

### **Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital and nursing staff**

The involvement and contribution of the Irish War Hospital was particularly significant and their participation is one of the few studies that highlight an Irish involvement in the South African War; Anthony Kinsella has written an extensive article on the formation and experience of the hospital during the war, so it is not the intention of this chapter to examine the subject in detail.<sup>129</sup> Rather this section will highlight the Irish War Hospital as an active measure of civilian support and a further dimension of participation in the war. The creation of the Irish Hospital was commended across the United Kingdom and Ireland; in February 1900, the *Irish Times* writer 'Murty' applauded its formation and its creator, Lord Iveagh:

While every Irishman worthy of his name has a taste of the fightin' spirit in him, 'tis an odd, and not an unpleasin' thing to notice that while we kill our enemies, there's no country in world is successfully devoted to the art of healin'. If we can kill we can also cure. And so, while the Irish brogue may be heard all along the front fightin' line in South Africa, blessin' the Boers accordin' to the Articles of War, there will be an Irish hospital-financed by an Irish nobleman, Lord Iveagh, who has a genius for doin' the right thing at the right time.<sup>130</sup>

A month previously, it was reported by the *Irish Times* that philanthropist, Edward Cecil Guinness, 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Iveagh, of the Guinness brewery, intended to support the health and welfare of troops by establishing the Irish War Hospital in South Africa. The hospital, which would be financially supported by Lord Iveagh, received a positive reaction from Irish loyalists; Lord Iveagh's response to the war effort was in the words of the *Irish Times*, an example of 'practical patriotism.'<sup>131</sup> The *Irish Times* reported that Lord Iveagh equipped the Irish base hospital with the 'kindliness of heart equalled only by his patriotism, having spared no expense to equip it with the very best appliances of all descriptions'; the hospital consisted

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<sup>128</sup> Letter from James Gildea, Chairman and Treasurer of SSFA, 18 Aug., 1914, to Lady Dufferin (P.R.O.N.I. Dufferin Papers, D1071/J/H/4/1).

<sup>129</sup> Anthony Kinsella, 'Lord Iveagh's Irish Hospital in South Africa 1900' in *Dublin Historical Record*, lix (2006), pp 81-94.

<sup>130</sup> *Irish Times*, 3 Feb. 1900.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 Jan. 1900.

of one hundred beds, the latest and extremely important, Roentgen Ray and various medical supplies including, anti toxins for the treatment and prevention of enteric fever, diphtheria, smallpox, blood poisoning and snake bites. In addition, Lord Iveagh purchased fifteen wagons, two water carts, two forage carts, ten marquees for hospital wards, and twenty bell tents for hospital staff accommodation; moreover, pyjamas, socks and handkerchiefs were provided for the patients, as well as champagne and brandy, which acted as ‘stimulants.’<sup>132</sup>

The privately funded hospital was certainly an Irish enterprise; the auxiliary staff consisted of some fifty men employed as ward masters, stewards, clerks, compounders, washer men, cooks, and bearers, who were all employed by the Guinness Brewery.<sup>133</sup> As the Guinness Brewery hired the vast amount of its workers from the Protestant community, it is interesting to note a distinct Protestant reaction and interaction with the war effort. The Royal Irish Constabulary (R.I.C.) allowed the selection of fifteen members of the police force to proceed to South Africa, attached to the war hospital, acting as hospital orderlies. The men were sergeants, acting sergeants and constables, who were also members of St John’s Ambulance Association; once their tour of duty finished, they were able to return to the R.I.C.<sup>134</sup> To provide the best care for the troops, the hospital also had an impressive array of doctors and dressers, under the overall charge of the surgeon in chief, Sir William Thompson. Sir William Thompson had a wealth of experience in the medical profession, being senior surgeon at the Richmond Hospital at Brunswick Street, Dublin, and past president of the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin.<sup>135</sup> Importantly, the role of hospital director was entrusted to Dublin native, Dr George Stoker of Hertford Street Hospital, London; George Stoker had valuable medical experiences in three military campaigns: the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) as a Surgeon of the Imperial Ottoman Army, being present at the sieges of Plevna and Erzeroum; the Turco-Servian War (1878) as Chef de l’Ambulance du Croix Rouge; and the Anglo-Zulu War (1879).<sup>136</sup> Sir William Thompson and Dr Stoker found support from Dr Alfred Friel and Dr James Coleman; Dr Friel, a student of Trinity College, Dublin, was considered a ‘distinguished medical scholar’, and before enlistment, he was a surgeon in Waterford City Infirmary – he was tasked with the management of the Roentgen Ray. Dr Coleman, a visiting physician to several hospitals, including the National Hospital for

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 2 Feb. 1900.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> *Freeman’s Journal*, 12 Jan. 1900; Ibid., 17 Jan. 1900; and *Irish times*, 17 Jan. 1900.

