



U.S. Base Hospital No. 37. The Southern Hospital, Dartford

History

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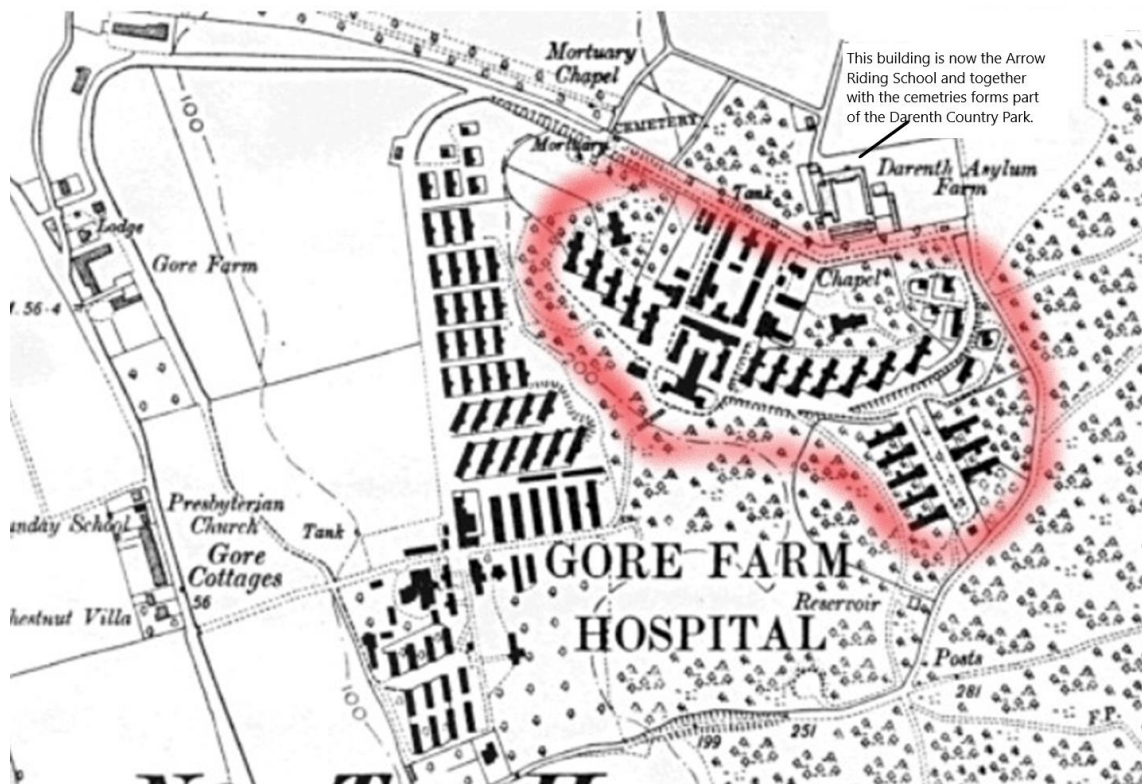
History

The Southern (known as Gore Farm until 1911) was set in grounds of 160 acres and was built by the Metropolitan Asylums Board (MAB) in 1888-9.

The Upper Hospital (marked in red on the plan below) consisted of 20 two-storey ward buildings and five small isolation wards. It was opened in 1890 to replace the smallpox camps. The building and equipment for the alterations made between 1890 and 1903 cost £199,569.

The Lower Southern/Gore Farm Hospital (on plan but unmarked) was opened in 1902. This cost £179,288. There was an outbreak of smallpox and the MAB did not have enough beds as they were in the middle of a seasonal rise in scarlet fever and diphtheria cases. The Upper Hospital was full of scarlet fever cases, so the MAB employed Messrs J Hawkin & Son to erect twelve dormitories and to adapt two recreation halls to receive patients (each with 40 beds). Because of the risk of infection the workmen had to be boarded in the grounds and were not allowed to visit Dartford. Four police constables were also in residence to preserve law and order.

