BMS Meeting Notes 1st December, 2022.

'A Rare WWI VAD group with Foreign Awards' by Paul Handford.

Tonight's presentation was dedicated to two BMS Members - the late Martin Keys [1954-2020] whose dry wit was fondly recalled and the late Tony Sabell [1926-2012].

Our usual permissions were first obtained for ZOOM recording of the presentation, the use of powerpoint slides and to photograph the awards on display tonight for the purposes of this meeting notes.

Secretary's Note: *Members with good memories will recall some parts of tonight's talk was discussed at the* ***BMS Miniconvention in July 2019*** *and also in the* ***September 2021 Members' Own and Recent Acquisitions meeting*** *[Please see the meeting note PDF's on the society website www.birminghammedalsociety.com].*

Mr President explained his collecting habits as mainly Voluntary Aid Detachment ['VAD'] Great War ambulance drivers and VAD personnel. He reflected on the fact that research can be a frustrating journey [hopefully one of achievement!] In this talk, he has skilfully managed to link several VAD personnel with some shared wartime experience and show their awards.

The main focus of tonight's talk was recipient Miss Dora Adelaide Champion a VAD nurse of the Friends' Ambulance Unit ['FAU'] whose awards were a Great War trio and L'Insigne Spécial in Bronze and Silver – the latter two being specific and rare nursing awards. The medals' provenance included the collection of the late Tony Sabell and their significance was that *Miss Champion was attached to a unit Paul was actively collecting* although Paul didn't usually collect awards to nurses.

Above left: Left to right: WWI Trio and L'Insigne Spécial en Bronze et en Argent.

Above right: Medal recipient Miss Dora Champion VAD in Nursing Uniform.

Reference was made to Norman Gooding's book 'Honours and Awards to Women - the Military Medal' [*Norman Gooding recently deceased 28th December, 2022 – secretary's note added 18.1.2023*]. He had also written an OMRS article on 'L'Insigne Spécial' for nurses.

The VAD had a range of duties and occupations which developed from the 1906-12 Haldane Army Reforms. One of the aims was to increase the numbers of Voluntary Aid Detachments of both sexes so that when serving personnel were sent to the front, the VADs would make up the numbers in the Territorial Medical Service on the Home Front.

As the Great War progressed, service abroad on the war front for certain VADs became more likely.

The 1914 Star [commonly called the 'Mons Star'] and entitlement to the 5th August – 22nd November, 1914 clasp were discussed – These dates of the War covered the first Battle of Ypres – The 1914 Star was awarded for service in France and Belgium but no other theatre of war. The date clasp was issued if the recipient had been under enemy fire. If the clasp was awarded, the recipient's medal bar would have a rosette attached.

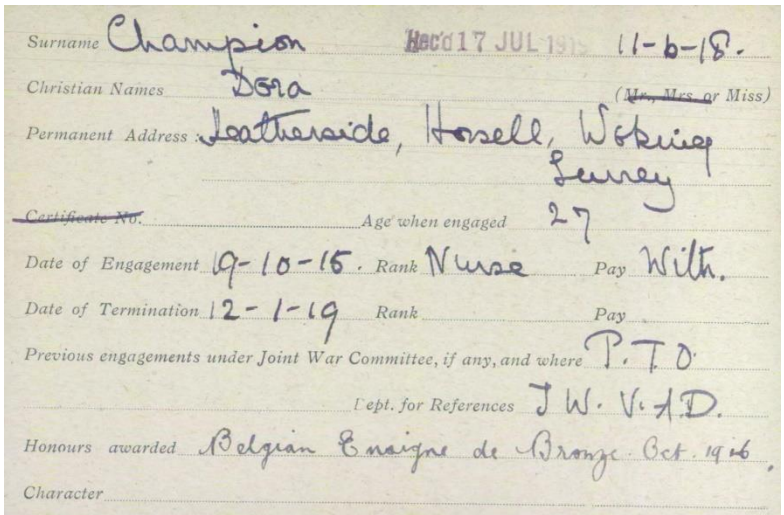
Approximately two thousand 1914 Stars were issued to civilian volunteers of the British Red Cross [BRC] and Order of St John of Jerusalem [OSJJ].

