**BOULTHAM HALL in WORLD WAR I**

**By Rod Willis**

 *(An abridged extract from his forthcoming book “Lincoln during the Great War 1914 -1919”.)*

At the commencement of the First World War a military hospital, the 4th Northern General Hospital was established in the commandeered premises of the Lincoln School on Wragby Road. The first train bringing 105 casualties, mainly from the fighting at Mons, arrived in Lincoln from Southampton on Sunday September 13th 1914. By the end of the year fifteen separate hospital trains had brought 3,130 sick and wounded troops into Lincoln. Throughout the war the influx of casualties continued with patients, after assessment and treatment, being either returned to duty, passed on to auxiliary hospitals for further care, or discharged as invalids unfit for military service. Auxiliary hospitals were staffed by either the British Red Cross or St. John’s Ambulance Brigade voluntary aid detachments.

Towards by the end of October 1914, because of the continuing pressure on the 4th Northern General Hospital the Lincoln St. John’s Ambulance VAD No.42 agreed to provide and run an auxiliary hospital in association with the military hospital. This was the first of nineteen auxiliary hospitals which would be set up in Lincolnshire during the war. Suitable premises were sought and offers were immediately received from the owners of Boultham and Bracebridge Halls, both of which were unoccupied. Boultham Hall with its extensive grounds and lake set in approximately eighty acres of wood and parkland was considered to be the more suitable for use as a hospital. Consequently, the generous offer of the owners, Messrs. Kirke and MacDonald of the Boultham Hall Syndicate, to let the Hall and grounds to the Lincoln VAD unreservedly and rent free for the duration of the war was gratefully accepted.

Work on adapting and equipping the Hall was soon completed. The gas fittings were replaced and the sanitary facilities upgraded. Walls and ceilings were stripped and redecorated with lime wash. On the ground floor the drawing room, dining room, library and billiard room were converted into five wards. Bedrooms on the first floor provided three more wards. Subsequently an operating room was provided. Initially two ford motor ambulances were donated. Later they were sold and replaced by a Maxwell ambulance which was retained until 1916 when it was disposed of because of lack of funds to meet the running costs.

Dr. Green was appointed medical officer in charge. He was assisted by a matron, a superintendent, a quartermaster/chief nursing officer and a trained nurse. Initially two trained masseuse provided recuperative treatment for the first year, after which they were replaced by another trained nurse who was also a qualified masseuse. A cook and six male orderlies provided support. Boultham Hospital admitted its first intake of 39 patients in November 1914. Lincoln VAD No.42 was formally mobilised for work at the hospital in May 1915 when just over twenty members took turns on a rota to assist every day with the nursing. Dr. Sharp, the Public Vaccination Officer for Lincoln, who lived at nearby Swallowbeck, served as anaesthetist when operations were needed and also acted as relief medical officer. Mr. W. Rayner, a chemist on West Parade regularly attended as the voluntary dispenser.

Finance was a constant problem. Although the initial adaptation costs of £300 were met equally by Alfred Shuttleworth and Sharpley Bainbridge and residents of Swinderby equipped two wards, the small War Office grant of two shillings per patient per day was insufficient to meet the running costs. Appeals for gifts of furniture, bedding and food were met from a variety of sources. Schools at Bracebridge, St. Botolph’s, St. Peter at Gowts and St. Martin’s regularly contributed money, vegetables and other foodstuffs. The villages of South Hykeham, Aubourn, Haddington and Ingham also sent monthly contributions of money. In addition fund raising events were staged In the Hall grounds. Such an occasion took place on Saturday August 25th 1916 when Boultham Hall Fete was held providing a pleasant social event for convalescent soldiers and the local community. The six hour programme included numerous stalls, a concert party, musical entertainment and dancing on the lawn. – A forerunner to the present day Boultham Summer Fair!

Another difficulty was staffing. There was no public transport to enable the Lincoln VAD members to attend the hospital. At first the ambulances were used for this purpose but eventually this had to be discontinued on grounds of economy. Eventually all of the VAD members except one stopped working at the hospital. During most of the last two years of the operation of the hospital all the nursing work was done by two officers with two trained nurses and the one VAD helper.

Despite the various problems, the challenges were overcome and Boultham Hall Hospital continued to give valued service in assisting the 4th Northern General Hospital. Boultham Hall Hospital closed on December 31st 1918. During the four year period of operation a total of 1,360 patients had passed through the hospital. A fitting tribute to the doctors, trained nurses, Lincoln VAD and other supporters who had contributed to its success.