: what they forbid you to write, the permissions they offer’.¹⁶⁵ Archives play an important role for social and cultural historians in understanding social history through a study of the writings and documents of a past era. In her chapter on archival methods in *Research Methods for English Studies*, Steedman cites Jules Michelet’s *Histoire de France*. In his work Michelet writes:

Those trustful souls who are begging for resurrection, art, while welcoming them and restoring their life’s breath [...] In the lonely galleries of the Archives where I wandered for twenty years, in that deep silence, murmurs nevertheless would reach my ears. The distant sufferings of so many souls stifled in those ancient times, would moan softly.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Michael R. Hill, *Archival Strategies and Techniques*, Qualitative Research Methods; v. 31 (SAGE, 1993), p. 65.

¹⁶⁴ Alison Steedman, *Dust*, Encounters Cultural Histories (Manchester University Press, 2001).

¹⁶⁵ Steedman, *Dust*, p. ix.

¹⁶⁶ Jules Michelet, ‘Preface to the History of France (1869)’, in *Introduction to World History (1831)* (Open Book Publishers: 2013), p. 145, p. 157.

Steedman describes working with archives as ‘breathing in the dust of the dead and making them live as they had never really done before’, or ‘communing with the dead’. This is particularly poignant in the context of autograph albums from wartime nurses, as many men who wrote in them later died at the front. These albums may be the only surviving records of the soldiers, since families might lack information about ancestors and many war records were lost in World War II bombings. As both album owners and contributors are now deceased, tracing individuals is difficult, making Steedman’s concept especially relevant to this research.

F. Gerald Ham argues that archival documents enable us to communicate our ‘cultural heritage from generation to generation’ and are essential to scholarly research into the past.¹⁶⁷ He further argues that archival documents can enable us to make sense of the past and its relevance to the present. Through analysis of archival documents in this study of nurses autograph albums’, the research aims to offer a comprehensive perspective on the cultural heritage of nursing during wartime, with relevance extending across multiple generations.

In their introduction to the section on Archives and Social Memory, Blouin and Rosenberg assert that there is a ‘complex relationship between social memories and elements of social culture’.¹⁶⁸ They present a series of essays on the different roles of archives in historical and social research and propound there is a link between archives and social memory and that the ‘written work itself is coveted; a direct link to past reality whether it is “discovered” by the scholar in some archive folder [or elsewhere]’.¹⁶⁹

Justification for the selection of particular archives and sources

¹⁶⁷ F Gerald Ham, *Selecting & Appraising: Archives & Manuscripts*, Archival Fundamentals Series (Chicago III Society of American Archivists, 1993), p. 1.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Archives and Social Memory’, in *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. by Francis X. Blouin Jr and William G Rosenberg (University of Michigan Press, 2007), p. 165.

¹⁶⁹ Blouin Jr and Rosenberg, ‘Archives and Social Memory’, p. 165.

In 2018 the QARANC Association funded a scholarship for research into a growing number of nurses' autograph albums held in the archives at the Museum of Military Medicine (MMM) and the QARANC Association Heritage Collection. These albums had been collated by the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service (QAIMNS), the QAIMNS reserve, Territorial Force Nursing Service (TFNS), and its associated Reserve and Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses serving in hospitals in France, Egypt, Malta and the home hospitals in the UK.

Of an initial audit of thirty-eight albums, thirty-six albums were selected and provided the data for the purpose of this study. The albums had been created as personal documents and not compiled with research in mind. Some of the albums provided perfunctory entries of dated names only. I focused my research on albums that offered a wide range of rich data from inscriptions, verses, original poetry and sketches by military personnel gathered within the wards. At least one album contained inscriptions that could not be verified as being contributions from military personnel excluding it from the study and another had been primarily collated during the Boer War. From these archives, eleven albums from the QARANC Association Heritage Collection, a further fourteen albums from the Museum of Military Medicine, together with eleven albums from the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) online scrapbook collection formed the basis for the detailed research.

Just before the Covid lockdown came into force the QARANC association and MMM permitted me to borrow their albums. Combining these two archives provided a substantial collection. The IWM has both soldiers' and nurses' autograph albums as part of their private papers collection; however, exploration of autograph albums in this and other archives became restricted due to the lockdown as part of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although information related to individual autograph albums can be found online, it was the RCN's

collection of albums that provided the widest online access and enabled my analysis to continue during the pandemic lockdown.

Limitations of the Primary Material

By the very nature of collecting autographs, the content is fragmented and often the entries are anonymous causing potential weakness of the primary material as research data. The reason a soldier-patient has been selected to contribute is not typically known, neither is the length of time spent between the nurse and patient in care-giving. Any significance in the choice of contribution is subjective and an interpretivist approach has, therefore, been taken in the analysis of this material. Other constraints of the primary material are the often-limited availability of related archival material such as diaries and letters.

Artifacts can find their way into archives in different ways. Relatives may donate items they believe are of historical interest, but they may keep other, more personal items. Auctions may split collections as items surface through an interest in the First World War centenary commemorations, and items may find their way into private ownership. For example, in the QARANC Heritage collection, there was a diary belonging to Lilian Robinson for the years 1914-1915; during the course of this research, further diaries were found in auction. These covered the years 1915-1916 and 1918-1919 suggesting that there are diaries for 1917. It is possible that these diaries are in private collections or that they did not survive. Anonymous and undated entries create difficulties when endeavoring to put the entry into the context of the war and the hospital environment, and poor handwriting is another issue in analysis of the albums. Each reading and re-reading of the contributions brings new understanding of this neglected archive.

Strengths of the Primary Material

The primary material exhibits its strengths most clearly when the albums are considered as a collection. Individual entries coalesce, revealing distinct themes that can be examined and

interpreted collectively. This provides an overview of the various themes that will be explored further. Notably, there is a significant focus on soldiers' experiences of trauma, particularly evident in their references to nightmares and sleep disturbances, as well as their observations regarding the care and treatment provided by nurses.

There is also the inclusion of potentially therapeutic materials in the form of soldier art, sketches, poems, maps, and badges together with widespread emphasis on love, death, nursing care, the war, and conscientious objectors. A further strength of this material is that it was written in the moment, unlike the published diaries and memoirs written after the war and potentially subjected to hindsight. The nurses' diaries too were a reflection of their day's experiences, written in the quiet of their off-duty space. Certainly, where the albums are linked to a particular nurse's diary or place of work they bring new dimensions to both place and diary. Inquiry made to the Museum of Military Medicine confirmed that none of the autograph albums in their collection had accompanying diaries in their collections. The diary and autograph album for Sister Robinson, however, enabled detailed connections to be explored between the two artefacts. Further exploration of archives such as those held by the Imperial War Museum may well provide further opportunities for future research.

How are These Artefacts being Read as Historical Evidence?

It is important to read these artefacts in conjunction with each other and with other material from the period. As historical documents, they reflect the attitudes of the time and provide a reading of different patients' views of the nurse album owner. In combination with the albums, I draw on wider archival materials including diaries, letters, newspapers, service and census records, as well as published memoirs and histories of the First World War to bring a new dimension to understanding the soldier-patient relationship.

Key texts from the war that have supported this thesis include Violetta Thurstan's *A Text Book of War Nursing*, Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone*, Ellen La Motte's *The*

Backwash of War and Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*.¹⁷⁰ Whilst these books provide first-hand accounts of the thoughts and experiences of these women and can provide detailed context for reading and examining the autograph albums, it must be acknowledged that they are subjective perspectives. For example, La Motte and Thurstan's books were published during the war in 1916 and 1917 when the causes and outcomes were then unknown and public feeling towards the Germans was strong. In contrast, Borden's book was published in 1929 and Brittain's, who had become a pacifist after the war, was 40 when she wrote *Testament of Youth*. Autobiographical material,—whether subject to self-editing or editorial revisions, and often reliant on memory or selected excerpts from letters and diaries—must be used with caution. Such sources should not be regarded as strictly representative of historical fact. Serving in a main dressing station with a Field Ambulance, Thurstan's textbook, which was first published in 1917, sets out aspects of nursing care of the wounded soldier. Brittain's *Testament of Youth* enabled similarities to be drawn from the VAD albums with her more thoroughly documented experiences.¹⁷¹

First World War service records for both QAIMNS and the British Army, and held by the National Archives, are rich supporting research material, helping to flesh out the people who owned and contributed to the albums. The service records of the military nurses provided background information on the military nurses as well as the officers, soldiers and hospital records of some of the contributors to the albums. Much of the information in the records directly relating to the nurses' work in the war is often very sparse, mainly containing post-war correspondence regarding resignation from service and pension issues. Some records, however, do provide detailed information regarding training hospitals, enlistment, and the hospitals where they worked in the First World War. Given this sparsity of

¹⁷⁰ Ellen N. La Motte, *The Backwash of War* (Conway Publishing, 2014); Borden, *The Forbidden Zone: A Nurse's Impressions of the First World War*; Violetta Thurstan, *A Textbook of War Nursing* (G P Putnam's Sons, 1917); Brittain, *Testament of Youth*.

¹⁷¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*.

information in records about these women's lives, the albums are important in providing new insights into how the care they gave was perceived. Soldier records from the National Archives were also used and, together with cross-referencing with genealogy sites, a further dimension can be added to the album contributors. With many records from the First World War lost or burnt, the albums provide evidence of hospital admissions which, for some soldiers, is the only proof of their being wounded.

The Commonwealth War Graves (CWWG) online site was used to confirm the deaths of some of the contributors, especially those listed in Sister Robinson's album.¹⁷² Alongside these resources, the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) online site provided details of the VAD nurses including information about the UK hospitals in which they worked.¹⁷³ This was extremely useful in verifying where the albums were collated. It also enabled links to private houses that were utilised as convalescent homes for the wounded.

The British Newspaper Archive was a source for valuable primary material regarding the increasing popularity of the autograph album among young women who used it as a means to connect with celebrities.¹⁷⁴ Newspaper reports and adverts also chart the influence of US autograph hunters on the UK population in the late Victorian and Edwardian (Pre-War) periods which accounts for the continuing use of albums during the War. Adverts placed in newspapers provide evidence of the popularity of albums as a gift in the First World War, together with diaries and miscellaneous writing materials. The British Newspaper Archive was also an excellent source for information regarding *King Albert's Book* which was source material for Sister Robinson's own contributions to her album.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Charlotte Lilian Annee Robinson, *HF00014.1 Autograph Book* (m).

¹⁷³ vad.redcross.org.uk

¹⁷⁴ 'British Newspaper Archive', *British Newspaper Archive*, 2023
<<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>>.

¹⁷⁵ *King Albert's Book* (The Daily Telegraph, The Daily Sketch, The Glasgow Herald, Hodder and Stoughton, 1914).

Periodicals and newspapers acquired a wider audience after the education act of 1870 provided reading to the masses.¹⁷⁶ Laurel Brake in *Print in Transition* argues that periodicals ‘despite their multi-authorship and distinct fragmentation into articles on different subjects – present themselves to the reader as a whole, as a book does’.¹⁷⁷ This certainly can be seen in the autograph albums which are very fragmented by the nature of the contributions and yet, although each contribution stands alone, it makes up the collective of the album. I consider the albums in their current form as they ‘present themselves to the reader as a whole’, while also exploring the conditions of their production as patients were invited to populate each book through their contributions, creating a dialogue with the nurses. Albums are amongst a range of multi-author composite works produced by soldiers and nurses in the First World War. These include textiles like embroidered table-cloths, and, more famously, trench newspapers like the *Wipers Times*, and magazines produced in prison camps and hospitals.¹⁷⁸

Maysa Demoor et al in *The Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals* summarises the plethora of magazines being published in all theatres during the war.¹⁷⁹ Trench, Camp, Prisoner of War, and Hospital magazines found inspiration and creativity among the soldiers, with some, such as *The Hydra*, working as therapy for both its readers and contributors.¹⁸⁰ Many hospitals created their own magazines, some of which lasted for only a few issues, whilst others, such as *The Gazette* of the 3rd London General Hospital, ran from late 1915 for the duration of the war.¹⁸¹ The Imperial War Museum archives hold various copies of hospital magazines and both the Royal Army Medical Corps Muniments collection, held by the Wellcome Collection, and the National Library of Australia have

¹⁷⁶ ‘The 1870 Education Act’ <<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/1870educationact/>> [accessed 29 April 2025].

¹⁷⁷ Laurel Brake, *Print in Transition: Studies in Media and Book History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 4.

¹⁷⁸ *The Wipers Times*, ed. by Capt F. J. Roberts and Lt J.H. Pearson (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1918).

¹⁷⁹ *The Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals*, ed. by Marysa Demoor, Cedric Van Dijck, and Birgit van Puymbroeck (Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

¹⁸⁰ ‘The Hydra. The Craiglockhart War Hospital Magazine’, *The Hydra. The Craiglockhart War Hospital Magazine*, 1917.

¹⁸¹ *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1915.

online copies of *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital* which were used extensively in the chapter on Edith Holden, Matron of the Hospital.¹⁸² Edited by the hospital staff and with contributions from both staff and patients, sales of these magazines provided a source of income to support entertainment of the wounded with comforts such as cigarettes, day trips and concerts.

Reznick, Carden-Coyne, and Meyer all discuss the merits of hospital magazines as a means of occupation, amusement, and propaganda during the First World War.¹⁸³ They all use *The Gazette*, which spanned the duration of the war, to discuss and provide examples in their discussion of hospital culture. Carden-Coyne used examples from *The Gazette* to illustrate hospital discipline and to highlight the disempowerment of the wounded arguing that these magazines could be used as ‘weapons of the weak’ with the use of humour exhibited in them as an instrument for the soldier-patients to criticise the care and staff.¹⁸⁴ Reznick, similarly, considers how the magazines were a means to foster mutual comradeship and loyalty, with censorship ensuring that the weapon of the weak stayed within the bounds of military discipline. Meyer, on the other hand, teases out the roles these magazines played and the differences between the environments and, therefore, the influence they had on the subscribers.¹⁸⁵ She argues that they were a bridge between the war effort at the front, in the hospitals, and the civilian population, playing an important propaganda role. All three researchers agree that the magazines were an outlet for emotions and a space to both criticise and praise hospital care. My work builds on these findings to consider the personal and political work of nurses’ albums for their makers and readers.

¹⁸² Wellcomecollection.org. A London museum and library exploring health and human experience which includes the Royal Army Medical Corp Muniments collection. The National Library of Australia (nla.org) contains collections regarding the cultural history of Australia. It is connected with the 3rd LGH as many Australian patients were treated there and many contributed to the Gazette.

¹⁸³ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*; Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*; Jessica Meyer, ‘Hospital Journals’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), pp. 338–51.

¹⁸⁴ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 319.

¹⁸⁵ Meyer, ‘Hospital Journals’.

Exploration of these texts allows us to see how autograph albums and other artefacts from First World War hospitals provide insights into the relationships between nurses and their soldier-patients. When considered alongside diaries, letters, newspapers, service records, and published memoirs, these artifacts offer valuable context and deepen understanding. The discussion around these items highlights that albums and hospital magazines, like *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital*, served not only as entertainment and therapy but also as avenues for patients and staff to express emotions, critique or praise care, and foster camaraderie. Although autobiographical and published materials provide important perspectives, however, they are subjective and must be interpreted with caution.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter one examines the continuing convention of album making in the First World War through the various verses that have stood the test of time and their relevance to their use in the First World War. The common practice of recurring themes and variation is considered together with how these verses are adapted to complement the relationship between the contributor and the album's owner. The association of autograph albums with celebrity is considered in the mythologising of the soldier as hero and everyday celebrity. By considering the album's use as a means for a nurse to document her professional and personal life is highlighted and set against the historical development of professional nursing.

Chapter two considers the presence of the nurses in their albums, which, in the main, is a very translucent one. The nurses are present through their own sporadic contributions to their albums, either in verse or photographs, but it is their presence as seen through the interactions with the contributors that pervades the albums. The chapter explores nursing aspirations through a manifesto of ideals and realities that sets these aspirations against the reality of war work, utilising the nurses' recollections of their reality. The effects of the war on their ambitions, both as military QAIMNS and civilian VADs, nursing at the front and in

base hospitals in the UK is analysed through the medium of the albums. QAIMNS records and, where possible, hospital records of soldiers are used to explore the environment and situation in which soldiers wrote in the albums.

The iconography surrounding First World War nurses and their influences, such as recruiting posters, is explored in chapter three together with the impact of their wartime nursing experiences on their aspirations and ideals. The second part of the chapter examines how these ideals and aspirations were tested and compares nurses' diary entries of working on night duty with the soldier-patient album contributions about their care at night and how they perceived the value of their nurse. These prevalent 'nightmare' entries are analysed in the context of shell-shock.

Chapter four is centred around one specific autograph album. This album was selected as it was considered to offer a wide range of material for analysis. It also had accompanying diaries that would lend another dimension to the analysis and provide an insight into other albums compiled by both professional and volunteer nurses during the First World War. This chapter provides a detailed analysis of an album belonging to Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson, a military nursing Sister who served in France throughout the war.¹⁸⁶ It follows her deployment as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) in 1914 through her work at Bailleul, a CCS, and a base hospital at Wimereux. Robinson's military records and diaries are used to contextualise and better understand the contributions of her soldier-patients in the album. Analysis of Lilian's album reveals themes of food, love, trench life and death which are consistent preoccupations across wartime albums. As is typical of nurses' albums, Robinson's album is rich with often complex images of nurses, both pictorial and verbal, presenting the care the nurse gives and the feeling she evokes from a range of perspectives. I trace the source material for contributions and how this is adapted for the context by both

¹⁸⁶ Robinson, *HF00014.1 Autograph Book*.

Lilian and her patients. Another aspect of this chapter, which is explored in a wider context in chapter two, is Lilian's own use of the album to explore her aspirations and doubts of her ability to work in a high-pressure environment. Chapter four demonstrates that autograph albums offer unique insights into how patients perceived nurses and their care, and into how nurses saw themselves and their ability to fulfil their roles in extreme conditions.

Chapter five is a companion piece to chapter four in that it also uses one album as a springboard to delve into the social conventions that shaped album content. I take a comparative approach to explore influences and source material for autograph albums. The chapter focuses on one album belonging to the Matron of No. 3 London General Hospital in Wandsworth and its companion magazine *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital*.¹⁸⁷ This is one of the few hospital magazines that spanned the vast majority of the war from October 1915 to its closure in July 1919. The Matron, Edith Holden, contributes to the magazine regularly and through this medium we can gain an insight into her personality. Within her album she remains, like many of the other nurse owners of these books, a shadowy figure only seen through the representation of her care by the soldier-patients. Comparison of the magazine with the albums demonstrates the intimate nature of the album, with contributions typically acknowledging the care the individual nurse has provided. The magazines, on the other hand, provide a less personal forum where frustrations and general angsts have an outlet and, in No. 3 LGH, the device of matron's 'pup' allows some gentle digs at Matron. A comparison of autograph album and magazine gives new insights into hospital discipline, and how it was experienced by nurses and patients as well as comparing the casualty evacuation chain from the perspective of the receiving hospital and the descriptions in Beatrice Bowman's album of the patients' remembrance of their journey from

¹⁸⁷ Edith Holden TFNS Holden, PE/1/68/HOLD (Museum of Military Medicine Archive). *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital (Territorial Force) 1915-1919*, Wellcome Collection.

point of wounding to hospital and convalescence.¹⁸⁸ *The Gazette* acknowledges the diverse nature of the hospital and especially its connection with the Australian commonwealth soldiers.¹⁸⁹ Finally, this chapter looks at empire through the prism of Edith's autograph album and considers the significance of nursing commonwealth soldiers, often seen as exotic to the nursing staff. Tracing another variation in a popular song often rewritten in albums, the chapter teases out the inflection of autograph book material by different communities of soldiers.

In chapter six, I examine the albums as an integral component of occupational therapy for the wounded. This therapeutic intervention is designed to facilitate the reintegration of soldiers into their military units and the frontline, or to assist in their transition back to civilian life. Additionally, the albums serve a dual purpose by providing therapeutic support to nurses, many of whom have been traumatised by the severe injuries they observed in their patients. Albums not only contain verses and sketches but physical objects are also inserted within the albums, mostly these are humorous jokey contributions. However, of the inserted items, one stands out for exploration, that is a single cigarette sewn into an album, which serves as a device to explore its wider use as a means of stress relief. Similarly, the artwork in the albums can be linked both back in time and forward to its wider use as therapy for military veterans of war.

Finally, the conclusion will present a summary of the main findings and arguments of the thesis. It will also consider the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and suggest areas where further research can be explored.

¹⁸⁸ Beatrice Bowman, *RCN Service Scrapbook* (<https://www.rcn.org.uk/servicescrapbooks>, 2021).

¹⁸⁹ 'Australians at the 3rd L.G.H.', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.1 (1915), p. 5.

Chapter One

“Come Look in my Album”

Placing the Autograph Album in the context of the First World War: Traditions and conventions of autograph writing

The autograph album evolved, as discussed in the introduction, from its origins in collecting famous autographed manuscripts through use as friendship books to the popularisation of collecting the autographs of celebrities. The first section of this chapter seeks to demonstrate the continuation of politeness conventions and other album writing traditions of the First World War. In the next section, I will then explore the way the common soldier was represented in the albums, as a hero, and endeavour to explain why many nurses clamoured for their autographs. I will consider the nurses’ use of their autograph albums to align themselves with these new heroes and to make a case for their professional expertise. The chapter will also examine the impact of military discipline and hierarchy in shaping acceptable contributions between a soldier and his nurse, reflecting on what was or was not carefully included in the albums and what the entries on particularly sensitive topics, including conscientious objections, leave the reader to infer.

In the introduction, I refer to visitors’ books which contain entries by distinguished guests. The book’s owner could proudly show off the comments left and remember his hospitality sharing with other guests. Some entries in the First World War autograph albums suggest a similar function. Brief entries giving just name, rank, and number together with the place name of where the contributor had received their wounds – places such as the Somme, Bullecourt, Arras, and Guillemont, battles now synonymous with the First World War – are

typical. These are often completed with a note of thanks, as in Figure 1, very much like the entries in a visitor's book.

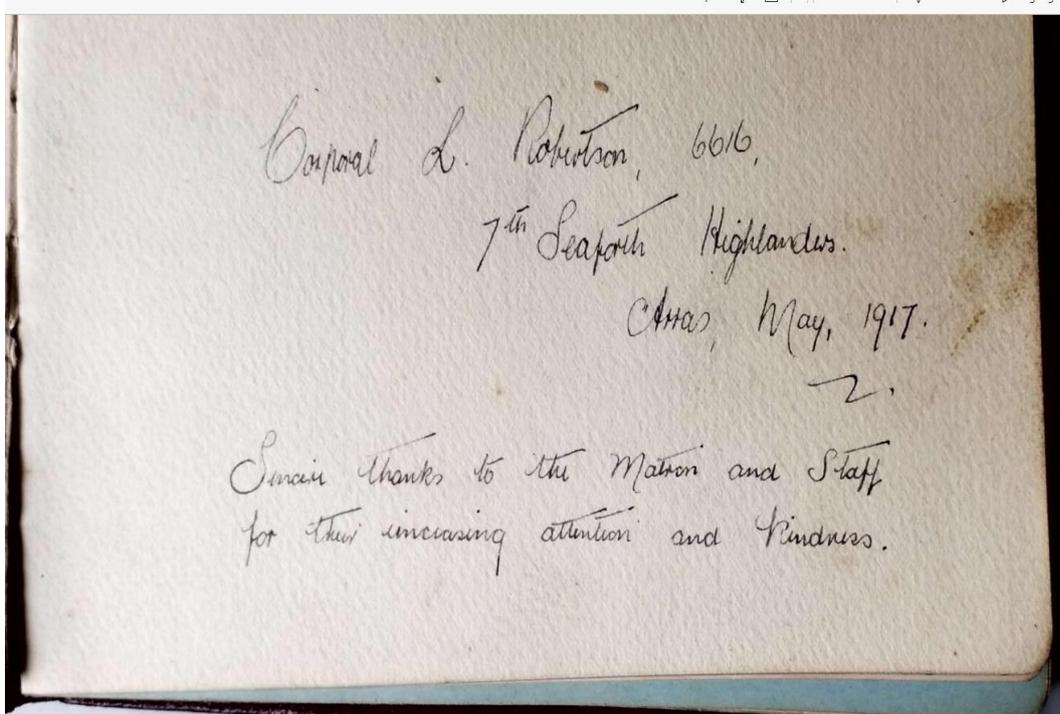


Figure 1. 'Autograph Album Marjorie Ayrton Russell VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0010.1, part 598.

While autograph albums traditionally indicated a community of social prestige, the First World War autograph albums no longer reflect the shared social position of owner and contributor. The nurses who collected the entries were often of a higher social standing than the wounded soldiers and any social networking or endorsement of the owner's education or circle of friends no longer applied as it did before the war. The endorsement is now a more abstract one in that it reflects the experiences that were shared between the soldier and his nurse through the care she gave. The soldier-patients came from a wide social circle, the handwriting of some entries carefully crafted by someone not comfortable with the skill contrasting with entries made in a fluent hand. The majority of the entries in the albums come from other ranks rather than officers who, after their care in the military hospitals on the Eastern and Western Fronts, returned to convalesce in private homes; two-thirds of officers'

beds were in these homes.¹ Many of the autograph albums of this archive were compiled in Military or Auxiliary Red Cross Hospitals and this might explain the high ratio of soldier to officer entries found in them. Whilst the next section will attempt to draw comparisons with other albums, particularly those of the ante and post-bellum era in the USA, it should be recognised that the national and historical context of album collecting differs. The albums collated in the ante- and post-bellum eras were mainly collected in a domestic environment, mostly among young women and signalling a separation of friends. In contrast, the First World War albums were collated in an environment of injury and death. Comparing and contrasting these albums, collated across different continents and time, however, can be used to attempt to demonstrate continuity of traditions and conventions of album writing.

The similarity of the content of van Meer's album, with its rich variety of contributions, as discussed in the introduction, and the albums created by the military nurses in the First World War is striking, with regimental badges now replacing coats of arms.² In the nurses' albums of the First World War illustrations of regimental emblems abound, similarly demonstrating the album owner's interaction with the many and varied regiments that participated in action at the front and can also be compared to the earlier practice in the album amicorum of collecting illustrations of national dress.

Patrizia Di Bello observed that albums had no order or value placed on their content and the similarity to the haphazard way the contributions in the nurses' autograph albums are entered is clear. In the First World War autograph album verses sit side by side with pen and ink sketches and watercolour pictures beside the contributor's military details. There is humour about the war as well as poignant verses of remembrance.

¹ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p.55.

² Regimental badges are common contributions to the albums, often very intricate in design they would have occupied a convalescing soldier for some time and for some, aided in improving their fine motor skills. For the nurses the different badges would have represented the soldiers from across the regiments of British and Commonwealth countries. Autograph Book Archive, Museum of Military Medicine, Keogh Barracks Aldershot.

Randolph and McCord observed that many of the Orzak albums began with a verse by the owner of the album inviting the contributor in. They cite one verse, ‘My album’s open, come and see| Won’t you write a line for me?| Write but a thought, a verse or two| That Memory may present to you’.³ In VAD Florence Walker’s autograph album a similar verse is found: ‘Come look in my album,| and learn as you look| That all are expected to add to my book| You may look as you please, --- but the penalty is| you must also leave something for others to quiz’ (1911) (Figure 2).

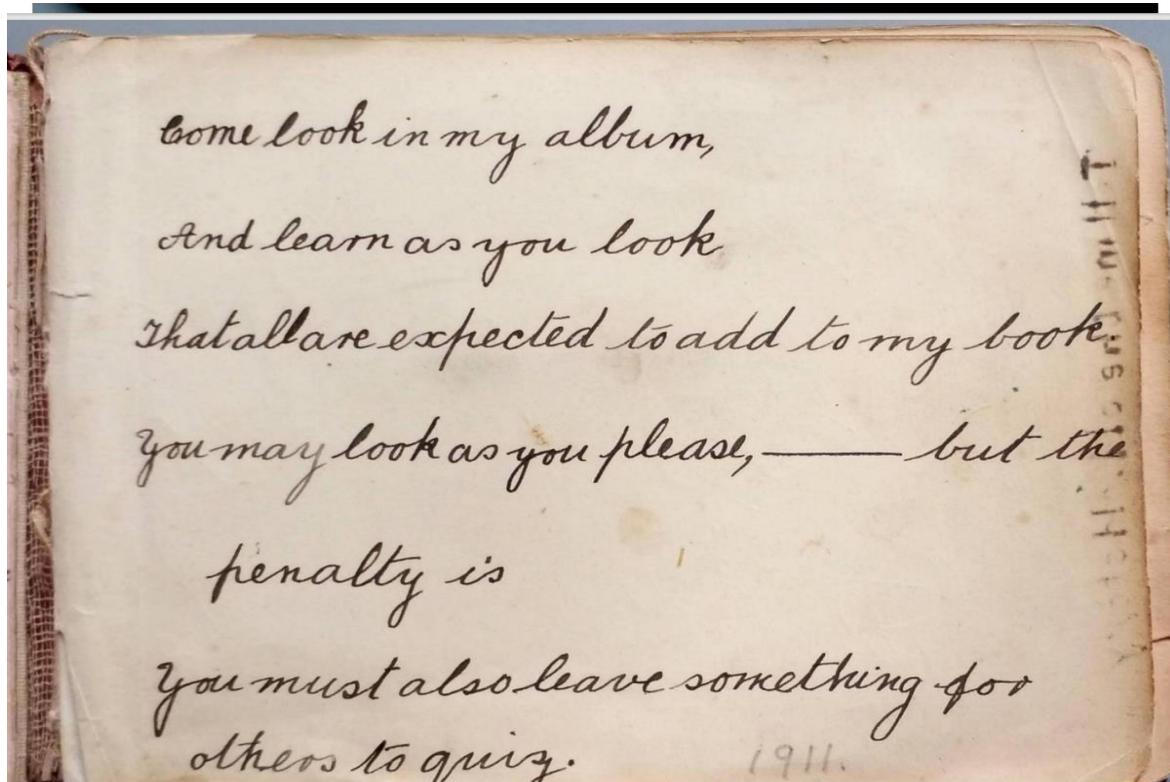


Figure 2. ‘Come look in my album’ in ‘Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD’ (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0013.

The invitation, either written or verbal when handed the album, to provide a contribution might be met with a response such as one left by Private Golding in Elsie Cotts’ album: ‘What! Write in a book for people to spy? – Not I, Not I!’⁴ This rhyme appears in

³ Randolph and McCord, ‘Autograph Albums in the Ozarks’, p. 183.

⁴ ‘Service Records Emily Cott QAIMNSR TNA WO399/1767’, The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War; ‘Autograph Album Emily Cott QAIMNS R’ (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/55/COTT.

several of the archive albums and its variations demonstrate how such contributions are half-remembered or altered for originality. Private Golding uses only the first line; two other versions in the archive illustrate how verses were adapted. In Florence Walker's album the second line appears as 'Critics spy, not I not I! I'm shy' and in Violet Hurdman's album 'gentlemen look and ladies spy, so goodbye'.⁵ This rhyme highlights the dilemma for the contributor in that he is well aware that his entry will be read by other contributors. The use of the word 'spy' suggests an etiquette of not reading other people's contributions and an acceptance that they will be read. Also, that there is an intimate relationship between the contributor and the book's owner. This theme of spying in the archive albums also occurs with turned down corners or small 'envelopes' inserted on the page telling whoever is reading the album it is (usually) 'For ladies only'.⁶ When opened it reveals an admonishment suggesting the curious person should be embarrassed. Equally the word 'critic' suggests that the contributor is aware of his shortcomings when writing something original and warns the reader against judging the entries. The use of 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' in one version suggests this may have been the original form of the rhyme which is polite and less caustic in tone. Private Golding is well aware that anything he writes will not only be read by Elsie Cott but by many other contributors browsing the albums for their own inspiration as well as for indicators of the tone expected from them.

The desire to write something fresh that will stand out from other entries, the lack of memory, and the option to repeat what has already been written is a constant issue for the contributor. Ernest Blankin's contribution to Nurse Fisher's album (Figure 3) sums up these dilemmas for the contributor rather well:

When I'm asked to write in a book| There's one thing I certainly find – The things I
once knew have all taken their [illegible] and fresh ones won't come to my mind |Of

⁵ 'Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0013; 'Autograph Album Violet Hurdman VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0012.

⁶ 'Autograph Album Violet Hurdman VAD'.

course if I chose I could easily quote| from wise men who lived in past ages| but just to repeat what another man wrote| seems hardly the thing for these pages| So I'll ask you this time to excuse me instead| and I hope that I shan't get the blame| if I just wish a wish that the path that you trace may be happy and then sign my name.⁷

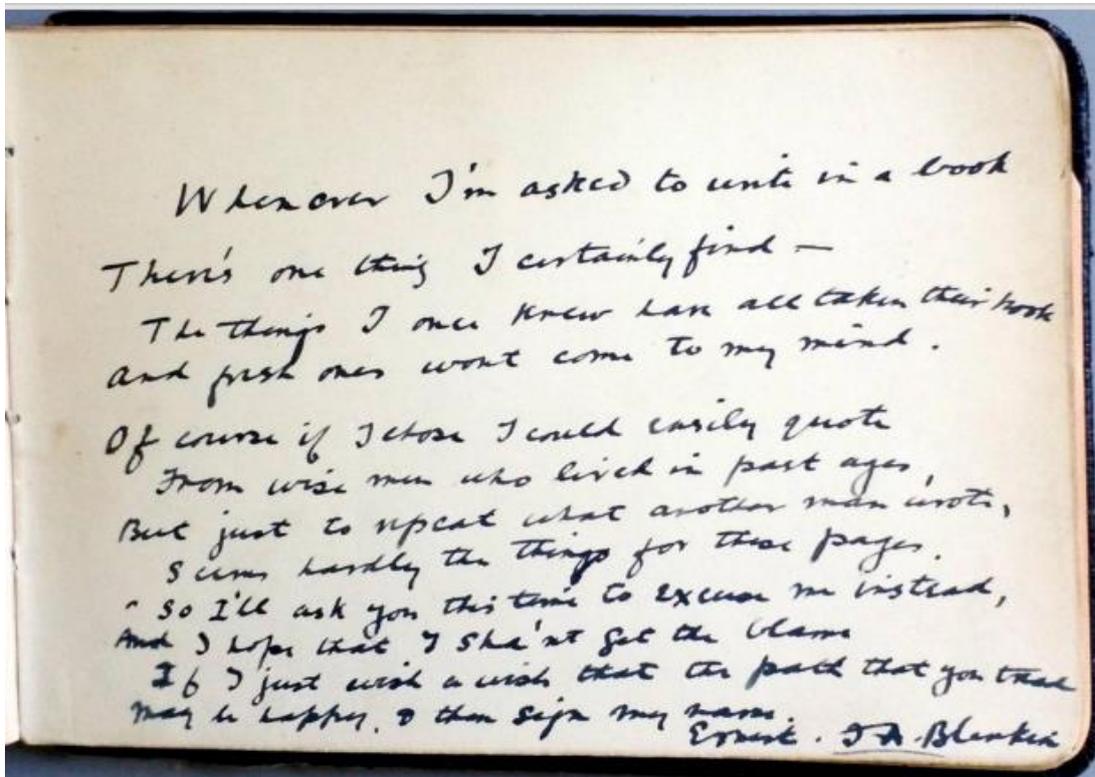


Figure 3. Ernest Blankin's contribution to 'Autograph Album Lily Fisher VAD', QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0003.1.

This verse gives an insight into the dilemmas faced by the contributors, and explains to some extent why there are so many repeated or mildly modified entries found scattered across the albums and across generations. Blankin's verse, though, also asks the album's owner to excuse this, and together with the word 'blame' suggests the worry of retribution. Though playfully handled by Blankin, his language suggests a concern that poor entries might lead the album's owner to look less favourably on those in her care.

Blankin does not give his rank, but the accompanying contributors were mostly privates which would suggest Blankin was too. The hospital was still a military environment

⁷ 'Autograph Album Lily Fisher VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0003.1.

and soldier-patients were still subject to military discipline. I suggest these entries may show a level of acquiescence to what could be perceived as a command to contribute. Used to obeying military instructions and still in military environments many must have complied with the request without question. Refusal could also be seen as ungrateful, hence the many concise entries of appreciation and thanks to the nurses. Blankin may well have felt duty-bound to comply with the nurse's request, his social position in the class structure also exacerbated his dilemma.

The dilemma of what to write is also expressed by Markland in his contribution: 'I've turned these pages over and over to see what others have done before' (Figure 4). He acknowledges that he has read the previous contributions looking for inspiration and the difficulties his task posed. The short phrase about turning the pages 'over and over' invites us, and other future readers who might also be contributors, to recognise the obligation to fulfil the request made of him and share in his struggle to find inspiration. The effort indicated suggests the value he places on the relationship between himself and Nurse Penn. He decides to settle on 'forget me not'.

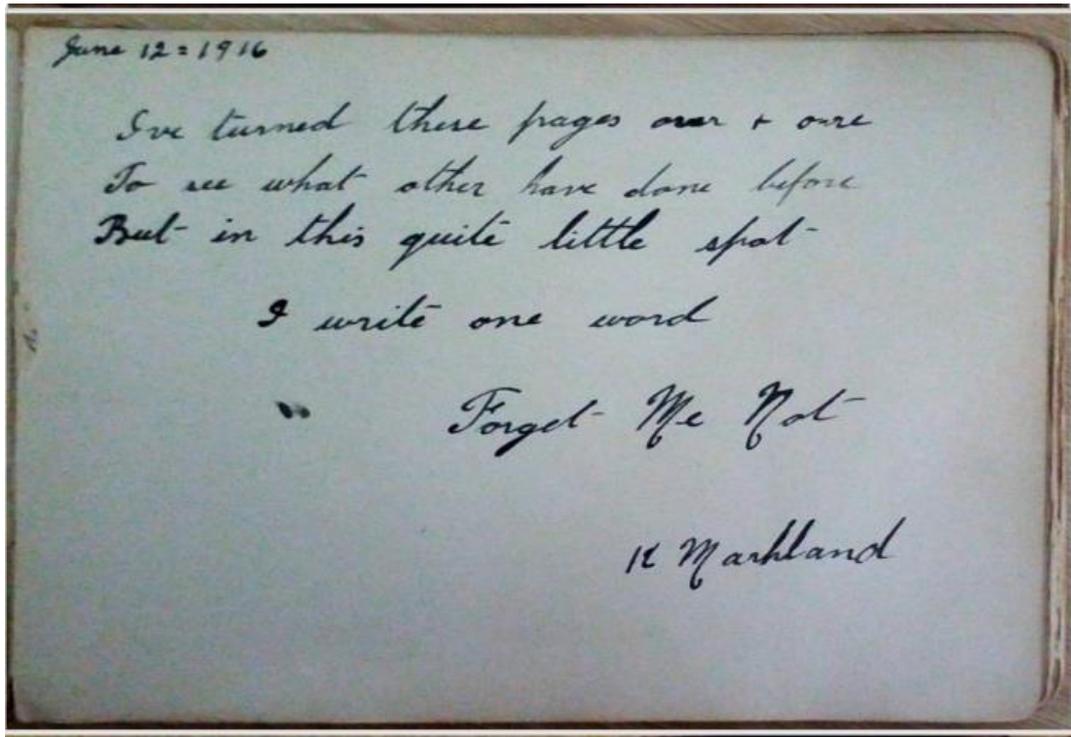


Figure 4. Markland's contribution from 'Autograph Album Mary Penn VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection

The friendship formed between the nurse and the soldier-patient was a transient one and there are many entries asking the album's owner to remember the contributor. This purpose of the album as a means to be remembered from a previous, often formative, phase of life, follows the expected conventions of autograph album writing which is apparent in the American ante- and post-bellum albums.

This would also have found parallels in the soldier-patients of the First World War who would have poured over the albums for inspiration. Randolph and McCord's research highlights not only illiteracy but the issue that the selected contributor was faced with, 'what to write'.⁸ The entries from the Ozark albums and 'Come look in my album' from Florence Walker's album in the First World War underscores the perpetual problem faced by contributors about what to 'leave' 'for others to quiz'.⁹ Lilian Robinson's album provides a

⁸ Randolph and McCord, 'Autograph Albums in the Ozarks', p. 185.

⁹ 'Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD'.

good example of how previous entries inspired originality or reuse.¹⁰ ‘Little Wet Trench’, discussed in more detail in chapter six, is a composite of two entries by two individuals, the second adding a new verse echoing the first.¹¹ The nurses’ autograph albums are splashed with common entries similar to this that have been copied, re-adapted, or added to.

Contribution Conventions: Recurring Themes and Variations

In sourcing some of the verses in the albums, Randolph and McCord demonstrate the re-use of common entries with changes to reflect the contributor’s relationship to the book’s owner.¹² Illiteracy in the Ozark region probably restricted the variety of available sources, but common to the vast majority of autograph albums the theme of remembrance is ever-present. They discuss the verses that suggest the contributor is in love with the book’s owner, although they consider that these are not intended to be taken seriously. These kinds of verses also occur in many First World War autograph albums. It seems that the expression of romantic love for the album’s owner was the more extreme end of the politeness conventions which prohibited contributors from writing anything overly rude or negative about the album’s owner.

A verse in an Ozark album owned by Lilian Scott reads ‘Lilian now, Lilian Forever| Scott now, but not forever’ finds a similar counterpart in VAD Florence Walker’s autograph album: ‘Nurse Walker is her name| Single is her station| Happy be the man| Who makes the alteration’.¹³ This parallel suggests that the autograph album was a safe place for flirtatious, playful declarations of love and remained so even within the context of the hospital ward

¹⁰ ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’ (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF00014.1.

¹¹ Miss D Eardley-Wilmot wrote ‘My Little Grey Home in the West’ in 1911. It became popular among the troops who wrote variations to reflect their own circumstances, in this case, the grey home becomes a wet trench.

¹² Randolph and McCord, ‘Autograph Albums in the Ozarks’, p. 182.

¹³ ‘Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD’.

where anxieties about the propriety of relationships between soldiers and the women who provided their intimate care often surfaced.

The American ante- and post-bellum albums are unremarkable in that they are neither owned by anyone pre-eminent nor do they contain entries by anyone famous, unlike the entries in the album *Amicorums* and Mrs Birkbeck's album. They are, however, representative of the culture of young male and female students and pioneers with poor literacy graduating into adulthood. Ricker suggests that the emergence of the friendship book or autograph album happened during the 'dawn of the US Romantic period'.¹⁴ Arriving in the US from Europe about 1820, Romanticism valued emotion and imagination over intellect and reason. The female collectors and contributors were on the brink of adulthood when the albums were compiled, as were the First World War nurses and the young men they were caring for who contributed to their autograph albums, also representative of the culture of First World War nursing with the added poignancy of recovering from wounds.

American friendship books reflect the relationships contained within them in the context of a time of happiness with the future albeit uncertain and possibly short. Of the themes Jabour analyses, separation of friends has a major influence on the verses that are written.¹⁵ There is an acceptance that they will live many miles apart with little chance of ever meeting again, especially after marriage and, as their contributions suggest, that they are parting as friends forever. Remembrance of these friendships are therefore integral to the theme of separation and many contributions urge the album's owner to always remember them. Randolph and McCord also note the remembrance themes in the Ozark albums, but they also suggest that there is a 'cynical quality in these remember-me-forever sentiments'

¹⁴ Ricker, '(De)Constructing the Praxis of Memory-Keeping'.

¹⁵ Jabour, 'Albums of Affection: Female Friendship and Coming of Age in Antebellum Virginia', p. 134.

that the contributor accepts they will most probably be forgotten quite quickly: “Remember me is all I ask | and if remembering is a task | forget me.”¹⁶

Just as Jabour argues that the albums of the ante- and post-bellum periods offer a rich source for understanding the experiences and emotions of these women in their preparation for major life events of marriage and motherhood, so too, these albums from the First World War can offer an insight into caring relationships between the military nurse, VAD, and the wounded soldier-patients at a point when their lives were precarious, and, for many, ending.

The industrial-sized death toll of the First World War called for a remembrance not only by friends and family but also by the nation, resulting in memorials and yearly remembrances after the war. In this context, the albums operate as small unique memorials themselves, working to enable individual remembrance. Just as the nurses’ albums reflect a poignancy of doomed youth so death looms over many of the contributions in young women’s nineteenth-century autograph albums as there was an acceptance that childbirth often resulted in the death of both mother and child. With such an uncertain future ahead of them parting, women friends contributed sureties of meeting again in heaven.

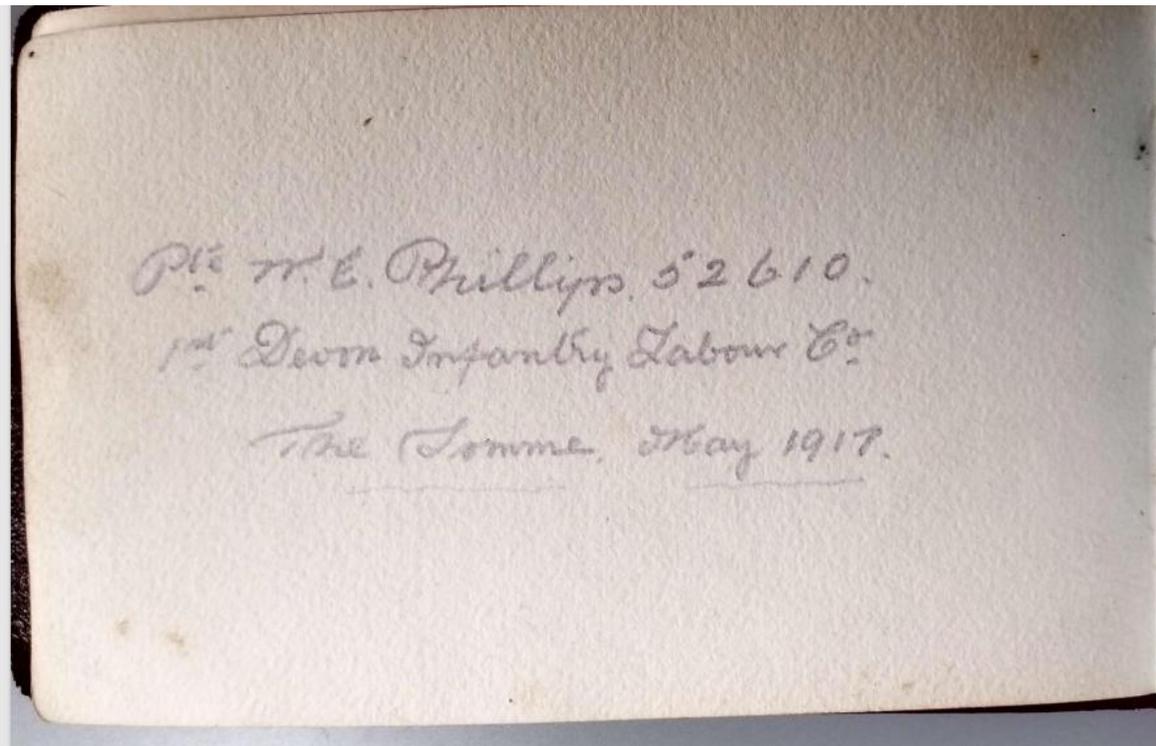
In their analysis of some remembrance entries in the Ozark albums, Randolph and McCord argue the contributors were ‘not too squeamish about the mention of death’ and that dying young held some fascination for them.¹⁷ These themes of separation, remembrance, and death also occur in the First World War autograph albums although open comment on death itself is not common in the albums. One reason for this may be because they had survived death at the front and chose not to dwell on returning to fight again. The wounded patients are separated not only from friends and family at home, but from their comrades in their regiments, and there is an acceptance that they may never see either of these groups

¹⁶ Randolph and McCord, ‘Autograph Albums in the Ozarks’, p. 185.

¹⁷ Randolph and McCord, ‘Autograph Albums in the Ozarks’, p. 185.

again. For some, as seen in Lilian Robinson's album and discussed in chapter five, their entries may be seen as an epitaph to their brief lives.

VAD Marjorie Russell's autograph album contains several entries that can be viewed as epitaphs to young lives (Figure 5a and Figure 5b). Marjorie worked as a VAD at Shepton Mallet Red Cross Auxiliary hospital in Somerset when she began her autograph album.¹⁸ Russell's album was started in May 1917 and contains contributions with connections to many of the well-known battles such as Arras, the Somme, and Ypres, battles which by 1917 were synonymous with large casualty numbers. The visual image of entries on pale-coloured pages such as these can be compared to the rows of white headstones in the Commonwealth War Graves (CWWG) with simple inscriptions giving just name, rank, number and regiment or 'A soldier of the Great war known unto God'.¹⁹



¹⁸ Marjorie Ayrton Russell, Somerset VAD 46. Volunteered December 1914 serving till January 1919 carrying out general service and nursing as required. 'British Red Cross Volunteers during WW1', *British Red Cross*, 2023 <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/>>.

¹⁹ Phrase selected by Rudyard Kipling for the Epithet on Graves of unknown soldiers: The Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

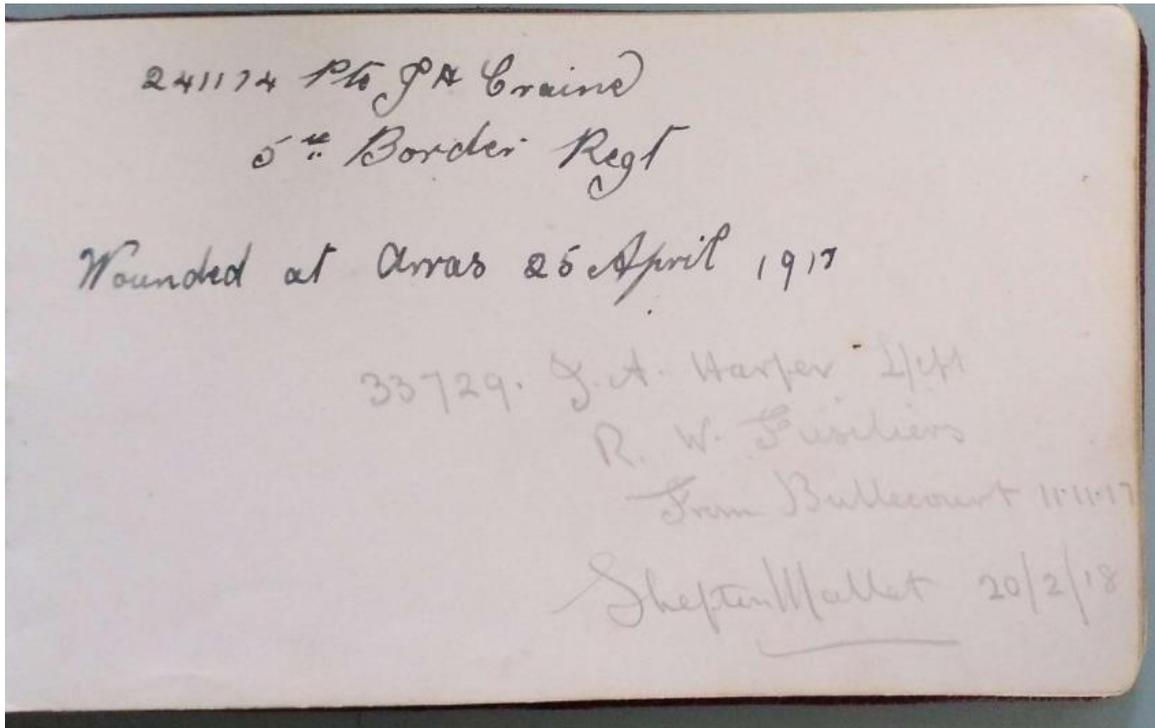


Figure 5a and Figure 5b. Epitaphs in 'Autograph Album Marjorie Ayrton Russell VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0010.1 part 598.

The grouping of these entries, too, reflects the future image of the CWWG headstones and reminds us that for some of these soldiers they were writing their own memorials. One particular entry in Marjorie Russell's album records being 'wounded on the Somme by a bomb which tried to get down my neck' with a short phrase thanking the 'Matron and her staff for their kind attention'.²⁰ The repetition of this phrase throughout her album suggests that each man copied the same sentiment of gratitude with a few adding short additions such as 'Her joy was Duty, her love was law' and 'Be kind to all that lives', and one contributor personalises his entry 'with best wishes to Nurse Russell thanking you for your kind attention shown to me while at Shepton Mallet Auxiliary Hospital'.²¹ The repeated references to Matron and her staff and one that dedicates his best wishes to the owner of the album suggests that Marjorie was possibly the Matron of the Convalescent hospital in Shepton

²⁰ 'Autograph Album Marjorie Ayrton Russell VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0010.1 part 598.

²¹ 'Autograph Album Marjorie Ayrton Russell VAD'.

Mallet or its outlying residence of Pilton House. It also indicates a rather impersonal connection between Marjorie and her patients as if the album has been left in the ward for those who wished to leave their thanks as they left the hospital after recovering rather than handed to contributors by Marjorie herself.²²

The sentiments in the main are a collective thanks to all the nurses. In contrast to other autograph albums where the contributions appear more considered and thoughtful, these entries appear hurried and give the impression that the thanks was expected of the men, perhaps by someone of authority such as an RAMC orderly of higher rank. Marjorie's autograph album reflects the admiration by the wounded patients for nurses as a collective rather than of an individual nurse's care, but it does not detract from the suggestion of the soldier-patients gratitude to the individual nurse who cared for them.

Another element of the earlier ante- and post-bellum albums was the space they occupied in the lives of the young women. After the American Civil War there was a shift in the domestic lives of young women and an increasing prosperity and widening of educational opportunities meant that many women had time on their hands.²³ Although women were barred from political life at this time, the post-bellum period saw many women at a crossroads between domesticity with homely friendship bonds and a growing interest in politics. Women's political involvement grew in abolition and women's rights that eventually took the form of women's emancipation and the suffrage movements both in the USA and Great Britain.

Album making also granted young women the opportunity to engage in a new way with the social, and the public sphere, involving them in communal forms of invention that heretofore have been little recognised. As Armstrong states, the discovery of four surviving

²² Marjorie Aryton-Russell (1881 - ?) Married name: Mrs. M A Crutwell. In the 1939 register she was a widow living with her sister in Matton Market Gardens Chew Stoke.

²³ Ricker, '(De)Constructing the Praxis of Memory-Keeping', p. 244.

albums from women of the black elite, ‘give[s] greater shape to the intimate relationships and community-building practices among privileged African American Women and men, providing new insight into the private worlds of kinship and friendship’.²⁴

Autographs of a Hero of the First World War

In this section I will explore the way the common soldier was represented as a hero in the albums and endeavour to explain why many nurses clamoured for their autographs. Both professional military nurses and VAD nurses kept autograph albums and the archives are formed from albums of both groups of nurses. The positions they held in the hospitals gave them a unique opportunity to engage with their ‘hero patients’. Patients’ different interactions with these nurses structured by gender, age, and class are reflected in these albums.

‘Within this book so pure and white let none but friends presume to write’²⁵: The Materiality of the Autograph Book

The autograph albums from the Museum of Military Medicine archive vary little in size. Pocket sized at either 5” x 4” or 8” x 4” the albums have richly coloured covers often in dark blue or red leather with the word ‘Album’ or ‘Autograph’ embossed on the front. With approximately 100 pale-coloured pages in blue, pink and cream the autograph albums in the archive are still easily identifiable with the albums of the 1800s reminding us of the quote in the introduction about ‘Splendid books [...] bound in rich Morocco and gold’. Clark described the Princeton collection as consisting of two distinct styles of book in either red or dark blue leather with gilt edged pages.²⁶ The albums were either octavo (8”x5”) or oblong (8”x 4”) albums with pages alternating in colour.

²⁴ Armstrong, ‘A Mental and Moral Feast: Reading, Writing, and Sentimentality in Black Philadelphia’, p. 80.

²⁵ ‘Autograph Album Beatrice Bowman Red Cross Nurse’, Royal College of Nursing, RCN Service Scrapbook <<https://www.rcn.org.uk/servicescrapbooks>>.

²⁶ Alexander P. Clark, “‘Princeton Memories with a Golden Sheen’: Student Autograph Albums of the Nineteenth Century’, *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 47.3 (1986), pp. 301–16, doi:10.2307/26404357.

Studies of American practices of collecting autographs in the ante- and post-bellum periods note that the albums are of a similar size as well suggesting a continuing tradition of conformity in an object.²⁷ By the late 1870, stationers were producing books purposely for this niche market. Advertisement sections in newspapers across the UK in the late 1890s and into the early 1900s were littered with various enticements to purchase autograph albums. Often listed under ‘gifts’ or ‘fancy goods’ shops regularly placed adverts for various types of stationery. Newspapers such as the *Banffshire Reporter* ran advertisements for ‘Fancy Goods: Suitable for Sending to Friends. Vanity Bags, Purses, Pocket Books, Autograph Photo and Postcard Albums’.²⁸ The wording, with references to ‘vanity’ and ‘fancy goods’, loosely suggests a target audience of females but does not exclude male purchasers.

In 1915 these adverts also included patriotic stationery, flags, and badges alongside the albums. By 1916 stationery advertisements [ads] were clearly aimed at those corresponding from military service and recording war experience. In a small ad placed in December 1916, the *Stonehaven Journal* no longer used the term ‘fancy goods’ but indicated elevated importance with the heading ‘Service Stationery’, including autograph albums among the various writing items. The same ad also, interestingly, lists ‘Photo Albums for Snap Shots’ showing the shift in forms of memory collecting.²⁹ In 1914 ads for Christmas gifts by a high street store in Dalkeith promoted *Princess Mary’s Book* and *King Albert’s Book*, as well as including autograph leather-bound books. It is possible that many nurses,

²⁷ Blouin, ‘Eternal Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Friendship Albums’; Clark, ‘Princeton Memories with a Golden Sheen’; Jabour, ‘Albums of Affection: Female Friendship and Coming of Age in Antebellum Virginia’.

²⁸ ‘Fancy Goods: Suitable for Sending to Friends. Vanity Bags, Purses, Pocket Books, Autograph Photo and Postcard Albums’, *Banffshire Reporter*, 10 February 1915, British Newspaper Archive <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0002708/19150210/028/0002>>.

²⁹ ‘Service Stationery’, *Stonehaven Journal*, 11 May 1916, British Newspaper Archive <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001271/19160511/039/0001>>. This ad also includes ones for Photo Albums for snap shots. Photos of friends began to overshadow the ‘friendship books’ as a means of remembrance.

such as Lilian Robinson, whose album contains verses she appears to have copied from King Alberts book, received all three items that Christmas.³⁰

Autograph hunting is still an ardent hobby today and the many fan clubs of TV personalities, sports personalities, pop and film stars often send out signed photographs as part of membership of their fan club. Besides the kudos of meeting a ‘hero’, autographs of the rich and famous can, in time, become valuable. Souvenir programmes signed by celebrities or pop stars often find their way into auctions selling for record amounts.³¹

Autographs captured on relevant material are reminiscent of the album amicorum practice of single sheets collected and later bound together. School children today often replace the yearbook with a T-shirt that all their friends and teachers sign. This textile equivalent to the autograph book has continuities with practices of signing a tablecloth or personalizing a quilt. A popular means of raising funds in commonwealth countries organised by the Red Cross to support their troops in the First World War was to pay to sign a quilt which was then sent to the Red Cross hospitals in England. Usually, they were white cloth with red embroidery. Today this can be viewed as rather symbolic of the young lives that were lost with their blood-red signatures on an innocent white background. Two commonwealth countries that supplied these quilts were Canada and Australia. In Canada the Braemar Women’s Institute Autograph Quilt and the Wolverton Red Cross Quilt stand testimony to the voluntary Red Cross work across communities separated from their country’s troops.³² The Canadian quilts would be auctioned for funds. In Australia the Rylstone quilt is a good example of an autograph quilt.³³ It is made up of over 900 signatures,

³⁰ ‘Christmas Gifts’, *Dalkeith Advertiser* (Dalkeith, 17 December 1914), p. 1, British Newspaper Archive.

³¹ A 1985 Live Aid Souvenir programme signed by Bob Geldof and Freddie Mercury was auctioned at Sotheby’s in the Autographs and Memorabilia section on 28 January 2020 with an estimated value of £3000-£4000, auction archive: lot Number 463 .

³² Rebecca Beausaert, ‘Red Crosses and White Cotton: Memory and Meaning in First World War Quilts’, *Active History: History Matters*, April 2917 <<https://activehistory.ca/blog/2017/07/04/>>.

³³ *Rylstone Fund Raising Signature Quilt: 1915*, 1915, The Australian War Memorial, REL28488 <<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/REL28488>>.

many from the soldiers before they left for overseas, and people paid to have their signatures embroidered as a means to raise funds for the troop's welfare. The Rylstone quilt appears to be unusual in that it is white on cream rather than the more usual red on white.

Convalescence in the Red Cross auxiliary hospitals saw many soldiers carrying out occupational therapy. Men were instructed in skills such as embroidery, crochet, basket weaving and furniture design.³⁴ Carden-Coyne argues that 'the very idea of the idle wounded was anathema to the military desperate for able bodies'.³⁵ Such occupation would have had a calming influence on fragile minds and created a bond between the men just as the collection of autographs in the albums bonded the men as a distinct community and to a particular nurse. The St Fagan's tablecloth is another example of communities coming together to embroider autographs.³⁶ Attributed to convalescing patients at Cardiff City Mental Hospital (Whitchurch Hospital) who embroidered signatures of both soldier-patients and staff in 1917, Elen Phillips, in her blog on these items suggests it was the rhythmic repetition that had a therapeutic effect on shell-shocked patients.³⁷ Like the Rylstone autograph quilt, it too has a ghostly appearance with its white embroidered signatures on a white cloth. Both are examples of soldiers capturing their names on material often paying to have their names embroidered on the quilt for fund raising.³⁸

Carden-Coyne cites the creation of a banner of embroidered signatures at the War Pensions Hospital in Bath as a 'physical therapeutic for some injures'.³⁹ Such activities would

³⁴ Judith Pettigrew, Katie Robinson, and Stephanie Moloney, 'The Bluebirds: World War 1 Soldiers' Experiences of Occupational Therapy', *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 71.1 (2017), pp. 1–9 (p. 2), doi:10.5014/ajot.2017.023812.

³⁵ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 265.

³⁶ *Tablecloth: Welsh Metropolitan War Hospital, 1917*, Museum Wales/Amgueddfa Cymru, Amgueddfa Cymru's First World War Collections <<https://museum.wales/first-world-war/?id=5027>>.

³⁷ Elen Phillips, 'Comfort in Creativity - Mental Health Awareness Week', *Amgueddfa Blog*, 21 May 2020 <<https://museum.wales/blog/2192/Comfort-in-Creativity---Mental-Health-Awareness-Week/>>.

³⁸ The Rylstone quilt is an example of common practice of fund raising in Australia. It captures over 900 names of soldiers from Rylstone NSW. It is the only known surviving World War 1 signature quilt and is in the possession of the Australian War Memorial. *Rylstone Fund Raising Signature Quilt: 1915*.

³⁹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 266.

also have been a form of remembrance of friendships akin to the friendship books. The hobby has, perhaps, now evolved into the ‘selfie’ taken with a celebrity to show to friends or as a memory keepsake of the meeting, and a new ‘craze’ has seen fans buying personal video messages from their favourite stars.⁴⁰ It is the information technology or IT equivalent of autograph collecting. Today, autograph albums are readily available for a small cost of anything from £2 upwards, online or in the high street with marketing initially aimed at young people who wish to remember an encounter with their childhood ‘hero’, although this hobby may last a lifetime. The size and composition of the albums has hardly changed from those of the early 1800s.⁴¹

The Hunters and the Hunted

The lively market for autograph albums supported different uses; while many albums reflected a social circle that rarely included those whose signatures would be considered of value today, a parallel practice of celebrity autograph bookmaking was also on the rise. Sharon Marcus argues that celebrities, as we understand them today, first began to emerge in the eighteenth century. Mrs. Birkbeck’s album provides evidence of the type of celebrities at this time which were doctors, writers, and poets.⁴² Marcus suggests that as literacy expanded in the Western world, so people of all social classes were able to read about notable personalities from actors, and writers to politicians: ‘Most importantly, democratization made people eager to track current events that they saw themselves as shaping’.⁴³ She goes on to argue that there are three entities in the culture of celebrity: the public, the celebrity, and the media.

⁴⁰ *Cameo: Celebrity Video Service* <<https://www.cameo.com/>>.

⁴¹ Disney retails autograph books with Disney characters depicted on the cover often aimed at young girls.

⁴² Di Bello, ‘Mrs Birkbeck’s Album: The Hand-Written and the Printed in Early Nineteenth-Century Feminine Culture’.

⁴³ Sharon Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 10.

In 1881 the *Glasgow Evening Post* reported the sale of a collection of autograph letters and books including Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott, Charles I, and Cromwell which sold for £49.⁴⁴ The market for autographs from people of note gathered momentum in the late 1800s. Owners left their autograph albums in hotels' lobbies or posted them to celebrities often with the cost of postage included for return of the albums. Newspaper reports of the time abound of actors', authors', and sportsmen's annoyance at being the target of autograph hunters.

In 1876 the *East and South Devon Advertiser* ran a story about an actor, Mr. Sothern, who became overwhelmed by the continued clamour for autographs during a theatrical tour of America.⁴⁵ He expressed the view that 'the nearest approximation we have to this mania in England is the collection of foreign postage stamps [...] there is good hope that the autograph mania will die in America'.⁴⁶ Mr. Sothern's hope was not realised as a newspaper report from the *Gloucester Echo* in 1913 confirms.⁴⁷ Autograph hunters tracked down the Sopwith water plane pilot Harry Hawker during his attempt to complete the water plane circuit of Britain. As the following extract reveals the autograph hunters were often women and they were prepared to go to lengths to achieve their aim:

Mr. Hawker said he would make a speech [...] but having got down he ran away. Afterwards he was surrounded by a number of photographers and then some fifty ladies wanted his autograph. After much pressure he agreed to sign a number of autograph books. Seeing, however, that those autograph books were followed by many others, with fly leaves, notebooks and other pieces of paper, all demanding his signature, he ran knee-deep into the sea, hoping thus to avoid his admirers. The ladies, however, followed him out, and remained knee deep in the water with him. He returned to the shore and spent half an hour signing his name.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ 'Scotch Autograph Letters and Books', *Glasgow Evening Post*, 5 July 1881, British Newspaper Archive <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001964/18810705/075/0004>>.

⁴⁵ Edward Askew Sothern (1886-1881) was known in both Great Britain and USA as a comic actor.

⁴⁶ 'Notes of the Week: The Autograph Mania', *East & Southern Devon Advertiser*, 27 May 1876, British Newspaper Archive <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001639/18760527/020/0002>>.

⁴⁷ 'Pursuit of Mr Hawker: Chased into the Sea by Ladies with Autograph Books', *Gloucester Echo*, 29 August 1913, British Newspaper Archive <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000320/19130829/075/0003>>.

⁴⁸ 'Pursuit of Mr Hawker: Chased into the Sea by Ladies with Autograph Books'. Mr Harry George Hawker (1889-1921) was flying his Sopwith Seaplane in the Daily Mail's circuit of Britain in August 1913.

Hawker's attempted escape into the sea in 1913 echoes a similar report fifty years later about the pop group The Beatles who were mobbed by mainly female autograph hunters.⁴⁹ These accounts support the earlier discussion on the shift from the male album amicorum of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the female friendship albums of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and autograph collecting remains a predominately female-gendered activity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Newspaper reports like these over the years illustrate the overwhelming number of fans, and the language used in these reports – 'Battle', 'escape', 'screaming' – suggests a diagnosis of autograph collecting as a mania, placing collectors firmly in the hunter category, with the celebrities as prey. Whereas Hawker 'avoided' his fans, the Beatles 'escaped' suggesting the escalating dangers of the pursuit by the hunter. The excitement of the hunters is captured in the use of the word 'screaming' which links to the Victorian view of hysteria being a female condition.⁵⁰ Both descriptions demonstrate the lengths (predominantly female) fans would go to for the autograph of a celebrity. The First World War soldier-patients were a focus for young women who perceived their military service and subsequent wounding as heroic. Carden-Coyne terms this as 'hospital blues fever', with many women known to have gained access to the hospitals in hopes of meeting a wounded soldier.⁵¹ For a determined autograph hunter, the soldier-patients had little chance of escape.

In contrast, the nurses' requests for autographs can be seen to have a deeper meaning and the wish to remember the intimate relationship that developed between the patient and nurse during care and treatment. Carden-Coyne, however, discusses how the wounded soldier could be a celebrity curiosity even for nurses in an account of a newspaper photo of nurses

⁴⁹ 'Battle of the Beatles', *Liverpool Echo*, 21 October 1963, British Newspaper Archive <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>. The Beatles sought sanctuary in a Birmingham television studio yesterday by a side entrance.

⁵⁰ 'Battle of the Beatles'.

⁵¹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 223. Young women in the First World War often sought out wounded soldiers as a means financial security from pensions and pay.

caught photographing their patients: ‘nurses had intimate knowledge of their patients, asked for autograph albums to be signed and wanted personal photographs of them’.⁵² Of the albums in the archives, at least three contain photographs of patients in their uniforms, (usually hospital blues). Nurse White’s album contains a photograph of a soldier in a dark uniform, probably a Belgian sergeant with the words ‘love brings the greatest distances closer’ (Figure 6). Nurse Jones’ album contains four photographs of her soldier-patients (Figure 7) and Nurse Penn’s album contains two photographs, one of which is a faded group photo of staff and patients on a ward at the 1st Southern General Hospital Dudley Road Section (Figure 8). As discussed earlier, photographs were becoming another way of preserving friendships in the albums, not just in words and sketches but with a visual presence capturing the intimacy of the nurse-patient relationship.



⁵² Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 229.

Figure 6. 'Autograph Album Madge White VAD' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/254/WHIT.



Figure 7. 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, AB476.

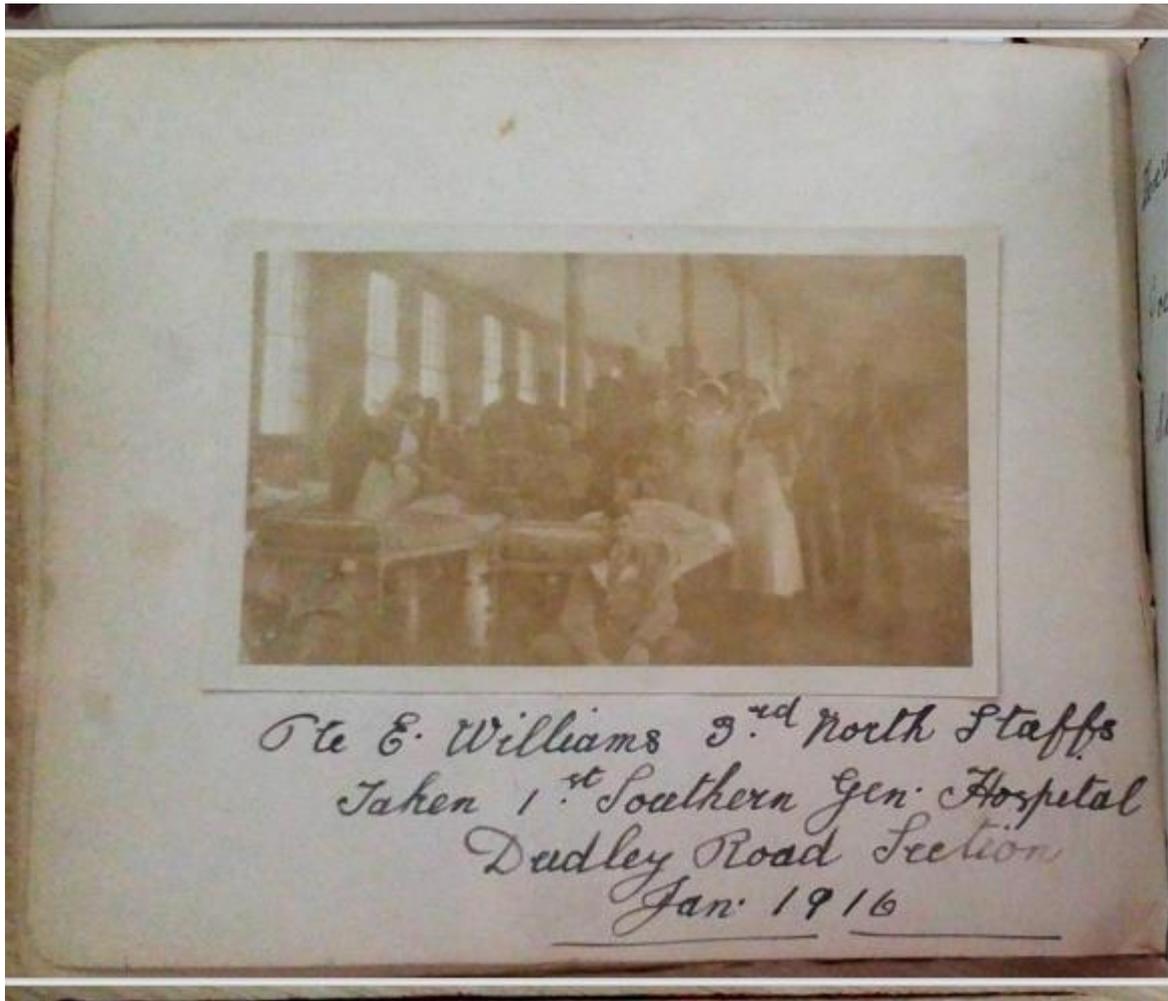


Figure 8. 'Autograph Album Mary Penn VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection.

A New Kind of Celebrity: The Ordinary Man becomes a War Hero

The First World War began only a year after Harry Hawker's unwelcome encounter with celebrity status. War was brought to the doorstep of every home in the country. People could hear first-hand accounts from the men of their communities, not professional soldiers used to the hardships of war, but of their fathers, sons, and brothers. Public Houses were a place of community and soldiers home on leave were treated like local heroes by many willing to hear their war stories. Local newspapers ran stories about local soldiers providing vicarious experiences of the war for public consumption. Carden-Coyne suggests that in their appearance of wounded hero, soldiers would often exaggerate their exploits in war to gain

more attention.⁵³ But these stories also served a healing purpose, and she cites Arthur Frank who argued that these narrations helped ‘ill people [...] to make sense of what happened to them’.⁵⁴

Reznick and Carden-Coyne both explore the culture of the hospital, its interface with the local communities and the celebrity status that the wounded soldier took on. The photograph from Mary Penn’s album captures a sense of community and belonging amongst the nurses and the patients. Reznick argues that ‘only passing attention [has been given] to the role of military hospitals in the management of the war and in wartime social relationships’.⁵⁵ His focus, through two case studies of typical General Hospitals in the UK is predominantly on the utility of the buildings and the propaganda they provided where ‘those who remain at home could do their bit by expressing appreciation of those who were serving King and Country overseas’.⁵⁶

Local charities and communities provided entertainment for convalescing patients as well as acting as fund raisers to help support the wounded patients. Garden fetes, free screenings at cinemas, picnics, and other activities were held to lift the spirits of the wounded. Reznick recounts that several London Convalescent Hospitals provided many of these activities including boat rides. He suggests that when they were on an outing ‘once on display – these men became the focus of intense public praise [...] the wounded men being loudly cheered by spectators’.⁵⁷

Carden-Coyne, on the other hand comments on ‘elderly ladies, well-meaning mothers and single women from the locality [who] visited the hospitals to offer comfort, but also to

⁵³ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 232.

⁵⁴ Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (1995) cited in Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 328.

⁵⁵ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 42.

⁵⁶ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 43.

⁵⁷ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 52.

listen to tales of wounding'.⁵⁸ These visitors were viewed by the military and hospital staff as a disruption and the female visitors were seen as taking the opportunity to form relationships with wounded men. Carden-Coyne notes that the 'constant stream of female visitors' though, caused many patients to feel 'like objects of fascination'.⁵⁹ Reznick is rather more brutal, observing that the

upper-class women who visited the hospital also promoted feelings of assault and insult [in the patients]. Hospital magazines portray these women as purveyors of more irritation than consolation, as persons who tended to gawk at the bedridden soldier.⁶⁰

These comments about the wounded being on display or exhibited as objects of fascination suggest a rather perverse extension of celebrity culture. The wounded soldier was at once a symbol of heroism as well as a recipient of the public's morbid curiosity about the brutality of war creating physically and mentally disabled young men.⁶¹

Civilian Fever

Newspapers carried images of wounded men, celebrating their heroism which the public bought into, creating their 'celebrity'. Bourke discusses a public film on disablement and states that the public 'judged soldiers' mutilations to be 'badges of their courage [...] their proof of patriotism'.⁶² The soldier's celebrity was enhanced by the accounts they could give of their experiences in the war, with Carden-Coyne describing it as a 'privilege of the wounded' and suggesting that the press encouraged the public's appetite for reading about the horrors of the war.⁶³

⁵⁸ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 222.

⁵⁹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 192.

⁶⁰ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 87.

⁶¹ Joanna Bourke, 'Mutilation', in *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Reaktion Books, 1996), pp. 31–75 (p. 31).

⁶² Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Reaktion Books, 1999), p. 56.

⁶³ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 223.

During the early part of the war the desire for being associated with a hero saw many young women with khaki fever.⁶⁴ Hospital blues had the same effect, and these men were possibly more vulnerable to the ambitions of such women.⁶⁵ Women were known to seek out liaisons with wounded soldiers, sometimes in the hope of the financial security of a soldier's war pension. Reznick argues that wearing the blue uniform made the 'Tommy who wore it the heroic counterpart to the khaki-clad soldier. Praise of the "convalescent blue", like "khaki fever" served as another way of loving a hero'.⁶⁶

The following verse from VAD Mary Penn's autograph album compiled at the 1st Southern General Hospital in Birmingham, reflects the pride in the wounded soldiers who have done their bit (Figure 9). The poem is simply signed 'LHB', we do not know who the contributor was, if 'LHB' was a VAD, military nurse, or even a patient, and there is no date:

We are proud of the boys in khaki| Not forgetting the boys in blue| They have all been out to do their bit| Also the sailors too| We are looking forward to peace| When they all get their release| So don't forget the brave lads| When war and tumult cease: I'm sure they happy be while fighting for old England you and me| Mary goes sewing shirts and socks galore| For the wounded soldiers ten min walk from her door| She says, come along girls, its little we can do| For our dear old Tommies', our brave lads in blue LHB.⁶⁷

The first part recognises both the Army and the Navy and acknowledges who they are fighting for. The second half shows the work done by the volunteers (sewing and knitting). The British Red Cross VAD records show evidence of the different roles that the VADs carried out, which included seamstresses and knitters.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Angela Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever' and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29.2 (1994), pp. 325–47.

⁶⁵ Hospital blues were a standard ill-fitting uniform provided to convalescent 'other rank' patients. There were no pockets and Reznick draws similarities with women's clothing. The blues also advertised the wounded on display and was a form of propaganda.

⁶⁶ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 87.

⁶⁷ 'Autograph Album Mary Penn VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection. 'Tommy' derivative of 'Tommy Atkins' popular name for British Soldiers of the First World War.

⁶⁸ 'British Red Cross Volunteers during WW1'.

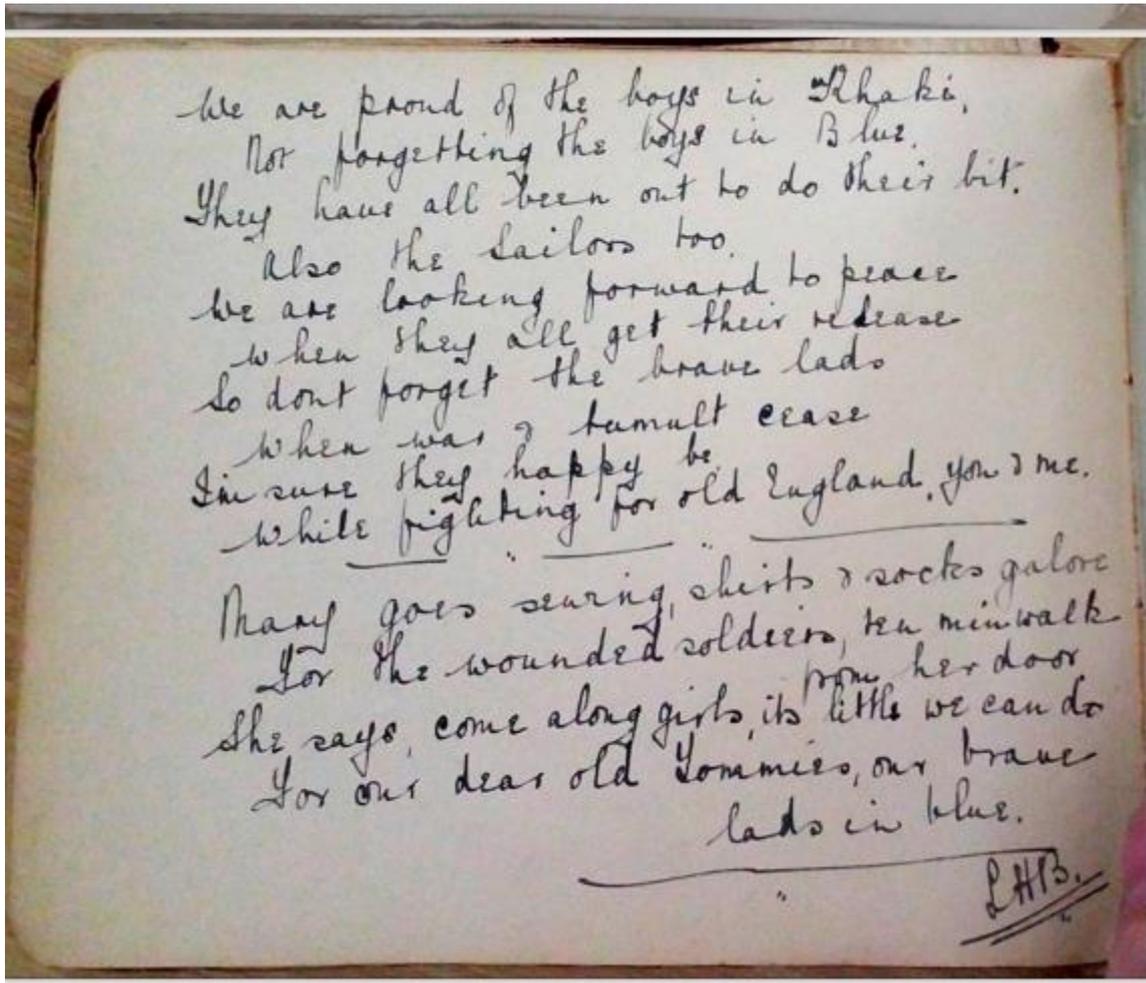


Figure 9. 'We are proud of the boys in khaki' in 'Autograph Album Mary Penn VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection.

Music halls were a popular place for recruitment of volunteers early in the war. Songs were especially composed to encourage patriotic fervour and recruitment stations were often set up in or near the music halls.⁶⁹ Marie Lloyd, a well-known music hall star sang several songs about 'Boys in Khaki' and there are at least two that were popular at the time the 'boys in khaki and the boys in blue' was contributed to Mary's album.⁷⁰ 'LHB' may have been influenced by these songs and quoting a music hall song he/she has heard. Although in the musical hall lyrics 'the boys in blue' most likely referred to sailors, in the verse taken from

⁶⁹ Robert Dean, "'We Think You Ought To Go' Music Hall and Recruitment in the First World War', in *The Edinburgh Companion to the First World War and the Arts* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 185–99.

⁷⁰ 'We Are Proud of You Boys in Khaki, Boys in Blue', *Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA* <<https://www.loc.gov/item/2014561420/>> [accessed 6 September 2023].

the autograph album, the description, given the environment, is used for the patients. These same volunteers returning as wounded also visited music halls as part of their convalescence wearing their hospital blues.

