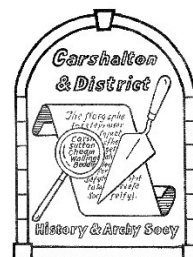


Carshalton & District History & Archaeology Society

Local History Note 15



The Invisible Hospital (Wallington Red Cross Hospital)

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An important role in World War 1 was filled by hundreds of Auxiliary Hospitals, staffed mainly by volunteers, across the country. There were three in what is now the London Borough of Sutton. The largest of them, *Benfleet Hall* in Benhill Wood Road, Sutton, had been one from 1915 to 1919.¹ The Red Cross VAD (Voluntary Aided Detachment) database² revealed two more such hospitals: *The White House*, Cheam, and the Wallington Red Cross Hospital in Woodcote Road, Wallington (WRCH).

The former was easy to locate and study, and has been published,³ but the latter was much more difficult. *Pile's Directory* for the war years (1914 to 1919) lists no building of that name in Woodcote Road. The Ordnance Survey 25 inch map of 1913 (Surrey XIII.16) showed no buildings of unusual shape or size in comparison to the other houses in Woodcote Road. The evidence is thus more circumstantial. Of the 43 staff listed in the database,⁴ four lived in Woodcote Road and one was the only Lady Superintendent of the hospital for its whole existence: Ethel Catherine Everett Fergusson. She lived at *Dalnabreck*, on the south-east corner of Woodcote Road and Blenheim Gardens, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, *Dalnabreck* was probably the location of WRCH. Incidentally, *Dalnabreck* is the name of a small village on the west coast of Scotland.

Ethel had married Rev. John Moore Fergusson in Cheshire in 1890.⁵ From 1911 to 1920, he was the Minister of Wallington Presbyterian Church,⁶ which stood at the corner of Woodcote Road and Stafford Road (where Sainsbury's now stands). They had four sons: John Donald Balfour (b. 1891),⁷ Edward Keith Ogilvy (b. 1893),⁸ Alec Everett (b. 1897)⁹ and Ian Victor Lyon (b. 1901).¹⁰ They are an interesting family and worth an account in a later Local History Note. John and Edward served in the army¹¹ (Edward was killed in action in 1916),¹² Alec qualified as a doctor in 1923¹³ and became a GP,¹⁴ and Ian was a successful businessman, becoming chairman and managing director of Evans Medical Supplies by 1949.¹⁵ Ethel had been involved in the administration of the Red Cross VAD,¹⁶ so it may have been an obvious decision to offer the services of *Dalnabreck* as an auxiliary hospital as casualty numbers grew towards the end of the war. There may be a hint of what we would now call "empty nest syndrome".

It is difficult to tell when the hospital opened, because the database only gives the start date of service, and most of the staff had worked in other hospitals before moving here. The Record of Service Cards (which had been scanned and are linked to the database) give more information, but the dates can be difficult to interpret. However, Ethel's says that she worked as Lady Superintendent for 12 months, so the most likely starting date is April 1918, calculated back from the given closing

date. Most of the staff (including Ethel) terminated their service on 25th April 1919, so the closing date of the hospital is clear.

The majority of the staff (32) are listed as nurses, though five combined this with administrative work such as linen-keeping, two also worked in the canteen (Miss Helena Bowman and Miss Florence Shelton) and one doubled as a masseuse (Miss Joan Gripper, see below). There was also one 'trained nurse', Mrs Annie Emily Tate, who worked on 'serious cases' and was not a member of the VAD. She however left in September 1918. There were also three orderlies, three cooks, another masseuse (Miss Dora Phillips), and a 'sewer', Mrs Emilie Bull, who mended clothes and worked mainly from home.

Only twelve staff had no previous service. Of the rest, thirteen had worked at Queen Mary's Hospital, Carshalton, which had opened as the Southern Hospital in 1908¹⁷ and became Queen Mary's Hospital for Children in 1915,¹⁸ several serving with the M.A.B. (the Metropolitan Asylum Board, which established a Nursing Training School here).¹⁹ Also, five had served at the Endsleigh Palace Hospital for Officers (not quite as grand as it sounds; it was the former Endsleigh Palace Hotel in Endsleigh Gardens), and the rest in various local hospitals. Only six continued to work for the Red Cross after WRCH closed.

Although the staffing numbers appear to be broadly comparable to *The White House Hospital* Cheam, the fact that WRCH operated for slightly longer and the work there appears to be more part-time, suggests that the number of the patients was less than the 20 recorded at *The White House*.²⁰ The number was probably between 10 and 15. In the desperate last months of the War, even this small number must have been valued.

Insights into the life and work of WRCH, can be obtained from the lives of two members of staff who obtained promotion in service, and had special mentions on their Record of Service Cards: the sisters Janet and Joan Gripper.

Janet Evelyn Gripper (b. 1894)²¹ and Bertha Joan Gripper (b. 1895)²² were daughters of Dr Walter Gripper (b. 1853),²³ a GP in Wallington²⁴ who from at least 1908 to 1924 was Medical Officer of the Royal Female Orphanage, Beddington.²⁵ From at least 1905 to 1922 they lived at Walpole House, Manor Road, Wallington.²⁶ Bertha Joan was known as Joan, presumably because the name Bertha had Germanic connotations.

