

Nursing at The London Hospital in the 1950s

We now concentrate for the next few minutes on the great Tredegar House. When Miss Luckes was Matron she opened Tredegar House as a Preliminary Training School in 1895. The first group of 20 probationers entered in June of that year. The training consisted of six weeks of lectures and practical instruction, followed of course by an examination before entering the wards for a one month trial period. Miss Luckes felt that this would give eager beginners a foretaste of the new life and work on which they were about to enter

In the 1950's, 30-40 student nurses, no longer probationers, and students from the Mildmay Mission Hospital entered for an eleven week period of preliminary training, later reduced to nine weeks. There were four sets during each year.

There were two tutors, one home Sister, one cook and teacher of cookery and Ethel. I followed the late Jane McCreath to be Sister in Charge at Tredegar House as she was going off to Canada. My colleagues during the 50's were Hettie Smith, now retired, Doreen Hayward, now in Northern Ireland, Freda Bullock now retired, Peggy Job, now Mrs Crispin who will be talking to you later. I was indeed fortunate to have such dedicated, able tutors working with me.

And those splendid girls in the sets that came in.

Lily Bowden was Home Sister. She used to get so far ahead with her work that she would meet herself coming back! She and the two nurse tutors lived in.

We started the day with morning prayers to give us strength to carry it through and then began the housework. Who will remember polishing the taps and cleaning those baths - splendid preparation for being a housewife, or a nurse at The London Hospital. This was followed by anatomy and physiology, personal and communal health, theory and practical nursing and bandaging! First Aid theory was taught by the late Mr Jack Crawford, Neurosurgeon. Mr Fowler from Essex taught the practice and a British Red Cross certificate was awarded.

Mrs Fitzgerald taught the cookery classes. She now lives in a lovely thatched cottage in Battle (with a different cat!)

Who will remember the making of the many tailed binder, the T-bandages and the padding of a splint? Who pads the splints these days?

Visitors came from The London including the Principal Nurse Tutor, the Chaplains and the Social Secretary, Miss Phyllis Stone.

Each student was taught how to make a cap, and mauve overalls - the purple passions - were worn until the students personal uniform had been made. And each wore Daniel Neal brown lace-up shoes.

A number of visits were arranged. These included the General Nursing Council offices, the sewerage works at Dagenham, the Water Works at Stoke Newington, the refuse disposal works, the pasteurising milk plant at Nestle's.

Days were arranged for ward experience and medical examinations, X-rays and injections were arranged by the Home Sister.

In all this teaching I hope we taught something about putting the patient first and I hope that this will continue to be foremost in nurse teaching.

Each week there was a test in preparation for the end of term examination. The tutors came down from The London for this and each candidate was given their results personally by the Matron Miss Ceris Jones. Then there were group photographs - I still have many.

On the last night of term we had a party/concert given by the students. Brilliant cartoons were produced, poems were written and I wonder which set put the skeleton on the balcony in front of my bedroom window? Passers by on the top of the No.25 bus must have thought that we kept some of our candidates a very long time.

In conclusion, I think that the course at Tredegar was thoroughly worth while, extremely strenuous and formed a sound basis for "The Set". It provided a sound basic training for future work in the wards and lasting friendships were formed.

May God bless The London Hospital and may it go from strength to strength. There's no hospital like it!

M.Daly

Night-duty and Brentwood

For me the 1950's dawn on night duty. My memory recalls nothing but the casualties of the New Year celebrations.

But how did you find the Night Sister? Each of the Night Sisters carried a bow, coloured according to their status, and hung it on the door of the wards they were visiting. So you tripped up and down the hospital with blue board and injection to recite your party piece and get the morphia checked. Bows were found on "cottage" doors and Alexandra's statue making the sisters difficult to find!

Number three Night Sister was responsible for The Block and the night Scrubbers. Remember that stalwart band of night cleaners who scrubbed on their hands and knees all night for a very small wage, perhaps their only means of providing food for the family that day.

All this was to change. Night Sisters were consulted by telephone, and staff nurses were allowed to check minor drugs, bringing comfort to their patients. The night

Scrubbers were taken over by the Household Department, with new and more mechanical methods of cleaning.

The 4 a.m. treatments for pre and post-operative patients were stopped, as was the early morning blanket bath for those with acute rheumatism. These patients now had their faces and hands washed and were made comfortable for breakfast, to be blanket-bathed by the day staff later. Patients were awakened with a cup of tea at 7 a.m. (actually it is earlier as you all know but you have to shut your eyes occasionally).

The student nurses came on duty at 7.30 a.m. The staff nurses, privileged, at 7.45 a.m. when the report was taken. Then breakfast was served by the day staff and all cleared away ready for the arrival of Sister at 8.30 a.m. and morning prayers.

The next stop for me was Brentwood. A miniature hospital, it wasn't quite like The London, but the same spirit prevailed. A third of the surgery done at The London was performed here in an operating theatre with two tables.

Mr Jack Crawford, Neurosurgeon, was always on 'full duty' as he lived in the area and it seemed to me that every accident in the county descended upon The Annexe at all hours of the day and night- but mostly at night. He was always short of beds and had no trouble pinching them from the other consultants. The ward sisters were wise. They pulled curtains round the empty beds before his arrival in the ward and it was more than even he dare to do to look behind them.

There were eighteen tuberculosis beds and the disease was very prevalent. Fresh air played an important part in their treatment. Together with drugs and surgery this disease has been drastically reduced in its prevalence.

The wards were very cold at night. The nurses were allowed to wear mauve regulation cardigans when not carrying out treatment.

Up until now the sisters had lived in the residents hostel but began to find it rather noisy and a Sisters House was bought in Brentwood. Later the Staff Nurses had another house.

Christmas was celebrated in the usual way. Carols were sung and batteries replaced the candles in the lanterns. Father Christmas and the fairies visited the wards, distributing the gifts to the patients and each nurse received a kiss and a buttonhole of violets. To perform this arduous task they were fortified with champagne provided by their mess.

Clare, Lady Mann, introduced the Matron's Party on Christmas Night. The highlight for the student nurses was to see the Sisters making fools of themselves. As sister-in-charge at Brentwood I didn't want to disappoint them!

So in borrowed plumes, trousers, high boots and my hair flowing, I attempted to go in through the window. The Works Department kindly obliged with a step ladder held by two sisters as I couldn't get up to it. I made a dramatic and successful entrance, fell

into the arms of the night sister and was sent to Matron's Office the next morning! It caused a great deal of amusement and fun.

By this time The Annexe had been open since 1944 and badly needed a face lift. The beds in the wards were to be reduced yet again. In the war there were 48 beds in each. They were in every available space. They had already been reduced to 36 but still had to be moved for treatment to take place. Now they were to be reduced to 26. The barrack stoves were replaced by gas fires, there were electric sterilisers and urns and the Sister's Office was brought into the ward in the form of a glassed cubicle.

The nurses' home was modernised and built-in furniture provided. Regrettably they still had to be shared. The bushes outside the nurses home remained. I wish they could talk. I would have learnt a lot.

The London has never stood still and neither did The Annexe. With the decrease of cases of tuberculosis one of the wards was converted to a Resuscitation Ward, an early Intensive Care unit. With all the rebuilding I was constantly in the wards checking and supervising progress. One morning as I entered I heard one patient whisper to his mates "Watch it! Here comes trouble!"

And if I don't stop now my name will still be trouble.

M.Stevenson

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