

# Whipps Cross Hospital

## Part 1 The First 50 Years



Although Whipps Cross isn't located in Walthamstow, for most residents it is regarded as their local hospital which is why I have included it as part of my Walthamstow Hospital mini series.

The name `Whipps Cross' comes from what was once an important local crossroads and from the family name of the local farmer - John Phipps. Early records mention the family from about 1374 and they also show how the name was corrupted to `Phypps Cross', then to `Fypps Cross' and, by 1636, to `Whipps Cross'.

Left: Nurse 'Gertie' - the 'old lady' of Whipps Cross

## Forest House

The *Forest House* estate lay to the south of Whipps Cross Road and west of James Lane. It has its origins in a lease of land granted by the Abbot of Stratford Langthorne Abbey in 1492. *Forest House* had been built by 1568 and was rebuilt before 1625. The estate passed through a number of hands until it was acquired by James Houblon in 1682, who build a new house on the site.

In 1703, the estate was sold to Sir Gilbert Heathcote (The last Lord Mayor of London to ride on horseback at the Lord Mayor's Show) In 1743, the estate was sold to the Bosenquet family who were the last private owners of the house.

The Bosanquet family, sold the property to the West Ham Union in 1889. Proposals to build a Poor Law school on the site or to use it as a cemetery were rejected because of poor drainage and eventually it was decided to build an infirmary on the site. (It seems that schools and cemeteries need better drainage than infirmaries!)

The old manor house of *Forest House* was converted to a workhouse and used from that year as an annexe to the West Ham Union workhouse in Leyton accommodating

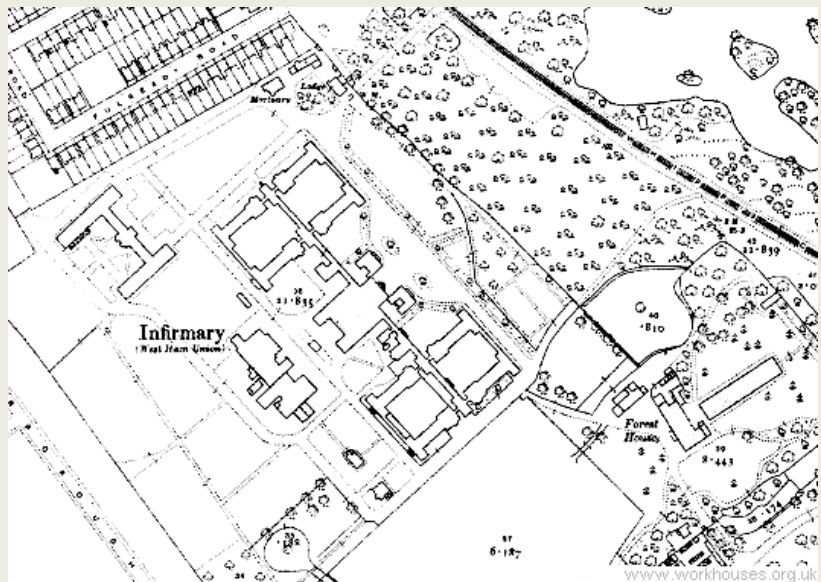
elderly infirm male mental patients. It was closed in 1962 when a new hostel, Samuel Boyce Lodge, was opened, and was finally demolished in 1964. The large pond in its garden had long been filled in after a nurse drowned in 1949.

The site of the house and its pond were left as open ground and are now used as a car park. The *Woodbury Unit*, a 36-bedded psychogeriatric facility managed by North East London Foundation Trust occupies the grounds of the house. The *Tomswood Rehabilitation Unit*, relocated temporarily from Claybury Hospital, is just to the southern edge of the site of *Forest House*.

An elaborate fireplace from Forest House is preserved inside the original entrance to the Hospital. Possibly sections of the perimeter wall of the estate have survived.

