

**BROOM LEYS - COALVILLE & DISTRICT
VAD AUXILIARY HOSPITAL
DURING THE 1st WORLD WAR**



Interior of Broom Leys VAD hospital

Coalville Times - Friday 12th April 1918

GRIFFYDAM CONCERT

A successful concert was given in the Council Schools on Saturday evening, March 30th, for the sick and wounded at the Broom Leys Hospital. Mr J. A. Goodman, C.C., presided over a good attendance. An excellent programme included contributions by Mrs A. Spencer (Melbourne), Mrs A. O. Loakes, Mrs G. Walker, Mr J. Wright, Mr William Price, Mr A. Waterfield, Misses E. Leech, E. Rowell, A. and L. O. Johnson, O. Stevenson, M. Morley and Mr W. Bird. The accompanists were Miss Leech and Mrs Loakes

SAMUEL T STEWART - FEBRUARY 2025

Broom Leys, was a large house and gardens off Forest Road owned by Whitwick Colliery Company and formerly owned and occupied for some years by the late Mr H. R. Mansfield. M. P. for the Spalding division of Lincolnshire, it was originally built by a Mr. Whetstone. Since November 1914 it had housed Belgian refugees. It began to operate as **Coalville & District VAD Hospital** with 75 beds in January 1917, after War Office permission was given in October 1916 and local fundraising began. First patients arrived 22 January 1917. The Matron was Miss K. S. Crawford.



Broom Leys VAD Hospital building

A "VAD auxiliary hospital" refers to a hospital during World War I that was staffed primarily by volunteers from the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), a civilian organization under the British Red Cross, where they provided nursing care to wounded soldiers, typically in a less intensive setting compared to military hospitals, focusing on convalescence and recovery.

Hospital personnel

Auxiliary hospitals were usually staffed by:

- a commandant, who was in charge of the hospital except for the medical and nursing services
- a quartermaster, who was responsible for the receipt, custody and issue of articles in the provision store
- a matron, who directed the work of the nursing staff
- members of the local Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), who were trained in first aid and home nursing

In many cases local women from the neighbourhood volunteered in the hospitals part-time, although it was often necessary to supplement voluntary work with some paid roles, such as cooks.

Auxiliary hospitals drew on members who were too old or young for work in a military hospital. Many were unable to leave home for six months due to family commitments, but were willing to sign a three-month hospital contract. Auxiliary hospitals also attracted members who found work in a military hospital too strenuous and others who 'preferred to be head cook in a small auxiliary hospital to assistant cook in a large military hospital'.

Local members of the medical profession did a large amount of voluntary work in these hospitals. In 1917 the War Office decided that some payment should be given to doctors rendering these services.

Patients

The patients at these hospitals generally did not have life-threatening injuries and needed to convalesce. The servicemen preferred the auxiliary hospitals to the military hospitals as the discipline was not as strict, conditions were less crowded and the surroundings were more homely.

Transcribed from an article in the Coalville Times - 4th January 1916?

It is a splendid place, and could not have been better had it been specially built for the purpose!

These words of the matron, spoken to a representative of this paper on a visit on Wednesday, aptly applied to Broom Leys, Coalville, which is now rapidly being transformed into a hospital for the reception of wounded soldiers.

As is well known locally, Broom Leys is a fine residence standing in its own beautiful grounds, less than one mile from the town of Coalville, and on the fringe of Charnwood Forest. It is now the property of the Whitwick Colliery Company and was

Soon after the war broke out, and Belgian refugees were flocking to England, the Whitwick Colliery Co. Generously offered the building free of cost to the Belgian refugee committee, and for nearly two years, some 70 Belgians were maintain there by the people of Coalville and District. When the building became vacant again a few months ago, the owners again commendably came forward and offered it to the military authorities for use as a V.A.D. Hospital.

The idea was heartily taken up and at a public meeting in Coalville, a local committee was formed to carry out the equipping of the hospital, with Mr. Water Lindley, J. P., chairman, Mr. R. J. Brown. Hon. Treasurer and Mr. A. L. Bertenshaw, hon. Secretary. These gentlemen are to be heartily

congratulated on the progress made. It is estimated the £1,000 would be required and though this sum has not been reached, the response to the appeal has been very gratifying.

