



WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

10.30am Registration and Coffee – Charles Hastings Building Reception

**Keynote address (CHG 009):**

11.00am **‘Le Petit Paradis des Blessés: Nurses, Nursing and Internationalism on the Western Front (1915-1918)’** - Professor Christine E. Hallett, The University of Manchester

**Remembering and Representing Edith Cavell (1865-1915) (CHG 009):**

11.45am **‘The Politics of Remembrance: The Commemoration of Edith Cavell in France and Belgium’** – Professor Alison S. Fell, University of Leeds

12.15pm **‘Representations of Edith Cavell in Children’s Literature’** – Professor Jean Webb, University of Worcester

12.45pm **The Cavell Nurses' Trust** - Steven Moralee / **Hartlebury Castle** (a Red Cross VAD convalescent hospital from June 1915 onwards) – Pam Barrett, Friends of Hartlebury Castle and the Hurd Library

1.00–2.15 **Sandwich Lunch / Exhibition** (Cavell Nurses' Trust / Hartlebury Castle) - ‘The Life and Memory of Nurse Edith Cavell’ and a selection of materials available at Hartlebury Castle and the Hurd Library. (**The Boardroom/CHG012**) / **Tour of The Infirmary Medical Museum**

2.15-4.00 **Panel Discussions:**

**Panel 1 – V.A.D. [Voluntary Aid Detachment] Nurses (CHG 009)**

2.15pm **‘I should be about as jealous of a V.A.D. member as a captain of an Atlantic liner would be of a man who could paddle a canoe’: The Response of the British Red Cross Society to Criticisms of VAD Nurses** - Dr Rosemary Wall, University of Hull

2.45pm **‘Dairymaids and Shop Girls, Mothers and Nuns: V.A.D.s in Southam, Warwickshire’** - Dr Val Brodie MBE, Independent Scholar

3.15pm **‘The Patricia Young V.A.D. Album: Service and the Red Cross Bureaucracy in World War I’** - Cathy Kawalek, Independent Scholar

**Panel 2 – Nursing in Europe (CH 1003)**

2.15pm **‘Duty, Pride, and Sacrifice: Themes in the Letters of American Nurses in World War One’** – Dr Kelley H. Pattison, Western Michigan University

- 2.45pm**      **‘Family and Performance in the Front: Reconstituting the Fantasy of the Family in German Front Hospitals’** - Samraghni Bonnerjee, Postgraduate Researcher, University of Sheffield
- 3.15pm**      **‘Two Extraordinary World War I Nurses: Georgiana Fyfe and Grace Charlotte Vulliamy’** - Dr Katherine Storr, Independent Scholar
- Panel 3 – Trauma, Death and Therapy (CH 1008)**
- 2.15pm**      **‘Nursing Soldiers with Psychological Trauma during the First World War’** – Dr Claire Chatterton, Open University
- 2.45pm**      **‘Commemorative Gestures: Nurses Writing Death in the Great War’** - Dr Alice Kelly, Postdoctoral Writing Fellow, TORCH, University of Oxford
- 3.15pm**      **‘Spa Wars and New Frontiers: Nursing and Physical Therapy, 1914-1918’** - Dr Jane Adams, University of Warwick

## The First World War: Nursing

### KEYNOTE ADDRESS (CHG 009):

- 11.00am**      **‘Le Petit Paradis des Blessés: Nurses, Nursing and Internationalism on the Western Front (1915-1918)’** - Professor Christine E. Hallett, The University of Manchester

‘L’Hôpital Chirurgical Mobile No 1’ was one of the most unusual military hospitals of modern times. The unit – one of the closes to the front lines during the First World War – was donated to the French Service de Santé des Armées by American millionaire philanthropist, Mary Borden Turner. The hospital, which came to be known among the French as ‘le petit paradis des blessés’, was the result of a remarkable feat of persuasion: Borden met directly with General Joffre in the Spring of 1915 and convinced him that, even though she had worked as a volunteer-nurse for only a few months, and had no previous nursing training or experience, she was capable of creating and directing a front-line hospital. She opened L’Hôpital Chirurgical Mobile No. 1 – a hutted encampment of about 160 beds – in July 1915, in the small Belgian town of Rousbrugge. For the next three years, she clung resolutely to the right to direct her hospital, even after such independent, voluntary establishments had been effectively outlawed by the allied military medical services. She also insisted on retaining the right to appoint all of her unit’s nurses, many of whom were fully-trained Canadian, British, Australian and American professionals. One of her most inspired appointments was Canadian-born, US-trained Agnes Warner, who joined the field hospital in September 1915.

