

Trilby McDowall



& the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry



4 August 1914

War!

At the outbreak of War, the lives of every single person living in Britain changed overnight. Yet this was a very different way of living, a very different society: where women had distinct roles, including what work they were allowed to do, for those who were allowed to work at all. It is hard to imagine that time, let alone imagine leaving all of what you know to go and fight in a war hundreds of miles away.

This tells the story of Trilby McDowall, a young woman from Scotland, who did not accept that she could not do anything to help with the war effort, and left everything she knew to volunteer on the front lines with the then unknown First Aid Nursing Yeomanry: FANY.

This Project

This is a project made possible with grateful thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund. We worked with children and adults from St Marks School in Hadlow Down, East Sussex, England; and young people and adults from Inverness Royal Academy in Scotland, alongside many volunteers from both countries and many partners including members of Trilby's family.

The children aged 9, 10 and 11 in Hadlow Down first had to learn about the First World War, in order to understand the context. Volunteers worked alongside

staff at the Highland Archive Centre, Newhaven Fort, and Gateways to the First World War plus many community groups to research and understand both the time and the FANY organisation, and the women who joined them.

This project has inspired everyone who has worked with it.



Sound Architect Creative Media

Our projects promote awareness of our inheritance and heritage; the world we live in; new skills and education, social inclusion and creativity. We work with a variety of people, and ages, in a wide range of projects using digital media and the arts. Our objective is to make history come to life, and to ensure that valuable research and memories are recorded for future generations: held within museums, libraries, schools and records offices as well as on-line; and live in the hearts and minds of everyone involved. We use film, drama and digital techniques to bring heritage to life, as well as working alongside participant volunteers in research, oral history, documenting and writing articles.

Our aim is to stimulate participants through interaction, creativity and knowledge, to increase their awareness of their heritage and their community and environment.

Inspire, Create, Educate

The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry

The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (F.A.N.Y.) owes its origins to Sergeant Major Edward Baker in the Cavalry in the Boer War. In the Battle of Omdurmen in 1898, he was wounded in the shin and lay on the battlefield for hours waiting to be picked up by stretcher bearers who were finding it very difficult to navigate the terrain. Lots of men were dying on the battlefield: if there was some kind of ambulance service, they could have been taken to advanced dressing stations and they would have probably survived.



Sergeant Major Baker

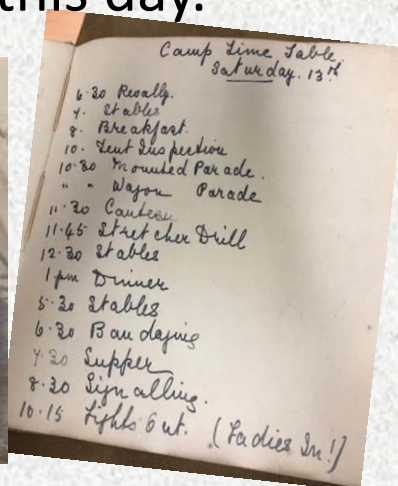


It was here that he began to have an idea: a vision or fantasy. Women on horseback coming to the rescue. Dressed in bright, beautiful scarlet uniforms, riding side-saddle onto the battlefield to administer first aid to the wounded men, then having tended their wounds, hoist the men onto their horses and gallop off to safety.

Foundations

In September 1907 he finally founded and established the Corps, putting his dream into action. Recruitment drives were held in the early years, with the emphasis always on attracting young women who could already ride and who owned their own horses. However, by 1911 the Corps was being led by Grace Ashley-Smith, a feisty, no-nonsense Scottish woman, and Lilian Franklin, who became the first Commanding Officer, always known as 'Boss'. They helped to introduce a more practical uniform and tougher and more serious training.

Early camps consisted of mainly riding and First Aid. Mary Baxter-Ellis (*pictured right*) who was a commanding officer in the 1930's, noted that *"the call was created out of a very feminine idealism, centred around that great Victorian heroine, Florence Nightingale."* A major step forward came with the Annual Camp in 1913 held at Pirbright, which lasted two weeks, and which saw the Brigade of Guards taking them under their wing, beginning a connection which continues to this day.



Into Action!