By June 1903, the MAB had opened Joyce Green and it was decided that Gore Farm Hospital would no longer be needed for smallpox, so both the Upper and the Lower hospitals provided treatment for fever and general convalescence.



Plan of Gore Farm Hospital/Upper and Lower Southern Hospitals. 1909

The Upper hospital was handed over to the United States Military Authorities in June 1918. It became U.S. Base Hospital No. 37 and treated American wounded soldiers.

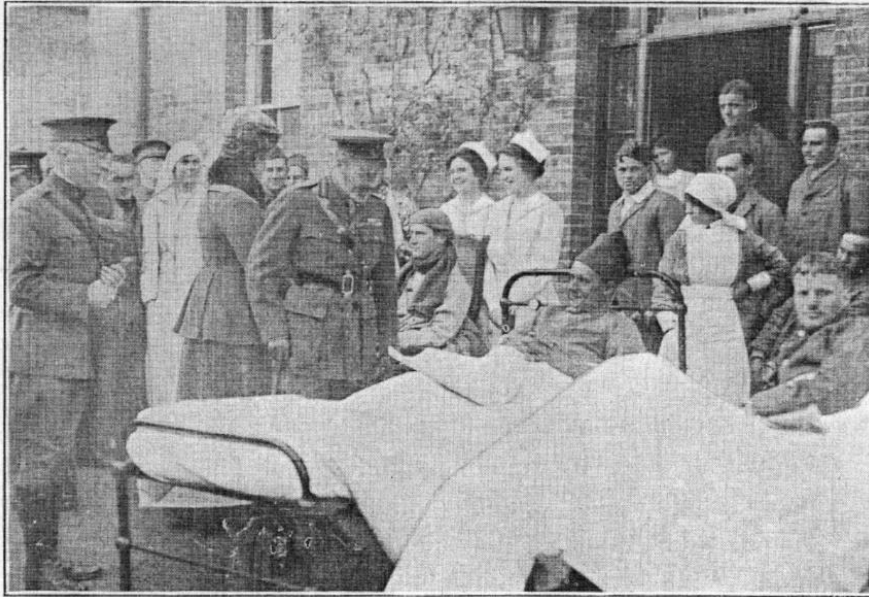
The No. 37 Base Hospital left the port of New York on the *Laplant*, May 19th 1918, arriving in Liverpool, England on May 31st. On June 1st it proceeded to the American Rest Camp at Southampton and on June 5th it left Rest Camp for Camp Efford, Plymouth, England which was to be its permanent station. It was ordered on July 18th 1918 to proceed to Dartford, Kent, for station where it occupied the Southern, a large hospital controlled by the Metropolitan Asylums Board.

The Commanding Officer was Col. B. H. Dutcher, M. C., December 13th 1917 to July 6th 1918 and Col. E. H. Fiske, M. C., July 7th 1918 to March 5th 1919.

The normal capacity of the hospital was 2,000 beds, but during November 1918 tents had to be erected to accommodate the large number of patients that were being admitted at that time. During its stay the hospital cared for 3,111 surgical and 1,239 medical cases. On January 21st 1919 all remaining patients were evacuated and the hospital was closed. The unit sailed from Brest, France, on the *Olympic*, February 18th 1919. It arrived in New York February 24th and was demobilized at Camp Upton, N. Y. on March 5th 1919.



Wounded U.S. soldiers arriving at Dartford Station. The people of Dartford would line the street and cheer for the wounded men.



