“Tell them of Us” is taken from one of the famous epitaphs of John Maxwell Edmonds and is a fitting title of this book about the North Tyrone Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps and their service in the Great War.

The story of this group has not been told in such detail before and there are many unseen photographs and new sources included. Trained in readiness should Civil War break out at home, they were the first detachment to set sail for France at the outbreak of the Great War. Funded by Ulster men and women, they first set up the Ulster Volunteer hospital in Pau, France, nursing the French wounded as well as German POWs and as war intensified, they then moved closer to the front, establishing their Hospital in Lyons.

This unique story gives Edith and her fellow Volunteers the opportunity to have their voices heard more than a hundred years later.

Claire McElhinney, author, and Amanda Porter, project co-ordinator

Supported by Miss Edith Harkness
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1912 Declaration signed by women in Plumbridge Orange Hall, Plumbridge, Co Tyrone
(PRONI – D1327/3/3429)
Usually when we hear about the momentous events of the Third Home Rule crisis and First World War, we hear about the 218,000 men who signed the Ulster Covenant, the 100,000 men who enrolled in the Ulster Volunteers and the heroic and tragic sacrifice that they subsequently made on the battlefields of the Somme.

It would be easy to assume that in those far off Edwardian days, ladies didn’t get involved in that kind of thing, but that would be very wrong. In fact, on Ulster Day in 1912, the number of women who signed the Declaration which accompanied the Ulster Covenant was higher than the number of men who signed the Covenant itself. Taken together, almost half a million men and women pledged to resist Home Rule by any means, in what must rank as one of the greatest shows of popular feeling in the history of the United Kingdom.

Their opposition to Home Rule was as much cultural as it was economic. They cherished their shared heritage with Great Britain, especially with Scotland and appealed to their kin on the far side of the North Channel for support on the basis of their shared identity. Ulster’s leadership was largely Ulster-Scots in cultural identity and even Edward Carson, who had been born in Dublin, readily identified with this, his own family having come from Dumfries. The very concept of the Ulster Covenant was Ulster-Scots, based on the Scottish National Covenant of 1638.

When the men and women of Tyrone went to sign on Ulster Day, the words of their own local poet, Rev WF Marshall were fresh in their minds. That morning, his poem *The Blue Banner* had been published in the local papers. It unashamedly used their Covenanting Ulster-Scots heritage as an inspiration:

“…For all they died for gladly in the homeland o’er the sea,  
For blood-won rights that still are ours as Ulsterborn and free,  
For the land we came to dwell in, and the martyr’s faith we hold –  
God grant we be as leal to these as were the men of old!...”
Baronscourt Castle Postcard
(Courtesy of Amanda Porter)
When it came to making good on their pledge, the women of Ulster were every bit as ready to act as the men and volunteered in large numbers to lend their support: and so it came to be that Edith Harkness and her friends, drawn from the country around the Ulster-Scots plantation village of Newtownstewart; and under the patronage of the Duchess of Abercorn, matriarch of Ulster’s foremost Ulster-Scots family, became a detachment of the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps.

Of course when they began organising and drilling it was in preparation for a confrontation which no-one in Ulster wanted and they all hoped would never happen. The tragedy was that it was only averted by a much larger conflict, which would see the Tyrone nurses working not in their native Ulster, but dealing with the carnage of the Western Front.

This book sheds new light on a largely unknown aspect of Ulster’s story and represents a tremendous effort on the part of the author, Claire McElhinney, who started out painstakingly researching a family story and uncovered something of much wider significance.

It is a story that deserves to be told.

Ian Crozier
Chief Executive,
Ulster-Scots Agency
This book is dedicated to my Mother,
Muriel Elizabeth Houston (née McFarlane), Plumbridge, daughter of Edith Harkness.
23 August 1925 – 3 June 2018
(Courtesy of Mrs Linda Houston)
My sincere thanks must go to the Ulster Scots Agency, Belfast and to their Chief Executive Mr Ian Crozier for agreeing to fund this entire publication. Without their financial support this book most likely would never have been published and the contribution of the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps, who went to France at the outbreak of World War One, never told.

I also want to gratefully acknowledge the help, encouragement and IT skills of my friend of over 37 years, Amanda Porter. She has been responsible for ‘drafting in’ photos, maps and other relevant material to where they should be! Not only has she proof-read the entire manuscript with me, (several times over!!), accompanied me to various places when researching material for the book but she has been responsible for managing the project in conjunction with the Ulster-Scots Agency. Determined that my story be told, Amanda was the one who suggested we approach the Ulster Scots Agency in the first instance to see if they would be interested in what I had written and facilitated a meeting in 2016 with Mr Ian Crozier the Chief Executive, and Mr Iain Carlisle of the Ulster-Scots Community Network, at which we presented our proposal.

Thank you also to the staff of the Local Studies Departments of Omagh, Strabane and Armagh Libraries who were always helpful on my visits. Our trips to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, in Belfast were made more enjoyable by the very pleasant staff, from the security man, the receptionist and those I asked for assistance in the research and reading rooms! I am very grateful to those friends and fellow genealogists who very kindly sent me pictures or other material for use in this publication; their contribution has been acknowledged on the relevant pages.

A very special thanks to designer Mark Thompson and his team for ‘brining to life’ the story of my grandmother’s nursing years in the Great War. Their design ideas, skills and attention to detail has transformed my manuscript into more than I thought possible.

Throughout the three years that I spent researching material for the book and typing the manuscript, family and friends and those who were interested in what I was doing, greatly encouraged me by simply asking “How’s the book coming on?”
Ulster Volunteer Medical & Nursing Corps Badge.
(Courtesy of Mr Billy Fisher)
Thank you to my cousins Miss Shirley McCay and her sister Mrs Amanda McGall for unearthing the photo album belonging to our grandmother. This has been an invaluable help in constructing Edith’s life during the Great War and the years beyond.

To my husband Jack and our two children, Faith and Matthew, my sincere thanks for your support and encouragement over the last few years while I devoted a large portion of my spare time to researching and compiling this book, which I hope will be of interest to them and future generations.

Another important person that I wish to acknowledge is my mother Muriel, Edith’s eldest daughter. Mum answered my many questions as best as she could and even though she was in her 90’s, her recall of events and people, when prompted, was quite remarkable. Sadly mum passed away in June 2018 and her brother Leslie just two weeks earlier.

Claire McElhinney,
Omagh, County Tyrone (2018)
To the Editor, “Tyrone Constitution.”

Dear Sir—Your readers will be interested to learn that the above mentioned Tyrone Volunteer Force Hospital has been appointed by St. John’s Ambulance Association, as also the assistant surgeon and matron. The Ulster nurses comprise—Nurse Wright, Strabane; Nurse Patrick, Castleford; Nurse Sullivan, Dungannon, and Nurse Jamison, Dungannon, and Stevens, belonging to the U.V.F. Hospital and Nursing Corps, and Dr. Clarke (assistant-surgeon). The other members of the staff include—Miss Sinclair, Holyhill; Miss Balfour, Lissadill; Miss Alexander, Moy; Miss Harkness, Plainsbridge; Miss Dickson, Dungannon; Miss C. Moore, Strabane; Miss Thompson, Clandeboye, Sergeant Bus, Mr. Tom Lowry, Mr. A. Downer, and Mr. R. Hunter, all members of the U.V.F. H. and N. Corps.

We wish to warmly thank all the Volunteers, trained and otherwise, whom we have had reluctantly to refuse owing to the necessity of the majority of the staff understanding French. We would like to take this opportunity of thanking Miss Maud Kendrew for her most generous gift of hospital equipment, and for all her care in the packing and despatching of the hospital baggage, a very large order. We also wish to tender our best thanks to Mr. Thomas Gallaher, Belfast S.S. Co., for the free transport of entire staff and baggage between Belfast and Liverpool.

As the scheme has of necessity become larger than was at first anticipated, we have to meet an expenditure, first to the amount of about £600, so we trust that the great interest that North-West Ulster has shown in the matter will have practical results in donations to meet our claims. We thank all those of every class who have already subscribed, but we earnestly plead for more.

It has been suggested that any person of district subscribing £10 would provide for a bed among the fifty we are establishing, and it could be named by the donor. Mr. W. B. Smyth, Strathsfoyle, Strabane, has kindly consented to act as treasurer, but all donations should be sent to Barencourt, where they will be thankfully acknowledged—Yours faithfully.

Rosalind Abercorn,
President St. John’s Ambulance Association, Tyrone.

Rosalie Belle Sinclair,
Batallion Organiser.

October 6, 1914.
INTRODUCTION

I never intended to write this book. I had been actively involved in genealogy and family history for almost twenty years and most of that time was spent researching my maiden name of Houston and while I had a fairly good knowledge of my immediate maternal connection, the McFarlane’s, I had never written anything down. However, a few years ago I decided to make a start on the McFarlane surname and became really interested in my grandmother, Edith (nee Harkness), who I knew was a nurse in the First World War.

Looking through family papers I came across a newspaper cutting that my auntie Flo had given me several years ago along with a few other documents. It was dated October 1914 and was a letter written by the Duchess of Abercorn and sent to the Belfast Newsletter and some of the local newspapers informing readers that a group of about twenty people from north Tyrone, who were all members of the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps, had gone to Pau, in Southern France to nurse French wounded soldiers. The name of everyone was listed and included Edith Harkness, my grandmother. This information was just too exciting to include in a record of family history and file away and so I forgot about the extended McFarlane family and concentrated on the story of Edith’s service in the First World War or the ‘Great War’ as it was known at the time. Thus, ‘a great oak from a little acorn grew’ and my family tree became a book!

The formation and organising of this group was in the capable hands of Rosabelle Sinclair, Hollyhill, Strabane, County Tyrone who was born in France in 1884. She became the Directrice of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital at its two locations in France where the group served until August 1917 when funds became difficult to obtain and the hospital closed. Hospital personnel who by that time also included staff from other parts of the world; England, Scotland, Canada, Australia and France, relocated to various medical establishments in France and the British Isles. Edith served in France until May 1916 and then joined the staff of Ripon Military Hospital where she remained until late 1920.

At the end of this book I have included Profiles of many of the staff from the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France. However, I hope I have succeeded in conveying that my grandmother had experienced life in its most cruel form before being forever known as ‘Mrs Walter McFarlane’.
“TELL THEM OF US”

Left: Covenant signed by men
Right: Declaration signed by women
Prior to 1800 the island of Ireland was ruled by a Dublin parliament. The 1800 Act of Union, which came into force in 1801, then united Ireland to Great Britain with one parliament overall – Westminster in England.

The First Home Rule Bill of 1886 and the Second Home Rule Bill of 1892/93 were an attempt to reverse this type of governance whereby Ireland would, once again, be ruled by a parliament ‘at home’ - namely Dublin. However, both these Bills were defeated but towards the end of 1911 the threat of a Third Home Rule Bill was gaining momentum. Although it was eventually passed by the House of Commons on 25 May 1914, with the onset of war, a few months later, it was decided to defer the enactment of the law until after the hostilities had ceased.

A four year war was not envisaged and when it came to an end on 11 November 1918, Ireland then entered into a time of great unrest and violence until 1922 – a period in Irish history that my grandmother’s generation referred to as the ‘bad times’ but known historically as ‘The Irish War of Independence’.

It was the very real possibility of a Third Home Rule Bill becoming law, which ‘stirred’ the Protestant people of the province of Ulster to action. Ably led by Dublin barrister Sir Edward Carson and Captain James Craig, MP for East Down, they soon had organised themselves into an army of volunteers throughout Ulster. All across the province more and more men were volunteering from all walks of life, many of whom were members of the Ulster Unionist Council and the Orange Order. Unionist Clubs were very strong in County Tyrone and prior to the formalising of the volunteers into the Ulster Volunteer Force in early 1913, there was already eighty-eight drilling centres in Tyrone, yet it was felt by some people that “Tyrone was of little importance and all opposition to a Dublin Parliament was concentrated in Belfast, or at most in the four Counties of Antrim, Down, Armagh and Derry.”

In order to show the rest of the province that Tyrone had “a vast army of men ready to sacrifice themselves for the maintenance of the principles and liberties which they have had handed down
to them” they organised a “great Mid Ulster Unionist meeting” which was held in Omagh, County Tyrone on 5 January 1912 “when every county from Donegal to Cavan was represented.”

Tyrone Unionist clubs had also been well represented at the large demonstration at Craigavon House, in Belfast on 23 September 1911 and again at the Balmoral demonstration, also in Belfast, on 9 April 1912.

On 28 September 1912 approximately 218,206 men signed ‘The Solemn League and Covenant’ and 228,981 women signed the ‘Declaration’, pledging to defend their position in the United Kingdom. This was a very worrying time for the British government who now had a very clear picture of the volume of opposition they faced in Ulster if they continued with the Home Rule Bill.

By January 1913 the volunteers across the Province came under one command to be known as the ‘Ulster Volunteer Force’ – UVF. There were County Divisions, Regiments, Battalions, Companies, Half-Companies, Sections and Squads.

For the remainder of 1913 and part of 1914 it was a time of great activity all over Ulster which was comprised of nine counties at that time. There was training, drill camps and church parades for the men, nursing classes for the women and fund raising events. One such training camp was held near Clones, County Monaghan in March 1914. The Tyrone Constitution reported:

“....work commenced in earnest at Knockballymore camp, near Clones, where the leaders and commanders of the County Fermanagh and County Monaghan battalions of the U.V.F are undergoing training. Drilling was carried out for several hours, and there were also musketry classes… there was also a special Sunday service in Clones Parish Church…”

At a meeting on 27 August 1913 the men of Tyrone were encouraged to join their local Ulster Volunteer Force which would hopefully be the start of the formation of the Tyrone Regiment. Over the next few weeks approximately 5000 men ‘signed on’ and the Tyrone Regiment, comprising five Battalions, came into existence. It was also at this inaugural meeting towards the end of August 1913 that Captain Ambrose Ricardo, from Sion Mills, County Tyrone, made the suggestion that a camp of instruction might be held locally in the following months. Within a few weeks the Tyrone Regiment had appointed the Duke of Abercorn from the local Baronscourt Demesne as Officer Commanding of the Regiment and Captain Ricardo as Adjutant.

The Duke of Abercorn readily gave the Tyrone Regiment the use of his demesne and out buildings and with Captain Ricardo in charge of planning and supervising, a Camp of Instruction was organised for Saturday 4 October 1913 to Saturday 11 October 1913.
CHAPTER 1

Copy of 1912 Declaration signed by Edith G Harkness
in Plumbridge Orange Hall, Plumbridge, Co Tyrone
(PRONI – D1327/3/3429)
The Tyrone Regiment now exceeded over 6000 men, so it was decided to restrict those attending, to the officers and non-commissioned officers of the five Tyrone Battalions – approximately 300 men. The objects of the Camp of Instruction were: “to afford everyone attending, instruction in work in the field and to give them such practical training as will best help them to instruct the men of their respective commands.”

The reports published in the *Tyrone Constitution* on the setting up of the camp and the actual training given, was published over three weeks:

Readers learned, “the spacious stables at Baronscourt were converted into a military barracks. There was electric light throughout the buildings, and the interior was most comfortable. Section leaders were accommodated in the premises which afforded ample and admirable quarters. The garage was converted into a spacious and comfortable mess-room while kitchens were also provided with sleeping accommodation adjoining for the cooking staff (supplied by the Ulster Menu Company, Belfast). Within a few yards from the stables were two marquees for lectures on military subjects while a number of bell tents were pitched for the use of the camp police and for storage purposes. Sleeping accommodation for the battalion and company officers was provided in cottages about half a mile distant. There was a camp Post Office and also a Telegraph Office.”

During the week of training, the camp was visited by Lieutenant General Sir George Richardson, KCB General Officer Commanding the Ulster Volunteer Force. Sir George
was received by the Duke of Abercorn and expressed “his amazement and delight with all he had seen and also congratulated the Tyrone Regiment on the distinction of having the first camp of instruction in connection with the Ulster Volunteer Force.” Other visitors to the camp were Officers Commanding from other UVF Regiments and Battalions from throughout the province and it was hoped that they too would be encouraged to set up special training camps in their areas.

As the training camp at Baronscourt was the first of its kind, it drew comment from many of the national as well as the local newspapers. These included The Times, The Morning Post, The Standard, The Daily Chronicle, The Daily Mail, The Pall Mall Gazette, The Manchester Guardian, The Evening Telegraph and The Daily Telegraph. Their comments were either positive or critical according to their “different political complexions.” The one consistency that most commented upon, was the fact that there was also a piano provided! The Duke of Abercorn’s explanation that a piano was provided so that “they will be able to have their sing-song at night” prompted the Evening Telegraph of Dublin to comment: “It will be observed that the Duke says ‘they’ and not ‘we’. This was followed by a two-line stanza “The Dukes and Lords feasted well at their tables, but the poor Volunteers ate and drank in the stables!”

The Duchess of Abercorn was also very much in evidence throughout the training week and in the Tyrone Constitution’s last report of the camp, which was published on 24 October 1913, it reported:

“An account of the camp would not be complete without a reference to the Duchess of Abercorn, who daily showed her great interest in it. Her kindly enquiries as to the welfare of all was greatly appreciated and her presence and that of her two sons at the instruction along with guests at the Castle, was always welcome.”

There is no doubt that, from the volume of newspaper reports, the Camp at Baronscourt was very well organised, well supported and a great success. Building on that success it was anticipated that “as a result of the recent demonstrations and of the holding of the camp of instruction the membership of the Tyrone Regiment will increase to about twice its present total within the next month or two. Already it has shown evidence of great development.”

In December 1913 two reports about Plumbridge and Rylands UVF Company appeared in the Tyrone Constitution. The first report related to a church parade to Glenelly Presbyterian Church just a short distance from the village:

“A church parade of Plumbridge half-company of the North Tyrone Battalion, U.V.F. was held on Sabbath, 14th December. The company numbering almost 70 members assembled at the Orange Hall, Plumbridge, at 11.30am. Falling in under the command of Company Commander Mr John McFarland, J.P., Half-Company Commander Mr. Robert Lunney, and Section Leader Mr. J. Stark, they marched to
Glenelly Presbyterian Church. The sermon, delivered by the Rev. J. Steen, B.A., the worthy minister of the congregation was eminently suitable for the occasion, being full of counsel and encouragement for all, being based on God’s promise to Abraham as found in Genesis 12:2 – ‘And I will make of thee a great nation and I will bless thee and make thy name great and thou shalt be a blessing.”

The second report under the heading of ‘Splendid Demonstration of Determination and Endurance’ related to a field parade on 26 December 1913:

“‘A’ Company of the North Tyrone Battalion U.V.F comprising Rylands and Plumbridge company, under the command of Company Commander J. M. McFarland, J.P., half company Commander William Scott and R. Lunney, (whom we will return to later) engaged in a field parade on December 26th commencing at 1 o’clock. The place of meeting was Beltrim Holm, (on the outskirts of Gortin village) kindly granted by Col. A.R Cole-Hamilton for the occasion. Notwithstanding the great inclemency of the evening, the rain falling in torrents, well over 100 members of the company assembled and took part in the drill in such a whole-hearted manner that it was commonly remarked by the spectators, ‘You would think the sun was shining on them’.

The company was afterwards divided into sections, and each under their leader performed all the evolutions of close and extended drill…. Taking into consideration the short period of training obtained…. all the movements were performed in a manner that reflected great credit on themselves and on their efficient instructors, three local gentlemen who are using every effort to bring the company up to the highest standard of perfection. After the cessation of drill the company marched to the Parochial Hall where refreshments were amply provided for all. Mr. McFarland, in a few well-chosen words, then addressed the company…. The day had turned out a complete success and went to prove that if ever ‘A Company’ were called on to mobilize very few men would be found missing…..”

The following report appeared in the March 1914 edition of the St John’s Ambulance Association magazine and clearly shows that the real threat of Civil War in Ireland was being taken very seriously in the capital city of England by several influential people and they had taken practical steps to help.

“A meeting was held on March 9th at the house of Mrs. Samuel Bruce, 23 Cromwell Road, South Kensington to inaugurate the formation in London of a company of the Ulster Aid Ambulance Corps, when the company of nurses, attired in full uniform, filed before Lady Londonderry, president of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Association. The corps has been raised by Miss Constance Bloomfield, of Castle Caldwell, County Fermanagh, and is to consist of four companies, each complete in itself with a surgeon in command.
Sir Alfred Fripp, who presided over a large attendance, said the primary object of the meeting was to show that England would not be behind hand in backing up other organisations in the alleviation of such casualties as might occur in Ulster.

Lady Londonderry expressed her intense pleasure at accepting from them the magnificent present of an ambulance corps, self-equipped and self-supporting, to help them in Ulster. She specially acknowledged the help given them by the Duchess of Portland, and the president of the corps, who had contributed a large sum to its funds.

At that moment, perhaps, Mr. Asquith and the Government had realised the irony of the title of their Home Rule Bill, “for the better government of Ireland”, for instead of bringing peace it was bringing a sword. Ulster had no intention of relaxing her preparations until she knew all was well.

Describing the work of organising the ambulance corps in Ulster, Lady Londonderry said that Lady Dufferin had turned Clandeboy into a convalescent home, while at her own house at Mountstewart they had a complete hospital with 21 beds, with three surgical nurses, two volunteer nurses and a voluntary aid detachment.

The sum guaranteed now amounts to £574. At the meeting £34 5s. was subscribed.”

Another report in the *Tyrone Constitution* dated 20 March 1914 gave a detailed account of the mobilisation of the 1st Battalion of the Tyrone Regiment of the Ulster Volunteer Force.

Mobilisation at Newtownstewart, County Tyrone

“"The 1st Battalion of the Tyrone Regiment is one of the strongest in the county...... like the other battalions in the regiment, the 1st Battalion equipped the men with bandoliers, haversacks and water bottles so that if the circumstance should present itself of their being called into action, they would be fully equipped for the conveyance of the needful to carry on a campaign ...... In the morning showers of snow and sleet fell and the mountains had a white mantle. Owing to the wet condition of the ground the snow melted at once, but there was a considerable amount of slush on the roads to be traversed. Notwithstanding, the men turned out well, practically up to the strength of A, B, C, G and L Companies, although Newtownstewart being a double Company in number and in eight sections, was paraded as two. The parade was fixed for 2 o'clock and some time prior to that hour the sun shone out with great brilliance, and during the entire afternoon, the weather remained dry for the parade, a remarkable circumstance considering the wintry morning and the very stormy night which followed. The men were able to keep their overcoats slung round their shoulders, as there was no occasion to wear them. The parade was in the large Holm, in which the Empire Day review of the Battalion took place last year, and a very fine place it was for the purpose. Each Company carried a Union Jack, and the
colour of the transport flag was Orange. In addition to the ordinary transport and the full equipment of tools, there was a water cart, and a field ambulance with hood, under which the stretchers were slung on pulleys. There was a strong cyclists section and the stretcher bearers, with red-cross armlets, formed up in a section by themselves. A large number of spectators assembled from near and far and took a great interest in the mobilisation parade, which was complete in every respect. The Companies present were ‘A’ (Plumbridge and Rylands, O.C. John McFarland, J.P.); ‘B’ (Newtownstewart, Beltony and Strawhill, O.C. Wm. T. Miller, J.P.); ‘C’ (Baronscourt, Drumlegagh and Whitehouse, O.C. Rev. F. M. Hamilton); ‘G’ (Sion Mills and Ballyfolliard, O.C. Wm. H. Woods); ‘L’ (Ardstraw and Douglas, O.C. Captain J.C. Herdman).

The Battalion Staff Officers present on parade were Mr E.C. Herdman, D.L., O.C. Battalion; Captain J.C. Herdman, Second-in-Command; Mr R. Lambert and Mr A.T.L. Barton, Assistant Adjutants. Captain Ricardo, D.S.O., Regimental Adjutant, also attended.”

Whilst Companies of the Ulster Volunteer Force regularly held their own training and drilling days, another major Camp of Instruction was held at the residence of the Duke of Abercorn, Commander of the Tyrone Regiment at Baronscourt, Newtownstewart, County Tyrone from the 30 May to 6 June 1914. The camp staff included Officer Commanding Tyrone Regiment, his Grace the Duke of Abercorn; Camp Commandant, Colonel H G S Alexander; Camp Adjutant, Captain A Ricardo, DSO; Camp Secretary, Mr P Cruickshank; Chief Instructor, Major Pine-Coffin; Quarter-Master, Mr R Bell; Camp Steward, Mr A T L Barton; Assistant Steward and Camp Transport Officer, Mr D J Bell; Sergeant Major, Sergeant F McMath; Provost Sergeant, Sergeant Keane.

The Major referred to above with the unfortunate surname of ‘Pine-Coffin’ and known affectionately by his men as ‘Wooden Box’ was Major John Edward Pine-Coffin, from a distinguished Devon military family. Born in 1866 he served in the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment in the 2nd Boer War and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO). He went on to serve in the First World War and died in 1919. He is buried in Alwington Church Graveyard, Devonshire. Major Pine-Coffin married Louisa Beresford who had family connections to the Rev Beresford of Termonmaguirc Church of Ireland, Carrickmore, County Tyrone.

The staff of the 1st (North Tyrone) Battalion were:- Officer Commanding, Mr E C Herdman, D L; Second in Command, J C Herdman; Adjutant, Mr W T Miller, JP; Assistant Adjutants, Messrs R Lambert, Newtownstewart and A T L Barton, Hollyhill; Scoutmaster, Mr John Weir, Strabane, Quartermaster Mr J F A Simms, Lifford; Battalion Organiser and Medical Nursing Corps, Miss Sinclair, Hollyhill. A total of over 900 men attended which included Company Commanders, Half-Company Commanders, Section Commanders, Drill Instructors, Signallers, Scouts, Quartermaster-Sergeants, Cooks and Red Cross corporals.
Sir Edward Carson inspected the preparations for the Camp of Instruction in the days before
the arrival of the Ulster Volunteer officers and such was his profound admiration for the
entire set-up, that “he was unable to find words in which to give expression to his opinion.”

It was noted in the *Tyrone Constitution’s* report of the Training Camp that “a very noticeable
feature of the regiment on the present occasion is the use of arms which can no longer be described
as “dummy”, being the genuine article. A large proportion of the troops are equipped with
Mauser rifles, while the remainder carry carbines.” The Regiments taking part in the week-
long training were all from County Tyrone and included 1st (North Tyrone) Battalion, 2nd
(Mid Tyrone) Battalion, 3rd (South Tyrone) Battalion, 4th (Dungannon) Battalion and 5th
(Cookstown) Battalion. When the Tyrone battalions left the camp at the end of the week,
the City of Derry and Donegal Regiments moved in for their week’s training.

Miss Rosabelle Sinclair as Battalion Organiser of the Ulster Volunteer Nursing Corps assisted
by Mrs Macafee from Omagh, 2nd (Mid-Tyrone) Battalion also attended.

While Ulster Volunteers were drilling on a regular basis, so too were the Nationalist Volunteers.
In early July 1914 a report in the *Tyrone Constitution* states: “The Ulster Volunteers and the
Nationalist Volunteers in Castlederg are each having two nights’ drill in the week and both are turning out strong, and it is very gratifying to know that the utmost good feeling prevails.” 17

The Nationalist Volunteers also took their drilling lessons seriously, practising their drilling skills whilst working in the fields with the odd injury as a result! In the same newspaper the following report appeared:

“A few days ago two members of the Nationalist Volunteers were working in a field with gaips cleaning potatoes when an argument arose between them in reference to the proper way to “slope arms.” Both of them started to do the “slope” with the gaips, and in a few minutes time one of them let his gaip fall over his shoulder and two of the prongs stuck in his leg. He immediately had it attended to, and is now apparently nothing the worse for his “field drill!” 18

Other UVF Church parades held in March 1914 throughout County Tyrone were reported in the Tyrone Constitution:

At Cookstown: “On Sunday morning the Cookstown companies joined by the Lissan company, paraded from the Orange Hall to the Third Presbyterian Church in Molesworth Street. The procession was almost 300 strong ….” 19

Another parade to Newtownsaville Church (outside Omagh) was reported… “one could not fail to be inspired by the sight of the Ulster Volunteers on parade to the above Church on the 8th inst. The physique, the deportment and the discipline of the men command the respect of any well-minded British subject who values the loyalty of those who have the best interests of the British Empire at heart. Above 200 men paraded….” 20

In July 1914 church parades were reported in Aughnacloy, Clogher and Gortin.

At Aughnacloy: “A special service in connection with the Aughnacloy (E) Company, 3rd (South Tyrone) Battalion U.V.F was held in the Parish Church, Aughnacloy…… the Company which mustered over 100 strong, marched from their drill hall in charge of their Company Commander, Rev. C.E. French and the Rev. W.F. Marshall, LL.B., half-company Commander, to the Parish Church.” 21

The Rev W F Marshall, was Minister of Aughnacloy Presbyterian Church, County Tyrone from June 1913 until April 1916 when he became Minister of Sixmilecross Presbyterian Church, County Tyrone, a position he held until May 1928 when he was installed as Minister of Castlerock Presbyterian Church, County Londonderry. He retired from the Ministry in December 1954; died on 25 January 1959 aged 70 and is buried in Sixmilecross, County Tyrone. Also known as ‘The Bard of Tyrone’, W F Marshall was not only a Presbyterian minister but was also a poet, playwright, novelist and pioneer in the study of Ulster’s language
and dialect. His involvement in Unionist circles and the Orange Order is well documented and like so many other prominent figures from every aspect of professional life in Ulster, W F Marshall played a significant role in the Ulster Volunteer Force, being the half-company Commander of Aughnacloy ‘E’ Company, 3rd (South Tyrone) Battalion.

At the Church parade in Clogher ... “Half the South Tyrone 3rd Battalion U.V.F comprising four companies, namely – A (Ballygawley), B (Augher), C (Clogher), D (Fivemiletown), participated in a church parade to Clogher Cathedral. Each company supplied about 100 men who were in charge of Company Commanders J.C. Crossle, Solicitor; W.J. Robinson, J. Thompson and John F. McCrea respectively. The whole force was in command of Mr William Coote, J.P., battalion commander, who with Mr William A. Coote, battalion adjutant, and Mr. W. Bailey, battalion quartermaster, marched at the head of the men. The entire congregation numbered about 600 people. The Dean of Clogher (Rev. A.N. Haire Forster) preached an impressive sermon.... Having read the Ulster Covenant, he said they were justified in resisting the Bill......”

At the Church parade in Gortin ... “over 120 members of ‘A’ Company, North Tyrone Battalion Tyrone Regiment, Ulster Volunteer Force under the command of Mr John McFarland, J.P., Company Commander and Mr Robert Lunney, Half-Company Commander, attended divine service in the Parish Church, Gortin on Sunday morning last..... The Rev. T.J. Willoughby, Rector, extended a hearty welcome to the volunteers remarking that it was a pleasing sight to see the members of the Ulster Volunteer Force assembled in the Parish Church to worship God. ... .... The text was from St. Paul’s second Epistle to Timothy, Chap 2 and the latter part of Verse 4 ’That he might please Him, Who hath chosen him to be a soldier’. He went on to show the several qualifications of a good soldier of Jesus Christ, which are as follows: self-sacrifice, obedience, loyalty, daring, industry, endurance, resolution.”

In the issue of the Tyrone Constitution dated 20 March 1914, under the Heading ‘PLUMBRIDGE U.V.F.’ it was reported:

“On Tuesday evening 3rd inst. in the Orange Hall, Plumbridge, a grand drawing for a valuable gold watch and chain presented by Mrs E. McElwaine Gordon, of Tullynadall, to the Plumbridge branch of 1st North Tyrone Battalion U.V.F. Over 300 tickets were sold. The drawing was conducted on lowest lines and on the square, the fortunate winner being Mr Forbes of Donemana. Mrs E. McIlwaine Gordon has been a most liberal subscriber to all funds in connection with the U.V.F and the ladies’ nursing corps, and on this occasion out of her own private purse provided an excellent tea etc for all attending the drawing. Tea being over, a most enjoyable evening was spent. Songs etc were given by members of the U.V.F. Club, and before parting all joined in giving three hearty cheers for Mrs E. McIlwaine Gordon.”
ENDNOTES

1. *Tyrone Constitution*, 24 October 1913, p.3
2. *Tyrone Constitution*, 24 October 1913, p.3
4. *Tyrone Constitution*, 17 October, 1913, p.3
5. *Tyrone Constitution*, 10 October 1913, p.3
7. *Tyrone Constitution*, 20 March 1914, p.8
8. *Tyrone Constitution*, 23 March 1914, p.8
10. *Tyrone Constitution*, 24 October, 1913, p.3
11. *Tyrone Constitution*, 19 December, 1913, p.8
12. *Tyrone Constitution*, 30 January 1914, p.8
13. *St John's Ambulance Association*, March 1914, p.176
17. *Tyrone Constitution*, 3 July 1914, p.5
18. *Tyrone Constitution*, 3 July 1914, p.5
20. *Tyrone Constitution*, 20 March 1914, p.8
22. *Tyrone Constitution*, 3 July 1914, p.5
24. *Tyrone Constitution*, 20 March 1914, p.8
Postcard ‘Ulster 1914 - Deserted! Well - I can stand alone’
Courtesy of Isabel Porter (Nee Godber)
Badge of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council
(Courtesy of Mr Billy Fisher)
The Ulster Women’s Unionist Council was established on 23 January 1911. It very quickly developed into a strong, active and democratic body that held the Unionist women of Ulster together with one common objective – the resistance to Home Rule for Ireland. Within just one year of its establishment, the UWUC was notably the largest female political group in Ireland. At its height membership was in the region of 115,000 - 200,000.

Although individual Unionist women were very much involved in promoting the Unionist cause, when the first Home Rule Bill was introduced to the Commons in 1886, their inability to effect any political change saw them taking on various supporting roles to that of their male Unionist colleagues such as fundraisers, canvassers and demonstrators. Many women were anxious to play their part in the event of Civil War in Ireland, particularly the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council who proposed, as early as the beginning of 1912, that an Ambulance Society be set up and associated with their organisation. However, they also became the driving force behind the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps which was formally in place by the end of 1913. They believed that each Company of the UVF should have a voluntary female nursing section that could be called upon in the event of Civil War breaking out. Up until that time various affiliated associations of the UWUC were already offering First Aid and nursing classes in their areas.

The Executive Committee of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council then took the initiative in early October 1913, to write to the Medical Board of the Ulster Volunteer Force to ask them to give serious consideration to the question of a nursing service. They indicated the urgency of the situation and then gave a brief outline of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) scheme that was presently operating in Britain under the Red Cross: that the volunteers should be trained in First Aid and Home Nursing using material from either the Red Cross or the St John’s Ambulance Association (these courses would last for around three months) emphasising the necessity for a co-ordinated, organised approach, and the proposal that the Medical Board organise a sub-committee of matrons, doctors and trained nurses. The UWUC were also offering the services of three of their members to the Medical Board. The Ulster Medical Board of the Ulster Volunteer Force replied swiftly within a week. They
agreed as to the urgency of the situation and requested that those members of the UWUC interested in nursing should forward a draft scheme to the Ulster Medical Board as to how they envisaged the training and control of a nursing scheme could be organised. They also agreed to accept three members of the UWUC onto their Medical Board namely Lady Hermione Blackwood, Mrs Robert Campbell and Mrs G H Wheeler.

The UWUC then put forward their draft scheme. Some of the main points were: they would prefer that text books of the St John's Ambulance Association be used for the First Aid and Home Nursing courses; trained nurses should provide the instructions on Home Nursing; that examinations should be more practical than technical and that examination and doctors’ fees be covered. Also included was a proposal that fully trained nurses should be asked to volunteer their services when the need arose. When their courses were complete these Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses were to meet at least twelve times per year to practice their skills and attend any lectures organised. The UWUC further suggested that every County should open a Depot for the storing of various pieces of equipment that might be gifted by people. They concluded their Draft proposals by assuring the Ulster Medical Board that a similar scheme was already operating well for the Red Cross in England. By mid-December 1913, apart from a few minor internal administrative difficulties, the training scheme was well under way in many areas of the province. Those candidates who passed their examinations were presented with proficiency certificates. It is estimated that from October 1913 until May 1914 almost 5,000 certificates were presented.

In the *Tyrone Constitution* of 30 January 1914 under the heading “The Women of Ulster – preparing for the horrors of war” an article appeared urging women over the age of 16 to get involved:

> “The women have realised almost more than the men that they must make any and every sacrifice to see this thing through to the end. There are thousands of Ulster women who are daily giving up the whole of their spare time to serving the Unionist cause. … at this moment an enormous number of Ulster women are engaging in perfecting one branch of organisation which will be as important as any if civil war inflicts its horrors upon the province. The ambulance, nursing and hospital work is being taken in hand seriously and though medical men have control of it and guide it, it is the women who are making the preparations. This mission of mercy has levelled all classes and we see in the movement to organise and equip field and stationary hospitals and dressing stations, rich women and poor women, old and young, working side by side and with equal energy to do all they can in a very practical way to render the medical side of the Ulster Volunteer Force complete and ready for emergencies.”

It is very evident from my research and with particular reference to the previous newspaper article that women were the driving force behind the formation and implementation not only of the UVM & N C but of many other groups that were to play a major role when war
broke out several months later. Such groups included members from all classes of society who were willing and eager to give of their time and talents to a common cause. Edith Harkness was one of the many women who responded to this call and in March 1914 she enrolled as a VAD with the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps, attached to her local UVF company in Plumbridge.

Locally, Mrs Hood, Pubble House, Newtownstewart, organised home nursing classes and a lengthy report in the *Tyrone Constitution* dated 24 April 1914 was given of the presentation of certificates:

“On last Friday afternoon there was a very interesting little function at Pubble House, Newtownstewart. Mrs. Hood, one of the company organisers for North Tyrone had organised about two months ago a home nursing class in connection with the Red Cross Society. Mrs. Macafee, of Omagh, who was trained in Glasgow Royal Infirmary for three years with a Nurses’ Training School attached, gave the lectures, and at the end of the course the class was examined by Dr. McFadden for the Red Cross Society. All who entered for examination were successful in gaining certificates and when the results became known Mrs Hood kindly invited the members of the class to her home for a social afternoon.” The Adjutant for North Tyrone, Mr W. T. Miller J.P.,
sent a letter of apology for his absence due to being in Dublin at that time. “Mrs. Hood said they had met there that afternoon for two objects. One was to have the certificates distributed by Mrs. Herdman, and the other was to give Mrs. Macafee a token of the feelings of gratitude entertained by all the members for her services....... be congratulated the class on the hearty way in which they did their work and the success that attended it and said the doctor had told him that the quality of the work done would compare favourably with that of any class of trained nurses.”

A similar event took place in Castlederg on 2 June 1914 and was reported in the Tyrone Constitution of 5 June, 1914:

“A public meeting under the auspices of Castlederg Nursing Corps was held in the Parochial Hall, Castlederg. Her Grace the Duchess of Abercorn was to have addressed the meeting but owing to a number of unexpected visitors arriving at Baronscourt, Her Grace was unable to attend.... Mrs Sinclair of Hollyhill was in the proud position of taking the place of her Grace.... Miss Rose Sinclair also spoke and appealed to the women of the district to do all that lay in their power in the present crisis. At the conclusion of the meeting a large number of ladies signified their intention of becoming members of the nursing staff. It is very gratifying to know that at the recent examinations held all the ladies passed in first-aid and also in nursing. Another examination will be held shortly for the Killeter Nursing Corps.”

It would appear that most villages ran First Aid and Home Nursing Classes around this time. No doubt, prompted by the professional medical advisors attached to the Ulster Medical Board, the training of these volunteer nurses was taken very seriously and they employed, from March 1914 to September 1914, one of the top nursing professionals in England, Miss Cathlin Cicely Du Sautoy.

The British Journal of Nursing of 7 March 1914 reported her new appointment:

“Miss C.C. du Sautoy has accepted the invitation of the Ulster Medical Board to organise and lecture to the Voluntary Aid Detachments in connection with the Ulster Volunteers, and has resigned her post as Inspector for Wales under the Queen Victoria’s Jubilee Institute.”

(Ulster Medical Board: was the medical board attached to the Ulster Volunteer Force).

The political situation in Ulster must have looked extremely ominous to Miss du Sautoy with the following appeal appearing in one of the April issues of The British Journal of Nursing:

“Miss Du Sautoy would be glad to hear from trained nurses (matrons, superintendents and nurses) personally known to her who would care to volunteer their services for their month’s holiday to undertake work in the temporary hospitals in Ulster should necessity arise for the mobilisation of the Ulster Volunteer Force. Nurses who wish
to volunteer should apply to Miss du Sautoy, G.F.S. Lodge, Donegall Pass, Belfast and enclose a copy of their certificate, and state previous posts held and their present work. A three years’ certificate is essential and experience as sister and in general administration is desirable, and absolutely necessary, for those who volunteer as Matron, and all must be prepared to come at a few hours’ notice.” Travelling expenses will be refunded, and maintenance provided during stay in Ulster. Members of the local V.A.D.’s will be used to staff the hospitals as probationers and the members are now working very hard with much keenness to qualify themselves to become really efficient “aid nurses.”

*There is no nationality in nursing—North or South – just wherever there is need of their services - there, we feel sure, trained nurses will be found caring for the sick irrespective of politics or religion. These are questions, fortunately for us, which have nothing to do with our duty.*

By July 1914 a further similar appeal appeared in the *British Journal of Nursing*. This time in a letter to the Editor from Katherine Furse, the Commandant-in-Chief of the Voluntary Aid Detachment organisation:

“Madam – We are in great need of more trained nurses to work in Ireland in case of trouble. We are offering no payment, but will pay passages for those who cannot afford their own, and Ulster is offering board and lodging. We particularly want nurses who can take charge of small hospitals and dressing stations..... We have no expenses at present beyond stationery and postages as the office is lent and the staff is voluntary. Large amounts of medical and surgical stores have been ordered provisionally to be delivered at twelve hours’ notice if required.”

*Katherine Furse, Ulster Hospital Corps, 112 Beaufort Street, Chelsea, S.W.*

Such was the level of organisational skills and foresight of the UWUC, they had even secured premises near London, staffed by volunteers, who were actively recruiting more trained nurses to come to Ireland. They were however mindful of creating a panic mobilisation, as many of these trained nurses would be giving up posts in order to volunteer their services to Ulster.

Miss du Sautoy’s work in Ulster during 1914 was not the last time she would come into contact with UVF nurses. When the Ulster Volunteer Hospital moved from Pau to Lyon in May 1916, she became Night Sister for a period of time.

The Ulster Volunteer Medical & Nursing Corps in Ulster was also involved in setting up ‘hospitals’ in large country houses, Orange Halls, Town Halls and by the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, Ulster had approximately 220 hospitals, 138 Doctors, 410 Nurses and a further 3,500 VAD nurses. Towards the end of the war in 1918 the Ulster
Volunteers had hospitals situated at the Exhibition Hall, Botanic Avenue, Belfast; University Road, Belfast; Craigavon House, East Belfast; (later known as the Somme Hospital); and Gilford, County Down.

Two days prior to the 12 July 1914, the *Tyrone Constitution* carried the following report:

“The U.V.F Nurses of Newtownstewart, Plumbridge and Rylands had a field day at Strawhulter, about two miles from Newtownstewart. Rain fell copiously early in the afternoon, but this did not deter a large number of red-cross corporals, stretcher-bearers etc from attending to assist in the field practice. The general idea was that a hostile force advancing from Gortin was met by a U.V.F. contingent from Newtownstewart. An engagement took place at Killymore and Mr James Crawford’s granary utilised as a temporary hospital. At 2.30 pm the red-cross men, wearing their armlets, haversacks, water bottles, etc assembled at Mr Crawford’s. Mr James Sproule was in charge of the ambulance cart containing all the necessary equipment, splints, bandages, dressings etc and Mr R. Vaughan brought the necessary timber. The Red Cross men were sent off to bring in the ‘wounded’ who were scattered here and there over the adjoining hills. Meantime the nurses and cooks were busy at the temporary hospital getting everything in order. These ladies all wore uniform. There were ten beds to fill and the nurses and attendants received detailed practical instruction, as each ‘patient’ was brought in.

