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2. A church becomes a hospital

The hospital was unusual, some say unique, in that it was set up in a church – St John's Presbyterian Church, Northwood, to be precise. It appears to be the only church building used as a hospital in England during World War 1.

The church had been founded in Northwood in 1901 as a result of promptings by Josias Rowell. But it was only on 24 February 1905 that it was decided to erect a:

New Church and the temporary Iron Hall.²²

The new hall was opened and dedicated 'for Public Service' on 7 July 1905 by the Reverend Alex Connell, while the vestry of the New Hall was first used on 10 July 1905. The building contained various rooms including a lobby and Minister's room (vestry). It was noted that there were also two doors to the building. In 1907, the church officially became St John's Presbyterian Church, Northwood. Post-holders at what was affectionately termed the 'Tin Tabernacle' on the outbreak of war included Reverend JR Coates (1905-1919), session clerk Mr WR MacDonald (1913-1934) and session secretary HB Sharman.²³

The local Middlesex VAD had its headquarters at St John's Presbyterian Church in Northwood and following the declaration of war, the minister, Reverend Coates, was informed by the War Office that:

the building will probably be needed as a

²² SJC: St John's Church Notes from Minutes, 26 February 1905 to 21 September 1906

²³ Ibid.