

Lincoln School in the First World War

From the Garton Archive at Lincoln Christ's Hospital School

Occasional Paper No 14

by

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Preamble

The second decade of the twentieth century was a tumultuous one, and it will not be long before the nation will be into an extensive commemoration of events between 1914-1918. Lincoln Christ's Hospital School will certainly be involved in this historic event, hence this early publication of an occasional paper which will no doubt become a point of reference as well as a document which will be revised or supplemented as other information comes to light.

The current School has not ignored the Great War or other conflicts in the last century. The tradition of the two minutes silence on 11th November has been restored, and staff members have done useful research, notably Mick Wall who has worked extensively on the last resting places of former pupils killed or missing in both 1914-1918 and 1939-1945. As we launch this particular occasional paper in April 2012 we are preparing a gallery of photos to be situated permanently opposite the War Memorial outside the Old Hall, itself a tribute to those who give their lives in action. Some of these contemporary photographs will be added to the school website later in 2012

Putting pen to paper on this subject was precipitated by an approach from the Western Front Association, which in turn prompted the decision that Lincoln Christ's Hospital School would participate in the national scheme of Heritage Open Days for the first time by opening its doors to the public on Saturday 8th September 2012.

The National Perspective and the Five Northern General Hospitals

War had been declared on 4th August 1914. The flow of casualties from the various theatres of war soon overwhelmed the existing medical facilities in the United Kingdom, just as it did the recently established bases in France and Flanders. Many civilian hospitals and large buildings were turned over to military use. By 1917 there were five Northern General Hospitals under the Northern Command. These were located in Newcastle (1st), Leeds (2nd), Sheffield (3rd), Lincoln (4th) and Leicester (5th). Lincoln School provided one of these buildings with the fields being requisitioned for additional accommodation in the form of over twenty huts.

In addition to these 'Territorial Force' General Hospitals, which were mobilised in August 1914 and expanded during wartime, there were other different types of hospital including those run by the Red Cross and St John's Ambulance, and auxiliary and private units. Some became specialist units for limbless men, and those requiring cardiac or orthopedic treatment, for example. Convalescent hospitals were formed to keep recovering soldiers under military control.

The main medical functions in a complex evacuation chain that processed the casualties from the front line back to hospitals at home such as the 4th Northern General may be summarised as follows:

1. The Regimental Aid Posts offered light first aid and superficial medical care near the front line, often in reserve trenches. These were staffed by the Battalion Medical Officer, orderlies and stretcher bearers.
2. In the Advanced Dressing Stations, supported by field ambulances, wounds would be dressed and emergency minor operations carried out.
3. The Casualty Clearing Stations, or Clearing Hospitals, were large well-equipped medical facilities usually in tented camps or huts, where serious operations, including amputations, would be performed.
4. Base Hospitals, situated near the Army's principal bases at Boulogne, Rouen, Le Havre and Etaples, were manned by 32 Medical Officers, 3 Chaplains, 73 nurses and 206 troops acting as orderlies. 'Tommies' would stand a reasonable chance of survival in these units. More than half would be evacuated to the UK for further treatment or convalescence.
5. Those needing specialist treatment were returned to 'Blighty', a slang term for Britain, and to a huge network of hospitals for all types of specialist treatment and convalescence. The final destination for a recovered soldier would be a Command Depot (Ripon was the nearest to Lincoln), which would be the last step before the 'return to hell'.

The military hospitals were manned and operated by the Royal Army Medical Corps and Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, supplemented by voluntary workers from a number of organisations including the Voluntary Aid Detachments, Red Cross, St John's Ambulance and YMCA.

Lincoln School and the 4th Northern General Hospital

Developing the Hospital on the Wragby Road site

During the First World War the 4th Northern General Hospital in Lincoln occupied the old buildings and fields of the former Lincoln Grammar School (later re-named Lincoln School and now Lincoln Christ's Hospital School). It held 41 Officer beds and 1126 Other Ranks beds with over 45,000 men being treated there during the war. The Newport Cemetery in Lincoln, situated less than a mile from the School, contains 139 First World War graves.

