

## The long history of the Royal Hospital in the UK popular press: searching for the RHN in the British Newspaper Archive database



*Examples of the Hospital newspaper advertisements which were published during 1980s*

During the past few months, I have been surveying the **British Newspaper Archive** for mentions of the Hospital. It has been an interesting deep dive into this online database of digitised newspaper articles, with over 40 million pages to search through. What I found was thousands of references to the hospital which I have only really scrapped the surface of what is there about the hospital in the past.

In this report, I will summarise some of the key types of items that were published about the hospital and provide some notable highlights from my initial research.

### What is the British Newspaper Archive?

The [British Newspaper Archive](https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/) is a web resource created by the British Library and the genealogy company, findmypast. The website contains over 40 million digitised newspaper pages of newspapers held in the British Library collection. The collection includes most of the runs of newspapers published in the UK since 1800.

## How to search the British Newspaper Archive

The British Newspaper Archives digital records include details of the newspaper title, date and place of publication. When searching through the newspapers you are searching through the newspaper text itself which the database can search as it has undergone a scanning process called optical character recognition (OCR) which makes it machine readable. When searching through a historic database it is important to choose keywords that will always likely to come up. For the hospital that is the name of the institution but which name to choose as there have been 4 variations in its long history. The Hospital was initially titled 'Royal Hospital for Incurables' from 1854-1917, then 'Royal Hospital and Home for Incurables' from 1917-1987, followed by 'Royal Hospital and Home, Putney' from 1987 until 1995 when its present title was chosen. Whilst ideally you would want to find all the digitalised newspapers of the hospital in one search, due to the name changes it is not possible. Therefore, I decided to choose a search which combined keywords from the title for the hospital for the majority of its history e.g. "Royal Hospital for Incurables" AND "Putney". This search resulted in 8000 results! Not all of these relate to the hospital but a vast majority did and the summary is based on these results.

## First appearance of the Hospital

From the year of its creation, the Hospital was regularly written about in national and local newspapers. The oldest report on the hospital appeared in the *Morning Chronicle*, the day after the first public meeting of the charity. The Hospital was referred to as the 'Royal Hospital' and reported verbatim the resolutions accepted on the charities' formation. Similar reports were issued in other London daily newspapers such as the *Morning Chronicle* and *London Daily News*. Later that year in November, several papers reported the first election of patients into the hospital. Funding was only available for the election of six candidates to the hospital and subscribers were presented in person with 30 applicants with various conditions including chronic asthma, lameness of both arms and feet, total blindness and "imbecility".

## Bequests and donations

The most numerous reports in the first few decades of the hospital's existence relating to notifications of bequests left to the Hospital within wills. An example of this is a report in the *London Daily News* on Saturday 11 December, announced that the hospital had received a bequest from Richard Habberfield for the sum of £1500. This sizable donation was reported throughout the country. Other fundraising activities could also be found in the newspapers such as church collections, concerts and theatrical performances in aid of the hospital and occasionally direct fundraising appeals by the hospital. In 1925, the Ladies' Committee organised a lecture by the famous novelist and author of *The 39 Steps*, John Buchan (1875-1940), in aid of the hospital. The lecture was on 'the old and the new literature' was given on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1925 at 18 Charlton House Terrace, at a cost of "10/6" [about £22 in today's money].<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Common Cause*, Friday 30 January 1925,  
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002229/19250130/033/0007>

## An early appeal

The earliest appeals for donations to the charity were very understated as the following transcript from an advert from the *Morning Post* will show:

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*Royal Hospital for Incurable Cases, Putney. Instituted 31st July 1854, at the Mansion House – the Right Hon. The Lord Mayor in the chair. The number of patients is now 114. and as many more are anxiously waiting for admission. Information cheerfully supplied at the Office, and Subscriptions and Donations thankfully received. “The greater necessity the greater the charity”.*

*Andrew Reed, D.D., Gratuitous Secretary, Office, 10, Poultry, E.C., Feb 16. 1860.<sup>2</sup>*

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## Hospital elections

Patients admission to the hospital was governed from 1854 to 1950 by candidates receiving votes from subscribers and governors to the charity. There was a great deal of competition for places and patients often had to canvass for votes to be successful. There is evidence from British Newspaper Archive that newspapers were used fairly frequently to recruit supporters. The earliest notification that I have found relating to election of Thomas Southee to the Hospital was in *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald* in 1873, where he published a note thanking supporters for their help. A later appeal made by W H Phipps in the *Cheltenham Mercury*, on 14 April 1877, showed the difficulty in gathering enough votes. Mr Phipps, was 22 years old with paralysis on one side of his body, was applying for election for a second time. His supporters included the then Mayor of Cheltenham, various religious ministers and military men.