## The West Ham Infirmary

The concept of providing beds for the sick-poor, as opposed to the simply poor (For whom there was the workhouse) was new. Florence Nightingale had suggested the separation of the two needs and the first facility for the sick-poor was the Liverpool Workhouse Infirmary, built in 1885. The West Ham Union Infirmary at Whipps Cross became one of the first in the London Area.



Above : A plan of the hospital in 1919

## Construction

Work started on the new infirmary in 1900. It took three years to complete and cost £186,000. It opened in 1903 and comprised a central administration building with ward blocks on either side. (See appendix for full description)

## Receiving Wards & Residences

The administration building was flanked by two massive towers.

Receiving wards, each with its own bathroom, were located on either side of a large entrance hall - the one on the right for men and the one on the left for women. Corridors connected the wards to the residences of the Medical Superintendent and the Assistant Medical Officers.



*Above: Entrance to the hospital*

The Medical Superintendent lived in a commodious detached house to the right behind the administration block. On the left, the medical staff quarters, contained bed and sitting rooms for three doctors and a common dining room. The other part of this house contained a suite of rooms for the Matron and two Assistant Matrons.

## Kitchens & Dining Rooms



*Above: view of the entrance to the administrative block in 1904*

The kitchen lay immediately behind the main corridor of the main administration block, off of which, right and left, were the Medical Superintendent's office, Matron's rooms, nurses' and probationers' rooms, dining rooms, workrooms and storerooms. Behind the kitchen were the sculleries and the servants' hall.

## The Chapel & Domestic Staff Accommodation

On the first floor, at the front of the administration block, was a chapel which

could accommodate 200 people and, at the rear, bedrooms and bathrooms for the domestic staff.

## *The Wards*

The four symmetrical ward pavilions - two on either side of the administration building (the ones on the right for men and those on the left for women) - contained 672 beds. Ward Block A consisted of six wards of 24 beds each and 12 isolation wards of two beds each. Ward Blocks B, C and D were identical; each contained 168 beds. Access to the wards was through an entrance lobby from the small central administration ward block, which contained a stairway, lifts and utilities. Each Ward Block had two lifts - one for patients and the other for food delivery (three other lifts in the Infirmary were service lifts). At the entrance to each large ward were two isolation wards, a nurses' duty room, a Day Room for the patients and a linen store.



Above: view of the rear of the hospital



The tower annexes to the Ward Blocks contained bathrooms and WCs.

The 3-storey buildings were linked by tiered covered walkways at each level.

### *Utilities*

The Infirmary was lit by electricity and had central

heating, which was auxiliary to the open fireplaces. Each large ward had a double-fire descending flue stove. The basement areas of the Ward Blocks were mainly used to store coal. On the west side were the Steward's office and the storerooms for meat and milk. A subway under the main corridors contained electricity cables, hydrants and the pipes for steam and hot and cold water. The boiler house was connected to the administration block by a tunnel.

### *A Boardroom & A Padded Cell*

Between Ward Block B and the central administration building was a Board Room.

Immediately underneath this was a room of similar size, intended to be used

for religious services. Next to the Board Room, and between it and the administration building, was a detached ward for short-term lunatics. It contained 2 beds, a bathroom, a WC and an attendant's room (off which was a padded cell).

### *Dispensary & Drug Store*

The dispensary and drug store were located in a detached building on the other side of the administration building, between it and Ward Block D. It was connected to the main corridor at ground level.

### *Maintenance Facilities*

To the rear of the administration building were the laundry and boiler house. The self-contained laundry had washing, drying and ironing rooms. There was a clothing disinfecting chamber, as well as a storeroom for inmate's clothing, and accommodation for the Head Laudress. Adjacent to the boiler house was the machine room containing engines and dynamos, etc., with storage for batteries.

Workshops for the carpenter and the smith lay at the end of this building. Houses for the engineer and the Steward were located to the east of these.

## *The Nursing Staff*

Initially the nursing staff consisted of 23 trained and 63 probationer nurses. The Nurses' Home contained separate rooms for 72 nurses, and bed and sitting rooms for the Home's Superintendent. On the ground floor were two recreation rooms, one each for the nurses and the probationers. These could be made into one large room, when required, for parties and entertainments.



