

## Brendan Flynn: Local History Project: Wicklow Women in the Great War

### Introduction and background.

#### Introduction

Two reasons prompt this article. The first is that young, single, middle-class women disappeared from social view in Wicklow in the early part of 1915<sup>1</sup>. The second, related reason, is the dearth of information and literature about what they were actually doing<sup>2</sup>.

If you asked anyone in Ireland today to close their eyes and picture a scene from the Great War, that scene would inevitably be a labyrinth of trenches in the mud, or possible long straggling lines of young men attacking across a barren, muddy landscape while being mowed down by artillery shells and machine guns. And this truly awful war was just like that. But the image never includes women, even though most of the wounded survivors of those attacks were treated within hours by women. Those women washed their broken bodies and all too often held their hands while they took their last breath. What makes that scene quite bizarre, is that most of the soldiers were working-class, while most of the nurses were middle-class women who would never have dreamt of doing such an outré thing just a few years earlier. This series of articles sets out to explain that conundrum, by showing exactly what the women of County Wicklow did during that war. It is a story of self-sacrifice, endless effort and a constant striving towards doing everything humanly possible to help their country and its young men in their hour of need.

To fully appreciate the extent of Women's war work in County Wicklow it is necessary to begin with an overview of the way in which these women's organisations actually worked within society. There were numerous voluntary women's groups operating in Wicklow during the war, the most significant of which were philanthropic individuals and small groups; the Voluntary Aid Division (VAD); War Hospitals of various kinds; Sphagnum Moss collection and its transformation into wound dressings; and War Work Depot's which manufactured bandages and wound dressings of all sizes and shapes; splints, crutches, bed stools and many other goods that were essential in a hospital system grossly overloaded with patients and desperately short of experienced and qualified doctor's and nursing staff<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> With one exception, married women won all of the lady's prizes in Wicklow Golf Club during the war years 1915-1918. Prior to the war these prizes were usually won by single women, and this pattern resumed from 1919 onwards.

<sup>2</sup> When I originally wrote about this topic in 2007, I did an internet trawl on the subject which threw up thousands of titles on Irish History. I could find none on women's war work during the Great War. That situation has since improved, but much more needs to be done to correct this imbalanced view of Irish history.

<sup>3</sup> The hospital system in Britain would have collapsed had it not been for the Red Cross and St. John's Ambulance Brigade (separate organisations who joined together at the start of WW1). During the war the combined organisations created over 3,000 auxiliary hospitals for treating the wounded, 352 in London alone.

## Militarism and Imperialism

Since war was the catalyst that caused these women to act as they did, something must be said about what caused such a catastrophic conflict.

The Great War was the result of militaristic posturing and imperial ambition by the great European powers, notably Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia. In addition to these, international defence treaties and the strength and importance of these empires dragged a number of lesser nations like Italy, Romania and Turkey into the conflict. Given the fact that over 20 million men died in this disastrous conflict, it is surely ironic that the leaders of the three main participants were First Cousins<sup>4</sup>.

A militaristic form of imperialism often called “jingoism” pervaded European society at the time as people everywhere became obsessed with uniforms, guns, violence and all things military. Public reaction typically demonstrated itself as ‘an aggressive nationalism’ as ‘schoolchildren throughout much of Europe were taught that their country was the greatest nation in history, and that their enemies were craven reptiles’<sup>5</sup>. In Britain, a new defence scheme envisaged the realm being defended by a mobilised civilian population. Yeomanry and Territorial units were formed including, for the first time, women’s nursing units. These were Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS) in 1902; the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD) in 1907; and the Territorial Force Nursing Service (TFNS) in 1908. Aggressive nationalism also affected Ireland, as is evinced by nationalists “blood sacrifice” during the 1916 Rising, which significantly also included a women’s corps entitled Cumann na mBan. In the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that young Wicklow women were immediately attracted to uniformed organisations when war broke out. Almost all of these joined the VAD as FANY was a relatively small and elite upper-class organisation, while QAIMNS and the TFNS only accepted professionally trained nurses (TN)<sup>6</sup>.

## Wicklow Society in 1914

Like Britain, County Wicklow and indeed all of Ireland was at the time a *class-structured society* in which the working-classes barely counted. Protestants of various denominations dominated the Irish middle-classes until the mid-nineteenth-century, after which a Catholic middle-class rose. Mainly consisting of farmers, these were quick to emulate the style and behaviour of the Protestant “gentry”. This resulted in quite large pockets of the middle-class’s clustering around the towns of Wicklow, Arklow, Bray & Greystones. Each of these towns had some importance. Wicklow was the county’s administrative centre, and agents of the state, like judiciary, coastguard, military and police, all lived and worked there. Arklow with its fishing, shipping and explosive industries was commercially important. Bray & Greystones were fashionable resorts with a high proportion of upper and middle-class

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<sup>4</sup> The leaders of Great Britain, Germany and Russia were all grandsons of Queen Victoria of Britain.

<sup>5</sup> Merriman, *History of Modern Europe*, p.1015.

<sup>6</sup> At this point in our history professional nurses were known as ‘trained nurses’.

residents. This often-transient class needed servants and so provided much-needed employment in what was otherwise a largely agricultural county. These 'society' people modelled their code of behaviour on their English counterpart. That model was a set of prudish social values based on 'class' and the gender concepts of 'domesticity' and 'separate spheres'.

'Class' attitudes were maintained in daily life by the 'correct' use of titles, which constantly reminded people of their 'proper' station in life. At the time it was socially taboo for someone of a 'higher' class to associate or even talk to a person from a perceived 'lower' class, so the titles Mister, Mrs., Master, and Miss were all insisted upon and were constantly used in public to denote age, gender, marital and particularly social status. The titled upper-classes, of which there were plenty in County Wicklow, expected to be called 'my lord' or 'your ladyship' or 'your grace' etc. The system applied to the middle-classes was slightly more complicated: Males were called Master or Mister depending on age, and this did not change with marriage. Women's titles did. In general, married women were called Mrs., while unmarried females were called Miss. Thus, a married woman would always be addressed in public as Mrs. Doherty, Mrs. Murphy etc., even by friends, while single women would be addressed as Miss Doyle, Miss O'Neill etc. Only in private would these titles be dropped. However, a daughter's eligibility for marriage slightly complicated this arrangement, as the eldest girl used her surname only to denote that fact to prospective suitors. Thus, Miss Nolan, Miss Byrne etc. denotes the eldest and most marriageable girl, while her younger sisters were simply referred to as Miss Alice, Miss Mary, etc.

Both upper and middle classes constantly reminded the lower classes of their inferior status by omitting any of these titles when addressing them. Working-class men were always referred to as Clancy, Wolohan etc., regardless of how well they were known by the person addressing them. This system was also used in the 'big houses' when talking to the servants.

'Domesticity' is the notion that because of their superior emotional and moral attributes, women were more suited for the home and raising children. 'Separate spheres' are based on what men saw as the natural talents of each sex. This view held that men were more suited for public life, while women were the guardians of the home. All of these views seem archaic now, but at the time they were widely supported by society and endorsed by all of the churches. This was particularly significant in Ireland, where the Catholic Church held the view that women's principal role was that of mother.

There was an embryotic suffrage campaign going on in Britain and Ireland at the time, but no evidence exists of active support for it in County Wicklow. Social life here revolved around dinners and social visits; dancing, golf, cricket, hunting, riding, tennis, sailing and even roller-skating. Each was the scene of intense social activity during the "season", as eligible "singles" looked for a suitable partner. War brought an end to all of this.

### Wicklow Women's Reaction to the war.

The female inhabitants of County Wicklow instinctively reacted to this great social crisis by organising ways of helping their community, which included:

- Philanthropic works carried out by groups and individuals (Book 1).
- War Hospitals in County Wicklow and their VAD nurses (Book 2).
- Wicklow VAD nurses on Active Service in Europe and the Middle East (Book 3).
- War Work Depot's and IWHS Depots in County Wicklow (Book 4).
- Collection and processing of Sphagnum Moss in County Wicklow (Book 5).

In organising and successfully carrying out these activities, the women of County Wicklow performed an extraordinary fete that is quite unique in the county's social history. It was never intended at the start, but the absence of male leaders during the war had gave women the opportunity to excel both in leadership and in traditional male spheres of work. Our women grabbed those chances and turned them into a triumph.

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## Brendan Flynn: Local History Project: Wicklow Women in the Great War

### Book 1: Philanthropic works carried out by groups and individuals.

Within weeks of the outbreak of war individual local women in County Wicklow began collecting food and clothing for Benefits Groups supporting the navy and local regiments like the Royal Dublin Fusiliers and Royal Artillery. In practice this consisted of collecting fresh vegetables for the Royal Navy and knitting scarves, hats, mittens and socks for soldiers living for months on end in wet and freezing holes in France. Four years later at the end of the war this initial instinctive philanthropic help had metamorphized into an elaborate network of war hospitals, VAD nursing sisters, moss collection and processing centres and IWHS work depots making multiple kinds of wound dressings; together with bandages, splints, bed linen, clothing etc. for the wounded, all of whom had lost all of their possessions when they were evacuated to hospital. It sounds quite pathetic now, but one of the most popular gifts to patients in County Wicklow hospitals were the 'treasure bags' which they were given to hold their new razors, combs, letters, prayer books etc. Many thousands of these had been made by the women of County Wicklow and distributed around the globe. But all of this was in the future, what faced Wicklow Women in 1914 was the simple fact that their men were at war and they had a burning desire to do something to help them.

Some of this work is being dealt with in more detail in other sections of this project, with this section concentrating on Philanthropic works carried out by individuals and small groups.

A lot of middle-class war-work can be attributed to **philanthropy**, as this was traditionally one of the few areas of public life open to women. A second factor was the important **social/civic function** of the middle-classes, who were seen at the time as the on-the-spot leaders and controllers of working-class morality. British society at the time was based on a class system of merit, where public duty was rewarded by the state. This had its origins in military service to the Crown. Prior to the English Civil War (1642-1651) there was no professional army in Britain<sup>7</sup>. Whenever there was a conflict, the Crown expected aristocrats and landed gentry to provide a levy of their tenants to act as soldiers. The number provided was a ratio of their title and land holding, so that the bigger the estate, the more soldiers the land owner was expected to provide. Because the armies were amateur, the Crown awarded titles and land to landlords for their efficiency and service during war. The remnants of this system are still in existence today, as Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth annually confers honours on New Year's Day and on her Official Birthday to people who have performed some meritorious service to the state. These social obligations existed in 1914 and because of the war, normally male obligations passed by default to their female relatives. This explains why middle-class women engaged so readily in war work.

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<sup>7</sup> Haythornwaite, Philip, *The English Civil War 1642-1651: An Illustrated Military History*, (Poole, hardback, 1983), pp100-103.



When war was declared the thoughts of middle-class women instantly turned to philanthropy. Within two weeks of war being declared, Miss Ida Halpin organised a mixed competition in aid of the Prince of Wales National Relief Fund at Wicklow Golf Club that raised £3-2-0<sup>8</sup>. Other competitions for the same charity, and Belgian relief Fund followed. With soldiers facing the prospect of

winter in France, sewing bees began appearing. These gatherings made coats, woollen hats (the famous Balaclava helmets), scarves and mittens for soldiers. In Bray Mrs. Randall appealed for clothes, equipment and money for Royal Navy hospitals<sup>9</sup>. Later in the year Mrs. Wilbraham and her Honorary Secretary Mrs N. Howe of Sydenham, Bray jointly launched an appeal for plumb puddings for sailors of the fleet, specifying that they were to be tied up in a cloth and delivered to the Town Hall on particular dates before 11 o'clock<sup>10</sup>. In December two Wicklow Town VAD's distributed Christmas parcels to 1,100 Royal Dublin Fusiliers, mostly from County Wicklow<sup>11</sup>. This practice continued throughout the war. In Greystones a concert was held that raised £43 for the Irish Prisoners of War Fund<sup>12</sup>. A fete and gymkhana held at Woodbrook raised money for the Comforts Fund of the Princess Patricia's Military Hospital in Bray. Organised by Lady Powerscourt, this attracted large numbers of entries<sup>13</sup>.

