

Hackford House as a First World War hospital

The November picture in the Reepham Life 2018 Calendar shows Hackford House (now the Bircham Centre) as a First World War hospital.



At the outbreak of the war, the British Red Cross had already secured buildings, equipment and staff, and was able to set up temporary hospitals as soon as wounded men began to arrive from abroad.

By December 1914, Reepham Red Cross Hospital was in operation as a 12-bed VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) Auxiliary Hospital No. 52, the first wounded having arrived at the "Parish Hall from Norwich conveyed in motor cars lent by local gentlemen".

Samuel Bircham had donated the use of the Scouts' Club Room (at the back of the Bircham Centre garden) as a kitchen facility and later gave permission for Hackford House to be used, which accounts for the number of "Hospital Blues" in the calendar photograph.

Permanent staff included a commandant (Lady Grace Barry of Witchingham Hall), a quartermaster, a matron, some full-time nurses and a number of VAD nurses. Many local volunteers from Reepham provided cooking, cleaning, laundering and night-duty support. Each volunteer had a record card and the card of Nan Bircham (Samuel Bircham's daughter-in-law) is shown below.

Surname	Bircham	NORFOLK 52
Christian Names	Nan	Rec'd 1 MAY 1919 (Call Mrs. or Miss)
Permanent Address :	Old Brewery House 1 Reepham Norfolk	
Date of Engagement	April 1918	Rank Nurse Day-Voluntary
Date of Termination	3rd week	Rank " Day April 12 1919
Particulars of Duties	Red X Nursing	
Whether whole or part time, and if latter No. of hours served	158 up to March 1919.	
Previous engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where		
Honours awarded		

Her sister, Dorothy Bruce, is also on the list, and although she gives a Norwich address, we can probably assume that she spent some nights at the Old Brewery House, where Nan lived with her children Merrick, Michael and Ann.

Also pictured is the card of Dr E.V. Perry, medical officer-in-charge, who lived at Eynsford House.

Surname Perry J.P., O.B.E. Rec'd 3 1 MAY 1919

Christian Names Edward Verdon. Dr
(Mr, Mrs. or Miss)

Permanent Address: Reepham

Date of Engagement Nov 26 1914 Rank _____ Pay _____

Date of Termination April 5. 1919 Rank _____ Pay _____

Particulars of Duties M.O. in Charge

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

Previous Engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where _____

Honours awarded _____ O.B.E.

Janet Archer