Later appeals for votes could also be found in high society newspapers and magazine such as *The Tatler* or *The Bystander*, which casually endorsed candidates within sketches and society news.

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### *An Appeal.*

*I am interested in a very deserving case- that of Miss Kathleen Mowat – which has been accepted for election at the Royal Hospital for Incurables at Putney. Miss Mowat, both of whose parents are dead, was being trained for a musical career, until in 1919 the malady from which she is now suffering began to show itself. If you have any*

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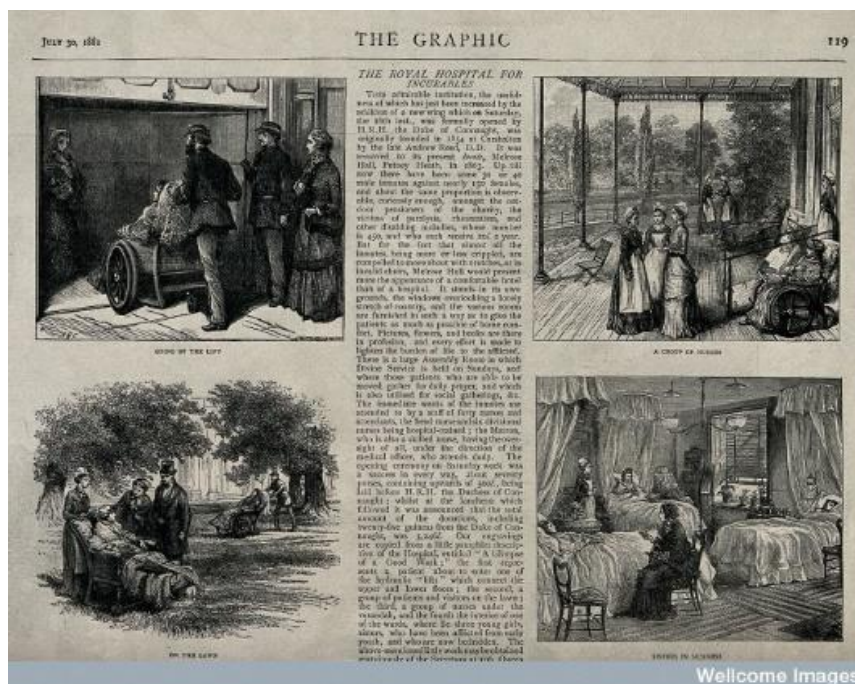
<sup>2</sup> The Morning Post, Thursday 08 March 1860.

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000174/18600308/002/0001>

spare votes, will you kindly bear this tragic case in mind? It is a most deserving one<sup>3</sup>.

## Moving and building

The Hospital's early history is characterised by frequent moves and expanding capacity as more people applied for admission. Building schemes and plans were regularly reported in the press when announced during hospital annual meetings and dinners. Whilst the expansion of new wings to the Melrose Lodge site in 1867, 1882 and 1901 were widely covered in newspaper reports with the Hospital hosting lavish ceremonies for the laying of the first stone and completion of these new wings. Below, you can see an illustrated report about opening of the New Wing at the Hospital written about in *The Graphic*, a popular weekly illustrated newspaper. The report describes Melrose Hall to be “*more of a comfortable hotel than hospital in appearance*”. The complimentary write up was echoed that year in the *Illustrated Sydney News* which used the report and illustrations to champion the building of a hospital for incurables in Sydney<sup>4</sup>.



Four scenes from the Royal Hospital for Incurables at Putney Heath, London. Wood engraving, 1881. Courtesy of the Wellcome Library, London under a Creative Commons License (Wellcome Library: ICV No 48264).

