

## Frances Ivens (1870-1944): the first woman consultant in Liverpool

MARIE-FRANCE WEINER\*



Frances Ivens was a remarkable woman. Her generation of women doctors faced adversity and prejudice with determination, never taking 'No' for an answer. They entered the medical profession at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and despite numbering under 500 in 1911, they led vigorous campaigns, not only in the medical field, but in the social and political spheres.<sup>1</sup> Many rose to the challenge during the First World War and Frances Ivens was no exception, embracing her role as Chief Medical Officer of a voluntary hospital in Royaumont, France for the duration of the conflict. After the war, she returned

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<sup>1</sup> S. Cherry, *Medical services and the hospitals in Britain, 1860-1939* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 33.

to Liverpool to resume her work as consultant to the Stanley Hospital. President of the Medical Women's Federation from 1924 to 1926, she became the first woman to be elected Vice President of the Liverpool Medical Institution in 1926.

The recent centenary commemorations of the First World War have brought into focus the long forgotten and much neglected contribution of women doctors. Frances Ivens epitomises the spirit of these women and deserves recognition not only for her wartime contribution, but for a remarkable medical career dedicated to the welfare of others, particularly women and children in Liverpool and London.

### *Early life and medical education*

Mary Hannah Frances Ivens, the youngest of five children, was born in 1870 in Harborough Parva, near Rugby, Warwickshire.<sup>2</sup> Her father, William Ivens, was a timber merchant and her mother Elizabeth was a descendant of Elias Ashmole who founded Oxford's Ashmolean Museum in 1683. Together with her sister Ethel, Frances was educated at boarding school where she excelled in French, a talent which would serve her well in years to come. Until her fortuitous meeting with Margaret Joyce, a student at the London School of Medicine for Women (LSMW), Frances led an untroubled and undemanding life, playing tennis, riding and gardening. Joyce inspired her to pursue a career in medicine and in 1894, at the age of 24, having passed her London Matric, she entered the LSMW. There, she made lifelong friends: Elizabeth Courtauld and Dr Augusta Berry (née Lewin), both of whom worked with her at Royaumont during the First World War.

Frances qualified in 1900 with the London University Gold Medal in obstetrics and Honours in medicine and forensic medicine. In 1902, she gained a BS (Bachelor of Surgery) with First Class Honours and in 1903 and became the third woman ever to achieve a master's degree in surgery. Frances furthered her experience in obstetrics and gynaecology at the Royal Free Hospital in London and studied abroad in Dublin and in Vienna.<sup>3</sup>

At that time, qualified women doctors had few opportunities to secure house posts in major teaching hospitals. In 1907 one third of the junior posts

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<sup>2</sup> Confusingly, according to the Medical Women's Federation register, she was born in 1876 whilst the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists suggest it was 1871. In the census of 1891, she is 21 years old so 1870 is probably the correct date of birth.

<sup>3</sup> Obituary, 'Frances Ivens Knowles', *Brit. Med. J.*, February 26 (1944), 308; Sir John Peel, 'Knowles, Frances Ivens 1871-1944', in J. Peel, *The Lives of the Fellows of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists 1929-1969*, (London, Heinemann Medical Books Ltd, 1976), pp. 228-229; Liverpool Medical Institution Exhibition, Then and now military medicine 1914-2014, Miss Frances Ivens (1870-1944)

<http://www.lmi.org.uk/LibraryAndArchives/RecentExhibitions/ThenandNowWW1Exhib/Ivens.aspx> (accessed 10/08/2015)

were still concentrated in women-run hospitals consequently, it was not unusual for women doctors to work at many different hospitals or even abroad to obtain the required training. It is therefore not surprising that, in addition to her appointment as Surgical Registrar to the Royal Free Hospital, Frances took up resident appointments at the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Hospital (New Hospital for Women) in London, and the Canning Town Mission hospital for Women in East London.<sup>4</sup>