Janet showed an interest in nursing while still at school, being awarded a medallion at Croydon High School for Girls Prize Day in 1913 for passing 'First Aid to the injured',²⁷ a course which may have been taught by her father (he had taught it in Carshalton as early as 1886).²⁸ Her work for the VAD was on the administrative side: administering nursing hours at various hospitals from April 1915 before moving to 'nursing and administration' at WRCH. She was appointed Assistant Commandant of Surrey/112 in September 1918 and appears to have continued in that capacity after the War. Her Record Card, signed by Commandant Janet Little, states "The Cause has always come first in every way with Miss Gripper. She has been a splendid right hand to me and a most capable organiser, and this VAD owes a great debt to her". In 1925 she married Lt. Charles Francis Wolley-Dod,²⁹ who died in Germany in 1937 while living near Redhill.³⁰ She travelled to Egypt with Joan in 1927,³¹ but I can find no record of when she returned. They appear to have had one child: Hova Charles Kirk, born in 1931.³² Janet died in the Middlesex Hospital in 1963 while living in Tunbridge Wells.³³

Joan worked first at Clandon Park Hospital from July 1915 to March 1917, then at Queen Mary's (M.A.B.) until August 1918 (where she trained as a masseuse), before moving to WRCH. Her Record of Service Card states "Seriously ill. A most splendid V.A.D. Sacrificed herself entirely for cause & endured much without complaint." After the War she served as a masseuse at Weybridge Hospital, and registered with the CSMMG (Chartered Society of Masseuses and Medical Gymnasts) and the CSP (Chartered Society of Physiotherapists) in 1920.³⁴ She travelled to work in Egypt from 1927 to 1931.³⁵ By 1939 she was a masseuse in Eastbourne, living with her mother Evelyn and her younger sister Christabel.³⁶ She died there in 1995 at the age of 99.³⁷

Another way to make the 'invisible hospital' more visible is through photographs of some who worked there. There is one in the David Knights-Whittome archive: Amy Margaret Hartley, who lived at *Limehurst*, 32 Springfield Road, Wallington, photographed in uniform on 18 December 1916.³⁸ She is the subject of a blog which covers her career as a VAD nurse.³⁹ Her work can be summed up in the words of her Commandant: "Has given much time willingly and answered extra calls always."



Nurse Amy Margaret Hartley, photographed by David Knights-Whittome on 18 December 1916

¹ Clive Orton, *Family home, Hospital, School; the story of Benhill House (later Benfleet Hall) in Sutton*, CADHAS Local History Note 9 (2021) p.16—19. See also pastonglass.wordpress.com/2020/12/03/a-house-through-the-ages-s2-ep8-its-finest-hour.

² vad.redcross.org.uk/.

³ Clive Orton, *The Story of The White House (in Cheam)*, CADHAS Local History Note 12 (2022), p.11—12. See also pastonglass.wordpress.com/2022/05/19/a-house-through-the-ages-s3-ep6-the-auxiliary-hospital.

⁴ *Op cit* note 2.

⁵ *Daily News (London)*, 27 Sep 1890, p.1; *The Queen*, 4 Oct 1890, p.46.

⁶ *Christ Church Wallington, The First Hundred Years 1880-1980*: LBS SBAW726.

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- ⁷ *Daily News (London)*, 29 Aug 1891, p.1; *Northern Whig*, 31 Aug 1891, p.1; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).
- ⁸ *Dublin Daily Express*, 7 Aug 1893, p.1.
- ⁹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 21 Apr 1897, p.7.
- ¹⁰ England and Wales Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007.
- ¹¹ TNA WO372/7/48202 via Forces War Records; UK, British Army World War 1 Medal Roll Index Cards, 1914-1920; Forces War Records.
- ¹² England & Wales, National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and Administrations), 1858-1966.
- ¹³ UK & Ireland, Medical Directories, 1845-1942 for 1925.
- ¹⁴ 1939 Registration.
- ¹⁵ *The Scotsman*, 1 Jul 1949, p.2
- ¹⁶ *Op cit* note 2.
- ¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Mary%27s_Hospital,_Carshalton;
<https://ezitis.myzen.co.uk/queenmarycarshalton.html>.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁹ <https://www.workhouses.org.uk/MAB/>.
- ²⁰ *Op cit* note 3, p.12.
- ²¹ 1939 Registration.
- ²² *Surrey Mirror*, 30 Aug 1895, p.1; England and Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916-2007.
- ²³ England and Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837-1915.
- ²⁴ UK and Ireland, Medical Directories, 1845-1942; 1901 Census; 1911 Census.
- ²⁵ *Croydon Guardian and Surrey County Gazette*, 27 Jun 1908, p.2; *Croydon Times*, 30 Jul 1924, p.6.
- ²⁶ Surrey, Surrey, England, Water Rate Books, 1868-1911 for 1905, SDWC48; Cambridge University Alumni, 1261-1900.
- ²⁷ *Croydon Guardian and Surrey County Gazette*, 29 Nov 1913, p.2.
- ²⁸ *Croydon Advertiser and East Surrey Reporter*, 23 Jan and 30 Jan 1886, p.6.
- ²⁹ England and Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1916-2007.
- ³⁰ *Op cit* note 12.
- ³¹ UK and Ireland, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890-1960.
- ³² FreeBMD; <https://groups.google.com/g/peerage-news/c/KC1aaRpa7mE> [4 June 2022].
- ³³ *Op cit* note 12.
- ³⁴ UK, Physiotherapy and Masseur Registers, 1895-1980.
- ³⁵ *Op cit* note 31; UK and Ireland, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878-1960.
- ³⁶ 1939 Registration.
- ³⁷ *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 Jan 1995, p.?.
- ³⁸ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pastonglass/19502549471/in/album-72157659790405385/>.
- ³⁹ pastonglass.wordpress.com/2020/06/25/amy-margaret-hartley-one-womans-kindness-to-patients-in-pain.