

Carry On Nurse. 'Uplands', Roundhay, in WW2.

© By Valerie Ives.

This article tells of a wartime convalescent home, a large Edwardian Villa called 'Uplands', on Old Park Road, Roundhay. The house was owned by an elderly lady who was prepared to rent it for a minute sum to accommodate 30-40 wounded servicemen in their convalescence.

The men came from the three services and 'Uplands' was to set them fit to resume their military duties. The organisation which undertook this hard task was the Roundhay Detachment of the British Red Cross Society of which my mother, Joyce Ives, was the Commandant.

It was a brave and unusual enterprise. There were only three full-time paid officials in the house. The first of these was a middle-aged Matron, an Alexandra nurse, who was obviously the arbiter of medical matters. Secondly, there was a middle-aged Sergeant who had become deaf in the course of military duty and was no longer fit for active service. He was responsible for discipline and patients' pay. Finally, most importantly, there was a cleaner, Mrs Kearney. It was generally believed that her son had won the VC but I have never been able to confirm this.

The staff were a mix of local housewives, many with children, and younger girls waiting to do their bit. There were girls from offices and banks who would start the evening shift or work through the night having done their day job.

Of these I remember Mrs Olive Cooper, the unpaid Red Cross Quartermaster, was responsible for provisioning the kitchen. She was the daughter of the lady who owned the house. There was the Hon. Shelagh Grimshaw (who was then Shelagh Milner) and a Mrs Gale, an elderly lady and friend of my granny.



'Uplands', Old Park Road, Roundhay.

Mrs Gale lived in a similar house to 'Uplands', which she ran with a team of maids, including a cook. Mrs Gale volunteered to be our cook. She undertook this very tricky job with dedication and culinary skill which needed much creative imagination. With only wartime rations and from unpromising basics she produced the most delicious dishes. Some of the patients had no idea what they were eating but this was just what they needed to set them up again. The make-up of the patients was very diverse. They hailed from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and there were many from the Commonwealth, - Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

One cold winter a group of Jamaican airman became ill with pneumonia and were sent to Butlins at Filey. I can't think of a worse

place for them and they were not getting better. Some RAF medic had a brainwave and had them transferred to 'Uplands', where they responded to this very different regime.

Jamaica is of course English-speaking so they had no trouble in communicating, unlike patients from the Gorbals in Glasgow who could not understand what was said to them and equally nobody could understand what they were saying. It seems that those poor chaps were witnessing a way of life they did not know existed.

The Jamaicans provided a new aspect of life for me. Before the war, my mother had been a great bridge player and she quickly discovered that two of them liked to play so they were invited home for a game and tea and biscuits. Wartime rationing did not give much scope for entertaining but we all enjoyed it. This continued weekly until they were deemed fit enough to return to the RAF.

For patients, life at 'Uplands' must have been pretty dull. 'Uplands' faced open country off Soldiers' Field. Trams were within walking distance and they could get to Oakwood or Leeds. Roundhay Park was also within walking distance for many and they enjoyed these walks. There were no pubs nearby but the Mansion quickly became a favourite place. They could walk there, where other drinkers bought them nonstop drinks and somebody would order a taxi for the return which the driver would never let them pay for. The Sergeant laid down strict boundaries for their behaviour but they were sensible enough to abide by them. They knew if they did not, there would be no more evening passes.

It is too easy with the passing of the years to see things in rose tinted colours. The War was awful. Some of these men had been wounded and seriously ill but they were all going to get better, which they did and we were going to win the war. All who worked there felt very much part of the War effort.