### *Liverpool 1907-1914*

In 1907, Frances left London for Liverpool where she became the first woman to hold an honorary post at a Liverpool hospital. She was appointed Consultant in Charge of a new obstetrics and gynaecology department at the Stanley Hospital, where beds had been specially endowed on the condition that they should be in the care of a woman practitioner.<sup>5</sup> She was later appointed to the staff of the Samaritan Hospital. During her time in Liverpool, Frances was a protagonist for women, children and wider feminist causes. In 1909, alarmed by the 14% incidence of gonorrhoea she recorded in her patients, Frances fought for more awareness of venereal disease affecting women.<sup>6</sup> Raising the issue again in 1914, Frances bemoaned the fact that the medical profession concealed the truth from women to spare them mental worry in addition to physical illness. 'It is unfair that a woman should be subjected to repeated infection without her consent and if unaware of the nature of the disease she was unlikely to submit to efficient treatment. If any change were to be made by the medical profession in this matter, it must be made by the profession as a whole.'<sup>7</sup>

In October 1913, at the annual conference of the National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain and Ireland, Frances was part of a panel discussion on the moral education of the young.<sup>8</sup> She lobbied against the neglect of women and children and in favour of more opportunities for young medical women.<sup>9</sup> Together with many women doctors of her generation, she was also involved in the suffrage movement and chaired the Liverpool branch of the Conservative and Unionist Women's Suffrage Society.<sup>10</sup> Dr Catherine

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<sup>4</sup> M.A. Elston, 'Run by women, (mainly) for women', in L. Conrad and A. Hardy (eds), *Women and modern medicine*, (Amsterdam and New York, Editions Rodopi B.V., 2001), pp. 92-95.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Stanley Hospital', *Brit. Med. J.*, February 23 (1907), 468.

<sup>6</sup> F. Ivens, 'The incidence of gonorrhoea in gynaecological hospital practice', *Brit. Med. J.*, June 19 (1909), 1476-1478.

<sup>7</sup> F. Ivens, 'Royal commission on venereal diseases', *Brit. Med. J.*, May 23 (1914), 1129.

<sup>8</sup> V. Caren, 'Mary Hannah Frances Ivens', <http://www.merseyside-at-war.org/person/mary-hannah-frances-ivens/> (accessed 10/08/2015).

<sup>9</sup> V. Caren, 'Mary Hannah Frances Ivens', <http://www.merseyside-at-war.org/person/mary-hannah-frances-ivens/> (accessed 10/08/2015).

<sup>10</sup> L. Leneman, *In the service of life The story of Elsie Inglis and the Scottish Women's Hospitals* (Edinburgh, The Mercat Press, 1994), p. 11.

Chisholm (1878-1952), the first woman to qualify as a doctor at the Manchester Medical School, described how Frances proved to be a magnificent leader. When Manchester and Liverpool medical women joined forces to form the North of England Medical Women's Society, 'her social experience was a valuable asset for she took part in everything going on in Liverpool'.<sup>11</sup>

Much can be gleaned of Frances' personality from an inaugural address she gave in October 1914 to young medical students at the London School of Medicine for Women. In her speech, Frances outlined 'Some of the essential attributes of an ideal practitioner'. The parallels with her own achievements before, during and after the war are striking and the following extracts embody many of her personal qualities of generosity, perseverance, diplomacy, leadership and fairness:

She (the ideal practitioner) would spare herself no effort to give physical and mental relief with as little pain as possible - She would gain the confidence of others... impressing them by a well-balanced judgement - Not always counting the cost to herself, she would be rewarded bountifully by the affection of her patients - Having a strict sense of duty, her word would be her bond, and what she promised she would perform faithfully, to the best of her ability - Not lacking in courage, she would be able to face difficult situations with calmness, and would not be dismayed by the first obstacle - Not forgetting that she was a woman as well as a doctor, she would use her intuition on many occasions with startling success - Tolerant of others she would express no harsh judgements - Honesty and sincerity would lead her to expect to find truth in others and she would be rarely disappointed.<sup>12</sup>

