

Wheatley Military Hospital

Wheatley Military Hospital was situated on the site of Wheatley Park School. The ugly utilitarian huts were part of Wheatley's war-time history originally built for the American 57th Field Hospital.

The hospital was built by Trollopes and Coles, using Irish labour, after the Americans entered the war. Many of Wheatley's womenfolk, especially those who were children at the time, remember the American medical staff and orderlies arriving at Wheatley railway station, followed at depressingly regular intervals by hospital trains carrying the wounded and shell-shocked servicemen.

In later years, after the hospital was handed over to the British Army's 21st Company RAMC, casualties began to be ferried in by helicopter - with flight paths illuminated by car headlights and landing sites marked by nurses waving white sheets and pillowcases.

The hospital, which earned a reputation for treating head injuries, closed in 1961. One man who worked there from 1948 - 1961 was Mr George (Bonnie) Martin of Littleworth. He recalls that the last patient to be brought in by helicopter was Sgt. Fred Dooley, of the royal Engineers, who had been badly injured in a swimming pool accident in Kuwait. The last commanding officer, he remembers, was Col. Coleman.

Mr Martin spent his own war service with the 32nd Field Regiment Royal Artillery, in France, India and the Middle East. He went to the Wheatley Hospital as storesman and, after it closed, became a school caretaker.

Mrs Averil Hassall, who lived in the Manor House during the war, was one of the volunteers at the hospital. She was an arts and crafts therapist. Later, she worked on the same site in her capacity as Head of the Art Department at Wheatley Girls Grammar School, and the Art Department was situated in one of the former army huts. She maintained a lasting friendship with Major Ewell, one of the medical staff, who later became General Medical Officer at Yale University.

Wounded patients often walked round the village, or were pushed around in wheelchairs, and they were very generous to the people of Wheatley. Village children were invited to parties at the hospital at Christmas and at other times, and were given toys, ice-creams and sweets.

One Sunday September 25th 1944, Glenn Miller entertained the patients there with a 98 instrument band from Oxford.