

An Examination of the VAD Workforce at the Netley British Red Cross  
Hospital, Southampton, 1914-1919.

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## Abstract

Over 90,000 individuals volunteered with the British Red Cross Society as Voluntary Aid Detachment members (VADs) during World War One and performed a variety of roles both at home and abroad. Until recently, the focus in secondary literature has been upon the demographics and experiences of one group of these volunteers – the middle and upper-class women who served as nursing members at frontline hospitals. A significant proportion of VADs did not fall into this category and this study questions why they have been largely neglected in existing secondary literature. This study also provides unique and original research into the demographics and experiences of the male and female VADs who volunteered at the British Red Cross Hospital in Netley, Southampton, between 1914 and 1919.

This study begins by providing an overview of the work of the Joint War Committee and a history of the construction and operation of Netley Hospital. The main primary source consulted in this study is the British Red Cross digital database of VAD service records for World War One. Chapter two of this study provides a quantitative analysis of the available records for the workforce of Netley Hospital. Key demographic information for male and female VADs are examined to establish to what extent the workforce at Netley Hospital followed the traditional concept of VADs. Chapter three discusses the high percentage of male VADs at Netley Hospital in more detail. It considers issues of conscription and conscientious beliefs and how they may have affected the male workforce of Netley Hospital. Societal attitudes towards non-combatant men during World War One are also discussed. Case studies of individual VAD members at Netley Hospital will be incorporated throughout the qualitative discussions in chapters two and three.

This study concludes that evidence from the VAD service record database for Netley Hospital demonstrates VADs were a far more diverse and complex group than historiography suggests. It argues the topics of VADs and non-combatant men during World War One would benefit from further research using the data held on the database as this information has remained largely ignored since its digitisation.

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## Abbreviations

AM	Adam Matthew First World War Collection
BRCMA	British Red Cross Museum and Archives
BRCS	British Red Cross Society
HALS	The Hampshire Archives and Local Studies
JWC	The Joint War Committee
OSJ	The Order of St John
VAD	Voluntary Aid Detachment

## Personal Statement

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work and that I have not submitted it, or any part of it, for a degree at The Open University or at any other university or institution.

## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

The organisation known as the Voluntary Aid Detachment was founded in 1909 by the then Director General of Army Medical Services, Sir Alfred Keogh, and with the assistance of the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) and the Order of St John (OSJ).<sup>1</sup> The primary aim of the Voluntary Aid Detachment was the provision of voluntary medical care by civilians to military personnel in times of conflict, both within the United Kingdom and abroad.<sup>2</sup> By the start of World War One there were 2,500 local detachments with a total number of 74,000 members, and during the course of the war over 90,000 individuals of both genders volunteered in a variety of roles.<sup>3</sup> The acronym VAD came to be commonly used in reference to just VAD nursing members during the war due to a societal assumption that the vast majority of volunteers were in nursing roles; this assumption continued after the war in both general society and academic studies.<sup>4</sup> However, this assumption about VAD nursing members overlooks the fact that 23,561 men were registered as VADs or OSJ personnel by July 1914, and a significant proportion of female volunteers (approximately 11,000 individuals), did not carry out nursing duties.<sup>5</sup> Male VADs worked mainly as stretcher bearers, ambulance drivers and mechanics at frontline hospitals and were chiefly employed in a variety of roles as orderlies in wartime hospitals and in the transportation of sick and

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<sup>1</sup> Menna Lloyd Jones, 'Voluntary Aid Detachments: nursing volunteer "VADs" during World War One', *British Journal of Healthcare Assistants*, 12.11 (2018), pp. 559-561 (p. 559), doi:10.12968/bjha.2018.12.11.559.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd Jones, p. 559.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd Jones, p. 559; Anon, 'Kingston University volunteers help historians complete landmark digital archive project of British Red Cross World War One volunteers', *Kingston University London*, 17 May 2016. <<https://www.kingston.ac.uk/news/article/1657/17-may-2016-kingston-university-volunteers-help-historians-complete-landmark-digital-archive-project-of-british-red-cross-world/>> [accessed 28 March 2024].

<sup>4</sup> Janet S.K. Watson, 'Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain', *The International History Review*, 19.1 (1997), pp. 32-51, (p. 33), doi:10.1080/07075332.1997.9640773.

<sup>5</sup> Anon, 'Who were the VAD volunteers?', *British Red Cross*, n.d. <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/volunteering-during-the-first-world-war/who-were-the-vad-volunteers>> [Accessed 05 March 2024]; Ian Martin, "'Where Needs Must: The Acceptance of Volunteer Aids in British and Australian Military Hospitals in World War 1'", *Health and History*, 4.1 (2002), pp. 88-98, (p. 88), doi:10.2307/40111424.

wounded soldiers within Britain.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the female VAD workforce undertook an array of responsibilities that included cooks, cleaners, pharmacy dispensers and clerical workers to name but a few.<sup>7</sup>

Existing historiography concerned with the experiences of individuals who were involved in the provision of medical care during World War One has mainly focused upon the professional nurses and VAD nursing members, and scant attention has been paid to the volunteers depicted above who provided care and assistance to wounded and ill soldiers via non-nursing methods. There has also been a tendency within existing secondary literature to approach the topic of VADs from a ‘top down’ perspective, which often overlooks the nuances that existed within such a large group of people. This study therefore aims to provide a different perspective on the topic of VADs during World War One by presenting a local study of one particular VAD workforce and focusing upon the very much neglected population of male VADs within that selected group. This will be carried out through a study of the VAD workforce of the British Red Cross Hospital at Netley, Southampton (hereafter referred to as Netley Hospital) between 1914 and 1919. It is hoped that a local study such as this which takes a ‘bottom-up’ approach to available primary source material will allow for a greater understanding into the demographics and experiences of the male VADs at Netley Hospital. The data and information obtained from this study will be discussed in relation to existing secondary literature with the aim that this study will both build upon existing knowledge and highlight new or contradictory evidence.

Chapter one of this study is a shorter, introductory section that provides context for the main body of work. It provides a background to the formation of the Joint War Committee (JWC), the construction and operation of auxiliary hospitals within Britain during World War One, and the history of Netley Hospital. This chapter will explain why and how Netley Hospital came to be built alongside the already established military hospital, The Royal Victoria Hospital, and provide information on how Netley Hospital developed throughout wartime. Chapter two will introduce the BRCS VAD service record database and discuss its history before outlining the methodology used for this study to extract the available data for

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<sup>6</sup> Anon, ‘British Red Cross transport during the First World War’, *British Red Cross*, n.d.

<<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/medical-care-during-ww1/british-red-cross-transport-during-the-first-world-war>> [Accessed 9 January 2024].

<sup>7</sup> Isobel MacAuslan, ‘St John and the First World War’, *Museum of the Order of St John*, n.d.

<<https://museumstjohn.org.uk/st-john-and-the-first-world-war/>> [Accessed 18 January 2024].



the Netley Hospital VAD workforce. A quantitative examination of the demographics of the VAD workforce will then follow, with particular attention paid to gender ratio, a breakdown of the age range of the VADs, location of the volunteers' permanent residential addresses and the roles and promotions available to the workforce. The aim of this chapter is to provide evidence that the VAD workforce was not one homogenous group, but instead a population of individuals of differing socio and economic backgrounds. Chapter three combines quantitative and qualitative analysis of primary sources to discuss the topic of the male VAD workforce at Netley Hospital in more detail. This chapter will build upon the data provided in chapter two and will include case studies of individual volunteers to explore the themes of conscription, conscientious objectors, and the cultural perception of males who became VADs instead of taking up combatant service.

The main primary source consulted for this study is the VAD service record database that is available online at the BRCS website.<sup>8</sup> The digitisation of over 244,000 World War One VAD service cards was a two year project carried out by volunteers at Kingston University's Centre for the Historical Record and was completed in 2016.<sup>9</sup> As analysing such an extensive amount of primary source material was beyond the scope of this study, the decision was therefore made to focus upon the service records for one specific hospital that was in operation for the full duration of World War One within the United Kingdom. Netley Hospital was chosen as it met these criteria and also benefitted from being one of the three largest BRCS hospitals in operation during World War One.<sup>10</sup> An initial search of the VAD service records for Netley Hospital produced just over 1000 service cards, an amount that would provide enough data for any trends within the VAD workforce demographics to be noticed and enable a quantitative examination to be conducted.

Whereas the contents of the VAD service record database allow for a quantitative approach to be taken, the inclusion of a qualitative method of analysing other primary sources was important to this study in order to provide a sense of 'balance'. A qualitative approach would also enable details about the experiences of the VAD workforce of Netley Hospital to be drawn out that would otherwise not been seen through use of the VAD service record

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<sup>8</sup> The full VAD collection of service records is available at: BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search>> [Accessed 01 December 2023].

<sup>9</sup> Anon, *Kingston University London*.

<sup>10</sup> S.H. Best, *The Story of the British Red Cross* (Cassell and Company Ltd, 1938), p. 146.

database alone. Although few original records relating to the running of Netley Hospital during World War One appear to have survived, original copies of *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine* are held at the Hampshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS). The analytical method of ‘reading against the grain’ will be used to discuss the contents of the magazines with the aim that this will highlight attitudes and beliefs of contributors that were not otherwise implicitly stated.

Other primary sources consulted for this study are more general in their scope. One distinctly useful source is the *British Red Cross Society Summary of Work*, a newsletter that provided updates on all the BRCS hospitals in operation during the war and was initially published on a weekly and then monthly basis as the war progressed. Each newsletter provided updates on the building, expansion and daily operation of Netley Hospital, and this information can be ‘read between the lines’ to discover evidence about the hospital’s VAD workforce that would otherwise not be available. For example, problems with the recruitment of staff and VADs, epidemics suffered by both the hospital workforce and its patients, and references to recreational activities available to staff and patients at the hospital all provide a greater understanding of what experiences the VAD workforce encountered at Netley Hospital. Although original copies of these newsletters are held at the Imperial War Museum archives, scanned copies are available to view online at the Adam Matthew First World War Collection, and it is those copies that have been consulted for this study. Other primary sources referred to throughout this study include the 1911 Census for England and Wales, local and national newspapers, and the few personal documents of Netley Hospital VAD staff that are available at HALS. These sources were included in this study as they enabled research into case studies of individual VADs who worked at Netley Hospital, which in turn provided more depth to the following discussions.

As highlighted at the beginning of this introduction, academic interest in military medical care conducted by women during World War One has previously focused on the professional military nurses and VAD nursing members who served in field hospitals abroad, and Hallett suggests that even this subject was neglected within the wider scope of World War One historiography until the 1980s.<sup>11</sup> Summers’s text *Angels and Citizens* was one of the earliest published studies of female military nurses, however her focus was professional nursing prior to World War One, and therefore little attention was given to the development

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<sup>11</sup> Christine E. Hallett, *Nurse Writers of the Great War* (Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 1.

of VAD nursing.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, whilst Macdonald's study was received positively, Macdonald's focus was upon the professional and VAD nurses who worked on the Western Front, and other narratives such as the VAD nursing members who worked in hospitals on the home front remained unexplored.<sup>13</sup> Reznick has also drawn attention to the lack of studies that focuses upon different views and experiences of caregiving that occurred during World War One and argues for the inclusion of a 'full array' of gender experiences.<sup>14</sup> More recently, developments in studies on the nature of wartime caregiving can be seen, which may be a reflection of how modern historians have begun to view World War One as a 'total war'.<sup>15</sup> For example, both McEwen and Watson have incorporated discussions on VAD nursing members working within the United Kingdom into their work, but the emphasis has been on the relationship between the professional nurses and VAD nursing members.<sup>16</sup> McEwen highlights the concerns felt by professional nurses towards what they perceived as 'untrained personnel' during World War One and how the BRCS were compelled to become involved in the discussion of their use in war time nursing.<sup>17</sup> Watson suggests that the two groups of women had different motivations for their involvement in wartime caregiving, and it is this that caused difficulties between them.<sup>18</sup> One of the most recent studies on other female medical and nursing war workers is Moore's examination of the predominately female staffed

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<sup>12</sup> Anne Summers, *Angels and Citizens: British Women as Military Nurses 1854-1914* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988).

<sup>13</sup> Lyn Macdonald, *The Roses of No Man's Land* (Michael Joseph, 1980); Cameron Stewart, Review of Macdonald, Lyn, *The Roses of No Man's Land* (Michael Joseph, 1980) in *The Oral History Review*, 14 (1986), pp. 92-95, no doi.

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey S. Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain During the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 8 and 10.

<sup>15</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, 'Who Gets to Be in the War Story? Absences and Silences in They Shall Not Grow Old', *The American Historical Review*, 124.5 (2019), pp. 1782-1788, (p. 1784), doi:10.1093/ahr/rhz1022.

<sup>16</sup> Yvonne McEwen, *In the Company of Nurses: The History of the British Army Nursing Service in the Great War*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2014); Janet S.K. Watson, 'Wars in the Wards: The Social Construction of Medical Work in First World War Britain', *The Journal of British Studies*, 41.4 (2002), pp. 484-510, doi:10.1086/341439.

<sup>17</sup> McEwen, pp.82-83.

<sup>18</sup> Watson, *Wars in the Wards*, pp. 509-510.

