

injured were carried off. Finally, to the strains of the March of the Red Cross followed by the National Anthem from three military bands, hundreds of balloons were released, carrying the emblem of the Red Cross high in the sky.

This concluded the days of commemoration of the Belgian Red Cross Centenary, thanks to which all the country together was able to manifest its attachment to the National Society, today representing within the nation a living force of human solidarity.

Great Britain

The British Red Cross News Review published an article by the journalist Jean Soward on WERN. We reproduce this below and readers will see how one of the works of the British Red Cross was instituted in a new field of mutual assistance¹.

The British Red Cross Society has over thirty homes for old people; but Wern, the home run by the Society's Caernarvonshire Branch at Portmadoc beyond the Snowdon range, must surely be unique. Or does one find, too, in the other Red Cross homes the same wide cross-section of old people living under one roof, each as far as possible in the manner to which he or she is accustomed?

Among Wern's inhabitants I was charmed to find an eighty-four-year-old gipsy who, since he treasures above all his freedom, has a cottage in the home's grounds and who, since he also prefers to cook for himself, is given a small weekly allowance enabling him to buy his own food.

There, too, a friend of the Princess Royal had a private room and her own small garden, and lived to the end of her days in a sort of gracious isolation, discouraging all intimacy and politely nodding to the other inmates if she happened to meet them.

¹ *Plate.*

In a room with three old Welsh ladies—one of them blind—lives an elderly woman from Egypt who came to England at the time of the Suez crisis, and who, though over eighty when she arrived, has learnt to speak reasonable English.

Down the passage, the widow of a company director has turned her small private room, crammed with antique furniture and a lifetime's collection of photographs, into a miniature of her former London home: she makes her own breakfast with electric kettle and toaster and has her main meals brought up to her on a tray.

A large room with wide bay-windows overlooking the grounds opened its door to the two daughters of a local hotel-keeper, who had never been parted in eighty years, and who went on living together at Wern until one of them died a few months ago.

Another small room, austere furnished, houses the sister of a local clergyman. Other rooms of four, six and eight beds are occupied by old men and women from all over Britain and many different social levels, some of whom have spent twenty years in mental homes; but who, under the new legislation—since they are only just a little simple—are able to move to an old people's homes, if one can be found willing to take them.

And all these old people are free to come and go as they like; to spend a day in bed if they fancy it, to potter in the gardens or take the bus, which stops at the end of the drive, into the village.

Free, too, to go to the local station, buy a ticket and journey to heaven knows where. "We call them *the runners*," said Mrs. Williams Ellis, who supervised the home and went to rescue and gently bring back these errant residents.¹

"Some of them imagine they have houses to go back to, or a brother waiting to welcome them." In fact, of course, the houses were probably pulled down and the brother been dead for years.

This unique atmosphere is matched by the house itself, and by the woman who ran it.

Wern is an old manor house—a miniature stately home—dating back to 1377, and possibly even earlier. The ancestors of the present owner, Lt.-Colonel Martin Williams Ellis, lived in

¹ Mrs. Williams Ellis died shortly after the author's visit to Wern. For this reason we have had to put into the past tense certain verbs used in the present in the original article. (Ed.)

it on and off for nearly six hundred years. Indeed, the whole district is known as Williams Ellis country. About two miles away, Portmeirion, the village, which draws nearly half a million tourists a year, is another monument to the family—the brainchild of Clough Williams Ellis.

At the end of the war when taxation made it impossible for Colonel Williams Ellis to keep the big house going he decided to move into the Dower House in the grounds, and offer Wern on loan to the Red Cross to serve the country's crying need for old people's homes.

The Red Cross accepted gratefully ; and in 1946, after stacking most of the family treasures into the big central hall, Mrs. Williams Ellis opened the rest of the sprawling, historic twenty-two-bedroom manor as a refuge for the aged. She had fifteen old people and the support and blessing of the Ministry of Health.

