

# **A History of the Canadian General Hospital No 4, Park Prewett, Basingstoke**

**1917 to 1919**

## **A New County Asylum**

The County Asylum at Park Prewett was originally planned because the existing asylum at Knowle Hospital near Fareham was unable to cope with the growing number of patients. Work on the hospital was started in 1912 and was well advanced by the time war broke out in 1914, at which time progress slowed due to war shortages. There was a railway branch line running to the hospital from the main line station to bring building materials to the site and later to bring coal to the hospital. The building was requisitioned by the army in 1915 and construction continued thereafter as a military project being finished in 1917. Progress of the project was followed closely and was frequently reported in the Basingstoke Gazette.



*Park Prewett from the air*

In November 1916 the Basingstoke Gazette reported the slow progress of the Asylum construction due to the difficulty of getting materials and labour, there were around 300 men working there. The Army Council were at this time keen to use the hospital buildings as a 900 bed war hospital and so arrangements for completing the hospital became war work. The

materials and men, labourers and 50 men in khaki from a labour battalion, were to be made available “...on the understanding that the men are employed to the utmost possible extent in expediting the work of rendering the asylum fit for military occupation”. The roads were being built by the army, the wards were nearly ready for occupation but drainage, sewage works and water supply were behind schedule, in part because critical lengths of pipe had gone astray on the railway journey to the hospital. The well house site had been prepared but construction had not yet started. At one stage there was considerable discussion in the Basingstoke Gazette as to whether the water from the well was of a high enough quality. There is detailed discussion about the progress of works and the installation of equipment such as bakery, laundry, heating and generating, that already installed and that to be installed, as well as detailed discussion as to which authority should bear which costs. The cost of the hospital building falling to the local authorities and the cost of adaptation, expansion and operation as a war hospital falling to the Army Council.

In February 1917 the Basingstoke Gazette reported. “The Army Council had decided to re open the scheme for the use of the buildings at Park Prewett as a war hospital”. “The Army Council have practically taken over the whole of the main block of the Asylum, and they are engaged in making the adaptations which will be necessary for its use as a hospital”. As the construction of the County Asylum neared completion, its chapter as a military hospital could begin.



*A post card of Park Prewett*

## **1917 and the Canadians Arrive**

The asylum was taken over by the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC) as the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian General Hospital. The following, taken from the opening pages of the units War Diary gives a summary of the site that they were taking over.

“The main block of buildings was completed in April 1917. This consisted of the administration offices, kitchens, recreation room, dining rooms, laundry, bakery, steward’s dept, engine and electrical plants, carpenter and upholstery shops, bath houses and accommodation for medical staff and servants, together with 8 large blocks of two storeys each, for patients, with an estimated capacity of 738 for Asylum purposes with the necessary recreation and dining rooms. In addition to this there are thirteen outlying buildings, one for private patients with 100 beds, and an admitting and discharge building with 100 beds with recreation and dining rooms. The other eleven buildings were intended for different types of cases and are situated close about the central block first described. Four of these are of bungalow type, the remaining seven are two storeys.

In February 1917 the central block was finished and Colonel Gray RAMC took possession for the war office. On April 17<sup>th</sup> Colonel J A Roberts CAMC took command for the establishment of a Canadian Military Hospital and from that time it was known as The Canadian Military Hospital, Basingstoke. At this time the central block and one bungalow and two 2 storey blocks on the west side of it were completed (blocks 24 and 25).

The changes necessary for the adaptation of the buildings for the purpose of a hospital were as follows – The tailors shop, upholstery shop and hair picking rooms were changed into an operating room with sterilising and anaesthetic rooms and a surgeon’s room. The cobblers shop was made an admitting and discharge room, the sewing room into the Officers Mess. Blocks 24 and 25 were fitted up as Nurses quarters, their mess being in block 24.

The pathological laboratory was placed in the central block, the existing laboratory becoming a clinical laboratory. The special clinics for Eye, Nose and Throat and Dental, were established in the west centre of the main block, and the X ray and electrical examination rooms in the east centre, together with the pay office, post office and office of Hospital Representative.

The wards (blocks A,B,C,E,F,G,H &I) are for the accommodation of patients. With slight alterations the bath rooms served their original purpose admirably.

The Stewards department has become the Quartermaster’s Office and the carpenters shop is used for the stewards stores. The officers quarters are over the administration block (D) and over the east and west centres and over the Officer’s Mess, accommodating about 40 in all.

Since 1<sup>st</sup> October 1917 the other ranks have occupied blocks 22, 23, and half of 21, the other half being occupied by the army canteen. Block 20 is the Sergeants’ mess. The large recreation and concert hall is being used as a dining hall for both patients and personnel as well as for entertainments; the church services are also held there.



*Post card of Park Prewett Recreation Hall*

On October 24<sup>th</sup> 1917 No 4 Canadian General Hospital having returned from Salonika, Lt Col W B Hendry, DSO in command, took over this hospital and the name was changed to No 4 Canadian General Hospital, and the bed capacity was placed at 1040”.

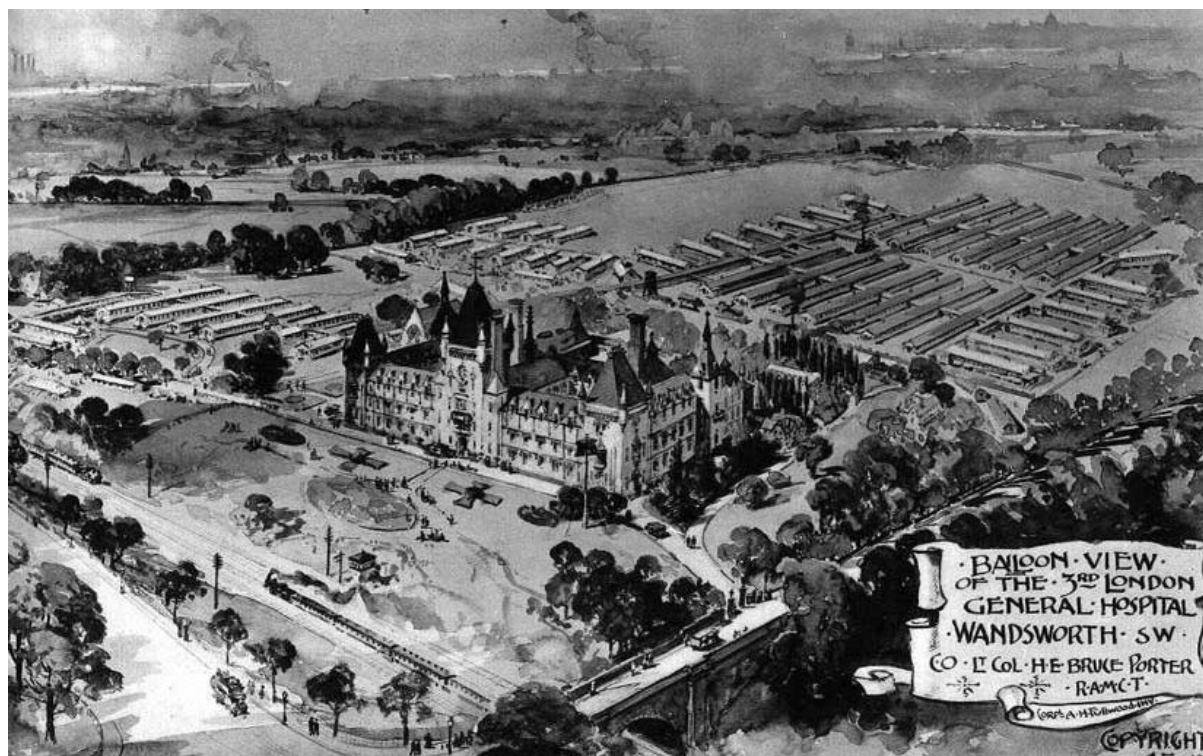
This then sets the scene for the occupation and operation of the hospital, which is recorded day by day in the unit’s war dairy.

The war diary shows that between the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1917 an increasing number of Canadian troops and hospital staff reported as they took over the site. On the 25<sup>th</sup> a party of sappers from the Royal Engineers arrived under Lieutenant Bartlett, and by the end of the month the whole of the central block was complete for use by the hospital and was taken over by Colonel Gray of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC). The main block of buildings was completed in April 1917. However an additional 15 outlying buildings were under construction for war time use. On April 7<sup>th</sup> the CAMC took command of the hospital initially under Colonel J A Roberts, whose appointment orders date to the 4<sup>th</sup> of April. He was the Assistant Director of Medical Services (ADMS) and was responsible for all the staff and patients of the CAMC hospitals in this area. It would appear that he was responsible for the establishment of the Basingstoke Hospital, before handing over its running to Lt Colonel Hendry once it was operational. There then followed a period where the buildings and outlying blocks were adapted for the CAMC hospital.

Through May 1917 staff were arriving, both the CAMC medical staff and troops from the Canadian Railway Troops Depot “for engineering services at the hospital”. Over 150 engineering troops arrived to work on the hospital site and on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 57 privates, 4 lance corporals, 3 corporals and 2 sergeants from the Canadian Railway Troops were attached permanently to the hospital. Building work on the extensive temporary accommodation beyond the permanent County Asylum buildings must have continued through the summer into autumn as on the 9<sup>th</sup> October some of the ‘other ranks’ were moved from tents into buildings, suggesting that tented accommodation had still been in use on the site until then. Even in late October the diary notes buildings were still under construction and that some specialist departments were not yet up and running. In November 1917 the recreation room had been completed. On the 7<sup>th</sup> there was a conference with representatives of Southern Command regarding the completion of the outlying buildings. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November a large party of labour corps left the site and perhaps this gives a date at which the principle construction works were winding down. On the 6<sup>th</sup> December the diary notes that work on the outlying buildings had stopped. However work must have continued in 1918 as on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 12 Canadian engineers arrive at the hospital and on the 6<sup>th</sup> September the war diary notes that the bed capacity has risen to 1540. The extent and layout of the camp can be gauged from the lay out of tracks that survived to be mapped after the war, and its character can be judged from the photographs of similar hutted hospitals elsewhere.



General view of H.R.H. Duchess of Connaught Hospital, 1914-18  
(Sgt. J. R. Howe)



*Third General Hospital RAMC, with extensive hatted camp behind the original permanent buildings*

## **The Staff**

During June and July Nursing Sisters had been arriving and on the 12 of June 1917 a Cadillac motor ambulance with driver reported, presumably to bring the wounded up from the main line station. Through August nursing staff arrived and departed and the diary reads as though Basingstoke was being used to collect, allocate and disperse nursing staff for duties across the CAMC service.

