

Mary and Rebecca Watson

Nurses in the Territorial Force Nursing Service



Scarlet Finders, *A Territorial Force Sister*, 'A Sister of Territorial Force Nursing Service',
<http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk/161.html> (accessed 16th March 2013)

By Heather Gibbs

This case study has been initiated as part of a University work placement at Worthing Library, in order to facilitate the other four students and I with experience working in a research situation. Our work constitutes a part of a larger lottery funded project being undertaken by Worthing Library, of 'West Sussex and the Great War', to mark the centenary of the Great War. The main factor is to discuss how people of the West Sussex community were affected by the war and what function they played. Other plans of this project include educational schemes for schools, including a number of case studies, a website and predominately, to publish a book on wartime West Sussex.

My chosen subject was the Watson family and in particular two members of the Watson family; Mary and Rebecca. I have a strong interest in the History of nursing, and the fact that these Sisters were the only Female members of the whole project is what influenced my decision toward this subject. The principle sources I used on their experiences in nursing institutions were collated from the National Archives by Sue Light (this will be discussed in the concluding words). Furthermore, the websites *Find my Past* and *Ancestry* provided documentation on the personal details of the two women. The Commonwealth Graves Commission and Red Cross was also useful.

I will begin with a discussion into the main historiography of the Territorial Force Nursing Service, an establishment which both women served with during the war. Subsequent discussion will turn to the personal background of the Watson family followed by the impact the war had upon Mary and Rebecca, and their commitment to the war effort. It is important to present the research composed, alongside evidence of the digital sources utilised, in order to further illustrate my analysis.

Military Nursing Background

It is crucial to begin with an introduction into the establishment of the TFNS and the functions and services the nurses provided. Prior to 1907 there was no nursing service dedicated to the Volunteer Army, as the health of the regular army was the priority. This situation altered with the actions of Lord Richard Haldane, Secretary of State for War. He established the TFNS; which was promoted by the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907 that united the Voluntary army alongside the militia; facilitated 23 hospitals throughout the country, of which each could hold 520 patients. ⁱ The purpose of the TFNS was to care for the Voluntary and Territorial soldiers. Furthermore, they worked to supplement the regular service in emergencies and all its members worked as nurses in civilian life. This was a sister organisation to the Queen Alexandra Royal Army Nursing Corps which was established in 1902 with Queen Alexandra as the President and it replaced the Army Nursing Service.

A number of hospitals had been identified before the war of 1914-18 for use and operation by the Territorial Force. They were based at existing hospitals and

other large establishments. For example, the 5th Southern General in Portsmouth functioned as a Territorial Force Hospital. It was expanded to include 48 officers and 989 other ranks. The purpose of such hospitals was for training purposes prior to the declaration of war in July 1914. During wartime the hospitals were expanded alongside additional Auxiliary Hospitals and annexes. They were staffed by a mixture of TF Nursing Staff and volunteers from other organisations such as VAD's and the Red Cross.ⁱⁱ The efficiency of the establishments is evident as by August of that year, 19 hospitals out of the established 21 were receiving casualties.ⁱⁱⁱ

Man was to be imbued with a sense of personal obligation to the military service and was representative of National moral regeneration.^{iv} By 1909 the War Office sponsored three army nursing corps. Each hospital was aligned 91 nurses and 30 sisters. Many members of the Army Nursing Service were concerned over the conscription of nurses into military service at the expense of civilian healthcare, due to the shortage of fully trained nurses in Britain. To qualify, women had to be over 23 years of age and with three years training. Mary was 33 when she was mobilised and Rebecca, 30 years of age. This would be a principle reason behind the shortage of necessary staff numbers during this period.

This new service proved to be popular, as women were very determined to be a part of the war effort. Additionally, meetings held by Elizabeth Haldane, Lord Haldane's wife and Alfred Keogh, a Medical Doctor in the British Armed Forces, was successful in attracting interest of many nurses. The meeting held at Mansion house, London on the 15th March 1909, attracted 600 nurses.^v

The TFNS was given permission to volunteer overseas if not needed here. Particularly in 1907, the view was that the threat of enemy attack was not upon Britain, so the army was needed to resist as a defensive force against Germans in Belgium, thus followed by the Nursing Service.^{vi} Rebecca Watson served in France. Additionally, the service opened up possibilities between the Volunteer agencies and the Army to co-operate in order to facilitate efficient services to the soldiers.