The stretcher bearers worked under difficulties, as rain fell frequently, and it was no easy matter taking the ‘wounded’ over fences and ditches under the circumstances. Dr. Hill, Strabane, superintended the work outside, whilst Dr. Hood attended at the hospital. Both these gentlemen belong to the U.V.F Medical Corps. The proceedings of the day were of a thoroughly practical nature and some of the difficulties of hospital work in real warfare were brought vividly before the nurses and attendants. Great credit is due to Miss. Sinclair, Hollyhill, chief organiser of this branch of the U.V.F work in North Tyrone, for the interest she took in arranging the event. Other officers present and who took an active part in the work of the day were Newtownstewart – Mrs. Hood, Pubble House; Rylands – Mrs. McFadden, Badoney Manse; Plumbridge – Miss. Steen, Badoney Manse; Dr. J. Hood, Newtownstewart; Dr. Hill, Strabane. Miss. Ballantine, Lisdiven, a highly qualified nurse superintended the nurses in hospital. (This Miss Ballantine was to also figure in Edith’s life before the end of the year) ......in addition to the Red Cross men from Newtownstewart, Plumbridge and Rylands, there were on duty 32 nurses and 13 cooks. The hospital work was considerably lightened by the preparations made earlier in the day by Mr James Crawford, Strawhulter, who kindly placed his residence as well as the outbuildings at the disposal of the Volunteers.”
Rosabelle Sinclair and other members of the Ulster Volunteer Force at a UVF field day at James Crawford’s granary at Strawhulter townland, Newtownstewart on 8 July 1914. (Townlands are the smallest unit of land division in Ireland.) (PRONI – D2618/B/214)

ENDNOTES

1 Tyrone Constitution, 30 January 1914, p.3
2 Tyrone Constitution, 24 April 1914, p.8
3 Tyrone Constitution, 5 June 1914, p.4
4 The British Journal of Nursing, 7 March 1914, p.209
5 The British Journal of Nursing, 18 April 1914, p.348
6 British Journal of Nursing, 25 July 1914, p.88
7 Tyrone Constitution, 10 July 1914, p.5
BRITAIN DECLARES WAR ON GERMANY

At the outbreak of war on 4 August 1914, the Home Rule crisis in Ireland and the threat of Civil War was now overtaken by a much greater calamity. The Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Volunteers almost at once set aside their differences and joined the ranks of Kitchener’s new army.

The outbreak of war propelled the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council into a new cause and for the remainder of the war their active opposition to Home Rule was put aside; the focus was now on how they could actively help on the ‘home front’. In response to a meeting held by the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Crawford McCullagh, on 7 August 1914, the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council sent the following letter to the Mayor.

The local report appeared in the Strabane Weekly News of 15 August, 1914:

“Dear Lord Mayor – We desire on behalf of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council to explain and amplify our offer of assistance made at the meeting called by you in the City Hall on Friday last.

In every great National and Imperial crisis no part of the community has more clearly demonstrated its loyalty to the Throne and to the Empire than the people of Ulster. Today our men are responding to the call of the King and rallying round the flag; and we feel it is our duty to see that their families and dependents are cared for and that any want and suffering which may result shall be minimised as much as possible.

We are very glad and proud to be able to assure your Lordship and your Committee, and also if they desire it, the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families Association, of the whole-hearted co-operation of our great organisation. It covers, as you are aware, the entire province of Ulster and through it any individual case can be reached without delay. The Council, its affiliated associations, and members form a unique organisation for investigating, registering and dealing with all cases of want or suffering and for dispensing such relief as may be found necessary. Associated with us are the members of the Ulster Volunteer Nursing Corps, all of whom are prepared to take up whatever
duty they may be assigned or called upon to perform. We have also at our disposal numerous well-equipped dressing stations throughout Ulster. We will assist in the distribution where required of supplies of clothing, food and other necessaries of life. We realise at this crisis not merely the privileges but also the duties attaching to citizenship of the British Empire.

We remain, yours faithfully (for the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council)

Theresa Londonderry, President
Rosalind Abercorn,
Harriet Dufferin and Ava, Vice-Presidents.”

In the same newspaper of 29 August 1914 a list was given of those ladies who had passed both their First Aid and Home Nursing examinations from the Newtownstewart area namely, Mrs Isabel Campbell, Greyvale; Mrs Isabel Savage, Ardstraw; Mrs Lena Whitford, Mrs Sara H. Lyle, Mrs Ellen M. Morton, Mrs Martha Arbuckle, Mrs Susie Marshall, Mrs Martha Kelso, Birnaghs; the Misses Elizabeth Wauchob, Ruby Brown, Mabel Henderson, Elizabeth Smyth, Anne E. Henderson, Margaret Crawford, Strawhulter; Annie Matthews, Nellie Moore, Mountilly; Kate Moore, Woodbrook House; Annie Patrick, Magheracolton; Frances Cumins, Eva G. Hamil, Harriett Baxter, Virginia Hamilton, May Clarke, Magheracolton; Jeannie Mowbray, Droit, Sadie Hunter, Droit, Sara Somerville, Moyle, Isabel Cooke, Ballintibbert; Mary Armstrong, Eskeradoey.

Lady Londonderry, President of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council, once again wrote to the newspapers in early September 1914 urging that the UWUC hold meetings throughout the province:

“At this crisis in our history when the whole Empire is fighting against Germany for our very existence, the Ulster women, who have hitherto shown a splendid spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice in helping to preserve the Union between Great Britain and Ireland are most anxious to do their part in common with the inhabitants of the British Isles. Wherefore, I suggest that the members of our great organisation, the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council should hold meetings throughout the province to help recruit Volunteers anxious to fight for their country as soldiers in the Ulster Division, to enlist recruits to fill the gaps in the Ulster Volunteers at home, to collect funds to help the wives and families of the Ulster Volunteers going to the front, and that the Voluntary Aid Detachments, trained in a similar manner to the Red Cross detachments in England, should be told off to the hospitals arranged in the public buildings or private houses in Ulster where our Volunteers, Officers and men could be treated at once on being sent home from the front, wounded or invalided.”
On 10 September 1914 at a meeting of the Joint Committee of Management of Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh, Dr. Thompson suggested:

“That the Committee should place a number of beds in the hospital at the disposal of the military authorities for the use of soldiers wounded in the war. Other institutions were doing so. He thought there would be about fifteen beds available and suggested that this number should be offered. Colonel Alexander proposed that Dr. Thompson’s suggestion be adopted. Mr A E Donnelly seconded the motion, which was carried unanimously.”

At the end of September, 1914 another letter in the Strabane Weekly News, written by Mrs. Macafee (wife of Rev Andrew Macafee of First Omagh Presbyterian Church,) informed readers that 53 Ulster Volunteer nurses from Mid-Tyrone had offered their services to the War Office several weeks previous, “to be utilised in any way that might be required. They all hold at least two certificates for First Aid and Home Nursing……obtained at a well-attended proficiency class held for some time past in the Lecture Hall of First Presbyterian Church, Omagh”. Mrs Macafee concludes her letter by stating “two members of this nursing corps, it is pleasing to note, have been called upon for duty from the beginning of the war, and have already rendered very valuable services.”

Whilst the war was still in its infancy, the UWUC were actively pursuing various avenues whereby the skills of their newly trained Ulster Volunteer nurses could be utilised immediately and like many other aid organisations, offered their services to the British War Office which was subsequently declined. Not to be deterred, the nursing section of the North Tyrone Battalion of the Ulster Volunteer Force then made an offer directly to the French Authorities which was gladly accepted and by 22 September, 1914 arrangements were already in place for the North Tyrone group to proceed to France.

Edith Harkness was now just a few months short of her 21st birthday and only four months as a nurse with the North Tyrone branch of the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps.

ENDNOTES
1 Strabane Weekly News, 15 August 1914, p.4
2 Strabane Weekly News, 29 August 1914, p.1
3 Strabane Weekly News, 12 September 1914, p.1
4 Strabane Weekly News, 12 September, 1914, p.1
5 Strabane Weekly News, 26 September 1914, p.4
Map of Ireland, 1914
(Courtesy of Amanda Porter)
One of the pieces of information I had in my possession from my aunt was a copy of the following letter sent to the Belfast Newsletter, the Tyrone Constitution and the Strabane Weekly News by Rosalind, Duchess of Abercorn in October 1914:

ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE HOSPITAL

“Dear Sir,

Your readers will be interested to learn that the above left Strabane on October 7th. The Surgeon in charge, Dr. Norman Darling, has been appointed by St John’s Ambulance Association, as also the Assistant Surgeon and Matron. The Ulster nurses comprise – Nurse Wright, Strabane; Nurse Patrick, Castlederg; Nurse Sullivan, Dungannon; and Nurses Jamison, Shimmon and Stevens, belonging to the U.V.F. Hospital and Nursing Corps, and Dr. Clarke (anaesthetist). The other members of the staff include: Miss Sinclair, Hollyhill; Miss Ballantine, Lisdivin; Miss Alexander, Moy; Miss Harkness, Plumbridge; Miss Dickson, Dungannon; Miss C. Moore, Strabane; Miss Thompson, Collermony; Sgt Buss; Mr Tom Lowry, Mr A. Downer; and Mr R. Hunter, all members of the U.V.F. Hospital and Nursing Corps.

We wish to warmly thank all the Volunteers, trained and otherwise, whom we have had reluctantly to refuse owing to the necessity of the majority of the staff understanding French. We would like to take this opportunity of thanking Miss Maud Herdman for her most generous gift of hospital equipment, and for all her care in the packing and despatching of the hospital luggage, a very large order. We also wish to tender our best thanks to Mr Thomas Gallagher, Belfast Steamship Company for the free transport of entire staff and baggage between Belfast and Liverpool.

We have to meet an expenditure, first to last, of about £800, so we trust that the great interest that North West Ulster has shown in the matter will have practical results in donations to meet our claims. We thank all those of every class who have already subscribed, but we earnestly plead for more.

One of the pieces of information I had in my possession from my aunt was a copy of the following letter sent to the Belfast Newsletter, the Tyrone Constitution and the Strabane Weekly News by Rosalind, Duchess of Abercorn in October 1914:
It has been suggested that any person or district subscribing £16 would provide for a bed among the fifty we are establishing, and it could be named by the donors. Mr W. B. Smyth, Strathfoyle, Strabane, has kindly consented to act as treasurer, but all donations should be sent to Baronscourt, where they will be thankfully acknowledged.

Yours faithfully, Rosalind Abercorn, President of the St. John’s Ambulance Association and Rosabelle Sinclair, Battalion Organiser.”

It is interesting to note here how The British Journal of Nursing reported the departure of the same group to France in their 10 October, 1914 issue:

‘IRISH HOSPITAL AT PAU’. The French Government have accepted the offer of the North Tyrone Ulster Volunteer Force Hospital for service at Pau. The St. John Ambulance Association have approved the scheme, and are giving assistance. The French Government will support the hospital when established at Pau, but the cost of equipment and transport will be found locally. A party of nurses left Liverpool on Thursday for Pau to establish this base hospital there. Matron Miss McCord, Night Sister Miss Patrick and Sisters Jameson, Collis, McFerran, Wright, Shimmon, Stevens, Sullivan, Johnston and Jennings. Dr Newman Darling, with two assistant surgeons and Miss Sinclair, will probably start on Saturday 10th, from London, for Pau. They are taking £250 worth of instruments and surgical stores for a 50-bed hospital for three months, and are supplying the beds and bedding. The hospital is being financed by a North of Ireland committee under the presidency of the Duchess of Abercorn.’

No mention of the five volunteer nurses which included my grandmother, Edith Harkness! However, the Duchess of Abercorn’s letter to the newspaper and the British Journal of Nursing’s report confirmed the personnel who went to France with that first group in October 1914 and as I continued with my research in the local papers I kept a watchful eye for any mention of their names. It wasn’t long before the stories of two local nurses appeared in print.

Isabel Patrick was a Charge Nurse at Castlederg Infirmary, County Tyrone and shortly after war broke out she wrote to the Board of Guardians of the Infirmary that she had volunteered her services. The meeting of the Board was reported in the Strabane Weekly News on 3 October, 1914 as follows:

“Nurse Patrick wrote stating she had offered her services as a volunteer nurse to the French Red Cross Society in connection with the present war. In the event of her being called up she would feel very grateful if they would be good enough to grant her leave of absence for such time as she would be away and let her know what arrangements they would make with regard to her position in that institution.”
This request proved to be the subject of quite a debate with some of the Board agreeing to her request to keep her position open and granting her a small remuneration and others of the opposite view. Agreement could not be reached, and so Nurse Patrick’s request was declined. News of the Board’s decision caused considerable resentment not only in the Castlederg district but throughout the county. A letter to the Strabane Weekly News dated 3 October, 1914 from someone in Victoria Bridge, County Tyrone seems to have reflected the reaction of some of the public to the unnecessary arguing of the Board of the Castlederg Infirmary. Under the heading ‘Castlederg Again’ the writer vents their ire:

“When I opened my morning paper on Saturday I was amazed to read of the action of the Castlederg Board of Guardians in regard to the offer of Nurse Patrick to go to the front. I am not so much surprised after all, however, for when I come to think of it, it is not the first time these Castlederg Guardians have landed themselves in a tangle. Evidently, at present they are anxious to damp the patriotic enthusiasm of their staff—a mean action, especially on the part of a public board. All honour to the ten sensible men who looked upon the nurse’s request for leave of absence in the way that every public body in the Empire would regard it at present. But there were ten (ten-a-side-kind-of game) who evidently have not seen a newspaper for weeks and who think only of their farms and their fairs and their crops and their mates, regardless of the poor men fighting for them on the Continent. In the newspaper report I have, the names of these ten men are not given, but I hope they will appear in your report in this week’s Constitution, for otherwise how is the world to know of its greatest ratepayers?

The resolutions in favour of giving Nurse Patrick leave of absence was (the paper says) favoured by Messrs. Keys, Robb, Haughey and Caldwell; the opposition resolution was proposed and seconded by Messrs. Doogan and Connelly. The names of the two latter, have, I understand, been forwarded to Berlin. The other eight names will be sent at once. Let us hope as a result that ten little iron crosses – which are plentiful in the ‘Faderland’ at present – will find their way to Castlederg. If there is to be a little sing-song over the presentation let them not forget “Hoch der Kaiser.”

One wonders what the Kaiser made of the whole disagreement if, in fact, any communication made it to Berlin! By the time the Board of Guardians of the Infirmary met again, Nurse Patrick was already on her way to France. She had, in fact, been ordered to proceed to France on Wednesday 7 October and respectfully requested the Board to re-consider their decision of 25 September and allow her leave of absence until she returned. More debate ensued between two members of the Board as to who would actually pay the remuneration for Nurse Patrick while she was away and to her replacement. This prompted a retort from one to the other of “If you had the Kaiser coming down through Mullanabreen on top of you, I can tell you, you would pay more rates very soon!” (Mullanabreen is a townland in the surrounding district of Castlederg, County Tyrone)
Eventually it was unanimously passed that Nurse Patrick be granted leave of absence with a small remuneration. In August of the following year the same Board of Guardians received a letter from Nurse Patrick stating that as she was to receive a salary for her services in France from 1 August 1915, she would no longer require the salary which the Board had so generously allowed her. She thanked the Board for their great kindness to her.

The *Tyrone Constitution* of 16 October 1914 reported on a meeting of the Board of Guardians of Strabane Infirmary, County Tyrone where the Head Nurse of the Infirmary, Nurse Isabella Wright, also wished to volunteer her services. A letter dated 10 October 1914 from Nurse Wright was read at the Board meeting:

“On the outbreak of war I volunteered for service at the front with the Red Cross Nursing Society and St John’s Ambulance Society. I have now been called upon by the latter Society to accompany a Tyrone nursing corps to Pau in France and am obliged to leave today. I regret that I was not aware of the sudden departure in time to have consulted the Guardians at their meeting on the 22nd September. I would, therefore, take it as a great favour if the Board would grant me leave of absence for the time I may be compelled to be away.”

Unlike Nurse Patrick from Castlederg, agreement was speedily reached and ‘leave of absence’ granted with her salary to be paid in the meantime.

Confirmation of the difficulties experienced by the Ulster Volunteers and other voluntary organisations, who wished to go to France, was supplemented by a book about Britain’s support to the French during the First World War entitled *‘For Dauntless France – An Account of Britain’s Aid to the French Wounded and Victims of the War’* by Laurence Binyon. This name, of course, synonymous with the poem ‘For the Fallen’:

> They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
> Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
> At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
> We will remember them.

Laurence Binyon had spent time in France during WWI helping out in hospitals and in 1916 was tasked with collating information on the various types of aid given to the French wounded. He reported on convoys, hospitals, orderlies, canteens, and other various aid organisations. He gives quite extensive information on the readiness and availability of the North Tyrone section of the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps, which is worth quoting in full:

> Page 11: “We (Britain) were the more able to help, because at that time the service of voluntary units was not desired by our own military authorities.”
Page 12: “In Ulster the North Tyrone Volunteers, having their Medical Corps fully equipped, placed it at the service of the French”.

Page 137: “The outbreak of war on the Continent found a section of the Ulster Volunteers, the North Tyrone section, with medical staff and equipment for two thousand men, all in readiness for the contingency of war in Ireland. How could this staff be used? An offer was made in the first instance to the British War Office – as was done in some other cases – but it came to nothing; and a proposal was then made to the French authorities through a Bordeaux lady. An invitation came speedily, asking the unit to go to Pau. The party sailed from Liverpool in October, reached Pau on the 12th and found that the Villa Beaupre had been placed at their disposal…”

At the outset of my research, one of my main aims was to try to find out why the Ulster Volunteer Medical & Nursing Corps from North Tyrone still wanted to proceed to a war zone when their initial offer to the British War Office had been declined, to determine who was the ‘Bordeaux Lady’ referred to by Laurence Binyon and why choose Pau? Pau lies in the South West corner of France – almost at the foot of the Pyrenees Mountains, near the Spanish border, so I thought I would at this juncture try a different approach to discover more about this North Tyrone group.

ENDNOTES
1 Belfast Newsletter, 7 October 1914, p.8
2 Tyrone Constitution, 9 October 1914, p.6
3 Strabane Weekly News, 9 October, 1914, p.4
4 The British Journal of Nursing, 10 October 1914, p.283
5 Strabane Weekly News, 3 October 1914, p.6
6 Strabane Weekly News, 3 October, 1914, p.3
7 Strabane Weekly News, 10 October, p.3
8 Tyrone Constitution, 16 October 1914, p.2
Rosabelle Sinclair’s ancestors the Bartons were important wine exporters from Bordeaux since the 1700s.
Rosabelle Sinclair of Hollyhill, Strabane was mentioned frequently in connection with the Ulster Volunteer Force nurses and given that the Sinclairs were a very prominent family in that area for hundreds of years, I decided to find out more about Rosabelle.

This family have been written about often and one piece of information that repeatedly appeared about Rosabelle was that she drove ambulances in Belgium during the First World War. There is a certain amount of truth in this statement as I later discovered, but this lady proved that she was capable of much more. Rosabelle Sinclair was to give exceptional service and unique leadership in the Great War at a time when most women were confined to home duties. (See Rosabelle Sinclair in Profiles)

The 1901 Irish Census listing for the Sinclairs of Hollyhill show Mary Everina Sinclair, Head of House, aged 48, widow, born County Fermanagh and Rose Sinclair, daughter aged 17, born France, who could speak English and Irish. There were four visitors present and six servants. The 1911 Census for Hollyhill listed Mary Everina Sinclair and three servants with no sign of Rosabelle. I then checked the neighbouring counties of Londonderry and Donegal but Rosabelle was not to be found. After a search of ‘all Ireland’ and some false leads, I found a ‘Rose Sinclair’ listed as a visitor in a house in Straffan Demense, County Kildare owned by a family called Barton. On closer examination of the Household Form, I got quite a shock as there were a large number of people living in the house. The Head of the Household was a man called Bertram Hugh Barton. Apart from ‘Rose’ (Rosabelle) there were four other visitors and 18 servants! The property description listed 70 rooms with 50 windows in the front and a total of 26 people residing there on Census night. There were also 37 out-houses - no ordinary house!

It was fairly straightforward to locate information about Straffan which further revealed that a Hugh Barton had purchased Straffan Park in 1831 and had built Straffan House. He also owned Coote Hall Estate in County Roscommon and Barberstown Castle, County Kildare and his estimated worth in 1845 was said to be £650,000 which would equate to £62m today.
The Barton family originated from the Waterfoot area of Pettigo, County Fermanagh where they had been since the early 1600’s. Further research showed that in the early 1700’s a member of this family went to Bordeaux and established a wine exporting business, later purchasing vineyards which are still in existence today.

I wondered why Rosabelle Sinclair was visiting this family only to later discover that Rosabelle’s mother was Mary Everina Barton, daughter of Lt Col Hugh Barton of the Waterfoot, near Pettigo, County Fermanagh, who had married James Montgomery Sinclair of Hollyhill, Strabane on 29 January 1868.

The Bertram Hugh Barton of Straffan Demense, Kildare listed on the 1911 Census and Rosabelle were 3rd cousins and he had inherited the Straffan estate in 1904 following the death of his father, Bertram Francis Barton. This same Bertram Hugh Barton also took over the running of the Barton & Gustier Wine Company, Bordeaux, France in 1908 along with Daniel Gustier III and during the First World War it was reported that he even converted his large family vehicle in France to be used as an ambulance, which he himself drove.

There was also a French connection through Rosabelle’s maternal grandmother, Mary Caroline Johnston of County Leitrim. A branch of the Johnston family lived in Bordeaux and over the years had intermittently married into the Barton’s.

The fact that Rosabelle was born in France was intriguing but on consulting the 1901 and 1911 Census returns for all the Bartons in Ireland, that were connected to the County...
Fermanagh Bartons, I discovered that on two other occasions at least, the place of birth was given as France, so it was not an unusual occurrence for a Barton connection to have been born in France.

It is always wise to take note of who the ‘visitors’ are on a Census return. Of the five visitors staying at Straffan House on ‘Census Night’ 1911, I noted, with interest, the names of two females – Emily Brooke, aged 20, born County Kildare and Rose Brooke, aged 15, born County Dublin. The spelling of the surname Brooke caught my attention as I knew that the Brooke’s of Colebrooke, County Fermanagh spelt their name that way.

Again, with the help of the 1901 and 1911 Census and other information extracted from within the ‘depths of the internet’ it led me on a fascinating journey through the intertwined histories of the Brooke, Barton and Sinclair families. Emily and Rose Brooke were the only two daughters of Sir George Frederick Brooke, 1st Baronet of Somerton, Dublin, a branch of the Brooke’s of Colebrooke, County Fermanagh. He was a Wine Merchant but also held office as Deputy Lieutenant in the City of Dublin, J.P. and High Sherriff of County Wexford, Governor of the Bank of Ireland, owned 6500 acres of land and had an extensive art collection. Sir George F Brooke had also six sons. The mother of the two girls and six boys was Emily Alma Barton, his second wife and a connection of the County Fermanagh Bartons. Sir George’s first wife, Anna Maria Shakerley died in 1877; they had one son. Sadly his second wife (Emily Alma Barton) whom he married in 1881 died in 1910.

On the 1901 Census George F Brooke, his wife, the two girls and two boys aged seven and eleven were living in a 25-roomed Georgian mansion - Somerton House, Castleknock, Dublin. Of the other four boys, only one is living in Ireland and he is aged seventeen and is in the army barracks in Cork. By the 1911 Census, George is not in Ireland and neither are any of the six boys. I discovered that the two youngest boys, Basil Gerald Brooke and Geoffry Thomas Brooke were boarding at Winchester College, England. Where had Sir George F Brooke gone by 1911 and why were his two girls staying at Barton’s in County Kildare? By all accounts Sir George led a very extravagant life and entertained lavishly. Unfortunately, such were his mounting debts that in 1911 his home, Somerton House, five miles west of Dublin, along with 130 acres, had to be sold to defray his debts.

The estate was bought by T K Laidlaw at that time and over the years had several owners but in 2005 was sold again to a property company who built Castleknock Hotel and Golf Club, now more famously known as the ‘K Club’. Somerton House on its own 11 acres continued as a private residence overlooking the golf resort but came up for sale again in 2016 with an asking price of €2.5m. Sir George Frederick Brooke died in 1926. Sir George’s grandfather was also called George Frederick Brooke and he was the first Brooke, who did not pursue a career in the army (a Brooke family tradition) becoming a wine merchant in Dublin in 1806. One of his suppliers of claret was the Barton vineyards of St Julien in the Bordeaux region of France, producers of Château Léoville Barton and Château Langoa Barton.
The business connection to the Barton vineyards in Bordeaux and Sir George’s marriage to Emily Alma Barton made for a strong connection to the Barton’s of Straffan Demense in County Kildare, and in fact, one of Sir George’s daughters, Emily, who was staying at Straffan when the 1911 Census was recorded, was born there in 1891. The close ties between the Barton and Brooke families seemed to continue for many years as in the 1950s two of Sir George Frederick Brooke’s sons, were buried in Straffan Graveyard.

The Brooke family feature later in this publication following my discovery that Sir Victor Brooke lived close to the Villa Beaupre, where the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps had set up their first hospital in France.

Armed with the knowledge of an active and on-going family connection between the Barton’s in Bordeaux, the Barton’s of Straffan, County Kildare and the Sinclair’s of Hollyhill, Strabane, I am confident that Rosabelle Sinclair was one of the key figures in the negotiations that enabled this group, comprised mostly of Ulster Volunteer Medical & Nursing Corps staff to proceed to France at such an early stage in the war. This was further strengthened by the knowledge that Rosabelle herself was born in France in 1884 (most likely in the area of the Barton vineyards of Bordeaux) and naturally the Sinclairs were even more determined to help the French because of the Barton connection over the centuries.

Whilst Rosabelle was one of the chief organisers of the group and became the Directrice of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France, I have no doubt the impetus to embark upon such a venture would have come from Rosabelle’s mother. Mary Everina was a formidable lady in her own right and very well respected in Unionist circles not only around County Tyrone, but also at the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council in Belfast.

During my research in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), I came across an exercise book in the documents of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council. It belonged to Mrs. Sinclair and was the actual Minute Book of the North Tyrone Women’s Unionist Association which was formed in April 1907. On the front of the book was a piece of woven material about 2” x 1” glued to the cover. It was much faded but on closer examination, I recognised that it was the French flag complete with flagpole - such was Mary Everina’s affinity with France even then. During the ‘war years’ Mrs Sinclair continued with her Unionist activities, writing many letters to influential people, particularly Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery, Blessingbourne Estate near Fivemiletown, County Tyrone. He was a leading Ulster Unionist and Member of the Northern Ireland Senate from 1922 to 1924; Magistrate and Deputy Lt of Tyrone, High Sherriff of Fermanagh in 1871 and High Sherriff of Tyrone in 1888. Mrs Sinclair continued as an active Ulster Unionist for the remainder of her life and by a very strange co-incidence ended her days in a house in Plumbridge which was owned by my great-uncle James Houston and close to the childhood home of Nurse Edith Harkness. Mrs Sinclair died there in 1925 leaving just £25 3s 7d in her Will! Forty years later the house was bought by Edith’s brother, Ernie Harkness.
Although many groups including the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps had offered medical assistance to the British War Office, their offers were declined believing that the war would only last a few months. However, the French authorities were only too happy to welcome aid from any direction, realising at an early stage in the war, there was insufficient medical facilities available in France. This fact was verified by Laurence Binyon in his book *For Dauntless France* – 1918.

“In France, before the separation of Church and State, nursing was almost entirely in the hands of the nuns. The nuns left France, and left a gap which could not be filled up at once. In the early autumn of 1914 France was in great and immediate need.”

Nursing in France was an area fraught with many difficulties in the three decades leading up to the First World War. The French state and Church clashed often and the 1801 Concordat between Napoleon and Pope Pius VII, which re-instated the Catholic Church as the state religion in France, remained officially in place until the 1905 Law of Separation of Church and State. However, from the late 1870’s the French Government began a gradual secularism. They removed priests from the administrative committees of hospitals and charity organisations; substituted lay women for nuns in hospitals and religious orders were not allowed to teach in schools (Religious instruction was forbidden) and by 1902 secularism had spread to almost every part of French public life and services. The 1905 Law of Separation of Church and State made most of the Catholic church buildings the property of the State, which led to the closing of many Catholic schools and eventually the expulsion of some of the Catholic religious Orders. The bottom line was that the French Republic would not ‘recognize, remunerate or subsidize any religion.’ Amongst the many Catholic Orders forced to leave were the Carmelites in 1875 who went to Bethlehem, the Jesuits in 1880 and the Benedictines in 1903.

In October 1901 the Catholic magazine, ‘The Tablet’ wrote a lengthy article about the persecutions and the expected expulsion of the religious orders in France. Part of the article stated “the teaching orders are doomed. Even the care of the sick … has been almost everywhere taken from the sisterhoods of mercy and charity and troops of hired woollen-clad people are intruded instead into the hospital wards and by the bedsides of the dying. The Socialist municipality of the great city of Marseilles has just demanded the expulsion of the nursing orders.”

With the loss of so many nursing nuns in the latter part of the 1800’s and early 1900’s, there was a dearth of nurses and it was not a career for women that had been much encouraged. In fact, prior to the outbreak of the Great War there was only one school of nursing in all France and that was the Florence Nightingale School at Bordeaux organised in the early 1900’s by Dr Anna Hamilton – a French doctor of French/English extraction. Only the long established French Red Cross societies were the most prepared at the outbreak of war and it was to this organisation that the Ulster group attached themselves in the beginning while still keeping their identity as the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps made
up of personnel from St John’s Ambulance Association, fully trained civilian doctors and
nurses and volunteer nurses.

France had three Red Cross Societies at that time: La Société de Secours aux Blessés Militaires,
L’association des Dames Françaises and the Union des Femmes de France. The latter organisation
had a committee in London long before the Great War but the French Ambassador in
London Mr Paul Cambon could see that a specialist organisation needed to be set up in
London to co-ordinate all the offers of help for France that were flooding in, and by the end
of 1914 the ‘Comité de Londres’ was formed.

ENDNOTES
1 For Dauntless France, 1918, p.11
2 The Tablet, October 1901, p.524
FOR DAUNTLESS FRANCE

An Account of Britain’s Aid to the French Wounded and Victims of the War

COMPiled FOR THE BRITISH RED CROSS SOcieties AND THE BRITISH COMMITTEE OF THE FRENCH RED CROSS BY

LAURENCE BINYON

WITH PREFACE BY

HIS EXCELLENCY PAUL CAMBON

FRENCH AMBASSADOR

AND WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

EDMUND DULAC, A. N. COTTERELL, MRS. WILFRID DE GLEHN, HERBERT WARD, AND WILLIAM ROTHENSTEIN

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO

Title page of *For Dauntless France, An Account of Britain's Aid to the French Wounded and Victims of the War*, (1918)
Route taken by the Ulster Volunteer group in October 1914.
Taken from The Historical Atlas by William Shepherd
Courtesy of the Perry-Castaneda Library, University of Texas, Austin.
CHAPTER SIX

THE JOURNEY TO FRANCE

Edith was a comparatively new candidate to the ranks of the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps so she would have been very inexperienced when the group went to France in October 1914. Why she was chosen out of the many hundreds of other volunteers, I do not know. A little hand-written note in the margin of one of the pieces of paper given to me by my Auntie Flo indicates that Miss Ballantine, Lisdivin, Strabane, ‘recruited’ Edith.

A Miss Ballantine had been the superintendent at the training day for the Ulster Volunteer nurses from Newtownstewart, Plumbridge and Rylands that had been held at Crawford’s farm in July 1914. This event had been organised by Rosabelle Sinclair who was Battalion Organiser of the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps in North Tyrone. Edith would have been known to both these women when she was being trained in First Aid and Home Nursing. Perhaps Miss Ballantine was impressed with Edith’s character and ability and when Rosabelle Sinclair was looking for suitable candidates to go to France, Miss Ballantine enlisted Edith. What I did subsequently discover was that there were two Miss Ballantines who were sisters. Louise, would become Rosabelle Sinclair’s Administrative Assistant at the hospitals in France and Mabel her sister would also spend some time at the same hospitals as a nurse. It was Louise who had been in charge of the nurses that day at Crawford’s farm.

I can only imagine Edith’s excitement at swapping rural County Tyrone for the warm environs of the tourist destination of Pau in Southern France. No doubt this was tempered by much apprehension and guilt at leaving her family behind. The eldest surviving child of Andrew and Jeannie Harkness, she would have felt it her duty to have stayed at home to help look after the seven younger children. The decision to leave would have taken great courage on Edith’s part given the close family bond that existed, coupled with the loss of four of her siblings between 1895 and 1903 from ‘consumption’ (T.B.) Martha Elizabeth died in September 1895 aged 4; Mary Orr died in March 1900 aged 6 months; Emily Catherine died in September 1902 aged 1 and Mary Florence died in March 1903 aged 13.

The matron who accompanied this group was Miss Melina Frances McCord (born 1868 County Down), who had an illustrious nursing career behind her. She only stayed for a few
months with the group in Pau. In June 1915 Matron McCord was officially ‘called up’ by the War Office and served as a matron of hospitals in England and France for the remainder of the war.

Meanwhile, the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John of Jerusalem were also combining their organisations to form the Joint War Committee (JWC). Like their French counterparts they also had one group to co-ordinate all offers of help and it became known as the ‘Anglo-French Committee’. These specialised committees of the ‘Comité de Londres’ and the ‘Anglo-French Committee’ worked closely together for the next three years to ensure that only the best workers should go to France. However, the Ulster group were already in Pau when these new committees were formed and the suitability or otherwise of the five volunteer nurses namely; Winifred Alexander, Jessie Dickson, Edith Harkness, Carrie Moore and Kathleen Thompson did not come under their scrutiny. At the end of 1917 the two special committees were united to form the British Committee of the French Red Cross.

This group from Ulster were some of the few from the British Isles who freely travelled to France at the beginning of the war but it was not long until the British War Office began to introduce, what we would now call, ‘red tape’.

Laurence Binyon’s book For Dauntless France cites:

“At the beginning of the war the regulations affecting the entry of British subjects into France were not strict. Several units found their way over to help the French wounded; …. But before long it was seen that more stringent regulations were necessary and many a would-be Red Cross worker or group of workers, who had contemplated rushing to the aid of the heroic French wounded, found themselves held up and unable to proceed till after long delays.”

Throughout the war there was an undercurrent of animosity between trained nurses and the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses. The VADs, with limited training, were available to go to France and other places almost immediately, while fully trained nurses either did not want to give up their permanent jobs in Britain or found it difficult to get permission to leave. Of the trained nurses that did go, there were inadequate numbers to provide skilled nursing care, especially in the early months of the war. As a result, the majority of ‘nurses’ going to help with the sick and wounded were those volunteers with little experience but owing to the desperate circumstances unfolding before them, had no choice but to take on the care of severely wounded soldiers, with limited supervision.

In the majority of cases, the VADs proved their worth and it wasn’t long before news travelled back to ‘home’ of the heroic deeds of these volunteer ‘nurses’ in the form of reports particularly from the Royal Army Medical Corps doctors. However, the professional nursing
hierarchy were not only sceptical about the skills of these volunteer ‘nurses’ but also how their morals would prevail when faced with situations other than that of a medical nature!

Whilst there was an element of snobbery among the VAD detractors, their concerns, especially with regard to the moral and social standing of some volunteers, was not without foundation. Just one example I discovered was the case of a young London VAD who had served in Egypt and elsewhere abroad, being fined 20 shillings or six weeks imprisonment for ‘keeping an open house’. In evidence she said ‘that the officers who had called at the maisonette were friends whose acquaintance she had made during the two years she was acting as a V.A.D. nurse’. A Nursing Sister commenting on the case exclaimed “we have always condemned the practice of the authorities sending young untrained girls to work in military hospitals abroad. We hope that both the War Office and the Joint War Committee will make it impossible for girls of twenty-one and under to be subjected to the temptations to which Peggy Robertson evidently succumbed.”

It was also quite often the case in the early stages of the war that the person in charge of the newly established small hospitals in the war zones, and in the auxiliary hospitals in England, particularly those set up in large country houses, was not a trained matron but very often the ‘lady of the house’ who was known as the Commandant. This too did not rest easy with fully-trained nurses of many years’ experience. No doubt some of the professional nurses took comfort in the following news which appeared in the April 1915 issue of The British Journal of Nursing:

“The War Office has given notice that voluntary hospitals will no longer be accepted, excepting as Convalescent Homes. All the sick and wounded are, at an early date, to be admitted to large auxiliary military hospitals of 500 to 1000 beds, and the nursing is to be done under trained supervision. This is indeed a wise decision. Members of V.A.D’s will be admitted as probationers on regular terms, and will no longer be in charge, as many have been in the past, of seriously sick soldiers. Nearly all doctors and nurses working under the Joint War Committee in France have now been recalled, and the French doctors deeply lament the loss of their English nurses.”

The personnel from Tyrone would most likely have travelled by train from Strabane to Belfast via Londonderry. The rail network to Strabane was established from Londonderry in 1847 and by 1852 Strabane was linked to Sion Mills, Newtownstewart and Omagh. The link from Londonderry to Belfast was completed by 1861.

In the letter written to the Belfast Newsletter and Tyrone Constitution by the Duchess of Abercorn in October 1914, it stated that the Belfast Steamship Company had transported all the baggage and staff free of charge between Belfast and Liverpool. At that time the Belfast Steamship Company had several passenger boats between Ireland and Great Britain. Three of these boats, the Graphic, the Heroic and the Magic were ’sister’ ships. The Heroic was requisitioned by the War Office as an armed merchant cruiser; the Magic was requisitioned
as a hospital ship for the remainder of the war and the Graphic continued as a passenger ship between Belfast and Liverpool.

The Graphic was built by Harland and Wolff in 1906 and despite being chased by a German U-boat twenty-two miles north-west of Liverpool in January 1915, continued in service until 1929. We can presume that the group from Ulster travelled overnight on the Graphic from Belfast to Liverpool.

At this stage in my research, I automatically assumed that the Ulster unit would then travel by train from Liverpool to one of the London railway stations and then take another train journey to a southern English port, in order to get the boat to France. The London and North Western Railway Company (LNWR) covered the line from Liverpool to London Euston. Other widely used train stations in London as the war progressed were Victoria and Charing Cross and Waterloo Street.
Further research showed that Liverpool port played an immense part during World War one, especially for ships from the ‘western approaches’. Hundreds of convoys sailed to and from the port in order to keep Britain supplied with food and other essentials. Many Liverpool owned ships were sunk during the war years and it was to the Port of Liverpool that the American troops landed in 1917. Laurence Binyon, *For Dauntless France*, recounted that “they sailed from Liverpool in October and reached Pau on October 12th.” If this statement actually meant that they went by boat from Liverpool directly to France, then their route would take them from the waters of the Irish Sea at Liverpool, into St George’s Channel, the English Channel and onto one of the usual French ports.

The main routes connecting England to France were via Southampton and Folkestone and these seemed to be the main points of embarkation at that time for troops and all other war personnel and equipment. The boats from Southampton would sail to Boulogne and those from Folkestone sailed to Le Havre. Some other boats first went to ports in
Belgium, particularly Ostend, where the troops disembarked for ‘the Front’. On occasions, personnel would be sent on a further sailing down the coast to various French ports. On the French side the ports of Le Havre, Rouen and Boulogne were important Base Depots. Dieppe, Abbeville, Marseilles, Étaples and Calais were also used. The 36th (Ulster) Division disembarked at the Ports in Le Havre and Boulogne in October 1915. At various times throughout the war it was necessary to close some French ports which had become blockaded by sunken ships attacked by the enemy, however Le Havre was successfully kept open and operational during the war years.

However, the discovery of Edith Harkness’s photo album in November 2014, confirmed part of my theory as to the route taken by the Ulster unit and discounted another part. One of the photos in Edith’s album was of the Ulster unit onboard a ship. Thankfully she had carefully written the name of the ship above the photo - “Vosges 1914”. When I researched this ship I discovered that it was actually a British cargo steam ship built in Liverpool in 1911. Its main route was Liverpool to Bordeaux in France.
I have to admit, that on first reading that ships actually sailed to Bordeaux, I wondered how they actually got ‘in’ to Bordeaux. Was Bordeaux not ‘land-locked?’ Closer inspection of a map revealed that Bordeaux was situated about 60 miles inland on the Garonne River and shipping came in off the Atlantic Ocean to the large Gironde estuary and then on to the Garonne River.

Bordeaux was a thriving town and port for many, many centuries and a very important military base during the First World War. It was also the place that the French Government and the entire Diplomatic Corps transferred to from Paris at the beginning of September 1914. Only the American Embassy remained in Paris, viewing their presence that as “the representatives of the greatest neutral power” they might be able to serve French interests as well as the interests of those Americans still in Paris.

I can now presume with a good degree of certainty that the Ulster unit sailed direct from Liverpool to Bordeaux – a journey of approximately three to four days. Once in Bordeaux
a train journey of about four hours would take them into Pau Station. I was interested to find out further information about the ship 'The Vosges' and discovered that it met its doom about five months later at the hands of a German submarine.

On the morning of 27 March 1915 the Vosges was attacked by a German U-28 submarine 70 km north-west of Trevoze Head, Cornwall. Despite Captain John R Green's best endeavours to out-maneouvre the submarine for almost two hours, severe damage was done to the Vosges by the enemy's firing as opportunity arose. By the time the submarine gave up the chase, the Captain realised that hoping to get the stricken vessel into Milford Haven was not going to happen as water was pouring in through the many holes. Several of his crew were injured and the chief engineer was killed. On board were also seven passengers with only one receiving slight injuries. Orders were given to abandon ship and the lifeboats were made ready. When all people on board were safely in the lifeboats Captain Green took his position in one of them and rowed towards help which was coming in the shape of the armed yacht 'Wintonia' which was in the area. Despite strong winds and heavy rain, everybody was successfully transferred to the 'Wintonia'. Shortly after 2pm the Vosges disappeared, bow first, beneath the waters. Captain Green received the D.S.O. for 'his gallant and resolute conduct' and gold watches were presented to other officers and crew members received a gratuity of £3.

The significance of the Vosges actually sailing to Bordeaux took me back to the beginning of my research when I had read that originally someone closely connected with the North Tyrone Ulster Volunteers had made contact with the French authorities 'through a Bordeaux lady'.

Putting all these facts together I am still of the opinion that the Sinclair's, Rosabelle and her mother Everina, with the assistance of the Barton family from Bordeaux, were the key 'players' in putting forward the Ulster unit for service in France but I was still on the trail of who exactly was the elusive 'Bordeaux lady?

ENDNOTES
1 For Dauntless France, Laurence Binyon, p.13
2 The British Journal of Nursing, 6 July 1918, p.4
3 The British Journal of Nursing, 3 April 1915, p.278
4 Ulster Evening Herald, 3 September 1913, p.3
Strabane Railway Station, County Tyrone
(Courtesy of the Deputy Keeper of Records,
Public Records Office Northern Ireland Flickr, A&G 29919)
Pau (pronounced Po) is located in the South West corner of France in the region of Aquitaine near the Pyrenees Mountains. (Copyright – www.heritage-history.com)
 CHAPTER SEVEN

PAU,
SOUTHERN FRANCE

Pau is located 62 miles from the Atlantic Ocean and 30 miles from the Spanish border. Toulouse and Bordeaux are over 100 miles distance and Lourdes is 19 miles south of Pau. The temperate climate has attracted many visitors over the past few hundred years and as a destination, it was written about in glowing terms.

An extract from an article in the New York Herald of 1879 also gives an account of Pau's climate in winter and this moderate climate may have been taken into consideration when the Ulster unit decided to go to France.