Both professional nurses and VADs had a more intimate relationship with these heroes. This was a position envied by the civilian visitors who were required to gain passes to access the patients. A relatively new, inexperienced nurse may well have ‘gawked’ at the disabled and disfigured patients and be swept along with the hospital equivalent of khaki fever. The nurses, though, were not necessarily as keen as some of the female visitors, some of whom gained access to the hospital to try to form a more romantic relationship with the wounded soldiers. The autograph album could be used as a bridge between the professional relationship of nurse-patient, and a more social one.

Tall Tales and Trauma Re-lived

The daily contact of nursing care, changing dressings, providing food and drink for her patients, may have allowed some nurses to see beyond the injuries and treat the patient as an individual. The use of an autograph album as a means of socialising with the patients can be seen as placing the nurse in the position of the autograph hunter, but it can also be viewed as a testimony of the care received by grateful patients similarly to the letters written in Mary Seacole’s book as discussed in chapter two.⁷¹

Recuperating patients, wanting to recount their experiences, would often ask or be asked, if they may write these memories in the nurses’ albums. Patients may have considered being asked to recount their war exploits in the autograph album of a nurse as reliving a traumatic experience they would rather not have. There was an obligation on the one hand but, equally, the albums may have been seen as a distressing nuisance, especially if there

⁷¹ Mary Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* (Blackwood, 1857) <<https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/seacole/adventures/adventures.html>>.

were several albums doing the rounds on a ward. The albums with short entries of thanks may be evidence of fulfilling the obligation by repeating hackneyed verses but under some duress.

Although many autograph albums have survived in various archives, such as those at the Imperial War Museum and the Royal College of Nursing, this research mainly focused on the albums in the archives of the Museum of Military Medicine and the QARANC Heritage collection. The ability, therefore, to compare two or more albums from the same hospital ward in order to gain an insight and understanding of the wounded patients' perception of the albums is limited. The two cartoons from the *Norfolk War Hospital Magazine* (Figure 10) and *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth* (Figure 11), however, may provide an indication of how the patients viewed them.

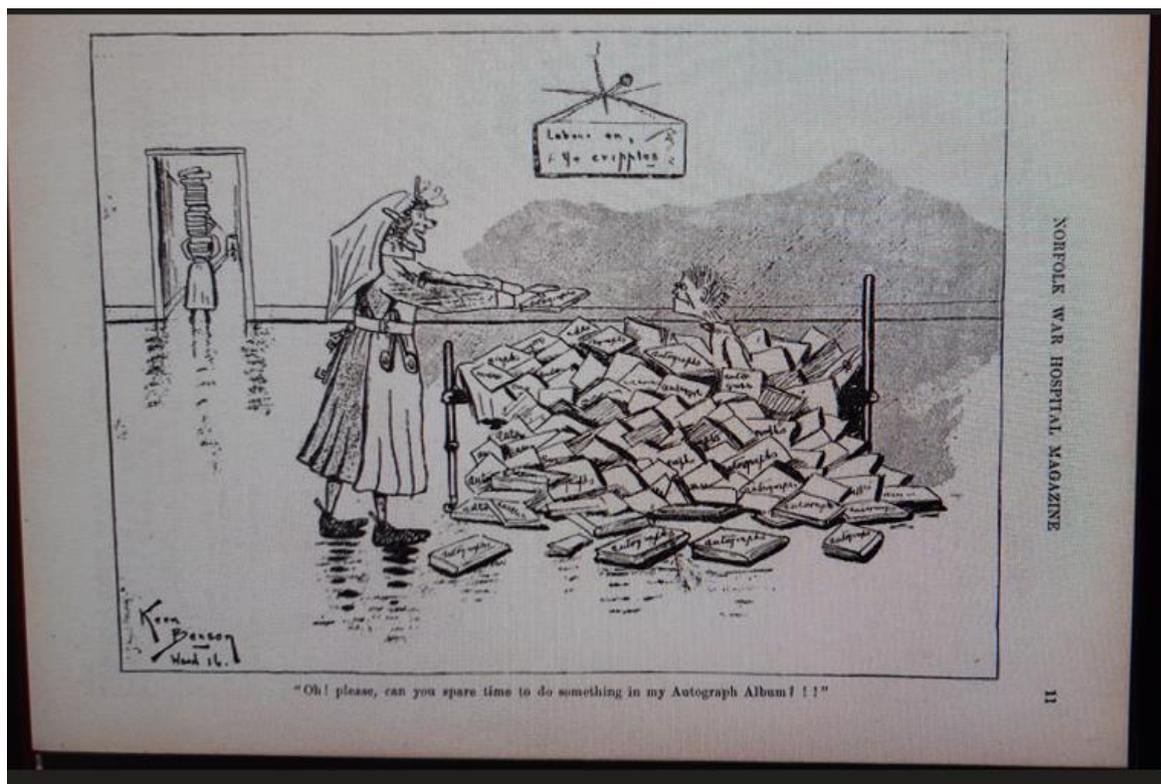


Figure 10. 'Norfolk War Hospital Magazine', *Norfolk War Hospital* (Thorp St Andrew Norfolk, July 1916), Imperial War Museum.

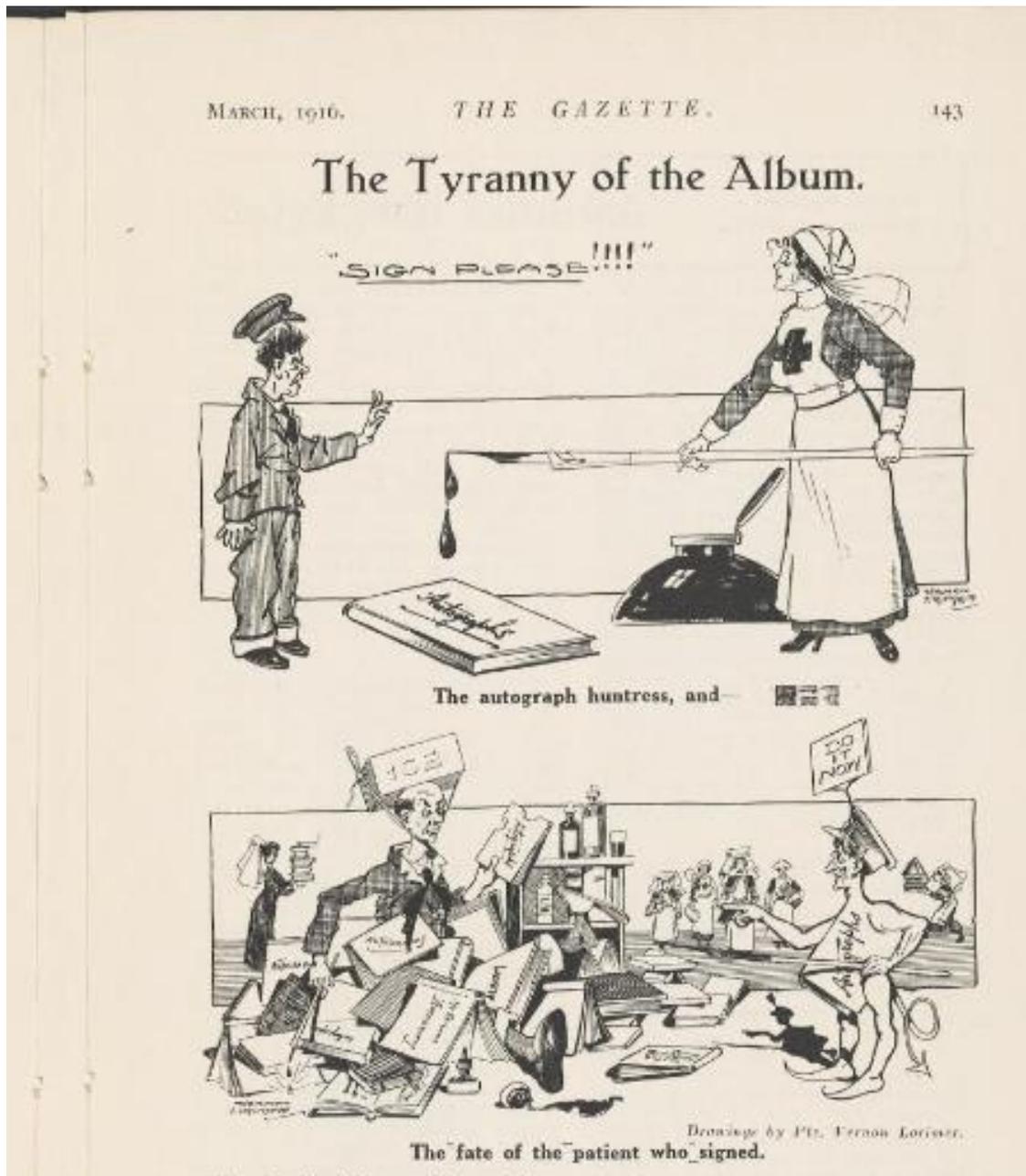


Figure 11. 'The Tyranny of the Album', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.6 (1916), 14.

The sign in the Norfolk cartoon is interesting, 'labour on ye cripples'.⁷² Today this is viewed as a negative comment but was a common term in the early-twentieth century.

Bourke considers changing attitudes toward the disabled population due to the number of disabled soldiers returning from the war and notes the various organizations who cared for

⁷² 'Norfolk War Hospital Magazine', *Norfolk War Hospital* (Thorp St Andrew Norfolk, July 1916), Imperial War Museum.

them, such as the ‘Cripples’ Guild of Courage’.⁷³ The sign, together with the patient weighted down in his bed by the number of albums, suggests that, although injured, he can still be useful. By signing all the autograph albums, he is possibly trying to express his thanks to the nurses for their care of him. It is also a visual reminder of the struggle he will face each day to get out of bed with his disabilities and the label he will carry for the rest of his life.

In contrast, the second cartoon, in *The Gazette*, depicting the nurse as a hunter confirms the public perception of the autograph hunter as discussed earlier in the chapter.⁷⁴ In wielding an exaggerated pen almost as a weapon with her quarry cornered, it is a visual reminder of the gender role reversal. The power of the nurse over her patients is reinforced in the lower section of the cartoon with the consequences of signing. The group of nurses is standing in the background as the patient is ordered to sign the albums. Notwithstanding the horror of the autograph book depicted in cartoons above, some patients and their nurses found therapeutic value in recounting their experiences (further explored later in the thesis), and for the nurse these might have a parallel value to a celebrity autograph as a first-hand account from the hero.

My Hero: ‘You Asked Me For a War Story’⁷⁵

The opportunity to gather evidence of having cared for a ‘hero’ can be seen in the autograph album of Sister Beatrice Bowman. Sister Bowman was an American Naval nurse who had come to England to help in the war effort. An entry in her autograph album captures the interest she had in her patients’ experiences of war (Figure 12).

⁷³ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 41.

⁷⁴ ‘The Tyranny of the Album’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.6 (1916), p. 143.

⁷⁵ ‘Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman’.

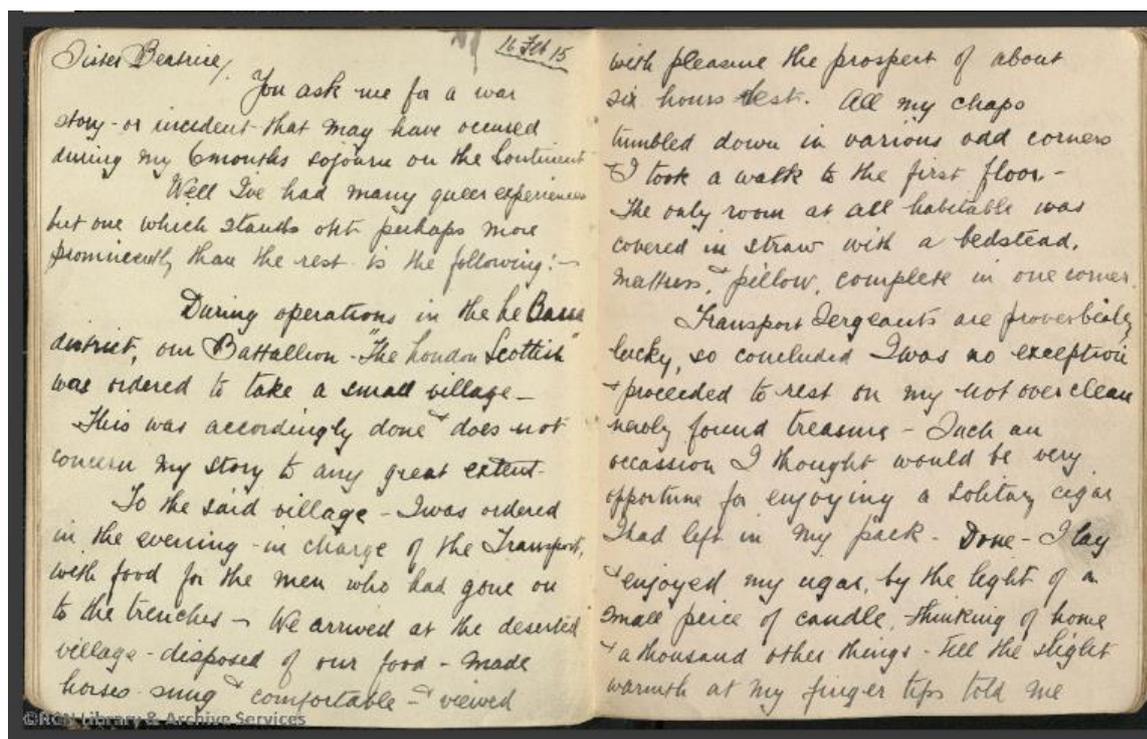


Figure 12. 'Sister Beatrice' in 'Autograph Album Beatrice Bowman Red Cross Nurse', Royal College of Nursing, RCN Service Scrapbook, <https://www.rcn.org.uk/servicescrapbooks>.

Sister Beatrice 16 Feb 15 You ask me for a war story – or incident that may have occurred during my 6 months sojourn on the Continent. Well, I've had many queer experiences but one which stands out perhaps more prominently than the rest is the following:-⁷⁶

Sergeant Fairlie's account, which is discussed in greater detail later in the thesis, goes on to describe the capture and death of a German soldier he found hiding in a house. The killing is told briefly, almost as a throwaway at the end of the account, which goes into more detail about his role as a transport Sergeant and smoking his cigar. Sister Bowman's autograph album contains many such entries with the acknowledgment that the stories had been requested by her. The phrase 'you asked me to relate' appears at the start of over thirty similarly detailed entries. Sister Bowman's autograph album is interesting in that she has selected the contributor for a specific type of entry and as she handed the album has made her request. It is possible that she found their verbal stories captivating and wished to have them written down to read again later. This contrasts with other albums where the contribution is a

⁷⁶ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

free choice. Requests for personal accounts may have been made in other cases, but the soldiers typically preferred to stick to the traditional style of entry.

Kate McLoughlin, in ‘Telling Tales’, in *Veteran Poetics: British Literature in the Age of Mass Warfare, 1790–2015*, argues that veteran’s tales are often ‘unsolicited or unwanted accounts; tales that are repeated too many times [losing] the interest of their audiences/or go on too long’.⁷⁷ She suggests that the war story is often seen as an unburdening tale of woe that dates back to Homer’s *Odyssey*. For the injured soldiers, it can be seen as a form of talking therapy that enables them to assimilate back into society after participating in the harsh aspects of warfare. Like Sergeant Fairlie, some soldiers recount how they killed in order to survive themselves, others record how they were wounded. For the wounded, though, there may be a sense of failure in their wounding. Carden-Coyne argues that there was a social value to wounds and that soldiers derived pleasure from telling their stories. She states that ‘performing the heroic role, military patients often exaggerated their stories of wounding with “tall” or exaggerated [tales] for female visitors’.⁷⁸ Absorbed by these tales of daring-do the nurses might have relished capturing the anecdotes to share with their friends or as a memory of a soldier they had nursed and viewed as stoic, brave and dealing with his injuries with humility. Awareness of the album owner’s eagerness to have evidence of first-hand accounts may also have led to some of these written accounts being embellished for the reader, some may even have been recounting events they had heard of and now felt able to claim ownership of themselves. Reinforcing their perceived image of the wounded hero may have ensured them more attention and by writing it down they may have come to some acceptance of their wounds.

Soldier Heroes: Recurring and Amended Contributions

⁷⁷ Kate McLoughlin, ‘Telling Tales’, in *Veteran Poetics: British Literature in the Age of Mass Warfare, 1790–2015* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 145–84 (p. 146), doi:10.1017/9781108350754.005.

⁷⁸ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 232.

The professional army was, in wartime, held in high esteem but in the same way that the popularity of celebrities and public figures fell in and out of favour so too did that of the military in time of peace. Nationalist fervour had elevated the ordinary soldier to the status of hero. The public's acceptance though, after the war, of disabled soldiers, was a negative one where they were seen as no longer useful to society, and often as a burden and embarrassment.⁷⁹ Glenn Fisher argues that the government's treatment of military veterans created a negative perception of the Army in the eyes of the public following the Crimean war. He cites Rudyard Kipling's poem 'Tommy' which he says:

combines the two central ideas of general disapproval of the soldier as a background narrative in peacetime, and his short term popularity in time of war : For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an'| 'Chuck him out the brute!'| But it's 'Saviour of 'is country' when the guns begin to shoot;| An' it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that an' |anything you please: |An' Tommy ain't a bloomin' fool – you bet that Tommy sees!⁸⁰

The following entry is redolent of the time, placing the soldier as a hero who comes to the aid of the people in time of war but is easily forgotten in time of peace. Dated 1916, the contributor is foreshadowing the fate of many soldiers after the war:

God and the Soldier all men adore| In time of trouble and of war| When war is over and all things righted| God is forgotten, and the old soldier slighted (In Egypt 1916)⁸¹

The verse has its origins in a poem by Francis Quarles:

Our God and Souldiers [sic] we alike adore |Ev'n at the Brink of danger;| not before: After deliverance, both alike required;|Our God's forgotten, and our Souldiers slighted.⁸²

The original verse was possibly written during the English Civil War period and its relevance some two hundred and fifty years later is indicative of continuing civilian/military tensions.

⁷⁹ Bourke, 'Mutilation', p. 60.

⁸⁰ Glenn Fisher, 'The Crimea and Indian Mutiny Veterans Associations of the 1890s' (unpublished Doctorial Thesis, Cardiff University, 2020), p. 22.

⁸¹ 'Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks, Aldershot), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, 2019 25/15.

⁸² "'Of Common Devotion" by Francis Quarles', in *The Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Francis Quarles (1880)*, ed. by Alexander B. Grosart (Nabu Press, 2012), p. 205. Later version attributed to Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

First World War soldiers, however, were more familiar with Kipling's version of this sentiment from his poem 'Tommy', as discussed above by Fisher. Of the six reiterations of this verse found in the albums in the archive, it is the first two lines that are adapted to suit the writer's intent and are good examples of the reuse and adaptation of common album verses. These adaptations show the ways soldiers contested and critiqued popular hagiography through which they became heroes for the duration of the war only.

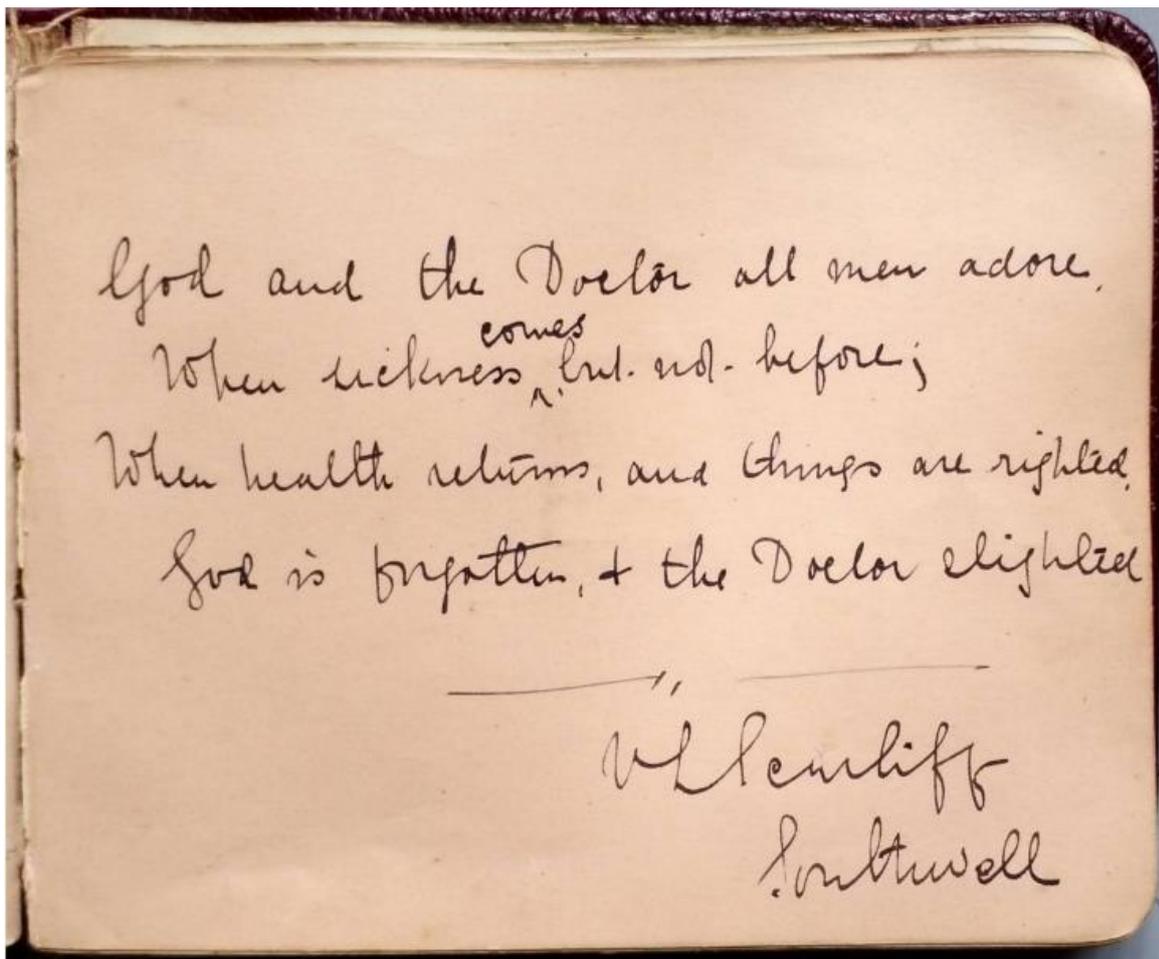


Figure 13. 'God and the Doctor' in 'Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0013.

Three verses stand out for their adaptation of this poem. The first places the doctor as the hero who, 'when health returns', suffers the same fate as the soldier (Figure 13). Having carried out his duty, he too, is discarded and his 'heroic deeds' in saving lives are forgotten.

God and the Doctor all men adore,| When sickness comes but not before,| When
health returns and things are righted| God is forgotten, and the Doctor slighted.⁸³

In the hospital environment, the doctors and nurses fought their own battles to save the lives of the wounded, and the verse sums up their reward. The War Office required the medical services to return the soldier back to fighting fitness: treating mass casualties would have been a thankless task when they were returned to the front to likely be injured or killed.

Michael Brown in his article, “‘Like a Devoted Army’: Medicine, Heroic Masculinity, and the Military Paradigm in Victorian Britain”, writes that Doctors in public service who ‘died treating the poor [were] “fallen martyrs”’ calling their work heroic.⁸⁴ He goes on to consider how the soldier hero in his fight was rewarded with medals and accolades unlike the heroic doctor who went unrewarded. It was in the Crimean war that the Victoria Cross (V.C.) was introduced in 1856 for exceptional bravery. Brown states that there were acts of courage by medical staff that went unrewarded. It was not until the formation of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) in 1898 that acts of bravery and courage by doctors were able to be acknowledged with a visible reward of a medal.⁸⁵

The writer of the second verse has given it a title, ‘A Soldier’s Toast’ (Figure 14).

Written in December 1914, it already displays cynicism about how the people will view the hero in the future at the end of the war.

When war is at hand, and danger nigh| To God and the Soldiers, everybody cry. But!
When war is o’ver and danger abated| God is forgotten and the soldier hated.⁸⁶

He has also altered ‘righted’ to ‘abated’ in order to change ‘slighted’ to the much more emotional and hard-sounding word ‘hated’ to end with. This writer is under no illusion that

⁸³ ‘Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD’.

⁸⁴ Michael Brown, “‘Like a Devoted Army’: Medicine, Heroic Masculinity, and the Military Paradigm in Victorian Britain”, *Journal of British Studies*, 49 (2021), pp. 592–622 (p. 592).

⁸⁵ Brown, “‘Like a Devoted Army’: Medicine, Heroic Masculinity, and the Military Paradigm in Victorian Britain”, pp. 606–07. Noel Godfrey Chavasse (1884–1917), for example, was commissioned into the RAMC in 1913 serving on the Western Front and is one of only three people to be awarded a Victoria Cross twice.

⁸⁶ ‘Autograph Album Lily Fisher VAD’.

his role as 'hero' will last only the duration of the war and of the fickle nature of people who will no longer view him benevolently but actually malevolently.

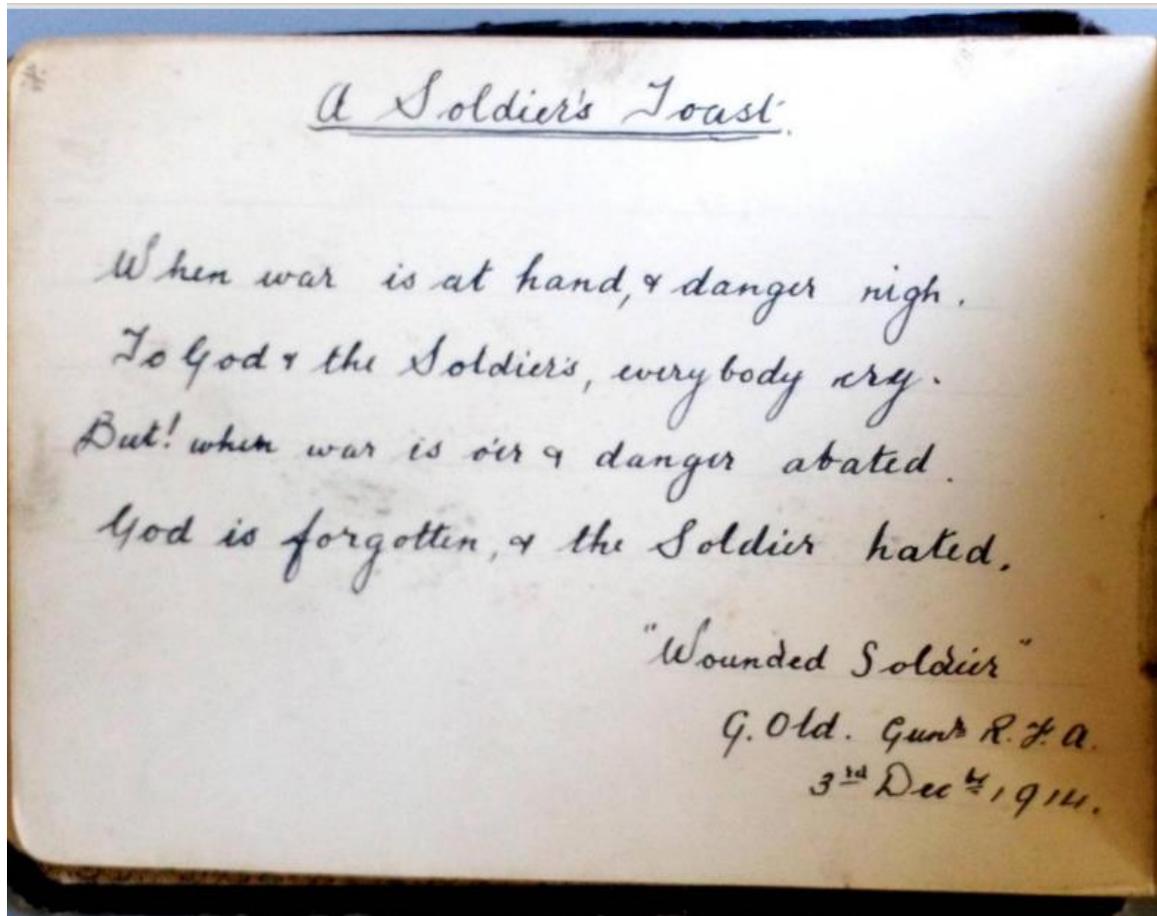


Figure 14. 'A Soldier's Toast' in 'Autograph Album Lily Fisher VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0003.1.

The third entry speaks of the widespread existence of war in Europe with battles raging and is written in early 1916 when there was little hope of a quick end to the war (Figure 15). The first lines of both the second and third entries convey the immediacy of war and danger that confronts England.

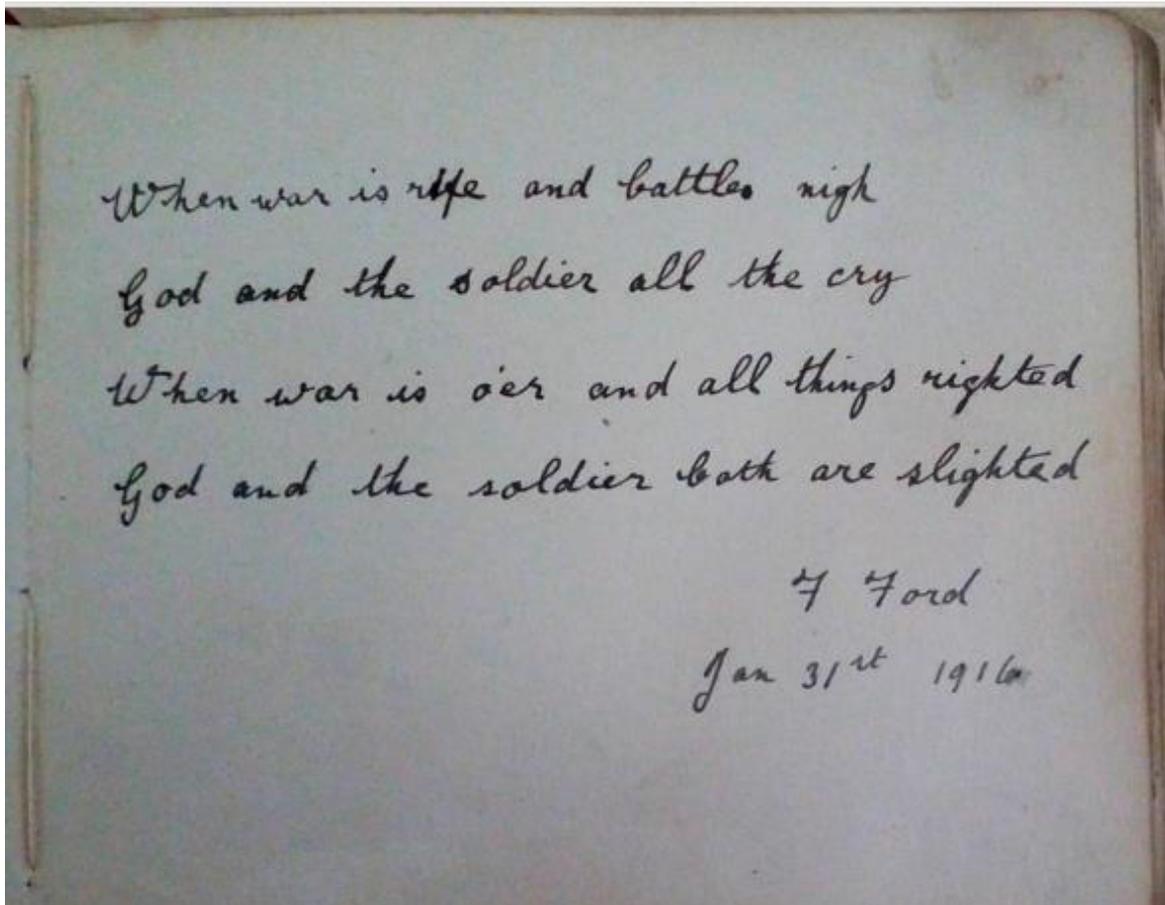


Figure 15. 'When war is rife' in 'Autograph Album Mary Penn VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection.

When war is rife and battle nigh | God and the Soldier all the cry | When war is o'er
and al things righted | God and the Soldier both are slighted.⁸⁷

Indeed, another verse, not fully quoted here, begins 'When England's at War and danger is nigh' and then continues with the same lines. Unlike the Crimean war, Anglo-Zulu war, South African, or Boer Wars, the First World War harked back to the threat of war from Napoleon over one hundred years before, now England was again in danger, with the threat of invasion and direct attacks and so in need of her heroes.⁸⁸

The inconstant public support of the soldier lauded in times of war and easily discarded in times of peace is an ongoing one. Fisher debates this in his work on the treatment of the Light Brigade Veterans and the various appeals for money to support

⁸⁷ 'Mary Penn VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection.

⁸⁸ Zeppelins bombed London in May 1915.

destitute veterans in 1891 thirty-seven years later.⁸⁹ Bourke's work on the treatment and attitudes to the disabled soldier is discussed in a comparison with disabled civilians and the various guilds, as referred to earlier, that were set up for disabled children that later developed to include the war disabled. The 'war maimed competed for limited economic and emotional resources with disabled civilians, in the end, there were no winners or losers'.⁹⁰ Bourke states that 'by the late 1920's the respect that had initially been given to the fragmented bodies of war-mutilated men had ended'.⁹¹

Although many of the entries across the archive conform to the norms expected of album writing, the specific conditions of the First World War do permeate through each album. Just as many of the typically conventional contributions have been adapted to reflect the relationship between the writer and the album's owner, as discussed earlier in the chapter, so the war context has also modified the conventions. The soldier entries are reflective of their experiences both of the war and their healing from wounds. Written in the hospital environment whilst recovering from their injuries, they may be blanking out the trauma of their battlefield experiences and wounding. These entries tend to be positive or comic in nature rather than melancholic, and the humour that pervades them can be viewed as communicating to the reader how it is helping them to recover. There are humorous perceptions of life in the trenches as a 'hero'. This ideal of the hero as being calm under fire is supported by Jane L. Bownas who states that 'the body chemistry prepares the body for action and temporarily [...] inhibits [...] fear'.⁹² Rewards for bravery were looked on by the soldiers as often being sent up with the rations. These humorous entries can be seen as an alternative way to deflect the expectations of their heroism, creating a space for an

⁸⁹ Glenn Fisher, 'The Soldier Slighted the Last of the Light Brigade', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 94.379 (2016), pp. 198–207.

⁹⁰ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 31.

⁹¹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 31.

⁹² Jane L. Bownas, *The Myth of Hero: Changing Perceptions of Heroism* (Sussex Academic Press, 2018).

acceptance of themselves as an unromantic, unheroic individual. Various transcriptions or adaptations of cartoons by Bruce Bairnsfather appear in several of the albums, usually depicting a soldier carrying on calmly regardless of the shelling around him. Figures 16 and 17 are examples from the autograph albums of Ethel Mason and Edith Marshall.



Figure 16. 'They've evidently seen me!' in 'Autograph Album Ethel F Mason QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks, Aldershot), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, 2019 25/15.

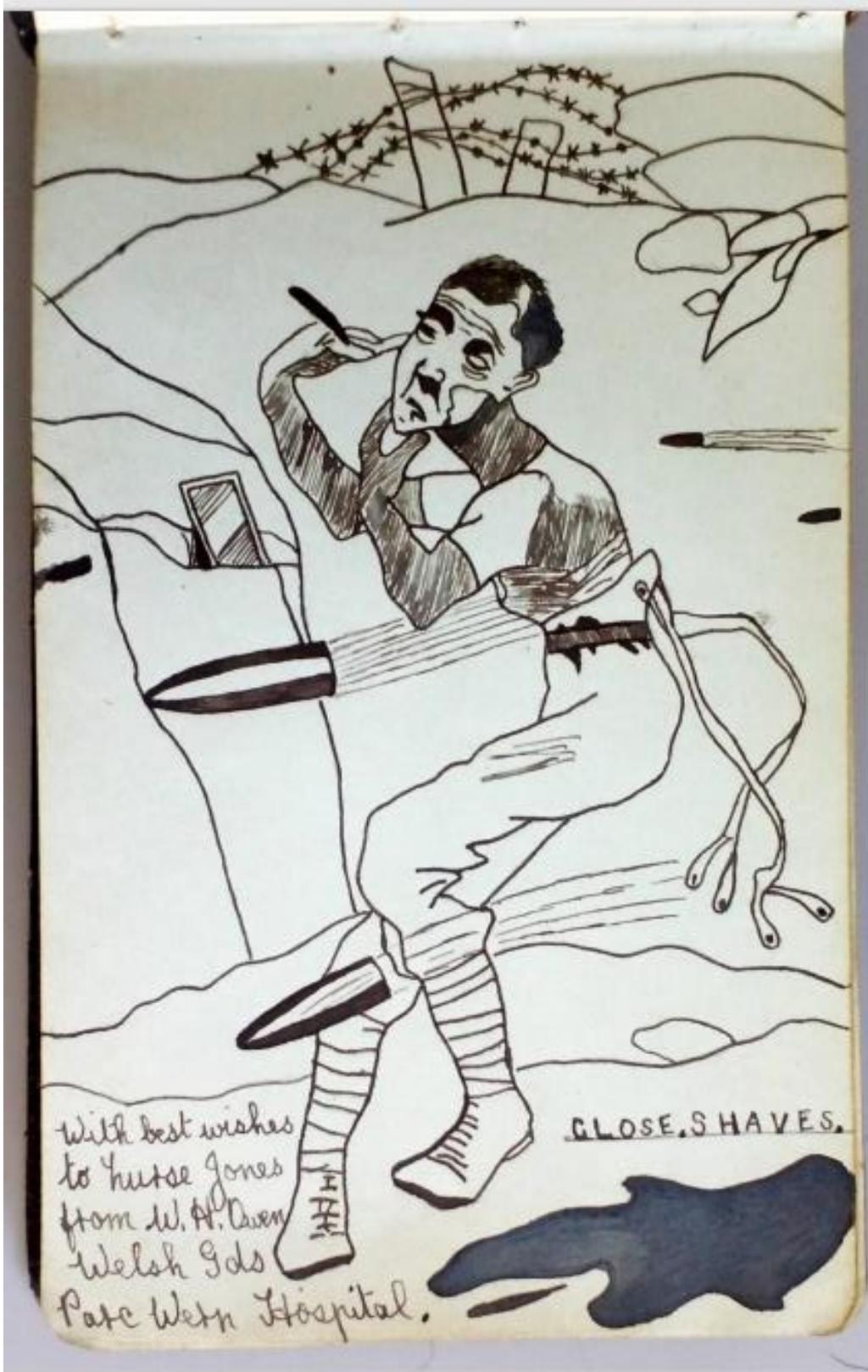


Figure 17. 'Close Shaves' in 'Autograph Album Edith G Marshall VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection.

Three different autograph albums share the same image of a soldier shaving which would appear to have been copied or remembered from some source. The subject in each case is depicted as calmly carrying out his shave, he is in a state of unreadiness (braces not done up, in his shirt sleeves) and the barbed wire above places him in a trench. Shells are whizzing by unnoticed. The nonchalance of the soldier depicted suggests the soldier contributors' awareness of the image that the public has of their hero but is quietly mocking the reality of the hero.

The other widely-repeated cartoon is a well-known Bairnsfather character – 'Old Bill' – usually depicted as being shelled, barely missing death, and with a long-suffering fatalistic look at life. The choice of this humour by the wounded soldiers contrasts the cool hero unafraid of anything with the reality of what it was to be a 'hero' in their own eyes as they recovered in the hospital. In these contributions soldiers clearly endeavoured to temper the hero fantasies behind khaki fever. There are a few cartoons of the soldier under fire from shelling in the albums and, although the 'Close Shave' cannot be sourced, its style is definitely inspired by Bairnsfather. It is probable these cartoons were copied from Bruce Bairnsfather's works. *Fragments of France* was a popular 48-page book first published in January 1916, of Bairnsfather cartoons that had appeared in the *Bystander*, a popular newspaper of the time, and also on playing cards and cigarette cards, which would have been readily available in the trenches and on the convalescent hospital wards.⁹³

Such images and verses suggest a humble acceptance and possibly an effort to correct the public's perception of the hero and his own view that it was only his duty. In contrast, other images provide a stark reality of war. 'No Man's Land' shows the soldier under attack, a shell exploding in the background, his rifle and helmet on the ground (Figure 18). He is

⁹³ *Best Fragments from France by Capt Bruce Bairnsfather*, ed. by Valmai Holt and Tonie Holt, No 1 in the 'If You Knows of a Better "Ole"' Series (Milestone Publications, 1983).

keeping low, and the desolation of the landscape marked with barbed wire and mud. The title of 'No Man's Land' conjures up his desperate position stranded with no protection. Unlike the cartoon hero, here Pte Dawson shares the stark reality of war. This was not the glory of war the public expected to see.



Figure 18. 'No Man's Land' in 'Autograph Album Violet Hurdman VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0012.

A much more sanitised version of heroic soldier death is found in Hilda Mottram's book and describes the soldier as a martyr who has died in glory:

Clouds have a silver lining| Thus says the ancient saw| True, for the sun is shining|
e'on through the clouds of war| Deeds of the greatest glory| Written in words of gold|
Shine through the battles story| Now to the world unrolled| Mothers, restrain your
weeping| Knowing the sons you gave| Peacefully now are sleeping| Dauntless they
battled, giving| All, till their latest breathe| Gallant they were while living| Glorious in
their death⁹⁴

⁹⁴ 'Sgt Lapwood' (1916) in 'Autograph Album Mary Hilda Mottram VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0011.

Contributed by Sgt Lapwood, the verse suggests an acceptance of the death in battle of the soldier. It is probable that this verse comes from a literary source, but equally it may have been originally penned by the contributor. Phrases such as ‘Deeds of the greatest glory’ and ‘Glorious in their death’ perhaps challenge Bownas’s assertion that the ‘soldiers of World War One had no interest in winning glory and did not see themselves as “heroes” they simply wished to survive’, unlike the Greek warrior who sought glory and honour.⁹⁵ Here the mothers are told not to grieve because their sons have died for the greater good. Just as the cartoons show the wounded soldiers’ perception of themselves as being as far from heroic, often portraying a funny kind of hero by sending up the public image, these darker entries show the harsh reality of the war and a willingness to accept the label of hero. For many soldiers, the public’s perception of them as heroes was a reminder of what they had witnessed, endured and were returning to after their recovery. Bourke argues that ‘many war disabled searched for new ways of interpreting the devastation wrought upon their flesh’.⁹⁶ The humour and sombre nature of this search can be seen to have its beginnings in the albums as the wounded soldiers begin to come to terms with their injuries. The use of conventionalised images of ‘dauntless’, ‘gallant’, ‘battling’, followed by ‘glorious’ ‘peaceful’ death within the autograph albums suggests that at least some patients and medical staff took comfort from this rhetoric.

The Invisible

The history of autograph albums shows that contributions are largely positive and upbeat, as the friendship between owner and contributor is reflected. The convention of politeness also meant that critical content rarely appears. Those who are not visible in the archive albums are the patients that are not asked to contribute, neither do the albums offer a record of those who

⁹⁵ Bownas, *The Myth of Hero: Changing Perceptions of Heroism*, p. 137.

⁹⁶ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 20.

refused to write in them. The convention surrounding politeness does not allow us to detect clearly entries that were grudgingly made or those who were instructed by senior ranks to contribute or considered the request, if made by a Military nurse, an order to be followed.

This unrepresented category may have included those the album owners classed as malingers and therefore not a 'hero' to be celebrated in the book. That is not to say that some contributors did not fall in this category or that the nurse did not have some sympathy for them. The nurse was obliged to provide unbiased care to her patients, but exclusion from the autograph album was possibly one way she could show her disdain for this perceived behaviour. It was acknowledged, though, that some nurses and doctors 'admitted hurting enemy patients or taking less care with their wounds'.⁹⁷ Wounded soldiers may have been aware of stories of ill-treatment of enemy wounded and did not wish to cause offence to nurses who may be capable of such treatment. Alison Fell argues that the many volunteer nurses were 'motivated by appeals to their patriotism and duty at a time of national emergency'.⁹⁸ This attitude towards the enemy would have been reinforced by propaganda and may have spilled over in their attitude to soldier-patients they considered were malingers. The majority of albums in the archive were compiled in the UK. Those assembled in base hospitals on the Western and Eastern fronts, including the albums of Lilian Robinson and Edith Mason, however, do not feature enemy wounded. This omission may reflect the nurses' attitudes towards the enemy whom they had nursed but did not consider appropriate to memorialise in their albums. Fell suggests that there were conflicting tensions between a nurse's duty, of remaining neutral, and their feelings of patriotism. Any enemy wounded remains an invisible presence in these albums.

⁹⁷ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 206.

⁹⁸ Alison S. Fell, 'Nursing the Enemy in the First World War', *European Journal for Nursing History and Ethics*, FINAL.3 (2021), p. 5, doi:10.25974/ENHE2021-4EN.

There are many debates around malingering and the attitudes of the times saw some men labelled malingerers when they may well have been suffering from ‘shell-shock’ or post-traumatic shock disorders (PTSD) as it is now known. Nurses and doctors were well aware of patients who played on the effects or seriousness of their injuries to delay their return to the war effort. In 1917 columns began to appear in the *Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital* humourously acknowledging ‘Swinging the lead’.⁹⁹ Both Burke and Carden-Coyne discuss how malingering and shirking were perceived. Whilst Burke contrasts attitudes to malingering and shirking in peace time with that of soldiers at the front and military discipline, Carden-Coyne considers how the hospital environment was a place where illness and recovery could be manipulated to delay a return to the front.¹⁰⁰ An article written by Eve (presumably a nurse) titled ‘On Swinging the Lead’ starts by singling Tommy Atkins and Bill-Jim out as ‘flattering themselves as past masters in the gentle art of “Swinging it”’. She ends, possibly cynically, but stating ‘not that we suggest the *Army* is guilty of swinging the lead. Heaven forbid, for we who have been privileged...to come in contact with suffering so stupendous can but dumbly marvel at the magnitude of man’s courage and endurance...’¹⁰¹ Carden-Coyne suggests that nurses often overlooked such behaviour either out of sympathy or by not wanting to draw attention to a lack of military discipline on their wards: ‘Malingering was an accepted practice within the ward culture to an extent that patients boasted about their efforts’.¹⁰² To do so in an album was not wise but such boasts made their way into the hospital magazines as an often anonymous outlet. The October 1917 issue of *The Gazette* ran a piece about ‘Lead Swinging Recognised at Last’ and ‘The Last Adventure

⁹⁹ Swinging the Lead was a common First World War term ‘Malingering or otherwise evading duty. A lead-swinger who let his fellow soldiers down was disliked by all.’ ‘Whizz Bangs And Wind-Ups: 10 Tommy Slang Terms’, *Imperial War Museums* <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/whizz-bangs-and-wind-ups-10-tommy-slang-terms>> [accessed 6 September 2023].

¹⁰⁰ Bourke, ‘Mutilation’; Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, pp. 235–36.

¹⁰¹ Eve, ‘On Swinging the Lead’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, June 1917, p. 233, nla.gov.au, Trove.

¹⁰² Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 236.

of Lieut. Duratio N. Swingit' by Capt. S.C. Wells' which openly celebrates the efforts of the malingerer.¹⁰³

In contrast to the wounded hero who was perceived to have fought bravely, malingerers were seen as cowardly. The wounded patient who subsequently exhibited a reluctance to return to duty was shattering the image of the hero. Wounded men with self-inflicted wounds were also judged as lacking in moral fibre and wanting to avoid going through the horrors of the front again once they had found a refuge in the hospital. Just as with malingerers who endeavoured by means of exaggerating their pain or ability to recover, it is not possible to identify entries in the albums made by men with self-inflicted wounds.

Conscientious objectors

Malingerers and slackers were a regular feature in *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*. There is, however, limited comment on conscientious objectors that can be found in either the hospital magazines or nurses' albums. Similar in tone to the jocular comments in *The Gazette* about malingerers and slackers are the following contributions on the theme of conscientious objectors. The image in Figure 19 contrasts two diametrically opposed groups of men. This simple pencil sketch contains a lot of information regarding attitudes towards Conscientious Objectors in the First World War. In the background is an animated recruiter surrounded by a group of indistinct young men, suggestive of the faceless masses who went to fight. The church, together with the horse and cart and the five-barred gate, suggest the recruiters are in a farming community. In the foreground, a young man, whose features are more defined, is facing the recruiting Sergeant who has what may be viewed as a kindly hand on his shoulder. The caption reads 'want to do your bit my lad 'of c-

¹⁰³ 'Lead Swinging Recognised at Last', 'The Last Adventure of Lieut. Duratio N. Swingit' by Capt S.C. Wells' *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, October 1917, pp. 12–13, nla.gov.au, Trove.

c-c-c-c-c-course I D_D_D_D_D_D_D_Do' 'Then take my advice and join the machine gun section'.¹⁰⁴



Figure 19. 'A Conscientious Objector' in 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/68/HOLD.

The lone figure who appears not to want to enlist is shown against the mass of those who do, indicating his isolation not only from the fighting but from his community. In the context of the sketch title, 'a Conscientious Objector', the isolation of the young man from the group, together with the written stutter, suggests a young man not imbued with the same fervent attitude of many young men for the glory of war. It also suggests a departure from the exception that masculinity and militarism are a natural and inevitable corollary as suggested

¹⁰⁴ 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/68/HOLD.

by the enthusiastic group. It could also be seen to indicate his shyness and his reluctance to join the military and fight for his country. The contrast between the sturdy upright Sergeant and the thin disheveled young man whose clothes hang off him further supports the image's critical representation of the conscientious objector as a weak cowardly man. The Sergeant's solution is for the young man to join the machine gun section. Machine gun units suffered heavy casualties and the Corps gained the nickname the suicide club.¹⁰⁵ It is possible that the Sergeant is trying to bolster the young man's masculinity by suggesting he, too, is capable of fighting. Bourke argues that, whilst the Boer War had drawn attention to the fitness of young men, 'The conviction that the British race was degenerating physically became increasingly prevalent' and the First World War had heightened such anxieties.¹⁰⁶ Although the sketch is captioned 'A Conscientious Objector', the dialogue between the two does not broach his objections directly.

Many farm workers were taken to tribunals held locally as they were needed on the farms. Ann Kramer in *Conscientious Objectors of the First World War: A Determined Resistance* argues they were 'rarely "impartial", "tolerant" or "fair"'.¹⁰⁷ Alternative work for a conscientious objector might be agricultural work. Often, a farm was left with the absolute minimum of men, predominantly those older than the conscription age.¹⁰⁸ Kramer states around 16,000 men became conscientious objectors in the First World War: 'they were mocked and vilified [...] by friends and family, sacked from jobs, imprisoned and physically

¹⁰⁵ 'Machine Gun Corps', *National Army Museum* <<https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/machine-gun-corps>> [accessed 12 November 2024].

¹⁰⁶ Joanna Bourke, 'Inspecting', in *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies Britain and the Great War* (Reaktion Books, 1996), pp. 171–209 (pp. 171–72).

¹⁰⁷ Ann Kramer, *Conscientious Objectors of the First World War: A Determined Resistance*, The Great War on the Home Front (Pen & Sword History, 2013), p. 41.

¹⁰⁸ 'Military Service Act 1916', chap. 4 <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/5-6/104/contents/enacted>> [accessed 1 May 2025]. made provision for four grounds for exemption (Section 1 para 2 (1) of the act): '(a) on the ground that it is expedient in the national interests that he should...be engaged in other work; (b) on the ground that serious hardship would ensue...; (c) on the ground of ill-health or infirmity or (d) on the ground of a conscientious objection to the undertaking of combatant service': ch 4 P.4-5.

brutalized. To most people, they were seen as shirkers [and] cowards'.¹⁰⁹ Another alternative for conscientious objectors was to serve in the RAMC as stretcher bearers or orderlies. One particular group who refused to fight on religious grounds were Quakers or The Society of Friends. Kramer outlines the kind of work they carried out on humanitarian grounds, where they served but were exempted from combat service.

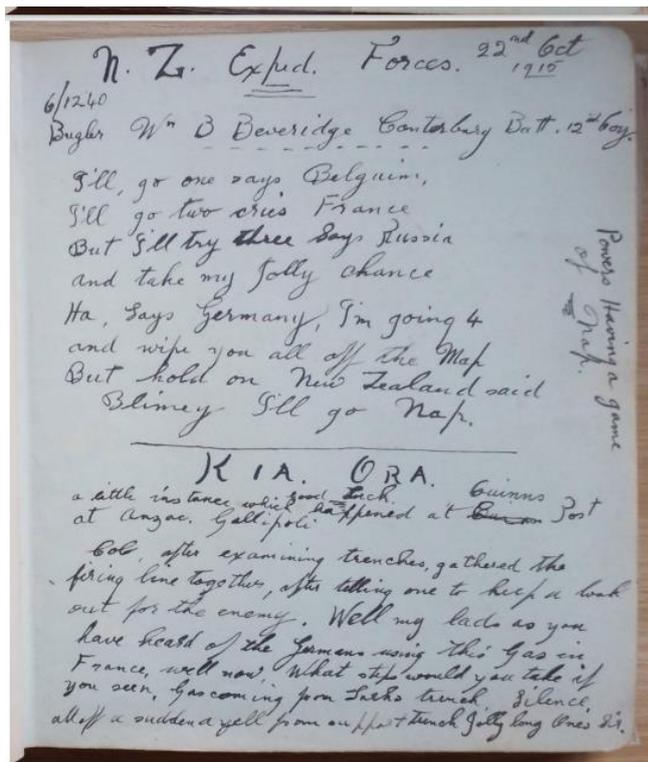
Figure 20 shows a gentler approach to conscientious objectors. This is in contrast to the overall tone of the soldier contributors and nurses who see participation in the war as the morally and ethically right thing to do. In 1914 there were many eager recruits who felt it was their duty to enlist and, together with those who were conscripted to fight, they gained hero status in the population at large. However, there were many who chose not to fight, often also for moral and ethical reasons.

¹⁰⁹ Kramer, *Conscientious Objectors of the First World War*, p. 1.



Figure 20. 'Have you killed those fowls?' [comment on conscientious objectors] in 'Autograph Album Violet Hurdman VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0012.

The image in Figure 20, however, is more mocking of the conscientious objector who won't fight for his country but is willing to kill animals for food. Here, the caption is 'She "Have you killed those fowls for dinner?" C.O. [conscientious objector] "I can't do it. You seem to forget I am a conscientious objector"'. In this image the conscientious objector is an older man who may have been exempt anyway. But the woman questioning him is representative of the attitudes held by many women towards conscientious objectors.



I'll go one says Belgium

I'll go two says France

But I'll try three says Russia

And take my jolly chance

Ha says Germany, I'm going 4

And wipe you all off the map

But hold on New Zealand said

Blimey I'll go nap

Bugler Wm B Beveridge Canterbury Batt 12th Coy

Figure 21. 'The Exped Forces' by Bugler Wm Beveridge Canterbury Batt 12th Coy in 'Autograph Album Elsie Maud James TFNS' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/63/JAME

Both military nurses and VADs worked alongside RAMC staff and some may well have been conscientious objectors. They may also have been amongst the patients they were caring for, those whose views on the war were well known to the nursing staff. Given the bonding community of convalescing soldiers, those with anti-war sentiments would have been known and these two images in the albums could have been a pointed way of telling the nurse about one of her patients. Again, given the shared and public nature of the albums, the contributor may have hoped to take a swipe at a known patient or orderly who would have seen the album. What the albums do not tell us directly is what the nurses thought of the contributions to their albums. Some albums have sections of pages cut out, which may be an indication of something unacceptable.

Personal views by the contributors about the politics surrounding the war itself, beyond accounts of their own experiences, are not often evident in the albums, although one entry found in many of the albums comments on how it started.

Often titled ‘The Rubber’ in other albums (figure 21), here the verse suggests that the war was the result of a card game between the various European powers of Serbia, France, Russia, Austria, Belgium, Germany and Britain.¹¹⁰ In this verse the contributor has substituted New Zealand for Britain. For the soldiers, it sums up the way the war started and Germany’s ambitions of Empire. These variations are another good demonstration of the continuation of the arguments about the adaptation of familiar material. To criticise the prosecution of the war, particularly in a military nurses’ album, could result in disciplinary action. The albums did not afford soldiers the anonymity and latitude to criticise in the same way that the hospital magazines did.

Conclusion

The First World War autograph albums can be contextualized within the history of the autograph or friendship book, revealing that many conventions have remained consistent over time. The practice of inviting contributions to the book for remembrance purposes, which is evident in ante- and post-bellum albums, persists in the albums of First World War nurses held in the QARANC and Museum of Military Medicine archive. In certain instances, the format has seen minimal changes. The contributions made by the young women in the antebellum and postbellum albums during their commencement period acknowledged a profound and shared friendship. These contributions also recognized the possibility that they might never meet again or face an untimely death in childbirth. This mirrors the recurrent themes of fleeting intimacy and precarious life found in the albums from the First World War.

The obligations and dilemmas placed on the contributor and the etiquette of what was polite to write in the albums is another thread as pertinent in the First World War as it was over 100 years previously. The reading of entries contained in the albums as a source of

¹¹⁰ Edith Holden, *PE/1/68/HOLD* (Museum of Military Medicine Archive); James, *PE/53/JAME*; Hilda Mary Mottram, *HF0011 Autograph Book* (QARANC Association Heritage Collection.); Tarran, *PE/192/AUTO* (Museum of Military Medicine); White Madge, *PE/1/254/WHIT VAD* (Museum of Military Medicine).

inspiration is often acknowledged, and the attempt to adapt entries to personalise them as the contributor's own is as common in the archive albums as it is in the friendship books of the ante- and post-bellum eras.

There is a recognition of the intimate relationship that developed between the soldier-patient and his nurse, tempered by the likelihood that they may never encounter each other again, alongside the understanding that those returned fit for duty may face death in action. This aligns with the tradition of albums from the ante- and post-bellum era, as discussed previously.

This underlying sense that they knew they would never meet again is set against hope. Hope is present in the entries in the albums where the soldiers provide their addresses and contact details but possibly these could have been written in the albums for the nurses to write to the soldier's parents especially those whose homes were in Commonwealth countries such as New Zealand and Australia.

The albums also demonstrate how nurses and soldiers are elevated to hero status in times of war, and a parallel with the Covid-19 pandemic is evident today. 2020 saw the NHS, and the nurses in particular, being lauded as heroes, with military language being used such as the front line and the battle against Covid-19, and yet so quickly forgotten and often abused as the danger passes. Although class hierarchies, together with military discipline, did not stop the soldiers from contributing humorous and critical entries about the First World War, these structures did temper any direct criticism of the nurses, hospital staff, and the politics of the war itself, which found a freer outlet in the hospital magazines.

Whilst this chapter has considered the mutual regard for war work that the soldier and the nurse undertook, the following chapter will consider other aspects of the nurse soldier-patient relationship. Aspects of gender and (dis)empowerment of the patients and how these themes are reflected in the albums will be considered and discussed, together with their

reaction to the care they were receiving. It will also consider the nurses' own relationship to the war and how they endeavour to position themselves as carers through their albums.

Chapter Two

Nursing Doubts, Aspirations, and Ideals in the Autograph Albums

In this chapter I will seek to explore the presence of the nurse in the albums. I trace the VADs and Military Nurses who have crossed paths with the album's owner either as a colleague or as a nurse working on the ward on the Western and Eastern Front and the UK home hospitals, as well as family connections found within the albums. This enables albums to be tied to particular war fronts and hospitals and builds up background to the nurses themselves. I look at the aspirations that nurses had through the lens of two poems that set out a nursing manifesto of ideals and realities. By focusing on the moments in which the nurse herself becomes visible, albeit briefly, this chapter shows what the albums reveal about the reasons for her 'doing her bit' and what her nursing aspirations were.

In his *History of the Nursing Profession*, Abel-Smith highlights the need for the young women of better-off Victorian families to escape the idleness and boredom of their lives.¹ The second half of the nineteenth-century saw a surge in Victorian philanthropy. Nursing, however, was not seen as a suitable occupation for women from the higher social classes. Historically, it was viewed as being undertaken by less fortunate women of the lower classes. Wages were poor, and often pauper nurses worked just for bed and board. Nursing in some hospitals and workhouses came to be associated with women of low morals, and alcohol, in the form of small beer, which was used as payment in kind, contributed to some nurses being habitually drunk. The only requirement for a nurse was to be able to 'read

¹ Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession*, p.17.

written directions upon medicines'.² Often dependent on their male relatives for economic security in return for managing the domestic environment, many Victorian women were poorly educated and had little if any legal standing. As Caglar Demir summarises, they were taught to see themselves as 'Angels in the house', in the terms used in Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name (1853-62).³ This view of women as angels is a recurring theme in the perception of nurses and one that is returned to by the soldier-patients in the autograph archive in their verses and in their sketches. Presenting professional and volunteer nurses in this way concealed their skilled, public role behind a conventional gendered image of domestic ministrations. The autograph albums fulfil various roles, documenting the personal relationships established in the ward as well as establishing the nurse's credentials as a caregiver.

There had been no uniformity between the hospitals and workhouses, each establishment setting its own conditions. Standards and training, therefore, varied from hospital to hospital across the country. In the late Victorian era, reforms of nursing practices and of the quality of nurses recruited gradually began. Abel-Smith argues that these nursing reforms provided an opportunity for 'idle spinsters' to escape the home and gain financial independence.⁴

Although many women, such as Louisa Twining (1820–1912), a philanthropist associated with the poor law guardians, were involved in the reformation of nursing, it is Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) who is most closely associated with its transformation into a respectable profession for educated women.⁵ These reforms had faced strong opposition

² Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession*, p. 14.

³ Caglar Demir, 'The Role of Women in Education in Victorian England', *Journal of Educational and Instructional Studies in the World*, 5.2.8 (2015), pp. 55–59 (p. 55). Coventry Patmore (1823-1896). A popular narrative poem published in 1854 and expanded in 1862.

⁴ Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession*, p. 17.

⁵ Louise C. Selanders, 'Florence Nightingale: The Evolution and Social Impact of Feminist Values in Nursing', *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 28.1 (2010), pp. 70–78 (p. 76), doi:10.1177/0898010109360256.

from various interested parties and also formed ‘a part of the wider struggle for the emancipation of women’.⁶ A study by Linda Martz charts the parallels between the nurses’ fight for registration and the suffrage movement’s call for women’s right to vote.⁷

As nursing became an increasingly respectable profession, many middle- and upper-class single women entered two or three years of training, usually within a hospital, and by the 1860’s, certificates began to be awarded to prove competence. There was, however, no uniformity of training at this point which led to a call to establish a register of trained nurses working to the same standard. This trend of proving competence of knowledge and skill is reflected in the album amicorum, which were often used as a means of validation for academic students travelling from university to university from the Reformation, through the Renaissance period, and onward. Another good example of providing evidence of competence in a similar way is demonstrated by Mary Seacole, a contemporary of Nightingale.⁸

In the absence of official nursing certification, Mary Seacole included an autograph section within her memoir of nursing in the Crimean War, in order to demonstrate her skilled contribution. In her autobiography, *The Wonderful Adventures of Mary Seacole in Many Lands*, Seacole reflects on her interactions with her patients and the intimate nature of the relationship, resembling that of mother and son:

I tell you, reader, I have seen many a bold fellow’s eyes moisten at such a season, when a woman’s voice and a woman’s care have brought to their minds recollections of those happy English homes which some of them never saw again; but many did, who will remember their woman-comrade upon the bleak and barren heights before Sebastopol.

Then their calling me “mother” was not, I think, altogether unmeaning. I used to fancy that there was something homely in the word; and, reader, you cannot think how dear

⁶ Abel-Smith, *A History of the Nursing Profession*, p. 36.

⁷ Martz, “‘That Splendid Body of Women’ Nursing, Professional Registration and Suffragette Militancy”.

⁸ Mary Seacole 1805-1881. Also known as Mother Seacole, she was born in Jamaica and had learnt much about folk medicine from her mother, knowledge and experience she used to good effect during her time nursing wounded soldiers in the Crimean War.

to them was the smallest thing that reminded them of home...Here are two from one of my best and kindest sons.⁹

She goes on to provide a testimonial from one of her ‘sons’ regarding the provision of medicine. The various familial permutations of this relationship between the nurse and patient are discussed in greater detail in the following chapter as similar themes recur through the First World War autograph albums. Seacole, however, also uses the testimony of ‘her best and kindest sons’ to validate her work in the Crimea.¹⁰ She goes on to cite seventeen testimonials from patients thanking her for her kindness and care when they were sick. Several entries begin ‘I certify’ or ‘This is to certify that’ suggesting that Seacole has requested the testimonial as she sees its value in securing future employment and, possibly, recognition and remuneration for her work in the Crimea.¹¹ Seacole cannily gathers evidence about her medical abilities from prominent patients in order to campaign for remuneration after the war. In the conclusion of her autobiography, she lists fourteen names of high-ranking soldiers and aristocracy stating:

If I indulge in the vanity of placing their names before my readers, it is simply because every one of the following noblemen and gentlemen knew me in the Crimea, and by consenting to assist me now record publicly their opinion of my services there.¹²

In the nurses’ autograph albums from the First World War there are similar testimonials. Many are brief such as Sergeant Dynis’ entry in Nurse Mottram’s album: ‘With greatest regards for kindness shown to me by the sisters and nurses of the Hale Red Cross Hospital Especially to Nurse Mottrim [sic]’.¹³ More detailed entries reflected the personal quality of care, as with the entry found at the start of Edith Marshall’s Album (Figure 1).

⁹ Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, p. 127.

¹⁰ Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, p. 127.

¹¹ Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, pp. 127–34.

¹² Seacole, *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*, p. 200.

¹³ ‘Autograph Album Mary Hilda Mottram VAD’.

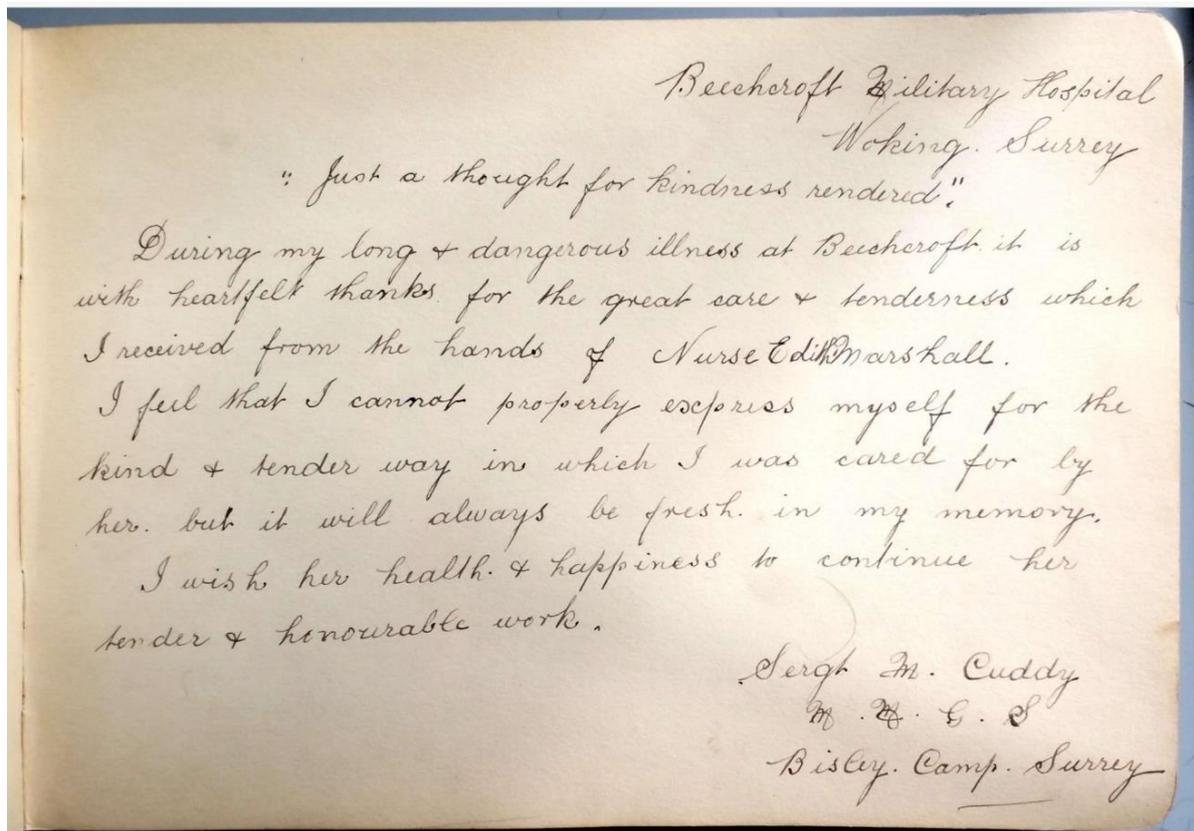


Figure 1. 'Just a thought for kindness rendered' in 'Autograph Album Edith G Marshall VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection.

Sergeant Cuddy titles his contribution 'Just a thought for kindness rendered'.¹⁴ His references to his 'long and dangerous illness' and the tenderness of her care, however, suggest the depth of his gratitude for his care.¹⁵ He also views this as honourable work, which reflects the reciprocal hero status accorded to the nurses who fought to return their soldier-patients back to the front.

Today, as part of revalidation of their registration, nurses are asked to provide five pieces of practice-related feedback from various sources.¹⁶ This is not so far removed from Seacole's testimonials or the entries of thanks by the soldier-patients in the autograph albums.

¹⁴ 'Autograph Album Edith G Marshall VAD'.

¹⁵ 'Autograph Album Edith G Marshall VAD'.

¹⁶ 'Revalidation: Practice-Related Feedback', The Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2 June 2023, pp. 25–26 <<https://www.nmc.org.uk/revalidation/requirements/practice-related-feedback/>> [accessed 2 June 2023].

Often letters and cards expressing gratitude and appreciation are frequently sent to nursing staff. These communications are often used to validate the quality of care provided.

The Invisible Presence of the Nurse in the Albums

It has been possible to identify the nurse owner of each album in the archive. Often, the name is inscribed on the flyleaf, and, in some cases, there is an indication that the album has been a gift. In other instances, references have been made to the nurse either in the form of an address – ‘to nurse [name]’ – or found contained within the verses together with reference to a particular ward and hospital. In the case of the albums belonging to Jessie Edgar, Edith Mason, and Florence Walker the flyleaf inscriptions of ‘Xmas’ and ‘New Year’ suggest that they were gifts to the individual, but there appears to be no indication of who the gift giver was.¹⁷

Although some of the albums have contributions that are dated pre- and post-war, the vast majority of entries are made by the soldiers whom the Military Nurses and VADs cared for in their wards. Occasionally, some contributions are made by the nurses themselves, expressing aspirations or frustrations about nursing. Often, the names do not immediately tell us if the owner was a QAIMNS or TFNS Sister or a VAD nurse. Although some entries are addressed to ‘The Sister’, this does not confirm that the nurse was a Military Sister as many patients referred to their nurse as Sister. Access to The National Archive (TNA) records using the code W0399 can provide some information in the form of medal records and/or service records of individual military nurses.¹⁸ After the First World War, however, military records

¹⁷ ‘Service Records Jessie Laurie Edgar QAIMNSR TNA WO399/2461’, The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War; ‘Autograph Album Jessie Laurie Edgar QAIMNS R’ (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/363/EDGAR; ‘Service Records Edith Frances Mason QAIMNSR TNA WO399/5690’, The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War; ‘Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R’; ‘Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD’.

¹⁸ ‘Service Records - First World War’, *The National Archives* <Thenationalarchives.gov.uk> [accessed 4 August 2021]. Service Records for both QAIMNS and TFNS including Reserve Nurses are located at The National Archives with the reference locator of WO399.

began to be systematically weeded out, and in the Second World War, many were destroyed in a German bombing raid in 1940. The National Archives estimates that there is a 40% chance of locating a service record from military personnel of the First World War. Records that did survive are often incomplete. Several linked to album owners consist mainly of correspondence relating to issues about their war pensions rather than details of their actual war service, deployment, or where they trained. Some, like Lilian Robinson's, just provide brief information recording the date of her first appointment as a military staff nurse.¹⁹ Others, like that of Jessie Laurie Edgar, provide dates of enlistment, name of training hospital, and letters of satisfaction from each military hospital the nurse worked at and in which theatre of war.²⁰ Sometimes, however, only the medal card survives, and this provides little more than confirmation that the individual nurse or VAD did indeed exist.

Bringing detailed biographical life to the VAD nurses is harder still. The British Red Cross collated VAD records that consist of cards detailing where they worked and what duties they undertook – cook, sewing room, driver, or nursing duties.²¹ Although VADs such as Enid Bagnold, Vera Britten, and Irene Rathbone published their diaries and war experiences after the war, for many VADs, and in particular those whose autograph albums form part of this archive, there is no information other than that elicited from their albums that would add any substance to their experiences as VADs during the war.

Duplication of surnames, together with some nurses not using their given first names, adds to the difficulties of accurately identifying specific records of the nurse owner of the album. Research into Freda Shingleton's album demonstrates how care has to be taken in attributing an album to either a military nurse or VAD. The fly leaf of the album is inscribed

¹⁹ Lilian joined up in Aldershot on 21 October 1912, where she remained until her deployment with the BEF from 8 August 1914 only returning to England on 8 March 1919. 'Service Records Charlotte Lilian Anne Robinson TNA WO399/7128', National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War.

²⁰ 'Service Records Jessie Laurie Edgar QAIMNSR TNA WO399/2461'.

²¹ 'British Red Cross Volunteers during WW1'.

in pencil 'Freda Shingleton, Warren Court, Nr Salisbury'. However, it is not clear if this was written by Freda or as part of the catalogue system for the archive. Newspaper cuttings that show the album was collated at Henley Park Hospital, and the dated contributions in the album are only up to the end of 1916.²² The VAD records held by the British Red Cross state she was posted to France in January 1917 and there are medal records for VAD Freda Shingleton. A Freda Shingleton is listed in the British Red Cross records as a VAD who served in France from 1917 to the end of the war, but no details are given for Henley Park hospital.²³

In contrast, there are TNA service records for Mabel Winefred Shingleton TFNS. She is recorded as working at the 2nd Southern Hospital, Bristol, in May 1915 and posted to France in June 1915. She was promoted to Sister in May 1916 and her war records indicate she was deployed to Italy mid-1918. Her records provide details of her enlistment in the TFNS.²⁴ She was medically examined and deemed fit for nursing service abroad in May 1915 and a letter informing her of her entitlement to the 1914-15 Star medal indicates she had enlisted during this time. Her records show that she was posted to No. 38 General Hospital, Italy, and the Matron, M E Stewart (QAIMNS), writes that 'Sister Shingleton has served under me for 3 months...she is good tempered, tactful, punctual, zealous, reliable and her influence generally is good'.²⁵ The report is dated 28 April 1919. Much of her record is taken up with correspondence regarding a lost kit-bag. Intriguingly, one contribution to Freda's

²² 'Auxiliary Military Hospital - Henley Park' <<https://normandyhistorians.co.uk/war1a.html>> [accessed 30 April 2025]. The hospital operated for nearly four years closing on 15th January 1919.

²³ 'British Red Cross Volunteers during WW1'.

²⁴ 'Service Records Mabel Winifred Shingleton TFNS', The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War.

²⁵ 'Service Records Mary Elizabeth Stewart QAIMNS TNA WO399/7978', The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War. Mary Elizabeth Stewart (1875-) trained at Norfolk and Norwich Hospital 1905-1908. On leaving in 1908 she immediately joined QARANC in October 1908. She served in 34 CCS, Nos. 10 SH, 13 GH, 14 SH as well as 38 GH in Italy in 1919. She was awarded the RRC (Royal Red Cross).

album refers to Mabel and Freda and, given the propensity for use of different names, Mabel Winifred could be known as Freda as well:

You may think some Freda or Mable is the reason why I am able| To get but two of hours sleep each Blessed Night...²⁶

Issues arise as neither TNA records nor Red Cross VAD records are exhaustive and other means must be employed to uncover more information about the nurses. This demonstrates the difficulties in tracking some of the nurses in the archives. Here, interrogation of the content of the albums can provide some assistance in identifying which VAD or military nurse owned the album.

Drawing on genealogy websites and census returns, but again with caution, is required to definitively identify any individual nurse's family. Hilda Mottram's album had a family entry (undated) of Geoffrey H Mottram, James Wilfred Mottram, and Sarah Mottram (Figure 2). This enabled a search of the 1901 census that confirmed her family listing. James and Sarah were her parents, and Geoffrey H Mottram was her younger brother. This is an example of how, very often, the names they were known by were not their birth names, making record searches difficult; Hilda Mottram's given name was Mary Hilda, just as Lilian Robinson's given name was Charlotte.

Sometimes family connections are apparent within an album's contents. Figures 2, 3, and 4 are examples of contributions to albums by family members. Sister Sarah Ann Clapp's brother, George, identified himself in her album (Figure 3), and Sister Emily Cott, whilst nursing in Malta, found herself nursing her cousin Percy Holden of the Manchester Regiment, and he makes known their relationship in her album (Figure 4).

²⁶ Contribution from Nurse Shingleton's album. 'Autograph Album Freda Shingleton VAD' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/65/SHIN.

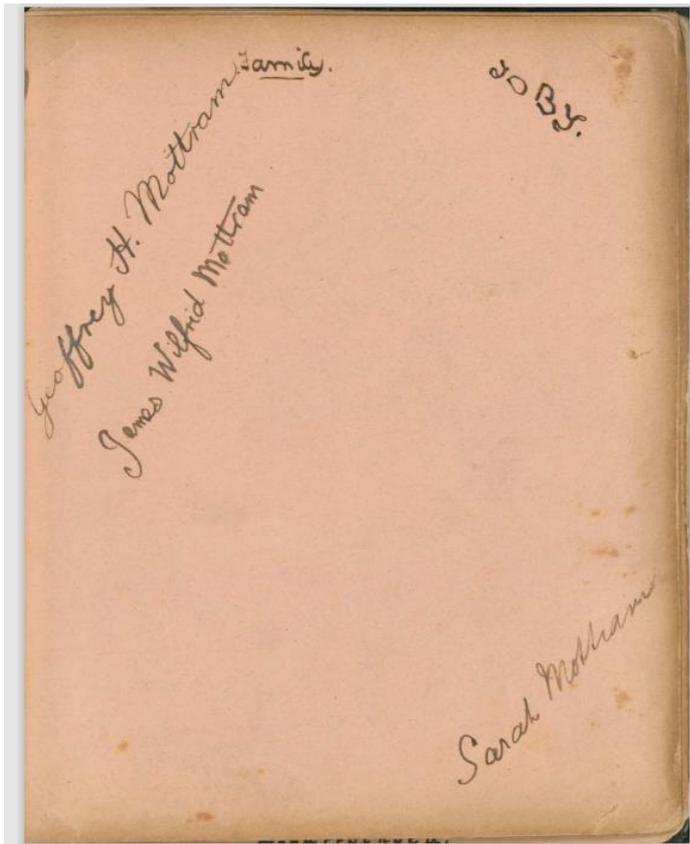


Figure 2. Autograph entries in 'Autograph Album Mary Hilda Mottram VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0011.

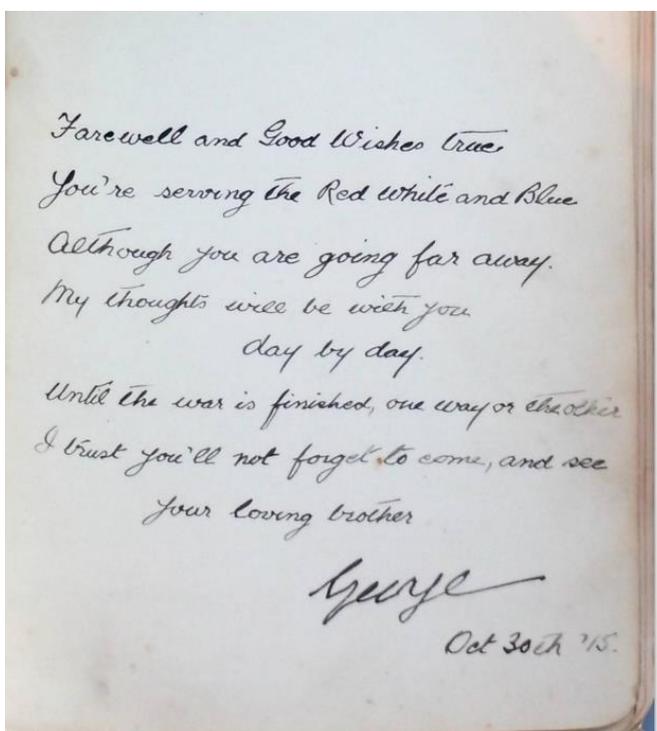


Figure 3. George Cott's entry in his sister Sarah's album in 'Autograph Album Sarah Ann Webber Nee Clapp QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/253/WEBB.

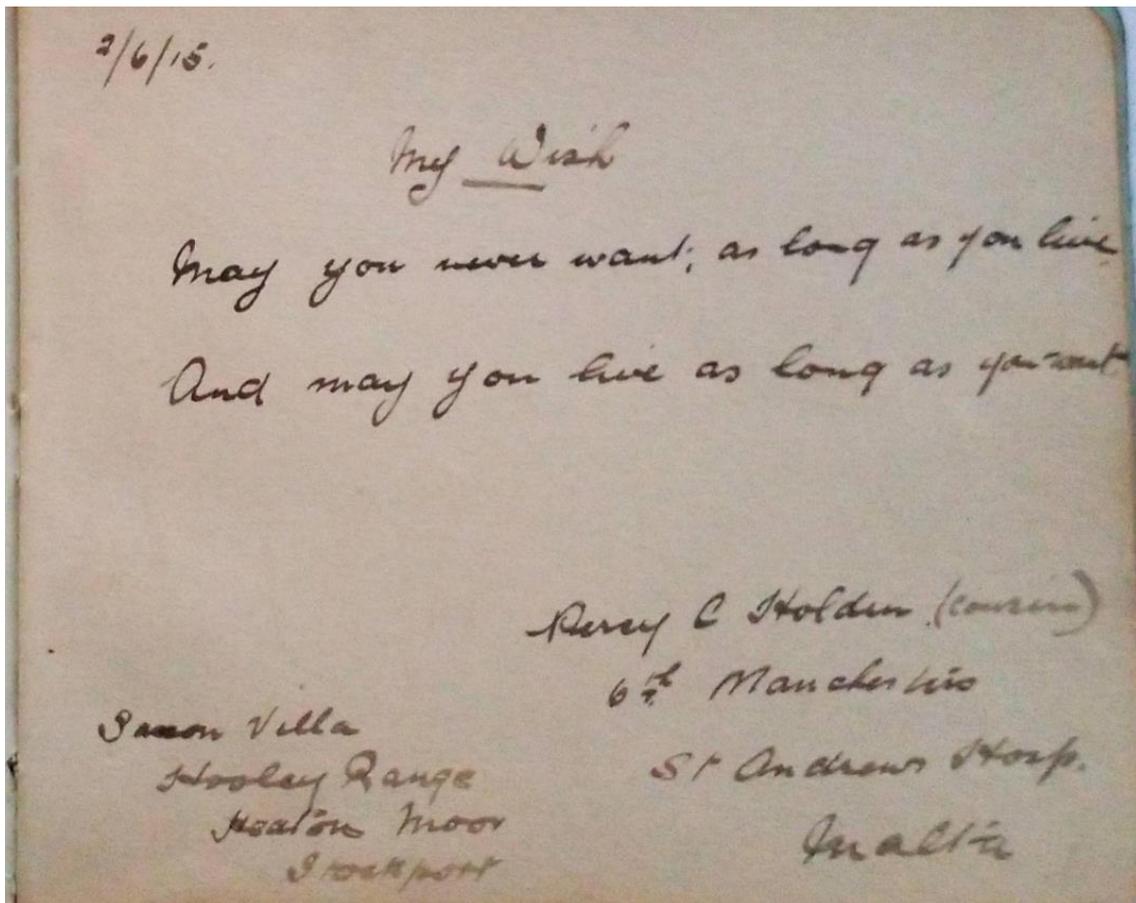


Figure 4. Percy Holden's entry in his cousin Emily Cott's autograph album in 'Autograph Album Emily Cott QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine 4Archive, PE/1/55/COTT.