Frances Ivens was highly respected by the medical community in Liverpool and within the women's movement. When war broke out, she planned to join the Women's Unit in Belgium under Mrs Stobart but this unit had to withdraw in the face of the German advance. Undeterred, Frances volunteered for service with the newly formed Scottish Women's Hospital for Foreign Service (SWH) unit bound for France. The SWH movement was founded in 1914 by the Scottish branch of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Society under Dr Elsie Inglis after she offered her services to the War Office but was turned down. In 1914, and despite the backing of the British Medical Association (BMA), the War Office refused women doctors for Foreign Service on the

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<sup>11</sup>E. Crofton, *The women of Royaumont A Scottish women's hospital on the Western front* (East Linton Scotland, Tuckwell Press, 1996), p. 239.

<sup>12</sup>F. Ivens, 'Opening of the winter session at the medical schools', *Brit. Med. J.*, October 10 (1914), 631-632.

grounds that current legislation would not allow it.<sup>13</sup> As the war progressed, the War Office were finally obliged to use their services but on a temporary contractual basis and commissioned rank was not achieved until the Second World War.<sup>14</sup>

***Médecin Chef - The Scottish Women's Hospital at Royaumont,  
France 1914-1919. 'Had there been no Miss Ivens,  
there would never have been a Royaumont'*<sup>15</sup>**

In December 1914, at the age of 44, Frances went to France as head of a unit of the Scottish Women's Hospital (SWH) to set up a 100 bedded hospital entirely staffed by women at the Abbaye de Royaumont (Figure 1). As she had no experience in treating men, let alone war casualties, she had prepared herself by reading the literature, most particularly articles by Sir Robert Jones on fractures under war conditions.<sup>16</sup>

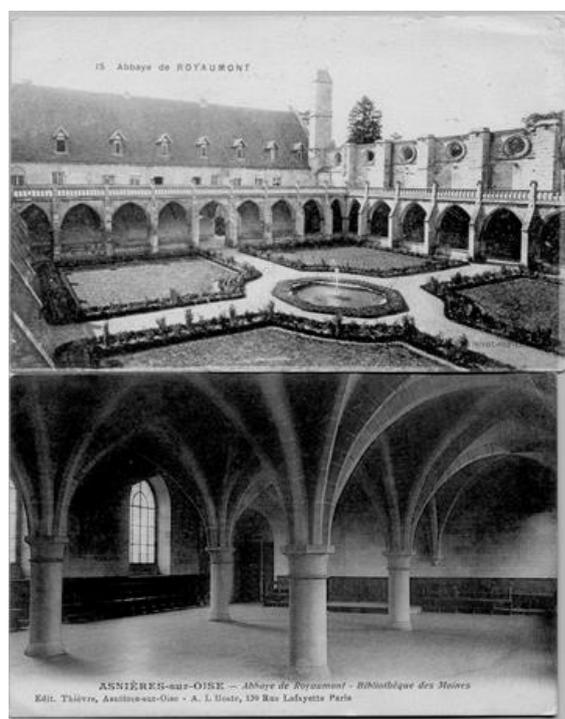


Figure 1: Fundraising postcards of Royaumont Abbey. Royaumont Archives

<sup>13</sup> Medical Women's Federation, 'Letter to A.B. Raper on World War I Commissions in the Army, 1917-1919', 2 March (1919), Wellcome Library Archives SA/MWF.

<sup>14</sup> J. Lane, *A social history of medicine Health, healing and disease in England, 1750-1950* (London and New York, Routledge, 2001), p. 180.

<sup>15</sup> V.C.C. Collum, Speech at First Royaumont Association dinner 28. 11. 1919. For a detailed description of the hospital at Royaumont, see E. Crofton, *The women of Royaumont A Scottish women's hospital on the Western front* (East Linton Scotland, Tuckwell Press, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Jones came to Royaumont and assisted Frances Ivens during operations.

