

‘Forth in His name we go’ – to West Africa and China at least! Wesley Deaconess Work

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Introduction

I understand that this Conference is focusing on the training and conditions of service of missionaries and so within these guidelines I offer an insight into how the Wesley Deaconess Order strove to care for its members. Little can be said about the special training for overseas work as all the deaconesses were suitably trained and, in addition, any going overseas to nursing posts were qualified nurses who took additional courses in specialist hospitals to enable them to cope with very different situations. Then, when they arrived in their allotted country, they were instructed in the local language, so that they could communicate with the people. Deaconesses going abroad as teachers had the usual basic deaconess training, but often were academically qualified as well.

Wesley Deaconess Work in West Africa

Colonial Nursing Association

In early 1900 the Colonial Nursing Association, apparently at the suggestion of Mary Kingsley, contacted Dr. Stephenson about the possibility of the Wesley Deaconess Institute supplying Deaconess Nurses for hospital work in West Africa. Unfortunately the Institute was unable to comply with the request at that time.¹ Then, in February 1903, Stephenson reported that Mrs Piggott, the Secretary of the Colonial Nursing Association, had sent an urgent request for nurses to go to a hospital in Sierra Leone. However, first, suitably qualified deaconesses willing to go to West Africa had to be found and practical issues settled. On 7th May he explained the background:

The Colonial Nursing Association is an organisation very closely connected with the Colonial Office... Its object is to maintain hospitals in the Crown Colonies and certain other places where Englishmen are in danger of being left in illness without proper care. But the Association finds a difficulty in obtaining Nurses of sufficiently trustworthy character, and they plainly say to us that they believe that Methodist Deaconess-Nurses could be trusted to behave themselves with propriety where persons who are merely selected on a commercial basis break down. The Association also represents to us that along the coast the Methodist

¹ Minutes of the Wesley Deaconess Institute 1890-1910 (hereafter WDIMins. I) pp. 71,138

Church has strong Mission Stations, and that Deaconess-Nurses would be in friendly touch with our other Mission workers and under the supervision of our general Superintendents.²

A draft scheme for the services of the Wesley Deaconesses, prepared by the C.N.A., was carefully considered and a 'proposed arrangement' was adopted and forwarded to the C.N.A. together with a 'draft financial scheme.'³ The CNA meeting on 9 June received the proposals, studied them and suggested some amendments. The Wesley Deaconess Council accepted several and reworded others [see Appendix 1]. The main difficulty seems to have been the Wesley Deaconess Order's insistence on maintaining its authority over its own deaconesses, which it was not willing to relinquish to anyone else.⁴ This point is made abundantly clear in the following comment, which the Order added to paragraph 4:

In reference to this point we submit to you that the W.D. Order is a community having its own government and itself subject to the Wesleyan Methodist Church. It is vital to the Order that it should retain to the full its authority over its members. It is through that authority, and the character of the members thereby guarded and promoted, that we are able with confidence to place Wesley Deaconesses in positions of trial, where others not so strengthened would be more likely to fail. If the authority of the W.D. Order over its members were in any way weakened, the very end which the Committee of the C.N.A. has in view would in our judgement be imperilled.'⁵

After all these negotiations, on 9th July 1903, Miss M. E. Dalrymple, the Assistant Secretary of the C.N.A, wrote to say that 'As the Committee was sitting a communication was received on Tuesday afternoon from the Colonial Office which informed them that in view of a dispatch just received from the Governor of Sierra Leone, the Colonial Office could not see their way at the present moment to make any change in the existing Nursing arrangements' and therefore the C.N.A. felt that for the moment the negotiations with the Wesley Deaconess Institute should cease, but that all the papers would be filed 'in the hope that it may become available in the future.'⁶

Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society

However, two and a half months later, on 25th September 1903, the WMMS Secretary, the Rev. William H. Findlay, wrote to Stephenson urging the Order to consider work in West Africa. Having been a member of the committee involved in the negotiations with the C.N.A., Findlay had become aware of the 'wider views of Missionary usefulness for the Deaconesses in West Africa.' The WMMS Finance Committee had endorsed his opinion and so he wrote to

² WDIMins. I pp. 137, 138

³ WDIMins, I pp. 139-141, 153

⁴ WDIMins I pp. 159-166

⁵ WDI Mins. I p. 164

⁶ WDIMins I, between pp. 167-8

Stephenson:

To you I need not enlarge on the urgent need there is for women missionaries in our West African work. Our progress is in many respects one-sided and unsatisfactory because women and girls have not the example and training of English Christian womanhood. I do not hesitate to say that at this moment women missionaries are more needed than men in our Native Churches.... The Deaconess Organisation appears to me to be in several respects eminently fitted to occupy this sphere of usefulness. Its large body of workers would render possible that rotation and succession which African conditions make desirable. The training is of the kind that would fit for usefulness in West Africa. Its Home at Ilkley and its extensive work in England would provide for rest or occupation during furloughs; while its care for invalid Deaconesses would go far to remove one of the chief anxieties of women workers in West Africa. I do not mean to suggest that Missionary work in West Africa can be any-thing but difficult and costly, even with the most favourable arrangements of organisation. All that I suggest is that the Deaconess organisation may perhaps render possible of achievement a Missionary task there which has long been desperately needed, but has hitherto seemed impossible.⁷

The General Committee replied enthusiastically and appointed a sub-committee to confer with Missionary Committee. A joint meeting, held at the end of October, noted that there were four types of Women's Work, which needed to be done:

(a) **Educational work.** The native Church realises the need for the education of girls:

1. *Cape Coast Castle School...*
2. *Lagos High School Building....*
3. *Freetown Girls' High School....*

(b). **Regular Itinerant Evangelistic Work by Women....**

(c). **Medical, Nursing and Dispensary Work.**

(d). **Pastoral Work....**⁸

Just before Christmas 1903 arrangements for administration, rotation of period of service and finance were agreed:

1. Wesley Deaconesses were to act under the direction of the General Superintendent who would be regarded as the Sub-Warden for his District;
13. Any withdrawal of Deaconess service would normally be subject to six months notice on either side, unless its was by mutual consent;
14. Three Deaconesses would be allocated to each station – two to be on the coast together, and one on furlough -and the estimate of cost would be on that basis;

⁷ WDIMins. I pp.181-2

⁸ WDIMins. I p.188

15. The length of service was not to be more than eighteen months;
16. The WMMS would accept the fully financial responsibilities for deaconesses employed under its direction;
17. There would be a special payment of £10 per annum into the Superannuation Fund because of 'the nature of the climate' for every deaconess employed.⁹

In the *Flying Leaves* of May 1904 Stephenson spelt out the difficulties of working in West Africa. The climate meant shorter terms of service there and longer furlough periods hence a greater number of workers were required for a satisfactory rotation. He also emphasised that the deaconesses who went overseas had to be volunteers; that only those who passed a stringent medical examination would be allowed to go and that two deaconesses would go together. He commented that modern developments in housing, diet, medicine, drainage and communications meant that there was now a better understanding of how to mitigate the risks involved. The 'Resolutions of the General Committee of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society on the Employment of Wesley Deaconesses in West Africa' were reproduced, so that any deaconess feeling a call to such service could see what was involved.¹⁰

Work in West Africa - The Warden

And, beyond question, the nature of the climate makes West Africa emphatically the land of Christian adventure. Heroic souls are wanted there. Men and women who "count not their lives dear unto them," should be sent thither, for the risks are more than ordinary. Yet that is surely no reason why the perishing people of West Africa should be left to die in darkness. If Christianity is to save the world, if Methodism is to take its share in that splendid achievement, and if the Wesley Deaconess Order is to be worthy of its name and profession, there must be no shrinking from a holy crusade like this.

Flying Leaves (May 1904) p.67

The Rev. William Findlay, spoke at the 1904 Convocation and issued an appeal for deaconesses to volunteer to go overseas, particularly to West Africa. He was conscious that the WMMS only had male missionaries there and that most of those were young and unmarried. The status of women and girls was very low and the situation needed to be addressed as quickly as possible. He said that the General Superintendent of the District, the Rev. A. T. R. Bartrop, who was home on furlough, was hoping that two deaconesses might be able to go back with him to work in the Cape Coast School. Findlay explained that Mrs Ellis, the widow of the Chairman of the District, had started a boarding school after her husband's death 'where the daughters of our Christian men on the Gold Coast were gathered, and she taught them cleanly ways and purity and kindness.' She had had wonderful success and the leading natives in that part of the Coast were happy to send their children to her. She had been on her own for more than twelve months, but she came home when her health gave way and was not able to return. The Women's Auxiliary

⁹ WDIMins I p. 188, cf pp. 199-202, 203

¹⁰ *Flying Leaves* (hereafter *FL*) (May 1904) pp. 67-9

had tried unsuccessfully to find a successor and had managed to keep going with native teachers, but someone was desperately needed to go out.¹¹ In the ensuing discussion it was emphasised that although the deaconesses should be able to prepare pupils for the the College of Preceptors Examination, the teaching of the scholars in Christian household ways was one of the most important works. One of the Deaconesses should be a good housekeeper, as the work was not all educational. There was scope for every kind of Deaconess Work. Mr Findlay added that ‘English would be spoken in the school. There were certain varieties of dialect spoken throughout West Africa, but all is easy; a knowledge of French would be an advantage.’ Mrs Stephenson said several deaconesses had already volunteered and indeed, on 17th September, Sisters Annie McVickers and Ethel Worthington set sail for Cape Coast Castle.¹² So Wesley Deaconess work in West Africa had begun.

