

## Remembering Quex Hospital

It is hard to imagine a museum housing large animals and skulls being transformed into a hospital, but that is exactly what happened at the outset of World War I.

For four and a half years during the Great War (1914-1918) Major PHG Powell-Cotton and his wife, Hannah, made their home available as an auxiliary military hospital, staffed and run by Birchington Voluntary Aid Detachment. Dr Harry Worthington, the Birchington GP was the Medical officer throughout the war.

The two museum galleries of the time were transformed into wards, but unexpectedly large numbers of patients led to extra accommodation being hurriedly prepared in the various parts of Quex House, including the large dining room, which was cleared of furniture to make way for numerous mattresses on the floor.

When the hospital closed at the end of January 1919, more than 1600 wounded had been nursed at Quex with only three deaths.

### Celebration

**The Armistice on 11th November 1918** was greeted with enormous relief and celebration. Some patients rushed over to the bell tower to ring the bells. The work of the hospital continued with the wounded and sick still arriving, at least for a few months. At Christmas 1918 the wards were a riot of decorations. Hannah Powell-Cotton dressed as Santa Claus and 75 people sat down to Christmas dinner in the Hospital mess.

### **Grateful son visits**

Colin Walker from Woolacombe, N. Devon, was interested to hear that this year's reunion of his Edmonton County Grammar school 1947 classmates, would be in Broadstairs, as it gave him the chance to visit the place where his father, Sydney, had been treated as a patient 92 years ago. Mr Walker was able to see archive photographs of the hospital at the time, showing patients and staff, including Dr Worthington who played a major part in Sydney's complete recovery.

Sydney Walker from Tottenham, signed on three weeks after his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday and after training he survived two years in the trenches at Ypres and the Somme, but had then been injured on the front line in France in 1917.

Sydney, then aged 20, was amongst heavy Middlesex casualties in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battle of the Scarpe at Cherisy, France in May 1917. Caught on a railway line by machine gun fire, it seems likely that he was one of the six out of 50 who survived from "A" and "C" Company of the 12<sup>th</sup> Middlesex, on that fateful day. The Battalion lost 14 Officers and 304 men killed wounded or missing in that action. Sydney was shot in the arm and head, and temporarily blinded. He was sent back to England, and after six days travelling, arrived at Quex Hospital.

After Sydney's sight returned, the Medical Officer, local GP, Dr HE Worthington decided not to remove the bullet lodged near the brain, between the eyes. As soon as his arm injury healed, Syd was transferred on 10<sup>th</sup> July 1917, to Shorncliffe camp, then to Chatham and finally sent to Cambrai in October 1917, to join the major Tank offensive.

Sydney Walker survived the war, thanks, in part, to the care he received at Quex and from Dr Worthington. He was very fortunate to survive, as he fought in the front line of many of the major battles of that war. He died in Enfield, Middlesex, in 1976 age 78.



*Sid, left, with fellow patient at Quex Park Hospital in June 1917*