

Supporting the War Effort: The Convalescent Hospital at New College during the First World War

Throughout the First World War, the gardens of New College, Oxford were transformed from their usual calm greenery into a sea of tents and bustling activity—becoming a convalescent hospital designed to support the work of the Third Southern General Hospital in Oxford, which had its headquarters in the Examination Schools. Although an intriguing episode in the history of the college, it is surprising that only limited research has been undertaken into the history of this hospital. The former New College Archivist, Jennifer Thorp, mentions the hospital in her discussion of New College during wartime in one of the most recent histories of the college, and there is brief discussion of the hospital in one of the main works of history of the university itself. In another history, one of the most well-known histories of New College, though, it is not prominently mentioned.¹ This article aims to address this apparent lack of research with the aid of sources held primarily in the archives of New College, revealing the role played by the hospital at New College within the hospital system in Oxford during the conflict, and its development over time as the war progressed. This information is then summarised in a timeline and estimated plan of the hospital site, listed as appendices to this Note.

To fully appreciate the work of the hospital at New College, it is first necessary to understand its role as part of the medical care offered to casualties by the British Army during the First World War: a completely unprecedented conflict for medical care on many levels. Firstly, it is important to note that the weapons technology used to fight the conflict was unique—the first large war fought by the leading industrialised powers of the world against each other. Indeed, weapons technology had advanced greatly in the decades before the conflict, with soldiers in the First World War confronted with a terrifying range of weapons that included ‘repeating rifles, high-velocity bullets, explosive shells, shrapnel, hand grenades, bombs, machine guns capable of firing 600 rounds a minute, artillery, flamethrowers and gas’ for the first time.² To put this new weapons technology into context, a company of just five hundred soldiers in 1914 could deploy the same firepower as the entire Allied army at the Battle of Waterloo, which numbered 60,000 men.³ When used in widespread conflict for the first time, this increased firepower naturally created injuries on a scale never seen before. Every day of the fighting resulted in thousands of new casualties in numbers that severely strained the traditional medical services and hospital infrastructure that the British Army had developed in previous conflicts.

Secondly, the war was fought on an unprecedented scale. Millions of troops were mobilised across Europe, and Britain was by no means exempt from this mobilisation. If anything, such widespread mobilisation was even more noticeable in the country as historically Britain had relied on a large naval presence and a much smaller standing army. These large numbers of troops resulted in many more injuries, but large numbers of soldiers were also extremely vulnerable to infectious diseases, such as mumps and measles, as well as diseases spread due to the tough

Thanks must be given to Dr Michael Stansfield, Archivist at New College, for his assistance in consulting the New College archival material, and to Dr Emily Jennings, Assistant Archivist and Records Manager at Magdalen College, for her assistance in consulting the Magdalen College archival material.

¹ Jennifer Thorp, ‘The College at War’, in *New College*, ed. Christopher Tyerman (London: Third Millennium, 2010), pp. 114–25, at pp. 115–16; J. M. Winter, ‘Oxford and the First World War’, in *The History of the University of Oxford: Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Brian Harrison (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 3–25, at p. 10; John Buxton and Penry Williams (eds.), *New College Oxford 1379–1979* (Oxford: The Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford, 1979).

² Fiona Reid, *Medicine in First World War Europe: Soldiers, Medics, Pacifists* (London: Bloomsburg Academic, 2017), p. 27.

³ Jerry Palmer, *Nurse Memoirs from the Great War in Britain, France, and Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), p. 48.

environmental conditions on the frontlines, such as dysentery, malaria, and pneumonia.⁴ The medical services, therefore, came under increasing pressure.

Finally, the proximity of the conflict to daily life was unique from a contemporary British perspective. In the decades prior to the First World War, the British armed forces had been active across the globe, protecting the British Empire—at the outbreak of hostilities one of the largest empires in global history. Although the British army continued this role in the First World War, serving in many different theatres around the world, the First World War was different in the fact that it was a global conflict that felt much closer to home than many previous wars. Although fought on a global scale, ‘the majority of the fighting and dying’ took place in Europe.⁵ For British soldiers, much of this fighting took place on the Western Front in Belgium. Indeed, the fighting was so geographically close to Britain that it was possible to hear the greatest bombardments on the Western Front in southern England, especially those that took place prior to the largest offensive operations.⁶ Citizens could, therefore, see the war and its devastating consequences at first hand, especially when soldiers returned to Britain after being injured. Many of the most injured soldiers returned to Britain via train. Large crowds gathered at the main London stations to welcome the ambulance trains, particularly after major battles, making it completely impossible for the government ‘to keep unpleasant news under wraps’.⁷ As such, the First World War was one of the first global conflicts to affect directly the lives of almost every single citizen in the country. For the first time, war was no longer an event that only happened overseas.

