

CIVIL DEFENCE PORTRAIT BOOK

Sutton Coldfield
(Hill Village and Boldmere)

Incorporating Further Notes by Mr. Adrian Sherwood (brother
of Ruth Sherwood) which gives details of the Sitters for the
Portraits

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CIVIL DEFENCE.

PORTRAIT BOOK.

(SUTTON COLDFIELD:-

HILL VILLAGE

+ BOLDMERE)

45.63

RUTH SHERWOOD (1907-1990)

Ruth Sherwood, who drew these sketches, was the elder daughter of Wilfrid Sherwood and Biddy Sherwood, nee Parkes.

The Sherwoods were originally yeoman farmers at Penkridge, Staffordshire, but started a silversmith's business in Birmingham in 1805 and settled at King's Norton. Wilfrid's parents moved to Sutton in the 1870's, and Wilfred inherited the business, which he sold soon after the First World War.

The Parkes family had been making agricultural implements since about 1620, the first of them being in partnership with his brother-in-law, "Dud" Dudley, inventor of the process of smelting iron with coke. In the eighteenth century, the family was running a water-mill to make spades in Sutton Park, at what was still known fifty or sixty years ago as Parkes's Pool or Spade-Mill Pool. This enterprise failed, but two generations later, the head of the family, Francis Parkes, set up business again in Birmingham, became a friend of Bessemer's and invented the steel digging fork, which made his fortune.

His son Richard (Ruth's grandfather) married an Anglo-Irish wife and in the early 1880's built a largish house ("Rathmore" - later "Derrymore") in open country in the south-west angle of Rectory Road and Hollyfield Road. It was, I believe, the first house in England (and so, probably, in the world) to have metal window-frames. Richard Parkes was something of an idealist, collaborating with Austen Chamberlain to found Workmen's Compensation, setting up a non-profit-making insurance company to insure it, and resigning as a Sutton Coldfield councillor over municipal corruption connected with the acquisition of the gas-works in Riland Road.

In later life (about 1926) he built a smaller house for his retirement between "Derrymore" and the "Boot Inn", combining the two gardens, while Ruth's family moved into the larger house. Richard Parkes's widow, who many years earlier had hired Four Oaks Hall for one night before it was demolished and given the last ball in it, died in 1941 and, with the larger house becoming increasingly difficult to run without servants, the Sherwoods moved into the smaller house. This was Ruth's home at the time she drew the sketches in this book. The older house was taken over by the Fire Service, was turned into flats after the war, and was finally demolished to make way for a housing estate.

Ruth's parents married in 1903 and lived over twenty years at The Woodlands, Whitehouse Common, where Ruth was born. She was fairly idle at school, being what was later to be known as dyslexic - probably the reason why so little information is written in the sketch-book and why several names are misspelt. However, like her father and several members of the family, she inherited a strong artistic bent which seems to have come through her paternal grandmother, a Griffiths from Lake Bala, who was related to Burne Jones, Rudyard Kipling and Stanley Baldwin and writers such as Angela Thirkell and her son, Colin McInnes. Ruth studied at the Slade under the famous Professor Tonks, of the same family as the Tonkses who lived in a large Georgian house which stood until after the Second World War opposite the College of Further Education at the beginning of the Lichfield Road.

FURTHER NOTES BY MR ADRIAN SHERWOOD

When she qualified in the early 1930's, she intended to become a free-lance commercial artist in London. She found that she could sell her work, but the Depression was at its height and she came to think that she was competing against artists much worse off than herself, who, when unsuccessful, were quite likely to put their heads in a gas oven. She therefore returned to live with the family in Sutton and kept up her painting for her own pleasure. The attached self-portrait dates from this period. At the time, she was thought somewhat eccentric for smoking a pipe rather than cigarettes, but it was purely in order to leave both hands free for her work.

After the war broke out, Ruth took a job as a factory worker in Birmingham with the Brooke Wool Company (which belonged to the Owens of New Hall in Sutton Coldfield) and moved to live with friends in Sparkhill, their house being severely damaged in the blitz. She particularly remembered walking to work during hot weather after a heavy raid and passing the time of day with a rescue worker, who told her ghoulishly, "We can't keep bodies in this weather. Yesterday we buried one with two left legs."

After a time she left the job to become an ambulance driver at Hill Village and Boldmere - hence this book. Towards the end of the war, the airraids had ceased and the work was largely taken up with driving patients to the lunatic asylum at Hatton. At this time, she began to find that, on long drives, she was becoming more and more numb in her lower limbs. It turned out to be a previously incurable form of anaemia, which had much earlier killed two of her brothers. She was given a new, almost untried, drug, which happily turned out to be a cure for the disease.

After the war she took a post teaching art at the Adult Education Centre at Dartington, Devon, but her own interest centred increasingly on weaving, at which she became quite adept. She was responsible for the altar frontal in Dartington Hall chapel of Richard II's badge of the white hart.

Ruth retired in the 1960's to a house in Amberley, Gloucestershire, to be near her widowed mother, later moving to a cottage in Minchinhampton. In the early 1980's she suffered a stroke, which meant spending her last years in a nursing home in Stroud. She died there after a series of small strokes.

The subjects of the sketches in this book were the ladies of the Sutton Coldfield Ambulance Service in the Second World War, at Hill (Mere Green) and Boldmere, and also at the Fire Station at Sutton Town Hall. The drawings were mostly made about 1942.

The interesting monograph written recently by Mr.A.F.Fentiman on The Ambulance Service at Hill and Boldmere shows that Hill and Boldmere were initially independent, but later worked in co-operation. Ambulance-drivers might be on duty at either, and the diary kept at the time by Mrs.Yapp shows that they also operated from the Fire Station.

