

In Memory of

Mary Ann Rodwell

Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service
Died 17 November 1915 age 40.



Remembered with honour:

The Diocese of Norwich & the Great War 1914-1918 Book of Remembrance
The Women's National Memorial Screen in York Minster
Ditchingham War Memorial
Hollybrook Memorial Southampton

The Story of Mary Ann Rodwell

Mary Ann Rodwell was born 7 June 1875 to John and Mary Rodwell. The family lived in Brockdish where Mary attended the local school.

By 1891 Mary left Norfolk for London where she lived with her aunt and uncle. It was during this time that she became an enthusiastic suffragist and was involved in the Crystal Palace and Anerley Women's Freedom League.

Mary trained as a nurse at the Central London Sick Asylum (also known as Hendon Infirmity Hospital) from 1901 to 1904. She worked in London hospitals as well as private nursing before the war. At the outbreak of war Mary applied to both the Red Cross and the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (QAIMNS). She was accepted by the Red Cross but they were not sending nurses to France at the time and so Mary joined the QAIMNS instead on 3 February 1915. Mary worked as a staff nurse on hospital trains before moving to the hospital ship Anglia.

On 17 November 1915 Mary was working on the Anglia caring for wounded soldiers on their way back to England from France. As the ship approached Dover it was struck by a mine.

Reports from some survivors say that she had been injured in the initial explosion. Mary was urged to get into a lifeboat but Mary refused apparently saying "we have the right to be last this time."

Mary's war records starkly note "Struck mine. Lost at sea." She was officially listed as missing and a death certificate was not issued. However, the War Office later declared that as she was on the Anglia but not on the list of survivors, so her death could be certified as 17 November 1915.

Mary's death was widely reported. In December 1915 The British Journal of Nursing printed a lengthy tribute to Mary.

"The last the Matron saw of her was shortly before the explosion, when she came up to fetch some warm wool- lies for her patients. She was in charge of 200 cot cases, and her last moments were spent in caring for them, as when the explosion came she was minister- ing .to the wounded. She died the death she would have wished for her King and country, doing her duty to the last moment."

The Norwood News, December 1915 reported:

"So far as we know she is the first member of the Women's Freedom League to sacrifice her life on active service . . . her name will be held in honour and reverence of the whole league."

Mary's death is commemorated at the Hollybrook Memorial in Southampton which names almost 1,900 servicemen and women whose graves are not known, many of whom were lost in vessels torpedoed or mined in home waters. Mary's name was also added at a later date to Ditchingham's war memorial.