The technology used in the First World War and the vast number of troops that fought for Britain created an unprecedented number of casualties, that—thanks to the war’s proximity to Britain—simply could not be ignored by the government. For the first time, there was therefore an expectation from soldiers and the general public that the state would provide adequate and effective medical care in the case of injury—especially for the most serious injuries. The military authorities soon recognised such care as being crucial for morale, ‘an element of national solidarity’ with those who risked their lives.⁸ Thanks to advances in medical care, this greater expectation could also be met. A greater understanding of hygiene and disinfection—combined with vaccinations—had increased the chance of survival for injured soldiers when compared to previous conflicts.⁹ Improvements were also made to the medical infrastructure over time, evacuating soldiers first to field hospitals close to the front lines and then to base hospitals further away—such as the large hospital in Boulogne. Thanks to these improvements, many soldiers could be treated in France or Belgium.

The most serious cases, though, still had to be sent back to Britain.¹⁰ Consequently, a supporting infrastructure of temporary hospitals was also created in the United Kingdom, and greatly expanded throughout the conflict depending on need—growing from a ‘40,000 bed capacity at the end of 1914 to a capacity of 365,000 at the end of the war’.¹¹ The true scale of this hospital infrastructure can be appreciated by just focusing on the five Southern General Hospitals. Established across southern and central England, the First Southern General was located in Birmingham, the Second in Bristol, the Third in Oxford, the Fourth in Plymouth, and the Fifth in

⁴ Anna Maguire, *Contact Zones of the First World War: Cultural Encounters Across the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 153.

⁵ Ian Cawood and David McKinnon-Bell, *The First World War* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 1.

⁶ Malcolm Brown, *The Imperial War Museum Book of the First World War: A Great Conflict Recalled in Previously Unpublished Letters, Diaries, Documents, and Memoirs* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1991), p. 49.

⁷ Mark Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 121.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 49.

⁹ Palmer, *Nurse Memoirs*, p. 48.

¹⁰ Mark Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 58.

¹¹ Leo van Bergen, ‘Military Medicine’, in *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Volume III: Civil Society*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 287–309, at p. 295.

Portsmouth.¹² One crucial part of this hospital infrastructure was the so-called auxiliary hospitals, which were designed to support the work of these larger hospitals by providing beds and convalescent care. Many large stately homes around the country were converted into this type of hospital, which provided more beds for patients than any other category of hospital in the country as the war progressed.¹³ In Oxford, home of the Third Southern General Hospital listed above, many of these auxiliary hospitals were based in several of the Oxford colleges and other institutions around the city.¹⁴ In 1914, Somerville College, the Oxford Workhouse on Cowley Road, Oxford Town Hall, University College, and New College supported the main hospital site to accommodate a total of 336 officers and 1210 soldiers of other ranks.¹⁵

Now that we have established the historical background of the vast hospital system in Britain in the First World War, we can focus our attention onto the hospital section at New College itself. As noted above, New College provided auxiliary support to the Third Southern General Hospital right from the start of the war and archival evidence at New College provides interesting historical background to its establishment in 1914. To begin with, the military authorities contacted the college almost immediately after war broke out to ask if the entire college could be used as a hospital facility, with New College stating that ‘the first proposals would have precluded any other use’ of the college buildings.¹⁶ After discussions, it was decided to base the hospital mainly in tents in the college gardens, as the college realised that many of the main buildings would still be necessary for the day-to-day functioning of the college.¹⁷ Interestingly, the military authorities considered that the hospital would be required for at least three years at the start of the war¹⁸—in stark contrast to the prevailing idea that the war would be ‘over by Christmas’.¹⁹