The Editorial in the October 1914 edition of *The Lincolnian* reported that Lincoln School (LS) was in a unique position among the schools of England in having its buildings used as a base hospital by the RAMC during the War. In implying that the School had a choice in the matter (they did not of course), the Editorial went on to suggest that it was the bounden duty of the School to help the soldiers and sailors 'in our country's peril' with pride and at 'whatever personal inconvenience'.

During this occupation of the School the same Editorial in *The Lincolnian* magazine also reported that those in authority utilised the six weeks of holidays after the outbreak of war to build a temporary school on Sewell Road which was 'excellent in every way'. Headmaster Canon RS Moxon, and the increasing numbers of boarders, lived in 'very comfortable quarters' opposite the School in Coldbath House, which was later demolished by a bomb during the Second World War. Arrangements had also been made for the Lindum Cricket Ground to be used for games, as the Wragby Road grounds were occupied by temporary hospital wards. After the War, the Hospital was apparently reluctant to return the buildings to the School, and it was not until the summer of 1920 that the pupils and staff were able to return to the Wragby Road site.

This may be indicative of the view that the War had not really ended. After all, the armistice on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month was effectively a cease-fire and the Treaty of Versailles between the Allies and Germany was not signed until 28th June 1919 and registered with the League of Nations on 21st October. Also there were many who believed that the end of fighting with Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey was merely a brief moment of respite before the next conflict between the constitutional monarchies and democratic republics which had survived the 1914-1918 battles and a new enemy. We should not underestimate the fear that Bolshevik Russia, newly empowered by the abolition of the monarchy in 1917 and then the slaughter of the Tsar and the rest of the Romanov royal family at Ekaterinburg on 17th July 1918, would soon seek the destruction of monarchies, democracies and capitalism across a weakened Western Europe. Not only did the 4th Northern General Hospital keep its hold on the Wragby Road until 1920, but a number of memorials from the period have inscriptions stating '*The Great War 1914-1919*' or similar.

The Fate of the Buildings

The Wragby Road buildings themselves bear no traces of their military past. However, contemporary photographs provide clues which enable links to be made with the existing school buildings and current use. A sample of pictures is to be displayed near the War Memorial later in 2012 and also on the school website. Some of the more obvious findings:

...the parking space at the front was a different shape reflecting a very different transport age;

...today's Library was a large hospital ward in 1914-1919 war, but previously and subsequently a dormitory for Lincoln School boys. Today there is a reminder of the Great War period here, in the form of a framed 'Thank you' poster sent by the Government to all establishments which housed military hospitals;

... the top corridor rooms were also used as wards, but are now occupied by English, History and Religious Studies classes;

... the Sergeant's Mess was a single space now divided into rooms 712 and 713 used for Religious Studies teachers;

... the operating theatre and perhaps the temporary mortuary were in the area of room 710;

... the last 'hospital hut' was removed at the end of the twentieth century. In the 1950's this was the 'Prep' department. By the 1990's rooms 808, 809 and 810 were being used by Special Needs and Maths. A visiting inspector in the 1990's once remarked that these provided the worst teaching accommodation he had ever seen, which might just have contributed to funding from central government for their replacement for the new Calladine Building extension. The ventilation, through the gaps in the timber cladding, made for some chilly children and unproductive teaching at times. The large water-tank in the corner of room 808 was another unusual feature. For a time one room of this wooden building was used by the legendary Fred Green for his Lincoln United fund-raising newspaper store, another feature which would probably not have survived our current era's health and safety legislation. The site today is the southern end of the tennis courts and the groundsman's nursery.

One element of the 1914-1919 period was the extensive use of the school field. As mentioned above there were wooden huts used as hospital wards, about twenty in number, mostly removed in the 1920's. There was also a small wooden chapel later used as the cricket pavilion especially by the Old Christ's Hospital Lincolnians, which finally succumbed to the ravages of time in 2008-2010 when a new pavilion was built as part of the sports development.

