

SECRETARY: Mrs. C. Martindale
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BUSH HALL 1940-1945

by Muriel Laurence

Bush Hall is a charming old Manor House situated on the banks of the River Lea at Mill green.

The earliest known date of buildings being there is 1673, a reference to a house there is 1704. Over the years, additions have been built on at different periods, and there may have been a Moat surrounding it, there is certainly a Ha-Ha.

When Bush Hall was an Auxiliary Hospital during the 1939-1945 Second World War, there was a farm and farm buildings (which were let to a local farmer).

There were very extensive gardens and water meadows. A previous tenant of Bush Hall had been a very keen gardener, and there were many unusual plants. Along the river banks were herbaceous borders, and a walled garden with nectarines and peaches, also camellias and azaleas - wide lawns and a tennis court. There were also some unusual trees. I remember a Tulip Tree. Bridges over the river lead to vegetable gardens. Ducks and hens were also kept.

To get to Bush Hall we walked down the Hertford Road which was quite narrow then, or across the fields called The Ryde - from Bull Stag Green crossing over 3 stiles to get to Bush Hall Lodge in Mount Pleasant Lane. A long drive led you to the front door of the house. In the spring the grass verges on either side of the

drive were covered in daffodils. The gardener, Mr. Castle and the land girls kept the grounds in immaculate condition supplying all the fruit and vegetables for the hospital, as well as lovely gardens to walk in.

The house was delightful, full of odd corners from cellars to attics. The living rooms were lofty and spacious, as were the bedrooms. When it was turned into a hospital every effort was made to make it as comfortable as possible for the patients, and the old house really lent itself to this. On the ground floor one large drawing room was turned into a ward. Also on the ground floor was the patients' cloakroom, a very large kitchen with an Aga stove, scullery and office for the Quartermaster. Then down a long corridor the Sisters' sitting room, staff sitting room, a very large pantry - partly underground, which went quite deep - part of which at one time had been a wine cellar.

The dining room and patients' sitting room were two lovely rooms. The fireplaces and doors were covered as they were said to be valuable. There were coal fires in winter - the whole house was centrally heated from a coke boiler.

All bedrooms on the first floor were turned into wards, bathrooms and toilets, and a surgery.

There was a flat on the top floor for two members of staff (other staff lived in a flat over the stable block).

The attics were turned into a linen room.

In 1938 Miss Elizabeth Bennett was asked by The Lady Alice Salisbury to re-start the Red Cross Detachment Herts. 6, which had operated during the First World War, when it seemed that once again there was going to be another war with Germany.

We started nursing classes - given by trained staff - which were held in the Old Palace. As soon as we passed our examinations we were sent to St. Albans City Hospital and the Royal Victoria Hospital at Welwyn for further training. There were about 100 members of the Red Cross, and when the war came they manned Mobile Units, First Aid Posts, and for a time a Maternity Unit which the Lady Alice Salisbury had set up at Northwold, a house in Fore Street. The Lady Alice Salisbury was most anxious that Hatfield House should be a Red Cross Hospital, but the Military insisted that they should have it instead, so she arranged that Bush Hall be made available.

War was declared in September 1939, and by 1940 members of Herts 6 were scrubbing and cleaning the house from top to bottom, before any beds or equipment could be brought in - we all beavered away even down to making heavy curtains to fit the windows for the black-out.

The Hospital was ready by 30 December 1940 and officially opened 1 January 1941.

The Staff:

Miss Bennett - Commandant
Miss Hampton - Sister-in-Charge
Mrs. Burville Holmes - Sister-in-Charge Relief Sisters
Dr. Jamieson - Medical Officer
Miss Jansen - Secretary
Miss Hanney - Assistant Secretary

Nursing Staff - Full Time

Pamela Becket
Dorothy Phillips
Mrs. Barnett
Jacqueline Taylor
Ruth Greenwood
Beryl Pankhurst
Muriel Laurence
Jean Shackleton
Rosemary Oliver
Other members of Herts 6 worked on a part time basis:

Mrs. Bennett - Quartermaster
Alison Innes - Assistant Q.M.
Miss Sear - Cook
Mrs. Goodrich - Assistant Cook
Ivy Castle - Kitchen Maid
Mrs. Wells - Kitchen Assistant
Mrs. Ormesby-Gore - Kitchen Assistant
Doris Castle - Housemaid
Mr. Castle - Gardener
Marjorie Perks - Land Girl
Mary Boswell - Land Girl
Noella Hulliet - FANY Driver
Mrs. Ridgeway - Laundry

Nurses Uniform:

1 Great Coat (Navy)
1 Costume - Blouse (Navy)
1 Cap - Badge
1 Alpaca Walking Out Dress (Grey)
3 Cotton Dresses (Light Blue)
6 Aprons
3 Pairs Cuffs
6 Caps
3 Pairs Lisle Stockings
2 Pairs Nurses Shoes
1 Tin Hat
1 Gas Mask

We were given £10 for our initial uniform - and an allowance of £5 a year for wear and tear. I think we were paid £2 a week to begin with and by 1945 it had risen to £2.6.0d.

