

Biog 6 Agnes Murdoch Climie, Nurse

Morag Cross

26 November 2013

*****6.1**

The Territorial Nursing Force Service was formed in 1908, to provide staff for the hospitals which would tend the wounded from the Territorial and Reserve Forces, in time of war. There were '2,760 women who in peacetime went about their normal duties in civil hospitals... but with a commitment to the War Office'. Standards of entry were high, requiring a full three years' nursing training, and the recruits were usually well-educated middle-class women. During the War, 2,280 nurses served overseas, of whom 150 lost their lives. 'Of that number, forty were Scottish nurses', four of whom were killed by enemy action. [Sources: 'Memorial to Scottish Nurses', *British Journal of Nursing*, Volume 67, 12th November 1921, p304; Sue Light, *British Military Nurses and the Great War: a Guide to the Services*, 2010, at <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/great-war-on-land/casualties-medcal.html>].

*****6.2**

One of them was Agnes Murdoch Climie.

Agnes Murdoch Climie was born at 8 Albert Drive, Crosshill, Cathcart in 1885, the eldest of six children of John Climie, a timber merchant's cashier, and Isabella Adam, his wife. John Climie worked for Love & Stewart, who imported wood to make pit props for the mining industry, which was a major employer in industrial Lanarkshire until the mid-20th century. The firm also exported the end product, coal. [Sources: Statutory Register of Births at www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk; Advertisement (unpaginated appendix), *Glasgow and Lanarkshire Illustrated 1904*, Hamilton).

During the 1890s and 1900s, the Climies lived at various addresses around Cathcart, which was then an independent burgh outwith the City of Glasgow. As John Climie received promotion to company secretary in the 1890s, his family could afford increasingly better housing. They moved from smaller to larger tenement flats in Langside Road, a semi-detached house in Montgomery (now Bolivar) Terrace, and eventually bought their own detached villa in leafy St Bride's Road, Cathcart. [Sources: Census 1891, 1901 at www.ancestry.co.uk; *Glasgow Post Office Directories, 1890-1920*].

*****6.3**

Agnes attended Queen's Park Secondary School in the early 1900s. Her family was by now probably sufficiently prosperous that she wouldn't have had to work. However, she had a vocation for nursing, and trained at the Royal Infirmary, Glasgow from 1908-1912. Her brother, Andrew Climie (born 1892) by contrast, studied medicine at Glasgow University, qualifying the month after the First World War broke out. [Source: *British Medical Register for 1919*, Online Resource, at www.ancestry.co.uk; Agnes Climie's name is on Queen's Park Secondary School War Memorial as a former pupil].

*****6.4**

Agnes joined the Territorial Force Nursing Service a week after war broke out in August 1914, and was on the staff of the 4th Scottish General Hospital at Stobhill, Glasgow until early 1917. Her

personnel file described her in 1916 as 'very keen. Her influence is good'. She was promoted to Staff Nurse in 1915, and sent to France on 29 May, 1917, to the 58th (Scottish) General Hospital, St Omer. St Omer was HQ to the British Expeditionary Force until March 1916, and thereafter housed several large hospital units and casualty clearing stations. [Sources: 'Cemetery Details: Longuenesse (St Omer) Souvenir Cemetery', Commonwealth War Graves Commission, at www.cwgc.org; Agnes Climie's official file, WO/399/10445, National Archives, at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/].

***6.5 nurses cooking

The official War Diary of the 58th General Hospital, now in the National Archives, London, reads *'1/10/17 During a hostile air raid on the night of 30/9/17 - 1/10/17, three bombs were dropped in the camp at 10.40 pm... [one] struck a marquee occupied by patients and two nurses, who were on duty... Nurses killed three, wounded three (one dangerous). Other ranks :- killed 16, wounded 60. Total killed 19, wounded 63. ... Many pieces of iron pierced the new corrugated sleeping hut for sister.* [Source: No.58 General Hospital War Diary, TNA WO95/4088, 1-2 Oct 1917, Courtesy of Sue Light, Nursing Historian, personal communication].