The staff were nearly all women - some full-time and some part-time. A team consisted of a driver and a nurse, but at night they had to be accompanied by a man. If there were stretcher cases, two men went with the ambulance to do the heavy lifting.

The service was at its busiest during the heavy air-raids on Birmingham and was active in moving casualties from the appalling destruction of Coventry. As the war progressed and air-raids grew less frequent and finally ceased, much of the work came to consist of taking elderly patients to hospital, and there was, inevitably, much sitting about and waiting for something to happen. Miss Wylie still has a postcard in verse from Ruth Sherwood (who drew these sketches) starting:

"Sing a song of the ladies at Hill -

Unless I'm mistaken, they're sitting there still."

One activity in idle periods was making gloves for men on mine-sweepers, but there was also time for crosswords and games of bridge. The ladies at Hill formed an acting group called The Mere Players, which put on performances at the public hall in Mere Green in aid of the Red Cross, Prisoners of War and the Merchant Navy.. One such was Laurence Housman's *Victoria Regina*, in which Margaret Wylie played Queen Victoria and Ruth Sherwood took the part of Prince Albert.

I feel that this book ought to go to Sutton Library - its "natural home", but I felt that it needed a short accompanying text, to give some account of the sitters. Unfortunately, it did not come into my possession until it was some ten years too late to gather all the information I should like to have had. Most of the sitters have passed on, and the population of Sutton Coldfield has changed enormously in fifty years, most people being "in-comers".

There are, therefore, large gaps in my brief account. Of some people, I have been able to find out nothing, and of others very little. Two drawings I have been unable to identify at all.

I have given a rather fuller account of Ruth Sherwood herself, because it brings in a little Sutton history which otherwise would probably be lost, and because she was a delightful person and this will be her only memorial.

At least three of the ladies are happily still with us: Miss Woolley, Miss Wylie and Mrs.Strover, and I am greatly indebted to them for invaluable help in preparing these notes. Mrs.Yapp's daughter, Miss Judy Yapp, has been of much assistance, and allowed me to read her mother's diaries of the period. Mr.Fentiman, the historian of Hill Village, undertook an enormous amount of work, which I could not possibly have done from a distance, and in the process, produced the monograph mentioned above. I also have to thank Mrs.Young of Tamworth Road, widow of Dr.Bashford, for information.

Adrian Sherwood

October, 1992.

22, Lynton Road, London NW6.

THE SITTERS

1. Miss Margaret Wylie: A nursing auxiliary at Hill, living in 1992 at the house in Lichfield Road where she was born. Before the war, after leaving school, she lived at home, doing voluntary work. She also helped Mary Perkins (see below) with her infants' school. Her father died in 1937, and thereafter she lived with her mother, who died in 1964.
2. Molly Shelton: No information has come to hand - somewhat surprising -ly when one looks at her portrait.
3. Miss Janet Atkinson: Thought to be deceased. She was a full-time ambulance driver and is believed to have lived in Clarence Road. She was an "outdoor" type, keeping goats and (?) horses. She taught riding.
4. Mrs. Tall: No information available.
5. Mrs. Evans: An ambulance driver. She lived in Maney Hill Road.
6. Mrs. Margaret Rowland: Thought to have served at the Fire Station. She may have been the wife of a bank manager.
7. Miss Jean Guthrie: A part-time ambulance driver. She lived in Moor Hall Drive. Possibly still alive in 1992, but not listed in the telephone book.
8. Miss "Kip" Lloyd: A full-time nursing auxiliary at Hill and Boldmere. She also worked at the Fire Station.
9. Miss Katherine Taylor-Jones: Deceased. An ambulance-driver. A heavy smoker. After the war she is believed to have been chauffeur-companion to a crippled girl in Halloughton Road.
10. Miss Mabel Lyde: An ambulance driver. She lived with her mother at 235, Lichfield Road, and never married. She is now dead. A particular friend of Ruth Sherwood's.
11. "Cleo" (by Miss Leake). Unidentified.
12. Mrs. Ratcliff: Part-time ambulance driver. She was a widow and is thought to have run a business. It has been suggested that she was the mother of Mr. F.R. Ratcliff of 107, Lichfield Road, but a written enquiry was unanswered.
13. Mrs. Dorothy Yapp: A remarkable instance of voluntary nursing in both world wars. She gained a Red Cross nursing certificate in October, 1914, and a Home Nursing certificate in March, 1915. She lived in Nuneston before moving to Sutton on her marriage in 1916. She became a VAD at Watson House, a convalescent hospital for war wounded in Birmingham Road. Mrs. Yapp volunteered again on the outbreak of the Second World War and served throughout, as a nursing auxiliary at the Fire Station. After the war, she became manageress of a cafe in Sutton. She kept an interesting diary of her time as a nurse in the 1939-1945 war.
14. Miss Gwen Griffin: A full-time nursing auxiliary at Hill and the Fire Station. In the early 1930's she helped Ruth Sherwood's mother (a Girl Guide Commissioner) to run a local troop of Guides. She kept up her connexion with guiding and (it is thought) helped run the Sea Scouts. She lived in Cremorne Road.
15. Miss Margery / Marjorie? Wiggins: A full-time ambulance driver. She never married, and died about 1989. She lived in The Driffold until her mother died, when she moved to 73, Wilkinson Close. Her father had a drink problem and spent the family's money, so that Miss Wiggins worked at Frost's, the chemists, until she retired.