The paper argues that ‘L’Hôpital Chirurgical’ can be viewed as a microcosm in which many of the tensions and conflicts of First World War military nursing were played out. Here, professional nurses of many nationalities worked alongside ‘lady-nurses’, French surgeons and military orderlies. The paper contends that Warner’s extraordinary leadership skills neutralised many of these tensions and created an atmosphere in which patients could feel they were in ‘paradise’. L’Hôpital Chirurgical’ was a dramatic stage, on which were played-out, ultimately very publicly, the nursing dramas of the First World War.

### REMEMBERING AND REPRESENTING EDITH CAVELL (1865-1915) (CHG 009):

- 11.45am**      **‘The Politics of Remembrance: The Commemoration of Edith Cavell in France and Belgium’** – Professor Alison S. Fell, University of Leeds

By far the most famous woman killed during the First World War, there were more postcards, books, statues, busts, plaques and buildings or street-names commemorating Edith Cavell than any other woman in this period of history. In France and Belgium, she came to represent a certain brand of virtuous resistance against German rule, an interpretation of her death that was given added poignancy by evocations of her profession as a nurse. Alongside postcards, posters and popular accounts that recounted

her death, a statue was erected in Paris in 1920 that was funded by public subscription; the same year, a statue was erected in Brussels that commemorated Cavell alongside Marie Depage, a Belgian nurse who drowned during the sinking of the *Lusitania*.

This paper will consider the politics of these acts of commemoration, highlighting the meanings with which Edith Cavell was endowed in France and Belgium from 1915 until 1940. It will argue that state-led commemorations were intimately linked to the representation of the civilian populations of invaded and occupied regions of these countries, which were understood as innocent in the face of 'barbarous' German aggression. These associations help to explain why her statue in Paris was destroyed by the Nazis in 1940; they equally, however, idealise her professional identity as a nurse. In contrast, it will consider the commemorations carried out by nurses themselves, including memorials, letters and articles published in nursing journals, and ceremonies organised or attended by nurses. These commemorations point to a different interpretation of Cavell - that of a woman whose death highlighted the dangers faced by the nursing profession, and their importance to the war effort. I will conclude by suggesting that in using her death for political ends - albeit in different ways - both of these commemorative discourses underplay her role as a member of a Belgian Resistance organisation.

**12.15pm**        **'Representations of Edith Cavell in Children's Literature'** – Professor Jean Webb, University of Worcester

2015 marks the centenary of the execution of Edith Cavell, a nurse in World War 1 for her activities in Belgium which were interpreted by the Germans to be deserving of such a final punishment. This paper will discuss the representation of the story of Edith Cavell in both literature for adults and for children, in particular considering questions of memorialisation.

**12.45pm**        **The Cavell Nurses' Trust** - Steven Moralee / **Hartlebury Castle** – Pam Barrett, Friends of Hartlebury Castle and the Hurd Library

Steven Moralee (Head of Fundraising, Cavell Nurses' Trust) will provide a brief introduction to the work of the Cavell Nurses' Trust. Pam Barrett, will also briefly introduce the work of the Friends of Hartlebury Castle and the Hurd Library.

**1.00–2.15**        **Sandwich Lunch / Exhibition** (Cavell Nurses' Trust / Hartlebury Castle) - 'The Life and Memory of Nurse Edith Cavell' and a selection of materials available at Hartlebury Castle and the Hurd Library. (**The Boardroom/CHG012**) / **Tour of The Infirmary Medical Museum**

This is an opportunity to view an exhibition and artefacts provided by the Cavell Nurses' Trust about the life and memory of British Nurse Edith Cavell and materials relating to Hartlebury Castle's time as a VAD hospital. We hope that you will also visit the Infirmary Medical Museum.

Hartlebury Castle, a Grade 1 listed building between Worcester and Kidderminster and seat of the Bishops of Worcester for a thousand years, was a Red Cross VAD convalescent hospital from June 1915 onwards. It was run by two very wealthy local sisters, the Misses Gibbons, as Commandant and Chief Nursing Sister. They created 'visitors books' which record the names, regiments and injuries of soldiers who passed through the unit and contain a wealth of messages, photographs and other memorabilia including details of the entertainment organised for and by the patients. For opening hours and further information check the website [www.whub.org.uk](http://www.whub.org.uk) or telephone 01299 250416.

