



Royal College
of Nursing



ALBUM

*It May Be For Sometime,
It May Be Forever*

Poetry Anthology

Acknowledgements

This anthology was inspired by ten nurses who kept scrapbooks and diaries during the First World War. The poetry and images they collected are included in these pages, alongside contemporary poetry written during workshops with nurse and poet Molly Case.

Thanks to our tireless RCN History of Nursing Society volunteers, who helped with every step of the Service Scrapbooks project, including the transcriptions in this book. Thank you to everyone who attended our poetry workshops and to All Souls School for your wonderful poetry contributions. Finally, thanks to RCN Library and Archive for their support and Heritage Lottery Fund for funding this project.

First World War Service Scrapbooks owned by: Jessie Akehurst, Josephine Angois, Florence Blythe-Brown, Beatrice Bowman, Nellie Carter, Hilda Hand, Beatrice Longmire, Mabel Pearce, Beatrice Tanner and May Wilson.

Thanks to History of Nursing Society volunteers: Marion Allison, Loretta Bellman, Julie Bliss, Jill Bowman, Joan Cobern, Caroline Robertson Cowell, Jane Dean, Judith Devine, Jacky Harvey, Claire Holmes, Liz Howard Thornton, Patricia Keegan Poels, Jacinta King, Jayne Knill, Claire Laurent, Lesley Mcfarlane, Helen Patrick, Sally Pentecost, Catherine Regan, Viv Sewell, Suzanne Shouesmith, Kathy Sturley, Alison Spires, Caroline Waller, Cynthia Wenden, Kate Whatman, Dianne Yarwood and Susan Yasee.

Published by
Royal College of Nursing
20 Cavendish Square
London W1G 0RN

Publication code: 006 648

© Royal College of Nursing. All rights reserved. Other than as permitted by law no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the Publishers or a licence permitting restricted copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS. This publication may not be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by ways of trade in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published, without the prior consent of the Publishers.

Cover Illustration: Album belonging to Hilda Hand.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 2 |
| Bed | 3 |
| Were Not the Stars Part of Our Life | 6 |
| Passchendaele | 7 |
| It May Be For Sometime, It May Be Forever | 10 |
| The Blue Eye | 11 |
| For Brave Deeds & Doing You Get the V.C. | 14 |
| Cancer Centre at UCLH | 15 |
| The Ideal | 18 |
| Tree | 19 |
| My Sister | 22 |
| The Bullet | 23 |
| Seeking Refuge | 26 |
| T'is Fun, Not Sarcasm | 27 |
| Mud | 29 |
| Essex | 32 |
| For Gold the Merchant Ploughs the Main | 33 |
| The Forest of Death | 36 |
| The Brown Sofa in the Lounge | 37 |
| I am a Pen... | 40 |
| To Miss Wilson | 41 |
| What Can I See? | 44 |
| Truce | 50 |
| Women's Work | 47 |



Service Scrapbooks: Nursing, Storytelling and the First World War

Poetry comes from human experience. As a nurse we encounter people at their most vulnerable, people experiencing times that are traumatic, life-changing, life-affirming, and memorable. We look after people all over the world, in hospitals, in their homes, in prisons and mental health settings, we meet people that have experienced the rawest layers of human experience and all with a story to tell. Writing poetry can improve mood, reduce stress, help people to explore life events, express and resolve painful feelings or simply act as a distraction to the mundanity or worries of daily life.

In my role as writer in residence I have been running a poetry workshop for nurses, the public and children exploring the theme of 'Place.'

In the workshop we examined places that meant something to us. Using the familiar nursing assessment, ABCDE, we used all our senses and skills in examination, Look, Listen and Feel, to bring to life homes we had known, places we had passed through and landscapes that have meant something to us, taking time to craft them into poems.

The Service Scrapbooks we have at the RCN speak of home, both the nurses and the soldiers long for familiarity and draw on memories and anecdotes from places they hold close in their hearts.

Molly Case

Bed

Queen Alexandra Military Hospital for Officers, Highgate, 1915.

We are rickety and old,
cold bed-post,
tucked-in bed-linen
all neat at the folds.

Rolled skin and fractured limbs,
straight and steady
before the wash begins.

In here the light is dimmed,
sunlight splits against the rim
of a glass, flowers and cards;
get well soon soldier,
we'll see you soon.

When night comes
moonlight falls
in far corners of the room,
open wounds,
poppies in bloom,
sheets now red
lying stained in the gloom.

This soldier wakes too soon:
wet with fever,
dreaming of a girl back home
who he told he'd never leave her.
Believe her when she writes,
she'll be waiting for you.

And sketch her in scrapbooks,
draw memories of home,
leave scribbled pages
on my sheets when you go.

When we're all washed clean
and this war is done,
and we can be left to dry outside,
in the warmth of the sun.

