

# THE "NURSES' GENERAL" DAME MAUD McCARTHY

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**6 November – 8 December 2019**

**OXFORD HOUSE, Derbyshire Street, Bethnal Green, London E2 6HG**

[www.oxfordhouse.org.uk](http://www.oxfordhouse.org.uk)

This is an exhibition of the life and leadership of a great Australian and one of the most remarkable and highly decorated womens' leaders of the First World War, Dame Maud McCarthy, Matron-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders, 1914-1919.

It brings together the 'public' side of Dame Maud McCarthy's life with newly researched family and archive material from her early life in Sydney, Australia, seen for the first time. The exhibition has been prepared by Juliette Wilson, an experienced film researcher, and a descendant of Maud McCarthy's, with images from Australia, New Zealand, the Library of Congress, Imperial War Museum and private collections.

Maud McCarthy helped bring up 10 brothers and sisters in Sydney, gave up her own chance to attend Sydney University, and came to England when she was 30. She undertook nursing training at the London Hospital, Whitechapel, at the time of its great reforms under Matron Eva Luckes and Sidney Holland, became a Sister, and was selected to serve, with distinction, in the Second Boer War from 1899 to 1902.

On her return she was rapidly promoted to senior posts as Matron of large Army hospitals, and became Principal Matron at the War Office in 1910.

With the outbreak of war in August 1914 she was summoned to duty in France and Flanders, and shortly afterwards appointed Matron in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force. Arriving in France in charge of some 500 nurses, with a tiny staff, one highly effective assistant in Sister Isabelle Barbier, and a couple of typists, by 1918 she was marshalling over 8,000 nurses and VADs, from Britain, Australia, Canada, the Dominions and America, and responsible for all the nursing operations in the field, to the German advance and retreat of 1918, the Armistice in November 1918, and beyond, to the prisoner releases and great flu epidemic of 1919.

# DAME MAUD McCARTHY

Dame Maud McCarthy was always in the field, inspecting hospitals and Casualty Clearing Stations, despatching staff and requiring improvements, and one contemporary account describes such a visit with the Matron in Chief of the Australian Army Nursing Service Evelyn Conyers, sitting in a field at night with tin hats being shelled and bombed from the air.

Her responsibilities were almost unimaginable, given the scale and ferocity of the battles of the War and the vast casualty lists after each encounter. Her contemporaries marvelled at her administrative ability, tireless, dedicated hard work, attention to detail, and support for her nurses. She was highly decorated, and after the war went on to be Matron in Chief of the Territorial Army Nursing Service and was received by the US President in 1924.

When she left France in 1919, her nurses filled her cabin with flowers and sang "For she's a jolly good fellow" on the quayside. For many years afterwards she would be stopped and thanked by grateful soldiers and former patients in the street.

This exhibition brings the life of this great womens' leader to wider notice for new generations.

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## Further Information

1. Dame Maud McCarthy's entire war diaries have been transcribed and made available for future historians by Sue Light at the Scarletfinders website at:  
[www.scarletfinders.co.uk](http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk)
2. Schools packs and materials, including Activity Packs and a Powerpoint exercise, have been prepared for this exhibition and will be available for school visits. Contact:  
artos7272@gmail.com
3. For further information and interviews about this exhibition please contact:  
artos7272@gmail.com

4. 

Oxford House is an arts, community and heritage centre located in a Grade II listed building. It has been recently refurbished with grants including National Lottery Heritage Fund.

instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/oxfordhouse1884/>

Email: [info@oxfordhouse.org.uk](mailto:info@oxfordhouse.org.uk)

## Getting to OXFORD HOUSE

**By Tube:** Central line – Bethnal Green

**By Overground:** Bethnal Green Rail Station

**By Bus:** 8, 388, D3 (Stop: Wilmot Street)

D6, 106, 254 go to Bethnal Green Tube Station