

# The Connaught Hospital in Orford Road

## Introduction

Connaught hospital served the people of Walthamsow and later Waltham Forest for very many years. It didn't spring fully fledged into the world but as the number of people in Walthamstow grew, it gradually evolved on a number of sites to meet their needs and was part of a much wider health provision for the Borough.



## Timeline History

In 1877, Mr and Mrs Tudor opened a Cottage for Sick Children in a private house in Brandon Road. This moved in 1880 to a bigger premises in Salisbury Road and became known as the Leyton, Walthamstow and Wanstead Hospital.

In 1894, Mr and Mrs Casey bought a large house called Holmcroft in Orford Road. This was a 'dower' house built by Alfred Janson for his wife. She died in 1893 and they bought it in order to donate it to be a hospital. This enabled the hospital to expand so that it could also provide general services and it was duly renamed the Children's and General Hospital for Leyton, Leytonstone, Walthamstow and Wanstead.



It was enlarged in 1897 and in 1903 and by 1925 had 50 beds. Additions made in 1926–7 included completion of the Leyton and Leytonstone war memorial ward in 1927. The hospital was renamed Connaught in 1928, the Duchess of Connaught having been patron since 1894. A dinner in 1938, chaired by the Duke of Kent, raised £17,000 for its running costs. By this time it had 100 beds.

*Above: Princess Louise Margaret of Prussia (Louise Margaret Alexandra Victoria Agnes; later Duchess of Connaught and Strathearn; 25 July 1860 – 14 March 1917) was a German princess, and later a member of the British Royal Family. She was the wife*

*of Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught and Strathearn. She also served as the Viceregal Consort of Canada, when her husband served as the Governor General of Canada from 1911 to 1916.*

The hospital was enlarged again in 1934 and had 118 beds in 1939..

## Wartime

**The war, with the consequent death and injury to many Walthamstow residents caused by air raids dramatically increased the work of the hospital staff.**

**The *Woman's Voluntary Service For Civil Defence* formed a working party at their Headquarters in the High Street Library which dealt with thousands of yards of material (bought by the Local Authority), and made them into various articles for the First Aid Posts, while other working parties made hundreds of articles for the Connaught Hospital, including many-tailed bandages, operation stockings, nurses' caps and sleeve lets, bed-socks, coloured blankets made of wool, and a host of other articles. Sewing machines were lent by the Education Committee, and ladies in the district also lent their own sewing machines so that this work could be carried on**

## A New Purpose Built Hospital ?

Although mooted and discussed in 1945, the prospect of building a larger hospital never materialised and, in 1959, the old Walthamstow Town Hall, built in 1866, was incorporated into the Hospital and became its main entrance. This expanded the hospital capacity to 128 beds.

The Hospital finally closed in 1977 due to financial cutbacks in the NHS.

*Right: The old Town Hall, Orford Road*



## The Oupatients Department

This was located at the top of Beulah Road and is now the *Turn Point Social Care Centre*.

## Patient Numbers

The report of the Medical Officer of Health in 1947 gives us some information about patient numbers in 1946 and 1947:

THE CONNAUGHT HOSPITAL.					
The Secretary to the Hospital has kindly supplied the following information:—					
“Of the total number of in-patients admitted during the year, 997 were residents of the Borough.					
“The following figures show the progress of the Hospital during 1947 as compared with the previous year:—					
	No. Admitted	In-Patients		Out-Patients	
		Average Stay	Daily Average	New Cases	Attendances
1947	2,285	16.79	104.73	19,342	95,814
1946	1,940	18.77	99.13	17,139	90,274
“Particulars as to Staff, Beds and Departmental activities:—					
There are 118 beds, including 10 private wards.					

  

THE CONNAUGHT HOSPITAL.	
The Secretary has kindly supplied the following summary of the work done in 1948:	
In-Patients—	
Number of patients admitted during 1948	2,804
Average length of stay	14.6 days
Daily average number	111.89
Number of patients X-rayed	1,010
Out-Patients—	
Number of new cases treated	23,310
Number of attendances	110,612
Number of patients X-rayed	10,840
Physiotherapy Department—	
Number of massage treatments	23,825
Number of electrical treatments	38,513
Number of sunlight treatments	2,526
Operations—	
Major operations	2,137
Minor operations	2,804
Number of beds	118
Number of new patients	22,310

## The Comely Bank Clinic

A large house called Comely Bank in Orford Road was the largest of several villas built between 1853-6 on the edge of Walthamstow Common. When first built, it had landscaped grounds that stretched to Shernhall Street. The property was acquired by Walthamstow Board member, William Elliott Whittingham (A school in Higham Hill was later named for him) in the 1890's and remained in his family until it was bought to be used as a clinic extension of Connaught Hospital in 1930

The clinic provided a variety of services including what was then regarded as 'revolutionary' artificial sun-light treatments. Many Walthamstow residents will have memories of attending the clinics.