Frances' gifts of perseverance and diplomacy became invaluable when dealing with the French authorities. Operating under the banner of the French Red Cross did not obviate the need for permission from the French Military to treat French soldiers. The doctors had to prove their credentials by providing a copy of their Medical Registration, obtain the necessary military permits to collect the wounded from the clearing stations and get permission to drive vehicles in a war zone.<sup>17</sup> They worked day and night to get the dilapidated building ready for inspection, but the Service de Santé deemed the layout and the facilities of the hospital unsuitable.<sup>18</sup> Disappointed, Frances tried not to 'take official snubs too much to heart'. Chauffeur Prance described how 'she was admired perhaps most of all for her quiet courage and persistence in overcoming the understandable hesitation of the high French authorities ... and how with infinite patience Miss Ivens gave herself up to this wearying work.'<sup>19</sup>

Antonio de Navarro was a visiting archaeologist writing a contemporary history of Royaumont Abbey. He captured the mood after the failed inspection:

It was a night of discouragement and perplexity. Those of sensitive temperament surrendered to the conviction that the Service de Santé being antagonistic to the idea of accepting the services of women as doctors and surgeons had discovered in a physical objection a subtle means of refusing their proffered assistance. To those of a stronger fibre the threatened difficulties did but whet their appetite to face and overcome them triumphantly. Despite the terrible conditions Ivens went to task to adapt Royaumont Abbey into a hospital and she persevered after the first failed inspection.<sup>20</sup>

To restore staff morale, Frances organised Christmas festivities and this proved a turning point for the hospital.<sup>21</sup> (Again in 1915, after a particularly gruelling allied offensive and a very demanding week, Frances bought champagne and gave the staff a 'spanking supper' and fancy dress party to celebrate the anniversary of the opening of Royaumont.<sup>22</sup>)

To save the SWH Committee of embarrassment in the face of this rejection, Frances tactfully brushed over the failed inspection. When the facilities were finally approved a few weeks later, she reported that 'after

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<sup>17</sup> E. Crofton, *The women of Royaumont A Scottish women's hospital on the Western front* (East Linton Scotland, Tuckwell Press, 1996), p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> A. De Navarro, *The Scottish Women's Hospital at the French abbey of Royaumont* (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1917), p. 111.

<sup>19</sup> Crofton, *The women of Royaumont*, p. 241.

<sup>20</sup> De Navarro, *The Scottish Women's Hospital*, p. 116.

<sup>21</sup> Crofton, *The women of Royaumont*, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Leneman, *In the service of life*, p. 36.

inspection by the Service de Santé, the hospital opened on 13 January 1915, as Hôpital Auxiliaire 301, fully equipped for the reception of surgical cases.<sup>23</sup>

When naming the different wards, Frances ensured that they paid homage to all the parties involved: The founder of the SWH movement with the ‘Elsie Inglis ward’; France, their host country together with Mr Edward Goüin the owner of the Abbey, with the ‘Blanche de Castille ward’ (mother of the founder of the Abbey); and finally they acknowledged the generosity of a major benefactor from Ottawa with the ‘Canada ward’.

As the SWH was entirely funded through donations, Frances was conscious of the importance of public relations. She unashamedly used her feminine charms to impress the many visitors to the Abbey (among them Sarah Bernard, the Queen of Serbia, Raymond Poincaré and his wife and Maréchal Joffre; Figure 2). Most importantly, she convinced the French Military authorities: ‘by persuasion of her powers of fascination she induced the commanding officers to send us cases and the 100 beds were soon filled and the hospital never again lacked work’.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 2: Dr Frances Ivens welcoming Maréchal Joffre and members of the French Military at Royaumont Abbey. Royaumont Archives.

Frances had considerable problem solving skills and a great sense of fairness. Dr Louisa Martindale, who visited Royaumont, remarked: ‘Most of all I was lost in admiration of the splendid organising and administrative powers of

<sup>23</sup> F. Ivens, ‘The part played by British Medical Women in War’ *Brit. Med. J.* Aug 18(1917), 203-208.

