



## Haslemere & District Community Hospital League of Friends

### History of Haslemere Hospital

#### Significant dates

- 1896 Letter in the Haslemere and Hindhead Gazette of 30th September proposing Cottage Hospital.
- 1898 Haslemere's first cottage hospital opened; a gift to the town from John Penfold.
- 1922 hospital in Church Lane built by public subscription to replace the original.
- 1930 (approx) Margaret Rose Children's Ward provided by Sir Richard Garton.
- 1973 A&E downgraded to Minor Injuries unit.
- 1976 St Georges Wood Maternity Annex beds transferred to ex-Children's ward.
- 1985 Princess Margaret Ward for Maternity closed.
- 1987 Operating Theatre closed. Godwin Unit moved from Holy Cross hospital.
- 1990 New Physiotherapy unit opened in Princess Margaret Ward.
- 1993 League provides extra car-parking spaces.
- 2000 Campaign to save beds and the famous "bed push" march.
- 2004-5 Brand new Minor Injuries Unit built.
- 2005 "Fit for the future" Campaign to save beds. The famous "Pyjama Protest".
- 2009 Planning permission granted for further new Car-park off Beech Road.

#### History

Haslemere's first cottage hospital was built as a response to an article in The Haslemere and Hindhead Gazette which read, in part, as follows, *"The fatal accident that, not so very many weeks since, befell a soldier cycling down one of our hills, will still be fresh in the minds of our readers... To come to the point; which of our readers, we wonder, is prepared to have suddenly thrust in at his or her door, this very day, the blood-stained and unconscious body of some unfortunate stranger? Is it fair to delicate women to ask them to turn their bedrooms into surgical wards, and their houses into mortuaries? For ourselves, we feel convinced that our readers have only to know how easily, how economically, a Cottage Hospital may be started and maintained, and they will no longer delay to put the matter in hand"*.

It was built at the top of Shepherds' Hill and opened in **June 1898** with 4 beds. It was a gift to the town from John Penfold and his sisters in commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. From the first there was full occupancy of the beds, so that within a few years extension was required. The building is now flats (known as Anderson Court).

*"For those who never knew those days, a doctor who worked there told of a case of appendicitis. It had only recently been normal to operate on such cases in the acute phase; prior to this time, a patient was housed in a medical ward till recovery from the attack should take place or, as in not a few other cases, perforation. Only at this latter stage was the desperately ill person transferred to a surgeon in a last forlorn hope. On one occasion an acute case was seen in the Hindhead area. The decision was taken to remove the patient to hospital for operation. A message was sent on foot to the Haslemere Ambulance Station which then boasted a stretcher which could be mounted on a wheeled chassis. This was solemnly pushed up to Hindhead by a squad of ambulance men, and the patient removed in the same way back to the hospital. The patient survived this time lag, the crude transport and the subsequent operation."*

(From a book by Dr G. R. Rolston 1953)

By the early 1920s accommodation had become inadequate. The routine of life and health had been severely disrupted by the 1st World War. The strain imposed on the civil population, as well

as the wounds sustained in mind and body by those who had fought, demanded more need for hospitalisation. The Cottage Hospital on Shepherds Hill was unsuitable for the needed enlargement. A strong committee to raise funds for a new hospital was formed, and a fresh site was sought. The lease for the recreation ground in Church Lane was coming to an end. This gave a good opportunity for those seeking to build a new hospital. Plans were soon drawn up for a building in brick and tile. Dr Rolston was on the committee and begged that it should be built of wood. His reason was that in 10 to 20 years, extensions would be required. To do this in stone or brick might prove costly or impracticable, but a wooden building could always be burnt down and a new start made on a clean and modern type of design. He was, of course, correct in his estimate of the future, as regards hospital needs, as the present building is a hotchpotch of bits added on at various times.

