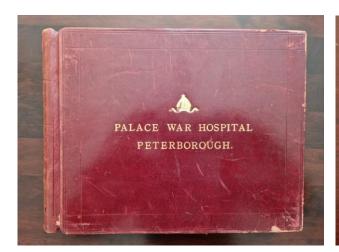
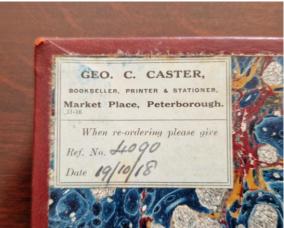
Peterborough Cathedral, Bishop's Palace, First World War Hospital - By David Gray

Back in March I visited Peterborough Cathedral to see an exhibition called 'The Longest Yarn', which celebrated the anniversary of D-Day. The display was very good but what especially caught my eye was a small display table set up near the entrance of the cathedral which commemorated a little known part of Peterborough's First World War history, the Palace War Hospital. Opened on October 1st 1918, the Bishop's Palace Hospital, also known as the Palace Auxiliary Hospital, had 50 beds and was situated inside the Palace of the Bishop of Peterborough, within the Cathedral Precincts. It was open for a very short time and closed on March 15th 1919, having treated 156 men in 5 months.

This is the first time the following details have been published from this rediscovered book.





The Palace War Hospital record book, *above*, was specially made by Peterborough printer George C. Caster. It wasn't available until the 19th of October 1918, nearly three weeks after the hospital was opened.

After my visit to the Cathedral I sent an email via their website asking if there was any way I could get a look at the hospital record book. I was hoping that it would contain the details of the patients and even the nurses that stayed there. I was answered by Paul Sellin, the husband of the Bishop of Peterborough, the Right Reverend Debbie Sellin. Paul arranged for me to visit him at the Palace and look at the book and I was not to be disappointed. Paul showed me into one of the rooms that had been used as a ward for patients during that period and while we sat there he allowed me to look at the record book and take photographs of the pages.

I found that the Palace Hospital Record book did indeed record the details of not only the patients at the hospital, but also the nurses that worked there. Each patient and nurse wrote the date they entered the hospital (sometimes also the date they left); they signed their name and also wrote their home address and their unit. This was more information than I could have hoped for, although as there were 169 separate sets of handwritten details, it is inevitable that a few words are not legible, having been scribbled down with an ink pen. I have compiled an Excel Spreadsheet (see separate attachment), which records all of the entries, which I hope will make it easier to read what was put down, but I have marked out one or two words as illegible. Readers may be able to decipher these when looking at the photographs of the record book pages later in this article.

V.A.D. (Voluntary Aid Detachment) hospitals were run by a voluntary unit of civilians, providing nursing care for military personnel across the British Empire in the First World War. Although V.A.D. hospitals were linked to war efforts, they were not under the control of the military. V.A.D. nurses worked in field hospitals close to the battlefield and longer term places of recuperation back home.

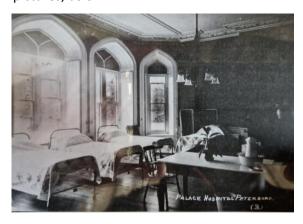
We can see on the first page of the book, *below*, that the first five signatures belong to the nursing staff. The first to sign was Judith M. Metcalf, the Commandant and person in charge. Her unit was the 'London 110 Red X [Cross] V.A.D.' and was living at Sutton Grange, Wansford. Then followed four other nurses, Florence N. Wilkinson, Quartermaster; 97, Park Road, Peterborough; Kathleen M. Smith, The School, Tansor, near Peterborough; Harriet L. Cook, West End, Yaxley, Peterborough; and Nina M. Gee Gothic House, Thorney. There are the details of thirteen nurses entered into the book although we don't know exactly how many worked there. There were also male nurses as indicated in the newspaper story of October 1918 below, but they don't appear to have signed the book.

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"Peterborough Advertiser, Oct 1918

The first convoy of wounded for the new V.A.D. hospital at the Bishop's Palace, Cathedral Precincts, arrived on the morning of Tuesday 1st October, on the 9.50 train from Northampton. The casualties were met by men of the Peterborough detachment of the V.A.D. and taken to the Palace where they were welcomed by the Commandant, Miss Metcalfe, and the staff. The two nursing sisters, Miss Cormack and Miss Cook arrived on Saturday 28th September. All the cases in the first arrival were convalescents, and they were all delighted to arrive at such a cosy hospital as the Palace. Many were taken into the grounds to bask in the autumn sunshine."

Very little was printed in the local press regarding the Palace Hospital, probably because it was so short lived. Paul Sellin showed me a number of photographs taken at the hospital during the war and I took a 'then and now' photograph of the room we were in as a comparison with one of the old pictures, *below*.