<sup>24</sup> V.C.C. Collum, Speech at First Royaumont Association dinner 28. 11. 1919.

the CMO (Chief Medical Officer), Miss Ivens – of her endurance, courage and above all her surgical skill.<sup>25</sup>

As an experienced administrator, Frances adroitly juggled the demands of the Committee of the SWH in the face of the dire financial needs of the hospital. Refusing a pay raise for herself, she successfully lobbied the SWH committee on behalf of her nurses, orderlies and chauffeurs for better working conditions, better food and increased pay and status. She valued and developed staff at all levels but was particularly appreciative of the work of the orderlies (Figure 3) whom she considered the backbone of the hospital. Frances could be dismissive of qualified nurses and clearly felt more at ease with orderlies who she thought ‘did more work and with more intelligence than an inferior type of fully trained nurse’.<sup>26</sup> She suggested that orderlies should be promoted to the status of ‘auxiliary nurse’ with the idea that gradually they could replace some of the sisters. This understandably caused friction with the nurses who had gone through three years of training to qualify but also often came from less privileged backgrounds and enjoyed less financial security than the orderlies. It could be argued that on this occasion, Frances showed a lack of empathy for the nurses’ plight.



Figure 3: Dr Frances Ivens surrounded by orderlies outside Royaumont Abbey. Royaumont Archives

<sup>25</sup> L. Martindale, *A woman Surgeon* (London, Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1951), pp. 166-168.

<sup>26</sup> Leneman, *In the service of life*, p. 64.

Initially, because of the uncertainty with regard to women being allowed to drive, two men were employed as chauffeur-mechanics. Once the women chauffeurs had proved their worth, Frances wanted the men gone. She successfully wrote to the Committee, playing the patriotic card:

It places me in a very awkward position to have useless men hanging about when we have any of the French authorities here if they are of military age, for there is a distinct feeling that England is not doing its utmost and it is most humiliating – not only that but it does not look well to pose as a woman’s hospital and yet have men here... it exposes us to criticism.<sup>27</sup>

During the Somme Offensive, Royaumont faced a large influx of colonial troops in particular Senegalese (Figure 4) and Arab patients who didn’t always see eye to eye. Apart from creating segregated wards (unthinkable today), Frances dealt with instances of racism among patients and from staff with tact, sensitivity and leadership.<sup>28</sup> She didn’t hesitate to dismiss an orderly who wrote to complain: ‘It is also most unfitting that white women should attend to natives in the ways we orderlies have to, as it will tend to lower the prestige of the white women in the East, as anyone who has lived in India well knows.’<sup>29</sup>



Figure 4: Dr Frances Ivens with some of the Senegalese patients in the grounds of the Abbey. Mrs Hayward photo album, Royaumont Archives.

<sup>27</sup> Crofton, *The women of Royaumont*, p. 28.

<sup>28</sup> De Navarro, *The Scottish Women’s Hospital*, p. 198

<sup>29</sup> Crofton, *The women of Royaumont*, p. 178.

Between 1914 and 1919, Frances Ivens and her team treated over 10,861 patients including 8752 soldiers and their astonishingly low death rate of 159 or 1.82% compared favourably to similar Military Hospitals.<sup>30</sup> The Royaumont doctors pioneered a new approach to the treatment of gas gangrene.<sup>31</sup> This research focused on the use of X-ray (Figure 5) and bacteriology for diagnosis, followed by surgery (debridement of the affected tissue) and antiserum therapy. Diagnosis and treatment involved the input of a surgeon, a radiologist and a bacteriologist. Lydia Henry, a doctor at Royaumont, postulated that it was this cooperation of different branches of the profession which allowed them to fight infection and avoid unnecessary amputations.<sup>32</sup> It should also be noted that much of the treatment relied on the use of antisera supplied by Professor



Figure 5: Dr Frances Ivens (in the white gown) and the X-ray ambulance. Reproduced by kind permission of the Women's Library, London.