Miss Champion was awarded the 1914-15 Star – The entitlement to this medal was reviewed being 'service in *any* theatre of war 5th August,1914-31st August,191515' [if not already issued the 1914 Star]. Approximately seven thousand BRC and OSJJ volunteers were entitled to the 1914-15 Star.

Also reviewed was the British War Medal ['BWM'] in silver or bronze and the Victory Medal ['VM'].

A source of much information is the BRC record card which can give details such as home address, pay and VAD rank. It confirmed Miss Champion's service engagement date of 19th October, 1915 and termination date of 12th January, 1919 in the department FAU. These record cards are usually available online.

Also stated on the card was the award in October, 1916 of the '*Belgian Insigne de Bronze'* but the award referred to is, in fact, *French* [***See image below:*** *BRC record card for Dora Champion*].



Surname Champion Recd 17 JUL 191[illegible] 11-6-18.

Christian Names Dora (~~Mr, Mrs, or Miss~~)

Permanent Address Leatherside, Horsell, Woking Surrey

~~Certificate No.~~ Age when engaged 27

Date of Engagement 9-10-15. Rank Nurse Pay Nil.

Date of Termination 12-1-19 Rank Pay

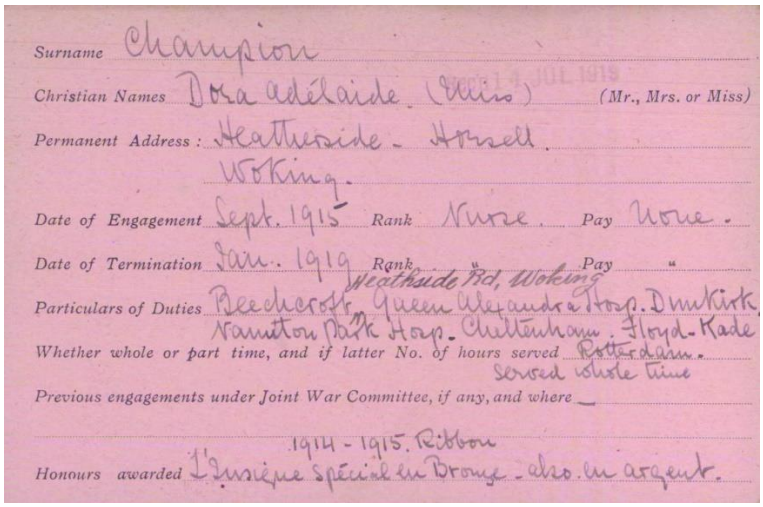
Previous engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where P.T.D.

Dept. for References T.W. V.A.D.

Honours awarded Belgian Insigne de Bronze Oct. 1916

Character

The FAU record card confirms details of hospital service both at home and at the Queen Alexandra Hospital in Dunkirk. Her awards were listed as the '*1914-15 Star ribbon*, *L'Insigne Spécial en Bronze. also en argent' ['in silver']*. [**See images: below left**: Dora Champion in civilian dress and **below right**; FAU record card Miss Dora Champion].



Surname Champion

Christian Names Dora adélaide (Miss) (Mr., Mrs. or Miss)

Permanent Address: Heatherside - Hansell. Woking.

Date of Engagement Sept. 1915 Rank Nurse. Pay None.

Date of Termination Jan. 1919 Rank " Pay "

Particulars of Duties Heatherside Rd, Woking. Beechcroft, Queen Alexandra Hosp. Dunkirk. Vanburgh Park Hosp. Cheltenham. Floyd-Kade Rotterdam.

Whether whole or part time, and if latter No. of hours served served whole time

Previous engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where —

Honours awarded 1914 - 1915. Ribbon L'Insigne spécial en Bronze - also en argent.

