

Recruitment

Those who wished to join the VAD completed an application form and would then be interviewed by the selection board. If the interview was successful, references were sought. Accepted candidates had to agree to be vaccinated against diseases such as typhoid, to conform to regulations of behaviour and to provide their own uniforms.

Conditions of employment for VADs stated that they had to be trained in first aid and home nursing, they were required to work under fully trained nurses, and they had to be between 23 and 38 years of age. The salary was £20 a year, although some refused payment, and many others worked at a lower rate of pay than their experience and qualifications warranted. Men between 18 and 36 years of age were not accepted unless they could prove that they were unsuitable for combat roles.



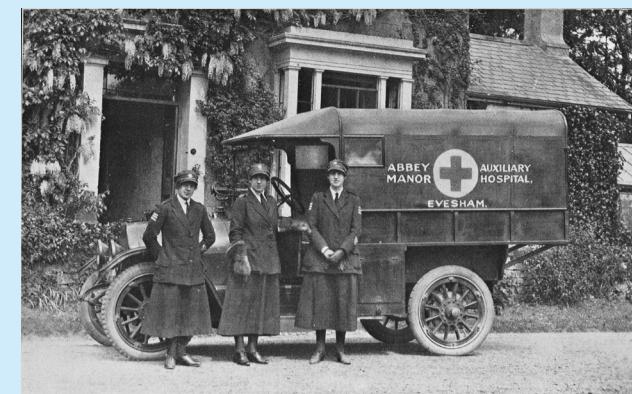
WWI VAD uniform (IWM)



VAD Recruitment poster, 1915 (IWM)

Most of the women who volunteered for VAD work came from middle and upper class families, had no need to work and had never done so. VAD work was liberating for these women, and many went on to stay in employment after the war.

VAD hospitals were opened in most large towns in Britain. These hospitals cared for patients who were less seriously wounded than those for whom the main military hospitals were designed. Rather than intensive nursing care, these patients required peace and quiet, good food, and sleep in order to recover in both body and mind. The healing of psychological trauma was just as important as the healing of broken bodies. An autograph book kept by Nurse Stokes of the Hartlebury hospital is filled with messages from patients which attest to the importance of the peace and comfort found in VAD hospitals.



Abbey Manor Auxiliary Hospital Ambulance, Evesham

Training

Female VADs were taught first aid, home nursing and hygiene by approved medical practitioners, as well as cookery. They were also taught self-defence in order to cope with attacks by patients, and undertook lifeguard training if they were posted to a hospital near water. Men were trained in first aid in-the-field and stretcher bearing. VADs could also undertake specialist training in such disciplines as massage therapy and X-ray machine operation.

Training took place at a recognised teaching institution such as Tredegar House, the London Hospital's training home. VADs had to stay for seven weeks while they received instruction, with free board and lodging but no pay apart from a laundry allowance. Exams took place in the sixth week. After passing the exams in first aid and home nursing, the VADs worked at a hospital for a month's trial, after which they were accepted into a hospital for three months' "hard work" probation period before they were accepted full-time.



First World War period British Army canvas stretcher with two wooden carrying poles (IWM)

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About Worcestershire World War One Hundred

Cultural and heritage organisations from across Worcestershire have come together to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War One with an outstanding 4 year programme of events and activities under the banner Worcestershire World War One Hundred. The programme, which received the largest Heritage Lottery Fund Grant outside of London for a project commemorating the First World War, will commemorate the role Worcestershire played in World War One and tell the stories of Worcestershire people, their involvement with and personal legacy from the War.