<sup>3</sup> *The Tatler*, Wednesday 19 October 1921

(<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001852/19211019/020/0018?browse=true>)

<sup>4</sup> *Illustrated Sydney News*, Saturday 18 February 1882, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/64033805>

### Reports of visits:

The hospital began to hold annual summer fetes in the garden and sales of wares which attracted various members of high society to the hospital. This included several Royal visits such as the visit of the Duchess of York in June 1924 to open the annual sale of patients' work. She was accompanied by the visiting Queen of Romania and press photos of the event could be found in national and regional papers, such as the photograph below taken from *The Bystander*.



*Photograph of Matron Lucy Begg escorting the Duchess of York during her visit the Hospital<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> *The Bystander*, Wednesday 11 June 1924, photograph of a visit from the Duchess of York visit the Hospital (<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001851/19240611/075/0033>)



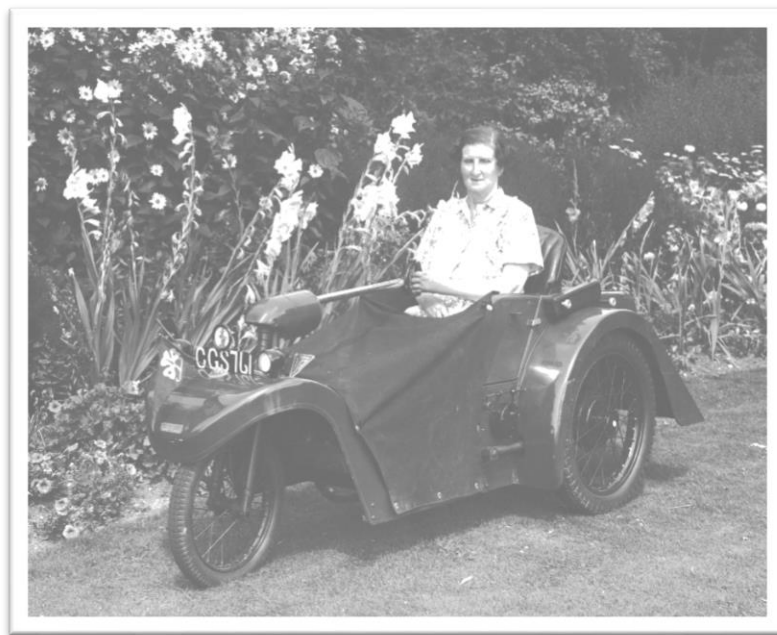
In February 1954, *The Outsider*, published an article by Donald Campbell (1921-1967), who was a British land and water speed record holder. He visited a hospital garden party and marvelled at the patients he met, stating:

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*"I saw a girl doing a far more dangerous job of driving a car than I ever will do, even though I am going to have an attempt to break the world speed record one of these days. She was only going ten miles an hour in an electric motor in the hospital grounds. But she couldn't move her neck and so she couldn't see much on either side. Ten miles an hour was much too fast. And she smiled<sup>6</sup>."*

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The archive has a photo of a patient in a motorised wheelchair from this period. Whether it is the same patient which Donald Campbell was referring to is not possible to confirm, however what it does do is to give an insight into our former patients' lives which otherwise would have been lost. This article and others helps reflect the value in researching the Hospital in the newspaper database for information about the hospital history.



Photograph of a unknown patient in a motorised wheelchair, c.1950s

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<sup>6</sup> *The Outsider*, Friday 08 February 1954,  
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000437/19570208/133/0006?browse=true>

## **Advertising in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Advertising became the predominant form of newspaper publication about the hospital. Annual subscriptions and other fundraising appeals, such as the annual Christmas appeal were becoming less profitable and in 1950 the Hospital appointed an Appeals Secretary to improve voluntary donations. The Hospital began employing the advertising agency, Messrs J Walter Thompson Co. Ltd from the 1950s onwards and the appeals notably begin to featuring hospital branding for the first time, with the 'Forget-me-not' logo and begin to feature actual patients and their stories.

## **In summary**

The British Newspaper Archive database provides a rich resource of documentary evidence of the Hospital from its birth up to the present day. Through searching through the old newspaper prints it is possible to view the hospital through multiple perspectives, such as how the hospital presented itself in print through advertising and official notices; how the hospital was reported within the general press and finally, how would be patients, benefactors and visitors perceived the hospital through election appeals and society articles.