Tracing family and hospitals within the albums

By cross-referencing family members in census returns with TNA, further data can be found to help verify individuals. For example, Sarah Ann Clapp's brother George Clapp, writing in his sister's album, identifies himself as her brother. Her military records identify another brother, Alfred, who was listed as next of kin to Sarah Ann. These two details help to verify that she was born in 1890. Her military records primarily focus on a disability claim, and from these records, we learn that she was 'on sick list the greater part of time spent in Mudros'. Sarah suffered from Raynauld's disease, tonsillitis, and influenza during her time in the military; however, in 1919, despite continued sickness, her request for demobilisation in order to apply to the Indian Nursing Service was turned down (Figure 5). She had signed for the duration and in 1919 was not deemed surplus to requirement.

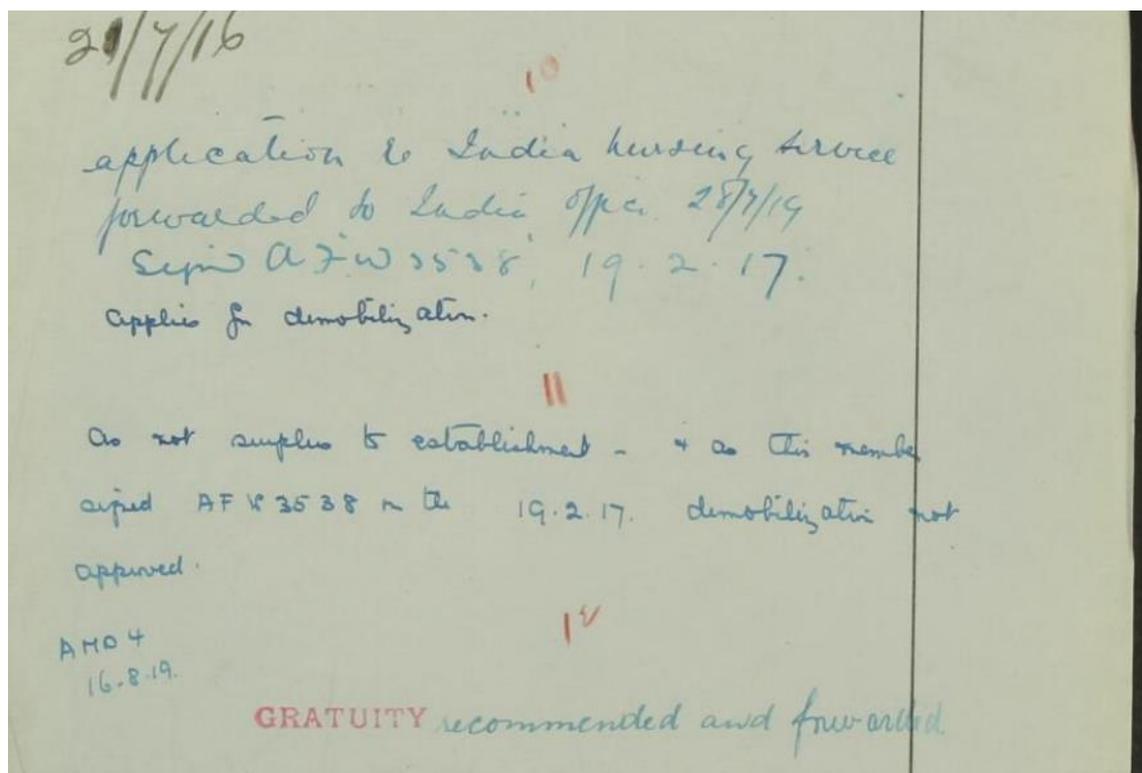


Figure 5 Sister Clapp's application to join India Nursing service in 'Autograph Album Sarah Ann Webber Nee Clapp QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/253/WEBB.

Most of the hospitals represented in these albums are based in England and Wales but at least five albums in the collection were compiled in France, Malta, and Egypt (Alexandria), closer to the battle front and with a higher probability that the men contributing to them would be returned to the front. Albums compiled at home-based hospitals sometimes required further investigation. The title page of Marjorie Russell's album gives Pilton House in Somerset and, together with entries in the album, suggest it was compiled at the Shepton Mallett Auxiliary Red Cross Hospital (ARCH).²⁷ Pilton House, close by, which, unlike Shepton Mallett ARCH was not identified on the Auxiliary Red Cross Hospital list, may have been an adjunct to Shepton Mallett as a convalescent Hospital. Similarly, Mary Penn's album had entries citing 'Fairoaks' and 'Park house' in Birmingham as her place of work.²⁸ This

²⁷ 'Autograph Album Marjorie Ayrton Russell VAD'. Contact with the Somerset Heritage Museum confirmed that a local researcher identified its use in this capacity.

²⁸ 'Autograph Album Mary Penn VAD'.

was part of No. 1 Southern Military Hospital based at Birmingham University and again is not found in the list of hospitals.²⁹

Other albums contain entries by soldiers who refer to the wards they are on, a detail not often found in any of the records that still exist, as well as the speciality of the ward. Soldiers made reference to gastritis, mumps, or limb amputation in their entries, and we know from entries in her album that Lilian Robinson nursed patients with influenza and measles towards the end of the war, reflecting the growing spread of the devastating post-war influenza epidemic.³⁰ Unlike the vast majority of contributions by patients to the other albums in the archive, Sister Jessie Laurie Edgar chose to collect the autographs of her Italian colleagues on No. 10 Italian Hospital train. Her title page gives the information ‘Il Personale Italiano Del X Treno-Ospedale’.³¹

As a resource the albums provide intriguing insights into the relationships between the soldier-patients and the nurses. The albums could be a vehicle for some of the soldiers to express their thanks for the kindness and care they received from these women. Often these expressions of thanks could extend into verses that are perhaps hopeful of romance. Both Catherine Judd and Miriam Bailin explore ‘the Nightingale effect’, a caregiver falling in love with their patient and vice versa, in Victorian literature.³² Judd states that ‘the overdetermined

²⁹ Chris Baker, ‘Military Hospitals in the British Isles 1914-1918’, *The Long, Long Trail - Researching Soldiers of the British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*, 2023 1996 <<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/soldiers/a-soldiers-life-1914-1918/the-evacuation-chain-for-wounded-and-sick-soldiers/military-hospitals-in-the-british-isles-1914-1918/>>; ‘British Red Cross Volunteers during WW1’.

³⁰ A. F. More and others, ‘The Impact of a Six-Year Climate Anomaly on the “Spanish Flu” Pandemic and WWI’, *Geohealth*, 4.9 (2020), doi:10.1029/2020GH000277; ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

³¹ ‘The Italian staff of no 10 Hospital Train’. ‘Autograph Album Jessie Laurie Edgar QAIMNS R’. Her military records show that she trained at University War Hospital Southampton before joining in December 1915. She embarked for France in August 1917 and served in Etaples before working on no 10 Italian Red Cross Train. Her records show that she contracted tuberculosis at the end of the war. ‘Service Records Jessie Laurie Edgar QAIMNSR TNA WO399/2461’.

³² Catherine Judd, *Beside Seductions: Nursing and the Victorian Imagination, 1830-1880* (St Martin Press, 1998); Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

fascination nursing images generate points to the nurse's importance as a paradigm for imaginary resolutions to ideological problems faced by mid-Victorians'.³³

This fascination reached new heights in the First World War when young men were cared for by these nurses who were often presented as perpetuating the image of Florence Nightingale's lady with the lamp.³⁴ Nightingale's heroism was transferred to the nurses of the First World War, probably more so than to the Boer War nurses, who were less in the public gaze, nursing professional soldiers rather than the conscripts of the First World War. Bailin considers the sickroom a place of isolation where occupants are 'incapacitated [by] their loss of socially determined status'.³⁵ This can be applied to the soldier-patients, isolated from the structure of their regiments and devoid of their status as protectors of their country. Bailin, however, suggests it is also a place of 'manifest pleasure and rewards of what Thackeray called "the joys of convalescence" that resists the forward energies of the recuperating self'.³⁶

As discussed in chapter one, soldier-patients could be reluctant to return to full health if they were destined to return to the front. Bailin also argues that 'illness authorised the relaxation of the rigidly conceived behavioural codes which governed both work and play within the public realm'.³⁷ Military hospitals were still a disciplined environment, but the intimate contact between the nurse and her military patient may well have seen a relaxation of behavioural codes on both sides.³⁸ The romantic content of the albums suggests that the environment in military hospitals, where seriously injured and dying young men were in the care of impressionable young women, could foster the Nightingale effect.³⁹

³³ Judd, *Bedtime Seductions*, p. 2.

³⁴ Bostridge, *Florence Nightingale: The Woman and Her Legend*, pp. 215–302.

³⁵ Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, p. 5.

³⁶ Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, p. 6.

³⁷ Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, p. 12.

³⁸ Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, p. 12.

³⁹ 'Nightingale Effect': the caregiver falls in love with their patient. Laura J. Ferris and others, 'The Florence Nightingale Effect: Organizational Identification Explains the Peculiar Link Between Others' Suffering and Workplace Functioning in the Homelessness Sector', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7 (2016), pp. 16–16, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00016.

Interspersed throughout the albums are entries that comment on the care patients received. Sometimes tongue-in-cheek patient cartoons could gently protest about their care without unduly upsetting the album's owner and jeopardizing their care. This use of humour could ease tensions on the wards and, in some instances, as Carden-Coyne argues, 'in the context of the military hospital where frail male bodies symbolised the inversion of gender norms, patient humour was a performance of empowerment'.⁴⁰ Through the medium of the albums, we can meet the soldiers, feel their presence as they recover from wounds and illness, as they open the books, read the entries, and contemplate what they would write. Apart from the usual autographing of their name and date at the commencement of the album (very often 'Xmas 1915') on the flyleaf, there are a few rare examples in the archival albums where the nurse has chosen to contribute to her own album, such as Lilian Robinson which will be discussed further in chapter four. Typically, the nurses are shadowy figures permeating each album, generally visible only through their soldier-patients' eyes. Through the brief contributions by some nurses themselves and in the soldiers' depictions and occasional quotes of their nurses, their voices can be heard through their interaction with their patients.

The nurses' own contributions are reflective of their aspirations, doubts, and ideals of being wartime nurses. From a purely historical standpoint, it is possible to build up some background on these shadowy figures. I suggest that these books also offer a unique perspective on the owners of the albums who are present in each contribution, albeit in a range of mediated forms.

The convention of autograph album collections is for friends and family to contribute something inspirational, memorable, or humorous to the book's owner for remembrance. The nurses' albums in the archive differ from this traditional convention in that, although they

⁴⁰ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 320.

may contain a few family members, such as school friends and fellow nursing colleagues, as discussed at the start of this chapter, they predominantly contain the contributions of their soldier-patients. Many of the soldier-patient entries can also be seen in the tradition of album contributions as inspirational entries exhorting the nurses to keep ‘doing their bit’.

Nursing Friendships: support and bonding

Just as in many other professions, especially in times of conflict, nurses find the support of colleagues important both during their training and later as professionals. Bridget Keown, in her article on nurses’ friendships, trauma, and resilience during the First World War, considers the importance of support from their nursing colleagues from her analysis of diary entries by two nurses.⁴¹ She argues that the support these two nurses found from their colleagues was important for them to cope with the extreme trauma of their patients and their own jeopardy from air raids during their time nursing in France.

These nursing bonds were formed from the start during their training and continued throughout their nursing careers during close work caring for their patients, and at times, grieving together for the loss of a patient. These friendships are also significant in helping trainee nurses to bridge the gap between their ideals of becoming a nurse and the harsh realities of nursing. The power of this community is celebrated in the rare entries’ nurses contributed to each other’s autograph albums. Sometimes this may take the form of the signature and designation – QAIMNS/R or VAD – but other entries consider their shared ideals and values of nursing. Beatrice Florence Longmire’s autograph album, held by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), reflects on the support that nurses provided for each other at different stages of their careers.⁴²

⁴¹ Bridget E. Keown, ‘“I Think I Was More Pleased to See Her than Any One ‘Cos She’s so Fine”: Nurses’ Friendships, Trauma, and Resiliency During the First World War’, *Family & Community History*, 21.3 (2018), pp. 151–65 (p. 156), doi:10.1080/14631180.2018.1555955.

⁴² ‘Autograph Album Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R’, Royal College of Nursing, RCN Service Scrapbook.

Beatrice began her autograph album in 1912 and a flurry of autographs in her album from this period are all those of women. The dates are predominantly March and April of 1912, and the entries are in line with traditional album conventions, the trend for that period, which would suggest a parting from friends and new beginnings. In 1913, prior to Beatrice starting her nurse training, there were just two entries.⁴³ These are from sisters Jean and Annie Cameron on 17 March 1913 and a further two entries on 14 and 20 October 1915, from AK Coates and J Gracie, respectively.

The use of the album during the period of Beatrice's training and lack of contributions is indicative of a very busy nurse whose friendships have been confirmed and therefore do not require the convention of admittance to the autograph album. The three years of nursing training would have been a settled period in Beatrice's life, with infrequent comings and goings of friends. It is interesting that, unlike the wartime albums where patients contribute to albums, Beatrice does not choose to request her civilian patients to contribute to her album. On qualifying, she may well have continued to see her colleagues often, and so did not feel the need to memorialise their parting in her album. It may also have been that the novelty of the autograph at that point wore off, and it was not until she began nursing soldier-patients that the impulse to use the album arose again. It is only after she enlists in the QAIMNS (R) that we next see consistent entries.⁴⁴ Most, though not all, of the albums in the archive, begin in 1914, spanning the war years and rarely continuing after 1919.

Beatrice's military records contain a letter dated 6 Nov 1916. In the short letter Beatrice states,

Having decided to go in for military work I take this opportunity of stating my qualifications. I was trained (3yrs) in Edinburgh City Hospital & obtained the Local Government Board Certificate for Scotland, the subjects being Anatomy & Physiology, Hygiene, Medical & Surgical & Fevers. Came here 1st July as a Staff

⁴³ Beatrice Longmire trained at City Hospital Edinburgh May 1913-June 1916. 'Service Records Beatrice Florence Longmire QAIMNSR TNA WO399/4969', The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War.

⁴⁴ QAIMNS (R) Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service (Reserve)

Nurse and was promoted to Sister 1st Sept. Would you kindly consider this & oblige yours Truly Beatrice F Longmire.⁴⁵

In a second, equally short, handwritten letter dated 11 November 1916 to the Matron in Chief QAIMNS (R) acknowledging receipt of enlistment application forms, Beatrice further supports her application and suitability in a letter dated 11 November 1916 to the Chief Matron stating: ‘nurses trained in Edinburgh City Hospital along with myself, have received posts in military hospitals as staff nurses, my references are quite as good as theirs.’⁴⁶

Beatrice does not name the nurses, and her mention of staff nurses who have received post suggest that Beatrice is assuming that the Matron-in-Chief will know who they are. Beatrice has been inspired by these colleagues who have already enlisted in the QAIMNS and her comment that her ‘references are quite as good as theirs’ is at once both modest and confident; confidence would be a quality she would need in the challenges ahead for war nursing. Beatrice aspired to become a military nurse and within a short time of qualifying believed in her abilities to do so. Since qualifying in June 1916, she quickly gained promotion to Sister of a fever ward indicating her drive to succeed as a nurse and fulfil her dreams of nursing.⁴⁷

In turn, Beatrice inspired other nurses she trained with to enlist in the QAIMNSR. One such nurse was Elizabeth Isabel Mackay, who enlisted in February 1918.⁴⁸ Appearing in the album in 1913 when Beatrice began her training, Elizabeth’s contribution of thirteen verses is on the subject of ‘Nursing and its Ideals and Realities’ (Figures 5a and 5b). It is the only entry made during Beatrice’s nursing training making it stand out as something of

⁴⁵ ‘Service Records Beatrice Florence Longmire QAIMNSR TNA WO399/4969’. Beatrice is writing from her hospital referring to her address in the letter as ‘Here’ meaning Ochil Hill Sanatorium Milnathort Kinross-shire. Dame Maud McCarthy was Matron-in-Chief, but D H Taylor signed for her.

⁴⁶ ‘Service Records Beatrice Florence Longmire QAIMNSR TNA WO399/4969’.

⁴⁷ ‘Service Records Beatrice Florence Longmire QAIMNSR TNA WO399/4969’.

⁴⁸ ‘Service Records Elizabeth Isabel Mackay QAIMNSR TNA WO399/5414’, The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War. Elizabeth Isabel Mackay joined the QAIMNSR in 1918 two years after Beatrice. This may have been age related as she would have to be twenty-three to join. Elizabeth was also stationed at No. 38 SH Augusta in Italy and may well have worked alongside both Mary Stewart and Mabel Shingleton.

significance. The verse still resonates today and with Beatrice at the beginning of her nurse training it is understandable why it appears in the album.

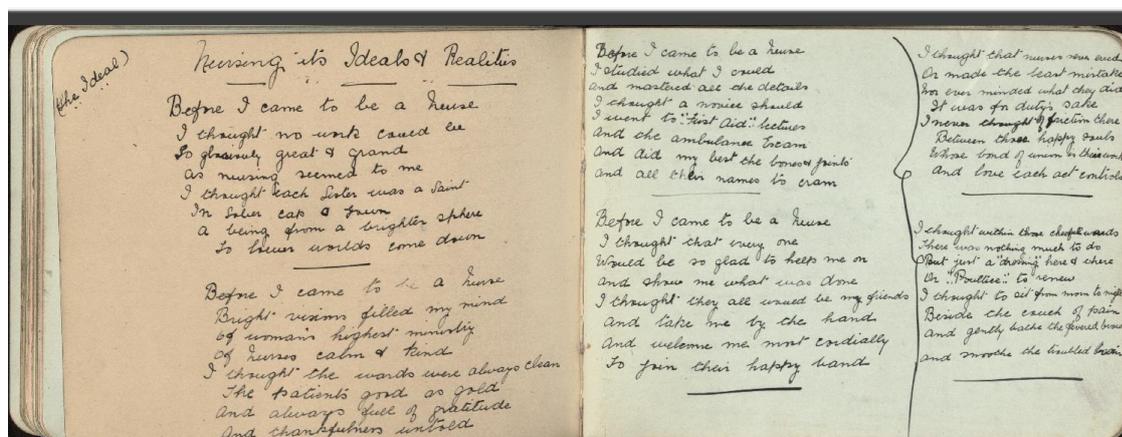


Figure 6a. Elizabeth Mackay 'Nursing and its Ideals and Realities: The Ideals' in 'Autograph Album Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R', Royal College of Nursing, RCN Service Scrapbook.

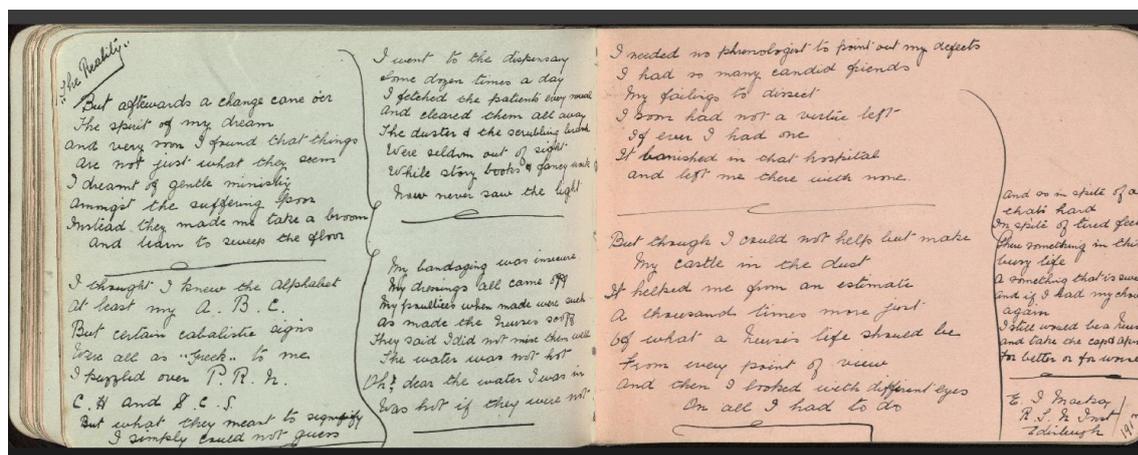


Figure 6b. Elizabeth Mackay, 'Nursing and its Ideals and Realities: The Realities' in 'Autograph Album Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R', Royal College of Nursing, RCN Service Scrapbook.

Commenting on Mackay's entry on the RCN webpage, nursing member Kate Regan writes 'I am sure that almost all nurses through the following decades can identify with the feelings she expresses both before and after joining the profession'.⁴⁹ Regan contrasts Mackay's appreciation of the realities of the profession in comparison to the idealistic aspirations she shared with her cohort at the start of their training together. The romantic vision of 'mopping of the fevered brow' of a sick patient, together with the Victorian and

⁴⁹ Kate Regan in 'RCN Service Scrapbooks - Beatrice Longmire', *Royal College Nursing*, 2021 <<https://www.rcn.org.uk/servicescrapbooks/Beatrice-Longmire>>.

Edwardian view of the sanctity of philanthropic work for the poor and underprivileged, is echoed here.

The first four verses begin ‘Before I came to be a nurse’ (Figure 5a). We are invited to hear Mackay’s recollections of what she believed nursing to be, and the later part of the poem dramatises the discovery of her delusion. She sees herself as the ministering ‘angel’ with each of the first four verses describing her aspirations. As a layperson, she sees nursing as ‘gloriously great and grand [...] each sister was a Saint’.⁵⁰ Words with religious overtones are liberally scattered through the first verses – ‘Saint’, ‘heaven’, ‘bright visions’ and ‘ministry’ – indicative of a naivety of the harshness of disease, death and dying and suggesting the background of a middle or upper-class young woman embracing philanthropic ideals.⁵¹

The tone of the second verse supports this philanthropic ideal; Mackay anticipates that her patients will be ‘full of gratitude’ and she will be welcomed with open arms by her fellow nurses. That ‘happy band’ though, is soon seen in a different light as they ‘scoff’ at her bandaging and poultices in verse ten.⁵² The last verses of ‘The Ideals’ section change pace. We lose the qualifying ‘Before I came to be a nurse’ and the reassuring repetition is disrupted.⁵³ The quicker formulation ‘I thought’ interspersed with ‘But afterwards’ conveys the gathering pace of disillusionment, the tonal change heralding ‘The Reality’ and the accumulating knowledge and experience of nurse training.⁵⁴

The second half of the poem becomes more subdued, and regret is apparent as Mackay says goodbye to her enthusiastic aspirations (Figure 5b). Her romantic view of comradeship in the lines where she envisaged extended hands that ‘Welcome me most cordially/ To join their happy band’ is immediately qualified by ‘I thought that nurses never

⁵⁰ ‘Autograph Album of Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R’.

⁵¹ F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 228.

⁵² ‘Autograph Album of Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R’.

⁵³ ‘Autograph Album of Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R’.

⁵⁴ ‘Autograph Album of Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R’.

cried' and 'I never thought of friction there'.⁵⁵ Suddenly, she is no longer among friends sharing their dreams but colleagues and there is an element of distrust and competition. In the context of the autograph album itself, where the convention of collecting autographs created a friendship book, the blank years of Beatrice's training represented in her album are perhaps suggestive that her trainee colleagues were not close enough to be asked to write in her album.

In contrast, the second set of verses on 'The Reality' continues the quicker rhythm set in the last few verses of 'The Ideal'. Shorter words and the abbreviations of P.R.N., C.H and S.C.S. after the use of ABC's are linked with learning a new language and the use of the word Greek, a popular euphemism for an unintelligible language.⁵⁶ These later verses become more matter-of-fact and criticism of her work by that 'happy band' is evident as her efforts 'made the nurses scoff'.⁵⁷ She is made fun of, and we understand that nurses DO cry and make mistakes.

The thoughts are written in verse, partially for amusement but also with seriousness about the hard work involved. In comparison to the multitude of short verses predominantly found in autograph albums of this period, this set of verses is unusually positioned over four pages. The impact of reading the first two pages about the writer's thoughts of what it would be like to be a nurse is contrasted with the next two pages. On turning the page, the reader is suddenly confronted with the harsher realities of nursing. The quicker rhythm of the verses now suggests the change in the nurse's life from one of leisure to one of constant hard work. The reader is caught off guard momentarily having been lulled into the dream-like thoughts of the previous pages. The material form of the album presents the shift to professional nursing as a new page within the nurse's life.

⁵⁵ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R'.

⁵⁶ P.R.N. Pro Re Nate - Latin for as needed with regard to administration of medicine such as analgesics.

⁵⁷ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R'.

In *Testament of Youth*, Brittain recounts a similar shift from romance to reality. She details her first experiences of nursing when her failed efforts to boil an egg led her to learn from her superiors ‘in those first few days, how numerous and devastating were the errors that it was possible to commit in carrying out the most ordinary functions of everyday life’.⁵⁸ Vera puts her soldier-patients’ fondness for her down to her naivety, eager youth and ‘the clean freshness of my new uniform [which] meant more to them than any amount of common sense and efficiency’.⁵⁹ But despite the arduous tasks of nursing, Mackay’s poem informs us that if she had her ‘choice again [she] would still be a nurse and take cap and apron for better or for worse’.⁶⁰

Hallett, in her examination of the rivalry between professional nurses and VADs, contends that despite some VADs feeling they were treated unfairly and assigned menial tasks, probationer professional nurses during their first year were considered the lowest-ranking hospital personnel.⁶¹ These probationers performed duties such as sweeping and dusting wards, cleaning and laying fires, and spending a significant amount of time mopping and scouring bedpans. Watson corroborates this stance, asserting that many trained nurses restricted VAD tasks to those traditionally allocated to low-status probationers, which the VADs frequently deemed more suitable for orderlies.⁶²

In an era when marriage and family were frequently regarded as paramount for women, nursing allowed many women to escape these social norms. Nursing was often viewed as charitable or philanthropic work suitable for women. The parallel with Nuns who nursed and were married to Jesus can be seen in Mackay’s choice of the phrase for ‘better or

⁵⁸ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 136.

⁵⁹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 136.

⁶⁰ ‘Autograph Album of Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R’.

⁶¹ Christine E. Hallett, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War* (Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 4–5.

⁶² Watson, ‘Wars in the Wards’, p. 502.

worse'.⁶³ Ouditt suggests that while soldiers saw the red cross as a symbol of protection, 'For the nurses it was, like the nun's cross, the badge of their equal sacrifice'.⁶⁴

Many military hospitals – such as No. 1 Southern General Hospital situated at Birmingham University, which published the Southern Cross magazines, as well as Huddersfield, Reading, and Norfolk War Hospitals – produced magazines both to raise funds and for the amusement of the patients and staff. In July 1916, *The Norfolk War Hospital Magazine* published a poem entitled 'The Ideal and the Real'.⁶⁵ Though shorter, with only nine verses to Elizabeth Mackay's thirteen (each verse only four lines long whereas Elizabeth's verses are eight lines), the similarities in sentiments are evident. The balance between the ideal and the reality is similar, with more verses used in each case to describe the harsh reality and fewer on the ideals, suggesting an acknowledgment of the disillusioning impact of war nursing.

In print form, the poem lacks the visual impact of MacKay's handwritten version. As discussed earlier, the layout of the album's poem adds to its rhythm and emotion, which is something the printed poem lacks. The *Norfolk War Hospital Magazine* poem uses only three verses to set out the same vision that Elizabeth presented over six. It is much more concise in its ideals, beginning with 'To soothe the weary, fevered brow| to calm the troubled mind| to cheer the sufferers' lonely hours'.⁶⁶

⁶³ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R'.

⁶⁴ Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*, p. 9.

⁶⁵ 'The Ideal and the Reality': 'To soothe the weary, fevered brow |To calm the troubled mind |To cheer the sufferer's lonely hours |With words of solace kind. |To tread the ward with noiseless step |Stop at each snow white bed| Stoop and arrange the pillows soft |Under the patients head. | To write perchance a word of cheer for some lad to a friend |This was the dream of nursing life |To comfort, soothe, and tend. |It is a dream indeed, ah me! |A nurse cannot live so |Soon as she enters on a ward |The dreams fade fast and go. |"For goodness sake, nurse, do be quick |How can you be so late? |The lotions, bowls, the swabs, come, come, |The doctor hates to wait" |"Then sweep the floor and mind the fluff |Now pull the beds all out; |How often shall I tell you that |You can't get clean without". |There are lockers waiting to be scrubbed |Bread-loaves and loaves to cut |Hundred and one odd things to do, |Ere, wearied, you seek your hut. |Now ponder well before you go |So gaily off to nurse |But all the same I guarantee |You'll find some lives much worse. |A nurse's life is hard no doubt |But much of good you'll find; |And 'tis better far to laugh and work |Than weep and lag behind |H.M.W.' 'The Ideal and the Real', *Norfolk War Hospital Magazine*, by 'Magazine Committee' (Norwich, Norfolk, July 1916), Imperial War Museum <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1506001609>>.

⁶⁶ 'The Ideal and the Real'.

The two poems envisage the nurse soothing ‘the weary fevered brow’, although Mackay’s opening verses are centred on feelings and emotions of being calm and kind, whereas the Norfolk poem describes actual patient contact: ‘to tread the ward with noiseless step | stop at each snow-white bed | stoop and arrange the pillows soft | under the patient’s head’.⁶⁷ Mackay’s poem is written in the first person; it is her voice we hear, laying out her aspirations and hopes of becoming a nurse. The handwriting provides an immediate intimate link to the writer who speaks of being ‘scoffed’ at for her lack of ability and we see the hurt she feels. Compare Mackay’s ‘My bandaging was insecure | My dressings all came off | My poultices when made were such | that made the nurses scoff’ with the Norfolk poem where the voice of a more experienced nurse is actually heard: ‘For goodness sake, nurse, *do* be quick | How *can* you be so late? [sic]’⁶⁸ We hear the exasperation of the Sister with her trainee and yet through Mackay’s poem we hear a novice trying so hard to learn.

Both poems speak of faded dreams and the hard work of sweeping and scrubbing the floors, and this resonates down the decades. As with Brittain and many middle- to upper-class VADs and nurses, their backgrounds would have precluded them from undertaking such menial domestic tasks as sweeping, cleaning, and cooking, which would have been carried out for them by their domestic servants.

The military nurses, some of whom had already served in the Boer War, had graduated into the harsher realities of nursing in wartime.⁶⁹ The VADs, on the other hand, were often young women from privileged backgrounds whose first encounter with hard work was during the war. Brittain aptly captures this transition in *Testament of Youth* when describing her schooling where ‘few parents possessed of more than a half-hearted intention

⁶⁷ ‘The Ideal and the Real’.

⁶⁸ ‘Autograph Album of Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R’. ‘The Ideal and the Real’.

⁶⁹ Spire, ‘Nurses in the Boer War (1899-1902): What Was It about the Collective Body of Nurses Caring for the Sick and Wounded during the Boer War That Shaped the Future of Military Nursing?’

to train their daughters for exacting careers or even useful occupations'.⁷⁰ She characterises the men and women who grew up in this late-Victorian/Edwardian period as the War Generation and the first four lines of her poem 'The War Generation: Ave', quoted in the opening chapter of *Testament of Youth*, show how very ordinary these men and women were: 'In cities and in hamlets we were born | and little towns behind the van of time | a closing era mocked our guileless dawn | with jingles of a military rhyme'.⁷¹

Many women were inspired to do VAD work as they had husbands, brothers, sons, and fiancés fighting in the war. Brittain says, 'it was always Roland whom I was nursing by proxy, my attitude towards him imperceptibly changed: it became less romantic and more realistic'.⁷² Her thoughts again echo the transformation from a naïve young woman with ideals of nursing to the efficient nurse seen in the two poems above. The strong similarities between the two poems suggest Mackay's poem may have been commonly known by nurses, possibly appearing in nursing journals of the time.

In a 2007 study, Jill Maben, Sue Latter, and Jill Macleod Clark identified three categories of nurses: sustained idealists, compromised idealists, or crushed idealists with frustration and 'burnout' a consequence of endeavouring to maintain their ideals.⁷³ Maben et al cite seminal work from Kramer (1974), Bendall (1976), and Melia (1987) that examined the way nurses managed the ideal and reality.⁷⁴ They discussed Kramer's work which 'identified a disparity between the idealised role conception and the role found in the work situation, which [Kramer] described as "reality shock"'.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 32.

⁷¹ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 17.

⁷² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 166.

⁷³ Jill Maben, Sue Latter, and Jill Macleod Clark, 'The Sustainability of Ideals, Values and the Nursing Mandate: Evidence from a Longitudinal Qualitative Study', *Nursing Inquiry*, 14.2 (2007), pp. 99–113, doi:10.1111/j.1440-1800.2007.00357.x.

⁷⁴ Marlene Kramer, *Reality Shock: Why Nurses Leave Nursing* (St Louis: C.V Mosby Company, 1974), Jill Macleod Clark, 'Learning for Reality', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 1.1 (January 1976), Kath Melia, *Learning and Working: The Occupational Socialization of Nurses* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1987).

⁷⁵ Maben, Latter, and Clark, 'The Sustainability of Ideals, Values and the Nursing Mandate', p. 100.

This same disparity is evident in the two poems from the First World War, and nurse narratives from the Maben et al study in 2007 echo both poems: ‘There was also a plea for more realism: they did set us up for fall [sic] [...] to have the ideals is great because it gives you something to strive for’.⁷⁶ In the Norfolk poem the nurse is told ‘for goodness sake nurse do be quick [and there are a] hundred and one odd things to do’;⁷⁷ and Elizabeth’s anticipatory fantasy, ‘I dreamt of gentle ministry’, is brought down to earth with a broom: ‘instead, they made me take a broom and learn to sweep the floor’.⁷⁸ This reversal of expectation finds its modern equivalent in the discussion by Maben et al of the ‘frustration, when it is so busy and there are so many things to do at once’.⁷⁹

Nurses continue to write poetry about their profession today. A search of contemporary nurses’ writings posted online brings up poems that still speak of dreams of caring, questioning the hours spent in study and doing their duty. ‘One Angel – No wings’ by Babs Hurst describes the realities of a night shift and the harsh reality of nursing comes out in lines such as ‘I worked my butt off, as per usual’ and ‘I wiped up shit and dished out pans’.⁸⁰ Nonetheless she ends the poem with ‘I am an Angel dressed in white |Walking the ward in the midst of night’.⁸¹ A similar focus on night duty in poems from the albums will be discussed in chapter three.

These present-day poems are perhaps grittier than those written by MacKay and in the *Norfolk War Hospital Magazine*, and this is reflective of both the social mores and the background of many of the VADs and professional nurses in the First World War, but the underlying themes remain the same. The sense of duty engendered in the nurse is what is left

⁷⁶ Maben, Latter, and Clark, ‘The Sustainability of Ideals, Values and the Nursing Mandate’, p. 103.

⁷⁷ ‘The Ideal and the Real’.

⁷⁸ ‘Autograph Album of Beatrice Longmire QAIMNS R’.

⁷⁹ Maben, Latter, and Clark, ‘The Sustainability of Ideals, Values and the Nursing Mandate’, p. 108.

⁸⁰ “‘One Angel - No Wings’ by Babs Hurst”, *Nurses Are Angels*, 11 October 2021

<https://www.nursesareangels.com/nursing_poems.htm>.

⁸¹ “‘One Angel - No Wings’ by Babs Hurst’.

after illusions are dispelled by reality, but nonetheless, each writer confirms that her vocation is worthwhile.

Conclusion

In the burgeoning reforms of nursing, the albums served as a place of validation for the care the nurses gave. Today's nurses are required to provide practice-related feedback in order to re-validate their NMC registration every three years. Various sources are used, and many choose to include patient feedback in the form of cards and letters sent to departments by patients thanking the staff for their care. The albums reveal that patient feedback was as important to the nurses and VADs in the First World War, providing evidence of the care given.

Short verses and poems form much of the substance of the autograph albums. Whilst they are, in the main, contributed by the soldier-patients, nurses also contributed to each other's albums. This chapter has sought to delve further into those entries and to try to provide some depth to the nurse owners. A comparison of two poems, one from an album and the other from a hospital magazine, was made to explore what influenced young women to take up nursing in times of war, creating a personal manifesto. These themes will be further explored in the next chapter, considering the iconography used in the recruitment of the VADs and how this informed the ways nurses positioned themselves in their own albums.

Chapter Three

The Call: Nursing Iconography and the Nurses' self-presentation in the albums

This chapter expands the themes explored previously. It considers the iconography of nursing and how the nurses positioned themselves in their albums. It looks at their expectations, their lives, and the soldiers' perceptions of the care they received from these women. The chapter focuses on how the anxious, sometimes nightmare-ridden hours of the night are presented in the albums and the importance of the nurse's role during this time when her presence becomes one of a protector and could be deemed a role reversal of the soldier's answer to his nation's call to arms.

As recruiting posters at the outset of war encouraged men to enlist and do their duty, so women were also encouraged to work in order to release able-bodied men to fight. As Lynda Mugglestone states, in the first year of the war 'some 400,000 women had joined the workforce [and] by 1918 [...] 1.4 million were in paid employment'.¹

Women in the masculine workplace can be seen reflected in this poem from Nurse Walker's album dated 1917 (Figure 1).² The soldier-contributor's use of the word 'toil' suggests hard manual work with the ploughshare, and the work of the land army; while he goes on to praise the work of all women, he singles out the nurse's work as being the hardest.

¹ Lynda Mugglestone, *Writing a War of Words: Andrew Clark and the Search for Meaning in World War One* (Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 180.

² 'The women who toil at the ploughshare| and office and workshop are fine| but the women who do the healing are the nearest to being divine| While the work of the others is tiring| the care of the troubled is worse| our thanks to all the women but we never can thank the nurse. Pte Spenser September 1917.' 'The Women Who Toil' in 'Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD'.

His reference to nursing the troubled may suggest the difficulty of nursing shell-shocked patients. Later in the album another entry states that 'for all the Tommies she's doing her bit'.³

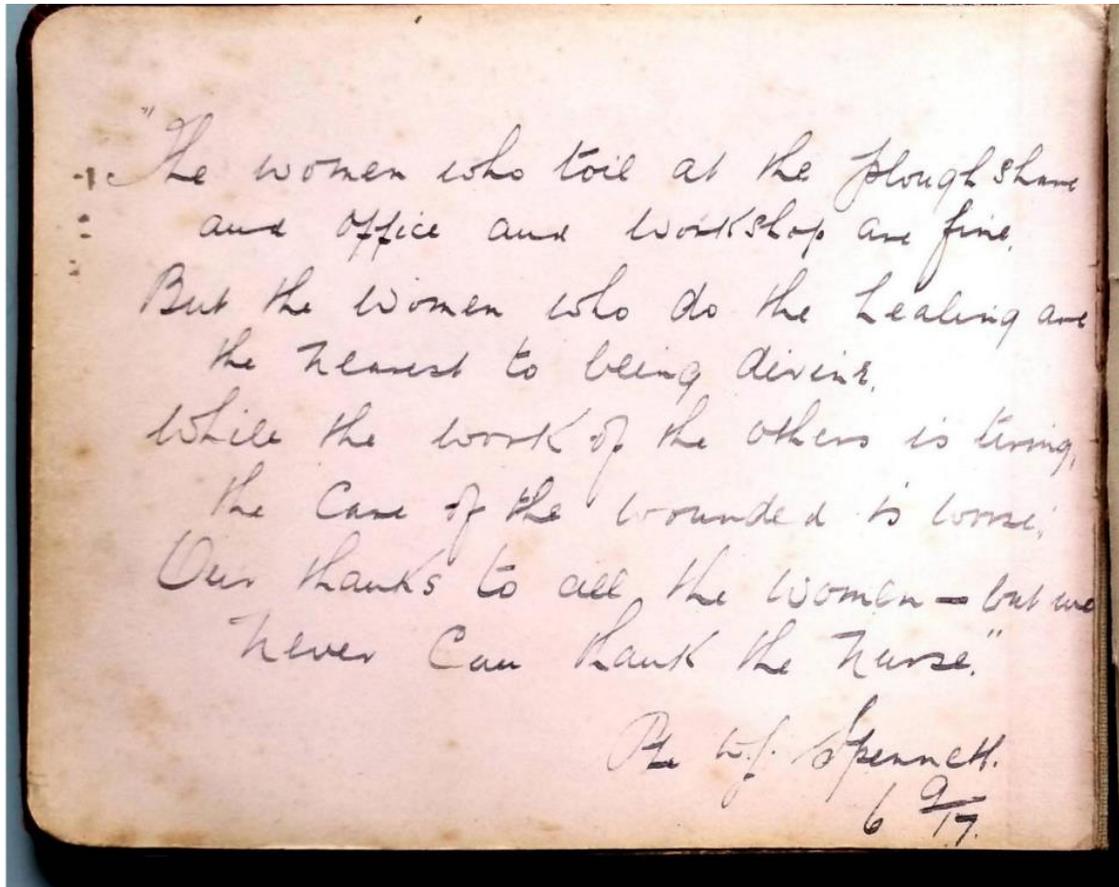


Figure 1. 'The Women Who Toil' in 'Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0013.

Mugglestone's work on Andrew Clark's lexicon of the language of the First World War identified 'Doing one's bit' or 'one's duty' as a popular phrase. She argues that 'it was, however, *doing one's bit* which encapsulated this rhetoric of national participation to best effect'.⁴ Everyone had something to contribute to the collective war effort. Many, however, considered that middle- and upper-class women should remain at home. Brittain, for example, was recalled from her work in France by her parents who considered her rightful

³ 'Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD'.

⁴ Mugglestone, *Writing a War of Words: Andrew Clark and the Search for Meaning in World War One*, p. 65.

place was to look after them at home.⁵ Mugglestone's work also concentrates on the wider work of women in more traditional male roles, stating that 'nursing and the provision of care formed, of course, traditional spheres of female endeavor'.⁶ VAD work provided many women the opportunity to nurse nearer the front in France, Malta, and Egypt. For many, however, the ties to home meant they preferred to volunteer to work in a local Auxiliary Red Cross Hospital (ARCH).

Mrs Violet Hurdman joined the VAD nurses in April 1915 aged twenty-nine years.⁷ She appears in the 1911 census aged twenty-five and married to George Hurdman, thirty-two, a farmer from Manor House, Willoughby in Alford, Lincolnshire. George Hurdman had served in the Lincolnshire Territorial army as a Sergeant before 1914 but was discharged in October 1915.⁸ Violet may have originally responded to the recruitment of VADs as her husband was initially serving. Violet needed to keep the farm working alongside her husband and care for at least one child of four years of age, so she worked part-time as a VAD for the duration of the war.⁹

At the beginning of her album a photograph of Violet in uniform is pasted beside a picture of a VAD nurse with a blinded sailor (Figure 2). Violet is shown standing in uniform rather than in a portrait photograph in civilian clothing. Her uniform shares the same crisp white apron with its central Red Cross, veil, and white sleeve protectors as the nurse in the picture, visibly telling us the role she chose for her war work. The inscription, however, does suggest that Violet, or perhaps a family member or friend, may have entered these pictures retrospectively, possibly after the war when she would no longer have been a VAD and

⁵ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, 6th Impression (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014), pp. 364–65.

⁶ Mugglestone, *Writing a War of Words: Andrew Clark and the Search for Meaning in World War One*, p. 197.

⁷ The British Red Cross records show Violet Hurdman joining the VAD in April 1915 as a nurse and working part time until April 1919, serving 2598 hours at the Red Cross Auxiliary Hospital Alford in Lincolnshire.

'British Red Cross Volunteers during WW1'.

⁸ 'Service Records George Hurdman', 1915, The National Archives, British Armed Forces, First World War Soldier's Pension Claims <Record Transcription: British Armed Forces, First World War Soldiers' Pension Claims WO364 Records | findmypast.co.uk>.

⁹ Her son Robert Emperingham Hurdman was one month old in the 1911 Census.

wanted to capture her role as part of the album itself. This material makes Violet a directly visible presence in the album. The explanatory caption, ‘her sick and injured heroes’ (Figure 2), supports the discussion in chapter one of the ordinary man who is transformed into a supposed war hero and celebrity by his military service, a shift to the extraordinary which, in part, motivated nurses’ collection of their patients’ autographs. This phrase tells us of Violet’s unabashed admiration for her soldier-patients. The use of the word ‘her heroes’ rather than ‘my heroes’, however, supports the argument that this may have been added later by a family member who sought to give context to the album and demonstrates the lasting power of the iconography of recruiting posters beyond the end of the war. In this juxtaposition of images Violet is positioned in the album as the soldier’s saviour.



Figure 2. Photograph of Violet Hurdman in ‘Autograph Album Violet Hurdman VAD’ (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0012.

Summers considers the roles of both military and auxiliary nurses (VADs) stating that ‘the VADs of August 1914 were marked out as the vanguard for other women to follow’.¹⁰

Lady Angela Forbes in *Memories and Base Details* wrote

‘No sooner had the war-cloud burst than a general desire to take some part evinced itself. First Aid classes were inaugurated, and everyone who owned a house in any way suitable offered it to the War Office [...] to be used as a hospital. There was a rush of women to the London hospitals to be taken as probationers, and every shop that sold a cape and apron was literally besieged by those who wanted, at least, to possess a uniform’.¹¹

Violet, too, was keen to ‘do her bit’, and the album begins by placing her contribution within the wider iconography of the ministering nurse as saviour to men disabled by war.

Often, the contributions by the soldier-patients acknowledged that the nurses were ‘doing their bit’. In Nurse Marion Jones’s album a poem begins, ‘It’s wartime now you must admit| and things are getting worse| but there’s many that have done their bit among them, our night nurse’.¹²

The picture accompanying her photograph in Violet’s album is representative of many posters of the time, with the nurse pictured behind the injured patient in a protective pose (Figure 2). He is crouched in a fetal position, and her stance with her arm around his shoulder suggests the guidance of a mother with a young son. His outstretched hand can be seen as reinforcing his need for help with his blindness, suggesting an unknown future for him and also an unknown future for the war.

These two images, pasted side by side, demonstrate how Violet is aligning herself with the popular image of the VAD and suggest that she may have been influenced by Red Cross recruiting posters of the time. Depending on when this material was added, Violet’s image at the start of the album might have also made a statement to her soldier-patients. The

¹⁰ Summers, *Angels and Citizens*, p. 247.

¹¹ Lady Angela Selina Bianca (St Clair-Erskine) Forbes, *Memories and Base Details* (Hutchinson, 1921), p. 153 <<http://archive.org/details/memoriesbasedeta00forbuoft>>.

¹² ‘Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD’ (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, AB476.

inclusion of these paired images as the album's opening, or mission statement, suggests that she, too, wants to be seen as a compassionate figure, doing her bit, and it can be seen to place her amongst a group of nurses as war heroes in their own right.

Many images depicting compassionate nurses, especially VADs, were popular at this time as a part of the general propaganda surrounding the war. The insertion of these images in her album actively demonstrates Violet's awareness of these popular pictures, and her relationship with them. Their use as both propaganda and recruitment posters was widespread. Radio did not yet have a common place in the home and television was still to be invented. The social media of the day was in the form of musical halls and picture houses, and, together with newspapers, journals, postcards, and posters, endeavoured to enlist the public by immersive, repeated messages of the need for volunteers. Robert Dean in *'We think you ought to Go': music Hall and Recruitment in the First World War* discusses the relationship between music halls and Patriotism. He argues that the popularity of music halls in the late 1800s and in the period up to the start of the First World War saw the 'militaristic song with its patriotic sing-along chorus was already a music hall staple' and that by '1914 this engine [the music hall] was primed and ready to serve as a recruitment factory for the Western Front'.¹³

These popular images played on the same ideals expressed by nurses themselves in their perceptions of the initial romance of nursing explored in the previous chapter. Violet's choice of image is one of romance and compassion and does not show the reality of badly injured soldiers with suppurating stumps or disfigurement. Acton in *Negotiating Injury and Masculinity* suggests that a wounded soldier and his nurse are counterparts. Both participating in fighting the war, the soldier is proving his masculinity through wounding, and

¹³ Dean, "'We Think You Ought To Go' Music Hall and Recruitment in the First World War', pp. 186–87.

his nurse shares in the wounding and equally proves her own worth through nursing him.¹⁴ This is echoed by Violet showing her soldier-patients both her inspiration for nursing as well as wanting them to perceive her compassionate care. Acton argues that nurses' responses to the wounded was mixed. She explores the perceptions of masculinity to both the wounded soldier and the nurses, suggesting that wounds were seen as a badge of honour and a sign of bravery. Acton explores Bourke's assertion that the 'male body during the Great War was intended to be mutilated', arguing that both young men and women had to accept that masculine ideology included mutilation.¹⁵

The opening insertions in Violet's album operate similarly to the wider use of illustrated posters as propaganda during the First World War. Two of the most famous First World War posters bracket the War. The first was the Britons Your Country "Wants You" featuring Field Marshal Lord Kitchener and first produced in 1914 (Figure 3a). The second is Alonzo Foringer, 'Greatest Mother in the World' poster produced for the American Red Cross in 1918 (Figure 3b).

¹⁴ Acton, 'Negotiating Injury and Masculinity in First World War Nurses' Writing', p. 123.

¹⁵ Acton, 'Negotiating Injury and Masculinity in First World War Nurses' Writing', p. 124.



Figure 3a. Britons “Wants You” Join Your Country’s Army!, 1914, Imperial War Museum.

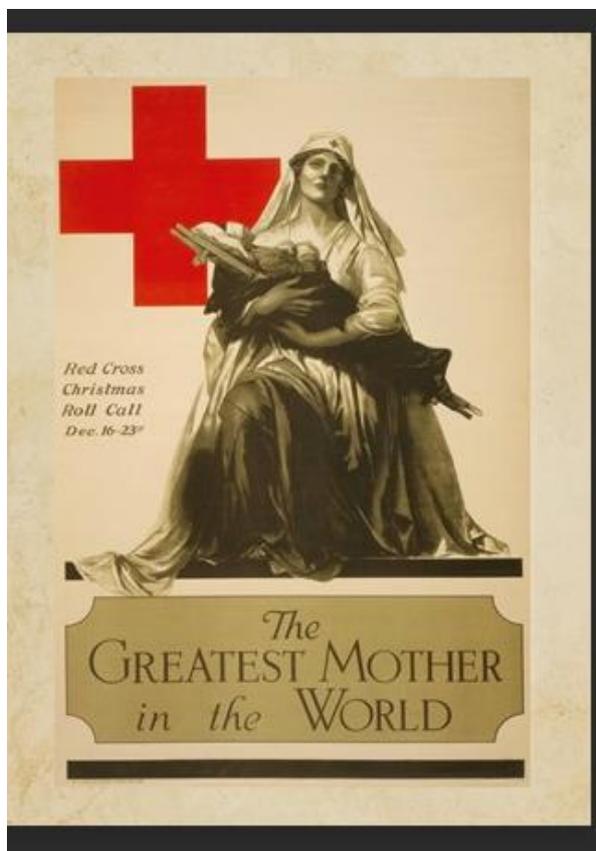


Figure 3b. *The Greatest Mother in the World*, 1918, Imperial War Museum.

Nicholas Ciotola draws out a parallel between these two posters on either side of the Atlantic: ‘Whereas [James Montgomery] Flagg borrowed a British idea for his Uncle Sam poster, Foringer’s image was so powerful that England requested it for use in their million-dollar Red Cross drive – a further testament to the poster’s popularity in its day.’¹⁶ The fine pencil sketch dated 1918 of “Mdse de Croix Rouge” from Mary Ann Thomson’s album (Figure 3c) is very similar to the Foringer poster suggesting the widespread popularity of the poster.



Figure 3c. ‘Mdse de Croix Rouge’ in ‘Autograph Album Mary Ann Thomson TFNS’ (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/388/THOM.

¹⁶ Nicholas P. Ciotola, ‘Alonzo Earl Foringer’s Greatest Mother in the World: The New Jersey Roots of the Most Famous Poster of World War I’, *New Jersey Studies (Trenton, N.J.)*, 3.2 (2017), pp. 215–30 (p. 218), doi:10.14713/njs.v3i2.88.

Based on Michelangelo's *Pietà* (1499) the image of a mother and child was a powerful image to women during the First World War. Sharon Ouditt argues that the VAD recruitment campaign was aimed at upper- and middle-class women, maintaining that their background made them capable of overcoming the arduous and dangerous work of women on active service.¹⁷

Ouditt argues that the image highlights the 'holiness' of the war, suggesting recruitment relied on aligning Christian and class ideologies. She cites Kathleen Furze informing VAD volunteers 'you have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience, your humility, your determination to overcome all difficulties'.¹⁸ Religion was an integral part of the community; the majority of people went to church every Sunday and the influence of the Church was instilled in their everyday lives. The image of the mother of Christ holding her Son widely resonated with the mothers whose sons were fighting and dying in the war. The iconography of the *Pietà* permeated war memorials after the war in Europe especially. Winter considers its use in his book *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the 20th Century*.¹⁹ In particular, Winter looks at the work of sculptor Kathe Kollwitz who lost her son in the war and created a sculptured memorial that she hoped encapsulated all the lost sons. Winter argues that 'part of the meaning is to be found in Kollwitz's commitment to gather to her family all those young men who had had to endure the war at its worst'.²⁰

Images such as William Hatherall's (1855-1958) painting of a Red Cross nurse aiding a wounded soldier who leans against her whilst a small child clings to her skirts, were

¹⁷ Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*, p. 19.

¹⁸ Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*, p. 20.

¹⁹ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the 20th Century* (Yale University Press, 2006).

²⁰ Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the 20th Century*, p. 148.

used in various poster designs throughout the war, perpetuating this role of nurse as a mother (Figure 4).



Figure 4. William Hatherell, *Nurse, Wounded Soldier and Child*, 1915, Imperial War Museum, Art.IWM ART 5194 <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/12369>>.



Figure 5. Joyce Dennys, *First World War VAD Recruitment Poster*, 1915, British Red Cross, 2355/1 <<https://museumandarchives.redcross.org.uk/objects/10811>>.

Violet, however, may have been more familiar with the VAD recruitment poster by Joyce Dennys (Figure 5). Featuring three VADs in the uniform of the British Red Cross and the Order of St John of Jerusalem nurses, it was designed to motivate many women of different backgrounds and convictions. It is believed to be the only poster used for recruitment of VADs during the First World War, as the response was so overwhelming that

more posters were deemed unnecessary.²¹ As a young mother herself, these images likely struck a chord with Violet who shows her strength by working as a VAD, a mother, and wife, and, no doubt, working on her husband's farm.

Answering the recruitment call: Nurse Jones's war

Marion Elizabeth Jones came from a middle-class background in Swansea and, like Violet Hurdman, she joined the VAD working as a nurse at the Red Cross Officers Hospital in Parc Wern and the Y.M.C.A Red Cross Auxiliary Hospital in Swansea in May 1915. Her autograph album appears to contain contributions from 1916 onwards and the photographs and verses, dated August 1916, suggest that the album may have been purchased or gifted around this time.²² There are many blank pages in the album suggesting either that Marion was too busy or was being selective as to who she passed the album to. Equally, the novelty of collecting contributions may have worn off.

Like Violet Hurdman, Marion Jones also used a scrapbook approach to her album with photographs of her soldier-patients and her colleagues. On the last few pages, she has pasted two faded photographs of a group of eight VAD nurses in their uniforms sitting informally gathered on the steps of Parc Wern hospital.²³ Marion has dated her contribution to 1 August 1916 (Figure 6). Whereas Violet Hurdman is placed front and centre of her album so that her soldier-patients or other album readers will immediately see and appreciate her aspirations, Marion Jones positions herself at the very end of her album. This suggests she views herself within the album as secondary to her soldier-patients; she is there to serve and care for them, and she does so with humility by placing herself with her friends and colleagues, sharing the responsibility.

²¹ Joyce Dennys, *First World War VAD Recruitment Poster*, 1918 1915, British Red Cross, 2355/1 <<https://museumandarchives.redcross.org.uk/objects/10811>>.

²² 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD'.

²³ 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD'.



Figure 6. Photograph Parc Wern VAD nurses in 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, AB476

Marion began her training as a VAD in May 1915, probably at Parc Wern hospital itself. From early 1915, it was decided that military hospitals in England and France could employ VADs, and this chance to nurse military patients may have inspired Marion to join as a VAD. Before they could care for the soldier-patients, all VADs had to undertake training in first aid and home nursing, cookery, and hygiene. Summers states that in the pre-war years VAD training included working in a hospital for a few hours weekly: making beds, caring for 'real sick and injured patients' taking observations and making 'fomentations and simple dressings'.²⁴ Run by the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) or the Order of St John of Jerusalem, instruction was given by trained nurses. The VADs were expected to complete

²⁴ Summers, 'Women as Voluntary and Professional Military Nurses in Great Britain, 1854-1914', pp. 331-34.

these courses within their first year.²⁵ Vera Brittain states that ‘as I had already passed my First Aid and Home Nursing examinations, I was enrolled as a full-fledged member of the British Red Cross’.²⁶ Hallett writes that ‘once they had acquired at least some relevant training certificates, most VADs underwent a further apprenticeship training – usually of about six months – in a local hospital to permit them to consolidate their skills’.²⁷

The VAD records for Marion and the seven VADs named in her verses list Parc Wern and the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) Red Cross hospital as their places of work. VADs were often the main workforce for auxiliary hospitals, and, although there is very little documentary evidence to support any significance that may be attached to this photo, it is possible to surmise that this group came together as a team on their first nursing rotation from 1-6 August at Parc Wern hospital in Swansea, where they began nursing wounded soldiers. This supports the traditional convention of marking special comings and goings by groups of friends in the album. By pasting the group photograph, Marion, like Violet, is aligning herself with collective war work carried out by young women in the First World War. This work fostered friendships and support from colleagues, which Keown has illustrated was essential to the wartime nurses.²⁸

The photograph is accompanied by a set of seven verses in which Marion’s colleagues are remembered. The signature to the verses is ‘Yours truly, Nurse James’. Each one is named and remembered for their virtues and characteristics, briefly captured in a couple of lines. Although the nurses in the photograph are not individually identified with the exception of Marion herself, who has placed a ring around her face, the nurses are given prominence in the poem and we glean their surnames in the verses. In contrast to the two poems about the

²⁵ Menna Lloyd Jones, ‘Voluntary Aid Detachments: Nursing Volunteer ‘VADs’ during World War One’, *British Journal of Healthcare Assistants*, 12.11 (2018), pp. 559–61, doi:10.12968/bjha.2018.12.11.559.

²⁶ Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 140.

²⁷ Hallett, ‘The British VAD’.

²⁸ Keown, ‘I Think I Was More Pleased to See Her than Any One “Cos She’s so Fine” Nurses Friendships, Trauma and Resiliency during the First World War’.

'ideals' and 'realities' of nursing discussed in the previous chapter, the verses in Marion Jones's album are of a more intimate nature (Figure 7).

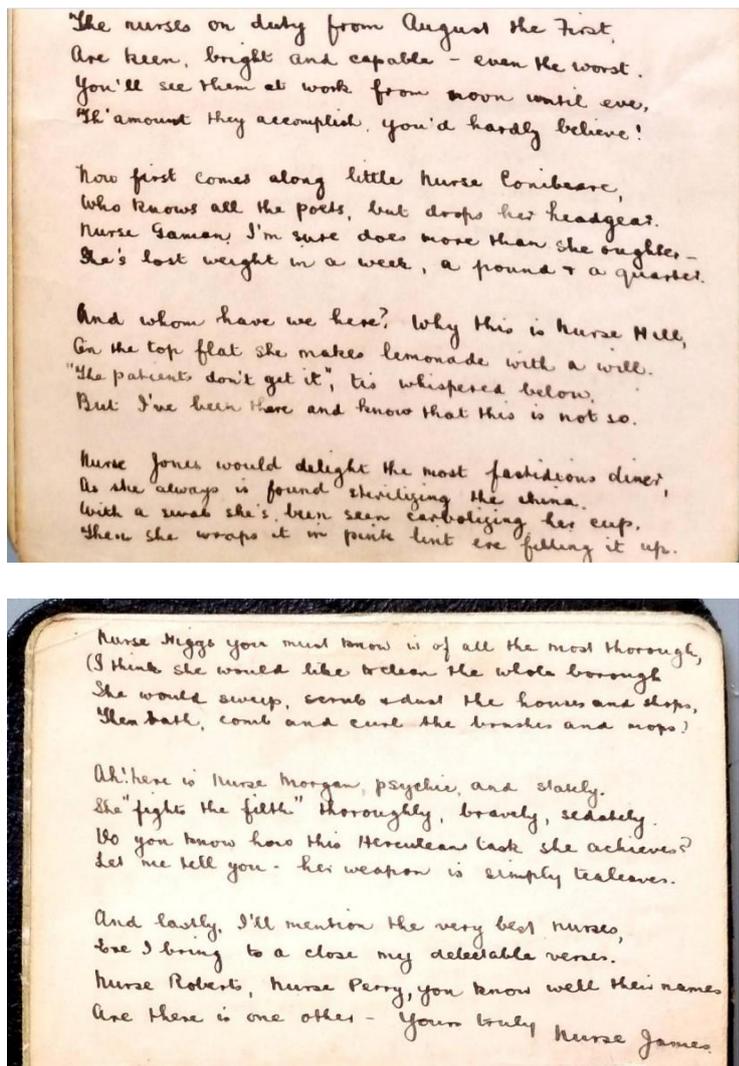


Figure 7. Accompanying poem to photograph of nurses 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, AB476.²⁹

²⁹ The nurses on duty from August the First |Are keen, bright and capable – even the worst |You'll see them at work from noon until eve |Th'amount they accomplish, you'd hardly believe. |Now first comes along little nurse Conibear|Who knows all the poets but drops her headgear |Nurse Gaman, I'm sure does more than she oughter –|She's lost weight in a week, - a pound and a quarter. |And whom have we here? Why this is Nurse Hill, |On the top flat she makes lemonade with a will |"the patients don't get it". |Tis whispered below |But I've been there and know that this is not so. |Nurse Jones would delight the most fastidious diner |As she always is found sterilizing the china|With a swab she's been seen carbolizing her cup|Then she wraps it in pink lint ere filling it up. |Nurse Higgs you must know is of all the most thorough|(I think she would like to clean the whole borough |She would seep, scrub & dust the houses and shops, |Then bath, come and cure the brushes and mops) |Ah! Here is Nurse Morgan, psychic and stately. |She "fights the filth" thoroughly, bravely, sedately. |Do you know how this Herculean task she achieves?|And lastly, I'll mention the very best nurses, |Ere I bring to a close my delectable verses, |Nurse Roberts, Nurse Perry, you know well their names, |And there is one other – yours truly|Nurse James. 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD'.

Each of the seven short verses considers the characteristics of each nurse in the photograph.³⁰ Nurse Hilda Conibear is the first nurse to appear, in verse two. Nurse James's line that she 'knows all the poets' suggests Hilda is well educated with a liking for the arts and possibly always quoting poetry to everyone; however, Hilda is also painted as being rather untidy in appearance.³¹ Just as the 'Ideals' and 'Reality' poems speak of the hard mundane work of cleaning, so this theme is in each verse of the poem. Nurse Gaman loses weight through hard work, Nurse Higgs is always cleaning everything and would 'sweep, scrub and dust the houses and shops then bath, comb and curl the brushes and mops'.³² The line, Nurse Morgan 'fights the filth', sums up the kind of work they did, but Nurse Morgan is also introduced as psychic and stately.³³ Nurse James writes that tea leaves are Nurse Morgan's weapon. As a psychic she may have read the tea leaves for her colleagues and others as a form of diversion and entertainment, but tea/tea leaves can also be used to clean and deodorise.

Although mediums and psychics had been popular in the Victorian age, the impact of the loss of so many young men saw an increased interest in the practice.³⁴ Many grieving families sought to contact their loved ones in the afterlife, often wanting reassurance and to find out how they died. When Vera Brittain's brother Edward was killed, she sought out

³⁰ The following nurses have been identified as working at Parc Wern Red Cross Officers Hospital and Y.M.C.A. Red Cross Auxiliary Hospital Swansea: Hilda Conibear (July 1916 – Nov 1919); Violet Gaman Senior VAD (Nov 1914 - May 1919); Katie Hill Senior Nurse (Jan 1916 – Mar 1919); Lilian Morgan (1915-1919); Records do not show a Nurse Perry but this maybe a nickname for Mrs Nellie Perritt-Bush Senior Nurse (Mar 1916 – Jan 1919); Frances Roberts (June 1916-Feb 1917) Nurse Roberts is possibly Frances Roberts (June 1916-Feb 1917) but no hospital is identified on her VAD record card, it does, however, comment that she was a Military nurse in France. Nurse Mary James (Mar 1915-Mar 1917) (No records show a Nurse Higgs (or similar name) for this date range. See 'British Red Cross Volunteers during WW1'.

³¹ 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD'.

³² 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD'.

³³ 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD'.

³⁴ 'The Rise of Spiritualism During the First World War: Raymond, Or Life and Death | Living With Dying', n.d. <<https://livingwithdying.leeds.ac.uk/2019/08/30/the-rise-of-spiritualism-during-the-first-world-war-raymond-or-life-and-death/>> [accessed 31 July 2025]; Murphy Thomas Temple, "Death, Where Is Thy Sting?": British Spiritualists and the First World War' (unpublished, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2020) <<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2734696493?pq-origsite=primo>> [accessed 31 July 2025].

details from his Colonel, worried that the official letters were covering up a more catastrophic end. For others, psychics such as Nurse Morgan would have provided comfort in the hope they would meet again.

Marion Jones's characteristics are also captured in the poem. We learn she is fastidious about eating and drinking, sterilizing her cup and wrapping it in pink lint. She is possibly aware of the risks of infection, and it is also probable a reflection of the home hygiene and sanitation training she received.³⁵

Aspirations Tested: Night Nursing

Sister Mabel Catherine Mary Tarrant's album, like Beatrice Longmire's album and Marion Jones, contains a verse from fellow nurses, Edith Pepper and 'Prattie'.³⁶ The album was gifted to Sister Tarrant by one 'Prattie' in March 1912. She appears several times in the album, always as 'Prattie', which may be a nickname, and apart from the date of the gift, all other entries are undated. Unfortunately, no other information about either Prattie or Sister Tarrant is currently available. That they worked together is evident in the verse 'Oh! Tarrant' (Figure 8). There is no date, and it is probable that it was written pre-war, but it does conjure up the long hours of a night shift.

'Oh Tarrant!' also vividly communicates the realities of nursing. This verse expresses the frustration of nursing and the difficulty of staying awake for the night nurse. The weariness of the early hours was a common experience, and the intimate companionship and support of the nurses on duty is seen in this verse:

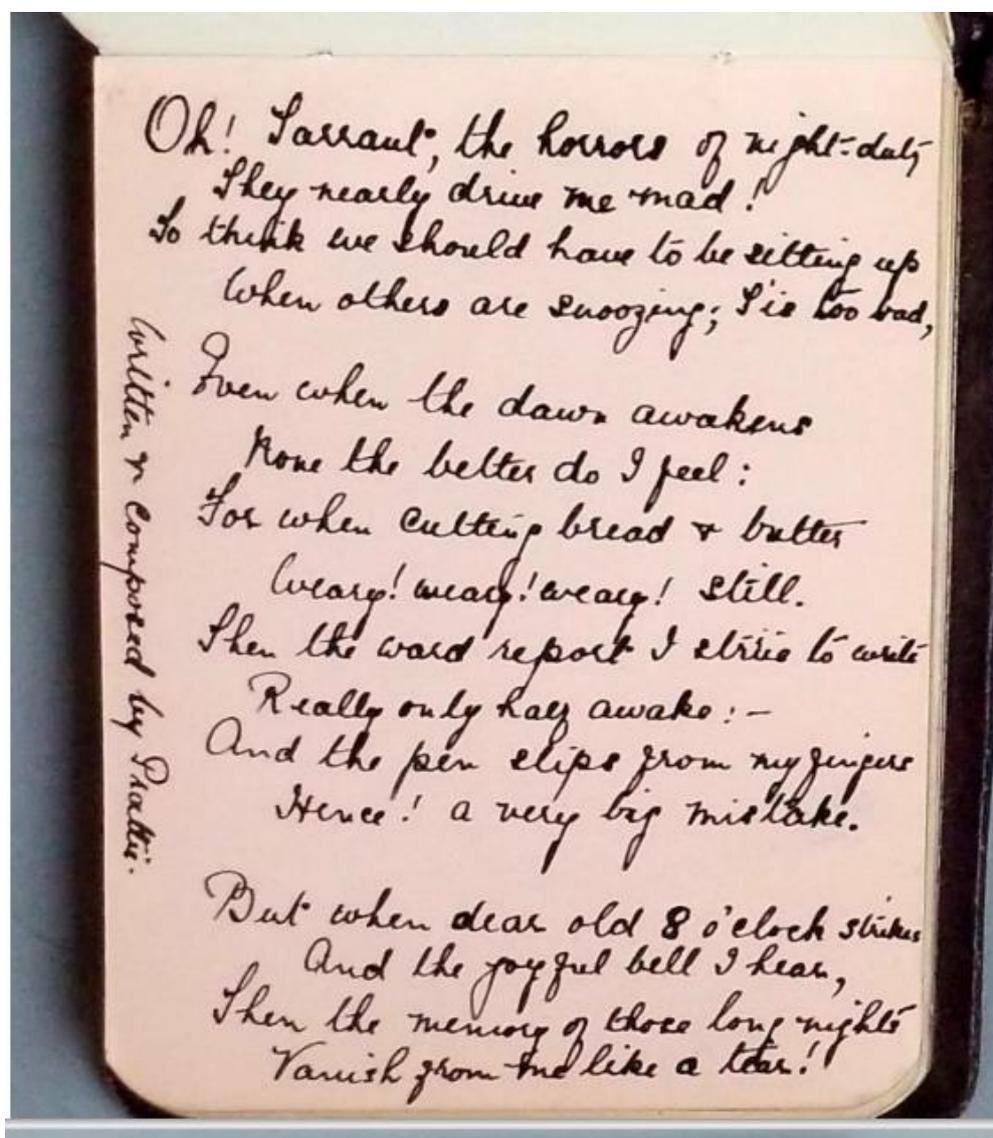
Oh! Tarrant, the horrors of night-duty
They nearly drive me mad!
To think we should have to be sitting up

³⁵ Summers, 'Women as Voluntary and Professional Military Nurses in Great Britain, 1854-1914', p. 335.

³⁶ Edith Pepper contributed to Sister Tarrant's album in 1912. Edith Pepper served for 7 months in the TFNSR before resigning to marry. Her service records (WO399-13830) show she worked at the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth where Edith Holden, whose album is also part of this archive. 'Service Records Edith Pepper TFNS TNA WO399/13830', The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War. 'Autograph Album Mabel Catherine Mary Tarrant' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/193/AUTO.

When others are snoozing; Tis too bad,
 Even when the dawn awakens
 None the better do I feel:
 For when cutting bread and butter
 Weary! Weary! Weary! Still.
 Then the ward report I strive to write
 Really only half awake:-
 And the pen slips from my fingers
 Hence! A very big mistake
 But when dear old 8 o'clock strikes
 And the joyful bell I hear,
 Then the memory of three long nights
 Vanish from me like a tear!

(Written and composed by Prattie)³⁷



³⁷ 'Oh Tarrant!' by 'Prattie' in 'Autograph Album Mabel Catherine Mary Tarrant'.

Figure 8. 'Oh Tarrant!' by 'Prattie' in 'Autograph Album Mabel Catherine Mary Tarrant' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/193/AUTO.

Prattie's ownership of her verses is, although unusual, occasionally found in the contributions in the albums. As with Brittain's references to the errors that a nurse could make, here, tiredness causes the writer's 'pen to slip from my fingers/ Hence! A very big mistake'.³⁸ Although it doesn't detail any specific patient care, nurses on night duty during the war would have related to the 'horrors' of it.

In contrast to Prattie's entry about night duty, the second entry in Sister Tarrant's album by Pte Court provides an insight into the patient's view of the nurse's night duty (Figure 9). Often with only two nurses on shift, their work was carried out in half-light and their ward rounds assisted only by the light of a torch. For some patients, this became a beacon of guardianship.

³⁸ 'Oh Tarrant!' by 'Prattie' in 'Autograph Album Mabel Catherine Mary Tarrant'.

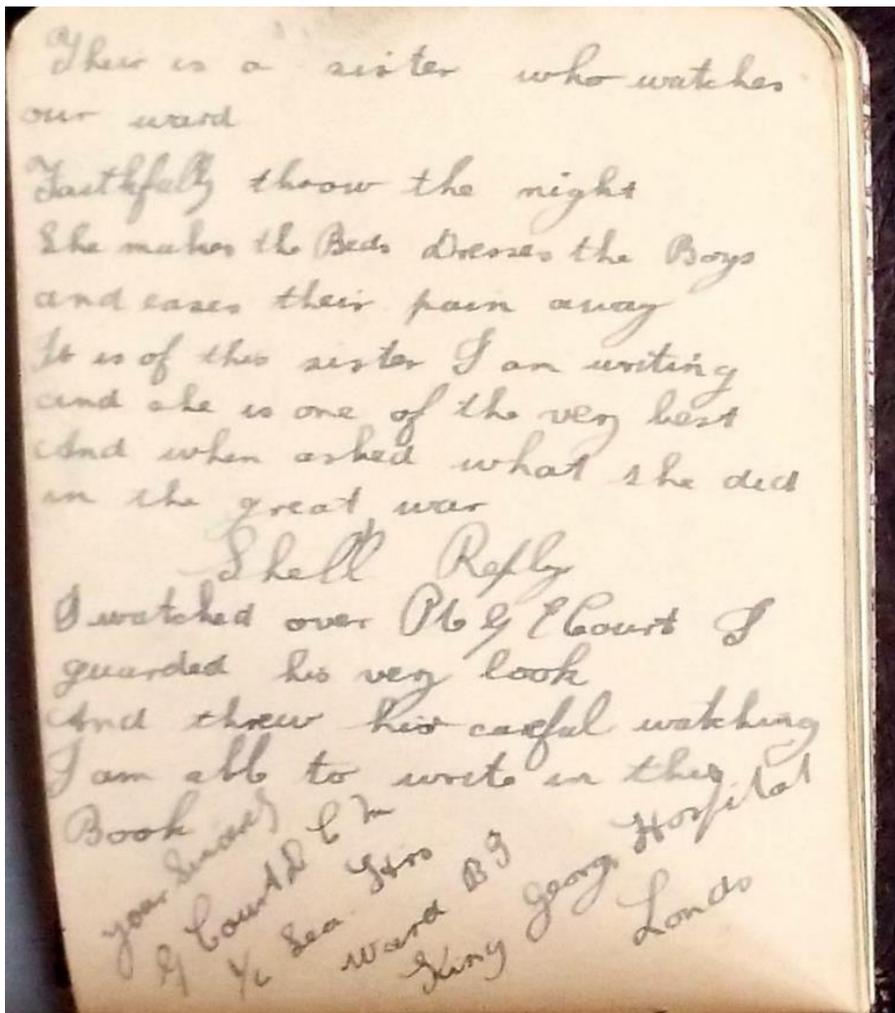


Figure 9. Pte Court's entry in 'Autograph Album Mabel Catherine Mary Tarrant' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/193/AUTO.

There is a sister who watches
Our ward
Faithfull throw[sic] the night
She makes the Beds Dresses the Boys
And eases their pain away
It is of this sister I am writing
And she is one of the very best
And when asked what she did in the Great War
She'll Reply
I watched over Pte G E Court I guarded his very look
And threw [sic] her careful watching
I am able to write in this book
(King Georges Hospital Ward B3)³⁹

³⁹ Great War – The term was used prior to 1914 to describe any large-scale conflict. It was first used to describe World War One in Parliament in August 1914.

A patient entry in Marion Jones's album dated 12 December 1916 describes VADs' work and routine in the convalescent hospital (Figures 10a and 10b):

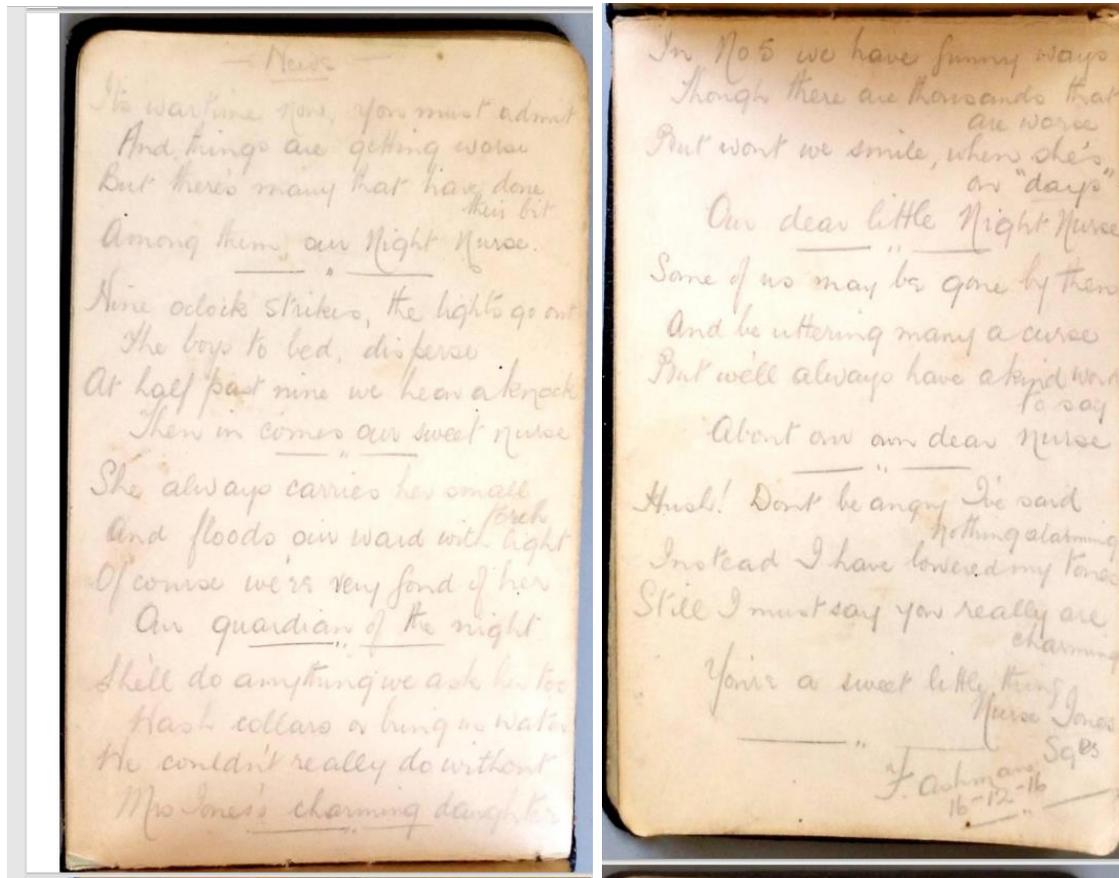


Figure 10a and Figure 10b. Patient's entry in 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, AB476.

Its wartime now, you must admit| and things are getting worse| but there's many that have done their bit| among them, our night nurse| Nine o'clock strikes, the lights go out| the boys to bed, disperse| at half past nine we hear a knock| then in comes our sweet nurse. |She always carries her small torch and floods our ward with light| of course we're very fond of her| our guardian of the night. |She'll do anything we ask her to | Wash collars or bring in water| we couldn't really do without Mrs. Jones's charming daughter| in no 5 we have funny ways| though there are thousands that are worse| But won't we smile when she's on "days" |our dear little night nurse| Some of us may be gone by then| and be uttering many a curse| but we'll always have a kind word to say| about our own dear nurse| Hush! Don't be angry I've said nothing alarming| instead I have lowered my tone| still I must say you really are charming| you're a sweet little thing nurse Jones.

In their study on *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, Nestor Serrano-Fuentes and Elena Andina-Diaz consider the nurses' roles that emerge from the contributions to the

magazine and one, in particular, resonates with some of the entries in the albums.⁴⁰ Pte Reed, comments on the ward number (No. 37), and the nurse's abilities in temperature taking, bed making, and of her popularity. Night duty too, figures in the poetry in the magazine, and Serrano-Fuentes and Andina-Diaz discuss the impact of noise and light on soldier-patients during the night citing an entry entitled 'Night Duty' that encapsulates the nurse's perception of her work: "I mustn't make a noise all night| I'm not supposed to show a light."⁴¹

The battle of the Somme, which had officially ended on 18 November 1916, had been intended to hasten an Allied Victory. This was not the case, however, and the contributor to Jones's album is aware of the seemingly never-ending war with 1917 looming, writing 'things are getting worse'.⁴² He writes of many who have 'done their bit' and includes Nurse Jones in this. There is a hint of the diversity of the work of the VAD reflected in this verse, washing, and bringing water, which encompassed many general domestic duties. The verse tells us something of the routine of Nurse Jones, who is allocated night duty on Ward 5. Lights go out at nine o'clock and she begins duty at nine-thirty. She does her rounds with a torch and the endearing wording of 'our guardian of the night' indicates the trust placed in the night nurse.⁴³

The albums provide several contributions about night nurses. References to night duty by nurses also appear regularly in hospital magazines, and together with albums and magazines, reveal the emotional significance for the nurses caring for their patients in the twilight gloom of a ward on night duty. The recurrence of such entries in the albums shows how important this interaction between nurse and soldier-patient at night was. Patients were

⁴⁰ Nestor Serrano-Fuentes and Elena Andina-Diaz, 'Exploring The Netley British Red Cross Magazine: An Example of the Development of Nursing and Patient Care during the First World War', *Nursing Inquiry*, 28.2 (2020), doi:10.1111/nin.12392.

⁴¹ Serrano-Fuentes and Andina-Diaz, 'Exploring The Netley British Red Cross Magazine: An Example of the Development of Nursing and Patient Care during the First World War', p. 3.

⁴² 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD'.

⁴³ 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD'.

often fretful at night, possibly in pain or having nightmares when images and bad dreams of their experiences at the front would haunt them. This would have given a different meaning to the horrors of night duty, no longer, for the nurse, the battle to stay awake but, instead, the exhausting task of comforting and reassuring their disturbed patients who kept the nurses busy at night.

Understanding, Empathy, and Curiosity: Sister Bowman's requests

Acton argues that while male writers felt able to reveal 'images of war to the gaze of the reader', nurse writers, such as Mary Borden in *The Forbidden Zone*, on the other hand, felt constrained in revealing what they witnessed and later revealed.⁴⁴ One album demonstrates the willingness of male writers to share such images with their nurse. These entries provide an insight into the soldiers' experiences at the front, which, for many, manifested themselves in their sleep in the form of nightmares.

Beatrice Bowman, by specifically asking her soldier patients to write about their experiences, simultaneously demonstrates the freedom of the male writer to share his experiences and, at the same time, her own participation as an authentic witness to the war. Contributors to her album specify that 'you asked for a war story – or incident that may have occurred during my 6 months sojourn on the continent' and 'You ask me to relate some of my experience of my time at the front'.⁴⁵ This atypical request for specific war material resulted in unusually detailed accounts in this album, as discussed in chapter one. Often beginning 'Dear Sister Beatrice' these entries continue much as the contributors would have written a letter from the front. These more extended contributions are redolent of letters or diary entries. These entries allowed Beatrice to share in the trauma her soldiers had undergone at the front leading up to their wounding. Hallett argues that in the sharing of experiences with

⁴⁴ Acton, *Diverting the Gaze*, p. 57.

