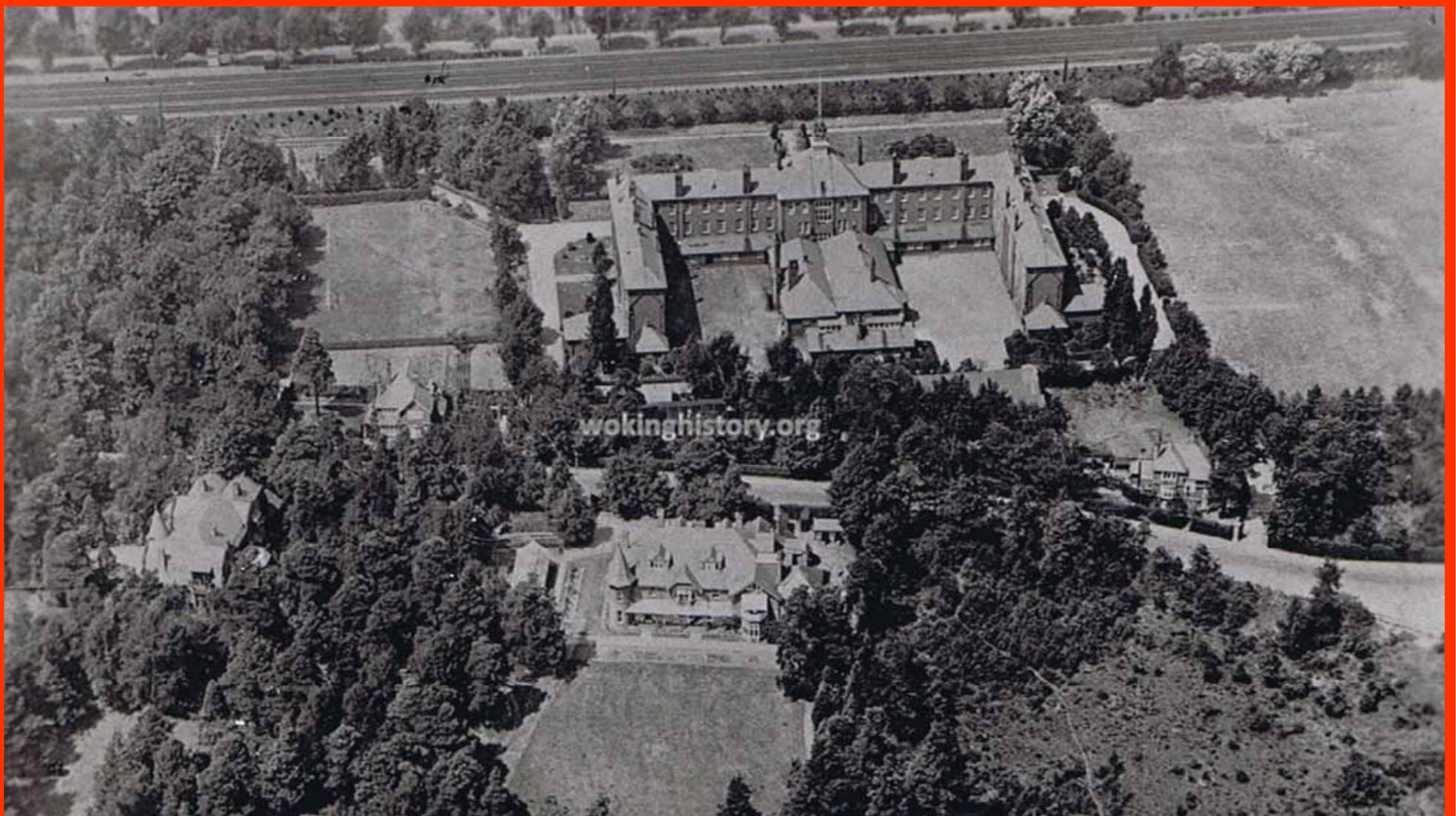


# WOKING'S WORLD WAR II HOSPITALS

Iain Wakeford 2017



As in the Great War, the Second World War also saw a number of local hospitals converted (in part) into 'emergency war hospitals', such as Brookwood Asylum, the Woking Victoria Hospital and the Woking Maternity Home (Wynberg) – but other local institutions and private residences also played their part such as the Southern Railwaymen's Home in Oriental Road.