## **2.15-4.00**    **PANEL DISCUSSIONS:**

### **PANEL 1 – V.A.D. [VOLUNTARY AID DETACHMENT] NURSES (CHG 009)**

**2.15pm**        **'I should be about as jealous of a V.A.D. member as a captain of an Atlantic liner would be of a man who could paddle a canoe': The Response of the British Red Cross Society to Criticisms of VAD Nurses** - Dr Rosemary Wall, University of Hull

Professional nurses and V.A.D. nurses have often been represented as in conflict in Britain during the First World War. However, historians such as Christine Hallett have recently reconsidered their relationship, beginning to dispel the myth of natural tensions between these women with their disparate training experiences. This paper furthers this research by analysing the perspective of the British Red Cross Society during the First World War, reviewing the charity's response to rhetorical attacks on their volunteer nurses.

By autumn 1916, the editor of the *Red Cross Journal* responded to yet another letter to the editor on this topic by comparing the lack of threat which V.A.D. nurses presented to nurses with more extensive training: 'I should be about as jealous of a V.A.D. member as a captain of an Atlantic liner would be of a man who could paddle a canoe.' The editorial team of the *Journal* reacted to regular criticism of V.A.D.s by praising the education of trained nurses and distinguishing V.A.D. nurses' training in home nursing and first aid, and their particular war experience as very different; they argued that V.A.D. nurses would not present any threat to professional nurses following the war. Instead, they reasoned that their Red Cross training and their practical skills should make them eligible for a reduction in the usual three-year training if they wished to become fully-trained nurses after the war.

A thorough analysis of how the debate was represented within the *Red Cross Journal* will be the key approach for this presentation. Regular defences of the character of Red Cross volunteer nurses, together with information about their training and work, were printed in the journal. The paper will discuss the roles of the editorial teams of the *Red Cross Journal* and the *British Journal of Nursing* in perpetuating this debate.

**2.45pm**            **'Dairymaids and Shop Girls, Mothers and Nuns: V.A.D.s in Southam, Warwickshire'** - Dr Val Brodie MBE, Independent Scholar

This paper focuses on the women and girls who served as VADs at The Grange, Southam's Red Cross Hospital (1917-1919). Using aural evidence gathered in 2012/13 from descendants and relatives of the VADS, together with a rare collection of photographs, and local newspaper archives, the social background of these rural women is uncovered, and the challenges and opportunities that their voluntary role afforded, is considered.

Popular media, fiction, and serious social histories frequently feature both the socialites who went to France to serve in the early stages of the war, and the local dignitaries who took on the onerous tasks of leadership in the 3,000+ hospitals that quickly were opened. This paper suggests that there is a danger that the life histories of the broad range of those who served as VADs are in danger of being overlooked, and their identities lost forever. In rural Southam, the women, and perhaps especially the young girls, faced new challenges (hospital discipline and the physicality involved in caring for injured bodies) and were given a rare opportunity to meet new people and to work outside the home or family. The sacrifices were shared by their families where small businesses depended on the labour of family members.

Six nuns are an unexpected group who gained their Red Cross Certificates and their background will be examined together with the life stories of a cross section of the Southam nurses. The paper will be illustrated by photographs that reveal aspects of life at the hospital. They give an insight into the contribution of these women and girls on whom the lives and wellbeing of over a 1,000 wounded soldiers, who passed through the hospital, depended.

**3.15pm**            **'The Patricia Young V.A.D. Album: Service and the Red Cross Bureaucracy in World War I'**  
- Cathy Kawalek, Independent Scholar

In the 2014 *BBC Magazine* article, "World War One: The many battles faced by WW1's nurses" author Shirley Williams (daughter of Vera Brittain) reminds us that the romantic image of nurses and VADs in crisp uniforms masked the reality of the grisly work and harsh bureaucratic rules both in the field and in the home front recuperation hospitals. Nowhere is this contrast better portrayed than in the Patricia Young photograph and autograph album from the Yale Center for British Art. This charming album was created by Miss Young during her VAD service in the Dumfries Maxwelltown Hospital.

The album's affectionate spirit, containing 40+ pages of photos, signatures and thank you notes from recuperating soldiers and staff members, ends abruptly with several newspaper articles that are tipped in the back pages. According to these accounts, on Christmas Day, 1917, Miss Young and 10 other women of the VAD, Red Cross Society, Kirkcudbrightshire, Scotland, were dismissed 'owing to an alleged breach of discipline.' The articles portray all sides of a heated debate about redress, right of appeal and war discipline that was eventually taken to the Undersecretary of War in the House of Commons for reversal (unsuccessfully.)