As it was such an important change in the college that was expected to be in place for years, it is not surprising that the hospital is featured in the business of the Warden and Fellows committee. At the meeting held on 17 August 1914, they approved the establishment of the hospital ‘for the duration of the war’, but no access was granted to any college buildings. It was explicitly stated that the college latrines were not to be used by hospital patients and that the use of the college kitchen was not permitted—perhaps due to worries about the risk of infection from patients.²⁰ Indeed, during term time it was envisaged that ‘the garden should be completely cut off from New College’.²¹ By 24 August 1914, there was already discussion between the Bursar and the administrator of the hospital, a Colonel Ranking, around the use of the grounds and the hospital’s construction. Access to the gardens of New College was arranged to be through the small door into Queen’s Lane from the New College grounds or through what are termed ‘the Masonic

¹² These Southern General Hospitals had different specialities and were, as implied by the name, further supported by Northern, Eastern, and Western General Hospitals in other areas of the country. For more information, see ‘Military Hospitals in the British Isles 1914–1918’, *The Long, Long Trail: Researching Soldiers of the British Army in the Great War of 1914–1918*: <www.longlongtrail.co.uk/soldiers/a-soldiers-life-1914-1918/the-evacuation-chain-for-wounded-and-sick-soldiers/military-hospitals-in-the-british-isles-1914-1918/> (Accessed: 2 April 2025).

¹³ Christine Hallett, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 54–6.

¹⁴ Winter, ‘Oxford and the First World War’, p. 10.

¹⁵ Stephanie Jenkins, ‘Oxford and the First World War: Third Southern General Hospital’: <www.oxfordhistory.org.uk/war/military_hospitals/> (Accessed: 6 March 2025).

¹⁶ *New College Record*, 1918–1919, p. 14. The establishment of the hospital is first discussed in the *New College Record* published after the end of the war, because it was felt that sensitive military information should not be printed whilst hostilities were ongoing.

¹⁷ Although this Note focuses on the hospital, New College was also used for other military purposes throughout the war. Accommodation was routinely provided for troops heading to the southern ports and the longest military usage was in 1916, when New College hosted a company of the 4th Officer Cadet Battalion, around 180 strong. For more information, see the *New College Record*, 1918–1919, p. 15.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁹ See Stuart Hallifax, ‘“Over by Christmas”: British Popular Opinion and the Short War in 1914’, *First World War Studies* 1 (2010), 103–121.

²⁰ New College Archives, Oxford, NCA MIN/W&F6, p. 102.

²¹ New College Archives, Oxford, NCA BCB/29, p. 291.

rooms'. These rooms were located at 50A on the High Street and were joint owned by two Masonic lodges in the city, Alfred Lodge and Bertie Lodge. Similarly to New College, the two Lodges granted the use of their building for hospital purposes for the duration of the war.²² As the property is located between the Examination Schools and the New College grounds, it provided the perfect access point to the New College site for patients and staff, with any building material brought into college via the much larger Holywell Gate.²³ It is interesting that approval was granted so quickly to the military authorities and for such a long period. There was obviously a desire from the Warden and Fellows to contribute to the war effort straight away, and the college was well placed to offer support in this way. Indeed, the college was remarkably empty shortly after hostilities began. The numbers of undergraduates not only at New College, but across the university had decreased massively as young men volunteered to fight in large numbers—over 1,265 served from New College alone.²⁴ A nearly empty college, therefore, could definitely be used as a hospital during the fighting.

After its establishment, the New College hospital quickly began to welcome its first patients, nurses, and doctors. Primarily a convalescent hospital, such hospitals were designed to give injured soldiers 'a period of rest of up to six weeks' and to support the rehabilitation of servicemen, 'many of whom had serious injuries, limb loss and/or were suffering from shell-shock'.²⁵ Archival sources provide key information on the running and development of the hospital during the first year of the war. The first tents were erected at the beginning of November 1914 and a lean-to shelter was quickly added under the East Wall, with the number of beds rising to as many as 120.²⁶ A contemporary painting of the tents can be seen below, which gives an idea of the conditions that the patients faced. This painting depicts the grounds in the summer, but the tents would have been used throughout the year. Conditions would, therefore, have been uncomfortable in the winter months—though nothing of course compared to the conditions faced by soldiers on the Western front itself.



New College, Oxford, NCI 1225—3rd Southern General Hospital, New College Gardens, 1914–15
Watercolour on paper by Walter Ernest Spradbery, 1919
© Courtesy of the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford

²² Joe Mordaunt Crook and James W Daniel, *Oxford Freemasons: A Social History of Apollo University Lodge* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, published for and on behalf of Apollo University Lodge, 2018), pp. 117–18.