Endell Street Hospital, in which she suggests that the VAD nursing members resented the authority the professional, yet socially inferior, nurses had over them.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the conversations around VAD nursing members working within the United Kingdom is beginning to grow, there is still a distinct lack of secondary literature concerned with the non-nursing members of the VAD workforce. For example, female VADs in what was termed ‘General Service’ roles during World War One only receive passing mentions in studies by Moore and Watson, and no studies have been located that solely focus on the demographics and experiences of male VADs on the home front.<sup>20</sup> A few historians have begun to examine the histories of the male professional and volunteer medical caregivers, but these discussions again tend to focus upon experiences gained in wartime hospitals abroad. One example of this type of study is Meyer’s analysis of the Royal Army Medical Corps, in which Meyer recognises that ‘the roles and status of non-professional male caregivers in wartime’ has not yet been fully explored.<sup>21</sup> Meyer goes on to suggest that the tendency in secondary literature to focus upon female nurses during World War One reinforces the Victorian belief that women have a ‘privileged perspective on care provision *because they are women*’.<sup>22</sup>

To date, the only study located that discusses the BRCS VAD service record database is Hawkin’s study on Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital.<sup>23</sup> Hawkin’s work will therefore be a key secondary source for this study (particularly the secondary chapter) as both incorporate a prosopographical approach to primary sources and, similar to this study, it is a local history that examines the demographics of the VAD workforce of one specific wartime hospital; the one main difference being that Hawkin’s focus is upon female VAD nursing members. Hawkins findings from the VAD service record database are used in conjunction with genealogical research to provide evidence of a diverse work group of female volunteers, the

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<sup>19</sup> Wendy Moore, *Endell Street: The Women Who Ran Britain’s Trailblazing Military Hospital* (Atlantic Books, 2021), p. 156.

<sup>20</sup> Moore, p. 154; Watson, ‘Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy’s Sisters’, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Jessica Meyer, ‘Medicos, poultice wallahs and comrades in service: masculinity and military medicine in Britain during the First World War’, *Critical Military Studies*, 6.2 (2020), pp. 160-175, (p. 162), doi:10.1080/23337486.2019.1677040.

<sup>22</sup> Meyer, p. 164.

<sup>23</sup> Sue Hawkins, ‘First World War VAD Stories from the British Red Cross Archives: The Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital’, *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 11.4 (2018), pp. 291-303, doi:10.1080/17526272.2018.1530409.

like of which have been ‘ignored in comparisons to their sisters overseas’.<sup>24</sup> Whilst Hawkin’s work includes little reference to male VADs, this is not due to an oversight by the author but is instead a reflection of the demographics of the VAD workforce at Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital.

Easier to locate are discussions concerning the issues of military enlistment, conscription and conscientious objectors – topics that are very closely associated with the male VAD workforce of Netley Hospital as they provide possible reasons as to why the men came to be working at the hospital instead of enlisting in the armed forces. McDermott, Slocombe and Wallace all provide thorough backgrounds to the concerns surrounding conscription in their individual local studies on military service tribunals.<sup>25</sup> In her study on reserved occupations, Pattinson suggests that civilian men were viewed by society as ‘failing to fulfil their side of the wartime gender contract’ and Ugolini explores the existence of a ‘shift in understanding of manly conduct in wartime’ in relation to married men participating in active military service.<sup>26</sup> The binary opposition of male soldiers and male conscientious objectors during World War One is highlighted by Bibbings, who suggests that these views drew upon pre-existing ideas about men.<sup>27</sup>

Very little secondary literature concerned with the history of Netley Hospital and The Royal Victoria Hospital, in the grounds of which Netley Hospital was located, has been located. This is perhaps surprising considering the combined size of the two hospitals during World War One, but it may be a reflection on the lack of existing primary source material.

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<sup>24</sup> Hawkins, p. 301.

<sup>25</sup> James McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals, 1916-1918: ‘A Very Much Abused Body of Men’* (Manchester University Press, 2011); Ivor Slocombe, ‘Recruitment into the Armed Forces during the First World War. The work of the Military Tribunals in Wiltshire, 1915-1918’, *The Local Historian*, 30.2 (2000), pp. 105-123, no doi; and Angus Wallace, ‘A Community of Consent: Conscientious Objectors on the North Yorkshire Moors and the North East Coast During the First World War’, *Northern History*, 61.1 (2024), pp.94-113, doi:10.1080/0078172X.2023.2272833.

<sup>26</sup> Juliette Pattinson, ‘“Shirkers”, “Scrimjacks” and “Scrimshanks”?: British Civilian Masculinity and Reserved Occupations, 1914-45’, *Gender & History*, 28.3 (2016), pp. 709-727, (p. 710), doi:10.1111/1468-0424.12246; Laura Ugolini, ‘The “recruiting muddle”: married men, conscription and masculinity in First World War England’, *First World War Studies*, 9.1 (2018), pp. 73-92, (p. 73), doi:10.1080/19475020.2018.1520138.

<sup>27</sup> Lois Bibbings, ‘Images of Manliness: The Portrayal of Soldiers and Conscientious Objectors in the Great War’, *Social & Legal Studies*, 12.3 (2003), pp.335-358, (p. 337), doi:10.1177/09646639030123003.

Hoare's *Spike Island: The Memory of a Military Hospital* is a history of the two hospitals, but it is also combined with personal memoir and therefore has been of only partial use to this study.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, and again perhaps surprisingly considering its importance to the individuals involved in its production, very little discussion on the historiography of wartime hospital magazines and 'amateur wartime literature' is available.<sup>29</sup>

As can be seen in the literature review for this study, relatively little secondary literature exists that concerns itself with the wartime experiences of non-nursing VADs. There are even fewer studies available that examine the demographics of the VAD workforce, either at a national or local level. The rationale for this study is to therefore contribute to existing historiography and to demonstrate the importance and need for further study in these areas. By positioning a local study of one particular group of VAD volunteers within the broader conversation of World War One medical providers and caregivers, it is hoped that this study will provide evidence to support recent thinking that the VAD workforce was a far more complex and multifaceted group than previously thought.

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<sup>28</sup> Philip Hoare, *Spike Island: The Memory of a Military Hospital* (Fourth Estate, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Reznick, p. 66.

## Chapter One: Background to the Joint War Committee and Netley Hospital

This chapter will provide an account of the histories of both the JWC and Netley Hospital as the JWC, and the BRCS in particular, were instrumental in overseeing the construction and daily running of Netley Hospital. This chapter aims to provide a greater understanding of the organisation in which the VAD volunteers of Netley Hospital worked so that the reader has context for the discussions included in the following chapters of this study.

### **The Joint War Committee and VADs**

The BRCS developed out of the British National Aid Society which had been formed in 1870, and the OSJ, who can trace the founding of their English headquarters to the 1140s and received its Royal Charter in 1888.<sup>1</sup> Both organisations provided aid to those in need, especially during times of conflict. The War Office introduced its ‘Scheme for the Organisation of Voluntary Aid in England and Wales’ on 16 August 1909 with the aim that it would ‘supply certain gaps in the territorial medical service’.<sup>2</sup> The organisation would be run as a joint enterprise by the BRCS and OSJ, and 202 detachments with a combined total of over 6000 volunteers were registered by October 1910.<sup>3</sup> By 1914 BRCS detachments comprised of 40,018 women volunteers and 17,696 male volunteers, and the OSJ had a membership of 6,773 women and 5,865 men.<sup>4</sup>

With the outbreak of war, the decision was made that the BRCS and OSJ would join forces to organise the administration of the Voluntary Aid Detachments in Britain together, which resulted in the formation of the JWC.<sup>5</sup> This action enabled both charities to pool

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<sup>1</sup> Bowser, p. x; Anon, ‘Our Story: History of the Order’, *Museum of the Order of St John*, n.d. <<https://museumstjohn.org.uk/our-story/history-of-the-order/>> [Accessed 18 January 2024].

<sup>2</sup> Summers, p. 247.

<sup>3</sup> Anon, ‘Who were the VAD volunteers?’, *British Red Cross*, n.d. <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/volunteering-during-the-first-world-war/who-were-the-vad-volunteers>> [Accessed 05 March 2024].

<sup>4</sup> Anon, ‘Women’s involvement in the Red Cross during the First World War’, *British Red Cross*, n.d. <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/volunteering-during-the-first-world-war/womens-involvement-with-the-british-red-cross-during-the-first-world-war>> [Accessed 05 March 2024].

<sup>5</sup> Bowser, p. iii.

resources and fund raising activities, as well as allowing the volunteers of both organisations to be protected during their work by the emblem of the red cross.<sup>6</sup> In her (rather flowery) history of British VAD work, Bowser claims the JWC had ‘absolute control of every detail’ of work both at home and abroad, and the JWC not only ensured all members were trained in first aid, but women completed classes in nursing, cookery, hygiene and sanitation and male volunteers were additionally trained in first aid in-the-field and stretcher bearing.<sup>7</sup> In September 1915 the General Service Section was set up which allowed female volunteers to replace male volunteers in hospitals who were being sent to the field. Women were then able to work as dispensers, clerks, telephonists, assistants in laboratory, dental and X-ray departments, laundresses, cleaners, storekeepers and cooks.<sup>8</sup> Roles for male volunteers included ‘driving, portage and mechanical repairs’ along with work as stretcher bearers and hospital orderlies.<sup>9</sup> Male volunteers who remained in Britain had the responsibility of transporting sick and wounded soldiers from ambulance trains and ships to local hospitals, and would also accompany patients between different hospitals and to patients’ homes.<sup>10</sup> Hospital orderly Ward Muir devotes a whole chapter of his memoir on accompanying a blinded soldier to the man’s home in Bradford by train from London; Muir states that this type of task was a regular occurrence, with some journeys being made as far afield as Wales and Ireland.<sup>11</sup>

### **Auxiliary Hospitals in Britain**

The JWC were also charged with the task of overseeing the running of temporary and auxiliary hospitals throughout Britain during World War One. Before August 1914, 9,000 hospital beds across Britain had been made available to the War Office; this figure increased to 20,000 by October 1914, but it quickly became evident to the War Office that this amount

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<sup>6</sup> Anon, ‘General overview of Joint War Committee activities during the First World War’, *British Red Cross*, n.d. <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/volunteering-during-the-first-world-war/general-overview-of-joint-war-committee-activities-during-the-first-world-war>> [Accessed 9 January 2024].

<sup>7</sup> Bowser, p. 17; Anon, ‘General overview of Joint War Committee’, *British Red Cross*.

<sup>8</sup> Summers, p. 269.

<sup>9</sup> Bowser, p. iv; Anon, ‘General overview of Joint War Committee’, *British Red Cross*.

<sup>10</sup> Anon, ‘General overview of Joint War Committee’, *British Red Cross*.

<sup>11</sup> Muir, pp. 235-249.



would not meet their revised estimation of 50,000 beds.<sup>12</sup> The decision was therefore made to construct temporary wooden hutted hospitals that could be easily dismantled and moved to other parts of Britain, or even abroad, if required.<sup>13</sup> Netley Hospital is just one example of these temporary hutted hospitals; the initial intention at the time of those involved in the founding of the hospital was that it would likely be transported to France to provide extra beds for the hospitals at the frontline at some point during the war.<sup>14</sup> However, as will be discussed later in this chapter, Netley Hospital remained in place for the full duration of the war and was still in operation in 1919.

The majority of hospitals overseen by the JWC were smaller auxiliary hospitals that used already existing buildings throughout Britain. At the outbreak of war, the JWC received over 5000 offers of buildings to be used as hospital accommodation.<sup>15</sup> In total, over 3000 auxiliary hospitals were under the administration of JWC county directors in buildings as diverse as town halls, schools and private houses; Westcliff Hall in Hythe, Southampton is just one example of a private house that was loaned out to the JWC.<sup>16</sup> Situated directly opposite to Netley Hospital across Southampton Water, Westcliff Hall was a private house that provided twenty five convalescent beds for the duration of the war.<sup>17</sup> The smaller auxiliary hospitals were operated in conjunction with larger military hospitals and mostly received convalescing soldiers with less serious injuries.<sup>18</sup> Funding for the running of the temporary and auxiliary hospitals came from the War Office which covered a patient's complete treatment, food and other costs; at their highest point a patient cost the War Office

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<sup>12</sup> Reznick, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Reznick, p.46.

<sup>14</sup> The Hampshire Archives and Local Studies (hereafter HALS), 92M91/1/31, *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, April 1918; Best, p. 150.

<sup>15</sup> Best, p. 143.

<sup>16</sup> Anon, 'Auxiliary hospitals during the First World War', *British Red Cross*, n.d.

<<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/medical-care-during-ww1/auxiliary-hospitals-during-the-first-world-war>>

[Accessed 9 January 2024]; Best, p. 144; *BRCS Summary of work 27.3.15*. 1915. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, The First World War,

<[http://www.firstworldwar.amdigital.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/LBY\\_BRCS\\_B8](http://www.firstworldwar.amdigital.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/LBY_BRCS_B8)>

[Accessed 2 May 2024].

<sup>17</sup> AM, *BRCS Summary of work 27.3.15*.

<sup>18</sup> Hawkins, p. 295.

£1 4s 6d per patient per week.<sup>19</sup> These funds were often supplemented by local subscriptions and fundraising.<sup>20</sup>

### **Netley Hospital and The Royal Victoria Hospital**

Netley Hospital was a wooden hatted hospital built in the grounds of The Royal Victoria Hospital in Netley, Southampton. The Royal Victoria Hospital opened in 1863 and its intended purpose from the outset was to be a military hospital and medical teaching school for the British Army.<sup>21</sup> The Royal Victoria Hospital was staffed by both male and female medical staff, with male staff being appointed via The Royal Army Medical Corps and female nurses were registered with the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service.<sup>22</sup> As the largest military hospital in Britain at the time, with 138 wards and approximately 1000 beds, The Royal Victoria Hospital's location alongside Southampton Water in southern Hampshire was chosen due to the proximity of the port of Southampton.<sup>23</sup> The hospital had its own railway station and a dedicated railway line ran between it and the port which allowed for wounded soldiers to be quickly and efficiently unloaded and transported from boats to the hospital via a specially designed ambulance train (please see Appendix 3 for a photograph of the ambulance train at The Royal Victoria Hospital).<sup>24</sup> It was claimed by the BRCS that the complete process of transporting wounded soldiers was so efficient that patients who were wounded on a Friday 'were in bed at Netley on the following Monday'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Anon, 'Auxiliary hospitals during the First World War', *British Red Cross*.

