

Two Nursing Sisters: Contingency, agency and the lives of two British military nurses in the early twentieth century

Nick Casswell and Christine E. Hallett

As a young boy Nick Casswell was intrigued when his father told him: “of course, your Aunt Madge got a medal from Hitler.” If the intention was to stimulate an interest in elderly relatives the result was a success. Much later in life, Nick undertook detailed research on his “Aunt Madge” and her sister, “Theo”. He linked his researches to his work as treasurer of the Spalding Gentleman’s Society – an association which holds the distinction of being the oldest antiquarian society in England. In keeping with the antiquarian tradition, the Society holds a vast range of eclectic and, in some cases, highly eccentric materials, among which are the seven medals of former Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service sister, Margaret Casswell.

The Spalding Gentleman’s Society is a rare example of an antiquarian society which has retained not only its archaic name but also its focus on the deliberately random collection of materials whose utility is not immediately obvious. One purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how a collaboration between professional history and antiquarianism – or between academic and ‘public history’ - can yield original findings. As John Arnold has pointed out, antiquarians have “less a grand tale to tell than a great love to express”, yet the fusion of their skills with the narrative and analytical emphases of professional historians is part of a complex historiographical tradition.¹

In this paper, we trace the lives and careers of the Casswell sisters. Our aim is to highlight the ways in which decisions they took early in their nursing careers had deep and lasting impacts on their lives, and, in turn, on their work in (and influence upon) the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. The role and significance of human agency in historical explanation is a matter for dispute. Whether women and men can knowingly and willingly create certain desired outcomes and, in so doing, change their worlds, is a philosophical question; yet it is also one with which historians have frequently grappled. On one side of a metaphorical balance sheet, 'agency' seems to offer human beings the means to construct their lives. But on the other side lurks 'contingency': the occurrence of events or happenings that appear to be governed only by chance. The British historian A.J.P Taylor was reputed to have enjoyed the idea that apparently insignificant causes gave rise to very significant events, suggesting in a 1969 publication that the First World War had begun because rail timetables were fixed and troop movements could not be halted.² His arguments, whilst, on one level, deliberately playful, focussed the attention of his peers on the importance of 'causation' in historical endeavour. He was writing for a highly receptive audience. In the same year, historian, Edward Hallett Carr argued that 'the study of history is a study of causes'.³ Much later, at a time when the idea of 'History' was fragmenting into a vast range of 'histories', John Tosh was still putting 'causation' at the heart of the historian's work, arguing that it was 'multiple and many-layered due to the manner in which different areas of human experience constantly obtrude on one another'.⁴ Yet, within ten years, Ludmilla Jordanova was arguing that focussing on 'explanation' at all was unhelpful. What was needed were cultural histories focussing on fine detail rather than overarching explanatory theories.⁵

Jordanova's critique notwithstanding, causation does still seem to be at the heart of historical analysis. In his 2015 edition of his *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal pointed out that "because most stories stress causal explanation over chance and accident, history imparted to and known by us appears less muddled, more foreseeable, than the past ever was when present",⁶ whilst, for Arthur Marwick, "convergence and contingency" are always included - albeit at the bottom of a complex "hierarchy of explanatory factors".⁷ One favourite historians' illustration of the role of contingency in history is the "Cleopatra's Nose" thesis: the idea that, had the famous queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, been less beautiful, the Roman generals Julius Caesar and Mark Antony would not have fallen in love with her; there might have been no destructive Roman civil war in the first century BC; and the entire history of civilisation might have been different. More a joke than a serious theory – and not without a lingering taint of chauvinism – the idea has been passed down from historian to historian as a shorthand for the ways in which chance events can exert an apparently disproportionate influence on historical developments.⁸

The "Cleopatra's Nose" thesis has an interesting resonance with the narrative we offer below. We consider the lives of two sisters, both of whom were appointed as Nursing Sisters in the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, but whose lives took remarkably divergent courses because of a chance meeting. In order to distinguish between the Casswell sisters we shall refer to them throughout as "Theo" and "Madge". The decision to use the nicknames given to them by their family might seem to be somewhat whimsical – even disrespectful. It was taken deliberately, and for two reasons: firstly, to avoid confusion when recounting the two women's careers, and secondly to convey a sense of the family story that is at the core of this project. In many ways, our collaboration represents a meeting of private and professional historical imaginations. We deliberately merge the personal with the

academic; the amateur with the professional and the familial with the detached, to produce a consciously co-created piece of public history.⁹

