

ON THE BRINK

The Politics of Conflict 1914-1916 Project

LOCAL WOMEN

LOUISE McILROY

Dr. Anne Louise McIlroy was born in Ballycastle in 1874, the oldest of four daughters. Her father Dr J McIlroy, a medical practitioner and Justice of the Peace, educated his four daughters to a very high standard for the late 19th century. A Louise graduated in 1898 becoming the first woman in Glasgow to earn a Doctorate in Medicine. She was then the first female gynaecological surgeon at the Royal Infirmary Glasgow.

In 1921 she became the first female full professor at a University— Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the London School of Medicine for Women. Her accomplished sister Jane graduated from Glasgow University in 1904, became an ophthalmic surgeon and conducted neurological research 1911.

At the outbreak of World War One, Dr McIlroy and other female medical graduates offered their services to the government. An earlier graduate of medicine, and founder of the Scottish Women's Suffragette Federation, Dr Elsie Inglis, rejected by



Portrait of Dr McIlroy in uniform Courtesy of Glasgow City Archives

the War Office, was inspired to start a hospital of 'our own', with influential supporters. The Scottish Women's Hospital Foreign Service, as part of the Suffrage response to the War and set up with the aim of using all female staff to care for the Allied wounded, became known for its surgical brilliancy and administrative efficiency on three fronts during the War. In 1915 Dr McIlroy went to France with the Girton and Newnham Unit financed by two Cambridge Women's Colleges. After 6 months work at Troyes, the French military authorities sent the camp hospital to Serbia and then to Salonika in Greece.

Her unit in Salonika was one of the few voluntary hospitals to accompany an expeditionary force. Working under canvas and at a time before antibiotics were widely available, she wrote home:

'we are hoping to (teach) the French the enormous advantages of the open air and sunlight for septic wounds. Our results have been simply extraordinary, no antiseptics at all.'

Hygiene standards in the tented hospital were such that inspectors remarked on the lack of flies at the height of summer in Greece. In recognition of her services she was awarded the French Croix de Geurre avec Palme in 1916, French Médaille des Epidémies, Serbian Order of St Sava and the Serbian Red Cross. In 1920 she was appointed to the Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) and a Dame in 1929 for her services to midwifery.