²³ NCA BCB/29, p. 291.

²⁴ Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', p. 10.

²⁵ Nicole Blay and Janette Pelosi, 'Historical Exploration of the Work and Workload of the WW1 Nurse in an Australian Auxiliary Hospital', *Collegian (Royal College of Nursing, Australia)* 27 (2020), 642–8.

²⁶ *New College Record*, 1918–1919, p. 14.

Patients were sent from the main hospital site in the Examination Schools to the various supporting hospitals, such as the one at New College, depending on the severity of their injuries. We know that the college supported the work of the main hospital in several different ways. Not only were convalescent beds provided in the grounds of New College, mattresses and bedsteads were also lent to hospitals around the city based on need.²⁷ Secondly, convalescent patients at other hospitals were given permission to use the New College grounds ‘at stated hours for exercise and air.’²⁸ Such permission was granted in line with medical thought at the time, as convalescent patients were encouraged to perform useful tasks, with ‘military drill and exercises . . . introduced as soon as the men became fit enough.’ Such exercises were thought to be useful for morale, as well as a therapeutic benefit.²⁹ Finally, New College also supported the transportation of patients across the city, too, as the college was one of many to donate to the purchase of a new ‘motor ambulance for the conveyance of the sick and wounded in Oxford’.³⁰ The photograph below reveals the need for such an ambulance, as two are shown parked in a convoy in front of the main hospital site at the Examination Schools.



Magdalen College Archives, Oxford, P/408/P2/2

Photograph of an ambulance convoy outside of the Examination Schools, February 1915 (digital reproduction)
The original of this photograph remains among the estate of Isabel Mabel Wace, in private hands.

The support provided by New College to the main hospital site only increased as the country entered the second year of the war in 1915. Firstly, mattresses and bedsteads were lent to the hospital in Oxford in April 1915.³¹ Secondly, the hospital was expanded, particularly noticeably in June 1915. In this month, permission was granted to place some beds on the gravel walk in the gardens to facilitate more patients. At the same time, ‘two water closets’ were added in the bastion of the East Wall—a necessary measure as the hospital was expanding and patients were still not allowed to use the existing facilities in New College, perhaps in a continued effort to reduce the risk of infection.³² To further support morale, a series of musical recitals were also arranged in the Chapel on Sunday evenings, which ‘gave great pleasure to the community and . . . brought in a

²⁷ NCA MIN/W&F6, p. 126.

²⁸ NCA BCB/29, p. 30.

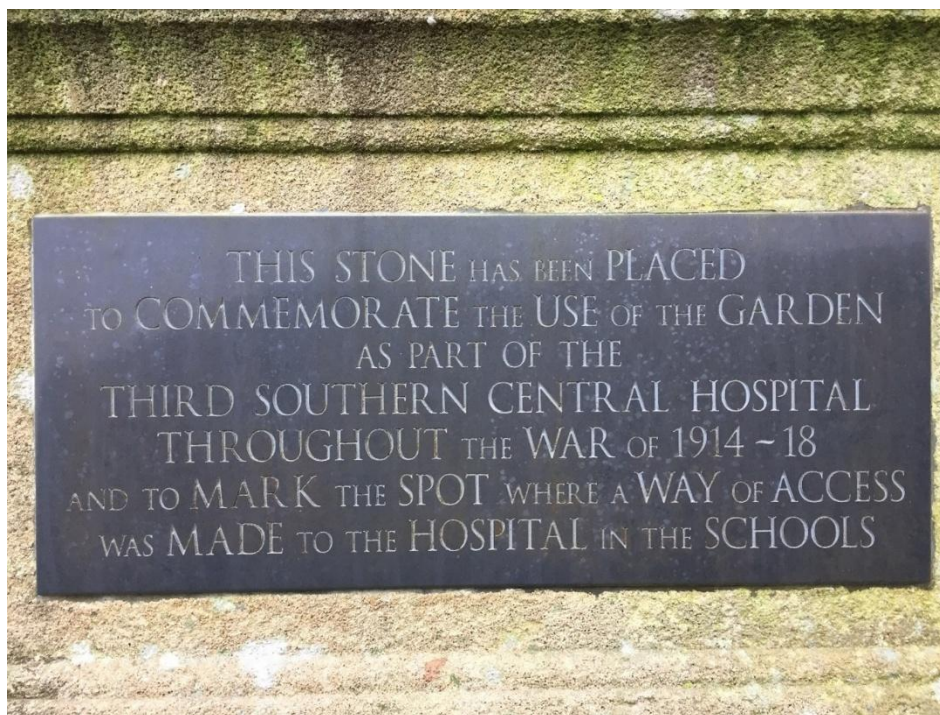
²⁹ Harrison, *The Medical War*, p. 60.