16. "Piglet": (by Miss Leake). Probably another portrait of Molly Shelton.
17. Miss Lily Gamble: A full-time nursing auxiliary at Boldmere and the Fire Station. She is believed (1992) to be in a nursing home.
18. Doris Gifford: No information has come to hand.
19. unidentified
20. Nurse Taylor: The Controller at Hill. Deceased. In the 1930's she became the first District Nurse and midwife for Four Oaks. This was evidently financed, at least in part, by voluntary contributions, as Norman English (who died 1991) of the Vesey Art Gallery in the High Street remembered his father's subscribing.
21. Miss Zilpa Milne: Deceased. She was a full-time nursing auxiliary at Hill.
22. Miss José Woolley: An ambulance driver, joining the service at Hill in January, 1940. Living in 1992 in Cremorne Road. She is an accomplished artist. Before the war, she lived at home, driving the family car and helping to bring up her young orphaned niece. After the war, she worked until her retirement as a dental nurse in the school health service, and looked after her parents, who both lived to a great age.
23. Mrs. Evans: Another portrait of number 5.
24. Miss Dorothy Insley: A full-time nursing auxiliary, I think at Hill. After the war she married a clergyman and went to live in Weston-super-Mare.
25. Mrs. Dorothy Sinclair: née Canlett. She lived in Tudor Hill and was a full-time nursing auxiliary at Hill. She was still unmarried in 1940 (when she spent Christmas Day with the Yapps) but was evidently married by the time the sketch of her was made. She moved either to Henley-on-Thames or Walton-on-Thames.
26. Mrs. Rosalind Strover: Née Rosalind Atkinson, of Mistle Hall, near Manningtree, Essex. Wife of what must surely be Sutton Coldfield's most remarkable curate. This was Colonel Ernest James Strover, Indian Army, who after retirement was ordained 1938 and appointed to be curate-in-charge at St. Chad's. On his first home leave (before the First World War) he learned to fly, and in that war was one of the first pilots in the Royal Flying Corps. He was shot down and became a prisoner of war in Germany, where he made several ultimately unsuccessful escapes. He eventually commanded his regiment in India. He and his wife and their two sons lived at 36, Coleshill Street. In 1939 he volunteered as a pilot in the R.A.F., was told that he was absurdly over the age limit, and was made chaplain of the large R.A.F. camp at Kirkham, Lancashire. Mrs. Strover stayed on in Sutton to pack up the house, and carried on as an ambulance driver before joining her husband in Lancashire. Her earlier war-work had been night duty at the Sutton telephone exchange. She was staying with Ruth Sherwood's family on the worst night of the Birmingham blitz, having returned to deputise for a viola player in the Birmingham City Orchestra, and still has vivid memories of the destruction of New Street station. Before the war, she was a member of the Birmingham Chamber Orchestra, and after it, taught the violin and viola in schools in Essex. At 88, she is living (1992) in a bungalow on what was her family estate, still playing the violin and driving herself to music festivals.
27. Miss Campbell: Known as "Scottie". A full-time nursing auxiliary at Hill. She came from Glasgow and lived in Sutton with a married sister.

28. Miss Gwendoline Hughes: Known as "Hughie". She lived at 66, Tower Road, and is no longer alive.
29. Spurr: (Miss Spurr?). She worked at Hill in the evenings.
30. Mrs. Routledge: No information has come to hand.
31. Miss Joan Moor: A full-time nursing auxiliary at Hill.
32. Miss Mary or Marie Perkins: A full-time nursing auxiliary at Hill. She lived with her widower father in Lichfield Road, on the west side after Four Oaks station (at 213, I think, before the re-numbering). Before the war, she ran a nursery school. Margaret Wylie (see above) used to help her with this. She was a friend of Ruth Sherwood's. She is thought to have died in hospital after a nasal operation.
33. Miss Cottam: A full-time nursing auxiliary. She lived with her sister in a flat over Wilder's, the men's outfitters in Belwell Lane. She is thought to have done secretarial work in Birmingham before the war. She died in a mental hospital.
34. Miss Margaret Leake: "Leakie". A full-time ambulance driver, who lived in Tudor Hill. She was adopted by a Mr. and Mrs. Ansell. And she herself adopted a boy called Simon. After Mrs. Ansell's death, she married Mr. Ansell. She was a fashion artist - probably free-lance, and advertisements by her appeared in the Birmingham papers, for Grey's Stores in Bull Street, amongst others.



SHERWOOD GIFFORD YAPP TAYLOR-JONES
BASON BURKE

1.