⁴⁵ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

their nurses, the soldiers felt they understood what they had gone through, and the nurse ‘seem[ed] to be [...] offered honorary membership of their “comradeship of suffering”’.⁴⁶

Carden-Coyne argues that ‘women admired men who “made light of their wounds” and men were complicit in feigning cheeriness’.⁴⁷ Indeed, the entries in Sister Bowman’s album appear, if not cheerful, then certainly down to earth and without deeper comment on the contributor’s injuries and the war, however, the presence of both permeates the contributions. Carden-Coyne further argues that the soldier’s ‘experience of pain and vulnerability, having his physical integrity compromised, and the social and cultural life within the hospital framed the expression of humour’.⁴⁸

Transport Sergeant HW Fairlie gives an unemotional description in Beatrice Bowman’s album of an enemy encounter early in the war.⁴⁹ At thirty-eight Sgt Fairlie was an older Territorial Army Soldier who had enlisted in 1907, being re-engaged at the start of the war for duties overseas. Sgt. Fairlie had mobilised to France as part of the BEF, and the events in his account probably occurred in late 1914 or early 1915.⁵⁰

There had been many British reports of atrocities by German soldiers against the civilian Belgians, and these, together with widespread use of propaganda, heightened animosity towards the enemy. Brian Feltman considers how common it was for British soldiers to murder enemy prisoners, arguing that ‘on both sides of the lines it was not unheard of for soldiers to participate in or witness the massacre of defenceless enemies who had laid down their arms’.⁵¹ He goes on to further argue that ‘Veterans [...] wrote of prisoner killings

⁴⁶ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 167.

⁴⁷ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 221.

⁴⁸ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 319.

⁴⁹ ‘Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman’.

⁵⁰ Herbert William Fairlie enlisted in the Territorial Army in 1909 aged 32 years. He volunteered to reenlist at the start of the war. He served in France from 15 September 1914 to 31 January 1915 in the 14th Battalion the London Regiment until his demobilization in October 1915 when he continued his war service at the Dublin National Shell Factory. He was treated in hospital for a ruptured urethra.

⁵¹ Brian K. Feltman, ‘Tolerance As a Crime? The British Treatment of German Prisoners of War on the Western Front, 1914-1918’, *War in History*, 17.4 (2010), pp. 435–58 (p. 446), doi:10.1177/0968344510376466.

in letters home and openly discussed the subject with friends and family in the post-war years'.⁵² This openness about such killing is evident in what Sgt Fairlie writes in Beatrice's album. Arriving at a deserted village, he and his men settle in a house to rest:

I lay & enjoyed my cigar...till ... my cigar was done -& time for me to sleep – I then carelessly dropped my lighted cigar -& was preparing to turn over when I ...saw a hand come from under the bed & put out the lighted end...Being fully dressed my first impulse was to spring out of bed & collar my unwelcome companion who I knew to be a German by the red cuff of his coat.⁵³

He goes on to recount his next actions in alerting his comrades and forcing the German soldier from his hiding place. The German's pleas of 'Comarade' have no effect on Sergeant Fairlie or his men:

I'd heard enough of that 2 months before elsewhere...My boys sprung up the stairs -& how gently they got him down, -Altogether Wallop!!! He didn't feel it – they threw him in the back room & in the morning buried him with a lot more of his own sort in a hole conveniently made by a shell during the taking of the village.⁵⁴

The account of the killing of an enemy here is given in a clinical, unemotional manner, but Feltman argues that such killing has less to do with practicalities and more about emotion. Sgt Fairlie's justification for the killing lies in the lack of trust. Feltman believes a lack of trust fostered a desire for revenge, and a 'cycle of violence and retribution [...] that had begun in 1914'; this 'belief in enemy atrocities [...] allowed soldiers to rationalise the decision to show the enemy no mercy'.⁵⁵

Fairlie's business-like account suggests a form of censorship to spare Sister Bowman the graphic details, and yet there is enough detail to indicate, quite vividly, the violence of war. We do not know Beatrice's reaction to this, but she continues to ask for her soldier-patients to recount their experiences. This potentially cleaned-up version of the killing accepts that Sister Bowman would have been familiar with death and although it may not

⁵² Feltman, 'Tolerance As a Crime?', p. 446.

⁵³ Sgt Fairlie in 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

⁵⁴ Sgt Fairlie in 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

⁵⁵ Feltman, 'Tolerance As a Crime?', pp. 447–48.

have been the kind of account that Sergeant Fairlie would have written in a letter home to his wife or mother, it supports Feltman's argument that killing a surrendering enemy or enemy prisoners was an open subject. Acton suggests that even with vivid texts such as Sgt Fairlie's, there are still aspects of the war experience that remain unseen or unknown by both the reader as well as observers such as the nurses.⁵⁶

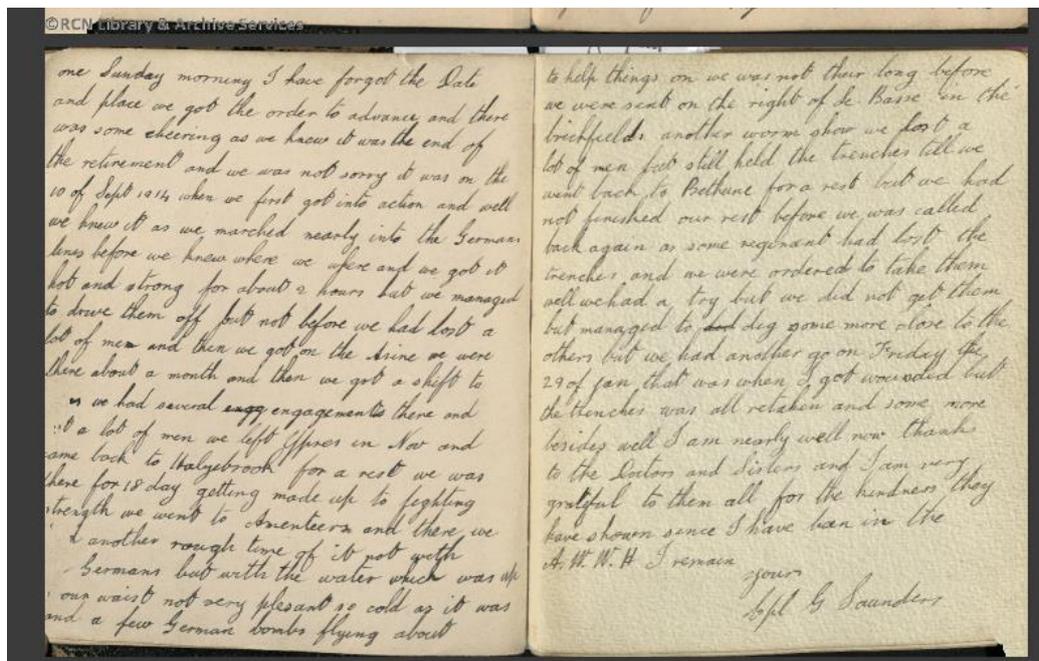
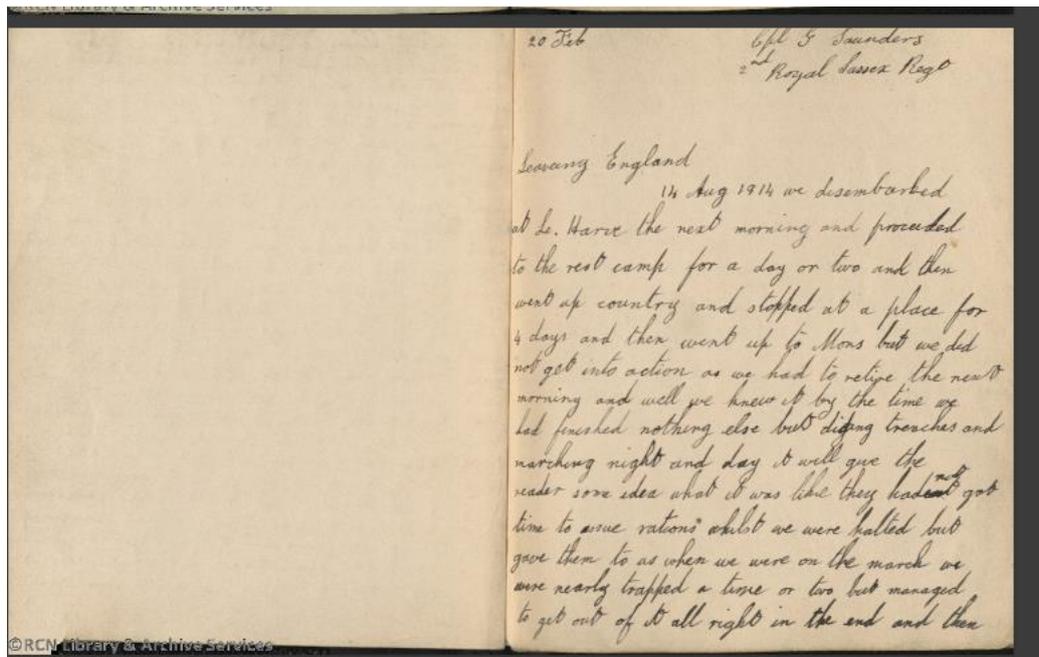
Further on in Sister Bowman's album, Cpl. G. Saunders recounts his participation in action early in the war noting that 'it will give the reader some idea of what it was like. (Figures 11a and 11b). 'Arriving in France 14 August 1914, it was not until '10 of Sept 1914 when we first got into action and well we knew it as we marched nearly into the German lines before we knew where we where[sic] and we got it hot and strong for about 2 hours'.⁵⁷ Later 'we went to Amenteurs [sic] and there we had another rough time of it not with Germans but with the water which was up to our waist not very pleasant [sic] so cold as it was a few German bombs flying about'.⁵⁸ This contribution succinctly describes both what it felt like to be under fire as well as the conditions they were fighting in. 'Water [...] up to our waist [...] so cold' foreshadowing the conditions of mud and water at Passchendaele later in the war.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Acton, *Diverting the Gaze*, p. 58.

⁵⁷ Cpl G. Saunders 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment in 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

⁵⁸ Cpl G. Saunders 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment in 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

⁵⁹ Cpl G. Saunders 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment in 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.



Figures 11a and 11b. Cpl. G. Saunders 2nd Royal Sussex Regiment in 'Autograph Album Beatrice Bowman Red Cross Nurse', Royal College of Nursing, RCN Service Scrapbook <<https://www.rcn.org.uk/servicescrapbooks>>.

Jane Marcus, in *Corpus/Corps/Corpse*, contends that the 'horrors of the forbidden territories extended to an unspoken ban on writing about it'.⁶⁰ Many letters home written at the front would have been censored and the content of these entries suggests the writers felt

⁶⁰ Jane Marcus, 'Corpus/Corps/Corpse: Writing the Body in/at War', in *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 124–68 (p. 126).

free from the constraints of censorship believing the nurse to be understanding of war given her job of treating dreadful wounds. Roper argues that letters home to soldiers' mothers would have endeavoured to protect them from the full horrors of what their sons were going through, with the same being true for husbands writing to their wives. The autograph albums, however, were a space that allowed the soldiers to share some of the horrors that their bodies bore witness to with an empathetic nurse. Beatrice's request for these entries suggests that she is trying to know her patients and their experiences in order to nurse them better.

Roper considers that for some First World War historians censorship casts doubts on the usefulness of letters, but he goes on to suggest that it 'did not stop rankers from giving intimate details of their war experience'.⁶¹ The hospital ward environment with its military discipline, fellow soldiers, and military nurses was a safe space where the soldiers who wrote in Beatrice's album were outside the constraints of formal postal censorship. That does not mean, however, that they were not cautious about what they wrote in the albums which would have had a wider audience.

In contrast to these detailed accounts in Beatrice's album, other albums often contain short, precise accounts of a patient contributor's wounding either in verse or prose. One Sergeant writes: 'Wounded on the Somme by Bomb which tried to get down my neck. Luckily only a small piece got there' (Figure 12). With comparable brevity Pte Moon writes 'Invalided from France with barbed wire wounds'.⁶²

⁶¹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 63.

⁶² 'Autograph Album Marjorie Ayrton Russell VAD'.

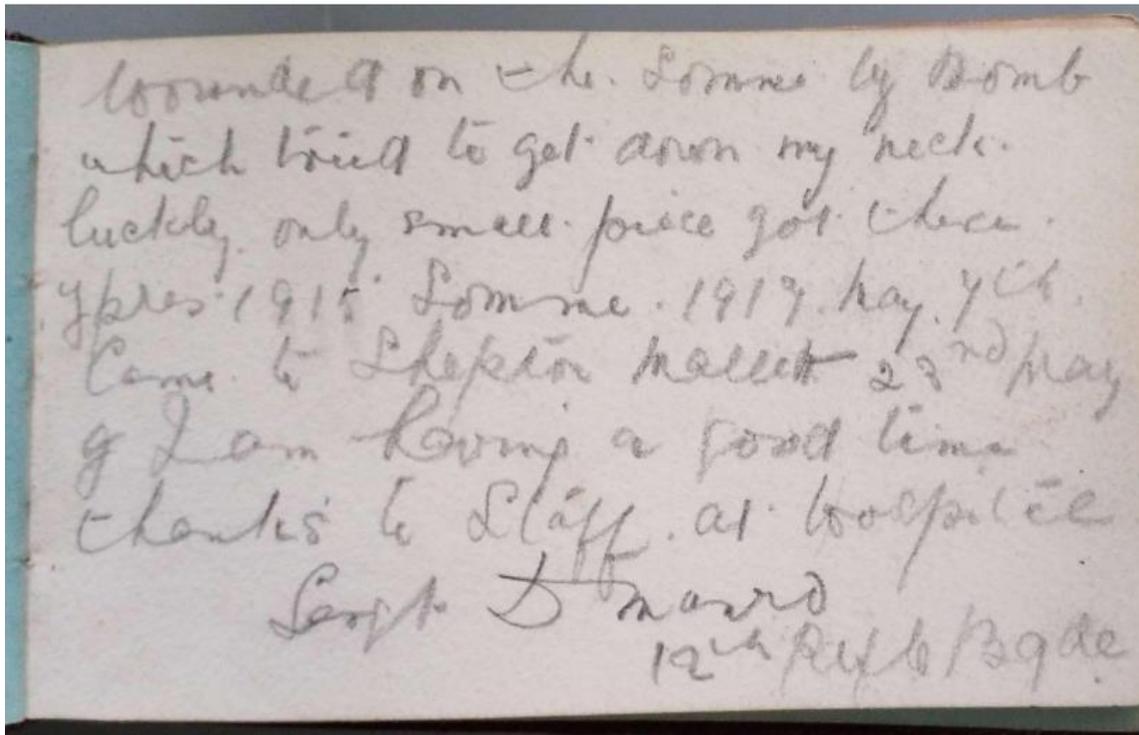


Figure 12. 'Wounded on the Somme' in Entry in 'Autograph Album Marjorie Ayrton Russell VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0010.1 part 598.

This, and similar short concise comments on their injuries, may be restricted by the writers conforming to the convention of only using one page whereas the contributors to Beatrice's album take up several pages to fulfil her request to relate their experiences. It is debatable whether Beatrice's active request for a detailed account of their experiences released her patients from the self-censorship of stoicism allowing a freedom of expression or even if, in some cases, there was an intent to shock Beatrice and in doing so gain attention.

Marcus argues that 'fragmented bodies of men are reproduced in the fragmented parts of women's war text, the texts themselves a "forbidden zone" long ignored by historians...'.⁶³ She argues that these fragmentary texts are like the body parts of men that will never be restored to full health, reflecting the generation of young men after the war who faced life disabled. The contributions to the albums, due to the very nature of albums, are also fragmentary and reflect the transitory and brief nature of the nurse-patient relationship

⁶³ Marcus, 'Corpus/Corps/Corpse: Writing the Body in/at War', pp. 127–28.

together with unresolved endings. These entries, with the details of wounding, frightening enemy encounters, extreme living conditions in the trenches, and the constant shelling and barrages, indicate the many soldiers who not only had physical wounds but had mental trauma as well. Today Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is well-known and better understood, and military nurses specialise in mental health nursing, but in the First World War understanding and treatment of shell-shock or war neurosis (neurasthenia) was still in its infancy.

Hallett highlights the fact that nurses had no formal mental health training and that, 'Nurses were generalists; they perceived their work in terms of offering comfort and care and promoting healing in a range of settings and with a range of patient types'.⁶⁴ These generalist nurses were thrown into caring for patients with gunshot wounds, gas gangrene, and mutilation from shells, bayonet wounds, gas attacks as well as trench feet, dysentery, and, in the latter part of the war, influenza. Much of their training would have enabled them to gain an understanding of such conditions and injuries but the nature of 'shell-shock' might manifest itself in different ways in each man. Jones and Wessely state that 'traumatised soldiers presented in a variety of ways during World War One, although the diagnosis doctors had the greatest difficulty understanding and therefore treating was shellshock [...] typically soldiers complained of fatigue, poor sleep, nightmares and jumpiness'.⁶⁵

A patient who was rational and coherent during the day may very well have become disturbed at night, exhibiting many different reactions from thrashing about and screaming (and in the process disturbing other patients) to sobbing and even violence towards anyone nearby. Suggested treatments were varied from abreaction (the recovery of traumatic memory and emotions to be able to confront that traumatic experience) to hypnosis. Soldiers were

⁶⁴ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 157.

⁶⁵ Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War*, p. 23.

encouraged to recollect their frightening experiences, often beginning at an initial interview and then question and answer sessions. Talking over the situation was strongly encouraged and group work was also carried out to encourage them to talk over their situation. Edward Strecker, in his article in 1919, 'Experiences in the immediate Treatment of War Neurosis', states:

When a sufficiently large group had been collected, they were gathered together in a tent and given an informal talk, which was little more than an effort to reach and sway the emotions. Beginning with a recital of the situation at the front with reference to the division, and particularly to the various units which were represented by the soldiers present, it emphasized the acute need for every available man, and the fact that comrades were suffering because of their absence, and finally came to a climax by a dramatic request for volunteers for immediate service. The result was always highly gratifying.⁶⁶

In *A War of Nerves*, Ben Shepherd discusses the work of Rivers and Brock at Craiglockhart. He states that Rivers considered the nature of the nightmares the soldiers suffered as a result of their traumatic experiences and goes on to say that Rivers believed that suppressing memories by day was ““only to bring them upon him with redoubled force and horror when he slept””.⁶⁷ In contrast, Brock encouraged activity as a means to work through shell-shock and the occupational therapy in hospitals would have supported this treatment. Jones and Wessely state that in occupational workshops, patients were ‘actively encouraged to undertake physical tasks [...] and art therapy to “remember past experiences”’.⁶⁸ I will return to the use of art therapy and its inception in the First World War as manifested in the albums in chapter six.

Carden-Coyne discusses the use of humour by the soldier-patients as a means of bonding and coping as well as a means of expressing ‘dissatisfaction with the military system’.⁶⁹ She goes on to argue, however, that ‘occasionally the cheerful discourse is

⁶⁶ Edward A. Strecker, 'Experiences in the Immediate Treatment of War Neuroses', *American Journal of Insanity*, 76 (1919), pp. 45–69 (pp. 60–61), doi:10.1176/ajp.76.1.45.

⁶⁷ Shepherd, *A War of Nerves*, p. 88.

⁶⁸ Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War*, p. 32.

⁶⁹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*.

subverted by patients' visions of their suffering, when the battlefield creeps back into their dreams when they no longer imagine themselves as robust soldiers but "Gaunt black wrecks in a Land of Doom".⁷⁰

Hallett further explores nurses' perceptions of caring for such patients. She argues that 'it is only by reading between the lines of the personal writings that one can perceive how they viewed their role'.⁷¹ Higonet delves into the personal writing of Ellen La Motte to endeavor to understand how she perceived her role in nursing such patients. She posits that La Motte questions the conventional, idealized view of the war by considering opposing views, giving as an example La Motte's sketch of 'the night nurse [who] carries a candle...searching for a true hero' who she can compare with her patient who has attempted suicide and is to be shot as coward.⁷² La Motte contrasts this with the perceptions of the day nurse, who is depicted as more practical in her approach to patient care. The night nurse engages in emotional interactions with the patient. La Motte's example highlights the different challenges nurses faced in their roles. Higonet argues that La Motte's writing is darkly satirical but that it 'it is the space she grants to the patient's return of the medical gaze'.⁷³ Similarly, the writings of soldier-patients in autograph albums offer insights into how they perceived nursing care, through interpretation and analysis of their comments. Hallett cites Douglas Bell's diary where he speaks of longing to be back with his regiment but that "at other times dread and terror would break into my rest at night. All men who went through the war will understand this".⁷⁴ Hallett suggests that nurses well understood what the soldier-patients had gone through, and those nurses working close to the front in the Casualty Clearing Stations (CCS) and the base hospitals in France saw first-hand the injured men

⁷⁰ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, pp. 321–22. 'gaunt black wrecks' is a quote by Corporal Lewis.

⁷¹ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 158.

⁷² Higonet, 'Cubist Vision in Nursing Accounts', p. 161.

⁷³ Higonet, 'Cubist Vision in Nursing Accounts', p. 162.

⁷⁴ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 159.

straight from the front. For the nurses working in England at the convalescent hospitals this would initially have been a steep learning curve especially when the first rushes came in.⁷⁵

Beatrice Bowman's request for the men to write their experiences provided her an opportunity for a still deeper appreciation of their generally poorly understood mental health needs. This use of the album space can be seen as a therapeutic intervention and the ability to talk through their experiences was a means of coming to terms with them. The therapeutic purpose of the autograph album will be discussed in more detail in chapter six. A well-known exponent of the 'talking cure' was W. H. R. Rivers.⁷⁶ Officers suffering from 'shell-shock' were treated at institutions such as Craiglockhart and one such treatment was the talking cure.⁷⁷ In a recent study on Rivers, Tim Bayliss-Smith argues that 'deviating from standard approaches such as electric shock treatment, Rivers instead pioneered the "talking cure", which relied on encouraging patients to discuss their experiences and emotions'.⁷⁸ Other ranks, however, were more often treated by means of electrical therapies and physiotherapy.

Thomas E F Webb's "'Dottyville": Craiglockhart War Hospital and shell-shock treatment in the First World War' discusses the hospital's fame and in particular its own hospital magazine the *Hydra*.⁷⁹ Webb presents the publication as a form of therapy in which patients could share their experiences in contributions to the magazine and, in doing so, could achieve a return to normal. He credits the *Hydra* as being a 'most important tool [of Arthur John Brock, who used it] both to communicate his aims to the patients and also as a form of

⁷⁵ Rushes were the term used to describe the sudden influx of patients straight from the front. Distribution saw some wounded soldiers taken straight to England for treatment via hospital ships.

⁷⁶ W. H. R. Rivers (1864 – 1922) was an English anthropologist, neurologist, ethnologist, and psychiatrist, best known for his work treating First World War officers who were suffering from 'shell shock'.

⁷⁷ Verbal therapy, the talking cure was a term used for verbal therapy developed by Josef Breuer a renowned neurophysiologist.

⁷⁸ Tim Bayliss-Smith, 'Rivers beyond Regeneration', *Research - University of Cambridge*, November 2014 <<https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/rivers-beyond-regeneration>>.

⁷⁹ Thomas E. F. Webb, "'Dottyville"—Craiglockhart War Hospital and Shell-Shock Treatment in the First World War', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 99.7 (2006), pp. 342–46 (p. 5), doi:10.1177/014107680609900716.

therapy in itself'.⁸⁰ In a similar way the autograph albums, and in particular Beatrice Bowman's use of the album, can be viewed as fulfilling the same kind of role as these Hospital magazines in helping the soldier-patients to heal. Given that the use of the *Hydra* was for officers rather than other ranks, Beatrice's album, in her pursuit of unique contributions from private soldiers and NCOs, was perhaps ahead of its time.

“Be warned all ye who here remain Never dare to dare again, This maiden o’ the night”:

Night Duty and Dealing with Nightmares⁸¹

Kirsty Harris in her study of Australian army nurse-patient relations in the First World War considers the nurse's role in soothing and reassuring the soldiers when they were distressed 'waking them from nightmares where "they lived through all their awful experience again"'.⁸² Although some poem entries refer to nightmares in the albums, one poem, 'O Maiden of the night', in Madge White's autograph book, provides a particular insight into the dread of the nightmare to come (Figure 13).

O' Maiden of the night
 Since here a patient I have been,
 Some numerous changes I have seen:
 But one I see as in a dream,
 O maiden o the night

At eight each night her toils begin
 And to this hut comes flying in
 This maiden o' the night

Now in this hut, in bed there lies
 one who dare not shut his eyes
 For should he – to his bedside flyes [sic]
 this maiden o' the night

His bed she grasps as oft' before
 And tips him on the hard cold floor
 He awakens to the hut's loud road
 Oh! Maiden o' the night

⁸⁰ Arthur John Brock (1879-1947) was an Edinburgh clinician with pre-war experience in treating neurasthenia.

⁸¹ 'Autograph Album Madge White VAD' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/254/WHIT.

⁸² Kirsty Harris, "All for the Boys": The Nurse-Patient Relationship of Australian Army Nurses in the First World War', in *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), p. 154.

As my khaki now I don again
 Be warned all ye who here remain
 Never dare to dare again
 This maiden o' the night:

Sincere thanks and best wishes yours sincerely S Agar 25 Royal Fus Oct 1918⁸³

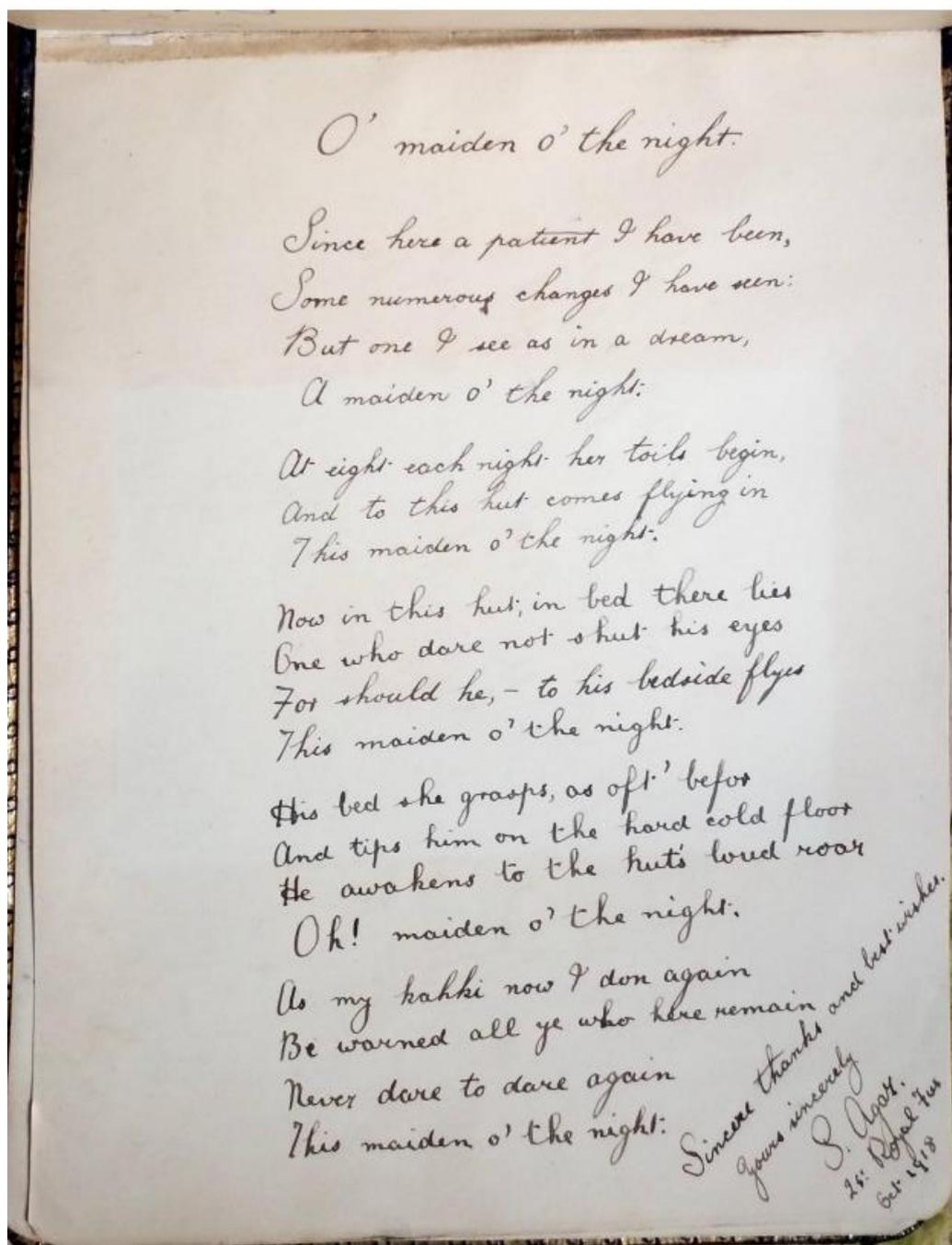


Figure 13 'O' Maiden of the night!' in 'Autograph Album Madge White VAD' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/254/WHIT.

⁸³ 'Autograph Album Madge White VAD'.

Given the references in poems and prose in other albums to the nurse beginning her night duty at eight or nine o'clock, the reference here to the maiden of the night beginning her toils at eight seems, at first, to refer simply to the nurse. But as the verse unfolds it becomes clear that this maiden is also the nightmare waiting to take hold of the patient. Harris recounts that Sister Anne Donnell 'discovered her patients feared sleeping and would seek her attention to put off "lights out"'.⁸⁴ In this poem the soldier is 'one who dare not shut his eyes' if he does, the 'maiden o' the night' flies directly to his bedside as his nightmare begins.⁸⁵ The 'maiden' here is ambiguous – both fearful dream and vigilant nurse. What he does not disclose though, is the exact nature of the nightmare. The fear of closing his eyes is that he wants to shut out the images that take form in his sleep. That these take a female form is possibly due to the presence of the nurse who, in trying to reassure him and wake him from his trauma, may cause it to be transformed due to altered state and assume a more menacing form.

The contradiction between feminine gentleness and the image of the nurse as mother with the tortuous feminine nightmare may have its roots in the daily treatment and dressings that the patient would have received from the nurse, often carried out with little or no analgesia.⁸⁶ But it also goes deeper in that the cries of young men on the battlefield, when badly injured and dying, for their mothers were not met. The caring mother could not rescue them from the reality of the horrors of war and their terrible experiences. Reality and nightmares merge, and we are left wondering if it is the nurse (or the nightmare, or perhaps a frightening amalgamation of the two) who 'tips him on the hard cold floor'.⁸⁷ A common practice was to place such patients in a safer position so that they could not harm themselves.

⁸⁴ Harris, "'All for the Boys": The Nurse-Patient Relationship of Australian Army Nurses in the First World War', p. 74.

⁸⁵ 'Autograph Album Madge White VAD'.

⁸⁶ Chapter four discusses how the nurse is presented in the albums not just as a gentle carer but is also seen as inflicting pain. Described By Duggy Arkinson in Lilian Robinson Album as 'torture loving'.

⁸⁷ 'Autograph Album Madge White VAD'.

It was also common practice to free up beds for more seriously injured casualties arriving in one of the rushes by placing less seriously injured patients on the floor.

As stated earlier, professional nurses and VADs did not receive specialist training to care for shell-shocked patients. Thurstan provides a short paragraph on nursing shell-shocked patients in her 1917 book, stating that ‘Insomnia is very common, and so are terrifying nightmares which are most distressing to witness’.⁸⁸ Experience was gained in each, sometimes terrifying, encounter. MacDonald recounts VAD Grace Bignold’s experiences of nursing one such patient:

One night I was absolutely terrified, Night Sister wanted to go to supper [...] and asked me if I would go up and sit with her patient [...] He was sound asleep and I was sitting on the other side of the room, his leg kept shooting up into the air, I was very frightened.⁸⁹

MacDonald also recounts the experiences of another VAD whose patient had exhibited no mental health issues during the day

I nearly got carved up with a knife. We had a patient who had shellshock, and he went berserk one night when I was on night duty...he had been all right up until then just nervous and quiet. I was amazed when he suddenly went berserk.⁹⁰

Thurstan states that ‘Bromide and other calming drugs are generally ordered’ together with complete bed rest and she notes that ‘there are now hospitals and convalescent homes arranged for them [for] special nerve treatment’.⁹¹ At a time when shell-shock’ and cowardice were widely seen as one and the same thing, we do not know how the nurses may have felt about these patients who, the albums would suggest, were only mild cases. Nightmares did not necessarily mean the soldier was suffering enough for further treatment of neurasthenia; Harris cites Sister Donnell’s awareness of the dread of sleep and closing their eyes: ‘The boys asked for such little things to ease their pain – This splint is loose, Could you bandage it up again please?’ – ‘Sister please give me some cotton wool to put under this strap’ – ‘Have you

⁸⁸ Violetta Thurstan, *A Textbook of War Nursing* (G P Putnam’s Sons, 1917), p. 138.

⁸⁹ MacDonald, *Roses of No Man’s Land*, p. 233.

⁹⁰ MacDonald, *Roses of No Man’s Land*, p. 234.

⁹¹ Thurstan, *A Textbook of War Nursing*, p. 139.

got anything to put on this rash under my arms?’⁹² This same delaying tactic is found in

Sister Mason’s album when a soldier-patient writes:

Sister Oh Sister do come again
My leg it has been aching again
My nights are so dreary
My back full of pain
Sister Oh Sister dress me over again
Sister if you love your nation will you bring me a hot fomentation?⁹³

Just as Sister Donnell acknowledges the procrastination of the soldier to prolong that moment of sleep, this verse shows a similar manipulation of Sister Mason to delay the sleep the patient fears. The writer demonstrates a strong self-awareness of his manipulation of the nurse and his reliance on her attention to help ease his anxieties, which are evidenced by his aching leg and back pain. However, the phrase about his dreary nights suggests the long hours to be endured and the attention of the Sister will help pass some of the time. By appealing to her ‘love [of] your nation’ he is aligning himself as having done his patriotic duty and asking her to do her part and reward him with the hot fomentation.⁹⁴ His contribution is acknowledging his behaviour and can also be viewed as an apology for his demands on Sister Mason and a plea for her to understand why he is making those demands.

Soldiers declaring a range of forms of less visible maladies may also have been considered to be malingers, although Bourke argues that such behaviour might mask neurasthenia.⁹⁵ As the soldiers recovered, they knew that they would be returned to the front and face the same horrors and risk of imminent death again. It is understandable that this may have caused them to prolong their recovery. The prevailing attitude to malingering,

⁹² Harris, “‘All for the Boys’ :The Nurse-Patient Relationship of Australian Army Nurses in the First World War’, p. 74.

⁹³ ‘Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R’.

⁹⁴ ‘Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R’.

⁹⁵ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 21.

particularly in wartime, was one of intolerance. It was considered an ‘evasion of man’s duty to the state and to other men’.⁹⁶

In hospitals, not all malingering was reported. Carden-Coyne cites one sister who found ‘many of the men fit for duty, yet while “their corporeal bodies are up to scratch,” patients complain of pains and sleeplessness to the MO’.⁹⁷ Carden-Coyne goes on to argue that ‘malingering was an accepted practice within the ward culture to an extent that patients boasted about their efforts’.⁹⁸ It is possible to view verses like the one above, with its delaying tactics for recovery, as an open acknowledgement of the patients’ efforts at malingering and of a certain collusion with the nurse.

For many though, it is the ‘soothing and reassurance’ during the dread of the night that caused contributors to describe the nurse as their ‘guardian of the night’ as seen earlier in Marion Jones’s album.⁹⁹ In Emily Cott’s album, we are informed of the work of these nurses in the following verse:

‘A toast to our nurses and sisters’

Who do their work with tender care
 And all unthinking of health or danger
 Who, with silent steps and tender hands
 Are working night and day
 To comfort those who are in sore distress¹⁰⁰
 The victims of a shell torn land

The poem goes on to ask the question:

[...] who are the real heroes of this war
 Our soldiers or our women kind?
 I think everyone will join and say with me
 Our “Nurses and our Sister”.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 78.

⁹⁷ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 235.

⁹⁸ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 236.

⁹⁹ ‘Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD’.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R’.

¹⁰¹ ‘Autograph Album Emily Cott QAIMNS R’.

Here we see the soldier's distinction between the VAD (Nurses) and the Military Nurse (Sister) but also the use of the autograph album as a means to memorialise 'heroes' as discussed in chapter one. Here the soldier returns the compliment by labelling the nurse as a hero also in this war for her battle with their injuries and for working tirelessly on their behalf. The popular image of the VAD as the conscripted soldier counterpart doing her bit out of patriotism and self-sacrifice as, according to Fell, embodied in the sacrifice of Edith Cavell. Fell questions if the public had a 'rose-tinted' perception of these nurses arguing that 'these idealized (or demonized) cultural representations of nurses had little to do with the day-to-day lives' of the nurses working in the hospitals.¹⁰² There is also a resonance with the ideals and realities of nursing discussed earlier. Those aspirations to care and the hard work involved are reflected back by the soldier-patient's question 'Who do their work with tender care?'¹⁰³

'Capt. in ward to Sister Mason on night duty stealing in the ward at 2.0 am with a torch': Lights of the World?¹⁰⁴

The reassurance and comfort of the night nurse with her torch is made especially clear in a verse in Sister Mason's album. It appears two-thirds of the way through the album, written almost as a letter would be drafted, with name, date, address, and pleasantries all encompassed in a small space (Figure 14). Lt. Cawley's greeting of 'Sister you're the light of the world with that torch' sends him into a kind of reverie and he links the event with a hymn of the time:

Light of the world faint were our weary feet with wandering far| but thou didst come
our lonely hearts to greet thou morning star| and thou didst bid me lift my hand to
thee| and afterwards said "your pulse is 70".¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Fell, 'Remembering First World War Nursing', p. 270.

¹⁰³ 'Autograph Album Lydia Luxford QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/69/LUXE.

¹⁰⁴ 'Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R'.

¹⁰⁵ 'Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R'.

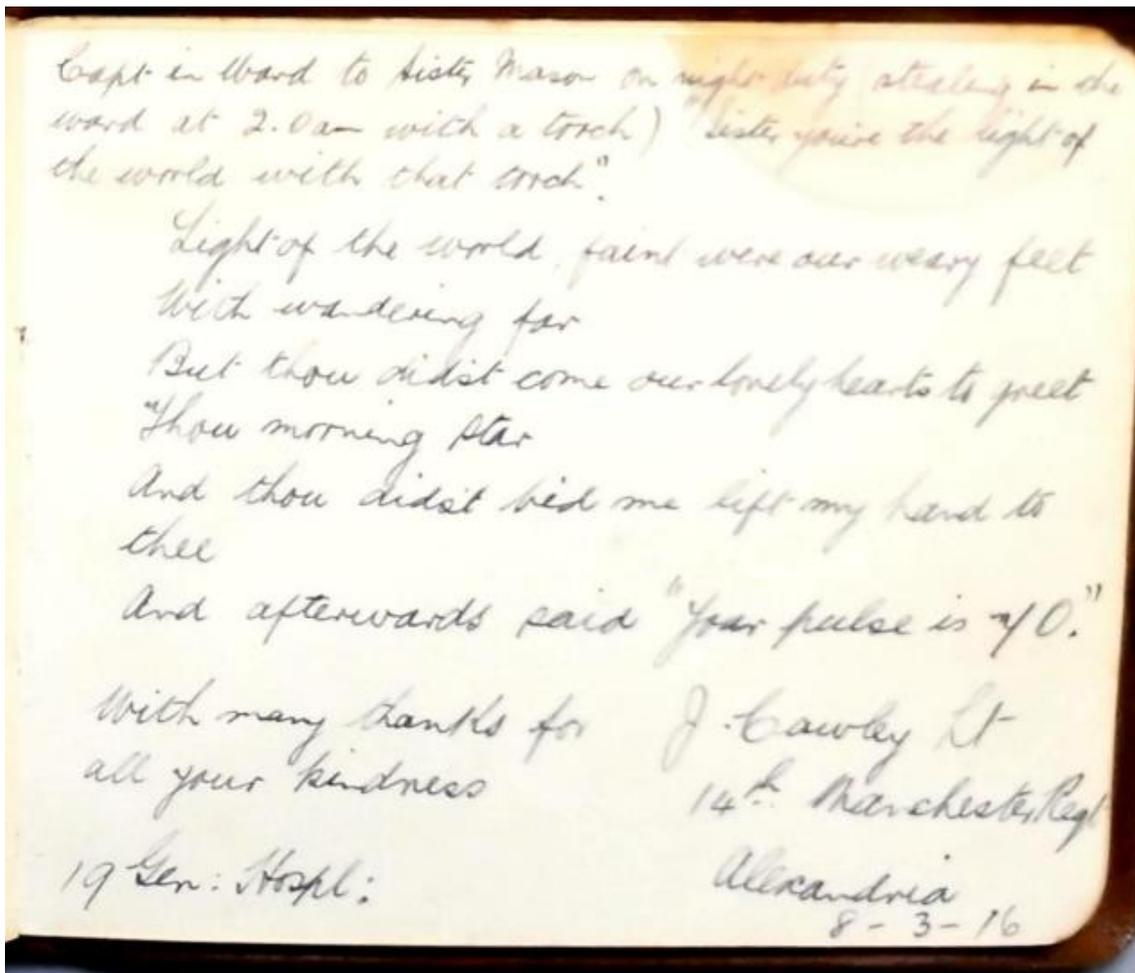


Figure 14. Lt. Cawley's entry in 'Autograph Album Ethel F Mason QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks, Aldershot), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, 2019 25/15.

The opening phrase detailing contributor, recipient, place, and time is written in the style of a military report. Brief and to the point we immediately know that the Captain is reporting to the Sister and, although the tone suggests an equality of position or rank between them, the Sister has the authority in the relationship. The entry, however, is by a Lieutenant (Lt.) rather than a Captain. Is this an overheard conversation heard during the night that he reports here? Records for No. 19 General Hospital (GH) Alexandria provide details of several Captains on F Ward who were on the ward at the same time as Lt. Cawley. The quote also acknowledges the nurse as a military comrade.

This entry contrasts with some of the entries in the VAD nurse albums in that it indicates a more rigid relationship between the two with boundaries that are unspoken but

known. As a military nurse she has a wider authority over the soldiers in her care than a VAD nurse would have. Her report on behaviour, such as malingering, would be made through military channels and could result in a soldier being disciplined. A VAD nurse would report such incidents to the Sister in the first instance. The Sister, therefore, was an individual in a position of power. Lt. Cawley respects that position, and we see that in the respectful establishment of a professional relationship in the opening statement.

We are immediately given a situation report in the opening line: ‘Captain in ward to Sister.’¹⁰⁶ It is 2am on the ward, a time when routine observations were often carried out. Lt. Cawley is awake, but we don’t know if he couldn’t sleep or if Sister Mason’s arrival woke him. She is obviously trying not to disturb the sleeping men by ‘stealing in the ward’.¹⁰⁷ She is on her ward round checking on patients. This may be to check on dressings and, in this case, to make her routine observations.

‘Stealing in the ward at 2am’ also conjures up the relative quiet of the ward and enhances the intimate interaction between the nurse and her patient.¹⁰⁸ There is almost something illicit suggested here, much as a lover would steal in to meet the object of her desire unobserved and participate in something forbidden but hoped for. Both Catherine Judd and Miriam Bailin consider the image of the nurse in the sick room as an object of desire, with Judd stating that ‘the Victorian nurse mobilised issues analogous to those raised by the fallen women in terms of class, gender and sexuality’.¹⁰⁹

Despite the reforms to nursing and its increasing respectability as a career choice for well-off young women emerging from the Victorian era through the Edwardian era and into the early decades of the twentieth century there was still a lingering association of nursing with lax morals of certain women. Bailin echoes this when she states that ‘illness not only

¹⁰⁶ ‘Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R’.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R’.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R’.

¹⁰⁹ Judd, *Bedtime Seductions*, p. 6.

substitutes the sick body for the troubled self but becomes a way of accommodating desires which are not legitimate in the society at large'.¹¹⁰ Young, impressionable soldier-patients who required very intimate care from young women could, as Bailin argues, see that intimate care in terms of desire.

The captain's spoken phrase, 'Sister you are the light of the world with that torch', suggests a gentle mocking of her reassuring presence but at the same time he is juxtaposing an everyday object with a concept on an extraordinary level.¹¹¹ His 'world' at this point is the ward he is in, but it also suggests a universal, all-encompassing religious ideology for him. This religious imagery is taken up in the verse that follows. It is the first verse from a hymn, and whereas the entry until this point is in short sentences, he now separates the verse by indenting it from the prose above it. Indenting has, however, restricted his space and the rhyming ends of each line are dropped to a new line to ensure the feel of the rhythm of the verse is maintained.

By visually separating the verse from the prose in this way we are taken into Lt Cawley's reverie. By 1916 the war had been prosecuted for two years with no end in sight. Many people would have looked to their religion for comfort in what were seen as dark days. This hymn speaks of light and positions the hope of Sister Mason with her torch in the same bracket as the hope and faith that people had in their religion, God, and Jesus.

The hymn was written in June 1901 by Laura Ormiston Chant (1848-1923) in response to a request from the Superintendent of a Wesleyan Mission in Manchester and included in the Methodist Hymn book in 1904. It is often regarded as an imitation of 'Lead Kindly Light' by Cardinal Newman which was associated with the sinking of RMS Titanic in 1912 and was sung at a service in 1915 for troops in the trenches before battle.¹¹² Chaplains

¹¹⁰ Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction*, p. 21.

¹¹¹ 'Autograph Album Edith F Mason QAIMNS R'.

¹¹² Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890), theologian, academic, historian, writer and poet. He wrote 'Lead Kindly Light' in 1833 and it was published in 1834 as "the pillar of the Cloud" in the *British Magazine*.

held services for troops before battles which helped in calming fears in the hours leading up to zero and going over the top. John Keegan argues that the ‘desire for spiritual fortification before battle’ was a ‘tribal rite’ and cites that for ‘the Christian Armies of the [...] middle ages, like Henry [V] at Agincourt [...] it was not enough to have written home, made one’s will and shaken hands with friends; [but] to have been to church was for many a necessary cap-stone of the preliminaries’.¹¹³

Heather Josselyn-Cranson’s study, *The Hymns and Hymn writers of World War 1*, argues that hymns of the great war have, largely, been neglected. She rightly argues they are ‘not only to be heard but to be sung by the people’.¹¹⁴ This collective outpouring through song enables emotions, fears, and anxieties to be expressed in a supportive environment. Hymns such as ‘O God our help in Ages Past’, ‘Jerusalem’ and ‘Abide with Me’ are synonymous with war and became a source of comfort and hope for both civilians and soldiers in times of great tragedy and national peril. Their association with the trauma of the losses in World War One is carried on in the Remembrance Services and at many funerals today.

A search of genealogy sites uncovered details of John Cawley who lived in Higher Openshaw Lancashire working as a carpet planner. He married in the Primitive Methodist church in 1911 and details of his enlistment show he joined the 14th Manchester Regiment on 9 January 1915. In May 1915 he was granted a temporary commission in the Manchester Regiment. Admission and discharge records for No. 19 GH Alexandria confirm that Lt. Cawley was a Primitive Methodist, and this may have been the reason for his choice of Methodist hymn. Given that ‘Lead Kindly Light’ was a popular war-time hymn, Laura

¹¹³ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and The Somme* (The Bodley Head, 2014), pp. 294–95.

¹¹⁴ Heather Josselyn-Cranson, “‘O God, the Strength of Those Who War’: The Hymns and Hymn Writers of World War I”, *Lied Und Populäre Kultur / Song and Popular Culture*, 63 (2018), pp. 167–88 (p. 168).

Ormiston Chant's alternative 'Light of the World' written in response to Newman's hymn may well have been equally popular amongst Methodists.¹¹⁵

Through the references to hymns and the connected imagery of the saviour, the verse suggests that, just as Jesus was the Light of the world who came to save sinners, so Sister Mason came to the ward to save the wounded soldiers, both physically and mentally. Lt. Cawley places her on a higher plane, from which she has arrived to 'save' him. Was he restless, or in pain? Was he prone to nightmares as many soldiers were due to the experiences of warfare? Her arrival obviously brought light into his life and therefore hope of a better night's sleep for having seen her.

Admission records show that Lt. Cawley had been on the ward for a month when Sister Mason did her ward round and so he may have been familiar with her routine. Records for No. 19 GH Alexandria show that Second Lieutenant Cawley was twenty-nine years old, had served eighteen months with the 14th Manchester Regiment and had been in Egypt one month when he was admitted to ward F No. 19 GH for catarrh and tonsillitis on 8 February 1916.

There are two strong candidates for the Captain at this time on ward. Capt. P. T. Priestley (twenty-eight years old) was admitted to F Ward on 10 February 1916 with Antral disease (Peptic ulcer) and discharged from the ward back to England on 15 March 1916, a total of thirty-five days in hospital. He was from the RAMC Medical stores Depot in Alexandria, served one year and five months in the Corps and four months in his unit in Egypt. The other potential candidate was Capt. A. Fraser (thirty-nine years old) admitted on 24 February 1916 with appendicitis to ward F and discharged back to England on 15 March 1916, a total of twenty-one days in hospital.¹¹⁶ His regiment was the Royal Artillery and he

¹¹⁵ Record Transcription: British Armed Forces, First World War Soldiers' Medical Records | findmypast.co.uk ;[https://www.findmypast.co.uk/TNA 106/1285](https://www.findmypast.co.uk/TNA%20106/1285). Laura Ormiston Chant, nee Dibdin, 1848-1923. 'Light of the World' was written in 1901 and considered an imitation of Newman's 'Lead Kindly Light'.

¹¹⁶ Record Transcription: British Armed Forces, First World War Soldiers' Medical Records | findmypast.co.uk

had served twenty-six years and one year in Egypt. He was being cared for in No. 19 GH Alexandria which suggests he was part of the Palestine campaign.

Of these two potential Captains from the entry, Capt. Priestley is a more likely candidate. He was in the RAMC, and he may have known Sister Mason prior to his admission, and this makes his address in the style of a report more likely as he may have addressed her in similar fashion if they met when dealing with medical stores for the ward. There are five entries from RAMC personnel in Sister Mason's album which supports the argument that Sister Mason knew Capt. Priestley prior to his admission. Lt. Cawley was just a year older than Capt. Priestley and they may have struck up a friendship and been near each other in the ward.

However, the other candidate as the Captain of the entry (Capt. Fraser) has contributed to the album (Figure 15). As there are a few anonymous entries the possibility that Capt. Priestley contributed as well cannot be ruled out.

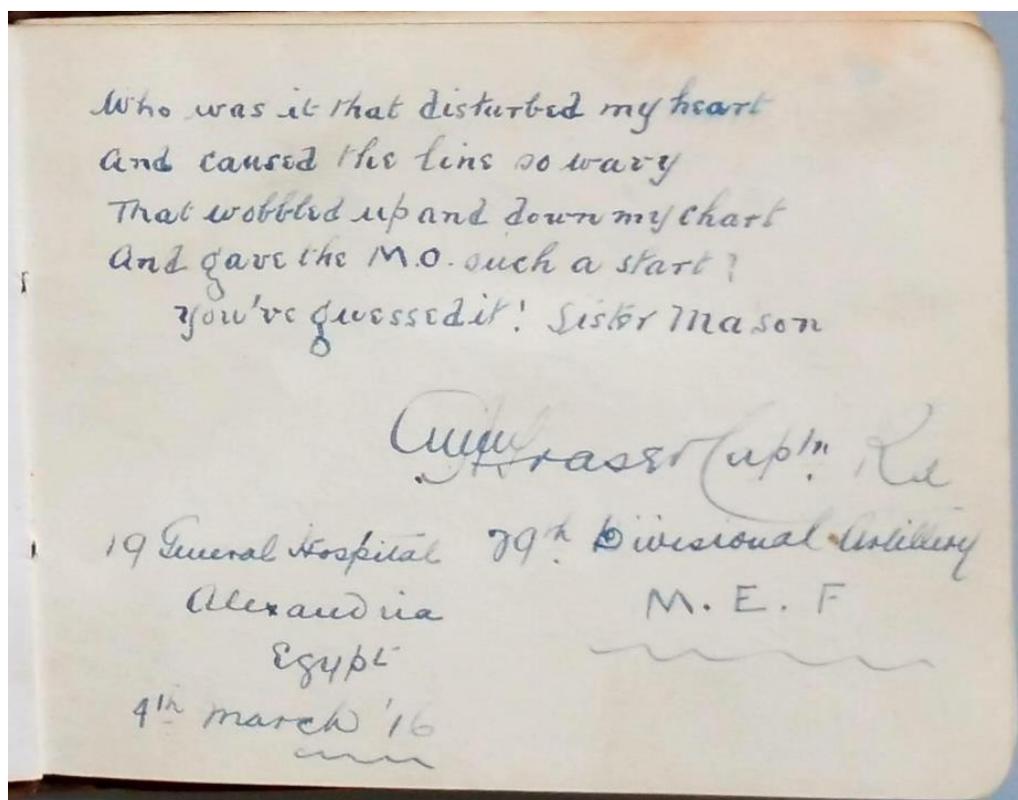


Figure 15. Capt. Fraser in 'Autograph Album Ethel F Mason QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks, Aldershot), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, 2019 25/15.

Conclusion

This chapter has expanded the themes discussed in chapter two. It uncovers the impact of night duty on both the soldier patient and the nurse herself in caring for a soldier having nightmares from his experiences at the front. I suggest this was a difficult time for both and that the album was a means for the soldier to acknowledge this. Although we do not know the nurses' views of the soldier-patients' contributions and what their responses were to the praise and thanks given for their care, neither do we know if the nurses viewed some of these patients as malingerers or, more sympathetically, as frightened young men trying to delay a return to the front by gaining the nurses' attention during the night hoping for a confirmation that they were not yet fit to fight. By expressing their vulnerability through the recounting of their nightmares in their contributions to the album, the soldiers may be utilising the album as an extension of talking therapy. This theme will be further developed in chapter six, which will examine therapeutic aspects within the album for both nurses and soldier-patients. Since many records of servicemen from the First World War are lost, a deep dive into the albums' entries provides details not otherwise available about the hospitals, the nurses, and their patients. As well as adding to the historical data on the work of First World War nursing, these albums provide an unparalleled insight into the ways nurses perceived the ideals and realities of their role, and how patients experienced their care.

Chapter Four

Anatomy of an Autograph Album

This chapter places the archive in historical context as viewed through the prism of a military nurse's role in the First World War. A single autograph book of military nurse Sister Charlotte Lilian Anne (Lilian) Robinson has been selected from the archive as it presents the combination of an autograph album that can be paired with her diaries.¹ It is also very representative of the range of entries in other autograph albums in the archive and, like each album, includes unique creative work and distinctive combinations of materials from sketches to verses. Lilian's album is interesting as it contains a range of contributions from officers in contrast to the other albums in the archive with contributions mainly of soldiers of other ranks (ORs). Beginning in 1914 the album extends until just after the war.² Together with Lilian's diaries, it is possible to map out her deployment journey within the Casualty Evacuation (CasEvac) chain and to provide a partial backstory to the autograph book.³ Lilian's own presence in her autograph album provides an insight into her ethos of military nursing, and her patients' perspectives of their care.

A detailed study of this album offers a way to examine the stories of its contributors.

By scrutinising the contributions, we can explore how Edwardian education influenced the

¹ 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

² National Archives' reference WO399/7128. Charlotte Lilian Annie Robinson born 15 January 1884 in Shanghai China. Trained at St George's Hospital Hyde Park Corner London April 1908–1912. Enlisted with rank of Staff Nurse 21 October 1912, promoted to Sister 21 October 1917 and subsequently Matron 10 August 1933. She retired from QARANC (QAIMNS) 14 January 1941 serving 28 years and 86 days. Detailed records of her service start in 1922 with just dates of her deployment with BEF listed. 'Service Records Charlotte Lilian Anne Robinson TNA WO399/7128'.

³ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection. The casualty evacuation chain provided care from point of wounding to convalescence back in UK.

men who fought in the war and how they shared their personal experiences. The contributions will also be analysed in the context of previous work on themes such as masculinity, power, survival, education, class, and gender in the First World War.

Sister Robinson Enlists in the QAIMNS

Charlotte Lilian Anne Robinson (15 January 1884 – 01 February 1968) trained at St George's Hospital, London. Lilian Robinson, as she was known, enlisted in Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) and was posted to Aldershot on 21 October 1912. Her records show that she was awarded the Associate of the Royal Red Cross (ARRC) on 3 June 1918, the Military Medal on 30 July 1918, and was mentioned in dispatches on 9 September 1921.⁴ Lilian held a full career as a military nurse; her service records detail her promotion to Matron, service in India and China during the 1930s, and her retirement from service in 1941.

On 8 August 1914 Lilian was posted to No. 2 General Hospital (GH); the Commanding Officer was Col. Holt and the Matron was a Miss Richards. The medical services came under the overall command of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), and Lilian subsequently deployed with the BEF for the duration of the war. Her war diaries begin on 13 August 1914, recounting her experiences of arriving in France and setting up No. 2 GH.⁵ Together with forty-four other medical personnel and BEF Matron-in-Chief Dame Maud McCarthy, whose own diary records joining No. 2 GH and outward journey, Lilian had boarded 'Comrie Castle' at 2.45am on 14 August 1914. The ship left for France at midnight escorted by two armoured cruisers and an airship. They arrived at Le Havre on 15 August at 14:40. Lilian had been on board for thirty-six hours.

⁴ 'Service Records Charlotte Lilian Anne Robinson TNA WO399/7128'.

⁵ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

Although some nurses did work in the Casualty Clearing Stations (CCS) near the front line, many more worked in Base or Stationary Hospitals (SH) further back. We know from Lilian's diary that she deployed to Le Havre to set up a stationary hospital to receive casualties as part of the CasEvac chain before their onward movement to either a UK hospital or a return to the front.

Lilian was expecting No. 2 GH to deploy nearer the front, instead, No. 6 SH was to go. She expresses disappointment in her diary: 'awful news. No. 2 is not to move up to Front but stay as base hospital here. Too sickening. News was confirmed on the 17th'.⁶ 'Here' was Le Havre which was the site of the large French and English Base hospitals. On 24 August her diaries record that she is swiftly posted to the *Casino* which is one of four receiving hospitals.⁷ The *Casino* was at the Victoria Hotel, which later housed No. 14 GH or SH and had a large Officers' section.⁸ Later, Lilian notes that many of the Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses (VADs) were women employed by the War Office in France and that many of them were titled ladies. In August and September 1914, however, Lilian makes no mention of these ladies in her diary.

Lilian sums up her rising expectations of the work at *Casino* in her diary on 24 August 1914: 'This is to be the real thing!'⁹ She relates that there are eighty-six beds made ready and that casualties are expected the following day. The expected casualties do not materialise and a further 120 beds are subsequently made available. On 27 August Lilian

⁶ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

⁷ Receiving hospitals were put on alert to receive casualties from battles. This system endeavoured to provide order and organization to ensure that no one hospital would become overwhelmed and that each designated hospital was in a state of readiness to 'receive' the injured. The hospitals were on a rota for receiving for a set period of time. The *Palais du Régates* received officers, *Casino*, soldiers of other ranks, *Gare Maritime* was for acute surgical and the fourth, *Sanvic*, for the care of patients with chronic illness.

⁸ There were two types of base hospitals, stationary and general hospitals which were part of the casualty evacuation chain. There were two stationary hospitals per division that could take 400 casualties, general hospitals had capacity for 1040 casualties. ⁸ 'British Base Hospitals in France', *The Long, Long Trail* <<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/british-base-hospitals-in-france/>> [accessed 1 May 2025].

⁹ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

records that 2000 English casualties from the battle of Mons are expected. Instead, the casualties are sent to Rouen, and Lilian's frustration is recorded, as she and a colleague 'nearly wept'.¹⁰ It was not until 28 August 1914 that Lilian's hospital began receiving casualties.

Amongst Lilian's personal possessions during her time as a military nurse was an autograph album. It is not known if she took it with her or if it was a present among the many parcels she received from home. On 24 October her diary records a parcel that included stationery and pocket books. Alternatively, she may have received the autograph album as a Christmas present among the 'enormous sack full of xmas [sic] parcels'.¹¹ Pocket-sized at 6" x 4" its cover is of bright red leather with the word *Album* in gold leaf emblazoned on the cover. Near the beginning, she has written her name 'Lilian C. A. Robinson' and underlined it with a flourish.¹² There are thirty-three entries in total spanning the duration of the war from December 1914 to June 1920. Of these, there are seven anonymous entries in a hand that is identical to both her diary and album entries signed as Lilian's. If these are indeed Lilian's own contributions to her album, this prominent presence in her own album raises questions about how far owners wrote themselves into their autograph albums. The other albums in the archive suggest this is rare and possibly unique to Lilian.

The album accompanied Lilian Robinson for the duration of her service in the First World War. During that time, the Officers of the hospitals she was working at contributed various entries from the simple recording of name, rank, and regiment, to details and observations of the care they were receiving, together with sketches and watercolours that portray a longing for a lost era wiped away by the violence of trench warfare. These

¹⁰ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

¹¹ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

¹² 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

contributions provide an insight into the type of nurse Lilian was and the relationships that developed between her and her patients.¹³

‘Xmas 1914’ at Bailleul¹⁴

A picture emerges from the autograph album of Lilian’s movement around the various hospitals in the area over the five-year period that the book covers. On 30 October 1914 Lilian received notice to proceed to Boulogne. She is one of five nurses out of forty-two chosen to move nearer the front. Although excited at being chosen to go, later diary entries show her disappointment at watching her colleagues being deployed to casualty clearing hospitals (CCS) much nearer the front and giving what today would be the equivalent of emergency unit care. On 2 November she records ‘real active service at last’.¹⁵ However, on 27 November Lilian is to move again. This time her excitement and growing expectation is clear:

Got order this evng to go to No. 2 clearing hosp. I knew I wd get a clearing hosp!...We are going to Bailleul to No. 2 clearing hospital¹⁶. It is well beyond Hazebrüch & just a few miles fr. Ypres, & must be I should think quite the nearest hosp. of any kind to the firing line. The officer on board said to me, “Do you know you are going right up to the firing line?”. I shall soon know a bit more about shells etc, I expect than may be pleasant [...] Arrived Bailleul 2.15 am. [sic]¹⁷

On 15 December 1914 Lilian received a visit from Maud McCarthy, Matron-in-chief of the BEF. Maud McCarthy recorded the visit in her diary:

Left by motor car at 8 am. in driving rain for Bailleul where we arrived at about 10 am. Drove straight to No. 2 Clearing Hospital, Major Leake in charge, Miss C. L. A. Robinson and 4 Reserves on duty. The Hospital being in a Priests’ College, capable of taking from 3 to 400 pts.¹⁸

Lilian records the visit in her journal on 15 December too:

¹³ The majority of entries in Lilian’s autograph book are from Officers. She was working in the Officers hospitals during the war; however, some entries do not provide ranks and are possibly from the other ranks i.e. Privates, L/Cpl.’s and Sgts. ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

¹⁴ ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

¹⁵ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’.

¹⁶ As the war front dug in so by 1915 the clearing hospitals became static and re-designated as Casualty Clearing Stations (CCS). This enabled nurses to be deployed forward to work in them.

¹⁷ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’.

¹⁸ Maud McCarthy, ‘War Diary: Matron-in-Chief’, 1914, The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War. WO95/3988-91

Miss McCarthy arrived this mng & inspected the hosp. She was v. pleased with all, & thought our theatre excellent. She told the Major & me it was all our own regular sisters coming up, & Major Leake said at once, “Well, I hope you are not sending anybody senior to Miss Robinson as I am very anxious she should continue to be matron here”. It was really awfully nice of him, but it has upset all Miss McC’s plans as she read me out the names of the 6 coming here & No. 8, & all were my seniors except 2 whose names I did not know, but Miss McCarthy said to me she wd see what she cd do, as she wd have liked me to be still in charge, as Major L. wished it. She said to me mine was a very responsible post, but she had sent me up in the first place because she knew I was very capable!¹⁹

Lilian’s brief few words on 29 November 1914, ‘I shall soon know a bit more about shells etc, I expect than may be pleasant’, are quite prophetic.²⁰ In 1917 her hospital was shelled and her actions in staying with her patients earned her the Military Medal (MM). It also confirms the faith that Matron-in Chief Maud McCarthy had in Lilian’s capabilities. These diary entries are very matter-of-fact, and it is in the autograph albums that we see Lilian facing her doubts and fears as well as her ambitions in the selected entries she makes which will be discussed in more detail in this chapter.

Lilian met two local women and a Doctor (Jeanne Marie and Alice Bels and Doctor Bels) at Bailleul (Figure 1). The Mme Bels first appear in Lilian’s diary on 1 January 1915, when they invited her to tea with them on 4 January. The Bels’ contributions in the album are a pencil drawing of the Town Hall and a verse about the town. (Figure 2) The drawing is rather crude but can be compared with the Town Hall today (Figure 3).

¹⁹ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’.

²⁰ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’.

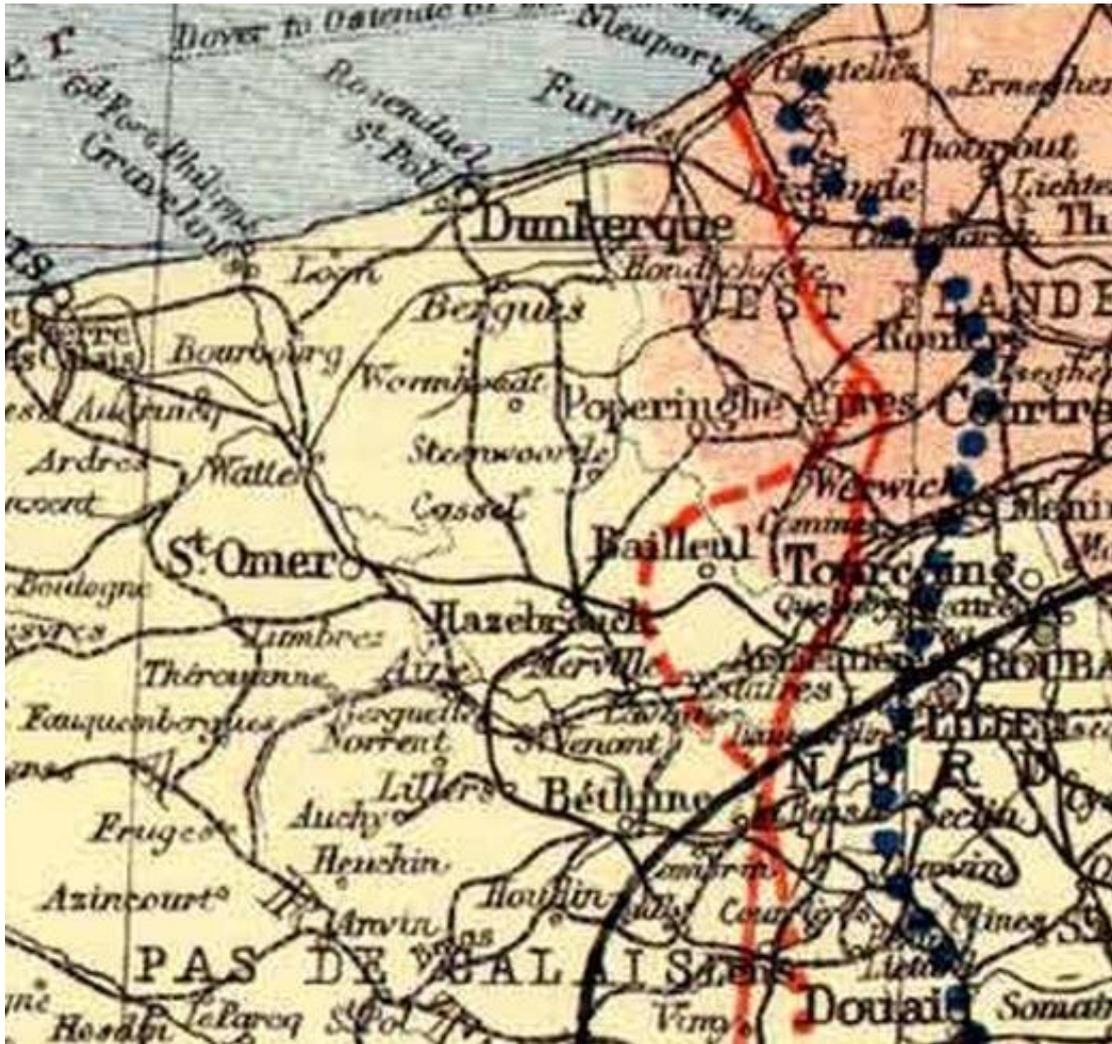


Figure 1. Location of Bailleul where Lilian Robinson worked at a CCS in 1915. Map showing the Theatre of War on the Western Fronts main battle lines September 1914 to November 1918. Courtesy of Chris Baker, 'Military Hospitals in the British Isles 1914-1918', *The Long, Long Trail - Researching Soldiers of the British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918*, 1996 <<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/soldiers/a-soldiers-life-1914-1918/the-evacuation-chain-for-wounded-and-sick-soldiers/military-hospitals-in-the-british-isles-1914-1918/>> [accessed 12 August 2023].



Figure 2. Sketch of Bailleul Town Hall which accompanies a poem by the Mesdames Bels from 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF00014.1.



Figure 3. Mary Evans Picture Library. Picture No. 11677305, Town Hall, Bailleul, Nord Northern France. View of the Town Hall and Square at Bailleul Nord Northern France before the First World War. Credit: The Patricia Aubrey Collection / Mary Evans.

The verse by the Mesdames Bel in Lilian's diary is in French and describes the small town in the early morning sun and the sound of the church bells, which once encountered will not be forgotten. It is poignant in that Bailleul was badly destroyed towards the end of the war:

If you could see my little town blown by a light morning breeze waking up gently listening to the country song, the church bells with their crystal song, you would never forget my small town where the wind sings happily. If you could see the stone church bell tower in the rays of sunrise bathing in the morning light, the dawn walking through the town with its golden reflections, you can always see the stone tower glistening in the morning sun's rays.²¹

As Lilian moved around the various hospitals and clearing stations her selection of contributors for her autograph album differed. One entry, dated 6 April 1915, is a comical sketch entitled 'The hospital fireman of 24 General Hospital' (Etaples 1915). There is, however, a more serious side to the sketch. Some hospitals and the CCS were under canvas or in wooden huts and were at high fire risk. Although the contributor locates the fireman at No. 24 Stationary Hospital, Lilian appears to be working at No. 14 Stationary Hospital located at Wimereux.²² By 1917 the autograph entries show that Lilian is working at No. 4 Stationary Hospital based in the Chateau and the Old Distillery at Arques, to the south-east of St. Omer.²³ In *A Sister's War*, Watson explores the diaries of TFNS nurse Alice Slythe and Slythe recounts in her diary, a fire at a hospital in Wimereux, recalling that "the most appalling thing happened & I think it will haunt me for months".²⁴ Slythe states the fire was caused by an electric fault in a linen store observing that 'the British were better at fighting fires than the French'.²⁵

²¹ 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'; 'Bailleul' in 'Lilian Robinson's Diary (1915-16)', QARANC Association Heritage Collections. Translation courtesy of Dawn Rumming.

²² Wimereux is on the coast approximately 55 Km from St Omer.

²³ Post-war documentation on the locations of some of the hospitals is confusing.

²⁴ Watson, 'A Sister's War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe', p. 110. TFNS Alice Slythe was a contemporary of Lilian born the year before. She deployed to France in May 1915 working at Le Havre, Wimereux and Bailleul. It is possible the two women knew of each other.

²⁵ Watson, 'A Sister's War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe', p. 110.

Ethos and Esprit de Corps of a Nursing Sister: Lilian sets out her Aspirational Code of Conduct

There are three entries believed to have been contributed to the album by Lilian, which she has initialled 'LR'. Two of the entries are in a similar mantra style which reflects strength through adversity, extolling the virtues she holds important as a nurse. The third contribution that has been initialled 'LR' is a pen and ink drawing of Charlie Chaplin entitled 'biking', (Figure 4) which occurs well into the album. In contrast to many of the other contributions this has a more light-hearted tone to it. Carden-Coyne explores the use of humour in hospitals and, in particular, the Hospital Gazettes that emerged during the First World War.²⁶ She argues that humour can connect the military hierarchy with the other ranks and be used as a distraction to the tragedy of the daily events: 'Humour was not just a weapon of the weak, but also an instrument of order, entwining all levels in a network of personal attachments and a collective identity within the regimental units'.²⁷

It can be argued that the 'biking' image represents Lilian's perception of her work on the wards. She is constantly on the move, rushing to tend to the demands of the patients from morning to night, the rising or setting sun providing a timeline to the frenetic nature of her work. It is a light-hearted image and may even be a private joke with some of the contributors who saw her rushing around answering their calls and perhaps indicates how Lilian sees herself at the end of her shift. Lilian's service records provide evidence of Lilian's fondness for cycling. Later in her career as Matron in C Southern Command Poona, India she was injured while riding a bike whilst off duty.²⁸

²⁶ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, pp. 319–23.

²⁷ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 319.

²⁸ 'Service Records Charlotte Lilian Anne Robinson TNA WO399/7128'.



Figure 4. 'Charlie Chaplin biking' in 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF00014.1.

Carden-Coyne also suggests that cartoons were a means of social protest and provided a strategy to empower the contributor: 'Humorous protest was officially sanctioned [...] cartoons were the main means of alleviating the strain and boredom of war [...] patient humour was a performance of empowerment'.²⁹ In this instance, Lilian is showing her willingness to tend to her patients as quickly as possible, but also the characterisation of herself as Charlie Chaplin pushes back against any criticism of her actions by suggesting that she is doing her best.

²⁹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 320.

The earliest dated entry in Lilian's book is 'Xmas 1914 B. E. Force' and is a verse by Robert Browning anthologised in *King Albert's Book*.³⁰ It appears near the front of the book but is not the first. Although it is an anonymous contribution, it may well have been entered by Lilian as the hand is very similar in style; if so, it is the first of Lilian's entries. Lilian's military records show only that she served with the B.E.F. for the duration of the war and the B.E.F. inscription shows the writer is clearly aligning themselves with the British Expeditionary force.³¹ As Lilian had been in France since August 1914, this first date may indicate that *King Albert's Book* was a Christmas present, but there is no evidence as to who may have sent it.

King Albert's Book was published by Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton on 16 December 1914 and sold for three shillings. It was advertised in many newspapers which also printed excerpts to entice people to purchase the book. It was sold for the benefit of the *Daily Telegraph's* Belgium relief fund.³² There were 240 contributions from thirteen nations and many of these contributions were from eminent writers, artists, poets, and statesmen of the period. Much of it was lamenting the fall of 'brave little Belgium' and inspiring the British nation through the message that Belgium's friends would rally to her aid. The art in *King Albert's Book* ranges from Saints in armour, such as Joan of Arc rising victorious from the flames and fallen soldiers in the presence of angels to idyllic pastoral views reminding the reader of what is being fought for and the sacrifice needed. The verses used are of a similar nature reiterating that the enemy would be routed by the combined efforts of everyone. Sold for the Belgium Relief Fund, these books likely found their way to the hospitals in France and

³⁰ *King Albert's Book* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), pp. 110–11.

³¹ TNA 'WO 399/7128 Military Record C L A Robinson', The National Archives.

³² George I. Gay and H.H. Fisher, *Public Relations of The Commission For Relief in Belgium* (Stanford University Press, 1929); 'War Relief Fund "Daily Telegraph" Bradford: Panic at Brussels', *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 18 August 1914.

Belgium, such as the one that Lilian worked at, and may have been a source of empowerment and inspiration in difficult times for Lilian.

Several of the contributions in Lilian's autograph album are from *King Albert's Book* and, whilst some are initialled 'LR', others are anonymous with writing that bears a strong resemblance to Lilian's. They are distributed throughout the album, but several have the date of January or February 1915. This may support the view that both the autograph album and *King Albert's Book* were Christmas presents.

Lilian may have been inspired to emulate *King Albert's Book* with contributions by her patients, mainly of verse and art, in her album. There is a similarity in style between the composition of both book and album, and this may be why Lilian has chosen to use text from *King Albert's Book* for her own entries. At least two of her possible contributions are songs that she might have wished to learn to sing at some point, copying the verses into her small autograph album that she could easily carry with her on duty.

The first confirmed contribution transcribed by Lilian herself, is short, dated '25.1.15' and initialled 'LR':

I would be true for there are those who trust me
 I would be true for there are those who care
 I would be strong for there is much to suffer
 I would be brave for there is much to dare
 I would be friend of all – then for the friendless
 I would be giving and forget the gift
 I would be humble for I know my weakness
 I would look up ---and love the gift.³³

It obviously made an impact on Lilian, exhorting the reader to uphold such virtues as trust, strength, bravery, humility, and above all loyalty, virtues that Lilian may have regarded at the start of the war as particularly important in her role as nurse.

³³ 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

‘I Would be True’ was composed as a hymn by Walter A Howard, an American Congregationalist minister in 1906 and published in *Harper’s* magazine.³⁴ Howard’s verse speaks directly to the qualities required in Lilian’s role. In ‘Obsessed by the Obscenity of War’, Acton discusses Mary Borden’s and Lesley Smith’s use of poetry to articulate the emotions they were experiencing. Acton argues that the nurses had to contain their own trauma and that ‘nurses must maintain an environment which promoted healing, [...] and in providing a sense of calm and security for the patient’.³⁵ Her face as she saw the wounds would have been observed by the patient who would see hope, despair, or disgust. Acton contends that ‘while nurse training emphasised the need for detachment to protect the emotional as well as physical self from “infection” by the trauma of the work’.³⁶ Lilian had to hide her emotions and for that she needed to be both strong and brave. Lilian would have had to be strong to tend to the wounds of a patient in agony. The development of high-velocity weapons with the power to inflict previously unimaginable wounds meant that Lilian would have witnessed the dreadful disfigurement of shattered bodies, requiring her to have a strong stomach. She may also have selected this verse to give hope to the soldiers who wrote in her book, to shape their perceptions of her, and possibly to guide what she expected them to write. In *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in the First World War*, Hallett outlines the significance of the ‘wordless’ quality of much nursing work, in which communication might take place in silence:

Nurses worked to contain the body and its physiological process in the aftermath of war injury. They gave this work meaning, but, in the moment of its performance, they did so wordlessly. In their on-duty hours they were quiet doers.³⁷

³⁴ ‘I Would Be True’, *Harper’s Magazine*, May 1907.

³⁵ Acton, ‘Obsessed by the Obscenity of War’, p. 337.

³⁶ Acton, ‘Obsessed by the Obscenity of War’, p. 337.

³⁷ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 27.

The second entry, 'The Lake', is in Lilian's hand but not initialled although it is annotated 'From King Albert's Book Xmas 1914 B.E. Force'.³⁸ Why Lilian acknowledges some of her contributions and not others is not known. She would be aware that her patients would read her contributions, and especially those that are related to her aspirations and fears. Lilian may not wish her readers to associate them with her as she wants to maintain their morale and faith in her care.

Lilian's diary recounts that on 4 January 1915 'Mme Bels asked me to tea as Major Leake was coming. He sang a lot to us, sang father's song "Le Lac" ["The Lake"] that I always love so much'.³⁹ In keeping with Lilian's thoughts of her duty, this poem tells the reader, 'sombre fate stands near us now [...] so shall one woman out of all the world keep faith in man, by keeping faith in you'.⁴⁰ As evidenced by Lilian's diary entry of 15 November 1914 quoted above, Lilian appears to have had a strong working relationship with Major Leake whose desire for Lilian to remain as Matron of No. 2 CCS is confirmation of her work ethic. Although there is no evidence to suggest that this was anything other than a professional relationship a diary entry on 12 January recounts a discussion about the ethics of love with a Capt. O'Brien, which she concludes with saying 'How I want my dear Major Leake back again'.⁴¹ When Lilian is posted from Bailleul in February 1915 her diary tells us that Major Leake again wrote letters to try to keep her at Bailleul. McEwen states that although there were 'respectful and affectionate bonds between the nursing and medical staff to the point of breaking the rules [...] it was prohibited for officers and other ranks to

³⁸ *King Albert's Book*, pp. 110–11. A poem by Ethel Clifford, 'By The Lake' in *King Albert's Book* with music by Liza Lehmann. Lilian copied and acknowledged source of this poem in her album.

³⁹ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'. Lieutenant-Colonel Jonas William Leake RAMC survived the war. He was part of the BEF in 1914 and went on to become Officer Commanding (OC) of No. 2 Casualty Clearing Station. He commissioned into the RAMC as a probationer Lieutenant in January 1899 and was promoted to Captain in January 1902. He married in 1899 and the 1921 census return shows him serving in Cologne at the 36th Casualty Clearing Station with the British Army of the Rhine.

⁴⁰ The Lake from 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

⁴¹ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1915)' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection.

socialise with the nursing staff'.⁴² The General Regulations for Nursing Staff - Professional and Moral Conduct rule No. 4 stated that it was not 'permissible for them to accept invitations to dine or go out driving, etc. with Officers, either patients or friends'.⁴³ Watson suggests that in her diaries Lilian's contemporary Alice Slythe is mildly critical of the socialising between the nurses and male medical officer and comments that an engagement 'will be the fourth achievement in that line of 14 General since the start of war'.⁴⁴ Lilian's frequent visits to the Bels in the company of Major Leake and Capt. O'Brien may have been testing the boundaries of these rules and may also explain why Lilian was posted back to Wimereux after only a few months at No. 2 CCS Bailleul.

In the absence of a formal, professional guide to nursing conduct, Lilian's autograph album shows her fashioning her own code of behaviour and values from the wider cultural materials available to her. It was not until 1919 that the Nurses Registration Act was passed, followed in 1920 by the formation of the General Nursing Council, which eventually evolved to become the NMC and codes of conduct for nurses were established.⁴⁵

Hallett argues that it is in their letters, diaries, and autobiographies that nurses found ways to "'contain" the trauma of war' where it enabled them to 'give meaning to their work as a process of continuing trauma [and] intentionally keep alive both the memory of those who suffered and died and the witness testimony who those who brought them relief'.⁴⁶ Lilian's entries would suggest that she uses her autograph albums in a similar way to help her give meaning to her work and as a means of therapy and healing through memory. Lilian is demonstrating her nursing skill in striving for patient recovery, not just physically but also

⁴² McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, pp. 153–54.

⁴³ McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, pp. 153–54.

⁴⁴ Watson, 'A Sister's War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe', p. 107.

⁴⁵ The Nurses Registration Act 1919, a culmination of a campaign to standardise nurse training.

⁴⁶ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 17.

from the mental trauma they have gone through in the trenches. The autograph album can be seen to take the form of occupational therapy for some of her patients.

Another of Lilian's entries, entitled 'Ambition', is seven verses and written over two pages. It begins:

I do not seek a place among the famous |A woman known to all the world by name
|For learning skill, or aptitude in business |Not worldly –wise, let me attain to fame.⁴⁷

Again, Lilian has chosen this verse to demonstrate the qualities she believes she should strive for as a Military Nurse caring for wounded soldiers. The verse has echoes of the Sandhurst Officer's Motto *Serve to Lead*; as a nurse, Lilian's first duty is the care of her patients. Is she reminding herself of her duty with the poem, grounding herself if she has received praise for her work? The inclusion of such sentiments can also be seen as reassuring her patients who would have read her book before making their own contribution. The last verse clearly states what Lilian believes is her work and its reward and places us firmly in the ward with Lilian:

Using what skill I have to ease the suffering |Of those around and tend their hideous
pains |Why, if one soul should whisper just one blessing |I'll prize it more than any
earthly gains.⁴⁸

Lilian is being very open about what she believes her patients expect of her and her ability to ease their pain, particularly at the last. She will try her best for them at all times.

This verse embodies the ideal relationship between the nurse and the patient, which was very pertinent to the casualties that were coming to the hospital. Although there is altruism in the verse, reward is still expected from the patient – 'just one blessing' – and the contributions made by the soldiers in these books are a form of reward for Lilian's nursing care. Lilian would also have anticipated reading the contributions at the end of her shift, and later readings would have enabled her to relive the events of her interactions with the individual patients in her care.