<u>The origins of the FAU</u>:

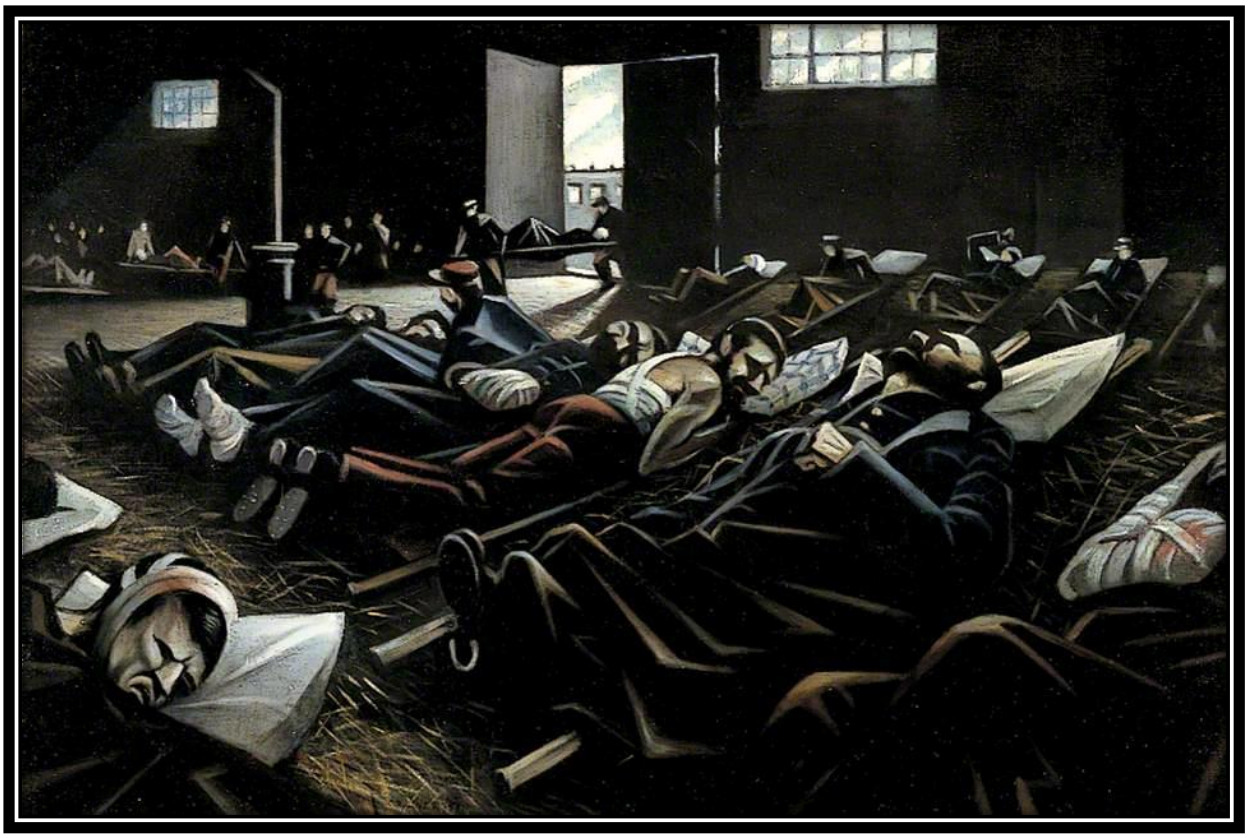
The FAU was a Quaker unit formed in August 1914 to assist the Allied cause.

On 21st August, 1914, Philip Noel-Baker [1889-1982 and Nobel Laureate for Peace 1959] placed an appeal in the Society of Friends Journal called 'The Friend' for volunteers to form an ambulance group.

They had formed on 7th September, 1914. The next photograph shown was taken during their first camp. Some details of their varied training were given eg first aid, stretcher drill but there was emphasis on keeping fit. There was no early posting to the Front so they had to await further orders.