## *Horse Drawn Ambulance Station, Mortuary and Dead House*

An ambulance station and its stables were by the entrance from Whipps Cross Road, as was the mortuary building, containing a dead house, a waiting room and a small chapel, and a post-mortem room.

## *Water Supply*

The Infirmary's water supply came from an artesian well sunk to a depth of 400 feet (122 metres). If needed, this could be supplemented by water delivered direct to steel storage tanks in the water towers from the East London Waterworks Company.

## *An Operating Room*

Originally there wasn't an operating 'room' but this was soon added and in 1912 the number of operations had risen to 350 a year. This, was some 35 years before basic antibiotics were available. There was some argument about the proposed use of the term 'operating theatre' as it was felt to be too dramatic and frightening - so it was called the 'operating room'.

## WWI

During WW1, in 1917 part of the Infirmary became the Whipps Cross War Hospital. It was affiliated to the Colchester Military Hospital and 240 beds were given over for wounded and sick servicemen. During the war some 6,000 injured soldiers were treated at the hospital.



*Above Some hospital staff in WWI*

## A Royal Visit

King George V and Queen Mary visited in November 1917 and commented on the magnificence of the buildings. The Queen presented medals and certificates to all the nurses who has passed their Final examinations that year.

After the visit, the hospital name was changed from that of the *West Ham Union Infirmary* to *Whipps Cross Hospital*. This marked the change from being a much-hated Poor Law institution, to that of being a general hospital.

## Whipps Cross Hospital

During the 1920's the first four Consultants arrived who specialised in: dermatology, ophthalmology, ear/nose/throat, and genitourinary surgery.

## Management & Administration

In 1926 the Board of Guardians who managed the Hospital were dismissed by Neville Chamberlain, the Minister of Health, as they had run up a debt of £250,000.

In 1930, the Boards of Guardians were abolished and control of the Hospital was taken over by West Ham Borough Council. The Council added new ward blocks and,



*Above: an aerial view of the hospital in the 1930's*

by 1936, the Hospital had 741 beds and had been recognised as a training school for nurses. During the years 1938-1940 four new blocks were built at the eastern end of the original buildings

Expansion of the facilities began in earnest in 1940 with four new blocks at the eastern end of the original building. Additional specialist units followed, along with larger capacity - an Outpatients facility (1958), the the Maternity wing (1973), the `S' block (1993) and the `S' block Phase 2 (1995).

## **WWII**

During WW2 the Hospital joined the Emergency Medical Service, with 388 of its 744 beds reserved for civilian air-raid casualties.

## ***The National Health Service***

In 1948, it was absorbed into the fledgling National Health Service under the control of the Leytonstone Group Hospital Management Committee, part of the



North East Metropolitan Regional Hospital Board. It had 1,044 beds, of which 846 were open.

## The Lake & Grounds



One facility on the site to disappear was a natural lake at the back of the main building, which was used for swimming until 1949, when a nurse drowned in it. It was only then discovered that the lake was badly contaminated, so it was drained and filled. It has now been turned into a car park - like much of the hospital site!

Following alteration during 1948 and 1949,, Wards C.5 and C.6 became TB wards for male and female patients, while Edward and Margaret Wards were converted into accommodation for babies and children.

In 1950 Ward B.5 was converted into improved facilities for the Pathology Laboratory. In the following year Ward A.2 became an X-ray Department with four major units, and Ward A.7 a Physiotherapy Department. Ward A.6 was adapted as permanent accommodation for the Pathology Department, with the provision of an animal house. The side rooms of Ward A.5 provided added facilities for the Pathology Laboratory. The verandah was enclosed in the Occupational Department.

In July 1951 an extension to the X-ray and Physiotherapy Departments was opened by a local MP - the Revd Reginald Sorensen, M.P. of Health, who had been delayed by unavoidable Parliamentary business).

