The Orchard Hospital

The Orchard Hospital was built as an 800 bedded temporary hospital in 1901/2, along with Long Reach Hospital, to cope with the smallpox epidemics of the time.



The Orchard Hospital in the foreground with Joyce Green Hospital behind c. 1910

When Joyce Green Hospital opened in 1903, the combined bed total of Long Reach, The Orchard and Joyce Green meant that there was an adequate number of beds available for smallpox and fevers. A tramway was also built to transport patients from the river ambulance down to the three hospitals.

After 1910 Long Reach was kept permanently in reserve for smallpox. It was apparent that in years of low incidence of smallpox there was high incidence of scarlet fever and diphtheria. The Orchard and Joyce Green hospitals, therefore, were turned to fever hospitals when there was little smallpox. The Orchard spent much of its time closed and was only opened for major epidemics.

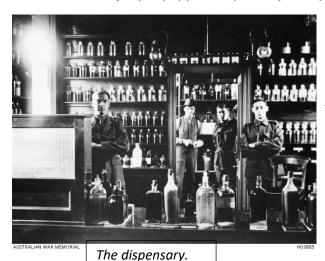
The Orchard became a Military Convalescent Hospital in May 1915 for wounded British

Soldiers. In May 1915 the Commanding Officer was Colonel C R Kilkelly CMG DVO, he showed the local newspapers around. 'Immediately inside the entrance gates are three buildings to be used as pack stores and guard rooms. Here the clothing the men arrive in will be stored after



disinfecting and cleansing to be returned when they leave, they will also be given a brand-new set of clothes and kitted out to face any weather encountered back at the Front. In the administration block there is a receiving room, clerks office, rooms used by the medical officer, commanding officer and quartermaster. There is also a large linen store. The next building is a huge kitchen, it has ten immense cookers to boil meat, vegetables, puddings and beef tea. There are gas stoves for roasting meat and baking puddings. There are hotplates and containers to keep food hot in transit. The kitchen is also fitted with a steam powered potato peeler and mincer. The new laundry and kitchen were erected by the engineer Mr Long.

There is also a fully equipped dispensary, telephone room with a switchboard, and a Post



Office. To the left of the administration block is the building for the RAMC quarters, officers mess, sergeants and privates' rooms, they all have comfortable bedrooms and first-class bathrooms. There is even a barber, shoemaker's shop and stores.

A unique feature of the hospital is the coffee bar and dry and wet canteen. The dry canteen is a shop in which items can be purchased (cigarettes, tins of peaches, shoe laces and shirts for example).

The wards run in two long blocks of 16, with covered walkways and include recreation rooms, dining halls, wards and theatres. In the wards there are sprung mattresses, sheets, pillows and three thick blankets. Each bed has its own locker'¹.

Christmas 1915 was celebrated in style. There were approximately 300 wounded men in the hospital. Two dining halls were decorated with evergreens and paperchains. The tables were laden with mince pies, nuts, fruits, bon-bons and excellently cooked turkeys and roast beef, and to finish 1,400 lbs of plum pudding. In the evening the men were entertained in the gymnasium, where there were games, dancing and an enormous Christmas tree.

In February 1916, Mr H S Pratt arranged an entertainment evening for the wounded soldiers, there was music, entertainment and competitions.² By March 1916, entertainment was provided in the theatre at the Orchard on a weekly basis. During one such evening in March Rifleman Tilley from the London Irish Rifles was presented with a DMC for a feat of great gallantry whilst in France, he held back the enemy single-handedly whilst his comrades went back for more bombs.