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the FANY quickly followed up on their military contacts, but to no avail - everyone refused to take them. Grace Ashley-Smith was on board a ship bound for South Africa to visit relatives when war was declared – she immediately turned back and set sail for home. One of the fellow voyagers was the Belgian Minister for the Colonies – and he decided that if the British would not have them, the Belgians would.

Back in the UK, Grace Ashley-Smith acquired an ambulance and returned with six FANYs – they crossed to Calais on 27th October 1914 to drive ambulances for the Belgians and the French. This date marks the official start of the FANYs' wartime service, and is still the date nearest to which they hold the annual Corps Reunion.



On 29th October, they took over a dirty and decayed convent school opposite the Church of Notre Dame,

called Lamarck Hospital. The wounded were being brought in before the FANYs had even had time to unpack. The conditions they had to contend with, even without the shellfire, were fairly arduous. The vehicles were those with rudimentary screens or none, uncertain engines, and tyres depressingly prone to punctures.



The FANY also performed other duties as required: setting up regimental aid posts, motor kitchens and even a mobile bath vehicle. This had been brought over by FANYs Marion and Hope Gamwell, and was called 'James' – and offered the luxury of a hot bath to 40 men per hour.

In all, during the First World War FANYs were awarded 17 Military Medals; 27 Croix de Guerre; one Legion d'Honneur, and 11 Mentions in Despatches.



Who Became FANYs?

At the time, and in such a structured society where women of every class were seen in a very particular way and most women were not allowed to work, this organisation was very progressive. However, its roots are in the conservative and traditional attitudes of the time: that women are innately caring and good at nursing. Yet again, the idea of women actually being on the battlefield was entirely new to Victorian and Edwardian society.

Edward Baker noted that *“should ever the horrors of war loom in our horizon, they shalt not shirk the task in front of them, but will ride forward with stout hearts and willing hands to render a great service to our country and gain great laurels for the brow of womanhood”*. In the same article Baker writes *“these women will follow the fighting line as closely as possible, ride with the skirmishing parties, take their chances with them”*.

Mary Baxter-Ellis states *“the FANY was created out of the old world – it belonged to the age of the horse; it’s members primarily horsewomen”*. It’s clear this was an organisation aimed at women who were wealthy and excellent horse riders: they had to be wealthy as they were unpaid. Curiously, this is the main reason that women gave for joining in the first place, not to do with nursing. Also, up until this point, women rode side saddle: now, suddenly, they were riding astride. It was not seemly for a woman to this, so again, this was hugely progressive.

These were women who had lived quite constrained lives. Upper class women in this time would be perhaps involved in a bit of philanthropy, a bit of charitable work, obviously none of them were expected to have a career. Here was an opportunity to join an organisation to mix with other women, do some horse riding, and perhaps do things they had never previously been allowed to do: which was hugely appealing.



Tasks for the Modern Young FANY Women:

- ✓ Drive cars, start cars: hand cranking an engine (physically exhausting work), fixing cars and punctures (all previously male roles)
- ✓ Cycling as well as horse riding
- ✓ Going to camp
- ✓ Domestic tasks such as peeling potatoes at camp – previously this would have been done by servants
- ✓ Basic nursing and first aid
- ✓ Stretcher bearing
- ✓ Wearing a uniform – which changed from the original scarlet tunic and blue skirt to Khaki in 1910; with hemlines starting to rise to just above the ankles, and pockets: previously unheard of in women's clothing.

Trilby McDowall

Trilby McDowall joined the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry in 1916 aged 20. She was stationed at Calais, France, which was subjected to some heavy bombing. She then went to Belgium, where the FANY became affiliated to the Belgian Army. Trilby said *"It was quite strange when we went home on leave. We would have to register as aliens because we were members of the Belgian Army"*.



She drove an ambulance just behind the front lines in the First World War, flew in an Avro Biplane, and received the Belgian Order of Elizabeth and the Croix de Guerre from the French.

She noted much later: *"Cologne was wonderful after the Armistice. I stayed on until 1920 as a guide*



driving people around showing them places of interest. Of course Cologne was not as devastated in the First World War as it was in the Second World War."

