ELSIE INGLIS and the SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITALS





The worst of being a doctor is that one's mistakes matter so much. In everything else you can just throw away what you have messed up and begin again, but you cannot do ' that as a doctor.



ELSIE INGLIS and the SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITALS

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ELSIE INGLIS AND THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITALS

INTRODUCTION

A new maternity hospital opened in the City of Edinburgh in 1925. It was named the Elsie Inglis Memorial Maternity Hospital in memory of a woman doctor who had died 8 years earlier. As a young doctor in the 1890s Dr Inglis had worked tirelessly to improve maternity care for the women of Edinburgh. Many a baby girl was named Elsie by her grateful parents.

The hospital closed in 1988 and, as time passes, memories of the hospital and the remarkable woman for whom it was named have started to fade. But Elsie was a woman who deserves to be remembered, not just for her determination to improve health care for women but for her mission to prove that with willpower great things can be achieved by anyone, women as well as men. This is her story and the story of the Scottish Women's Hospitals.

ELSIE'S FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLY LIFE



FAMILY TENNIS MATCH. ELSIE IS STANDING BACK RIGHT.

The Inglis family originally hailed from Inverness-shire and were known to be a determined breed. Elsie's ancestry includes several characters who fought for their beliefs and would not take no for an answer. Hugh Inglis, Elsie's great great grandfather, remained loyal to Bonnie Prince Charlie and the cause after defeat. When her great grandfather, Alexander Inglis, fell out with a rival in America the only resolution was pistols at dawn – fortunately, he won. On Elsie's grandmother's side, her ancestry can be traced back to Robert the Bruce. Determination was in her genes.



JOHN INGLIS

Elsie's father, John Inglis, was a magistrate and worked for the East India Company. Her early life was a privileged one in the British Raj but it was tempered by her parents' strong religious beliefs. Elsie was devoted to her father, who was a principled and caring man. However, John had also inherited the Inglis' outspoken manner and when he disagreed with Lord Lytton's imperious way of running the East India Company he let it be known. This cost him his post and the family had to return to Scotland.

Elsie showed an interest in medicine and healing from around the age of six or seven. On the ship home from India she started 'looking after' the babies on board. When she reached Edinburgh, in the absence of real babies to care for, she had to make do with dolls. Her sister Eva recalled:

"We had forty dolls. Elsie decreed that they should all have measles. So we spent days in painting little red dots all over the forty faces and forty pairs of arms and legs. She was the doctor and prescribed gruesome drugs, which we had to administer. Then it was decreed that they should slowly recover, so each day so many spots were rubbed off until the epidemic was wiped out."

Elsie went to school in Edinburgh and then, as was the custom for girls of her social ranking, to finishing school in France. All along she was determined to study to become a doctor, however difficult this might prove to be. The authorities wanted to keep the profession a male preserve and put many barriers in the way of women like Elsie. Yet Elsie's father was a progressive man and was more than happy to support his daughter's ambition.



ENJOYING AFTERNOON TEA WITH FAMILY IN CRIEFF. ELSIE IS SEATED FAR LEFT, HER FATHER IS SEATED TWO ALONG FROM HER.



HARRIET, ELSIE'S MOTHER



ELSIE, EARLY TEENS

FINAL EXAMINATION.

SCHEDULE

OF THE COURSE OF STUDY FOR THE

JOINT QUALIFICATIONS IN MEDICINE AND SURGERY

OF THE

ROYAL COLLEGES OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS OF EDINBURGH, AND THE FACULTY OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS OF GLASGOW.

N.B.—Every Candidate must deliver to the Inspector of Certificates before he is admitted to the Final Examination, this Schedule carefully filled up with the particulars of his Course of Study, dated and attested in the last page by his Signature. (See Chap. V. § 25.)

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Elsie mand Inglis * Date and place of Birth, as certified 1864. hainer Jal India. of Registration as a Medical Student May 1888. Anticario L. Cetton 1887 liminary Examination - Name of the Boln calional Institute of Scotland July 1890. 5. Date of passing Second Examination 6, Courses of Study prescribed. Certified by. Leith Aspilal 18 89 Practical Pharmacy (3 Months), 3 months Practical Midwifery, or At-tendance on Labour Cases (not less than six), glarger maturity tospilal. 18 91 32 Leit & spicel. 12 months Hospital, Medical and Sur-gical, of not less than 30 Patients (24 months). 1888 -1892 Placepre Royal my in many 15 mm. 27 mm Dispussion of the Tengel Infirm Attendance at a Dispensary, or as an Assistant to a Registered Practitioner (6 months), 1891-1892 grasps_ gracyns Troyer Supier Vaccination Certificate by a Public Vaccinator, or Regis-tered Practitioner, 18 9 2 * In Schools or Hospitals where separate Certificates are not issued by the Teachers, the Dean or other official of the School or Hospital accredited to sign on helbalf of the Teachers will certify the Cosmes by their or his signature in this colume, but where separate Certificates are issued, this is not necessary.

Her plans had to be put on hold however when her mother contracted scarlet fever and died in 1885. Initially, Elsie looked after the house for her father but she became restless and, with his blessing, she started to follow her chosen career path.

