

First World War Hospitals in East Dorset (additional notes)

By Janette Marsh

My title was taken from an article by Rev James Cross talking about Newton Hospital. I then found the same words in another article on the closure of Grata Quies Hospital in Branksome.

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Beaucroft House was offered as a hospital soon after war broke out in 1914 by the executors of the late Mrs Bernarda Lees who had died in 1912.

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Beaucroft Hospital

Opened 3 December 1914, Miss E D Kemble, Commandant (many local people had contributed loans and gifts to equip the hospital).

30 April 1915 reopened to receive 26 wounded soldiers (from then on it was a first line hospital treating surgical cases including amputations).

August 1916 temporary marquee erected and in 1917 a permanent marquee was erected (this was after a large influx of patients, the number of beds increased to 56).

21 March 1919 instructions given to auction contents of house (this included two pianos, a harmonium, bath chairs and wheelchairs as well as general household equipment).

The house was eventually divided into three – Beaucroft Lodge and Beaucroft Mews remain as reminders of the estate.

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Olive and Florence Harcourt were sisters who came to Dorset in 1916 and worked as nursing orderlies at Beaucroft. They also gave concerts to the men.

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In the Colehill Book of Remembrance that I found at Dorset History Centre is this list of the workers at Beaucroft Hospital, from the Commandant to the house maids.

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The late Mr Mackrell's house was procured to be used as a hospital in Sturminster Marshall. Promises had been made in 1912 for equipment so it was relatively easy to prepare the hospital for use in 1914.

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Newton Hospital, Sturminster Marshall

Dorset 12 VAD had been formed in 1912 and fortnightly meetings were held for instruction in First Aid, bandaging and home nursing. There were also ambulance drills and stretcher work. This meant that they were very prepared in 1914.

Summer 1917 fire swept through the marquee in the garden. Thanks to the quick thinking of Nurse Agnes Kent all the men were evacuated without injury.

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Rosamond, Violet and Ellen Cross were the daughters of Rev James Cross, Vicar of Sturminster Marshall. I have used some of his notes on the hospital in my research and I took the title of my talk from those notes.

Molly and Nancy Wavell were sisters of Field Marshall Archibald Wavell who was Commander in Chief in the Middle East in the second world war.

Phyllis Blandford was a ward maid and nurse from January 1916 to May 1917.

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Nurse and patients at Newton Hospital. The patients are wearing the blue coats.

The Hospital Blues uniform was worn by those patients who could get out of bed. They were a flannel type material of Oxford blue hue with single-breasted suit and trousers. Each had a white lining. The tie would have been red and the shirt white. Regimental caps were worn and medals were displayed on the left breast. Those with missing limbs would have had their arms and trouser legs of the missing limbs carefully folded up and pinned back.

The Hospital Blues uniform was also known as the blue invalid uniform, convalescent blues or hospital undress. Sizing could be hit or miss and therefore in some photographs the inner linings can be seen. Most, in time, became ill fitting, since on washing, the flannel would shrink whilst the lining did not, giving a comical appearance that was lampooned by many a popular penny picture postcard artist.

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Sir Thomas and Lady Lees lent their home, South Lytchett Manor, and equipped it as a hospital with 31 beds. Two VAD detachments, Dorset 74 under Lady Lees and Dorset 48 under Mrs Sturt, worked alternate three-week duties.

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On the outbreak of war many of the labourers at St Giles House had left to join regiments. The Earl and Countess Shaftesbury lent part of the house to be used as a hospital for wounded soldiers.

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Wimborne St Giles House

11 January 1915 first patients received (20 beds in three wards, which is increased to 30 in May). In February the local Baden Powell scouts were helping at the hospital every day. The Commandant, Mrs Lucas, said, "I do not know what we would do without them".

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Fifehead Magdalen House was fitted out as a hospital by Bernarda Browne, daughter of Sir Thomas Lees of South Lytchett Manor. She was the widow of Colonel Percy Browne who had perished off the coast of South Africa on the SS Watarah. Bernarda had four sons, two of whom served in the Dorset Regiment – both returned.

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Fifehead Magdalen

6 March 1916 hospital opened - the house had been fitted out ("with every comfort") by Mrs Percy Browne as an eight bed hospital. It took convalescent cases from Beaucroft.

The convalescent soldiers went to a fete in Stalbridge and they also attended a concert.

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The Infirmary was attached to the Wimborne Workhouse in East Borough and was loaned for the war effort by the Board of Guardians of Wimborne and Cranborne Poor Law Union.

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The Infirmary

April 1916 hospital opened with 50 beds, Mrs Sturt, Commandant (later Mrs Lyon took over). The Infirmary had a theatre and took direct overseas cases.

It was demolished in 1958.

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The Victoria Cottage Hospital had opened in 1887 in honour of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. At the outbreak of war, the civilian patients were treated at the Infirmary until October 1915, when the number of military beds was reduced to three to make room for civilian patients.

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Victoria Cottage Hospital

October 1915 beds for wounded soldiers reduced to three to make room for civilian patients; these were constantly occupied. The local people were very generous in providing comforts and luxuries, such as tobacco and cigarettes for the soldiers.

In February 1917 the jury at an inquest in the town donated their fees 'for comforts for soldiers'.

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The Hut, Ferndown

The Hut was in Pinewood Road, Ferndown. The house was owned by Andrew Clunies-Ross, a tea planter from India.

Circa 2 December 1914 opened as a dressing station for the Manchester Regiment who had come from Bovington.

18 December 1914 opened as a hospital for Manchester Regiment senior officers. The lower ranks were treated at the Methodist Chapel in Victoria Road, next to Galton's Stores.

The Hut became St Mary's Vicarage but has since been demolished.