

# Horsham War Hospital Supply Depot



Plaque situated in the Causeway- taken by Joanne Marychurch

By Joanne Marychurch

This case study will look at the creation of the Hospital War Supply Depot in Horsham during the First World War, as an example of the types of charity work done by women. The case study will provide a chronological account from the formation of the Depot to the outcome of the women's War effort at the end of the Great War. As a volunteer of Horsham Museum, I used to walk past a plaque in The Causeway dedicated to the Horsham War Hospital Supply Depot, (see title page) and I always wanted to find out more about what the women of Horsham did during the Great War, something which has always intrigued me after seeing this little known plaque.

Today Horsham is recognised as a historical market town, but at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the population size 'had reached 10,781'<sup>1</sup>, a figure that is quite substantial for such a place. Horsham was also a prosperous town, being relatively close to London and surrounded by smaller villages such as Warnham and Broadbridge Heath.

The outbreak of war in 1914 saw women take on new and exciting tasks. Generally, there were three main areas available to help support the war effort in. Working on the land, ('unofficial figures recorded in 1918 that 23,00 Land Girls had been at work'<sup>2</sup>) trained as nurses or working in munitions factories are the roles that we most associate them with today, but for the average housewife who was to volunteer there were other ways to contribute to the war effort. K Grieves in *Sussex in the First World War* states that this element was seen as 'practical philanthropic patriotism'<sup>3</sup>, for women who helped to provide support in other ways- and this is the category that the Supply Depot falls under.

On a National scale, the idea of a War Supply Depot was originally connected with Queen Mary's Needlework Guild- an organisation that Queen Mary was a patron for, as a way to contribute towards charity efforts which still exists today under the Queen Mother's name<sup>4</sup>. At the outbreak of the war, the focus of the Guild shifted towards helping the troops by providing bandages and other healthcare by opening branches of the newly named War Supply Depot up and down the country. For Horsham, the first mention of setting up their own is not advertised until Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> July 1915, in the West Sussex County Times Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard (hereafter referred to as the West Sussex County Times).

'It is proposed to start a Branch in Horsham of the War Hospital Supply Depot at Hove. The chief objects of the Depot are: -

- 1.- To collect or purchase the proper material from which all sorts of bandages, splints, medical dressings and other War Hospital requisites can be made.
- 2.- To make the various articles daily in the rooms of the Depot under thoroughly qualified (sp) and expert superintendence. This work will be done by voluntary helpers.
- 3.- to collect and receive Gifts of all other necessities, such as Antiseptics, Invalids' Foods, Clothes, etc.

4.- To distribute quickly to various Hospitals at the Front and others which are in urgent need of all such requisites.

Further particulars of the working of the Branch will be inserted in next week's paper.

In order to ensure success, a considerable amount of financial support is necessary. The Committee urgently appeal for funds.

President: MRS.E.D.L.HARVEY.

Hon. Treasurer: MRS.CURTIS.

Hon. Secretary: MISS ALLCARD.<sup>5</sup>

The above extract perfectly explains the purpose of the depot, and the Committee were made up of local dignitaries; or Ladies who have influential husbands. The President, Mrs E D L Harvey is most likely the wife of the Rev E D L Harvey, who was 'Justice of the Peace, Deputy Lieutenant for Sussex and Vice Chairman of the West Sussex County Council'<sup>6</sup>. Having a Committee made up of such high society figures gave Horsham's War Depot real weight behind the cause, as these women would be able to carry considerable influence. To be involved in a charity cause was also something that was highly regarded, as they wanted to be seen to be doing their bit for the War effort.



