

Corsham Red Cross Hospital

During World War 1 the Corsham Town Hall was transformed from its normal role at the centre of Town life into a busy Red Cross Auxiliary Hospital.

From its opening on the **26th October 1914** until it finally closed on **30th August 1919** the Corsham Hospital cared for **875** wounded and sick soldiers transported back home after fighting abroad. Over **300** local people made up of doctors, nurses, volunteers and auxiliary workers directly supported the hospital but it also brought Corsham and its surrounding villages together in a common cause. It was their contribution to the war effort. Local people went **Above and Beyond** to do whatever they could while their own husbands, sons, brothers and uncles were away from home fighting for their country.



Corsham Red Cross Hospital October 1914. Awaiting its first patients

In Preparation.

Well before the war started preparations were being made for a possible war and an invasion of Britain.

Local men were recruited into Territorial and Reserve Forces and were trained to provide home defence should it be needed.

The Red Cross and the Order of St John combined to create a county by county network of Voluntary Aid Detachments where volunteer men and women were trained in first aid and other skills needed if a home invasion were to happen.

Detachments were most often led by aristocratic and titled ladies and organised in their homes.

Locally groups were set up in Corsham, Biddestone and Box where women were trained in first aid, home nursing, cooking and domestic duties and men were practiced in make and mend skills, stretcher bearing, transport and ambulance duties.

On the 6th of August 1914, just 2 days after war was declared, Field Marshall Lord Methuen as an influential and senior military man, called a meeting in the Town Hall to prepare Corsham for war.

Agreement was reached to:-

- allocate the Town Hall Building as a Red Cross Hospital - together with a fire-hydrant, hose and duty fireman
- move the Town Hall to the Parish Room at the Almshouse
- fully support the work of the local Red Cross Society Ladies' Committee co-ordinating local effort in aid of the war effort.

With Lady Christian Methuen appointed as Commandant, Corsham Hospital was set up very quickly and a newspaper article reported a 'pay to view' public opening ahead of receiving its first patients

The Town Hall at Corsham has been transformed into the headquarters of the Voluntary Aid Detachment, and 30 beds have been prepared, 24 in the large ward and six in the small ward, while the officers' quarters are located in the house opposite. On Wednesday the hospital was open for the first time to the public, who were admitted at a small charge, and many availed themselves of the opportunity, including visitors by charabanc from Bath, some of whom expressed great satisfaction at the accommodation and arrangements. Lady Methuen was present part of the time. Her ladyship had just been to King's Hospital, London, to see the wounded, her two daughters, the Hon. Christian and the Hon. Seymour Methuen, being in attendance there as nurses.

Patients Arrive.

The arrival of the first patients came very quickly as remembered by Miss Maudie Talbot from Lacock Abbey in her book 'Extract from My Life and Lacock Abbey' on the evening before the hospital opened.

One afternoon I had a message saying that the hospital would be opened at Corsham Town Hall on the following day, and asking me to see to the cooking arrangements. The Town Hall was not really a very convenient place; though we had wards and a somewhat inadequate bathroom, there was no place for a kitchen. So our only plan was to cook the food in a small house on the opposite side of the street, and carry it over. There were two bedrooms in the upper part of this house and I had a girl, a farmer's daughter, who was a first-rate helper, besides other pairs of

hands that were willing, if not always experienced. On the very first evening, thirty men arrived at about six o'clock, and needed a meal at once. One of the Corsham bakers proved a tower of strength. We had had no warning that these men were coming, but the baker produced bread, butter, tea, sugar, milk, bacon and eggs with wonderful speed. He and I had two frying pans and we fried bacon and eggs steadily till everybody was served. I slept in the house the first night and we fixed up about breakfast the next morning, and then things gradually got into a routine. There were the men's meals, the nurses' meals, and the Matron's meals to be planned, in addition to the special diets which might be ordered.

The Newspaper though reflected the very strong support received from the people of Corsham, the importance of the railway station to the transport of patients, the co-ordinated efforts of many including the Boy Scouts and the need for things for the patients to do.