The lives of Theo and Madge are interesting in themselves, but, here, we choose to interpret them in the light of the perspectives of late-twentieth-century women's historians. We draw, in particular, on the work of Sheila Rowbotham, June Purvis and Jill Liddington who, among others, worked consciously to restore women to a historical record which had hitherto focussed on the influences and contributions of men.¹⁰ In 1997, Rowbotham argued that women's history had shifted "the contours of inquiry" by arguing that the work and influence of women was equally important to those of men, in shaping the modern world.¹¹ Almost a decade later, Liddington wrote of the "dazzling generation of campaigners", which had produced militant suffrage campaigners, acknowledging that they were the "avant garde" of the fight for women's rights.¹² As Sarah Jane Aiston has argued, the histories of such women are those of "determination and activism against sometimes overwhelming odds".¹³

Histories such as those of Rowbotham, Purvis, Liddington and Aiston provide a valuable corrective to what was, previously, the mainstream history of men's social, political and economic achievements. Yet, it almost goes without saying that even these correctives distort historical reality. Active campaigners for women's rights were very few.

Rowbotham's *A Century of Women* can be viewed as a ground-breaking analysis of women's fight for change during the period.¹⁴ Similarly, in her later text, *Dreamers of a New Day*, focussing on the years from 1880 to 1920, she emphasises the work of active campaigners.¹⁵ Yet, the reality was that most women accepted the conditions of their time. And, if they "dreamed" a future world into being, they did so through the pursuit of their own, individual visions and desires. We do not know what the perspectives of Theo and Madge Casswell

were on women's rights and the suffrage campaign. Like the vast majority of Edwardian women, they probably kept their opinions to themselves, and their views – even if these were voiced - have not been “handed down” in the Casswell family. We do know, however, that both women decided to enter professional employment as nurses, and that both chose to join the elite military service - the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service - well before the outbreak of the First World War. This suggests that, at the very least, both women had ambitions to enter (even if only temporarily) a world outside the domestic sphere of drawing-room tea-parties and the "social round". Remaining “angels in the house” was not their aspiration – although there is evidence that Theo always intended to marry eventually.¹⁶

Mary Theodora Casswell (Theo) and Margaret Russell Casswell (Madge) were two of the daughters of George and Ann Mary Casswell of Bank House Gosberton, now a nursing home. Theirs was a large family: seven sons and seven daughters in all. George was a tenant farmer and grazier who had been Captain in the Lincolnshire Volunteers, though he never left home to fight.¹⁷ On his retirement from the Volunteers he was awarded the title of Major, a title he used proudly for the rest of his life. He was a prominent figure in the area, active in parish affairs and Chairman of Spalding Rural District Council for many years. Ann Mary bore children at the rate of nearly one year between 1879 and 1898. Theo was the 4th born in 1883 and Madge next in 1884.¹⁸

There were not many positive role models on offer to girls as Theo and Madge grew up beyond those of wife and mother. In a commonplace book of Theo's the dread of becoming an Old Maid comes through very strongly, which suggests the existence of some tension or conflict in her personal aspirations.¹⁹ Writing in the 1920s, campaigner for women's rights, Ray Strachey, had commented on nineteenth century women's dependency on their male

relatives: “A girl could go on being somebody’s daughter only so long as her father was alive; and after that, if she had not succeeded in becoming somebody’s wife, she was adrift. Without money, or the possibility of earning for herself, she was reduced to being dependent on her male relatives; and the position of being somebody’s unmarried sister, or somebody’s maiden aunt was far from agreeable”.²⁰ This state of affairs continued well into the nineteenth century, and the Casswell sisters might have been expected to focus their sights almost entirely on preparing themselves for marriage, as the pattern of their times seemed to dictate.

There was, however, a particularly impressive and influential exception to this pattern of female constraint: the “Lady of the Lamp”, Florence Nightingale, who captured the imagination of both her own time and later generations.²¹ Theo and Madge are believed to have been inspired by Nightingale’s story, and their father, Major Casswell was said to have been delighted in the path they took.