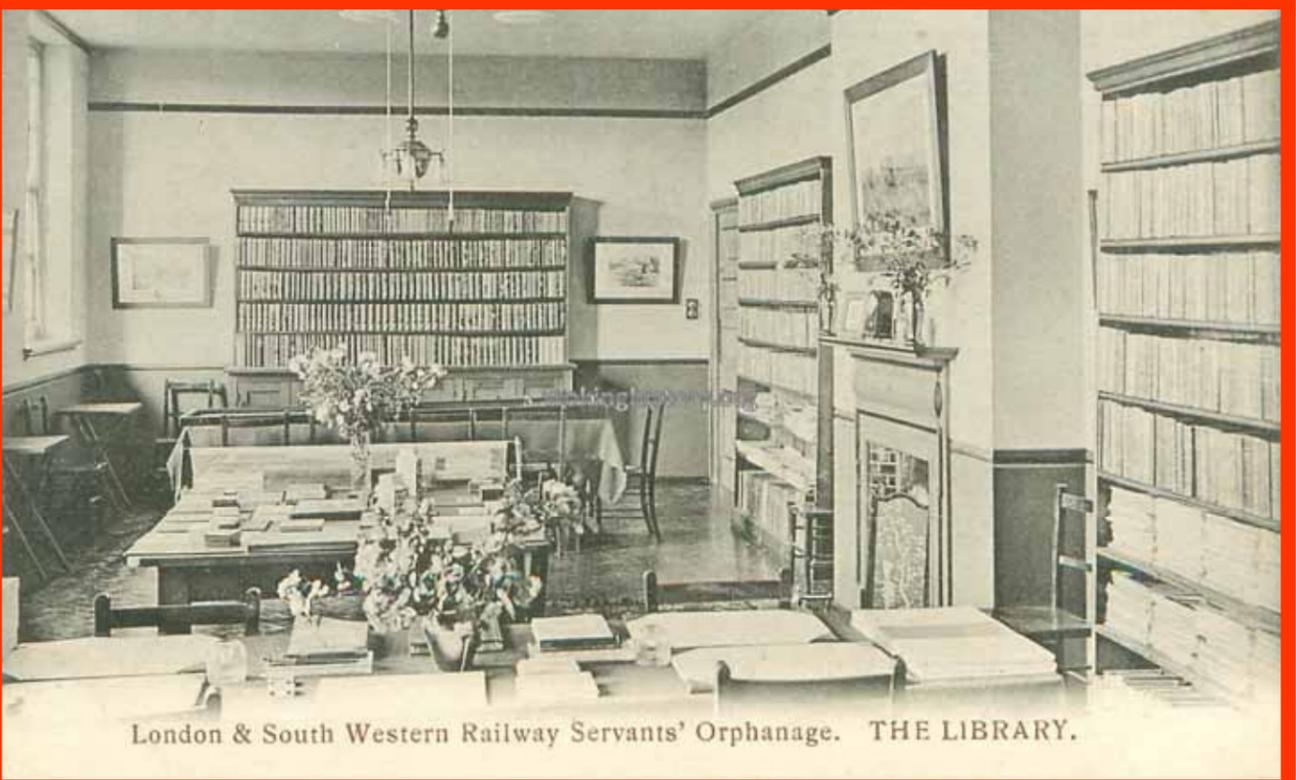
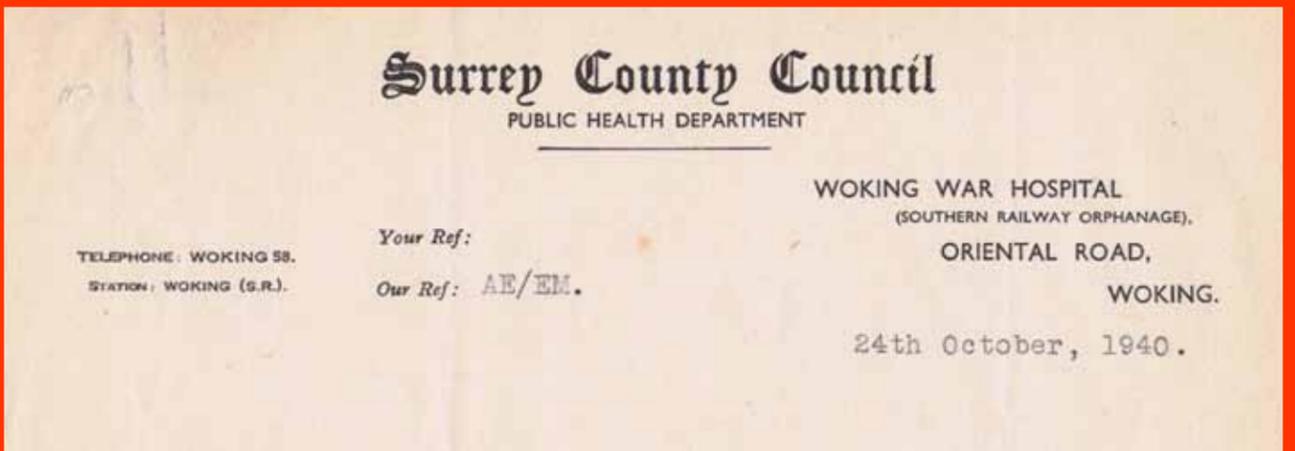
The Southern Railway Magazine from May 1940 noted the many meetings between the Board of Managers of the Railwayman's Home, the Office of Works and the Ministry of Health regarding the take-over of the orphanage. They proudly pointed out the 'complimentary remarks which have been made as to the high standard of maintenance and hygiene to be found in the Home' as well as favourable comments regarding the children's library. The children had already been evacuated to places such as Basingstoke and Guildford, although how much safer they were there as opposed to Woking is perhaps debatable.

