

**Metropolitan Convalescent Hospital, Walton-on-Thames. Coloured wood engraving, 1854, after J. Clarke.**

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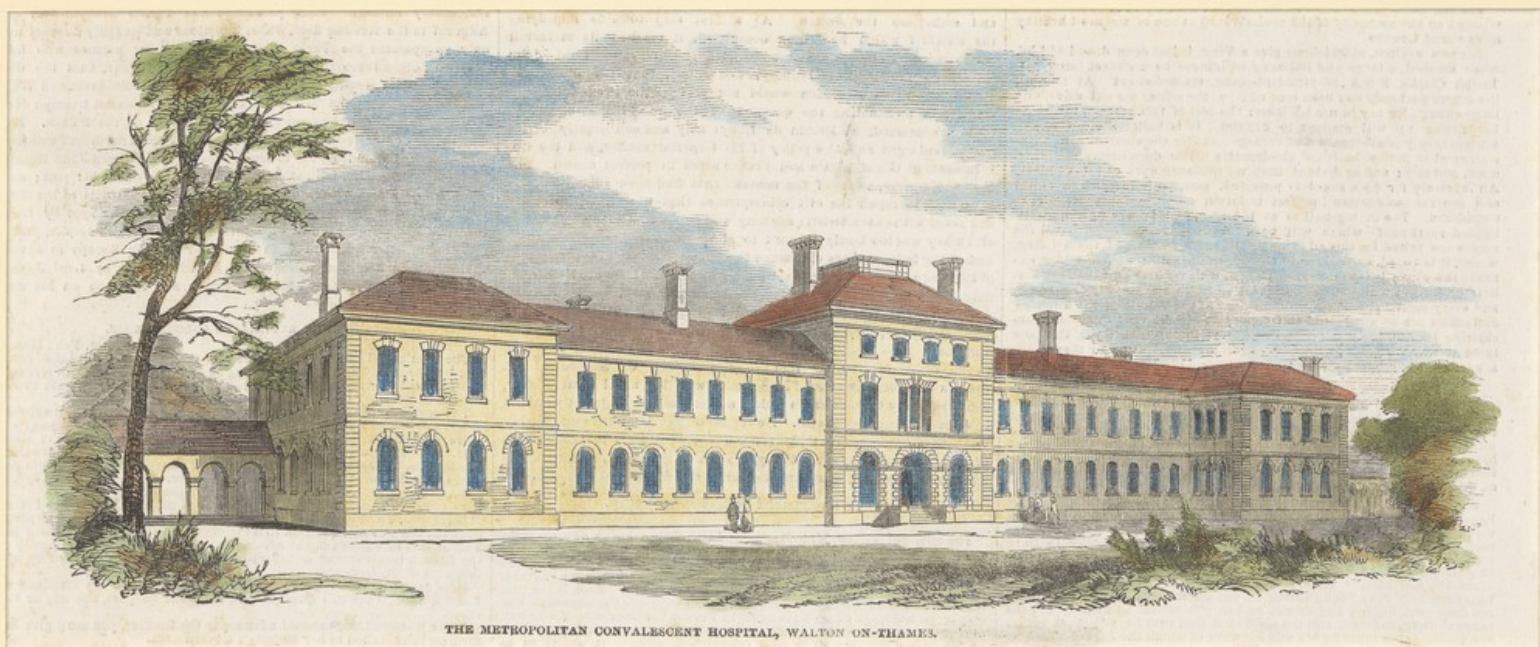
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THE METROPOLITAN CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL, WALTON ON-THAMES.



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# THE METROPOLITAN CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL.

ALL who have attended to the manifold evil-besetting the lot of the labouring poor in London and other great cities, are familiar with one of wide prevalence, for which, until lately, no remedy was sought to be provided. It is that state of general weakness usually termed Convalescence, which, though short of actual disease, equally with disease incapacitates for labour.

This state, indeed, is to the poor often a more grievous misfortune than even sickness itself. When struck down by actual disease, the doors of dispensaries and hospitals are always open to them; and in the latter establishments more particularly, they are supplied not merely with the best medical advice, but with most of the comforts which the wealthy enjoy in their own houses. When, however, after having derived all the benefit which medical skill can supply in the hospital, they are necessarily discharged, they are frequently thrown into a position more distressing than ever. Many, no doubt, are discharged perfectly restored to health, and able at once to return to their daily labour; but a large proportion are still feeble and depressed, although free from actual disease. If in this state they resume their labours, as they are often forced to do, they speedily break down, and are compelled once more to seek shelter in an hospital, with a greatly diminished chance of recovery.

What these poor people want are not hospital comforts, however liberally bestowed, nor medicines, however skillfully prescribed; but the natural restorative of fresh country air, good food, gratis exercise out of doors, and that mutual quiet and freedom from anxiety which cannot possibly be the lot of the labouring man while struggling at once against poverty and bodily weakness. And by the poor such restoratives can only be found in special charities provided for the purpose. Of this kind, and the only one in existence, is the Metropolitan Convalescent Institution.

The idea of a refuge for the convalescent poor originated in the year 1840; and, though at first carried out on a very limited scale, in merely opening a few rooms to the cottages of a village in the neighbourhood of London, it soon gradually expanded, and a sum was raised large enough to justify the promoters of the charity to take and fit up the old workhouse, at Canhampton, where it has increased from time to time and flourished to such an extent that it has now passed through its thirtieth state, and is about to occupy a noble asylum, just erected, at Watlingtonham.

Through the generous gift of the noble president, the Earl of Ellesmere, five acres of valuable ground have been secured to the charity; and by the response to the appeal made to the public charity a sum was raised large enough to justify the committee in commencing the new work, and, adding still further on that new system of personal charity which sacrifices itself for the relief of others, the novel plan of opening the Asylum without a paid dinner has been resorted to, believing that there are more who will sympathize with poverty in one of its most grievous forms through such an opportunity than in giving under the influence of those feelings, which, thanks to the spirit of the age, are believed to be distasteful to very many of its supporters.

The site forms a part of the well-known Ostland-park, and has been selected on the authority of the medical staff as one of the most healthy spots round London.

The new Asylum, of which we give a View, is just opened, and will be, when finished, a large and imposing building—the architect being Mr. Joseph Clarke, F.R.S., of Stratford-place, Oxford-street. At present, the centre part only has been erected; but the offices are extensive, and large enough for any future addition; the cost of this portion, including the fitting up, will amount to £12,000. It is built fire-proof, and contains every convenience and arrangement for the comfort and reinstatement to perfect health of the inmates. The dormitories are large, open, and airy; and so divided that no inconvenience can take place. An infirmary for both sexes is provided, and, both in the day-rooms and even in the dormitories, perfect isolation, and the wants of each are considered. The dining-hall is at the rear, and is a large and well-lighted apartment, which will be used as well for a chapel, till the means are raised for the addition to the completeness of the building, which, it is hoped, some day may be accomplished—a wide corridor extends the whole length of each division, which forms an excellent ambulatory in wet weather. The ventilation has been carefully considered, and every means provided for the heating of the building; the kitchens and offices are as ample and satisfactory as can be well imagined, considering how materially they are necessary to the recovery of the poor inmates, who very soon, with the good living and the fine air they enjoy, are restored to robust health and fit for their daily toil.