Their Majesties King George V and Queen Mary visited the base in October 1918. This was the first time the Royal party had ever visited and inspected an American Base Hospital. The Times newspaper report said *'The Royal visitors made a tour of the wards, and strolled through the grounds, chatting with some of the patients.*

They visited a concert hall

decorated by one of the patients (Alfonso Di Lorenzo, a NY sculptor) and spent some time in the officers wards. In the "shock" wards, their Majesties were interested to notice the variety of maps, pictures and ornaments, such as not usually seen in hospitals. The officer in charge informed them that the cases treated here seldom required medical aid and every effort was made to claim their attention and take them out of themselves. Selections from the poets were read to them, and they were encouraged to discuss current events. So far, the results had been satisfactory. Before leaving the King and Queen expressed the pleasure their visit had given them, and they were heartily cheered by the patients as they drove away'. The King had talked to 83 men from 22 different states in their two-hour visit.



During the visit the King and Queen saw the new Recreation Hut built by the American Red Cross at a cost of £12,000. The building was T shaped. There was a general club room with card tables, writing tables, 500 books and racks for current American and British newspapers and journals. There was also a theatre/cinema.

Inside the Recreation Hut, built by the American Red Cross.

American Red Cross and local women from Dartford, giving cigarettes to the wounded American Soldiers.



Christmas 1918, the soldiers at the US Base Hospital No. 37 give a Christmas Tree to local orphans.

This could possibly be to the children at the Darenth Schools which were part of the Darenth Park Hospital.



The American Red Cross Bringing the News of the Armistice to Dartford Hospital

The American Red Cross car brought news to the hospital of the Armistice. The hospital was full of men mostly from the 27th and 30th American Divisions from the Hindenburg Line between Cambrai and St Quentin (late September – October 1918). The American soldiers formed a line with the American and Red Cross flags at its head and marched around the



Head of the Armistice Day Parade

hospital. They then marched to the German POW camp a few hundred yards away. Here they encountered a rejoicing no less boisterous than their own. The Germans lined up to greet the Americans, waving their skull caps and cheering. The Americans gave them cigarettes.

1,500 American soldiers marched around the hospital during an impromptu Armistice Parade.



Armistice Day, the Base Hospital No. 37 marched the few hundred yards to the German POW at the Dartford War Hospital (Lower Southern Hospital). The Germans were also celebrating and cheering.



In the afternoon the men of the 27th and the 30th Divisions celebrated the conclusion of the armistice by staging a mock battle in exact imitation of their great feat in breaking the Hinderburg Line between Cambrai and St. Quentin. In the mock battle, the convalescent Americans, some on crutches, formed two detachments, one of which took the part of the "Germans", while the

other represented the attacking Americans. Volunteers for the "German" side were decidedly scarce, so a policy of conscription was decided upon, with two bars of Red Cross chocolate for wages. The tanks in the attack were severely wounded men in wheel chairs, the ambulances were wheelbarrows. The mock battle occupied an entire afternoon, and was in the charge of Miss Alice Fleenor of San Francisco (Red Cross) and Major Alfred Howell of Birmingham, N.C. (U.S. Army). The opening scene of the battle shows a group of "Germans" blissfully ignorant of the American grenade throwers approaching from the bush. The Americans are about to

bomb (with mud balls) this strong point. The daring grenadiers are Lieut. Ira I. Hodes, Lieut. Edward J. Bonny & Private Ben Kaufman, all of Brooklyn. The unsuspecting "Germans", who wore their oversea caps wrong side out, were under the command of Unter-Officier Lieut. John Adams of Columbia.



The Armistice Day 'mock battle'. Collecting the 'wounded'.

The No.37 Base Hospital returned home in 1919. The American Base Hospital Veterans, however, returned and placed a plaque at the Southern on May 20th 1955, to commemorate their stay. The Veterans consisted of Dr Edward F Fox (accompanied by his wife) who represented Col. Henry Monroe Moses, Chief Medical Officer in 1918, and the medical staff of the 'old 37'. John Parry, who represented the enlisted men, and Mrs Amiee Stewart Bradstreet, who represented the nurses' corps.



