



Nurses and VAD Hospitals in the Great War

Just as there was demand for men to join the forces during the war, the need for nurses was equally as great.

However, despite Florence Nightingale opening the first training school for nurses in 1860, nursing as a profession was still fairly unregulated by 1914. This changed drastically during the war when the vital role played by nurses and VAD 'lady-nurses' was acknowledged.

Established nurses attached to the forces were the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service ([QAIMNS](#)) and Queen Alexandra Naval Nurses ([QARNNS](#)). These nurses were the ones who served on in the Casualty Clearing Stations and on hospital ships on the front line on the Western Front and Mediterranean Front.

However, demand for nurses soon outstripped supply and VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachments) under the auspices of the [British Red Cross](#) and Order of St John of Jerusalem, provided much-needed reinforcements on the home front.

Voluntary Aid Detachments had been created by the War Office in 1908 at the same time as the Territorial Forces Act. They varied in size but in general consisted of a Commandant, a Medical Officer, a Quartermaster and 22 women, only two of whom were qualified nurses.

Most of the new recruits during the war came from upper and middle-class backgrounds. Although the rudimentary training of 6-8 weeks was free, all other costs, such as uniform and travel, had to be met by the volunteers, putting joining out of reach of most working-class women. Locations of the VAD hospitals varied from church halls, providing up to a dozen beds, to large stately homes or grand town houses, transformed into suitable accommodation and funded by the home owners themselves.

Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire had several military hospitals and convalescent homes. Closest to Collingham were Thorney Hall (demolished in 1963) Langford Hall and, in Newark, there was a military hospital on Lombard Street which worked closely with Newark Hospital on London Road to provide beds and care for the sick and wounded.

To differentiate between qualified nurses and VAD nurses, the VAD nurses had a red cross emblazoned on their pinafores. [Terms of service](#) for VAD nurses were strict; their role had to be taken seriously.

It is unknown how many women from Collingham and Brough were either qualified nurses or British Red Cross volunteers.

Known names include sisters Nellie and Elisabeth Hunt who were professional nurses. Both began their training at Sheffield Royal Infirmary around 1911. It is thought their training was sponsored by an unknown benefactor in the village as they couldn't have afforded it otherwise.

Elisabeth joined the prestigious QARNNS (Queen Alexandra Naval Nurse) Reserve at Haslar in 1914. Sadly, she died aged 32 of complications following an appendectomy in 1917.



Nellie Hunt in her nurse's uniform. She never married and lived at 28 The Green next to her parents.



Sister E Hunt in her QARNNS uniform.
photograph kindly supplied by J Stirland

VAD nurses included Dorothy Colton of South Scarle Hall, Clara and Alice Clarke of North Collingham and Kate Millns¹. Tragically, Kate Millns of Bank House, High Street, Collingham, who was attached to the Lombard St hospital, died of the Spanish Flu in 1919 aged 25, along with her sister Monica and 9-month old niece, also called Kate. Kate's cousin, Harold Millns, was killed in the war (see The Fallen section).

¹ See Frecknall p 135



Red Cross Nurses in an unknown VAD base. This post card is in Collingham and District Local History Society archives. The only clue is the name 'Alice' – possibly Alice Clarke (1893- 1978).



Clara Clarke (1890- 1983) in VAD uniform. Photo c/o Mr B Douthwaite. Clara later became a dinner lady at the Girls and Infants' School. Her memoirs can be found in CDLHS Archives Ref: EF/AA/CLA

Dorothy Colton (1895 – 1978)



Dorothy Colton c 1917. Dorothy's mother, Minnie Colton (1864-1936, often opened South Scarle Hall's grounds to the wounded for recreation. It is not certain that the hall itself was used as a military hospital. Minnie's sister (Dorothy's aunt) Flora Hutchinson was Quartermaster at the Lombard Street detachment (see T Frecknall's book p 119). Dorothy's epaulette reads '44 Notts' indicating the detachment she served in. Photograph c/o Mrs Pat Pennington