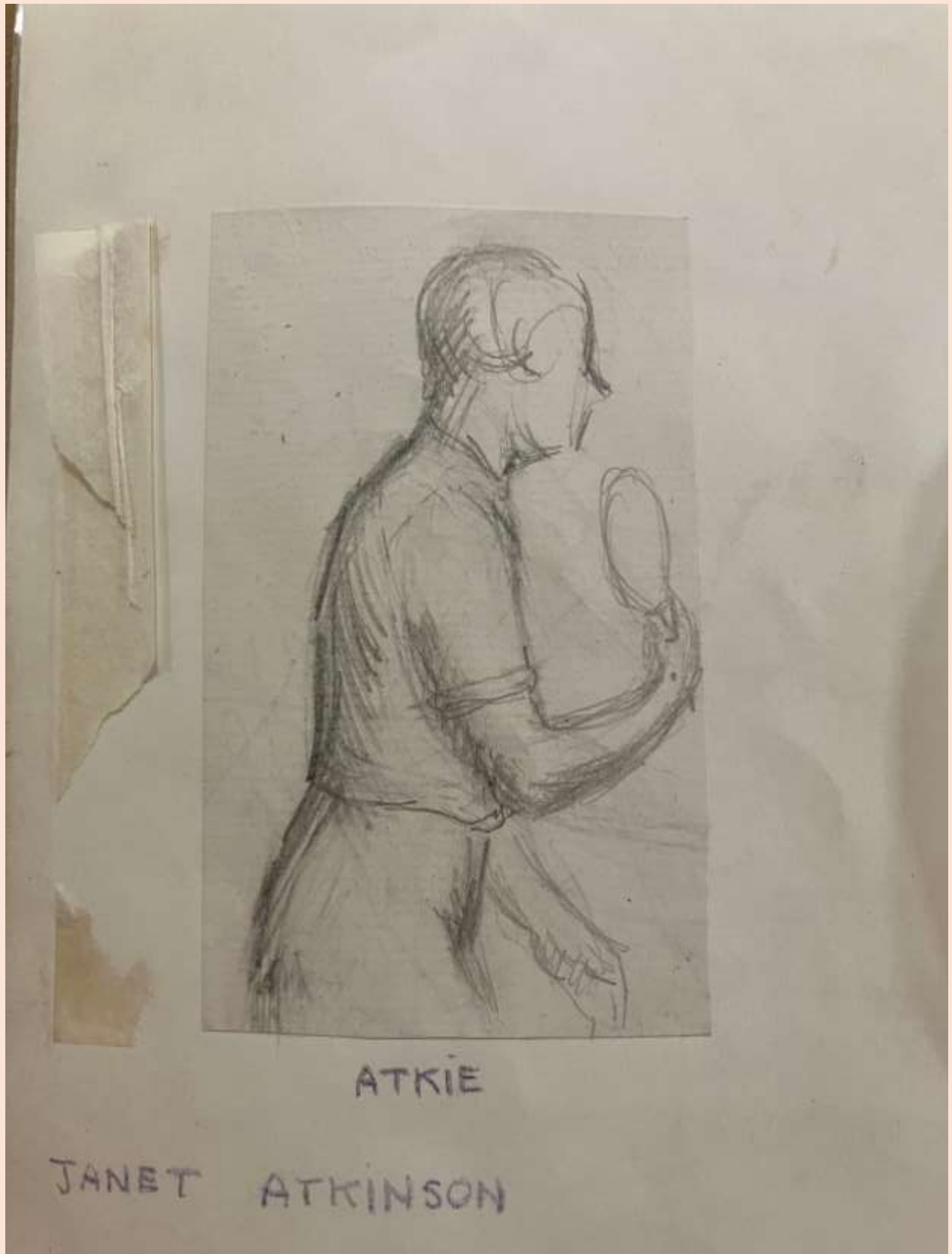
Miss Margaret Wylie

2.



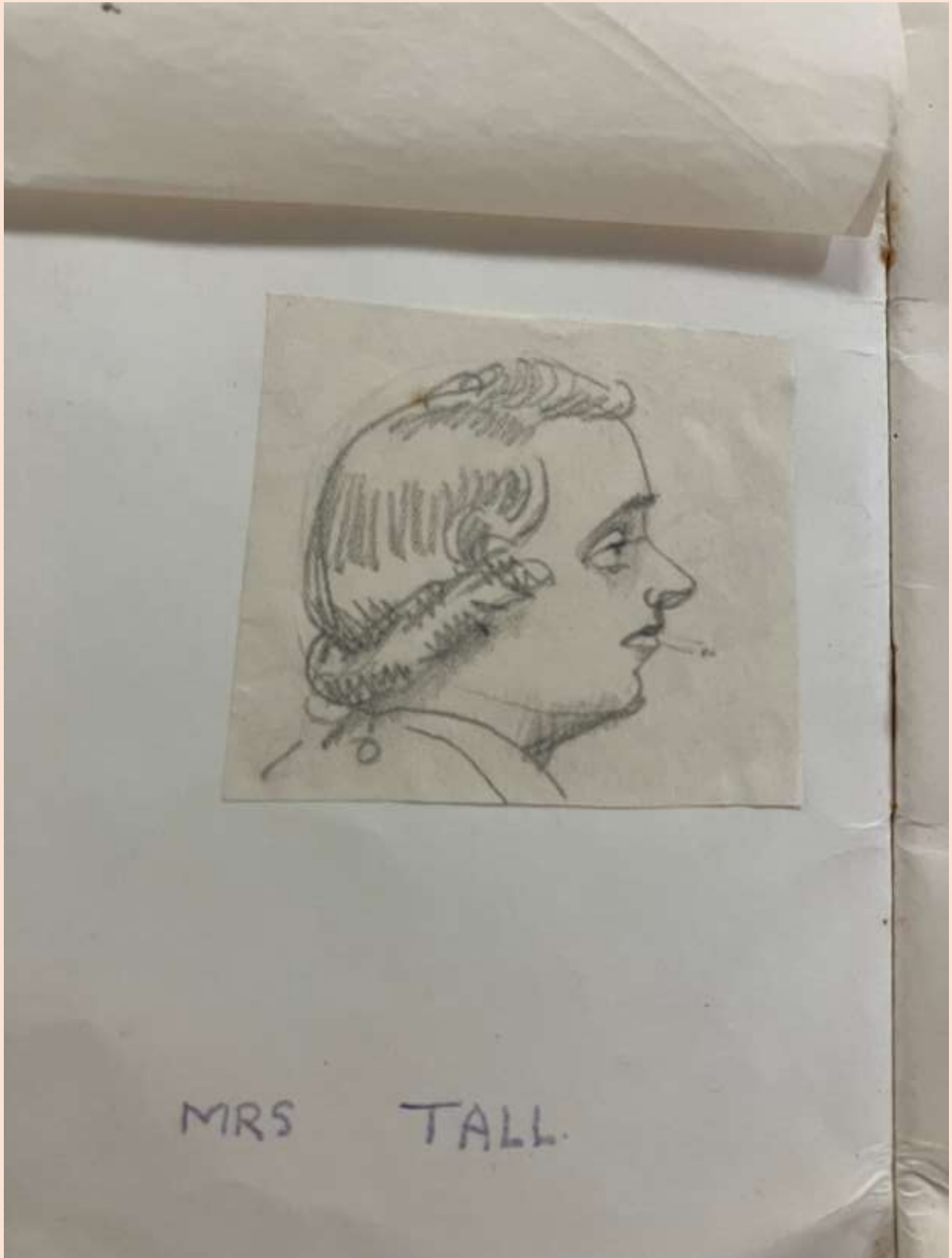
Molly Shelton

3.