From the Army’s perspective, Theo and Madge were “good material”. Nightingale herself had pronounced farmers’ daughters to be the most suitable of women for military nursing. She wanted women of high moral character and social graces; and the Casswell sisters fit this stereotype of the modern nurse.²² Pictures of Bank House suggest the Edwardian idyll of legend, with gardens ready for afternoon tea, croquet and tennis.²³ The girls could play the piano and engage in polite drawing room conversation. At the back of the house one would have seen a different picture. Here, there was a working farm, with accommodation for livestock alongside facilities for slaughtering and butchering animals and poultry. The children would have been accustomed to rolling their sleeves up and being part of this less

dignified world. A squeamish girl would be no use as a farmer's wife, far less a military nurse.

The sisters received a good education and then applied for nursing training, Theo at Glasgow Royal Infirmary, Madge at Leeds General Infirmary.²⁴ These were not soft options. Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service personnel were only accepted from a few major metropolitan hospitals, or from military hospitals such as those at Netley and Woolwich.²⁵ It was considered that only the most rigorous training would offer the depth of experience necessary for military duty. Theo submitted her application to QAIMNS in January 1910, Madge in December 1912.²⁶ The QA's were an elite unit. The success rate for applications was low. Impeccable references were required before the applicant was summoned for interview: the face had to "fit"; any hint of a "common" background, parental illiteracy, or personal untidiness were grounds for rejection.²⁷ It was the older of the two sisters, Theo, who seemed the more likely to succeed. The admission register for the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service records: "She is an excellent nurse and has the judgement and capacity for management and supervision".²⁸ Such positive appraisal was given to a small percentage of applicants, generally referees are cited simply as "reporting favourably". At the outbreak of war there were just 297 nurses on the full time staff of the Queen Alexandra's; hence, Madge and Theo were two of a small and hard pressed band.²⁹ Both embarked with the British Expeditionary Force in August 1914.³⁰

Maud McCarthy, the Matron-in-Chief in France and Flanders, was a remarkable woman who held that post from the outbreak until 1919 - the only staff officer of the original BEF to remain in service throughout the entire war.³¹ McCarthy's War Diary is an extraordinarily complete record of everything from the tracing of a missing cap badge and the organisation

of a visit from the King, to the deployment of women to front-line casualty clearing stations in advance of campaigns such as The Somme (1916) and Passchendaele (1917).³² She reports on inspecting medical units all over northern France. Sometimes there are glimpses of what she thought about the wider war in which she provides a brilliant account from someone with real insight reporting from just slightly off the main stage. She would have needed prior knowledge of planned military operations in order to allocate resources; and would also have had a better idea than anyone about the true scale of casualties.

Theo's first recorded overseas posting is at Number 10 British Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) at Hazebrouck in Flanders. CCS's were the closest that nurses were sent to the front line. In 1914, they might be located 20 or 30 kilometres behind a rapidly moving front line, but as warfare became static and entrenched they were brought much closer to the fighting, in order to enable the more rapid surgical treatment of heavily infected wounds. By the Spring of 1915, many were located about 6 km from the frontline trenches.³³ In July 1915, No. 10 was moved to a strategic location behind the Ypres Salient, known as 'Remy Siding', which became a significant international (British and French) complex of front-line CCSs.³⁴ The fact that she was entrusted with such a posting suggests that Theo must have been one of McCarthy's most trusted Nursing Sisters. But, while she was serving here something totally unexpected happened: something that totally transformed Theo's prospects. She became engaged to Royal Army Medical Corps Captain, Arthur Dennis, an officer at the CCS. It was later reported in the family that the dashing medical officer had "swept Theo off her feet". In October 1915 she dutifully reported her engagement to Maud McCarthy. It was not quite professional suicide, but military nursing protocol required an immediate withdrawal from the forward position to a base hospital. This was standard procedure, in such situations; the priority was to remove one member of the partnership so that the two were not working in the

same war zone. It was always the woman who was removed to the base. In Theo's case this was Number 3 General Hospital at Le Treport in Northern France.³⁵ The hospital was housed in a high quality hotel overlooking the sea. While serving here, Theo received a "Mention" in Sir John French's Despatch of 13th November 1915.³⁶ It is clear that she intended to work for as long as she could and that she wished to see out the duration of the war. Theo's engagement was particularly prolonged; most nurses left the service fairly quickly once they had decided to get married. Normally the resignation took place at the same time or very soon after the engagement; but Theo appears to have been reluctant to give up her career, or to resign from active service. Her apparent dedication was rewarded again in Douglas Haig's Despatch of 13th November 1916. However over Christmas 1916 it was decided that the wedding could not be postponed further and Theo attended an interview with Maud McCarthy on January 14th 1917. McCarthy recorded in her War Diary:

I interviewed A/Sister Caswell, QAIMNS who asked if she might be permitted to send in her resignation in consequence of her approaching marriage so that she might be released in April. She would then like if possible 2 months leave without pay and to be permitted to be again employed, but in the Home Service. I advised her to put the matter up officially and I would forward and recommend it without delay.³⁷

Theo planned to get married, take the leave but continue in the service on the home front. This was an arrangement that had been agreed with previous brides-to-be and promised the best of both worlds. McCarthy appears to have had some faith in Theo even though she took a dim view generally of nurses putting marriage before their military duty. When a problem emerged at General Hospital No 16, on 17th February, McCarthy sent Theo to take over the running of the hospital to cover for a sick Matron. It was at this point that Theo's good fortune ran out. Just after correspondence had been opened with Headquarters about leave arrangements McCarthy fell ill with acute appendicitis and was absent from her post until

March 29th. The officer in command of General Hospital No 3 approved Theo's leave recommendation, as did the Surgeon General. Acting Matron-in-Chief Ethel Becher turned it down. It is possible that she decided to make an example of Theo, in order to discourage any further matrimonial plans from the staff. This was devastating for Theo's career. Her resignation was accepted but there could be no resumption. Her military service was at an end.

Madge does not feature at all in the McCarthy diary. Her record shows a typical sequence of postings for a service nurse: Casualty Clearing Stations, Stationary Hospital, General Hospital, Ambulance trains.³⁸ Research by Sue Light has revealed that her original deployment (with General Hospital No 9) was conducted with six other units under secret orders in August 1914.³⁹ The secrecy was to conceal the logistical arrangements supporting a planned attack to drive the Germans out of France and Belgium. A letter written by McCarthy at a later date indicates that the intended destination of these units was Amiens. This would have taken Madge very close to the fighting and may add some credence to a story told in the family that she had been at Mons. Like her sister she was mentioned in the Despatch of 30th November 1915 and again in November 1916.⁴⁰ These mentions were a source of understandable pride to the sisters' father, and they are reported in the Lincolnshire Free Press of the time.

Madge remained in France until November 1917. At this point in the war a number of Army units were sent to Italy to bolster the fight against the Austrians in the Northeast of the country.⁴¹ Medical support was needed and Madge joined Ambulance Train No 21 to Italy. Attached to 11 General Hospital she was posted to Istrana, just to the east of Lake Garda to

serve CCS 24. This was within 20 miles or so of the active front line and it was here that she gained her Associate Royal Red Cross Award.⁴²

In July 1918 Madge was made Matron of an Officers Convalescent Hospital in Portofino and was in post there at the time of the Armistice. She later spoke of this as a happy time and a joyous occasion. When she retired back to Spalding at the end of her career, she named her new home "Portofino". Nursing wounded and sick soldiers - including large numbers with influenza - kept her in Italy until March 1919.⁴³ As a full time "regular" with the QAIMNS her job, unlike many thousands of reservists and volunteers, was secure. Ahead of her was a recognised profession offering job satisfaction and security. After the horrors of the war the next few years offered a much more appealing work environments. There were "Home" postings in the UK but during the 1920's much of her time was spent on hospital ships in the Mediterranean. These were convalescent cruises for the most part.⁴⁴ A surviving photo album of her time on the Hospital ship "Suntemple" would suggest that it resembled a holiday cruise. As well as pictures of colleagues it shows many of the standard tourist attractions that are taken today.⁴⁵