In 1887, Dr Sophia Jex-Blake, the first practising female doctor in Scotland, founded the Edinburgh School of Medicine for Women and Elsie eagerly enrolled. However, along with other students, Elsie disagreed with much of Jex-Blake's approach and methods and transferred to the Glasgow Royal Infirmary under the tutelage of Sir William MacEwen.





NEW HOSPITAL FOR WOMEN, LONDON

Elsie always kept in touch with her father whilst she was away from home. One of her letters assured him: "I am not such an idiot as to miss my meals, Papa dearest. My temper won't stand for it!" Another letter tells him of her finding out that a woman who should have been in bed had been up

all night because her husband had come drunk and was lying asleep on the bed. She wrote: "He ought to have been horse-whipped and when I have the vote I shall vote that all men who turn their wives and families out of doors at eleven o'clock at night, especially when the wife is ill, shall be horse-whipped."

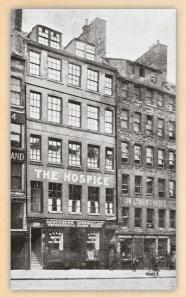
She qualified at both the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in Edinburgh and the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow in 1892. Her first post was at the New Hospital for Women in London after which she worked at the Rotunda in Dublin, a leading maternity hospital. She wrote to her father from the New Hospital: "The patients have to pay a small sum, yet they have had over 20,000 visits this year up to November – that is about half the size of the Glasgow Royal. This is paying, and for women! Who says women doctors are not wanted."



In 1894 Elsie's father died. Devastated, she threw herself even more into her work as a doctor and her involvement with the campaign for women's rights.

Elsie was extremely unhappy with the standard of medical care which women were receiving. This, in part, spurred on her political activism within the suffrage movement. During her studies in the 1890's she was secretary for the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage. The suffragists were distinct from the suffragettes who, frustrated at the lack of progress, advocated militancy and direct action.

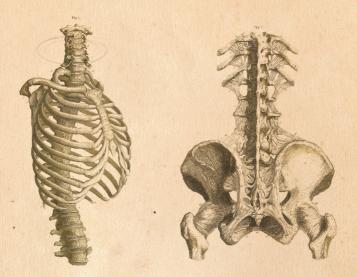
On Elsic's return from Dublin she, together with former fellow student Jessie MacLaren MacGregor, established a medical practice in Edinburgh. At the same time Elsic set up The Hospice, a maternity hospital for poor women, at 219 High Street, alongside a midwifery resource centre.



THE HOSPICE

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Elsie often tended her patients for free and was also known to occasionally pay for some of them to travel to the seaside to convalesce. Edinburgh families adored her, especially the poorer families. Biographer Leah Leneman writes: They named their children after her and clubbed together to buy a torch for her to light the way up dark tenement stairs. Her care went far beyond prescribing medicine; she involved herself in the lives of families in need, sterilising milk in one home, coming at night to bathe a baby at another home when the mother was ill, even helping to raise money to send one poor woman to a sanatorium for six months. One man said: 'That woman has done more for the folk living between Morrison Street and the High Street than all the ministers in Edinburgh and Scotland itself ever did for anyone.'



Elsie was a consultant at Edinburgh Hospital for Women and Children and, despite a disagreement between Elsie and the hospital management, her own Hospice joined forces with them in 1910.

Her political activism became central to her being. She not only campaigned from Shetland to Cornwall, arguing for women's rights, she also supported Home Rule for Ireland and joined the Liberal Party for a while. "There is no question among women who have to work for themselves about wanting the suffrage" she wrote. "It's the women who are safe and sound in their own drawing rooms who don't see what on earth they want it for."

Elsie was a skilled orator and drew on many practical everyday examples of injustice to inspire and motivate her audiences. For her, "the common cause of healthier homes and happier people and a stronger Empire, the righting of all wrongs, and the strengthening of all rights... was wrapped up in the vote."

Like many other independent-minded women of that time Elsie rode a bicycle. Bicycles represented freedom and independence and openly demonstrated the rejection of the traditional women's side saddle for horse-riding.

She would board the train in Edinburgh with her bicycle and head off across the new Forth Bridge for Aberfeldy, where she would go on little cycling jaunts on her own. Hot water for baths was a top priority when choosing where to stay the night. It was not so much that cleanliness was next to godliness but rather a prerequisite for health and hygiene. In the wilds of Scotland it was also a little luxury.



"GO HOME AND SIT STILL."

When war broke out in 1914 the world was thrown upside down. Certain things would have to be put on hold, the campaign for women's rights among them. But Elsie, aged 50, saw an opportunity to show the abilities of women to their fullest at the same time as doing her bit to aid the war effort.

The Government put out a call for doctors and nurses to help on the front line. Elsie was more than willing to play her part. She went first to the military authorities in Edinburgh and then to London to the War Office itself to offer her services, only to be told: "My good lady, go home and sit still." There was nothing personal in this; it was simply that women doctors and surgeons were not permitted to serve in front line hospitals.

Elsic went home but she did not sit still. Instead she smoked a cigarette and, by the time she had thrown the stub into the fire, she had made up her mind to offer all-female units to the Belgians, the French and the Serbians – who all gladly accepted.