<sup>20</sup> Best, p. 143.

<sup>21</sup> Hoare, p. 110.

<sup>22</sup> Nestor Serrano-Fuentes and Elena Andina-Diaz, 'Exploring The Netley British Red Cross Magazine: An example of the development of nursing and patient care during the First World War', *Nursing Inquiry*, 28.2 (2021), no pp., doi:10.1111/nin.12392.

<sup>23</sup> Buswell, C.G., 'Netley Hospital', *QARANC: Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps*, n.d. <<https://www.qaranc.co.uk/netleyhospital.php>> [Accessed 16 January 2024].

<sup>24</sup> J. R. Fairman, *Netley Hospital and its Railways* (Southampton: Kingfisher Railway Productions, 1984), p. 54.

<sup>25</sup> AM, *BRCS Summary of work for 11.11.14*, 1914. Available at: <[http://www.firstworldwar.amdigital.co.uk/libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/LBY\\_BRCS\\_B71](http://www.firstworldwar.amdigital.co.uk/libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/LBY_BRCS_B71)> [Accessed 2 May 2024].

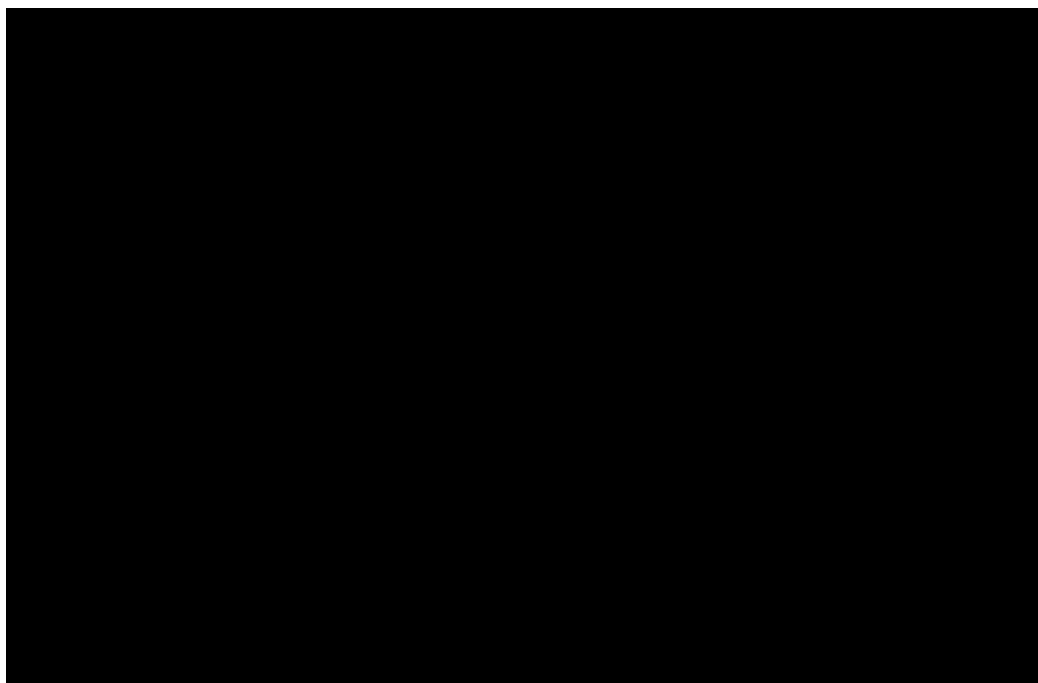


Figure 1.1. Postcard showing an aerial view of The Royal Victoria Hospital, with Netley Hospital to the rear. Source: British Red Cross Museum and Archives (hereafter BRCMA), 0324/IN7062. Available through <<https://museumandarchives.redcross.org.uk/objects/555>>. \*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS\*

However, despite both the size and capabilities of The Royal Victoria Hospital, it quickly became apparent during the initial stages of World War One that both the existing building and the number of available staff would be insufficient to meet the predicted demands that were to be placed upon it by the anticipated large number of wounded soldiers who were to be sent back to Britain from frontline casualty clearing stations. Therefore, in August 1914, shortly after the outbreak of war, the JWC offered The Royal Victoria Hospital a temporary hospital at the request of the War Office, although it was agreed that it would be entirely under the control of the BRCS.<sup>26</sup> Netley Hospital admitted its first patients in October 1914 and by 11 November 1914 the number of patients in its care was 140.<sup>27</sup> The estimated cost for constructing and fitting out each ward hut was £300.<sup>28</sup> Hospital staff at this point consisted of eighteen medical officers, sixty five nurses, a matron, twenty quartermasters and one hundred and thirty NCOs (non-commissioned officer) and men under

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<sup>26</sup> Best, p. 146; HALS, 92M91/1/31, *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, April 1918.

<sup>27</sup> HALS, 92M91/1/31, *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, April 1918.; AM, *BRCS Summary of work for 11.11.14*.

<sup>28</sup> Best, p. 150.

the direction of the Commandant Sir Warren Crooke-Lawless.<sup>29</sup> Initially, the hospital took in wounded soldiers from both the British and Indian Armies as well as a small number of Belgian refugees; by January 1915 the average number of patients had increased to 380.<sup>30</sup> It appears that initially Netley Hospital was not a particularly pleasant place to work as the fields quickly became waterlogged and staff had to contend with open drains.<sup>31</sup> British Medical Officer Maberly Squire Esler who worked at Netley Hospital until the Autumn of 1915 stated that whilst the hospital was still being built the Medical Officers and senior female staff lived in hotels in Southampton and staff would eat their meals at The Royal Victoria Hospital.<sup>32</sup>

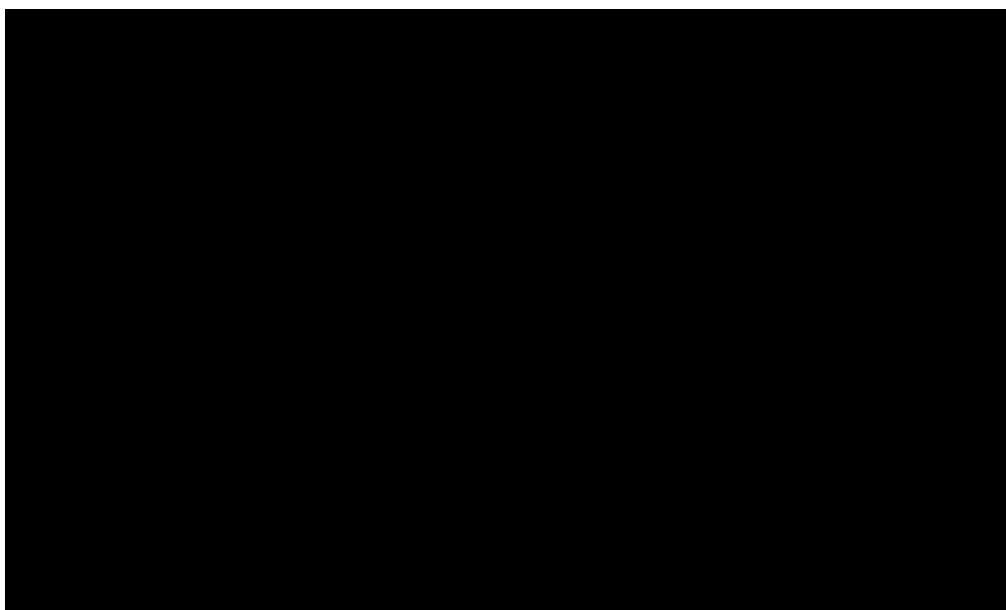


Figure 1.2. Photo showing an aerial view of the British Red Cross Hospital at Netley, taken from the rear of the Royal Victoria Hospital, 1916. Source: BRCMA, IN4384. Available through <<https://museumandarchives.redcross.org.uk/objects/29615>>. **\*IMAGE REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS\***

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<sup>29</sup> AM, *BRCs Summary of work for 11.11.14*, 1914.

<sup>30</sup> AM, *BRCs Summary of work for 23.1.15*, 1915. Available at <[http://www.firstworldwar.amdigital.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/LBY\\_BRCS\\_B80](http://www.firstworldwar.amdigital.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/LBY_BRCS_B80)> [Accessed 2 May 2024]; Best, p. 150.

<sup>31</sup> HALS, 92M91/1/31, *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, April 1918.

<sup>32</sup> The Imperial War Museum, 378, Interview with British Medical Officer Maberly Squire Esler (sound recording), 1974. Available at <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000377>> [Accessed 20 April 2024].

Expansion of Netley Hospital continued throughout the war. At the end of 1914 ‘The Welsh Hospital’ was added, paid for by the Welsh Ministry of Pensions, and in March 1915 Viscount Iveagh paid for the provision and upkeep for the duration of the war of two hundred additional beds that became to be known as ‘The Irish Hospital’.<sup>33</sup> Figure 1.2. shows the extent of Netley Hospital in 1916, as seen from the rear of The Royal Victoria Hospital. By December of that year, the hospital consisted of forty huts and at the end of the war the total number of beds had grown to 1000.<sup>34</sup> Investment had also been made to the surroundings of the hospital – concrete paths between the huts and a central road known as ‘Piccadilly’ were laid in 1915, and trees and gardens were planted.<sup>35</sup> Approximately 30,000 patients were cared for by Netley Hospital between September 1914 and May 1919.<sup>36</sup>

The history of the JWC as discussed in this chapter demonstrates that the committee’s responsibilities were complex and varied as they had responsibility for both the running of auxiliary hospitals across Britain, and recruiting and managing the volunteer workforce that would make up the bulk of auxiliary hospital staff. Chapter two will build upon this chapter’s discussion of Netley Hospital by examining in more detail the demographics of its VAD workforce.

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<sup>33</sup> Best, p. 150; HALS, 92M91/1/31, *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, April 1918.

<sup>34</sup> Best, pp. 150-151; HALS, 92M91/1/31, *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, April 1918.

<sup>35</sup> HALS, 92M91/1/31, *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, April 1918.

<sup>36</sup> Alec Riley, *Netley Diary 1915-1916*, ed. By Michael Crane and Bernard de Broglio (Little Gully Publishing, 2023), p. 90.

## Chapter Two: The Demographics of the VAD Workforce at Netley Hospital

A prevailing view continues to exist within academic and general thinking that the VAD workforce comprised solely of middle or upper-class women who worked as nursing members. It is only relatively recently that discussions have begun to be concerned with the lack of representation of the section of the VAD workforce who do not 'fit' this concept. In the conclusion to her study on the VAD workforce of Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital, Hawkins states that the BRCS VAD service records reveal 'a significantly more varied workforce than is reflected in the VAD memoirs' and that working-class VADs are overlooked in the histories of World War One nursing.<sup>1</sup> Meyer's examination of male medical and care providers during World War One does much to widen established discussions on the demographics and experiences of individuals involved in war time medicine. Meyer suggests that the established tendency to focus upon women as the main care providers during World War One serves to reinforce Victorian beliefs that 'women have a privileged perspective' on the provision of care.<sup>2</sup>

Approximately 70,000 VAD service cards out of the available 244,000 state an individual was involved in nursing duties in some capacity, this figure means that the majority of the national VAD workforce were far more diverse in terms of employment roles and gender.<sup>3</sup> Diversity in social class also existed, but a strictly enforced social structure was still in place from the Edwardian era. Hawkins points out the existence of a long-held general assumption that the war brought together the different social classes in a way that had not been experienced before, but argues that contemporary sources contradict this idea.<sup>4</sup> Although the different social classes worked alongside each other in, for example, a hospital setting, Hawkins suggests that existing social attitudes still remained amongst the staff and it is that which caused the majority of problems between the professional and VAD nursing members.<sup>5</sup> In another example, Hawkins references the memoirs of Lady Gaddum, who

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<sup>1</sup> Hawkins, p. 301.

<sup>2</sup> Meyer, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> Hawkins, p. 294.

<sup>4</sup> Hawkins, p. 292.

<sup>5</sup> Hawkins, pp. 292-293.

volunteered as a Laboratory Assistant at Netley Hospital, in which she states that the general service VADs were considered so inferior to the nursing members that the two groups never met or spoke.<sup>6</sup>

Taking these issues into consideration, this chapter aims to provide evidence that smaller, diverse communities of VAD volunteers existed, and the VAD experience was not a uniform one. The focus of this chapter will be on the findings from the BRCS VAD service record database and what information it provides on the demographics of the VAD workforce at Netley Hospital. Although the available number of VAD records for the hospital are small in comparison to the total number of VADs registered on the service record database, the proceeding discussion aims to show the importance of local or ‘micro’ studies in future discussions concerning medical and care providers in World War One. Hawkins’s study is so far the only one that has taken a similar approach to this study; it has not been possible to locate any other study that focuses upon the BRCS VAD service record database. What follows will be an explanation as to how and why the database came to be compiled and then digitised nearly one hundred years later. A quantitative analysis of the data will then be carried out to establish what information the database can provide on the demographics of the Netley Hospital VAD workforce.

### **The BRCS VAD Service Record Database**

As discussed in the Introduction to this study, the digitisation of the BRCS VAD archive of their Membership Rolls for World War One was a two year project carried out by volunteers from Kingston University Centre for the Historical Record and the full database was made available online in 2016.<sup>7</sup> Although it is known that approximately 90,000 individuals volunteered as VADs for the BRCS and OSJ during World War One, many of those volunteers provided their services multiple times which resulted in over 244,000 index cards being transcribed.<sup>8</sup> In her study on the VAD workforce of the Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital, Hawkins (who also managed the creation of the digital database) states that the formation of the Membership Rolls was a post-war decision that took place in 1919; a central record of

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<sup>6</sup> T2 GADD, Lady I. Gaddum, *Reminiscences*. (Unpublished typescript. BRCMA, London), cited in Hawkins, p. 293.

