Edith Cavell – Briefing Notes

**Known by the Audience from Presentation**

* Born 1865 in Swardeston, Norfolk. Daughter of a clergyman
* Religious upbringing.
* Worked as a governess in England and Belgium
* Opted to train as a nurse, aged 30, in 1895.
* A dedicated and courageous nurse. She risked her life in the Tooting Fever Hospital and in Maidstone typhoid epidemic whilst seconded from the London Hospital
* In 1907 accepted a post to set up the first nursing training school in Belgium
* Worked tirelessly to overcome prejudice against the profession and establish a school in four converted terraced houses.
* By 1914 the school was established and in the process of expanding into purpose built accommodation
* The Germans occupied Belgium in 1914. Edith was allowed to stay on as a Red Cross Nurse – an impartial non-combatant

Background facts

* Edith was often seen as reserved and aloof
* She was a very strict disciplinarian but saw this as being for the good of her nurses
* She never spared herself and worked harder than anybody else in the Nursing School
* She showed exceptional kindness to animals and tried to practice Christianity in her day to day dealings with others
* She knew that her ‘work’ was likely to result in arrest
* It is likely that she knew that many of the men she helped smuggle across the border were carrying messages to British intelligence but this was never her primary motive for involvement.

**PTO**

Ian L’s Questions

**Why did you stay in Belgium when war broke out?**

**Answer along the lines ‘My work was unfinished. The Nursing School was not fully established in Belgium.’**

**When you remained you did so under the Red Cross flag?**

**Yes.**

**You were aware that this required impartiality towards both sides in the conflict?**

**Yes. We did nurse German casualties as well as British, French and Belgian.**

**So why did you agree to help allied soldiers escape when this would mean they would rejoin the Allied armies?**

**Answer along the lines of ‘I couldn’t say no’. Most were wounded and needed the help of a nurse.**

**But not all?**

**Increasingly not. I was also an Englishwoman – and a patriot.**

**Were you aware that they were taking messages concerning German troop movements back to British intelligence?**

**I tried not to think about it.**

**Patriotism in war often involves killing or helping others to kill. Is this Christian, Miss Cavell?**

**The Church of England supports the war. That’s all I have to say.**