In the same year, the Wilfred Lawson Temperance Hotel in Woodford Green was purchased by the Regional Hospital Board as additional accommodation for 50 nurses. The



Hospital Management Committee decided to use the premises also as a Preliminary Training School for student nurses; this opened on a temporary basis in October 1951. The nurses' badges bore the Hospital's motto: *Semper ad coelum* (always aim high).

Bill Bayliss  
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## Appendix

A detailed description of the buildings appeared in *The Builder* in April, 1903.

### INFIRMARY, LEYTONSTONE, N.E.

A NEW Infirmary for West Ham was opened by Mr. J. Lasham at Whipp's Cross, Leytonstone, N.E., recently. The estate comprises about forty-four acres of gardens, pleasure grounds, and meadow land, together with the mansion house (known as Forest House) and outbuildings, the lodge and cottage (since pulled down) in James-lane, and the cottage at the entrance to the estate in Whipp's Cross-road. The establishment is placed nearly parallel with the Whipp's Cross-road, the main entrance being reached by a roadway across a strip of forest land lying immediately to front of the boundary of the site. Generally, the plan is an administrative block centrally with two ward blocks right and left, connected by a covered corridor running from end to end of the building. Immediately in the rear of the administrative block is the boiler-house, laundry, and machinery building, and to the east of same are detached houses for the engineer and steward. On the south-west side of ward block D is the nurses' home, and near the Whipp's Cross-road entrance are the ambulance and stable buildings and the post-mortem room, mortuary, &c. The accommodation is as follows: — Ward A, six wards of twenty-four each, 144; twelve isolation wards of two each, twenty-four; wards B, C, D, being exactly similar, 504; lunatic ward, two. The whole of the buildings are connected by a complete arrangement of fire-escape bridges, so that every ward has access to other blocks at each floor level, and these bridges are constructed by brick arching. In the administrative, right and left of the large entrance hall, are placed male and female receiving wards, each having attached a bathroom, and close by these wards are corridors connecting the medical superintendent's and assistant medical staff houses. Immediately behind the main corridor

Each ward consists of a small central or administrative ward block, containing stairs, lifts, nurses' lavatories, &c., and from the main corridor at each floor level access to the large wards is gained by disconnecting lobbies or bridges. On entering one finds a dayroom, two isolation wards, a nurses' duty-room, and a linen store. In the tower annexes are the bathrooms and lavatories.

The nurses' home contains separate rooms for seventy - two nurses, superintendent's bed and sitting-rooms, whilst on the ground floor are recreation-rooms, for nurses and probationers, and these two rooms can be thrown into one, when required, for entertainments, &c. The laundry and boiler block consists of a self contained laundry with washing, drying, and ironing-rooms, with separate provision for staff, clothing disinfecting chamber, and inmates' clothes store, and attached are living-rooms for the

Externally the buildings are faced with red bricks, obtained locally, with Bath and Portland stone dressings, the roofs of the chapel, towers, and staff quarters being covered with green slates. The walls of bathrooms, kitchen, sculleries, dynamo-room, and some stores are faced with glazed bricks, the dayrooms having dados in salt-glazed bricks. The walls of wards are finished with Keene's cement painted, with skirtings in glazed bricks. The corridors are in all cases of fireproof materials, finished with terrazzo, or artificial stone. The buildings are warmed by radiators when necessary, as auxiliary heating to the open fireplaces. Each large ward has a double-fire descending flue stove, and the separation wards have warm-air grates. The electric lighting has been carried out by Messrs. F. A. Glover & Co., Ltd., of London. The lifts were provided and fitted-by Messrs. C. & A. Masker, Ltd., of Liverpool. There are eleven lifts in all, four, being one in each of the blocks, A, B, C, D, for patients, four in the same blocks are dinner-lifts, and the remaining three are service-lifts. The kitchens have been fitted by Messrs. Benham & Sons, Ltd. The water supply to the institution is obtained either from the East London Water Co.'s mains, delivered direct to the steel storage tanks in the water towers; or the alternative provision (and the one to be most largely drawn upon) is from the artesian well sunk by Messrs. Isler & Co., to a depth of 400 ft., and which is expected will yield sufficient water to meet the demand of the institution.