Alongside the TFNS, the VAD's, Voluntary Aid Detachments were established in 1909 by the War Office. These voluntary organisations provided services in hospitals and were divided into local councils. They were trained in nursing and first aid. By 1914 they numbered 74,000, of which two thirds of members were women and girls.^{vii} Furthermore, Queen Alexandra, president of the British Red Cross Society conducted an 'appeal to all women of the Empire to undertake this women's work; the one and only way to assist the army.'^{viii} Seen as a privileged group of women, they were appointed the task of upholding Feminist beliefs and rise up to the equal status of men in the war. They took on roles including ambulance drivers and welfare officers and prepared buildings for hospital use

and set up rest stations for soldiers too ill to travel. Also, many were sent abroad during conflict to aid the Territorial Force Nursing Service.



All Nurses of the TFNS received a service badge by permission of the QARANC (Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps) association

Scarlet Finders, *The Territorial Force Nursing Force 1908- 1921*
<http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk/92.html> (accessed 25th February 2013)

Family Background-

It is important to begin with a description of the background of the Watson sisters. Their parents, named William and Martha, lived in Bramber, West Sussex up until 1884, when they moved to New Bridge House, Station Road, Steyning. At the household in Steyning the family employed two Domestic Servants, thus emphasising the wealth the Father upheld as a builder. Their Mother did not work, as was usual during this period and took on the role as housewife.

According to the 1891 census there were seven children at home in Bramber; three Daughters; Mary (ten), Rebecca (seven) and Esther (one) and four Sons, John (twelve), Walter (nine), William (eight) and Samuel (five).^{ix}

Mary Watson-

As the second eldest child, she was born in 1881 in Bramber, West Sussex.

Although she grew up in Sussex, the 1901 census lists that Mary lived in Hackney/ Stoke Newington with her Aunt and Uncle, Edward and Mary Collinson at 54 St. Kilda's road.^x

Her military career began in 1914 when she was mobilised on 13th August. Her first appointment was at the Royal Sussex County Hospital (RSCH) in Brighton

from August- September in 1915 whereby she worked as a Sister and also lived on site. The average earnings during this period were £50 per annum and if they served for over a year, Sisters would earn an additional £10. ^{xi}

This job was cut short by the declaration by a medical board at the 2nd Eastern General Hospital, Brighton, that she was 'unfit' on 10th September 1915. According to letters to and from Mary and the RSCH, held at the National Archives at Kew, she was diagnosed as having influenza Bronchopneumonia, which led to the disabling of her day-to-day skills. The influenza was attributed to strains of bacteria that produced pneumonia. She was merely 34 when the medical board was assembled in Brighton hospital in 1915. A medical attendant at the hospital claimed that Mary couldn't even exert herself in her nursing duties; due to shortness of breath. As she described 'her heart could not stand the pressure'. She was deemed 'permanently unfit', by the disability caused by military service. Mary was forced to be invalided out of the service, as she was on sick leave for more than six months.

Correspondence from the Matron- in Chief of the TFNS from 1902-06 at 5th Southern General Hospital, Portsmouth, Sidney Browne declared that Mary should receive £30 per year from September 1915- March 1916. ^{xii}

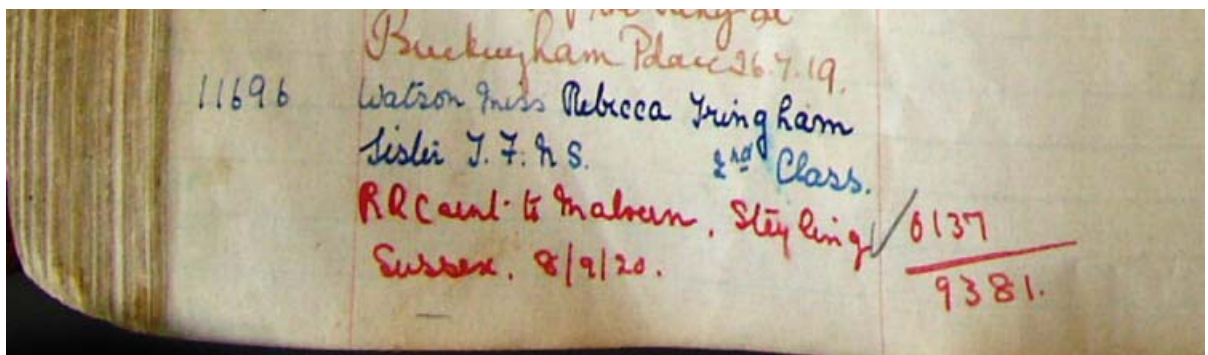
Rebecca Tringham Watson

She was born in 1884 in New Bridge House, Steyning, West Sussex.