On the 31 of August 1917 the arrival of two patients marked the commencement of the hospital in an active role. From then on the war diary maintains a tally of the numbers admitted and discharged each day. On the 1st of September 17 Nursing Sisters arrived from Salonika and over the following days more and more reported. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 120 other ranks and 41 Nursing Sisters arrived, on the 7<sup>th</sup> 38 more and on the 11<sup>th</sup> another batch of other ranks and non-commissioned officers arrived along with Lt Col C S McVicar. On the 20<sup>th</sup> two more Lieutenant Colonels arrived, Hendry DSO and G Gow. But on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Lt Col McVicar was given leave to Canada and Lieutenant Colonel Starr was posted away.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> October Colonel J A Roberts CB came to the hospital and on 24<sup>th</sup> it is recorded that Lt Col Hendry took over the duties as the Officer Commanding the hospital from Col Roberts. Indeed on October 24<sup>th</sup> 1917 the No 4 Canadian General Hospital officially took over the Park Prewett site under Lieutenant Colonel W B Hendry DSO, with a bed capacity of 1040. On the 28<sup>th</sup> September yet more staff arrived, 23 officers and 35 'other ranks', from Salonika and by the 31<sup>st</sup> October the staff level was 1 Colonel, 2 Lieutenant Colonels, 5 Majors, 25 Captains, 72 Nursing Sisters, 1 Warrant Officer, 28 Sergeants, 4 Lance and Acting Sergeants, 22 Corporals, 8 Lance Corporals and 253 Privates. The hospital had 690 patients.

The Nursing Sisters of the CAMC were military personnel, under the command of a Matron who, in her turn, was responsible to the Director General of Medical Services (D.G.M.S). They had to meet qualification and training requirements, and when qualified Nursing Sisters had an equivalent rank to a lieutenant. Unlike Nursing Sisters of all other armies in the field, the Canadian Nursing Sisters had military status, and were under direct military orders. This explains their uniform, their war service medals and their overseas service chevron badges. In total 3141 nurses volunteered. They were known as 'Bluebirds' because of the blue dress and white headscarf. About 50 died in the war, of enemy action or disease. Of these 14 died when a German submarine sank the hospital ship Llandovery Castle in June 1917, which was fully lit and marked as a hospital ship. All the nurses on board died, "acting with coolness and courage" to help the wounded. There were only 24 survivors and they spoke of being deliberately attacked whilst in their life boats, and of these only 6 were medical personnel. The nurses who served closer to the front line not only were in danger from enemy action but also suffered from some of the harsh conditions and rats and fleas that plagued the war zone.



### *Canadian Nursing Sisters*

In addition to the Canadian military nurses were the VADs. At the outbreak of war the British Red Cross and the Order of St John formed a Joint War Committee, and organised their members in to Voluntary Aid Detachments (VAD), trained in first aid, cookery and hygiene. They were often middle or upper class ladies who could afford to work without wages and they were available to assist and support the work of the nurses. The Park Prewett VADs may have been women from Basingstoke and the surrounding area, but in at least one case it is noted that she came from London. 90,000 VADs had registered in the country by the end of the war and whilst many worked in Hospitals at home they did serve in hospitals in France as well and they made a significant contribution to the care of the wounded during the war.

### **Medical Administration**

In November 1917 Colonel Amyot, the Sanitary Officer, visited the hospital. Colonel Amyot had been Associate Professor of Pathology, and then Professor of Hygiene at Toronto University. During the First World War he was commanding officer of the sanitary section of the Second Canadian Division in England, subsequently going to France with the First Division. On everything connected with sanitary science he was the recognised authority. He was the inventor of the Amyot Disinfecter.

(In the early twentieth century there had been an epidemic of small-pox in, Ontario, and a need to disinfect clothing and bedding on a large scale. Dr. Amyot used two wooden sheds and a portable steam engine. The chamber was hung with the outer clothing from fifty to one hundred men. Around the walls there were steam pipes, whereby the temperature of the air and clothing was brought up to seventy or eighty degrees. Then steam under pressure was sprayed from pipes running along the ceiling for fifteen to twenty minutes completely killing

both lice and eggs. When the door was opened the clothes were removed in a perfectly dry condition ready for use. In this way batches of men were given baths hanging in their clothes as they went in and getting them back at the end. Two sheds meant one could be loaded whilst the other was being operated. These Amyot Disinfecting Chambers were adopted by the Canadian Division and they came into extensive use also along the British front. Combating lice on an industrial scale at the front was extremely important for the health and comfort of the soldiers, and Col Amyot is credited with enabling this).

On the 17th consulting surgeon Colonel A Primrose visited the hospital. He and Col Rudolph would take up regular responsibility for the hospital visiting it periodically whilst it was in operation. They were consulting surgeons and visited the hospital, perhaps monthly, and were part of the outside and overall direction of the hospital. They seem to have been both responsible for inspecting and also guiding, and Colonel Rudolph was called upon when Nursing Sister Davies was taken fatally ill.

On the 23rd General G L Foster CB Director-General Medical Services (DGMS), Overseas Military Forces of Canada visited the hospital accompanied by Col Amyot. He too regularly inspected the hospital, coming twice in January 1918 once with Col Jakes, ADMS 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division and then with Col Chisholm; twice in July 1918, first with Major Woodbury and then with Sir Andrew McPhail. Sir Andrew was an influential professor of medicine who had been knighted only a few months earlier in January. Although appointed Professor in 1907, when war broke out he had enlisted aged 50 and served in a field ambulance corps at the front with distinction, and was at the battle of Vimy ridge. General Foster visited in December 1918 and January 1919 again with Maj Woodbury, and then one last time in May 1919 as the hospital was closing. After the war it was Major-General Foster who was credited with having achieved the rapid expansion and high efficiency of the CAMC from relatively small beginnings to the vast organisation it was by 1919.

In 1914 in France Colonel G. L. Foster had been in command of the Divisional Medical Corps as Assistant Director Medical Service (A.D.M.S.), there being one ADMS per division responsible for all medical matters within the division. He was active right up into the front line during the Battle Ypres superintending the evacuation of the wounded and reached as far forward as Regimental Aid Posts. He records in his diary having visited all the Aid Posts during the course of the night, "I inspected one group of these men, forty-five cases in the farmhouse, and found that their wounds had all been dressed and they were fairly comfortable in a cellar". In all the units under this control it is reported: "During the fighting from April 22nd to May 4th, on which date we were withdrawn from the 5th Corps, the number of wounded handled by the three Canadian Field Ambulances, and the 10th and 12th Field Ambulances of the 4th Division, was 304 officers and 9,739 other ranks. Of these, 79 officers and 1,983 other ranks were Canadians"

## **The Hospital Routine**

During the initial period as the hospital became established quite a lot of the staff were given leave, presumably having arrived back from their overseas service in Salonika some leave and rest was over due to them. There were also quite a number of 'permissions to marry' granted. A number of the medical staff also started to be returned to Canada and in October new staff for the hospital were coming directly from Toronto. Toronto was the 'home' of the hospital unit having been formed at the University from nursing graduates. The unit's full name was "No 4 (University, Toronto) Canadian General Hospital and had close ties to the university as is shown by some of the visitors. In August 1918 President Falconer of Toronto University visited and "He had afternoon tea in the Sister's quarters meeting many of the original members of the University Unit". President Falconer appears to have been instrumental in setting up the unit from the university and is an important figure in their history. In a history of the CAMC it is recorded "Of other public bodies in Canada special reference must be made to the universities. Not merely have they given freely of the best of their teaching staff in medicine to form University Units .... But in addition they have raised sustentation funds and furnished various hospital units with additional apparatus, conveniences and comforts...".

It would appear from the war diary that wounded were received from the front and from other hospitals closer to the front, including on the south coast and from Bramshott. After treatment, and when fit to do so, they were sent to convalesce before being returned to service or were transferred back to Canada. Those going back to Canada were taken by train to Liverpool accompanied by nursing sisters for the sea trip back across the Atlantic. Some of the sisters who accompanied them back to Canada stayed there having fulfilled their overseas duties, but otherwise they returned to Basingstoke.

The war diary frequently refers to personnel sent to Buxton. This was the No 1 Canadian Discharge Depot from which men no longer categorised for overseas service were sent back to Canada, along with those being sent back for further treatment. They were supervised by the conducting staff and in the case of those being invalided back this would have included nurses. Many nurses from Basingstoke will have made the trip up to Buxton, then with their charges to Liverpool, and from there to Canada. It is likely that they would have taken leave whilst back at home. To give an idea of the scale of this traffic, 9000 patients were returned to Canada in 1917 and over 13,000 in 1918.

The hospital had to deal with the sick and wounded of the Canadian forces, both those based locally and from the front. Also admitted were the hospital staff themselves when they become sick. There are also references in the Basingstoke Gazette to local people being admitted for treatment, for example in one case after a road traffic accident. We know from the diary that there was a very busy dental unit, and an Eye Department and an Ear, Nose and Throat department. There was an orthopaedic surgery unit and Park Prewett also treated shell shocked soldiers. Massage treatment figures highly in the hospital records. Massage was an

important part of the hospitals work and an important feature of treatment used to rehabilitate those with deep tissue and muscle damage as well as forming part of the treatment of the shell shocked. Reference is made to the “School of Massage Swedish remedial drill”.

There is a continual record of staff being taken on to the strength of the hospital and struck off the strength of the hospital. There were those coming to Basingstoke to be sent on to the front or returning to Canada, and those going on courses or being transferred to other hospitals. New nurses and officers from Canada for onward travel to other units are sometimes named as they arrive and leave, although often they are not. Other ranks and non medical staff are not named but their arrival and departure are noted. Nurses were also sent to named hospitals, often the Red Cross hospital at Buxton, Shorncliffe and the nearby Hospital at Bramshott, as well as being sent on courses and travelling up to the establishment offices in London.

The diary quickly settles in to routine recording of numbers admitted and discharged daily, the weather and administrative events, visits by dignitaries, consultant medical staff and officers from Southern Command who over saw the operation of the hospital; entertainments, muster parades, pay parades, clothing parades and church services. There were five church services most Sundays and often a mid week service or evensong, as well as parades to note promotions amongst the staff, the awarding of good conduct badges and courts of enquiry.

Throughout the diary staff are awarded their good conduct badges for example 20 other ranks were awarded their good conduct badge on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1917. These were issued for over seas service after two years and a second could be awarded after five years. But also periodically more important awards are announced. On the 6<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Assistant Matron Dickinson was invested at Buckingham Palace with the Royal Red Cross 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. In December 1917 the following staff were mentioned in dispatches; Maj Graham, Lt Col Gow, Nursing Sisters Conlin, Courtice, Mc Cort, Richardson and Stirling. In February 1918 Col Roberts and Col Hume visited and presented Sergeant Major J Diffey with a Meritorious Service Medal for services rendered in Salonika. In January 1918 Nursing Sisters A M Stirling and M McCort were awarded Royal Red Cross 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, and on 30 of January they and Col Hendry were invested by the King at Buckingham Place. Col Hendry received the DSO. In June Nursing Sister A Dickinson was awarded Royal Red Cross 1<sup>st</sup> Class and Nursing Sisters C M Oatman, L E Galbraith, E N Campbell and A Huston were all awarded Royal Red Cross 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. Nurse Dickenson was invested at Buckingham Palace at the beginning of July and the others a few weeks later.



*Nursing at their Royal Red Cross investiture ceremony at Buckingham Palace. They are not from Park Prewett, but Park Prewett Nurses were invested by the King*

In February, on the 25<sup>th</sup>, Col Hendry went on leave to Canada and in early March Lt Col H C Parsons CAMC was temporarily appointed the Officer Commanding No 4 Canadian General Hospital until Col Hendry returned in April.