“Pau as a winter home: the advantages of Pau are the air and scenery. To the men of science there is an endless field of study in the geology of the Pyrenees. Invalids are within easy range of famous baths and springs. In winter the weather is, as a general thing, dry and the sun is sure to be about some part of the day.

Medical men speak highly of Pau…. the air is influenced by the Pyrenees, by the sea breezes, by the odours of the pine forests. It is a dry air….”

In 1994 Italian writer, Claudio Perinot wrote about well-known poet, T S Eliot and Eliot’s close friendship with French doctor, Jean Jules Verdenal. Verdenal was born in Pau and met Eliot at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1910. Perinot interviewed some of Verdenal’s relatives who gave a brief synopsis of the close ties between Pau and the British. (Dr Jean Jules Verdenal was a Medical Officer during the First World War and was killed at the Battle of Gallipoli in 1915).

“In about 1810-1820, due to Pau’s extremely favourable climate, the British started to holiday here, and they brought with them their characteristic habits and customs. They went hunting, played golf, tennis, and so on. The continent’s first golf course was laid out here in Pau, and we still have three golf clubs: the Pau Golf Club, the Royal Golf Club and the Scottish Golf-course. The British also brought fox-hunting, and it caught on, strengthening Pau’s unusual cosmopolitan culture. This immigration lasted almost a century and eventually, alongside the British, we find Americans, Germans,
Portuguese, Spanish and Russians. Pau became an internationally acclaimed holiday resort. The Russian ambassador of the time came with his whole household for long holidays at a time. An American, I don’t remember the name, brought his three hundred horses with him and spent day after day hunting in the area. For a long period, Pau lived on the English and life was certainly “brilliant”. New communities sprang up and tens of churches, of all religions, were built. This state of things continued at least until 1914. Then, for obvious reasons, things changed, people left, the churches were closed or knocked down.”

Recreational activities were not just confined to hunting and golf, but flying small aeroplanes had also become a familiar sight in Pau in the years leading up to the outbreak of war. In January 1914 it was reported that at the Bieriot School, ‘flying was in full-swing for the winter season.’

In a book written by Eric and Jane Lawson published in 1996 entitled ‘The First Air Campaign August 1914 to November 1914’ they stated:

“Wilbur Wright established the first commercial aerial school in Pau, France. This school later became one of the largest pilot training centres for French and American aviators during the Great War.”

In another publication entitled ‘War, Judgement and Memory in the Basque Borderlands’ by Sandra Ott (2008), we learn that Pau was a recruiting centre for French soldiers and within a month of the war commencing in August 1914, approximately four to five thousand infantry had ‘signed-up’ to the French Army.

From 1840, Pau was a favourite holiday destination by numerous affluent British, American and Russian families, and their large villas would have proved very suitable for use as temporary hospitals during the First World War. No doubt many of their owners left the area for safer environs.

It has been previously mentioned that, the ‘Ulster’ Brooke family had a tangible connection to the Pau area. Villa Jouvence was the home of Mr Victor Brooke, father of the famous Second World War leader, Field Marshal, The Right Honourable 1st Viscount Alanbrooke. Alan Brooke was born in 1883 at the Brooke summer residence in Barneres-de-Bigorre, but moved to Pau shortly afterwards where he lived until the age of 16 years. He was the youngest child of nine. When his father died, Alan Brooke’s eldest brother Douglas, who was eighteen years older than him, became his ‘father figure’. Douglas’s own son Basil, who was born in 1888, was only five years younger than his uncle Alan!

Alan and Basil went to St George’s school in Pau where Basil was a boarder. He spent his Easter and Christmas holidays at ‘Villa Jouvence’ and in the summer time both the boys returned to the Colebrooke Estate in Co. Fermanagh. Basil Brooke was later to become the
3rd Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and 1st Viscount Brookeborough. He died in 1963. Another brother of Alan Brooke, Major Victor Reginald Brooke, who was a member of the 9th Lancers, was killed in the first month of the war during the retreat from Le Cateau.

Pau was also famous for its hunt and was known as ‘the Leicestershire of France’. Past Hunt Masters included the Earl of Howth and Alan Brooke’s father, Victor Brooke (Sen) who was also Captain of Pau Golf Club for several years in the 1860s and was partly responsible for upgrading it from a 9-hole to an 18-hole golf course.

The Ulster Volunteer group journeyed to Pau from the safety of their various towns and villages in early October 1914 and I am sure they were anxious about the months that lay ahead. What was happening in Belgium and France? Where was the French Army fighting; whose casualties they were going to nurse? What volume of casualties from the French army could they expect at their hospital and were they in any danger themselves?

On 28 June 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie were assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia. Events escalated and by the time Great Britain declared war on Germany on
4 August 1914, Germany had already declared war on France and Belgium. France's military had also been given orders to mobilise. The fear of war in the early summer of 1914 alerted the French army enough to mobilise another 2.9 million men as well as their regular army. (By the end of the war, France had ‘called up’ 8.3 million men and suffered 4.2 million casualties). The first attack by the French in World War One was the Battle of Mulhouse which began on 7 August 1914 and ended in retreat by them on 9th August. Other ‘frontier battles’ were at Lorraine, Ardennes, and Charleroi. By the time the first members of the British Expeditionary Force (B.E.F) landed in France on 7 August 1914, German troops were on their way through Belgium and were soon occupying the city of Brussels. The French joined the British for the next major battle which started at Mons on 23 August 1914 (and ended the next day). On that one day alone, approximately 27,000 French soldiers were killed at Mons. The greater strength of the German army at this time and the sudden withdrawal of a greatly depleted French army left the British troops at a great disadvantage. They were forced to retreat and for nearly two weeks, wearily made their way Southward towards Paris. The retreat was made even more difficult by the wet weather and having to engage in rear-guard battles, particularly at Le Cateau on 26 August 1914, with various German troops that were now coming into France. Day and night they kept going for over 150 miles until they reached the Marne river region to the east of Paris. This was to be the next big battle.

The French commander Joffre had by this time built up a new French army which were outside Paris. In the ensuing Battle of the Marne from 7 to 10 September 1914, the French made remarkable gains and by 11 September, the German troops were in retreat. From September to the end of 1914 other confrontations involving the French took place in both France and Belgium: the 1st Battle of Aisne, the 1st Battle of Ypres, the 1st Champagne Battle, 1st Battle of Artois, 1st Battle of Arras and the Battle of Armentieres.

In the weeks that followed the Ulster groups’ arrival in Pau around the 12 October 1914, wounded French soldiers from the 1st Battle of Ypres, would probably have been their first patients. Letters received by a local newspaper from some of the staff of the hospital at Pau, mention that wounded are coming ‘straight from the front’.

The French army, with their distinctive blue and red uniform, soon recognised this was making them easy targets for the enemy and by early 1915 had changed the colour to a more muted Horizon Blue. They felt that this colour would allow them to blend in with the skyline when they attacked rather than go for any of the khaki colours worn by other armies.

ENDNOTES
1 New York Herald, 5 March 1879, p.4
2 Journal of the University of Venice 1996,  
 Claudio Perinot, ‘Jean Verdenal:TS Eliot’s French Friend’
3 The First Air Campaign – August 1914, Eric & Jane Lawson, 1996, p.16
French soldier wearing the old, brightly coloured uniform.
(Courtesy of Vintage Everyday)
Map of Pau (Pre-WW1) Ulster Volunteer Hospital (Villa Beaupre) encircled red;
Sacré-Coeur (Convent) encircled in green;
Hospital No 118 (Villa Ridgway) encircled yellow;
Palais D’Hiver encircled blue
(Copyright – The Perry-Castaneda Library, University of Texas, Austin)
When I first started researching where in Pau the Villa Beaupre was located, I had mistakenly spelt Beaupre as Beaupres. Realising my mistake after many fruitless ‘google’ searches, the correct spelling brought up several references. One of these was a site selling French postcards and a little ‘thumbnail’ picture was listed as ‘Hôpital de la Villa Beaupre - Ulster Volunteer Hospital’. Imagine my great delight when I enlarged the picture and there sitting on the front row, extreme left, was my grandmother, Edith!

Ulster Volunteer Staff and patients outside the Villa Beaupre, Pau (Edith Harkness – front row, extreme left)  
(Courtesy of Yvonne McLellan and Julie Rhys, nee McFarlane)
Soon I also had the exact street name of where the Villa Beaupre was located. This was about a mile North East of the town of Pau, at 11 Avenue Thiers (now known as Avenue General du Gaulle). It was a very large three-storey building with extensive gardens to the front and rear. The Villa itself was on one of the main thoroughfares from the centre of Pau and was listed as ‘Hôpital No 36’ on a French internet site listing all their military hospitals at that time - ‘Hôpitaux Militaries 1914-1918’. How coincidental, given that many of the Ulster volunteers would become part of the 36th Ulster Division! The Villa had been made available for use as a hospital from 7 September 1914 but the Ulster group were its first inhabitants from mid-October and when they left at the end of April 1916, it seems to have continued as some type of hospital as the French hospital register gives its date of closure as 15 February 1919.

Meanwhile back in Ulster, the formation of the Hospital and its work was not forgotten and soon after the Ulster Volunteers’ arrival, the following letter appeared in the Tyrone Constitution dated 23 October 1914:
CHAPTER 8

ULSTER VOLUNTEER HOSPITAL FOR FRANCE

The following letter is copied from The Times. “May I, an Ulster woman not now resident in Ulster, venture to ask for a small space to appeal to Ulster men and women in Great Britain and America for a work which is calculated to command our special sympathy? It may also appeal to some not directly connected with the North of Ireland. Circumstances having brought home to Ulster women the necessity of learning to tend the wounded in their own province, they gallantly prepared and trained themselves, therefore when the European war broke out they were ready. At the request of the French authorities an Ulster Volunteer Force Hospital, formed from Voluntary Aid Detachments from County Tyrone and St John’s Ambulance Association is quartered at the Palais d’Hiver at Pau, with a fully qualified staff and 50 beds. Donations towards the hospital may be sent to the Duchess of Abercorn at Baronscourt, County Tyrone, Ireland, President of the St John A.A. in Tyrone.” ¹

In light of a subsequent letter from Rosabelle Sinclair dated 19 November 1914 and published in the press in January 1915, I believe the writer of the above letter is Lady Agnes Daniell – the former Agnes Henrietta Sarah Knox, daughter of 3rd Earl of Ranfurly, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone. Could she be the elusive ‘Bordeaux lady’ that was mentioned in connection with offering the services of the Ulster group to the French Authorities or was the ‘Bordeaux Lady’ one of the Barton’s of the Barton & Gustier vineyards in Bordeaux? The reference to the group being “quartered” at the Palais d’Hiver “with a fully qualified staff and 50 beds”, aroused my curiosity. This seemed to indicate that the hospital was also located at the Palais d’Hiver as well as the staff! Was the Palais d’Hiver and Villa Beaupre one and the same place or two different places?

Rosabelle Sinclair, in her letter home which was partly published in the Tyrone Constitution at the end of January 1915, made reference to the fact that some of the staff were billeted almost a mile away from the hospital. While the Villa Beaupre was indeed where the Ulster Volunteer Hospital was to be set up, perhaps the Palais d’Hiver was used as a temporary hospital and accommodation for a few weeks after the groups’ arrival in Pau? Checking out this new information was my next task in hand.

There were several mentions and photographs of the Palais d’Hiver (Winter Palace in English) on the internet. Looking at one of the internal photographs I experienced a déjà vu moment. It looked so familiar to me, yet I had never been to Pau!
Internal view of the Palais d’Hiver in the 1900’s
(Courtesy of Amanda Porter)

One of the three pieces of ‘information’ given to me by my Auntie Flo about the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau
(Claire McElhinney)
I studied the photograph closely and looked at all the features. The roof structure was very unusual and kept drawing my attention. Where had I seen that before? I looked again at the few pieces of paper that had been given to me by Edith’s daughter, my Auntie Flo. One of the pages was a partly blank picture of a gathering of soldiers and civilians all sitting in rows in a wonderful looking building with the most unusual roof structure! It was the same as I found on the internet! Written underneath the picture were the words ‘Fund Raising Concert for hospital’. Ladies from the Ulster Volunteer Hospital can be seen seated behind the gentlemen. They are wearing the same hats as they wore on the “Vosges” ship which had transported them to France.

I now know for certain that Edith was part of the audience at the “Fund Raising Concert” at the Palais d’Hiver, as her name appears on the programme along with the other staff present on that occasion. The programme also listed the various artistes participating in the concert which no doubt raised valuable funds for the Ulster Volunteer Hospital.

List of staff at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Villa Beaupre
(Claire McElhinney)
Fundraising Concert Programme, 3 November 1914
(Claire McElhinney)

External view of Palais d’Hiver
(Courtesy of Amanda Porter)
Consulting the ‘Hôpitaux Militaires 1914-1918’ for the Pau region of France, the Palais d’Hiver is listed as being a temporary hospital for the months of September and October 1914 so this confirms that the Ulster group had spent some weeks working there while they waited for the Villa Beaupre to be made ready. The Palais d’Hiver then became one of the hospitals in Pau run by the American Red Cross with a maximum capacity of three hundred beds, and remained in their hands until about August 1916 and while American troops did not arrive in France until June 1917, some units of the American Red Cross had already arrived by the end of August, 1914. An article published in The British Journal of Nursing on 2 January 1915 stated: “the American Journal of Nursing reports on where the Red Cross units sent over from the United States have been stationed …… the French Units went to Pau to nurse 800 severely wounded German prisoners.”

One of the nurses who arrived in Pau in March 1915 was Vashti Bartlett whose personal letters and papers form part of The Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives of The Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Baltimore. From March 1915 to January 1916, she was head nurse and supervisor of nurses at the American Red Cross hospitals in Pau. Vashti wrote in her correspondence that Pau had many hospitals and her hospital was located within the Palais d’Hiver. When she first arrived, there were 176 beds, with a staff of 18 nurses and 6 doctors. She also wrote of the agony and bravery of the ordinary French soldier who after spending time at the hospital had to return to the ‘front’ to possibly succumb to the same fate all over again!

Meanwhile back in County Tyrone, the Tyrone Constitution dated 30 October 1914 reported on a local fund-raising concert for the hospital at Pau.

ENTERTAINMENT AT SION MILLS

“A concert and cinema entertainment was held in the Recreation Hall, Sion Mills on Friday evening in aid of the hospital at Pau, France, organised by the Unionists of North Tyrone. The attendance at the entertainment was worthy of the object for which it was organised. The event was under the patronage of her Grace the Duchess of Abercorn, who, with Miss Sinclair, Hollyhill has taken a deep interest in the scheme. At an interval in the programme Captain Jack Herdman referred to the object of the entertainment and spoke of the great gratitude of the French Government (who were not so well supplied with Red Cross equipment as we were) for the assistance rendered by the hospital at Pau. The greater part of the equipment came from Sion Mills, but it required a great deal of money for such a scheme and he hoped those interested would give all the help they could. The programme opened with photos of gentlemen who have taken a prominent part in the call of the Empire, the loudest applause being reserved for Lieutenant Colonel Ricardo. The first vocal item
was the singing by Mrs W. E. Gordon of the now popular ‘Your King and Country Want You’, the chorus of which was joined in enthusiastically by the audience and Mrs Gordon received a well-deserved encore. Captain J.C. Herdman contributed a first-rate parody on ‘Tipperary’, in which place William and Son in some of the verses found it’s further away than they anticipated. ‘For King and Country’ a patriotic song, was rendered by Mr Wason (Newtownstewart) in a pleasing manner. Mr J.J. Gray kept the audience amused by the doings of ‘Andy McIlrole’. Sergeant O.L. Walsh, one of the most popular performers in Sion Mills (and now of Finner Camp) was loudly applauded for his singing of ‘The King’s Own.’ Over 5000 feet of films were shown, chiefly of a topical nature – ‘America’s Heroic Nurses’, ‘Britons bid for Supremacy,’ and ‘French Naval Manoeuvres’, were especially good.

The entertainment, which concluded with the singing of the National Anthems of the four Allies, owed its success in great measure to Mr J. Crosbie and Mr W.E. Gordon. The entertainment was repeated on Saturday night.”

The people of Sion Mills and surrounding districts may have been pleased with all their efforts to help the North Tyrone contingent who went to Pau but the War Office was ‘putting the brakes’ on any other group thinking of heading in the same direction with trained nurses in tow.

Their advert in the *Tyrone Constitution* of 23 October 1914 was clear:

**NURSES FOR FRANCE**

*War Office Notification*

“The Press Bureau makes the following statement:- It is notified that no person has any authority from the War Office to approach hospital nurses or nursing institutions with a view to securing the services of nurses for any of the troops operating in France. Nurses so approached should make application in writing to the War Office, the British Red Cross Society or St John Ambulance Association, before entering into any engagement of this nature.”

Fortunately or unfortunately, Edith’s group had ‘escaped’ the bureaucracy of the War Office and had travelled freely to Pau having had their offer of medical help refused by the very same Office, a few months earlier.
VILLA BEAUPRE: ULSTER VOLUNTEER HOSPITAL - JANUARY 1915

Front row: Sr Johnston, Dr H Woodroffe, Matron F McFerran, Dr N Darling, R Sinclair (Directrice), Dr Fayon, Dr I Clarke, Nurse E Harkness, Sr S Sullivan, Cpl T Lowry, Sr I Wright

2nd Row: Sr A Jameson, Sr Shimmen, Nurse L Ballantine

3rd Row: Sr I Jennings, Sr I Patrick, Nurses K Thompson, J Dickson, W Alexander and Sr C R Stevens

Back Row: 1, 2, 3 Kitchen Helpers, Cook, Uniform Steward, Kitchen Helper

(Courtesy of Yvonne McLellan and Julie Rhys, nee McFarlane)
Front row seated: Dr Leonard Brown, Dr Woodroffe, Directrice Rosabelle Sinclair, Dr Pradignac, Nurse L Ballantine

Middle row: Sr McCullagh, Sgt Downer, Sr Roulston, Sr Patrick, Nurses Cunningham and McCrory, Sister Kilpatrick, Lt Gouet and Sr Steen

Back row: Nurses Dickson, Tupper, Forde, Thompson and Auchinleck

(Courtesy of the Deputy Keeper of the Records, Public Records Office, Northern Ireland - D1098/2/6)
Front Row: Sr Murphy, Sr I Patrick, Dr Woodroffe, Directrice R Sinclair, Lt Gouet, Nurse L Ballantine, Sr G Murphy.

Middle Row: Nurse D Sandys, Sr P Kilpatrick, Nurse Lowry

Back row: Sr E Leitch, Nurses Lupton, D Stronge, L F Humphreys, V Purvis and M D McCombe

(Courtesy of Dr I Adamson)
Picture of some of the Hospital staff at the Villa Beaupre, Pau along with wounded French Soldiers.

Rosabelle Sinclair (Directrice) is standing at the very back wearing a sash.
Matron McFerran is front and centre

(Courtesy of the Deputy Keeper of the Records,
Public Records Office, Northern Ireland - D1098/2/6)
The only written record I was able to consult regarding this hospital, was the actual Medal Roll compiled by the British Committee of the French Red Cross in 1921 and held by the National Archives, Kew. Sixty-six people are listed as working at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau and Lyon or with the remainder of the group who joined the 559th American Field Ambulance (similar to a Casualty Clearing Station) attached to the 3rd French Army, when the hospital at Lyon closed in August 1917. This list also included one or two French personnel.

One of the interesting facts that I did discover early in my research was that the hospital was first known as the Tyrone County Hospital owing to the fact that for almost a year after it was set up, Tyrone unionists were responsible for raising the funds to finance the running of the hospital. The name was changed to the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in September 1915 when the Ulster Women’s Unionist Association undertook to raise the necessary funds. What information I have gleaned about the work of the hospital at Pau is from letters sent by Rosabelle Sinclair and Daphne Stronge which were published in local newspapers.

While the first letter was written in November 1914, shortly after they arrived in Pau, it was not published in the local newspaper until 29 January 1915 and it was not until many months into my research for the book that it came to light that the published letter was excerpts from a much longer, detailed account. A visit to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) with my friend Amanda did not produce much of great importance initially. However, in the last half hour of our search, Amanda’s documents produced the full version of the letter from Rosabelle Sinclair. It was one of those occasions when I really wanted to stand on my chair and shout “I’ve found something! I’ve found something!” Both of us tried to read quickly through the flow of information that was before us, mindful that we were in the Reading Room and not wanting to disturb the other researchers, yet greatly excited by what we were reading! My mind was ‘sifting and sorting’ out the new information and mentally registering particular paragraphs as either being the answer to unanswered questions or saying to myself, ‘well that’s that theory firmly knocked on the head!’

To me, it is a fascinating letter and is full of information that satisfies my natural curiosity for detail. There are two possible theories behind this communication from Rosabelle Sinclair. She may have been asked by the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council to write an account of the early days of the hospital, so that they could either publish extracts in the local newspapers or have it professionally printed and sent out to members. Either way it would inform those who were contributing towards the hospital how their money was being used. Or perhaps it was a private letter sent by Rosabelle to her mother in Strabane and it was she who took the initiative to have it printed for circulation among the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council members as well as putting an extract in the local newspapers. We read that the hospital was inspected by a French army colonel, head of their Medical Department, who was accompanied by several other dignitaries and that the Destructor (incinerator) built by Sergeant Buss was to be replicated at other hospitals in the area. The much admired Operating Theatre, Sterilising room, Laboratory, Dispensary and surgical
instruments would add credence to the knowledge that medical facilities in pre-war France must have been quite inferior.

The comprehensive list of staff and the hospitals or groups that they came from has been very helpful and it is within this list that I see confirmation that Edith Harkness was one of five probationers. Whether she was one of the two probationers sent to the nearby hospital at Lescar, is not made clear. It is an amazing letter and as the content is of great historic interest it is reproduced in full below.

ULSTER VOLUNTEER HOSPITAL,  
VILLA BEAUPRE  
Avenue Thiers  
PAU (B.-P.)  

19th November, 1914

“We have at last got to work. We spent three very long, weary weeks getting the house ready. It had not been occupied for a long time, so needed a lot of cleaning as well as carpentering and plumbing work. It was a most disheartening business. Things never move very fast in this part of the world and just now of course all workmen are at the war except the very old and the very young, and they have more to do than they can possibly get through, as all the hospitals here are clamouring for them besides their private customers. Every time we got the house clean, a plumber or an electrician, or someone came along and dirtied all the stairs and passages again. All the floors are polished and they had to be washed time after time and then polished. Then when we thought we were fairly right, something went wrong with the chimneys; even now, though we have patients, a carpenter is still hovering about.

On Saturday (31st Oct) we were inspected by the Medecin–chef. He is a Colonel in their Army Medical Department and is head of all the Hospitals, etc, in the department, which, of course, includes all the hospitals at Biarritz etc. With him came the Mayor and various other dignitaries. As a result of their visit I had a letter from the Mayor, of which, I enclose a copy. (I think Subscribers should see it). Sergeant Buss built a Destructor in the back yard for burning all the dirty dressings, etc. It has caused quite an excitement. All sorts of officials have come to inspect it and copies of it are to be built at other hospitals here. Our Operating Theatre and Sterilising room are much admired with their nice glass and white enamel fittings. The instruments too are a source of great interest. We also have a very nice Laboratory and Dispensary. For the present only the three Doctors, Matron and theatre Sister are to live on the premises. In addition to their bedrooms the Doctors have a sitting-room and I have a little wee ‘office’. If they want to give us more wounded in here we could take in another 30 by moving the staff out.

The town of Pau as far as I can understand, is paying for the alterations to the house, shelves, tables etc.
We have a nice linen room which takes every lady's fancy. It really does look rather attractive with its big shelves filled with linen and clothing. When we get our full allowance of patients in, I fear our shelves will look less opulent.

Our staff consists of: Dr Norman Darling (of Harley Street) who is in charge. He is, unfortunately, at present away for a few days, as he is doctor to the Spanish Royal Family, and has been telegraphed for to go to Madrid. He hopes to get back in 2 or 3 days.

Doctors Woodroffe and Clarke, both Irish.

Our Matron, Miss McCord, a native of Co. Down, formerly Matron of a London Hospital. She is in the U.V.F.M and N Corps.

Sisters Johnson, Cobbett, Jennings from St. John's. (Author's note: Ambulance Association)

Sisters Steevens, Jameson, Shimmin, Sullivan (Dungannon), McFerran (Belfast), Wright (Strabane), Patrick (Castlederg, all members of Tyrone U.V.F.M and N Corps. (Author's note: the towns in brackets refer to the locations of the hospitals in which the above staff nursed)

Probationers Alexander, Dickson, Harkness, Moore and Thompson, also all Tyrone U.V.F.M. and N Corps.

Orderlies: Sergeant Buss, Corporal Downer (Londonderry), Hunter (Belfast) and Lowry (Strabane) also all U.V.F and last Miss Ballantine and myself. Miss Ballantine has charge of all the Linen, Clothing and Stores of all sorts.

Everyone is more than kind to us. The officials are most anxious to do everything they can for us, and seem so pleased with all our equipment and arrangements. The English Consul's wife comes here nearly every day and takes someone out for a run in her car, which is a great treat.

We have now got 23 patients here; 12 more are due this afternoon, the latter are all cases for operations sent on from another hospital some distance away. We are very proud at having been chosen out of all the other hospitals here to do these operations. We expect to be filled up before the end of the week.

As well as our 54 beds here, we have charge of the nursing arrangements at a hospital at Lescar, a few miles from here. It is in charge of a French doctor, and has been equipped by the Government, but is being run by our nurses. Sister Johnson is in charge, helped by Sisters Patrick and Cobbett, two probationers and Sergts. Buss and Hunter. They have French people under them to do the unskilled work, such as cleaning up, handing round the food, etc. This (Lescar) hospital is a most delightful place. It is in a wing of what was a very ancient monastery, but which has been used as a school for some year.”
(Lescar was a district to the West of the town of Pau and the ‘ancient monastery’ referred
to was of the Barnabites Order. This building is currently used as a school but during the
war it became hospital No 130 with 100 beds and was functional from 13 October 1914 to
11 October 1917. The fact that the hospital at Lescar was staffed by some members of the
Ulster Volunteer Hospital is also verified in Laurence Binyon’s book for Dauntless France):

“there were fifty beds, all too few, as it happened, for the ample staff sent out. But no
sooner was the Prefet made aware of this superabundance of skilled energy than he
asked to borrow from it for a hospital in the neighbourhood. Two orderlies and two
probationers were lent to this French hospital, under two Sisters; one of these Sisters
has been there ever since, and is reported to have done invaluable work.”

(I am sure that Edith would also have undertaken nursing duties in the hospital at Lescar and
this may be the reason why she and fellow probationer, Carrie Moore, are listed as leaving
the Ulster Volunteer Hospital at the Villa Beaupre in February 1915, given that the Hospital
at Lescar was not under the jurisdiction of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital. However, we
know from the records of the British Red Cross that Edith remained in Pau until the Ulster
Volunteer Hospital moved in its entirety to Lyon in April 1916).

Rosabelle Sinclair’s letter continued:

“My office window overlooks the garden of the Sacré-Cœur Convent (or at least it was
formerly the Convent.) It has been turned into a hospital for the German wounded.
There are about 200 of them there now. Some of them are walking about in the
garden. One of our doctors goes in there every morning to help with dressings. He has
also done a couple of operations in there.

(This hospital listed as ‘Hôpital No 34’ on the French ‘Hôpitaux Militaires 1914-18’ register,
was in existence from 20 September 1914 to 20 May 1920).

Rosabelle continued:

“Our wounded are the most charming people in the world. They are so gay in spite
of all they have suffered, and so grateful for the slightest thing. A lot of them are able
to move about. They are rejoicing in the warm sun today, and have been sitting out
all day on the ‘terrace’ in their dressing gowns playing cards and reading. It is hard to
realise it is November. The climate here is very changeable; when the sun does shine
it is very hot, but we get days of pouring rain and cold.

We got rather a shock this morning. We expected 12 new patients to be passed on to
us this afternoon, but at 7 am, eight men straight from Amiens were planted down on
the doorstep without any warning. Poor things, some of them look awful.
I will send you an account of all our patients and who’s ‘beds’ they are in, tomorrow or the next day. I couldn’t properly get them all straightened out before, as we had so few and they have been changed to different beds, but after today I will be able to get the names up over the beds.


I have explained to some of the men that the people at home have provided the money for the various beds, and one of them suggested that they would like to write to the donors of their respective beds to thank them. Isn’t it a nice idea? I dare say they will do it as soon as the beds are allotted.

At present we (the staff) are still billeted in various hotels; of course, we are most comfortable, as we have been put in the best hotels in the place, but it is very inconvenient, as we are almost a mile away from the hospital and such a lot of time is wasted going backwards and forwards for meals etc.

There is a little house just opposite the hospital which belongs to a German, who has had to clear out during the war. The authorities have taken it for us and we hope to get into it soon.”

(I can now confirm that the move to the ‘little house opposite the hospital’, No 12 Thiers Avenue, did come to fruition sometime in August 1915, and as well as the ongoing temporary accommodation at the Palais d’Hiver, additional billets were also made available in the former stables belonging to the nearby Villa Ridgway. The Villa Ridgway had been converted into a hospital at the beginning of the war and was functional from 13 October 1914 until 15 January 1919).

Villa Ridgway, situated on “Allée de Morlaas”, Pau, was built in 1905 by American, Charles Henry Ridgway, who was a Polo player, Master of Pau Hunt and who died in 1913.

Rosabelle Sinclair’s letter continued:

“A small committee of ladies has been formed here to help us, it consists of Vicomtesse de Sujay (daughter of the Mayor), Hon. Madam Duval (Lord Vernon’s daughter), Mrs Hewiston (wife of British Consul), Mrs Ayrton, Lady Agnes Daniell and the Secretary is Mrs Wheteway, sister of Sir John French. These ladies are most helpful. They borrowed all sorts of furniture for us from various hotels and houses. As for Lady Agnes Daniell, who kindly came out with us, I don’t know what in the world we should have done without her. She has lived a great deal at Pau and knows everyone. She has put us up to all the ropes and has been invaluable.”
If the people who have been kind enough to help this hospital could see their 'guests', I am sure they would feel, as we all do, thankful to have the opportunity of doing something to help these men who have suffered so much and who are so wonderfully brave and gay in spite of it all. It really is too tragic. They are not even like our soldiers whose profession it is and who have chosen it. They are for the most part men who are small farmers and labourers, whose whole interests are in their homes and they have had to leave everything, whether they like it or not, for a life to which they are quite unaccustomed — many of them are not at all young. Many of them even in our little Hospital will never again be able to follow their former occupations. It is too pitiful — and yet there they are so gay — never a grumble. But they love to talk of their homes and families and occupations.

I hope to send a detailed account of the patients in a few days, but there isn't much time for letter writing.

R.L.S."
The ‘small committee of ladies’ referred to by Rosabelle included the Honourable Madam Duval (Lord Vernon’s daughter). Lord Vernon was George William Henry Venables-Vernon of Sudbury, Derby who was born in 1854 and died on 15 December 1898. His daughter Frances Lawrence Venables-Vernon, born in 1886, married Maurice Raoul Duval of Chateau de Marolles, France, on 15 June 1910. Duval was a well-known French polo player, who was educated at King’s College, Cambridge and competed in the 1900 Summer Olympics. Sadly, Duval was killed at Meuse, Verdun on 18 May 1916. They had three children. Mrs Duval later married Lt Jean de Kermaignant in 1918.

Lady Agnes Daniell was Agnes Henrietta Sarah Knox, born on 19 March 1851, and only daughter of Thomas Knox, 3rd Earl of Ranfurly, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone. On 1 December 1870, Agnes married Nugent Murray Whitmore Daniell who died in 1908; they had no family. Nugent M W Daniell was born in 1838, one of fifteen children. The family seat was at Sandown House, Esher, Surrey, where his father was a JP and who also was a Lieutenant of the City of London. Many of this family were born in Macao, China, Hong Kong or India where they joined various civil service departments as well as the Indian Army.
Nugent Daniell had been in the Bombay Civil Service. Whilst it was clear from the letter written by Rosabelle Sinclair that Lady Agnes Daniell had spent much time at Pau, and was almost certainly the person responsible for guiding them to that area, I have now discounted Lady Agnes as the ‘Bordeaux lady’. Given that the Barton family was very well known throughout the Bordeaux region and with their family connections to Co. Tyrone, I am confident that the ‘Bordeaux Lady’ must have been a member of the Barton family connected with the Barton & Gustier Vineyards. After the war Lady Agnes returned to live in London where she died on 19 December 1921 aged 70 years.

Another interesting member of the ladies committee was Mrs Whiteway, Secretary, who Rosabelle tells us is the sister of Sir John French, Commander of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) for the first year of the war. Mrs Caroline Whiteway was also a widow. Her husband, Augustine Robert Whiteway, who was the British Vice-Consul at Pau, had died in 1902. While Caroline Whiteway was greatly involved in helping at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau, another sister Katherine Mary Harley was a nurse with the Scottish Women’s Hospital also in France. Katherine was also a volunteer worker with the Serbian forces and was killed by shell fire at Monastir, Serbia on 7 March, 1917 aged 64. She is
buried at Lembet Road CWGC in Thessaloniki, Greece (now Salonika) and is remembered on a memorial plaque at St Mary the Virgin Church, Shrewsbury. The most well-known of the French sisters was Charlotte, Mrs Despard. Mrs Despard, another widow, was a vocal suffragette in London prior to the war, had been imprisoned a few times, was against conscription, an active Labour member and when she moved to Dublin after the war aligned herself to Sinn Fein and also joined the Communist Party. Towards the end of her life she moved to Whitehead, near Belfast and died there at the great age of 95 in 1939. However, she was buried in the Republican Plot at Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin.

How amazing to learn, in the detailed letter from Rosabelle Sinclair, that next door to the Ulster Volunteer Hospital was a hospital for the German wounded and that the Ulster Volunteer Hospital doctors helped each morning with dressings and even undertook operations! I can only assume that these were wounded German Prisoners of War.

A ‘Press Association War Special’ report from Bordeaux published in the *Ulster Evening Herald* on 18 September 1914 confirms that wounded German prisoners-of-war were in the Southern region of France:

> “several thousand German wounded prisoners have arrived here. They mostly belong to Saxon, Bavarian and Hanoverian regiments, with a sprinkling of Grenadiers of the Guard. They all express themselves as very happy to be cared for and allowed to eat their fill, and they further declared that they were not aware of the existence of the Quintuple Alliance, until after the battle of the Marne””

The following week a similar report, taken from a French newspaper, and also published in the *Ulster Evening Herald*, quoted extracts from letters of wounded German soldiers to their families:

> “I fell on the field of battle and was taken by the German ambulance with 350 comrades. The same evening we learned that the Germans were beating retreat. Our ambulance fled, of course, and fortunately, five priests and five sisters remained with us. Without their assistance we should all have been dead of hunger. Next day we were taken prisoners by the French cavalry and our wounds were carefully dressed by a French surgeon”

Another German soldier writes; “Our ambulance men covered themselves with shame and left us for two days unassisted without food or drink. Fortunately the French came to our assistance and treated us with the greatest attention. I hope therefore, that you will take equal care of the French wounded.”

A similar view was expressed in several other letters; “the German army doctors abandon the wounded in the moment of danger …. The cowardice of the German surgeons has been the cause of a thousand German deaths!”
It is interesting to note in these letter excerpts that ‘five priests and five sisters’ were helping the German wounded. Only about ten years earlier these very priests and nuns were being expelled by the French state. That some of these Religious Orders did come back into France when the war started is verified in two newspaper articles.

In the *Ulster Evening Herald* published on 17 September 1914 under the heading 'Possible Reconciliation of Church and State of France', the correspondent writes:

“It looks as if the Kaiser may succeed in re-establishing some sort of an entente cordiale between the French Church and the French State. Hundreds of nuns have been recalled from Belgium to which country they were expelled when the religious orders were dissolved, and are working as hospital nurses with a devotion which is beautiful. Moreover, there are 22,000 ‘brothers’ on the battlefield ready to lay down their lives for their country. It is quite impossible that the heroic work of both nuns and monks should be lost on a public which is ever quick to recognise devotion to duty when there is no axe to grind. A war always brings a religious revival in the countries concerned in it. We shall probably never see the Concordat in France again, but under the new Pope it is quite on the cards that the war will induce a better understanding between the Church and the Government.

The Churches will still remain the property of the State, but I think we shall at least see an era in which not only national monuments but all the churches will be maintained and repaired at the public expense – a point which, as everybody familiar with French history of the last few years know, has been a grave difficulty.”

The second article in the *Ulster Evening Herald* dated 7 September 1914, sheds light on where exactly the religious orders went when they were expelled from France:

“Many Christian Brothers, who, when the Government deprived them of their schools, went to teach in the primary French schools of Egypt or Asia Minor, have returned to take their place in the ranks. Sixty come from Egypt, twenty-four from Smyrna, others from Brazil. They were warmly welcomed in the different regiments to which they were appointed, and were generally given positions of confidence. The worth of these humble and devoted teachers of the children of the poor is universally appreciated by all those of their countrymen who are not blinded by sectarian prejudice.

From the French monasteries at Jerusalem came Dominicans, Benedictines, Lazarists, and religious of the Order of Sion. A few miles only from their old home, from which they were so cruelly expelled, the Carthusians have arrived from Italy, where they retired when the “Grande Chartreuse” was taken from them. They made their entrance into the barracks of Grenoble, clothed in their white habits, a compact band of willing and smiling “reservists”. The memory of the injustice done to these men, who once showered blessings on the surrounding district, prompted the ovation that was given them by the soldiers.”
The reference, in Rosabelle Sinclair’s letter, that wounded French soldiers came from Amiens to the hospital in Pau was most likely as a result of the German capture of that city at the end of August 1914 and the re-capture by the French some weeks later. Amiens was an advance base for the British Expeditionary Force in August 1914 and the Battle of Amiens four years later in August 1918 was a ‘turning point’ to the ending of the war. It is astonishing to discover that the distance from Amiens to Pau is almost 600 miles. How could the wounded French soldiers have survived that journey in trains that were not, at that time, converted into ambulance trains? So many soldiers of all nationalities died because of being ‘shaken to death’ when they were being carried off the battlefield by comrades, stretchered off, taken by horse ambulance, motor ambulance or train.

The local Pau ladies mentioned in Rosabelle’s letter, who formed the Committee, may have been ‘small’ in number but their social positions were undoubtedly a great asset and their influence would have overcome many an obstacle that more ordinary people could not easily surmount.

Attached to the letter written by Rosabelle Sinclair in November 1914 was a copy of a letter that Rosabelle had received from the Mayor of Pau:-
Dear Miss Sinclair,

Allow me to write to you all my admiration for the excellent equipment of the Ambulance you so kindly brought us.

I hope you will soon be completely and comfortably installed, and provided of the wounded you so kindly came to nurse and restore to health.

I beg you to transmit my thanks and the thanks of the town of Pau to the Doctors, Nurses, and all the Staff of your Ambulance, to Lady Agnes Daniel, and all those to whom we owe this precious help for the care and the cure of our wounded.

You know what great share in these thanks is due to you, and in begging you to accept it,

Believe me, dear Miss Sinclair,

Yours very respectfully,

(Signed), H. de LASSENCE.

(Courtesy of the Deputy Keeper of the Records, Public Records Office, Northern Ireland - D/1098/2/6)
(The reference to ‘the ambulance’ in this correspondence does not actually refer to a motorised vehicle. The French used this term to refer to a complete medical unit of doctors, nurses, basic shelter and some form of transportation that could be relocated, if required to do so. However, in June 1916 when the hospital relocated to Lyon they were presented with a motorised ambulance, funded by the people of Ulster and elsewhere).

ENDNOTES
1 Tyrone Constitution, 23 October 1914, p.4
2 The British Journal of Nursing, 2 January 1915, p.7 & 8
3 Tyrone Constitution, 30 October 1914, p.5
4 Tyrone Constitution, 23 October 1914, p.8
5 For Dauntless France, Laurence Binyon, 1918, p.138
6 The Deputy Keeper of the Records, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, D1098/2/6/1
7 Ulster Evening Herald, 18 September 1914, p.3
8 Ulster Evening Herald, 25 September 1914, p.3
9 Ulster Evening Herald, 25 September 1914, p.3
10 Ulster Evening Herald, 25 September 1914, p.3
11 Ulster Evening Herald, 17 September 1914, p.3
12 Ulster Evening Herald, 7 September 1914, p.4
Daphne with easel in Rannoch, Perthshire whilst on honeymoon
(Courtesy Katherine Kinghan)
An unexpected discovery on a German auction room website of a set of three ‘books’ belonging to an unnamed nurse from the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, was both intriguing and exciting. Whilst they were shown on the site, they had actually been sold a few years previously. However, several pages from the three books were available for perusal on-line. One of the ‘books’ seemed to be a journal which contained many sketches and observations about the nursing staff and this immediately brought to my mind that one of the nurses at the Pau Hospital, Daphne Stronge, had been an artist.

While I knew that I could not use any of this ‘exciting material’ in my book, without the permission of the owner, I thought that I would, at least, set about trying to prove that the books DID belong to Nurse Stronge. When I mentioned to my friend Amanda about finding the ‘books’, she suggested I compare Daphne Stronge’s signature on the 1912 Declaration (Ulster Covenant & Declaration) with the handwriting in the notebook. We first looked at the style of writing and the formation of the letters and felt fairly sure that they were a match. Our findings were confirmed when the writer of the notebook used the word ‘strong’, in describing the housekeeper at their living quarters. The letter formation in ‘strong’ and ‘Stronge’ as written on the 1912 Ulster Covenant & Declaration, were identical and coupled with a study of the professional type sketches, we were confident that the notebook belonged to Daphne Stronge. There the story of ‘Lot 151’ would have ended had it not been for the determination and patience of Amanda Porter. Not being one to give up easily, she discovered that the German auction site actually was another branch of a well-known English company. Several emails passed between them explaining that I was looking for permission from the owner of the ‘books’ to reproduce some of the sketches in my publication. We were just about to give up the quest, when word came through that permission was granted. This was good news but Amanda wasn’t finished yet! Her next email to the ‘go between’ auction rooms in England asked whether the owner would be
willing to sell the ‘collection’ to me. A swift reply came back that they were willing to sell and once again, Amanda negotiated a good deal and now I am the proud owner of Lot 151!!

Yes, the journal did belong to Daphne Stronge but this was not evident until I read where Daphne wrote what one of the doctor’s had said to her one day, “I’m sorry Miss Stronge that we do not have an operation for you today”. Apart from the wonderful sketches which provide the reader with an understanding of other aspects of the nurses’ daily lives, Daphne had written amusing descriptions beside each one of them which would suggest that she was very observant of the people around her and in a light-hearted way had encapsulated her observations through her sketches and writing. Of the other two books, one belonged to a lady called Norah Murray who was resident in Leeds in 1907 and a nurse at the Leeds Women and Children’s Hospital. However, there is no indication of who owned the third book.

Daphne’s first entry in her Journal is “The U.V.F. Hospital at Pau, its manners and customs”. She then writes about her first impressions of the public sitting room in the hospital. “My first shock was to find a larger than life portrait of the great Sir Edward printed on the sofa cushions in our public sitting room. Often the unfortunate man’s head hurtled thro’ the room. I think it is the only connection he has with the hospital.” I can only presume that Daphne is talking about Sir Edward Carson!

Daphne explains her arrival at the hospital, “I arrived at 6pm on a Sunday – 6 hours late because my train had gone on fire in the night. Previous ladies had gone to Spain in trying to get here”. Her description of the location of the hospital tells us that it had “a dull street front – but a pretty lawn and circle of trees – making a lovely outlook from the beds. I loved the hospital and all it held from the first.” One of Daphne’s first duties was cleaning a small kitchen and then she also cleaned the shade of the electric light in the hall which she remarks “had never been done before”.