Another local institution which catered for a number of war wounded was the St Nicholas and St Martin's Homes at Pyrford run by the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society. Their expertise at dealing with children with various disabilities proved vital in the treatment of servicemen who suffered similar injuries during the war.

The St Peter's Convalescent Home on Maybury Hill also took in the war wounded as well as the Clock House Private Nursing Home at Byfleet, with even part of the Gordon Boys School at West End playing its part in looking after some of the wounded.

The Southern Railwayman's Orphanage in Oriental Road was taken over as the part of the 'Woking War Hospital'.

After the war the Home took over the 'Wynberg' War Hospital (the house with a corner turret, above) across the road as extra accommodation.



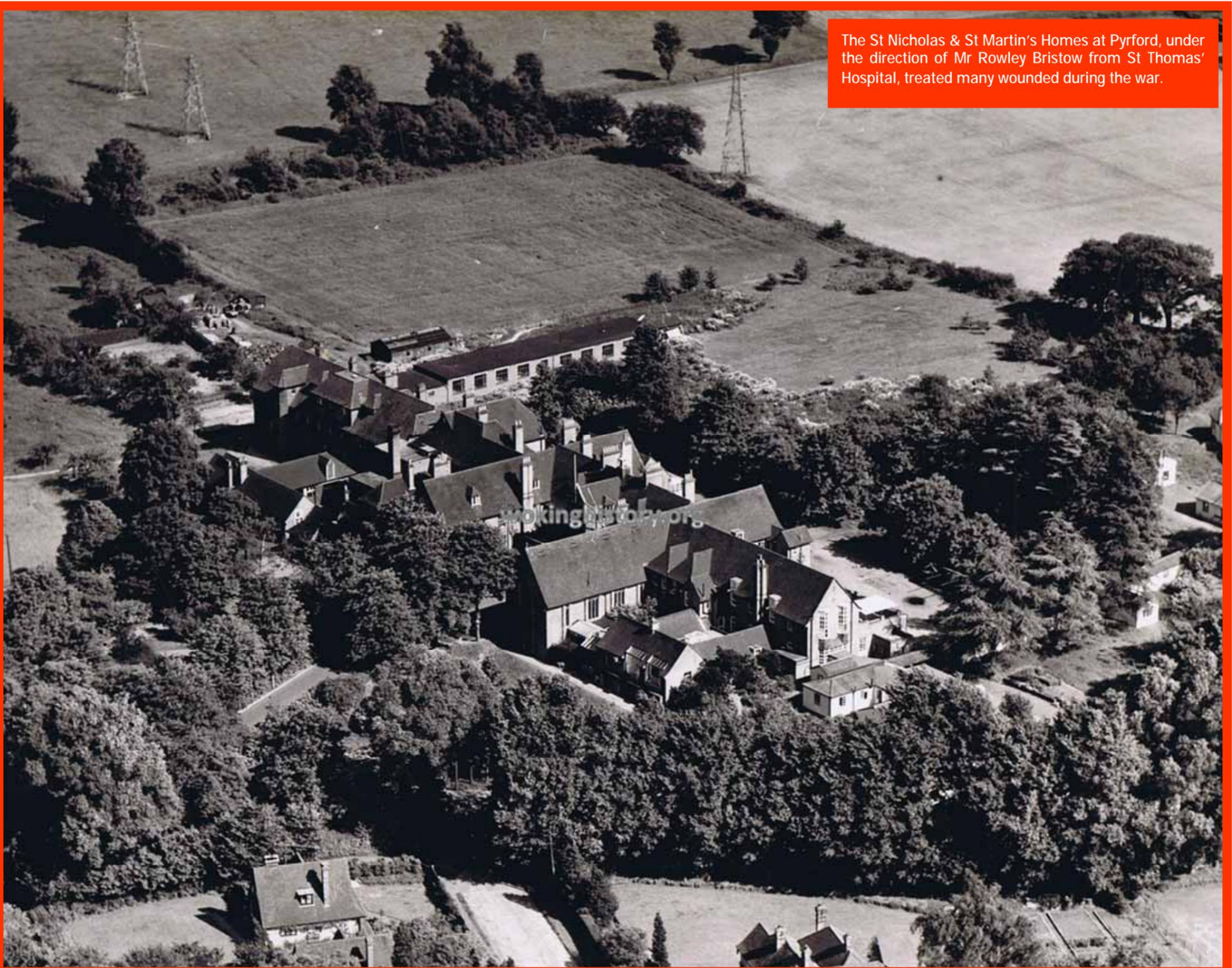


Part of Brookwood Hospital was turned into an emergency war hospital during the war.

The Woking Victoria Hospital also received some of those wounded, with local convalescence homes, such as the Clock House at Byfleet and the St Peter's Convent on Maybury Hill, also playing their part.



The St Nicholas & St Martin's Homes at Pyrford, under the direction of Mr Rowley Bristow from St Thomas' Hospital, treated many wounded during the war.