<sup>7</sup> Anon, *Kingston University London*.

<sup>8</sup> Hawkins, p. 293.

volunteers did not exist prior to this date.<sup>9</sup> The decision was taken by the Joint War Committee (JWC), which comprised of the BRCS and OSJ, that individual volunteers should be officially recognised for their contributions during the war, and pre-printed cards were sent to local Voluntary Aid Detachments to be completed with information on their VAD personnel before being returned to headquarters in London.<sup>10</sup> Once the completed service cards had been processed VAD members received an acknowledgement from the JWC and the Army Council. Figure 2.1. is an example of the documentation that VADs received.

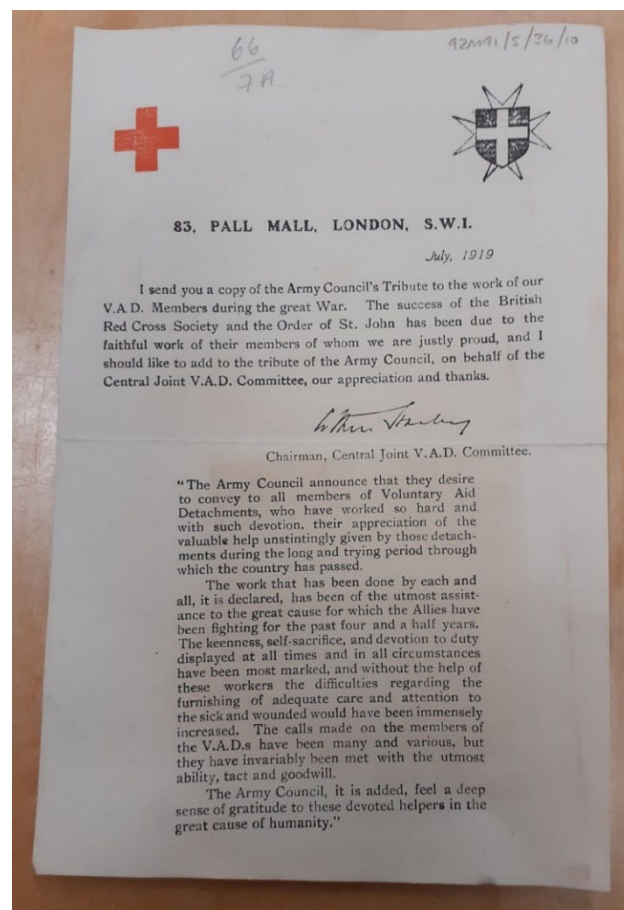


Figure 2.1. Example of acknowledgement of VAD service during World War One, sent to registered VADs by the JWC and the Army Council in July 1919. Source: HALS, 92M91/5/36/10, photograph author's own.

As Hawkins points out, the creation of this physical database relied heavily upon accurate records being kept for the duration of the war by Detachment Commandants and

<sup>9</sup> Hawkins, p. 293.

<sup>10</sup> Red Cross Journal.1919. (BRCMA, London), cited in Hawkins, p. 293.



local County Directors, and instances of incomplete or inaccurate information on some service cards have been identified.<sup>11</sup> However, despite the issues of duplication and incompleteness, the database is a substantial source of information that has many uses beyond that of a family history resource. One such example of its potential use is an examination of the demographics of the whole of the available VAD workforce, however, such a project would require an extensive period of time to complete and is well beyond the capabilities of this study. One other example of the potential use of the database is its ability to provide a greater understanding in how particular wartime hospitals were staffed, as the search function of the BRCS website easily allows for the service records of individual hospitals and specific locations to be viewed and examined.

### **The BRCS VAD Service Records for Netley Hospital and Methodology**

The BRCS VAD service record database holds 877 entries for male and female VADs who worked at Netley Hospital between 1914 and 1919. This number of entries was reached by conducting searches on the BRCS website using 'Netley' as the search term. Two searches were carried out using the same search term but with different search filters – 'Netley' as the hospital and then as the location. This method resulted in over 1000 service cards that referenced Netley Hospital. Although this process led to much duplication of information, it ensured that as many incomplete or inaccurately completed service cards were found. For example, some service cards do not have Netley Hospital recorded in the correct 'particulars of duties' space, but the hospital is instead recorded on the reverse of the cards where there is space for additional information or notes. A decision was also taken early on into the collation of the information from the service record database to refer to both the transcribed information available with each entry on the BRCS website and also the original scanned service card. This decision was made as minor errors in the transcribed information was noticed early on into the research and this study aims to be as accurate as possible with the available information. Figures 2.2. and 2.3. show examples of the service cards examined as part of the research for this study.

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<sup>11</sup> Hawkins, pp. 293-294.

Surname **Millard** Recd 1 JUL 1919

Christian Names **William Charles** (Mr., Mrs. or Miss)

Permanent Address: **Stanton-St-Quentin, Chippenham, Wilts**

Date of Engagement **7th Mch 1915** Rank **Orderly** Pay **4/= a day.**

Date of Termination **6th June 1916.** Rank **"** Pay **"**

Particulars of Duties **Orderly at Netley Hospital.**

Whether whole or part time, and if latter No. of hours served **Whole time.**

Previous engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where **None.**

Honours awarded

Figure 2.2. An example of the front of a VAD service card. This card was completed for VAD William Charles Millard, hospital orderly at Netley Hospital.

Source: BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=150851>>.

To enable the 877 VAD records for Netley Hospital to be easily studied and discussed in detail in this study, the information from all the service cards were recorded onto two separate spreadsheets that were organised by gender (see Appendices 1 and 2 for samples of both spreadsheets). Each individual VAD had one entry on the relevant spreadsheet, irrespective of how many service cards were held for them on the BRCS VAD service record database. This decision was made in an attempt to simplify the data, and any information such as breaks in service and periods of employment at other hospitals was recorded for that individual in the 'notes' column of the spreadsheet. Information obtained from the service cards was recorded under the following headings on the two spreadsheets: full name, age, permanent residential address, rank or role at time of engagement (dependent on gender), service start date, service end date, BRCS Commission and notes (e.g. information relating to previous service, breaks in service and any honours obtained). For female VADs an additional column for an individual's title was included. Collating this information onto the two spreadsheets allowed the data to be easily examined to establish if any notable trends existed for each group and for comparisons to be made between the two sets of data.

PERIOD OF SERVICE, Etc.		Miss New
From	20.9.17	To 14.12.18
	Re-engaged	16.6.19
		{ Commission or Department or County
Served at		
	B.R.C.Hospital, Netley	14.8.16 to 16.2.17
Re-engaged	" "	20.9.17 " 14.12.18
His work satisfactory in every way. Left of his own accord. Re-engaged St Dunstans 16.6.19		

Figure 2.3. An example of notes written on the reverse of some VAD service cards. This card was completed for Francesco G. De Santi, hospital orderly at Netley Hospital.

Source: BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=60386>>.

### Results from the BRCS VAD Service Records for Netley Hospital

Of the 877 records available for Netley Hospital, 464 (or fifty three per cent) are for male VADs and 413 (or forty seven per cent) are for female VADs.<sup>12</sup> The percentage of male VADs at Netley Hospital was significantly higher than the national figure of eighteen per cent as stated by Hawkins, and Hawkins makes no reference in her study to locating any male VAD service records for the Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital.<sup>13</sup> The high percentage of male VADs at Netley Hospital can in part be explained by the fact that the logistics and size of the hospital, along with the types and severity of the wounds sustained by the injured soldiers treated there, required a greater number of men to carry out heavy duty tasks that would not have been considered appropriate for female VADs at the time. One example of these tasks is the unloading and transferring of wounded patients from one of the 1200 ambulance trains that arrived from the port of Southampton at the station shared by Netley Hospital and The Royal Victoria Hospital between August 1914 and December 1918.<sup>14</sup> *The BRCS Summary of Work*

<sup>12</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>> [Accessed 11 December 2023].

<sup>13</sup> Hawkins, p. 294.

<sup>14</sup> Fairman, p. 54.

for 11.14 claimed that unloading of these ambulance trains and transferring patients to Netley Hospital via stretcher was ‘covered in some four or five minutes’, however as Ward Muir highlights in his memoir of work as a hospital orderly, the process was hard work and not appropriate for female VADs as it took ‘four orderlies to haul the stretcher from its shelf in the ambulance; two orderlies then take its handles and carry it indoors’.<sup>15</sup> Another reason for the high percentage of male VADs at Netley Hospital may be due to the specialised skills that were required for both the building and continued maintenance of the wooden huts and the hospital's utilities. Men who had gained trades prior to the outbreak of the war were sent to Netley Hospital by their Voluntary Aid Detachment. One such example is Herbert Dawson from Manchester who joined Netley Hospital as a VAD in 1917 at the age of twenty nine. Although technically employed as a hospital orderly, Dawson was immediately given the honorary British Army rank of Corporal due to his civilian trade as a plumber.<sup>16</sup> The subject of honorary British Army ranks will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

There are multiple differences in how and what information was recorded on the service cards for the two genders. Data such as age, particulars of duties and pay were recorded differently according to whether the service card was for a male or female VAD. The most significant of these differences is the matter of age as, with the exception of most VAD nursing members and a few female VADs in non-nursing roles at Netley Hospital, the vast majority of women's ages were not recorded on their service cards. An examination of the available data for the hospital shows that whereas eighty four per cent of service cards for male VADs included their age, age was only included on twenty five per cent of the service cards for female VADs.<sup>17</sup> It is highly probable that the ages of male VADs had been recorded by their Voluntary Aid Detachments due to the age requirements for voluntary enlistment and conscription as set out by the government, and were therefore available to be included on the 1919 service cards. As conscription did not apply to women during World War One, there was not the same need for a Detachment's Commandant to record the ages of the majority of female volunteers. One possible reason why most VAD nursing members had their age recorded may be due to the initial requirements set by the JWC that females in nursing roles

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<sup>15</sup> AM, *Summary of work for 11.11.14*; Ward Muir, *Observations of an Orderly: Some Glimpses of Life and Work in an English War Hospital* (Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, & Co. Ltd., 1917), p. 98.

<sup>16</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=58343>> [Accessed 22 January 2024]; Census return for ‘Herbert Dawson’, 1911 Census for England & Wales, RG14/24383, Sch 231.

<sup>17</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

had to be aged between twenty three and thirty eight years old, with nursing members over the age of thirty eight only allowed to continue to work on the condition that they did not have ‘diminished capacity’.<sup>18</sup> However, as the war continued and demand from auxiliary and military hospitals for VAD nursing members grew, regulations were relaxed and the age range was increased to between twenty one and forty six years of age.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, whilst it is possible to compare the ages of male and female VADs at Netley Hospital, the difference in the quantity of available data and the reasons behind this difference should be taken into consideration.

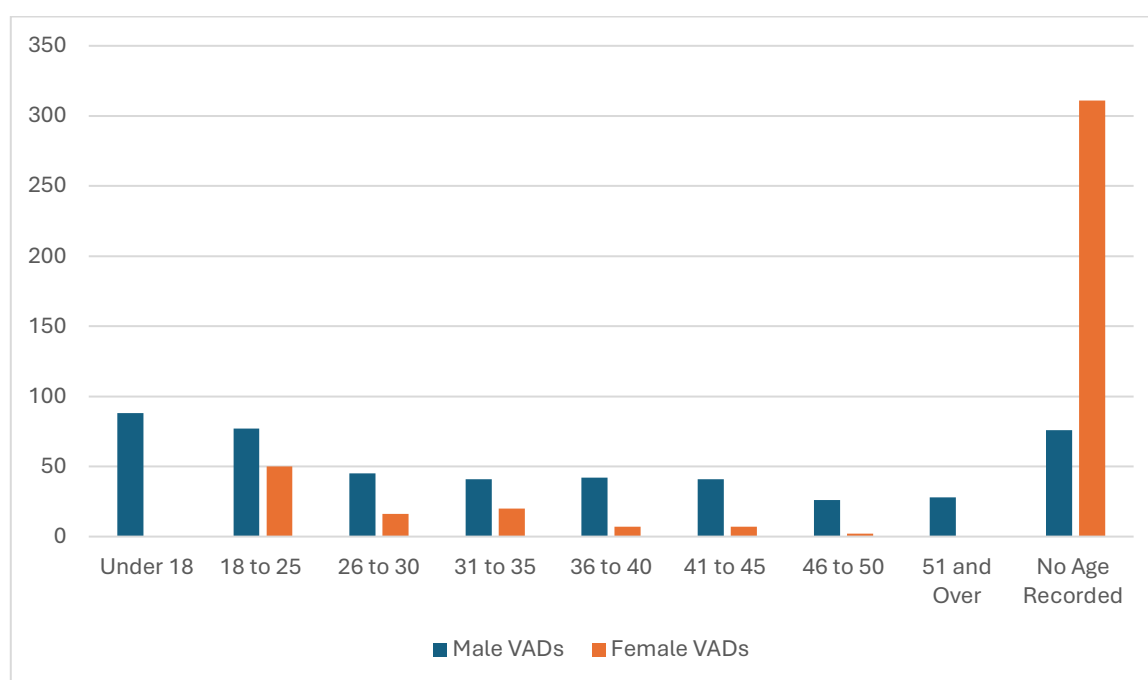


Figure 2.4. A comparison of the ages of male and female VADs at the time of engagement at Netley Hospital. Source: BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

As shown in Figure 2.4., Netley Hospital had a relatively young VAD workforce. Of the 490 individuals whose age was recorded, forty four per cent were aged twenty five and under. This figure is skewed somewhat by the high number of male VADs who were aged under eighteen at the time of engagement – eighty eight individuals out of the 388 males

<sup>18</sup> Anon, ‘Nursing during the First World War’, *British Red Cross*, n.d. <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/medical-care-during-ww1/nursing-during-the-first-world-war>> [Accessed 5 March 2024].