Modern examples of this instinctive 'want to help' attitude can be seen in County Wicklow today when women become involved in charities for Cancer and other forms of medical research after a member of their family had been helped by that charity. The exact same reaction occurred in 1914 when women with family members serving at sea with the Royal Navy, or whose husbands, fathers, brothers, sons or boyfriends were serving with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers wrote letters home talking of the freezing cold, or the lack of basic comforts. To some extent this feminine reaction was only to be expected. What is notable however, is the remarkable organisation of the women involved in these philanthropic exercises, and the fact that they stuck to their task, continuing it right through to the end of the war.

Some random examples of collections in Greystones during 1916 were Miss Rosalind Burke of 'Silverstream', Miss G. Handcock of 'Khiva' and Mrs. West and Mrs. Fitzgibbon, all of whom collected separately for the Royal Dublin Fusiliers Fund at different times of the year. Mrs. West also collected for the Royal Munster Fusiliers Fund, while Mrs. Wingfield collected socks for gunners in the 25<sup>th</sup> Battery Royal Field Artillery.

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<sup>8</sup> Flynn, Brendan, *A History of Wicklow Golf Club 1904-2004*, (Wicklow, 2004), p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> *Irish Life*, 19-11-1915, p. 241.

<sup>10</sup> *Irish Times*, 04-12-1915. A maximum of 5 to 6 pounds was specified.

<sup>11</sup> *Wicklow People*, 11-12-1915, the two ladies were Miss Tottenham and Miss Linda McPhail.

<sup>12</sup> *Irish Life*, 1-12-1915, p. 350.

<sup>13</sup> *Irish Life*, 20-10-1916, pp 604-607. Entries for some of the races were 28 for the Champion Stone Wall, and 25 and 31 in two others.

Philanthropy wasn't only about collecting money. While younger women joined the VAD, older, more mature women became involved in knitting and sewing, in the process creating a number of **Needlework Guilds** around the county that co-ordinated and concentrated their efforts. Volunteers were to be found all over the county, but particularly efficient groups developed in Greystones, Bray and Carnew. This particular activity was sponsored by Her Highness Queen Mary, who put herself forward as patron of the movement. She later awarded quite beautiful medals to women who achieved high production standards. The output of the Needlework Guilds in Bray and Greystones was simply astonishing, while the smaller **Carnew Needlework Guild** was also very productive. Miss Beatrice Symes of Main Street, Carnew, was the first Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer of this rural organisation, a function which she later passed on to her sister Mabel. She in turn later passed the baton on to Mrs. Ethel Smith of Clonegal, who was based for a time in Corrig Castle, Dun Laoghaire. Many women from the Carnew and general south Wicklow area were affiliated to this Guild.



Badge awarded to members of Queen Mary's Needlework

The **Greystones Needlework Guild** opened in 1915 under the leadership of Miss Adelaine Figgis. In its first six months it produced 214 shirts, 142 nightshirts, 564 pairs of socks, 47 bed jackets, 21 H.P. wrappers, 78 body belts, 34 pyjama's, 218 mufflers, 43 helmets, 90 pairs of



Needlework Poster

mittens and cuffs, 10 dressing gowns, 20 pillows, and 50 bed socks. In addition to all of this, they also provided bandages, boot-laces, 12 dozen pocket handkerchiefs, slippers, 1,500 cigarettes, pipes, chocolate, Christmas and playing cards, stationary etc<sup>14</sup>. By the end of 1916 the Greystones guild were able to announce that it had made 1,257 garments in all during that particular year. Astonishingly, by April 1917 the total number of garments produced had risen to over 5,000 articles. What a truly marvellous achievement! this was philanthropy at its very best.

A novel example of philanthropy involved the **Greystones Girl Guides**, led by another Miss Figgis, who organised her young guides to assist at the local Irish War Hospital Supply (IWHS) Depot. Among the many tasks they performed were as cleaners, door keepers etc. As an incentive she began awarding special badges to the girls for war-work, which included Ambulance, Horse-women, Cyclist, Cook, Child Nurse, Interpreter, Dairy Maid, Domestic Service and Knitting.

As time passed philanthropic works became more varied, and including forming a chain of communication between soldiers and their families at home. In every district of County Wicklow female **Home Help** agents began visiting the homes of soldiers, where they wrote letters on behalf of the families, made enquiries with Regiments and hospitals and organised

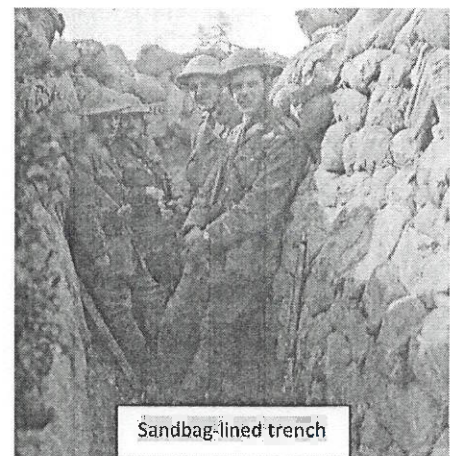
<sup>14</sup> Irish Times 20-02-1915

financial and medical assistance where required. This often involved helping solve whatever domestic problems the women had to face at home at the time.

A number of *sandbag depots* were also formed around the County Wicklow, run by Mrs. F. Cooper, of Glencarny, Glenealy; Captain Burnside of Delgany, Mrs. Glen of the Manse, Bray and Miss Adelaine Figgis of the Greystones Needlework Guild. Sandbags were an essential piece of protection for the soldier in trench warfare, as they gave them protection from rifle, machine-gun and artillery fire. They also provided them with a 'fire step' from which they could defend their lines<sup>15</sup>. The two biggest problems with the system was that a single shell could obliterate dozens, if not hundreds of sandbags; while the sandy, silty soil where they were fighting turned into mud after heavy rain. This of course, rotted the hessian sandbags and they fell apart. The net result of these problems was a neverending need for new sandbags.

At the period of history we are dealing with almost all goods were delivered to stores and farms in one-hundredweight sacks made from hessian, which is a product of jute. In the case of coal and agricultural goods the sacks contained even heavier weights than this. When emptied these bags were normally discarded and thrown to one side. Some workmen used them as capes while doing dirty work during the winter, but otherwise the bags were effectively refuse.

A new use was found for these cast-offs during the war, as sandbags were made from the same material. Several dedicated Sandbag depots were set up in County Wicklow at Bray, Greystones, Glenealy and Delgany whose purpose was to take these cast-offs and manufacture sandbags from them. The process involved was fairly simple, but because of the size of the sacking, it inevitably involved a number of people, usually women. The stitching was first removed from the old sack, so that it opened out into a single large sheet. These were then washed and hung out on lines to dry. A cutting party then took over, dividing each sheet into several parts, each one just the right size to make a single sand bag. When this was done the sewing-women took over, cross-stitching the base and one side in order to make it into a single, sturdy, empty sandbag. The new bags were then arranged in bundles and when enough were ready, they were dispatched to the front. All of this work was voluntary and almost all of the workers were women.



One final example of Philanthropic war-work was the *Vegetables for the Fleet Campaign*, which was handled in Bray by Miss Wilbraham of Bray, together with her Secretary Mrs. Randall Howe and a small committee of local women. Bray was a small seaport at the time, and so had strong links to the sea. During the war three merchant ships from the town were sunk, with three local merchant seamen losing their lives. In addition to this, ten Royal Navy

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<sup>15</sup> The trenches used during the Great War could be up to ten feet deep, so it was often necessary to build a fire step with sandbags on the inside on which defenders could stand to shoot over the parapet.



sailors from Bray were killed during the war, four of them officers, which goes somewhere towards explaining the interest these women had in the Royal Navy. There were of course many Bray sailors from both fleets who survived the war. The ingenuity, organisation and enterprise of these women can easily be demonstrated by the manner in which they organised this scheme in 1914. The whole point of delivering 'fresh' vegetables was that they would be collected from the garden, and delivered to the recipients on the same day.

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century everyone in Ireland grew vegetables in their own garden, and all of the middle and upper-classes employed gardeners.

The committee began by getting permission from the Town Council to use the Market under the Town Hall every Friday morning to collect donations of vegetables. These had to be delivered there by 10 o'clock. When the vegetables arrived, volunteers packed them into standard sized wooden boxes, after which they were transported to Bray Railway Station by a fleet of volunteer drivers using their own cars. They had also organised free railway transport for the boxes from Bray to Dublin Docks every Friday morning. From the docks the rest of the journey was the responsibility of the Royal Navy. At the dock the goods were immediately transferred into a waiting Royal Navy steamer, which left for Aberdeen straight after loading was complete. When the goods arrived in Aberdeen, the Naval Authorities immediately forwarded them to the Fleet in Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands. This 'garden to kitchen' transportation of a consignment of fresh vegetables in a single day is a terrific testament to the ingenuity and organisational skills of these women. They continued to run the scheme throughout the war.

The few instances mentioned above are just a tiny sample of an extensive local philanthropic campaign in County Wicklow that continued throughout the war.

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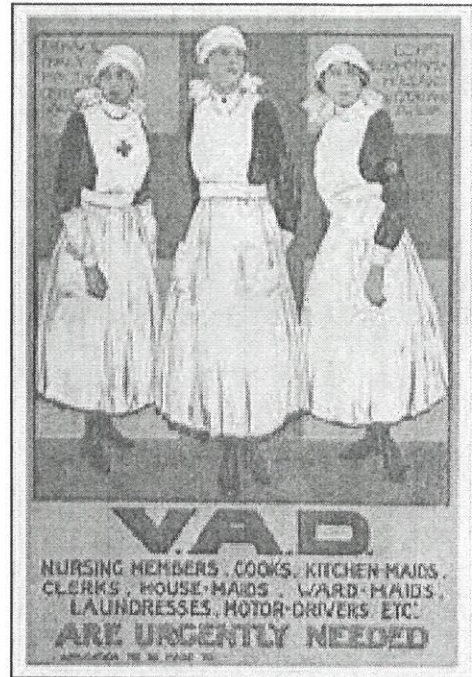
### Book 2: Hospitals in County Wicklow and their VAD nurses.

#### Introduction

The pattern of war changed in the spring of 1915, as the scale of casualties from the 1914 Mons battle emerged. This witnessed the complete destruction of Britain's professional army and casualties were enormous. During the first five months the allies

<sup>16</sup> suffered a daily average of 68,000 casualties; an astronomical attrition rate which 293 fulltime Queen Mary's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QMIMNS) nurses were incapable of handling on their own<sup>17</sup>. Wicklow society, which contained many professional soldiers, featured heavily in the casualty lists. By July 1915, Church of Ireland casualties from the Bray parish included fourteen killed, sixteen wounded, four missing in action, four prisoners-of-war, and six permanently invalided out of the army<sup>18</sup>. A large proportion of these were middle-class. Faced with this level of sacrifice,

young women began disappearing from the area, as, dissatisfied with philanthropic work; they opted for more direct action in the VAD. This voluntary women's organisation was formed by the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) in 1907 but until the outbreak of hostilities it had remained a low-key group. This changed with the outbreak of war and during the first few weeks, VAD headquarters was 'absolutely swamping' with volunteers, which were formed into 1,900 detachments of 60,000 members<sup>19</sup>. In Ireland, these were drawn 'from the upper echelons of Irish society; the titled ladies of the landed gentry, and the wives and daughters of senior officials, politicians, businessmen, clergymen and professionals<sup>20</sup>. McEwan describes them as 'women, and indeed girls of title, women who were known for their public services, professional women who abandoned work of lesser for that of greater importance, university graduates, as well as stay at home girls'<sup>21</sup>.



<sup>16</sup> The Great War was fought between the Allied Powers (The British Empire, France, Russia, Japan and Italy); and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire). The USA entered the war on the Allied side in 1918.

<sup>17</sup> McEwan Yvonne, *It's a Long Way to Tipperary: British and Irish Nurses in the Great War* (Dunfermline, 2006), p.45. p. 45.

