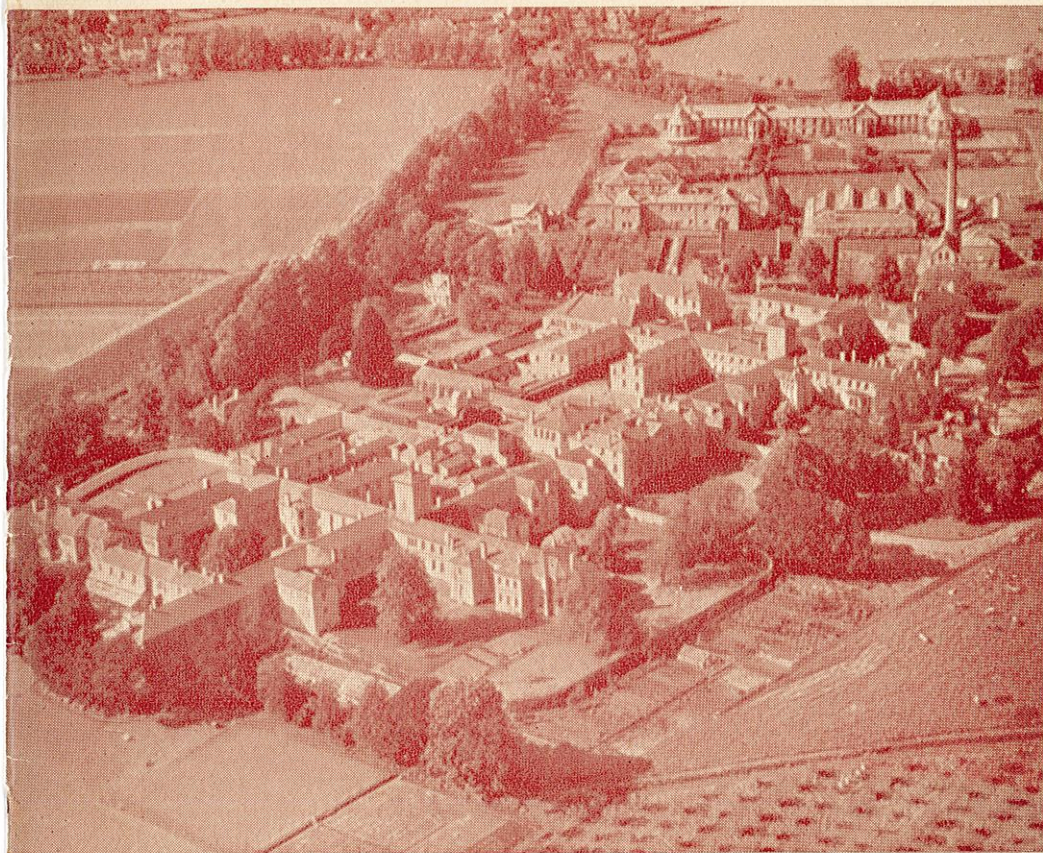


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No. 2

# ROUNDWAY REVIEW



News and Views from  
Roundway Hospital and Old Park House, Devizes, Wiltshire

JANUARY, 1956



# Roundway Review

News and Views from Roundway Hospital  
and Old Park House, Devizes, Wiltshire

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Contributions in the form  
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Stories and Comments,  
together with  
correspondence on topical  
subjects will be welcomed  
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## C O N T E N T S

	page
Editorial ... ..	26
" Au Revoir " to " Captain ... ..	28
The Case of the Teachers ... ..	29
Mobile Telephone Service ... ..	30
The Christmas Story... ..	31
Old Park News ... ..	34
Commissioners' Report ... ..	35
To be Fired ... ..	35
Short Story ... ..	36
The Runaway Scow ... ..	37
Badminton ... ..	37
History of Nursing ... ..	38
Film Preview ... ..	40
Partition of the Moon ... ..	41
Mr. Horace Lindrum at Roundway ... ..	42
Personalia ... ..	43
Strange Incident ... ..	44
A Day in a Nurse's Life ... ..	47
Forthcoming Attractions ... ..	48

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It is the aim of " Roundway Review " to encourage  
free expression of ideas. Opinions put forward in  
contributions do not necessarily represent the  
official view of the Committee.





# STRANGE INCIDENT

By ERIC WALROND.

THE town, presumably for reasons which might have been consistent with the pattern of race relations in America, was out of bounds to "black Yanks". It also lay somewhat off the beaten track, insofar as the generality of visitors from the "dependent territories" were concerned. Even as transients non-whites of whatever variety—colonial war workers, English mulatto evacuees or West Indians in the R.A.F.—were such a novelty I had a feeling that when they did put in an occasional appearance they possessed for the local folk all the interest of an exotic, war-time phenomenon.

I passed through the empty foyer. It was deep in the dusk of a late afternoon in November, 1943. I pushed open the big glass door and went in.

"Did you get our postcard, Mr. X?" asked one of the clerks. No, I hadn't. The card, mailed on the previous evening, did not reach me until the morning of the third day. "One of your books has arrived."

The clerk, a blonde with golden hair and an unvaryingly polite smile, emerged from behind the counter and walked down to the front of the shop. (It was she who had taken my order about a fortnight previously). When she got to the ladies' patterns on a stand just inside the door she proceeded along the wall behind them to the foyer. The girl out there was selling someone a newspaper. After a word with her the clerk returned and, taking no more notice of me, wandered off.

