

Name: Hunt, Elisabeth

Rank: Surgical Nurse (Sister)

Attached to: Haslar Military Hospital in the Queen Alexandra Naval Nurse Reserve (QARNNS) and then the Royal Seabathing Hospital, Margate, Kent



Sister E Hunt in her QARNNS uniform. photograph kindly supplied by J Stirland

Date of birth	Date died	Age
Oct 25 <sup>th</sup> 1884	June 23 <sup>rd</sup> 1917	32

Elisabeth Hunt was the fifth child born to agricultural labourer Thomas Hunt (1851-1928) and Ruth née Boccock (1851-1934). Her name varies in spelling. In the family bible (entry copied out below) she was recorded as 'Lizzie' but was referred to by close family as Betty. Children of Thomas and Ruth Hunt:

Thomas William Hunt (born Dec. 31 1874 d.1952)

Robert Edward Hunt (born Feb. 7 1877 d. 1947)

Joseph Frederick Hunt (born February 16 1880 d.1943)

Nellie Hunt (born Dec. 21 1882 d 1957)

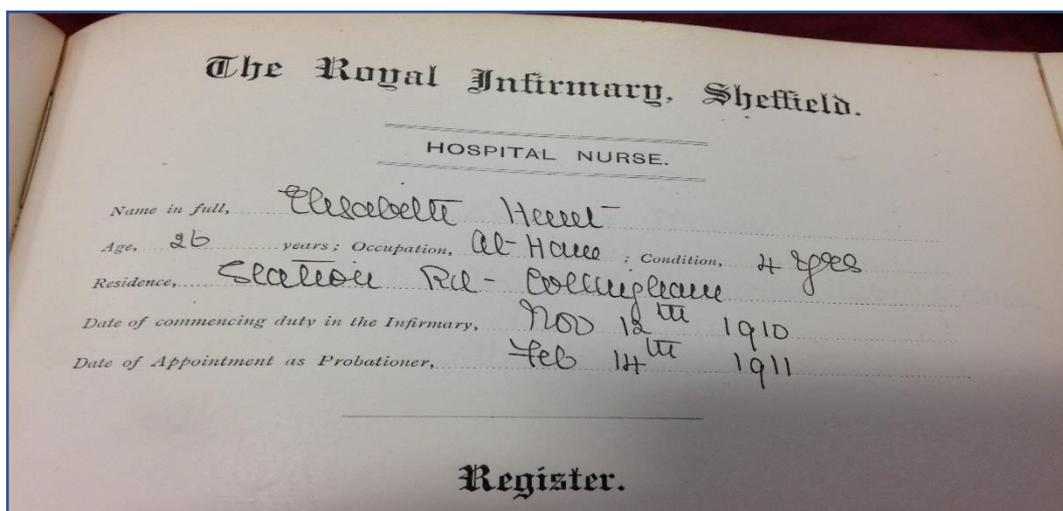
**Lizzie Hunt (born Oct. 25 1884 d 1917)**

The Hunts were 6<sup>th</sup> generation farmers and smallholders in Collingham. Many had strong links to the Baptist Church. Betty lived away from home from 1910 onwards. Elisabeth's sister, Nellie, was also a nurse although her qualifications appear to be less certain. According to Jane Stirland, Elisabeth and Nellie's great-niece, a benefactor from the village

paid for both sisters to be trained, as the cost would otherwise have been prohibitive. After the war, Nellie lived in a cottage on the corner of the Green/Low Street (now 28 The Green 'Corner Cottage') with her parents.

## War Service

Elisabeth Hunt trained as a nurse at Sheffield Royal Infirmary, enrolling in 1910 on a 4-year course<sup>1</sup>. At the outbreak of war, she transferred to the Royal Naval Hospital Haslar<sup>2</sup>, in Hampshire, before completing her final year of training.



Above: Elisabeth Hunt's entry in the Royal Infirmary Sheffield Hospital records courtesy of Sheffield Archives

Like many nurses, Elisabeth wanted to help with the war effort and her experience in Sheffield, dealing with men wounded in mining, steelwork and foundry accidents, would have been a massive advantage.