Of course there was hard work, but it was not a bad way to earn a living and see the world. Madge went on to serve in Egypt and Hong Kong as well as for spells in the UK at Cosham, Colchester and The Queen Alexandra's Hospital, Millbank.⁴⁶ She was not a high flyer, failing her Matron's written exam in 1924. And her career nearly ended early in 1933. She *had* passed her exams in 1932 and had been put on warning to go to India in July 1933. This was not a popular posting, and, perhaps in order to avoid it, Madge requested retirement on August 21st. On 11th September she was told that she was not needed in India but should prepare herself for a Mediterranean station. That same day she withdrew her application to

retire. Her next posting was to the military hospital in Gibraltar, where served as Matron until November 1937.⁴⁷

In May 1937, the German battleship, “Deutschland” was hit by Republican bombers during the Spanish Civil War causing serious casualties. Germany had no local facilities and it was agreed, for humanitarian reasons, that the British would offer medical help at Gibraltar. The hospital was already under strain; staff were caring for large numbers of casualties from the Royal Navy ship “Hunter” which had hit a mine a few days earlier. A request was put in for reinforcements and 4 nurses were sent on an overnight flight by seaplane from London to assist. Madge was not one of those pioneers; she was already supervising the operation in Gibraltar. Yet, she was the matron in charge of all the nurses involved in the operation. As recognition for their services Matron Casswell and 12 nurses were awarded the Ladies Cross of the German Order of the Red Cross. Decorations were presented on board the Deutschland’s sister ship by the German Admiral of the Fleet and it was reported that “there was dancing” as part of the celebration.⁴⁸ In 1938 Madge wrote to Buckingham Palace asking permission to wear the medal, and this was granted.⁴⁹

Madge returned to home service at Millbank in November 1937. She was Matron there until she retired at the end of April 1939. She had enjoyed a fulfilling and fascinating working life, of the sort that was not available to most women of her time. As a final postscript the May 1939 edition of ‘Nursing Illustrated’ had a feature extolling the attractions of the Armed Services as a wonderful career path for nurses. The front cover photo is of Matron Casswell quietly working at her papers, a fine tribute to the career of a very determined lady.⁵⁰

But what of Theo? She had drawn a line under her career at the time of her marriage. While it is tempting to see this as a result of a harsh bureaucracy in truth the birth of her son, David, in November 1918 would have required her to leave the service anyway. Captain Dennis would have seemed a “good catch”, his father was a well respected canon of Southwark Cathedral and the family was wealthy. Following the marriage, Theo moved into the Dennis household at The Rectory, Cheam, while husband Arthur returned to France. At some point in the next few months Arthur’s affections turned from his pregnant wife to a French Red Cross nurse. At what point his new relationship became more widely known is not clear. His marriage with Theo survived for a few unhappy years but was then dissolved. In a divorce application of April 1924 the register of the Imperial Hotel Russell Square for 19-21st December 1921 showing Major Dennis signing in with a woman he falsely claimed was his wife was cited as evidence for adultery. The divorce was not contested. Given Major Dennis’ background his divorce must have created quite a public scandal, and Theo’s family were later to comment that it was perhaps for the best that Major Casswell had gone to his grave in 1918.

There was a modest settlement of £60 per annum. Theo was left a single mother with no secure employment or easy way of gaining it. The end of the war saw a reduction in the need for nurses. Many women who had tasted life beyond the home and a glimpse of a career were left out of work and with reduced prospects of marriage or any form of security.

Theo turned for support to an old friend from her nurse training days in Glasgow. Known as “Chiz”, Glaswegian Lizzie Chisholm had also enlisted in the QAIMNS Reserve during the war. She had not served with Theo but had actually worked alongside Madge for a time in Rouen. Chiz was also looking for work and, with Theo, set up some Tea Rooms in Tewkesbury which they kept running for a few years. It was an enjoyable time but the

educational needs of young David had to be considered, and in 1927 the business was sold and Theo took up the position of School Matron at Summer Fields School in Oxford. Appreciation for her work was shown when she left in 1935 by the presentation of an inscribed silver salver.⁵¹ Whilst at Summer Fields, Theo was responsible for the wellbeing of boys who were later to become well-known actors: Christopher Lee and Patrick Macnee.

Theo retired in 1935 and returned to Gosberton, to live in a cottage near the family farm. Her son enjoyed the friendship and company of his farming cousins much to the delight of his mother. David enlisted with the RAF reserves in July 1939, at the age of just twenty. His skills as a photographer were of value to the service and he commenced training as an Observer. On the 18th August 1940 his plane was flying over Cambridgeshire when it collided with another aircraft. Both planes crashed near Madingley. There were no survivors. The news devastated Theo and her relatives.