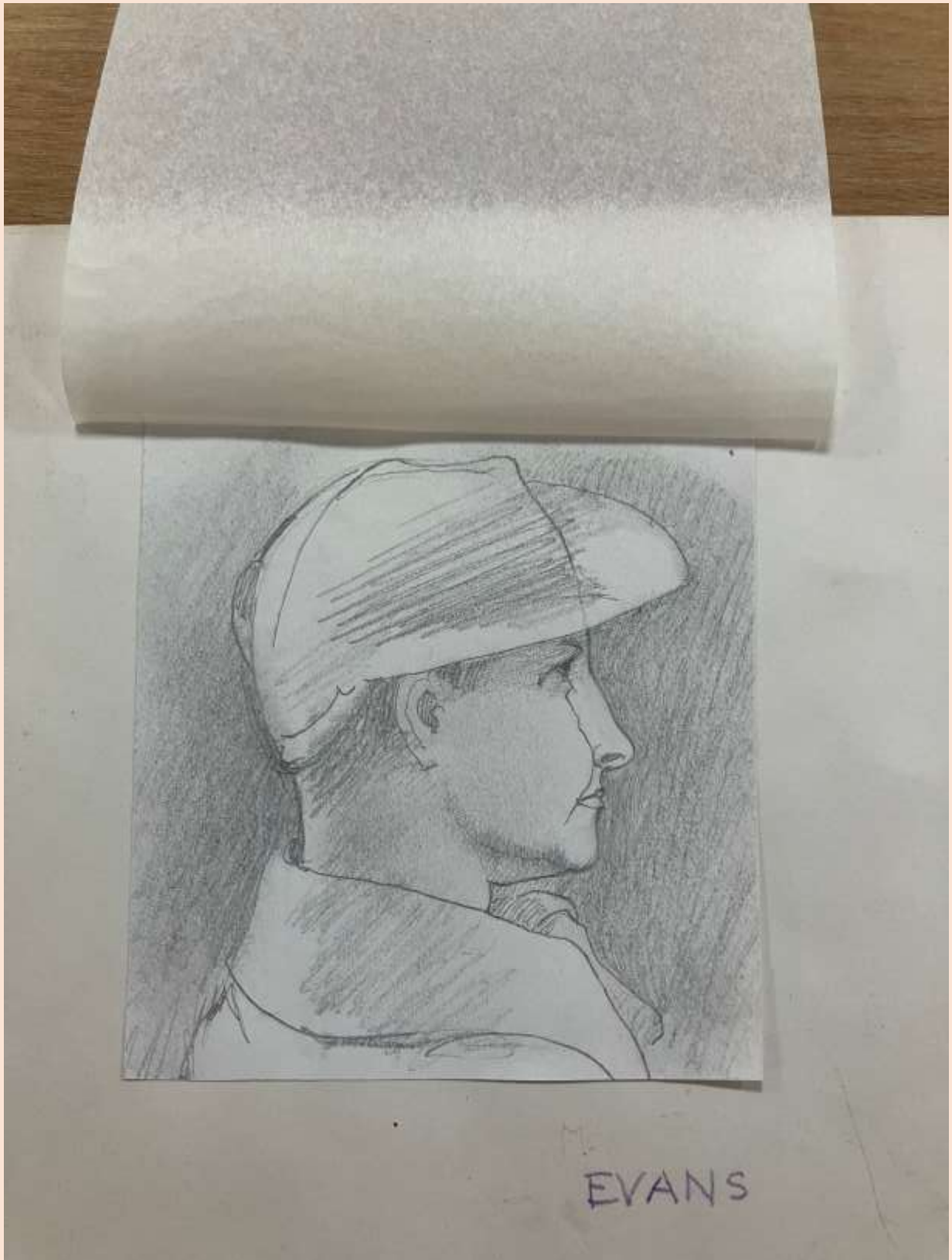
Miss Janet Atkinson

4.



