

WOMEN WHO MADE BRITAIN

EDITH CAVELL

The name Edith Cavell has been with me ever since I can remember.

Why I hear you ask?

The answer is fairly obscure.

My father was a tall, broad man, and had on his ample chest, a tattoo of the lady in question!!

Again Why? Unfortunately I do not have the answer to this. My father was a long time serving soldier, and before WW2 he was posted in various "hot spots" Did he on a wild night out with the boys, decide to have this done? Had he researched all her good deeds and honoured her this way?? We will never know, but there she was proudly displayed on his chest. So her name has always been known to me.

When starting to find out a little more about her, I was impressed with all the things she had done, and how brave she must have been, always doing what she believed to be the right thing.

Let's start at the beginning.

Edith was born in Swardeston a village near Norwich in 1865.

Her father was the village vicar. Edith was the eldest of four children, and seemed to have had a fairly ordinary, happy childhood.

She attended Norwich High School then went on to two boarding schools. One in Somerset one in Peterborough.

From here she went to Brussels as a governess, where she worked for a family for five years.

She returned home to help nurse her father after he'd had a serious illness. This experience led to Edith becoming a probationer nurse at The London Hospital. She worked in various hospitals and also as a private nurse treating patients in their own homes.

She was sent to assist with the Typhoid outbreak in Maidstone in 1897 and was awarded the Maidstone Medal.

In 1907 she was recruited to be Matron in a new nursing school in Brussels.

In 1910 she launched a nursing journal. Within three years she was training nurses for three hospitals, twenty four schools and thirteen kindergartens.

When WW1 broke out Edith was in Norwich visiting her mother, but she returned to Brussels where her clinic and schools had been taken over by the Red Cross.

In November 1914 the Germans occupied Brussels.

Edith began sheltering British soldiers. By providing them with money and false papers, they were guided through a network of "safe houses" through to the neutral Dutch border. It is believed that she helped at least 200 allied soldiers escape German occupied Belgium.

Edith had always held very strong Anglican beliefs, and treated injured soldiers irrespective of their nationality. She is quoted as saying "I can't stop while there are lives to be saved"

Edith was arrested on August 3rd 1915 charged with harbouring allied soldiers, which was in violation of German military law. She had been betrayed by Frenchman Georges Quien, he was later convicted by the French as a collaborator. Edith never denied her actions only believing she was doing her duty. She was imprisoned for 10 weeks the last 2 in solitary confinement.

The night before her execution she is quoted as saying
"Patriotism is not enough, I must have no hatred or bitterness for anyone"
These words are inscribed on a memorial to her in Trafalgar Square.

Edith Cavell was executed by firing squad on October 12th 1915.
She is buried in Norwich Cathedral.

It has been suggested that Edith had a relationship with her second cousin, but they never married.
Every year The Church of England commemorates Edith in their Calendar of Saints on October 12th.

Why do I feel Edith Cavell Deserves a mention in any book on great British women?
Because by doing what she considered her duty she was prepared to surrender her liberty and life, to relieve suffering and help achieve freedom for others.
(She put her money where her mouth was)

So "thank you dad" for lots of things, including your body art. Which has led me to learning about a fairly "gutsy" lady.

Sue Wolfe