

## **“Our Belgian Guests” - Refugees in Brent, 1914-1919**

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Between late August 1914 and May 1915 250,000 Belgian refugees came to Britain. It was the largest influx of political refugees in British history. Today it is almost entirely forgotten. Even social histories of Britain in the First World War barely mention it. Yet in the early part of the war helping Belgian refugees was a significant part of local people's contribution to the war effort. This is the story of the Belgian refugees who came to what is now Brent, and of the people who helped them. Apart from general information taken from the Internet and a couple of obscure academic works, all of the sources for this story were found in Brent Archive. Several of the illustrations come from the Museum and Archive collection as well.

In 1905 Count Alfred von Schlieffen decided that the way to attack France was to outflank her armies by invading through Belgium. In August 1914, faced with the need to knock France out of the war before Russia could fully mobilise, Schlieffen's plan was put into practice. The invasion of neutral Belgium gave Britain a useful moral pretext to enter the war, though her alliance with France and her strategic interests would almost certainly have forced her to take part anyway.

The German invasion plan had been calculated assuming an invasion force of German regular soldiers facing minimal Belgian resistance. In reality the German army consisted largely of reservists, who were far slower, and far less competent, than the plan's calculations had allowed for. Furthermore the Belgians fought bravely in places. The ill-designed

Liège forts, for example, held the Germans up for at least two days in mid-August.

The German troops lived in perpetual fear of imaginary civilian snipers, the *francs-tireurs* who had supposedly harassed the German armies in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. They assumed any resistance by Belgian or French stragglers to be *franc-tireur* activity. Sometimes they fired on each other in error and blamed this on *francs-tireurs* also. Their officers were aware that they were operating to a very tight schedule. A combination of insecurity and urgency led to a spate of atrocities.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1914 the Germans killed 674 civilians at Dinant, a documented crime comparable to Lidice or Oradour in the Second World War. On 25<sup>th</sup> August they destroyed 1,500 houses in Louvain, including the university library. In all some 5,500 Belgian civilians were killed by the German army in 1914.

Stories of such atrocities led many Belgians to flee the fighting. From very early on some fled to Britain.

Many civilians followed the Belgian army to Antwerp, where there was an attempt to create a 'national redoubt'. Antwerp fell on 10<sup>th</sup> October, though the Belgian army escaped down the coast. It took up a position on the Yser river, just inside Belgian territory. Under the command of King Albert I it would hold this ground for the rest of the war. The abandoned civilians created a massive refugee crisis.

Nearly a million civilians fled to neutral Holland. At the same time large numbers crossed over to Britain. Most of the refugees in the Netherlands eventually returned to Belgium, but a significant number were transferred to Britain and France in early 1915.

People in Britain admired “plucky little Belgium” and sympathised with the Belgian people and army. On 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1914 the Chairman of Kingsbury Urban District Council, José Diaz, “in striking terms referred to the present war with Germany and emphasized the cruel manner in which the German soldiers were conducting the war both in regard to their behaviour toward innocent men, women and children and to the wilful destruction of beautiful buildings.” There was also a strong feeling that Belgium’s resistance had bought Britain and France time.

In 1911 there had been 4,794 Belgians in England. By early 1915 there were significantly over 100,000, with 4,000+ a week coming from Holland. Two-thirds of these refugees were Flemish speaking. Most came from cities, notably Antwerp and Ostend. Eventually a Belgian village for munitions workers called Elisabethville was created near Gateshead. It was subject to Belgian law, had Belgian police and, apparently, even served Belgian beer. Most refugees, however, were dispersed in small groups throughout Britain and Ireland.

At the start of the war there was a fear that the economy would collapse, causing widespread poverty. As soon as war broke out a National Relief Fund was set up. Local authorities established committees to prevent and relieve distress. There is a reference to such a committee in the Willesden Urban District Council minutes for 10<sup>th</sup> August 1914. Initially these bodies were not intended to deal with refugees, but only with domestic poverty.

Although Britain was largely unprepared for the Belgians, before the war there had been private plans to provide aid for Protestant refugees from a feared civil war in Ireland. These preparations were now the inspiration for the War Refugees Committee, based at General Buildings, Aldwych, and headed by Herbert Gladstone, 4<sup>th</sup> son of the Victorian Prime Minister.

Another member was Herbert Morgan, who worked for Smith's Crisps, first manufactured behind the 'Crown', Cricklewood, in 1912.

