

The College has been the recipient of many unusual donations over the years and wherever possible the provenance of the item is documented and incorporated into the records. The following account illustrates the importance of provenance providing, as it does, a snapshot of history.

Late last year I was contacted and asked if I was interested in acquiring a 1910 edition of *A Surgical Handbook* by Cathcart & Cathcart, which had originally been owned by a Scottish nurse who had trained at the Royal Salop Infirmary in Shropshire and who had received the book as a prize. The book had been handed to the donor when she began her nursing training at Western Suburbs Hospital in 1952.

In accepting the donation I asked if the donor would be prepared to provide me with a written version of the history regarding the ownership of the book and I paraphrase, in part, her response as it demonstrates the incredible journey of some of the objects in our collection.

“My father, an Irishman, Herbert Crowther Foxtton, migrated to Australia in 1912 and enlisted in the first AIF in 1915. He was in the 25th Battalion that was formed in Toowoomba. Incredibly he survived the September Gallipoli landing unscathed but was severely injured in France during 1918. With half his face blown off, he was placed on a train to be taken to hospital; however, before the train had left he was removed to allow somebody with a ‘better chance’ of survival to take his place. It was noted that 24 hours later he was still alive so he was subsequently transferred to the London Hospital where he underwent many years of reconstructive surgery, although his sight was never restored. Whilst many nurses would have cared for him, as children we all knew about one particular nurse, ‘Jock’ Steel, a Scotswoman who seemed to have played an important part in his recovery.

In 1948, my mother, also Irish, returned to Belfast for her parents’ 50th wedding anniversary and on the return voyage by sea she became friendly with a Scots couple, the Coopers, who were migrating to Australia. It transpired that Mrs May Cooper was the sister of ‘Jock’ Steel. By the time the ship reached Australia, my mother and the Coopers were fast friends and remained so, becoming a part of our family. Mrs Cooper had also trained as a nurse at the Royal Salop Infirmary and she had brought this precious textbook with her giving it to me when I commenced my general nurse training.”

Peggy Morrison gave me the two photographs that accompany this story and consent was given to reproduce them. The photograph of Captain Foxtton was taken in 1917 before his devastating injuries and May Cooper’s photo is believed to have been taken about 1918–20.

The College acknowledges with gratitude the gift of the book and the wonderful story that accompanies the generous sharing of such a precious family memory.



THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVENANCE

Judith Cornell AM ~ Honorary Archivist