³⁰ NCA MIN/W&F6, p. 113.

³¹ *ibid*, p. 126.

³² *ibid*, p. 133.

considerable sum for the wounded'.³³ Finally, the most drastic change was the unprecedented permission granted by college to create 'an additional door in the south wall of the College garden', with New College bearing the cost 'if necessary, subject to recovering it ultimately if possible from the military authorities'.³⁴ The location of this additional entrance in the gardens is now commemorated with a plaque, pictured below:



Photograph of the Hospital plaque in the gardens of New College, Oxford, taken in 2003
© Jason Lowe, Maintenance Manager, New College, Oxford

This South Wall gate proved to be essential to the running of the larger hospital, creating a larger entrance and improving the journey from the New College site to the main Examination Schools hospital.

Unfortunately, there is not much information kept in the archives at New College on the individual patients themselves. Such information is likely to be contained within individual service records at The National Archives and within the individual hospital archives. Even within these service records, often the information entered during cataloguing is, understandably, the name of the main hospital treating the soldier—in the New College example the Third Southern General Hospital—and not the convalescent hospital.³⁵ Thankfully, a set of photographs in the archives at Magdalen College, Oxford, can provide us with more information about the staff who worked at the hospital, whilst also giving us a glimpse into patient life as well. This set of photographs was owned by Isabel Mabel Wace, who joined the Territorial Force Nursing Service and worked as a nurse in Oxford, including at New College, during the war.³⁶ We know that nurses were housed in

³³ *New College Record*, 1915–1916, p. 3.

³⁴ NCA MIN/W&F6, p. 132.

³⁵ An example record can be found in The National Archives: MH 106/2098/7. This record is for a Private Charles Folley, who served in the Middlesex Regiment. The record mentions that he was treated in the 3rd Southern General Hospital in Oxford and that he was 'convalescent from rheumatic pain'. There is, though, no mention of any convalescent hospital he stayed at: <<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C16887040>>. Many of the records, like this one, have not been digitised, so they have to be consulted at The National Archives in London.

³⁶ Magdalen College Archives, P/408, browsable at: <<https://archive-cat.magd.ox.ac.uk/records/MCA/P/408>>. The pictures were given to Magdalen College Archives in March 2013, by Judy Burge, the granddaughter of Isabel Mabel Wace.

accommodation owned by Merton College, so Nurse Wace may have stayed at the college's New Quad, a short walk from New College itself.³⁷ Two of these pictures are included below. In the first image, taken in 1915, you can see Nurse Wace with ten soldiers in the New College gardens, with the Garden Quad in the background. A striking image, it gives a sense of the horrors of war and the vast range of injuries sustained by soldiers.



Magdalen College Archives, Oxford, P/408/P2/27

Photograph of Mabel Wace and ten soldiers in the grounds of New College, Oxford, 1915
The original of this photograph remains among the estate of Isabel Mabel Wace, in private hands.



Magdalen College Archives, Oxford, P/408/P2/6

Photograph of Mabel Wace delivering food outside a tent at New College, Oxford, 1915
The original of this photograph remains among the estate of Isabel Mabel Wace, in private hands.

The second image again has Nurse Wace as its focus, this time carrying a tray in front of one of the tents in the New College gardens. A patient can again be seen in the background and it is

³⁷ Winter, 'Oxford and the First World War', p. 10.

possible to gain a glimpse into the rather basic sleeping arrangements within the tent itself. Although Nurse Wace completed her nursing training before the war, she would have been supported in her work at New College by many volunteer nurses who had trained during the war, part of the V.A.D. or Voluntary Aid Detachment. These voluntary nurses took courses in several aspects of nursing before they could work, including ‘first aid . . . bandaging, sick-room cookery, hygiene, and home nursing’.³⁸ Thanks to this archival evidence, it is possible to gain glimpses both into the work of these nurses in New College hospital during the First World War, and into the lives of some of the patients that passed through the hospital whilst it was in operation.