Theo lived alone in the cottage on her family's estate until shortly before her death in 1969. After her retirement Madge came back to "Portofino" where she lived with another of her unmarried sisters, Kitty, until her death in 1971.⁵²

In her *Dreamers of a New Day*, Sheila Rowbotham asserted confidently that "the [early-twentieth-century] women who tried to alter everyday life and culture along with their own destinies were both dreamers and adventurers, for they explored with only the sketchiest of maps and they headed towards the unknown courageously interrogating assumed behaviour in personal relationships and in society".⁵³ But what of the ordinary women who did not make their marks on society in any obvious or notable "feminist" way, but whose lives altered their societies in more subtle ways? How often did their journeys into the unknown

come to precipitate ends? Our analysis of the lives and careers of Theo and Madge Casswell acknowledges the complexities of ordinary women's lives; and admits the role of both agency and contingency in the apparent "advance" towards a society in which women's rights would (if not always fully met) be viewed as inalienable. Women such as Theo and Madge do not appear to have been deliberately attempting to "alter everyday life and culture along with their own destinies". They, along with (we would argue) the vast majority of women of their time, were simply trying to navigate a course through the complexities of the gender-relations and politics of female war-service. And service in the QAIMNS offers a particularly stark example of the ways in which a service led by women could mould, confine and, indeed, constrain its members. Although we acknowledge that many will view the real "message" of the Casswell sisters' story as one which illuminates the larger issues of feminine constraint and the response of the QAIMNS to societal trends, we also argue that the very human contingency of "falling in love" had an enormous influence on the events we recount.

Along with these insights into the power of chance and contingency in the lives of early-twentieth-century women, we would also suggest that this paper offers a methodological insight into the ways in which historians from different backgrounds - both public and professional - can collaborate fruitfully in the construction of histories that bring hitherto unknown lives and experiences to attention. Although Theo and Madge Casswell were never famous or renowned, they left indelible marks on their society and were – albeit less obviously and less forcibly than a Millicent Fawcett or a Marie Stopes - both "dreamers and adventurers, [heading] towards the unknown courageously".⁵⁴

¹ John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 40

² A.J.P. Taylor, *War By Timetable: How the First World War Began* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1969). See the discussion of this argument in: Richard Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 132

³ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* Second Edition (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001 reprint; first published 1969), 81

⁴ John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (London: Longman, 1991), 116

⁵ Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (London: Arnold, 2000), 107-111

⁶ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) p.342

⁷ Arthur Marwick, *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 204-206

⁸ Daniel J. Boorstin, *Cleopatra's Nose: Essays on the Unexpected* (New York, Random House: 1995). The originator of the “Cleopatra’s Nose” theory was seventeenth-century French mathematician, Blaise Pascal, who was actually arguing that the size of Cleopatra’s nose illustrated the force of her personality, which, he claims was the reason both Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony fell in love with her: “Cleopatra’s nose had it been shorter, the whole face of the world would have been changed”, Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* (London, Penguin Classics: 1995 edition). The ‘Cleopatra’s Nose’ theory is discussed by Evans: Richard Evans, *In Defence of History* (London: Granta Books, 1997), 130

⁹ On the significance of the co-creation of historical knowledge, see: Pedro Ramos Pinto and Bertrand Taithe, ‘Doing history in public? Historians in the age of *impact*’, In: Pedro Ramos Pinto and Bertrand Taithe, *The Impact of History? Histories at the beginning of the twenty*

first century (London, Routledge, 2015): 2; Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.17. See also: Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Revised, 2nd Edition (London: Verso Books, 2012), passim

¹⁰ Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden From History: Three Hundred Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, Third Edition (London, Pluto Press: 1992); June Purvis, *Women's History: Britain, 1850-1945* (London and New York, Routledge: 1995); Jill Liddington, *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote* (London, Virago: 2006);. See also: Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London and New York, Routledge: 1999)

¹¹ Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* Second Edition (London, Penguin: 1999), 3

¹² Jill Liddington, *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote* (London, Virago: 2006), Preface, p. xiv

¹³ Sarah Jane Aiston, "Women, Education and Agency, 1600-2000: an historical perspective", in Jean Spence, Sarah Jane Aiston and Maureen M. Meikle (eds) *Women, Education and Agency, 1600-2000* (New York and London, Routledge, 2010), 1-8: 7

¹⁴ Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London: Penguin, 1997), passim

¹⁵ Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 2010), passim

¹⁶ The popular Victorian idea of the perfect wife as the 'angel in the house' originated with a poem by English poet, Coventry Patmore.