1955. Plaque being unveiled.

2nd left Dr Henderson Medical Superintendent, Matron Thomas (Southern Hospital), Mrs Aimee Stewart Bradstreet (US Base Hospital Nurse), Dr Edward Fox (US Base Hosp), Mrs Fox, Mr Parry (Dartford Hospitals Management Committee Chairman)



Commemoration of Plaque, 1955. Mrs Aimee Stewart Bradstreet (US Base veteran), Matron Thomas (Southern Hospital), Miss Schroeder (sister of Mrs Bradstreet).

Mr Pontin wrote in the Kinco Chow, the Newsletter for the Enlisted Men of the Base Hospital, *"Upon our arrival at Dartford we found so much was new. The fields were now housing developments. But as our driver set us down at the gates of the Southern hospital, the scene seemed as unchanged as ever.*

At the administration building we found Mr Durrant and Mrs Sumner (secretary to the Medical Superintendent in 1918 and still held the same position). We were soon on the way to the old



recreation hall. Here we met Mr Parry (Chairman of the Hospital Management Committee) and Mrs Welch (Vice-Chairman). After wine and hors d'oeuvres, we had some pictures taken and returned to the Administration Building. When Mrs Bradstreet pulled the cord, there appeared, I must say, our very handsome bronze plaque."

A letter was sent to the Veterans when the Southern closed 4 years later inviting them to come to Joyce Green. A few postcards were received from Mr McAfee (who had written to the Hospital Management Committee in 1954 and made all the arrangements for the plaque but had been unable to attend the presentation because of an accident) to Mr Parry and Mr Durrant.

The plaque is now in storage at the Dartford Museum.

After the War, the Southern was again used for fevers. When it was not needed for fevers, children from London requiring convalescence and fresh country air were received in large numbers (often as many as 1,500). Playing fields were laid out and special indoor recreation facilities were provided.

In 1930, control of the hospitals was passed to the London County Council but their roles remained unchanged.

September 1938 saw the Munich Crisis. The Royal Naval Hospital at Chatham was evacuated to the Southern and some 300 naval personnel were transferred there.

SECOND WORLD WAR



Mr Lacey, Naval Schoolmaster gives a talk on resettlement prior to discharge.

Upon the outbreak of the Second World War the hospital was taken over by the Emergency Medical Service and classed as a Group 1 Emergency Medical Service Hospital. Each hospital was classified according to the facilities available and a considerable amount of upgrading was undertaken in order to provide operating theatres, x-ray services and improvements in wards, so as to deal more effectively with large numbers of casualties. The Southern became one of the largest general hospitals in the country with 1,580 beds. More casualties from Dunkirk were

admitted to the Southern than to any other hospital.

The hospital retained the Medical Superintendent Dr R G Henderson. He was made Commanding Officer of a naval unit at the hospital and appointed Surgeon Captain in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, one of only two in the history of the reserve. In 1947 he was awarded a CBE for services in medicine.

The rehabilitation of soldiers was under the care of the Naval Schoolmaster, Mr Lacey. The physical and mental rehabilitation of the soldiers was given equal importance. The hospital library had 10,000 catalogued books and 3 full-time librarians. The library was open every day for patients to visit and librarians visited the wards every day. Most of the books were presented to the hospital by the British Red Cross and the Order of St John of Jerusalem.



Education and vocational instruction were also important features of hospital rehabilitation. The hospital had three large classrooms, a picture gallery, lecture room and cinema. Correspondence courses and postal study courses were also available in a variety of subjects.

The picture gallery contained 70 reproductions of famous

masters and regular lectures given on art appreciation. In this room groups also listened to gramophone recitals. Lecturers in art and music regularly attended these classes and lecturers were also used for other educational subjects.

Later the Southern took casualties from the many 'blitzes' on London. During the war years, the Southern treated 51,975 patients. These included 21,913 Naval Personnel, 9517 Army personnel, and 20,545 civilians.

After the Second World War the hospital became an NHS general hospital. It was closed in 1959. The buildings were demolished and is now under the A2.



1945. Learning a trade.



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