T trilby's Letters

Thanks to Trilby's family, we were given access to Trilby's letters home during the First World War and when she stayed on afterwards.

Her letters are candid and open and talk excitedly of dances and dinners and meeting handsome men, as well as her duties and tasks as a FANY. It is clear that it was an adventure for her, and if she was ever afraid, it certainly doesn't show in her letters. She is driven, tireless, and incredibly hard working.

My dearest mother,

Here it is time to write again. The days just fly in this place, and one does not seem to have time for anything. We have been fairly busy, with trains every day, and sometimes in the middle of the night, not only Belgian, but English, French and Bosche who have lost their divisions. One English Officer that I took the other day did not even know what town he was in, absolutely lost. On Thursday General Charteris passed through on his way back to GHQ so we went to Boulogne for dinner. It is such a nice change, and he is quite a dear old thing. He often comes down to the Isle, and thinks of standing in Kirkcudbright in the next election.

On Friday Moses Marples and myself went for dinner with General Radcliffe here, at Base Headquarters. We had a very cheery time, and danced until 12 with a topping band, and a lovely floor, and the staff are such a very cheery crowd. On Sat I had a goodbye lunch with Tebbut who is going back to the line; he is such a nice kid I miss him tremendously.

Then I played tennis in the afternoon with the English Convoy; as it was my first game I did not do very much to uphold the honour of the Belgian FANYs.

Mother dearest,

I have been having such a gorgeous time and I must write and tell you all about it.

On Monday Major Perkins and another Brigade Major from HQ came down and took us out for lunch, and we did a lot of shopping for a dance they were giving. He really is a dear Major Perkins, fearfully good-looking and attractive but of course married. All the nicest people are out here.

On Tuesday we had a great bathing party. A real pukka Major General, Colonel Goslet and Major Perks went down in a glorious car to the shore, and had great fun. I must say I like those staff people enormously. They are so awfully easy to get on with, and altogether charming. Then yesterday Major Perkins came down in a tremendous state of excitement as they were short of girls, so what a time I had. I tried every girl I knew without success, but at last raked up some Canadian nurses. Then off we went, and I have never enjoyed myself so much in all my life. Simply topping men, nearly all brass hats with four generals. A wonderful old chateau with a beautiful garden with a lake and everything. A top hole dinner with a band, and then such a dance, I cannot describe it. All men who I really like and just everything you could wish for.

Major Perkins is leaving the Division now so I don't expect we will see much of him in the future which is rather sad, he is such a dear boy. We got to bed at 3 o'clock and by 5.15 we were on the road again, then we bathed this morning and lunch on the plage and we were both so dreadfully sleepy even Marples' flow of conversation was stemmed for the time being, and now she is sleeping as if she would never wake up again. A pathetic babe has just come to ask me out for dinner as he is so lonely, so I must stop.

How is dear old Kathleen, give her my very best love and tell her I will write quite soon, love from Trilby

FANY – After The First World War

They played a vital role in the Second World War as well: the FANYs were the wireless operators and coders that were receiving messages from men and women that trained in unarmed and armed combat and parachuted into occupied France.

They carried on and are still active today: known as the “Princess Royal’s Volunteer Corps”. When there is a terrorist attack, they will be staffing communication lines, telephones, helpdesks.

It is an organisation that women belong to because they are wanting to be in a women’s organisation that does exciting things. The FANYs today do much more and the training is rigorous, akin to Army training.

We were lucky enough to find and interview a current member: Rachel, who joined for exactly the same reason that those original women did: to be useful, for adventure, for sorority, and to be useful to their Country.



Trilby's Ongoing Adventures

After the War, her adventurous spirit kept her travelling all over the globe including to Singapore, Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) and India. She wrote to her mother again from Singapore about tennis with the Lord Chief Justice and Lady Shaw, dancing at the Europa Hotel, tennis and dancing at 'The Club'; more tennis and afternoon tea at Government House and then back to Penang. In 1926 she was spending time with Army Captain (later promoted to Major) Daniel Bullard, and on 14 October 1926 they were married in Rangoon. He sadly died in 1938 and Trilby returned to England with their three year old son William.