The soldiers were also entertained away from the hospital. In May 1916, a group of 45 soldiers were given tea and entertained by the members of the Baptist Church, in their school building. There was a variety of musical entertainment and the soldiers returned to the hospital at 9pm.³

The Orchard was turned over to the Australian Military in August 1916. It became the No. 3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford, on the 9th October 1916, under the command of Lieutenant-Col. H Arthur Powell. In a newsletter written by the soldiers, their arrival at The Orchard was described like this: "There was nothing particularly inviting about the trip from the railway station to the gates. The country looked dark and bleak, nothing that could suggest a happy hunting ground



Soldiers standing on the tramway which ran between the ward blocks.

after nature's bounteous gifts, yet those weary travellers hailed it at last as their haven of rest. A word and a glance were all that passed during the dreary march from the station to the Hospital (a distance of two miles).

At last the Hospital was reached. It had an unattractive and deserted appearance. Nevertheless, those weary travellers hailed it with a sigh of relief. The eye scanned quickly the long rows of timber and iron buildings, weather-beaten, unpainted, unkempt, and a little shudder could not be avoided at the prospect of having this for a future home of probable indefinite period. There was no one in sight; everybody looked glum. At occasional intervals one could see small rays of light peeping through the darkness like small guiding stars from the shacks, called wards. Here was home with a vengeance, and here was work to be done. Here was the home that many a fine Australian lad was to be nursed back to life and health again on his return from the battlefields of France and Flanders. Here, under the care of his Australian comrades, Australian sisterhood, and the science of Australian medical and surgical law he was to smile once again.⁴"



The kitchen was very modern with large ovens and steam powered appliances.

Over the next two years and 10 months to 1919 considerable improvements were made. The most notable was to the grounds and gardens, cookhouse, headquarters and the addition of an operating theatre. There was an efficient boiler house supplying steam to drive the engine to supply heat for the laundry to dry clothes and to provide hot water for all the wards (this was also used for heating). The lighting was provided by gas, each ward having a liberal number of jets. A canteen was added, run by the Navy and Army

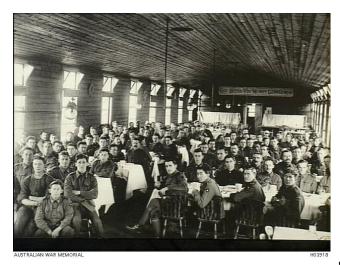
Canteen Board. The officers and sergeants had separate messes, the sisters had recreation and reading and writing rooms, the WAAC also had specials rooms to themselves and separate mess rooms.

There was also a motor transport section, with specially built garages for the motor vehicles.





The ward blocks had different uses. There were 14 wards for acute cases, 11 wards for convalescence, two of the wards were used as dinning halls, two as recreation rooms, one as a massage room, one as an entertainment theatre. The ward buildings were 120 foot by 24 foot with 3 doors and 26 windows. At the entrance to each there was a small kitchen with a gas stove, cupboards and tables and a bathroom with a bath, three sinks and hot and cold water. At the end of each ward there was a small annexe with three lavatories and a sink. Each ward had 46 beds. The operating theatre had the walls and ceiling plastered and enamel tiles, there was also an annexe for anaesthesia and x-ray.



One of the dining halls.

The two wards that were used as dining halls each had 25 tables, each seating 10 people, there was also a piano and large scullery. The two being used as recreation rooms had excellent ash furniture, numerous wicker Oxford armchairs, three full sized billiards tables, games and books.

The ward used as the entertainment theatre had a stage, lighting, scenes, and cinema equipment, it seated 400. Monday was cinema night, Thursday a concert and Saturday was a play or revue. Extra entertainments were offered on the other

nights, some local groups came to the theatre and put on plays or musical evenings.

The 3rd Auxiliary Hospital also had its own band. All the men were 'C' classification. Instruments were bought or loaned and they played at parties and as an orchestra in the theatre as well as in parades and marches. They were a vital part of the hospital.



One of the recreation rooms.



Possibly the remains of the mortuary recorded by Bexley Young Archaeologists' Club in June 2018.

A new mortuary building was built in the south east portion of the hospital and was fitted with enamel tiles. This may be the building found by Bexley Young Archaeologists' when they were recording the site, it was a building not marked on any of the plans or maps. There is evidence of a tiled floor. The building rubble nearby shows that the building was tiled with white enamel tiles and had white sanitary ware.