[http://www.horshamposters.com/Friends-Horsham-Museum/display\\_poster-3770.aspx?id=1998.1502.1](http://www.horshamposters.com/Friends-Horsham-Museum/display_poster-3770.aspx?id=1998.1502.1)

Image courtesy of Horsham Museum Reference number: 1998.1502.1

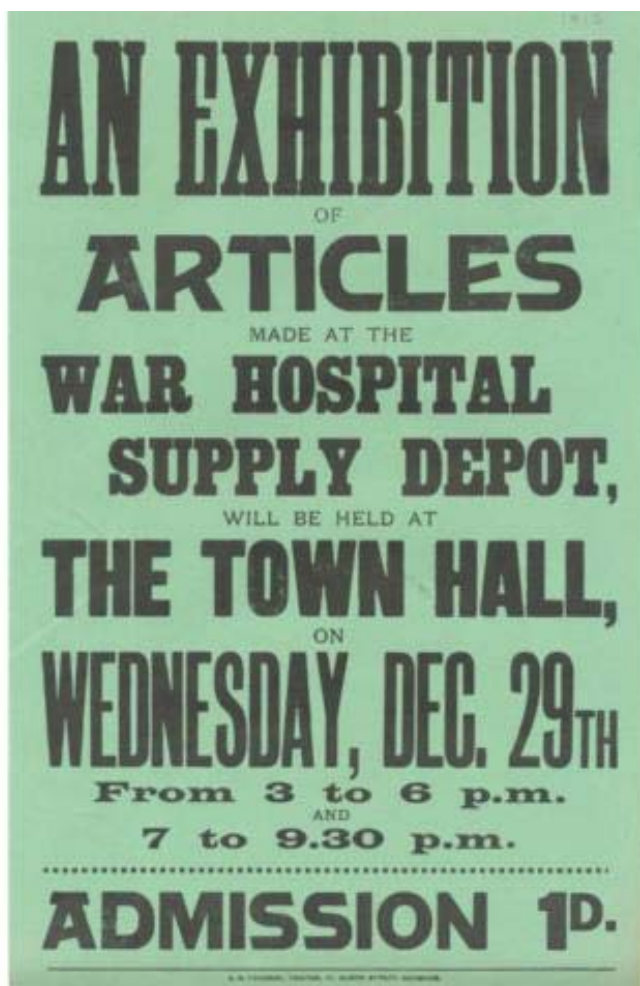
Now the depot had formed, they needed a place to operate from. The West Sussex County Times reports that Mr Charles Rowland- a local

councillor had 'most kindly allowed the use of his house, 8, The Causeway, rent free for the work of the Guild, so long as the house remains unlet, it is hoped to commence work there very shortly'<sup>7</sup>. Additionally, the council minutes report that 'a letter was read from the war hospital Supply Sub. Depot asking if the council would supply No8, the Causeway, with electricity at a reduced rate owing to the fact that the premise were being used as a War Hospital Supply Depot'<sup>8</sup>. Having support from the Council enabled the scheme to take off and start appealing for volunteers. The below advert, written a week later than the initial proposal, outlined the working hours and expectations of their volunteers, which gives a suggestion that the main focus group would be women who had other domestic responsibilities.

'The working hours will be 10.a.m. to 1.p.m. and 2.p.m. to 5.p.m. every-day except Saturday's. There will be a Head of each Workroom to regulate work done and see that the work is neat and accurate and up to the correct standard as laid down by the Headquarters Depot. The rooms are open to anyone willing to come and help on whatever day and at whatever hour suits them. No notice need be given before hand.'<sup>9</sup>

Along with securing a property for the duration of the War, the residence needed to be furnished; not only with materials to make the bandages, but also equipment for the volunteers to use. The West Sussex County Times helped to launch the appeal, by publishing a list of contributions; 'the following were also given or lent: - Anonymous , kettle; Miss Lee Steere, oil stove and old linen American cloth: Mr. A. Scrase Dickins, two clocks and two sewing machines; Mrs Keatinge, trestle tables....'<sup>10</sup>. By August of 1915, a month after the Depot was opened, the publication of figures and statistics printed the following: 'Number of workers during week ending August 11<sup>th</sup>, 301; Number of members up to date, 217; Number of articles finished during the week, 699'<sup>11</sup>. These figures clearly illustrate the high level of public interest and response that had been as a result of the appeal.

