

Lady Ridley's Hospital for Officers at 10 Carlton House Terrace

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During 2014, the British Academy is holding a number of events to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. Further information can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/firstworldwar/

The building that the Academy now occupies played its own significant part in the history of the War – as revealed here by the Academy's archivist, Karen Syrett.

The British Academy moved into 10 Carlton House Terrace in 1998. But for the first 90 years of its life the house was the London home of the Ridley family. Originally built in 1830, the house was remodelled in the French classical style by the 2nd Viscount Ridley in 1905: it was then that the current porch and black marble staircase were installed. The Viscount also commissioned a painted ceiling in the ballroom (now the Lecture Hall).

When war broke out in 1914, Lady Ridley (Figure 1) decided to open up her London home as a Hospital for Officers. On the first floor, the ballroom and the south drawing room (now the Mall Room; Figure 2) were converted into wards. The Red Cross roll of hospitals for January 1915 records Lady Ridley's hospital as having 25 occupied beds. As the war progressed, Lady Ridley made more room available by moving out a lot of furniture and pictures. By 1917, further rooms on the ground floor (Figure 3) and first floor had been converted into wards, and huts had been built on the terrace, taking the total of beds to 60. There was also an operating theatre on the ground floor.

Aileen Maunsell, volunteer nurse

The Hospital was affiliated to Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital in Millbank, and was principally a convalescent hospital for wounded officers. Members of London/52 Voluntary Aid Detachment (VADs) provided the nursing care. VADs – who have been portrayed in the recent BBC television series *The Crimson Field* – were trained in first aid and home nursing and worked alongside qualified nurses. One of the VAD nurses who worked at Lady



Figure 1
Lady Rosamond Ridley. All the images in this article are taken from Aileen Maunsell's scrapbook or diaries, and are reproduced courtesy of Hugo Gell.

Ridley's was Aileen Maunsell (Figure 4). Aileen was 19 when war broke out and, like many upper-class girls her age, she quickly volunteered to attend home nursing courses and become a nurse. In her diary, she records her first day at the hospital:

Thursday 3 June 1915 – Off at 8.30 by taxie to nurse at Lady Ridly's Hospital 10 Carlton House Terrace. Put in Long Ward with Sister Bell & Nurse Paice 8 patients. 3 bad stretcher cases & 1 bad arms. Off from 2 to 4, got Red X uniform at Harrods. Dead beat by 8.30.



Figure 2
Nurses and patients in the South Drawing Room (now the Mall Room).



Figure 3
Ward in the Dining Room on the Ground Floor.

The British Academy is very grateful to Aileen's grandson, Hugo Gell, who has provided access to her diaries and scrapbook.¹ These resources offer a rich and fascinating insight to the life of the hospital. On 19 January 1916, Aileen attended her first operation: 'At 8. went to operation on Capt Dodds til 8.25 when retired as very giddy to recover in the office! Finger was cut off & Right Hand stretched.' Her diary entry for the following day records that Capt Dodds was 'very cheerful in spite of operation; beastly finger bottled!' Those early signs of queasiness quickly vanished: by 1917 Aileen was happily dealing with one patient who 'had lungs pumped by Doctor Wingfield. Operation on ward – got 12oz pusy blood out'; and another who had a splint removed from his leg, 'had to clean it after, wads of skin peeling off.'

Bandages and breakfast trays

Lady Ridley's Hospital bore testament to the realities of the Great War. Many of the soldiers who were brought to 10 Carlton House Terrace had suffered life-changing injuries. Amongst men who had experienced terrible wounds were those who had also lost limbs. Soldiers who had inhaled poison gas were kept in huts built on the terrace, in the hope that fresh air would be good for their lungs (Figure 5). Others suffering from shell-shock were tended by 'special' nurses in a small quiet ward.

Aileen's work at the hospital was varied to say the least. She took the dressings to be sterilised at St Thomas's Hospital, she bathed and fed the patients and took their temperatures, she cleaned the wards and made the beds. She learnt how to 'work electricity' on patients and how to deal with haemorrhages. In January 1916, she records the outbreak of a manicuring craze which lasted for several days: 'Busy morning – manicured folk.'

Aileen also spent a lot of her time chatting and laugh-



Figure 4
Aileen Maunsell, known as 'Dinkie', at 10 Carlton House Terrace.

ing with the patients, and was no doubt involved in concocting many of the nicknames given to the nurses and soldiers: hers was Dinkie. The young convalescents were often bored and therefore boisterous, but it is clear from her diaries that Dinkie was more than capable of giving as good as she got:

Thursday 11 October 1917 – Great rag in evening, pillow fights ... sponges, cushions, pillows & paper flying. I upset all Mr Walton's water by mistake unfortunately – Sis[ter] Jones furious. All blew over though in the end.

