

The Queen Victoria Hospital Collection

The Queen Victoria Hospital Collection at East Grinstead Museum explores the Hospital's unique heritage.

McIndoe and his Guinea Pigs

The Queen Victoria Hospital, which stands on the Holtye Road, East Grinstead started life as a cottage hospital in 1863 and achieved fame during World War II due to the success it had in treating the War's burnt airmen. Plastic surgeon Archibald McIndoe, a charismatic New Zealander, was charged with custody of this task and arrived there in early September 1939, treating his first patient from the War in December.



McIndoe proved to be a pioneering surgeon in the treatment and reconstruction of burns, having been schooled by his distant relative and the then authority on burns treatment Harold Gillies.

Whilst at the Hospital McIndoe developed a number of surgical procedures. He succeeded in having tannic acid which, although used for the treatment of burns, actually caused more harm than good, banned, and pioneered use of the saline bath after noticing that airmen who ditched in the sea fared better than those that crashed onto land.

Plastic surgery was, then, in its infancy and, prior to the growth in understanding of burns treatment that developed during the War, most people that experienced burns to the level that his patients did would not previously have survived.

It was McIndoe's insistence that his patients be treated holistically and that their psychological readjustment to life was just as important as that of their medical complaints, that he became renowned for.

McIndoe encouraged his patients to go out into the town of East Grinstead, he had a barrel of beer installed on the ward and would often join his patients at the piano he also installed there to help boost moral.



It was in this unique environment that, in 1941 and with 39 founding members, the Guinea Pig Club was born.

Initially set up as a drinking club; the Secretary was a pilot with badly burned fingers, which meant he was excused from writing many letters and the Treasurer was a member whose legs were burned, this ensured he could not abscond with the funds.

It was one of the most exclusive clubs in the country and, bar a small number of honorary members, patients had to have been treated at the Queen Victoria Hospital and had to have received at least two surgical procedures there. From these humble beginnings the Guinea Pig Club (which continues to this day) went on to become a vital support network for both its members and their families and by the end of the War the Club had 649 members from all across the Allied Forces.

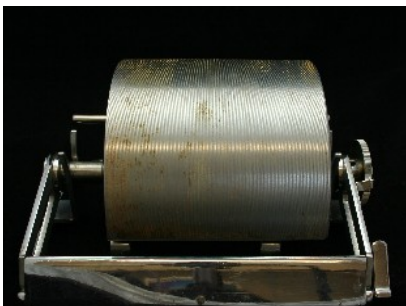


The Collection at East Grinstead Museum

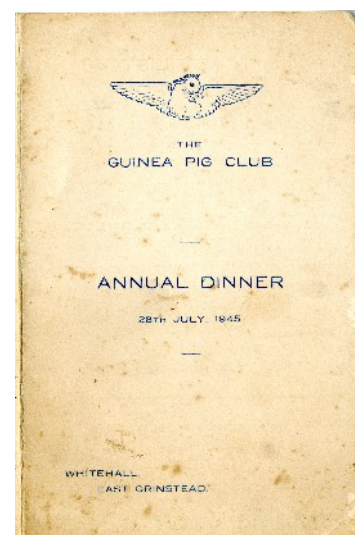
Between 1993 and 2009 the Queen Victoria Hospital was itself the home to a museum and a collection was amassed which explores the unique history of the Hospital.

Today, East Grinstead Museum is proud to be the custodian of this nationally and internationally important collection. The collection itself includes approximately 3000 different items which comprises objects, archives, books and images and includes items from as early as 1863 right up until the 21st Century.

In the collection are items that relate to the unique history of the Hospital such as Guinea Pig Club memorabilia and souvenir items, as well as medical and surgical equipment.



A large number of archival pieces such as signed menus from the Club's annual reunion, and cartoons by Guinea Pig Henry Standen are held in the Museum's Store and a complete collection of the Guinea Pig Club journal is available for visitors to view in the Research Room.



The Museum makes the collection accessible and interprets it for the town and its visitors. Since receipt of the collection, it has been catalogued onto the Museum's database and work is ongoing to scan and photograph each item within the collection. A database of the Guinea Pig Club has been put together listing every known member of the Club. A recent exhibition *The Town That Did Not Stare* (which was a title born out of the town's response to McIndoe's Guinea Pigs) has been developed as a resource for other organisations to borrow.



Visitors to the Museum can take advantage of a dedicated section in the Museum's Research Room where all the books, and some further documentary material from the Queen Victoria Hospital Collection are fully accessible during open hours. Here, visitors can browse the Museum's collection on a computer enabling them to learn more about individual items and to identify items they would like to see in more detail.

The Museum has also created a small exhibition case which tells the story of the Queen Victoria Hospital, to date.



Items not on display can be viewed by advance appointment with the Museum's Collection Officer. The Museum works closely with the Secretary of the Guinea Pig Club who is available, by advance appointment, to meet with researchers and give tours of the Queen Victoria Hospital.

Visiting East Grinstead Museum

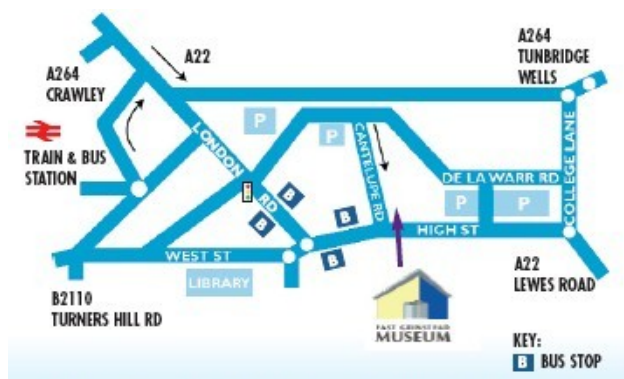
The Museum is in a central location and entry is free. There is full disabled access.

East Grinstead Museum can be found at:

Old Market Yard
Cantelupe Road
East Grinstead
West Sussex
RH19 3BJ.

Opening times are:

Wednesday-Saturday 10am-4pm
Sundays and Bank Holidays 2pm-5pm
Closed over the Christmas period.



For more information look the Museum up on www.eastgrinsteadmuseum.org.uk or find us on facebook. If you would like to get in touch with the Museum or would like to make an inquiry about the collection and accessing it please telephone us on 01342 302233 or email info@eastgrinsteadmuseum.org.uk.