<sup>18</sup> *Wicklow People*, 26-06-1915. Three of the four missing were later pronounced dead.

<sup>19</sup> McEwan, *Tipperary*, p.57.

<sup>20</sup> Eileen O'Reilly, *Women and Voluntary Work*. In Gregory, Adrian, and Pasetta, Senia (eds), *Ireland and the Great War*. (Manchester, 2002), p.66.

<sup>21</sup> McEwan, *Tipperary*, p.48. This description certainly fits County Wicklow, as all of these, including university graduates, can be found among the list of Wicklow volunteers.

### The Joint War Committee is formed

Almost immediately after war was declared the British War Office held a secret emergency meeting with the BRCS, St. John's Ambulance Brigade (SJAB) and other similar bodies. Its purpose was to organise a civilian medical division capable of providing large-scale medical assistance to the British Armed Forces at war. A tacit acceptance at the outset was that the British Military was incapable of providing this service on its own. As a result of this meeting the BRCS, SJAB, etc., joined into one ad-hoc organisation called the **Joint War Committee**, (usually called the Joint Committee or JC) for the duration of the war. Without this hastily cobbled-together organisation the British war effort would have failed at the outset for lack of medical facilities capable of treating the enormous numbers of casualties resulting from modern conflict.

The most crucial factor facing this meeting was the **number and severity of casualties** that were expected to be caused by modern weapons.

Since the Crimean War some fifty-odd years previously, most of Britain's wars had been fought against natives armed with bows, spears, swords or primitive muskets<sup>22</sup>. The Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) was well capable of handling the casualties resulting from this type of action. As the German and Axis Armies were all equipped with **modern bolt-action rifles, machine guns and artillery** just like Britain, there was bound to be considerably higher numbers of casualties than heretofore. Under these circumstances, what was now needed was an enormous, highly-skilled medical organisation which would keep the British Army manned and operational. **This was what the JC were tasked with providing**. This momentous decision led to the mobilisation of **all doctors and trained nurses**<sup>23</sup> in Great Britain (which included Ireland at the time), and the creation of over 3000 Auxiliary Hospitals, including **two in County Wicklow**. All of these were staffed by VAD's and administered and ran by the JC.

To give some idea of the immediate pressure this put on the Irish Hospital system, between October 1914 and February 1919 forty-six Hospital Ships docked at the North Wall in Dublin and in Cork and unloaded 19,255 military patients, most of them Irish, who were immediately admitted into our hospitals<sup>24</sup>. As a result of this flood of military patients, a total of twenty-three Auxiliary Military Hospitals were created in eight counties around Ireland<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> An exception to this was the Boer War 1899 -1902 where modern bolt-action rifles were extensively used. Prior to that the muzzle-loading muskets used by the army were slow and laborious to load. These had a short effective range of approximately 100 yards and were very inaccurate. The cannon used during the same period were also muzzle-loading and for the much of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century its ammunition had been solid shot (non-explosive). The weaponry facing them in 1914 were breech-loading rifles capable of quickly and accurately firing bullets at 300- 400 yards and even longer; machine-guns; and artillery that fired high-explosive shells, gas, smoke etc. all at ranges of several miles.

<sup>23</sup> At this period of British history professional nurses were known as Trained Nurses.

<sup>24</sup> Clair O'Neill, DU, pp 37-38, War Record of the St. John Ambulance Brigade and the BRCS in Leinster, Munster and Connaught 1914-1918 (Dublin) N.D. c 1919, p. 288.

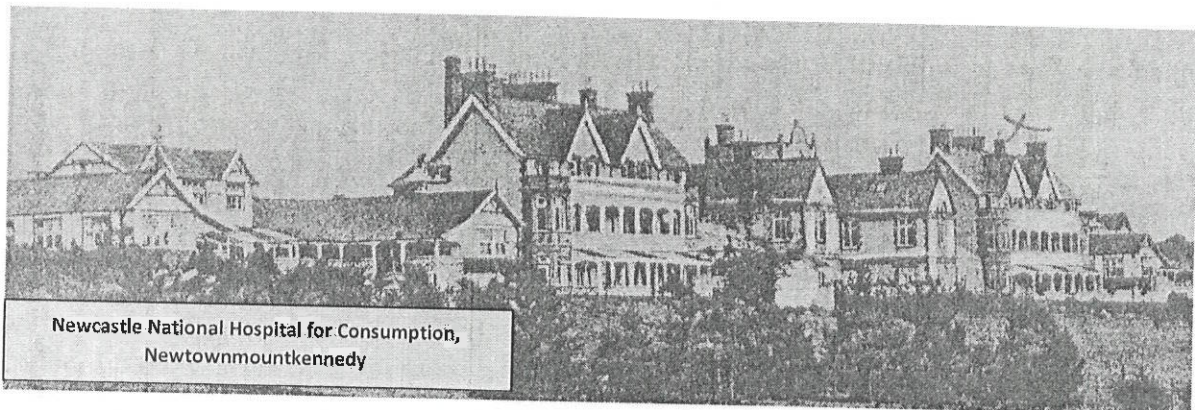
<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## No. 1. Newcastle Hospital

### Existing medical care facilities in County Wicklow

By today's standards, the medical facilities available in County Wicklow at the turn of the twentieth-century would be considered primitive. When the Upper-Classes and Middle-Classes were ill they paid a local doctor to attend them in their own home. If they needed specialist treatment or admission to a private clinic, they also paid for that. All this is very similar to the private health care system many people use in Ireland today.

In contrast to this, medical facilities for the working-classes and destitute poor were primitive<sup>26</sup>. The poor could not afford to pay a doctor, so in order to safeguard public health, County Councils in Ireland operated a system of Dispensaries, all run by doctors employed directly by the relative Local Authority. This system was originally prompted by the fevers which swept through Ireland in the wake of the Great Famine, which if left unchecked, would have caused a major epidemic. By the 1890's there were 20 such dispensaries scattered around County Wicklow, and it was these Dispensary doctors that looked after the poor<sup>27</sup>.



In 1914 the only hospital in County Wicklow that could properly be called modern was Newcastle Hospital in Newtownmountkennedy. This was a specialist hospital opened by government in 1898 to provide treatment for consumptive (TB) patients and was staffed entirely by Trained Nurses (TN). It was a national institution, intended to treat patients from all parts of Ireland. Originally opened with 24 beds, this number had rapidly expanded to 125 beds by 1914<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> From the time of the Great Famine, County Councils had dreaded the fever-like symptoms produced by starvation, malnutrition and its resulting illness and death. Between then and the end of the eighteenth-century Fever Hospitals had been located around County Wicklow at Shillelagh, Baltinglass, Rathdrum, Arklow, Wicklow, Newtown, Enniskerry and Bray. Many of these had been located in old disused Workhouses dating from the Famine, and there was a social stigma associated with using them.

<sup>27</sup> National Archives, Survey of Hospital Archives in Ireland, No. 26, Wicklow, Dispensaries, pp 72-73.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.

From 1914 onwards the hospital began treating Irish military and naval patients, who in very different circumstances had contracted this often-fatal illness. Many of these were Wicklowmen. Trench warfare intensified from 1915 onwards, and leaving aside its military dangers, living in a wet hole in the ground for months on end in the depths of winter was always going to be injurious to one's health. One of the many fatal diseases it produced was Consumption and Irish soldiers who were seriously affected by this disease were sent home to Ireland to be treated in this hospital. A similar situation applied to sailors in the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy. At the time the engines of most ships were coal-fired, and the engine-room staff of all ships lived permanently below the water-line. Working as they did in permanently damp conditions, with no fresh air and with lungs choked with coal-dust, they



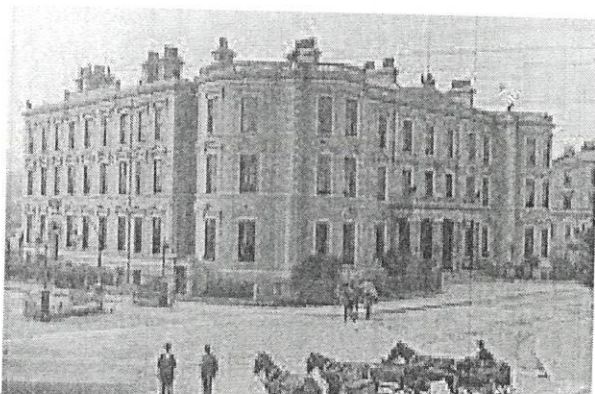
Stretched party with wounded, Passchendaele, 1917



Engine-room crew on a merchant ship

were always prone to getting consumption or silicosis. During peacetime it wasn't as bad, as Royal Navy ships spent most of their time in harbour, only venturing out on the occasionally cruise. All that changed in wartime, when all ships were more-or-less permanently at sea. This particularly applied to convoy-work. The presence of U-boats always made it dangerous at sea, so sailors preferred the stormy high seas of winter, as it hindered U-boats in their operations. This of course had its downside in health, and the inevitable result of working in these unhealthy conditions was an increase in the numbers of men contracting lung disease. As Newcastle Hospital was a national institution it had to deal with military and naval patients from all over the country, and this continued for the rest of the war. No VAD's are known to have worked in this hospital, despite its treating military personnel. This may have had something to do with the sickness being treated in the facility, and the fact that the men were not considered battle casualties.

## No 2. Princess Patricia's Auxiliary Military Hospital

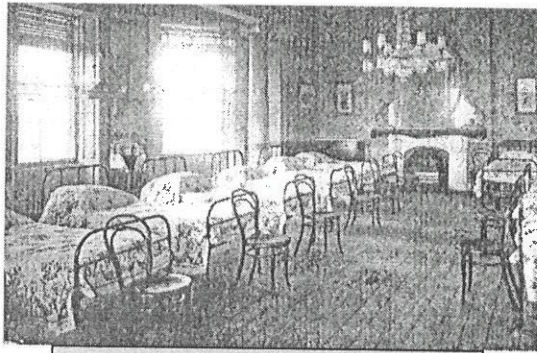


Princess Patricia's Auxiliary Military Hospital, Bray

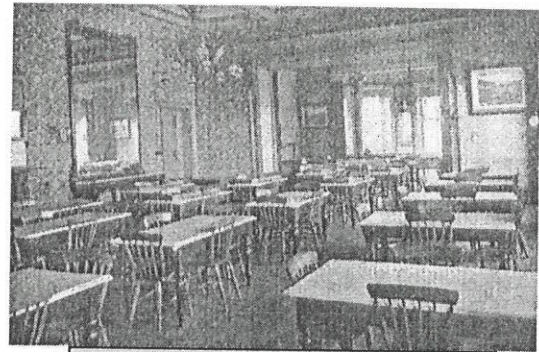
The first of four new hospitals to be opened in County Wicklow during the war period was *Princess Patricia's Auxiliary Military Hospital in Bray*. When it opened its doors in May 1915 it was one of the earliest auxiliary war hospitals to be formed in the country; with the speed of its creation reflecting the social and political power of the residents of Bray at the time. Located in the old International Hotel, it was just a few minutes' walk from

Bray railway station, making it convenient for bringing patients in by rail. It was equally convenient for the families of patients who wanted to visit loved ones. The new facility catered for Irish patients, many of whom were local men. Containing 200 beds, it was also fully equipped with Dining Rooms, Sitting Rooms, Kitchens, pantries, larders, stores and various other offices. Two local doctors provided the necessary medical expertise and its other medical staff was initially a matron, four TN sisters and thirty VAD's. These were later joined by thirty members of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), under the command of a commissioned officer. These soldiers were officially classified as Orderly's and Stretcher-Bearers, so they provided the muscle-power necessary for lifting badly injured and immobile male patients.

This impressive building went on to become one of the most popular VAD hospitals in Ireland. Donations of £5000 were raised locally for its conversion, with one anonymous individual donating £1,000. Five wards were endowed by Irish Counties, and a sixth by the Dublin Women's Unionist Club. The seventh was endowed by the City of Montreal in Canada. The hospital was equipped with Tonic Medication, Radium Hot-Baths, Galvanic Batteries, a medical switchboard, etc<sup>29</sup>. Two matrons of the hospital were later awarded the Order of the Royal Red Cross; Miss Henrietta Laing in 1918, and Miss Ethel Hackett in 1919.