As one newspaper wrote in her obituary: "To Elsie it seemed wicked that



THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITALS OFFICE



MEMBERS OF THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITALS (SWH)

women with the power to wield the surgeon's knife in mitigation of suffering and with knowledge to diagnose and nurse should be withheld from serving the sick and wounded." And she herself said: "The need is there, and too terrible to allow any haggling about who does the work."

With the acceptance of her offer by some of the allied governments, Elsie formed what soon became known as the Scottish Women's Hospitals. Their headquarters were in Charlotte Square, Edinburgh – with a London branch forming very soon after.

Along with her colleagues and associates in the suffrage movement Elsie then started a massive fund-raising campaign that was to run throughout the war. The cause quickly became a popular story in the press. Almost every town and village in Scotland held fetes, coffee mornings and book sales to help raise money. Suffragists went far and wide with their appeal, giving stirring addresses in America, Australia, Canada and India as well as across Britain. A suffragist called Kathleen Burke was so successful that she became known as the '\$1,000 a day girl'.

Individuals, communities, companies and countries all contributed. The wards, beds, blankets, tents, ambulances, surgical equipment and X-ray machines purchased were named after their sponsors, with titles such as the Canada Ward or the Airdrie Tent. When women came back from serving in one of the hospitals on the front they often then went on to help raise more money by giving talks about the wonderful work that they and their fellow women were doing. Boxes and boxes of cheques A breakdown of the main geographic contributions:

London Committee	£100,000
Glasgow	over £50,000
Edinburgh	£27,000
Dundee	£5,000
Liverpool	£5,000
Girton and Newnham	
Colleges (Cambridge)	£5,000
India	£40,000
Canada	over £13,000
JSA	£126,000
Australia	over £20,000

had to be processed at Charlotte Square. Between 1914 and 1919 the Scottish Women's Hospitals raised £500,000 (the equivalent of roughly £53,000,000 in today's money). This money enabled the women to buy everything they needed and to set up their stations behind the front line.

One woman who went to serve as a nurse in Serbia was Madge Neill Fraser, a champion golfer. Sadly she died from typhus within three months of arriving but had been so well liked in the world of golf that her club at Murrayfield, Edinburgh wrote to every golf club in the UK and beyond, from which over $\pounds 3,000$ was raised for the Scottish Women's Hospitals.

SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITALS

Scottish Women's Hospitals served the war effort from 1914 to 1919 and were not finally disbanded until 1925. They started off in Calais, supporting Belgian soldiers, but their main locations were four hospitals in France, two in Corsica, two in Greece, one in Macedonia, two in Romania and six in Serbia. There were also a number of satellite hospitals and dressing stations.



During the course of the war 1,500 personnel were involved across these locations. The vast majority were women. A handful of men, around 20, were employed as handymen and clerks. Undoubtedly these were men who sympathised with women's rights and were happy to take instructions from women.



ELSIE ATTENDING A PATIENT



AN OPERATING THEATRE

ELSIE INGLIS and the SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITALS



MEMBERS OF SWH WITH AMBULANCE

SPONSORED AMBULANCE

Women came from many different backgrounds. Doctors, surgeons and nurses were mainly middle class, the daughters of teachers, ministers and doctors. The orderlies on the other hand tended to come from aristocratic or wealthy, privileged classes. Women also served as administrators, cooks and ambulance drivers. When the military had stressed that only men could drive ambulances and that women could merely accompany them, Elsie just smiled.

The orderlies mopped up the mud and the guts and disposed of the amputated limbs – there was a high incidence of amputation in World War One due in part to a condition called gas gangrene, which tended to quickly infect wounds with the fatal risk of septicaemia. Not only was the stench of this disease unbearable but there were also no antibiotics to counteract the infection. Amputation was the surest way of saving lives.

The hospital hierarchy could turn class on its head, at least for those from professional and aristocratic backgrounds. Those who had been educated received higher status, whilst those who had enjoyed privilege could find themselves doing more menial jobs. Yet for many privileged young women it was an opportunity to venture out on their own, 'to do their own thing', not just wait to marry this Sir or that Lord. Although this may have been a very different choice from what their mothers and fathers wanted for them. For privileged women their motivation was a mix of patriotism, a sense of adventure and empowerment. Having cars, or access to cars, at home meant that many of them could drive and as a result some of them became front line taxi or ambulance drivers.

THESE MEDALS WERE

ELIZABETH (BETTY) FORBES MACPHERSON - (1883-1965)

WHO SERVED AS AN ORDERLY AND STOREKEEPER AT ROYAUMONT FROM MAY 1916 TO FEBRUARY 1919.

Her sister, Jessie Blackwood Hannah Macpherson (1885–1967), was a cook at Royaumont from August 1915 to February 1919.

SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITAL 1914-19 LAPEL BADGE gilt and enamel

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IN THE CLOISTER OF THE ABBAYE AT ROYAUMONT. DR. FRANCES IVENS INSPECTING A FRENCH PATIENT.

By Norah Neilson-Gray, who left Glasgow School of Art to join the Scottish Women's Hospitals to serve as an orderly at Royaumont hospital.

The Scottish Women's Hospitals developed quickly, with Elsie being joined by many remarkable women like Chief Medical Officer Dr. Frances Ivens who ran the highly successful hospital at Royaumont Abbey just north of Paris. The women who were motivated by a sense of adventure certainly got that. However the adventure was incalculably more hair-raising than they could possibly have imagined.