Evidence of the boiler house was still visible in June 2018, as was the demolition rubble showing how well constructed it was. It held three boilers each with a 7-foot diameter which provided all the heating and power for the hospital.



Site of the boiler house recorded by Bexley Young Archaeologist's' Club in June 2018.



Floor of the boiler house recorded by Bexley Young Archaeologist's' Club in June 2018.

The laundry was next to the boiler house. Reports⁵ show that on average over 50,000 items were washed each month.



In January 1917 a committee was formed, charged with raising funds for the entertainment of convalescing troops. At the meeting it was decided to amalgamate several funds and committees that overlapped, making sure that monies were spent fairly and also meant that entertainments did not overlap. A flag day to raise

funds was adopted for April. The War Relief Committee at J & E Hall had contributed £85 to the Orchard Hospital and £47 to the Dartford War Hospital, he agreed that they would contribute more of their fundraising to the Entertainment Committee. The Committee was disappointed that members of the public had not attended the meeting to support the fundraising.⁶

The Womens' Guild also ran entertainments for the soldiers at the Orchard. They used the Dartford Co-operative Hall to provide a programme of dancing, music and games. Tea and refreshments were served by the ladies of the Guild, the evening ended with Auld Lang Syne. The Ladies Guild continued to raise money to repeat the entertainment during the year.⁷

Every Saturday night, at the Rodney Hut, Crayford, there was entertainment for the Australians from the Orchard hospital as well as for the Australian Munitions Workers at Vickers, Crayford. There were five very good billiard tables, the guests were given tea at five



long, brightly decorated tables, tea was finished with cigarettes and cigars.

The Rodney Hut was presented to the Young Men's Christian Association for the use of munitions workers by Lady Rodney as a memorial to her son, Lieutenant William Rodney of the Rifle

Brigade, who was killed in action in France in May 1915. The Hut was built on land given by Vickers between their factory and the River Cray about 100 metres downstream from Crayford Bridge. The opening ceremony, performed by Lady Rodney, took place on the 7th June 1915. Distinguished guests



included Lady Grosvenor, Lady Randolph Churchill, General Sir Francis Lloyd, Sir Henry Chaplin, Sir Arthur Yapp, George Baker and Thomas North⁸. Entertainment for the wounded Australian troops took place right up to their departure in 1919.

February saw snowfall, the local newspaper reports 'A determined if bloodless battle was fought in the streets Dartford waged with unabated fury all afternoon. It was started by a couple of young girls, who were more saucy than wise, threw a AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P10997.036

snowball at an Australian soldier. The soldier threw one back and other girls

Snowball fight in the Orchard. February 1917

joined the first two. The soldier called for reinforcements and soon the battle was in full swing. Very early in the fray a policeman who was on duty nearby found matters were beyond his control as he was good humouredly covered in snow. Soon many of the shop fronts were decorated with snowballs and in some establishments, assistants watched from the windows. Soon the ammunition ran short so the Australians detailed a party to bring supplies from the park. When the battle had raged for some time it was rumoured that the police and military were going to arrive in large numbers, the combatants fell away and peace was once more resumed.'9

The Bishop of Rochester dedicated the newly decorated and adapted Chapel at the Orchard at the beginning of March. The Rev. F W Hassard acted as the Bishop's Chaplain and the Rev. F V Baker, Vicar of Christ Church and the Rev. Ashley Browne, Chaplain of the hospital also took part. The chapel had a well-appointed alter and a beautiful picture of the Great Sacrifice as an altar-piece. After the chapel was dedicated one of the men, who was very ill, was confirmed.¹⁰



Informal picture of nurses at the Orchard.

The Australian Red Cross took control of the Red Cross Store in April 1917, led by Mrs Kennedy. Every patient able to walk visited the store and was issued with various items to add comfort to his stay. For patients unable to walk, the shop visited them once a week to give them cigarettes and chocolate. Every patient was issued with 30 cigarettes a week. The Red Cross also provided tennis bats and balls, four billiard tables and a piano in the Hospital Theatre.