<sup>19</sup> Anon, ‘Who were the VAD volunteers?’, *British Red Cross*.

VADs whose age was recorded. This statistic will be expanded upon in the next chapter as it focuses upon the male VAD workforce, but a brief discussion will be included here to enable a comparison with the data for the female VAD workforce. The large number of adolescent males at Netley Hospital can, in part, be explained by the fact that the minimum age for both voluntary and conscripted military service was eighteen for the duration of World War One.<sup>20</sup> For those males under the age of eighteen, volunteering as a VAD was the closest way for an individual to obtain experience of, and be involved in, the mechanics of war until they were old enough to volunteer or be conscripted. A period of service at the hospital as a VAD would also provide them with an employment reference that could prove useful when entering military service, as will be discussed further in the following chapter.

<b>Particulars of Duty</b>	<b>Total</b>
Nursing Member	39
Lab Assistant	4
Dispenser	2
House Member	2
Assistant Cook	1
Clerk	1
Pantry Maid	1

Table 1.1. The particulars of duty carried out by female VADs aged twenty five years and under. Source: BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

As can be seen in Table 1.1. above, of the fifty female VADs aged twenty five and under who had their ages recorded on their service cards, thirty nine were working as nursing members. It is more than likely that this figure reflects the relaxation in the rules surrounding the recruitment of VAD nursing members, especially when the date of engagement is considered. Out of the thirty nine nursing members in Table 1.1. twenty nine volunteers started work at Netley in either 1917 or 1918.

The topic of an individual's permanent residential address as noted on their VAD service card is easier to compare between the two genders than that of age. It is important to

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<sup>20</sup> Slocombe, p. 106.

point out that as the Membership Rolls were compiled in 1919, it is possible that differences exist in the addresses provided post-war in comparison to the addresses volunteers might have had at the time of engagement. However, for the majority of cases the county or town of an individual's Commission (i.e. their local Voluntary Aid Detachment) matches that of the permanent residential address provided in 1919. It is therefore appropriate to assume that although it was of course possible for an individual to change address, it is unlikely they moved too far away from the address they had at the time of engagement.

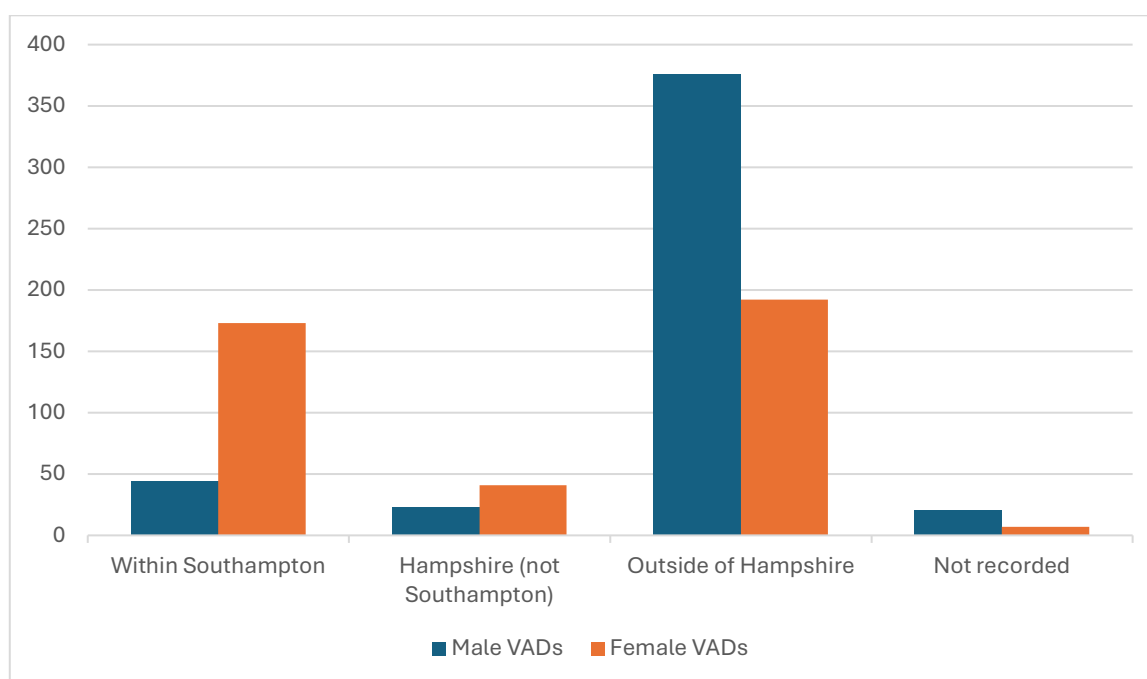


Figure 2.5. Location of permanent residential address for male and female VADs working at Netley Hospital. Source: BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

As Figure 2.5. demonstrates, there is a noticeable difference between the permanent residential addresses for the two groups of VADs at Netley Hospital. Eighty one per cent of the male VAD workforce provided permanent residential addresses that were outside of the county of Hampshire. In contrast, the service records for the female VAD workforce shows a more equal split as only forty six per cent of female VADs were originally from outside of Hampshire. One possible reason for such a large number of men originally from outside of Southampton may be due to the likelihood that the hospital was unable to rely upon the local male population to supply the manpower it required; and men were therefore sent by their local Detachments from throughout Britain to the hospital. The topic of reserved occupations

will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three, but it is worth pointing out here that a sizeable percentage of the male population of Southampton were probably employed at the port and docks and were therefore considered to be in 'certified' or 'reserved' occupations and not available for work at the hospital.<sup>21</sup> It is also possible that some male VADs were specifically sent to Netley Hospital due to the skills they had obtained prior to war, as was suggested in the case of Herbert Dawson above.

The majority of the women who provided permanent residential addresses outside of Hampshire were recorded as working in a nursing capacity on their service cards, and conversely, women employed in non-nursing and general service roles were more likely to reside within the Southampton area. This difference can be accounted for by the fact that due to their specialised skills and knowledge, VAD nursing members and professional nurses registered with the BRCS would be sent by their Detachments to wherever they were required; in comparison, general service roles were more easily filled by the local population as they did not necessarily require high levels of training or experience. Of the 192 women originally from outside of Hampshire, twenty three were from Wales and had previously been working in Welsh hospitals prior to being transferred to Netley Hospital to form part of the workforce in its own dedicated Welsh Hospital. It was not just nursing members, however, that were transferred to the Welsh Hospital as five women in non-nursing roles also relocated.<sup>22</sup> Although an Irish Hospital existed at Netley, there does not seem to have been the same emphasis upon recruiting Irish staff; this may perhaps have been down to the fact that the Irish Hospital had been built and was run using the private funds of Viscount Iveagh, whereas the Welsh Hospital was funded by the Welsh Ministry of Pensions who had a strong desire for the Welsh soldiers to 'feel at home' in a hospital run by mostly Welsh staff.<sup>23</sup> In contrast to the findings of Netley Hospital, Hawkins states that only three of the sixty six nursing members of Holmfirth Auxiliary Hospital relocated during wartime; Hawkins suggests this is a reflection on the fact that all the staff at the hospital were local women and as most were working class they combined their VAD work with local paid employment.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Pattinson, pp. 712-713.

<sup>22</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

<sup>23</sup> HALS, 92M91/1/31, *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, April 1918; Hoare, p. 183.

<sup>24</sup> Hawkins, pp. 298-301.



A further noticeable difference in the contents of the service cards for Netley Hospital, is that unlike the majority of male VADs who simply had 'Orderly' noted in the particulars of duties section, only fifteen service cards for female VADs did not include the specific role an individual carried out at the hospital. Table 1.2. below provides a breakdown of the roles included on the female VAD service cards for Netley Hospital. From September 1915 the 'general service scheme' allowed women to apply for paid civic positions in the VAD workforce; cooks earned £1 a week and three meals a day, clerks £1 6s a week, and qualified dispensers £1 10s a week.<sup>25</sup> The size of Netley Hospital would have meant there were plenty of employment opportunities for local women, and it can be argued that the hospital benefited by employing female VADs in these roles as, unlike with male VADs, it would not be required to replace them due to enlistment or conscription into the armed forces.

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<sup>25</sup> Anon, 'Women's involvement in the Red Cross during the First World War', *British Red Cross*.

<b>Particulars of duties upon enrolment</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Nursing Member	156
Clerk	76
Cook	52
Storekeeper	37
Maid (all types)	28
Not recorded	15
Laboratory Assistant	9
Dispenser	9
Post Office Assistant	7
Waitress	7
Lift Attendant	4
Secretary/Typist	3
Telephonist	2
Bookkeeper	2
X-Ray Attendant	2
Ambulance Driver	1
Electrician	1
Kitchen Assistant	1
Linen Stores	1

Table 1.2. Comparison of the particulars of duties noted for female VADs at the time of engagement at Netley Hospital. Source: BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

In comparison to the above findings, however, only fourteen of the 464 service cards for the male VADs specify an individual's work role at Netley Hospital. Of those fourteen, seven individuals were messengers, the remaining work roles include shorthand typist, driver, plumber, 'Quartermaster Store' and 'Finance'. Due to a lack of available evidence, it has not been possible to establish if this was simply the BRCS's method of record keeping or was due to the possibility that all male VAD were expected to take on a variety of roles as and when required by the hospital, so any further explanation of duties was deemed irrelevant.

Related to the topic of employment roles at the hospital is the subject of pay. Female VADs in general service roles were paid weekly, as mentioned above, but initially VAD nursing members were expected to provide their time for free and pay was not introduced

until 1915.<sup>26</sup> All male VADs were also paid weekly, and the amount of pay they received was noted on their service cards. The pay for the majority of male VADs at Netley Hospital started at a rate of 28s a week, and increases were dependent upon length of service and promotion.<sup>27</sup> The amount of pay received by female VADs at Netley Hospital was rarely included on their service cards, although where it is included for nursing members the amount paid was £20 per year.<sup>28</sup>

The last remaining piece of information included on VAD service records to be discussed in this chapter is the subject of honours and honorary army ranks. Honours for female nursing members were introduced by the JWC in 1917 and were awarded in the form of bars or stripes that could be displayed on a nurse's uniform and would denote how many years of wartime service that individual had completed.<sup>29</sup> In addition to these honours, individuals could also be awarded efficiency stripes.<sup>30</sup> Of the 156 female VADs recorded as nursing members at Netley Hospital, thirty nine either had service bars or other commendations noted on their service records.<sup>31</sup> For some individuals these commendations included being mentioned in dispatches or to the Secretary of War. One such example is Ethel Buckenham, a professional nurse who had enrolled as a VAD in 1911. She trained new VAD nursing members prior to taking up the role of Sister at Netley and it is noted on her service record that she received her five years service bar along with being mentioned in dispatches.<sup>32</sup> Male VADs did not receive honours and commendations, but there was the possibility of earning honorary British Army ranks if an individual was promoted. Males in receipt of these honorary ranks could only use them within Netley Hospital and they were removed once an individual left the hospital's workforce. Of the 464 available service cards for male VADs at Netley Hospital, thirty four men received instant promotion upon engagement at the hospital, as in the case of Herbert Dawson discussed above, and forty nine

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<sup>26</sup> Lloyd Jones, p. 560; Hawkins, p. 299.

<sup>27</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

<sup>28</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

<sup>29</sup> Lloyd Jones, p. 561.

<sup>30</sup> Anon, 'Nursing during the First World War', *British Red Cross*.

<sup>31</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

<sup>32</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=31004>> [Accessed 14 March 2024].

achieved promotions during their service; honorary army ranks awarded ranged from Private to Staff Sergeant.<sup>33</sup>

The variety of information provided on the VAD service records has allowed this chapter to provide a unique examination of the demographics of the VAD workforce at Netley Hospital. When analysed in detail, some results have initially been surprising, for example, the almost equal number of men and women at the hospital, and the hospital's relatively young workforce. However, when the logistics and practicalities of running such a large hospital as Netley are considered, along with the issues of conscription and the potential workforce that was available in the surrounding area, the reasons for the results discussed in this chapter become evident.

The VAD workforce at Netley Hospital was far more diverse than the workforce usually represented in existing secondary literature, and when compared with the very different results included in Hawkins's study, it is clear the subject of the VAD workforce during World War One would benefit from further research using the BRCS VAD database. Whilst the database and the information it contains do have some limitations, it remains a unique and largely unstudied source of information.

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<sup>33</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

### Chapter Three. Male Orderlies and the Issue of Conscription

The previous chapter of this study established that the VAD service records for Netley Hospital showed an almost equal split within the workforce between the two genders, an amount that is in stark contrast to the figure of eighteen per cent for the whole VAD workforce provided by Hawkins.<sup>1</sup> The first chapter also introduced the theory that a possible reason for the high number of male VADs at Netley Hospital was due to its size and the range of required tasks that would not have been deemed suitable for female VADs. It also suggested that the high percentage of male VADs under the age of eighteen at the time of engagement was due to the ineligibility of that age group for voluntary and conscripted enlistment. This chapter will consider in more detail the issues surrounding the male VAD workforce at Netley Hospital. It will incorporate both ‘bottom up’ and ‘top down’ approaches to primary evidence and secondary literature to explore the possible reasons why males chose to volunteer as VADs, with particular attention paid to the issue of conscription and the effect this law had upon the recruitment and demographics of the male VAD workforce at Netley Hospital. It will also touch upon issues such as conscientious objectors and cultural attitudes towards male VADs and other non-conscripts. Individual case studies will be incorporated throughout this chapter to add depth to the discussion.