The Unit CO was Philip Noel-Baker.

Geoffrey Winthrop Young, the celebrated climber, poet and educator became a war correspondent for the 'Daily News' in the early days of the war. In October, 1914, he reported from the quayside at Calais on the many wounded of the Belgian Army who suffered in appalling conditions with minimal medical and nursing care.

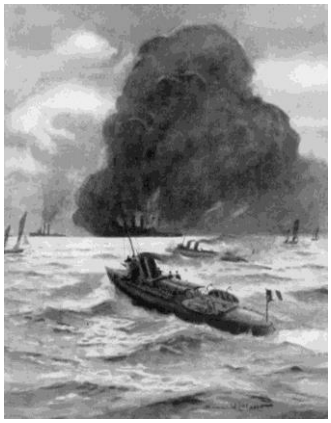


Painting above: 'La Patrie [Homeland]. The Railway Sheds Dunkirk 1914' by FAU member Christopher Nevinson painted in 1916.

G.W. Young was at Calais with the BRC Commissioner Sir Henry Norman. Following a short discussion, Young was tasked with returning to London and informing Sir Arthur Stanley [the Chairman of the Joint War Committee of the BRC and OSJJ] and Philip Noel-Baker of the Calais crisis.

Young was aware of the Quaker Ambulance unit and its near readiness to assist so, with the promise of logistics from Sir Stanley, the Unit was reassembled urgently at the end of October 1914 for duty. It was initially called the 'First Anglo-Belgian Ambulance Unit'.

On the 31st October, 1914 they made the channel crossing to Dunkirk on the SS Invicta. When their two escort vessels suddenly left Invicta, they were soon to know why. Ahead HMS Hermes had been hit by two torpedoes fired from submarine U-27. It was aflame and rapidly sinking in the Straits of Dover. The Ambulance Unit were soon at work in their first experience of war. These casualties were returned to Dover before the Invicta set sail again for Dunkirk.



Above left: HMS Hermes.

Image left: HMS Hermes after being torpedoed.

Above right: is the single Victory Medal [VM] to HMS Hermes survivor No 200606 P/O2 [Petty Officer 2nd Class] Matthew Driscoll. Twenty-two had been killed on the Hermes.

Aboard Invicta and assisting with casualties was Dr George Raymond Fox FRCS whose photo and Trio with Belgian Ordre de la Couronne are shown below.

The Emergency at the Railway Sheds Dunkirk:

The SS Invicta had received an urgent message about the medical emergency at the railway sheds at Dunkirk, namely the many hundreds of casualties of both enemy and Allied soldiers. This horrifying scene was painted powerfully in 1916 by artist and FAU member Christopher Nevinson [1889-1946]. The painting is now in the Imperial War Museum [IWM] London.

The FAU were immediately at work clearing the wounded and the dead who lay everywhere. There are some graphic descriptions of their work, the appalling injuries and the awful odour of sepsis

The first HQ for the Anglo-Belgian Ambulance Service was at Malo-Les-Bains a seaside resort near Dunkirk.

The typhoid epidemic.

The FAU were next involved in managing this outbreak requiring the sanitising of properties in Ypres.

The typhoid epidemic at Ypres began to affect the French military near Dunkirk and highlighted a lack of facilities and hospital beds. The FAU doctors and nurses moved to a newly constructed, modern one hundred bedded hospital called 'L'Hôpital Queen Alexandra' [Known as the 'Queen Alexandra Hospital - the 'QAH'] at Malo-Les-Bains which would look after British and French casualties.

The Adjutant and Officer in Charge of the QAH was William Mordey who had [from his FAU record card] also been *in charge* of its construction. Also working there was medical student, Leslie Maxwell, who had worked tirelessly with the injured at the railway sheds. Maxwell was to resume his medical education in January, 1918. Both were to be awarded the Belgian 'Ordre de la Couronne'.

