

Aunt Emmeline and Piper's Hill Auxiliary Hospital

In *Dorothy from Hythe in Kent* by Dorothy K Thomas (nee Dann), my mother told the story of her life until she married in 1927. Because of the Marriage Bar she had to leave her much-loved job as a Primary School teacher. The manuscript of her early life was found after her death: as her executor I felt it deserved to be set in context to her whole life [Plowright Press 'Ordinary' Lives Series No 6. 2004]. Dorothy was the youngest of seven sisters. **Emmeline** was one of them.

Thanks to the Royal College of Nursing Archives and those of the Red Cross, I discovered that **Emmeline** trained at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, Reading, 1914-1918. Her life long career included nursing at Piper's Hill Auxiliary Hospital, near Leamington Spa, for over two years during the Second World War. For much of her nursing career she 'lived in' and nursed injured servicemen. When I was a child, this interesting Aunt spent her holidays in our family home. I still have two of the paintings which convalescing or dying soldiers gave her as a remembrance of her skilled care.

The only reference Warwickshire County Record Office found of the Piper's Hill Auxiliary Hospital was its location in the village of Bishops Itchington, to the south of Leamington Spa, at Piper's Hill Farm. In 2003, a County Archivist told me: "It is owned by the Kettle family and Rupert (now deceased) and his wife turned it into an Auxiliary Hospital during the Second World War. Unfortunately we do not have records relating to the hospital, nor can I find any reference to it in the small collection of local history pamphlets on the village that we hold."

I wrote to a member of the Kettle family. She explained that the Kettle family, in fact, did not move to Piper's Hill until 1960: it was the Lakin family who lived there during the War: and that Daphne Lakin was alive.

I traced her in Sussex. The Hon. Mrs Daphne Lakin was happy to help. We corresponded and spoke on the telephone. Her father-in-law, Harry Lakin loaned Piper's Hill to the Red Cross in 1940. He moved out of the house: "and I was asked to run the Hospital. At the time, I was nursing at the Warnford Hospital in Leamington Spa and found the proposition a little daunting aged 21! Anyway, it all happened: our staff consisted of Matron, **Sister Emmeline Dann**, and 2 or 3 VADs. On the Admin Side: myself and Sergeant Weir. We had either 32 or 36 beds – I can't remember which. Our patients were Army or Air Force: very occasionally Navy".

Daphne Lakin found and sent me a photo of **Sister Emmeline Dann** playing croquet with convalescing patients. She had a photo stuck in an album of Piper's Hill as it was then, and sent me a photocopy. These pictures were included in the book *Dorothy from Hythe in Kent*. Copies were deposited with Warwickshire County Record Office, together with the relevant correspondence items and pages from *Dorothy from Hythe in Kent*.

Has anyone further information about this Auxiliary Hospital? Auxiliary hospitals played a vital role in World War Two.

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