As already highlighted in the Introduction to this study, there is considerably little existing secondary literature that considers the experiences of male VADs working in the United Kingdom during World War One. The vast majority of historiography concerned with the male experience of World War One focuses upon those who served with the armed forces and directly experienced warfare, which Pattinson ascribes to an ‘idealised yet largely imagined’ concept of the ‘soldier hero’.<sup>2</sup> Pattinson goes on to suggest that the volunteer soldier was culturally viewed as the ‘epitome of manliness’ and individuals volunteering for military service were received with ‘huge social approbation’, attitudes which arguably then influenced academic study of World War One.<sup>3</sup> Texts that do consider wartime medical and hospital experiences generally focus upon the injuries and illnesses suffered by the wounded

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<sup>1</sup> Hawkins, p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> Pattinson, p. 709.

<sup>3</sup> Pattinson, p. 709.

soldiers and the professionally qualified medical staff that treated them. Men such as VADs who worked as orderlies and caregivers during World War One essentially remain overlooked in the historiography of wartime medical care.

There are two main themes discussed in relation to the issue of conscription: the attempts made by individuals and/or their employers at local military service tribunals to avoid conscription, and conscientious objectors. Studies by McDermott and Slocombe mainly focus on local tribunal records, but both incorporate wider discussions around the issue of conscription and the tribunal process to, as Slocombe describes, highlight the complexities surrounding the matter on conscription and provide evidence that requests to be granted exemption from enlistment into military service were not simply due to conscientious beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

In his memoir Ward Muir discusses the prevalent attitudes towards male VADs as being perceived as ‘shirkers’, and argues that in fact a vast number of hospital orderlies had either been deemed as medically unfit for combatant service, were outside the age range for conscription, or were on ‘home duty’ after being wounded in active service.<sup>5</sup> In her study of married men, conscription and masculinity during World War One, Ugolini highlights the ‘powerful idealization of military masculinities’ that drove huge numbers of men to volunteer for military service during the early stages of the war.<sup>6</sup> Pattinson continues this theory by suggesting that men who remained on the home front during the war were considered ‘lesser men’ and were ‘rendered unmanly’ as they were unable to prove their masculinity by volunteering to fight and fulfil ‘their side of the wartime gender contract’.<sup>7</sup> Although it is not possible to say with any certainty to what extent the male VAD workforce at Netley Hospital faced these attitudes from their families and communities, it is important to remember that as a group male wartime caregivers had their masculine identities ‘challenged by their wartime service’.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Slocombe, p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Muir, pp. 150-154.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Ugolini, p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> Pattinson, pp. 709-710.

<sup>8</sup> Meyer, p. 167.

## Conscription

Despite an initial spell of enthusiastic volunteering by men for military service at the start of the war, it became evident to the British government during the summer of 1915 that they could no longer rely upon voluntary recruitment and therefore the possibility of conscription began to be considered.<sup>9</sup> However, before making conscription statute law, the government introduced the Derby Scheme as a means of compromise due to being wary of provoking negative reactions from the public. Slocombe points out that the Derby Scheme was also a way for the government to be seen by the public as doing something about the young men who were eligible for enlistment but had chosen not to do so.<sup>10</sup> The Derby Scheme was introduced in October 1915 and required all men between the ages of nineteen and forty one to either immediately enlist or 'attest their willingness to serve when required'.<sup>11</sup> As McDermott points out, the scheme ended in failure as out of the approximate 2.2 million men who had been identified by the government as potentially suitable for enlistment, only 840,000 individuals attested.<sup>12</sup> The government therefore made the decision to introduce compulsory military service for unmarried men aged between eighteen and forty one with the implementation of The Military Service Act in January 1916.<sup>13</sup>

Evidence from available primary sources suggest that prior to the implementation of conscription, the male VAD workforce at Netley Hospital consisted of a significant proportion of men who were otherwise eligible for enlistment in the armed forces. Evidence for this can be found in a letter sent in 1916 by Sir Warren Crooke-Lawless, Commandant of Netley Hospital, to local VAD auxiliary hospitals and Detachment County Directors in which he requests the service of any male VADs who can be spared, and he states that at least forty men were required due to the 'difficulty in obtaining Orderlies now'.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, in the *BRCS Summary of Work* for November 1916 it is noted that 'practically the whole of the men

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<sup>9</sup> Slocombe, p. 106.

<sup>10</sup> Slocombe, p. 106.

<sup>11</sup> McDermott, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> McDermott, pp. 13-14.

<sup>13</sup> McDermott, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> HALS, 102M81/9/2, Letter received by Mrs Paxton, Commandant of Langstone Towers Auxiliary Hospital, Havant, 1916.

eligible for active military service have joined up and been replaced by non-eligibles'.<sup>15</sup> The report continued by stating that the change in staff applied to both 'medical and supernumerary' staff, and female VADs had replaced night orderlies; a clear indication that male VADs were affected by the new conscription law.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Parr Bailey is one such example of an individual who chose to volunteer as an orderly during the early years of the war, despite being suitable for military service. A testimonial of employment for Bailey states that he worked at Netley Hospital between 3 March and 11 December 1915 and left his position at the hospital to join the Royal Navy.<sup>17</sup> The 1911 Census shows that Bailey, who was twenty five and single during his period of employment as a VAD, was a trained carpenter and wheelwright prior to World War One.<sup>18</sup> As with plumber Herbert Dawson who was discussed in the previous chapter, Bailey's profession might be a potential reason as to why he was recruited from his hometown of Newbury, Berkshire to work at Netley Hospital. Although Bailey's departure from the hospital took place before conscription was implemented, the Derby Scheme had been in existence for nearly three months and could perhaps have been an influencing factor for Bailey to make the decision to enlist.

Under the rules of conscription, individuals and/or their employers had the right to request exemption from enlistment due to personal circumstances or their work. These requests were made through and decided by local tribunals. One example found within the VAD service records for Netley Hospital of an individual appealing to their local tribunal is in the case of William Gibbons from Devizes in Wiltshire. Gibbons worked as an orderly at the hospital between December 1915 and June 1916 to specifically strengthen his claim to be made permanently exempt from military service and made reference to the Derby Scheme in his appeal.<sup>19</sup> Gibbons claimed that he chose to volunteer at Netley Hospital as he had been

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<sup>15</sup> *Summary of work for 11.16.*, 1916. Available through: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, The First World War, [http://www.firstworldwar.amdigital.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/LBY\\_BRCS\\_E35](http://www.firstworldwar.amdigital.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/LBY_BRCS_E35) [Accessed 2 May 2024].

<sup>16</sup> AM, *Summary of Work for 11.16.*

<sup>17</sup> HALS, 92M91/5/26, Letter of testimony, Mr J. P. Bailey, 1915.

<sup>18</sup> Census return for 'Joseph Parr Bailey', 1911 Census for England & Wales, RG14/6384, Sch 156.

<sup>19</sup> <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=83347>> [Accessed 22 January 2024]; *The Wiltshire Telegraph*, 30 September 1916.



‘anxious to do something in the national interest’.<sup>20</sup> However, he had also made an agreement with his business partner that once Gibbons had returned to Devizes at the end of his six months of voluntary work, his partner would enlist for military service and Gibbons would take over the running of the business.<sup>21</sup> *The Wiltshire Telegraph* reported how Gibbons had already been approved for enlistment but attempted to strengthen his claim for exemption due to his additional role as manager of the egg depot for the Devizes and District Poultry Society alongside his own business.<sup>22</sup> The case was temporarily adjourned until 1917, but any further decisions by the tribunal were not published by *The Wiltshire Telegraph* and the majority of tribunal records have been destroyed, so the final decision of the tribunal is unknown.<sup>23</sup> However, Slocombe points out in his study that Wiltshire tribunals ‘allowed more appeals than they dismissed’ but that the majority of claimants were only granted temporary exemptions.<sup>24</sup> The example of Gibbons’s attempt at exemption does provide evidence that not all male VADs at Netley Hospital were there due to patriotic or compassionate motivations.

### **Adolescent Male VADs**

When a breakdown of ages of the Netley Hospital VAD workforce was examined in chapter one, males under the age of eighteen stood out due to the quantity of this age group in comparison to the other age ranges. When the year for the start of engagement for adolescent male VADs are looked at in more detail, as per Figure 3.1, a trend towards the latter years of World War One can be seen, with the highest level of adolescent males occurring during 1918. Whilst there is no available primary evidence to provide definite reasons for this trend, it can be surmised that it may be due to the minimum age restriction that applied to enlistment into the armed forces. Adolescents who were keen to be viewed by their families and communities as ‘doing their bit’ may have chosen to volunteer as VADs as it was one way to legally become involved in the war effort. It would also, as seen with Joseph Parr Bailey’s testimony letter, provide them with an employment reference that could prove useful when (or if) the time came for an individual to enlist.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Wiltshire Telegraph*, 30 September 1916.

<sup>21</sup> *The Wiltshire Telegraph*, 30 September 1916.

<sup>22</sup> *The Wiltshire Telegraph*, 4 November 1916.

<sup>23</sup> McDermott, p. 219.

<sup>24</sup> Slocombe, p. 122.

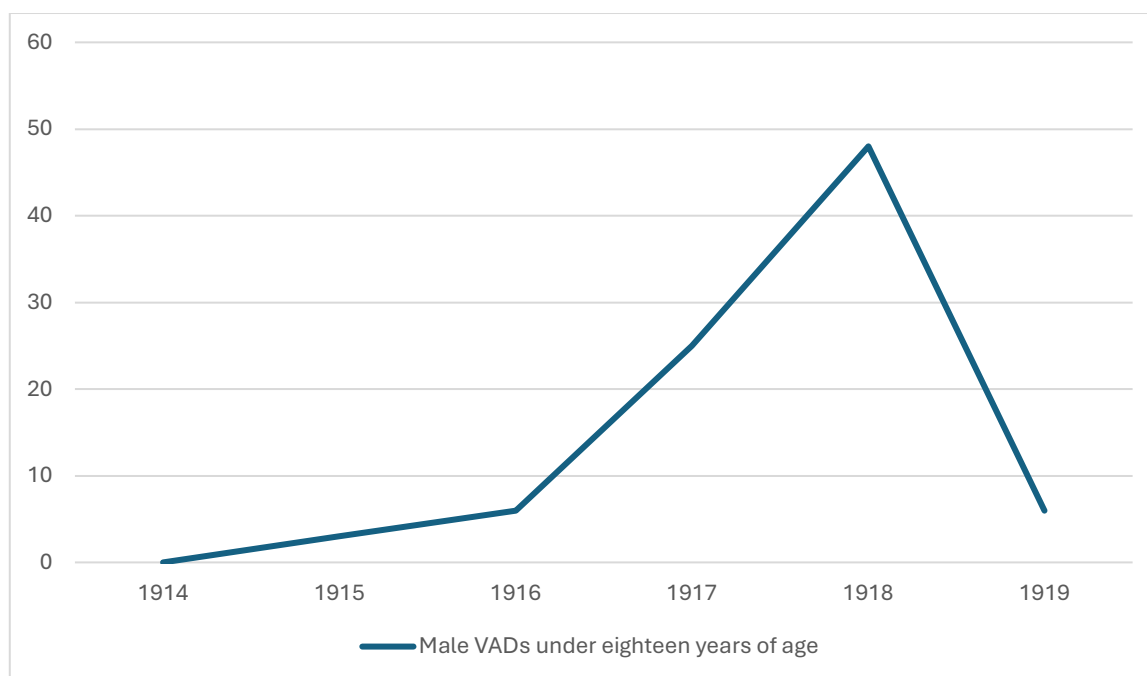


Figure 3.1. The number of male VADs under the age of eighteen at the time of engagement at Netley Hospital. Source: BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

It was noted on many of the service cards for those male VADs who were seventeen at the time of engagement, that their ages were in fact seventeen years and six months.<sup>25</sup> When the period of time served at Netley Hospital by these males are examined, it can be seen that they worked at the hospital for approximately the length of time it took them to turn eighteen. Examples of this can be seen on the VAD service cards for Harold Clark from Portsmouth who worked for exactly the six months it took for him to reach eighteen years of age, and Reginald Bailey from East Liss spent seven months at Netley Hospital before leaving at the age of eighteen.<sup>26</sup> Henry Clements from Reading worked at the hospital for a total of fifteen months and twenty five days, but he was still in his eighteenth year when he left and his service card states that he specifically left Netley Hospital for ‘service with colours’ (meaning that he joined the British Army).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

<sup>26</sup> <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=42085>> [Accessed 29 April 2024];

<<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=8794>> [Accessed 29 April 2024].

<sup>27</sup> <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=43522>> [Accessed 29 April 2024]; Census return for ‘Henry Clements’, 1911 Census for England & Wales, RG14/6603, Sch 316.