Day duty began at 8.00 a.m. - a split duty - off in the afternoon from 1.00 p.m. - 5.00 p.m. Then until 8.00 p.m., or 8.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. with breaks for meals.

Night Duty 8.00 p.m. - 8.00 a.m.
Day Duty 1 Day off a Month
Night Duty 4 Nights off at the end of 3 months.

1 Month Holiday - Annual Leave.

The first patients to arrive were suffering from hernias and varicose veins. Some very undernourished because of the depression in the 1930's. Hernia patients in those days were kept in bed for 21 days.

On arrival every patient was issued with a Blue-Bag, Blue coloured flannel suit - white shirts - turkey red tie - underwear - pyjamas.

Soon we were admitting men coming back from Dunkirk. Most were in shock - apart from their wounds, they would lie on their beds for hours without speaking, or walk by themselves in the garden.

All the time I was at Bush Hall men who had been in battle rarely wanted to talk about it. Some had psychiatric treatment, but psychiatry was very much in its infancy and most men who went for treatment resented it. They did not want to talk of the horror of war.

Miss Hampton, Sister-in-Charge was the best nursing teacher I ever had - she gave 100% plus - she was very strict but very fair.

This was a time before antibiotics. Every dressing had to be done by Non-Touch Technique. Hands and arms had to be scrubbed up to the elbows before touching a dressing with sterilised instruments.

Patients arrived from Hatfield House, Woolwich (Royal Herbert Hospital), Milbank (Royal Hospital).

Bush Hall was always filled to capacity.

There was a lot of fighting in North Africa - and we had a lot of men who had been fighting a long time, these were mainly from the 51st Highland Regiment. They were lovely men and all so young, but worn down by tropical diseases - Malaria, Sand-Fly Fever, Temperature Unknown Origin.

Specialists with knowledge of Tropical Medicine came to see these men. There was a Tropical Disease Unit at White Lodge Hospital, Newmarket, and some of the men were sent there for check-ups. They were all a yellowish colour, caused by taking Mepacrine - a substitute for Quinine.

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour, America came into the war and after the fighting ceased in North Africa and men were landed in Italy, the wounded were sent back to this country, and very often their wounds took a long time to heal.

We also started getting patients from the Far East. Men who had fought their way down from Burma to Arakan. They were all ill with Tropical Diseases. Amoebic Dysentery - Malaria - Kala Azar - Temperature Unknown Origin. These diseases can recur in later life. This is where the gardens of Bush Hall played a big part. In spring and summer, these men would lie out all day on day beds, and with the help of garden produce, and wonderful meals served up by the cook, and being so well taken care of they gradually began to improve.

Throughout the war Mrs. Bennett, the Quartermaster, and Miss Sear produced the most marvellous meals. I do not know how they did it. Miss Sear liked to feed her boys well and properly - they all became very fond of Kate.

Miss Bennett, Commandant was an excellent administrator - she was the youngest Commandant in the country to run a hospital. Most of her staff stayed with her for the duration of the war, which I think speaks for itself.

Army Chaplains and local clergy visited regularly as did the Lady Alice Salisbury. Services were held in the hospital if patients were well enough to walk. Lord and Lady Salisbury gave permission for them to go through the Park at the Hertford Road Lodge, to go to the Chapel in Hatfield House. This permission was also given to the staff. Most of the staff off duty went to evensong.

Sometimes there were lectures for some of the men who had been called up from Universities or Technical Colleges who were anxious to keep up with their studies in order to return to their colleagues when the war was over.

At Christmas people came to entertain with concerts and carols. The patients and staff put on their own concert on Boxing Day. Always a Christmas tree. Holly and evergreens were sent from Hatfield House Park. Everyone did their best and I remember a lot of laughter.

I remember how young we all were, both patients and staff, most in their late teens or early twenties. There was very little transport so we all learned to ride bikes. Jack Olding provided a shooting brake, which he also

maintained, which was driven by Miss Hulliet, F.A.N.Y. This was used for transporting patients.

War is a terrible thing, and in this war civilians as well as the armed forces came under enemy fire from air raid bombing. The fear when we heard the banshee wailing of the sirens, the noise of explosions, and the smell of cordite is something you never forget.

Hatfield had its share of bombing and quite a lot of people were killed. A VI bomb exploded on St. Audrey's School one morning at 5.00 a.m. so no children were hurt, but some people living opposite the school were killed, the force of the blast blew in the heavy front door of Bush Hall and smashed a lot of windows.

In spite of the war all was not gloom and doom, we managed to get to London to see the latest plays and films.

Noella Hulliet was a member of the Overseas Club, which was in St. James Palace. Sometimes we would go with her to the tea or thé dances which were held there, and we would meet the boys from New Zealand, Australia and Canada. Hostesses were there to introduce us and to see that we behaved in a proper manner. Youngsters today would roar with laughter at our stately dance. We were given addresses to write to Prisoners of War who were so far away from home if they were in Prisoner of War Camps in Germany. I wrote to a New Zealand Pilot until he was repatriated to New Zealand.

