

Dr Joan Kennedy Rose

World War 1 veteran approves Balerno baby - Remembered by Lesley Henderson

'Auntie Joan', Dr Joan Kennedy Rose, was my Grandmother's cousin. Born in 1883, raised in Nairn, the eleventh child of a butcher and an astonishing mother, she worked toward her lifelong ambition to be a doctor by going first to Moray House on a bursary, and teaching for six years to raise the money for her medical studies in Edinburgh. Though as a woman she was not allowed a graduation, she qualified in 1917, travelling straight afterward to Ostrovo in Serbia as part of the Scottish Women's Hospital, whose pioneering founder Elsie Inglis had not so long before been advised 'My good lady, go home and sit still,' when she proposed the first of her hospitals.

Auntie Joan spoke very little to us about her actual work at this time; her diary, also extremely modest, is in the Imperial War Museum - a visit to be made as soon as possible! - and tells much more. The extracts we have are beautiful, poetic, and mostly about the seasons, the countryside, trips to markets and what was done to help keep each other in good heart during a period like no other. We were however always clear that she went because it was her duty - and also that by doing so she knowingly helped make the case for women's suffrage: if you could do what the WW1 women doctors and nurses did, you and other women surely merited the vote. She stuck with the campaign until it was successful.

Her war work brought her back stronger, not broken. She returned to a new Edinburgh career in 'obs and gynae', retiring in 1950 as (I think) Chief Consultant at Elsie Inglis Hospital. She wrote for The Lancet, working also at the Bruntsfield and Deaconess Hospitals, much loved and valued, at a time when many women had preferred to stay dangerously quiet about illness rather than consult a man. Into a ripe old age, she globetrotted, always active in many local and international causes, and lived until 1975.

We have wonderful memories of trips out when she was an old lady: the Going Out Hat, the wicked pithy asides, people nearly dropping their cups as she announced to the whole Braid Hills Hotel tearoom 'My mother, you know, was born in 1840.' And it remains one of our greatest family joys that just before Christmas 1974 she cradled our brand-new Balerno daughter, inspected her thoroughly, and pronounced her 'a satisfactory baby'.



Lesley Henderson

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