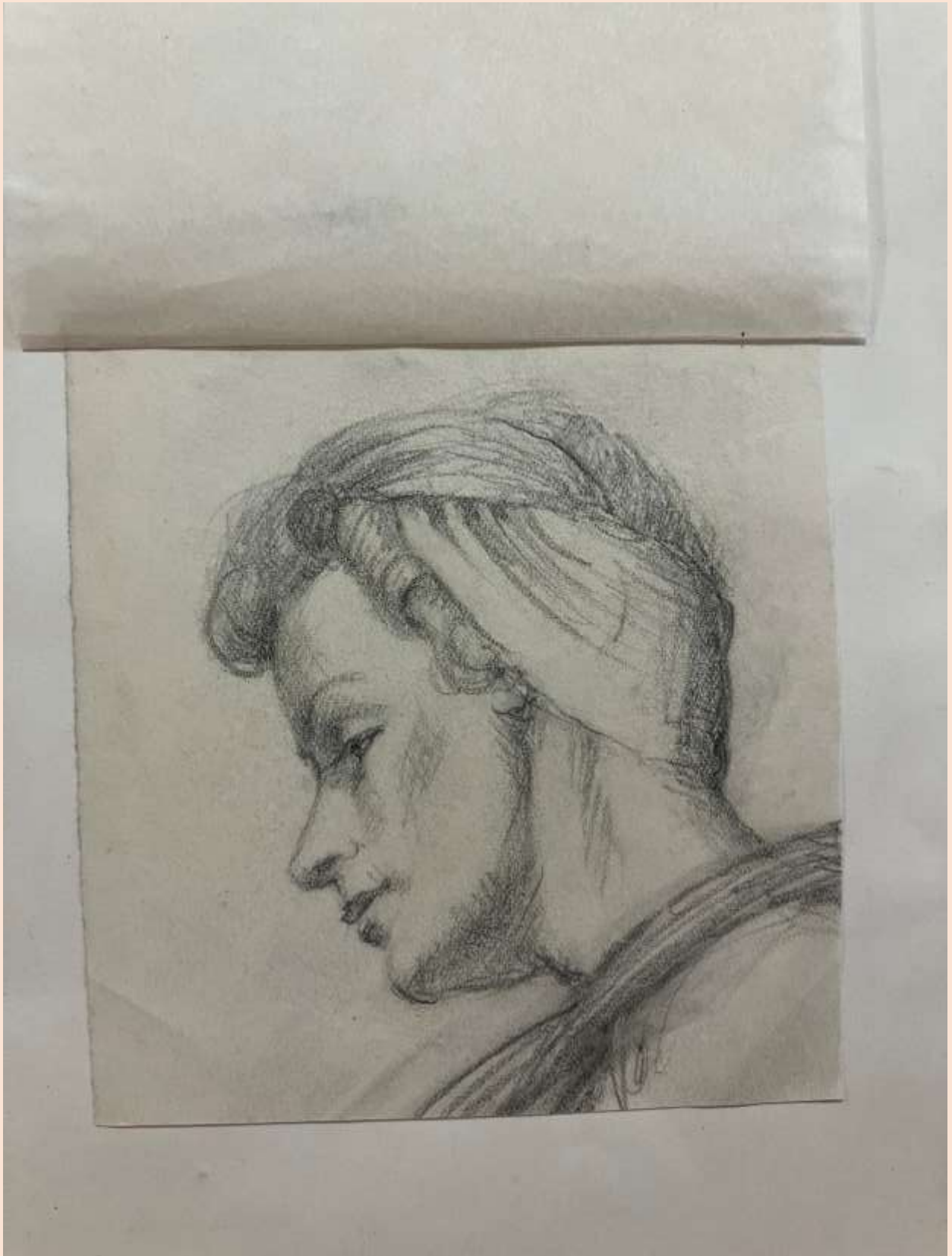
Mrs Tall

5.



Mrs Evans

6.



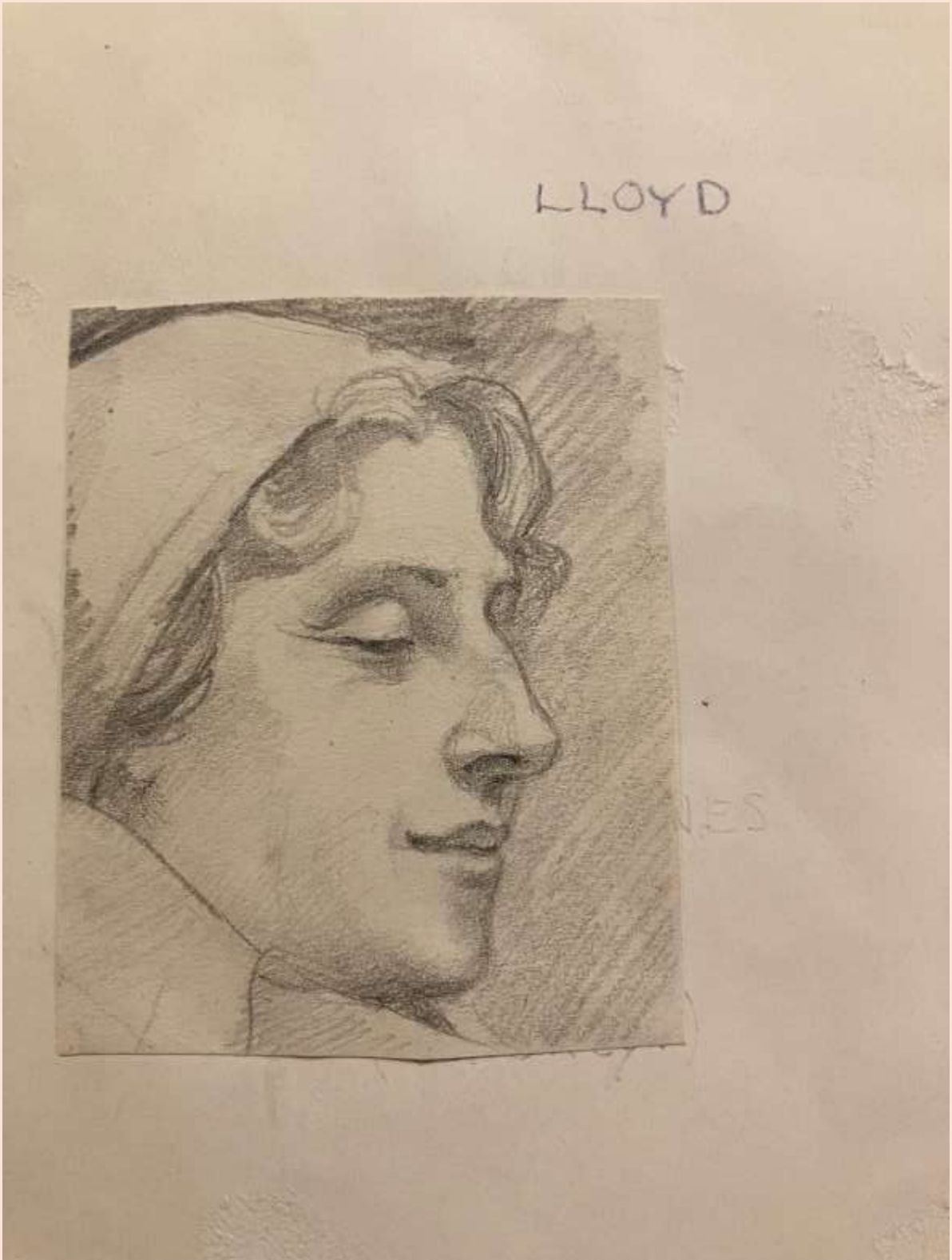
Mrs Margaret Rowland

7.



