

EDENHALL HOSTEL

FOR LIMBLESS & OTHER DISABLED SOLDIERS AND SAILORS

Edenhall Hostel was opened in June 1915 under patronage of Queen Alexandra to provide – “a home for men who have lost one or more limbs in the war while substitutes are made, fitted and the men rehabilitated”. The Hostel which was the first of its kind in Scotland and second only to Roehampton accommodated 35-40 men.



Courtesy of Alastair Brooks

The Hostel was run by a Management Committee which included Lady Isobel Douglas Home who had been instrumental in obtaining the use of Edenhall House. It was staffed by volunteers of the Coldstream Red Cross Detachment under Mrs. George Henderson as Matron in Charge, Lt. Col Cathcart RAMC (T) who supervised the fitting of artificial limbs which were made on the premises and volunteer Dr. Henderson of Coldstream.

Men were at first drawn from hospitals in various parts of Scotland, but after the opening of Erskine House near Glasgow, Edenhall became recognised as **the** hospital for the East of Scotland including Orkney and Shetland. The Hostel was supported by Voluntary subscription and from the outset the appeal for funding was led by Lady Isobel Douglas Home. As well as monetary subscriptions, gifts of provisions, clothing, games, puzzles, books etc. were gratefully received.

The Community in Kelso and District was very generous in their giving of such gifts, for example the rural community and schools arranged for the collection of eggs from anyone who could spare them and donated them either to Edenhall Hostel or Newton Don Hospital every week. Fund raising events including concerts & whist drives were held regularly on behalf of both establishments. In addition regular entertainment for the men took place in the form of concerts, picnics, parties, exhibitions etc.

In 1918 an important decision was taken to transfer the Hostel to Musselburgh near Edinburgh. The accommodation at Kelso was proving inadequate for the growing needs of the East of Scotland and the water supply was poor. Pinkieburn House near Edinburgh was purchased and plans were made which would allow accommodation for 100 men. The costs of the alteration, extension and equipment, estimated at £12,000 was given as a grant from the Scottish Branch of the British Red Cross. The new Hostel would retain the name “The Edenhall Hostel” at Pinkieburn, Musselburgh.

During the 3 years that the Hostel functioned in Kelso 987 men were fitted with artificial limbs (including 18 double amputees). By 1919, 1,176 prosthetic legs and 405 arms had been fitted. A farewell concert was held in the Town Hall at Kelso on 18th January 1918. The Hostel was finally vacated on 10th May 1918 when the patients departed by train from Kelso.

By 1919 the number of serving men requiring artificial limbs diminished and it was considered advisable to arrange for the engagement of a paid staff so that the voluntary workers might return to their duties in civil life. The War office decided to hand over the financial responsibilities for running the Hostel to the Ministry of Pensions and to send any remaining serving soldiers still requiring limbs to Erskine House, Renfrewshire.

A farewell party was held in the grounds at Musselburgh, attended by the current inmates and many of the former men as well as the voluntary ladies and Lieut. Col. Cathcart. Following a speech thanking all the volunteers each member of the voluntary staff was presented with a gift from the men.

The Commandant of the Hostel, Mrs. Isobel Douglas-Home and the Matron, Mrs. George Henderson, were both subsequently awarded the Royal Red Cross.

Footnote

Edenhall Hospital Musselburgh, officially taken over by the Ministry of Pensions in 1920, was opened to convalescent cases as well as the limbless.

In the period up to the Second World War it then became the main Ministry of Pensions Hospital in Scotland providing general medical and surgical treatment for war pensioners.

Ensuing Government changes saw the Hospital transferring into the responsibility of Lothian Health Board, being developed as the key Paraplegic hospital for the East of Scotland, having this service centralised in the Southern General Hospital in Glasgow and the other services transferring to the new Midlothian Hospital in 2012. Currently this hospital is closed.

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