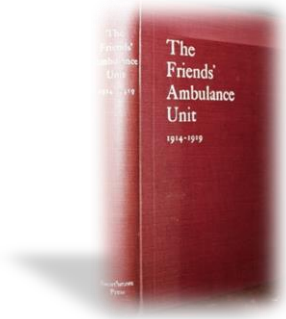
Image above: Photo of Adjutant and OC William Mordey FAU, his BWM and Belgian Ordre de la Couronne.

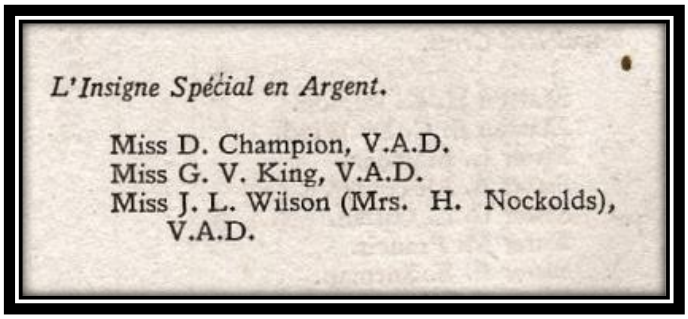
Among the Medical Staffing was Dr Harold Fardon an anaesthetist whose 1914-15 Star and VM were shown. The whereabouts of his BWM is unknown.

Dora Champion:

FAU record cards have much detail for example age, nearest relative, address, inoculations and whether a conscientious objector. Dora Champion was born in 1887 and joined the FAU aged 22 years on 18th October, 1915 with a leaving date of 23rd June, 1918.

From the FAU record on 19th October, 1915, she is stated to be a VAD at the QAH. She is confirmed as receiving L'Insigne Spécial en Argent 16th December, 1918. This is confirmed in the Friends' Ambulance Unit 1914-19 book.




L'Insigne Spécial en Argent.

Miss D. Champion, V.A.D.
Miss G. V. King, V.A.D.
Miss J. L. Wilson (Mrs. H. Nockolds), V.A.D.

The VAD nurses were an important help to the existing nursing staff of the QAH. Conditions in Dunkirk were tough with proximity of the German lines and bombardment of the town. A contemporary map was shown which had recorded where all the different ordnance had fallen along with the associated casualties. For the 5092 bombs dropped, there were 888 injured and 424 killed: The overall totals were munitions dropped 7514, injured 1113 and 548 killed. The map and these statistics highlight the great danger.

The FAU HQ had to be moved to Hotel Pyl at Malo-Les-Bains in September, 1916.

On 11th August, 1918, when the HQ was hit by a shell, Wiliam Mordey had been asleep inside and trapped but ultimately had been saved by a large food cabinet chest which had fallen over him. Driver Charles Proctor and Orderly Fred Kitchin had been killed. A photograph of their adjacent headstones at Dunkirk Cemetery was shown. The food cabinet still remains in the possession of the Cadbury family.

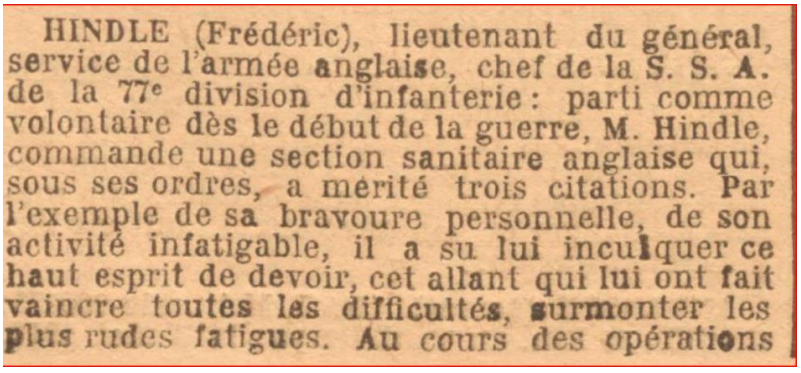
Dora Champion's younger brother, Lt Reginald James Champion had served in various regiments [18th London Irish Rifles, Scots Guards and Trench Mortar Battery] He had been wounded twice but had been killed in action [KIA] 18.7.1917 aged 22years.

