

MORE REFUGEES AND WAR HOSPITALS

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Numbers 51, 71 and 156 High Street Old Woking were just three of the many properties in the Woking area to house Belgium Refugees during the early part of the First World War

With last month's bombs in Brussels, my thoughts turned once more to the story I told of the Belgium Refugees who were helped a hundred years ago by the people of Pyrford. I hope I did not give the impression then that Pyrford was the only village that showed compassion at that time, because the truth is that within a couple of weeks of the country being invaded in 1914 over 100,000 offers of accommodation throughout the country had been received, and in Woking at least a dozen more houses (on top of the ones in Pyrford and West Byfleet mentioned before in this column) were provided as a refuge.

They were spread throughout the district, ranging from the rooms above the St James' Tea Rooms in Chobham Road to a house called Wychehazel in Fern Hill Park, with houses in Westfield, Old Woking, St Johns and Maybury also taking families in.

There was another large house in West Byfleet that was supported by the villagers of Byfleet, called Blytheswood (on the corner of Oakcroft Road and Old Woking Road – opposite the junction with Sheerwater Road). It was leant by Mr John H Robinson, who provided the property rent-free for at least six months from October 1914 – although it couldn't have been used for

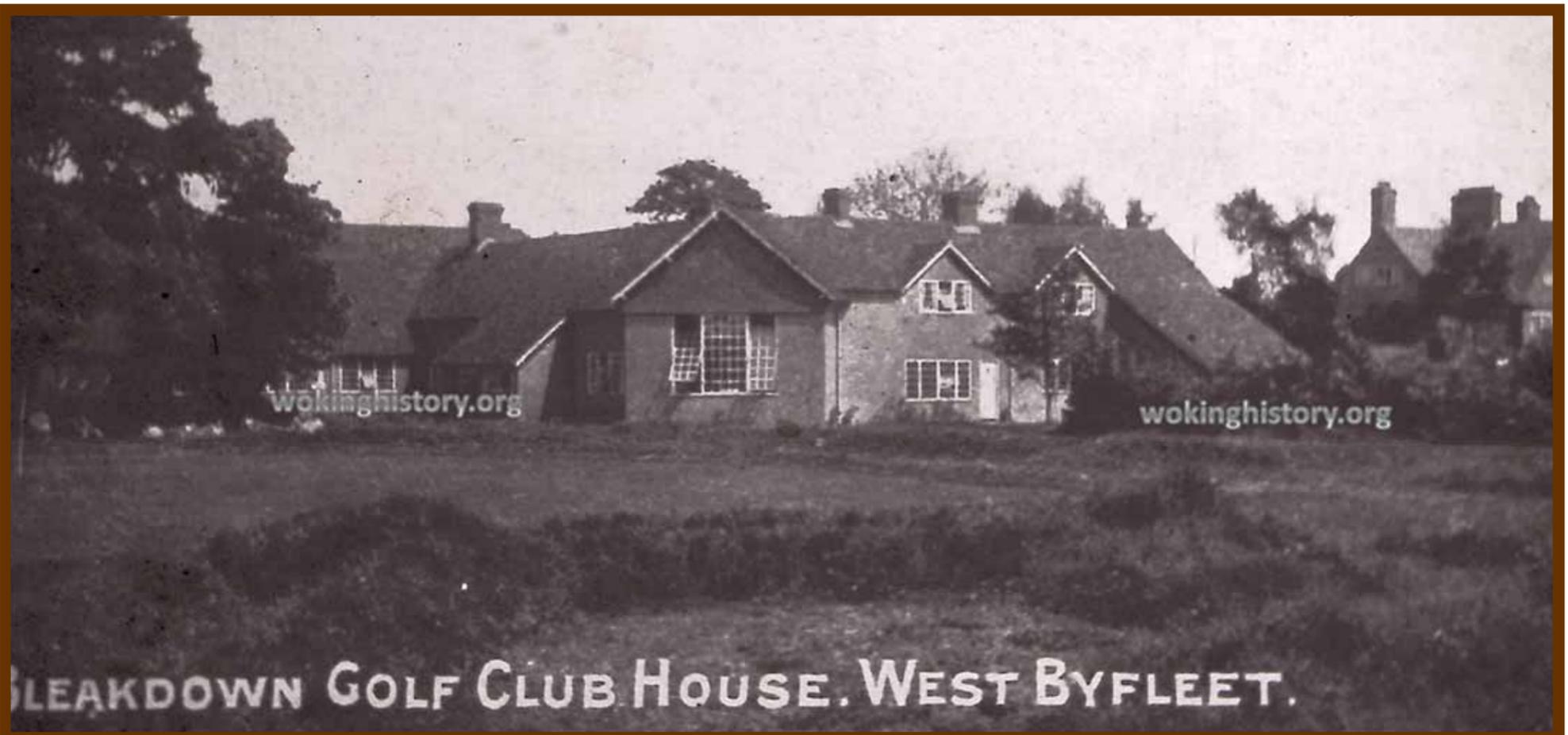
much more than that as by November 1915 the property had been turned into an Auxiliary Hospital affiliated to the South African Military Hospital at Richmond. It was then staffed by a Matron, a masseuse and thirteen part-time nurses from the local Voluntary Aid Detachment, and had room for forty-five beds, with others apparently being available in the summer when 'open-air wards' were added.

