

# A Guide to Cheltenham Ladies' College Archive WW1 Resources

This guide explains some of the resources that you will find on our Learning, Virtual Exhibition and WW1 Library pages by visiting [www.cheltenhamremembers.org.uk](http://www.cheltenhamremembers.org.uk)

## **CLC Roll of Honour**

This volume records the names of those who fought in WWI and were related to the CLC community in some way.. For example Lt Crombie was the brother of Fenella Crombie (at College 1914 – 1919) Many College girls lost close relatives in the conflict. One such was Fenella Crombie (at College 1914 – 1919) whose brother (Eugene) died during an attack on the Roeux chemical works during the Battle of Arras. He was a Captain in the Gordon Highlanders Regiment and, poignantly, Fenella was allowed to wear his cap badge on her College tie as an act of remembrance and mark of respect following his death.

## **Letters from the Front**

Pupils were expected to contribute their own money towards buying items to place in 'comfort' parcels which were then sent out to the troops in the trenches and in the Royal Navy. The contents ranged from knitted mittens and electric torches to chocolate and tobacco and the letters of thanks, such as the ones you see here, were read out at Prayers so that the girls could see how much their contributions were appreciated by those who were enduring terrible conditions in the battlefield trenches.

The "War Workshop" at St Clare's Boarding House in Fauconberg Terrace was open daily except Saturday to past and present students, making amongst other things sunshields, sandbags and a periscope designed by a member of staff. There was also a Hospital Supply Depot making swabs and pneumonia jackets and the College labs in the Science Department were involved in making iodine for this depot.

## **A Chronicle of War Work**

College is very fortunate to have a volume which records all the war work carried out by anyone who was connected in some way by College. This volume is called 'A Chronicle of College War Work'. The pages list a huge variety of roles carried out by women towards the war effort. Many involved working in hospitals all over the country and on the enemy lines in France and Belgium. This page shows that Awdry Jane Simeon (at College from 1895 – 1900) served as a nurse working in the American Red Cross Hospital in Juilly in France. She received these two medals in recognition of her war work and her obituary in the 1927 College magazine states that her 'teaching record was fine, in later years her nursing record was finer, and her War record finest of all. She was not afraid of anything or anybody.....'

## Red Cross

In 1910 a College branch of the Red Cross was formed with the aim of letting women 'take their share of the burden of national defence.' Students were entered for First Aid and nursing exams and by 1914 over 400 pupils held certificates.



Regular inspections of training procedures were carried out between 1910 – 1914 and pupils would have taken part in the inspection process, either as a pretend patient or a trainee nurse. There are many photographs in the CLC Archive which tell the story of this rigorous training

Everyone who was still studying at College was expected to help in any way they could towards the war effort. At a time of food shortage, feeding over 500 boarders on a daily basis was a problem and College

became smitten with 'Allotment Fever' as many boarding house gardens and various parts of the playing field were dug up to grow vegetables. All the girls were responsible for helping with this instead of playing all the usual sports. Rubbish from the boarding houses was collected and sorted for recycling by the girls – e.g. paper, bottles, tins and meat bones. The effects of the restricted war-time diet on the girls were carefully monitored with regular weigh-ins, a reduction in prep where possible and more time allowed for sleep.

With many farm workers serving on the Western Front, the girls also helped out local farmers with a range of agricultural tasks such as haymaking. They also gathered medicinal herbs which were sold to the Herb Growing Association (formed to replace supplies previously imported from Germany).

## College Magazines

Annual reports were issued in the College Magazines describing the contribution by the College to the war effort. These pages describe Christmas in St Martin's Hospital, an outbreak of mumps, and the output of the College war workshop, including the making of 270 mosquito nets for Mesopotamia.

## New Careers

With many men fighting on the battlefields, new careers were opening up to girls once they had left College. This pamphlet entitled 'Table of Profession and Occupations for Girls' and dated 1915, lists all the many careers available in medicine, teaching, domestic science, agriculture, business, and other professions. This page lists some of the careers available within the Civil Service and details the qualifications needed, length of training in terms of time needed, the likely salary after training and future career prospects.

Amongst these documents is correspondence and related reference for Miss Alice Peck, 1916 and 1918. Miss Faithfull was often asked to recommend suitable girls for confidential Government war work and received many requests for references. One such pupil was Miss Alice Peck (at College, 1911 – 1915) who was recruited to the staff of the Directorate of Military Intelligence in 1918.

## St Martin's VAD Hospital



In 1914 the first wave of front line casualties reached the Red Cross hospitals. Eversleigh boarding house (then next door to St Helen's in Parabola Road) was turned into an actual Red Cross Hospital called St Martin's Hospital. Each ward was named after a College boarding house and was fully staffed by former pupils (known as Guild members) and staff who volunteered to nurse using their free time away from teaching duties, often giving up all their holidays and weekends.