Page 2 is also of great interest. “The dining room door is a wonder of calligraphy – 2 generations of schoolboys having worked their names and heights on it – Basil Brooke grew to be quite tall here – from very short beginnings!”

This really was interesting as from previously only knowing that Basil Brooke (future Prime Minister of Northern Ireland) went to a school in Pau along with his eventually well-known uncle, Field Marshall Alan Francis Brooke, it now seems that the school was actually the Villa Beaupre which became the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in October 1914. Further research found that the school was known as St George’s and was a private boarding (and day) school for boys which had been in existence for many years. The Headmaster was German and perhaps he lived in the house on the other side of the road where staff from the hospital were billeted for a time. (Rosabelle Sinclair’s letter of November 1914 made mention that “there is a little house just opposite the hospital which belongs to a German, who has had to clear out during the war. The authorities have taken it for us, and we hope to get into it soon.”
In fact, Daphne did relocate to the ‘little house just opposite the hospital’. She shared a room with Nurse Katherine Ruth Auchinleck (sister of Field Marshall Sir Claude J E Auchinleck), whom Daphne ‘christened’ Ermyntrude, “as she needed a fine broad-flowing name!” Daphne’s own nickname was Samson despite her very petit frame! ‘Napolean’ and ‘Sebastians’ seems to be Daphne’s way of referring to the doctor and sisters.

“`The walks to and from the Villa Ridgway stables are worth watching. ‘To the Villa’ is at 8.30 am. We all look drunk, except Winnie’s nose which she has taken to powdering. I carry a milk bottle, she the wicker provisions basket. Sister P forces her hands in her pockets and trudges.’
‘NIGHT DUTY’

“An awful affliction. To live in a house of 80 beds full of sleeping men - still a total of 80. Many of them snorers – all audibly breathing. My lot as junior probationer is the cuisine – and plenty of it.

Winnie says “I spend my time in a corner washing up” but that is only after she has eaten and is full!

Certainly Night Duty to me will be synonymous with scrambled eggs and greasy plates? The history of my first ‘œuf sur le plat’ ended at the very breaking of the shell in an oeufs brouillés (scrambled).

A great element in Night Duty is Gracieuse. She is the La Gran-Mere of the Villa Ridgway where we sleep in what used to be the Hunt stables. Gracieuse is nearly 70 – very short and fat and strong and wearing a deep saffron petticoat, very, very full and has various other dark blue and black ones in varying lengths.”
The ‘Fox’ she refers to is Miss Sophie F.M. Fox, Masseuse at the Villa Beaupre from July 1915 to January 1916 and ‘Winnie’ is Winifred Alexander, one of the other Probationer Nurses who married Daphne’s brother James in July 1917. (James Matthew Stronge, born 1891, was killed at the age of 26 while serving as a Lieutenant with the Royal Irish Fusiliers at the battle of Ypres in France, August 1917. His name heads the war memorial at the church in Tynan).

At the early stages of the Great War, Mr and Mrs Almeric Paget approached the War Office and offered to set up a massage corps in the London area to treat the many wounded soldiers returning from ‘the front’. This corps was involved in massage, electrical, hydrotherapy and gymnasium treatments what would now be known as physiotherapy.

“Breakfasts on Night Duty have been a trying ceremony, not so much to me as to the unfortunate Fox, who has to listen to our appalling conversations ‘willy-nilly’. Often it has ended in her leaving her roll unfinished.”
This proved to be very successful and in early 1916, Sir Alfred Keogh, Director General of Army Medical Services, requested that this valuable service be extended to all types of Military Hospitals and convalescent homes in the UK but it was not until January 1917 that masseuses were sent to France. The Ulster Volunteer Hospital was under the French authorities and not controlled by the War Office, which enabled them to have the services of their very own masseuse, Sophie Fox from as early as July 1915.

Daphne’s description of the hospital’s chef is colourful and interesting: “he is very muscly — simply bulging into deformity with them and his face knocked into lumps with scars running here and there. He is a great friend of Jack Johnson (a famous black American heavy-weight
(Previous to the war when he was not employed in cooking for the ‘Lusitania’, he used to act as sparring mate to J.J.” Not a bit wonder his face was knocked into lumps! “His teeth are stopped with gold and he grins perpetually. He is a great friend of mine. He is really rather loveable especially for his kindness to the blessés.”

When Daphne has been there for a few months she is assigned to work in the theatre, a duty which she comments, “personally I loathe operations” and “there are more catch words in the theatre than anywhere else – the earliest is: will you carry on please, Nurse”. She then adds, mischievously – “Carry on with the floor; carry on with the kettles.”
The theatre gowns for the doctors and sisters come in for special comment: “For an operation, when two Doctors and a Sister are assisting, it is essential that they all should be disguised to be as hideous and terrifying as possible. By contrast, I look like an angel of mercy”. Dr Good’s portly figure does not escape Daphne’s notice either. “His tummy is the hardest thing to avoid in the theatre and sterilising room – all the taller nurses have scored cannons off it. I being luckily small, can juke under ‘it’.”
Daphne mentions Nurse Tupper and Nurse Sandys of whom she comments, “Young Sandys goes about perpetually balancing, so as not to make a noise. She comes round corners looking scared.”
Sister Elizabeth Leitch (Skelpy, County Donegal and before the war, nursing in Omagh, County Tyrone) was obviously struggling with the French language and had enlisted the help of Daphne who wrote in her journal: “I spent February (1916) with Sister Leitch. French was her great difficulty and it was my business to eavesdrop every word the Doctors let fall on ‘rounds’.
By March 1916 Daphne is beginning to feel the strain of all the hard work and she writes in her journal: “March saw me daily getting thinner and paler. My fingers were habitually encased in bandages. I wrote depressing letters to Sandys. (Authors note: Nurse Sandys may have gone home ‘on leave’.) Nothing funny happened at all this month!”
‘Daphne off touring’
The journal ends in April 1916 and this would coincide with the hospital's move to the outskirts of Lyon. Daphne’s last entry is dated ‘April 1916. “A very happy time – but all too short. The day of ‘Freckle’s’ operation I saw everything swim in the theatre and that night my long promised holiday plumped itself across my path. The end of the month saw me touring.” I can only assume that Daphne felt faint or may have fainted, which hastened her previous request for time off.

Daphne’s Journal/Sketch book has confirmed my understanding of the role and responsibilities of a VAD nurse. Duties of a medical nature were, rolling bandages, attending the doctor and sister on daily ward rounds, being solely responsible for their ward when on night duty. Theatre duties included assisting the surgeon during operations as well as taking turns in the sterilisation room. Domestic duties involved the cleaning of wards and other rooms, scrubbing floors, cooking food for staff on night duty and perpetually carrying kettles of hot water for various tasks. Off-duty time was spent reading, walking, writing letters and in Daphne Stronge’s case she indulged in her favourite past-time, sketching.

Daphne rejoined the Ulster Volunteer Hospital at Villeurbanne after her ‘long promised holiday’ and stayed there until August 1917 when the Ulster Volunteer Hospital closed. (See also Profile of Daphne Stronge in Chapter Thirteen).

I now feel I have a clearer picture of what duties my Grandmother Edith would have been required to carry out while she too was at the Villa Beaupre.
Hôpital No 36 Villa Beaupre, Pau (1914–1916)
(Courtesy of the Deputy Keeper of the Records,
Public Records Office Northern Ireland D1098/2/6)
CHAPTER TEN

“INVALUABLE SERVICE & SELF-SACRIFICE”

No further letters written by Rosabelle Sinclair were published in the Tyrone Constitution after that first letter written in November 1914. However, letters from other people concerning the hospital, staff and support on the ‘home front’ were published over the next few years.

Tyrone Constitution 4 June 1915:

“The Duchess of Abercorn is asking for bed linen – pillow covers, small towels and pieces of Turkish towelling – also for cheap writing blocks and envelopes for the above hospital, which was sent to the help of the French wounded last October, under the leadership of Miss Sinclair, Hollyhill and mainly staffed by volunteers from Tyrone.

The French medical authorities have asked for the number of beds to be increased.

The Duchess of Abercorn feels sure that this mark of approval of the work the hospital is doing, will be appreciated by the donors of the fund raised last autumn in County Tyrone and other parts of the province, and she hopes that this appeal will have as good a result as the first. Gifts in kind should be sent before June 10th to Miss Herdman, Sion Mills, who has undertaken to dispatch them. Gifts of money to buy any of the above articles will also be gladly received by her.”

Tyrone Constitution 6 August 1915:

“In the interest of the U.V.F. Hospital at Pau, South France, a first rate concert was held at the Stables, Baronscourt, on Thursday, 22nd ult. The commodious motor-house was specially seated and tastefully decorated for the occasion, the general arrangements being in the hands of Mrs. F M Hamilton and Mrs Sutherland. The Rev F. M. Hamilton presided….. as a result of the entertainment, a substantial sum has been realised for the Hospital in South France.”
In the *Tyrone Constitution* of 20 August 1915 a glowing report of the hospitals work is given by an unnamed person.

The following is an account written by a well-known Belfast lady, a recent visitor to the hospital of the Ulster Volunteer Force in France.

“Amongst the numerous undertakings of the Province of Ulster in the way of alleviating distress, succouring and tending the wounded, none should appeal more to the Irish people than the establishment of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France. This hospital was the outcome of the original scheme of the Ulster Volunteer Force in County Tyrone. On the outbreak of war the arrangements were in such a condition that no delay retarded those who were anxious to place their services at the disposal of the Allied cause. The staff and equipment were offered to the French Military Authorities last September and were gladly accepted.

The hospital owes its inception to Miss Rosabelle Sinclair, Commandant of the U.V.F. Nursing Corps in North Tyrone, who with the President, the Duchess of Abercorn was able to procure its speedy transit to, and establishment at, the base in France. The Villa Beauvre was offered by the French Military Authorities as a building which with slight structural alterations would be suitable for a commodious and well equipped hospital. It is delightfully situated in the midst of extensive grounds and has accommodation for eighty patients. Since it opened early in November numerous convoys have been sent direct from the front and the results obtained up to the present have far exceeded the most sanguine expectations. This is particularly gratifying when we remember the character and severity of the wounds many of which owing to the journey from the front are in a condition which considerably lengthens the period of treatment.

One can never think of this wonderful and practical effort without realizing the invaluable services of Miss Sinclair whose self-sacrifice on behalf of the scheme is beyond praise. The staff and equipment went out under her supervision, and since its establishment in France she has acted as Honorary “Directrice.” Nothing could exceed her personal interest in the welfare of the individual patient who has had the good fortune to be sent to this hospital. Miss Sinclair’s interest in the wounded is not confined to their period of residence in the Beauvre as she has with untiring energy kept in touch with all those who have returned to fight for their country. Miss Sinclair has been ably assisted through-out by Miss Ballantine (Strabane) whose ability in respect of detailed management has done much to contribute to the smooth running of the hospital. Dr F Leonard Brown (Pau) is another voluntary worker who gives much valuable assistance. The surgeon is Dr Warren Woodroffe and nursing staff consists of five trained sisters and seven Voluntary Aid Detachment members. There are many outstanding features in connection with the hospital, but as an eye witness, what impresses me most after the
skill and good nursing of the wounded, is their happiness and contentment during their stay, and their evident regret when the time comes to leave this haven of rest provided with such beneficence by the people of Ulster.

Very quietly and unostentatiously this good work has been carried on by the untiring efforts of these Ulster people tending the French wounded who come from every department of France. They are helping to bind together the bonds of friendship and unite more closely the entente, which has been sealed by shedding the blood of both countries on the battlefield, where the greatest conflict in history on behalf of the cause of the oppressed is at present raging.”

Tyrone Constitution issue of 1 October 1915:-

RYLANDS AND PLUMBRIDGE VOLUNTEERS

“A farewell entertainment was given by the members of Rylands and Plumbridge Ulster Volunteer clubs at Plumbridge Orange Hall, on Friday 17 September, in honour of their comrades of the U.V.F now serving in the Ulster Division, who are about to proceed to the front. Mr John McFarland, J.P., presided, and a most enjoyable evening was spent, dancing being kept up until a late hour. Nurse Harkness, who has lately come home from France for a short rest, and several other ladies, contributed a number of songs, which were well received. Refreshments were served in a very elaborate manner by Miss Steen, Mrs James Dunn and Mrs Joseph Duncan, at the expense of Plumbridge Nursing Class. The ladies mentioned have always taken a very active part in everything in connection with U.V.F.

A number of valuable presents were handed to the volunteers in the name of Rylands and Plumbridge clubs.

The Chairman, in a few appropriate remarks, said the occasion was a worthy one. These fine young men from Rylands and Plumbridge were going to risk their lives, not only for their King and country, but for the slackers, who had not the courage to follow their noble example. He hoped everyone appreciated the great sacrifice they were making in leaving home and friends for the trenches of France and Belgium. He trusted to see them all home again, safe and sound, and covered with glory.

Corporal Lunney, responding on behalf of himself and comrades, remarked that as an Orangeman he only did his duty. The country was in danger, and it was the duty of every loyal man, who could be spared, to give his life, if necessary, to uphold their country’s honour. Moreover, they were all proud to belong to the Ulster Division and in particular the 9th Inniskillings, which was considered one of the best battalions in Kitchener’s Army. He thanked the clubs for their appreciation, and assured them that he would never forget the kindness of his comrades of the U.V.F.”
This is the first reference that I have found regarding Edith home on leave. By September 1915 she would have been eleven months in France. It is quite possible that she had been home before but it is more likely that this was her first time since leaving in the previous October.

The translation of the main part of the card reads:

“With the love of Kathleen E Thompson.
I will be going soon to care for the wounded next week to Strabane.”

(Courtesy of Ronnie Johnston)

This is a copy of a postcard kindly sent to me by a gentleman in Strabane, County Tyrone. He is an avid postcard collector and among his collection he found this one from a Kathleen E Thompson to a French soldier at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau.

It wasn’t until I had the book almost completed that Mr Johnston re-discovered this postcard among his collection and made contact. He had bought the postcard on Ebay from a Dublin based company and how it ended up in Ireland again after clearly been sent to France is a great mystery and ironically has returned to the very area from where it was posted! The picture on the reverse of the card is of Abercorn Square, in Strabane, County Tyrone. Kathleen E Thompson was a colleague of my grandmother Edith and one of the five Probationer Nurses who went out with the group in October 1914. Kathleen was from Londonderry but this postcard clearly indicates a postmark of Milltown, Burndennett,
Strabane 18 November 1915.’ This places her in the area in which her uncle and two aunts lived whose address she gave when joining the Ulster Volunteer Medical & Nursing Corps the previous year.

At the top of the postcard is written in English “On Active Service” and this is why no postage stamp was required. This was most likely Kathleen’s first trip home since she went to Pau in October 1914.

We can clearly see that the postcard reached Paris on 21 November and I am presuming that the date shown on the middle at the top, 22 November, would be the date received at Pau. While there is not very much written on the postcard, it tells me a great deal. It is written in French by Kathleen obviously at home on leave and sending this card back to a wounded French soldier at the Villa Beaupre in Pau. Her French seems very good given that she had
only spent a year in France but I am now of the opinion that Rosabelle Sinclair may have
given basic French lessons to the group prior to leaving. Kathleen Thompson writes on the
postcard that she will soon be going to Strabane to nurse wounded soldiers.

This is a reference to Strabane Military Hospital, known locally as the VAD Hospital or
sometimes the Red Cross Hospital. In April 1919 the Strabane Weekly News carried a lengthy
report about the activities of Strabane Women’s War Relief Committee over the four years
of the Great War and one of the organisations mentioned was the VAD hospital. We learn
that a hospital was first suggested as early as October 1914 but only opened on 18 May 1915
and was under the direction of Londonderry Military Hospital who played a major part in
not only setting up the Strabane hospital but also offering help and advice during the years
that the hospital was in existence. The article relates how “the late Dr Trimble most generously
offered the house, free of all rent, and he and Mrs Trimble took the greatest interest, and worked
tremendously hard with Mrs Delap in preparing and equipping the hospital. Dr Trimble acted
as one of the medical officers until his death in January 1916, and his loss was irreparable”. 5

This particular article did not state where in Strabane the hospital was situated and in fact,
the opening of the hospital on 18 May 1915 did not merit front page headlines in the local
paper. The event was casually mentioned in the issue of the Strabane Weekly News dated 29
May 1915 along with other news, in a report of a meeting of the war relief committee. Also
included in the article is an account of the first arrival of wounded soldiers and under the
title ‘Wounded Arrive in Strabane’ we read:-

“Pathetic scenes were witnessed in Strabane on Tuesday evening when six wounded
soldiers arrived. They were met at the railway station and conveyed in motors provided,
to the hospital in Newtown Street. The wounded men belong to English regiments in
Northumberland and Lancashire, and they all took part in the recent severe fighting
at Hill 60* where they were wounded on the hands and arms, principally, by shrapnel.
Neither time nor trouble will be spared to look after the wounded. The hospital has
been supplied for some time with the necessary utensils, and the services of the local
doctors have been obtained and they will attend daily to the patients. The hospital
will be maintained by the inhabitants of the town and furniture and fittings has long
ago been contributed by the kind ladies concerned.” 6

Many ‘kind ladies’ from the town and surrounding districts also brought weekly supplies
of vegetables, cakes, sweets, milk, tomatoes, cigarettes, jam, books, buttermilk, fruit, eggs,
lemonade, soup, jelly and even jars of Bovril!

We see from the above newspaper report that the hospital was situated in Newtown Street and
further research including the 1901 and 1911 Census reveals that Dr Trimble lived in ‘Newtown
House’, Newtown Street. Doctor John Maxwell Trimble was born in Strabane in 1858 and the
son of James Trimble, flax and tea merchant. In 1908 he was appointed a Justice of the Peace
for County Tyrone. He was the Medical Officer for Strabane Dispensary District, and recruiting
medical officer for the 9th Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. Dr Trimble’s brother, Robert was also a doctor and he died in West Bromwich, Staffordshire in 1939.

A preliminary search of the 1901 Census could not locate Dr John Maxwell Trimble anywhere in Ireland but going on the premise that he might have lived in Newtown Street in 1901, I did a search in the Census on the basis of ‘Newtown Street, Strabane’. Strangely, there was not a ‘Newtown Street’ in Strabane but there was a ‘Newtown Road’. A quick check of the names, as transcribed by the National Archives, Ireland, did not include John M Trimble as living in Newtown Road but there was a John M TRUNBLE and only upon checking the original ‘Household Return (Form A) and the ‘House and Building Return’ (Form B1), did I find that the surname should have been Trimble. Newtown Street is referred to as Newtown Road, and this appears to be a mistake by the Enumerator. However, the 1901 Census return gives us valuable information about Dr Trimble’s property at that time. It had twenty-two rooms, sixteen windows in the front of the house and seven outhouses.

Comparing this to the 1911 Census, the property now inhabited by Dr Trimble and his wife Ethel in Newtown Street, has only fifteen rooms, twelve windows in the front and ten outhouses, but he indicates the dispensary and an uninhabited private dwelling are also owned by him. It seems probable that Dr Trimble had moved out of the large house in the years between the Census’ to a property ‘next door’ and thus when a suitable large building was being sought for a hospital, he offered his vacant property in Newtown Street. This was as much information that I could glean about the hospital until, once again, my contact in Strabane ‘came up trumps,’ by finding a picture of the hospital in the early 1970s! The photograph is very clear and now we can all see the grand proportions of the house that functioned as a very important hospital facility for convalescing soldiers from many areas of Ireland and Britain.

Dr Trimble had married Ethel Rutter from Bolton in 1906 and she had been one of the superintendents of the Strabane hospital but following her husband’s sudden death in January 1916 with acute pneumonia, Mrs Trimble returned to England in October of that year to take up a nursing position in a Prisoner of War Hospital in Belmont, Surrey where she remained until April 1918 when she was posted to Salonica.

Previous inhabitants of Newtown House were Mr Samuel Colquhoun, Attorney, who died there in March 1869 and then his son-in-law James B Atkins who had married Mary Colquhoun in 1858. Dr Trimble was living in Townsend Street, Strabane prior to moving to Newtown Street in the late 1890’s, and following Dr Trimble’s death in January 1916, a Dr John Joseph McNicholl and family then moved into Newtown House.

From the hospital’s opening, the Strabane Weekly News informed readers on a weekly basis of the name of the nurse in charge for that particular week, activities organised for the convalescing soldiers and the numbers of patients discharged. A large majority of the nurses were from St John’s Ambulance Association.
The Strabane Nursing Division of the St John Ambulance Association (now known as St John Ambulance) was first formed in the town in 1910 and among those who joined this organisation at that time was Rosabelle Sinclair, Louise Ballantine and Tom Lowry – all three later forming part of the North Tyrone group who went to France in October 1914. During the four years that the Military Hospital was in existence, 650 war wounded were nursed back to health under the matron, Miss G Magee who was described as ‘one in a thousand’ and who also received the Royal Red Cross Decoration from the King for nursing services. When the last patients left in April 1919, the hospital closed.

* Hill 60 was one of the battles within the Second Battle of Ypres and took place between 17 April 1915 and 7 May 1915. Its location was to the south-east of Ypres and prior to the actual battle, nineteen mines were blown. Many of the tunnels constructed in order to place the explosives were dug by miners from Northumberland and Wales.

Many towns and villages in Tyrone continued to hold fund-raising events for the hospital in Pau. One event at Augher, County Tyrone was reported in the *Tyrone Constitution* issue of 3 December 1915:-

(Strabane Military Hospital, ‘Newtown House’, Newtown Street, Strabane (Photograph by Stephen Beckett, Strabane, courtesy of Ronnie Johnston)
TYRONE HOSPITAL AT PAU, FRANCE
Successful Augher sale

“A successful jumble sale for the above object was held in the Carmichael Memorial Hall, Augher, on Friday evening 26th November. Rev J. Winter, rector of Augher, conducted the sale in a businesslike and very amusing manner, and was assisted by Mrs Carmichael-Ferrall…. the proceeds of the sale which amounted to £15, have been handed in to the hospital fund.”

In the Tyrone Constitution edition of 7 January 1916, under the section ‘Castlederg Notes’ it was reported that a reception and concert, organised by Mrs Sinclair, Hollyhill, Strabane (Rosabelle Sinclair’s mother) was held in Castlederg Orange Hall for Nurse Isabel Patrick who was home for a short time from France. It will be remembered that Nurse Patrick, who was a Charge Nurse in Castlederg Infirmary, had volunteered her services to the French Red Cross in September 1914 but her request to the Board of Guardians caused much discussion and disagreement. I wonder if the ‘large attendance of the leading resident classes’ present included some of her previous detractors? Also accompanying Nurse Patrick were Sister Isabella Wright, Nurse Kathleen Thompson and Mr Thomas Lowry who were all part of the original group that left in October 1914.

Catering arrangements for the evening were led by Mr & Mrs Roulston. I believe they were the parents of a Sister Roulston who also served at the hospital in Pau and may well also have been the parents of William Roulston of Ballindrait, County Donegal who married Nurse Mabel Ballantine after the war!

The Tyrone Constitution 11 February 1916:

“We publish elsewhere a report of the work accomplished by the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, which has been established at Pau, France, and a glowing tribute both provide of the generosity of the people of the Northern province and the humane services the hospital has rendered to the wounded. Tyrone people will be specially interested in the work of the institution for it will be remembered that it was organised chiefly by Tyrone ladies and gentlemen, and financed in the early stages by the Tyrone loyalists before it assumed the wider title of an Ulster Volunteer Hospital. Her Grace, the Duchess of Abercorn has manifested a great interest in the welfare and work of the hospital, the treasurer up to recently was Mr W. B. Smyth, Strabane (now Lieutenant in the North Irish Horse) and several of the most energetic ladies in the hospital staff come from North Tyrone. No greater testimony could be given to the usefulness of the institution than that bestowed on it by the French military authorities, who have recognised its importance by requesting that the number of beds be increased from thirty to eighty. The maintenance of a hospital at such a distance from Ulster is a big undertaking for the loyalists of the province, involving very considerable expense, but the liberality with which it has been supported in the past has enabled the promoters to extend its operations. We confidently bespeak for such a praiseworthy object a continuance of that support from the people of the North-west in the future.”
The following is the report of the work at the hospital in the *Tyrone Constitution* of 11 February 1916:

**ULSTER VOLUNTEER HOSPITAL AT PAU**  
**Splendid Service of Tyrone Ladies**

“It may interest readers to know that there are now eighty beds in the hospital, and during the first year, though it was a base hospital, where some of the cases stayed for three or four months, 72 per cent of the cases were discharged fit for active service. Deaths amounted to 1.76 per cent and in all 287 cases were admitted.

No less than 44 stayed for three months in the hospital. One hundred and forty one operations were performed by the surgeon of the hospital, Dr Warren Woodroffe, and owing to the importance the French military authorities attached to the work of the hospital, we were asked to increase the original thirty beds to eighty in the summer.

Those in charge of the hospital are anxious to thank their many kind supporters, who are too numerous to admit of a full list being printed, but all Ulster has contributed to it, and many friends no longer resident in the province, besides friends at Pau. Many gifts in kind have been received, and as the French Red Cross Depot in Knightsbridge, London, have kindly offered to forward all such gifts free, it is requested that anyone contemplating further gifts to the hospital will do so through this organisation.

It was found, chiefly owing to difficulties with passports to make the necessary change of nurses, that the hospital could not safely exist without being connected with a recognised society, and therefore the hospital became allied to the committee of the French Red Cross in London, who give every help in their power without in any way interfering with the management or threatening the individuality of the hospital.

The whole staff has worked most devotedly from the beginning, but perhaps it would interest many of our friends to hear that Miss Patrick, Castlederg, has been with the hospital from the very beginning and has rendered highest service. Miss Sinclair and Miss Ballantyne continue the supervision and organisation and it is to their efforts, coupled with a most efficient and willing staff and the great skill and devotion of Dr Woodroffe, that the hospital has pursued its successful way for a year, and it is hoped that under the arrangements lately concluded with Ulster, that it will continue for another year to help our brave allies and restore many French soldiers to the fighting line.”

This is another interesting report about the work of the Ulster Volunteer hospital in France and once again, the invaluable work of Nurse Patrick, Miss R Sinclair and Miss Ballantyne (Ballantine) is particularly mentioned. It is also the first time I have seen the hospital referred to as a ‘base hospital’.
During the First World War, the treatment of the wounded mostly followed an agreed arrangement as set up by the Royal Army Medical Corps. The first place wounded soldiers were taken to, was a Regimental Aid Post (RAP). This could be as rudimentary as part of a trench or shell hole a few yards behind the front line. Here a basic field dressing would be applied and in some cases a morphine injection given if necessary.

Next step was to convey the wounded by whatever means available; motorised ambulance or horse drawn cart to the Advanced Dressing Station. At the ADS the dressing would be changed and if the soldier had only basic injuries he would most likely be returned to duty. If his wounds were more serious he was then transported, usually by train, to a Casualty Clearing Station (CCS). These were located anywhere between seven and thirty miles behind the front line and could be housed in anything from an agricultural building, a church or large vacant buildings. Casualty Clearing Stations located in rural areas were mostly set up in tented accommodation, where three or four of these temporary hospitals could be grouped together in one location.

The organisation behind the many hospitals and casualty clearing stations in France and Belgium alone was a major fete. A Base Hospital would be known as either Stationary or General and when each type was being established they were all given numbers. While some Stationary and General Hospitals did move to other locations, those used for soldiers who required longer term care, had been set up in the northern French coastal towns like Calais, Boulogne, Étaples, Le Tréport, Dieppe and L’Harve. Hotels and schools were often used to accommodate these hospitals as well as the great huddled and tented establishments like that set up at Étaples.

No. 1 General Hospital was first based at L’Harve, France from 20 August 1914 to 30 November 1914 and then moved to Étretat where it remained until 12 January 1919. No. 1 Stationary Hospital was at Le Mans and opened in September 1914 staying only until October when it moved again to Rouen and remained there. No. 1 Casualty Clearing Station started off at Mons on 16 August 1914 and by the end of the war, had moved thirteen times!

Nos. 3 and 4 General Hospital each moved five times in the course of the war and despite the name ‘Stationary’ the majority of these moved more times than the General Hospitals. In fact, No.10 Stationary and No 41 Stationary moved seven and six times respectively.

The Casualty Clearing Stations (CCS) or as they were first known, ‘Clearing Hospitals’, moved many, many times. Each numbered CCS was attached to one of the five British Armies and they would follow their particular army or retreat when necessary. I made a study of the movement of approximately sixty CCSs that were located in France and was amazed to find that, with one or two exceptions, they all moved, on average, eight times! However, two Casualty Clearing Stations, Nos. 47 and No 48, both with the British 4th Army, moved sixteen times each!
The number of days that No. 47 CCS remained at any one location varies from 6 to 268 days, with an average stay of 59 days. No 48 CCS stay at various locations varies from 4 to 301 days and their average length of stay at any one location was 58 days. Indicative of what was happening at ‘the Front’ both these CCSs moved ten times in 1918 with an average stay of just 20 days and 26 days respectively. In Vera Brittain’s ‘Testament of Youth’, published in 1933 she summed up the transient nature of life during the Great War; ‘nothing was permanent; everyone and everything was always on the move; friendships were temporary, appointments were temporary, life itself was the most temporary of all.’

Being of a temporary nature, albeit on a large scale, orders for moving ‘up’ or ‘back’ could come at a moment’s notice and the tents, equipment and patients would all be required to move. These CCSs were usually located near a railway siding and when the hospital had to relocate, trains were used to quickly move to the next destination. Sometimes there was enough time to not only get the patients moved to another facility but also as much equipment as could be dismantled and carried, but many times, valuable equipment had to be left behind. Depending on the location of the CCS, converted barges were also used to transport patients and this was much favoured by the wounded as the journey was much smoother than any type of road or rail transport. Wounded soldiers arriving at the Casualty Clearing Station wore coloured labels according to the seriousness of their wounds. A red label meant a severe wound; a blue label meant a less severe wound and a white label meant slightly wounded. White label wearers often did not need the services of a CCS. The ‘Casualty Clearing Stations’ were cleared of patients as quickly as practically possible. After being assessed and operations performed, if necessary, they would have been moved on to Stationary or General Hospitals within a few weeks or less to make room for more convoys arriving.

The last move in the chain for severely wounded soldiers requiring long-term nursing was a hospital ship back to Great Britain. We can put into this category the many thousands who lost limbs, along with other horrific injuries.

The major military hospitals in Ireland where wounded soldiers were received were located at Cork; The Curragh, County Kildare; The King George V Military Hospital, Dublin and the Ulster Volunteer Hospital based at Craigavon House in East Belfast.

It is interesting to note, in the article published in the *Tyrone Constitution* dated 11 February 1916, that the Ulster Volunteer Hospital had now aligned itself to ‘The Committee of the French Red Cross in London’ – ‘Comité de Londres’. However, by associating themselves with a widely recognised organisation ensured that supplies and staff were processed much more quickly and efficiently.

The next mention of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital is in the *Tyrone Constitution* edition of 3 March 1916 from Nurse Daphne Stronge. The newspaper’s heading is The Tyrone U.V.F Hospital, Pau, France.
“Miss Stronge, daughter of Sir James Stronge, Tynan Abbey, Armagh, writes:

Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Villa Beaupre, Pau, January 1916

“Dear Sir, I hear you would like a short account of the Ulster Volunteer Force Hospital which has been working under the French Red Cross at Pau for over a year. I am at present, unfortunately, on night duty and it is sometimes a struggle to gather one’s brains sufficiently together to write anything that does not bear the trace of those very contagious things – yawns!

The hospital itself is an adapted villa, and has eighty beds with a staff of sixteen, and we nurse ‘Poilus’ or French Tommies. I think that the first experiences of men coming here straight from the front, tired out by their long journey in the ambulance train must be very bewildering. They are singled out at Pau Station from the long convoy train and put into a large open motor and then driven up to the hospital by Miss Sinclair herself, to find themselves eventually undressed and put to bed by English nurses. The other patients gather round and fire question after question at them and soon make them feel at home. It is never long till they venture on their first word of brilliant repartee – “Yes!”

The character of a French Tommy is very much that of an adorable child, and probably hospital life increases this, especially if the man is helpless and has to be washed and to have his food cut up for him. Though the majority of the men are farmers and labourers, still one meets with every imaginable trade – jewellers, postmen, miners, steel engravers, butchers, bakers, coachmen and shop workers etc. and we have one man who in a varied career has been a snail gatherer and vendor and has also an intimate personal knowledge of the sewage system of Paris!

Throughout the winter the hospital has been a veritable hive of industry – chip carving, beaten metal work, basket making, knitting and crochet being all very fashionable. A club for wounded soldiers has lately been opened in Pau where the men from the various hospitals go to work, read or play billiards. Their work is exhibited and sold, they being allowed to keep the proceeds, less the cost of material. For a time aluminium rings, made of bits of Bosch shells, were very much in vogue – some are beautifully worked with elaborate designs. Every member of the staff has at least one ring! When real Bosch metal ran out we found they bought aluminium plates in the town and melted them down or used bits of piping.

The great social outing of the week is to the Cinema and they have tea parties at neighbouring villas and motor drives through the lovely country round Pau, but before leaving to re-join his Depot nearly every man makes a pilgrimage to Lourdes, only an hour’s train journey from here. They leave the hospital at 5am, sometimes
voluntarily fasting till they have visited the shrine. The crowd at Lourdes is chiefly composed now of the maimed and wounded soldiers of France.

In the hospital, life is always gay; the men’s motto seems to be “pour la France”, whether in reference to some practical joke or to the bearing of pain. It is in every way a happy hospital; the staff, sisters and probationers are all from Ulster, wearing the same badges and bound together by many associations.

I could tell you a great deal more about the individual men – their histories, their pluck and their letters of thanks when they leave, but perhaps this is enough to show you what a happy Ulster settlement we are away here in the south-western corner of France.”

Daphne Stronge’s letter provides us with a great insight into how the wounded French soldiers are received at Pau Station; that they are transported to the Ulster Hospital in ‘a large open motor’ driven by Miss Rosabelle Sinclair and how they are cared for by the Ulster staff. We are also given an insight into the many occupations of the soldiers before they joined the French Army. I cannot help but wonder how much the French soldiers had to endure, not only in battle but also the added worry about their families. Many questions must have preoccupied their minds in relation to their home towns and villages, especially if the French soldiers knew those regions were now in the hands of the Germans.

The winter pastimes enjoyed by the convalescent soldier, as listed by Daphne Stronge, is proof they were engaged in a wide variety of other crafts as well as the usual ‘trench art’. Trench art artefacts can still be widely viewed in many museums, particularly in France and Belgium. This type of ‘occupational therapy’ was actively pursued at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau too. Obviously, spent shell and bullet casings were not available at the Hospital but I would imagine the soldiers made great use of the many ‘souvenirs’ they had brought with them from the battlefields.

Laurence Binyon in his book ‘For Dauntless France’ (written in 1918 and published by 1923) makes reference to the Ulster Volunteer Hospital at Pau and whilst he did not personally visit Pau before it had relocated to Lyon, I can only assume that Rosabelle Sinclair gave a brief history of the group to Binyon during his visit to the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Lyon to enable him to write the following:

“There were fifty beds, all too few, as it happened, for the ample staff sent out. But no sooner was the Prefet made aware of this super abundance of skilled energy than he asked to borrow from it for a hospital in the neighbourhood. Two orderlies and two probationers were sent to this French hospital, under two Sisters; one of these Sisters has been there ever since and is reported to have done invaluable work.

At this time, as we have said, the wounded were coming as far south as Pau direct from near the front, even from places as far away as Dixmude. But gradually the
hospitals nearer the front were reopened, and bad cases kept there till they were better able to support the long journey south. At the Villa Beaupre the number of beds had been increased to sixty, and later to eighty, but by the beginning of 1916 serious cases were becoming fewer and fewer and the patients were practically all either in an early stage of convalescence or men with slight wounds from the Champagne front. But light work is not to the mind of doctors and nurses. They crave for arduous days and nights; they hunger for difficulties and desperate cases; they want to be used to the last of their strength and experience; not to fulfil a prescribed duty only, but to give all they can, and all they know.”

The letter published in the *Tyrone Constitution* in March 1916 from Daphne Stronge, was the last direct report from any of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital staff in Pau.

Only two further brief mentions of the Ulster hospital in France are given in the *Tyrone Constitution*. In the issue of 7 July 1916 a collection for ‘Ulster Hospital at Pau’ is acknowledged and the last mention appears in the issue of 20 October 1916 concerning a ‘Patriotic Concert at Baronscourt’:-

Examples of trench art items made from shell casings
The Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917, Zonnebeke, Belgium
(Claire McElhinney)
An over-crowded house, a good programme, and an attentive, appreciative and well behaved audience, characterised the proceedings at what may now be almost considered the annual patriotic concert, held in the Schoolhouse, Baronscourt on Friday evening last, 13th inst, under the patronage of her Grace the Duchess of Abercorn, who was present, accompanied by Lady Cynthia Hamilton and Mrs. Hamilton, The Rectory. The gross receipts amounted to the sum of almost £25....... leaving a substantial balance of £15 for equal distribution between the Tyrone Hospital in France and the Baronscourt and Drumlegagh Volunteers, who are at the front in France. The sum to the hospital goes through her Grace, The Duchess of Abercorn directly while Mrs Hamilton, The Rectory, Baronscourt has kindly consented to make arrangements for sending parcels to the boys at the front......”

In February 1916, the tremendous German assaults on Verdun commenced, which were to last until December of that year, sending reverberations all over Europe and whilst there were no British soldiers involved, the large volume of French casualties soon overwhelmed the hospitals in the central region of France. It was decided by the French Red Cross that the Ulster Volunteer Hospital would be of greater assistance to the mounting casualties from Verdun if they were to relocate to Lyon. So, after spending eighteen months in Pau, the Ulster Volunteer Medical & Nursing Corps re-located to Lyon at the end of April 1916.
Probationer Nurse Carrie Moore from Ballindrait, County Donegal outside the Villa Beaupre
(Photo from Edith’s personal album)

Nurse Edith Harkness (2nd from left) & Sister I Wright at the Villa Beaupre
Edith with “Oban” - Edith is wearing part of her nurses’ uniform under her cardigan (Photos from Edith’s personal album)

Tea in the garden at the Villa Beaupre, Pau (Edith Harkness on left)
ENDNOTES
1 Tyrone Constitution, 4 June 1915, p.4
2 Tyrone Constitution, 6 August 1915, p.8
3 Tyrone Constitution, 20 August 1915, p.3
4 Tyrone Constitution, 1 October 1915, p.8
5 Strabane Weekly News, 5 April 1919, p.1 & 2
6 Strabane Weekly News, 29 May 1915
7 Tyrone Constitution, 3 December 1915, p.5
8 Tyrone Constitution, 11 February 1916, p.4
9 Tyrone Constitution, 11 February 1916, p.5
10 Testament of Youth, Vera Brittain, 1979, p.372
11 Tyrone Constitution, 3 March 1916, p.6
12 For Dauntless France, Laurence Binyon, p.137 & 138
13 Tyrone Constitution, 20 October 1916, p.6
Map showing location of Ulster Volunteer Hospital
Allee du Sacré Coeur, Villeurbanne, Lyon, France
(Copyright – The Perry-Castaneda Library, University of Texas, Austin)
Lyons (also Lyons) is the third largest city in France and situated in the east-central area of the country, within the region of Rhône-Alpes. Its two major rivers, the Rhône and Saône, run almost parallel to each other through Lyon and converge to the south of the city.

When the Great War began in August 1914, Lyon was fortunate to have as its Mayor, Edouard Herriot who had been elected to this office in 1905 and by the time of his death in 1957 had been the Mayor of Lyon on two different occasions spanning forty-seven years. He also held the office of Prime Minister three times between 1924 and 1932. However, it was his role as Minister of Public Works and Transport from 1916 to 1917 that he worked tirelessly for the city of Lyon. He could see that much needed to be done to increase the availability of all types of hospitals for returning wounded soldiers and the thousands of refugees that were flooding through the city. In this quest he pushed for realistic funds to build these much needed military and civilian hospitals and also put in place other measures to help alleviate the hardships of the families of soldiers. Food and fuel rationing was introduced; property, horses and cars were also requisitioned.

Like other places throughout France, the welfare facilities were limited and seemed to be in the hands of various charities and despite the best efforts of those in authority to remedy the shortage of hospitals in particular, there was just not enough to accommodate the growing number of soldiers and civilians needing attention. Throughout the city of Lyon and its environs, hundreds of temporary hospitals were established in hotels, schools, villas and church property, staffed by volunteers under the supervision of the ever decreasing availability of trained medical personnel who’s services were required more urgently at ‘the front’.

The arrival of the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps in May 1916 was one such group that established their hospital to help in any way they could and by the end of 1916, it was estimated that over 15,000 soldiers had been treated in the hospitals of Lyon that year. In October 1914 when the Ulster Volunteer Hospital was first established at Pau, wounded French soldiers travelled a great distance to get there. Perhaps the idea of hospitals being
as far away as possible from the battle fronts was a sensible one at the beginning but as the
months passed it was soon realised that many, many wounded soldiers were dying because of
these long, painful journeys. Their new location in the suburbs of Lyon, closer to the battle
areas undoubtedly saved many lives.

Laurence Binyon, ‘For Dauntless France’ gives an account of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital’s
move to Lyon:-

“It was decided that the Ulster Volunteers should move to Lyon, but it was not till
the end of April that the hospital was closed at Pau. The unit reached Lyon on the
2nd May, but much had to be changed and improvised in the building put at their
disposal, and it was not till the beginning of June that patients began to be received.
The building was a technical school, owned by a society, the ‘Travail de la Femme et
de la Jeune Fille’ (the Work of the Women and Young Girl); and it accommodates a
hundred beds. It is not in Lyon itself, but in an outlying suburb of the city.”

The only record of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Lyon is, once again, attributed to
Laurence Binyon. On his fact-finding tour of France in 1916/17 he visited the hospital
in the summer of 1916. He mentions arriving in Lyon early in the morning and upon
enquiring for ‘the Ulster Hospital’ was told ‘it was a long way off’. On learning that the
hospital was not within walking distance he managed to hire a ‘fly’ (pony and trap) and
headed off from Perrache station in Lyon. He crossed the river Rhône and continued “down
many long streets and leafy boulevards to the outlying suburb, where at last we turned in to the
Allee du Sacré-Cœur, and I saw the legend ULSTER VOLUNTEER HOSPITAL, No 250.”

He describes the rest of his visit as thus:-

“The building which has been taken over for the hospital was a technical school.
It has large and pleasant rooms which serve for Wards, but is otherwise not fitted with
much in the way of modern comfort and convenience. All short-comings, however,
of this kind had been overcome by the energy of the staff. There was evidence of
inventive improvisation; and every opportunity was turned to account. The Medecin-
chef gave me a cordial welcome, and we went the rounds of the wards. It was easy
to see that the happiest relations prevailed between staff and patients. The Poilu
was among friends. An Irish gaiety and animation were in the air. A great cherry
tree thick with exquisite white blossom, just outside the window of one of the wards,
seemed to be flowering expressly for the pleasure of the wounded. I talked with some
of these and found them all more than contented with their quarters and the care
bestowed on them. The hospital contains a hundred beds. It was three-quarters full,
and more wounded were expected. The Directrice (author’s note: Rosabelle Sinclair,
Strabane) invited me to lunch, in company with some of the nurses, at a modest,
tiny, but amusing and excellent restaurant a few doors off, to which the staff are
in the habit of adjourning. Afterwards we were to drive across the city to the other
British hospital at St-Rambert. I was told about the move from Pau, where the Ulster Hospital was originally set up and heard experiences of those early days of the war.

A motor ambulance came round from the garage to take me across the town. It was an opportunity for a joy-ride for some of the more convalescent soldiers; and with a good deal of merriment and raillery among themselves, and friendly comments and commands from the nurses, they were collected for the outing and helped each other in. The Directrice, (whose French is of an enviable perfection) gave her orders, punctiliously obeyed by the soldiers, and took her seat at the wheel. We called at a suburban station to see if there were any wounded expected by the train for the hospital, but none were arriving that day. It is usually arranged for the tram, which passes close to the hospital, to bring the sitting cases."