Molly Case



Were not the stars part of our life
we would not see them shining there
Did not perfection end the strife
we would not dream its' grandeur here
If souls were killed in dying breath
we should not ponder love and death.

Geoffrey Ogle. 3/3578
N.Z.M.C. 22/2/18.

Were Not the Stars Part of Our Life

Were not the stars part of our life
We would not see them shining there
Did not perfection end the strife
We would not dream its' grandeur here
If souls were killed in dying breath
We should not ponder love and death.

Geoffrey Ogle. 3/3578
N.Z.M.C. 22/2/18

Passchendaele

When I stepped inside the trench,
all at once the dirty and sticky mud sank my shoe.
Our captain telling us to fire at the enemy.
The rats running around our legs.
Raining like hell dripping down to earth,
Soaking like a wet sponge.
When we finished firing it was lunch time...

...the time for rest.

Sinking into my emotions, I feel devastated.
A harsh shell flew right through my head,
it all happened in slow motion.
I closed my eyes, never to open again
I died in hell, they called it Passchendaele.

Antara
Year 6



"It may be for sometime, it may be for ever"

Shall we be here another year, will there never be an end?
Shall we stay on till we're old & grey & there's not a man to mend
Must we be called at 20 to 6, the rest of our life on earth?
Twenty to five it really is, not my idea of Smith.
How long shall we wear the scarlet & there's not the slightest doubt;
We'd pack it away in lavender, were the Matron not about
I should think the folks of Lincoln, will see red for evermore
For the streets are red with tippets & there's one at every door.
Must we ever climb the Lindum, or the Steep's more giddy heights?
Forbidden are coats unbuttoned, a most unseemly sight;
We love the ancient city, that sitteth on a hill
We'd love it with a greater love, if it passed a Tramway Bill.
Despite our little worries, we've a very happy time
These really are not grumbles, it's just to make it rhyme
We'd do it again dear England, we'd do far more for thee
But if we stay here another year, we deserve the R.R.C

Elsie Dakin
Lincoln July 21st 1916

It May Be For Sometime, It May Be For Ever

Shall we be here another year, will there never be an end?
Shall we stay on till we're old & grey & there's not a man to mend
Must we be called at 20 to 6, the rest of our life on earth?
Twenty to five it really is, not my idea of mirth.
How long shall we wear the scarlet & there's not the slightest doubt;
We'd pack it away in lavender, were the Matron not about
I should think the folks of Lincoln, will see red for evermore
For the streets are red with tippets & there's one at every door.
Must we ever climb the Lindum, or the Steep's more giddy heights?
Forbidden our coats unbuttoned, a most unseemly sight;
We love the ancient city, that sitteth on a hill
We'd love it with a greater love if it passed a Tramway Bill
Despite our little worries, we've a very happy time
These really are not grumbles, it's just to make it rhyme
We'd do it again dear England, we'd do far more for thee
But if we stay here another year, we deserve the R.R.C

Elsie Dakin
Lincoln
July 21st 1916

The Blue Eye

Dark, deadly, doom.

This story begins at Passchendaele. Dark, deadly, doom.

I spread across the land, crashing over the sea of people.

Feeling terrified, sorry, I cried through the clouds.

Making the land wet and muddy...

Wet, windy, worried.

The man below me cried.

Wet, windy, worried.

The smell of blood was swallowed by the air with a blink of an eye.

Feeling terrible, scared, I whimpered through the clouds

Why am I here?

Why are they here?

Why is everyone here?

The white flag was up on the hill.

For now, the war has ended...

Danielle

Year 6



Bringing up the guns

For brave deeds & doing you get the V.C.
To be worn on the left breast so that all may see
But there's thousands of brave lads &
thousands to be,
Whose reward for brave deeds is just R.I.P.

When this you see remember me
And bear me in your mind
Let all the world say what they will
Speak of us only as they find

Best wishes from
Pte J.S. Boone 202063
2nd West Yorks Regt
5A Ward
Lincoln

For Brave Deeds & Doing You Get The V.C.

For brave deeds & doing you get the V.C.
To be worn on the left breast so that all may see
But there's thousands of brave lads &
Thousands to be,
Whose reward for brave deeds is just R.I.P.

When this you see remember me
And bear me in your mind
Let all the world say what they will
Speak of us only as they find

Best wishes from
Pte. J.S. Boone 202063
2nd West Yorks Regt
5A Ward
4th M.G.H
Lincoln

Cancer Centre at UCLH

Kind smile
gentle voice
quiet welcome
a word, a glance, a nod
“The Quiet Room?”
A place to pray, to weep
and scream
a place to live, and a place to die.

Bridget Clarence-Smith



The Ideal.

Soft little hands by the sun kissed brown -

I bend and kiss you too:

Dear little hands that have gripped my heart
Gripped it and held it true.

Hands of a child yet a woman grown
Little brown hands that I hold in my own
Soft and warm as the summer sands
How do you comfort me, little brown hands?

