



Imperial War Museum Photograph Hu95722

**Fig.3**

This photograph is unfortunately undated, but it might have been taken fairly early in the war

### **Community support**

Both hospitals received enormous support from local residents.

Equipment and bedding was often lent or donated and there was a succession of other gifts too. Many people donated items of food and drink (e.g. eggs, cakes, jellies, fruit, vegetables, and butter) while others provided clothing such as mufflers, shirts and socks. There were flowers for the wards and illustrated newspapers and magazines such as *Punch* for the patients to read, whilst a pianola with a large quantity of records was donated for use in the Day Room at Northwood.

The cost of running the hospitals always seemed to be higher than the grants received from the authorities and much activity was therefore directed to raising funds. In Northwood some residents made weekly contributions towards the cost of the hospital and church collections were regularly donated. Concerts, plays and other shows were frequently laid on and these had the dual role of both entertaining patients/visitors and of raising money. Flag days were also held.

People gave their time to take patients on outings. They took them on drives in their cars and showed them their gardens on fine days. There were also many group outings, such as the following:

*Last Saturday 35 of the soldiers being nursed here were invited to join a large party of wounded men from London at the beautiful grounds of the Cavendish Athletic Association, Eastcote, where they were royally entertained by the staff of Messrs Debenham & Freebody. Sports, races, games, band, tea, and a concert by professional artistes filled the hours of a delightful afternoon.<sup>17</sup>*

A feature at Northwood was that convalescent soldiers were regularly invited to special matinees at the Northwood cinema. One film they saw was 'The Battle of the Somme' which, interestingly, was made by Lieut. Malins (a Wealdstone man) who had apparently filmed the soldiers on one of their visits to the cinema the year before.

Organisations also lent their support.

At Northwood, for example, the Metropolitan & G. C. Railway Co. allowed temporary hospital buildings to be erected in their field.

The Colne Valley Water Co. supplied water free of charge, the Pinner Gas Co. supplied gas at a reduced rate and gas-stoves free of charge, and the RNUDC exempted the hospital from the payment of rates.

## The patients

### Who they were

The Order of St John Museum & Library hold copies of the monthly hospital returns for Northwood from November 1914 through to March 1915: it is unfortunate that there is not a complete set. The returns give name, rank, regimental number and corps followed by the date of admittance, the nature of the disease or wound, and the treatment being provided. Dates of discharge, transfer to another hospital, or death are also provided. The return for November 1914 (see Fig. 4) identifies the initial twelve patients who were transferred to Eastcote.

Fig. 4

Apart from these official lists names of patients were sometimes mentioned in local newspaper reports of the time. In the early 1980s the then owners of the Tudor Lodge Hotel were contacted by an ex-patient and were keen to discover information about other men who had been sent there, but it is not known whether they collected any information and, if so, if it is still extant.

Clearly, the majority of patients were rank and file soldiers (of the patients admitted in November 1914, 18 were privates, two were Lance Corporals, the remainder being a sapper, driver, gunner, sergeant, corporal, and a Belgian 'volunteer for war') but Northwood also looked after two other

categories. Firstly, a few civilians who were injured during the building of the new Presbyterian church: three were hospitalised in January 1915, and then a carpenter fell 28 feet from scaffolding some twelve months later and was nursed for some six weeks before he was discharged. Secondly, discharged soldiers, resident in Northwood, were able to receive treatment by arrangement with the Local War Pensions Committee.

By the end of the war 2,374 sick and wounded men had been nursed at Northwood: there were only four fatalities and there is a record of one military funeral that took place in 1917.

### What they were treated for

The hospital returns record the type of wounds or diseases the soldiers had. The most prevalent condition in November 1914 were GSWs (gun shot wounds?), bullet and shrapnel wounds, but other cases included a sprained ankle, appendicitis, duodenal ulcer, and a neurasthenic. During the next few months there were cases of pleurisy, rheumatism, bronchitis, tonsillitis, shingles, pneumonia, nerves, and one of malaria. In February and March 1915 no fewer than 39 soldiers were admitted with influenza.

### Hospital life

Mention has already been made of local residents taking the Northwood patients on outings, and of visits to the cinema. The hospital itself was the location for numerous shows and some of the soldiers played their part in staging these such as organising concert programmes, decorating the stage, and inviting the hospital staff as their guests. There was also the Day Room with its full-sized billiard table. Hospital visiting times were from 2 to 4pm every day.