China

The missionaries in China had been anxious for a Nurse-Deaconess to take charge of the Hankow Men’s Missionary Hospital. When, in early 1905, the Warden reported that he had received a request from the Rev. Dr. Hodge ‘for the appointment of a Nurse-Deaconess to the Hankow Missionary Hospital’ he regretted that there were no deaconesses suitably qualified, although a number were ready to go. Then, Mabel Roscorla, a nurse, but who for personal reasons was unable to become a deaconess, offered to “hold the fort” for two years. Her offer was accepted and she was ranked “as a companion of the Order”. So Mabel sailed for China in March to become the Sister-in-charge in the Hankow Men’s Hospital.¹³ She reported in 1906 that things were going well at the hospital and that she had ‘been so interested and happy in my work and everything looks so smart and nice.’¹⁴

At the Executive Committee Meeting on 28th November 1905 Sister Bessie Mountford, a Nurse-Deaconess from Leicester was appointed to the Hankow Men’s Hospital ‘in place of Sister Mabel Roscorla, whose term of special service before marriage will be completed.’ After a special consecration service held at the College Bessie duly sailed on 16th March 1906. Bessie had become a deaconess candidate at a very young age and this, plus her four year nursing course, which had resulted in first class certificates, meant that she had actually been in the Order for nearly eight years before she went to China.¹⁵

In the January 1907 *Flying Leaves* Sister Bessie wrote that she had settled well in Hankow and was living happily with Dr. and Mrs Hodge. She said she had found the work very different, but was sure that when she had a better command of the language and customs she would find things easier.¹⁶ An indication of the trauma experienced by working so far from familiar surroundings can be appreciated when Bessie wrote to the Warden expressing thanks for

¹¹ *FL* (June 1904) pp.89-91

¹² *FL* (June 1904) pp.89-91; (Sept.1904) p.116; (Oct.1904) p.131

¹³ *WDIMins* I p.232; *FL* (March 1905) p.212, (April 1905) pp.229-30

¹⁴ *FL* (Dec.1905) p.355, (Jan.1906) p.24

¹⁵ *WDIMins* I pp.255, 259, 261; *FL* (April 1906) p.59

¹⁶ *FL* (Jan.1907) p.10

letters from home, which helped to combat the feelings of loneliness and distance. She remarked that the Men's Hospital was very busy and always full because people who would not go to the Mission House would quite happily go to the Hospital and were receptive to the Evangelists as they read in the wards, so there was much work to be done and 'workers of every description are wanted; I am hoping the time will soon come when I shall not be the only Wesley Deaconess here.'¹⁷

Mrs E. C. Cooper, a former Wesley Deaconess, who was the wife the Rev. E. C. Cooper, a missionary in Yung Chou Fu, Hunan, wrote to the Order expressing her delight that the Women's Auxiliary had appointed Miss Derham to do women's work there. She described the new Hospital and the Boarding Schools for both boys and girls, which were connected with the Mission. So, obviously, although technically no longer a Wesley Deaconess she kept in touch with the Order. Later she wrote telling her friends at Ilkley about the work of the missionaries in China and in particular on 5th May 1910 she referred to the difficulties encountered because of the riots in Chang Sha which had destroyed their home.¹⁸

Sister Alice Shackleton went out to Canton on 26th August 1910, having previously taken a dispensary course to fit her for her work there. She went to relieve Bessie Mountford, who married the Rev. R. Hutchinson on 1st October in Hankow.¹⁹

An agreement was drawn up between the Hankow Hospital and Wesley Deaconess Institute and approved by the Committee in December 1910 with regard to the service of Alice Shackleton. It is likely that this agreement formed the basis for further arrangement and it shows the care taken by the Institute to safeguard the welfare of the deaconesses working in China [see Appendix 2].