⁴⁷ 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

⁴⁸ 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

Lilian's contributions demonstrate her strong sense of duty. She perceives herself as being able to ease the suffering of the soldiers, but she is aware of the dreadful nature of their injuries. Das discusses the impact of nursing ravaged bodies of young men on the nurse. He argues that nurses were passive witnesses to the 'horrors of the battlefield' going onto state that the nurse must protect herself while caring for the mutilated bodies so as not to 'fall prey to trauma herself'; to do so, he states, would be a 'shame that dare not speak its name'.⁴⁹ Suffering is a theme in both the contributions discussed here. In the first, the nurse looks to herself to be strong enough to endure her *own* suffering in having to care for the wounded patients, some of whom will die. The second item is related to using her skills to relieve the suffering of the patients.

The choice of some of these contributions, and those of the patients can also be viewed from a religious perspective. The hospital environment was, at the same time, a place of hope but also of death. The death of fit, healthy young men in the service of defending the country would also have been seen as a sacrifice, and many post-war war memorials in the form of cross-like swords support this perception and connection with Christ. Jay Winter argues that the cross of sacrifice is an abstract symbol that reflects the chivalric nature of the warrior.⁵⁰ He goes on to suggest that these war memorials are an 'important part of the ritual of separation which surrounded [the dead]'.⁵¹ The autograph albums containing the names of soldiers can be viewed as part of this ritual of separation when patients departed the hospital and the nurses' care. Lilian uses the language of sacrifice and suggests the futility of these wasted deaths in her diaries. As will be discussed later, Lilian followed her soldier-patients with concern, collating a list of names in her album.

⁴⁹ Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 195.

⁵⁰ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, 9th Edition (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵¹ Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, p. 113.

In the wider archive, references to lost comrades are, when they do appear, often oblique and names are not specified. A common example can be found in Lydia Luxford's album. Entitled 'In Memory', it speaks of a mother's loss and, in the short verse, refers to death as sleeping as 'one of the "rank and File"'.⁵² Finally, we are told of his sacrifice: 'he gave his all'.⁵³ The deaths of many of their comrades no doubt affected them greatly and they would have witnessed much carnage. But during their convalescence most chose to reflect on themselves but rather focusing on life and not death. Lilian, however, chose to memorialise the few men she considered she knew better than most of her patients and those whose deaths affected her most.

Although the autograph albums are compiled by recovering soldiers, they bear witness to death on a mass level in the trenches and continuing in the hospital environment. For some, the hospital was just a safer place to die away from the trenches. Death and dying were ever-present, pervading the everyday lives of both the soldiers and medical personnel. It is not surprising, then, that words such as faith, sacrifice, worship, and adoration are scattered throughout the verses of the autograph albums: 'Because your body's maimed is your soul altered?' reads one line of a verse.⁵⁴ The soldier's soul remains the same, this verse suggests, despite the devastation to his body.

At a time of such national trauma, religion was a crucial support for many both on the home front, with families praying for their loved ones, and for soldiers in the trenches, the wounded in the hospitals, as well as their caregivers. The majority of people at this time would have been brought up to attend church every Sunday, their work and homes possibly

⁵² 'Autograph Album Lydia Luxford QAIMNS R'.

⁵³ 'Autograph Album Lydia Luxford QAIMNS R'. In Memory "Somewhere in France" There is a soldiers grave,| where sleeps a mother's son amid the brave| a cross with letter twain doth mark the place;| and they the hand of time shall soon efface| For him no cheering crowd, no pealing bell| But he will reck [sic] not, and shall sleep as well| one of the "rank and File" he heard the call| and for the land he loved be loved he gave his all' Pte A Whitaker 11077, 9th Duke of Wellingtons Ret. Wounded 4 August Delville Wood.

⁵⁴ 'Man of My Heart' in 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

forfeited if they did not, and children were moulded from an early age to accept religious teachings. Religious culture was well-established in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Sunday Schools were first established in 1780 but compulsory education did not happen for another hundred years with the Elementary Education Act of 1880.⁵⁵ In 1900, the school-leaving age was raised to fourteen, although some still left earlier.

Robson charts the use of the memorised poem in education and argues its original use was to enable the masses to access the gospels and read the bible: ‘What is learnt in verse is longer retained in memory and sooner recollected’.⁵⁶ This is very evident across the history of autograph albums with the memorised short verses that constantly recur over the generations. Robson argues that ‘primary texts largely continued to understand their fundamental mission in explicit or implicit Christian terms for at least the next two hundred years’ and that, ‘at the very least, moral imperatives were, for a very long period, a tremendous driving force behind and within mass education’.⁵⁷ Poetry was seen to have both a moral and religious impact on how people would live their lives.

Lilian was a product of this education system and the religious overtones in her choice of verses of sacrifice and duty can be seen. Brought up with this dominant role of church and religion in daily life, together with a growing sense of patriotism and nationalism stoked by the pre-war propaganda in the news, Lilian’s verses reflect her background. Her reliance on religious guidance to help her through difficult times pervades many of her writings. Robson argues that the pervasive nature of religion and biblical stories of ‘noble martyrdom’ in nineteenth-century mass education, saw poetry imbued with a sense of ‘Christ by other

⁵⁵ ‘Elementary Education Act 1880’, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/Projects/Controllers-Library/item_651859 (King’s Printer of Acts of Parliament) <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Vict/43-44/23/contents/enacted>> [accessed 30 April 2025].

⁵⁶ Robson, *Heart Beats Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem*, p. 43. John MacKenzie supports Robson’s work stating ‘It is likely that the manifold imperial influences of the late nineteenth century had penetrated all the more successfully to the educational, entertainment and propaganda media of the age’. *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. by John M. MacKenzie (Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 5.

⁵⁷ Robson, *Heart Beats Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem*, p. 42.

means'.⁵⁸ Literature in schools was also increasingly imperialistic in nature and the use of poems in schools extolled the virtues of laying down your life for others.⁵⁹

Imperialism and Patriotism can be seen in some of the contributions in the wider archive. Besides the many pen and ink sketches of regimental badges and words to regimental marches that litter all the albums, other sketches reflect both imperialism and patriotism, such as the British lion and Union Jack found in Lydia Luxford's album (Figure 5).⁶⁰

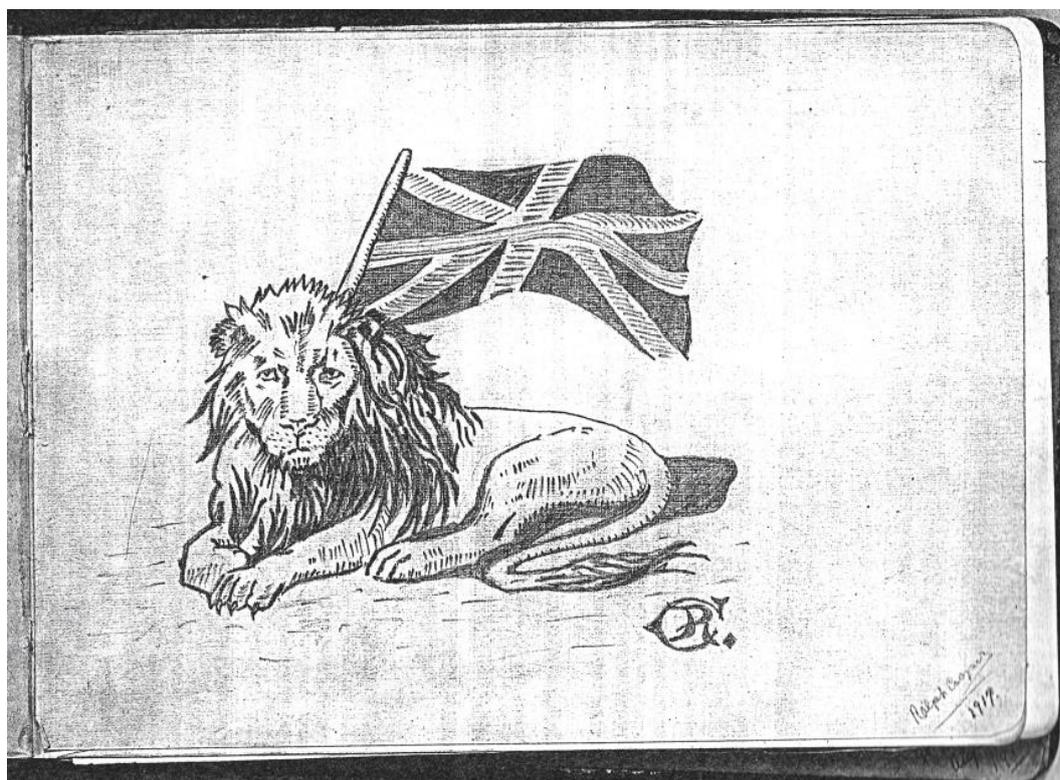


Figure 5. British Lion and Union Jack Sketch in 'Autograph Album Lydia Luxford QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/69/LUXE.

⁵⁸ Robson, *Heart Beats Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem*, p. 99.

⁵⁹ Robson, *Heart Beats Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem*, p. 217. Robson discusses Wolfe's 'Burial of Sir John Moore' as one that was part of British consciousness up until the First World War. Many of the memorialized poems were 'martial and patriotic poems of the past'. Robson, *Heart Beats Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem*, p. 217.

⁶⁰ 'Autograph Album Lydia Luxford QAIMNS R'. Imperialism in the nineteenth century gathered momentum due to the growing demand for raw materials. In his chapter, "'Up Guards and at them!'" British Imperialism and popular art, 1880-1914', John Springhalt discusses the hold imperialism had on the public imagination and how the British Army's campaigns created the image of Tommy Atkins. Newspapers avidly reported on the Campaigns in the Crimea, Sudan and South Africa by the time of the First World War the public was used to seeing and reading about heroic and romantic Empire expansion. John O. Springhalt, "'Up Guards and At Them!'" - British Imperialism and Popular Art, 1880-1914', in *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 49-73.

On 22 December Lilian's diary records a visit to the Trenches: 'Really the most exciting day of my life! I've been up to the trenches, or rather to be quite accurate to within 500 yds of them'.⁶¹ Many nurses were keen to explore their new environment and the eagerness that nurses felt at seeing a Trench is explored by Watson's analysis of Slythe's diaries. Watson describes Slythe as being 'in some ways a tourist of the war, excited to see "a Trench – only a reserve & unoccupied trench, but a trench nevertheless"'.⁶² Understanding the environment that the soldiers lived and fought in informed the nursing care. Today's basic training for military nurses is the same across the board for all new recruits to the military regardless of rank or occupation. By experiencing what the soldiers are trained to do, medical staff can ensure both physical and psychological care is appropriately given. Lilian's visit would have had a similar effect of understanding the horrors the wounded soldiers endured and this may explain the emotional impact it had on her and the enormity of the work she had to do when, in a diary entry for 23 December Lilian records her feelings:

I feel tonight I want guidance so much, things I can't tell even to you to my diary.
What a strange life I am living in here. Oh Father, keep me always near Thee &
worthy to bring the dying to Thee!⁶³

In her album on 25 January 1915 Lilian entered the short verse 'I Would be True' discussed earlier in this chapter. Given the closeness of the dates, the verse may have been the guidance she was looking for. Referring again to her diary entries at this time, on 26 January 1915 Lilian writes: 'I wrote a poem in the night. I just felt like it last night so I tried, so many years long since I wrote anything I have lost the power of expressing my feelings'.⁶⁴

Hot Beef Tea and a Gentle Shake: Lilian's Treatment

⁶¹ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

⁶² Watson, 'A Sister's War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe', p. 113.

⁶³ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

⁶⁴ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1915)'.

22 August 1914 saw the first major engagement of the battle of Mons but, by 24 August, the B.E.F. had retreated.⁶⁵ Official British records state there were ‘just over’ 1600 British casualties.⁶⁶ The retreat caused confusion in the evacuation of the casualties with many wounded being abandoned near Mons. A lack of vehicles added to the problem. Carden-Coyne states that there were six clearing hospitals and two stationary hospitals, with many others, including Lilian’s, in stages of readiness.⁶⁷ We know Lilian spent from 8 to 27 August preparing the base hospital to receive the wounded. Just as the soldiers were in a state of combat readiness and mentally built up to be eager to engage the enemy, the hospital staff would have been preparing to receive the wounded in the aftermath of the battles. Lilian’s anticipation to put all her training and experience into action was heightened and her frustration at not being able to carry out her duty is seen in her diary entries. And then we see a sense of relief that her work is to start:

August 28th: At last! We got up this mng at 3.45am as word came that wounded were on their way to us. (P.S. I went to bed at 12pm.) They arrived about 5.30, 130 in all, tired out, hungry & wounded but v. brave & cheerful. Hardly sitting down until told to. We just sat them on anything & fed them Bovril & hot milk, & then tea, & I gave them our bread, the first they had had for 4 days! Then we sorted them out to the 6 wards. I was to take charge of Wards Nos 3, 4, 5 & 6, with 2 others to help me. Directly they had fed we gave them hosp. kits & towels etc. & sent all fit to wash in lavatories. They just thronged to the narrow passage too glad to see water. Most of them had been under fire since Sund. Afternoon. Only biscuits as food fr. then till now. [sic]⁶⁸

Her diary records that the nurses gave them hot drinks, among which was hot Bovril, a beverage featured later in a poem in the autograph album written on 3 November 1917 by Duggy Atkinson of the 6th York Lancaster’s:

Who was it first, who welcomed me, and filled me up, with hot beef tea then pushed me into 23? The Sister: Who gives me just a gentle shake and while I’m but half awake proceeds my temperature to take? The Sister: And who is SHE, whose chief delight lies in thermometers steely bright and giving gargles day and night: The

⁶⁵ John Terraine, *Mons: Retreat to Victory* (Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2001), p. 94. Battle of Mons, 23 August 1914. Mons was the first major battle of the BEF who suffered heavy casualties.

⁶⁶ Baker, ‘Military Hospitals in the British Isles 1914-1918’.

⁶⁷ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 32.

⁶⁸ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’.

Sister: Who dressed in cape of gorgeous red approaching to my mumpy bed Says
 ‘Take that muffler off your head’ The Sister: Who said in tones of gentleness ‘Today
 you may get up and dress but don’t go into the measles mess’? The Sister: Who is that
 Torture-loving Band who’ll drive me to the Better Land? The Misses Eyell, Lewes
and The Sister. And when she dies, shall we all hear her voice in heaven, calm and
 clear say ‘Take your gargle Peter dear’ I wonder!⁶⁹

Here we have an insight into the hustle and bustle of the ward. The rush of patient care on
 arrival to the ward – being welcomed on the one hand with beef tea, whilst on the other being
 ‘pushed into 23’. No doubt Duggy was one of many patients being admitted to the ward on
 that one occasion. We do not know if No. 23 was a ward but more likely it was his bed space.

This brief verse describes the gentleness of her touch but equally her business-like
 routine. Although he is woken by a gentle shake, an act which resonates with Lilian’s
 aspiration to strive to comfort others, she does not wait for the patient to wake in order to
 fully participate in taking his temperature. We can refer back to the Charlie Chaplin drawing
 here; Lilian has much work to do and not much time for pleasantries!

The morning routine was one of strict order and task-orientated: observations,
 administration of medicines such as gargles, and dressing changes. Lt. Goss dedicates his
 entry solely to ‘The Good Old Gargle’:

its gargle in the morning and gargle late at night| gargle when it’s raining or when the
 sun is bright| we like this life immensely but we feel were like to fight| when the
 nurses bring the good old gargle.⁷⁰

Just as in Duggy Atkinson’s verse, we see the Sister in two lights, both feared and loved.
 Both Duggy Atkinson and Lt. Goss draw similarities between nursing care and the war.
 Duggy uses the words ‘steely bright’ to describe the thermometer suggesting a similarity to
 the bayonets used in close-quarter combat in the trenches. This is Lilian’s ‘weapon’ against
 disease and infection and her own close-quarter combat with the patients. Lt. Goss likens the
 administration of gargles by the nurses to a ‘fight’.

⁶⁹ ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

⁷⁰ ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

The hospital environment is often referred to as a battleground with the medical staff fighting to save lives and battle the constant threat of infection. In the First World War, they were not only waging war against disease and infection but battling against the traumatic effects of the new weapons of war – gas, shell bombardment from heavy and light artillery, and the constant pre-attack barrage which created shell-shock, and the unseen sniper who could take out a soldier without warning. Bullets and shrapnel would pick up soil potentially containing anaerobic bacteria, mud-soaked cloth, and debris on the journey into the human body.⁷¹ In a time before antibiotics and with asepsis still a relatively new concept, gas gangrene was a common wound infection. Minimal exploration of wounds and irrigation with relatively new antiseptic solutions were often the only treatments available. Innovations in medical treatments, however, were rapid, such as Major Edward Archibald's advances with battlefield blood transfusion during his time at No. 3 Canadian General Hospital.⁷²

The language of war can be found in several of the verses in Lilian's album. Her first entry, a transcription of a poem by Robert Browning speaks of 'marching breast forward [...] wrong to triumph [...] we fall to rise; are baffled to fight better'.⁷³ Her choice of verse suggests an awareness of a long war ahead.⁷⁴ It can also be viewed in the light of her work at Bailleul CCS and, later on, the battleground in the hospital, with the fight to save life often lost.

In Lilian's album (8 June 1915), P. Foster quotes a few lines from *Lorna Doone*:

⁷¹ Alexander Fleming, 'Some Notes on the Bacteriology of Gas Gangrene', *The Lancet*, originally published as volume 2, issue 4799, 186.4799 (1915), pp. 376–78, doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(01)53738-1; W Watson Cheyne, 'On the Treatment of Wounds in War', *British Journal of Surgery*, 3.11 (1915), pp. 427–50, doi:10.1002/bjs.1800031105.

⁷² Andrew Beckett and Edward J. Harvey, 'No. 3 Canadian General Hospital (McGill) in the Great War: Service and Sacrifice', *Canadian Journal of Surgery*, 61.1 (2018), pp. 8–12, doi:10.1503/cjs.012717.

⁷³ 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

⁷⁴ Battles like the Somme in 1916 saw tremendous losses, often with only a few yards of front won and the hospitals would have been overwhelmed with casualties.

[...] The power to lie, and the love of it| the stealth to spy, and the glory in it| The quiet relish for blood and| the joy in the death of a foe| These are what any man must have| to fight the enemy on equal terms|⁷⁵

But he apparently extends the lines with his own:

And Yet, thank God, we Irish have some of these things|. Rather, the taste for mirth and the joy of it| the Delight in danger and the fun of it| the loss of work and the opposite to it!⁷⁶

Words such as ‘glory’, ‘blood’, ‘enemy’, ‘danger’, and, interestingly, ‘fun’, sum up the contradictory nature of warfare. Meyer argues that war experience is a ‘defining incident in the formation of male identity’.⁷⁷ Many young men saw the chance to go to war as an adventure, and for some, combat was even anticipated as ‘fun’. The reality of the horrors of trench warfare would indeed be defining of their masculinity, and for those who spent time in the hospital, their military masculinity would undergo different shaping.

In ‘The Sister’, Duggy Atkinson gives us an insight into the nurse-patient relationship and the regard with which the Sister is held, both loved and feared in equal measure. In Atkinson’s poem, the nurse is described as dressed in a ‘cape of gorgeous red’, the uniform of the QAIMNS sister, and again we hear the contradiction between the gentleness in the instructions she has given him to get up and dress, with the admonishment not to go to the measles ward.⁷⁸ This patient has mumps, and we see there is a concern for cross-infection in separating the patients.

The next verse, though, describes the nurses as ‘torture-loving’ and we are told that the Misses Eyells, Lewes, and Sister Robinson make up the group of nurses caring for him in this ward. Finally, he envisages the latter’s death and, when in heaven, taking the same

⁷⁵ ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’. Quote from ‘Chapter 38’ in *Lorna Doone* by R. D. Blackmore: ‘Oh that God had given me brains, to meet such cruel dastards according to their villainy! The power to lie, and the love of it; the stealth to spy, and the glory in it; above all, the quiet relish for blood, and joy in the death of an enemy—these are what any man must have, to contend with the Doones upon even terms. And yet, I thank God that I have not any of these.’ R.D. Blackmore, *Lorna Doone* (Wordsworth Classics, 1997), p. 252.

⁷⁶ ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

⁷⁷ Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 2.

⁷⁸ ‘The Sister’ in ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

authoritarian stance with St Peter to take his gargle. The picture this poem paints is of Lilian as a nurse who carries out her duties gently but very firmly, exhibiting the leadership expected of a military nurse. Carden-Coyne argues that military discipline was central to the efficient running of a military hospital and was strictly enforced by the orderlies and nurses:

Nurses, doctors and physiotherapists had medico-military power and carried out painful procedures on men whilst treating, feeding, bathing and comforting them. Wounded men often felt disempowered and frail.⁷⁹

The Nurse through the Eyes of the Patient

Not all the entries relating to nurses in Lilian's album are about her. Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses (VADs) worked alongside the military nurses, featuring in the autograph archive both as collectors of their own books and in images and text from the soldiers. The youth of many VADs contrasts with the age of the military or professional nurses. These nurses, for the main part, remain anonymous in the autograph albums, but the care they give is commented on. Nursing care is observed by the patients daily, either by watching the nurses or chatting with fellow patients. Lilian's autograph album has entries that allow us to explore the patients' perspective of the nurse.

Although we do not know the identity of the nurse in the sketch shown at Figure 6, the contributor was Samuel John Bates of the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA) who was in C4 ward No. 10 Stationary Hospital in 1918. It may be that this is a self-portrait of him.⁸⁰ Bates's watercolour of the VAD nurse with her white veil and large bow suggests the image of an angel. It can also be considered in the light of soldiers seeing the nurse as an angel, God's servant. An enduring myth during the First World War was of the Angel of Mons who

⁷⁹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 301.

⁸⁰ Service Records TNA WO363 'Burnt Documents' for 29542 Samuel John Bates enlisted aged twenty-eight in August 1916 and on discharge in 1919 his records show he was suffering from neurasthenia. His records give his height as 5'6". In 1916 conscription was started and single men aged 18 to 41 were liable to be enlisted. Every able man was affected. Men undertaking work that was considered important could still be called up and local Tribunals were held to consider anyone who applied for exemption. Later the Military Service Act was extended to include married men and the upper age limit was raised to 51. This may explain the balding man depicted in the sketch. Samuel John Bates was 5'6" tall according to his records.

appeared to the retreating troops at the battle of Mons in 1914.⁸¹ The religious symbolism of the nurse as an angel would not have been lost on the wounded patients. Lilian's verses show that she is dedicating her life to nursing just as a Nun would dedicate herself to the service of God. Her chosen verses, which are discussed in more detail later in this chapter, reflect her chosen path to ease suffering and pain. She deals in sacrifice. Is this her own sacrifice to help others or to tend those who have sacrificed themselves in war? She 'strive[s] to wipe just a few tears away.'⁸²

⁸¹ Richard J. Bleiler, *The Strange Case of 'The Angels of Mons': Arthur Machen's World War I Story, the Insistne Believers, and His Reutations* (McFarland & Company Inc.), pp. 15–16.

⁸² 'Ambition' in 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.



Figure 6. S J Bates 1918 in 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF00014.1.

In the sketch, the nurse's veil strings float backward, suggestive of wings on her shoulders, evoking the image of the nurse as an angel of mercy in the midst of the horror of the war. McEwen argues that 'although visual iconography is strongly represented, confusion still prevails over the uniforms worn by the different services' and the image of the VAD with the emblazoned red cross on her white starched bib is today synonymous with a young, well-heeled, pretty nurse in the First World War.⁸³ The high-heeled boots of the young VAD

⁸³ McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, p. 5.

in the picture, and her feminine figure and pretty face suggest that the contributor appreciated the physical appeal of these young volunteers. Carden-Coyne states that the VADs were also often viewed as being more sympathetic towards the patients than the professional nurses.⁸⁴ In a spotless, white-starched apron emblazoned with the iconic Red Cross and veil with an armband depicting her VAD status, the VAD nurse hands a Quinine mixture to the patient.⁸⁵ He is in a blue uniform with the No. 15 badge on his right arm; he stands in slip-on shoes waiting to take the rather large container. The perspective of the two figures shows the dominance of the VAD towering over the patient. His diminutive size suggests that he is inferior to the nurse not only in rank, but it also suggests a shift in gender power from the older man to the young woman. Not only was there a shift in his role from protector to protected but the balance of authority in a young woman looking after the needs of an older man may well have needed his adjustment.

Alexandra McKinnon contemplates the use of size between nurse and patient in sketches in the autograph albums compiled by Australian nurses, arguing that the power dynamic between male and female, protection and vulnerability had shifted. She cites one sketch in an Australian album that represents the “‘nurse supreme” [who] controls the space of the hospital. Withholding food from a patient on bedrest’.⁸⁶ Roper argues that pre-war class relationships were inverted, as those from the lower classes often had stronger survival skills. The pre-war social housing and poverty meant that ‘most rankers [...] were more practiced in housework than their officers. They knew how to clean, launder, sew and cook’ and, despite overcrowded housing, there was a sense of community; ‘support could go

⁸⁴ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*.

⁸⁵ The use of quinine suggests that the patient is suffering from Malaria, and this may indicate that he has served on the Eastern Front and contracted the disease.

⁸⁶ Alexandra McKinnon, ‘Impressions of Empire: Autograph Books as a Historical Source, 1899-1919’

(presented at the Summer Scholars Scheme, Australian War Memorial, 2019), p. 5

<https://www.awm.gov.au/sites/default/files/impressions_of_empire_-_alexandra_mckinnon_reduce.pdf>.

beyond the immediate family to others': this meant that the working-class soldier was better equipped with practical survival skills in the war.⁸⁷

Most Private and non-commissioned (NCO's) soldiers were, as Roper describes them, working-class rankers. The officers were mainly, but not exclusively, from the upper class.⁸⁸ When the wounded came into the hospital environment pre-war class distinctions still existed. The nurses and VADs, from middle- or upper-class backgrounds, often had to carry out intimate nursing care on the wounded male.

Many patients' pre-war relationships with women had been mainly with their mothers, sisters, and wives. The other ranks' interaction with aristocratic ladies would more likely have been from a distance with a hierarchy not dissimilar to the soldier and the General. Joyce Kaufman and Kristen Williams, in *Women in War: Gender Identity and Activism in Times of Conflict*, argue there was a reversal of the role of the male protector, and the nurses are now seen as the protectors in the hospital.⁸⁹

Carden-Coyne argues that power relationships within hospitals presented an element of emasculation. Emotionally, patients may have reverted to a mother-child relationship to cope with this aspect of care, made more uncomfortable by disruptions in the social hierarchy. Childhood was seen as a time of security and safety, protected by their mothers and war had threatened their sense of safety. Some of the nurses may have taken on the role of 'mother' or 'sister' in their approach to the patients and, equally, the young soldiers may have responded to the older nurses in a child-like manner. Carden-Coyne cites one soldier's account that 'the nurse put me to bed like a baby, and since then I have been helpless as a child'.⁹⁰ Roper argues that childhood was seen as a place of safety: 'What extreme anxiety

⁸⁷ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, pp. 182–83.

⁸⁸ Later in the war the losses within the officer cadre meant that field promotions resulted in soldiers being commissioned from the ranks.

⁸⁹ Joyce P. Kaufman and Kristen P. Williams, *Women and War: Gender Identity and Activism in Times of Conflict* (Kumarian Press, 2010).

⁹⁰ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 249.

did to these young men was to throw them back to the position of the small child, who needs its mother to assuage its terror'.⁹¹ The hospital, on the other hand, may not have seemed like the retreat from the horrors of the trenches that they hoped for. The soldier was away from his unit and a realisation of the impact of his wounds and their treatment may well have produced another sense of anxiety. For some, the expectation of a 'Blighty' wounding represented the chance of going home, seeing family and friends, and, not least, being spared the tensions and fears of being at the front.⁹²

Carden-Coyne argues this healing of the body to return it to the front 'affected trust between patients and practitioners [...] Wounded men often felt disempowered and frail; [fearing] operations, redressing and massage, they especially resented being ordered about by women'.⁹³ Carden-Coyne goes on to say hospitals would sometimes request patients who were no trouble.

Discipline, however, had to be maintained. Khaki uniform was 'surrendered' and they were issued with the hospital blues. Bates's sketch also provides an image of these iconic hospital blues. Hospital Blues reinforced military discipline within the hospital environment and easily identified convalescing military patients, especially useful as men recovered and were able to mobilise both within the hospital and the local area, essential for the soldier who would return to the front. In chapter five, the rowdy behaviour of one Australian soldier is discussed and illustrates the difficulties that the nurses had in keeping discipline in their wards with young convalescent men.

Whereas the wearing of hospital blues by other ranks was a means to exert authority over them, officer-patients did not wear blues; they would though, have been expected to uphold standards appropriate to an officer and a gentleman.⁹⁴ For officers, transfer to a

⁹¹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 15.

⁹² A 'Blighty' wound meant time away from the war back in relative peace and tranquillity of England.

⁹³ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, pp. 301–02.

⁹⁴ Most officers came from the upper-middle classes and aristocracy at this time.

convalescent hospital in England was most typically to a private home, and, although they feature quite heavily in Lilian's album, it is the other ranks who dominate the contributions in the wider archive. Reznick quotes one officer, Alan Thomas, who 'recalled [that] "the regime was much less strict than it had been at [Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital] Millbank"'.⁹⁵ Reznick goes on to argue that recovering officers were allowed greater freedom than the other ranks who remained under strict discipline in the hospital. Carden-Coyne argues that discipline on the wards was important in maintaining the cohesiveness of men who were used to responding to authority in their regiments. Wounded officers, however, who had been used to wielding autonomy and leadership, would still have had to accept the authority of the nurses who cared for them, despite the freer environment in a private house; this may have created a contradiction over who was in charge and for some a resentment of female authority. Certainly, some UK hospitals, and those in private homes, would have had a more relaxed environment than the base or stationary hospitals that Lilian worked in.

As soldiers recovered from their wounds, their convalescence would see graduation from ward to Command Depot and eventual readiness to return to combat fitness again. This return to strict military discipline saw, according to Carden-Coyne, the transformation of the feminised invalid to the masculine combat soldier again.⁹⁶ When soldier-patients undertook physical activity around the area, their distinctive blue uniforms set them apart from the fit soldiers such as the RAMC orderlies.⁹⁷ Many soldiers viewed the blue uniform as stigmatising, but it had advantages too. A wounded soldier who had 'done his bit' was seen as a romantic hero by the women: it also protected the wearer from any insinuation of cowardice. They had demonstrated their bravery and, although many wounds were not from

⁹⁵ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, pp. 55–56.

⁹⁶ The Military authorities dictated that there should be a two-week convalescence period at these Command Depots. Carden-Coyne notes that over 82% of wounded soldiers were returned to the front. See Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*.

⁹⁷ Hospital Blues ensured military discipline was maintained outside the hospital and also curbed the consumption of alcohol.

‘going over the top’ but from indiscriminate shelling, sniper action, and illness or disease such as trench feet, they were viewed as symbols of bravery and masculinity. Although known as ‘hospital blues,’ the uniforms attracted the nickname for recovering soldiers of ‘convalescent blues’.⁹⁸ Ill-fitting, as in the sketch, soldiers would roll up the trouser bottoms and sleeves presumably because they were too long.⁹⁹ The verse, ‘We are proud of the boys in Khaki’ from Mary Penn’s album and discussed in more detail in chapter one, captures the regard the wounded soldier was held in. The last verse concludes, ‘Mary goes sewing shirts socks galore for the wounded soldiers ten min walk from her door| she says, come along girls, it's little we can do| for our dear old Tommies, our brave lads in blue’.¹⁰⁰

Symbolism and patriotism are evident in Bates’s sketch of a patient and VAD in Lilian’s album (Figure 6). The red cross on the nurse’s uniform and the red tie of the patient in Bates’s sketch form a link between the two figures. The cross and the tie are both positioned on the breast directly opposite each other in an approximate position of their hearts. Red, the colour of blood, symbolises that the soldier has bled for his country with the nurse tending the bleeding wounds. Both their uniforms are in patriotic red, white, and blue. The VAD’s veil is tied in a large bow and this gives added height to the nurse, symbolising her authority over the diminutive figure of the patient. The soldier’s power on the battlefield is left behind; the nurse wields her power now.

⁹⁸ Hospital Blues were single breasted, made of flannel material in ‘Rickett’s Blue’ just a few sizes were made that would fit all recovering soldiers and a red tie was part of the uniform. Rickett’s blue refers to the similarity of the colour of the Uniform Blues to the product ‘Ricketts Blue’ or blue bag that was added to the laundry rinse to enhance the whiteness of fabric which was prone to lose its whiteness after repeated washing. It was a vivid blue colour and made by the Rickett’s company.

⁹⁹ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*.

¹⁰⁰ We are proud of the boys in Khaki| not forgetting the boys in blue| They have all been out to do their bit |also the sailors too| We are looking forward to peace| when they all get their release| so don’t forget the brave lads| when war and tumult cease| I’m sure they happy be| While fighting for old England , you and me. Mary goes sewing shirts and socks galore| for the wounded soldiers, ten min walk| from her door |she says, come along girls its little we can do |for our dear old Tommies our brave lads in blue. LHB ‘Autograph Album Mary Penn VAD’.

McEwen argues that nurses provided a ‘safe haven [...] where traumatized soldiers could express their feelings of fear, despair and shame’.¹⁰¹ Roper though, states that hospitals were also scenes of horror and terror for the soldiers, citing a soldier’s account of a dressing change which was ‘more painful every time’: this was a bandage that was ‘poked up with a knitting needle into the wound’.¹⁰² It was a place of contradictions. Whilst painful procedures were endured, the nurses comforted the patients, feeding, and bathing them. Neither the patient nor the nurse in Bates’ drawing looks particularly happy.

These descriptions of nightmare and unhappiness contrast with the gentleness of Lilian as seen by ‘Duggy,’ though he also described nurses as ‘torture-loving’. Joanna Bourke discusses the conflict that faced caregivers when causing pain when treating patients. She argues that ‘witnessing people in pain inevitably elicits anxiety in caregivers’ and accusations of a lack of sympathy and even cruelty were levelled at the carer.¹⁰³ Irene Madjar looks at the conflict the nurse had between the act of inflicting pain and trying to relieve pain. She argues that, despite sharing the encounter with pain their perspective would have been separated by their different lived experiences.¹⁰⁴ In *The Body in Pain* Elaine Scarry argues that we cannot share pain, and that there are ‘no two experiences farther apart than suffering and inflicting pain’.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Santanu Das in ‘*The impotence of sympathy*’: *touch and trauma in the memoirs of the First World War nurses*’ states that ‘Touch is the most intimate and the most elusive of the human senses’.¹⁰⁶ He goes on to consider how nurses learned to cope with the difficult work of caring for badly wounded patients, projecting a callousness as a

¹⁰¹ McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, p. 3.

¹⁰² Lance Corporal Roland Mountfort in Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 245.

¹⁰³ Joanna Bourke, ‘Pain, Sympathy and the Medical Encounter between the Mid Eighteenth and the Mid Twentieth Centuries’, *Historical Research*, 85.229 (2012), pp. 430–52 (p. 430), doi:10.1111/j.1468-2281.2011.00593.x.

¹⁰⁴ Irene Madjar, *Giving Comfort and Inflicting Pain* (Routledge, 2016), p. 147, doi:10.4324/9781315428130.

¹⁰⁵ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 46.

¹⁰⁶ Das, ‘The Impotence of Sympathy’, p. 240.

means of self-protection.¹⁰⁷ These autograph album entries show that patients viewed the nurses as being here to ease their pain but finding that, to do so, they must inflict more pain. For the soldiers, this is a new battlefield with a new enemy which sometimes took the form of the nurse on her rounds with unpalatable medicine and painful dressing changes.

‘There’s a Haven for the Starving:’¹⁰⁸ Food in Lilian’s Album

On 28 August Lilian records in her diary, ‘We just sat them on anything & fed them Bovril & hot milk, & then tea, & I gave them our bread, the first they had had for 4 days!’¹⁰⁹ The entry by Duggy Atkinson in November 1917, quoted earlier in the chapter, also refers to this ritual of welcoming the wounded into the hospital with ‘hot beef tea’: ‘Who was it first, who welcomed me, and filled me up, with hot beef tea then pushed me into 23?’¹¹⁰

Many troops at the front would often exist on cold rations or even go hungry for several days. The rations that made up trench food and its distribution were unreliable resulting in cold, stale, and sometimes inedible food by the time it reached the trenches.¹¹¹ Food took on a particular significance in this context of scarcity, featuring in letters, homes, and diaries. As Meyer argues, ‘bodily functions were central to the ways in which [the soldiers] constructed their war experience. Food and its consumption, cleanliness, exhaustion, and physical endurance were all subjects of fascination in men’s narrative written about endlessly and in detail’.¹¹²

Roper cites an extract from Eric Marchant’s letter home, comparing his family sitting down to eat with himself ‘covered in dirt, feeling a “bit chilly” and living on nothing more

¹⁰⁷ Das, ‘The Impotence of Sympathy’, p. 240.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

¹⁰⁹ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’.

¹¹⁰ ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’. 3 Nov 1917 by Duggy Atkinson of the 6th York Lancaster’s.

¹¹¹ Trench food, rations, were often tinned and the soldiers had small stoves to heat the food on. Other food would be brought to the trench from the Field Kitchens but would often be cold before it reached the front. Water was only available in the trenches in old petrol cans and the difficulties and dangers of getting hot food into the trenches meant that the soldiers had cold rations which they cooked on small stoves.

¹¹² Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*, p. 9.

substantial than tinned beef and biscuits'.¹¹³ To add to the hunger, the men would often be cold and wet living in leaking tents and constantly being drenched through to the skin. For wounded men, the journey to the hospital may have taken several days with minimal or no food so it is not surprising then to find a concentration of verses relating to food in Lilian's autograph book.

'Number 8' reflects the impact of hunger on the soldiers.

When you've lived for weeks by drinking and of food your always thinking| and your chart looks like a music sheet gone mad| then the line may come down "plunk"| amongst the pulses remain sunk| and you think of all the meals you've ever had.| There's a haven for the starving| where they never leave off carving| joints and chicken for the aching void|. Where you get meals every minute| A large plate with plenty in it| and the orderlies do never get annoyed| It's a home of joy and pleasure| where you live in ease and leisure| and the number of this paradise I'll state| Sisters Robinson and Hessey (I ejaculate "God bless'ee")| are the powers that be and rule in no 8.¹¹⁴

In comparison to the worry in the trenches of where the next meal would come from, regular meals in hospital meant it really was a haven for the starving. In hospital it was the duty of the orderlies to bring the food round, although Violetta Thurstan states that, 'The ward sister serves the dinner; the probationers or orderlies take it round to the patients'.¹¹⁵ Patients with injured arms 'must have their food cut up or be fed'.¹¹⁶ The orderlies were usually male and may either have been volunteers with the Red Cross and St Johns Ambulance or in the RAMC. The grateful writer of 'No 8' profusely thanks Sisters Robinson and Hessey in No. 8.¹¹⁷ He may have thanked the nurses, particularly in the knowledge that some of the food may have been prepared by the nurses themselves rather than the orderlies. Thurstan comments on this: 'When the ward work is light, she [the probationer/nurse] can occasionally fry the patients' potatoes or their eggs, [...] and perhaps tempt them to eat'.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 68.

¹¹⁴ Contribution from Hugh Scietson (ASC) in 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

¹¹⁵ Thurstan, *A Textbook of War Nursing*, p. 67-68.

¹¹⁶ Thurstan, *A Textbook of War Nursing*, p. 68.

¹¹⁷ Number 8 probably refers to the ward.

¹¹⁸ Thurstan, *A Textbook of War Nursing*, pp. 67-68.

Enabling the practicing of social skills, meals were also a means of forming relationships with others. In the trenches, men often shared their food parcels, and Roper states that it formed bonds of comradeship. This communal sharing of food created a sense of family, reminding soldiers of family meals at home. In welcoming the wounded with food and drink, nurses welcomed their soldier patients into the new home of the military hospital, a place of relative safety and calm from the trenches. Roper argues that ‘Soldiers may have imagined home and trench as opposed worlds’.¹¹⁹ Equally, the hospital environment would have seemed a different world, too. Sleeping in clean sheets and with regular hot meals and drinks it was a world away from the mud synonymous with trench warfare. Roper explores the connections between food and home, citing soldiers’ descriptions of ‘the “homely smell” of bacon in the trenches after morning stand-to’.¹²⁰ Thoughts of home could be strengthening but equally a harsh reminder of their present situation: ‘The scenes from home that men conjured were not just wistful, but sometimes conveyed their fear, anger and disenchantment.’¹²¹ Although the regular hot meals provided in hospitals were welcome, they did not stop the men from complaining.

Food was an important part of the healing process, just as surgery and medicines were used to heal the injured. The common soldier’s pre-war diet was often not healthy, and many were undernourished. Skilled workers were often the healthiest, with agricultural labourers ‘the least well-nourished despite working on the land’.¹²² The impact of nutritional deficit on patients’ general health had a knock-on effect on wound healing. Food was a medicine too.

Another patient in No. 14 SH bemoans being accused of greediness: ‘Cruel Mr Wallis and only because my temperature is up a bit; what! He says I have overeaten that is really

¹¹⁹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 122.

¹²⁰ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 122.

¹²¹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 68.

¹²² Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 183.

most rude!’¹²³ The patient defends himself saying he had an ‘aching void’, and implies Mr. Wallis would have overeaten if he had been in same situation and looks forward to the day when he can eat eggs, bread, butter and morsels of chicken, oranges, bottled fruit, and sweets.¹²⁴ The verse calls Mr Wallis ‘cruel’ for withholding food and the contributor uses the album in an oblique way to complain to the Sister about a specific individual possibly in the hope that he (Mr Wallis) would be disciplined. Carden-Coyne argues that orderlies often needed supervision as they could be undisciplined at times.¹²⁵ Sometimes viewed with suspicion, orderlies were often accused of theft without any evidence. Kevin Brown quotes a private from a Scottish Regiment who stated, ‘RAMC men should be shot, out wounded and dying travelling five days in a train from the front and they don’t even look after them or give them water to drink’.¹²⁶ There may be a sound medical reason for this apparent neglect.: ‘Cruel Mr. Wallis’ may have been restricting food for medical reasons rather than out of cruelty.¹²⁷ Wounded soldiers with abdominal wounds would certainly have received restricted solid food and given fluids only, or even been restricted to nil by mouth before and after their surgery. These patients would have craved their first solid food. Easily digestible food would have been provided by the staff.

Lilian records her work on an ‘enteric’ ward, affectionately calling her patients her ‘enterics’.¹²⁸ The conditions in the trenches, poor hygiene, and contaminated food and water resulted in many diseased casualties. Enteric fever, also known as Typhoid fever, was prevalent, creating the specific category of patients Lilian was nursing. Food restriction

¹²³ ‘Oh Sister’, pp. 25-26 in ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

¹²⁴ Mr Wallis may have been a Red Cross/St Johns ambulance volunteer or an orderly in the RAMC.

¹²⁵ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 301.

¹²⁶ Kevin Brown, *Fighting Fit: Health, Medicine and War in the Twentieth Century* (The History Press, 2008), p. 47.

¹²⁷ The wounded requiring surgery would also have been starved pre-operatively for planned surgery following on from any treatment in the CCS.

¹²⁸ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’.

would have been an important part of their treatment and, in the case of enteric fever, where symptoms included abdominal pain and diarrhoea, a light, bland diet was important.

Carden-Coyne suggests that the social community in war hospitals was a delicate one. The relationships between medical staff, both civilian and military, and the patients were ‘kinship bonds’ and ‘military authorities encouraged “family” feeling to facilitate the healing process’.¹²⁹ She goes on to comment that soldiers scrutinised the care they received and that they had an expectation of how they should be treated. ‘Oh Sister’ perhaps hints more at the relationship and authority that Mr Wallis had over his soldier-patients. Carden-Coyne argues that hospital magazines were often a safe space for patient complaints whilst at the same time both reinforcing and undermining expectations of stoicism. She quotes the Shepherd Bush hospital magazine, *Cheerio*, which declared itself “a medium through which [...] the serious can ventilate his seriousness, the humourist can air his pretty wit, the growler can make known his complaints, the victim of the nurse’s tyranny can get one back on his tormentor”.¹³⁰ Reznick states that the sometimes harsh but necessary treatments that patients underwent in hospital ‘underscored their sense of being processed by a medical machine in tune with a society mobilised for war’.¹³¹

Patients expected the medical staff, and especially the nurses, to behave with sympathy and gentleness. Patients were vulnerable and their wounds and environment disempowered them. Overarching this was military discipline. Although wounded and in hospital, they were still soldiers and further disempowered by the ownership of their care by the medical staff and a different kind of military authority to be followed. Instead of the male Corporal, Sergeant, and Officer at the front, they now had the Doctor, Sister, VAD, and Orderly. ‘Cruel’ Mr Wallis may have been simply carrying out his orders and ensuring that

¹²⁹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 191.

¹³⁰ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 320.

¹³¹ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 78.

the patient followed discipline regarding his food. Just as the soldier would have moaned or groused about the orders from the Corporal or Sergeant, so too was this same attitude prevalent in the military hospital.

Both these verses reflect the power of the staff in the allocation of food. In ‘Number 8’ Lilian and Sister Hessey are lauded as ruling the ward and their power enabled the ward to take on the mantle of a paradise, mainly due to the surfeit of rich food. In contrast, in ‘Oh Sister’, the contributor airs his grievances about Mr. Wallis withholding solid food. Carden-Coyne suggests that ‘the disempowered patient’s vulnerability was exacerbated when gender shaped the encounter’.¹³² Patients’ sense of gendered hierarchy was met by the male doctors, and they expected the nurses to be gentle and treat them tenderly when dressing wounds. In these examples, with the author of ‘Oh Sister’ reserving criticism for Mr. Wallis, the female nurses remain idealised figures of nurture and care.

Food was not only important in the healing process but it was also part of the basic need for survival and growth, as defined in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, a pyramid with the basic needs (air, heat, clothes, water, food, sleep etc) as the foundation.¹³³ At home, food was usually prepared by the women of the family and formed part of familial care and food parcels were a way that families could continue to nourish their children whilst they were separated. This act of nurture was then associated with the nurses as providers. This practice continues today. Just as the men shared their food parcels in the trenches, creating bonds of comradeship, no doubt Lilian shared her luxuries with her fellow nurses. Her diary records a visit to the Bels family to take tea with them, which was a relaxing socialising event. On 1 January 1915 we read that ‘Mme Bels gave me a lovely box of “marrons glacées” [candied chestnuts] for the New Year’.¹³⁴ This event was immortalised in her autograph album with

¹³² Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 197.

¹³³ Saul McLeod, ‘Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs’, *Simply Psychology*, 14 March 2025 <<https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>>.

¹³⁴ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’.

the poem and pen and ink sketch (Figure 7) discussed earlier in the chapter and the intimacy of the 'tea'.

Just as food figures largely in many soldiers' letters and diaries, it is also much discussed in nurses' records and Lilian's is no exception. She records not just the casualties that she deals with daily, but also the food she has, either as parcels from home, just like the troops, or the rations in her mess. 'Oct 1st 1st parcel of biscuits etc'. Subsequently for 21 October and 21 November she just records having received parcels of chocolates, and on 14 October she writes 'Did I mention Queen Alexandra sent all of us some tea for her nurses?'¹³⁵

Rationing for the nurses was just as much a problem as for the troops. In September 1914 Lillian records in her diary, 'We eat each meal wondering when & where we will get the next' and again, 'For 2 days now we have had no rations. I suppose if we happened to be where we cdn't [sic] buy food we shld be on the road to starvation by now! Pts' food awfully short, both yesterday & today'.¹³⁶ She records her joy a few days later when a new cook arrives: 'At 9am who appears but one of the pts! It seems he was a mess cook at one time & so now as only v. slightly wounded he has offered his services to fill the gap'.¹³⁷ Her concern with food was not just for herself. On 19 October she writes:

I begin to dread that enteric ward. They are of course ravening for food & 2 of them think I don't give them more to eat just because I don't want to! It's v. wearing all day long the continual grousing for more to eat tho 'I have explained to them why I cannot give them more at present'.¹³⁸

This is evidence of the tension between the kind, provisioning nurse and withholding authority. Lilian is wanting her actions understood and yet feels she is being seen as a tyrannical nurse. When read together, the autograph album and diary demonstrate the highly emotional quality of food that could cement and strain relationships within and around the

¹³⁵ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

¹³⁶ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

¹³⁷ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

¹³⁸ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1915)'.

hospital, not just between the soldier-patient and the nurses but also as ways to cement relationships with local families.

Time to Reflect on Trench Life whilst Convalescing

The First World War is synonymous with war poets such as Wilfred Owen and Edward Thomas whose poetry provides deep insights into trench life, together with humorous artwork similar to that produced by Bruce Bairnsfather.¹³⁹ Comic sketches, often copies of Bairnsfather's work, as well as verses from popular songs, appear in the albums, which convey their trench experiences. Although the soldiers who have contributed to Lilian's autograph album have lived and been wounded in the trenches, only two have chosen trench life as a theme for their contributions. There may be many reasons why the contributors have chosen not to reflect on their experience in the trenches and more on their experience in the hospital and their relationships with the nurses who care for them.

The two trench life entries are short verses written two years apart and, although by two different authors, refer directly to life in the trenches showing the changes and similarities that both men experienced in the trenches. Norman Strickley, a patient in Lilian's care, provides this short account about his 'Little Wet Home in the Trench' in February 1915.¹⁴⁰

The origins of the verse, a song composed before the war by D. Eardley-Wilmot titled 'My Little Grey Home in the West', became extremely popular for soldiers to adapt and appeared in various guises, within the autograph albums of both UK and Commonwealth

¹³⁹ Wilfred Edward Salter Owen (18 March 1893–4 November 1918). Owen is considered one of the foremost War Poets of the First World War. He enlisted in the Artist Rifles in October 1915 and was killed in action in November 1918. Two of his best-known poems are Anthem for Doomed Youth and Dulce et Decorum Est. Philip Edward Thomas (3 March 1878– 9 April 1917) Thomas enlisted in the Artists Rifles in July 1915, later commissioning as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Garrison Artillery. He was killed shortly after arriving in France. Charles Bruce Bairnsfather (9 July 1887–29 September 1959) British Humourist and cartoonist his popular character of 'Old Bill' a war-weary soldier regularly featured in the *Bystander* and later in a collection titled 'Fragments From France. The *Bystander* was a weekly tabloid magazine featuring cartoons, short stories and reviews it ran from 1903 until 1940.

¹⁴⁰ Norman Strickley, 'A Little Wet Home in the Trench' in 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

soldiers as well as newspapers of the time. It is discussed in greater detail in chapter five.¹⁴¹

Here it is discussed in connection with the dialogue between the soldier contributors:

I've a Little Wet home in a trench\where the rain storms continually drench \ there's a dead cow close by with her hoofs t'wards the sky and she give off a beautiful stench there's a mass of wet mud and some thaw and the Jack Johnsons tear thro' the rain sodden air in my little wet home in the trench.¹⁴²

These few lines tell us about the misery of the rain and the squalid conditions. The account ranges across the senses – touch, smell, sound – providing a very sensory, bodily, and visceral account of life in the trenches. The sight and smell of the dead cow is palpable but, despite the description of the decaying cow, the verse steers clear of the human dead and decaying bodies that would have surrounded the soldier reminding him of his own mortality. Trench conditions were primitive. Roper states that, 'In summer the trench soldier suffered from heat and dust, while in winter, unable to move about much, the cold and wet penetrated through his layers of clothing'.¹⁴³

The second 'Little Wet Home in the Trench' verse contributed to Lilian's album is by Michael Buckley of the 9th Rifle Bde. The autograph albums would be read by each contributor, perhaps reading to occupy themselves but also, by doing so, finding inspiration for their own entry. Strickley's humorous lines must have struck a chord with Buckley as he adds a second verse:

There are Snipers who keep on the go| so you must keep happen down low| there are star shells by night |which give a deuce of a light| and causes some language to flow| then there's biscuits and bully we chew| for its hell of a time since we tasted a stew| and the Jack Johnsons tear throu [sic] the rain sodden air, To my little wet home in the Trench.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ 'The 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth Has a Clever', *The Spectator*, 28 July 1917, The Spectator Archive <<http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/28th-july-1917/22/the-3rd-london-general-hospital-at-wandsworth-has->>. May Eardley-Wilmot (1883-1970) was known as a lyricist writing under the pen name of Dorothy Eardley-Wilmot.

¹⁴² 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

¹⁴³ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 123.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Buckley, 'A little Wet home in the trench' in 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'. Star shells were flares that would light up a wide section of the battlefield. Enemy patrols and wiring parties in No man's land would be at risk of being easily fired on if identified by these flares.

Buckley's experience of trench life differs from Strickley's, whose main worries, earlier in the war, are the rain and the smell. Buckley's life in the trench has to contend with constant sniping and shelling, which would have put the men under tremendous strain and no doubt contributed to shell-shock. The nightly star shells would have impeded necessary work carried out at night under the safety of darkness, repairing the parapets and patrols into no man's land; to be caught, lit up for the snipers was a cause for the 'language to flow'. In adding his own verse, Buckley revises Strickley's account, to emphasise the additional dangers of snipers and ordnance unmentioned by Buckley. Both men experienced the stress of being shelled: the 'Jack Johnson' was an integral part of trench warfare throughout the war.¹⁴⁵ Buckley's reiteration of Strickley's final line draws out this commonality of experience, literally blending his voice with that of the previous contributor. Buckley's additions are a good example of the dialogic nature of the autograph book, with each entry's meaning modified by the other contributions around it. This might be intentional, as in this case, or a product of proximity and co-existence between the separate entries within a periodical.

The two 'Little Wet Trench' contributions would have resounded with Lilian's experience of patients admitted to her care. Her diary entry of 20 November 1914 reads:

Bitterly cold again. One poor man in today with toes frost-bitten. Had been 3 days in icy water in trenches. We sent a great many off today. 600 more wounded to come to Casino alone by tomorrow. One day last week, 8,000 wounded came down here! in one day.¹⁴⁶

The constant rain that Strickley cites in his poem meant that the men were drenched in water for long hours whilst standing in the trench. Soldiers developed a fungus they named 'trench foot', which could end in amputation of toes and feet to arrest the spread of the infection.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Jack Johnson – British nickname used to describe the impact of a heavy, black German 15-cm artillery shell. Named after a famous American world heavyweight boxing champion who held the title from 1908-15.

¹⁴⁶ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

¹⁴⁷ Roper, *The Secret Battle*. Later in the war (1917), in admissions to hospital, not related to enemy action, only VD outnumbered frostbite.

These verses would also have been of interest to Lilian, giving her an understanding of life in the trenches for her patients and what their experiences were. These two verses, written two years apart, illustrate the link between the two soldiers who never met each other, further demonstrating the dialogical nature of the albums where the soldier speaks to the soldier and both to the nurse.

‘Alas we loved our little Scottish Boy’: Loss in Lilian’s Book

Although the hospital offered sustenance and a respite from the immediate dangers of the front, it was itself a space of suffering and death as well as recovery.¹⁴⁸ A significant role for nurses in the hospitals was care of the dying men and ‘laying out’ of the body ready for burial.¹⁴⁹ There was an expectation that medical staff and nurses would work with ‘professional detachment’; however, the intimate care they provided created an intense bond.¹⁵⁰ This bond would have taken a great emotional toll on all the staff caring for the dying men. Lilian keeps a record of deaths and, on opening her album, the first two pages, after her signature on the fly leaf, consist of a list of some fifty-six officers’ names with abbreviated Regiments (Figure 7). The list appears to have been collated gradually, and next to a few of the names, Lilian has written, ‘Died’.

¹⁴⁸ Joanna Bourke, gives a statistic of ‘7 percent of all men between 15 and 49 years of age were killed in battle’. See Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁹ Laying out of the body involved washing, dressing, and positioning the corpse before rigor mortis set in. It was usually carried out by nurses.

¹⁵⁰ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 8.

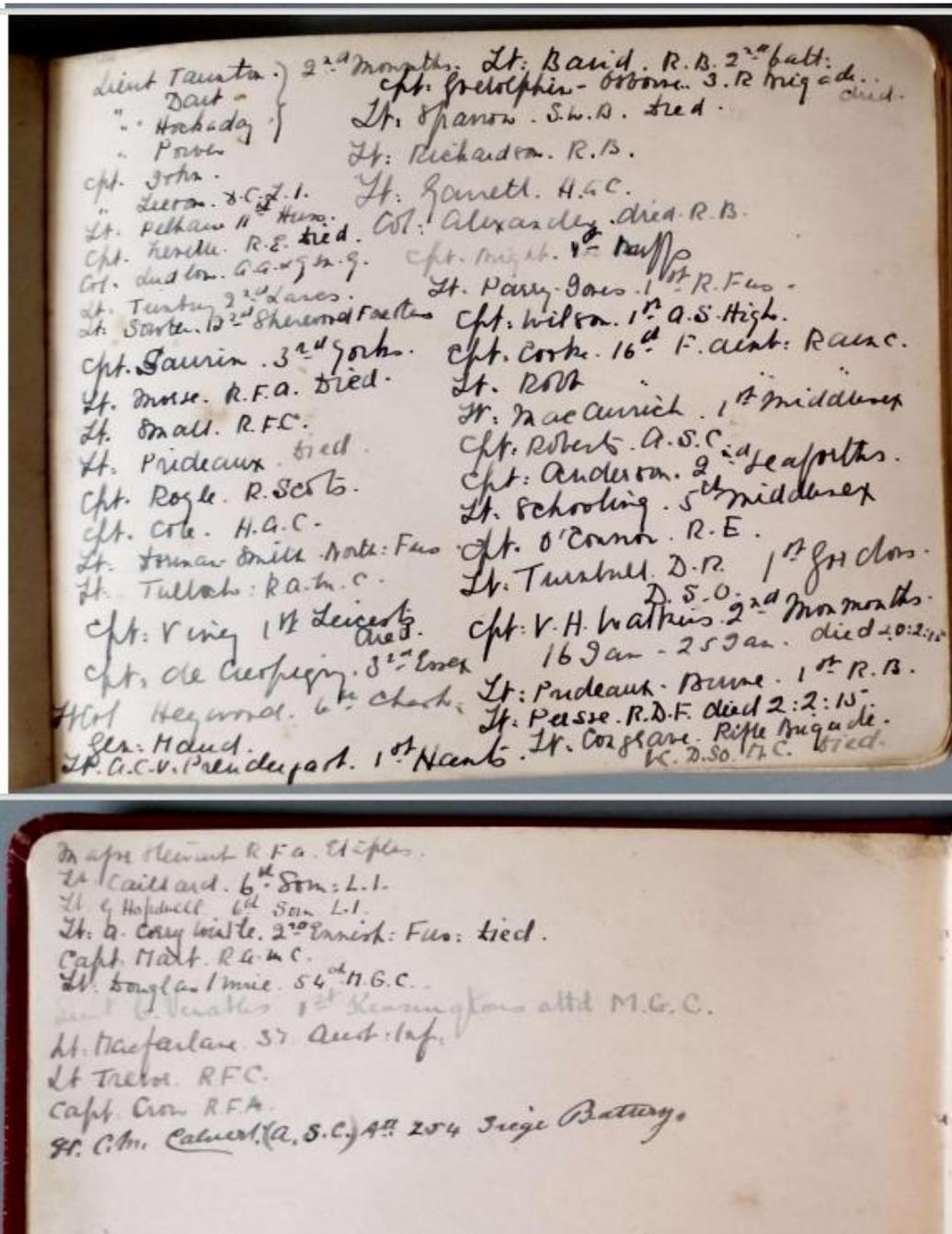


Figure 7. List of names from front of 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF00014.1.

Lilian's list both acknowledges an attachment to certain individuals she cared for and memorialises them as part of her war experiences. Cross-referencing these names with her diary it is possible to draw out her interaction with a few of these men and to gauge the emotional impact their deaths had on her.

In Lilian's diary, entries such as 'Poor old Sullivan had died at 3am & Bull at 11.30' on 6 November 1914 are perfunctory and factual, suggesting she is distancing her feelings with regard to death.¹⁵¹ There is a reluctance to dwell on death in her diary, in which she often moves on quickly after references to patients dying in hospital or killed on their return to duty with little emotion expressed: '6 of my men went today to Conval [convalescence]. Camp at Sanvic [sic]. I said goodbye to them wondering if I shld [should] ever see them again or next read their names in the papers "killed"'.¹⁵² Just as Lilian is reluctant to dwell on the deaths of her patients, so too was Alice Slythe. Watson notes that initially, Slythe recorded the deaths only as numbers, distancing herself from the intimacy of having nursed a young soldier who has died. Watson states that, finding herself becoming emotionally involved, Slythe chastises herself, writing, "'but that's enough..." and end[ing] the entry'.¹⁵³ Lilian's emotional bond with her patients is evident as she tries to follow the progress of her patients after they return to the front.

Lilian's album represents her memorialisation of the patients she had nursed who returned to the front and subsequently were killed. She certainly made close bonds with her patients as is evident in her diary entry of 28 September 1914: 'Got a boy, Underwood of 1st Queens v. ill indeed, probably double pneu [pneumonia]. The Chaplain has been to see him. I'm so glad as this lad might die suddenly'.¹⁵⁴ A few days later she reflects on Underwood again: 'I opened the door between it [Chaplain's service and hymn singing] & my wd [ward] so my poor boy Underwood cd hear. I have a feeling he is not going to get better. I can't help spoiling him a bit. S. Hyde calls him my "ewe-lamb"'.¹⁵⁵ Watson argues that it was mainly hospital volunteers who made emotional connections with their patients, contending that

¹⁵¹ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

¹⁵² 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

¹⁵³ Watson, 'A Sister's War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe', p. 114.

¹⁵⁴ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

¹⁵⁵ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

these volunteers wanted to nurse wounded soldiers in order to “do their bit”¹⁵⁶ Lilian goes on to record Underwood’s return to a UK hospital via the hospital ship *Carisbrook Castle* on 29 October: ‘Underwood went! Think of it. He is frightfully ill still. He had on the dressing gown I gave him [...]I took a snap of him [...] getting into the ambulance, a regular cinematograph of him!’¹⁵⁷ This ‘snap’ shows Lilian’s impulse to record and archive her patients in additional forms to the album. Here she immediately captures the moment, preserving her emotions together with her diary entry. It also demonstrates the shift from written contributions in an album to the growing use of photography for memory archiving.¹⁵⁸

On 16 January 1915, Lilian again records in her diary the arrival of a badly wounded officer, Capt. Vivian Holmes Watkins DSO to No. 2 Casualty Clearing Hospital. Unlike Underwood or ‘Poor Old Sullivan’ Capt. Watkins appears in Lilian’s list:

A busier day for me today. Several officers in and one very badly shot in the head. They trephined him this afternoon but say he is quite hopeless. He is such a nice man Capt. Watkins, Mons Regt and quite conscious this morning when I was shaving his head. I had quite a lot of officers come to see me today. Maj Davidson came between 1 and 2. He looks awfully ill and was not a bit like his usual self. Then Col Ludlow came past as I was getting Cpt Watkins back from the theatre.¹⁵⁹

Later Lilian writes that she spent the night ‘specialing’[sic] Capt. Watkins: ‘he is only quiet if I hold his hand and smooth his forehead’.¹⁶⁰ She writes that he wants her to go to England and nurse him there; otherwise, he will die: ‘Poor, poor man, he little knows the odds are out against him this time anyhow, and he is going to die with us here. Oh it is too [illegible] sad. Such another grand young life sacrificed!’¹⁶¹ Her use of the word sacrifice is powerful, and the anguish suggested by her repetitions ‘poor, poor man’ and her struggle to convey the

¹⁵⁶ Watson, ‘A Sister’s War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe’, pp. 107–08.

¹⁵⁷ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’. No further information is available on Underwood and it is possible he survived the war.

¹⁵⁸ At time of writing, it has not been possible to trace Lilian’s photographs.

¹⁵⁹ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1915)’.

¹⁶⁰ Specialing a patient is one-to-one nursing of a critically ill patient in order to provide a rapid response to a deterioration in condition.

¹⁶¹ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1915)’.

sorrow of the situation, with an unusual instance of her writing becoming illegible, provides an insight into the emotional state of the nurses at the loss of young lives. Despite their care, attention and ‘specialing’ they might ultimately fail to preserve life. Capt. Watkins was transferred to No. 7 SH out of Lilian’s care; she continues to write about him in her diary however. Lilian’s compassion towards her patients is evident in these diary entries which indicate the strong emotional bond she has made in such a short time.

‘Such a Sweet Letter’: Lilian Corresponds with Relatives of Her Dying Patients

For many Matrons and nursing Sisters, their duties included writing to the relatives of the deceased. Lilian refers in her diaries to correspondence between herself and her patients’ families, in particular recounting correspondence with Capt. Watkins’ mother who sent Lilian a photograph of Capt. Watkins brothers who were also serving at the front:

2 February 1915 Recd letter from Mrs. Watkins and photo of all her family. It is indeed one to be proud of 5 sons in the army! Such a sweet letter, Cpt Watkins is at 7 Stationary, and his mother has had a wire he is very ill indeed.¹⁶²

This unenviable task no doubt took a toll on the nurses writing to break bad news, just as it would have with the officers writing from the front with news of deaths in action.¹⁶³ Lilian has taken the responsibility for this duty seriously and, with her camera, takes grave photos to send to relatives. In this case, her correspondence with Mrs Watkins is reciprocated with a family photo. Both mother and surrogate mother find comfort in each other’s care of Capt. Watkins. As Hallett argues, ‘nurses were a safe link to home, when they wrote letters on behalf of their patients or communicated with bereaved relatives [...] and protected the feelings of those at home’.¹⁶⁴ Lilian writes in her diary on 25 February, ‘I went up to Cole’s [her friend’s] grave this evening and took some photos of it to send her sisters’.¹⁶⁵ By sending

¹⁶² ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1915)’.

¹⁶³ McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, pp. 139–64.

¹⁶⁴ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 180.

¹⁶⁵ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1915)’.

these grave photographs to grieving families, Lilian is providing a sense of place for the grieving family, unable to visit the grave. Di Bello considers the impact of the loss of a child on a mother stating, ‘in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty [...] and clinging to memorise and collecting photographs [...] an attempt to fill a gap in the maternal ego’.¹⁶⁶

A search of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) confirms the deaths of some of those on Lilian’s list; six of these men are buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery.¹⁶⁷ Others, however, such as Capt. Watkins, are recorded as having been buried in the UK; Lilian received a letter from Mrs Watkins giving her news of his death.¹⁶⁸ This event is a double blow for Lilian. She had been transferred to Wimereux on 20 February and was quite devastated at leaving Bailleul and her ‘Dear Major Leake’. On arrival, Lilian is informed of ‘the saddest of news, my little Cole had cerebral meningitis!’¹⁶⁹

Despite nursing dying men, it is ‘Cole’ who appears to affect Lilian the most, and her diary entries reveal the depths of her emotional attachments to the dying. Lilian takes a photograph of her friend’s grave and keeps it in her diary (Figure 8). She has been separated from close friends at Bailleul and is the ‘new girl’ at Wimereux. Expressing her grief at losing Cole, and her loneliness at this time, she writes of having no heart and of being moved by the Last Post over Cole’s grave: ‘Oh to think she will never speak to me again!’¹⁷⁰ Sister Cole’s name, however, does not appear in Lilian’s album nor is there evidence of any of her

¹⁶⁶ Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England*, p. 105.

¹⁶⁷ Lt. Morse, RFA 09 Dec 1914 age 20; Capt. Viney, Leicestershire Regt, 17 Dec 1914 age 26; Lt. Sparrow, South Wales Borderers, died of wounds, 23 Dec 1914; Col. Alexander, Rifle Bde, 29 Dec 1914, age 48; Capt. Godolphin-Osborne, Rifle Bde, 25 Dec 1915 age 25; Lt. Persse, RDF, 1 Feb 1915, age 22; Searched via CWGC and Forces War Records websites. ‘Commonwealth War Graves Commission’, *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, 2025 <<https://www.cwgc.org/>>. ‘Forces War Records’ <https://uk.forceswarrecords.com/>

¹⁶⁸ Capt. Vivian Holmes-Watkins, 1st/2nd Monmouth’s, 20 Feb 1915, age 25, Pontypool (Panteg UK) CWWGC

¹⁶⁹ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’. Sister Emily Helena Cole QAIMNS (1883-1915) She died on the 21 February 1915 just as Lilian arrived from Bailleul. Lilian took photos of the grave to send to Emily’s family and the grave states, ‘Not Divided but gone before only waiting & watching for Mother.’ (Wimereux Communal Cemetery). ‘Commonwealth War Graves Commission’, *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, 2025 <<https://www.cwgc.org/>>

¹⁷⁰ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’.

nursing colleagues contributing to her album. Lilian's list is reserved only for the soldiers she has befriended or nursed, and we can interpret the album as a unique space reserved only for her patients.



Figure 8. Sister Cole's grave taken by Lilian Robinson. Sister Emily Cole's cross the nearest left.

The annotated deaths in Lilian's list occurred in late 1914/early 1915 and coincided with Lilian's deployment to the Bailleul Hospital. It is highly probable that Lilian nursed these young men there and may even have prepared them for burial. A few of those named in her list can be confirmed as having written in the autograph album. Capt. Lowry-Corry Wintle is one of those after whose name Lilian's annotated word 'Died' in her list (Figure 9).¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Service Records Capt. Armar Lowry-Corry Wintle. TNA WO337/21337. Killed 22nd August 1917. Lilian writes his regiment as 'Ennis Fus'.

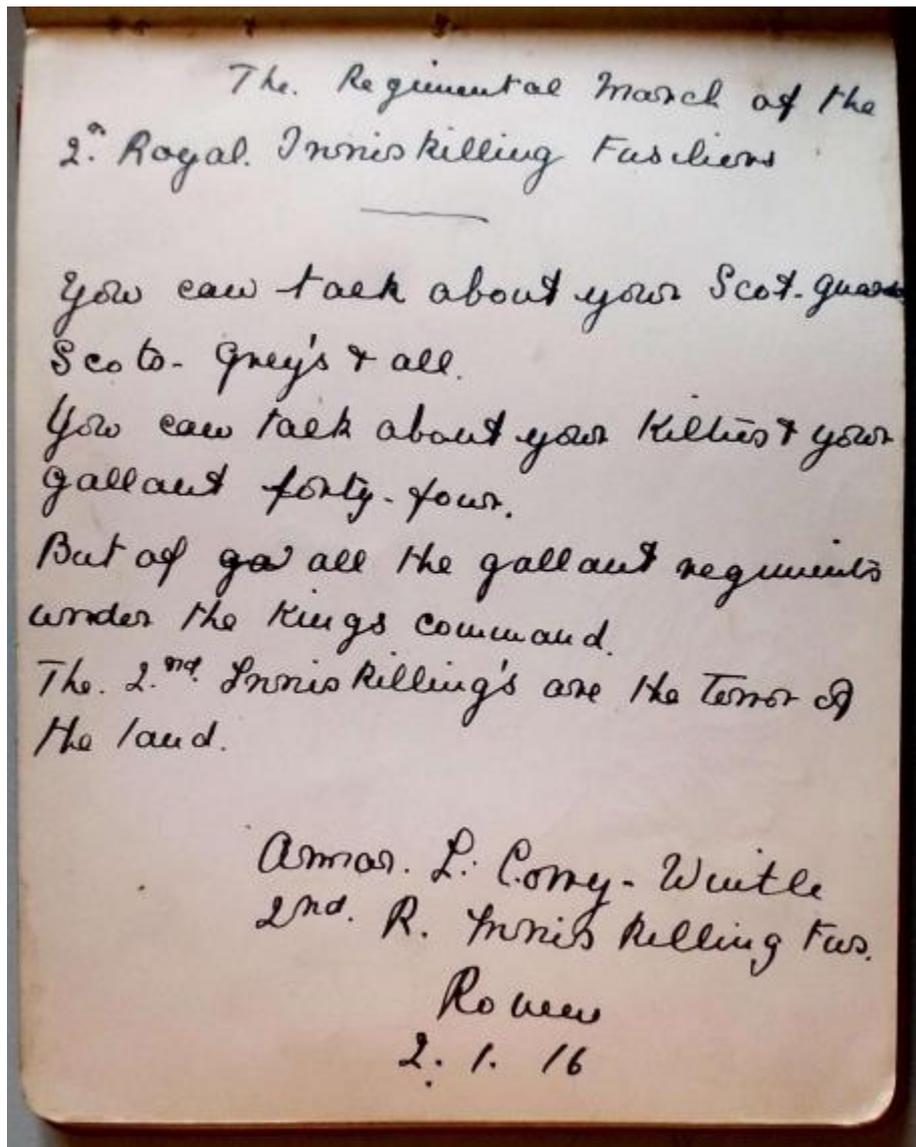


Figure 9. The Regimental March of the 2nd Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers dated 2 January 1916, contributed to Lilian's album by Capt. Armar Lowry-Corry Wintle. 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF00014.1.

Battles such as the first day of the Somme, 1 July 1916, saw death on an industrial scale. One Officer who appears in Lilian's list died and who shortly after the Somme offensive was Major William La Touche Congreve of the Rifle Brigade. Lilian's list ranks him as a Lieutenant whereas the CWGC gives his rank as Major. He is recorded as being killed in action which precludes Lilian's contact with him at this time, rather suggesting an earlier contact between the two for a previous injury. Unfortunately, no records survive to

confirm that he was cared for by Lilian who showed an interest in following the men who returned to the front.¹⁷²

Lilian, like so many of the young VADs, military nurses, and Doctors, was at the sharp end of death and dying of the young men. Their role involved enabling their patients to die with dignity where possible. This likely exerted an immense toll on her and other nursing staff, and Lilian's list is indicative of the emotional connections that were often made between the nurses and their patients. Unlike the families of the men who were killed, the nursing staff would not have had time to grieve in the same way. The constant onslaught of caring for mutilated, dying men would have left many with a form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and their trauma, like shell-shock, at that time was not well understood.¹⁷³

The Constant Presence of Death all Around: Sacrifice, Fear, and Stoicism

As discussed earlier and evidenced by the entry in her diary on 26 January 1915, Lilian, no doubt in common with many people of the era as well as the eminent war poets of the First World War, sought comfort in composing, reading, and sharing of poems as a means of expressing her emotions. Lilian's own contributions to her album include selected verses

¹⁷² Service records TNA WO338/7831 Brigade Major William La Touche Congreve VC, DSO MC (22 March 1891-20 July 1916) Rifle Brigade. He was mentioned in dispatches 3 December 1915 (Gazette 29422) and promoted to brevet Lieutenant Colonel on 3 June 1916 for distinguished service in the field (Gazette p. 6316). An extract from the *London Gazette*, dated 24 October 1916 records the following: "For most conspicuous bravery during a period of fourteen days preceding his death in action. This officer constantly performed acts of gallantry and showed the greatest devotion to duty, and by his personal example, inspired all those around him with confidence at critical periods of the operations. During preliminary preparations for the attack, he carried out personal reconnaissance of the enemy lines, taking out parties of officers and non-commissioned officers for over 1000 yards in front of our line, in order to acquaint them with the ground. All these preparations were made under fire. Later, by night, Major Congreve conducted a battalion to its position of employment afterwards returning to it to ascertain the situation after assault. He established himself in an exposed forward position from where he successfully observed the enemy and gave orders necessary to drive them from their position, Two days later, when Brigade Headquarters was heavily shelled and many casualties resulted, he went out and assisted the medical officer to remove the wounded to places of safety, although he was himself suffering severely from gas and other shell effects. He again on a subsequent occasion showed supreme courage in tending wounded under heavy shell fire. He finally returned to the front line to ascertain the situation after an unsuccessful attack, and whilst in the act of writing his report, was shot and killed instantly".

¹⁷³ Sharon B. Shively and Daniel P. Perl, 'Traumatic Brain Injury, Shell Shock, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in the Military—Past, Present, and Future', *The Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation*, 27.3 (2012), p. 234, doi:10.1097/HTR.0b013e318250e9dd.

from two poems by Robert Browning. One of these is featured in *King Albert's Book* and is set to music as a song.¹⁷⁴ Lilian's choice of verses from these Browning poems may provide an understanding of how she managed her grief. The first entry is the penultimate verse from Browning's 'Epilogue':

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.¹⁷⁵

In *King Albert's Book* this single verse ('One who never turned his back') is set to music by Alexander C. Mackenzie.¹⁷⁶ As with the poem 'The Lake', discussed earlier and also set to music in *King Albert's Book*, Lilian may have copied it to memorise and sing with friends such as at the gathering with the Bels at Bailleul. Diary entries from January 1915 confirm that Lilian played the piano herself and was teaching one of the Miss Bels.¹⁷⁷

A second Browning poem, 'Prospice', is found in her album.¹⁷⁸ Although an anonymous, undated entry, the handwriting strongly suggests Lilian wrote it. Its inclusion in her album, together with her other entries, underlines the theme of seeking strength and stoicism in the face of adversity, especially parting and the presence of continual death and dying. The reader's attention is caught immediately with the words 'Fear death?' and the language of grief pervades the poem. In it, Browning suggests he will face death with courage, even though it will not be easy, and that he will take death on in a fight. Its significance for Lilian may have been similar to her need for courage in caring for the

¹⁷⁴ 'One Who Never Turned his Back' in *King Albert's Book*. P. 34 -35.

¹⁷⁵ Lilian Robinson, *HF0014.1 Autograph Book* (QARANC Association Heritage Collection).

¹⁷⁶ 'Epilogue' (1889) in *King Alberts Book*, p. 34. In 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

¹⁷⁷ 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1915)'.

¹⁷⁸ 'Prospice' (1864) in *King Alberts Book*. Browning wrote this three years after the death of his wife and it

looks forward to facing death rather than looking back on life. In 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

wounded. Comparing ‘Prospice’ with Lilian’s other Browning choice from his ‘Epilogue’, they share a concern with how he wishes to be seen after his own death and deals with his preparation for death and the optimism of life after death.¹⁷⁹ Inarguably, the message that he must fight and follow those who have gone before, facing up to the fact he may die and resolving to face it willingly has pertinence to both Browning and Lilian: ‘I was ever a fighter, so – one fight more| the best and the last! I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,| and bade me creep past’.¹⁸⁰ Lilian may also intend this verse to extol her soldier-patients to be fearless in the face of pain, a recurrent feature in her book. This time it is the pain that results in peace and the hope that God will save the soul: ‘Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain, |Then a light, then thy breast, |O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,| And with God be the rest!’¹⁸¹ The sentiments suggest an acceptance of inevitable death which should be a good and brave death. These verses convey her understanding of the fears of her patients and can be seen as a method of helping those patients who read her album.

When Browning wrote ‘Prospice’, the ‘fog in my throat’ describes the emotions of overwhelming grief and the feeling of suffocation and inability to express his grief verbally. Despite being written in the previous century, this description takes on new significance in the wake of the mustard gas attacks first used in 1917 near Ypres. It also finds echoes in Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* when she writes: ‘I wish those people who write so glibly about this being a holy war [...] could see a case [...] of mustard gas [...] fighting for breath, with voices a mere whisper saying that their throats are closing, and they know they will choke’.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Francis O’Gorman, ‘Browning, Grief, and the Strangeness of Dramatic Verse’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, 36.2 (2007), pp. 155–73, doi:10.1093/camqtly/bfm008.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Prospice’ by Robert Browning in ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

¹⁸¹ ‘Prospice’ by Robert Browning in ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’.

¹⁸¹

¹⁸² Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 395.

Roper considers the impact that fear of death had on both the soldiers and their families. He argues that the soldiers were careful which family members they shared their experiences in their letters with, protecting more vulnerable members from the harsh reality of war and death they were facing: “I don’t know whether I ought to tell you these incidents for I’m afraid they make you feel anxious about me”.¹⁸³ This echoes Hallett’s observation that men told their war experiences ‘invariably [...] to individuals who were most available to listen – nurses and VADs’.¹⁸⁴

In 1969, Elizabeth Kubler Ross defined the five stages of death and dying as disbelief and shock, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.¹⁸⁵ Later, together with her co-author David Kessler, a sixth stage was added: meaning.¹⁸⁶ Nurses caring for dying patients would undoubtedly have experienced these stages in grieving for the loss of their young patients. Kessler goes on to quote Erich Fromm: “To spare oneself from grief at all costs can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness”.¹⁸⁷ Professional nurses like Lilian and Slythe were trained to maintain a professional distance in the face of so many deaths; they would have had to find detachment in order to continue to nurse the constant flow of casualties and face the regularity of death. Watson, however, argues we can see a wearing away of ‘carefully trained emotional detachment’ in Slythe’s comment, ‘I can not get used to it & I know we can’t [prevent death]’.¹⁸⁸ Further, a comparison of Lilian’s more emotional diary entry about her “ewe-lamb” with Slythe’s comment about her patient Gates, “If he lives [he] will never be normal, I don’t want him to die”, demonstrates the difficulty of balancing compassion with

¹⁸³ Letter from Edward Chapman to his mother in Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 64.

¹⁸⁴ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 166.

¹⁸⁵ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Families* (Routledge, 2008), p. 1.

¹⁸⁶ David Kessler, ‘Finding Meaning After Loss’, *Therapy Today*, 31.5 (2020), pp. 42–45.

¹⁸⁷ Kessler, ‘Finding Meaning After Loss’, p. 44.

¹⁸⁸ Watson, ‘A Sister’s War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe’, p. 114.

professionalism.¹⁸⁹ Lilian clearly has made a strong bond with her “ewe-lamb” whilst Slythe is endeavouring to remain detached. Hallett argues that ‘nurses walked a tightrope between maintaining a professional distance that would allow them to practice and becoming emotionally close enough to help patients overcome their traumas’.¹⁹⁰ Fromm’s thinking also suggests the benefit of remaining open to grief and happiness, a balance Lilian’s album shows she sought to achieve.

After the war, the dead were often described as having been sacrificed for their country. As Bourke puts it, ‘death was not entirely in the hands of the Creator: it had many stage-managers’.¹⁹¹ The military was now one of those stage-managers and the medical staff had a role to play within that. Bourke suggests that the First World War sanitised death and their families no longer had sole rights to mourn a loved one or for burial. The military authorities now had claims over the men in death as well as life, their military service continuing after death. Bourke argues that an especially ugly death was ‘reserved for men in active service, and the experience of death dramatically widened between men and women’.¹⁹² The sanitised version was of the whole body with hardly any marks on it, as if the dead had just closed their eyes and fallen asleep. This could not be further from the truth for many whose mortal remains were gathered or shovelled into a sack with nothing much left to be identified. The post-war memorials such as the Menin gate at Ypres are a reminder of those who died leaving no remains. Whilst families, separated by distance, could believe in a sanitised death of a son, brother, or father, the nurses and VADs would have experienced firsthand the death of young men who died of horrific wounds and in great pain.

‘Cold, with his sightless face turned to the skies; ‘Tis but another dead’¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Watson, ‘A Sister’s War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe’, p. 114.

¹⁹⁰ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 165.

¹⁹¹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 210 (Chapter 5).

¹⁹² Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 214 (Chapter 5).

¹⁹³ Austin Dobson, *Collected Poems* (Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner & Co Ltd, 1897), pp. 148–49.

Together with the two Browning poems related to death in Lilian's album, there is a poem by Henry Austin Dobson titled 'Before Sedan'. Originally written by Dobson after the battle of Sedan in 1870 its sentiments are equally applicable to the German occupation of Sedan in the First World War.¹⁹⁴ Dobson also features in *King Albert's Book*, although 'Before Sedan' does not appear. Robson's work, discussed earlier, considers the use of memorising, quoting Isaac Watt's adage that "what is learnt in verse is longer retained in memory and sooner recollected".¹⁹⁵ The recollection of these memorised poems about earlier conflicts would find new meaning for people during the First World War.

