

1. What did Edith Cavell do and why?

Edith Cavell was matron of a nursing school in Brussels when WWI broke out. She decided to remain at work there. Over nine months from 1 November 1914 to early August 1915 she worked with Belgians to help around a hundred British and French soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium to neutral Holland. She also helped many Belgian men to escape and join in the war.

She ran considerable risks - there were posters threatening death to any who harboured the soldiers. Spies and informers were everywhere.

She could have left Belgium herself but felt her duty was to her nurses and to the ongoing work of the hospitals she worked in. (In August 1914 the main hospital where she worked in Brussels had been moved out to the North Sea coast by her employer, Dr Depage).

in May 1915 she wrote *'Don't send any more men'* but later in the same letter she retracted: *'We must save them – if one were caught and shot it would be our fault'*.

After being arrested with all her underground network colleagues she was held in solitary confinement for 10 weeks and tried. At the end of the trial one of her co-accused reported her as saying: *'What could I do? Those poor men (the soldiers she helped) were being shot whenever found by the Germans. My woman's heart would not let me sit still while there was so much suffering. I determined that, be the cost what it might, I could not close my doors against those poor men. The Germans may call it a crime if they like. It is a crime of which I am proud, for I am sure that the Christ whom I serve would not have left those men to perish at the hands of their merciless foes'*

This sums up her motivation: patriotic, humanitarian, determined, and at its heart Christ-like. She lived out the apostle John's challenge: *'Whoever sees his brother in need and does not help him, how does the love of Christ dwell in him?'*

Photographs

Edith Cavell and her nurses in Brussels – from The Royal London Hospital Archive : contact : RLH.Archives@bartshealth.nhs.uk Dan Heather 020 346 55798

Edith Cavell at her trial – Imperial War Museum EC IV C4677.

The first soldiers she helped: Colonel Dudley Boger and Sergeant Fred Meachin, Cheshire regiment (see also Sergeant Jesse Tunmore image below, page xx)