The chosen plans, designed by architect Herbert Reed, and built by the local firm of Chapman, Lowry and Puttick, cost £35,000, raised by public subscription. The hospital was opened by the Lord Chancellor, Viscount Cave, in 1923 and Matron Davenport with nursing staff came proudly down from Shepherds Hill to take charge.

Initially there were 35 beds but by the end of the 1920s further additions included a children's ward, X-ray and massage rooms and more accommodation for staff.

St George's Wood, the maternity home closed in 1977, and the Princess Margaret Rose children's ward at the main hospital became the maternity ward. By 1948, when the hospital was nationalised it had 82 beds and provided a pretty comprehensive medical service (for the time) for the residents of Haslemere and environs.

Between 1948 and 1982 the hospital underwent many changes in management and for much of this time it was part of the Guildford Group of Hospitals which included the Royal Surrey County Hospital and St Luke's Hospital.

In 1982 it became a Community hospital, along with other cottage hospitals throughout the country, separate from the large Acute hospitals that in our case was the Royal Surrey County Hospital

In 1984 a long and, in retrospect, misguided, campaign started to keep the baby unit in Haslemere in which the League of Friends, medical and nursing staff and residents from a very wide area fought in all the ways they could, including a protest march down the High Street. But the battle was lost and maternity services were transferred to St Luke's, Guildford. The Princess Margaret ward was now redundant and it was decided to relocate the physiotherapy department there. In 1990 the League of Friends donated £26,000 for a lift to reach it on the lower floor.

In 1982 it was agreed that a ground floor extension was needed for the busy outpatients department. Initially the public felt that the upper floor should be used for this as the future of the hospital, even at that time, was uncertain. However, it proved impossible and the League gave £22,500 towards the full cost of £35,000. At the time the League's funds were in a National Savings account earning 11%.

In 1987 the operating theatre was closed. Eight long term patients were transferred into George Ward at Haslemere from Holy Cross. The remaining beds were used by new patients and patients who received hospitalisation in Milford Hospital. George Ward was renamed 'Godwin Unit' after Mrs Alma Godwin who was Matron in charge of the Hospital in 1988. The Godwin Unit treats disabled young people (aged under 65 years), some of whom have been involved in serious accidents; others suffer from multiple sclerosis or strokes.

In 1993 plans were drawn up to provide parking spaces on part of the garden. This was the quickest project ever undertaken, the work being completed within 6 months and the League providing the full £20,000 for the job.

Another campaign to save the beds became part of the town's history in 2000 when over 2000 people joined a march pushing a hospital bed through the High Street. Several public meetings were held, the Haslemere Hall being full to overflowing as people clamoured to be heard.

In 2005 the "Fit for the future" policy was introduced. This money-saving exercise had the effect of putting community against community as supporters of Farnham, Cranleigh, Milford and Haslemere Hospitals all fought to prevent their beds being closed. Packed meetings were held in Haslemere Hall and Wispers School where the local doctors and hundreds of residents showed their support. Good media coverage was gained through a "Pyjama Protest" when around 100 residents, dressed in nightwear, gathered outside the Haslemere Hall holding banners and chanting "Saving our Beds". The League manned a stall outside Tesco's for a whole week, during which time signatures were collected, and these, together with lists left in individual shops, added up to 12,000 names. Our reasoned arguments and barrage of letters and petitions seemed to win the day when it was decided Haslemere Hospital should be "saved", Haslemere beds gained a temporary reprieve when Option 1 was adopted. However, as a result of improved financial situation, new stroke & other national guidelines and a failure to demonstrate that closing anything improved patient care, the plans were scrapped.

As of April 2011 it looks as if Milford, the initial loser, will be saved as a specialist rehabilitation unit, Haslemere Hospital will become one of 4 (community) Hub hospitals, with a defined catchment area of about 40,000 inhabitants, but nothing is certain; even the NHS Health Bill currently going through parliament is uncertain. Meanwhile though, local opinion remains resolute.

**We want our hospital and will fight to see it retained and developed!**