Eight gramophones were provided for use on the wards. They also provided the library with 800 books, which were supervised by the chaplain. Mrs Kennedy also arranged for suitable homes for patients, without any relatives in the UK, to go to for a period of respite from hospital. She also arranged for volunteers to write home for soldiers that were illiterate.¹¹

April also marked Anzac Day, the second anniversary of the Anzacs landing in Gallipoli. A service was held in the Holy Trinity Church, Dartford. Soldiers paraded through the streets and were joined by other armed services and soldiers from other hospitals. The first arrivals to the church were the men on stretchers, they were then followed by those who needed nursing assistance to help them walk into the church, the remainder marched behind the band. On the 25th April Colonel



Informal group portrait of unidentified patients of Sister Ellen Jean Imlay, at 5 A A H Dartford England.

Powell presided over another service held at the Orchard Hospital. Captain Milne gave the address, 'today is the second anniversary of the landing in Gallipoli. That landing has become historic. It has brought to Australia and New Zealand imperishable glory. We are here to

commemorate that event and especially to do homage to the officers and men who fought and fell at Gallipoli.'12

Funds for charity were also raised by the soldiers themselves. With so many fellow countrymen working for Vickers in Crayford, Australian rules football matches were often played. Warrant Officer A M Ramsey was captain of the home team and Mr Hebard captain for the munitions workers. Matches were played at the Orchard Hospital and in Dartford park.

The soldiers at the Orchard supported other events in the town, usually by providing a band. One of these occasions was Empire Day 1917, 2,300 children from local schools attended the service in the park. The Orchard band played before, during and after the service.

The YMCA applied for, and was granted, permission to put up a hut in the park where soldiers could meet with their families and friends. The hut was opened by members of the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital and local dignitaries.



The opening of the YMCA Hut opposite the Park entrance in Dartford. A place for soldiers to meet their families.



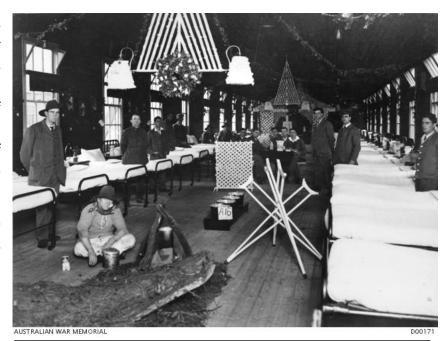
The interior of the YMCA Hut opposite the Park entrance in Dartford.

At the end of April 1938, a smallpox case was confirmed in Dartford so the town was placed out of bounds. All the staff and patients were revaccinated and no-one contracted it. This has a special significance as the Orchard was built as a smallpox hospital.

During 1918 an appeal was put out for families to take soldiers into their homes for 14 days for a 'holiday' away from the hospital and to help their rehabilitation before going back to war.

Christmas 1918 was especially jolly, with war ended the Australians were looking forwards to returning home. Each of the wards was decorated 'to the taste and touch of the Sisters and the patients¹³'.

There were gifts from the YMCA, two days leave as well as turkey, cake, sweetmeats, oranges, chocolates, nuts and crackers. Ward A16, which had Private P F Tunbridge in charge, was given the honour of being the cleanest and most artistically decorated. It



Ward A16 at No. 3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital (3AAH) on Christmas Day. Left to right: Private (Pte) W. J. Harris MM, 27th Battalion (Bn), dressed as a bushman sitting beside a billy in a bush scene.

was chosen for its fairy lights all over the ward and the 'Bushman's fire' which was superb in its originality. Private W. J. Harris MM, was dressed as a bushman sitting beside a billy in a bush scene.¹⁴

The hospital was visited by the Australian Prime Minister 'Billy' Hughes. Sports day was held and he presented the prizes to the winners. He talked at length to the soldiers about Australia's success during the war. To help raise money for the Red Cross his autograph was auctioned and purchased by Lieutenant-Colonel J W Springthorpe for £3. Mr Hughes was still in England when the armistice was announced. He stayed on to become involved in the peace negotiations.

