

Culture and Sport Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 23 August 2016

Commemorating Elsie Inglis

Item number	7.6
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	All

Executive Summary

At the Council Meeting of [25 June 2015](#), Councillor Rose put forward a motion in respect of Dr Elsie Inglis, a well known Edinburgh doctor who was a medical pioneer, an advocate for women's rights, and a heroine of the First World War. Given the current World War I commemorations, and in particular the opportunities afforded by the 100th anniversary of her death in 1917, Councillor Rose called for a report, which was agreed to be presented to the Culture and Sport Committee, outlining moves to commemorate her life and work, including the possibility for a statue in the High Street or elsewhere.

Links

Coalition Pledges	P31
Council Priorities	CP6
Single Outcome Agreement	N/A

Commemorating Elsie Inglis

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee:

- 1.1 welcomes the motion put forward by Councillor Rose to commemorate the pioneering work of Dr Elsie Inglis.
- 1.2 notes that the Council does not have a formal mechanism or funding route for erecting new statues but is willing and able to give advice to groups or individuals wishing to pursue the erection of new commemorative statues.
- 1.3 welcomes the lecture and film presentation on the Scottish Women's Hospitals during the Great War commemorating Elsie Inglis' life and work.
- 1.4 places the name 'Elsie Inglis' in the Street Naming bank for use when a suitable location is identified.

2. Background

- 2.1 Dr Elsie Maud Inglis (1864-1917) was a medical pioneer, an advocate for women's rights, and a heroine of the First World War. During her lifetime she was honoured by International Governments and upon her death, Winston Churchill said of Inglis and her nurses "they will shine in history".
- 2.2 Elsie Inglis was born in India. Her father, John Forbes David Inglis, worked in the Indian civil service as Chief Commissioner of Oudh. After a private education her decision to study medicine was delayed by her mother's death in 1885. However, the next year the Edinburgh School of Medicine for Women was opened by Dr Sophia Jex-Blake and Inglis started her studies there. After founding her own breakaway medical college as a reaction to Jex-Blake's uncompromising ways, she completed her training under Sir William Macewen at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary.
- 2.3 She qualified as a licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, Edinburgh, and the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow in 1892. Appalled by the general standard of care and lack of specialisation in the needs of female patients, she obtained a post at Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's pioneering New Hospital for Women in London, and then at the Rotunda in Dublin, a leading maternity hospital.

- 2.4 She returned to Edinburgh in 1894 where she set up a medical practice with a fellow student, and also opened a maternity hospital (The Hospice) for poor women alongside a midwifery resource centre, which was a forerunner of the Elsie Inglis Memorial Hospital. The Hospice was within 219 High Street.
- 2.5 Her dissatisfaction with the standard of medical care available to women led to her becoming politically active. She was the secretary of the Edinburgh National Society for Women's Suffrage in the 1890s and she played a role in the early years of the Scottish Federation of Women's Suffrage Societies.
- 2.6 Despite her early achievements, it was her efforts during the First World War that brought her acclaim. She was instrumental in setting up the Scottish Women's Hospitals for Foreign Service Committee, an organisation funded by the women's suffrage movement with the express aim of providing all female staffed relief hospitals for the Allied war effort. The organisation was active in sending teams to France, Serbia and Russia.
- 2.7 When Elsie Inglis approached the Royal Army Medical Corps to offer them a ready-made Medical Unit staffed by qualified women, the War Office told her "My good lady, go home and sit still." It was instead the French government that took up her offer and established her unit in Serbia.
- 2.8 Elsie Inglis went with the teams to Serbia where her work in improving hygiene reduced typhus and other epidemics. In 1915 she was captured and repatriated but upon reaching home she began organising funds for a Scottish Women's Hospital team in Russia. She headed the team when it left for Odessa, Russia in 1916 but lasted only a year before she was forced to return to the United Kingdom (UK), suffering from cancer.
- 2.9 In April 1916, Elsie Inglis became the first woman to be awarded the Order of the White Eagle (V class) by the Crown Prince of Serbia at a ceremony in London. She had previously been awarded the Order of Saint Sava (III class).
- 2.10 She died on 26 November 1917, the day after she arrived back in the UK, at the Station Hotel Newcastle upon Tyne. Her funeral service at St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh on 29 November was "the occasion of an impressive public tribute", according to The Scotsman. She is buried in the north section of Dean Cemetery.

3. Main report

- 3.1 Although Dr Inglis is not presently commemorated in Edinburgh by a public statue, there are already a number of memorials within the city to this pioneering reformer. In 1922 a large stone tablet to her memory, sculpted by Pilkington Jackson, was erected in the north aisle of St Giles Cathedral. A bronze plaque on 219 High Street marks the site of her early hospice. Another plaque marking her pre-war surgery from 1898 to 1914 is situated at 8 Walker Street, and there is also a plaque erected by the University of Edinburgh on the south side of Old Surgeons' Square in the north facade of Old Surgeons' Hall.

