

## THE CATHERINE GLADSTONE HOME, MORDEN

In the archives of the Royal London Hospital, Whitechapel Road, there are three files of cuttings, photographs, notebooks etc relating to an institution which was a landmark in Morden for more than 40 years.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Catherine Gladstone was the wife of William Ewart Gladstone, the 19th-century Liberal leader who was four times prime minister. In the cholera outbreak in East London in 1866 she made daily visits to the London Hospital, and as a result of what she saw she set up an orphanage for children who had lost their parents to this dreadful disease. The information in the file states that the institution was in Watford, but this was not so. It was first at Clapton, but soon moved to Woodford Hall on the edge of Epping Forest.<sup>4,5</sup> This was a handsome Georgian house with a wing at each side and large grounds. (From 1840 to 1848 it had been the home of William Morris, as a boy.)

As it turned out, thanks to cleaner water and much improved sewage disposal, the outbreak of 1866 was the last such in London, and provision for 'cholera orphans' was no longer needed. The home became Mrs Gladstone's Convalescent Home - for women and children of the East End.

Though imposing, Woodford Hall may have been becoming dilapidated, for c. 1897 it was demolished. However, new premises for the Home had been found, at Morden, in the shape of Ravensbury Park House. This large gaunt structure had been built in 1864 by George Parker Bidder the railway engineer,<sup>6</sup> who had died in 1878 and who had sold the estate the year before to his eldest son, also George Parker Bidder. After the death in 1896 of the latter the house and most of its land came on the market.

The Home moved in, continuing, as before, to depend on subscriptions for its support. During the 1914-18 war it was a military hospital, and then in 1922 there was a crisis in its affairs. It was offered, as premises and furniture, to the London Hospital as an annexe, with an endowment of £20,137. The hospital could not afford to accept and referred the trustees to the 'Marie Celeste' Samaritan Society. This charity had been set up in 1791 by Sir William Blizard to provide social welfare services at the London Hospital. The name 'Marie Celeste' was added in 1899 as a memorial to the wife of a generous benefactor. The Society had just closed its own home at Whipps Cross. Under the new arrangement the committee of the Society would act as agents for the London Hospital in running the Home. The Society paid for structural alterations, new furniture and (new) electric lighting.<sup>2</sup>

To mark the occasion there was an opening ceremony on 19 November 1923, performed by Sir William Joynson-Hicks Bart., Minister of Health. It was widely reported in national and local papers and in the nursing press. A special feature appeared in *The Commercial Motor*, as the Samaritan Society had taken delivery of a new Lancia ambulance to bring patients from the East End to this country convalescent home.

The Home (or 'Homes' as it was usually called) was set in seven acres of grounds, including orchard and kitchen garden. There was room for 42 patients - 28 women and girls and 12 children, plus an isolation bed and an isolation cot. The Home continued to depend on subscriptions for most of its income, and the matron's cash-book for 1919-23<sup>3</sup> lists some of these (including donations from the Duke of Westminster and Viscount Cobham) as well as accounts with local (Mitcham) tradesmen.

The archives contain a number of photographs, from the late 1930s, showing patients in the grounds - on beds, in deckchairs, women knitting in the sunshine, children on swing-seats or being pushed in wicker carriages.

In 1940, following the outbreak of the second World War, the Samaritan Society closed down the Home. Later in the 1940s the house was demolished and the site was soon covered with houses. The Catherine Gladstone Home stood close to where Seddon Road meets Bishopsford Road.



JG

*Catherine Gladstone Home, Morden  
postcard view from the north-east*

1. Royal London Hospital Archives LH/P/2/68.
2. Royal London Hospital Archives LH/D/4/21
3. Royal London Hospital Archives SS/F/102.
4. J Thorne *Handbook to the Environs of London* (1876) reprinted by Godfrey Cave Associates 1983 p.736
5. H V Wiles *William Morris of Walthamstow* The Walthamstow Press, London 1951 pp.6-7
6. E F Clark *George Parker Bidder: the calculating boy* KSL Publications, Bedford 1983 pp.284-7, 358-9, 388

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