With the onset of the Second World War, she again volunteered and served as a driver with the FANY, though this time remaining in the UK. In November 1940 she was with the American Ambulance Corps GB in Newcastle, but three months later went south and spent most of the war based in Honiton, Devon and Marazion in Cornwall. 1941 was a particularly busy time with the Luftwaffe bombing of such places as Plymouth, Exeter and Portland. Even so, Trilby notes *"this time it was very dull because I was stationed in England all the time."* She finally left the Service in October 1945 and retired to her home at Gatehouse of Fleet back in Scotland.

There is an article in an Australian Newspaper circa 1971 that mentions her:

Trilby having to hand in her machine gun

By Nadia Panic

Trilby Bullard hated having to handover a machine gun, a relic from the First World War, to the British authorities.

Trilby lives at Kirkcudbright, in Scotland, 40 miles from troubled Northern Ireland and all firearms have had to be confiscated because the British authorities believe they could fall into Irish hands and be reconditioned and used.

“The machine gun was given to me as a memento by a French boyfriend, who had shot a German with it,” said Trilby. “It has amused many young boys during the years, even my son.”

privileged young women were content to stay in Britain but Trilby went to the firing lines to join the FANY on her own, to serve King and Country. It was a spirit that never lost its fire, throughout her life.

She is, without doubt, a woman to admire and be inspired by.

Recollections of her in later life by her daughter-in-law are of a very independent lady with firm views (mostly very conservative) on almost anything. She died on 13 June 1987 aged 91.

Trilby was an incredible woman: uncommonly spirited and seemingly fearless, willing to try her hand at anything and travel anywhere with enormous bravery for everything she did. Most 20 year old



This Project

This project has seen the collaboration of children and young people from East Sussex and the Highlands, and volunteers from all over Scotland and England. These people have had experiences peeking into a world which is now out of living memory, and these are experiences that they will never forget. The following pages show some of the work undertaken throughout the project.

It is so important that we keep the spirit of these people alive: these brave women and men that really did ensure that we can all live the lives we have now.



The Menin Gate, Ypres / Ieper

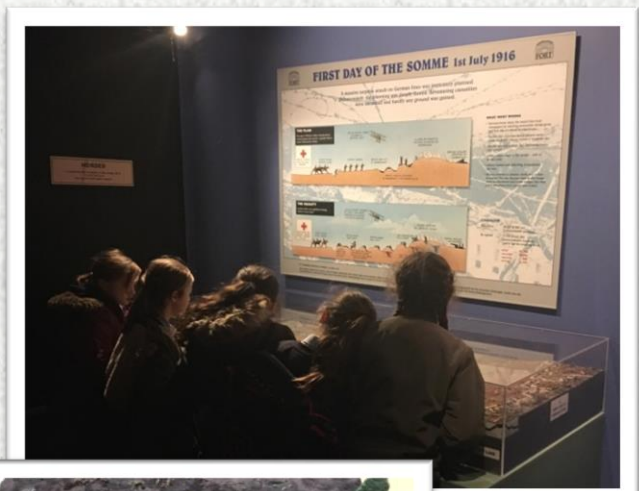
Trips and Research

Learning about the Wars

The Imperial War Museum



Newhaven Fort



*Work by
the school
children*

*Including
trench
systems*



Poppies

The world war has come, people were fighting and dying, animals were sheltering.

When the war had ended, poppies grew.

We didn't know what they meant until the war ended.

Poppies meant peace.

BY FREDDIE
AGE 7



Flanders

FR 1914 FRANZÖSISCHE FRONT DEZEMBER 1914 FRENCH FRONT DECEMBER 1914 FRONT F
15 BRITISCHE FRONT JANUAR 1915 BRITISH FRONT JANUARY 1915 FRONT I



Above: a preserved First World War trench; left: a small part of the Menin Gate with engraved names of missing fallen. Below: a small section of Tyne Cot Cemetery on the site of the Battle of Passchendaele.

Top / bottom: in the path on the ground at Hill 60.



DECEMBER 1914 DEUTSCHE FRONT DEZEMBER 1914 GERMAN FRONT DECEMBER 1914 FRONT

In Flanders Fields Museum

We explored First Aid as it would have been in the First World War



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