In the *Tyrone Constitution* dated 24 November 1916:

**ULSTER VOLUNTEER HOSPITAL AT LYONS**

“The following account of last year’s work of the above hospital together with the balance sheet, as audited by Messrs. Craig, Gardner & County, has been sent to us for publication. On the completion of two years’ successful work, under the direction of Miss Sinclair, to whose initiative the scheme was due, and who has been in constant attendance ever since, it is pleasant to learn that the invaluable work done among the French wounded has increased and spread over a wider area, as the hospital in April was transferred at the request of the French medical authorities, to Lyons, where it not only has the advantage of being nearer the French lines, but is also lodged in a larger building, and so can accommodate and treat a much larger number of patients.

The generous financial aid of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Association has been the means of keeping the hospital going through the second year. The best thanks of those concerned in the upkeep are due to the members of that body for their support, and also to all those local collectors, who have, by their energy, enabled the various branches of the association throughout Ulster to make up the amount promised by the Association.

The Belfast Ambulance Committee also kindly supplied the hospital with a splendid ambulance of the latest and best type, which has rendered invaluable assistance, not alone to the U.V.F. Hospital, but to many other institutions for wounded in Lyons.

By the generous help of many donors an X-Ray apparatus and table, a special kind of wheeled chair for crippled men to propel themselves, and countless gifts of dressings, etc. and comforts of all kinds have been sent, the names being too numerous to publish individually but the hospital is equipped in a first rate manner – all thanks to kind friends in Ulster and elsewhere.
The hospital now deals with 100 beds, which are perpetually full. A convalescent hospital has been started by the French authorities in connection, (Author’s note: presumably in connection to the continual ‘full to capacity’ status of the Ulster Volunteer hospital in Lyon and not necessarily as an auxiliary Ulster Volunteer hospital) so that patients can be drafted out of the U.V.F. Hospital before they are quite cured, enabling a larger number of fresh cases to be treated. Since the removal to Lyons the work has been very heavy and it was found necessary to arrange a second operating theatre. The skill of Dr. Woodroffe, and the devoted nursing of the staff have earned the warmest gratitude of the French soldiers who have benefited by the hospital.

The balance sheet for the second year ending on 1st October 1916, audited by Messrs. Craig, Gardner & County, Chartered Accountants, appears in our advertising columns.”

When the above Treasurer’s report appeared in the Tyrone Constitution in November 1916, the Ulster Volunteer Hospital had been functioning for over six months in Lyon and like reports published regarding the hospital at Pau, we see that this hospital too is now very well equipped in every way, all thanks to the generous contributions from the people of Ulster and elsewhere.

(Courtesy of Tyrone Constitution)
The modern ambulance referred to in the above report was officially handed over in Belfast in June 1916 by the Belfast Ambulance Committee in recognition of the work of the Ulster Volunteer hospital in France. It was the last of 22 ambulances donated by the people of Ulster to various organisations at home and abroad and on this occasion it was handed over by the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Sir Crawford McCullagh, to Rosabelle Sinclair’s mother. Other dignitaries present were the Countess Clanwilliam, Sir Robert Kennedy, Mr R Kyle Knox LL D, William Gibson and Mr W H Alexander.

An intriguing few lines in the same article about the opening of a convalescent hospital to ease the over-crowding of the Lyon hospital drew my attention and while no indication was given as to where this hospital was located, it brought to mind a puzzling fact written on the Red Cross War Record of one of the nurses at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital. While Nurse Watson’s service details on the Ulster Volunteer Medal Roll showed two separate dates of service at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, only one of these corresponded with her Red Cross record. The second set of dates confirmed she was, in fact, a VAD at Hospital No 222 Menton, situated on the coast of the Alpes Maritimes region of France, and close to the Italian border. There was no reference to it before in connection with Ulster Volunteer nurses.

By the end of the 19th century, Menton was a popular tourist destination attracting English and Russian aristocrats who built many of the luxurious hotels, villas and palaces, many of which were requisitioned as hospitals during the First World War to allow injured troops to recuperate in a pleasant climate. Menton also drew many notable English writers and poets to its pleasant shores and it was here in January 1939 that the Irish poet W B Yeats died and was buried. (Yeats was later exhumed in September 1948 and reburied at Drumcliffe Parish Church, County Sligo.)

Hôpital No 222 based in the Imperial Hotel, Menton from April 1915 to 1919/1920
(Courtesy of the Imperial Palace Hotel, Menton)
I also checked the French Hôpitaux Militaires list and discovered that No 222 was ‘Hopital Auxiliaire de l’Entente Cordiale’ based at the Hotel Imperial which had been partly taken over as a hospital from April 1915. Laurence Binyon’s book ‘For Dauntless France’ gives quite detailed information about the setting up of this convalescent hospital at the beginning of 1915 by an English couple Percy and Helen Cochrane. The Cochranes who had previously lived in Menton for many years, returned from Italy to the area with the express purpose of setting up a hospital for British officers and soldiers:-

“made an offer to the British authorities. This came to nothing. An offer was then made to the Association des Dames Francaises, one of the three French Red Cross Societies and it was arranged that a hospital of four hundred beds should be installed in the building of the Hotel Imperial, which was requisitioned by the French Government.”

The hospital was opened under the auspices of the Association des Dames Francaises at the beginning of April 1915. The original English donors paid for the whole outlay and maintenance of the hospital till mid-July, when an English Committee, formed for the purpose, began to support the work financially and undertook to collect subscriptions in England.

This hospital enjoys all the advantages and amenities of a modern hotel…..there are lifts, electric lighting, central heating, bathrooms on every floor. Nothing too has been spared to perfect its equipment, so that the hospital has become the surgical centre for the Mentone district. It possesses an admirable pharmacy; a micro-bacteriological laboratory…….the radiography room was splendidly equipped by an Irish donor."

The reference to ‘an Irish donor’ is not elaborated upon but could possibly be the eminent Irish physician, writer and antiquary, Dr Ephraim McDowell Cosgrave, born in Dublin in 1853. He took a special interest in chest diseases, particularly tuberculosis and among his private patients was the wife of the 5th Duke of Leinster, Baroness Hermione W Fitzgerald, who died of tuberculosis in Menton at the young age of thirty-three, in 1895.

On 1 January 1917 the ‘Hôpital Auxiliaire de l’Entente Cordiale’ based at the Hotel Imperial, changed its name to ‘Hôpital Franco-Britannique Auxiliare No 222’ and a year later on 1 January 1918 it came under the control of the London based ‘British Committee of the French Red Cross’. The Ulster Volunteer Hospital at Lyon was also under the authority of the British Committee of the French Red Cross (and its predecessor London Committee – Comité de Londres) since the beginning of 1916, so it would be reasonable to assume that doctors and nurses could be sent from Lyon to the hospital at Menton, as well as any other establishment which was under the authority of this committee.

Upon further research I could not help but notice that a familiar name kept ‘popping up’ in connection with Menton and that was Dr James Henry Bennett. I was acquainted with that name as it too is listed on the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll! He was described as the
‘Inventor of the Menton resort’ and in fact there is a monument to him in Menton. He was an English doctor who first came to the area in 1860 when he had contracted tuberculosis and stayed there until his health greatly improved. For the rest of his life he regularly spent the winters in Menton returning to England for the summer months. Other facts relating to his life clearly indicated that as he died in 1891, he wasn’t the Dr James H Bennett of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital but I am almost certain that the two were related. Perhaps the Dr Bennett of the Ulster hospital was the grandchild of Dr Bennett of Menton? According to the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll, Dr Bennett served at the Ulster Volunteer hospital on three different occasions at the two locations – Pau and Lyon and may well have also worked at the Hotel Imperial hospital in Menton. Information on the less detailed Medal Roll Records as held by the National Archives show that he was a ‘Surgeon with the French Red Cross’ from September 1915.

Another unexpected find while searching for information about the hospital in Lyon, unearthed an article in the *Lisburn Evening Standard* dated 9 February 1917.

This was a first-hand report by Rosabelle Sinclair’s mother, Mary Everina Sinclair who had visited her daughter at the Ulster Hospital in France:

“On Wednesday afternoon last a very interesting address was delivered by Mrs Sinclair, Strabane, in the Nicholson Memorial Schoolhouse, Lisburn, to a large and representative gathering.

Mrs Sinclair has just returned from France, where she has been on a visit to her daughter, who is in charge of the U.V.F. Hospital at Lyon. Her description of the work that is being done by the brave nurses and doctors, who are doing their best to alleviate the sufferings of our heroes, was most instructive.

She related numerous conversations she had with British and French soldiers. One of Mrs Sinclair’s most interesting items was what she described as “facial repairs”, relating to the high surgical proficiency that obtains in these days of war. She alluded to the way, in many instances, in which part of the face has been blown off and how the surgeon in nearly all cases had been able, through a composition, covered by skin taken from the body, to make good without the slightest detection the part that has been deficient. Mrs Sinclair showed photos of a number of patients who had been treated in this way. Surely, we should be thankful for this wonderful achievement, as many who would have been disfigured for life will be able to return to their homes not the ghastly sights that otherwise they might have been.

The hospital has been doing a good work and is worthy of all we can do to help. It is under the care of the Ulster Women’s Unionist Council and should appeal greatly to our members. Tea was supplied by Mrs. Ewart and the ladies of the Committee of the Lisburn Branch S.A.W.U.A. On the proposal of Miss Stannus, seconded by Miss
Pounden, a vote of thanks was passed to Mrs. Sinclair for her kindness in being with them that afternoon, and the pleasure they all had in listening to her very interesting address; also to Rev. R.H.S. Cooper for presiding in the unavoidable absence of Miss McCance, who had been laid aside by a severe cold. The collection was in aid of the hospital, and the meeting was terminated by the singing of the National Anthem.”

Identifying the exact location of this hospital at Lyon proved more difficult than I first assumed until one day whilst casually perusing old French postcards of military hospitals ‘on-line’, I came across a written postcard addressed to someone in Marseille. The words ‘Hôpital d’Ulster No. 250, 2 Allee du Sacré-Cœur’ was stamped on the top right hand corner. Success at last! Included within the official hospital stamp was also the name ‘Villeurbanne’.

Villeurbanne (now a city) was a town to the north-east of the city of Lyon. A search for the hospital on the ‘Hôpitaux Militaries 1914-1918’ register for the Rhône region of France revealed the following entry: ‘HB no. 250 bis Villeurbanne – Association pour le travail de la femme (Mlle Rochebillard), Ulster Volunteer Hôpital, 2 Allee du Sacré-Coeur – 100 lits – fonctionne du 31 Mai 1916 au ?’ (Hospital No 250 (a) Villeurbanne – Association for the work of the woman (Miss Rocherbillard), Ulster Volunteer Hospital, 2 Allee du Sacré-Coeur – 100 beds – functioning from 31 May 1916 until it’s closure (date unkown).

I searched for ‘Allee du Sacré-Coeur, Villeurbanne’ and found images of old postcards of this area. However when I tried to pinpoint the exact location on a modern map, the Allee du Sacré-Coeur was no longer listed. Remembering that the French seem to have a penchant for changing their street names regularly ‘depending upon the politics or regime of the day’. I presume that is what happened in this case. It was not the easiest of tasks but I eventually discovered the name had been changed to Rue Frederic Mistral. Rue Frederic Mistral is not a long road and where I presumed the hospital would have been located, a large, squat multi-storey apartment block was now in its place!

A Mlle Rochebillard is mentioned in connection with the building used by the Ulster Volunteer hospital in Villeurbanne. She opened this establishment in the late 1890’s as a type of technical college for young girls. When war broke out she immediately gave her building to be used as a hospital which was first known as Hospital No. 218, functioned from 27 September 1914 to 10 February 1916 and had 100 beds. After her death in 1936 a street in Villeurbanne was named after Mlle Rochebillard.

It was to these premises that the Ulster Volunteer Hospital moved from Pau in April 1916 and by May had the premises ready for patients. The hospital number then became No 250 Villeurbanne and the Ulster group stayed there until August 1917. During that time one of the Night Sisters was Miss Cathlin Cicely du Sautoy who was Organiser and Lecturer under the Ulster Volunteer Force Medical Board and had taught many UVF nurses in Ulster prior to the outbreak of the Great War.
In August 1917 The Ulster Hospital at Villeurbanne (Lyon) closed owing to increasing expenses. Many of the staff relocated to other British nursing establishments in France or Britain but nine members of staff however, remained within the French army structure and with the help of the surplus funds of the Ulster Hospital, joined the 559th American Field Ambulance (similar to a Casualty Clearing Station) who were attached to the 3rd French Army. A year later the British Journal of Nursing reported in its issue of 3 August 1918:

“The Ulster Unit are anxious not to lose their identity, and an appeal for funds is being made. This Unit has had a strenuous time. They were close to the battle for an important point, and their hospital drew the usual attention from the Germans. Finally, they got orders to evacuate in the night, packed all and arrived safely at the next point, where they are now in charge, after almost miraculous escapes. Every window broken and roofs moved by injuries to the walls, yet the only building completely destroyed was their goods store and the only lives lost by bombardment were seven horses close outside the nurses’ quarters. The Germans fired on them while removing the stretcher cases and on the doctors, and again on the orderlies, finally clearing off. Ulster nurses who would like to join the unit should apply to the Matron, Samaritan Hospital, Belfast. They must speak French fluently and not object to hard work and some discomforts.”

7
First of all, my dear Andre, my congratulations on your (illegible word). You were due them a long time ago. But apart from that you tell me that you are expecting your mother this evening. Is that true? On her postcards that I received together (the post is so terrible) from the 1st, 2nd and 3rd, she doesn’t know yet exactly when she will be leaving, because she finds herself feeling tired. I therefore haven’t seen her in Lyon, since I didn’t know exactly when she would be able to pass by. If she is in Marseille, write me immediately and if the person that I spoke to her about can help her, then I will speak to him/her in more length. Adieu my Andre and (illegible word) to you.
'Hard work and some discomforts' is not how I would have described being bombed and shot at by the Germans! I wonder how many nurses were encouraged to join the Ulster unit following this appeal! However, with the war ending in November 1918, the Unit was disbanded by December 1918, thus ending four years’ service in France by the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps.

There are nine names on the Medal Roll of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital that show dates of leaving as November and December 1918. These are: - Lillian Allix, Deborah Caruth, Bessie Cawood, Arthur Downer (Orderly), Kathleen Forest, Prudence Kilpatrick, Margaret Mitchell, Margaret McCombe and Rosabelle Sinclair. Perhaps these are the staff that remained with the French army?

The Red Cross record for Edith Harkness indicates that she left the hospital in Lyon (Villeurbanne) in May 1916 shortly after it was ready for taking in wounded French soldiers. I have not been able to find out where Edith went to until she took up other nursing employment at the end of that year. The most probable answer is that she came home to Plumbridge in County Tyrone.

There was many temporary hospitals established within the city of Lyon but outside of that, Villeurbanne had the greatest concentration of these types of hospitals. Where large numbers of war hospitals exist, unfortunately this leads to the requirement of cemeteries and the cemetery at Villeurbanne contains 6,346 graves. Over 3600 are from the Great War and are of French or North African soldiers who died in hospitals in or near the city.

The Medal Roll for those who served with the Ulster Volunteer Hospital at either Pau or Villeurbanne (Lyon) is held at the National Archives, Kew, London. Although 66 people are listed on the Roll, I have discovered, from various photographs taken of the staff, that at least several others also served at the UV hospitals but their names do not appear on this list.

ENDNOTES
1  *For Dauntless France*, Laurence Binyon, 1918, p.138
2  *For Dauntless France*, Laurence Binyon, 1918, p.260
3  *Tyrone Constitution*, 24 November 1916, p.6
4  *Tyrone Constitution*, 24 November 1916, p.2
5  *For Dauntless France*, Laurence Binyon, 1918, p.153 & 293
6  *Lisburn Evening Standard*, 9 February 1917, p.5
7  *The British Journal of Nursing*, 3 August 1918, p.79
THE U.V.F. HOSPITAL IN FRANCE

Miss M. McCombe, daughter of Mr. John McCombe, Basin Walk, Newry, who is a nurse in the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France, writing to a Newry friend says that the hospital has been moved to Villeurbanne, Lyons, and adds—

"We have accommodation for 100 patients. I think it is a credit to Ulster. We have three doctors and a staff of 20 sisters and nurses. One of our doctors (a lady) is an Australian, and another is an American, who is giving his services free. All our patients have come from Verdun—some of them have not had a wash for 21 days. The fighting is very severe just now at that place. It is only out here one realises that war is going on. I did feel so ashamed of the Dublin Rebellion; it makes these people make so little of the Irish. I am very glad their plot failed."

Belfast News-Letter, Friday 16 June 1916
(www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)
TRANSLATION:

My dear little Margot,

I will be decorated this afternoon and I hope my return to Paris will be in a few days from now. Burns are doing better and I am hoping to be in good health. All my best kisses and sweet caresses. Good night dear and see you soon.

René
Ripon Military Hospital – Main Entrance
(Photo from Edith’s personal Album)
The well-documented ‘Battles of the Somme,’ which commenced on 1 July 1916 and carried on until November of that year, inflicted great numbers of casualties. Hospitals in France struggled to cope with the daily influx and thousands were sent by boat to ports in England for onward transportation by train or motor ambulance to military and auxiliary hospitals all over Britain.

A lengthy newspaper report in the Strabane Weekly News of 3 October 1914 gives us some idea of the logistics faced by organisers when wounded members of the British Expeditionary Force were being sent home from France:

“All the hospital ships proceed to Southampton where there is a special staff for the reception and distribution of the sick and wounded officers and men who are being sent home on them. The arrangements are under the control of a surgeon-general, who holds the appointment of a Deputy Director of Medical Services. He has at his command twelve ambulance trains specially constructed for the conveyance of four officers and ninety-six men lying down or for a considerably greater number sitting up. Twice weekly, telegrams are received by him from all the larger military and territorial force general hospitals stating the number of beds vacant in each. With this information before him he arranges convoys of sick and wounded on arrival and despatches them to their destination in one or more of the ambulance trains.

Already the sick and wounded from over-seas have been comfortably placed under treatment in most of the large military or territorial force hospital centres.

At the railway station of these localities, arrangements are made by the military authorities for conveying the sick and wounded in motor or other ambulance vehicles from the railway stations to the hospitals. Voluntary Aid Detachments have already done useful work in connection with this stage of the movements of the sick and wounded and it is expected that the scope for utilising voluntary aid in this direction will be extended as its value becomes better known.
As the military hospitals get filled up, arrangements have been made for transferring sick and wounded from them to various hospitals arranged by voluntary effort. Many schemes have been submitted to the War Office through the British Red Cross Association in accordance with field service regulations. At present the opportunity of using private hospitals to any great extent has not yet arisen as there are still several thousand beds vacant in the military and territorial force hospitals. There is no doubt, however, that in time, private hospitals will be of much use as an overflow, and also when it is necessary to set free a sufficient number of beds for future requirements in the larger military hospitals.

When sick and wounded are sufficiently convalescent to be granted sick furlough, advantage is being taken of the many offers of accommodation for them in convalescent homes in different parts of the country, and in order to prevent overlapping and to facilitate the means of placing men on sick furlough so far as possible in their own counties, a Central Registry of convalescent homes has been formed by a joint-committee of the British Red Cross Society and Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Help Society.

This Central Registry acts as a clearing house. Only convalescents who would be given sick furlough to their own homes if they so desired are being sent to convalescent homes. Convalescents who require continued hospital treatment will be sent either to the special home in connection with the hospital from which they are transferred (under the supervision of the medical officer of the hospital) or to one or other of the private hospitals already referred to. In order to enable a convalescent to be placed on sick furlough in a convalescent home, all that he has to do is to inform the Medical Officer who is in charge of him, where and what county or neighbourhood he would like to proceed to. These particulars are entered on a form and sent to the central registry, where the address of the nearest railway station to the convalescent home in the neighbourhood is entered on the form, and it is immediately returned to the medical officer of the hospital.

Whenever the convalescent is ready to leave on sick furlough, the medical officer sends word to the convalescent home stating the hour of the man’s arrival at the railway station, where arrangements are made to meet and take him over. This arrangement has been working very well, and already over 100 convalescents have been received in various convalescent homes.

It may also be of interest to know that in all the hospitals, arrangements are made for replenishing any deficiencies in the men's kits and for giving them any additional clothing which it may be desirable for them to take with them when they go on sick furlough. The hospitals are for this purpose receiving many generous gifts of pyjama suits and other articles of clothing. At the end of their sick furlough the men are required to re-join the depots of their regiments in order to be refitted and until arrangements are made for their re-joining their units either in this country or
abroad. They are provided with railway warrants to enable them to go to convalescent homes and to re-join at their depots. Arrangements have also been made that they shall receive their pay both while they are in hospital and while they are convalescent.”  

To anyone reading the above detailed report in 1914, it would certainly be very reassuring that should their loved ones become wounded, the logistics in place once they reached Britain seemed to be well organised. However, this was not often the case and for the first two years of the war much confusion ensued in many aspects through lack of information, leadership and the War Office’s inability to comprehend the extent of the crisis they now faced. The new methods of warfare employed in Belgium and France were different to those of previous wars and consequently this resulted in great numbers of new types of injuries. However, as the war progressed it soon became apparent that there was insufficient medical aid to cope with the large numbers of wounded arriving at the various British hospitals and Casualty Clearing Stations in the war zones as well as at the available hospitals in Britain.

Advertisements began appearing in newspapers and nursing magazines seeking nursing personnel for hospitals at home. In the issue of The British Journal of Nursing dated 5 August 1916 an appeal was put out for nurses by the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John:

“A real and urgent necessity has arisen for more nurses, V.A.D. nursing members (women) and V.A.D. general service members, in military and auxiliary hospitals at home. The demands made upon us by the military authorities are very heavy, and cannot be met out of the existing supply. There must still be many women who are not giving the whole of their time and service to the war, and who have no ties which prevent them from doing so. We earnestly call upon these women to come forward and help us in this emergency, and thus enable us to answer the call of the sick and wounded men.

Suitable women who are able to help in the hospitals may be attached to existing Voluntary Aid Detachments for immediate service in the hospitals.”  

Another issue of The British Journal of Nursing dated 19 August 1916 stated:

“The appeal of the British Red Cross Society for Nurses for the military hospitals has resulted in several thousands of applications from women with various qualifications.”

An Editorial in The British Journal of Nursing dated 30 September 1916, comments on the War Office’s appeal for additional nurses:

“Last week we were once more startled by a professional bomb. A Committee had been quietly engineered, and appointed by the Secretary of State for War, to enquire into the present shortage of nurses in military hospitals at home and abroad, and to
One of the recommendations by the War Office, once again came in for some sharp words in the 7 October 1916 issue of *The British Journal of Nursing*:

“As we go to press we learn that no more trained nurses are to be permitted to leave the country for foreign service in France and they are to be stopped by the Anglo-French Committee of the Red Cross – which is to be given power to withhold the Anglo-French Certificate, without which trained nurses may not cross to France. The War Office has been asked under what law the new regulation has been issued, but, so far, no reply has been received.”

Further comments on the same subject appear in the next issue dated 14 October:

“The officials of the Anglo-French Committee of the British Red Cross Society have intimated – we presume, with the approbation of the War Office – that thoroughly trained and certificated nurses may not now be sent to nurse our brave wounded Allies in France, but that vacancies in the French Flag Nursing Corps (FFNC) – and we presume, in other organisations – may be filled by sending ‘partially trained’ women into French military hospitals. We hasten to reassure the certificated Sisters of the Corps that their Committee will neither break its honourable contract with the French Government, to supply certificated and experienced nurses, nor its moral obligations to the highly skilled women who have joined this Corps, by adopting such a suggestion – as they realise that by so doing the prestige of the Corps, would suffer irreparable depreciation and failure as a result. ‘Partially trained’ nurses are usually failures who have not completed their training for one of the following reasons: they may have broken down in health – that is their misfortune; they may have proved temperamentally unsuited for nursing the sick; or too stupid to attain the necessary skill and pass examinations; or their moral character may not be reliable.

That these failures should be considered eligible for service in France, as substitutes for trained and certificated nurses of high moral character, demonstrates once again, the necessity for effective professional control of all military nursing. That all efficiently trained nurses available are required at home for the care of our own sick and wounded need not have been the case, as hundreds – if not thousands- of well-trained nurses in our Overseas Dominions could long ago have been secured by the War Office, if the quiet justifiable expenditure of transporting them to England had been guaranteed.

Anyway, only the best nurses are good enough for service in the F.F.N.C., and none others will be offered through its medium as worthy to care for the heroic sick and wounded French soldier who is fighting our battles as well as his own.”
Here we are two years into the war and the same intransigence by the War Office still existed. Consideration should have been given by them at this point to actively recruiting nurses from other allied countries as clearly pointed out in the above article. For some unknown reason, Edith Harkness must have been one of the many who answered the call for additional nurses and VADs for the many hospitals in Britain. Her war record shows that she was selected on 20 September 1916 and was posted to the Military Hospital, Ripon, Yorkshire on 5 December 1916 as a VAD nurse.

The great number of casualties being sent from the various ‘theatres of war’ to hospitals in Britain soon filled up all the existing Military establishments. More accommodation was urgently needed so many civilian hospitals were given over to military use as well as a large number of asylums. (These asylum patients were sent home to their families, if they had any, and this became a great burden on these families as to how to look after them properly). When all these became filled to capacity, Universities, hotels and other large buildings were turned into hospitals. Wooden huts were erected beside existing hospitals and beside army camps. The owners of large country houses gave them over for use as a Convalescent Hospital.

Ripon is situated in the Borough of Harrogate in North Yorkshire and before the outbreak of the war in 1914 it had an army base of sorts on the north-west side of the city. It was a tented establishment used by the army for training camps mainly during the summer months. However, when war was declared the City Council agreed to the building of a proper army encampment and this was built on a 1000 acre site. In Military circles it would be known as the Northern Command Depot. It was divided into two – North Camp and South Camp and at its peak housed 17,000 men. North Camp was built astride the River Laver and the South Camp was below the River Skell. Thirty-five miles of roads were constructed of various classes; sixteen miles of drains and sewers and an extensive light railway system ran from Littlethorpe - all to service this vast area. The railway line proved to be very useful when the existing basic hospital facilities were greatly expanded with the building of a new hospital in an area named Lark Lane in 1916. Wounded soldiers could then be brought by train to the hospital door.

Troops began arriving for training to the newly constructed camp in May 1915 from all areas of the North of England but also many of the Scottish regiments were trained here too. It was very much a transient camp and once training was complete they moved South towards the English ports for onward transportation to France and the ‘front line’. Ripon Military Camp must have been a rather dire place. Being of nature a training camp, new recruits were not spared in the vigour of getting them ready for service at ‘the front’. No doubt the very large numbers of soldiers that were training there and the vastness of the camp all combined to make the overall running of the site a very difficult job.

The author J.B. Priestley found himself spending time there during the war and recorded that “my spirits sank as low there as they did anywhere during the whole war.” Another famous ‘inmate’ for a short time was the poet Wilfred Owen, recovering from ‘shell shock’.
Soldiers outside one of their huts at Ripon Military Camp. (Note railway line close by)
(Courtesy of King’s Own Royal Regiment Museum, Lancaster)
Owen arrived in Ripon Army Camp on 12th March 1918 - “an awful Camp”. During his initial training with the Artists Rifles in London he had rented a room of his own and when he arrived in Ripon, he soon found accommodation outside the camp. It was a quiet cottage room located in Borage Lane, a pleasant rural approach to the city from Ripon Camp which was busily processing squads of young conscripts urgently needed at the front. Following Siegfried Sassoon’s advice that he should write about his war experiences, and using the techniques learned at Craiglockhart, he drew on the events that led to his shell-shock, and during the spring of 1918 drafted, wrote and re-wrote the poems which still show some of the realities of war. This fruitful period produced poems such as “The Send-Off”, “Mental Cases” and possibly “Strange Meeting”.

Author’s note: Craiglockhart was a hospital in Edinburgh which specialised in the treatment of those suffering from shell shock. Patients were encouraged to become involved in the various activities on offer such as lectures, meetings, expeditions, hobbies and entertainment. It was here that Wilfred Owen met Siegfried Sassoon in 1917. Owen left Ripon camp in July 1918 and returned to France but sadly was killed on the 4 November 1918, just one week before the end of the war, during the crossing of the Sambre-Oise Canal at Ors, northern France. He is buried in Ors Communal Cemetery. Other, anonymous ‘poets’ wrote their impressions of Ripon Camp, which were not too complimentary in their composition.

Remarks on Ripon Camp

There’s an isolated, desolated spot I’d like to mention,
Where all you hear is ‘stand at ease’, ‘quick march’,
’slope arms’, ‘attention’.
It’s miles away from anywhere, by Jove it is a rum un,
A man lived there for 50 years and never saw a woman.

There’s lots of tiny huts all dotted here and there,
For those who live inside them, I have offered many a prayer.
It’s mud up to your eyebrows, it gets into your ears,
But into it you have to go without a sign of fear.

There’s soldiers living in the huts, it fills my heart with sorrow
With tear-dimmed eyes they say to me
“It’s Ripon Camp tomorrow”.
Inside the huts live rats, they say as big as any goat
Last night a soldier saw one ‘trying on his overcoat!’

For breakfast every morning, it is just like Mother Hubbard
You double round the hut three times and dive into the cupboard.
Sometimes they give you bacon, sometimes they give you cheese.
Which ‘marches’ up and down your plate,  
‘slopes arms’ and ‘stands at ease’.

At night you sleep on straw and boards, just like a herd of cattle  
And if perchance you should turn round, your bones begin to rattle  
And when you hear Reveille blown, it makes you feel unwell  
You knock the icebergs off your feet and wish the Bugler in Hell.

(Attributed to Ray Laverick)

The Camp site was also used to house prisoners of war and in March 1918 six German Officers managed to escape – quite a daring feat when surrounded by so many thousands of soldiers! Perhaps they too, could no longer cope with the living conditions!

There are no official records of this temporary hospital and when I started my research all I initially found was ‘a large hutted hospital of 670 beds – including 25 for Officers and 70 for Infectious Diseases’. However, with persistent digging and the subsequent photos in Edith’s album, I discovered that this ‘large hutted hospital’ was spread over both the North and South Camps.

Map of Ripon Military Camp  
Courtesy of Councillor Alan Skidmore, Ripon.
The main hospital had two operating theatres. An isolation hospital, which consisted of block-built buildings with slate roofs, a post office, and supply depot were also on site as well as a Church and accommodation for the medical and nursing staff. The convalescent soldiers who were mobile wore the regulation ‘hospital blues’ uniform. This was a blue uniform with white shirt and red tie.

The many photos of groups of convalescent soldiers and nurses give the impression that it was a place of great comradeship between staff and patient and for those soldiers and nurses like Edith who had served in any of the ‘theatres of war’, it would have been a welcome haven of rest, and quietness.

The discovery of Edith’s photo album provides more information and shows not only soldiers from several different British regiments but also Canadians. This fact is borne out in the military headstones within Ripon Cemetery. Among the 122 war casualties buried there, several are from the Canadian Infantry and the Royal Canadian Air Force.

The qualified nurses were Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service (Reserve) assisted by Doctors of the Royal Army Medical Corps, trained civilian nurses and Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses such as Edith.

Isolation Wards
(Photo from Edith’s personal Album)
Days off for Edith and her fellow nurses were spent walking to places of interest like Fountains Abbey, Ripon Cathedral, Black Hawk Falls, Studley Royal Park and to the nearby village of Galphy as well as attending Church on Sunday.

The Armistice of 11 November 1918 declared that all prisoners of war were to be returned within fourteen days. However, this was not always possible due to the chaos in Germany and lack of transport. Many of the prisoners made their own way to various ports – some of them coming into the port of Hull in Yorkshire, where they then proceeded to Ripon Camp hospital for medical examination. Those who were deemed fit, returned to their respective Regiment for eventual demobilisation and those who required medical attention were processed in accordance with the Royal Army Medical Corps regulations, many of them remaining at Ripon Hospital until sometime in 1922.
The *Tyrone Constitution* gives quite a detailed report of returning prisoners of war in the issue of 29 November 1918:

“The Inter-Departmental Committee on Prisoners of War issue the following statement:- The total number of British prisoners of war who have arrived in this country from Germany and Holland is 494 officers and 14,235 other ranks. Of these, 444 officers and 8,358 other ranks have arrived at Ripon Camp and the rest at Dover. Three officers and 5,838 other ranks are expected to arrive at Ripon this week from Germany, Holland and Norway, and 41 officers and 2,004 men are arriving at Dover from Germany, Bulgaria and Turkey. 2,500 civilians are also expected this week from Germany.

Reliable information has been received that prisoners who are escaping from the German lines in Belgium, though badly clothed and very dirty, are not in a serious condition. Belgians are feeding and sheltering them as they move towards the British lines. The men are in good spirits. All prisoners of war of whatever Nationality are to be received by the Allied armies they first strike. They will be fed and given facilities for bathing and then be sent to their own armies or concentration camps.

The prisoners who are reaching the Allied armies across the front are those who have been working behind the German lines, and their condition must not be regarded as typical of the condition of British prisoners of war in Germany. British prisoners in the interior of Germany are to be repatriated either via Holland or Switzerland or the Odor, Elbe, Weser and Rhine. Every effort is being made to ship prisoners arriving in Denmark and Holland or at Baltic ports of Germany with the least possible delay.

About four hundred “Old Contemptibles” who fell into the hands of the enemy during the retreat from Mons arrived at Southampton on Tuesday and were welcomed by the Mayor and Mayoress. There were 64 cot cases. The men stated that at Rotterdam, where they embarked, there were hundreds of prisoners awaiting shipment to England and hour by hour the number was increasing.

Another twelve hundred returned prisoners arrived at Dover from Calais on Tuesday afternoon, and had a big reception from the vessels of the fleet. Instead of staying at Dover they proceeded in two trains to Canterbury.

On Tuesday morning fifty-five Irish soldiers who had been prisoners of war in Germany, arrived in Dublin and were accorded an enthusiastic public reception. The men were entertained to breakfast at the London and North-Eastern Railway Station. Lady Anott, representing the Central Advisory Committee of the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, addressed them, and subsequently presented each of them with a packet of cigarettes.”
Up until my research for this publication, I had no tangible record of Edith’s time in Ripon Military Hospital. Then, one day out of the blue, my mother suddenly produced Edith’s two war medals and a Police Certificate of Identity (Travel Permit). Whilst I had been aware that Edith was a nurse in France and Ripon during the Great War, I had never at any time heard it discussed by any member of the family!

The travel permit is quite detailed and not only gives her name but also her age, height, occupation (which clearly states that she is a VAD Nurse) and her home address. It is also interesting to note that her address includes the word ‘Ireland’ after County Tyrone (Northern Ireland was not established until 1921). In all, Edith nursed at Ripon Military Hospital from December 1916 until late 1920 when she was just 27 years old. It is not
known exactly when this hospital closed but various reports suggest that by the end of 1922 most of the hospital had been demolished. Little remains today apart from some single storey buildings on the original foundations of what would have been the hospital wards (huts) on the eastern side of Lark Lane.

Whilst Wilfred Owen and several other literary figures had written in less than glowing terms about their time at Ripon, Edith’s photographs of the staff and patients at the Hospital seem to show an alternative perspective of life there.
Edith’s Travel Permit (Ripon Camp Stamp)
(Courtesy of Muriel Houston – Edith’s daughter)
Edith (front Left) holding the cap of one of the convalescent soldiers at Ripon Military Hospital
(Photo from Edith’s personal album)
Once again Edith (back and centre) has someone's cap in her hand!
(Photo from Edith's personal album)
Hospital Medical Officers at Ripon Military Hospital
(Photo from Edith's personal album)
Matron Dorothy Rose Lewis (centre) was from the Uxbridge area of London. She was a fully qualified nurse and prior to joining the Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve on 29 August 1914 she was nursing at Westminster Hospital, London. Her first ‘war-time’ posting was to the Royal Victoria Military Hospital, Netley, near Southampton where she remained until her appointment as Matron of Ripon Military Hospital on 16 August 1915. Matron Lewis resigned from her position for ‘personal family reasons’ on 15 March 1918.
ENDNOTES
1 Strabane Weekly News, 3 October 1914, p.3
2 The British Journal of Nursing, 5 August 1916, p.122
3 The British Journal of Nursing, 19 August 1916, p.149
4 The British Journal of Nursing, 30 September 1916, p.265
5 The British Journal of Nursing, 7 October 1916, p.289
6 The British Journal of Nursing, 14 October 1916, p.312
7 Tyrone Constitution, 29 November 1918, p.6
VILLA BEAUPRE: ULSTER VOLUNTEER HOSPITAL - JANUARY 1915

Front row: Sr Johnston, Dr H Woodroffe, Matron F McFerran, Dr N Darling, R Sinclair (Directrice), Dr Fayon, Dr I Clarke, Nurse E Harkness, Sr S Sullivan, Cpl T Lowry, Sr I Wright

2nd Row: Sr A Jameson, Sr Shimmen, Nurse L Ballantine

3rd Row: Sr I Jennings, Sr I Patrick, Nurses K Thompson, J Dickson, W Alexander and Sr C R Stevens

Back Row: 1, 2, 3 Kitchen Helpers, Cook, Uniform Steward, Kitchen Helper

(Courtesy of Yvonne McLellan and Julie Rhys, nee McFarlane)
During the early days of my research I came across a website about British Military nurses called www.scarletfinders.co.uk. It covered the period from 1880 to almost present time but with particular reference to the First World War and was created by a lady called Sue Light. I emailed her with a query as to where I might find more information about the Ulster Volunteer nurses and their hospital in France. She very promptly replied and while she did not exactly have the answer to my query she nevertheless remembered that while doing research at the National Archives, Kew, she came across the Medal Roll of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France. I was able to obtain copies of this document which listed those who served at the hospital and were entitled to receive the Victory Medal and the British War Medal. It was wonderful to see my grandmother’s name among the sixty listed and to know the names of those whom she worked with while she was there. Sadly, Sue Light, who had been most helpful to me, passed away in July 2016.

I already had a copy of Edith’s record from the British Red Cross which I had contacted at the beginning of my research and now with two records to verify her war service I felt confident that at least I could ‘cross-check’ dates. (The British Red Cross are still in the process of making these records available online). It covers all the people who volunteered their services to the Great War, in any capacity, whether at home or abroad. The majority of them would be referred to as a VAD - Voluntary Aid Detachment but there was also many trained nurses amongst them who had also volunteered. This Medal Roll had been compiled in February 1921 and the names were in alphabetical order giving Rank, Name and dates of service. However, upon checking the dates of Edith’s war service, the two records did not match and that has been the case with almost every other person that I have checked. Obviously there is some very good reason why this is so and although I have a few theories which might explain the differences between the records; this theory did not hold up in all instances.
If conflicting dates of service for most of the civilian volunteers was not complicated enough, add to that the dates of war service for the professional nurses. The Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll seems to give the rank of ‘Nurse’ to the civilian volunteers like Edith, while all the professional nurses seemed to be referred to as ‘Sister’ with the exception of the Matron who was given her proper title.

While some professional nurses volunteered their services to the war effort, others applied to join the ranks of the Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service and if accepted they were known as ‘Reserve’ QA’s (QAIMNSR). They were usually employed on a one year contract which had to be renewed at the end of the period and when the War ended they too were demobbed. It is possible to find the War records of some of these QAIMNSR nurses on the website of the National Archives but, once again, the dates on their records of service with the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, conflict with the dates on the Medal Roll of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital.

However, in the following profiles of those members who served at either of the two locations of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France, I will give the dates that appear on the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll first but will endeavour to include the other dates and indicate any inconsistency. Whilst I have endeavoured to include as much background information as possible on members of staff, it is not an in-depth study of their life and therefore, other information may exist which has not been included.

(Courtesy of Great War Ulster Newspaper Archive www.greatwarbelfastclippings.com)
Nurse Mary ACHESON: Knockboy, Broughshane, County Antrim. Nurse Acheson is listed on the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll from 7 October 1918 to 30 November 1918 but as the Ulster Volunteer Hospital at Lyon closed in August 1917, I can only conclude that the Medal Roll dates refer to her service with the nine or ten remaining Ulster Volunteer Hospital staff which then became known as the Ulster Unit and joined the 559th American Field Ambulance who were attached to the 3rd French Army.

The British Red Cross Record lists Nurse Acheson as also serving from 28 February to 13 September 1916 at the Waveney Hospital Ballymena; 21 September 1916 to 6 November 1917 Cottonera Hospital, Malta; and 22 January 1918 to 24 July 1918 King George Hospital, London.

Nurse Winifred ALEXANDER: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, September 1915 to February 1916. Winifred Elizabeth Charlotte Alexander was born on 10 January 1891 and was the daughter of Col Henry George S Alexander. He was the son of Rev Samuel Alexander, Rector of Termonmaguirk Parish Church, near Carrickmore, County Tyrone from 1851 to 1889.

At the time of the 1901 Census, Winifred and her widowed father are staying at Termon House, (the Rectory) with her father’s brother Charles and three of his children. Winifred is 10 years old and her father’s occupation is given as Land Agent. He is also a retired Lt. Col of the 4th Regiment of Inniskilling Fusiliers. In 1911 Winifred and her father are now living in the townland of Derrygally Demense, in the Parish of Killyman, County Tyrone. Her father is still a Land Agent and also included in the household are two nieces, a governess and five servants.

Winifred was one of the five probationer nurses who went out with the original group in October 1914 and this is documented in newspaper reports as well as on a list of staff who attended a fund raising concert in Pau in November 1914 and again in November 1915. However, the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll gives her dates of service as September 1915 until February 1916!

Looking at the British Red Cross War Records, Winifred is only listed under her married name of Stronge; there is no mention of the UVH in Pau or Lyon and her dates of service are December 1917 to the 4th Southern General Hospital, Plymouth and from April 1918 to July 1918 Military Hospital, France.

In November 1916 Winifred became engaged to Lt James Matthew Stronge, Tynan Abbey,
Wedding photograph of Lt James Matthew Stronge and Winifred Alexander (Courtesy of Katherine Kinghan)

County Armagh and they were married on 10 July 1917 at St Columbkill’s Parish Church, Carrickmore, County Tyrone. It was to be a brief marriage – he was killed only a few weeks later on 16 August 1917.

Winifred re-married on 5 June 1920 to a Lt Col Clarence Ivor Alistair Dubs of the Ayshire Yeomanry who saw action in Gallipoli but had at one time been stationed in Omagh, County Tyrone. They had no children and Lt Dubs died in August 1943. In July 2014 his six medals were sold at auction for £900.

Nurse Muriel Lilian Helen de Burgh ALLIX: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau and Lyon - December 1914 to September 1915 and September 1916 to November 1918.

The surname Allix is of French origin and Lilian’s father Noel Charles Noel Allix was born in Paris in 1846. True to his unusual combination of Christian names he also seemed to have an unusual lifestyle. The ‘family seat’ was at Swaffham Prior village, Cambridgeshire but Lilian was born in 1873 in Cairo, Egypt. They also lived for a time in Hampshire and Marylebone, London.

Lilian was unmarried and died on 28 June 1922 in Holborn, London at the age of 49 years.

Sister Clara Louisa ATKINSON: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Lyon, March 1917 to August 1917. Sister Atkinson was from Nottingham and a trained nurse. Her British Red Cross war record gives no details where her postings where from her first ‘Date of Engagement’ on 15 Jan 1916 until ‘Date of Termination’ 23 June 1919.
Nurse Katherine Ruth Leighton AUCHINLECK: Ruth Auchinleck appears in a photograph of staff attached to the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France but her name is not listed on the Medal Roll held by the National Archives for that hospital. Subsequent information was found on the British Red Cross War Records.

