

# Redlynch & District Local History Society

## Brockenhurst, a Hospital Village in WW1.

by Diane Fletcher

In March members enjoyed a very interesting talk entitled 'Brockenhurst, a Hospital Village in WW1.' Our speaker, Diana Fletcher, had researched her subject thoroughly and illustrated her talk with excellent contemporary photographs. She explained that because of Brockenhurst's proximity to the port of Southampton, it was chosen, in 1914, as the site for a temporary military hospital to treat Indian service men.



Initially tents were used to accommodate the wounded, but later huts were constructed with iron roofs, giving the site the nick name 'Tin Town'. The Lady Hardinge Hospital, with 24 wards, provided full medical facilities. Treatment was also given at the requisitioned Balmer Lawn and Forest Park Hotels (the latter being for officers) and at the Morant Hall. King George and Queen Mary visited the Indian troops in 1914 and presented gifts.

After the Indian soldiers left the hospital, it was taken over by the New Zealand medical corps, from 1915 until 1919, when it closed. Over 21,000 casualties were treated. Surprisingly only 93 died and were buried in St Nicholas' churchyard.

The soldiers appear to have been well cared for in clean, airy wards and parcels from home helped to supplement food supplies. Sphagnum moss, collected from the forest by local school children, was used to pack wounds, as its antiseptic and absorption qualities were thought to aid healing. There were various rehabilitation activities and some servicemen visited the Kia-Ora club, opened in 1916, to relax, read newspapers and play games.

Villagers from Brockenhurst were involved with the hospital, visiting patients and taking them out and even after the war, kept close ties with New Zealand. Anzac Day is celebrated each year on April 25th. In 2016 a stained-glass window, commissioned by the New Zealand government, was unveiled at St Nicholas' church to commemorate the country's link with Brockenhurst during WW1. An Exhibition about the hospital is also on display and the Poppy Trail highlights important sites.

Next Meeting: "How Old is my House? What to look for in Old Buildings." Nigel Walker April 4th 7.30pm Morgan's Vale & Woodfalls Village Hall. All welcome.