To showcase their efforts so far, the War Hospital Supply Depot decided to hold an exhibition of their garments. The Council Minutes dated 22<sup>nd</sup> of December note that 'The Chairman reported that application had that day been made to him by the War Hospital Supply Depot Committee for the use of the Council Room on the following Wednesday for an Exhibition of the various articles made and prepared at the Depot'<sup>12</sup>. There was even a poster (seen below) inviting people to view the work the women had done.



[http://www.horshamposters.com/Friends-Horsham-Museum/display\\_poster-3770.aspx?id=1998.1030](http://www.horshamposters.com/Friends-Horsham-Museum/display_poster-3770.aspx?id=1998.1030)

Image courtesy of Horsham Museum Reference number: 1998. 1030

A particularly poignant date to note was the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1916. The beginning of the battle of the Somme saw a rise in the number of articles dispatched to hospitals, a far larger number than previously raised- 'report for week ending July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1916....Articles dispatched 4823'<sup>13</sup>. Following on from the initial above sentence, the newspaper also frequently published letters from the front line, so that all those involved could read how their hard work had been gratefully received.

'Letter received from a Casualty Clearing Station, dated July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1916: - "Now that our first big rush is over, I should so much like to tell you how much we all (both Medical Officers and Nursing Sisters) appreciated your valuable help during that strenuous time. The surgical dressings and other surgical appliances which we received from the War Hospital Supply Depot at Horsham were indeed a priceless boon. Please allow me to congratulate you upon the high standard of efficiency you have attained in this work and to accept our grateful thanks for the liberal supply you have sent. Yours etc, Sister in Charge"<sup>14</sup>

In order to support the War effort, the ladies organised many fundraisers in the hope to raise more for the charity. One such event was called A

Grand Fete and Bazaar, which the West Sussex County Times subsequently labelled as 'Garden Fete At Horsham. A Brilliant Success'<sup>15</sup>

This Grand Fete and Bazaar, as the poster shows, included entertainments such as a Baby Show, and music from the 13<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion Canadian Military Band. Asked to open the Fete was Lady Leconfield, who, according to Keith Grieves, in *Sussex in the First World War* was the occupant of Petworth House.<sup>16</sup> It is clear that this Grand Fete was a good chance to promote the cause for Horsham and also give a display of patriotism. The most important factor for the event was that the public would have fun because it was good for morale, but still contribute towards fundraising.



[http://www.horshamposters.com/Friends-Horsham-Museum/display\\_poster-3770.aspx?Id=1998.1020A](http://www.horshamposters.com/Friends-Horsham-Museum/display_poster-3770.aspx?Id=1998.1020A)

Image courtesy of Horsham Museum Reference number: 1998.1020A

In a follow up recount of the day, The West Sussex County Times writes that 'the result was one of the most pronounced successes ever achieved at horsham'<sup>17</sup>, which shows how popular and busy this event was; and it also notes that 'nearly £50 had been taken in cash at the entrance'<sup>18</sup>, a staggering sum for the time.

Overall, the efforts of all those involved in the War Hospital Supply Depot cumulated in a resounding success. Throughout the duration of the war, The West Sussex County Times published weekly reports as to where the completed articles were sent to, which even included places such as 36<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital, Egypt<sup>19</sup>. In comparison to other sub depots in the same area (dated 1918), the weekly output was much greater, for example, 'Christ's Hospital..366, Horley...342'<sup>20</sup> against Horsham's '1856'<sup>21</sup>; suggesting that Horsham was by no means one of the smallest towns in the country to be offering their services for the war effort.