More formal activity included embroidery classes which were run by Lady Malmesbury and Lady Tilden. The class work included fancy needlework, regimental badges worked on linen, VAD nurses badges, and a banner screen of the RAMC badge worked in cross stitch.

Services were held for the patients and staff each Sunday and were conducted in rotation by all the resident ministers of religion in Northwood, who also conducted brief prayers every week-night. There were also discussion classes under the leadership of the Rev T H Darlow which were open to both the soldiers and outside civilians. An interesting range of issues were tackled such as 'Can a man get rich honestly?', 'Is gambling wrong?', 'Is everything fated and fixed beforehand?', and 'Ought a man always obey his conscience'.

We cannot really know what life must have been like for the patients in these hospitals but we may consider that this description of life at Eastcote hospital in 1915 slightly rose-tinted:

*During the summer the lovely grounds have been a paradise of open-air treatment for the men, where they may be seen enjoying hammocks and garden chairs and (in the case of many) games of croquet with tea on the lawn. The fine old-fashioned kitchen has been transformed into a Common Room for writing letters, &c, and for meals. Two motor-cars are constantly in requisition for taking the men through the country lanes, while concerts and entertainments are furnished by local friends. Under such favourable conditions the recoveries have been most satisfactory, and it is small wonder that those who enjoy such hospitality and kindness are full of gratitude and sorry to leave, and even face with equanimity the chance of being wounded again so as to get back to Fieldend Lodge.<sup>18</sup>*

## Closure

*Since last Monday, the occasion of Germany signing the Armistice, much fun and excitement has been seen in the parish in celebration of the great victory. Flags, banners and streamers were to be seen in the whole of the streets, while each evening bonfires, fireworks and bands of concertinas, trays, baths, and whistles were made up by the lads of the parish. A huge bonfire was lighted in Church-road, which got so dangerous that the police had to eventually throw water on the flames to prevent damage to property...<sup>19</sup>*

The closure of the hospitals was almost as swift as the speed by which they had been set up. On the day after the armistice was signed

the Northwood Commandant sent an urgent request to the military authorities for permission to close the largest ward so that it could be returned to St John's Presbyterian Church. This was agreed to and the size of the hospital was reduced from 125 to 70 beds. Meanwhile, the Commandant at Eastcote had also asked for permission to close: this was granted and closure had taken place by the end of November, the thirty remaining patients being transferred to Northwood. St John's Presbyterian Church re-opened for public worship in early December.

Northwood continued as a hospital until 31 January 1919. After closure the temporary buildings and equipment were disposed of under instructions from the Middlesex County Demobilisation Committee as follows:

The McAlpine Ward, with surgical, electrical and other equipment was given over for a temporary cottage hospital while the Day Room and kitchen were offered to the RNUDC on loan, to be used as an Institute in the first instance but with a long-term plan that the buildings would revert to the Northwood War Memorial Cottage Hospital.

Gifts of surplus equipment were made to Mount Vernon Hospital and St Vincent's Cripples Home, while bales of surplus clothing (used and unused) were sent to the British Committee of the French Red Cross for distribution in the devastated areas of northern France.