As war ended the hospital was inundated with cases of influenza, this affected both soldiers and staff and continued into 1919. Another problem is there was a backlog of fit men waiting to return home to Australia due to a limited amount of ships available. They were causing friction in the town as they had money to spend and the Dartford publicans were more than willing to take their money. The monthly reports from the hospital¹⁵ state that some of the men were less amenable to discipline and had to have their pay books marked. The town centre was placed 'out of bounds' to stop the good relationship between Dartford and the hospital breaking down. This meant that many staff and patients went AWOL for nights out.



One man admitted during this period, with influenza, was Horace William Colston Sparkes, he was admitted on 10th February 1919 and then discharged back to duty on 21st February 1919. While he was at the Orchard he played some cricket matches for the 3rd Australian Auxiliary Hospital Cricket Corp. His family have a cricket ball which was presented to Horace for scoring a hat trick. The shield is engraved as follows *No.3 A.A.H.C.C H W Sparkes HAT TRICK Vickers Ltd Erith* 1918.¹⁶

Many of the soldiers married Dartford girls. St Albans was the nearest church and lots of the weddings were held there. Another popular place to marry was Holy Trinity in Dartford.

In 1919 wounded Australians from German prisoner of war camps started to arrive at the Orchard. The staff were horrified at the very poor condition of the men both in general health and their wounds. They listed two examples to the Australian HQ: one was an ankylosed hip (when inflammation has caused the joint-ends of the bones to be fused together) in a bad position, there was also sepsis present. The patient was so wasted and his general health was so poor that surgery could not take place until his condition had been improved by food and careful nursing. The other man had a compound fracture of the leg. The injury had taken place in April 1918 and, at the time, was probably not a very severe fracture. It had obviously had a sequestra (a piece of dead bone that had become separated from normal or sound bone at the site of the fracture) for some time. He had not received the surgical treatment it needed and now it needed prolonged treatment to correct the deformities it had caused.

On 28th July 1919, just as the hospital was preparing to leave, Dame Florence Leitch, Commandant of the QMAAC came and presented a badge to 9238 Mrs M Cort. She was one of the original women to volunteer when the Corps was founded and the only one still on active service.

On 23rd September 1919 the Australian government presented the people of Dartford with a 7.7cm FK 16 German Field Gun captured by the Australians. The inscription read 'Presented to the people of Dartford by Government of Australia in grateful appreciation of the kindness and hospitality extended the Australian Soldiers of the 3rd Australian Auxiliary Hospital by the citizens of Dartford 1915-1919'.



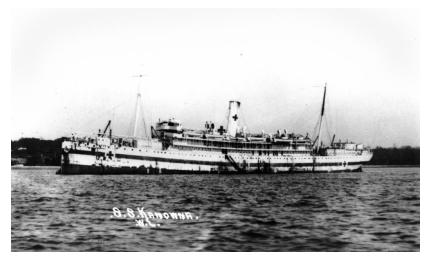
The gun was 'sent for scrap' during the Second World War when metal was desperately needed.

During the 26 months spent at the Orchard the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital the Orchard's capacity increased from 1,000 to 1,200. This change meant additional staff were required and on the recommendation of Lieut. Col. B M Sutherland, 110 Women's Army Auxiliary Corps members found work.

Admissions from 9th October 1916 – 31st December 1918 were 56,411.

Discharges from 10th October 1916 - 3ist December 1918 were 55,527.

Remaining in the Hospital on 3ist December 1918 were 884.



The Australian Imperial Force War Diary of No. 3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital August 1919¹⁷ showed how the hospital's transfer back to Australia was arranged. On the 14th August 1919 it was arranged that they would travel from Southampton on the *Kanowna*.