Most intriguing of all was the presence of an extensive network of drainage pipes running from the huts southwards across the site towards Wragby Road. No maps, if any were ever made in these turbulent times, survive from 1914-1920, and so subsequent building developments took place with no prior knowledge of where the 'temporary' pipes were. This led to some interesting moments from 1991 when work started on a series of major construction projects at the back of the school. Chris Williams remembers being shown a hole in the 'junior' playground where a potentially lethal combination of services appeared to cross each other with electricity at the bottom, gas in the middle and water closest to the top. A few years later excavations in the bottom corner of the same playground revealed exactly why

heavy rains always flooded a significant area. Two 6-inch pipes of unknown vintage converged into a single 4-inch pipe which was itself partly blocked by tree roots. A drainage survey with camera robots has more recently provided a reliable picture of what lies under the modern school, an application of technology unforeseen a century ago

And as a different type of evidence, there is a story of a ghostly figure of icy form which has been seen or felt on the top corridor near the spiral staircase by normally reliable witnesses. Rumour has it that this is a young woman in a long dress typical of the Great War era. It is said she might be a nurse, or possibly a teacher, who fell down these stairs and died of her injuries, but, as yet, no research has been conducted to confirm or deny these claims.

Lincoln Grammar School and its Old Boys in the Great War

Of course, the buildings merely provide a frame for the people, in this case the staff of the 4th Northern General Hospital and their patients, casualties from the Western Front.

Perhaps with somewhat blinkered eyes, the Editorial of the May 1915 edition of *The Lincolnian* describes 'these terrific days in the history of our world'. It was reported that old friends had of late been turning up 'marvellously unrecognisable in khaki, with healthy glow and alert look, which suggests that war may have its compensations'. Many were described as wearing the stars of commissioned rank. Both these editions of the School magazine have appendices listing Old Lincolnians who were serving their country, and subdivided into Officers, NCOs and Privates. According to the 1914 edition, one active combatant was despatched straight from the Upper Vth form. He must surely have been no older than sixteen. As the magazine reported, 'Certainly the spirit has not been wanting.'

Later wartime editions of *The Lincolnian* reported both the decorations and deaths of former pupils. Captain Charles Hartley FRCVS had been recommended in Field Marshall Sir J French's Despatches in 1916, and during the same year the death was announced of GV Rainforth of the Artist Rifles, who had succumbed to pneumonia while in training in Rouen. Cecil George AB of HMS Hampshire had not been heard of since his ship went down off the Orkneys. *The Lincolnian* reported sorrow that there was little hope for his safety, but that his friends could feel proud that he had accompanied Lord Kitchener to his fate. In the same edition, the revival of the Cadet Corps was welcomed and acclaimed. The July 1918 edition celebrated the fact that the casualty list had lately been light, and first mention was made of a committee to consider the possibility of a War Memorial, and the form that it might take. Obituaries were included for Sergeant Cecil Atkinson RE, Private LB Duckles RGA, Rifleman S Green, 2nd Lieutenant HL Hubble of the 4th Lincolns, 2nd Lieutenant M Orcutt RFC, and 2nd Lieutenant BH Quine of the Black Watch.

There are two fascinating war reminiscences in the 1919 edition of *The Lincolnian*. The two brief extracts below give something of an insight into what it must have been like in active service towards the end of the War.

'I could just see the towers of old Ypres in the far distance peering through the bedraggled forests over the vista of ruined villages, gradually fading as the sun went down. It was eerie to stand that night in the cover of an obliquely-running trench watching the flashes of guns and listening for the shriek overhead as our guns replied.'