Worcestershire World War One Hundred

www.worcestershire.co.uk/
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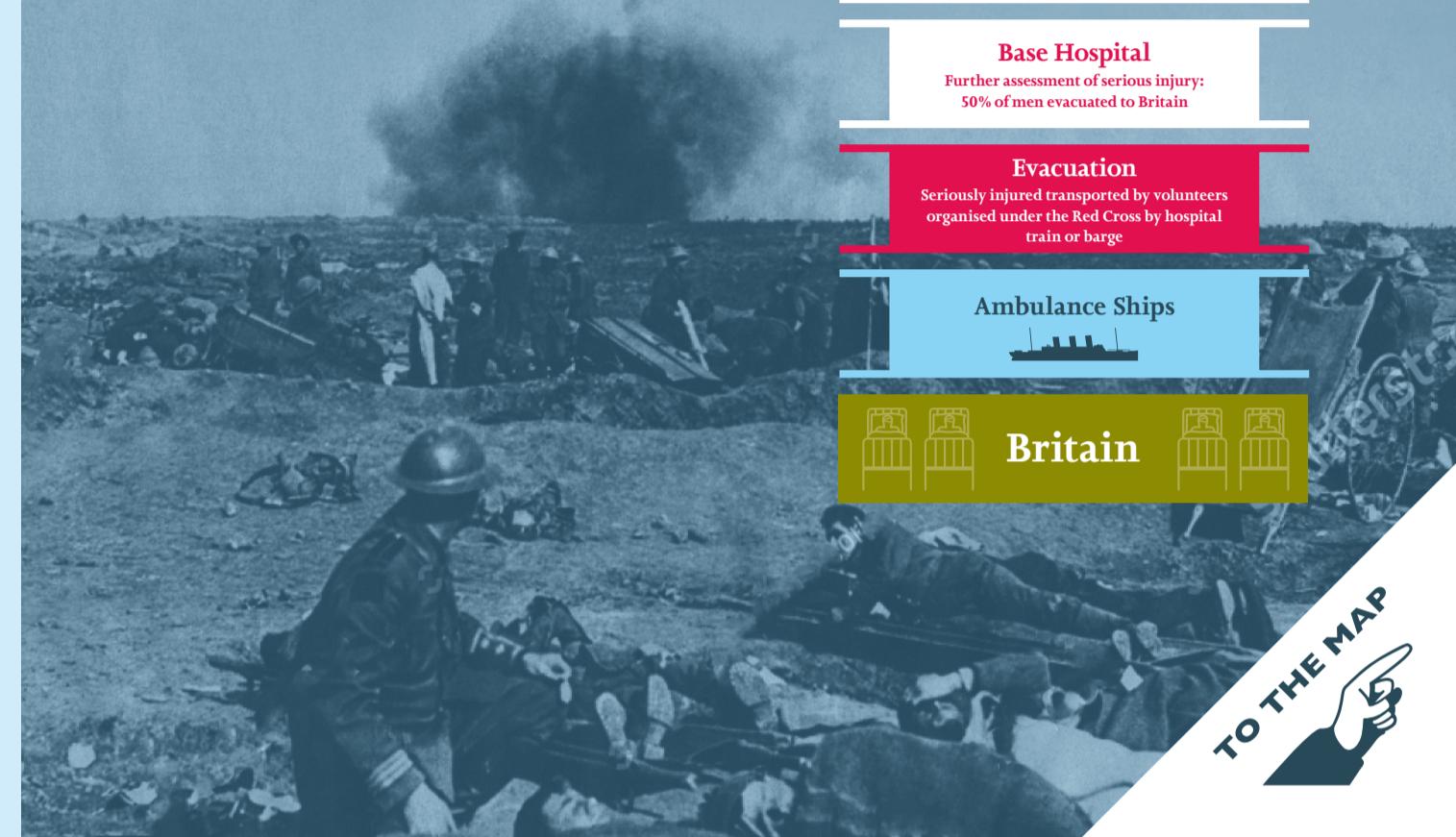
@WWIWorcs [World War One Worcestershire](https://www.facebook.com/WWIWorcs)

From battlefield to hospital

It was often a long and arduous journey to a hospital, which only added to the need for peaceful recuperation. From the front, the patient was taken first to a field ambulance (a mobile medical unit, not a vehicle), then to a casualty clearing station, then by train to a base hospital some distance from the front. When he was well enough for further travel, the patient was sent back to Britain by boat across the Channel, then by train to a military hospital. Most of the patients in Worcestershire's VAD hospitals came via the Birmingham Military Hospital.



© Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum



Base Hospital
Further assessment of serious injury:
50% of men evacuated to Britain

Evacuation
Seriously injured transported by volunteers
organised under the Red Cross by hospital
train or barge

Ambulance Ships

Britain

TO THE MAP

History of the VAD movement

The Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) was an auxiliary nursing system founded in 1909 by the Red Cross and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, to provide nursing support, cooking and transport services in hospitals. By the time World War I broke out there were over 2,500 VAD units in Britain. Of the 74,000 VAD members in 1914, two-thirds were women and girls. Most served in military hospitals and convalescent homes in Britain, as the Red Cross was initially reluctant to allow untrained nurses a role in overseas hospitals, and military authorities would not accept VADs for frontline service. However, the shortage of trained nurses eventually made it imperative to use VADs in overseas military hospitals.

The vast numbers of wartime casualties led to the expansion of military hospitals, and many civilian hospitals were given over to the military authorities. By war's end there were about 80,000 VAD members: 12,000 nurses working in the military hospitals and 60,000 unpaid volunteers working in auxiliary hospitals of various kinds. During four years of war 38,000 VADs worked in hospitals and served as ambulance drivers and cooks. Female volunteers undertaking these duties released men to go to the front. By 1919, 11,000 men had been released for active service and were replaced by women.

