

# Cellardyke Lassies: Nellie and Ailass in WW1

This photograph shows the steam drifter *The Alices* KY 210. It was named by Henry Bett (thereafter nicknamed 'Ailassies Henry') after his daughter Alice Pratt Bett, his mother Alice Pratt, his sister Alice Bett and his grandmother Alice Bridges. In WW1 most local steam drifters were requisitioned, so 'the fishing', such a part of all Cellardyke livelihoods, was greatly diminished.



WW1 brought the urgent need to produce more ammunition. Girls from all over Britain were asked to support the war effort.

Best friends Nellie and Ailass were recruited from Cellardyke. They looked after the 'munitionettes', the name given to the girls employed in munition (ammunition) factories.

The back of their photograph says: 'Nellie [Helen Watson] and Ailass [Alice Bett] working as housemaids in the hostel where the munition girls lived.'



They had made their own outfits.'



Despite the grim reality of the ammunition stacked in the background, Nellie is obviously feeling amused by having her photograph taken in her utilitarian working clothes.

Nellie and Ailass were sent to a factory in Gretna Green, where they worked hard. A family member's account reads: 'Sometimes Ailass had to rise at 4 a.m. to make breakfast porridge. Nellie went round with the bell to wake the girls. They scrubbed stairs and floors, did general cleaning and waited at tables. Everyone had to wash up for one hundred girls and the plates were higher than Babs, the scullery maid. At night Babs danced and when they heard Matron coming they jumped into bed with their clothes on!'

Girls like Nellie and Ailass, both daughters of fishermen, were relieved of the drudgery of mending the fishing nets – a task expected of the village's women. Brothers and friends had already left to fight for, and protect, their country, with Nellie's brother Tom joining the Black Watch and Ailass's brother John serving as a Royal Naval Reservist.

ANSTRUTHER. — As a result of two days' efforts in Anstruther and Cellardyke, including a concert, sports, and flag day collections, a sum of over £120 had been collected for the Red Cross.

The women of Cellardyke Parish Church have forwarded to the soldiers and sailors 336 pairs of mittens, 110 pairs of socks, 42 pairs of hose-tops, 36 belts, 30 perseys, 15 shirts, 11 mufflers, 9 knitted jackets, 6 night-shirts, 2 bed jackets, and 2 dozen handkerchiefs.