The women experienced hard and often intolerable conditions: bitter cold, oceans of mud, evacuations, capture, retreats, jerky ambulance rides down rutted tracks, inspecting and burning filthy lice-ridden uniforms, the thud of guns, the screech of fighter planes and shaky operations by candlelight as bombs exploded nearby. Alongside all this was the heart-breaking reality of working behind the front line: comforting soldiers with the most appalling wounds, some of them barely old enough to shave, listening to their screams of agony and seeing some of them die. Disease was also a constant hazard, with a number of women dying from typhus, malaria or cholera.

Eight staff nurses drowned after the Hospital Ship Glenart Castle was torpedoed on 26 February 1918, one of whom, Mary McKinnon, was a staff nurse with Scottish Women's Hospitals.



MEMBERS OF SWH PERFORM A NYMPH DANCE





SOLDIERS ENJOYING A GAME OF BLIND MAN'S BUFF

WATCHING A SHOW



MEMBERS OF SWH

There were some better times too, such as picnics, friendships, concerts, Christmas shows and excursions, as the women became part of the local community in which they were working, and as they made every effort to build communities within the hospitals. Above all there were the successes, as thousands of soldiers' lives were saved through their ministrations.

The women tended mainly French, Russian, Greek, Romanian and Serbian troops. The ethnic mix was very diverse. The French Army for instance had soldiers from North Africa and the Far East. They also tended civilians, mainly women and children, during quieter periods, especially in Serbia. Sometimes they also nursed wounded German and Austrian soldiers in the same wards as Allied soldiers. On both the Western and Eastern fronts the byword was *"if you're wounded get to a Scottish Women's Hospital if you possibly can"*. The French likened the hospital at Royaumont Abbey to *"paradise"*. However, thanks to the War Office's initial rejection of Elsie's offer in 1914, very few British soldiers had the benefit of being nursed at one of these remarkable hospitals.

The units also provided canteens, for civilians as well as soldiers. They served up thousands of cups of tea and snacks, often nourishing hungry and weary soldiers on their way to or from the front.

There are a number of diary extracts on pages 35 to 37 describing hospital life.



A NURSING SISTER OF A SWH UNIT TEACHING A FRENCH PATIENT TO SEW, SALONIKA 1916



WOUNDED FRENCH SOLDIERS PLAYING CARDS IN A TENTED WARD OF A SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITAL UNIT, SALONIKA, 1916.



DR KATHERINE STEWART MACPHAIL OF THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S HOSPITALS AND A BRITISH OFFICER DANCING THE KOLO (THE SERBIAN NATIONAL DANCE) AT A SERBIAN SLAVA OR REGIMENTAL FESTIVAL AT SALONIKA IN 1916.

A DEDICATION THAT OUTLIVED THE WAR

Dr Katherine Stewart MacPhail joined the Scottish Women's Hospitals in December 1914, aged 27, and was posted to Serbia. Her father had been a doctor before her and she had qualified as a doctor from Glasgow University in 1911. She worked at the hospital in Kragujevac until June 1914 then moved between Corsica, France and Salonika where the photograph above was taken. Katherine returned to Serbia towards the end of the war to organise medical care for poor children suffering from tuberculosis – a serious medical and social problem at the time. She first developed a hospital in Belgrade and then in the village of Sremska Kamenica.

The hospital was a huge success and Katherine dedicated most of her working life to it. She eventually retired to St Andrews where she lived with her sister Annie. She died in 1974. Their sister Isobel also served with Scottish Women's Hospitals in France and Salonika.



INSTRUMENTS AND SURGICAL APPLIANCES.

1 Aneurism needles and director. * 1 Ordinary Aneurism needle. 1 Director. 2 doz. Kocher's Artery forceps. 3 dez. Spencer Wells artery forceps. 1 bone chisel - McEwan's to. 88 1 bone chisel -1 Osteotome - McEwan's 1". 30. . 1 -1 bone Drill - Archimedean - 3 drills. 1 pair bone cutting forceps. × 1 pair rib cutting forceps. 1 pair Lion forceps. 1 pair necrosis forceps - angled. l pair gouge forceps. 1 set 4 awls in metal handles. 1 screw driver in fixed handle. 2 steel bone plates - 4" straight. 2 -99 - 5* 2 doz. assorted bone plates - sizes 1-8. 1 gross assorted screws for bone plates. 1 periosteum detacher. 1 respatory - Farabeeuf - straight. 1 pair Bayer's bullet for ceps. 2 gunshot probes - 10" and 8". 1 mallet - Heath's. 1 amputating saw - moveable back. 1 . " - knife - 8". 1 Syme's ankle joint knife. 1 bistoury - straight - sharp. . - curved 1 - probe. 2 doz. Scalpels. 1 small hone for sharpening knives. 4 copper retractors. 2 Thomson's retractors- 14". 2 Volkmann -- blunt 4 prong. 1 metacarpal saw. 2 Gigli's saw handles c hooks. 1 -c saw. t doz. 12" saw blades. 1 flexible guide for Gigli's saw. 1 Hey's saw. 1 Horsley's trephine 1". 1 skull elevator. 1 pair scissors 52 curved on flat. . 5" angles. 1 -2 --5" straight blunt point. 1 --6" sharp. 1 -. 5" probe points. 2 dozen pairs areasing scissors - screw joints. 1 Volkmann's sharp spoon 5/8. 2 Lane's tissue forceps - 2 - 5 teeth. 6 towel clip forseps. 2 Foulis' tourniquets. 2 Petit's spiral tourniquet. 1 rubber bandage - Esmarch - 4 yds. 1 brass syringe - 4 oz. 2 Croft's mouth gags. 1 forchead mirror - with head band. 1 meal handles for laryngeal mirror. 2 laryngeal mirrors to git handle - sizes 2 and 4. 1 stomach tube. 4 rectal tubes. > 2 blunt hooks. 1 sharp hook. /