Romance seems to have been able to blossom at the hospital. On the 4<sup>th</sup> December 1917 Lt Col Gow married Nursing Sister Stevenson in St Michael's Church Basingstoke, and on the 2nd Lt Col K A Ramsey married Nursing Sister Kidd also at St Michael's Church. In February 1919 Nursing Sister M Cummings was married to Maj M C Sharpe both of the Basingstoke Hospital. The diary records many occasions when other ranks were given permission to marry but generally they are not named. It was reported in the Basingstoke Gazette that at Worting Gertrude Ilsley of the village was marrying a Canadian from the CAMC at Park Prewett.

Politics also intrude. In addition to the politicians who visited, the war diary notes that between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1917 the staff and patients were able to vote in the Canadian General Election. In the summer of the next year the Canadian Premier returned the favour by visiting the hospital.

By January 1918 there were some 1000 cases in the hospital mainly surgical, shell shock, tuberculosis and heart cases. In February the daily average was 997 patients, with a maximum

in the month of 1058. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March it is particularly noted that a convoy of 120 patients arrived, which appears to have been a notably large number to arrive in one batch. But the daily average number of patients in March had dropped to 425, with a maximum in that month of 526. The diary notes some of the wounded are now coming directly from France. In April 1918 the daily average crept up to 798, with a maximum patient number of 1046 and a minimum of 530. Perhaps not surprisingly as this was a period of intense fighting as the Germans sought to push the allies back in the Spring Offensive of 1918 before American troops could enter the war.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of March Major W H Lowry was appointed president of the Categorisation Board. This board assessed the degree of injury and the category of discharge, whether to lighter duties, back to the front line or home to Canada. Category A was fit for General Service; B fit for some of the overseas service; C was temporarily unfit for A or B; D is temporarily unfit for A or B and this likely to be the case for more than six months, and E unfit for general service. Within these broad categories were others, for example A3 were wounded who needed hardening and training at reserve units before return to full duties; A4 were under age and awaited their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. These were in the Young Soldiers Battalion at Bramshott. Having been trained and in some cases having served on the front line before their true age was discovered they were a valuable source of replacements. 568 of these boys were sent back to the fighting once they came of age. Category B1 could work in the forestry, Labour, railway or CAMC; B3 could be used as cooks and clerks. Across the whole of the Canadian Army there were over 6000 medical boards a month and up to 14,000 men reviewed by them in a month.

Other arrivals in March included 9 regimental police. We know from newspaper reports in the Basingstoke Gazette that troops liked to go into Worting and into town for a drink and sometimes got out of hand. Whilst dealt with relatively leniently by the civilian authorities it is perhaps not a surprise that military police were needed. After the armistice in 1919 there was trouble from Canadian wounded in town, getting drunk and getting into fights with the town's pub landlords and the police. In the description of one court case the judge asked the police how much of a problem it was and it is clear that it was regarded as wide spread. The soldiers should have been wearing their 'hospital blues' uniform in which pubs were not allowed to serve them, but they came into town in their khaki uniforms to get drunk. In view of their wounds and war service they were treated some what lightly even when the prosecutors called for an example to be made. When the innkeeper of the White Hart at Worting Town End was assaulted the magistrate, Mr Bullock, said "the licensed victuallers of the town and villages had experienced trouble from men at the Canadian hospital and they felt that their licences were not safe. Everybody was pleased to see the Canadians over here and they were sorry for those who had been wounded; but these men must understand that they must obey the laws of the country and could not be permitted to create disturbances in public house". He asked Superintendent Reynolds to "state his experience regarding Canadians. Supt. Reynolds said that he had had complaints from numerous licensees in the town and neighbourhood with regard to hospital patients coming to their house dressed in khaki and obtaining beer, and in some instances it had been a job getting them out". He went

on to say "I did not say they were a nuisance. As a general rule the men in the hospitals have been very well behaved, but there have been a few that have come out in khaki who should have been in blue for the express propose of getting drunk."



On the 17 March 1918 it was announced that Overseas Chevrons were to be issued to Canadian troops. Following a dip in morale in 1917 the government had decided to issue a badge, chevrons, to be worn on the sleeve to denote overseas service. One chevron was put on the sleeve for each year the soldier or nurse had served overseas. Anyone serving overseas from before the end of 1914 had a red chevron as their first chevron to distinguish them. (After the war there was a Red V Club for those who had been eligible). It was intended to be a visible sign of the length of service, but it caused some controversy as it was issued to those overseas, but was not exclusively to those serving at the front. Some soldiers refused to wear them. After the war it was allowed that veterans could wear them on their civilian clothes to show their service (although wearing chevrons you were not entitled to carried stiff penalties).

Many of the wounded were eligible to wear the Gold Wound Stripe. This was for wounds sustained in the presence of the enemy. This included those wounded in air raids in England. It included those who had been gassed, and interestingly it also included those suffering from shell shock, indicating that the attitude to them as casualties of the war was sympathetic.

In April Captain Quarter Master D M Murphy was attached to the hospital as its Quarter Master. In May 12 Canadian engineers were attached to the hospital presumably for construction and maintenance duties with 12 more arriving in June.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of May Captain J W McDonald, the chaplain, was admitted to hospital. It is not recorded what ailed him but later in the year, in September, Captain Cumming was attached for duty as C E Chaplain and "Captain McDonald, was invalided to Canada. (he) is greatly missed by patients and personnel". So he must have been very ill. In December Captain Paquain reported for duty as chaplain.

In May 1918 there were "Convoys from France daily – many severely wounded cases". The average number of patients rose to 953, with a maximum of 1091 and a minimum of 899. Then at the end of June there was an "Epidemic of influenza throughout the hospital. 60 men from the Forestry Corps near Reading admitted to hospital with severe attack of influenza. Ward Isolated". The next day Col Stewart and Col Rudolph visited hospital as there was an outbreak of measles and mumps in the nursing staff who had to be isolated. In addition to these cases the wounded troops kept arriving in large numbers. In June the daily average at the hospital was 997 with a maximum of 1040 and a minimum of 976. "Some severely wounded, tuberculosis, gassed cases and severe type of influenza cases". It dropped a little in July with the average being 820, the maximum 1028 and the minimum 883. In August the average was 1038, with 1290 as maximum and 937 as minimum. But there was a death of a member of the hospital staff, Private Webb, for whom a special funeral parade was held.



*Not Park Prewett, but shows the a glimpse of something similar*

The Forestry Corps were formed when the shipping of timber, of which six million tons were imported in 1916, had to be reduced. Britain asked Canada to supply a battalion of lumbermen to exploit the forests in Britain, thus reducing the need to ship it across the Atlantic where submarines operated and in competition with much needed food and war materiel. In less than three months a Canadian Forestry Battalion had been raised and was producing timber. Eventually the number serving rose to over 1,500 and became the Forestry Corps. Later as the British forests were exploited they moved to France to extract timber there too.

Late in September there seem to have been a number of staff movements. Nursing Sisters J Weatherstone and J S Wilson were transferred to No 9 Canadian General Hospital at Shorncliffe. Nursing Sisters S E A Robinson, E E Rae, M S Townsend, E M Rennie were transferred to No 2 New Zealand Hospital Walton Thames. Nurses M C MacLeod and G Black transfer to Granville Special Hospital Buxton and early in October, Nurses E E Thompson and L E Slatton were transferred to the 12<sup>th</sup> Canadian General Hospital Bramshott. 10 more named nurses being transferred there the next day. It can't have been for want of work. In September the average number of patients was 1390 with three deaths. The maximum was 1531 and the minimum 1223. The war diary notes that "general health of nursing sisters very good" so presumably the flu, mumps and measles outbreak was under control. In October there were 3 deaths and an average 1515 patients, with maximum of 1572 and minimum of 1429 patients. This was at the time of the last big allied push against the Hindenburg line, Germany's last line of defence. In November, the month the war ended, the number of patients was still high. There were four deaths at the hospital and an average of 1517 patients with a maximum of 1599 and a minimum of 1440. The war ended on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November but the sick and wounded were still coming in.

Early in December "Two motor ambulance drivers (ladies) attached for duty". It is interesting that the war diary feels it necessary to note that they were female. There were 1423 patients in the hospital that month.

January 1919 started with 60 'other ranks' being quarantined for mumps and Sister C E Budge being admitted to hospital with an injured ankle as a result of a fall. In January we also see the end of the war starting to release hospital staff from medical duty to go home. Faithful and regular visitor Col Gow ceases to be attached to Basingstoke, and named Nursing Sisters start being returned to Canada. There are still 1700 patients but the staff level at the end of January is stated as 1 Matron, 1 Assistant Matron and 128 Nursing Sisters.

In February Capt. McDougal reported for duty as paymaster to replace Capt. White who returned to Canada his service having been completed. But on the 27<sup>th</sup> the war diary records "No 955 Pte Brown R CADC one of the members of the unit died" (dental corps). This may have been from flu, as the diary notes that the following month 21 nurses were admitted to the hospital with flu. The flu pandemic at the end of the war killed large numbers and it

seems likely that some of the last deaths at Basingstoke were from influenza and other diseases and not enemy action.

In March 23 Nurses were returned to Canada having completed their war service, and Nursing Sister C M Ruddick had her service recognised when she received the Royal Red Cross 1<sup>st</sup> Class at Buckingham Palace. Nine named Sisters were transferred to Canadian convalescence hospital Bearwood and five more went early in April. By the end of March 1919 there were 1525 patients and the hospital staff stood at 32 officers, 95 Nurses and 248 other ranks. In April the figures were similar, with 33 officers, 105 nurses, 290 other ranks and 864 patients.

With the war coming to an end there were happier things to note. On the 26<sup>th</sup> April Nursing Sister F E Welle married Lt Pruder of the RAMC, the ceremony being performed by Rev McKenzie in Basingstoke Methodist Church. Then on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May Nursing Sister J M Fergusson married Lt Rose of the RAMC. But also amongst the things to finalise before going home was visiting the graves of war dead. In early May Nursing Sister A Copeland went to France to visit relatives graves, and later in the month Nursing Sisters M Darling, E Stewart E Macdonald set off for France on the same mission.

In May General Foster DGMS visited the hospital for the last time and late in May the closure of the hospital commenced. The diary counts down the patients as they leave. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> May there were 561 patients, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> 542, and on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> there were 541. On the 27<sup>th</sup> 233 were evacuated leaving only 318, by the 29<sup>th</sup> it was 283 and the 30<sup>th</sup> 257 and 255 by the last day of the month. By the end of May there were 32 officers, 140 nursing staff, and 271 other ranks. 12 Nurses had set off for Canada, 27 were transferred to the Canadian General Hospital at Taplow and 13 arrived from Number Seven Canadian General Hospital in France. On the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of June there were 246 patients. That figure dropped to 204 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 184 on the 4<sup>th</sup>. On the 5<sup>th</sup> it was 44, and 32 on the 6<sup>th</sup>. These last 32 were evacuated on the 7<sup>th</sup> June 1919, the hospital patient return was Nil by the end of that day and the hospital's war had ended.