With this album as a visual guide, this paper will explore the personal interactions of the VADs and recuperating soldiers and detail the bureaucratic rules of the Red Cross Society seen as necessary for good

management of the hospitals. It will examine how women, many of them working and volunteering for the first time, found themselves not only in the cross-fire of war and women at work, but in the friction between traditional British due process and military law in a time of war.

## **PANEL 2 – NURSING IN EUROPE (CH 1003)**

**2.15pm**            **‘Duty, Pride, and Sacrifice: Themes in the Letters of American Nurses in World War One’** –  
Dr Kelley H. Pattison, Western Michigan University

At the beginning of World War One the United States Nurse Corps was made up of 403 nurses, but by the end of the conflict 21, 480 nurses had enlisted answering their nation’s call for help. These American nurses served both on US soil and over 10,000 served overseas. The nurses were victims of the war, with over 200 American nurses dying in service and numerous ones wounded. The present study aimed to explore the experiences of nurses serving with the American Expeditionary Forces in France during World War One. The goal of this study was to identify nurses’ experiences during this conflict. The method used was a thorough review of 103 original letters written by and received by nurses from 1917 to 1919. Thematic analysis was carried out on the content of these letters. Three major themes were identified: (1) duty, (2) pride, and (3) sacrifice. Verbatim examples of each of these themes are included in order for the readers to fully understand the lived experiences of these nurses. The importance of understanding the experiences of nurses during World War One and how it relates to nursing history and the opportunities afforded women at this time are also discussed.

**2.45pm**            **‘Family and Performance in the Front: Reconstituting the Fantasy of the Family in German Front Hospitals’** - Samraghni Bonnerjee, Postgraduate Researcher, University of Sheffield

In Helene Mierisch’s *Kamerad Schwester* (1934), she writes about young soldiers as:

A large hall is the “infants’ ward”, so called because it is populated solely by eighteen-year-olds . . . I must comfort my children well. When they are better and have recovered from the shock they will make just as good soldiers as anybody else. In the evenings . . . I sing to them “Sleep, my little prince, sleep.”

The encounters of the German nurses at the front were often translated into the plane of familial relations. Having been trained in *Mutterhäuser* (mother houses), the concept of ‘sisterhood’ was already engrained in their being. However, as the memoirs reflect, the nurses wanted to be sisters of the soldiers. In other memoirs, the nurses donned the roles of mothers, and especially during Christmas, reconstituted the atmosphere of a typical German Christmas household in front hospitals. This paper will look at the attempts of German nurses to reconstitute the paradigm of the family in the front, and their endeavour to rival the mother at home through close attention to Helene Mierisch’s *Kamerad Schwester* and *Frontschwester: Ein deutsches Ehrenbuch*, a collection of diary and memoir fragments by fifty-one German nurses of the First World War, published in 1936.

The assumption that all nurses were angel beings and that nursing was a substitute for motherhood is mere generalisation. While these nurses revived the intimate personal space of the family in hospitals for wounded soldiers, this very act provided succour to the nurses as well, as being their method of coping with daily pain, death and destruction. The anonymity rendered by the nurses’ uniform was quelled to a certain extent by the roles they adapted while treating the soldiers. Ultimately this paper will examine if this act can be treated as ‘performative’, since the nurses persisted in their roles, but the soldier in the hospital was replaced.

**3.15pm**            **‘Two Extraordinary World War I Nurses: Georgiana Fyfe and Grace Charlotte Vulliamy’** -  
Dr Katherine Storr, Independent Scholar

Due to the focus on military history, it is not generally recognized that there were more civilian than military deaths as a result of the First World War. It is also not realized that the Armistice on 11 November 1918 for many countries did not end the war, since some eighteen wars were still in progress. Two extraordinary women, Georgiana Fyfe, who is thought to be a midwife and Grace Vulliamy, a psychological nurse, assisted military and civilian wounded and sick people during the war and both remained in Europe after the Armistice, alleviating the devastating results of continuing mechanised warfare and famine. Their nursing was not only of the usually imagined type of tending to patients by bedsides, although they did this, but in both cases they became the administrators that made such care possible.

Georgiana Fyfe's work was in Belgium, where she ran hospitals and maternity homes. A forerunner of Nicolas Winton, she rescued children from the area near Ypres and took them into safety in Switzerland. One of the boys rescued, Albert Ryckaert, is now aged 103. Grace Vulliamy's work was with refugees and with British civilian and military prisoners being exchanged for Germans in Holland and then, from 1919, she aided refugees and children in Czechoslovakia and Poland. In Holland she became the last link in the Edith Cavell escape chain, herself smuggling the men on board ship for their journey to England. In all these areas she applied her understanding of the significance of employment in restoring people to mental and therefore to physical health.

