



When Marlow Museum opened in 2009, many items of old medical equipment from the Cottage Hospital were given to the museum for safe keeping. Just a few of them are shown here – can you guess what they are? Some of the items look quite frightening, while others raise a smile.

The idea of a cottage hospital in Marlow goes back to at least 1867. The original idea came from Revd Robert Milman, Vicar of Marlow from 1862–1867, before he was consecrated as Bishop of Calcutta, India.

It was over 20 years before the hospital was established, although in August 1877 the Bucks Free Press reported: "It is with great pleasure that we have to announce that there is some chance of our having a Cottage Hospital in Marlow – [which is] so much required – which would confer a great blessing on the poor. "

The first Cottage Hospital in Cambridge House, Cambridge Road, Marlow opened in 1889. (See coloured photo) Previously the building had been a private house and a school for boys. Sister Mary-Anne Cole was seconded from Reading to be in charge and was the only nurse. In its first year the hospital had 25 patients. It was supported by voluntary contributions and cost £200 a year. The catchment area included the parishes of Bisham, Medmenham and Little Marlow as well as Marlow. This hospital continued to serve the medical needs of residents for over 20 years, but in the early 1910s it was beginning to be recognised that a larger establishment was required. In the nine months up to February 1914, 87 patients were admitted for treatment and there were 144 out-patients. Sister Cole remained in post until 1915, having then served the Marlow community for 26 years.

A Charitable Trust was set up in 1913, to re-site the Cottage Hospital to larger purpose-built premises on the corner of Glade Road and Victoria Road (see photo). The new hospital was designed by Gerald Berkeley Wills, a lifelong resident of Marlow, a distinguished architect and a founder member of the Marlow Society. He lived at Wolmer Cottage near Marlow Common, a house built to his own design. The Cottage Hospital was to cost £2000. It was opened by well-known Marlow resident General Sir George Higginson in 1915, using a silver key with its own commemorative box, now held by Marlow Museum (see photo). The Matron of the new hospital was Miss 'Bobby' Schilling (see photo). This was of course well before the start of the NHS so the hospital continued to be maintained by public subscriptions, donations and annual fund-raising activities.

The First World War had a major impact on the Cottage Hospital. A report in June 1918 said "An arrangement has been reached with the Bucks War Pensions Committee whereby the Cottage Hospital Committee have agreed to admit, for after-care and treatment, men invalided out of the Navy and Army, and they feel sure that subscribers will sympathise with this arrangement." However, the hospital was ill-prepared for the influx of wounded patients from the Forces and the Trust's accounts were hit hard. The old Cambridge Road building was used during much of WWI, but the War Office Authorities vacated it at the end of October 1917 and in January 1918 the premises were re-let to a private tenant at a rental of £40. The Cottage Hospital in Victoria Road continued to be run by the Trust's strict rules and financed by donations until after WW2. In the 1930s it was estimated that the hospital cost £1000 a year to run. In 1948 the NHS was set up and took over control of the hospital.

In 1967 the Doctors' House surgery was opened to meet the needs of the community and a League of Hospital Friends was formed to raise funds for the continued development of the hospital. It was to be known as Marlow Community Hospital. In 1991 an extension creating a Day Room and Examination Rooms was opened by Princess Diana, (see photo) who was able to use the same key that General Higginson had used in 1915. Miss Bobby Schilling had married the hospital Treasurer and their daughter kept the key until 1991 when she gave it back to the hospital.

Della Fitzgerald, with thanks to the Riley Park Trust, Bucks Free Press and MyMarlow.