The War Refugees Committee needed local committees, and rather than creating new ones it decided to use the local committees for the relief of distress mentioned above. These had little to do, since the economy had not collapsed. To be precise, it used sub-committees of those committees.

The Government, meanwhile, decided that the national side of refugee relief should be the responsibility of the Local Government Board.

Willesden UDC received the Local Government Board's instruction to set up Refugee Committees on 9<sup>th</sup> September. No. 5 District (Roundwood and Stonebridge) Committee of the National Relief Fund immediately set up a sub-committee to deal with refugees, and started looking for accommodation for them.

No. 5 District asked Willesden UDC to set up a central apparatus. However, on 30<sup>th</sup> September, the Local Government Board's instruction was countermanded "as the number of refugees was less than was at one time thought probable". The fall of Antwerp led to a second reversal. On 12<sup>th</sup> October Willesden received a telegram from the Board reading "More Belgian refugees arriving. Further offers of hospitality welcomed". A Willesden Refugee Committee was then set up consisting of initially two, and later four, members from each District Committee.

The committee first met at the Town Hall, Dyne Road, on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> October. George H. Hiscocks, chairman of the UDC, became chairman. His wife became chair of the Special Ladies' Committee intended "to supervise and control and generally to deal with all questions of housekeeping, and other kindred matters of a domestic character in

connection with the Refugees”. The energetic No. 5 District Committee seems to have operated independently of the main committee.

On 28<sup>th</sup> October 1914, Chairman Diaz of Kingsbury UDC reported that “he had formed a local committee for the purpose of looking after the interests in our district of Belgian Refugees”. Altogether there were 2,500 such committees throughout Britain.

The national War Refugees Committee should not be confused with the Belgian Relief Fund, which was intended to help victims of the war in Belgium. The first local newspaper references to Belgium are connected with the Belgian Relief Fund. On Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> September an elaborate Help The Belgians event was held in Harlesden.

In mid-August 1914 Miss Winifred Stephens of 36 Craven Park, Harlesden, a professional singer who had worked on the Continent, appealed for assistance for “destitute Belgian peasants” and wounded soldiers. She received a generous response. She used her home as a depot for clothing to be sent to Belgium. A Belgian flag floated from a top storey window.

By early September Miss Stephens was looking for offers of accommodation for refugees in Willesden. Interestingly, one of the first things she had to point out was that “no young girls are being sent into domestic service”. In late October she is named as a member of the ladies’ committee of the No. 5 District Committee. It is possible that she is one of the reasons why the No. 5 Committee was so active from very early on.

On Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> September, Cricklewood Congregational Church held a crowded meeting in the Aberdeen Hall “to welcome Belgian Refugees to

Cricklewood”. It was chaired by the church’s pastor, Cuthbert McEvoy. So many people came that the meeting had to be transferred to the church.

Among those on the platform were local religious leaders, as well as several refugees. The Reverend Noel Gill of St. Gabriel’s proposed “That this meeting of the inhabitants of Cricklewood desires to place on record their gratitude and appreciation of the heroic resistance of the brave Belgians to their ruthless invaders”. The motion was seconded by Rabbi Lazarus of Brondesbury Synagogue.

The Congregational Church’s Lown Hall was fitted out as a hostel for about 20 refugees, provided with beds lent by local people. Initially it held 16 Jews from Antwerp and, after Rabbi Lazarus had transferred them to a hostel in Kilburn, 21 mostly Catholic refugees.

By 29<sup>th</sup> September 1914 158 Willesden Lane is mentioned in Willesden UDC minutes as having its rates remitted since the house is being used as a refugee hostel. This seems to predate Local Government Board instructions that councils remit rates in such circumstances.

A couple of weeks later eight houses on Harvist Road and one on Oxford Road were provided by the London Electric Railway Company for the use of refugees. No. 7 Harvist Road was run by Mrs. Arthur Brown of Brondesbury Park. By May 1915 it was accommodating “24 of our Belgian friends”, and Mrs. Brown was writing to the papers asking for financial aid from the public. Two more of the houses were handed over to the Willesden Wesleyan Church. No. 15 was run by Mr. G.W. Kenyon. Another house was handed over to St. Augustine’s Church for the use of refugees. Nos. 9, 11 & 13, and the Oxford Road house, were taken over by the Willesden Refugees Committee. The UDC remitted the rates, and electricity was charged at cost (“viz. 1 ½ d. per unit net.”).