Today, Comely Bank in Adison/Ravenswood Road is a Community Health Centre running clinics and a toy library

## Nurses Accommodation At Hayward House

There was residential accommodation for nurses at Hayward House that was conveniently located by the Nags Head Public House. Since the closure of the hospital this has reverted to being private residential accommodation.

## Public Dispensary

There was a Public Dispensary that was supported by subscription at 35, Orford Road in 1873. It moved in 1913 to no. 105 Hoe Street, where it remained until it closed in 1942.

## The Pathology Department



*Above: the St Mary's National School now the Waltham Forest Asian Centre*

After the Second World War, the St Mary's National School building, just a bit along the road from Connaught Hospital in Orford Road, was acquired as a Pathology department for the hospital. This building was built in 1866. to supplement the St Mary's National School in Vestry Road. Originally, it was occupied by boys until 1904, when the boys went to the Vestry Road school. It then became 'Girls' school and the Vestry road building became the 'Boys' school.

The premises served as the Pathology Department from 1949-1977 when the hospital closed. Today it houses the Borough's Asian Community Centre.

## Some Connaught Memories

This is what some ex hospital patients have written about the hospital:

Mick Gilbey in his very readable <http://micksmuses.com/tag/connaught-hospital/>

.....It was only a few months after my arrival in Walthamstow when out shopping with my mother, I told her I had a pain in the side of my stomach to which she did no more than take me directly to the doctors, shopping bags and all. Although I was unaware of it, my family apparently had a record of appendicitis problems and my mother fortunately knew the symptoms well. Our doctor a gruff but wise man by the name Dr. Belton did not mess around and called an ambulance directly to the surgery. Within the hour I had an emergency operation for a severe case of peritonitis, (ruptured appendix), which kept me in hospital and confined to bed for six weeks.

Connaught Hospital in Orford Road previously the Old Walthamstow Town Hall is where I was located, I really felt proud when about the second week of my stay I was inundated with dozens of letters and cards on the same day. It would appear that the Headmistress at Greenleaf Road School asked the entire school to write letters to me. Being confined to bed for so long is not easy for a youngster especially as one starts to get better and somewhat fidgety. I recall one day of suddenly being surrounded by an army of nurses during the doctors daily rounds. Even as a child I could sense that something ominous was afoot just by the number of nurses including the ward sister and in the way they positioned themselves around my bed. Before I knew it, four nurses held down each arm and leg as the sister painfully tore a large elasoplast type dressing from the scar on my stomach and then proceeded to cut the stitches off with a pair of scissors. There were a considerable number of stitches as micro-surgery did not exist in those days and I still carry the quite visible scar and stitch marks. My eyes still water at the thought of that day.



October 1953: Nurses and patients at the Connaught Hospital, Walthamstow, feeding one of the circus elephants after its free performance. (Photo by Fox Photos/Getty Images)

The second notable day that I recall during my hospital stay was about a week before I left. Again I was surrounded by several nurses and the ward sister. They told me I had to get out of bed and learn to walk again. This I did not understand as clearly I already knew how to walk, however with the nurses tightly holding each arm as I stood on the floor, my legs simply gave way under me. It is quite remarkable how quickly leg muscles can simply forget walking movements. I felt a little like Douglas Bader as I lurched around the ward trying to drag one leg in front of the other in turn. I was only allowed to exercise for about five minutes but remarkably the next day I found I could walk reasonably normal again but quickly became tired at the effort. Fortunately being a child with the excess of energy one has at that age, I found that my walking was back to normal by the time I left.....

Marilyn Stroud nee King <http://www.walthamstowmemories.net/html/Postbags/postbag12.html>

....We waited patiently for the traffic to thin out before deciding to cross but then not too far from us in the distance we could hear an ambulance bell and into view came this L.C.C. Ambulance tearing along Forest Road towards Palmerston Road. I suggested that we waited for the ambulance to pass before we crossed.

The next thing I knew was the ambulance door swinging open on the right hand side from the driver and it knocking both my friend and I to the ground and the one thing I seemed most worried about was the loaf of bread that began rolling down Forest Road. Of course the ambulance stopped and I remember seeing the policeman from the zebra crossing running down to us. My friend's coat had been ripped and she had hurt her arm but I had got off quite lightly save for shock.

We were both huddled into the back of the ambulance where a nurse was in attendance with a young boy who we had learned later was suffering with appendicitis and who was constantly being sick. We arrived at Casualty in Connaught Hospital waiting to see a doctor who ordered x-rays for my friend because of her arm.