As the hospital prepared to close and the staff returned to Canada, some were transferred between hospitals so that when units were returned to different destinations in Canada they comprised staff originally from those locations. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 7 Nursing sisters went to Taplow, and 100 came to Basingstoke.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1919 the war diary states "Word received that 92 officers and nursing sisters and 100 men would proceed with the unit on the Olympic and that 70 nursing sisters would proceed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July on the Carmania". On the 30<sup>th</sup> arrangements were completed and the unit, consisting of 57 Nursing sisters, 31 officers and 100 other ranks, were paraded for the last time. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July the baggage was collected for the train station and, although a rear party would be left in Basingstoke to finally close down the site on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1919 "No 4 Canadian General Hospital entrains and embarks on the SS Olympic for Canada"



## Hospital Visitors

In addition to the regular visits of the consulting surgeons and sanitary officers and others tasked with inspecting and directing the hospital, there were also visitors of higher note.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1917 the hospital was visited by the first non medical dignitary, Col Walter Gow, the Deputy Minister for Militia overseas. His cousin was Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae, was later famous for his World War I poem, "In Flanders' Field", often quoted at memorial services. His brother Lt Col George Gow had served with great distinction in Salonika from where the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian General Hospital had just come. He visited again at the end of February 1918 accompanied by General G L Foster, (DGMS), later to become Surgeon General in 1920. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of December there was a general inspection of all ranks by the Surgeon General G C Jones, the Director of Medical Services CAMC. He was in effect the professional head of the Canadian Military Medical Services. On the 28<sup>th</sup> he inspected the wards and on the 29<sup>th</sup> he completed his inspection of the hospital, meeting with Col J.A. Roberts C.B. A.D.M.S. Canadian London Area.

At the very end of December 1917 several American doctors visited the hospital, presumably to learn what arrangements were needed in medical establishments to support fighting troops. Having entered the war in April 1917 American troops were starting to arrive in France. Earlier in the war Canadian doctors had visited the British and French hospitals as they geared the CAMC up to war.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1918 Major Cochrane of the Historical Section, Canadian Records Office visited. This branch was established in 1916 under Lord Beaverbrook to keep the Canadian people in touch with their military overseas and was an important part of morale at home and in the military. It might be presumed that he came to ensure that the good work of the 4<sup>th</sup> General Hospital and the stories of the patients and staff were reported back home.

In February, on the 7<sup>th</sup>, the Duke and Duchess of Wellington and Lady Eileen Orde paid a visit to the hospital. He and his wife had entertained patients and staff to tea at various times. The Duchess was a poet. Lady Eileen was the Duke's sister and married to Cuthbert Orde, later the celebrated war artist noted for his portraits of the Battle of Britain pilots, but at the time was himself serving in the RFC. Then in June, the Duke and Duchess of Wellington entertained 60 patients for tea at Ewhurst. "A very enjoyable afternoon was spent". They were local dignitaries and the Duke of Wellington's estate was close by at Stratfield Saye.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1918 The Honourable Sir Edward Kemp KCMG, MP Canadian Minister for Overseas Military Forces of Canada visited. He had been appointed chairman of the War Purchasing Commission in 1915, then in 1916 became Minister of Militia and Defence and in 1917 came to London as Minister of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada. He was on the Military Hospitals Commission between 1915 and 1919 which might explain in particular his visit to Park Prewett. He visited again on the 2nd of June

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of April the Quarter Master General D Hogarth CMG DSO, with Col J A Roberts, now DDMS, visited. While still a member of the Canadian Assembly Don Hogarth had

enlisted in 1914 and rose rapidly through the Canadian military ranks. In 1915 he was placed in charge of military supplies and transport in London. In January 1917 he was made Director of Supply and Transport for the Canadian forces. He was awarded the DSO (Distinguished Service Order) in June 1917 and became the acting Quarter Master General. Then in February 1918, shortly before his visit, he was appointed Quartermaster-General. It is interesting to note that in the weeks that followed General Gibbons Chief Engineer Southern Command, Capt Bayes Food Inspector and Captain A E Clifton Inspector of medical and technical equipment all visited the hospital. Following these visitors Col J A Roberts CB returned in May and General Hogarth visited again at the beginning of June, the day before Sir Edward Kemp returned. It is tempting to think that Sir Edward Kemp needed matters seeing to and that General Hogarth, and the subsequent visitors, were putting matters right for a follow up inspection to ensure everything was in place before the arrival of The Canadian Premier less than a month later. The role of the CAMC was not restricted to medical matters. They were in charge of preventative medicine such as inoculation, hygiene and sanitary conditions; the quality and wholesomeness of the food and the drinkability of the water; the adequacy of clothing and blankets; waste and sewage disposal, vermin control and burial. The hospital would have been visited and checked for efficiency of these functions in the normal course.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> May Sir George and Lady Perley, with Colonel Wylde visited. Sir George was the High Commissioner to Britain and Minister of the Overseas Military Forces. He had not run for re election in 1917 so that he could concentrate on his duties. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of July Hon. M W Rowel President of the Privy Council visited. He was a supporter of conscription and chaired the War Committee of Cabinet. In July 1918 had been touring the western front

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of July Sir Robert Borden the Premier of Canada and Sir Edward Kemp Minister of Militia visited all the wards. Sir Robert had transformed his government to a wartime administration, committing Canada to provide half a million soldiers. When there were no more volunteers he moved to conscription, which was controversial. In 1918 Sir Robert Borden introduced a bill extending the franchise to women. He was at the Paris Peace conference in 1919 and enabled Canada to assert itself as an independent power leading to a Canadian Army that was independent of the British Army. He was a truly historic character and his visit is a key moment in Park Prewett's history and perhaps an overlooked moment in Basingstoke's history..



*Sir Edward Kemp visiting wounded soldiers*

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August Col Roberts and Matron –in- Chief MacDonald, the first woman in the British Empire to rise to the rank of Major, visited the hospital. Her nursing career spanned 30 years and she served in the Spanish American War, the Boer War and the First World War. She received the Royal Red Cross and the Florence Nightingale Medal. She was the first full time Canadian military nurse and one of the five founding members of the Canadian Nursing Corps. She was responsible for 1,900 nurses during the First World War.

General ‘Galloping Jack’ Seely of the Canadian Cavalry Division visited the same day. He had led the last great cavalry charge at Moreuil wood (see James Alexander Thompson – deaths) and was known for his bravery in battle. His horse was called Warrior and also survived the war. He was one of only 4 horses that survived the charge at Moreuil Wood and one of only a few horses to be repatriated after the war. The horse also had a reputation for bravery under fire. When Warrior died in 1941 his death was reported in the times. “The Canadians, all of whom held Warrior in great affection, called him “the horse the Germans couldn’t kill”. His owner afterwards said, “His escapes were quite wonderful. Again and again he survived when death seemed certain and, indeed, befell all his neighbours. It was not all hazard; sometimes it was due to his intelligence. I have seen him, even when a shell burst within a few feet, stand still without a tremor, turn his head and, unconcerned, look at the smoke of the burst”.



In August Lt Col Gibson Deputy Director of Dental Services visited. The hospital appears to have specialised in dental work. Many facial wounds would have involved damage to the teeth and jaw, as well as problems arising out of poor dental hygiene in the front line conditions.

On the 24th Col Adami visited. He was a professor of pathology and was serving with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Hospital, but is of note as after the war he wrote a history of the CAMC in France in the First World War, "War Story of the Canadian Army Medical Corps".

At the end of the month HRH The Duke of Connaught, Prince Arthur, accompanied by Col Worthington and Capt Philips ADC to HRH visited. Prince Arthur was the third son of Queen Victoria and was her seventh child. He had served in the military his entire career with particular connection to Canada and was given the name 'Chief of the Six Nations' by the Iroquois. In 1911 he became the Governor General of Canada. At the outbreak of the war he supported the training and readiness of Canadian troops for the war and as a Field Marshal saw troops off to war, although this rather over stepped the mark of his role according to the Prime Minister Robert Borden. He was active in war charities and visited hospitals. He was also an admirer of Baden Powell and a president of the Boy Scouts Association, and officially

opened the 3<sup>rd</sup> Jamboree at Arrowe Park after the war (which was attended by scouts from Basingstoke)

On the 2nd October Mrs Fraser and Mrs Orr of the Canadian Red Cross visited the hospital. The Red Cross greatly supported the hospitals and other medical units. Amongst their roles was ensuring that the men were visited, for their morale, with “comfort bags”, and to help report back to the families how they were doing. Whilst the war diary records the visits by the great and the good it is likely that Mrs Fraser and Mrs Orr were visiting in order to coordinate and oversee a continual stream of visitors and help from the Red Cross for the men in the hospital. They came “week after week and month following month”. The Red Cross also supplied food, invalid food and delicacies to vary the hospital diet. On a wider front they supplied ambulances, huts and in one case an entire hospital.

On the 21<sup>st</sup> of October Lt Gen Sir Robert Turner VC KCB KCMG DSO, Chief of the general staff visited. Whilst personally a very brave man his lack of tactical ability on the battlefield led to high losses and he was moved to more administrative duties. He won his VC in the Boer War in South Africa ‘saving the guns’ whilst already wounded.



In November Sir Arthur Mayo Robson visited Park Prewett. He was an eminent medical man, being both a member of the Royal College of Surgeons and of the British Medical Association. He had joined the Territorial Army in 1908 and volunteered in an ambulance unit at the beginning of the war until asked to organise French hospitals along the lines of the British military hospitals. He was then the consulting surgeon with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force in Egypt and Gallipoli. He returned to England in 1917 where he was appointed the consultant to the Southern Command and then in 1918 Inspector of Military Orthopaedic Hospitals. He was described as a short, sturdy man, spectacled, bearded, and

good-looking, and was endowed with abundant health and vitality.



In February 1919 Major General Mc Pherson Deputy Direct Medical Services (DDMS) of Southern Command paid a farewell visit to the hospital, presumably before heading home to Canada. In a number of these high profile visits we can see the pattern of leaders visiting their commands to thank the troops and nurses and to make their final farewell. In May Sir George and Lady Perley came to the hospital. Sir George served as High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and Minister of the Overseas Military Forces during the First World War. Sir William and Lady Osler a famous Canadian physician and his wife also visited. Sir Richard and Lady Ryecroft also visited he being local dignitaries who lived at Kempshott House, now under the M3.