On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> October 12 Belgians, all related to each other, arrived by motor 'bus at 7 Harvist Road from the Alexandra Palace dispersal centre. Another 10 came later. They were provided with contributions from Sunday's harvest festival. By March 1915 there were 81 refugees in residence in the Refugees Committee houses, consisting of 23 men, 37 women and 21 children. Local doctors offered their services for free.

Meanwhile the No. 5 District Committee had procured a flat at 52 High Street, Harlesden, which accommodated two women refugees, and 20 Park Road, which could accommodate 14 people. This house was completely furnished by the committee. Later flats were taken at 47 Craven Park Road, 39 and 41 Shelley Road, 61 Carlyle Avenue, 26 Albert Terrace (Milton Avenue), 59 Milton Avenue, and 5 Bruce Road. Several of the flats were occupied by Belgian railwaymen who worked for the L&NWR at Willesden Junction.

By 13<sup>th</sup> November "Willesden railwaymen and their wives" had got permission to use the old police station at Harlesden to house refugees, who had now been provided with a Belgian priest.

'Beverbrook', Brondesbury Park, 17 Cavendish Road and 154 Willesden Lane all had their rates remitted in November. 'Beverbrook' was run by a lady superintendent called Mrs. Streeten and was supported by the congregation of Christ Church, Brondesbury. It has been demolished. 154 Willesden Lane was a Jewish cultural centre. It may have housed Rabbi Lazarus' refugees.

Meanwhile, 27 nuns from a convent in Ypres were put up in the Convent of Jesus and Mary in Crownhill Road. By December there were refugees at the Willesden Lane Welsh Church as well.

In Wembley the War Help Committee consulted with Mr. Haynes - presumably the son of the Alperton builder who had died in 1910. They planned to house approximately a hundred refugees in the Railway Arches at Alperton. Criticism of this idea, including a sarcastic letter to the *Harrow Observer* suggesting that the sound of the trains would make the refugees feel at home by reminding them of artillery fire, probably succeeded in preventing it being implemented.

By 23<sup>rd</sup> October a number of refugees were housed in the new diphtheria ward of Alperton Isolation Hospital, though 13 of those the *Harrow Observer* reported to be there were in fact being looked after by John F. Douglas, Vicar of Alperton, at the Bonnet Box, 10 Stanley Parade, without any help from the Wembley committee. The 13 comprised four families and included five children.

In November Sheepcote Farm, on the Wembley/Harrow border, became a home for refugees.

In February 1915 the *Harrow Observer* reported that the Wembley committee had taken “a commodious house in Sudbury” to house some three families, and a smaller one in Alperton to house a further two. These are never named, but we know that by late 1915 Amble Cottage, Sudbury and 33 Clifton Avenue, Wembley were housing refugees.

At its high point the number of refugees for whom the Wembley War Refugees Committee was responsible appears to have been 46 or 47. To these should be added a minimum of 13 (the four families at Stanley Parade), making an absolute minimum of 59 refugees in Wembley.

The total for Willesden, according to Chairman Hiscocks’ end of year report in March 1915, was “upwards of 360 Refugees”. Many of these

were being looked after privately rather than being directly cared for by the Willesden Refugee Committee or the No. 5 District Committee.

In Kingsbury a house called 'Elmwood' was furnished and a number of refugees maintained there. We do not have figures for Kingsbury.

Owing to a failure of communication between the Red Cross and the Belgian army in the years before 1914, the medical branch of the Belgian military was incapable of coping with large numbers of wounded. So, in addition to the Belgian civilians, 15,000 wounded Belgian soldiers, men like these, were evacuated to Britain after 14<sup>th</sup> October 1914. 31 of them arrived at the new St. Andrew's Hospital, Dollis Hill, on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1914. Today, only the gates survive.

At least two of the soldiers, Leopold Philips, of the 1st Carabinier Volunteers, aged 23, and Desiré Roymans, aged 26, died in early 1915. They were buried at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cemetery, Kensal Green. Later other Belgian soldiers were buried alongside them. A Belgian memorial was erected there in 1932.

The committees needed to raise money to provide for the refugees. Reports on donations start appearing in local papers in October 1914. £52/10/- had been paid into the Wembley Belgian Refugee Account by 23<sup>rd</sup> October. On 29<sup>th</sup> October Alderman Pinkham, Honorary Treasurer of the Willesden War Refugees Committee, sent a list of financial contributors to the *Willesden Chronicle*. Similar lists would appear regularly in the months to come. Hiscocks saw fundraising as an opportunity for every man, woman and child to give "a tangible expression of their thankfulness for their own preservation and security, and their sympathy with the unhappy folk in our care".