Sharp eyes will notice I have 158 patients listed in my spreadsheet when the hospital is supposed to have only treated 156 patients. This may be because I have two nurses in the 'Patients' list but have not been able to pick them out. As I don't know how many nurses served at the Palace I don't know how many are missing from the 'Nurses' list. We do know there were male nurses there so this may be where the error comes from. Those that know more about unit definitions may be able to find them in the original sheets.

Five of the patients are listed in the record book as 'died':

Private, 6974, **Bert Wootton**, Depot, Lincolnshire Regiment. Transferred to (239408) 580th Agricultural Company, Labour Corps, was admitted to the Palace Hospital on November 2nd 1918. He died on February 10th 1918 and is buried in Birmingham, Lodge Hill, Cemetery.



Private, 1133784, **Thomas Sparrow**, 683rd Agricultural Company, Labour Corps, was admitted to the Palace Hospital on November 11th 1918. He died aged 26 on the day he was admitted. He was the son of Henry and Elizabeth Sparrow, Otter Holt, March, Cambridgeshire. He is buried in Peterborough (Old) Cemetery, Broadway.



Private, 4987, **Henry Higgs**, 7th London Regiment, transferred to (480511) 683rd Agricultural Company, Labour Corps, was admitted to the Palace Hospital on November 12th 1918. He died on November 15th 1918 and is buried in Peterborough (Old) Cemetery, Broadway.



Private, 203584, **William W. Wise**, Bedfordshire Regiment, transferred to (254629) 669th Agricultural Company, Labour Corps, was admitted to the Palace Hospital on November 20th 1918. He died on December 3rd 1918 and is buried in Peterborough (Old) Cemetery, Broadway.



Private, 21015, **Edward Thomas Hovell**, 16th Cheshire Regiment, transferred to (500022) 669th Agricultural Company, Labour Corps, was admitted to the Palace Hospital on November 22nd 1918. He lived at 32, Albert Place, Peterborough, and died of sickness on November 28th 1918 and is buried in Peterborough (Old) Cemetery, Broadway.

The entries in the record book are not always in date order. Occasionally they are written in groups and in what appears to be the same handwriting. A nurse may have been asked to go around the wards and fill in the details of any men who had not yet done so, which would explain the same handwriting. It may be that men were not fit to write in the book when they were first admitted, or there was just too much going on for anyone to ask them to write their details down at that time. Later, when it was more convenient, they wrote in the book but by then others may have gone before them and they were then out of date order.

I have photographed every page from the record book and they can be found on the following pages. I have reproduced these here so that readers can see the actual handwritten entries themselves. I have also created a spreadsheet which shows this information set out in the same order as it was written, but it will be easier to read and understand as some of the writing is not clear. There are still one or two words that I have not been able to decipher, in which case I have entered the term '[Illegible]'. Having access to the original pages may help someone to work out more of these illegible words.

Photographs From The Palace War Hospital Peterborough



The room below is accessed through the door seen at the back in the picture above.





Above, another view of the room in the previous picture



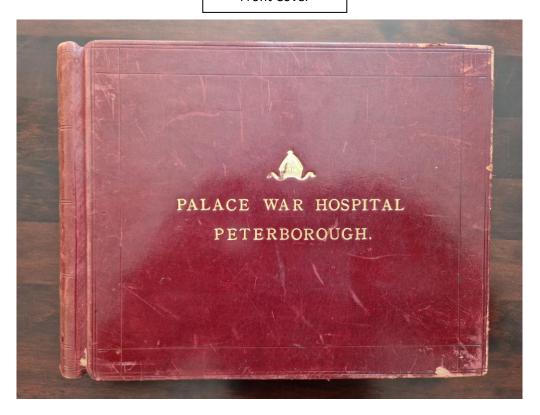


Above, the group facing the camera to the left are standing in the doorway to the Palace.

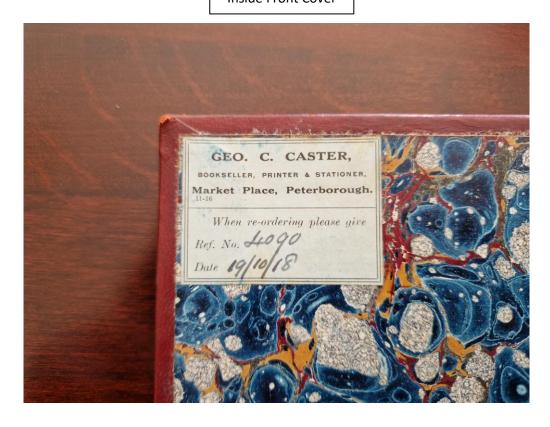


<u>Palace War Hospital Peterborough – Record Book</u>

Front Cover



Inside Front Cover



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