

# FRANK DERRY - ALIAS MR AMBROSE WILSON

Iain Wakeford 2016

In 1929 Frank J Derry, employed a friend to design a new home on eight acres of land at Ashwood Road, Woking.

Frank Derry was born on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 1869. In his early years he had been a journalist, writing for a magazine called 'Leisure Hours' and was apparently invited by Alfred Harmsworth to join him on his new venture – the Daily Mail. But for one reason or another Derry declined and by 1911, with several failed business ventures under his belt (if you will pardon the pun), he hit upon the idea of selling 'the Magneto Belt' a magnetised belt to 'improve health and vigour'.

His new company, Ambrose Wilson Ltd, sold the belts for 'a deposit of one shilling down with four weekly one shilling payments thereafter' advertising them in the 'Umpire' and other popular publications of the time, eventually

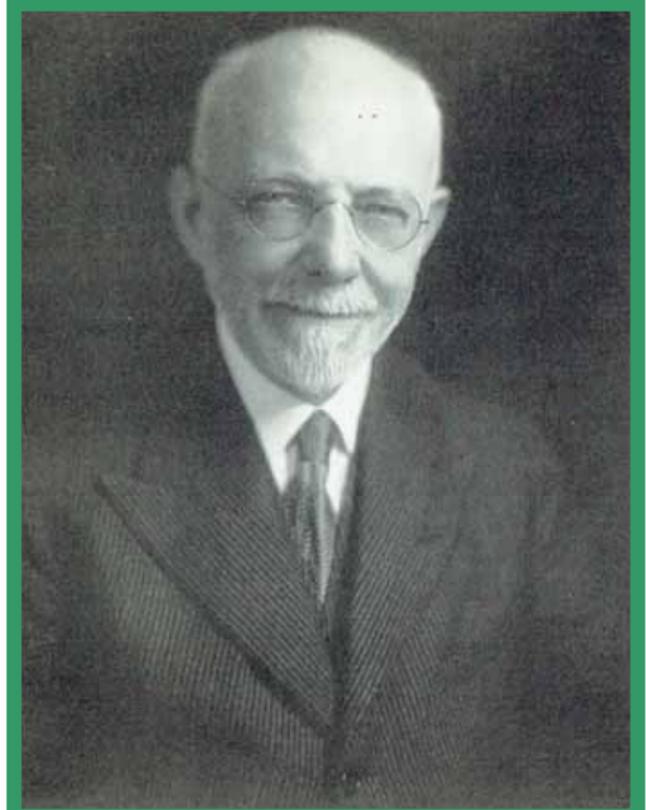
In the 1901 census (below) Frank Derry was living at The Retreat in Guildford Road (where he is listed as a book publisher), but later electoral registers record him in Maybury Road, Midhope Road and York Road before his move to Chertsey Road.

going on to set up a factory producing the belts (including the larger 'Hercules' belt), and then his famous 'Magneto Corset' in September 1911.

According to the official history of Ambrose Wilson Ltd (*The Ambron Story – Biography of a Business*) early in 1911 Frank Derry was almost broke. He couldn't even afford a cup of tea at Waterloo and had it not been for the fact he had a season ticket on the train, he wouldn't have been able to get home to his wife and family in Woking. 'It was a bleak winter for the Derry family, especially the Christmas of 1910 and early 1911.'

The story then goes that there was a 'haunted house' owned by a doctor who could 'neither let nor sell it', so Frank persuaded the good doctor to let him and his family live there 'rent free' and break the spell – the doctor paying him £50 for the trouble!

I don't know about the haunted house, but the electoral registers show that prior to 1911 Frank Derry was living in a house called 'Clifton'



Frank Derry had been a publisher and advertising agent before hitting upon the idea of selling magnetized belts and corsets on a mail-order basis.



Administrative County		The undermentioned Houses are situate within the boundaries of the													Page 41
Civil Parish		Ecclesiastical Parish		County Borough, Municipal Borough, or Urban District			Ward of Municipal Borough or of Urban District			Rural District		Parliamentary Borough		Town or Village or Hamlet	
of Woking (part of)		of St Peter (part of)		of Woking Urban District			of Woking Station (part of)			of Surrey		of Woking (County of Surrey)		of	
No. of Inhabitants	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	HOUSES			Name and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	Condition as to Marriage	Age last Birthday of	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION	Employer, Worker, or Own account	If Working at Home	WHERE BORN	17		
		Inhabited	Uninhabited	Number of Inhabitants (including those of lower Main Street)									(1) Deaf and Dumb	(2) Blind	(3) Lunatic
	222 The Retreat	1			Frank Derry	Head	M	21	Publisher Books	Employer		London Islington			
					Kate E. do	Wife	F	35				do Lambeth			
					Cyril do	Son	S	5				do Lewisham			
					Blady E. do	Son	S	1				do do			
					Beatrice do	Sister	S	50				do Islington			
					Beatrice H. Hall	Serv	S	40	General Servant Domestic			do Piccadilly			



