The History of the North Middlesex Hospital

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Like a lot of hospitals in the United Kingdom, the North Middlesex began life as a workhouse.

The Edmonton Union Workhouse was built around 1839-1841. The map shows it was at Tanners End in Edmonton just near to Bull Lane and Bridport road.

This map was on display in the hospital.
It was meant to fit 500 inmates. Maxine at North Middlesex Hospital told us that it cost about £15,000 to build. The workhouse was designed by the partnership of George Gilbert Scott and William Bonython Moffatt.
At the archives centre we found that people who stayed at the workhouse had to pay for their night at the workhouse by breaking rocks small enough to fit through the grill that you can see at the back of the cell. We didn’t think that they would have to sleep in cells because they were just poor not criminals.

We found this quote on http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Edmonton/ from someone whose father worked at the workhouse as a ‘labour master’:

“The term ‘labour master’ meant what it said. Inmates of the workhouse were required to work, the main task at Edmonton being stone breaking - that was breaking up lumps of granite into knobs, about one and a half inches across, which were used in making the macadam roads. Macadam was these knobs, set in sand and compacted by rolling. The district was fast developing in the period 1900 - and there was a large demand for this material. The labour master was responsible for setting the inmates to work and keeping them at it.”
Inside the Trust Building we took photos of its “Arts and Crafts” style fireplace and tiles. There is also a memorial for the soldiers who fought in World War 1.
We found the 1881 Census on the http://www.workhouses.org.uk/ website for the workhouse. There were 641 residents listed.

We looked at the ages of the people who lived there. The oldest was 92 (Mary MacDonald) and the youngest were only 1 month old (Edward Campbell and Agnes Daisy Miles).

We were surprised to find out that a lot of the inmates were between 20 and 50 because we thought they would be able to work and not live there but some of them were listed as having handicaps ("blind", "imbecile", "lunatic") so they wouldn’t have been able to work.

Most of the children were there with parents (we assume because they had the same surname) but some were listed as "foundlings" or "abandoned".
Most of the inmates came from Edmonton or at least London so we looked at some of the people who came from other places. Most people came from Ireland and Mrs Pearson said that was because a lot of people had to leave Ireland in the 1840’s and 50’s because of the potato famine. It was surprising to find that people from America and India ended up having to live in Edmonton.

![Places of birth of non-English inmates](image.png)
Then we looked at how many people were married or single or widowed. We had to ask Mrs Pearson what O meant in the marital status column. She didn't know so she asked the National Archives Office () and they didn't know either! This is what they said:

10:55:32 AM: **Yvonne Pearson:**

I'm looking at the 1881 census of the Edmonton Union Workhouse for a school project. Can you tell me what the abbreviations under Marital status mean? Obviously M is married and W widowed but what about U (unknown?) and O?

10:57:04 AM: **Steven:**

It's always hard to say without the image in front of me. U would be unmarried and O doesn't make any sense to me?

10:57:42 AM: **Yvonne Pearson:**

Most of them are very young so maybe orphaned?

10:58:36 AM: **Steven:**

I have never seen a census page with marital status given for minors

10:59:18 AM: **Yvonne Pearson:**

These are in a workhouse though maybe that's different?

10:59:59 AM: **Yvonne Pearson:**

Albert AMBROSE O 10 M Casual Rochdale, Lancashire

Herbert AMBROSE O 8 M Casual Rochdale, Lancashire

11:00:15 AM: **Steven:**

Orphaned makes no sense under the marital column either way - of course census returns all have their quirks

11:00:28 AM: **Yvonne Pearson:**

That's O for marital status and M for months old by the way

11:01:39 AM: **Steven:**

Yes but entries under marital status for minors is usually left blank and if they are marking them as orphaned then that is a quirk of that enumerator - it is not something entered under census guidelines
Yes but entries under marital status for minors is usually left blank and if they are marking them as orphaned then that is a quirk of that enumerator - it is not something entered under census guidelines.

It was not information that was statistically collected.

We also looked at what sorts of jobs the inmates had. Our favourites were:

Hawker (but sadly it only means that he sold things in the street or door-to-door - nothing to do with hawks!)

Cordwainer (shoe maker)

Scavenger (he just picked up other people’s rubbish and tried to sell it)

Tobacco pouch maker
The first medical director of the workhouse was Mr Hammond. John Keats who was a famous poet and lived in Edmonton was his apprentice. Keats became a doctor at Guy’s Hospital but he gave up and wrote poems instead. On our visit we saw poems by Keats and others on the walls by the lifts.

Angel Road

It caught me up at Forty Hall
followed me to Southgate.
I felt its presence at World’s End
and in Friern Barnet.

I’ll swear it was behind me
as I walked up Silver Street
and I know I’ve seen it from the bus
in Hornsey and Wood Green.

I’ve seen it many times before
in Tottenham and Oakwood
in Haringey or Osidge
and along Salmons Brook.

It’s been shadowing me for years
It’s shadowing me still
from Freezy Water to Bruce Grove
from Enfield Wash to Angel Road

John Davies

The Diverting History of John Gilpin’
by William Cowper (1731-1800)
At the hospital we found out that the only part of the workhouse that was left was the old infirmary that was built in 1909 and we told John Clark at the archive centre that because he thought that nothing was left of the workhouse!

In this picture that we saw at the hospital the Trust building is circled.

This photo was taken in 1917 when the workhouse was turned into a military hospital.

And this is the Trust building now.
The first medical director of the infirmary was called Mr. Hammond and the first building were built in 1909. It had 12 wards and 28 beds. The foundation stone is still there surprisingly! It opened in 1910 and had deep windows and big balconies, the corridors and halls were painted green and white and there was a fully operating theatre.

Maxine who showed us around the hospital told us that there was a magnolia tree that was in the workhouse garden that is still alive. She said that all builders working on the hospital now had to make sure that the tree stays safe.

When we were there it was looking OK!
Hospital
In 1915 the hospital became a military hospital because of the first World War. Large huts were built for 2000 patients! It had a kitchen and it produced 900 to 1000 sausages a day and had an unusual automatic potato peeling machine that cost £29!!!!!
The hospital was renamed the North Middlesex Hospital in 1920.

They built a maternity unit, which held 60 beds, separate from the main hospital in 1921. Because there was no NHS then, patients had to pay to go there.

This picture taken between the wars shows the tennis courts outside the nurses that Maxine told us about.
In 1930 a Radium Department which treated people with cancer was opened. This had to be in a separate building because radium is radio-active and very dangerous (actually it causes cancer!) The Hospital kept about 500 mgm of radium, kept in a special safe lined with 7 inches (175mm) of solid lead protection. Another building was the X-ray Therapy Department which also had walls lined with sheet lead a quarter of an inch (6mm) thick. The operator had to control the X-ray machine from a cabin outside.

The hospital was bombed in World War Two. In 1944 six high explosive bombs fell on the site. There was a lot of damage and people died but they still carried on treating wounded soldiers.
The National Health Service started in 1948 and made hospital treatment free for everyone (before that you had to pay so poor people might not get to hospital).

The hospital had more money so built more wards and departments.

A television programme called Emergency Ward 10 was filmed at the hospital between 1957 and 1967. We watched an episode in school we recognized the hospital but really it was a bit boring!
In 1960 HRH Princess Margaret (the Queen’s sister) opened a new out-patients building because the old one had been hit by a bomb in the war.

They kept adding new buildings and the last of the workhouse buildings (except for the Trust Building) were demolished in 2009. These are some of the buildings including the new maternity unit that was opened by Princess Anne in 2014 and cost £21million.