As already discussed in this chapter, Netley Hospital struggled to fill the vacancies left by those male VADs who enlisted in 1916, and the large numbers of adolescent males working at the hospital during 1917 and 1918 may have been an answer as to how the hospital attempted to overcome those recruitment problems. The lack of available adult men also reflects the problems the government were continuing to experience in recruiting adequate amounts of men into military service. In June 1916 conscription was widened to include married men between the ages of eighteen and forty one, and the maximum age was increased again in 1918 to men up to fifty years old.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, apart from those males who had been confirmed as ineligible for enlistment, Netley Hospital had an ever-decreasing pool of available men to recruit from during the last two years of the war and the only available demographic that remained was adolescent males. One of the advantages of employing a young and potentially inexperienced workforce at Netley Hospital was that the role of hospital orderly often required high levels of strength and stamina. Muir's description of the process of unloading ambulance trains, as discussed in chapter one, demonstrates just how the work of a hospital orderly could be intensely physical; the male VADs of Netley Hospital were particularly tested during the summer of 1916 when, at the start of the Battle of the Somme, twenty nine ambulance trains arrived at the hospital's station on the same day.<sup>29</sup>

### **Conscientious Objectors**

Whilst there is still little secondary literature that focuses upon the experiences and motivations of male non-professional medical staff and BRCS VADs, much more has been said on the topic of conscientious objectors. This section must be prefaced with the caveat that the subject of conscientious objectors is particularly complex as it was not defined by one 'true' set of beliefs, instead countless conceptions of what constituted conscientious and pacifist beliefs existed as a result of religious or moral and political views. Additionally, the author of this study has been unable to locate any primary evidence to confirm that any of Netley Hospital's VAD workforce were volunteers due to their pacifist beliefs. However, a discussion on conscientious objectors is worth including here as there was a tendency for

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<sup>28</sup> Slocombe, p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> Fairman, p. 54.

male non-professional medical volunteers and conscientious objectors to be viewed in a similar light by contemporary society.

Before The Military Service Act was passed in January 1916, Arnold S. Rowntree and T. Edmund Harvey, both Quaker MPs, ensured a ‘conscience clause’ was included.<sup>30</sup> This clause allowed applications to be made for certificates of exemption on the ‘ground of a conscientious objection to undertaking of combatant service’ and if approved it ensured that alternative work to combatant service had to be arranged.<sup>31</sup> Although much has been talked about the topic of conscientious objectors in both secondary and popular literature, there is a suggestion that the amount of cases at local tribunals that laid claim to conscientious and pacifist beliefs may have been significantly smaller in reality. Slocombe found only twenty seven of the 1500 available tribunal cases for Wiltshire were appeals made on the grounds of conscientious beliefs, and in the North Riding area of Yorkshire 170 of the 5812 cases that came before the tribunals were due to conscientious beliefs.<sup>32</sup> Slocombe suggests the proportion of conscientious objection cases may have been even lower as those cases would nearly always be reported in local newspapers in comparison to other applications.<sup>33</sup>

Conscientious objectors can be viewed as belonging to three categories: absolutists, alternatives and non-combatants.<sup>34</sup> Absolutists objected to both the war and any work that supported the war effort and would therefore seek complete exemption, alternatives would consider civilian work that was of national importance but not directly in support of the war, and non-combatants were prepared to enlist but on the proviso that they would not use or carry out any work associated with weapons.<sup>35</sup> It would be on the grounds of the latter two categories that conscientious objectors would agree to take up work as military stretcher bearers, ambulance drivers, and as hospital orderlies on the home front. In her study on the

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<sup>30</sup> Rebecca Wynter, ‘Conscription, Conscience and Controversy: The Friends’ Ambulance Unit and the “Middle Course” in the First World War’, *Quaker Studies*, 21.2 (2016), pp. 213-233, (p. 219), doi:10.3828/quaker.2016.21.2.6.

<sup>31</sup> Wynter, p. 219; Military Service Act, 1916, p. 5. Available at <<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1916/104/contents/enacted>> [Accessed 12 April 2024].

<sup>32</sup> Slocombe, p. 111; Wallace, p. 99.

<sup>33</sup> Slocombe, p. 111.

<sup>34</sup> Denise M. Amos, ‘Conscientious Objectors: men of Nottinghamshire who failed the call to arms, 1914-1918’, *Midland History*, 45.1 (2020), pp. 95-110, (p. 104), doi:10.1080/0047729X.2020.1712076.

<sup>35</sup> Amos, p. 104.

Quaker-ran Friend's Ambulance Unit, which aimed to provide frontline medical aid in Belgium and France, Whyte demonstrates how conscientious objectors could dramatically vary in their beliefs and what they were prepared to do instead of combatant service, from those who were prepared to face prison for their beliefs, to others who joined the unit for beliefs that originated from political rather than religious views but agreed with the motivations of the unit.<sup>36</sup> It is possible that Netley Hospital accepted conscientious objectors as part of the male VAD workforce, but after the implementation of the Military Service Act, it is more likely that conscientious objectors formed part of the British Army medical corps and not the BRCS. As the reasons and motivations behind an individual volunteering as a VAD was not recorded by the BRCS, it is impossible to say with any certainty what proportion of the male VAD workforce held conscientious or pacifist beliefs.

### **Cultural Perceptions of Male VADs**

Much like the depictions of conscientious objectors in popular culture, the contemporary portrayals of male VADs and military non-professional care providers were generally negative and often questioned the masculinity of those individuals. Bibbings suggests that being a soldier was viewed as 'the only way to be truly male', and tales of heroism not only reinforced this idea but aimed to provide motivation for voluntary enlistment and to support the introduction of conscription.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, any male who did not take part in combatant service, including male non-professional care providers such as BRCS VADs and conscientious objectors, were viewed as 'shirking their responsibilities, benefiting from their cowardice and prolonging the war' and there was increasing pressure on civilian men to 'do their bit' for the country.<sup>38</sup> Male VADs of military service age, such as those at Netley Hospital, were placed in an awkward position as there would have been numerous reasons why they were working for the BRCS instead of in some form of military service. As already discussed in this chapter, it is possible that some male VADs held conscientious or pacifist beliefs, but it is likely that these men only made up a very small proportion of the workforce. Prior to the implementation of compulsory conscription, it is probable that male VADs at

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<sup>36</sup> Wynter, p. 214 and 232.

<sup>37</sup> Bibbings, p. 337.

<sup>38</sup> Bibbings, p. 340.

Netley Hospital had chosen to volunteer because they had either been deemed medically unfit for enlistment or had been outside of the accepted age range for military service.

As the two very different case studies of Herbert Dawson in chapter two and William Gibbons earlier in this chapter have shown, there was an array of motivations that lay behind an individual's decision to enrol with the BRCS. Another example of the complexities that existed within the male VAD workforce at Netley Hospital is the case study of Henry Kemp from Ross, Herefordshire. Kemp began working at Netley Hospital in March 1915 as an orderly, and records from the 1911 Census show that prior to volunteering with the BRCS he was employed as a cooper at a local brewery.<sup>39</sup> Kemp was born in 1877 so would have been approximately thirty eight at the time of volunteering and still within the age requirements for voluntary enlistment into the British Army.<sup>40</sup> However, Kemp remained at Netley Hospital until March 1919 and during that time was promoted to the honorary army rank of Corporal and was working as the Captain of the hospital's Fire Brigade.<sup>41</sup> Whilst evidence does not exist that confirms why Kemp chose to volunteer and how he was able to remain at Netley Hospital despite being of a suitable age for conscription, it is possible that his medical grading for military service was such that he was unsuitable for both enlistment and conscription, yet was physically fit enough to work at Netley Hospital for four years; it is also possible that the BRCS were able to successfully apply for an exemption from conscription on Kemp's behalf due to his role with the hospital's Fire Brigade. Kemp is just one example of the male VAD workforce at Netley Hospital who may have received criticism and negative reactions for taking on a non-combatant role during the war despite seemingly appearing to be suitable to do otherwise.

The criticism faced by male non-combatant volunteers from contemporary society has been examined by Meyer in her study of male involvement in military medicine during World War One. Meyer describes how Royal Army Medical Corps stretcher bearers and orderlies were depicted in cartoons in hospital magazines as 'hen-pecked' by the nurses and as insignificant and sickly, and Meyer suggests this demonstrates their roles were viewed by

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<sup>39</sup> <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=124491>> [Accessed 28 January 2024]; Census return for 'Henry Kemp', 1911 Census for England & Wales, RG14/15642, Sch 176.

<sup>40</sup> Chris Baker, 'Special enlistments into the regular army 1914', The Long, Long Trail, n.d. <<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/soldiers/a-soldiers-life-1914-1918/enlisting-into-the-army/special-enlistments-into-the-regular-army-1914/>> [Accessed 4 April 2024].

<sup>41</sup> <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=124491>> [Accessed 28 January 2024].

their contemporaries as ‘cowardly and emasculated’ due to being seen as subservient to the female staff.<sup>42</sup> Whilst the contents of *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine* are comparatively kinder than those discussed by Meyer, a low opinion of the male VADs by the patients is evident. A song written about Netley hospital staff and performed by patients at a hospital concert includes the following verse:

Now if you want a few lines more,  
I’ll write about our orderly – ‘lor!  
He never shuts the blooming door;  
It creates an awful draught you see.  
And then he’s late in making tea!  
So ‘twixt you and me, he’s N.B.G.<sup>43</sup>

Although this can be viewed as light-hearted in tone, it is noticeable that it is the only verse of the song that is critical of staff. Other examples of patient attitudes towards orderlies include a poem in the September issue entitled ‘Ten Bold Orderlies’ which is a parody of the rhyme now known as ‘Ten Little Indians’ and depicts various methods by which Orderlies cause their own demise through their ineptitude, and a fictional letter written by a patient that describes the orderlies by saying ‘they do the floor, and find where “fag-ends” lurk’.<sup>44</sup> Although all staff, from the Medical Officers to the VAD nursing members are caricatured throughout the issues of *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, it is the orderlies who face the harshest treatment by the patients.

Muir was only too aware of the attitudes of patients and other medical staff towards orderlies stating, ‘the hospital orderly is not... puffed up with foolish illusions as to his place in the scheme of things’.<sup>45</sup> He states that the work of orderlies is ‘uninteresting’ and ‘unromantic’ and that orderlies are aware of their ‘humble place’ within the hospital staff

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<sup>42</sup> Meyer, p. 167.

<sup>43</sup> HALS, 92M91/1/31, *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, May 1918, p. 63.

<sup>44</sup> HALS, 92M91/1/31, *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, April 1918, p. 46; *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine*, September 1918, p.168.

<sup>45</sup> Muir, p. 154.

hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> Throughout the issues of *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine* it becomes evident that the strict social hierarchy mentioned in the previous chapter was very much in force at Netley Hospital. Male VADs were never included in social outings with other staff and are rarely mentioned in reports of social events that took place for patients and staff.

The discussions included in this chapter have aimed to provide a greater understanding of the issues and attitudes faced by male VADs during World War One. Conscription had a major effect upon both Netley Hospital and its male VAD workforce. Prior to 1916, men working at Netley Hospital were able to choose to volunteer as VADs instead of enlisting. However, once conscription was introduced, a large proportion of the VAD workforce had no choice but to enlist for military service, which in turn impacted the staffing of the hospital and meant that it came to rely upon a younger workforce who were not yet eligible for conscription. Whilst it can be argued that this young workforce was relatively inexperienced, the benefits to Netley Hospital of employing a fit and healthy adolescent male workforce can be seen.

Although we are not able to uncover the reasons why the male VAD workforce at Netley Hospital chose to volunteer, studies such as those by Slocombe, McDermott and Wallace demonstrate the general societal attitude towards non-combatant men and conscientious objectors was not positive; and Meyer and Bibbings's work shows the masculinity of these men were called into question throughout the war. The attitudes towards the male VADs within the contents of *The Netley British Red Cross Magazine* confirm that these men were not always considered in a favourable light by the patients and staff of the hospital.

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<sup>46</sup> Muir, p. 154.



## Conclusion

This study set out with an aim to highlight the diversity of the BRCS VAD workforce during World War One. The rationale for this study was that the full demographics and experiences of volunteers had long been overlooked in existing historiography in preference to the middle or upper-class women who volunteered as nursing members. The online availability of the entire VAD service record database enabled this study to undertake a unique quantitative examination of all the available service records for the volunteer workforce at Netley Hospital. The evidence produced from the database demonstrated that the volunteer workforce at Netley Hospital was diverse and contained many complex personal histories.

Chapter one of this study provided a general overview of the founding of the JWC and the work the committee carried out in Britain during World War One, which were chiefly the management of the VAD workforce and over three thousand auxiliary hospitals. One of the three biggest of these auxiliary hospitals was Netley Hospital and chapter one also discussed the history of the construction and running of this hospital as it would be the location focused upon for this study.

Chapter two examined the data for the VAD workforce at Netley Hospital that had been compiled from the VAD service record database. The discussions included in this chapter demonstrated how distinct differences existed between the male and female volunteers. The large amount of male VADs who had worked at Netley Hospital between 1914 and 1919 was at first glance surprising, especially when the hospital's figure of fifty three per cent was compared with the national average of eighteen per cent, however this figure is just one example of the diversity that existed within the hospital's VAD workforce.<sup>1</sup> Further analysis on topics including the particulars of duties, the location of a volunteer's permanent residential address and the amount of promotions and honours gained by the workforce demonstrated that the VAD experience was not an homogenous one. The case studies of individual VADs included in this chapter reinforced this argument.

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<sup>1</sup> Hawkins, p.294.

Chapter three expanded the discussion on the demographics and experiences of the male VAD workforce at Netley Hospital. The discussions in this chapter demonstrated that the topic of male VADs is a complex one. Prior to the implantation of the Military Service Act in January 1916, it was possible for any man to choose to volunteer as a BRCS VAD in preference to enlisting for military service. Netley Hospital made full use of this pool of volunteers, as evidenced by the fact that the VAD service records show an almost equal split between the two genders of the workforce. However, once conscription was in place there is evidence that Netley Hospital struggled to fill the vacancies that occurred due to suitable men being sent to join the armed forces. One of the ways the hospital attempted to resolve their staffing problems was by recruiting adolescent male VADs who were too young to be conscripted. Evidence from the BRCS VAD service records demonstrate just how strongly the hospital came to rely upon this section of the male population, with numbers of adolescent male VADs rising dramatically before peaking in 1918.