The entry reproducing 'Before Sedan' was made by an RAMC Officer in January 1916. Small changes, such as the opening 'here' changed to 'see' and the line 'just a few ruddy drops' changed to 'just a few stained blots' suggest this was a memorised poem the RAMC Officer was recalling.¹⁹⁶ The original 'ruddy drops' could be the father's blood but the stained blots used in the album suggest the spreading blood oozing from his wound across his tunic. As a doctor, he would have witnessed the often brutal and horrific death of soldiers injured in the trenches and, although 'Before Sedan' was published 1897, it captures the sight of a dead soldier serving 'King and country' but also one who had a family that would never see him again. The dead man in the poem is clutching a letter from his daughter. Many soldiers kept letters from home on their person whilst in the trenches which maintained a strong bond and link with their loved ones.

Austin's poem explores the pain of grief felt by the family of the dead soldier rather than of the individual as Browning does in 'Prospice'. The inclusion of this poem in Lilian's

Henry Austin Dobson (1840-1921) Poet and Essayist. Sedan is in Northeastern France. The Battle of Sedan took place during the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. During the First World War it was occupied by German Forces for 4 years.

¹⁹⁴ Robson, *Heart Beats Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem*.

¹⁹⁵ Robson, *Heart Beats Everyday Life and the Memorized Poem*, p. 43. Isaac Watt (1674–1748): congregational minister, known for writing 'When I survey the wondrous Cross' and 'Our God our help in Ages Past' which is now sung at the Remembrance Service at the Cenotaph.

¹⁹⁶ 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

album by an RAMC Officer would have resonated with Lilian. The soldier comments that after the battle, a dead French soldier was found with a letter clutched tightly in his hand, adding emphasis to the letter in the poem. Lilian's letters to the families were an emotional bond to the families informing them of the death of their loved one whilst in her care. The RAMC Officer is acknowledging the importance of the connections to home. As a patient, he could observe Lilian's actions, and she may have written to his family on his behalf. Just as in the poem, soldiers would have treasured these letters, which would have been re-read many times. This vital communication preserved the bonds between the soldiers and their families in the First World War, given the long periods of separation they endured.¹⁹⁷

'Before Sedan':

Here in this leafy place| quiet he lies| Cold, with his sightless face | turned to the skies;
| 'Tis but another dead| All you can say is said. [...] Ah! If beside the dead |slumbered
the pain;| Ah! If the hearts that bled|slept with the slain;| If the grief died – but no|
Death will not have it so.¹⁹⁸

The sentiments of this poem regarding the importance of letters from home to the soldier and the invocation of memories, such as Marguerite missing her father's kiss find echoes in Roper's research on family letters. Just as the soldier clings to the letter from home so the importance of his letters to his family would have brought comfort. However, 'The balancing act between confession and concealment was almost impossible to sustain in the letter'.¹⁹⁹

Men wrote home to reassure their families of their safety and well-being.

'Hail to thee – Flagwagger [...] The flags are draped in mourning, all for thee' (Figure 10)

Capt. Sullivan's contribution to Lilian's album embodies the act of grieving. It mourns the departure of 'Jock' a signalling officer with mumps who has possibly been moved to St Omer and is another poem by an RAMC officer. Lilian's diaries reveal her friendship with the

¹⁹⁷ See Chapter 2: 'Separation and Support' in Roper, *The Secret Battle*.

¹⁹⁸ 'Before Sedan', Henry Austin Dobson (1840-1921) in 'Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS'.

¹⁹⁹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, p. 64.

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 Ah, woe is me! The Buzzer will not act
 nor Buzz. The 'phone is silent – solemn fact
 The flags are draped in mourning, all for Thee
 The Signal Sections tears' are sad to see
 the wires have cried their hearts out "it is Death"
 Their cry was "Jock" with their last parting
 Breath
 Oh come back soon, our Darling and our
 Joy
 Alas we loved our little Scottish Boy
 R J Sullivan RAMC Capt.

The contrast between these four poems is interesting. 'Prospice', 'Epilogue', and 'Before Sedan' were all written in the late-nineteenth century and deal with death from the perspective of individual grief, their own mortality, and the impact of grief on those who remain. The fourth poem, which appears to be an original composition, speaks about the loss of parting from a loved comrade rather than of death itself. It links the writer's role as a signaller with his inability to contact his friend, and the parting is as emotional as the grief of death. The description of 'our little Scottish Boy' and the overall sentiment would suggest a young lad and, given that some underage boys lied about their age to join, this was a possibility. The youthfulness of the boy makes the loss more poignant and his important role in keeping up the morale of those is sorely missed.

Carden-Coyne explored the emotional bonds that men formed in the hospital environment. They were 'intense spaces where temporary relationships were formed'.²⁰⁰ She cites RAMC orderly Ward Muir who suggested 'social relationships between patients and medical staff [...] resembled kinship bonds'.²⁰¹ This sense of 'family' that the military authorities encouraged to aid healing and return soldiers to the front also engendered a period of mourning and grief by those who remained, either staff or other patients. The overwhelming number of deaths in the First World War created new experiences of grief and

²⁰⁰ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 191.

²⁰¹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 191. Pte Ward Muir worked at the 3rd London General Hospital and helped to edit *The Gazette of the 3rd LGH*.

mourning. Hospital Magazines such as *The Gazette of the Third London General Hospital* and *The Fifth*, the magazine of No. 5 London General Hospital, regularly ran a *Roll of Honour* listing both medical staff posted to France who were killed and patients who had died at the hospital. After the war had ended, in an attempt to cope with loss on such an industrial scale as well as control of the body of their loved one and its final resting place, particularly when so many of the dead could not be found or identified, people felt the unknown warrior came to symbolise a public place where people could focus their collective grief. Ann-Marie Foster considers the bureaucracy involved in identifying and burying the dead, arguing that the paperwork for many formed ‘a significant part of family experiences of bereavement’.²⁰² She goes on to argue that ‘during the First World War, the state wrested control of the families of the dead and assumed a familial role’.²⁰³ Bourke contrasts the heroic death of the unknown warrior with that of the known and very public hero Kitchener. Both were part of the tradition of heroic sacrifice of self for country. Winter argues that families were ‘acting in order to struggle with grief, to fill in the silence, to offer something symbolically to the dead’.²⁰⁴ He argues that it was this collective loss that unified the civilian population in grieving for their civilian sons who had been conscripted for war.

The entries in Lilian’s autograph album and diaries indicate some of the wards she worked on were isolation wards with references to mumps and flu – something that later became a pandemic, killing more people in the post-war years than the industrial deaths of the First World War. The poem, entitled *Lines addressed to a Signalling Officer stricken with mump*’s and beginning ‘Hail to thee - Flagwagger’, highlights that not all deaths were

²⁰² Ann-Marie Foster, ‘The Bureaucratization of Death: The First World War, Families, and the State’, *20th Century British History*, 33.4 (2022), pp. 475–97 (p. 475), doi:10.1093/tcbh/hwac001.

²⁰³ Foster, ‘The Bureaucratization of Death’, p. 481. Red Cross and the then Imperial War Graves Commission worked to identify the graves of the dead and today’s CWWG online site provides evidence of the families’ interaction in providing an inscription for the grave of a loved one.

²⁰⁴ Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the 20th Century*, p. 140 (Chapter 6).

'heroic' or from enemy fire. The subject of the poem is a signalling officer with mumps who has merely left the hospital rather than died, but his loss is mourned nonetheless. Bourke says that 'an even lower rank of heroic death belonged to the servicemen dying of disease'.²⁰⁵ The contributions in the albums provide us with the image of the recovering soldier. In the main, however, there is very little information regarding the nature of their hospitalisation. The albums allowed a space in which these other forms of less heroic loss can be explored and honoured.

One theme that does emerge in the albums, however, is the struggle with the psychological trauma the patients were experiencing either due to their injuries or their experiences at the front. The references to their nightmares and the comfort of the presence of the nurse appears in many of the albums and was discussed in more depth in chapter three.

Each of these entries considers aspects of dealing with death when industrial death became the norm for many people both on the home front, in the trenches and in the hospitals. Expressing thoughts and feelings engendered by the trauma of war in personal writings in letters diaries and in the more public space of the autograph album can be viewed as a way of dealing with the prospect of death, actual death, and the grieving process and the act of mourning, which extended widely in the post-war period.

Conclusion

Using Lilian's own diaries of the time in which she record her experiences has enabled a wider understanding of the value of the album entries to Lilian. Far from being just a set of random contributions of individual writers, they constitute a collective response to a specific and memorable period of history.

Various aspects of being wounded in war are all found in the album from the admission to the hospital and the first meeting of the nurse and patient, through the

²⁰⁵ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 249.

experiences of care from the VAD to the ‘cruel Mr. Wallis’. The album’s exploration of hospital life encompasses the importance of food, treatments and the distress of nightmares which will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. What appeared to be a simple ‘Roll of Honour’ at the start of the album is more than that. As the entries in Lillian’s diaries unfold, a very human element to her nursing and the loss not just of patients but of close friends emerges. We see Lillian’s vulnerability and humanity as a nurse on the front line. The personal writing in her diaries provided her with a space for an intimate, private expression of her emotions. Her contributions to her album are more public; sharing her hopes and fears with her chosen contributors would have been a therapeutic way to manage her own feelings and the anxieties of those she cared for. The poems especially offered strength and encouragement and were no doubt selected because of the current significance Lillian and her other contributors identified in them. I envisage Lillian carrying this pocket-sized album with her through difficult times so that she could read it at any time of stress and find comfort.

By systematically examining the construction and content of Lillian Robinson’s album it is possible to gain an in-depth understanding of the evolving relationship between a specific nurse and her patients at a stationary hospital in France during the First World War.

Chapter Five

Autograph albums and their links to hospital magazines:

Comparisons and Contrasts

The autograph albums from the archive were collated in the war hospital setting and with a few exceptions such as Sister Mason and Sister Robinson's albums which were collated in field hospitals in France and Malta, these were UK based hospitals.¹ Meyer outlines the establishment in Britain of the different types of hospitals that would receive casualties of the war.² Hospital magazines became popular in many establishments and could be used as inspiration for some of the contributions to the nurses albums. These albums were a popular part of ward life with nurses inviting soldier-patients to contribute to the albums as a keepsake of the interactions between nurse and patient. One album in the archive stands out from the rest as it belonged to the Matron of No. 3 LGH Wandsworth.³ This album provides the thread throughout chapter five and enables the influence of hospital magazines seen in the albums to be explored.

This chapter considers the autograph albums against the backdrop of the cultural history of the war hospitals and will take a comparative approach to these autograph albums and the hospital magazines to explore what could and could not be expressed in each form. It considers the emphasis placed on each element of the soldier-patient's experience. I suggest that a combined reading of hospital magazines with related autograph albums can provide

¹ Meyer, 'Hospital Journals', pp. 338–51.

² Meyer, 'Hospital Journals', pp. 339–40.

³ 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS'.

new insights into hospital ethos, into the experiences of nurses and patients, and the relationships between them.

Conflicts were conducted in distant nations with minimal effect on the awareness of the civilian population. Wars such as the Crimean War and the Second Anglo-Boer War resulted in casualties being treated away from the United Kingdom. Florence Nightingale's contributions during the Crimean War significantly increased the recognition of military medical care and led to the acceptance of nurses as an integral part of treating sick and wounded soldiers.⁴ Field hospitals, along with their contingent of military doctors and nurses, are mobilised with the Army during times of war to receive and treat casualties. Spire notes that "Army Nursing Sisters served in support of many of the campaigns that took place between the Crimean War and the Boer War."⁵ The casualty evacuation chains performed triage, providing treatment for walking wounded soldiers who could be treated and returned to the front lines, while seriously injured personnel requiring hospitalisation and more extensive treatment were designated for onward journeys to base or UK hospitals.⁶

Historians have charted the different aspects of the patient journey to base hospitals and onward to hospitals in the UK.⁷ The closeness of the war in France and Belgium meant that hospitals in the UK were called upon to receive casualties as well. In the first decade of the twentieth century, preparations were underway by organizations, such as the British Red

⁴ Helmstadter, *Beyond Nightingale*, p. 63.

⁵ Spire, 'Nurses in the Boer War (1899-1902): What Was It about the Collective Body of Nurses Caring for the Sick and Wounded during the Boer War That Shaped the Future of Military Nursing?', p. 18.

⁶ Martin Bricknell, 'The Evolution of Casualty Evacuation in the British Army in the 20th Century (Part 2) - 1918 to 1945', *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, 148 (2002), pp. 314–22, doi:10.1136/jramc-148-03-21.

⁷ Mark Harrison, 'Building the Medical Machine: The Western Front, 1914-June 1916', in *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 16–64.

Mark Harrison, 'Casualty Evacuation in Korea, 1950-53: The British Experience', *Korean Journal of Medical History*, 32.2 (2023), pp. 503–52, doi:10.13081/kjmh.2023.32.503; Harrison, 'Building the Medical Machine: The Western Front, 1914-June 1916'; Mayhew, *Wounded: The Long Journey Home from The Great War*.

Cross, The Order of St John of Jerusalem and the Territorial Force Nursing Service in the event a war in Europe would threaten the UK.⁸

At the start of the war, military hospitals such as the Cambridge in Aldershot and the Royal Herbert in Woolwich, were designated receiving hospitals for the casualties. Casualty numbers, however, soon overwhelmed the system. Established civilian hospitals such as St Thomas' in London were quickly upscaled to become receiving establishments in the event of war. Many nurses joined the reserve forces of the QAIMNS and the TFNS. Women began first aid and VAD training in the event of war being declared. In the pre-war years contingency plans identified buildings such as schools that could quickly be converted into hospitals. Established in 1908 by Lord Haldane, the Territorial Force Nurse Service (TFNS) initially consisted of twenty-three TFNS hospitals in the country.⁹ In the opening pages of the first edition of *The Gazette*, the new hospital magazine for the 3rd London General Hospital, Lt Col Bruce Porter the new Commanding Officer (C.O.) of the hospital provided a brief history of how the hospital became established stating

These [Territorial Force] hospitals existed, till mobilization, mostly on paper... In London there were to be four General Hospitals, 1 and 2 City hospitals and 3 and 4 County.¹⁰ No. 1 City of London General hospital (GH) was staffed by nurses from St Bartholomew's and No. 2 City of London GH was staffed by nurses from the London and Guy's Hospital.¹¹ No. 3 London General Hospital, (LGH) was considered one of the 'largest War Hospitals in

⁸ The British Red Cross was granted a Royal Charter in 1908 by King Edward VII. It aimed to provide aid to the casualties of war either the sick or wounded. It was inspired by the International Committee of the Red Cross established in Geneva and founded by Henry Durrant. The Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem was granted a Royal Charter by Queen Victoria in 1888. The Territorial Force Nursing Service was established by Lord Haldane in 1908.

⁹ Sue Light, 'The Territorial Force Nursing Service 1908-1921', *Scarletfinders*.

¹⁰ Lt Col Bruce Porter, 'The History of Our Hospital: The C.O. Tells How the Hospital Came into Being', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.1 (1915), pp. 1-3 (p. 1).

¹¹ Sue Light, 'British Military Nurses - Scarletfinders', *Scarletfinders*, 2013

<<http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk/index.html>>. The territorial hospitals were based in well renowned London teaching hospitals: Guys was established in 1721; St Thomas' pre dates 1215; St Bartholomew's in 1123; Kings College in 1669; Middlesex in 1745 and Chelsea and Westminster in 1876.

the British Isles'.¹² It was staffed by The Middlesex, University College London (UCL) and St Mary's Hospitals. No. 4 London GH was based at King's College London with St Thomas's Hospital later becoming the Fifth London GH. Convalescent hospitals took recovering wounded patients and specialist hospitals such as Craiglockhart in Edinburgh for psychologically wounded men, No 2 Northern General Hospital in Leeds for specialist orthopaedic care and the 3rd London General hospital for facial wounds.¹³

Historians such as Jeffrey Reznick, in *Healing the Nation*, explored the culture of caregiving for the wounded of the First World War on the home front and Janet Watson discussed the wards as a place where women sought to define their place as professionals in time of war.¹⁴ Joanna Burke, Anna Maguire and Ana Carden-Coyne all discuss the hospital as an important point of contact in the journey of the wounded soldier.¹⁵ Burke discusses malingering and shirking as a key issue in many hospitals and Carden-Coyne argues that 'although a serious issue, the malingering patient was satirized and not always reported to the authorities.'¹⁶ I will discuss evidence of this found in both the albums and in the Hospital magazines in this chapter. Another aspect of the hospital was its importance to wounded colonial troops who were far from home. Maguire states it is a 'key site of colonial encounter' and argues that 'the consuming encounter of hospitals was, though, with the nurses...' going on to suggest that the contact with the nurses who cared for them was

¹² '3rd London General Hospital (TF) Wandsworth. London SW - Grey and Scarlet', *Grey and Scarlet* <<https://www.greyandscarlet.com/3rd-london-general-hospital-lgh-wandsworth-london-sw.html>>.

¹³ Meyer, 'Hospital Journals', p. 340.

¹⁴ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, pp. 1–17. Janet S. K. Watson, 'Wars in the Wards: The Social Construction of Medical Work in First World War Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 41.4 (2002), pp. 484–510, doi:10.1086/341439.

¹⁵ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*; Anna Maguire, 'On the Wards: Hospitals and Encounters', in *Contact Zones of the First World War: Cultural Encounters across the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 153–76; Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*.

¹⁶ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 235. I discuss the satirisation of malingering in Hospital Magazines in chapter three.

significant for the colonial wounded.¹⁷ Analysis and comparison of the contents of the albums demonstrate the evidence of those encounters contained within the albums.

War hospitals, at home and abroad, all produced similar magazines for the amusement of patients, staff, wider public consumption and as a means of fundraising. Reznick argues that these magazines also fulfilled a propaganda role, seeking to reassure the public of the hospitals' efficiency and the care of the nation's heroes.¹⁸ Demoor et al. state that the First World War saw 'a dazzling number of periodical publications.'¹⁹ Many of the War Hospitals established magazines to raise funds for their facilities and to create a sense of community between patients and staff. Some magazines, such as *The Gazette of the Third London General Hospital*, published their first issues early in the war; others, such as *The Hydra*, ran from 1917 to 1918.²⁰ Others, such as *Fragments: The Wounded Soldier's Magazine*, published by Heywood Auxiliary Hospital in Lancashire, were printed for a relatively short duration of only a few months.²¹

Chapter One discussed the possible sources for some of the content in the autograph albums, such as the common copying and adaptation of other contributions in the albums, demonstrating the wider culturally collaborative nature of the albums, with a focus on the repurposing of Bruce Bairnsfather's popular 'Fragments from France' cartoons. Many of these appeared in trench journals and later found their way into hospital magazines and autograph albums. Perhaps the most well-known trench journal was *The Wipers Times*, but

¹⁷ Maguire, 'On the Wards: Hospitals and Encounters', p. 154.

¹⁸ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 70.

¹⁹ Demoor, Van Dijck, and van Puymbroeck, *The Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals*, p. 1.

²⁰ *The Hydra* was the journal of the Craiglockhart War Hospital, Edinburgh. Its first issue was published on 28 April 1917.

²¹ 'Fragments: The Wounded Soldiers' Magazine', *Imperial War Museums*, 1917 <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1506008022>>; 'Fragments The Wounded Soldier's Magazine', 1917, Imperial War Museum; *Fragments The Wounded Soldiers' Magazine*, 1917; *Fragments The Wounded Soldiers' Magazine*, 1917.

many army divisions published their own journals too.²² Written primarily for and by soldiers to read, the content of trench journals was a mix of poetry, songs, and cartoons as well as satirical content emulating advertisements such as the one for ‘Our Great Insurance Scheme’ urging the reader to ‘insure at once by placing an order for this paper with your newsagent’ against the risk of death caused by submarine.²³ The notorious mud of Passchendaele that the men had to contend with gives this particular satirical advert a poignant slant. With the exception of the comic pseudo advertisements, the trench journals largely mirror the content of autograph albums which are on a smaller scale. The popularity of trench journals was carried forward into the hospitals who produced their own magazines. The autograph albums, too, carried on this mix of poetry, satirical content, and cartoons on a more personal level, and all contain commentary by the soldier-patients on their environments. By doing so, they were sharing their wartime experiences with the readers of the album, the nurses, and other contributors.

On the home front, publications such as *The Illustrated War News* offered more official content and photographs in contrast to the often-black humour of the trench journals.²⁴ As discussed earlier, a few of the albums contain photographs of individual soldiers and of wards. One example of this is the album of TFNS Elsie James which contains a series of faded photographs of nurses working under canvas together with photographs of derailed trains.²⁵ Elsie has not commented on them not do her service records indicate where she was deployed but it would appear to be on the Eastern Front. Similarly, the entries in

²² *The Wipers Times. A Facsimile Reprint of the Trench Magazines: The Wipers Times - The New Church Times - The Kemmel Times - The Somme Times - The BEF Times* (Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1918); Roberts and Lt J.H. Pearson, *The Wipers Times*.

²³ ‘Our Great Insurance Scheme’ in *The Wipers Times. A Facsimile Reprint of the Trench Magazines*.

²⁴ *The Illustrated War News* was a pictorial record of the First World War. First published in August 1914, it ran weekly for the duration of the war.

²⁵ James, *PE/53/JAME*.

Beatrice Bowman's album (discussed in Chapter One) are of a more serious nature as she has asked for accounts of their war experiences.²⁶

Chapter one considered entries linked to autograph albums in the Norfolk War Hospital Magazine and the possible influence of the hospital magazines as a means to help soldier-patients with shellshock.²⁷ *The Hydra, The Magazine of Craiglockhart War Hospital*, is a good example of the creation of a magazine to support the recovery of soldiers suffering from shellshock and two of its most famous contributors were the War poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen who was also editor from July 1917 until early 1918.²⁸ Carden-Coyne argues that 'patient magazines were both therapeutic and disciplinary, underpinned by the coercive culture of military hospitals'.²⁹ The Imperial War Museum has in its collections various Hospital Magazines or 'Gazettes', among them *The Huddersfield Magazine*, *The Norfolk War Hospital Magazine*, and *The Southern Cross – the Journal of the 1st Southern General Hospital R.A.M.C.T. Birmingham*.³⁰ A comprehensive collection of *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth* (henceforth referred to as *The Gazette* in this chapter) has been compiled by the National Library of Australia and the Wellcome Trust.

³¹This latter magazine is of particular interest as the autograph album of the Matron of the 3rd

²⁶ Beatrice Bowman, *RCN Service Scrapbook* (<https://www.rcn.org.uk/servicescrapbooks>).

²⁷ 'Norfolk War Hospital Magazine', 'Magazine Committee', *Norfolk War Hospital* (Norwich, Norfolk, July 1916), Imperial War Museum.

²⁸ *The Hydra* Edited by Wilfred Owen from July 1917 until early 1918. It contained poems by Siegfried Sassoon. It ran from April 1917 to July 1918. Wilfred Edward Salter Owen (1893-1918) was a soldier and First World War Poet. Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) was a war poet, writer and soldier. 'The Hydra: The Magazine of Craiglockhart War Hospital', *Napier*, 2023 <<https://www.napier.ac.uk/about-us/our-location/our-campuses/special-collections/war-poets-collection/the-hydra/>>.

²⁹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 320.

³⁰ Newspapers of the First World War: Imperial War Museum Collections. Others included *The Iodex* (Shoreham VAD Hospital Magazine), *Second Southern Magazine* (1916 Southmead Bristol), *The Ration* (Reading War Hospitals); *Fragments*; *The Wounded Soldiers Magazine* (1917).

³¹ Two collections of *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital* had been accessed to support this chapter. The Wellcome Trust holds a complete collection of the magazine from 1915 through to 1919. The National Library of Australia collection is incomplete but provided useful access to specific events. *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital (Territorial Force) Wandsworth* (1915-1919), Wellcome Collection.

LGH, Edith Holden, is part of the archive.³² It will form part of the discussion later in this chapter.

Hospital magazines regularly called for contributions from both patients and staff. Under notices and on the back cover, *The Gazette* stated that contributions should be addressed to the editor c/o the Hospital Post Office and that the editor was ‘especially anxious to receive contributions from patients, sisters, nurses, VADs and lady orderlies.’³³ Whilst the nurse may have requested a contribution from a patient, the contribution itself was the patient’s choice. The editor of each hospital’s magazine selected suitable items for each issue and censorship ensured that morale was kept positive through the moderation of direct critical comment on the war. Some of the albums have pages or sections of pages removed. This may have been due to an inappropriate contribution and could be seen as the nurse editing her own album. An example can be found in Sister Clapp’s album where she has carefully cut out sections over two consecutive pages.³⁴ Both magazines and albums, however, encouraged similar extemporised forms of creativity.

The first section of this chapter will consider the autograph album of Edith Holden Matron of No. 3 London General Hospital together with the hospital’s own magazine, *The Gazette*, and will consider the public forum of the hospital magazine in contrast with the more intimate contributions of the autograph album. In her position as Matron, Edith took an active role in the publication of *The Gazette*, appearing regularly throughout its lifetime commenting on various aspects of hospital life as she perceived it. Edith’s presence in the magazine is vivid in the description of other contributors, even seen through a column about her pet dog ‘Chikoo’ or ‘pup’ as it accompanies her on her ward rounds it provides a rather acerbic perspective on Matron’s beneficent values.

³² ‘Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS’.

³³ ‘Contributions for *The Gazette*’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1915).

³⁴ Sarah Clap nee Webber Clapp nee Webber, *PE/1/253/WEBB Autograph Book* (Museum of Military Medicine Archive).

Unlike their obscure depiction in the albums, nurses are prominently featured in war hospital magazines, and Edith is no exception. Regular contributions by nurses to *The Gazette* of poems or columns about diverse aspects of nursing care and their perception of their patients by the nurses themselves, bring them to life. In the May 1916 edition of *The Gazette*, a poem 'To a VAD from a VAD' recalls the VAD's day from oversleeping, cleaning, doctors' rounds, and being detailed for night duty (Figure 1). The first verse of this poem later finds its way into Edith Grace Marshall's album (Figure 2). An exact copy, it would suggest the wide circulation of *The Gazette* given that Edith Marshall was nursing at Beechcroft Military Hospital in Woking, a British Red Cross Hospital.

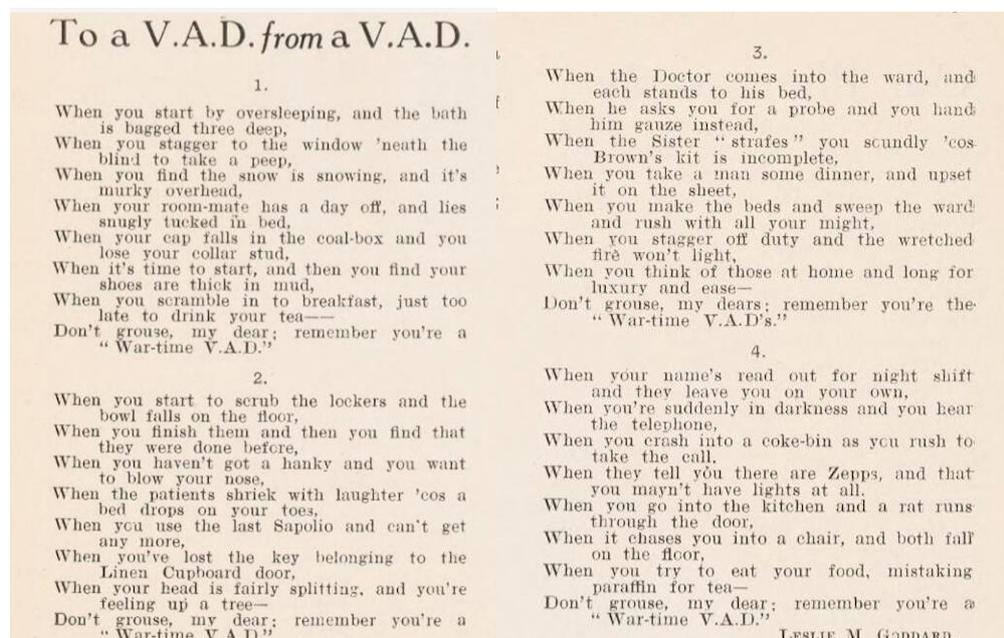


Figure 1. Leslie M. Goddard, 'To a VAD from a VAD', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.8 (1916), p. 23.

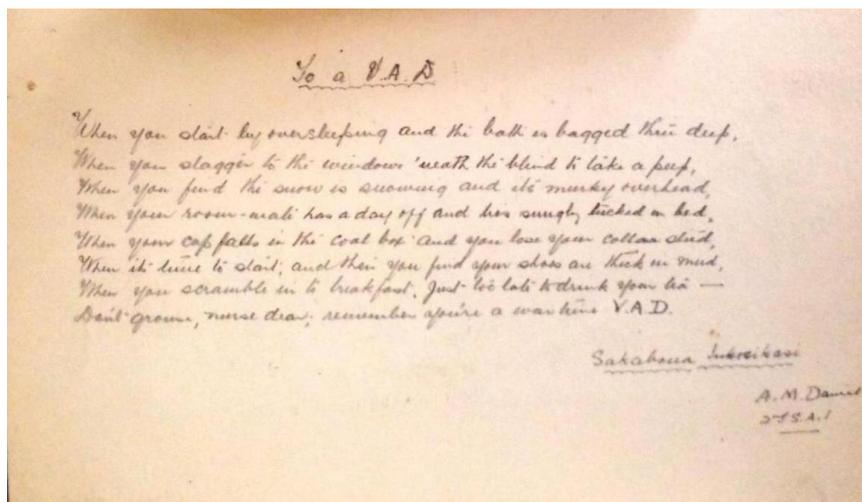


Figure 2. 'To a V.A.D' from the 'Autograph Album Edith G Marshall VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection.

The nurses' presence in their album is often revealed only through brief hints at their character from the contributors. Edith Holden's presence in *her* album, however, is even more invisible. There are no contributions that refer to her in person and this would suggest that the contributors were cautious in what they wrote due to her position as Matron. This has the effect of making it difficult to extract anything of interest about Edith's value to the patients. As Edith contributed regularly to *The Gazette*, this publication offers a different angle on her relationships with soldier-patients and hospital staff shaped by her position as Matron. I will compare Edith's view of the hospital and its patients as seen in the magazine with her invisible presence in her own autograph album. This comparative archive of hospital magazines will allow us to see further into the nurse's commitment to her patients and the fulfilment of her aspirations as a wartime nurse.

In chapter four, I considered how Lilian Robinson's personal journal provided an intimate view of her aspirations and inspirations, but in the magazines the nurses often shared their emotions in a more public forum allowing the soldier-patients a glimpse of the person behind the uniform and an opportunity to gain an understanding of their carer's. Edith's high-profile position both within the hospital and *The Gazette*, together with the preservation of her album, provides a unique opportunity to compare and contrast these sources.

The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth (October 1915 – July 1919)

The first issue of *The Gazette* was published in October 1915 and cost three pence (figure 3a). By July 1919 the front cover (Figure 3b) showed it now cost one shilling, was available outside the hospital at a cost of two shillings for a subscription for six months and *The Gazette* stated that ‘ALL profits from the sale of “*The Gazette*” are paid into our hospital’s Benevolent Fund, and therefore directly increase the comfort and happiness of the wounded’.³⁵ Meyer argues that, as with other hospital magazines, *The Gazette* ‘served an important purpose in boosting morale and serving as an outlet for complaints by rankers and patients in a way that avoided outright insubordination and insurrection’.³⁶ Carden-Coyne also provides a brief overview of the importance of *The Gazette* supporting the view that the magazines provided an ‘outlet for the pains and worries of wounded men’ and drew prestige from the well-known artists and cartoonists who contributed, stating it was ‘regarded as an emblem of the empire’s cultural talent.’³⁷ This was also commented on by the *London Evening Standard* after *The Gazette*’s first appearance, which applauded it as being ‘brightly written and well made up’.³⁸

³⁵ ‘All Profits from Sale of *The Gazette*’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1919), p. 48.

³⁶ Meyer, ‘Hospital Journals’, p. 338. Jessica Meyer, ‘Hospital Journals’, in *The Edinburgh Companion to First World War Periodicals* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023), p. 338.

³⁷ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 276.

³⁸ ‘Journalism in the Wards: The “Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital”’, *London Evening Standard*, 1915, p. 5.

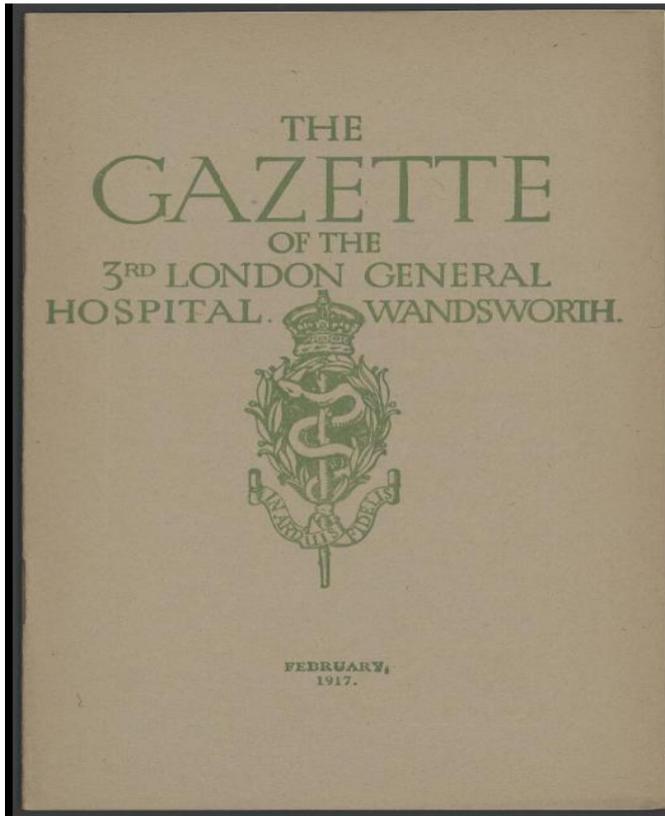


Figure 3a. Cover, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, February 1917.

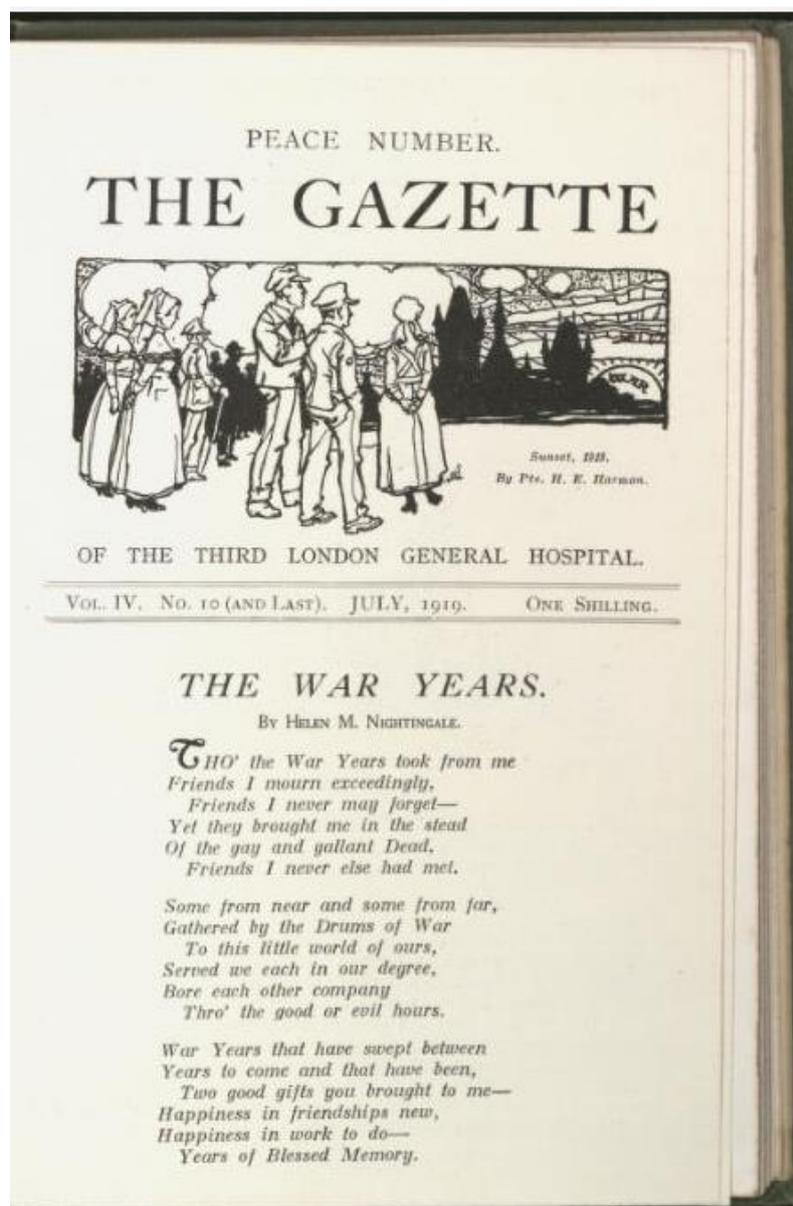


Figure 3b. Cover, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, July 1919.

Capitalising on the success of *The Gazette*, popular articles were later compiled into a book *Happy Though Wounded* (published in 1916).³⁹ The emphasis on the happy and contented patient hid the reality of painful treatments, broken minds, and fear of returning to the front when recovered. This inevitability and its consequences can be seen in one soldier's comment that when he is wounded again, he will return to No. 3 LGH: 'In due course, he

³⁹ *Happy-Though Wounded! The Book of the 3rd London General Hospital*, ed. by Ward Muir and W. Noel Irving (Country Life, 1916).

rejoined his regiment and I now hear that he has just been sent to France. Says Clancy, writing to tell me this news: “*Reserve Bed 5 for me, please, Sister [sic]*”.⁴⁰ This positive outlook, reinforced by the numerous visits of well-known personalities regularly documented in the magazine by Edith under the heading ‘Our Distinguished Visitors’, would have been reassuring to the public.⁴¹

It should be remembered, however, that many soldier-patients died and were buried in Earlsfield Cemetery Wandsworth.⁴² Others were left with serious mental health issues and in August 1916 the *South Western Star* reported the suicide of a soldier at No. 3 LGH.⁴³ The magazine’s emphasis was on happiness in the hospitals to such an extent that an article in *The Spectator* commenting on the book *Happy Though Wounded!* stated that the ‘contributors seem resolved to show that a military hospital is, on the whole, a very cheerful place, and we are glad to believe them’.⁴⁴ The tone would suggest that the optimism of a cheerful hospital was not fully agreed upon. This presentation of an image ‘we are glad to believe’ had a practical purpose as the monies raised, as *The Spectator* notes, went to the Hospital’s Benevolent fund.⁴⁵

The Spectator also mentioned the contributors to the magazine: ‘the “staff” evidently includes a couple of poets, one of whom at least may lay claim to merit.’⁴⁶ “The Poet in C8”

⁴⁰ ‘Odds and Ends from My Ward’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.1 (1916), p. 27.

⁴¹ Edith Holden, ‘Our Distinguished Visitors’, *The Gazette of the 3rd LGH*, 1.12 (1916327).

⁴² Commonwealth War Graves Commissions lists 486 graves from World War One. It is not possible to attribute them all to the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth.

⁴³ ‘Soldier’s Suicide at the 3rd London General Hospital’, *South Western Star* (British Newspaper Archive), 1916 <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>>.

⁴⁴ ‘The 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth Has a Clever’, *The Spectator*, 28 July 1917, The Spectator Archive <[http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/28th-july-1917/22/the-3rd-london-general-hospital-at-wandsworth-has->](http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/28th-july-1917/22/the-3rd-london-general-hospital-at-wandsworth-has-) [accessed 11 September 2023]

⁴⁵ ‘Some Books of The Week’, *The Spectator*, 1917.

⁴⁶ ‘Some Books of The Week’, *The Spectator*, 1917, p. 27. ‘The 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth Has a Clever’. May Eardley-Wilmot (1883-1970), elder daughter of Rear Admiral Sir Sydney Marow Eardley-Wilmot, was known as a lyricist writing under the pen name of Dorothy Eardley-Wilmot. Her other popular songs of the time included ‘Rose of my Heart’, ‘Coming Home’, ‘The Road of Looking Forward; and What a Wonderful World it Would be’. She was listed as a TFNS nurse at the No. 3 LGH, her medal card notes she later worked for the French Red Cross.

by D. Eardley-Wilmot, author of “Little Grey Home in the West”, is particularly good.’ In *The Gazette*, ‘The Poet in C8’ begins ‘C8 has got a poet, you can feel it in the ward’ and acknowledges that Dorothy is the ‘Author of “Little Grey Home in the West”’.⁴⁷ Describing her struggle to keep her focus on her nursing duties, Dorothy asks that her fellow nurses won’t be too hard on her. Part of ‘The poet in C8’ is reminiscent of the ‘ideal and realities’ poems discussed in chapter two, only here her inspiration is for writing verse:

Oh, I try to cast it from me, give my heart up to the work,
And I may be absent-minded but you know I wouldn’t shirk.
When I feel the inspiration flooding heart and pulse and brain,
Then I’ll think of pills and fomentations and thermometers again....
Well, its time I left off writing and surveyed the ward, I think,
Just to see if some one’s dying or if someone wants a drink.⁴⁸

Eardley-Wilmot’s pre-war poem ‘Little Grey Home in the West’ had become popularised as a song by the well-known Australian singer Peter Dawson in 1911 who later performed at wartime concerts for charity and to entertain the troops which may explain its popularity with soldiers and war nurses. Its wide circulation accounts for its appearance in many variations in nurses’ autograph albums, including Lilian Robinson’s album as discussed in chapter four. *The Gazette*, too, acknowledges Eardley-Wilmot’s popular poem and uses the title as a headline grabber ‘Our Little Grey Home in the (S.) West’ for an article about the origins of the No. 3 LGH as the former Patriotic School as well as its growth as a military hospital.⁴⁹ An adaptation of her verses by Pte Varley, a patient at the 3rd LGH, appears in *The Gazette*. Entitled, ‘Our Little Gay Home up South-West’ (Figure 4), Pte. Varley adapts it to the work of the hospital orderlies comparing an office job in the city and its regular hours to the work of the orderlies and ‘orderl’ims’.⁵⁰ There is a subtle observation here that the female

⁴⁷ Dorothy Eardley-Wilmot, ‘The Poet in C8’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1915), p. 47.

⁴⁸ Muir and Irving, *Happy-Though Wounded! The Book of the 3rd London General Hospital*, p. 124.

⁴⁹ ‘Our Little Grey Home in the (S.) South-West’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1915), pp. 19–20.

⁵⁰ ‘Our Little Gay Home up South-West’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1915), p. 32.

‘orderl’ims’ don’t do much work but ‘smile and look sweet’ while the male orderlies do all the work. *The Gazette* also claimed to have invented the term Orderlettes.⁵¹

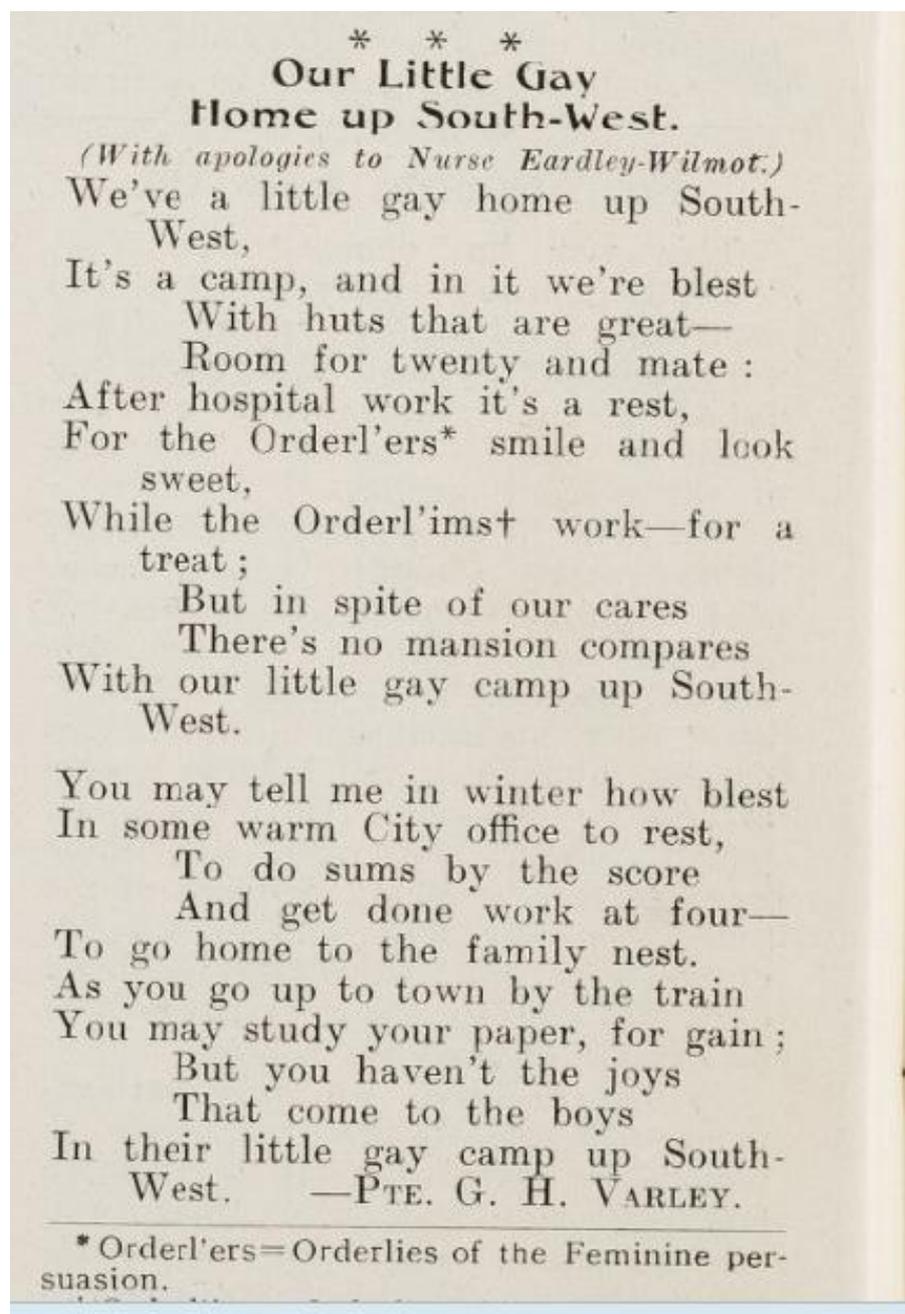


Figure 4. 'Our Little Gay Home up South-West', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1915), 32.

Despite the poem's popularity it only appears in Lilian Robinson's album from the archive and not at all in Edith Holden's album. McKinnon also notes its popularity in the

⁵¹ 'Editorial Notes', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.8 (1916), p. 195.

Australian Nurses' autograph albums, however, and in similar tradition, the original is adapted to the writer's need, but all begin 'I've a little wet home in a trench'.⁵² A poem by an Australian Soldier Tom Skeyhill further expands on this theme demonstrating its popularity with the ANZAC troops. In the forward to his book *Soldier Songs from Anzac* he notes the poem's appearance in leading British and Australian Newspapers of the time as well as a Trench magazine *The Sniper*.⁵³ Many of the ANZACs found a contrast between trench warfare and their homeland which made the original song particularly poignant and many parodies appeared in the newspapers regularly throughout 1915.⁵⁴

⁵² McKinnon, 'Impressions of Empire'.

⁵³ 'Foreword', Tom Skeyhill, *Soldier Songs from Anzac: Written in the Firing-Line, by Signaller Tom Skeyhill* (T. Fisher Unwin, LTD., 1916), p. 45. Tom Skeyhill (1894-1933) was a signaller in the Australian Infantry wounded in Gallipoli in 1915. The following poem, written in April 1915 was published in 1916.

'I've a little wet home in the trench,
Which the rain-storms continually drench;
Blue sky overhead,
Mud and clay for a bed,
And a stone that we use for a bench.
Bully beef and hard biscuits we chew;
Shells crackle and scare,
But no place can compare
With my little wet home in the trench.

Our friends in the trench o'er the way
Seem to know that we've come here to stay;
They rush and they shout,
But they can't get us out,
Though there's no dirty work they don't play.
They rushed us a few nights ago,
But we don't like intruders, and so
Some departed quite sore,
Others sleep evermore,
Near my little wet home in the trench.

So hurrah for the mud and the clay,
It's the road to "Der Tag"—that's "The Day."
When we enter Berlin,
That big city of sin,
Where we'll make the fat Berliner pay,
We'll remember the cold, and the frost,
When we scour the fat land of the Bhost [sic];
There'll be shed then, I fear
Redder stuff than a tear
For my little wet home in the trench.'

⁵⁴ 'My Little Wet Home in The Trench', *Croydon Times*, 24 March 1915, p. 1, British Newspaper Archive.

Hermann Lohr set ‘My Little Grey Home in The West’ to music in 1911.⁵⁵ It is in three/four time (or Waltz time) and keeps a steady even pulse in each line of 9,9,6,6 and 9. The sentiment of the golden sun setting and weariness and rest in the verses would have been uplifting to the troops far from home and its popularity among the troops made it easy to parody, contrasting the comfort of home with the conditions in the trenches. A comparison of three parodies of the song demonstrates one commonality, which is its first line ‘My little wet home in the trench’.

The trenches of the First World War, especially Passchendaele, were synonymous with mud and rain. Some reference the gore of war with a dead cow nearby as seen in the verse from Lilian Robinson’s albums. References to the types of warfare the troops endured figure, snipers, shelling (in particular ‘Jack Johnson’s’, also mentioned in Lilian Robinson’s album) and the food of bully beef and stew.⁵⁶ Of the three selected newspaper printed songs one differs in that it concentrates its theme on the Germans, comrades and finally victory and peace.⁵⁷ The adaptability of the lyrics and their simplicity coupled with music hall songs that were memorised for enjoyment too; it is not surprising that parodies were made for amusement during difficult times. The rather negative tone of the parodies reflects the soldiers’ black humour of life in the trenches. Its popularity persisted into the work of Spike Milligan who sang ‘I’ve got little grey hairs on my chest| and they stick to the holes in my vest’ to the same tune.⁵⁸

As Carden-Coyne shows, a proportion of the income from *The Gazette* was spent on entertainment such as outings.⁵⁹ In his case studies of two hospitals, Reznick considered the

⁵⁵ Hermann Lohr (1871-1934) English composer.

⁵⁶ Lilian Robinson, *HF0014.1 Autograph Book*.

⁵⁷ ‘My Little Wet Home in The Trench’; ‘My Little Wet Home in the Trench (Song to the Tune of “My Little Gery Home in the West”’, *Mearns Leader*, 1915, p. 6; ‘My Little Wet Home in a Trench’, *East Kent Times and Mail*, 1915.

⁵⁸ ‘The Spike Milligan Show’ (BBC Sounds Radio 4 Xtra, 29 July 1973)

<<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001dx81>>.

⁵⁹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 321.

use of activities such as boat trips, concerts, tea parties and picnics for the convalescent men as part of their rehabilitation.⁶⁰ Many hospital authorities described these outings as fresh-air treatments and placing patients on open-air wards was common practice to aid healing.

Carden-Coyne also discusses these entertainments and the public face of the hospitals who relied on charities and individuals to provide these entertainments; fundraising events such as garden parties put together with the income from hospital magazines also funded cinema and theatre outings.⁶¹

Not only did the magazines generate income, but they also provided information about events and their successes as well as offering a form of activity for the patients as readers and contributors.⁶²

Occasionally, the albums contain ‘scrapbook’ contributions by the nurse of an event at her hospital and some soldier-patients contributed information of entertainment with cast list of the entertainers both patients and nurses.⁶³ At the back of her album Freda Shingleton has pasted a newspaper report ‘At Henley Park Military Hospital: Fairy in a Christmas Pudding’ detailing a Christmas event at the Hospital.⁶⁴ A report in *The Gazette* describes a ‘first-class entertainment’ for the patients at the Christmas Concert.⁶⁵ The entertainment was arranged by the staff. Gifts were given to all the patients and a Christmas dinner of nearly a hundred turkeys was provided for the eight hundred patients. In the February 1917 issue Edith writes extensively about the Christmas ward rounds. Entitled ‘Christmas at the 3rd: Our Third Christmas’ Edith writes of the excitement and revelry on the wards which began at 4 am. Each ward is visited finishing with E and F wards where ‘we pulled crackers there and

⁶⁰ ‘Havens for Heroes: Life in two military hospitals’, Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, pp. 42–64.

⁶¹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 220.

⁶² Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, pp. 319–23.

⁶³ ‘Autograph Album Freda Shingleton VAD’; ‘Autograph Album Madge White VAD’.

⁶⁴ A brief search of the British newspaper library contains a few items about Christmas at Henley Park Military Hospital but the exact item in Shingleton’s album was not located

⁶⁵ ‘Our Christmas Concert’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.5 (1917).

then began again, Music, gramophones [sic], pianos singing, everyone was happy'.⁶⁶ E ward is also the subject of a humorous cartoon showing a happy amputee with a Medical Officer entitled 'High Jinks in E Ward' (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Cartoon, 'High Jinks (Sketch)', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.5 (1917), 120.

⁶⁶ 'Christmas at the 3rd: Our Third Christmas', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.5 (1917), p. 115.

The regular promotion of entertainment is found in most of the magazines. *The Hydra*, for example, advertises Camera clubs, cricket, tennis and concerts.⁶⁷ Concerts are a common theme in both the magazines and the albums and again the emphasis is on keeping a positive mood throughout the hospital. One of the most iconic popular songs of the first world war, ‘Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag’, extols the listener to ‘Smile, Smile, Smile’.⁶⁸ This sums up the need for everyone to keep positive and the albums feature many contributions exhorting the nurse to keep cheerful too.

Comments on entertainment appear in some of the albums, sometimes detailing concert programmes and the parts played by the staff. VAD Madge White’s album details a ‘Grand Concert given by the Nursing staff and Patients of No. 5 Ward Evington War Hospital’. It includes a comment that ‘Item 6’ in the programme was encored twice and that ‘Miss Stroud insisted on repeating it as a solo at least 20 times during the programme [and was] forcibly ejected by the other soloists.’⁶⁹ ‘Item 6’ was the song Boiled Beef and Carrots and maybe a comment on the hospital food! Nurse Shingleton’s album also contains details of a three-act play listing the cast which includes Nurses Shingleton, Evans, West, Strange and Haseal from her time at Henley Park Military Hospital.⁷⁰

While the hospitals published a propagandist image of a happy hospital (reinforced by the compilation of *The Gazette* in the book *Happy though Wounded!*), this emphasis on cheer sporadically permeated the albums too.⁷¹ The private nature of the albums, though, allowed a more varied tone and cheerfulness was not mandatory.

⁶⁷ ‘The Hydra: The Magazine of Craiglockhart War Hospital’.

⁶⁸ Pack Up Your Troubles was written in 1915 by George Asat and Felix Powell. George Asat was the pseudonym of Georg Henry Powell brother of Felix. A popular song with the troops.

⁶⁹ ‘Autograph Album Madge White VAD’.

⁷⁰ ‘Autograph Album Freda Shingleton VAD’.

⁷¹ Muir and Irving, *Happy-Though Wounded! The Book of the 3rd London General Hospital*.



Figure 6. Photograph of 3rd London General Hospital', in *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 4.2 (1918), 146.

The Matron: Edith Holden T.F.N.S

Edith Holden took up her post as Matron of No. 3 London GH Wandsworth in August 1914 (Figure 6). Whereas the majority of owners of the albums were either QAIMNS/QAIMNS (Reserve) Sisters or VADs, Edith was a Territorial Force Nursing Service (TFNS) Matron. A report in *The British Journal of Nursing* states she took up her post immediately upon being called up.⁷² She had previously been working as Matron in a hospital in Dublin, and records show she maintained her accommodation there for the duration of the war.

The Principal Matron of No. 3 London General Hospital Wandsworth was Miss Barton from the Chelsea Infirmary with Edith Holden as its onsite Matron. A column in *The Gazette* provides details of how it was staffed:

⁷² 'Report', *The British Journal of Nursing*, 1918, p. 313.

42 officers and 204 N.C.O.'s and men...There are 114 Territorial Force sisters and nurses. Of T.F. Nursing Association Probationers – which is the title accorded to our friends the V.A.D.'s as soon as they enter the hospital – there are 134.⁷³

The article goes on to list the various other ancillary workers such as servants and laundry workers. A report in *The Gazette* at the end of the war states that No. 3 LGH was one of the biggest military hospitals in the country with over 2000 beds.⁷⁴ Sadly, no medical records survive for many of the military hospitals in the country from the First World War and none have survived for the Territorial Force General Hospitals in the United Kingdom.⁷⁵ This makes the autograph albums linked to these hospitals a unique and valuable resource.

Edith's album of her soldier-patients

Edith Holden's album contains contributions from the soldier-patients at No. 3 LGH with the earliest dated entry on 20 October 1914.⁷⁶ Its connection to the hospital can be authenticated in some of the contributions which give the hospital as a form of address or location of the soldier-patients. None of the contributions, however, mention either Edith's name or her status as Matron. The only indication of her connection to the album is a cut-out photograph of Edith Holden on the facing page (Figure 7), accompanied by a roughly cut caption that was probably taken from the March 1916 issue of *The Gazette* (Figure 8).⁷⁷

⁷³ 'How the 3rd LGH Is Staffed', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.1 (1915), p. 21.

⁷⁴ Hon. Mrs Francis McLaren, 'Miss Edith Holden', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 3.9 (1918), pp. 91–93. The Hon. Mrs. Francis McLaren (1887-1973) was the widow of Francis McLaren MP (1886-1917) she later married Bernard Freyberg later 1st Baron Freyberg.

⁷⁵ Light, 'British Military Nurses - Scarletfinders'.

⁷⁶ 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS'.

⁷⁷ 'Photograph: Miss Edith Holden RRD', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.9 (1916).



Figure 7. Photograph of Edith Holden, RRC, Matron of the 3rd LGH Wandsworth in 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/68/HOLD.



Figure 8. Photograph of Edith Holden, RRC, Matron of the 3rd LGH Wandsworth: 'Miss Edith Holden RRC', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.9 (1916).

The other unusual feature of the album is the fact that several pages have been pasted in it from another smaller album, although this newer album also contains contributions on its pages too (Figure 9). The reason for the amalgamation of two albums is not known but it may be conjectured that the original album was small and filled quickly. Edith may have been gifted a larger album or purchased one realising the large number of patients she would interact with and wish to keep a memento of in her album. The decision to paste the original pages into this new album demonstrates her desire for the collection to be viewed as a whole. Edith pastes fifteen pages on alternate pages of the new album (its first thirty) this regular pattern is then interrupted by a couple of contributions before she pastes 'The Battle Honour' contribution over four consecutive pages.⁷⁸ The album then continues to be filled in the usual way.

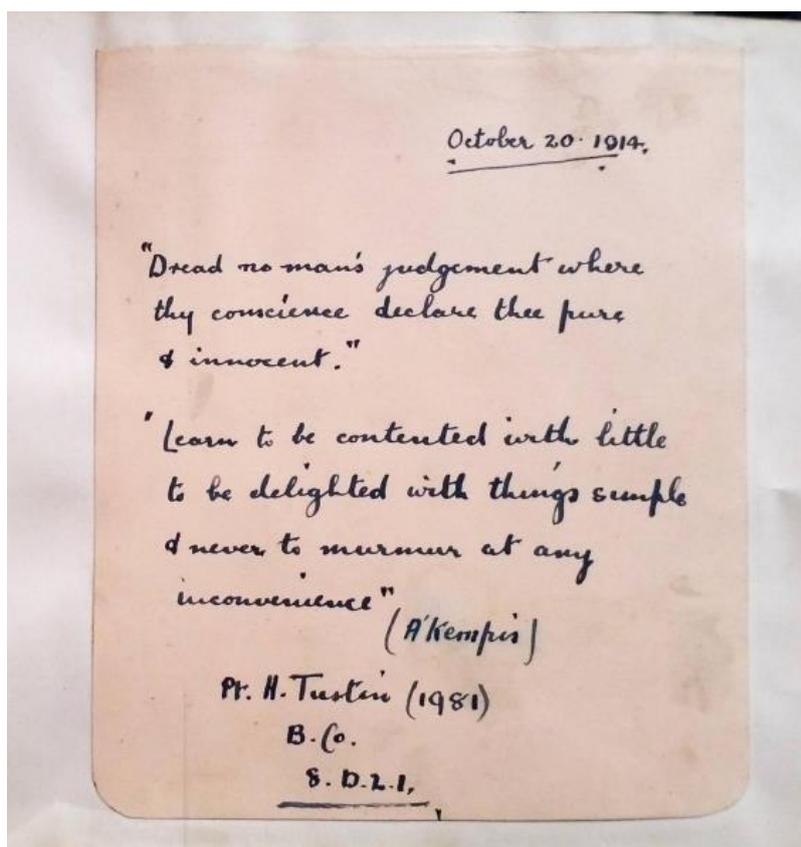


Figure 9. Pasted page in 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/68/HOLD.

⁷⁸ 'The Battle Honour' in 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS'.

The first dated entry suggests Edith began her album shortly after taking up her post as Matron and continued collecting until 1919 coinciding with the closure of both the hospital and the last issue of *The Gazette*. Despite the range of dates, however, the majority of contributions were made in April/May 1916. In February 1916, *The Gazette* reported that Edith was awarded the RRC followed by her portrait photograph in the March 1916 issue (Figure 8).⁷⁹ This may have sparked a particular interest in her from patients on her ward rounds, prompting her to provide her album for entries.

What is striking about the album is that, despite her position as Matron and her daily contact with many important military and political figures, as well as the very talented *Gazette* contributors, no celebrity visitors appear in her autograph album. As *The Gazette* regularly ran articles and photographs of ‘Distinguished Visitors’ to the hospital, it is not known if Edith had a second album which focused more on noteworthy contributors from the very many celebrity visitors to the Hospital that are regularly featured in *The Gazette*.⁸⁰ It may be, as the album contents suggest, that her interest lay purely in contributions from her soldier-patients who had been wounded in battle. Many of the contributors were from Commonwealth Countries, in particular soldiers from the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) and she may have had an interest in talking to them about a country she had, presumably, not visited.

Edith provides her readers with an account: ‘My First Day at the 3rd’

Unlike her presence in her album, Edith's presence in the hospital was a very visible, hardworking one. She was often accompanied on her hospital rounds by her dog Chikoo who I will discuss in more depth later in the chapter. The contributions that Edith Holden makes to *The Gazette* allow us an insight into the relationships between the soldier-patients and herself.

⁷⁹ ‘Photograph: Miss Edith Holden RRD’.

⁸⁰ Holden, ‘Our Distinguished Visitors’.

We see little of the nurses' view of their relationship with their patients in the albums (except by extrapolating from what the patients' contributions might illuminate), why the nurse chose a particular contributor, or how meaningful their interactions may have been. In setting some of the contributions in the albums against those in *The Gazette* and together with Edith's own writings in *The Gazette* I start to build up a picture of the kind of soldier-patient who was asked to contribute to her personal album. This can further enable consideration of similar relationships in the other albums.

Edith's first contribution to *The Gazette* was in the first issue in October 1915. Her article was a description of her first day at No. 3 LGH. It is written a year after her appointment as Matron and, given the penchant for journal keeping by many nurses and VADs, was probably expanded from a diary entry recalling what she would have considered a momentous event:

It was very hot, and I was just starting for a holiday (which I considered I needed very badly) when I was summoned to come to the 3rd London General Hospital. Where that was I didn't know. But I hoped it might be 'somewhere in France'.⁸¹

Edith's hope for 'somewhere in France' was no doubt echoed by many of the QAIMNS and TFNS nurses in August 1914. Lilian Robinson's diary entry for 13 August similarly notes an unknown destination: 'August 13th We left A'shot at 9.15 for where - ? we know not'.⁸² In contrast, when Alice Slythe was deployed in May 1915 the war had been reported on for some months and it was no longer the unknown quantity facing Edith and Lilian. Watson comments that TFNS Sister Alice Slythe had a romanticized view of Wartime France stating that 'the environment was a distraction from the work because France was more exciting than the hospital.'⁸³

⁸¹ Edith Holden, 'My First Day', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1915), pp. 9–10.

⁸² 'C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)'.

⁸³ Watson, 'A Sister's War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe', p. 105.

Edith shares her mix of apprehension and relief at meeting her colleagues on her arrival at No. 3 LGH, some of whom she knows. She goes on to give a detailed account of the lunch, which takes up much of her article and is in stark contrast with the brevity with which she recalls her meeting with the Commanding Officer (CO): ‘and I was taken to be introduced to the Commanding Officer who had just arrived.’⁸⁴ This telling of apparently less significant aspects at length compared with the sparse detail Edith provides of her first meeting with her CO can be viewed as Edith’s respect for details from this intimate meeting that would not have been for public consumption in *The Gazette*. Telling of her relief at meeting her colleagues, and the detailed account of the lunch, however, can be seen as Edith wanting to be perceived by the staff and patients as approachable in her role as Matron. She can share this as she is the senior figure as opposed to her junior role in relation to the CO where she would not have been at liberty to divulge much information about the running of the hospital.

There are regular contributions in *The Gazette* from the Matron, such as ‘My Day’ and ‘An Appreciation’, a brief article that tells of a unit formed from No. 3 LGH that left for the East. It doesn’t give specifics of their destination, but we know it is headed by Captain Hope Gosse. She takes pride of ownership in their marching past and conveys a sense of belonging together with the hope of their safe return in her phrase, ‘We have only *lent* [sic] them to the East’.⁸⁵ In another article, ‘Concerning Hospital Discipline-and some Reminiscences’ we are given an insight into Edith’s ward rounds:

“Matron...one day you came through the ward. It seemed to me that you flashed through...Sister got a message from you to send the two bed-tables with the broken legs...to be mended...” he then asked how I apparently went through the ward not taking much notice, but in reality taking everything in practically at a glance.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Holden, ‘My First Day’.

⁸⁵ Edith Holden, ‘An Appreciation by Matron’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1916), p. 289.

⁸⁶ Edith Holden, ‘Concerning Hospital Discipline’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.3 (1916), p. 57.

This quotation illustrates Edith's appreciation of her staff – this exchange was with an orderly – and how she has time to listen and respond to them. In the same article, Edith then goes on to reminisce about her first day as a probationer nurse. Her account is one that echoes the poems about the ideals and realities of nursing discussed in chapter three. Edith recounts that she was overwhelmed and sought refuge in the kitchen with a 'very superior ward-maid who gave me to understand that I was only a pro [probationer]'; she is found and tasked by a Sister to go to theatre, Edith says she is 'too frightened to ask what for'.⁸⁷ Edith's reminiscences provide a picture of the inexperienced, frightened young probationer nurse who is feeling very unprepared for the career she has chosen. Her admissions of her lack of experience and her doubts about her ability to overcome her fears are frank. Such open honesty, perhaps, is intended to encourage both military and civilian readers of *The Gazette* to see her as an empathetic Matron, one they could approach when visiting the hospital. The contrast with the orderly's view of her ward round works in summing up her professional development: she shares not only how far she has come but how her confidence has grown; here we see the attributes of a well-respected efficient matron.

Sharing such memories of her arrival and later reminiscences of being a probationer, would have shown empathy with her nursing Sisters, VADS, orderlies and orderlettes as well as inexperienced nurses facing the task of nursing badly injured soldier-patients back to health.⁸⁸ She is portraying herself as an empathetic Matron who understands the daunting tasks ahead. Equally, such openness about anxieties would have provided some reassurance to the patients arriving in an unfamiliar environment.

⁸⁷ 'Concerning Hospital Discipline (Probationer)', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 2.3 (1916), 58–59.

⁸⁸ 'Orderlettes', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.10 (1915), p. 251.

In the January 1916 issue of *The Gazette*, Edith provides an account of ‘My Day’ to the readers.⁸⁹ We are invited into her world as she is woken by the noises of the hospital changing pace from night duty working to the General Duty Section at 0630. She takes us through her routine, receiving the reports from the Night Sisters, ‘each with her tale of the night’s adventures’ and on to matters of the day before she begins her hospital rounds: ‘Now comes the “daily round.” Sometimes we go round the main buildings, another day the huts, and finally the kitchen, to see the dinners go out.’⁹⁰ Edith, no doubt, took her autograph album with her on many of these occasions and the entries reflect her journey as many refer to the different wards and huts – A3, B7, D, E, F and hut H. Contribution to Edith’s album reflect her ward rounds containing references to the wards as well as Hut H. One soldier refers to ‘Hut H’ in his address block whilst another refers to his location in a verse. ‘A Soldier once lived in this Hut| the nurses said you are a nut| He had two legs one small one large| and the only cure it was massage’.⁹¹

Barbara McLaren considers the range of Matron’s responsibilities, which are reflected in Edith’s own column ‘My Day’, not only recounting her management of the dietary control, but her compassion towards the families of her soldier-patients:

Yet a further and very human branch of the Matron’s special, though unofficial, activities is the care of the relatives who are sent for by the medical officers to see the dangerously ill cases...many [arriving] from remote parts of the country, never having been in London before; and the Matron has made it her duty to find accommodation near the hospital.⁹²

⁸⁹ Edith Holden, ‘My Day’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.4 (1916), pp. 85–87.

⁹⁰ Holden, ‘My Day’.

⁹¹ ‘Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS’.

⁹² Barbara McLaren, *Women of the War* (George H. Doran Company, 1918), p. 101.

Edith's regular contributions to *The Gazette* would have been a connection to the wider readership of the magazine, in particular, the families of the soldier-patients as well as fundraisers and the soldiers at the front, all of whom could subscribe to the magazine and be reassured of the commitment of Edith and her staff to give the highest standard of care possible.

Matron's 'pup' and gentle subversion in Albums and Magazines

The different genre of the hospital magazine to the autograph album offers a range of perspectives precluded in the albums. Both forms, however, used an imaginative engagement with Matron's dog to express ideas that would otherwise have been difficult to include.

The Gazette featured many personalities of the hospital, and this included Edith Holden's dog Chickoo. Sketches of small animals are found in many of the albums and dogs are a common subject for contributors. They often featured in photographs of military establishments and Sue Light notes that in India in the 1890's they were often Jack Russells.⁹³ Edith had a small Pekingese dog that accompanied her on her visits around the hospital. Although Chikoo became a well-loved symbol of the hospital, even making contributions to *The Gazette*, he was not universally liked. In Edith's album, a verse appears about a dog: 'Sister had a little dog | She called it rag-a muffin but her father cut its tail right off | So now it wagging nuffin'.⁹⁴ Given the shared knowledge of Edith's affection for her pet, this depiction of a tail-less dog in her album is humorous and yet rather tasteless. It is also possible to give a darker meaning to the verse. The metaphorical cutting of the tail could be interpreted as a salutary tale of disciplinary action against a nurse under the authority of the ward Sister, 'Father' being Matron or even the CO of the hospital.

⁹³ Scarlett Finders, 'Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service', [Http://www.Scarletfinders.Co.Uk/](http://www.Scarletfinders.Co.Uk/),

⁹⁴ 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS'.

A cartoon sketch of Chikoo in *The Gazette* describes him as ‘a well-known member of the Staff’ (Figure 10). He is shown as a well-groomed dog ‘as seen by his fond mistress’ and is contrasted by an alternative view of Chikoo as a rather grumpy, scrappy dog ‘as seen by a jaundiced world’.⁹⁵

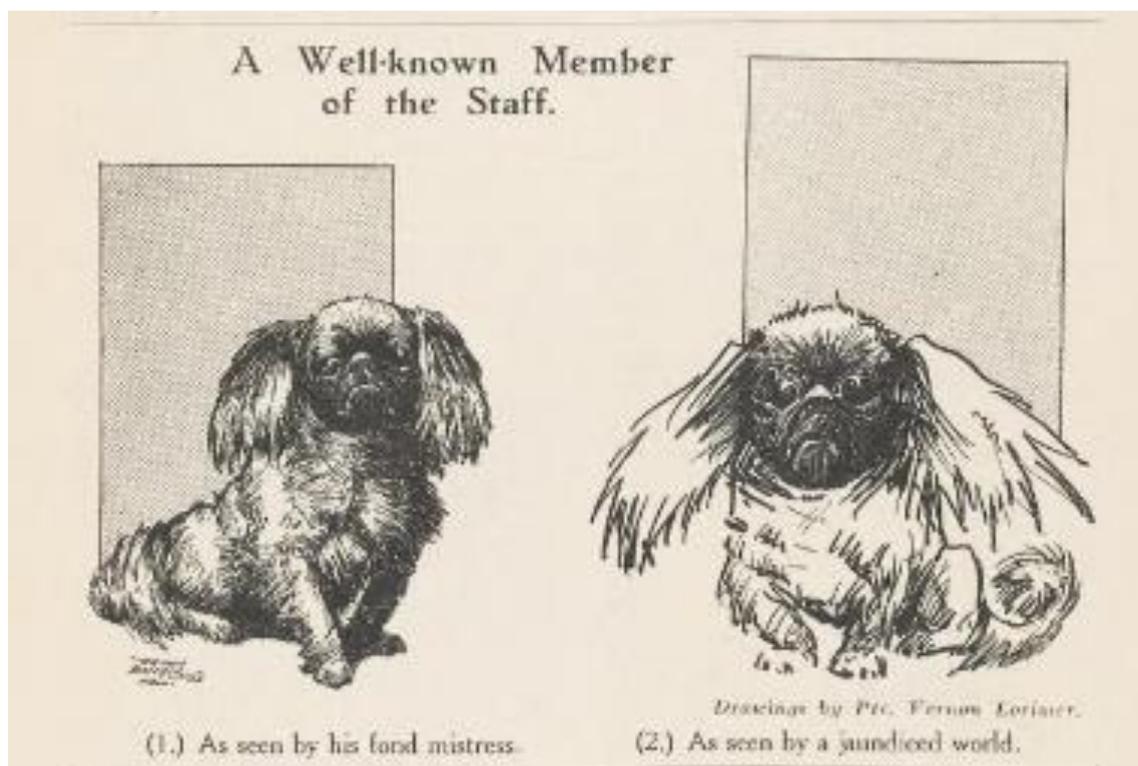


Figure 10. Sketch of Edith Holden’s dog ‘Chikoo’: A Well-Known Member of the Staff’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.8 (1916), 197.

The cartoon images of Chikoo in *The Gazette* suggest the dog is not altogether viewed affectionately and the contributor here may be indicating his dislike of this small dog. In another cartoon, ‘When Chikoo Strayed’, a soldier-patient is seen laughing at the news the dog is missing, which adds to the sense of opposing views of Chikoo’s popularity (Figures 11a and 11b).⁹⁶ These two images of Pup as seen by Matron and the staff and patients might also be an analogy of how Matron herself is seen by the staff!

⁹⁵ ‘A Well-Known Member of the Staff’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.8 (1916), p. 197.

⁹⁶ ‘When Chikoo Strayed/A Heartless Series’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.1 (1916), pp. 20–21.

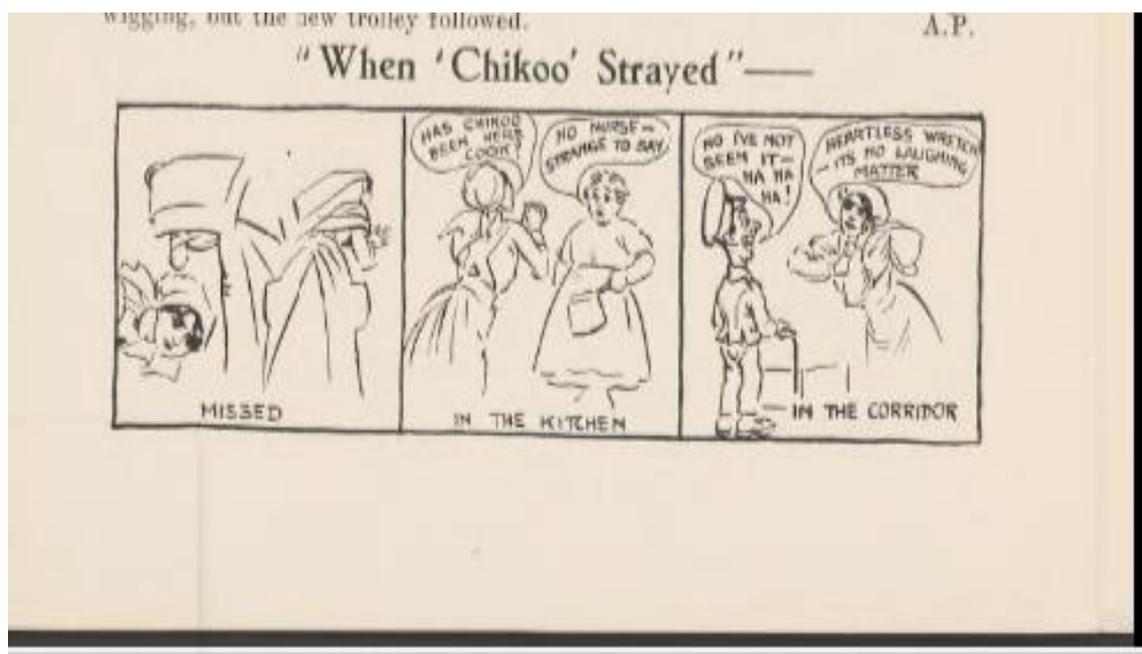


Figure 11a and Figure 11b. When Chikoo Strayed/A Heartless Series', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.1 (1916), 20–21.

An interview entitled 'Our Monthly interview: no 5 "Pup"' appears in the magazine in 1916.⁹⁷ An anonymous piece, it uses the dog's voice as a device to explore the hospital and Matron's presence providing a new perspective on her reputation. Feigning disinterest in hospital life – 'I'd rather be out looking for rabbits on the common' – pup reiterates Matron's daily round of the wards and inspecting the dinners that she wrote of herself in 'My Day'.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ 'Our Monthly Interview: No. 5 "Pup"', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.12 (1916), pp. 322–25.

⁹⁸ 'Our Monthly Interview: No. 5 "Pup"'.

Pup goes on to respond to the interviewer's comment about the universal admiration and respect his presence excited [by stating]

“It's not always genuine: you'd be surprised [...] the women are the worst. They are naturally deceitful and have no moral perspective [...] half the time they've got one eye glued to some curly haired Anzac down the corridor and are thinking ““My word, some boy!””⁹⁹

This, albeit humorous, characterisation of women as ‘naturally deceitful’, lacking ‘moral perspective’ and drawn to appealing, perhaps more exotic, male physical features suggests that Edith's presence on the ward rounds may have been viewed in different ways.

The second sentiment of ‘Pup's’ statement may reflect not only the nurses’ more romantic interest in the Anzac patients but Edith's too and these two aspects will be discussed later in this chapter; many Australian soldiers as already noted, appear in her album. These commonwealth soldier-patients may have seemed exotic to the nurses, and *The Gazette* popularised this image; one article relates how an Australian joined up, and several images of the Kangaroo catch the reader's eye, drawing them in.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Edith's album contains a pen and ink outline sketch of a Kangaroo and Emu.¹⁰¹ Edith may also have taken the opportunity that her ward rounds afforded her to leave her autograph album on the wards with the commonwealth soldier-patients in the hopes of contributions; in over one hundred contributions, at least twenty-three come from commonwealth soldier-patients which supports this. Pup's interview reminded nursing staff of their responsibilities and also gently let the nurses know that their morals are not as strict as they should be.

The use of Pup's voice humorously acknowledges that not everyone would have welcomed Edith's ward visits. Other entries in both *The Gazette* and Edith's album also use

⁹⁹ ‘Our Monthly Interview: No. 5 “Pup”’.

¹⁰⁰ Major H C Taylor Young, ‘Australian Mythology’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.6 (1916), pp. 148–50.

¹⁰¹ ‘Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS’.

humour to explore the difficult issue of hospital discipline, reinforced by Edith's daily presence, for both soldier-patients and the nurses. The night reports she received informed her of any wards that had issues, and her rounds enabled her to remind staff about the need to keep military discipline at all times. Carden-Coyne argues that military discipline was upheld in the military hospitals and that 'patients [...] will break the rules for the mere fun of it'.¹⁰² The following entry in Edith's album is an example of the fun and not only gives us the soldier's view of E Ward but also a comment on his behaviour (Figure 12).¹⁰³ Edith would be pleased that it was a 'happy ward' and the sobriquet he gives himself as 'The Rowdy AUSTRALIAN' with particular emphasis through use of the capital letters for the country, suggests he was the one who had a boot thrown at him.

Contributions such as this one in Matron's album may have many meanings.

Although it is entitled 'Happy Happenings in E Ward' with an emphasis on happiness and fun, there is an underlying suggestion that the soldier-patients caused trouble, especially at night. The Corporal is possibly using the medium of the autograph album to try to reassure Matron that discipline is maintained on the ward by the ward nurses, and any trouble she may have heard of was just 'fun'. But, as discussed in chapter three, night-time could be stressful for some of the patients who suffered from nightmares. The trouble or 'fun' starts at lights out when 'If out of you're [sic] turn you speak |look out or you will roar| Someone will throw a boot at you| To try and close you're [sic] Jaw.'¹⁰⁴ Although there is a humorous tone to these lines they perhaps hint at the impatience and anger of other patients towards a patient

¹⁰² Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 301.

¹⁰³ 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS'. Australian National Archive records for Cpl John Harold Laphorne show he was admitted to the 3rd LGH on 5th December 1915 with enteric fever. In April 1916 after discharge from hospital, he went absent without leave, forfeited 2 days' pay, and was reprimanded. Australian Divisions had a high rate of being absent without leave. He was later awarded the Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry and in 1917 commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant.

¹⁰⁴ Cpl. J H Laphorne in 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS'.

who is causing noise when everyone is trying to sleep. By signing himself ‘The Rowdy AUSTRALIAN’ we can see this verse as an apology for his behaviour.

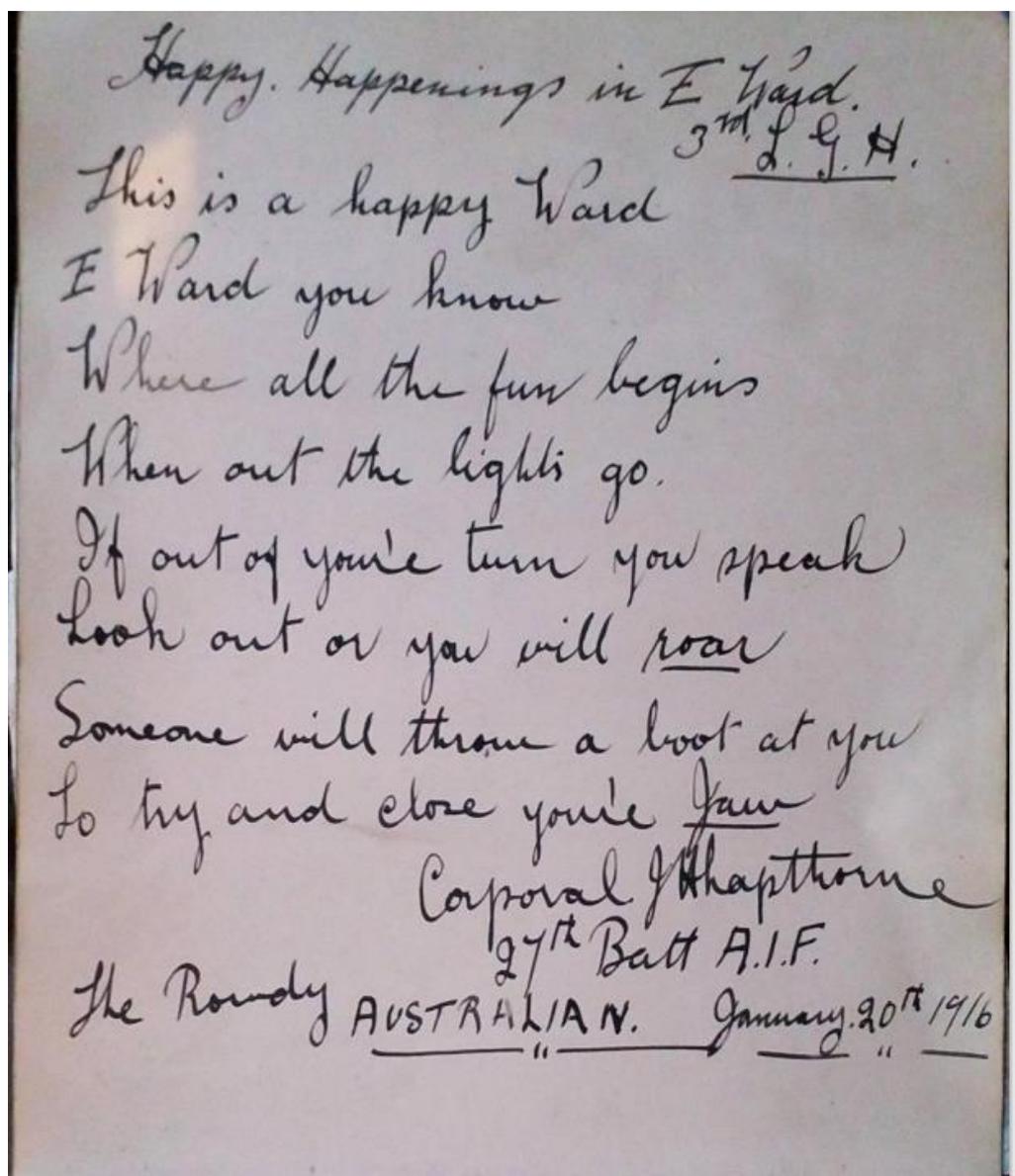


Figure 12. Cpl. J H Lapthorne in ‘Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS’ (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/68/HOLD.

