



Charlton Park, Former VAD Hospital of WWI

Closing of Charlton Park Hospital

A Year's Good Work. Countess of Suffolk's Generosity

At the end of the present month the Countess of Suffolk's Hospital at Charlton House, near Malmesbury, is to be closed after having served a most useful purpose for exactly a year in the treatment and care of sick and wounded soldiers. The definite decision of Lady Suffolk to close Charlton House altogether for an indefinite period, owing to her ladyship having arranged to sail for India next month, has necessitated the change in the original plans with regard to the hospital. The Earl of Suffolk, it will be remembered, is serving in India as major in command of the Wilts Battery, 3rd Wessex Brigade, R.F.A. (Territorials).

By kind permission of the Countess and by courtesy of Mr. Aubrey Hopwood (private secretary), and Miss O'Brien (matron) we are able to publish some interesting details of the noble work done in the hospital during the year it has been open as an auxiliary to the 2nd Southern General Hospital, Bristol. When the war broke out the Earl and Countess of Suffolk were amongst the first of our English nobility to offer their residence as a temporary hospital. Miss O'Brien who had been superintendent of the London University College hospital was at that time in charge of the Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachments in the Malmesbury district, and her services were at once requisitioned by the Countess as matron of the new hospital. The preparations made were on a lavish scale, for her Ladyship considered that nothing that could be done for our brave soldiers could be too well done as a token of gratitude for their noble sacrifice. Accordingly the magnificent picture gallery at Charlton House was stripped of its art treasures, many of these being priceless art paintings, and the capacious room, the ceiling of which was designed by Inigo Jones, was fitted up a hospital ward. The ward, when completed, contained 30 beds, all conveniently placed to allow of free access to the patient, so that every needed attention could be given one without disturbing the others. The hospital as a whole was not, of course, confined to the picture gallery, but consisted of a self-contained block, cut off from the rest of the house, and comprising an operating theatre, nurses' quarters, lavatories, baths, etc. Everything that was provided was absolutely new, the equipment being the very best procurable, and no expense being spared in this direction. If we

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were permitted to name the sum expended, even approximately, it would stagger the general public who have little idea of the enormous expense connected with such a venture. Everything was in order to receive patients for some time, but the first patients did not arrive until October 27th. Later an electrical department was added, this enabling the staff to give the patients radiant heat baths and high frequency treatment. This proved a huge boon for by means of radiant heat and massage certain patients got well in half the time necessary without this modern process.

In the course of the year the whole of the accommodation has at times been utilised, but often there have been beds to spare. Altogether there have been 148 patients and most of these have been surgical cases, shrapnel and similar wounds, the remainder about 30 being medical cases. There were several cases of frost-bite in the early months of this year, and it is gratifying to know that the treatment of these was particularly successful, no amputations being necessary. Indeed the whole record of the hospital has been remarkable in having not a single death, and some of the cases on arrival were serious enough to all appearances.

Miss O'Brien assisted by four fully-trained nurses was responsible for the principal work of the hospital. Eleanor, Countess of Suffolk has been commandant, her Ladyship being indispensable in carrying out what ever duties were possible to her, and those were many, for she had previously become well-trained in home nursing and first-aid, as well as general hospital work in her capacity as Commandant of the Charlton V.A.D. To Lady Agnes Howard fell the task of caring for the men's clothes of which she has had the entire charge. From the time the patients arrived Lady Agnes looked after their clothes and saw that the soldiers' comfort was assured by having their clothes well-aired.

Miss O'Brien herself has been an ideal matron. Our representative was assured of this by many of the soldiers who had been privileged to be cared for at Charlton House. They were loud in their praises of the beautiful hospital and park, which they appreciated to the full. They had had cricket, bowls, and other outdoor games during the fine days of the summer and these largely helped them to regain their health and strength once they became convalescent. With all these advantages however, without Miss O'Brien's admirable skill and constant vigilance in the interests of her patients, they would not have progressed anything like so well and they were one and all deeply indebted to her. The discipline has been excellent. Of course the Matron has been strict, but that policy is always an essential to success in a military hospital.

As to the help rendered by the local members of the Voluntary Aid Detachment, Miss O'Brien paid them a high tribute of praise. "They all worked most loyally and well," said Miss O'Brien "and quite qualified their existence. They have been of the greatest possible use." These Red Cross members have worked in batches each one doing a half-day's work per week, and all having regular days. The Crudwell members have been mainly responsible for the night duty. The following are the list of the members who have helped.

Malmesbury Detachment; Miss Luce (commandant), Mrs. Ramsey (quartermaster), Miss Alexander, Miss G. Alexander, Mrs. Basevi, Miss Bower, Miss Brown, Mrs. Hugh Barker, Mrs. M. Chubb, Miss E. Chubb, Miss P. Chubb, Miss L. Clark, Miss Daniels, Mrs. Edwards, Miss Fisher, Miss R. Farrant, Mrs. Grant, Miss Gay, Miss Hanks, Mrs. F. Jones, Mrs. W. Jones, Miss Jones, Miss Jenkins, Mrs. King, Miss Milner, Miss M. Moore, Miss Pollen, Mrs. Pearce, Miss Smith, Mrs. Tabor, Miss Wilkins, and Miss L Wilkins, with Mrs. Weaver, Mrs. Teagle and Mrs. Gawthropp (attached for temporary duty).

Charlton Detachment; Eleanor, Countess of Suffolk (commandant), Miss Whiting, Mrs. Gwinnett, Miss Lea, Mrs. Pendall, Miss Sisum, Mrs. Davis, Miss Stratton, Miss D Law, Mrs. Shellam, Mrs. Law, Mrs. Cove, Mrs. Finch, Mrs. Porter, Miss Tait, Mademoiselle Eberlin, Mrs. Woodhouse, Miss Wilson, Mrs. Coldwell, and Mrs. Chester-Master.

Crudwell Detachment; Mrs. Whitcombe (commandant), Miss Clara Ody, Miss Pattie Chamberlain, Miss Alice Hislop, Miss Elsie Cuss, Miss Blanche White, Miss Esme Whitcombe, Miss Linda Godwin, Miss Ethel Roseblade, Miss Daisy Large, Miss Amy Redfern, Mrs. Sole, Mrs. R. Large and Mrs. Parker.

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Mr. Hopwood told our representative that there is no question of the hospital being transferred to Malmesbury or anywhere else. When Lady Suffolk closes Charlton House her Ladyship's connection with the hospital ceases, of course, and whatever might be done to continue the work of an auxiliary hospital elsewhere in the neighbourhood would be quite independent of her effort. This explanation was due said Mr. Hopwood, on account of a rumour which appeared to be prevalent in the town that what was going to take place was merely a transfer to another house in Malmesbury or the district.

To the generous benefactress many hearts are sincerely grateful for her noble work, and all will wish her Ladyship, when she leaves for the East, "bon voyage" and a safe return, once to resume in Charlton House, accompanied by the Earl and the family, her position as the Lady Bountiful of the neighbourhood."

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