

**“Little Folks” Convalescent Home
at Woking, 1940-45**

by

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INTRODUCTION

The “Little Folks” Convalescent Home was the country branch of the Queen’s Hospital for Children. The Hospital was founded in Bethnal Green in 1867 as the Dispensary for Women and Children.¹ In 1911, a country branch for convalescent children - the Little Folks Home - was opened in Bexhill-on-Sea.

At the outbreak of World War Two, it was decided to evacuate the Home from Bexhill-on-Sea; it was relocated to Woking, Surrey in 1940, where it stayed until the end of the war.

ORIGINS

The Dispensary for Women and Children in Virginia Road, Bethnal Green, was founded in 1867 by two Quaker sisters, Ellen and Mary Philips, in the wake of a cholera epidemic. It was soon decided that only children should be treated; the following year, work was transferred to 125 Hackney Road, as the North-Eastern Hospital for Children. The Hospital had 12 cots.

In 1870, the freehold of a building on the corner of Hackney Road and Goldsmiths Row was acquired and the Hospital moved there. During the late 19th century, new ward buildings were added and the hospital was greatly expanded.

The hospital was renamed the Queen's Hospital for Children in 1907.²



Figure 1. Hospital at Hackney Road

In 1911, a country branch for convalescent children - the Little Folks Home - was opened in Bexhill-on-Sea.

¹ *Lost Hospitals of London*, <https://ezitis.myzen.co.uk/queenelizabethhackney.html>

² A ten-minute film about the hospital, made in 1939, can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpJ6KXV228Y>

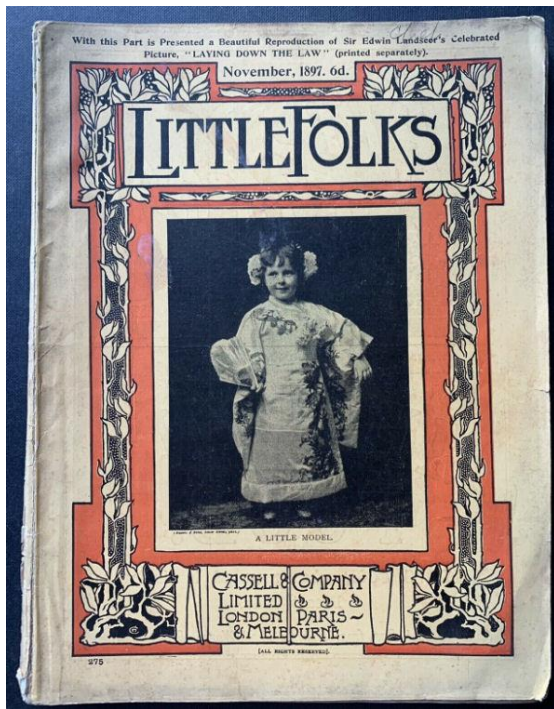


Figure 2. 1897 edition of *Little Folks*

Little Folks was a 'magazine for the young' published by Cassell & Co. in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was based in London, but an American edition was also published.

Little Folks began in 1871 and ran until 1933.

Thomas Young was a journalistic business manager. Having previously worked on the *Dundee Courier* and *Sheffield Telegraph*, he joined the management of Cassell & Co., publishers, in 1908³, becoming Managing Director just before the First World War.

An appeal for funds for the Queen's Hospital for Children was made, by Miss Bella Sidney Woolf (later Mrs R H Lock)⁴, through the pages of the *Little Folks* magazine to its readers. The idea was to raise sufficient money to buy additional beds or cots for the hospital. The response was so great that the fund was able to pay for an entire new ward for the hospital.

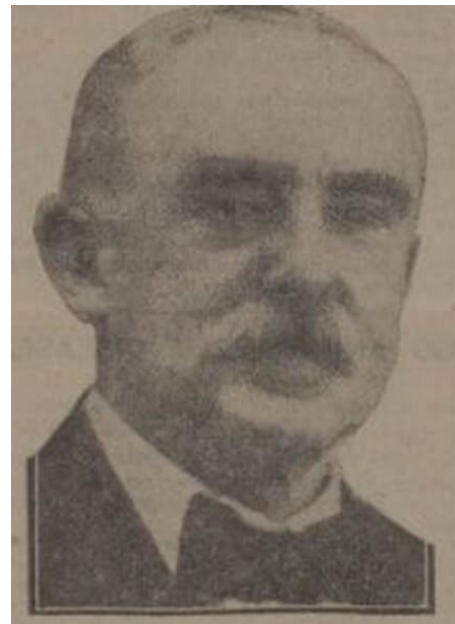


Figure 3. Thomas Young 1868-1943

When additional space was required, further appeals were made, producing £3,200 – half the sum required for the new home.

The Home was opened on 13th July 1911. HRH Princess Louise was due to perform the ceremony but, three days prior to the event, had to pull out on the advice of her doctors. The mayor of Bexhill, Alderman Paton, stepped in to cut the ribbon.

³ *The History of Cassell Publishing*, <https://curiosmith.com/pages/cassell-publishing>

⁴ Sister-in-law of Virginia Woolf https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bella_Sidney_Woolf



Figure 4. The Home at Bexhill-on-Sea

The Home was for children of both sexes aged from three to fourteen, who had been patients of the Queen's Hospital for Children, London; they could stay for up to 50 days. In 1929 there were 257 patients and 36 beds, of which 34 were occupied on average.

