

Health and Welfare

Although there was prosperity in Rhuddlan there was also poverty and deprivation. The very poor, elderly, those unable to work, orphaned or abandoned children and vagrants faced admission to the St Asaph Union Workhouse which became a hospital only in 1948 (HM Stanley Hospital), although it had an Infirmary wing for sick residents and the St Asaph Hospital for Infectious Diseases on the same site from 1910. Inevitably, babies were delivered there and records show there were 85 babies born between 1912 and 1921, of which 6 were born to married women.



H M Stanley Hospital 2013, before closure

In 1914 the residents of the workhouse numbered 80 including 30 children, and around 20 vagrants were “given relief” in cottages in the grounds each week. In December that year, a widower from Rhuddlan requested admission of his four children to the workhouse until he could find someone to look after them as he could not leave them to go out to work and had no other means of support. The request was refused, the vice chairman pointing out that “the Board of Guardians had too many children left on their hands through acting kindly. Parents brought in their children and too often ran away”, but a sympathetic lady member asked for the request to be referred up to the Local Government Board, who relented. Funding for the Workhouse was the responsibility of each Parish and the Rhuddlan contribution for 1914 was £826 supplemented by the Rhuddlan churches which regularly sent the Sunday Service collection to assist funding. Rhuddlan people generously gave donations in addition which helped to support education and training to enable inmates to leave and work in society.

With no National Health Service, many patients had to pay for medical consultation with doctors in St Asaph, Dr Edward Fortrey George Turnbull Heap, surgeon, of Pendinas, Denbigh Road, registered 1905, LRCP, MRCS, or Dr Edward Henry Lloyd, physician and surgeon, Medical Officer to St Asaph RDC, Arsyllfa, High St, registered 1884, MRCS, LSA, MD Durham 1900, later joined by his daughter Katherine (known as Rene) who qualified as a doctor and married in 1919 to become Dr Quinby. Later, she opened a surgery in Rhuddlan. Children were fortunate in that regular health, dental and eye checks were carried out at school but if times were hard, adults could sell teeth, 18s to £1 for a whole gold plate or 5-10s for other metals! Across-the-counter remedies were popular for obvious reasons and Mr Salusbury of Machine House wrote to a local newspaper endorsing Doan’s pills (containing an aspirin-type drug) for relief of his rheumatism.

Hospital treatment took place at the Royal Alexandra Hospital (RAH) Rhyl, Denbigh Infirmary (DI) and North Wales Hospital (NWH) Denbigh (often called Denbigh Mental Asylum). Again these were funded by public and charitable organisations plus generous individual donations and it is a great credit that these contributions continued unflinching throughout the war.

At Christmastime in 1915, RAH was flooded with gifts of decorations, fruit, meat and poultry, cake, crackers, toys, books and presents from local benefactors. Donations of several thousand pounds to fund a “cot” in memory of fallen soldiers were made, such as £4,000 in 1915 by Mr and Mrs Hayes of Woking whose son Second Lieutenant H V Hayes was killed in France aged 19yrs. As war casualties began to flood the country in 1915, RAH responded by allocating 12 emergency beds for the admission of the wounded (these men could originate from any part of Britain or allied countries and were sent to any available bed) but in 1918 the beds were reallocated to the North Wales Joint Disablement Committee for the assessment and management of those disabled by war. The same applied to the 10 places supplied by Denbigh Infirmary. The effects of the early war in the air were highlighted in February 1916 when RAH was insured for £15,000 against bombardment and airstrike while lights and windows were obscured with paint or blackouts. Unfortunately, the 12 RAH nurses caring for injured military personnel (six of whom were at the Front) fared rather badly in 1916 when their pay was reduced from 2 to 1½ guineas per month as they were not actually working in the hospital but were in France!

North Wales Hospital (NWH), Denbigh played an interesting role during the war. Regarded as advanced in its treatment of psychiatric illness and providing 1000 beds, it took patients from a wide area and continued its work despite losing 20% of its regular staff to enlistment. There were very few military patients in the early days of the war apart from two who were declared insane and a few enemy prisoners who were treated successfully. Patients were well fed with porridge, bread and butter and tea for breakfast and meat, vegetables, potatoes and bread for dinner - apart from patients with epilepsy who received a vegetarian diet. The food was largely supplied by the extensive hospital farm and gardens and in accordance with the rules of the National Food Controller. Life in the institution was not as grim as may be imagined, with patients helping in the garden and workshops and being entertained by local well-wishers, regimental bands and theatre groups, while a gift of 19 gramophones donated to the wards added cheer. Military patients increased as time went by and usually responded well. Initially treated as “pauper” patients they were reclassified as “private”, had better food, were not “certified”, received prompt treatment and importantly, there was no stigma attached to them. There was one significant increase in admissions from the general population, that of “war worry” cases, affecting wives and mothers struggling with grief or fear for their loved ones.



North Wales Hospital, Denbigh before closure

Where did the thousands of other wounded go? The British Red Cross established auxiliary hospitals in halls and houses around the land, for example Morfa Hall in Rhyl (moving to Leeswood Hall, Mold in 1915), and Llanbedr Hall near Ruthin. The King Edward VII hospital at Llangwyfan opened in 1917 and treated soldiers returning with tuberculosis, which was prevalent in service personnel. The majority, however, were treated at the 890 bed Military Hospital at Kinmel Camp, away from the general population.