ARRIVAL OF WOUNDED SOLDIERS

Some little stir was occasioned in the town on Monday evening, when a number of wounded soldiers arrived at the Town Hall, the headquarters of the V.A.D. The local branch of the Red Cross Society had everything in readiness for the reception of the patients. Nineteen arrived from Bristol by the 6 o'clock train, and were met by members of the local committee in motor cars and conveyed to the Town Hall, where a large crowd had assembled. Cheers were given as they entered the hall. A great many were suffering from pleurisy and bronchitis, and there were a few cases of wounded (one from Mons and another from Aisne). Drs. Wood and Crisp (Corsham), Dr. Tayler (Lacock) and Dr Nixon (Chippenham) are daily in attendance, and the nurses of the Red Cross detachment, with the Hon. Christian Methuen (commandant), Lady Goldney, and Mrs. Hedworth Williamson are also lending valuable aid, day and night. The services of the local staff of stretcher-bearers, hospital orderlies (superintended by Mr. P.J. Gane) and Boy Scouts are also much appreciated. The committee are appealing to the public for games, books, etc., for the purposes of recreation for the convalescents.

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette 30th October 1914

Red Cross Volunteers

The Red Cross organised over 90,000 volunteers during WW1, both men and women, to fulfil a wide range of roles at home and abroad.

Typically these volunteers supported the auxiliary hospitals and that was certainly the case in Corsham Hospital where we have almost 350 names of men and women who undertook a range of roles from the professional Staff managed by the Red Cross to the local Nurses and Hospital Orderlies who provided direct support and care to patients, to the more practical roles like **Cooks, Gardeners, Housemaids, Kitchen Maids, Pantry Maid and Washers** and to the more obscure and surprising roles such as a **Carver, Despatch Rider, Egg Collector, Masseuse, Potato Peeler** and one nurse who provided **Swedish and Electrical Massage**.

Volunteers gave hundreds and in many cases thousands of volunteer hours, which were probably conservative in the counting, as people did what they could to support the Hospital

- **Gladys Rogers** of Morely House in Corsham recorded 7180 hours in her roles of Nurse and Assistant Quartermaster
- **John Batchelor** who was an Orderly living in Priory St recorded more than 4000 hours
- **Owen Bishop** was an Ambulance Driver and recorded 5200 voluntary hours
- **Walter Merrett** lent his car for the duration of the war and recorded more than 5000 hours as a Driver and Orderly
- Others, particularly the knitters and the needle workers gave half an hour or an hour a week - these would have added up and were just as valuable.

Red Cross Service Record Cards were maintained during the war and are now available online through the Red Cross website. www.redcross.org.uk

Corsham and its Belgian Connection.

At the very start of the war a great many Belgian families fled their country to avoid the advancing German Army. Initially they went to France but soon they were being invited to come to England and towns in Wiltshire very quickly accepted Belgian refugees - including Corsham.

In the Corsham area it was Neston that took an early lead with 22 refugees being looked after by a local committee of ladies and then 54 more came to Corsham and were housed locally in Lacock, Biddestone, Castle Combe and as far away as Calne. At least 18 were housed in Corsham and by March 1915 that number had increased to 41 - almost certainly including families of Belgian Soldiers who were patients in the Hospital. Families were accommodated in houses and cottages - we know for instance that a young family were in Little Lypiatt Farm.

Support to these families was co-ordinated by the Parish Council with local jobs found for men that were able to work and additional costs met by subscription, by donation and from regular fund raising by the people of the Town. Families were given a regular delivery of fresh meat and provisions and a dedicated Supply Depot was established at the Grove Stables where refugee families were able to collect various supplies on a weekly basis. This eased some of the financial pressure on Towns to support their refugee families but Corsham did report some difficulty in meeting costs as early as November 1915.

It is thought that families stayed until the end of the war.

Extracts taken from Belgian Refugees in Wiltshire by Ivor Slocombe

Belgian Soldiers known to have been in the Hospital.