### **PANEL 3 – TRAUMA, DEATH AND THERAPY (CH 1008)**

**2.15pm**            **'Nursing Soldiers with Psychological Trauma during the First World War'** – Dr Claire Chatterton, Open University

This paper aims to explore the role of British nurses during the First World War in the treatment of the psychological trauma that was experienced by many soldiers. Nurses during the First World War were expected to deal with both physical and psychological trauma and suffering. Hallett (2009) however, has drawn attention to the invisibility of nurses in accounts of what she terms the 'emotional containment' side of their work. By the end of World War One the British Army had dealt with over 80,000 cases of what was commonly referred to as 'shell shock' (Leese, 2014) and accounts have continued to fascinate, as the success of Pat Barker's best-selling novel *Regeneration* and the subsequent film bear witness. Famous medical men such as Rivers and Yealland are frequently discussed in accounts of the treatment of mental disorders such as shellshock, but much less is known about the nurses who worked alongside them and were expected to provide an environment which would promote and aid recovery.

This paper draws on an analysis of archival sources and articles from contemporary journals such as the *Journal of Mental Science*. It aims to give an insight into this aspect of nursing work during World War One and illustrates the diversity of the medical approaches that were undertaken which largely depended on the stance taken by the doctors treating those affected and their interpretations of the aetiology of shellshock and its most appropriate treatment. Nurses' work was to a large extent governed by this and it was to be this that shaped and defined their work in this area.

**2.45pm**            **'Commemorative Gestures: Nurses Writing Death in the Great War'** - Dr Alice Kelly, Postdoctoral Writing Fellow, TORCH, University of Oxford

The enormous amount of injury and death that nurses encountered in casualty clearing stations and military hospitals during the war, and the subsequent emotional burden they carried, was unprecedented. Much has been written on the culture shock to 'these gently nurtured girls who walked straight out of Edwardian drawing rooms into the manifest horrors of the First World War' (Macdonald, 1980), but relatively little on how nurses coped with such large numbers of dying men. This interdisciplinary paper explores the ways in which women involved in hospitals in the war zones and on the home front witnessed and represented military death in contemporary diaries and memoirs. Drawing both on literary accounts and visual culture (propaganda posters and nursing scrapbooks), this paper argues for the importance of these wartime accounts and images as a type of immediate proto-commemoration, before more official memorial modes were established. The nurse's heavily gendered role and ambiguous military positioning was compounded by her contradictory roles of healer and griever, as well as participant and witness. The peculiarly liminal status of the nurses, with their 'marginalised identity – one in, but not of, the war', as Sharon Ouditt observes, makes their accounts particularly valuable (Ouditt, 1994). Focusing on intensely proximate encounters between nurses and the dying and dead, I hope to demonstrate that nurses were implicitly positioned at the forefront of the contemporary debate about death, burial and adequate memorialisation, and that their unique viewpoint warrants further critical attention.

**3.15pm**            **'Spa Wars and New Frontiers: Nursing and Physical Therapy, 1914-1918'** - Dr Jane Adams, University of Warwick

Between 1890 and 1914 the major English spas, including those at Droitwich, Leamington, Bath and Buxton became increasingly associated with intensive therapeutic regimes delivered by specialist personnel in bath houses and hospitals. Increasing numbers of skilled workers including doctors, nurses, masseuses and bathing attendants delivered advice and treatment to patients. During the First World War bathing facilities were integrated into the national network that evolved to treat wounded soldiers as the potential

value of 'intensive physical treatment' in rehabilitation and recovery were recognised. The spas were deemed to be 'National Assets' and there were calls for them to be fully integrated into the war effort. This paper will examine the roles of nurses, masseuses and other workers in hospitals and bathing institutions at English spas over the course of the war. In addition to treating new conditions, associated with war trauma, the influx of wounded soldiers brought a marked class and gender shift to those treated at spas. At the same time male workers were called up into the military.

The war years were influential in shaping the professional boundaries between nurses and physical therapists. Although nurses had formed the Society of Trained Masseuses in 1894, the establishment of the Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses in 1900 began the process of separate recognition for this group. The establishment of the Chartered Society of Massage and Medical Gymnastics in 1920, a year after the Nurse Registration Act in 1919, reinforced separation between the two professions. Drawing on early volumes of the *Journal of the Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses*, which was started in 1915, and selective nursing and medical journals for the same period, this paper will explore changing perceptions of the boundaries between the role of nurse and physical therapists in this period. The conclusion will draw out how WWI changed the role of nurses within the specialist workforce at English spas.