Sister Alice sent her first letter home, dated 11th November 1910, saying that she was 'very, very happy here. The hospital is a fine place, far above my highest expectations.' When she wrote on 31st October 1911 it was to reassure the Warden that she was safe in spite of the war conditions caused by the revolution in China. Unfortunately, this letter was followed the very next day by one telling that the native quarter of Hankow was on fire and that they were afraid the houses, schools and hospital compound would be burned down. Writing again on 3 November she said that some of the buildings had been destroyed, but everyone had got away safely. Tributes to her work were paid at the General Committee Meeting on 14 April 1912.²⁰

Alice and her fellow workers were allowed back on 20 January and found that trying to replace the hospital items lost during the unrest and cope with patients meant life was extremely busy. Although she had extra help in the form of eight new nurses that was a mixed blessing as they were 'boys, only sixteen and seventeen years of age' whom she had to teach and train, so

¹⁷ *FL* (July 1907) pp.106-7

¹⁸ *FL* (Nov.1907) p.152, (Dec.1907) p.175, (July/Aug 1910) p.115

¹⁹ *WDIMins* I pp.354, 359, 367; *FL* (Sept.1910) p.125, (Dec.1910) p.173

²⁰ *FL* (Dec.1911) pp.170-2, (Jan.1912) p.7; *WDIMins* II p.24

that she had very little leisure time. As well as the nursing, prayers and Bible Study classes were part of her life.²¹ One result of the revolution had been an easing of prejudice against foreign hospitals because of the work done by the Red Cross, so in addition to civilian patients the hospital treated soldiers and was also trying to help opium addicts. On 22 June once again the hospital was threatened by fire when a nearby shop caught fire. Days without rain, temperatures into the nineties and a breeze blowing towards the compound made it a very anxious time, but fortunately the wind changed and disaster was averted.²² After all her traumatic experiences Alice arrived home for a well-deserved furlough on 12 December 1915.²³

Gladys Stephenson, having successfully completed her three year hospital course, plus a year's special training, went to Ilkley for one year before going overseas to a nursing appointment.²⁴ Convocation in 1915 made 'an offer to the Missionary Committee of the money to support a nurse in China for one year.' This offer was accepted and Sister Gladys Stephenson, after being consecrated at her home church of Southall on 1 September, sailed with a missionary party on the S.S. Medina on the 4th for the Wuchang District. The Order now set about raising the £100 promised for her support, which was then passed to the Mission House and duly acknowledged.²⁵ Sister Mary McCord left for Anlu on 24 December 1915 following a special consecration service held at Ilkley Wesleyan Methodist Church on Monday, 29 November.²⁶ So the Wesley Deaconess work in China was established.

Wesley Deaconess Order and the Women's Auxiliary (Women's Work)

Finally, a very brief word about the arrangements between the Wesley Deaconess Order and the Women's Auxiliary (Women's Work).

In my paper on the work in Puttur, Ceylon at the Sarum College Conference I referred to the arrangement made in 1897 that the Women's Missionary Society would pay the 'necessary expenses of passage and outfit', while the Order raised money for the deaconess' maintenance. In 1905 Faith Hunter went to Batticaloa under the auspices of the Women's Auxiliary to fill an important vacancy there, and the Order agreed to find half the cost, i.e. £35 per annum. Stephenson insisted that, although her support would be provided by the Women's Auxiliary and she would act under the direction of its Committee, she would nevertheless remain a Wesley Deaconess.

The arrangement between the Order and the Women's Auxiliary was formalised in December 1910 when the Executive Committee resolved that:

In cases where Wesley Deaconesses are employed by the Women's Auxiliary

²¹ *FL* (April 1912) p.55

²² *FL* (Sept.1911) pp.130-1

²³ *WDIMins* II p.90; *FL* (Dec.1915) p.94

²⁴ *FL* (Nov. 1914) p.152

²⁵ *FL* (July/Aug 1915) p.53, (Sept.1915) p.70, (Oct.1915) p.80, 81; *WDIMins* II p.85

²⁶ *FL* (Dec.1915) pp.94, 96

Society, the terms of engagement with regard to outfits, passages, furloughs, allowances and all other payments, shall be those which the Women's Auxiliary makes to its other agents in similar cases, and that payments shall be made direct from the women's Auxiliary to the Deaconess concerned. The only payment to be made to the Deaconess Institute being £5 a year to the Superannuation Fund.

This arrangement was to be retrospective where possible.²⁷

Appendix 1 Proposed Arrangement With The Colonial Nursing Association, 1903

1. For prudential reasons, the working staff shall consist of:-

3 Nurse-Deaconesses, whose rota of service should be twelve months on the coast and six months on furlough. .

A Sister in Charge, whose rota of service should be independent of that of the Nurse-Deaconesses, and might be twelve months on the coast, succeeded by a furlough of six months or longer, her place, if necessary, being taken by another to be sent out.