The majority of her nursing career was served in the TFNS during the period, August 1914- March 1919. She was mobilised on 5th August 1914 and served as theatre sister in Britain and France until March 1919. Her work was predominately at the 3rd London General Hospital, Wandsworth.

According to her documents from the Matron M.S Riddle, she had 2 months leave due to anaemia and dyspepsia in March 1916

She was awarded a 2nd class Royal Red Cross award, September 1920.



TNA PRO WO/399/15368, Register of the Royal Red Cross Decoration (8th September 1920)



2nd Class Royal Red Cross award

British Red Cross, 'About us', *Medals and Badges*, <http://www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/Museum-and-archives/Collections/Medals-and-badges> (accessed 15th March 2013)

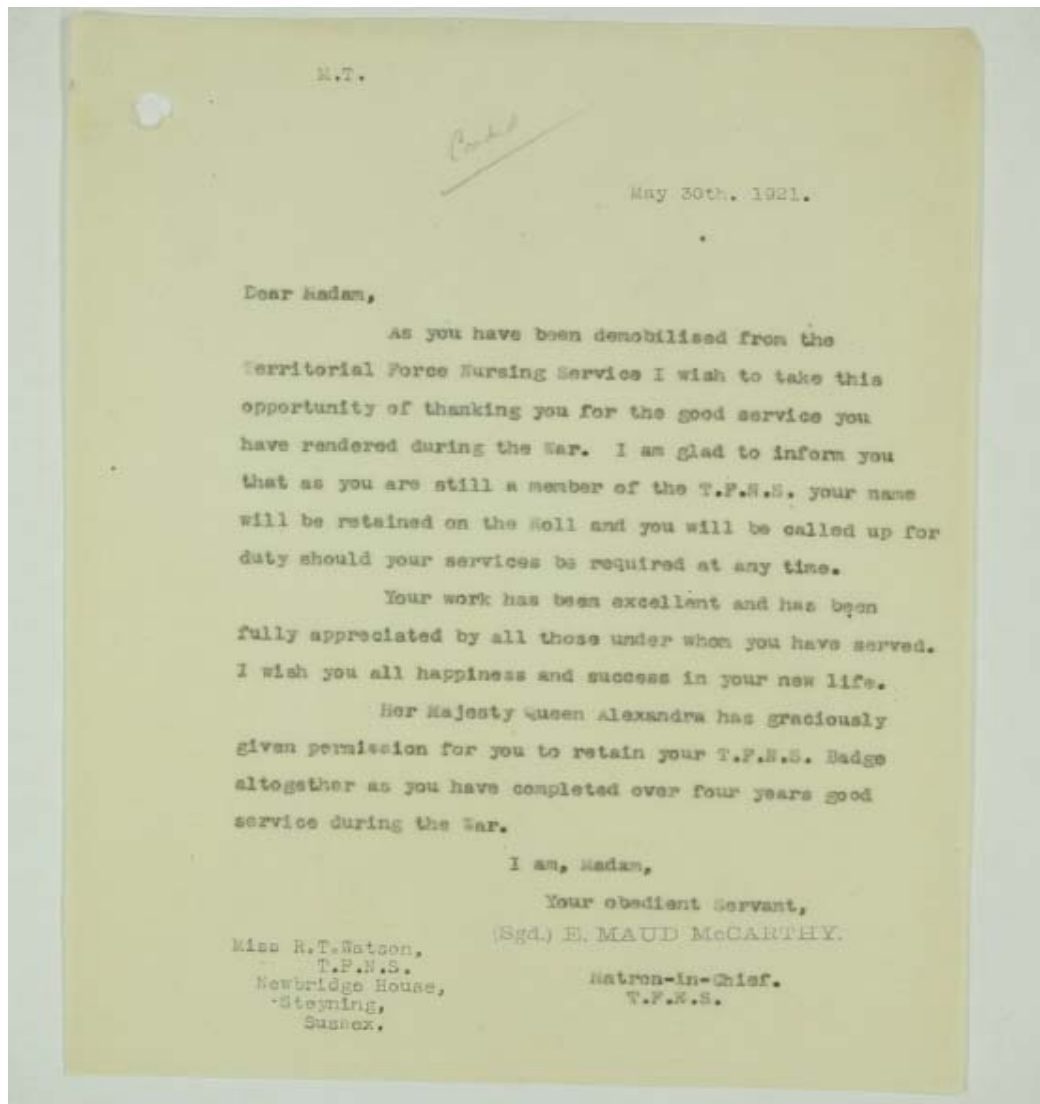
This decoration was established in 1883 by Queen Victoria. There are two types of badges awarded; the 1st Class award which is gold and has the words 'Faith', 'Hope' and 'Charity' engraved on the arms of the badge. Rebecca received a second class Red Cross award so would have been decorated with a badge similar to this but it would have been silver, not gold. This was given for special devotion and competency in the performance of actual nursing duties. ^{xiii} Recipients would have been named 'associates' and would be able to put the initials ARRC, Associate Royal Red Cross after their names. Such medals are still awarded today.

