

HALLAM HOSPITAL DURING WWII



On the back row, second from the left, with dark hair and dark-rimmed glasses stands Collette Keane.

She seems to be holding a scroll, so we'd guess that this was what we would call today a Graduation Photo, the marking of a qualification gained, a passing-out ceremony.

Collette had arrived at the Hallam Hospital in August 1939, at the tender age of eighteen, a month before the outbreak of the Second World War.

She had travelled from the far west of Ireland, on the shores of Galway Bay, looking out over the Atlantic Ocean to the Aran Isles with the famous landscape of the Burren behind her.

Her parents – farmers of the land - had given her permission to join her older sister, Bridget, who had arrived in West Bromwich to train in nursing and midwifery at the Hallam Hospital a year before her.

She once said: *"It wasn't long before I was thinking about going home. I didn't like the noisy, dirty Black Country. I found it very hard to adapt to the industrial surroundings, even though I had taken to the local people who were very kind and helpful. Within a few weeks of my arrival in England war had been declared and I was determined to finish my training."*

Collette would particularly remember the Civil Defence exercise, which required her to be in front of the Memorial Garden opposite the Town Hall with a label attached to her wrist whereon was written the word – "Dead."

She would recall the bombing and some reluctance by her or others to go into the air raid shelters... some nurses would lock themselves in the wardrobe or hide under the bed, she said. Maybe until the siren had ended.

She remembered the wounded soldiers transferred to West Bromwich from the Dunkirk evacuation. In particular, she recalled one who had what she described as "terrible burns." This unnamed person, weaved a scarf which he gave to Collette which she was to keep her whole life long. It was coloured green with a nice pattern and her eldest son would wear it when he was young.

She remembered her friends of the time... there was a Nora Collins who got 'black market' for Collette! She recalled boating on the lake at Dartmouth Park with Sally Halloran – Sally was a General Nurse who was to marry a man named Jim Walsh. We know that Josie Radburn (her married name) is also in the picture but we don't know which one she was...she was to settle in Wolverhampton, not far from Collette.

Collette moved on from the Hallam Hospital later in the 1940's spending time in Stoke-on-Trent and Yardley in Birmingham and by the end of the decade moving to the Manor Hospital in Walsall where she became a Ward Sister. She met her husband Danny Clifford in the vicinity. They settled in Bilston and had nine children.

Collette didn't lose contact with Hallam Hospital. She returned there for the birth of ninth and last child, Carmel.

Collette eventually became a District Nurse and was well-known in the Bilston area. She believed that when she retired in 1980, she was the last District Nurse in Wolverhampton to use a bicycle. On her retirement, a photograph of her was published in the *Express & Star*, under the heading "*Cycling sister retires.*"

Collette died in Wolverhampton in 2009 not long after the beginning of her ninetieth year. She was quite a lady.

Brendan Clifford
July 2016

More information at: <http://www.blackcountrymemories.org.uk/pages1/clifford.htm>