"At that time", she told me, "we were expected by the local authorities to feed, clothe and keep them on thirty shillings a week. Quite impossible. The home got desperately into debt and had to be subsidised."

Those desperate days are over. Wern has its maximum complement of fifty old people; with a matron in charge, two trained Red Cross workers living in and three local helpers who come in daily.

All the beds have spring mattresses now, and beside many of them are the chair-type couch so essential to the old with their stiff, or sometimes almost unmovable, joints. Some of the shared rooms have gay cotton patchwork quilts presented by the Canadian Red Cross. Old people, well into their nineties, who would in former days have been bedridden, shuffle between the large comfortable sitting-room and the dining-room on walking aids, known as pulpits. "We may have difficulty in getting some of them dressed and up and down stairs," said Mrs. Williams Ellis, "but it is well worth the extra effort to make them feel they are still among us and part of life."

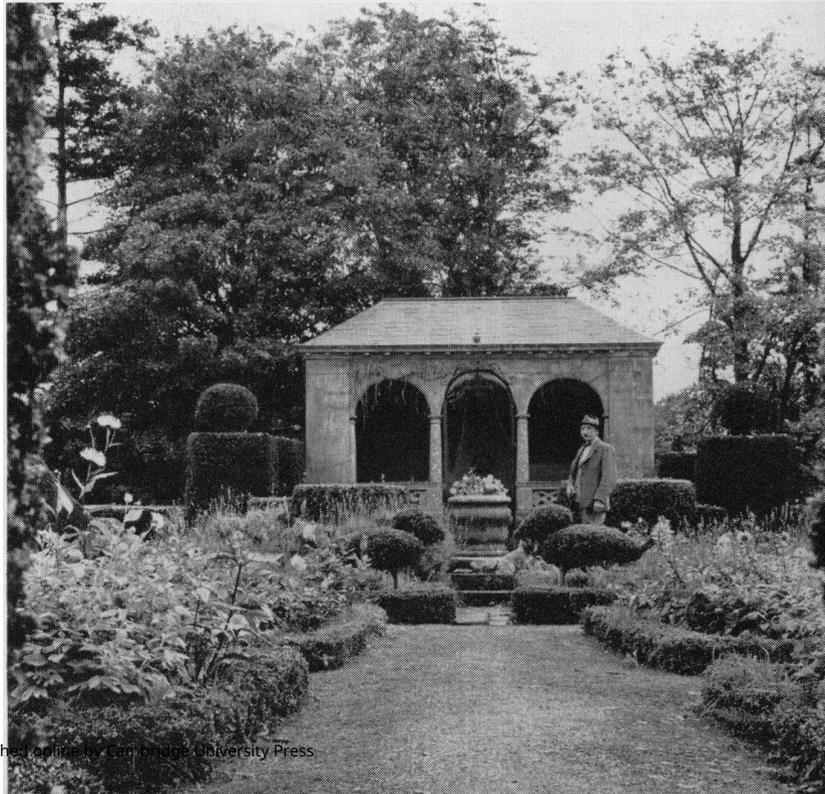
Indeed, no effort, if it added to the well-being of the old people, was too great for the remarkable woman who ran Wern. She rose every morning at six-thirty to supervise their breakfasts and on Sundays, when the kitchen staff was off all day, prepared their food single-handed; she was always on hand to encourage, listen, advise.



One of the rooms...

WERN, a British Red Cross old people's home.

... a corner of the garden.