2. Of these four, *three* must have satisfactory hospital qualifications. The *fourth* should be one of our experienced and tested Deaconesses, who should be the *Sister-in-Charge* of the "Nursing Home". She would have, as all our Wesley Deaconesses have, such knowledge of nursing as would enable her to give assistance to the qualified Nurses; but her special care would be the domestic management and general oversight.

C.N.A. hoped that Sister in charge might be a fully trained nurse.

3. Wesley Deaconesses, whilst serving the Hospitals of the C.N.A., shall wear the Uniform of the Order.

C.N.A. insisted that the W.D. Nurses should wear the uniform of the Hospital to which they were appointed.

W.D.O. accepted this amendment.

13. The selection of the Deaconesses shall be made by the Officers of the W.D. Order, subject to the approval and Medical Examination of the C.N.A.

C.N.A. requested the Officers of the W.D. Order to submit Candidates for selection and medical examination by the Officers of the C.N.A.

W.D.O. suggested it should read: "The Nurse-Deaconesses selected by the Officers of the W.D. Order shall be subject to the approval and Medical Examination of the C.N.A."

14. The Officers of the W.D. Order accept the proposal of the C.N.A. to put their Hospital at Sierra Leone in our charge; paying to us the sum of £...(?) annually. We agree to maintain a Staff of not less than three qualified Nurses, of whom not less than two should be on the

²⁷ WDIMinsI p.371

coast, and one on furlough. But we intend to maintain a Staff of four as above.

C.N.A. explained their position regarding Government Nurses in West Africa – they were the intermediaries between the Colonial Service and the Nurses in respect to references, appointments and expenses, etc. They added that if a satisfactory agreement about W.D.’s serving in West Africa was reached they would discuss the matter fully with the Colonial Office. In the meantime they thought the Colonial Office might consent to pay a lump sum to the W.D.O.

W.D.O. accepted it as an experiment and for a limited period.

15. The domestic discipline and general oversight of the Nursing Staff, apart from their Nursing duties and in accordance with the Rules of the Hospital, shall be in the hands of the Sister-in-Charge, acting by the direction of the Officers of the W.D. Order.

C.N.A. wished to add “and with the approval of the Colonial Officials.”

W.D.O. accepted this and explained its position. With regard to the ‘Colonial Officers’ referred to above the W.D.O. wanted to know who they were and how far the ‘approval’ would limit the authority of the Sister-in-Charge. While the Order understood that the Rules of the Hospital and the Nursing work itself must be under the authority of the Colonial Medical Officers it failed to see why ‘the domestic management and all that belongs to the conduct and demeanour of the Nurses should be subject to the approval of any Colonial Official. Therefore it suggested that two notes be added. N.B. 1. “That any complaint made by the Colonial Officers shall be made through the C.N.A. to the Officers of the W.D. Order, who will at once consider and deal with it” and that paragraph 7 (below) should become N.B.2.

16. In all the Nursing work, the Nurse Deaconesses shall be responsible to the Medical Officers.

17. The engagement between the Wesley Deaconess Institute and the C.N.A. may be terminated by twelve months’ (?) notice on either side.

Source: Minutes of the Wesley Deaconess Institute 1890-1910 pp.138-141; 159-166

Appendix 2 Agreement Between Hankow Hospital and Wesley Deaconess Institute, 1910

1. Term of service to be 5 years.
2. Passage 2nd class to Shanghai, and 1st class up river to Hankow, to be paid by the Hospital.
3. Outfit £20 to be paid by the Hospital.
4. Extra freight to be paid, half by the Hospital, and half by Wesley Deaconess Institute.
5. a. A minimum holiday of six weeks during the hot season, extra board allowance during her stay at Kuling, return steamer fare to Kuing, and £1 towards the expenses of the land journey from Kuing to Kuling
b. Allowances to begin the day she leaves England.
6. Furnished quarters to be provided, and £30 a year for board, or whatever beyond it may cost. This, however, does not include sheets, blankets, pillow cases, towels etc.
7. Personal allowance at the rate of £25 a year, apart from the above named board.
8. A further sum of £5 to be paid to her for travelling.
9. Payment to the Superannuation Fund of the Wesley Deaconess Institute of £5 yearly.
10. A furlough of fifteen months from the time of leaving to date of return in China, once in six

years. Passage home to be paid, and outward passage also, should she return. If returning, furlough allowance to be at the rate of £40 per year, and also £10 for renewal of outfit.

11. The Superintendent of Hospital Department to be the responsible person with whom the Deaconess and the Institute deal.

12. Six months notice on either side to be given before terminating the Agreement.

13. The financial arrangements to be reconsidered at the end of 2 years, if not found to work satisfactorily.

Source: Wesley Deaconess Institute Minutes (1890-1910) pp. 372-3

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