- Sergt. Jean **Schoutieten**, 8th Chasseurs Infantry, fought in the battles of Hoenjaerde and at the siege of Antwerp.
- Sergt. Charles **Deleroix**, officer of the Carabiniers Cyclistes Tournai, fought in the battles of Hannut, Haelen and Diest
- Soldat Victor **Jacquemart**, 8th Regiment of Artillery (Charleroi), fought in the battles of Liege, Tirlemont, Malines, Boom and Duffel.
- Sergt. Robert **Verhaighe**, premier sergeant, 3rd Chasseurs Infantry, Ecole Regimentaire, Menin, Belgium, fought in the battles of Heppenheim and at Duffel October 5.
- Sergt. Albert **Zoonens**, tout officer, 10th de ligne, fought at Namur
- Soldat Edouard **Tuymans**, 1st Regiment Carabiniers (Brussels), fought at battles Mechelin and Tremeloo



Belgians in Corsham. Herbert Spackman took the above photograph in June 1915. Photo from A Life Revealed by Ernest Hird.

Women's Work for the Troops.



Towards the end of October, a parcel containing 118 knitted belts and 138 pairs of socks was sent as a contribution from the women of Corsham towards the gift from the Queen and women of the Empire to the troops at the front. By command of the Queen a gracious letter of thanks was sent to all who had contributed, these included knitters from Slaughterford, besides some of the Belgian refugees in Corsham. Special belts have been made to suit the needs of the Indian soldiers. The next effort the Corsham women propose to make is to provide as many flannel shirts, socks, mittens, and mufflers as they can for our soldiers and sailors on active service, and any help towards this end, in work, money for materials, or kind, will be gladly welcomed.

Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette Newspaper published on 20th November 1914.

During the past month the women of Corsham have been busily engaged in making garments for the Red Cross Hospital here, and for soldiers on service, as well as for distribution by the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association and by committees for the relief of distress occasioned by the war. During the past week a distribution has been made; 200 articles were sent to the Red Cross Hospital at Corsham, through the commandant, including nightshirts, bed jackets, vests and linen, and more are available in case of need; 43 shirts and seven pairs of socks were sent to Lady Methuen to add to her collection for the use of soldiers now on duty; 24 shirts and 24 pair of socks, with the sum spontaneously collected of £5 10s.

As the war started local Red Cross Working Parties were formed across the whole country. They were structured on a regional basis, were numbered in military fashion and were most often organised by the owners of larger country houses involving ladies from the local area.

We know that knitting and needlework groups were located at:-

- **Hartham Park** (Work Party 1625) organised by Mrs The Honourable Eva Talbot,

- **Middlewick House** (Work Party 1725) organised by Mrs Hedworth-Williamson,
- **Beechfield House** (Work Party 1786) organised by Lady Goldney.

The local Work Parties co-ordinated important support work including the supply of hospital clothing including socks, shirts, blankets and belts for soldiers and might also have been called on to make essential hospital equipment such as bandages, splints, swabs and clothing.



Thanks to excellent Red Cross records we have the details of the women from the Town and surrounding villages that were part of these groups - all of them contributing regularly and freely of their time.

In addition the location of the Work Party also became a Work or Supply Depot where clothing was brought together and despatched as required to Red Cross headquarters, to the network of Red Cross Hospitals or directly to soldiers both at home or abroad.

Red Cross records lists Hartham Park, Middlewick and Monk's Park as local Work Depots.

Neighbourly support.

Support to the Red Cross Hospital in Corsham was not restricted to Corsham itself. All local villages were involved but the contributions of Biddestone and Box in particular stand out. Both had their own Voluntary Aid Detachments comprising local women trained in basic first aid and hospital support skills and these were utilised fully once the Red Cross Hospital was established. The work and support of V.A.D. 40 Biddestone under Commandant Mrs Charlotte Hedworth-Williamson and Box V.A.D. 56 under Mrs Stephen Langton is recognised on the War Hospital Memorial Tablet that hangs in the Corsham Town Hall.

From January 1916 the women of Biddestone and Slaughterford involved themselves in the Needlework and Knitting Work Party that met at Middlewick and above this, from November 1916 through until the end of the war, they organised themselves to undertake most of the washing of soldiers socks that came from the Hospital.