Ruth was the sister of Field Marshall Sir Claude John Eyre Auchinleck and they were related to the Auchinleck's of Crevenagh House, Omagh. Her address was given as Greenways, Lower Bourne, Farnham, Kent when she volunteered her services in early 1915. Her first war-time position was as Acting Sister in the Highlands Hospital, Shortheath, Farnham from 10 March 1915 to 29 May 1915 for six hours daily. She then went to France on 3 June 1915 and spent time at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, in Pau and the Anglo-French Hospital in Verdun until November 1915, working full-time but with no pay. On 29 November 1915 Ruth returned again to Highlands Hospital on a full-time basis and stayed there until 2 April 1916.

From May 1916 until December 1917 she worked with the Belgian-Anglo French Red Cross based at The Grand Ocean Hotel, La Panne, Belgium. For her services in this hospital she was awarded the Order of St. Elizabeth. This was followed by work at Welbeck Abbey Auxiliary Hospital, Nottinghamshire, from January 1918 until 22 March 1918 and while this was a full-time position, once again, Ruth received no pay.

Welbeck Abbey was owned by the Dukes of Portland and the kitchen block was given over to a convalescent type hospital. The 7th Duke married Ivy Gordon-Lennox in August 1915 whose mother Lady Algernon Gordon-Lennox, ran the 13th Stationary Hospital in Boulogne.

On 10 March 1923 Ruth married Montagu Chenevix Baldwin. They had one daughter.

Nurse Louise and Nurse Mabel BALLANTINE: Louise and Mabel were the daughters of Thomas Ballantine, Cloonty townland, Ardstraw Parish and his wife Martha nee McCrea who were married on 22 June 1871. Louise was a pupil in Victoria High School, Londonderry and she is mentioned in connection with her war work in the schools yearly report which was published in the Belfast Newsletter on 22 December 1916.
Louise was the elder of the two girls and in the 1901 Census was aged 29 years and along with her widowed mother Martha, was living at her uncle’s house, Joseph McCrea, in Lisdivin Upper townland, Parish of Donaghedy, County Tyrone. Mabel is not listed on the 1901 Census and Louise at that time had no occupation.

The 1911 Census finds Louise and her mother still with the McCrea’s but Mabel is now listed. She is aged 32 years and no occupation is given. However, subsequent information concerning Louise shows that she had become a member of the Nursing Division of the St John’s Ambulance Association when a branch was formed in Strabane in 1910 and was, in fact, in charge of the UVF nurses at the training day in July 1914 at James Crawford’s granary near Newtownstewart, County Tyrone.

When the First World War started in 1914 Louise was one of the original volunteers with the Ulster group and became the administrative assistant to Rosabelle Sinclair at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau and later when they re-located to Lyon in April 1916.

The Ulster Volunteer Medal Roll lists her complete service as October 1914 to October 1917. Louise stayed in Lyon until August 1917 when the hospital closed and presumably spent the last few months of her service in France with the Ulster unit who joined the 559th American Field Ambulance attached to the 3rd French Army.

Louise then joined the Queen Mary’s Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC) in England in October 1917 as an administrator and remained there until she was demobilled in 1919.

For her services to the War, Louise was made a Justice of the Peace. She was also awarded the Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française in 1919 by the French Government.
Louise’s obituary pays tribute to her ‘immense organising ability to the task of building up the hospital out of very humble beginnings.’

Returning to the Strabane district in 1919 Louise became a very active member in public life. She was a member of Strabane Board of Guardians, Strabane Rural Council, Strabane Hospital Committee and Strabane & Castlederg Regional Education Committee. To all these “she brought wise advice and counsel” and “lost no chance in advancing the claims of her own area and while she might not have been so eloquent in public as some of the other members, she brought to bear a sound judgement in the many complex matters affecting these bodies”.

As a JP she was often in attendance at Strabane Petty Sessions and also gave valued service to Dunnalong Parish Church. Louise ended her days at the Ballantine family home, Lisdivin House, Strabane, on 10 September 1957. To her sister Mabel who lived with her when she became widowed, Louise left the sum of £2176.

Mabel Ballantine went to the Ulster Volunteer hospital in Lyon in September 1916 and according to the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll, did not leave there until April 1917. However, her Red Cross War Record indicated that from January 1917 until February 1919, Mabel was working at the War Hospital Supply Depot, Strabane, County Tyrone which was at the home of her aunt, Miss Elizabeth (Bessie) McCrea of Magherareagh townland, Dunnalong Parish. The McCrea’s lived in a large 15-roomed house with many outhouses, so presumably these were used to store all the supplies and equipment that were donated for onward transportation to England and then to the places of need in Europe. Previous to her service in France Mabel worked as a VAD in the Military Hospital in Birmingham.

Mabel was married to Mr William Roulston of Tober, Clonleigh Parish, Ballindrait, County Donegal and like her sister Louise, was a faithful member of Dunnalong Parish Church when she returned to live with her sister after widowhood. She was also known for her beautiful garden which was frequently opened to the public in aid of various charities. When she died in April 1961 she left the sum of £13,054.

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Doctor James Henry BENNETT MRCS, LRCP: 46 Bromley Road, Beckenham, Kent. Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, September 1915 to October 1915; Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Lyon, August 1916 to September 1916 and June 1917 to July 1917. It is clear from the above dates that Dr Bennett spent a month each year with the Ulster Volunteer Hospital when it was based as both Pau and Lyon. It is most likely that he used his holiday allowance from his full-time profession as Assistant Medical Officer at Balgowan Hospital, Beckenham, to volunteer his services overseas. He had also volunteered his services in January 1915 for air raid duties in his locality and central London. Perhaps some of his time in France was also spent in Hopital 222 Menton, near Nice, the town where his doctor
grand-father had been very-well known and who had spent several months living there each year from the 1860's.

Nurse Deborah Mary CARUTH: Brocklamont townland in the Parish of Ahoghill, County Antrim. Deborah M Caruth was the daughter of solicitor, Norman Caruth and his wife Jeanie.

According to the British Red Cross records, she first worked in the Waveney Hospital, Ballymena, County Antrim and then spent 1915 and 1916 at a French hospital in Rouen. She returned to the Waveney for the whole of 1917 and then served with the French Red Cross to November 1918. However, the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll lists her service dates as October 1916 to November 1918!

Doctor Ina Marion CLARKE: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau October 1914 to May 1915 - Anaesthetist with the Ulster group. Dr Clarke was born in Dublin in 1886. She had two other sisters, Constance and Alice. In the 1901 Census Ina was living with their widowed mother, also called Alice, at a large 10-roomed house in Adelaide Road, Glasthule, Dublin.

By the time of the 1911 Census the family had moved to another large house at Sorrento Terrace, Dalkey, Dublin, Ina was already a physician and surgeon in one of the Dublin hospitals, her sister Alice was dead and the other sister Constance was now married but living with her husband and two children at Sorrento Terrace.

Ina's mother ran a boarding house and at that time two nurses, were boarders. Ina's sister, Constance had married Harold Marrable, who was also a physician and surgeon. He was the son of Arthur Marrable, a barrister. He and Constance had lived for a few years after their marriage in Persia (now known as Iran) where their two children were born.

Ina's sister Alice had married Reginald Victor Bury in the early 1890s and they had one child, also called Alice. Reginald Bury was a Church of Ireland curate in Dublin. Sadly, within ten years Alice Bury had died, Reginald was transferred to Belfast, boarding in Botanic Avenue and their little daughter Alice (Jun) was being looked after by the Clarke household in Dublin.
Dr Ina Clarke was a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin and during the First World War over 800 medical graduates volunteered their services. Ina joined the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau in October 1914.

Dr Clarke stayed with the group for a few months before transferring to the Anglo-French Hospital No. 2, at Chateau Tourlaville, Cherbourg at the beginning of 1915. This hospital was in use from the beginning of November 1914 until the end of March 1915. Prior to locating in Cherbourg the Unit had been in Antwerp but made a hasty retreat as the Germans advanced, bombing Antwerp. The Chateau was a very old, stone building with square or octagonal towers and dark interiors. Much work was done to make it habitable and when ready could only accommodate about seventy-five beds. The one redeeming factor was its location – a peaceful and quiet spot, surrounded by a lake and trees. In the garden of the chateau a large marquee with a boarded floor was erected. This was heated by stoves and used as a recreation tent for convalescents. Dr Clarke worked closely with Dr Mabel L Ramsay at this hospital and it was unique that apart from some of the chauffeurs, all the staff at Chateau Tourlaville, were women. By early March 1915, only about 30 patients were left in the hospital and it was decided to close the facility. All the equipment from the Anglo-French Hospital was given to the Scottish Women’s Hospital at Royamount while the local French Red Cross benefited from receiving many dressings.

I have not been able to find where Dr Clarke went after March 1915. The Medal Rolls at the National Archives, London, indicate that she returned to ‘Home Service’ in January 1916.

Sister Violet M COBBETT: Ulster Volunteer Hospital Pau October 1914 to April 1915. Sister Cobbett’s home address was 86 Carlton Mansions, Portsdown Road, Maida Vale, North London and following her service with the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau took up a position on 1 May 1915 at the Officers Hospital, Stoodley Knowle, Torquay.

Nurse Clementina Isabella CUNNINGHAM: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau and Lyon, May 1915 to August 1917. In the 1901 Census Clementina Cunningham, her widowed mother Lydia and sister Georgina are living with a great-aunt, Frances Green in Clarence Avenue, Londonderry. Clementina is 15 and Georgina is 14. The 1911 Census finds the family of three living in the Fahan area of County Donegal.
Surgeon T Norman DARLING: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, October 1914 to April 1915. Dr Darling does not appear on either the 1901 or 1911 Census of Ireland, which would indicate that he was not resident in Ireland at the time the Census was carried out. However, a Doctor John Singleton DARLING and ten children are listed at High Street, Lurgan, County Armagh. This Dr Darling was born in Co Meath and could well be Norman Darling’s brother.

Rosabelle Sinclair’s letter written in November 1914, outlining the first few months of setting up the hospital in Pau, adds a little more information about Dr Darling. We now know that he was Irish, a Harley Street doctor and was the personal doctor to the Spanish Royal Family.

Nurse Annie Ellen DICKSON: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau and Lyon August 1915 to August 1916. Nurse Dickson’s name on the Medal Roll of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, in Pau, stands out from the rest of the nurses because it was written in red with the word ‘Deceased’ beside it. I had always assumed that this nurse died after the war, hence when the Medal Roll list was being compiled in 1921 this was the reason why the word ‘Deceased’ was written beside her name.

I had tried in vain to find out where Nurse Dickson originally came from but with no information to point me in the right direction, I had to reluctantly abandon my search. Then several months later, when I was looking for information on another Nurse Dickson (from Dungannon, County Tyrone) I came across a reference to a War Memorial dedication service in Fahan Parish Church, County Donegal in 1923. Reading down through the names I was amazed to find the name of Annie Ellen Dickson and also a Mary C Dickson. This was the breakthrough I was looking for and what a story of a family who volunteered their services in many ways during the Great War.

Annie Ellen Dickson was born in Milford, County Donegal in 1886 and the ‘middle child’ of seven. Her parents were William A Dickson, Rector of Fahan Parish Church and his wife Mary. Prior to becoming a Rector he served with the Royal Irish Constabulary. On the 1901 Irish Census Annie is aged 14 and is a boarder at Victoria High School, Crawford Square, Londonderry (later Londonderry High School and now Foyle College following
amalgamation with another local school). By the 1911 Census she is at the family home in Fahan with her father and two sisters and lists her occupation as student/scholar! Annie's mother and another sister are visiting relatives in Belfast. Sadly Annie's father died in August 1912.

Annie joined the staff of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau in August 1915, and remained there until August 1916. A report in the Belfast Newsletter in December 1916 about past pupils of Victoria High School in Londonderry who were in war service, states that Annie Ellen Dickson is now working 'in munitions in London'. Annie's name appears on the War Memorial tablet in Fahan Parish Church, dedicated in 1923. It obviously relates to the war years of 1914 to 1918 and therefore her death must have occurred sometime between December 1916 and the end of the war in November 1918. At this stage of my research, I engaged the help of Ann Robinson, President of the North of Ireland Family History Society, and within a day Ann had located evidence of Annie Ellen Dickson's death, registered in the District of Burt, County Donegal.

Annie died on 17 April 1918 at her home in the townland of Figary, County Donegal from 'Phthisis Pulmonalis' – Tuberculosis, at the young age of 30. The added information as 'Cause of Death' notes that she had been suffering from the condition for one-and-a-half years so perhaps Annie's time working in the unhealthy environment of a munitions factory led to her eventual death.

Annie's elder sister Mary Charlotte Dickson had died in Rouen, France on 16 February 1917. Mary Charlotte became a VAD on 21 July 1915. Perhaps she and Annie offered their services at the same time! Mary's first posting, according to her British Red Cross service record, was at 'M.H. Cosham' until 1 August 1916. This hospital in Cosham (near Portsmouth) may refer to the place known locally as the Alexandra Hospital. On 27 October 1916 Mary was posted to No 9 General Hospital at Rouen. No 9 General Hospital was one of the many hospitals at Rouen and was established in November 1914. It was taken over by the American army in June 1917 and continued until February 1919.

The war diary of Maud McCarthy, Matron-in-Chief of France and Flanders gives an account of Mary C Dickson's illness when she was admitted to the specialist unit for infectious diseases at No 25 Stationary Hospital, Rouen:-

14 February 1917 Sick list: Telegram received from Rouen saying that Miss Dickson, VAD, had been admitted to 25 Stationary Hospital from 9 General suffering from cerebro-spinal meningitis and had been placed on the dangerously ill list. Her friends had been informed. 1

15 February 1917 Sick list: Reported to DGMS by telephone the sudden illness of Miss Dickson, VAD, diagnosed as cerebro-spinal meningitis. 2

16 February 1917 Sick list: Was informed that Miss Dickson, VAD had died. Telegraphed to
Mary Dickson’s death from cerebro-spinal meningitis was by no means an unusual occurrence and at that particular time in the hospitals at Rouen, their seemed to be an epidemic which Maud McCarthy describes, “The unit is very full – a great many seriously ill with cerebro-spinal meningitis, dysentery and diphtheria, as well as a large number of mumps.”

Two other Dickson sisters also volunteered their services. Hilda Evelyn Dickson joined in November 1915 as a VAD. She became an ambulance driver and served in Étretat, No 5 Casualty Clearing Station, Maubeuge and in Étaples. Her service ended in February 1919.

Sheila Margaret Dickson was a trained nurse and served from September 1915 to December 1916. Her postings included six months as a nursing Sister at St Patrick’s Military Hospital in Malta and an un-named military hospital in France.

Back in County Donegal their mother Mrs Mary Dickson became Hon Secretary of the War Hospital Supply Depot in Londonderry in March 1916 and gave endless hours of her time in that capacity until March 1919. Her British Red Cross war record gives the added information that could be applied to thousands of volunteers ‘at home’: “ladies who were Organisers and Secretaries could not make an estimate of hours, as in addition to long periods spent in the Depot, much other work like Secretarial, had to be undertaken outside. But it is safe to assert that their hours exceed the best records of the ordinary workers.”

An extraordinary family, who despite the death of two family members, continued to give their services freely wherever directed.

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**Nurse Jessie Reed DICKSON:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, October 1914 to date unknown. Nurse J R Dickson is not listed on the Medal Roll for the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau but she was one of the five probationer nurses who were part of the original group that travelled to France in October 1914. In a newspaper report about the departure of the doctors and nurses a ‘Miss Dickson, Dungannon’ is mentioned. Also her name appears as a staff member on the programme for a fund-raising event held at the hospital in France, in November 1914.

Jessie was born in December 1890, one of four children of James and Annabella (Ella) Dickson of Miltown House, Dungannon, County Tyrone. Her father was a Magistrate and Linen manufacturer and on the 1901 Census her two
elder brothers, William Tillie Dickson, and Thomas Cedrick Dickson were not listed in the household and may have been at boarding school in England. According to the 1911 Census, when both William and Thomas are now part of the Dickson household along with their parents and Jessie, there is also the added information on this particular Census, that of the four children born, four are still living.

Jessie’s formative schooling in County Tyrone was followed by a few years boarding at the Levana School in Wimbledon, Surrey (a small private school situated at the side of Wimbledon Common) and it was through being invited to stay at the home of a fellow-boarder, Gladys Boot, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, that Jessie met her future husband, Douglas Boot, the brother of Gladys.

With the onset of the war in August 1914, Jessie and her two brothers volunteered for service. Sadly one of them, Captain William Tillie Dickson of the 6th Battalion attached to the 1st Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers died from wounds on 9 July 1916, aged 29 years. Captain Dickson is buried in Plot A 13 of Beauval Communal Cemetery which is located between Amiens and Doullens, France. Captain Dickson was survived by his wife Elizabeth who was living at 46 Cranley Gardens, South Kensington, London at the time of his death.

After six months at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau, Jessie transferred to a British Hospital in Arc-en-Barrois, France sometime around April 1915. Most likely the Hôpital Temporaire d’Arc-en-Barrois - an empty château in rural eastern France which was an emergency evacuation hospital serving the French 3rd Army Corps. It was organised and staffed by British volunteers.

Jessie’s friendship with Douglas Boot continued to flourish during the war via letters and parcels. He was in the Royal Navy, serving both on land and at sea. Early in the war he was interned in Holland near the German border but eventually escaped and went on to serve at Gallipoli where he became dangerously ill with dysentery. Jessie and Douglas were married in 1920 at St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh. They returned to live in Newcastle-upon-Tyne where Douglas resumed his career as a stockbroker and was also a Conservative politician for a short period of time. They had three daughters. However, his health never really recovered from his illness at Gallipoli and in 1936 at the relatively young age of 42, he died from cancer. Jessie died in 1958 when she was around 68.
Nurse Vere Isabella Crook DORMAN: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Lyon, May 1916 to September 1916. She is listed as a Nurse but she was also a chauffeuse.

Born on 7 June 1892, she was the daughter of Richard H Dorman, a Civil Engineer from Cork and Beatrice Norah Jane Dorman. She had 2 siblings and lived at Tullymore Park, Armagh. If there was ever a prize for the most unusual combination of Christian names, this family would win every time! I first thought that her name should be spelt ‘Vera’ but it is Vere.

In January 1917 she was with the International Committee in France serving at a Rest Station in Boulogne; February and March 1917 at No. 10 British Red Cross Hospital, Le Treport, France; April 1917 at the Red Cross Hospital, Gournay (northern France); May –June 1917 Rouen, June and July 1917 Paris Plage and from February 1918 to August 1919 Vere Dorman was a full-time chauffeuse at Rouen, France.

Surgeon James Wilford GOOD: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, Oct 1915 to April 1916. James Wilford Good was born in December 1852 in Kincardine, Upper Canada, son of John Good and Isabella Anderson. He graduated from Trinity Medical School, Toronto in 1877 and followed this with post-graduate studies in Edinburgh. In 1879 Good went to Winnipeg where he was appointed physician at the Winnipeg General Hospital and at the Hôpital de Saint-Boniface. Further study in Vienna of diseases of the eye and ENT problems led to him becoming the first ophthalmologist to practice in Western Canada. In 1883 he was a founding member of Manitoba Medical College in Winnipeg and four years later became Dean of the College.

In 1898 during the gold rush in the Yukon he moved to Dawson where he became medical health officer, tackling the problems of typhoid and scurvy. Good returned to Winnipeg again in 1900 and resumed teaching at the Manitoba Medical College where he was Professor of Theoretical Ophthalmology and Otology.

When war broke out in 1914 James Good was deemed too old to be in active service but he overcame this obstacle by accepting a post under the French Red Cross and served at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau for six months, returning to Winnipeg at the end of his time in Pau in April 1916. (This was when the hospital closed at Pau and moved to the outskirts of Lyon). However, in 1917 he again took up service for the war – this time with the honorary rank of Major in the Canadian Army Medical Corps and worked in West Cliff Hospital, Hythe, Southampton, specializing in facial wounds.

In 1921 Good moved to Vancouver, Canada and remained there until his death on 1 September 1926. He was unmarried and his considerable wealth was distributed to the
sanatorium in Ninette, Manitoba; the Children’s Home of Winnipeg and a senior citizens’ home. Good Street in Winnipeg was named in his honour.

**Doctor Lucy Edith GULLETT**: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Lyon, May 1916 to September 1916. Dr Gullett was born in 1876 at Hawthorn, Melbourne, Australia. Her parents were both journalists and she was one of three daughters.

After graduating from the University of Sydney in 1901 Dr Gullett worked for a time in a children’s hospital in Brisbane followed by a few years in her own GP practice which had been bought for her by her father. However, by 1911 she returned home to Sydney to be nearer her sisters and opened a private medical practice. She was not very dedicated to her work and often closed the practice to attend major horse racing days or to play bridge.

Dr. Gullett’s war service record as noted by the University of Sydney, shows that in 1915 she embarked on the ship Mongolia in Sydney bound for Europe and she may have served somewhere else before joining the staff of the ‘Hôpital d’Ulster, Lyon’, in May 1916 as shown on the UVH Medal Roll. Less than six months later Dr Gullett boarded the ship Mongolia once more and returned to Sydney. She spent the rest of her life in the medical profession and was particularly involved in women’s and children’s health, opening a small hospital in 1922 and the Lucy Gullett Convalescent Home in 1946. Following a stroke in 1949, Dr. Gullett died on 12 November 1949 at the age of 73. *(Photograph Courtesy of Sydney University Archives)*
Nurse Edith HARKNESS: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, October 1914-April 1916 and Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Lyon, April-May 1916, Ripon Military Hospital, Yorkshire, December 1916-late 1920.

My maternal grandmother was Miss Edith Jane (Gertrude) Harkness of Fair View House, Glencoppogagh townland, Plumbridge, County Tyrone. She was born on 7 November 1893 to Andrew Harkness, a postman (later farmer) and Jane (Jennie) Orr and was the third of twelve children, eight of whom lived into adulthood.

Edith's father, Andrew Harkness was born in the townland of Rylands, just outside the village of Gortin, in County Tyrone. He was one of nine children and his father William was a labourer and wood-ranger, most likely on the nearby Beltrim Castle Estate on the edge of Gortin village. William Harkness (Edith's great-grandfather) came from the nearby townland of Erganagh, near Omagh, where there are several Harkness headstones in the graveyard adjoining Cappagh Church of Ireland. There are also two Harkness headstones in Old Drumragh Graveyard, on the outskirts of Omagh, with dates of 1745 and 1760.

The Harkness family first came to Ulster from Dumfriesshire, Scotland in the 17th century and by the time of the Griffiths Valuations of the 1850s County Antrim had the largest concentration of the surname, followed by County Tyrone, where seventeen different Harkness families were listed in the parishes around Cookstown. It is interesting to realise that although this surname is spelt ‘Hark-ness’ the majority of people (including myself!) pronounce it as Hart-ness? However, some of the listings in the Griffiths Valuation did spell the name Hart-ness.

Edith attended Letterbratt National School on the outskirts of the village and I presume remained there until she was fifteen around 1908. By that time, however, two older sisters and two younger sisters had already died. I have no knowledge if Edith ever had paid employment after leaving school. In the 1911 Census when her age is listed as 17 and her sister Peggy is 15, no occupation is given for either of them. Their brother Willie John, aged 13, is listed as a scholar. It was not uncommon in those days for females to remain at home, helping with chores until such times as they married. In Edith's case because they had a farm, she would also have been expected to assist outdoors as well. My mother (Edith's daughter) having left school at 16, remained at home until she married in 1950 at the age of 25.

What I do know is that by mid-July 1909, when she was just sixteen, she seems to have been romantically linked with Walter McFarlane. A postcard sent by Walter to Edith still exists and on it he writes:
“Dear Edith, Just a postcard to recognise the wink you gave me passing the last day. Purest love seemed in your eye. Hoping to meet you some evening soon where we know. P.S I love you still, I love you yet. W.M.F”
It might seem a bit ‘corny’ by today’s standards but I found it even more amusing knowing that their houses were only separated by two fields and as the postman was Edith’s father, we can be certain that he had a good look at it too!

It was to Edith’s credit that she forged ahead with her desire to join the Ulster Volunteer Force as a nurse in March 1914 and later, when selected for war service, readily agreed to accompany the Tyrone Group to France. She was by then the eldest of the family and most likely would have been expected to remain at home to help with younger children. However, the situation may have been helped by the fact that her younger sister, Peggy, was now eighteen and her brother Willie John, was seventeen. At the time of Edith’s departure to France in October 1914, the ages of her five other siblings, Andy, Fred, Ethel, Ernie and Mervyn, ranged from eleven years to two.

However, Edith went “off to war” at almost twenty-one years of age and it would be another eight years before she became Mrs Walter McFarlane on 1 November 1922. Edith was twenty-nine and Walter was thirty. On her marriage to Walter, Edith moved the short
distance across the fields to take up residence in the McFarlane household, Leightown House. I have often wondered about the name of this house and with the most popular meaning of ‘leigh/lea’ as ‘meadow’ I am of the opinion that in this particular case the name has somehow become changed over the years and was possibly ‘Lowertown’ as about half a mile above the McFarlane house is an area known as the ‘Uppertown’, which was also a small hamlet of houses.

Walter’s father William McFarlane (Sen) who had been the local Rate Collector, died on 15 August 1921 and his mother had died on 18 January 1916. However, Walter’s brother, William (Jnr) was still living in the house. William, (Jnr) became the local Rate Collector after his father’s death and held the post until his death in the early 1930s. Walter then took over the position of Rate Collector until he retired in 1964. In the early days of his job as Rate Collector, Walter travelled the countryside on horseback and even when they acquired a car in the early 1950s he never learnt to drive but was taken round the district by his youngest daughter Eva. He was also the Unionist registration agent for the local district for over thirty years and in this capacity would have come into contact with Rosabelle Sinclair’s mother, Mary Everina Sinclair, who was very involved in Unionist activities in the Strabane area which is just over 10 miles from Plumbridge.

The McFarlane’s, like the Harkness’s were also of Ulster-Scots origin. Edith’s husband Walter was the 4th generation of McFarlane’s to reside at Leightown House. His great-grandfather John McFarland came from Ayrshire, Scotland around 1800. The surname was originally spelt as McFarland, but the spelling seemed to have changed to McFarlane by the 1840s.

The first of Walter and Edith’s children, Leslie was born in February 1924. This was followed by Muriel, (my mother) born in August 1925; Leo born July 1927; Douglas born January 1929; Florence born December 1930; Walter born July 1932; Gordon born July 1934; and Eva born December 1936. Of the eight family members, only two of them are still alive. Gordon died at three and a half years of age in 1938 as a result of a scalding accident; Eva, October 2003; Florence, June 2013, Walter, September 2016, Leslie, May 2018 and my mother (Muriel) in June 2018. The tragic death of little Gordon, was a severe blow to the whole family, particularly Edith, who by this time was not in the best of health herself. From then on she was less able to do all the housework and my mother Muriel took on a lot of the physical work, particularly looking after Eva whom she also took to school on the back of her bicycle.

Edith’s children, my uncles and aunts, never talked about their mother very much. Perhaps they just wanted to keep their memories of her to themselves following her early death. Conversations with my mother in her final years have given me greater insight to her as a person. Edith enjoyed sewing and patching, baking, looking after her ducks and hens, and attending local concerts. Doing cross-words and listening to the radio were also favourite pastimes. However, my mother always noticed that when Edith listened to the radio, particularly around Remembrance Sunday and bugles were sounded, her mother cried. On
the anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, Edith always attended the local village band parade to mark the occasion. She was talkative and enjoyed visitors coming to the house, particularly her cousin Major Bob Orr who was himself a survivor of the Great War. Mum recalled these visits when her mother and Bob would go to the sitting-room for their chat. Edith could talk to Bob because she knew that he understood how she felt having gone through the war himself. Years later when my mum married my dad, Cyril Houston, Edith looked forward to their visits too as she and dad had ‘great chats’. Her love of music was always with her and she sang around the house while doing her housework. Going to church was a family affair with the girls travelling in pony and trap and the boys on bicycles.

The McFarlane home was situated in a little hamlet of five houses and frequent callers to the house were the neighbours looking for advice about a sick child or elderly person. No doubt the injuries and ailments she dealt with in the neighbourhood were very minor compared to what she had to deal with in her six years nursing war wounds.

One gets the impression that Edith was content in her role as wife and mother and despite trying times in the 1930’s when money was scarce, they succeeded in building up a successful farm ably led by their sons Leslie and Leo.

Recent conversations with some of Edith’s other ‘children’ paint a picture of a mother who was gently spoken and patient. Her son Leslie recalled that “she never raised her voice even when we did something wrong. She would just calmly point out that we had done wrong and that there was a better way to deal with the situation”. Walter remembered her being a great help when he was a pupil at Omagh Academy. His French homework became a less frustrating task when his mother, effortlessly, could sort out the tangle of foreign words in a few minutes! However, Walter never questioned her ability as to how she understood French! Leo’s amusing tale of how their mother had warned them all not to disturb the farm workers when they were having their tea and Leo’s subsequent plead to one of them for ‘the top of his egg’ as his mother wasn’t looking, shows that Edith respected others no matter who they were.

Walter’s great passion was horses and he competed in local horse jumping events and races. On one memorable occasion a circus came to the village and of course, they had horses for various acts. Walter ‘fell’ for a lovely pie-bald pony and before the circus left the village he had bought the pony. The circus performed under the name of ‘Stackel’s Circus’ and that was what the pony was called. The Stackel’s family came to Ireland from Denmark in 1912 and were as famous as the other well-known Irish family circuses such as Duffys and Fossetts. They also operated in Northern Ireland during World War Two where they entertained the British and American troops. The circus continued until the 1950s and was most famous for its acrobatics and animal training. I remember this pony well and as very young children we would be placed on Stackel’s back as he walked into his stable. ‘The other horse was called ‘Big Tommy’ and in order to get into his stable, we had to lie flat on his back!'
A recent conversation with Edith's nephew, Norman Harkness, son of her brother Ernie, seemed to confirm that Edith's last years were beset with poor health. He remembers her as tall, about 5.9", square face, pale complexion and of strong build. A 'nice lady' to talk to; who never raised her voice, and who had to use a stick as she had difficulty in walking. Norman recalls that she gave him little books to read and he always enjoyed his visits. When Edith died on 19 December 1954, Norman was ten years old and he was taken by his father over to her house. Norman had never seen a dead person before and when no one was looking, he ran up the stairs and into the room where Edith was lying, and touched her face.

At the time of Edith's death my mother had been married for four years and my sister Audrey and I had been born. Eva was now the only woman in the McFarlane household and had taken on the role of house-keeper. Florence, by this time was a teacher and lived in Belfast and both Douglas and Walter had joined the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Several months before her death Edith was confined to bed and when she died it became the sad duty of my mother to help the doctor to dress Edith prior to her funeral. It was thought by the family that their mother should be dressed in something very special so Mum got out her own Confirmation dress and that was how Edith was dressed for her final resting place.

Edith's obituary in the local newspaper was printed alongside the obituary of my father's uncle who had died the day before Edith. Her obituary had the heading of “Mrs Edith McFarlane, Plumbridge' while James A Smyth's obituary not only had his name as a 'heading' but also the words 'Noted Educationalist'. His obituary continued with a summary of his life in glowing terms but there was not one word in Edith's to indicate who she was or what she did before becoming the wife of Walter McFarlane. No mention that she was the mother of eight children and certainly no mention of her six years as a nurse through the Great War and afterwards. Edith was buried in the family plot at the Church of Ireland graveyard in Gortin, six miles from the village of Plumbridge. Even the headstone makes no reference to her war service.

My grandfather, Walter, lived until 1976 and in the years after Edith's death, it was Eva who kept the home going and looked after not only her father but also her two brothers Leslie and Leo. When Eva married in 1966, my grandfather managed fairly well and was able to do the cooking at least. Edith and Walter had seventeen grandchildren and twenty-six great-grandchildren and even though my sister Audrey and I were the only grandchildren born before Edith died in 1954, we were still too young to remember her.

What have I learned about my grandmother, now? Writing this book has answered many of the questions I had about Edith's life particularly her nursing career during the Great War. I feel that I now know her pretty well but I need to remember that she also knew me! She nursed me as a baby and no doubt saw me take my first steps. I am glad that she lived long enough to see at least two grandchildren - my sister Audrey and myself. Through the photos in her album I see a slightly apprehensive young girl onboard a boat taking her to France;
an unsmiling girl in group photos at the hospital in France and sometimes she has either ‘cut’ herself out of the photos or scored through them with a pen. Later photos show more confidence and the many photos at Ripon Military Hospital from 1916 to 1920, tell a story of someone who is very much at ease with all her colleagues and patients, regardless of their rank! If she is not in a particular group photo, then she can be seen mischievously peering out of a window. Of those photos that she is included in, many times she has taken off the headgear of the soldier in front of her and is holding it above his head!

When I think about Edith’s journey from ‘the Plum’ (Plumbridge) to Pau, it never ceases to amaze me how someone who had been brought up on a farm in rural Tyrone, had suffered the loss of four of her sisters and never travelled outside the Province before, had the courage to join the Ulster Group and make the epic journey to an unknown place in a country that was now at war! Initially it may have seemed like a great adventure to Edith and the other four probationer nurses and no doubt when they reached Pau it was an idyllic location. However, as the wounded French soldiers began arriving at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, their devastating wounds would soon reveal the true reality of war and the real reason why Edith and her colleagues were there in the first place!

Edith’s two remaining ‘children’ Douglas and Leo are aged 90 and 91 and sadly because of their health and advanced years, they will be unable to read this book about their mother.

Some of Edith’s grandchildren and particularly her great-grandchildren will possibly not even know Edith’s name never mind that she was a nurse in the Great War. It is my desire that they will take time to read her story and that of her nursing friends and then I can truly feel that I have fulfilled the title of this book – “Tell them of us”.

I have two sources of information regarding Edith’s wartime record. The following index cards are the British Red Cross records.
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Honours Awarded

Red or Blue Stripe, if any

Character

J W 384
**Surname**  H A R K N E S S  
**Died**  5 AUG 1918  
**Birth**  17-7-19

**Christian Names**  Edith S.  (Mrs. Miss)

**Permanent Address**  Fairview House  
Hambidge  Co Tyrone.

**Certificate No.**  
**Age when engaged**  23.

**Date of Engagement**  5-12-16  
**Rank**  Nurse  
**Pay**  

**Date of Termination**  Still Serving  
**Rank**  
**Pay**  

**Previous Engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where**  P.T.O.  
**Dept for References**  J.W.V.A.D.

**Honours awarded**  
**Character**  

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**PERIOD OF SERVICE, Etc.**  

**From**  5-12-16 to Present  
**Commission or Department or County**  Donegal/

**Ripon Hil. Hosp:**

Edith Harkness War Service Record (Ripon) as held by the British Red Cross  
(Courtesy of British Red Cross Society)
Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll as compiled by the British Committee of the French Red Cross (Courtesy of The National Archives, W0329/2323)
Edith with her two eldest children, Muriel (my mother) and Leslie outside the family home in Glencoppagagh, Plumbridge circa 1929 and ‘Daisy‘ the pony.
(Courtesy of Muriel Houston)
Background to the discovery of Edith Harkness’s Photo Album

In February 2010 I took my mother, Muriel, to visit her sister Flo, who lived near the village of Derrygonnelly in County Fermanagh. (This event recalled from dated photographs taken that day). Auntie Flo enjoyed talking about family history and we had quite a discussion about another branch of the McFarlane family. During the course of our conversation she told me that she had a photo album belonging to her mother that I would probably have found of great interest only to add “I lent it to a lady in the village and I cannot remember who it was!” I recalled thinking what a pity that she didn’t remember who she lent it to and what interest would they have in some stranger’s photo album. Both my mum and Flo remembered that the album was green in colour and then Flo went on to say that she thought that letters existed somewhere which had been sent by Edith during her war service.

In October 2013 when I decided to write down the little I knew about my grandmother, which eventually has become this book, I started to make enquiries among the extended family and it was suggested that another of Edith’s daughters, Eva (Eva McCay died in 2003) may have had the letters. I contacted Eva’s daughters Shirley and Amanda and all they could tell me was that when they cleared out their parents’ house after their deaths, all boxes were put in Shirley’s attic in Belfast, without being opened. I explained my quest and they agreed
to check the attic. I felt a bit guilty asking when Amanda explained that access to the attic was not easy and that it involved ‘putting a chair on the kitchen table and vaulting into the attic!’ I had visions of being responsible for broken limbs at least!

Several months after my initial request to Shirley and Amanda, you can imagine my excitement when one November night I got a phone call from Amanda to first of all ask “Are you sitting down?” “Yes” I replied, “Did you find the letters?” “No” was the reply, “But we did find a photo album with about 64 photos and Andrew and I have scanned them into the computer and we are just about to email it all to you”. When I could get a ‘word in’ I tentatively asked “Is it green in colour?” “Yes!” she said “How did you know that?” and I briefly explained my conversation with Auntie Flo of three years previous. What excitement that the album had been found and was still in care of Edith’s family. ‘The lady in the village’ turned out to be Flo’s sister, Eva! Mystery solved! Auntie Flo’s memory lapse and subsequent diagnosis of Alzheimers eventually led to her death in June 2013. I could barely contain myself, waiting for the email to arrive from Amanda with so many photos from Edith’s long lost album.

What a discovery and with every page I viewed there was photos of Edith’s childhood home in Plumbridge and her brothers and sisters; photos of my grandfather Walter and his beloved horses; photos of Plumbridge village, the hospital in France and many photos of her time in Ripon Military Hospital. Edith had written the names of many of the people in the photos and in some cases where the photos were taken. I was able to pick Edith out in the majority of the photos which my mother confirmed.

My mother, (Muriel Houston) 2nd from left back row, wearing my grandmother’s nursing apron for cookery class at Aughalane Public Elementary School, Plumbridge, circa 1940. (Courtesy of Muriel Houston)
Nurse Lilian Frances HUMPHREYS: Ulster Volunteer Hospital Pau, from September 1915 until April 1916. While the information on Nurse Humphrey’s British Red Cross War Record gives her address as ‘Brookvale, Stillorgan, County Dublin’ she was born in 1865 at Milltown House, Strabane, County Tyrone. She was one of eleven children of Thomas W Drummond Humphreys, a Magistrate in Strabane but who also had a home in the Castlefin area of County Donegal.

Lilian Frances Humphreys’ aunt was the very well-known hymn writer Mrs Cecil Frances Alexander whose most famous hymn, ‘All Things Bright and Beautiful’ was said to have been inspired by her surroundings in that part of Strabane.

Lilian Humphreys was a Nursing Sister of the St John’s Ambulance Brigade prior to her service in Pau. Other service was in The Princess Patricia Hospital, Bray, County Wicklow from July to December 1916; and the Special Officer’s Hospital, Kensington, London from December 1917 until January 1919.

Sister Mary Florence (May) HUTCHINSON: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau and Lyon January 1916 to August 1917. May Hutchinson was the eldest daughter of Isaac and Margaret Hutchinson from Gorey in County Wexford where her father ran the Post Office and a shop. In the 1901 Census she was aged 17 and did not have an occupation.

By 1911 the family had moved to 11 Villiers Road, Rathmines, Dublin and May’s occupation is not listed but I presume that she is a nurse somewhere. In 1915 May is in lodgings at 40 Lower Baggott Street, Dublin and in October of that year she moved to England to become Night Sister at Dane John Hospital, Canterbury, where she stayed until January 1916 before joining the Ulster Volunteer Hospital. Sister Hutchinson also served for a time at No 9 British Red Cross Hospital, Calais, France. This hospital was operational from 12 January 1916 until 14 March 1918, so most likely it was after leaving the UVH Hospital, Lyon, which had closed in August 1917 that Sister Hutchinson went to Calais.
**Sister Anne Christina Mary JAMESON:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, October 1914 to April 1915. Sister Jameson was 37 when she joined the original Ulster group who went to Pau in 1914 and had been working in the hospital in Dungannon, County Tyrone.

Her home address was given as 14 Clarendon Road, Holland Park West, London but there is no mention on her British Red Cross war record of her time in Pau. Other duty in France was at No 2 British Red Cross Hospital, Rouen which functioned from 14 September 1914 until 20 December 1918 and No 5 British Red Cross Hospital, Wimereaux which functioned from 14 December 1914 until 10 January 1919.

**Sister Isabelle Domincus JENNINGS:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, October 1914 to April 1915. Sister Jennings belonged to the St John’s Ambulance Brigade and originally came from Southsea, England. She was 33 when she went to Pau with the Ulster group. Other service noted on her British Red Cross War Record is at No 9 British Red Cross Hospital, Calais from 11 February 1916 until 24 November 1917. Another former member of the hospital at Pau, Sister Hutchinson also spent time at No 9.

**Surgeon Arthur Edward KELSEY:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau and Lyon June 1915 to June 1917. Dr A E Kelsey, who was born in 1865 at Redhill, Surrey, was the son of Arthur Kelsey, Surgeon of Redhill. He attended St Paul’s School, London, London University and in March 1883 entered Trinity College, Dublin where he graduated from with a BA in 1886. Dr Kelsey received an MB and BC in 1890 and his MA in 1910 and worked for some time in Guy’s Hospital, London before becoming a surgeon with the Royal Navy in 1900 and Fleet Surgeon in 1910.

When war broke out he joined the RAMC with the rank of Captain. After his time with the Ulster Volunteer Hospital at Pau and Lyon he then joined a hospital ship called ‘Glenart Castle’ (previously known as ‘Galacian’). ‘Galacian’ was built in 1900 at Harland and Wolff, Belfast for the Union-Castle Line, London. Her normal passenger route was between England and South Africa. When war broke out the Galacian was requisitioned for use as a
British Hospital ship and renamed the ‘Glenart Castle’. On 26 February 1918 the Glenart Castle left Newport, South Wales bound for Brest, France, to collect more wounded Allies. On board were crew and medical staff only. She was well identified as a hospital ship and lit from bow to stern. However, a German u-boat surfaced in the Bristol Channel and fired a torpedo which effectively destroyed most of the lifeboats. Within eight minutes, the Glenart Castle was no more; only 38 survived. Among those who lost their life was the Captain, 8 nurses, 47 medical orderlies and 7 RAMC officers, which included Dr A E Kelsey.

Nurse Stella Hariette Beresford Lawless: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Lyon, from July 1916 to September 1916. Mrs Lawless was the wife of Dr George R Lawless, Drumcaire, County Armagh who was in charge of the Asylum in Armagh. It was rather unusual that as a mother of three teenage children she volunteered her services but from June 1915 until as late as April 1919 Mrs Lawless seems to only have had a few interspersed months at home between her various postings.

Prior to Lyon, she worked at North Evington Hospital, Leicester from 7 June 1915 until 1 January 1916 and from 6 January 1916 until 11 May 1916 at the 1st Western General Hospital, Liverpool.

After Lyon, she worked at Furness Auxiliary Hospital, Harrogate from 18 January 1917 to 19 February 1917 and from 17 April 1917 to 30 July 1917 at the County Hospital, Colchester. From 21 September 1917 to 20 December 1917 she was at Attingham Park Auxiliary Hospital, Shrewsbury; from 21 January 1918 to 21 March 1918 Haddon Court Auxiliary Hospital, Warrington; from 19 September 1918 to 4 April 1919 she was Lady Superintendent at Cranwell Aerodrome, Lincolnshire, looking after the WRVS and the WRAF Sick Bay.

Sister Elizabeth Leitch: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau and Lyon, September 1915 to October 1916. Elizabeth Leitch was born on 3 October 1870 at Skelpy near Castlefin, County Donegal, the fifth child of Sydney and Willie John Leitch. She spent some of her early adulthood working on the family farm at Skelpy but then went to Omagh, County Tyrone to enrol as a nurse. The 1901 Census lists her employment as a nurse at the Tyrone County Hospital and lodging in the Campsie area of the town. Some years later she moved to London and the 1911 Census lists her living at Oxford Terrace, Paddington, nursing retired army officer, Henry Augustus Candy. After the war Sister Leitch
open a nursing home in Bayswater, London, where she lived until the early 1940’s when she retired and returned to live in Bangor, County Down at 81 Ashley Drive. Elizabeth died at age 76 on 9 March 1948 at Newtownards Hospital.