The specially trained nurses at Haslar were known as Queen Alexandra Royal Naval Nurses (QARNNS). They were at the front line, receiving the wounded from France and Belgium from across the Channel and dealing with atrocious and unprecedented injuries on a scale never known before including mustard gas poisoning. They were also under attack from air-raids along the Kent coast.

Elisabeth Hunt was in the QARNNS Reserve, enlisted only for the duration of the war. This is not to be confused with nurses attached to VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachments) run by the Red Cross, who were often untrained volunteers with little experience.

At some stage around 1916, Elisabeth returned to Sheffield to complete her training. Having done so, rather than return to Haslar she appears to have chosen to nurse at a civil hospital in Margate. This was probably to be near her close friend Daisy Ellwood, with whom she had trained in Sheffield and had also been in the QARNNS Reserves and who was now

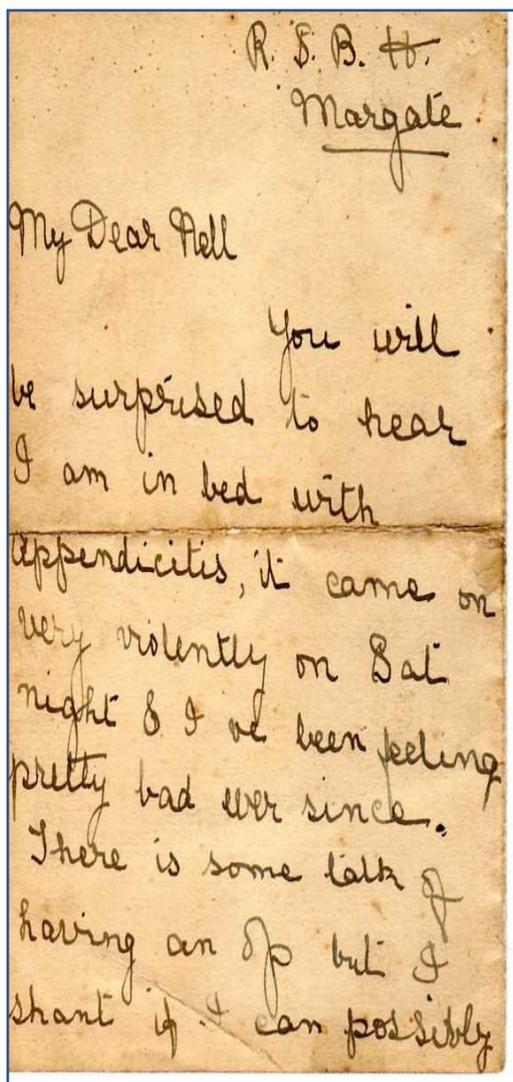
<sup>1</sup> E Hunt's records are kept in Sheffield Archives/Sheffield Royal Infirmary collection

<sup>2</sup> The Royal Naval Hospital Haslar was founded in 1753 and was at the time the country's foremost military hospital. It closed in 2009 and has since been converted to luxury apartments.

stationed in nearby Deal. Elisabeth was a Sister by the time she was transferred to Margate. Her references were good, unlike Ellwood's, whose 1916 record reveals she was 'inclined to be troublesome – not a lady.' Nurse Ellwood, a teacher before training as a nurse, obviously had a rebellious streak.

By early 1917, Elisabeth was working at the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital in Margate. In June, she came down with appendicitis. Here, she managed to write a fairly chirpy letter to her sister, Nellie, from her sick bed:

*My Dear Nell,*



Above: scanned image of part of Nurse Hunt's original letter c/o Jane Stirland

*You will be surprised to hear I am in bed with appendicitis, it came on*

*very violently on Sat. night & I've been feeling pretty bad ever since.*

*There is some talk of having an op but I shan't if I can possibly avoid it.*

*Am getting every attention & everybody is most kind, but I hope I shall*

*soon be out of it.*

*Am not allowed to have anything but sips of barley water, soda water*

*& milk etc., so you can imagine what with that, the pain & ice bags on*

*my tummy, I don't feel particularly happy.*

*Ellwood was married very quietly at the R.C. Church at Deal last Sat*

*and is now gone up to Newcastle with her husband, he is joining a ship up there.*