Weinberg, an eminent bacteriologist from the Pasteur Institute in Paris.<sup>33</sup> During the Battle of the Somme, when the number of beds increased to 600, the surgeons and doctors (typically four of them at any one time) worked for eight

<sup>30</sup> E. Shaw McLaren, *A history of the Scottish Women's Hospital* (London, New York, Toronto, Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), viii.

<sup>31</sup> F. Ivens, 'The preventative and curative treatment of gas gangrene by mixed serums', *Brit. Med. J.* 19 Oct (1918), 425-427; F. Ivens, 'A study of anaerobic wound infections with an analysis of 107 cases of gas gangrene', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 10 (1917), 29-110.

<sup>32</sup> L. Henry, *The Treatment of War Wounds with Serum Therapy*. University of Sheffield, MD Thesis (1920).

<sup>33</sup> M-F Weiner, 'The Scottish women's hospital at Royaumont, France 1914-1919', *J. R. Coll. Physicians Edinb.*, 44, (2014), 328-336.

days with only sixteen hours of sleep. If faced with an electricity cut, they would perform surgery (Figure 6) by candlelight.<sup>34</sup>



Figure 6: Dr Frances Ivens in the operating theatre at Royaumont Abbey. Royaumont Archives

Leading by example and putting the patients and the hospital first, Frances obtained outstanding commitment from her staff. Roslyn Rutherford, an Australian masseuse described a busy period:

The three theatres are going night and day without ceasing and also the two X-ray rooms. The poor Chief looks dreadful, but never gives in and never allows a big op to be done by anyone else. She is a top hole [*Sic*] surgeon, but has cured me of all desires in that direction.<sup>35</sup>

Later she commented again ‘The hospital is a perfect purgatory but notwithstanding which we are contemplating signing on again for another three months. We both feel that they give us so much, it is rather dirty to leave at the end of six months, if the war is still going on.’

Frances’ human understanding towards her patients, who affectionately referred to her as ‘Madame la Colonelle’, permeated the entire organisation. In 1919, at the first reunion of the Royaumont and Villers Cotterêts Association, V.C.C. Collum, a radiology technician at Royaumont and one of the founders of

<sup>34</sup> Weiner, ‘The Scottish women’s hospital at Royaumont’, 329.

<sup>35</sup> Roslyn Rutherford, ‘Letter to her mother’ 24.10.18 Royaumont archives

the Association, gave a speech in honour of Frances Ivens in which she explained:

She was ready to work us to death for it (the hospital). And when the call came we quite contentedly fell in with her views and just let her! Why was it? Because we all knew our Chief never asked any of her staff to do anything or face anything that she would not do endure or face herself. She had a genius for scrounging talent and holding on to it.<sup>36</sup>

Frances insisted on being woken to receive the wounded whatever time of day or night. When beds were in short supply she selflessly surrendered her own. She would often get up in the middle of the night to bestow a medal (Figure 7) on a dying soldier.<sup>37</sup>

Described by a newly arrived orderly as ‘a funny old bird’, Frances knew how to assert her authority.<sup>38</sup> In her history of the SWH, McLaren described how the *blessés* (wounded soldiers) did a revealing skit on the advanced hospital at Villers Cotterêts: ‘The most amusing parts of the piece were the absolute calm and indifference on the part of the Staff at the explosion of a supposed bomb close by and the wild panic which takes place on news coming through that ‘*La Colonelle*’ (Miss Ivens) was on her way from Royaumont to pay the Hospital a flying visit!’<sup>39</sup>

During what Eileen Crofton described as ‘their finest hour’ in 1918, a new orderly wrote to the SWH committee to complain about the lack of hygiene and the poor running of the hospital. Clearly with such an influx of wounded, the women were under enormous pressure and Frances wrote a defensive and unashamedly political reply putting an end to all argument: ‘The Sous-Secrétaire d’Etat du Service de Santé sent for me on Sunday to see him at the Ministère de la Guerre, when he said that he regretted very much that all hospitals were not modelled on Royaumont, as he considered it quite the best going.’<sup>40</sup> Some accused her of lacking a sense of humour but her answer to the SWH committee’s complaints about the cook Michelet refutes this: ‘If you had been here from the beginning, you would know that the cooks had always quarrelled with other cooks. Michelet has his faults but he cooks meat splendidly’.