One person closely associated with the unit, from start to finish, was Robert Falconer President of Toronto University. The Canadian 4<sup>th</sup> Hospital was recruited from graduates of nursing at Toronto University. Robert Falconer was knighted for his advocacy of war time recruitment On New Years day 1918 he and Mr Fred Starr, also of the University, sent a cable of greeting. Then in August 1918 when President Falconer of Toronto University

visited in person. "He had afternoon tea in the Sister's quarters meeting many of the original members of the University Unit". A month later he was back to give ".... an address to the patients and personnel of the hospital". The 4th Canadian Hospital was always referred to as 'Toronto' and maintained its close association with university. As the President of the University Robert Falconer was closely associated with the origins, maintaining and winding up of the Toronto unit, and was a great support to them and to the war effort.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> December 1917 Surgeon General Jones, Medical Commissioner, began a tour of inspection of the hospital. Maj V E Henderson of the 198<sup>th</sup> Batt also visited the hospital. There were many visitors from other units, the purpose of the visit not being recorded, but perhaps to thank the hospital for their care of troops as units are disbanded, and others from the medical hierarchy before setting off for home. Col Morrison and Lt Col Cassels from GHQ; Maj Hindes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Forestry Corps visited; Major Gen Lodie, Lt Gen Cruikshanks and Col McKewn; Capt Hardry District Office of the Royal Engineers; Col Roberts C E Major Barton (Canadian Forestry Corps); Lt Col J A Gunn from No 1 CGH visited; Col Wylds Maj Monks; Col Taylor of the Canadian Engineers; Col Wood CAMC, Lt Col Weir, Lt Col McKillop and Maj Creighton. All were of sufficient note to merit an entry in the war diary, but their role or relevance is no longer apparent.

## **Entertainment and Recreation**

Recreation and entertainment were important for the patients, as well as for staff, and it is a recurring theme within the diary. For the most part it consists of cinema and concerts, with lectures and sometimes days out. It is recorded that on the 11<sup>th</sup> November 1917 the recreation room was completed and later a billiard table was installed. The recreation room was managed by the YMCA, and although it is not overtly stated, it is likely that much of the attendant recreation activities, particularly the cinema, were also organised by the YMCA. The YMCA, Young Man's Christian Association, took on many duties during the war, mostly through the efforts of volunteers, but they also had some paid staff. They were tasked with 'comfort, entertainment and inspiration'. In particular they ran welfare activities, most notably canteens serving teas, sandwiches and refreshments, as well as providing reading material and entertainment. They also arranged such things as keeping the wounded in touch with relatives and even organising trips to France for relatives to be with badly wounded men. The YMCA staff served close to the front as well as behind the front line and not a few died on active service and served directly via the Canadian Corps Headquarters. In the Commonwealth War Graves, each unit has its badge engraved on the headstone, and there are headstones which carry the YMCA triangle. They were partly government funded, partly funded by donations and partly funded through their profits. Much was supplied free to front line troops and a percentage of profits were fed directly into the food budget of individual front line units to supplement regular rations.

In the Canadian army there were 'Y' officers with the honorary rank of Captain and other ranks, to integrate the service which the YMCA delivered with the military organisation. By 1918 there were 140 Y officers and 745 Y other ranks. They operated up to the battle zone, including taking supplies to the front line and beyond in an attack. They ran canteens, provided entertainments, baths and recreation.

In the Basingstoke Gazette in November 1917 it is recorded that the YMCA had taken over the property adjoining the Old Angel Cafe, "providing a place of rest and recreation for soldiers from the local military hospitals (there was a small military hospital at West Ham house run by Mrs Bullock) and for any others who happen to be in town for the time being it is intended to organise weekly entertainments. The first of these was held in the town hall on Thursday afternoon last week, when the room was nearly filled with men in hospital uniforms". They could not sell refreshments because their landlord owned a catering establishment next door – presumably the Old Angel Cafe - and they were not to compete with him. Mr Frost the director of the YMCA at Aldershot indicated that the people and the churches of Basingstoke were "uniting and cooperating in an effort to make the soldiers afternoons and evenings during this winter, happy, bright and cheerful". The Rev Mackintosh said "We found when we had such a large hospital opening in the close vicinity that it was necessary that we should do something to entertain and help the men who were going into town from time to time. And the best way was to call in the YMCA".

## **The Khaki College**

The YMCA also ran study groups and organised lectures and in this activity lies the roots of the Khaki College. This was an education institution set up and managed by the Canadian Army in Britain between 1917 and 1919 and owed its origins to both the YMCA and the Chaplain Services of the Canadian Army. There was a central college that organised courses and sent staff out to the camps, convalescence homes and hospitals. During 1918 14 Khaki colleges were established, one at Basingstoke, which we can assume was at the hospital. Others were able to follow correspondence course. The courses were aimed at education and post war careers and included agriculture, business, mechanics, teacher training, and the legal and medical professions and in due course became affiliated to Canadian educational establishments who maintained standards and issued degrees based on study through the Khaki Colleges. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1917 the war diary states that the Canadian Soldiers College was started. Then, for example, the war diary tell us that on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1919 “Two representatives for Khaki College were attached for duty”, on the 18<sup>th</sup> January another officer was attached and, when the closing of the hospital was well advanced on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, “Lt Cooke Khaki College ceased to be attached”. On the 8<sup>th</sup> March 1919, as the hospital is closing down, Capt Dennison “ceases to be attached for YMCA work”. Although rarely mentioned directly in the routine diary of the hospital it is clear that they were an integral part of the hospital. The work of the Khaki College became more important after the end of hostilities as the men were prepared for demobilisation and to return to their civilian roles. Many men had joined up part way through their education and were keen to finish their qualifications and start their delayed careers.

## **Films and Concerts**

Throughout the diary references are made to concerts, concert parties, cinema concerts, talks and lectures. The cinema is the most common form of entertainment. On the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1917 it is recorded ‘First cinema performance was given to the patients. The machine was installed by the YMCA’. Occasional reference makes it clear that the cinema was shown in the large dining hall. In the early days there is inconsistency in how the movies are described, ‘a cinema concert’, ‘a moving pictures concert’ and a ‘cinema concert performance’. But the diary settles down to using the term a ‘cinema concert’. One entry suggests that a concert comprised of a series of films. (September 1918 cinema concert “a series of cinema films shown during the evening and greatly appreciated”) When the films are first shown in early 1918 it is on only a few occasions each month; through the summer this rose to 10, 12 or 14 performances a month, which tailed off into the winter. In the early part of 1919 the number of cinema concert performances drop to around half a dozen a month.

It is interesting to note that concerts are given in higher numbers than cinema showings in the early part of 1918, but the number of concerts drops away into 1918 falling to about 4 a month, and to only one, two or even none a month in the early months of 1919. The last concert was given as the hospital was closing and there were only 32 patients left to see it. Lectures on the other hand increased into late 1918 and into 1919, and it is tempting to see the work of the Khaki College in this.

The concerts were largely given by the London Concert Party ("A splendid concert given by the London Concert Party was greatly appreciated by patients and personnel"), but others included ... "The 23<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Battalion Band has been stationed here for a week and is much appreciated". The band had come from Bramshott Canadian hospital. The reserve battalions were station in England during the war and supplied replacement troops to units at the front. The 20<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion Band, the 12<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion Pipe Band and the 21<sup>st</sup> Reserve Battalion Band all played at Park Prewett. The war diary for 25<sup>th</sup> March 1918 records, "The third anniversary of the mobilisation of the unit was celebrated by all ranks. The officers and sisters had a dinner and dance. Col J A Roberts being a guest". "The NCOs and men also spent a very enjoyable evening" The 21<sup>st</sup> Reserve Battalion Band played for both these events. There was a concert given by the 'Cherry Pickers' concert party. Many of the concert parties had amusing names like the Bombshells, Giggles or the Splinters, or took their name from their unit.

In October 1918 there as a "Concert given by the Oscar Asche Dramatic society". Oscar Asche was an actor manager and was best known for his record breaking musical comedy Chu Chin Chow which ran between 1916 and 1921. This was first class entertainment. On the 17th December 1917 "Mr Mark Hambourg gave a piano forte recital which was greatly appreciated by a large audience" "A grand concert was given by the celebrated pianist Mark Hambourg". He was a famous pianist of the time and high quality act. A concert was given by the Southampton Hippodrome Party, the Canadian Engineers from Seaford and by the Wood Craig Concert party. Another concert party "came from Swindon", and Mr Edward's concert party did a "four act comedy". By late in 1918 the hospital had its own concert party. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of November "The hospital orchestra and concert party gave a minstrel and vaudeville show" and on the 10<sup>th</sup> December "The Hospital Concert party gave a concert which was very much enjoyed". "New Year's Eve. Dance given by officers and nursing sisters of the unit. London Orchestra to furnish music for the evening".

There were also lectures which seem mostly to be of an educational nature and in which the hand of the YMAC and the Khaki College can be seen. These included; "An address was given to men only by Capt A J Vining assisted by Miss Doreen Harley as soloist"; Mr Williams gave a lecture on Asia Minor; there were lectures on agriculture; "Miss Philips of London delivered a lecture on "Alsace and Loraine" with pictures which was much appreciated by the patients"; a "very interesting" Lecture was given by Dr Jenkins on South Africa. "Dr Creelman, President Guelph Agricultural College gave a lecture entitled Agricultural opportunity in Canada"; "Dr A Fleming St Columba Church of Scotland, London gave an address"; "illustrated lecture given on Bolshevik Russia by Mr A L Williams"; Lecture on Scotland by M Walker; "Lecture given in the dining hall. The Thames and Oxford by Mr H B Spears" ; "Lecture conducted in dining hall on Imperial India by Mr E G P Cotelingham" and The Russian Revolution given by Rev W Clare. Two more particularly strike the imagination. An Illustrated lecture "other worlds than ours" by Miss Proctor, London. What might that have been about? Spiritualism perhaps, which was gaining popularity at this time. The other is "Speaking photo play entitled 'The Life Boat' given for patients and personnel by Mr Eric Williams". I am not sure what a photo play might be, but

perhaps a story told by a series of slides. There was also a lecture by Sir James Leston but I can find no reference as to who he was.

In July 1917, early in their occupation of the hospital the Canadians bought some novel recreation to the town. To celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Confederation of the Dominion they had a game of Baseball on the common, believed by the Gazette to be the first game of baseball (described as “a hit and run game”) ever played in Basingstoke.

The patients also did handicrafts, often as part of their rehabilitation to recover manual dexterity. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1918 “Lady Drummond and Miss Beawey from 14 Cockspur Street, London, opened the exhibition of patients needlework, basket making, bead work etc at Basingstoke Town Hall 2pm. Lady Drummond made a short speech which the patients appreciated very much. Great interest in the patients work was shown by crowded hall all afternoon. Lady Drummond also visited the different departments of the hospital and the wards” Lady Drummond was from the Canadian Red Cross Society. It was also reported in the Basingstoke Gazette in December 1918 that there was a display of the patients work at the Town Hall, and the awarding of prizes in different categories. The news paper report was extensive, but in summary a wide range of handi crafts were on show, and prizes awarded for the best work, with speeches of admiration and encouragement. In the hospital war diary it is recorded, “There was an exhibition of the work done by patients, basket making, embroidery, belts, wood carving, knitting etc.. Much of the work was done by patients with only one hand. Red Cross visitors were pleased with the work that had been accomplished”.