VAD Hospitals in Worcestershire



Life for the staff

A typical VAD hospital was staffed by a commandant who was in charge of overall administration, a quartermaster who was responsible for supplies, a matron who was in charge of the nursing staff, and a number of local volunteers who were trained in first aid and home nursing. Duties of the VAD staff in these convalescent hospitals included tasks such as cooking and serving meals, cleaning, stoking fires, driving, changing dressings, emptying bedpans, and taking temperatures. It was hard and dirty work, with long hours and only half a day off per week.

Male VADs were used mainly for jobs that required skills or strength that women in those days lacked. For example, Alfred Fussell was a railway worker who served as an ambulance driver at the Battenhall hospital. The majority of ambulance drivers were taken from male VADs. Men at home often divided their time between working as local ambulance drivers and acting as night orderlies in auxiliary hospitals. However, as more men enlisted, many women volunteered as ambulance drivers.



Nursing staff, Hartlebury Castle, 1914

Life for the patients

VAD hospitals were more relaxed and homely than the military hospitals, although the soldiers were still under military discipline and had to wear the blue uniform that denoted their status as wounded soldiers rather than shirkers. Most stayed at the hospitals for a few weeks, and as they recovered they were expected to undertake duties that helped the hospitals run smoothly. Even so, they enjoyed themselves. One soldier wrote in the Hartlebury autograph book, 'I got wounded on the 21st of April at Hill 60. I was sent back to England and I came to Birmingham hospital and from there to Hartlebury. I was here for 6 weeks and enjoyed myself while I was here and I was very sorry to go away, and I hope if I get wounded again they will send me back to Hartlebury.'

Life at the hospitals ran to a strict timetable, but did provide plenty of leisure time. Abbey Manor's rulebook dictated breakfast at 8 am, dinner at 12.30 pm, tea at 5 pm, and supper at 7.30 pm, though patients were allowed to go into the town in the mornings and afternoons as long as they returned in time for tea.

At Abbey Manor, patients were provided with entertainments such as outings, sports, amateur dramatics and handicrafts. They were allowed to go into the town, where there was a canteen they could use, complete with refreshments, reading material and a piano. Visitors were allowed on Friday and Sunday afternoons until 5 pm. Relatives could visit any day between 2 pm and 6 pm, and relatives who had travelled considerable distances were often provided with accommodation by local families. However, the rule book dictated that all patients able to walk were required to go to church on Sunday. At Hartlebury, pastimes included croquet, bowls, painting, walks, embroidery, boat trips, fancy dress competitions and even a gymkhana. Patients at The Larches were allowed to use the Workmen's Club on Church Street and were given free seats at the Vicar Street Picture House.

The local community also provided assistance to the hospitals, with farmers giving food and local medical professionals providing their services free of charge. There was also much fundraising by the local community in order to provide money to keep the hospitals running. The proceeds from 1918's fundraising fête at Abbey Manor was used to purchase a much-needed ambulance.



VAD Hospitals in Worcestershire

At the outbreak of war the Red Cross had been inundated with offers of accommodation for hospitals. Within Worcestershire over 30 hospitals opened in private houses and public buildings, including in Pershore, Malvern, Droitwich, Kidderminster, and Battenhall and the Infirmary in Worcester.

Other buildings that were perhaps too small to be used as a hospital, or had other purposes, were used for associated Red Cross functions. Worcester's Guildhall, for example, was a Red Cross depot used for administrative support and training purposes.



1 ABBEY MANOR

The main VAD hospital in the county was Abbey Manor in Evesham, whose owner, Mrs Florence Rudge, had been preparing since before war broke out. The hospital was ready by September 1914, but received no patients until the following May. More than 3600 wounded soldiers were treated at this hospital, which had a fully equipped operating theatre in its former conservatory. Mrs Rudge also took on the tenancy of Chadbury House as an annexe to Abbey Manor, adding another 45 beds to her hospital, which closed in 1919.

2 ARELEY KINGS



3 ASHFIELD HOUSE

Ashfield House in Malvern treated 1033 patients between its establishment in July 1916 and its closure in March 1919. Approximately 300 yards away, another house, called Formosa, was opened in April 1917 as an annex to Ashfield, and closed in February 1919.