Messrs. Shillitoe & Sons, of Bury St. Edmunds, have been the general contractors, Mr. H. Fawcett being the works manager, Mr. T. E. Edmunds has acted as clerk to the works, and Mr. John Buley, of Laurence Pountney Hill, Cannon-street, E.C., has superintended the engineering works for the

is the kitchen, and off this corridor, right and left, are the medical superintendent's office, stores, matron's rooms, workrooms, nurses' and probationers' rooms, dining-rooms, and behind the kitchen are sculleries and servants' hall. On the first floor in the rear are bedrooms for servants, and attached are bathrooms, &c. In the front is the chapel, accommodating 200, and off the main corridor, from this floor, storerooms and tanks in towers are reached.

The basement or lower ground floor of the ward blocks (for, owing to the fall of the land, the back portion is above ground) is chiefly occupied by coal stores, but on the west side are steward's office, meat and milk stores, cellars, &c. Under the main corridor is a subway containing the steam, hot and cold-water pipes, hydrants, electric cables, &c, and the boiler-house is connected to the administrative block by means of a tunnel.

head laundress. In line with the boiler-house is the machine-room, containing engines, dynamos. &c, and behind is storage for batteries, &c. At the end of this building there is a carpenter's and smith's shop. The mortuary block contains a post-mortem-room and dead-house, and attached is a small chapel, together with a waiting room, &c. Adjacent is a stable building.

Between ward block B and the administrative building is the boardroom, access to which is gained through an ante-room from the main corridor at ground-floor level, and adjoining is a lavatory. Immediately under the boardroom there is a room of similar size, which is intended to be used for the purpose of religious services. Next the boardroom and between it and the administrative building is a detached ward, providing accommodation for short-period lunatics, and containing a ward for two, bathroom, lavatory, attendant's-room, and, leading from this, a padded-room. On the opposite side of the administrative block and between it and D block is the dispensary, a detached building connected to the main corridor at ground-floor level ; this contains, in addition to the dispensary, an office, and the basement or lower ground floor is occupied by the drug store. Right and left of the entrance hall and chapel building are respectively the medical superintendent's house and the medical staff quarters. The

Guardians, and Mr. A. T. Walmisley, M.Inst.C.E., of Westminster, has acted as consulting engineer to the architect. The stoves and ranges have been supplied by Messrs Hendry & Pattisson, and Carter & Aynsley ; the glazed bricks by Brookes, of Halifax, and the red bricks by Cornish, of Shenfield. The stonework was by F. Mortimer, of Walthamstow; heating and hot-water work by Wontner, Smith, Gray, & Co. ; the hydrants by Shand, Mason, & Co. ; the road-making by H. V. Manders ; the marble mosaic and terrazzo flooring by Pattesson & Co. of Manchester, and the Art Pavements and Decorations Co., Ltd. ; electric bells, Jackson Bros. ; glazing to chapels, Lowndes & Drury ; steel tanks, Steavenson & Co. ; covering to boilers, Dick's Asbestos Co. ; fencing, Bayliss, Jones, & Co., and E. C. White ; water softener, Stanhope Water Co. ; floor polishing, Ronuk, Ltd. ; engineers for well pumps, J. Reedman & Co. Mr. Crow, of Stratford, supplied the clock and bells. The architect to the Guardians is Mr. Francis J Sturdy, of London. The amount of the building contract was 186,665/.

	<p>former is a commodious residence for the medical officer, and is connected to the main entrance hall, though the building is detached, and the latter, connected in a similar manner, contains bed and sitting-rooms for three assistant medical officers, together with a common room for dining. &amp;c., and the remaining half of this house is occupied by a suite of rooms for the matron and two assistants. On each floor are two bathrooms and lavatories, &amp;c. and on the ground floor a further lavatory in addition.</p>	
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## Some Sources

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