As we have seen in Edith’s account of ‘My Day’ she would have received the night duty report of incidents on each ward. The fun may have been viewed as a lack of discipline on the part of the soldier-patients but also would have reflected on the Sister’s inability to maintain discipline on her ward.¹⁰⁵ The following cartoon (Figure 13) from *The Gazette*

¹⁰⁵ Edith Holden, ‘My Day’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.4 (1916).

portrays some of the jokes and behaviour that the patients participated in at night and compliments Cpl. Lapthorne's album contribution (Figure 12).¹⁰⁶ By writing this verse in Matron's album, it can be seen as a personal plea to her for leniency in any discipline of either/both staff and patients.



Figure 13. 'What the Night Staff Has to Put up With', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.9 (1917), 236.

Despite being in hospital, the soldier-patients would still have been expected to maintain discipline. Army regulations provided duties to be carried out by the soldier-patients and also covered undisciplined conduct within the hospital. Patients were expected to stand by their beds or brace where possible if their treatment confined them to bed.¹⁰⁷ Carden-

¹⁰⁶ 'What the Night Staff Has to Put up With', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.9 (1917), p. 236.

¹⁰⁷ Brace or 'Brace up' is a military command, to come from a relaxed position to attention, often when sitting and unable to stand to attention.

Coyne quotes from John Squire's 'Medical Hints' that 'Patients – especially those with slight ailments or those recovering after a long convalescence – will “break rules for the mere fun of it or to experience the novel sensation of doing just what they like”'.¹⁰⁸ In Sister Clapp's album, a contribution hints at collusion between nurses and patients in breaking rules: 'and if you want to smoke| between dinner and tea |she says watch for the Matron and never mind me.'¹⁰⁹

Although the Medical Officer (MO) was responsible for maintaining discipline on the wards, the orderlies and nurses were expected to keep the soldier-patients in line at all times. Edith's hospital rounds were part of maintaining discipline and reporting incidents up the chain of command. Cpl Laphorne's verse acknowledges the breaking of rules after lights out and the attempts to enforce them with a boot!.¹¹⁰

Articles and contributions were often positive, aiming to maintain the morale of the patients. Hospital magazines frequently challenged the propagandist view of the hospital as a place filled with whole-bodied men cheerfully accepting the tender ministrations of young or motherly nurses soothing a fevered brow. Carden-Coyne argues that instead, 'Images of brutalized patients accompanied those of patients shrugging off wounds with light-hearted humour.' Despite the public's perception of the military hospital as a place caring for heroes, Reznick argues that for many soldier-patients, the hospital was an 'extension of the large negative disciplining war machine.'

In contrast to Cpl. Laphorne's comments on the 'Happy Ward', the first contribution that Edith has pasted to her new album suggests that No. 3 LGH is not seen by everyone as a

¹⁰⁸ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 301. Quotation from John Squire's Medical Hints for the use of Medical Officers Temporarily employed with Troops. 1915. J Edward Squire 1855-1917.

¹⁰⁹ Sarah Clap nee Webber. 'Autograph Album Sarah Ann Webber Nee Clapp QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/253/WEBB.

¹¹⁰ Edith Holden, PE/1/68/HOLD.

happy place.



Figure 14. Contribution from Sergeant Major J Tunnah in 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/68/HOLD.

Sergeant Major J Tunnah of the RAMC's contribution of a man resembling the Kaiser behind bars, entitled 'coming events' (Figure 14) suggests the hoped-for early end to the war and places blame firmly on the Kaiser.¹¹¹ However, the emphasis on imprisonment also suggests that some patients may have seen themselves as captive in the hospital, too, with its rigid discipline and punishments for not obeying the rules and regulations. Edith has pasted this contribution which appears to be from another album, on the first page of her new album. Perhaps also as a reminder to the album readers of hospital discipline. *The Gazette* can be seen as a tool to ensure the discipline of the hospital: in this instance, the nurse's control is maintained.

Blighty: From Point of Wounding to Discharge

¹¹¹ 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS'.

The treatment of the casualty begins at the start of the casualty evacuation chain at the front with immediate first aid followed by life and limb-saving surgery at a CCS.¹¹² The homeward journey culminated with their arrival at a War Hospital such as No. 3 LGH Wandsworth.

Although an important point in the soldier-patient's journey, the reception at the hospital does not figure as prominently in the albums of the archive as it does in the magazines. Although there are occasional brief references to their arrival, such as Duggy Atkinson's verse in Lilian Robinson's album (chapter four), it is in the hospital magazines where this aspect of the patient's journey appears most prominent, and this gives a different perspective on these entries in the albums.¹¹³ Although the soldier-patients did contribute to the magazines, so too did the staff. Arrival of the wounded is a familiar feature in *The Gazette* and the Sisters, VADs, and orderlies all write about it from their individual perspectives. In her article 'My Day' Edith sets out the regime for the admission of the wounded.¹¹⁴ The hospital is informed by the War Office of a train arriving at Clapham Junction and she details how the staff assemble in the Receiving Hall. In 'The Captives Home Coming', the article describes the cramped and busy Receiving Hall where it seemed 'every member of the staff was concentrated here to lend a hand.'¹¹⁵ Other articles detail aspects such as the Ambulance Column that collects the patients from the Station.¹¹⁶

It is therefore conceivable that, while the soldier-patients did not consider admission in the albums important for their care, the nursing staff regarded this as particularly significant as their first encounter with patients, utilizing the pages of the magazine to demonstrate this. Before exploring the differences in the treatment of arrival at the hospital in

¹¹² Bricknell, 'The Evolution of Casualty Evacuation in the British Army in the 20th Century (Part 2) -1918 to 1945', p. 203.

¹¹³ Robinson, *HF00014.1 Autograph Book*.

¹¹⁴ Holden, 'My Day', p. 87.

¹¹⁵ 'The Captives Home Coming', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1915), p. 31.

¹¹⁶ 'The Ambulance Column: The Organisation Which Brings Each Patient from the Train to the War Hospital: A Note by Our C.O.', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1915), p. 39.

the magazines and albums, I use the albums to trace the length and often traumatic soldier-patient experience, as far as it was expressed, during the initial pre-hospital stages of the journey through care.

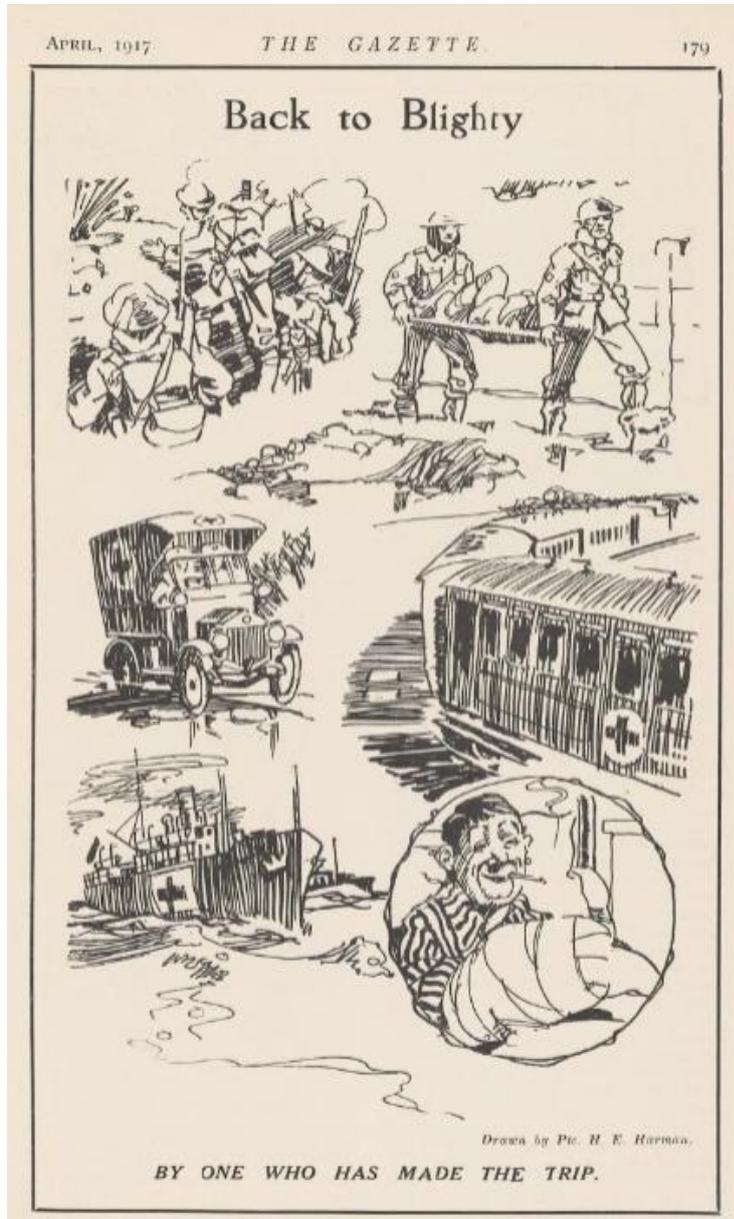


Figure 15. 'Back to Blighty', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.7 (1917), 179.

For the soldiers, being wounded represented going home. This sentiment appears in both the albums as well as the magazines, although in the albums more usually in words rather than the sketches we see in the magazines. The 'Back to Blighty' sketch 'by one who has made the trip' depicts the casualty evacuation chain journey from point of wounding to

the hospital bed (Figure 15). Hallett provides a more detailed account of this ‘journey through care’.¹¹⁷ She states that it was only when they arrived at the hospital that ‘they were at last settled into hospital beds, washed and made comfortable. Waking in a base hospital [either in France or in Britain] was often the first clear memory a man would have after being wounded’.¹¹⁸

After injury, the wounded endured a painful and difficult journey from the trenches to a Regimental Aid Post (RAP) and on to a casualty clearing station either by stretcher-bearers or as walking wounded. In *A Textbook of War Nursing (October 1917)*, Violetta Thurstan describes aspects of the patient’s journey from point of wounding onwards. She describes the RAP as being ‘generally a dug-out as near to the front trench as possible’.¹¹⁹ The onward journey is several miles further back:

the patient has to be carried all the way on a stretcher, very exhausting work for the stretcher bearers. A very painful transport this for the wounded man, over the rough, shell-pitted ground and again too often a passage perilous for both patient and orderlies.¹²⁰

At the CCS the seriously wounded – especially those requiring life and limb-saving surgery – would have been treated before onward transfer to a base hospital near the coast for more definitive surgery and then transported by ship to the UK. The seriousness of injury, however, could cause long delays of weeks, if not months, before the soldier-patients would be well enough to return to the UK. Thurstan goes on to comment on the efficiency and organisation of the Casevac chain noting that ‘it is quite possible for a man to be wounded in Flanders one day and to be eating his supper in a London hospital next evening’ and that ‘the long journey is over at last and Mr. Thomas Atkins settles down in the hospital to which he has been assigned to await his cure’.¹²¹ Emily Mayhew’s book *Wounded* expands on the

¹¹⁷ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 15.

¹¹⁸ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 16.

¹¹⁹ Thurstan, *A Textbook of War Nursing*, p. 23.

Thurstan, *A Textbook of War Nursing*, p. 24.¹²⁰ Thurston, *A Textbook of War Nursing*, p. 24

¹²¹ Thurstan, *A Textbook of War Nursing*, p. 28.

patient journey as she takes stories of the individuals involved in the wounded man's journey from the bearers who risk their own lives to collect the wounded from the battlefield to the surgeons, nurses and transport staff who facilitated that journey. Despite Thurstan's assertion that about 'eating supper in a London Hospital' on the same day as being wounded, it was often fraught with delays. Mayhew comments that the hospital trains that carried the patients from the front as well as in the UK were a low priority, often waiting 'in sidings for hours, sometimes days, for other trains to pass by'.¹²² These long delays caused missed connections with wounded left unattended on cold platforms.

Contributions in Beatrice Bowman's album provides some information regarding the long gap between wounding and arrival in hospital on the Western and Eastern Fronts.¹²³ As Pte J James of the Middlesex Regiment writes in Beatrice's album, 'I was wounded on the 7th Feb and when I arrived in England at the American Women's War Hospital Sister Beatrice asked me to put some of my experiences in writing into this book'.¹²⁴ Several of these descriptions do fill in some of the traumatic events between wounding, initial treatment and forward transport to arrival at a home hospital. Drummer Phelps of the S.W. Borders wrote on 28 February 1915 of his experiences capturing the whole timeframe in less than a few lines:

I entrained for Belgium there I received 3 German bullets which laid me Hors-de-Combat; I laid on the field for 3 days, during which I experienced tortures of Hell, eventually I was picked up by some Belgians [sic]. I arrived at the A.W.W.H 21st Dec 1916 and am now practically well, thanks to the kind attention of the Doctor and Sisters of Munsey Ward.

Yours truly

The Boy in Blue ¹²⁵

¹²² Mayhew, *Wounded: The Long Journey Home from The Great War*, pp. 2–4. Troop trains, ammunition and supply trains all took priority over the hospital trains.

¹²³ Beatrice Bowman's album, discussed in chapter three, was collated whilst she was working at the American Women's War Hospital (AWWH), and stands out in that she specifically requested the contributors' document their experiences in detail in her album. 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

¹²⁴ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

¹²⁵ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

He is summing up his experience rather in the manner of a military situation report (Sit-rep) to a senior Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) from point of wounding (POW) to his present situation in the hospital ward. This style is apparent in many of the entries in Beatrice Bowman's album and demonstrates quite well how the soldiers quickly assimilated military jargon and ethos from their training. The reference to experiencing the 'tortures of Hell' may explain why many did not want to recall the period of time from wounding until feeling safe. Detailed entries of battle are scattered across the entries in Beatrice Bowman's album; Sergeant K W. Hardy of the 2nd Cameronian's Scottish Rifles writes:

A little experience from the Front...[a] German officer with a sword in his right hand and a revolver in his left not a yard away from me, when I saw that it was pointed at me. Just a moment more and I would have been where hundreds of my comrades were but by sheer luck I gripped the revolver and forced it above my head when it went off through my fingers I took away the weapon from him and shot him in the shoulder when he fell into the trench I got down after him and in my madness I lunged with my Rifle and Bayonet catching him under the chin the point coming out at the top of his head so he died immediately.¹²⁶

Sergeant Hardy also provides, in some detail, a grizzly account of his personal killing of two Germans apparently with scant regard to the sensibilities of Beatrice. He may well be assuming that in her role as a nurse, tending the horrific wounds of her soldier-patients, she will not be shocked by such detail. Yet in all of his account, Hardy does not describe his own wounding. It is possible that he chooses not to reflect on a moment when he was facing potential death, and the only acknowledgement of his own vulnerability is his reference to being on the train that was taking him to the hospital.

Mayhew's chapter on Bearers details the work of the Bearers through the eyes of three bearers. She states that 'the call for bearer teams was the last thing a soldier heard in the forward trenches before the final order to attack.'¹²⁷ W. Molam's entry is interesting in that it

¹²⁶ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

¹²⁷ Mayhew, *Wounded: The Long Journey Home from The Great War*, p. 16.

provides the perspective of an RAMC stretcher bearer collecting the wounded from trenches in France:

Sister Beatrice

I will endeavour to relate a few experiences whilst serving at the front with a Field Ambulance of the RAMC (rob all my comrades) a nice titel [sic], don't you think so?...The worst part of Field Ambulance work is visiting the trenches every night to collect the wounded and bring them to the Field Dressing Station. There you are, creeping along in the dark trying to avoid the holes and deep mud, and the snipers busy with their rifles to remind you to be careful to keep out of their way, and your patient cursing you in three different languages because you are jolting him. It is not a picnic by any means.

W. Molam RAMC ¹²⁸

The comment 'It's not a picnic by any means' shows an element of resignation to the dangers of shell holes, mud and snipers that stretcher-bearers faced. Mayhew commented on the trench networks, the sharp angles and corners that made bearer work difficult, she states 'they were so deep and narrow that, once you got down in them it could suddenly be very dark except for the strip of sky above'.¹²⁹ Mowlam's contribution, however, does not tell us if he is now a patient or if he is now working in the hospital having served as a stretcher-bearer at the front. His comment about the patient cursing him highlights the conditions the wounded had to endure during rescue which caused the wounded soldier further agony. Mayhew argues that many bearers tried to calm the wounded soldier rather than issue pain relief such as morphine tablets. She contends that conscious patients were easier to carry, when unconscious they became a dead weight.¹³⁰

Other contributions in Beatrice's album refer to treatment at various other hospitals in France before arriving at the AWWH which would account for the time lag before reaching a home hospital and definitive care: 'I was wounded on [...] the 15 Nov 1914 [and] sent to England on the 21 Dec 1914'.¹³¹ Yet another speaks of 'three weeks before I came to

¹²⁸ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

¹²⁹ Mayhew, *Wounded: The Long Journey Home from The Great War*, p. 30.

¹³⁰ Mayhew, *Wounded: The Long Journey Home from The Great War*, p. 29.

¹³¹ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

England'. Pte. Richard Morrell of the 3rd London Regiment Royal Fusiliers' gives a concise summary of his timelines: 'I also had Rheumatism. They sent me to St [illegible] where I was for 2 weeks. From there I was sent to Etretat, then I was sent to England arriving at the A.W.W.H where I have received every attention'.¹³² Compared to these two weeks J. Cooper recounted a longer stay, 'I was wounded in both legs (both fractured) and was eventually sent to Boulogne where I was in hospital for 8 weeks before being sent home.'¹³³ These brief entries illustrate both the time delay between wounding and finally arriving back in England and the lack of reference to their admission to hospital. Some entries, like Pte. Morrell's refer to this as 'home'. For many, this meant being closer to their family and friends.

For the families, this point of wounding may have meant a telegram informing them of their loved one's wounding or that they were missing. There would have been relief at being in the safety of a hospital and the feeling that 'all would be well'. Confirmation of survival often did not happen until the wounded soldier was back in England and families would have been in a period of not knowing.¹³⁴ Roper discusses the separation anxiety that the soldiers would have experienced, especially commonwealth soldiers, and how home lost some of its importance the longer a soldier was away and was replaced by their unit, the men in it were now family.¹³⁵

The delay can be seen reflected in contributions that provide short details of this timeline from point of wounding to admission to a UK hospital such as the No. 3 London General Hospital. One Private from the 1st/ 23rd Battalion, the London Regiment, wrote in Edith Holden's album 'wounded at Loos Sept 25th, 1915' dating his entry together with the

¹³² 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

¹³³ 'Autograph Album of Beatrice Bowman'.

¹³⁴ Casualty lists published in newspapers may have incomplete information such as missing in action. Telegrams too may only give incomplete information and it was when the wounded reached hospital that confirmation of survival could be made.

¹³⁵ Roper, *The Secret Battle*.

words ‘Good Luck to all the Girls’, as June 30th, 1916.¹³⁶ Another accompanied a pen and ink drawing of a biplane dated 5/6/1916 with the comment ‘Took sick in France on 23/3/1916 admitted to 3rd London General Hospital on 13/5/1916 Ward B7’.¹³⁷ Dated entries such as these suggest a long period of treatment and convalescence, and yet they offer no further information about either their wounds or sickness and their journey to England and provide only minimal insight into their ‘journey through care’.¹³⁸

It is generally accepted that when the body is overwhelmed by shocking experiences such as the trauma of wounding in battle, the body and mind will find coping mechanisms to deal with it.¹³⁹ Physical trauma can cause memory loss of an indeterminate duration from minutes to even months in some cases. A systematic review by Lorenzoni, Silva et al in 2014 into the link between memory loss and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) argues that there is a strong link between memory deficit and the development of PTSD.¹⁴⁰ This protective mechanism, it can be argued, explains the lack of reference in the autograph albums to the arrival at the home base hospitals. Other reasons may be a sense of relief at being away from the front and a desire not to dwell on recent traumatic events or the nature of the wounding that keeps the patient in a delirious state, all reasons for the mind blocking out this period in their lives.

McEwen’s book *In the Company of Nurses* focuses mainly on the work of nurses at the Front rather than home-based nursing. She does, however, discuss the casualty evacuation chain to Stationary and Base Hospitals and the types of transport used.¹⁴¹ All forms of

¹³⁶ ‘Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS’.

¹³⁷ ‘Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS’.

¹³⁸ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 15.

¹³⁹ Dirk Montag, ‘Retrograde Amnesia - A Question of Disturbed Calcium Levels?’, *Frontiers in Cellular Neuroscience*, 15 (2021), doi:10.3389/fncel.2021.746198.

¹⁴⁰ Pânila Longhi-Lorenzoni P and others, ‘Autobiographical Memory for Stressful Events, Traumatic Memory and Post traumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review’, *Avances En Psicología Latinoamericana*, 32.3 (2014), pp. 361–76, doi:10.12804/apl32.03.2014.08.

¹⁴¹ McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*.

transport were used but motorised vehicles were most common for the quick transportation of the wounded to the CCS and base or stationary hospitals. Hospital trains were used to transport the wounded long distances and, as Mayhew noted, subject to delays.¹⁴² QAIMNSR Sister Jessie Laurie Edgar's album is the only one in the archive with a connection to a hospital train. Her service records state, 'Sister Edgar has acted as Sister-in Charge of an ambulance train before coming to me' and record she worked on No. 10 Ambulance Train (Italian Red Cross Train) during 1918.¹⁴³ Her album, though, does not contain contributions from any wounded, rather the entries are from her Italian colleagues.

Horse-drawn buses were common before the war, and early in the war, horse-drawn ambulances were used to transport the wounded in the absence of motorised transport (figure 16).¹⁴⁴ Although they had largely been replaced by motor vehicles, it is possible that all forms of transport would have been used to transport the patients to the hospital from the station or that these vehicles were used to take the convalescent soldiers out for the day. Wearing their hospital blues, outings in such transport may have earned it the sobriquet of the Patriotic Station Bus as in the pen and ink sketch in Edith Holden's album (Figure 17). Equally, this may have been the transport used for the walking wounded and Gunner Samain may have arrived at the hospital in this vehicle.

¹⁴² Mayhew, *Wounded: The Long Journey Home from The Great War*, pp. 159–82.

¹⁴³ 'Service Records Jessie Laurie Edgar QAIMNSR', The National Archives, War Office: Directorate of Army Medical Services and Territorial Force: Nursing Service Records, First World War; Jessie Laurie Edgar, *PE/1/363/EDGAR* (Museum of Military Medicine Archive).

¹⁴⁴ McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, pp. 50–51.



Figure 2.1 A Red Cross horse-drawn ambulance used at the start of the War because motorised ambulances were not available. National Library of Scotland.

Figure 16. Photograph of First World War Red Cross ambulance in Yvonne McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 51.



Figure 17 Pen and ink sketch, “PATRIOTIC” STATION BUS’ in ‘Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS’ (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/68/HOLD.

The image of a weary horse (Figure 17) with the initials GWR on the carriage with the caption ‘The “PATRIOTIC” STATION BUS’ with its pen and ink line drawing enhanced

by the red lettering and hatching is interesting. Previously known as the Royal Victoria Patriotic Asylum or Patriotic school which had links back to the Crimean War as a school for orphans of military men, this sketch may be reflecting both the hospital's origins as a school and that of the station bus, which may have part of the materiel left by the school. Just as some of the autographed Red Cross quilts and tablecloths were often embroidered red on white, as discussed in chapter two, and symbolised the shedding of the blood of young men, so too the use of red on white here, together with a sad-looking horse can be seen as symbolic of the work of the military hospital. It is not known what the initials G. W. R. on the station bus stand for. The government had taken over control of the railways in 1914 so it is possible that all transport was commandeered for general use across London, and this might be a Great Western Railway bus.

Hospital Arrivals in the Magazines and Albums: 'Happy Though Wounded'?¹⁴⁵

This next section will investigate the differences in emphasis on the pivotal moment of arrival as shown in the hospital magazines in comparison to its near virtual absence in the albums. It will consider its level of importance to the nurses and the soldier-patients and how this is manifested in the forums of both magazines and albums.

The arrival at a hospital in the UK, although the end point of the casualty evacuation chain, was the beginning of further treatment and convalescence. Bricknell states that the development of the Casualty Evacuation (CasEvac) chain in the First World War meant that a more effective triage system came into place where the urgent cases were moved as quickly as possible from the Casualty Clearing Stations to the General Hospitals and that the 'casualty was evacuated to the UK if he was unlikely to return to fighting fitness or needed a long period of convalescence'.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Muir and Irving, *Happy-Though Wounded! The Book of the 3rd London General Hospital*.

¹⁴⁶ MCM Bricknell, 'The Evolution Of Casualty Evacuation In The British Army In The 20th Century (Part 3) - 1945 To Present', *J R Med Corps*, 149.1 (2003), pp. 85–95 (p. 204), doi:10.1136/jramc-149-01-20. M. <<https://doi.org/10.1136/jramc-149-01-20>>.

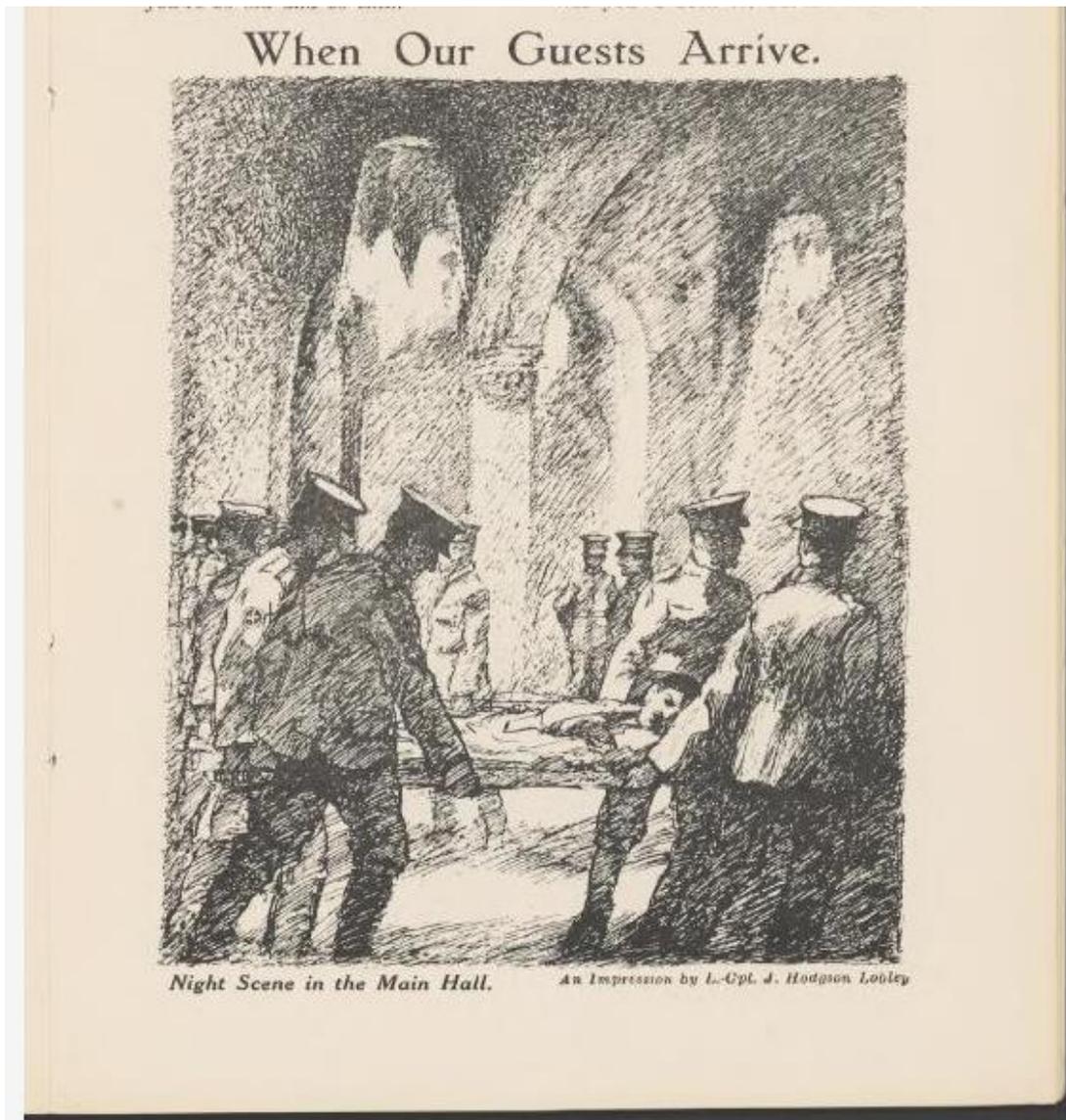


Figure 18. 'When Our Guests Arrive', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.3 (1916), 69.

All hospitals, near the front or home hospitals, prepared for the arrival of the wounded. *The Gazette* posted a sketch of the arrival of the wounded, 'When our Guests Arrive' (Figure 18).¹⁴⁷ The sketch has a sense of anonymity; the orderlies are in shadow, and the faces are either shaded out or turned away from the viewer, and the soldier-patient, too, is indeterminate. The arches are suggestive of a Cathedral nave with a sense of grandeur and solemnity. The fact that the arches take up half of the sketch helps to give perspective to the

¹⁴⁷ 'When Our Guests Arrive', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.3 (1916), p. 69.

overwhelming task of the arrival of the wounded. Yet, the wounded are represented only by one visible stretcher, outnumbered by the helpers surrounding it. The title, too, provides good propaganda. The wounded are ‘guests’ much like hotel guests whose every need will be catered for.¹⁴⁸ Images such as these from *The Gazette* provide different snapshots of the preparation and arrival of the wounded at No. 3 LGH.

Penny Starns’ *Sisters of the Somme* provides a vivid picture of the sight that met the nurses on arrival at a Brigade Hospital of wounded after a battle. She describes a convoy of fifty-seven soldiers from Loos:

First came the walking wounded, with heads, legs and arms covered with soiled bandages, splints and slings, bedraggled and grimy, and carrying small parcels of meagre belongings. With deep fatigue lines etched into their muddy weather-beaten faces and eyes dulled by pain, they shuffled and stumbled, many limping into the hospital triage area. Those with severe injuries were carefully carried in by stretcher-bearers.¹⁴⁹

Lilian Robinson, as discussed in chapter four, expressed both excitement and anxiety in waiting for the arrival of the wounded. No doubt the range of staff at these receiving hospitals would have had similar experiences. The preparation for the arrival of wounded at No. 3 LGH is an opportunity to display the efficiency and care taken by the staff. Each group, from the CO to the orderly and administration staff have their part to play. In the main, the magazine chooses to show this visually, initially in sketch form but later through photography, although it should be noted that both mediums exercise an element of censorship by eliding a focus on the wounded by emphasising staff activity around them. In an article from *The Gazette* article in 1916, ‘Hospital Impressions: An intake of Wounded’ (Figure 19), the sounds of the action are given life:

¹⁴⁸ ‘When Our Guests Arrive’.

¹⁴⁹ Penny Starns, *Sisters of the Somme: True Stories from a First World War Field Hospital* (The History Press, 2016), p. 29.

The stretcher-handles click into place; each is grasped by an orderly. “Haul!” – the stretcher with its immobile burden, slides out. “Lift!” - strong arms raise it, lest it bump as it emerges. “All clear, Lower!” – the four bearers back away, with their stretcher and mount the steps into the hospital.¹⁵⁰

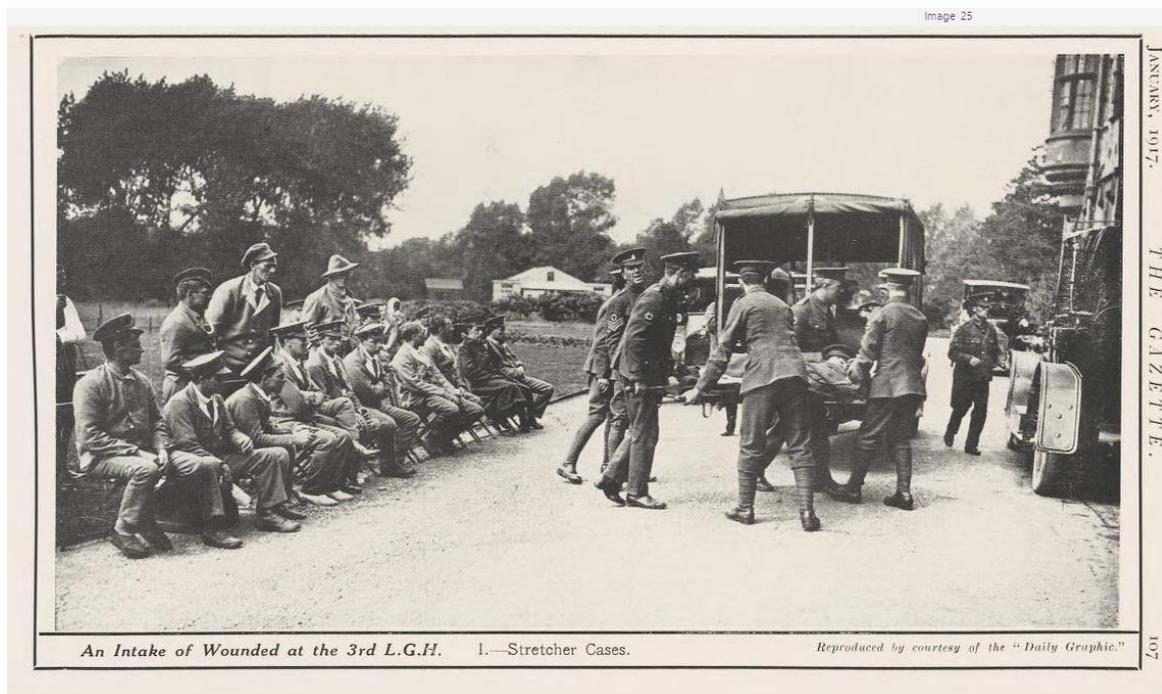


Figure 19. ‘An Intake of Wounded’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 2.3 (1917), 107.

The Gazette uses these opportunities to celebrate the work of the teams at what was a busy and distressing time, and we can sense the solemnity and respect the orderlies have for the wounded.

Contributions by the patients in the magazine, in contrast, which explore their arrival are limited to cartoon sketches of the journey from point of wounding to sitting in a hospital bed, with the journey summarised in a few quick snapshots in time rather than specific references to arrival. Similarly, in the albums, there is a striking absence of contributions marking the actual arrival. Often, the soldier-patients only refer to their arrival in the albums

¹⁵⁰ ‘Hospital Impressions: An Intake of Wounded’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.7 (1916), pp. 178–79.

obliquely writing just the date and place they were wounded and then the date of arrival at the hospital. Pte Hobby writes in Marjorie Russell's album:

Wounded at Bourlon wood near Cambria after doing 25 months service. "Take me back to dear old BLIGHTY. Put me on the train [sic] London Town take me over there, dump me anywhere." Dumped at Military Hospital, Shepton Mallet on Oct 9th 1918.¹⁵¹

This does not, however, mean that other albums might not contain references to the arrival in more detail.

The Take-in

The hospital magazine provides a different picture of the arrival of wounded soldiers. Referred to as 'take in' at No. 3 LGH, and 'rushes' by Vera Brittain, their arrival was presented as a time of busyness and efficiency. 'Practically every day, at some hour, we "take in."' ¹⁵² Once notified of imminent arrivals, the No. 3 LGH sent RAMC orderlies to Clapham Junction to assist with the unloading of wounded from the trains. At the hospital, they were met at the receiving hall by the Commanding Officer and helped inside 'where hot drinks are waiting for them, and they are given tickets for different wards and taken out to the baths.'¹⁵³ In figure 20 a group of nurses are depicted rushing around laden with armfuls of blankets and pillows and orderlies with trays of mugs of hot drinks.

¹⁵¹ Marjorie Ayrton Russell, *HF0010.1 Autograph Book* (QARANC Association Heritage Collection,).

¹⁵² 'Practically Every Day', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1916), p. 87.

¹⁵³ 'Practically Every Day'. *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 1.2 (1916), p. 87

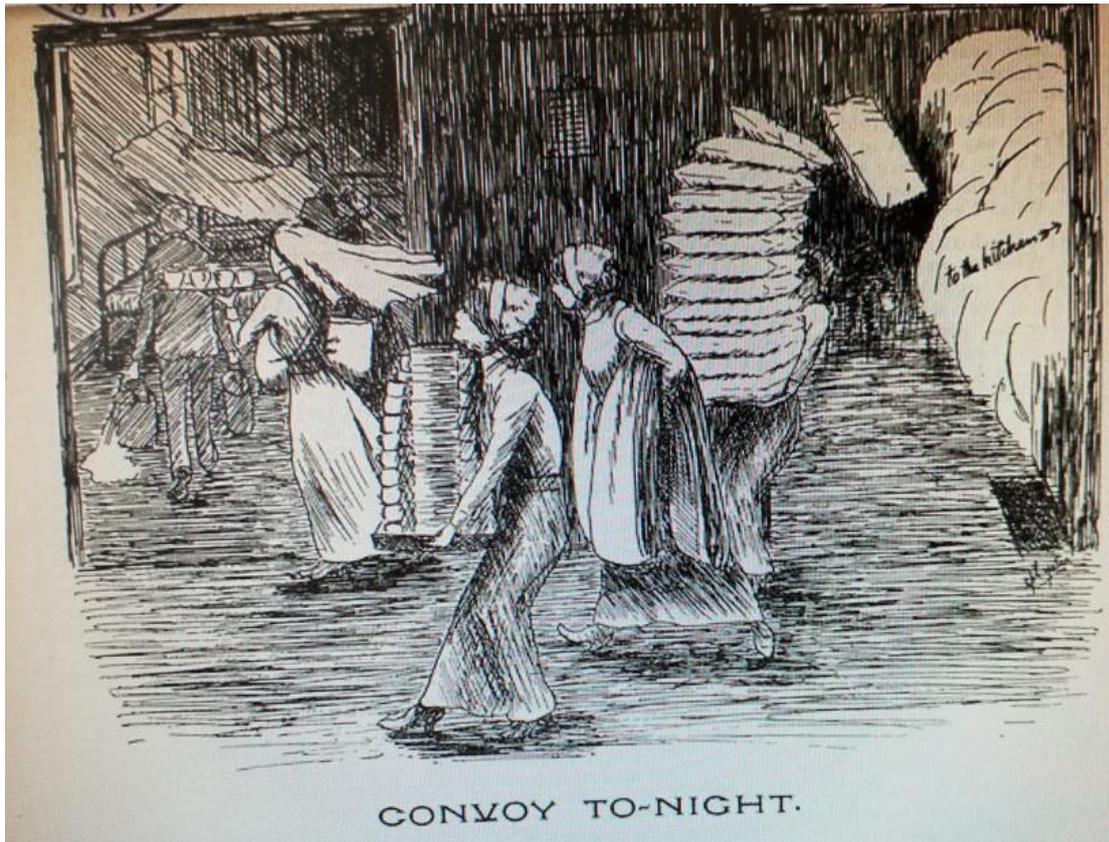


Figure 20. 'Convoy Tonight', *Norfolk War Hospital Magazine*, by 'Magazine Committee' (Norwich, Norfolk, 1916), Imperial War Museum, Newspapers and Journals.

Helen Dore Boylston, in her war diary, *Sister: The War Diary of a Nurse* (1920), gives a vivid description of the arrival of wounded soldiers at her hospital at the Front and the soldiers' elation at getting a 'blighty one':

Just as we reached the Administration Hut the first ambulance stopped in front of us...Nearly everyone should have been a stretcher case. Ragged and dirty; tin hats still on; wounds patched together anyway, some not even covered. The boys' faces were white and drawn and their eyes glassy from lack of sleep...everyone had a cigarette in his mouth and they grinned at us. Grinned! 'Cheerio, sister I got a Blighty one this time!'¹⁵⁴

Enid Bagnold also recounts in her diary the reception of wounded at her hospital at the front: 'the long wooden table loaded with mugs of every size; kettles boiling; [...] the station entrance is full of men crowding in and taking the steaming mugs of tea and coffee.'¹⁵⁵ This parallels the description in *The Gazette* of welcoming hot drinks:

¹⁵⁴ Helen Dore Boylston, *Sister: The War Diary of a Nurse* (Kismet Publishing, 2018), p. 37.

¹⁵⁵ Enid Bagnold, *A Diary Without Dates* (Heinemann, 1918), p. 35.

The orderlies line up outside the front door, and help with the men into the Receiving Hall, where hot drinks are waiting for them, and they are given tickets for the different wards and taken out to the baths.¹⁵⁶

The welcoming of the wounded with a hot drink provides immediate sustenance and would echo domestic hospitality practices making the wounded soldier feel he had come to a home as a welcomed guest rather than to a hospital. Both Lilian and *The Gazette* mention the need for baths or washing. Lilian writes in her diary:

‘Directly they had fed we gave them hosp. kits & towels etc. & sent all fit to wash in lavatories. They just thronged to the narrow passage too glad to see water. Most of them had been under fire since Sund.[sic]’¹⁵⁷

Although Lilian was at the front, the wounded were evacuated as soon as possible to whichever hospital was able to take casualties, often, as discussed, this meant a journey by train, barges, and ships back to ‘Blighty’. The wounded typically remained in their mud- and blood-caked uniforms, probably holed by shrapnel or bullet wounds and cut to access wounds to be immediately treated; they received no fresh hospital gown until they were admitted into the hospital.

The numerous articles in *The Gazette* focusing on the arrival at the hospital is in contrast to the scarcity of contributions on the subject in the albums illustrates the different attitudes to ‘arrival’ at the hospital. For the hospital staff it is the equivalent of ‘going over the top’ for the soldier. A time of stress, tireless work for the staff in contrast to, for the walking wounded, a time of relief at being in a place of recovery and the seriously wounded may not have many memories of their arrival and so chose not to dwell on their arrival.

Empire Through the Prism of an Autograph Album

Blighty: perhaps best known among the troops from the refrain of a musical hall song ‘Take me back to dear old Blighty | put me on the train for London town | take me over there | Drop

¹⁵⁶ Holden, ‘My Day’.

¹⁵⁷ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1914)’.

me anywhere [...] Hurry me back to Blighty | Blighty is the place for me' could be used with 'biting humour and bitter irony [...] or suggest paradise'.¹⁵⁸ Michael Hollington and Clare Hall's study of the term's associations with the First World War calls attention to its secondary use as a term for a wound that would get a soldier returned home to England.¹⁵⁹ The albums of VADs Russell and Jones each contain contributions that refer to blighty. Whereas Driver Deane writes in Marjorie Russell's album on May 22 1917 'Invalided from "Somewhere in France" May 10th 1917 "Take me back to Blighty| Drop me anywhere"', Guardsman Healy (Figure 21) provides a pen and ink sketch of a wounded soldier returning to Blighty.¹⁶⁰

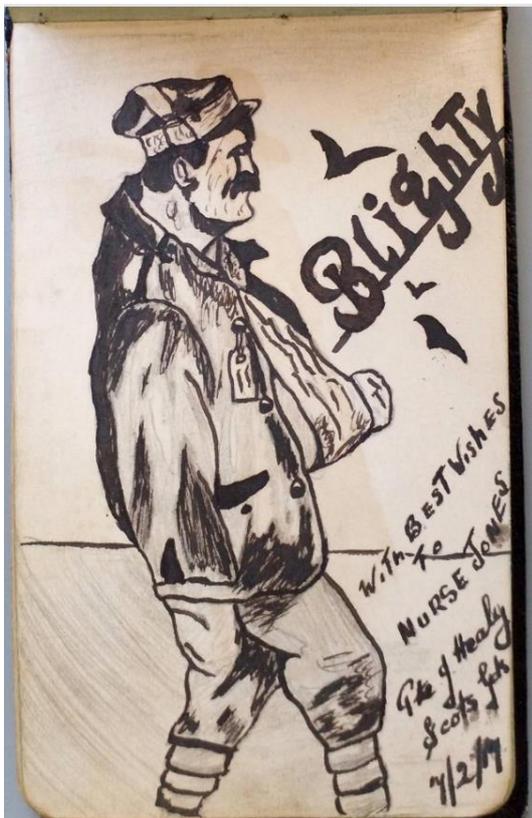


Figure 21 Walking wounded soldier going back to Blighty in 'Autograph Album Nurse Jones' VAD (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Heritage Collection

¹⁵⁸ Arthur J. Mills, Fred Godfrey, and Bennett Scott, 'Take Me Back To Dear Old Blighty', 1916. This was a popular music hall song from the First World War.

¹⁵⁹ Michael Hollington and Clare Hall, 'Home Thoughts, From Abroad: The Fantasy of "Blighty," The Reality of Home', *Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, no. 31 (2020), p. 12, doi:10.31902/fl.31.2020.2.

¹⁶⁰ Russell, *HF0010.1 Autograph Book*; Marion Jones Jones, *AB476 Autograph Book* (QARANC Association Heritage Collection,).

Home for the commonwealth and colonial soldiers, though, was not England, although they did sometimes consider it and speak of England as such. These patients had a very different hospital experience. Although British families would have been able to visit their loved one in the hospital, distance and economics would have precluded many from doing so.

Commonwealth families, on the other hand, unless very wealthy, would have had no opportunity to visit increasing the sense of isolation from family and country for their loved one. Communities of commonwealth soldier-patients in hospitals took on added importance creating bonds to replace family far away and we see these communities reflected in many of the albums where commonwealth soldiers were nursed. Anna Maguire argues that during the First World War ‘in hospitals, the body became a key site of colonial encounter’.¹⁶¹ The first issue of *The Gazette* (October 1915) ran a short column commenting on the hospital’s ‘Empire character’ and the allocation of ‘no less than five hundred beds [...] permanently at the disposal of Australian patients.’¹⁶² The Gallipoli campaign had begun in February 1915 and the ANZAC wounded, in particular the Australian wounded, were a constant community within No. 3 LGH and a regular part of *The Gazette* from its first issue in October 1915 to last in July 1919.¹⁶³ This is reflected in Edith’s personal album as a sizeable portion of the contributions in her album are from Australian and Canadian wounded convalescent soldier-patients, and this constituency also made regular contributions to *The Gazette*. Other London Hospitals, too, received many Commonwealth soldiers, and a column written in *The Fifth*, the magazine for No. 5 London General Hospital based at St Thomas’, with whom there was a good-natured rivalry, provides a personal insight from an Australian patient. In it, he speaks

¹⁶¹ Maguire, ‘On the Wards: Hospitals and Encounters’, p. 153.

¹⁶² ‘Australians at the 3rd L.G.H.’

¹⁶³ The Gallipoli Military Campaign (19 February 1915 – 9 January 1916) notable as a military defeat and for establishing the reputation of ANZAC troops who suffered great losses on the peninsular. ANZAC Australian, New Zealand Army Corps.

of their ‘bounden duty at once to rally round the old Mother Country to crush an enemy who has proved to be a menace to the whole of Europe’.¹⁶⁴ He goes on to describe being drafted to Egypt and Gallipoli, where he was wounded, and his journey to England is summed up in just a few short lines: ‘It was here that I was wounded and sent first to Malta and then to England, or what is called “Good Old Blighty”’.¹⁶⁵ He then describes the treatment he received ‘at the hand [sic] of the mother country while in hospital and from visitors and people in general [which] is ample compensation for any hardships experienced while doing our duty’.¹⁶⁶ Such sentiments as these and the lack of any obvious criticism in the albums suggest an outward stoical acceptance from Imperial soldiers of their war on behalf of a ‘mother country’ to which their own countries were subordinate. Many commonwealth soldier-patients had complex and mixed feelings about being so far from their family networks, and some felt less comfortable about the “duty” owed to Britain.¹⁶⁷

Maguire asserts that in relatively new countries like South Africa and New Zealand, the introduction of conscription in 1916 was framed as a demonstration of "patriotism and manliness," with frequent references to patriotism found throughout the narratives.¹⁶⁸ The ethos of Empire that had been instilled in commonwealth troops almost since birth meant they would have felt a responsibility to the colonial power and that fighting for Britain would have supported the call for national independence. For many, this would have caused tension between being called to do their duty for a country they wished to break away from and, therefore, that duty was at variance with calls for a recognition of full independence. Whilst many enlisted willingly, others felt a disconnect with a distant country and its wars. *The*

¹⁶⁴ ‘An Australian’s View of the War’, *The Fifth: The Magazine of the Fifth London (City of London) General Hospital St Thomas’s*, 1.1 (1916), p. 14.

¹⁶⁵ ‘An Australian’s View of the War’.

¹⁶⁶ ‘An Australian’s View of the War’.

¹⁶⁷ Maguire, *Contact Zones of the First World War: Cultural Encounters across the British Empire*, p. 97.

¹⁶⁸ Maguire, *Contact Zones of the First World War: Cultural Encounters across the British Empire*, p. 36.

Gazette in November 1915 poses the question ‘Why Did You Join?’¹⁶⁹ The comment ‘they are notoriously crafty in concealing their true feelings’ suggests that despite protestations of ‘for the fun of the thing’ and ‘a trip around the world in the bargain’ to join and leave their homeland may not have been what they really wanted. The magazine hypes the propaganda of commonwealth soldiers coming to the aid of the Empire, but the item itself concludes ‘The pride and glory, the whole magnificent panoply of war, had their day years ago.’ And asks cynically, ‘Did any of you feel eloquent in the mud and dirt out yonder?’¹⁷⁰

No. 3 LGH was proud of its connections with its Colonial and Commonwealth patients, and *The Gazette* utilised the connection as propaganda. It fashioned No. 3 LGH as a reassuring place representing the nation in fulfilling its duty to care for the soldiers across the Empire who were wounded in coming to its aid. The title of the book of compilations from *The Gazette* was *Happy Though Wounded* and endeavoured to present the hospital as a family community of medical staff, British and Commonwealth soldiers all working and fighting for the same goal.¹⁷¹ The regular items in *The Gazette* by and about the Australians helped to make them feel a sense of home from home, but two contributions in Edith Holden’s album show how the Australian patients also felt home sick.

The title ‘Hands Up’ may be a bitter reference to the man with no arms in the cartoon drawing, but it can also be read in the context of the words ‘Home Sweet Home’ with images of a Kangaroo and Emu reminding him of home (Figure 22). In this instance, he is putting his hands up to admit to his homesickness, something that *The Gazette* does not dwell on.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Why Did You Join?’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 1.2, p. 43.

¹⁷⁰ ‘Why Did You Join?’

¹⁷¹ Muir and Irving, *Happy-Though Wounded! The Book of the 3rd London General Hospital*.



Figure 22. 'Hands Up' in 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/68/HOLD.

The second contribution in Edith Holden's album that can also be read in the context of homesickness is by a Soldier from the 5th Australian Light Horse:

A soldier may ride in pomp and pride
 And travel o'er the sea
 But wherever we Australians be
 I will always think of thee.¹⁷²

Edith can read this as the soldier-patient thinking of her, but in writing the verse, the Australian patient can be referring to his longing for his home, no matter where he is in the world.

The Museum of Military Medicine's archive consists of albums from British nurses, and it is these albums with which this thesis is mainly concerned. McKinnon's study on *Impressions of Empire*, however, looked at the autograph albums of ten Australian nurses to

¹⁷² 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS'.

consider ‘Australian attitudes towards Britain and the British Empire between 1899 and 1919.’¹⁷³ Her work sought to provide ‘a new understanding of imperial identity as manifested in their pages’.¹⁷⁴ The complex makeup of commonwealth troops who were wounded and treated is a visible presence in many of the albums from the archive, which contain one or two New Zealand, Canadian, and Australian contributions, but the vast majority of identified regiments are British ones. This makes Edith Holden’s album stand out as there are at least thirty contributions from Commonwealth soldiers, which is not surprising given the five hundred allocated beds. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd Australian Auxiliary hospitals (AAH) were located in the greater London area with the 2nd AAH at Southall specializing in the fitting of artificial limbs and together with No. 3 LGH which was renowned for prosthetics such as the ‘tin noses’, there would probably have been communication between the two groups of Australian patients and nurses.¹⁷⁵ A list of nurses working at the 3rd LGH from October 1915 to September 1916 does not appear to show any Australian nurses working there, however, it maybe that later in the war they did.¹⁷⁶

The presence of these Commonwealth soldiers in the albums provides an opportunity to compare and contrast their relationships with British and Australian nurses. Both McKinnon and Harris discuss the connection between the Australian soldier-patient and the Australian nurse as a link to their homeland providing psychological comfort and reminding them of the ‘bonzer girls with bosker [sic] eyes’.¹⁷⁷ Harris argues that the sick and wounded soldiers experienced homesickness and loneliness by being far from home and had ‘an

¹⁷³ McKinnon, ‘Impressions of Empire’, p. 3.

¹⁷⁴ McKinnon, ‘Impressions of Empire’, p. 4.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Tin Nose Shop’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth*, 3.2 (1917), p. 52. Lt. F. Wilcoxson enlisted in the RAMCT in 1915. A talented sculptor he worked with Capt. Derwent Wood helping to transfigure deformed faces in the Splint Room, known to the soldier-patients as “The Tin Nose Shop”.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Nurses and Wounded in World War One (Grey and Scarlett) Female Staff List - 3rd LGH Wandsworth’, *Www.GreyandScarlett.Com*, October 1915.

¹⁷⁷ McKinnon, ‘Impressions of Empire’, p. 7.

intense desire to be nursed by them [Australian nurses]'.¹⁷⁸ Being nursed by an Australian nurse would have created a sense of kinship and their knowledge of their country would strengthen the bonds made. McKinnon argues that 'many Australian soldiers drew a distinction between being nursed by British nurses and VADs and being nursed by Australians.'¹⁷⁹ This need to identify with their home country can be seen in the contributors adding their home location to the entry. This is more evident with the commonwealth entries than those of the British troops but not exclusive to them.

Maguire argues that strong commonwealth patients forged connections with each other as a reminder of their home country. Carden-Coyne states that the hospital magazines played a part in encouraging friendships and contributions to *The Gazette* demonstrate this in the form of cartoon sketches and articles. She goes on to argue that there was a collective cohesiveness in the brigades, a pride in battle honours which 'motivated wounded men to return to the front', asserting that this separation bonded men with other commonalities such as country.¹⁸⁰ It was in this convalescent environment that they looked for commonalities and made bonds with each other, despite not being in the same platoon or regiment but through their common link of country. Swapping war stories with each other also helped the men bond and form communities within the wards. Maguire suggests that during this phase of their recovery 'encounters became visible in the men's writing once they had at least partially recovered'.¹⁸¹ This is very evident in both the magazines and the albums.

The references in Edith's album to the Australian state of Victoria and its capital city, Melbourne, along with the mention of Tasmania and the crude ink sketch of a soldier captioned "Home Sweet Home" (Figure 22), support McKinnon's and Harris's arguments

¹⁷⁸ Harris, "'All for the Boys': The Nurse-Patient Relationship of Australian Army Nurses in the First World War", p. 160.

¹⁷⁹ McKinnon, 'Impressions of Empire', p. 7.

¹⁸⁰ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 262.

¹⁸¹ Maguire, 'On the Wards: Hospitals and Encounters', p. 155.

about homesickness and collective identity.¹⁸² Although their work is specific to Australian soldiers and nurses, the same can be said of the entries in Edith's album of the Canadian soldiers who write of 'the Maple leaf' and cite Ottawa and Newfoundland in their entries (Figure 23). This can be seen as an extension of the belonging to extended family groups seen throughout the albums by all the contributors, both Commonwealth and British soldiers. Soldier-patients often exhibited a sense of pride in their regiments by the use of the regimental badge as their album contribution, as well as listing their regiment, number and battalion details. Some, as in Edith's book, add proud descriptors of their regiment such as 'City Of London Yeomanry "Rough Riders"'.¹⁸³

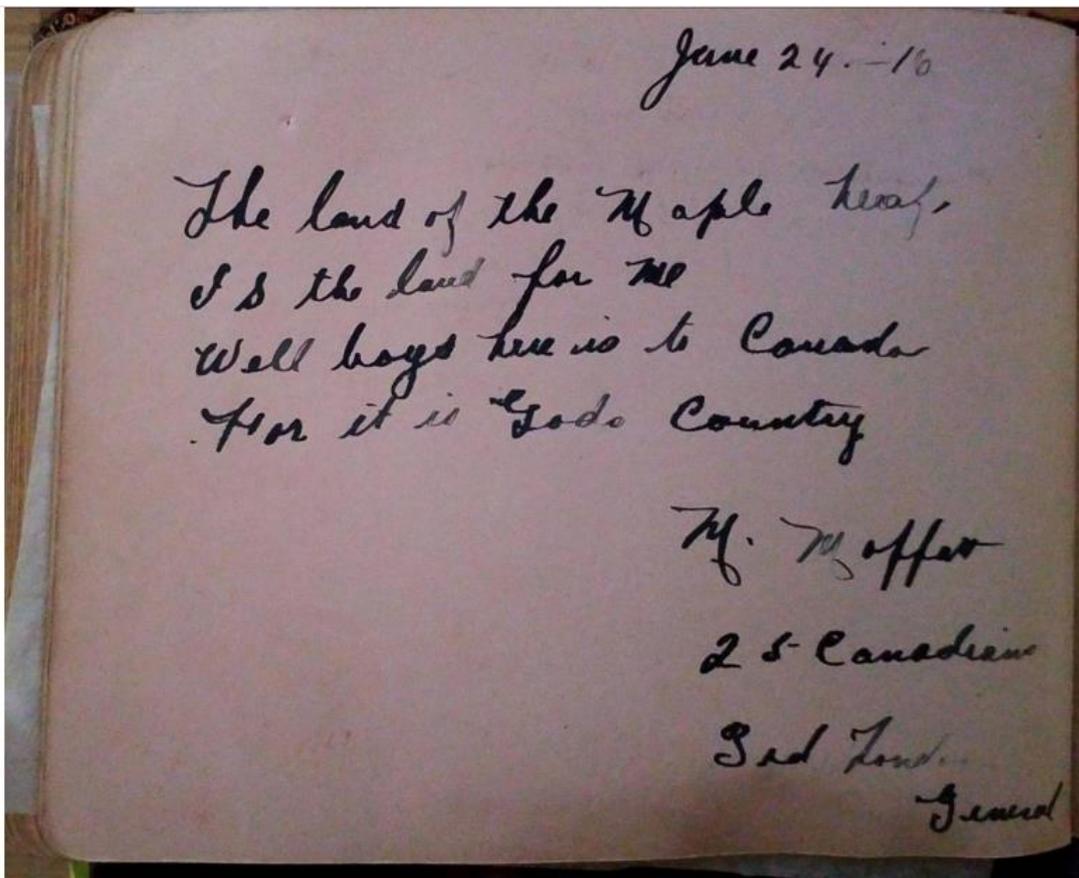


Figure 23. 'The land of the Maple Leaf' in 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/68/HOLD.

¹⁸² McKinnon, 'Impressions of Empire', p. 5. Harris, "'All for the Boys': The Nurse-Patient Relationship of Australian Army Nurses in the First World War", p. 175.

¹⁸³ 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS'.

McKinnon argues that whilst being nursed by a woman from their own country was important to an Australian soldier, and no doubt true of other commonwealth soldier-patients, ‘for the British soldiers with whom these [Australian] nurses came into contact, any difference is subsumed by the multitude of similarities, and the ancestral ties between many Australian servicemen and the United Kingdom.’¹⁸⁴ Similarly, in caring for their patients, British nurses would also have become a central figure in the soldiers’ lives and, in the absence of family, the British nurses may have felt an equally strong bond realising they were far from home and wishing to provide comfort in the absence of family and friends. Dorothy Eardeley-Wilmot’s account in *The Gazette* of the Australians giving her impressions of their arrival was reproduced in the book *Happy-Though Wounded!* :

In they came, tall, loose-limber, wondering greatly what it was all going to be like. They had practically travelled from one end of the world to the other, but what was distance to them? In spite of all their curiosity of England they were still haunted by a kind of nostalgia for those far-away vast places they had left behind. You could see them dreaming of huge expanse of sky and land here in the juts where there was a well-proportioned roof between them and the stars. A cheery lot, talking eagerly of Australia with warm boyish pride - speaking the name like a challenge and an inspiration in one: very susceptible to their Colonial independence, an independence which by looking at them one knew had been earned by sheer hard work - the sort of work that an all-wise God first assigned to man so that he might live closer to nature and learn to love her. Such kindly hearts, such helping hands – if I could re-christen Australia I should call it “The Country of Lend-a-hand” – English enough to be modest about themselves, but Australian enough to be proud of their native land and eager in praising it.¹⁸⁵

Dorothy Eardeley-Wilmot’s account sums up the wonderment felt by British nurses and VADs about far-off countries through their contact with its men. The men were ‘tall, loose-limbed’ and her juxtaposition of the description of the men with descriptions of the ‘vast far-away places’ and ‘huge expanse of sky’, demonstrates the nurses’ inquisitiveness about the commonwealth soldier-patients. To have an autograph from an exotic patient, as the commonwealth soldiers must have appeared, would have been treasured.

¹⁸⁴ McKinnon, ‘Impressions of Empire’, p. 9.

¹⁸⁵ Muir and Irving, *Happy-Though Wounded! The Book of the 3rd London General Hospital*, p. 132.

Romantic Interludes in Edith's Albums and Across the Albums

Chapter one considered the historical background of friendship books or autograph albums, and it was argued that the album was seen as a safe place for flirtations and ‘playful declarations of love’ (Figure 24).¹⁸⁶ In chapter two, the Nightingale effect was analysed in relation to the military environment where the soldier-patients could perceive their carers as romantic saviours. The romantic notion of the nurse having an interest in her patients are brought to the attention of all the readers – staff and patients – in No. 3 LGH when ‘Pup’ speaks of the respect his presence excites around the wards and the rivalry he sees from the patients: ‘They’ll call you a Wazzumodyeeny [sic] and give you a bone they’ve dug out of the Incinerator if they think anyone’s looking, but half the time they’ve got one eye glued to some curly-haired Anzac down the corridor and are thinking, “My word, *some* Boy! [sic]”’ Pup, however, deems their interest as being deceitful and having ‘no moral perspective’.¹⁸⁷ Such playful comments from Pup may also be seen as a gentle reproof of nurses who became attached to their soldier-patients in this way.

¹⁸⁶ See chapter two: ‘Contribution Conventions: Recurring Themes and Variations’.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Our Monthly Interview: No. 5 “Pup”’.

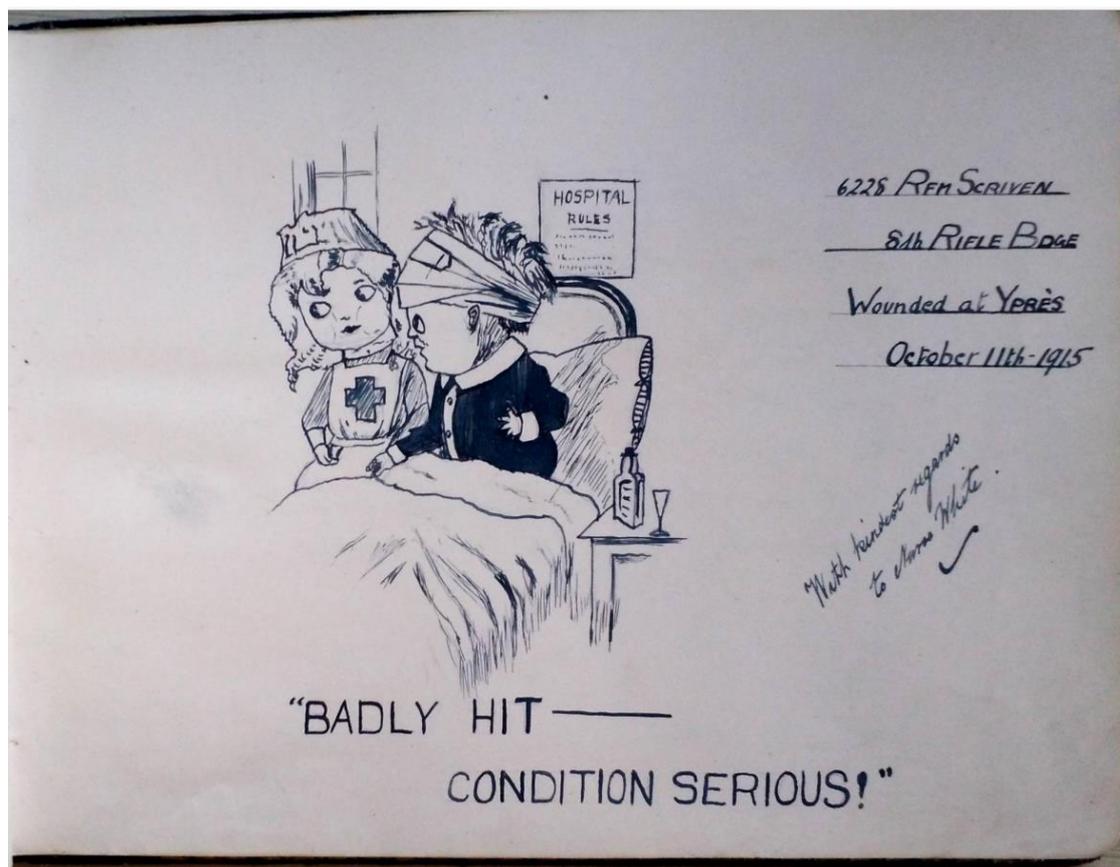


Figure 24. ‘Badly-Hit - Condition Serious’ pen and ink sketch in ‘Autograph Album Madge White VAD’ (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/254/WHIT.

This atmosphere of intimacy did, sometimes, result in romance. The British Red Cross website section on ‘Valentine Volunteers’ recounts the love stories of three Red Cross Nurses (V.A.D.s): ‘many patients took a shine to the women who cared for them. Soldiers gave nurses they liked photographs of themselves as a memento’.¹⁸⁸ We see evidence of this in the albums of VAD nurses Penn and Jones (Figure 25 and Figure 26).

¹⁸⁸ ‘Valentine Volunteers: Love Stories from World War 1’, *British Red Cross* <<https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/our-movement/our-history/valentine-volunteers-love-stories-from-world-war-1>> [accessed 23 September 2023]. The British Red Cross website acknowledged the work of VADs in the First World War as part of the centenary commemorations in 1918. Part of this was a section on their website about ‘Valentine Volunteers’. The above selections on the website appear to be random and the criteria for their selection are not known. The BRCS were contacted but no further information was given other than the following response: ‘this and others like it in the history stories section of our website, <https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/our-movement/our-history>, were originally written to mark the centenary of WWI. Since this was a few years ago, I’m not sure why they selected these WWI volunteers’ stories to highlight, but I think they were looking at different themes, such as romance between nurses and soldiers, VADS working abroad, famous volunteers, etc’.



Figure 25. Photograph of Pte Taffe in 'Autograph Album Mary Penn VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection.



Figure 26. Photograph contribution in 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, AB47.

The photograph from VAD Nurse Jones' album (Figure 26) appears to show the soldier-patients in their hospital blues.¹⁸⁹ This, together with the ward photographs such as the one in Nurse Penn's album (Figure 25), suggests it was common practice in the convalescent hospitals for photographs of the soldier-patients and wards to be taken to capture the memory. It was also another example of how morale was maintained. The three Valentine Volunteers stories are contrasting events.

The first is probably very typical of the encounters reflected in the albums, that of the soldier mildly enamoured with his nurse. VAD Helen Beale recounts in letters home from France observing an interaction with one of her patients and an old YMCA man 'what must my boy say than 'wouldn't you like to be me, sir, lying here being washed by a nice young lady like this!'¹⁹⁰ The second account is of a matron marrying a pharmacist on the ward and the final account is of a VAD nurse and an Australian soldier she nursed at Gwy House Chepstow. They met in October 1915 and the following June (1916) he was returned to duty. They married before he left. He survived the war but shortly after died from pneumonia. No wedding links have been established between any of the VAD nurses and their soldier-patients from the albums.

Military nurses had to resign in order to marry. The Service records of Edith Pepper, a TFNS (R) nurse, friend of Sister Tarrant and a nurse at Edith Holden's No. 3 LGH hospital are just one example of this.¹⁹¹ Staff Nurse Pepper's date of joining for duty was May 1916, by December she had resigned to marry. The letter from the War Office dated 4 December stated that 'the Advisory Council of the T.F.N.S. does not give permission to nurses to resign in wartime, but if Miss Edith Pepper is to be married shortly, we cannot of course stand in the

¹⁸⁹ Jones, *AB476 Autograph Book*.

¹⁹⁰ 'Valentine Volunteers'. Helen Beale: Red Cross record give a Helen Beale and a Helen Mary Beale both from East Grinstead and most probably the same individual. Helen Mary Beale transferred to the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) in January 1918. Her VAD records show she was 29 in 1915 and her WRNS application a birth date of 1885.

¹⁹¹ 'Service Records Edith Pepper TFNS TNA WO399/13830'.

way of her resignation'.¹⁹² Edith was not entitled to a Gratuity. A letter from Miss Barton, the Principal Matron of No. 3 LGH presents Edith Pepper's resignation as part of a wider pattern: 'there seems to be quite an epidemic of marriage just now. But I fear there is nothing we can do to prevent them..'¹⁹³

The albums provide an abundance of these verses labelled by Randolph and McCord as 'the "Oh-Gosh-How-I-Love-You" poets represented in every album' and they even provide a list of two-line ditties humorously declaring love including 'Roses are red violets are blue, Sugar is sweet and so you are too'.¹⁹⁴ These two lines are perhaps the most synonymous with autograph albums and variations on the two lines appear in many of the albums, such as the following by New Zealander F W Roberts writing in Nurse Cotts' album: 'The Roses Red| The Violets blue| The honey sweet| And so are you'.¹⁹⁵ He goes on to include his home address – 12 Howard St Dunedin New Zealand – suggesting that there is a hoped-for continuance of the friendship. Das contends that the nurses' autograph albums are a poignant and 'unique genre' which 'provide a vivid map of personal networks as well as a formal language that legitimises the articulation of intimacy: the entries vary from sentimental farewells and messages to rather risqué poems and even sketches'.¹⁹⁶ Das goes on to argue that although the albums are 'fascinating in the sheer variety of entries, for a more comprehensive account of the life that produced them, as well as for a record of female subjectivity, we have to go back to the writings by the women nurses'.¹⁹⁷ I argue that the albums should not so readily be dismissed as they form a valuable part of the historical narrative of the intimacy between the soldier-patient and his nurse. They provide a new dimension to the letters, diaries and other related documentation of these women.

¹⁹² 'Service Records Edith Pepper TFNS TNA WO399/13830'.

¹⁹³ 'Service Records Edith Pepper TFNS TNA WO399/13830'.

¹⁹⁴ Randolph and McCord, 'Autograph Albums in the Ozarks', p. 191.

¹⁹⁵ 'Service Records Emily Cott QAIMNSR TNA WO399/1767'.

¹⁹⁶ Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, p. 178.

¹⁹⁷ Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, p. 178.

“A real question – What is love? Answer: A hope”¹⁹⁸

Although some of the verses are flattering to the nurses, to find verses such as these in the albums of older nurses such as Edith Holden and married VADs such as Violet Hurdman arguably suggests they are written in recognition of their work rather than with any romantic intentions. There are, therefore, different meanings to the use of these verses in the albums. Some suggest the acceptance of unrequited love, others a longing for wives or girlfriends at home. As McKinnon and Harris argue, the commonwealth soldiers, and in particular the Australian soldier-patients, experienced homesickness and loneliness yearning for their ‘bonzer girls’.¹⁹⁹ This can be seen in the following short verse ‘A soldier may ride in pomp and pride| and travel o’er the sea| But wherever we Australians be| I will always think of thee’.²⁰⁰

The quote above about love being hope is a poignant one given the prospect that life expectancy at the front could be very short indeed. It appears in Edith’s album just as a single line with no other context, as with other verses providing advice about love and marriage that litter the autograph albums – and Edith’s album is no exception – it is probably summing up the futility of war felt by the contributor who still holds out hope for sustained peacetime relationships. The upbeat nature of many contributions in the albums to maintain morale, keep smiling, and indulge in mild infatuations with some of the pretty young nurses is also reflected in No. 3 LGH’s (in parallel with other hospitals) reputation as ‘happy hospital’.

Conclusion

This chapter has taken a comparative approach to explore an autograph album with its connections to one specific hospital, the No. 3 London General Hospital at Wandsworth,

¹⁹⁸ ‘Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS’.

¹⁹⁹ Harris, “‘All for the Boys’: The Nurse-Patient Relationship of Australian Army Nurses in the First World War”, p. 160; McKinnon, ‘Impressions of Empire’.

²⁰⁰ ‘930 B Burke 5th Australian Light, Horse’ in ‘Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS’.

through its related hospital magazine *The Gazette*. This helps to illuminate what is acceptable and what is not acceptable to be contributed to the albums and the boundaries the soldier-patients placed on what they wrote in a nurse's album. Criticism and unacceptable comments were more likely to find their way into the forum of the more impersonal hospital magazines allowing frustrations and angst an outlet for soldiers still under military discipline.

By considering the background of Edith Holden through her own words and those of others writing in *The Gazette*, notably Barbara McLaren, the chapter enables Edith to move out of the shadowy presence she holds in her album into a woman who we can see upholding her professional standards and relating to not only her patients, but their families. Through this medium it is possible to gain an understanding of how contributions to Edith's album may have been made as well as seeing her album as a useful vehicle for analysing the hospital care of the soldier-patients.

This care included intensive preparation for arrival of the wounded at the hospital, an event that *The Gazette* shows figures more in the staffs' importance than the soldier-patients. I have also been able to highlight the length of the journey for the patients from point of wounding to arrival at a home hospital in the UK. For many soldier-patients their journey is not one they choose to dwell on in any depth the albums, but the hospital magazines do contain reference to the journey often in cartoon form concertinaing the long arduous journey into a few short drawings reflective of the often short accounts in the albums.

The No. 3 LGH has very strong commonwealth connections in particular the care of Australian wounded and wider connections to other albums can be seen in the popular song *My little grey home in the West*. This song found its way into the psyche of the autograph albums with various adaptations found in many albums, particularly the Australian albums as cited by McKinnon's study. This chapter has complimented her work by examining the use

of this song and No. 3 LGH's striking association with it due to Dorothy Eardley-Wilmot working at No. 3 LGH.

The Gazette as a companion piece to the albums provides a more impersonal view of the care given and is a forum to see the nurse's perspective of the hospital. The use of Edith's pug as a device in the hospital magazine for providing an alternative perspective on the hospital and Edith in her role as Matron shows how more taboo subjects, such as the criticism of the staff, could be voiced. While hospital magazines, in part, sought to broadcast strong patient morale to the public, I suggest that the more intimate albums are a space in which patients could provide morale to the nurses themselves with their gratitude and (usually) playful protestations of love. Working long hours and facing badly mutilated and disfigured patients on a regular basis would have taken its toll both emotionally and physically on the nurses. Hannah Bentley in 'Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service: A study of female active service during the First World War', draws attention to the awareness of the soldier-patients and male staff of the 'physical and emotional demands placed upon the nurses.'²⁰¹ Service Records of letters regarding war pensions for the nurses also support the impact of nursing during the First World War had on the nurses. The soldier-patients would have seen up close how stressed the nurses could become on a daily basis. The albums were a space of sympathy and emotional connection between them where the soldier-patients could reverse the power differential and seek to write something inspiring, diverting and even profound for his nurse.

²⁰¹ Hannah Bentley, 'Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service: A Study of Female Active Service during the First World War' (University of East Anglia, 2021).

Chapter Six

Rehabilitative Album Art, Hospital bonds, and Creative Therapy

On a superficial level the content of the albums can be read simply as uplifting, humorous contributions meant to bring a smile to the reader or provide some moral advice. On a closer reading, however, there is a deeper meaning to be had from the albums' contents, and consideration of the experience of album contributing and compiling is overdue. While my thesis has largely focused on the written entries within albums, in this chapter I want to turn to some of the rich visual and material contents to show how these contributions also bear out a wider argument about the album as a space for the navigation of hospital relationships and, in particular, as a creative, therapeutic, resource for soldier-contributors and nurses. I contend that the albums contributed to rehabilitation of the wounded in the ward environment and could also act therapeutically for the nurses who owned them.

The albums, overall, conform to the tradition of friendship or autograph albums containing many written entries of verse and words of gratitude. They do, however, also include a variety of artwork. These range from quick sketches to elaborately detailed drawings and paintings along with physical enclosures (including cigarettes, knots, stamps, and a needle). I suggest that these materials help to tease out my central arguments about imitation and adaptation of various sources, how the albums might be used for flattery and flirtation, and the rehabilitative qualities of the album for contributor and owner. This chapter considers how the collaborative creative project of the album could contribute to rehabilitation.

Trench Art by Extension

First World War soldier art is often equated with the turning of shell fragments, bone, and bits of cloth into a souvenir of life in the trenches. These objects, with a direct physical connection with the horrors experienced by the soldier himself, could be taken home, handled, passed around, and evoke memories to be talked of among comrades. Both the albums themselves and the art created within them, in the form of sketches and verses, can also be considered trench art by extension. Nicholas Saunders argues that the term Trench Art is ambiguous and that Trench Art meant different things to those who made and collected it.¹ Saunders argues that it symbolised shared experiences, hopes, and emotions and demonstrated that there was an inherent ‘human instinct to create’ even in the most destructive of environments.² Holly Furneaux argues that it is the connection between the soldiers and the creation of the art that defines what can be classed as trench art.³

In *Created in Conflict: British Soldier Art from the Crimean War to Today*, Furneaux argues that objects, such as magazines and parcels from home, are an ‘example of the thick connections and layers of communication between home and front’.⁴ It can also be argued that the albums provide a similar complex conduit between the soldier-patients and the nurses in the hospitals that were an integral part of their convalescence. In ‘Contested Objects: Curating Soldier Art’ Furneaux and Sue Prichard consider the creation of military quilts.⁵ As I have discussed in chapter one, quilts were often made to raise funds for the troops, particularly for Commonwealth troops where the quilt could also act as a physical connection between their home communities and the troops abroad. Furneaux and Prichard contend that

¹ Nicholas J. Saunders, ‘Bodies of Metal, Shells of Memory: “Trench Art”, and the Great War Re-Cycled’, *Journal of Material Culture*, 5.1 (2000), pp. 43–67 (p. 54), doi:10.1177/135918350000500103.

² Nicholas J. Saunders, *Trench Art: A Brief History & Guide, 1914-1939* (Leo Cooper Ltd, 2011), p. 133.

³ Holly Furneaux and Sue Prichard, ‘Contested Objects: Curating Soldier Art’, *Museum and Society*, 13.4 (2015), pp. 447–61 (p. 447), doi:10.29311/mas.v13i4.346.

⁴ Holly Furneaux, *Created in Conflict: British Soldier Art from the Crimean War to Today* (Compton Verney, 2018), p. 22.

⁵ Furneaux and Prichard, ‘Contested Objects’.

these quilts were often created as a part of soldiers' rehabilitation, arguing that this kind of occupational therapy can be traced back to at least 1700 and that hospitals and workshops in 'the First World War institutionally established the use of craftwork for therapeutic purposes'.⁶

The scale of the industrial war gave rise to unprecedented numbers of wounded with multiple injuries and disabilities. As part of their recovery and recuperation many wounded soldiers were involved in physical and occupational therapy. In a study of American soldiers' experiences of occupational therapy in France during the First World War, Pettigrew, Robinson, and Moloney state that the U.S. rehabilitation initiative was based on that of the British arguing that the bedside occupations and curative workshops of the British system informed the US care model.⁷ They make use of a poem entitled 'The Bluebirds', written by Frank Wren, a recovering patient, to explore the experiences of rehabilitation and occupational therapy of First World War soldiers.⁸

Jennifer Bloom Hoover argues that there was an 'atmosphere of gloom and despair' in the hospitals with many wounded suffering from depression.⁹ Occupational therapy as diversion was central to the response to both the psychological and emotional need. Hoover suggests that, whilst on the wards, many recuperating soldiers became discouraged and lethargic. This was often viewed by the staff as idleness and occupational therapy was seen as a means to 'divert attention from pain, disability and depressive thoughts'.¹⁰ She contends that these diversional occupations did indeed positively impact on the mental health of the soldier-patients.

⁶ Furneaux and Prichard, 'Contested Objects', p. 450.

⁷ Pettigrew, Robinson, and Moloney, 'The Bluebirds: World War 1 Soldiers' Experiences of Occupational Therapy', p. 1.

⁸ Pettigrew, Robinson, and Moloney, 'The Bluebirds: World War 1 Soldiers' Experiences of Occupational Therapy', p. 1.

⁹ Jennifer A. Bloom Hoover, 'Diversional Occupational Therapy in World War 1: A Need for Purpose in Occupations', *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 50.10 (1996), pp. 881–85 (p. 881), doi:10.5014/ajot.50.10.881.

¹⁰ Hoover, 'Diversional Occupational Therapy in World War 1: A Need for Purpose in Occupations', p. 881.

The goal of recovery from wounds followed one of two paths, a return to full fitness and a return to the unit or to be medically discharged back to civilian life. There was, therefore, a strong physical need for these therapies. As well as returning a soldier back to fighting fitness, occupational therapy could also provide useful employment for disabled soldiers returning to the civilian workforce.¹¹

The surgery that many of these wounded underwent generated a need for rehabilitation facilities. In *Reclaiming the Maimed*, Robert McKenzie sets out different types of therapy, from electrotherapy to massage and hydrotherapy, and details the various therapies for the upper extremities and, in particular, exercises for hand and finger movements.¹² He goes on to state that occupational therapy is the final stage in the wounded soldier's recovery pathway, arguing that these men had a 'natural hunger for movement' and that hospital life could create depression and lack of motivation. The opportunity a nurse's album provided to contribute artwork could be seen as a way to fulfil the hunger and physical need for movement.¹³

A reading of albums together with hospital magazines can help expand the insight into the life of recovering and convalescing soldier-patients. Through an examination of selected drawings from *The Gazette*, Sophie Sibson explores the difficulties recovering soldiers faced in readjusting to society. She argues that the drawings provide us with an understanding of the various issues they were confronted with. The impact of hospitalisation, together with interactions with both nursing staff and civilian visitors, had an effect on their perceptions of their masculinity.¹⁴ Reznick argues these magazines 'opened a window onto

¹¹ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 12.

¹² Robert Tait McKenzie, *Reclaiming the Maimed: A Handbook of Physical Therapy* (Macmillan, 1918), pp. 70–79.

¹³ McKenzie, *Reclaiming the Maimed: A Handbook of Physical Therapy*, p. 106.

