

Personal Stories: from the university to the front line

Lydia Manley Stewart Henry

MB ChB Medicine 1916, MD Medicine 1920,
Hon DSc 1978, 1891–1985

‘I have never lost the spell it had on me’

Lydia Henry on her experience at Royaumont



Portrait photograph of Lydia Henry in Sheffield 1918, wearing her Croix de Guerre.



Group photograph of Royaumont staff. Reproduced with permission of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.

Lydia Henry enrolled at the university in 1908 and became one of the first to be enrolled in the University of Sheffield’s Medical School and one of two female graduates in medicine at Sheffield at the time, achieving an MB ChB (Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery) in 1916. She was the daughter of the university’s first female lecturers, Lysbeth Henry.

‘I had just graduated in medicine at the University of Sheffield. It was my birthday, June 30th, and I felt proud that I was the first female to receive the medical degree from the School of Medicine.’

Quote taken from the archive of Lydia Henry, Special Collections, University of Sheffield Library, MS 110

At the start of the First World War, Lydia worked at the Sheffield Royal Hospital and Sheffield Royal Infirmary. Later, she served as an assistant surgeon in the Abbey of Royaumont, north of Paris within reach of the Western Front.

Between January 1915 and March 1919, Royaumont was one of the largest voluntary hospitals and one of the closest to the front line. The hospital was managed entirely by women from the Scottish Women’s Hospital for Foreign Services. The hospital was noted for its performances of treating soldiers that were involved in the Battle of the Somme. It is likely that Lydia may have come into contact with soldiers from the Sheffield Pals Battalion that fell at the Somme.

She was the first woman at the University of Sheffield to receive a second MD at the time, later receiving an honorary degree (DSc) in 1978. Lydia was also awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French Government for her time at Royaumont.

Lydia’s archive about her early life and career is held in the Special Collections, University of Sheffield Library, MS 110.

Major William Barnsley Allen

VC, DSO, MC, and bar,
1892–1933

‘[Allen] went on with his work till the last man was dressed and safely removed’

London Gazette, 1916



Portrait photograph of Allen



Victoria Cross awarded to Allen on the 27th October 1916
University Heritage Collection ID 1001

William Barnsley Allen graduated with a honours degree in Medicine (MB ChB) in 1914 and was a member of the University of Sheffield OTC 1911-14. Allen is a highly decorated alumni and soldier, receiving the John Hall Gold Medal in Pathology, the Kaye Scholarship for the highest marks in physiology and anatomy, and 3 bronze medals. He then became a member of the Sheffield University Officer Training Corps before joining the Royal Army Medical Corps after Britain declared war on Germany. Later Allen enlisted in the Third West Riding Field Ambulance where he rose from a lieutenant to a Captain after being awarded the Military Cross in 1916.

Major Allen was one of the most decorated British medical officers of the war for his acts of gallantry, especially for his actions at Mensil, on the Somme, during 1916 that resulted in Allen being awarded the Victoria Cross and gained the title of major. Allen was also awarded the Distinguished Service Order and Bar.

‘The first shell...exploded the ammunition and caused several casualties. Captain Allen saw the occurrence, and at once, with utter disregard of danger, ran straight across the open, under heavy shell fire, commenced dressing the wounded, and undoubtedly by his promptness saved many of them from bleeding to death. He himself was hit four times...’

The London Gazette, describing the source of Allen’s injuries. Issue 29802, 24 October 1916.

After the war, Allen served in India but was weakened by wounds. He returned to England in 1923 after retiring from the Army. He died on the 27th August 1933 aged 41 in Bracklesham near Chichester, Sussex and is buried in a local graveyard. There is a plaque dedicated to Major Allen at the city Cenotaph in Barker’s Pool.

William Harold Armitage

MC,
1892–1916

‘A remarkable career at Sheffield University’ – in ‘Some Other and Wider Destiny’

by Mercx and Rigby



Portrait photograph of Armitage



Military Cross awarded to Armitage in 1916
University Heritage Collection ID 1000

William Harold Armitage was a distinguished student at the University of Sheffield; he obtained a First Class Honours degree in Engineering in 1912, along with two other prizes and the Mappin Medal for becoming first in his degree award.

Armitage was recognised for his sporting efforts whilst at the University and was the Vice-Captain of the University Rugby football team and excelled in cricket.

He joined the army as a lieutenant in the 9th Battalion Yorkshire Regiment in 1916, one year after the Battalion landed in France. Armitage is acknowledged for his brave decision to lead a party to cut the enemy wire. This procedure was successful and Armitage was awarded the Military Cross.

Armitage was killed in action during the Angres sector on the 22nd May 1916. He is buried in the Tranchee De Mecknes Cemetery, Aix-Noulette with a simple inscription from his parents:

‘The dearly loved only son of W H and E Armitage of Sheffield’

<http://www.w1-yorkshires.org.uk/html-files/tranchee-de-mecknes-cemetery.htm>

Lost Histories

Whilst commemorating the actions and achievements of university staff and students during the First World War, it is important to also address the unfortunate circumstances impacted by the war and understand the consequences of the past that can be forgotten when we are only reminded of the fallen.

One such individual whose life at the university was impacted is German-born Julius Freund who worked as Professor of German. He was detained and imprisoned in 1915 due to his German heritage, despite working as a lecturer at the university since 1908.

Alphaeus Abbot Casey

Private 12/69,
1895–1916

‘Everybody seems to be enlisting...’

Casey’s diary



Portrait photograph of Casey



Sheffield Pals’ Platoon at Redmires, Sheffield, in hut A2, taken by Casey .

Alphaeus Abbot Casey (Private 12/69) was a second year student in Physics, Pure Mathematics, and Geography at the University of Sheffield when he joined the Sheffield Pals Battalion (12th Bn. York & Lancs Regiment) which formed in September 1914.

Casey trained at the Redmires Training Camp on the outskirts of Sheffield in early 1915 and during this time, Casey kept a diary which is in the Special Collections in the University Library (MS/312). Casey recorded daily events, training routines, and leisure activities during his training. This included marches, digging trenches, attack formations, aiming and shooting, and more.

‘[I] was doing 3 wks teaching practice at Morley Rd Council School when Archduke of Austria murdered. Never thought would lead up to England entering war.’

Unfortunately, Casey was killed in action with the Battalion’s ‘A’ Company during the attack on Serre on the Somme on July 1st 1916 along with other members of the Battalion. Sadly, he has no known grave.

‘Didn’t think war would be so tremendous. When [I] realised, [I] enlisted as private in Sheffield University and City Battalion on 10th September 1915 together with over 90 others from varsity.’

Quotes taken from the diary of Alphaeus Abbot Casey (1895-1916), soldier, Sheffield. Special Collections, University of Sheffield Library MS 312.

Freund was later dismissed from his job in 1916 as the university believed that the tense political atmosphere would have a negative impact on the university and was therefore not permitted to continue lecturing.

Freund’s experience of losing his job and the discredit to his reputation portrays an unsettling history associated with the university, yet one that should be recognised alongside that of others who were affected.



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