

## **Emma Silvia Cowles (1882-1967)**

Silvia was educated by a governess at home and then entered St Felix School, Southwold in 1897. Silvia completed the two year course at Dartford in 1903 and was encouraged by Madame, who recognised her talent, to take a course of training in art. Silvia spent a year in Italy and three years at The Slade. By 1908 she had accepted a teaching post. In 1913 Silvia represented Madame Bergman Österberg's Union of Trained Gymnastics Teachers on the Committee of the Journal of Scientific Physical Training. Silvia supported the suffrage movement.

At the start of WWI Silvia travelled with the Scottish Women's Section of the Red Cross to France to work as a masseuse and then transferred to an American hospital. After the Armistice she went with the American Friends Association to Lille and worked with English Quakers and then American Quakers in Germany before moving on to Poland. She cared for people suffering from typhus lice in extremely challenging conditions. Silvia was a Commandant of the Red Cross and was awarded their Distinguished War Service Certificate. She was also awarded the British War Medal 1914-1920, The Allied Victory Medal and the French Medaille d'Honneur

On her return to England Silvia lived at the Mary Ward Settlement where she extended her interest in Social Services. She delivered lectures on Penal Reform in this country and the USA. Silvia's experience convinced her that physical education, remedial work and art should be closely linked and she led the way in the development of occupational therapy.

During WWII Silvia distributed parcels of handicrafts to Prison of War camps and when the war ended she continued to work for the disabled by attracting students from all over the world to train at her handicraft courses.