Big grey eyes, like misty skies
with the sunlight shining through
Eyes that are grey when the skies are grey,
And blue when the skies are blue.

Eyes that are laughing and sad by turn;
Sometimes gay and sometimes stern;
Eyes like violets brimmed with dew,
Tender and true, tender and true.

Little red mouth like a cherry flower,
lips that I long to kiss,
Like two soft rose-petals, lightly crowned
with a quaint little smile & bliss.

Just at each corner that wee smile hides,
With one little dimple there besides,
Dear little mouth, so strong, so true -
But everything's dear, love - because it's you.

J. G. J.

Herbert A. D. Alexander R.A.M.C.
Salonique 1917

The Ideal

Soft little hands by the sun kissed brown-
I bend and kiss you too:
Dear little hands that have gripped my heart
Gripped it and held it true.
Hands of a child yet a woman grown
Little brown hands that I hold in my own
Soft and warm like the summer sands
How do you comfort me, little brown hands?

Big grey eyes, like misty skies
with the sunlight shining through
Eyes that are grey when the skies are grey,
And blue when the skies are blue.
Eyes that are laughing and sad by turn;
Sometimes gay and sometimes stern;
Eyes like violets brimmed with dew,
Tender and true, tender and true.

Little red mouth like a cherry flower,
Lips that I long to kiss,
Like two soft rose-petals, lightly crowned
with a quaint little smile of bliss.
Just at each corner that wee smile hides,
With one little dimple there besides;
Dear little mouth, so strong, so true-
But everything's dear love- because it's you

J.G.J.
Herbert. A.D. Alexander R.A.M.C.
Salonique 1917

Tree

The smoky breeze blowing in my direction,
My autumn leaves falling onto the muddy floor,
BOOM BANG
Cannons, guns, swords and more,
As boots sink in the deep dark mud below,
A plethora of soldiers come marching down
Piles of death lay on the ground
A huge army they have found
My bony arms start to dry,
All the birds are forced to fly.
Oh World War One
What have you done?

Elektra
Year 6



I have spoken to ladies of each style and set,
Some can charm; others act like a blister;
But the most fascinating that ever I met
Is our bright little Hospital Sister.

-2-
You may feel "in the blues" any hour - day or night,
She'll speak and she'll smile as she passes -
That laugh is infectious - your troubles take flight,
And you call yourself all kinds of asses.

-3-
She'll make up your bed five or six times a day,
Just when you feel ready for leisure;
"It's all for your good and your comfort," she'll say,
So you smile, and pretend it's a pleasure.

-4-
You've then got to wash during unearthly hours,
(Of course, to keep clean is quite proper)
So you screw up your face, but her marvellous powers
Make you scrub - without coming a cropper.

-5-
Horrid medicines you drink; nasty pains you endure,
As she does all so nicely and neatly;
You will do almost anything - kill you or cure,
For this lady who treats you so sweetly.

-6-
But of all the gay moments I have in my sight,
A sublime one I would not have missed sir -
Is, while taking one's pulse, one's hand is held tight
In that of our dear little Sister.

2nd General Hospital,
Salonica,
10/12/16

Harold Ross.
R.A.M.C.

My Sister

I have spoken to ladies of each style and set,
Some can charm; others act like a blister:
But the most fascinating that ever I met
Is our bright little Hospital Sister

You may feel in the blues any hour- day or night
She'll speak and she'll smile as she passes—
That laugh is infectious- your troubles take flight
And you call yourself all kinds of asses

She'll make up your bed five or six times a day
Just when you feel ready for leisure
"Its all for your good and your comfort" she'll say
So you smile, and pretend it's a pleasure.

You've then got to wash during unearthly hours,
(Of course to keep clean is quite proper)
So you screw up your face but her marvellous powers
Make you scrub - without coming a cropper.

Horrid medicines you drink: nasty pains you endure
As she does all so nicely and neatly
You will do almost anything - kill you or cure
For this lady who treats you so sweetly.

But of all the gay moments I have in my sight
A sublime one I would not have missed sir-
Is, while taking my pulse, one's hand is held tight
In that of our dear little Sister

42nd General Hospital
Salonica 10/12/16
Harold Ross
R.A.M.C

The Bullet

I am a bullet.

I live in a gun.

The creatures put me in the gun.

I've been carried to the battlefield in the gun.

My friends had been ejected from the gun.