¹⁴ Sophie Sibson, 'Hospital Magazines: Sharing Wounded Soldiers' Stories and Social Issues in Post World War One Britain.', 7 March 2022, p. 2 <<https://hal.science/hal-04244281>>.

the soldier's multifaceted experience of recovery'.¹⁵ He further argues that by providing an outlet for their frustrations with their care, the magazines enabled the hospital authorities to improve its service with the ultimate goal of 'returning the soldiers to duty or to civilian life'.¹⁶

In contrast, the soldier-patients are likely to be more careful of expressing such frustrations in a personal album with the albums instead providing a source of activity in order to alleviate the boredom of recovery or as an extension of occupational therapy. Carden-Coyne argues that 'the recovery period positioned the wounded men in a queer, ambiguous state of becoming'.¹⁷ Occupying the convalescent soldier-patient by various methods helped to rehabilitate a broken mind and body. Occupational therapy was part of the recovery programme and skills such as those that required fine motor skills were important. I will explore the use of the albums as an extension of occupation therapy in more depth in chapter six. Encouraging soldiers to write and draw in an album had a dual purpose. It alleviated boredom and also provided further practice in fine motor skills. Meyer cites the case of a drawing in the *First Eastern General Hospital Gazette* that was done by a soldier-patient rehabilitating after losing his left arm. The patient had been wounded in right (dominant) arm and had taught himself to draw with his left hand whilst in hospital.

While the distraction of the creative process might also have been a necessary form of therapy for men production of trench journals at the front, the specifically rehabilitative nature of the activities ... was a particular function of journals produced in hospitals, where such rehabilitation was a necessary and acknowledge role to the institution.¹⁸

Ana Carden-Coyne suggests that studies on the role of occupational therapy in the First World War have been marginalized, arguing that 'though integral to the gendered process of

¹⁵ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 65.

¹⁶ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 56.

¹⁷ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 264.

¹⁸ Meyer, 'Hospital Journals', p. 348.

rehabilitation, [it] offered patients a surprising capacity to express themselves creatively'.¹⁹ She goes on to suggest that this aspect of rehabilitation has been overlooked and that while the goal of the military authorities was to return the soldiers back to military service or to discharge them back to civilian life as productive citizens, 'what emerged was men's creativity and expressive interest in flowers, gardens and butterflies'.²⁰ This argument is supported by the numerous sketches, pastel and watercolour images which focused on various aspects of innocence and nature found in the albums created by the recovering wounded. The artwork in the albums ranges from rather crudely drawn sketches to some very finely worked pieces, ranging from basic outline drawings of small children and animals such as cats, dogs, and birds to more intricate portrait work. Detailed sketches, like 'Colin's 1915 drawing of horses' heads' (Figure 1) in VAD Madge White's album, appear throughout the albums, showing the effort invested in them.²¹

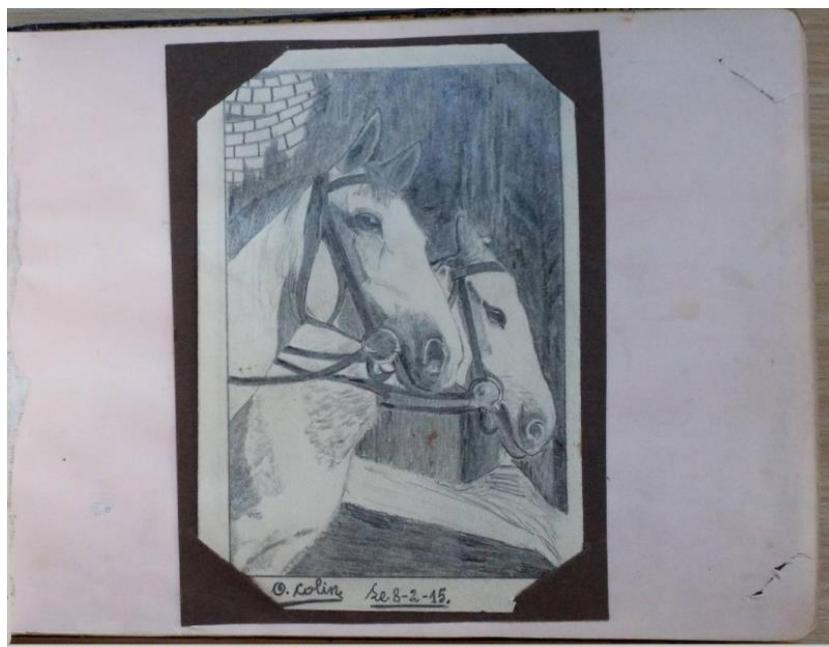


Figure 1. Pencil sketch of horses' heads in the 'Autograph Album of Madge White. VAD' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/254/WHIT.

¹⁹ Ana Carden-Coyne, 'Butterfly Touch: Rehabilitation, Nature and the Haptic Arts in the First World War', *Critical Military Studies*, 6.2 (2019), pp. 176–203 (p. 177), doi:10.1080/23337486.2019.1612151.

²⁰ Carden-Coyne, 'Butterfly Touch: Rehabilitation, Nature and the Haptic Arts in the First World War', p. 178.

²¹ Octave Colin Mathias added a photograph to Madge White's album of himself in the Uniform of a Belgium Soldier with the quote 'L'amitie rapproche les plus grounds distances' [Friendship brings the most distant places closer together]. 'Autograph Album Madge White VAD'.

The cow and small children in the image in Figure 2 from VAD Marion Jones' album, suggest a longing for childhood and the pastoral peace of the countryside as embodied by the cow. The colours are vibrant in this pastel image, with the green of the grass in stark contrast to the mud and grey of the trenches and the dead, dying, and rotting corpses of men and animals. It suggests the energy of life in animals and children, and a hope for the future after the war. The association between the cow and the scattered tins may be a reference to the production of tinned milk and its use during the First World War as part of the rationing for both troops and those on the home front.²² The reference to 'A Cow's Nest' may be a child's logic making the link between tinned milk and cows.

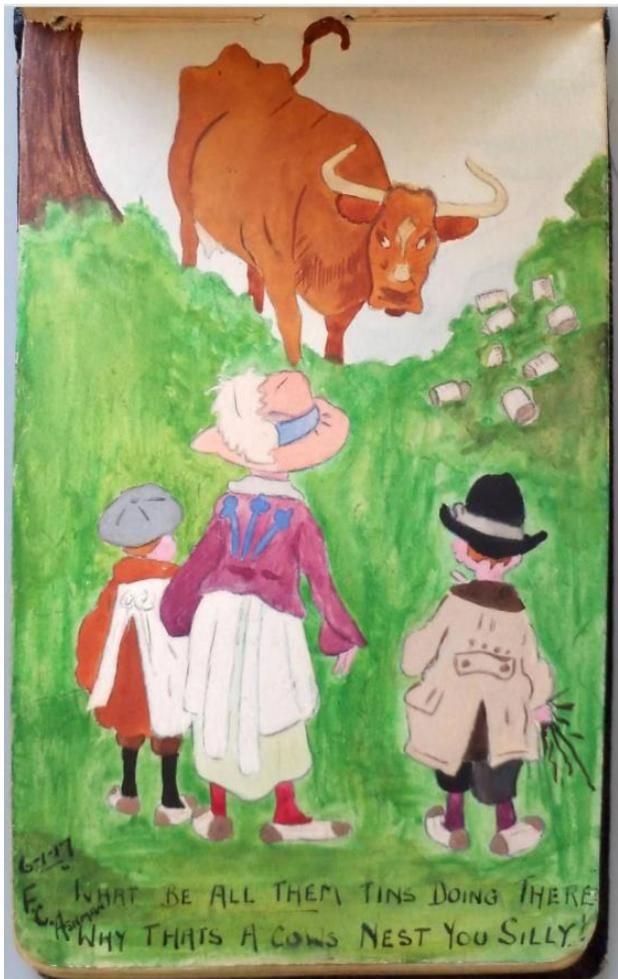


Figure 2 'A Cow's Nest Pastels sketch' in 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, AB476.

²² John Ryan, 'Statistics of Tins and Cans', *Journal of Royal Statistical Society*, 115.4 (1952), pp. 463–99 (p. 13), doi:10.2307/2980837.

The chosen subject matter varies from peaceful landscapes, sailing and troop ships that transported the men to fight, to well-executed portraits of anonymous women who may or may not resemble the nurses in their wards. Carden-Coyne argues that the subjects chosen for the artwork and handicrafts created by convalescent men suggest that they sought to capture a world far removed from the death and dying of the battlefield.²³ She emphasises the butterfly as a notable symbol of life's fragility, representing ephemeral beauty and the innocence of childhood. Although she contends that the butterfly is a popular image, it only appears in one album in the archive.²⁴ In the image 'Life!' in Violet Hurdman's album, there are winged insects that may be butterflies (Figure 3). The use of the candle, however, may indicate these are moths rather than butterflies. The moths are flying too close to the candle and their short lives ending even sooner may be a metaphor for the war ending many young men's lives. Moths or butterflies also represent metamorphosis and during the First World War there was an interest in the spiritualism, as previously discussed in chapter three, with many families, especially mothers trying to contact their dead loved ones to find consolation. The phrase 'like a moth to a flame' is associated with a destructive attraction to something or someone. Seen in the context of the First World War it could be applied to the appeal of war to young men, who were attracted to the thought of finding adventure in going to fight but were badly wounded or killed.

Acton describes the war as part of a 'game of life and death', arguing that the nurse not only witnesses the destruction of young men but must also participate in the game.²⁵ Contributions in the albums show an invitation to the nurse to share in the game of life and death and the struggle they both face. In Pte Dawson's sketch, 'Life!' we see the face of a

²³ Carden-Coyne, 'Butterfly Touch: Rehabilitation, Nature and the Haptic Arts in the First World War', p. 176.

²⁴ Carden-Coyne, 'Butterfly Touch: Rehabilitation, Nature and the Haptic Arts in the First World War', p. 177.

²⁵ Acton, *Diverting the Gaze*, p. 67.

young woman rising out of the flame, her hair becoming integral to the smoke from the candle.



Figure 3. 'Life!' Pen and ink sketch in 'Autograph Album Violet Hurdman VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0012.

Dawson's use of the exclamation mark after the word 'life' suggests he may well be reflecting on his survival at a time when so many were killed.²⁶ Despite being a pen and ink sketch, there is darkness and light emitting from the image, suggesting the veil between life and death itself and again resonant of the cult of spiritualism of the time. The woman's face is youthful but unsmiling as it emerges from the candle flame, possibly symbolising the proverbial phoenix rising from the flame and subsequent rebirth. It might be argued that the

²⁶ Pte Dawson (Army Service Corps) contribution to Violet Hurdman's album is dated September 1917, which may suggest that he was injured whilst taking supplies to the front during the third battle of Ypres in July 1917. The third battle of Ypres had upward of thirty-two thousand casualties.

contributor is suggesting that the nurse has enabled him to overcome his wounds and be reborn. The imagery of the moths here suggests the same fragility as the butterfly imagery discussed by Carden-Coyne. Dawson may see his life hanging in the balance under her care, and her somber face suggests the weight of responsibility she carries in nursing the wounded back to life.



Figure 4. Colour landscape image in ‘Autograph Album Elsie Maud James TFNS’ (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/63/JAME.

Carden-Coyne contends that landscape scenes of nature and sketches of boats and ships, in particular sailing ships, maybe a means of the soldier-patient diverting his mind from the ‘sordidness of killing and dying’ to reach a place in his mind of peace.²⁷ For example, the serene landscape in Maud James’s album seen in Figure 4, in stark contrast with the blood and gore of the trenches.. Equally, the ship can be interpreted as being symbolic of the artist freeing themselves and being transported away from the confines of the ward and the reminders of their injuries. The watercolour from VAD Madge White’s album of ships at

²⁷ Carden-Coyne, ‘Butterfly Touch: Rehabilitation, Nature and the Haptic Arts in the First World War’, p. 178.

sunset or sunrise conveys the hope of embarking on a new day (Figure 5). The soothing colours and the tiny boats on the horizon symbolise looking toward the future.



Figure 5. Watercolour of boats in ‘Autograph Album Madge White VAD’ (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/254/WHIT.

Carden-Coyne’s study also examines the use of handicrafts and occupations that could be performed at the bedside, including embroidery. She emphasises that many of these projects often focused on regimental badges.²⁸ The Royal School of Needlework designed and provided embroidery kits to support the occupational therapy of wounded soldiers.²⁹

²⁸ Carden-Coyne, ‘Butterfly Touch: Rehabilitation, Nature and the Haptic Arts in the First World War’, p. 195.

²⁹ ‘With Honour: 150 Years of the RSN: Virtual Exhibition’, *Royal School of Needlework*, 2025 <<https://royal-needlework.org.uk/virtual-exhibition/with-honour/>>.

Several of the albums contain sketches of regimental badges, suggesting that soldier-patients undergoing occupational therapy used the opportunity to practice sketching their designs in preparation for needlework. Figure 6 is an example of the kind of embroidery worked by convalescing soldiers. Some regimental badges are relatively simple, while others reflect considerable time and effort invested in their creation.



Figure 6. Embroidery Made by a Convalescing Soldier', 1916, *British Red Cross Museum and Archives*, Collections Catalogue, Objects: 3055/54
<https://museumandarchives.redcross.org.uk/objects/13695>.

Regimental badges appear across a range of soldier-made items and are prevalent in the albums, clearly linking them with more widely recognised trench art. They establish a connection among the soldiers contributing to the album, reminding them of the bonds formed within their regiments and during their time at the front. This ties into Carden-

Coyne's argument about men's creativity and expression of nature.³⁰ Her points about creative instinct amid destruction equally apply to hospitals where medical staff endeavoured to repair the damage inflicted on wounded soldiers.

Despite the fragmentary nature of the albums, the inclusion of regimental badges provides a shared link across the soldier-patient community and imparts a sense of continuity throughout the archive. The contributors' pride in their regimental history is evident in the careful reproduction of their badges (Figures 7 and 8). These regimental badges created a thread among the soldier-patients, as each contributed their own badge to the album, thereby connecting their shared trench experiences with one another and fostering an unspoken communication between the reader and the contributor.

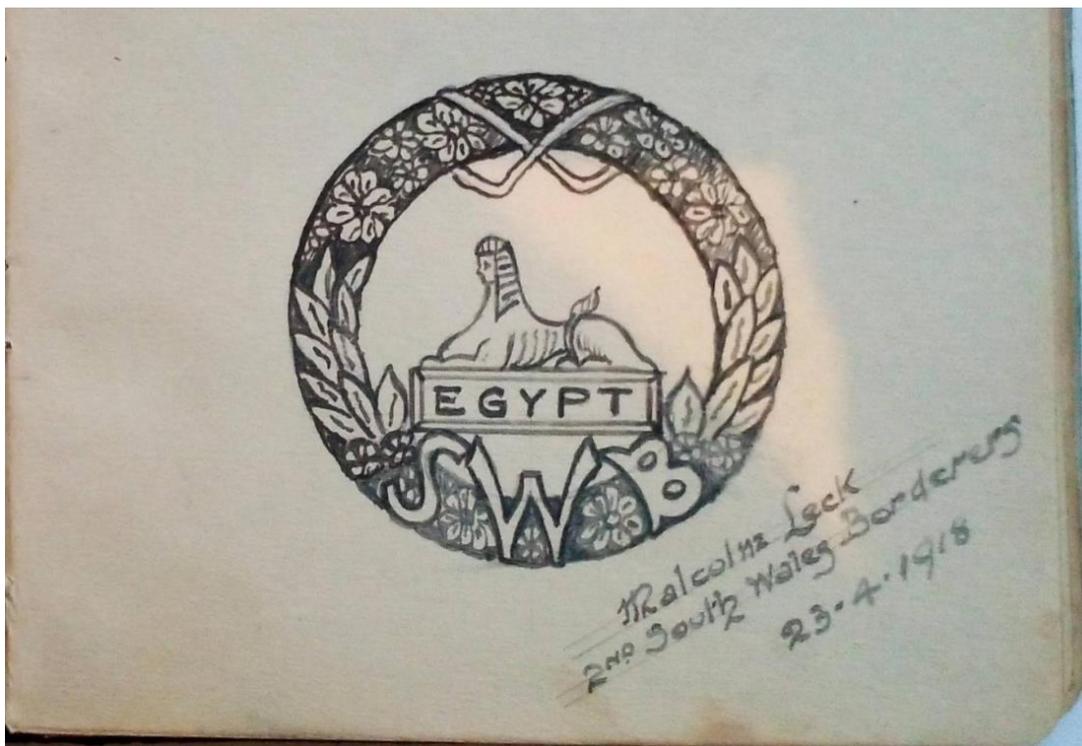


Figure 7. Pen and Ink drawing of 2nd South Wales Borderers Regimental Badge in 'Autograph Album Emily Cott QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/55/COTT

³⁰ Saunders, *Trench Art: A Brief History & Guide, 1914-1939*, p. 133; Carden-Coyne, 'Butterfly Touch: Rehabilitation, Nature and the Haptic Arts in the First World War', p. 178.



Figure 8 Pencil sketch of regimental badge of the Royal Artillery in 'Autograph Album Marion Jones VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, AB476.

Therapy through Art

The act of creating through sketching or through writing verse can be seen as a parallel to the healing observed as part of the creation of trench art, and the albums' entries similarly indicate the soldier-patients' ability to see beauty, despite witnessing the horrors of warfare. Exploration of the various art in the albums adds to our understanding of soldier art and provides new approaches to the study of soldier-patients of the First World War. Similar to how creating art and craft in the trenches served as a productive use of idle time, contributing

to an album on the wards also fulfilled a dual purpose by providing both occupation and therapeutic benefit.

The creation of an album entry occupied the soldier-patients, especially those who were immobile, providing therapy at the same time for those who had nervous shaking or were learning to use a different hand.³¹ Just as the handwriting in the albums might indicate the educational background of the patient, such as a well-educated young man or one not as skilled in penmanship, so too a shaky script might indicate a recovering injured patient. The kind of artwork present in the albums required an element of dexterity and some contributions suggest fine motor skills. The various pencil or pen-and-ink sketches necessitated a steady hand and control of the pencil or brush producing delicate, often intricate, work. Focusing on copying an image, creating one from his imagination, or using a needle and thread to attach an item to a page could form an extension of any occupational therapy a soldier might be receiving as part of his rehabilitation in the hospital.

The mediums used for the artwork in the albums vary from well-executed pen-and-ink sketches and small landscape watercolours to rudimentary attempts to portray an image with pastels, pen, or pencil. The opportunities taken by contributors to paint or sketch may indicate a childlike enjoyment of expressing their imagination regardless of their expertise or it may be a more practical effort to practice rebuilding their motor skills.

In her introduction to *Art Therapy with Military Veterans*, Janice Lobban highlights that even today, there has been little written on art therapy.³² She states that, although art therapy to aid PTSD veterans is not available routinely through the NHS, UK Veterans organisations such as Combat Stress are using it as part of their rehabilitation programs.³³ Art

³¹ McKenzie, *Reclaiming the Maimed: A Handbook of Physical Therapy*, pp. 70–79.

³² Janice Lobban, *Art Therapy with Military Veterans: Trauma and the Image*, ed. by Janice Lobban (Routledge, 2018).

³³ Lobban, *Art Therapy with Military Veterans*, p. 9. The charity Combat Stress was formed on the 12 May 1919 in response to the effects of shell shock in the First World War, it was initially the Ex-servicemen's Welfare

has been used over the centuries to capture the rawness of the battlefield or to show the commander on his horse, or in front of his troops. War artists continue this practice today despite the use of modern technology to capture these events.³⁴

In 1917 Adrian Hill was commissioned by the Imperial War Museum to create over 180 vivid images of the devastation of the war on the western front.³⁵ Later, after the Second World War, Hill coined the term ‘Art Therapy’ with his book *Art versus Illness: A Story of Art Therapy*.³⁶ Lobban argues that art therapy helps veterans express their emotions and ‘body sensations [enabling them] to make sense of experiences and to find meaning’.³⁷ Lobban further suggests that ‘remembrance and ritual are seen to play a part in recovery, and to provide a way for the wider public to acknowledge the sacrifices made through military service’.³⁸

The following two images show two different aspects of remembrance. Sister Jesse Edgar worked on an ambulance train and she chose to remember her colleagues in her album rather than the soldier-patients (Figure 9). This may be because these patients were not convalescing and their injuries demanded care that meant it may not have been conducive to forming any relationships between nurse and patient.

Society. ‘Combat Stress - for Veterans’ Mental Health’, *Combat Stress* <<https://combatstress.org.uk/>> [accessed 14 April 2025].

³⁴ David Rowlands is a Military Artist whose works have captured the British Army in the recent campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. www.davidrowlands.co.uk

³⁵ Adrian Keith Graham Hill (1895-1977) artist and author of Adrian Hill, *On Drawing and Painting Trees* (Pitman, 1936).

³⁶ Adrian Hill, *Art Versus Illness: A Story of Art Therapy* (G. Allen and Unwin, 1945).

³⁷ Janice Lobban, ‘The Invisible Wound: Veterans’ Art Therapy’, *International Journal of Art Therapy*, 19.1 (2014), pp. 3–18 (p. 9), doi:10.1080/17454832.2012.725547.

³⁸ Lobban, *Art Therapy with Military Veterans*, p. 9.



Figure 9 Front page from 'Autograph Album Jessie Laurie Edgar QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/363/EDGAR

The image in figure 10 on the other hand uses symbols of death – the grim reaper's scythe, the cross bones and a sand timer - to urge the reader to remember.³⁹ The symbolism is offered together with the phrase 'lest we forget', which is now synonymous with war memorials and Remembrance Day since the First World War, and reference to the sinking of

³⁹ The scythe represents the Grim Reaper and is associated with taking souls to the afterlife; the skull and cross bones is again associated with death and mortality. Sand timers were often used to symbolise the shortness of life and as a visual representation of the finite nature of life.

the Lusitania and Belgium.⁴⁰ This writer would have been aware of the popular newspaper headlines about what would now be considered war crimes involving civilians. Dated two months after the Somme in 1916 the writer suggests that a surgeon's scalpel is needed to help the country recover from the devastation of the war. The contributor of figure 10 may also be seen as venting his anger at what he viewed as atrocities through this image and working through his trauma by looking to the future of a better Germany and therefore forgiveness.

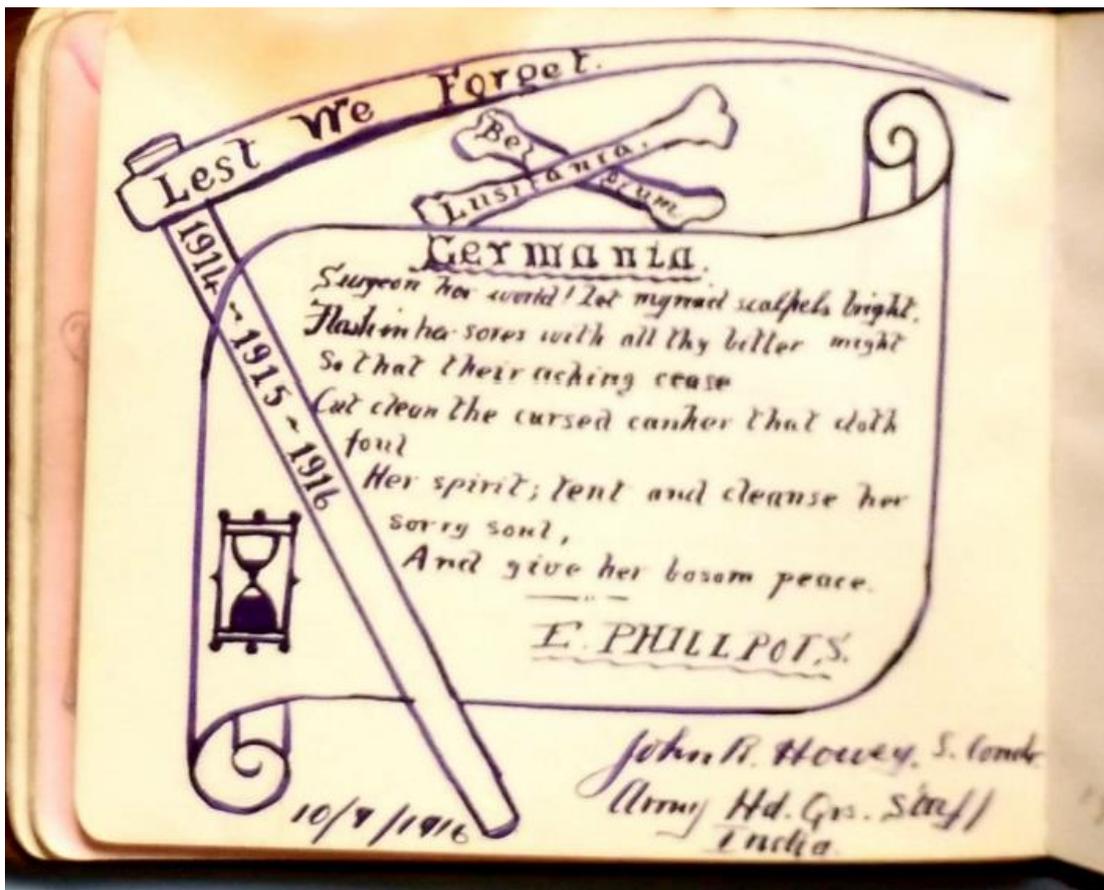


Figure 10 'Lest we forget' Pen and ink sketch in 'Autograph Album Ethel F Mason QAIMNS R' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, 2019 25/15

I contend that these images suggest a need for recognition of a longer history of art therapy and, despite its associations with post-Second World War therapy, these First World

⁴⁰ Rudyard Kipling wrote a hymn-poem 'Recessional' in 1897 for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Each verse concludes with the lines 'Lest we forget-Lest we forget' and the last verse 'Thy mercy on thy people, Lord!' 'Recessional', *The Kipling Society*, 22 March 2021 <https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/readers-guide/rg_recess1.htm>.

War albums and magazines show it was just as much a part of the rehabilitation of the wounded then as it has come to be recognised as today.

Hospital Magazines and Therapy

Hospital magazines played a similar therapeutic role to albums but on a broader scale serving as a larger community space for both medical staff and patients and providing a platform to share their experiences and support each other. Art was encouraged as part of the soldier-patients' convalescence, contributing to their recovery process. The October 1915 issue of *The Gazette* ran a column about an exhibition of art at the Hospital together with a long list of exhibitors from the wards. Shephard argues that many physicians of the time believed that these patients required engaging activities rather than "aimless lounging, excessive entertainments, and passive recreations," as stated by Sir John Collie.⁴¹ Various hospitals employed different treatments ranging from rest and diet to physical exercise as well as electrical therapies but many patients were left to their own devices. Encouraging soldier-patients to contribute to the hospital magazines provided a different kind of therapy. The magazines could serve as a wider community space for medical staff and patients; the albums, therefore, can be seen as an adjunct to these therapeutic activities with their artwork having a personal purpose for both nurse and patient.

The sketches of nurses in the albums are often stylised, suggesting the soldier-patient's idealised vision of his nurse as an angel, young, and compassionate. We can compare these images with the disfigured, disabled patients. A common theme of the artwork in the albums is that of portrait sketches of a Gibson-like girl in a stylized sloping large hat, with several variations being found in the albums.⁴² It is not known if these are sketches copied from fashion magazines on the wards, in keeping with the album convention of

⁴¹ Shephard, *A War of Nerves*, p. 74.

⁴² The Gibson Girl was considered the quintessential feminine ideal of physical attractiveness created by the Artist Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944).

adapting other work, or if it is a likeness of the nurse caring for the contributor. These are generally pen and ink sketches, and the detail in them varies. Unlike some of the verses that are short and very likely to be written down quickly, or verses that may have been worked on separately from the albums before contributing, the sketches would have required the soldier-patient to retain possession of the album for some time. Retaining an album over a period of time can show the trust between nurse and patient. In the selection of images below, the fine detail of Figures 11 and 12 clearly required greater care and time and suggests the artist-contributor was fairly accomplished in the skill.

These portraits of young, attractive women are created by wounded men who may have been familiar with fellow patients who had facial disfigurements, or even the artists themselves may have had facial injuries. Facial disfigurement was probably the most impactful and visible of injuries suffered by the soldier-patients in the First World War. High explosive shells, bullets, and shrapnel caused devastating injuries, not only to the body and limbs but severe damage to the head and face.⁴³

Sophie Sibson considers the effect physical and mental injuries had on the male identity and soldier-patients' perception of their masculinity. She contends that

One of the aspects linked to masculinity was obviously a man's capacity to seduce a woman, to have a girl of his own. Having a fiancé or a wife was an expected part of the success in a man's life. Hospital magazines included drawings and love stories that expressed love beyond injury.⁴⁴

She details many of the drawings in *The Gazette* that demonstrate that injuries did not stop men hoping to find love. The hospital magazines could be considered an expression of hope for the maimed and disfigured patients who would return to civilian life. I contend that these ideas can also be extended to the artwork in the albums working in a similar therapeutic way. Taken together with the many flirtatious verses in the albums, these illustrations can be read

⁴³ S. Biernoff, 'The Rhetoric of Disfigurement in First World War Britain', *Social History of Medicine*, 24.3 (2011), pp. 666–85 (p. 666), doi:10.1093/shm/hkq095.

⁴⁴ Sibson, 'Hospital Magazines', p. 6.

as an expression of hope for future friendships and possible love with someone they felt would not recoil from their disfigurement or disability.

The No. 3 LGH's Masks for Facial Disfigurement Department was under the organization of Lieutenant Derwent Wood.⁴⁵ A sculptor by profession, Wood made plaster face-masks for the injured, and 'facial disfigurements [were] built up and the most terrible unsightliness made presentable by means of the sculptor's art'.⁴⁶ By choosing to sketch youthful, pretty women the album contributors may have been distracting themselves from the horror the war inflicted on their own bodies, perhaps reassuring themselves that, despite their own possible injuries, they could still look at attractive women who could look back at them from the page and not make any judgements.

The image in Violet Hurdman's album depicts a young woman in a checkerboard scarf and hat (Figure 11) which may be suggestive of Violet engaging in board games such as chess or drafts with her convalescing patients. Similarly, figure 12 from Emily Cott's album, shows a young woman, possibly Emily, peeping over a fence and a sign indicates No 8 Stationary Hospital.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Francis Derwent Wood (1871-1926) British Sculptor who worked as an orderly at the 3rd LGH and opened the Masks and Disfigurement Department at the hospital in 1917. Masks took weeks to construct were made of thin metal and the department became known as the Tin Noses department.

⁴⁶ Muir and Irving, *Happy-Though Wounded! The Book of the 3rd London General Hospital*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ 'Service Records Emily Cott QAIMNSR TNA WO399/1767'. Emily is recorded as having trained and worked at London Hospital from 1907-1915. Emily joined the QAIMNS R in May 1915. In 1918 a report showed she was a ward sister on a surgical ward and was working in No. 8 Stationary hospital in March 1918. Emily continued in service after the war transferring to the regular QAIMNS and serving in India.



Figure 11. 'Checkmate!' in 'Autograph Album Violet Hurdman VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0012.



Figure 12. 'No. 8 Stationary Hospital' in 'Autograph Album Emily Cott QAIMNS R' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/55/COTT.

The images from Madge White's album and Nurse Thomson's albums (Figures 13 and 14) are delicate portrait sketches that would have occupied the contributor for some time allowing him to practice his fine motor skills. The sketch in Nurse Thomson's album (figure 13) titled 'Mdse La Croix Rouge' bears a striking resemblance to the popular Pietá image, as discussed in chapter three, and may have been the inspiration for the sketch. He may have used the French language for the title to demonstrate his knowledge of the language. These

sketches are physically attractive depictions that extend the written flattery that is scattered across all the albums in the archive, as well as several sketches showing the nurses in uniform and in civilian clothes, which can be seen to represent the nurses as stylish fashion plates.



Figure 13. Portrait sketch in Autograph Album Madge White VAD (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/254/WHIT.



Figure 14. Portrait sketch in 'Autograph Album Mary Ann Thomson TFNS' (Keogh Barracks Aldershot), Museum of Military Medicine Archive, PE/1/388/THOM.

Other images show how the disabled soldier views his life after the war and indicate that patients used the albums to reflect on physical change and its impacts. 'Sweet are the uses of adversities' from VAD Florence Walker's album shows the fisherman using his wooden leg as a fishing rod (Figure 15). Auxiliary Red Cross Hospitals such as the one at Chippenham in Wiltshire had various sports and amusements to occupy the convalescing patients. In *Unity and Loyalty: The Story of Chippenham's Red Cross Hospital*, Ray Adler

notes that there was a local angling club which organised fishing competitions for the patients.⁴⁸



Figure 15. ‘Sweet are the uses of adversity’ in ‘Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD’ (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0013.

The Therapeutic Cigarette

Florence Walker’s album has more tangible contributions inserted into it. These include knots (Figure 16), a needle (Figure 17), stamps (Figures 18a and 18b), and a cigarette (Figure 19), all accompanied by witticisms. Again, knot work would help develop dexterity of the fingers and was something that may have been practiced in an occupational therapy workshop.⁴⁹ In ‘The Bluebirds: World War 1 Soldiers’ Experiences of Occupational Therapy’, Pettigrew, Robinson and Moloney examined the activities in occupational therapy workshops by

⁴⁸ Ray Adler, *Unity and Loyalty: The Story of Chippenham’s Red Cross Hospital* (The Hobnob Press, 2021), p. 178.

⁴⁹ McKenzie, *Reclaiming the Maimed: A Handbook of Physical Therapy*, p. 113.

recovering soldiers.⁵⁰ Among the various activities, they state that ‘Hitchcock [an occupational therapist] had completed “private lessons in ambidextrous drawing, basketry and several minor crafts” before deployment’.⁵¹ They used a poem, ‘The Bluebirds’, written by Corporal Frank Wren, and included in Hitchcock’s unpublished memoir in order to analyse and provide insights into these therapies, which not only helped with physical recovery but also mental health recovery.⁵² The poem describes the types of activities undertaken as part of therapy which involved giving soldiers things to make such as woodwork, knitting, sewing and basketry. Knot work, as represented by the knots in the albums, would have been an extension of such therapy.

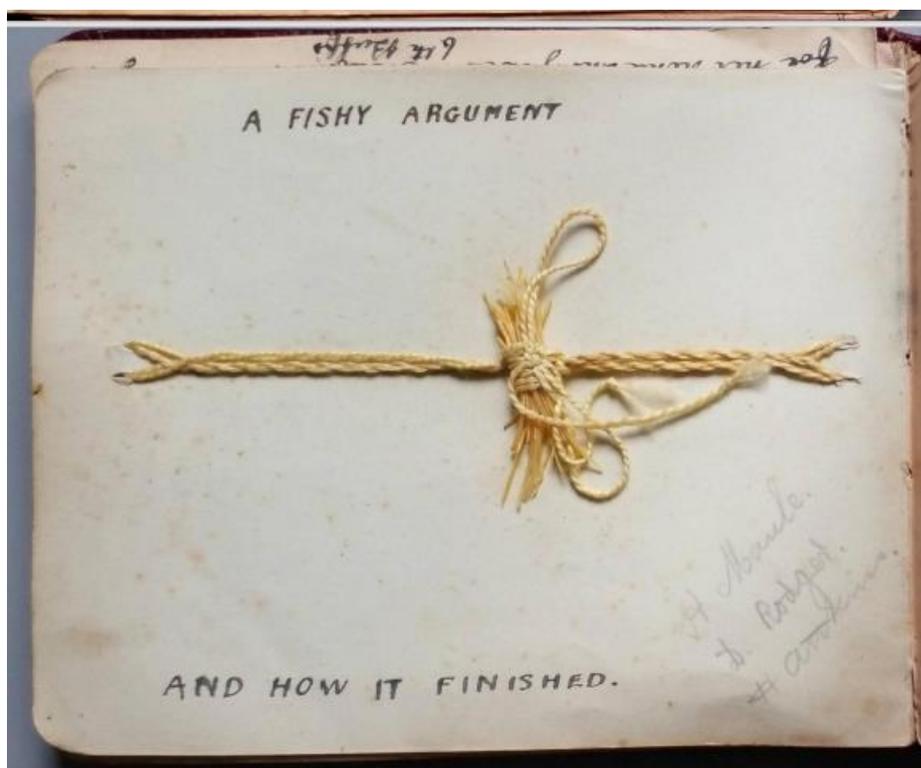


Figure 16 ‘A Fishy Argument’ in ‘Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD’ (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0013.

⁵⁰ Pettigrew, Robinson, and Moloney, ‘The Bluebirds: World War 1 Soldiers’ Experiences of Occupational Therapy’, pp. 1–5.

⁵¹ Pettigrew, Robinson, and Moloney, ‘The Bluebirds: World War 1 Soldiers’ Experiences of Occupational Therapy’, p. 5.

⁵² Cpl Frank Wren was a patient in Lena Hitchcock’s hospital in 1918. His poem describes the activities and equipment used in occupational therapy. The name ‘the Bluebirds’ was the soldiers’ nickname for occupational therapists, or reconstruction aides, such as Hitchcock due to the colour of their uniforms.

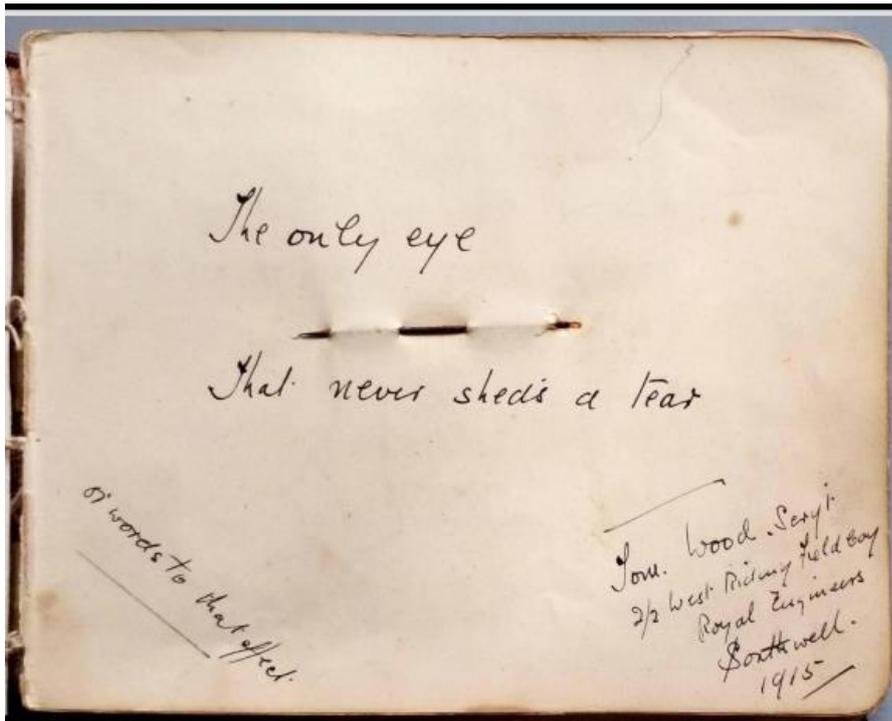


Figure 17. 'The only eye' in 'Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0013.

Although Florence Walker's album is unusual in these inserts, a common material across the albums (and one still used today) is a stamp. In these cases, one with the words 'by gum it sticks!' together with a very common autograph album verse requesting to be remembered (Figure 18a), and the other 'a Contribution that cannot be licked' (Figure 18b).

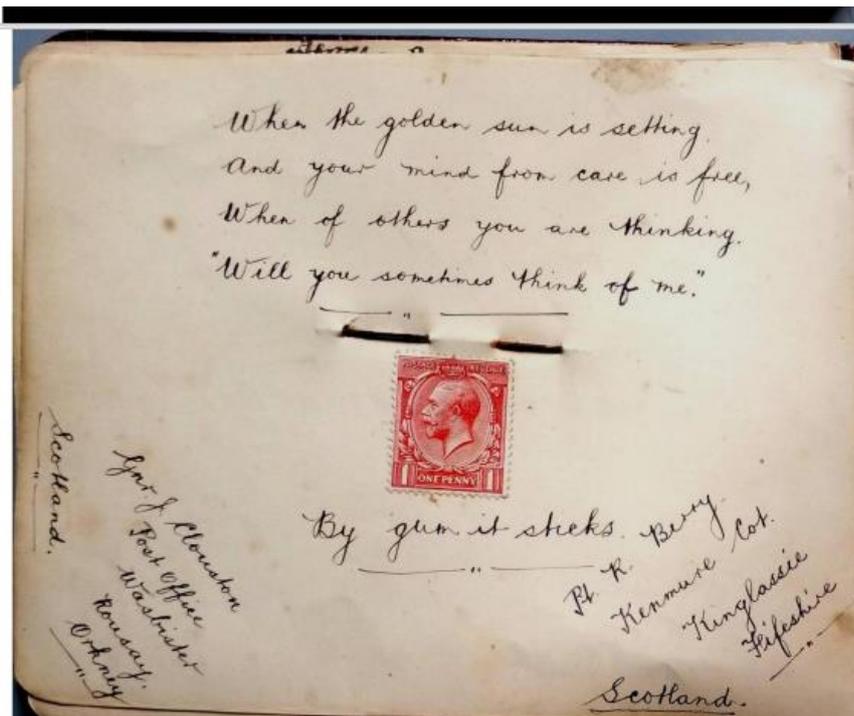




Figure 18a and 18b. 'By Gum it sticks!' and 'A Contribution that cannot be licked' in 'Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0013.

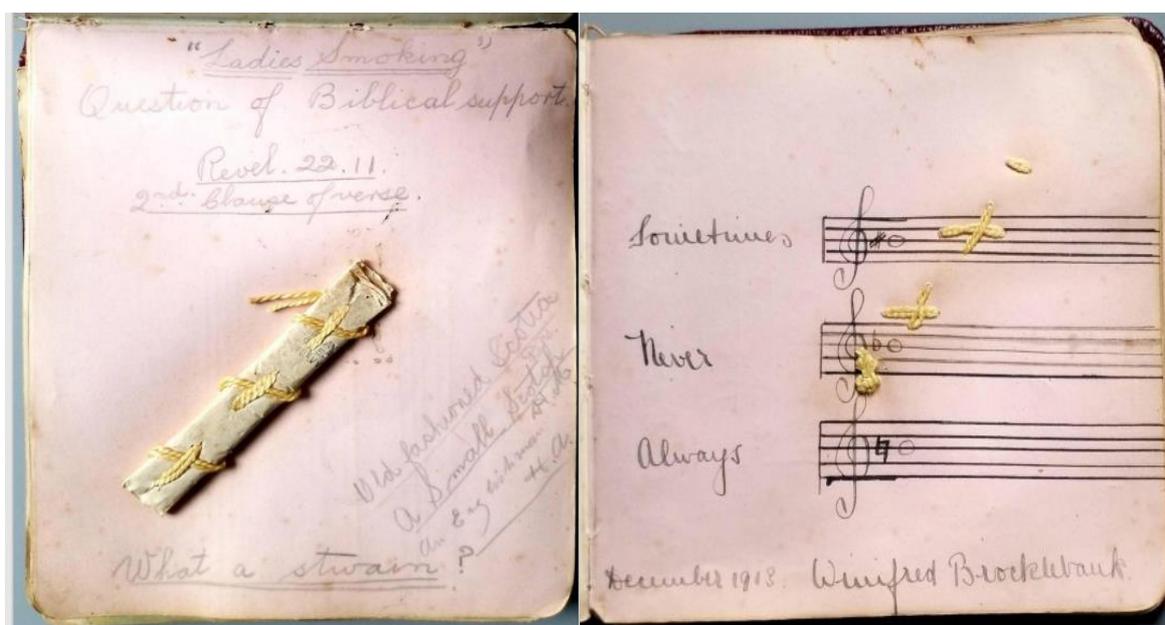


Figure 19. 'Ladies Smoking' in 'Autograph Album Florence Walker VAD' (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF0013.

Titled 'Ladies Smoking', a cigarette has been sewn into the page of Walker's album with little regard for the ruin of the contribution on the following page (Figure 19). The act of sewing a cigarette into an album can be seen as having a dual therapeutic purpose.⁵³ Not only does the album provide representations of soldiers having a moment of relief but also their contributions of sketches enabled them to work through emotions, offering the contributor relief at the same time. In 'Ladies Smoking' the contributor suggests an alternative form of support in the form of religion. He writes 'Question of Biblical Support' and directs the nurse to a biblical verse 'Revelations 22.11', and, more specifically to the second clause of the verse:

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still and he that is holy let him be holy still.⁵⁴

Interpretations of this verse suggest that its thrust is that the end of time is at hand, which, given the devastating death and destruction of the First World War, the contributor may be picking up on, telling her that conventions don't really matter anymore.⁵⁵ It is more likely, though, that he is telling the nurse to carry on using her cigarette to relieve her stress. Perhaps we can surmise that she finds him a stressful patient or that his wound care is stressful, and she needs a cigarette soon after caring for him. His choice of verse may suggest that the nurse finds the strength to face the difficulties of her work by seeing it as God's work and her endeavours are 'righteous'. The short phrase 'What a Stwain?' is difficult to interpret. It might be surmised that the nurse had a lisp and stwain is the phonetic sound of the word of strain, indicating her anxiety about the stress the work places on her. This also echoes Lilian Robinson's use of religion to shore up any doubts she might have had about her ability to do

⁵³ Damee Choi, Shotaro Ota, and Shigeki Watanuki, 'Does Cigarette Smoking Relieve Stress? Evidence from the Event-Related Potential (ERP)', *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 98 (2015), pp. 470–76 (p. 475), doi:10.1016/j.ijpsycho.2015.10.005.

⁵⁴ 'Revelations', in *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, 1611.

⁵⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation Revised* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 406.

her nursing duty to the best of her ability, and the doubts and aspirations of the nurses, as expressed in their albums and discussed earlier in the thesis.

Gendered debates about smoking were prevalent at the time. Amanda Amos and Margaretha Haglund argue that the First World War marked a turning point for the cigarette with ‘both the emancipation of women and the spread of smoking among women’ becoming acceptable.⁵⁶ We might also surmise that the soldier-patient has inserted the cigarette into the album for the nurse to smoke after she had completed her shift. The gendered extension of smoking meant that it was both indicative of women’s emancipation and of the masculinity of a fighting soldier. This enclosure is demonstrating the acceptance of the emancipated nurse.

Sharon Anne Cook argues that the number of women smokers had expanded by the twentieth century linking the increase in women’s smoking to gaining the vote and equality with men.⁵⁷ Although predominantly a masculine habit, women’s bid for independence saw many take up smoking too. It could be viewed as sophisticated and erotic and, for those wanting to visibly demonstrate their independence in the wake of the suffrage movement, a cigarette could be viewed as symbolic of their freedom.⁵⁸

Reznick comments on the use of cigarettes as part and parcel of the soldier’s convalescence: ‘By 1918, authorities at over 130 hospitals in the greater London metropolitan region made these outings and associated concerts, tea parties and cigarette give-aways available to over 50,000 convalescent men’.⁵⁹ On the other hand, Carden-Coyne suggests their negative use by unscrupulous women who viewed wounded soldiers as unsuspecting victims, with stories of warnings from the Red Cross about ‘women who offered men

⁵⁶ Amanda Amos and Margaretha Haglund, ‘From Social Taboo to “Torch of Freedom”’: The Marketing of Cigarettes to Women’, *Tobacco Control*, 9.1 (2000), pp. 3–8 (p. 3), doi:10.1136/tc.9.1.3.

⁵⁷ Sharon Anne Cook, *Sex, Lies, and Cigarettes: Canadian Women, Smoking, and Visual Culture, 1880-2000* (McGill-Queen’s Press - MQUP, 2012), p. 228.

⁵⁸ Cook, *Sex, Lies, and Cigarettes*, p. 230.

⁵⁹ Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p. 52.

drugged cigarettes and later robbed them'.⁶⁰ Jones and Wessely, on the other hand, discuss the use of cigarettes laced with diphosgene as a means of rooting out malingerers as a healthy gag reflex would indicate they were faking.⁶¹

At the end of Matron Edith Holden's album an anonymous contributor has provided a pen and ink sketch of a packet of "Chairman" Medium by R J Lea Ltd.⁶² This entry offers a hint to Matron that cigarettes would be welcome perhaps, but it also demonstrates the power of advertisements in hospitals as well as utilising an everyday object to sketch in an album. In his article 'Special Needs, Cheerful Habits: Smoking and the Great War in Britain, 1914-18', Michael Reeve states that 'smoking acts as a "contact zone"'.⁶³ He goes on to link its use as a stress reliever often at that time advised by the medical profession. Popular advertisements for different brands of cigarettes encouraged millions of people to take up smoking. The stress of life in the trenches and the boredom of time behind the lines made cigarettes a beneficial crutch for many soldiers and this continued in their calming effects when wounded. Military rations included cigarettes and charities such as the Red Cross sent cigarettes to the front.⁶⁴ Reeve argues that the cigarette was an important social leveller where men from different social backgrounds and classes found themselves fighting together. He suggests that the 'shift in gender roles and the promotion of smoking as a cure for frayed nerves' saw an acceptance of female smokers and smoking, which was, just as in the trenches, also a means of stress relief for the nurses on the wards.⁶⁵

In Eva Gertrude Tomlinson's album there is a group of four sketches of officers: 'The Staff' Officer, notable for his red band on his hat, 'The Major', 'The Captain', and 'The

⁶⁰ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p. 224.

⁶¹ Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War*, p. 46.

⁶² R J Lea Ltd were founded in 1865. Chairman cigarettes were a popular brand. 'Autograph Album Edith Holden TFNS'.

⁶³ Michael Reeve, 'Special Needs, Cheerful Habits: Smoking and the Great War in Britain, 1914-18', *Cultural and Social History: The Journal of the Social History Society*, 13.4 (2016), pp. 483–501 (p. 483).

⁶⁴ Robert N. Proctor, 'War Likes Tobacco, Tobacco Likes War', in *Golden Holocaust*, 1st edn (University of California Press, 2012), pp. 44–48 (p. 41) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnxdm.9>>.

⁶⁵ Reeve, 'Special Needs, Cheerful Habits: Smoking and the Great War in Britain, 1914-18', p. 496.

Rookie', probably a lieutenant (Figure 20a, Figure 20b, Figure 20c, and Figure 20d). The three more senior ranks are all smoking and the sketches suggest they are relaxed and confident about their positions in the war. Only the Rookie is saluting the others and without a cigarette.



Figure 20a. 'The Staff'; Figure 20b. 'The Captain'; Figure 20c. 'The Major'; Figure 20d. 'The Rookie' in 'Autograph Album of Eva Gertrude Tomlinson', Imperial War Museum.

Its importance as a ‘special need of the fighting man’ saw communities fund-raising to send cigarettes and tobacco to the men.⁶⁶ The cigarette included in Walker’s album is a reminder of the fund-raising that communities undertook to send tobacco and cigarettes to the troops. This began early in the war and an advertisement for an auction in the *Ross Gazette* details the following:

On Thursday the 10th December the Auctioneer invites Free Consignments of Fruit for sale by auction, the total proceeds being given for the purpose of sending Tobacco and Cigarettes to the Troops at the Front.⁶⁷

Another newspaper reports that:

The Press Bureau states that the following telegram has been received by Lord Kitchener from General Maxwell, commanding the Forces in Egypt: “December 1st, 1914 – Matossian [sic] has presented 500.000 cigarettes for our troops at the front.” Lord Kitchener has sent a telegram expressing his grateful thanks for this generous gift.⁶⁸

For convalescing soldiers, the importance of cigarettes can also be seen in *The Gazette*. These verses articulate the value of the cigarette to the soldier in times of stress and fear. In the first verse, the reaction to the sight and stench of the dead is to ‘dive dahn [sic] our pockets for a stump of cigarette’; this echoes the diving down into shell holes, or ducking down when shells came overhead that many would have experienced.⁶⁹ It is as if the sight and smell makes them relive such events. The stump they keep shows how precious the cigarettes were, every last bit was kept. The image conjured up of a song and cigarette to calm the nerves shows its use to alleviate difficult feelings and makes explicit the relief they find in the cigarette. Its importance and value is seen in the last verse that places it equally in value at the end of a life with the wife. The cigarette becomes the last wish of the dying man, providing consolation in his dying moments.

⁶⁶ Reeve, ‘Special Needs, Cheerful Habits: Smoking and the Great War in Britain, 1914-18’, p. 487.

⁶⁷ ‘On Thursday 10th December’, *Ross Gazette* (Hereford, Gloucester and Monmouth, 26 November 1914), British Newspaper Archive.

⁶⁸ ‘500.000 Cigarettes for the Front’, *Nottingham Journal*, 4 December 1914, British Newspaper Archive.

⁶⁹ ‘Cigarette’, *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 11.9 (1917), p. 226.

For soldiers, the cigarette was a source of comfort, calming the men in the trenches and even ‘a stump of cigarette’ was valued and kept (Figure 21).⁷⁰ Reeve argues that smoking for medicinal purposes was greatly encouraged during the First World War. He contends that the ‘war’s social-psychological effects refreshed popular enthusiasm for smoking for medicinal purposes (stress relief) both on the home front and in the trenches’.⁷¹ At that time, there was a widespread belief in the therapeutic value of cigarettes. The act of sharing cigarettes was not only a means of communication between both genders and across classes but the act of offering a cigarette was an act of offering relief, recognising the nurses’ need for relief in grueling war work.

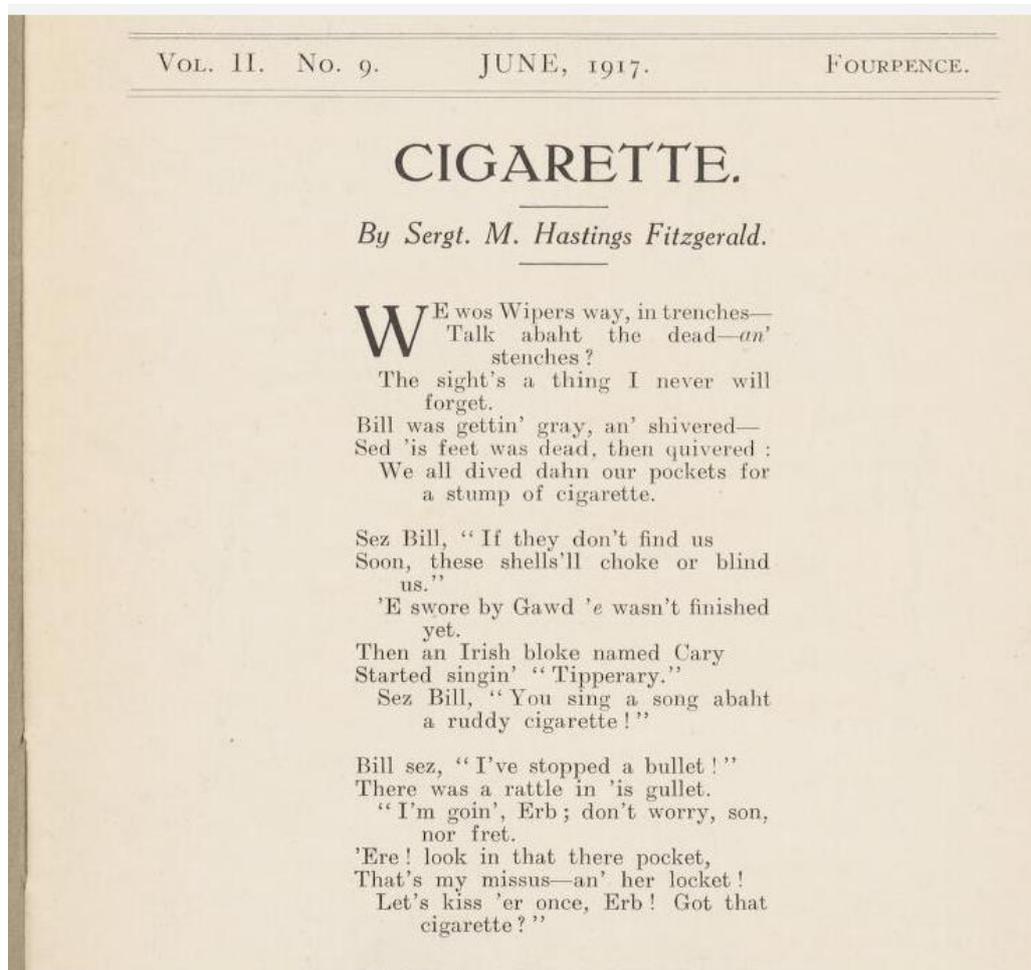


Figure 21. 'Cigarette', *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth*, 11.9 (1917), 226.

⁷⁰ 'Cigarette'.

⁷¹ Reeve, 'Special Needs, Cheerful Habits: Smoking and the Great War in Britain, 1914-18', p. 484.

Albums against Trauma and Healing the Healers

Das, together with historians such as Acton, Potter, and Ouditt contend that in their diaries the First World War nurses recount facts about their work rather than allowing emotion into their reflections.⁷² In chapter four I discussed how Slythe initially distanced herself from the trauma she was witnessing gradually allowing emotion to creep in but always conscious of keeping control.⁷³ In comparison, Lilian Robinson was more involved in her patient care, connecting to them and their families in a more intimate way. This is not to say that the nurses were emotionless only that they chose not to do so in their diaries.⁷⁴ Acton and Potter contend that studies of nurses war-time experiences focus on the containment of ‘combatant trauma and their own emotional responses’.⁷⁵ The trauma of the nurses is often overshadowed by that experienced by the combatants and the focus on the method of injury rather than the treatment and healing process which itself could be brutal. The gap surrounding nursing trauma, which is less understood than combatants’ trauma, is increasingly being acknowledged. By addressing the issue of nursing trauma, which is less studied than combatants’ trauma, this research aims to explain why nurses valued the therapeutic qualities of the album.

In chapter three I discussed the contributions of soldiers who wrote about their nightmares and the care and trust they had of their nurses. Nightmares were a symptom of shellshock, which was still not fully understood and treatments for it varied.⁷⁶ In her study on *Authenticity and art in Trauma Narratives* Margaret R. Higonet asserts that the definition of PTSD has allowed researchers to grasp the manifestations of shell-shock and analyse why

⁷² Das, ‘The Impotence of Sympathy’; Acton and Potter, “‘These Frightful Sightings Would Work Havoc with One’s Brain’”; Sharon Ouditt, *Women Writers of the First World War: An Annotated Bibliography* (Routledge, 2000) <<http://archive.org/details/womenwritersoffi0000oudi>>.

⁷³ Watson, ‘A Sister’s War: The Diaries of Alice Slythe’, p. 114.

⁷⁴ Das, ‘The Impotence of Sympathy’, p. 239.

⁷⁵ Acton and Potter, “‘These Frightful Sightings Would Work Havoc with One’s Brain’”, p. 64.

⁷⁶ Jones and Wessely, *Shell Shock to PTSD: Military Psychiatry from 1900 to the Gulf War*, p. 23.

they became prominent in earlier war narratives. She posits, however, that PTSD has contributed to a masculine canon of modernism and suggests there is an alternative history of First World War trauma, specifically noncombatant medical corps trauma.⁷⁷ She goes on to suggest that alternative evidence should be examined, and that one overlooked source was the traumatic stress that the doctors and nurses themselves endured in treating the wounded. She argues that by re-examining the personal accounts of shell-shock we can better understand it and ‘frame the forms that shell-shock took and to inquire why they became so central to the earlier war narratives’.⁷⁸

Medical staff ‘not only dealt with the soldiers’ physical and psychological traumas but were themselves exposed to situations that triggered breakdowns similar to those experienced by combatants’ in witnessing the destruction of the bodies of their comrades.⁷⁹ The correspondence in their service records regarding pensions and mental health issues indicate the lasting effect of the trauma of the nurses.⁸⁰

Examination of the albums can illuminate further evidence of how the soldier-patients witnessed the trauma exhibited by their carers when confronted with life-changing injuries on a regular basis. Just as Higonnet suggests that the bond that developed between the soldiers was recognized as helping to reduce the incidence of shellshock, so too, the comradeship between the non-combatant medical staff and their patients.⁸¹ They shared in the hardships of the stressful process of painful treatments such as surgery, the constant irrigation of wounds, removal and redressing of bandages together, and as witnesses to badly damaged bodies. Extensive injuries to men’s bodies resulted in extended admissions for soldier-

⁷⁷ Margaret R Higonnet, ‘Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 9.1 (2002), pp. 91–107 (p. 92), doi:10.1353/mod.2002.0009.

⁷⁸ Higonnet, ‘Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I’, p. 92.

⁷⁹ Higonnet, ‘Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I’, p. 95.

⁸⁰ McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, pp. 203–04.

⁸¹ Higonnet, ‘Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I’, p. 96.

patients who often required multiple surgeries and intensive treatment. Amputations necessitated therapy to adapt to life without hands, arms, or legs, in addition to severe facial injuries affecting their jaws, noses, eyes, and cheeks. Edith Holden and her nurses at the 3rd LGH would have tended to such patients, as it was renowned for its ‘tin noses’ department.⁸² Lengthy hospital treatment would have enabled strong relationships to be built between the nurse and her patients but would have also required nurses to confront new ways of both caring and coping. Observing her patient’s gradual progress and eventual discharge created bonds between nurse and patient which functioned as a means to reduce the mental trauma for both nurse and patient. This familiarity of regularly seeing each other would, for some, become strong and lasting friendships. It can be argued that these connecting bonds between nurse and soldier-patient through the medium of an album reflect the pathway of his treatment and recovery. Keown argues that through her ‘close friendships with her fellow nurses Wells was able to find emotional closure from the trauma [...] and the sights of suffering she endured’.⁸³ Equally, nurses formed close friendships with their patients. As we have seen in chapter four, Robinson’s album demonstrates the closure she found in the deaths of patients she had formed close friendships with by memorialising them in the front pages of her album.⁸⁴ The albums, therefore, could be considered a shared space for the two individuals, patient and nurse, to come together to support each other in coping with their own experience of the injuries.

Conclusion

⁸² ‘Tin Nose Shop’. Lt. F. Wilcoxson enlisted in the RAMCT in 1915. A talented sculptor he worked with Capt. Derwent Wood helping to transfigure deformed faces in the Splint Room, known to the soldier-patients as “The Tin Nose Shop”.

⁸³ Keown, ‘I Think I Was More Pleased to See Her than Any One “Cos She’s so Fine” Nurses Friendships, Traum and Resiliency during the First World War’, p. 156.

⁸⁴ ‘Autograph Album Charlotte Lilian Ann Robinson QAIMNS’ (Robertson House Camberley), QARANC Association Heritage Collection, HF00014.1.

The effect the experiences of the First World War had on the mental health of the nurses and their soldier-patients can be seen in their writing in their journals and letters, which have been extensively researched since the end of the First World War. Keeping journals, letters, albums, and other memorabilia helped to rationalise the war and its emotional and lasting impact on those involved. Hallett argues that the nurses maintained their professionalism in the face of dealing with and caring for ‘the trauma of their patients’.⁸⁵ Nurses’ journals and letters, she argues, were the space where they could express their feelings openly. They recognised the stress in each other, as when Helen Dore Boylston writes in her diary on 16 September 1918 ‘Kitten [a colleague] is back from the line for a day or two. She looks absolutely all in’.⁸⁶ Another entry on 24 March 1918 comments on Ruth who ‘armed with a pair of scissors, stood in the doorway of the dressing-tent and beckoned the boys in two or three at a time [...] The only way was to snatch them [the dried-on dressings] off with one desperate yank. Poor Ruth! Her tender heart nearly broke’.⁸⁷

Acton and Potter examine the accounts of various nurses to demonstrate how they coped with the conditions they were working under and the impact caring for the wounded and dying had on their mental health. Through their analysis of the diaries, letters, and memoirs of medical staff, Acton and Potter argue that the response to their experiences ranged from utter despair to a ‘heightened language of sacrifice and duty’.⁸⁸ We can see this anger at such losses in the diary entries of Lilian Robinson discussed in chapter four, where briefly in her diary she allows herself to rail against the war and the loss of her young patients.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Hallett, *Containing Trauma: Nursing Work in The First World War*, p. 228.

⁸⁶ Boylston, *Sister: The War Diary of a Nurse*, p. 82.

⁸⁷ Boylston, *Sister: The War Diary of a Nurse*, p. 38.

⁸⁸ Acton and Potter, ““These Frightful Sightings Would Work Havoc with One’s Brain””, p. 33.

⁸⁹ ‘C L A Robinson War Diary (1915)’.

Just as the nurses recognised the stress in each other, the soldier-patients recognised the stress in their nurses. Having witnessed the toll the work and workload took on their nurses, the soldier-patients, by contributing to the albums, could write something uplifting or humorous for their nurse to make her smile and feel valued by her patients. The albums, with their visual material and physical enclosures, whilst working as an occupational therapy tool for the soldier-patients, could equally work as therapy for the nurse too.

Nicola Blay and Janette Pelosi look at the work and workload of nurses in Harefield auxiliary hospital for Australian patients. Their work considers the emotional toll on the nurses and how the soldier-patients witnessed it. They quote a Corporal Stewart who observed “the sisters are having a hard time, but one never hears a grumble” and, again, Sergeant Jim Mackie who comments “the nurses were getting the life worked out of them”.⁹⁰ Blay and Pelosi also note the twelve-hour shifts the nurses did, which added to their exhaustion, not so dissimilar to the twelve-hour shifts nurses in the NHS work today.

The service records of the nurses provides evidence of the impact on the nurses of often working under dangerous conditions on active service when caring for badly wounded patients. Their records often contain correspondence in regard to war pensions and it is perhaps only here that we can see the emotional stress their work puts on the mental health of these nurses. Kayla Campana’s thesis, ‘Sacrificing Sisters: Nurses’ Psychological Trauma from the First World War, 1914-1918’, explores the experiences of nurses who witnessed the effects of war on their patients, arguing that whilst shell-shock became an acceptable description of men suffering mental trauma, it was rare to describe the psychological trauma of the nurses in the same way and that women were described as suffering from ‘hysteria’.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Nicole Blay and Janette Pelosi, ‘Historical Exploration of the Work and Workload of the WW1 Nurse in an Australian Auxiliary Hospital’, *Collegian*, 27.6 (2020), pp. 642–48 (p. 644), doi:10.1016/j.colegn.2020.07.004.

⁹¹ Kayla Campana, ‘Sacrificing Sisters: Nurses’ Psychological Trauma from the First World War, 1914-1918’ (unpublished Master of Arts, University of Central Florida, 2022), p. 3 <<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd2020/983>>.

She quotes from a journal article from 1918 ‘it is not to be wondered that nurses as well as soldiers and sailors suffer from shell-shock, considering the strain and danger of active service’.⁹² For those nursing on the Western and Eastern fronts, working under the threat of shelling either by long-range artillery, or, as evidenced by Lilian Robinson, the increasing risk of daily air raids on the hospitals, the nurses were also subjected to the psychological trauma of war. Campana notes that the stress some of these nurses were under resulted in some, like Sister Pearse, committing suicide.⁹³ A table in her thesis provides a list of VADs and TFNS nurses whose stated cause of death in records was strenuous work, anxiety, overstrain, and arduous duties.⁹⁴ Campana argues that, although there were convalescent homes for rest and recuperation of the nurses, ‘no one acknowledged or named nurses’ trauma at the time’.⁹⁵ McEwen notes that nurses’ confidential records recorded ‘suffering from nervous debility or debility caused from nervousness in air raids’.⁹⁶ She goes on to state that ‘for some nurses the physical and psychological strain was a burden they were no longer prepared to carry and they committed suicide’.⁹⁷ Long after the war, these albums could enable a nurse to try to make sense of her experiences.

This chapter has considered the use of the nurse’s autograph album as a possible therapeutic tool for both the nurse and the soldier-patients. I have argued that the artwork contributions can be seen as an extension to the hospital occupational therapies and that it was another space for the soldier-patient to endeavour to come to terms with his wounds, in particular the facial disfigurement of many. I have endeavoured to demonstrate how these albums show the beginnings of art therapy as a tool to work through the devastating issues of

⁹² Campana, ‘Sacrificing Sisters’, p. 26.

⁹³ Campana, ‘Sacrificing Sisters’, pp. 34–35.

⁹⁴ Although only a snapshot of the data, it is interesting that with the exception of Edith Simpson, a TFNS nurse, the others are voluntary Red Cross nurses.

⁹⁵ Campana, ‘Sacrificing Sisters’, p. 40.

⁹⁶ McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, p. 174.

⁹⁷ McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, p. 174.

shellshock on a patient and how the albums also reflect the other tools of stress relief such as the therapeutic cigarette. The albums were a form of communication and support not only between the nurse and her patient but also, through its passage through the work of many hands, bound the contributors to the album. The albums highlighted commonalities of extreme experience, forging a therapeutic link between the soldiers themselves, often unknown to each other and yet linked by their regimental badges, their words, sketches, and common sharing of one nurse.

In this chapter I have traced the ways in which contributions – even derivative or apparently banal ones – could be therapeutic for soldier patients, allowing for the negotiation of nurse-patient relations, and offering a form in which the nurse could reaffirm her duty in doing her bit. The use of art and material enclosures within the albums bears out my arguments about the use of the albums and hospital magazines as forms of occupational therapy alongside other established activities within the hospital.

Conclusions on Albums, Hospital Relations, and Creative Therapy

This thesis has explored the various uses of the autograph albums of the military nurses and VADs of the First World War. It has shown how they could be a space to occupy a patient and continue occupational therapeutic activities. It demonstrates how traditional album conventions were adapted, including the repurposing of verses and images in response to the extremes of the war situation, and as a means of communication between a soldier-patient and his nurse. The album could be used to gently flirt with her or express his thanks and to give a smile to her face. Contributions such as the sketches and inserts of physical items discussed demonstrate that these albums are a valuable resource for analysis in their own right.

The autograph album was a place of communication between many people on both sides of the healing of the wounded. Mary Louise Pratt argues that such ‘social places where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other’ are a contact zone.¹ Such contact zones took many forms in the First World War. Maguire’s work looks at the various zones in the war which mirror the journey of the wounded soldier and the various contact zones he would have had with a nurse.² These zones can be narrowed down not just from the hospital but to the ward and then the intimate connection of the nurse and patient. This last connection is encapsulated in the autograph album which stands testimony to the caring relationship and the hands on care given to a wounded soldier in an intimate contact zone. The album connected not just the soldier-patient to his nurse long after the war but it became an invisible thread through the ‘work of many hands’ across class divides, genders, and countries.

¹ Mary Louise Pratt, ‘Arts of the Contact Zone’, *Profession* (1991), pp. 33–40. The term contact zone was first coined by ML Pratt.

² Maguire, *Contact Zones of the First World War: Cultural Encounters across the British Empire*.

This thesis has demonstrated the evolution of the autograph album genre from a personal show of social prestige to a means of memorializing a nurse's soldier-patients. Autograph albums served as a means of remembrance and connection, reflecting the diverse attitudes and experiences of the soldiers during the First World War. The thesis has explored the relationship between the nurse and the soldier as presented in the albums and examined how these books provided a platform for social interaction, storytelling and reflection on the war's harsh realities, showcasing both camaraderie and the exclusion of malingerers.

It also considers the nature of such relationships where women sought relationships with wounded soldiers for different reasons, some for financial gain, others for the association with a hero. The albums were also used to platform the nurse's own perceptions of herself and her aspirations and doubts. The thesis places aspirations and anxieties alongside nurses' respect for the heroism of their patients and their desire to live up to expectations in the face of challenging injuries of the soldiers. Through archival analysis, I have demonstrated how the autograph albums reveal the challenges, camaraderie, and resilience of the First World War nurses and the significance of the nurse-patient relationship, and the impact of night duty to both nurse and patient.

The albums also reveal the complex social dynamics of the hospital, and how the contributors faced dilemmas in crafting unique entries influenced by military discipline, social convention and the desire to be remembered. Comparison of album entries with hospital magazines such as *The Gazette* offer insights into the journey from point of wounding to reception at the hospital and a lack of detail around this event in the albums suggest it is due to the trauma or a desire to forget. The albums also reveal the homesickness of the Commonwealth soldiers, the bonds they formed with the nurses and the romanticised perception of nurses by patients.

Finally, the albums have served as an extension to occupational therapy through art as part of the recovery pathway. The albums served as a space for the soldier-patients to express their emotions and experiences and showcase the soldiers' creativity and resilience. The albums also highlight the prevalence of cigarettes, both as a symbol of independence and of stress relief and as such, they reflect the changing gender roles and social dynamics of the time. I have explored the therapeutic elements of album making for both soldier-contributors and nurse owners.

Most of the current research on autograph albums is focused on America, where they seem to have been most common. This literature has highlighted various traditions and conventions of contributing to these albums and helped to steer my attention to the amalgamation of public and private within the albums, and to the adaptation and repurposing of material for the use of the contributor. The traditions of album-making firmly established in Britain and America in the late eighteenth-century continued, as First World War soldiers found new ways to update and adapt existing verses as well as creating unique ways of contributing to an album that reflected their specific concerns and experiences. First World War albums are a rich medium which captures the experiences of both men and women, civilian and military people, from all walks of life and from across the Commonwealth. In essence, these albums enabled the players in this world event to memorialise meetings as well as partings that were of significance to them.

The tradition of using albums to record important, prestigious connections and brushes with celebrity encouraged me to explore how the First World War albums engaged with ideas of heroism, for both soldier-patients and their nurses. Nurses' admiration for the men who fought was reciprocated in the grateful thanks of the soldier-patients who saw their carers as heroes too. In chapter one the elevation of the common soldier to the status of hero

and the need of the nurse to align herself with the men on the front line is traced through the albums.

The aspirations and doubts that the nurses had of their abilities to nurse the casualties is focused on in chapter two. Given the semi-public space of the albums, that could be read by many of the nurse's patients, some nurses who also contributed knowingly shared their fears with their patients in return, and this can be seen as an unflinching recognition of the fears that the war engendered in everyone.

The First World War, however, saw a turnaround of gendered contributions reflecting the power relationship that turned the male protector of vulnerable females on its head in the hospital caring environment where the nurse held the authority and the men appeared in some cases infantilised. Recurrent themes emerge across these varied albums and are discussed in varying ways across the chapters. A comparative approach to reading the albums has been invaluable. By looking across a range of different albums from both Military and VAD nurses it has been possible to identify shared concerns. One that is common to most of the albums, and discussed in some depth in chapter three, is that of night-duty, taking us into a more intimate time where the difficulties of coping with nightmares emerge. The vulnerabilities and fears are verbalized in verse and shared, not just with the nurse but with the many readers of the albums. I have discussed how the symptoms of shellshock and the soldier-patient's fear of sleep and the difficulties of coping with the coming nightmare appear across a wide range of different albums. This provides a communication of acceptance of his fear of his nightmares and his awareness of the nurse's protective presence. Such heartfelt contributions may suggest the soldier-patient acknowledges his dependence on his nurse who watches over him during troubled, often nightmare-ridden, sleep. But we can also glimpse the vulnerability and humanity behind the care given.

The focus on what the albums reveal about the soldier-patients perceptions of their care and the nurses caring for them has mainly been through analysis of verse although some sketches and, in the final chapter, material enclosures have been utilised too. Album entries provide an insight into intimate shared relationships and an invitation to write in a nurse's album was special and lasting to both the contributor and owner. The many contact addresses that appear across many of the albums suggests hope that they will meet after the war and that friendships can be renewed.

The chapter on Lilian Robinson is a more intimate look at the production of an album. I have suggested that Lilian, in compiling her album, had taken *King Albert's Book* (KAB) as a source of inspiration. The varied verses selected both from KAB and those with special meaning to her together with carefully selected contributors are of a similar nature to KAB. She also includes a roll of honour of the officers she had formed friendships with, either as patients or through contact at the hospital. This chapter also utilized the opportunity to connect events and people from the album with Lilian's diary. This is an area that can be further explored in future research where albums and diaries can be connected to the same nurse together with relevant letters which would provide even wider data of the nurse-patient experience during the First World War.

I expanded on my method of using of Lilian Robinson's diaries to explicate the themes of her autograph albums by bringing *The Gazette of the 3rd London General Hospital Wandsworth* and Edith Holden's album into dialogue. Holden, as such a prominent album owner, enabled a fleshing out of the nurse's presence, often somewhat shadowy in other albums. By using *The Gazette* and the wealth of accounts of the 3rd London GH together with Holden's album I was more fully able to document her professional standards relating to patients, her nursing staff and patient families. These findings can be extrapolated to other war time nurses, as this album's unique connection with the Matron and hospital provides the

opportunity for a broader exploration of themes that have been found in other wartime albums. For example, the journey from point of wounding to a base hospital figures prominently in the magazine but is not so clear in the majority of albums in the archive. The portrayal of the patient journey in *The Gazette* and nurses' roles in receiving the wounded led me to focus in on small details in the albums – that would have been difficult to interpret without this context – and accord them full significance. As well as comparing across albums' contents, I utilised other materials such as the Red Cross quilts and diaries. Considering the First World War albums with older albums such as those from the Ozarks in the nineteenth century shows the recurring themes that endure the passage of time. Albums enable the capture of memories and emotions of individuals during significant life events and their popularity endures. This comparison also shows the transient nature of these relationships which equally apply to the nurse-patient relationship.

Some albums in the First World War archive were unusual in their contents. Beatrice Bowman's album stood out with her request for specific details of her patients' experiences at the front. This allowed me to contrast the casualty evacuation journey as often portrayed in hospital magazines with a more personal account in an album. *The Gazette* and similar hospital magazines provided a contact zone that interacted with the albums and provided a source inspiration for those who contributed to the albums. Inspirations taken from hospital magazines paralleled Robinson's use of KAB in constructing her album.

The complexity of a hospital ward cannot be viewed through only one medium, and diaries, magazines, and letters provide established sources for in-depth analysis of nursing in the war. This thesis has shown that the albums provide another perspective to the nurse-patient relationship within the ward environment.

The albums are often researched as supplementary to other documents such as diaries and letters. As these documents originate from individual family collections they are often

deposited in archives such as the Imperial War Museum and the Museum of Military Medicine. Whilst families may see the value in the letters and diaries as recognised research documents, the previous scholarly neglect of albums means they may be viewed as less historically valuable and become separated from the other documents, possibly being kept by families as a treasured item. Lack of hospital admission and discharge records that can be connected to a hospital where the albums were collated are also a limitation to the research. Together with the anonymous nature of many of the contributions, these gaps have meant that it has been difficult to verify some of the data and to add better context to all entries.

The dispersal of albums in various museums around the country, time constraints, as well as the restrictions of the Covid pandemic (as detailed in the introduction), meant that it was not possible to access them all. The research, therefore must be considered within these constraints and it should be acknowledged that findings are limited only to the albums analysed in this research. While my research has teased out many commonalities and strong patterns between contributions across albums, it is possible that the treasures within other albums not considered may invite different lines of enquiry.

The form of the album, offering an insight into a particular moment in the relationship between nurse and patient, also leaves a number of questions about those relationships unanswered. Contributors' only necessary connection with the nurse is the ward and their treatment, and the albums do not give any indication of the length of time they knew each other. Their connection with the other writers in the albums may be further removed. Many contributors were unknown to each other, their main connection – beyond overlapping soldiering and hospital experiences - being the nurse who cared for them, often at very different periods.

In the initial stage of absorbing myself into the data, I scanned every page of each album in my sample. This meant that extraneous information could be captured. Every page

of each album was then catalogued on a spreadsheet and where possible linked to external data, such as linking any verses to known poetry and poets or sketches of ships to the actual troop ships. The unique perspective I gained through my experiences and skills as a civilian perioperative nurse at Guys and St Thomas' Hospital in London working in the maxilla-facial theatres, emergency theatres, together with my experience at St Mary's Paddington where I worked as part of the theatre team that cared for victims of the Paddington Train Crash in October 1999.³ Then, later, as a military nurse where, I worked alongside military patients and colleagues during my deployment to Kosovo, as well as real-time support to military exercises. This meant I was able to fully immerse myself into the content of the albums as a whole. My military nursing knowledge and an interpretive method of analysis informed close readings of the material. This enabled me to understand and interpret the emotional relationship between nurse and patient and look for connections between album contents and actual nursing care, both physical and psychological. Analysis of the primary material as a collection rather than individual books allowed themes to emerge from across the albums. In this way the fragmentary nature of the albums becomes less apparent and there is more cohesiveness to the contributions when seen from the perspective of the soldier-patients as a cohort rather than individuals.

As the albums were written in the moment, not edited or written in hindsight, they capture the essence of relationship between nurse and soldier-patient as well as a specific moment in time. This, coupled with primary texts of the time, provided greater depth to the research. Through the project I developed and deepened my method of cross-reference to other related documents written in the time, such as the hospital magazines of the 3rd London General Hospital and the diaries of album owners. The ability to work closely with the

³ The Ladbroke Grove rail crash, 5th October 1999. 31 people died and hundreds injured who were treated at various London Hospitals

previously private archive of Lilian Robinson's diaries was also a strength of this research. For the first time, these rich sources are brought together to give unique insights into the experiences of this nurse.

There are many recurrent threads that emerge from the albums, such as attitudes towards nurses, nursing care and death, and inclusions of significant maps and badges, as well as social commentary in the form of sketches of workers in civilian life. These provide valuable insights into the interaction, reliance, and relationship between a nurse and wounded patient under her care. I have concentrated mainly on the nurse-related themes; future research, however, may look at some of these other themes in more depth for a wider reading of what they may contribute to social history. A deeper exploration of the soldier-art found in the albums may provide new approaches to the study of First World War soldiers and their carers in the hospital ward environment.

As more artifacts are added to museums and archives it may be possible to gain a wider view of the consistency of the types of entries in the albums. Connecting with relatives and adding oral histories may expand some of the stories that are contained within the albums. Such anecdotes would have to be treated with care as passing time can exaggerate and distort memories. Further exploration of archives and reading the albums in line with diaries and letters may bring further information to light.

This thesis has shown how the albums bring a different dimension to our understanding of the importance of the nurses to their patients. Whilst the traditional purpose of an autograph album was to commemorate friendships, particularly at times of separation, I contend that the albums of the First World War serve another purpose, that of acting as a form of therapy for both the soldier-patients and the nurses. The albums provide insights into the occupation of the soldier-patient during his convalescence. The albums were a tool in his

recovery and acted as an extension of his occupational therapy. I also contend that they provide a source of strength to both nurse and patient.

The emotional power of the album is neatly captured in a verse, written and republished by Ward Muir. Muir, an orderly at the 3rd London GH, was one of the editors of *The Gazette* and in his forward to the book that followed, *Happy Though Wounded*, chose to include the following verse. It aptly sums up the importance of the album to the nurse. This verse first appeared in *The Gazette* in its third issue in November 1915 without the dedication ‘for Sister’s Album’, instead titled ‘In Hospital’ and attributed to ‘A 3rd LGH Orderly’. In *Happy Though Wounded*, Ward Muir claims it as his own and retitles it. In a further book, *The Happy Hospital*, Ward Muir uses it as part of the introduction.⁴ The retitled poem presents the autograph album as an integral part of the nurse’s equipment employed to cheer her patients up. It emphasises the pleasures of being part of a hospital community in ‘fun that conquered pain’ and acknowledges the sadness of separations to come. The poem celebrates the album as an item that would, when the war was done, enable the Sister to recall her work, and both the happy and sad experiences of caring for her soldier-patients.

For Sister’s Album

When the war is done we’ll recall the fun-
 The fun that conquered the pain-
 For we’ll owe a debt (and we’ll not forget)
 To the jokes that kept us sane:
 How the wounded could laugh and bandy their chaff
 And kick up the deuce of a row!
...It may be, in peace, when the sufferings cease,
We’ll be sadder, aye sadder, than now. [sic]
 Pte Ward Muir, R.A.M.C. (T)⁵

⁴ Ward Muir, *The Happy Hospital* (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., LTD., 1918), p. 10, Hathi Trust: Library of Wisconsin.

⁵ Ward Muir, ‘For Sister’s Album’, *Happy Though Wounded*, p. 115. RAMC (T) Royal Army Medical Corp (Territorial)

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