Patients, Hartlebury Castle



© Charles Hastings Education Centre

8 HIGHFIELD HOSPITAL



12 THE LARCHES

In Kidderminster, The Larches was used as a hospital from May 1915 until April 1919. It was staffed by members of the Red Cross detachments of Kidderminster, Bewdley and Wolverley, under Miss Marion Tomkinson, who was commandant for the entire period of operation, and Miss Stratton as Matron from 1915 to 1918. With a maximum of 100 beds, it treated a total of 2278 in-patients as well as out-patients.

9 HILL COURT



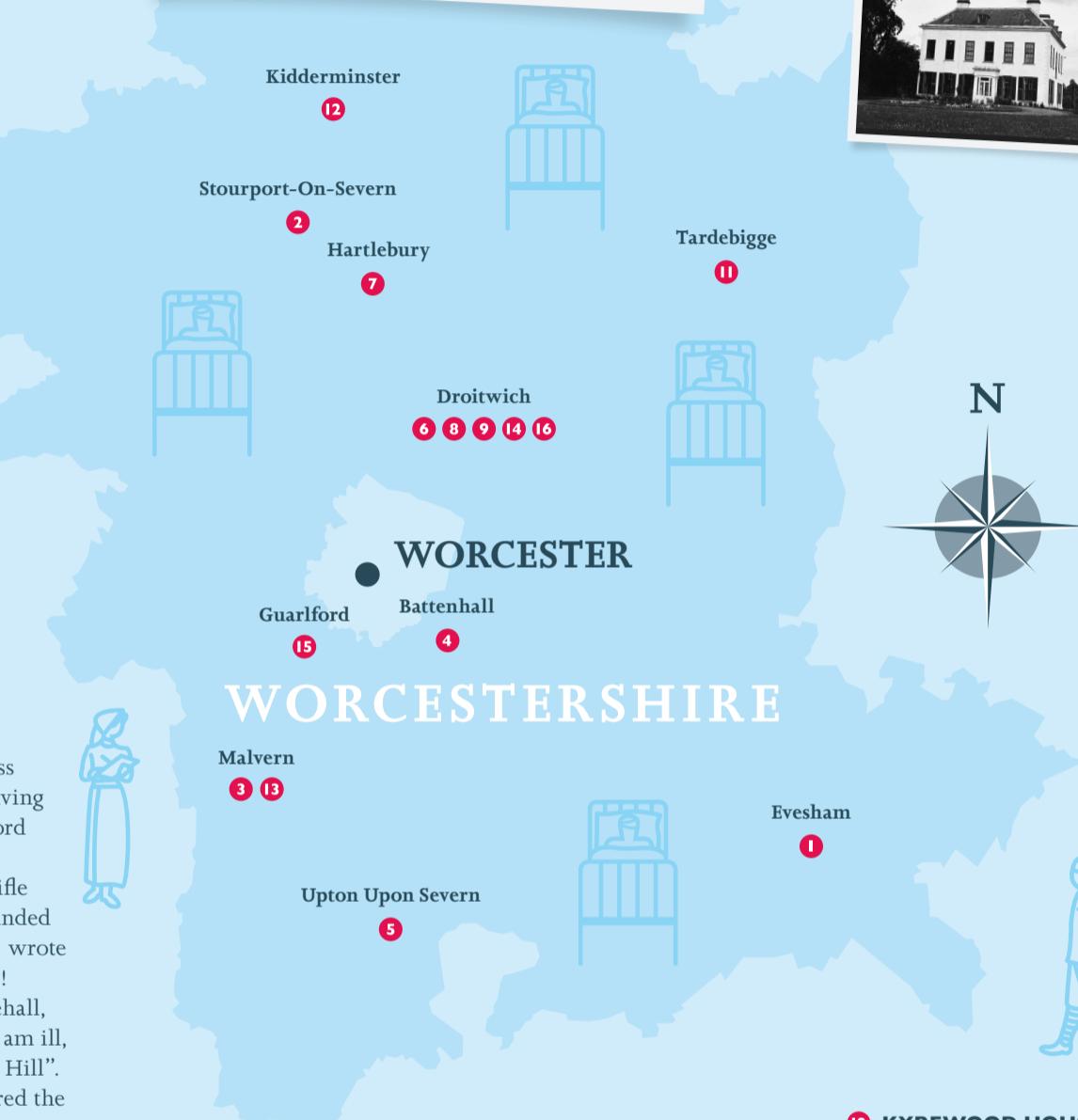
13 MALVERN

In Malvern, there were a number of very small hospitals. A house called Fairfield had 61 beds, while a house at 49 Hornydold Road became St. John's Red Cross Hospital with 15 beds. A house known as Harderigg was loaned to the Navy for use as a hospital. Its original complement of 20 beds was later increased to 25.