The record cards of 31 women from around Biddestone that supported the Corsham Hospital are listed and one of those of note is Mrs Alice Wait who was by 1916 almost 60 and who in the 1911 census was recorded as being a Laundress. Mrs Wait was both part of the Work Party and then also took on the responsibility of collecting the washing from the Hospital, delivering it around Biddestone and then returning it clean. Her Red Cross Service Card records a personal total of 1560 voluntary hours undertaking these duties.

The Box Voluntary Aid Detachment had 17 nurses that were regular attendees at the Hospital and above this it is clear that the men of Box provided time and effort to the cause working as Hospital or Ambulance Orderlies' - there are 35 recorded names of men who gave 100s of hours of volunteer time.

One of the Box volunteer Orderlies was the Reverend De Vere Awdry who recorded over 1100 volunteer hours in the hospitals in Corsham, Bowood and Chippenham in just over a year after he moved his family to Box in 1917. Reverend Awdry was the father of Wilbert Awdry, better known as the Reverend W Awdry, who wrote the stories of Thomas the Tank Engine.

The link between Box and the Corsham Hospital was further recognised when an additional ward was opened and named the Box Ward. In part this new ward was funded by donations from the people of Box.

Corsham Needs You.

Corsham's response to set up the Hospital was swift and it received the full support of the Town but as the war went on some encouragement was still needed.

The newspaper reported a public meeting in 1916 detailing the sort of work to be done and need for more workers.

Mr. Basil Hankey, County Director (Red Cross Society) presided at a public meeting held in the Methuen School room on Wednesday evening for the purpose of obtaining more workers for the Hospital. He explained that more workers were required throughout the country as well as in Corsham. A large number of hospitals had been opened in Wilts and they were all full, totalling 706 beds.

*Miss Stuart (who recently left Corsham Hospital, where she was Matron, to return to Bowood, whence she came) addressed the meeting. Since she came to Corsham, she said, she was **perfectly astounded at what Corsham had done**. For the ten weeks she was*

here Corsham had raised £9 or £10 per day. Everything had been satisfactory except that they wanted more workers. The labour was enormous.

As regards the women she asked for sewers and women who could wash or scrub. Then there was the kitchen. People were inclined to think that the person actually handling the sick patient was mainly concerned with the recovery, but he would not get well, in spite of all the nursing unless there was good cooking. Then clean and well-aired beds were necessary, and in order to be useful in the wards, one must give a fair amount of time, because it needed time to get skilled. Then there was the sterilising to manage, the washing of bandages, etc., and the washing after meals. As regards the men it was desirable that some of the men's detachment should undertake the washing of patients; they had already done good work. Carvers were urgently needed, and there was carpentry, masonry, etc. Some questions were afterwards asked and workers enrolled.

Patients admitted to the Corsham Red Cross Hospital

It is a source of frustration to researchers everywhere that there aren't full listings of patients received into Red Cross Hospitals during WW1 but the reality is that WW1 Service Records were lost in bombing raids in WW2 and that WW1 Hospital records were for the most part destroyed after the war.

The Scarlet Finders website <http://www.scarletfinders.co.uk/> provides a very good summary of what is and isn't available and why finding any records is so difficult.

For Corsham we know that at the end of the war the summation was that 875 soldiers had been treated and spent time recuperating in the pleasant surroundings of the Red Cross Hospital. Reports suggest that patients seemed to enjoy being in Corsham and Corsham enjoyed having them here.

We do however know the names of some patients that spent time in Corsham. At the start of the war the local newspaper - the Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette - reported weekly the names and regiments and sometimes the injuries of soldiers being admitted to the hospital. While helpful to researchers now this practice was soon stopped so it is an incomplete record. Above this there was clearly a practice of Nurses keeping diaries or autograph books where they would ask favourite patients to sign their names or leave a note. We have found 4 autograph books with details of Corsham patients. They belong to:-

Miss Kathleen Crisp

Nurse Elsie Cuss from Malmesbury

Nurse Hilda Vine

And Miss Winifred Head

Each one only covers a brief period when they were involved at Corsham Hospital but they each add to the story and to the list of names. In total we have the names

of 180 soldiers who were treated in Corsham. The list shows that Corsham did not receive complicated or serious hospital cases - it was mainly a place to recover after previous trauma and before transiting back into full service. Patients were most usually of the rank of Private, were in English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish Regiments and had served in all theatres of the war.