Events began to be organised to raise money for the refugees. On 22<sup>nd</sup> October Harlesden ladies held a ‘sale of work’ at 16 Springwell Avenue. The sale was opened by a lady from Brussels, who was presented with a bouquet. The sale raised £25/1/-.

By March 1915 the Willesden Refugees Committee had raised nearly £900 from local people, plus gifts in kind. By the end of 1915 the No. 5 District Committee had raised £449/9/8d.

A pleasant way for middle-class people to raise money for the refugees was through whist drives and concerts. On the same day as the Harlesden ladies’ sale Stonebridge Conservative Club held “one of the largest whist drives ever organised in this district” at Furness Road Council Schools, Harlesden. During the interval a Mr. Pollard stressed the debt of gratitude that Britain owed Belgium.

On 26<sup>th</sup> October money was raised at a concert at St. Gabriel’s Hall, Cricklewood, under the patronage of several distinguished Belgians. Similar concerts and whist drives are reported throughout the period. We should not however assume that the middle-class residents helping the Belgians did so without cost to themselves. According to Councillor Taylor “ladies on the [No. 5 District] committee had literally spent themselves for the Belgians.”

Working-class organisations also raised funds, using similar methods. London General Omnibus Company employees raised money for refugees by organising a fancy dress dance at the Pound Lane Drill Hall. Local railwaymen collected money too.

Money could be raised, and the public informed, by giving talks about Belgium. The Roman Catholics of Willesden Green, aware that the brunt of aid to Catholic Belgians was being provided by other churches,

presented a talk by Prior McNabb in late November. Amongst other things McNabb showed pictures of the ruins of Louvain. In October, incidentally, the residents of the German-sounding Hanover Road had asked Willesden UDC if they could rename it Louvain Road. The suggestion was rejected.

Aid for the refugees came from outside Willesden too. In November the No. 5 Committee received a cheque for £100 from the New Zealand High Commissioner. The main Willesden Committee obtained £100 from the same source. More aid from the Dominions arrived in February 1915, this time two consignments of food from Australia. The food was distributed using the UDC's van.

Money continued to be raised for civilians in Belgium, sent there via neutral countries. Money and gifts were also collected for the Belgian soldiers on the Yser. In November 1915 knitted socks or cigarettes for Belgian soldiers were being collected by Mrs. Mundy of 82 Melrose Avenue. In July 1916 the girls of Chamberlayne Wood School raised £7 for Belgian Children's Day.

The refugees needed social outlets as well as accommodation and food. Those at Lown Hall were given access to "the splendid club rooms" at St. Gabriel's Church Hall. On 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1915 Belgians in Willesden were entertained at Salusbury Road Schools by the Willesden Refugees Committee. Tables were provided for 59 children and 175 adults. A Belgian priest thanked the people of Willesden for their hospitality, and afterwards the children were given toys "from a magnificent Christmas tree", while the adult Belgians were given a *conversazione* (concert) in the upper hall of the school. Several Belgians took part as performers.

On 28<sup>th</sup> January 1915 the Belgians at Lown Hall arranged a concert and reception for their hosts. In the interval they presented the Reverend

McEvoy with a bust of himself, as well as with an album signed by all the Lown Hall Belgians. A Miss Kann, understandably ignoring the linguistic and class divisions that had riven pre-war Belgium, gave a speech that started “Six months ago we were a happy nation”. Two wounded Belgian soldiers were among the performers in the concert.

Soon the Belgians were organising regular social activities for themselves. A choir of Belgian refugees performed at a meeting of the Harlesden Men’s Own Brotherhood at the Willesden Hippodrome on 21<sup>st</sup> February. In April 1915 a team of Belgian refugees played nearby Hampstead Town FC (now Hendon FC), the gate going to the Belgian Wounded Soldiers Fund.

Eventually the Belgians were holding monthly meetings, inviting a “select few English friends” to listen to musical performances. The *Willesden Chronicle* for 9<sup>th</sup> June 1916 reports that at one of these Monsignor Wachter, acting bishop of the exiled Belgians, spoke at Linacre Hall.

Many of the Belgian refugees spoke no English, so language classes were arranged for them. On 15<sup>th</sup> January 1915 Willesden UDC’s Committee for Higher Education arranged for a Mr. O’Toole to take classes “at a salary of 8/- per evening, subject to twelve students undertaking to continue”.