Ward at Princess Patricia's Auxiliary Military Hospital, Bray



Dining Room of Princess Patricia's Auxiliary Military Hospital, Bray

The hospital was officially opened in June 1915 and continued in full-time operation until it was decommissioned on September 30<sup>th</sup> 1919. During this period 4,236 military patients were treated there, most of them Irish. 267 of these soldiers were fitted with artificial limbs at the



Matron Miss Michie and the nursing staff of Princess Patricia's Bray, 1915



The Royal Red Cross



The matron with two VAD's at Princess Patricia's Hospital, Bray

<sup>29</sup> The Irish Home Front 1914-18, Clare O'Neill, Thesis for a Degree of PhD. Department of History, National University of Ireland, pp 37-38, (Dublin N.D. c. 1919, p. 283) citing the War Record of the Saint John's Ambulance Brigade and the British Red Cross Society in Leinster, Munster and Connaught 1914-1918. Dublin.

hospital, and a further 869 received Tonic Medication. The hospital also provided Swedish massage treatment for patients, Radiant Heat treatment and for a time specialised in malarial patients<sup>30</sup>.

Because of its size and the abundance of accommodation in the building, the hospital also housed the **Bray Work Party** for most of the war<sup>31</sup>. Leaving aside the VAD nurses and administrative staff of the hospital; there were over a hundred additional Bray women working in the Bray Depot, who met twice a week; as well as a further fifty-three women working in the Bray Sphagnum Moss sub-depot, who met three times a week. All of these volunteers worked for an average of four-six hours on each of these days. As a result, this building was a hotbed of female wartime activity for the duration of the conflict.

### VAD's who worked in Princess Patricia's

Almost 250 VAD personnel are known to have worked in Princess Patricia's hospital during the war, although there is some evidence that this figure could be much higher. With the exception of thirteen Englishwomen, all of these were Irishwomen, the majority of them single<sup>32</sup>. These young Irish ladies hailed from **all four Provinces of Ireland**, with a total of twenty-two Irish counties represented among Princess Patricia's VAD staff. Three **Ulster** VAD's each came from counties Down and Armagh, with Fermanagh represented by Miss



**The Matron and nursing staff of Princess Patricia's Hospital, Bray, 1915.**

**Back Row:** Miss Wickham, Miss Darley, Miss Drought, Miss Adams, Miss Rutherford, Miss Bayley, Miss Martin.

**Middle Row:** Miss Orme, Miss Orme, Miss Thring, Miss Draper, Miss Young, Miss Davies, Mrs. Gordon, Miss Porter, Miss O'Neill.

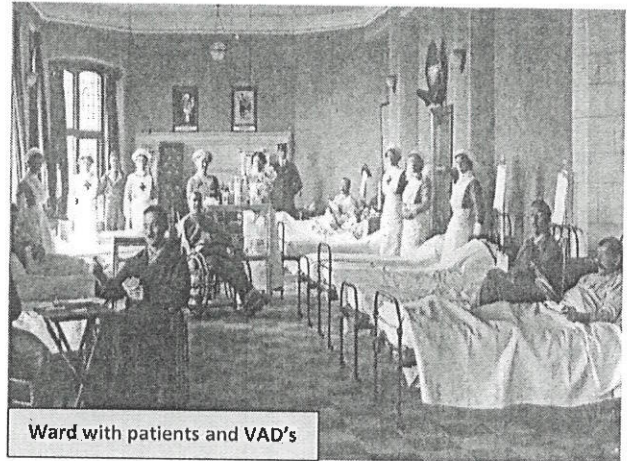
**Front row:** Mrs. Barrington, Sister Argue, Sister Mullaly (Assistant Matron), Miss Mickle (Matron) Sister Palmer, Miss Saunderson, Miss Berry.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> The Bray Work Party consisted of an Irish War Hospital Supply (IWHS) Depot which contained a number of different departments, including Bandage-making and wound-pads of various kinds; Knitting and clothing departments; and Men's Section complete with carpentry shop for making splints, crutches, supports, lockers etc. See Book 4 (War Depots and IWHS Depots). The Bray Sphagnum Moss Sub-depot was also located in this building (see Book 5 (Sphagnum Moss collection and processing)).

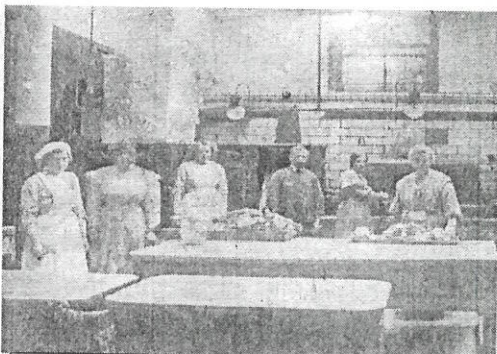
<sup>32</sup> At the time the BRCS operated a system of three -six-month contracts, so the turnover of volunteer VAD's was constant. Only 30-40 VAD's worked in the hospital at one time. The system also enabled VAD's to move around different hospitals, so it was common for VAD's to serve in anything from two to six different hospitals.

M.C. Reade from Enniskillen. The other Ulsterwoman was Eileen Clifford from Belturbet in County Cavan. **Connaught** was represented by four VAD's from Galway, with a fifth coming from Roscommon. All of the counties in **Munster** were represented with the largest contributions coming from Limerick and Tipperary with eight VAD's each. Both of these groups were organised by very active Saint John Ambulance groups in Munster. There were also five women from Cork; three from Clare and two from



Ward with patients and VAD's

Waterford. These last two women were Maud Langford and Annie Whitelock-Lloyd from Strancally Castle in Tallow. Of the twelve counties in **Leinster**, only Kilkenny isn't represented on the staff of Princess Patricia's. Wicklow, as you would expect, provided the largest single contingent of 107 VAD's to the hospital staff. Dublin followed behind with fifty-five VAD's, while three representatives each came from Offaly, Laois and Westmeath. These are followed by two-each from Carlow, Louth and Wexford. This was a magnificent example of the very best kind of humanitarianism in action. The commitment, dedication and sheer hard work shown by these patriotic young women was simply astonishing. As you would expect, most



65 VADs in the Kitchen of Princess Patricia's Hospital, Bray

of the Dublin-women on the staff hailed from the south-east of the county close to the Dublin-Wicklow-border near Bray. The Bray area itself provided the largest individual pool of VAD's with many family groups working in the hospital together. Some examples of this are Mrs Madge Kelly from Kiltiernan with her two daughters Ethel and Joan; and Sir Albert Meldon from Bray serving with his daughter Lydia. There were four Elvery sisters from Bray serving together; and three each from the Millar family of Belmont in

Bray; and the Moore family from Kiltiernan. There were also seven instances of two sisters working alongside one another, all of whom lived in Bray town itself. The details of these last are too numerous to enumerate, but the surnames involved were Darley, Egan, Mitchel, Odlum, Roberts, and two families named Scott.

### Community Charity

Everyone in the general Bray area were both kind and generous to the patients during the life-time of the hospital. Christmas 1917 is a good example of this. The yuletide celebrations in the hospital began with carol-singing at 6.30 in the morning on Christmas Day. Later that evening a delightful concert was provided in which Miss Maunsell, and a number of other men and women contributed. Gifts of cigarettes and sweets were distributed among the patients and special meals were laid on during the day in order to make the day as special to



the men as possible. Other features of the day were visits by local dignitaries who called in during the day to greet and wish season's greetings to everyone.

### **Honours and awards**

While Home-Service was not as dangerous as Active-Service abroad, it was just as onerous, so quite a number of County Wicklow VAD's and Red Cross Personnel attached to Princess Patricia's hospital received awards and honours of various kinds. These were as follows:

#### ***Member of the British Empire (MBE)***

Miss Maureen Thring, Dorset; VAD Nursing Sister (Born County Dublin).

#### ***Royal Red Cross Roll of Honour: (RRC ROH)***

Sir Albert Meldon, Vevay House, Bray. Chairman of the House Committee.

#### ***Associate of the British Red Cross: (ABRC)***

Miss Adelaide Louisa Beckett, Terenure Road, Dublin; VAD Nursing Sister.

#### ***Royal Red Cross, Class II: (RRC)***

Mrs. Olive Alice Brew, Prince of Wales Terrace, Bray. VAD GS hospital worker.

Miss Ethel Marjory Bruce, Borrisokane, County Tipperary. VAD Nursing Sister

Miss Helen Hackett, Birr, County Offaly. Matron Princess Patricia's Hospital, Bray.

Miss Henrietta Laing, Princess Patricia's Hospital, Bray. 06 August 1918. VAD Nursing Sister.

Sir Albert Meldon, Vevay House, Bray. Chairman of the House Committee.

Miss Alice Enid Scott, Mount Pleasant, Bray. 15 February 1919. VAD Nursing Sister.

#### ***Mentioned in Despatch (MID):***

Mrs. Charlotte C. Bewley, Foxrock, Dublin. November 1918. VAD Nursing Sister.

Mrs. Sarah Jane Bradshaw, Vevay Road, Bray. VAD GS i/c linen dept. clothing etc.

Miss Ethel Marjory Bruce, Borrisokane, County Tipperary. VAD Nursing Sister.

Miss Catherine Elvery, Inniskeel, Bray. VAD Nursing Sister.

Mrs. Margaret J. Ramage, Newgrange, Bray. Lady Divisional Superintendent VAD.

Miss Violet Maud Riall, Old Conna, Bray. VAD Nursing Sister.

Miss Augusta Scott, Pembroke Lodge, Bray. VAD Nursing Sister. i/c engaging new VAD's

#### ***YMCA Badge***

Miss Mary Figgis, Sidmonton Square, Bray. VAD Nursing Sister.

Miss Charlotte Fowler, Ardbrae, Bray. VAD Nursing Sister.

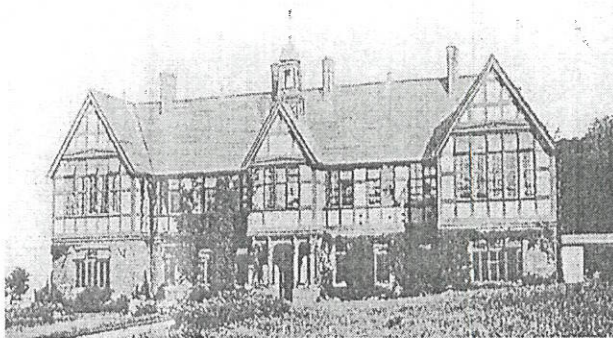


MID Oakleaf



***Many of the VAD's were also awarded service bars of various kinds. These have not been included in the list for lack of space (see Book 3, VAD nurses on active service for images and a further explanation of these awards).***

### No. 3. The Duke of Connaught Auxiliary Hospital, Bray



A terrible feature of modern warfare was the number of men who lost one or more limbs as a result of shellfire. There were so many of this type of casualty that early in the war a special hospital named Queen Mary's Auxiliary Hospital for Limbless Men was opened at Roehampton in England. This hospital was created for two reasons. In the first instance it had become imperative to open a hospital with the specialist equipment and skills needed to treat this kind of injury and Roehampton was genuinely needed by both the British Army and the Royal Navy. The second reason was more covert. At the time many senior officers in the military felt that it was bad for morale to mix soldiers with minor injuries who would soon be returning to the trenches; with others who had sustained such horrific injuries. They felt that the shock and horror involved might turn to fear and encourage desertion. The military term used for this kind of situation was **being prejudicial to good order and discipline**. Ireland had no hospital of this kind at the time and by 1917 nearly 270 limbless Southern Irish soldiers had been treated in this specialist way at Princess Patricia's Auxiliary Military Hospital in Bray. In addition to this another 158 Irish soldiers and sailors had also been treated at Roehampton, so there was obviously a need for an Irish Hospital of this kind. As a consequence of these deliberations a decision was made in 1917 to open an Irish version of Roehampton, and Bray which selected for its location as it housed the only southern Irish hospital with experience of this type of treatment. The result of this deliberation was the creation of the **Duke of Connaught's Hospital for Limbless Patients** in Bray, which was opened in Bray in 1917 in a derelict industrial school building on Vevey Road owned by the Earl of Meath<sup>33</sup>.