Miss Jean Guthrie

8.



Miss "Kip" Lloyd

9.



Miss Katherine Taylor-Jones

10.



MABEL THOMAZINE MARY -

LYDE

Miss Mabel Lyde

11.



“Cleo” (by Miss Leake)

12.



Mrs Ratcliff

13.



Mrs Dorothy Yapp

14.



Miss Gwen Griffin

15.



MissMargery/Marjorie? Wiggins

16.



“Piglet” (by Miss Leake)
Miss Wiggins (see 15)

17.



Miss Lily Gamble

18.



Doris Gifford

19.



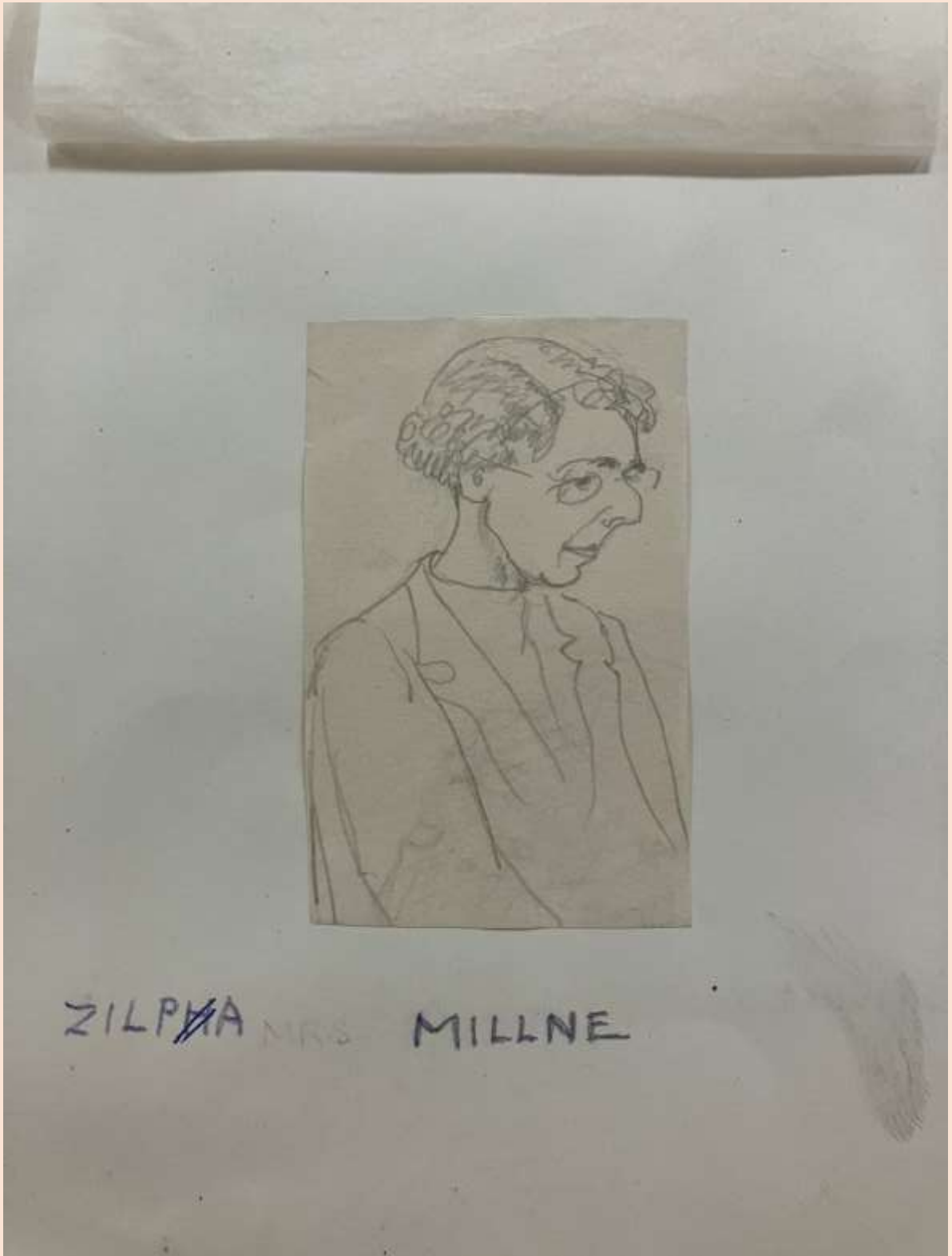
Desie? (Unidentified)

20.