Picture above: Memorial tablet for Lt Reginald James Champion from St Mary's Church, Woking. He had been head boy at Guildford Grammar School. He is buried at Canada Farm Cemetery at near Ypres.

It is interesting to speculate and highly likely that he would have been visited by his sister.

With reference to the 'Journal Officiel de la Republique Française' [now available on line], there is information about Sir Fred Hindle's [commander of SSA 16] three Croix de Guerre which, as a civilian recipient, are not gazetted in Britain.

His citation is pictured below.



HINDLE (Frédéric), lieutenant du général, service de l'armée anglaise, chef de la S. S. A. de la 77e division d'infanterie : parti comme volontaire dès le début de la guerre, M. Hindle, commande une section sanitaire anglaise qui, sous ses ordres, a mérité trois citations. Par l'exemple de sa bravoure personnelle, de son activité infatigable, il a su lui inculquer ce haut esprit de devoir, cet allant qui lui ont fait vaincre toutes les difficultés, surmonter les plus rudes fatigues. Au cours des opérations

What was the Insigne Spécial?

Photograph above: Insigne Spécial en Argent.

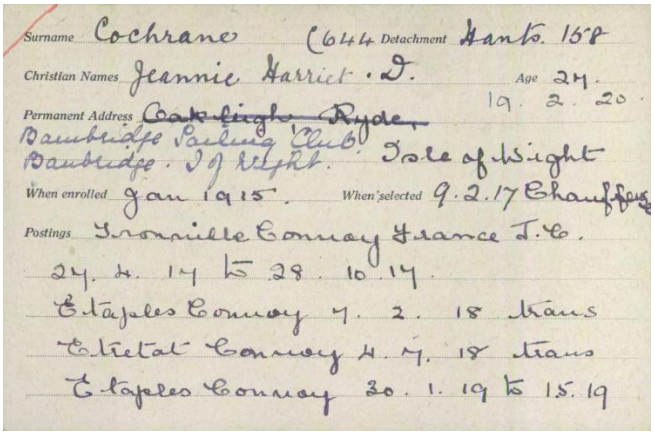
The design is crossed palms with a red cross on a white background. The entitlements were given as twelve months service for the bronze award, twenty-four months for silver and thirty-six months for gold for dedicated service to the sick and wounded. The applicant had to be proposed for approval by senior medical personnel as the start of the process, the badge being finally awarded by the Undersecretary of State for Military Medical Services.

Why is it so rare? The award is unusual in that it is a new design in an era of medals issued for the Great War which followed an accepted design e.g. crosses and stars.

It is rare ***when verified*** but was small, easy to lose and was not gazetted. The official certification might not survive so proof of the award might be difficult to establish.

Other recipients:

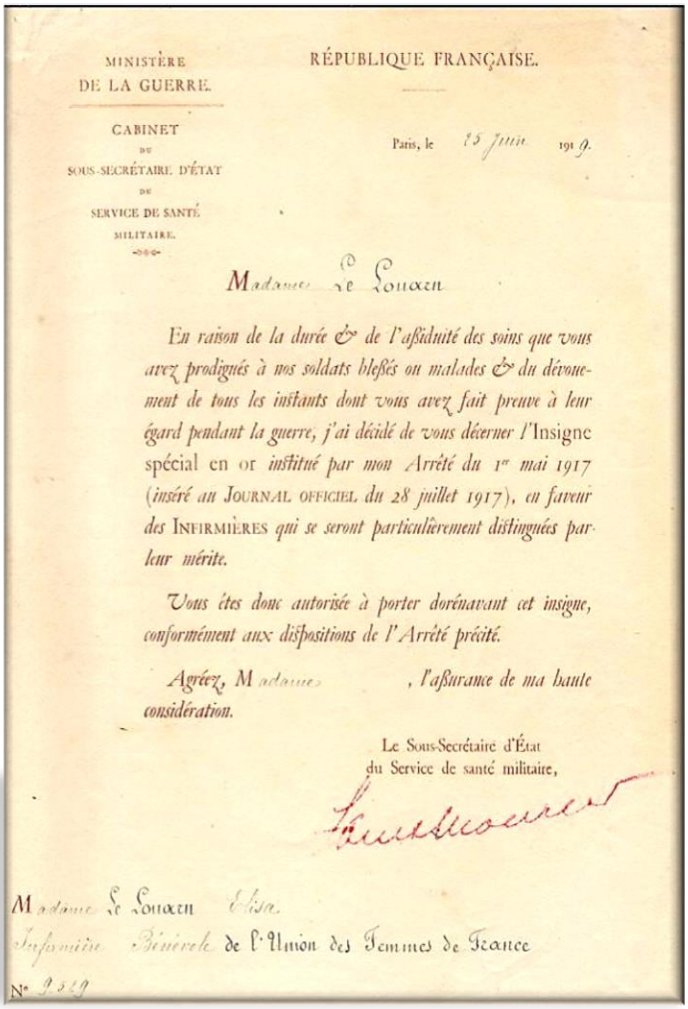
The BMW/VM pair to VAD driver Chauffeuse Jeannie Cochrane was shown. She was served 1915-16 [but not a full year of service] There is no confirmatory information on her VAD card about her Insigne Spécial.


Surname Cochrane (6444 Detachment Hants. 158
Christian Names Jeannie Harriet D. Age 24.
19. 2. 20.
Permanent Address ~~Coat-leigh Ryde~~
Bambridge Sailing Club
Bambridge. I of Wight. Isle of Wight
When enrolled Jan 1915. When selected 9.2.17 Chauffeuse
Postings Ironville Conway France T.C.
24. 4. 14 to 28. 10. 14.
Etaples Conway 7. 2. 18 Trans
Etretat Conway 4. 7. 18 Trans
Etaples Conway 30. 1. 19 to 15. 19

Pictured above left: BWM, VM and Insigne Spécial en Argent to Chauffeuse Jeannie Cochrane VAD.

Pictured above right: BRC record card for Jeannie Cochrane with no mention of Insigne Spécial.

The certificate for the ‘Insigne Spécial en Or’ to Madame Le Louocen was shown. Her Bronze award in not listed in the FAU history book although her silver award is.



MINISTÈRE
DE LA GUERRE.

RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE.

CABINET
DU
SOUS-SECRÉTAIRE D'ÉTAT
DU
SERVICE DE SANTÉ
MILITAIRE.

Paris, le 15 juin 1919.

Madame Le Louaen

*En raison de la durée & de l'assiduité des soins que vous avez prodigués à nos soldats blessés ou malades & du dévouement de tous les instants dont vous avez fait preuve à leur égard pendant la guerre, j'ai décidé de vous décerner l'*Insigne spécial en or *institué par mon Arrêté du 1er mai 1917 (inséré au* JOURNAL OFFICIEL *du 28 juillet 1917), en faveur des* INFIRMIÈRES *qui se seront particulièrement distinguées par leur mérite.*

Vous êtes donc autorisée à porter dorénavant cet insigne, conformément aux dispositions de l'Arrêté précité.

Agréez, Madame, l'assurance de ma haute considération.

Le Sous-Secrétaire d'État
du Service de santé militaire,

Madame Le Louaen Elisa.
Infirmière Générale de l'Union des Femmes de France
N° 9529

There is a mark on Dora Champion's Insigne Spécial white medal ribbon – could this represent a gold award or not?? The meeting discussed this point in great detail and the overall conclusion was 'probably not' as she had left before completing a third qualifying year.

At 20.50hrs, thus ended a very stimulating and enjoyable evening with a well-earned round of applause for our speaker!

Typed 18-31.1.2023 with my usual apologies for all typos, errors and omissions.

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Chris Davies

BMS Secretary.