# TO EVERY WOMAN WHO WEARS A CORSET.

**AN IMPORTANT FREE TRIAL OFFER BY MR. AMBROSE WILSON OF HIS FASHIONABLE MAGNETO CORSET.**

**New Fashion CORSET that CURES ILLNESS AND RESTORES VITAL ENERGY sent to ANY ADDRESS for**

**1/- ONLY.**  
(See Coupon Below.)

I WANT every lady who reads this to know that she can have at once a pair of my beautiful "**New Model**" (Gold Medal) **Magneto Corsets** sent direct to her address in return for a Postal Order for 1/-

The price of my Corsets is not pounds, it is only shillings. The price is 5/11, but I do not ask you to send me that amount. All I ask is that you send me a Postal Order for 1/-, and by return of post I will send you a pair of my Magneto Corsets that will fit you like a glove. It will be a red-letter day to you the day you receive the Corsets, because it will be the beginning of new life.

The joy of New Life, of New Health, and New Vigour thrills through every nerve. You feel a different woman. Your outlook upon life is different, brighter, happier, and more hopeful.



A NEW & FASHIONABLE (GOLD MEDAL) CORSET THAT POSITIVELY CURES COMPLAINTS WILL BE SENT AT ONCE TO EVERY LADY WHO FILLS IN THE FORM ATTACHED AND ENCLOSES A 1/- POSTAL ORDER.

Remember that my Magneto Corsets are Nature's Remedy for Rheumatism, Gout, Sciatica, Lumbago, Nervous Troubles, Mind-Wandering, Loss of Will Power, Involuntary Blushing, and scores of similar Ailments, and I place it in your hands, to test for yourself, for the trifling outlay of 1/-. Does not this show that I have faith in what my Corsets can do for you?

## THE AMBROSE WILSON MAGNETO CORSET

### CURES—

Nervous Troubles, Mind Wandering, Involuntary Blushing, Loss of Will Power, Rheumatism, Gout, Sciatica, Lumbago.

### SECURES—

Beautiful, Fashionably Correct Figure, Perfect Comfort, Graceful Blending of Contour, whether full, medium, or slender figure.

"ON APPROVAL."

**COUPON.**

POST TO-DAY.

To Mr. AMBROSE WILSON (Corset Dept. 215), Vulcan House, 56, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.

Simply write your full name and address on a piece of paper, fill in your Corset measurements, pin coupon to paper, and post it to me at once.

Please send me a "Magneto Corset" on approval. I enclose 1/-, and if I do not immediately return Corset, I will pay you the balance of 4/11, either in one sum, or by weekly instalments of 1/-.

Size of waist..... Bust..... Hips.....

NOTE.—Foreign and Colonial orders must be accompanied by the full amount, and 1/6 extra to pay postage.

# OPEN-AIR WARDS AT PYRFORD HOMES

Previous articles in this series have looked at the establishment of the Church of England Waifs & Strays Society's homes at Byfleet Corner in the 1890's and the transfer to Pyrford of the St Nicholas Home in 1907-8, but now I want to bring the story more up-to-date.

The original St Nicholas Home in Pyrford was officially opened on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 1908 by the Duchess of Albany, but as I noted last year it was some time before the design, by Mr E J May, was complete due to lack of funds.

The building could accommodate 120 children up to the age of sixteen, but once the boys reached the age of seven they were transferred to the St Martin's Home at Surbiton, until 1915 when a new St Martin's Home was built in the grounds at Pyrford. It was officially opened on the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1916.

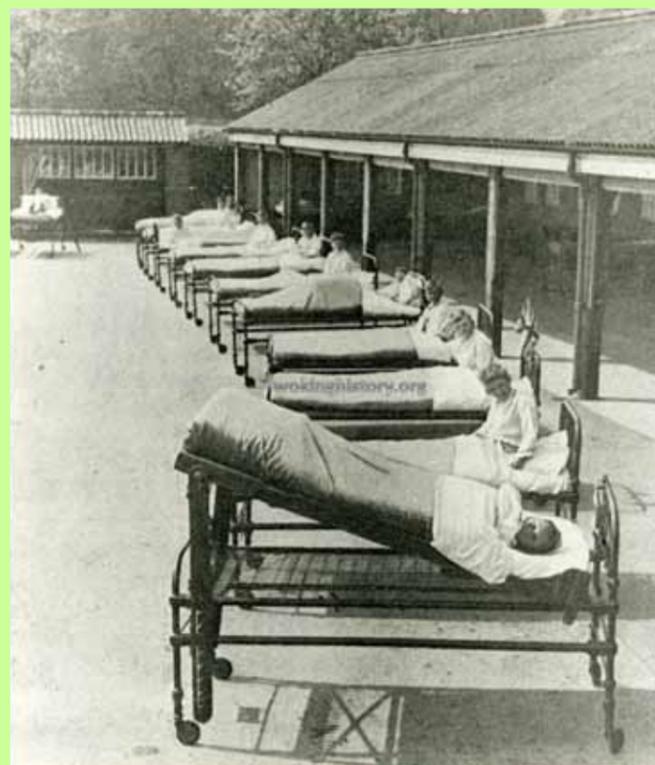
The two homes were initially run separately, but in 1923 they were amalgamated under the rather long-winded title of the 'St Nicholas'



and St Martin Orthopaedic Hospital Homes and Special School of Recovery' – more often than not shorted to the 'Homes for Crippled Children'.