Many Belgian families came to Britain accompanied by school age children. Their education had to continue despite the war. As early as 29<sup>th</sup> September 1914 a 14-year old Belgian boy was asking for reduced fees at Kilburn Grammar School. Willesden’s Committee for Higher Education noted that the headmaster would interview him. By May 1915 there were eight Belgian boys at KGS. Another Belgian boy joined the school in autumn 1916, at the reduced fee of one guinea a year. His name, Libovitz, suggests that this may not have been the first time that his

family were refugees. He came from Brussels and was a keen boy scout. Belgian children “learned English with surprising rapidity”, according to the Belgian Minister in London.

Refugees with younger children were worried that “their little ones were fast forgetting both Flemish and French and adopting English”. Neither the British nor the Belgian governments were in favour of this, as both wanted the refugees to return to Belgium after the war. In February 1916 Willesden UDC therefore agreed to open a Belgian school, following a request by Father Dominic Dams for elementary classes for Belgian refugee children in the area. The Belgian Government agreed to part fund the school with an annual grant of 1,366 francs, while the rest of the money was contributed by Willesden UDC and the Board of Education.

Accommodation was found in the Sunday School building attached to the recently built Brondesbury Park Congregational Church, Wrentham Avenue, Kensal Rise. Two Belgian teachers were found, M. Pieters for the boys and Mlle. Rosalie Jansen for the girls. Another female teacher, Miss Kathleen Riley, is mentioned alongside Mlle. Jansen in December 1917. In May 1917 Mlle. Jansen was presented with a diploma in gratitude for her efforts “in the making and collection of comforts” for the Belgian soldiers on the Yser.

The school was named after King Albert. It opened on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1916 and had 60 places. Lessons were conducted in English, French and Flemish. Monsignor Wachter praised Willesden Council for setting up the school, in which the children’s “nationality was realised, and for a few hours each day they were back home.”

The King Albert School’s first annual open day took place on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1916. The prize-giving at this event gives us a number of the children’s names. We are also fortunate that Mr. Arthur Dunn took a series of 30

photographs of the children. These photographs are now in an album in Brent Archive. They show children outside the school premises, in class, in Queen's Park and at a Confirmation service.

In December 1917 a concert was held at the school for the benefit of Belgian soldiers at the front. On show at this concert was "a splendid album" of photographs intended as a present for King Albert from Willesden Education Committee.

By mid-1915 many of the Belgian refugees were in employment. At 10 Stanley Parade, Alperton, the men were able to contribute £1 a week to their hosts. In Wembley, by October 1915, each family was contributing about a third of the man's earnings.

Some Belgian men entered the Belgian Army, which was conscripting soldiers from early 1916. One such soldier, M. de Clerck, formerly of the Lown Hall Hostel, stayed in touch with Cricklewood Congregational Church. In April 1918 de Clerck was reported as having been through "a very rough time" at the front.

We can catch glimpses of the life of the Belgians from the local papers. The *Harrow Observer* even published a couple of notices in foreign languages. One was a long message in Flemish, the other this trilingual notice pointing out that Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> July 1915 was the anniversary of Belgian independence, and encouraging refugees to decorate their homes with Belgian flags. Presumably they did

In August 1915 a refugee wedding at Harlesden Roman Catholic Church "attracted very considerable interest". Eugene Theunis, of the Brussels Stock Exchange, had come to Britain as a wounded soldier. Unfit for further service, he gained employment with L&NWR. His fiancée, Mlle

de Hamme, was somehow got out of Belgium by the ladies of the No. 5 Committee.

The newly married couple lived in one of the homes in Harlesden, “and later, when they have become more accustomed to English life and English ways, they may have a home of their own”.

As this quotation shows, though well-meaning, the British tended to be somewhat patronising about “little Belgians”. This was not the only problem the refugees faced.

A number of the Belgians who came to Britain died in their first winter, mainly the old, young children and women in childbirth. Madame Libeert, one of the refugees at Cricklewood, died at Willesden Cottage Hospital on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> December 1914. She had relatives among the other Belgians at Lown Hall. Another death occurred in December 1917, when the *Willesden Chronicle* reported the suicide of a Belgian refugee.

On Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September 1915 Mrs. Elodie Durrand of 253 Cricklewood Broadway was assaulted by George McGarrick, a drunken tradesman who was attempting to recover unpaid goods from her landlord, Noel Drury. Drury was also assaulted, and two other Belgian women were made fun of.