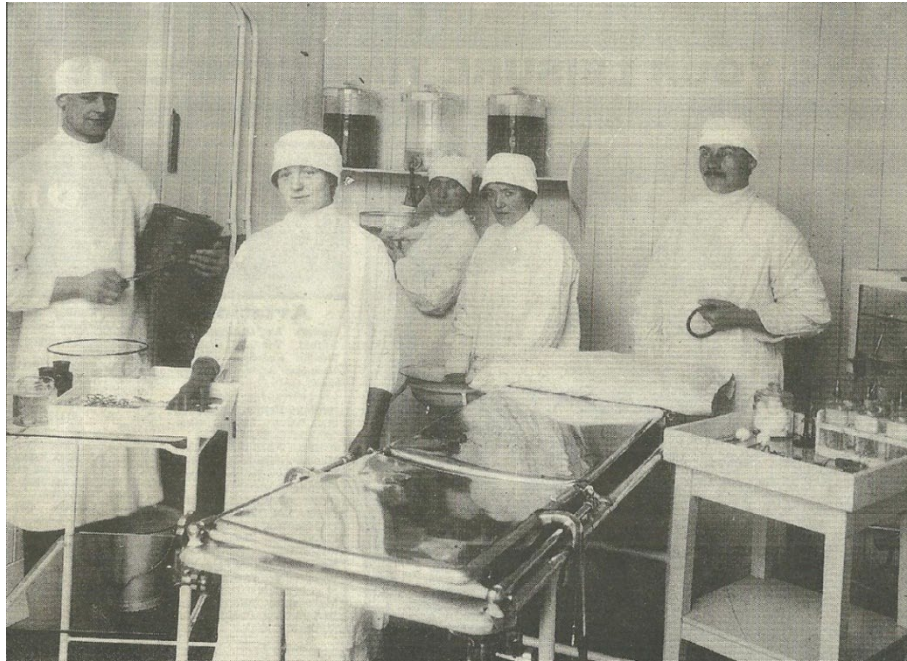
V.J.Dunstan

'Nothing happened until about 9.30 when it was reported that the King George V had sighted the Hun. We ourselves saw the first of the line about 9.35 as she came out of the mist, above her an airship which had passed over us about half an hour before. Just ahead of the first Hun, which was the Seydlitz, I think, was our Light Cruiser HMS Cardiff. The Seydlitz seemed to have her guns trained on us. But we could not be certain because of the mist.'

F.R.Watkins, writing from HMS Colossus, dated Nov. 24th 1918, some two weeks after the war ended. (The authors have taken the liberty of amending the text from 'Leydlitz' to 'Seydlitz'.)

The following photographs provide graphic images of life at the 4th Northern General Hospital at LGS during the Great War. The first picture of one of the wards was taken in what was originally a dormitory in the boarding house at LGS. It now serves as a library at LCHS. The second picture shows the small amputation theatre, and both images speak for themselves.





The undated photograph below is equally evocative. The decorations suggest that it was taken at Christmas time in one of the wards, which was probably situated on the ground floor of the boarding house at LS, used by the School House as a refectory. The gentleman in the second bed on the left is Sergeant Herbert Daniel Morley, aged 35, who was a native of Lincoln, but did not attend LS. The photo was discovered by one of his grandchildren, Mr Ivor Morley, while looking through old papers, and he gave it to his grandson, Joshua Vickers, who was a pupil at LCHS at the time. The photograph, taken by J Herbert Walker of Leicester, is beautifully organised, and could tell many another story.



There is another poignant personal account of the War in an article in the May 1915 edition of *The Lincolnian*, signed by 'R Le F', and entitled '*Life at Antwerp during the War.*' The author wrote that the most visible proof of the war was certainly the many wounded who filled the hospitals. He described the state of the men who came directly from the Front with their rifles, their bullets and their outfits still covered with mud. During the last week of the defence of Antwerp, the hospital where he was situated admitted sixty soldiers in one day, their hands and faces 'burned absolutely by the explosion of the powder magazine of a fort that the Germans bombarded. Instead of skin they had blood coagulated with earth.'

Several Old Lincolnians were awarded medals for their service. For example it was reported in *The Times*, and recorded in the July 1918 edition of *The Lincolnian* that Lieutenant William Harrison Crowder RFA was the Forward Observation officer who stuck heroically to his task during the first rush of the Germans in their Spring offensive. He was reported killed, but later found to be a prisoner. He was awarded the DSO in 1920. The Garton Archive contains a book about his life and wartime career, entitled Family, War and Captivity. His memories of the Great War provide salutary reading as this brief extract shows;

'Nothing went according to plan on this occasion except that we managed to keep alive! When the mist began to clear away I saw figures of men near where our lines were but they were not distinct enough to be sure whether they were our own men or the enemy. I was not in doubt for long for very soon machine gun bullets began to whiz past us and in a short time we heard men moving about in the trench between us and our rearguard.'