Images used in this report have been cropped and reproduced from newspaper reports from the British Newspaper Archive. All the original images are held by the British Library. All rights of the images are reserved and may not be used for publication.

## **Appendix: Newspaper transcripts**

### **1) Tuesday 28 November 1854, *Express* (London)**

#### **Royal Hospital**

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The subscribers to this charity, which was established but a few months ago, and whose object is to afford permanent relief to indigent persons who are suffering from incurable and hopeless disease, and who are therefore ineligible for admission to the ordinary hospitals, met yesterday at the London Tavern for the purpose of giving, for the first time, practical effect to its object, by electing recipients of its bounty. The number of applicants was thirty but the funds of the charity at present admit only of six persons being placed upon them. The thirty cases presented to the consideration of the subscribers were all cases of utter and hopeless helplessness, arising from imbecility, total blindness, paralysis, lameness of both arms and feet, chronic asthma, chronic rheumatism, and other similar afflictions, and the chairman, the Hon. Edmund Phipps, who in the absence of Sir Geo. Carroll, presided, stated that he had examined into the claims of them all, and had found them to come strictly within the category of complete destitution, helplessness, and hopelessness, and would be closed against. He expressed regret that of more than six, but in selecting that number from the list of candidates for the purpose of placing his own votes he had been guided entirely by what appeared to him the greater degree of destitution and misery under position and influence of those who recommended them, which filled up an important gap hitherto existing in our metropolitan charities, commencing its operations where others concluded theirs, he hoped it would so grow in public favour that at the next election they might be enabled to place upon the list of successful candidates a much larger number than six, to which they were now necessarily confined.

The election was then proceeded with, and six of what appeared to the most urgent of the 30 cases presented were elected.

A vote of thanks to the chairman conclude the business of the meeting.

<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002642/18541128/025/0002>

### **2) 13 December 1873, *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald***

#### **Royal Hospital for Incurables.**

To the Governors and Subscribers to the Royal Hospital for Incurables.

Thomas Henry Southey begs to tender his sincere thanks to all his kind friends through whose support and interest he obtained 953 votes which secured his election on the 28th ultimo.

Stour Street, Canterbury. December, 1873.



### **3) Cheltenham Mercury – Saturday 14 April 1877**

MAY ELECTION, 1877.

ROYAL HOSPITAL FOR INCURABLES, WEST HILL, PUTNEY HEALTH

W H. MORRIS PHIPPS, aged 22, is suffering from paralysis, from which he had lost the use of one side.

Last year he applied to the above Hospital for an OUT-DOOR PENSION. He was accepted as a Candidate, and at the Election on the 24<sup>th</sup> November obtained 186 Votes.

W.H.M. PHIPPS desires gratefully to acknowledge the kindness of those friends who assisted him at the last Election. He now earnestly and respectfully solicits Votes or Subscriptions towards a Fund which is being raised for the purpose of securing his Election in May.

Mr VOILE, 6 Colonnade, Cheltenham, is Treasurer for this Fund.

When elected, MORRIS PHIPPS, will receive a Pension of £20 per annum.

Subscriptions may be paid to the Treasurer, or at the National Provincial Bank, Cheltenham, (owner of Cambray), where a book lies for that purpose.

Every Half-Guinea purchases Two Votes, and every Guinea Four Votes.

The following Gentlemen have kindly consented to interest themselves on his behalf –

The Workshop THE MAYOR, 9, Queen's Parade Cheltenham

Rev. Canon Bell, The Rectory, Cheltenham

\*Rev J. Richards, Minister of Trinity, Church, Cheltenham

Rev. Dr Morton Brown, 3, St Margaret's Terrace, Cheltenham

Capt. St. Clair Ford, J.P., Hove, Brighton

\*Lieut. –Colonel Schreiber, Roden House, Cheltenham

Rev. Gordon Calthrop, Incumbent of St Augustine's, Highbury, London

William Gardner, Esq, J.P., Prestwich Lodge, Cheltenham

Henry Beach, Esq, M.R.C.S., Swindon, near Cheltenham

\*Will be most happy to receive Votes.