Graylingwell Chapel Memorial

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Introduction

This article explores the role played by Graylingwell Hospital in Chichester during the First World War. It will focus on staff members, both those who served abroad, and those who continued to care for patients at the Hospital as the war progressed. In particular, it seeks to present details about the Graylingwell attendants who lost their lives in service, and who are remembered on the Graylingwell Chapel Memorial Windows.

Discussion

Graylingwell Hospital played an important role in the war effort; having previously been a psychiatric hospital, in May 1915 it began taking care of the Great War’s wounded soldiers, a service it provided until 26 April, 1919. On the subject of its conversion, the Report of the Visiting Committee stated on 23 July 1915 that

“The officers and staff desire to express their cordial appreciation of the way in which, under extraordinary pressure, the work was carried out by Colonel Kidd and the whole of the Staff under him in transferring nearly 800 patients and in subsequently receiving an equally large number of wounded soldiers, thereby eliciting an expression of warm commendation of the Authorities of the War Office.”
The Report notes that 18 of Graylingwell’s attendants left to join active service after the call to mobilise on August 5th, 1914, and a further report from 28 July added that “At the outbreak of War several attendants who were on the reserve joined the colours. Subsequently practically all the male indoor staff enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps and remained at the hospital.” In order to address the staffing shortfall, leave was restricted and those who were already on leave returned to the Hospital directly. In this regard, the Report notes that “All sections of the staff have acquiesced uncomplainingly in the restrictions of leave.” Former psychiatric patients residing at the Hospital were re-located to various asylums throughout the South; for example, in 1915, of the 722 patients at Graylingwell, 57 were moved to Portsmouth Borough Asylum in Milton, 101 to Kent County Asylum, in Chatham and 106 to the Surrey County Asylum, in Netherne, while only 18 patients are listed as remaining on the Graylingwell Estate. Commenting on this influx of patients to other asylums, the Report of the Visiting Committee remarked considerately: “The stress imposed upon the receiving Asylums must have caused considerable extra work and anxiety, and they have thus all willingly shared with us in the onerous work imposed by the authorities in consequence of the War.” Once Graylingwell Hospital had been converted to a military hospital, it received patients from across the Allied forces, such as Don Stuart, a “brilliant young cartoonist,” from The Iodine Chronicle, the journal of the No.1 Canadian Field Ambulance- 1st Canadian Division. On 22 December, 1916, the Chronicle reported that Stuart had “‘gone down the line’ and when last heard from was at Graylingwell Hospital, Chichester.”

Accounts of Graylingwell Hospital featured in The Times newspaper throughout the war. A report from May, 1916 states that “Outdoor games of all kinds and gramophone records would be gratefully received” in the Gift Room of Graylingwell. The request is attributed to Mrs Kidd, the wife of Lieutenant Colonel Harold Andrew Kidd, who was Graylingwell’s Medical Superintendent of almost thirty years. In a news article from 5 March, 1917, Graylingwell nurse Sister J. R. Johnston is given an honourary mention in the War

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Secretary’s Honours List for valuable service. A death notice from The Times in February, 1917 also commemorates Graylingwell’s Dr Isobel Tate. Tate was a Northern Irish doctor specialising in bacteriology, and was a former Inspector of Schools in Manchester. Tate served in Serbia and Malta but returned to Ireland after contracting typhoid. In 1916, after having recovered from the illness, Tate became a radiographer at Graylingwell, but “could not feel satisfied that she was doing enough” and so returned to Malta, where she died on January 28th 1917, of a short illness.

Many members of staff who served at Graylingwell lost their lives in the First World War, and are remembered in various ways. The 1915 Report of the Visiting Committee notes the tragic death of Senior Medical Assistant Dr Arthur Knox Stewart in a road accident just prior to its inauguration as a war hospital. Dr Stewart appears to have been very highly thought of at the Hospital, and the Report mourns the loss of “a kind-hearted doctor, and a true and trusty friend.” The Report also mentions the deaths of two attendants, Lance Corporal Hurst and Sergeant H. Barnett. These men are remembered, alongside others in the Chapel at Graylingwell (whose military service details are outlined below). The chapel features several stained glass windows inscribed with dedications to former members of staff. The stained glass work in the chapel was made by Heaton, Butler & Bayne, London. The window at the Western end of the chapel was dedicated by the Bishop of Lewes, on 28 February, 1919, and cost £235. 17s, which was raised privately. The triptych window above the altar features memorials to several members of Graylingwell staff members, and beautiful religious imagery and quotations - the most striking of which is that of a knight resting with his horse on the far right panel. On it an inscription reads “To the glory of God and in grateful memory of the members of staff of this hospital who died 1914-1918.” The western stained glass panel above the door features the names of a variety of saints, and the words:

“To the glory of God and in honoured memory of the officers, NCOs and men who died at Graylingwell and of the members of staff who fell in action also in grateful record of the fortitude and cheerfulness of all these who occupied the wards in this hospital during the The Great War 1914-1919.”