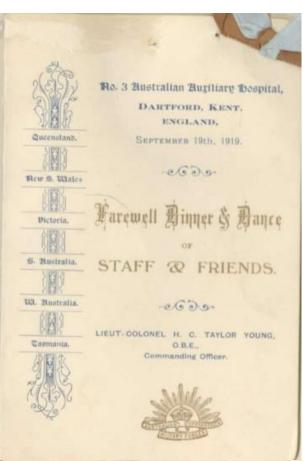
On the 20th August any patients not fit for the journey were transferred to the Queen Alexandra Military Hospital, Millbank, London.

On the 27th August final orders from the Director of Movements and Quartering were received and departure was to be from Crayford Railway station. A programme of transport was drawn up to ensure that everyone arrived in time to board the train.

The day of departure, 28th August, was marked with a valedictory. The Commanding Officers wished each patient 'bon voyage' and a speedy recovery. Despite the early hour a specially prepared breakfast was served to each patient.

Sadly, it was raining heavily and the lack of shelter at Crayford station was an inconvenience. The sickest were sheltered the best they could and no-one seemed to suffer any ill effects. Another delay was caused by the inadequate accommodation for kit on the train. Each man had his required kit and there was also some equipment that needed to travel with them. Another luggage car was called for, from Dartford station, and the train eventually departed from Crayford at 10.56am. Mrs Kennedy, the Red Cross representative, travelled with the men handing out chocolate and cigarettes on the journey which were gratefully received.

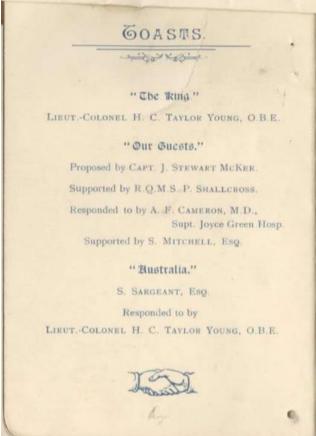
The journey was successful and the *Kanowna* departed from Southampton at 7pm. From this point the No.3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital ceased to function.

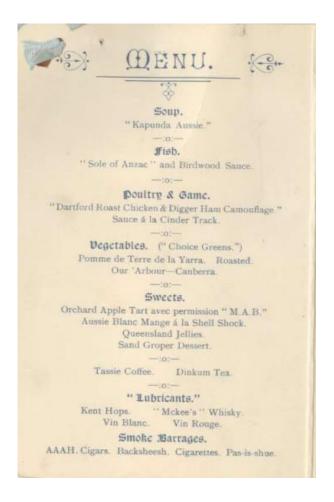


On the 1st September 1919 there was 149 staff remaining, 77 were from the AIF and 72 other staff. The following day 30 members of the QMAAC were transferred to the depot at Bostall Heath.

On the 19th September there was a formal expression of farewell. A dinner and dance was held at the Orchard for 160 staff and guests including Dr A F Cameron, Medical Superintendent of Joyce Green Hospital.

By the end of September there were just 66 remaining staff, 44 from the AIF and 22 others. The records and equipment had all been cleared and the official handover took place from the 1st – 13 September. The remaining staff were then sent for disposal home or to another unit.





The story of how soldiers ended up at the Orchard is told through the letter of Wilfred Denver Gallwey¹⁸. Wilfred was a young man of 18 when he joined up on 7th February 1916¹⁹. He sailed from Brisbane on 19th September 1916 on the *Seang Choon*. After some training in Blighty he was sent to France on the 25th February 1917 on board the *SS Invicta*. His letter tells his parents of his journey and life in France. It gives an insight into how horrific he found war. In June 1917 he becomes ill. His unit were moving so he was sent to a cleaning station. He said *'I was too ill to move and felt I was too young to die'*. He was tended to by 'a lovely Iris girl whose voice was like music to my ears.' Once cleaned he was sent on the Red Cross train to Boulogne. His high temperature made him delirious so at Boulogne he was placed into a British hospital with other wounded soldiers who were too ill to move to England.