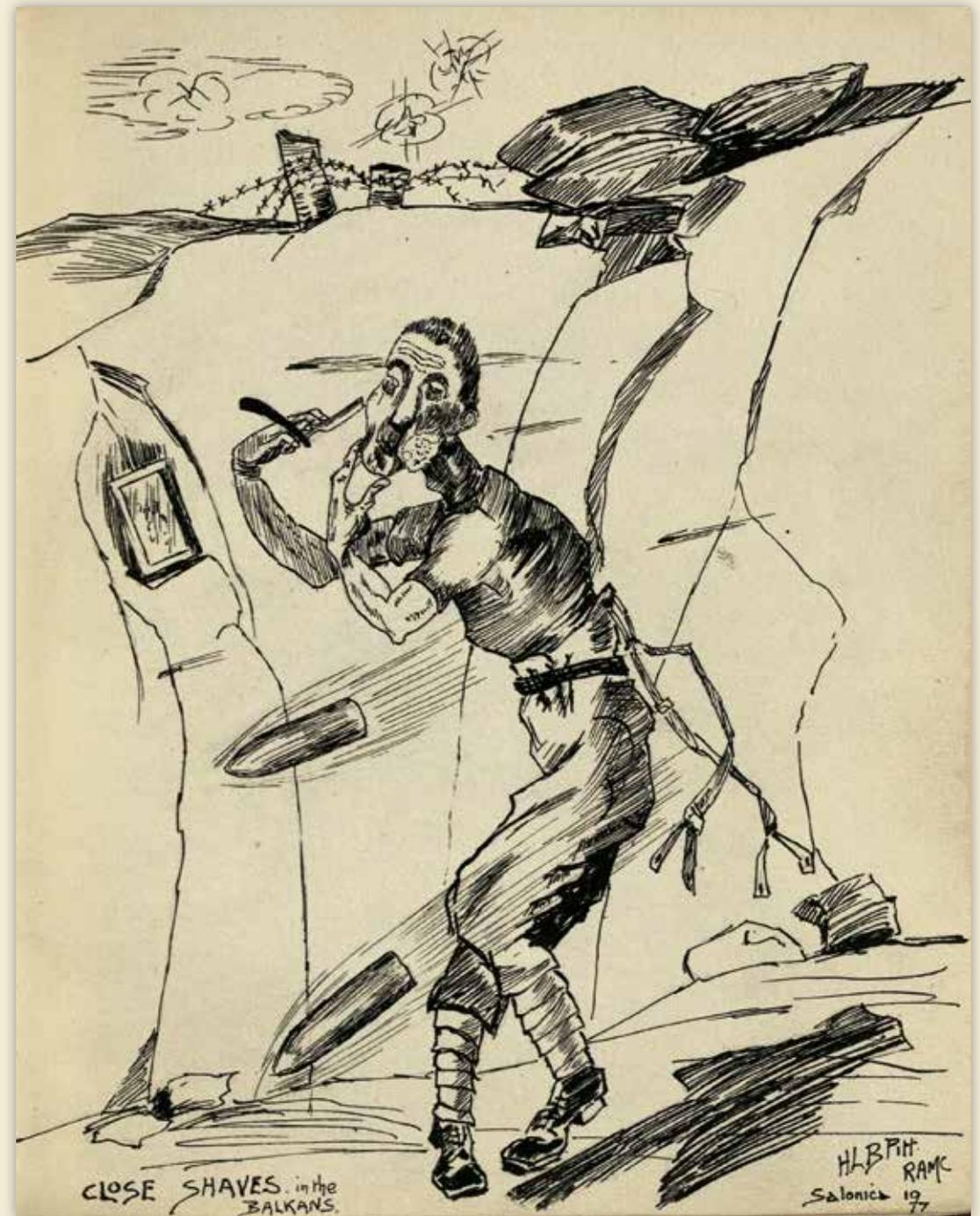
One day I was the first in the line then I shot in
to the flesh of an unsuspecting human.