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AMBULANCE DRIVERS (SWH)

SERBIA

Elsie Inglis was not content to manage the Scottish Women's Hospitals from Edinburgh or London. She wanted to be in the thick of things. From December 1914 until her death in November 1917 she travelled extensively across Europe, visiting the various hospitals as well as being shifted to and fro by the vagaries and fortunes of war. However, it was in Serbia that Elsie expended her main effort and where she served both in the operating theatre and in directing improvements in general treatment.

Around 700 Scottish women went to look after the Serbs in World War One, yet the initial batch could not have arrived at a worse time. The country was in the grip of a typhus epidemic and starvation was taking hold. According to one Serbian historian, "The women went into the jaws of death".

Serbia was strategically very important to the Allies. Its geographical position prevented the Germans opening a direct train connection with their Ottoman allies in Turkey. Serbia was like a cork in a bottle: it stopped Germany escalating the war eastwards.



WOUNDED SERBIAN SOLDIERS

The Serb Army was essentially a peasant force. Their equipment was unsophisticated: many soldiers had no boots, just cloth wound round their feet. Yet they were good fighters and they won the first allied victory of the war over the Austrians. However, their victory was a double-edged sword. Sixty thousand Austrian prisoners of war, like all soldiers in World War One, carried lice which, in cold weather, brought typhus as they burrowed into the warmest parts of the body.

By the time the Scottish Women's Hospitals arrived on 6 February 1915, the epidemic had already taken tens of thousands. Serbia had 430 doctors and no nurses to speak of. Typhus had taken a third of the doctors. The Scottish Women's Hospitals were like a blessing from heaven. Elsie was immediately into her stride and spoke to the Serbian high command to ensure the imposition of basic preventive measures such as quarantine. Uniforms were boiled or burned – all body hair was removed and patients were sprayed with benzene and bathed in paraffin. The nurses wore rubber uniforms and wellington boots to protect themselves, with rags soaked in camphor wrapped around the tops of the boots. Despite these precautions, four of them died from the disease.



NURSES OF THE SWH WITH THE SERBIAN ARMY

By April 1915 the weather had warmed up and the epidemic was over. Elsie set about creating three hospitals – introducing ventilation, running water, fresh bed linen and sanitation, all of which was revolutionary at the time. When they had arrived the Serbian wounded were check by jowl in tottering barns laid with straw.

Elsie designed the hospitals to outlast the war. She recognised the country's need and wanted to leave a useful legacy. She shared information with other hospitals and she planned to set up a nursing college in Serbia. During the summer of 1915, when things were quieter on the war front, the doctors and nurses went into the wider community, treating women and children. Staff got time off too. Elsie understood the importance of this, no doubt recalling her cycling expeditions back home.

The nurses grew very fond of the Serbian people. The Serbs showed open displays of love and affection. They were very hospitable, warm and family oriented. One observer wrote: "It's very difficult to say goodbye quickly in Serbia". Stories abound of the soldiers, when they were better, bringing flowers for the nurses.

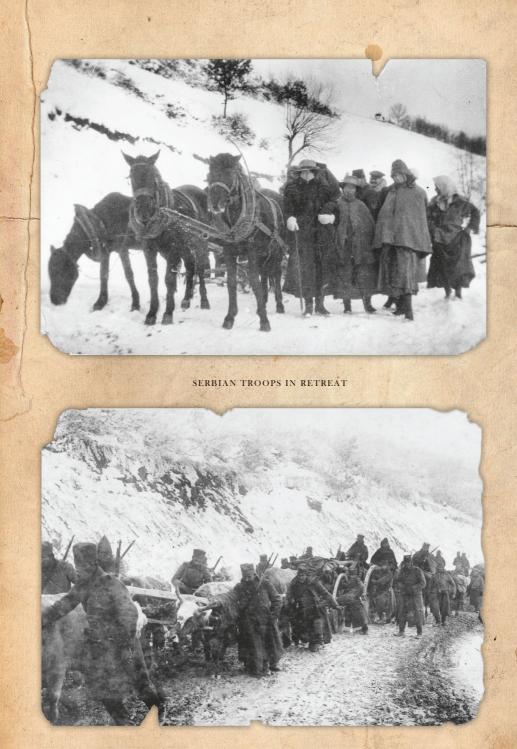
Having a more leisurely summer to explore the country, its people and its customs helped solidify this affection. Many remarked how much like the landscape of Scotland Serbia was, only sunnier. Elsie herself said: *"These beloved Serbians, you cannot help loving them"*.