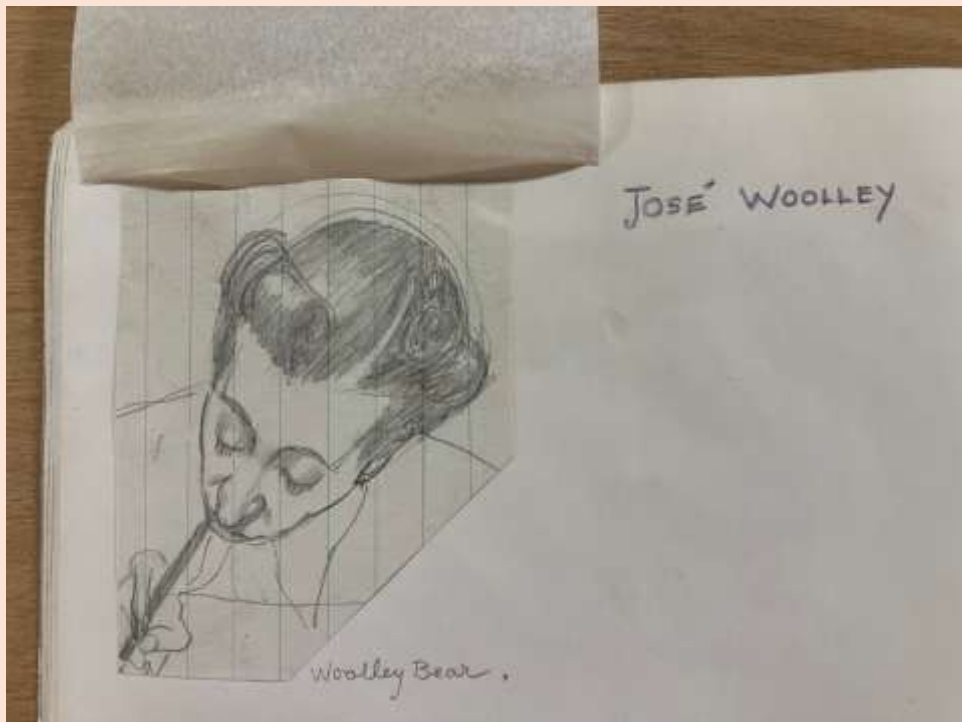
Nurse Taylor

21.



Miss Zilpa Milne

22.



Miss José Woolley

23.



Mrs Evans (see No. 5)

24.



Miss Dorothy Insley

25.



Mrs Dorothy Sinclair (née Canlett)

26.



Mrs Rosalind Strover
(née Rosalind Atkinson)

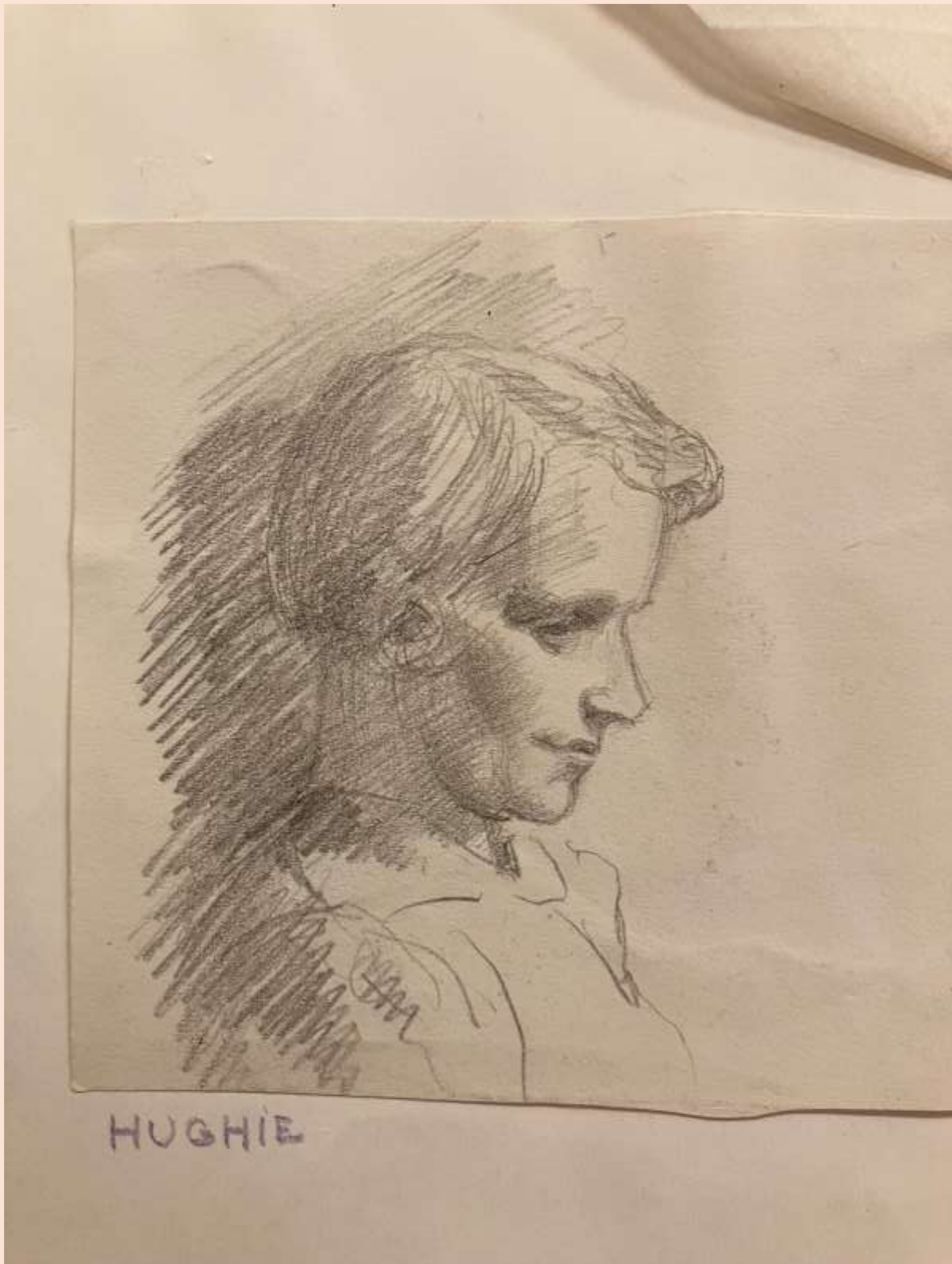
27.



Scottie

Miss Campbell

28.



Miss Gwendoline Hughes

29.



Miss Spurr?

30.



Mrs Routledge

31.



Miss Joan Moor

32.



Miss Mary or Marie Perkins

33.



MISS COTTAM

Miss Cottam

34.



Miss Margaret Leake