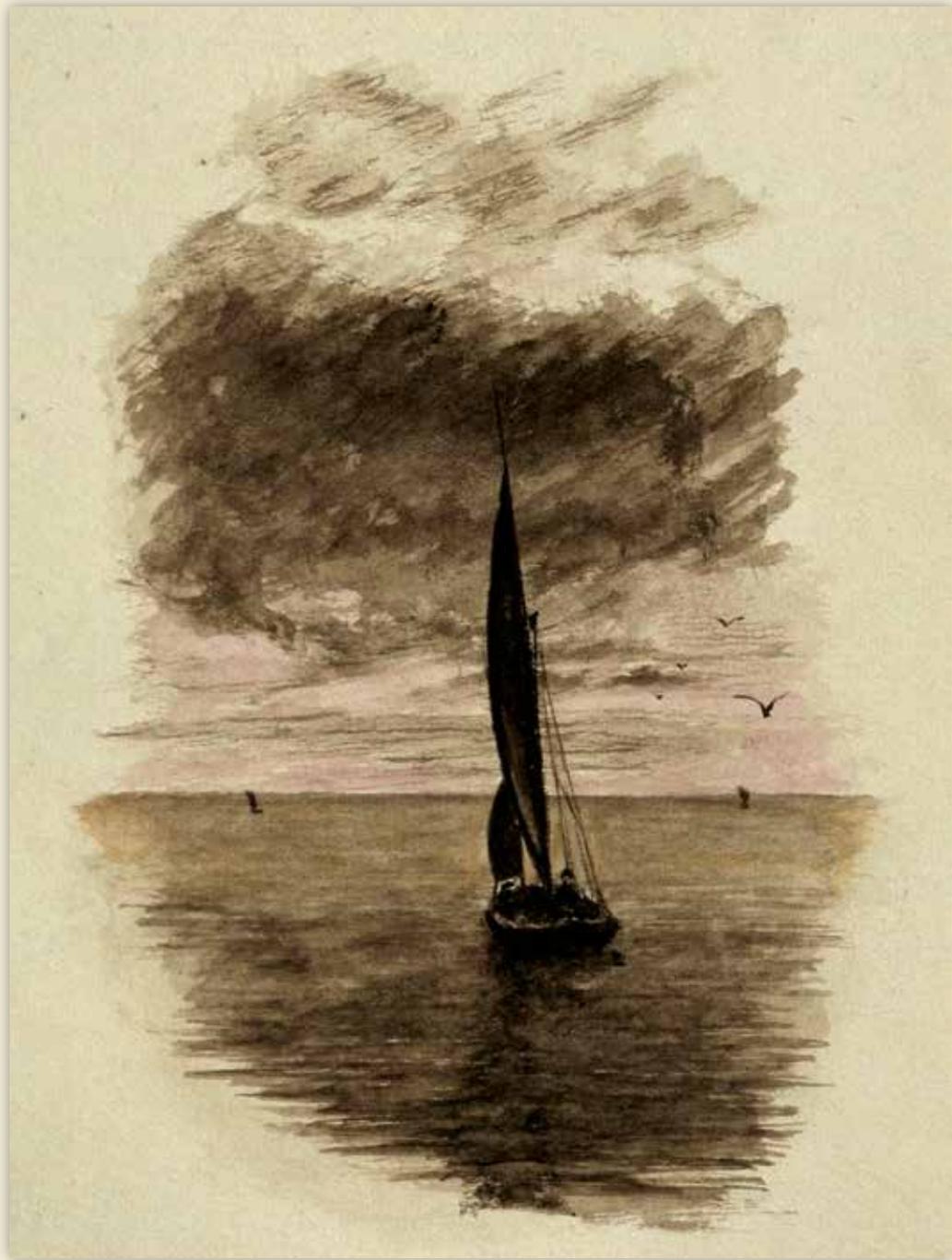
I dug and dug in the humans flesh until I found
the humans brain and murdered him...

My job is done, not that I am proud of it.

Bing

Year 6





Seeking Refuge

Take me to the country,
from which, my love, you derive,
and show me the lands,
in which you were designed,
the tribes and the people,
with whom your features align,
O my love, take me to your home,
the place that feels divine.

Haajarah Hussain

'Tis Fun, Not Sarcasm.

A Cathedral city of ancient fame,
To be truthful, Lincoln is its name,
Noted for the Imp, with grinning face
That years ago, did haunt the place.

A hospital now the city holds,
A thousand beds 'tis said it unfolds,
In many huts, in a sea of mud,
Like a lot of arks at the fall of a flood
British, Belgian, Flemish & French
Men who've experienced life in a trench,
Sick or wounded in body or mind
In coming to Lincoln fresh health hope to find.

Here Drs, nurses & orderlies who
Of varied experience & character too,
Come to work in this hospital town,
All wear the cross but are minus the crown,
The work goes on by night & by day
The guards prowls round in a dreary way,
To answer the whistles that shriek loud for aid
And see lights all out for a Zeppelin raid.

Two night sisters wander in mud, rain, or snow
And brave the wild winds that up here often blow
They carry a storm lamp to lighten the way
To visit huts thrice ere the break of the day.

There are "B" huts & "D" huts, with "C" in between,
And "Big Bouncing Bertha" 's a sight to be seen
Two long rows of beds, a hundred in all,
Filled up with "Tommys", old, young, short & tall.

The hospital news of this quaint old town
Would fill a large book if all written down;
But I am no poet or author of fame
So I'll end this now by signing my name,
M. C. Sullivan-Crooke,

J. F. H. S.

The London Nurses Co-operation,
22, Langham St. Portland Place,
London. W.

4th. Northern General Hospital,
Lincoln.

April 15th. 1915.

Mud

The mud is the new enemy.

The mud just eats soldiers.

Eats them whole and alive.

Always hungry.