COLUMNS OF SERBIAN TROOPS IN RETREAT IN KOSOVO WITH ONE SOLDIER, ON THE LEFT, STRUGGLING TO WALK.

By October 1915 the lull was over. For 14 months the Serbs had held the eastern front against the Austro-Hungarians. They had become a thorn in the side of Germany. Accordingly nearly 700,000 troops massed on Serbia's borders. The Bulgarians sided with the Central Powers, keen on wreaking revenge for their losses in the Balkan wars of 1912-13. Serbia was surrounded and their army was severely defeated.

That winter it retreated south west towards the Adriatic Coast. Forty women from the Scottish Women's Hospitals followed. Elsie and others stayed. The whole nation was in panic and on the move. Patients were literally running out of hospitals and dying in the snow. Elsie said to her staff: *"It's your choice. Serbia has lost"*. She was furious that the British and French had not sent reinforcements sooner. Two hundred thousand soldiers, men, women and children died on the retreat, including some of Elsie's staff who lost their lives in fatal accidents.



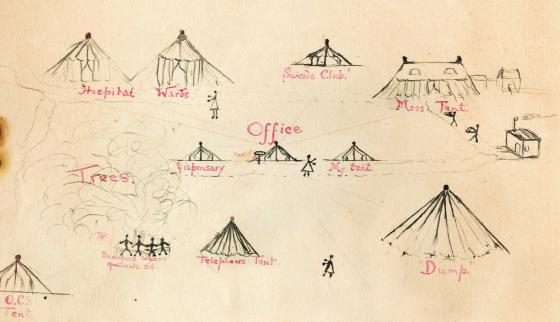




THE PERILS OF THE GREAT RETREAT

SISTER MARGARET CROWE was one of the forty women from the Scottish Women's Hospitals who accompanied the Serbian Army in its retreat in 1915. The narrow tracks over the high mountains were windy, steep and treacherous, compounded by ice and snow. At one point the ambulance she was in went skidding over a yawning precipice. Everyone in the vehicle was hurt except Margaret. She put her good fortune down to her long coils of hair, which helped absorb the impact of the crash. A fellow nurse, Caroline Toughill, was less fortunate and was seriously injured.

Margaret accompanied her to a dressing station and nursed Caroline until her death a few days later. Margaret attended Caroline's funeral before re-joining the retreat.



Part of the reason Elsie stayed was that she was not going to let the Germans get hold of the medical equipment. But she also made things difficult for the Germans and Austrians by quoting the Geneva Convention wherever she could. Their occupation was brutal, with rape, shootings and hangings a commonplace occurrence. Elsie was as outspoken as she could be, whilst at the same time looking after the German wounded.

Elsie and the staff who remained in Serbia were repatriated in February 1916. The returning women were exhausted and not in great condition. Elsie herself, having had cancer since the beginning of the war, was becoming increasingly exhausted. Her thoughts were never for herself though. "What's become of my poor Serbians?" she asked, and was soon busy organising talks and speeches raising money for the Serbians.

BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

Over the winter of 1915–1916 the Serbian Army had been recuperating on the island of Corfu. By April 1916 they were in Salonika (today's Thessaloniki), fighting their way home, which they continued to do until October 1918. The women from the Scottish Women's Hospitals were with them every step of the way.

In 1916 Elsie received instruction from the Serbian government, exiled in Corfu, to provide hospitals for two Serbian divisions fighting on the Russian Front.

These divisions were made up not of Serbs but of other Slavs, mostly Croats and Slovenes, from the Habsburg Empire who had been conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian army and were then given their freedom after they had been captured by the Russians. Elsie answered the call, which meant she could be with the Serbs once more. However her long journey to the Russian front further depleted her health.

Although the trenches of the eastern front were not as thick or as well developed as those of the western front, they still shaped the fighting in Russia. For almost a year Elsie continued to look after Serbian and Russian wounded, sometimes working 56 out of 60 hours in theatre and never revealing her own fragile condition.





REPATRIATED AFTER BEING PRISONERS OF WAR. VIENNA, EARLY 1916 (ABOVE AND BELOW LEFT)

Then, from March to November 1917, the world changed again with the Russian Revolution. The impact on the eastern front was that the Russians lost interest in the war. Romania, which had joined the allies in September 1916 and was then rapidly overrun, had been kept in the war largely thanks to Russian support but was now increasingly isolated. The same fate threatened the so-called Serb units, which were earmarked to support the Romanians.

Elsie was told: "You must come home" but she was concerned about what would happen to the Serbs in Russia if they carried on fighting while the Russian army did not. "As long as the Serbians fight we'll stick with them," she told her staff. To the War Office she declared that, unless the Serbs in Russia were granted safe passage to return home at the war's end, she was not leaving.

She was not a lone voice though. There were many orderlies from well-to-do families who could exert influence in high places back home. Accordingly, safe passage was granted to take the Serbs from the Russian front to join the main Serb army and the other allied forces in Macedonia. Elsie could come home.

By now she was really sick and bed-ridden and those around her were aware that all was not well.