- 3.2 Her main physical memorial was the building of the Elsie Inglis Memorial Hospital in 1925. This operated primarily as a maternity hospital and thereby had a female-only patient base. Until the decision to close it in 1988, it remained a respected and popular maternity unit. A small plaque to Elsie Inglis exists near the south-west corner at the entrance to Holyrood Park, near the hospital site. In addition, in 1988 the Council commissioned artist Dorothy Black to create a series of artworks marking the demise of the facility. More recently, in 2009, the Museum of Edinburgh staged an exhibition entitled 'Votes for Women: the Women's Suffrage Movement in Edinburgh', in which Dr Inglis's key role in the struggle to win the vote for women was explored.
- 3.3 Further afield, a memorial fountain has been erected in her memory in Mladenovac, Serbia, commemorating her work for the country, and in March 2015, the British Residence in Belgrade was renamed 'Elsie Inglis House' in recognition of her work there.
- 3.4 Elsie Inglis was commemorated on a new series of banknotes issued by the Clydesdale Bank in 2009; her image appeared on the new issue of £50 notes. Finally, in December 2015, she was featured as one of six World War One heroines on a new set of stamps issued by the Serbian Government.

Statues and Memorials within Edinburgh

- 3.5 The Council has a monuments estate comprising over two hundred statues and memorials throughout the city, four of which commemorate women: the figurative statue of Queen Victoria at the foot of Leith Walk; the gothic Eleanor Cross to Victorian novelist Catherine Sinclair in North Charlotte Street; the figurative anti-apartheid African woman and child statue in Lothian Road; and the commemorative ziggurat to Zannah Alice Stephen in James' Court, behind the Writers' Museum, which was erected by her family in 2000. In only three historical occasions, were statues directly funded by the Council, and the Council presently does not have any dedicated funds for this purpose. Every other statue has been funded by public subscription, or in most recent times, by groups of citizens campaigning for a particular cause or person.
- 3.6 Nevertheless, Council officials from various departments do provide advice and assistance in a variety of ways to anyone wishing to consider erecting a public artwork. Colleagues in Planning and Culture will advise on potentially suitable sites. Initial designs will be reviewed to make sure they meet health and safety guidelines. Advice can be offered on suitable materials, possible sculptors, and installation methods. Assistance can be provided with community consultation and planning or listed building consents if required.
- 3.7 Upon the completion of a new statue, the Council will normally agree to accept the work into public ownership, if a future maintenance endowment can be agreed with those providing the artwork.
- 3.8 The cost of erecting a statue is dependent on a variety of factors. As an example, to commission, produce and install a life size bronze statue from a leading sculptor will

cost in excess of £100,000. The recently unveiled statue of Wojtek the Bear in Princes Street Gardens has cost a total of £300,000.

Special Event

- 3.9 In a special event to celebrate Dr Elsie Inglis' contribution to the war effort, historian Alan Cumming will give a lecture and film presentation on the Scottish Women's Hospitals during the Great War. Alan became fascinated by their story after a chance visit to Serbia and has featured in the television documentaries and various radio productions both in Scotland and in Serbia. He will introduce his film about his own journeys to Serbia, France and around Scotland researching the roll of Scottish Women's Hospitals during World War One. This event will take place at the Museum of Edinburgh on Monday 21 November at 2.00pm.

Street Naming

- 3.10 Discussions have been held with the Street Naming Team about having Dr Elsie Inglis name added to the 'Street Name Bank' for use as new sites are developed. Potential areas that could be explored are Central and South Areas. Her medical practice, a maternity hospital and the Elsie Inglis memorial hospital were located in the Central area of the City and she worked at the Bruntsfield Hospital in the South Area.

4. Measures of success

- 4.1 The commemoration within the city of Dr Elsie Inglis.
- 4.2 Success is also measured against the following objectives within the Culture Plan;
- a. encourage the highest standards of creativity and excellence in all aspects of cultural activity; and
 - b. support greater partnership working in the cultural and creative sectors and maximise resources available to help them thrive all year round;

5. Financial impact

- 5.1 The cost of erecting a statue is dependent on a variety of factors; however the Council does not currently have funds dedicated for this purpose. External sources of funding would therefore need to be sought.

6. Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

- 6.1 There are no risk, policy, compliance or governance impacts arising from this report.

7. Equalities impact

- 7.1 The work described in this report is not relevant to the public sector general equality duty of the Equality Act 2010, or human rights legislation.

8. Sustainability impact

- 8.1 There are no sustainability impacts arising from this report.

9. Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Not applicable.

10. Background reading/external references

- 10.1 N/A

Paul Lawrence

Executive Director of Place

Contact: Frank Little, Service Manager – Cultural Venues

E-mail: frank.little@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 529 3994

11. Links

Coalition Pledges	P31 - maintain our city's reputation as the cultural capital of the world by continuing to support and invest in our cultural infrastructure
Council Priorities	CP6 – A creative, cultural capital
Single Outcome Agreement	N/A
Appendices	None