

HISTORICAL FACTSHEET No 22

The League of Friends

From Baschurch days, the hospital has relied on volunteers, both for providing patient and staff comforts, and for fund-raising. The annual report for 1907 lists donations of fruit, vegetables, eggs and rabbits, along with clothes, linen, toys and books. Later on, the extensive network of Voluntary After-Care Committees set up by Dame Agnes Hunt in the 1920s played an important part in raising funds for the hospital rebuilding programme. With the coming of the National Health Service in 1948, it was assumed that there would be no further need for voluntary assistance, as "the State would provide" for everything. This idealistic attitude did not however prevent the hospital Patients' Comfort League and the Welfare Committee from continuing to raise funds and provide amenities for both patients and staff.

Gradually it became recognised that state funds were finite and that the voluntary sector still had an important role to play in hospital activities. In 1961, a reappraisal of voluntary services within the hospital was carried out, which led to the formation of the League of Friends, with over one thousand founder members. Branches were formed in centres served by the After-Care clinics. Today, there are 17 active branches, half of which are located over the border in Wales, demonstrating that the League is one of the most widespread geographically in the United Kingdom.

Many eminent figures from the hospital's history have been associated with the management of the League of Friends over the years: Dr Charles Salt, local General Practitioner, Mr Graham Murphy, business man and benefactor, and Mrs Alice Crampton Pym, whose association with the hospital began in 1931 and lasted until her death in 1979.

It is impossible to list all the day-to-day activities carried out by the League for the benefit of patients and staff since its foundation, but mention must be made of the hospital shop which the League has run since 1963, and the annual fete, held each year in June. These are managed by the Organising Secretary, a post first established in 1963 to provide day-to-day co-ordination of the League's activities.

Over the years, the League of Friends has played a very important role in the development of hospital facilities. The largest ever fund-raising exercise undertaken by the League raised around £1.3 million towards the £1.5 million cost of a new therapeutic swimming pool. The Pennill Pool, named after Samuel Pennill, whose legacy started the fund rolling, was opened in 2005. Interestingly, this pool replaced one funded by the League of Friends in 1966. At that time, it cost only £22,000!

In 2011 the League of Friends celebrated its golden jubilee. Over 50 years the League has raised a massive total of almost £5 million towards patient care and projects within the hospital. A plaque marking the anniversary was unveiled by HRH Princess Alexandra, during a visit to the hospital on 21 July 2011.

Presidents 1961-2011

The Viscountess Bridgeman	1961-1976
Rt Rev A.S. Reeve (former Bishop of Lichfield)	1976-1979
Mr Graham Murphy	1979-1985
Mrs Ailsa Corbett-Winder	1985-1996
Mrs Mary Hilton-Jones	1996-2001
Mrs Lyn O'Connor	2001-

Executive Committee Chairmen 1961-2011

Dr Charles Salt	1961 -1963
Mrs Alice Crampton Pym	1964-1975
Mr Leo Denny	1975-1984
Mr Gwynn Williams	1984-1991
Mrs Heather Parry	1991
Mrs Averina Northmore-Ball	1991-1997
Mrs Gaynor Hughes	1998-2002
Mrs Annabelle Simpson	2002 -

Organising Secretaries 1963-2011

Mrs Doris Green	1963-1965
Mrs Bettye Chapman	1966-1970
Mrs Dorothy Lloyd	1970-1989
Mrs Helen Hughes	1989-

Sources

1. *Hospital Annual Report 1907, p 16*
2. *The Heritage of Oswestry: the origin and development of the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, Oswestry 1900-1975. 3rd ed. Oswestry: The Hospital, 1975, p 107-16*
3. *Carter, Marie. Healing & hope: 100 years of 'The Orthopaedic'. Oswestry: The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District Hospital NHS Trust, 2000, p 61,63,72*
4. *The League of Friends annual reports 1963 onwards*
5. *Orthopaedic Illustrated No 7 1966, p 3*