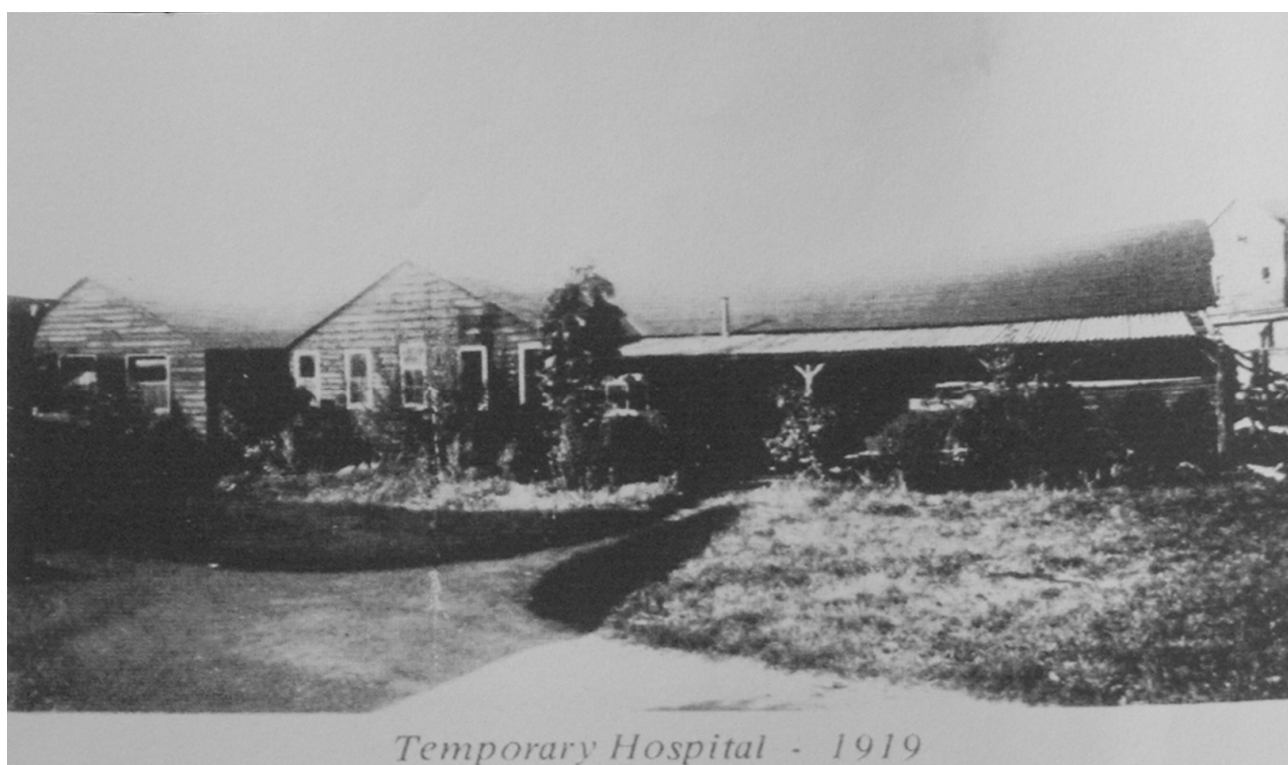
Residue effects were sold by Messrs Swannell & Sly at auction over the three days 18 to 20 March 1919. The advert for the auction mentioned 60 bedsteads and bedding, 417 blankets, 400 sheets, 350 bedspreads, 40 table cloths, pillow cases, towels, clothing, trestle and other tables, 150 chairs, 7-octave cottage pianoforte, fireproof safe, billiard table, two roll-top desks, typewriter, linoleum, capital cooking utensils, cutlery, plated ware, and china.





Imperial War Museum Photograph Hu95920

**Fig. 5**



Northwood Hills Residents Association

**Fig. 6**

Once liabilities had been met £750 of War Loan Stock was purchased as the nucleus of an Endowment Fund for Northwood War Memorial Hospital and other money was spent in connection with the McAlpine ward which was used as the temporary cottage hospital. (see Fig. 6)

### Remembrance

After the war the Army Council sent out thousands of certificates recording the nation's grateful thanks for the work done in the home hospitals and it good to see that the certificate sent to Eastcote is still displayed in the reception lobby of Tudor Lodge Hotel. The text reads:

*During the Great War of 1914-1919 this building was established and maintained as a hospital for British sick and wounded: the Army Council in the name of the nation thank those who have rendered to it this valuable and patriotic assistance in the hour of its emergency and they desire also to express their deep appreciation of the whole-hearted attention which the staff of this hospital gave to the patients who were under their care: the war has once again called upon the devotion and self-sacrifice of British men and women and the nation will remember with pride and gratitude their willing and inestimable service.*

A large stone tablet is displayed in St John's United Reformed Church, Northwood. This reads:

*This church and its lecture room were given up in the Great War to be used as an Auxiliary Military Hospital in which 2374 sick and wounded soldiers were nursed by the Northwood St John Voluntary Aid Detachments between November 1914 and January 1919.*

### Conclusion

The idea of VAD nurses and staff going about their duties in some isolation to those living in the neighbourhood of the hospitals (much in the same way as hospitals perhaps exist nowadays) is a false one. Whilst a huge burden fell upon the members of the Detachments there was much more community support than might be imagined. The sick and wounded soldiers' lives were made much more bearable by the generous support of the local population and the lives of many local residents were altered by the presence of the two hospitals.