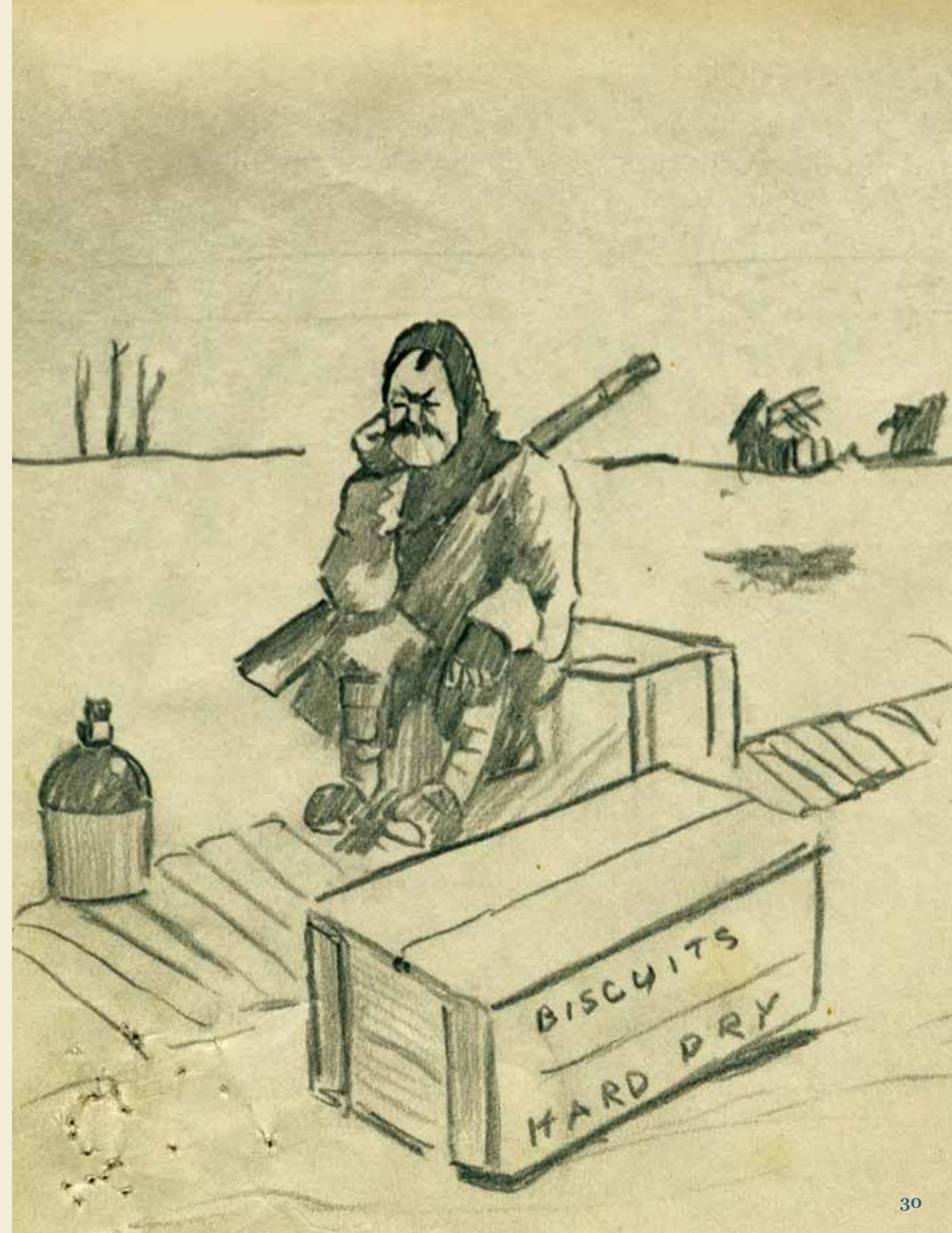
Lucky that the mud always gets served.

Mud works with mustard gas.

The mud never dies.

Isa

Year 6





Essex

Stark fields of autumn stubble
like Russia, land goes on forever
wind-blown across farms
wheat, sand and flint.

The sky gets old and days shorten
a line of gulls
hang over the station
follow the river
surrounded by willow and ash
leaves coloured like fur
or clay, flint and ivy stained
oak trees left over
since the peasant's revolt.
In bark carve the name Wat Tyler,
in hawthorn speak louder John Ball.

Pink anthropocene skies
a line of gulls caress
slowly towards sleep
beneath the din of planes

Bleak open roads
pools home cormorant
black in summer, the stench of wheat
pigeon feather, still water
oak galls
sap
grease
beeswax
splattered pesticides
the land is open

