

# Leytonstone and Medical Matters (3)



A change of status for the local hospital and a pandemic exercised the minds of Leytonstone people in the last year of the war. Both had far reaching consequences.

## Whipps Cross Hospital

The current hospital was built as a 'Workhouse Infirmary' in 1903. However by 1912 it was carrying out 350 operations a year and its status was growing. In 1917 the Board of Governors persuaded the War Office to allow the infirmary to treat wounded soldiers and soon the first casualties arrived. Although restricted to fifty at first, the numbers of wounded increased and this reduced the beds available for civilians. The site was sensibly renamed 'Whipps Cross Military Hospital' in 1918.



On 17th November 1917 King George and Queen Mary visited Whipps Cross to give medals to Nurses and to visit the 300 military patients being treated. A plaque near reception commemorates this visit.

A Social Committee was formed to raise funds to build a recreational hut for the wounded. Leytonstone people and others made great efforts to raise the cash. There were Fetes, Concerts and even a soccer match organised by Leytonstone F.C. Eventually the hut was built and this became one of the very many charitable initiatives local people organised for the returning wounded.

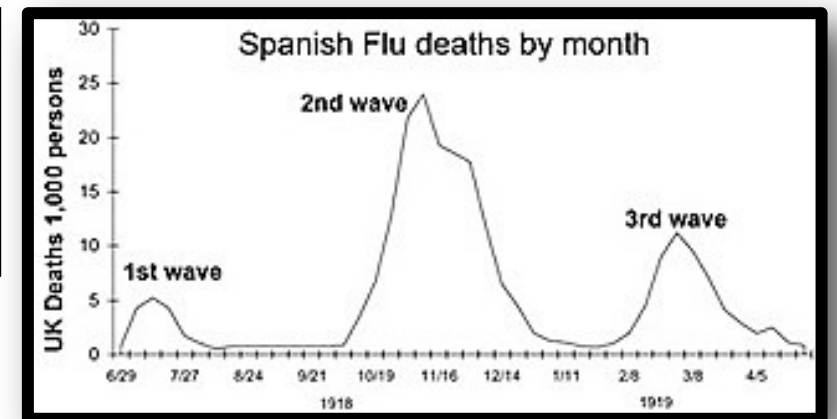
The hut contained equipment to keep the patients entertained and it was formally opened by the matron using a 'silver' key.



## Pandemic

Spanish Flu attacked the world in three waves and killed 50 million people. It seems unduly harsh that in the month the war ended, the disease killed no less than 135 Leyton people - with the majority of these being housewives. The sad toll for 1918 was 364 and perversely those in the age range 25 to 45 were most vulnerable because the disease was most lethal to those with the strongest immune systems.

Cinemas and other meeting places were closed and a leaflet sent out to every household explaining what precautions to take. The disease characteristically disappeared quickly and only 3 people died during Xmas week, but wretchedly, another 'wave' would hit London in the Spring. Perhaps fearing this, the medical officer suggested that a new mortuary, "...more adapted to the size of the district" was built.



## Spanish Flu

The medical officer reported that in 1918 no cases of plague, cholera, smallpox, typhus or dysentery had occurred. But what had occurred was devastating.