VAD Nurse with soldier-patients learning to weave



Matron and two VAD's with patients

<sup>33</sup> The building later became Loretto Primary School.

## Preliminary Planning

In the early stages of planning a committee was formed to carry out the project under the patronage of the Duke of Connaught<sup>34</sup>. A letter from Surgeon-General Ford C.B. DSO, read out at this meeting pointed out that there was a large number of limbless invalids on a waiting list and that he strongly endorsed their proposal<sup>35</sup>. As a result of these deliberations the following **organising committee** was formed:

## Organising Committee and Patrons

Patron: *His Royal Highness The Duke of Connaught KG.*

Vice Patrons: *His Eminence Michael, Cardinal Logue, D.D., Primate of All Ireland.*

*Sir Bryan Mahon, K.O.V.O., CB, DSO, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Forces in Ireland.*

The Right Honourable *The Lord Mayor of Dublin.*

The Right Honourable *The Lord Mayor of Cork.*

*The President of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.*

*The Lord MacDonnell of Swinford.*

Fifteen Lord Lieutenants of Counties:

*The Marquis of Sligo;*

*The Marquis of Ormand, KP, PC;*

*The Earl of Meath, KP, PC;*

*The Earl of Courtown;*

*The Earl of Bandon, KP;*

*The Earl of Kenmare, CVO;*

*The Earl of Ross;*

*The Viscount Powerscourt, KP, MVO;*

*The Lord Clonbrock, KP, PC;*

*The Lord Dunalley;*

*The Lord Castlemaine;*

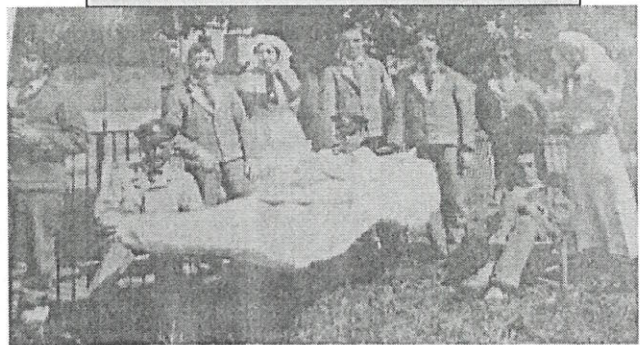
*The Lord Rathdonnell;*

*The Right Honourable O'Conor Don, PC;*

*Sir Algernon Coote, Bart;*

*Sir Anthony Weldon, Bart., CVO, DSO.*

VAD's with patients in the grounds



Thirty-five other individuals from around the country took part in this meeting including two military officers; one doctor and a judge. Other nobility present at the meeting included two Countesses, one Marchioness; eight Knights and two Ladies. As a result of these proceedings a decision was made to proceed with the project under the leadership and management of the following **General Committee**:

**President:**

*The Earl of Meath KP, PC.*

**Vice-Presidents:**

*Sir Maurice Dockrell, DL.*

*Surgeon-General R.W. Ford CB, DSO, Deputy Director Medical Service, Irish Command.*

**Joint Hon. Organising**

**Secretaries & Treasurers:**

*Frank W. Perry Esquire,*

*A. St. G. de Renzy KC.*

Twenty-four other members of the committee were also selected including The Viscountess Powerscourt; The Countess of Bandon; The Countess of Courtown, The Countess of Wicklow, Sir Stafford Bart. CB, The Lady De Malahide; Lady Arnott, and Lady Bellingham<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Irish Times 12-12-1916.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 14-12-1916.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Both Perry and de Renzy resided in Bray.

The final meeting **officially establishing the hospital** took place in the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1916. Among other resolutions passed at this meeting was that the establishment would officially be named “**The Duke of Connaught’s Auxiliary Hospital**”. The meeting was chaired by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, and the following **Committee of Management** for the hospital was formed:

**President:** *The Earl of Meath, KP, P.C.*

**Vice Presidents:** *Sir Maurice Dockrell DL. and Surgeon-General R. Ford, CB, DSO.*

**Organising Secretaries and Treasurers:** *Frank W. Perry and A. St. George de Renzy KC.*



Exact details about the treatment of patients in this facility are unfortunately unknown. We do know that it received patients from April 18<sup>th</sup> 1917, and that it closed down sometime between the end on December 1919 and the Spring of 1920. There were sixty beds in the hospital and a total Of 801 disabled servicemen were treated there while the hospital was operational. Primitive artificial limbs were fitted to the unfortunate patients and attempts were made to teach them elementary skills that might help them find work in their future life. Cobbling and weaving were just two of the many skills taught to patients who no longer had the full use of their limbs. One of the above photographs depicts five servicemen who have been disabled by full or partial amputation of limbs, taking part in weaving classes under the supervision of a VAD. This was one of a number of trades considered suitable for men disabled in this way. At the time it was felt that the men’s mental health would be improved by the knowledge that they could work at a trade where full mobility was not an essential factor. This type of training was provided in order to prepare the patients for discharge from the army.

In contrast to Princess Patricia’s, the Duke of Connaught’s Hospital is almost devoid of written records, leaving us grasping for details about the staff who worked there. Photographs can partially fill this void, in particular two taken in 1918, one of which includes the names of the staff. The first of these images shown above creates an excellent impression of the complete hospital establishment, showing as it does the building, management, nursing staff and patients. Set against the backdrop of the entrance to the hospital are the RAMC Commanding Officer with the Matron sitting beside him. Arrayed around them are two TN Staff Sisters, fifteen VAD Nursing Sisters and forty-three patients. Most of the leg-amputees are grouped to the sides and front of the photograph, some of them with one leg missing, while others

have lost both. To the sides and rear can be seen the empty sleeves of arm-amputees. Few photographs better portray the horror and savagery of the injuries inflicted by shell-fire on human beings. It is some consolation to think that the staff of this Wicklow hospital were able in some small way to alleviate the suffering of these heroic men.



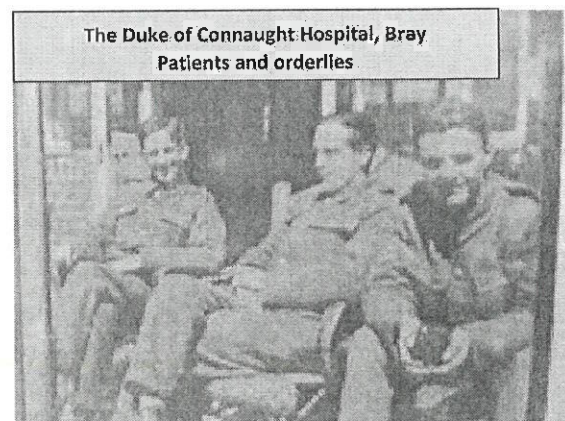
The management and staff of the Duke of Connaught Hospital, Bray,

This second staff photograph depicts a much smaller group, but fortunately identifies the people included in the photo. The senior staff of the hospital are grouped in the centre of the **front row** and consists of (L-R) Doctor Roantree, Miss Darrington (Matron), Major Daly RAMC (Commanding Officer) and Doctor O. Smyth. To the left of this party are Miss Madelaine Sheil and Sister O'Brien, and to its right are Sister Aylmer, Miss Brew and Miss Wagner. The **second row** consists of (L-R) Miss Sheil, Miss Wilson, Miss Wintle,

Miss Halpin, Miss Conroy, Miss Carpendale, Miss Scott and Miss Redun. The **back row** consists of (L-R) Miss Wood, Miss Phillips and Miss Keating. The Sister O'Brien and Sister Aylmer mentioned above are both TN Staff Nurses, while the remainder of the women are VAD Nursing Sisters. What is truly astonishing about this photograph is that just three of the fifteen VAD Nurses have been identified in official BRCS records. Such inaccuracy throws considerable doubt on the remainder of these records, which must now be viewed as partial only. Including the VAD's mentioned above, just over one hundred women have been identified as working in this hospital, all of them Irish.

### Charitable Activities

Quite a number of newspaper reports at the time describe charitable activities relating to the hospital. One of these was an appeal launched in the newspapers in the Summer of 1917 looking for public help with the patients of the hospital. The notice explained that the men generally spent each morning practicing the use of their artificial limbs, then rested during the afternoons because these exercises were both stressful and tiring. As there was a shortage of petrol at the time, the hospital made an appeal to owners of horse or pony-drawn carriages in the district. Owners were asked if several would join together to take groups of men out during the afternoons and show them the countryside around the district. The reporter quoted the doctors as saying that this sort of activity would distract the patient's and take their mind off their own troubles. This appeal

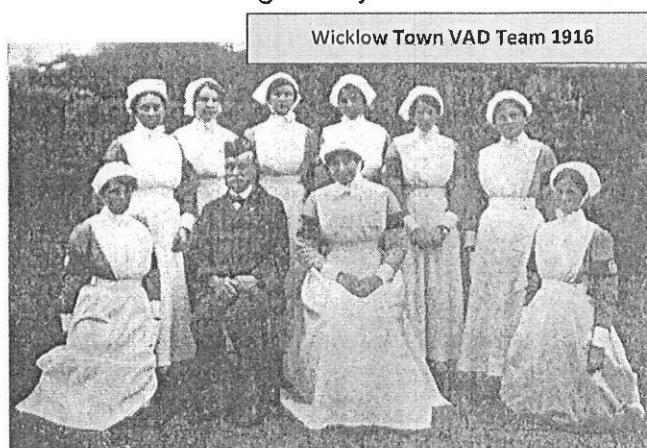


was so successful that outings ran on a weekly basis throughout the entire summer<sup>37</sup>. Another rather special entertainment organised on behalf of patients took place during the afternoon of Christmas Day 1917. This was co-ordinated by Alderman Moran, Chairman of the Dublin Port & Docks Board, and consisted of a special two-hour entertainment by numerous artistes from the Tivoli and Queens theatres in Dublin. The concert was a tremendous success and proved very popular with both patients and staff. Prior to the concert a real Christmas dinner was provided by the committee of the hospital, complete with cigars and presents for all<sup>38</sup>. These were just two of many such appeals which were made during the life-time of the hospital.

## No. 4. Wicklow VAD Hospital

### The old VAD system

Prior to the summer of 1916 all VAD training, qualification and work had been done on an individual basis. A woman who wanted to become a VAD nursing Sister joined either the BRCS or SJAB, and that organisation arranged everything for her. When her training was complete, it then arranged a position for her in a hospital. When this contract was completed a position was arranged for her in a different hospital and so forth. The case of GS VAD's was somewhat different. Many, but not all of these also joined the BRC or SJAB; but did not train in hospitals, as they did not intend nursing. Instead they were sent directly to hospitals who needed staff in the areas that they intended specialising, for example cook, housemaid, wardmaid etc. In other instances, women personally contacted the matron or person in charge of engaging staff; and themselves arranged to join that hospital. All contracts were for an initial three-months period; and the tasks they were to perform were agreed at the time of entry. As time passed, and as individuals learned the variety of other tasks performed in hospitals, they sometimes changed role. So, it was common for GS staff to perform a variety of functions during their career. Since they very often changed hospitals at the end of their contract, this gave them the opportunity to also change roles. Over time everyone settled into and specialised in either nursing or GS tasks, which included an array of jobs including cooking, pantry, massage, porter, stores, offices and a variety of specialist maids. In addition to the above, Matrons of hospitals also formed personal relationships with other matrons, and this also facilitated these rotations.



<sup>37</sup> Irish times, 29-05-1917.