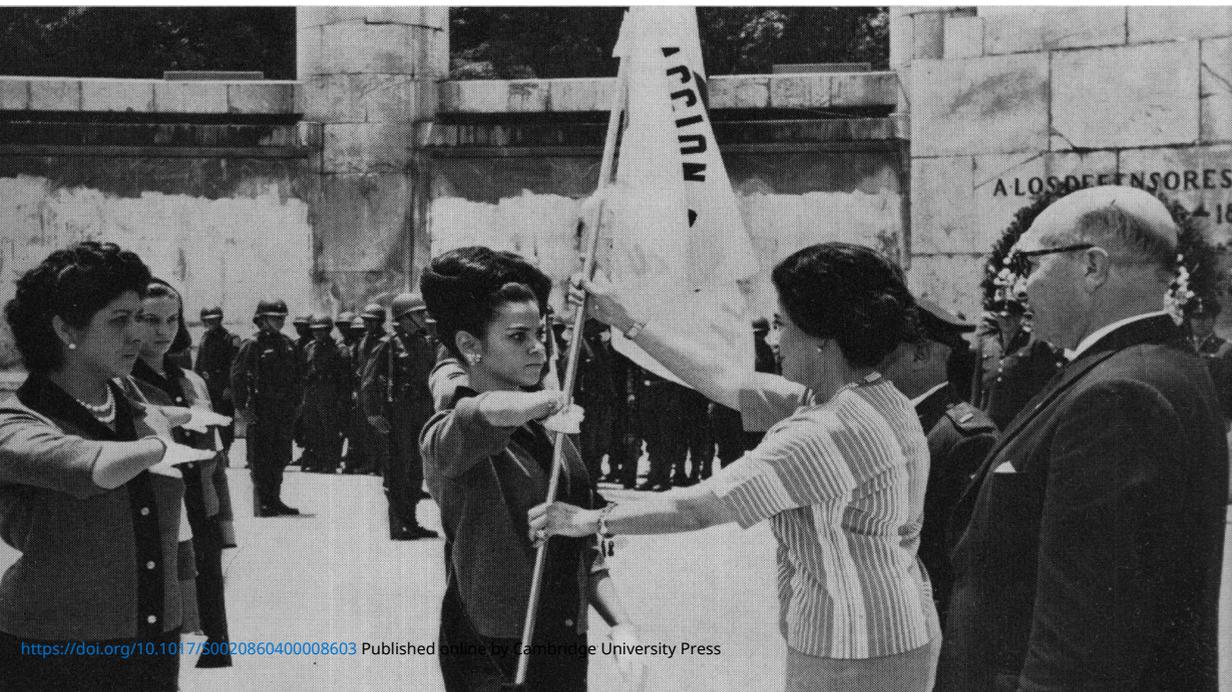




Mexico City :
Parade of first-aiders...

MEXICAN RED CROSS

... and presentation of a flag to the Junior Red Cross by the Society's Secretary-General, Mr. Aristi Madrid.



If an old woman, left partially crippled after an accident, felt one morning she could not face the stairs, even with a helper on each arm, Mrs. William Ellis was there, sitting beside her at the top of the stairs and making the journey down with her, stair by stair, on their respective behinds.

When old people, on their own or in pairs, wander through into the ten acres of grounds and stray from the ornamental garden with its shrubs cut like port decanters, its Italian stone well-head filled with geraniums, and its folly, past the palm trees and the giant tulip tree and the late-flowering magnolia, into the woods beyond and seemed to have vanished, it was Mrs. Williams Ellis who sounded the alarm and headed the search to discover and bring them back home. "We can never be sure whether they have fallen into one of the streams, or just taken the bus to Criccieth," she said.

But this is all part of the "no rules" rule of Wern. "Everyone is an individual," said its overseer, "we are all quite different, with our likes and dislikes and our individuality doesn't end because we are getting old."

Mexico

From Mexico where he is at present, Mr. J. J. G. de Rueda, delegate of the Mexican Red Cross in Europe has, it will be recalled, already contributed to the International Review. He has sent us some notes which we now summarize for our readers. These give interesting facts about the tasks being undertaken by an important National Society in Latin America.

In Mexico the National Red Cross assumes in several places the responsibility of hospital establishments in which nurses which it has trained are working. After three years' study in Red Cross schools the nurses then obtain a university diploma. We would mention in passing that the shortage of nurses, which is so keenly