open
open
open

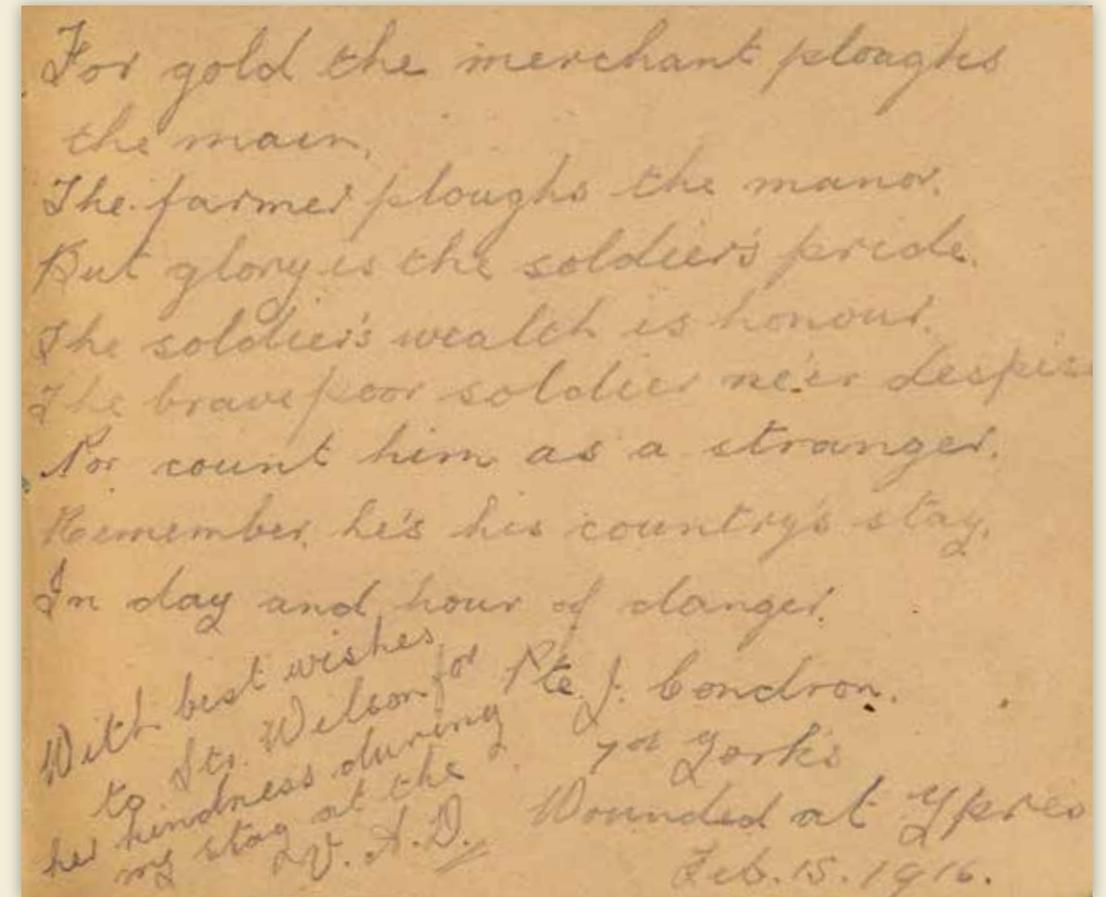
Tom Goodchild

For Gold the Merchant Ploughs the Main

For gold the merchant ploughs the main
The farmer ploughs the manor
But glory is the soldiers pride
The soldier's wealth is honour
The brave poor soldier ne'er despise
Nor count him as a stranger.
Remember, he's his country's stay
In day and hour of danger.

With best wishes to Str. Wilson for
Her kindness during my stay at the
V.A.D.

Pte J Condron
1st Yorks
Wounded at Ypres
Feb.15.1916



For gold the merchant ploughs
the main,
The farmer ploughs the manor,
But glory is the soldier's pride,
The soldier's wealth is honour,
The brave poor soldier ne'er despise
Nor count him as a stranger,
Remember, he's his country's stay,
In day and hour of danger.

With best wishes
to Str. Wilson for
her kindness during
my stay at the
V.A.D.

Pte J. Condron.
1st Yorks
Wounded at Ypres
Feb. 15. 1916.



The Forest of Death

As I walked across the forest
I was glancing at the broken trees.
Not daring to step in the killing ground
Writing a diary to my family
Feeling shivers down my spine.
Bombs exploding behind me – boom! Pow!
Closing my eyes with a frown on my face.
Opening my eyes hours later
In a disastrous place
I hear shouting and screaming in pain
I look over the top
Someone is aiming at me
Getting shot two times in the head
Knowing I won't open my eyes again.

Erion
Year 6

The Brown Sofa in the Lounge

Engulfed in softness
and surrounded by love,
I watch as you sleep on the sofa
for two
soon to be a sofa for one.

Warm sunshine caresses your face,
like I touched you
when you first came home,
gently wiping tears as you cried
through the night,
nuzzling my breast,
our hearts beat as one.

Soon our time was full of adventures,
cushions became castles and dragons
were slain,
pirate ships and princess parties –
(always with some handsome
princes).

Story time and telly-time
and time for friends and fancies,
sick-time and surgery,
sleeping and snoring,
then well again, and jumping and
bouncing,
and fun and laughter
and everything that says
“happy ever after!”