The discussions on conscientious objectors and societal perceptions of civilian and non-combatant men highlight the attitudes faced by the adult male VAD workforce at Netley Hospital. Whilst the true overall number of conscientious objectors may have been low in comparison to those seeking exemption from conscription on the basis of their employment, the tribunals featuring requests on conscientious grounds were highly newsworthy and negatively skewed public opinion about non-combatant men. Orderlies, whether in the British Army Medical Corps or the BRCS, faced criticism, belittling attitudes and challenges to their masculinity. However, as Meyer suggests, it can be argued that the existence of stretcher bearers and male orderlies challenged cultural assumptions about the ‘natural dominance of women as providers of care’ as they undertook emotional labour that was traditionally viewed as ‘women’s work’.<sup>2</sup>

A full and comprehensive examination of the entire VAD workforce at Netley Hospital is beyond the space limitations of this study. However, it is hoped that the findings discussed here have demonstrated that further study on the long-neglected topic of male VADs (whether at a national or local level) would enable a better understanding of a ‘unique male identity in wartime’ and enable a greater understanding of the demographics and experiences of this distinctive and diverse workforce.<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, the digitisation of the

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<sup>2</sup> Meyer, pp. 171-172.

<sup>3</sup> Meyer, p. 161.

BRCS VAD service records database appear to have so far been overlooked by academics, but there is much scope for further research to be carried out on both the Netley Hospital volunteer workforce and the database as a whole. Whole sections of the World War One VAD workforce, including male and working-class female volunteers, have until recently been overlooked in existing secondary literature in favour of the experiences of the female nursing-members, and there is the potential that the unexamined information held on the VAD service record database could influence how the VAD workforce is perceived in the future.

Appendix 1. Sample Spreadsheet for service records for Male VADs at Netley Hospital.<sup>1</sup>

SURNAME	FIRST NAME	AGE	RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS	RANK AT ENGAGEMENT	SERVICE START DATE	SERVICE END DATE	BRCS DETACHMENT	NOTES
Moorman	Richard Charles	n/a	Gibraltar House, Hound Road, Netley, Southampton	Superintendent	05/08/1914	Still Serving	No. 2 Hants	St Johns Brigade Superintendent, work at Netley on voluntary basis.
Jennings	William Caleb	33	Pickwich, Corsham, Wiltshire	Orderly	26/10/1914	Still Serving	Wilts/3	Pay increased from 28/- to 30/6 by 1919, employed full time.
Mills	Thomas	20	125 Battle Road, Silverhill, Hastings	Orderly	08/02/1915	08/06/1917	n/a	Pay increased from 28/- to 30/6 by 1919, between 11/06/1917 to 14/06/1918 in France, 02/07/1918 onwards an Orderly.
Peerless	Archibald	17	138 Bohemea Road, Hastings	Orderly	24/07/1916	20/03/1917	n/a	Pay increased to 29/- by 1917.
Workman	Samuel	32	49 Summerhill Road, St George, Bristol	Orderly	07/12/1916	Still Serving	n/a	Promoted to Corporal, pay increased from 28/- to 34/6 by 1919.
Foard	Albert Victor	24	18 Belteming Road, Eastbourne, Sussex	Orderly	10/02/1915	11/09/1916	Sussex 47	n/a
Harries	David Jenkin	32	2 Carrick Fern, Cwmgwrach, Neath, Wales	Orderly	24/10/1917	26/04/1918	n/a	Served six months at Welsh Hospital, Netley, then served at Bellahouston Hopsital, Glasgow.
Young	Edwin	35	Redholm, The Wallands, Lewes, Sussex	Orderly	28/12/1915	11/05/1918	Sussex 37	Promoted to Sergeant, pay increased from 28/- to 30/- by 1918.
Field	James John	46	High Street, Ashstead, Surrey	Orderly	06/12/1915	31/01/1919	Surrey 17	Pay increased from 28/- to 30/6 by 1919.
Eaton	Robert	17	35 Marshall Street, West Smethwick, Birmingham	Orderly	19/12/1917	04/10/1918	Staffs 3	Pay was increased from 28/- to 29/- by 1918.
Kemp	Henry	40	20 Station Street, Ross, Herefordshire	Orderly	22/03/1915	Still Serving	Hereford 1	Promoted to Sergeant, was Captain of Fire Brigade. Pay increased from 28/- to 45/- by 1919
Davey	Ernest	16	155 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford	Orderly	29/04/1918	12/10/1918	n/a	Was aged 16 years and 3 months at engagement.
Gilkes	John	58	41 Manners Road, Southsea	Orderly	13/01/1916	Still Serving	Hants 47	Promoted to Corporal.
Bowsher	Leonard	19	47 Orchard Street, Reading	Orderly	20/04/1916	02/06/1917	Berks 13	Pay increased to 29/6 by 1917.
King	William	22	73 Rupert Street, Reading	Orderly	08/06/1916	27/10/1916	Berks 13	
Vernon	Henry	17	136 Corporation Street, Nuneaton	Orderly	26/11/1917	20/09/1918	Warwick 23	Pay increased to 29/- by 1918.
Fulford	Arthur	20	4 Castle Street, Southampton	Orderly	11/11/1915	02/06/1916	Hants 3	
Taylor	Albert Edward	16	199 Rolfe Street, Smethwick	Orderly	12/06/1918	Still Serving	Staffs 3	Age was 16 years and 8 months on engagement. Pay increased to 29/- by 1919.

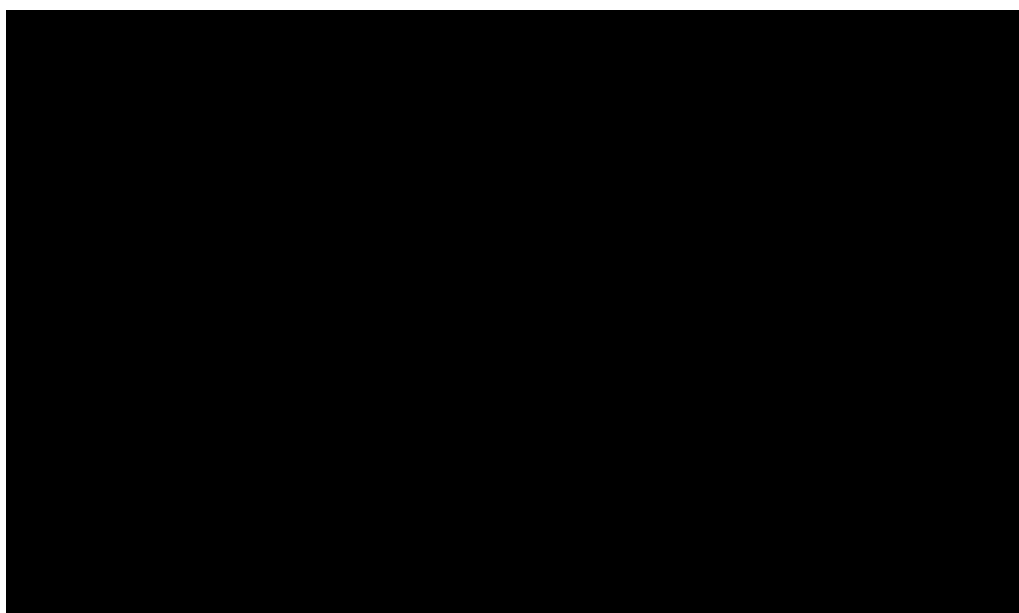
<sup>1</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

Appendix 2. Sample Spreadsheet for service records for Female VADs at Netley Hospital.<sup>2</sup>

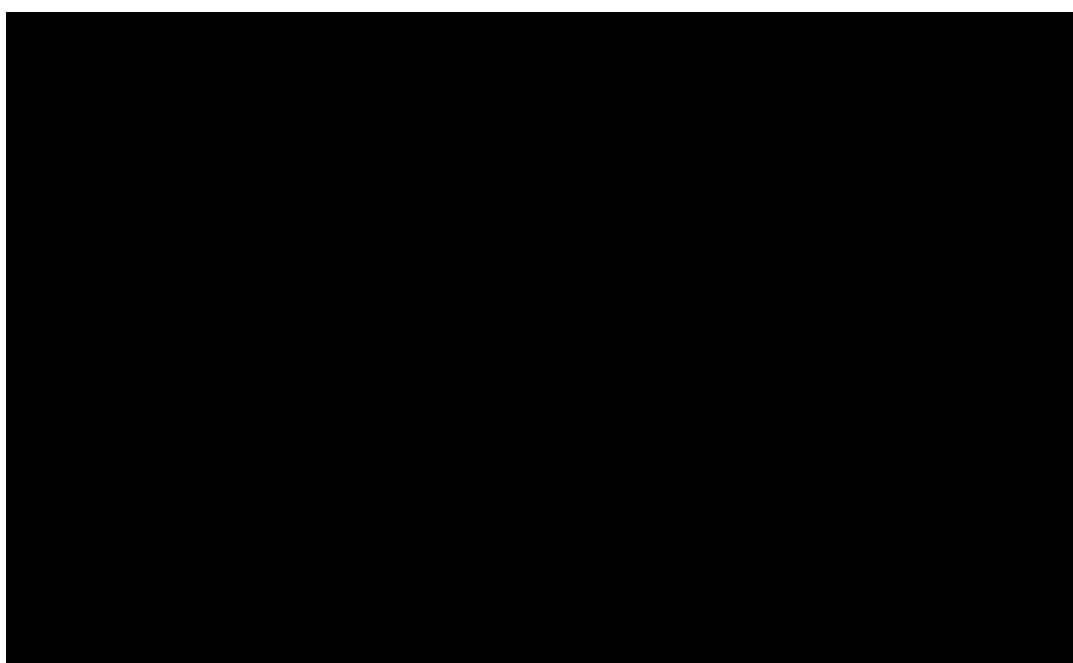
SURNAME	FIRST NAME	TITLE	AGE	RESIDENTIAL ADDRESS	RANK AT ENGAGEMENT	SERVICE START DATE	SERVICE END DATE	BRCS DETACHMENT	NOTES
Nye	Lilian Annie	Miss	n/a	Hazelmere, Station Road, Netley	Clerk	30/11/1917	Still Serving	Hants Reserve BRCS	
Lawrence	Lena Alice	Miss	n/a	75 Butlocks Heath, Netley Abbey	Clerk	30/01/1917	Still Serving	Hants 2	
Mewten	Myrtle	Miss	n/a	Sithney Green, Sithney, Cornwall	VAD Nurse	01/06/1916	01/10/1919	Cornwall 38	
Mugford	Ellen	Miss	n/a	19 Cecil Court, Fawcett Street, Earl's Court, London	Assistant Cook	05/06/1917	19/07/1918	n/a	Pts Kitchen.
Nuttall	Esther	Mrs	n/a	Chester Cottage, Netley	Postal Clerk	21/01/1917	09/03/1919	Hants 2	
Coxon	Beatrice Mary	Mrs	n/a	29 Woolston Road, Butlocks Heath, Netley Abbey	Clerk	01/02/1917	12/12/1918	Hants 2	
Hailes	Barbara	Miss	n/a	6 Wellington Crescent, Manchester	Nursing Member	14/06/1916	00/00/1917	London 248	Six months ward duties at Netley.
Goodridge	Alice May	Miss	n/a	Hunts Pond, Titchfield Common, Titchfield	Cook	15/11/1917	Still Serving	Hants Reserve BRCS	Worked at hospital some years before enrolment.
Jackson	Dorothy Annie	Miss	20	Old Hall, Dunstall, Burton-on-Trent	Dispenser	29/06/1917	03/04/1919	Staffs 56	
Agar	Beatrice	Mrs	34	Brocksford Hall, Doveridge, Derbyshire	Nurse	15/07/1915	06/10/1916	Surrey 10	
Smith	Winifred	Miss	n/a	The Oaks, Newton Road, Burton	Nursing Member	00/05/1916	00/03/1919	Glamorgan VAD 132	Worked at Welsh Hospital. Received 2 years service badge.
Houchen	Violet Gwendoline	Mrs	25	Bridge Street, Downhill Market, Norfolk	Nurse	19/08/1916	31/08/1917	Norfolk 88	Commended 20.10.1917
Blair	May	Miss	29	71 Marsland Road, Sale, Cheshire	Assistant Cook	16/08/1919	Still Serving	West Lancs 86	
Taylor	Muriel	Miss	18	Claremont, Glasnevin, Dublin, Ireland	Clerk	14/02/1918	Still Serving	City of Dublin 26	
Thompson	Elizabeth Mary	Miss	48	Glendevon, West Hill Road, Bournemouth	Nurse	20/06/1917	20/07/1918	Hants 68	
Babbage	Nellie	Miss	n/a	17 East Street, Southampton	Assistant Cook	21/05/1917	Still Serving	Hants 2	
Jones	Sophia	Miss	36	Pare Y Vicar Llanstephan, Nr. Carmarthen	Nurse	20/03/1918	17/05/1919	Glamorgan 166	Transferred from Welsh Hospital to Salonkia
Trodd	Edith May	Miss	n/a	Dove Cottage, Commercial Road, Bitterne	Laboratory Attendant	17/09/1917	Still Serving	Hants 2	Laboratory Attendant - untrained

<sup>2</sup> BRCS, <<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/search?searchTerm=Netley&filter=Hospital>>.

Appendix 3. Photo of ambulance train arriving at The Royal Victoria Hospital, and photo of inside of inside Ward 11 Horsham Hut at Netley Hospital.<sup>1</sup>



**\*IMAGES REDACTED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS\***



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<sup>1</sup> BRCMA, IN4383. Available through <<https://museumandarchives.redcross.org.uk/objects/29614>> [Accessed 8 May 2024]; BRCMA, 0324/IN7096. Available through <<https://museumandarchives.redcross.org.uk/objects/589>> [Accessed 8 May 2024].

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