Archival sources then reveal another expansion of the hospital in 1916, the third consecutive year of fighting. Such a sudden expansion of hospital provision is not surprising during this period, as fighting greatly intensified on the Western Front—by 1916, the British forces in France were collectively ‘the largest, most complicated, and most comprehensive single organization ever evolved by the British nation’.³⁹ On 28 April 1916, the Warden and Fellows granted permission to extend the lean-to bed accommodation on the east wall of the garden as far as the bastion used as a lavatory (first installed in June 1915).⁴⁰ This expansion may have been requested in preparation for the planned British and French offensive on the Somme, fought between 1 July 1916 and 18 November 1916. This extensive battle, with the largest casualty numbers in British history, had far reaching consequences across the military hospital system,⁴¹ with New College also feeling its impact once the fighting had begun. Firstly, in July 1916, an unprecedented step was taken to allow convalescent soldiers the right to use the ‘sitting rooms on staircases 9, 10, 11, and 12 in the Garden Quadrangle’⁴²—an initiative that would greatly increase their comfort and aid their recovery. Towards the end of the Battle of the Somme, in October 1916, the hospital was expanded once more, with yet another shelter constructed ‘from the middle of the Southern bastion in the East Wall of the Garden’ and an additional latrine and kitchens placed near the mound and under the north wall of St Edmund’s Hall Chapel.⁴³ The archival sources reveal the importance of such steps for the effective running of the wider hospital. Special thanks are recorded from the administrator of the hospital, still Colonel Ranking, who thanked the college ‘for the very kind offer of the rooms and for all the other acts of kindness on their part’, which has provided ‘great assistance in the administration of [the] hospital’.⁴⁴ The expansion of the New College hospital in this period, therefore, reflects a clear demand for hospital beds that only increased as the bloodiest battle in the history of the British Army continued throughout the second half of 1916.

After reaching a height in 1916, there is less discussion of the hospital in the archives at New College in the final years of the war. This reduction may be explained by the fact that the college became accustomed to the presence of the hospital and by the fact that there may have been a slight reduction in the numbers of patients. At any rate, there is no evidence for further expansion—as any expansion would naturally have been approved by the Warden and Fellows and included in their minutes. We do know, though, that the college continued to support the activities of the hospital right until the end of the conflict. Firstly, a set of organ recitals were again given in the chapel on Sunday evenings throughout 1917 and 1918. These performances directly contributed to the funds of the V.A.D. hospital again, so were crucial to raising the income required to enable it to run effectively.⁴⁵ Secondly, an entry in the minutes of the Warden and Fellows gives a brief insight into the experience of one New College alumnus who was injured in

³⁸ See Hallett, *Veiled Warriors*, p. 205.

³⁹ Paul Kennedy, ‘Britain in the First World War’, in *Military Effectiveness: Volume 1: The First World War*, ed. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, new edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 31–79, at p. 45.

⁴⁰ NCA MIN/W&F6, p. 162.

⁴¹ Hallett, *Veiled Warriors*, p. 184.

⁴² NCA MIN/W&F6, p. 176.

⁴³ *ibid.*, pp. 186 and 187.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴⁵ *New College Record*, 1917–1918, p. 1.

the war. On 25 April 1918, permission was granted to give a Mr Dawson, ‘scholar of the College’, a key to the college buildings for him to use ‘so long as he is receiving treatment at the Base Hospital’.⁴⁶ This Mr Dawson must be a Henry Dawson recorded in the register of undergraduates in the archives, who matriculated in 1913 before leaving college to enlist in 1915.⁴⁷ This brief mention is the only evidence by the Warden and Fellows of a New College alumnus being treated at New College itself—sadly there is much more discussion of fatalities and services of remembrance.

Finally, we know that the support provided by the college to the war effort did not cease when the armistice was signed in November 1918—in comparison to the attitude of the wider university. As the war came to an end, there was growing impatience from the Vice-Chancellor, the Warden of Merton College, and the Master of University College to regain the use of their buildings that had been requisitioned for the war effort. As the hospital was spread out in different sections across the city, the evacuation of patients from the central Examination Schools site was seen as a necessary first step before other sites could be vacated—but this step was delayed by several months. In a series of letters to the military authorities, now held in the University archives, the Vice-Chancellor expressed frustration at a lack of communication from the military authorities, reminding them that it would take at least nine months to ‘put the Schools in order again’ and stressing that the University and colleges needed their buildings back to continue their work ‘of national importance’.⁴⁸ This frustration is not evident from the archival evidence at New College—perhaps because at New College the hospital section was mainly based in the gardens and hence not affecting the use of college buildings for teaching purposes. Instead, the Warden and Fellows permitted the hospital to remain in place until December 1919,⁴⁹ giving the military authorities enough time to support fully the wounded for more than a year after the end of the fighting.