**Nurse Margaret Dalton McCOMBE:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau and Lyon from February 1916 to December 1916. The 1901 Census gives the family’s address as Basin House, Newry, County Down. Margaret was born in 1883, one of six daughters of John and Lily McCombe. Her father was a Land Agent and between the 1901 and 1911 Census her mother had died. The only son of the family, Victor was at boarding school in Belfast.

Like so many other occasions, when I cross-checked records of people, there is a conflict of dates between her records. Suffice to say then that she did serve with the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France. Other postings were at the Fever Hospital, Wolverhampton; General Hospital, Newry, County Down; Military Hospital, Leeds; and Connaught Hospital, Aldershot.

**Matron Melina Frances McCORD:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau October 1914 to December 1914.

(What a great name! – Melina Frances McCORD) When I first read the surname of the Matron that went out with the Ulster group in October 1914 it immediately took me back about fifty-five years to my childhood on our farm in Plumbridge, County Tyrone. My father grew potatoes for sale and before these could be sold they had to be inspected by someone from the Ministry of Agriculture (as it was known then). Enter, Mr David McCord, Potato Inspector.

I can still recall the distinctive smell of the new hessian potato sacks into which was filled the potatoes after being carefully checked by my father. All good potatoes went into one sack and all rejects into another. These sacks were attached to the end of the potato chute. Checking the potatoes was a task which my father usually did after milking time, when normally he would be going indoors for the night. He would take the hurricane lamp, go into the barn and shut the door to keep out draughts. Often we would go too and try and help sort the potatoes or sew the tops of the sacks when they were filled, with a very large needle. Mr McCord’s visit held a certain amount of trepidation. He would open several
potato sacks, one at a time, empty the contents onto the potato chute and check over the potatoes carefully. If the majority of the potatoes met his standard then that was ok – he ‘passed’ the whole lot, but if he kept finding inferior quality potatoes, then he would reject the entire crop and Dad would have to start all over again, and check each sack of potatoes. Of course, as children we did not appreciate the volume of work that this would entail and my father’s disappointment that all his hard work would have to be repeated.

Recent enquiries from farming relatives as to where Mr David McCord originated from could not pin-point a particular location but all agreed that it was ‘somewhere in County Down’. As children we enjoyed his visits. He was a very distinctive speaker, clear, precise and articulate. We sat open mouthed listening to his stories about the many farms he visited and the people he met. Mum always made him tea. Perhaps ‘our Mr McCord’ was related to Matron McCord! It is an unusual name and while there are instances of the name around the Cookstown area of County Tyrone, it is also noted in County Down. Also, in Melina McCord’s war record she lists as Executor of her Will, the Rev George Shaw, Claggan Manse, Cookstown, so perhaps there is a family connection with Cookstown too.

Meanwhile back to Matron McCord. Melina was born in 1868 and her home address on the British Red Cross records is given as 47 Emerald Terrace, Bangor, County Down. She received her nursing training at Crumpsall Infirmary, Manchester. This was followed by three years as a probationer. Other positions held were Staff Sister and Night Superintendent. In 1887 Melina was appointed as Lady Superintendent at Carlow Infirmary, County Carlow, a position she held for seven years. Upon leaving in 1894 she was presented with a silver dressing table set and a purse of sovereigns. Information from the 1901 Census of Ireland shows Melina at her mother’s home 24 St Ives Gardens, Cromac, Belfast. She is aged 41 and her profession is given as Hospital Matron. Her mother, who is also called Melina Frances, is aged 62, born in England and a Methodist. A brother, Arthur is aged 25, born in County Down and is an Electrical Engineer.

Her next appointment was as Matron of Queen Charlotte’s Lying-In Hospital, in Marylebone Road, London. It had 56 beds, 4 Sisters, 2 Midwives and 30 trainee nurses. Matron McCord resigned from this post in December 1905 “in order to take up an important appointment in Italy.” This ‘important appointment’ was certainly a prestigious position. Towards the end of January 1906 Melina went to Rome at the invitation of the King and Queen of Italy to look after the Royal nurseries. King Victor Emmanuel III, of the House of Savoy, reigned for 46 years from 1900 to 1946 and became the last King of Italy. His only son Umberto had a very brief reign from 9 May 1946 to 12 June 1946. Italy then became a Republic. When Melina McCord arrived in January 1906, three of their five children were already born. Yolanda was born on 1 June 1901, Malfalda born 2 November 1902, Umberto II (their only son) born September 1904. These were followed by Giovanna born November 1907 and Marie Francesca born December 1914.
It is not known when Melina McCord returned from Italy or where she moved to. She is not listed on the 1911 Census of Ireland although the McCord family have returned to Bangor and are living at Railway View Street. Mrs McCord now lists her religion as Presbyterian. Two other sons are resident; David, aged 37, an Electrical Engineer, and William Millory aged 44 who is an Able Seaman.

When the group from Ulster left for France on 7 October 1914, 54 year old Melina McCord travelled with them as Matron. However, her tenure as Matron at Pau was short – just two months. Melina must then have applied to join the QAIMNS (Reserve) as on 25 March 1915 she was officially ‘called up’. Many fully trained civilian nurses offered their services at the commencement of the war and when it soon became evident that there were not sufficient army nurses and reserve army nurses, these offers of medical help were soon called upon. Up until that time there were less than three hundred qualified female army nurses and about 2220 reserves. The British Army were still trying to get used to employing female nurses, when this work was always carried out by male Orderlies. This new type of army nurse belonged to the Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service. The QAIMNS was formed in 1902 from the previously known Army Nursing Service and in 1949 became known as Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps. When war broke out the authorities were faced with the quandary of accepting applications from qualified civilian nurses who wanted to join the QAIMNS. What would they do with a surplus of army nurses when the war was over? It was decided that any enrolments to the QAIMNS would belong to the reserve service – the QAIMNS(R) and that applicants would be accepted on the understanding that not only would they have to sign yearly contracts but when war ended, so too would their service with the QAIMNS(R).

Uniform for the ‘reserves’ would be slightly different to that of the regular QAIMNS, whose scarlet shoulder cape (known as a tippet), was a unique part of a very smart uniform. The QAIMNS(R) shoulder cape on the other hand was grey, edged with scarlet.

While researching this book I looked at many photos of qualified army nurses during the Great War and I now understand why the majority of nurses seemed to be wearing grey shoulder capes edged with scarlet and not the scarlet capes that I was expecting to see. It was the fact that there were relatively few regular army nurses prior to the commencement of the war.

As a member of the QAIMNS(R) Melina McCord’s first placement began on 30 April 1915 when she was appointed Matron at Croydon War Hospital. Croydon War Hospital officially opened on 30 June 1915. It was spread over five different, large school building’s, all requisitioned by the War Office, and could accommodate one thousand patients. The doctors were all RAMC personnel helped by a nursing staff of eighty, many of them Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses and as patient numbers grew local General Practitioners undertook regular duties at the hospital. In October 1916 the King and Queen visited the hospital.
and later that month King George V bestowed upon Matron McCord the Decoration of the Royal Red Cross, First Class, at Buckingham Palace, in recognition of valuable services in connection with the war. Matron McCord’s sister, Elizabeth was also a nurse during the war. She was attached to the BEF as a Nursing Sister in Cameroon, West Africa.

Melina’s time at Croydon War Hospital ended in the last week of August 1917. This was followed by two weeks ‘leave’ before going to France. (Croydon War Hospital finally closed on 9 May 1919). Her first short appointment as a QAIMNS(R) was at No 14 General Hospital, Wimereaux, from 8 September 1917 to 2 October 1917. Melina McCord then became Matron at No 46 Stationary Hospital Étaples and remained there until being demobbed on 10 June 1919. This hospital was previously known as the Isolation Hospital from July 1915 to January 1917. Dame Maud McCarthy, Matron-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, France and Flanders, wrote the following report in her official war diary after her visit there on 6 October 1917:

“Miss M McCord, QAIMNS(R) has recently arrived from England and has just taken over from Miss Plaskitt QAIMNS Retired. The hospital has 1000 beds with a trained nursing staff of 31 and untrained staff (VADS presumably) of 40. The hospital is composed of huts of all varieties and sizes, as well as marquees. It is lighted with electricity and well supplied with stoves for warming purposes. There is a first class lavatory and scullery accommodation and extremely nice sitting-rooms both in the Officers’ and Sisters’ divisions. There is accommodation in this unit for Officers, Nursing Sisters, WAAC (The Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps) and men; at the time of the visit the hospital was very full of all varieties of infectious diseases. The unit has been very much improved since my last visit and has every possible convenience for the comfort of the patients. A large number of Portuguese were in hospital at the time ….. The accommodation for the nurses is huddled and extremely good and beside their quarters they have two asphalt tennis courts. The nurses are not kept in this unit for over a year in most instances. The majority of the VADS are first-rate and extremely interested in the infectious work – one makes a point if anyone is expressing any nervousness in working in this unit, to move them”.  

Étaples is a town and port situated on the coast in Northern France, below Boulogne. Le Touquet and Paris-Plage are ‘next door’ and the River Somme joins the ocean some miles to the south. During the Great War the British established the Étaples army base there, the largest of its kind. It was built along the railway adjacent to the town and was served by a network of railways, canals and roads connecting the camp to the southern and eastern battlefields. There were twenty different hospitals on the site, stretching over almost four miles, capable of treating 22,000 patients. At its peak, the camp housed over 100,000 people. In addition to the many hospitals, Étaples camp was a major training base not only for the British but also the Australians and Canadians. A supplies depot and a detention centre for prisoners were also on site.
Another visit from Dame Maud McCarthy on 27 January 1918 records her observations as thus:

“We saw the Matron Miss McCord, QAIMNSR. The hospital has increased tremendously and they have now a non-infectious division of 200 beds on the other side of the road, in Nissen huts, for local cases. The Isolation Hospital is equipped for 1000 beds – 20 for Officers and 20 for Sisters. The question of extra accommodation is being considered here, in consequence of the large number of WAAC in the area requiring attention. I went over the hospital and the Sisters’ quarters, all of which were very good”.  

In May 1918 the Germans bombed this area of Étaples many times, despite the very obvious large red crosses on the roofs of the hospitals. Maud McCarthy records in her diary on the 19 May that:

“A very severe air-raid took place over the hospitals, lasting 3 hours. No 1 Canadian General Hospital suffered most heavily in personnel – one Nursing Sister being killed, two severely wounded (have since died), and five others injured. At No 26 General Hospital there were two minor casualties amongst the nursing staff and the Sisters’ quarters were partly wrecked. At No 46 Stationary Hospital there was one casualty – a VAD being slightly wounded. Overall many patients and personnel were killed and wounded”.

Maud McCarthy then visited the hospitals in Étaples on 24 May 1918 and her visit to Matron McCord’s hospital, No 46 Stationary is recorded:

“Visited Nos. 24, 26 and 56 General Hospitals and No 46 Stationary Hospital where I saw the Matrons and OC’s and saw what damage had been done in recent air raids. I instructed all Matrons to use every precaution and to be sure to send any nurses who looked the least bit over-tired or seedy, off duty. Everywhere strong dug-outs are being made and in the meantime the whole of the day staff are being taken into the country in details with two officers and 2 NCO’s in charge – the Matron and night staff remaining with the hospital”.

Another very severe air-raid took place again on 31 May 1918 and Maud McCarthy records that:

“there was a terrible raid right over the hospitals at Étaples. Practically all the Étaples hospitals suffered, those which had the most casualties being the St. John’s Ambulance Brigade hospital, where one Sister was killed and five wounded, besides many patients and personnel…. The St. John’s Ambulance Brigade Hospital, which was beautifully equipped, is entirely wrecked”.

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With the many severe air-raids throughout the month of May 1918 on the Étaples area and particularly the hospitals, it was decided to evacuate most of them. Four complete hospitals were closed, with many of the patients being sent to England. Of the others that did remain, Matron McCord’s hospital was one of them. Despite many warnings and alarms, June 1918 was fairly quiet but July and August saw the return of the enemy air-raids.

A year later on 20 May 1919, the war now being over since November 1918, Dame Maud McCarthy visited Matron McCord at No 46 Stationary Hospital in Étaples. Obviously Matron McCord was now seriously facing the fact that she will very soon be unemployed and no doubt the stark reality of her age made her very aware that she would most likely not be offered another nursing post in civilian life. She shared her concerns with Miss McCarthy who records her visit with Matron McCord:

“Went to No 46 Stationary Hospital to see Miss McCord, QAIMNSR, who is shortly to be demobilised, and who is to hand over to Miss Lang RRC, QAIMNS. Miss McCord is taking Paris leave before returning to the United Kingdom. She spoke of the recent improved conditions of the War Gratuity, which many did not quite understand, and she is putting up the matter officially, as from her calculations the Matrons, under the present arrangement, are not benefiting as much as they did under the old regulations. She also spoke a great deal about the discontent among the Nursing Staff, so many of the Trained Nurses being demobilised who have no fixed work to return to, while large numbers of VADs are still being employed in the country. I advised her to put the matter up officially. The hospital is at present extremely light, they have a staff of 46, and under the present conditions it is felt this can be considerably reduced. Decided that for the present, at any rate, their staff should be reduced to 36.”

A book published in 2013 by Richard Crewdson entitled *Dorothea’s War: the Diaries of a First World War Nurse* tells the story of VAD Nurse Dorothea Crewdson who served in three different French hospitals from June 1915 until her untimely death in March 1919. Her diaries give a vivid account of her time in France, particularly her last hospital, No 46 Stationary, Étaples where Melina F McCord was Matron and whom Dorothea mentions several times. When Dorothea was first introduced to Matron McCord she wrote: “she is not a regular and used to be in charge of Croydon, where Giles Chapman worked. A rather hard-looking little woman and dried up, but not very alarming to talk to.” On another occasion Dorothea’s soldier brother and his friend came to visit her at the hospital. When she went to Matron to ask permission to go out with the visitors it was refused. Dorothea writes: “I went to Matron and got a refusal from her to go out at all with either of my visitors, it being a very strict rule in the camp that one shouldn’t be seen out with an officer – even a brother – nor somebody else’s brother!”
Rumours of the Germans advancing rapidly in their direction in March 1918 had everyone in a state of anxiety: “Matron had quite made up her mind we should have to pack up and fly, unless the Germans were too quick for us and we were all taken prisoner.”

Towards the end of April, Dorothea was sent for by Matron McCord, “who beamingly told me that I was to go on night duty. However the news was not beamingly received – in fact I pulled a face. I didn’t take proper notice of what she told me and failed to take in the fact that I was to report at the office at 8pm.”

Dorothea went on duty that evening in her usual ward only to be shortly summoned to the office “to find a fuming Matron, furiously angry because neither I or Read, who had also come on night duty had appeared and she was very late for dinner in consequence. I just stood dumb before her outburst and the next I knew was that I had been ordered off to the tanks to begin work there in an absolutely unknown field of operation with strange patients. Read got her wigging soon after mine, having to pursue the irate Matron to the dining room …”

Previously mentioned, the large encampment at Étaples came in for aerial German bombardment several times from May to August 1918 and these events were documented in the book ‘Dorothea’s War’. In May, the hospitals within the encampment seemed to be the main target and in No 46 a number of patients were killed and wounded. Arriving back from leave in June Dorothea had a most cordial welcome by her colleagues “and Matron was almost effusive greeting me with a long hand clasp, though I suspect she was relieved to see me as she was short of staff.”

Towards the end of October when the Allies were making rapid advance, casualties still continued to fill up No 46. Dorothea remarks that No 46 seems to be over staffed and that:

“some of the VAD’s are helping at 26 General, where the work is very heavy. I suppose Matron was ordered to let them go, otherwise she would have clung to them under the pretext that we needed every available member of the staff here. She is a veritable miser in the matter of parting with her staff and can hardly bear the thought of their being taken from under her vigilant eye. She is in very cheerful mood just now and always very beaming when she comes into my ward.”

Over the next several months Matron McCord continued to be in charge of No 46 Stationary. After the end of the war on 11 November 1918, the number of patients had dwindled but then the Influenza epidemic struck. Many patients, recuperating from their war wounds now succumbed to pneumonia as well as members of the nursing and medical staff at the Étaples base.

Dorothea Crewdson’s Diary entries end on 6 March 1919. On 12 March Dorothea died with peritonitis. She was just thirty-three years old.
Matron McCord wrote a lovely letter of condolence to Dorothea’s parents. She gave much detail of Dorothea’s illness, death and her burial in the Military Cemetery at Étaples. This Military Cemetery is the largest British war cemetery in France where 11,557 ‘friends and foes’ are buried. Whatever Dorothea may have written or thought about her Matron at No 46, Matron McCord’s impressions of Dorothea were very warm and sincere. Part of her letter illustrates this:

“here she was loved by everyone – so thorough, thoughtful and reliable was she that any seriously ill patient who had her for a nurse was more than fortunate – and so honourable, gentle and loyal, always working straight on out to help and helping with all her mind as well as her body. She is a serious loss….. and your dear girl was perfectly happy in her work. Forgive this long letter, but I wished you to know all I have written.”

With my most sincere sympathy, believe me,
Yrs v sincerely,
M.F. McCord, Matron.

Matron McCord ended her war service a few months later and on 2 June 1919 arrived at Folkestone. She was officially ‘demobbed’ on 10 June 1919 and went to live with her sister Elizabeth in Sinclair Road, Kensington, London. By this time she was in her late fifties and obviously too old to pursue a nursing career at home. In December of 1919 she wrote to the War Office to claim ‘the extra remuneration in accordance with Army Order 300 of 1919’. Her request was forwarded to the Paymaster. It is not recorded on her War Record if this request was granted. In April 1927, now aged 67 years, she applied to the Joint Nursing and VAD Services Committee of the United Services Fund, for assistance – presumably financial. Recalling Melina McCord’s conversation with Matron-in-Chief, Dame Maud McCarthy in May 1919 and Matron McCord’s concern at that time about her future financial security, it now seems that by 1927 she was struggling to ‘make ends meet’. What a sad and unfair situation to be faced with, in view of her unfailing devotion to her nursing career particularly the years that were given over to the Great War and her time at No 46 Stationary Hospital in Étaples where during part of 1918 the hospitals were on the receiving end of enemy air-raids.
No 46 Stationary Hospital, Étaples Army Base
(The Great War Archive, University of Oxford)
Sister Florence McFERRAN: Sister at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau from October 1914 and was then appointed Matron in December 1914 when Matron McCord left. She is not listed on the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll. However, I know for certain that she served in Pau as she is named in several photographs taken at the Villa Beaupre, Pau.

Miss McFerran had many years nursing experience in Belfast Workhouse, Lisburn Road and would have been around 44 years of age in 1914. It is not known when she left the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France but the remainder of her war service was in Britain in the Red Cross Hospital, Eastbourne (most likely Summerdown Convalescent camp which was first opened in April 1915) and the auxiliary hospital Highbury Hall, Moseley, Birmingham (the family home of the Chamberlain family). Her British Red Cross Card indicates that she also served on two different ambulance trains in France and lastly at the Voluntary Aid Hospital in Torquay, Devon where she served from 13 December 1917 until 1 April 1919.

Matron Florence McFerran was awarded the Order of St John (Honorary Nursing Service) and the 1915 Star for service in France. Florence McFerran died on 27 August 1923 at the Union Infirmary, Lisburn Road, Belfast.

Nurse Olive (Olivia) M MACRORY: Ulster Volunteer Hospital at Pau, France from 1 April to 8 August 1915. Prior to this she was a probationer nurse at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Belfast from 1 to 24 March 1915. Olive Macrory’s address on the British Red Cross records is given as ‘Coolegrean’ Windsor Avenue, Belfast. However, this is the address of her uncle, Robert Augustus Macrory and her unmarried aunt Olivia Elder Macrory. Nurse Macrory was the daughter of Samuel Macrory and Anna Martin and she was born in Londonderry around 1882. She had a sister Ethel who married George Garnett and a brother Robert Valentine Macrory.

Olive Macrory was from the lineage of the well-known legal family of the same name in Belfast and Dublin. The Macrory Memorial Presbyterian Church in North Belfast was also named in their honour when it was built around 1894/5. Olive’s uncle Robert Augustus Macrory was an extremely wealthy man and when he died in 1919 he left £62,000 to be divided between his two sons and his unmarried sister Olivia. Nurse Macrory did not benefit.
Nurse Margaret Dorothea MITCHELL: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Lyon, March 1917 to August 1917 and with the Ulster Unit, who were part of the 559th American Field Ambulance attached to the 3rd French Army, January 1918 to November 1918. Margaret Mitchell was born on 16 November 1888, the second youngest of six children born to Andrew Mitchell MA, Oxon, Advocate and Sheriff-Substitute at Stirling and Jane Fordyce Buchanan Mirrlees. They lived at Langlees House, Biggar, Scotland which was built for Andrew Mitchell in 1890-1 with a further wing added in 1899. Margaret’s British Red Cross war record, like many others that I have consulted, has dates that do not match those given on the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll. Additional information on the British Red Cross records is written as ‘France Military’. I have come across this reference in several other instances where I was certain the nurses were part of the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France and I can only assume this is the case here. The British Red Cross record also indicates that Margaret was still serving as late as September 1919, presumably still in France somewhere.

Margaret’s sister Miss Elizabeth B Mitchell was the first lady town planner in Scotland. She obtained her BA at Trinity, Dublin and another degree at Oxford and for a time was Assistant Classical Lecturer at Royal Holloway College, Egham, Surrey (now part of the University of London). In 1916 Elizabeth inherited Langlees House when her father died and remained there until 1964 when the property was sold. Elizabeth Mitchell died in 1980.

Nurse Carrie MOORE: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau October 1914 to February 1915. Carrie Moore was from the townland of Drumleene, near the village of Ballindrait in the Parish of Clonleigh, County Donegal and was the daughter of Andrew and Charlotte Moore. She had older brothers Galbraith, Samuel and Andrew and an older sister Mary Catherine. By the time of the 1911 Census her parents were dead and she lived with two of her brothers and her sister, Mary Catherine in the family home.

Carrie, like my grandmother, Edith, was one of the five probationer nurses who accompanied the group to France in October 1914. Her record of service on the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll for the hospital in Pau shows her dates of service there as October 1914 to February 1915, while her Red Cross War Record indicates service in ‘Military Hospital, France’ as October 1915 to November 1916! Whilst the Red Cross record does not specifically mention the UVH in Pau or Lyon, the term ‘Military Hospital, France’ may well refer to her service at both the Ulster Volunteer Hospitals in Pau and Lyon.
My grandmother Edith has the same dates of service at the Pau hospital as Carrie Moore (as indicated on the UVH Medal Rolls) but on Edith's Red Cross War Record it clearly indicates that she was with the UVH when they moved to Lyon at the end of April 1916.

Carrie Moore had further service at the 1st Southern General Military Hospital in Birmingham from March 1917 to April 1919 and then R.A.F. Military Hospital, Kidbrooke, Greenwich, SE London from 28 May 1919 to 22 September 1919.

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**Sister Isabella PATRICK:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau and Lyon October 1914 to August 1917 and whereabouts unknown between September and November 1917. Born in 1884 she was the eldest daughter of Anne Moore and William Patrick. In the 1901 Census, 16 year old Isabella (Bella) Patrick is living in the townland of Magheracolton, Ardstraw Parish, County Tyrone. Her father William (aged 41) is a widower and Isabella is the eldest of five children.

In 1911 they are still living at the same place but her father is now dead and Isabella has taken on the responsibility as 'Head of the Household'. Only her brother Joseph and sisters Elizabeth and Mabel are listed. Another sister Annie (who was 9 years old on the 1901 Census) is not shown. However, whilst most Census return forms are signed by the ‘Head of the Household’ this particular return is signed by Isabella’s brother Joseph on behalf of Isabella.

'Bella' Patrick was Charge Nurse in Castlederg Infirmary, County Tyrone, at the outbreak of World War One. Her desire to offer her nursing services for the War effort and her subsequent request to the Infirmary's Board of Guardians to be released from her local nursing duties, led to a protracted discussion which was detailed for some weeks in the local press. When the North Tyrone unit left for France on 7 October 1914, Bella Patrick was among the group.

In January 1917 Sister Patrick applied to join the Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserves (QAIMNSR). Her application was approved and she had been given orders to proceed to 12 General Hospital, Rouen, France. However, on 14 February 1917 the War Office received a letter stating that she would not now be going to France. It would appear from the Medal Roll that Sister Patrick stayed at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Lyon until the end of 1917 when she became Sister at Park Hall Camp, Oswestry, where she remained until sometime in 1919. It was while nursing at Park Hall Camp, that Sister Patrick was awarded The Royal Red Cross, 2nd Class ‘In recognition of valuable nursing services in connection with War’ and this was bestowed upon her at an Investiture ceremony in Buckingham Palace on 24 March 1920.
Following the end of the First World War, Isabella Patrick remained on the QAIMNS Reserve and it was from the Reserves that she again was ‘called up’ in May 1941 under ‘Emergency Commissions’ and given the rank of Sister to serve in the Second World War alongside the full-time Queen Alexandra nurses.

Following her time in England, Bella also nursed in Omagh General Hospital, formerly the Workhouse. She moved to 23 Parkmount Road Belfast in the 1950s and worked in a private nursing home before moving to Londonderry to live with her sister Annie. Bella never married and died in 1966. She is buried in her home Parish of Ardstraw, County Tyrone.

Isabella Patrick pictured outside the, General Hospital, Omagh’ formerly Omagh Workhouse. (Photograph courtesy of Patrick Family, Newtownstewart)
CHAPTER 13

Nurse Vida May PURVIS: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau from January 1916 to April 1916. Vida May Purvis was the youngest child of David Purvis, a Tea Agent and his wife Frances, and at the time of the 1901 Census, the family were living in Downshire Road, Bangor, County Down. Vida had two sisters and one brother. Her sister Ada was 28, Amy was 14 and her brother William John, who was a barrister, was 26. By 1911 Vida’s parents are now living in Knockdene Park, East Belfast. Her father is still working as a Tea Merchant but there are no other family members living at the address. Vida, by this time, is now aged 17 and is at a boarding school in Seaview Street, Warrenpoint, County Down.

I have not been able to find any of Vida’s siblings on the 1911 Census but sadly one of her siblings has died as indicated on the ‘return’ of her parents, which states that only three children are now alive. When Vida’s father dies on 1 July 1926 he is still residing at Knockdene Park, but also has property at 90 Marlborough Park Central, Belfast.

Nurse Dorothy Barbara SANDYS: Ulster Volunteer Hospital Pau and Lyon, October 1915 to October 1916. Dorothy Sandys was the eldest of three daughters of Henry and Maud Sandys of the townland of Tinnapark Demesne, Kilcoole Parish, County Wicklow. She was born around 1889, followed by her sister Hilda, who was born in 1892 and Margery born in 1894. Her father was a Magistrate and landowner and the Sandys family had been prominent in that area of County Wicklow for several generations. They were members of Powerscourt Parish Church.

Dorothy’s great-grandfather, Robert Sandys, had been agent to Lord Powerscourt in the 19th century; an occupation carried on by her grandfather and father for various members of the ‘Landed gentry’.

The 1901 Census shows them living in a large fourteen-roomed house with two servants and also owning three other houses in the townland. They are all still living in the same house at the time of the 1911 Census, with the exception of Margery who is not among the list of family members nor is she listed elsewhere in Ireland. This would indicate that she either died in the years between the Census’ or is living outside Ireland.

Both Dorothy and her sister Hilda served as VADs in World War One and for her part, Hilda was awarded the Royal Red Cross by the King, at Buckingham Palace. She went on
to join the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force, in World War Two, becoming an Officer. In the 1960’s Hilda returned to north County Wicklow where she lived until her death in 1984 at the great age of 92.

I have been unable to find any reference to Dorothy Sandys after she left the UVH in October 1916, by which time it was located at Lyons. However, she does feature several times in Nurse Daphne Strong’s journal. (See Chapter Nine ‘Lot 151’ – The Journal of Nurse Daphne Stronge, Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau 1915 to 1916).

**Sister Sarah Ensworth SHIMMON:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau Oct 1914 to date unknown. Sarah Shimmon was the daughter of John Ross Shimmon and his wife Martha. In the 1901 Census she is listed in the family home at Donegall Pass, Belfast, along with three other siblings. Sarah is aged 19 and gives her occupation as ‘Hospital assistant’. By the time of the 1911 Census, the family have moved to the Lisburn Road area of Belfast, but Sarah is not listed within the household, nor is she listed anywhere else in Ireland. Sister Shimmon was one of the original group of the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps when they went to Pau in October 1914 and prior to that she had been nursing in the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Belfast.

**Directrice Rosabelle Lindesay SINCLAIR:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, and Lyon October 1914 to August 1917 and the Ulster Unit, which became part of the 559th American Field Ambulance who were attached to the 3rd French Army, from August 1917 to November 1918. Rosabelle Lindesay Sinclair was the youngest of three children of James Montgomery Sinclair and his wife Mary Everina Sinclair née Barton. The Sinclairs are synonymous with Holy Hill House, (more commonly referred to as Holly Hill House) in the townland of Holly Hill, Leckpatrick Parish, County Tyrone. The first Sinclair to arrive in the area was Rev John Sinclair who was descended from a James Sinclair of Caithness, Scotland. The Rev Sinclair was Rector of Leckpatrick Parish Church and bought Holyhill (Hollyhill) House in 1683.

If there is one person who deserves special mention in this book it is Rosabelle Sinclair. When I started my research, I could not find very much written material about Rosabelle but starting with the 1901 Census led me on a journey of intrigue. The 1901 Census states
that Rosabelle was born in France, and her date of birth, 21 January 1884 is confirmed on her headstone. The 1911 Census lists her as a visitor in a Barton household in County Kildare – relatives of her mother. This was the link to France as these Barton’s were of the famous Barton & Gueustier wine merchants, Bordeaux, France. I can only assume that Rosabelle was born somewhere in this region. It was not an unusual occurrence that the children of James M Sinclair and Mary Everina Sinclair were not born in any of the family homes either at Holly Hill in County Tyrone or at Bonny Glen near Inver, County Donegal. Their first-born, William Hugh Montgomery Sinclair was born in Dublin on 31 December 1868 and the next child, Everina Mary Caroline Sinclair was born on 21 May 1870 in County Dublin. When Rosabelle was born her brother was already sixteen and her sister was fourteen so the age gap was considerable.

It may have been the case that Rosabelle spent her formative years in either France (hence her fluency in the French language) or perhaps Dublin where the opportunity to learn French would certainly have been more available than in County Donegal or in County Tyrone. She was also an Irish language speaker. Rosabelle certainly did not attend any of the schools in the areas around the Sinclair home at Holly Hill near Strabane in County Tyrone. Several school registers checked did not include her name.

The Sinclair family seemed to spend their time between their homes in County Donegal and County Tyrone. Rosabelle’s grand-parents, William and Sarah Sinclair certainly lived at Bonny Glen but perhaps when their son married Mary Everina Barton in 1868, the senior Sinclair’s relocated to Holly Hill, in County Tyrone. This assumption is further enhanced by advertisements placed by them in the Belfast News Letter looking for staff for the home at Holly Hill. On 7 July 1869 they were looking for a kitchen maid and farm worker. William Sinclair then advertised for a ‘boy who can wait at table’ in July 1870 and Mrs Sarah Sinclair advertised for an ‘experienced cook’ and footman in mid-1883.

The senior Sinclair family continued to live at Holly Hill until William Sinclair died in August 1896, followed by his wife in December 1898. It was around this time, I believe, that James and Everina Sinclair and their family moved to Holly Hill in County Tyrone but still kept on the family home in Bonny Glen, County Donegal where James Sinclair often stayed because of his business interests there and also he was High Sheriff of County Donegal for 1899. However, a dreadful tragedy befell the family at the end of August 1899 when Rosabelle’s father took his own life.

Upon reading about this tragedy for the first time, I could not quite believe that something so terrible could actually happen. No wonder the newspapers used the headlines, ‘Dreadful Donegal Tragedy’, ‘Pathetic Story of a Terrible Mistake’, ‘Sad Result of a Mistake’ ‘The Misunderstood Message’, ‘A Telegraphist’s Error.’

On Sunday 27 August 1899 Rosabelle’s father, James M Sinclair, received a telegram at his house in Bonny Glen near Inver in County Donegal. The telegram was addressed with
these words, ‘Sinclair, Bonny Glen, Inver.’ The message contained in the telegram was “Go Donegal. Rose died last night.” Upon reading these words the distraught James Sinclair, assuming that this referred to his daughter Rosabelle, summoned one of the servants to tell him of the dreadful news and to get his horse ready as he was going to Burtonport, near to where his daughter was on holiday. Burtonport, is a fishing village on the mid-west coast of County Donegal. Rosabelle Sinclair was actually staying in the Sinclair holiday home on Inishcoo Island, one of the smaller islands between the County Donegal mainland and the large Arranmore Island. Burtonport was the main access route to these Islands and it was here that she was participating in the annual Burtonport Regatta.

The servants were harnessing the horse when they heard a loud bang from the house but thought it was a shooting party nearby. Upon investigating what was keeping ‘the Master’ from getting on his journey, they were confronted with the dreadful sight of James Sinclair lying dead by the fireplace in the drawing-room. A photo of his beloved Rosabelle was on the mantelpiece. Rumours soon spread that not only had Rosabelle Sinclair died but that her father also had died in some tragic accident. Rosabelle was reported as being drowned at the Regatta in Burtonport; drowned whilst swimming and even drowned whilst trying to rescue her dog which had fallen into the sea!

At Hollyhill House, near Strabane, Rosabelle’s mother had just returned from the Dublin Horse Show on the Saturday night. Late on Sunday night she received news of the ‘double’ tragedy. Immediately she and Rosabelle’s sister, Mary Everina and a man servant headed off in a horse-drawn trap. They reached Ballybofey, County Donegal at 3am where fresh horses were made available. Mrs Sinclair was persuaded to stay the night and to journey to Bonny Glen the next morning by train, while Mary Everina continued her journey to Burtonport. Mary Everina’s sighting of Rosabelle, when she eventually reached Inishcoo Island, was mixed with relief and great anguish when realisation dawned on them both that their beloved father had died unnecessarily.

At the Coroner’s inquest on 2 September 1899, held in the room where James Sinclair had died at Bonny Glen, the story unfolded. The telegram was intended for James Sinclair’s son, William. William Hugh Montgomery Sinclair, a barrister in Dublin and later British Vice-Consul in Manila, Boston and Buenos Aires had rented three rooms in a house in Lower Merrion Street, Dublin, owned by three sisters by the name of Malone. One of the Malone ladies was called Rose. When not living in the rented accommodation himself, it was used by family members and friends when visiting Dublin. In March 1899 Rose Malone became ill and such was the friendship between the Malone sisters and William Sinclair, he asked to be kept informed of Rose’s health. The telegram received by his father on 27 August 1899, was intended for him informing him that Rose Malone had died. Also, the words on the telegram, ‘Go Donegal’ should have been ‘Co Donegal’ (County Donegal) and in fact written as part of the address, not as part of the message.
James Montgomery Sinclair’s ‘remains’ were brought from Bonny Glen to Inver Railway Station and then on to Strabane Railway Station on Wednesday 6 September 1899 for burial at Leckpatrick Old Graveyard. He was 58 years of age, Rosabelle was just 15.

The lengthy obituary in the *Strabane Chronicle* at the time of her father’s death, gives us additional information about Rosabelle’s character. She seemed to be a great outdoors person, participating in many sports, like the Burtonport Regatta. She was also an accomplished horsewoman taking part in frequent hunts with her father and also a prize winner in other horse field events in Strabane and Londonderry. There is no doubt that Rosabelle was a greatly loved daughter and perhaps the fact that she enjoyed and partook of many of the outdoor pursuits that her father enjoyed, endeared her to him even more. There is also an indication in the obituary that Rosabelle may have been home-schooled. In the rumours and counter-rumours that widely circulated after her ‘supposed’ death, one participant in the Burtonport Regatta related that as he “sailed off after the regatta, about six o’clock, and as we were passing Inishcoo there was Miss Rosie standing beside her governess on the little quay.”

Within a few years from 1896 to 1899 Rosabelle had ‘lost’ her grandparents and her beloved father and one wonders how joyful was the wedding of Rosabelle’s sister, Everina who married Charles L D Maxwell in 1900. The Maxwells then went off to New Zealand where their first child Everina Heather, was born in 1901. However they returned to Ireland at some date and are listed on the 1911 Census at the Sinclair holiday home on Inishcoo Island, County Donegal.

In 1924 Rosabelle’s only brother William Hugh Montgomery, who was a barrister and also served in the Diplomatic Service in the early 1900’s, married an American called Bessie E Hayes and returned to Holly Hill. Sadly, William’s marriage was short as he died in 1930. Bessie died in 1957 and is buried in Old Leckpatrick Graveyard. They had no children.

The death of Rosabelle’s mother (Mary Everina née Barton) on 22nd April 1925 must have been a severe loss to Rosabelle. Her mother was a very well-known woman in counties Tyrone and Donegal and in many ways Rosabelle was following in her footsteps as regards her involvement in many organisations and causes. The Sinclair family were very much involved with St Patrick’s Church of Ireland, Leckpatrick near Strabane from the early 1900s where Rosabelle was organist for a time and her name is inscribed on the First World War Memorial Plaque within the Church. She had also been an organist at Inver Parish Church, County Donegal when the family resided there until around 1899.

Rosabelle served with the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps in France from October 1914 to November 1918. For her services to the French she was awarded the highest honour of the French Government, the Croix de Guerre and also the Médaille des épidémies. When Rosabelle returned from the Great War she became involved in the school she had previously helped to set up on the Holly Hill estate, but it was not a success and closed around 1920.
In 1910, Rosabelle had joined the St John’s Ambulance Association when a branch was set up in Strabane and it was to this organisation that she returned to after the war. Between 1924 and 1940 she was organiser of the local branch and was head of the Nursing Division. From 1933 until 1942 she also represented the Northern Ireland area on the Central Committee of the Women’s Legion in London and between 1938 and 1948 she was Chairman of the Northern Ireland Area of the Women’ Section. During the Second World War Rosabelle served as Camp Commandant of the St John’s Ambulance Brigade near Londonderry and also with the Auxiliary Fire Service.

Nearer home, Rosabelle had been Chairman of the Leckpatrick Branch of the North Tyrone Women’s Unionist Association (her mother had been the founder member and Secretary of the North Tyrone Women’s Unionist Association formed in April 1907), a delegate at the Ulster Unionist Council meetings in Belfast, a member of Strabane Rural Council, Strabane Board of Guardians and Strabane Hospital Committee. Rosabelle’s only interest, outside of local politics, was poultry breeding. She had her own poultry farm and was a member of the British Poultry Breeders Association. For her years of devoted service to so many organisations, Rosabelle, deservedly, was awarded the MBE in June 1948 but it came at great cost.

When the King’s Birthday Honours List was announced Rosabelle was in hospital “suffering from the results of years of overwork in the interests of the public” and it was in Strabane Hospital that Rosabelle passed away on 8 March 1952 at the age of 67.

Although Rosabelle’s sister-in-law Bessie was still alive at the time of her demise, it was the Superintendent of the Hospital who registered the death and unbelievably her occupation was given as ‘Housekeeper’. She died from Arterial Sclerosis.

How terribly sad that the entire life’s work of someone who served her country in two World Wars and gave of her time to so many charities and organisations should be encompassed in one word – “Housekeeper”. Some “Housekeeper!”

![Headstone of R L Sinclair in Leckpatrick Old Graveyard, Ballymagory, Strabane, County Tyrone](Image)
WWI Memorial plaque in St Patrick’s Church of Ireland, on the outskirts of Strabane
Rosabelle’s citation is inscribed at the bottom
(Courtesy of St Patrick’s Church of Ireland, Leckpatrick)
Sister Agnes Hamill STEEN: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, March 1915 to March 1916. Agnes Steen was one of six children of James Steen and his wife Mary from the townland of Inshinagh, in the Parish of Ballymoney, County Antrim.

In the 1901 Census, Agnes is living with her parents and other family members but is not listed on the 1911 Irish Census. When she joined the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in March 1915 she was 31 years old.

Sister Claire Rose STEVENS: Ulster Volunteer Hospital Pau October 1914 to April 1915. Sister Stevens was also an original member of the nursing group and prior to going to France she nursed at Dungannon Hospital, County Tyrone. Her British Red Cross War Record gives several addresses for her:- Newark-on-Trent; Nottingham; and Stoke-on-Trent. Between April 1915 and September 1915 Sister Stevens served at No 5 British Red Cross Hospital, Wimereaux, France and No 2 British Red Cross Hospital, Calais.

October and November 1915 was spent at Mulgrave Castle Auxiliary Hospital, Whitby. Other postings were to Havant, Hampshire; Seaham Harbour, Co Durham; Redditch, Worcestershire; and Tattenhall, Cheshire. Sister Steven’s last war posting was to the Voluntary Aid Hospital, at Newton Abbot, Devon from 27 August 1918 to 16 November 1918. At some time towards the end of the war, Claire Stevens got married and became Mrs Egan.
Nurse Daphne Helen STRONGE: Ulster Volunteer Hospital
Pau and Lyon from August 1915 to July 1917. Daphne was
born in 1889 and was one of five daughters of Sir James
Stronge owner of Tynan Abbey, County Armagh, who died
in 1928.

Daphne was an artist and some of her sketches and comments
about her time at the Ulster Hospital in Pau are mentioned
in Chapter Nine. Her only brother, James Matthew Stronge
was killed at the 3rd Battle of Ypres in August 1917 aged
26 and it was while researching the circumstances of his
death I discovered that three weeks previously he had married Miss Winifred Alexander
of Carrickmore, County Tyrone who was one of the original group of nurses who went
to Pau in October 1914. In fact, like Edith Harkness, Winifred was one of the five
probationer nurses.

The Orange Order wrote to Sir James Stronge, who was the Grand Master of County
Armagh, expressing their sympathy on the death of Daphne's brother.

Sir James replied in a letter dated 2 September 1917 (Courtesy of County Armagh Grand
Orange Lodge):

“Dear Crozier, very many thanks for your sympathy. As you know what a fine and
capable fellow my son was and how he drew everyone to him, you can realise the pain
his death causes to me and to all the family.

But if he was required for the cause we are thankful that he fell as he did instantaneously
and at the head of his own dear Battalion of Transport men who would have done
anything for him. They were taking water and ammunition to the men in the fighting
line over a notoriously dangerous road and had been spotted by the heavy guns of the
enemy. His dear wife is very brave about it. She and my second daughter hope to go
back to the Ulster Hospital in France before long.

Yours very truly, James Stronge.”

The untimely death of Sir James Stronge’s only son and heir resulted in the ownership of
Tynan Abbey passing to his cousin, Sir Norman Stronge. He too served in the First World
War and was decorated with the Military Cross. Sadly, Sir Norman, in his eighties along
with his son James, was murdered by the Irish Republican Army in their home at Tynan
Abbey in January 1981.

Daphne stayed at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Lyon until July 1917 when she moved to
the 4th Southern General Hospital, Plymouth and stayed there until April 1918. From April
1918 to November 1918 she returned to France and nursed at No 74 General Hospital, Trouville; from November 1918 to April 1919 at 83 General Hospital, Boulogne, and from April 1919 until June 1919 at No 14 Stationery Hospital also at Boulogne. Her Red Cross War Record indicates that while she was serving at Pau and Lyon she was a VAD and did not receive any pay.

Daphne’s mother Lady Margaret Stronge worked in the War Hospital Supply Depot in Armagh and two of her sisters were also voluntary workers serving locally and then in a Military Hospital in Hampton Court, London, a munitions factory in Coventry and on a farm in Oxfordshire.