<sup>135</sup> Sir William Henry Thompson would later drown in the Irish Sea, after *RMS Leinster* was torpedoed by a German U-boat on 10 October 1918, with a loss of around 500 lives. Philip Lecane, *Torpedoed!: The R.M.S. Leinster disaster* (Cornwall, 2005), p. 14.

<sup>136</sup> *Irish Times*, Jan 27, 1900 and ‘The Irish Hospital’ in *British Medical Journal*, i (1900), p. 93.

Consumptives, was selected due to his expertise in the treatment of enteric fever. The medical support staff consisted of six dressers; four from the Richmond Hospital in Dublin; one from Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital, Dublin; and, one from the Royal Hospital, Belfast.<sup>137</sup>

The war hospital also enrolled the help of Captain John Deane, who would be chief officer of transport, and Captain W. Mould, R.A.M.C., who had previous experience in the military operations in Sierra Leone (1898-99), and would act as liaison officer with the British armed forces. Colonel Nixon went to South Africa representing Lord Iveagh; Captain the Right Honourable Rupert Guinness, the son and heir of Edward Guinness was also attached to the hospital staff.

On 2 February 1900, Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital departed from Dublin and hundreds of civilians gathered along the streets of the city to see off the hospital corps. The *Irish Times* reported the march *en route* to *S.S. Violet*:

Their march, indeed, was quite a triumphal progress, and was one of most enthusiastic demonstrations of loyalty seen in Dublin for very many years ... The crowd, growing larger and larger every moment, hemmed in the khaki-clothed contingent, until in a short time they were completely lost sight of in the vast cheering throng by which they were surrounded ... The windows of many of the houses were crowded, and hats and handkerchiefs were waved with vigour ... Some of the members of the crowd, carried Union Jacks, the waving of which served to increase the demonstrations of enthusiasm *en route*.<sup>138</sup>

Lord Iveagh's Irish War Hospital remained in South Africa for under a year, having spent much of their time in Bloemfontein and Pretoria; their contribution to the war effort was acknowledged and appreciated by an officer who visited the hospital, delighted by the work rate of 'seventy-seven' Irish nationals:

They are soldiers as true and brave as any that ever wore uniform ... and there is not a soldier in the entire British force that will not give three cheers for the wearers of the shamrock and one more cheer for Lord Iveagh and the Irish Hospital.<sup>139</sup>

Throughout the war, it is estimated that around one thousand nurses served in South Africa,<sup>140</sup> many of whom were Irish. Attached to the Irish War hospital were Sisters Denton, Smyth, McGonigal, Richardson, Walker and Miss Annie McDonnell. Miss McDonnell, a native from Derry, was Lady Superintendent to Dublin House of Industry School, and a founding member of the first Governing Authority of the Dublin Metropolitan Technical

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<sup>137</sup> 'The Irish Hospital' in *British Medical Journal*, i (1900), p. 93.

<sup>138</sup> *Irish Times*, 3 Feb. 1900.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 6 June 1900.

<sup>140</sup> M.S. Stone, 'The Victorian army: health, hospitals and social conditions as encountered by British troops during the South African War, 1899-1902' (Ph.D., thesis, University of London, 1992), p. 299.