<sup>38</sup> Irish Times, 26-12-17

## A new VAD scheme is introduced into Ireland

A second VAD system was introduced into Ireland in the latter half of 1916 in the wake of the Easter Rising in Dublin. The principal factors involved in making this decision were the huge number of civilian casualties resulting from the fighting in Dublin, and the associated wholesale destruction of public and private property. An added factor was the great assistance given by VAD volunteers from all over the country who rushed to Dublin to help with the overworked and overloaded hospitals in the city<sup>39</sup>. These included a number of VAD's from Wicklow Town who will be mentioned later. With this in mind and keeping an eye on the possibility of further civil strife and/or urban warfare, the envisioned new system contained two key features; Firstly this new system was to be organised on a county basis, so that all parts of the country would be prepared in the event of future civil unrest; and secondly, there was to be a centrally-approved, graduated system of qualification. In effect, this new scheme became the precursor of the Civil Defence scheme used twenty-years later during World War Two<sup>40</sup>. It must be stressed however, that the new scheme did not replace the existing VAD scheme which continued to operate in all hospitals in Britain, Ireland and in active service hospitals on various fronts, it merely ran **concurrently** with it. One other point to note, is that the scheme seems to have been an Irish one only, as it would not appear to have been introduced in mainland Britain.

### The 1916 VAD scheme

The new scheme was introduced in August 1916 and had its Headquarters in Dublin. County Wicklow was allocated three VAD detachments totalling 113 female members, under the command of County Director Sir Albert Meldon of Vevay House, Bray. The Lady Superintendent and Commandant was Mrs. Margaret Leslie-Ellis of Magherymore. The units were located as follows:

- *Wicklow VAD, Commandant Miss Crofton, Marlton House, Wicklow:  
30 members.*
- *Bray VAD, Commandant Mrs. Ramage, New Grange Lodge, Bray:  
65 members.*
- *Greystones VAD, Commandant Mrs. Dunlop, Craigmore, Greystones:  
18 members.*

An important element of the scheme was that each of the detachments would have access to a local hospital to which they could bring casualties for treatment should the need arise. As a result of these deliberations, Wicklow VAD Hospital was opened in Wicklow Town in the autumn of 1916. The other two VAD Depots did not need to do this, as three hospitals were already available for use in the North-East of the County. The building selected for the new hospital was a private house at No. 4 Wentworth Place in Wicklow, which already housed the Wicklow IWHS Work depot<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> At the time all nursing VAD's spent about three months training in Dublin Hospitals before going out to work. It was to these hospitals that the VAD's were drawn to in 1916.

<sup>40</sup> The destruction of property and the corresponding rescue of the injured were also included in the WW2 scheme by introducing a fire and rescue service.

<sup>41</sup> This practice of mixing medical care with War Work was also used in Bray where Princess Patricia's Hospital also housed Bray War Depot, Bray IWHS Sub-depot and Bray Sphagnum Moss Sub-depot.

Although ostensibly intended for emergency use, the hospital was completely staffed and equipped as a regular functioning JC medical unit. Doctors McCormack and Carton were appointed, as was a Matron, TN's and RAMC orderlies. The local VAD unit provided all the VAD Nursing Sisters and GS VAD's required to fill the complement of the hospital. From that moment it began functioning as a War Hospital, offering medical assistance to local sick, injured or wounded servicemen. Because of its peculiar civil remit, it also became a sort of emergency hospital for the local civilian population, and many of these were treated here as a result of accidents and other related injuries and illnesses. This is particularly true of the flu epidemic in the winter of 1918-1919, when numerous staff, military and civilians were treated at the hospital.

### Awards and tests

In January 1917 a number of Nursing VAD's from Wicklow Town were called to Dublin where they were presented with certificates and medals at an award ceremony. These are the women who had travelled to Dublin during the rebellion at Easter 1916, and offered their assistance to various Dublin Hospitals. While there they helped treat both military and rebel casualties, as well as the innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. The Wicklow VAD who were honoured in this way were:

*Catherine Bradshaw, National Bank House, Wicklow Town.  
Lucy Cullen, Rathmore, Ashford.  
Emily Head, Magherymore, Wicklow.  
Eleanor Loftus, Knockaquirk, Cullen, Wicklow.  
Joan Leslie-Ellis, Magherymore, Wicklow.*

The first qualification exams under the revised new examination system took place in Wicklow Town in September 1916. This saw **First Labels** presented to Mrs. Margaret Lesley-Ellis, and the Misses Mary Tottenham, May Casement, Gertrude Cuffe and Edith Eldred. **Medallions** were awarded to the Misses Joan Leslie-Ellis, Eleanor Loftus, Lucy Cullen and Emily Head; and the Misses McCoy and Connell. It's worth stressing the level of society that these first qualifiers of the new system came from, as four of the women presented with First Labels were members of the landed gentry, while the fifth, Edith Eldred, was a retainer on the Magherymore estate owned by the Leslie-Ellis's. A second examination was later held in Wicklow in May 1917 in which the following were presented:

**Second Labels:** *Mrs. Margaret Lesley-Ellis, Miss Gertrude Cuffe and Miss Edith Eldred.*  
**First Labels:** *Miss McCoy, Miss Nellie Carroll, Miss Doyle, Miss Eleanor Loftus and Miss Joan Leslie-Ellis.*  
**Medallions:** *Mrs. Doyle, Miss Myra Crofton, Miss Linda MacPhail, Miss Edith Loverock, Miss Kavanagh and Miss D'arcy.*  
**Certificate:** *Mrs. Elizabeth Barrow, Mrs. Darts, Miss Nichols; Miss Eileen Brodison, Abbeyville, Wicklow; Miss Alice McCarroll, Leirim Place, Wicklow; Miss Lena Shannon, Miss O'Brien, Miss Katie Fitzsimmons, Miss Murtagh and Miss Fitzroy.*

The continued re-organisation of the new VAD into a quasi-military body controlled by the state was further extended in a second re-shuffling that took place in December 1917. On this occasion it was decided that two Ambulance Stations and Rallying Points were to be located in County Wicklow, as follows:



- Saint Paul's School, Bray under the command of Commandant Mrs. M.J. Ramage, of Newgrange Lodge, Bray.
- No. 4, Wentworth Place, Wicklow under the command of Commandant Mrs. Margaret Leslie-Ellis, of Magherymore, Wicklow.

Further ceremonies were held in Dublin to mark the new VAD system, and the five Wicklow-women who attended one of these in June 1918 were First Nursing-sisters Myra Crofton and Gertrude Cuffe; together with Nursing Sisters Helen O'Neill, Emily Head and Mrs. Darts<sup>42</sup>.

### 1918 Influenza Epidemic (Spanish Flu)

As it transpired, Wicklow VAD Hospital only had to handle one national emergency, which was the influenza epidemic often called the '**The Spanish Flu**' that hit Ireland towards the end of 1918. Following an urgent request to Headquarters by Commandant Margaret Leslie-Ellis the hospital was immediately opened to civilian patients suffering from influenza, with the first four patients admitted on October 29<sup>th</sup> 1918<sup>43</sup>. Some thirty people from the immediate area around Wicklow Town died within a month during the epidemic, which was few enough in national terms; as around 23,000 people died in Ireland out of the 800,000 infected. Internationally, some twenty-two million people died in this worldwide epidemic, including twelve million in India and eight million in Spain<sup>44</sup>. During the course of the epidemic dozens of local people were admitted to and treated in the hospital. Some died, including two Christian Brothers and two English soldiers stationed in the town; but most recovered. The flu virus also hit a number of the nurses caring for the sick. TN Nursing Sisters Gaskin (day nurse) and Fortune (night nurse) were both hit, as well as TN Nursing Sister Webster. Thankfully all three recovered. VAD members who also fell victims to the virus were the Commandant Mrs. Margaret Leslie-Ellis; VAD First Nursing Officer Miss Myra Crofton of Ashford; and VAD Second Nursing Officer Miss Gertie Cuffe of Westbrook, Rathnew. Also stricken were Nursing Sisters Nellie Carroll from Ballybeg, Miss E.M.F. Loverock; Miss F. Darcy; Joan Leslie-Ellis of Magherymore; Miss J.M. Kent; Miss M. Doyle; and Miss Alice McCarroll. Mercifully all of these survived. The pandemic unfortunately coincided with the departure of Doctor Carton who had been called up to serve in the Royal Flying Corps; and two RAMC Orderlies who were also taken away around the same time. The overworked VAD cooks in the hospital at the time were Miss L. Doyle and Miss Halpin. Knowledge of this piece of local history involving Wicklow VAD hospital and the Spanish Flu has all but passed from social recollection. It deserves to be remembered for two reasons: firstly because of the invaluable work done here in 1918-1919 by local volunteers, treating local influenza patients; and secondly, as a reminder of the foresight of the administrative innovations that saw the need for such establishments in the first place. It also goes without saying that the truly altruistic women who performed such incredibly feats during this period of our history were of course vital to its success.

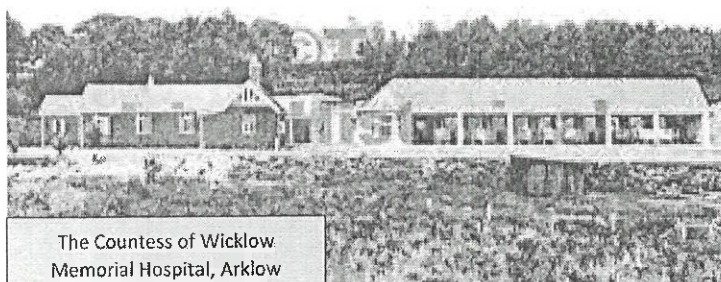
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<sup>42</sup> Note the new titles.

<sup>43</sup> In her written request Mrs. Leslie-Ellis claimed the suffering civilian residents of the town had 'nowhere else to go'. The Wicklow Newsletter, cited in 'The Influenza Epidemic of 1918 in Wicklow Town and District', cited by Bro. John Kavanagh in the Wicklow Historical Society Journal 1990. Permission was immediately granted and the first patients were admitted within hours.

<sup>44</sup> The National Museum of Ireland: The Enemy Within, The Spanish Flu in Ireland 1918-19, citing Dr. Ida Milne, in *Stacking the Coffins: Influenza, war, and revolution in Ireland 1918-19* (2018).

## No. 5. The Countess of Wicklow Memorial hospital in Arklow.



The Countess of Wicklow Memorial Hospital, Arklow

This was the last hospital opened in County Wicklow during the Great War period and as the name implies it was sponsored by the Earl of Wicklow in memory of his late wife Gladys, Countess Wicklow, who passed away on March 12<sup>th</sup> 1917. The announcement of her death appeared in the Wicklow

Newsletter on May 12<sup>th</sup> 1917 with a simple statement announcing a proposal to erect the Countess of Wicklow's Memorial Hospital at Arklow. It was further stated that the new facility was to be located on the site of the Kynock's Munitions Factory on the north side of Arklow.



Gladys, Countess of Wicklow

The new hospital contained just twelve beds. Originally a Works Hospital owned by the Kynocks Munitions Factory, it was located within the grounds of the factory on the North side of the river, close to the present site of the Arklow Bay Hotel. Its original purpose was to treat the injuries suffered by employees during the course of their duties. Manufacturing explosives could be a very dangerous job; and frequently resulted in the serious injuries of employees. The hospital was originally provided to treat these injuries, and was later enlarged in 1921 by the addition of three new wards and an operating theatre. Almost nothing is known about the medical staff who worked in it, or the patients who were treated in it, but there were two tragic incidents involving this hospital that are worthy of note. *One of these took place after the Great War itself, but*

*as already mentioned, all the other County Wicklow Hospitals were also operating well after the war. Most importantly, numerous British servicemen were treated in this hospital during the 1918-1919 flu epidemic and the during the War of Independence, as it was the only hospital in the area.*

### The big explosion

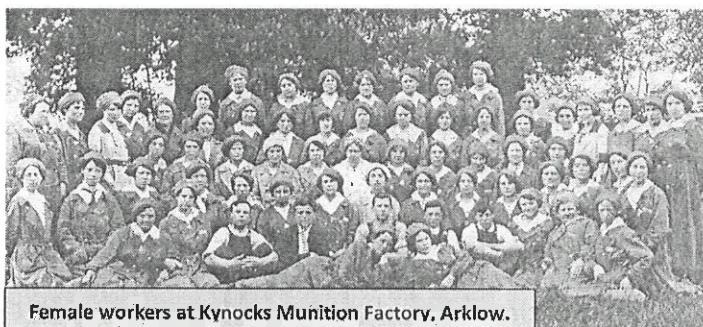
The first of these fatal incidents took place on September 21<sup>st</sup> 1917 when an explosion occurred in the factory that killed twenty-eight men. Working in a munition factory was very dangerous because of the volatile nature of the chemicals used in its manufacture. Accidents frequently occurred, and prior to this incident there had been three fatal accidents in the factory. This is why the factory had its own hospital. The exact reasons for these incidents are unknown, but were possibly caused by the carelessness that familiarity breeds in the behaviour of workers. No-one knows exactly what caused the 1917 explosion, but a total of thirty-seven men were instantaneously killed. There were also an unstated number of injured, and it is said that one of these later died in the



hospital. The plant had over three thousand men employed in it at the time, as well as several hundred women. Since the population of Arklow could not supply those numbers, special trains were laid on every morning and evening to bring employees from places as far away as Wicklow Town, Glenealy, Rathdrum, Avoca, Aughrim and Woodenbridge on the northern line; and Wexford, Enniscorthy, Gorey and Camolin of the Southern line.

