

The Landmark Trust

WINSFORD COTTAGE HOSPITAL, HALWILL JUNCTION

Winsford Cottage Hospital, listed Grade II*, was designed by the influential architect and designer, C. F. A. Voysey (1857-1941). Voysey designed many houses for his private clients, but Winsford is his only hospital, and its style is entirely representative of his distinctive approach.

A century before the National Health Service was created in 1948, the prospects for the sick or elderly in rural areas were bleak. Doctors' fees were high and the few general hospitals were large and often unsanitary places in distant cities. For want of proper care, ordinary people often died at home from entirely treatable conditions. Hospitals and workhouses were often combined in the same impersonal large institution providing treatment for the sick alongside shelter for the poor and needy.

Representing a more humane approach, the advent of cottage hospitals from the 1860s transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, providing clean and homely settings for care close to home. The first cottage hospital was in Cranleigh, Surrey, founded in 1859 by a GP called Albert Napper. Cranleigh featured in detail in *Cottage Hospitals, General, Fever and Convalescent: Their Progress, Management and Work*, a popular book by Henry C. Burdett. It became fashionable for wealthy philanthropists to build and endow such establishments on their own estates. The Halwill Junction cottage hospital, built in 1898, was quite a late example.

Winsford Hospital was named after Winsford Tower, the estate of its benefactress, Maria Medley. Winsford Tower was an undistinguished late-Victorian pile, built in the 1880s by George and Maria Medley, close to the railway that arrived in the village in 1879. The Medleys were a wealthy London couple: George had made his money on the Stock Exchange, much of it from railway shares. When George died in 1898, Maria (known to all as Molly) built this cottage hospital in his memory, to serve twelve parishes in this remote part of North Devon. Until then, locals had to travel to Okehampton or even Exeter for medical treatment, or stay at home. Rural living conditions as recorded in 1880 by the local medical officer, Dr. Thomas Linnington Ash, were dreadful. He found many dwellings 'literally hovels of mud.' At Winsford Hospital, they could receive medical treatment closer to home for the first time.

The Winsford Hospital reflects, on a modest scale, all the characteristic features of the private houses Voysey built for his wealthy clients. It feels like a house rather than a medical institution in scale and design detail, low and horseshoe-shaped. The long ribbon of simple stone mullioned windows gives a strong horizontal emphasis; its sweeping Delabole slate roof with rendered chimney stacks and prominent eaves give as sense of warmth and welcoming shelter. Inside and out, white walls are accented by woodwork painted a dark green. Voysey liked to design every detail of his houses, and this was also true for Winsford Hospital, where his fireplaces (with his signature elongated hearts), delightful air vent covers of whimsical birds and trees, doors and window latches have survived decades of NHS use. So too has the mosaic floor of glazed sandstone tiles, running up the skirtings for ease of cleaning.

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205

Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417 Website www.landmarktrust.org.uk

The hospital's single storey floorplan, all on a single level, reflects the needs of the patients. The wards face south towards the views and the sun; treatment and consulting rooms lead off a central corridor. In scale, the hospital could easily be mistaken for a middling-sized house rather than a medical institution, and Voysey's plans show only seven beds in the four wards, very small even by cottage hospital standards. By 1906 this had risen to nine beds, and by the time the hospital closed in 1998, to fifteen. Men and women were cared for in different wings and the wash house, mortuary and fuel store were placed beyond the main hospital range, all as recommended by Henry Burdett.

Visitors from across England flocked to see the hospital when it opened, and the Visitors' Book records their reactions. One wrote 'If I am to be ill, please may I be brought here'. Many said how much they would like to live here permanently.

When war came in 1914, Winsford tended the sick and wounded from the Front. They convalesced sitting peacefully on the sunny, south facing veranda, looking out across a rose garden to the rolling Devon countryside beyond. When peace returned, the hospital returned to serving the community and a charitable trust was set up in the 1920s. After the NHS was founded in 1948, Winsford Hospital was absorbed too, and became primarily a maternity unit. It remained in use as a hospital until 1998, when the local health authority prioritised Holsworthy Community Hospital and put Winsford on the market, to the distress of local residents. A League of Friends was formed and managed to arise the deposit and then the purchase price, and the Winsford Trust was founded to keep the building in community use. Despite their best efforts, the struggle to cover their running costs proved too great and in 2012, they turned to the Landmark Trust for help.

Voysey's original design survives surprisingly unaltered but serious maintenance was long overdue. With a generous grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Heritage Enterprise scheme, Landmark has restored Winsford Cottage Hospital, creating a holiday let for six people at the west end of the building. The east end is reserved for community use, providing an information room about Voysey, and a meeting room and a treatment room for ancillary health practitioners to hire.

The building has been re-roofed and a great deal of render and internal plaster have been replaced. During the NHS years, the golden mosaic floor that runs the length of the hospital had been covered by fitted carpet laid on a hard screed, and all this has been painstakingly chipped away by a loyal band of volunteers. Many of Voysey's original fixtures and fittings remain, and we have reinstated them where they were missing, to present the building's fabric more or less as it was at the outbreak of the Great War.

From now on, maintenance costs will be chiefly met by the hundreds of Landmarkers who stay in the building each year, and Winsford Cottage Hospital can continue to play its part in the life of the local community, just as Molly Medley originally wished.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Winsford Cottage Hospital sleeps up to 6 people. To book it or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit www.landmarktrust.org.uk. To hire the community rooms at Winsford Cottage Hospital, please see the same website or email winsford@landmarktrust.org.uk