MOVE TO WOKING

Thomas Young later became Chairman of Cassell & Co. (publishers of *Little Folks* magazine), a position he held until just before his death. He was appointed one of the managing directors of Amalgamated Press (which bought up a number of Cassell's magazine titles) in 1926.

Thomas was involved in many charitable causes, but the Little Folks Home was particularly close to his heart and he became chairman of its management committee in about 1920.

Initially, Bexhill was identified as a safe place at the outbreak of the Second World War and received over 700 evacuated children from London. This changed in early 1940 when frequent air-raids began along the south coast.

When the Little Folks Home started looking for a new location, Thomas Young gave them his own home - as an outright gift. This was *Brackendene* in Woodham Rise, Woking. The Home at Bexhill had 44 beds; although the number available at *Brackendene* was fewer, 'was sufficient to make the home an important branch of the work'.⁵

⁵ *Surrey Advertiser* 18 January 1941



Figure 5. Location of *Brackdene*
1912 OS Plan (Woodham Rise then called Albany Road)

It is not clear exactly when the Home moved. Advertisements for staff at Bexhill appeared in the local press as late as July 1940, whilst advertisements for staff at Woking appeared in December that year. The matron at Woking was Miss Dorothy Irene Hook.

The Home continued to be supported by collections and donations (this was before the time of the NHS). In 1939, the cost of maintenance for a year was £3000. Each cot sported a plaque with the name of the appropriate sponsor upon it (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Postcard

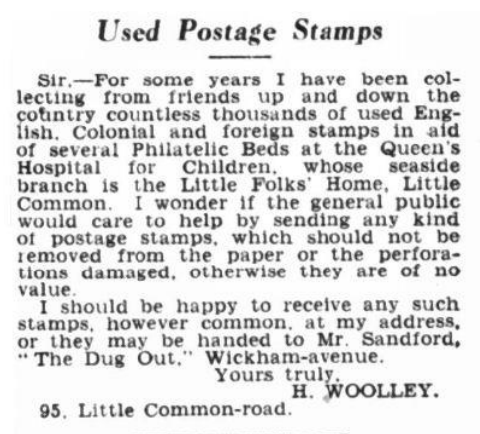


Figure 7. Letter to *Bexhill Observer*,
1940

One of the war-time patients at Woking was Maureen Armistead, an inmate of the Royal Alexandra Orphanage. Her recollections were published in 2016⁶:

“Then came the War and the school was evacuated to Bedford where children were billeted with private families. I didn’t go to Bedford. I went to stay in a large house in Woking (namely Brackendene, Woodham Rise, Woking). Together with Beryl Wise who had asthma, Valerie Rivers who had her leg in a plaster after breaking her ankle, and another girl of about my age whose name I cannot remember. There were two older girls, one being Doreen Lidstone.

The house belonged to Mr and Mrs Young, and although I have enquired I have never found out what connection Mr and Mrs Young had with the Orphanage, or why I was sent there. Maybe because we each had health problems - as I was first getting over an eye operation.

Shortly arriving at Brackendene, Mrs Young arranged for the soldiers to come and take away a full sized billiard table and the billiard room became our playroom and also school room where Mrs Young taught us from text books. We had a maid called Annie⁷ (in maids uniform) who supervised us, more like a house mother, but Mrs Young always supervised our prayers in our bedroom where there were four beds (Doreen had a room elsewhere) and always 'tucked each of us up' before going to her own dinner. She always dressed for dinner and I still remember the soft velvet of her dark red dress.

We attended church on Sundays, taken by the chauffeur 'Rutland' in I imagine to be a Daimler. It was yellow and black. Maybe it was Mr Rutland, but we only knew him as Rutland⁸. We were allowed to play in the beautiful garden, but not allowed in the kitchen garden. Whilst there, Mrs Young invited our relatives to visit and my late mother often spoke of what 'a lovely lady' Mrs Young was, and how kind it was of her to give each visitor a large amount of fruit and vegetables to take home.

I am not sure how long I stayed with Mrs Young but after the Christmas holiday which I spent at home, I joined the rest of the school ...”

Mrs Young was Mary Mona Young, Thomas’s second wife and 26 years younger than him. She was probably born Mary Mona Paterson, but no record of any marriage has been found. Thomas’s first wife, Margaret, had died in 1931.

**THE LITTLE FOLKS HOME,
Brackendene, Woodham Rise, Woking,
Surrey.**
IMPORTANT WAR-TIME OCCUPATION.
Two Resident Maids aged 15½ or over
required for the above Children's Con-
valescent Home. Commencing salary
£45, with full residential emoluments.—
Apply personally or by letter to the
Matron.

Figure 8. Advertisement for staff, 1943

⁶ *The Gattonian*, February 2016

⁷ Annie Louise Brown, aged 56, is listed as a maid in the 1939 Register

⁸ In the 1939 Register, Herbert Thomas Rutland, aged 38, is listed as 'chauffeur/gardener'

Thomas Young died suddenly on 27th November 1943, at *Bibury*, his house in Cobham, to which he had moved when he gave *Brackendene* to the Home. Mary continued to work at the Home until it left Woking, taking over from her late husband as chairman of the Woking branch.⁹ In 1945, she was living in Heathside Road.

At the end of the war, the Home moved back to its original building in Bexhill, reopening there in October 1945.

Brackendene was demolished [in about 1970] and the houses of Brackendene Close built.



⁹ *Surrey Advertiser* 8 July 1944

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