### Civil unrest and the shooting incident

In times of war munitions factories are officially classified as **vital installations**; and are placed under permanent military protection. In Arklow a company of about one-hundred soldiers lived full-time within the factory grounds. The first troops to be stationed there in 1916 were a company of Royal Munster



Female workers at Kynocks Muniton Factory, Arklow.

Fusiliers, and it is believed that this was a Garrison Company that remained in Arklow until the end of the war<sup>45</sup>. As this is the case, they would have used the Factory Hospital as a garrison hospital, and all of their accidents and everyday illnesses would have been treated there. As these troops were all Irishmen, they were relieved by English troops from 1919/1920 as part of a national policy decision made at the start of the War of Independence. This change led to an unfortunate incident in 1921 when an enormous crowd of 2000/3000 people gathered in the Main Street in Arklow to greet ex-nationalist prisoner and hunger-striker Andrew Holt, who had just been released from prison and who had travelled to Arklow by train. At the time the soldiers in the Kynocks garrison were having their annual regimental celebration in the men's mess, and were supposedly inebriated. They were also without commissioned officers, as these resided in lodgings in town<sup>46</sup>. When the soldiers heard the disturbance on the streets they rushed to the bridge where some **unprovoked shots were fired** at the crowd. It was suggested at the time that a single shot was fired (presumably from the crowd), followed by three volleys (from the soldiers). This evidence is contradicted by the fact that just two casualties were reported. The more minor of these was John Kavanagh, who was said to have been wounded. It is highly unlikely that so many shots could be fired into a crowd of 3000 people crammed into narrow streets without causing a lot more carnage. It seems much more likely that warning shots were fired into the air, and that under cover of these one or two soldiers fired into the crowd. The seriously wounded victim was a young Arklow-man named **Philip Dowling**, who was out walking with his girlfriend and whose attention had apparently been attracted by the crowd. He was taken to the Kynock hospital where he later died from his wounds. Although it isn't mentioned in any reports, John

<sup>45</sup> Garrison troops were retired soldiers who volunteered for service during the war. They were considered to be too old for active service, and were used for garrison duties in order to free-up younger soldiers that could be sent to the front.

<sup>46</sup> Every regiment in the British Army has an annual Celebration Day each year, usually on the anniversary of some famous battle on which it played a significant part. There were usually three separate parties running concurrently; one for Officers, another for NCO's and the third for privates. It is likely that on this occasion there were just two, as the commissioned officers were lodging in the town. If this is the case, the first intimation of trouble that the officers would have had would have been the sounds of the first fusillade of shooting. A full report on the incident was published in the Wicklow People 01-05-1920.

Kavanagh must also have been brought to hospital. This personal tragedy was afterwards turned into a **political circus**, when an inquest into the event was held later in the town. This returned a verdict of wilful murder by unknown soldiers of the Lancashire Regiment, although this was immediately denied by the military. Nothing was ever done about the incident, and it was apparently swept under the carpet. This terrible tragedy is compounded by the fact that Dowling was an ex-RIC Constable who had resigned his position in order to enlist in the army during the war. His untimely death later turned into a greater family tragedy when his brother Constable Michael James Dowling, RIC, was shot dead on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1921 by republican forces in Blackwood, County Roscommon. **It is truly ironic that these two policemen-brothers were killed by the opposing sides in the Irish War of Independence.**

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TOTAL 7993

## Brendan Flynn: Local History Project: Wicklow Women in the Great War

### Book 3: County Wicklow VAD's who worked in hospitals in other parts of Ireland, in England, or on Active Service in France, Belgium, Malta, Egypt or Italy.



VAD Advertising poster

Voluntary Aid Division (VAD) nurses were probably the best-known group of female participants in the Great War. Their white uniform with the red cross on the front made them easily the most recognisable public image of the war. A number of reasons contributed to their fame. Their young age and consequent beauty certainly contributed, as patients and many others saw them as modern-day Florence Nightingales. Undertaking menial tasks in hospitals that were done by domestic servants in their own homes also contributed to their renown, as this exemplified their willingness to do just about any kind of work to help. It isn't fully appreciated nowadays, but Great War VAD's were the original multi-taskers. Aside from various kinds

of nursing duties, they also successfully carried out a whole range of other duties including cooking, various kinds of maid, Hall Porter, Bureau, Housekeeper, store-keeper, various types of clerks, administrators and typists; as well as treating patients with more advanced ionization and massage treatment. Mainstream nursing duties included specialist areas like Day and Night Nursing, surgical and shell-shock patients. On top of all this they also became land girls, munitions workers, drivers and just about anything else imaginable.

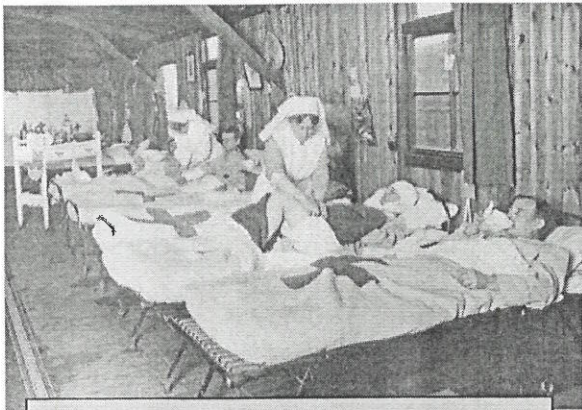
#### Typical VAD Career paths

Most VAD volunteers began with an initial First Aid training course, which was usually organised by a local doctor. Following this, many took a Home Nursing course, the combined courses sufficient to allow entry to a Dublin hospital where they underwent a special three-month nursing course under the supervision of a professional Matron and her Staff Nurses. Thus qualified, most ended up as **Nursing Sister's** in hospitals in Counties Wicklow, Dublin or the Curragh Military Hospital. Large numbers of these later travelled to England where the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) had opened over 3,000 new War Hospitals. Later still, dozens went on **active service** to France, Belgium, Malta, Egypt and Italy.



VAD Nursing Sister Ida Halpin of Wicklow.

## Other types of war-work



VAD Nursing Sisters with wounded soldiers in a Field Hospital in France

Our Wicklow VAD's didn't just work in hospitals, they also performed many other vital wartime functions. From 1916 onwards, farmers everywhere in Britain and Ireland were having trouble harvesting their crops due to the drastic manpower-shortage. This shortage was caused by the fact that over six million British and Irish men were serving in the army and navy<sup>47</sup>, not to mention the half-million or so who had already become casualties<sup>48</sup>. Women in England responded by forming a **Land Army** that took the place of men

on farms. Here in County Wicklow VAD's like Helen Moore, Rose Riall and Lucie Roberts, all from Bray became **land-girls** and pitched in to help. These and many other local VAD's spent several months in 1917 and again in 1918 helping Wicklow farmers harvest their crops, thus providing essential food to the country.

Maud Harding from Greystones and Maud Langford from Princess Patricia's Hospital in Bray were just two of those Wicklow VAD's to work as **munitions-workers** in England; while many others worked in Munitions factories in Dublin and Kynocks Munitions Factory in Arklow. Another

Female Munition workers at Kynocks in Arklow



Wicklow VAD named Jennie Hamilton was one of a select few who worked in the central military Remount Station at Plunkley in England **training cavalry horses**. A number of others became **motor drivers** and operated motor vehicles, tractors and ambulances. These included the Bray-trio of Dorothy Denroche, Phoebe McIvor and Ruby Figgis; who along with Lillie and Annie DeCoursey-Dillon all drove ambulances in London. Helen O'Neill of Glenealy drove Army lorries and other military vehicles for the Army Service Corps (ASC); while Margaret Bond worked as an active-service **ambulance-driver** for both the British Army and Belgian Army. She was later awarded the War Medal by both countries. Despite the undoubted bravery and success of these women; they were all out-performed by Hilda Riall from Bray. She became Wicklow's most famous VAD-driver when she was made head **ambulance-driver** in a Dublin hospital for a full year.

Another profession that developed in military hospitals during the Great War was that of **masseur**. The profession had been around for many years, but had rarely been used in hospitals. It came into its own during the Great War as a result of the shattering injuries



Aileen Mina Crofton VAD of Ashford.

<sup>47</sup> Three-quarters of a million British soldiers (this includes Irish) were killed during the war, with another one-and-one-half million wounded.

<sup>48</sup> Military casualties in the Great War include wounded and killed. The ratio of these is usually about 3:1.

## Hours of work

The hours worked by VAD's were quite horrendous, as is exemplified by the record left by Eileen Herbert, a Kerry-woman who served as a VAD Nursing Sister in Princess Patricia's Hospital in Bray. She recorded that she worked seven days a week, with one half-day off every week. Half-days were staggered between different nurses so as to keep the hospital fully operational, so you didn't get time off with your friends. She was also allowed an additional half-day off every *second* Sunday. Her daily hours of work were 7.00 a.m. until 8 p.m. each day, with a three-hour break during the day for lunch etc. Given the type of work they were doing, and the grotesque injuries they were treating, it is a wonder that the health of so few of them broke down.



VAD Nursing Sister  
Florence Clements  
Milltown. Rathnew

But it did, as will be seen from the later section dealing with *Active Service in war zones*.

## Types of hospital work

Among the many routine medical tasks carried out by Nursing VAD's in hospitals were Surgical Nursing, Day and Night Nursing, General Nursing, Shell-shock, and specialist work with amputees. General Service (GS) VAD tasks included wards, linen, bureau, stores and canteen, patient dining room, staff dining room and kitchen. Other non-medical tasks included housemaid, parlour maid, kitchen maid and specialist tasks like ionisation treatment, massage and various types of clerical work.

## Family Record

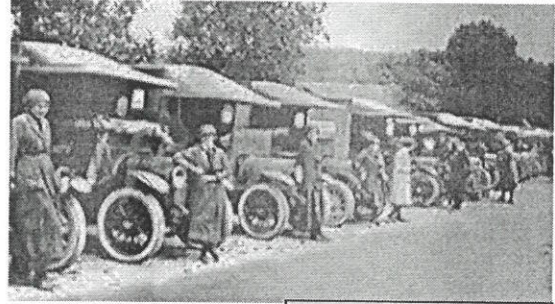
The Hall family from Church Hill, Enniskerry hold an unusual record for their service in Colonial Military hospitals. Mary and her daughters Louise and Irene all volunteered as GS VAD's and went to the south of England to take up posts among the mass of hospitals that were located close to the ferry ports.

As it transpired, all three ended up working in hospitals belonging to the American, Canadian and Australian armies.

Mary and her daughter Irene both worked in the Australian Army Hospital at Harefield in Middlesex. Louise and her sister Irene both worked at the 37<sup>th</sup> USA Hospital at Dartford in Kent, while Louise also worked in the No. 4 Canadian General Hospital at Basingstoke in Hampshire. The family also worked at hospitals in London and Gateshead. This remarkable record of family service with colonial troops is unique amongst County Wicklow-women, and is made more interesting by the mystery surrounding Ruth's age. According to the BRCS Irene was 18 years-old when she was first employed by them in March 1918. The 1911 census however, gives her age as 8, which clearly shows that she was actually just 15 years of age when she was employed by the BRCS in 1918. This probably explains why either her mother or sister worked with her in all of her posts. The story would also appear to confirm that when it came to stretching their age at enlistment, girls were just as willing as boys!