1. Three other scrapbooks of Lady Ridley's Hospital are known to exist. Nurse Muriel Butler's is held at the Imperial War Museum (catalogue no. 2012-07-09). Nurse Marjorie Howell's is held at the British Red Cross Museum and Archives (reference no. 1152/1). And an album held by the Wellcome Library has been digitised and is available online (<http://wellcomelibrary.org>, cat. no. RAMC/555).



Figure 5

Nurses and patients, outside the huts built on the terrace that overlooks the Mall. On one occasion, the huts themselves became a hazard. In one of her letters, Nurse Isabel Bell-Irving wrote: 'We had a fire here – the tar paper between the corrugated iron roof of one of the huts caught on fire and spread to a ward inside. All the cases in that ward are femur cases and they couldn't move. Luckily there are French doors, so all the men could be wheeled out on the terrace. Everyone who could formed a bucket brigade.'



Figure 6

Home entertainment in one of the wards. On 12 September 1917, Aileen records a concert in the North Ward: 'Wales sang National anthem in Welsh, Col sang Somewhere a Voice is calling, the Major played, Mr Paget on the mandoline, & self Chopin Etudes. Went on till 10. All in bed 10.30.'

When Aileen slipped coming down the black marble staircase a few days later, she sprained her ankle and had to go home for a few days. The event was recorded in a poem that one of the patients wrote in her scrapbook:

*Last week our Dinkie fell down stairs...
The North Ward all dissolved in tears
When they heard the news.
Young Duncan was disconsolate
And Barry got the blues.
Life is weary, life is sad
What shall we do without her
It's only 'cos I feel so bad
I write this song about her.*

And she could also be clumsy when it came to delivering their breakfast trays: in another poem, a patient teases her about spilling the porridge and dropping the fish.

The Bell-Irvings

Two sons of a Scottish-Canadian industrialist ended up at Lady Ridley's on more than one occasion. Duncan and Malcolm Bell-Irving were both pilots who bounced back from one injury only to be shot down again. When they were first admitted in 1915, their father and sister Isabel visited them at the hospital. Isabel decided that she too would like to do her bit for the war effort and so volunteered as a nurse. In one of her letters, she describes 'the boys' on her ward:

They vie with one another to have the most ridiculous toy mascots. One man has a huge monkey whose arms and legs and head can be manoeuvred into amazing shapes. I suppose when you think about it, they have to be silly, otherwise it would just be too ghastly. A Captain Taylor had a double amputation and I was worried about him. He said, "Cheer up B-I, I've always wanted to be a shorty!"²

Visitors and shows

Lady Ridley's Hospital quickly established itself as 'by far the most fashionable hospital for officers in the war'.³ As a result, the hospital was constantly busy. Armfuls of fresh flowers would regularly arrive from Lady Rothschild, and grateful ex-patients would send in 'quantities of chocolates and strawberries'. There was a steady stream of visitors which included family and friends as well as off-duty nurses and former patients. On 8 June 1918, Rudyard Kipling popped in to see one of the nurses and her patient. Royalty would also drop by. Isabel wrote:

Queen Alexandra comes to visit quite often. She speaks with a heavy accent. She is kindness itself, but often the

2. A biography of Duncan Bell-Irving by his daughter Elizabeth O'Kiely, *Gentleman Air Ace* (published 1992), draws on correspondence and accounts written by Duncan and his sister Isabel. All of the Bell-Irving quotations used in this article are taken from that book.