Standing there alone with the patterns, I didn't feel at all self-conscious. Not even a teeny weeny bit? I cannot be positive. The shop, in contrast with the gloom of the wintry dusk, was festooned with a beckoning array of lights. Nor was the lure of the lights abortive. There was a sprinkling of the local folk in the shop, but there was in addition a surprisingly large number of American military police conspicuous in their white helmets and white armbands. ("Snowdrops," I'd once heard a gum-chewing Negro G.I. from the camp outside the town where I was staying say, referring to the ones in his unit). There were about twelve of the M.P.s. and they were slowly moving about in groups of two or three . . . gazing up at the bookshelves . . . lingering beside a tray with Christmas and birthday greeting cards . . . gathering around the pyramids of new books on a row of tables in the centre of the room . . . coming in and going out through the big glass door behind me.

Presently the girl from the foyer appeared with a parcel for me. I handed her a ten-shilling note, pocketed the change and walked out.

Passing two M.P.s. in the foyer, I turned and strode up the street. Should I be able to accomplish all that I had planned? The doctor's surgery was open



from six to seven o'clock. (A return of an old bronchial complaint). I had a choice of two buses back: one at six o'clock and the other at six-twenty. But before I boarded the bus I wanted to stop somewhere for a cup of tea. Meanwhile I was hurrying along Church Walk to the County Reference Library! I made a rapid calculation. Even at the brisk pace at which I was going I could not get to the library under eight to ten minutes. Ahead of me and beyond the spiked railings of a high stone wall the clock on the church tower was barely visible in the dark. I peered up at it. 5.45 p.m. I decided to change my plans. Instead of going to the library (the things I wished to look up there in connexion with an historical work on which I was engaged could easily wait), I'd get a cup of tea and catch the six o'clock bus.

I started to retrace my steps. Nothing was farther from my thoughts than that I should forthwith find it necessary to step aside quickly in order to avoid a head-on collision with two ominously silent American M.Ps. I had not heard them coming up behind me. I continued on down Church Walk. When I got to the end of the passage I paused before crossing the road, took out a packet of cigarettes and lit one. The two M.Ps. emerging out of Church Walk, had stopped on the pavement of the High Street and while casting furtive glances in my direction, appeared to be trying to penetrate the blackness of a shop window.

The big store, lit up like a Christmas tree, absorbed a high proportion of the day's shoppers from the surrounding countryside. It was packed with a milling throng and trade at the buffet was brisk, incessant. The line of customers was two deep——.

“Do you live around these parts?”

A large, black-gleaming shape stood beside me.

“Yes,” I answered.

“Whereabouts?”

I mentioned a town on the Wiltshire Avon to which I'd moved down from London on the evening of the day Hitler's ultimatum to Poland expired.

“Let's see your identity card.”

The constable looked at the card and then handed it back to me.

“What's up, officer,” I said, “What's all this about?”

“We've had a complaint,” he said, “that you are wearing U.S. Army shoes. Are you?”

“I don't think so.”

I glanced down at my shoes. They were an old pair of brown utilities I had purchased from a well-known firm of boot and shoe dealers in a West Country town.

“Who made the complaint?” I said.



“The U.S. military police.” “I see.”

“They said you sounded when you walked as though you were wearing U.S. Army shoes.”

For a moment I contemplated the shoes. What was it that I had done, or omitted to do to them that had made them sound on the wet, shining pavement in the darkness of an early November evening as though they did not belong to me? I looked up at the officer. It was plain from the expression on his face and in his eyes that he did not believe my story.

Half-jestingly, I said:—“Shall I take them off and show you?” The officer flushed. “Yes!” he hissed, leaning over towards me. He was daring me to take off the shoes then and there. Seeing that we were not getting anywhere like that, I turned my head aside in an agony of disgust. The whole thing was so ridiculous . . . . .

“I think you had better come with me,” the officer then said.

I extended my foot. The M.P. bent down over it. I even pulled up the leg of my brown corduroy trousers.

“Are they U.S. Army shoes?” the constable asked.

“Yes, they are!” declared the M.P. without a moment’s hesitation. He straightened up and remained standing erect and motionless with his eyes set dead ahead of him. He never once looked in my direction. He was a boy of about 19 or 20, tall and lean with light hair that stood up stiffly on the top of his head. Until I had joined him and the constable outside the store I had never seen him before.

We stood in a corridor outside the door of a small room facing a larger one with a switch board and some unoccupied desks in it. The constable was telephoning. He was trying to get someone to replace him on his beat. When he got through telephoning he disappeared up the stairs. People kept passing and re-passing before us. Girl auxiliaries in dark blue uniforms eyed us. Finally a U.S. Army Officer with a tentative air about him, slightly built and bespectacled, appeared. The constable led us into the small room and I was motioned to a seat beside a desk.

“Let’s see one of your shoes.”

I took off the shoe and handed it to the lieutenant. He wasn’t long examining it. He turned it over, glanced at the marks inside . . . A 199 . . . MMI . . . 62M94 . . . Size 8 . . . Shape 6-77 . . . REF 1398 . . . and then casually handed it back to me. “No,” he said, “It’s not a U.S. Army shoe.”

When I got to the bus stop, just in time for the 6.20 p.m., an old woman crept up to me. “How did you get on?” she asked in a whisper.

“It was a case of mistaken identity,” I said.

“I thought so,” she said with a sigh. It was the same woman who, not for the first time, had served me the cup of tea at the buffet in the store.



