

Women

Pauline Page Whitney - Military Massage Corps



The following information is for teachers to utilise in planning classroom activities.

The use of massage as a means of treating wounded soldiers during the First World War was pioneered by the trained women of the Almeric Paget Military Massage Corps (A.P.M.M.C) under the supervision of Pauline Paget.

Of the British soldiers that went to war eighty-eight percent returned from the Western Front alive and would only spend a few days at a time in the front line trenches. However, whether they were to be involved in a major offensive or just in the wrong place at the wrong time, there was always a chance of death or serious injury. Around 1.6m British men were wounded during the war. Some of these wounds were so serious the men needed to return to Britain for medical treatment.



Located near the South Downs at Eastbourne, Summerdown Camp opened in 1915 as a convalescent home for wounded soldiers. At its height Summerdown contained 3,500 wounded men who were known locally as 'Blueboys' because of the different uniforms they had to wear. Wounded men were still under military control and curfews so it was important for wounded men from the camp to be easily recognisable when out in the town. Also some wounds were not obvious to an onlooker and being a man who seemed physically fit yet not in army uniform could result in pressure being placed upon them by civilians to join the army. The handing out of [white feathers](#) by women to men suspected of being too cowardly to join the army was humiliating at the time. Wearing a blue uniform let everyone know that the man was already in the army and had been wounded.

Almeric Paget Massage Corps

The treatment given to men at Summerdown included regular sessions with the women of the Almeric Paget Massage Corps. Initially founded by Almeric Paget and his wife Pauline Page Whitney, the Massage Corps provided the services of 50 masseuses to the War Office. The number of women who worked as Almeric Paget masseuses increased across the war and reached 2,000 during 1918. The group would be renamed as the Almeric Paget Military Massage Corps in 1916 and the official body for all massage services to the army. From 1917 members would also be sent overseas to provide treatment in France and Italy.

Women in the Corps were easily distinguishable from women in the regular Nursing Service. They wore a simple uniform with the badge of the A.P.M.M.C on their left arm, whilst the presence of red bars on the shoulders highlighted those women who



were senior in rank. The treatment they gave was a mix of massage and electrical stimulation using machines like the [Bristow Coil](#).

Whilst some of these treatments now seem outdated by modern standards they did lay the foundations for much of what we now understand as physiotherapy.

The Angel of Summerdown

Before her marriage to Almeric Paget, Pauline Page Whitney had been born and raised in the United States. With the formation of the A.P.M.M.C and the outbreak of the war, she became active in the organisation and was regularly seen at Summerdown Camp organising the women there. The wounded soldiers liked her and the masseuses so much that she was widely referred to as the 'Angel of Summerdown'.

Living in her house at Berkley Square in London, Pauline Paget maintained a strong interest in the women of the A.P.M.M.C and the services they provided to wounded soldiers. However following three weeks of illness she died in November of 1916 and, as a result, never lived to see how important the organisation would become.

News of her death was published in the New York Times and a [monument](#) to her still exists in the grounds of [St Mary's Church in Hertfordshire](#).





Questions to ask students:

- 1) Who was the 'Angel of Summerdown'?
- 2) What role did women have in WW1 hospitals?
- 3) Why did wounded soldiers wear blue uniforms?



Images



Figure 1: Pauline Paget and nurses at Summerdown Camp





Figure 2: Pauline Paget at Summerdown Camp



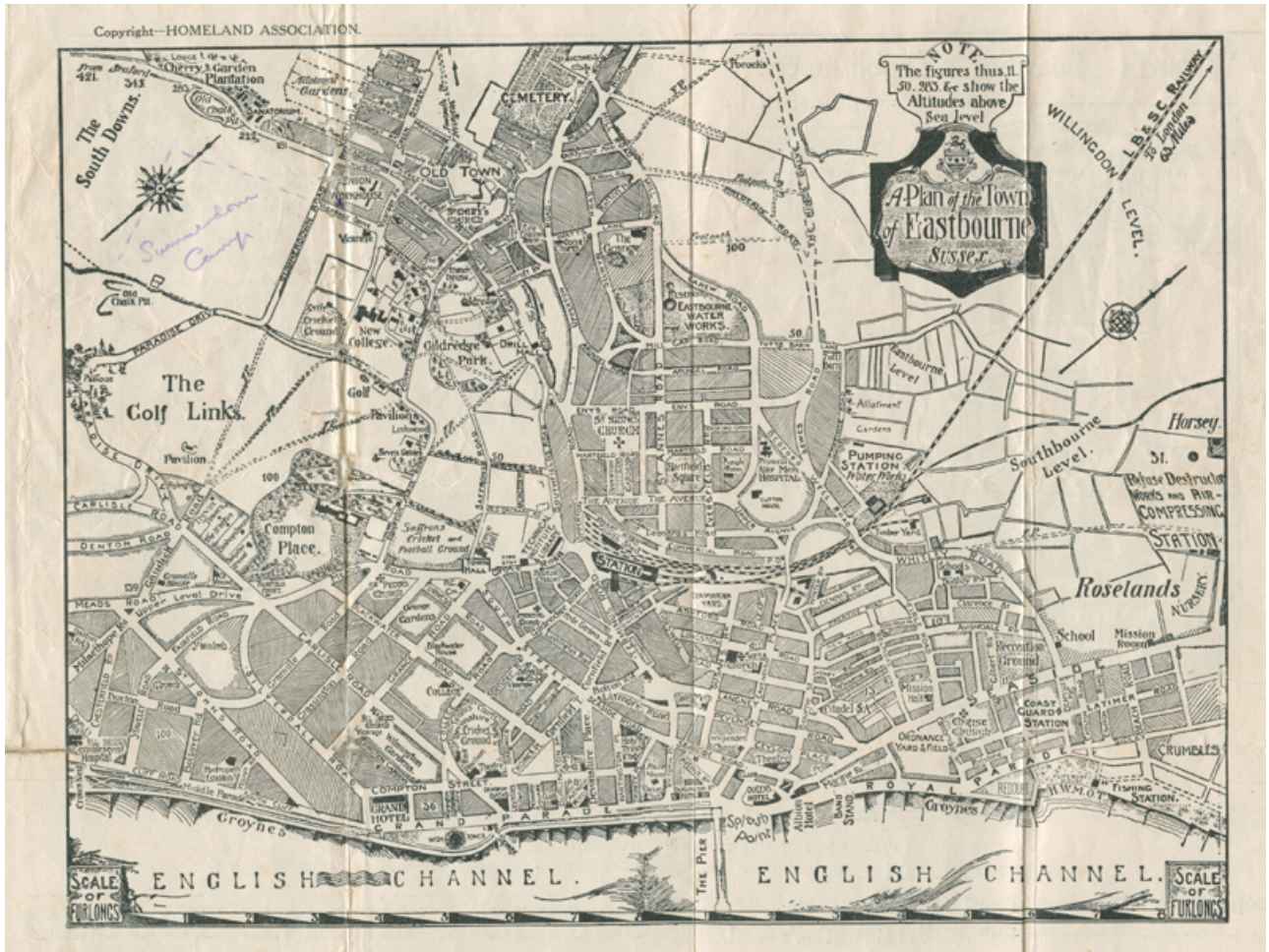


Figure 3: Map location of Summerdown Camp, Eastbourne





Figure 4: Summerdown Journal announcing Pauline Paget's death