Never-ending days stretched out like
the sand,
but a tsunami tide of time rushed in,
and suddenly...
I had hoovered and polished the
school days away,
hair bands and scrunchies,
chocolate wrappers and crumbs,
the soft smell of innocence was
numbed,
curry and air freshener fill the
night air
and university awaits,
somewhere out there.

I clutch your hand –
I’m scared and afraid,
you awake and we hug
the soft sofa engulfs us,
and I gently sigh.
It’s time to let go
you’re ready to fly,
your story is waiting,
your next adventure begins,
you are amazing and always will be –
whatever life brings.

Heather Wood



Winifred M. Poppel
Hurstdene
Dulwich
Jan 2 1915



1 am a Pen...

I was all clean and untouched
but now a man writes with me,
was this meant to be?
Now I am wet like this man,
I can see his grief and sorrow in his eyes.
All his friends are dead but will he survive?
Mud surrounding me, like corpses and blood.
Shells going off like bells,
this was a living HELL coming closer and closer every second.
I tried my best just like the rest.
The man carried me upon the Duck Boards
then he slipped and we both fell in to bottomless mud of death.

**Isaac
Year 6**

To Miss Wilson

Companion in misfortune –
Vincent Square

I'm only a poor V.A.D.
As in uniform quickly you'd see;
I've been horribly smashed
for a motor-car crashed
Into me, and damaged my knee.

Sometimes when I'm knitting my sock
Miss Wilson, (who suffers from "shock")
Comes and sits by my bed
And often she's said
She thinks me a lazy old crock

For in bed I'm made just to lie,
While now on her pins she's quite spry.
I think it's a shame
That I should have blame
For not walking- I'm longing to try.

Sometimes with a wheeze
She'll laugh and she'll tease
And we often make fun of each other.
I know I'll feel sad

Thought for her I'll be glad
When she has safely crossed over the seas.

Active Service is all very fine
But for her own native land she must pine
It's not nice to be sick
And one craves to be quick
to get back to the work near the "line"!

But when the war's done
And home we are gone
Having tried to do our small bit
For the good of the Cause
In the Greatest of Wars
We shan't be too sorry to quit.

M. G. Fynes. Clinton
25th May 1918

To Miss Wilson - Companion in misfortune - Vincent Square

I'm only a poor V. A. D.
As in uniform quickly you'd see;
I've been horribly smashed
for a motor-car crashed
Into me, and damaged my knee.

Sometimes when I'm knitting my sock
Miss Wilson, (who suffers from "shock")
Comes and sits on my bed
And often she's said
She thinks me a lazy old crock.

For in bed I'm made just to lie,
While now on her pins she's quite spry.
I think it's a shame
That I should have blame
For not walking — I'm longing to try.



What can I see?

What can I see?

A bunch of men covered in fleas,

As they came closer and closer

Holding guns in their hands,

They pray that they will get a new land,

BOOM BANG!

Sinking in the mud, dying in the fields,

Starving for food

In a bad mood

My wood starts to scrape

As the trenches start to get in shape.

Bones lying on the floor

Oh, you soldiers are so poor.

Hala

Year 6

I left the Base and went
to join the 2nd Divons and
went into the trenches on
Christmas Eve. On Christmas
Day we had a truce with
the Enemy and the day went
off all right. Those Germans
who were with us appeared
to be a decent lot of chaps.

We did not have many casualties
in our Regt. whilst I was
there. Once when we were
in our Billets we were
shelled and had to go

to the underground trenches.
I was wounded one night when
going to relieve another Regt.,
and was taken to Etretat. After
three weeks I came to England.
I arrived at the A. W. H. at
Painfont. And thanks to the
Sisters and Doctor of the American
Red Cross. I hope to soon be
well. And I shall always
be a grateful patient, and in debt
to the above.

E. J. Bees.

E. J.

Women's Work

In the low light of a dust mote attic,
above the radio hum and the TV static,
there are scrapbooks and diaries
from women that went before
women that lived
and worked and died
and experienced the Great War.

Between their sketches,
spilt ink stains and lines,
you will find,
blast wounds
washed out and dressed,
lacerations and amputations,
burns and blindness,
pages that talk of survival
and the comfort of kindness.

We are more than this old war, they say.
We are all-hour canteens,
bus stops and bottle tops,
corned beef cans and strawberry jam,
we built these dew-drenched shipyards
with our very own hands –
and tanks, boats and planes,
policed our cobbled streets
that would never be the same.

Fought fires,
cooled and coated new rubber tyres,
clipped tickets with a
strong grip and dry winter lips,
licked beneath blue skies,
ploughed the earth with tired eyes
we are chimney sweeps and little sleep,
long hours and will power
flour sacks and aching backs,
laid out flat fixing railway tracks.

We are more than medals and decoration
we are the beating heart,
the blood that fuels the circulation.
We've nursed the best
and seen the worst
inside these pages
full of women's work.

Molly Case





LOTTERY FUNDED



Royal College
of Nursing