THE LONG JOURNEY HOME

At the end of October 1917 Elsie and the unit left for the Russian port of Archangel on a train journey that lasted a fortnight. For someone as ill as she was it was gruelling. Her companions only just persuaded her to travel in a second-class compartment. Leah Leneman writes: "There were dangers during the slow journey through revolutionary Russia and it grew ever colder with fears that ice might close the port of Archangel before they could set sail. They got there on 9th November. To reach the deck of the ship Elsie had to climb twenty feet of rope ladder, since there was no alternative, with one orderly in front and one behind".

They also discovered there was a strike in progress at the port, which meant their equipment would not be loaded. However, the strikers did not know Elsie and she was not leaving it behind. A smile and a word or two from her and the ship set sail with the equipment on board.

BURIAL IN EDINBURGH OF DR. ELSIE INGLIS, FOUNDER OF SCOTS WOMEN'S HOSPITALS.



The functed of Dr. Edics Inglis, founder of the Scottinh Women's Hopsibile for Foreign Service, took place setterday attenzoon to the Dana Cameter, Edinburgh and distances in the second sector of the second sector of the second sector of the second sector of the second sector. Property of Scribe attended the SPIC Sector Sector of the Se

They tried to stop off at Orkney but a violent storm meant they could not get ashore. In spite of further setbacks - at one point the engine room was under seven feet of water. There was a risk of icebergs and submarines, and the captain once admitted that he had no idea where they were – on 23 November 1917 they finally reached Newcastle, although again due to storms they could not get ashore the first night.

The next morning, though desperately ill, Elsie got dressed in uniform with all her medals before going ashore. She walked around the deck and thanked all the Serbian officers on board who had come with her. She was taken to the Station Hotel where she died on 26 November 1917. Although Elsie did not make it back to Edinburgh her niece Eve had received a telegram informing her of the situation. She and Elsie's sister Eva journeyed to Newcastle to be with her. Elsie's dying Scottish Women's Hospital has achieved was released. words were: "So, I am going over to the other live in our national history. side. For a long time I meant to live, but now I know I am going. This is wonderful - but this is wonderful".

A large crowd attended her Funeral Service in St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh on 29 November 1917, following which a cortege took her body to the Dean Cemetery where it was laid to rest. Crowds lined the streets. The nation had lost a remarkable woman. Sincere commiserations were sent from 10 Downing Street and Buckingham Palace. A bust of Elsie was brought to Edinburgh as a gift from the Crown Prince of Serbia. It is now on display in the entrance hall of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

A GREAT SCOTSWOMAN.

Dr. Elsie Inglis, founder of the Scottish Women's Hospital, has given her life for her country, or rather for humanity's sake.

It matters not that her death occurred on British soil; the cause of it was noble devotion to the great crusade and to the wounded who have suffered in it.

Scotland will treasure her name as a bright symbol to wave before the ideals R OF SCOTS of its womanhood. This brave Scots- SPITAL. woman, one of the women pioneers of her profession, held in great repute in founder of the Edinburgh and beyond, waited for no I, died suddenly invitation addressed to the services and nglish port only initiative at her command; she founded rom Russia. the Scots Hospital, which came to be a August, 1916, deeply revered wherever the Allied cause ad war, and with did work in the is being fought for, and offered the Unit going incredible for immediate use.

The result was that a band of glorious women from Scotland shared in the agonies of both Serbia and Rumania, morrow. agonies of both Serbia and runnania, motion, and did their utmost to alleviate them, her in India, her leaving an undying name and a com- e. She was a both same pelling inspiration to the army of of Edinburgh, women now serving in the West behind offich Women's the fighting line.

te fighting line. These columns have often told, in the at Krushievatz, words of Dr. Inglis herself, what the ir both by them and endured. It is a record that will erved with the sian Army, and live in our national history.

INGLIS.

from the ship

home, and, un-which she had health.

at St. Giles'

being the only woman on whom that honour had been bestowed. She brought her unit safely home last Saturday. In the midst of a storm sho was brought ashore very ill on Sunday. and passed away at 9.45 on 'onday night' An official of the London units of the Scottish Women's Hospitals said yester-day:-

Scottish Women's Hospitals sam yester-day:--"Dr. Inglis had been in failing health all the way home, but nothing would have induced her to give up any of the duties which she had undertaken. "She was truly one of the splendid women of the nation, which, no doubt, will pay her that honour in her death which it failed to do in her life. Honours have been conferred on people far less worthy than she to receive them. We feel that there ought to be a memorial service in Dr. Elsie Inglis was a lady of outstand-Dr. Elsie Linglis was a lady of outstand-

London." Dr. Elsie Inglis was a lady of outstand-ing personality, and in Edinburgh, where she spent so much of her life, she was one of the pioneers of the movement which led to the recognition of her sex as fully qualified doctors. Besides being a pioneer in the Women's Hospital work, she will also be remembered as a fearless exponent of the rights of women for the Parliamentary franchise.

ELSIE INGLIS PREPARES FOR HER LAST JOURNEY

So, I am going over to the other side. The secret beast I thought I had the beating of through sheer will – this canker that divides by stealth and multiplies, has taken hold.

Only three weeks past, as Arctic ice clawed Archangel's port, I hauled myself up a rope ladder, to the ship's deck, a fluttering fleck on the vessel's flank in frozen air. I'd soon be home and rested, instruments prepared – hooks, clamps scalpels, saws – ready to set out afresh with my women's team, to heal men's wounds; but not this time, it seems – I'm going over to the other side.

