

Sybil Campbell Library Monograph Number 1

Women and War

Summary of a talk by Nancy Edwards, 11th February 2004

The Sybil Campbell Library resources in this field are strongest for the period 1914-1945. For World War I the strength of the collection lies in the medical sphere, where trained women (doctors and nurses) could make a contribution, despite initial male opposition; as a result Dr Elsie Inglis founded the Scottish Women's Hospitals under the aegis of the French Red Cross. The work of Frances Ivens, one of the second generation of pioneer women doctors, as Chief Medical Officer at the Royaumont Abbey hospital has been described by Dr Eileen Crofton in the 20th Henry Cohen Lecture on the History of Medicine. Their X-ray car was at first the only facility in the area. Later, their casualty clearing station at Villers-Coterets was the only hospital capable of receiving patients during the offensive of late May 1918. One nurse, Lesley Smith, illustrated her account, *Four Years out of my Life*, with her own woodcuts. Others were trained as anaesthetists by Dr William Herringham, *A Physician in France*. Women provided medical services outside France, especially in the Balkans. I. Elmslie Hutton served *With a women's unit in Serbia, Salonika and Sebastopol*. Vera Brittain left Oxford to join the VAD, recounting her service in *Testament of Youth*. There is little about other women's services in the Library, although Hugh Popham describes in *FANY 1907-1984* how the services of well-to-do women ambulance drivers were also rejected by the British government. The change in women's employment on the home front can be seen from Mary Drake McFeely's *Lady Inspectors: the campaign for a better workplace*. Women factory inspectors, who only dealt with women workers, were involved with workrooms set up by Queen Mary's Work for Women Fund and gave advice to manufacturers. In 1915 200,000 women left domestic service for war work. Rose Squire was involved in welfare in munitions factories, where women doctors reported on the effects on the workers' health. Some women were employed on precision engineering work, to the satisfaction of Lady Parsons, a suffrage campaigner and founder member of the Women's Engineering Society. Others were still working for peace, like Kate Courtney, the sister of Beatrice Webb, whose *Extracts from a diary during the War* refers to the Women's Conference at the Hague and the Women's International Committee; she also served on the Belgian Committee for Refugees.

Between the wars, women were involved in reconstruction, help to refugees and the peace movement. A. Ruth Fry tells in *A Quaker Adventure* of a year's work in setting up a maternity hospital, refugee camps, famine relief, the Viennese Land Settlement Movement, children's homes and anti-tuberculosis work in welfare centres. Both Winifred Holby and Vera Brittain wrote and spoke on the subject of the criminal futility of war. *Testament of Friendship* covers their partnership and *Testament of a Generation* their journalism. The Federation's work with graduate refugees from 1933 onwards is now better known, as a result of Heather Nash's pamphlet, *Refugees and the British Federation of University Women*; the original records are in the Women's Library.

For World War II there is a general survey by Vera Douie, *Daughters of Britain*. Katharine Bentley Beaman wrote two accounts of the WRAF, *Wings on her Shoulders* and *Partners in Blue*; she also published *Green Sleeves* on the WVS. Felicity Peake, who became Director of the WRAF, wrote in *Pure Chance* of the early days of the service and drew an unfavourable comparison between conditions for male and female officers. More information is available on medical services. *Women in medicine during World War II* gives accounts of the wartime experiences of women doctors and medical students, serving in Liverpool, the RAMC and with ambulance units. Quakers were again active; A. Tegla Davies describes the work of the *Friends Ambulance Unit...1939-1946*. The BBC listening service at Evesham employed a number of women; the history was written by Olive Renier and Vladimir Rubinstein, *Assigned to Listen*. Information on women's lives in wartime is given by Mavis Nicholson, *What did you do in the War, Mummy?* and in *Wartime Women: a Mass-Observation Anthology 1937-1945*, edited by Dorothy Sheridan. Françoise Rigby, *In defiance*, covers the Belgian Resistance movement. Two works in French deal with concentration camp victims: Rosane, *Terres de Cendres 1943-1945* and *De l'Université aux Campes de Concentration: Temoignages Strasbourgeois*

Kate Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage*, published in conjunction with the Women and War exhibition at the Imperial War Museum provides a more comprehensive picture of the subject.