Judging by appearances up to the present, the authorities have been very fortunate in their choice of a matron. When Miss Newton arrived from Bicester only a week ago, the place was in a state of chaos, and our visit revealed a wonderful transformation. Several members of the Coalville Women's V.A.D. have rendered valuable assistance, and under the supervision of the matron the work of getting the hospital ready is making excellent progress.

The large drawing room on the right hand side of the main entrance has been fitted up as a ward for the worst cases, and contains 9 beds. Beside each bed is a locker for each soldier to keep his belongings. It is a cheerful room, with plenty of light, overlooking the lawns. This is the only ward on the ground floor. The room on the opposite side of the entrance hall is to be occupied by the matron, while a small one adjoining will be the assistant matron's room. There is a large dining hall which opens into a conservatory, and the latter is to be converted into a recreation room. A corner of the dining room is being fitted up with facilities for the writing of letters.

As 50 soldiers in all are to be accommodated several of the bedrooms upstairs are set out as small wards, some containing six beds, some less according to the size of the room, while there are one or two single bedrooms for soldiers who may be suffering from shock, and have to be kept quiet. These are all admirably fitted up and have a most comfortable appearance. On a spacious landing which overlooks the park will be raised lounges and deck chairs for the use of the soldiers and there seems to be no detail which has been overlooked by Miss Newton in her arrangements for the success of a hospital. There is to be a billiard room fitted with a full-size table, and a concert room in which a piano is to be installed, and concerts and whist drive will be arranged. Two bathrooms have been fitted up as well as one for the staff, and the arrangements for the latter in every way leave nothing to be desired. The same may be said of the kitchen and culinary departments.

It is interesting to note that this is the third war hospital which has been organised under the supervision of Mrs Newton, so that the Coalville committee have the benefit of the services of a lady with considerable experience. The hospital at Bicester was opened with her as the head, while prior to that she was in France, in charge of a hospital at Dieppe. Her efforts are being well backed up by the Honorary Assistant Matron, Mrs. W. Moss, of the Grove, Swannington, the leader of the women's V.A.D. movement locally, who is unselfishly giving her time to this noble work. There are also in residence two nursing sisters—who, by-the-way, are sisters—and the staff will also include a cook and assistant cook, while the matron is also applying for a laundry maid, by which she hopes to effect a considerable saving. Arrangements have been made with the V.A.D. for two members to take night duty, and three are permanently required for day duty, in regard to which arrangements are not yet quite complete. Dr Hamilton and his assistant will be the medical attendants. The hospital is to be opened on Saturday, the 20th

January inst., and the public on that date to be allowed to make a tour of inspection at a charge of one shilling per person, the proceeds to go to a fund for providing tobacco, cigarettes and games for the patients.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

A soldier who was injured in the field would be treated firstly at a Regimental Aid Post in the trenches by the Battalion Medical Officer and his orderlies and stretcher bearers, then moved to an Advanced Dressing Station close to the front line manned by members of a Field Ambulance, RAMC. If further treatment was needed he would be moved to a Casualty Clearing Station, a tented camp behind the lines and then if required moved to one of the base hospitals usually by train, the seriously wounded were taken back to Britain by Hospital Ship and onto the relevant hospital for further treatment. With the wide range of serious injuries before faced, hospitals began to specialise in certain types of injury in order to provide the best treatment, with soldiers being sent by train to the relevant hospital. This is the reason why the majority of the wounded were sent to hospitals many miles from their homes. Many large houses and hotels were used as Convalescent Hospitals or Class B hospitals, they usually accepted patients from Class A Hospitals once the man had recovered sufficiently.

Those being treated wore a blue uniform with a red tie, known as "Hospital Blues", once a soldier was deemed fit enough to leave convalescence, he would return to one of the Command Depots for the rehabilitative training after which they would be allocated to a battalion, frequently a different battalion or regiment to that in which he had previously served, as his place would have been taken by another man to maintain numbers. If fitness was not fully recovered, a man may be transferred to a non front line unit, such as the Labour Corps or to a training battalion so that he could put his field experience to use in training others or a home service unit which had lower fitness requirements.

Those who did not recover sufficiently to return to active service in any form were issued with a Silver War Badge, to wear on their lapel, this signified that they had completed their war service. The badges were individually numbered and numbers are recorded on the medal cards of those who received them. Silver War Badges were also issued to soldiers who had completed the length of service they had signed up for, mainly regular soldiers who had served before the war and whose period of service expired before the end of the conflict.

