

Edith Cavell Archive Swardston England supported by a
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World War I memorabilia: Edith Cavell and cigarette lighters and matchboxes

Recent finds, 2019

World War I memorabilia:

Edith Cavell and cigarette lighters and matchboxes

A Cavell 'lighter' found in South Dakota, USA, in early 2019

In January 2019 a Mr Dvorak of Lake Andes, South Dakota found a buried item while doing some digging in a field near Pickstown, South Dakota, USA.

The item is brass, about 1 1/2 inch (1.5 cm) in width. The picture and name on one side is Miss Edith Cavell. The reverse shows the US emblem.

Research on the web shows that the item is a small (cigarette) lighter:.



Since January 2019 three other different US lighters of a similar nature have been found on the internet. (There are also French and Belgian equivalents).

They will have been manufactured at some point after October 1915 when nurse Edith Cavell was executed by firing squad in Brussels for having assisted British and French troops out of occupied Belgium, along with Belgian men wishing to join the allied forces.

Why were these lighters produced? As yet we do not know, but possibly because keeping ordinary matches dry in the trenches was difficult.

What companies produced them and when remains to be discovered too. The US joined Britain and its allies in the war against Germany in April 1917. Its intervention helped being about the end of the war eighteen months later. Were the lighters available in the US before that April to honour her, or only soon after the US men began experiencing trench warfare?

Photos :

S Dakota lighter images from finder

Other images from the internet – sources acknowledged.

Images of other US and French and Belgian 'lighters'



Source: Worthopedia <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/ww-i-trench-lighter-first-red-cross-hero-edith>

Reverse has a star with the head of an eagle and small stars

Another US 'lighter' – reverse has US Eagle



Source: Worthopedia <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/rare-wwi-era-cigarette-lighter-miss-edith>

A third US 'lighter' – reverse has an American soldier slaying the German eagle



Source : Worthopedia: <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/edith-cavell-martyred-nurse-brass-ww-115148065>

Images of two further lighters manufactured in France and Belgium.

French lighter – 'Edith Cavell victim of the barbarians' in French.



Reverse represents the Virgin Mary watching over soldiers

A Belgian 'lighter' with its reverse commemorating (in French) the 75th anniversary of Belgian independence in 1905.



Source: Worthopedia: <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/vintage-bronze-brass-lighter-belgique-439320294>

Matchboxes with an Edith Cavell label

A Norwich contact has recently shared research published in *Match Label News* December 2014 pp 10-11 on matchboxes with a label in the name of Edith Cavell. At least two sets were issued in 1916: the second label (shown with comparable WWI labels) indicates that the print run was for 100,000 labels.

I hope that a collector some day can solve the mystery for us.

Below; The mystery labels.

(note: some were seen in the MLN No.403 page 15)

Right; the blue backing paper seen on the used labels.



Matchbox cover with an Edith Cavell image

The Cavell Archive in Swardston holds a metal matchbox cover (size 6cm x 4cm x 2cm) which shows on the front an image of Edith Cavell, on the side a statement by King George V and on the reverse the Red Cross (under which Cavell managed nurses in Brussels in 1914). A matchbox would be held within it, with the 'open' side giving access to the striking surface.



At present there is no further information on what company produced the item nor how many were produced.

Comment

What is interesting in all these finds is how far-reaching the impact of the execution of a nurse in Brussels in October 1915 was. To find US, French and Belgian *armed forces* using lighters bearing nurse Cavell's image, presumably on a daily basis, gives one, at this distance in time, pause for thought. (Did British and Empire forces also have such lighters?) Equally, it is moving to discover that *civilians* (presumably British but maybe also French and Belgian) used up to 200,000 matchboxes bearing her name, and others protected their matchboxes with a metal cover with her image.

Her death led to much *formal commemoration* (for example the highest mountain in the Canadian Rockies was named after her in 1917, a fund in her name led to the provision of seven different homes for exhausted WWI nurses in England from 1916 on and a statue was erected in a prominent position in her home city of Norwich in October 1918). However, the sustaining of her memory for '*ordinary soldiers and civilians*' via these lighters and matchboxes has not hitherto been documented and acknowledged.

Any help with assembling more information on lighters or matchboxes would be greatly appreciated – contact enquiry@edithcavell.org.uk