## Active Service in hospitals in War Zones

During the Great War over thirty County Wicklow VAD's served in **War Zones** mainly in France and Belgium on the **Western Front**; and Malta, Egypt and Italy on the **Mediterranean/Middle-Eastern Front**. Because of the enormous numbers of casualties involved, a graduated system of military hospitals grew up to the rear of the actual battlefield. Casualty evacuation began



Red Cross Ambulance  
Convoy with VAD drivers

when a wounded soldier was brought into a Regimental Aid Post (RAP) or Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) just a few hundred yards behind the front line. Depending on the severity of his injuries, he was then successively transferred, ever rearwards, first to a Field Hospital, then to a Base Hospital, followed by transfer to a ferry port, and so back to England or Ireland. Wicklow VAD's, and indeed doctors, nurses and orderlies from County Wicklow were involved in every stage of this operation.

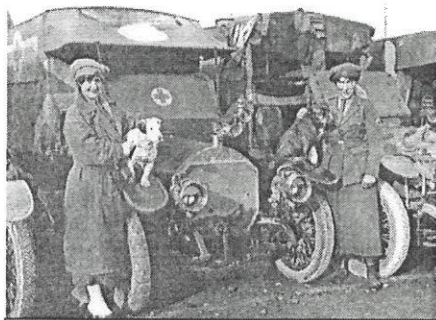
Most worked on the **Western Front** in France and Belgium. It is difficult to imagine now, but there were over a hundred Field hospitals run by the BRCS, SJAB and British Army located in the immediate area adjoining the Channel Ports. These also ran an Ambulance Convoy system for evacuating casualties from the Front Line to the Hospitals in the rear. Bray-woman Dorothy Denroche served on two of these; the Trouville Red Cross Convoy, and the Etaples Red Cross Convoy. We know the details of 24 VAD's from County Wicklow who served on Active Service in France, and another 2 who served in Belgium. Five others served in the **Mediterranean/Middle-Eastern Front** in Malta; with another three serving in Egypt and one in Italy. It must also be stressed at this point that these women are merely the ones we know about; the reality is that there must have been very many more that we don't know about.

Fourteen of these Active Service VAD Nurses **hailed from Bray**, including Olive Brew who worked in a hospital in Belgium; and Dorothy Denroche, Ada Beatty, Rose Riall and Beatrice Whelan who all worked in France. Others who served in France include **Greystones-women** May Fitzgibbon and Effie Eager; while Greystones-woman Averil Deverell worked for the French Red Cross at Cambrai. Sisters Anna and Ellen La Nauze **from Glenealy** served in Etaples, Boulogne and Malta; while Samia Briscoe **from Ashford** served in Etretat in France. **Arklow-woman** Nellie Darcy served in Wimereux, also in France.

On a lighter note, the record of Beatrice Whelan from Bray, shows that during her stay in Malta, she lightened the mood of the war by playing the violin at over 20 concerts!



## Mental and physical health



Red-Cross Ambulances with VAD drivers and their pet dogs

The physical and mental strain under which these heroic young Wicklow-women worked was bound to have its effect. Nothing in their previous life prepared them for the carnage they encountered in France. Handling a never-ending river of wounded and maimed on a daily basis inevitably led to some of them crumbling under the stress. As a result of their collapse a number of Wicklow-women had to be invalided home. The first of these to go was Ada Beatty from Bray, who was invalided home in 1916 but who returned to France immediately after her recovery. Overwork once again took its strain and

she was *invalided home a second time* in 1919. Ada was just 23 years old when she started nursing, and no amount of training and commitment prepared her for what she met in the charnel-houses of France. This and the work-load broke the health of two other Bray-women in a similar way. Sydney McMullen had her initial breakdown in St. Omar in France and she was also invalided home. Instead of returning to France after recovery, she wisely opted to take up an appointment in a hospital in Dublin. Unfortunately, she suffered a *second breakdown* at this hospital. Jeannie Scott was the other Bray-woman who was also invalided home from France.

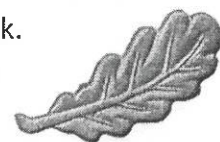
### The home-towns of the Active-service VAD's

Of the 29 VAD's from County Wicklow who have been identified as serving on *Active-service Fronts*, sixteen came from Bray, four from Greystones, two from Glenealy. One each came from Enniskerry, Ashford, Rathnew, Wicklow and Arklow. The addresses of the remainder are listed simply as County Wicklow.

### Honours awarded to VAD's (not including those in County Wicklow Hospitals)

During the Great War *Service Bars* made of *coloured braid* were awarded to VAD's for varying kinds of service, all of which were worn on the sleeves of their uniform. At the upper end of importance were scarlet bars, which were issued for service in military hospitals in war zones, followed by white bars for each additional year served in that role. Then came blue "efficiency bars" for your dedication and the quality of your work. Blue chevrons were also issued for overseas service, each one representing one years' service.

All of Wicklow's active-service VAD's received some of these awards. Kathleen Chapman was awarded three scarlet war service bars, while Effie Eager from Greystones got two. Anna La Nauze from Glenealy got one scarlet bar and two blue efficiency bars. Elizabeth Riall from Bray was awarded one white bar and two blue chevrons, while Mattie Scott, also from Bray was awarded one white stripe and three blue chevrons. These awards are typical of those presented to all Wicklow-women.



Above: MID Oak Leaf  
Below: Victory Medal  
with Oak Leaf



Other, more prestigious awards called *Member of the British Empire (MBE)*, the *Royal Red Cross (RRC)* and *Mentioned in Dispatch (MID)* were also bestowed on Wicklow-women. At that point in British History, it was customary for all commanders to submit a report (despatch) to his superiors at the end of every campaign. In it he selected individuals for particular praise and recommended them for some honour, in this case the *MBE*, or *RRC*.



Others were merely 'mentioned' by name as having done something that positively affected the outcome of the operation. This was the '*Mention*' referred to. The MBE and RRC awards were elaborate medals, while the MID was a simple brass oak leaf which was pinned to the ribbon of your Service Medal or Victory Medal. In the case of VAD nurses, the report was submitted by the Commanding Officer (CO) of their own hospital, who was usually a doctor, so it must be assumed that the recommendation was thoroughly deserved. Many Wicklow nurses received one or more of these awards during the war, some of which will be dealt with here, while others have been dealt with earlier in *Book 2: Hospitals in County Wicklow and their VAD nurses*.

29 year-Old Ruby Figgis was the only *active-service* Wicklow-woman to be awarded the *MBE*. She first worked as a VAD chauffeuse in Malta from September 1915 until April 1916. Later she was transferred to France, where she served as a driver until January 1919.

Olive Brew from Bray was the only *active-service VAD nurse* from County Wicklow to be presented with the *RRC*. She served for much of the war in a hospital in Belgium. We do not know exactly why she was selected for this prestigious award, but the disastrous Passchendaele campaign in the winter of 1917 may have had something to do with it. This was the only large-scale military campaign of the war that continued through much of the winter, and the images of young soldiers drowning in the mudholes that had been their trenches lives forever in the mind. What was left of the 16<sup>th</sup> (Irish) Division and the 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division famously fought side by side in this campaign and both divisions were utterly destroyed.

### The death of Family members

It has been suggested in the past that many of these young women were motivated by the fact that members of their families were serving in the war; and the thought of doing something positive to help may have influenced their decision. Whether this is true or not; it is a fact that the families of many Wicklow VAD's were visited with tragedy. It would be impossible to mention everyone, but a random sample will suffice to make the point:

Bray-woman Violet Carpendale worked in hospitals in Bray and London. She lost her brother Max when he was killed in 1918. She had a breakdown shortly after getting the news and had to be invalided home. Effie Eager from Greystones served in France from May 1918 until May 1919. She also lost her brother William killed in 1915. May Fitzgibbon, who was another Greystones-woman, nursed in Birmingham before going to France in April 1918 for ten months. She was yet another Wicklow VAD to lose a sibling; her brother Richard was killed in 1915. Ellen and Anna La Nauze from Glenealy had the unfortunate personal tragedy of losing their two brothers George and William. Both served in the Royal Irish Rifles and were killed

within a week of one another in May 1915. Both Ellen and Anna served in France from June 1918.

### **Trained Nurses (TN), Military Nurses, Doctors and RAMC Orderly's from County Wicklow on Active Service**

Although this article deals specifically with County Wicklow women VAD's, at this point it might be appropriate to mention some other medical personnel from County Wicklow who worked alongside them on Active Service. These include:

Ten Professionally *Trained Nurses (TN)*<sup>50</sup>, three of whom served in France. These were Emily Howe and Margaret Lacy from Bray; and Kathleen Townsend from Enniskerry. The other seven all served in hospitals in Britain and Ireland.

Four *Military Nurses*<sup>51</sup> from County Wicklow also served throughout the war. These were TN's who were also professional soldiers. They were Susannah Armstrong from Newtown who served with the *Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS)*, she served overseas for one year. Bray-woman Alice Isaacson and Tinahely-woman Martha Morgan both saw Active Service with *the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC)*, and Alice Scott from Bray served as a Military Nurse in *Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS)* in Egypt and Italy. Alice Isaacson CMNS mentioned above, spent a year nursing in France. She holds the unusual distinction of having an enormous collection of photographs that record her service in France held in the Canadian National Archives<sup>52</sup>.

### **Other Medical Wicklowmen and women who died in the war**

Quite apart from those mentioned above, many other Wicklow-men also worked in *medical spheres* during the war. These included three male BRCS Orderlies, whose job was that of stretcher-bearer. These were George Crozier and Cecil Fitzherbert of Bray; and William Stuart from Rathdrum. All of these saw active-service in France. Crozier also served in Russia and Rumania, and was presented with the *Medal of Saint Stanislaus of Russia* for his work there.

There were also many Wicklow Doctors and ordinary soldiers (Orderlies) serving in the *Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC)*. A total of seventy doctors served in the *RAMC* during the war who were either born in County Wicklow, or lived and practiced there. So many doctors were engaged in military work, that during the war, the civilian population of County Wicklow had to be cared for by elderly men who had retired prior to the commencement of the war, and who volunteered come out of retirement to take place of the younger men at war. Nine of these Wicklow doctors died on active service. These were James Duggan from Greystones who was killed in Gallipoli in 1915; Frank Ferguson of Bray died in 1919; John Gage from Rathdrum and Newtownmountkennedy died of malaria and pneumonia in Salonika in 1918; Ernest Henly who served with the New Zealand forces died in 1918; Robert Lee from Bray was lost in the sinking of the Mailboat Leinster when it was torpedoed in October 1918; Harry Massey-Miles from Bray died of wounds in April 1918 in France; Samuel Matthews of Wicklow

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<sup>50</sup> These women were all professional full-time career nurses. They were commonly known as Trained Nurses.

<sup>51</sup> AANS, CAMC, QAIMNS were all military organisations, where the nurses were considered to be soldiers.

<sup>52</sup> These can be viewed on the Library and Archives Canada website.

and Newcastle died in Tanzania in November 1918; and Walter Quinn of Greystones died in Iraq. George Taylor from Tinahely drowned in Mesopotamia in 1917. He was one of three doctor-brothers who served with the RAMC throughout the war.

Assisting these military doctors in the RAMC were *male orderlies* who worked as stretcher-bearers in combat, and male-nurses in military hospitals. Seven of these men from County Wicklow lost their lives during the war. Alfred Kelly and Thomas Scully were Bray-men, while Edward Starkey came from Ashford. George Grimes was a native of Rathdrum; while Edward Mackay came from Dunlavin. Gabriel West came from Delgany and John Mullarchy was born in an unidentified part of County Wicklow. Starkey and Kelly served with the Canadian forces, while Mackay served with the Australians. The rest served with the RAMC.

Once again, it must be stressed that these are the professional doctors, orderly's and nurses *that we know about*. There must be very many more that we do not know about.

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