

WILLIAM WISKING and the IRISH HOSPITAL

William Wisking was born in London on 24 December 1847.

For his service in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, William Wisking was awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal bars Cape Colony, Orange Free State and Johannesburg; engraved SRVT: W. WISKING. IRISH HOSPITAL



The IRISH HOSPITAL.

In December 1899, Lord Iveagh ¹ made a proposal to the War Office that he establish and equip a 100 bed mobile hospital for service in South Africa. The unique feature of this proposal was that the hospital was to have its own transport able to support functional flexibility.

Though most of the personnel and equipment left London on 3 February 1900 aboard the *SS. Montford*, Sir William Thomson, the Chief Surgeon and others traveled by mail steamer which, arriving ahead of the main party, facilitated their establishing the unit at Green Point camp. Shortly thereafter, they proceeded to Naauwpoort, arriving there on 10 March 1900.

De Villiers lists the following senior staff: Captain W Mould, Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) (Administrative officer)²; Sir William

¹ Edward Cecil Guinness, 1st Earl of Iveagh, KP., GCVO., FRS (10 November 1847-7 October 1927) was an Irish businessman and philanthropist. Until 1889, he was manager of Guinness, the family brewing business in Dublin, later becoming the Chairman of the Board. In 1900, Rupert Edward Cecil Lee Guinness, his son, served in the Anglo-Boer War with the Irish Hospital Corps.

² William Thomas Mould. Registered 22 February 1887; MRCS Eng 1887, LRCP Lond 1887. S., afterwards S. Capt., 1 Feb. 1890. R.A.M.C. Capt. 1 Feb. 1890. Maj. 1 Feb. 1902. Lt. Col.

Thompson (Chief Surgeon)³; Dr G Stoker ⁴(Assistant Surgeon); Dr JB Coleman ⁵(Physician), Mr. A Friel ⁶(Surgeon/Radiographer); Mr. FB Counihan ⁷ (Surgeon); Mr. J Pouden ⁸ (Surgeon); Mr. Percy Stewart, Mr. JE MacElwaine, Mr. Douglas S Thomson and Mr. ED Edwards (Dressers). The Hon. Rupert Guinness and Colonel FW Nixon, RE (Rtd.) accompanied the hospital as financial commissioners.

Though initially nursing sisters were not planned to be appointed, eventually the hospital had a Matron, A.M. MacDonnell, and 26 nursing sisters attached to the Army Nursing Service. Two NCO's of the RAMC, four ambulance officers of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade (SJAB), 12 ward orderlies (first grade), 12 ward orderlies (second grade) of the SJAB, six servants (including a cook and female servant), a secretary and a treasurer completed the staff compliment. William Wisking was amongst these people.

Following a request from Lord Kitchener, the Irish Hospital provided 5 ambulance wagons and the necessary personnel to accompany an expedition to Prieska. Traveling via De Aar, they established a stationary hospital at Britstown, established a small hospital at Upwater and then moved on via Doringbergfontein and Karabeek to Prieska where they arrived on 21 March 1900. After a march of some 230 miles, they returned to De Aar at the end of March and then set off to Norvalspont.

Meanwhile, the main hospital at Naauwpoort remained unused during that month anticipating a move to Bloemfontein. Eventually, Sir William Thomson was ordered to Norvalspont, *en route* met those returning from Prieska, and together they marched to Bloemfontein, reaching there on 11 April 1900[sic].

8 May 1912. Col. 1 Mar. 1915. Sierra Leone 1898- 1899. South Africa 1900- 1902. b. at Forton, Gosport, 12 July 1865. As would be expected, his name does not appear on the Irish Hospital Medal Roll.

³ Sir William Henry Thompson (1860-1918) KBE 1918, MRCS 1887 FRCS 1890 MD RUI 1883 ScD Dublin 1904 MRCP 1906 FRCPI 1914. In these biographical notes (Plarr's *vide infra*) no mention is made of his sojourn in South Africa. In 1914, he resigned his fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons "in consequence of his having been elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, and thereby having become subject to a by-law of that College forbidding him to be a Fellow of any College of Surgeons". Honourably, he enclosed a cheque of ten guineas, the fee payable by a Fellow on resignation in accordance with Section XVIII of the by-laws. He died by drowning on the 9 October 1918 whilst in his bunk aboard the *Leinster* torpedoed by a German submarine.

⁴ George Stoker CMG. of Mayfare, London (1914). Registered 1 September 1878; LRCS Irel LKQCP Irel 1878.

⁵ James Byrne Coleman CMG. of N. Dublin (1914) Registered 1 November 1889; MB BCh MS 1889 MD 1897 RU Irel M 1898 F 1899 RCP Irel

⁶ Alfred Richard Friel of 25 Kapteijn St., Johannesburg (1914). Registered 3 July 1894; MB ChB 1894 MD 1895 U Dubl FRCS Irel 1896. Registered in SA 1902; record states MB ChB 1895 MD DPH 1897 U Dubl FRCS Irel 1898. Settled in Lombard ST., Potchestroom. Naturalization 1910 TAB CIO 8.N666. Married Sophia née Seikingo. Died 1959 TAB MHG 3416/59

⁷ Francos Borough Counihan of Krugersdorp (1914) Registered 12 February 1898; MB ChB 1897 U Dubl. Settled in Krugersdorp. Married Emmie Mary née Wood. Died 1915 TAB MHG 27901

⁸ John Colley Pouden of Gorey, Co. Wexford (1914) Registered 20 December 1899; MB ChB 1899 MD 1900 U Dubl.