ARRIVAL OF WOUNDED SOLDIERS

(from the Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette October 1914)

Some little stir was occasioned in the town on Monday evening, when a number of wounded soldiers arrived at the Town Hall, the headquarters of the V.A.D. The local branch of the Red Cross Society had everything in readiness for the reception of the patients. Nineteen arrived from Bristol by the 6 o'clock train, and were met by members of the local committee in motor cars and conveyed to the Town Hall, where a large crowd had assembled. Cheers were given as they entered the hall. A great many were suffering from pleurisy and bronchitis, and there were a few cases of wounded (one from Mons and another from Aisne). Drs. Wood and Crisp (Corsham), Dr. Tayler (Lacock) and Dr Nixon (Chippenham) are daily in attendance, and the nurses of the Red Cross detachment, with the Hon. Christian Methuen (commandant), Lady Goldney, and Mrs. Hedworth Williamson are also lending valuable aid, day and night. The services of the local staff of stretcher-bearers, hospital orderlies (superintended by Mr. P.J. Gane) and Boy Scouts are also much appreciated.

THE HOSPITAL: MORE WOUNDED

On Monday evening the Matron received nine more wounded soldiers into her care. The following is a list of names and regiments:- Sergeant Pedrick. 2nd D.C.L.I. (wounded in shoulder); Private W.C. Williams, 1st Devons (gun-shot wound in arm); Rifleman V. Underwood, 1st Monmouths (T.), (arm wound); Gunner R.J. Reynolds, Royal Field Artillery (wounded finger); Lance-Corporal R. Blenkinsop, 2nd Northumberland (wounded in leg); Private W. Constable, 2nd East Surreys (fractured arm); Private J.G. Cowley, Warwick Yeomanry (horse kick); Private P. Parkes, Connaught Rangers (fractured hand); Lance-Corporal C. Matson, 1st Monmouths (gunshot wound). Concerts were given frequently in the evening by kind friends, those assisting on Tuesday being the Misses Kinneir, Rogers, Bishop, Baycliffe, Sergeant Hawthorne and Mr. Herbert Spackman. Mr. and Mrs. Gladstone, of Bowden Hill, kindly invited the soldiers to their house on Tuesday afternoon, and about 24 of them were conveyed in two brakes to their destination where they spent a most enjoyable time, being entertained to tea, after which Aunt Sally, bowls, etc., were indulged in. Before leaving hearty cheers were given to the kind host and hostess.

Extending the Hospital.

When the Hospital opened in October 1914 the Town Hall premises offered 30 beds then increased up to 36 but as the need outgrew the Town Hall building, additional premises were obtained for hospital use.

This newspaper cutting is from July 1916

*To meet the repeated needs for the reception of more patients the number of beds was increased to fifty by taking the premises of the **Liberal Club in Church Lane** and a **shop at the corner** was acquired and converted into headquarters. Now that the British Army is on the offensive the need for still further extension has become imperative and Lady Goldney has been fortunate in obtaining the **old Bank** premises two doors removed from the central hospital, and the original Liberal Club premises on the other side of the High Street. The acquisition of these premises has necessitated a re-arrangement which will tend to facilitate administration and increase the number of beds from fifty to seventy. The headquarters have been moved to **Bank House**, and the old quarters utilised as wards, while the political club premises in High Street will provide day rooms for the men.*

We also know that:-

*the beautiful grounds and **The Priory** were rented off Field Marshal Lord Methuen when the War Office desired an additional 60 emergency beds*

Elsewhere in the Town

***Butts Gymnasium** off of the High Street became a Soldiers Club*

and

*The **Corsham Conservative Club** gave the like loan of their premises in Pickwick Road for a Red Cross work room;*

The hospital was constantly reported upon by the War Office authorities as being one of the very best equipped and managed in the Southern Command and Corsham with '**its beautiful and healthy environs**', was found most beneficial to the patients sent there.