***6.6 cemetery

2/10/17 The three nurses (Sister Climie, Nurse Thompson and Nurse Coles) and the 16 other ranks killed by hostile air-craft on the night of 30/9/17-1/10/17 were buried at 4:00 pm today in the Souvenir Cemetery Longuenesse. Sister Milne, who was dangerously injured in the same air-raid died last night in No 10 Stationary Hospital.' [Source: No.58 General Hospital War Diary, TNA WO95/4088, 1-2 Oct 1917, in National Archives, courtesy of Sue Light, Nursing Historian, personal communication].

The War Diary of the Matron in Chief, British Expeditionary Force (also in the National Archives), give another account of the same event:

01.10.17 [speaking of St Omer], 'One Staff Nurse had been seriously wounded and 2 slightly wounded as well as 67 seriously wounded patients. ... Left for St. Omer immediately after lunch arriving about 4 p.m. Reported to the ADMS office and then proceeded to 58 General Hospital, where I met the A/Principal Matron and the Matron, and where I found Surgeon-General Macpherson had already arrived. The whole unit seemed shocked and dazed. Everyone spoke of the wonderful courage of the women. The raid lasted for some hours and the casualties occurred in the hospital where everyone was on duty. A tremendous lot of damage had been done, several marquees being blown to atoms and some of the Sisters' quarters in process of erection simply perforated with shrapnel. A large German camp quite close to this unit with 500 prisoners escaped without any damage whatever.' [From the original in National Archives, Cat No WO95/3988-91, transcript by Sue Light, Nursing Historian, at <http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk/110.html>].

***6.7 nurses walking

Agnes's obituary in the British Journal of Nursing stated: *'Although not on duty during the raid, she went to her ward, and when killed was singing to a patient who was nervous'*. [source: British Journal of Nursing, Volume 59, 10th November 1917 (p300)]. The Matron in Chief, Miss S Brown, wrote to her father in Glasgow: *'We have the greatest sympathy with your loss. I have heard from*

France of the wonderful bravery of the nurses. They gave their life for their patients, whom they were dressing at the time'. [Source: National Archives, Agnes Climie's official file, WO/399/10445, p 43, at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/].

Agnes was mentioned in dispatches by Sir Douglas Haig, the British field marshal, and mentioned in *The Scotsman* on March 5, 1917 in an article on 'Valuable war services by ladies brought to the attention of the Secretary of State for War', which listed over 1035 women, including 60 attached to Scottish hospitals. Her family received notice of her death on the day before her birthday. [Source: *Glasgow Herald*, 4 Oct 1917, p6; National Archives, Agnes Climie's official file, WO/399/10445, p 27, at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ ; *The Scotsman*, 5 March 1917, p9].

***6.8 agnes grave

Agnes is buried in Grave VI. B. 1, Longuenesse (St Omer) Souvenir Cemetery, France, alongside fellow nurses Elizabeth Thomson, Daisy Coles and Mabel Milne, killed in the same air raid, thus preserving in death the sisterhood they practised in life. Agnes's gravestone reads 'Killed by enemy air bomb while on duty'. She was 32 years old. [Source: St Omer Cemetery, Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, at <http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2100/LONGUENESSE%20%28ST.%20OMER%29%20SOUVENIR%20CEMETERY>, and photographs from the War Graves Photographic Project, at <http://www.twgpp.org/>; Sue Light, personal communication].

***6.9a and b

As Agnes left no will, her four surviving siblings donated her estate (earnings, savings etc totalling £62.14.8d) to charity, in her memory. Agnes's two brothers, James and Andrew were also in the forces. James was a private in The Gordon Highlanders, who was wounded in action, but he survived the war. Andrew was a captain in The Royal Army Medical Corps, serving in France. After the war, he became a doctor in Barrhead. [Source: National Archives, Agnes Climie's official file, WO/399/10445, p 27, at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/; 'James A Climie' and 'Andrew Climie', *British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920*, at www.ancestry.co.uk].

Agnes Climie is commemorated on the following memorials:

***6.10a and b

The Scottish Military Nurses' Memorial, St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, unveiled in 1921 [Source: *British Journal of Nursing*, Volume 67, 12th November 1921, p304]

***6.11 a and b

Glasgow Royal Infirmary Roll of Honour, a large bronze panel in the hospital

***6.12

Queen's Park Secondary School Memorial (now in Langside Library), Glasgow

***6.13

Camphill Church War Memorial, now relocated to Queen's Park Baptist Church, Queen's Drive,
Glasgow