



A group taken at Savernake Hospital about 1930, which shows Sister Walker on the right of Miss Lavington and Sister Bridges on her left. Standing behind are the medical Staff from left to right: Dr. Wheeler, Dr. Walter Maurice, Dr. Bashall, the late Dr. Haydon and the late Dr. Taylor. Sisters Walker and Bridges are Sisters, being the Misses Walker but one of them took their Mother's maiden name to avoid confusion. On retiring they went to live not far from Miss Lavington and they saw her at least once a week.

## Death of Miss Evelyn Lavington

### Much Loved Matron of Savernake Hospital

As briefly reported last week, Miss Evelyn Lavington, the much beloved Matron of Savernake hospital for nearly 20 years, died at her home at Datchet, Bucks, on 18th January after a long and trying illness, most patiently borne.

Evelyn Rossell Lavington was the eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Lavington, of Marlborough, and was born in 1875 at Fyfield House, near Marlborough.

After leaving school her success as a nurse soon proved itself and for fifteen years she held the post as Sister Adelaide at St. Thomas's Hospital, London, until 1914 when Miss Lavington voluntarily undertook the night nursing at the V.A.D. Hospital, Marlborough, afterwards becoming Matron until the hospital closed at the end of the war.

Then, by earnest request, Miss Lavington went as voluntary Matron to the Savernake Cottage Hospital which had very few beds. She soon organised this into one of the best cottage hospitals in the country.

Being limited to 100 beds she frequently gave up her bed to a patient and when very full often put the children "top and tail". When H.R.H. The Prince of Wales called he was greatly amazed to find the children like this - one each end of the bed !

When Miss Lavington retired in 1937 she had given about 40 years of her life for others and steadfastly refused for the last twenty-seven, to be paid one penny for her services, instead always helping others out of what she chose to call "funds at her disposal"

Miss Lavington was decorated with the Florence Nightingale Medal, the Royal red cross Medal, made a serving Sister of St. John of Jerusalem and finally made a Member of the British Empire.

Miss Lavington bought a house and settled down in 1939 at Datchet with her friend and constant companion, Miss Nash, who went to live with her. Miss Nash first joined Miss Lavington in 1914 at the V.A.D. Hospital, Marlborough and stayed throughout helping there and at Savernake afterwards. They have continued to help the sick and the old since their retirement in Datchet and have taken a keen interest in church affairs and in helping to keep the parish church clean and beautiful.

## **A TRIBUTE**

One, who knew her well writes:- Last week came the news of the passing of a great lady: the words are used in the highest sense. It will be given to few of us to be so widely known in this district, held in such esteem and affection, and so sincerely mourned.

As a girl, Evelyn Rossell Lavington had not the slightest doubt of her vocation: like her great predecessor, Florence Nightingale, she was determined to train as a nurse. "I ran away from home to become a nurse" she would say, and though the words perhaps were not intended to be taken quite literally, yet one senses in them the strong disapproval and opposition of a father unable to see why a beloved daughter, who was very far from strong, should wish to exchange a comfortable home for the nursing profession, a life in those days arduous and exacting.

In 1895 Miss Lavington was too young by five years to be accepted as a probationer by any good London Hospital and Training School, 25 being the usual age for entry. So she went to the Ears, Nose and Throat Hospital in Golden Square, W. an establishment where, in those days, conditions for the younger nurses were Spartan indeed. She managed to survive training there, then 'played out time' in the nursing of typhoid fever. At last she succeeded in entering the Nightingale School at St. Thomas' Hospital but (as was possible in those days) only as a paying probationer; on the usual terms she could never have passed her medical examination on entry. Within 6 weeks however word was passed round among the Hospital authorities concerned that as the new probationer showed such outstanding promise she was not to be lightly dismissed by reason of health. Again she stayed the course, largely by sheer will power, proving a brilliant pupil and most devoted nurse.

From time to time she and her fellow students were invited in turn to the home of Florence Nightingale who, in her old age, took the deepest interest in their progress and welfare.

Fully-trained, it was arranged for her to enter the Sheffield Infirmary for a time as a Surgical Sister, in order to gain wider experience. She was then invited back to St. Thomas' to become Sister Adelaide, i.e. to the important post of Sister of the Gynaecological Ward. This she held for the space of ten years, establishing a great reputation in the nursing world.

## **BREAK DOWN IN HEALTH**

Then came the First World War, and the years 1914 to 1919 must have held many a bitter disappointment for Miss Lavington. Efforts were repeatedly made during the autumn of 1914 to secure her services for important posts, including organization of military nursing in the Eastern Theatre of the War, in Serbia, in Salonica. Later on came offers of Matronships, including that of the Star and Garter Hospital for the Disabled, but all had to be urgently refused for Evelyn Lavington, completely broke down in health, had resigned her post at St. Thomas' and been ordered a long rest.