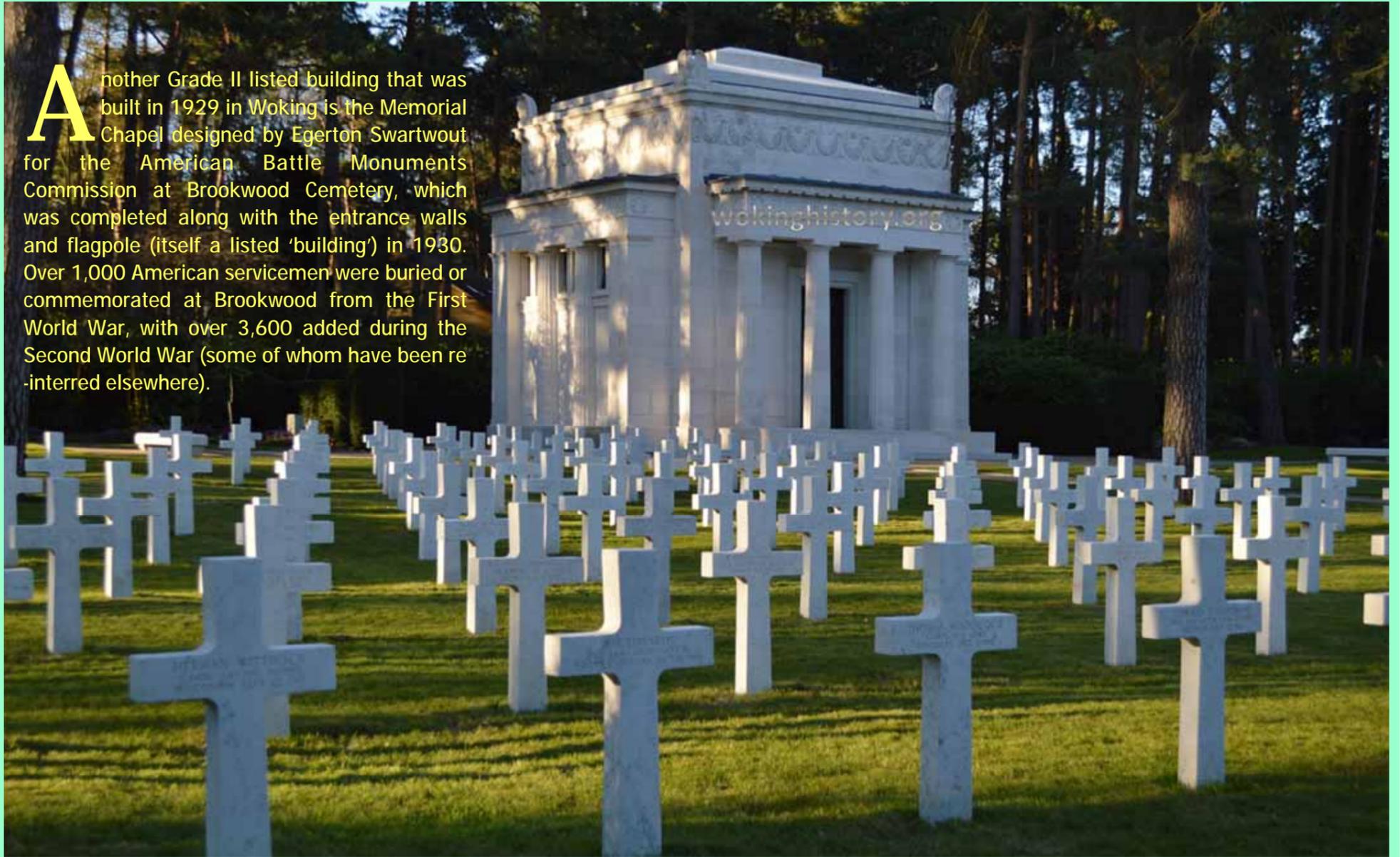
In July 1928 the Duchess of York (later Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother) visited the homes, accepting purses on behalf of the extension fund and inaugurating the new open-air ward and operating theatre that apparently had cost £10,000.

The idea of open-air wards was apparently that the fresh air and sunshine would help with the children's treatment – especially those suffering from TB and 'Rickets'. How often the weather allowed their use is not certain, but judging from the photographs they seem to have been quite popular, with another open-air ward added a couple of years later – opened by the Bishop of London.



# A LITTLE PART OF BROOKWOOD THAT WILL BE FOREVER AMERICAN

**A**nother Grade II listed building that was built in 1929 in Woking is the Memorial Chapel designed by Egerton Swartwout for the American Battle Monuments Commission at Brookwood Cemetery, which was completed along with the entrance walls and flagpole (itself a listed 'building') in 1930. Over 1,000 American servicemen were buried or commemorated at Brookwood from the First World War, with over 3,600 added during the Second World War (some of whom have been re-interred elsewhere).



2. BROOKWOOD - Surrey, England - 437 Graves — General View



Photo S. Francis, Woking, Surrey, England