We must have been there for over 2 hours and eventually we got the all clear to go with my friend's arm in a sling and her ripped coat over her other arm. As we left a nurse came running up to us and handed me the loaf of bread which I had bought previous to the accident and back we went to school to explain why we hadn't returned from lunch.

Just as we entered the hall the bell rang and classes began to empty. I remember us being surrounded by half the school all asking what had happened. I think we must have repeated our story over and over again.

The headmaster at the time suggested we went home and there was my Mum walking towards me calling me every name under the sun as she had been called into the office at work and told that I had been run over in Forest Road! I remember saying to her that they took care of the bread in casualty and she immediately dropped it into the dustbin!

My friend was compensated for her coat and her arm healed. Then the following week we made news on the front page of the Walthamstow Guardian "Ambulance In Accident Takes Two To Hospital". Felt quite a celebrity for a few weeks. But from that time on I always crossed on the zebra crossing. I had learnt my lesson .

Bill Bayliss remembers:

I have two memories of attending Connaught Hospital. The first was in 1960, when working in the High Street fish and chip shop I was skinning a skate (Ray fish family) and caught my hand on one of the hooks that are on the edge of skate wings. The following day my arm had swollen up like a balloon and I went to Connaught Outpatients to have it lanced, cauterised and have an antibiotic injection.



The second time was in 1966, when my wife had her an emergency appendectomy. At that time we had two young children and two short term foster children all under the age of five years. I notified the Walthamstow Child Care Officer expecting that, in the circumstances, she would remove the two foster children but nothing happened.

Although my wife was only in the hospital for less than a week, the children badly needed to see her and know that she was alright, I have vivid memories of getting all four children ready, loading the two youngest in the Silver Cross pram and pushing it up the hill with the two children who could walk trotting alongside to visit her.

## The Old Town Hall & Connaught Hospital

The building is a 'listed' building which means that nothing may be done to change the facade of the buildings. The front of the building is



unchanged. It has been cleaned so that it looks very much as it did when first built. Perhaps demonstrating the incredible diversity of present day Waltham Forest. It has been turned into the main UK Taoist temple by followers of I-Kuan Tao and one of the rooms is now lavishly decorated with 1,722 golden-painted buddhas, which line the walls from floor to ceiling.

*Above: The old Town Hall Building Today*

I-Kuan Tao may be translated as 'the way of unity' and is a Chinese movement whose teachings emphasize traditional values such as family, honor, respect and moderation.

Amongst its objectives are to:

Enlighten oneself and help others to be enlightened

Help the world to have peace and order

Transform people's hearts to goodness

Bring Great Harmony to the world



## The Connaught Day Hospital At Whipps Cross

Although Connaught Hospital is long gone (But not forgotten!) and has been replaced with Holmcroft House, a 30 unit retirement/sheltered housing development belonging to Waltham Forest Council; it is still remembered in the Department of Medicine for Elderly Care at the Connaught Day Hospital that is part of Whipps Cross Hospital.

Bill Bayliss

July 2014

## *Some resources used in this article:*

<http://ezitis.myzen.co.uk/connaught.html>

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/hospitalrecords/details.asp?id=2406>

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42780>

<https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/ke23-orford-road-conservation-area-appraisal.pdf>

<http://wellcomelibrary.org/moh/report/b19876671/1#?asi=0&ai=89&z=->

[0.3081%2C0.8423%2C1.8697%2C0.8027](http://wellcomelibrary.org/moh/report/b19876671/1#?asi=0&ai=89&z=-0.3081%2C0.8423%2C1.8697%2C0.8027)

<http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/nurses-and-patients-at-the-connaught-hospital-walthamstow-news-photo/3263275>

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/work/england/essex/user\\_1\\_article\\_2.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/work/england/essex/user_1_article_2.shtml)

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=QGj->

[wsJ885MC&pg=PT66&lpg=PT66&dq=connaught+hospital+walthamstow&source=bl&ots=AwecyJJPbg&si](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=QGj-)

[g=nOCgtDzJj0WOGG6w8ba3CwWwKt8&hl=en&sa=X&ei=oE8SU8SNEqTH7Ab5pIHwBw&ved=0CEIQ6AEw](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=QGj-)

[BDg8#v=onepage&q=connaught%20hospital%20walthamstow&f=false](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=QGj-)

<http://apps.nationalarchives.gov.uk/hospitalrecords/details.asp?id=1082&page=79>

<http://wellcomelibrary.org/moh/report/b1987635x/16#?asi=0>

<http://wellcomelibrary.org/moh/report/b19876336/>

<http://fycdkm.org/english/principle.html>