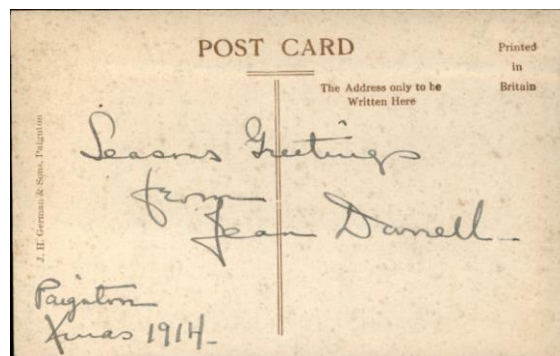
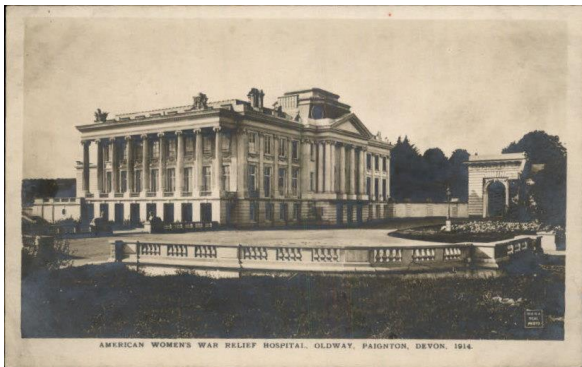


## Christmas at the American Women's War Relief Hospital, Oldway Mansion

The following article was published in the Paignton "The Western Guardian" on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1914.



### "Christmas in Paignton

#### Cheer for the Wounded at the Hospital

For the most part, the exception being some showers early on Boxing Day Christmas passed off very quietly and therefore very happily, in Paignton. The quietude was external; it was as usual, essentially a home holiday, and the subdued conditions out of doors was the measure of the warmth of the many family reunions in the homes. Familiar faces were missed in many homes, because of the terrible war and the fact that so many have enlisted or are on service, but where possible absent ones returned as yore to the family circle.

Christmas Day was bright and cheerful, with a mild temperature, and those who had to be about experienced favourable conditions. The Church services were very fairly attended during the day, but after dusk the lighted windows and drawn blinds testified to the homeliness of the festival.

The wounded at the two local military hospitals, likewise the patients at the Cottage Hospital, were excellently catered for.

The American Women's War Hospital at Oldway was a scene of brightness and cheerfulness that could scarcely be surpassed. Evergreens and mottoes, flags and draperies, rendered the wards the acme of cosiness, and special Christmas fare was served with sumptuousness remarkable even for this magnificently managed institution. A delightful touch of home was infused by the presentation to each of the 165 patients of a large stocking -these were specially made by the nursing Sisters and others - which each man received in the morning. They contained all sorts of acceptable gifts, including a very thoughtful present of a handsome cigarette case, with the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes embossed, from the American Women's Committee; a very pretty card and box of chocolates from Mrs. Harcourt, one of the Secretaries, a pretty card from Miss Fletcher, the Matron; a neat matchbox from Nurses Hewat and Mackenzie, with their initials engraved thereon; and a khaki handkerchief from the ladies of the bureau.

After the mid-day dinner, the Commandant, Lieut. Col. R.C. Gunning, accompanied by Mrs. Gunning, the Chief Surgeon and Mrs. Beale, and the Matron, visited each of the wards, wishing the men a Happy Christmas and a speedy recovery. The Commandant distributed to each patient a special Christmas card from their Majesties the King and Queen. This was a handsome photogravure of their Majesties, and on the back of each card was a lithograph in the King's handwriting:

"With our best wishes for Xmas, 1914. May you soon be restored to health. Mary R.; George R.I."

The present was, quite needlessly to say, received with the liveliest gratitude and pride by the gallant soldiers, who were delighted to receive the Royal cards, and who appreciated their Majesties' kindly thought very deeply. It was hoped to distribute presents from Queen Alexandra and the Princess Mary's fund, but these not arriving in time were left to be the subjects of the New Year gifts. The Commandant, who spoke a few pleasing words to the inmates of all the wards, also distributed a box of chocolate from

the firm of Messrs. Cadbury, and a handsome card from another well-known firm. Lieut. Col Gunning expressed his great pleasure in handing these gifts to the patients, especially those from their Majesties. The Committee provided a very excellent dinner of roast beef, plum pudding, mince pies, apples and bananas, which were all thoroughly enjoyed. The Plymouth Breweries sent a bottle of beer for each convalescent patient. Handsome presents were very generously sent by the Committee for each member of the staff, and Christmas Day, 1914, will long be remembered by all at the hospital.

In each happily decorated ward, entertainments were given by several performers, and a really merry Christmas Day was spent by all concerned.

At the Larches Red Cross Hospital the wards were gaily decorated with holly, mistletoe, etc., and a very jolly high tea at 6.30 was followed by music and games; the wounded Belgians and the staff spending a very happy day.

The Cottage Hospital was likewise gaily bedecked with a profusion of holly and other adornments, and the patients' tea, to which friends were invited, was characterised by that cheerfulness which always attends on the Christmas function. Special seasonable fare was served, and with gramophone selections the time was most pleasantly spent. At both the Larches and the Cottage Hospital the Parish Church choir sang carols in the evening."

The following Christmas scenes are undated but are probably from the period 1914 – 1917.



Mary Ward



Harcourt Ward





Malborough and Singer Wards



St George and Astor Wards



Greetings from the Executive Committee of the  
American Women's War Relief Fund  
Xmas 1917



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