Below is a list of all the items that the Depot produced over the duration of the Great War. Among those figures, the West Sussex County Times reports a total of 335,169 articles<sup>22</sup>- a staggering amount which shows how successful the War Hospital Supply Depot was, and also how hard all the volunteers worked to supply essential goods to those on the front line. The overall monetary outcome was, according to the Chairman in the same article, 'since they started in July, 1915, rather more than £18,000 had been received in donations and from entertainments and other sources'<sup>23</sup>

'Of the articles already sterilized ready for use, were, extra large, large, medium, small, extra small, and amputation dressings, 58,193. Flat gauze swabs numbered 54,633 and operation towels, ligature drains and gauze handkerchiefs, 15,405. Surgeons' operation gowns and caps, 3,076 and wool and gauze swabs 99,747. From the bandage room 23,327 many tailed, chest, amputation and head bandages were sent, together with 35,354 dom. and white roller bandages. Of slings there were 1,787; pillows 1188, shifts, pyjamas and bed jackets, 3,187; socks, bed socks and stockings, 3,668. 36 bed tables were made, 5,428 splints and loose pads, and 4,781 heel pad packets. Finger stalls and hand stalls numbered 2,211, pneumonia jackets 1,338 knitted swabs, cup covers, slippers, treasure bags and sundries, 1855; surgeons' mackintosh aprons, 1,223; and no fewer than 15,703 sphagnum-moss bags, besides 600 cases and 100 crates, making a grand total of 335,169 articles upon the making of which no pains have been spared in order that all may come up to the high standard set by the Committee, who have so indefatigably and persistently worked to achieve their ideal and help in the alleviation of suffering in the Great War. That the work of all has found the fullest appreciation in the hospitals on many Fronts is amply evidenced by the many letters from surgeons and nurses who have throughout the past several years used the output sent direct from Horsham.'<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Haines, *Horsham: A History*. (Phillimore and Co Ltd, 2005). p. 118

<sup>2</sup> Bob Powell and Nigel Westacott, *The Women's Land Army* (The History Press 2009) p.7

<sup>3</sup> Keith Grieves, *Sussex in the First World War* (Sussex Record Society 84, 2004) p. 164

<sup>4</sup> For more information on this, please visit <http://www.qmcg.org.uk/history.htm>. This website contains a brief early history of the Guild, and is where the above information has been sourced.

<sup>5</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 10<sup>th</sup> July 1915, p. 5 found at the bottom of the page, left handside.

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- <sup>6</sup> John Harrison, 'Sussex Colgate War Memorial' *Roll of Honour*, 2006.  
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- <sup>7</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard July 17<sup>th</sup> 1915, p. 5 Column 2
- <sup>8</sup> UD/HO/1/18 Horsham Urban District Council Minutes 4<sup>th</sup> August 1915, p. 286 at the West Sussex Record Office
- <sup>9</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 17<sup>th</sup> July 1915, p.5 Column 2
- <sup>10</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 31<sup>st</sup> July 1915, p. 5 column 6
- <sup>11</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 14<sup>th</sup> August 1915, p. 5 column 1
- <sup>12</sup> UD/HO/1/18 Horsham Urban District Council Minutes 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1915, p. 393 at the West Sussex Record Office
- <sup>13</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 15<sup>th</sup> July 1916, p.3 column 2
- <sup>14</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 15<sup>th</sup> July 1916, p.3 column 2
- <sup>15</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 11<sup>th</sup> August 1917, p. 3 column 2
- <sup>16</sup> Keith Grieves, *Sussex in the First World War*, p 241. The information can be found in footnote 10.
- <sup>17</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 11<sup>th</sup> August 1917 p. 3 column 2
- <sup>18</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 11<sup>th</sup> August 1917 p. 3 column 2
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- <sup>21</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 12<sup>th</sup> January 1918 p.3 column 5
- <sup>22</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 21<sup>st</sup> December 1918 p.3 column 3
- <sup>23</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 21<sup>st</sup> December 1918 p.3 column 3
- <sup>24</sup> West Sussex County Times, Horsham Advertiser and Sussex Standard 21<sup>st</sup> December 1918 p.3 column 3



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