



THE SOLDIERS AT BURGHLEY

Over the four year period of the war Burghley cared for approximately 450 soldiers; all were either Privates or Non-Commissioned Officers. They generally stayed for between four and six weeks to convalesce before being discharged or returned to active service. The oldest patient treated was Private W. H. Edwards, aged 53, but many were as young as 18. Private Gibbard is recorded as being 18 with 2 years, 2 months service!



PRIVATE WILLIAM WRIGLEY – 16TH BATTALION (CANADIAN SCOTTISH), CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Private William Wrigley was 34 years old. He saw action in France and came to Burghley on 8th July 1915 suffering from concussion and rheumatism. After 6 weeks convalescence he was later discharged from the army and returned to Canada from where he wrote to the Marchioness thanking her for the “many kindnesses” shown to him whilst he was at Burghley and also asking her opinion of his plans to buy furs from ‘the Indians’ and sell them in England.

A subsequent letter from Pte. Wrigley thanks the Marchioness for information regarding the English fur trade and tells her that he has married. He sent a handbag, made by his mother, for Lady Winifred (the Marchioness’ daughter) as a token of gratitude for the kindness shown to him while at Burghley.



William Wrigley

SERGEANT W. H. NORMAN – ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

Sgt. Norman arrived at Burghley for Christmas, 1916, suffering from severe muscle strain. Before the war he had been a Methodist preacher and gave a sermon in Star Lane Chapel, Stamford. Such was the respect of his fellow soldiers they all went to hear him speak. He returned to active duty, but was tragically drowned on the troopship ‘S. S. Transylvania’ when it was sunk by a German U-Boat on May 4th 1917. Lady Exeter wrote a moving letter to Sgt. Norman’s sister which was acknowledged with the tell-tale, black-edged reply.

The following is an eye witness account of some of Sgt. Norman’s last moments:
“About thirty minutes before the end Sergeant Norman saved a man from drowning by going down a rope ladder into the water, getting the man to it, and fastening him there so that he could be pulled back on the ship’s side, he remained in the water until the ladder could be lowered again to enable him to be pulled to safety. I assisted in getting him back so know that it actually happened. Before the end he knew all that could not be off the boat, and he was assisting me to get away all that we could, himself remaining on board. He could have got away by means of a destroyer, but whilst there he knew there were others to be saved he elected to stay behind, he knew the risks of death was great to those who remained behind, but he faced it with a smiling face, cheering and encouraging others to keep up a good heart.”

(Extract from a letter to William Norman’s sister by a Staff-Sergeant Tootill)



Extracts from Letters sent by GUNNER WILLIAM H. BARNES – 12th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery to Lady Exeter after departing from Burghley.

(Admitted with a crushed finger, 2nd October 1917 to 15th January 1918)

10TH FEBRUARY 1918

‘We are very well looked after here, but it is not Burghley! Motor car rides are things of the past and there is no Ruby here to take the cripples out.’

28TH FEBRUARY 1918

‘I was very, very sorry to hear that the baby of the house had been so poorly, and I most earnestly hope that she has recovered. I shall never forget her bonny little face coming into the ward each morning. I am sure we all felt better for seeing her.’

30TH JUNE 1918

‘I shall always look upon my long stay at Burghley as the brightest part of my army experience, as I am perfectly certain it also is, and will be, in the experience of many more.’

24TH NOVEMBER 1918

‘I was very surprised to hear from Nurse Jones some time ago that the hospital has been closed down. I am quite sure that you must miss the ‘boys in blue’ very much. But although you may not have any more patients, I am sure the remembrance of Burghley days will long remain with many men of the army.’



Programme
Grand General Burghley
Home Xmas, 1917
Dance
10) Song. Mrs. Bossey
11) Song. The Woodpecker.
12) Solo. Mr. Parker.
13) Special Solo
Sung by the
Burghley Glee
Club
Bacchus
On the evening
of moonlight
god save the
King
C. J. J.

BURGHLEY HOUSE.
A
Whist Drive
RED CROSS (Sole of Peterborough) FARMERS' SALE
BANQUETING HALL,
AT BURGHLEY HOUSE,
THURSDAY EVENING, June 7th, 1917.
Refreshments at moderate charges.
Valuable Prizes will be awarded.



GOOD TIMES

To relieve boredom the soldiers undertook a number of activities. Fishing on the lake proved popular and is referred to in letters sent by the soldiers. Things didn't always go to plan ...

(Private F. Bingham - Gunshot wound in his foot – 21st February – 10th April 1918)

On the Landing Stage stood Bingham,
Looking very, very sad.
When suddenly his float bobbed under,
And at the float he made a grab,
He brought the fish quite near, but
He hardly knew what to do,
When he fell into the water,
And came in wet through.

A poem written by one of the soldiers.

In the winter when the lake at Burghley froze, the soldiers skated with members of the family and staff.

Shortages of food encouraged gardening. Areas previously used for flowers were turned into vegetable patches. The garden outside the Orangery became a potato patch! Fruit was harvested and turned into jam and preserves.

Concerts were staged at Burghley for the enjoyment of the soldiers and to raise funds for the war effort. The soldiers themselves often performed in conjunction with staff from the house.