14 OAKLANDS

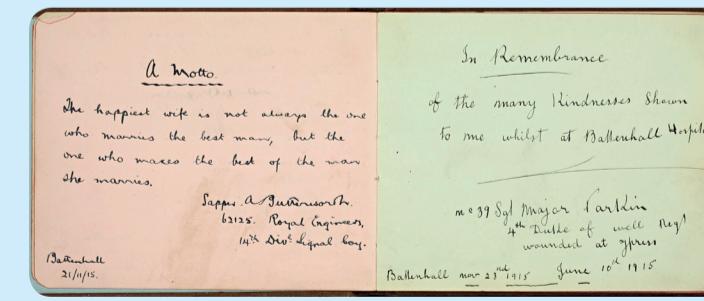


15 RHYDD COURT



4 BATTENHALL

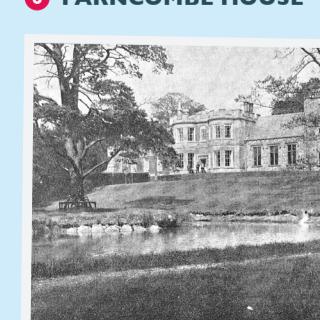
Between 1915-1919, Battenhall Mount was leased by the Red Cross for VAD use, the surviving autographs books record the soldier's affection: Sgt S R Evans of the Rifle Brigade who was wounded at Hooge in July 1915, wrote "Battenhall! Battenhall! We're all fond of Battehall, Take me there when I am ill, The VAD beneath Red Hill". He warmly remembered the kindness of the sisters.



5 THE BOYNES



6 FARNCOMBE HOUSE



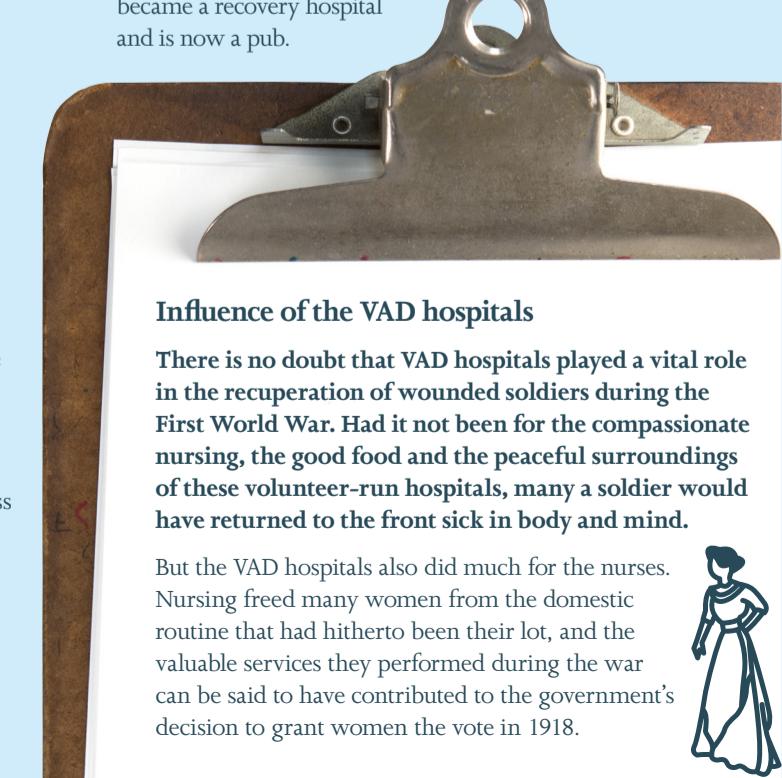
10 KYREWOOD HOUSE



11 TARDEBIGGE

Hartlebury Castle was the home of the Bishop of Worcester, and had a Church of England clergy training college in a building on the estate. This closed in September 1915, and the Bishop offered the building to the Red Cross. A VAD hospital of only 16 beds was established, after initially operating at The Woodlands, a private house in the village.

The Hartlebury hospital had a staff of one doctor, a nurse, a cook, a laundress and 23 VAD nurses. The commandant was Frances Gibbons, who, with her sister Margaret, often had soldiers staying in their home when no beds were available at the hospital.



Influence of the VAD hospitals

There is no doubt that VAD hospitals played a vital role in the recuperation of wounded soldiers during the First World War. Had it not been for the compassionate nursing, the good food and the peaceful surroundings of these volunteer-run hospitals, many a soldier would have returned to the front sick in body and mind.

But the VAD hospitals also did much for the nurses. Nursing freed many women from the domestic routine that had hitherto been their lot, and the valuable services they performed during the war can be said to have contributed to the government's decision to grant women the vote in 1918.