This ridicule is the only recorded example of xenophobic behaviour against Belgians in our area, but others were not so lucky. There was a spy craze in the early stages of the war. Public speakers at Harrow warned of “the alien peril”, and fear of espionage was so widespread that a drunk even accused a man with a Devon accent of being a spy. Britain interned some 32,000 men as ‘enemy aliens’ under the 1914 Aliens Act, which was far more draconian than its 1905 predecessor.

In May 1915, after Germany's use of poison gas at 2<sup>nd</sup> Ypres and the torpedoing of the *Lusitania*, there was widespread anti-German disorder. Foreign-born shopkeepers had to stick their passports in their windows to prove they were not German. Mr. Hyman Astrinsky, a furniture dealer at 86 Willesden Lane, accompanied his with a note reading "I am one of the Allies. Here is my Russian passport". No Belgians appear to have been victimised in this incident, but it cannot have made them feel secure.

Despite these problems the people of Willesden behaved better than those of Fulham, where in May 1916 there were anti-Belgian riots, caused by a housing shortage and the belief that Belgian refugees were receiving higher benefits than families of British servicemen.

As time went by the refugees became less newsworthy. There are at least 28 stories referring to Belgian refugees and soldiers in the *Willesden Chronicle* from August 1914 to August 1915, but only 21 similar stories in the next three and a quarter years. The *Harrow Observer* published no stories about Belgian refugees in Wembley after October 1915.

Cuthbert McEvoy was aware of growing complacency. In September 1916 he wrote "How far off seems that day when, amidst the great excitement and uncertainties of the opening days of the war the first refugees came over to our shores! Let us remember them and be faithful to our trust now that the excitement and the novelty has worn off".

As the refugees found employment, more and more of them moved into private accommodation. This was encouraged by Willesden UDC, "in order that they may contribute their proportion of the cost of local administration by paying rates".

In October 1916 it was stated that “the whole of the Belgians were now self-supporting, and funds had long since ceased coming in from the public on this account”.

The scattering of the refugees as they found jobs and homes led the Willesden Belgians to form a society called **The United Belgians in Willesden** on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1916. Father Verstreken, a Flemish priest, played a significant part in its creation. It had its own banner, bearing a black lion on a golden field, and held two meetings weekly, one on Thursdays for men and one on Sundays for all Belgians.

Other things may have replaced the Belgians in the newspapers, but they were not forgotten at Christmas. In December 1915 the No. 5 District refugees were fed on black swans, courtesy of the New Zealand government. In 1916 Mrs. Thompson of Randolph Gardens organised a Christmas party for 85 Belgian children at the Linacre Hall, Willesden. “What happy memories the children will take with them of this country when they finally return to Belgium”, wrote the *Willesden Chronicle*.

In January 1917 the Lown Hall Hostel closed, “as almost without exception the refugees have obtained good situations.” A closing ceremony was held on 20<sup>th</sup> January. Mrs. Scott, the matron, was thanked for her efforts over the past two and a quarter years and presented with 12 guineas and two volumes of a book called *Belgium the Glorious*. At the same time the ‘Beverbrook’ hostel in Brondesbury Park also closed. Money remaining after its closure was sent to help the needy in Belgium.

The Harvist Road houses lasted longer than Lown Hall or ‘Beverbrook’. The *Willesden Chronicle* announced their closure on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1918.

With the end of the war the majority of the refugees returned to Belgium, though some remained. There were 9,892 Belgians in Britain in 1921,

nearly twice the figure in 1911. Most people only know of Belgian refugees because of a fictitious Belgian who stayed in the UK.

The Belgian boys at KGS went home. Libovitz seems to have been particularly missed. In 1919 the school magazine reported "Our Belgian scout, Libovitz, has, we hear, been exalted to be Patrol-Leader on the Staff at Brussels, and official interpreter. We heartily congratulate him. We wish we had many scouts as keen as he was." The King Albert School closed at the end of March 1919.

The last reference to refugees in council minutes is in Willesden UDC minutes for 28<sup>th</sup> January 1919. "We report that some of the equipment lent to the Belgian refugees has now been returned".

These last two slides show the memorial Belgium offered to Britain in gratitude for its role in the war. It's on the Embankment, across the road from 'Cleopatra's needle'. The monument probably refers to military help rather than to aid to refugees, but I would imagine that any person who had helped refugees felt that this memorial was in part a thank-you to them personally.

[Link to Brent Archives bibliography on Belgian refugees in the First World War](#)