While it was clearly about the hospital there was also advantage to the Town

Apart from the pride of the inhabitants at the establishment of such a large hospital in their midst, it is understood that financial benefits accrued to the town and trade therefrom.

Gift of a Motor Ambulance - a splendid specimen of utility

On July 11th 1917 the local newspaper reported the generous gift of a new Motor Ambulance

On Saturday afternoon, Lieutenant-Colonel Spencely, of Ashley House, Box, presented to Lady Goldney, Commandant of the Corsham Red Cross Hospital, an 18.25 horse-power

Wolseley motor ambulance for service by the 3rd Wilts Men's Voluntary Aid Detachment attached to the Corsham Hospital.

Colonel Spencely, in presenting the Ambulance, said: On behalf of my wife and myself I formally present this motor ambulance to Lady Goldney and dedicate it to the 3rd Wilts Voluntary Aid Detachment for the transport and comfort of wounded soldiers, and other Red Cross and First Aid work.

The ambulance, which was a splendid specimen of utility, convertible, to take four stretchers or eight sitting cases, was painted in green and white, and bore the emblem of the British Red Cross Society and St John Ambulance Association, and the inscription, "Presented to the 3rd Wilts V.A.D. 14th July, 1917." It was inspected by Lady Goldney, who thanked Colonel Spencely and his wife for their kind thought and useful gift, and assured him that it would be most appreciated by all those interested in the welfare of the wounded soldiers, and prove a valuable addition to the Men's Detachment to carry out the good work for which it was intended.

Hearty cheers were given to the Colonel and his wife at the close, and the ambulance was made good use of shortly afterwards, five wounded soldiers arriving by the four o'clock train.



B3164. Presentation of a Motor Ambulance to the 3rd Voluntary Aid Detachment Corsham.

Electrotherapy Treatment in Corsham Hospital



Little was known about this photo taken in Corsham in 1918 save for the notation on the back which confirmed a date and place of 'July 1918 Church Street Hospital'.

During WW1 the practice of electrotherapy and electrical massage was most likely experimental but clearly it would have been for the specialist treatment of injuries and to restore muscle strength. While this photo was taken in 1918 the Corsham Hospital benefited from the appointment of trained Massage staff during the entire war. Indeed the duties of the first appointee, Beatrice Houlson, in October 1914 were listed as Swedish and Electrical Massage. By virtue of a family member visit to Corsham Town Hall, the location of the Red Cross Hospital during WW1, we now know more about the soldier being treated and the treatment itself.

The soldier in the foreground of the photo is Sergeant William Pottinger of the 2/4th Royal Berkshire Regiment who was transferred to Corsham for convalescence and treatment after reconstructive surgery to his arm to repair a serious shrapnel injury. Although his arm had been saved by the surgery it was initially assessed that 'it will never work' and that 'we might as well take it off'. Fortunately for Sergeant Pottinger the Massage Sister appointed to Corsham at the time insisted on the course of treatment and following 'days, weeks and months' of treatment and an accident, when the electrical leads slipped into the water bucket carrying the electrical charge, the use of his arm was gradually restored. Although unable to return to active service he was sufficiently recovered to become a postman after the war and to live a long life to the age of 96. Testimony to the treatment and to the determination of the staff treating him.

From research of Red Cross records the likelihood is that the lady providing the treatment in the photograph (which was staged on Sergeant Pottinger's last day in Corsham), is Massage Sister Sybil Page from Kendal. It seems that the Red Cross ensured that a trained masseuse was on the staff at the hospital for the duration of the war. Nurses were appointed and remained resident for the period of their tour. It was fortunate for Sergeant Pottinger that his stay co-incided with that of a senior Massage Sister.

The extended part of the story is in the exploits of Sergeant Pottinger during the time that he was receiving treatment in Corsham. As a Sergeant he clearly brought order to the 'sometimes exuberant patients' providing valuable assistance to the Matron, he was allowed to accompany Lady Goldney on shopping trips, enjoyed walks and evening tea with an acquaintance living in the Town, played whist with a



local family and was dared to buy 'frilly underwear' from the local store for a young lady - a dare duly accepted and discharged.