*Patients make their own entertainment*

## Social Life

The staff were also able to go out and about. “General health of nursing staff good. Tennis and bicycle riding are the means of recreation enjoyed by the nursing sisters”. They also enjoyed gardening, usually for food, and took trips out for picnics and to the Thames. On the 9<sup>th</sup> August 36 Nursing Sisters had a very enjoyable picnic on the River Thames. Local dignitaries also invited the nursing staff to tea at their homes. There was a farm attached to the hospital to provide fresh milk and in March 1917 it is recorded that “Considerable interest being taken in farming by sisters, officers and men of the unit on hospital grounds”.





### **Christmas 1917 and 1918**

Christmas was a day in the year when a general sense of fun and festivity were maintained. In 1917 we learn that “632 Xmas stockings arrived from the Canadian Red Cross Society for the patients” on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December. On Christmas Eve “all wards received Christmas stockings for all patients for distribution on Xmas day”. On the day itself, “Christmas morning – each patient received his Christmas gifts and were greatly surprised and pleased. Wards were decorated with holly, ivy and all lights shaded with red and green paper, which gave a very festive appearance. 850 patients had dinner in the large dining hall. The nursing sisters assisted in serving dinner. The band played during the meal. Christmas concert in the evening ended a very happy day for 1000 patients and others”.

Christmas of 1918 is accorded fewer words in the diary, but none the less suggest a happy time. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> a large number of ‘Other Ranks’ proceeded on leave for Xmas. On Christmas Eve there was a concert in dining hall by Mr Edward’s Concert Party who put on a “four act comedy”. Christmas day itself is described in the otherwise perfunctory war diary as “The happiest day of the year spent in hospital. Wards and dining halls decorated and splendid dinner and supper served to all – all expressed their happiness.”

### **Armistice Day November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918**

The war diary entry for this momentous and defining date is strangely muted. Perhaps it was a matter of public knowledge that the war would soon be over and the actual date was merely a full stop to that conversation. Or perhaps the enormity of what had been done and was ended, particularly in a hospital with those who would carry scars all their lives, meant that although it was celebrated it must have been a mix of emotion. “Armistice signed. Many celebrations” “great deal of excitement shown on report that armistice was signed”. A moment to celebrate the end of the fighting, to reflect on the prospect of going home and not

back to the front, to reflect on the scars and damage of one's own body and those of friends, and a moment to remember friends and comrades who didn't make it to see that day. It is easy to imagine celebration at Park Prewett hospital but it is also easy to imagine faces turned to the wall and silent tears of sadness and relief. Indeed, this was often the tone with which the news was received by soldiers at the front, more relief and introspection than celebration.

## The Journey To Hospital

When wounded at the front, or indeed succumbing to illness in the conditions that prevailed, the soldier was first sent to the Regimental Aid Post. Here medical staff attached to their own regiment would deal with them. The medical officer inspected the troops each day at their posts and attended to all sickness, held a sick parade, monitored personal hygiene and health care and dealt with wounded at a dressing station. He was responsible for 16 stretcher bearers, 5 water bearers (assisted by pioneers), medical supplies and sanitary conditions. If necessary the wounded were then passed back down the line to the Advanced Dressing Station and into the care of the CAMC.



*First steps on the road to hospital*

From here they were moved to Casualty Clearing Stations, large tented camps behind the lines with operating and hospital facilities, where immediate treatment took place, as well as prioritising the wounded and sending them to the appropriate hospitals, either for specialised care or according to where space was available. At different stages these men would have been moved in Field Ambulances (of which the Basingstoke made J class Thornycroft ambulance was a favourite for its relatively comfortable ride). Some of these hospitals were in France and others, like Park Prewett, were back in England. Contrary to local legend the wounded were not carried to the hospital on the branch line, it was too narrow and the bends

too tight for general rolling stock and it was only served by its own small gauge train and trucks. Motor ambulances brought the wounded up from Basingstoke station to the hospital by road.



### *Into Ambulances*

Once recovered sufficiently they were sent to convalesce. These convalescence hospitals were often hotels or large country houses that had been temporarily taken over. It seems that the Park Prewett patients were sent to Convalescence Hospital at Bearwood, Wokingham. It was one of 10 Convalescence Hospitals and had 700 beds. Bearwood was the home of the Walter family, owners of the Times newspaper. He made it available to the Canadians and received the official thanks of the Canadian government at the end of the war. Here the recovering soldiers enjoyed guests, entertainment, days out, picnics and river trips. There were around 900 soldiers convalescing at Bearwood. This included not just social exercise but recuperative exercise to make them fit for duty. Once fully well the soldiers were returned to the command depot and re allocated to duty. This may have been to return to the front or in some cases assigned to lighter duties consistent with the effects of their injuries. Perhaps Sergeant Thomas Renwick who died at Park Prewett hospital is an example of this. He

initially served in a front line unit but when he died he was in the Labour Corps. Perhaps earlier wounds had made him more suitable for supervising labour than leading in combat. That is from category A to category B. For some the limits to their recovery meant return to Canada, and the end of their war service being no longer fit for duty. Back in a civilian world, and no longer in uniform at time of war, they were entitled to wear a Silver War Service Badge on their lapel to identify that they had done their duty overseas.

There is an entry in the Park Prewett war diary that sheds some light on this journey from the front to the hospital ward. On the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1917 Colonel Roberts, with Lieutenant Colonel Davy, the Officer Commanding No 2 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station (CCCS) visited Park Prewett and informed them to be prepared for 250 officer patients. At this time the 2<sup>nd</sup> CCCS was based at Remy Sidings near Poperinghe, and was one of four Casualty Clearing Stations there during the third battle of Ypres which was part of the extended and very bloody battle of Passchendaele. In November 1917 the Canadians launched a major counter offensive and in that month the 2<sup>nd</sup> CCCS had 2698 admissions of which 2554 were further evacuated back to base hospitals.



*A Casualty Clearing Station*

## Deaths at the Hospital

Despite the very high numbers of patients who passed through the hospital there were only 35 deaths. The recording of these deaths in the hospitals war diary is not consistent. Sometimes they are aggregated to the month, sometimes they are listed by the day. The number of deaths in the war diary and the number of Canadian soldiers buried in Commonwealth War Graves in Basingstoke are only very approximately the same and in many cases the date of death recorded on the headstone and in the war diary correlate, but in other cases they do not. Perhaps we can assume that the Canadian war dead in Basingstoke came from the hospital. They lie in two cemeteries. The Worting Road Cemetery and the South View Cemetery for the Roman Catholics. There appear to have been in total 35 deaths at the hospital and there are 24 burials at the town. Perhaps others were buried in their home towns where they had only recently emigrated.

Sergeant **John Diplock** who died on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 1917. He was 36 years old and was serving in the Canadian Infantry, the 27<sup>th</sup> battalion of the Manitoba Regt. (874046) He was married to Fanny from Vancouver, but his family were originally from Falmer in Sussex. Before the war he had been a plate layer and enlisted 1916. Although a Canadian soldier he is also listed on the on the war memorial at Falmer. The 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion arrived in England on SS Carpathia (of Titanic fame) on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 1915. In 1917 they had fought at Vimy Ridge and Passchendale. We cannot be sure when John Diplock was wounded but in November they suffered 150 wounded when in the Mericourt Sector.

Corporal **T Chesters** (91572) of the Canadian Field Artillery 15<sup>th</sup> April 1918. No age at death is given. This was the period of the German spring offensive and there was heavy fighting.

Sergeant **James Alexander Thompson** (6087) of Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) aged 25years. He enlisted in 1915 and died on the 17<sup>th</sup> April 1918. Lord Strathcona raised this Regiment in the Boer war. In 1915 they served as infantry in the trenches, but later in the war were deployed as cavalry. Sergeant Thompson died in an English Hospital so it is hard to know long before he had received his wounds. However the Strathcona Horse were involved in the 'last great cavalry charge' at Moreuil Wood on the 31<sup>st</sup> March led by galloping Jack Seeley. Of the 100 men who took part three quarters were wounded or killed, and of the 105 horses, only 4 survived. The battle was the subject of a

famous painting and a posthumous VC was won.



*The last great cavalry charge' at Moreuil Wood*

Sergeant **Julius De Pelichy** (63292) of the Canadian Infantry 22nd Battalion (Quebec Regiment). He was born at Ypres, Belgium, in 1882 joined up in November 1914. Perhaps he was coming to the help of his country of birth. He died on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1918 and is buried at the South View Cemetery. He was in an all French unit known as the 'Van Doos' (from their name Vingt Deuxieme). They (and he) served throughout the war and fought with distinction in every major Canadian engagement of the war, losing 4000 killed or wounded. Serving from 1914 to 1918 Julius nearly made it through the war. His unit saw action at Neuville Vitasse in the period immediately before his death

Private **William Carnochan** (1087289) of the Canadian Infantry 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Eastern Ontario Regiment). He had been born in Scotland and was a labourer. He enlisted in February 1917 and died aged 20 years on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1918. His unit saw action at Neuville Vitasse in the period immediately before his death.

Private **Sylvester Braddock** (53065) Canadian Infantry 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Western Ontario). He was from Ontario, but was born in Bradford and joined up in October 1914. He died on 7 June 1918 aged 26 and is buried in the South View cemetery. His unit fought in every major Canadian engagement

Private **William Edward Thompson** (1084030) of the Canadian Infantry 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Manitoba Regiment). Previously a labourer he was 22 when he died on the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1918. They were nicknamed the 'little black devils' and had a devil on their cap badge. They were in the Somme area in July 1918. We can't know when Private Thompson was wounded prior to 29<sup>th</sup>, but five men were sent back due to mustard gas poisoning on the 27<sup>th</sup> in a period that was otherwise quiet.

Private **James Herbert Webb** (1097) of the Canadian Army Medical Corps 4<sup>th</sup> General Hospital (Park Prewett). He was from Toronto, enlisted in 1915, was previously a brick burner, and had been born in Bath. He died on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1918 at 22 years of age. On the 2nd of August the war diary notes "Special parade for the funeral of Private Webb of the unit".

Private **James Robertson** (2173567) of the Canadian Infantry 78<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Winnipeg Grenadiers). He was from Seattle, Washington, USA, but had been born in Vancouver. He joined up in October 1917 and died on the 21<sup>st</sup> August 1918 aged 34. At this time they were involved in the battle of Amiens where 97 other ranks were wounded, perhaps Private Robertson was amongst them.

Private **Albert Edward Farmer** (276549) of the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade. This was the first fully mechanised unit of the British Army. He enlisted from Saskatchewan but originally was from Sedgeberrow. He died on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1918 aged 23. The unit had played a major part in halting the German advance in spring 1918. When Private Farmer was wounded it was during the 100 day offensive that followed pushing the Germans back to the Hindenburg line. The closest battle to his date of death was the battle of Amiens.

Private **J W Dempsey** (505624) of the Canadian Forestry Corps 4<sup>th</sup> September 1918. No age at death is given. Also known as the Sawdust Fusiliers they were recruited from the lumberjack community in Canada to fell and cut timber in England for the front. As well as experienced lumber jacks it also attracted those wishing to serve but objecting to fight, and those found to be under age at the front and sent back. There was a Forestry Corps camp at Reading. We know this because on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1918 it is recorded "Epidemic of influenza throughout the hospital. 60 men from the Forestry Corps near Reading admitted to hospital with severe attack of influenza. Ward Isolated"

Acting Bombardier **Maurice Louis Anselme McGreer** (347452) of the Canadian Field Artillery 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade. He was from Montreal and enlisted in 1916. He died on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 1918 aged 24.

