

# BROCKENHURST

A World War 1 Hospital  
Village



A Walk Through History



The Importance of Brockenhurst in WWI

In 1914 the War Office designated Brockenhurst a key hospital centre. King George V and Queen Mary visited in November 1914 to see the Lady Hardinge Hospital where 3,500 Indian troops were treated. The soldiers were a common and popular sight in the village (A).

The N° 1 New Zealand General Hospital opened in June 1916. By the end of the war some 21,000 New Zealand troops had also been admitted (B).



Markers indicate the sites of interest. Recommended Parking - at the station or the village centre car park.

Church Lane is a single track road with no public parking.

Approx distances from Station: - Village Centre Car Park (Brookley Road) 0.5km (0.33mi); St Nicholas' Church 0.5km (0.33mi); Balmer Lawn or Forest Park 1.4km (0.8mi). Guidance overleaf is given to timings.

Original map by Potting Shed Cartoons, reproduced by kind permission of New Forest Community Rail Partnership.



**Brockenhurst before WW1**

Brockenhurst life in 1914 was very different from today. There were eight working farms. Men and boys were otherwise mostly employed in timber related industries or the railway. Other villagers worked as servants in large houses, though the wages were not necessarily generous. At the time it was not usual for married women to work but many undertook dressmaking or taking in laundry while cottagers kept pigs, fowl and animals. Finding work was a concern for many.

**WWI, the Hospitals and the Villagers**

In 1914 the Lady Hardinge Hospital was hurriedly opened for Indian troops on several sites locally. In 1915 they were posted to Egypt. In 1916 it became the N°1 HQ New Zealand Hospital. The hospitals recruited villagers as support staff and other people provided fresh eggs, meat, and locally grown vegetables, regarded as something of a treat. The local population also actively engaged in fund raising and ladies made surgical dressings, some of which used sphagnum moss collected from the New Forest by children. Weekly food parcels were sent to fighting units. Notably the villagers also set up a convalescent unit at the Morant Hall.

**The surrounding Forest**

After the battlefield troops must have found the New Forest an idyllic haven. Soldiers wrote of opportunities available to them, including popular activities such as golf, forest picnics and walks in Roydon Wood.

**Local Recruitment & Losses**

The population of Brockenhurst in 1914 was about 2,000. Like the rest of the UK, local men responded to the recruitment campaigns and signed up for military service at a recruitment office set up in Rosetta Cottage at the junction of Brookley Road and Sway Road. In total 79 men from Brockenhurst were killed, 21 of those in the last year of the war alone. The emotional and economic impact was significant for many families.

Find out more from:-  
Brockenhurst Parish Council  
[www.brockenhurst.gov.uk](http://www.brockenhurst.gov.uk) (history page)  
Brockenhurst Church  
[www.brockenhurstchurch.com](http://www.brockenhurstchurch.com)  
Tourism sites  
[www.thenewforest.co.uk](http://www.thenewforest.co.uk) / [www.visit-brockenhurst.co.uk](http://www.visit-brockenhurst.co.uk)

The walk between locations 1 and 4 is a pleasant rural stroll guided by interpretation boards. It provides a feeling of what it was like to arrive at the station from the Western Front and be taken to the hospital at Tile Barn Lane for admission. (Allow 60 minutes plus 30 minutes to view the exhibition inside the Church).

**1. Brockenhurst Railway Station**

Start from the plaque near the ticket office / bus stop.

**2. Commonwealth War Graves**

Information boards are sited in the Churchyard.

**3. St. Nicholas' Church**

The oldest church in the New Forest with a 1000 year old yew tree, St Nicholas' Church is open 10am - 4pm daily. An exhibition commemorates the part played by Brockenhurst in wartime events. A memorial stained glass window, gifted by the people of New Zealand, was unveiled in 2016.

**4. N° 1 New Zealand General Hospital**

500m beyond the Church is the site of the former N°1 New Zealand General Hospital. This can be viewed from the lane and access to the Tile Barn site, now an Activity Centre, is available during normal office hours. At the site entrance is a small plaque illustrating the hospital layout. In 2016 a collection of 'Glamping' Pods was installed for use by present-day service personnel to relax and enjoy.

The walk between locations 5 and 11 forms a pleasant level walk around the village north of the railway. Allow between 90 - 120 minutes plus any time taken to dwell at each site. Why not also pause in Brookley Road to see the famed watersplash or visit our shops and cafes?

**5. WWI Hospital – site of Morant Hall (demolished 1971)**

Provided by the generosity of the Morant Estate the village community hall (then The New Forest Hall) was a large building with extensive grounds. Under an initiative led by the vicar Rev. Arthur Chambers the villagers converted the building into a convalescent annexe to the Royal Victoria Military Hospital, Netley. Later it was integrated into the N°1 NZ General Hospital.

**6. WWI Hospital – Balmer Lawn Hotel**

The hotel was requisitioned as a hospital and mostly used for neurological and eye cases. Surgery was undertaken at the Tile Barn hospital site in Church Lane. Much of the hotel remains as it was at the time especially the dining room that was used as a ward.

**7. Meerut Road**

This pleasant forest fronting road, linked the hospital units at Balmer Lawn and Forest Park. The road name recognises the 7th Meerut Indian Army Division who with the 3rd Lahore Division were the first casualties to arrive in 1914.

**8. WWI Hospital – Forest Park Hotel**

This hotel building was also requisitioned and used for officers. Much of the hotel remains as it was at the time.

**9. Kia Ora Building (Soldiers' Recreation Centre)**

Literally meaning "be well/healthy" the Māori phrase "Kia –Ora" is used in New Zealand as a greeting. The Kia Ora building was redeveloped 2005 as the new Masonic Hall and the symbolic "Silverferns" housing development.

**10. Site of YMCA**

The YMCA building was also used as a recreation centre and was on the site now occupied by Auckland Avenue so named to reflect connections with New Zealand.

**11. The Village War Memorial**

In July 1917 a wooden war shrine was dedicated, subsequently replaced with a more permanent Portland stone memorial on the same site in Sway Road. This was dedicated in June 1921.

**ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) Day**

Australians and New Zealanders who served and died in conflicts are commemorated annually on 25 April around the world. Here in Brockenhurst an ANZAC day service is held at the Commonwealth War Graves on the nearest Sunday in April at 3pm. It is always well attended by villagers of all ages, and many visitors from near and far as well as representatives from New Zealand and Australian High Commissions to the UK.

The New Zealand website  
<http://ngatapuwa.govt.nz>  
provides more resources – follow "Western Front" and the "Brockenhurst" trail

This leaflet was first produced for Brockenhurst's commemoration of the Centenary of WWI and further updated in 2023. Printing of this edition is kindly funded by a local parishioner.

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