

BELGIAN WOUNDED AT QUEX PARK
OCTOBER 1914

Account written by **Major Percy Powell-Cotton**
soon after the event

7.45 pm. Wednesday, **October 14th 1914** – rang up by Dr. Worthington (Mrs Cotton answered) to say that a telegram had been received O. H. M. S. from Folkestone asking if Birchington could take 100 wounded that night. Also received messages to the same effect from Mrs Serres, Westgate, Gardner, etc. all of whom received wires as follows:

Folkestone Pier Ril. [Til?] O. H. M. S. 3 address. Handed in 5.20
recd 7.14 Reply pd Chairman Council Birchington.

Please wire immediately Surgeon General Whitehead transport Officer
Folkestone Pier whether you can take tonight 100 wounded waiting
to start. .Colonel Wilson.'

Nearly all above had sent wires in reply. I got Gardner to send one to the effect that Westgate and Birchington could take 100 wounded only. This included all those mentioned in previous wires.

I got in Dallas who sent for Gardner and Sayer, and collected all the men in the Bothy and Knott. They moved the piano and couch into the Drawing room bay, and carried the bronze lion and stand out of the museum, and cleared up the few other things that were there. Meanwhile Gardner (Secretary) was collecting the motor transport. The Westgate V.A.D. agreed to take over this place, and to collect their beds and bedding at once and bring it over. This they did, the first wagon arriving at(time omitted)

They unloaded and arranged in the Drawing room and two Museums. Their people came over in all sorts of cars to help. Rang Enderby Margate Ambulance out of bed, and got him to arrange to send stretcher bearers to Margate Sands Station at midnight, I having, after much trouble, telephoned Folkestone (two different places) and got a reply back at 10.55 to say that 100 wounded were arriving at Margate Sands Station between midnight and 12.30 having left at 10.30

Dr Worthington had arranged for a party of the Birchington bearers to be at St Mary's and Thicket. St Mary's was to take twenty, and the Thicket 20, (Stretcher cases were divided between these two), Mansford House 17, and Quex 41 and two on mattresses. I got out my three camp beds, and there was much hunting for blankets etc.

At half past eleven I went down to the Square in Mr Grant's car with St Nicholas matron and nurse, followed by the two motor ambulances, and found the following fleet :- Walker's white 'bus, capable of taking 16 inside and 18 out; his charabanc, taking 27; taxi taking four inside and one out, and Ford taxi taking four inside and one out; Mrs Watson's car – two inside and one out; Mr Grant's car and Dr Oscar Worthington's – four inside and one out each; Mr Stone's one, and our 2 Ambulances taking four stretchers each with an attendant inside and two sitters outside. All arrived at Margate Sands station just before midnight, to find that the station staff knew nothing of any wounded arriving that night, and were just about to close the station. The ambulance men were there, and by degrees the police and others turned up; also Dr Street from Westgate.

With much difficulty we got through to Folkestone. They stated only one train had left bound for Greenwich, and they knew of no other leaving. The Police, ambulance etc. evidently thought that I had been hoaxed by

someone, or had given way to panic. I produced the official wire, which they agreed appeared in order, and ought to have been acted upon.

While discussing what we could do, news came through from the Margate West station, sent on from Birchington signal box, that they had been advised that a train was arriving via Bickley from Folkestone at 3 am, having left at 11.35 and we all returned to the Square. I left the cars and came to Quex. Found everything practically ready and the place a blaze of light. Advised the nurses to lie down, which I did also.

Went down to the Station at three with Dr Rutherford of Westgate, only to hear that the train was late. It did not leave Folkestone till half past one, was delayed on the way and would not be in till five. Back to Quex, and everybody again lay aside.

Down at five, had homes warmed and was then informed that the Thicket matron had received orders not to take in any Belgians. At 5.20 the train came in – an ordinary train with third class saloons. Two Red Cross men in charge. All were Belgian wounded (which we had not previously known). The men stated they had no list, nor did they even know the number. They had taken out a lot at Bickley, Canterbury, and Herne Bay, and received orders to take the remainder to Westgate. I said they were not to go on to Westgate, I would take them over, and after a demur they agreed. I counted the men out and despatched them to each of the Homes, those to St Mary's (twenty) walked across. [It stands in Beach Avenue near the station.] We found that instead of 100 they had sent 145. Under these circumstances, I sent 55 to Quex instead of 41; 30 to the Thicket where Worthington said he would be responsible for their being received till I could arrange for their removal in the course of the day. The remaining 23 were sent to the Morrison Bell Home. Our two motor ambulances carried – the Delaunay Bellville 15 including the driver, one trip, and the Renault 11. I walked up the village and met them returning. Told them they were through.

