



Publication date **Thursday, July 09, 2009**
Price **£20.00**
ISBN-13 **9781848091337**
BIC Subject **World History: First World War (HBBW1)**

Binding **Hardback**
Format **Royal Octavo**
Depth **32mm**
Extent **256 pages**
Territorial Rights **World All Languages**
In-House Editor **Trevor Dolby**

Author living in **London**

Elsie and Mairi Go to War Two Extraordinary Women on the Western Front

Diane Atkinson

Keynote

The extraordinary and moving story of two women whose courage and charisma made them the most famous women in the First World War.

Description

When they met at a motorcycle club in 1912, Elsie Knocker was a thirty year-old motorcycling divorcee dressed in bottle-green Dunhill leathers, and Mairi Chisholm was a brilliant eighteen-year old mechanic, living at home borrowing tools from her brother. Little did they know, theirs was to become one of the most extraordinary stories of the First World War.

In 1914, they roared off to London 'to do their bit', and within a month they were in the thick of things in Belgium driving ambulances to distant military hospitals. Frustrated by the number of men dying of shock in the back of their vehicles, they set up their own first-aid post on the front line in the village of Pervyse, near Ypres, risking their lives working under sniper fire and heavy bombardment for months at a time.

As news of their courage and expertise spread, the 'Angels of Pervyse' became celebrities, visited by journalists and photographers as well as royals and VIPs. During lulls in the fighting they would tour the United Kingdom on their motorbike with sidecar to raise money to run the post, starring in fund-raising events hosted by famous actresses of the day. Glamorous and influential, they were having the time of their lives, and for four years, Elsie and Mairi and stayed in Pervyse until they were nearly killed by arsenic gas in the spring of 1918.

But returning home and adjusting to peacetime life was to prove even more challenging than the war itself.

Sales Points

- A gripping, rollocking tale of wartime courage, **packed with historical detail** and focused on two larger-than-life characters who became celebrities in their day for their actions
- A great narrative read for fans of untold, stranger-than-fiction wartime stories like **Agent Zigzag** and **Enigma**
- Diane Atkinson is an **extremely well-respected historian** who is guaranteed review coverage on publication

Praise for Other Titles by this Author

- **Love and Dirt:** 'Diane Atkinson has produced a compelling and strangely moving story of an extremely odd Victorian marriage' - Miranda Seymour, *Sunday Times*
- **Love and Dirt:** 'Diane Atkinson presents us with an amazingly vivid picture of this extraordinary relationship' - Val Hennessey, *Daily Mail*
- **Love and Dirt:** 'Hannah and Arthur have been lucky with their biographer ... Diane Atkinson has a generous appreciation of all the nuances and paradoxes in their bizarre relationship' - Craig Brown, *Mail on Sunday*

Author Biography

Diane Atkinson was born in the North-East and educated in Cornwall and London, where she completed a PhD on the politics of women's sweated labour. At the Museum of London she worked as a lecturer and curator specializing in women's history. She has an MA from the University of East Anglia in Life-writing. She is the author of *Suffragettes in Pictures*, *Funny Girls: Cartooning for Equality* and *Love and Dirt: The Marriage of Arthur Munby and Hannah Cullwick*, which was published in 2003.

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