



An hospital ward decorated for Xmas during WWI (image courtesy of British Red Cross)

CHRISTMAS IN THE WARDS 1916

There was great excitement in the wards for some days before Christmas, as a prize had been offered for the best decorated ward.

On Christmas Eve the woods were alive with Tommies collecting holly, trees and nests, and even trying to catch rabbits and birds, these last however (owing to the decorations remaining for a week!) had to be omitted, much to the grief of the collectors.

On Christmas Day the wards presented a most strange and beautiful sight, and one had to stop and think if one was indeed still at Heywood House, or transported to Fairyland!

"A" Ward had been turned into an old fashioned garden. On first entering, the eye was arrested by a path of green grass (which a gardener was diligently sweeping) leading to a rockery and bower of roses, surrounded by an archway of purple clematis; then looking round, seated in a corner, we saw Darby (Cpl. Osborne), and Joan (Pte. Battes), over whom a canary in a cage was sweetly singing. The odd couple were embowered in pink roses, and in the ivy was a most realistic spider's web, and last but not least, over the mantelpiece was a most effective design, conveying good wishes to the whole Hospital. It should be mentioned that the spider's web was the work of Private. Doherty (the gardener), and that the decorations were entirely the work of the patients of the ward.

Next door in "B" Ward the decorations were of an entirely different character. Always being rather "go-ahead" they thought they would become Americans, naming the ward "The New York Bowery" The decorations were extremely light and dainty, the chief feature being pink rose-buds, Canterbury bells and trailing smilax. The walls themselves being pink gave a most excellent background. All the patients had worked very hard, and in the end the door had to be locked against Spies! As everyone was trying to find out where they got the exquisite trails of green, but the nook remained

undiscovered. Standing arm-in-arm, looking very saucy, were a Yanker Masher and an American flapper in most appropriate clothes; the former was Pte. Pickup, the latter Pte. Gillan.

"C" Ward representing "A Wounded Hero's Christmas," whilst retaining its old form, had put on a new dress, so had a certain patient. If one says "the silent one" turned himself into a meek Red Cross Nurse all will know it was Driver Pyke! For a change L/Cpl. Newton, had gone to bed! and took the part of the wounded Hero. Seated beside him were his father and sister, the father being Pte. Mather (who for once in his life had such a solemn face that no one recognised him). The sister was a most lovely girl with golden hair and pink cheeks, and a most exquisitely thought-out costume, with ear-rings and necklace to match! and until she was asked to walk no one discovered that it was L/Cpl. Edwards! Standing beside the patient was a most fascinating medical student (Rifleman Fells) with his white gown and stethoscope, just preparing to find out the condition of his patient's heart! It must be mentioned that the other patients in the ward had worked hard at making artificial poppies and anemones, which had a most effective appearance. In fact, the whole ward was cheery.

Going out of the ward laughing, we all held our breath as we walked into "D" Ward, for there indeed a most beautiful sight met one's gaze. The whole of the ward had been turned into "A Model Winter Garden." There was such a heavy snowstorm and the snowflakes were so beautifully made, that the effect was most realistic, and one wanted to get one's overcoat. In fact Cpl. Bulford, Pte. Campbell, Pte. Tarrant, were all in their khaki great-coats, which were covered with snowflakes. One looked in vain for Sapper Power, till he spoke and said "Fear not! I am here, but in the form of Father Christmas," and there sat, in a green archway covered with frost, Father Christmas himself. As all entered he blessed them and gave them Greetings. The beds and lockers had vanished! And nothing but a scene of snow, with fallen leaves and frost, met one's gaze. Even as one walked onto the floor, one's feet scrunched leaves! In the centre, was a lovely old tree by a frozen lake, at which a swan was trying to drink. Many robins were hopping round, and looking up was an aeroplane flying through the snow. On the wall was a most beautiful design in laurel leaves on a white background, "God bless Heywood House," and just as one was leaving the ward, there, on the mantelpiece, was a beautifully illuminated design, in various colours, with the light behind: "Welcome to 'D' Ward!"

Now we come to "F" Ward. This indeed, was the most original design in the whole hospital, much praise being due to Driver Allen, who - on crutches - thought, planned and worked out the whole scheme. The ward was changed into a garage, called "Speed House Garage." Round the walls hung all the usual motor advertisements, and on the ground were tyres, hose, and quantities of petrol cans. Of course, the chief attraction was a most wonderfully made "Racing Car," called "Ye Heywood Cub." No detail was forgotten, even to mascot and number, and it must be mentioned that the whole motor was made of cardboard, painted and polished with black-lead, the framework being a ward table turned upside down! How they managed to screen off and hide beds, etc. is best not asked! The other patients must have worked very hard, carrying and fetching for the chauffeur, who as one entered the ward, came from under the car in a dirty brown overall covered in grease.

Along the corridor in "G" Ward, one was taken out of Europe altogether; for this ward had been changed into a Chinese garden. The flowers (chrysanthemums) had been made with infinite pains, and many of them were taken for real blooms. Over our old friend Pte. Clarke's bed was an arch of chrysanthemums, and from the centre were hanging Chinese lanterns of various colours and shapes. The mantelpiece and charts were decorated most effectively; and the costumes of the three Chinese men were really splendid. It was most difficult to recognise Pte. Clarke, Pte. Loader, and Pte. Millard. Marvellous to relate, the pig-tails, which were made of tow, appearing from beneath their oriental hats, stopped on in spite of much ragging!

Last along the corridor is "H" Ward. This ward was called "Spring," and the exclamation of everyone on entering was; "How absolutely sweet" Spring has come again! Masses of apple-blossom, daffodils and daisies, even grass, were here to be seen. In a corner was the most lovely tree, full of real bird's nests, some with eggs in them, and some containing most life-like birds which even shook
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their heads as you touched them. In the window was a "sheep-pen" (being the doctor's table turned upside down!) covered with moss and containing a life-sized lamb of cotton wool and here and there growing around were such beautiful daffodils that one had to touch them to find out if they were indeed real! In a corner we saw a family of young chickens, and looking up, there was the blue sky above us and a cloud, arranged with pale blue muslin. To greet one were four most sturdy and robust looking shepherds in smocks, red handkerchiefs, and suitable hats, and carrying crooks, (Ptes. Sharpe, Abbs, Bodaly and Hollins.) As one left the ward it was with the same words as one had entered "Sweet! absolutely sweet!"

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The Heywood Hospital Gazette, January 1917