*I went to the wedding & the bridegroom sent me a very pretty pearl*

*& amethyst pendant as a slight memento!*

*Must dry up now as it is very awkward writing in this position.*

*Best love  
Yours Betty<sup>3</sup>*

Sadly, Elisabeth Hunt did not survive the operation. Nowadays, such an operation is fairly routine but back in 1917, survival from such operations was not guaranteed. This is something Elisabeth appears aware of in her letter when she writes that she hopes to avoid the operation if she can. She joined the 1% of nurses who died while on war service. Like in Elisabeth Hunt's case, the vast majority of deaths were: *'due to illness or disease that would have proved fatal in any conditions, such as influenza, pneumonia, diabetes, gastric ulcers and cancers of many types.'*<sup>4</sup>

## **Appearance on North Collingham War Memorial and Parishioners' Plaque**

Sister Elisabeth Hunt is the only woman of the 44 names on the War Memorials (North and South). Although she died of natural causes, she was still seen as having given her life 'for the cause' as Rev. Gould, North Collingham's vicar, made clear in his sermon at her funeral service, quoted here in the Newark Advertiser's report on her death on Wednesday July 4<sup>th</sup> 1917:

*'Preaching at North Collingham Church on Sunday morning the Vicar, Rev: Gould made reference to the passing of the deceased. He said "Before I begin my sermon I would like to say a few words in reference to the death, a few days since of one who has a place on our Roll of Honour, and whose name has been remembered in our prayers here week by week with the others from among us who have given themselves to the service of their country in this time of war.*

*I think we rightly include in our remembrance the nurses who are labouring so splendidly in our military hospitals, and who have shown such wonderful patience and devotion in their grand work of ministering to the sufferings and alleviating the pain of our brave and stricken soldiers and sailors.*

*In the case of Nurse Hunt, if her own fatal illness was not directly due to her professional work, it, at all events overtook her at her post of duty in the Margate Hospital, where, after a serious operation (which it was hoped would be successful) she passed peacefully away, and was laid to rest here on Thursday last.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Copy of a letter kindly shared by Jane Stirland, great niece of Elisabeth and Nellie Hunt – see East Trent Group website (link below)

<sup>4</sup> Source: Sue Light's 'This Intrepid Band' blog: <http://greatwarnurses.blogspot.co.uk>

<sup>5</sup> Death of a Collingham World War I Nurse (by David Collins) 'Vicar's tribute to Duty Done.' 2007

The funeral took place at North Collingham and a large number attended to pay their last tribute of respect to the deceased. There were many floral tributes which included some from Hospital Medical Staff-The Sisters and the patients to: 'one of the best of Sisters.'

## Elisabeth Hunt's Grave as a War Memorial

Unlike Arthur Brompton (died 1919) and Harold Millns's (killed in action 1915) graves (both also buried in All Saints' Churchyard), Elisabeth Hunt's grave is not recognised as a War Memorial on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website or Imperial War Memorials database. Hunt is included on the Nottinghamshire County Council Roll of Honour.



*Left: Elisabeth Hunt's grave in All Saints' Churchyard, Collingham. Her sister, Nellie, (pictured above) is buried alongside her. Nellie also trained as a nurse at Sheffield and worked in hospitals near Leeds during the war. Afterwards she lived in 'Tyne Cottage' (28 The Green) with her parents, Thomas and Ruth, next door.*

See also: Robert Stanley Hunt (KIA October 26<sup>th</sup> 1916) (cousin)

### Sources and Further Reading

- *Death of a Collingham World War One Nurse* by David Collins 2007 – copy in Collingham and District Local History Society Archives
- Correspondence and photographs kindly supplied by Jane Stirland, daughter of Elisabeth and Nellie's brother, Robert Edward Hunt.

- Many thanks to the late Sue Light, who provided details of nursing records on Elisabeth Hunt
- Sheffield Archives (Sheffield Royal Infirmary Deposit)

#### **General**

- Sue Light's 'Scarlet Finders' is an excellent website about Nurses in the Great War. See also her blog 'This Intrepid Band.'
- The Haslar Heritage Group (<http://www.haslarheritagegroup.co.uk/>)
- Documentary film (BBC) about Haslar here: The Abandoned Hospital That Treated D Day Soldiers <http://cachestack-live.bbcverticals.com/future/story/20170929-the-abandoned-hospital-that-treated-d-day-soldiers>