### Play Programmes & Photographs

The aim of many of the College drama productions was to raise as much money as possible for St Martin's Hospital.



### The Guild

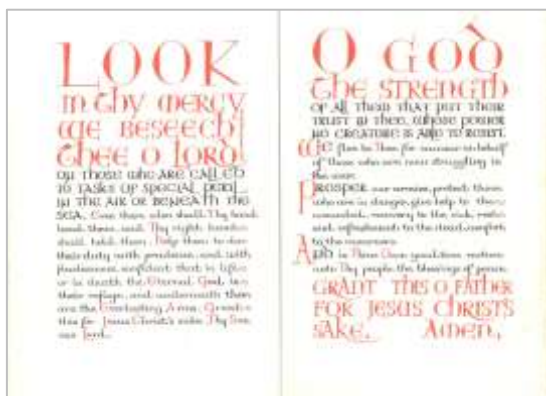
As well as providing the staff for St Martin's Hospital, the Guild also raised £560 to fund the purchase of a mobile X-ray unit. This was presented to the War Office by Guild in 1915. The College Magazines record the many ways in which members of Guild helped with the war effort in addition to staffing and equipping St Martin's VAD Hospital.

For a comprehensive overview of the CLC war effort see Chapter 10 of 'Cheltenham Ladies' written by Gillian Avery, 2003 (copies of book available from CLC)

The Guild Leaflets (sent out twice a year) also carried reports of the how the money donated by Guild was spent. Shown here is a report of the work with the mobile x-ray unit.

## CLC Prayer Book

This little book of 'Prayers for Use in Time of War' was handwritten in July 1915 by a pupil, Alice Hindson, in an Art Class in College. When offering it to the College Archives in 1983 she wrote that 'my generation heard these prayers read by Miss Faithfull morning after morning and I think that they meant a great deal to us all and are a memorial to that heart-rending time.' Religion was a great comfort and Miss Faithfull (Principal) wanted the girls to have a place of sanctuary, a place of quiet for private prayer and thought, so she established a prayer room near her own office and the room was in constant use.



## 'The British Prisoner of War', Jan – Dec 1918.

Printed monthly newsletter bound in one volume, detailing conditions in which British prisoners were kept and the work of the Central Prisoners of War Committee and Care Committee in trying to look after those held prisoner overseas. If subscribers to the Journal were interested in a particular prisoner, they were to give the name and address of that prisoner and to enable food parcels and money to be sent by the above Committees. Includes the 'official' view e.g. suggested items to be included in a 'personal parcel' (p. 11) and eye witness accounts of what it was like to be held in an 'internment station' (p. 99) or a more restrictive prisoner of war camp e.g. Karlsruhe Camp in Germany (p. 75).

## Bowen Davis Family Collection

In 2016, the Archive at Cheltenham Ladies' College recently received a donation from the Bowen Davies family which included a wealth of photographs, letters, documents, clothing and more relating to the lives of four Welsh sisters – Essylt, Dora, Gwladys and Olwen, who were students at the College from 1895-1918.

On the outbreak of the First World War, the Bowen Davies sisters were involved in Red Cross nursing activities. Gwladys worked as a VAD at the West of England Electrical Treatment Centre at Exmouth, and two of her other sisters Essylt and Olwen were also involved in work at this hospital. The archive collection charts their development from school girls to responsible and valued members of society who were keen to help with the war effort in a dynamic and inspiring way.

After leaving College, Gwladys Bowen-Davies served much of her VAD career in Exmouth, at the VAD hospital which had been established in the city's YMCA building. During her time she was a valued member of the staff and developed a strong rapport with the nurses and her patients, many of whom wrote to her after leaving.



The photograph albums kept by the Bowen-Davies sisters contain many photographs of their work in the Exmouth VAD hospital. These are examples of photos like those Gwladys sent to the soldiers who had been under her care at Exmouth VAD hospital. This group formed a football team, their letters thank Nurse Bowen-Davies for sending these on.

This letter thanks Nurse Bowen-Davies for sending on a photograph of the Exmouth VAD Hospital football team.



The Performance programme for an event planned and delivered by the wounded soldiers who were at Exmouth VAD hospital where the Bowen-Davies sisters worked. This type of undertaking, alongside activities like football, were common among soldiers who were recuperating and nearing readiness to return to the front. Such activities were surely to focus attention away from the darker aspects of the time and to help their physical and mental wellbeing.

### **Lilian Faithfull's autobiography**

Miss Lilian Faithfull was the Principal of College from 1907 – 1922. Entitled 'In the House of My Pilgrimage', she wrote an account of her experiences of running a girls' school which includes a chapter on the war years.

*Rachel Roberts, College Archivist August 2018*