

PWY YDW I'N MEDDWL  
OEDDWN I?

1914

WHO DO  
I THINK I WAS?

1918

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## Yvonne Pugh, Dowlais Visual Art Group

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### Help

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March 1915

I'm nineteen born in Merthyr, I was so excited at the prospect of moving to Cardiff. I had trained as a first aider out of interest but had now gone and trained with the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps as an auxiliary nurse. I was sent initially to Howard Gardens, a converted School where the main hall was home to thirty wounded, how on earth they crammed thirty beds in with barely a walkway in between is beyond me. Then onto Ypres Salient Northern France.

My work at Howard Gardens had been to care for the influx of wounded soldiers arriving from overseas. Their injuries in the main were cleaned up so it wasn't too much of a shock. Mind you they had abdominal fever and other infections.

My first impressions of the posting to Ypres was not good; the rows of coffins and the smell of death, a smell I had not encountered before. No amount of training could prepare me for the sights I now have seen.

Well here I am with the feeling of wearing blinkers to protect me from the sad, sad sights and sounds. Young men, bloody and with missing limbs crying for their mothers however brave they had been in joining up. Now they were injured and had seen too much. They were left traumatised.

My back stiffens and I walk confidently among them soothing and settling, reading their letters from home and penning their answers. One of my friend's had an autograph book and I just loved to look at some of the things the boys had drawn, painted and written.



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They show their chirpy side with ditties and poems of love and childhood memories. One that stays with me is...

*Look up not down,  
Look out not in,  
Look forward not back,  
And lend a hand*

Hmm I like that, such a poignant choice of words.