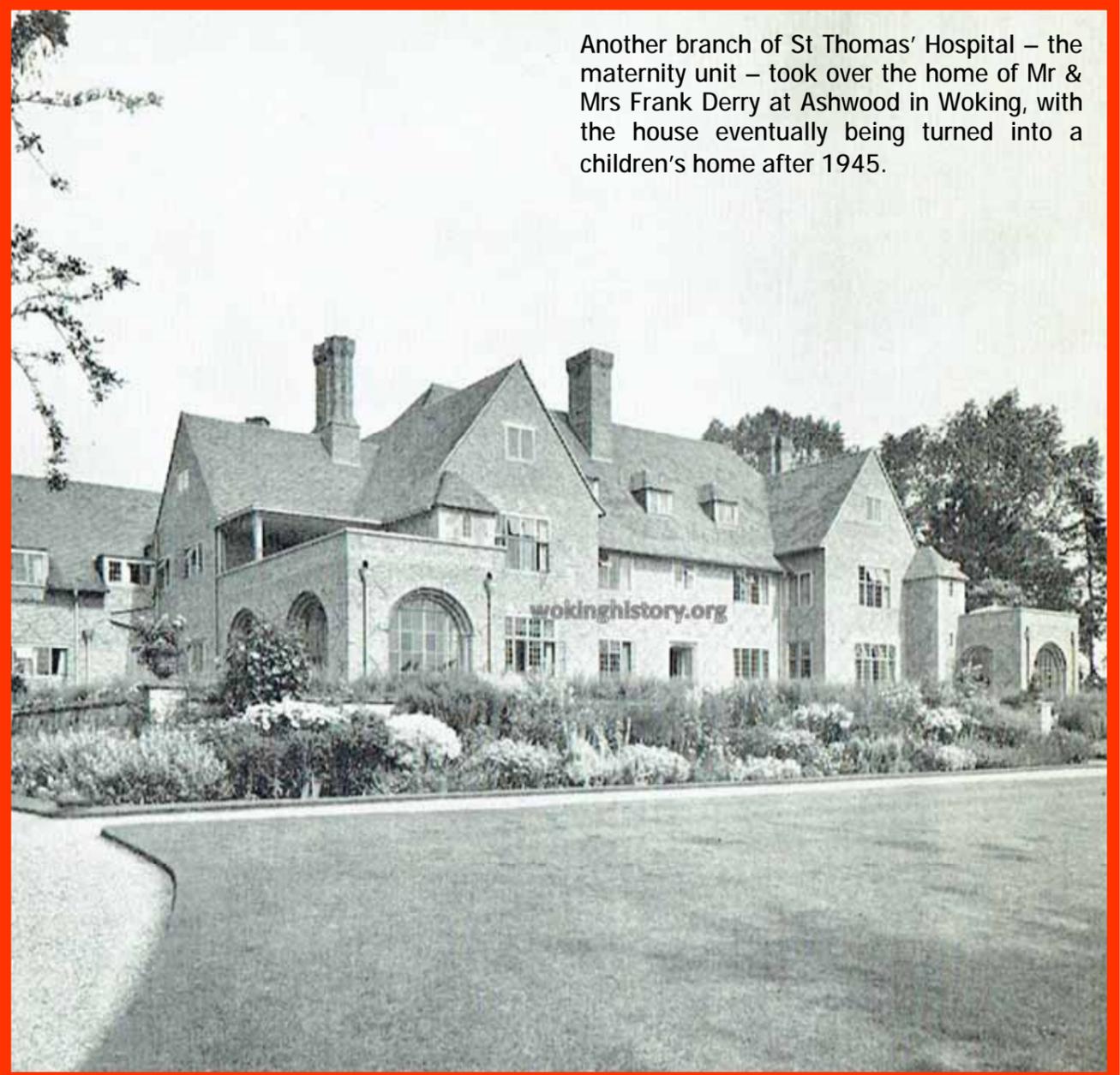
One of the largest local emergency war hospitals, however, was to have a major effect on the positioning of local health services long after the war, when new wards were set up in the grounds of the Botleys Park Mental Hospital at Chertsey.

The hospital was initially an annex to St Thomas' Hospital in London and was designed to take casualties from air raids on the capital as well as wounded service personnel. By February 1940 there were thirteen 'huts' on the site with eventually twenty being constructed radiating off a long corridor (known as 'the ramp'). Each hut had thirty beds arranged fifteen on either side and was heated (if that is not too much of an exaggeration) by three small coke stoves arranged down the middle. The doctors and nursing staff were accommodated in the old Botleys Park Mansion, where the stores and kitchens were also located – meals being wheeled over to 'the ramp' and then distributed to each of the wards.

One of the wards was reserved for German prisoners of war whilst another served as an operating theatre – three large tables in the middle allowing three operations to be carried out at once.

Just before D-Day the hospital was visited by the Minister for Health and it was converted from a 'base' to a 'transit hospital' with 14,000 wounded being received, immediately treated, and then transferred (where possible) further north to continue their recovery.

Another branch of St Thomas' Hospital – the maternity unit – took over the home of Mr & Mrs Frank Derry at Ashwood in Woking, with the house eventually being turned into a children's home after 1945.