**Sergeant Thomas Renwick** (47396) of the Canadian Labour Corps 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Area Employment Company, previously a private in the 17<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Infantry. The Labour Corps carried out the essential non fighting tasks, such as bringing up supplies,

creating and maintain roads, building camps etc He was originally from South Shields and enlisted in Quebec in September 1914. He died aged 35 on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1918.

Corporal **Wilbray Lacerte** (26467) Canadian Army Medical Corps No 4 Canadian Stationary Hospital. He Joined up in September 1914 right at the very beginning of the war and died on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 1918 only three days after it ended. He was 32 and is buried at the South View cemetery.

Private **Walter Harold Walker** (3080603) of the 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles Battalion from Massawippi. He was drafted in January 1918 and died on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1918 aged 28. The unit arrived in France in 1915 and fought in all the pivotal battles of the war, including the Somme, Vimy Ridge, Ypres and Passchendale. At Passchendale it lost 60% of its strength in one day. Private Walker would have been one of the many replacements for this attrition, and the unit was involved in the final assault on the Hindenburg line which may have been where Private Walker was wounded.

Sergeant **C H McAuley** (113420) of the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles Battalion. He died on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1919 no age being recorded on his headstone. Much like the 5th, this unit served from 1915 in all the major battles of the war including the final assault on Germany.

Sapper **Arthur Wye** (2504428) of the Canadian Railway Troops, enlisted in Winnipeg in June 1918. He had been a teamster. He was 42 when he died on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1919. In Canada it is was not unusual to build temporary rail lines and bridges, and the need for temporary and quickly laid rail and bridges meant that a request was made to Canada to recruit men with these skills. During the war they laid all of the narrow gauge railway and 60% of the standard gauge railway used at the front in France. The railways were used to move materials and troops up to the front, and bring back wounded. They laid thousands upon thousands of miles of track at the front. They were non combatant troops and received no military training, but suffered many killed and wounded. Sapper Wye was one of 483 of that unit killed in the war.

Private **Randal Brown** (955) of the Canadian Dental Corps. He is named on his death in the war diary as he was one of the medical staff at Park Prewett. He had been born in Ireland but enlisted in Canada in 1915 and was 28 years old when he died on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1919. He died after the war had ended and at a time when there was a flu pandemic. Many hospital staff were being treated for flu in the hospital at this time. It has been suggested that more people died world wide of the flu after the war than had died in the war and certainly many commonwealth soldiers died and are buried here in England after the war had ended during the flu outbreak. In the war diary it states 27 February "No 955 Pte Brown R CADC one of the members of the unit died"

Private **Fred King** (1048257) of the Canadian Infantry 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion (British Columbia Regiment). He was a Canadian but had been born in San Francisco. He was a teamster and had enlisted in 1916. He died on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1919 at 32 years of age. His unit was raised by Lieutenant Colonel Tobin in Vancouver, British Columbia, and was known as 'Tobin's Tigers'. They fought in France from 1915.

Quarter Master Sergeant **Andrew Ross** (928) Canadian Army Medical Corps 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian General Hospital on the Park Prewett staff. He had enlisted in 1915 and died on the 19<sup>th</sup> March 1919 aged 27.

Private **John Harold Pasmore** (532308) of the Canadian Army Medical Corps 12<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance. He had been a printer and enlisted in 1916, but died on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1919, no age given. They were still in France at this time, caring for troops of several units and preparing for a review for King Albert of Belgium. They were dealing largely with soldiers with flu, dental problems and VD. Private Pasmore was one of many who were evacuated to hospital almost every day despite the fighting having ended

Private **John Harold Isaac** (528560) of the Canadian Army Medical Corps. He was from London Ontario and died on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1919 aged 28. At this time the hospital was treating men with flu, and many of the staff were also taken ill. It is possible he was one of the many troops who died after the war during the flu pandemic.

Gunner **Arthur Henry Pittman** (87222) of the Canadian Field Artillery 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 20<sup>th</sup> Battery. He came originally from 49 Hill Street, Reading where he was born. He was a clerk by trade and enlisted in Alberta in November 1914. He was 41 when he died on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 1919.

### **The Canadian Nurse Left Behind**

Nursing Sister **Lena Aloa Davies** was taken ill and died at the hospital. The hospital war diary records that on the 16<sup>th</sup> February 1918, "Sister L A Davies admitted to hospital, diagnosis, Blackwater Fever". Blackwater fever is a severe and often fatal form of malaria. The next day, "Sister Davies dangerously ill, persistent vomiting, extreme jaundice condition. No improvement in condition" "placed on the dangerously ill list". On the 20<sup>th</sup> Colonel Rudolph, a consultant with a responsibility for the hospital, visited to consult on Nurse Davies

Nursing Sister Davis served with the Canadian Army Medical Corps and is one of the few women who died while serving her country at war in the Canadian army. She was Born on July 30<sup>th</sup> 1885 in Beamsville, Ontario and enlisted April 7<sup>th</sup>, 1915 in Toronto, Ontario. Posted to the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Stationary Hospital in Salonika on October 10<sup>th</sup>, 1915 she disembarked from the Llandovery Castle, hospital ship on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1916. On August 19<sup>th</sup> she contracted malaria and was in bed for four weeks with a high fever. Recovered by September 17<sup>th</sup> she was given 4 weeks rest, but by October 10<sup>th</sup> she was still not well and was given another three weeks rest.

On April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1917 she was admitted to Moore Barrack's hospital in Shorncliffe having been in contact with Nursing Sister Fraser who had diphtheria. She must have been transferred to serve at Basingstoke because on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1918 she was recorded as seriously ill with Blackwater fever at Basingstoke; dangerously ill on the 20<sup>th</sup> and died on February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1918 at 1h35 a.m. at the age of 34.



The war diary recorded that “Sister L A Davies died at 1.35 am”. On the same day it records, “Military funeral of Nursing Sister L A Davies 2pm. Short service conducted by Rev Capt J W Mc Donald, C E Chaplain at the hospital. Col J Roberts, CB ADMS Canadian London Area; Assistant Matron D A Cains and Nursing Sister Coxall representatives from the Matron in Chief MacDonalds office, Captain Grobb Cousin of Sister Davies, Col W B Hendry, DSO, Officer Commanding, officers, Matron and nursing sisters, VAD members, NCOs and men of the unit marched to Sherborne St John cemetery, where a short service was held. The flowers covering the grave were beautiful and numerous”. Her medals (1914-15 Star, British War medal, Victory medal) were sent to her sister, Emma Davis of 544 Clinton Street (Toronto) and the Memorial Plaque and Scroll and Memorial Cross were sent to her mother, Martha J. Davis.

The grave is still there, but it is not a Commonwealth War Grave headstone. The local British Legion laid a poppy on her grave every Remembrance Sunday and more recently the Girl Guides have done the same.

Eighteen nursing sisters of the original No. 4 Canadian General Hospital, Toronto unit, and their matron, A. J. Hartley, met in Ottawa at the nurses' memorial unveiling ceremony. A luncheon was given, the following attending: Matron A. J. Hartley, Christie street hospital, Toronto; Miss A. Campbell, Saskatoon; Miss C. I. Stewart, Regina; Miss L. A. Gamble, Olean, N.Y.; Miss E. E. Augustine, Arkona; Miss M. Sterling, Owen Sound; Miss M. Townsend-Sheen, Miss M. E. Wilkinson, Miss M. E. Fletcher, Miss B. Austin, Miss E. E. Fraser, Miss E. Dunn, Miss L. Galbraith, Miss M. Darling, Miss S. Driver, Miss M. Lucas, Miss A. Campbell, Toronto; Miss B. Macallum Ellis, Ottawa. A very happy reunion was enjoyed by all. After the unveiling ceremony these sisters placed a wreath near the memorial tablet in memory of Miss Lena Davis, one of No. 4 nursing sisters who died on active service,

*Toronto Star, Aug. 31, 1926*

Clearly she was not forgotten. She was one of around 50 Canadian Nursing Sisters who gave their lives in the war, through enemy action, through disease and when the Hospital ship Llandoverly Castle was sunk.

### **Just Passing Through**

Many Nursing staff passed through Basingstoke on their way to other hospitals, including to hospitals closer to the front. They are not always named and their fate is unknown, but some amongst the may have been in the 50 or so CAMC Nursing Sisters who were killed in action. One example is Nursing Sister Margaret Lowe who passed through Basingstoke. Born in Scotland in 1888 she was trained as a nurse, enlisted on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1917 arriving at Liverpool on June 8<sup>th</sup>. She was posted to a series of Canadian military hospitals arriving at the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian General Hospital in Basingstoke on December 5<sup>th</sup>, one of 16 nurses that arrived that day to await their onward transfer to France. On the 8<sup>th</sup> January the war diary notes Matron Dulmage and 13 Nursing Sisters of the No 10 Canadian Stationary Hospital were awaiting orders to their unit in France and then on the 26<sup>th</sup> Matron and 27 nurses "proceed to France". Nursing sister Lowe arrived in France on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1918, posted to the 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Stationary Hospital and then on to the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian General Hospital on March 8<sup>th</sup>. Here she was wounded in the air attack on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 1918 with a fractured skull and chest penetration wounds and died from her wounds on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1918 at the 24<sup>th</sup> British General Hospital, Etaples. She is buried at the Etaples Military Cemetery in France.



**Above:** Soldiers carrying casket bearing remains of Nursing Sister Margaret Lowe to her grave, Etaples, France, May 1918.

The air raid on the hospital at Etaples was one of three German outrages, where they are reported to have bombed, strafed and dropped incendiaries on a well known and well marked hospital complex. One nurse was killed and two more, including Nurse Lowe, died

subsequently of their wounds. Nursing Sister Margret Lowe represents the named and the unnamed Nursing Sisters who passed through Park Prewett during their active service. In the war diary for the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Hospital (Basingstoke) many of the Nursing Sisters who served are named in the war diaries and the service records of all the nurses can be viewed on the Canadian military web sites.

### **Aircraft Crash**

Death also visited from the sky on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1918. The war diary states “Flt Lt Smith and Lt Ewell whilst flying over the hospital, smashed to the ground and were both killed”. This incident is reported in the Basingstoke Gazette. The plane crashed just to the west of the Aldermaston Road close to the hospital and whilst both airmen died in the crash hospital staff and patients rushed to the scene and their bodies were taken to the hospital mortuary. It seems the aircraft’s engine was dead and as they approached to make an emergency landing the pilot made a sudden turn to avoid the road and the plane corkscrewed in and burst into flames. Pilot error was regarded as the most likely cause. The wreck was looted by souvenir hunters and several boys in the area were subsequently taken to court for theft of government property (although their defence was that they were given the items by Canadian soldiers who were first on the scene). The diary notes that on the 9<sup>th</sup> February “The civil authorities conducted an inquest on the bodies of the two RFC officers who were killed on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February”. This was a short inquest as investigating military deaths with a straight forward cause were not to fall heavily on the coroner in time of war.