Welcomed by a group of leading citizens,⁹ Lord Roberts's force occupied Bloemfontein on 13 March 1900. They brought with them ten field hospitals and ten bearer companies. Almost immediately enteric fever (typhoid) broke out amongst the troops and prisoners, the aetiology being the consumption of polluted water at Paardeberg. Throughout its history, very few admissions were ever attributable to war casualties.

The only available accommodation for the typhoid patients in Bloemfontein were the field hospitals and a few buildings that had to be appropriately equipped. Within two weeks, 620 beds were scattered amongst the Raadzaal, the Industrial Home, the Artillery Barracks, St Michael's Home and the attached Cottage Hospital, Grey College, Upper Dames Institute, Lower Dames Institute, the Greenhill Convent, the Volks Hospital, and the old St Andrews College. Initially, all these facilities were staffed by No. 10 General Hospital. No. 5 Stationary Hospital from De Aar plus three general hospitals, Nos. 8, 9 and 10, arrived late March into mid-April together with three privately-funded hospitals, the Langman, the Irish from Naauwpoort and the Portland. The latter three provided accommodation for a further 300 patients; and brought to a reputed 1,960 the number of patients that could be accommodated at any one time.

Two hospital trains which had been operating along the lines of communication in the Cape Colony reached Bloemfontein on 2 and 8 April 1900 respectively and the evacuation of patients from the town continued regularly after these dates.

Already in January 1900, at the request of Lord Roberts responding to criticism from the medical profession, *The Times* newspaper sent Mr. W Burdett-Coutts as a special correspondent to observe the medical situation in South Africa. He, after some weeks spent in Bloemfontein, wrote articles in late April 1900 and again at the end of June 1900 which created a furor at home.

These reports led to the appointment of a five-man Royal Commission, led by Lord Justice Romer, which took evidence in South Africa visiting Bloemfontein from 31 August to 4 September 1900 during which 60 people testified. Prominent amongst the complaints were three hospitals in particular, the field hospital of the 12th Brigade and the Nos. 8 and 9 General Hospitals.

As, at that time, the private hospitals housed comparatively few patients beyond the number for which they were equipped, the Commission considered that these hospitals were well managed in general, kind consideration being given to the comfort of the patients.

On 10 May 1900, that part of the hospital under Sir William Thompson and consisting of 10 wagons, four large tortoise tents and seven square bell tents, left to join Lord Roberts at Kroonstad. Here they joined the 11th Division for the advance to Pretoria. They entered Pretoria on 6 June 1900, the day after its occupation by Roberts. It was the first private hospital to enter the capital of the ZAR.

⁹ Dr B.O. Kellner (mayor), Mr JG Brebner, Dr Wolffe Ehrlich, Mr J Fraser, Mr. HFD Papenfus (landroost/magistrate)



The Irish Hospital at the Palace of Justice, Pretoria
Hanson Family Album courtesy of Prof. J C de Villiers

Chairman of the Refugee Committee in Pretoria, Mr. Leigh Wood, suggested using the newly completed Palace of Justice as accommodation. By 14 June 1900, already they had admitted 83. By 10 July 1900, the ever-increasing demand for their services had caused the original hospital capacity of 100 beds to be extended to 500 beds. For such dramatic expansion to occur the Irish Hospital had to receive assistance from the Military as they were the only British hospital in Pretoria at that stage. Military hospitals soon had to assist with staff.

On the day of the Battle of Silkaatsnek and the Action at Dwarsvlei (11 July 1900), the official opening of the hospital by Lord Roberts took place, attended by high ranking military officers and even included the wives of Boer generals Louis Botha and Lucas Meyer.

The persistent pressure on beds led to Surgeon-General Wilson ¹⁰ eventually to comment unfavorably its siting, construction, the poor hygiene and indiscipline. The Hospital admitted its last patient on 30

¹⁰ Sir William Deane Wilson. KCMG. Reg 1867; MB U Dubl. 1866 L., LM 1867 RCS Irel. A.S. Staff, 1 Oct. 1867: 107 F. 3 June 1868. A.M.D., S., 1 Oct. 1867. S.M. 1 Oct. 1879. Special promotion S.M. ranking as Lieut. Col. 20 May 1884. Brig. S., afterwards. Brig. S. Lieut. Col., 28 Oct. 1889. S. Col. 18 July 1894. R.A.M.C. Col. 18 July 1894. S.G. 3 Oct. 1898. r.p. 1 Jan. 1904 having been continued on Active List as Supernumerary to the Establishment under R.W. of 26 Oct. 1900. Afghan 1878-1880. Egypt 1882-1884. Soudan 1884. South Africa 1899-1902. K.C.M.G. 1900. [R.] 1907. b. 27 Aug. 1843. M.B., Dub. 1866. He was P.M.O. during South African War, 1899-1902.

September 1900 and the staff left for England on 15 October 1900, leaving 180 patients in the hospital in the care of the military medical authorities. The Irish Hospital was finally closed in November 1900.

GENEALOGY OF WILLIAM WISKIN[G]

1 James Wiskin m. Charlotte

1.1 James Wiskin(g) b. 5 November 1823 ~ 8 February 1824 St. Dunstan, Stepney, London m. Sarah

At the time of the 1881 Census in England, James Wiskin was living alone, a widower at 2 Regent Cottages, London, Middlesex. The 1881 Census of England and Wales has the following entry:

Name	Relation	Marital Status	Gender	Age	Birthplace	Occupation
James WISKIN	Head	W	Male	57	London, Middlesex	Engine Driver

1.1.1 William Wisking b. 24 December 1847 ~ 21 March 1855 St. Thomas Charterhouse, Finsbury London

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- 4) South African Archives Repository, Cape Town
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