Blytheswood was not the only Auxiliary Hospital in the area. In September Miss Marjory Duff, the 'Quartermaster' at Blytheswood, left to set up another hospital just across the Old Woking Road in the large dining room of the Bleakdown clubhouse (now known as the West Byfleet Golf Club). On leaving Blytheswood she was presented with a bicycle on behalf of the committee and an inkstand by the patients.

Bleakdown initially had thirty-eight beds, but this was increased to forty-six in 1917. It was run under the watchful eye of Ethel Locke-King, the wife of Hugh Locke-King who developed the golf course in 1906 (having previously established the New Zealand and nine-hole Sheerwater courses). She was ably assisted by two live-in members of the V.A.D., a physiotherapist and a matron, as well as several part-time nurses, and of course Miss Duff.

A letter sent home to a newspaper in Australia by one soldier convalescing at Bleakdown in 1917 makes interesting reading.





The large dining room of West Byfleet Golf Club was used as an auxiliary war hospital from September 1916 until October 1919.

'There is a pretty little one-arch bridge spanning the canal, almost covered on one side with ivy and other creepers, and this is a favourite rendezvous of the boys from each of the hospitals. A great many fir-trees along the canal are now being felled and cut up into sleepers and other matter for the front by a timber mill just upstream.' 'Our crowd played another hospital at cricket on the New Zealand golf links the other day, all our team being "Ausys" and the other "Tommies", so we were keenly interested'.

I probably need not record the score (he probably wouldn't have mentioned it if the Ausys had lost)!

Meanwhile at Blytheswood on the 14th June 1918 a gymkhana was held to raise money, with patients and staff competing 'with great spirit' for various prizes and Privates Kent and Fowler raising £1 by 'impersonating respectively a land girl and a blind soldier'.

Other Auxiliary Hospitals in the area were at Beechcroft in Heathside Road (where the Woking Community Hospital is today), whilst large houses such as Mount Felix (the New Zealand Hospital) in Oatlands Drive and

Brooklands at Weybridge; Ottershaw Park and Ottermead in Ottershaw; Windlesham Moor and Lady Ellenboro's Hospital in Windlesham; and Clandon Park and Hatchlands at West & East Clandon, were all utilised for convalescing soldiers.

Not that all the 'wounds' being treated were inflicted by the 'enemy'! According to a number of sources I have found, the hospital at the Woking Detention Barracks at Inkerman 'had a specialist venereal disease unit'!

Celebrating Christmas in 1917 at Mount Felix in Weybridge. Similar celebrations are known to have taken place at Blytheswood and Bleakdown Hospitals at that time.