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<sup>36</sup> V.C.C. Collum, Speech at First Royaumont Association dinner 28. 11. 1919.

<sup>37</sup> Crofton, *The women of Royaumont*, p. 247

<sup>38</sup> E.M Proctor, ‘letter to her mother’ 27.07.1917 Imperial War Museum archives.

<sup>39</sup> Shaw McLaren, *A history of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals*, p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> Leneman, *In the service of life*, p. 168.



Figure 7: Dr Frances Ivens surrounded by patients at a Medal ceremony at Royaumont Abbey. Royaumont Archives

In 1917, at the request of the French Military authorities, Frances established another advanced tented hospital at Villers Cotterêts. There she operated under shell fire during the 1918 German advance until they were forced to evacuate back to Royaumont. When at last the armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, much rejoicing took place at Royaumont and Frances was ‘chaired’ by the orderlies around the place and she gave all the staff a day off to go to Paris and join in with the celebrations.<sup>41</sup>

After nearly five years of intense involvement, the transition to peacetime work must have been difficult for these women. Many ‘old Royaumontites’, as they called themselves, described their time at Royaumont as the most rewarding of their lives. Frances was bitterly disappointed at the end of the war when her plans to run a canteen for the occupying army at Mayence were turned down by the SWH committee: ‘it is distinctly depressing to us to feel that the work that we have done for the French is to be allowed to drop completely’.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Roslyn Rutherford, ‘Collection of letters to her mother’, Royaumont archives.

<sup>42</sup> Leneman, *In the service of life*, p. 186.

In recognition for her war time contribution, she was awarded the Croix de Guerre with Palm and the Médaille d'Honneur des Epidémies, and was decorated with the highest award, the Croix de la Légion d'Honneur, by the French President.<sup>43</sup>

Despite being denied a commission as a doctor in the British Army, Frances remained loyal to her country and showed no rancour towards the British Government or the Military who shunned women doctors. Eluding controversy, she explained why British medical women volunteered abroad, suggesting that 'the British Red Cross and the War Office were at that time amply supplied'.<sup>44</sup>

### *Post war career – Liverpool and London*

After the closure of Royaumont hospital in 1919, Frances returned to Liverpool to resume work at the Stanley and the Samaritan hospital. In addition, she became involved in the building of the new Maternity Hospital, and helped to found the Crofton Recovery Hospital for Women and the Liverpool Women's Radium League. She continued to lecture to students, encouraging them to 'devote themselves to medical research to assist in the advancement of medical knowledge'.<sup>45</sup>

During her presidency of the Medical Women's Federation from 1924 to 1926, Frances Ivens actively promoted the role of the 1000 medical women she represented. Her conviction was that 'medical women should take their share in the great schemes of reconstruction and re-organisation'.<sup>46</sup> She raised a variety of issues; the status of women doctors, equal remuneration for women doctors, the Married Women Employment Act and the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Bill, the admission of women to medical school and co-educational medical education.

Frances was particularly vehement with regard to the availability of training posts in hospitals. In 1925, she criticised those few medical schools which still admitted women but denied them access to resident hospital appointments: 'Whilst giving equal opportunity to men and women as far as graduation, they do not realize their further responsibilities and they have made no effort to throw open to their women graduates the resident posts in their own hospitals.'<sup>47</sup>

One of her main campaigns was for the improvement of health provision for women and children. Having first raised the issue of birth control in 1921,

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<sup>43</sup> 'Obituary Frances Ivens Knowles, CBE ChM (Hon.), M.S., F.R.O.G', *Brit. Med. J.*, Feb 26 (1944), 308.

<sup>44</sup> F. Ivens, 'The part played by British medical women in the war', *Brit. Med. J.* 18 Aug (1917), 203.