## **The Closing Days**

After the war ended in November 1918 the closure of the hospital becomes inevitable. Of course there are still sick and wounded coming from the front, and in 1918 there was an influenza epidemic that spread through the troops and killed large numbers of men. But the war of attrition and high casualties was over and in time the wounded would work their way through the system and be sent home and the No 4 Canadian General Hospital would close and release the Park Prewett hospital buildings back to their original planned use as a County Asylum.

Perhaps the first clues of this process starting are in May 1919. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> 30 other ranks arrive and on the 9<sup>th</sup> 4 sergeants and 20 corporals and then on the 11<sup>th</sup> a Sergeant Major. Throughout the war non nursing staff arrived and left in small numbers. This appears to be quite a large arrival of non medical staff and might indicate preparing to wind down the hospital. There are also increasing numbers of nursing staff being sent to other units and a lot being sent home to Canada, some on transport duty, some on leave, some to serve at home and some to leave the CAMC. There seems to be ever increasing numbers of staff transfers between hospitals including on the 30<sup>th</sup> nursing staff from France. It appears that the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian General Hospital would be sent back to Toronto and staff from elsewhere intended for Toronto were being sent to Basingstoke and Basingstoke staffs for other destinations were being sent away to suitable hospitals to go to other destinations in Canada. There were regular drafts back to Canada and a great increase in staff transferring between hospital units. We also see VADs, the local voluntary nurses, being struck off strength in this period.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May it was announced that the hospital closing had commenced. There were at that time 561 patients at the hospital. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 233 of them were evacuated leaving only 318. This had reduced to only 255 by the end of the month. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of June it was announced that all patients would be evacuated by the 6<sup>th</sup> of June and by the 4<sup>th</sup> there were only 184 patients left. On the 5<sup>th</sup> there were only 44 and on the 6<sup>th</sup>, the deadline, there were still 32, to be evacuated on new deadline the 7<sup>th</sup>. On the 7<sup>th</sup> the unit war diary states "Hospital closed for reception of patients. All wards cleaned out and equipment turned in". The daily return of patients resident at the hospital is 'NIL'. Now the patients were gone there was the task of closing up the hospital both in terms of medical equipment, which presumably fell to the medical staff and in closing and dismantling the site by the non medical staff.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> May the war diary records, "Unit commenced complete documentation. Unit is to proceed to Canada as a unit and not to leave Basingstoke" and the 10<sup>th</sup> June "wards nearly all closed. Ordnance to take everything over and sell at auction sale". Preparations were now under way to sell off material and send the unit home to Canada. A rear party was to be left in Basingstoke after the main party had left to finish the closure and hand over of the hospital. A lot of leave was granted at this time, including officers and nursing sisters who went to France to visit the graves of relatives. It must have been on their mind that they would never be as close to the graves of their loved ones as they were now once they had returned to

Canada. One such was Nursing Sister A Copeland who on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1919 “proceeded to France to visit relatives grave”. Others were on leave in England and as many were first or second generation emigrants it might be supposed that many had family in England to visit before they went home.

The dates for the sale of government property were set for the 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> June. On the 21<sup>st</sup> preparations for the sale commenced and these were complete by the 24<sup>th</sup>. On the same day the war diary notes, “ All documents for the unit completed and most other ranks on leave”. On the following days;

25<sup>th</sup> June, “first day of sales, 170 approximately were present, and all sales were good”

26<sup>th</sup> “second day of sales. About 150 buyers were present and all sales good.”

27<sup>th</sup> “third day of sales. Not so many people attended but sales were all good”.

The auction of surplus government property at Park Prewett was advertised in the Basingstoke Gazette along with quite number of auctions at other sites, such as Chattis Hill, Andover Airfield, Tidworth and Winchester. A huge range of war materials were becoming available including vehicles and agricultural machinery. The huts themselves were not sold. The government estimated that they had 500,000 surplus army huts and that with conversion to dwellings these would ease the post war housing shortage. Amongst the material for sale at Park Prewett was an X Ray machine, an operating room and equipment, typewriters and telephones. But the bulk of materials related to the wards. Beds, mattresses, bed stands, chairs, ambulance stretchers, bed linen, blankets, pyjamas, towels, crockery, cutlery, clothing, all by the hundreds and by the thousands. There is a long list of items in huge quantities offered in the Basingstoke Gazette. The Canadian government offered to transport any purchases over twenty pounds in value to the railway station. The sale raised £30,000 and attracted bidders from all over the country as well as from the continent. Some examples will serve as to the scale of the sales. 1,100 folding bedsteads, 1,800 bedside tables, 2,500 mattresses, 2000 pillows and 2000 bolsters, 8000 sheets, 4,600 blankets, 2,100 counterpanes, 216 Axminster rugs, and 500 table clothes. There were 2000 Windsor chairs, 150 bent wood chairs, 123 rush seated chairs, 100 arm chairs and 31 easy chairs. There were coal scuttles, bracket clocks, horizontal clocks and 8 day clocks, book cases and writing tables. There were 19 potato peeling machines, 2000 china plates, 2000 enamel plates, 1500 butter dishes of different types, glasses, cutlery and cooking equipment, 100 dining tables and 62 oak writing tables. There were 500 pairs of pyjamas, 4000 cotton shirts and 4000 flannel shirts, 3000 handkerchiefs and 3000 neckerchiefs, 2000 pairs of leather slippers, 5000 pairs of socks, and thousands of hospital blue uniforms.

With the property sold and the hospital no longer accepting patients, it was time for the Canadian Army Medical Corps to leave. On the 26<sup>th</sup> June “Word was received that the unit would leave for Canada round 1<sup>st</sup> July and that all documentation was to be completed”. On the 27<sup>th</sup> June “Word received that the unit will proceed on the S S Olympic on 2<sup>nd</sup> day of July”. The Olympic was the sister ship to the Titanic and had been requisitioned as a troop ship in 1915. She carried over 200,000 troops and covered 184,000 miles earning her the nick

name 'Old Reliable'. She was returned to civilian service in August 1919, her last trip as a troop ship leaving Liverpool 21 July 1919 just a couple of weeks after it took the Basingstoke hospital staff home. Then on the 28<sup>th</sup> June "Word received that 92 officers and nursing sisters and 100 men would proceed with the unit on the Olympic and that 70 nursing sisters would proceed on the 5th of July on the Carmania". On the 29<sup>th</sup> June "all documentation of the unit completed and nominal rolls made out", and the 30<sup>th</sup> June "final preparations for the move of the unit being made. Train arrangements completed and unit paraded. Strength return was Nursing Sisters 57, officers 31 other ranks 100."

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July the train arrangements had been made and the baggage collected. The last war dairy entry for the Park Prewett Canadian Hospital, Basingstoke, England on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1919;

"No 4 Canadian General Hospital entrains and embarks on the SS Olympic for Canada"

## **Canadian Military General Hospital No 4 (University of Toronto) Summary of Service**

Established Toronto, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1915

Shorncliffe, between 28<sup>th</sup> May and 15<sup>th</sup> October 1915

Salonika, Greece, between the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1915 and the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1916

Kalamaria, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1916 to 17<sup>th</sup> August 1917

Basingstoke, 18<sup>th</sup> September 1917 to 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1919

Officers Commanding:

Col T. A. Roberts

Col W. B. Hendry

Col H. C. Parsons

Matron:

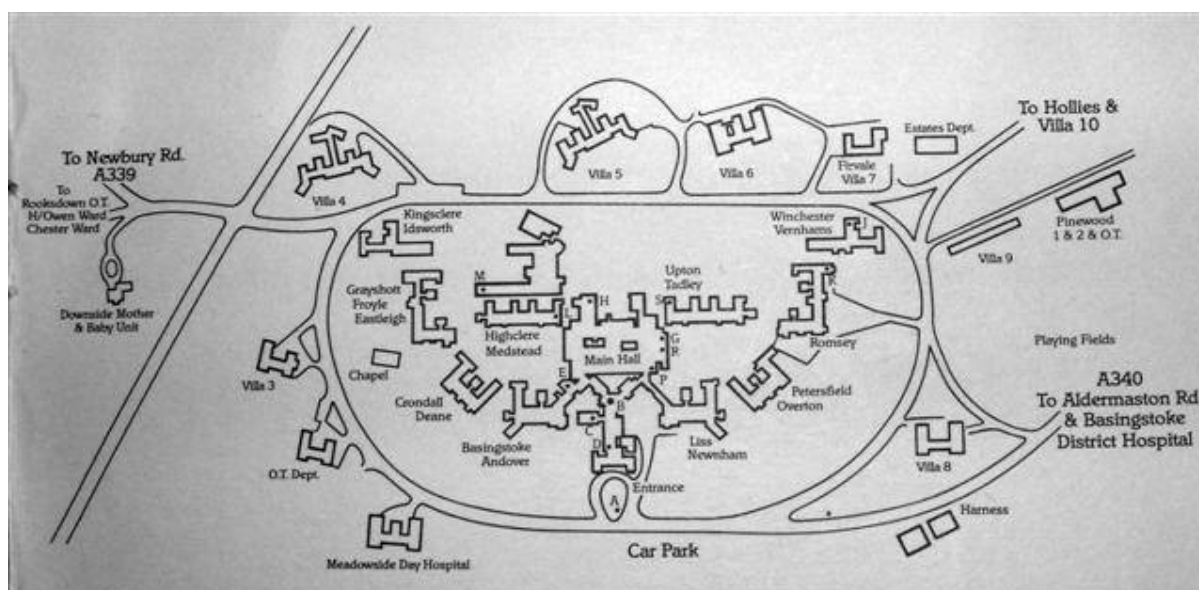
A. J. Hartley



Park Prewett Hospital, Front Entrance.

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<http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/cy/image/EPW033331>

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PARK PREWETT HOSPITAL, BASINGSTOKE.

Eighteen nursing sisters of the original No. 4 Canadian General Hospital, Toronto unit, and their matron, A. J. Hartley, met in Ottawa at the nurses' memorial unveiling ceremony. A luncheon was given, the following attending: Matron A. J. Hartley, Christie street hospital, Toronto; Miss A. Campbell, Saskatoon; Miss C. I. Stewart, Regina; Miss L. A. Gamble, Olean, N.Y.; Miss E. E. Augustine, Arkona; Miss M. Sterling, Owen Sound; Miss M. Townsend-Sheen, Miss M. E. Wilkinson, Miss M. E. Fletcher, Miss B. Austin, Miss E. E. Fraser, Miss E. Dunn, Miss L. Galbraith, Miss M. Darling, Miss S. Driver, Miss M. Lucas, Miss A. Campbell, Toronto; Miss B. Macallum Ellis, Ottawa. A very happy reunion was enjoyed by all. After the unveiling ceremony these sisters placed a wreath near the memorial tablet in memory of Miss Lena Davis, one of No. 4 nursing sisters who died on active service.

*Toronto Star, Aug. 31, 1926*



TERRY HILL  
P.O. 1000

Canadian Hospital, Hongkong.