¹⁷ George Casswell's Lincolnshire Volunteer's Badge is at the Spalding Gentlemen's Society Museum, Spalding, Lincolnshire, UK

¹⁸ Information relating to the Casswell family is obtained from The Census, The National Archives, Kew, UK

¹⁹ Mary Theodora Casswell; Commonplace Book; Private Collection, Nick Casswell

²⁰ Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: G. Bell and Sons: 1928), 17

²¹ On the life, career, and influence of Florence Nightingale, see: Mark Bostridge, *Florence Nightingale: The Woman and Her Legend* (London: Viking, 2008), passim; Sioban Nelson and Anne Marie Rafferty, *Notes on Nightingale: The Influence and Legacy of a Nursing Icon* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2010), passim; Lyn McDonald, *Florence Nightingale at First Hand* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), passim

²² On Nightingale's views about suitability for nursing, see: Lynn McDonald (ed.) *Florence Nightingale: The Nightingale School*, Volume 12 of the Collected Works of Florence Nightingale (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009)

²³ On Edwardian middle class society, see: Andrew Miles, "Social Class" in Chris Wrigley (ed.) *A Companion to Early Twentieth Century Britain* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 337-52; Martin Pugh, *State and Society: A Social and Political History of Britain Since 1870* Fifth Edition (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 188-207. On the debate about the middle-class origins of professional nurses, see Christopher Maggs, *Nursing History: The State of the Art* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Sue Hawkins, *Nursing and Women's Labour in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2010); Christine E. Hallett, *Social and Economic Histories of Nursing, Volume II of The History of Nursing: Major Themes in Health and Social Welfare* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1-80

²⁴ Most Army records were destroyed during the Second World War, but nurses records survive. They were weeded in subsequent years and are somewhat uneven but there are 243 pages of service history at the National Archives for Madge: Margaret Russell Casswell; War Office File; WO/399/1394; The National Archives, Kew, UK. There are 43 pages for Theo: Mary Theodora Casswell; War Office File; WO/399/2181; The National Archives, Kew, UK

²⁵ On the history of the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, including the development of training schools at Netley and Woolwich, see: Anne Summers, *Angels and Citizens: British Women as Military Nurses, 1854-1914* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1988). On the preparedness of the Service for war, see: Christine E. Hallett, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp 16-26; Christine E. Hallett, *Nurse Writers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp.10-17

²⁶ Registers of the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service; WO/25/3956; *The National Archives, Kew, UK*

²⁷ Juliet Piggott, *Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps* (London, Leo Cooper Ltd, 1975)

²⁸ Registers of the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service; WO/25/3056; The National Archives, Kew, UK

²⁹ For this information and much else we are indebted to the website 'Scarletfinders' researched and created by Sue Light. It concentrates on the corps of professionally trained nurses through it does also offer information on Territorial Force nurses. Sue Light contributed directly to this paper, by answering many of our queries, and her website, which is now supported by the Heritage Committee of the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps, is an outstanding example of an online free-to-use historical resource created out of a passion for the subject. One pillar of Light's work is been the transcription of the entire War Diary of the Matron-in-Chief in France, Maud McCarthy, throughout the war and beyond. Sadly Sue Light died in 2016, but her scholarship remains accessible and invaluable to all, and can be found at: <http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk/> [last accessed 17 November, 2018]. Two additional resources, also authored by Light, are: *The Fairest Force: Great War Nurses in France and Flanders* [<http://www.fairestforce.co.uk/>; accessed 17 November, 2018] and a

blog entitled *This Intrepid Band* [<http://greatwarnurses.blogspot.com/>; accessed 17 November, 2018]. See also: Sue Light, ‘British Military Nurses and the Great War: A Guide to the Services’, *Western Front Association Forum* (7 Feb, 2010), 4; available at <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com>

³⁰ Individuals service records, including their assignment to particular units are recorded on “Army Form B103”, in their War Office files. Unfortunately the first years of service are filled in retrospectively and early deployment details lost. In Madge’s case more information can be found in the qualification-for-pension documents that specifically record mobilization with General Hospital No 9 on August 14th 1914. The forms B103 show the sequence of deployments in a simple listing of dates with Unit name. In Theo’s case it was possible to find more personal information in the Matron-in-Chief, Maud McCarthy’s diary, available at <http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk>.