School for Nurses. Her services were considered ‘invaluable’ by Dr Coleman,<sup>141</sup> and following her contribution to the hospital she was awarded the Royal Red Cross.<sup>142</sup> In July 1900, seven nurses from Ireland boarded a ship from Southampton *en route* to South Africa to join the staff at Imperial Yeomanry Hospital at Pretoria.<sup>143</sup> The *Illustrated London News* noted that four nurses from the City of Dublin Nursing Institute enrolled into the Army Nursing Service Reserve (A.N.S.R.) in 1899; from Count Westmeath, Nurse Mary Talbot had eight years previous service in Cork Infirmary and City of Dublin Hospital; she received the decoration of Serving Sister of Hospital of St John of Jerusalem for her service during the typhus epidemic on the island of Inniskea in 1895. Nurse Sarah J. Callwell, who had also received the same decoration, trained as a probationer in the City of Dublin Hospital and sought further experience in various other hospitals in Ireland for four years; Nurse Mary Anna Davis had a wealth of experience in many institutions across Ireland, including Cork Street Fever Hospital, Dublin, the Roscrea Infirmary, Charlemont Street Hospital and the City of Dublin Hospital; and finally Nurse Rosa Lawless who had six years experience serving in Castlebar Fever Hospital, Lisburn Fever Hospital and Mespil Hospital.<sup>144</sup> Of the sisters of the Nursing Institute nurse Ellen O’Neill failed to be mentioned; however, the nurse attached to the A.N.S.R. died from pleurisy, contracted at the Imperial Yeomanry Camp Hospital in Pretoria.<sup>145</sup> Other army nurses that travelled out to South Africa were Miss Potter from Sandycove, Dublin,<sup>146</sup> and nurse Kate Evelyn Luard who was attached to Queen’s Alexander Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve.<sup>147</sup>

Considering Lord Iveagh’s Irish War Hospital, and Irish nurses’ contribution to the war in South Africa, it is interesting to note that their participation was entirely voluntary, similar to the Imperial Yeomanry. These examples provide a further dimension to Irish involvement in this war and the role that the Irish landed gentry played, revealing the levels of active support that existed during this period. Moreover, they illustrate the opportunities that Irish citizens were presented with to be an integral part of the metropolitan core of the Empire. It is unclear why these Irish citizens decided to travel to South Africa and to risk

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<sup>141</sup> James Coleman, ‘Medical experiences in South Africa’ in *Dublin Journal of Medical Science*, cxii (1901), p. 101.

<sup>142</sup> Gerard M. Fealy, *A history of apprenticeship nurse training in Ireland* (New York, 2006), p 56; Anthony Kinsella, ‘Lord Iveagh’s Irish Hospital in South Africa 1900’ in *Dublin Historical Record*, lix (2006), p. 93.

<sup>143</sup> *Irish Times*, 9 July 1900.

<sup>144</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 13 Jan., 1900; Neville Edwards, *The Transvaal in war and peace* (London, 1900), p. 326.

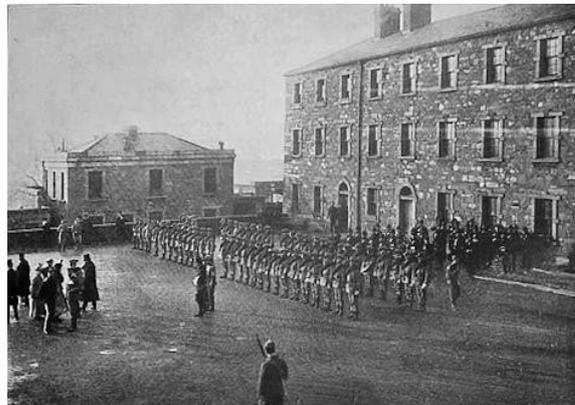
<sup>145</sup> *Irish Times*, 23 Mar. 1901.

<sup>146</sup> *Belfast News-Letter*, 31 Oct. 1899.

<sup>147</sup> She would later go on to serve in the Great War, recording her experience anonymously in *Diary of a Nursing Sister on the Western Front 1914-1915* (London, 1915).

their lives in a dangerous environment; perhaps, the individuals sought adventure and excitement, away from the boredom and monotony of service in Ireland; it is conceivable, given the reaction and formation of the Imperial Yeomanry, that Irish citizens were responding to the war's difficulties in a patriotic fashion – the Irish public were undoubtedly inundated by an abundance of press accounts that revealed the hardship of the campaign. Their willingness and responsiveness may have been a result of economic motivation, however this is considered unlikely as a decisive component, as from evidence each individual had stability in the R.I.C., the Guinness Brewery and in the medical profession. Arguably it was patriotism and interest in the war that may have been most influential in men and women attesting into the British army medical services and the Irish War Hospital.

**Fig. 52: Major-General Gosset inspecting Lord Iveagh's Field Hospital staff at Dublin before departure to South Africa**



Source, *The Illustrated London News*, 10 Feb. 1900.

**Fig. 53: A group of Irish nurses for South Africa – Nurse Mary Talbot, Nurse Sarah J. Callwell, Nurse Mary Anna Davis and Nurse Rosa Lawless.**



Source, *The Illustrated London News*, 13 Jan. 1900.