3. Newspaper clipping in Muriel Butler's scrapbook.

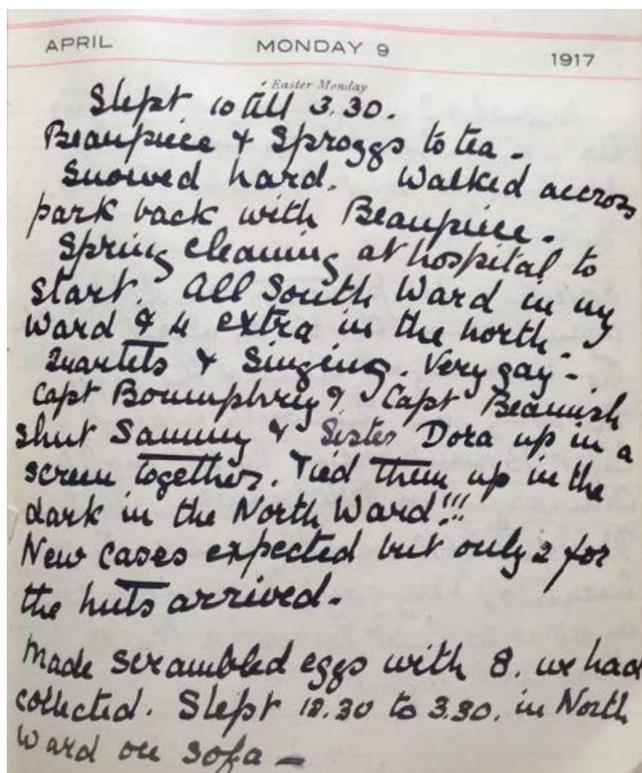


Figure 7
 Diary entries for early April 1917 reveal Aileen Maunsell to be practising some 'quartets' to perform for the patients. But the entry for Monday 9 April shows how a performance could degenerate into misbehaviour. 'Quartets & singing. Very gay - Capt Boumphrey & Capt Beamish shut Sammy & Sister Dora up in a screen together. Tied them up in the dark in the North Ward!!!'

men can't understand her and they are just getting comfortable when she arrives and puffs up their pillows. Sometimes when they know she's coming they pretend to be asleep

The hospital soon became a popular sightseeing spot. A newspaper clipping from the period states that 'every morning an interested crowd collects [along the Mall] to see the public shaving of the wounded soldiers, who are so comfortably situated in the temporary hospitals which are perched on the top of the terraces behind Carlton House Terrace'.⁴

The more mobile patients would often go out for tea or a trip around the park, and some of them would occasionally go to the theatre for a matinee performance. Mr Williams got into numerous scrapes when he was out and about in his wheelchair; on one occasion he got tangled up in a crowd at the Lord Mayor's show, and ended up being escorted down the street by a policeman - according to Aileen's diary there was 'much cheering from everyone'.

In the evening, there were regular concerts. Sometimes the patients would provide the entertainment (Figure 6). Aileen herself was a very accomplished pianist - prior to the war she had spent time in Dresden studying music;

she spent many of her evenings playing for the patients, and her musical talents were greatly appreciated (Figure 7). But on other occasions people from outside would come in: 'Madame & 3 pupils came & sang & sang. Good voices but very sentimental'. In January 1916 'a Miss Jones played rag-times. Danced behind the screens with Capt Dodds and Mr Bell Irving!!!'

When there wasn't a concert to distract them, the young patients would try to concoct an excuse for a party. Duncan Bell-Irving recalled:

When Dr Wyatt came to the drawing room, I said brightly, 'What about a birthday party tonight - you know, champagne and oysters from Mrs Lewis's'. Dr Wyatt looked around the ward. There were ten beds and at the time all their occupants were more or less cheerful. 'Right! You may have your oysters. But no more birthdays for at least a week.'

Aileen records that for one Captain's last night at the hospital, there was 'champagne in profusion. After Dr Wyatt left we all had some ... Very gay!'

Tensions and romance

Although many friendships were formed amongst the nurses and patients at Lady Ridley's hospital, there were times when personalities clashed. In August 1916, Aileen described one nurse as: 'Very condescending, ought to be squashed!!' On another occasion, Aileen writes about two nurses who 'are not working well together, going to be trouble.' In September 1917 her diary entry records a particularly bad day:

On duty 8.30. Very tired. Sister bad tempered to start with. Awful row over Mr Rae's eye. I took off the bandage as Mr Hudson ordered. Broke my specs to crown all & had to sit up with Sister still glowering till 3.

However, most of the time, it seems that everyone got on well together with many friendships continuing outside the confines of the hospital. Aileen became especially friendly with the Bell-Irving family - indeed, she briefly became engaged to Duncan Bell-Irving. Duncan was admitted to the hospital for the third time on 4 October 1917 following a flying accident. Aileen, who was working in the North Ward at the time, records that the next day he was 'moved from the Dining Room to North Ward. Hooray!' Duncan remained at the hospital until the end of January 1918 when, patched up but with a permanent limp, he was able to leave to resume his responsibilities at the flying school in Gosport. On the 27 February 1918, Aileen wrote:

Met Duncan - R.A.C. Lunch with him & Mr Bell-Irving Hyde Park Hotel. Photographed in park. Home together - gave me the ring.