<sup>45</sup> F. Ivens, 'Address to the Liverpool Medical Students' dinner', *Brit. Med. J.*, Feb 7(1920), 198.

<sup>46</sup> F. Ivens, 'Address to the Liverpool Medical Students' dinner', *Brit. Med. J.*, Feb 7(1920), 198.

<sup>47</sup> F. Ivens, 'Women doctors', *Brit. Med. J.*, Jan 24 (1925), 192.

she was still campaigning on the subject in 1933 when she gave a talk to the South West Essex division of the Metropolitan Counties Branch of the BMA entitled, 'The scope of birth control in preventative medicine'.<sup>48</sup>

In her capacity of Chairman of the Midwives Committee of the Medical Women's Federation, Frances was involved in political issues until 1930, discussing the remuneration of practitioners attending complicated maternity cases.<sup>49</sup>

In 1925, Frances was awarded an honorary Masters' degree by the University of Liverpool. In 1926, she became the first woman to be elected Vice President of the Liverpool Medical Institution, one of the oldest medical societies in the country. Following her appointment as a lecturer in Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Liverpool, she was awarded an honorary degree of Master of Surgery (ChM) in 1929.<sup>50</sup> That same year, she was a founder Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians, and in recognition for her public services she was made a Commander of the British Empire.<sup>51</sup>

In 1930, Frances married an old family friend, Charles Matthew Knowles, a widowed barrister, in Liverpool. Shortly afterwards, they moved to London where Frances continued to work in private practice for a few years until her husband's retirement when they went to live in Cornwall. There, Frances engaged in public work as a County Medical Officer for the Red Cross and as a school governor, whilst still finding the time to tend and enjoy her beloved garden.

Frances continued her association with fellow Royaumontites, not only as president of the Royaumont and Villers Cotterêts Association but through her friendships with many of the doctors. In 1928, she attended the International Conference of Medical Women in Bologna, journeying there by car with Louisa Martindale. That same year, after a holiday spent in France with radiologist Dr Agnes Savill, they visited Royaumont on their return only to find that l'Abbé Rousselle, the local vicar who had been such a solace to them during the war, had died that very day.<sup>52</sup>

Frances maintained her interest in medical research and published her clinical findings in a book entitled 'Caesarean Section' in 1931. When the Second World War broke out in 1939, she acted as medical inspector for the Red Cross in Cornwall, and was also involved in an organisation looking after the welfare of soldiers and their relatives. She died on the 6 February 1944, at the age of 74, in Killagorden, St Clement, Cornwall.

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<sup>48</sup> F. Ivens, 'The scope of birth control on preventive medicine', *Brit. Med. J.*, May 20 (1933), 222.

<sup>49</sup> F. Ivens, 'Midwifery fees', *Brit. Med. J.*, Feb 1(1930), 35.

<sup>50</sup> Liverpool University accepted women in medical school as early as 1903. P. Raemaekers (ed), *A painful inch to gain* (Peterborough, England, Fastprint Publishing, 2013), p. 59.

<sup>51</sup> P.A. Last, 'Women doctors at the front', *Lancet*, 352 (1998), 1156.

<sup>52</sup> Royaumont and Villers Cotteret Association Newsletter Nov 1928, Archives of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh.

### ***Conclusion***

Frances Ivens was the first woman Consultant in Liverpool and the first woman to be elected Vice President of the Liverpool Medical Institution in 1926. Liverpool and its medical community should be justifiably proud to be associated with such an extraordinary woman. Her lifetime achievements in caring for the health and social welfare of women and children are an inspiration to the medical community, not only in Liverpool but further afield. Medical women are indebted to her for her indefatigable efforts to improve their professional status and working conditions. However, she will be most remembered as Chief Medical Officer of the SWH at Royaumont, an all women hospital under the Aegis of the French Red Cross from 1914 to 1919. The numerous testimonies from staff and patients bear witness to her inspirational leadership, her boundless energy and her surgical skills.

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