

GWYNETH (GWEN) ALICE COBBOLD (1887-1926)

February 2015

Gwen (#396 in the family tree) was born in Ipswich on 14th October 1887 eldest daughter of Alfred Townshend Cobbold (#253) and Alice Bessie Nunn. In 1891, by which time Gwen had two younger sisters, Margaret and Joan, the family was living at 222 Woodbridge Road, Ipswich. Their father was a Solicitor who later took on significant civic responsibilities. By 1901 they had moved to The Rookery in Sroughton and Gwen had acquired three brothers, Rowland, Sterling and Mike, the last member of the family, Prim, being added the following year.

In April 1915 Gwen went to train as a nurse at Endell Street Military Hospital in London. Endell Street was set up by the Women's Hospital Corps led by two suffragist doctors, Flora Murray and Louisa Garrett Anderson. The WHC had successfully set up and run hospitals in France for the Croix Rouge but when British casualties were being evacuated back to the UK in 1915 they offered their services to the British Army. The Army accepted the offer and Endell Street, which opened in May 1915, was born under the auspices of the Royal Army Medical Corps but was staffed almost entirely by women.



Gwen's brother, Rowland who had gone to work in Argentina before the war returned on the outbreak of hostilities and was commissioned into the Royal Field Artillery. Whilst trying to re-establish communications with his battery from his

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forward observation post he was killed instantaneously by shrapnel on 25th September 1915.

Two months later Gwen transferred to the Post Office Home Hospital, Kensington Palace Gardens for six weeks before going to the Hospital d'Alliance, Yvetot, France for six months which was followed by eight months at the Hospital Temporaire d'Arc-de-Barrois. This latter hospital had been set up by four English sisters to help with the chronic shortage of medical facilities and trained nurses in the French military.

Records show her back in England from 12th to 24th July 1917 by which time her family was at Bramford House near Ipswich. Gwen was posted to Gifford House Auxilliary Hospital, Roehampton before returning to France, probably in Etaples for an unknown period during which she was fortunate to survive a bombing raid on the hospital where she was working. Her career of great dedication as a VAD nurse ended in 1919

At some stage around 1917 Gwen became a Catholic and anecdotal evidence suggests that she relished her life in France and particularly enjoyed nursing French soldiers. It was probably around this time that she was diagnosed with cancer from which, after a spell in remission in Menton, France, she died in 1926. Her funeral was held at the Catholic Church, Crown Place, Woodbridge and she was laid to rest there in the new Cemetery.

Note

The considerable contribution made by Kelvin Dakin of the Bramford Local History Group is acknowledged and appreciated.

The picture which shows the 7 children, from bottom to top, Gwen, Margaret, Joan, Rowland, Sterling, Mike and Prim is reproduced by kind permission of The Martin Shaw Trust Archive.