# WOKING PLAYS ITS PART IN OPERATION DYNAMO...

**B**ernard Darwin in his excellent book 'War on the Line' first published in 1946, recalled the role the Southern Railway played in transporting the troops to this area (and beyond) in the aftermath of Operation Dynamo – the evacuation from Dunkirk in the late spring of 1940. Getting the men back from France was obviously the main achievement of the evacuation, but then getting them to where they had to be was another matter. 'These names and facts may give some notion of the problem, but it is a very faint one' he wrote. 'The French troops for instance had to get to Bournemouth and thence by Plymouth back to France. Yeovil, Tidworth, Dorchester, Ludgershall, Bulford, Southampton, Blandford, Exeter, Salisbury, Plymouth, Devonport, Weymouth, Warminster, - I copy them down as they occur, some of them again and again for page after page and column after column, and in the next column devoted to their route comes the single recurring name of Woking'.

The trains had come via Redhill and Guildford to Woking where they had to be turned around so that they could head west. This involved continuing up to Weybridge, back down the spur to Addlestone, and then forward again along the other spur back to Byfleet and Woking. More often than not the engines were uncoupled from their carriages at Woking and then attached again once they had completed their turnaround.

Bernard Darwin continues the story. 'In the case of men having to drive on lines strange to them, which naturally arose with drivers called from all over England, pilots were, if possible given, but the supply of pilots ran short so Mr Powell of Woking had often to tell the drivers orally about the signals at Weybridge so that they should deal with the curve at Addlestone'.

Members of the Woking Red Cross and other local volunteers, played an important part in getting the wounded to local hospitals and tending to the troops that came through Woking Station.

Long after the war Jack Stedman remembered coming through Woking on the train from Dover to Salisbury Plain in the after being evacuated from Dunkirk. He was a local lad and when the train was near Worplesdon Station he suddenly realised where he was.



Local buses were turned into ambulances with their drivers volunteering as ambulancemen.

'I said to my mates that I knew where we were and that I lived a couple of miles away, they said why don't you skip the train and go home

for a few days and we'll let you know where we are and you can meet up with us later. I must say I gave it some thought, especially as we hadn't been checked when getting on at Dover and no one would have missed me.' – 'I resisted the temptation to abscond and we travelled on to eventually arrive at Woking station where we received food and drink from the Women's Volunteer Service but couldn't get a wash or go to the toilet as the queue was never ending, anyway it was a pleasure to have a cup of tea. As we departed Woking the civilians on the other trains, the railway staff and people along the railway side waved to us as we passed by, treating us as if we had won the war, not as a defeated army.'

The minutes of Woking Council hardly mention the event, although they did acknowledge on the 11<sup>th</sup> June 1940, 'the council's appreciation of the work of those organisations and individuals who provided refreshments for members of the B.E.F. during the previous week'. These included members of the local Red Cross who of course were busy transporting some of the wounded to local war hospitals.



# ...AND ITS PART IN OPERATION OVERLORD



**W**oking Station again came into its own a few years later during the D-Day campaign. In the lead-up to the 6<sup>th</sup> June lorries were busy carrying materials to the station to be transported to the coast, with Maud Ceelly recording in her diary on the 7<sup>th</sup> June 'the streets here seem absolutely deserted after weeks of convoys continually passing through'.

Ivan Summer's of the Queen's Own Royal Infantry, encamped at Bisley just before D-Day recalled – 'Went to Woking a couple of times; this was as far at the time we were allowed to go; then came the order for the regiment to move, leaving us (the rear party) behind; we watched the convoy move off and we wondered what the hell the situation would be when we eventually rejoined them; the days passed by, we didn't know where they had gone, but rumour had it that they had gone to a large tented wooded area not far from Southampton, where troops were being massed ready for the "big show" – a favourite expression used by the top brass; we were very eager at the time to hear the BBC news, and then on June 6<sup>th</sup> 1944 the announcement came that the Allies had landed in France; D-Day!'



Of course it was not just materials and troops heading to France that were transported through Woking at this time and as has been noted elsewhere some of the wounded came back as well. A history of St Peter's Hospital notes that 'the wounded would be transported by train to Byfleet Station; with the railway sidings being used as a terminal from hence they were transported to Chertsey by road'.

Whether that was Byfleet & New Haw Station or West Byfleet Station (or both), I have not been able to ascertain, but it is clear that the doctors and nurses of our area were kept busy during this period, playing a vital part in the local war effort.

