

WW1
Hospitals
in
Reading

The Trooper Potts VC Memorial Site



Battle Hospital

Battle Hospital is no more. It began as the new Reading Union workhouse in 1865. This was one of the best of the nation's workhouses as it had both an infirmary and a fever hospital attached and properly qualified medical staff. It occupied a considerable amount of ground to the north of the Oxford Road and a little to the east of Brock Barracks.

On 1st March 1915 the site was requisitioned by the War Office. All the inmates were moved out and the site became the hub of the Reading War Hospital which included other buildings off site, plus what is now Battle Library on an adjacent site. The War Hospitals themselves came under the administration of the Royal Army Medical Corps but there were also a number of auxiliary hospitals run by the Red Cross. Eventually there were five section and 38 auxiliary hospitals attached, although not all of them were in Reading.

The No 1 Hospital became one of the largest military hospitals in the country, with a surgical section, dysentery centre, malaria centre and an ophthalmic branch, It also became a national centre for pathological research. There were seven main blocks with a separate nurses home. Initially it provided accommodation for 440 other ranks but within three years the number of beds had risen to 3000. An officers' section with 110 beds was created in summer 1916 when one of the blocks was converted. 350 men could be accommodated in the adjacent West End Free Library which was used for lightly wounded and convalescents. An orthopaedic section was formed in October 1917.

By the end of July 1919 the hospital had received 493 convoys of wounded from France and many of the less serious cases were moved on to the section and auxiliary hospitals. It treated 39,312 patients including 2,518 officers. The staff never got much above 200 RAMC personnel but as well as their immediate hospital duties they also trained over 300 men to serve overseas. The hospital was commanded, first by Lt Col E A Hanley and later by Col W J Maurice RAMC

The archway entrance to the War Hospital in 1915



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Two of the ambulances operated by the Red Cross VAD which conveyed patients from the station to the war hospital



The hospital was visited twice by King George V, in 1915 and 1918. On the second occasion he presented medals to a number of men and widows, including that of 2/Lt W Beasley. After he had presented the MM to the widow, her small son stepped up and gave the King a smart salute which reduced everyone to tears. After the war the site was handed back to the Guardians and renamed Battle Infirmary.



*The arrival of the
Royal party 31st July
1915*



*The central
courtyard
when the
Royal party
visited in 1918*