³¹ Hallett, *Veiled Warriors*, 22

³² Maud McCarthy, *War Diary*; WO95/3988-91; The National Archives, Kew, UK.

³³ Hallett, *Veiled Warriors*, 47-66

³⁴ Christine E. Hallett, *Nurses of Passchendaele: Caring for the Wounded of the Ypres Campaigns, 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2017), 34

³⁵ Mary Theodora Casswell; War Office File; WO/399/2181; The National Archives, Kew, UK

³⁶ “Mentions in Despatches” were published in *The London Gazette*. No information was ever given on the reasons for the “mention”.

³⁷ Maud McCarthy, Matron-in-Chief, *War Diary*, entry for 14 January, 1917; <http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk/> [last accessed 17 November, 2018]

³⁸ Margaret Russell Casswell; War Office File; WO/399/1394; The National Archives, Kew, UK

³⁹ <http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk/> [last accessed 17 November, 2018]

⁴⁰ *The London Gazette*, November 1916; November 1917

⁴¹ Hallett, *Veiled Warriors*, 223-4

⁴² *Madge was awarded her ARRC Medal while at Istrana but the War Diary for her unit gives no details. It does, however, record her compassionate leave on the death of her father. See WO95/4207; The National Archives, Kew, UK. See also: Margaret Russell Casswell; War Office File; WO/399/1394; The National Archives, Kew, UK*

⁴³ Margaret Russell Casswell; War Office File; WO/399/1394; The National Archives, Kew, UK

⁴⁴ Margaret Russell Casswell; War Office File; WO/399/1394; The National Archives, Kew, UK

⁴⁵ Margaret Casswell, Photograph Album; Private Collection; Carole Wakefield

⁴⁶ Margaret Russell Casswell; War Office File; WO/399/1394; The National Archives, Kew, UK

⁴⁷ Margaret Russell Casswell; War Office File; WO/399/1394; The National Archives, Kew, UK

⁴⁸ Margaret Russell Casswell; War Office File; WO/399/1394; The National Archives, Kew, UK

⁴⁹ Correspondence with Buckingham Palace is held at The Spalding Gentlemen's Society Museum, Spalding, Lincolnshire, UK

⁵⁰ *The Nursing Illustrated*, May, 1939

⁵¹ This salver is held at The Spalding Gentlemen's Society Museum, Spalding, Lincolnshire, UK

⁵² Madge's medals comprise; the Associate Royal Red Cross Medal; the 1914 Star; the British War Medal; the Allied Victory Medal; George 6th Coronation Medal; the QAIMNS

Medal; and the Ladies Cross of the German Order of the Red Cross. The Register of Royal Red Cross Awards is at WO/145/1; The National Archives, Kew, UK. These medals are all available for viewing (by appointment only) at the Spalding Gentlemen's Society Museum, Spalding, Lincolnshire, UK. There is also a full set of replica miniatures, although several mistakes were made in the construction of these. On the Associate Royal Red Cross Medal, the words Faith Hope and Charity are on the reverse, whereas on the miniature set the medal shown is the full Red Cross Medal with words on the enamelled front). The miniature of the 1914 Star is also incorrect, showing the 1914-15 Star). The miniature of the Ladies Cross of the German Order of the Red Cross is not accurate. It appears to be a rather generic version perhaps due to its rarity.

⁵³ Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*, 3

⁵⁴ Ibid, 3. The Spalding Gentlemen's Society holds the Mentions in Despatch certificates for both Theo and Madge Casswell (1917 and 1918); each carries the printed signature of Winston Churchill, then Minister of War. The Society also holds Madge's German Red Cross certificate with the printed signature of Adolf Hitler. For one individual to have commendations from both Churchill and Hitler is a rare if not unique distinction. The whereabouts of Theo's medals is unknown.