Later that day she returned the ring, but does not record why. She simply says: 'Very miserable'.

Later in the year, a young soldier called Philip Gell

4. Newspaper clipping in Muriel Butler's scrapbook.

arrived at the hospital. Aileen didn't write very much about Second Lieutenant Gell during what remained of the war years. But on 16 November 1920 they would marry at the Parish Church in Paddington.

All fighting ceased

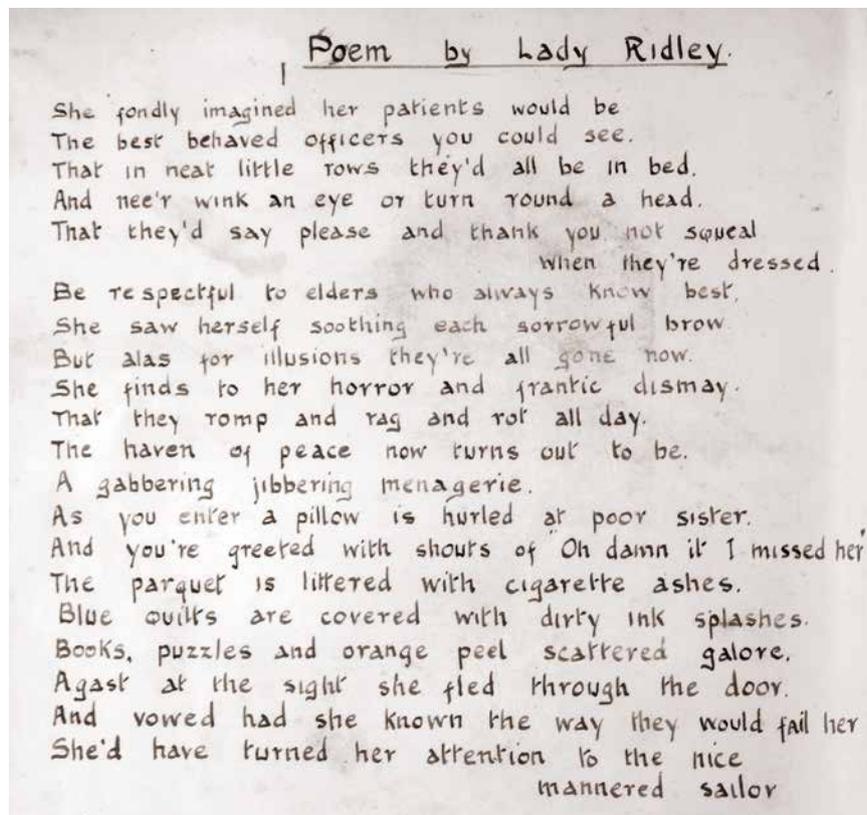
On 11 November 1918, an armistice was declared. Aileen describes the 'Wild rush down the Mall to Buckingham Palace' and writes that 'Lady Ridley gave all carnations & flags.' Although the war was over, the Hospital remained open until February 1919. Lady Ridley's gracious generosity was recognised in 1918 when, as donor and administrator of the Hospital, she was made a Dame. Upon the Hospital's closure, she wrote to express her own gratitude to those who had worked there: 'it is largely owing to the devoted band of V.A.D's that the hospital achieved such a standard of efficiency and comfort, and was able to bring such a great measure of relief and happiness to those who suffered so much in the War'.⁵ Aileen's scrapbook includes a poem that echoes Lady Ridley's appreciation of the VAD:

The smile on her face, and the look in her eye,
Was sufficient to cheer you, though ready to die.
The way that she did things, the way that she walked,
The way that she smiled, and the way that she talked,
Were more good to her patients than physic or dope;
If you were depressed she would fill you with hope

Exhibition

From the beginning of September to the end of November 2014, the British Academy will be holding a small exhibition of photographs from Aileen Maunsell's scrapbook and diaries, together with reproductions from Lady Ridley's own photograph album.

Items will include the poem above from Aileen Maunsell's scrapbook. It is unknown whether this poem was written by Lady Ridley, or by a patient imagining what Lady Ridley must be thinking.



The First World War at the British Academy

The British Academy is holding a range of events relating to the First World War during 2014. A list of the events, linking to recordings where available, can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/firstworldwar



Professor Jay Winter's lecture 'Shell Shock and the Emotional History of the First World War', given on 9 July 2014, included

a clip from the 1919 French film *J'accuse* showing a shell-shocked soldier's vision of the war dead rising from their graves.

5. RAMC/555, Wellcome Library.