



# Hero who gave his own life to save a woman in danger

By Melanie Wynyard

This month marks the 100th anniversary of the death of Lieutenant Charles Campbell Wood, whose story of heroism throws light on a little-known corner of the history of Avenue House in East End Road, N3.

Near midnight on the cold winter evening of 27 December 1919, Charles and a friend were walking across Hammersmith Bridge. They heard a scream and saw a woman fall from the parapet and into the Thames. Rushing onto the up-river side of the bridge, Charles saw she was in grave danger as the Thames is a tidal river with a very fast flow.

Bravely diving from 30ft up on the footway of the bridge, Charles discovered too late that there was only 12ft of water below. He struck and severely injured his head but, despite that, managed to save the woman's life.

## East Finchley grave

Charles was transferred to the Central RAF Hospital at Avenue House in Finchley. The house, now part of the Stephens House & Gardens estate, had served as a Voluntary Aid Detachment hospital during the First World War and,



Lifesaver: Lt Charles Campbell Wood.

after hostilities ceased, the War Office decided to retain it in a similar role. In May 1919 the estate became the Central RAF Hospital and would remain so until 1925.

Sadly, Charles was never to leave Finchley. His severe injuries and the extreme dirtiness

of the Thames had led to him contracting tetanus. His death aged 28 on 10 January 1920 was registered in Barnet and he is buried in Plot I. 16. 136. at East Finchley Cemetery. The plot has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission headstone and bears an inscription chosen by his mother: 'Greater Love Hath No Man'.

## Record of courage

Charles was born in December 1891 in Bloemfontein, then the capital of the Orange Free State, though he had British nationality. When the First World War broke out, he initially joined the South African Medical Corps as a private and took part in the German South West African Campaign, for which he was awarded the 1914-15 Star. We do not know when he came to England, but by 1919 he had joined the 9th Brigade of the Royal Air Force as a flying officer and held the rank of lieutenant.

Should you find yourself walking across Hammersmith Bridge look out for a small brass plaque on a handrail, placed in the summer of 1920, which still marks the spot on the bridge where Charles dived into the Thames, risking and ultimately sacrificing his life to save that of a complete stranger.



Night shelter: Operations manager Amanda Weiss with new sleeping bags for Together in Barnet guests.

# Plea for volunteers and venues to help the homeless

By Simon Rubinsohn, Together in Barnet

The all too familiar sight of homelessness on our daily travels, while disturbing at any time of the year, is particularly so in the immediate aftermath of the festive season.

A significant initiative designed to address this issue and assist people sleeping rough on the street, not just in East Finchley but across the wider borough, is the provision of a night shelter by the charity Together in Barnet (TiB) which has been running for some 15 years.

## Shelter arrangements now

TiB currently provides a service seven nights a week for three quarters of the year. It relies on space provided either by community groups or faith-based organisations with the capacity to enable up to 17 guests to sleep in a warm environment, be fed a nourishing evening meal and start the next day with a warm breakfast.

Since the shelter is overseen by volunteers, the guests are risk assessed and referred by

Homeless Action in Barnet to ensure there are no individuals who have particularly complex requirements where more professional oversight is needed.

## Next stage

TiB is now looking to expand the provision of the facility to the full 12 months. To make this happen, more venues and more volunteers are required. East Finchley is already contributing to the success of this project but could we do more?

Do you know of a hall with enough space for this number of guests, a separate section for female guests, kitchen facilities and toilets? Would you like to give up some time to help, perhaps by cooking, sleeping overnight or just talking to the guests? If so, please get in touch with Amanda, the operations manager for TiB, by emailing [amanda@togetherinbarnet.org](mailto:amanda@togetherinbarnet.org).



Hundred years ago: Avenue House serves as the Central RAF Hospital shortly after the First World War.

# Where to pick up The Archer

Spare copies of *The Archer* are available to pick up free each month at several locations around East Finchley.

Subject to availability, you can find them in the foyer of the Phoenix Cinema, in East Finchley Library and in the entrance hall of the Green Man Community Centre, Strawberry Vale. Copies are also available to buy for the cover price of 20p from newsagents on the High Road, including Pacey's, Budgens, Sainsbury's and Premier Express.

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