I'd return to Serbia, if I could, give thanks to old comrades. I'd drink a long, cool cup from the fountain they built there, those blessed men, in battle's lull, to honour us, above the Crkvenac spring, where, in sun and moonlit flash of gunfire, my women, saving lives, proved what's plain as day: that we are equal – daughters, sons, husbands, wives.

So many battles still to fight, for votes, for wages, health and peace; but mine are done, the hidden war beneath my skin almost won. "Its just an onward journey, the last we take," father said before he died. Another ladder looms. Thought dissolves. I'm going over to the other side.

> GERDA STEVENSON, MARCH 2017 Gerda Stevenson is an award-winning Scottish actress, director, playwright and poet.

Diary extracts in relation to the Scottish Women's Hospital at Royaumont Abbey, a former Cistercian Abbey 30km north of Paris. Extracts taken from Angels of Mercy by Eileen Crofton

On the peaceful environment

"The beautiful Gothic cloisters offered a habitation that for picturesque repose was unobtainable even by millionaire sanatoria; by day a harbour of unaccustomed novelty and enchantment; and when evening was come, a night of silence and stars - the soothing babble of the fountain lulling the nerve-racked sufferers to peaceful sleep."

Antonio de Navarro

On the most challenging of laundries

"On arrival I was confronted with seventy piles of filthy tattered clothing, most of it in sacks, ranged in some semblance of order round and across the room, each sack with a number in a penny notebook, giving the owner's name and the ward he was in The cowsheds with their stinking, crawling burden became a nightmare. The pile was higher than my own head."

Vera Collum, X-ray technician

Orderly duties

"15 beds to make myself, perfect stream of bedpans, 3 horrid dressings and then bandage up and clear away Cleaning feet and nails is a smelly job. They're very particular about nails here because of the microbes."

Marjorie Starr, a young Canadian orderly

On her first operation

"all tendons and nerves mixed up - agony of dressings so great they give him chloroform, and it took 6 of us to hold him down while he was going under - got all sprinkled with blood and pus as he was very septic."

Marjorie Starr

On stumps and limbs

"There are several very bad cases of gas gangrene, which is nasty and smelly and, of course, very dangerous. I was very glad I wasn't the poor VAD* yesterday who got a leg to burn as the theatre sisters were too busy to attend to it. An incinerator was provided for the disposal of limbs, dressings and other rubbish. It is bad enough to hold the stump for dressings without having to handle the lifeless limb."

Marjorie Starr

*A member of the Voluntary Aid Detachment, which provided field nursing services in both world wars.

Halloween 1916

"On Friday night we had Halloween potatoes with all sorts of things stirred in them, rings, buttons, badges and even British threepenny bits... We had games too, hunt the slipper and musical chairs without the chairs when you flop to the ground when the music stops and the last left standing goes out... Hunt the slipper gave an opportunity to those of us who are better with their arms than their legs. Then we had a great sing-song, all the men's favourite trench songs 'Le Petit Chapeau", 'Tipperary' etc."

Mrs A.M. Robertson

New Year 1917

"This piece de resistance was a performance of Three Blind Mice. Fat and with a round face Orderly Berry was the farmer's wife armed with a large wooden knife covered with silver paper. The mice were clad in grey knitted helmets, long grey operation stockings, grey sateen costumes, tails of dressing gown cords, pink sateen ears and whiskers from the straw casing of a champagne bottle. Holding each other's tails and with Berry flourishing the knife, gleaming in sinister fashion in the lamplight, they burst into Canada Ward, squeaking with fright, leaping on and off beds, dodging behind tables and chairs, with Berry hacking at their tails. A moment's surprised silence then a roar of applause from the delighted patients."

Royaumont Newsletter

The women of Scotland

"The women of Scotland have cause to be proud of their representatives, who will surely leave a fragrant memory behind them at Royaumont If any male doubts the capacity of women to organise, administrate and create a cheerful order, let him go to Royaumont."

The poet Lawrence Binyon, best known for his poem 'For the Fallen'

On the cold, 1918

"Our breath froze to the sheets, our hair to the pillows, our rubber boots to the floor, our sponge would have seriously hurt anyone if by chance them as bombs"

Nurse Etta Inglis

COUNT FRANCESCO BORELLI, A SERBIAN OFFICER, IN CONVERSATION WITH DR. FRANCES MAY DICKINSON BERRY, AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR THE LATE DR. ELSIE INGLIS, ST. MARGARET'S CHURCH, WESTMINSTER, 6 DECEMBER 1917.



Elsie mand Inglis

LEGACY

The Scottish Women's Hospitals continued serving the war effort in France until 1919, tending to the wounded from the last great advances on the Western Front.

When the Scottish Women's Hospitals were disbanded, it was decided that remaining funds should be used to provide a memorial to Elsie. This resulted in the building of the Elsie Inglis Memorial Maternity Hospital in Edinburgh, which opened in July 1925 with 20 beds. The bed complement quickly increased and by the time of the hospital's closure in 1988 it had reached 82.

Yet perhaps the greatest achievement of Elsie and her 1,500 colleagues is that they had proved, beyond a shadow of doubt, that women were as competent as men. With grateful thanks to the following:

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with a special thanks to everyone who has kindly shared personal stories which feature within this book.

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