Rebecca was later discharged from 3rd London general hospital in March 1919 and became a Ward Sister and Theatre Sister in Sept. 1920

Conclusion-

I will end on a discussion into what happened to the two Sisters at the end of their service during the war. Mary served in the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service from 1916. Following her service in the war she married and became Mrs Breach, continuing to live at Newbridge, Steyning.

Due to the reduction of staff after the end of the war in 1918 Rebecca was demobilised in 1921. Although, if necessary she would have been 'called up' for duty again. The following document from the National Archives illustrates this.



TNA PRO WO/399/15368, Letter from Maud McCarthy to Rebecca Watson (May 30th 1921)

I found the interpretation of the sources challenging to begin with, as I have not had much experience working with Primary sources. A further issue of analysing archives and documentation is having a lack of comprehensive study of palaeography. This manifested itself during my research, as I found the task of deciphering handwritten letters to and from the women and the hospital staff, very vigorous and time consuming. Furthermore, the process of recording all the information I had read was time-consuming. Despite this, I found it very interesting and enjoyed to learn about an area of nursing history I had never researched before. As previously commented upon, the principle Primary sources from the National Archives of the nursing history of Mary and Rebecca were collated by Sue Light. This proved notably useful, as it was not necessary for me to search through a vast amount of files to find the relevant documents. Light, a trained nurse and midwife, has a great interest in the role of nurses during the First World War, which is manifested in her website *Scarlet Finders*. This website founded the basis for my research on the background of the TFNS.



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Books-

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With thanks to Sue Light for collating the sources from the National Archives on the Watson family and providing me with supporting relevant articles and documents necessary for the foundation of my research project. As well as Martin Hayes who provided valuable help and advice on research techniques and specifically to my case study.

ⁱ Light, Sue, Territorial Force Nursing Service 1908-21 *Stand to!* No. 75, January 2006, p.9.

ⁱⁱ The long, long trail, 'The military hospitals at home' http://www.1914-1918.net/hospitals_uk.htm, (accessed 25th February 2013).

ⁱⁱⁱ Light, p.10.

^{iv} Summers, Anne, *Angels and citizens British women as military nurses 1854- 1914* (Newbury, Threshold Press: 2000) p.208.

^v Light, p.9.

^{vi} Summers, *Angels and citizens British women as military nurses*, p.209.

^{vii} Spartacus Educational, 'Voluntary Aid Detachment', <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWnurses.htm> (accessed 25th March 2013).

^{viii} Summers, *Angels and citizens British women as military nurses* p.211.

^{ix} Find my Past, 'Census, land and survey records', *1891 England, Scotland and Wales Census*, <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/search/census/1891/person> (accessed 25th February 2013).

^x Ancestry, 'Census and Electoral Rolls', *1901 census*, http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gl=35&rank=1&new=1&so=3&MSAV=0&msT=1&gss=ms_f-35&gsfn=mary&gsln=watson&msbdy=1881&msbpn ftp=Sussex%2C+England&msbpn PlInfo=7%7C0%7C0%7C3257%7C3251%7C0%7C0%7C0%7C5287%7C0%7C0%7C&msrpn ftp=Hackney%2C+Middlesex%2C+England&msrpn=85844&msrpn PlInfo=8-%7C0%7C0%7C3257%7C3251%7C0%7C0%7C0%7C5275%7C85844%7C0%7C&sbo=0&uidh=000 (accessed 25th February 2013).

^{xi} TNA PRO WO/399/15365, Regulations governing the employment of VAD members in Military Hospitals, Pay and Allowances on Mobilisation p.9. (undated, circa 1915)

^{xii} TNA PRO WO/399/15365, Letter from Sidney Browne Matron in Chief to Mary Watson (30th September 1916)

^{xiii} British Red Cross, 'About us', *Medals and Badges*, <http://www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/Museum-and-archives/Collections/Medals-and-badges> (accessed 15th March 2013)