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# ROYAL VICTORIA HOSPITAL NETLEY

## History

What is now an idyllic country park was once the scene of a bustling military hospital. As the British Army's first purpose-built hospital, Royal Victoria was a unique and ambitious project which would help change the face of the medical world.

**1854 – 1856**

### Crimean War

In the midst of a devastating conflict, with no transport, poor shelter, and insufficient clothing and food, the fate of the wounded soldier was hopeless. Indeed a soldier may well have had a higher chance of survival outside the appalling fort hospitals.

Into this horror stepped a young Florence Nightingale, and she swiftly set to work improving cleanliness and restoring hygiene.



**19 May 1856**

### Queen Victoria lays foundation stone at Netley.

Queen Victoria was inspired by the efforts of the nurses and when visiting Fort Pitt – the primary hospital for wounded military - she was shocked by the foul overcrowded conditions being suffered by patients. She quickly set to work rallying support for a new hospital.

On 19 May 1856 – the queen laid the foundation stone before a crowd of 11,000 people who turned up to witness the event. The build for Royal Victoria Hospital began.

Some 30 million bricks were used to make the hospital which made it the longest building in



the world.

**1863**

### **Hospital Opens**

The hospital began functioning in March 1863. With its 138 wards and 1000 Beds steadily filled with British troops from across the globe, it truly was a hospital to serve an Empire.



**1899 – 1902**

### **Second Boer War**

This was a lengthy war—involving large numbers of troops from many British possessions, which ended with the conversion of the Boer republics into British colonies.

British losses were high due to both disease and combat and once again Royal Victoria Hospital was put to good use.



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**1900**

### **New railway built**

The new railway line enabled wounded troops to be brought on ambulance trains, straight from Southampton Docks and into the back of the hospital. You can still see the railway lines in the car park at Netley.

**1914 – 1918**

### **First World War – hutted hospital built**

Many young men were sent to fight in the trenches in Europe, just across The English Channel. In that awful war, millions of people were killed, injured, or died of disease or hunger. Now Miss Nightingale's reservations about Netley Hospital were more correct than ever, and many new rows of wooden hospital huts were built behind the main hospital to facilitate for this dreadful War.



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**1918 – 1939**

### **Hospital used for tuberculosis patients**

With the end of the First World War, Netley's hospital once again fell silent. You could hear the birds again, rather than railway engines. Most of the soldiers had gone, and the wards were empty. Peace had returned, but one part of the hospital was used to treat patients with tuberculosis.



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**1939**

### **Start of the Second World War**

In 1939, the Second World War began, and Netley once again was used to treat wounded soldiers brought back from Europe. The hospital was busy again, its corridors and wards echoing to the noise of trucks, jeeps and ambulances. Soldiers sent back from the evacuation of Dunkirk came here.



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**1944**

### **Main hospital used by US Army and Navy**

In 1944, the American army and navy took over the hospital, ready for the invasion of France, known as D-day. The American soldiers had no patience

with those quarter-mile-long corridors. They drove their jeeps down them. Some even drove up the stairs!



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**1963**

### **Fire destroyed a large part of the hospital**

After the Second World War, Netley was not used much as a hospital.

In 1963 there was a bad fire. It gave the Army the excuse to have the building condemned.

**1966**

### **Hospital demolished**

The diggers and trucks came to the front of the hospital's chapel, and everything stopped. At the last moment, it was decided to save this holy place, as a monument to Netley Hospital. In front of the chapel was a big foundation stone, which had been tapped into place by Queen Victoria herself, more than a century before.



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**1980**

**Royal Victoria Country Park opens**

In 1980, the site of the hospital was cleared up and turned into a country park. A peaceful setting for recreation and leisure, the park today belies a fascinating story of war, suffering and devoted care.