Thankyou to David Pottinger for the information about his grandfather which he has incorporated into a book about those exploits and more.

At the end of the war

Peace was declared on Monday November 11th 1918

In his diary for the day Herbert Spackman recorded:-

The news that the terms of the Armistice had been accepted by Germany came through about 11 o'clock and immediately the news spread through the Town; bunting was put about the houses, bells were set ringing and the town soon got full: and at 1.30 there was a thanksgiving service in the church which was crowded; the Vicar gave a short sermon and the Hymns "Now thank we all our God" and "All people that on earth do dwell" were sung with heartiness. At 2.30 I was asked to photograph the hospital staff and soldiers



Corsham Hospital. Peace Day 11TH November 1918. Photo courtesy of Corsham Postcards.

The Hospital Closes

The Hospital finally closed on August 30th 1919 - the hospital had been allowed to stay open after the official end of the war to treat returning soldiers - and a final photograph was taken to record the event.



Closing Day of the Hospital . August 30th 1919. Photo courtesy of Corsham Postcards.

Almost immediately action to restore the Town Hall to its previous role was started as the Hospital was dismantled.

On the 26th September 1919 there was a sale of hospital materials with local people keen to purchase usable items. It was reported that 'a large crowd turned up and good prices were realised'.

The extent of the dismantling and of the sale is evident in that the Parish Council themselves bought some of the fixtures and fittings, including washbasins and a bath!

LORD METHUEN UNVEILS A MARBLE TABLET

The marble tablet in the Town Hall which remains as a tribute for those staff who served at the Corsham Red Cross Hospital was presented to Lady Goldney at a service in the Hall on the 26th October 1920. 6 years to the day when the hospital opened.

There had been earlier discussion about a presentation to Lady Goldney herself but she was unwilling to receive anything unless her staff were part of and allowed to share in the recognition. It was Lady Goldney herself who suggested that a marble tablet recording the use of the Methuen Hall as a Red Cross Hospital, with the names of the detachments mentioned thereon, would be appropriate and acceptable.

The tablet marks the period from the 26th October 1914 until the 30th August 1919 and records the names of Doctors, V.A.D. commandants, quartermasters,

chaplains, and other officers together with 28 V.A.D. nurses from Corsham, 26 V.A.D. nurses from Biddestone, 17 V.A.D. nurses from Box and the senior officers from the Corsham and Box sections of the men's Voluntary Aid Ambulance Detachments.

An Official Acknowledgement was also presented to Corsham Parish Council in the form of a framed certificate from the Army Council which was to be hung in the building as a record.

It no longer exists but it read as follows: -

'During the Great War of 1914-1919 this building was established and maintained as a hospital for British sick and wounded. The Army Council, in the name of the nation, thank those who have rendered to it this valuable and patriotic assistance in the hour of its emergency, and they desire also to express their deep appreciation of the whole-hearted attention which the staff of the hospital gave to the patients who were under their care. The war has once again called upon the devotion and self-sacrifice of British men and women, and the nation will remember with pride and gratitude their willing and inestimable service'

The Final Word

The final word should be from Lady Goldney who was Assistant Commandant of the Hospital from October 1914 until June 1915 and then Commandant through until the hospital closed on 30th August 1919. The King awarded her with an O.B.E. for her patriotic efforts but she, above all others recognised, the efforts of all of her staff and those of the Town.

In accepting the presentation of the marble tablet Lady Goldney said that:-

"she could never speak too highly of her staff and the workers and could never thank them enough for what they did. She did not think Corsham quite realised what they had done for the hospital. There had never been a thing that she asked for that it was not given her. Money, and houses, in fact, they almost suspected every time she looked at a house that was she was going to take it. Everything she wanted for the soldiers they gave her, even down to onions. There were few places in the world where the people had supported the hospital as Corsham did, and she very much appreciated it"

Above and Beyond

The Story of Corsham's WW1 Hospital