Bush Hall staff adopted a mine-sweeper. We all madly knitted jerseys, socks and scarves. We got back notes and letters from the crew.

Towards the end of the war we

started getting patients from East Grinstead Hospital where Archibald McIndoe was pioneering plastic surgery. These were RAF pilots with badly burned faces and hands. These young boys needed a lot of care and attention, as they had lost a lot of confidence.

When the Allied Forces landed in Normandy we watched the Flying Fortress B17s going over in the day time and the Lancaster bombers going over at night. One day we watched as wave after wave of Dakota aircraft towing gliders went over. We heard afterwards they were going to Arnhem.

The war ceased in 1945, 6 years of war.

Gradually Bush Hall was dismantled as a hospital, and once again became a family residence, then it became a preparatory school, and now it is a hotel. A lot of the garden has gone, and a main road has been built across the fields beyond the Ha-Ha.

A housing estate has been built across the Ryde.

The Lady Alice Salisbury was the wife of James, 4th Marquis of Salisbury.

Heritage Open Days 2005

Is being organised by
The Welwyn Garden City
Society
on
September 8th - 11th
There will be an
Information Desk
In the
Howard Centre

Letters

ADVANCE NOTICE

Following the enormous success of Alan Bryettes' talk "The Great Escape" at the Central Resources Library in February I am pleased to announce that we have been able to book Alan to give his follow up talk "The Long March" on 22nd September. In this he tells of his gruelling experiences at the end of World War 2 when he, and hundreds of other prisoners, were marched across Germany in atrocious conditions.

Alan is a compelling speaker and I'm sure that your members would be interested to hear him.

The talk is to take place at 7.00pm on Thursday 22nd September 2005 at the Central Resources Library, New Barnfield. Tickets are £2.50 each (no concessions) and include a glass of wine or fruit juice.

Angela Samways

WILLEDEN HOUSE

When I came to work in Hatfield in 1845 my home was in the London Borough of Willesden and I was intrigued to find a house bearing that name at the foot of Fore Street. Many years later a study of Kelly's Directories in our library showed that in the thirties there had been a 'Willessden House Cleaning Company' offering 'Valet Services' at No. 15 and which had moved across the road to No. 38 by 1940 as a 'Dyers and Cleaners' company. By 1954 the business had become 'Group Cleaners Ltd.' and had gone by 1958. Was there a connection between the North West London Borough and this company?

Jim Parker

WHITEGATES

I am, and have been for many years, the longest living resident of Old Roe Green. Tom and I came in 1937 after our wedding in County Durham. He already lodged in Endymion Road and taught in St. Audreys school. We immediately went house hunting. He would not pay rent and there were only three houses for sale in Hatfield at that time, including this one, owned and built for a retired teacher. Because of the 1/3rd acre garden, we bought it.

A two bedroom bungalow when we moved in, we began to find faults - every door was in the wrong place so the draughts were cruel. There was a back to back fireplace - the fire in the lounge and the oven in the kitchen. Carrying a pan from kitchen to lounge to boil I dropped it and had water and a suet pudding to clear up off the floor. The wallpaper was of sea and mountains, but was pasted upside down, so that was my first job - papering before we moved in.

The garden was full of vegetables, and a middle path full on both sides with roses. Badly pruned. The blooms all grew at the top of the bushes and the only ones who got a good view of them were our neighbours from an upstairs window.

Tom was by nature and college training, a gardener, so gradually the garden changed and became a show piece. With Tom gone seven years ago, the family managed to keep it in very good order and at present it really is still a show piece. The vegetable garden made into a big lawn, so we now have three lawns for family (including my great grandchildren) to race around.

Our £750 house has been enlarged, altered and filled with beauty - we had to spend to make the changes but it's last valuation was ¼ million. That might drop because the University encroaches with threats on the lovely view from the front windows, which is one of the best in Hatfield. Time will tell.

Mary Padget

AUTUMN MEETINGS

Monday 12 September 7.30

Anne Grimshaw
A Weaver at Waterloo

Thursday 13 October 2.30

Anne Rowe
Lost Gardens of Hertfordshire

Monday 14 November 7.30

Robin Webb
Thatching Materials, methods The industry today

Thursday 8 December 2.30

Our regular open meeting for Christmas

All at Friendship House Wellfield Close

DOVE ANNIVERSARY

On September 25th 1945, sixty years ago, just three days after the Company's 'Victory Party and Thanksgiving', held on the Sports Field, the appropriately named DH 104 Dove made its first flight in the hands of Geoffrey Pike. The twin engined light transport aircraft was a considerable success and 542 were sold worldwide. A small display compiled by History Society members covering the Dove's career will be on view in Hatfield Library window from mid-September 2005.

Your letters, memories, comments are of interest to other members.

Share them in our next Newsletter

We will be pleased to print them.