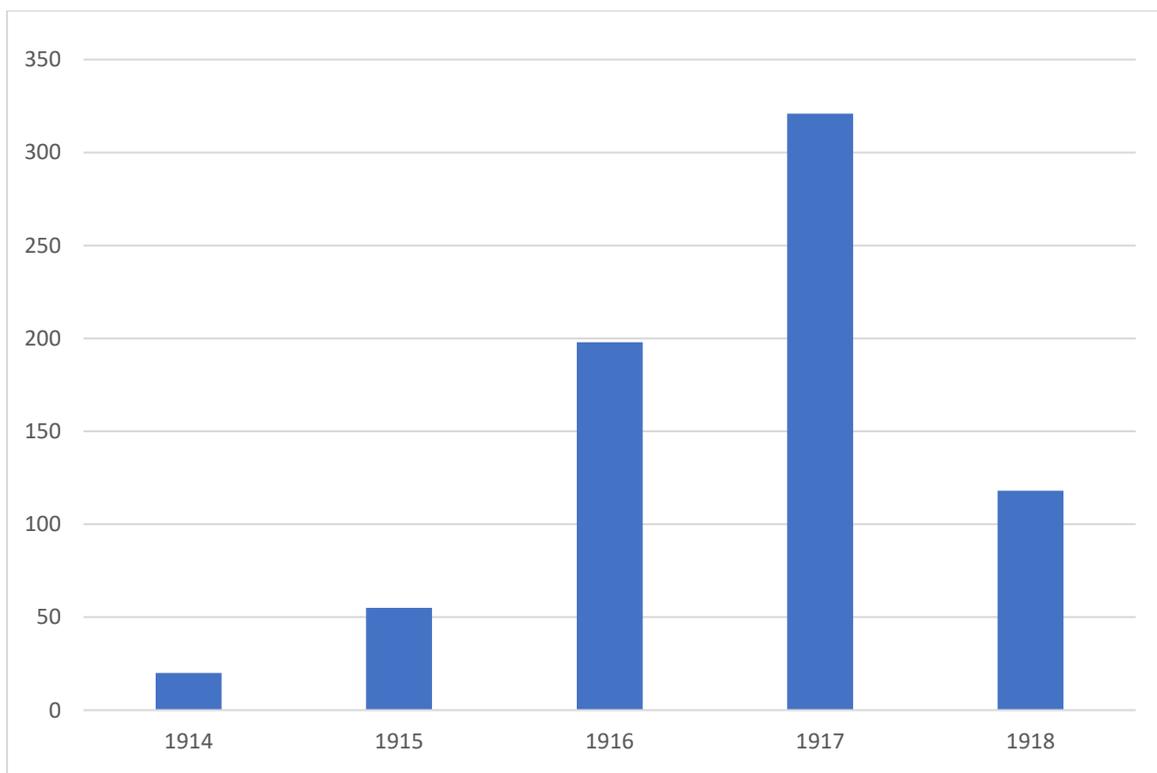
Newark Hospital

A useful resource in Newark Library is the Newark Hospital & Dispensary Account Reports 1906-1920 (Local Studies Reference Section). This lists the number of soldiers treated in the hospitals during the war.

'In August the Board placed 20 beds at the disposal of the War Office for the reception of wounded soldiers 20 men, 8 English and 12 Belgians were received from the Lincoln Base Hospital and remained several weeks; on leaving they expressed their gratitude for the care and attention bestowed on them by the Medical and Nursing Staff, who were ably assisted by Members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment, to whom the Board offers its cordial thanks.'

- Dated Feb 16th 1915 and signed by John Tidd Pratt, Vice-President

Below: Chart Showing Number of Soldiers Admitted to Newark Hospital 1914-1918



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Sources:

- Collingham and District Local History Society Archives
- Scarlet Finders [website](#)
- Trevor Frecknall's book 'Collingham and District in the Great War' published 2015 (available to borrow from Collingham Library and Newark Library)
- Photographs kindly supplied by Pat Pennington and Bob Douthwaite
- Newark Library Local Studies (for Newark Hospital & Dispensary Account Reports)
- [East Trent Genealogy](#) database

Recommended Read:

[Veiled Warriors](#) by Christine Hallett pub. OUP 2015