Thus it happened that the only war-work which one of the leading Sisters in the nursing world could undertake, was found in acting, first as Night Sister, then as Matron, of the Red Cross Hospital in Marlborough..... "That excellent Hospital", wrote Colonel Goddard, R.A.M.C., Southern Command, on its closing in 1919 "That haven of rest and healing how useful it was to me." Its Matron was decorated by King George V in 1918.

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## SAVERNAKE HOSPITAL

Shortly before the closing of the Red Cross Hospital in 1919 - Savernake Hospital then a small Cottage hospital of about 20 beds, and largely dependent on local support, found itself in debt and difficulties owing to the war. The possibility of securing Miss Lavington's invaluable assistance occurred to certain persons concerned, and after much hesitation on her part; a somewhat ambiguous arrangement was made. The Committee at that time was of the opinion that a ten bedded Cottage Hospital was the limit of local public support. Would Miss Lavington consent to put the whole establishment in order. She was definitely appointed Matron - unsalaried by her own desire - and it was feared that so small a post would not interest her for long.

But the new Matron was a woman of vision, of foresight and steadfast purpose. She saw there was urgent need for the Hospital to be greatly enlarged, properly equipped and staffed, and brought up-to-date if it was to fulfil the requirements of the considerable district that it served. Would the public support this great enterprise? Gradually the beds were increased, eventually up to 100, new buildings were added, modern equipment provided, visiting specialists made their appearance, clinics established. The support on the part of the public was outstanding; it is a history of generous donations, of special efforts great and small, of much voluntary help gladly given. In connection with this, mention must be made of the contributory scheme with its scores of voluntary helpers.

This gradual but steady transformation was, needless to say, warmly supported by the doctors concerned and by the majority of the Committee, as by the general public whose help was so essential, but all who were concerned with the inner working of the hospital, know that the chief motive power was a woman of vision, strong character, and determination, who realized she had at last met with the supreme work of her life.

The hospital as it now exists may be said to be her best memorial, including the little mortuary Chapel which rears its Cross above the trees bordering the Bath Road, the erection of which was the direct result of the Matron's own appeal in the *Marlborough Times*.

### **“TAKE ME TO MISS LAVINGTON”**

Evelyn Lavington was a superb organiser and leader, and was created an M.B.E. in the Honours list of 1935, by the late King George V. But another side of her work deserves special mention. She was devoted to nursing, and her outstanding skill was at the service of the most serious cases in the hospital. If she saw a chance of saving a life she would sit up all night with a patient, continuing her work as usual next day. In her marvellous memory she carried the history of cases past and present. Innumerable problems, troubles and difficulties were poured into her ear, and advice and help freely given. As the years went on “I wish to go to Savernake Hospital,” became in the vernacular “Take me to Miss Lavington!”

None but her private secretary knew even a fraction of her private charity, of jobs found for the workless, of outfits provided, of patients helped to convalescent treatment and holidays. Mention must be made of her loyal, willing staff, both nursing and domestic, of the happy homely atmosphere, of the Hospital Slogan “Patients First.”

Savernake was not at that period a Training School, and the nurses, often skilled young women with years of service, could not be certificated, but it is illuminating that a famous Surgeon on hearing that certain nurses were not staying on after their Chief's departure, wrote to ask if he could secure for service in his own Hospital “any senior Nurses trained by Miss Lavington.”

The matron would willingly have given twenty years of her voluntary service to Savernake Hospital but it was not to be. Shortly before the end of that period her health again broke down and another long rest was essential. Her resignation was accepted with deepest regret. Then came the day when the Matron made her last progress through the Hospital, bidding farewell to patients and staff when it seemed that hearts were near to breaking. The last characteristic touch from the Matron from whom

nothing escaped the eye: Nurse! Is that a cobweb I see in that corner? ..... and then she was gone: it seemed almost lost to us for a year, when she reappeared in yet another phase of her career.

A charming little home at Datchet, where Miss Lavington had the devoted care of Miss Nash, another well-known and honoured member of the Savernake staff, became a veritable haven of rest and inspiration to her many friends, especially those of the former Savernake nursing staff with whom their Matron kept ever in close touch. She nursed various chronic and dying patients, within reach of her home, gave active help to the district nursing association: at times, during the nurses' holidays herself acting as visiting nurse, ever rendering service to others in ways too numerous to mention.

## DEEP RELIGIOUS FAITH

It was not only by reason of her great skill as a Nurse, and her powers of organisation that Miss Lavington was such an outstanding success - her days were ordered, directed and inspired by a deep and sincere religious faith. One little incident will explain her attitude and approach to her daily task. In the sitting room at the Hospital, late one evening her secretary was endeavouring to obtain from the Matron necessary particulars required during the entry of the day's operations into the records. The task was a slow one as the Matron, in utter weariness, kept falling asleep as she sat. Suddenly the sound of wheels, lights, voices, the arrival of an ambulance - an accident, sufferers perhaps in need of immediate operation, the Matron was on her feet, alert, self possessed, in command ..... "Matron" she was asked, "how do you manage to act as if any patient was just the only one you had dealt with that day." Her answer came softly: "I say to myself, the Master is come and calleth for thee."

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The Savernake Cottage Hospital