Several individuals are also commemorated at the Chapel. Dr Arthur Knox Stewart, mentioned above, is remembered there, along with two of his brothers: Walter Ochiltree
Stuart, a lieutenant in The Royal Inniskillen Fusiliers who was killed in action at Pieter’s Hill in South Africa during the Boer War on Feb 23rd, 1900, aged 22, and Captain Charles Erskine Stuart, a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, who died of wounds in France on March 15th, 1917, aged 34. The middle window of the triptych pays tribute to Medical Superintendent Harold Kidd, CBE, “The first Medical Superintendent of this hospital, 1896-1926.”

Also remembered are the names of eight attendants who died in the Great War. Their details are available on Ancestry.com, and are listed below.

Private James Batchelor
Gunner Horace W. Bennett
Sergeant Harry Barnett
Private Charles Bleach
Gunner Richard S. Chase
Private Arthur Hollist
Lance Corporal Francis Hurst
Private Thomas E Pursley

Private James May Batchelor (Service Number: 6580) was born in Portsmouth and enlisted at Chichester. He served in the Scots Guards Regiment, and was awarded the 1914 Star. James was killed in action on 11 November, 1914. His death place is listed as France and Flanders.

Gunner Horace Walter Bennett (Service Number: 243933) was born in Brighton, Sussex and enlisted in Chichester. He served in the Royal Horse Artillery and Royal Field Artillery. Horace fought on the Western Front, and died of his wounds on 18 January, 1918.

Sergeant Harry Barnett (Service Number: 5065) was born in Stokenchurch, Oxfordshire, and enlisted in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. He served with the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, 2nd Battalion. Harry was killed in action on 17 February, 1915 in Festubert, France.

Private Charles Bleach (Service Number: G/9590) was born in Cowfold, Sussex in
1882 to parents James and Jane Bleach. He enlisted in Chichester and fought in the Royal Sussex Regiment, 9th Battalion. Charles died of his wounds on 5 February, 1917, and is buried at Étaples Military Cemetery, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France. Gunner Richard Samuel Chase (Service Number: 22237) was born in East Ashling, Sussex and enlisted in Gosport, Hampshire. He served in the Royal Garrison Artillery. Richard died in No. 10 Casualty Clearing Station, in France/Flanders, on 27 July, 1915. Private Arthur Hollist (Service Number: G/19275) was born to mother Ellen Hollist in Mundham, Sussex in 1882, and lived on Whyke Lane in Chichester. He also enlisted in Chichester, and served in the Queen’s Own (Royal West Kent) Regiment. Arthur was killed in action on 7 June, 1917 on the Western Front, and is remembered on the Menin Gate in Ypres, West Flanders, Belgium. Lance Corporal Francis Hurst (Service Number: L/8030) was born in Chichester and served with the Royal Sussex Regiment, 2nd Battalion. Francis was killed in action on 30 October, 1914 and is remembered on the Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium. Private Thomas Edward Pursley (Service Number: 1028) was born in Midhurst, Sussex and enlisted in Chichester. He fought with the Northumberland Fusiliers, 8th Battalion. Thomas was killed in action on 14 June, 1917, and is remembered on the Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium.

Conclusions

In an article from 2013, Alun Joseph, Robin Kearns and Graham Moon argue that today’s Graylingwell Estate “exhibits elements of selective remembrance alongside strategic forgetting,” suggesting that Graylingwell’s past as an asylum and hospital has been obscured. Recent research endeavours, however, such as this research, as well as the Graylingwell Heritage Project, and Katherine Slay’s Graylingwell War Hospital, 1915-1919, endeavour to bring the Hospital’s military past to new audiences. The Chapel’s Memorial window is also a moving tribute to both staff and patients at Graylingwell who served and gave their lives in the Great War.

References

1911-1916. Annual Report West Susses County Asylum (WSCA – Graylingwell)

HCGR 2/1/4. West Sussex Record Office.