Went up to Morrison Bell Home, meeting Gardner, who informed me that the Matron absolutely refused to allow the men in, but had permitted them to sit in the Verandah. It was then raining. I stopped a milk cart and told them at once to take up a gallon, and also bread. None was to be found in Birchington, and somebody went to Westgate to fetch it.

I got up to Quex and helped put down mattresses in the Hall and Armoury for the 12 extra men I had sent. They had hot coffee and bread and butter and fell onto their beds. One said he was sufficiently rested and said he preferred strolling in the open air.

H. [his wife Hannah] went down to see what was happening, told the Matron of Morrison Bell what she thought of her, and phoned to me to send cars and fetch them up to Quex. We set to work and cleared the Dining room. We then collected all spare mattresses and made up two continuous rows on the floor, with blankets and coverlets, and as the men arrived from the Morrison Bell they simply threw themselves down and slept for three or four hours.

I started phoning and arranged with St Peter's to fetch 24 to be put in Fairfield (Norman Craig's house). Margate agreed to take 19, Mansford four more, and St Mary's seven, beds for them being sent from Red Cross House as they arrived.

Meanwhile, H.'s arrangements, only completed the night before, were carried out as to collecting all the promised goods from Birchington, Acol and St Nicholas, Sarre, Monkton and Minster, and all day carts and wagons were arriving with the goods. All worked wonderfully well considering the extremely short notice. I wired Yolland as follows :-

Margate and St Peter's have taken our surplus Belgian wounded. Please officially mobilise Birchington and recognise that Quex, St Mary's

and Mansford House were filled this morning. Morrison Bell declined to take any and the Thicket does not take Belgians.

Kindly communicate by telephone.

and received reply that we might consider ourselves mobilised and it was recognised that we had these wounded. The following wire was received :-

..... [Wire wording is omitted]

Everybody was very hard worked, but the general arrangements went well, and the soldiers appeared very pleased with their reception generally. After the men's dinner we pulled out the grand piano and couch from the Drawing room, and put them in the Museum workshop, putting in additional beds to accommodate thirteen more than I had provided for in the two Museums and Drawing room.

We then replaced the furniture in the Dining room and dined there, the Armoury being turned into a Dining room for the nurses.

At dinner the light suddenly dimmed. Dallas was out, and on H., Ragliss, two Belgian soldiers and self, visiting the engine house, found that the battery was run down. Got Nannio and tried to start the engine, but the Producer would not work. Dallas joined us but he could not make it go. Meanwhile I had been round, had all the lights put out in the house and Museum, and distributed candles. We finally turned in about eleven, dead tired.

16th October. About two o'clock I went down and saw Merryweather's man run the pumps, which went much smoother, although one leaked a little. He said it would require truing up next time it was dismantled. Dallas and the smith got the Producer running, and were clearing up. Got the furniture cleared out of the Pine room to make it an isolation ward for a man to be operated on. Various arrangements and S.A.F.F.A. work.

I heard in the afternoon wild wires were going round as to what had become of the ambulance train and the men on it, which had never arrived at Westgate. At two o'clock two men from Yolland arrived, to whom H. had a good deal to say as to arrangements. They disclaimed all responsibility and said it rested with the War Office.

Had First Aid practice and questions by Brunton. I knew nothing. Supped with Harold 9.30. After I got to bed and sleep, Brunton rang up to say more wounded were expected that night. H. arrived and said we were not taking any more at present.

Bill Weigall rang up at about 9.45 to say that he had been appointed in supreme command of all Belgian wounded in Thanet by the War Office and Red Cross, and was calling a Meeting to have everything arranged.

17th October. Heard that ten wounded had arrived via Bickley from Folkestone, and been put into St Mary's. Spent most of day on lists of soldiers and correspondence.

Heard that the news as the men arriving at Birchington was got accidentally by the Birchington signalman, who after he had shut up, heard the bell ringing and got the message that the train was coming down.

P.P.C.