To conclude, this New College Note has explored a truly fascinating part of the college’s rich history. By exploring the working of this one hospital in more detail, it is possible to gain an insight into the operation of the wider hospital system and to appreciate how convalescent hospitals across the country aided the military authorities to adapt the medical care they provided to a completely unprecedented conflict. The photographic evidence captured by Nurse Mace is particularly striking, giving the reader a direct link to the past—an opportunity to see how the hospital functioned and a brief glimpse into the lives of some of the patients treated in the college during the war. As the New College archival evidence details its expansion over time, it is also possible to see how medical care and hospital facilities developed, improving as the war progressed. In fact, such hospitals were surprisingly effective. The hospital section at New College was just one cog in a vast medical machine that managed to return a staggering total of 2,396,273 sick and injured British personnel to duty after service on the Western Front.⁵⁰ Further exploration of this hospital system is definitely warranted, at both a national level and by focusing in on individual hospitals such as the one at New College. This Note has focused mainly on the archival collections at New College, but a comparative approach between multiple hospital sites and using evidence from multiple archives would no doubt yield more fascinating insights into patient care during this global war—one that would change Britain forever.

Will Shire
Deputy Librarian
New College, Oxford

⁴⁶ NCA MIN/W&F6, p. 264.

⁴⁷ NCA ADM/R1, pp. 309–10.

⁴⁸ Oxford University Archives, VC 1/43, letter dated 15 February 1919. Similar frustration with the evacuation process is also mentioned in letters in the same collection dated 17 March 1919 and 2 April 1919.

⁴⁹ NCA MIN/W&F6, p. 264.

⁵⁰ Harrison, *The Medical War*, p. 110.

APPENDIX 1: A TIMELINE FOR THE HOSPITAL SECTION AT NEW COLLEGE

- 1.) 17 August 1914—The establishment of a hospital section in the grounds is approved by the Warden and Fellows.
- 2.) Original access to the grounds is via Queen’s Lane and the Masonic rooms on the High Street, whilst building material is brought in via the Holywell Gate.
- 3.) 5 September 1914—Convalescent patients from across Oxford are given permission to use the New College gardens ‘at stated hours for exercise and air.’
- 4.) 24 November 1914—New College donates funds towards a motor ambulance ‘for the conveyance of the sick and wounded in Oxford.’
- 5.) 27 April 1915—New College donates bedsteads and mattresses to the Red Cross Hospital in Oxford.
- 6.) 8 June 1915—Permission was granted to create an additional door in the south wall of the College garden to facilitate the transportation of patients between New College and the Examination Schools.
- 7.) 8 June 1915—The hospital section grows, with beds placed on the gravel walk in the garden.
- 8.) 11 June 1915—Permission is given to install two water closets in the bastion of the East Wall.
- 9.) October 1915 until the end of the war—Organ recitals and other musical performances take place in the Chapel to raise funds for the hospital.
- 10.) 28 April 1916—Lean-to bed accommodation is constructed on the east wall of the garden, as far as the bastion used as a lavatory.
- 11.) 10 July 1916—Convalescent soldiers are granted permission to use the sitting rooms on Staircases 9, 10, 11, and 12 (and if wished for 8) in the Garden Quadrangle.
- 12.) 30 October 1916—The hospital section grows once more, with the shelter continued from the middle of the southern bastion in the East Wall of the garden, the placement of a latrine in the southern bastion, and a kitchen near the south-eastern corner of the mound.
- 13.) 31 October 1916—An additional kitchen is placed in the garden under the north wall of St Edmund Hall Chapel.
- 14.) 25 April 1918—A key is given to a Mr Dawson, Scholar of New College, so he can access college whilst receiving treatment at the hospital.
- 15.) 3 April 1919—The Warden and Fellows agree to allow the use of the garden for hospital purposes until December 1919.

APPENDIX 2: A MAP OF THE HOSPITAL SITE OVER TIME

Each number on the map corresponds to the numbers listed in the timeline in Appendix 1.