WOKING'S GREAT WAR MILITARY OFFICES



Large local houses were not just commandeered for war hospitals, some were taken over and used as offices, such as Wynberg in Oriental Road which was used by the Royal Army Pay Corp., who I have been led to believe later went on to erect the huts on the corner of Oriental Road and Onslow Crescent (later still converted into the Girls Grammar School).

I have also been told that they built the bungalows opposite what is now the Park School on Onslow Crescent for some of the officers, but I haven't been able to confirm that from my records yet. What I do know is that the

Army Pay Corp were not the only military paymasters in Woking by the end of the First World War, as Hansard records a question in the House on the 2nd May 1919 regarding the delayed payment of pensions to airmen from the 'Royal Air Force Pay Office at Woking'. Unfortunately it doesn't say exactly where in Woking the office was, although a number of buildings are recorded in local directories of the time as being under 'military occupation', such as Swindlerby in Coley Avenue; Springfield in Guildford Road; and Hurlingham in Heathside Avenue – so perhaps one or more of those houses were used by the Air Force. If anyone

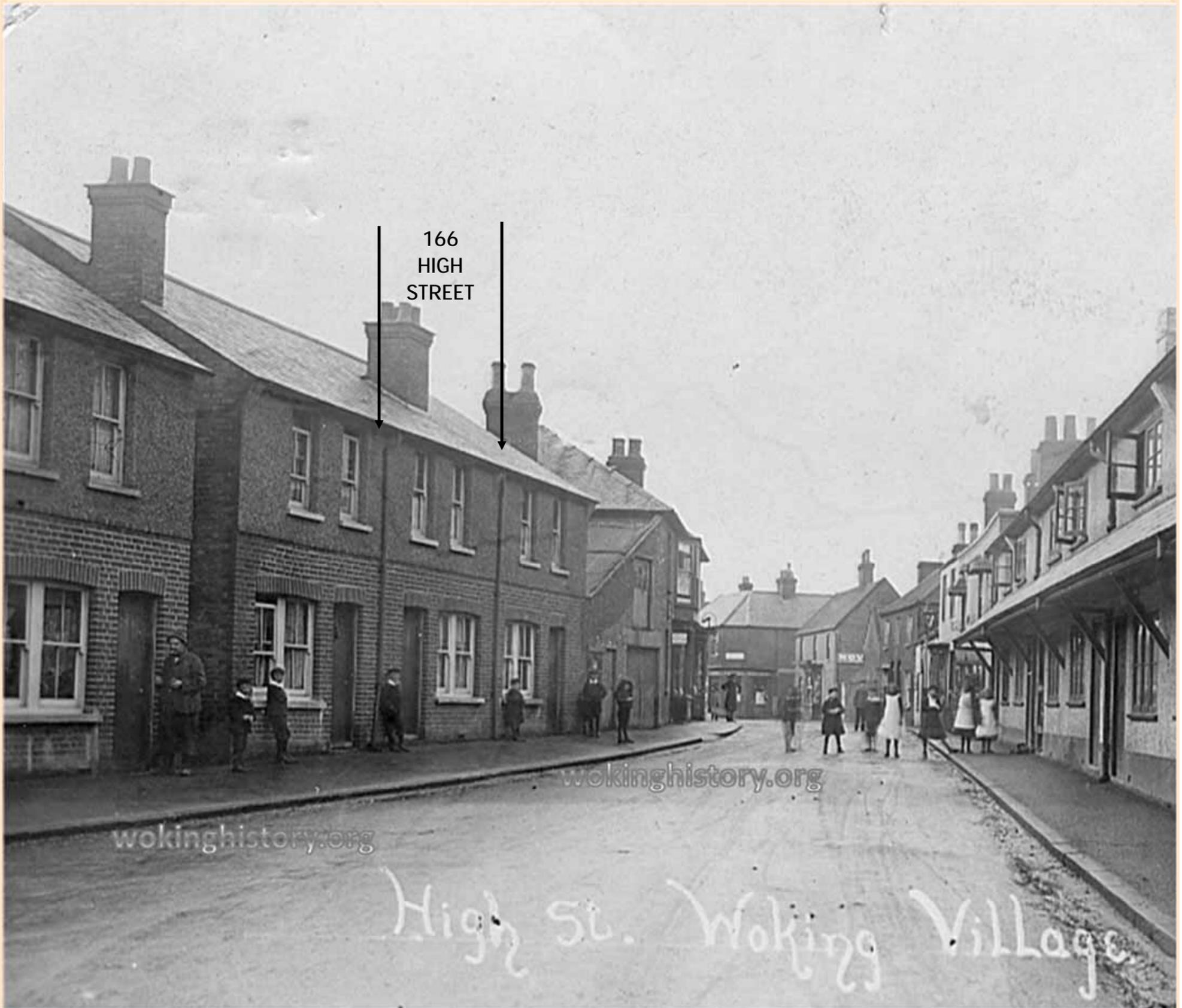
Wynberg in Oriental Road (now replaced by Foxhanger Gardens) was just one of many large houses in the Woking area taken over by the military for use as offices.