Once his temperature dropped he got a shock when the doctor said 'do you want to go to Blighty? You will have to have a wash you know. We will carry you all the way.' On the 9th July 2017 Wilfred had a ticket pinned on him 'like a piece of luggage' for the journey. He was set on board the Jan Breydel, a Belgium boat. The journey to England took two hours, once at Dover he was put on board a train to Dartford. The train was much more comfortable than the Red Cross train across France.

As he was recuperating at the Orchard hospital he wrote to his parents 'in a few weeks I will be back in France and facing death over again'. After spending a month in the 3rd Auxiliary hospital Wilfred was discharge on the 10th August to Weymouth. Instead of returning to the front line after his recovery, he was sent to Codford for instruction in signalling and received first class honours. He was then selected to become an instructor of signalling, the training for which took until June 1918 when he was transferred to the 15th battalion. Gallwey spent the rest of the war as a signalling instructor in England.

Wilfred survived the war and, on the 3rd May 1919, returned to Australia aboard the Kaskmir. He was discharged from the army on the 10th June 1919. He died in 1967 age 69 years.



Informal portrait of two Australian convalescent patients at No 3
Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford.
Identified are 2272 Private (Pte) GH Bell and 3575 Pte CJ Long.



The interior of the Sisters' Mess at No 3 Australian Army Auxiliary Hospital. The staff in the photograph from the left, Misses I. Peel, D. Hansford, A. Sebon, - Sexton, M. Heron and K. Perkins.



After the war the Orchard was back to the occasional opening for epidemics of scarlet fever and diphtheria. Many hundreds children from London were treated. Many of them travelled down the Thames in the ambulance steamers, which must have been a unique experience for them.

The Orchard remained mostly idle until 1939 when chronically sick patients were brought from the Midlands. After they had gone the Army took over. First an Officer Cadet Training Unit, who constructed an assault course and next a battalion of the Green Howards, finally a contingent of anti-tank gunners. Soon after D-Day these disappeared. The night they left a doodlebug landed on the east of the buildings, very quickly it became a blazing inferno, partly demolishing it. It was fully demolished a few years later; the last few buildings were used as a pig farm for Joyce Green.



The Orchard post WW2, showing bomb damage.

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¹ Dartford Chronicle 14.5.1915

² Dartford Chronicle February 1916

³ Dartford Chronicle May 1916

⁴ Souvenir of No.3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford, England. Vol. 1 Joyce Green 1919. P 3

⁵ Report from No. 3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford. Australian War Memorial. AWM11

⁶ Dartford Chronicle 19.01.1917

⁷ Dartford Chronicle 30.3.1917

⁸ http://ww1.crayfordhistory.co.uk/index/crayfords-first-world-war/the-rodney-hut/

⁹ Dartford Chronicle 9.2.1917

¹⁰ Dartford Chronicle 2.4.1917

¹¹ Souvenir of No.3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford, England. Vol. 1 Joyce Green 1919. p5

¹² Dartford Chronicle 27.4.17

¹³ Souvenir of No.3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford, England. Vol. 1 Joyce Green 1919. P.2

¹⁴ Ibid p16

¹⁵ Report from No. 3 Australian Auxiliary Hospital, Dartford. Australian War Memorial. AWM11

¹⁶ Email from Carol Kuerschner, Australia

¹⁷ Australian War Memorial. AWM4

¹⁸ https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C2088220?image=2 Letter of Wilfred Denver Gallwey to his parents 1917.

¹⁹https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRetrieve/Gallery151/dist/JGalleryViewer.aspx?B=4001992&S=4&N =48&R=0#/SearchNRetrieve/NAAMedia/ShowImage.aspx?B=4001992&T=P&S=7 Records of Wilfred Denver Gallwey