Daphne married General Sir Walter William Pitt-Taylor, KCB CMG DSO in 1920 whose military career spanned over forty years. Following their marriage they spent some years in India before returning to England where her husband had several senior military positions and in this capacity travelled to various countries. The arrival of Sir Walter and Lady Pitt-Taylor was reported in the local papers in Sydney, Australia when they went there on a visit in 1938. Daphne died in December 1945 at the relatively young age of 56 and Sir Walter died in November 1950, aged 72. They had no children.
Sister Sarah Elizabeth SULLIVAN: Ulster Volunteer Hospital Pau October 1914 to May 1915. Sister Sullivan was part of the original Ulster Volunteer group who left for France on 7 October 1914. She was aged 35 years at the time of her appointment with a home address in Manchester and was a nurse in Dungannon Hospital, County Tyrone. Following her time at Pau, she was posted to No 3 British Red Cross Hospital, at Abbeville, France where she stayed until July 1915. Sister Sullivan was awarded the 1915 Star.

Nurse Kathleen Elizabeth THOMPSON: Ulster Volunteer Hospital Pau, October 1914 to October 1915. Kathleen Thompson was the daughter of David Thompson, corn merchant, and his wife Elizabeth Mary Thompson. They lived in the Shantallow area of Londonderry, moving there from Deburgh Terrace also in Londonderry between the 1901 and 1911 Census. They had only two of a family – Kathleen born around 1891 and her sister Frances Jane, born around 1893. The British Red Cross records list Kathleen as being from the townland of Coolermoney, in the Parish of Leckpatrick near Strabane, County Tyrone. However, I discovered that the three Thompson’s listed at that location are, in fact, Kathleen’s aunts and uncle and Kathleen was most likely staying with these relatives when she joined the Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps.

One of the five probationers with the Ulster group, Kathleen’s dates of service on the British Red Cross War Record, do correspond with the UVH Medal Roll. From October 1915 there is a gap in her Red Cross war records until August 1916. However, with the subsequent discovery of a postcard she sent from the Strabane area in November 1915, to the hospital in Pau, we now know that by this time she had completed her service with the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau and was soon to be posted to the VAD hospital in Strabane where she remained until July 1916. In August 1916 she was posted as a VAD to 1st Southern General Hospital, Dudley Road, Birmingham, where she stayed until September 1917. On 24 September 1917 Kathleen received a Scarlet Efficiency Stripe.

From February 1918 to August 1918, Kathleen nursed at the 2nd Southern General Hospital, Birmingham followed by service at 1st London General Hospital, Camberwell until February 1919 and her last posting was to 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth, where she remained until 31 July 1919.

After the war Kathleen married Mr Stanley Theodore Carter a Headmaster. Her sister
Frances Jane married Thomas James Beare, an engineer who died in May 1941. When Kathleen's parents retired they moved to live with their daughter Frances and her husband in Castlerock, County Londonderry. Kathleen's father, David Thompson, died in October 1934 leaving £6569 to his daughters and when their mother died in February 1948, both Kathleen and her sister inherited another £6000.

Nurse Mary Pauline TUPPER: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, March 1915 to October 1915. In the 1901 Census, Mary Tupper is just eight years old, living with her mother Emily and two other sisters in the home of her grandmother, Agnes Isabella Greer of Grange townland, Clonfeacle Parish, Moy, County Tyrone. Her father is not listed on the Census but presumably is not in Ireland at that particular time. Mary was born in County Tyrone but her sister Agnes was born in Dublin and her other sister, Loveday Eileen, was born in London.

The Greer’s, who were Quakers, came to Ireland in the mid 1860’s from Northumberland to establish a linen manufacturing business in south-east Tyrone and were extremely well-known in that part of Tyrone. The Tupper family do not appear in the 1911 Census of Ireland but are listed as living in the Hampshire area of England. Mary’s grandmother, now 82, was still living in the Greer home at Grange townland, in County Tyrone with five servants.

When I received ‘Lot 151’ – The Journal of Nurse Daphne Stronge, Ulster Volunteer Hospital Pau, 1915 to 1916, it was apparent from Daphne’s writing that she had a close friendship with Nurse Tupper from childhood and this strong bond still existed between the two with Daphne describing her as “my guide to knowledge” despite the fact that Daphne was her elder by only 4 years.

Nurse Sylvia Fairlie Douglas WATSON: There are two sets of dates on the Ulster Volunteer Hospital Medal Roll for Nurse Watson, December 1915-June 1916 and January 1917-August 1917. The first date of service I assumed related to her time at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau and their first month at the hospital in Lyon, however, her British Red Cross record indicates that she ‘joined the French Red Cross’ and served as a VAD at Hopital No 222 Menton, French Riviera between these dates.

The Ulster Volunteer Hospital was attached to the French Red Cross as was this convalescent hospital in Menton so it would seem that personnel attached to the French Red Cross could be sent to any of their hospitals. Nurse Watson’s second term of service with the Ulster
Volunteer Hospital at Lyon, according to the Medal Roll was January 1917 to August 1917. This agrees with the British Red Cross record. Prior to her first posting to the UVH, Nurse Watson, who was from Colchester, worked at Essex County Hospital from October 1914 to May 1915, Gostwyck Hospital, Devon for several weeks and again at Essex County Hospital from June 1916 to December 1916.

**Nurse Beatrice Eleanor WHELAN:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau from September 1915 to February 1916. Beatrice was born in 1887 and one of six children of the Rev Ernest Whelan and his wife Deborah. Rev Whelan was the Rector of Kilbride Parish Church, Bray, County Wicklow and extremely well known as a musician, composer of hymns and choir conductor. The 1901 Census shows the family living in the townland of Kilbride but in 1910 the Rev Whelan died and by the time of the 1911 Census the family had moved to Sydenham Villas, Bray.

Prior to joining the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau, Nurse Whelan had spent the months of April to June 1915, in Dublin University Hospital. On 26 October 1916 she was posted to 16th General Hospital, France which had been established at Le Treport in January 1915 and remained there until the 26 May 1917, when this hospital was taken over by the Americans. An interesting little note on her British Red Cross war record mentions that she 'played the violin at over 20 concerts in Malta'. Beatrice obviously inherited her musical talents from her father. When she finally left war service in November 1919 she had an address on the British Red Cross records as 11 Prince of Wales Street, Bray.

There is also a local connection to this family through Beatrice’s brother, the Rev Robert Hamilton Whelan. He was Rector at one time of Lislimnaghan Parish Church (on the outskirts of Omagh) and his daughter Aureole Helen married into the Archdale family. Rev Robert Hamilton Whelan died in December 1959.

**Doctor H L Warren WOODROFFE:** Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau and Lyon, October 1914 to August 1917. Harry Lewis Warren Woodroffe was born in 1888 in Sussex, England, where his father, Dr AW Woodroffe, practised. Warren had a distinguished career as a medical student at Trinity College, Dublin, where he won a scholarship in anatomy and physiology, the Purser medal in physiology and a gold medal winner in natural science.

Dr Woodroffe graduated in 1911 and following a short time at the Royal City of Dublin Hospital, where he won the Wheeler
medal in medicine, he moved to London for postgraduate hospital experience. In London he was house-surgeon at the Royal Cancer Hospital, clinical assistant at Great Ormond Street and house-surgeon and house-physician at the Royal Northern Hospital.

In October 1914 he was one of two doctors who accompanied the Ulster Volunteer unit to Pau in France, where he was surgeon in charge. He moved with the unit to Lyon in April 1916 and remained there until August 1917 when he received a Commission as a Captain in the RAMC.

While at the Ulster Hospital at Lyon Dr Woodroffe wrote a lengthy article for The British Journal of Surgery on “The Reparation of Cranial Defects by means of Cartilaginous Grafts”. He witnessed many severe injuries of all types caused by the weapons of war used at that time but he was particularly interested in repairing those severe head wounds which left gaps in the skull. He also was acutely aware of the resulting scars and in his article concluded by saying “Finally, and an important point in frontal wounds, the cosmetic result must be considered. A depressed, discoloured scar on the forehead is an unsightly thing; its removal is in itself well worth an operation.”

After the war he married and entered general practice in Chester. During the war he had become a skilful surgeon and had several useful contributions on the treatment of wounds published in the British Journal of Surgery. As well as being a GP he also was elected to the surgical staff of the Chester Royal Infirmary – a post he held until the age of 60. Dr Woodroffe also kept up with new surgical developments and techniques, completing a MCh degree (Master of Surgery) at the University of Dublin in 1930. At the time of Dr Woodroffe’s death in February 1961, after a short illness, he was still a busy general practitioner in Chester.

Sister Isabella WRIGHT: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Pau, October 1914 to April 1915. Sister Wright was from Southport in Lancashire and from 1902 until the outbreak of war she nursed in Strabane Workhouse Infirmary where she was Head Nurse from 1910. After her time at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Pau, she returned to Strabane Workhouse Infirmary where she remained until February 1917 when she returned home to England.

Nurse Annie WYLIE: Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Lyon 15 May 1916 to 15 December 1916. Nurse Wylie was born in County Londonderry around 1870 but in both the 1901 and 1911 Irish Census, Annie is living with her sister, Elizabeth in Glebe, Straffan, County Kildare. Elizabeth’s husband Lionel is the Rector of Straffan. It was also in 1911 that Rosabelle Sinclair, Strabane was visiting her relatives, the Barton’s in Straffan and it is quite possible that they knew each other. Perhaps Rosabelle invited Annie Wylie to come out to the Ulster Volunteer Hospital in Lyon! In July 1917 Nurse Wylie was posted to Firmount Hospital, Clane, County Kildare and remained there until February 1919. In between nursing employment she worked as a needleworker for the British Red Cross.
PROFILES OF OTHERS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE

**Catlin Cicely Du Sautoy:** Miss Du Sautoy was born in Collingham, Yorkshire in 1875. Her illustrious and distinguished career was remarkable, when at the young age of 22 she was appointed as Lecturing Sister at the Training School of the London Hospital. This was followed by three years at Guy’s Hospital, where she was the Gold Medallist of her year; Superintendent and Inspector under Queen Victoria’s Jubilee Institute; Lecturer and Examiner under the British Red Cross Society; and Lecturer under the Medical Board of the Ulster Volunteer Force from March to September 1914.

Her war work began in March 1915 in England when she was appointed Organiser and Matron of a VAD Hospital at Standish, Gloucestershire; a position she held for fifteen months. She then successively held the positions of Night Sister at the Ulster Volunteer Hospital, Lyon; Staff Nurse, Charge Nurse and Home Sister at the hospital La Panne, Belgium, and Matron of the Astoria Hospital, Paris until the end of the war. She remained in France as Organiser and Director within the devastated areas of the country for a further twenty-two months, under the French Committee of the British Red Cross. This was followed by work in the city of Reims and elsewhere, under the American Red Cross, until April 1921.

For her war work Catlin Cicely Du Sautoy was awarded the Médaille d’Honneur des Épidémies, the Médaille de la Reconnaissance française and the Plaque of the Compagnie des Sauveteurs de Reims – the last being a very rare distinction. She died on 9 June 1968.

**LUNNEY brothers:** Robert & William were the sons of William and Margery Lunney from the townland of Aughalane, Plumbridge, County Tyrone.

Robert was born in 1889 and William in 1890. They had a brother John James, born in 1893 and a sister Anne Elizabeth born in 1899. Their father was a labourer and by the time of the 1911 Census, his wife Margery, had died and so too had Anne Elizabeth. One can imagine the loss of a mother in this household of men and the sense that they were now without ‘purpose and direction’ and when a local company of the Ulster Volunteer Force was being formed in the Plumbridge area with Rylands (townland) near Gortin, Robert Lunney immediately joined and became Half-Company Commander.

He was a very active member, attending all parades and drills and when called upon to volunteer for war service, joined the 9th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in mid-1915. At a social evening held in Plumbridge Orange Hall on 17 September 1915 to say farewell to those who
had ‘joined up’, Robert Lunney responded to the good wishes expressed by all those present, saying ‘that as an Orangeman he only did his duty. His country was in danger, and it was the duty of every loyal man, who could be spared, to give his life, if necessary, to uphold their country’s honour. Moreover, they were all proud to belong to the Ulster Division and in particular the 9th Inniskillings, which was considered one of the best battalions in Kitchener’s Army.” While no mention is made of his brother William, he had joined the 10th Inniskilling Fusiliers. At this same event my grandmother Edith Harkness was present. She was currently home on leave from her hospital in Pau, France and was one of a group of local young ladies who sang a few songs.

Perhaps Robert Lunney felt an affinity with Edith Harkness as he sent a Christmas card from France in December 1915 to her family, which is now in the possession of my mother.
There's no Country like our own,
No flag we love so well;
No friends like the dear old friends
Who neath its shadow dwell.

God of our fathers, known of old,
Lord of our tur-dung battle line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dumidion over pain and pine.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget?
— Rudyard Kipling.

A Kindly Message of
Goodwill and Cordial Greeting
sent at Christmastide,
but continually yours.
From
Lance Corporal R. F. Lunney.

9th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers,
France.
Christmas, 1915.

(Courtesy of Muriel Houston)
In June 1916 Cpl Robert Lunney came home on leave. He appealed to the young men of Rylands and Plumbridge to “not hold back, but join at once and assist their comrades in keeping up the glorious reputation that the Tyrone Volunteers have already gained.” During his few days at home he got several new recruits to ‘join up’. Robert was a member of Eden LOL 39 (near Plumbridge).

Cpl R Lunney’s life came to a swift end on 1 July 1916. He fell on the first day of what was to become known as the Battle of the Somme. His Commanding Officer, Lt Col Ambrose Ricardo (Sion Mills) wrote of Cpl R Lunney in the *Tyrone Constitution*, “I am grieved to say that Corporal Robert Lunney fell during the attack on July 1st. Together with many other brave and gallant Ulster gentlemen he gave his life for his King and country and helped to win honour for Ulster.” Like thousands of others, Robert has no known grave.

In July 2012 I paid my first visit to some of the battlefields and cemeteries in France and Belgium. Prior to my visit I started to research the possible whereabouts of the Lunney brothers as I felt they had been forgotten in my home village of Plumbridge. I can recall vague conversations from my childhood of some of my great aunts and uncles about the ‘poor Lunney brothers’. They talked of how the brothers were never further than a few miles from their home, were general farm labourers, motherless and now lying all alone in some part of France or Belgium.

William Lunney died on 10 August 1917 (3rd Battle of Ypres) and was initially buried at the Irish Farm Cemetery, Ypres and was later moved to the New Irish Farm Cemetery, St Jean (north-east of Ypres). I was unable to find any trace of Robert Lunney but on mentioning this to our very knowledgeable guide while we were in Belgium, he said he would make enquiries. Our guide was able to tell me that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission had been made aware ‘a few years ago by someone in the army’ that Cpl Robert Lunney’s name had been omitted from the Thiepval War Memorial but his name would be added to an ‘addenda panel’ whenever a suitable position was found. Imagine my surprise then, when I recently discovered that the ‘someone in the army’ was my second cousin, retired army Major, Alan McFarland, also a native of Plumbridge. In 2015, Cpl Robert Lunney’s name was added to an Addenda Panel on the Thiepval Memorial, along with some others who had also been omitted.

The Lunney name is completely gone from the area of Plumbridge and ended at the death of bachelor John James Lunney, brother of William and Robert, who died on 21 April 1984 at the age of 92. James had worked for many years on the farm of my grandparents, Walter and Edith McFarlane.

The anniversary of the Battle of the Somme (1st July) is commemorated in towns and villages throughout the province of Ulster. Band parades accompanied by members of the Loyal Orange Lodges gather to remember those Orangemen who lost their lives in the Great
War and as children, we were always very excited about going down to the village to see and hear the bands. In the 1950s and 1960s several bands and lodges would parade through the village but even though I was still quite young, I can recall that there was an old lady who always cried when the bands passed her as she stood alone at the side of the road. I could never understand why the bands made her cry when we were happy and excited at the whole spectacle.

When I asked my mother why ‘Isa’ was crying she told me that she was to be married to a soldier who died in the First World War. It was only very many years later that I learned the soldier was, in fact, Robert Lunney.

ENDNOTES
1 The National Archives, WO95/3989/6
2 The National Archives, WO95/3989/6
3 The National Archives, WO95/3989/6
4 The National Archives, WO95/3989/6
5 British Red Cross – War Service Record Card of Volunteers, Mary Dickson
6 The National Archives, W095/3990/2
7 The National Archives, WO95/3990/3
8 The National Archives, WO95/3990/5
9 The National Archives, WO95/3990/5
10 The National Archives, WO95/3990/5
11 The National Archives, W095/3991/6
12 *Dorothea’s War: The Diaries of a First World War Nurse*, Richard Crewdson, 2013, p.250
13 *Dorothea’s War: The Diaries of a First World War Nurse*, Richard Crewdson, 2013, p.256
14 *Dorothea’s War: The Diaries of a First World War Nurse*, Richard Crewdson, 2013, p.262
15 *Dorothea’s War: The Diaries of a First World War Nurse*, Richard Crewdson, 2013, p.267
16 *Dorothea’s War: The Diaries of a First World War Nurse*, Richard Crewdson, 2013, p.267-8
17 *Dorothea’s War: The Diaries of a First World War Nurse*, Richard Crewdson, 2013, p.279
18 *Dorothea’s War: The Diaries of a First World War Nurse*, Richard Crewdson, 2013, p.298
19 *Dorothea’s War: The Diaries of a First World War Nurse*, Richard Crewdson, 2013, p.347-8
20 *The London Gazette*, 9 April 1919, p.4676
21 *Strabane Chronicle*, 2 September 1899, p.3
22 *The British Journal of Surgery*, 1918 Vol 5, p.42
23 *Tyrone Constitution*, 23 June 1916, p.2
24 *Tyrone Constitution*, 20 July 1916, p.6
“TELL THEM OF US”

Harry Lauder and his son Captain John Lauder
(Roads to the Great War)
During my time working on this publication (on a part-time basis only) I have read dozens of books and many articles relating to the Great War. The physical and mental suffering, hardship, unbelievable bravery and great sacrifice of all those involved, was starkly evident. There were times, at the beginning of my research that I often ‘skipped over’ the more gruesome details but as time progressed, I read every word. I needed to understand the type of horrific scenes my grandmother would have witnessed in the hospitals in France and later in Ripon, England.

However, two paragraphs from one particular book stand out from all the rest and I often go back to the book and re-read it over and over. It comes not from the many well-known military historians, historians in general or the pen of a war correspondent, but from a very famous Scottish entertainer, Sir Harry Lauder.

On one of my visits to France and Belgium we were on a conducted tour and our guide indicated a very straight road ahead as far as the eye could see. He said a song had been written about this road by a famous Scottish singer whose son had died in the Great War. I immediately thought of Sir Harry Lauder and his song ‘Keep Right On to the End of the Road’ and I was correct. This led me to finding out more about the song and Sir Harry Lauder and I bought a copy of a book he had written entitled ‘A Minstrel in France’.

John Lauder was the only child of Harry Lauder and his wife Ann and when Britain declared War on 4 August 1914, John and his parents were in Australia. He was soon to take up employment as a barrister, but as an officer in the Territorial Army, he was ‘called up’ before his career began.

On 28 December 1916, Captain John Lauder was killed in action at Pozières, France and is interred in Ovillers Military Cemetery. His father and mother were consumed with grief and hid themselves away in their house in Dunoon, Scotland for almost a year. Friends tried to encourage Harry to resume his work of entertaining but he could not even think of the prospect. However, he had been contracted to do some shows in London towards the end of 1917 and with much persuasion, agreed to fulfil his contract. A great majority of the audiences were soldiers home ‘on leave’ and their ecstatic welcome and understanding of Harry’s personal grief and being able to empathise with his situation, was a turning point in his decision to resume his work as an entertainer.
However, Harry Lauder had a plan, and a plan that he would not give up. Yes, he would devote his time to entertaining the troops but not in the relative safety of his home environs or in the coastal areas of northern France. No, he let it be known that “it was the real front I was eager to reach. I wanted to be where my boy had been and to see his grave” and with the help of friends ‘in high places’ that was exactly what he did. He was allowed to proceed but would have to obey all orders given by his army escorts and for several months he sang to troops wherever he met them. It could be at the side of a road, in a trench, in temporary billets or in the many hospitals. Impromptu concerts were even given to weary troops, trudging back from the ‘Front line’. In 1919 Harry Lauder received a Knighthood for his services in the Great War.

Still his aim was to see his son’s grave and knowing that the cemetery was near the village of Ovillers, he duly arrived at his goal. A guide was dispatched with Sir Harry to the cemetery where around five-hundred British soldiers were buried. Pointing out the row in which Captain John Lauder lay, the guide stopped.

“and so I went alone to my boy's grave and flung myself down upon the warm, friendly earth and as I lay there on that brown mound, under the June sun that day, all that he had been, and all that he meant to me and to his mother came rushing back afresh to my memory, opening anew my wounds of grief. I thought of him as a baby, and as a wee laddie beginning to run around and talk to us. I thought of him in every phase and bit of his life, and of the friends we had been, he and I! Such chums we were, always!

And as I lay there, as I look back upon it now, I can think of but the one desire that ruled and moved me. I wanted to reach my arms down into that dark grave and clasp my boy tightly to my breast.”

Heart rending words from Harry Lauder who eventually got to see his boy’s grave! But what anguish for the loved ones of those from all over the world who never knew exactly where the resting place was of their husband, son, brother or uncle. Their personal torment followed many of these families to their own graves. Only from reading and discovering for ourselves can we begin to have some understanding of the supreme sacrifice that millions made during the Great War of 1914 to 1918. Harry Lauder’s words are as true today as they were over a Century ago. It is all about the loss of a human being, a loved one, a family member that can never be replaced.

ENDNOTES
1 A Minstrel in France, Harry Lauder, 1918, p.68
2 A Minstrel in France, Harry Lauder, 1918, p.188 & 189
TO
THE MEMORY OF MY BELOVED SON
CAPTAIN JOHN LAUDER
First 8th, Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders
Killed in France, December 28, 1916

Oh, there’s sometimes I am lonely
And I’m weary a’ the day
To see the face and clasp the hand
Of him who is away.
The only one God gave me,
My one and only joy,
My life and love were centered on
My one and only boy.

I saw him in his infant days
Grow up from year to year,
That he would some day be a man
I never had a fear.
His mother watched his every step,
’Twas our united joy
To think that he might be one day
My one and only boy.

When war broke out he buckled on
His sword, and said, “Good-bye,
For I must do my duty, Dad;
Tell Mother not to cry,
Tell her that I’ll come back again.”
What happiness and joy!
But no, he died for Liberty,
My one and only boy.

The days are long, the nights are drear,
The anguish breaks my heart,
But oh! I’m proud my one and only
Laddie played his part.
For God knows best, His will be done,
His grace does me employ,
I do believe I’ll meet again
My one and only boy.

Copyright 1918 by Harry Lauder.
### APPENDIX I

**ULSTER VOLUNTEER HOSPITAL**

**BRITISH COMMITTEE**

**FRENCH RED CROSS – MEDAL ROLL**

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#### ROLL OF INDIVIDUALS

Entitled to the Victory Medal and/or British War Medal in sequence Units and Corps previously served with by each individual and Regt. No. therein; the highest rank, whether substantive, acting or temporary, recorded as having been held for any period in a theatre of War, unless reverted for misconduct, being shown against the name of the regiment or Corps which is to be inscribed on the medal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regtl. No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Theatres of War in which served</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sister ALEXANDER, Marge</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sister ALLIX, Jullien M. H. de B.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sister ATKINSON, Clara</td>
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<td>Sister BALLANTINE, Louise</td>
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<td>Nurse BALLANTINE, Mabel M.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sister BEAUCHAMP, Isabel M.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Surgeon BROWN, James H.</td>
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<td>Orderly BUSS, A.</td>
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<td>Sister CAVOOD, Reggie M.</td>
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<td>Nurse DOWAN, Vera E.</td>
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I certify that according to the Official Records the individuals named in the above table are entitled to the Victory Medal and/or British War Medal.

**Place:** London  
**Date:** February 24th, 1919

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220
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Touched up from page 21a of this roll. B.210. Roll No. 1014. Medal returned.

Guarantee not received. Requisition No. 1014/11/12.

Decreed.

Issued for: U.K. 19/10/12.

Decreed.

In this ROLL are entitled to the Medal or Medals as detailed above.

Signature and rank of Officer certifying:

319
### ROLL OF INDIVIDUALS entitled to the Victory Medal and/ or British War Medal given

Hold by an individual in the Corps in respect of which the rolls are submitted.

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<td>Surgeon GOOD, James Walford</td>
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<td>&quot; JAMIESON, M.</td>
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<td>Nurse LAWLESS, Stella H.</td>
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<td>MC SAWER, Margaret A.</td>
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<td>Matron MC CORD</td>
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I certify that according to the Official Records the individuals named in this roll are entitled to the Victory Medal and/or the British War Medal.

Place: London.

Date: February 24, 1921.
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I certify that according to the Official Records the individuals named in this Roll

Place: London.

Date: February 21st 1921.
APPENDICES
### ROLL OF INDIVIDUALS entitled to the Victory Medal and/or British War Medal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regtl. No.</th>
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<td>Surgeon WOODHOWER, Harry L. W.</td>
<td>10-14, 8-17.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sister WRIGHT, *</td>
<td>10-14, 4-15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nurse. WYTHE, Annie</td>
<td>5-16, 12-16.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I certify that according to the Official Records the individuals named in the above list have been entitled to the Victory Medal and/or British War Medal.

Place: London.

Date: February 28th 1921.
in this ROLL are entitled to the Medal or Medals as detailed above.

Signature and rank of Officer certifying:

D. Sparks

Signature and rank of Officer certifying:
The British Red Cross and the Order of St John of Jerusalem (St John's Ambulance Association) played a pivotal role throughout the First World War. Two reports on the work of The British Red Cross appeared in the *Tyrone Constitution* on 12 October 1917 and 2 November 1917.

Some of the facts given were:

“2,500 motor ambulances, cars, cycles, wagons and soup kitchens sent abroad; £1,100,000 spent in the purchase and upkeep of motors; four hospital trains running in France, each capable of accommodating 450 wounded, costing £60,000 to build and run. £750,000 spent in the regions of India, Egypt, Salonika, Malta and the Near East and 65 launches despatched to these places as well as the hospital ship ‘Nabba’ to Mesopotamia. £1,600,000 worth of surgical dressings etc have been supplied and 600,000,000 articles of clothing and bedding, hospital furniture, and equipment.

416,383 parcels of food and clothing have been despatched to prisoners of war in all enemy countries from London and twelve branch offices have been established for the purpose of making enquiries for wounded and missing men.

As is well known, relatives are sometimes given an opportunity of visiting wounded men and to these also is extended help, hostels being provided for their accommodation. There are 6500 surgeons, nurses, V.A.Ds, stretcher-bearers serving abroad. At home 57,000 hospital beds have been found and 30,000 of these provided with nursing staff, whilst about £350,000 have been spent on hospitals and treatment. Red Cross work costs over £59,000 per week or £5 per minute and it is interesting to note that the home administration and management expenses for last year only represents 2.92 per cent of the total expenditure, or 7d in the £. Omagh has always responded nobly to the appeal for this very deserving fund, from which so many of its lads have benefited, and it is hoped that this year a record collection for the town will be established.”

The report in the *Tyrone Constitution* of 2 November 1917 covers fund-raising in Castlederg.

“Tyrone is going strong in raising funds for Red Cross work just now and Castlederg had its day on Friday last. From an early hour residents and farmers from the surrounding districts who were in town in large numbers, it being the monthly fair day, were similarly beguiled by flag-sellers.……… Castlederg was doing magnificently
and doubtless this was largely due to the energy of Mrs Leary and Miss Wilson in the matter. This great work was unlike any other work; it was work they were doing for brave men who were dying every minute for those in the homeland, and the least they could do was to contribute their money and their time to the work of the Red Cross. Her good friend Mrs L I Scott did not spare herself nor her motor in this cause.……

Tyrone stood third of all the counties in Ireland last year in the matter of raising Red Cross funds and she wanted them to uphold the record. Tyrone too had more V.A.D nurses than any other county in Ireland. She often received letters from these ladies from France, Egypt and Salonika and they all said they never regretted taking up the work…”

Door to door collections were carried out in the Plumbridge district in February 1918. A list of all subscribers and their donations was given. It was noted that “the subscriptions for the Red Cross from Plumbridge district, are highly creditable to the people of that locality. Compared with other districts,… Plumbridge has given far more proportionately.”

Omagh had its own War Hospital Supply Depot, organised by Constance K Buchanan. Her letter to the Tyrone Constitution in April 1918 details some of the responses she had from the ‘front’ for supplies sent out. She further remarks:

“We are not all able to be nurses, but we can sew and make dressings, and the next best thing to being a nurse is to provide the necessaries which the doctors and nurses require in such numbers. One has only to go into a hospital at home and see the number of bandages and dressings required, to realise the enormous quantity used at the advanced dressing stations behind the front lines, where men are coming in so badly wounded, often stripped to the waist, with a coat slung over their shoulders, with head, arms, and bodies swathed in bandages; and not only our men are tended, but doctors, dressers and nurses know no distinction between friend and foe, so we must not let our men suffer for want of the requisites that are so badly needed. I should like to hear that the members of the War Hospital Supply Depot are doubled in number, as our casualties must be, during the terrible battles that are taking place. In conclusion, I can only quote the King’s message to the Times – ‘Never was the need of a continuance of the ministrations of the Red Cross more urgent.”

ENDNOTES
1 Tyrone Constitution, 12 October 1917, p.6
2 Tyrone Constitution, 2 November 1917, p.5
3 Tyrone Constitution, 8 February 918, p.6
4 Tyrone Constitution, 26 April, 1918, p.6
One of the more interesting items that I came across during my research was the use of sphagnum moss as a dressing for wounds. Sphagnum moss is found in boggy areas and had been used for centuries as a dressing for wounds because of its absorbency and antiseptic properties. Approximately 10oz of dried moss could hold 70oz of water and it was for this reason that it was much preferred to the more expensive cotton wool. Given the nature and new types of weaponry employed in World War I, coupled with the contaminated terrain in which the men were fighting, all contributed to wounds becoming easily and quickly infected and in such cases, the antiseptic property of the sphagnum moss, was an additional benefit.

As casualties mounted, and the war progressed, the demand for traditional wound dressings far exceeded availability but it was not until February 1916, that the Director General of Army Medical Services, Sir Alfred Keogh, agreed to the use of sphagnum moss as a wound dressing and it was then placed on the list of materials approved by the War Office as suitable surgical dressings.

Once gathered, the moss had to be carefully dried and bagged and then delivered to the local railway station for transportation to the War Supply Depots where it was then dispatched to the various war zones. Although this seemed to be an industry all over the province, there was a willing response from the people in the rural areas of County Tyrone, where sphagnum moss was in abundance. Outside of Britain, Canada and the United States of America eventually became two of the largest suppliers of sphagnum moss dressings.

Tyrone Constitution dated 15 December 1916

‘OMAGH SPHAGNUM MOSS SUPPLY DEPOT’

“The Sphagnum Moss Depot has been working since the beginning of August on Mondays and Thursdays in Trinity (Presbyterian) Church Hall. There has been an average daily attendance of forty, and a large quantity of moss has been cleaned, dried and graded before being sent to the depot at Derry. The moss in this neighbourhood is of excellent quality, and the committee are extremely grateful to the numerous people who have so kindly gathered it for the depot. They also wish to thank the committee of Trinity Church for the use of the hall and Mr. E.V. Hamilton for drying rooms.

The following members have received voluntary workers badges: - Mrs. Morrow (lady superintendent), Mrs. McAdam, Campsie; Miss McAdam, High Street; Miss K. H.
McAdam, High Street; Miss Eileen McAdam, Campsie; Miss Ruby Montgomery, John Street; Miss Jane McKimm, Church Street.

The conditions of receiving the badge, laid down by the Director General of Voluntary Workers’ Organisations, are 100 hours’ work at the Depot in three months, or 150 hours in six months, and the promise to continue working, unless prevented by illness, ceasing work meaning forfeiture of the badge. The badges were presented by the Rev H. W. Morrow. It was hoped that her Grace, the Duchess of Abercorn, would have performed this ceremony, but that was, unfortunately, impossible. She writes from London, as follows: “I am extremely sorry that I shall not be at Baronscourt for some months, so it will be impossible for me to go and give the badges, as you so kindly suggest. You will understand that it is only absence that prevents me. I was so impressed by the zeal and devotion of your workers that I much wish I could have been able to give them their well-earned badges.

The depot is now closed for the Christmas holidays, and will re-open on Monday 1st January 1917. As the supply of first-class moss is almost exhausted, kind friends in the neighbourhood are requested to bring in some more before that date. Sacks of moss can be left with the Caretaker, Trinity Church, John Street, or if more convenient, with Mr. T. J. McAdam, Campsie.”

In the *Tyrone Constitution* of 15 June 1917:

“The Newtownstewart branch of the Ulster Sphagnum Moss Association still continues to be one of the largest suppliers in the North-West, to the Londonderry War Hospitals Depot. The work of gathering the moss, often under difficult circumstances, is greatly facilitated by residents in some of the rural districts, notably in the vicinity of Plumbridge and Corrick. The branch is greatly indebted to Mrs Hutchinson, Mrs E McIlwaine-Gordon, Mrs Miller, Mr Joseph Duncan, and Mr M Ferguson, for continuous assistance given in various ways. Some farmers contributed empty bags occasionally, and these are very useful.”

The *Tyrone Constitution* of 7 December 1917 gives a lengthy report of the annual meeting of the Newtownstewart branch of the Ulster Sphagnum Moss Association held in the Railway Road Hall:

“Dr Lyle presided and said that the branch deserved great credit for the good work done during the past twelve months. Mrs Morton, Hon Secretary, who had been so energetic in starting the branch, gave an encouraging report. The Rev D Morton, said the secretary’s report showed that 49 sacks of the finest, first quality, perfectly dried moss had been sent to the Londonderry War Hospital’s Supply Depot during the past 12 months. That represented moss for 23,520 dressings (small size). They were indebted to the workmen at the G.N.R station for their help in roping the bags prior
to dispatch. Continuing, Mr Morton said the great value of sphagnum dressings in the battle field and in the hospitals has been proved beyond all doubt, and Mrs Morton had received letters from surgeons at the front, one of them from a County Tyrone Doctor, testifying to the superiority of the moss over the old standard dressings. One of the surgeons wrote “there is no doubt whatever about the value of the moss for wounded soldiers. We use a great deal of it in France, and on certain occasions I have great difficulty in getting as much as I want. It makes a most comfortable absorbent dressing for large, suppurating wounds, which have to be dressed frequently. The demand for it is, unfortunately, very great, so that your helpers will be doing real useful work in procuring as much as possible to forward to the depots. It is also used for splints where wounds also cause fractured bones, and makes a limb comfortable during long, and often very painful transport from the battle area to the hospitals and thence to the base.”

A well-known Tyrone doctor at the front wrote recently “being one of the two surgeons who do all the operating here, and being in charge of half the more serious cases, I may claim to know a little about the value of sphagnum moss. Of the many useful things we get sent out from voluntary organisations at home, the moss pads are about the most useful. I have often thought of the amount of trouble and labour expended by the people at home on the picking, sorting and packing of the moss, I have personally used, and I am only one of hundreds who use it every day. The medical officers and sisters here realise that the picking and sorting of the moss must be monotonous and uninteresting work, and I am really glad to have the opportunity of thanking one party of pickers for the splendid work they are doing. We use it to a large extent to replace the absorbent cotton wool of dressings. The moss is many times more absorbent than cotton wool - in fact it is the best absorbent I know. The best and most useful method of treating large wounds after operation consists in keeping continuous flow of a special antiseptic lotion running into the wound. You can see that that means a dressing which is always wet, and that the bed would soon be soaking wet too if we had not got something to absorb the overflow – that is what sphagnum moss does. If we didn’t have sphagnum it would mean using an enormous quantity of cotton wool, which is not one-tenth as good an absorbent and which costs about 1s. 3d per pound. From the point of view of economy alone, many thousands of pounds must have been saved by using this moss. The medical officers like it because it keeps their dressings sweet and clean; the sisters like it because it means a saving of labour; and most of all the wounded man likes it because it means comfort and a dry bed. There are a hundred and one other ways in which it is useful – for instance, in badly poisoned wounds from which there is a copious, foul smelling discharge, it has the property, which cotton wool has not, of taking away, to a large extent, the smell as well as absorbing the discharge. I should like to thank you on behalf of everyone in this hospital for the good work you are doing at home in this connection – it’s dull work, we all know, and for that reason all the more thanks, and gratitude. I hope you will keep it up.”
Mr Morton said he had also a letter from Nurse Isabel Patrick*, who spoke of the great value of the moss, of which she had considerable experience in the military hospitals.

Miss Osborne, of the Hospital Supplies Depot, who was present, thanked them all for the good work they had been doing since her last visit. At that time she was receiving appeals from the hospitals for hundreds of dressings per week, now it was thousands a week they wanted. She hoped the winter would not be so severe as last year, when workers had to procure the moss in snowy and frosty weather. The moss sent to them from Newtownstewart was the driest and most carefully picked of any received at Londonderry. From Derry Depot no less than 52,340 dressings and nearly 1,000 pillows had been sent to casualty stations and military hospitals.”

A letter to the Editor of the Tyrone Constitution dated 6 December 1918 praised the efforts of the Castlederg Sphagnum Moss Gatherers.

“Dear Sir, Now that the war is over it will not be out of place to give some recognition in your valuable paper to the work done by the Castlederg and district sphagnum moss gatherers and other work carried out by a number of loyal men and women, young and old. It was my privilege to find myself among the jolly crowd one Wednesday in June, and I will forever look back with the greatest of pleasure that I was one of a party of 50 away in a mountain, where in a short time we had gathered in or about 31 bags, not weighing less than 8 or 10 stone in each bag. I understand that this made up 110 bags for the season up to that day and the work was not finished. The labour was all done gratis and even the merchants lent their horses and carts to take it to the station for Strabane and Newtownstewart, where it was picked and dried. I understand that some 25,000 eggs were gathered by another band of willing workers and about 250 pairs of socks sent out to these men who thought of the home they were fighting for to keep us in peace. Quite a lot of money for comforts and other little necessaries were gladly subscribed for and sent out to show to the fathers and brothers, husbands and sweethearts that although they were far from home, their friends at home were thinking of them and now that God in His great love and mercy has vouchsafed us such a magnificent victory, of which I do trust and pray that we all may fully appreciate, let us go on and gain other victories over self-pleasure, greed of gold, and every form of evil, including Sabbath desecration, intemperance and impurity, which is keeping back God from making us the mighty power for good which I believe He has in store for this favoured old Empire, which, with all her black stains, loves Him.

I trust you will see your way to put in this little tribute of praise.”

Yours very, REHOBOTH

*Nurse Patrick was one of the UVF nurses who went to Pau in October 1914 with my grandmother’s group.
“TELL THEM OF US”

ENDNOTES
1 *Tyrone Constitution*, 15 December 1916, p.8
2 *Tyrone Constitution*, 15 June, 1917, p.6
3 *Tyrone Constitution*, 7 December 1917, p.4
4 *Tyrone Constitution*, 6 December 1918, p.6
APPENDIX IV

LIST OF NAMES OF STAFF & PATIENTS AT RIPON MILITARY HOSPITAL CONTAINED IN EDITH HARKNESS’S PHOTO ALBUM

My grandmother’s wartime photo album contains not only photos of her time in France but also many photos taken at Ripon Military Hospital where she nursed from December 1916 to late 1920. While some of the photos are now faded, many are still very clear with the names of the people in the photo written underneath as follows:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>Rank/Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams</td>
<td>Capt RAMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adamson</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
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<td>Bernier</td>
<td>Lieut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bousfield</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadbent</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryon</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
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<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey</td>
<td>Sister QAIMNSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chard</td>
<td>Nurse Emma 83 Poulton Road, Fleetwood</td>
</tr>
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<td>Clewely</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooke</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrine</td>
<td>Sister QAIMNSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowan</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crow</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
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<td>Soldier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cunningford</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawson</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnell</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutton</td>
<td>Sgt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyball</td>
<td>Nurse Carrie The Willows, Gedding, Nottinghamshire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everall</td>
<td>Mr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folliett</td>
<td>Sister QAIMNSR</td>
</tr>
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**“TELL THEM OF US”**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Rank/Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>GORMAN</td>
<td>Nurse Maude L M, 49 Warrior Sq., St. Leonards On Sea</td>
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<td>GOW</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRIFFIN</td>
<td>Sister QAIMNSR</td>
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<tr>
<td>GUTHRIE</td>
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<td>HUMBLY</td>
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<td>'HUN'</td>
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<td>Sister QAIMNSR</td>
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<td>KELLY</td>
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<tr>
<td>KELLY</td>
<td>Cpl</td>
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<tr>
<td>KENNY</td>
<td>Sister QAIMNSR</td>
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<td>KEPPARD?</td>
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<tr>
<td>LEWIS</td>
<td>Matron</td>
</tr>
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<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LONGSTAFF</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOWNER</td>
<td>Capt RAMC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LUTHLY</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Capt</td>
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<td>Sister QAIMNSR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMILLAN</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOORE</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RING</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
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<td>RITCHIE</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROBINSON</td>
<td>Capt RAMC</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHANNON</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHAW</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHEARER</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STANLEY</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
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<tr>
<td>STEVENS</td>
<td>Sister QAIMNSR</td>
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<tr>
<td>STEWART</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEMPLE</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THOMPSON</td>
<td>Capt (Padre)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TURPIE</td>
<td>Cpl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USHER</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
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<td>Cpl</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEBB</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHERRY</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
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</tbody>
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Flickr

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- **Tyrone Constitution**
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- **Ulster Herald**

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- Katherine Kinghan
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- Scarletfinders, Sue Light (Deceased)
- St John’s Ambulance Association
- St Paul’s Church, Canterbury (Daniell Family)
- The Peerage
Mervyn Harkness (Edith’s brother) and his wife Dr Kathleen Sides. (Mervyn was aged two when Edith went to France in 1914) (Taken Sept 1948)

“How many people can fit on one bicycle?” Some of Edith’s family L to R: Flo, Leslie, Walter (Jnr), Douglas and Eva (Taken around 1949/50)
‘All eyes on the goose!’
L – R: Edith’s sons Leo and Leslie, her husband Walter, and her daughters Eva and Flo
(Taken 1957/58)

Six of Edith’s children outside the family home.
Back Row L to R: Walter (Jnr), Douglas and Leslie
Front Row L to R: Flo, Eva and Muriel (Taken late 1940’s)
Back Row L to R: Edith’s husband Walter, their daughter Muriel Houston and her husband Cyril (my parents) and daughter Eva McFarlane.
Front Row L to R: Claire Houston, Walter McFarlane (Jnr), Audrey Houston
(Taken June 1955)

Stackles (the circus pony) with Walter (Jnr & Snr)
(Taken June 1955)
“Tell them of Us” is taken from one of the famous epitaphs of John Maxwell Edmonds and is a fitting title of this book about the North Tyrone Ulster Volunteer Medical and Nursing Corps and their service in the Great War.

The story of this group has not been told in such detail before and there are many unseen photographs and new sources included. Trained in readiness should Civil War break out at home, they were the first detachment to set sail for France at the outbreak of the Great War. Funded by Ulster men and women, they first set up the Ulster Volunteer hospital in Pau, France, nursing the French wounded as well as German POWs and as war intensified, they then moved closer to the front, establishing their Hospital in Lyons.

This unique story gives Edith and her fellow Volunteers the opportunity to have their voices heard more than a hundred years later.

Claire McElhinney, author, and Amanda Porter, project co-ordinator

Supported by Miss Edith Harkness

“TELL THEM OF US”
The Ulster Volunteer Hospital in France 1914–1918
CLAIRE McELHINNEY