

VILLAGE ECHOES

One of the requests recently received by the Local History Society was for information about Lidwells Auxiliary Military Hospital during World War 1. The enquirer told us that three members of her family had been nurses at Lidwells and her request had further been prompted by the discovery, among family papers, of a hand-written poem (12 long verses) entitled "*The Lay of the Lidwells Nurses*".

The society was subsequently sent a copy and it makes interesting and amusing reading. There are few identifiable names but the situations faced are clear, such as the treating of soldiers' injuries, the food and beer provided, especially when it was accidentally dropped on the floor, and the amount of cleaning needed to keep the hospital spick and span.

Lidwells was opened as a military hospital on 17th May 1915 and by November of that year accommodated 32 patients (the maximum number it could take). Altogether, until it closed as a hospital on 31st March 1919, the staff looked after 1,479 patients. The accompanying photograph shows some of them outside the building.

The First World War was not Lidwells' only connection with the military. In 1860 it had been the home of Captain Augustus Ruxton, who was the first adjutant of the local battalion of the the Rifle Volunteers (see the previous issue of Village Echoes for more about them). However, in 1915 it was the home of the Reverend Henry Purefoy Fitzgerald and his family who had lived there for several years. Apart from being the commandant of the hospital, (his wife was matron) Fitzgerald was also the chief special constable during the war. Outside of these activities, he was also the owner of Lidwells French Gardens – if any reader can clarify the significance of "French" in the description, please get in touch with the Local History Society. Was it what the English would normally call a market garden? The garden had certainly been established by 1911 as the census for that year has Harry Collins, of Lidwells cottages, giving his occupation as "*French market gardener, assisting in the French gardens*". Similarly, Frederick Campfield, who lived in another of the Lidwells cottages, gave his occupation as "*private chauffeur and French garden van driver*".

The society has very little information about the gardens and would be interested in finding out more. An advertisement in the Goudhurst Jubilee Book (1935) names the proprietor of the gardens as Captain T R H Smyth. The Fitzgerald family left the village in 1934 so it would seem that Smyth, who lived at Little Orchard in Lidwells Lane, took over at that time. Incidentally, during the First World War, Smyth had been a Captain in the East Yorkshire Rifles – yet another military connection for Lidwells.

Local History Society