has any more information I would love to know.

The R.A.M.C. also utilised large houses in the area for their offices, with Denmead on Constitution Hill apparently housing their records; The Oaks in Guildford Road being occupied by their Major Purser; and other quarters being noted in White Heath in Heathside Avenue; The Nutshell in Hillview Road; Craycombe in Mount Hermon Road; and Woking Lodge in White Rose Lane.



OLD WOKING'S WAR BABIES



Many years ago Old Woking historian, Tom Harding, leant me the Midwife's Register for the village covering the period 1914-1925. One entry I found particularly interesting was for Mrs Russell (aged 41), who gave birth to her fifth child, a

'thriving' baby boy at a quarter past five in the morning of Wednesday 4th July 1917. Unfortunately the register doesn't give the name of Master Russell, but my interest is not so much in who was born, but where he was born, as the place of birth listed in the register

is now my home!

If you want to view the register, please go to the 'archive' section of this website - you will find it listed under the 'Old Woking' sub-section.

The entry in the Old Woking Midwife's Register for July 1917.

REGISTER OF CASES.

No.	Date of expected Confinement.	Name and Address of Patient.	No. of previous Labours and Miscarriages.	Age.	Date and hour of Midwife's Arrival.	Date and hour of Child's Birth.	Presentation.	Duration of 1st, 2nd, 3rd Stage of Labour.	Complications (if any) during or after Labour.	Sex of infant: Born Living or Dead.	Full time or Premature. No. of Months.	If Doctor sent for: Name of Doctor.	Date of Midwife's last Visit.	Condition of Mother then. [Use Rules, Section K, Table 11, p. 31.]	Condition of Child then.	REMARKS.*	
7	July	Mr. Collyer 25 High St.	2	37	July 1 st 1917	July 1 st 1917	P.A.P.	1 st 4 hrs 2 nd 20 mins 3 rd 1/2 hr	None	Living Full	Female Term.		July 12 th 1917	Normal Pulse & Temperature	Thriving Breast Fed.		
93	July	Old Woking Mr. Russell 166 High St.	5	32	10.55 a.m. July 4 th 1917	10.50 a.m. July 4 th 1917	P.A.P.	1 hr 1 st 10 mins 2 nd 2 hr 3 rd	None	Living Full	Male Term.		July 13 th 1917	Normal. Pulse & Temperature	Thriving Breast Fed.		
44	August	Old Woking Mr. Hamplon Church St.	4	41	5.15 a.m. July 22 nd 1917	5.10 a.m. July 22 nd 1917	P.P.L.	6 hrs 1 st 2 hrs 2 nd 1 hr 3 rd	None	Living Full	Female Term.		July 31 st 1917	Normal Temperature & Pulse	Thriving Breast Fed.		
95	July	Old Woking	2	35	3.15 a.m. July 3 rd 1917	3.20 a.m. July 3 rd 1917	P.P.L.	1 hr 1 st 2 hrs 2 nd 1 hr 3 rd	None	Living Full	Female Term.						

M. Russell 19.7.17