He went on to describe their predicament as '*like rats in a trap*'.

In memoriam

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to commemorate those Old Lincolnians who sacrificed their lives during the First World War. In *The Lincolnian* magazine, April 1927, some three pages are devoted to the unveiling of the War Memorial, referred to earlier, which took the form of a mural tablet designed by Mr WG Watkins FRIBA, President of the Old Lincolnians' Society, and executed by Messrs James Powell and Sons of Wigmore Street, London. It consists of a slab of Hopton Wood stone with lines of gold mosaic dividing the four panels of lettering, a border of black, white and gold mosaic and a frame of green Irish marble. The tablet was unveiled on Saturday 26th February 1927 in the presence of Governors, staff, pupils, parents, and relatives of the fallen. Above the names the inscription reads:

'In memory of Old Boys of this School, who sacrificed their lives in The Great War, 1914-18.'

Surmounting the tablet is a gilt cross and wreath in relief.

The tablet (see photograph below) was originally situated on the wall of the cloisters facing Wragby Road and to the left of the main entrance, but has since been mounted on an interior wall to the right of the entrance to the Old Hall. *The*

Lincolnian magazine describes the 'simple but impressive ceremony' in some detail. Mr Watkins introduced Dr TE Page, an eminent classical scholar and Old Lincolnian, who had been invited to perform the unveiling ceremony. Dr Page then stepped up to the Memorial, and uttered the following words:

'I unveil this memorial in reverent and grateful memory of those sons of this School who gave their life that the nation might live.'

He then released the Union Jack in which the tablet had been draped, and addressed the gathering, pointing out that the tablet itself had a silent eloquence which no spoken words could either strengthen or confirm. He told the audience that the tablet was not intended to be merely an ornament and embellishment of the cloisters, but a constant reminder that we must all show the same spirit that they showed. These men, he went on to say, were no paladins of romance, no proud knights. They were simple men who, without fame or glory, endured the squalor and the sickness and the suffering of war, leaving a rich heritage in the perfect memory of their self-sacrifice. The entry in *The Lincolnian* concludes with the following line from one of Horace's Odes:

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori

Perhaps the most well-known modern use of this dictum is in an anti-war poem by Wilfred Owen written during the Great War, and reproduced below:

*Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nine that dropped behind.
Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.
If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest*

*To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est
Pro patria mori.*

(Wilfred Owen, MC was killed in action one week before the end of the War.)



Sources

Notes from Professor Charles Garton's 'Numbered Folder' 125A

Documents stored in the Garton Archive, including a tribute to Lieutenant William Anthony Taylor, and a photograph of Sergeant Herbert Daniel Morley

The Lincolnian magazines cited above

Family, War and Captivity (2006) A tribute to William Harrison Crowder DSO 1894-1979, with a Foreword by RMC Holland

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch (ed) (1939) The Oxford Book of English Verse. Clarendon Press, Oxford

www.scarletfinders.co.uk

www.wartimememoriesproject.com

www.1914-1918.net/hospitals

www.1914-1918.invasionzone.com

Recommended Further reading

Lucas, Mary 'Schools in the neighbourhood', (pp 23-26)

Walker, Andrew 'The Fourth Northern General Hospital', (pp 55-57)

Both of these short chapters are in Andrew Walker (ed) 'Uphill Lincoln II: The North-Eastern Suburbs'. Survey of Lincoln, Lincoln, 2010.

About the Authors

Peter Harrod is Archive Assistant and a Foundation Governor at LCHS. He was a pupil at Lincoln School from 1952-1959 and is a retired teacher and lecturer.

Chris Williams is Honorary Archivist and was a teacher of history and Deputy Headteacher at LCHS from 1986 to 2007 with two three month periods as Headteacher. He now works for the school and a number of organisations on a consultancy basis.

NB Other occasional papers and documents may now be found on the School website under LCHS History/School Archive. The 'Royal Visits' article shows a photograph of the visit of King Georg V and Queen Mary to the 4th Northern General Hospital.

Acknowledgements

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