

OBITUARY



HELEN DUNCAN 1921 - January 2014

In January, we also lost Helen Duncan, aged 92, following a short illness. A former member of the WRNS, she had featured on the front cover of a book, and been the face of a recruitment campaign during the war, of which she was ultimately very proud – although mortified when it first became known that her photograph had been selected!

She had been in the WRNS during the war, and a photograph had been taken of her, which was used on the front cover of a book about the WRNS, called "Blue Tapestry", by Vera Laughton Mathews.

The photo was also used by the WRNS as part of a recruiting campaign.

The Legion obviously heard of this, and in 2010 contacted Helen, to ask if she would mind being interviewed, and the interview published in "Legion" magazine. This duly went ahead, but somehow without photographs, and Pamela Austin was asked if she would take a portrait of her! Pamela went to visit her, and spent an afternoon chatting to her in her conservatory, along with taking several photos.



This is the autobiography of Dame Vera Laughton Mathews, giving her personal story of service in the WRNS during the First World War and of her part in its refounding in 1939, all told from a personal angle by the person who was the creator and head of the Service for 'the Duration', the only Director of one of the Women's Services who had that distinction. In the book, Dame Vera tells of the inadequate plans in preparation for the war, of the difficulties of organising and administering a new Service at the same time, and then of the triumph of the WRNS in the eyes of the Navy, becoming a permanent element in the post-war establishment. A fascinating story, beautifully told.

Dame Vera Laughton Mathews, DBE (1888 — 1959) was one of the first officers of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) and served from just after the inception of the WRNS in 1918 until it was disbanded in late 1919 and served again as Director of the re-founded WRNS from 1939 until 1946. In addition to all this, Dame Vera was at various times in her life a suffragette, the editor of the Ladies' Field and Time and Tide; and a devoted wife and mother. Blue Tapestry was first published in 1948, being also reprinted that year. Since then, it has remained

unavailable for 70 years until being republished as an e-book in 2018 by Baker Steele Publishing.