The bias in this article towards the Northwood hospital reflects the fact that much more documentation has been found about it than Eastcote hospital. I am grateful for the help of staff in the organisations listed under Sources of Information below: research on these hospitals continues and I will be pleased to hear about any further information, material or photographs relating to the hospitals or the personalities involved.

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- <sup>1</sup> *Middlesex, Pinner & Harrow Advertiser* 8 August 1914 p8
  - <sup>2</sup> *Middlesex, Pinner & Harrow Advertiser* 15 August 1914 p6
  - <sup>3</sup> *Middlesex, Pinner & Harrow Advertiser* 3 October 1914 p6
  - <sup>4</sup> Now St John's United Reformed Church
  - <sup>5</sup> DRO 19/K2/1 at London Metropolitan Archives
  - <sup>6</sup> Letter dated 6/11/1914 held by Order of St John Museum & Library
  - <sup>7</sup> *Ruislip-Northwood Courier* 1 January 1915
  - <sup>8</sup> *Ruislip-Northwood Courier* 29 October 1915 p1
  - <sup>9</sup> Report in *Northwood, Pinner & Harrow Advertiser* 21 July 1916 p8
  - <sup>10</sup> 50 beds were supported in this way during 1917 when the road collections realised £1,200. Participating roads were: Church Rd, Chester Rd, Carew Rd, Davenham Ave, Duck's Hill & The Avenue, Dene Rd, Eastbury Ave, Eastbury Rd, Frithwood Ave, Green Lane, Hilliard Rd, Highfields, Hallowell Rd, Kewferry Rd, Maxwell Rd, Murray Rd, Pinner Rd, Reginald Rd, Roty Rd, Watford Rd & Oxhey Wood.
  - <sup>11</sup> Men's Detachments trained in first aid while girls were expected to pass exams in nursing as well. In October 1914 the women's Detachment had run first aid and home nursing classes with 47 members passing the first aid examination. Several of these enrolled for the newly formed Detachment which was called 'First Year' under 'Middlesex 10'. At the same time, the Men's Detachment nearly doubled in strength and steps were taken to form four stretcher squads.
  - <sup>12</sup> Hospital Return for the month ended 30 November 1914
  - <sup>13</sup> Report and summary of accounts 1/11/1914 to 30/6/1915 issued by Northwood Ambulance Committee
  - <sup>14</sup> One white stripe was awarded for each year of service
  - <sup>15</sup> *Ruislip-Northwood Courier* 13 August 1915 p4
  - <sup>16</sup> Supplement to *London Gazette* 24 October 1917
  - <sup>17</sup> *Ruislip-Northwood Courier* 15 October 1915 p1
  - <sup>18</sup> Article on Eastcote Voluntary Aid Hospital originally published in *Wings*, then reprinted in *British Journal of Nursing*, 16 October 1915
  - <sup>19</sup> *Ruislip-Northwood Courier* 15 November 1918 p5 referring to Northwood

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## Additional references

Bowser, Thekla. 'The story of British V.A.D. work in the Great War'. Imperial War Museum, 2003. [reprint with new historical preface of a text originally published in 1917]

Fenn, C.R. *Middlesex to wit*, being a brief record of the work performed at the Auxiliary Medical Hospitals in Middlesex during the war 1914-18. London, St Catherine, 1919

Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance Committee of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John of Jerusalem in England on voluntary aid rendered to the sick and wounded at home and abroad and to British prisoners of war. HMSO, 1914.

Storey, Neil.  
'The Auxiliary War Hospital Nurse'  
*Family Tree Magazine*, April 2007 pp 6-9

## Sources of information

The Order of St. John Museum & Library hold some original correspondence, mostly relating to the Northwood hospital, together with the monthly hospital returns mentioned in the article.

The British Red Cross Museum and Archives hold the record cards for many of the VADs who worked at the hospitals.

The Imperial War Museum's photographic archive holds five postcards of the Eastcote hospital, two of which have been reproduced in this article, and their library has the Women's Work Collection that contains a few pieces of information.

The Hillingdon Local Studies, Archives and Museum Service holds copies of local newspapers: copies of the official reports and summary of accounts of the Northwood hospital are contained in the Francis Edwards scrapbooks.

Tudor Lodge Hotel, St John's United Reformed Church, and Northwood Hills Residents Association have also provided valuable assistance.